

Strange Trades

KRISTY ODELIUS

Strange Trades

Shearsman Books
Exeter

Published in the United Kingdom in 2008 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
58 Velwell Road
Exeter EX4 4LD

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-905700-84-4

Copyright © Kristy Odelius, 2008.

The right of Kristy Odelius to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988. All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements:

Some of the poems in this collection have been published by the following, to whose editors and publishers I am most grateful:

ACM: 'Ineffable Green Thing, Loved By All'; 'My Mister's Eyes Are Something Like Dim Sum'; *Blue Sky Review*: 'Pantoum'; *Chicago Review*: 'Dress-up'; 'Interview'; 'It's Curtains, ars poetica'; 'Thoughts of Falling, Pollen, Pare'; *Combo*: 'And How'; 'Three Flights in a Multiplying Sky'; *Eratio*: 'Slide'; *Diagram*: 'Impostor With Housemaid's Knee'; *Keep Going*: 'Baby, What Kind of Help Do You Really Want?'; *La Petite Zine*: 'Dislocations Lessons'; *Locus Point*: 'Aubade, Big Eyes'; 'Ekphrastic'; 'Infestation By Islands'; 'Page. Pact. Buoy. Body.'; *Moria*: 'Cardio/sky'; 'The Newlyweds Climb a Fence'; 'Nascent, Sage, Gulfs of Air'; *Notre Dame Review*: 'Forecast'; *Pavement Saw*: 'The Atmosphere Leaks a Troubadour'; *PFS Post*: 'The Virgins of Chicago (4)'; 'The Virgins of Chicago (5)'; 'Equivalents'; *Seven Corners*: 'A Breath Catalogue'; 'No Breath Found'; 'The Virgins of Chicago (3)'; *Sidereality*: 'Vertigo to Eros'; 'Raving Stark Mad'; *Spiral Bridge*: 'We Make Strange Trades'; *Words on Walls*: 'Third Grade'; 'Winter'.

'The Virgins of Chicago (3),' 'Thoughts of Falling, Pollen, Pare' and 'Cardio/sky' have been reprinted in *The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century* (Cracked Slab Books, 2007). 'The Virgins of Chicago (2)' was produced as a broadside for the Poetry Center of Chicago and 'If We'd Met In The Swamp It Would've Been Different' appeared on the Poetry Center of Chicago's website, in conjunction with their 10th Annual Juried Reading selected by Campbell McGrath (February 2005). Many of the poems appeared in the chapbook *Bee Spit*, published by Dancing Girl Press, December 2007. Thanks to publisher Kristy Bowen.

Cover image: detail from *Descent* by Kelly VanderBrug.

For my parents, with gratitude

CONTENTS

I.

- Thoughts of Falling, Pollen, Pare / 13
Forecast / 14
“It’s curtains, *ars poetica*” / 17
If we’d met in the swamp, it would’ve been different / 19
Three Flights in a Multiplying Sky / 20
Aubade, Big Eyes / 22
Vertigo to Eros / 23
Pantoum / 24
Equivalents / 26
Vi Ses, Water World / 28
Baby, What Kind of Help Do You Really Want? / 30
The Atmosphere Leaks a Troubadour / 32
Reverie, or war / 33
Dress-up / 34
Impostor with Housemaid’s Knee / 35
Interview / 36

II.

- Dislocation Lesson III / 39
The Virgins of Chicago (1) / 40
And How / 41
The Virgins of Chicago (2) / 42
Novatrix / 43
Elegy / 44
The Newlyweds Climb A Fence / 45
The Virgins of Chicago (3) / 46
Third Grade / 47
Dislocation Lesson IV / 48
Dislocation Lesson II / 49

The Virgins of Chicago (4) / 50
The Four Horsemen Cave to the Mayor's Demands / 51
The Virgins of Chicago (5) / 52
We Make Strange Trades / 53

III.

Slide / 57
A Breath Catalogue / 59
No Breath Found / 60
Mere / 61
Strategies of Lip, Tactics of Late / 63
Page. Pact. Buoy. Body. / 65
My Mister's Eyes Are Something Like Dim Sum / 68
Nightsongs / 69
Raving Stark Mad / 73
"Magical Thinking" / 74
Winter / 75
Nascent, sage, gulfs of air / 76
Months From Now in Sweden / 78
Ekphrastic / 79
Infestation by Islands / 80
Cardio/sky / 81
Ineffable Green Thing, Loved by All / 82

Perhaps we ought to feel with more imagination.

—John Ashbery

I have thus endeavored to preserve the truth of the elementary principles of human nature, while I have not scrupled to innovate upon their combinations.

—Mary Shelley

I

THOUGHTS OF FALLING, POLLEN, PARE

When champion-bred
leaves lie splayed
like minimum wage
sin, when sleep,
a raincoat czar,
spreads its liquid
hands thin, I'll say

not on: *your life, your daddy's knee, a new knife blade.*

Try, swim the brackish margin
between holy and hole, the ocean's
backstitched locomotion loosely
recites "no, there's no such
night in prosaic blood" nodding
its great nose toward the
mollusky dance-floor.

When honey leaks from
eyes bent to breezes
eyes like peach pits
fragrant and useless,

the czar disappears into
the rain's rumpled plumage
my heart's gong-bruised knees
buckling through branches.

It's bee-spit
that blows me
I admit
and you
away.

FORECAST

The wife is in the grip of being.

Anne Carson

★

All around me orchestra
was spinning out algebra.

I said *closed*—
but eyelids hum,
recurring there.

A fan unfolding
you, sketching
clean birds
on my gold-brown thighs.

I alleged,
I am my love.

★

I alleged pleasure
breakwater,
a violet storm.

Bare knees on a girl's rum sheets
burned a steel distance in me.

Two-tongue. Sea-eyed.
Sweet fuck thinking
my pink dresses
away to real seas.

I won't, but bear harder.

★

Curled in
a star's mouth,
black.

Warm as sick cats,
and bright.

When I say *now*
bite straight down.

★

Sponge-flowers
drift in
lullaby chambers,

a view of lime seeds.

Cut a window in my palm
sometimes to feel you.

I heard—a *lucky girl*.

Wrung like a hand waking to rainwater.

★

Morning flew down the beach,
loose cash, the wing
we stash keeps a ruby fog.

Each root lodged in
your beautiful used-to—
dawn, my green glass,
what I can't do with you.

“IT’S CURTAINS, *ARS POETICA*”

Is this why I stand at my oeil-de-boeuf,
blowing sugar bubbles at that guy
in the snazzy black hood?

Nipples and waffles rustle
a mean last week, ruffle

the constellations oar-locked
along our shower curtain.

A falling,
my heart,
a crocus
stalls at dawn.

Street noise adjusts
its head, tumbled
among the oak leaves.

At home in the bushes, thimble-
berries fill, advance a plump sortie.

O thermostat!
Preside like a priest
over our mouths,
dreaming.

Somewhere, an offhanded window
winks from a sea-drowned cabin.

On the dock, faded gray paint
suggests “submerged rock.”

Underwater, you there, you hear?

**IF WE'D MET IN THE SWAMP,
IT WOULD'VE BEEN DIFFERENT**

Our black eyes transparent, our home base a high
bat's nest stuffed in the chest of an arthritic cypress

named for a one-eyed chief, and several of his
descendents. Flowering water is the muck

of our breakfasts. We ease ourselves, we slip
into a sweet, a mosquito bath drawn from waters

we don't dare drain. Oh man, I don't like
the sound of that thunder. Gator jaws

are beautiful, like a gum-tree raft.
What is "natural"? What is "good" in a forest,

tucked under water? Cypress knees rise up from nowhere,
on fire, the light making coals of a root's reflection.

What is all this nonsense? We have swamps
on our conscience, like a lie that returns to

the edge of our dreams, laughing much louder
than our swimming fists. We are caught in a swamp

storm, out on the boardwalk, the sky falls toward
us with each cracking branch. The cypresses have

lived here so long in this silent buzz, they talk
of our dumb luck, they make us feel good,

as if we were already the past.