THE WRITING OF AN HOUR
ALSO BY BRENDA COULTAS

The Tatters (2014)
The Marvelous Bones of Time (2007)
A Handmade Museum (2003)
Early Films (1996)
The Writing of an Hour

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The Writing of an Hour
Hour I

The domestic dust of an hour: when a granddaddy longlegs has spun, from corner to corner, a network of webs and eggs.

Low radio bleed-through, partner walking and scraping something like dried egg off a plate, an hour after breakfast, and the hour before in the bath, the laptop by the tub but out of reach of the splatter, or is it better to say, the displacement of water, the waves a body makes as it enters another body and laps over the edge? I should learn something during bath time, so I listen to a talk on Peruvian ruins and their effects on local economies, the speaker says, “like village women selling while preserving traditional crafts.” TED Talks on auto play, learning as I soak and after drying off, I could pass an exit exam.

Change the station, drying my hand and arm, and shutting the lid to be with my own thoughts about how to reduce cleverness in writing, to consider an assignment of describing lost sounds, like all the sounds in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” but mostly how to overcome writer’s block, and how to do two things at once exceptionally well, and think I’d like to drop acid.
Heating soup in the kitchen, even though this is the hour of writing, glance at three French baguettes that need to be tossed into the woods for animals to eat: back on the bed, propped up and keyboarding, sniffles, and looking at blue socks on my feet, and this view of green grass despite the season, leaves of curled brown like butcher’s paper and summer lawn chairs, and what about that humpback whale videoed in Hudson River, a singular traveler, through heavy boat traffic and if the whale is lost or sick, how lonely or not, is this mammal, who must surface to breathe.
This is the hour of writing, raining and dark days of winter. Of colds and crap, of umbrellas and hate when the wind blows them ribs out. My husband follows me from room to room. And I wonder if my domestic dust is more like “The Story of an Hour” or more like “The Yellow Wallpaper”? I cannot distinguish fact from fiction.

Houses from accessories
Bowls from pitchers
Armoires from wardrobes
Carriages from shopping carts

I steal into the ceramic shop to eat from white plates as thin as saltines, some cabbage-shaped dishes and lobster-handled platters that the British are so proud of. I carve houses out of a roadside bank of clay, garages and arches court the danger of collapse and they do collapse on the best matchbox cars, including sports cars with suicide doors—and when I am the little match girl, I obsess over haunted houses as much as Shirley Jackson, and I draw you into a warren of rooms.

When I return from the hour, Mrs. Mallard is dead, and my partner stoned and cooking and listening to a podcast of Don Quixote, and we both are thinking of the Americas.
The Mending Hour

I tied one on, I mean I took my grandmother’s apron, its strings and glittery rickrack and I wore it on the streets of the East Village. The apron is a cloak of superpowers, a psychic umbrella. I paraded past Emma Goldman’s East 10th Street address, and rang her doorbell for a sip of water. My domestic armor is made of gingham even though a woman is still considered an unelectable candidate.
An After Hour

When one thing is becoming another, when writing is morphing, when the writing of an hour becomes the desire to write at all hours and into the night, fueled on caffeine or wine and desiring instruments of writing; typewriters, even a nib and inkwell, and considering all the ways of stretching a space, digital or hard copy; hard copy, an ugly expression for printed matter, and for that matter, printed matter is efficient but lacks beauty. Page, a soft and elongated word; page, an extension at the end of my fingers; page, a screen that holds dreams and desires; the page of a legal document that binds. The page is a promise. I read all sides, turning the page counterclockwise and turning the page over for what I may have missed.
An Hour Earlier

Desire is a stick for scratching words into the dirt and for chiseling stone until the words become solid. The pen is a body, an anatomy, not an earthworm with indecipherable ends; the pen has a head and tail, and inky guts. And the brain of the pen belongs to the maker of marks.
A Late Hour

All the elements of the hour surround my laptop, in the dying blades of cut grass and in the dying battery. Finches continue their making of a nest of twigs and grasses, but I know the nest is early paper, the raw ingredients and pulp. I know the world is a page-turner, a paper globe, and I know that the birds are the great writers of the sky.
What I Fed the Hour

Envy and anger, and analogies of how one thing is and is not like the others. I fed it glowing wire filaments from inside an Edison bulb. I fed it the blue ink of blood by the shovelful.

What is happening in this hour? Neighbors moving out of their house, flowers reaching towards the light, insects hovering, a puddle of water fading in the sun and I read a long poem. Begin to consider the year I might die of old age. And wonder if I will live to 2050, which seems like a great long time from now. Hear the noise of the bathers from swimming hole and I hear him grab his bong from the back porch.

A house cat forages scraps from the compost. I wish it was a puma, a mountain lion in the backyard, chewing blades of grass. Admonish self to address the material (page) instead of raiding the fridge; dandelions (not mountain lions) thrive outside, and there are so many that I will have to eat them.
Beginning of An Hour

The hour begins at 8:50 p.m. in my childhood room reading *A Handbook of Disappointed Fate* by Anne Boyer. A podcast on gender and chromosomes plays.

Earlier run to place small American flags on family graves. Walked through tall weeds into my uncle’s dream house. Dream for him anyway, must have drawn the blueprints on a napkin. No sidewalk. He never made one. The house looks like a sea captain’s house with a widow’s walk even though it’s thousands of miles from either coast. Waterlogged and sinking, it should be bulldozed.

In this hour, came the year of asking for what I want. So I asked for a year off work, I asked for writing space, I asked for travel funds, and they all came. I gave myself permission to fail and to say anything on the page and after all my loud self-talk, I fell silent.
An Hour of What I Still Do

My mother is a solid piano, she may be mahogany, she might be a dogwood, with Christ-like wounds in the center of a white flower. My matriarch is grand and made of black and white keys. My mother is strings and vibration. Foot pedals and varnish.

I am over sixty
I have a mother
I am not an orphan
I always hoped that she would be with me for this long
I have a mother
I am over sixty
I am a child
I am her child
I am not free
I have three sisters and a brother
We will be survivors
I have a mother still living
My father is not living
I am not an orphan
Yet, her brother lived to age ninety-nine
I try to forgive her
I have a mother
I am over sixty
I will survive her
An Hourglass Running Fast

An hour of returning sweaters to drawers, of hanging blouses and of listening to thudding wet clothes going in circles, agitated. Isn’t that the appropriate word? You have to agitate the clothes.

I stand by the spin cycle and I hear my partner’s phone ping.

Small farm table behind me, red legs and soft pine top. Looking at books in the morning. The seal of the day torn off. Turn off devices to quiet the mind. I hate writing through the gauntlet. If I am away from writing for long, the voices reform and say, “there are better uses of time than making poems.”

Straw handbag in red and white that I brought 100 miles north. Pocketbook from a poet, silks and soft garments. And another poet gave me orange slippers from China, plastic slides on wooden painted soles. I think of the givers and receivers, I know the provenance of garments and objects in my writing room.

Dump out a plastic bag of early writings, all pasted together and pressed in folds, an accordion. I read the accordion as a map and maybe there is a sentence that could be the root of something larger and greener. The accordion of raw thought, of raw art. I write “You Can Do It” in childish print. Pen mark of hesitation midway through and I tape a recused rift at eye level:
I didn’t come out for the stars
Meant to but too lazy to put on shoes. [hesitation period] and a jacket
And I know they will show up
As [handwritten correction] luminous lava [handwritten period inserted].

Glimpses strong enough for carrying on, yet barely make it to the end of writing hour. Here I am facing a screen, shoes in hand, thinking of dinner.