

Vona Groarke

**DOUBLE  
NEGATIVE**



Gallery Books

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*To fill a Gap*  
*Insert the Thing that caused it —*  
*Block it up*  
*With Other — and 'twill yawn the more —*  
*You cannot solder an Abyss*  
*With air —*  
Emily Dickinson, Poem No. 647

*No one uses doilies anymore*

so why do I hold the word to the window  
so the holes in the pattern are years ago  
and a visitor has come?

Impossible to talk of the mart or catarrh  
as though days, clumps and clods of them,  
could be glamoured by a paper doily  
placed nicely on a plate.

Here, so, for this poem only,  
is its wheel of stars  
and star-shaped flowers,

an inkling of words  
as ornament,  
the way stars and, yes,  
flowers are.

## *How Do We Get These Lives?*

Being the question you'd strip to, if you could,  
if the words came clear over a night  
thinking itself a furnace  
to be stoked repeatedly.

How riverly set it is on an answer  
while pretending not to be. You reckon  
you shouldn't have to reach for an ending  
when they mostly seem to come so easily.

You want to be gentle, of course you do,  
to slip through as your body does  
the empty space before it and after  
as you shift from day to day

but someone has stitched these little traps  
like tiny mirror sequins to your clothes  
so every time you move you think  
you can't afford the glare.

When you shut your eyes it's as if  
the white sheet all this flickers on  
slips down an inch inside its clips  
and the clips don't move at all.

## *Against Anxiety*

A cartoon rider on a horse so real  
it shits and stalls and rears against the rider  
it's been saddled with in this narrative.

Who wonders, of course, if he's been here before  
but nobody, not the old-timer in the sun chair  
nor the woman stock-still in her parked car,  
not even the dog that stares him down,  
bids him the time of day.

The horse comes not to care.  
There will be hay or else there won't;  
either way, he's a horse still tomorrow.

The rider knows nothing about tomorrow.  
He moves on, colour and storyline,  
to the next bit of road and the next,  
past fury, exhaustion and bafflement  
as he drags with his ears a shaft of light  
from a moon he thinks is real.

I suppose that's the thing about cartoons:  
everyone sees the punchline coming  
except the one who's about to get punched.

## *The way memory operates*

is the way a man scheduled for hospital at two  
at ten plants a rosebush by the wall  
and asks not to be photographed  
as he tamps the earth with the sole of his boot,  
the inconceivable earth.

Small comfort that the rosebush dies,  
that instead of roses all summer long  
is the absence of roses year on year  
shifting a little when the light is cramped  
or rain huddles in from the west.

This too is the way I come back  
to where I was young and my children were young,  
to where we planted all those summers  
and tamped the months around them, hard

and hard to say where the years have gone  
when we lay down, night on night,

when the slipway sings so narrowly  
and the wind stoppers up the gap in the wall  
and the sky is civil in fits and starts  
and the boats play their moorings like spoons.

## *Against Despair*

When the past sets you down  
between grillework and mirrors  
closing off that one time

you feel for the hidden spring  
but there's only a hinge  
that whinges whenever you breathe.

Which is how the past remembers itself:  
a faulty hinge and a lock that keeps turning  
in a door that isn't there.

You believe it will turn into  
something in the end  
but it is you who changes

to a wooden boat out on a fathomless sea.  
Which is how memory works,  
what can you do?

The best you can hope for  
is a warm day,  
good news of this or that.