Who by Water
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For Colin

SAMPLER
Half by Half We Sleep

On this eve of nativity
twined lovers stranded high
above tideline on shore
of age-stroked stones a gift,
a present each to each

beneath far rainbow doubly born
of brine, cord cast uncut
into blue noon like diadem
of neonate studded with news
to shake the snow-streaked hills

– and half by half we sleep
watched over by the same veiled nurse
and half by half we wake
to the becoming of the universe.
Tide Turn

April sea running blind
to or from the sun, skirts
filled with light,
to give or take in
their first kiss, to
turn the tide on
double bliss
twice tumbled
twins in ecstasis
strand ruched high
ribbed low by lunar love, no
if and why and when,
first ebb then flow –
only the stone-eyed
viking seal, high-proved,
ruddered, rowed
rocked dry and
riding time knows
pinioned
momentum,
vertigo,
rode heave of water
in the womb, moon-
clutched dominion
of neither now nor
then or come or go.
Home Again from Long Ago

Home again from long ago
to narrow sparrow-romped close,
honeysuckle laden lane, to wild
white rose and fledgling
fluttered lilac.

Home from flatland exile, wind-spun
horizon without end, to mountain
uttered song deeper and darker
than histories, jasmine’s
night shining stars
falling, caught in the cobweb
breath of coming wish come true, spanning night’s secret
rendezvous, northerly ice
calling the tune
of whale locked in some rocky
cave beyond the bay where rain
veils hamlets humped and grey,
remote as memory, lost as
the coracle.

Home again from then, when
childhood’s footstep led away
across the rambling railway track,
ever to climb the flower-fled,
the flower-bled embankment back.
The Mystery of Glass

My sister has gone outside now.
I do not know if she feels the rain,
sees ragged crow dragging his
frayed feet above the field,
smells clover mead reigned
over by brown kye, crown-
uddered as queens.

Perhaps she walks the clouded hill
with me, watches the firth evaporate,
the crags disintegrate,
the undulating land whisper
its muted antiphon from crypt
to misted crypt crouching
between cached sunshine –

captured between
yes and yes,
a russet hind
hugging tarnished
gorse edge –

maybe she stops to thrust her thumb
into the foxglove maw,
eager to silence that mauve throat
for now or evermore,
its prescience, its deadly
digitalis roar, or runs ahead
to meet the many-faced magenta stare
of rose-bay willow-herb stabbing
honeysuckle-crept floor
where mitred felix mas
waves tawny-haired
munificence, broadcasting
dusky spoor where thrush
scatters her ashy unsung song,
soothsaying robin
and slight wren run;

or waits beside harebell-rung
verge where dreamy dissemblies
spin of thistle’s burnt-out stars
to watch the swallows harvesting
their dancing wheat-flung
fare in leaping pas de chat,
unearthly, sown in air –
wing

as she
sliding
severing
light diving
dividing
shuddering stalk
from flower a-gawp,
lisping
its scented song
of where
colours
come from

or leaf
in bright diatribe
against the wind's
wild cry
of coming rain,
beside itself
with life

in love
with clandestine
flow of time
hunting oblivion
for fragments
of itself
rain

kissing the street, the
earth, the unforgiving stain,
veil of heaven-sent
remorse, or grief,
missing seen
crystal through
crystal to
crystal bead
upon the ground

a bird
a memory of flight
or origin of height
higher than soprano
shift of tongue, a
touch alit upon
by notes and shine,

into the citrus throat
of toadflax slides
a drop of sky,
parched calyx swallows
wept rebirth
preserving it
until some quaking sun
in passing snaps
and slakes its thirst –

giving and taking
is all we know –
tell me a teardrop
from its wild cousin,
tell me the truth.

(I waited
and you did not come.
Outside a bird
sang my obliteration,
rain fell unendingly
it seemed; night
came and went
and day reconvened

and again I was excluded. Entrances
and exits were made, instructions issued
and laws obeyed; I saw the endless carnival
repeat itself and all of life was spectacle.
Here is the meaning: truth
does not come round again
but is the very constant sustenance.
Do we describe the peril that we do not know
but by hunger and enforced abstinence?

Breaking the bond with fear
is agony. All is still in here.
The clock enunciates its
mannered order, as pre-planned,
as if shared dream
was waking certainty;
the potent march of minutes manned

against contingency. A web
of terror holds in place
the chair, the wall,  
the lacquered carapace.  
A scream defies the law  
whereby each atom may flee  
in sudden preference for east,  
yet each door opens  
upon a furnished void  
declaiming its deficiency;  
a silent plea for warmth,  
occupancy to interrupt  
the rage spanning each mute  
relationship from ledge to pane.
pain

Today she is tired, 
fatigued, she says, 
and in the mirror 
above the mantelpiece 
watches the parade, 
the busy business of the street: 
devoid of destination, delayed, 
foiled by a double act of light 
obedient to her need for 
more time. The day 
is weeping. She waits, 
kept in abeyance 
by the steepness of the stair, 
the self-absorption 
of the cat, the sapphire 
surface of a tile, square sunlight 
listing jasmine. Her 
husband is not there. 

She waited. Rain 
crept down 
the window pane 
as wept 
across porcelain 
cheek of denied 
Madonna, 
led by light, 
sky white 
holding 
her son 
oh 
lacryma 
sistere.
then

Back then, great-grandfather built his world of glass (thirteen children and every one survived) a shard for every living joy ('the higher up the mountain, the greener grows the grass') recalcitrant boy sent upstairs to his room ('the more a donkey wags his tail the more he shows his…') the maid reports to master. Heart pierced, he knew (the higher up the mountain) what his lad saw through. It was his vocation. The wonder of it, not solid nor quite a-flow, the wealth of it (a bell-pull in every room), slow vitrification, great heat, the memory of sea, stealthy, manifold solitudes coalescing yet not admitting night, keeping faith with some forgotten law transmitted by the tide. Looking up, he saw where it all began: a glittering cascade, a shuddering, dissembling
span of spectra shattered
in song not of some
wayward child but
belonging to everyone.
I was his granddaughter’s
darling, her coveted one,
the one she saw in the mirror
each time of day,
each way she looked at me
I was descended from her truth,
the loved, the pirouetting lie
they told. I saw it too.
I was the one
who looked away
and now I am on the street
shuffling like time along
its grey meridian,
my sister somewhere near,
and she whose womb we knew
in great old age lets go
a sudden flood of blood
as if reliving maidenhood,
and then grows young again,
regains vitality, and neither
nurse nor doctor can divine
disease or calculate a cause –

it was her memory,
tripped by the spotted
wally-dog upon her windowsill,
the faded wooden babushka
monitoring her decline from atop
the tv set, the bed that cantilevers
up and down. Trapped
daughters in her lap,
hiding behind her apron,
trying on her headscarf
in the dark, tap,
tapping to come out.

At last we spoke.
‘The atmosphere,’ she said,
‘of one’s mind changes.’
I said, ‘Don’t look at
what I wear.’ She said,
‘Do I recall correctly