

MARY LEADER

For the Love of Gerald Finzi

SPIDER MUMS

Not these, I think, stroking
with my forefinger the outermost petals
of the individual I have selected, I think: *Not these splayed
phalanges,*

*cream and smooth, first out, now
farthest apart, sculptural . . .* Rather, it's the
innermost petals that intrigue me, those in the formative stages:
something in

the way they minutely
grip, curl, they're preparing for something later,
they're enduring the tension, the desire to do something, somehow make
the part that

feels the desire obtrude:
a young girl in her skirts squats to pet the cat
who lies on his side for her, a kind of girl: lonely, adult. Often
I address

figures I feel close to,
sketching under titles like "Girl in Full Skirt,
With Cat," addressing in the second person feelings I know: "You wish
your legs were

stems of such slenderness,
you could twine them together, tighter, tighter,
tight almost to the bursting point, tight as silk cord twisted into fringe
for velvet

cushions, or draperies
like those at "Grand-maman's." *Something needs to squeeze
or be squeezed to extinction, doesn't it . . .* [I name her] *Julie?* She says:
Yes! And, and

*"it's nothing to do with
my talented mother or with my mother's
talented menfriends, nothing to do with my pastel chalks, or with my
violin*

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either!" "No," I confirm,
"it's wholly outside those things, but it's something
to do, to do with gripping/squeezing/pleasure/pain, like talented men,
like the chalks

themselves, like the very
paper, whether cream and toothy, or slick and white
to sooth the sharpest pencil, like the rending violin itself." Still
chartreuse, these

Not-yet-tendril-like . . . I
ply them, these inward petals, with my left thumb
away from the center's minuscule round yellow rug, I feel their urge
to go right

back where they were, so tight,
so inside-gripping. But I could tell them what
they better face: even the most secret vulnerability is
obvious.

THIS MUSIC THIS DRINK

Is melancholy
or rather
strong, sweet

SPIDER MUMS, IN MAJOLICA PITCHER

Story
Story
Story

"IT OPENS"

". . . a strong outburst from the
orchestra, the bass line constantly rising
to twist the harmonies in new directions. The first entry of the
clarinet

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pays little heed to this
introduction, the solo part rather prefer-
ring to move things along in a more pastoral way. Two more attempts
by the strings

to add tempest to the
movement fail to stir the clarinet, which calms
the orchestra down to a rippling accompaniment, so remi-
niscent of

Finzi's songs . . ."

WATER

*In whose motions children dance,
I wish you had prepared me.
Water, in whose several bodies wanderers wash,
I wish you would heal me too.
Water, in whose extremes, of steam, of ice, pain forms,
why didn't you cauterize, immobilize my infant heart?*

*Now, you had better warn your best friend, the earth,
better warn each vessel made of earth or shaped like earth,
"This woman may well abandon you."
You should enlist the aid of your enemy, sun-fire, saying
"This woman half wants you to blind her, obscuring
all manifestations to which she cannot but cling."*

Dear Water, How I wish you would gather yourself together and rise,
gather yourself together with thunder and together
overpower my sole lover, the air,
commanding him:
*"Send this woman this hour no barrier,
rain on slurry-gray waves."*

PAPER

The novel that isn't getting written.
Or that is, with glacial slowness.

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I imagine you.
The eyes that weary
windowward
the rain blues
the highway mists
the headlights that speed.

The sheets look whiter
under the black-metal desk lamp
with its skullcap and its elbow
crane
the machine
the watermark
the white bird flying
the poet Hart
the verb
I imagine you.

In January, clarinet concerto.
Opus 31.
In white January.

The novel that isn't getting written
not one letter.
Inchoate pen.
Ink marrow.

The little box the pen-nib came in says
Osmiroid.
The flat little bottle of black ink
says Osmiroid.
The box the pen came in
said Don't
shake your pen.
But it's hard not to shake your pen

the story that isn't
the story that is.
Tenacity.
I imagine you.

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A shiver.
A tapped furnace.
The bed where one doesn't lay oneself down.
The bed where you don't lay yourself down.
And then you do.

RIDDLE

Tending to squatness,
my bottom is broad.
On top I offer
his hand a curve.
Both flat and round,
I spread heat,
marry what he draws
with what he breathes.
Curious, he lifts
the part that covers
my opening, his fingertips
encircle its knob.
He picks his time
by his own thirst
but too, by the sound
I make losing pressure:
then doth he grasp me
up altogether and pour.

MAJOLICA PITCHER, MORE OF THE WORDS

"It's late."

THESE FUSE

Whether their quiet lamps darken or burn, fuse
doubly, if only once, surely

desire must twin, span the single night, link
the two horizons—radiant—black—

desire must bevel the moment these vanish
into a shared dream—

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alert trees, and moon-on-glade, reflections.
There—these are pulled

toward each other, toward
fusing forever his bellow, her scream . . .

if only on paper

ON PAPER

Paper, smooth, and cream, as
the longest oldest petals of the spider
mum I glide along my lips . . . not despairing till made-up "Julie" asks:
"Doesthatcount?"

Gerald Finzi—British Composer and apple grower.

"IT OPENS"—quotation from Alun Francis, in the Program Note to the Compact Disc, CDA66001, Hyperion Records Limited.

RIDDLE—Possible solution: A tea kettle