



CAPTIVITY

LAURIE SHECK

A K N O P F  B O O K

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In sickness and in health

Captivity is Consciousness—
So's Liberty.

—Emily Dickinson,
from Poem #384

“We thank thee Oh Father” for these strange Minds, that
enamor us against thee.

—Emily Dickinson
in a letter to Mrs. T. W. Higginson,
LATE SUMMER 1876

...chance left free to act falls into an order as well as
purpose.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins,
from his journal,
FEBRUARY 24, 1873

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NOTES

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A Note About the Author

Other Books by This Author

September light

'his homesickness of mind

Like cuts made almost tenderly in flesh. The surfaces of things grown slow
and

dangerous

Beneath the desire to apprehend. September light I cannot hear your quiet.
so much elsewhere unsettling each surface, so much annulled.

No hour

White sky and such intervals of quiet.

How even the most still-seeming thing rushes through itself and isn't final.
articles. Waves. Nor can I compute the possible.

In my most careful calculations, I am the automaton holding out her bells,
raising and lowering her fists to a measured, steady ticking. But there is a cast-
apart

In me that marks no hour, and its hands hold no bells at all,

The seconds slant and coarse with split-asunder.

The First Remove

he others hiding away when they took her.

Eventually I learned other words. Assere for knives. Toras: North. Satewa: alone.
Always a breakdown of systems that will not be restored.

Something cuts itself in me. It's not a question of refusal.
'steronde: to rain. Tesenochte: I do not know.

The shattered of, and then the narrowness opening where the vanished
touches it—
then how the mind recombines and overthrows—

A quiet skin

Thinking has a quiet skin. But I feel the *break* and *fled* of things inside it,

Blue hills most gentle in calm light, then stretches of assail
and ransack. Such tangles of charred wreckage, shrapnel-bits

Singling and singeing where they fall. I feel the stumbling gait of what I am,
the quiet uproar of undone, how to be hidden is a tempting, violent thing—

Each thought breaking always in another,

all the unlawful elsewheres rushing in.

As when red sky

The morning's raw and wet.

There's something delicate and fierce that comes damagingly out of the
mind

When the body's ill. I feel the invisible boundaries of my life strike into me

From regions I can't see, as when red sky assails itself
After intervals of blue, whiteness, dullish gray. I sense crimson strokes at the
edges of things

And have burnt inside myself so many words in a bonfire

Unseeable but real as dirt. The worst fault a thing can have is unreality.

Here is a window, here a chair. The air swirls with severity and

Hazard. The chair is white-painted pine, peeling in places, and carved with a
five-petalled flower.

The mind would pierce them

rost, then ridged snow.

The body can't rest when it's in pain. Outside: hills closed as the cells' glass
secrecies,

Vaste spaces etched and fissured with genetic script.

Why should their meanings be clear? Such bold disconsolates
n them, and the tendings, the dividings. The mind would pierce them,

Being scared. Now on my arm, chopped angled shadows;
nd how they enter the eye with their sense of breakage, their sense of outlaw

nd estrange.

Yet this may be so delicate

Am now in careful hands; I have some fever.

Something striking sideways and unlooked-for pierces yet this may be so delicate.

Before falling ill I saw elms in small leaf, purple orchis, cowslips, streaks

Of brilliant electrum. An extremity of mind concealed grows anxious to become. The present fury is ash. Still, note

The water coming through a lock. Note green wheat. It's lucent. Perhaps

It has a chrysoprase bloom.

The Second Remove

*Vas taken by. And the rest scattered. Extremity
Planting itself in me until I am most Northerly and lost—all tundra-cold
whiteness and mistrust.
Vinter-taught, ignorant, unsolved.*

Daylight in its first and narrowest pulses. Reddish sky.
This noiselessness in mind-space. What does astray look like, and what is the
sound of capture,
the sound of breaking free? Her footsteps moving off into snow-deeps and
never-to-come.
The never-returned of her, smoke from a way station burned down.
And thus she continued. And thus in mind's secret, and in so bitter a cold.

But couldn't cross

All the more rare and wilder

In storms of otherwise and then again fettered,
feel my mind disfiguring itself as if it could not in any other way approach
The withering, the *frightened back* of things, the buoyancy crushed. Today
the fasting girl

ried. Four nurses were sent to watch over her

But couldn't cross to where she had installed within herself the darkest field.
like someone watching trees, they couldn't turn with her turnings. I wonder at
that country

She belonged to, the obligation of not, the eye-blur restlessly steering. It's
December,

Almost dark at 3:00. They moistened her lips with water as the redness left,

The skin of a white tiger. She had an air of the knights of chess about her.
Something bitter distills where we can't see.

It is hard to seize what is.

Hidden liberty

December night. The north winds shift above the icy hill;

How they move like an unfinished sentence always, wave-like and varying,
and I think they are beautiful this way, where nothing can explain,
And the green of the near lies altered and effaced by snow.

This *now* has little of its own—the winds inside it from far off

Where once the trees had leaves. I don't want to be warm. I don't want a
marble
halm. Branches click like hair triggers, and the ground refuses ownership,
Each hidden liberty soundless, undisclosed.

How oddly lawful

stayed behind, unable to sense any center to things anymore.

Yet how oddly lawful in itself it seemed and sometimes graceful—
that place in me like water clouded-over or the blanked gray of a computer
screen candescing.

The way it wouldn't break itself, nor allow any thinnings or openings,
an ancient kingdom risen whole and ruthless from the sea.

I was its Emperor, irrelevant, deposed.
So often in the eyes a shocked tenderness. But where does it go, over
That gray water, that gray land?