

White Bird

ALSO BY GAIL SHER

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White Bird

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For Brendan

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First Grandchild

1

The Jambu continent is called the Jambu continent because a fruit of the great Jambupriksha tree fell into a lake, making the sound “jam.”

As one thousand buddhas will come and the teachings flourish, this Jambu continent is considered supreme and is called “*The Victorious Southern Jambudvipa.*”

This continent contains twenty-four great lands, ninety-nine small lands, three hundred and sixty different clans, one hundred and eight remote areas and one thousand and two extremely remote places. The Land of Snows is one of them.

So hovering in a row, the breath of the row in its high peak of rows.

Squares of light are cool settling night in a row.

The hill air is cool, like a tower of air carrying through to nothing.

Each night the sun yields its bit of darkness to the child. The darkness squats and *plays* dark but the child knows that it *is* dark.

The child counts the *pieces* of dark unsullied by subdued and broken darknesses.

Dark is solid but is also its own lamp. That's why the sun is dark.

Each night the sun gathers its arm. Each night the sun electrifies the sky as if sun is sky's fathomlessness.

Like being awake in your blood before it is your blood in the subtle state of not being at war with sky, you mutter.

Clouds of crows carry sky back. Should I, quick, whisper in one's ear?

Each time one dies, one's breath, like the moon, hangs from a *hook of sky*.

Like a leaf crosses a twig and he waves the twig. The twig had already been waved though.

To sleep in oneself, as if one is alive, but not really, only until something happens.

As if the clarity, the full-on *bindu*, amortizes itself, emptying itself, as if the leaf too, wheeling from sky, drops from the *throat* of sky.

2

Then her speaking image of a person catches fire. In my dream a man is wearing birds and my speaking image of the birds . . . she clearly sees the long stream of qualities pouring themselves all over his body.

A woman eats holding her mouth above her. *You are tall, and your mouth, too, is a tall, lean mouth.*

She longs to be near what she's sure she remembers knowing, as if an image has an ear and it is *your own* ear so you want to be near it.

Like the sound of her birth in the far-flung distance of birds.

Because the air is there whether you're awake (or you could be awake beforehand).

Whether before, occurring as in the darkness of something. I mean *before* the crows, but the dakinis have already taken them.

If one's mind clearly holds what *is* previously, to recall how in the past such things exist anyway. (Like the woman washes her hair in a lake and the lake nearly dies.)

It knows me in its eye. If I part from me, the rape is left, but the eye stays inside my belly.

So much water making her a person, like a bone in water is the slain inside her.

Instead of her own, she is *their* hair, the skin of her hair being *mother-hair*.

A portrait of hair tucked in one's mother, *as-if* it is *her* hair not having quite left her mother.

A woman locks her hair. It falls inward and she feels the falling inside the hair's cud.

The *her* of her hair is not in my fingertips.

The *her* of her mind lacks the valence of my sorrow.

Lung and tail, I consist. I *am*, I say.

I am in the boat of me.

3

I am her. I am her. I think it is my mother saying something in a dream.

She sleeps in *her* now, but it is the *memory* of her, not the person *being* her.

Thus people see a form's endless slipping, like a tour of herself drifting along her bloodstream.

At the *foot of air* (like a bloodspot in air) or is it the real air.

Is that death, you ask, because the straightest line is death.

So much down deep as a spring morning.

When she wakes it is still down, so close to her face, further and further.

I'm trying to remember that particular mustard-color, like a blood-bath of *down*, stand-in for all *downs*.

Birds grow down. Each harp of down, each plucking twining chord of down's interior pause, so that I *am* (in the pause).

A hummingbird dissolves into its own pure form. One thumb moves as if venturing towards it slowly.

Oh! the mother dolly begins, but it is a pretend mother. (However there *was* a possible mother, I mean a mother exists who could be her mother.)

The *real* mother, whom she'd not yet met, would not have said *Oh!*

The beauty of sky relates to birds flying out of sky.

At dusk the hill withdraws into its form. (*Through* birds, quiet has a mode.)

First grandchild is extreme, I think, as a mode's emptiness accrues.

I am that, I'm thinking. A tree lashes night to quiet, then falls away leaving the quiet naked.

4

Being the person dreaming and now, saying hello to the person who, in the dream thinks, *I am also the dream!*

Dreams implode inward and multiply, like a virus, sort of.

The belly of the dream sits in its plate as if the mind of someone were growing from the plate. *I am eating for my plate*, the mind says.

I am my own faller, being in my mind my own kind of falling. Death is in the center.

Being the person dreaming, though dead again. A mind *thinks* but is dead.

A young bird falls as if from the sky but it's from the water where sky was.

You hear the drops of a being, then each piercing droplet of being's time.

I *feel* her sky in the mass of me today. She *smells* the inside of me today.

Empty becomes empty-in-the-mass-of-me-today, like a bone gets loose and falls away in the rain.

A stream of fish crosses her heart. One drinks her milk and is appeased in its fish-ness, like a baby fish would be coming out of its shell.

The baby is frozen. *Not many war people come here*, she's thinking.

Blue is raw, the ocean like teeth. (Inside the teeth are the color of the teeth.)

If a dream implodes and then its bits of dreams (I'm thinking hounds of sky-hawks flaring their wings, *tooting* their wings almost.)

Even without the wings there can be an experience of wings, but she prefers the sound of her mother's skirt is to sun like the breast of the sea buried in it.

Because the things that we are turn about and become who we are.

I am definitely your mother, someone whispers softly, but it is just my voice as if far away.

5

A bird's song fills the morning. Between song and morning there is space. Like she could draw an ideal of the little bird's voice.

So tenderly green, so *now*-green. A bird doesn't speak but its motion is stored in its body.

How will I know, she says, watching the bird see its own face.

Seeing itself there, nipping at air, the traces of itself still in air, like a grike, say, pushing the bird *inside* its air.

Seeing the brain of the face. So much medley tearing up the face.
*Each person must unwrap her face, memorize her face, someone
hollers.*

*It's like a belfry, you comment. A ring of bay and little sips of sky
knocking about the water.*

It's hard to say if the air falls away, the lure of *away*, behind the fog
(what's actually taking place).

*A bowl of green water may be placid tight water, but it's me being
tight, accomplishing green, you whisper.*

Air leaks from her bones. *The last moment of air is the thinnest air*, she's thinking.

I take my thinness seriously, he says, placing his mother in a bowl.
(As if an animal blows away and is found on its back in a bowl.)

Air gets tired, you say, but if you clutch air, mauling a poor, tired section of air.

A dull green bowl holds the water of my air, because the mind of the person is a *trilogy* of air told through mother-air and father-air.

You in my air on my birthday cake sighing. (Though I did not.
I was only sighing for her.)

You in the village of people-less thought searching for that
connection.

The gist of a bird is the animal of its relatives. (She could see its
ochre bill and the young tooth of another new child.)

A symbol of one's animal seems to slip down her fingers, crawling
over them also (*and has its own animal also*).

6

Each night the trees slip into sky becoming themselves.

Does the grandmother exist? She sees the sky weakening back.

Her creamy eyes bulge, slipping back to themselves. She imagines the trees rocking.

Trees light passing tips of sound. You watch them disappear, like a man walks back to nothing.

The lips and teeth of wood hang quietly in grandmother's face. *I am wintering in me*, she says. She doesn't want someone speaking out loud.

Time is exposed. *Grandmother!* I gasp, but it's a heart gasp, like her death.

Within the death are letters. *If you harm the death*, someone begins, because a letter is flesh, beautiful as a peacock.

Her breath too might swallow itself. So many rings lapping waves of sorrow on her broken dress-buttons.

See an eating turkey seeing, the pebbles of its eyes weighing down
the sky.

It's because grandmother's skin looks tight. Her eyeballs are too
poppy like she sees through time, whereas I don't.

Seeing the ignorance in her skin, its reticulations hanging. The
crevice in her mind, its wrinkles hanging.

Seeing her shape press itself there, like the mud of a bed of a river.

Her heart, too, imprints into her skin, pressing its shape into the room.

I may find sky, she continues, forgetting. To me her mind feels brushed.

I am fine, she says, creating a support. *I am fine*, she repeats, her wooden gaze lasted to her. (*Fine* is space so her mind is protected.)

Grandmother's body's *space* seems heavy. Sometimes she leaks out. I say *leak* because, later, if she moves, aspects of her do not move.

The Elements

EARTH

A tulip's knowing is from before knowing, you say mildly. I'm thinking, That's time. Like when Khyungpo Naljor displayed the five Tantric deities present in his five chakras saying 'From now on, never see me as ordinary, not even for a moment.'

Time is your own mind, you repeat, and I have a memory of myself disappearing, not in death but somehow being me another way.

Like I'm me without a precedent, as if your body is you in the name of a foreign person.

A spring of dark lingers in time. It was time before but now the boy draws time. The clear beauty of one whose color is the great color.

To hear the evening sung in night's dim peace. I am
me and then the person who is really me.

The traces of her (or *bowl* of her) like she could be that
and grow into someone saying *hello* to someone.

The collapse of yellow altogether unnerves me. Like
the sheer end of yellow. *Time seems to be more like
that, or the feeling of time sticks on you, you add.*

*It's just whatever you see the world, like a childless
person sees, actually, what is being passed over.*

One imagines time folding back into the cliff. Death, as a figure, turns into a rock, though its flesh is soft, pinchable like a human's.

Behavior takes place *after* its occurrence. I move and am aware that I have already done this.

One imagines time dripping over the hill. She hides inside, feeling *hill* into its space, so that all her lifetimes happen together.

Only when you are completely through it can the ink of "hill," the swift calligraphy in its soft Western snowfield, become a roaring *geshé-like* blessing.

WATER

A junket of fish is in the crook of a man's mind,
so circular in his mind, as if the world, as if his mind and
the world become the dawn of fishlessness.

Far and near, like the junket is *as-if* versus the smell
inside his head.

So many fry wandering around, *as-if* eternity, the
transvestite, is just more precise fish-hood.

As-if one transmutes the fish's consciousness to a Pure
Land, which is just an aspect of *my* consciousness
seeming *as-if* far away.

The man bites off its head, mumbles, then throws the fish toward similar headless fishes.

As-if its distance wakes me, like the throes of a cloud pressing space into its shape.

The memory has shape and the shape time. Distant and close merge in the fish, which has *duration*.

I mean an imprint of time settles in its skin, *as-if* its skin *had been* that.

The fish is ME! (The afflicted mind is an inward-bearing motion.)

Nevertheless, as the fish recedes, the ilk, all the ilks share the same essence.

My raspy throat converges with the cut throats of that fish pile. *Rakshsas wandering through sky enter into people's throats*, she recalls.

A residue of fish coats the skin of my throat and sometimes I feel I am not my throat.

I am longevity instead. Because someone prayed.
Someone saw the pile of fish's bodies and prayed for
their long lives anyway.

*Mercy lasts, you say flatly. The fish enter the divine is
all.*

The man who cut their throats knew the precise
consequences of his action, therefore his assiduous
practice of slicing, tossing, eating, *as-if* his belly were
a globe.

His belly WAS a globe, you say.

FIRE

An island backs toward night. Thin slabs of shore and soft eyes heaving toward these.

Am I dead? (I am nine birds.) A quarry of birds drifts in fragile evening sky.

A lion mounts a yak washing back through sky. Sky is a floor and the two animals are flying but they are really on the floor.

When lambs are in the sky meowing, each lamb *is*, a cross passing over the water.

A bird is poised. She rocks her space gently.
She offers her tongue to taste what is held off.

Because she speaks in such pure stream, her *gaze of tongue. Each and every blade of a zinnia is me*, she sighs.

Swarms of arms lay at her side. It could be death. *I am the stomach of my death fallen to the earth.*

Embers of me are held in sky's arm, but *which*, which arm actually slides over the horizon?

A bird or fish toned by where it flies, slips into its landmark.

A graceful bird, its lip chewed by its mother. She reaches to its lip, chewing passionately.

I try to chew passionately. (That is how she instructs her infant birdlings.) *I want to be kind* is said by the mother.

The mother of my lip, I lay awake wondering if she is happy.

AIR

*The razed town is part of a wall now, I'm reading,
and I know that really the bones and eyes are me only the
book doesn't reveal that.*

The skin of the town is injured, which I carry. When
something touches my skin I feel both the present and
the past, the way it *feels*, taken by itself, without
anything added.

Animals are there. They recall their skin. Some
animals scratch, as if they could scratch the knowing
away.

I see a being and know that it's me being that being in
someone's time that's simply slower than knowing.

I am always dreaming time, you say, as if tenderly knowing the color of your grave-clothes.

One forgets that it's knowing. A thought presses through the ridgelines of one's hand (the silence inside one's hand).

Like a monk *knows* something, which could be light or snow or lilies but it doesn't matter because his teacher sees it also.

When I press on light there is a thought inside, just beneath the skin, like subcutaneous knowing.

Sometimes I hear a sound closer than my skin (the *distinction* between me and the skin). *I definitely have never heard this sound*, I'm thinking, all the while knowing absolutely that my skin has.

If you look at a flower then close your eyes, you definitely know the inside of the flower because your citta has assumed the flower's pattern.

So if you forget the flower you can still have it, like you can crawl inside the flower.

If your citta is alive, like a rooster in a field. Each dawn the freefall of wings.

SPACE

Now it is summer and cherries are hard, nubile on-the-tongue.

Now (as in India) I climb a *shed* of sky.

A bird eats a worm near a tree, but it is space, their host, the nucleus being the passion of one.

Walking westward in sky, where home is a plate of sky. Howsoever I walk, the stride of space is one.

A woman in my dream walks briskly down a hill and I, a cornucopia of space, am overflowing with little horizons of spaciousness.

The space that she wanted was the space inside *her*, that she would see say in a tree, the way a branch gives way to sky.

A bed is spread beneath the tree, wider and deeper into the tree.

Each night she looks out on the hill and if the lines of sky land quietly on the hill, in integrity with its grass, she feels she is *dreaming* grass, maybe being *inside* the grass.

Huckleberry Finn also. Floating down the river he feels *inside* the river and when he is wholly inside, his breath stops.

If you envision light at the point of the *trikuti*, the small light there that enlarges more and more, as long as you visualize that amplified light, the breath stays stopped.

The gross perception of breath leaves me now. Farls of nothing leave me starved.

Death is a *place* and someone *goes to death*, as if going is the non-going of an echo.

The Fourth Part of Air

You look at the sky through the tusk of a hill and a cloud disbands of scattered ones. A songbird chirps. The cry of a dog turns to sky.

As if a nerve from sky measures her appearance within a context of light settings.

A leaf unfurls, then fades into sky. Space is not sky, even though she's dead.

A bone of sky (one, two, three line up as skies), a *wheeze* of sky as if gotten out of the desert.

A bird touches sky. It seems so sure. Sure displaces sky
just at my ear-tip.

The space of my dead mother is a content of mind, a
shock of *rest* fallen from sky.

Birds click sky toward the *perfection* sky. In their space are
flowers falling.

And after rain the full bare sky, deep black, like a sea of
shells.

I see a woman in a brace and the brace holds her up, but
the brace is just breath.

I am definitely what comes out of a trumpet, she's saying. Its
echo is like her whole mouth. Movement inhabits her
whole mouth.

It slowly slips down, though the girl in the death house,
she's too thin. Her death is too *there*.

Very tangible air (*cloth air*) arrives in her there, in the
fourth part of air, breathing her back to air's non-air.

A woman sits alone. The lines of her life spread. Her
body waits for air to tip.

The branching off of age grips a person's face. A certain
opaque color inhabits it like a lake.

There is a hat-bearing person. What I hear is the hat
swinging from side to side.

The flesh of such greens. Like crushed paper in a branch
sweeping ground-cover into green.

My mother is a color (she could *grow* her color), like if a
bird constellates in the blue of its color.

As if her face were on me, a faint breeze or burr in the
side of the dead one.

In other rooms, *under-rooms*, a glimpse of her death in lieu
of *knowing* the deep accord of her own death.

The candles of a shade breathe the word without the
illusion and the breath of us exchanging ourselves.

So I laugh and compliment a person on her color. *What's that shade?* I say and she says *marigold*, which is SO beautiful.

She is wanting to *tell* the color, but is it the *real* color?

Real could be a color. A woman sees me, an impression that doesn't erase her image of me.

Now I am real, I'm thinking, as if *now* contains the moment that that can occur.

Am I alive? Maybe I'm just space. I am an interior walking through the door.

The time of light may pass, you say. Light may fall outside its space.

A lattice of light, a *pod* of light, gobbling space, or not space, light's *taste*.

You locate the light in the undergrowth of darker ones, a pale glow as if I am being buried.

Food is light. Teeth are light. Her teeth grind back. Its
Use is her presence.

Her teeth are like a sling of teeth hitting you in the air.

So there are mother teeth and father teeth beginning from
the beginningless white and red *bindu*.

Now, in the *age of teeth*, I mean hers are swollen and I am
left with something I cannot piece together.

White Bird

1

A man wearing birds, *sitting* in birds, inside the birds' flow.
Together they're called *White Bird*.

White Bird grows tall. *White Bird* hugs his own legs back.
The meditation of sky streams into his heart so there's a
passage of heart into which he may relax.

White Bird relaxes back into his heart, breathing white, like
the beauty of a seed or wind in a bird's hair.

A man sits in wind wearing few clothes, but the birds
come and sit on him like clothes.

White Bird stops. Summer light swarms his shell and the blue shell breaks.

The beauty of his wing fills with sky.

A gull too drags its sky. As if it were an ear gathering in sky.

Beauty is sky. Beauty is rain in sky's past sky.

My mother's arm is pure, its curve of sky seeping into structures.

Then later someone says, *That person is a dead person.* So then I think, *The beauty of sky's color flows from her arm reminding me of her arm.*

I want to wear sky, I holler. (I am in tune with degrees of my mother hanging from death like a soft shoe.)

Her yellow armpit sags, like old newspapers would be lying fallow as they do on distant fields.

A man buys socks but it is really death lurking in sky. *I want to dust sky out so that my limbs swallow themselves.*

He looks, passing by death, as if he is new, *in sky now*, as he puts it.

O look at the birds! They're combing each other's hair! (He's watching a bird gather its gorgeousness.)

My mother is a line. Within the death-lines she is one.
But a node on her blackens and then she is not my mother.

I know a bird whose color is sky before the sky admits itself. Like the brain of a color if sky admits the bird.

A mountain is visible *inside* the bird then. Its color dies then.

A queen bird releases into sky. *There's the sky!* someone says, as if there *is* sky, the *location* sky.

That bird knows me well, I'm thinking, because the bird is mostly dead.

Here is a corner of sky, mother says, fondling a dead bird wrapped up in her pocket. (The bird had lost sky. That's why it died.)

I am the oscillations of a flower, inside, like a flower's brevity, she whispers.

A tall bird tumbles through sky. The touch of its voice is like a raw egg folded into zero.

My mother feeds me air, the tablature of air, doubling air, forcing it to become air to something.

I dream of air (a box of air) because I conflate air with my dead mother. She could taste the flavor of the box and in her mind suck out the box. (Secretly she criticized people who didn't suck.)

Her feet swell in air. The ascending foot, like you could crawl inside the foot.

Who is the end of my mother? Who is the end of my death?
(I am organizing myself backwards.)

Flowers fall, but mountains blossom in air. Born in air, I'm in air already, like a broken piece of air.

2

Sometimes a tree lies flat against sky and its outline in sky makes a sound.

The sound has a color that is not something I know.

The sound of a flower goes anywhere, you say. The water of its breast dribbles down the grass, which is old grass, with old sound, barely any.

So then I think, *My mother is dead but when I sleep with her, I'm old.*

A woman stands alone. She swings her eyes out past nothing.

If you look at a squirrel and see it very clearly, its feeling pulls back, pulls its loyalty back.

Squirrels are always alone. May the squirrel never be alone, she continues, as if time were a bottle of water.

As if a young calf molts or a snake coils around a flower and then *is* the flower.

Is it true or false, a child demands, hearing that petunia-lands exist.

For sound doesn't die, though its lineage may, like Buddha Shakyamuni's dharma.

Sharsin, Muni Sharsin, they say. Muni Sharsin means Buddha Shakyamuni's dharma, which the Buddha said, without the lineage will die. Thus the longevity of a sound's hand dissolves into its legacy of repertoire.

Which is *not* acquisitive, does *not* form a habit of being.
It's the loin of the habit of the sound.

3

Can sand laugh? You see sand and then sand's throat. I mean the lax throat of her death-rattle.

Is it a whole throat? Be aware of the whole throat.

Take the climate of her throat. Like she could set it on the sill and it would still be her throat.

Because things exist, and then exist, and their detritus is left in the mouth of the person.

I see a photograph of her throat, which is not the actual throat. *Where is her throat in the wake of that?*
(I'm guessing *that* means *after* her throat.)

Does it learn? you ask. (I'm trying to remember if her throat learned during its lifetime as my mother.)

Someone is the location of what *once was my mother*. (There are pigs, dogs and someone is riding the dog.)

It's the still core of an eye, thus my mother *almost*. She begins in her heart, like a step ladder of hearts all within one heart.

A little dog trapes across the edges of a carcass, its spots blowing toward birth.

The weight of its space creeps under space. (This is called 'opening the space gate.')

Her parakeet that died can release itself in space. (She pictures her mother in an agony of space, beyond what she can imagine as *being*, as if her mother *is*, somehow, without *being*.)

Take a maximum bird. One feather fills the canyon and its children eat plentifully. BECAUSE FROM TODAY SHE IS NOT DEAD.

White Bird

is set in Minion, a typeface designed by Robert Slimbach in the spirit of the humanist typefaces of fifteenth-century Venice. Minion was originally issued in digital form by Adobe Systems in 1989. In 1991, Slimbach received the *Prix Charles Peignot* for Excellence in Type Design from the *Association Typographique Internationale*.

