

Andraste's Hair

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Also by Eleanor Rees

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Andraste's Hair

ELEANOR REES



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'A Nocturnal Opera' was written as a collaborative poem for performance with The Word Hoard, Huddersfield 2004/5.

'Tell me something of this' was a commissioned collaborative poem initially shown on an interactive LED architectural interface at The Media Centre, Huddersfield in 2004.

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Night Vision

An open moon; burr of grass.
Last reaches of the spilt day
ending, the last
quiet pitch heard
in deep woods. Wet sod of dirt.
Scent of the sun's fire
passing field ruts and furrows,
seedlings, coiled roots, hedgerows;
flight of night-bird
turning tail into a sea breeze
beak batted to the north.



Cloud—now stone in ocean in undertow—
drops from night above the city
into an unseen sea,
at edges of membrane and sinew.
Wade through sky. Perforate.
Pebbles of rain on pitted tarmac
clutter the way home;
night-splashed, corroded.



A cold touch in a bleeding house.
An open door. Sores.

And I dream you are the rising sun:

where are your bones, baby? Where are your bones?

I've hurt for you — for your nights.

Each turn and flat-packed mile
walked to catch the drift and knack of ends
and fugitive ends.

Back alleys of the city burn.

Night boils outside the window.

The streets smoulder as morning comes.

Roadworks

1.

Sometime around midday.

The tarmac is biting at my ankles.
Well-lit sky snaps fast and short
as the street opens up to tumble
me into an underground
of corpses and snowdrift
and horses with gold faces
and pretty girls with bees in their hair
and silverfish with steel legs
and smiling boys with tattooed penises
and wet hearts in jars like flowers or flames
and invisible ledges of air
and rock face of baby's faces
and heavy tongues loll like dogs
and tall ships crash on cavern walls
and underground rivers clot
a golden fleece moulds on a stalactite
skeleton warriors waltz in the dark corners.

Atop and heavy, Liverpool tightens, glowers.
He disapproves. *I'll be driven out of town.*
A drill snaps down on our skulls
We shatter like shells.

2.

Sometime after dark

I know that hurt
colliding as dust

over bones,

the poor lady's beer-addled bones,

in the dark comes before

the bee hive city squeeze

in the street comes before

avalanche of brick.

Thick blood
comes before

the fall.

My city is wearing costume jewellery tonight
glittering and unreal.

A Red Moon

I break the top from the cathedral
and it comes,

 oozing steam
cream, champagne,
a thick cloud on the ground,

is a cake now, a castle, an island,
a ship, a table, pip in an apple, an eye,
an overweight seal on the edge of the tide.

It loves me I think

heavy under sheets
 of water-clogged cloud.

The city is a man.
 He raises terraces, parks,
streetlight eyes
to see moon simmer on paving skin.

He walks.
 I cling.
He wants to take me home
to sleep stretched over the shore
 to fall,
 shorting,
 hot and sweet

to leave me surly
but settled in the street:

breath in the night, three stars,
ice at toes, a haze
of streetlamp orange and fumes
and this road is a gate
it seems, that leads
to the other side of town like an arrow
and burns –
the flames
standing up from yellow hyphens
that mark the tarmac,
joining its thinking into streets and suburbs.
Fire burns fire burns

in this skin
in a car engine
in the threshing blue of the sea –

across the town from here,
sun leaps into deep plum distance
and a full-shadow midnight white
raze and cut of moon
on the well-lined multi-storey roof
where lamp lit eyes
blink now at bubbling rain-sky,
fat-laden midriff-spinning
end of the ocean
end of an evening rain.

Thinking of love
momentarily pass to you

stood absent in shadow
stood absent in the park
stood absent in the dock

or you absent in the cemetery
where a granite wall, smooth and shiny dark,
is a top hat
balanced on the edge of the quarry

—they took the sandstone
from this furrow
spooned it north into brick and mortar-

mausoleums
stone angels:

a spring
levels from the rock
pours its wetness over mulch and moss
of autumn passed
as night irradiates with moon,
statues,
arms aloft,
catch unseen, the past:

a sailor sings calypso
heard at the docks,
tail-coated gentleman
is lost in fog,
and a child in a nightgown
runs into town
cotton wet on thin legs
she slips quick into

this cross-hatched night:
servant girl carries laundry,
butler waxes railings with shoeshine.
In a carriage without a driver
a thin black horse plumed and warm
draws a hearse of white bones
to the burial ground.

The light is hot.
The city is burning up
 with fires that have passed
 or should have passed
 but linger
 gold at a touch.



Triangle shards
of glass in
 edgy water
 sap the light,
 threads of weeds
like stitches:
 these eyes
buckle on the reach
of stone, its push into
 itself
bobbing back from the air
into substance,

and across heavy roofs
naked
 with new rain

sky is tumbling
bottoming up and over
 colour
on colour
 a blast of
red through to blue.

A tap on my shoulder,
breath, bright face,
a crowd
a fray—
I keep the dead
deep and quiet
under stone:

a dancing slither
of hips and knees.



The cathedral
bustles under a smear of sky
clouded and marooned.

I force it home
take the elegant thick
 of cement and brick
and toss it
 upended
out over the river
like a shot

and revealed

 a hive of bones
that jiggle about maggot-like
 burrowing up and under
white cold
on white cold

and
back on the street in the under gloom haze
in the fat dark, ripe and blooming
night betrays
its own distinction
ebbing into black for a moment
then back into blue.

Night River

East to west, west to east,
wetness crawls

the promenade wall.
Oil and chemical, salt and tar:

the night is in my throat.

I consume distances
at the edge of the river,

three am, solitary
held only by the rain and the sky.

The wind's touch is courageous.

The stars are stags,
antlers pointed at each new shore

sailors discover
far from here, in some sunny waters.

I open to it like a mouth

and sense her shining
full height on the horizon,

as if the horizon is a ledge
she balances upon,

and hovering I rush to her,
her starriness, her electric pulses

that beckon, she widens:

I immerse myself in her thighs.
Her whiteness, her size.

I am her: the sea is a boat.
We ride until the dawn.

Seams of Dust

The pavement erupts and the past
– tail twitching –
rises from the cracks.

I lie face down on the road
cars circling like lions.
A wolf howls on Church Street.

Two eyes
yellow radar seeking scent.
Stay still. Keep calm.

Hear the ground break,
hear the ground break open.
Hold tight to the day
the ends are streaming in the wind.

See the stars in the earth's belly shine.
See the stars in the earth's belly die.

Too much choking my throat;
Be silent now, be silent.

A flurry of ravens sweeps through the underpass
Talons reaching out for meat.
Do not encourage it. Do not speak.

There. It will pass back into the shadows.
Someone has turned the lights on.

It's done.
Take hold of my hand.

The Clock Tower

I see the right hand smile.

A line
from five across to nine
turns to a curve.

Along unlit back streets
I am running for home.

In the shadows dust shines.
Bright things,
it seems are fading—
my watch, the window where
a family settle for the evening,
shiny filament of an electric lamp—

all are thin
faded by the burning of my eye
by passing.

And the city loves me for it
wants my bones
inside its bones
seeking out
passages of self,
the alleyways
lanes:
this puzzle of home.

Contradictions
are a dark alley
in a grey light,

this messed up distilled light—

where the smile
on the clock face dwindles,
and the smile
on every fly poster
on the scaffolding fades
and every smile
on every advertisement
sinks back into the past,

a scar on a belly;
an organ removed.

The damage is a ghost.

Do not burden it
Keep it close.

Do everything you can,
until battered round streets
to the river you go into the thick sludge,
until you are sleeping under
the heart of the river.

No answer though
a certain kind of light.

Listen! There
the memory of kindness
reaching into a night I can not touch.

Headlights

Litres of rain.
A consumption.
Enter the old weighed
net and block of buildings
— erode, erode,
the sandstone says.

7 am shadow.
Terrace window curtained shut;
blank canvas waiting for intention.
Her husband has died; she sees ghosts.
A kitchen lamp left on all night,
past fires flicker
like a lighthouse beacon,
brush on the window.

As the city calls out,
heads quiet
in before-day sleep,
open mouthed
wails slide out;
flat on feather
sleeping bodies
quiver. Foghorn
on the river
and it's over.

Parkland

Skating through trees,
you could break your neck on the moon.

Like a paper doll you expand your body on the breeze
shadow after shadow.

These versions of you hesitate, sit down,
climb trees, play Frisbee, give birth.

There is nobody else in the park but you,
reclining on benches, naked, smiling,

running between branches, distances,
mending ship's sails on the dilapidated bandstand—

you make rope in the avenues between cherry trees,
weave it round the pedestals of statues.

You wear a crinoline and row armoured carriers across the lake,
swans at your ankles like terriers.

You break your neck on the moon:

exercise horses on the sandy track looped around the edge of the park,
deliver laundry to old women in houses with broken windows.

You lie in the grasses in the small hills beside the streams,
touch yourself whilst looking at the sky.

You run naked in darkness across the open parkland,
starlight still wet on your back.

A plait lain out on the end of the bed
like a rope
several metres long it hung there
swaying
tied with a yellow bow.

It belongs to no one now
lopped off at the nape of the neck.

The door is closed.



Arms raised to hug the sun
woman
eyes like sods
ratchet-nosed, craggy
hatchet arms creak and clank

lady

sleeping under sunless light

another sun gone

reaching obedient: she dreams.



From among the ashes
from what had not burnt
gathered to a mass
of brown turf gathered
her hair

and carried
—a cloud in her arms—
and carried
 to the river
 her hair
to spread in the warp of water.

The light smooth and silting.
The forest behind—
 remember
too much too much
 dark cannot exist?
 The sun swings to the right.
She went left
 to the river
 old dirt track
stepping over grass
hair taken down to depth.

In the forest they look for her.

Now,

she walks along the path by the river
her hair in her hands
 to deliver
what had been taken
 to the river
 to the water
the smooth strand that curves its path
over the head of the hill.

Something subsides.
Something has passed.