

INTERFERON PSALMS

— 33 psalms on the 99 names of God —

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ALLEN&UNWIN

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1

Lift up our hearts.

Lift up our hearts. So then, lift up our hearts.

It is a flooded world: every available flood.

It is a flooded world: such floods of good.

Everything present, as it always was.

A flooded world; I'm sick with shallow corpuscle.

•

Skin turned to scale. Head peeled away. I am Reptile,
hear me roar.

On this earth I learned all about suffering. *Mutter, meine Mutter*, the bandages stick to my skin.

All countries are equally evil, but some more evil than others. Ditto for the sections of my body.

I would write nothing, from the perfect centre of a monstrous place, O Holy One of Being. Nothing at all: that was my plan. I had to gather the forces of my memory and

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I had to trust my memory. But first I had to allow sheer bewilderment to flow through me.

•

She said: *I want to talk to you, at roughly four removes.*

But I am getting ahead of myself. First, bewilderment. Then the memory packs it in. Then bewilderment, protein-enriched. Then a long time later, the coast was clear, and I began to recollect. Which in no way diminished embarrassment and pain. O how the years passed.

Such grand sadness inside her, I mean me.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

•

In the centre of my life I lost its centre. *Touch his bone and flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.*

The blade of my happiness broke at the hilt. I flailed, without balance, at air. A break at the hilt is a hard break to fix. Life in search of a blacksmith. Of bellows and tongs I knew little.

The rumpled magazines of waiting rooms.

The great lakes came and went. Winter rolled in for ten thousand years. I dreamed of heat, in lethargy.

All life became a leaving behind. There weren't alternative fullnesses.

There were stories written on calfskin, though I had no capacity for concentration. The lost would be found, on land, and by water.

It was never going to be a long love affair, but in my yielding I became a mystic.

I was staying the course. I felt the tightness.

•

Perhaps, O Witness, O Word, O Diadem of Beauty, perhaps the hummingbird would have been enough, its extravagant plausibility, its taste for weightlessness. I'd been a honeyeater too, myself, so weightless in the desert light. This was the arid time.

All the old men were dying or feeble and yet there were certain evenings when their ideas whirred like wings. Twenty years earlier, when I learned one could bow to the earth, or that there even was an earth, I was snapped out of my abstraction. I stopped hurting myself.

The monastery
of sentience

Such moments of rupture. I cried that I had never seen the snow, having seen it now.

I was certainly in the place of licking wounds. Though not as a cat licks; I was certainly a bull.

But even a bull can be felled by flukeworm.

Eventually the universe will be felled.

Don't fret. A good interstice.

•

To have said *Go! Go!* to the bees. To have said *Disperse*.
To have understood a taxonomy of honey-gatherers.
To have seen the crane not as wing but as arabesque,
Inhabiting space in all but memory,
Punctuations of red its martyrdom,
This crane who forms these arabesques of light.

Wash me in the blood of mine enemies
And I shall be that I am.
We could bottle the rage and make money.

I emptied the spaces I tried to fill
But the unnerving stranger was always waiting.
I could not create enough bang and clang
To make him go away.
The sun set sparks of pure light
On the bullets of his gunbelt.
Walking down that long main street.
Saloon, oasis of my appetites.

•

There were no stop signs, no planets, nothing smaller than
galaxies. Just an endless plummeting away from her. This
proved fruitless and painful, so you open a door. You step
through. The birds feel the shockwaves. Their flight so
fervently runs rings around mine.

Then one day and for long after, words
Were all I had left. There was absolutely

Nothing else in the bereftness and now I was
A child once more; in any case, quite young.
Let it be, I said, to the jumble of words
Even as I rearranged them, and experiment
Returned. The specific always made me so
Rational. Also I was fighting the tide of many
Fools in the world—incredible, those numbers.
For a long time I had been too serious.
How to stop worrying about the architecture
Of the scansion of the rigging of the vessel
Of the bardic journey of the elders
And youngers alike was the lesson that
Awaited me. And all those fucking
Mouthfuls.

I was exhausted.

How to elevate to first position
Honey Smacks or Froot Loops:
In any case this was the kind
Of lifestyle I was returning to—
But tenderly, so as not to give myself
Too hard a time of it.

Because of the desperation came the anxiety.
Out of the coffee the halitosis. The betrayal the triumph.
The bad boy the next bad boy:
Lined up for her as in a hall of mirrors.
Out of the wandering came the grocery list.
I always had a plan.

A decade passed like that.
Then the rains came and the soil softened.

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I just let it fucking fly.

Chronology was never my finest hour
But only because I came to know time
Both inside and out so that
Reverence became a given;
And all, when all was good, was now.

But the mud leached up to my ankles and I went back
To looping in and out of the present. Damn!
Because I had for a while
That thing, that okay, that what, that *here*.
For God's sake, plant the flag.
Ain't nothing else'll grow
But the ensign of your selfhood,
That is to say, sovereignty.
So I saluted myself, feigning half-belief,
Which was abundantly more
Than what was truly necessary.

•

*So foolish was I,
and ignorant:
I was as a beast
before thee.*

Everywhere I went—and for years I went everywhere,
As if chased by myself—everywhere I went
I would always stock up at the supermarket
Because food became paying attention.
But the tins of tomatoes never travelled with me
To the next continent, the next supermarket.

*Why leap ye,
ye high hills?
This is the hill of
the mercy seat.*

A warning sign of any sort.
God no. Possibly I slept through it.
That would account for the shock as well as the awe.

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The earthquake-addled desolation.
God yes. The jumble of masonry,
The concrete in its disarray. I'd picture coming home,
Across the welcome mat and through the open door.
I'd crawl into your open arms, for sure.

That's just not
Going to happen, I told myself. Pockets of realisation
Floating stateless and neutral like tiny planets. The bricks
All structureless and recently aflutter. Shock waves
Past their use-by date. The utter exhaustion
Of trying to maintain one's dignity amid one's pain.

I too became stateless and neutral.

The pleasure of your company. It was like being mugged.
For months, nothing is like the everything it should be.
The world is a little to the side of itself.

Navigational discomfort, the explorers called it.
A searing lock in the vertebrae, and in one's neck an
Ohmygodwhatthefuckisthat disaster of immobility.
For months, you clench the steering wheel.

The night sky was huge, but at any one time it was daylight
somewhere else: rendering the business calls impractical.
Time zones fattened out into the arhythmical haze of mere,
of sheer, loss.

I clung to my illuminations.

If every pen had a light in it my words would be of helium
and hydrogen, fused in a crucible, just like the textbooks
describe it. Or celestial globe.

•

None of this is happening.

•

I began to drift down to my death, like a ship heading ocean floorwards. On land, in my glory, I had been paramour and pirate rolled into one. Exceptionally talented. As I was a-walking down Paradise Street, a flash-looking packet I chanced for to meet. And now ten fathoms further, my cells were preparing for dispersal. It was uncanny, what sorrow looked like. I sensed in the darkness my cousins the squid. I was dying of course, like us all. I had lived on oxygen for so long, and now my lungs were panicked, then sad, and three atmospheres later I might as well have been tripping. Those were the last of my memories. The great kelp forests swaying. If I only had a sister, to hold her hand, then I would protect her, and forget about my fear, and we would walk under water, where the light shines.

It was a long slow world and time, by rivers and oceans.