

Like a Tide Rising

A woman with long hair is wearing large black headphones. She is looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a vast, blue-tinted landscape of rolling hills and mountains under a full moon. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Songs and Poems
by Los Haward
and Ingrid Hansen Smythe

About the Album

Many years ago a friend gave me an unpublished novel to read called *The Lady Penelope Papers* written by some mysterious half-brother of his in the UK. Besides being a great story there was lots of poetry in it, and I felt inspired to take one of the poems, “Summer Day in the Tuileries”, and make it into a song, which I played for the poet himself when he visited Canada later that year. He liked it a lot, but we fell out of touch, and nothing more got composed until over a decade later when he sent me “Who’s Who” which became a song upon first reading. He responded with, “I wish you would turn all those poems into songs,” and I thought, all righty then, that’s just what I’ll do. I’ll turn all of this—all of these songs, which don’t exist yet, but never mind—into an album. And, because I’m *that* suggestible, this exists. -IHS

The Band

Los Haward writer and reader.

Ingrid Hansen Smythe composition, vocals, instrumentals, production, artwork.

Sappho Hansen Smythe lead vocals (Education), backup vocals (Ophelia, Ariadne’s Thread, Valediction, Healing).

Ariel Fiess backup vocals (Summer Day in the Tuileries, Healing).

Tristan Zaba electric guitar, bass (Ophelia, Education, More Monsters).

Jarred Albright fiddle, mandolin (Ariadne’s Thread, Life Happened).

Steve Hansen Smythe trombone (The Future), piano solo (Education), backup vocals (More Monsters), musical flourishes, graphic design, technical support.

Mastered by **Dave Horrocks** at Infinite Wave Mastering, Calgary Alberta.

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Table of Contents

Volume 1 - Songs

3:17 Who's Who	5
2:38 Not Much to Ask	5
3:10 Ophelia.	6
4:23 Falling Out	7
6:04 Ariadne's Thread	8
1:34 Ariel's Song.	9
3:43 Culture	10
3:39 Lost Lyric	11
5:29 Education	12
5:25 Inside Story	13
5:19 Life Happened	14
3:06 The Poet at Sixty	15
2:48 The Future.	15
3:24 If It Were Not So.	16
5:05 Ephemera	17
3:22 More Monsters	18
4:43 Summer Day in the Tuileries	18
3:31 Exile.	19
5:05 Valediction	20
4:09 Saved	21
1:36 Healing	21

Volume 2 - Poems

2:20 "These Things Shall Be"	24
0:56 The Fall of Man	25
5:18 Close Encounters	26
2:35 Bad Karma	28
2:36 Tea With Sunsets	29
5:28 Just Like Alice	30
5:39 I Made This For You, Even Though	32
2:49 Nothing but the Truth	34
4:10 Falling In	35
4:35 Now Am I Commanded	36
4:39 Postcards to Oblivion	37
2:11 Don't	38
0:32 Unbroken.	39
6:37 Incarnation	40
3:59 Transmission	42
0:54 The History of Fire	43
5:13 Flower Poems	44
4:50 Heavy Metal	46
0:56 Prophecy	47
2:40 Schopenhauer's Blues.	48
1:44 Invasion	49
0:49 No Big Deal	50
1:58 Politics	50
1:26 Complete Unsense.	51
2:26 Abraham	52
3:42 Church Service	53
5:11 Keeping Up Appearances	54
3:38 Lost Lyric	56
1:28 Advice to Other Writers	57



Like
a Tide
Rising

Volume 1

Who's Who

You are not the flower.
Neither red nor blue nor green.
Not the sugar.
Not the arrow.

You are not the notes,
and you are not the top of the mountain.
You are not the notes,
and you are not the top of the mountain.

You are not the flower, you are the perfume.
Neither red nor blue nor green,
you are the colour scheme.
Not the sugar, but its sweetness.
Not the arrow, but its flight.

You are not the notes, you are the music.
And you are not the top of the mountain:
You are the act of arriving at the summit.

Not the sugar, but its sweetness.
Not the arrow, but its flight.

Not Much to Ask

There's a message for me
in the sound of the rain
falling through the leaves of the trees.

It says to me that on the other side
of death's dark doorway,
There is a garden made of light.

And I can enter if I take off my shoes
Take off my self and my history.
I can enter if I take off my shoes
Take off my self and my history.

Well it's not much to ask
not much to ask
not much to ask
it seems to me...

Ophelia

Think of Ophelia
drowned in the brook,
through the brown clouded water
her pale form descending.

It's a high price to pay
That she had to die,
To make such a beautiful
Mandala for the eye.

Imagine the moment
caught in a snapshot,
A speck of dust captured
in a column of sunlight;
the water turned
to a transparent gel
in which she is held
like a feather
in a crystal ball.

That great mane of hair,
like a silent explosion
is laid on the surface,
and the shape of her cape
is splayed like a dancer's fan,

The folds and pleats chiseled
with infinite patience and care.

Well, her lungs may be bursting,
but her clothes look fantastic!
Between her dress and her distress
there's a gap that can't be fathomed or filled in.

Sweet Ophelia, gentle nymph.
Her tragedy is on display
but she'll never know how well it showed.
She never got to see the play.

Think of Ophelia
drowned in the brook,
through the brown clouded water
her pale form descending.

Sweet Ophelia, gentle nymph.
Her tragedy is on display
but she'll never know how well it showed.
She never got to see the play.

Falling Out

Air is too ethereal.
I need the resistancy of water
to let me know I'm here
before I drown.

Air is too ethereal.
I need a cloud to rest in,
before I sink right through
to the other side.

Chorus

Every golden flame
has an aching blue heart.
Every golden flame
Wants to get back home.

Air is too ethereal.
I need something beneath me,
I need someone to catch me
when I fall.

Air is too ethereal.
I need somebody below me.
I'm falling through
To the other side.

Chorus

Earth is too material.
Oh Mother Earth, you broke my fall.
Receive this body broken
Receive this body broken
on your law.
Receive this body broken
Receive this body broken
on your law.

Chorus

Ariadne's Thread

Dogs and cats walk 'round themselves
before they spiral down to sleep,
like a hand slowly stirring the obscure depths
of the deep green genetic whirlpool.
Hands linked up through the generations
weave daisy chains through evolution,
but who can read the story that they tell?
Oh hands linked up through the generations
weave daisy chains through evolution,
but who can read the story that they tell?

Chorus

And I remember the hands
that sowed the seeds
and nursed the child
but swung the scythe;
and felled the oak
that built the frames,
but held the spade
and dug the earth
and cast the dirt,
that rattled loud
on the coffin lid.

I saw the wind in the fire
make the flames bend low,
but I could not read
their racing tongues,
and I saw the sea
shape semi-circles
in the sand,
but I could not notch
my arrow to that bow.

From a furled up flag
to a torn up rag,
the life of a leaf
keeps time to a rhythm
that follows a tune
well past my ear,
and far beyond my vision.

Chorus

Ariel's Song

This azure vault,
these curlèd clouds,
the turquoise sea below;
the engrainèd sands,
the lace fringed surf;
of these enchanted things
I must let go.

If it were not for the fear of pain
the fierceness of the fire's flame
might give me some release.

Or if it were not for the fear
of a breathless suffocation
the watery waves might wash it all away,

Both purify
Both simplify
Both take away the weight.
Both purify
Both simplify
Both take away the weight.

If it were not for this mortal frame
then I might be all right.
Without a body,
who would have a problem?

And so I will not feel the fear
of falling from the height;
my soul will sing as I take wing
and fly into the light.

Both purify
Both simplify
Both take away the weight.
Both purify
Both simplify
Both take away the weight.

Culture

There's a lot going on in London town.
Exhibitions, shows, concerts and stuff.
"The multicultural centre of the world," some say,
And it's only an hour away.

But I like to go for a walk with my dog in the rain.
I like to go for a walk with my dog in the rain.

Beyond the outskirts of this village
into what's left of the old English woodland
and find some old log to sit down on,
where I can listen to the sound of the rain
falling through the branches of the trees
onto the sodden, leaf-strewn ground,
and the hood of my old coat.
And there I like to sit and see,
and sometimes I just sit
until I've lost
all sense of time and place.

And I don't care
what's going on in London,
And I don't want
to go downtown.

As far as I'm concerned
you can take your culture
and shove it up the back end
of your broken civilization.
The sound of the rain
falling on the leaves
is good enough for me.

But I like to go for a walk with my dog.

Lost Lyric

You were just a stepping-stone
on a river I had to cross
to get to a bigger poem
that lay on the other side.

So you got left behind.

No one else around here
knows anything about you,
and they never will.
For since I cannot write you,
so then they cannot read you.
But that's all right.

And I cannot find my way back now
to wherever it was I left you.
And whatever it was you might have meant,
you have a different meaning now.

Image of pure possibility,
your potential inexhaustible,
your existence inexplicable,
your issues unresolvable,
your riddle now insoluble,
your magic inexhaustible.

You think that I've forgotten you
But that just isn't so.
Often times I've thought of you
reflecting the dappled light
under the shadow of the river bank,
my lost lyric.

In a far off, forgotten country
you gleam like a distant star.

Pale and forlorn
and perfectly formed.

The heart in your stone
inscrutable,
and your song
Unparaphraseable.

In the mute abandoned eloquence,
of the silence of your soul,
you have a deeper beauty
than any I might lend you anyhow.

Education

Verse 1

I have heard
those big guitar chords in the sky,
and I have watched
the clouds make maps
across that field of light.
And I have stood upon the mountain top
and seen the land and sky
merge into one.
And I have seen the sunset
lay down its glittering path of light
from the horizon to the shore.

And from all of this have I learned.
And from all of this have I learned.
And from all of this have I learned.

Verse 2

And I have gazed
into the depths of rivers
for hours on end,
And I have watched the water
breaking over stones
on many a summer afternoon,

And I have looked down
through tunnels of trees
into the pools of pale green light
that shine at their far end.

And from all of this have I learned.
And from all of this have I learned.
And from all of this have I learned...

Chorus

Absolutely nothing.
Absolutely nothing.
Absolutely nothing.

Verse 1

Chorus

And sometimes
when it was really good,
I unlearned almost everything I knew.

Inside Story

“Don’t open your eyes.
I’m not out there.
I’m in here.
And don’t wake up.
It’s easier for us to merge
if you stay asleep for a while.

You may feel a gentle rhythm
in the distance
like a tide rising
and falling.
That’s you, breathing.
And me talking.
That’s the rhythm of this verse.

It’s good in here.
Now you are free
from the clamour
of your body
and the world
which always wants
something out of you.
And all the things that do divide us
in the daytime.

They say that God is a circle;
the centre everywhere,
the circumference nowhere.
It’s a bit like that in here.
There is no separation anymore.

There are no walls in here
and all the bridges have been crossed.

Although there is no time now
time will soon return.
The busy world will come knocking
at your door to wake you up.
You may not remember this.
Don’t fret for that.
It doesn’t matter.
It happened and nothing
that happens can ever unhappen
and it makes some kind of difference.

Can you hear them now
knocking on your door?
You go. I’ll stay.
For all I know
I may be dead out there.
For all I know
that may be why I’m here.

Either way,
you’ll find me here the next time.
Don’t be afraid,
You cannot lose me,
and you won’t need
a pathway or a key.”

A young man wrote that poem
and an old man finished it.
And the girl
he wrote it for
was old when she put it down.
But while they read it both together
they had no age at all.

Life Happened

but I must have been looking in the wrong direction.

And it was obvious enough.

There was your face
for a start,
that's the main thing;
but there were also
rivers and clouds
and mountains, moving in a big sky.

And all of it happening
right in front of me
presumably,

but it was like I didn't see it,
because I was waiting for it to happen.

Leaning forward, gazing expectantly
into the future,
waiting for it to come up
over the hillside;
then, suddenly,
I saw it behind me!

Somehow,
for all my vigilance,
it had got past me,
and now it is the past;
a place I can't get back to.

It's a picture of you
leaning out of a window
on a houseboat
on the river
waving at me,
and the children too
also waving,
giggling excitedly,
calling to me,
and the dog barking
and wagging its tail,
and me
standing there
on the other side of the river,
looking back,
watching you get smaller
and further and further away.
Going downriver, leaving me feeling
stupid and tricked,
outmanoeuvred and lost,
and guilty and sad.
Just too sad
for words.

The Poet at Sixty

Sometimes there's still
a sense of possibility;
A flash of blue sky
through a crack in the doorway;
But most of the time
it's grim and it's grey
and I turn it away.
Pull my hat down,
Pull my collar up
and push my way
into the future.
Like someone working their way
through a difficult day,
and really looking forward
to getting home.

Pull my hat down,
Pull my collar up
and push my way
into the future.
Like someone working their way
through a difficult day,
and really looking forward
to getting home.

The Future

I'm looking forward
to dementia,
I can't wait
to lose my mind.
I'm looking forward
to dementia,
I can't wait
to lose my mind.
I can't wait to lose my mind.

I'm looking forward
to looking backwards,
and no longer being able,
no longer being able,
Looking forward to looking
backwards
and no longer being able
to remember...

Repeat

I'm looking forward
to looking backwards,
and no longer being able,
no longer being able,
Looking forward
to looking backwards
and no longer being able
to remember
all this shit.

All this shit.

I can't wait to lose my mind.
I hope I don't find it.
I'd quite like to go out of it.
It's being stuck inside it all the time
that I could do without.

If It Were Not So

If I were not so subject to sensation
I might have found a way to free my mind.
And if I were not always dragged and driven
through sequences of stupid situations,
I might have found the time to work it out.

If my head was not so burdened
with useless information,
and my nervous system wired and rigged
with desire and fear and apprehension;
if my thinking was not clogged and blocked
by fixed ideas and premature conclusions,
I might have found a way to say what's true.

And if it were not for the fact
that I am just the way I am,
I might have found a way to get to you.

Ephemera

Nothing happening.
It's a dull, grey day,
the clouds congealed
in a condensed, occluded sky.

Then the faintest flush of light
trembles through the room;
a passing glance,
a glancing pass,
the palest pulse,
scarcely there;
then a glare,
which strengthens
and hardens
and the shape
of the window frame
like a crucifix
is thrown onto the wall;
and four big rectangles of light
achieve a momentary stability;
blazingly,
eye-blindingly bright.
You can almost
hear the energy sing,
as tight as the string on a violin.

Then there's a pause,
like an intake of breath;
a dip in the beam,
shadows flicker and quiver;
There's a sense of energy
being gathered together
and then a further power surge.

Radiance
seethes at the edges;
the full blush
of the sudden sunlight
blossoms,
and the cupped hands
of the present moment
fill up, crest
and overflow.

A fountain of light
pours down the walls
with opulent abundance.

From fruit to flower
to total fulfillment
in one fantastic flash;
from poverty to plenitude
in about five seconds flat.

The reflected windows
hold it for a moment,
then suddenly waver;
they stagger
and buckle;
cling, briefly,
then give up the struggle;
they lapse and fade
and the shapes bleep out
and the light dies out
and the wall is just
like it was before,
like nothing happened,
which it nearly didn't
in more ways than one
because I only just saw it in time.

The sun came out for a moment,
and then it went back in again.

So preoccupied with this and that
I hardly even registered the fact
and realized it only
when it was all but gone.

And I just told you
something important
which you won't remember
for long.

More Monsters

I can feel them.
I can smell them coming.
I can hear them moving quietly through the bracken.

I can feel them.
I can hear them coming.
On the far side of the river,
Their breath clouds the frosted air.
Their breath comes out in steam.

Men from the Department of Employment.
Men from the Social Insecurity Services.
Men with great big clubs in their hands,
And foaming dogs on leads,
And at their head a monster on a chain.

I can feel them.
I can smell them coming.
I can hear them moving quietly through the bracken.

They're waiting.
They're waiting so patiently.
They're waiting with such certainty,
For my boat to drift across to them,
To take me prisoner once again.
On the far side of the river,
They wait for me
to fail.

Summer Day in the Tuileries

The waves were leaving through the trees,
waving and weaving through the leafing trees,
in the dapple – dapped park of the Tuileries.

Arrow forked light blades
hatching up the patches,
wind blown light
unshadowing the branches.

Leaves sliced and spliced
in the tessellated light,
speared, and striped,
with tiger bars of sunlight.

Through kaleidoscopes of light spokes
round ripples run,
spun out from a deep green throat.

And she is happy just to be
one bright spinning spoke
on the wheel of the circle drawn sunlight.

Through kaleidoscopes of light spokes
round ripples run,
spun out from a deep green throat.

And she is happy just to be
one bright spinning spoke
on the wheel of the circle drawn sunlight.

Exile

Somewhere deep inside of me
a foundation stone is broken.
When I reach out like a child in the dark
she's no longer there beside me.
Sometimes I think, this can't be real,
and I must wake up.

And I feel myself slowly emerge
from the sticky glue of a deep sleep;
suddenly squinting against the glare
of the green sunshine
filtering through the leaves above me,
where I'm lying low on the forest floor
under a blanket beneath the big oak tree.

I can smell the smoke
of the early morning campfires,
and I can hear the sound of the women talking
and the children laughing
merging with the sound of the shallow stream
telling its beads
through England's ancient woodland.

Everything new and starting again
and there's a flash in my heart
like a bird's wings beating
against the surface of the lake
as the swan takes off,
and the air sparks
and glitters with liquid brilliance.

And so it is a bitter thing
to have to wake up once again
and find myself as I really am;
a refugee in a foreign land
walking alone down a broken road
with no direction home.

Valediction

We're down in the valley
looking up at the mountains.

There's a breeze up there
with my name written on it.

And right now we're talking face to face,
but I'm gonna turn away from you,
I'm gonna turn away from you,
and I'm gonna walk,
I'm gonna walk,
I'm gonna walk.

Through the big gates of the picture frame,
across the cornfield Van Gogh painted
once upon a Summertime,
to those blue hills in the distance.

And I'm gonna follow the music of the little stream,
up into the mountains, past the pine trees,
and the bushes with the red berries,
way above the timber line,
and all the way to the top of the ridges.

And I'm gonna raise my arms above my head,
like wings, like wings, to the sky.
And I shall wait, I shall wait,
I shall wait, I shall wait.

And I shall wait for that wind to carry me home
like a bird, like a bird that at last can fly.
And I shall wait for that wind to carry me home
and I won't turn around
to wave goodbye,
goodbye,
goodbye.

And I won't look back,
not even once.

We're down in the valley
looking up at the mountains.
There's a breeze up there
with my name written on it.

Saved

You put my salvation
in the palm of my hand.
And just when all my rivers
had run dry.

So gently, so simply,
I thought it couldn't be real.

I thought

I must have made it up.

But when I dared to look again
I saw that it was well beyond my art.
You were just too good to be untrue.
You were just too good to be untrue.
You were just too good to be untrue.

I love you.

Healing

I dipped my face into a bowl of light
and lifting up,
my head was gloved
and wore the hood of radiance.
When I wound it off like bandages,
I had new skin, and my hair
sparkled with starlight.

Volume 2

Like
a Tide
Rising





“These Things Shall Be”

There won't be any objects in the future.
Everything will be made out of music then.
 Instead of objects there will be
 organisations of three dimensional light,
and geometric patterns of great intellectual beauty
 unfolding through time like petals from a flower
 into ever deepening levels of awareness.
There won't be any violence in the future,
 because everyone will realize
 that murder is just long distance suicide.
And there won't be any pain or suffering either.
 People won't sink under the water
 in their cars any more
 and only the baby getting rescued,
lifted through the window to the heroic passer by
 who has to look at the person trapped inside
 and find some way to meet their eye.
There won't have to be stuff like that any more.
 There won't be any refugees
 or migrants in the future
because everyone will travel as far as they like
 but without ever having to leave home.

There won't be any more pins and needles
 of outrageous fortune neither,
 no intestinal shocks, no savage butchery.
It will all be way beyond that in the future.
Inter-subjectivity will be the order of the day;
people will change sex and morph into one another
 on a regular basis
 just to know what it really feels like
 to be somebody else.
There won't *be* any else in the future.
 And when it gets dark
the mountains will become transparent
 and light up from within.
 Warm glowing colours
 will sail through the night skies.
The outside and inside worlds will merge.
 thoughts will be things
 and things will be thoughts,
 and, just to get really carried away
I might even possibly venture to say
that you might find me just slightly less irritating
 than you do now, one fine day,
 in the future.

The Fall of Man

Light falls through space
but nothing shines
until it lands on something.

Then rainbows arch
and sunsets blaze,
but need an eye to see them.

The mind is empty
and undefiled
until it has a thought.

And Sleeping Beauty
dreams all day
lest woken with a kiss.

Once that happens
there's hell to pay
and poems like this get written.

Close Encounters

A second dream woke up inside the first
but before the first had finished
and dreamt by a different dreamer.

The first dreamer was a woman
who suffered from depression.
But in her dream she was Ophelia,
floating on the lake
like in the famous painting,
hair spread out across the water
garments heavy with their drink,
chaunting snatches of auld lauds
and just about to sink.

The second dreamer was a man
emerging from the depths
of slow wave sleep, and reaching
blindly for the surface.

He swam into her from below
and almost lifted her above the water line;
and she then sank back into him
as his body merged with hers
the way that bodies can in dreams
or on the astral planes.

His fingers slid inside of hers;
his hand putting on her hand
the way a hand puts on a glove.
He felt their delicate slenderness,
the fineness of her features;
the tracery of veins,
the fragile scaffolding of bones.

He hesitated as he felt her weakness,
and knew her haunted beauty from within.
He felt that she was dying
and he fell in love with her.
In a kind of existential panic then
he poured his energy
through all the gates and alleyways
and every pathway running through her body
to save her from the fate of poor Ophelia.

He could not see her, but, looking through her eyes
he saw how pale and wan
the world around her looked
and she then saw his energy confer
colour to the shapes around;
the clouds above came into focus
and everything began to pulse with life.

She felt this as a gift of power
like a visitation from a God
as her muscles flexed and hummed
and the lights along her nervous system
flickered into life.

They never saw each other, yet
two strangers shared, who never met,
a sense of mutability
beyond the comprehension of the Gods.

They hung together for a moment
in a connection that went deeper
than sexual intimacy;
it was the dark complicity
of creatures caught and tangled
on the curves of the mortal coil.

Then the morning drew the dreamers
back to their dreaming bodies
and they were disengaged,
waking up in different rooms
in different parts of town.

Neither one of them remembered
anything about it.

She woke up feeling totally renewed
as though she'd had a blood transfusion,
her suicide's depression
mysteriously banished
and she leaped into the morning.
He woke up feeling utterly exhausted
but somehow vindicated
(but with no idea about what).

She catches the bus to work and so does he.
When she gets up from her seat
as her stop comes into view
she sees a man sitting near the doorway
and something stirs inside of her.
He looks up as she passes by
attracted by her energy,
her aura of vivacity
but then averts his eyes, thinking
"I'm too tired for this today,
she's way beyond my reach."
And, judging by her sense of disappointment
when she sees his tired face
and the way she steps down lightly
and walks into her day
without a backward glance,
She probably agrees.

Bad Karma

On your way up and out
you got snagged on a branch
and became inveigled
in a confusion of cherry blossom;
tugging against the world like a kite
that seeks surrender to the wind;
like Ariel on the Island
with Prospero long gone,
trembling fitfully
from one dream to another,
tremulous as an eyelash,
you were ready to evaporate,
till you got lost in that pink froth
you thought you'd scoured your palette of,
but just sufficiently snared by the world
as to alter minutely the angle of that shadow
that falls across the door of the old barn,
and unlatches the gates,
starts and opens clocks and locks,
and kicks away the chocks
from under the front wheels
to let the big old truck slowly lumber out
across the dusty farmyard,
through the chicken wire
down the dirt track,
and out across the highway,
gaining speed.

The next thing you know
you're locked in the fast lane
with a heavy commitment to keep it all going.
If you check the rear view mirror now
you may notice that you have somehow developed
a complicated history since the last hairpin bend.
Family trees and situations
are sprouting out all over you.
Don't panic at this stage;
keep your eyes on the road.
After a while you'll see it gets easy.
But by that time of course
you'll need a lot more gear.
(I'd advise muscles for the hillsides
and money for the bank clerk).
Now if you keep all this up
You'll soon get enough weight
to bear down upon the world like an avalanche.
(You may even get an invitation
to step down and join up
in the Yewnited Nations).
That's all for later;
just now you're doing fine,
and anyway, pretty soon
you won't have the time
to remember how it was
that you got here.

Tea with Sunsets

In the good old days, when the children were little,
we used to go on these cheap holidays
to the Greek islands in the Aegean.
You could go on day excursions then
in these nice little wooden boats they had,
and in the late afternoons,
coming back, near sunset,
they would sometimes serve tea on the boat.

It came in glass cups,
which were decorated
with a golden stripe
around the rim,
as I recall;
and,
because of the transparency of the cup
you could see the tea inside;
greenish brown,
chartreuse in colour,
and you could watch
the clouds of sugar dissolve,
and sometimes the liquid
would be suddenly suffused
by a ray of light from the setting sun,
and it would glow with glory.

The outlines dissolved
in a soft, effulgent dazzle,
and the golden stripe would gleam
like a headline over the moment.

There was the feeling of a sudden,
soft ignition;
a silent spark,
then a fattening flame
blooming inwardly;

a reflection in the mind
of the physical sun out there,
which ran its golden fingertip
around the golden rim;
and,
touched by this tuning fork of light
the cup became a sonic bowl;

the harmonic note lifted
the energy level an octave or two;
the pitch of life pushed upwards,
and quickened like a flame.

It deepened and intensified,
and I absolutely knew
that what the poets and the mystics
had always said was true.

It was a cheap holiday
but there was no expense spared
in the special effects department
when you had some sugar
and a sunset in your tea.

Just Like Alice

She stood tiptoe on the edge of the ledge
and she fell into slow motion
through the air thick with rainbows
and ethereal honey.

Down through the folds of the sculptured drapery.
Down the tangled vines and doodles
in the margins of medieval manuscripts,
with their flowers and their fruits
and their haloed saints and apple trees.

Through layered maps and dappled lights
in the valleys of information.

Through the torrential rain of blossoms
on the tips of the thinnest branches
that sigh and susurrate in the strident winds
(the twigs like animated Arabic script
and the branches all shaped like the rooks
on Shakespeare's castled battlements).

Through flocks of ring doves frayed and cooed
(wings in salute at such brave flight).

Through the multiplication tabled snowflakes
and mathematical layers of molecular dust
and ladders of light through shattered shades
and shadowed lattices and hatches.
And ribboned screeds of sheet music
in gay abandon on the breezes blown.
And scribbled sacred shopping lists
and sheep's wool from the shearing
flung about in rustic jubilee.

And serried ranks of clothes pegs
on the washing lines in a stiff dance
on a rainy windswept day.

Past choirs and congregations
with angels wings for hands in prayer
all shaped like Gothic doorways.
Down through the lonesome astral planes
past the phantom hitchhiker
drifting through the fault lines
and fractures in the slipstream.
And jangled in the wavebands
of radio station tunings
with their random music and messages.
And past old clockwork musical boxes
with paintings of horses and carnivals
on the woodwork.

And fractal equations and logical syllogisms
and long hair waving like weeds underwater.

And the plumes and tufts of bearded God
and his angels with their tongues like trumpets.

And hieroglyphics looked at
through the magnifying glass
of the academic Egyptologist.

And tracks in the sand deciphered
by trusty Indian scouts.

And graphs that plot the secret journeys
of walking sticks down country lanes
in English village yoga manuals.

And down through the flocked unnumbered leaves,
through the blank pages of the unwritten books
she glided;
down and through the thorns of flames
and the briared tangled crowns
of bewildered light
in a storm of swirling sycamore seeds
in the roaring raging symphony
of all things in the free fall.

Till she herself was braided and tressed
by the vexed and fractious winds untied,
unfurled by the complicated idle breeze,
suspended in the spun coilings
of the swarming pathways of the air –
round the hooves and horns of this handwriting
and the convolutions of these sentences.

Like a boat before its glittering
electrical pathway of light
upon the rivers of the skyway –
aimed like an arrow through the eye of a needle
she twisted slowly to the centre
like a corkscrew in a vortex,
all the way down to the very navel of the world.

And she fell upwards baby;
and she crashed up through the surface of the lake
in a shower of smashed chandeliers
and exploding stained glass windows
with Excalibur in the both of her fists
and the sun and the moon in the heart of her eyes.

With features all resolved at last
and the purple bruise below the cheekbones
quite healed over now,
and with a flower in her fingers called gravity.

Rising up towards us as we bend down to receive;
with arms uplifted,
palms held outward,
fingers open,
with everything offered,
always arriving,
arriving always,
She.

I Made This For You, Even Though

For Lara, on the occasion of her thirteenth birthday

*If poems were stones
I could build you a castle
to keep you safe inside;
and if wishes were horses
we'd ride up in the mountains
to the land where the dream
never died.*

But they're not
and they aren't
so we can't.

This poem can't save you either,
let's be clear about that
at the outset.

It won't actually help
when the monster's eye
fills up the windowpane.

But even so,
for what it's worth,
I know a trick
to soothe your mind
on a fretful, sleepless night.

See this screwed up sheet of paper?
I pick it up, and hold it
between my thumb
and my forefinger,
and carefully shake it loose;
pull it open at the edges,
then flatten and smooth it out
across the surface of the table;
I ex-plane it for you.

And on this sheet of paper
I draw you a map of your world,
to show you how the pieces
fit perfectly together.

And see, I also unravelled
this straggle of rhythms
and rhymes
(they arrived in a heap,
all talking at once,
and I had to disentangle them,
and tease out the words,
in an equable order
to harmonise your mind).

Now I put the words
into the map;
each word in its box,
each box in its corner,
every corner in a design;
the design in a composition
to make sense of your journey through time.

And, speaking of time,
I'd like to imagine
that sometime in your future,
when I'm no longer here,
in the middle of a busy day
you might come across this poem
where it's been waiting for you
down the years,
and it will open out for you
like that screwed up sheet of paper,
and you might climb inside it,
like getting into bed,
and pull the sheets up,
over your head,
to gain for yourself
a moment's peace
from the pull and the push
of the world.

Well, it isn't much,
but no man's work
makes a deeper mark in time.

So let me summon sounds for you,
and let me paint you pictures.
Here, child, lift your head up,
just a little,
so I can slide and tuck,
under your pillow,
these memories of the farm
where you spent
so much of your time
in your imaginary childhood.

Every night I told you stories.
The narratives are faded now,
the trails worn down
and overgrown;
but the love I felt
when I made them up
still shines as bright within them.
I could pick up those storylines
between my thumb
and my forefinger,
loop them into a circle
and set it up to glow;
the soft light like a halo
above your sleeping head;

its influence will infiltrate
your dreams with happy endings,
and your memory
of my spoken words
from evenings long ago
will make a nest for your mind.

And here is an Alpine valley
to cool your fevered brow;
covered with flowers, a bit like you,
pale, unpossessed, and open.

I will lay thee down
by waters clear
on soft white sand,
on sunshine beach;
and, in the seashell of your ear
I will allow
no clam'rous sound;
there may you only hear
the gentle susurrations
of creamy, lace fringed surf.

(I've put you on an island,
and the beach itself
in an enchanted lagoon
where the little boat
bobs up and down,
in a protected bay, far, far away
from the sound of the storms
that circle around,
and out of the swing of the sea.)

And then, beyond the horizon
I'll sketch for you a view
across meadowlands of galaxies
of a star-studded sky
so stunningly beautiful
it could even make you cry.

*Oh, if poems were stones
I would build you a castle
to keep you safe inside;
and if wishes were horses
we'd ride up in the mountains
to the land where the dream
never died.*

Nothing but the Truth

Now let me tell you a story
that I never told to you before.
I was hanging out in a bar in Rome,
it must've been some years ago now,
and, looking out across the room
I saw Leonard Cohen
sitting all alone,
and I went over to him
and sat down opposite,
on the other side of his table,
and then I said to Leonard Cohen,
I'd like to read you a poem.

And, while he sat there
sideways on to me
drinking a glass of old red wine
and smoking a cigarette,
I read to him that poem
that I wrote about me and you;
the one that ends by a fountain in a park,
at the end of an avenue of trees
whose branches, thinning at the top
interlaced above our heads
like fingers linking hands.

And when I'd finished talking
he just sat there for a while
and smoked another cigarette,
and then he said to me
that's maybe the best poem
that I've heard in a long long while.
It's better than the one
that I just wrote, he said.
And I agreed.

But the thing I have to tell you now
is that none of that ever happened.
It should have done, but it didn't.
I've never even been to Rome
and now I'll never go there
just in case.

But the other thing about it
is, that now that I've told it to you
you'll always read that poem about you
through the story you just heard,
no matter what you do.

You won't be able not to.
You'll always see Leonard Cohen listening,
sitting there in profile
wearing his old blue raincoat,
and smoking a cigarette.
And the red ring from the wineglass
staining the table top
in that old bar in Rome.
And so, in a kind of a way,
and all because of you
that story will come true.
That's the way it works.

Falling In

Because of you I know the pain the ice must feel
when Spring thaws the stiffness out of the rivers
and the lakes,

melting on the moving surface of your body;
and I know the sudden fear of the breaking bud
when the leaves surrender and the flower spills
and plunges into unknown space
before it finds a cradle on the airwaves.

Every time I draw my outline
you break across the border-line again
and then once again I'm falling, helpless,
like a candle flame when a passing breeze
sucks against the vertical plume
and it elongates beyond itself,
driven by a desire so desperate,
it almost drags itself up by the roots
to the risk of its own destruction.

You're like gravity,
you get bigger and brighter all the time
as I'm pulled into your orbit
like a meteorite into the face of a planet,
until I can't see anything outside you.
From the far flung frontiers of my nervous system,
that I haven't heard from in a thousand years,
lights start flashing on and off
with distant news of electrical fires
that staple themselves from my knees up to my neck
the moment that I see you, across a crowded room.
The thought "that's why they call it falling in love"
travels across the screens in front of me,
but never shapes up to a coherent phrase –

the words evaporate like vapour trails,
and as they start to slowly rotate
I feel like I'm going down in a tailspin.
But you guide me in when I catch your eye,
and when you move your body that way,
that way that you move your body.
You lift your arms to absorb my impact,
but that's all right, there's no crash landing,
because the nearer I get
the slower I come.

The air gets thicker with information
the more I move into your atmosphere.

As I arrive through an explosion of migrating birds
I can hear the blood beating in my ears
and the distant sound of bells and thunder.
And I'm as blind as a bat, but it doesn't matter;
I'm guided in by the smell of your skin.
My limbs get heavy, I can't remember
how to walk, I can't remember
how to talk, and I'm dropping down
into a trance
like a bird falling down a tunnel to the light.

By the time my mouth finds its way to your mouth
I'm fast asleep and I'm dreaming wild dreams
of fast moving clouds in a blue sky over the ridges.
Their fleeting shadows chasing up the hillsides
are your hands moving over me,
and the many fingered breeze that flutters
across my body in a long caress,
is just your breath that I'm breathing inside of,
feeling your heart beat inside mine,
until I'm home again at last.

Now Am I Commanded

Is it not obvious that the Creator yawns with scarcely concealed boredom during thunder and tempest, yet toils in rounding the delicate spirals of a seashell? W.B. Yeats asked that question once, and I ask it now again as I try in vain to trace the exact angle of the curves that meet and merge to make the magical performance of your face. Now am I commanded to calculate once again the beauty of your body, as you sleep deep within the shelter of its structures, and to delineate the drastic curves and the suntanned planes of the muscles of your tummy and your thighs, as though they were what indeed they are—the actualisation of the architecture of love and the articulation of all of my desire. But I am dumb beside such easy and unconscious grace. And my heart in shreds in the witness box.

Like an eagle my eye tracks across the landscape of your body as though I saw the world from the peak of a mountain, and my gaze comes finally to rest and hover just above your knee. There is a scar below your knee. I know the story of that scar. I know its history. In the name of the childhood accident that it commemorates I summon angels and ministers to witness the

unrecorded outrage of your leg caught under the roundabout in the park. In the name of this never quite forgotten pain I think it reasonable to expect the wheels of the war machine to cease from their endless turning. I want the constructions of brutality dismantled now, and I also require that the armies who have been marching for a thousand years come to attention at the foot of this bed. I expect the soldiers to lay down their weapons and kneel. When I turn to look out of the window I want to see every field between here and Nottingham covered with their kneeling forms, under the monochrome moon, their steel helmets like a million buds waiting to hatch the miracle of compassion born out of fear and loneliness.

You throw an arm out away from your body across the bed, your hand half open like a flower. The bedside lamp likewise throws its delicate illumination into your half hidden palm, making a shadowed pool of light. The modulations there go past the art of Rembrandt. Let atheists gather and gaze into that pool of light until their eyes heal over.

The power that persuaded the galaxies into a spiral rounded also your heels and your hands. And your face was sculpted by the sea winds. Across the pillow your hair is spread in a careless blond explosion. How many times have I carved with an endless patience every flying tendril of that great mane of hair, and set it up behind your profile and placed it on the prow of my boat as I followed your face like destiny?

How many times, I wonder? Who knows how many times? Who cares how many times? I wasn't counting at the time. I was never counting anyway.

Postcards to Oblivion

They used to have a little address book. Maybe Lella brought it with her from before they moved into that little house in Jericho. It seemed always to have been around, and most of the addresses in it had been written over and changed many times with the passing of the years. We won't even go into that, the comings and goings of people and the sadness of a dead address. On this occasion, to commemorate the cover of the book in question is about as much as we can manage. It was a small black leather hardback book with a picture of a Scottish Highlander in a tartan kilt with full regalia standing on a hillside, playing the bagpipes, pasted on to the cover. She used it mainly for phone numbers then. Well in the course of time the bagpipe player's features became indecipherable under the impact of the doodles scribbled across his head and the blue sky behind him (and of course he had long borne, with the stoical fortitude for which his clan was famous, the obligatory, unimaginative moustache and glasses).

Harding liked to think that those doodles, randomly scrawled in unconscious agitation during the tensions of many forgotten phone calls, were like mystic cryptograms that somehow recorded the emotional details of the phone calls themselves, and that in some future time some semiotic research system would decode and unscramble them back to the actual stimulus of which they were the unwitting representations, so that the original scenes could be replayed like old movies, forgotten conversations revived in living colour, so that he could see again the fleeting expressions crossing her face like clouds across a troubled sky, and see again the way that she used to lean forward when she laughed, or the way she bit her lip when she was concentrating.

A palimpsest of stains and scuffs eventually backgrounded the bagpipe player almost into oblivion, and eventually the whole book followed him.

Richard Dawkins tells us that molecular genetics, in the not too distant future, will put together the one true tree of life. They will "reconstruct the great migrations and invasions of the centuries, track the voyages of the Viking longships, follow the American tribes by their genes down from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego and the Saxons across Britain, document the diaspora of the Jews, and even identify the descendants of pillaging warlords like Genghis Khan." Yeah, but no similar power will read, like psychic braille, the pattern of dotted holes hammered into the Scotsman's kilt with a biro during one call that she had found particularly distressing. One day I suppose the cover fell off of that little address book, and the pages loosened and were eventually thrown into the bin, like postcards to oblivion.

Sooner or later, everything goes that way.

Don't

Suddenly
a flash of light
and your face
before me.
Beautiful. Simple. Perfect.
And with that look.
That look!
Brilliant. Radiant.
Alive.

The passing breeze
held its breath,
and the moment
paused
as though it almost realized
something
but then you moved,
and the moment passed
and your face was lost
then found again
as the shadows and the shapes
round your outlines
rearranged;
found a frame
and there you were
inside again.

Your face again,
beautiful.
Like a soft flame
glowing, trembling
like a feather,
a wing
then two wings
folded over
one another
to shelter, and nest
beneath them
your heart
gently beating.

The pulse of life.
Beating
gently.

Don't stop
beating

Don't stop
beating

Don't stop
beating
beating
beating

Don't stop
beating

Don't stop
beating

Don't stop

Don't

Stop

Don't

Unbroken

Let the Land heal over
and let grass again cover
the ground that was broken
and wounded
to nourish a Nation.

May the stone be unbroken;
and be again as before
Michelangelo made the marble
blossom.

Incarnation

Perhaps I should sing
with the syllables of sound
of the stones in the stream,
with their chime and their clangour
their suck and their stammer
their shine and their shimmer
and muffled laughter
as, counted and clucked
by the swirl of the water
they inscribe their inscrutable commentary.

Do they complain
that they but wind a chain
around the world
(itself a stone
in which the imprisoned spirit
looks out through the watery windows)
or do they simply celebrate
This perishable tissue?

And shall I join the choir,
or should I not condemn
the way you dragged us all down here
into this gravity well?

I think it was the way
you just jumped down and dug the dirt.
That was something to see.
That was what got to me.

It was an audacious declension,
possibly even
a noble condescension,
or maybe I just like to see it that way.
At any rate,
It was that graceful curve
on the downturned
incline of your face,
and that little upturned curve
on the corner of your mouth,
as you acknowledged gravity.

So flash and shine put on their metal undercoat
and summer's green depends now on the leaf.
Yes you *allow* the thickening of the light,
the wavelengths slogging down
like a broken stroboscope
which drugged us down
into a stupor
breathing the air
through bubbled mud.

Yet you don't even hesitate.
You step down lightly like a ballerina
then you come up on the other side
as brazen as a fleshpot sent from Babylon.
You sashay by like rock and roll,
wide-hipped, broad-beamed,
mast up and rigging on;
all shuck and jive and sheer swank,
flags waving in the wind.
You thumb your nose at tragedy
and palm me off with a wink.

'til I don't know just what to think.

The weight of your arrival here
destroyed interpretation
(yeah, thanks for *that*,
it was *nice* to see the theories dissolve
like Dracula's flesh
struck down by the morning sunbeam).
But a single graze on a schoolboy's knee
indicts your Universe,
and millions are starving to death right now
because you dragged us all down here,
and you don't care
you just lie there
like a caterpillar on a broad green leaf,
Legs crossed, arms akimbo,
sunglasses on,
sipping a strawberry milkshake,
probably.
You return to the serried ranks
of my anxious question marks
just the smile of the Cheshire cat.

You're without permission,
you're without guarantees,
you've got nothing
at the back of your beyond,

but if it weren't for the fact
of this broken leg
I'd have to say I love the way
you dance us all to death.

I mean what could be bigger than you are baby?
I'm cleft right down
through the core of my being
like a log that's been spliced by an axe.
What argument could I advance against you
as you design the architecture
of the snowflake
and take care
of each and every fingerprint?

What could anyone say against you
when even "fuck you" is a prayer?

So lie back Mother Nature
(lift it up a little higher there);
I've got my airplanes on right now
and I'm flying straight into you.

The carpets are corrugated all down the hallway
and the curtains are stretched out flat
in the blast.

Oh, end this dark frivolity!
Yea, spread far wide thy plates of light,
I want it with sunsets and lipstick.
And confuse the world as much as you like,
I know how to read your tracks
in every drop of rain.

Just like Leonardo used to contemplate
the stains on an old stone wall,
in which he saw
the forests grow,
the flowers bloom
and the blossoms fall,
I see it all so surely spelt
in a phrase of the changing sky,
the gods behind the galaxies
coming down to rest
on the curve of your thigh;
finding their sight
in the light of your eye.

I go riding out to life
on every beat of your heart
like you were the last train to Paradise.

So don't drag me down
through purgatory again.

Because you took my breath away,
because you blew my mind right out,
because you smashed my headlights in
but let the light come leaping out,

you ignited me
with an inblent fire
and I don't think time or disease
can extinguish the ecstasy of sugar.

You made me read it out real clear
in the pattern of the grain
of every ordinary tree.
You're telling me
it's simply there
and you don't care
about my
reservations.

So perhaps I should sing
with the syllables of sound
of the stones in the stream,
with their chime and their clangour
their suck and their stammer
their shine and their shimmer
and muffled laughter
as, counted and clucked
by the swirl of the water
they inscribe their inscrutable commentary.

I should simply celebrate
your perishable tissue.
For I have heard the heart of life
say yes to me.

Transmission

1

Unlike Lazarus and Jesus
plucked out of the tomb
or Ariel from the knotted entrails of his tree
by a force far stronger and more urgent than he,
Michaelangelo's slaves and stupendous giants
look reluctant to be set free;
delivered, it seems, unwillingly
from out of their marble womb;
and some of those fetched up to the surface
look like they're longing to return
back into the self involved stone,
as though a flower would shut its eye
and be a bud again.

Their powerful muscles
are sinking down to sleep,
their heavy eyelids closed;
and Adam can hardly even be bothered
to lift a languid finger
to receive his electrical shock
from the hand of his maker.

Such a strangely supreme relaxation
after the efforts of their author
to find them out and haul them up
out of the mute autistic block
inside which they'd lain brooding all the while,
curled up around their own potential
like a snail around the spirals of its shell.

2

But now I see the giants have done
more work than I'd supposed.
(the limpid beauty of Christ's hand
in the late Pietà,
or the pleated folds in Mary's robes
that a whisper might ripple and flutter).

That such subtleties were thus persuaded,
so lifted from the intractable stone!

They aren't regressing after all,
but resting after labour.

Theirs is the sensual rapture
that follows the act of creation.

This is the exhaustion
of something that's been spent.

What drew them up has drawn them out;
what we see is just a recoil;
a signal has been sent.

Listen.

Put your ear up close to the stone
and you can hear it sing.

And look,
the surface of the sculpture breathes,
it's *blurred*;

the energy that pulled it up
evaporates above it
like heat in waves
escaping from dry land.

So consummately chisel-kissed
the rock has bloomed,
the flower opened
and the perfume has escaped
into the liberated air.

The stone made flesh,
the flesh made breath,
the breath a breeze
that has become
at one with the wind and the sky.

That which was made visible
has now achieved
invisibility.

The final stroke has gone beyond
whatever can be seen;
the sullen earth has taken wing,
It's gone beyond, it's real real gone;

the cage is down,
the bird has flown
into the wild blue yonder.

The History of Fire

Some say the flame once stood alone,
others say it never did.

Its need is equal to its power
And it needs fuel to live.

It's hungry and it must consume
the things that it creates.

The fire must slake its endless thirst
so everything must burn.

All creatures flee in fear from its desire,
but come to understand, as they expire,

flames do not burn themselves and so
they're turning into fire.

Flowers

I'd never have guessed that such emotion
could be provoked by the sight
of a bunch of flowers.
They were lying along the back window of a car
stopped in front of me in the traffic
while I was driving somewhere or other;
long stemmed they were, with small,
fiercely bright red tips
(I don't even know what they are called).

They'd been cut from the root,
wrapped in a paper shroud
and taken hostage
to be ransomed off,
in a gesture of mollification
to close down some low grade
domestic entanglement
probably.

They should have looked stupid and absurd
trussed up like prisoners, and thrown on a shelf,
and being used in such a way,
so what I felt was really envy
for their immunity
to everything about us;
the way they couldn't be requisitioned
as witnesses in any human drama.

They had been roughly handled
but they could not be touched.
Their calm unblinking certainty
gazed over the head of all our circumstance;
looking directly into the face of something
that we can't even see.

More Flowers

There's a vase of flowers
on the kitchen table.
They look so remote they make me think
of snow on distant hillsides.
They seem to carry the atmosphere
of deep and dreamless sleep.
Paradoxically though,
they also look alert and attentive,
but their attention is obviously elsewhere.

Perhaps they are tuned in
to a madly passionate music
coming in through the ether,
that we can't hear,
composed entirely of silences.
Or are they really introverts
contemplating theorems
of complete equilibrium.
Something must be going on
behind those involved eyelids.

Is it sublime indifference
or do I detect a distant disdain,
an ironically raised eyebrow
in their devout demeanour?
But to ask that would be to undermine
their sense of absolute innocence.
Looking at them is like gazing
at the face of a sleeping newborn child.

But no way of describing them
comes anywhere near the mark,
and there is no sense
in looking for likenesses
for something that isn't like anything.
They are simple, they are singular,
they are quite simply
their simple singular selves.
They are really utterly utter.
Sat there on my kitchen table
right in front of me.
Completely out of reach.

Flowers Revisited

T. S. Eliot wrote about flowers.
He said that some of them had the look
of flowers that are looked at.
But flowers don't look like that.

They don't see your look.
They are completely preoccupied
in looking at something else.

While you are looking at them,
they are looking over your shoulder
at something you can't see.

Judging by their look
of utterly rapt devotion
it must be something as beautiful
as you think flowers are.

I bet you wonder what it is.
Don't wonder too much though.
The reason you don't know
is because you've chosen to forget;

and if you were to remember
exactly what it was;
if you were to remember
the beauty you have lost
it might bring you to your knees.

Heavy Metal

Imagine this,
an enormous piece of military
or industrial machinery,
something so unbelievably heavy
its massive wheels sink even into stony ground.
Something of such awesome density
that it might seem the very child
of gravity itself.

Imagine that this huge colossus
rests upon a gently sloping field,
tied by many ropes and chains
as thick as branches
to metal stakes
the width of trees
buried deep in the earth.

Settled down
into an immemorial slumber.
Moss and rust
conspire with its own stagnation.
Equally indifferent
to the wind and rains of winter
and to the glancing lights of summer,
the brute actuality of the thing
could put stress lines into your head
just from looking.

The seasons revolve in a flicker of light.
Butterflies stagger and tumble overhead,
oblivious to the insentient mass below.

Its weight is so tremendous
that gradually, inevitably,
it begins to loosen its fastenings,
and some of the ropes and chains
just snap from the pressure.
Feel the incredible tension in those chains
just before they break.
Feel the metal stakes
being pulled like teeth.

And then the thing begins to gently slide,
so slowly at first that you cannot see
but only sense the movement;
As though it clung to its own inertia,
then, regretfully, down the slope,
it gains in speed,
builds up to a slide,
tips over the edge
and begins to fall,
effortlessly, end over end,
into a chasm
of inconceivable depth.

A tremendous feeling of relief
shudders across
the whole gigantic fabric
as it surrenders to free fall;
and as it falls,
as the cushion of air beneath its frame
begins to build
it starts to shed its outer shell,
which falls away like skin from fruit.

One after another the various bits and pieces
of the framework just burn away
and freewheel into space.
And as it falls it's stripped away
surrendering its exoskeletons
like envelopes of matter,
until slowly a finer
and more delicate structure
begins to emerge.

Eventually it becomes as frail
as the frame of an ancient bicycle,
as a ladder,
a coat hanger,
a key ring,
a needle,
then just the ghost
of a gleam of reflected light
flashing on and off
from a silver coin
tossed into the sunlight.

All the surfaces of the world
seem to burn away
in scrolls of flame
in an incandescent conflagration
as the big blue lake rises up from below
to receive into its welcoming breast
the hurtling 'V' shaped wings of fire,
extinguished in the heart of light.

Evaporation on impact.
It feels all right.
Inside the explosion, it's quiet.

Prophecy

Inside my mind
there's a lake of light
of endless depth
lit from within,
and deep below
I can see the shape
of a beautiful giant
tangled in weed
and snared in shadow;
caught in the chains
of time and space
that failed to deliver
the first time around
so now He is finding
another way through.

People get ready.
Something is coming.
I can see it shining
in the dark.
I can sense Him
searching
for the surface.

Schopenhauer's Blues

Oh the engines of endless energy,
what is it that they *want*?
However much they manage to deliver
it will never be enough.
When Blake said that time
was the mercy of eternity
I know what he meant.
Otherwise, to be famished when fed
at the very same time
and off of the very same plate
and from the very same source
would be about par for the course.

The which, of course, it damn near is.

I thought you'd figured that out,
worked it down to the bone
checked out the illusions,
seen all that was shown,
but look at you now
like the last fool for love
in your broken down shoes
and your almanac,
standing on the barricades
and waving a silly flag for some cause
you can't even remember the name of;
and going down with the ship
in the teeth of the evidence
and not because of God,
not because of the colours,

and not because of the flowers,
but just because
of the way she made you feel that day
when she looked up
and smiled at you that way.

Don't consult your horoscopes,
episodes without a plot
don't do much for history,
and don't you know
that blind men can't use glasses?

Need will wear your face
to move from place to place
in one of its many disguises;
then it will dump you off
on the side of the road
in a tangle of busted wires
like a broken puppet
when it's used you up.

You think it's all about you
but it's not.

You just have to believe
that it's going somewhere
but it's not.

It's just all about need.
Need is all that you've got.
Oh baby, this is your *lot*.

Invasion

Into the landscape of your face,
through the film screen of my eyes
I threw everything I had.

(I tried to pull my soul back in
when I realized it had gone out there
but, such was the force
of the originating gesture
I damn near lost my arm.)

Now I'm sitting here
in the ruins of my invasion
trying my best to calculate
what else got lost out there.

My cocky cavalry were the first to go.
Famous for their charm they were,
optimistic, brisk bearded men,
set to storm the frontal features,
the forehead and the eyes.

Meant to sweep you off your feet.
They went headfirst into the frozen moat,
and none of 'em ever returned;
(all except for a couple of independent scouts
on a special commission to find your heart.
No sign of that, they said).

The saboteurs and the spies came back
spliced and filleted,
the diplomats gutted,
and all my gentle infantry
patiently ascending
the long slopes of affection
set to woo you with persistent devotion;
I saw them twisting in the wind
hung up outside the castle walls,
blackened with frostbite and malnutrition.
There was really no need for that.

I'm sitting downriver now
with my hook and line
waiting for my soul to drift by
once you've spat it out.
I know it must be dead but
I figured it deserved a decent burial.
I've got used to arranging those.

No Big Deal

Human history is so heavy.
I can feel the world sag with the weight.
Mother Nature can hardly swing her hips
around the axis anymore,
let alone push the planet
on its pathway round the sun.

Maybe I should just step off.
Lighten the load, just a little.
It's no big deal.

After all, I'm only here now,
like a schoolboy in detention,
waiting for somebody to tell me I can go.
I would have left a while back,
but I don't know my way home.

"Because you're worth it"
the advert said.
The model in the picture though
looked out as if to say,
"You're not worth it,
but you might be
if you buy this stuff.
Then you can look at them
the way I look at you;
with absolute disdain.
And they will look at you
the way you look at me,
with all-consuming envy.
After all, if they envy you
you really must be worth it."

They will take away your self-esteem
then make you spend the rest of your life
buying it back again.

Meanwhile you're spoiled for choice,
as long as it's either
Capitalism
which is a man
standing on your head
to climb up way above you,
or Socialism
which is a man
pulling you down by the ankles
to make sure you don't get above him.

Politics

Yeah it's ambition or resentment.
Doesn't get much better than that.

So the Genie said to the farmer,
"You can have anything you want
but you must understand the deal;
whatever it is that you receive
your neighbour will receive
twice as much as you do."
So the farmer thought about that
for a while
and then he turned and said,
"Thanks. I think I'd like to lose
the sight of one of my eyes."

I guess we all know someone like that.

Complete Unsense

I want to sit on the back of the Quantum wave,
like a rider on the back of a rearing horse,
before it crests
before it breaks
before it makes
a violin,
a ball of string
or absolutely anything.

I can hear the silence around me seethe
with unspecified significance,
and I'd like it just to stay that way.
I don't want to hear whatever it is
that it might have me say.

Perhaps I owe you an apology
for speaking to you this way,
in a language that I don't understand,
but the thing is, that I need to stay
one step behind the object.
Once energy becomes something
then it's already dead.

And if the question is
does God exist,
and the answer is
not yet,
but we're working on it;

then that's one job
better never get done;
what happened to Him
the last time round
really wasn't much fun.

Abraham

The ram did not show up,
so Abraham slew Isaac
(who he loved more than any other
except of course for God).

If the sky sang like steel.
If the blade shone in the sun.
If the fire from fear
fetched back its flashing forks;
we cannot say.
We could not look.
We had to turn away.

But Abraham saw the whole thing through.
Then had to return home, alone,
along the paths he'd ridden down
the day before with Isaac,
when the world was a different size and shape,
and life was a different colour.

We don't know what he thought.
It would seem wrong to speculate.
But for certain it must have seemed to him
that the worst thing that could ever happen
had happened to him that day.

He was wrong about that though
because along the way
he ran into a radical atheist
who proved to him
beyond a doubt
that God did not exist.

Seems like below the bottom line
there's another bottom line
with a bottom line below it.

All that happened a long time ago.
But up in Heaven just the other day
God looked down upon the Earth,
and then He turned to Abraham
and unto Abraham He did say,
"Seems like it's not just you anymore.
These days everybody feels that way."

Church Service

At the exhausted end
of a hot humid day
up in the hills in the Lake District,
arriving back in the little village,
even the dog was tired
and overheated.

We found the tiny Gothic church
with its tiny little churchyard,
and its monumental tombstones.
Immaculately beautiful somehow.

I stepped
through the low arched doorway
and was suddenly saturated
in silence and cold air.
Such a purifying shock,
a severe but welcome chill;
the marble floor
satisfyingly hard
after the bendy bumpy grass
and the stony tracks before.

As I walked down the aisle
I could feel the sweat
evaporating off of my skin,
and I realized
that the silence and the cold
and the empty well of space
could not be told apart;
they were like three expressions
of the very same idea.

I went to a row near the front,
and sat down at a pew;
picked a kneeling mat up
from the floor
and placed it on the wooden rail
of the pew in front of me;
put my elbows on my knees
and leaned my body forward;
laid my head upon the cushion
and fell instantly asleep.

Feeling my breathing far away
like the swell of a distant wave.

And for the next few minutes
I absolutely knew
that I was fundamentally all right;
incontrovertibly connected
to the ghost in the machine;
the vast space inside the atom
and the intimate proximity
of the stepping stones of stars
across the endless shelves of sky;
to the inviolate validity
behind the face of matter;
the spark that lights up everything
that lives in the heart of nature;
at one with the wood
and the marble
and the stones
and the grass outside,
and the ground in which it grows;

and with everything
that grows from it
runs through it or flies over it.

A gift that can't be falsified,
qualified or compromised,
and I relaxed completely.

An hour later
back at the house
I found that I was once again
my usual neurotic self.

I was not especially dismayed.
I've been through
all this stuff before.
That's just the way it is
and it doesn't change a thing.

Don Juan always used to say
you can never get rid of the ego.
It will always be there
like some old dog
sleeping on the porch.
It's just that, once in a while
you get to step over it.

Keeping Up Appearances

She is the crimson crest on the cockerel's crown,
and possibly the crown itself,
the coveted golden round
perched on the head of the King.
Good to hypnotize the hens
and impress the proletariat.

The King took an arrow in the cheekbone
at the battle of Shrewsbury
in fourteen hundred and three.
They laid him down and they dug a channel
carefully down the shaft of the arrow
in which they poured a tiny river
of honey and wine and other libations.
It took five days to wiggle it out
but that side of the face was shattered.
And so it was the other side
that appeared on the coins of the realm.
They were hard to the bite
and they gleamed like gold
and the troops at least were dazzled;
punch drunk on delusions of glory
which took them all down to the slaughter.
It was absolute bloody carnage down there
but from the top of this hill
the only thing you can see
is the shine of the sun on the swords and the steel.

Beauty tends to flare up like that,
in unexpected places.
She comes up everywhere.

I'm looking at a grainy black and white photo
taken in nineteen thirty three
in a red brick street in the north of England.
A man, an unemployed coal miner maybe,
is leaning against the wall in an elegant slouch.
He has his hands in his pockets
and he looks down towards the ground
He wears a flat cap at a rakish angle
so you can't really see his face,
and a waistcoat, buttoned all the way up,
and a pinstripe jacket, that's seen better days
and some kind of tucked up scarf.
He looks to me the absolute epitome of cool.
I've seen rock stars, I've seen film stars,
I've seen street kids try for that look
but none of them ever even came close
to this man's unconscious charisma.

But that nonchalant leaning on the wall
is probably exhaustion.
He hardly has the strength to stand
and he is almost certainly
suffering from malnutrition,
demoralization, alcoholism
and terminal depression.

He had no idea that Beauty
had cast her light across him.
But Beauty tends to flare like that,
in unexpected places.
She comes up everywhere.

The spider's web in the corner
is an efficient death trap machine
but its Euclidean geometry
could have been designed by an angel
or Leonardo da Vinci.

So Beauty has a bad reputation
everywhere you go.
No wonder the philosophers
hector and scold and imprecate
and wag their bony fingers.
She is so easy to requisition
as an ornament to power.
She is so plausibly positioned
as a tool for treachery.
Mother Nature's painted screen
to screen out suffering;
a motivational strategy
to keep the whole game going.
Bait to the bottom line
and promiscuous as hell.

But I declare her innocent.
If the silhouette of the gunslinger
looks good against the sunset;
or if the Nazis happened to wear
such sexy uniforms,
it's not her fault; it's not her fault
that she should find herself
in such bad company,
or if something should happen to shovel
her sugar all over the shit.

And I hear she has an older sister
who draws from a deeper well.
She says that beauty is the face of love
and I believe that's true,
but to understand how it all works out
is more than I can do.

Lost Lyric

You were just a stepping-stone
on a river I had to cross
to get to a bigger poem
that lay on the other side.

(That other poem let me down,
but that's another story.)

So you got left behind.

You think that I've forgotten you
But that just isn't so.
Oftentimes I thought of you
reflecting the dappled light
under the shadow of the river bank,
my lost lyric;
pale and forlorn
and perfectly formed.

I'm sorry that I couldn't stay to listen
to whatever your message was
and that I never wrote it down.
You needed my voice
to undo and do you up again,
and I just wasn't there for you,
and now I'll never know
whatever it was you wanted me to say.
But I was in a hurry then
and your meaning was too subtle
for those crowded, urgent times.

I'm in another country now,
under another name,
in another city,
still playing the same old game.
Like one of those men you used to see
in the carnivals and fairgrounds
making animal shapes out of coloured balloons,
I churn out these cheap novelty toys,
these baubles, for the people.

But sometimes,
while I'm grinding out the bullshit,
under all the noise
in the back of my mind
in a far off, forgotten country
you gleam like a distant star,
a pebble shining in the stream.

No one else around here
knows anything about you,
and they never will.
For since I cannot write you,
so then they cannot read you.
But that's all right,
you were always much too good
for that lot anyway.

I cannot find my way back now
to wherever it was that I left you.
I think we both know that,
and perhaps it's for the best.

Whatever it was you might have meant,
you have a different meaning now.

Image of pure possibility,
your potential inexhaustible,
your existence inexplicable,
your issues unresolvable,
your riddle now insoluble,
your magic inexhaustible.

The heart in your stone
inscrutable,
and your song
Unparaphraseable.

In the mute abandoned eloquence,
of the silence of your soul,
you have a deeper beauty
than any I might lend you anyhow.

Advice to Other Writers

Everything
that has ever been said
is but a tiny fraction
of everything that might have been said;
and everything that might have been said
is but a tiny fraction
of everything that could have been said;
and everything that could have been said
is but a tiny fraction
of all that there is to say,
most of which will never be said
since most things are unsayable.
And further to the same
everything that has ever been said
should not have been said
in the first place;
and, more than that
anything that has ever been said
can never be unsaid
once it's been said.
Therefore
don't say it.
Just zip it,
just button it,
just shut the fuck up.



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