

He takes off the glasses, the mask that fails him.
His two blue eyes mock hers.
He is a smiling imp in black.
He moves closer. The fiddler plays a reel.

His lips are like smoked sugar, his tongue an instrument,
his stubble a burnt field.
She is dying.

She opens her eyes. His are closed, lashes relaxed.
She snaps every line, every scar in close-up.
His black hair reveals paler roots.
Her hands are on his neck; the skin is soft.
She closes her eyes again.

They are stealing each other
for a moment.
He is giving her something to keep
but she is just dying, dying.

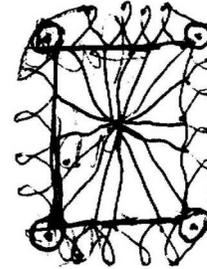
One more voice

*In the place of the fallen tree
how many have prayed? In the name
of memories, in the silence of relics,
in the presence of placements of small stones
and not one Coke can.*

*In the face of the fallen tree
how many have sung out loud?
And how many have whispered a song
with dreamtears on their lashes
and traced their names on the earth
to be erased?*

This shape my offering,
one more voice my gift.

*In the ache of the fallen tree,
while it still aches, and before
the Coke cans come.*



poems

Janet Jackson
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As real as

You are the person I am dressing up as.

You are the picture on the website
the character onscreen
the person, as real as I am,
who sends my messages.

You are full of pieces of everyone.
You are awake at 4am
talking intensely into a mobile phone
in a bar somewhere in America.

Then you are on your private broomstick,
beaming yourself home and catching a nap;

having breakfast, just
like anyone does, but later;

out in the streets, clattering and prancing,
gathering your pieces of everyone

taking them back to your secret cauldron
mixing them, making chequered magic
in your stainless-steel kitchen
in your weird old house

with paintings by Dali and murals of yourself
in your big black hat and boots and cloak
with beat poets and musos and lamas and prophets
and incense and alcohol hangin' in the air

because you are the person I am dressing up as.

Peeled off

Oh go back to your wife!
Don't look at me that way!
I would do anything but hurt you
 you with the sea in your eyes
 and the storm in your hands
 and the city lights in your mouth
I would have you a thousand times just to give you pleasure
but not hurt you.

Go back to your wife!
She is still beautiful
she is much smarter than me
she dances like a sonnet
and dresses like a haiku
and I can see that you love her
and hurting her would hurt you.
Go back to her!

Leave me to my desperation,
masturbation,
fantasies of your skin and voice and eyes
 jeans peeled off your slim hips,
 t-shirt off your heart
 my tongue on your nipple and my
 muscle on your cock,
 your hands in my hair
 and your voice incoherent

and cigarettes and
searching the Web from your lap,
naked
and drinks and
late-night talk about everything

me Yoko, you John...

No! Go back to your wife.

Lay your stuff on me, anything you've got,
sparkle-new or pre-loved, keeps me moving...

Hey, it's 2004 already. And he says
the world's going to hell in a handbasket
but I say to him
no - you are.

OK, so petrol's expensive. But people
are still driving old Datsuns with P-plates and attitude
and I can still buy tyres from a shop
where the metal shelves are dusty and they
call you "mate" or "luv"
depending on sex. I get "mate" first,
because of my hair, or my workboots.
Then the bloke sees my tits in their t-shirt
and my hips in their jeans and it's
"oh, sorry - luv".
I don't care. I don't. Maybe in another five
years I'll finally have enough 'tude to say,
that's cool, I'm a poet.

The hippy woman in the op-shop calls me "darl"
but I don't buy anything.
Bombs are going off
but the sun is still shining
and tomorrow I'm driving for five
hours by myself with the stereo
loud

Anything you've got, anything. Keeps me moving.

The secret

She in his house
and I in his house.
She in his bedroom
and I in his basement.

Her hands are white and smooth
mine red and rough
Hers touch silk and linen
mine wood and water.

She has a secret
but I have a bigger one.
She feels his skin
but I wash his shorts.

Loud

When we need him

When we need him
we siphon him out of the software, out of the
layers, out of the
hyper-reality and into the inter-reality
of our mouths (hands, eyes)
and release him.

When we release him
we let him out of his box, out of his
house, out of his
walled garden and into the buffeting
of the street (sea, sky)
and grow him.

When we grow him
we swell him into a blimp, into a
billboard, into a
website, and out of the hospitality
of his cushions (pools, toys)
we focus him.

When we focus him
we turn him into a lens, into a
screen, into a
speaker, and out of the foundations
of his DNA (islands, keys)
we aim him.

When we aim him
we point him into the ocean, into the
violence, into the
slums, and out of the clamouring
of our gut-fibres (horror, joy)
we use him.

And when we use him...

Would you like some soup?

Would you like some soup?
It's pumpkin. I grew the pumpkins
myself, in my own garden.
I watered them with my own hands,
fed them with manure and straw.
I trained the trailing vines to safety
as the pumpkins budded, burgeoned, ripened;
and then the vines withered.
I broke off the heavy pumpkins one by one,
carried them inside, and today,
chose one for soup.

Listening to the CD, the one you gave me,
I forced the pumpkin open with my knife,
seeded it with a spoon held in my hand,
peeled and chopped it with my knife,
held in my hand,
cooked it, pureed it, mixed in salt,
onion, pepper, nutmeg, butter...
listening.

Don't be in a hurry, not this time.
Don't rush off to your noisy place.
Don't leave me, alone with my soup.

There is music in my soup
and butter
and a pumpkin
grown with my own hands.
I made it just for you
with my own hands
thinking of you
for months
as the vines and pumpkins grew
and as I picked and peeled and chopped and stirred
with my own hands
just for you.
Would you like some soup?
I made some good bread, too.
Come into my house and let me feed you.

Whose mouth is an outline, a plan
Whose eyes and hands make a circle
Whose circle completes
my eyes
Whose hands define
my mouth.

Brought it home.
Amid the running.
A place where we walk by the water.
A dream-calm tarn, a
slow-motorcade river. A waiting,
continuing,
thoroughgoing sea.

A castle, weathering, stumbling, its
breaking body
the pattern.

Where we walk, where we are still, where we dance
once in a lifetime --
once in a lifetime
and always.

Amid the running.

Listen. There's a gull. It knows.

tree breaks *tree breaks at base,
falls as one on earth. Drum
shakes floor and heartbeat*
*tree lies alone
without music
bird whispers*
*tomorrow his birthday
new trees grow
in the fallen tree's arms*
*tomorrow he sings
in a new tree's arms
happy bird day*

Amid the running

Listen.
I brought it home turned low,
smuggled low in my chest,
in my gut.

Who held, and was held
once in a lifetime --
once in a lifetime
and always.

Who looked into my eyes, who took my look
once in a lifetime --
once in a lifetime
and always.

Rails.
A bridge.
Once in a lifetime.

Whose hands are my hands,
whose eyes are my eyes,
who has
always
looked into my eyes, who will
always
look into my eyes.

Rain.
A bridge.
Once in a lifetime.

A roofless church,
a leaf-lighted shrine,
a tower. Spiral. Stare.

Hardcore

No-one says anything
I don't say anything
The world smashes on
smashes on

If I'm all gone in the eyes
it doesn't stop the children crowing
as they install cursors and wallpapers.
Harry Potter smiles from his important playworld.
A piebald rabbit mesmerically comes and goes.
A tabby kitten poises itself in a meadow.

America continues.
Australia continues.

Diagnosis, treatment, remission, relapse.

My inbox fills with email
black with anger
white with prayer

My hardcore heart detaches itself, makes this

Now this is a poem about coffee. There's lots of those: poets drink coffee, it seems. But let me explain the subtext. So I was drinking coffee, and listening to the radio, and... Now this is a poem about sex, of course. Aren't they all? So I was thinking about my... But this is a poem about music. I was listening to the radio. Oh - the hell with it. Just think about yours, OK? Ready? OK, here we go then.

I prefer it white but I'll
take it black. I'll take it any
way you give it.
Sugary or bitter, with
chocolate or cream, with
Baileys or Galliano -
even with vanilla -
However you want to serve it, if it's
made by you I'll drink it.
Just put your poison in it.

Coracle

I will find a place to wait.
A niche in the shore-held sea-crag.
I will watch the lighthouse and the coming
and going ships, the world-cruisers,
oil-bringers, war-makers,
the private and public yachts,
the racers, fishers, fighters,
pirates and smugglers,
the ships of dull metal and
boats with bright paint,
with sail-quilts, mast-needles, nets,
radar, radio, GPS,
pitching and reeling and rocking and
blustering with a Babel of balloons and
sparkling miniature winebirds and
tinny electronic bells and
genetic gladiators and none

of them will detect me
in my grey waitplace. I will watch them all
until that ship comes, the ship

with the black and red sails that are made of pure skin
with the decks of ebony and carbon steel
with the tall sailors whose robes bear
witness, who reserve
their grey-and-silver wings, worship
their titanium anchor on its hawser spun
from their once-long hair. They will cast
their continental-shelf-gripper gently, with careful
hallelujahs, place their sleek ship
in the tossing flapping sea and in the sea of vessels
and sing and sing, rumguttled, steelsilked,
calling, responding, calling the land,
naming it.

*Bleed heaven on us - build a sky with us.
Throw a shape on us - twisted, pushed, extruded.
Thrown.*

*Then the rain will wet us
and the sun will dry us.
The walls will not hold us. The roof
will not restrict us. Will our
noises, voices, choices
sky the weeping earth?*

Come dancing.

*Will the sky
be high enough, ice
thick enough, rope
strong enough?*

Come dancing.

*Let us all be there together
when the rain rains on us
when the sun shines on us
when the stars shiver us
when the water rises up to meet us.*

Storm

Sing songs: sweet bells in the night
the blackbird and the kite
the tree-ghosts in the white
the storm and the morning light
dark and light
black and white
string and kite
all afternoon, all night.

Sight

Night is where we are.
Kite is what we are, string of lucid
white we are, black
light we are, dark outlined in
light, mourning storm of
white in ghosts, in trees, in
kite calling out blackbird.
Night bells sing violent, bare and sweet.

Come dancing

*We walked to the water, but we didn't
touch the water, didn't
drink the water
We walked by the water, along, near,
above the water, but not
in the water.*

*Baptise us.
Drown us, resurrect us in worldwash.
Wash us real.*

*Fill us, don't leave any
space in us, let us swim
in stumbling stars.*

*And may the moon
be part of you.
May lunacy
meet serendipity.
May the stars
inhabit you.
May heaven bleed on you,
make holy love to you.*

*May rains and sky-high stars dive into you
Glow through your coats,
shine in your eyes,
pour fizzing from your mouths,
come dancing from your hands.
Find your peaceful building and
smash it, smithereen it, scatter it,
rebuild it, reshape it, a new
artefact with an ancient spirit
twisting, spiralling, stairing
irresistibly into the sky.*

Irrefutable, undeniable.

And I in my hermit-hole will have built
my coracle, small
and sturdy, its
making a ritual. Built
my boat and carved my oars
and practised to strengthen my arms
and heart. I will hear
the singing and launch,
row my raw face through the buoys
and dinghies and liners, row and row, back burning,
arms screaming, row and row, and throw my line,
climb cold railings, fall,
collapse
among coiled ropes and mysterious much-used tools
and salt rain will needle me,
giant wings will beat on me,
torn tongues will lash and lacerate and feed on me,
as I lie on that wet deck bleeding in ecstasy.

Now mouth

*Lines to caress me, undress me,
bless me, lines to confess me, to
make me. Wow, mouth.*

*Lines to impress me, digress me,
guess me, lines to distress me, to
wake me. Show mouth!*

*Lines to derail you, curtail you,
nail you, lines to impale you, to
break you. No, mouth!*

*Electric and tronic. Arting.
Liming and lemoning.
Studioed.*

*Painting and failing.
Pick me up, throw you down. Howling.*

*Howl mouth high lines and bylines,
shy lines, howl mouth on skylines, mouth
my lines. Now mouth.*

Come home

Lay your eyes on me
Me and the whole of me
Down in the depth of me.

Like me to think of it?
A lamp in the darkness.
Bridge between towers,
Over the dateline,
Troubled by turbulence.
Waters lap the docks and rocks.
I...
Will.

Lay your hands on us
Me and the rest of us
Down by the docks and rocks
Like pilgrims on the narrow way
A truth tattooed on our eyes.
Bridge sent by satellite,
Over the Atlantic,
Troubled and frantic.
Waters moat your castle eyes.
I gone,
Will run.

Lay your eyes on me
Me and the whole of me
Down in the depth of me.

Lay your noise on me

Put my words on you
You in the place of you
You in the role of you

Lay my eyes on you
You and the grace of you
Blind in the gale of you

Lay my hands on you
You and the real of you
Feel for the whole of you.

Spread your sauce on me
Me and the rest of me
All down the length of me

Exert your force on me
Me and the stones of me

Lay your noise on me
Me and the bones of me
Me and the skins of me
Me and the strings of me
All the little springs of me
Open the sluice of me
Make a bruise on me
Make a hole in me.

Put your voice on me
Leave no choice for me
Tear out the words of me.

Windows

*We are pinned like prayer
flags, fluttering in
all the winds, fixed
by our hands nailed
to the wooden
walls, fences, windows.*

*We send our prayer
emails, tunnelling to
all the temples, channelled
by tonight's whims nailed
to the pulsing
bitstreams, servers, windows.*

*We are bonded, prayer
wheels spinning with
all the neighbours, trapped
by our feet nailed
to the plastic
furniture, appliances, windows.*

*We fire our prayer
cannons, thundering at
all the icons, frenzied
by manacled passion nailed
to the glowing
gates, paintings, windows.*

*They are shut with prayer
books, wailing in
all their houses, held
by our symbols nailed
to the shrieking
screens, skins, windows.*

Quay

Cranes creak and clatter
Concrete trucks trundle and splatter
Gull flaps, screeching
Boat rots, bleaching

I on old stone dangle my workboots over the Liffey and
it is *not* smooth.
The river is *not* smooth.
The sound around me and in my head is *not* smooth
The old stone is *not* smooth
but the new buildings
the new buildings are gonna be so smooth,
so soundless.

Like Leopold Bloom I walk along
the quay and what sun there is bleaches
me pale and Dublin's stone, water, mud bleaches
the sound out of me, sucks
the wet salt of the Liffey
out of my eyes.

Gentle touch of elsewhere

She stands at the counter selfconsciously
me... skinny,
skinny bootlegs, denim jacket, black
shirt, sunnies...
orders a cappucino to take away.
Watching from the table I know
she's been in the record shop (being me,
she's old enough to call it that)
and, yes,
she takes a new CD out of her bag and
studies it, track list, four band members,
can't see who they are from here
I think of my chat-up line:
so what's your favourite band?
but she gets her styrofoam capp and goes
leaving me still and still
incomplete

And there's a guy
with the hair and the eyes
but he's someone else's: a conservatively beiged little
woman, and I'm someone else's too
but maybe we could be friends, if, you know,
our paths could cross.
She gets him water and I...
Well it's not that I hide behind my book,
it's that you don't. You don't
chat up strangers in this
semisuburban lunchvenue with
seniors and young mums luxuriating in its
gentle touch of elsewhere.

You start a club. That's what you do.
You put up a notice and you attract people who are
so like yourself that they bore you, and people who
think they are you but
you know different

A guy emails me, says my poem reminds him of
Camus: the outsider/stranger/foreigner. Yeah.
A guy in Ulster emails me that
and where am I?

Ancient screams are my lover's
lyrics. I want your milk. Sustain
my spirit - but stay
away awhile. Come
back when you are cool
enough to touch. Let
the voices of your many
dances overclock my ears,
visions of your many rhythms
blur my broken eyes.

May you always be short
on shame. Your name lies
folded in my chest. I will
tear it out and flash it about. You
gave me beasts; I fed them well. You
gave me tests, and things
to sell. So take this nameless plane to smack
its aim. Blast my woken-princess
mouth, you faery-fashioned flame.

This nameless plane

rescued

princess
woken, mouth
blasted
as she
wanted, oxy-
welded
shut, lips
melted
together, hands
smashed
as she
asked for, words
torn
out of her

feel, princess

Feel not

Tracks in a bubble chamber, particles
whizzing and circling, we signal
each other with a brush
of the fingers
We don't see the fingers, only
the words

velvet-coated two-edged words
all you had
(more than you wanted)
and it tasted like...
tasted like...
it tasted like rain in your mouth

Like rain falling into your mouth,
and like a stone on your tongue,
and like earth on your lips

(You said this doesn't taste like sunlight it tastes like water,
this doesn't taste like soap it tastes like a sliver of toast,
this doesn't taste like wine it tastes like water
straight from the tap)

It tasted like rain in your mouth
There was no leftover curry, no cigars,
no clubs, cars or exotic beaches,
none of that. Only the clean electron taste
of rain. Had you shocked and shaking,
had you spinning on the spot
(had you blurting out nonsense)
had you groping, scratching, licking for more
had you a blind beast
had you
had you
had you
had you sated, slapped around, passing
out and coming round,
doubled up in grief at the death of the mystery,
doubled up in grief at the death of the rain,
doubled up in the mud,
doubled up in pain.

Transmitted character
by character, the striking,
twisting duality, the position and momentum

(You said this is salt and pepper and greasy chips
- but you wanted prosciutto, you wanted laksa -
eggs and dubious sausages, American ketchup
- but you wanted sushi, chilli, rollmops -
pesticide potatoes and chemical cabbages and waxed, fake apples.)

Smell not sweet fresh energy, smell not old leather, smell not.
You wanted roses and lilies
but you smelt daffodils and forget-me-nots
You wanted trucks or lions or angels,
moans or whispers, bells,
but you heard a little stream without even a name
You ached to feel sandpaper, to feel a flame,
a cat, a weapon
a rod, a whip
and a hand, a calm hand in yours
but in the end you felt nothing.
Feel not ecstasy, feel not contemplation, feel not.

Taste not blood, hot metal, cinnamon, smoke
Taste not rain
Taste pain,
quiet transparent pain.

(You said this looks not like a god or a beast or a devil
but a man, just a man
You said it tasted like rain
but it tasted like mud, mud, mud in your mouth
and in mine)

Haiku (or not)

*gloves laid aside
hands touch*

*a face lined and bristled
a smooth peach
kiss*