

VIOLET CRAG

A Thesis Presented

by

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ABSTRACT
VIOLET CRAG

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Violet Crag is a book of poems.

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I.

WANT

In this so-called expansion & contraction
the cosmos loops
like a necklace

& latches

*

Matter lives
in deepest spots
of deepest dark
in irises

Child
this happens

In the light
there is too much light

*

Want
makes a suicide inside us

to find eyes
we do not have

with eyes who
do not know how

*

Silent nights
we chew loud

shake
large sets of stars

Blink

that bridge of magpies
flies apart

THE CHILLING ASPECT

After the war, when everyone was cold & poor
another war began & everyone got warm.

The foliage ended
in a bed of redder perennial color.
The sun was purged.
The drugged city curbed its skyline.

In this newest war
in which only the most steadfast
will die, we will want to fail beautiful.
Comets flare into a blood-fist

dust in the woolen theater
oblivion in which we breathe.
So we'll fall in love & rage
upon the native grass.

That there was an aim
was not the chilling aspect. That the shouts
carried, or the public buildings dripped
with January rain.

It was that it was a burn, & thus
could not return home.
A memory against the body
erotic on the wild ground.

TWO POEMS

I.

How could paper, stationery, press
inward such with mundane distance?
& do we seem to be doing—I mean,
& do you too go walking slowly
as a plastic wrapper dripping grease
glints in the park grass? Classic.
Everything on earth is hurting.
That's the crux of hospitable planet
stratum & its tendency to breed
living creatures. Only we break
food apart to mourn the dead.
The rest go to it to feed, to tooth.
Last one of us left turn the light off,
unfeather. Lie in the dark. Nest.

2.

& when some thin part, deep
in your dark lump of isolation says *jump*,
the rain goes on forever & completely.
Your ankles creak, & also wrists, the damp interior
of you is left listing. Common sense is spilling
in. A loss of uncontrolled emotion
& coarser throat, a cloud spoon scooping
to blue sky, the usual.
The sun dries out
the shallow spot
the downspout down the block filled up. Then,
crows drop to the dead worms, all of them,
that's when. Everything worth happening
will not stand happening again.

SPOKE OF HUMAN GENOME

I'm not gone
I've been walking

In a quiet corner of the airport
Shoes on the floor in front of me

The terminal sleepiness
The display in dreary hands
The take of every train of focus

Not where bed is meant & made
For my occasion
If I'm occasion

& I can't stand
That I can't stand what's left
My eternal cant to the left-hand

Open bag of peanut M&M's
Open wounds keep open
Neosporin

No cracks in the night
Or what softness it offers

That wake that's waving after me

Contrails mumble over me

Three of every hundred me

A slightly extinct species

WHATEVER A SOLITUDE

I sit
in it on a summer day
away from some morose nature.

Forest dark,
there were breathings in you, sharp angles
of daylight, then, in the corner of you

a switchback,
a north aspect, huckleberries.
I went to be at home in my aloneness,

to bloom
in the slow
dark spree.

DEHYDRATION

below the owl hole
in the saguaro
I see half-digested
& pelletized
animals eagerly
bending low only
to feel my face
hair curl against
my cheeks seeing
they are cactus
flowers shriveled
& shriveling
it seems each time
I look for vomit
to wallow in
I find blossoms
I've missed
& keep missing

NIGHT BEGAN

three hours ago. More to go
to get the sky set right, to fold
on its interminable curve, & cinch shut.
An hour of that, & stark satellite
through no black scope.
Plumage. Red light
through honey, or drop of blood
on dolloped whipped cream,
some rocket's mist as it hits
its brakes. Flooded lid on dried-up iris.
Loophole. Cheap lamp stuck on
a front lobe when it's turned off.
Moss on fencepost. Bullet exit
or new bud. Garnet comet
in its longing, or seed of passion fruit
embalmed in juice. Empty cup,
broken plate, sunglass half
flat in grass. Grouse gone up
& shot in apex. Throwing star
-cut autumn peach. Old piece of coal,
or burned bald head. Whosoever bowed
so low. The back of a mind,
a dug-up hole. Nickel
in basaltic sand. A basketball.
One whole note, raw end of elbow,
or ring of hair afloat in ocean.
Cold bright skin
pulled over eyes, the thing inside
it breathing beside you.

TOPO

The snow fell, melted, fell again. In the meadow, a blending
of relief. No more of us can safely fit & the weather intends
for changing. Inland, the weasel. Colorless

skipping across the drifts. Branches snap under a mass of ice.
More melting, more protest. The political apparatus upon us
like a doused rag & we do not go

numb. We don't act like we don't grieve the broken limbs ——
oddly cold when we grab them.

We know what fastens when we give ourselves to wind.

THE MEDICINE

The medicine rests on the table,
& the night on the boy at the table.
The night is breathy. The book & the hat
lie flat in the night, the color scheme
not of the period. Modern setting.
Sitting, the boy is no less current
than the last thought thought
about him. He is thought of every night
in the Midwest, in the long backyard.
In the long backyard, crickets carouse as usual,
fireflies smolder existence intermittently
in the imagination where the boy looks in,
& the night sits on the windowsill,
& the hat flattens his hair & settles there.

DECLINATION

A back window refines day with cobweb.
Soon, I swear, I'll sit beneath it.
Try to contemplate the atmospherics.
To consider glow through & from dirt,
to behold it, & not be terrified.
I fear being alone: the mouth bones
in rattlesnakes coiled around the bend
from where the final spike was pounded.
Hear the crude transported
up the cutbank, sloshing.
I shoot. I aim

to know my words. That they might hurt.
I want to look up more often
when the leaves fall
at night. I want to cleave my heart
to learn the minimal carpentry.
Sawdust. This, she says,
is not my dream—I never sleep
& will not have that landscape.

COLD SMOKE

Got outside by bits
Clenching the teeth

Stood in the sun
A lot, irately

To lift, forking
To take on anything

Above the lake
Trimmed flat with snow

The beneath-horizon
White trees, spiderwebs, ilk

Flagging a man down
Shake clouds, swirling

Deer around their beds
Flagging him down

With a hand
The road fussed, turned

White truck, feeding
Curling them long necks

Onto that long grass
Staying in twos

II.

AFTER GREAT BEAUTY

I committed to the genre.
Those garnets stiffened
& igneous. So
I caved in, & found out
Oh,
how American of me.
How torn blue jeans
deep in red states molding
slowly, how your hair
got washed
in gas station bathroom sinks.
What the odometer reads
after great beauty.
For scenery, some trees
grow hundreds of years old.
Like those junipers there—
we might never see them perish.
Like, I have never driven past
the coal plant in springtime.
Still flowers styling its hillside,
the hillside
killing off its slope.
I wrote this letter
without voice
& after the folding,
travel. Sleet, pale mountain
pass. After that,
no you. For you,
great beauty.

FLOWER MOON OVER GOOSE CREEK

I don't know how to make love
in the world I want
& in the morning
dew. The moon
has moved.

HARBOR

Finally it was morning this morning
& the plane trees all held signs so I could name them.
Their clay as cold as yesterday.
It was the real estate I was running in that took me
to them. I was following Japanese holly leaves——
glossy green grapefruit spoons
serrated as the sandman's teeth
as I imagined them when I only spoke of sawlike things
or sawdust. You nonchalantly
drop belongings on the bedroom floor,
oblivious it's unswept & the houses
next to our one move their rooms
with heat & body movement.
You say you don't know how to be.
I want to find us words we will remember,
& we turn to sleep & take turns sleeping.

GEOMORPHOLOGY

Often, in unwinding, the baling twine lets loose
its own self, strung out fatter & less long,
no longer wanting to keep up a good knot.
I left the house even smaller than before.
The wind, rent on me for a moment, kept coming
together. The other side had not my memory.
Here. The last cold apples will not hang on,
even near pastures turning empty. Have one.
It's unshakeable, my standing still. I don't know
how to take the space the world splits open.
I turn away. Remember about our perfect
failure to pull the gray out of the dusk?
The spittle of god's cold sneeze, it brightened.
The altitude had nothing to do with us.

YOU BE GOOD SEE YOU TOMORROW

I love you & the world
keeps ending gently on its axis.

Tilting into sleep,
its folklore falls out.

Albatross, albatross,
Lego blocks. Let's label

beautiful plumes
of plastic *biology*. You & me,

once we were wildlife.
Once, I wanted to be bugs

curling on the ceilings
of your dreams. *Waves*

broke on, I wrote you.
When I wanted

a someone, the world
was ending then. Palm fronds

& flotsam locking hands
erode their drawn-out coasts

apart & paper over them.

RANGES

Beartooths

Mountain goats
descend the scree
to lick our dried-up piss.
Grasshoppers sit in snow
frozen into pretty impurities.
But by morning, August:
a glint on scissors. Sunshine
safety-pins her dress together.
Just a thin curtsey
of solar eclipse, slivering
in the horrid middle distance.
Dance of goddamn fortitude
& wind-crooked fibers,
song of seed proteins & beetles
& needles in clusters.
Show us the swivel
of diseases through these
centuries of tree rings.

Sawtooths

I touch
what the glacier leaves behind—
a soft touch, scarring,
U-shapes, in its dying.
Butterflies on flowerbeds
in dead wood & the sun warms
striations on polished stone.
The lichen recollecting
a waist, an ice age.

I WANTED TO BE SAD

& instead drew a diagram
of a birthday kiss: a chipped gap,

the Beartooths & chapped lips
all plainly labeled. Help me,

I've fallen. Hold me, little
three full decades of some fine

someone. Little muddy pond woman.
Yes, we're odd systems of difference.

I'm under other ozone, pushing forks
into your favorite bad chorus,

exposing its most tender note
& eating peanut butter, wanting

to write that same one someone
a love poem: Guardrails

zipped our narrow timezones open.
World, roll over.

Play dead for just a moment.

THERE ARE SO FEW PEOPLE, ET CETERA

Because I thought I could not leaf

I chose flat scales
& rubbed my hands
under my shirt. I pointed out
bad traffic.

Because I thought
I could not choose my friends I found
the disappointment pleasing. I lost

new wonder
in new weeds

thought I was invasive species.
Such common tansy,
I wandered in dry fields
bent over under wind

& pulled at dull stones
to show you. Tasted soil.

I painted birds
on ground. The sun fell down
upon my skin & didn't feel it.

Its mouth
was open
& you showed.

A small hole in your elbow
I could not look away from.

Because I saw it closing up.
Your sweater mending

anchored by back stitches.
Saw blue yarn
wend. & new knit

was taut distance
fixing itself around you.

ANIMAL IN WATER

You loved, when you returned,
the bay for its gestalt
you say to introduce me.

Having learned, you did not look.
Instead would have you stay,
instead would have you forage.
To lay beneath the violet crag.

Slaughter was another word
we used. Rough against the banks.
Fast to its inner sinew.

ALMANAC

This pass into space
creates half-chances.
One part: the body

brought with it.
We were silent, unspecific.
The other: starve-heart-

arisen, a slow-twitch
muscle of discussion,
damp in the ungroomed

drama of leaves
on our knees. Crisp seeds
tumbled off stalks

cut sharp by the known
future, not what we
were-to-be.

Your love of fear.
My darker flame.
The natural wing.

I watched a sunset
with no comment.
The sky spilled-

upon with thick ink,
a half-moon,
a day had been.

Those same seeds
descended all night
in sacred fashion. All night

I heard them hit the earth.
I heard birds chirp
in the dark.

Below the dirt,
worms & buried fur
& new millennium

time-capsules took in
vibrations. Tremors
of seed-storm. Constant.

Awakened was my far-off
awe of your every moment,
each loose clip

in your hair or kept
on your sweater.
I'm an almanac

of false frights, freight
folded from its rails
falling from a cutbank

in the floodplain, storm
warnings on static,
news of a pet

dropped soft
in the ditch, all loosening-
into, hatching bacteria.

It's almost rain-
smelling while some bright
bird wrapped

in its own wings
rolls in the road
in the wind.

Not everything responds
to sustenance
or is thus sustained.

So the strange-triangle
hangnails of dried-up
earth appear. So life

sinks out of reach.
Is such wakelessness
ours to keep?

My better explorations
of lost thought in your eye?
In unspecified space

a whistle splits at your lips,
is blown free of itself.
& a terrible calm

climbs over me.
The whistle spreads,
singing emptiness

loses hope of you
falling in. Emptiness falls
asleep like a theater.

III.

NOTES & LOCAL FOLKLORE

My skull is falling like snow.
I will keep piling past my angle
of repose, searching
for terms I might come to.
Colluvium. (Whispering) I'm the breath
feeling the body & climbing
through the teeth. I am the cliff,
the sharp leaves
that shoot from it in skinny arcs.
I arc into the air, I am the air
whistling through the canyon
for a cave to settle down in.
I coat caverns with charcoal
that blossoms & glistens. Am
reforestation. Hand-me-downs, mycelium
running their chorus. I want to be pollution,
the nopales, the lichen, wanting nothing.
Following instructions to fall
out of my footholds. I know in people
there's some beautiful
smooth facet with cracks in it.
I want to turn my face to clay
my feet to clay to offer my clay shoulder
blade to strangers. Scrape away,
I'd say. A dab to fill you in. Scoop
from me my body. We're infinite.
The universe is hungry.

TERROR SEEKS OUT THE ODD

Wings without light
fold into the bushes. To wit
they are waiting. What image makes

a lead weather irrelevant
makes the eye transmit different
is an excellent image.

The eye is in training for it.
The woman, mid-thought
catches a glint of lava in the arid field

leans on the rotted fence
in a note, says *dusk*
scattered clouds, & possible obsidian.

The hand tasked with capture
holds new & arduous postures
& it preys. There is no endless

pasture of blank page.
So blinks the eye, intent on the horizon.
She walks beside the fence.

SUBJECTIVE, TEMPERA, VENISON

You see, my memory was more of a reality than the thing itself.

— Andrew Wyeth

Stored the stark & dustlit finches of existence,
even keeping the misspellings, a detail of winter bees,
a hive in twigs & holding skinny purchase.
I couldn't see the sky behind it. There was a quilt,
a stove, a brown hill of cold ground. There were crows
across the fading light, splitting it like wicker baskets.
But also the body of a bird with wings spread out, hung
upside down, feet nailed to a wooden toolshed.

& from down low, across the fields,
it is a high horizon. There is less universe
beside the earth. The color of wind on everything.

When a deer hangs from a round tree limb, it was hunted
& bleeding. Place a house in the same frame, & deer
have more meaning. From inside, I see a buck swing
on thin legs & it's cold with the door propped open.
Yet exterior is forever the perspective. The knot taut,
neck craning, taste of old grass in my mouth.

CLIMATOLOGY

The iron doorlatch
lifted, I exit

into weather,
exist as it.

So I don't stay.
It's not how

patterns work.
The forecast

involves digital
graphics

& low pressure
& I blow

into rings
my used-up language,

a storm upon several
small towns.

The snow
not sticking.

Falling to the far side
of blue

& beetle-eaten
ranges, I don't

find rest.
The rotation's set

in general
western tilt,

or state
of disrepair.

Best practice
is letting us

destruct
at our own fast pace:

the flickering
road signs,

breakfast,
just plain days.

BLIP UPON BLIP

There are days you wake to find a low white ceiling.
There are days you cake your place with paint & days
you fake your face into its acrobatics. There are days you shake
your pocket change, just to feel percussion in your walk
around the grocery store to buy a dozen Grade A eggs.
Cheddar & ramen. Organic bananas. There are days
you take twelve seashells from the mountain face &
place them carefully in Excel seashell spreadsheets. Map out
fallen fauna on the one-time ocean floor before the earth got bored
& shrugged. Such pincer clamber of crustacean.
There are days you bake your bones in boats of tin to float alone
& jerk the bay fabric to bait a trifle creatures' death to string.
Such silence in the bucket swing. There are days you make
one sand foot push, languidly, & shallow seas.

LIGHTNING STRIKES OUTSIDE OF TOWN

Heir to dormant needles, the beak holes
& beards sloughing off red bark. Heir to canopy,
rooted scar. Ruined turbidites turned dirt. A hive

mind strewn with wind climbs the back
bent in sweat in your shirt, seeking shelter
in your smaller buildings.

Heir to sweeping gestures.
Heir to day,
the dark unfastens. A woman peeling

apples in the one green barn.
Pulled to the table.
You saw sand of stones unglue, you tell them,

& wind-borne storks
descend upon the distance. Saw white sashes
dress the charred trees.

You did not see the bitterroot, barefoot
under the long branches.
You do not see what lands

now, in the moon-smooth field.
The pale arsenal
of stars chases the dark out.

PLATE TECTONICS

& in the broken trunk, the heartwood drips
its viscous substance. Hollowing the core,
some principle's forgotten, pith all stripped
to loosened dust, & beaks go seeking pore.
Today, I hate the modern gesture. Still,
it's better. Orbit slowly, torrid form.
The taste of earth eroding, canyons spill.
Unsolid structure, oceans close what's torn
& bleeding meekly, wave on wave on tree
too thick with mangrove crab. Belated change.
Below the boat, beneath the water, plea
the fucked tectonic plates, the ones that scrape
upon the others. Breccia crusts & moans.
It never holds. Our floor: subducted. Stoned.

THE BIRCHSKIN PUBLISHER

Winter stoops to sniff the sun
perched on her twine-swung shelves.
The woodstove cooks her nettle cakes.
She can tamp a posthole
in the topsoil, pulling gray hair back
with a knuckle from her forehead sweat,
swaying in her dress a certain way the stitch permits.
The baby spruce splits. The baby spruce splinters
down its middle as we slice its head
with pocketknives & pull its halves apart.
It will be rope. She shackles crossbeams to posts
burned at the base to withstand the ground
they're planted in. The ground goes colder
while the forest cows are pregnant.
Penciled over & over in snow,
the corral will hold as folksongs float,
not in rounds, not drowning out
the bleating from the trees.

THE WORLD'S TIMED PERFECTLY

So I'm told beauty can only break open.
& it's true: Yellowstone: a series of explosions.
Breath: one last thing feeling
your body, a sun gone down some used-up alley.
So sit two chairs, rusting in a clearing.
Such insignificance reddening into terminus, such ad
infinitem we all fall into. There are no night skies
in music, nor tendon. But imagine
an entrance into boil-temp
landscape, its perfect water cycle,
its dense pinecones. Imagine being certified
precisely, in forest fire.

Lately, the news holds me awake. We're turning tires
over insects, other facts of existence.
I pick through quills & pocket a jawbone,
hoping for scorn, humming the last chapter
& wishing it end well: geyser, geraniums,
dark thorns through long seasons.
What sent the heaven from them?
Our loud red viscera. Some wisdom.
So slowly a caterpillar builds its chrysalis,
humidity fixed, little mineral facets—
a lifetime—a tight grip
cutting the solitary figure we slip from.
An opening, timing our bodies to the storm.

TO DISSECT LIONS, YOU NEED LIGHTNING

No outwelling rally will quell the world's hate
without witness, without the praying
mantis having felt a twitch of branches.

No dry state is not bonfire
some seasons, & some forms in storm
depress by inches the earth with wet weight.

No bench prevents two people, stable
from distance, from touching hands
in a leaf-strewn park. Bicycles

from riding by. Blue heron changes its mind,
walks back up the shallow stream, pecking
at the grating song in its heart.

HINGES

open quiet
vermiculitic patient attic

mobile scarcely spinning
in the painted room

*

see a airplane
drop meaning from its lonely hatch

little robin red-breast
the no one born before me
please forgive yourself

*

the mary had one
the tiny lamb one
steeples on our fingers
in the living room

algal flowers of the stem

*

christina has collapsed
ascetic
in the field's blonde tangle

the acre we set fire to
so soft
could almost feel it

IV.

SCREE

Bone: light, windpiped close
in silent gait. In white,

sweat splotches the flesh perceptible.
I call her *Antelope*. A pant,

let open. The large heart's speed is excess
with no steadfast predators extant.

The small leaf breathes.
The large heart wants teeth.

For what is love if not a fleck of felt on knapweed
thumbtacked once. A pillowcase

stashed in an oak chest, spoor-locked for the luck
of old-age death. Or hung,

framed on the basement wall. Hair hung,
grew long, fell out.

Would I have it woven. A lamb must die
to sleep in lambskin. Snowmelt

makes the bridge feel necessary. Talus
& rose hips. Mass wasting.

Yet the world has grown intolerably
tolerable. When I finish peeling twigs,

bones will not be slippered with young skin.

Pit sweat: dark brown

in brown. The chalky stone
clap of the window well reverberates,

the beetle folds its wings back,
micaceous—called *Morning*.

MIDDLE OF THE ROAD: A MEANTIME

We talked in the red light
of the Easthampton rain.
One of the many everythings.

Self in world,
self in day
in day out,
person to person.

The damp down
of it deep in the pockets
of every passing night.

The road being
salted, slipping
through its banks.

I expect that you
expect this, & this tree
too. & the cold drips

drop. The road drops.
The light drops, & plays
in the hills. Still. & always
you are wonder.

OPTIMIST CLUB

What were the needs were given names.
Shapes & colors
came, too. & spreadsheets.

There are blues to see
in the feathers of small birds.
Also, what despair

can be found in odors!
I am smelling of elm
& shame, lowering myself deeper.

I am filled with kindred
spirit & hatred.
This is not uncommon.

I am hunting who for,
but the forest keeps spreading
for miles before me

in the most angled places,
magical, & still
I can't find who for.

It's morning
again, & the hierarchy
of sadness moves in

with the wind through the window.
Today, I might make
a life change.

When we say that we are
capable, sometimes we accomplish
a wonderful thing.

BACK THEN

The wall: a flower wallpaper
popped out
when we pulled it back.
Magpies jumped
to pick bugs
from the bumper.
Despite itself,
a contrail. Red-winged
blackbirds swerved
from the windshield.
We fooled around
back then.
We played in
Livingston
on a dead soccer field, & sun
was underneath our skin.

A PATCHWORK, A RHAPSODY

a stack of split tree pieces
a half cord round, drying out

into the room where I talk local,
droning, no dirt road almond

blossom, california, california,
or I can feel the wet

& feathered breath of apathy,
the trumpet mute,

a winter tongue
under the fallen red-bottomed

& falling maple leaves
in evening, even licking some,

uneven composition,
drum, & untouched stasis

of my hollow running
gutter of a skin alive,

a floating stalk
of sweetgrass drowns

in icy lake, the sick say how
disaster comes,

then more of them
ride one-by-one

atop a riddled nature, stepping on
serrated frost, the skelter as I run

PRIVATE LAND: TRESPASSING

The ground is earth & earth
is covered over
almost everywhere.
Everywhere
I see right now.
The larch,
the flapping
on the pond behind the stand
of aspen: let it be your thoughts
breaking
into view. Slash piles
under woodpecker holes,
pileated,
the yellow morels
growing old. Here is dirt
& these little hands
sprout up about it.
Sound out
what it does
when I say whole.
Sound out what is rot.
Say crucial.

BREAKING DOWN

Underneath our feet is everyone. Illiterate middens of family
branches & heartwood. Stranger things. Crude fires
bloom soft-hued smoke from the soil around us
while purple finches hurtle to perch in the fossil light.
I practice pulling blankets from the shapes I burden,
but it's harder than you'd think, because only I know how.
Everyone says look up, as though
our eyes might bulge & hatch that one last
bunch of elderberries, see balloons intent on the mesosphere.

*

Nestled in our silken nets of imperfection, we justify
all little things we have not helped. Rubbing our tenders.
Would you ask me to unhook my hammock down I would not.
The wind speaks persimmons through the crooks & crannies
of our sleep, & the moon is a train straight at me. An orphan
looking out her window. Approaching blizzards tingle figures
in her arm hair. Dust sloughs down the axis
our charming, tilted failures.

WORDS ARE DEAD IN MY HEART

In the diagram
of the hands

number
the bones

that have not been
kissed.

Paint
by those

numbers
the river

rocks, colors
of lips.

SENTENCE

The vastness in us on grass
tipped with winter

was romantic, doubt
& ebbing,

was the exquisite
& toplit

February
beginning of spring

that year,
the next

standing in wet
socks, longing for evening,

rug
colored in lust, long

limbed
& burned akimbo.

LAST NIGHT, or, THE CALM OF FORGETTING

Was back in pain, out
loud & the only left, only one

come to begin with. Was
long in a swan sea, watching
the downy cloud turn pit

& lit pitch & blow over.
That seldom door banging
for morning. Was wing.

Had read about bindweed
climbing mesh fence,

& read about the dead
& restless.

Was frantic or hands'
clap for the start of it:

that freakshow of wild hair
rumble on spent hummocks,

the curled grasses, & ants
in slender tunnels. Was turned

rock. Was under
& grub, nutrient

of the dunny packed mass
in love with——— was lost.
Rough shell hooked on

loosely & letting
sound out. Was knee

-thick & lightweight, was
new current, was washed.