

Soft As Chalk

Joanna Newsom

So, so long ago,
and so far away,
when Time was just a line
that you fed me,
when you wanted to stay,

we'd talk
as soft as chalk,
till morning came, as pale as a pearl:

No time!
No, no time!
Now, I have got all the time
in the world.

Say, honey, did you belong to me?
Tell me, honey,
was your heart at rest when, darlin,
all the mourning doves were howling us
a song of love's
godawful lawlessness?
Say, honey, did you belong to me?
Tell me, darlin, did I pass your test?
I lay, as still as death, until the dawn,
whereupon I wrested from
that godawful lawlessness.

I roam around the tidy grounds
of my dappled sanatorium.
Coatless, I sit
amongst the moles, adrift,
and I dote upon my pinesap gum.
And the light, through the pines,
in brassy tines,
lays over me, dim as rum
and thick as molasses.
And so time passes.
And so, my heart, tomorrow comes.

I feel you, leaning,
out back with the crickets,
loyal heart marking the soon-ness,
darkness:
tonight, still,
the mourning doves
will summon us their song
of love's neverdoneing lawlessness

while, over and over--
rear up! stand down! lay round!--
trying to sound-out,
or guess the reasons,
I sleep like a soldier, without rest.
But there is no treason,
where there is only lawlessness.

In the last week

of the last year I was aware,
I took a blind shot, across the creek,
at the black bear,
when he roused me in the night,
and left me cowering with my light,
calling out
Who is there?
Who's there?
Who is there?

I watched you sleep,
repeating my prayer.
(Give love a little shove
and it becomes terror.)
Now I am calling,
in a sadness beyond anger
and beyond fear,
Who is there? Who's there?
Who is there?

I glare and nod,
like the character, God,
bearing down
upon the houses and lawns.
I knew a little bit,
but, darling, you were it,
and, darling, now it is long gone.
Sweetheart, in your clean, bright start--
back there, behind a hill, and a dell,
and a state line or two--
I'll be thinking of you.
Yes, I'll be thinking,
and be wishing you well.
We land, I stand,
But I wait for the sound of the bell.
I have to catch a cab,
and my bags are at the carousel.
And then--Lord, just then--
time alone will only tell.