31 words
*prose poems

by
Evie Shockley
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once there were thirty-one words. they couldn’t get along. they
couldn’t go back where they came from. they couldn’t decide
whether to be california or fuck california. here they are,
addressing you.
# 2

In the beginning. he, she, or it always. the only exception. then one day. no one ever thought. chapter seventeen. he or she said. the next thing we knew. reader, i.
everybody made predictions and everybody ignored the predictions. it rained and rained, but that wasn’t the problem — it was the breaking and the failing. poor poor. please don’t drink the gasoline.
# 4

To market, to market, to sell a black art :: home again, home again, deeper in debt :: to market, to market, to make a fair trade :: soon to return to the home money made

# 13

the esprit to be free. the code blue to pursue. the make less to express. the pain to remain. the squeak to speak. the brute to mute. the fear to bear.
dreads, braids, twists, fros: nappy do's come without don'ts. black women have no privates; our hair is public, even when it's pubic. like tar, baby: our own dark sticky sales pitch.

# 5

alien investor desires sanguinity. awfully insistently dark spot. aesthetic incorporating dreadful silence. an internal destruction sequence. antidote interminably delayed somewhere. another invidious death sentence. africa is doomed still. ain't it divine?
# 6

bleeders blinders blames bombs tombs troops traps entraps entrails impales fails souls souls schools scowls showers disempowers disembarks dissent deserts storms screams shames shams shards discards distorts retorts reports readers

# 11

no color is strange to war. it taints even delicate tints: pink rimming eyelids of the sleep-starved and grieving, or on a ribbon floating away from a cluster bomblet’s belated heat.
highly visual rural winter image seeks lyric poem (14-30 lines) for mutual enrichment and long-term relationship. image offers potential lines about fog-covered fields where snow seems to rise toward its origins.

vanilla. chocolate. white bread. black coffee. granola. juice. meat and potatoes. fried chicken and collard greens. sauerkraut. cole slaw. tuna casserole. rice and beans. pears. watermelon. tapioca pudding. sweet potato pie.
fire! in a crowded theatre. fire! in the halls of congress. fire! in the streets of l.a., the fields of des moines, the highrisers of new york. water! in new orleans.

the “a” paper walks on water. the “b” paper swims well. the “c” paper can tread water for several minutes. the “d” paper often manages to float. the “f” paper drowned.