

SAMPLER

*The Sleepwalkers*

ALSO BY WILL STONE

POETRY

*Glaciation* – Shearsman Books (2015; 1st edition,  
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*Les Chimères* – Gérard de Nerval – Menard Press (1999)  
*To The Silenced – Selected Poems of Georg Trakl* – Arc Publications (2005)  
*Journeys* – Stefan Zweig – Hesperus Press (2010)  
*Rilke in Paris* – Rainer Maria Rilke & Maurice Betz  
– Hesperus Press (2012)  
*Selected Poems of Emile Verhaeren* – Arc Publications (2013)  
*Nietzsche* – Stefan Zweig – Hesperus Press (2013)  
*On the End of the World* – Joseph Roth – Hesperus Press (2014)  
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Will Stone

*The  
Sleepwalkers*

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and my cherished parents.

But paradise is locked and bolted...  
We must make a journey around the world  
to see if a back door has perhaps been left open.

Kleist

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*For my parents, the loved ones...*

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I

You walk upon corpses, beauty, undismayed...

Baudelaire

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## The Sea off De Haan

Silent now in darkness  
are the marram grasses.  
With stillness as sustenance  
only the cicadas sound.  
The black sea moves blindly,  
a body turns, awakens slowly  
like something beginning to burn.  
Always the precipice, the abyss  
always the curling lip of the falls,  
always the mind seen slipping away.  
Solitary walkers on the silver shore,  
a dog shape that cavorts, lovers  
forced apart by the moon's  
strengthening blade of bone.  
Out there patrols the immensity  
with its sheathed claw of beauty.  
Have no fear of the child to come.  
A place is held in dawn's aquarium  
for our last ripple, our final  
tail fin twist.

## Balloon Ride

Silent and smoothly darkened  
pass the baskets, with the strange  
reluctance of evening doves.  
A last flight swept by flame roars,  
space seen and space missed for  
the beautiful sadness of the balloon  
signing God's acre, the ochre wheat  
and shadow on the foliage as it drifts  
westwards then east, closer or away  
like the riders' lives dangling beneath,  
charcoal to the moon's chalk smudge  
and thin cries that fell to our garden  
and lay on the table like browning petals.  
Conjured from day's offcuts, the newly  
enchanted passed over us, somehow  
maintaining their footing on death's  
loosening scree.

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## The Bear of Bern

It's a perfect circle  
compass-measured by man,  
where the bear lives.  
Concrete is the lip of the pit  
over which the freshly enthralled  
fling their nuggets of fruit,  
so he might catch them in mid air,  
standing up like a seal for a ball  
swaying on his henge hindquarters,  
power still, but theatrical, vulnerable  
a half-naked general no one believes in,  
waiting for his uniform.

The bear is beckoning down  
the harvest of shrieks and gasps,  
the reviving burst of juice  
as his crone tooth works the fruit,  
then all this repeats,  
shadowing the sadness of a wave  
against the dark sea wall.

The young mothers grip their infants,  
rest them on the balustrade  
above the bear's great half-senile head,  
so they kick their feet, mewl and drool  
as his giant paw pads slap the wall  
then like collapsing soil, he falls  
and with blunt claw scratches  
the floor for errant raisins.

Now he's up again, and the growth  
on his neck swings like a leather pouch

and he leans like an old tree  
weighing its chances in the first  
scout breezes of an oncoming storm.  
Then suddenly he sits down, head up,  
noble as a dusk-combed mountain.  
But they do not see, nor do they feel  
how deep this pit, how long the fruit  
takes to fall...

The pitted muzzle sweeps testily  
from side to side, the eyes they thought  
lifted from a fairy-tale turn a deeper black,  
disappear abruptly into the boulder head,  
a pride glimpsed, power half drawn,  
then a great weariness, he slumps down  
the blade remains sheathed, the raisins fall.

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## The Sleepwalkers

For one last night of song  
they ascended the sacred hill  
where, like a vessel waiting to sail  
over black woods and ochre fields  
that immense inverted crypt of stone,  
the Madeleine, swallowed them all.  
Till dawn their burly wave bore down  
and eddies of chant lapped at the door.  
They sang unwearying, and in the houses,  
sleepless, they cursed.

At dawn the singing mass spilled  
onto the grey rose tinged square  
Invalids they pushed in barrows  
and the mad, with colours of all nations  
like feathers in their hair. They sang on,  
faces flushed with conviction  
and began their descent  
down the dark pipe of silent villagers,  
incandescent faith, unstoppable  
the lava forged its course  
and the square was empty but for  
a speechless sun and the abbey  
now held by the air alone, like  
a honeycomb released of its worker load.  
The double doors swung closed  
and the monks furtively returned  
like svelte swallows to a cliff,  
from the alleys and tortuous lanes  
they darted in their dark grey robes,  
while the Ursuline sisters tiptoed  
through their secret tunnel

beneath the road and emerged  
on the lofty terraces of their Eden.

Years passed, then decades  
and the white dust road  
did not darken. Some said  
they heard song in the distance  
and the foreigners had returned.  
But no one came and time  
ground the event into grains that  
slipped through the grates of even  
the keenest memories.

Then war and furious men  
came with hammers and axes to  
relieve the angels of their smiling faces.

The abbey was abandoned and lay  
in ruins. A century passed.

Only doves broke the silence  
rustling around the cloven heads of saints  
and excited swifts left their imprint on  
the stonework of the tower.

The village beneath survived  
and there was death and new life, love, guilt  
envy and power and there was sloth.

In this warren of ever sprouting pulses  
a new breed slowly shaped,

born without the memory of song  
and in time they spread their kind  
through all the neighbouring lands.

Plague did not finish them  
and neither did the floods, they endured  
melting ice, storms and quakes

they just kept coming back, stronger  
like a willingly beheaded plant.

So successful was their wisdom that

today there is no more room for them.  
They point vaguely to other planets  
and sigh for the lost knowledge of  
how to sing together.  
For every evil, they blame each other,  
on how to go forwards or back  
they cannot agree, or decisively act  
for they have still not woken, and  
will never wake from their delicious  
and diverting slumber, this race  
named beyond their sight, by  
those who must soon step in, as  
*The Sleepwalkers.*

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