

Poetry Series

royness (' ')
- poems -

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royness (' ')(04/12/86)

I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.

(haiku) - Bum Deal

the horse came in at
a hundred-to-one - the bum
never worked again.

royness (' ')

(haiku) - Confession

here priests in boxes
lay hands on wicked children
soaking up the sins□

royness (' ')

(haiku) - Enigma

Here, he presents her
With a true enigma, the
Key without a lock

royness (' ')

(haiku) - Oil On Concrete

Oil spreading over
Concrete -in inky blackness
Uncoils a rainbow

royness (' ')

(haiku) - The Death Of Virginia Woolf

beyond the lighthouse
treading water with her toes -
pockets full of stones

royness (' ')

A Moon, A Sadness

The moon is sad about something –
Her surface is a pale shadow, a light that dims
with the passing of each night. She embraces
This darkness, these clouds that conceal
Her face. She shines on no one.

The bent willow bears his branches,
Throwing arms wide open to the wind,
In offering, in sacrifice.
Lightning splits the heavens,
Thunder roars in answer –
Great showers grace the blackened skies.

A flower bows before her mistress,
Drunk and heavy, a bell swollen with water,
A stem that is fit to burst

The moon lulls in the fog
The stars recede, and the land
Is washed in sadness
With a sound
More tender and desperate than silence.

royneſs (' ')

Angels And Demons

I was out on the balcony, alone, when the angel appeared to me. I covered my ears and pretended not to hear him. Once he was near enough, I gripped him by the shoulder and slashed through his wings with my penknife. They were delicate as paper and easy to cut through. Faker! Imposter! I threw him from the balcony.

Please don't misunderstand me. This all happened in a matter of seconds. I am quick when I need to be.

I tied the wings to my back with an elaborate tangle of pins and string and thread. Standing at the edge, I looked upon the fallen angel. His body lie broken on the rocks below, stripped of its wings. A man and nothing more.

I flexed muscles I'd never known I had, in readiness for flight.

At first things were difficult. It took all my strength just to get off the ground. I just couldn't seem to gain momentum. It took a few failures before I could get to grips with the technique. But when my feet left the balcony, I glided over the stones with ease.

I tore through the clouds and descended upon the village. With my great wings, the people couldn't help but mistake me for an angel. They knelt before me, ready to act on my word. Every utterance from my lips was written down as scripture. I was received as a messenger sent down from the heavens.

I spoke to them in riddles and presented them with a feather. Even now, it rests upon the altar.

*

I visited the cathedral, appearing before the pictures painted on glass. My shadow filled the hall. I bellowed from the windows.

The poor fools thought the gods returned to Earth. Most of them ran away screaming.

For those brave enough to listen, I invented myths and stories. I told them I had come with a message. We gods did not want to be worshipped. We had never needed to be believed in. There was no need to fight over our existence.

The priests wouldn't stand for such nonsense. Even in their terror, they denounced me. They shouted me down and decried me as a devil. I fell to the ground. My flock ran towards me.

Hands and bodies covered my wings. My struggles only sent up further clouds of feathers. The priests were plucking me! They pulled off my wings and strapped me to the pyre.

And then, the miracle. The flames rose up around me and yet, I did not burn. The ropes around my body turned to ash and fell away. I stepped out of the fire, spreading my arms, my flesh unscathed.

I rose from the fire on wings of flame. The priests fell to their knees before me.

I shot into the sky, a star.

royness (' ')

Beggar's Belief

He stopp'd me on the street -
crook'd fingers cupped `round a china mug
slurred brown with age, cocked out towards me -
Spare a few pence? He spat and said.
I dropped a coin into the cup
He nodded his thanks and got up -

Over my shoulder, I saw him
Stroll hopefully into the bookies, just
minutes before they came in.
He slapped these meagre coins onto the desk
And clutched at his ticket, eyes fixed
On the screen above him

The horse came in at a 100-1
The bum never worked again

royness (' ')

Butterflies And Oracles

It is the coldest Winter on record
for twenty years.
I'm not sure how we made it through December.

Outside, red-faced men and women
hurry past each other.
They walk with their arms
held tight around their chests.
They breathe smoke
and do not stop to talk.

It is the kind of cold that gets inside of us.
We seize up. Our smiles freeze over.
I keep my door shut to the world.
These windows have not been opened
in weeks. I breathe air
that is stale and thick.

Yet today is a tiny miracle.
I am dressing, getting ready –
I am going to meet the girl,
When a painted lady reveals herself
to me. She unfolds
her wings, so rare and delicate –
transformed – she dances
around the light-shade.

I cannot tear my eyes from her. I am afraid
she too will disappear.
I dream of coming back to find her
dead, because I couldn't save her.
My hands search the room for a container,
not to capture or contain, but
to release her, to help her find her way.
I will be late, but know I cannot leave her.

Through the meeting, we talk
of trivial things.
We do not speak of butterflies,

oracles or signs. I fear
she will not understand me.
The painted lady
remains my secret spell -
precious coincidence, a happenstance.
All through the Winter, I see no other.

Later, we touch -
I chance a kiss.
The girl becomes my lover.

royness (' ')

Butterfly

When first I discovered her,
She was nervous as a butterfly.
A kiss sent her flitting about the party
As if scorched -
I scooped her up and took her home that night.

At dinner, she kept her wings folded
And my guests were too dignified
To raise any questions. Though children
Sometimes chased her round the table,
And the boys would try to catch her in a net.

And though we always looked after her,
Her beauty was never meant for the collector -
one day she simply took flight.

The children are still in awe of her,
In awe of the day when she, as if
Remembering a kindness,
Alighted on the crest of my head,
Tender, weightless,
In the briefest of caresses
Before she found her path out through the curtains.

royne (' ')

Champagne Conversation

I was not involved in this one, but
merely an observer. I watched
from across the room. My vision obscured
by the guests and glasses,
the hands raised in toast –

Dressed to impress,
she struts on high heels, somehow above
the smoke and conversation –
The stage is set.
She has waited on this moment -
her delivery is practised perfection.

Under her words,
his skin drains of all colour,
the jaw drops, the face
begins to crack apart –
He takes another drink, and
cordially
she lifts her glass to his.

Seconds later, there is little left
of the guest. He shrinks into his clothes -
a pile of bones and buttons, and a sorry
nodding head on top

She turns to face me,
holding her drink aloft -

A meeting of eyes -
a sip of champagne,
a smile.

royneſs (' ')

Chicken

We were not born but brought here –
packed and shipped in boxes,
thrown to the conveyer.

We hop on broken feet.
They have severed the points of our beaks. It is not
as they say, like the cutting of toenails
but the cutting of toes. The fire courses through me.

They have murdered our brothers –
stripped them of their feathers and heads –
I tread over the bodies of my breed.

The men come. They pick the dead
from the floor, to be ground up
for feed. Nothing is wasted here.
We, who are already in hell,
fear only the hook and conveyer.

The men have disgraced us. It is not in my nature
to waddle and cluck. Once we were graceful,
we soared across the country -
Now we are heavy, grown fat
on the flesh of our sisters.

I lay because I cannot do otherwise.
We conceive too many, each egg is painful to bear -
I walk to wear the blood from my feet.

In darkness, I scratch at the steel cage,
peck at the enemy, the shadows that surround me –
blunted beaks stab blindly through the black –

We listen for the stamp of their footsteps –
The doors that withdraw –
the light that spells death-death-death...

royness (' ')

Child And The Aquarium, The

Alone in the aquarium,
I stare at the fish through glass

Their movements follow my fingers
This way, now that
To the bottom, to the
Top of the tank
And back
For a minute, I forget myself

I lift up the lid
Guppies wriggle up to meet me,
My fingers tickle the surface
Do they think I mean to feed them?
I have opened their sky, the light
Is pouring in –
I am only just beginning

I plunge my hand into the tank.
The smaller fish dart into the coral,
Frantic shrimp scuttle over the sand,
waving their feelers -
a crab withdraws into his shell

These waters are mine to explore
I am here to raise hell.
These creatures don't know what they are in for.

With a swish of my hands, I command
These waters to rise.
I brush aside mountains of coral. Fish appear
And swiftly disappear
My fingers scissor through the water
Snapping at fins,
Angry as piranhas

Can I help you? He says –
In the tank, in this tempest
My eyes spy a second reflection

I stare at the hand in the glass

It is larger than I remember

Stems of anacharis

Curl about the wrist – fingers clench

And unclench, rippling and withdrawing

The man nods and moves on -

He is evidently used to this sort of thing.

royness (' ')

Clouds

We stand beside a tower of stone. Overhead
the clouds trace vertebrae formations.
The sheep are tufts of cotton, spotted
Across the fields –
A river, weirdly blue, divides the hills.

This city is too much for me. It is necessary
To get above it sometimes. Up here,
We can see the end of it, we stand
Outside of it, here
We can indulge our fantasies.

You complain of the cold.
I reach for a cloud
To wrap around your shoulders.

Watch, as the clouds become shapes
And the shapes become faces,
And those faces begin to take form.

They speak to me from the sky,
Their eyes invite us to join them –
One leans down, unrolls
A great staircase from his palm –
Light as air,
We tread the steps to the heavens.

I can see for miles.
The waves have become stallions,
A hundred horses
Gallop towards the shoreline...

I offered to give her the world -

Stop screaming at the clouds, she said.
You are starting to scare me.

royness (' ')

Dear Diary

Monday, March 24th

Dear Diary,

This has gone on long enough. This examination, pages in self-effacement, the dragging through desperate moments. You are too great a danger, too much of a risk.

These memories survive in spite of me.

You are the ghost that haunts me. This "me" that is no longer part of me. This "I" that is not "I."

I do not recognise myself. I cannot sit still. I am restless, changing from one page to the other.

I have trusted you too long. This record would make me a madman.

Wednesday, April 2nd

Dear Diary,

I am in love once more with someone I never loved. I see now I was trying to convince you. Me. The I that is not I.

The doubts are writ between the lines. A sickness. Savage and distinct.

Sunday, September 16th

Dear Diary,

I try to remember her face. A shape in the fog; a dream.

She is worried about me.

Three days since I last slept, approaching the seventy-second hour now, and it is raining inside.

We cuddle up under the stars, curl up in the arms of a mountain.

Listen. The ticking of distant clocks. I am unsure how long...

I wake up and try to smother the pillow.

Thursday, December 14th

Dear Diary,

You confront me, suicidal. In a script that is wild and desperate, words torn into the page.

I wanted to die. I was running a fever. I feared for my life.
I was angry and raving, drunk on love and on hate.
It was always, it was never like this.

Friday, January 5th

Dear Diary,

It comes down to this: I exist. I am. And you, you cannot live.
You must perish in the fire; die as these former "I" s have died.
I will burn all of you. The fire is inevitable, and beautiful for that.

royness (' ')

Death Drops The Hourglass

Death drops the hourglass -
it shatters across the floor, sand spills
out over shards of glass -
every grain an hour.

Somewhere, a man
feels himself weaker.
A hand
tightens around his heart, sand
trickles from his eyes instead of tears -
at the sweep of the scythe,
he sleeps.

royneſs (' ')

Death Of A Scarecrow

Stuck rigid on his stick, he stands,
scraggly hat and a head full of straw -
blank button eyes stare straight ahead,
never blinking, seeing nothing
arms stretched out to endless fields -
absurdly horizontal.

Wrapped up in some beggar's clothes,
(dungarees and checkered top)
he hopes to pass for a man -
he'll watch for crows
and ward them off,
with stupid grin and flailing hands.

The birds, wary at first, grow wise -
they are not long fearful.
Some scout the skies, as others spy,
heads cocked mockingly to side
scrutinising all with beady black eyes -
they'll not be took for fools.

'Kwrah Kwrah' the harbringer calls -
the crows all sing discordant,
calling, cackling from the trees.
The scarecrow, oblivious, will watch the wheat
as circling high in swollen sky -
a mass of black and beating wings

and they descend, descend as one,
peck at arms and perch on head,
picking stitch and thread undone. Crippled now,
he can't defend, whirling on his useless stick,
as arms fall flacid to his side -
the crows withdraw, take cover, hide

and flung to air, his insides fly,
whoosed hard out of his belly,
in a whirlwind of dirt and straw.
All that is left, some clothes on a peg,

sagging arms and a sack of no more -
stupid grin of drooping head.

royness (' ')

Description Of A Scene

In search of his mother, Zushio
edges over the shoreline.
He crosses between two trees,
steps barefoot over the stones.
Ambient noise: recordings of the wind
and moving tide. He has come as a beggar.
The camera tracks
crablike, alongside him.

Mother
sits hunched over her legs.
Her hair is matted and grey.
She beats on the sand with a stick
and her voice
is carried in song:

"Zushio, how I long for you.
Isn't life torture? "

Zushio approaches –
He has climbed mountains to find her,
escaped from slavery, relinquished
his title of governor.
He has seen men branded
and on command,
he too has branded men.

The gentle, subtle strings
hint at a resolution, sing possibilities. Zushio
leans down onto his knees.

But she cannot believe it is him –
The bailiffs have put out her eyes.
She grieves for her husband,
for Anju, her daughter (who sleeps
beneath the lake) and Zushio –
the son she does not recognise –
who weeps on the beach beside her.

The waves rise and fall,
closer now,
as though the water will cover them all...

"You wretched being.
You've come to try and fool me again."

And yet, there is hope –
The camera moves slowly into close up.
Zushio reveals the amulet (a statue
of the goddess of mercy
entrusted to him by his father) .
Mother studies the Kwannon with her hands,
Tracing out the lines of a memory:

"Forgive you my son?
I don't know what it is you have done."

The camera pulls back as they embrace, tilts up –
The angle reveals a vast seascape. Sand
stretches into desert. An old sea-weed gatherer
combs the beach, dragging thick tangles of weed
across the shore. At the edge of the frame, twin shadows –
(two cliffs cut into the picture) .
In the distance, in the space
In between, (and here, the image
begins to fade) the sky merges into the sea.

royness (' ')

Distance

It is not space that separates
Nor time
That drives this distance -
The words themselves are walls.

They speak
Of immeasurable distance
Impenetrable circles -
A thousand promises tall

Castles are not raised
In times of peace.
Our thoughts enclose completely.
The silence deafens all.

royneſs (' ')

Dreams Of Falling

In an old cottage we never lived in
We eat brown sugar at breakfast,
Walk out
Across the ruins.

What was once a castle, now
All broken towers, patches
Of wall, climbing with ivy.

You are saying something
But I can't make out
The words.
You point towards the tower.

I see you skipping over stones
A pony-tail bobs, playfully
Over both shoulders,
Beckoning me to follow.

Suddenly, we're much higher than before
In a tower raised anew.
We look out across the ruins.

There is movement down below
The stones
Are rebuilding themselves!

You turn to take
Those last few steps
Alone.
Your white dress, swirls out
Behind you
In ribbons, winding mystery...

The scream –

And then I see you.
Hands clutch

at tangles of ivy, fingernails
scrape at the stone,
shreds of your torn dress,
ripple in the wind.

Your mouth is open,
Calling,
Calling out to me...

I cannot hear a word.
You clasp my arm, hard -
sure that I will save you -

Each time I hold your life in my hands
The look in your eyes (I shiver to think)
When you realise
I will let you fall -

calmly I release my hold
I feel your fingers slip
through mine -
you are screaming
and this the only sound.

You are falling...
falling...
falling...

I wake up before you hit the ground.

royneſs (' ')

Drifting, Doubting

The stomach tightens,
yawns shake the body - needles
prick the skin into gooseflesh.

Objects, once pliable to organisation
become strange, resisting solidarity –
the poet lends his ear.

The room drifts into entropy. Objects
call out without answers,
resisting meaning, naming themselves empty.

Paintings drip from the backs of naked girls. My eyes
are bright as stars –
I knew on the phone it was you.

The candle whistles with spirits. Shadows
dance in the flames -
music opens out into the room

Fibres move like molecules -
A million eyes
look out from the back of a chair.

Under the bridge,
Midnight cats are fighting in alleys. A boy
crushes an egg into his fist.

I see all of this.

Your smile precedes catastrophe.
I go walking in circles
doubting the ground beneath me.

Every second is its own eternity -
I dream of what it might be like to sleep.

royness (' ')

Empty Room

The room is empty, except
for a bulb hung low from the ceiling,
a ring on the dresser, you swore
never to leave; these flowers
that curl into themselves.

The room is empty, and yet
sometimes,
I think I hear footsteps -
clothes rattle on hangers, shuffled
by invisible hands,

voices
escape from under the door.

I imagine
figures at the window -
shadows, ghosts -

You left three weeks ago.

The room is empty.
These flowers curl into themselves.
A bulb on a noose
swings low over the bed.

royneſſ (' ')

Enigma

I am the most single-minded of tools
I perform only one duty, designed
For me alone
And that one always perfectly.

Far more than the mere brass of my substance
My shape suits my purpose
I am unique; there are none identical

I am not loyal to my keeper
I will work for any man
It requires no special skill to employ me

And yet I hold the power
To imprison
Or set free

royneſs (' ')

For Those Who Have Passed Through The Fire...

Wisps of smoke permeate the air,
sparks fly like fireflies –
the fire rises from nowhere –

The tourists suspect some trick –
such things are impossible.
They ask him to show his scars -

And you say you feel no pain?

Such questions amuse him.
He who has passed through the fire
does not burn his foot on coals –

He stands at the edge of the flames.

I have no scars to show.

You have not passed through the fire –
You do not, you cannot know.

royneſs (' ')

Iron In The Soul

A stone is thrown. A window
Shivers briefly in its frame, shatters
Into fragments, falls in a rain
Of glittering crystal.
The last of the glass is gone
Iron bars close over the doors.

I walk forgotten city streets, paved
With broken stones. This world is folding
In on itself. Street lights fade
To a dull glow. The pavement cracks
Beneath my feet. Railings rise
Outside my cage –
The walls are closing in.

No one wants to look outside. Darkness
Closes over the city. People laugh at light
And glass, shrink under
The Moon. She turns
To face the other way.

A single flower
Raises its head, forces up
Through a crack in the pavement.
I tread it into the ground. Iron
Is in my soul. The birds
Are dead. The animals are all in cages.
Everything is under control.

royne (' ')

Joyride

Quick, instinctive –
We strap ourselves in. Switch on
the stereo, flick headlights –
the engine growls and whines,
shivering with excitement.

This machine
Is an extension of ourselves.
Strapped down, plugged in,
Legs work like levers, hands
Run the wheel. Here
in the back, the trees
Merge into one. A sickness is rising.
A long grey railing flows
alongside us. I open the window, fumes
fill the compartment.

The dial wavers, stalls –
It seems unsure
Whether we can go
Faster –
I catch a glimpse
Of signs, lights, cars.
We are heading nowhere.
We need no fuel, we run
On pure adrenaline.

We crash past two cars
Crumpled into each other –
A world full of accidents, collisions -
Flowers by the roadside, firemen
Cutting bodies from the wreckage.

We are close to the edge -
Sirens are firing on all sides. My
Eyes are blurring circles. At one
With our machine, ready to meet
Head-on -
I am holding my breath.

royness (' ')

K

The banker would have left us with nothing,
burning the drafts of castles and countries
and a never ending trial,
adjourned
in the middle of a sentence.

K,
no longer shall you stand accused.
the words were always yours
to burn. Take off that
rigid suit, unlock this door at once.
Come out
from under the covers.
These metamorphoses are no matter to me -
I envied you even as a beetle.

royness (' ')

La Mort Des Amants - Translation By Non-French Speaker

New auras delight, plain odours leaguer
And divans are preferred to tombs.
The strangest flowers sour the effect
Enclosing our new sister, the sow from below.

You shout aloud in envy. Shall hers down there
Not serve to coerce, to sever these vast flamboyancies?
Key reflections are lost, dampened illuminations
Dance now with spirits, the mirror jams.

Unsure fate, roses of blue mystique
New enchantments are declared unique -
There comes a long, low song, charged with goodbyes,

A pause taut with anger, enters over the portent
Veranda, raining men, joyful in fidelity,
The mirror turns these mortals into flames.

royness (' ')

Lost Gods

We were never truly bad, only
born into the wrong time
a world without heroes or gods
where everything is lost...lost...

lost as we, out on the town
dancing down midnight city streets
swigging from bottles and
singing up at windows

chasing Nirvana
all over the place –
ready to paint the sky with fire
delighting in our own demise...

no one hears us, anyway
they are listening for the sirens –
the policemen are
chasing the children again

while all us crazies run free
the light still shines in our eyes
and our madness is beauty -
let me take your hand in mine

and we'll glide through the night
drinking whisky and poetry
lamenting the loss of our gods...

royness (' ')

Mosquito

She comes to me
in the early evening twilight
drawn by breath or scent -

with the merest of touches
she rests her fragile body upon me
pressing her eager mouth to my flesh

and delicately, with practised skill
she slides in her spiny needle
drawing the blood from a vein in my arm.

I watch as she drinks of me,
growing heavy and swollen -
I give myself willingly

and thus, I do not bleed
she leaves not a mark where she fed
softly withdrawing from me

as I, the great provider
offer up my body to the night -

feed, dear insects
drink of me -
my blood is surely thine.

royneſs (' ')

Moving Skin

Your head - huge, impossible -
sticks out from the wall,
as though you had somehow got
stuck
while trying to climb through.

Except -
on the other side there is nothing.
This head is mounted
on a shield of bronze. These antlers
are dead wood. It is not blood
but sawdust
that drips from your wounds.

Taxis Derma - the art
of moving skin. Once,
you were the pride of the school.

We students come and go -
you have outlasted many.

Outlasted,
but not outlived. The dust
settles on your pelt -
caught
between two worlds,
you stare at the walls through
glass eyes, rheumy with dirt.

royneſs (' ')

Mute

I wish that all was written down
so I shouldn't have to speak.
My voice, it taints, makes words impure -□
they cannot breathe up here, □
they choke my throat like cancer meat,
fall dead, upon the air.□

Too long my words have been ignored, □
I shall be mute from spite.□
'Til granted voice to shake the earth□
I shall not speak aloud -□
my pen will make a silent sword
and strike without a sound.

I'll walk as one whom without tongue
does press his words to page.
My silence, kingly as a crown,
a'stud with muted gems -
these words are far too strong for sound
my pen will tame them.

royness (' ')

No One Is There (A Villanelle)

He kisses her eyes, buries his hands in her hair
He rests his weight upon her where they lay
He wakes alone, to find no one is there

The room is icy; her breath gives form to air
Neither of them knows quite what to say
He kisses her eyes, buries his hands in her hair

He dreams of a hospital, the walls are white and bare
She stands in the light, at the end of a hallway
He wakes alone, to find no one is there.

Her beauty is ghostly, more fragile than air
She hides within his arms, so small and fey
He kisses her eyes, buries his hands in her hair

He hides her clothes, leaves her nothing to wear
'lest something from the night steals her away
Yet still he wakes alone. No one is there.

With her, he could rise out of this despair
At night they drink, and sleep all through the day
He kisses her eyes, buries his hands in her hair
And wakes alone, to find no one is there.

royneſs (' ')

Not Even A Flower

My room holds no nectar,
not even a flower -
we are far from the gardens up here.

Opposite, the offices have
bars across the windows -
or maybe blinds, I cannot quite

tell. The lines divide pale faces
into sections. I think
they have noticed me watching.

Sometimes, they force their heads
through the bars,
stand on chairs, lunge

against the glass -
but the walls of this room are thick
and invisible,

the air is cloying,
saccharine -
not even the bees can stand it.

They come here seeking honey,
Drift in
and die by my window.

This is one spent his only sting
to kill his own reflection. Dead,
he lies, and fat as a furball.

I curse him for not stinging me.
I press my fingers
over his wings, lift his

body
from the sill -
I throw him to the wind.

The neighbours knock on the walls.
I turn up the music, knock back
and wait on an answer.

The man in the glass is watching me again.
I will drive a knife right into his eye –
He will cry out, he will bleed honey.

It is two in the morning,
dear neighbour -
I am calling your bluff.

royness (' ')

Passing

He comes home to find Grandma, still –
sitting amidst the papers and magazines,
the dirtied grey furniture,
the crumbling walls and curtains stained
with age,
the slow reek of tobacco smoke.

Her sunken eyes do not see him.
Her stunned brain wonders
at nothing. She stares at the television.

Something is passing –
her skin is parched and worn,
dry and thin as paper.
Already, her walk is skeletal.
She skulks about the house,
hunched and broken –
her speech is a raspy whisper.

The children cannot look at her
and shiver at her touch –
They too can feel it.

The doctor promises it will come soon.
They await on the sound, the knell
that comes, and never comes –
the knell that must come now.

Sometimes, he sees her sitting there, still –
A box of matches
rattles between her fingers -
she sucks on the end of a cigarette,
strikes a match to flame.

royness (' ')

Pets With No Bodies

She seemed too huge to be dead.
Flopsy, our rabbit,
Our mad albino –
frozen stiff like meat from the freezer.

Mummy said we had to help her
get to heaven – which meant
getting rid of the body.
We sealed her up in a shoebox full of sawdust.

It had to be hurried. Dad
would soon be home. Dad who
flushed fish down the toilet.
I knew. I had seen them
gaping, pleading –
until the waters rushed in and swept them out
into the sewers, where I guess
the alligators ate them.

How could he know I had named them?

Would he try to flush Flopsy?
I didn't think she would fit. What if she got
stuck, and he had to keep flushing,
drowning the body deeper into the basin?
I saw him pull the rabbit out
by the ears, hair matted to the skin -
A failed trick. Her dank,
accusing eyes.

We decided to bury her. Not in the garden,
where a dog or fox might find her -
but in the field which bordered the house,
under the stalks of corn, or wheat, or barley –
I carried a shovel dutifully over my shoulder.

Mummy says she has gone up to heaven
I ask her:
When I die will you bury my body?

She tells me:

When you die, you won't need your body -
but I think that's not really an answer.

We return at the end of the Summer -
sheaves of wheat lay tied in bundles, tractors
churn the earth up into tracks.

The cross lies splintered and broken.
Tufts of white fur lay scattered over the dirt.

She covers my eyes.

I try to imagine
myself
without a body -

a head wedged into a toilet,
a thrusting hand, a torrent of water.

royness (' ')

Sculptress

Her lover was a haggard, weathered
statue, worn and undefined.

Time

had stiffened him. He was
unmoving, ugly
and stubborn as a rock.

She worked on him, night and day –
chiselled away at his features, removing
all those unnecessary segments –
creating definition,
smoothing out the lines.

In time, she would make him perfect.

Little by little,
she begins to leave her mark –
a figure takes form within the stone.

With expert hands, she guides
tiny hammers into crevices –
svelte fingers find the lines of his face.

She uncovers his eyes. He watches
as she polishes. A hand appears –
she takes it in hers,
carves in a smile –

You are my rock, my dear
In time you will be perfect.

royneſs (' ')

Snails Awaken

In the dampened morning air
the snails awaken
rising with the measured pace
of something coming into life.

Reborn from the rain, a hundred spirals
emerge from under rocks and earth,
lift heavily from the ground
and slowly, slowly, slowly

ebb from their shells
shift into shapely bodies
ooze into form -
life ripples through their fleshy folds.

They luxuriate in the slovenly
dampness, arch their backs
lift neckless heads to heaven -
primordial, awake, alive.

Every movement is tentative, deliberate
they ease their bodies over obstacles
caress every surface, feel through every pore
they feed, engulf, absorb.

Their kingly drapes of silver white
undulate in waves, cover invisible feet -
they tint the leaves with their Midas-touch
a sliver of glistening silver thread.

At the merest touch
of their tender, fleshy bodies
they withdraw, foetal, to their shell
to hide from the world outside.

royness (' ')

Snow Child, The

He wished for her
and here she stands -
naked and blameless,
ineffable, immaculate-
the child of his eye,

the white of his desire.
Dark magus! -
he has conjured her
and she must bleed for him.

She cannot deny the rose,
nor he -
there is nothing more deadly than beauty.

Her sin will be the death of him -
this rose is a flower
and it will prick.
She screams; this is her Fall -
she is the fairest of them all

but soon she too must melt away,
winter cannot sustain her -
child of ice,
snarled in thorns and make-believe.

Her white skin begins to fade -
in death none is more pure,
she leaves him no remains -

no trace but the bloodstain,
a hole filled with blood,
as cold as love.

royness (' ')

Taking Root

We, who have learnt to love the rain
Salute to the sun
Blocking your path, with
Arms as big as branches

This skin, it thickens
Hardens like bark
Feet begin to slip
Into the soil.

We begin to take root.

These animals have made their home in me;
starlings feed of my fruit, make nests
In the leaves of my hair -
No, we will not come down

My veins become grainy with age -
My mouth closes up -
I stand mute
But unmoved -
These branches block your path -

We have made this forest a fortress -
The people have taken root.

royneſs (' ')

Villanelle (For Emily Dickinson)

Why flee from fear of feelings too intense?
Dear Emily provided the refrain:
Much madness is in fact divinest sense

Too few have spoken out in its defense
While I for one am wary of the sane
Why flee from fear of feelings too intense?

Though doctors may seem eager to condense
Our dreams into 'diseases of the brain'
Much madness is in fact divinest sense

To speak your mind is sure to cause offence
Those who demur are handled with a chain
Why flee from fear of feelings too intense?

For those who see far, far beyond the fence
Or find the world within a single grain
Much madness is in fact divinest sense

Let us speak honestly, without pretense
In a mad world only the mad are sane
Why flee from fear of feelings too intense?
Much madness is in fact divinest sense

royneſs (' ')

We Separate

We separate the
ripples
from the lake.

Droplets
swirl in circles, a
breath
above the surface.

royness (' ')