**Originally**

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| We came from our own country in a red roomwhich fell through the fields, our mother singingour 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, 5the street, the house, the vacant roomswhere we didn’t live any more. I staredat the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw.All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow,leaving you standing, resigned, up an avenue 10where no one you know stays. Others are sudden.Your accent wrong. Corners, which seemed familiar,leading to unimagined, pebble-dashed estates, big boyseating worms and shouting words you don’t understand.My parents’ anxiety stirred like a loose tooth 15in 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 onlya skelf of shame. I remember my tongueshedding its skin like a snake, my voice 20in the classroom sounding just like the rest. Do I only thinkI lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first spaceand 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 lightlike the careful undressing of love. 5Here.It will blind you with tearslike a lover.It will make your reflectiona wobbling photo of grief. 10I 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 15as we are,for as long as we are.Take it.Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,if you like. 20Lethal.Its scent will cling to your fingers,cling to your knife. |

**War Photographer**

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| In his darkroom he is finally alonewith spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.The only light is red and softly glows,as though this were a church and hea priest preparing to intone a Mass. 5Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.He has a job to do. Solutions slop in traysbeneath his hands which did not tremble thenthough seem to now. Rural England. Home againto ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel, 10to fields which don't explode beneath the feetof running children in a nightmare heat.Something is happening. A stranger's featuresfaintly start to twist before his eyes,a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries 15of this man's wife, how he sought approvalwithout words to do what someone mustand how the blood stained into foreign dust.A hundred agonies in black-and-whitefrom which his editor will pick out five or six 20for Sunday's supplement. The reader's eyeballs prickwith tears between bath and pre-lunch beers.From aeroplane he stares impassively at wherehe 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 worldof forests, castles, torchlight, clifftops, seaswhere we would dive for pearls. My lover's wordswere shooting stars which fell to earth as kisseson these lips; my body now a softer rhyme 5to his, now echo, assonance; his toucha verb dancing in the centre of a noun.Some nights, I dreamed he'd written me, the beda page beneath his writer's hands. Romanceand drama played by touch, by scent, by taste. 10In 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 headas 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 5in 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, 10my 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. 15Don’t think it’s only the heart that b-b-b-breaks. |

**Mrs Midas**

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| 51015202530 | It was late September. I’d just poured a glass of wine, begunto unwind, while the vegetables cooked. The kitchenfilled with the smell of itself, relaxed, its steamy breathgently 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 waythe dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky,but that twig in his hand was gold. And then he pluckeda 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 ofthe 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 watchedas 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 wineon my own, hearing him out. I made him siton 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: | 35404550556065 | 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; slakesno 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 roominto 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 livewith a heart of gold? That night, I dreamt I borehis child, its perfect ore limbs, its little tonguelike a precious latch, its amber eyesholding their pupils like flies. My dream milkburned in my breasts. I woke to the streaming sun. So he had to move out. We’d a caravanin the wilds, in a glade of its own. I drove him upunder the cover of dark. He sat in the back.And then I came home, the woman who married the foolwho 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 trouton 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 Panfrom the woods. Listen. That was the last straw.What gets me now is not the idiocy or greedbut lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness. I soldthe 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. |