

Like This

DIANA POOLEY was brought up in the Queensland outback and worked as an artist and art lecturer in Brisbane and London, where she lives now. Her poems have taken awards, in the Essex Poetry Competition, in the *Msllexia* Competition, have been published in *Poetry London*, *Smiths Knoll*, *The North* and *The Shop*, and will be included in *Identity Parade: New British and Irish Poets* (Bloodaxe Books 2010 ed. Roddy Lumsden).

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DIANA POOLEY



CAMBRIDGE

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Part I

Dish The Dirt

I put on my city shoes, grabbed a cane
and the top hat and gloves
from out of the Christmas concert chest,
bought a packet of Players No. 3
and when we met at Charing Cross I said,
'A smoke old thing, and a short snort, eh?'
She looked down through the net
from her hat and spotted my fingernails.
'Have you lifted all the onions yet?
How are the pigs? Has Grandma Golch
come back?' But I patted her arm,
'Come on girl, dish the dirt.'
Then she told me about Mr. Attlee's socks
and, taking my stick,
showed me the way Max Wall
had walked up the stairs at The Garrick.

Springtime,

and at 10 or so in the morning,
his red silk dressing gown trailing the cord,
he'd leave Ingrid to her croissant and lemonade
and walk the length of the gallery
to the Yellow Room
where he'd open a bottle, stack a tray
with figs, quail and salted shark;
go with it on to the balcony;
sit by the potted cactus
and give titbits to Asteran swinging there
on her perch. He'd note any cloud or wind
and keep an eye open
for Marte crossing the courtyard—
if she was wearing the pale green scarf
he knew he'd have to hurry, change,
pick up the old pigeon-hawk
and be ready to fly him with her eagle-owl
on the bald hill behind the Bois des Chèvres.

Listen Amelio,

this is how you make a painting of the night :
fix your easel, set out your palette, brushes,
maulstick—everything—the way I taught you.
When the tower clock begins to strike at noon
come to this drawer. Take out the black silk scarf
I keep between these little bags of loosestrife
and eyebright. Blindfold yourself, tying the knot
above your pigtail, and paint. You'll be finished
by two. Have a break, then bring in some ochre ;
grind it well. Now I must be off; the sun's up
and the lunette above the cross in St Paul's
needs retouching. Pass me those wings. There,
on the hook under my red cloak. Tomorrow
I'll show you how to use them and you will find
they are essential if you're working on birds,
angels, insects, dragons or flying horses.

Brisbane, 1962

Because they saw that Meg and I were at the party—
the one where Kelvin, dressed as the Pope, sat
all sixteen stone of him, in his mother's basket chair
on the dais of the scout hall behind St Joseph's,
where Bach's B Minor Mass was on his player
and where he'd got the two hundred-odd
of *my boys* as he called them, to walk the length
of the floor up to him as he lifted the little gold cross
he'd made out of foil—because they saw that girls
were there, three constables who'd come to the steps
turned straight back to their Panda, but when
at that moment Sean, who was standing on a high stool,
his legs trapped in his long skirt which had been tied
with string under the seat so the cloth flared
to make a fishtail *just like Ginger's*; when, at that moment,
he jiggled a bit at the sight of the uniforms,
lost his balance and fell sideways on to Darren's lap,
they changed their minds and stood around for a while.
Shane almost persuaded them to have a XXXX.

Maureen

The day fish took to the air
all up and down her London street
and as far into the sky
as could be seen—
Snapper, Big-eye Trevally, Barracuda,
to name a few—
it wasn't until nearly sunset
and, as it happened, at the very moment
a humpheaded Wrasse
slid along and filled the narrow space
between the privet and the front window
with its deep electric blue
and put its fat lips
against the glass and looked in
as she sat in the bay of her small room,
that it dawned on her
not only were they all tropical
but native, as she was,
to the Great Barrier Reef.

Behind, In, Under, On and Up

I'm down behind the sequinned masks
in Gran-da's dressing room most days,
under Mammah's bed or in the cellar cupboard
where Pappy keeps his sharpening tools.

I tell Hirmesh—we're trysting by the lake;
he cocks his head at the moon, *Me, I like the light.*
The roofs of the village glisten.
He points. *I'm up on them, daytime.*

And nights, all night, he keeps his house lit up.
We marry. Mr Grey, the Head of Chantry Prep
(Cousin Lottie does the dinners there)
tells us that our children are well-balanced.

Balm

After Czeslaw Milosz

A wonder.

The chair's foam memorised me.

Sun soaked in through the window.

Outside they went by in coats, faces at an angle to the wind.

I lay back and loved them all.

There was nothing in this world that I wanted.

Nothing ached.

Anything owed me, I forgot.

Whatever nastiness I'd known,

even Edgar's, next-door,

who'd leant over the fence and cut my lilac tree down,

who lets his howling dogs out at two in the morning every morning,

who kept my red towel that had blown into his garden,

who parks in front of my house even when there's space in front of his,

who has speakers against our party wall,

I forgot.

Life Class

Charlie could never get the proportions right—
that day he made the model's legs look wasted
and her feet the length of half the width
of her three-quarter-view face
which had eyes that were in profile and larger
than the hand resting on her lap,
so when everybody went to tea
and the drawings rose out of the paper
for the figures to move around the studio,
Charlie's figure flopped onto the donkey
and made a groaning so loud it could be heard
three rooms away in the student cafeteria.

Corners

For him the horizon didn't curve—
it was three sides of a square
observed in a gentle perspective;
but he hadn't spoken of this, since
as a boy, he'd pointed to a ship,
'That's a big 'un on the corner',
and Marty said he must be nuts
while Pedro pulled a face
so they laughed and kicked sand.

Now, at thirty-one, on a clear day
in the wheelhouse of his boat
he hears his six-year-old on deck,
'Dolphins jumping in the corner',
and his wife cry out, 'Oh look—
they're jumping in the other corner too'.

‘Lindisfarne,’

across the street, with its tall sash windows
and tiled doorway was in character with the area
when I moved in, but it wasn't until the afternoon,
years later, just as Mr Clough, the painter
and decorator who lived at number sixty-seven,
had finished working on its front—first
he'd used soap and water and a scrubbing brush,
then pale cream Maxi-Renda that he'd smoothed thickly
all over the Victorian mouldings and red brick work
and into which, while it was still wet,
he'd gouged patterns of horizontals and verticals
with the point of his trowel held against
a piece of two-by-one that I'd stood and watched him
pick out of the skip—it wasn't until then,
in a moment the sun came out from behind a cloud,
that light as never before bounced off his brilliant wall
and into my front room, picking out the tendrils
between grape leaves in the cornice, the gilt bobble
on the frame of the mirror, and a glass eye
of an Asian pipit in great-aunt Maud's walnut cabinet.

Sea Sprite II

It's all because of him—
he comes down here and lights it up.
Now I know what shadows are.

And patterns: wrinkles on the sea-bed
near my burrow, stripes on tonguefish,
crabs in rows beside the vents.

And colour everywhere: iridescent eels,
yellow of the sulphur, mussels
that are pink and red and purple.

Now I've looked along my ridgy beak
and watched it dig and peel;
I have seen my gristly, mottled suckers.

Not long ago, just above the II,
I touched his hard, shining coat, slid
my smallest tentacle around his basket

as he cored. He kept on humming.
Next time he'll stay for good. I'll put him
in the cave behind the Blower,

rub him down with squid oil, feed him
waterbears and tubeworms. He will strobe
and flicker as I show him how I swim.

Grey Dog Hair

In an emergency it may *usually be safest to stay on the train* as the sign says but on the 10.20 to Waterloo the other evening a knife was thrown. Still, would that be better or worse than being on the street with Jack the Ripper

about? He having been brought to mind by the play, *The Only Girl in the World*, that's on at The Arcola. Perhaps it's not only on that night going home down the Old Kent Road we'd be able to watch from the top deck of a bus

the hairy man dressing or undressing in a room above the café next to Ann's shop, his light full-on and the gauzy curtains only half or even a third drawn (he twitched them back further as we vibrated at the stop). A woman

in the seat behind, with fangs and drops of blood printed on her black shirt, who was saying on her mobile she had to drive twenty panto headdresses to Leeds by 2 p.m. on Wednesday, didn't notice. Her fingernails were dirty—

paint and hat glue must be hard to remove. Consider Luther in Cranach's portrait of him and Erasmus in Holbein's—they didn't have that excuse. You'd think that the artists would have pretended their sitters were clean. Would have had to.

Distinguished sitters—not like the anonymous creature responsible for the red feather left on the egg in my Tesco pack—free-range, so at least she could go for walks. Not be up for the chop before she'd experienced something of the world.

Dreams of flying don't often if ever involve wings. You just fly. In the
outback
we trimmed the feathers of one wing of each of our Australorps
so they couldn't get into the garden. Early each summer Eddie the fencer
gave his collie a pill. Then he clipped her coat—he called it Lassie wool.
And once
he used it, unwashed, to stuff his pillowcase. In the 60s, a cushion
from a jumble sale in Dulwich fell under the tyres of the Beetle as we
were leaving.

It was grey dog hair that squashed out through the split in the tie-dye
fabric.
The other day at a boot sale Deb found nearly-new hedge cutters,
a Dinky truck in pristine condition and twelve fire alarms. No
watercolours though.