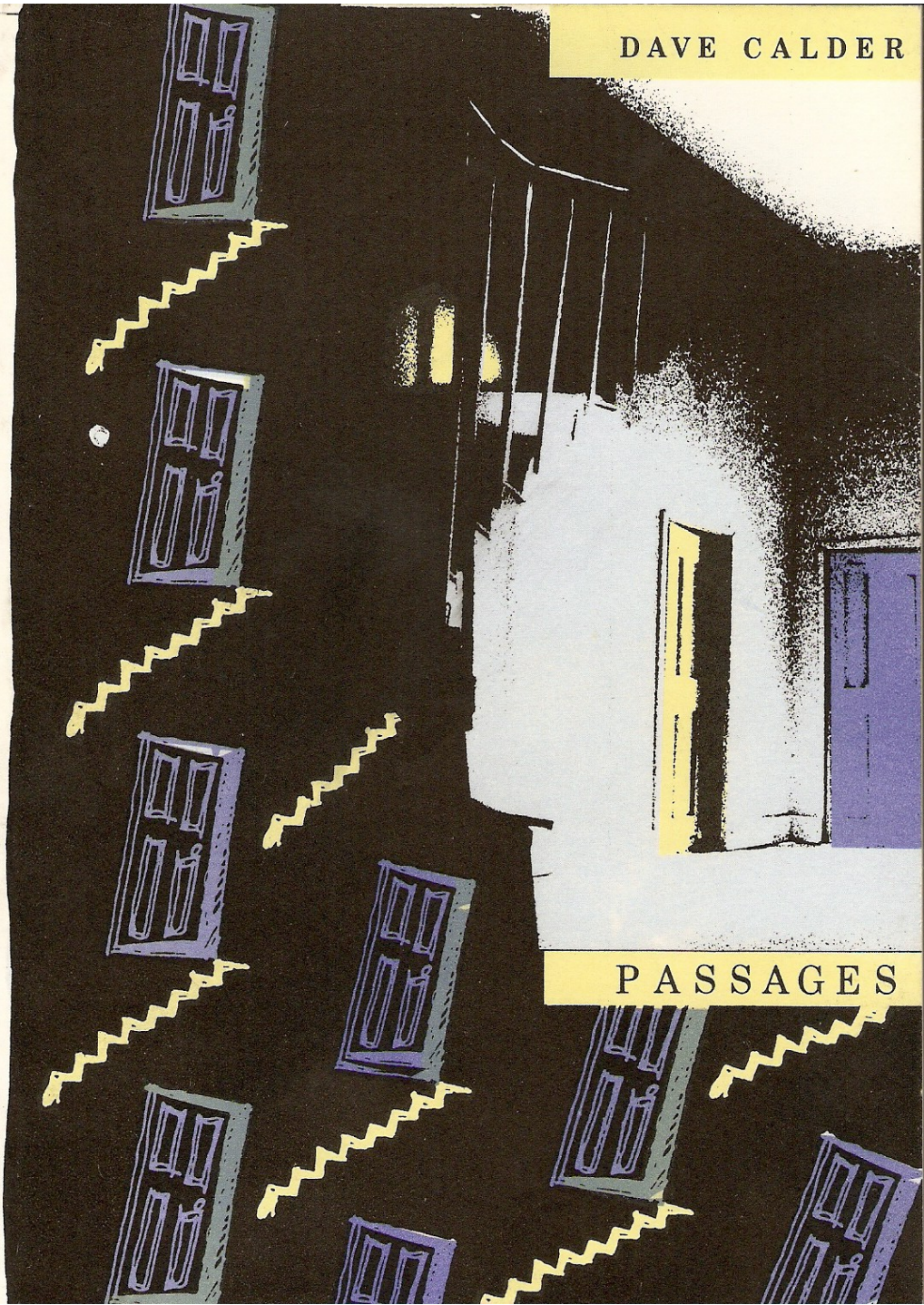


DAVE CALDER



PASSAGES



**PASSAGES**

**DAVE CALDER**



- Under the stone eyelid torn roots  
of plaster tentacles of convulvulous  
trickles of soil scraps of paper  
on the stairway vaguely breathless -
- Is that all you've written - demands Yeck - it's  
not much of a story.
- These are the points of contact - says Wafo -  
the rest of the tale would be no different.

Yeck tosses the paper indolently down to rest among the wandering dirt and weeds beneath the balustrade. He leans back against the plinth his eyelids limp in mimicry of the bust beside him.

- Pointless to have started then - he states -  
let's get back to the real business of going  
up or down.

In the bathroom Yeck is dancing in the dark. Wafo understands this from the shadowplay behind the opaque glass.

In this room he lies sideways on cushions, exhausted from trying to please this most wanted woman who is staring in anger or apathy at the fire. The memories of her morning lovemaking cannot lessen his flickering nerves. He seeks her for some reason vaguely hidden from him. He cannot know whether this pain will lead to, or is, happiness.

She jerks up, twists a smile, goes to the bathroom, pushes in the door

In the dark in the bathroom Yeck is dancing, the greased soles of his feet slither him uncontrollably. He is caked in mud and shining slime. A steaming sponge surrounds his prick. His face is in an agony of delight.

The woman starts to giggle. Wafo feels unaccountably better.

A dank day by the river. The usual tourists  
congregate. Far away loudspeakers caution and  
cajole.

A group of hairy men are solemnly ducking people  
who emerge spluttering, yelling yet delighted.

Others on the bank murmur approvingly. Even the  
cops are well behaved.

Further upstream Wafo is fishing.

- It becomes plain - he said to Yeck, who was  
dressing himself in river-mud - that we are  
approaching some kind of mystery.

The dove flies out of the crack in the heavy-thighed  
clouds and shits on his head.

- You are the mystery - she shrieks.

There is an empty port and a timber warehouse  
across the water surrounded by fire-engines.

Wafo turns back from the window to the naked  
woman. The tide gleams along her body.

A small candle ebbs before the moonlight. The  
timber warehouse erupts. The pool rises. The world  
is drowned. Not even the fire-engines are saved.

Somewhere a soft voice is singing in husky german.

Wafo is staring through one bleary eye at the  
dripping candle.

The naked woman is lighting a cigarette.



In the dewdusk on the day of the dragonslayer, Yeck strides blatantly past the No Trespassers sign towards the manor house. His clothes are inside out, he carries a green turf on his head. Neither gamekeeper nor gardener attend to him, the chained mastiff at the door growls only in confusion. Along corridors brushing the breasts of chambermaids, walking through doors with the guards, he is unchallenged.

He reaches the famous room at sunrise. The assembled treasures bedazzle his eyes and brain. His head hurts terribly.

- Playing dead before your time?

He twists painfully. Against the mantelpiece leans the dark rider, in scarlet jacket, tapping a crop of elder-wood, one heavy boot pressed hard on Yeck's shadow. He brings his feet together sharply. Tears burst from Yeck's popping eyes, the turf is crushing his skull.

- It's a long wait to dinnertime - remarks the rider, and leaves the room.

Yeck runs yelping after him, runs from the gemglare, while serving-girls mock this strangely dressed figure whose hands are clutching earth and grass, whose bright and staring eyes reflect only a great hard light.

The street twists on and upward. To one side now there is only a misty vertigo. On the other, the cavernous forges of the ironsmiths have been left behind, sparks spitting from dull red mouths.

Wrapped in jebellas these two toil up. Whether to the citadel or the city walls they no longer know. Hooded shapes huddle in crevices or crouch round tiny fires, talking low and fierce, smoking long pipes.

Also beggars drone irrhythmically by the rock; white scar of eye, dark stain of palm, deformities made monstrous by shadow. Some moan, some laugh, some are worse silent; some recite one phrase of a holy book over and over. One even carries an eagle on his shoulder.

Wafo realises that Yeck was lagging behind, and turning sees him toss coins into the shadows, then come up fast.

- Well? said Wafo.

- Oh, it's definitely this way - said Yeck, pointing up.

- Well? said Wafo.

- Well - said Yeck - I didn't think much of the singer but the bird could whistle well.

Decked in feathers from birds of paradise and hell  
Yeck lies on his back, rifle stiff to the east. The  
bulrushes mask his blubbery feet.

Wafo is in the thought-dome dreaming a harem of  
soft owls. The clear sphere shimmers above him,  
above the tall emerald grass. A hired man, black-  
cowled, has just handed him pen and paper.

In the blue light Yeck waits for these thoughts to  
slip his mind.

*Yeck goes widdershins*

once round you for the pain i bear  
forgotten pleasure and despair  
twice times round you for your power  
that weakens me in root and flower  
thrice around you for your love  
more sister to the shrike than dove  
four times round for your delight  
that has burnt away my sight  
five times for the ways you, re kind  
that cheat the body through the mind  
six times for the pleasures sour  
in which i lost my art and hour  
seven times for my desire  
suffocated by your fire  
eight times for i no longer know  
myself, trust, or a place to go  
nine times nine times, the race is run  
and damn you lady to your fun

Suddenly the door bursts open and the plants come in screaming.

- Enough of this - chided Wafo, flailing.

The chaff splits. A nasturtium sneers behind him.

Ivy tangles his ankles, a sunflower blinds him.

- Enough of this - moans Wafo, stepping back a ghastr.

- Cabbage cooker - shrieks a shrinking violet.

- Mushroom murderer, daffodil plucker, beetroot violater, he imprisoned hyacinths, he caged a rubberplant ..

A great waving of stems and slogans, their leaves batter his legs. Wafo is losing control.

- Plants have a right to live - they are shouting.

Wafo has his back to the wall. Suddenly the craft of anger returned to him.

- So have I - he yells, his face contorted implausibly.

He rips at a green bean, makes a grab for a grim geranium and is tripped by a notsosweet pea.

They leap upon him, shaking their roots in his eyes and ears, pushing pollen up his nose; whole cauliflowers and potatoes crunch suicidally against his body.

- Look to other animals - shrieks the sunflower as it stalks out of the door.

- They came yesterday - whimpered Wafo from the floor where, in an hour, he was seen to smile inanely and start biting his fingernails, sucking his socks.

As Wafo is coming under the tall hawthorn he begins to meet them. Their eyes are glazed, they trip over, a nervous giggling their most expression.

In the square Yeck stands speechifying behind a stall, one placard on his soapboxes reads

NOTHING IS REAL

another

BUY NOTHING HERE

Wafo makes him a secret sign and he dismisses his audience. Vacant they stay still.

- Since when? roared Wafo.

Yeck rubs his ear.

- Think what I can get away with - he mutters

Despite the wind in the pines, the garden is unruffled.

Wafo is lying on his face and flayed thighs. A beautiful toe is tickling his ear.

He can feel the pimples on his buttocks melting. Bees buzz him. His mind trickles through innumerable pores. He would get up if he could think of anything at all. The toe stops tickling. He raises his eyes, the sun eats them. In a greedy despair he buries his head, drowns in a dream.

The buds burst, the birds sing, a camera clicks

Under dark elms of evening and over yielding  
furrows, his breeches in his boots and his nose in  
himself, Yeck treads towards home

Dimming clouds swirl and implode, the blackbirds  
swim around him. A final buzzing in the hedgerows  
spins him, he is a mazed

Along the lumpy dips of furrows comes Yeck goes  
seeking between the strange lights and the startled  
thicket



Halfway down the street the demon caught up with him and walked along there at his left shoulder not saying a word.

Wafo became considerably uneasy and strode straight through several people. Waiting for the lights to change his mind he turned feverish to the jagged grimace.

- What .. ? he began

A fog of musk and civet flooded him, seeking out the most secret small crannies and swelling. His body bristled like an over-ripe cactus-fruit.

- And this - said a voice running its fingers down his thigh - is all that can be hoped for.

Wafo shook himself loose. On the other side of the road stand all the crackling kindnesses, the nervous dance with those who are desirable but not somehow acceptable, the music in a dangerously low key

The demon grinned, toothless and ever hopeful.

- Later - hesheit murmured, and went off wiggling with all eyes transfixed.

His feet in the gutter disturbed by discarded wrappers Wafo is remembering how one body in its right place had smoothed out the whole world yet not moved nor said one word.

The horned and hooked birds travelled with him, having no purposes to lose, but hung in the scar of sky after he passed between the silver totems.

The ravine creaked with the rebellious urgings of stone and petrified beasts. Small shapes darted between tussles of scrubgrass and bracken. First we suck your bones, then hug them deep.

- I am the thin end of the sky - whispers a brook. Wafo bends between bulrushes. He touches water to his stretched face. His spirit soars.

High above him hover the birds, at the bottom of the pool.

After the stone steps and so many years Wafo sits looking at her so still in the bed, her so unexpected wanting and delightful.

Now on him lies the knowledge of so many things that wait within his life for their moment or hang poised at every instant for denial or acceptance, fine strands of possibilities become webs of questions he cannot : answer. He bows his head in amaze and curls up beside her

On the stairs to number 6 squat Yeck and the rider, chip-papers at their feet, wine in their hands, grease on their jaws. They are making bets based on the needless greeds his body will demand, the intensity that smothers hope.

She smiles in a half-sleep, roused by their voices, herself murmurs snugly

- One time at a time -

In the yard she feeds the geese. There is also the sound of an axe at work.

By the window Wafo trims a quill with a small knife his mind on the clouds.

Her arms are fluttering. The axehead staggers, stunned with blood.

He returns to the shrieks of plucking. Of blood, feathers and quivering thighs.

The sharp blade slits his thumb, the quill stabs his cheek. Harsh he sits up.

There is a moment of absolute poise. Then he hurls himself at the window, clawing his mouth.

One relates how, browsing through a foreign library, he was flicking through what appeared to be a dissertation on physics when he came upon a page written in his own language that described his whole life up to that point. Overleaf the thesis continued in the strange tongue.

Another, hunched on the stone bench, recalls finding a letter addressed to himself on a stranger's hall table. Opened, it revealed certain truths and courses of action which he followed, finding everyday delight in their working out, whether in joy or sorrow.

The sharp beak of a brown bird nips a young bud.  
The tall man in a cotton robe states that all things are true at some time in some universe. The man in the crumpled business suit asserts that there is only one moment, if that, and that all we are is memories.

The marble colonnades. The glossy flagstones.  
Vibrant bushes. A ruffled pool. Where leaves lie drowned.

Wafo bends his toes back, grasping the earth.  
The abysses rushing up.  
The cypress and the sun.

They are halted on the avenue when the old year ends. Wafo is seeking a way out, making drunken symbols in the air. After the tight stagger the women are settled on a bench, drinking wine and nibbling at conversation. They are past the season for running naked round field or house. Nor is there a full moon.

In the weak light he wavers towards them. Their smiles are quiet, he collapses by them, their beaks are gentle their furs downy, they pass the sacrament.

Unaroused by the harsh mew of sirens, scream of rockets. or the torrent of bells they rest in high silence.

A marooned sailor comes and tells them of his voyages. Without hope or fear the world continues to spin.

Its parasites resume their hungry wandering.

With a sudden leap of inspiration Wafo reached the bookshelf.

With mouth agape he pulls down a huge leather bound volume. He reads the title. His eyes shine with foreknowledge of success.

He throws the volume open. Dead leaves fly, float and fall everywhere. His mouth slips back into place.

- Now look! he whistles angrily.

Leaning back on the damask ottoman Yeck lights a scented cigarette.

To his right vased roses in sunlight tint the varnished table.

His eyes travel from the cat trapping drifting paper to the girlie magazine on his lap to Wafo's quivering lips.

- I am looking - he says, blindly.

In the high chamber bluegrey afternoon the cuckoo clock has been disembowelled.

- I keep pet saints - says Yeck - I hoist them out once in a blue sabbath and leer fervently.

- That's no use to me - Wafo wobbles his neck - I'm doomed.

Yeck draws the curtain. Below on the frozen field outsize figures shift iron crosses. All the enormous burdens: cathedrals, pyramids, eggs, some so private as to be unnameable, oppress in a random arrangement whose secret meaning is obvious but incomprehensible. Yeck moans ecstatically.

- No, no - whelps Wafo, his tail well clear of his legs

- I don't want to carry anymore. I'm doomed because I respect those who renounce ..

- Anything ?

- Everything.

The note of triumph softens Yeck's ears. He puts on his black cap, and lying back on the sofa languidly pulls the bell-rope that will summon the tempter.



The rain trawls until the wind falls. Under the alder she is gazing at a gravemarker of polished wood, hollowed, latticed, unscribed.

Across the lawn Wafo sits at a five-legged table, sifting old photographs. A cup of stale coffee at his right elbow.

She is walking strongly across the muddy loam, is carrying a bunch of tulips, wears a furcoat.

He is holding celluloid strips up to the weak light the light drizzle. In every frame he looks for his lover and cannot understand her absence.

She is halted before him, flushed and relieved.

Smile and arms are waiting for a sign.

Suddenly he realises that his lover was the photographer. His face becomes marble etched with answer.

She lays the tulips before him, passes sideways, over cobbles. The wicked children are kindly when she meets them.

Wafo is leaning out of the window. The road stretches to the glowing river. He manages to stop thinking of the moon as patient.

- Well - said Yeck - love rarely lives up to itself. Most people need something a little more difficult.

He refills his glass. A cat stretches on velvet.

- Order and menace - he says - that's what they need, to give themselves where they feel most menaced, to someone whose ideals conflict and who can be converted. You can only hate yourself for hating someone who loves you. Loving itself is such confusion : too much generosity makes the giver despised. Why not the order of excitement, why not the calm honesty, the alerting attraction of disagreement, the open struggle with the secret desire to be dragged down; perhaps respect for the kind and handsome enemy

He drinks deeply, murmurs - and only interesting pleasure and argument, no placid traps, no painful needs ..

- Screw you - snaps Wafo, tossing his glass down onto the pavement. Cursed splinters of poisoned ice.

Out of the tunnel and into the waxworks. And all are there. The remembered postures, slightly worn or dusty in memory. The key hangs heavy on his neck, its shine unbearable. He knows what he must do.

In the guttering glimmer of gas-jets he twists the old machinery to action. Lions set loose by children prowl the dark beyond the cages.

Stammering all start to speak. Then hurtling headlong their accelerating gestures become blurs of symbol and intent. Cast in clockwork, Wafo beside the motor.

Flesh hardens on his face. A few mechanic steps, then in the arlight how he dances faster than them all, kicking frantic as they scream for air their bodies breaking.

Ripped and buffeted he collapses on the straw. His face stiff and steamy.

- Why didn't you go with her? asked Yeck.

- Because she never asked me ..

Wafo awoke sparrowstartled to the white room and was driven out by sharp memories. Down the drive he hustled and by the fallen oak met the dark rider splitting a joker with a stiletto.

Sir - said Wafo - I regret disappointing you last night, but if you will pick the scattered cards up from this rotting lawn I may help you to find me.

A crows' nest falls from the scarred pine. Thin yolks of buttercup colour smear the grass.

Oh - said the rider - that was yesterday and now you as you were and I needed you is history and it is proper to deal fiercely with ghosts.

He walks through Wafo, climbs the stile, sniffs the air. Down the road comes Yeck with a curly cauliflower head under his arm. Wafo shivers with loss beneath his nightshirt.

News was brought of their attempted escape.  
That they were now back in their cells.

In a reason born of wild loneliness Wafo comes  
crawling back through the jagged labyrinth. A  
yellow moon behind the briar. Tigers and disease  
are rampant.

He crosses the frontier to stroke her ruffled mind  
and plan again her freedom. He is willing to live  
with her in an exiled sunset but she is always  
drawn to the more desperate prisoners.

In the nursery curious constructions of painted blocks express geometries of time, relationships of minute variables. The cot's beadladen rails form a huge abacus.

Yeck fingers his forked beard, nudges the elbow of his spectacles, belches pensively.

- As regards heaven and hell - gurgles the baby - it seems to me that only two possibilities are involved. Either you are in the labyrinth of causation or outside it, and what you call either is purely a matter of attitude

Yeck toys with a heavy cushion, leers encouragingly at the cat.

Wearing dirty jeans and a constructive frown Wafo hurries down the hill, late as usual, late late late. How to build the framework? Would it stay up? It wouldn't look craftsmanlike - why had he got into such a time-wasting impossible of success ...

She came up the hill with all her shopping in a wicker basket strapped to the front of a big green bicycle whose spokes winked at the sun, whose bell rang to him

Wafo sighed. She waved. He was close to tears.

He felt so good that when, a few minutes later, someone asked him to do something he knew so little about, he went and did it happily for three hours without success or concern

His scalp and wallet were almost bare. He stumbles through a high-arched arcade, base of a dark throne of the rain, and through the door of whorled green glass to where a thousand fingers point to different hours on their faces.

- Time - gibbered Wafo - sell me some quick.

On the counter Yeck's fingers flicker gemladen, tapping a slowing rhythm. He passes his hand in a sure sign he is a member of the Bloodleague of the Apostolic Doublecross.

The pendulums multiply marching armies that stomp down his thoughts. His belly is kicked by each seconds' swing.

Yeck's tongue slicks from one corner of his mouth to another, his features become more cruel and babyish.

Stumbling under centuries of pain Wafo crawls sideways out onto the grass, legs pointing five to two or ten past eleven. quiver to achieve the next minute then subside

It is a warm summer's afternoon, his breath is light, his hands are very wrinkled



Nothing, it seemed, could make her smile.

Wafo left the court and pawned his professor's frown. Then he bought a toy trumpet, as full of holes and hope and random notes as life; bought it, brought it back.

In the drawing-room an organ's swell drowns out cathedral bells. His trumpet drew a quiver of distaste; it was the same with the kazoo, the flute, the castanets and wandering harp

Once more he leaves, nodding politely to the dragon leaning on her shoulder

On the street he trips over a thought, catches the eye of a young girl, gives her a toot

like crystal bells her laughter in his frozen head

Yeck's boots mount the kitchen table among the tea things. A kitten whimpers beneath his chair. Scraps of wool tatter the carpet.

His jamsmeared fingers turn the page. The secret itches his imagination. His heel is in the butter.

The kitten is peeing furtively.

He lights a cigarette, turns arrogantly to the last page. It is meaningless. His lips twitch.

The kitten scratches herself.

Odd bits of wood slop off crude piles, ropes hinges  
screws and tools lurk in the sawdust.

Wafo is deep in an operation involving the balance  
and connection of two constructions whose length  
and breadth is greater than the available space,  
whose height is greater than the ceiling.

Yeck steps upstairs, dangling transistor and fob-  
watch.

- What? he gesticulates.

Wafo turns, face fevered from the power drilling,  
the teeth of saws and claws of chisels

-A cage - he quivers loudly - the world in a cage  
and visions on all its walls.

Yeck raises an eyebrow, changes his mind.

- Good, good - he assures, puts a finger on his lips  
apologetically, leaves through a chink in the nearest  
wall



Out of the ghost train they roll again. His face is taut, stretched in patient appreciation of a lousy joke. her hair and mind are tousled and tangled from fighting devils and shadows.

They pause at the crossroads.

- You must learn to laugh at me - she says; kisses him, goes

He dances among his distortions in plateglass windows; crunching cobwebs and cardboard skulls

Moonlight in the old factory falls on gigantic  
wheels, heaps of rusted springs, broken filaments  
and the toothless yawn of a great furnace whose  
breath on the bent watchman is ashes damp and rat.  
His thin light picks out the charred tatters of paper  
the indefinite pictures the greygreen decomposition  
the sooty walls a tense unmoving mound of fur  
He pulls his coat tight with one hand extends the  
torch with the other, peers  
The mound stirs, has two eyes, a face. It snarls  
- If I've met you before, go away

Although the corpses still lean awkwardly where they fell by the steel door they smell of nothing more than rotting fruit beyond the seventh turn of the spiral and he no longer descends so far now that the radio screams only static.

He keeps to the rituals, checks the dials, cleans the reflectors, the glass; he times the rhythms of the beams sweep during nights of teeming phantoms during days defined by alterations of the sea and sky, on vertiginous stairs, in the walls' closeness, eye to eye with the squall through deep slits, through the neck of the hourglass formed by the room and the vastness outside.

Sand under tide slide his dreams of the whale's belly, of the pits of utter dark, of the wealth of drowned cities to which he will someday be summoned when he has watched enough (when the dead men throw open the door

In the snow fields the isolated cottage the oil lit  
room the narrow bed the small fire weakening  
he feels the learned arrogance of priest returning.  
A huge greyfeathered quill, large enough for an  
angel, is poised in the well of an old tree trunk.  
beside it on a tall carved column is stuck an unlit  
candle.

His roots shake.

- I can't explain, he mutters, don't ask me to write  
His mind trails away he is staring at the  
incomprehensible wall behind the objects of ritual  
- I'll settle for kindness, he murmurs

The fire flickers. he turns the radio on, closes his  
eyes.

Great wings lift, beat dark and hollow above the  
glimmering land, great talons glinting.



thin man on a beach, the seas tail. uncountable  
small deaths beneath his feet.

ribbon and bone wait for the return, immersed in  
their proper purposes. the cloudy sky is very far  
away. stumps of timber point feebly towards it.  
friends by the dunes, at the seas edge, strangers.  
gathering mist and tide, the sigh of drowning sand.  
no boat comes to the border. death trickles round  
his feet. he suspended without even the purpose of  
seaweed, an abandoned mooringpost.

leaving the scene where the one sin was not being seen with someone who others want to see, he goes into the rain, the crowded street where it seemed that everyone was following or being followed.

he was not following, as far as he knew. he looked for a way to shake off the pursuit.

he dodged into a gateway, a short tunnel to a yard.

he stood very still pressed to the walls holding his breath.

he did not whimper as the city turned him to stone

it is well past midnight. cairns of objects are piled  
about the floor where he sits encircled by scraps of  
paper, pins & broken mirror

the air stunned by fumes of musk, tobacco &  
resinous guaza.

at the bottom of the big box he has come to a downy  
feather she had sent him in a letter, a memento of  
many burning falls from grace

out of his visible past he has built a small fire to  
praise the dust, a ghat to free them both; but it will  
be no use.

she is the white feather that he still holds in his hand,  
she is the fivepointed star that pierces his heart

the night presses on him. a wall of bodies breaks  
before his drowning eyes. even the air is thick  
he could not join the dance. he suspects a wrong  
step. the whole world is vibrating, fit to burst.  
he has one hand on the table. he will not make a  
speech. his friends have tired faces and bright bored  
eyes. he is about to leave  
(his heart is in the dance)

Giggling the posse rounded the corner. Faster than a dead leaf he scurried into the rocks.

A jagged stone stared at his throat. Silence! it rasped. He is motionless, spreadeagled in the cold cell while the searching voices of his friends fade far away.

He begins to stretch a grin, more ruined than ash, wider than a hangman's loop, that bares the small bones of his mouth.

Wild cats view him kindly; even the savage moon bends to kiss his forehead.

Silly you; she murmurs.

He comes down dark alleys and into a moonlit square where the moans of wounded flesh sweat from the houses and ponies snort impatient for the dawn.

On the low wall by the fountain is a small cage. Stone rutted by water. bars of acid green.

He goes to it, unsteady on the slimy cobbles, sits on the stone, breathes in the night, its breeze, stars and dreams, its lovers and ponies.

He takes out a small knife, snicks open the grille. The dog comes out calmly, he no longer foams. He squats on the cobbles and looks keenly at the man, and the extending hand and bared forearm which slowly he takes between his jaws and nips to blood

He leaves. The other leaves. Padded feet. Moonshimmer.

The patrol arrives too late. They swear they will cage the dog again and shoot the man. If they can find them

the ultramarine palace whipped by maddened rain.  
the mirror crashes once more from the wall. no-one  
is disturbed. a flapping arras reveals a dead mouse  
in the dust. horses whinny in deep courtyards below  
blank walls. leaves clutter the hall. commissionaires  
in jaded uniforms cluster round a weak samovar in  
an alcove. the throne is empty, the dowager lies  
under wool and velvet, rabbitfaced, migrained.

what are these people waiting for?

the mirror to break ?

the seven lean years to come and pass ?

a jester in a manycoloured tunic goes giggling along  
an arcade open to an inner yard

outside the ice capes the obelisks, the gigantic metal  
disks. an east wind harsh with dank and grit large as  
dead locusts, claws at his eyes

Outside the long shed the high scabble sound of thousands of drugged hens still scratches his ears, the rows of crowded cages still cramp his sight.

Beyond the white house and the vegetables, old dresses of pink tulle are draped over the fruit trees.

His face is a stiff blank. His hands are thickening until they become too heavy to move, his eyes start running desperately to the boundaries.

Beyond the tall fence on the hills' swell, the man with his face stands staring towards him, beyond him to the open sweep of moorland, the mirky pinewood, the rushing sky.



Language is such a corrupting thing, he said, for instance and etcetera it is obvious that a rose is made of rose and not only rain seed and earth, since there are a great many things which must meet in the right proportions to make a rose and to ascribe to any one thing excessive importance would be foolish since a rose could not be rose without any one of them. Thus it is that particular combination of essential things that we call rose and yet the very flower is not given a personal identity. This is the same for the word man, but you would not look upon me and these courtiers crippled on a barrow and say: I'll have a bunch of those ...

In this way we make slaves of flowers.

As he spoke he danced, was wearing a cocked hat, was juggling three bright balls

It is not known whether the high king dreamt it or whether he was told by a secret messenger, which is much the same thing.

He was, however, fascinated, and ordered a search to be made in all lands for the beast. He also described it, but even had his exact words been recorded it is doubtful whether they would have been more than hints and shadows.

The wisest to the most foolish and back again alike searched for it. Some painted representations. or embedded conjectures of it in stories. Others coming later often took these as truths, signposts or even tracks

To it were attributed all nature of powers to cure or curse it was a subject of fairy tales, myths, fables and morals. It was firm in the mind of the people who worried about it and continually watched for it, spoke of it

After almost a thousand years the high king died, his wish unsatisfied, his body and mind wearied by the constant dissent over the shape, servants and nature of the beast that caused civil wars and bitter lack of trust between his ministers.

At the same time died a madman who may also have been the king, quietly smiling terribly, for he knew he was not real and so neither could be the high king or his message or the beast

Another night in the underground. Mother Chaos  
buys the drinks, brokentoothed and beautiful, her  
eyes gleam calmly as the fever rises

By the tramp jukebox leans another whose mind still  
walks the windy streets while the sound storms  
through her body

And between this urchin and the door, a semicircle  
of familiars, the man with a twisted face, the pig  
lady, a frustrated faun. one in jade and mourning  
who claims relationship with mr. death. a weaver of  
hopeful despair, a silent lady everything rolls off or  
through, a lustful monk

The black doorman laughs a lot, sways slowly.  
these others sit in tired amusement, each grief has  
its private face, its ways to laughter

Before them cavort idiot dancers and lizards on their  
hind legs, mouthing the ritual. the watchers are  
unimpressed by protestations of revulsion or  
delight; they have been through it all before and  
now require good faith alone

And yet the company is congenial, there are  
energetic possibilities, there is no point in going  
home, there can never be too much joy in this  
only possible world

She tells how her child pretends sleep then as she  
leaves says goodbye.

He cannot answer, he is buried under life. his greedy  
tongue is searching his teeth for a stale scrap a  
memory to justify the upward scrabble

Away inside him stretch the gorse links of  
childhood so level seen from these cliffs, then the  
stony shore the sands the vast and teeming sea

He surfaces, murmurs goodbye, she smiles yes

Against the darkened glass of this inland window  
comes the squelchy rap of drying seaweed

At the beginning there was dust, perhaps the ashes of old fires. His mind, skilled in cataloguing the diversity of things, found it a place, defined it by movement, shape and form.

He catalogues its parts which are as randomly reasonable as anything else, identifies them with the suppositions of his own desires.

He observes, he forms beliefs. It fulfils them.

It has no religion, he kisses its feet.

It has no politics, he votes and campaigns for it.

It has no economy, he gives grants for development.

In short, he creates his own world about it.

In moments of paranoia, he believes it schemes his downfall.

In moments of cruelty, he believes it merciless.

In moments of claustrophobia, he believes it traps him.

In moments of disbelief, he believes it disbelieves him.

Maybe he never understands this, sees through it. Greater and worse illusions exist. And anyway, if he does, the world will turn to ashes in his mouth and the thing itself to dust.

And on the moon's day they take the box filled with herbs, the box bound in red and white wool, through the hard fields to the dry spring and lay it on the bank beneath the elder trees

They fill their mouths with grass and kiss it, they speak to it in many tongues and spit upon the earth, they break off dry dead branches and drum upon the trees, dancing

They wait. The heat is relentless. The rituals fail. There is a hungry silence.

They send a soul to the sun and eat the bread of the crow, of the intricate, of the darkness, of the strangeness. They rattle the white stones and sing. Clouds like clenched fists crush the countryside. The blood caked on the box becomes limpid. Yet still clouds clot the air already dense with flies, dust and nauseous smells until all is choking confusion, knives in the darkness from here to the edge of the world

Even though rain is slicking the warm earth the streets are crammed with sailors bearing banners and crosses. In the harbour their ships are a procession of wide sails and masts.

She thinks of futures with unfurling hands, of what covers and what crosses. She has travelled deep oceans and knows the pit of the storm

The rain trickles through the torn thatch in the hut's corner, staining the dirt. Behind the bamboo screen others play the forbidden game. Their shouts and groans confuse her blood

She knows her friend and does not seek for lovers. Those who come receive gifts that do not diminish her.

In the doorway a small boy sticks his belly out, a lean pig at his heels.

She understands currents with the blind intensity of fish, she knows the motions of the body on the earth and other bodies that can free the mind.

Long before darkness company will call.

The dancing, the singing has gone down to the sea from which masts of light reach to the billowing clouds. Fire within smoke she thinks of her friend.

For as long as he could remember it had been the stone corridor, as long as the eye could see the brain forget or the breath measure. Crude granite, the painted beasts, figures in many colours, eyeless. A smooth protuberance shadowing a circle, an ironflecked unreflecting mirror. On either side of the wrinkled gullies, the trickling waters, paintings show actions of delight that might be hatred, expressions of excitement that might be fear. Also there are tiny black holes perfectly void, clear even in the most tangled crevices

The voices tell him what to do where to go, but since he has moved in only one direction and always by constraint he no longer gives them external credence. They are the secret stage of talking to himself. A low moan of wind not even fresh drones even in his dreams, those fevered distortions of the frescoes, the surfaces. He sleeps in the centre way, the water no longer disturbs him, his head points where it has not been.

He cannot think back far enough to decide in favour of returning. The voices tell him that way is sealed. The passage was smaller then, at some point he would not be able to pass an arm through. On the odd occasions that he has turned and looked back this has been apparently confirmed, although it is perhaps a trick of perspective.

When he looks at the walls the voices tell him he has seen everything already, that this is remembering. Believing this, he searches his surroundings, occasionally lingering, even falling back a few paces; sometimes he sits conjecturing on after and



before, or dreaming dreams as hard as marble.

He is looking for a blank stone that will justify him, or a fresco with his face. Occasionally with eyes closed he imagines vast halls, dares to believe in a door to unlimited space and light. He suspects it is a trapdoor, an entrance he could not know if he saw it, or that it opens only on a secret word. Such thoughts make the walls close in.

To keep them apart he envisages a time when they will crumble, leaving the certainty of either earth or sky. Until then he pretends as best he can that they do not exist, giving greater reality to the frescoes and the more interesting flaws. This keeps him from remembering, which is perhaps a bitter kindness, for as long as he could remember it had been the stone corridor.

the bed was huge and richly carpeted  
veneers and velvets swam across his glistening eyes  
he was befuddled but not dizzy it was all  
incredibly sharp and clear only he was not sure  
that it was happening to him

even naked he could not measure or compare her  
if anything if it was more difficult than when she  
had been dressed shades of flesh weight of  
breasts length of hair curve of lips all were  
shifting all were true

it would not be too fanciful to say he saw stars,  
perhaps perspired and more mundanely rivers  
mountains oceans plains

she nibbled him somewhere that felt like everywhere  
a voluptuous fever stupified him she devoured  
him almost entirely before he realised faithlessly  
he began a scream before the jaws the soft lips  
closed finally

who knows how many universes there are in one  
held breath?

he twisted in them was forced along a throat  
through lips let out the scream again

The shore is cold, grey in halflight. the sea shudders. there is also a sea of pebbles. among them lies the object. it is round smooth and shiny. It has much in common with rock and such inanimates, but is overheavy, feels, but is not, metallic.

That is all. but it is not created in the manner of the toys of men nor in the growing of crops or animals. it simply has been and will continue to be.

It is older than anything, but I would not be surprised to learn that it was remaking itself totally new every instant of a second.

It is truer than the gods, cosmos or chance. which is perhaps why, as I stare at it now, so bright and hard, some eternal eye, on this wild dusk where the sea breeds and the pebbles wear to sand, the sky trembles and so do I

As advised, I confide in this other not all the secrets that I know, in case he should someday become an enemy.

This I know is not impossible, there are many parallel well-documented cases; also, for all that we like each other and are settled in habits together, we frequently argue and only good luck and certain shared hopes have saved us.

It was, therefore, with great confusion that I discovered the probability of his not only knowing all the secrets, but also of having taught me them .

Four or five waiting at the end of the track, or at least the rise, the turn; under the tree, deep hedgerows. And my head tired of pursuit said all right and they took my hands pulling me down among violets, flowers of deep and dusk. Not too sudden with words uncloying they introduce the sleepfever the sun surging through the eyes pit, distending vision till it filled the whole body the shining towers curious levels glassy high walks and the vast lake. I beg for time; they giggle atrociously, fondling each other, this is reassuring.

And we know that there is no past or future and that we face the same choice continually. they chant innumerable rituals simultaneously: the high pitched questions, the low emphatic responses. under the strain the words become merged become white and clear the words become unimportant. And we know it has always been this way, while the high trees twist overhead and the small flowers shudder in the shadows and none of these more than themselves being integral shapes of the same

The fool kisses my eyelids; it is all calm confusion dancing. The magician kisses my forehead; it is all energy vibration and light. The high priestess kisses my lips; it is all tapestry a web a veil. The empress kisses my cock, her vulva firm; it is all swirling is the completion at crossroads the division of paths. The fifth is standing at the head of the roads where the rain shimmers and the other body swings in the chill wind and now we are leaping down any road gladly binding ourselves to life and forgetting why



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