

**Lynda Hull** (born— 1954 - March 29, 1994) || **Ornithology**

Gone to seed, ailanthus, the poverty  
tree. Take a phrase, then  
fracture it, the pods' gaudy nectarine shades  
ripening to parrots taking flight, all crest  
and tail feathers.

A musical idea.

Macaws

scarlet and violet,  
tangerine as a song  
the hue of sunset where my street becomes water

and down shore this phantom city skyline's  
mere hazy silhouette. The alto's  
liquid geometry weaves a way of thinking,  
a way of breaking  
synchronistic

through time

so the girl

on the comer  
has the bones of my face,  
the old photos, beneath the Kansas City hat,

black fedora lifting hair off my neck  
cooling the sweat of a night-long tidal  
pull from bar to bar the night we went  
to find Bird's grave. Eric's chartreuse  
perfume. That

poured-on dress

I lived days

and nights inside,  
made love  
and slept in, a mesh and slur of zipper

down the back. Women smoked the boulevards  
with gardenias afterhours, asphalt shower-  
slick, ozone charging air with sixteenth  
notes, that endless convertible ride to find  
the grave

whose sleep and melody

wept neglect

enough to torch us  
for a while  
through snare-sweep of broom on pavement,

the rumpled musk of lover's sheets, charred  
cornices topping crosstown gutted buildings.  
Torches us still-cat screech, matte blue steel  
of pistol stroked across the victim's cheek  
where fleet shoes

jazz this dark

and peeling

block, that one.

Vine Street, Olive.

We had the music, but not the pyrotechnics—

rhinestone straps lashing my shoes, heels sinking  
through earth and Eric in casual drag,  
mocha cheekbones rouged, that flawless  
plummy mouth. A style for moving,  
heel tap and

lighter flick,

lion moan

of buses pulling away

through the static

brilliant fizz of taffeta on nyloned thighs.

Light mist, etherous, rinsed our faces  
and what happens when  
you touch a finger to the cold stone  
that jazz and death played  
down to?

Phrases.

Take it all

and break forever—

a man

with gleaming sax, an open sill in summertime,

and the fire-escape's iron zigzag tumbles  
crazy notes to a girl cooling her knees,  
wearing one of those dresses no one wears  
anymore, darts and spaghetti straps, glitzy  
fabrics foaming

an iron bedstead.

The horn's

alarm, then fluid brass chromatics.

Extravagant

ailanthus, the courtyard's poverty tree is spike  
and wing, slate-blue

mourning dove,

sudden cardinal flame.

If you don't live it, it won't come out your horn.

Hull, Lynda. "Ornithology." *The Only Word*. New York:  
HarperPerennial, 1995. Print.

**Susan Mitchell** (born- 1944) || **Havana Birth**

Off Havana, the ocean is green this morning  
of my birth. The conchers clean their knives on leather  
straps and watch the sky while three couples  
who have been dancing on the deck of a ship  
in the harbor, the old harbor of the fifties, kiss  
each other's cheeks and call it a night.

On a green sofa five dresses wait  
to be fitted. The seamstress kneeling at Mother's feet  
has no idea I am about to be born. Mother  
pats her stomach which is flat  
as the lace mats on the dressmaker's table. She thinks  
I'm playing in my room. But as usual, she's wrong.

I'm about to be born in a park in Havana. Oh,  
this is important, everything in the dressmaker's house  
is furred like a cat. And Havana leans right up  
against the windows. In the park, the air  
is chocolate, the sweet breath of a man  
smoking an expensive cigar. The grass

is drinkable, dazzling, white. In a moment  
I'll get up from a bench, lured  
by a flock of pigeons, lazily sipping  
the same syrupy music through a straw.  
Mother is so ignorant, she thinks  
I'm rolled like a ball of yarn under the bed. What

does she know of how I got trapped in my life?  
She thinks it's all behind her, the bloody  
sheets, the mirror in the ceiling  
where I opened such a sudden furious blue, her eyes  
bruised shut like mine. The pigeon's eyes  
are orange, unblinking, a doll's. Mother always said

I wanted to touch everything because  
I was a child. But I was younger than that.  
I was so young I thought whatever I  
wanted, the world wanted too. Workers  
in the fields wanted the glint of sun on their machetes.  
Sugarcane came naturally sweet, you

had only to lick the earth where it grew.  
The music I heard each night outside  
my window lived in the mouth of a bird. I was so young  
I thought it was easy as walking  
into the ocean which always had room  
for my body. So when I held out my hands

I expected the pigeon to float between them  
like a blossom, dusting my fingers with the manna  
of its wings. But the world is wily, and doesn't want  
to be held for long, which is why  
as my hands reached out, workers lay down  
their machetes and left the fields, which is why

a prostitute in a little *calle* of Havana dreamed  
the world was a peach and flicked  
open a knife. And Mother, startled, shook  
out a dress with big peonies splashed like dirt  
across the front, as if she had fallen  
chasing after me in the rain. But what could I do?

I was about to be born, I was about to have  
my hair combed into the new music  
everyone was singing. The dressmaker sang it, her mouth  
filled with pins. The butcher sang it and wiped  
blood on his apron. Mother sang it and thought her body  
was leaving her body. And when I tried

I was so young the music beat right  
through me, which is how the pigeon got away.  
The song the world sings day after day  
isn't made of feathers, and the song a bird pours  
itself into is tough as a branch  
growing with the singer and the singer's delight.

Mitchell, Susan. "Havana Birth." *Rapture*. New York:  
HarperPerennial, 1992. Print.