

WORLD WITHOUT END

I love you.

Images of a sweet face in that swampy, preconscious hour
As I make the steep ascent from sleep.

I sleep, but my heart waketh.

Vistas of holding,
Enfolding, availing, delighting,
Fingertips tracing the soft braille of the night.

Thou whom my soul lovest.

The sky is shouting hallelujahs as the sun sinks;
The river answers, gives of itself, in a glittering flood.

Thou hast ravished my heart, beloved.

Arms strained wide,
I try to encompass, to take you to me.
I track you in cloud chambers,
Scan you through reflectors and refractors.
Elusive One.
Not a single grassy acre can my heart contain.

Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my love; thou hast ravished my heart.

Dear One. Old friend.
Bursting heart surfacing in my breast again,
Spout of salt tears, gush of breath.
Your breath sounding, breaking from the depths.
Intimate beyond all knowing amongst the stretches of vastness.

My beloved is mine, and I am hers.

You other herds, natives of my broad plains.
Tusks like the white edge of the moon amongst the dim firs.
Out of their own luminous telos, wolves harass you,
In spite of your hugeness.
You seek sanctuary, and instead, like many after you,
Find everlastingness, in the fastness of ice.

Behold thou art fair, my love, behold thou art fair.

Descendents of those Old Ones, still manifest,
Still patrolling the world's perimeters.
Harried now by jaws devoid of telos,
Machines that might be seen, rolling, gleaming,
Over closing-in horizons.
To you I swear, if you file down the spiral track into extinction,
I will follow in your steps.
I will not live in the outerness of the world
When its inner grooves are shattered.

Do I disappoint you, refuse you?

No, no. I embrace you, on any terms,
As long as the wind still prowls the land at night,
And a star rises.
But can I live, can I still lift up my eyes to the hills,
In the midst of such absences?

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, beloved?

Under desert stars a fox barks, circling the camp, disconsolate,
Gripped by a hauntedness unknown in the far-off hedgerows
Of his origins.

Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, unto me.

A kangaroo returns to its high place to watch skies blaze.
Throughout the land there are such worn patches
Commanding wide views of the west.
The quiet ones are drawn to them as daylight ebbs.
Oh gentle tribes, who are you, you who, alone of the folk,
Sit dark-eyed contemplating earth and sky?

Speak to me, beloved. Let me hear thy voice.

Into the gorge I walk, thinking to meditate.
Into the pink hall of rock, with red striations high above.
A river brims from desert plains in flood.
I enter, ready to perform with my mind feats of attunement.
But the gorge is already deep in thought,
And I, along with purple winter blooms and white eucalypts,
Am part of its infinitely wiser musings.

Rise up my love, my fair one, for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

Saltbush plains of my childhood,
You whose emptiness provides, at the end,
A greater plenitude than the layered forest, the lilting lake.
I pass through you today in a fast train,
But it is my own heart that I traverse in haste.
I gaze from the window,
Needing decades, lifetimes, to find my way home.

Whither is my beloved gone, O thou fairest, whither is my beloved turned aside.

Beside the freeway, the great lake,
Imprint of the Rainbow Serpent,
Radiates forgiveness.
On its mown banks,
The old folk, dusky in their swans' plumes, faithfully raise their cygnets.
The young ones find fulfilment in their patch of sun,
Not questioning the stream of runners, walkers, cyclists
Through their place of dreaming,
Nor the nearby roar of another kind of torrent.

Many waters cannot quench love, dearest, nor can floods drown it.

On the beach of a nearby island, seals slumber
To the tune of outboard motors and amplified music.
A ferry nudges right up to the water's edge, but do they care?
Not a flipper stirs.
Were not the antarctic rookeries more anarchic than this?
What is it to them that the discord here
Is of human, not Nature's, making?
Does the penguin who makes its nest beneath the painted steps
Not bless this human contrivance on its dunes?
Oh happy island, whose dreaming encompasses
Speedboats and native beings!

O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice.

Could it all be thus?
Could we weave our handiwork back into the pattern of Creation?
Oh love, I pray that it may be so, though my heart misgives me.
Oh love, I pray you, upheave yourself, rain down on us,
Till we are constrained to find a way.

The flowers appear on earth, beloved. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs.

In time the wild duck runs to my hand,
Seeking not only bread, but the moment of meeting.
Even the turtles in the backyard surrender to touch.

Expectant, they crane out of the mint bush at the sound of my step.
What is this imperative to which every living thing,
However bereft its origins of friendship,
Responds?
Might we not after all, the lion and the lamb, the entire clan,
At the end of the day,
When the hunting and mating and staking of claims is done,
Lie side by side?
Were we never banished from the Garden perhaps?
Is there a law which transcends the contingencies of matter
And casts its shadow faintly in our hearts as love?

Rise up my love, my fair one. The voice of the turtle is heard in the land.

Spring.
I lie in high grass beneath the great Cape Lilac in its early bloom.
Our bed is green, beloved.
A thousand sun-drunk flies add their hum
To the back yard's hymn
Of praise.
Our ducks clamour to greet me.
Already replete, I pluck and eat snow peas off the jubilant vine.

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so art thou, my beloved, unto me.

Garden or wilderness?
Which is your pleasure, dear one?
The noon sun in the singing meadow, or the twilit thicket?
Do our attentions, when properly tuned to your rhythms and cycles,
Gratify or depress you?
Can we hold our heads proud and high, we women, your lovers,
Or is our task to stem the tide of torment,
And then retire ourselves,
Inviting wilderness to hide again your violated loveliness?

The vines with the tender grape give a good smell, do they not, love?

Have we anything to offer, dear one, any boon or true bestowal?
What is it, what is it, that we are meant to give?
Our material legacies, our bodies, our shit?
Yes, yes, precious gifts indeed.
Bury me in the topsoil.
And I pledge to make my excrement a bed for lilies.
But these leavings cost you exceedingly, my love.
We revive the courtesy of return, perhaps.
But can our voices swell the bounteous singing?
Can we add our special handful to the shower of blessings?

Speak to me, beloved.

Is this love that rushes towards the rim to meet you
A main thread in the inwardness of things?
Without it would the great externality loosen and unravel?
Is it our purpose to see and say that the world is good?
And could we have seen this and said it, beloved,
While you seemed indubitable?
Are we being fashioned to speak the word
That will sustain the planets in rotation,
The expansion of the orb of space?
I do not know.
I stand with hands dangling empty at my sides.
I have no wisdom bequeathed to me by ancestors.
The stars are equivocal, and around me
Nature is in sorest travail, weeping.

I love you.

**This is the only sacred word in my keeping.
This is the last trace,
The last print in our hearts' waste,
Of the migration of a thousand traditions,
A thousand embodiments of wisdom.
I stand with my useless hands,
And out of the transparency of my poverty
I offer you this, my single gift.**

Who art thou that looketh forth, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?

**Do you doubt me, dearest.
Do you mistrust a lover who romances you,
Who refuses your harsh truths?
I do not refuse. I know you, love.
I have heard the cries within the stillness of the wilderness,
The ripping of live flesh.
We act shocked,
But we recognize it with such inwardness,
It permeates our sense of being.
'Hello violence, my dear friend.'
And fear, and terror.
'Greetings, old friends, ancient ones.'
I embrace you.
My love feeds as hungrily on darkneses
As it does on illuminations.**

I will rise now and go about the city in the streets; in the broad ways I will seek her whom my soul loveth.

**Do you mock me, beloved?
Do you think I do not see that you are here, within this maze?
That as the forests fall, your wildness infiltrates our very midst?
Those who turn away from cities, seeking you,
In fact retreat from life.
What they seek is rustic peace and quiet,
Not the sexy diversity, complexity and unexpectedness
Of you, my love.
Unsentimental, you rise, bright-eyed,
From the tailings of the blackened land.
You wax most willing, most fecund, and most dangerous,
In the very citadels of your assailants.
Accepting this, we break the fatal cycle that has laid you waste.
Your terms are tough, beloved,
But I strive to meet them.**

My beloved is mine and I am hers; she feedeth among the lilies.

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