



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service

Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, tests publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30.

More Great Dinners from Life

Su Croll

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

February 1988

© Su Croll, 1988

Permission has been granted to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author (copyright owner) has reserved other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her written permission.

L'autorisation a été accordée à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de microfilmer cette thèse et de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

L'auteur (titulaire du droit d'auteur) se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation écrite.

ISBN 0-315-41602-5

ABSTRACT

More Great Dinners from Life

Su Croll

The three sections that constitute More Great Dinners from Life are linked through the themes of eating and consumption, through the notion of life as a meal, and through a struggle for both spiritual and emotional "feeding".

The first section, "Parlour Matches" takes the kitchen as its setting, and the preparation of a series of meals as its main subject. As the series progresses, the kitchen becomes less a place of security and more a place where the self may be consumed; the focus switching from feeding to consumption. The poems become more sinister, the imagery developing an underlying sense of violence in the implied cannibalism of the feeding and eating in the second half of the section.

The second, shortest section, "Fingerbowls" is a series of portraits in which the primary concern is with voice and narrative development through the use of "fractured time". This fracturing is an attempt to convey a simultaneity of time and place within a poem which, on first reading, might appear random in its choice of imagery, and in the unfolding of its narrative line. The fracturing is also evident on a formal level in the shortened, almost telegram-like quality of the lines, and in the use of subtitles to indicate temporal shifts. Finally, the poems in this section, though not dealing directly with meals and eating, concern themselves with the notion of consumption, where people are consumed with a feeling of inevitability that colours the situations they find themselves in.

The subject matter of the third section, "Chopsticks" is a series of worlds, many of them internal emotional landscapes, coming to their ends. Its principle concern though, is the transformation of the body, implying resurrection. This may be seen most clearly in both the "House" poems and the "Grandparent" poems.

Finally, a related theme runs through More Great Dinners from Life. This theme, one of transformation, is closely linked to the eating/consumption theme, and finds its most obvious application in those poems where the body itself is transformed into the meal (or Host), and where the god willingly becomes the most life sustaining element of the great dinner.

When you buy peaches
Consider the background colour
not the blush
It should be creamy
And never be optimistic
about buying peaches
thinking they will ripen
They never will

C
Plan to have this dinner sometime when you are feeling bored with things in general. Shopping for the ingredients is a kind of challenge and the cooking is freewheeling.

from GREAT DINNERS FROM LIFE
by Eleanor Graves

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I PARLOUR MATCHES

The Kitchen.....	2
How Small Must the Sparrows Fit in you Hand.....	3
Old Butter Churns are Best.....	4
Banjo Poem.....	5
Bessie's Depression Blues.....	6
Christmas Holidays.....	7
Fish Out.....	8
Heat Animal Fat.....	9
My Rubbing Has Made a Red Mirror from Stone.....	10
Sibling Sauces.....	11
Rich Host Jack Joke.....	12
Supper Time Open Wide.....	13
Shave the Bride.....	14
Marinating.....	16
When Barges were Gravy Boats.....	17
Pastry Making.....	19
When the Pie was Opened The Birds began to Sing.....	20
Roast Pork.....	21
Ground from Water.....	22
A Small Family of Minotaurs Lament their Lost Suppers.....	23
Greek Myths.....	25
Kronos Inventing.....	26
God the Father.....	27

II FINGER BOWLS

A Point of Land Running to Water.....	29
Smothering with Softer Hands.....	30
The Decoy Burns the Sky for Hours.....	31
Prenuptial Provocation.....	32
The Night has a Thousand Eyes.....	33
Map of the Stars.....	34
Long Hair and Red Capes.....	36
Beginning with the Dog Paddle.....	37
Jungle Kitchen.....	38
A Second Language.....	40
No Sooner is the Ceremony Over than the Bride Begins Criticizing her new Husband's Driving Habits.....	42
Country Animals.....	44

-III CHOPSTICKS

Limping Leadfoot Fishing West.....	48
In Virginia's Dream I am Daisy Miller.....	49
Wedding Days.....	50
Legs.....	51
Placing Beginnings.....	52
Ghost Remains.....	53
The Winter before Granny Died.....	55
There is a Barbecue in the House of God.....	56
Unfamiliar Wind.....	57
Those Country Roads in Summer.....	58
Houses.....	59
Only Forest.....	60
Here is the House that has Folded.....	61
Vegetables Pets and People.....	62
Last Days.....	63
Day the World Ended on Parchman Farm.....	64
Pigs and Pearls.....	66
Last Time we saw Jesus.....	67

More Great Dinners from Life

PARLOUR MATCHES

blanch: To immerse in boiling water to loosen skins or to heighten flavour.

Blaze (flame, flambé): To set a match to liquor-drenched food so that it bursts into flame.

from: The Doubleday Cookbook, vol. 1,

THE KITCHEN

Welcome to my kitchen
church of my coal burning oven
Lazarus has the drum stick
St. Paul samples the gravy
Eating my white meat
until I've fed a multitude
Families camping
on white sand shores
with dogs and cousins
and picnic baskets

I see fluttering table cloths
from across this wide blue water

HOW SMALL MUST THE SPARROWS FIT
YOUR HAND

fitting that sparrows are circled
by your hand fitted tight
with millet and suet to keep them
bless them and keep them
fat and feathered in the longest night
and the wickedly short shape
of the days you have left

OLD BUTTER CHURNS ARE BEST

Can't you see the slow in the breeze
top heavy bending of ripe peonies
That old sky that just lengthens and rains
Greenhouse girls in braids
balancing pots of clover honey on big
milk-maid hips

I've got a banana in my fruit basket
a ripe orchid in my pocket
When you kiss me
I stay kissed
Roll me over in August
Old butter churns are best

BANJO POEM

You got a dancehall for parading
with a bar for drinking
and a floor for dancing
You got women wanting to feed you
and clothe you
and put you up in their hope chests

Bet you never went hungry
with a banjo like that

Things are different up here
Come on in and close the door

Now you got to earn your keep Get up and chop me
some wood you got to fill up my big Franklin stove
fore we get any heat in here

And here it is baking day My kitchen's sweet
and ready pewter's all polished cupboard's full
with plenty

It's cold outside
but we're under this tent
you me and your banjo
And you can play that music
'til bread dough rises
Then we'll punch it down
and set to square dancing again

6
BESSIE'S DEPRESSION BLUES

The blues is gone outa fashion
Big bands with trombone and king clarinet
swingin in and sweepin me aside
This new sound too big
to snap your fingers or shake your ass

New sound too loud and I'm sinkin in my cellar
Can't get my sweet man up into my kitchen
to take my lovin Can't get my stormy daddy
to jelly roll me slow over his big ol burner
Nothin more cookin in my red hot oven

The blues is gone outa style
an I'm an ol rockin chair
This cold night my man's gone cat dancin away
to the yella light of a swingin big train
My cupboard's bare and I ain't empress no more
These depression blues got me trailin the moon

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS

It's cocktail piano
on the radio in the front room
Norm in on the five o'clock train
got him a wife from the paper
fried hotdogs at birthday parties
and enough empties in the kitchen
for another case
Get me a deck of Belmont Milds
and a pack of Sensen
to cover it up

You got Christmas holidays
right up to Groundhog Day
Got a fruit cake wrapped up
and a carton of Black Cat Corks
in case Billy comes home with a girl
And there's a bottle of John Begg
over the stove
to get you warmed
when you come in

Then it's New Year's Day
Kirk is still pissed and screwing
the doors off the cars
and sugaring up
Overton's gastank
because his boy
just got married again

FISH OUT

my favorite rose push me back
into those july's when finding
the best red queen
elizabeth rose was our best pastime
and trying to match
overton's peonies tying those damn flowers back
while his wife tried on pink gloves
for church

peonies overgrown and spreading
like a beautiful woman's hair you only wanted
to look for as long as you could

HEAT ANIMAL FAT

so it melts away connective tissue so it floats
away free down a great bubbling current
into midday meals with men
coming up the hill taking off their hats
before they reach the house We are sharpening
our longest knives and waiting We are plunging
hot foods into ice water setting
the colour We are pushing back
hair from our children's foreheads and praying
for humility before a god who rules
everything under the sky His dominion
stopping at my front door where his hat
comes off and his shoes
pile in the corner with all the rest

MY RUBBING HAS MADE A RED MIRROR
FROM STONE

you'll remember
an after-image of sky
a red brick house
with a face in four directions

I still have fire
flickering the warm rubbed bellies
of copper pots

it is the land
that lies down
with me now

SIBLING SAUCES

one with freckles the other more sedate . . . cooked down
to a tee Now you need never
fear putting hollandaise on your fish
or béarnaise on your steak

EACH PIECE OF BREAD I TRIED TO PUT IN MY MOUTH
snatched away in a clawed storm at dawn
birds bringing food from the sky I am never able
to eat I am called away Ants
heave under my weight moving me
to the open river

RICH HOST JACK JOKE

billy's on the run again can't save him whole town
wants him dead our last time we kiss
in the kitchen they see his hat
on the hook kick open the front door
and shoot and miss put the gun
in my hand but I can't
do it I'm crying saying don't

make me do it I've got a knife
then there is bread billy
has gone I cut twelve slices pat them
sweet with butter and pass round
'til everyone has eaten I wish
billy was here so he could taste
for himself

SUPPER TIME OPEN WIDE

you look down at the plate but away
 from the meal away from daddy's shaking
 storm cloud beard away from mother
 smoking a marlborough and counting out her rings
 and earrings away from the great dane
 lapping up all you cannot eat away
 from sister marjorie with her cage
 on her head pushing at the cuttle bone with her soft
 stupid lips away from the low pressure
 air mass passing over the dinner table clouds anchoring
 and answering our call for the nightly conflict
 of pass the butter and this meal
 is burnt weather is in us now clouds forming
 comically above our heads pawing off
 pieces of eight papa donates slabs of supper
 to the god of shipwrecks and we bend
 to our plates again

at easter there is the addition of russian vodka
 softer bread and longer line ups
 god is waking up right on time and rolling around
 under the table christ is risen
 but we don't give a shit saying pass
 the butter this meal is burnt why did I marry
 you and why did I have these kids papa slaps
 on mustard and red beet horseradish

these are the blessed eggs
 these are the scraps of spring

SHAVE THE BRIDE

OLD ENGLISH FLESH FOOD

Lift the pig onto foil...bend hind legs forward and front legs backward into a praying position so pig crouches...and force a foil ball about the size of an apple into its mouth... THE DOUBLEDAY COOKBOOK

Somewhere in the dressing my feet
were left off as roasting tails of sentences
unable to end or fall flat into resting positions
but limping on braised stumps And my hands
are lost swimming away from that certain knowledge
of movement

Who is that holding her legs shut
still birthing me back
to that rare roast before being
Until I don't know which lungs
to breathe with mine or hers mine or hers

THE FAT SHOULD COME FROM THE BACK OR THE BELLY
and be well chilled and easy to chop I live
in a neighbourhood where I can get fresh
tripe every Tuesday

WHAT IS THIS ANIMAL THAT HAS COME TO MY HOUSE
Here is a man who takes the shape of what he hunts Women
gathering in the second field that pure gesture
of sky Hunters shooting Making many mouths
for all they will eat

(cont'd.)

SHAVE THE BRIDE / 2

LIKE ALL THE WOMEN IN MY FAMILY I WAS SEWN SHUT AT AGE FIVE
thrown into the Lachine canal for swimming lessons

They curled my hair with tongs
There was smoke everywhere, and orchids
the most sexual of flowers
this one is wet and purring in my hand

PREPARING THE BRIDE BELONGS TO THE WOMEN
We are punching down bread dough all night
and into the morning We are fishing and teething
Fish and teeth ground down to butter

Shave the bride Hold her down between your knees
Shave her 'til she's nice and clean Shave her
'til she cannot see

AT GRANBY ZOO THE KANGEROOS WERE LYING ON THEIR SIDES
I thought they were dead
but Mother said no only sleeping Then she said
during the war the burning
crocodiles tried to escape into the river
but couldn't and were made
into new hats and shoes for tourists

MARINATING

She hangs me
by the heels
'til I'm nice
and seasoned
And she rubs me down
for hours
with olive oil
and oregano
I hate
how I love
those little attentions

But we both want
to put
our best face forward
And we both want
my meat
to be tender
and pleasing
to melt
in your mouth
to dissolve
in its own
sweet juices

WHEN BARGES WERE GRAVY BOATS

In those days desserts were just
and finished the meal off
so nicely
And funeral barges
were just thick wooden
gravy boats
In that town
all the streets
had the same name
and you could never
get lost

what we swallowed
what we held
in our mouths
all those delirious hours
what we devoured
what feast
what fat
what thick brown gravy
soaking up
the whitest of breads

Bread and white
floured hands
so open
so willing
to fill us
Bread
soaking in wine
holding out
the promise of feasts

where we are eating
meat so red hot
it burns like coal
and burnt apples
going down

(cont'd.)

WHEN BARGES WERE GRAVY BOATS / 2

Burns like ovens
scorching the skins
of bread baked to last us
another week

And it burns like the hand of God
forcing second helpings
from his burning dish

PASTRY MAKING

Work the cream
to a butter
with your hands out
big as they'll stretch
Your hands,
and the mixing bowl
should be iced
and set in a cool place
for an hour

Let all their bones dissolve
and sink to the bottom of the bed
like sugar Let them sweeten
roses and azaleas
'til the next dry spell

And let nails push out
through the cold flesh
of hands longing again
for usefulness

WHEN THE PIE WAS OPENED THE BIRDS
BEGAN TO SING

When they run
slick and small
from my kitchen
When their bellies
are of a cream
and they've shucked
their outer shells

When they have stuttered
out their old bones
and laid their pretty memories
on cinderblocks
to rust away in the backyard

When they've held
their hands out
as far as they'll reach
and the wings
have come in
fresh and green

Then they are meat
for heaven

ROAST PORK

An unwholesome meat and should never be eaten by children or people
with weak digestion, nor, indeed, by anyone except in cold weather.
MRS. LINCOLN'S BOSTON COOKBOOK

Butter your hands
and keep everything
as cold as possible
Then grease that pig
pull its front teeth
for a trophy
Keep its feet
to stop your kitchen door
Scrub away the bristles
until the skin is soft enough
for Sunday boots
Make a mouth
of its apple face
and save two cranberries
for eyes
Then watch grinning
through the oven door

Eat until you can't eat
Eat until you are unlaced
by such supping
and thick gravy tears
run from your bleary eyes
And eat until the dead
join you at the head table
cursing your roasting
that roused them home

GROUND FROM WATER

Let me see sky
before the next visionary
climbs to heaven

Let me collar small
seasoned hands
and a soul

all scratched clean
and ready to wear
in all weathers

Let me shanghai newly shod
feet and hair blackly
pulled back from the water

in nets
Let my markings
keep me grounded

Let me not be tempted
to wander
beyond the comfort of my own dear pastures

And let me grind down
today's catch of tooth
and bone

to a rich fleshly butter
And you and I can
swill it together

perched on this vagabond fence
and revelling in the feverish marrow
of this bedlam stew

A SMALL FAMILY OF MINOTAURS
LAMENT THEIR LOST SUPPERS

Properly cooked, the bones become delicately charred, the skin
glistens and crackles, and the crown takes on a golden glow.
GREAT DINNERS FROM LIFE

We were a fat
and hungry nation
Now we live without comforts
in houses of straw
We have clean scrubbed faces
and newly shod feet
leading us wherever we wish
in this little ribcage mansion
you've managed

If you let us
we'll borrow your spare shoes
and shape them
for our own pretty pink feet
We'll steal your smiles
and dance a dramatic
Sarah Bernhardt minstrel show

We'll take you to the basement labyrinth
We'll show you how we were fêted
every fall by those small fry from Athens
How we swayed in blood contests
played out to delicious finales
How crowds screamed
and threw down roses
and rib steaks

We'll show you how we dug straight down
to the rich yellow marrow
clawing down and gripping supper
down to its elbows and boney knees

(cont'd.)

A SMALL FAMILY OF MINOTAURS / 2

But now we are hungry
and tired of suckling
old bones
We want newer foods to arouse
our tastes Newer scenery
to rerapture us Newer kings
to donate newer daughters

But the shrinking world has grown
so lonely We miss
our life on the stage
That stadium above is in ruins
and only a few skinny tourists
roam the pitted surface

GREEK MYTHS

Here comes Io in her rubber dress
now she is a sow now she is the snow
white cow chased by a southwest
crown of flies chased
by a thorny wind that won't quit

The man who husbands her
catches her in sheepskin catches her
at her sheepskin act the usual one
with the wolf in a Ralph Lauren
monkey suit I will describe him to you
beginning with the fangs and Io
still dripping from his mouth

There's brother Rex over at the bar
riddling Antigone's twin sister and gouging out
memories for sunglasses and reaching
for the goat meat and ball park pretzels provided
by the management walking around
on those morning noon and night legs
and salting us up on beer nuts
and pickled pigs feet

KRONOS INVENTING

Father smacks his lips
rubs his belly
after that little snack

He eats them like stones
You can see the years
of brothers and sisters
singing harmony in his guts

Kingdoms lay gaping
on the landscape
then carve easily
beneath his hands

I'm spread out
like a tablecloth
tucked in underneath

And it's night
desiring love as he
happens to me

with words
absently rubbing himself
over me until
I'm a new language

bubbling up
and being born

G O D T H E F A T H E R

Eating
the words of Christ printed in red
Maybe angels
are inside and outside
at the same time
fitting
like a glove in a glove

This cold room lets me see my breath
blue before me where I'm lying
with this bag of bones A clawed bird
with yellow teeth leather wings
and a stubbled blue face
scratching my stomach

Why do I need this monster
in my bed

Then the grinning glow
as he wakes
Father
baring his teeth
and clawing his name
onto my flanks

A need for language
comes at night with fire

FINGER BOWLS

coddle: To poach in water just below the boiling point.

from: The Doubleday Cookbook, vol. 1

A POINT OF LAND RUNNING
TO WATER

IN THE BUILDING WHERE I LIVE THURSDAY IS RUG BEATING DAY
I remember the fire reels rounding the corner
The year I lost my ring in the lake same lake
we could sit in for hours propped up
in inner tubes In winter the cars out on the ice
Those five skidoos stayed parked out back
all year I remember Paddy's truck up the bend
of Shore Road Someone tell Kate
to bring a rope

I remember the geese coming back I remember
the geese overhead for days

PAUSING UNDER THE DOORWAY
You could see the flock heading north again
like we have no more countries left We agreed
on small talk waiting for the cops to come

WATER COMING UP OVER OUR BOOTS
Whose truck is that on the ice it's too warm
the weather turning everywhere
the sound of creeks breaking
through their skins

SMOTHERING WITH SOFTER HANDS

A MAN'S GOT TO COME HOME TO SOMETHING
better than a house full of women
stuffing Easter baskets for the priest
He can't read and he can't hear you
when you ring Goddamn wedding
lasted three hours and nobody knew
I was there Last time she held me
in private was when her mother dropped dead

she would give it to me raw seasoned with pepper 'n' onions

THE WEATHER TURNING

over a roasting spit threatening summer
This country will cook you alive if you let it

FRANTIC DAYS OF BIRDS

never stopping everything snatched seconds before
the world changes again Everything dangerous the shift
in falling leaves laundry on the line A door slams
far from this My dad coughing blood into the toilet

THE DECOY BURNS THE SKY
FOR HOURS

SAM SHEPARD'S DOWN ON THE FARM WAITING FOR THE WOMEN
cross me jesu t's and sell the shirts
that don't keep out the cold watch the river
and know when it's coughing up
your back yard

OUR BEST CLOTHES
were more wooden than waking our best smiles
pinned up and forever over at freckled corners
the struts of our ribs hold us close right up
to whalebone jaws jackdaw rhyming
with a welter of ravens black trains } rumbling hard
all night

PRENUPTIAL PROVOCATION

IN DREAMS I SWAM IN THAT VERY WATER
 I know everything the very moment rock
 gives way deeper water the appearance
 of sand bars further out

I FINALLY SETTLED IN A LITTLE BOARDING HOUSE
 99 fat boy road with bugs
 in the shower growing swelling
 like baked beans they won't go down
 the drain priests and nuns run
 the house and I feel implicated
 in the whispering going on
 behind that closet door

GO AHEAD AND DIG A HOLE
 you've got to eat your way out of that one
 granny's gold teeth lighting
 the way eat them words eat them
 with salt and beef tallow all cold
 and sunk into day old bread eat up
 be merry we've got a whole prison
 tent together two bits of heaven under this
 army issue got a sandwich a love letter and two sets
 of keys and we're driving out of all this shit
 at last let's say you married me
 for money let's say you married me for I'm fair
 of face and wide of ass let's say
 you didn't marry me but you belong to me anyhow
 you can't get away from that

THE NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES
(for Edward G. Robinson)

If we could meet again the night would have a thousand eyes
a thousand eyes to see us with and a thousand nails
to drive us into each other's hearts We'd be coming up
true love and daffodils ringside at the Rose Room
and throwing matchstick bets on dining and dancing 'til four

We could be waking up weekends to steak and mushrooms
and you'd be ruling the cathouse lying there in your underwear
smoking that little caesar cigar And we could be ordering in
fried wontons and Belgium beer plugging quarters into hotel beds
and shaking pinball like those skinny alley cats moaning love
at the window and poking sardines from twisted cans

And you could tell tales on the future from that roll top desk
in Hong Kong where fireworks would pay off with another
new year and the paper tails of a hundred paper tigers
would blow out towards the Luzon Strait And Hurricane Mary Agnes
slamming in from the South China Sea blowing boats ashore
and declaring the world world dead but we'd be alive and the night
would have a thousand eyes

MAP OF THE STARS

GARY COOPER HAS A RED FLOWER BEHIND HIS EAR
 statue of liberty tatooed on his chest
 we are in a screening room telling big stories
 full of local colour and natural and artificial
 flavourings I have a finger in each
 and every ocean laced up
 to my brunette crown I'm kissing the ground
 in imitation of the pope splashes of lo-cal
 colour dance in my hair

YOU LOOK LIKE FORTY MILES OF ROUGH ROAD
 you look frozen half way up the forbidden
 water tower like alice toeing
 the corners in a chess game speaking in poetically
 broken english saying

twist torso with broom
 hold weights at belly level lean back look
 at a spot twist while leaning
 back on all fours leg lift
 straight then bend then to side

gary laughing marlene piling
 her head with yellow curls one side
 squashed everybody blowing off the hat
 whatever THAT means I am looking for fruit
 toppings for vanilla ice cream the phone ringing
 as I wake up to

THE SAME FILM NOIRE TENDENCIES
 same venetian
 blind fantasies gary cooper
 spying on me from heaven looking down
 from rabbit and toad hall constellations
 on my map of the stars I'm snapping
 photos as the bus tour pulls past the main house

(cont'd.)

MAP OF THE STARS / 2

SUN CAN PASS MANY MIDNIGHTS
 waiting for him to breathe
 into my trap there is no path
 in this poem only a withering fish
 swimming out of my mouth each and every morning
 and I am alone with the twelve swirling suns
 burning above hollywood and vine

everyday I am freer the cup
 of coffee going on for hours

GROUND PORK BROWN 'TIL PINK GONE KEEP STIRRING

BLIND TOUCH TESTING
 in the end marlene follows him into the dessert
 he eats a forbidden apple she slips him
 the key

in the end I won't want
 all this stink and wash our glories
 are soggy and I'll be getting you
 mail order in small bite sized pieces

for a little local colour we can watch
 cap'n kangaroo each and every morning and listen
 to the bellhop singing HAPPY TALK

in the end I'm beginning
 to adopt your habits and putting
 these two milk bottles between my windows

LONG HAIR AND RED CAPES

our parents bought us canadian souvenirs indian
dolls with long black braids we'd take them out
and rebraid and rebraid we wanted hair
like princesses would come downstairs,
pink bath towels on our heads long hair
I'd go to the attic and read
superman comics run outside yelling my cape
trailing behind me in the hot winds of krypton
superman must save the city
under glass jimmy olson is trapped
in an under ground prison and lois covering it
for the late city edition

the credits are rolling and the lights
are coming up we are almost alone
popcorn on the floor an usher
smoking a lucky strike kiss me jimmy

BEGINNING WITH THE DOG PADDLE

HER FATHER KEPT PADDLING AND HUMMING TO HIMSELF
 old songs that we didn't know about bonnie
 prince charlie we were embarrassed and spoke
 too loudly -- he's not deaf you know -- only moving
 slower like a snail or clams coming to slow
 salt water boils that year
 we went to norway bay had hotdogs
 by the beach fire taking
 too long pebbles hurting our feet we walked
 with tiny steps and made squealing sounds
 'til we could get to the car
 for our flip flops

HER DAD WAS COVERED silvery hair
 over his chest and legs I'd never seen
 that before and so skinny
 like an athlete he dives right away makes
 an arrow in water that is too cold
 for us he swims into the middle of the lake
 like an olympian I want
 to ask jenny about her dad but I can't
 form the question with my lips. can't move
 it out of my mouth

CANOEING THE ISLANDS UP IN NORWAY BAY
 and naming them jennifer gave them names mythical
 animals or characters from c s lewis I see her dad
 in the grocery store he comes in
 every morning at nine for a loaf of whole
 wheat bread unsliced and walks
 with a cane I can't ask
 if he remembers me and I know he's not
 deaf but count back his change
 very loudly

J U N G L E K I T C H E N

I REMEMBER THOSE LITTLE WHITE BREAD SANDWICHES
mother made cucumber and mayonnaise melting
to gruel on cruel girl
guide trails

small made of bleached bread
dough speaks in squeeks
and squawks and peeks
through lace curtains

most mornings it's beating
eggs burning toast cooking
bacon crisp

I ORDER OUT AND EAT
in bed ignoring giraffes waiting
in easy chairs and boa
constructions of alligator lanterns
and freshly stretched
rhino hides

in a jungle kitchen
it's the roaring
of wall paper wall
to wall carpets burning up at us
with the milked and yellow faces
of angry house pets

(cont'd.)

JUNGLE KITCHEN / 2

MAYBE YOU COULD REACH UP AND MAKE MORE GRAVY
there is old dick tracey pooling
in his shell clutching his pet
monkey farmer in the dell
tripping up a staircase jungle
in the hall roving
like a dragnet jumping to
the call climb right up
my ladder burrow in my lap
peanuts from my fingers chipmunks
in my trap

A SECOND LANGUAGE

I WANT TO BE A SMALLER TARGET
no burning decks stacked
against me I want fires
to end burn more
slowly so animals have time--
moving slowly from the path

love is that way

we fall back in
with our tormentors throwing dog meat
for pie mashing flour
and gravel and gravy they know us best
our tenderest parts that hide
under torture

A PICTURE RUNS DOWN MY ARM ONTO DRIPPING WALLS
he's got a finger in
where writing begins he's got me
pushed down on a bed
of words the usual kind
it's the dripping that puts me
to sleep water forming ceilings
and falling wet foot
prints in the hall

this bear in my house teaching
new language this water
this hall this face this house

(cont'd.)

A SECOND LANGUAGE / 2

I HAVE FOUR LOVERS NOW
so many take away
sadness mountains sloping
straight to heaven earth
and asia under my finger nails
ice on the ocean's edge
year round love
is that way

nothing breaks down the light on this broken
treeless land it's an unbroken
singing forth love is that way

EACH HOUR HAS A SEPARATE RELIGION
the hour of the wolf the last hour
of darkness this is where we've stopped
slowing down to single phrases
then words bright blue
and giving } words repeated
slower than gems as hands
running over them on dark velvet
getting under all folds

as a view from a tent of the sea

NO SOONER IS THE CEREMONY OVER
 THAN THE BRIDE BEGINS CRITICIZING
 HER NEW HUSBAND'S DRIVING HABITS

LARRY LIFTED WEIGHTS

when he was a kid made him gentle
 man can't be a weight lifter
 and a bum he said almost went to the olympics
 for wrestling threw a guy
 too hard then threw him again
 too many hard hits on the mat and banned
 for life but in weights
 he was runner up for mr montreal I saw him
 flexing on the beach bicycle chains
 for a belt larry drives the company
 station wagon to work calls it
 the shit wagon

LARRY'S BEEN CERTIFIED CRAZY

by a doctor downtown can't get
 another job pays alimony
 for a wife in b c plays in the street
 singing wake up little suzy
 -jesus is hot
 on your trail finding you a sparrow
 to fit
 your feeder

(cont'd.)

NO SOONER / 2

LARRY LURES ME OVER WITH A CARTON OF SALEMS
watches carson every night drinks
jack daniels and root beer knows twenty ways
to light a match on his teeth bought a scottish kilt
croons for quarters at the mall
got a lover who threw him
into the street easter sunday CAN'T GET
A GODDAMN CAB AND MY STUFF'S GETTING
SOAKED IN THE RAIN heart's got
another hole in it house got
roots growing down there
in the basement down to the burning
bottom of the world

MAYBE WE WILL FINALLY HAVE SOME GOOD LUCK
after having our asses
kicked half way to january

COUNTRY ANIMALS

ALL NITE BUTCHER CHOPPING
midnight livers into early morning
eels winding round eel
wheels fish
escaping into air I open my eyes
snails all around on the bed
and wall on the floor moving
towards me all night
on roman roads

SO I'M OFF TO RUDY AND THE PASSEL
of brats the pastry of it all
run of that mill the fog
horn chowder of leaving
mimi trapped on the beach
smart as a whip quick
as a trap quick as the day
clouding over water becoming
thoppy too choppy for swimming

north american jars
holding the whole damn history
under coloured glass here's hurricane
helena swimming off the coast of florida

(cont'd.)

COUNTRY ANIMALS / 2

THE ABSOLUTE RIGHTNESS OF THE VERY BEST FLOWER ARRANGING
he told me what he could cook what he was
good at things to tempt me up
to his house

in the garden snakes
swilling with parrots frogs
and anteaters stop in
for lunch and after the birthday party
balloons grow slow wrinkles in the closet

I see the world like a sparrow
eaten by a cat I've come to the country
to see country animals

what we usually do is fit love
into me before I go to work in the coolness
of morning with separating shadows
of palms and monkey tails
hanging over everything

HE WANTS TO DO THE KINDS OF THINGS MEN ARE SUPPOSED TO DO
he wants portraits quick as poison
he wants chicken livers
fried in butter and onions
on wheat toast each day
of the week he wants wall
to wall willingness
from whatever he wants

(cont'd.)

COUNTRY ANIMALS / 3

HE WANTS TO TAKE ME ON A MONKEY RIDE
he wants me to pack
my trunk leave miami and drive
up the coast in a car
borrowed from his brother the butcher he wants
tinned snails in garlic
butter and eels caught
in a horse head churning
through the eye hole and diving
into the mouth hole he wants
to see where his last meal
came from

CHOPSTICKS

devil: To mix with hot seasonings (commonly mustard and cayenne).

deglaze: To scrape the browned bits off the bottom of the skillet or roasting pan, usually by adding a small amount of liquid and heating gently; this mixture is added to the dish for flavour.

from: The Doubleday Cookbook, vol. 1

L I M P I N G L E A D F O O T F I S H I N G W E S T

SHOW PATIENCE PULLING MOUNTAINS OVER DESERTS
keep spirits of sands and demons away from corpses
pour warmed water over beds
of grain read guide books to the underground world
pop pomegranate seeds and stir up
the soup

SOUR SOW MOTHERS
get out your congealed boxes
of shades don't be fooled
by fat wrapped bones choose blacker
blood to bring your patient babies back
to life

tell bedtime stories to slaughtered sheep
and paper wolves stuff foodstuffs in
at turkey stuffing time roll beeswax
between tongue and tooth hot then cooling
make do with few words and a hundred
hand gestures

IN VIRGINIA'S DREAM I AM DAISY MILLER

TREES ARE GRACE

seasons on the moon salt in the sea
trees are forgiveness look at them
forgiving us allowing us to breathe

WE SPOKE OF THE GREAT HEAT

and the dead husband sprouting
under the bed the varieties of love
and romance in these eastern onion
loony bins we are filled
with quiet surprise at this divine
presence in our small country coloured lives

IN VIRGINIA'S DREAM I AM DAISY MILLER

and all was as it should be I carried a smooth
girlish laugh in my apron pocket pulling it out
in my most charming girlish moments
I had neither desires nor opinions
and could easily be filled with whatever you wanted
later my hands grew
and I discovered a new set
of lungs swinging buckets
in great circles I was able to get blood
down to my hands down to my finger tips

sometimes I'll lie in bed
and see the light moving around
to my window feel the life
rushing back in and see
my skin gradually
pinking up

W E D D I N G D A Y S

THESE COLD WEEKS BRIDAL FEET WRAPPED IN NEWSPAPER
AND YELLOWED CHRISTENING DRESSES

and they'd be passing the wedding ring from hand to hand
one year there was no hand to give up
its ring and they passed a gold tooth newly pulled
and said to bring luck to the woman whose hand stilled
the bleeding the blood not wanting to leave
that lucky palm one year there were no eyes to see
if the husband was foul or fair and a glass was passed
held for an instant and looked through as a spy
glass a rose spy glass seeing all the world afire
seeing all the campfires of the world lit and burning
red hot

GUSTING SAND CUTTING THEIR FACES WIND
up their skirts like the mayday priest a man
so old so passed from wife to wife that his cloak
his wrapped christening feet and one clutching hand
were all that remained to him
his teeth and eyes long since passed on
in marriage

he had one woman
hitched on behind his brood mare
she had a necklace of painted red fingernails
for a paycheque two button string belts
for a calendar and a camp stove
keeping his congealed heart warmed over

and she saw him
up and down the hills gathering
up his dwindling body parts
every wedding day

L E G S

There is something wrong
that legs should hang so
that we should watch
with such attention
that life should flow
so quickly from the heels
that hanging should take so long

The pity that legs
should hang so
the slightest movement
of wind
sending them again
setting them again
to move
in this same
breathless motion

PLACING BEGINNINGS

EMBERS BECOME EASY CLUES

I remember a prayer from out on the water
We have different ways of waiting tide bending
to mud no beach but small flat rocks reaching
down to where water begins We are burning
for a separate place to place our beginnings
He knows where I've been he can taste it on me
when he comes up from the water the blue bucket
alive with fish

IN OLDEN TIMES THE DEVIL WAS JUST ANOTHER STRINGY OLD MAN
shuffling from country to country but death
was all around, clinging to the undersides
of shrubs and lapping at the banks of rivers
running downstream And death roamed untamed
in Northern Africa and over unpopulated parts
of Europe But it had not touched America
Nobody had died people had been alive
since the beginning of the world everything stayed
new and the graveyards were empty

FINALLY THE DEVIL HARNESSSED THOSE GREAT HORSES OF DEATH
and people became afraid of him He gained
respect and social position Great deserts
and burned places began to grow
People forgot all language and grew
apart The land became
so dry that it roamed on forever
never touching the oceans that used to lie upon it

G H O S T R E M A I N S

BECOMING THE MOON

On this grip of unenclosed land we secure
 a floating boat We become the star
 by which time is measured

THE WORLD ENDED with devils
 Toads breeding the puffing walls branches burning
 when they touch Toads in bed Horns on the head
 Devils offering to pull down covers and show
 their sickness

the food the pots and pans our clothes infected

DEVILS ARE LIKE COCKROACHES AND TRAVEL WELL
 Streets fill with water and running
 Then there are train tracks we offer
 two hundred dollars Down south he says it is less
 toads can't breed
 in houses This box car
 crowds knapsacks and hidden sickness

The sun has gone devils and angels are held
 together by women who hold them
 between their teeth

The trees in this underworld move
 on memories of breezes suggesting the fading
 glory of heroes the discovery of continents
 the naming of animals

And the darker figure hidden under painted layers
 disappearing in a revision But the ghost
 remains dictating the remaining action

(cont'd.)

GHOST REMAINS / 2

A STORM RAGING OUTSIDE

I'm taking half the food half the cans
 of beans and creamed corn half the socks
 saying feet should stay warm and dry taking
 half and leaving remains Everyone has a bedroll
 and pots and pans tied to their backs We are
 an all woman bank like a pack of nuns setting out
 across dried landscapes singing
 THE HAPPY WANDERER until I remember
 we are escaping and should stay quiet
 Passing a barren field overgrown with dead
 milkweed we are like girl guides
 all grown up

THE MYSTERIES GROW SMALLER AS WE MOVE FORWARD REALIZING
 the stupidity of women's shoes The moon completing
 its shining Waiting for birds to come Blotting out
 all but essentials

PIG TAILS

we'd be digging mushrooms 'neath old elms
gassing her up and palming the rat dragging in
by the tail we'd be drinking bloody marys and watching
the last light over the golf course in the end feathers
fall into place and we dragon up supplies
splitting cans of beans and woolen socks and never singing
THE HAPPY WANDERER too loud

THEN I HAD THE DREAM AND I KNEW WHERE MY GRANDFATHER HAD GONE
 He was the same only the skin on his face
 had darkened his lips melted to gold and a bubble
 of crude oil His hands clutched to the bone
 forming roots for milkweed

THE WINTER BEFORE GRANNY DIED

the winter before granny died she was up
gossiping with nelly miloy who comes in and does her hair
every second week and the blue rinses that scared me
when I was little at the funeral nelly takes me
aside and tells my fortune

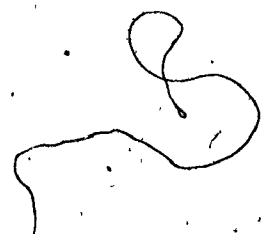
granny's in the garden now and pushes up every year
some years my dad leaves that patch of garden alone
and lets her come up as weeds and spreading mint
and the horseradish that is so tough it has to be cut
with an axe

T H E R E I S A B A R B E C U E I N T H E H O U S E
O F G O D

Roses grow
from my grandmother's face. her lips become
thick red petals
She waits three years for her husband
to be poured over her as ash
and bone

My grandfather drinks the holy spirit
as water Mold and mushrooms grow
from his fingernails and tight fists
clench sprouting wildflowers

At Easter
there is a barbecue I don't know
when I've felt
such hunger Waiting at the pit
and my grandmother reaches down with a piece
of god and puts it
in my mouth



UNFAMILIAR WIND

The grazing cows follow
the same path to the river
the slow turning down
at the same
white birch grove
This ache
does not leave me
It is an unfamiliar wind,
moving up the river from St. Placide
It is an unfamiliar wind
but easy
and cool on the face

This ache
does not leave I stay
on the last hill
remembering
the slow sinking
into the earth's palm
Grandfather going down
sinking placidly
into these same grasses

THOSE COUNTRY ROADS IN SUMMER

when you can't run fast enough
A congregation spilling into yellow
centres of fields The sound of the choir
remains with you as you run The middle
of the road grown
waist high with weeds There is
urgency Wheat is cut and waiting
in fields

WILD DOGS ARE RUNNING TOWARDS SMALL COTTAGES

Wheat is cut and lying yellow
in fields There is urgency
Roads grown waist high with weeds
The sound of choirs
as you run A congregation
spilling into waiting
fields You can't run
fast enough

H.O U S E S

We inhabit this house
like unfurnished rooms
clutching our heirloom
photographs to our thin
chipboard chests

Our ceilings top off
to nowhere and higher
into Christmas snows
that bring nothing

but fading daguerrotypes
of other Christmases
There were more of us
alive and still speaking
and passing the turkey
and second helpings with gestures
that bordered
on the friendly

What is really lost
is the will to remember

kind words passed down
Words carefully polished
with soft cloths held
in small blue boxes
lined with cotton
until we passed them on again
hand over hand
with assurance

Like the string of buckets leading to fire - You don't know
the source of the water but it passes easily
through your hands From here you cannot see
the fire going out Though somehow its light grows
less with each bucket

ONLY FOREST

Take down the west wall
and start rebuilding It is suddenly
all forest My house
has grown smaller and blacker
Windows are red with mud
and soot from the last fires

Take down
the west wall I've given up
listening for calls
from the blacker woods Something screams
beyond the lower marshes There's always
some detail left out
I can never know
what's been caught
in my husband's traps The forest
won't speak to us now

And my house falls back
to moss and charred
redwood Light
paths still open
before us then close
behind giving nothing
It is only forest
and we are alone

HERE IS THE HOUSE THAT HAS FOLDED

like cardboard under the weight of weather
standing in the spring
clearing looking bulldozed Come late summer
two doors left
open Windows boarded so early Once closed
for the season the days
will darken we'll stay in tents made of warmth
we'll save food for when there is light
again Everything is closed
and surrounding us like a dream
of black rivers There will be days
too close-fisted in their grasping
when we'll need
to walk the frozen lake surface
just to feel
the cold space around us

VEGETABLES PETS AND PEOPLE

Strange stuff
 catching hold in the vegetable garden
 Looks like the carcass from last year's turkey
 taking root I want to keep the kids away

Seems like everything dead is coming back
 Cut myself shaving this morning that drop of blood
 swam away like a damn fish under my feet

Old wedding invitations fluttering in •
 unpaid bills report cards from when our Sarah
 was in school lottery tickets that never
 paid off And the silver wrappings off all the cigarettes
 I ever smoked floating across the tracks
 like leaves

And the dogs I had when I was a kid all limping
 back from wherever they went to die now sniffing
 around for something to eat Two or three died
 of distemper and that's not a pretty sight My wife's
 pet cat dead since before we moved up from Petraville
 come back with his left eye torn from the socket
 Gail was pretty broken up about that

And there's my dad
 waving at me from over the front of Bundy's he's been gone
 three years killed when Kelly's half ton went off
 the road bet he still has the marks on his legs

Looks like the dead are all coming back And I don't know
 where we are going to put them There's only the spare
 room and the sitting room couch bought only last year
 and still covered with the plastic to keep it nice

LAST DAYS

WE EAT WITH RESIGNATION

world ending again cancer swimming
the air we breathe white scars forming
our new skins small white molds move
over the surfaces of oranges and potatoes
we chew the poisons for as long as it takes

in the second room the nurse allowing my daughter
to die one more time grandma watching
from the rocker I shake the baby
to life

she has a finger opening at its tip
into a mouth
with pointed teeth
this is where I feed her

only a few days left now the sun
going out gradually my husband not believing
in heaven and where will he go

flies coming to life in winters
rotted mice behind thicker walls
how will the dead be raised

we are in the last days already
I'm just eating ice cream
and waiting for jesus

DAY THE WORLD ENDED ON PARCHMAN FARM

I had to burn a guy a little and they gave me a little time down there
on Parchman Farm -- they treat you like you treat yourself...and I seen
better days there than I did at home -- on Sundays girls would come by
and take me for a ride -- bring me food and cakes.

BUKKA WHITE

The people from the town
and all the women too
was in a kind of rabid dog
crawlin on all fours
yellin that the devil had come
and he could have all their children
if he wanted them

Sky tore open
and we climbed down from the pickin
and watched the land blow away
Three days
and the wind took the trees too
Even the mountains
all gone

All that time
farms ridin the wind
to dust
Everything all busted up
in that black black fire
Musta bin lightning raw
from God's fist

And him sayin
gimmee three days black snow
wolves howlin
in the throats of all men

(cont'd.)

PARCHMAN FARM / 2

All them Christian men
and they was hungry
and tryin to sell their wives even
for the blackened cores
that was left
from our garden

The last to go
was Mckrenna's hotel
Had to laugh almost
to see it go
the sign spinnin backwards
on the fire
It was all crazy mystic even
like back in bible days

Sure is somethin to remember
the day the world ended
and we lit outa
Parchman Farm

PIGS AND PEARLS

THE UNDERTOW MAKES SWIMMING DANGEROUS AND I ADMIRE HIS COURAGE
From this angle his sweet body seeming frozen
above the cold water The memory of that white skin
multiplying like onion skins losing themselves
to the gradual sauce To the east
the same purple hills The yards are overgrown
I'm not afraid of anything

The sky pressed down onto this
its oldest dearest pasture
The heat wave is ending and we can touch
again

BOOTS WARMING BEHIND THE OVEN YEARS
of coal dust painting the flowered paper
The sun gone down and we are plowing
through slanted snows to prehistoric coal
found like backyard pearls A garden stone
gives up clam shells and oysters and jesus
still wrapped in his shawl

AND WHO WAS JESUS BUT ALL THOSE SWEET-SKINNED
limbs roasted with apples in a pit by the seaside
those many years ago when we were small
God who serves best is served
up Christmas day And we'll never hunger
We'll eat wedding cake walnuts and roses
candied flowers ice cream
and strawberries topped with whip cream

LAST TIME WE SAW JESUS

Down here we like our meat
falling from the bones
Our vegetables boiling all day
in honey water

Sure there was people
who called him teacher
I only know
he spoke every language
I ever heard of

Last time we saw Jesus
it was cousin Ida and Billy Marpin
dead all this time
but coming up for air
coming up like flowers
or trees in Pastor Fluree's garden
There was birds feeding
in their branches and petals falling
same time as those baker's wives
gathered apples for pie

And we just wasn't afraid at all