

*Penelope Shuttle*  
*from Missing You*

1

This year no-one will ask how you voted,  
or if you know the way to town

No-one will call you as an eye-witness  
or teach you how to train a bird of prey

No-one will bring you your New Scientist,  
try to sell you double-glazing  
or tell you their secrets

People will write to you  
but you won't answer their letters

The high sheriff of mistletoe  
will never catch your eye again

No-one will peel apples for you,  
or love you more than you can bear

No-one will forget you

2

I wept in Tesco,  
Sainsburys  
and in Boots

where they gave me  
medicine for grief

But I wept in Asda,  
in Woolworths  
and in the library

where they gave me  
books on grief

I wept in Clarks  
looking in vain for shoes  
that would stop me weeping

I wept on the peace march  
and all through the war

I wept in Superdrug  
where they gave me  
a free box of tissues

I wept in the churches,  
the empty empty churches,

and in the House of Commons –  
they voted me out of office

3

I can't cry anyone's tears except my own,  
can't teach anything but my own ignorance

I can only fall from my own mountain,  
ledge by ledge

I can't rival the wasp's sting  
or sew except with my needle

Like a saltwater wife,  
I prise open the oyster of my loss,

hoick out the pearl of your death

4

The rainbow is not enough,  
nor the flood

My eye can't see enough,  
nor my ear absorb sufficient silence

January is not enough,  
nor June

Books are not enough  
nor the El Grecos

Christianity is not enough,  
nor Judaism

China is not enough,  
nor India

Good luck is not enough,  
nor absolution from the bad

Jasmine is not enough,  
nor the rose

Kingdoms are not enough  
nor the oldest city in the world,

without you

10  
I make my home in your absence,  
take your smallest hope

and make it grow

I wake to the dusk of everywhere  
as if assisting at my own birth

or arriving in a country  
where all the rivers settle down to be ice

11

World was one word  
I could not guess it

World was one gesture  
I could not copy it

World was one question  
I couldn't answer it

World was one song  
How could I sing it?

World was one forest  
I couldn't fell it

World was one bridge  
How was I to cross it?

13

My tamer of doves,  
my alphabet of the moon,  
fool of night,  
harvest's welcome, the grief  
of day, my blind man  
and my seer,  
dreamer against his will,  
my furious saint,  
warrior of peace

16

Think of me  
as a small backward country  
appealing for aid from the far-off first world

Imagine the dirt of my shrines,  
the riddle of my dry rivers,  
the jinx of my cities

When you hold the full purse of autumn  
or celebrate the nativity of a pear,

picture me as the hawk of spring,  
a one-pupil school,  
the safe-keeper of sunrise

Think of me without you,  
stuck here forever between rainless May  
and the drought of June

17

Your name didn't change  
after your death –  
many others also answered to it

After your death  
the climate didn't change,  
the government stayed calm

Waterfalls  
remembered you forever,  
remaining loyal,  
looking for you everywhere,  
storm after storm, teacup after teacup

18

Autumn fans its tail without you  
and spring bears its burden alone

Summer, that small supernatural being,  
manages without you

and winter closes your many doors

Like an interval between kings,  
the year is a confusion of reds and golds,

but in the gulag of August  
days are where you left them,

nights,  
the same

21  
I've lived with your death for a year,  
that despot death, that realist,

stunned,  
as if I've just given birth to a foal,  
or made an enemy of the rain

All at once  
you had more important things to do  
than to live

Death is the feather in your cap,  
the source of your fame,  
my darkest lesson

This dropout year closes,  
I begin my second year without you,  
just me and the paper-thin world