

**Love Letters Unsent  
To People Unmet**

poetry by  
John Robinson

**ONE TUSK PUBLISHING**

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"Hello," "The Nature of the Beast," "Per Dolorem Ad Astra,"  
"Postcards from Galapagos," "The Stygian Depths of You and I and  
All," "12:03 AM," "Why Do Living Things Bury Themselves?"  
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## Introduction to the Online Version

2001. After long and fruitless attempts at buying into the idea that I had to ostensibly "get permission" from someone else to be published, I finally gave up and launched One Tusk. I would do it all myself and reap the whirlwind in whatever direction it decided to go.

Since I was sitting on a great deal of poetry, I decided a chapbook would be a nice toe to dip in the self-publishing pond. At the time, fifty copies of a fifty-page chapbook seemed a lot easier to write off than several thousand copies of a three-hundred-plus page novel.

And I had experience with creating a chapbook, as I helped to put one together in 1997 for a poetry/spoken word group I had been a founding member of--The Usual Suspects. Our chapbook/audiobook was called *The Usual Suspects Meet Frankenstein*. That was essentially my proof of concept right there.

Well, I'm pleased to say that the chapbook was a success. And the novel that followed it has been a success as well. Anything over and above rotting on my hard drive--anything that actually puts the stuff in somebody's hands so they can read it--is a rousing success in my book. We sold out of the chapbook in just a couple of months. I even created a two-CD audiobook of the thing, and we sold a few copies of that as well.

The chapbook has since gone out of print as I moved onto other things.

Then I ran across Cory Doctorow's website (<http://www.craphound.com>) via a nudge from Warren Ellis' online mailing list (<http://www.warrenellis.com>).

Doctorow had apparently taken the insane step of releasing his novel(s) online free for download--and yet was still making money in decent amounts on the physical books themselves. He was basically living what I had been cogitating and preaching about in such places as my Widge Goes Off audio column and elsewhere. Checking things out--I figure the guy had to be doing something right considering his books seemed to have decent sales numbers on Amazon: i.e., better than mine.

So following Doctorow's lead--even though he wouldn't have any idea who the hell I am--I figure if this is the party, I want in. So I've created this online version of the first chapbook and it's being made available under the terms of a Creative Commons license (<http://www.creativecommons.org>).

If you have previously read the physical version of the chapbook, there have been some very minor changes in some of the poems...mostly dealing with lineation. Working within the confines of the page sizes for the chapbook meant I had to compromise on a few lines just to get them to fit. Those have been restored.

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for my parents,  
John & Nancy Robinson.

# Hello

Hello.

See, that wasn't so hard, was it?  
Sometimes it can really be that simple.

But now that we are talking,  
we must move on to more important things  
more important questions, like  
How have you been? and  
How's the family? and  
Who are you anyway? i don't know you  
from Adam, Eve, or the Serpent, and  
Who let you in here? and just  
Who the hell do you think i am anyway?

Well, now that we've gotten those out of the way,  
and obviously i can't frighten you off with my questions,  
we must now truly speak.

Are you aware that inside all of us is a  
conundrum, and lovingly folded inside it is an  
enigma, and enclosed in an envelope inside it is a  
paradox, and when you dial the right combination you get a  
quandary.

And when you pry open the quandary, you get  
nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Because all of this is a ruse  
to keep your attention away  
from the second shelf down from there  
next to the broken telephone  
and the bowl of rose leaves  
where sits the shoebox.

Inside the shoebox you would find  
reams upon reams of letters you will never write.  
You do not not write them for reasons of fear that transcend  
the haunting memory which is the written word, or  
the liability which is flesh made verse.  
You do not write them for fear that if you write them  
you will wish to send them, and  
if you wish to send them  
you will either realize that you have no one to send them to  
or perhaps worse, that  
you do.

If you have been at this for long,  
you do not bother to meet these people  
who you would write these letters to.  
You simply file the pages in no particular order  
in the shoebox for the moment  
that will probably never arrive,  
the moment in which you might need to skim over  
lines which do not and should not exist.

And you take comfort in it.  
You will simply buy a cat.  
And then another when the first gets lonely.  
You'll believe it.

Still,  
the gnawing question remains--  
if the blank after *Dear...* were to bear fruit  
would it be succulent and sweet  
or a wax facsimile?

In the case of this emergency,  
if someone were to actually walk up and say  
*Hello.*  
you would know exactly how to act.  
you would know exactly what to say.  
you have the moment mapped out in your head  
down to your last exhalation of breath.

Still,  
when you're standing there on aisle ten  
with poison in cart and bag of corn chips in hand  
and he or she asks if you're married  
you'll say no, but not ask for his or her number.

You see, the shoebox's lid is closed.  
And there are rubber bands holding it so.

## The Nature of the Beast

The tile floor is cold under your bare feet.  
The cold of the sink sinks up through your palms.  
You pull down the bottom of one eyelid.  
You accuse your reflection, saying

THIS NEVER HAPPENED  
as the woman you murdered  
shifts in her sleep in the next room, smiling.  
Angrily, you think  
                                  at least one of us can smile  
                                  at least one of us can sleep.

You have seen it all before.  
You have heard it all before.  
You have been here before.  
But still, the exit is no easier to find.

                  What never happened?  
All the lies we promise ourselves  
All the moments we honestly meant to mean  
All the things unspoken yet better off unthought  
                  What never happened?  
The constant drip drip drip drip of anticipation  
filling up a bathtub with days and ways  
filling it up with hopes and dreams  
leaning back and pretending to relax  
but still pondering the possibilities  
of that appliance near your toe.

THIS NEVER HAPPENED

You could return to the next room.  
You could lie down beside her,  
and in the morning when you awoke  
ten thousand cold miles of mattress  
would separate your spent corpses.  
Any emissaries sent to bridge this gulf  
would lie bleaching in the mid-morning sun.  
Then, bound by the schism which is clarity  
there would be words, but their casings  
would rattle noiselessly on the ground.  
As was stated, you have been here before.  
                                  You know the terrain.

Or perhaps it will all pass away  
in a few hours.  
You can speak of it as the Grand Mistake,  
and yes, perhaps even laugh about it.  
Go back  
Go back to the night before  
to that moment before you appeared on her doorstep  
half out of your mind with a half-formed thought in your head  
and say

THIS NEVER HAPPENED

You can think no more of it now.  
You climb into bed and she shifts towards you.  
Her head slips under your chin.  
You put one hand on her shoulder as if to push her away.  
You want no part of this for

THIS NEVER HAPPENED...

but her breathing is so contentedly even

and as you close your eyes you think,  
Damn...

if only she weren't so warm.

12:03 am

Eyes unclose themselves  
in the moments wet and mundane  
after the passing of the previous day.

Silent stars wear black armbands  
and peer down through solemnity  
at your formerly sleeping form.

Once again,  
    you dreamed that you were having this dream.  
    A goddess had poured honey upon your lips  
    as you dozed in an unspoiled garden,  
    free of human longings, free of inhuman duplicity, and  
wormwood.

    You opened your eyes,  
    but before she could explain the vase and the rose,  
        before you could even cross the room,  
        before you could pose the question,  
        before she could compose the answer,  
    another day slipped through the splintered hourglass, and

you awoke  
with regret in your soul  
and sweetness on your lips.

## Postcards From Galapagos

1.

Dream a little dream of suffocation.  
Glance in the direction of the indifferent snore  
and pray for a skipped beat.

It's no longer amusing how he can use a sundial  
to tell time  
on overcast days.

The ghosts of pleasantries eye us warily.  
The shelf is littered with their icons:  
photographic proof of hollow smiles  
behind, the tide repeating and eating at the shore  
and sea shells which you won't hear the sea in anymore.

This is not a life of quiet desperation,  
it's just that no one is listening.

2.

Here is everything you ever wanted.  
Here, right here,  
right there in front of you.

It took years to stumble over it,  
crouched at your feet as it were,  
but you are forced to acknowledge it now.

They fed you the desire and the dream,  
but instructed you no further.

Big as life and  
twice as devastating,  
it waits for a response.

Close your mouth.

We're staring.

3.

Reason cries out in the wilderness  
and no man pays it heed

Except--

for the Department of Transportation Officials  
in their Hardhats, who start putting down Stakes.

Evolution seeks footholds in the air like a capsized beetle  
while Charles spins and laughs  
and spins

and

laughs

No one wants to grow fur anymore.

## **And When You Returned Home**

You brought the grocery bags in.  
You sat them down in the kitchen.  
You said they had distance on special,  
so you picked up some extra.

You said, hurry and help me,  
we need to keep it cold  
so it won't spoil.

i could not move slowly enough.

## **Orpheus and Eurydice: a love story**

Son of Oneiros and Calliope he was,  
grandson of Zeus the father,  
and he was mine, almost completely,  
as i was his, more than completely.  
He sang of his love for me with  
such passion, such incredible passion  
that nature would still itself  
and give breathless notice,  
not allowing even the wind  
to interfere with his song,  
so that the trees themselves would need to bend  
of their own accord to give an attentive ear.  
He sang of his love for me with  
such passion, such incredible passion  
that the gods of Olympus would give  
pause from their petty rivalries  
and seductions of mortals to be seduced themselves  
by my lover's song.  
He sang of his love for me with  
such passion, such incredible, empty passion  
that it would make me sick to hear.

i fear the annals of history will show me  
as nothing more than a name,  
but since we are in Hell here together,  
and none has ever returned alive from this depth,  
i will tell you truthfully:  
That even though in life i was woman,  
i had a song of my own.

But compared to the brightness of my dearest one  
what was my cheap inspiration?  
A drop in an ocean,  
a one among many--  
still it was mine, but overshadowed by one  
i had bound my life to.  
And just as his song had easily managed  
to make mine as notes unuttered,  
so too did his love for art  
make his love for me,  
and moreover,  
my love for him  
into nothing more than a title  
for one of his compositions.  
Lovely though they were, and  
loved for they were about me,  
they seemed more against me  
or perhaps more through me,  
but never about myself.

Never about myself.  
So you see, when my life ended abrupt,  
i, at first, wept openly, tears falling silently  
among the red rock of this place.  
All of my comfort and familiar was gone--  
gone with him, gone with his song.  
But my lyre had fallen with me,  
so i began to sing my lament  
and demanded the deaf stone open itself to me.  
The damned listened despite their suffering  
and my song finally found purchase  
in the darkness of this place,  
this place where his melodies could not reach.  
Better to have the ear of one disembodied soul  
than all the inattentive living things of the world.  
So, content i was,  
content i was to dream  
that Lord Hades himself might  
possibly hear my despair and give pause.

Content to dream i was.

But the crass fool would not leave well enough alone.

At first, i was happy--  
happy for him,  
happy that he  
felt so in love with me  
remembered me for a moment  
that instead of his song  
he had given my soul chase,  
taken the time to descend  
and win my hand again  
by robbing Lord Hades of a single tear.

i was to return with him,  
return to him,  
return to the world above  
and i was happy.  
But i had the realization, one step from life:  
That things would no doubt return to as they had been,  
that the song of this man  
would coax the affection of men, women,  
children, animals, winds and gods--  
and then what of the song of poor Eurydice?  
*Be dumb, child, we have come for the song of Orpheus.*

But it was too late,  
my hesitation upon the stair  
had made him untrusting turn.  
Then the damage was done,  
for with the loss of Lord Hades' tear  
we were torn from each other forever,  
as i was torn from the ear of the monarch for eternity.  
My lover's song had invaded even my private corner of Hell,  
and the damned were even more the damned  
for being denied the words of Orpheus.

Now and again,  
i would catch a drift of the dirge,  
his lament for my loss,  
and could feel nature bending itself  
to his sorrow.  
So i must ask:  
Was it all for me, love?  
Or was it all for your song?  
Did you go through the suffering  
only to rape more inspiration  
from your harlot muse?  
How many epics did you wring  
from my untimely demise?

But this is Hell, after all,  
and they will not take my lyre from me.  
i have tried to lose it many a time,  
only to find it there in my hand once again.  
i am a woman with a song to sing,  
and not even the damned will listen.  
For it seems no one will pay heed  
to the notes and words of woman,  
no, neither in Heaven, nor in Hell,  
nor anywhere in between.

When i heard they had finally  
rend you into pieces,  
i felt no loss at all  
but neither did i feel freedom.  
This world has already been tainted with your art,  
leaving no room for mine.  
So despite my love for you,  
nay, because of my love for you,  
i wished a handful of your flesh for my own.

i am sure that when your crown  
drifted downstream  
and was swept into the sea,  
you were still singing,  
Damn you.

## **Another Poem About Your Eyes**

The thing I hate most about being a poet.

I'd like a poem about my eyes, you know,  
For once. Just for a change of pace.

No one's ever written a poem about my eyes.  
I constantly draw inspiration from what I see  
In the eyes of others: the light, the spark in them.

There's no spark in mine that I can find.  
I can't start kindling with it.  
I can't even find my way to bed with it.  
Instead, I keep tripping over your shoes.

## Never and Always

Five and a half feet and still going down.  
Sweat ripe for the picking from my brow.  
Dirt under my fingernails, reminding me I'm alive.  
Frenetic with hesitant expectation.  
Waiting for the sound of metal striking wood.  
Breathing hard, not as young as i used to be.

You're out.  
I've seen you.  
Haunting me again.  
Reading the ingredients off the backs of mirrors.  
Sculpting clouds out of dragons  
and wishing all the seeds away.

Six feet. Anytime now.  
A nod to worms, trundling black things.  
They will excite joy in my unmoistened throat,  
will bring life again from the dust, my life,  
and i can crawl from this hole reborn in exchange for musky  
death,  
relase filthy gills and inhale the moon.

Six and half feet and standards break down on the subatomic  
level.

There is nothing here.  
Nothing here but dirt and more dirt and myself, more dirt.

Where are you?

Seven paces from the tree at the fork,  
these two words interred before,  
this undergrowth a spearcarrier in all my forgotten dreams.

Where are you?

## Sharing

There's ink on my fingers--  
enough to incriminate myself,  
enough to mark you for life,  
the scar, a letter, a circle,  
fading and growing in the sedentary light.

Mine still itches when it's cold.  
It's like a divine blessing.  
Believe me.  
You want to pass it on.



## Untitled

i would weave you an untruth  
if i spun for example that  
i have this feeling.  
Instead, this feeling has me.

i speak so and so  
the precipice yawns and  
feigns indifference  
but will receive me once again.  
It calls me by my secret names  
and bids me fall.

The tumbling descent is familiar  
but this time i have time  
to count the trees as i go.  
It is a delicious avalanche indeed  
the tide of white washing clean the mountainside  
erasing the slopes below  
but never gaining speed.  
Uncontrolled but submissive  
it will die at the base  
it will die at your feet.

What you might hear me say  
is that i do not want this  
that i do not want this at all.  
Rest assured, i could promise you  
if i still believed in promises  
that this would be the only lie i share with you.

## Get Well Soon

i don't miss you.  
i won't mince words or lie to you  
for that would be too easy.  
And you know me, always the difficult one.  
You rise up now and then, and shake your tiny fist  
You'll try to convince me you know what you want,  
and that's as maybe,  
but you don't know what you need.

You strap yourself to the mast and pour  
wax in the portals of your ears.  
You sing offkey at the top of your lungs.  
You're trying to defend yourself against  
singing siren or mermaid,  
but they don't bother with either of us.

No, not anymore.

No, the only person here was me,  
and wonder of wonders,  
but that was the malady.

Here's your remedy.

## Hesitant Love Letter

God pricked his finger  
while spinning your hair  
so an angel told me

i am afraid of you  
because you are exactly who i would like to meet  
in a dark alleyway.

You see, in my dreaming hours  
i gather kindling in the cold grey of the valley  
to keep such thoughts at bay.  
i ponder your name, and roll it along my fingers  
not daring to let it pass my lips  
for fear of invocation  
for once in flesh, what then?

Those fingers,  
one of yours brushed against one of mine  
once and once only  
but it was enough to set in motion  
things which only desired to remain still.

In the darkness, the darkness of your eyes  
opens wide and wide  
almost inviting me to look inside  
but i fear watching  
more than being seen.

You see,  
there are letters sealed,  
i know.  
But postcards are cheaper.  
Here is one now,  
read it,  
it says Wish You Were Here.

Please sign it.

## Habeus

The casualty lies casually still  
and lets the plush carpet sponge that it lies upon  
soak up the humours that stream out.

If natural selection did not rob me of my smile  
then certainly it must have been you  
for it looks so flimsy hanging there beneath your nose.

No matter what happens between a you or an i  
it is always the third party involved, the us  
who sustains injury.  
The words that are now shoved inwards  
to the hilt, are illegible, partly due  
to the stains which had burst forth from our side  
when the phrases were thrust there  
and partly because my hand had stuttered and shook so  
while writing them in midair.

Before they could vanish like a smoke ring  
a small thought brought them into solid reality  
and sent them home--  
here between two ribs,  
sheathed in our side.

They paused only long enough  
to finish their own chalk outline,  
which i had begun in a parking lot in December  
and which you finished months later in your living room.  
Friends, you said, and if we say it over and over  
it will make it be so.

It did not cross our lips often enough, it seems,  
for i walk down the street, my hand at my side,  
applying pressure.

Every night, i should have knelt and murmured it  
like a mantra, each repetition forcing it to be so.  
Every night, i should have gone to my home and  
suffered in relative silence.

Instead, i suffer the deafening,  
that of no phones ringing,  
of no words spoken,  
of future selves stillborn.

**Still Lives**

zero

Stay, stay, stay, said the bird: Mankind  
cannot bear too much mankind.

Comfort without comfort --

Stay. The car will not arrive until four  
this you know as well as your name --

Stop.

Do not rise and peek through the blinds.  
Do not let the barbed sunlight sting your eyes.  
Hide beneath this canopy.  
Hide within your flesh.  
Reside inside that which does not make you  
what you are not.  
Remain inside your remains.

Or,

if you feel driven to action,  
compelled to be compelling,  
do not wrap your head in a cloth,  
let it go naked up the stairs  
to the roof, throw open the door  
if you must, lean over the precipice  
to the world below you.

And, look at them.

Look at them, all of them.  
Pass by each of their open caskets  
and remark that they look so much like ourselves.

Listen. Do you hear it?  
Listen to their desperation.  
Listen to the spiritus mundi sigh.

Listen.

Listen.

one

She was dead.  
She was dead, and she pronounced herself so  
                  mere moments after she had opened the door  
                  and entered into what was left of her fantasy  
for the very last time.

On the table by the door  
                  sat an ashtray into which  
                  they would leave their keys.  
When hers clattered down alone  
it was the emptiest sound she had ever felt.

She would have called his name  
in an attempt to bridge this gulf,  
to shatter this silence self-imposed,  
but it would do no good.

Much later, she would make the rounds and find  
                  spaces in the closet,  
                  under the bed,  
                  in the bookcase, and elsewhere  
not unlike the ones in her stories,  
                  locations and people that either were visited  
and did not exist,  
                  or the other way around.

So there in that moment of endings,  
                  she thought about what it must have been like  
                  at the beginning, when she still had control,  
                  when she was the one  
                  arranging the fruit and the bowl,  
                  and not the fruit itself.

She had a half-empty ashtray  
                  a half-full story about her tardiness  
                  and the knowledge  
that she was dead  
                  but with years left to live.

two

She meant no harm.  
She truly meant no harm.  
She would walk up to paintings  
in museums, unthinking,  
and place oily fingers on oiled canvas.  
She only wanted to see what they felt like.

Years before,  
Keats tried to convince me that it was better this way.  
He was muttering something about  
the beauty of unconsummated and unconsummating love  
and pottery.

That one moment of

just before  
for all eternity.

i rebelled against this idea  
stagnation through ceramics  
"Better to get to the point and get it over with,"  
said i, "no man can teeter on the verge forever.  
"Gravity may or may not be a truth,  
"but hearts and pots both break  
when they fall from shelves."

"Or if they are pushed," he added.

"Or if they are pushed," i agreed.

"Just remember," he said,  
"you were warned."

His words echoed in my head as i realized  
she meant no harm.  
She truly meant no harm.  
She would walk up to people's lives  
in the world, unthinking  
and place tapered fingers on tapered lives.  
She only wanted to see what they felt like.

three

Underneath the overpass  
    he takes another pull from the bottle  
    as the cars ignore him and turn up the ramp  
up Highway 15 and out of his life.

    To all things an ending, he thinks,  
    it's just that some endings take longer than others...  
so he spits out a vapory laugh to the fluorescent sky.

He wrote their names together  
    in the pavement.  
That was long ago, in another lifetime.  
Things were simpler.  
There were still some things to believe in.

But last night,  
he lost all of the misbelief  
he had once held as true.  
While seeking contentment in the flesh  
of his latest soulmate,  
he breathed out a name.

*"Kori."*

And that name belonged anywhere but  
    in his bed,  
    in the ear of the woman he feigned to love  
and who did him the same favor in return.  
    It belonged here in the sidewalk next to his  
    cut in the stone which marked her bed  
    cut in the memory breathed in the ear  
    of that long ago lifetime  
    that long ago bonding of souls.

So he pulls again from the bottle and smiles grimly.  
He thinks of endings, and then  
he thinks of endings.

    His thoughts are carved in stone,  
and more than her name is encased within.

four

When she arrives home  
it is long since dark.  
It is exactly like it was when she left it.

The lock rattles as the door opens  
to permit entrance to this particular fantasy.  
That of home,  
and the smile of welcome  
which she should have received  
walking through the door.

Or so she thought.  
The ideas of home  
of welcome  
of welcome home,  
she had dreamed of them since she was a child.

But there is no smile here, heralding home.  
Only a grimace given for the note  
which is in its usual place on the kitchen table.  
A promise of a time to return  
which is flexible  
as all promises are.

She climbs into bed  
and wraps herself in the blankets  
reaching for some touch besides her own.

This was her today.  
And this was her yesterday.  
And if the cold was not so comfortable  
she could wish for a different tomorrow.

But instead, always wishes and words,  
well-intentioned,  
but never good  
or made good upon.

So she falls asleep and half-remembers  
something Goethe said about being free.  
She can never recall how the quotation goes,  
but she will die with it on his lips.

five

The shower beats down upon her.  
Her eyes closed she gives her unmoving body over  
to the movement of the water  
down, down along the sheath of her skin  
descending a familiarity  
though she cannot remember without checking  
which direction  
the spiral goes here north of the equator.

She faintly hears him whistling a tune in the kitchen  
punctuated once by the rebounding fall of a pan.  
She smiles despite herself and runs her hands back through her hair  
letting the falling water encompass her form  
as his thoughts of her encompass her mind  
the way he would touch her cheek and sigh  
the way she tried to shrink back inside herself

It was the potential of the moment that frightened,  
the realization that the actualization of one moment  
would either destroy her or make her whole once more.  
This thought was more compelling than the fragmentation  
of a lifetime  
scattered and still, half-formed emotions  
slipping as they walked through beaded pools  
languishing on the faucet

She moves, and realizes the stopper is in place.  
This whole time she has been wading through these thoughts,  
deep water shrouding her feet.

She pulls it free and calms herself  
with the knowledge that all things rise and fall  
all things return to the norm  
whatever that norm might  
or might not be

The water escaping through the hole  
dropping out of sight decidedly clockwise  
she frowns, i must have been wrong...  
and it  
drowns out the humble music from the kitchen.

six

The waves outside go in and out  
nonchalantly erasing some child's forgotten castle.

The sky is clear, and the bloated moon hung there  
looks down with disinterest on the solitary man,  
lying awake in the vacuum that is a sprawling  
two a.m. bedroom,  
his wife pinned beneath heavy slumber beside him.

The moon knew for some time what this man has experienced  
in this moment of epiphany:  
His entire life is a lie.

What the patriarch laid out for him,  
he had done, just like his father before him.  
The few paintings he had been proud of  
relegated to a forgotten corner of a  
rented storage room across town  
like some guilty family secret.

The loving father who had uncapped  
his dreams and squeezed them down the garage sink  
was somewhere else, sleeping the sleep of the just,  
next to his own smiling trophy.

This is where most men would ask in that  
shocked man voice, "My God, what have I done?"  
But this one knows his crime to the letter.

He goes to the glass door and looks out and up.  
He would fly if he still could, but it would do no good.  
Not even moonlight could restore the wax he had once worn  
upon his arms.



eight

Forty-five miles from his destination  
    all four windows came down  
        the music came up  
and the freezing cold came in  
for he had slipped  
and forgotten he was alive.

    As the flesh on his bare arms stood at attention  
    and the joints in his fingers  
gripping the wheel stiffened  
    he watched abstractly  
        as the orange leaves on the trees  
    descended into shades of grey  
        only half-convinced as he was  
that it was due to nightfall.

And as an orange line was drawn  
        across the horizon  
and the birds taking flight  
        reminded him that a body in motion  
        still has a tendency to feel emotion  
    his eyes watered  
        only half-convinced as he was  
that it was due to the cold.

    And as the dashes in the road  
        disappeared underneath his headlights  
he thought of them suddenly  
        as the perforation of the world  
        waiting for the gleeful hands of gods  
to rend it into pieces.

        He laughed then,  
and watched, crying,  
        as the laugh clouded his windshield.

For he was alive.

    He was alive.

## Grey Spirit Yearning

A fin cuts a swath through the shallow pool of memory.

She trod barefoot across a crowded room,  
until the water

                  came up to her knees.  
the oceans

                                  of her eyes  
                                  too full of  
doldrums, quadrapedal spectres.

Not enough rope to be bound to a mainmast,  
neither any nails to consume the deed,  
but no song learned passed fresh lips to draw me deeper,  
and for that,

                  thanks are on order.

I kissed her once

                  with undercurrents of raw betrayal,  
                  the only time we ever shared skin.

A hysterical front moved rabid over the surface of former calm  
and washed the seeds of any

                  ghosts of growth away.

Gratitude

                                  for moments past  
                                  because they are past  
and not lodged in the gears of now.

Karma

                                  or some other blindness  
                                  has taken its tithe and

Possibility

                                  without enough for bus fare  
                                  must wade  
                                  the long distance

home.



## Why Do Living Things Bury Themselves?

You and i stand there  
and hold mirrors up to reality,  
searching for the confused fog  
that lets us know it is alive.  
Was that a diminutive sigh?  
Did a nostril stir? No.  
Then to the garden with it,  
let it return in returning,  
let the convocation of worms commence.  
Worst case, a little sleep  
and not the entire pie  
served on a platter with your crown  
and so transfigured, wash it down.  
Children will skip around in a ring  
and an awakened hand will begin to ring  
the bell for the end of everything--  
Except for you and i.

If you wander toward the back of this hall,  
mind the signs there, they say  
COME SEE THE EGRESS  
and you should know the rest by now.  
Rats' alley beyond, and beyond that--  
we forget.  
Mankind can only bear so much fantasy  
and the little bird is dead.  
Easter the cat grins cheshire  
and does not wish to repeat herself.

The handle on the alley's side of the door.  
You recall it, i know you do.  
You were crouched in a cardboard box  
the first time i stepped out  
so long and long and long ago.  
Purest silver, the handle it was,  
and we could come and go as we pleased.  
They melted it into coinage  
struck a manmade god into it  
and rendered it in exchange for a kiss.  
The doer of the deed still mumbles by occasionally.  
He could not reconstruct it if he tried.

Perhaps, instead ask  
Why do buried things live still?  
If our dead partner was to appear now  
he would wear his chains and rattle them,  
yes, but they would not be forged in sin.  
Each link instead an amalgam of  
broken promises, still held together with regret,  
words no longer echoing,  
love letters unwritten to people unmet.  
Let them go, let them leave,  
their feet are covered by the sheet  
and they can harm you no longer.

The dead can fend for themselves  
and the living sometimes catch a glimpse  
of the little man behind the curtain  
of the acorn fallen on fertile, unfriendly ground  
of the leaves full of children  
and the children full of straw.

The dog's nails are ragged.  
He will not cannot find us down here.  
We fester too deeply for shallow minds to go.  
We decay so well so the infant hand will grow.  
When you have shed your outer shell, i somehow still will know.  
But i cannot find your hand in this dank, musty place.  
These roots they clutch at my moral remains.  
Sweets to the bittersweet, my love, you say  
as the pathway here loses the memory of human feet  
as the innocent ceremony is borne down by its own dress  
as is written an unauthorized autobiography  
of all of our sins disremembered.

God is in his world, and all is right with heaven.  
Ask the roses to sing you this song when they bloom forth from me.  
You will not hear your answer  
inscribed in the air with a vegetable tongue:  
Some things cannot return to dust fast enough.  
Now leave me to Adam's blessed curse, my love.  
i am thirsty for my sleep  
and the wind is shifting away from the south.

**Requiem:**

a mass for the living in four movements

(translated from the original English text)

*these ruins i have shored against my fragments*

# Requiem Aeternam

## I.

The chosen have already left us  
their cars on the side of the roads  
bumper stickers and sheep's blood as sigils  
to call a rain of angels down upon them  
lights hazarding clues as to where they went from here

i do not know for sure  
i only have an educated guess.

So here we sit the rest eternal  
eternally at rest  
eternally left behind  
to suffer in blind ambivalence  
denied the doorway  
denied the steps into darkness  
denied the pass through the dark mountains  
to the other side

instead with each egress  
we digress  
and regress  
and always come back out again at the beginning  
and always then at the middle  
this shore with no passage  
no passage to the other side  
only watching and waiting and watching  
the grains of continents drift away in the surf  
and perhaps sometimes drawing strength from  
a universal half-truth of erosion.

## II.

So roiling in the surf  
(as i roiled on the shore)  
a tennis ball  
which i plucked from the foam  
and forced into metaphor.

or rather, the attempt was made:  
The ball itself would not be so moved.

There it was, constantly reaching the shore  
but rolling back again into the sea  
and i thought, yes,  
it is the same but without man or hill  
and then, Ah!  
What a happenstance rife with meaning!

"What portents do you bring?" i asked.

Nothing, it replied.

"Impossible. You must mean something."

Nothing, again, nothing.

"But..." i screamed, "this is madness!"

"When the larger, seemingly-significant events in one's life lack even the semblance of meaning, it is only natural to look to smaller occurrences such as this for succor."

Such are the births of religion, it said.

"But..." i continued, "the universal truths,

"the universal meanings,

"they all escape me.

"If i cannot piece together enough meaning to impose it on such an inconsequential moment as this..."

Such are the deaths of faith, it said. Now we are getting somewhere.

### III.

So the rest is silence? If so,  
how much rest can we achieve in this quiet cacophony?

We swear we will speak only the truth  
and therefore our mouths move without meaning  
soundless and furious we attempt to force from our lips  
promises which no language can truly muster.

Therefore, we, the rest, are indeed silent.

Speak we eternal, but  
eternal, we silent.

Donaeis Domine

I.

We were told to immerse ourselves  
for he was coming back home.  
This fine patina of promises and prayer  
will keep us safe from all manner  
of disease destruction despair

Forty years and more we have wandered  
in this waste land, still never getting  
the joke laid before us  
that those who strike rocks in anger  
are punished  
while those who throw rocks in righteous fury  
are granted eternal life

But still how long must endurance stretch?  
These nigh two millennia have come and gone quickly  
like a dream that upon waking you realize  
you never really had.

Flickering images of false fire  
gift us with assurance that all is well  
*Es un mundo pequeño despues de todo*  
so get some sleep and  
try to feel better.

II.

So the rest is silence? No.  
The sum is silence.  
Or is as it should be.  
The endless mocking voices of five billion parrots  
all echo as one large quiet cacophony  
and yet no words are spoken.

Rather, the masters  
the maestros throw words at jet engine noise  
and watch them splash against blank canvas  
i ask for meaning, and in reply,  
they cry  
"Where were you little man, when we remade the world?"  
i answer with no more than a shake of the head.  
i know which way the wind is blowing.  
i know which hand you use.  
i know that i do not what i do not know.  
Which is more than one can say of you.

I can see her now in my mind's eye, The Creator,  
adjusting a pillow by her head and saying,  
that that was not what she meant at all.  
that that was not it at all.

So preachers in pulpits,  
and friends on boxes  
and lovers on bedsheets  
in backstreets  
and elsewhere  
all of them  
paint for me.

III.

i say there shall be no more promises.  
Those promises made already may live.  
All except one.  
That one  
is already buried with the  
tearful woe of ten-thousand imaginary brothers  
piled on top of the pine box.  
(There are two words in the box.)  
i forgot the path to the gravesite.  
(The first is NEVER.)  
There were flowers growing there.  
(The second is FOREVER.)  
i forget what they were called.

You see,  
i thought i was in the middle of the path  
she said i was in the middle of the path  
but i was out of sight  
out of mind  
in the box  
with two meaningless words.

i hear the man in the plot next to mine.  
He says,  
"At least your bell will ring."  
"At least you have a rope to yours,"  
i reply,  
unfazed.

IV.

We have neither mastered reality nor fantasy,  
yet seek to make them both obsolete.  
Our souls, more precious than gold,  
    have been melted down for the fatted calf  
to which we offer praise.

i will lay my hands upon it.  
i will say that i believe.  
But have pity, for pity's sake,  
    though pity like patience  
has worn thin.

    So for heaven's sake,  
        and in heaven's name,  
do not promise me anything.

# Et Lux Perpetua

## I.

We staked our claim on the shore.

    These forces  
    these small forces shaping this foot of coast  
    and small forces elsewhere shaping their respective feet of coast  
my own feet mired in infirmity here  
my own feet sired in infinity here  
    buried in the wet remnants of memories  
i feel those same forces lapping up and washing away  
    my own particular shore.  
Standing in what used to be my...demarcation?  
    declaration?

Who knows?

    i know  
    that i was abandoned by my fellow scripters  
    i cannot keep repeating myself in impermanent bliss  
    for the tide always wins and  
    washes my words away.

And those scribes who deserted my sinking islands  
    they float just out of reach  
    held aloft by delusions of mediocrity.

There is something to be said for writing in the sand.  
"Impermanence is better than nothing at all."  
    i wrote these words,  
and even i do not believe them.

My fine floating friends,  
    they make letters in the water with gracious hands  
    they draw oaths in the foam with tapered fingers  
    they do not comprehend the short span of these promises.

At least i can offer this sand, which will  
    hold a word or two before it is consumed.  
    It can hold three words quite well if you  
    write them over and over.

And choose those three words carefully.

For you see,  
    even a fourteen-year-old girl knew better  
    than to accept a pledge sworn by the moon.

But yet,  
    her fate was no different.

II.

i am sitting on the steps and  
writing this poem.  
Four lifetimes stroll past, arm in arm with  
fifteen pages.  
When i look up again, a boy is there,  
watching me write.

"Hello," i say.  
"What are you writing?" he asks.  
"Words, words, words."  
"Why?"  
"It's all i was given," i say. "Some people get wealth,  
some love  
i words."  
"I would like to be given words," he says.  
"i've never thought of it as a gift," i say.  
He asks, "What is it, then?"

i tell him about being a boy of his age,  
of wearing a hat that was too big  
playing a violin that was too big  
and playing for a girl with a smile that was too big  
a song that was too small.

He did not understand.

i spoke of having to write one's thoughts down  
and having to pretend that you cared  
about the things that troubled you.  
of watching couples walk by  
and remembering when i needed help to  
make my hands as cold as they now are.

He did not understand.

i told him that once you have drunk from your own imagination  
no earthly drink will satisfy your thirst afterwards.  
that once you have drunk from this well of truth  
the lie that is life will not satisfy you again.

He did not understand.

He still wished for more than these words  
and no collection of words i could gift him with would satisfy him.

He left me there, bathed in frustration.  
Can it be that life had undone even one so young as this?

And then that voice again--  
"Now we're getting somewhere."

III.

Bring me an honest woman  
and i will find you an honest man.  
Though your search would last eternity  
mine would stretch longer still.  
i set out in the streets one night,  
i held a lamp aloft  
my eyes squinting for the goal.  
One better than i had quested thus before,  
with much the same result.

For you see,  
blacks and whites,  
truths and lies,  
loves and indifference  
all converge into this dull gray fog  
that permeates our existence,  
and keeps us from fulfilling our quest,  
lamp or no.  
This mist of belief disbelief and rebelief  
that is around us even now.  
Every word you misconstrue is another wisp of smoke  
confounding communication.  
So breathe deep.  
It cannot hurt you,  
but hope it will numb you  
to the unnatural shocks which are to come.  
to your unnatural shocks which are to come.

We've seen it all before.  
We've heard it all before.  
And anyone who accepts a smile and a solemn word,  
merely has another lesson to be learned.

IV.

*Rockabye baby thy cradle is green,  
Father's a nobleman mother's a queen.  
You will be taught by the great god machine  
The great sacred lie which is nearly obscene.  
For groom bearing black and bride wearing white  
Will make grey the vows which color their night.*

## Luceat Eis

### I.

i find i am choking on the coin  
    which you left in my mouth  
a premature and useless but appropriate gesture  
for which i thank you.

Signs we have tried on this side--  
Once a great golden bonfire we lit  
all to gain a certain captain's attention  
    but my embers died,  
and returned as moths  
    only to fly disgruntled  
to find the effigy untouched and cold.

"But what reason do you have to complain so?" she asks,  
    and no more expects an answer  
    than she understands my pain.  
And she could not withstand my pain  
anymore than i could withstand hers.  
Our torments are handtailored for the individual.

You see i see her chains, just as  
    i see she sees mine.  
She has gone to the trouble of polishing hers,  
and look at how they shine!

If you must wear it, i guess you can be proud of it.  
    i suppose i will go to sleep  
        and try to feel better.

### II.

The chosen ones have left their cars by the side of the roads  
and the authorities tow them away before  
we can find the universal half-truth  
    perhaps in the glovebox,  
    perhaps in the floorboard, under the tracts  
                                and the empty beer bottles:

Life is the only true sacrifice  
    the only true martyrdom left to us.  
    The only true saints are those who hurl themselves  
    upon the knowledge before it could destroy us all.







## Highway 15, Heading North

I missed my exit  
because I was thinking of you.  
This did not give me more  
than a moment's hesitation  
and a fifteen minute detour  
but all was well  
for the sights were worth seeing and  
I was in no hurry.

Later, on my path again,  
I remembered something that I had left unsaid  
forgotten in the casual flow of conversation  
from the night before.  
I had a grasp on it now,  
and turned to your place in the passenger seat  
to relate it to you.  
But, of course, you were not there  
you were seventy miles to the south instead  
and the distance growing.  
This gave me pause,  
but still it was no cause for alarm.  
I kept moving.

Later still, still on the path,  
I passed the waterfall  
you know the one  
the little one just beyond the county line?  
It is very small,  
not more than a notion really,  
but still a beautiful memory of rainfall  
descending the mountain.  
Still, the thought struck me:  
That there was no one  
I would rather see it with than you.  
That's when I knew:  
That I am lost.  
I am truly lost.



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