

**The Death of the Honeymoon Fly
And Other Poems**

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The Death of the Honeymoon Fly

Poems by

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The Death of the Honeymoon Fly

The honeymoon fly stepping slowly, gingerly
Onto an oak leaf lying upon the forest floor
Does not know why she feels as though
One half of herself has been ripped from her body.

Her memory is as gauzy as her wings, and yet
She feels an absence on her abdomen
Where once her mirror image --
Skinny black body, jagged spindly legs, red brow --
Stuck eternally to her like honey,
Even in midair.

Suddenly she remembers,
And the emptiness is so heavy
That it flattens her wings against her back
And she sinks her body down
Upon the leaf, perfectly still;

Hoping that another mirror image
Will come and attach itself to her --
Or else, that she may be able
Or be willing
To fly again,
Alone.

The Clown

No court ever housed a greater fool than I
As I knelt stammering before my queen,
Claiming a kinship of more than friendship,
And that we were equals.
Equals! -- when I handed over that crown myself,
Balanced on its pillow by the tight grip
Of desperate young hands.

She sat before me on the throne
That only desire to love
(Not love itself) built;
Her head cocked to one side,
An amused smirk about her lips,
Occasionally laughing and clapping
As one would at any clown.
She devoured my every trick,
And took, and took -- but seldom gave.
Why should she? And what right have I to complain,
When I designed it all this way?

Now, she hears that another realm awaits me,
And she will no longer find me at her feet.
She weeps, "Do not forget me.
You were one of my favorite subjects."
I promised. After all, how could I forget
The one who I allowed to treat me like this?

As I leave, I remember
What I ought to have recalled in the beginning:
That no new queen is crowned without a death.

Tu N'est Pas Un Mannequin

I see the way you look at her
As we try on clothes like new skins,
And the way you glare at your reflection,
Always comparing.

I do not and cannot understand why
You worship her, of all false idols --
She with her violent elbow that juts out
As she puts her hand on her bony hip,
She with her hollow form
And her colorless eyes
And papier-mâché hair and skin.

I loved you once because you were not her.
Now every day, more and more
Of the soft flesh that I knew so well
Hardens, cracks, and crumbles to the floor,
Like an ancient ruin that destroyed itself because
It could not see its own beauty.

Swallow Seven Spiders

The myth goes like this:
In our lifetimes, while we sleep
We will each swallow seven spiders.
It was thus that Arachne spun for me
The story of each one of my lovers.

The first, I guzzled eagerly down
When he fell into my wine's golden cup;
He swam in my gut until his bitter taste
Forced me to vomit him back up.

The second merely tap-danced upon my lips,
And remained for an even shorter time.
How could I argue if he decided
He'd rather wallow in a mouth that wasn't mine?

The third, I would have bet
My life that his poison
Would not be as fatal as all the rest.
But when I saw the blood-
Colored hourglass on his belly,
I knew he'd make a widow of me yet.

Three down now,
And four more to go.
Swallowing these spiders
Has already made my stomach sick.
I long for the night
When I will consume the final one --
To see it scurry near my open mouth,
Slide down my throat,
And latch its claws into my heart
Like a tick.

The Artful Dodger

I see another one dash off into the crowd.
But by now I'm growing used to it,
Used to finding my hands and pockets empty again.
I'm even growing used to being reduced
To writing nothing but ridiculous love letters
(Thankfully unsent) while you disrupt my life.

All of that would have been all right
If they had been anything like
Elizabeth's letters to her Robert.
But even though we may both be artists,
Together we will never be Brownings --
And you are just another let-down.
You nicked my watch right off my wrist
While pretending to take my hand.

Crippled by love again, I find
That the cunning ones like you
Are the true thieves of my time.

Two Ways of Having Her

I'm in search of him,
 My lawfully wedded one.
 I will pursue my MRS degree
 Like a woman who would become
 Wifehood's preeminent scholar.
 And after all my hard work,
 I know what my reward will be:

Girlfriends giggling over the wedding gown.
 Sending out gilded invitations,
 And exchanging rings before God.
 The house, the joint bank accounts,
 The PTA meetings we'll attend
 For the children I'll lovingly bear.

Yes, all this will be mine,
 Because I will need you,
 Want you again, I swear.
 Just give me time
 To pull away from them...

And then I will remain
 On your side --
 The side I was meant to be on
 When I died.

I promise, my invisible darling,
 We'll need one another again.
 You'll dig, and within me
 Find your lost rib.
 Each of us the missing piece
 Of some future's puzzle,
 Proof of all those creation myths.
 A hermaphrodite created by love,
 Man and woman, complete again.

But she's such a lovely one --
 I see her,
 See what it is you see,
 Covet what you covet,
 And yet --
 Always wonder
 If I only love her

Because she's what I'd like to give you
In my form.
I'm just another woman torn
Without you --
Without her.

If I had her,
She would have
Glass-smooth skin;
A smile that melts gods and men;
She would have cat's eyes
That pierce like an arrowhead;
Hair wild, whether short or long;
She would have tan shoulders,
Arms that could lift boulders
In rival of Atlas.

I have two ways of having her.
Two different ways, clearly separated.
And how will I ever know
Which is better suited?
Which to believe –
These late night confessions
In which God Himself says
That you are my only choice,
Or these afternoons of crimson
Where all I can see is her?

But I can't believe either one.
Because I haven't met
You or her, yet.

Venus Fly Trap

How can you entice me, ensnare me,
And not even give me the pleasure
Of being consumed whole?
I think you only like to hold me
In the delicious prison of your jaws,
As I endlessly drone and slam my body
Against your clamped, milky-white teeth.

You know too well
That I could never fly away
From your gaping red mouth.
I am so used
To having my wings torn off
By malicious school boys
(To which I said, never again).
But you! --

If I must go down again,
At least this time I was the prey
Of one as exotic as you.

No Madame Bovary

Friends, Mother and Dad:
If you'd allow me please
To introduce my latest squeeze.
I think I've managed
To scrape around the bowl and dig up
A good one this time.
No...he doesn't have a job
Or a degree, but at least
He's on the "graduate-by-thirty" plan--
More than can be said
For a lot of men, these days.

And there are times when he doesn't
Leave his clothes and trash lying
All over the house for me to clean up.
And anyways he always pays for dinner,
So it all comes out even, you see.
Sure, I suppose I could "do better,"
But couldn't one *always* do better?
No, give me a simple man;
A Madame Bovary I won't be.

And if you could only see
The way he lays his head on my chest
Like a child at night, you'd understand
Why I don't leave.

Lilith's Lament

I wanted this quietness --
These nights when, like Lilith after Adam,
I can roam
In the austere garden of my thoughts,
Free from the days
When two was a crowd.

At four in the morning,
In this porcelain silence,
I pace barefoot on cold tile
And stare into the spattered mirror.
My face shines back as blank and white
As the pages in my writing journal were
For two years.

I reach up and touch my hair,
Still surprised to feel where it ends.
Last week I cut it into a bob
That would make Edna St. Vincent proud.
And I should be proud of myself
For snatching back the solitude
I yearned for,
For having the fortitude to tell him no.

When sleep finally takes me,
It is without arms snaked around my waist --
The only thing I miss.

The Fury

The anger comes again,
Suddenly --
A rabid hound
That once was tame
And sleeping at my feet,
Now snapping at my hand
And snarling.

Your smirk like a perverse Cheshire Cat's
Tears through the pages
Of the book that I'm reading;
It drowns the laughter of a friend.

But all this fury
Can never match my anger at myself
For having been your better half
For so long;

For allowing you
To have hold on me even now,
And distorting my self into
A paralyzed reflection
Of your own bared, bloody teeth,
Posed forever to strike.

Meditations on Maggie

Our imagined life slips into my mind
 As naturally all the real time we spent,
 My departed inamorata,
 My former friend,
 My perpetual dilemma.

How dare I write about what never was?
 How dare I try to break through
 The black curtain of my regret
 To try to reclaim you now?

I reach out to draw back the curtain again
 Because we could have made it.
 Yes, I am certain of it.

We could have hidden under blankets
 After our mothers and fathers were asleep,
 Our skinny seventeen year old bodies entwined
 Like two caterpillars.

We could have sat on the edge of the pier
 Of your grandfather's lake house,
 The one you wrote so fondly of;
 Our legs hanging as precariously off the edge
 As if it were a sky-scraper,
 While we laughed and threatened
 To push each other into the misty water.

* * *

Oh Maggie,
 During all the time I was engaged
 In a cold war with your lovers;
 During all the time they were trying
 To turn you into a snail bearing the weight
 Of a housewifely home on her back,
 Instead of the dew-spotted dragonfly
 I alone knew you were;
 During all this, did you ever consider
 That I could have given you the happiness
 They failed to give?

You told me, again and again,
 That if your pendulum had not been fixed
 And still, it would have swung towards me,
 As surely as mine always swung towards you.
 But what force was so strong
 That it held your pendulum so steadfastly?
 Whatever our love was
 (Whatever kind you wanted to call it),
 I know it was a Taj Mahal
 Compared to the hovel they offered you.

Perhaps I speak arrogantly; maybe I only want
 To believe there was nothing real
 Between you and my competition.
 Perhaps there was no competition at all.
 After all, they had you and I didn't;
 Nothing I can say will ever change that.

* * *

I know what I should say,
 To myself and all of my friends,
 During those late nights
 When talk of pain and regret
 Flows as freely as the wine.
 I should say, thank God your pendulum
 Remained where it was after all,
 And never met mine;
 Because as soon as the clock struck midnight,
 Our Taj Mahal would have crumbled wholly
 To the ground. Instead it stands
 Empty, silent, and cold -- still a ruin
 In its way, but a far less devastating fate.

And when I say this, my friends will praise me
 For "getting over" you, as if you were an obstacle
 And not the short-lived blessing you were.
 And though it might be the right thing to say,
 Though it might even be true,
 Killing my desires in favor of that supposed truth
 Makes as much sense as cutting off my left breast
 To make room for my bow and spear.

It is no use to pretend
 That I can put you away on a shelf

Like a book I have vowed never to read again.
 I know that fifty years from now
 I will smooth down my hair in front of the mirror,
 And in its hue I will see the melancholy gray of your eyes;
 Your smile, your laugh, may be reincarnated
 In my granddaughter, and I will look at her and shiver.
 And I will tell no one,
 Because who understands or cares for
 An old woman's memory of a deviant love
 That was never returned?

* * *

Of course, more than once I gave up
 Any renewed hope for us; that was *my* decision.
 At least grant me *that* freedom, now -- if you never
 Could give me anything else.

You and I were identical twins silently facing one another
 As we sat in two different boats,
 Drifting slowly away in opposite directions.

Such an ending will never be enough.
 My final wish is that if we had to part,
 It was only because a current
 Stronger than any tempest you'd ever seen
 Pulled our clasped hands apart at last --
 As we held on so tightly that our fingernails
 Cut half-moons into the other's skin,
 So tightly that our knuckles shone
 As white as sea-foam.

The Heat

I still feel the heat
Where it burned when I was thirteen.
A sudden shock for a girl
Who, in her dreams, had loved nothing
But the cool London fog.
Now, the face of my future stared at me
With eyes like two pieces of flaming coal
In the sockets of a sun-bleached skull.

Lifted, as if by the Wendigo,
With a cry in the wind.
Dropped onto a desert
I didn't know existed
On the island of Lesbos,
With no water in sight
Among the ruins.

I thought I sweated it out at last;
The heat broke like a short series
Of blistering summer days
In my native land.
But something heavy,
Thick and impenetrable
Remained in the air
Surrounding me ever since.

And I wonder if the Wendigo
Was not really Aphrodite, incognito,
She of all that is divine and lovely,
Who brought me to the other side,
To show me its beauty.

“My darling, what you thought burned you
Was only my warmth, never before felt.”

Death for Passion

*Did I reopen a wound from within?
Every time I smell your cigarettes burning,
I mistake death for passion.*

You were standing in front of me
With all I usually found detestable
Smoldering between your fingers:
Addiction, filth, self-destruction,
It all was there in the flaming,
Disintegrating white stick
That you brought to your lips.
You boasted about your prowess
In blowing smoke rings
And I, peering at you from the edge
Of your tall mushroom,
Feigned that I was impressed.

Your kiss singed my mouth
And I fell into your bed
Like ash into a glass tray.
But you'll be lucky
If I ever forgive you
For giving me that night.
To you I am but a momentary light
That blazes up into gray dust
Before being carried away by the wind.

*Did I mistake death for passion?
Did I reopen a wound from within --
The moment that I gave in,
The moment that I smelled your cigarettes burning.*

A Brief Telephone Conversation on the Library Steps

"Hi, darling.
Why are you calling?"

I'm thinking of cheating on you.

"Oh, no reason -- I just wanted to say
Goodbye before you left today."

With him, and with her, too.

"But you know I won't be gone
For very long."

*I can hardly believe that I must do this,
Which I would have once despised.*

"I know. Call me when you get there tonight,
So that I'll know that you're all right."

*All choice is fled when I am suffocated by your embrace.
This is the only thing that will make me feel alive.*

Prose Poem

Two years, she thinks. Two years and now
 She's sitting across from him in a 1950s-style diner
 To discuss the return of their belongings.
 He pushes through the double doors
 And walks into the small, shiny restaurant
 With a swagger that says:
It has been six days, and already
You mean nothing to me.

She takes her gaze off the Formica table, and sees
 That he has trimmed his once-scraggly black beard --
 Something he never did before
 No matter how much she begged.
 Her awkward "hi" leaps out like a fish onto dry sand.
 "Hey," he returns flippantly;
 Then unceremoniously dumps a plastic grocery bag
 Full of books and CDs onto the table
 Before plopping into the snug booth
 With the red faux-leather cushions.

"I couldn't find your copy of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,"
 He says, not taking off his large black sunglasses,
 The ones she always thought made him look like a blind man.
 But she suspects where the book is; probably in plain view
 On the tall bookshelf in his apartment, the bookshelf
 That is actually hers. But she let it remain there
 Because "it's too much bother to get it,"
 She told her incredulous friend.

She pushes another bag towards him,
 The one that contains *his* belongings:
 A couple of battered, paperback science fiction books
 So old and cheap that the pages feel like dust against her fingers.
 She peeks into the bag of her own things, and tells him
 That one of her CDs is missing, too: the Ryan Adams one.
 "Oh? I didn't know you liked Ryan Adams."
 "You never asked," she says.

Looking further into her bag, she is startled to see
 Several books she had bought for him:
 Christmas and birthday presents.
 "These are yours," she says, holding them up.
 "Yeah," he says, "but you inscribed them."

She feels her throat tighten. She struggles
To swallow a sip of lukewarm coffee.
"I inscribed them because I wanted you to have them,"
She says after a moment, her voice trembling like a flag
Blowing at half-mast in the wind.

He shrugs; takes back the inscribed books
With the same demeanor as a rich man
Accepting a penny from a stranger.
He lifts his sunglasses for only a second
To look at his watch. In the brief moment
She catches a glimpse of his eyes,
She cannot even recognize them.
"John and Mike are meeting me here in a few minutes.
You should go," he says, returning his black plastic gaze
To the window next to their booth.

She hesitates for just a moment
To see if he will look her in the eye,
But she is disappointed. She shakes her head,
Then stands up so quickly that she bumps into the table
And sends a few drops of her coffee sloshing
Out of the white cup. Glad she already settled the bill,
She picks up her things and hurriedly walks away.
"See you later," she says over her shoulder,
Although she knows that this is a lie.
"Later on," he says. Then, as an afterthought he adds:
"I'll bring the rest of your stuff to you later." Another lie.

Before she walks out, she turns, wondering if she should go back
And put her arms around him in a final goodbye.

He is still staring out the window
With his shades on, looking like a giant insect.

She shakes her head again. Then, clutching her plastic bag
And hitching her purse higher on her shoulder,
She passes through the doors and into the autumn air.

The Miner

Fuel for fire is why I am here,
Forging through the gritty darkness
With my pick-axe in hand
To rob the pillars again.

The only light radiates
From my helmet
As I step past rocky walls
Blacker than Plato's cave;
My face and overalls smudged
With evidence of having been here
Countless times before.

Of course I am aware of the risks.
I have been nearly crushed
Under the timbers and the fallen roof
That held up my yearning --
The same yearning which pulls me now
Through the tunnel that only grows darker
And more narrow the further I go in.

But danger is easily forgotten
When one seeks the fuel and fire
With such direness;
When one has been taught that nothing else
Is more worth evading death for again and again
Than the sight of her fortune
Glistening among the rocks on the floor.