

Perihelion

Also by Sarah Law:

Bliss Tangle (Stride, 1999)

The Lady Chapel (Stride, 2003)

Perihelion

S a r a h L a w

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with thanks to Katie

A CLUTCH OF MONSTERS

for Neil

FAKE

You ancient doll. Your wax film of a face
careers across the living room and fills
my vision. I am caught in a breathless womb,
pulse at the plastic yoke your body builds
and am hungry for clouds. I think we sit in rows,
half-hearted as the smoke seeps under doors,
hedging the onus of more leadership. I won't
if you don't first. Misery's twin. My friend.
In shops or in the chapel it's the same:
everywhere an idol doing nothing in the finery
of death. The glass cracks in the dawn and scuppers
defences of pepper spray, rock salt, dew;
and what you feared to love was what you knew;
they offer me a twist of daffodil.

DUELLIST

Burnt bird in a rich fruitcake. Your block
is in unlocking universal gestures; bad seeds spiral
in the trickle of evil grease you use to oil
phantoms, seasons. Blame the lonely malcontent.
He wants what has intrinsically been lost. The innocent
intent of speech has got all bent, and I
daren't engage. My attitude is nude; I join
the stranger on his quest. And then the fiddle is
within myself, love griddled on a disc, all
my doing if the power shorts us out, not all
my friends condone the bleach, the whiteout segment.
A patch, a yin-yang pattern in a cup; the black
is part of therapy, smelling of wretched ether,
cuts a desert dash, my own flash choice.

SPARE PART

I have a precious metal lover. He's a child of ice,
wearing brands about his stubborn body. I
hoover up the splinters from his tomb, use them
to cut a new name on my arm. Into your vein
the snowflakes flow. You stretch and lumber along.
It's later, I'm watching the box and my dress slips down,
and everything puckers. Don't replace the part,
whistle for rats, or aggravate a war: I siphon
blue fluid and watch your small heart float; Mr
electric circuit, you're a jerk. Fist on the console,
sympathy's an allergen, an unscrewed iris, your
attitude's enough to block a lift shaft. Let's
do it in the tunnel with that time bomb on your back.
Credits crackle, rolling on in silence.

PEPPER POT

A blistering hump rolls over the hill.
Stasis commands us. I'm hooked. I can't move.
You fall and are booked by a terrible glare. This
is my nightmare and its residue. Here, a stalk
is the sum of fatality, waving crazily under a hat
that's cast by a boffin, a dodger, a mystery man:
my job to try and follow if I can. And you communicate
essential supremacy to these young worlds, herding
slaves up your radioactive tower, down your burning chute.
Once we were perfect. Dictionary race. And then
you put your finger on the one invented word,
released the raw body of a sword, lay
sweating in the rupture of projected end-it-all:
two live wires, in hands that never touched.

STONE

Must live. Calcified god in your anchorhold,
one cracked hand is brooding under rubble,
cupped to receive the breast of a companion.
Take my form into your fractured strands, and
bloom like coral. I'm captivated by your crystal hips,
see how we fit, the one into the other. Tessellation of desire.
We move through the chemical nave and are wed,
policy documents swimming in the cloud. But love—
your lips leak an alien language, your rough-shod
frequency pierces my temple; I fall out of faith.
Your carbuncles accrue, your middle thickens, I
can't see myself in the glitter so trip to the void,
force you to roar for that old bliss of empire, lost
to a thunderous grace on a once proud screen.

FETISH

Skull rapping vision. Pulse in the waste of time,
pinch it in, hit me with it. I remember a child who stood
before the glass cabinet, that Neanderthal cranium
soothingly irrelevant. Not so now, the archetype is
singing, this scientist gleams at the crux of taxonomy:
it all comes in time. Threaten as your face contorts,
your palm stuck to mine, no wave of a king on his mission
to resign. Fall to the floor and declare your idea.
All these people get the message, circle my skins,
think I'm sweet. Out of my golden lids destruction pours.
Remember me once, twice, as your vintage, my sleep
is almost as endless; wrap me in billows and bags
and I'll brandish a rock solid amulet, crumble you,
dunk my gestalt in a hot witch's brew.

CHIVALROUS

Your reverberations are unique. They pain
the arc of my ribs where the memories crowd
and flood. Two axes rear and strike, slow pro-
grammed to hold sense in abeyance. I slide
through a mirror; my skin gives the lie. Those
knights are slumped in cobweb glamour, we
are caught in the spell and tongue each secret,
each drugged wafer, turn in the slot of
gothic bodies, craving enslavement. My echo
is prophetic. Your toppled goblet spills the deal,
and what I learn from you is only real in stark
white transit. Blast this need to move beneath you.
I'm weak. I raise a war against the gateway,
fantasising how you'll slam me down.

EVOLUTIONARY

Look at how I try to talk to you. Spindling
fingers at the collar of your body, eyes
green and gleaming for a meal. Lover, you step
aside and raise the standard. How your faith
is solid and platonic, shielding me. But I'm polluted
into becoming young again, the blue pool
swirls through slits of time and punishes us.
I wish I'd said. I wish I'd said the word.
Thus a combustion and the slur of tears.
Marbles roll out of my unpacked bag. Sand the plane
and fit the windows in my ball and chain.
Now listen to my attitude of doubt; it liberates
a louche desperation. Gills and gasps proliferate.
I try to surface after it's too late.

DIGNIFIED

Noblesse refracted in the scale of grace,
you fighter with an icy mercy. I desire
to join your ranks. I'm grateful for my exile,
tuned to a dance on the moon's crater,
transported in a solitude. Tones signal
your masked arrival, and I turn the corner,
utter the conquered word. Your fabled force
is bliss on my skin, as I slip the noose of thoughts,
float in the air, enact an attitude of trance.
Who's the master after the fact: that foam
slathers the earth as you thirst for home;
and take my snowy back as further proof,
and clutch the pick of fractures from the past,
and chill me like a relic in a glass.

PARISIAN

Darling, you are divided like a king.
The art that kept these centuries intact
copies for us now the vital moments.
You, in your suit, crash-landing in ink
as each woman wrings her hand, reflects
that the dive has nothing on a platform,
a roundly stopped clock, a schoolgirl's hat.
There's a chicken in the basement.
Nothing is stable. Ascetics are marching
through this sumptuous city, arresting
silvered eyes and swathes of waist.
One day you order this; a genius paints
my face in afterglow, and your wealth is sealed
in this room with its bloom of hidden veins.