



# DUET

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I do but read madness.

Clown, *Twelfth Night*

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*These poems were written in collaboration. The first poem was written on 27 March 2014, inspired by the mysterious disappearance of Malaysian plane, MH370, on 8 March 2014. It was carrying 239 passengers. The plane's wreckage was never found.*

*If there's any connection at all to these poems, it is perhaps the mystery of life on our planet. We come up with stories. That's all we can do. These poems mythologize, speak a kind of ineffable love whose essence is both permanence and fragility. In the process, they seem to weave a precious, breakable thread that runs through life and art.*

*The last poem in this collection, dated 20 June 2014, may be viewed simply as part of a piece of tape that had been snipped off.*

*To distinguish authorship, Irene's poem titles are in blue and Christopher's poem titles are in black.*

*Irene Tob*

*I had been missing the unique creativity of poetry duets for some time before Irene from Singapore contacted me about using some of my poems in the first issue of The Red Wolf Journal. We jabbered for a while and decided to try a partnership because we both can write rapidly.*

*Poetry duets work best, I think, as a kind of dialog, not unlike the old haiku orations of the teahouse that were made up on the spot and traded back and forth by poets gathered there of an afternoon. I have written like this before and the work normally fills up with delight for me as the creations flit back and forth like improvisations in some jazz group. Irene and I are on opposite sides of the world. In Singapore, Irene is fifteen hours ahead of me as I write in Oregon City, the end of the Oregon Trail on the Willamette River in Oregon, USA.*

*So that is something to remember about these poems. Whether they are the blue titled poems offered by Irene or the black titled poems offered by me, these poems were produced rapidly. If they are at all rough, they are supposed to be. At least for me, they are a practice, a practice that I hope leads to ever better work. I have no intention of slaving for days and weeks over some magnum opus. Longer than an hour is already far too long for a poem.*

*Christopher Hileman*

Mortals wish to burst time.  
Do I need ask why, you fly?

–Ah, Sunflower

It was fall. The eagle called  
your name after mine

–The Hunt

## We Survey The Wreckage

I haven't tasted the rind. Lemons or oranges.  
Does absence taste like that?  
Zesty? Sourness that goes unnoticed  
being mixed into an opera of flavors.  
So which juice to identify,  
which secretion?

There's the unidentifiable sound.  
Know which one?

All the planes and ships converge  
on a clear day of search.  
Identifiable floating pieces of wreckage  
that remain unidentifiable.  
By now we all know this is no phantom  
wreckage. It remains suspect  
even if already convicted.

As for the missing bodies,  
they're irrecoverable.  
The sea doesn't want to secrete them.  
It absorbs them into darkness,  
absorbs all juices.

## **I So Very Much Love You**

So which secretion  
is yours, from ripeness and sun  
and which mine from sour  
grapes all in a bunch?  
Can I tell the truth at last?  
Or is it likely  
I will fabricate  
yet another cloudy light,  
a foggy fable -

(Interrupted: found  
in the rocks and waves within  
soggy wrack, two bones.)

## My Heart Went Up In Flames

What did you want me to say?  
That we had barely touched.  
That I heard a frosty roar  
and all that remains becomes  
an act of alchemy—grafting  
grief which none called for.

That the light has come after  
doused fire. My hair aflame.  
Amongst the rocks and waves,  
two bones, cerebral white.  
He wiped my wet calves flecked  
with grit. I felt whole again.

## **The Apparition's Regret**

That we barely touched  
seems odd to me now  
and the jet way's roar through glass  
was not that constant.  
Neither then was I  
for you were too hot, all fire  
and me shrinking back  
from your smoky hair.  
I was at a loss that time  
though usually  
I knew how to treat  
my lovers. It's a strange thing  
but I flew off. Then  
the bottom dropped out  
and I smacked surface tension.

## Ah, Sunflower

Would you die again, and again?  
Mending that aftermath–shiver  
your toes? When the bowl turned to  
face the sun, then I remember.  
After Blake, I followed a stream,  
packed liquid gold; heavenly sill.

Mortals wish to burst time.  
Do I need ask why, you fly?  
Kiss upon my brow so I sigh  
and root in you as if it's  
some divine plan brought to  
heal this growl. Kneel I will.

## Find God In Sunflowers

What were his quatrains  
increased by two, two hexes  
of lines. They nearly  
rhyme as you call Blake  
to your side to build your case  
and show me my love  
in spite of my rush  
for the door.

I shall burst time.  
I meant to do that  
long before we met.  
I don't fear your kiss, nor mine  
but confess I fear  
the hot lips of God.

## Heaven Is A Deacon

There you go, Christ, pope, deacon,  
putting a hex on our magic,  
getting all messianic about  
purgatory, catapulting women into  
sirens, once you've achieved your  
catharsis, your leap of faith.

There we go, building small  
snowstorms. All the white expanse  
that shovels a path to heaven.  
What is heaven except in stooping  
to sweet apples fallen? Sphere  
an Edenic fruit: to know is heaven.

## Apples In The Light

I'm no messiah!  
Talk about purgatory.  
I take no leap now  
nor did I, I say,  
puffing all up about it.

Peace: How can I show  
the cotton rose clouds  
what lies above my green scene?  
Clouds do yearn for us.

Oh you sleek of pelt  
and flash of eyes - suns and moons  
adorn your twisty  
ways with sweet apples,  
your far curves with drops of gold  
called down from heaven.

## A Cumulous Dream

You take no leap now.  
So we lie here cloud-watching,  
watching geese fly.  
The orange marinade of sky  
washes over us. Perhaps we're  
in a boat, paddling a ripple.  
This trumps long oblivion.  
Rapturous silky tongues licking  
wood-fire. Kindling. Redness of  
masala fish tingling. I forget  
where we were. Trees listening.  
We've come to a mooring.

## The Flock

The geese took my hope  
but handed it back  
demanding bread, yellow beaked  
with slobbering rims,  
goose tongues loose, pointed  
my way and I'm glad  
I have some old crumbs.

I count over forty geese  
all lined up aiming  
at me with coal black  
(I should say obsidian)  
eyes.

Why they gave me  
back my hope, I don't  
know. But it smells of goose oil,  
of warm mother geese  
and I find I don't  
mind the feathers, not at all.

## A Moon's Tutorial

I've been through the madness  
of a truant moon. Its flank  
grew thin, a mockingbird sang  
on a wooden spike, as I fed  
it bread. In the pond, geese  
made a noise like rain.

I had none left to give.  
It was gray. Down the road,  
a man was feeding the geese.  
It was you. The church bell  
rang. Shadow of a rabbit in  
a skirmish. Stars came out.

## **Walking The Fat Rabbit**

I saw you approach  
with our rabbit in harness  
and three cats trying  
to figure what that  
fat white hopping thing could be.  
They circled around  
you both and came close  
one by one only to go  
out of range again.  
I could see their thoughts  
in their twitching tails and eyes  
and I thought, we are  
like this, dealing with  
this new creature between us  
even in harness.

## Making Music

I could hardly walk today.  
Sodden with praise, you know,  
for this new creature.  
I'm heady. When I stretched out  
my arms, and twirled so much,  
it's as if I'm memorizing you.

There isn't a single strain  
you can separate. It's all  
knotted up in your throat  
and comes out as music.  
Even if all discordant,  
straying from the mean.

## **It's Always Like This**

The geese took me down  
then nibbled my edges off,  
all of them on me  
as if I was some rock  
or pile of mud packing worms.

Off a ways, there's you  
dancing without care  
as if it's all the same thing  
rain or shine, moon, sun  
haloes of rainbows  
and pots of wee folk spun gold.

Not a single strain  
to separate us  
this music of geese and dance  
and twirling discord  
but I've no more bread  
for geese - and just words for you,  
dancer in the day.

I'm far too smelly,  
in need of a wash. Those geese  
were not ready for  
this no more bread shit.

## Earthy Things

The invocation to geese is  
my guileless art, so let's  
now put on another livery.  
That of leaves and roots,  
mud and winnowing wind  
along an alpine route.

But what of ghosts? That's  
an old alphabet you tossed  
like corpses into the river.  
You do smell odorous tonight  
if you'd forgive my saying.  
Smelt earth. It's killing me.

## **Moving Right Along**

It's all so feudal,  
this change of my livery  
and I guess yours too,  
as if you could just  
tell the tiger to change his spots.

I heard some guy say  
(trying to stay dry)  
he could hold his finger up  
a tiger's ass for  
one damn day. I doubt  
he really meant to try  
such a stupid thing.

And yes what of ghosts  
and goddesses for all that?  
What of mud and wind  
and the winnowing  
of souls? You are not guileless.  
That's far from your shape,  
not in the hills nor  
down here in the fertile loam,  
nor the final sea.

## Soul Work

You have floored me.  
In the glare, I opened  
the cage. Rabbit hopped out  
then right back in to nibble  
romaine lettuce. Insatiable  
nibbler of leafy things.

In a liver-red, sun-  
embroidered dress, ankle  
deep in unbridled mulch,  
searching for soul that  
eludes. I say, the heart's  
work is never done.

## Squatting On My Heels

The last thing you would  
call me is gaunt. I don't mind.  
If I was all bony  
then could I squat like  
the rest of the world does, flat  
on my heels and butt?

Even underweight  
I could not do that.

I guess  
I'll just decompose  
and shed radical  
weight, leave vile puddles of me  
all over the place,  
become skeletal  
(though I am big boned) and gray.  
maybe then I can.

## Peonies

My first lover was big-boned.  
Solid corporeal flesh, strong  
hands. I liked that. Not a  
skeletal feel, oh no.  
I'm forever pining for  
those hands.

So you're leaving me in  
the muck? Digging for sweet  
tubers in our yard.  
Do not worry, my love.  
Oh won't you look at those  
peonies, stacked blooms?

## **Suspended In The Garden**

I noticed hand prints  
beside the tat on your back,  
darker markings on  
the smooth lighter planes  
I know so well, twenty years  
of real touch and go.

I thought I might stray  
at that but instead I dig  
up tubers looking  
for sign that all's well  
and at least there is no mold  
turning our food black.

The moist mounds of mulch  
that once were mature plantings  
I leave, signs for you.

## Chicken Tonight

The way you love considers  
my breath. The things we do  
carry the simple equation.  
Sometimes I sit in the room  
with you and I cannot leave.  
It is like that now.

When the heavens opened to  
let us through, I didn't know  
as I now know. It seems we're  
breathing the same present.  
We're even living together,  
you calling me to the kitchen.

## **In Your Orbit**

I look back on times  
like the way we cooked chicken  
from scratch, killing them,  
plucking them, cutting  
them all up in choice pieces,  
then frying them in  
the gold green sweet oil  
pressed from our own plump olives.  
That was another  
lifetime, not this one.  
You chose that time for us both.  
I agreed of course.

Now you like the way  
I love as if we were new.  
It's our tenth return,  
at least. I can tell  
that's true from the time scented  
trace you leave on things.

## The Well

The next day we spared no effort  
to dig. This time depending on  
a sense of the water table lying  
beneath, deep welling within.  
Denuded chickens—a new batch—  
hung from hooks to be braised.

Next thing we knew, the rain  
returned. Downing tools, dashing  
to the outhouse. There we touched  
for the first time; there in that  
brief squall, we undressed wet  
gluggy skins. You took me in.

## The Question

Dropped a double hit  
of Acid and dowsed a well -  
over two hundred  
feet down in the rock,  
found it the first time, baby.  
My old friend said that  
to his new girlfriend.  
We sat on his wood plank porch  
and I dreamed of you  
years and years before  
we could meet. I've known this man  
since we roomed at school.  
I asked, how's your wife?

## A New Universe

*Worlds are altered rather than destroyed.*  
–Democritus

I don't know what brought us here  
unpremeditated, this sudden change  
of tide. I was trying to grasp  
something else. You're a whole  
new blessing. Looking through  
an aperture to the ground.

You were telling me how a friend  
had hit the spot when groundwater  
broke. Oh swell. I can't imagine  
how many chickens we killed to  
get to this point, including  
the unaccounted ones.

## A Change Of Scene

Talking to the tide again  
like talking to air  
or to the blue moon,  
courting tough chicken power  
and then you suspend  
the zip detail strap  
in the waterfall to wash  
away the feathers  
of all the dead birds,  
a barrier found, a pleat  
in the swing of things.

A diamond stream,  
your hand raised as a true sign  
of the hope you've gained  
while the sun's unit  
of bright starts to trace your hair.

## Being Together

We began as one unit. The barrier gone.  
You looked at me in the beam  
zipping my hair diamond,  
and we laid suspended in  
all that detail.  
Some wool remained.

Later we went by the end of the pier.  
Strapped together, watching  
the tumble of waterfall. Small  
but powerful, pleating its way  
tough through rough stone.  
The coop's door swung open.

## Someone Left The Door Open

I looked behind us  
using the brass periscope,  
saw the barrier spin  
toward atmosphere  
and the burn up on descent.  
We sit in tandem  
in this junk clunker  
with its glass wool peeking out  
the seams and the squeaks  
and groans a constant.  
I wonder will we make it,  
or go to pieces  
on the way back home?  
Got to shut the chickens in.  
Prolly much too late.

## Adagio

We spun around—crazy moon, red  
moon, river moon—engorged with  
presence. A blinding force  
field of something larger  
fleshing out the shadows  
in our *pas de deux*.

The ground strewn with trumpet  
flowers in pink and white.  
Walking on tissue carpet, asking  
what journey we've partaken,  
as your back turned to drive  
the brown chickens home.

## How Coyotes See It

You say, *pas de deux*  
and I had to look it up  
because I didn't  
want to seem stupid  
though I have heard this French stuff  
all my livelong days.

Something much larger  
than those crazy moon eyed souls  
gnaws on our lines  
of sight. The souls stay  
in the pale shadows while we  
step forth, open ground  
beneath fine furred feet,  
no chickens, not even bones,  
and we howl, oh yes,  
how we harmonize  
shaking the stars til one falls.  
It's dust makes me sneeze.

## Call Of The Wild

I hear howls that intermingle  
and you know I lie under  
the aura of moon. Trespassing  
into the auditory event,  
drawn as to a homing,  
closer to true nature.

This doesn't bode well,  
my other sense tells me.  
The lemony side of self  
who is white as a marshmallow.  
Caught onto root, banking on a  
low sand rise soundly wounded.

## Two Meter Chickens

I am no longer  
too sure which side possibly  
could hold me up now.

If I could get me  
some giant chickens I would  
ride into the void,  
or some bland sunset  
before I hear what comes next.  
Got to get this sand  
out of my damn ears  
where the grit roughens my lobes.

In it all, there's you  
grinning away on  
demon heels sinking straight on  
past my cataract.

## Falling

I took off those wedges that  
made me trip onto a sandbar,  
pulled you right along too.  
Am I so porous? Stroking  
my hair, you're everything  
I've ever dreamed of.

The way you made me feel.  
But we're in a coastal place.  
Liminal, you know, these  
borders between land and sea.  
You're talking chickens tonight.  
I cry thinking you'd let go.

## **I See Your Bruised Knees**

I'm done chasing them.  
The chicken flock has dropped off  
our low limbs and pecked  
all the way up past  
their free range knoll, out of sight  
and whole truth be told,  
out of my long hair -  
farm fowl brushed and combed on out.

I look for that hole  
for you claim there's one  
sadly your own in the tall  
park grass, all while I'm  
sending you scansion,  
free verse, stanzas, dreams  
and illumined tales, edges  
and shoals in deep sea.

## No Harm Done

Truth be told, you melt,  
thrill me like no other.  
You said you're done but  
you're not. Aside, the hole  
is bottomless, walled up  
against, blubbering mostly.

Are you dry-mouthed now?  
You're weary of our tunes.  
Here I am, no Dickinson yet  
you held my hand so we'd  
enter the heavenly realm,  
burst time into flames.

## The Next To Last Line

The shadows my words  
may cast streaming quickly through  
your tropical heart:  
Oh, I'm temperate  
and seasonal. Here spring comes  
after ice and snow  
and leads toward dry  
heat, not monsoon, dust not mold,  
nor humidity.  
Spring itself rains down  
on me and my short hair queen  
while in the next block  
a guy keeps chickens,  
not me. See? Almost done now.

## Spring

After a dry spell, follows monsoon  
showers. The city breaks open.  
Spring-like sakuras everywhere.  
I gloat in happiness. Opened  
a spring trap door.  
It squeaked a little.

The time for frigid temperatures  
to change to smoldering heat.  
The ground thaws out fingers  
of crocuses. Daffodils unfazed  
and yellow. Me, I'm waiting for  
tulips. You're oiling your tendons.

## Haru Sakura

I got a good job  
voice acting your latest part,  
the one you wrote for  
Spring Cherry, the girl  
who broke free of winter ice  
by her own power.

I stand on the side  
with a screen between my voice  
and the microphone  
and speak falsetto  
as comes easy as ever  
and I don't allow  
any more pictures.

Haru Sakura can't be  
a bearded fat man  
of sixty damn eight!

## Not Your Body

Sorry for needling you, my love,  
with a song of spring. I speak  
now through a middle-aged body,  
wonky, still malleable and all  
I could do to stall sag, its  
sail to the sound of foghorn.

Your mind, still unassailable,  
calls to me: pry this interior  
open. You are not your body  
falling apart. That will empty.  
You are gold. Your joy, as is  
sorrow, mine now and forever.

## Posting Along

I ride an old horse  
as best I can warmer days  
as I watch the road  
crack open beneath  
the clip clop of trotting hooves.

Day is done, sun gone  
down, the afterglow  
is just beginning to fade.  
This is fine with me.  
My work too is done.  
I am laying down last words.  
That is what I do.

I call on people,  
hold them close for no reason.  
I smile at the moon  
with no plans at all.  
The goddesses give me songs.  
Daddy god conducts.

## Rethinking Myth

For a while all roads led to  
him, it's like that in love,  
all branches joined to  
a trunk. The shining  
afterthought. Deepening  
into bark. Yeast underfoot.

It's like when my son cradled  
his brother, newborn;  
prefigures its own myth  
that became true somehow.  
I don't know what else to say,  
chainsawed, beautiful grain.

## **Holding A Newborn**

So I see you hold  
this poem like your son held his  
bro', newborn, fragrant.  
That's what I mean – just  
like that – like moss in the mist,  
such a green beyond  
green, all flourescent  
and deep and you are deep too  
when you are like this.

## How Not To Have A Heart Attack

I had time to kill  
so sat in the library,  
read cover to cover  
a book that said  
it all started with  
a tear on the artery wall  
like a paper cut.

I thought about relationships  
with the sort of inflammation,  
how the immune system kicks in  
and forms a scab thick as hell  
and how the blood pressure rises  
with oxidative stress—alright,  
I'm winging it now—  
But the book said you could  
start living well again  
and you wouldn't keel over  
and it's true, the body  
talks to each cell,  
whispers good thoughts and  
then it just doesn't happen.

## Peace Within The Storm

Back in whenever  
bee cee a guy they called Job  
found himself in dutch,  
dumped in a tough shit  
test and exposed in a book  
to show what is true  
in the way of things.

Sometimes I wonder what gives  
with all the people  
who think after all  
it is a matter of mind  
set straight rights the wrongs  
that lay siege to life  
as if there's no thing outside  
us with another  
flipping agenda,  
or inside either, by God.

Be grateful for breaks  
in the hard weather  
that may come to us or not  
under the long sun.  
Accept the changes  
in the soft weather as well.

No news is good news.

## Ode To Moss

Green and burgeoning, I leaned  
toward the lichens and moss  
against the cascade of leaves.  
Crow nowhere in sight. My belly  
full of butterflies. Ripples  
clutching like a newborn.

When my boy was still sucking  
a pacifier, I was writing  
a paper and preppers and did  
not imagine the pleasure it  
would give, juggling like this;  
all growth, stoney moss.

## **Juggling Crows**

I watched you juggle  
twelve crows at one time, then add  
a glass of water  
balanced on your chin.

(And you were pregnant that spring  
with your second child.)

I thought how way cool  
you are to so well train crows.  
They hold still for you.

They eyed you but stayed  
sleek on the up and the down  
and you caught them each  
without spilling a drop.  
You started doing a jig  
and the lead crow squawked.  
Lovey, what a hoot!

## Which Phantom Were You?

I hadn't yet known grief.  
That will be six years later  
whose long cawing vibrated  
after my dad's leave-taking.  
The tenor opened a veil,  
a trapping I never asked for.

That spring unleashed all  
the phantoms. Mainly it was  
sleep deprivation. By the time I  
recovered, I was transfigured by  
the eschatology of leave-takings.  
I stayed in the grove with my baby.

## **It's Probably Too Late**

I don't know which one.  
Some phantom took me over  
the gap between us,  
me with my cold flame,  
you with feathers and white cake.

I turned thirty so  
long ago. No hope  
for a return flight. I've not  
the grit for take off.

I would hope I could  
reach the moon despite  
there's no air there and colder  
than a marble bum.  
Oh I'm lousy at  
housekeeping so I would leave  
all my trash behind.  
They won't let me go.

## My Beloved

We are stardust. Moon  
and flowers make a garden.  
Truth is heir to love  
made on the grass, or  
the china seen long after  
they're gone from the mat.

Your waiting for death  
a weaving of the sun,  
the moon and the stars.  
A genuine door, you'd say.  
A way of seeing heaven,  
our native tapestries.

## Death On My Shoulder

I'm waiting for death.  
It seems like that though maybe  
not exactly that.

Carlos found his guy,  
a brujo, or desert mage.  
Don Juan told Carlos,  
"Carry death, your friend  
on your shoulder to whisper"  
and I heard Caesar  
wanted trusted men  
to tap him, "You are mortal!"  
I sometimes still growl  
defiance and grin.  
But I have been practicing  
for decades now.  
This is my merry way.

## A Period Piece

I am perhaps, something  
the cat dragged out of  
the attic. A candlestand  
in need of a shine.

Silvo or brasso.

An Aladdin's lamp.

You're as ramshackle.

Can't decide what you are  
except for all this pinball  
energy, amidst dead timber.

Start up the woodfire,  
we're headed to the highlands.

## Hairy Story

I was the towhead  
at five and curly brown mop  
at fifteen, went straight  
at twenty six years,  
also moved to Oregon.

The curls, they came back  
and I had to dry  
out at thirty eight for her.

It's all been my hair.

I know why guys shave  
it all off and use that fleece  
to shine a chrome dome.  
But me, I've gone long  
and it's getting in my food.

Hey! My color's good.

## Daily Bread

My son did sit me down,  
went through the holy  
scripture. It all made  
sense. I get it but my  
heart doesn't buy into it.  
Faith is licking marble.

Jesus appeared to me  
a white bearded man in  
slippers, seemed more  
a hippie confounding us  
with spongy miracle bread  
dipped in LSD fantasy.

I don't like to be  
mollycoddled. That's  
a cat walking on a tin  
roof, my daily bread,  
leavened in moonlight.  
I'm just a cat shadow.

## **Eschatology**

I caught you licking  
stone as if you could change things  
that way. What came next,  
the wings and plucked strings  
while golden eyes flashed brilliant  
in the descending  
armies of the Lord  
and I said, “Oh shit” to that

(you know that terse phrase  
is the most common  
of last words men say)

spewing  
time as it ran out.

## A Nest Of Finches

I'm fussing over a nest  
of house finches. Over  
the rambling roses, edged  
in grasses and straws.  
You asked me to hurry, get  
dressed while I fluctuated.

So I dressed this verse  
in a hurry, throwing on a  
mint camisole over shorts.  
You wore your welder's cap,  
fluffy curls peeking brown.  
A small finch arrowed out.

## **The House Finches**

The Jasmine bloomed thick  
that year, full of white flowers  
and that big perfume  
and there, just above  
eye line was the house finch nest,  
angled out of sight  
but I could hear them.

They wove it so carefully,  
and she layed three eggs,  
I think three. I stayed  
away from them all the while,  
through the small hatching  
and then all the flights  
to feed the three tiny chicks  
and they grew and grew  
until one day that nest  
tilted and spilled all three out  
to the waiting cat  
Hell Boy or perhaps  
the stray who came from further  
up our springtime street.

There was nothing left  
but the nest all vertical  
and old eggshell shards.

## Under Water

You scraped through plaster  
twice the layers of rock  
unplugged, swayed knife  
sharp, added aching bones  
your own. I'm afraid of  
what's under the sink.

The rainwater was coming  
through the roof, stolen  
in through holes. Thunder  
cracked open, sound pour  
adding to a shapely mess.  
Our limbs made a bridge.

## **On The Verge Of Resurrection**

Grab me by the throat.  
Pockets of terror  
burst in the force of your hands.  
I slide from my skin  
to escape your grip.

You begin to sing the hymns  
we both remember.

Will you waken first  
or shall I tumble and fall  
out the bed after  
using the stainless  
on your two long bleach blonde braids?  
Go on, ask for love.  
See what I answer.  
The sky will strip itself clean  
of all storms and such,  
shape by silver shape.  
Only my one eyed blindness  
can crack the sky now.  
I know they don't care.  
By the way, Happy Easter.

## Both Sides Now

You tried to slither away  
till I promised you a kiss,  
but to close your eyes,  
and then you felt something  
like wasabi on your tongue  
and I broke out crying.

What's all this talk  
wanting to resurrect love  
somehow? What hubris to love  
without gore or lore?  
Spring's glint in your  
eye an Easter ambush.

## **Joni Sings Both Sides Now**

Was so long ago  
and she sang it as I lived,  
no hollow spaces  
just the corners turned  
and standing right proud in light  
of the noonday shift.

I can hardly take  
the force of it in my gut.  
I will come undone.  
Oh sometimes I don't  
get how they stand in the front  
and take the crowd's roar  
or how you are on  
time like this, always on time.

I started running  
late, always too late  
to catch your ever loving  
ways, not for years now.

## We're Still Here

The world laid in ruins  
as we listened to Garfunkel  
and I played with a beaded  
necklace looping it around  
my fingers again and again.  
It is tawdry, more or less.

Only us left, love, survivors  
in an imagined apocalypse  
my son spoke of. Meanwhile  
there's pop, racked trash,  
sin redolent of flowers,  
and bravura, lots of it.

## **Bleak Street**

Said she didn't know  
where to go from this blasted  
street with all the broke  
down cars, the spilled oil,  
and the starving dogs chasing  
the few remaining  
cats and rats.

Not one  
honeybee left in the land  
is what the guy said  
before we killed him.

Said she didn't know how to  
get up the old grit  
now that the canned goods  
have run out, not even now  
that the cooking oil  
is all used up. Yea,  
she has started to look at  
me with a strange glint.

## The Beast

And so we left Bleak Street,  
its terrible oil-less edge  
swirling in the boondocks  
of that imagined apocalypse.  
Don't you know by now mind's  
champagne eye glow-in-dark?

See how love tells new stories  
when it means to stick around for  
its perfumed gig. We remember  
the beast, rearranged boundaries,  
exchanged flesh for spirit, kissed  
the ass of abyss, heading home.

## **You Can't Make Me**

Don't you know by now  
is what she said to me, tossed  
off like flicking hair  
or picking a sore  
at the corner of her mouth.  
But I am still face  
planted on Bleak Street in my  
own quantum dot haze  
calling this shit art,  
still mud eyed looking beyond  
my own ooze crusted  
brick at the good life  
they say waits for me over  
the tropical wall.  
It's chickens again.

## The Rat And The Cock

You wanted a reprise. Lit the wick of  
a haunted place. While you pumped  
chemicals, I danced with veils. Drink  
for drink, a vacant cesspool glugging  
in the kitchen sink. We opened the door.  
Rat's eyes said, there's a drowning.

Take me in. We wanted a funeral,  
candles burned on both ends,  
body to be tossed into the river.  
I know what it was. The hot wax  
meant there is nothing and no one  
left. In the morning, cock crowed.

## **The Turn Of The Century**

I had a lover  
who danced with veils in my house,  
before me and God,  
small tight breasts under  
vest with see through pantaloons  
before adoring  
me as only she  
has ever done.

I tumbled  
down the steepest slope  
in my whole hot world  
and then opened stem to stern  
promising the moon,  
as if I had rights  
to the cold of lunar time  
and bright stellar spice.

## The Lord's Prayer

There's another world that  
calls to us. This isn't all,  
what we'd scraped together.  
The cards we hold have missing  
queens. An epidemic of losses,  
an erasure of drift clouds.

It's as if we're born to write  
elegies. That time will come  
but not now. All will be done.  
The Lord's prayer. We're in  
a body once. In placement.  
Beauty fleeting but true.

## **The Bronze Age**

I see you believe  
the sweet and gentle white lie  
of the rope that winds  
through the endless halls  
with knots that mark time, mark us  
as if we were once  
knot and once again  
will be knot but for now we  
are, swift and fleeting.

I would believe too  
but I was told face to face  
that I was to stop  
such blather right now  
(which was long long long ago).

Oh, I remember  
the bronze minotaur  
and the bloody dark red spoor,  
the flood leaving me!  
Me! sere on the floor  
over twenty eons past  
and magi after  
telling time stories  
to confound the western priests  
for the fun of it.

## Kindled Hearts

I do not know God except by  
his grace. You came to me  
as sunlight through high  
windows, a sudden outpouring  
sodden with cascading sun  
kindling magic incense.

An eagle glides feathered  
transcendence, benevolence  
circling snowy mountains buoyed  
by the blood you spilled  
in ages past. A girl raised  
her hands in swirling snow.

## **The Hunt**

The fierce heart of birds  
of prey take me into you,  
into the first snow  
searching for your scent.  
It was fall. The eagle called  
your name after mine  
and the aspen quaked  
beneath the force of that sound  
in the hills while small  
things dove into holes  
and I was forced to open,  
expose my secrets  
to the clear fine air.  
Someday I might be ready  
for loving someone.  
Someday I might get  
my heart back, open my chest,  
put it in its place.

## You Speak Heart

I wish to say we've cracked the  
permutations of Rubik's Cube.  
The heart's glaze, channelling  
patterns all its own. Colors bead,  
pass through the Tropic of Cancer.  
Burnished colors, tarnished rust.

I wish to say the cheatsheets  
we needed didn't fly, sail on  
beastly wind. I wish to say  
we could leave anytime we wish,  
release stars, our branch of  
sky, chewed up moon, apiece.

## **My Second Attempt**

I tried to rise up  
and ended with a reject  
and so here I am  
confessing my shallow  
heart – I have scabbled my way  
out of the hardpan  
but need to dig dirt  
out from under my broken  
talons, shake the shit  
off me and burnish  
my gold leaf wings as I try  
not to tear them up.

I wanted to call  
God down from on high, something  
like that, but all God  
did was point at me  
and titter gaseously  
through my damp exhaust.  
Damn.

## Eagle Flies Free

I let you pour yourself out  
into me, a hot welding  
process. Your secrets  
opened a spring–sorrow,  
yes, but also folded in,  
the fount of joy.

For a moment I could inhabit  
you, held your quaking  
inside secret passageways,  
salty, permeable. Purge  
of earthy odors. We entered  
a deep dreamless state.

## **Encouragement**

Feel the elixir  
ooze on your tongue, down your throat.  
Try to hold it there  
by your strength of will  
alone and don't think sad, mad  
or other dark thoughts.  
This magic will not  
work then, will not grow your wings  
for you and your air  
will be like cement  
slurry and damn it – I can't  
get these thoughts to stay  
on their own right lines.

(At least this ended rightly  
slowing to full stop.)

## Mind Over Body

I could only half squat  
after an arpeggio of legs,  
swivel, ascent, kick—to  
Beyonce's "Drunk in Love"  
and like you, could never  
grind back to liveness.

My body's a mountain,  
and a river, and tree too.  
I retrieved your heart  
from gentle blizzard.  
Body wounding soul.  
Let the star be mind.

## **I Have Stolen You**

Let the mind be star,  
you said, and let your heart be  
lithe no matter what  
your body might do.  
No matter how I try to  
form this up I grow  
fur and snout and snort  
into the easterly wind.  
My velvet ears flare  
and tremble. All four  
legs push claw into the mulch.  
Then I grip your soul  
in mine and dash off,  
headed toward my thieve's den  
in the basalt rocks.

## Elixir Of Mudprints

I did. I drank the elixir  
and grew orange wings.  
Which didn't work, caked  
in mud and all. Maybe  
I misread the instructions,  
something I'm wont to do.

Now on to the second part  
(call it a wing?) where  
you had stolen me away.  
Bet we could spin out more  
prayer, leave our mudprints.  
I'm so going to miss you.

## **Mud Rolling**

I know. It's damn hard  
to follow those directions,  
the ones to grow wings –  
especially hard  
when you have instincts to roll  
in really grand mud.  
Good for cooling blood  
is what I heard about mud.

No need to miss me.  
I am not thinking  
of shooting off world  
anytime between today  
and twenty nineteen.

## Cry Me A River

Suddenly you're wild-eyed  
released from a cage—  
ravishing tongue  
out of range now  
licked at me.

Why you won't let in  
infinity, mirror of dreams—  
nuances we try to catch,  
blue and yellow stripes  
bred, in camouflage.

The river's our truth  
in a hokey-pokey world  
but will I ever know  
trying to catch yellow  
sinking into blue.

## **The Sixth Extinction**

I have cried oceans,  
creeks, rivers, and how I wail  
on and on and on...  
I think I am done  
and it all starts up again.  
It's embarrassing.  
You'd think I wallow  
in it but it is beyond  
all that self serving  
bull crap. It's fatal  
stuff come home to roost after  
that really bad thing  
among all of us  
and how we keep dying off  
in this day and age.

## Tulip Fever

Red orients me into white.  
I sipped their alcohol  
so many springs ago,  
seeds of altered mind  
in every bulb.

There's a silent frenzy  
that mutates into  
something like joy  
smoking these pipes  
of heavenly hues.

Then you gave me a clip  
that had the gardener  
sit gazing at pink tulips  
falling in love each  
time he looks at them.

## **The Bubble**

I invested in  
tulips when I came around  
last time and lived in  
Holland on the north  
bank of the town's main canal.  
That was just before  
the market smashed bang  
on the stones of the basement.  
I lost all my seeds...

## Dali And I

Everything's improvised  
in this room. I went to  
the Dali Museum in Figueres,  
saw that Gala was his muse.

The art of Balinese spoons  
balanced against the  
cruciform, the sun haloed  
straws poised against the parable  
of feathered flight.  
We are fallen meteors.

You said you didn't need a woman.  
I think you lie.

## **Do I Need A Woman, You Ask**

That arrow you shot  
went past my ear, one feather  
cutting just enough  
to draw my red blood  
in passing.

I did reach out  
to push you away.

I had to stanch both  
that cut and the other near  
my heart, a deeper,  
slicing cut you made  
because I twisted too late  
to get off scott free.

If I lie about  
needing a woman then how  
is it I lived well,  
so well for seven  
years, happy to return home  
to the old blind cat?

## Getting Back Together

It was when you weren't yet  
in my field of vision.

Mesmerised as I were by  
the female visions  
in the windows, sitting  
on plastic chairs.

Then when you came,  
we laid on the grass  
and I was mesmerised yet  
by your eyes wrestling  
to my soul. I made this  
up, you know.

## **I'll Never Be A Poet**

I can't even start.

I need more light than I have  
and more grit as well  
if I am to say  
what it is that wakes me up.

You say the trances  
take you and I guess  
that's what we should say happens.

It would be better  
if unicorns grazed  
in our nearby city parks  
calling to the bold  
in us to approach,  
to mount, and then ride after  
our retreating dreams.

## Moss And Camellias

I scaled the wall towards  
you even though the chasm  
just got wider. It's as if  
we're expecting the sadness  
of moths—blighted wings  
and all ragged, salty.

My pink camellias sigh.  
I showed you a garden  
teeming with moss and  
you turned backward curved  
onto a shingled path,  
singled out longing.

## **The Merchant**

I worked hard at it,  
at erasing the scuff marks  
in the ivy trails  
on the outer wall.

A lookout told me you stood  
on the glass shard top  
face, the concreted  
cap of that high wall and hailed  
me but I was not  
at home, not at all.

I guess that's just the right thing.  
I hope you got down  
okay. As for me,  
the trip went as it should have  
and I made a pile.

## Found Pewter

I wanted to write of mussels  
in my dream-life. Bountiful,  
grab-by-the-handfuls,  
smell of salt air by  
the lungfuls.

I like to pick up seashells  
and hold these conches  
to my ear. Whiskey  
crashing foam. But time  
has spirited them all.

Instead I find a lonely  
pewter, an otherness  
that flitted into sandy  
palms, in this bay of  
uncertain smell.

## **The Divorce**

As if a dolphin  
rolled beneath my misty edge  
breaking surface once  
in a sparking spray,  
so it is that you and sand  
and the tidal rip  
stir beneath my skin  
and crack me open again,  
but only this once.

I will not permit  
more than this, cannot permit  
the stories of us  
to reach the warm pools  
and stretch in the sound and light  
with the other clams.

## Love Is A White Rose

I'm no more lonely. Or less,  
as if our parting should leave  
me stranded, a windless gray.  
Here I'm still busy. Painting,  
sketching. A summer's day.  
There you go dog-walking.

Our catamaran's moored.  
The sun rose above the salt  
marsh. The wolfhound bounced  
off having spotted a rabbit.  
Our season is over, you say.  
Crack me open. Everyday.

## **Living With A Big Dog**

If you weren't so trustworthy  
it would be creepy  
what you do down here,  
appearing on your towel  
spread in the corner  
with the tiniest  
of your big dog sighs leaking  
from your salt peppered  
fur curly broad frame.  
What is Irish about you  
I wonder and what  
some other wolfhound  
dream fractional and extreme?  
I have seen you fight,  
don't care to again.  
I like you best so wanting  
to please us, trying  
to understand how.

## A Doggone Day

I keep on stroking you as  
I would an animal wounded  
on my lap. The time my dog  
returned with stitches  
having a womb removed.  
Cradled, held in trust.

It had become common truth.  
The past haunting, taunting.  
But we were both primed for  
all the preparatory work.  
I keep stroking. Dusk falls,  
your brown curls in shadow.

## **Waiting Tonight**

I think how it is.  
You put me in the kennel  
for the night, full moon  
and clouds passing by  
to obscure the last issue  
before the discharge  
of all my duties.

How I can settle all this  
is the big question.

I hitch up my belt  
which of course makes my sword clank  
a little against  
the chain link fencing  
and then I get still to wait  
for your grinning face.

## The Sword

You disavowed the blossoms  
all over the place. Sidelined,  
sanded over again, your  
heart's terminal, mine's  
rehabilitated. The arrow  
that lodged there gone.

It is how it should be.  
I let you be. Walking  
toward where you lay  
breathing, lucid, adrift,  
and then I noticed  
the gleaming sword.

## Secret Business

I slip down the hill  
from my hovel. The bedding  
is bunched up to look  
like I am still there.  
If I told you what I'm doing  
I'd have to kill you  
goes the by now old  
joke in these parts but I'm half  
serious about  
all that. If you have  
checked on me before you've not  
said anything, so  
don't this time either.  
I'm nearly done with this thing  
and never you mind.

## Coloring The Lines

I'll have to gather them,  
all the wilted roses.  
Demarcated by color so  
the yellow buds, late  
bloomers, still hold up  
flushed canary faces.

Saw you leave in a blue  
parka. Thought of lavender,  
orange popsicles, blue-and-  
white china. Oh, freaking  
mind's just a placeholder  
the color of eggshell.

## **The Lover Overhears Things**

You like the flowers  
more than you like me. I heard  
you say so to him  
while I eased my way  
out of the green density  
of his successful  
half acre garden.  
I never heard him deny  
you the whole way out.

It's absurd. It's worth  
a groan or more but I guess  
his garden will win  
every time, dear.  
You are both too weak to find  
any effective change.

## People Sending Flares

We got altitude sickness.  
So we'd let the whole thing  
collapse. Used one gram of  
force, so it wasn't lethal.  
It's easy to make a bomb  
disaster, mean terrorists.

Why I can't figure out  
chaos anymore. God is  
plastic, gets an alabaster  
face. I hate bread. Can't  
make you want what's not  
mine nor be too graphic.

## **You're Innocent**

They do really name  
you a freaking terrorist.  
I heard one guy say  
so anyway, think  
someone caught your scent or sign  
in the wreckage – not  
the last one brought down –  
the one blown up before that.  
But I have your back.  
I denied you went  
anywhere near that cargo  
hold late yesterday.

## Old Me, New Me

I tried to ferret out the  
old me, found a soggy mess.  
Glared at the giddiness,  
the utterly flaccid way  
I set things down. Quick  
doctor, euthanize her.

Oh the new me is all form,  
raisins you popped in  
your mouth. There's just  
me sitting down watching  
telly, an anthem in my  
heart. Still not gone.

## **Wherever You Go There You Are**

Getting more shit done,  
that's the name of this sludge farm  
and I will join up  
because there's nothing  
else I can find to do now.

You revise, revise  
and revise your revision.

You know what I feel?  
I feel like I am  
the other guy all revised  
shiny and sunny  
and newly minted  
but underneath it's all sludge  
you know – scrape the shine  
and you find the crap.  
Same old, same old, oh my God,  
I'm just gonna die.

## On the Last Day

Half dreaming,  
slugged by morphine,  
violated yet inviolable  
chimes beyond sealed  
black veil

You'll see me there, love,  
commingled with the stars

I'll come sit bedside  
when death comes take  
you memorising your face  
inward turned  
toward infinity—  
home

## **Hypatia Has Left The Building**

I looked past my book,  
raised up my glasses and heard  
you gasp and rattle,  
fuss though you had gone  
flying while lying so still.  
I called for a nurse  
and we gave you some  
morphine then to ease your wait.

She came past sunset,  
your sister's daughter  
whom we took in to protect  
all those years ago.  
I sat on one side  
and she sat on the other.  
I held your left hand  
She spoke, told stories,  
told you how much she loved you.  
Then you breathed your last.

Your son, your daughter  
by your side – others were there.  
we saw you gently  
go.

## Rouge

He sought me out and then  
I sought him out and it  
was all airy bread and  
now it's grown mold.  
'Transformative like ectoplasm.  
I fingered its trace.

Over-rouged now.  
I've come back from the dead  
wiping off all that faded  
rouge. You'd have to agree,  
*oh mercy, my eyes!*

## How Some Dogs Must Feel

How she sought me out  
I will never know for sure  
because I see how  
her eyes dart sideways,  
then to the ceiling before  
she speaks some glib rhyme  
about it all.

Sigh.

Something creaks up there rather  
like giants moving  
some comets about.

After that she looks at me,  
back I should say at  
me cringing as if a blow  
soon will box my ears.

## A Glib Sheen

I don't flounce about as  
you say I do. That's just  
a glib sheen. I cover my  
wound with gauze, take out  
stitches you'd sewn, left  
for me. I am not stiff.

The lyrics came to me:  
*everything I do I do it  
for you.* It's a bit like that  
now. The lamp on the bureau  
is sputtering orange. I shrink  
and mumble. But I shine too.

## **Telling The Truth**

Who is talking now?  
Which one of you all said that?  
Putting me in blinds  
on both eyes, leaving  
one ear unstopped then jumping  
all over the place –  
even using sound  
effects to cover your voice,  
well, it worked, damn it.

What's next? Waterboard?  
Me sent to Guantanamo?  
Covered in orange  
jumpsuits forever?  
Sleeping in bright light, exposed  
to whoever cares  
but oh, no one will?  
All because you say I pump  
hot air in my truth.  
Oh man, I never!  
Well, I say hardly ever...  
at least not this time.

## Gold Threads

I've been reading, know  
the marbled heart of you.  
My copper red hair all  
straggly dipped in fire,  
gold one minute, dull  
the next. What's at stake?

Everyone dies, wants to  
do that on a throne, a  
crowning glory. There we  
go metaphorical, as if  
risking all. Lame, you say.  
No, it's gold threads: lamé.

## **What's At Stake**

My heart is laced up  
with threads drawn from my fat head  
and cinched far too tight  
for comfort and joy.  
To top that, the two get ups  
the dog made me do  
in the night because  
her turgid gut ached and leaked.  
The doggie tooted  
in the key of F  
and I felt distress and worse.  
The fat head lacing,  
the absence of joy,  
the lack of comfort and sleep -  
another fine mess  
you got me into.  
I will expect my wages  
to be free of sin.

## Hills And Bamboo

Don't you mind me,  
as you are enshrined  
already in my stupa.  
Gilt is my prayer.  
We shall repent with  
a stipend, heaven-sent.

These waterways of love  
have come unblocked,  
uncinched laces loose.  
So a paddleboat may oar  
across muddiness, green  
hills, sticks of bamboo.

## The Hedge

I wear a cincture  
on my craft. Should I call this  
love? I must ponder  
the old growth and ways  
the new bamboo says to me  
a gold coin safely  
can be used, stipend,  
it says, and by God coming  
straight down from heaven.

Trying to rebuild  
my holy place takes a skill  
beyond all my days.

He said, keep the ruse  
of my life a verdant hedge  
and the art of it  
divine in my core.  
There I finish the touches,  
then give it all back.

## The Bald Eagle

The garden muse is my calling.  
All along the edge you've planted  
a hedge, for me to climb over  
carrying a large paper bag.  
A hoard of supplies to last us  
throughout the winter.

What matters what name to  
give it? A bald eagle is a bald  
eagle no matter what. Fluffs out  
its feathers to a wing span  
and glides into sky. That is  
as stretchy as we are.

## **Vultures Soar Above**

They still say the cold  
will increase this next winter  
and then they suggest  
the vultures stock up  
carrion for icy days  
certain to descend  
from the frozen shield,  
pushing all the marine air  
back out west to sea.

Oh wait, that's true here  
while I guess for you winter's  
a different deal,  
cooler and drier,  
but still not frozen, not high  
enough latitude -  
and your eagles, bald  
and otherwise do rise up  
into stretchy sky.

## In God's Garden

Here I abide in you,  
shook the leaves till they fell  
hysterically. In the tilt,  
a mythic question formed,  
you live what you feel,  
don't you?

The green of ecstasy  
shaking, lilted,  
shrouding you.  
Eating hard sweet apple,  
feeling grace,  
noticing in God's lair  
strange vibrations of  
leaves lying still.

## Jonny Applepoem

I was trained to dash  
from tree to tree, grabbing nuts  
in my squirrel like  
passage, modestly  
crossing your mythos with mine,  
me the wannabe  
road guard all got up  
in old military gear  
with black grease striping  
my eyes.

Eating hard  
sweet apple, a Jonagold  
or a good Braeburn,  
I do feel it now.  
I clean me all up – cold cream  
to remove the grease.  
Possibly God knows  
what I really mean to say  
but I surely don't.

## Reprising Moon and Stars

Only you can be talisman,  
adjunct to soul,  
luminous to dull  
in the pallor of  
corona moon.

We could be sitting together  
in a laundromat,  
hear the whirr of steam  
and soapy syllables.  
Having found Jesus.

Commingled poems stacked  
flickering stars.  
Jumbled we lie.  
Washed alive.

## **At The Laundromat**

Soapy syllables  
of the tumbling wash shuffled  
in a thoughtless mess,  
machine out of true  
in the spin cycle last time,  
big thumps and dull clanks  
when it gets like that,  
and there's you and me hanging  
out, window sitting  
and seen by the town  
as if we belong this way  
and on my mind, coins,  
if I have enough  
change to feed the damn dryers...  
...and you watch me fret.

## Sylphs Of Night

That glint was celebratory  
bordering on eternal things,  
like the clay moon taken on  
the shape of a woman.  
Grandmother whispers flame  
in your wooden wake.

Are you drugged now,  
snuffled by grace? Your cat  
misses you, and so do I.  
Or should I say, memory  
works those chemicals  
you used to shoot.

Sun dipped in a cycle  
following the usual  
incarnations. Night  
turns the planet like a  
bowl. We wait, the cat and  
I, luminous, native magic.

**Christopher Hileman** was born in Berkeley, California, in 1945. He moved to Oregon in 1973. He has retired to live on the volcanic bluff overlooking Willamette Falls in Oregon City, Oregon. He ascends the stairs from his basement digs to improvise on his Yamaha keyboard or the house Playel grand when the calico cat releases him from below. The part-Irish Wolfhound here likes him. Christopher keeps a poetry blog called View From The Northern Wall, <http://northernwall.blogspot.com/>.

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