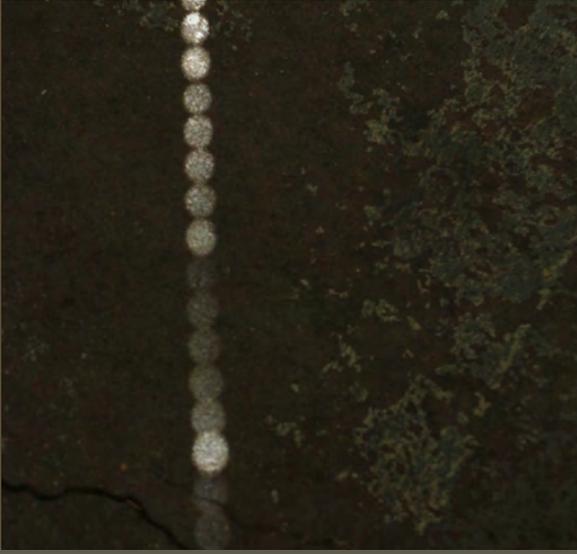


WAITING
TO BE CALLED

*Poems by
Claire Scott*



"A brilliant, eccentric, unique voice with a range that encompasses childhood violence and a God who comes to therapy. Claire Scott's lean, beautifully crafted language dares to be cynical about the world but is never without a deep compassion. These are poems that will be read over and over again as a seismograph of our time."

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"Claire Scott's poems are very well made. Familiar with the mad, yet stated so sanely."

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Waiting to be Called

Poems by Claire Scott

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for John, forever

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Waiting to be Called

The light is too bright. This place
We have been seeking since birth

This heaven or nirvana or paradise
A promised land without shadows

Time suspended in dazzling light
Long ago shadows have curled up

Slunk away taking tomorrow
In their suitcases of what

Might have been, cumbersome
Cases filled with parts

Cast aside in fear or shame
Parts not ready to be claimed

Or yet to be discovered
Desire, anger, aggression,

Prejudice, tenderness, tears
All biding time in the steadfast
shadow

Waiting to be called

Measuring

I measure each moment
With a silver yard stick

Meticulous, methodical
Exact measurement
 essential

Does the moment merit
Anger fear sorrow joy
 and how much
 especially how much

I keep my yard stick polished

Does a friend cancelling
A late supper measure
 three inches or seven

Does waiting for a test result
(Possible cancer per Dr. Stuart)
 merit all three feet

Or is that reserved for
Fire-blazed homes, ashes
 shrouding the past

the numbers clearly marked

And the death of a cat
Striped and sassy
 rescued years ago
 from a city shelter

How many tears
Before looking foolish
 friends frowning

Does a poem published
In a prestigious journal permit
 eighteen inches of ecstasy

easy reading for tired eyes

Or only two or five, avoiding
The embarrassment of no
further acceptances

How will I know without my
Silver yard stick, my constant

Companion that so precisely
Tells me what to feel.



Love

My love is no good
I have tried sweeping
Polishing, scrubbing
But it does no good
I have taken it for repair
A solemn doctor with
Round glasses investigates
Searching and sighing
A jeweler with a serious squint
Adjusts some screws
But it comes back the
Same as always
No good
I made my mother sick
With my no good love.

Every Sunday

Every Sunday my mother serves burnt lima beans
doused in bitterness and butter. Her special
recipe. We tumble in from church where my
father sings Bach in the filtered light of stained
glass saints. Us kids in the front row under the glare of
his fixed eye. In our Sunday best we pinch and poke
pretending to listen. She full of night's pills
and alcohol. Lumpy house coat askew.
Hair a-fly. Cook's day off. Air thick with smoky
resentment. My father clears his throat to say
a wobbly grace. Us kids never sure exactly what
we are grateful for. We sit to a bleak meal seasoned
with spite. She rearranges her food, listless, vacant,
twirling her hair. We stare at our plates of burnt
beans. Us kids just sit, eyes down. No kicking
under the table or sticking out silent tongues.
Every Sunday.

Murder

Yesterday I murdered mother,
 or maybe the day before
possibly sometime after lunch
 I tucked her Hermes scarf
around her crinkled neck
 yanking satisfaction
 fists tense, nails slicing
 a kitchen knife chasing
 eyes vacant as steel
daily drops of belladonna
 dripping delirium
 breath held in icy suspense
 enemas burning, bursting
 naked in a shivering tub
I shot her bloodless heart
 exhaling each ripping blow
 firing and firing ecstasy
 hazy nights, drugged days
 doors locked against a child
I hear slippered steps jerk and scuff
 time for milky tea and toast
made by your daughter,
 the one-eyed jack.

Scylla and Charybdis

Scylla: my father's six-headed rules
three rows of teeth to keep you in line

Charybdis: my mother's emotional tempest
uninhibited swallowing and belching

Like Odysseus, I chose Scylla
and a phantom limb aches with loss.



Knots

I was my father's son 'til I was twelve
Playing catch with leather gloves
In a browned-out field, just us two.
Feeling the satisfying whop
Of ball meeting glove,
My sisters left behind, redundant.
Off to tennis, racquets swinging
Dressed in matching whites
Hitting the ball back and forth
Back and forth, feeling the
Rhythm deep in our bodies.
We tiptoed past my mother
Easing softly out the door
Sharing the winks of thieves.
On rainy days he taught me
Sailor's knots, tying and untying,
Tying and untying,
Sitting close, heads together.
Wanting to look into my eyes
And see himself shining back
A perfect father, a father who
Teaches his son skills, introduces
Him to the ways of the world.
Bowline, square knot, anchor hitch.
I hated knots, hated his insistence,
But I tied and retied
To be the one beside him
To be the one to please him
Then breasts betrayed, my spirit
Folded, no longer able to
Pretend. I almost lost him.
But when I turned thirteen
I became his wife.

Cats

But I was there, I saw it
Water swirling under the bridge
We stood on, my father and I
White foam licking bare rocks
Eddies churning, sucking
Cats curled in bags of stones
Twisted with twine
Father, how could you
I was three
It could have been me.

Uncle John

My Uncle John was bald and lived
with his parents. My Mother said he drank.
He didn't seem to do anything.
He never showed much interest in me,
but then neither did my grandparents.
I played alone in the cold echoing rooms.

Once my mother had him drive
me to my grandparents'
summer cottage by the sea.
He stopped the car. I remember
the crunch of the leather seat.
I remember my underpants

were white. I was ten.
The pungent smell of the
Lincoln Continental. After,
he drove fast. I watched the needle
move upward, fascinated, petrified.
One terror overlaying another.

Later I played cards with children
at the beach. We played
I Doubt It: a game of secrecy and lies.
I felt the grip of the speedometer,
stomach seizing, body shaking,
the smell of leather fading.

Mother, you knew.
You told us he was strange.
You knew, Mother.