

Dennis Cooley

there there

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i used to get "A"  
I really did  
swear to god it's true  
for handwriting this was  
public school in the 50s

it was a blue fountain  
pen in peacock blue  
ink & my friends  
think this is outrageous  
coz since then ive gotten  
a little messy  
scribble on wind like a crow

that was then & there  
was no thing iffy about it  
F would be terrible  
A was in F  
able in its own way & i  
in mine affable  
laughable to you i spouse  
i pose all the time

it's true the pages i write now  
look a bit like varicose veins  
blotchy with turn & return  
first verses i wrote there & 11th

they could be tracks crows left  
tah-two tah-two tah-two  
two-timin two-steppin crow  
tattoo she beats into my days  
they are that thick  
ink all over their feet  
various & tabooed pleasures they felt  
& left for all to read

small kid lugging mud on his boots  
& his mom says look  
just look at what you've done

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there  
there  
she said &  
there it was  
it was there  
there & where  
was it  
it was  
there  
& every  
where it went  
it went  
it meant  
du vent  
she said  
she said there  
is where  
the wind is rent  
there it is  
she said  
what's the matter can't you see it  
it's all  
right there  
it's all right

there there  
you said  
that's what  
you said  
& there you were  
it's all there is you said

ou he said  
la she said

oh you mean la  
oui she said la la  
oohhh he said  
no no she said la  
yes that's what  
i was saying he said  
hoping you said  
ooh la la he said  
she said but  
she said she didn't  
he only said she said  
till they didnt know  
whether they were  
coming or going  
if they were here or there  
if they would ever  
lay in on the line

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squiggles & curly  
queues would they be cues  
would they be pigs

tails you said when the ball rolled  
stone from the cave or you pre  
tended & ran around un  
attended catching the house

the ones who couldn't  
read the signs getting caught

aawwwww c'mon  
gimme a cue

how about one goddamn straight answer  
the truth for a change no more fancy letters  
enuff of swallows sculling down air & bugs  
you call phonemes it seems a bit much  
these franciscan creatures that scan & move  
& speak in holy writ  
mosquitoes at every turn  
sealed with red hairs &  
geese every spring & fall driving  
roman wedges into the sky

ive had it up to here  
every single one of us  
what's with these pelicans swooping in grandiose arcs  
people would say they were bellicose  
if it weren't for the fact  
they're on some kind of lark  
I've had it with birds especially  
cranes doing rolls & loops  
practising up to be pilots  
one eye out for the ladies  
that's bush & i'm  
sick & tired of it

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one game  
you like i know  
you want to play The Queen  
of Hearts it really is  
i know but you are stuck  
in a slough of despond &  
can't wait to discard  
wish to whisk off

you are impatient for your turn  
so you can slough me off  
your game of whist

triumphant when you play  
the trump you thump  
    down turn  
    it over turn  
    it turn over  
thumbs down  
turn me  
                        down again

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this time the pen is  
    a pin she pushes  
        shoves it deep  
        until it disappears  
    into the cushion of night  
the comfort of darkness  
begins to darn the night  
its ink tangled and in collusion daring  
us to read or write

all thumb & thimble  
she is more than able  
    she couches  
    her words in  
pricks and teasings

and later in the morning  
    crush of light  
she tropes in and  
    irons out  
the wrinkles of his confusion

she has been giving him  
the needle pulling  
the thick thread of horizon  
through the eye of the prairie  
    tugs it up tight as a gromet  
where the sky has been

ript needle in hand  
she is taking measurements  
she feels under foot  
tries to stitch the seam  
between earth and sky  
where every morning they are  
    threatening to tear  
apart the sky tugs and is ready  
    to sail off flapping  
tent in a stiff wind where all day  
robins up to their ankles in green  
    tip their heads &  
    cock their eyes

and so they loop buttons in and out  
do their best to repair the grass  
tie down the high blue sky

    all day long they pull  
the camomile in and out of the driveway  
mend the words they pin there  
    darn near

the world wrapt inside  
their intricate embroidery  
the red ribbons of their attention  
grommets with which they tighten  
    hope to fasten  
a canvas sky into place

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we lie at the bottom  
finest fit of word & world  
inside the hard crust of consonants  
dream in soft vowels  
within which we extract sounds  
secrete lacquer of moon  
below sail and hull we shellac  
small disturbances we secrete inside  
wrap ourselves around

bellowings they might think & raise  
alarms ring bells  
words glowing over pouring off  
when we rise & leap when  
those on board throw out  
nets haul us  
up out of the dark  
where in quiet luminescence we shine  
stand over us in teeth and eyes  
prodding the shells & sorting  
until we are  
drowning in light