

Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas

Generic Dreams & Other Poems



Generic Dreams

ii

It's over in a second. Falling
From sleep to waking, worlds
Bridged by a gasp and
The long sliding darkness.
They say it's only memory
Jerking its primordial tail,
Plunging to redemption on
The waiting branch, the forked tree.

So reach down, Icarus, Son of the Morning,
Two-footed brother, put out your hand
— Its thumb (opposing, as they say,
But to *what?*) wondrous as a wing,
Shaped like a wing —
As we fall together, thrashing
Up from the long dream of water
Cleaving air, on our way earthward.

xi Daphne and Apollo

Safety lies on the far side
Of the dusty old gorge

Or in the grove of trees
You've just emerged from —

The pursuer's faceless,
Gaining on you

Breath by breath, a futile game, like
Racing in ancient ocean deeps:

Legs are caudal fins on land,
Arms longing to turn to wings —

Earth is the alien element now:
Fear holds you rooted, boneshell to bark —

Fear propels you, cave to mountaintop, or down
From the forest's sheltering clasp: to stand alone

Scenting the wind, thighs bare in the long grass,
Thoughts swifter now than the legs of the hunter —

Victory's crown: turning round from the oldest choice,
(*Fight or flight*); defying terror is, finally, to stand still —

Is it the god forever behind, relentless, that makes
The leaves spring green from your head?

xii

It's not as easy as it seems
(Fistful of fairy dust, second at left,
And straight on till morning). Pursuit
Sets it off, or simply, mere despair.

The man with the hole in his heart
Takes small, buoyant leaps; the paraplegic
Drops his wheels; the throbbing shape
Underneath the pregnant woman's heart
Turns into a balloon; the aged ballerina
Gathers her withered memories,
Lifts them off into a final grand jeté

Defying the logic, grave, ineluctable,
That holds the planets steady in timeless
Dance. World without end, we were meant

Only for this: tightening of sinews in shoulders
And chest, higher and ever higher; the legs shed
Their final function, kicking through the alien
Emptiness — Your hands are clumsy to the end,

Seeking to shape feather tips or rudders, till,
Swimming past treetops and upturned faces,

Earth falling away, you learn the air's end lesson:
To let go, effortless at last (the heart, yes,
Is made for more
Than breath). Verily, nothingness is
Our element, and consummation lies
Upward where we plunge,
Into the light.

Bookim Danno

Quickly, inexorably dropping into statelessness,
the overstaying Filipino watches *Barney Miller*
and *Hawaii Five-O* on the late-night reruns
with his little daughter in their basement apartment.
It's their first winter in the Midwest. He watches
Hawaii Five-O, he thinks, to catch

glimpses of the sea and sand and mountains
and vigorous men in outriggers, now fictitious
shores that will be denied him
to see again for he doesn't know how long,
as he is even now beginning to realize.
We're frozen here, a rerun, not on the run.

As long as at the end of each increasingly
numb day, with no word yet from Omaha,
he can hear Jack Lord, famed forelock dripping over
his otherwise time-proof
pompadour, say, "Book 'im, Danno,"
the world is safe for one more day.

Laging Handa

Forty-two years now—three months
Before Kennedy—that plane crashed en route
To Marathon. Never quite
A playmate – the height and three years'
Advantage, the luck of the draw,
Made him unapproachable. Eyes alight with certainty,
That was Scout Magbanua: his grieving parents
Claimed his remains, identifying the ring,
Making his room, the memory of his fourteen years,
A shrine. Now his name's a street.

In midlife, I wonder about the man
He would have been,
Spared the wrong choices, the body's sly
Betrayals. Then, my mother said:
"Perhaps God took him, so he would be
Pure and strong forever."

One Sea

No solace here. *Deaths rising past 70,000* says
The *New York Times* online. The women
In saris and sarongs wail, the father stares mutely
Upon his child's still, sandy foot.

The word the newscasters use is Japanese:
A three-story wave, its relentlessness unimaginable.

Is the women's grief made more bearable
When other women beside her carry it too?
Or is it magnified, monstrous as the wave itself,
Since all are kindred in the village, now gone?

The child's teeth leave bloody tracks on the bright blue
Sweet he's been given by the soldiers from far away.

The Asian woman living in Nebraska sees his face
On the evening news. She thinks: Maybe his mother flung him
Onto the sand as the waters wrapped big hands round her,
The dark god not to be denied.

No. She shuts the bottle of little white pills,
Reaching for one more day. *No.*

The Astronauts' Remains

A torso falling from the sky,
A skull, a thigh bone...and imprinted
Within them, the DNA sequence,
Immortality's code
Stretching across the ages,
Orbiting past the fields
Of gravitation, of winter wheat,
Of computer binaries replicating themselves.

Now plunging back to join
Pithecanthropus, Australopithecus,
Lucy, the footprint of Eve:
Burning the barrier, this
Humanness, incandescent
In our fall, our flight.