**Originally**

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| We came from our own country in a red room  which fell through the fields, our mother singing  our father’s name to the turn of the wheels.  My brothers cried, one of them bawling Home,  Home, as the miles rushed back to the city, 5  the street, the house, the vacant rooms  where we didn’t live any more. I stared  at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw.  All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow,  leaving you standing, resigned, up an avenue 10  where no one you know stays. Others are sudden.  Your accent wrong. Corners, which seemed familiar,  leading to unimagined, pebble-dashed estates, big boys  eating worms and shouting words you don’t understand.  My parents’ anxiety stirred like a loose tooth 15  in my head. I want our own country, I said.  But then you forget, or don’t recall, or change,  and, seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only  a skelf of shame. I remember my tongue  shedding its skin like a snake, my voice 20  in the classroom sounding just like the rest. Do I only think  I lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first space  and the right place? Now, Where do you come from?  strangers ask. Originally? And I hesitate. |

**Valentine**

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| Not a red rose or a satin heart.  I give you an onion.  It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.  It promises light  like the careful undressing of love. 5  Here.  It will blind you with tears  like a lover.  It will make your reflection  a wobbling photo of grief. 10  I am trying to be truthful.  Not a cute card or a kissogram.  I give you an onion.  Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,  possessive and faithful 15  as we are,  for as long as we are.  Take it.  Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,  if you like. 20  Lethal.  Its scent will cling to your fingers,  cling to your knife. |

**War Photographer**

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| In his darkroom he is finally alone with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows. The only light is red and softly glows, as though this were a church and he a priest preparing to intone a Mass. 5 Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.  He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays beneath his hands which did not tremble then though seem to now. Rural England. Home again to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel, 10 to fields which don't explode beneath the feet of running children in a nightmare heat.  Something is happening. A stranger's features faintly start to twist before his eyes, a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries 15 of this man's wife, how he sought approval without words to do what someone must and how the blood stained into foreign dust.  A hundred agonies in black-and-white from which his editor will pick out five or six 20 for Sunday's supplement. The reader's eyeballs prick with tears between bath and pre-lunch beers. From aeroplane he stares impassively at where he earns a living and they do not care. |

**Anne Hathaway (** *from The World's Wife)*

*'Item I gyve unto my wife my second best bed ...' (from Shakespeare's will)*

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| The bed we loved in was a spinning world of forests, castles, torchlight, clifftops, seas where we would dive for pearls. My lover's words were shooting stars which fell to earth as kisses on these lips; my body now a softer rhyme 5 to his, now echo, assonance; his touch a verb dancing in the centre of a noun. Some nights, I dreamed he'd written me, the bed a page beneath his writer's hands. Romance and drama played by touch, by scent, by taste. 10 In the other bed, the best, our guests dozed on, dribbling their prose. My living laughing love - I hold him in the casket of my widow's head as he held me upon that next best bed. |
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**Havisham** *From Mean Time (1998)*

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| Beloved sweetheart bastard. Not a day since then  I haven’t wished him dead. Prayed for it  so hard I’ve dark green pebbles for eyes,  ropes on the back of my hands I could strangle with.  Spinster. I stink and remember. Whole days 5 in bed cawing Nooooo at the wall; the dress  yellowing, trembling if I open the wardrobe;  the slewed mirror, full-length, her, myself, who did this   to me? Puce curses that are sounds not words.  Some nights better, the lost body over me, 10 my fluent tongue in its mouth in its ear  then down till I suddenly bite awake. Love’s  hate behind a white veil; a red balloon bursting  in my face. Bang. I stabbed at a wedding-cake.  Give me a male corpse for a long slow honeymoon. 15 Don’t think it’s only the heart that b-b-b-breaks. |

**Mrs Midas**

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| 5  10  15  20  25  30 | It was late September. I’d just poured a glass of wine, begun  to unwind, while the vegetables cooked. The kitchen  filled with the smell of itself, relaxed, its steamy breath  gently blanching the windows. So I opened one,  then with my fingers wiped the other’s glass like a brow.  He was standing under the pear tree snapping a twig.  Now the garden was long and the visibility poor, the way  the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky,  but that twig in his hand was gold. And then he plucked  a pear from a branch. – we grew Fondante d’Automne –  and it sat in his palm, like a lightbulb. On.  I thought to myself, Is he putting fairy lights in the tree?  He came into the house. The doorknobs gleamed.  He drew the blinds. You know the mind; I thought of  the Field of the Cloth of Gold and of Miss Macready.  He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne.  The look on his face was strange, wild, vain. I said,  What in the name of God is going on? He started to laugh.  I served up the meal. For starters, corn on the cob.  Within seconds he was spitting out the teeth of the rich.  He toyed with his spoon, then mine, then with the knives, the forks.  He asked where was the wine. I poured with a shaking hand,  a fragrant, bone-dry white from Italy, then watched  as he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank.  It was then that I started to scream. He sank to his knees.  After we’d both calmed down, I finished the wine  on my own, hearing him out. I made him sit  on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself.  I locked the cat in the cellar. I moved the phone.  The toilet I didn’t mind. I couldn’t believe my ears: | 35  40  45  50  55  60  65 | how he’d had a wish. Look, we all have wishes; granted.  But who has wishes granted? Him. Do you know about gold?  It feeds no one; aurum, soft, untarnishable; slakes  no thirst. He tried to light a cigarette; I gazed, entranced,  as the blue flame played on its luteous stem. At least,  I said, you’ll be able to give up smoking for good.  Separate beds. in fact, I put a chair against my door,  near petrified. He was below, turning the spare room  into the tomb of Tutankhamun. You see, we were passionate then,  in those halcyon days; unwrapping each other, rapidly,  like presents, fast food. But now I feared his honeyed embrace,  the kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art.  And who, when it comes to the crunch, can live  with a heart of gold? That night, I dreamt I bore  his child, its perfect ore limbs, its little tongue  like a precious latch, its amber eyes  holding their pupils like flies. My dream milk  burned in my breasts. I woke to the streaming sun.  So he had to move out. We’d a caravan  in the wilds, in a glade of its own. I drove him up  under the cover of dark. He sat in the back.  And then I came home, the woman who married the fool  who wished for gold. At first, I visited, odd times,  parking the car a good way off, then walking.  You knew you were getting close. Golden trout  on the grass. One day, a hare hung from a larch,  a beautiful lemon mistake. And then his footprints,  glistening next to the river’s path. He was thin,  delirious; hearing, he said, the music of Pan  from the woods. Listen. That was the last straw.  What gets me now is not the idiocy or greed  but lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness. I sold  the contents of the house and came down here.  I think of him in certain lights, dawn, late afternoon,  and once a bowl of apples stopped me dead. I miss most,  even now, his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch. |