



Quark Soup
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The cover design is based on Kandinsky's *In the Black Circle*, 1923.

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I. Title *Quark Soup*

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For M, D, O, G



Whorl

From this point
everything begins.
He comes out crying
no need for a smack
eyes wide
fighting the light and shocks
slippery, red and incredibly solid.
From this point it all begins.
The whorl
where superfine hair grows
like one of those spiral galaxies
Andromeda or Triangulum
full of stars
and the promise of real life
different from anything we have known
but starting at the same point.

Coil of Life

Take a single cell
tinier than the tip of a pencil
in its nucleus the DNA blueprint
six billion pairs of nucleotides
an intricate array of structures
with the potential of a universe.

Utterly simple, unutterably complex
the sheer density of information
in its miniaturised space
coiled, tense, ready.

Binary fission
mitosis and cytokinesis
the cervix thins and dilates
the dreaming and waking cerebral cortex
already perfect signals uterine contractions,
the Big Bang.

Hurling matter in all directions,
the particles of the embryonic universe
rush away from each other.
In the beginning there was nothing
but plasma soup. Less than a second later
pure energy became
a slippery birth cry still measurable
fifteen billion years later
in the decaying echoes of space.

Photons, neutrinos, electrons and quarks
brain, spinal cord, heart
each living cell in a given moment of time and space
forms part of a greater whole
visible
in the ice caves of your eyes.

Quantum Quirk

Ten thousand miles away
another continent
a different life
the push pull effect is still clear
weird action at a distance
Einstein called it
quantum quirk
we're neither together nor apart
your cut hurts my finger
your failure breaks my heart.

In the quantum world of our
drifted lives
entanglement between us remains
giving mass to my
insubstantial body.

Your face is foggy
with time and distance
the downward draw of gravity
distorting the image
in our mutual mirrors.

Beyond the melting edges of the present
our tiny lives are frozen
in quantum
superposition
love-not love
both here and there
mine and not mine
alive forever and
already dead.

Moon Fountains

Looking up he saw
a twilight glow
low over the lunar horizon
crepuscular rays
of light and shadow
so fleeting he rubbed his eyes
and they were gone.

The scientist in him cried
imagining an atmosphere above
small (like him)
intelligent beings
neither man nor woman
waving from on high
understanding
his endless innocent pain.

Long after the moon fountains
he whispered himself to sleep
atmospheric haze
distant horizon between land and sky
words he could hardly comprehend
beyond their soothing sibilance.

He knew
after his mother kissed
that peach down cheek
closing the most mundane
bedtime story
that his gentle
aliens
would be waiting
his future clearer
than the icy stars.

Venus Returns

Hiding in her
atmosphere
tentacle fingers dripping terror and love
Venus returns
to the evening sky.

Long before darkness sinks
she pries into
our twisted hearts
finding the burden of anger
a limitation larger
than we ever have imagined.

Our dreams were great
staring at violent stars
but only human,
the beauty we hoped
to emulate
filled little more than
a second
between sunset and
night.

Crackling Planets

In the static lightning of your energies
wild hair
crazy eyes
the world lapping your ankles
you flash smiles
that break every storm
before skipping off
the most gorgeous planets
in the galaxy.

In the storm's eye
fingers charged
with the dry magnetic field
of your potential,
drawing in ions
with each milky breath,
the stuff of life,
crackling planets,
tempering your thick cup
of morning wisdom
with a deliberate dose of youth.

Despite its limitless innocence
the waterfall of your laughter
is powerful enough
to destroy
the universe as we know it
leaving
in its wake
something entirely
perfect.

Green

dying in her shoebox
she asked for a poem
something sweet and pretty
birds and trees and expanses of green
to break up the long stretches of grey pain
alternating between bed and toilet
throwing up the medicine
which wasn't curing her

i couldn't think of a thing.
outside
the birds weren't singing
the trees looked bare
in the sunless winter cold

my fingers worked independent
from intent
tracing the landscape of her arched back
as she bent over her porcelain taskmaster
begging the drugs which she couldn't swallow
to kill the disease
indistinguishable from her own cells

i saw beauty in her hungry face
every stretched line writ
with the spring of her waning life
and the pallor of her skin
became a forest where birds sang
a song as sweet as death was ugly
a permanent hymn to that hard place
Cancer can't touch
which fills me now
with a longing as tender
as any green day

The Rift

In the space defined by the rift
your voice became an echo
indecipherable and cold
lost in the cavern between our worlds
a husky cry for help
I couldn't hear
or heard, lashed to my own mast
and couldn't attend.

It wasn't for want of trying.

The faster we move
the slower time goes
bringing us back to our roots,
our genetic inheritance
flaws natural selection
have yet to remove.

Is it a tear
in the fabric of space/time
a dangerous temporal anomaly,
or just the non-absolute nature
of your space and my time.

Approaching an infinite mass
we curve back to the singularity
of our origins
rocked
by the curvature
of our own interphasic rift.

Sunspot

on the Earth facing side
of the sun
wider than Jupiter
crackling solar flares
silently heat the atmosphere
with coronal mass ejections

the geomagnetic storm
of my rapidly beating heart
tilts and flashes
an Aurora begging for attention
its dancing beauty
belying the absence which follows
or the violence that gave it birth

swallowing solar sized pride
burns like a Taurid fireball
all down the oesophageus
while my eyelids soften
pretending you haven't
shown me your dark spot
the hot ions of rejection
on the coldest day of the year

Cruel Summer

Where will it end?
In the ghost of your youth
you told me
love was old fashioned
that you could live
on peanut butter
long hair flying back
your wild laughter beautiful
as the cruel joy in your eyes.

Now the cruelty has
migrated downwards
your eyes scan the room
for enemies
note the Joneses next door
have a Mercedes
while you're stuck with Ford
a hamster's wheel spinning
on its tyres as you
follow the worn track
between Scylla and Carybdis.

Ulysses perhaps
though you'd never admit it
the life you're leading no
more or less
than the dreams you mourn.

Cruelty is only another word for
old fashioned love.

Stellar Corpses

Hand in hand
feet dangling beneath the jetty
I felt oceanic
life growing inside me
you looked up at the planetarium above our heads
and laughed bitterly
*one by one the stars will wink out
galaxies disappear, stellar corpses disintegrate
black holes evaporate in flashes of energy
the universe cold, dark, and dead.
So don't get too sappy.*

Your hand was soft as a girl's, your sweater
fine wool, knitted
by your grandmother
recently deceased
I imagined those textured strings
beneath her aged fingers
coming together, a woven homage to the future
you wear so easily
in the midst of that infernal
depression.

In the intimate link between the nature of particles (wool)
and the nature of forces (spindly fingers on knitting needles)
some truth is revealed
reigniting those stellar corpses
glowing at X-ray wavelengths in the nursery
and when you pass on the sweater
to your growing son
he'll feel, rather than articulate
the living burning neutron stars
keeping his skinny body
forever warm.

Galactic Collision

In the crackling wake of our galactic collision
shaking fans of stars from still wet hair
hazy, frightened
remnants of our newborn cacoon visible
amidst space junk
primordial remnants
of the dwarfs we once were.

The centre of our wreck
brought to light by fireworks,
our pain crisscrossed
filaments of dark dust.

It's difficult to come to terms
with this rebirth.

Cold hydrogen gas
giant molecular clouds
condensed deep in your heart's black hole
expand into a cartwheel blaze
cosmic showdown.

Still simmering
from the transformation
of equal-weight individuals
into a single spinning spiral
we wipe crusty eyes in the silence
of a billion year conjoined spin
the past nothing more than memory
caught on film by Hubble
the future an open door
we can only enter
in perfectly aligned motion.

Exile

It isn't homesickness
rather nostalgia for an Ithaca
I can't return to.
It couldn't be homesickness
since there never was a home
the sickness populating my dreams
isn't like a waking tenderness
or a missing limb - an arm
which once hung usefully from my shoulder.
It's more like darkness
walking for miles in a place
familiar and unfamiliar
a house I can't find
a door that won't open
a key which doesn't fit the lock
and strangers where family should be.

I want
what I imagined in my cousin's lives
or other people's hearths
and if ever for a moment
we sang round the piano
or sat together and watched the sun
go down over the boatyard and laughed
then the moment is gone, the places sold
the people dead
and I'm alone
ready to create a new Ithaca
a mythology my children will dream about
when they've grown and moved away.

Antidote

In the solitary second between daylight and darkness
bed seems the only sanctuary
quiet the only solace
for a world turned sideways on its axis.

You pick up the paper
rustling tragic headlines against the newly formed day
sounds emerge like foghorns in your brain
cynicism and distrust
twin cyclones riding the low pressure cell
of insecurity and fear
twisting you further into
the armchair of self-protection and greed
until you are paralysed prey
for the ugly conviction
of our enemy's worst weapons.

In the limitless sky
grand and perfect above your head
waves of light still radiate.
There's no sharp break between
atmosphere and space
and the heartbreaking blue
surrounding your morning
is the same shade as those almond eyes
cutting through your gloom
with the lightest kiss.

The delicate breath of one child is more powerful
than any ideological whirlpool.

Each tiny gift you give and receive
is an antidote to the war
raging between your ears.

Betelgeuse

In the critical moment
before you blow
your fusion almost exhausted,
maybe just a few million years
or a second on earth
time being illusory
when the vastness of your life
the swelling and contracting of your matter
your billion year old breath
becomes a single exhalation.
Alpha Orionis
over 160 million Suns
could nestle in your stellar body
but there's only me.
hiding behind your magnetic force
listening to the noisy beating
of your fiery heart
I close my eyes and inhale, waiting,
hating your promised demise
and my own insignificance
while you prepare yourself
to become a cold and impersonal
supernova.

The softness of your cosmic rays
no more than a memory
a mangod
too beautiful to observe
with the naked eye
too exacting
to allow yourself a laugh
in the critical moment
before the blow.

Red Tide

It came without warning
while we sat plump and complacent,
our mouths stuffed
with sweet snapper and mackerel flesh
lips sticky with juice.
When the red tide struck
we had no idea how much there was to lose.
Fingers numb,
Tingling with ataxia
we staggered into the future
your cavalier shrug no help
against red water
the hungry bloom of algae seeking sunlight.

Our eyes wandered to the horizon
hands clutching skeletons
we knew what we'd lost.
It was more than dinner
the thread of our DNA
gone like the Maya.

We took more than we needed
then had nothing at all.
Lone survivors
our hearts bleeding into the sand.
as we gasped for oxygen
looking across the Sea of Cortez
to a past we only
held in our hands
after it was gone.

The Radical Conversion

Futility sat like a stone
in her breast cage
a long distance call
from the inner lobes
begging for
anyplace but here and now.

She kept an armchair vigil
against pain
she secretly courted
a love affair excluding
everyone.

Looking at her aging face
in the mirror
she whispered
*just because we exist doesn't mean
there's a point in existence.*

So seductive was the silky darkness
of her despair
I almost followed
down the narrow Alice hole
into the heart of her futility
where I found neither stone
nor death
only fear.

The Singularity

On the one hand nothing's changed
the spiralling dance of love and hate
still drives us, forward, backwards
round in ever tightening circles
the bigger the technology
the faster the bang
death's bite hasn't changed one iota
since man caught his reflection
in a shiny prehistoric rock.

On the other, there's the singularity.
Techno-rapture, or technocalyptic dreaming?
Our bodies and brains merging with machines
outwitting aging, pollution, hunger,
ending pain and pleasure
the incubus of art.
Utopia or dystopia?

Will we even make it to that point
struck down by some heaven sent meteorite
or the perverted bomb of a crazed lunatic
jostling against sweaty armpits on your daily commute?

As you rebuild
molecule by molecule
your body and brain
spare a thought for poor
Homo-sapian
scratching her mortality
with a broken piece of wood
and a few salty tears.

Personality

When the perfect
personality formula
of your tickbox life
leads you into the
swamp of overconformance
telling you who you are
whom to love
what to do
your world reduced to
gorgeous masks you pull from the cupboard
wear with aplomb
to order and control the
random variation in behaviour
behind type
Mars v Venus
extrovert v introvert
square hole or round peg

deep under the downy covers
you hide a chaotic mess of wings and tears

the ticking of boxes mirrors the ticking clock
until time is up
the candle snuffed
leaving only the
taut masks
of your vibrant
personality
restlessly alone on their splintery stem

that's where I'll meet you
at the Maginot line
of your self perception
match in hand
ready to light the candle.

Chill of Titan

Not your ordinary evolution
stuck below an impenetrable layer
of atmosphere and clouds
thriving in -178°C
opaque mosaic glow
enshrouding the hydrogen cyanide
of your amino acids.
Call that life?

Lower down
swimming happily through ethane seas
super enzymes oil
the wheels of your non-watery existence.

1427 million kilometres from the sun
your exotic landscape
holds the weakest hint of hope
beneath orange curtains
a blinking eye
or methane exhaling microbes
the chill of Titan
changing our terrestrial biosphere
into something more than a one off
hopelessly rare
temporary phenomena

the loneliest of seconds
into
a fundamental property
of the universe.

Dark Matter

It isn't possible to show you the imprint
small footsteps across the surface of my stomach
silvery scars up my hips
the change is deeper, more pervasive
dark matter.

Look at it directly and you'd miss it entirely
a still life picture, pleasant enough
but empty of our velocity's jostle.

You might count the years
the mellowing of age's gravitational pull
the visible dimming of light
dissipation and exhaustion in equilibrium
and expect a fall in intensity or rotational speed
you'd be wrong
there's much you can't see
but I know you know.

In the cosmic hide and seek
of your soft heart
versus my hard head
or my soft heart
against your hard head
the mass has only increased
perception as important as proof.

Call it massive astrophysical compact halo objects
or weakly interacting massive particles
too large to measure, too small to be captured
or you could just say 'love'
it's all the same
the pull is stronger than gravity
and greater than the mass of all the galaxies
put together.

Quark Soup

It's all poetry you said
flipping a coin
heads I win, tails you lose
an intellectual dead end
waste of time
sitting in that soft chair
contemplating the universe
which may as well be your navel
as unwashed and meaningless
in the overall scheme of things.

I imagined those infinitesimally small
wiggling objects called strings
vibrating inside me
sperm meeting egg
the birth of subatomic particles
comprising the cosmos
I wanted to see it
keep the eyes open
hold the mirror down there
a female perspective I know.

Untestable theory
eleven dimensions
parallel worlds with different laws
wormholes
dark matter
so diverse it can encompass anything
which makes it utterly useless
against a hungry mouth
a worn out scientist
too tired to read another book
too angry to breathe another breath.

I felt it anyway
damn the theories
damn the frozen heart you conceal under
your lumberjack shirt.
The logic may be faulty
but the emotions are resistant
to linear thinking.
Hunger is still hunger.
Love is still love.
A sperm meeting an egg still produces

the inexplicable miracle
life
love
meaning where there once was none
the strings are playing their
own symphony
regardless of how many great men
are able to map it
in bland black and white notes.

There's your theory of
everything.

The Genetic Code

In the primeval heat
four billion years
before you opened
one puffy eye
the chemical imbroglio of our home
shouted your name
from the depths of its seabed,
no more miraculous
than the smack of light
against your heaving diaphragm.

In the random accident of your arrival
contingency or collaboration
paternal will or lucky break
makes no difference.

You are life itself
the stunning complexity
of DNA woven within each cell
the culmination of every moment
that gave rise to this one
changing everything
sloppy, sleepy, spontaneous,
perfect.

The organised complexity
of your extraordinary beauty
couldn't be simpler
as you reach a tentative hand
towards the future.

The Fading

in the sienna gasp
eyelids closed tightly against life
you create your own shadow
the steel bars
of your deviant past
shatter the illusion of freedom
I cling to
with useless desire
a hunger you can never satisfy
floating the narrow
staircase towards Cyclops
all-seeing, unforgiving, utterly uncaring
that seductive nothing
you've been straining toward
since the day you were born

there's no backward glance
no tiny wave
from the arc of your clenched hands
only the last smoky exhalation
from the icy cavern
between your phantom lips

Aurora

Lying on your back
the night sky alight
you believed in magic.

It didn't matter
that you saw little more
than charged particles streaming from the sun ,
excited oxygen and nitrogen in Earth's atmosphere
it was all poetry.

The glowing red, green and purple curtain of light
waved above you like the God of your dreams
benevolent, present,
anything but impersonal.

The black hole of meaninglessness
haunting your daylight,
dissolved into a dream
as you watched the curved collisions'
energetic dance moving inside of you.

If I could capture that spectrum
the atomic neon sign of your lost wonder
and feed it to you on a spoon
when your lonely vigil against
poverty and incompetence
becomes ball and chain
I'd give up my own food
stand with my back to the solar wind
close my eyes to beauty
to keep you warm.

I'd be your personal aurora
your talisman against the dark lure of ennui
an electrical current charging
your ionosphere.

Sleep

Opening the door a crack
the dull beating heart thump
belies your daily exertions towards death
time only moves forward
you swore
before sinking into your long sleep.

You can't teach time's arrow to a child
whose perception of the world is an ocean
full of waves and sideways motion
elegant supersymmetry
free from the prison
of old age and cynicism.

You're still there
a shadow breathing softly
older than yesterday
even if tomorrow doesn't come
as you bear down
tired, scared and sick.

The mirror lies.
Stand back far enough
and you're no older
than you ever were
below the age spots and wrinkles
lies a sleeping infant.

Stop looking so hard
and you might see it:
the tender pink skin
of your permanent youth.

Planet X

UB313,
alone in icy orbit
dodging rock balls
in the Kuiper belt
knocking Pluto off its perch.

Does it help to have someone reach out
Past the painful isolation
of your methane-and-rock heart
grabbing your frozen hand
from billions of miles away?

Would you wake from the stupor
of your underworld prison
if spring arrived
breathing hot air against
your immobile lips
dragging you
into the dirty chaos of life
the deadly search
for meaning,
the solar system
of your crazy Earthbound
lovers?

Or would you prefer the
sterile perfection
of distance
and mystery?

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