

1. *Hine-ruaki-moe*

in embryo; survived the sanctity of some sort of witnessing for the lord, stretched its gills, and decided to emerge.

to the screaming of its mother and the vast interest of a vaster doctor, corpulent with scientific zeal, trailing his history into the observation of this somewhat premature arrival.

survived the shock of noise, of slapping; survived the G.P.'s pokings and the proddings of a conscience, and built upon its somewhat precarious survival.

stirred; and look — you can see its fringed and slightly shifting gill-flaps, which the air ripples; thin skin sheets disturbed by his breathing, his smooth movements hardly but just visible.

sensing a furtive approach he shifted into adolescence, confusing the scented air that rolled in advance of a soft-shoed beldam, hungry for strangeness, massive in her billowed silks like waves of perfume, rising and falling in her wake.

and sweeping him up in transit (not a unit of momentum lost), she smothers him — suffocating in the depths of layered dress he loses grip on metamorphoses, surrenders for the moment to the moment. and archly sighing, she “we have so much to teach each other...”

wasted was the time he lined the inside of her; wasted were the hours of set responses, set to the music of derision deep within his fever, gills begun to atrophy; wasted was the second dreary cold reminder of their meeting. cow-caught and resentful...

taught him something, maybe; it taught her nothing, though it tortured what she'd want to call her soul (her id sustained a beating but her ego took it like a man). either she or he escaped... he had become too solid, and he spent some time in quietly dissolving what he didn't want to keep, leaving just a clear essential centre.

intact; he felt drawn by events around him till, tiring of the human artefacts he felt himself divorced from, he left, wandered, found a river with a hole beneath its sluggish surface, dispossessed the rats who'd stolen from a vole a muddy network of tunnels and half-excavated chambers, and made his home.

2. *The phenomenon of mind*

unconsciously following an earlier thinker, he reasoned thus:

If I am right in believing that the world, that everything exists, then I exist. If I am wrong in believing that the world, that everything exists, then I exist, for there must be an 'I' to be wrong. Therefore I certainly exist!

Finding, however, that reasoning could take him no further he hesitated. He toyed with a feeble sort of solipsism, but it bit him and he had to let it go. For a while, in a cycle of destruction and rebirth, he investigated methods of perception — there were moments when the world flattened around him, when his faith in concepts weakened and dissolved. There were moments, too, when things and movements blended; those moments seemed to lose their resolution, seemed to mould themselves like fluids, taking on the forms of vessels that he couldn't see. Objects became twisting, tortured shapes that altered as his long legs took him past them — houses revolved, and trees assumed a sort of flickering and silhouetted dance upon the hills above his river. He thought he saw his shoulders melt and felt his gills gavage.

Complexity and symmetry became a sort of mantra, and his body learnt to take on different frames of reference. He became clumsy, and dropped all sorts of pills. He passed through a caustic phase, and scattered acid comments; he took up politics, but all the canvassing he worked at failed to gain grass-roots support; he slowed down, picked up speed, dropped it, took up horse-riding, hearse-riding, decided to try drugs.

An apothecary sold him aspirin — thirty-three proprietary brands; the cycle of destruction and rebirth was almost unaffected. He looked at theory, looked at thought, decided finally to stay content.

3. *I am a Texas rose, yellow*

He spent most of his spare time walking; he was walking now. Sometimes he thought, and now he was thinking. The fields changed to open moorland, became foothills, turned to suburban streets, where he stopped before it turned too late. The first he knocked at opened much too fast; he had barely time to wipe the sweat from his thin, long face.

"Yes?" It was a female voice, and he tried to hear the harmonics beneath the undertones. She impatiented herself, and he switched syntax, thought-streams, produced a half-smile, talked his way into the house. She seemed to just talk him into the house; he rebelled against the subtle manipulation, and sat down. She stared, half repelled by his multiple chins and hairless head. He in turn was attracted by her apparent nudity, her air of vague nonchalance.

He ate quickly, chewing scarcely at all; she followed the movements of his arms and legs, oiled and glistening in the light from the bathroom's fluorescent tube. It had a purpose, and they each recognised the other's reluctance to ignore that purpose.

He left, walked softly into the suburban sunrise, left her moaning slightly, unsatisfied. He rhymed, walked on, unthinking and untroubled. His neat beard, oiled and curled, glistened in the red light. The fields became river banks, became a hole beneath the water-line, became sleep.

How old are you? The woman at the bar started, surprised, began to object, then changed her mind and answered. He looked dissatisfied — she knew that he would want a younger woman. He left her reflection in the mirror and polished glasses, salivating (amusingly blank, he thought). He walked without thinking.

Found a young whore in a very exclusive club, went back to her place, squared her, added forty-two, and lived with her until she turned thirty. They broke down, and he left.

Walking took up most of his idle hours. He sat and watched a group of dragonflies; they flew over to him and sat on his shoes. He sighed, turned over, sank into a small stream, a wake of silver bubbles forming as he shot down to a small black opening in the mud of the bank.

The stars! The last frontier! He walked a lot and pondered or brooded. It started to rain, and his gills stirred slightly, shivered at the cold.

Conversation was limited to nods and gestures of intent and denial, rejection and tears and an aimless meandering of his fluid eyebrows. Percussive fingernails and an irritating shrill whistle. He preferred baroque, but rock affected him in ways he didn't like to think about. He felt awfully tired and black.

A succession of more or less fantastic lovers vented their mistrust on his inertness; he recovered under intensive care, woke to a world so far in the future that he hardly noticed the difference. His hole in the river bank was clogged. He cleared it out.

The purity of line, of tone, of purpose in his song (marred only by the half-hysterical laughter in the back of his mind) illumined his parents' remembered features. He held his body, stroked it, pulled at it, more and more frantic, urgent, till his mother held his father's eyes in hers, and he collapsed back on the bed, groin aching, hands limp and useless.

He felt her eyes on his back as she slowly undressed, left her alone in the room, the factory swallowing him with its noises, smells, confusion of so many moving and anonymous faces. Regular and simple bass-line: he plucked his eyebrows, and started in surprise.

He walked on, humming faintly, unbreathing, thinking. Legs moved like scissors, his arms grotesque. Oh and his cherry lips, his auburn goatee in its oiled perfection. Gone on walkabout in Spirit Land; his fathers watched in shrieking approval. They couldn't see his eyes either.

Sunlight on the cracked and arid river bed, a flash of decay in the roots of a dead peony. His mind was going, and his brain worked furiously at the solution. The pattern had been broken, and he had to complete, to free it.

Er, this one's on me. She walked with him for a while, bobbing nervously at his cracking knee-joints. She couldn't even see the patten, but her mouth rounded so prettily when she took him that he conjugated her. She didn't thank him for it, of course.

He didn't talk much — the young guy licked his lips nervously, shifted his weight from one buttock to the other, snapping his partner's blood-engorged penis. He walked swiftly away, never one for ugly scenes, preferring, whenever possible, to avoid recriminations. The hairs on his legs stirred after their long compression, like insects or spiders walking up and down him. He watched as his large python, oiled and gleaming, disappeared inch by inch. Its scales rubbed the wrong way, and he bled a little. This sex thing was getting out of hand.

At last he finished with a flourish of the goose-feather, and the girl drew a sobbing breath, sought to slow her racing heart. He'd been tickling her, but as he walked, his thought strayed to the golden suburbs, to his old black hole in the river mud. He longed to return, but all his wit failed to get him there.

He sighs heavily and walks on, sometimes thinking or not, his long thin face reflecting

4. *A warrantable beast*

Every evening at about this time he ran for a while, enjoying the pumping of muscles, lungs, heart, the throbbing in his head, the concentration on mindless effort. This evening he ran for a while, along a river bed (cracked by summer), through a small wood, over a number of minor hills, and drumming for a while, almost regular in his mind, the concentration diffused by cloud. Running set up a counter-rhythm, round and round, opposing and complimenting and letting the rest just skim past, almost unseen.

Or hummed to himself, usually wordless, now and then a half-noticed hoarding where the land hadn't yet choked down the old advertisements, mmhmm buy mmhmm. Or a notice to pedestrians concerning an interdicted area promising danger, the excitement of the chase, inevitable ending to it all, all over, but not oh no of course not painless on dead (rusted) television screens. Half-noticed but ignored, and so he ran for a while, enjoying the run, the red mist forming in his mind and eyes.

A red mist formed in a tree before he reached that tree, and that red mist spoke silver, but he doesn't understand silver when he runs, not even urgency, not even final warnings in such a tinsel voice, away from here, well away, far off.

mmhmm final mmhmm, running only a running only a legs, a feet one two feet, arms and hair streaming out behind, a now a stumble, he's in a wood now, in a wood, is among trees, under branches, jumping over roots, running, the breath coming in heaving, in mmhmm in mmhmm in half-light, in shade, in the last possible moment he stopped, staring into the eyes of a hunter.

His breath shivered the hair at his neck, heaving his chest, paining. It stood metal, tattered green over one shoulder, the tape running through its head, a sacre de printemps, a wilderness its limbs twitched to; oh oiled and shining (he, oiled, sweat gleam, eyes wide, abstracted yet), oh sunlight on the flatness of its hide. a rhythm sets its feet to tapping, his gills to flapping, hands now beating time, on, on, a severed rhythm, on, on, the two, hands upraised, on, on, around, around, now this tree now that, now each the other slightly bent, one hand waisted, one high, both then whirling, both running within the glade, then out, along pathways, along the beaten-down rhododendrons, but silent.

silence. still. only wind. Only rain, soft and steady. The riot forgotten, he wipes his eyes with his hands; and walks away from the hunt, and hums vacantly from warning signs, from a ruined memory of old songs, from the air hmmh halt hmmh; mmhmm hard rain mmhmm.

mmhmm 3.5 km.

5. *Rotation*

he moved silently, almost;
he moved in regular
parallel
lines, almost mechanical
but for the slightest (almost
imaginary) deviations.
he ploughed, walking steadily,
hauling the dulled steel,
furling an old design.
occasionally, stopping, he took
out his handkerchief, wiped
sweat from his eyes, looked up
at the doubled (one red,
one yellow, far apart) suns,
resumed his almost silent movement.

it was a quickening in the way
the air felt on his face; not an
actual movement, but as if the
molecules... no — as if a new
and alien eagerness had
seized the atmosphere, reaching his
skin in the sympathy of strings or
wires vibrating.
not green, but young.
he could almost see the new forms
growing, strangely familiar;
not an actual recognition,
but he felt at ease.

a harvest is, when the crops are
ripe, a harvest; harvesters and
harvested vary. the sunlight
flashing on the blade of his long,
almost too long, scythe; the
sunlight was in two shades of
blindness if you looked too long,
in two directions. solitary,
the field lay bare and open,
rows of plants that filled the air
with scents of strange and urgent
hunger. he'd have preferred
trees, but you have to eat.

6. *Under the rose*

It begins with a heartbeat.

Scream and gentle perfect; it begins (for him) with a view of only he could see it. And only he could see the throb of pumping ventricles in the human mass that cried to heaven for surcease. Gentle and perfect night, in which the stars rained ships and men — always running from something; and he went with the second flight on Thursday, 6.58 a.m. Somewhere in Pegasus, from Marylebone.

Leaving Earth was a walking tour he'd always promised himself — this morning, the commuters (bowlers, umbrellas, furred Financial Times) in purple and silver conformity — oh, fade into the spectrum, don't stand out from the motley. He stood out from the motley crowd of passengers who waited there on Platform 23: he stood in black, in unrelieved by ornament or functional grace-note (buttons).

He stopped singing abruptly. Walking was difficult in null-G; the floor wasn't, and his feet couldn't find their sequences. He couldn't find his feet. Piano chords, with a vocal impro on a timetable and the slowed-down muted screams of mating chicken-farmers, filled the tourist-class compartment with its null-G seats in faded velveteen. He relaxed, allowed his tense gills to open, eyelids droop. He slept.

If one meteor falls roughly, think on! But there were no emergencies, and the fragile sliver of hollowed human craftsmanship slid on towards the Flying Horse. Its head thrown back, mane proud and streaming in the light that shone from twenty billion stars, in countless eyes from all directions (from the backside, Pegasus resembles a gargantuan and slightly asymmetric midden). And finally arrived.

Went walking, after breakfast, and his arms and legs were hindered by the faces which he couldn't read for lack of one or several features (once with all its features missing, and he thought he saw a flicker of sardonic idiocy ripple through the blank grey hide). Noticed a lack of dialogue, and he approached a female standing joint-deep in the viscous mud:

"Now the green blade rises from the buried grain," he muttered, somewhat ill at ease, "doesn't it?"

She stared at him in seeming total lack of understanding, till a light shone in her eye:

"O-o-oh," she squeaked delightedly, "you're vat bloke from the wosname, encha? That place wot we seen on telly lars nigh'. Yis you are, I rimember — you 'ere ter wosname are yer lav?"

He ran. She yelled after him, but her wosname was shredded on the sudden blast of liquid ammonia that pelted his suit-helmet with live frogs of some kind. He felt inconsistent, and slowed down to a healthy jog, soaring slightly in the low gravity.

And much later, back on the ship, sliding out of the Midden towards a black hole, he developed some sort of yellow anguish that kept him flat on his back on a null-G couch. He was thus unable to watch as the great liner flashed into the hole, its

ravering beams of lambent energy licking at the sexual organs of a browsing star-slug, and almost instantaneously skittered out of a counterpart hole some thousands of light years distant (in the galaxy which its former inhabitants had once called 'Home'). He didn't miss much: the operation was routine and uneventful. He did miss walking around the poop-deck forty times a day, though. His body was restless in its drug-induced sleep.

The sun was a girasol; his auburn goatee looked well in its light. He practised his strappado when he wasn't walking; he was fifth dann, and getting more and more bored with it. His cadenzas needed trimming.

The atmosphere contained a subtly insidious hallucinogen, which penetrated even the four-inch lead suit he always wore. He became terrified of gilded Colorado beetles, and spoke in High Anglican on Sunday afternoons. He composed jeremiads in a gruff falsetto, went for walks in the local casbah. Everyone packed a rod, and he worried about the suffering masses. He turned very slightly yellow again, but put it down to the local tippie (fermented extract of granite); outside the Lestersk-werodeon a man in a wheelchair played the same snatch of Mozart again and again. The stopover to refuel became a nightmare of pizzicato heartbeats (delicate, insistent), for the native women were demmed beauties, what? and even eating crow became a tedious business. Even the rainbow's hues were black, dusty, dishevelled. His hair began to fall out, and they left for the next stage of the tour.

Walking soothed his shattered nerves, and soon he was able to come to terms with his loneliness and grief. He wept, sometimes, and remembered too much: softness was forbidden, and he craved it. He'd forbidden himself it. He was weak though.

The silver lining of his top-hat clouded over, and he watched as a pirate vessel hove to in the vacuum just off the treacherous Barrier Belt of asteroids and broken ships. Every night he was visited by a houri; he became bored with her and strapped a blaster to his hip. He needed action.

Up to his muffled knees in it, floating on repellor-skates, his lean face contorted by gravity. His legs twitched as he walked, the skates skidding slightly as they fought the planet's bulk — miles high, birds of some sort skimmed beneath him, and he couldn't see a thing below his knees.

His feet are numb, and his eyes ache from lack of sleep. Horizons matter, this one too far. He gambled on a mountain-peak and lost, too clumsy for a mountain-goat, too alien for now. The gun on his hip caught light, burning with a strange blue radiance, fell from his belt into the shifting gases. The pirate cruiser still hung where they had left it and, as they pulled away from where they had left it and, as they pulled away from the gas giant, it followed them, not even sinister.

He blacked his face, then whitened it, then covered it with a masque of slipping characters, unreadable and distant; he

swallowed hard, and grief flooded, blocking his digestion, halting his speech. He wanted to go home, and his mind blanked. He checked his Bradshaw.

Walking, swinging a thurible, head down, the smoke in a cloud around his shoulders. He walks alone, humming, his head a pohutekawa, peruked, he puckers, pukes, passively to pass. He's all alone and has no other; no son, no sister, and no brother. Walking was impossible in this gravity — besides, he wanted to go home, to return to his river. His gill-flaps were gummed together with some sort of nervous fluid, unpleasant. His tears were saltless. He had a feeling, and murmured softly. The ship wouldn't turn for him, he knew.

He told no-one, travelling, now, under the rose.

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