

# WRONGHEADED

A poem of voices and movement for stage

By Elaine Feeney for Liz Roche Company

## 1 | Hand Fast |

The women are here to count

To sit together and carve out arms

To bury the dead & to feed their living

When done, they

Dance in the end clutches of spat energy

Bone on bone like a sharp cuckoo barrage

Sweet desire, all spent

## 2 | Liquescence |

*How to Contour the Face to Make Things Pop*

Use a primer/ Wash on generously/ Lather/ Then begin by painting forehead bone/Next the temples/ Sides of nose/Chin and hollows of cheeks with a bright iridescent highlight.

Next, with Lavinia Fontana's stroke as she puts the belly on Cupid and nose on Venus, flick straight parallel brown lines on nose. Buff, bust and burst the brush to sfumato the skin, especially cheeks, blend in. And without moving the tiny face hairs, keep small tight circles, stay in a small circles, continue moving the wrist, but keep it tight, sweep, cover and accentuate the cheek bones,

although this face is so thin now, perhaps best to consider  
plumping it out with a pop of colour: *Love Lorn*, *Girl about Town*,  
*Likeable* or *Milan Mode* are all delicious pinks for bringing back  
life to a dead pallor.

No need to curl the eyelashes.

The eyes

will be

closed.

### **3 | Vanishing |**

If they have any spirit left

They know to save it for one another

They will only feel some control by leaning back

Upon each other

Mapping done deeds

Paying heed to their needs

Breathing

Screaming

Thawing

Melting

#### 4 | Kaleidoscope |

Through the dead window

The grey goose dirty pavement

Floats to the mottled sky like how I

Moved to meet your love

I think of how fast you moved into me

And how suddenly out of me

My hipbone is lower

Down than yours

It sits in your knee groove

And I like us to walk this way

Dragging you with me

Dragging me with us, our

Three-legged walk down

The soused empty streets

Sometimes I don't

Sometimes I like to be alone

Or unaided

Sometimes I can't. Today I can't begin to imagine

What's going on

Like now

Here, where you cannot find me

Where you cannot birth for me or see my dreams

The subtle cavities inside of me, I can hide things from you

Like in a quiver. Or swallow my screams in the lovefucked

Velvet folds of myself

Here where I cannot find you, I can see you on the street

I see you walking away from me, or are you walking

Towards me?

When we pause and freeze, I cannot determine this

And I tell you the tales, now, to remind you

How oftentimes I am feeling all by myself

And especially now

To remind you why I scream when you catch another girl's eye

It's because of now

Now I am protoplasm

Now I am organic matter

Now I am a weighty ion for you all

## 5 | Petrification or Condensation |

Spring is overused. I am overused

And you are overawed

We are gnawed and wrapped and spat out and sucked in

Magnetic

Directions

My nerves are at me

I don't want a blue plastic tray

I don't want to be here

I don't think I can breathe

I don't want to have to say to him

To you; all the hefty cleave of me

Go out; go out again to the outside

Sneak your body out there

For me, if you slim yourself to shimmy through the gap

There are things I need

That you need to fetch for me, or him inside me

Maybe we just need to forage together, get it done

But I see you don't understand the word *forage*

So I mime it beside the edge of the bed, my hands going

Like the clappers, the TV's gone to snow and shadows

And I never can accept *together* in this hospital ward

This is not us

This is my space only, and I don't want it.

Despite having it, space

*I'm in his debt* space

## 6 | St. Vitus' Dance |

If you could go out to the outside and find me some air, I would be most grateful. I would hate to make a nuisance of myself but I would be so thankful. Although *I'm in debt to you for giving me air to live* would be the worst kind of debt. Myself should let me out. To the air. I should drive myself. To wherever. To wherever I need to be, or where I need to go. I cannot find a door. I cannot believe the care is such that I'm better in here where I cannot make a rule. I cannot find my keys. And I know I need them for escape. A decision. A cup-of-tea. My womb. This room is a cell. I am made of cells. My eyes. My finger tips. My shinbone. This womb makes madness of the rest of us. And the test is to get to the outside and breathe the air. And be without a care of everyone or anyone. This brouhaha womb. This woman womb. This honey fungus hole. You'll fit out through, I promise you

Here, take these tips:

*First:*

The narrow wooden knots in the door

Push them through, push. Push

Push down and they will fall out

Push hard down on the door's pine knots

And we'll be finished here, or there

Either way, the relief when it ends

*Second:*

You can bring the outside in

I miss the outside but you'll have

To go grab it for me, hide it inside yourself, quick

Kiss it hard and hold it inside your belly

Quickening. A pennyweight

Of air. Whoosh. Quick. Quickening

*Third:*

Blow the bright mossy green outside into me. See. Simple

Me. Here. Here I am. Me. Here see. See me. Here. Here I am. Me

Bring me the outside wind, and I will

Move, the wind will move inside of me



I will find the middle

It will force

Into me, calming my gimcrack nerves

Some times. Sometimes it calms me

Other times it frays me. Othertimes

Listen to me, ssshhh, get the outside and blow

It back to me. Hurry

They're all watching

## **7 | Petrified | Hardening | Permanent |**

*Ssshhh*, you shouldn't say that

*Ssshhh*, try get some sleep, come now

If you leave your head back on the pillow

And shut down your eyes

You're too erratic

You're nervous

You're so anxious

You're ectoplasm/desperate

You're too cautious

You're so suspicious chatty/weighted/loaded/charged

You're so giddy

You're too unclear  
You're near  
You're rushing now  
You're going to need to sloooooow down  
You're fucking needy  
You're too demanding  
You're gone so quiet, why so quiet?  
You're all hysteria  
You should just *ssshhh*  
And shut the creased frost violet lids  
Your young tired eyes – you might sleep  
My love and *ssshhh* – maybe you can't say that  
I shouldn't  
Have said it, I know  
I know that now, but they didn't tell me  
They never told me anything

## **8 | Sucking Numb |**

They didn't tell me to pack it in the bag  
I know they shouldn't have to constantly explain shit to me but  
I have all the pamphlets here  
Look, nothing about it at all:

*D and C    if your child needs to be ventilated    what to  
pack for the labour ward    signs of meningitis    how fucked  
you are    how happy you are    how to get the paper cup  
from the coffee machine    where to order quinoa  
where to have a ciggie    signs of dilation    tips for reducing  
piles    sit on an inflatable ring    clean hands save lives*

See? Nothing about me. See? Or how to get the air back inside?

Me

*Ssshhh*

Or you and me

But I'll stop now. I'll stop now

Sorry. I should stop now. Sorry. I am sorry you know. Sorry

Did the bottom of my back just snap?

Would you mind awfully checking it for me?

I'm like a hawthorn stick, I am, see I'm brittle like this

*Ssshhh*, maybe if we could say it

In another way, maybe it's the words

They can't hear, is the air blowing

On your face yet, from the outside

Did you catch it for me, to breathe it?

Through my body, you'll need more, you need to

Suck it down into here, here, here, where it

Stretches out your hipbones darling

Nonononono I can't feel it  
Spray it on me, or move it to me  
Ssshhh, maybe if we're silent

## 9. | Kick Up a Dust |

I had never met him before  
I can't see your face mother, bring it  
To me, bring it over to me  
I could put this crinkled cherry band  
To your hair and it will pull the wisps of your strain  
Back into to the crown of you

*I could tell you how he fucked me  
How I fucked him. How I liked it  
How he smiled. I think he liked it too  
But I won't tell you mother  
I have no better word than 'fucking'  
So I'll ssshhh. And how it was a cock  
And I am a hen in this den to crew*

I remember when you were born  
Here on the tiled rubber

Right here. Right by where you are now  
Were you happy mother?  
Yes. A little then. Not so now darling, and it's all  
Ahead of you my darling  
*Ssshhh*. You have to stop. You have to stop screaming  
You have to stop asking  
There is only one way to get  
Air in and get air out  
No mother, there are more ways. There are always more ways  
They won't like you if you keep up your fuss  
You're gone so very pale like a bad duck egg darling  
Do you like duck eggs?  
I think you may have broken your fever

## **10 | Enflame |**

There's a ring of sinewy stuff stuck in the middle of me  
Twisted tight like plaited rock, they're going  
To take a hairy skin hammer to it and open the middle  
Of me. No, they haven't asked me. It's not mine  
I shouldn't have said that. They're only trying to help get  
To the middle of me and give me  
Something,

A ball of heather, a ball of heat, a ball of sunrise

The ball moon, a ping-pong ball of evaporating rain

## **11 | Compliance |**

*Ssshhh.* I'm sorrysorrrysorrrysorrrysorrrysorry. I would have drawn a map on vellum. I should have drawn a star. I could have put me on a bar graph or an app or something, and I would have let you find me, the middle of me, quicker, I see now how much I'm slowing down your day, holding up your trolleys and beds and catheters and toast for other mother makers. I could have jotted down coordinates and put them in some new soft wear. But I was doing the laundry and making bread. I'm sorry. I loved him, the very essence of his eye. I never found the middle of him, they never showed me how. It wasn't there; it wasn't fair that I never did it for him. I will hurry up. If I got up and walking, but I've a hose in my back. Ok if I stopped talking. I've said I'm sorry. I'm like the echo of the hills. I'm like the sorry of the cliffs. I mean the caves. My words are stumbled.

Have you found the middle of me? Of any of us?

This is the twilight hour

Everyone dies at this hour

*Nononononono he's fine, he's alive*

*It's just devoid of energy, this hour.*

*Listen, he's clawing up through you, you know, or down*

*Which way do you look at it?*

*Backwards*

Like looking at the enamel casing of a looking glass

I had a looking glass once, in the shape of a teardrop

I have never looked at a fully formed teardrop

Really? Do you not make them? In your eyes?

Do your eyes not make teardrops for you?

No, I do, I make lots of them

I just never catch them fully formed

I can never see them for myself

They're like melting snowflakes

I fear I have cracked it when I got up too fast

In a too fast motion, the looking glass

I did, I definitely did, and I cracked the casing

And I chastised myself. For I was

Always breaking things, the wooden legs of our heron

And that glass bottle that had the boat in

Smashed that too and your

*Yorkie* Easter egg mug

I would have packed it for you my love  
The boat? No. The looking glass  
Even with the crack? Because of the crack  
Am I cracked? Not yet darling. You've a few hours left  
Were you happy looking into the looking glass?  
Well not with the crack in it  
Was it cracked on the enamel part?  
Yes darling. But surely it wouldn't  
Affect your reflection? Everything affects your reflection

## **12 | Honey Sac|**

The light reflects the flats sprawl in the Liffey  
The sun reflects my child's blood red hair  
The moon reflects our shiny oiled chimney breast  
The stars reflect the ebony dashboard, with my feet elevated  
The Christmas lights reflect chestnut eyes, only in my head  
The looking glass will reflect your demise  
But look, we have made it passed 12 labours with our feet up



### 13 | Ice Cubes for the Ferry Trip and Purgatory |

I wonder how many party bags of ice it would take?

For what?

To keep her body frozen on the back seat of our car

To keep her frozen in your beating stone heart

To not ever again reflect the stars

Never

No never. To never again reflect the lights on the riverbed

Our dead child

Never? No no never

2

2 what?

2 bags

2 bags of what?

2 bags of ice to keep her forever frozen in our hearts

Frozen on our trip

To drive her home for hours

Our dead child

## 14 | Gentleman's Agreement over Bouclé Coat |

I reached my leg over. Feeling the dark. The railings. Of the River Liffey. It was dark. Dead dark time. Deathly dark time.

I put my second leg over. I was wearing a skirt. The frost sprayed pole shocked me. I am here. I am there. I am never inside my own head. I stepped inside the railing. A man passed in a Bouclé coat. Said, are you ok Hun? No, I said.

Can I call anyone for you? Yes, I said. Yes. Have you a number. No, I said. Have you? No, he said. Would you like my coat? Does it fit two? I said. It does, he said, mocking himself with shame. It's very cold love. To be out so late.

The railing? I know.

I'm riding it. I'm frozen, I said. I am riding it straddle. Not sidesaddle. If I sidesaddle this way I slip, I slip in. I am like her in the bed of flowers after her mad lover who had feigned mad, went mad and killed her. He didn't kill her but really he did kill her. You can't go mad and not warn someone. It's an unfair thing to do. Do you really think he killed her? He asked, nodding down his head like a good stable horse might.

The Prince? Oh yes. Yes, he killed her. All mad men kill what they love. Often by their killer sulks. Especially by their sulks and their moods. Not in this Bouclé coat, mind. Especially if

you're younger than them. If you would only sit in this way keep your feet in here, hun. The heart is leaping outta me watching you straddle that pole. In where? In here. On Dublin. Keep my feet in on Dublin and my legs together sidesaddle? And you've done nothing more than leave me in a Bouclé coat, warm to survive, but not heated enough for us to live. Only to survive. But be in fools. You are not a fool. It will be ok. He survived. You will too. He took a very small fall. I will wake up and I will have this inside my belly. And I can't even find it. But I can't even find it. See. It's not here. Or there. Or anywhere. I can't point it out to you with this index finger. I am blind. There are more ways to be blind than gouging out the eyes. Imagine cutting off the feet. You could. Are you still cold? No. No. Saddle in this way and slip back here. And you can keep the coat. I can? Thank you. Are you ok now? Can you remember the number? Yeah. Ok, great let me dial it for you Hun. Call someone to help you. Yes ok. Ok. The Number? 2. 2? Yes 2. I am walking away now. I don't know how else to say it. 2 and me away from you and your kindness. Riddle me this though sir of gentle night. How many bottles of gin and herbs would it take now? Would it take for what? A naggin? A shoulder? A baby? A litre? So what volume would it take to divide 2? Divide it in half? No. No,

in fact to divide it by 10. Why ten? Because it's not really 2 is it? Not really. A bud is not half a tree if the tree dies, is it? A chick is not half her mother on a plate roasted, is she? A virus can't sustain without the host it kills, a cocoon is only as alive as the butterfly but half and half a cocoon does not make a butterfly winged, my eyes cannot see underwater, my legs cannot run without me. Minus 1 has no potential, has it? Well, yes with a positive. Otherwise, no. I suppose not. But I am not a Siamese twin. Oh awful position, where no one will win. A baby kangaroo in its pouch is not half her mother. The wolf spider's egg sac will be carried by the mother but is not half of her. Ah that's it. Touch the Dublin soil under your feet. Don't mind talking of spiders. Have you drink taken? Or drugs? Lots around here still sniffin' the poppers. Without their coats on. Is the coat warm? It's lovely. Thanks. Mind yourself Hun. Yes gentle man. I am a woman. And I will try to mind myself on Dublin soil. But you seem to be unaware of my risk. Do you care? This is concrete. Yes, but under it. Think under it, crack it up and destroy it and think of the fertile soil and the earthworms under it. Gouge up the concrete. And then I will see. No. Sadly no. Unless you run the earth through your fingers. But these are weak fingers. They can't fight off anything.

They can sow seeds. Sew buttons.

And so, they are not weak fingers.

And you are warm so you are not weak.

## **15 | Baksheesh |**

You must make sure that they are empty and that they know their crime and give them a scrubbing brush. You must remember the children must not be marked. No one will buy them. Keep the girls alive. Without exerting too much energy. I have a photographer, he is coming later to take pictures, we are thinking of making a brochure of them. A well-educated man, the photographer.

What do you want me for, what do you want with me, do you want anything? I will freeze if you expect anything from me.

I am only part of a sequence. I am a Silver Cross pram. I am walking down the street in my town. I see my first burka. I am walking and walking and yet I can give you nothing. I am carrying the dead weight in my legs. It haunts my walk.

I am remembering the teenage boys on the train to Heuston telling me how Molly loved

when one of them would hold her tit  
and the other would hold the other tit and  
how oh how she said she loved. It. She loved.  
It. I asked them did they ask her, Molly, about  
what her tits loved, or what she loved  
but they said they didn't need to ask her.  
They knew what Molly loved.

I am a cemetery slab. I am a pine tree. I am a fourteen-year-  
old unmet dream. I am the wooden owl carver. I am my dead  
brother's tiny boot. I am a footstep. I am the truck man who  
hides behind the baby home gate. I am the altar polisher. I am the  
local doctor. I am scared of the dark. I am the evening lark. I am the  
cemetery goat. I am choked. I am cold. I am my sister's first  
host. I am in America. I am always looking for my mother. I  
am a snooker player. I am gay. I am the eternal day and I am  
not ok. I am hungry. I am a radio wave. I am tested and  
depraved. I am my father's wish. I am my mother's dead  
womb. I am never giving in. I am the identification process. I  
am the train ticket checker. I am the taxi driver. I am the cot  
maker. I am the blanket baby knitter. I am the fruit seller. I am  
the teacher. I am the orchard stealer. I am the dead. I am the  
child's eyelash flutterer. I am the pissing seven-year-old-

stutterer. I am a crown of thorns. I am the goat horn. I am the  
cook. I am a milkman. I am the van driver. I am a carpenter. I  
am a fort, a promontory fort.

I am this man's soft navy jumper, riding his steely chest; I lie  
up against it and beg him to save us.

I am not beyond begging for my sister.

Or my daughter. Or your mother.

I am in my dead Granny's kitchen and she is sweating.

She is making scones. She makes a special gingerbread man  
for my brother. I give him a bow tie with raisins. It doesn't  
look too good. Later he flicks off the raisins and chomps  
down the thing. He never offers me a bite, and I don't like  
that he has eaten him. It's my secret.

Women need to keep secrets.

This is not my first secret.

*Ssshhh* they tell us all the time.

Sorry we tell them all the time.

Face to face with the men who would sell the  
world out from under us.

I was always face to face with the men who would sell me.

The world out from under me.

They are a whole alphabet of gestures.

They are a whole language of figurative translation.

Here/There is a pain of woman.

Here/There is a pain of man.

## **16 | Gavel-Kind |**

You're twelve. You have small dark hands and narrow almond hips. You are useful to your father. And your uncle.

You are not sick.

You're forty-two tomorrow. You have lumps all over your chest. You have a high risk of deep-sea swimming to the rock deep bottom today. You are not sick.

You are spread eagled on the green of the college in March.

It is Paddy's day. They are taking advantage of the day. And afterwards they steal your red clutch bag with the flick clip.

They didn't take advantage of you. You were non advantageous.

You are not sick. You are a sign of suffering.

And how bountiful how bountiful how bountiful you are.



Not sick.

You are mothering, you are feeding, lactating. Do you know that bovine mastitis is more researched than human?

You are spreading, don't scream for yourself, now.

How selfish?

Don't feed yourself now.

And that mask over your head, for you to breathe first before you put one on your child? You know that's a head fuck, don't you?

They will judge you in the algae of the Atlantic and it will all be your fault.

Always.

You are bated, oh how bated, how bated how bated you all look, suffering.

## **17 | Tom Tiddler's Ground, Who Owns a Dead Woman? |**

### *How to Put Cake Makeup on a Dying Body*

Last Lesson.

First you wet the blending sponge under the running tap water, you need Prolong Foundation Wear and lots of dry powder as the body stays sweating long after the brain is dead. Really no need for contouring at this late stage.

You may hear gas noises

don't be alarmed

The baby will not coo inside, but it's ok, we'll all hear it coo  
afterwards with the help of

And what should we do with mum?

(This is the beautiful mum with the cherry-cola-lip-stain and  
the twenty-four-hour-make-up-cake on her face)

Oh mum. Poor mum is dead. So to the morgue. Yes. To the morgue.

But oh what a darling what a darling what a darling she is.