

## **The girl I would have married**

The girl I would have married  
had we met  
is on the other side of the street,  
a walking blur  
I only notice for a second.

And her hair is a shade of blonde  
or maybe brown I can't recall,  
nor anything about the jacket  
she'd been wearing nor the boots,  
only that for some silly unknown reason  
we would have married had we met,

maybe at the bookshop  
where I would have bumped her arm,  
said sorry for my clumsiness,  
which caused her to drop her classics  
and a dictionary too;

or it may have been at a party,  
hosted by a mutual  
friend,  
finding that we shared  
a favourite song,  
or that we're social  
democrats,

or that neither of us  
can stand  
the sight of blood;

then again, it may have been something  
random,  
her seated in the row  
just ahead,  
in a theatre  
with a paltry slope,  
her failure to remove the hat  
that blocked my view,  
my gathering the brazen courage  
to tap her shoulder,  
whisper into her ear  
that I'm unable to see a thing.

**My Cat Is Half-Greek,  
or Zeus Left the Acropolis Open Again**

My cat communes  
with the mythical, with the infinite  
and glorious invisible,  
getting an inside track  
on the weather  
and when the sky's  
about to change its tune.

My cat leaps up and tells me  
*whenever* it's about to rain,  
by the way she wiggles her whiskers  
and tilts her head  
beside the bathroom wall.

My cat instinctively knows  
when it's going to pour  
in Noachian proportions,  
when the neighbours  
will pound the door  
and beseech us to let them in,  
their basements flooded  
and the water still rising.

Silly cat, tumbling around  
with slanted head  
and twitching whiskers—

I'm only turning on the shower.  
Go back to your bed of sleep—  
and *dream*  
of chasing moths  
in the garden,  
the sun brighter  
than an Orion Nova  
and your shadow in pursuit  
as you run.

Let's not talk of storms today  
despite the warnings  
you sense from above:

Perhaps those sounds you hear  
are the thunderous applause  
from the pantheons up from their seats,  
as Taurus snags the matador;

the rumbling  
that of Hercules in hunger,  
starving for the love of Deianeira,  
she who brings his eyes  
to overflow  
with spit and drizzle,

a few simple sobs  
to remind us men and beasts  
that the deities too  
feel that which pains us all,  
blotting out the sun  
when there's none to share  
their sorrow.

Or it may only be Aphrodite  
calling you in  
for your dinner,  
unaware you have a home  
with *me*,  
cavorting with the mortals  
since we bow to your meows  
and your purrs,  
our closest, intimate link  
to both the eternal  
and the divine.

## **Before You Die**

*Before You Die*, it seems,  
has been springing up in bookstores  
all over the place.

“1001 Movies to See Before You Die” —  
double-faced in Performing Arts.

“1001 *Places* to See Before You Die” —  
yields a tepid trudge to Travel.

And every genre,  
it seems, has its own  
Arabian Nights-inspired thing to do  
*before* the hooded hangman calls:

“1001 Foods to Eat *Before You Die*”  
“1001 Albums to Hear *Before You Die*”  
“1001 Books to Read  
*Before*  
*You*  
*Die.*”

It’s worth noting  
that with all this talk of death,  
the titles continue to fly  
and booksellers can scarcely keep up.

Maybe that's due to the fact  
that you're never, ever told  
exactly *how* you'll die,  
for it's unlikely you'll see:

"1001 Dances to Learn  
*Before You Develop Cancer*"

or

"1001 Liqueurs to Drink  
*Before You Get Hit by a Train*"

OR

"1001 Puzzles to Solve  
*Before You Get Shot in the Head.*"

Perhaps we prefer that Death  
keep its *own* swell of incense,  
its *own* black curtain,  
its *own* cryptic crossword,  
one not deciphered  
by reader or writer alike.

But why that extra *one* after *one thousand*?  
That little bonus, as a P.S. or encore—  
to make amends  
for the penultimate trip or film?

Where you're much too anxious  
about your impending expiry  
to *enjoy* that stroll in Oahu ...  
too *perturbed* about your nearing demise  
to *laugh* through *A Day at the Races* ...

and only Banks' *allusion*  
to *The Sweet Hereafter*  
will make that final book  
even tolerable.



## Early Morning Rain

In the yard,  
you felt sorry for the slug  
that crept so slowly up the stem  
of one of your greens.

*Poor thing,  
it doesn't even have a shell  
to call a home.*

Afterward,  
I compared it with its cousin,  
the snail, several of which will  
gather in the garden  
after an early morning rain—

sturdy,  
in the swirly cave it carries  
on its back,  
a place to retract its head in  
when it pours,

feigning it isn't there, perhaps,  
should a desperate, homeless mollusk  
come to call,  
knowing there *isn't*  
any room  
for two,

and yet burdened  
by that extra weight,  
its inability to travel  
wherever it may wish,  
at its turtle-like, sloth-like pace,  
like a car that's always pulling  
a camper/trailer,

never having the mettle  
to face the world  
when things get tough,  
even ducking in its hovel  
when there isn't a cloud  
in the sky.

## **A Place Beneath the Water**

We drive to the beach  
the day you're released  
from the hospital,  
the pills once afloat in your glass  
currently a memory  
taken by tides;

and I suggest a brief, brisk swim  
in cleansing waves,  
to wash the stress  
from your battered mind,  
and you strip-down rather hastily,  
splash about as a child might,  
as you did when you were a girl,

and I lose sight of you  
in a panic of thirty seconds,  
as you submerge your head  
and hold your breath  
for a protracted half-a-minute,  
attempting to touch  
that part of yourself  
where the air cannot reach  
nor light tell the world  
what you've hid.