

Margaret Adams Birth

ALPHABETICAL DISORDER

With thanks, for inspiration, to John Ashbery for his poem “They Knew What They Wanted” and to our local teenagers for their dramatic texting-style dialogue I can’t help but overhear whenever I walk near their high school

A-number one—
that’s what you think you are!

“To *B* or not to be”—
you smartly say that that’s the question,

but you’re so blind:
you can’t *C* the *C*, or the forest for the trees, or whatever,

because you’re so busy
focusing on being *D*-lighted with your precious self.

E-e-e-e! I feel so frustrated
that sometimes I just want to scream:

What the F?

G whiz!

What the H are you thinking?

(*I* am a nice girl,
so I don’t say the actual words.)

If I dared you to *J*-
walk across a crowded city street,

you'd probably simply say, "*K*,"
the way you always do when you're dismissive.

Once upon a time, you would've said, "*I L Y*"—
sweet shorthand—and I would've said, "I love you too."

But now . . . *M-m-m!* . . .
See me shake my head.

N-O!

P-ew! Now our relationship stinks!

It started on the *Q-T*—

you *R* devoted only to me, you swore—

but "*S* happens," as the saying goes—

it even happens
to the pretty "*Bachelorette*" on *TV*.

U are so full of yourself—
you don't have a clue

how the *V* for *victory*
fingers you hold high should only be the one

(you should be able to figure out the one—
and no, I don't mean that you've *W-O-N*).

You know what they say: *Love and lose*.
You've now lost me—just call me: *X*.

You want me to tell you *Y*?
You're so smart (or so you say), and I think I've made it clear.

Z-z-z-z-z . . .
Your drama is such a bore—good-bye!

DAMAGED GOODS

That's what I called
myself: *damaged goods*—
as if I were
a bruised flower,
a chipped mug,
a broken toy.
I had allowed
him to reduce me to
an object,
a thing,
something less than
a living, breathing, feeling human being,
a tenderhearted woman.
Even though it was over—
only one night, days, then weeks, then months, then years
ago—its impact reverberated persistently in my soul:
I could never recover the innocence I
had lost, never regain the trust,
never again think myself pure and worthy;
and, although my intellect accepted
that it wasn't my fault,
I somehow feared, nevertheless,
that it was;
and even though I believed
I'd never hurt another
in a similar way, I knew that was what
he'd done . . . so, why not I?
Was I so good?
Was I so much better
a person than he?
After all, I was just
damaged goods.

SALAMANDER

Crawls from fire
golden stars ablaze atop a
black back sparking with flames
that burn but don't consume

Maybe mythological
maybe biological
the Shadrach/the Meshach/the Abednego
of the fantastical or natural world

In resemblance like a lizard
but cousin to the newt
conjures images
of Kipling's tales or biblical creatures

Moves as if supernatural grace provides protection
slips seemingly without fear from
between crackling pieces of wood
miraculously still alive amidst a pile of ashy logs

WHEN SAINT FRANCIS COMES TO CALL

The sacred brightness
which signals another soul's arrival
fills up one tiny cell
amidst the blackened rest;

along the hallway of windows with
bars, the luminescence moves. A woman
of sixty-some-odd years
has strung a musty sheet that reeks

of sweat, rose water and baby powder across the width
to divide in two the SRO, and she's twisted
a red bulb into the ceiling light
to cast a flattering glow;

the only sound is her own crackling, off-key hum
to which she rhythmically shuffles;
company is coming, so she gladly prepares.
The light keeps approaching, and then a knocking

resonates. She smiles: he is here. She lifts
Saint Francis' picture from the wall, and watches
as he walks out; dear friend of the indigent,
he embraces this one crazy, lost lady,
and then falls to his knees in prayer.