

STUART BARNES

conversation

a cento for Silvia Schivella, after the Emma Jones poem of the same name

‘how did we make it up 2 yr @tic’ —
(what am i doing w/ a lung full o’ dust & a tongue o’ wood,

knee-deep in the cold & swamped by flowers? how shall
i tell anything @ all 2 this infant still in a birth-drowse?

what do u know about *th@*, my *ph@* pork, my *m→y*
sweet♥, *face-2-the-wall*? what keyhole have we slipped

thru, what door has shut? – the moon’s? is she sorry 4 what
will happen? have u seen something awful? when will it

b, the second when Ti’m breaks & eternity engulfs
it, & i drown utterly? who is he, this blu, furious

boy, shiny & strange, as *if* he had hurtled from a *?
what did my fingers do b4 they held him? what bloo, moony

ray ices their dreams? how long can my h&s b a b&age
2 his hurt, & my words bryt birds in the sky, consoling,

consoling? r u not blinded by such expressionless sirens?
who has dismembered us? is there no way out o’ the mind?

what r these words, these words? o God, how shall
i ever clean the *fone*? is He here, Lil’ Poppies, Lil’

Hell Flames? do u do no harm? where r yr opiates,
yr nauseous capsules? what do they know *th@* i don’t? –

i am bitter, i’m averse, a tiger this year @ the door, a Christus,
the awful God-bit dying 2 fly? O mother o’ leaves & sweetness

who r these *pietàs th@* whisper ‘howz this, howz this?’
will it go on once 1 has seen God, once 1 has been used in

the sun’s conflagrations, the stains?) — ‘what is the remedy?’

Sources: Sylvia Plath’s ‘Leaving Early’, ‘Candles’, ‘Zoo Keeper’s Wife’, ‘The Babysitters’,
‘Three Women’, ‘Crossing the Water’, ‘Event’, ‘Apprehensions’, ‘Words heard, by

accident, over the phone', 'Poppies in July', 'Burning the Letters', 'The Tour', 'Years',
'Winter Trees', 'Totem', 'Paralytic', 'Mystic'