

The Unhaunting

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The Unhaunting

NEW POEMS 2003–2008

ANDREW TAYLOR



CAMBRIDGE

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Dedication

Your hair has grey in it now
but your back as the sheet rucks down
is coffee. I'm tea coloured I'd joke
and didn't really know what got you
to be you. I still don't. But I know
my illness cost you and you've never
presented the bill. Instead
asleep, you offer a richness
I don't think either of us
ever could have imagined
that day you entered my room
and the whole world tilted our way.

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The importance of waiting

Night by night

Strawberries ripen by the back door.
Rain patterns a pond's surface
and fills the fountain to overflowing.

The fish hid for two weeks, we assumed
an egret or kookaburra had removed them
the way a surgeon removes cancer.

Rain falls with vertical precision.
Someone appeared last night at the gate
to the park, appeared and was gone again.

No wind. They rise strawberry red
under the pond's surface
which dimples where their mouths touch air.

What did she want? If I wait beside the pond
in the rain till 3 a.m. will she come again
to the park gate? This geometry

of perpendicular rain is ruffled
by a rising breeze. Is it her passing
that is stirring the leaves? The surgeon

has finished his work and the body's labour begins.
Strawberries hang by the back door
and rain for a moment hides as the fish hid.

She will come again at 3, I know it
the way a shoulder presages rain.
3 a.m. By the gate leading to the dark park.

Waiting

Waiting is a kind of hallway
with old portraits
uncomfortable furniture
and something that might be
a door onto a garden
or someone behind a desk
reading from a file.

He looks up from it
and I can see
a lemon tree through the glass door
to his left
as he nods
then picks up a pencil
and underlines what he's holding.

Waiting is not about time
I realise now
it's about that careful underlining
of what he might tell me
and whether he does it.
My own waiting is immaterial
it's his on which my universe turns

Keeping the pool clean

Each afternoon
as I towel myself
the sun slants my shadow
further across the pool—
late February lengthens

it will all be well
I murmur to myself
this is what it means
to be a gnomon
for the seasons

it will all be well
I hope
the appointment is two weeks off
I've made it four years so far
my shadow lengthens

over the clear pool water
I sweep every day—
why this obsession
to keep it so clean
of fallen leaves and flowers?

Reborn

Too much on the
too cluttered yet a phrase
those who
the empty plain
surface too much has
surfaced



perish by
simple phrase plain
words pieces of
letters notes he waits
for them to vanish
those who live by



the word
sword
surfacing in the white
that uncluttering
scar
those who the knife
whom



knife-line
the encumbered desk
he scatters papers aside
a plain
surface
who have died



by the sword
who live by
the white scar on his belly
borne plain
born
by the knife

I move a bit

I move a bit
as the ground moves
as spring warms it or

here when autumn comes
lilies start to grow again
the sun-withered herbs perk up
and the camellias

bees
why do so many bees
need rescuing from idle
swimming pools
in autumn?

hovering
may be the answer
as the ground moves
whatever I am
moves just that hare's
breath
above it

pollen
scandal
call me
what
ever you like

I'm just above your words

When the white stuff

When the white stuff of dreams
begins to
when the beginning of
where

where did the beginning
this was when cloud massed
summer had indeed
ended

why had summer

the weather map was clear
chasing summer across the ocean was a mass
of low pressure

empty air

beginning is a fullness
hotly pursued
by a

cold front
white dreamy stuff
an atmospheric valley

begins to disperse
a question emerges
on the horizon

Cliffs

When a cliff collapses
its new face
faces the light

an ancient unsuspected fault
is revealed and
the new face faces the light

the light's not kind
and the face can't turn
anywhere but to the light

that's how cliffs are built
by collapse
by facing the light

Sand dollars

Sand dollars on my desk
are the beach's hard currency
stranded by the receding tide

counterfeit-proofed
by their intricate perforations
both worthless and constantly

valued for their weightless
yet elaborately designed
mortality.

They're a portable and collectable cemetery
crafted by consummate and
unaware artists.

My eyes wander
among these little headstones
bearing not a single name.

Family reunion

for Kristin Headlam

Disbelief grows
as he drags out
canvas after canvas—

*this is Mum aged seven I remember
how she cuddled that poor cat
(it died when she was thirteen)
and here she is at her wedding—
I remember that too and the guy on her left
is you Dad am I right?*

His younger sister interrupts—
*Terry you weren't even conceived then
Did you paint these from photos? But
the silvery man who's been shovelling shrimp
and sausage from the barbeque
to the kids startles them all
with his hoarse voice.*

You weren't there

*but that doesn't mean
you didn't exist. Heather and I
had you existing years before
you were born. Terry's
just doing it in reverse.*

Enigma

The enigma in the middle of the roundabout
puzzles many drivers
and has caused a number of accidents.

It's a very large enigma
dazzling with its laser display
and racketing music

though some claim never to have seen it
obscured as it is by trees
and a large traffic sign.

It depends as the cliché claims
on which way you approach it
but it hits you all the same

either front on or in retrospect
as something you didn't negotiate
especially well

leaving the road ahead less clear
and how you got there or here
even more obscure

The simple truth

Simple it might be
as night

or as the right goodbye
one's never quite capable of

or flight
on a thermal's invisible wings

or an eagle's vision
from such height

simple despite
the intricate

flutterings of chaos beneath
the quite

quiet simplicity
riding its storm



That was a winter
reluctant to succumb

to spring
yet a kind of spring came

with its rain and sunlight
its lack

of simplicity
and though it's summer now

it's still more like spring
curled on itself

waiting to be born
a cooling coil

neither happy
nor simple



The declension of rain indicates
a wind change

and of weather
wherever and whatever

we might have expected
of December.

Christmas parties
eye the invisible elements

their fortunes ride upon
like stock values.

The choice is simple:
bring a sweater

or everything under cover.
But first you must consult.



The mulberry rains down
its black fruit

Christmas goes on, Hosannah!
while Christians and Muslims

slug it out on the beaches
of Gallipoli and Cronulla

there is no
simple

answer
when the world

asks you
what is it

that keeps it moving
that asks you what it is



Five sonnets to simplicity
are like the thousand nets

spread for the dolphin of Truth
in those sparkling seas to my north

which are now over-fished
and almost dead.

The simple
truth

is what you don't haul
aboard

you might consider it
the holes your net is made of

what you might pursue
of whatever you've lost

Metamorphoses : The Pinnacles, WA

The Pinnacles reveal a shifting shadow
flitting from limestone
monolith to imagined
gravestone to plinth to decayed
tooth to a knifeblade of stone

she's only present when your eye
is elsewhere like when
you watch the carload of Japanese
pose before what Italians would dub
a Pomodori sculpture

and she's slipped to the huge rock
or something smaller
in the middle distance
becoming its shadow

She told you in the motel last night
these rocks are millions of years old
and their shadows always new

and that you'd see her here
mornings and evenings
and never find her