

Millicent GRAHAM
Poems

Yellow Dog

I

In the pitch black
shadow of a hill
the yellow dog rises, like a halo...

II

Under the tamarind tree
the grasses shoot-
the yellow dog digs them out furiously!

III

The statue's head is rolling-
the yellow dog is yelping,
I closed my eyes and whisper
in tandem, 'Amen, amen.'

IV

The yellow dog turns his eye on me.
I taste vinegar, think, 'It is finished!'

V

The shame in me bent into a bow,
like the lapped tail
of the yellow dog.

VI

An old moon lifts through the air's raw scent-
the yellow dog drags its belly
on the pavement.

VII

I hang my head in shame

having seen the faces that spat
as the yellow dog drifted through
my thoughts ...

VIII

All I have seen is nothing
compared to the yellow dog
whose tongue hangs out at the
sight of
Everything!

IX

The sun goes down
The yellow dog is licking its groin.

X

Digging down to the earth's core, I
came upon
the molten leer of the yellow dog.

XI

The world was asleep: a painting
in which nothing moved but for
the yellow dog's jaundiced eye.

Dawn

Your shadow climbs on top my half
of the divan; the damp patch of you
is cooled by an oscillating fan.

Underneath a fitted sheet forgets,
losing its crush to a day not yet solid
but a cut of gentian violet.

Sleep till I come;
I go with the worn-out moon
to Coronation to buy ground provision

from women with dirt dried aprons
and earthstains under crescent nails
bundled in bales; women

like crushed leaves staining
the lining of hand-me-down linen
skirts; women bitter like medicine

calling out from yawning holes
the names of diggings,
their eyes on my bosom.

Leaning to one side, I tell time
by the lift of dust, the smell
of my pits; I know

that the dew on your forehead will soon drop
like ripe pears, purple and dangling.
Picking between death or dying

I whisper, *Stay,*
to the moon leaving me to carry the crocus,
And don't raise up to the sun,

Sleep, sleep till I come,
don't raise up till I come.

Rain Days

I watched with weightlessness little ones
bursting puddles as they pushed
off with naked soles against the wet
road, chasing shoes! The gutters broke;
torrents usurped their leather boats.

The streets were patent where wiggled once
the toes of sodden girls with tunic hems
hoisted to expose clear beads in mid-swell.
I was heavy, too heavy for rain jewels.

My mother said, "Tie yuh shoes-lace,
mind cloud-water pools, know only the dry."
Not this ache for rain days

Now, regret like ring worm
blueing and young limes cannot heal;
these feet that restrained the heart
and kept me raw, far from the damp in things.

Country Road

Country road. For miles
nothing but a man, two goats
and wild, bushy strokes.

Why I can't marry her? By now
she is elbow deep in soap suds
or pinned to the wire line,
belly glistening with rinse water.

The river road bends:
a bow. Shot into the sky
are gold arrow grasses.

Sun hot as my head,
I think of her and burst
into a sweat. Her belly
in a ribbon of clothespins
grows impatient. "No more
goat stink," she says. "Time
to mind two kids of our own."

The light mostly gone
the shadows mix and gather
on the patchy road.

Woman, I cannot see you as wife
material, your belly damp
and marked from labor. Like my
old shirt, you been hanging on,
waiting on the first sun to dry
you fresh as the day we met.

Middle

At thirty my body sinks into moon
cycles; waves rush in, and then
recoil, in their old habit of ebbing,
covered by the risen shore

where children with paper cup buckets
and spades watch, their bobbing heads
full of castle expectations
and grainy smiles, and sad sea-loving eyes

Old School

Old school dressed in green fatigue and stale
tea-coloured walls; there, pressed, counting to ten,
are smaller moons and softer even breath;
What I could give to smooth these calluses!

If I could feel the patches on my face
of morning sun cut through the chicken wire
and brand each cheek forever with its lace
I would squeeze my eyes, tight... tighter...

Autumn

If I only had another day of crisp yellow leaves
I would not wilt from the sight of sundown

as the dumb phone sits in a shinny cradle, waiting,
strange how your accent rings through everything.

I shuffle my feet, ruffle the carpet stubs
and make a different sound, softer than crunch.

A smell lifts; dry, a barren earthfulness-
I thought I scrubbed the furniture to bone

and rid the moist den of that sickly dust
I sprayed aspen, your favourite, at my nape.

So many men have pressed their cool lips there
but yours were warm and lingering like evening.

Soon an engine throttles and an oily tang
today will be yesterday. Soon

And the vaulted passage where your tenor rang
the mind will close on that artery

like the sealing of a linen envelope,
and almond trees, balding shameless in the spring

will shed the colour of a wound that throbs inaudibly
I'll imagine you called; that now is autumn.

Meditation

Breath after breath, it all crumbles away
as if air is a muted sea loosening clay
from the crimped toes of an old vessel.

Grain follows grain. The days are lost until
a stub too small to hold is all that peeks
from where it lies broken, buried in red earth.

Will some hand come to form this thing again
and this time will it be fired in a kiln?
I suck the glaze from my lower lip

and weigh the sun as it bakes me to stone.
A lotus empties pollen in the wind,
I clasp my palms to keep from floating off.

Ebb

You smiled and waded out beyond the light-
green bands, into dark water; my mind
turbulent from your assuring words;
It was your swaying smile I did not trust
that made my heart a starfish in my chest
or some white fossil, dumb. Beyond the surf
the scream I felt was tangled in the strands;
it drifted to the oaring of your palms.
Was it my tears that turned you toward shore?
I can be brave today, but tomorrow
the bedsheets will smell of a different sea,
the tide leave a different jetsam

Going home

-for Cooper

As men slam shut the market gate,
my goats whine for the old estate.
The sun slipped from the sky so fast
I never feel them separate!

The trucks pack up each soul at last,
but few walk on ahead. They cast
their shadows on the lucid street,
I watch them move through ginger grass.

No one has stopped for me as yet;
the goats want nothing else to eat,
so I jus catch my breath, I know
that dark is curling round my feet.

No shortcut through the ginger row-
my zinc house is *jus a stone-throw*.
I'll soon untie the rope and go
I'll soon untie the rope and go

Dandelion Heads

Out loud, a floating sentiment
like dandelion heads I press my lips
to fingertips then blow you away
away, a floating dandelion head-

We watch the smallness of befuddled words
and wonder where they go
slaved cargo transported in my bosom's hull.
When did we trade them and for what?

These days gambolled, bodies mused and mislaid
till who can tell which limbs belong to whom?
Only the whites of their eyes are paired
rolling in sockets, blank dice thrown

how have we beheld these un-sures alone?
Once in the jaw of a wordless night, we steered
our hands toward each other, the Calabash Bay
kneading the splinters of shells into stars

then we chanced to grapple human barbs
perhaps God blowing dandelion heads
gave me the falling will to jump at more

And yet calendar leaves have autumn too
and through there seasons consciously renew
the thought of you, the promise
we will write

But when ? To find words, begin again-
I wonder while silence worms you away,
will love unravel like a memory's stitch
pulled too hard too often ?

I feel a sway like wine sipped too fast,
my dandelion head comes floating out the past
and tugs on my promise's thin string
anchored to a sentimental phrase

Let us wait for the fragile thing to brake
and ponder where the bays wind might take
two miss guided parachutes who dared
to lunge into the desperate grey

Dragged by the stiff tow of few words

Away Away

We land somewhere in the cracks
that dandelions know

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