

OF PREHISTORIC LIFE 1001 FACTS

P O E M S B Y J O A N N C L A R K



Black
Lawrence
Press

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for Zhenya

... several facts make me suspect that any sensitive nerve may be rendered sensitive to light, and likewise to those coarser vibrations of the air which produce sound.

Charles Darwin

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Scheherazade to Baby Sister, D.

Thing is, some days lions run
in odd-numbered prides.
Other days, bargain hunters

pay retail. Word-processors
and big league pitchers
for minutes at a stride

cannot oppose their thumbs.
Dogs, as ever, relieve themselves
as their owners stare off into the middle

distance. But don't be fooled. Times
like these, when freeways slip, faiths
flag, something else is surely at work—

evolution, revolution,
the naming of names. Keep
your ear to the ground, Sister Mine.

Keep watching the grain supplies,
the stocks. To your infamous
ubiquity, I'll play know-it-all,

chronicling each unearthly loss,
stationing each crossover from amoeba
to man to kingdom come and back—

you can't make this stuff up.
Meantime, keep tallying our one
princely body count in the dust

under the bed, fingertips tracing . . .
rounding down. One thing more—
under the circumstances,

desire something darkly
comic. Under the circumstances,
desire. Something.

Considering Her Insomnia

Within the pull of her voice
every orbital among us is kept
awake at night by the tales

she tells to keep herself
awake at night and breath-
taking, gravity be damned.

Even the moon is all ear,
the sky—a cross-legged
Buddha settled into the soft

isosceles of himself, glazed
and seemingly empty, listening.
What else is out there—

starry-eyed stars, heat-leaking
meteors, attention-seeking,
impact-crater-making comets

and cosmic junk—is all
long since reentry-burnished
fragments of her stowaway

imagination. Into the fisted
hand of day—*coughcough*
coughcough—only dawn

gives away her hiding place
within the hold she has taken.
Only dawn can break her.

Other Flightless Birds

About the sea-
sons of our
penultimate mass

extinction,
we most miss
the way their stellar

flare-ups
laser-lit all would-
be beings then in

attendance,
shedding flattering
light on the state

of our mind—
not to be con-
fused with

what the
matter was,
monkey-over-

mastodon coming
as no surprise
to whatever

had been paying
attention. Even
understories—

defoliated, fernless—
looked divine
in the after-

glow of heat
lightening's
slasher-flicking

zig-zag,
in that blink
before what

took over
took over.
Besides, what was

killing us
off was so
narcotic and

tactful that we,
famously,
could not have

scared less—
more is the pity:
could not have

not seen it
coming. But we
handicapped

the sun never-
theless—gave it
its heedless head

start before
furthering our-
selves afield

to stake out
migration
routes and

stalking ground.
And yet we knew
even then that

catching up
was never
going to be

in these cards:
so we gathered
our gene pools

round the watering
hole below
the most

photogenic
of our water-
falls and felled

ourselves—
Ur little lamb-
kin alongside

proto-lion—
in no especial
preordained

order—one un-
slaked specie
at a time.

Why She Killed the Orchid

Because it was gifted, arriving with the cut-flower bouquets and get-wells.

Because the way the stalk couldn't hold itself up without miniature hairclips fastening it to the dowel unnerved her.

Because its two ornamentals gleamed like the bruise-blossoms that biopsy needles make of the tissue and skin of breasts.

Because no matter where she put it—windowsill, upright piano, countertop—and no matter the thought she gave to lighting and cold draughts, its dark lavenders created disturbances.

Because, once when she'd cornered it, the orchid refused to wallflower.

Because, by listening in, it had foreknowledge of its abject neglect in her home.

Because her sister knows its name in every language but their own.

Because her sister won't leave their diseases alone.

Because she hates to share.

Because their father says that ice cubes are the best delivery system for the moisture it craves.

Because it can't get enough.

Because their father says they get it from their mother.

Because its leaves, petals—their turgor pressure
freed like strains from the piano no matter the privations
she subjected them to—neither fell nor withered on the stem.

Because, instead, in marvelous reproof, the leaves appeared
to have vanished.

Because she prefers the company of the hearty, the mongrel, the crossbred.

Or, rather, above hot-house exotics, the hybrids have shown a preference
for her, forbearing her lies.

Because she would be true to her all-forgiving ficus and cacti, her pets
from the shelter, her evolutionary outtakes and extinctions, the nephews
whose birthdays she routinely overlooks.

Because her record speaks for itself, replaying
the cadences of those who no longer take her calls.

Because it was hers for the killing.