

**Rachel West's
30 Poems
April, 2013**



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I dip a toe in sunlight
after reading Keats--

I can only laugh at myself in this
and every thing I do--

Seeking, seeking
with my toe
some natural heat.

The Great Oxymoron

From out of myself I draw
a gnarled staff
and a house with golden windows
where trains go by at night,
winding up the mountain of my head.

With my staff I conjure dynamite
so tunnels can be hollowed out for commerce,
with a spiral staircase up my spine,
religion for a lighthouse,
digestion for the baser practicalities
of spiritual life-- the great oxymoron.

In the house I seat my iron will
to gaze down and ever down in consternation
at the striking around my ankles and my knees,
all my joints and bones beset by change.

Even if I grant myself this magic
this mansion and this place
in the constant process of falling
and standing forever--

Even if the gold is salvaged by the earth
for what seems nothing to me:
continuing light,
books,
materials for daffodils.

Shanty

There are no seasons in the sea
Only left and right
And intermediate degrees
And many shades of night

You cannot drink it all at once
For as the wise ones say
The sea will have just what it wants
And won't be drained away

The sirens that defend the pools
Most heavy-heaped with gold
Will have their plates piled high with fools
'Ere those now young grow old

It happens then a thousand times
And round and round it goes
That those who fear to speak their minds
Surround themselves with foes

And when they go out on the sea
A-gathering cockle shells
They find their greatest enemy
In meeting with themselves

The deepest places in the world
Are deadly as they're deep
That's where you'll find the devil curled
In bed and fast asleep

So find safe harbor where you can
Beware your feet don't stray
Too far abroad from home or land
Or down the darker way

Just Another Victim Of The Ambient Morality

It's going to be one of those nights
when you rise again and again
from the graveyard of your own self-regard
each time wondering
 where am I now?
only to find yourself immediately required
to make witty conversation with students of the law
(they hold the future in their hands).
Maybe they'll let you play their little game with them,
make you up, saddle you,
choose you for their side--
though now that you happen to look
you're a bit old for that,
graceful, meek, oozing away into
shapelessness,
the same shapelessness the young
are cutting themselves out of--
None of this is a pretty sight
so you sink back down,
trying to remember the one thing
you swore you would not forget this time--
Too late, you look up and someone's riding off
on your bicycle.

The Virginal

wooden
keyboard, two-toned
keys and simple levers
produce a quiet certainty
when played

Spring

There was a wedding;
I almost thought it was mine.
The people looked
like my family
and the evening seemed the same
as the evening I was in.
How easy it would be
to walk out of here
and into that evening.
Who knows what I would become?
A bubble
divided into drops
or air?

The kingdom of heaven

You can get to heaven
right now.

You can't get there
until.

So much in the moment
before now, or right after —
so much you have to
untangle, first.

But that's why you can't get there —
not until
you lay down that ball of thread
and go — now.

Learning To Use A Sewing Machine

A witch went to the mountains where a certain flower was known to grow. The path was stony and steep and she searched in vain, unaccustomed to being lost. She was a witch, and wise! But the flower wouldn't show and night was coming. Night on the mountain is full of strange bats that glow and flutter and fill the air with noise. Oh help! she cried, but she was still a witch, canny at hiding. She slipped into a hole and chanted spells all night. In the morning she saw her mistake. Her spells had all tangled in the trees; the bats were turned to drops of lead that lay all over the mountain; her flower had turned into a red dress hanging from a branch.

An Ending

My haunted mansion days
are, I hope, behind me.

Someone left a door open
and I slipped out like a fog.

Forecast Of Snow

Loving again–

Running in the open air–
It's easier at first to stay buried

under constant, comforting
disappointment.

The deadness of late winter
keeps us gathered in
another day.

Relief! Oh that life
never had to begin!

This Is The Poem I Would Never Write

This is my sincere apology.
This is my appropriate response.
This is a love story
and a story of grace.

I was on a journey
and you were the sky over my boat.
I knew and felt the stars
like the closeness of god
and my heart was a warm fire for you
and I never came home
because I needed nothing.

This is how I say it was.
This is all I ever said.
This is the star chart
you can navigate me by

because when I was old I died
with a thousand days
of perfect accounting
at the foot of my bed.

Shift

Just me
and a flower

Just me
and a fire

I could accept this night
if it were warm

or burning

or beautiful

I could wait as long as I had to

Valediction For A Headache

Go in peace, flimsy intimate guest,
after we have shared these embarrassments.

My rudeness is to blame
for your peevish refusal to leave early.

We ended up stuffed together in a closet
not big enough for one— let alone
two fantasy creatures.

How we grappled there, entwined
without the benefit of common language!

I would apologize
but you're already dozing
in the deeps of me
and soon I too will sleep.

Bioluminescent mollusc
coiled in the chambers
of my brain—

thin and brittle shell that it is—

I hope it kept you warm
as I staggered in and out of the night
trying to evade your conversation.

A Lovely Day Without Poetry

It was warm.

My hair got washed and dried bouncy
with lots of smoke in it

(lighting a grill
with bank statements
was a poem)

and now I'm afraid to lie down
because there's a dragon started up in me
(and it hasn't done enough destruction
or given enough blessings
for one day): I found I was alive!
And I had all that I wanted.

I Have Never Minded Nearsightedness

The things that hover
in focus when
my glasses are off
are the things I love:

My hands,
my hair,
the people
who know me well enough.

Dragon Dragon

There, war.

Faith-fog.

Abnormalfeather

Vulcan spine.

Excrement, leaven,

earth:

“Ours. Ours.” Unfaithful.

Anemia takes poison

out. Anomiography:

maybe tenement-born

need-art!

Meteors,

stars, house by the windfarm– Green

imperiality

blankets.

The house breathes.

The house of Bruce lies.

Item.

We Are Waiting To See

We are waiting to see
if you changed your hair.

It's me,
my boyfriend,
and Dad

in a house full of flowers
for your birthday.

Something tells me
THE SPACESHIPS WE PILOT
HAVE HIT THE SMOOTH BRIGHT
ICE CREAM HIGHWAY OF DEEP SPACE,
Mom — We can do anything!
It's our first time around.

No matter how many years
seem to go by
we're out there
IN WILD COUNTRY.

No matter what's on t.v.
we're alive and changing.

Knowing this,
any moment is
exciting and beautiful.

Right now,

we don't even know what you'll look like
when you get home.

Why It Worked

opened my hand
to what was in
the air — struck
by angel propulsion.

the things words have words for
are invisible. they build themselves.

Turn here.
Pardon the mess.
We are bringing you in.

In meditation
I worried
about money
and a medallion of pain
slowly seared itself into my chest.

In writing
there are admonitions
and benedictions
to be scrawled upon every thought.

Shift #2

The turbulent sunset roils
like the sea

and the arena
is like a bomb going off.

Droplets

People's conversations seem
undemocratic.

I can't listen and participate at the same time.

Just let me
float in my mind's ghost
at the permanent dinner table.

The party's over.
Stillness comes like a lost pet
returning on a rainy evening,
droplets
on the linoleum of its welcome home.

There was wind and rain.
I leaned in.
A weird echo of my voice
surrounded me — the umbrella
let nothing through.
I could not even see you
except, occasionally, reflected
all black and amber
in the wet street.

Poem on a Torn

Linearity only want
to dissolve — the magic
is in the zeroes, the

negative space. I coul
have done nothing all
but hold you — instea
I made a grocery list
with this page. So ma
interruptions and
counterfeits.

When I started out wi
a mind to complete
everything
I suppose that was la
of self knowledge.

At least I came back
with all the things
you wanted.

Minecraft Poem!

Day dawns in fantasyland,
an exact replica of the world
of materials.

What better place to be alone,
building the sky
and the spirits
and the wars —
building the doors, delineating
fear and invention!

The realization is that there's nothing
else to do.
There's no T.V.

There are computers —
the ancient kind, bewitched
and raised from dust.

How many days of the week
should properly be devoted
to worry?

Do you know the words
by heart? Take time
to practice.

At what age should a woman
be put out into a field of wheat
to silently recount
her omissions?

Will there be a second count
for bad intentions?

Be prepared in case there is.

In an alley echoing
with drunken song
is there a spell for protection?

That's a trick question, of course.

Magical intentions
are suspect and should be
vigilantly monitored.

As for drunkenness,
drink is for forgetting, so forget
to drink.

Gardening

Sitting in the garden,
feeling like a jerk.
I'll just have to be happy anyway.

My lover's out walking.
I exposed him to my insecurity
and what is left for me to do now?

By the time I die,
I'll have mastered the art of beginning.
Of struggling without complaint.
Of being a fool.

Today I'm still an amateur
at being an amateur.

Shift #3

A kind of silence
and the sun hurries down.

We each have our ways
of getting out of this place.

Green Sea

to wake in an unknown place
by a green sea

one thing i have never done

shallow but wide, the sea
is still and blinding

its sound the sound

the green sea that is everywhere

someone is saying its name
over and over

The Pawn

A game piece out of play or in
its crowning move reveals
the underlying strategy governing its world.
Tensions resolve.
Another round is over.

Such resolution always surprises me.
I am not good at games

and I am too often the subject
of my poems,
not the author.

The sky gives us plenty of room
while still seeming like shelter.

Today the clouds trumpet lowly with blue
and lashings of yellow-white,
a fleet of dying gods
graciously headed East.

They pass over the garden
where we are planting spinach.
We kneel.