

POEMS

MARGARET GIBSON

WHAT CANNOT BE KISSED AWAY

What am I going to do now? she wrote
in her journal.
Counting her losses, she confessed
just once
she was angry with God.

Who else? she said.

To understand her going blind, I close my eyes.
To sense what it would be like
both legs gone
I tuck my own legs under me
and sit,

 facing the dark.

It's the best I can do.
Trying to imagine with my body
what was come here to do
having finished.

LAST WORDS

I wanted her words to make sense.
I wanted to think her suffering
made each word count.
On Sunday, she asked to dictate a letter.
To David Cornfield:

Dear David,

*How much is seven cornfields?
At how much? And how much
per cornfield? I am very strict.*
She was propped up by pillows,
as short in the bed as a child,
each remaining thigh
swaddled, plump as a loaf.
"No, no pain," she lied.
"I don't know," she said. "I don't know."
"Someone must come."
I wanted the silence between us
To open, but it
Dried to a pod, like a rattle,
The seeds
Trapped inside.

COMFORT

I wade into the pond and reach down
for the roots of the pond lilies,
roots that reef and tangle into the mud.
Tugging. Falling back from the force
of their letting go. Reaching into
the snarled and braided tenements

bumped now and again by the fish
that feed on these moorings.
Putting my face under, coiling the long
whips of stems with their flat pads and buds,
heaving them to the shore.
Still angry that she must suffer so.
Wishing the root of her pain weren't
so hidden, so human.
Wishing God were not inside me.
A green frog stretches out on a lily pad,
watchful. I want to assure it
I won't pull up all the lilies in my fury.
The root of *comfort*, and the motive
I remind myself, is strength, not ease.
Out of the depths I cry to Thee,
O God. . . what's the rest of it?
I tug up from the murk and silt
a raft of root, long stems, a few blossoms
floating after, like the wake of an ecstasy
or a flush of pain, my hands now
stained purple by the lilies, black by the mud.
The same hands that fumbled through
her Psalter and couldn't find the one
she wanted, couldn't find my way.
Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell
in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there. . .
I read her that instead.

PSALM

As I read the psalm, she lifted from the bed
both her arms: briefly, not far:
then let them fall
alongside her, as if to say
I have taken the blow, and it is good.
Shall I keep reading? I asked. She nodded.
The vein in her neck beat fast,
her eyes stayed shut. She never said
my name, nor did it matter
who I was: *that* was
her gift, her teaching.
She was laying herself aside—
so I read until the sound of my voice became
her breathing, her breathing
the wind that lulls and falls off, sundering
sentence and skein, unraveling
back to the Source
O resourceful Maker,
innermost: beyond our names.