

# Laura Mullen

## Impossible Arrows

“Otto, you are awfully good at building things, but there seems to be something strange about their construction.”

“It’s fun making the possible impossible, but some of my creations have turned out to be pretty ugly.”

The man in an impossible window thinks about an impossible cube. The sides of this cube seem to twist in a paradoxical way, and this room has a strange extension. Everything seems to be at the same level, but at the same time not at the same level. This graph is impossible. This is a sculpture of an impossible ring. (See also the following pages.) If you extend the impossible triangle, you get this type of impossible figure. There are several impossibilities: can you find them? Each step of this staircase is level with each other step, which is impossible. Are you seeing this balcony from above or below? Are these stairs possible? Can this ramp really exist? This meander is impossible. Also, this ladder seems to twist in a strange way. In this strange window, you can look out in two different directions simultaneously. Another strange figure. How could this possibly be? There is something peculiar about this birdcage. Is this possible? Can you arrange wooden blocks in this way? This knot may not be possible. If you start climbing this staircase from a vertical position, when you arrive back at the starting point, you will arrive in a horizontal position. Lots of paradoxes here.

A set of impossible blocks. Can you connect these beams in this fashion? Can you arrange physical blocks like this? There is something strange about the block’s relationship to its shadow. Although it looks entirely possible, it is not possible. In front of the mirror you can see an impossible triangle: each piece of this impossible triangle seems possible, but when combined, the triangle itself is quite impossible. This construction is impossible. Can you see why? Can these gears really turn? What is wrong with this shelf? Can you find all the impossibilities here? These three rings twist in an impossible way. Notice how the figure connects with itself. Another impossible meander. This figure is impossible right side up, and also impossible when you turn it upside down. This is a physical model of the impossible triangle. How can this be? How can a solid block of wood pass through the other two blocks in this way? Are these trains going to collide? What is wrong with this garden fence? Try covering either side of the fence. There are a lot of impossible stairways here. The two lovers Romeo and Juliet are connected in an impossible way. These two figures are connected in an impossible way. Can you find both male and female legs. Can you find what

is impossible here?

Ponder this set of impossible stairs. They will flip-flop if you stare at them. The little male figure on the right sits on top of a ledge, but if you follow the ledge to the left, the female figure sits in an indentation. What is wrong with this figure? How many prongs can you count? What happens to the depth of the middle prong? Cover either side of the figure, and each side will appear perfectly possible, but when you uncover the two sides, it appears impossible again. Larger pieces are fitting into smaller pieces in this impossible triangle. The arms simultaneously go away from you and toward you, yet they somehow meet. Separately cover each corner of the triangle, and see how differently your mind interprets this figure. What is impossible about this window sill? What is wrong with the buildings on top of the roadway. This is probably the most famous impossible figure, known as an impossible triangle. Is the top of the building connected in a funny way to the bottom of the building? This is the solution of the impossible crate found on page 46. This is a physical model of a set of impossible columns. There are some strange things going on with this building. Can you find them all? A lovely variation on the impossible triangle. Another impossible meander to leave you thinking. This man is holding an impossible cube. The reflection reveals how it is made.

# Sestina

Blacked out: bright                      Blacked out: shaded  
Held too close to the held            In where repeated uneven lines  
Waves of a shroud or veil cast aside   Indicate flow, horizon, a boat? Lies  
Before the arrival                      The snow job, the sob story, white  
As I know and then no as those shades   A songbird briefly                      stills

*No        river this crosses one*  
*Alive no one reaches this side        side this reaches        one no*

Turning. This aside  
(Stage whispered) introduces that procuress whose repeated lines  
And gestures should--while remaining "line" and "gesture"--make wet the river  
Of "we're sending you up the river," referencing some remembered water over this white  
this white                      Still  
    Finer shades  
                                    barely audible almost sighed  
                                    as if the speaker still  
Failing to understand her memorized lines.    Begins, sometime before the hero, riven  
  By sorrow arrives

Speaking. There should be something more than a little shady  
About the whole thing. White              On one side black on the other  
So turning reveals a line                      Are you still

There? Listen. Show him a series of stills  
  From the river  
Of images. So he chooses one says he knows her so I know you know he's a liar  
  Say she shadows  
This guy all the way back up to the right side  
Of the tracks acts like she's lily white snow white

"And then I drifted"—still goes to show  
You find the rest of the body down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by  
Lying    Open and shut black and white white white

B     E  
D     C                      (right it)  
F     A

- A** white / why / while
- B** stilled / still
- C** aside / side / beside / sighed
- D** arrival / river / rival
- E** shade / shaded shades / shadow
- F** lines / lyre / liar / lies

# Part

Attention

Long held taut by fear

“At last”

*This latest diagnosis*

Snaps

Not frayed

Cut

Now we see we see

To the end of it

“Dear”

Another test

A sudden

Shakiness and then the new

Results

*This shadow*

Shadow pressure in the skull’s

Fastness *see*

Straining *these*

*White*

*This increasingly*

O stop

The heft

Of promised years life

Alone should slowly

Loosen

Comes

Slashing all at once

As weightless

Lash back

Leaving us as if  
Conjuring an abyss  
Whose used blue  
Seems a section  
Of sky trapped  
Beneath our feet

From which  
All calls return  
As echoes  
Echoes

If