

A POEM FOR VIPERS

I sit in Lees. At 11:40 PM with
Jimmy the pusher. He teaches me
Ju Ju. Hot on the table before us
shrimp foo yong, rice and mushroom
chow yuke. Up the street under the wheels
of a strange car is his stash—The ritual.
We make it. And have made it.
For months now together after midnight.
Soon I know the fuzz will
interrupt, will arrest Jimmy and
I shall be placed on probation. The poem
does not lie to us. We lie under
its law, alive in the glamour of this hour
able to enter into the sacred places
of his dark people, who carry secrets
glasses in their eyes and hide words
under coats of their tongue.

(The Hotel Wentley Poems, 6.16.58)

A POEM FOR PAINTERS

Our age bereft of nobility
 How can our faces show it?
 I look for love.
 My lips stand out
 dry and cracked with want
 of it.
 Oh it is well.
 My poem shall show the need for it.

 Again we go driven by forces
 we have no control over. Only
 in the poem
 comes an image that we rule
 the line by the pen
 in the painter's hand one foot
 away from me.

 Drawing the face
 and its torture
 That is why no one dares tackle it.
 Held as they are in the hands
 of forces they
 cannot understand.
 That despair
 is on my face and shall show
 in the fine lines of any man.

I had love once in the palm of my hand.
 See the lines there.
 How we played
 its games, are playing now
 in the bounds of white and heartless fields.

Fall down on my head, love,
 drench my flesh in the streams
 of fine sprays. Like
 French perfume
 so that I light up as
 mountain glories
 and I am showered by the scent
 of the finished line.
 No circles

but that two parallels do cross
 And carry our souls and bodies
 together as the planets,
 Showing light on the surface
 of our skin, knowing
 that so much of it flows through
 the veins underneath.
 Our cheeks puffed with it.
 The pockets full.

2.

Pushed on by the incompleteness
 of what goes before me
 I hesitate before this paper
 scratching for the right words.

Paul Klee scratched for seven years
 on smoked glass, to develop
 his line, LaVigne says, look
 at his face! he who has spent
 all night drawing mine.

The sun also
 rises on the rooftops, beginning
 w/ violet. I begin in blue
 knowing why we are cool.

3.

My middle name is Joseph and I
 walk beside an ass on the way to what
 Bethlehem, where a new babe is born.

Not the second hand of Yeats but
 first prints on a cloudy windowpane.

America, you boil over

4.

South of Mission, Seattle,
 over the Sierra Mountains,
 the Middle West and Michigan,
 moving east again, easy
 coming into Chicago and
 the cattle country, calling
 to each other over canyons,
 careful not to be caught
 at night, they are still out,
 the destroyers, and down
 into the South, familiar land,
 lush places, blue mountains
 of Carolina, into Black Mountain
 and you can sleep out, or
 straight across the States

I cannot think of their names.

This nation is so large, like
 our hands, our love it lives
 with no lover, looking only
 for the beloved, back home
 into the heart, New York,
 New England, Vermont green
 mountains, and Massachusetts
 my city, Boston and the sea.
 Again to smell what this calm
 ocean cannot tell us. The seasons.
 Only the heart remembers
 and records in the words
 of works
 we lay down for those men
 who can come to them.

7.

At last. I come to the last defense.

My poems contain no
 wilde beestes, no
 lady of the lake music
 of the spheres, or organ chants,

yet by these lines
I betray what little given me.

One needs no defense.

Only the score of a man's
struggle to stay with
what is his own, what
lies within him to do.

Without which is nothing,
for him or those who hear him
And I come to this,
knowing the waste, leaving

the rest up to love
and its twisted faces
my hands claw out at
only to draw back from the
blood already running there.

Oh come back, whatever heart
you have left. It is my life
you save. The poem is done.

(The Hotel Wentley Poems, 6.18.58)

A POEM FOR EARLY RISERS

I'm infused with the day
I'm out in it.

from the demons
who sit in blue
coats, carping
at us across the
tables. Oh they
go out the doors.
I am done with
them. I am
done with faces
I have seen before.

even tho the day may destroy me.
Placating it. Saving myself

For me now the new.
The unturned tricks
of the trade: the Place
of the heart where man
is afraid to go.

It is not doors. It is
the ground of my soul
where dinosaurs left
their marks. Their tracks
are upon me. They
walk flatfooted.
Leave heavy heels
and turn sour the green
fields where I eat with
ease. It is good to
throw them up. Good
to have my stomach growl.
After all, I am possessed
by wild animals and
long haired men and
women who gallop
breaking over my beloved
places. Oh pull down
thy vanity man the
old man told us under
the tent. You are over-
run with ants.

2.

Man lines up for his
breakfast in the dawn
unawares of the jungle
he has left behind
in his sleep. Where
the fields flourished
with cacti, cauliflower,
all the uneatable foods
that the morning man
perishes, if he remembered.

3.

And yet, we must remember.
The old forest, the wild
screams in the backyard
or cries in the bedroom.
It is ours to nourish.
The nature to nurture.
Dark places where the
woman holds, hands
us, herself handles an
orange ball. Throwing it
up for spring. Like
the clot my grandfather
vomited / months before he
died of cancer. And
spoke of later in terror.

(The Hotel Wentley Poems, 6.20.58)

A POEM FOR COCKSUCKERS

Well we can go
in the queer bars w/
our long hair reaching
down to the ground and
we can sing our songs
of love like the black mama
on the juke box, after all
what have we got left.

On our right the fairies
giggle in their lacquered
voices & blow
smoke in your eyes let them
it's a nigger's world
and we retain strength.
The gifts do no desert us,
fountains do no dry
up there are rivers running,
there are mountains
swelling for spring to cascade.

It is all here between
the powdered legs &
painted eyes of the fairy
friend who do not fail us
in our hour of
despair. Take not
away from me the small fires
I burn in the memory of love.

(The Hotel Wentley Poems, 6.20.58)

A GLIMPSE

There is a knot in the middle of my head
that will never be untied.

Two monkeys sit there
one on the right turned towards me, the
other crouched and turned

away. They
have red hair and do not play
with their chains. But sit on a ledge
above Venice? Anyway a city with canals
painted by Breughel, I see
them in a mirror when I look for my own face.

(unpublished manuscript, dated 1959)

KING SOLOMON'S MAGNETIC QUIZ

And when I went to the woods
 I heard the whispering of lovers
 ages ago. Was it
 lights or my eyes playing tricks on me? The trees were
 forms, was rain dropping on the ground like feet,
 fog and my own game at hand.
 On my back I saw

The stars creeping up the hill and thought of sex in the dark,
 catching him surprised coming around some corner, cradling
 his cock in his hands. Hard it was
 on me to lay there
 with only the ground under me. Bits of it stuck
 to my coat. Let it go
 I think; Rise up from this waste. There is no lover
 in the dark. No nightmare stallion

turning into a tree to see
 you; are alone. I rose and went out
 by the street bush I came in.

(for RC)

(unpublished manuscript, dated 1959)

LONG NOOK

There she took her lover to sea
and laid herself in the sand.
Go up and undress in the dark.

He is fast, was down the dune
with silk around his waist.
Her scarf was small.

She opened her clothes to the moon.
Her underarms were shaved.
The wind was a wall between them.

Waves break over the tide,
hands tied to her side with silk,
their mind was lost in the night.

The green light at Provincetown
became an emerald on the beach,
and like stars fell on Alabama.

(Ace of Pentacles, 1964)

THE SUCK

This morning
last evening, yes
terday afternoon

in the hall
your voice, full
of complement

turns to strike
someone you do not

know as a wife or brother,

shaking trembling
in your arms
sweating like seventeen

again under young middle-aged

bellies in the summer

(Nerves, 1970)

ACCEPTANCE

Should I wear a shadowed eye,
grow mustaches
delineate my chin

accept spit as offering,
attach a silver earring
grease my hair

give orders to legions
of lovers to maintain manhood
scimitars away as souvenirs?

Sooush, beloved! here is my tongue.

(Nerves, 1970)

TO H.

I like Sunday evenings after you're here.
I use your perfume to pretend you're near
in the night. My eyes are bright, why
can't I have a man of my own?

Your wife's necklace's around my neck
and even though I do shave I pretend
I'm a woman for you
you make love to me like a man.

Even though I hear you say why man
he doesn't even have any teeth
when I take out my plate
I make it up to you in other ways.

I will write this poem.

(Selected Poems, 1972)

WHAT HAPPENED?

Better than a closet martinet.
 Better than a locket
 in a lozenge.
 at the market, try and top it
 in the Ritz.

Better than a marmoset
 at the Grossets,
 better than a mussel
 in your pockets.
 Better than a faucet
 for your locker,
 better not
 clock it.
 Better than a sachet
 in your cloche,
 better than a hatchet
 in Massachusetts,
 Ponkapog
 Pudget
 Sound
 lost and found.

Better than an aspirin—
 aperitif does it.
 Better not ask
 how you caught it
 what has happened to me?

Better not lack it—
 or packet in at the Rickenbackers.
 Better tack it back
 in a basket
 for Davy Crockett

Better not stack it.
 Better stash it
 on the moon.

Oh Pomagranate
 ah Pawtucket.

Oh Winsocki or
Narragansett.

Better not claque it. Better cash it in
at Hackensack.
Better not lock it
up again.

*(Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry &
Prose 1956-1985, 1988)*

DOLL

How many loves had I
 in young boy's bed,
 at Humarock, or Provincetown's
 Cape Cod, under sweating summer sun,

after Land's End, before their interruption.
 How many loves had I?

in discourse by firelight, after highballs
 to records of Marlene Dietrich and Cole Porter,
 how many loves had I?

in Swampscott flat, or Beacon Hill house,
 Beacon Street garage or Fiedler overpass,
 how many loves had I?

How many loves, in Annandale
 before pavement or threat, in the Public Gardens
 or Fifth Avenue park, how many loves—

None, none, none at all.

*(Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry &
 Prose 1956-1985, 1988)*