

# WOMEN & OTHER HOSTAGES

Laura McCullough



*Heart, you bully, you punk, I'm wrecked, I'm shocked...*

Marie Ponsot

# Contents

## Prologue

MEDUSA AS A PARABLE OF FAITH & RESILIENCE	3
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## I

### Women & the Syntactical World

COUGAR ME THIS	11
EMOTICONFISCATED	12
CREDIT RATING	14
WOMEN & THE SYNTACTICAL WORLD	16
UNTIL YOU KNOW IT	19
CHILDREN & THE PARTICULATE LIGHT	20
SWEET SICK	21
SOME LINGUISTS SEE SYNTAX AS A BRANCH OF BIOLOGY	22
SWORN VIRGIN	24
IN THE GARDEN OF MEN	25
WOMEN & THE NATURAL WORLD	26
BENEFICIAL INSECTS	27
THE PUBLIC POOL ON POINT	28
HEAT & SHAME	30
LISTENING FOR SNOW	31

## II

### Other Hostages

WOMEN & OTHER HOSTAGES	35
WOMEN & OTHER FEMALE IDENTIFICATIONS	37

WORK & NOISE	38
WATER LINE	40
SOLID & VOID	42
YOU HAVE TO BECOME STONE	43
POEM WITH THE WORD 'DAMAGE'	
FOUR TIMES (DX <sub>4</sub> )	45
BIOLOGY LESSON: APPROPRIATION	
OF THE LOVER	46
WHAT COMES OUT OF THE SKY AT A	
HORIZONTAL TRAJECTORY	47
THE PLACES WE HAVE ALL BEEN	48

### III

#### The Owls of Mercy & Grace

ICARUS IN THE HOUSE OF SPIRITS	51
THE TROUBLES OF MEN: HOLOMETABOLY	52
THE OWLS OF MERCY & GRACE	54
HUNGER & SNAKE	55
WALKING PALMS UP IN THE DARK	56
JUNIPER	57
SATELLITES: PERMANENT ONLY	
IN MEMORY	59
THE WATER INSISTS ON TAKING	
EVERYTHING	61
CURVE OF FORGETTING	62
DISSONANCE & STILL	63
TRAFFIC & CONSTRUCTION	64
EVERYONE IS WHAT	66
MOLECULARITY	67

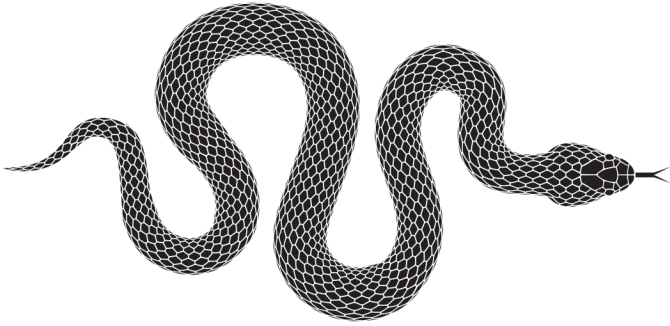
## IV Marriage

(trajectories)	71
(skin)	71
(intergenerational wounds)	72
(water)	72
(wood & dog)	73
(after unseen damage from the flood)	73
(stew)	74
(roots)	74
(the re-articulation)	75
(woman with two hearts)	75
(how to hold a heart)	76
(more than mercy)	76
(what they try in spring)	77
(being in becoming)	77
(motel)	78

## V Fallen Kingdoms

<i>A Guide to Wild Flowers</i>	81
THE LOGIC OF YOU	82
KINGDOM OF CLASS	83
THE WILL	84
MUSIC IN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEART	85
<i>Bonne Chute</i> (good falling)	87
HEAT	88
ALMOST NOTHING SOMETHING	
[stars / plates / cells]	90
Acknowledgments	93
Gratitudes	95

# Prologue



# MEDUSA AS A PARABLE OF FAITH & RESILIENCE

*Birth, not death, is the hard loss.  
I know. I also left a skin there.*

Louise Glück

*Pain is joy when it cries, it's my smile in disguise.*

Pusha T

I.

Sometimes mistakes are set  
to right; others never are.  
Athena never owned up  
to her crime against Medusa.

We know what Poseidon did  
to her & how  
Medusa was blamed for it.  
Athena had daddy issues & competed

with other women,  
her projections & rage  
transforming Medusa  
into a monster as punishment for the crime

of having been raped.  
Even women blame  
the victim. I've always loved  
snakes, those in the grass or on the path,

misunderstood & mis-cast;  
    they are victims, too.  
        I've heard this joke:  
*He'd even screw a snake if someone pinned it down.*

2.

I've been teased  
    my head is full  
        of snakes, hair wild,  
a thistle brush, rarely pretty, always too much.

Snakes & curls  
    have a lot in common;  
        & girls aren't always your friends;  
Poseidon was a bastard, & maybe Athena was

jealous of Medusa,  
    but the punishing  
        had its gifts. What is stripped  
from you—skin of identity—lets you choose:

accept the shadow & glow,  
    wet, raw, vulnerable:  
        if someone steals from you,  
what's left behind is all you own, like Medusa's blood

became medicine.  
    Asclepius revived a snake;  
        it whispered secret knowledge  
of healing into his listening ear—the rod of this god



has one snake coiled;  
    considered divine,  
        a being wise, its wreathed body  
a symbol of bringing people back from the dead.

3.  
All these gods & goddesses!  
    Fucking whomever they could  
        pin down, or fucking someone  
up or over, mortal or immortal, kids jumping out of heads

or broken earth, being  
    raised by snakes or  
        like the snake,  
discovering both their poison & ability to shed skin—

like the father wound,  
    mother grief—disappointments  
        & betrayals both flaying  
us alive & renewing us. When I say, all my life my hair

was my bane,  
    my shame,  
        an accusation & a curse,  
I am saying there was pain in the becoming.

4.  
You who broke  
    my heart, I didn't turn  
        to stone. Grotesque,  
maybe, my coarse tangled mess, these snakes

are more wondrous

as I age, & my blood  
holds both pain & joy.

You remember that, don't you? Pain is joy? Pusha T

knows poison like

Glück knows isolation.

Do you de-fang dis?

Or dine off it? No one  
can be believed anymore. Not one  
of the gods can be pinned down,

& my hair gets frizzier by the day.

Like snake skin, the latter shed, mine  
gets redder, both penny bright & gray.

My head is roiling snake charmed

& only half fro'd out,  
just a type 3B or C, curly not coil—  
judged by elasticity, variance, & porosity.

5.

I'm going to read Glück's  
*Meadowlands* backwards,  
& her parable thus:

*In pain as in joy.*  
*In the generous heart*

I'm going to twist my hair, pinch my snakes, release their poison:

*The grief of his lady: his*  
*Yet gladly would the king bear*

Or maybe I'll just pardon the world,  
as if it were possible  
to do so before I'm dead,  
but maybe after, my blood,  
one drop damning, the other reviving,  
feuding with itself, embodied  
by these knots, these *Caduceusized* matted,  
near dreads, still unlocked  
either to be cut out or embraced.

I choose neither pain nor joy,  
nothing about the night that's virtuous,  
just necessary, no perfect endings,  
only endings & endings, & endings  
as Glück said.            Shall I feed—  
as others fed off me—these snakes

instead of a snake in the grass as Virgil first wrote—  
*oh herd-boys picking flowers & strawberries, beware  
the cold snake lurking in the grass*—or just cut off

their heads  
(whose head?) or shave my own?

Or just follow the map of my hair into the night  
of grief  
& grievance?            Or slough off

even the concepts of truth or justice,  
embrace the ouroboros,  
the snake eating its own tail.