

Sea Table

ALSO BY KELVIN CORCORAN

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TCL

The Next Wave

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Melanie's Book

When Suzy Was *

Your Thinking Tracts or Nations

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Roger Hilton's Sugar

Backward Turning Sea *

Hotel Shadow *

For the Greek Spring *

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Kelvin Corcoran

Sea Table

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WORDS THROUGH A HOLE
WHERE ONCE
THERE WAS A
CHIMPANZEE'S FACE

GOING DOWN

Book 11

And when I was down there
this was in my mind
even though I was not.

The unnumbered dead
the blurred and breathless dead
brides and young men and old men.

Massing for blood honey sweet
the nations of the dead and you
sifting through my hands – a shadow.

Lee has sent me a book – *The Wonder Book of Wonders*. On the cover a deep sea diver in a weighted suit sets to work with an acetylene torch, as fish swim by and submarine plants waver. There's an accompanying note, 'I found it in a second-hand bookshop in Harlech and immediately fell in love with the amazing cover. It's in fairly good condition, except on page 88 someone has cut out the face of the chimpanzee. Hmm.'

wet season
most for
animals earth
Herr Forelegs

I think I grew up in fear
my dad's alcoholic behaviour
unpredictable and cruel,
you never knew which way it would fall;
– well, it sharpened the wits
but wore out the heart.

*

And indeed the male chimpanzee
makes a family nest in a tree
and sleeps under the shelter on guard
he dreams of words through a hole.

*

In the darkening room Pat
– how come you make me talk Pat?
– I don't know, I really don't,
it just happens that way.

I was blind and suffered some short term memory loss because that area of the brain was hit by the blood clot. I was unconscious, then raving and had to be told what happened because I've no memory of it.

It's a trauma for the brain to handle, I know how it feels. I can see fine, with some colour confusion – bright reds and pinks drain to bronze – but with greater clarity, oddly, though the world is busy, intricate surfaces invading my eyes. Unexpected harsh sounds hurt and I see the noise.

Apparently I vomited copiously and kept shouting – help me, help me. I kicked out at the equipment around the bed. – You kicked out like a horse in a box. Apparently I would only do what Melanie said. I shouted – Tell that fucking man to stop fucking shouting. There was only me shouting, perfect. I babbled random numbers.

I saw faces floating over faces unseeing. Held out a hand to you, touching your nose and mouth, and said – This is your face isn't it? 4 a.m.

Brian emailed. – If you're well enough for me to make the journey. I will try to ensure my face doesn't assume a default setting of concern, although my face has but two default settings. You don't want to see the other one.

*

I like to think of Lee sitting at the window of his flat in Brighton, marine light making shallows of the high ceiling. He turns to page 88 in mild surprise at the absence of the chimpanzee's face. – oh.

*

Herr Forelegs waits at the door
a lurking confident bastard
his shirt of bloody platelets
his heart like a fist – bastard.

*

The greatest risk of another stroke is during the four weeks following the first. Two weeks to go. The ABCD2 model also suggests the odds are with me. Cold cold prose, clear as day. Come on you anti-coagulants – take these chains from my heart and set me free.

Sentenced to Wonder

An open air church in California.

The marvel of bird migration.

A lifting magnet empties a truck-load of iron scrap.

The Vatican is a wonderful city in itself.

Air is practically a non-conductor of electricity.

A temple of the Doric order in the heart of civilisation.

The helmet and chin strap are composed entirely of bees.

Pompeii was a sort of Roman Brighton.

The victor ends by tearing her opponent in pieces and eating most of
the body.

Many keen brains are at work on the problem.

A man in a weighted diving suit,
acetylene torch in hand makes wrecks fit to float.

The air's pumped in and she rises,
barnacled guns and Kitchener dancing a jig.

But see she floats grey and mighty,
big as a town, ready for salvage.

*

John Coltrane bends time
Bach straightens it out again;
stay with me boys
be at my side, my left and my right.

*

A recording of *The Text of Shelley's Death*.
Alan adds a note, – it might seem an odd gift,
but no, it's perfect.
To be avoided:
– romantic sailors
– romantic sailor poets
– death bed confessions
– sea bed confessions
– boats.

*

Ian's voice recognised
a back bearing shared
small town boys foot it
a blink in the world.

Herr Forelegs made his smell,
– Do you really mean to keep fighting this?
On the other side of seeing
in the crowded darkness, you belong to me.

I can wrinkle the world in front of your eyes
make the familiar unfamiliar,
spit you out like gristle
like a knuckle bone, like nothing.