

Image inside page one full bleed facing front cover 25% black



*To lovers of almonds, walnuts, maple syrup,
volcanoes, animal prints, stray keys, woven strands,
yoga and Rumi. May you remain beautiful
and invisible forever.*

(3) Right page

Poems to the Second Breast

(4)

Read the book of your life which has been given you
A voice comes to your soul saying,
Lift your foot, cross over, move into the emptiness
of question and answer and question.

Rumi The Big Red Book (Coleman Barks 2011)

POEMS TO THE SECOND BREAST

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Vol 4 The Ecstasy of No Further Communication

Vol 5 Invisible Forever

Poems to the Second Breast

Roger Connah

(6)

We meet people, we come in and out of other's lives, we pause, we stop, and then at some moments two people can look into each other's eyes. There is sometimes a depth, we do not know why or where it comes from, and whether it should be there. It can come at an instant, or it takes years to arrive. It can be wonderful, fearful and unconditional and it is often suspended when it happens. Those two people may never meet again but for that fraction in a lifetime have held the invisible. Momentarily the unreachable becomes reachable again. A truth can emerge, hesitatingly trembling like a hand on cold stone, turning over to receive another hand within. The hand moves on. And trembling from the past we make ourselves closed, forbidding ourselves from saying the obvious, thinking (un)imaginable futures, however fleeting. Can words ever achieve this fleeting love? That's what I felt just for that fraction at the table when I spoke with you...

(right side page)

Birthday in Occitania

How can I possibly be this age, uncelebrated in song
a year before the bottle of wine and the valentine
a year before the clocks just have to be stopped
whilst the yoga lesson continues in the village hall
and the Greyhound buses crisscross this North American
desert of scant but rare poetry?

You, over there, alight and light up within me.
You put feathers on the wings that carry us across
the majestic iron bridge in this land of language past
Carrying us well beyond the betrayal some still expect
from the grey frost and grime, beyond a Pope's resignation.

And as the beast takes off through the ambiguity
of city, landscape and snow, there's you, beautiful
in this or that yoga pose, holding the body firmly,
eyes alert calling out in silence the happy returns
that make up an awakened day like this.

It was celebrated early, a restaurant called Rumi
Thankfully, blissfully, ecstasy now needs to sense
the tenderness, to feel the gift of blindness, to close
the moistened eyes and lips, and to take that route
between re-softened skin and the land known as Occitania.

A Scarf is Not a Gift

A scarf is not a gift
nor is the 1000 Mille Livres banknote found within
the book which comes wrapped in a silk scarf.
Carefully unfolded, the book purchased along with
Camus in the Rafic-Hariri International Airport
is also neither a gift, nor is it a trade,
or even the dear commerce of friendship
To be interpreted as the desired alibi of the moment
or the wonderful distraction of controlled intimacy.

Instead, take it wrapped, as a miniature
and take its contents on a journey towards
that desire that hints at initiatives taken in unknown times.
Received, opened, unwrapped and unveiled with grace not pain
nor reluctance, this moment that has yet-to-be touched
by those smoother fingers will reach the lips
to unwrap the body of words inside you.

Words that, however briefly, tempt the impossible
No longer impossible. Words that are unreturnable
like your body, no longer closed for unworthy
but dignified reasons, and like life, the gift that is not a gift
like the 1000 Mille Livres banknote, touched lightly
Trembling, just as the book opens to the unreturnable.

The Craving

We bury the wounded soul deep within our uncertainty
where it invites us to occupy only that which is occupyable
reinforcing the lies we play on ourselves
in order to comfort the passing moment of disquiet

We live lies that we script and change to our fiction
until the narrative overtakes us, forcing us to wager
with a body that is no longer our own.
And then fooled by the soft breath on our skin

We awake to the wound that appears to have lessened.
Gifts are not quite the wounds nor can they match unwanted words.
Only love goes as deep as the fingers scratch into the body
Only love offers the danger we crave.

After the Meeting about Salt

After the meeting about salt
where will you be, where will the mind
take you and the body roam,
for the desire to come to rest?

And what, this time, will ask you to pause
to stop even, momentarily, take back the hand,
gently close the lips, avert the eyes, go silent,
saving the laughter for next time?

The Gift of Emptiness

You may have to tell me to stop writing
You may have to tell me to be less
Overwhelming, to be less inventive with words
Choose a less enticing way.

This will mean another silence, another door
slightly opened, unsure of its direction
Instead of locking poems open for you
you will have to ask me to stop writing

That might be the gift of emptiness
you will bring me.

Unuttered Words

With these scarves and ribbons that control the pace of entry
wrapping around our bodies, the queue snakes to
continue under the clock. I can no longer recall the
poems that remain unwritten, ungifted, those that would
have kept you speechless, trusting and warm in the early spring.

Ice has momentarily cut through the letters scrawled,
your laughter lights the darkness. And water runs out
Between the meaning unintended. Some words
are recalled, taken back, unuttered, left without any
destination, as if we can retreat and remove the canvas

Across which some blood will spill, and some love will
keep on dying, to re-emerge in what, silly of me,
only amounts to another attempt at displaced poetry
With a destiny deep within your caressed trembling neck,
thrust forward. In some way all this connected to whispered

Words at bus stations that also cannot be called back,
Unsullied words, deft and different, softly but clearly speaking
the unreachable, a truth we still do not know what to do with.
I go for the seating Reserved for Damaged Souls
Or those for Unaccompanied Minors, Veterans of other wars

Remembering:

I will eat better now because of you.

Weeping the Beautiful Morning

Once again I thought I was on my way home
but such mistakes no longer register.

The destination has changed so many times
even the bus driver cannot keep up with
the printouts slid into the section that reads:
This is where we are going today.

It is possible she says the same. It has become
questionable whether we should accept the silent
invitations offered us. When the poetry and words
from other poets remain unwritten, at least there is a
chance that the words need not be retained,

Instead they are cashed in for the violin, or the
frayed scarf, tied around her waist to reveal the hips
the beguiling dance that translates her body into
a weather vane. No guidebook to her city will recall the gift
Another, in the many indexed into a misunderstanding.

This one, paper-thin, a Goddess's bondage
dyed into a deep fuchsia, the colour of love's fresh grief,
torn out of The Book of Scarves, pulled tightly
hipped lightly, skirted coquettishly
only left undone when evening comes.

And the chapel beckons to weep the beautiful morning
through to new beginnings...

To Fly

To fly, you need air
But how much, what speed
And in which direction?

To fly, you need space
Gifted to you, to your soul
By those close and some, not so close
By the loved and the unloved.

To fly, you need words
But only those that cautiously bend
In the wind of a serious lightness
To become a phrase
that sticks to your heart not mind.

To fly, you need wings
Feathered, just enough to lift from the ground
To fly, you need the span
Of the eagle as well as the wagtail
And then, only then, close to the
Control of your own limits,
You can let go

And fly.

After the Dance

You take me out of this world
into another world which we know only from
a very careful and gentle intimacy.
How much do you know this?
How much do I know this?
How much do we look across
and through the sunlight that falls
first on the wall, penetrating, slanting,
then on the shoulder before it reaches the breast.
Or, as the Unrewarded Poet says,
looking out from the deep forest,
never quite obeying the language given:
Do we ever know where the shoulder ends
and the breast begins? And where the body
Takes back its memory from this cave of being?
Head forward, neck open, hands suppliant
Beauty emerging, beckoning the Goddess
into the new journey, the hands holding,
then smoothing the most gentle skin,
coming to an unthreatened rest
after the dance.

The Second Breast

All that we have experienced and shared of course
Cannot hide the stains of our individual lives.
We keep exhaustion understated when speaking
And the second breast remains hidden
Coy until the joy of meeting in the deep and unknown
Allows other secrets to remain buried.

Yes of course as we continue, we cannot speak at times
When we wish. We cannot understand the tear gas
Or the explosions let off until inner loneliness returns,
Proving there is more to the secrecy, the lines that can be
Apposite in their relevance

Yet cannot yet bring us closer at this moment of hesitation
So as to allow a clear image to emerge in what used to
Be called new directions in life. But so last century
We now coincide with a staged life, fresh solitude,
Love's return. This might be a destination.

Like a Walnut

Shy in life, not so shy in words:

Isn't that the poet: *dance with me.*

If I try and still the words, hold them

Handcuff them, throttle them.

You still made the sorcerer dance today

and go on dancing until now,

the evening, and we speak.

Who cares what we call this thing that is hurting us,

this grief on the ground like a walnut?

Again I slip in between Rumi's words to find you

to empty the hurt, to open the heart

to recognize again where hurt ends

and beauty begins, to open eyes that undress

the moment, to beckon the heart.

Empty, we crush it. We are the heart.

Rumi says.

A Listening Intelligence

"New light on the ground", Rumi writes
New light in the soul, we add
Is it unnecessary to come in between his words
to signal our fragrance with his own:
"The fragrance of love arrives."

I chide myself for this interruption
I should not intervene in his lines
but let them run over the sanded
contour of our freshly-alert bodies

"The one who heals us
lets whatever hurts the soul
dissolves to a listening intelligence,
where what we most deeply want, union with eternity,
grows up around and inside us now."

I yearn for that listening intelligence that
I may never bring to you
All hurt, dissolved into new light.

Blindness is Our gift

You were thinking this morning
How friendship has become this gift
The gentlest of tasks now, daily
In between the grief of others
is to de-overwhelm you.

To go silent even in the words
To leave Rumi aside for the moment
To take the speech out of speechless
And let the gift do its work
and fly to where it has yet to reach
even if back to his words:

*The minute I heard my first love story
I started looking for you, not knowing
how blind that was.*

And even if that blindness is our gift:
*Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.
They're in each other all along.*

Mother was Alert Today

Mother was alert today, her head bobbing
as if seeking something, as if listening to
the television voices, as if...

She looked at me longer than she has done
for some time, took her left hand up to my
cheek more than once and moved it ever so gently...

She ate little but then she has eaten little
for more than a year now; I repeat, she ate little
But she was communicating...

I will go tomorrow - it's possible she will
be up in the chair, and not die this night.

Wanted to read to you tonight
thinking as the year turns of an eternal
speechless embrace, of your second breast.

Bound and Gagged

So good that you got some sleep,
and please do much more of the 'nothing' you deserve....
We went to see mother - sadly she couldn't open her eyes
For 90 minutes, her head rocking from side to side
I fear a little more decline each day

The wood fire is lit and burning well
and is beautiful. I was hugely guilty today
as I prepared the duck that will one day
be served to you (forget Whitman!) on the plate:
grav lax (salmon), quince jam, fig preserve, stilton blue,
goat's cheese and a very light prosecco or white port....

It's not you that will never escape this kidnap scenario
it is me. Every book in this library has more stories
Every part of the small chateau holds a ceaseless
Conversation. You are bound and gagged, unwillingly
To the poetry that has to emerge.

On the way to the Second Breast

I cancelled the news today to continue the scenario:
The bombs didn't go off, the thermo-nuclear attack
Was a rumour and you are now free again
Inside all the books of the world

Here in this intimacy, this ancient dwelling
You will never escape, nor need to escape
As the books all become one, unconditional,
Unreachable but for the skin's contour

Reached by the merest though immense touch,
That unknown but no longer shockingly
Imagined embrace which reaches the first breast
On the way to the second

Where being speechless and being silent
Carries this torrid intimacy,
Until brevity opens for us again
Longing more than we can ever know.

Kenosis

I am not however sure what self-help means here:
They often use phrases in the abstract sense
Of already knowing what they should imply.
Their general nature, this joy of being, has value of course
In how we choose to believe the formless dimension
Or dwell within the event and consciousness
But these, and existential variations on them
repeat the texts of our fathers.

Unless we are careful with the very 'now' of words the
Weight of true happiness can overcome the
Desire of the words within, falling for expected patterns which
In our careless use, self-justifies this 'oneness'
Offering the ideal because of the interventions
that shape the oneness and nothingness invoked.
But who am I to deny the usefulness of accepted phrases
without an emptying.

You too will learn to prefer those more aligned to poetry
To offer such insight within which we work inside
As language becomes the moving target of desire
And the breast yet to be touched, still unmoved and unmoving
Another veil, behind which we sit and hide, the gentle hand
Will withdraw just as each veil is removed as we enter inside
Back then to the oneness, the desired emptying
of those in front of God.

The destination is getting closer.

Vocabulary

When fingers walk from hands to feet
when they feel the clay that has hardened into the heart,
they walk on, sacred in their wandering.

When these fingers reach the first sacred breast
to be opened and blissful, the vocabulary must be careful:
they cannot be considered sneaky.

For these fingers that bring such lightness have nothing
inappropriate in them, nor is naughtiness part
of this sacred journey.

These are but the remnants of a poor vocabulary
that is yet to celebrate the body of this unknown heart
the celebration of distance closing

Along with fingers that now have a memory of more
than momentary jouissance and grasp tightly the
beleaguered but beautiful second breast.

Eyebrows like Fireworks

I make more experiments in silence
as far as possible uttering no words
when leaving one country for another,
when leaving one life for another

The temptation does not grow and the eyes
still learn new tricks in order to close
the books that have already closed.
And open the book that is You.

Did you see that: Not a flicker!
and the papers went sprawling,
the life tags left strewn across the floor
as people rushed for the exit.

The alterations in the airport don't
really change a thing, though someone
does say: they should get some paintings
up on these walls.

It's doubtful anyone would notice that this
is the same place we met, some months ago
untouchable, the place by the window
believing we would meet up again.

Is it years ago now, though unlikely,
as we still struggle with the arrival?
But then there's nothing new about that
except the touch paper for the fireworks.

Another outrage, whether called a war,
a cutback or a celebrity break-up
is just about to happen. Or a good death
without us needing to know more.

Your eyebrows, so marked, so beautiful
stand out from all this like fireworks
crossing and meeting the early spring sky.
Your book remains open in my hand.

A Stranger To Your City Again

For a moment in the winter sun, an unforgettable
but brief hint at eternity, I thought you
might be there, that ordinary life had been
cancelled, that the words, often stray but
alert had got through, that business had
agreeably stalled and desire taken over

But of course I knew you wouldn't.

Heartaches recognize arrival, always directed
Achievable when least attended
We control them in ways that differ as we age
and recall the feeling: the less time we are
met in railway stations, bus stations, airports
the more we may need to live to exchange

A sun such as this for a returning embrace.

Nothing More, Nothing Less

As I leave the country, your country
for how long it is unsure, I have long thought
how to say this, how to go too far if indeed
it is going too far, how to transgress if
indeed this is transgressive, how to say in
the sweetest way that I have imagined
loving you so slowly, so gently, so delicately
encountering your body, journeying on from the
tender second breast, entering you in ways that are
unknown and unscripted, an act so pure
that it remains in the imagination for much longer
than the danced moment, more than seven
or even eleven minutes

And if indeed this is going too far, inviolating
the gradual intimacy attained, invading
the unready self, that beauty with the wounded heart,
if indeed it is saying something that should remain unsaid,
then let it remain unsaid but only in the way
that whatever happens in your future,
you know you have been desired,
and desired so truly, deeply and yes, madly.

And, again, if it is possible that this does go too far,
and you turn against this confession, put it amongst
the unwanted and undesired gifts, use it for the next
withdrawal after the previous withdrawal, and count me
amongst the almonds, the olives, the fleur de sel and
the dried fruits. Then I will smile, the sweetest smile at you,
hair-up and coyly teased in the mischief of life,
teasing me back as a good old sport. And I will accept
that silence will be spoken again but in another way

And if that happens, if the head refuses its coyness,
if the hands go under the chin, and no longer make
that destination, if your smile disappears
into a lined frown, if your face plunges,
if your body does not bend so sinuously
like the stem of a water lily, heavily overbalanced
and seduced by the sun, I will still know that you are
more than aware and alert that under these difficult,
vulnerable circumstances, almost half a year, a lifetime,
that again for the second or third time, you truly know
what it feels like to go beyond the second breast,
to be desired unconditionally. No reward, no responsibility,
no obligation, no return. No final destination to the journey,
just desire and desire. Nothing more, nothing less!

Sleep the Phone

He uses them to abuse them

Dismember them

She uses them to lose them

Remember them

Both run away from the worlds

Protected by them

Unable to enact the interval

Required

Of life demanding to leave

All words behind

From the Book of Scarves

Another scarf that is not a gift, another book written
By one who can never tell, despite what the poet keeps
Insisting, where your shoulder ends and the breasts begin.
The scarf starts at the neck and wraps the warmth of words
Until they make their own way without prompting
To the second breast. Without further guidance too,
Watch the scarf as it is takes smoothly to the skin
Turns in the light as words do, catches the breast and
As words do, when held up to the light, dissolves.

Returning to the body from where it emerged

So much hidden deep within the years, the veil
Of protected pain that has taken fortunate and
Unfortunate turns on journeys unremembered. Now
She now takes away the veil, she replaces the scarf
She peels back the tightness of skin still pleasurably
Lost between the shoulder and the breast, his hand.
Musk on skin, you ask to be myself in yourself
Yourself in me, incomprehensibly sane at last
Ancient, contemporary, folded over, but with the memory of
Always being taken from The Book of Scarves

And folded into that long neck,
the collar of a Goddess, turned inside
not for all to see: the second breast.

A Monument to a Monument

If you led me to the door upon which it said
'Monument to a Monument'
Or took me down the side street to that
Other secret of the universe
I think I would not take your hand.
If you still invite me into another universe
That wishes to see and know everything
Why not abandon me to your city, your body?
Give me no more personal cosmologies that I can
Shroud myself in, let me stutter instead inside the
Flesh. Save me from the taxonomies of desire
That became the present encyclopaedia
Of those never quite the artists they imagined
Themselves to be. Not that anyone fell short.
If this is the imaginary architecture of the mind,
When mind matters, let me describe you so as
To dance closer, remove all possible desires
And prove ourselves less absurd.

10% proof

How have you allowed this alertness to become
So vacant, so voided by the self that stalks you.
The *you* that only I know, the you that loves
In the shadows and crevices of other lives
This *you* that has not been asked the necessary
questions to keep your love alive. This *you*
That has been deprived of the soft response
That can stir your body and ravish. You have
Uttered the sweets of nothingness without following
The invited path, until they burden you with responsibility.
The diaspora of intimacy has found no other country
To inhabit. No other body to ravish, no other mind to unravel,
No other breath to breathe. This *you* is still loved.

I Caught Your Face

I caught your face looking away
Plunging down that ravine
That lies in wait for you. But if you had turned
You would have seen how the birds flew
Higher than the café itself and the fish struggled
To avoid the heat of the kitchen.
I caught your face plunging down, practised
So cleverly that no one noticed, no one remarked
As the waiter entered to check on the fish.
We had no flood defences, no special protection
And I was the lucky one to receive the thunder
In your eyes. I wrapped myself in the sweet paper
Somebody, probably a child, had turned into a boat.
And the last time I caught your face plunging
You were sailing down the lagoon. No one could tell
Whether you noticed the birds, whether you
Listened to the fish, but your tears were flowing,
I suspect to float that little boat made by the child
In you who had finally awakened.

The Poem? It's gone now

Is this going to write so thinly

as to be almost impossible to read?

Why is it, without a firmer hand

only carrying out the lighter shade of black?

In other words, shades of grey.

We do not really know why

But it is flowing now

And I am ready to use this pen to

Express my love for you and write

A poem that was in my mind.

The poem: it's gone now.

The Mindless Self

The sound of invention and redemption buried
Deep within the responsibility of daily blemish.
It was probably part of early learning that went astray
Where, the more you return to them and occupy them
Distracted you by the cleverness of the swaying body
And penetrating eyes. How so, when the lies appear
Written in the report: Forced to live, forced to
Become a force of nature. No, that's not quite right.
You were forced to accept this is not the wound
That others speak about as you recall how you have
Controlled the language that would invite blemish
As much as serenity. In the Chapel, others cry.
You holed to the light whilst meaning escapes
The mindless self. It is a thoughtful gesture
Held wondrously in the way the neck leaves a space
For the breath of a whisper.

Speechless once more

Tightened, and tautened, the very meaning of 'now'
like strings on a violin..

Muteness interrogates those desires:
too many for the comfort of being

The embarrassment of desire
as new words merge with old

All capable words which once again bring tears
unwanted gifts in this journey to no-thing.

Perhaps it is better to get there as fast as one can,
naturally without wanting too much

Nothing! The quiver in body and lips
disloyal to the moment

Admit to seeing the body open, to knowing
you can touch and be touched

Allow the world outside to aid us
resist turning this into a beauty

Too long held back, abandoned to hope
No, no re-wind of life's past

Withdraw the words, any words, overwhelming
the vulnerable in you once more

The fragility of the lost has become painful
immutable form, immutable desire

Guide me towards that patience where pain has
no right to be reversed but it is.

Matters less and less now, but for days and days
truth churned all around and within.

The call to remain silent was confused with serenity
only the imagination remained unwept

Makes a fool of me, yet fool that I am
hopeless in what I bring

I even take your side now and wish that you would
not hear such words

That you would be spared more intimacy
that spills over into every moment

When the imagination has arrived there already
and is on the return journey.

Do I Have to Spell it Out to You?

Do I need to spell it out to you?

Do I have to venture once more into the Guidebook

Or suggest one more theory for the tango

For this special but spiky moment

When all that has passed has faded

Not to the detuned version of ourselves

But to know why the film is being paused

The dance floor on the top of the mountains

Is cleared for the Occitanian Girl

With a basket in her open hands

For the one who refuses to age but who

Takes age so seriously, enough to be beautiful

At intervals reminding us we have no right

To demand eternal beauty when desire dances

On the edges of this night and turns to find the body

Willingly spent inside, saved by the confession:

Do I have to spell it out to you?

Friends

Friends don't allow themselves the body's reach
The distance from fingertips to breast
From the citadel to the open countryside
From where they look back as if from the plateau
up there where the mountains meet the clouds.

The wave back is not quite as final as it could be
Such measured desires no longer need deciphering
For the distance measured can only take you inside
Where the warmth of the writing cannot pull back
Retreat's untimely wisdom, love's denial.

When the clouds lift, one might consider the moment
Freighted with an outpouring, never as close as tears,
All ready to signal finality, to end the rehearsal that
Death cannot deny. But even that is not enough to get
The pen out and hold it there, to imagine new writing
from the old.

Instead a more useful exercise is to fuse two worlds,
To put the random together and force this embrace
Another most useful exercise would be the aimless
Walking around the apartment of a mind, waiting for the
Invitation. For then there may be no better reason
To take the finest of fine pens out and
write this message across her body.

In the Giving Ecstasy

We didn't quite expect the uncurious world once more
To speak so intimately without so much as a giggle
Of life's laughter, until silence opened to much of the same.
It is the uncurious who decide the day's journey
Passed the Chapel of All Compendiums and
The Ease of Leaving New Experience Unencountered

And the welcome blizzard of the ordinary, inside
The Emporium, when the guns didn't go off,
Didn't give away any secrets of our lives, even
When in fear we melted within each other.
As we lay low, beneath the flowers, the gunman
Looked over and missed us, seeing a landscape

Where there must have been our bodies as one
Holding onto language for dear life, the sirens
Spread out, the lost past faded into your concern
The light faded, the snow melted and water
Ran off the roof of the sanctuary
Tears that would not be collected or recorded.

Tears which added to the uncurious mind
That imprisons the past.
Muteness is the tango of death
The turn in seasons that reach for new gifts
In the giving ecstasy.

Da Capo

I make more experiments in silence, I am forced to
as far as possible uttering no words as she leaves
one country for another. The temptation no longer
grows, the eyes learn to close on the books that have
already closed. Did you see that?

I turn to words written in books I cannot decipher.
Surely we have been here before. Did you see that?
Not a flicker, and the papers, the pens and the words
all went sprawling. Life tags, did we get it right
first time around, were left strewn across the floor.

The alterations designed in our absence don't change a thing.
Someone did though say: "they should get some art up
On these walls." It's doubtful whether anything
Is worth exhibiting here, but it is still the place we met
some months ago. Or is it years now.

But I am no longer struggling with the arrival.
The Plateau from here in the jungle looks inviting
The buffalo herders often lose one or two.
They are seen coming down to eye level.
There have been other outrages since then,

Though no real mention is made of them
after the newscaster and the weather forecast.
Fortunately a country was not invaded, but celebrities
still break up and this bundles life comes to rest in a room
with chinese doors and a mosquito net.

Sleep is just about to happen. Apart now, we sleep not
With our words or wake up to the excitement of
Children pawing the glass door. Your eyebrows mix
with the cotton dress, the sensible travelling shoes and the
shape of your lips. So beautifully marked

We stand out as new fireworks but no longer for each other.
Control the direction of gossip, they say and
Misdemeanours are further expected and validated.
I keep thinking I've written you the last poem
The one nearest the second breast.

I've even shamefully named the one before this
as the last poem written to you. But it's clearly a lie.
That makes me wonder surely
How many other lies have I told you through poetry
that remains undeciphered?

How many times has this untruth been inscribed
into something as simple as a poem which has
no destination, no fate, nothing further
but feared worlds have no destination
We can sulk in meaning's past

And in the boundless lie to ourselves
turning into shapeless histories of the vision
once danced in staged futures.
A theatre if lost, we ensure history
cannot take us back from ourselves.

For The Doll

When you asked for the unsung
When I thought you might envy the day, I said I did.
When I should have said this: if I contemplate you
At every moment, what is this contemplation but
Love's solitude and craved coincidence?

I realise now it is the words that touch you
Their incomprehension was soothing,
Presenting life, touching yours without touching,
Violation with no violation. No more events are loved
That can reach the surface where the body pulls away

At the disgust of the ugly, the everyday with their footings
Of the sharp winter. Nothing remains inside, if shaken
In this visible disquiet, to reach the worship needed.
It's time to put on that other face to go with the dress
That pictures the body fair and trained.

Lean, the thinness of coy, I have seen that
Look on you, that face when you think
Nobody is looking, when you rehearse the
Necessary distance for the day after next
For the doll.

Forget Me, Think Dancing

When did you last dance

And remember it?

When did you last ache and moan

And feel blissfully agape?

When did you last laugh out loud

At a fantasy come true?

When did you last deny a person's touch

And not realise?

When did you last sense how other eyes

Undressed you?

When did you last act out the opposite

Of what you thought you felt?

The Angel That Could Have Been

I saw the fire go from your eyes, those fireworks
that joined from brow to brow,
that knotted hope and took off in different directions.
It is impossible that previous words meant anything but
the passing of small intimacies without desire.
I saw the off-guarded moment, no one around
The plunge into the Lagoon, the pearls thrown into disarray
Cut from metal that was not yours, polished by labour
That wept inside. The water taxi would ripple
Across water and sunlight, but the journey again has
Lost direction. Make the fireworks knot together again.
Watch them arch over the Basin before diving into
Cold, cold water. Stand at the edge of the balcony of the sky
Don't look down. The final volume was never delivered
The writing never quite made it across your body
And the reading also remains unfinished,
strangely incomplete for the angel that could have been.

Other Lives Lived

Everything, for every angel is written there in the poems,
Is lost now, it refuses to enter, will never become the poem
on the public address system, and will never unearth
what could have happened. The code is secure though.
The kite is flying across new landscapes, new bodies.
Ogre, angel, goddess, the gunman didn't notice us.
The right photograph will be found, the invitation elaborated
by the popsicle scholar of the diaspora.
I've gone in and out of love with you without being invited,
without any mutiny. The second breast was a journey too far.
The humiliation fell around like crashing timbers in disaster
areas unattended, in countries that cannot become the
Opera for your pain. We didn't fight the war of souls,
we lost no time though you have lost a country
And along with it, found unwanted flesh in the interim
that is a life unloved. We knew each other
Could become the victim of those old souls incapable of
loving, having experienced trauma and the crushed heart
That is why on the last ride to the harbour and the airport,
whichever city you thought you were in, you realised
you must never return to these cities, or this moment.
You are released. Someone announced it in the journal
and it is now immortalised as a poem in the guidebook
of the city you will always wish to visit.

A Tear to Fall

The last day I would have seen you, the imagination
Was still working. You would have returned from
The vaporetto stop, you would have slipped your guards
And minders, you would have kept the jewellery
Around your neck but slipped into the nakedness
That has always defended you.

Then and only then would you have flown Chagall-like
Over the roofs, escaping the family of your own making
Tempted to try out the romance from rooftops to
Stretches of sea until coming to land way over the Lagoon
Farther than St Lazarro you would have become
You in the only way you know and would no longer
Return to self you left off.

Instead you carried daylight along the winding route
Under the small bridge to the apartment beneath the roof
There, packed tightly as shrink-wrapped luggage
The life-banking world brings one tear from your eye.
A single tear, clean and perfectly-formed, that would
Take an eternity, more than a lifetime to fall.

As you left, another angel complete with accessories passed.
On her art-emblazoned canvas bag the words:

“I have nothing to say. I’m a poet.”

Then the water taxi arrived in San Marco.

By Proxy

Seek the safety of each day's illusion.
you will have to do it for me,
you will have to draw the veil
over the silence, de-overwhelm the sorcerer,
and take your dancing eyes back within.

I have imagined your body
opened to the greatest moment of all,
when light finds its way through
and the darkness asks for comfort once more,.
The lost cannot remain lost
whatever shapeless form it takes

Hearts Out of Season

The careful words, laid out alongside the verbena
extract, lemon juice and shea butter
those words, once fragile with promise
words that opened language to the spiked warmth
of the uncaressed neck and unawakened flesh, have stilled.

Unborn, no longer ecstatic they lie low, unsure and
awkwardly unable to complete that return journey
to unformed language where before, in feint echo
a shimmering would have received them
embraced them, ravished them.

Abandoned lines close off in ambivalence
in the embarrassment of opened pores,
unworthy of easy destiny, seeking those same eyes
where the fireworks are no longer set alight,
the peacocks muted and the touch paper damp

Where does the moistened second breast lie,
impressed and closed on which side of the bed?
Where does the index finger fall, after licking the ointment
where does it hover near lips pursed, aching but
no longer writing the body or sensing the unknown?

The smell of buttered skin and lemons emerges
reluctantly, unfailing in its beauty across crowded
restaurants. Smiles caught out as if no one notices
the pain etched on wine-soaked dresses and gay scarves
but still drunk on the perfume of a lost-heart.

The poems now, like hearts, have sheets
thrown over them. White sheets like those over
hotel furniture out of season, waiting
until you dare lift a corner, and fool infinity with
laughter, and undress the words again.

(laid out the same as page 6)

We are on the voyage back. Here in the hotel in Frankfurt, I must now write you out through the words that will be put in the place of others. The day could go West again towards seduction and the spoils of accepted cruelty. Are these the hands that still hold the instrument as I observe the skin that has aged in the sunlight? We have been there before. We watched the surprise in the eyes, as the breast was so delicately touched. Now we take the lantern to observe closely the skin, the fold that closed your eyes. It could be an Eastern turn, a Byzantine step, this bullying of nothingness, with the waiting now postponed and the immediacy we thought we relied on, already passed. You will be there in the words that now must unfasten themselves from your body, from the ecstasy you knew we would never achieve. The hand draws back, once again ungraspable. Your face, your eyes and your hair can now re-take that moment left for nothing more than to drown in your beauty, as if reaching you once again after all these years, we no longer need to open the last book, we no longer need the last word, but leave the breast unattended. And if your hands could chance to touch, then once more glance across the café, never world's apart, never world's end. You will remain beautiful, and the second breast will swell.

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