

*Notice: All texts in this document are the work of Kathryn I. W. Sparks and may be used only with explicit permission from and credit to the author. No fees are charged for such use except as required by law or the regulations of third-party agreements.*

## **Dark Dreaming**

### **Goodbye, Farewell & Hello**

Isn't it always so in the world,  
That on a day like today,  
Sun gleaming in a pure  
Blue porcelain sky, somewhere  
Not far away, someone  
Is shivering as a storm gathers  
And he finds no shelter near.

On such a day, across the sea,  
Sisters and brothers, citizens  
Of every stripe, pause in their  
Usual track of things to be  
In concert celebrating  
Their independence day, waving  
Pennants and flags, wearing  
Their utmost finery, drinking  
Toasts to the past and  
Future of all their nation knows,  
And in another place yet,  
Death stalks a man too  
Young to die and strikes  
In its ugly certainty to wipe  
All semblance of peace  
And sanity off the day.

This is how it always goes,  
Death and destruction rattling  
Their sabers in whatever  
Corner of the earth they choose  
To darken for the while,  
When not a hair's-breadth away,  
A newborn child is kicking  
And squalling into life,  
Just for her joyful moment  
Out-shouting the noise  
Of any such darker clash.

### **Convulsions of Convolution**

I'm thinking baroque thoughts today,  
Internecine and wild—  
As weirdly Machiavellian as  
The daydreams of a child—  
As byzantine as psychotropic  
Drugs could make them be—  
But you need not be worried for  
My safety: that's just me.

### **Siege Cantata**

Skinless and hairless and toothless,  
Charred and parched and  
Practically turned to stone,  
We wait  
For the flare and glare of tracer fire  
To light us across roads made  
Earthquake-proof only by virtue  
Of their being now in an irreducible state

To cross  
Is the main goal of the hour,  
To gather up a little water, not  
Very clean or cold, to retrieve the bits  
Of furniture we were forced to leave  
Behind last time, which now are welcome only  
As firewood, pretty as they were  
Before shelling; to take some  
Tinned food which we had hoarded some  
Long time ago as though we could  
Be causal about having more  
Than was necessary for the day

The children so very seldom  
Cry nowadays, having learned along the way  
That crying must be stifled when  
Danger seems imminent, which is both  
When they most wanted  
To cry and when they found  
Themselves least likely to be heard;  
Not that we  
Love them less  
—Impossible, horrible!—

Only that the mortars and blasting are  
So loud and the ears  
And eyes of an enemy  
So keen

Mostly the children are just  
Too hungry, too tired, too weak  
To cry anymore unless  
From (now so rare) surprise

Anyway, it is the night of a day  
Pretty much like the others, made  
Real and common and strange  
All at once  
By a dash for a bread-loaf down  
Sniper's Alley or stopping and stooping  
To scratch one of the innumerable local  
Three-legged dogs (thinking  
Sadly meanwhile whether he is  
Fit to eat),  
A day made  
Survivable  
Sometimes by nothing  
More, nothing less, than  
A single burst of spontaneous laughter  
Which forgot to be afraid,  
A moment's touch  
From Grandmother's beautiful  
Cracked hand

### **Color Coded**

The colors in the room  
Broke the sound barrier  
Of my heart, the way that  
Aching dream occurred.

The images were all  
Of danger and of death,  
But I  
Could only feel the  
Surging repetition  
Of the waves of heat  
That came to me  
As wrenching sweetness,  
Eye-stinging, heartbreaking  
Gorgeousness.

Stucco walls only about  
Ten feet high enclosed  
The courtyard that  
For some mysterious  
Reason

Was concealed  
Deep in the center  
Of infinite miles  
Of fields  
Of exquisite susurrating  
Seas of gilded wheat—  
The walls, I say,

Were also radiating heat  
Off of their  
Extreme purity of white,  
Their blank  
Enclosing  
Windowless defense.

What the courtyard  
Should protect I do not  
Know, since there  
Inside was merely  
Yet more wheat,  
Hissing, golden,  
Breaking off in eddies  
All around me where  
I stood.

Always, there was  
A sense of some  
Impending thing—  
Someone coming  
That I must  
Evade at any cost,  
Or some event  
Afoot that surely  
Ought to be defused.

So it didn't stun  
Me utterly  
When suddenly  
The brilliant white  
Of stucco walls, the  
Monumentally intense blue  
Of the endless sky,  
The hot  
White absoluteness of  
The light,  
Were interrupted by  
A sharp-edged shadow  
As a figure

Came to stand  
Above me on the wall.

It was a man,  
Also dressed  
Entirely in white  
(And wearing a crisp white  
Panama hat, too,  
As I remember now)  
Who had a long-tailed  
Scarlet parrot  
Sitting on his shoulder.

I think perhaps  
The man was armed;  
At least, I sensed  
That he  
Was a sentry of a sort.

In that whole dream,  
Although an undertone  
Of danger was  
The common thread,  
The only thing  
That finally  
Undid me with a  
Sudden shock of fear  
Was when the  
Blood-red bird  
All in a second  
Swung up wildly  
Into the fiery blue  
Solidity of the sky and turned,  
And as the black-haired man  
Reached up to try  
To catch it back,  
Plunged,  
And snapped

With its cruel beak,  
Tearing out  
The throat  
Of the man in white.

Every second of  
This picture-tale  
Took place in total,  
Massive silences,

Except perhaps  
The faintest rustlings of  
The wind-stirred wheat,  
The one  
(And only one)  
Clear scream.

This, as in slow motion,  
Was the final  
Image of the dream:  
Silence, heat and wind;  
A crimson parrot diving  
Straight up into  
Perfect depths  
Of azure sky,  
A universe  
Of burning gold  
Wheat curling  
And stretching to every  
Horizon and beyond;  
White blinding walls,

And a man  
All dressed in white  
But wearing  
One bright streak  
The color of the bird,  
Falling,  
Infinitely falling from  
The chalk-white walls.

**Under Sea, Under Stone**  
*(A Litany for the Suffering)*

A very small voice breaks the infinity of the darkness with a  
Plaintive query to the night: "Is there anyone here who knows me?"

All of the icons of safety have been swept away.

This curled, infant being who lies  
Alone in the place of maximum fear  
Knows nothing of where he is. Is there anyone here who knows him?  
It is a promontory of impossible jagged height.  
It is an island straight in the center of horrible frigid sea, an ocean  
That plunges beyond the very heart of the earth and right  
Into heartless Space.  
It is the grinning crevasse atop that peak, which waits  
To slice and grind  
Sense into terrible shreds, it is

The tomb, the cave that has never seen light, the wound  
Without salve, without name, without hope.

Is there anyone here? In the tiniest of words comes  
The most fearsome question of all: Is there anyone?

The inquiry breaks, though fainting, through  
A virulent, violent roar—the forces of all (nature and unnatural alike)  
That seek to destroy, to crush, to drown, to eat every  
Molecule of him, this child, to snatch him in ashen glimmerings into  
Utter nothingness. Hear: the wind screams. The waves  
Batter, bang, smash, grind; the seas climb and rise, bound and swell, and  
Grapple to grasp an ankle, a pale  
Retreating foot. Massive trees crack like twigs and groaning  
Electrical towers snap their terrible tentacles of torn power lines,  
Whip their sparking raw wires in pursuit, competing with every  
Slash of lightning against the bruised and brooding  
Immensity of stormy skies. Sleet, rain, hail. Lashing and stabbing,  
They make a monstrous river of their own to chase  
And chew whomever they can harm.

The earth growls and vomits its own angry reply,  
Dust sweeping, then gravel leaping, and soon  
The very foundations of onetime stability  
Rattling, crackling, bursting upward in a wild  
Heave of quaking and flaming volcanic spew,  
Shards and shrapnel that were once  
Dependable ground now threatening  
To atomize everything that's ever been known.

In the maelstrom is that blend of perfectly harmonious incompatibles,  
Millions of elements, each dangerous and dire, that would  
Not ordinarily have come to terms with each other at all, except  
That the hurricanes, the seas, the quakes, the firestorm all  
Funnel them together with the debris of what  
Had once been order, once been normalcy—of what  
Had once been life. Now, the ugly stew of  
Everything a boy once knew as Everyday, car and home  
And clothes and pets and toys and trees  
And family  
Taunts and tantalizes him by flying  
By in countless mismatched parts, lumber, limb and love  
Strewn in the wind, boiled in the waves, passing by with a roar  
But not a word in the endless dark.

WHO KNOWS ME?

Left on his throne

Of misery and dread, one little child  
Clings and makes his desolate cry, Is there ANYONE? and we  
Others, all on far-off  
Endangered islands of our own, what  
Will we call back across the impenetrable abyss of doom, what  
Can we say to answer him?

Perhaps a grave  
Will finally prove the only safe  
And knowable place. When we lie  
Curled and infant in another plane, under stone that stays  
Eternally still, we will  
At last hear the sound we had all been longing to hear,  
The reply, soft as a whisper, lapping at us as though  
We lay rocking at the bottom of a soothing midnight sea:

Yes, I am here and you are mine.

Or perhaps, if the wind  
Is somehow for a moment exactly right, we will hear  
That voice of rescue come  
Without every one of us having to die. Yes,  
Scrabbling to hold  
Onto the outcroppings of extremity, we will truly hear  
The longed-for sound:

Yes, yes, yes.

### **Episodes of Amnesia**

Episodes of amnesia  
Frequently broke  
Across her cloudy  
Brow & she  
Would wake (or  
Simply find herself)  
Of a sudden  
Standing in the  
Chapel  
& it was raining but  
Her hair was dry  
& her  
Dress as dry  
As the ancestral  
Bones  
But her face  
Of course wet  
With inexplicable  
Tears running down

& then  
She would be  
On a train  
Going somewhere  
Completely (heretofore)  
Unknown to her  
& carrying  
Provocatively scented  
Bouquets  
& then  
(Most unsettling she  
Would be  
All perfectly normal  
& living in a  
Perfectly  
Unremarkable  
But sane &  
Pleasant life again  
But have  
No idea  
What she was doing in it  
How she got there  
& who  
She was  
In the first place & she  
Found (with increasing  
Frequency) she wished  
She would  
Appear on the  
Train once more &  
Finally take it  
To wherever it was  
She was  
Forever going.

### **Amelioration**

Prefatory to stepping out  
Of his steam-vent heated doorway  
To greet the day with his customary  
Cusses and cursory  
Cursing, Nathaniel scratches  
The one good ear of the only one  
Who still knows how to love him.  
Cake is his dog, a mutt  
As sweet as his name. With three  
Legs to toddle around on,  
Milky eyes, and a muzzle chewed  
With surgical precision by

A larger, meaner dog, Cake might be  
(You'd think) made at the world, but he  
Has always taken the philosophical view  
And never leaves the side  
Of old Nathaniel, who at his very best  
Was never as kind or sensible  
As Cake. Nevertheless, they need  
Each other quite enough to call it love,  
And thankfully,  
Among his other distinctive traits,  
Cake's ears—both the pretty one  
And the bad—are deaf as death,  
And so that kindly dog  
Never minds at all Nathaniel's  
Perpetual and impetuous  
Streak of swearing shrieks but smiles  
The benign smile of a used-up dog  
At passersby until  
They cannot help but see Nathaniel  
In all his messiness  
Through milky eyes and hear  
Him only faintly if he should  
Blurt out blasphemies  
In that hapless helpless way of his  
Just as he passes them.

**Rasputin Whispers  
& We All Succumb**

Unholy creature!  
From the start,  
I knew you would  
Impale my heart—  
Still, I could not  
Resist your wiles,  
The mesmerism  
Of your smiles—  
Sharp-toothed,  
Perhaps:  
For a vampire  
Is not the usual  
Desire—  
Yet even so,  
I was drawn in  
By piercing eyes,  
And by the thinly  
Veiled and  
Dangerous import  
Of your expression,

Just the sort  
Of risky business  
One abhors—  
But craves, as well—  
And so,  
I'm yours.

### **Fortresses**

Wars build walls  
On a foundation of  
Corpses—  
The evil and  
The innocent alike—  
And what do the walls  
Keep in?  
Keep out?  
How is it that  
Battles can be declared  
Won or Lost?  
For both sides die,  
Both parties always  
Somehow  
Lose land and goods  
And certainly, soul;  
Starve in the snow or  
Roast in the heat,  
All the while watching  
The world they knew  
Reduced to ugly  
Holes and rubble and  
Its storied walls replaced  
By a fortress that  
Is really  
Only a new prison

### **Fellow Travelers**

*Most migratory of all species, how is it that we have  
so little respect for those who come to join us on our journeys?*

### **Sojourn's End**

What sorrows did they flee and trials know  
Of servitude or poverty or fright  
To pack their meager baggage in the night,  
Leave everything they loved, pick up and go  
To unknown lands with dangers of their own?  
What suffering impelled that journey's start,  
So fraught, and with what heaviness of heart  
Must they have left behind all good they'd known,  
To grow so desperately daring, run

From the familiar to such dire straits  
As might be lying just beyond the gates,  
To leave behind—oh, why—their natal sun?  
No fellow immigrant should cause alarms,  
But rather, land with welcome in our arms.

### **Monsters & Mirrors**

Cavernous voices, craggy brows,  
    eyes shadowed darker than a crow's  
Inmost black feathers at the height  
    of moonless, starless, stormy night—  
These are the shades of anger, deep,  
    of ev'ry burning coal I keep  
Banked in my heart, of fear and hate—  
    and, too, the keepers of my fate;  
These are the demons of my doom,  
    long as I stay locked in my room  
Counting the universal ills  
    and sins outside my windowsills  
But blind as will can make me blind  
    that I'm at one with humankind  
In wickedness and failings rife  
    as poison every single life.  
Grim and haunted, harsh and cruel,  
    is the fate of the haughty fool  
Who's pious, preaching at an ass,  
    heedless that it's a looking-glass;  
And if I fail to open eye  
    and heart enough thus to descry  
Reflected there myself alone,  
    this Basilisk will turn to stone;  
Save that I learn more temp'rate ways  
    to inward turn my critic gaze,  
I'll feel the cryogenic burn  
    that cauterizes as I learn  
I've earned no better than have those  
    whose sins so loudly I oppose  
And have condemned to caverns dark  
    for crimes like mine and not more stark

### **Unbearable Beauty**

She lay in her bed above the Falls,  
Straight and cold, her head  
Upstream and long hair ribboning  
Sweetly toward her china wrists;  
Palms down, ankles loose and seeming  
Still to swim, she lay pinned at the neck  
By river branches gentle but reluctant

To lastly let her beauty go. Under her chin  
The leaves of birch and slender grass  
Held fast and delicately near,  
Swept in the clear-paned rush  
Of knee-deep stream across her pallid breast,  
Her flimsy dress of former blue.

It was the fault of stars, of the  
Reflecting white articulated moon, to love her so—too well, as sprites  
Who lured her on the slipping stones did too;  
Her porcelain frame and  
Fairy skin were made for this, this mica-  
Scattered rest and pose, all tumbling light  
And clover-flavored elegy  
(The water a recorder's tune).

This should be an unattainable wilderness  
Where none could come undo the lovely sight,  
And she forever preserved without decay;  
The fish and leaves and mallard pairs  
Would pass her over undisturbed,  
Would leave her lips in their listless song, her  
Open mercury-colored eyes in endless gaze  
At the dissolving mysteries  
Of drifting toward the Falls,  
All day and every night.