

FROM PROTON TO NEPTUNE

No one knows how I sing you,
especially when everything's coming up noses.
But I'm thrilled by your Breakthrough Discovery
of How to Grow Long Beautiful Nails
even though I personally would have no use
for them.

But all this has been a long time incubating
and nothing can diminish the perspective
your presence here lends to the landscape,
like a Chinese inkscap only better
because in a decade or two with global warming
fish will be swimming through office buildings
and reading old newspapers and personal files.
Meantime we can play splashy splashy,
while millions of others force their heads through
the phantasmol logarithms of their nationalistic conceptions
when all we need here is solidarity, to flirt a little,
express brotherly love.

DREAM DATE USA

We don't know what sort of tomorrow
will befall us, shadowed or blithe,
and alone now I wonder if today's moments
of happiness are renewable: certainly some kind
of extension would be welcome.

Sitting at a table outside Lilly's
on First Street, Neptune Beach
as I approached you smiled at me
from afar and the next four hours seemed to last
only moments.

I liked you with your two-tone hair and pale party dress,
And as we sipped our Pinot Grigio, listened
to the romantic music of the live band,
and inhaled the warm fragrance of the Florida evening,
freed from any prejudicial surroundings distracting
to the eye, I gazed into your face and wondered
if after all I could outrun my fate with a past
that has not yet happened since I hadn't yet written
it; and my life is still an empty canvas, yet black
and morbid as the face of a winter sunflower.

So for now I still remain dream-dipped in the land
of No Can Do.

ONE WAY TICKET (1)

You have my full consent I told them
and afterwards there was no going back
to whatever it was that might-have-happened
before I put my moniker on.
But could it be of any consequence if they notice
I've never been able to make any of my signatures
look the same?

Right now it all seems so overbaked and my instinct is
to put out my hand firmly, like a traffic cop.
But such a gesture could get misinterpreted
as my eagerness to sustain permanent skin
changes even outside the treatment fields.

Is it too late to spend a long night of intoxication
in some eden of enchantment, amid flowers
of the utmost rarity and fragrance,
then peacefully go to sleep at dawn
cradled by the murmuring of a waterfall?

**GLOBAL WARMING IS THE LEAST
OF HIS/HER WORRIES**

She'd heard rumours he was hitchhiking to Tampa
in a semi, to get away from a globe that'd gone
all watery. That was nonsense of course,
fact was he was on the run after stealing a trashbag
of bras from a discount chain store. He loved women
so much he wanted to dress up as one and was hoping
to hook up with a lesbian on the way to Wherever.
Wipe that grin off your face puh-leeze –
this is no joking matter: he'd had eighteen arrests
in the past and Mississippi law allows prosecutors
to combine felony arrests with felony arrest
which made him a habitual offender.
Landsakes!, if caught he'd go down for life!

CHEW

Three days later she returned home
but there was nothing left but his name
in a charred Bible sitting outside
in the garden.

She needed some kinda fix to unfreak her out
of this horribilitude and followed the road
past houses hidden up long drives.
She was in a frenzy of pure energy
without emotional content and she felt unreal,
sailing along past the loblollies like a sheet in a play.
This was just another twist of the knife
which was only a plastic replica of one.

She removed her chewing gum and stuck it
on a oak because it tasted of ash.
Would they come after her for the balance
owed on all their furniture?

It was a tragic inconvenience just when she'd read
in a magazine that she was not alone
for according to the American Academy of Dermatology,
more than thirty million American women are coping
with the daily nightmare of hair loss,
suffering alone – since the subject is taboo – hiding
under wigs, scarves and hats...or worse.

A man rode by on an enormous black Harley.
He stopped after twenty, removed his goggles
and helmet, revealing curled blond hair.
She liked his hair and his smile too,
so she ran up and got on. Soon they hit a two-lane
blacktop and sped straight off into the sunset,

never to return. The chewing gum was not an issue
even though it grew hard as rock on the tree.
Fact was, she'd never really liked the colour
of the curtains, nor the green leather sectionals,
even though they'd got twenty percent off.

MUGSHOT

Of course you need to leave sufficient slack
For the face to remain expressive.
No sense in being cut off from authentic life
experiences. But let me ask you this –
what’s wrong with forgery, fakery,
especially if no one can offer you
a different scenario?

Was anybody there when the woman’s Rolex watch
went missing? I mean, all those whacky security devices
that peppered her home.
Some say it’s seasonal, like an invasion of ants or cockroaches.
Something has to be got ready. People have a yearning
to run more risks, like putting metal in a microwave,
or not “washing separately” when they do the laundry.
Calling time will come soon enough.

TURNUP

Get a grip on yourself please.
Fewer people dabble in torture these days;
it may not seem that way
but remember you are much older now
and it's inevitable that the world appears harsher than before
despite all the gadgets designed to ensure our comfort.

It might've looked good were it not for all the things I can still see
that were so dear to me but seem now
so far away like bright little stars that have been extinct for an age.
It's little comfort that, although alone, I am not the only one.
There are other bird sufferers who find some consolation
in photographing their own footprints as they wade
across the mouth of the harbour, content not to falsify
their own personal history

UNDERGROUND

Still lost in a world of commas and clauses
when really I just wanna kiss you.
For years I lived on a diet of fried cardboard
and snail soup until finally I sailed along
the sewers to reach you.

You wanted to whip the string around
so I could catch the feather
even though the bird was already dead.
These days I dine out on fancy meals
and take chocolate and tomato cake home
in a doggy box.

If you think you have me over a barrel
then remember I know which carpet
the feathers were swept under.
Maybe we could have lunch and discuss
what we agreed not to discuss
until you were in a better mood.
Are you?
I just don't want us to get in a bad mood again.

PORTRAIT OF CRYSTAL

I like your colours, their softness and values,
your warm, oceanic eyes.
I've taken them in and hope they'll come out
on the canvas that way.

But I can't think too much about it,
leave something to chance and just enjoy
this dreamy feeling of drifting in space
and time, while I think of you and move
the brush around.

I see your smile and feel like a morning glory
sensing the sunrise.
Green might be nice as the background –
there'd be room for us both in a colour
like that and maybe we could dance a little
to some snatch of this-or-that-then how about
a ride on the carousel through the hot summer
downpour?

CLOUDS PASS

His email read 'the machine's just took over',
and he felt the fonts within whirl up to dance.
Sharise's suicide prompted him to write
a children's book to antidote the lost borders,
but to make one, too many lives are needed.
Even then once all the ballyhoo has ended
what else is there but to return to the beginning
of her story and treat it as a metaphor for love?

Somewhere within someone may rise up
a child-that-has-been, something yet unknown.
If you have a ticket to get through the glass
partition you can look close at her dolls,
the miniature merry-go-round and the tiny table
still set out for a Mad Hatter's high tea.

One day we'll say it didn't mean that much,
it was just here.

I KNEW IT ON NEPTUNE BEACH

You emerge in sun green
from the sandflower like a one-off butterfly.
What can we gather from all this?
Your life is your own
while a certain sort-of-out-of-body voluptuousness
draws me in,
and I just want to hold you,
very gently,
so as not to crush your wings
for I know you'll always want to return
to the open sky above the eye-blue sea
that transmutes you.

How long after our names
written like an Arabian Nights'
legend in the sand have been washed away
will you remember you and I?

My senses come alive to the wonderful reality
of you in every detail,
even the tiny pearls nestled like drops of dew
in the lobes of your ears.

MOON IN THE MAN

I have a moon growing deep inside the centre
of my head, just under the brain.
I was born with it. It's a remnant of some long ago
extinct species and very rare.
I've lived all my life with it growing in the dark cave
of my skull. It's now the size of a golfball.
It can't be removed or stopped,
but it grows slow as a stalacmite,
and most like won't kill me...just yet.

But it exerts an awful lot of pressure
on my brain and pushes softer bits of me
aside which would best be left where they were.
Some reckon the existence of this rock
has affected me all my life, long before a head scan
revealed it was there: "it's like the grit of sand in the shell
of an oyster that torments the creature into making a pearl".

Jean reckons my novels, paintings, and poems
are my pearls. Funny the name of my publisher
is Oyster Press. Coincidence or what?

Maybe there's enough time yet for my moon
to nudge some extra lyricism out of me,
but is it cool to have to cripple myself into beauty?
I might have preferred some other way
drink or drugs (of which I've had a few) - to be creatively
fucked up. Maybe I should just quit, move into the woods,
live on ants, caterpillars and grubs, and in my next life
they could live on me.

MUMMIFY THAT FEELING FOR GOOD

It bugged me you didn't call
especially as what I'd prepared was topped
with slices of fresh avocado.
In the end I shoved it all back in the fridge
and got on with executing a series
of close-knit undulations.
All the way up I sewed a perfect seam
in a wonderful running stitch.
But really the whole thing was a set up,
and the strength and pressure of my tears
built up ripe as grapes before they burst
to be gathered up in a phial tagged with your name.

I can sit here quiet now for a little while.

BUGGED

Many are just a mishap away from catastrophe
living in these idyllic settings.
No one of unimportance could know
about the overdrained ticket sales
where children from the Springfield Mommies Group
in their dresses of more than one colour
hurry hand-in-hand spread over like the girls
Marcel saw on the beach at Balbec to Klutho Park.
No one would have known about the crisis
at the Byrd's home until sewage started bubbling.
No one could get a ride out there to check the blinds
whose damaged irises seemed like an indictment
of the world in general. The sheriff spent the afternoon
squirring at the keyhole not daring to enter
until all the twitching and drooling had climaxed.

SWEEP

He showed them the small black
automatic pistol in the palm of his hand
which, when he wasn't using to shoot
wasps or termites, he liked to fire off
to punctuate his trumpet solos
like a clown at the circus.

When the marquee was as full as this
he forgot revolving door partners
and focused on wooing them all as friends.
Meantime, ladders of light swept across the canvas
in a noiseless clash of optics.

NATURE POEM

A St John's River wood in July:
your eyes closed,
your face passionate and dreamy,
the sea life and wild mushroom
smell of your womanly passion
fills the air as, full-sized I fill you.
By your cheek the sunlight passes through the wings
of a butterfly asleep by the swollen stream on a blade of grass.

MOMENTO

The swarming season is here
and termites build mud tubes up the walls
to reach wood and then head back underground.
Similar work of alternate scribbling and dusting
is continued until tiers of stanzas reach the very foot
of the page.

The golden characters inspire us to clean out
our cupboards even while the outlook is grimming out
into another long hot damp summer with bugs.
Popcorn is optional, but some displacements make things
easier especially if the overabundance of signifiers increases
blur of drug and spin of mind. Some allow the leavings
of their wet dreams to be placed upon a slide piled high
with dead insects and discarded wings.

Other key moments can be preserved.

MOONBURST

It takes more than an apple a day
to get through the contusions brought on
by procedures to prolong life
if you want to leave even the dust
of your footprints behind.

It takes a certain order and structure,
with no spring, summer, autumn, or winter,
if you want, despite the passage of time,
to preserve the agglomeration of cells.

In the breadth and generosity of the universe
easy to get lethally extinguished.
Best try to transcend it by getting lapped
through a series of mind-blowing climaxes.

SPRINGFIELD HOME AND GARDEN TOUR 2010

I presume I'm still on message
although through the paint spray
I can't make out every symptom,
still less what any of them mean.
But my training wasn't meant for that
and if further opportunities arise from the cloudbank
I'll make my final choice then.

I'll try not to be swayed by how mesmerising it is
to watch the brush, dipped in a delicate shade,
draw a vertical strip of sky down the side
of the wall. Anyone peering over might conclude
the whole neighbourhood has a postorgasmic glow on.

I guess that's nearly enough for today,
especially as tomorrow promises us all
the best time we've ever had,
with or without clothes on.

TAKEN BACK

I went there a month before her breakout
when her blood was still in circulation.
Finally she called it in and so her life is still
hers even though she nearly lost it
because the vase it was in stood so close
to the edge that even a house spider
could have knocked it over.

She differed greatly from the imaginary portrait
her father had conceived in her years of disappearance.
She coped with his effusions and was delighted
with the white plant. She sucked at the big sweet buds,
while the ubiquitous stranger hit the switch
and left in numerous wrong directions.

GENTLE IT SOME MORE

Software is needed to scratch that gut instinct,
or sixth sense. Other than that we could all throw
a whammy on ourselves and indulge in an intellectually restrained tantrum.
When the guests have eaten, the ball continues.
It's nice when the band dizzies it up a little,
With no trace of whitecap on the surface.
Who is the girl in the doorway,
her hand with its red fingernails tight around the neck
of her cotton terry robe?
I recall reading an old diary entry that noted I'd seen her
in a dream, a red-and-white candy-striped sash hugging her
narrow waist. She is looking at me right now
her face still soft with sleep.
Is she dreaming me?

THE HUNT

There were no cameras on the bus
and the broad bands of blood made them all
wonder what had gone on. Such redness,
like smears of sound, the streak of ambulances at night.
Heat-seeking sensors pushed deep in the earth
turned up no unmarked graves.
Nothing else was uncorked save an empty box
that'd contained a Barbie.
But that was long ago and it was only today
when the new owners of the house decorated
her little room they found the invitation
from the tooth fairy.

EVEN BARBIE GETS LONELY

It may not look much but it's a home for my babies.
The empty boxes of mixed Barbie dolls had been abandoned
in the defunct shop doorway along N. Main Street.

This could be too late to make the last post so I'll just sit here
and play with it a while longer, and hope that the whey-complexioned lady
with the high cheekbones and tweezed Dietrich eyebrows
will be there tomorrow, same time, same place.

Funny though how less and less I desire the impossible.
But is it too much to want to have some kind of sacred conversation
with someone? I guess so, and all I have left is the insufficient substitute
of art.

“ALMORA”, FLORIDA

He began to visit her most afternoons
at Riverside to act out whatever it was
he did or wished he'd done with his first love
fifty years ago.

The uniform was red.
Red was the colour of the single rose
he used to bring her coloured with the blood
from his heart.
But red was not the colour of her hair.

The Riverside girl enquired once as to what happened
to the distant lover whom she was meant to impersonate.
He told her that the girl he'd loved most,
who was most important to him was not gone,
she'd just never been.
Never been where?, the red-haired Riverside girl
persisted, cutting him a slice of the iced cake
she'd baked him as per.
He retraced his steps

for a moment, stood at the window to watch the St Johns river
flow by. Let's go out he said, the visit queered, I think the true
blue moment is over or yet to come.

He realised that if she never grew old she couldn't be
real, unless she was growing old and growing real
somewhere else, far away south on this continent.
In any case he didn't want the Riverside girl
to impersonate her,
he wanted her to incarnate her.

He wanted her to be her.