

Rodin on Patrick Street

It could be a painting,
but it would probably

work best as a sculpture.
You sitting on that marble—

speckled slab on Patrick Street,
oblivious to the flow

of human traffic, babies
in prams, teenagers

skulking in shop doorways,
their headphones on;

the cars and buses, the belch
and blast of engine and horn,

while you sit back
with your Roman broccoli,

a Romanesco, its near-luminous
chartreuse,

its logarithmic spirals,
strikingly fractal,

an endless source
of curiosity to your mind.

You might feature in a Klimt painting:
your mustard-yellow

corduroy pants, green hat,
blue and gold scarf

would do the trick, but still,
knowing you, I think of Rodin

— something elegant, muscular
and grooved — although

I see you fully clothed,
sitting there for all to view.

Chai Lattes

I will always remember
that first coffee,

when you arrived
with two chai lattes

and the choice of one
of two smoothies. Now

I know you better,
and can recognise your habit

of buying drinks
in pairs, although

the reason for this
remains a mystery

even still. After the latte
we walked the Barrow track,

as sometimes
spells cannot be broken

and moments
just want to keep flowing.

We observed couples
out for a Sunday stroll,

Polish men fishing,
a boy walking his dog,

as we sauntered on
as far as the old sugar factory,

past the graveyard,
talking, and tempted

to hold hands and kiss.

I wanted to taste you,
regardless of chai latte,
smoothie, or tobacco,
to smack my lips
after your deep flavour,
pungent and rare,
the making of any Sunday.

Chinese Whispers

I am a bucket that leaks.
I am the prophet Isaiah re-incarnated.
I am a bluebell that is really pink.
I am a Martian spying on humans.
I am a Neil Young record stuck in a groove.
I am the lost sock.
I am the worm sliced by your spade.
I am the plant let die in the window.
I am the little girl humming to herself.
I am the boy who dreamed of Santa.
I am a verb without a declension.
I am the sugar dissolved in your coffee.
I am the tiger who lost his stripes.
I am the middle-aged man
who has been fucked around
once too often by Life.
I am resilient. I refuse to give in.

Sandpaper

You'd agreed to paint
the house, a striking act

of generosity. We've had
our differences, the night

I served you and some friends
a fancy vegetable-hash dinner:

peppers, mushrooms, courgette,
spiced up with *Worcester Sauce*,

and you said you preferred pizza.
Given the task, to turn

a white house vivid:
raspberry twist, lime crush, seashell,

we knuckled down,
and though you can be

abrasive, like the sandpaper
we used on the worn skirting,

we bonded,
talking of boyfriends, politics, the weather.

The Other Thing

The needle will be lifted
as the hammer strikes the hour.

Some coins have five sides.
Some lilacs bloom in December.

There's a Great Red Spot on Jupiter
hidden to the naked eye.

Some books are less interesting
than their cover.

Noodles from China inspired the Italians
to make pasta, or so I read.

While John F. Kennedy was driving
down the avenue in Dallas

a killer, from some black spot in his heart,
was aiming to take him down.

In the Psych Ward

Let me take you from here,
as too much has happened

you will want to forget.
I brought in a magic carpet,

smuggled past security,
wrapped up in the *Aldi* bag

I'd usually use
to bring in your art material,

sweets, and books.
I bought it off the Persian gypsy

you see wandering around the town,
and he promised me it'd work wonders.

I had to trust him.

We are heading off to Prague,
that trip I promised you

months ago – the doctors really
wish it for you –

I read their minds – we're going
to drink coffee

by the Charles river,
and sip cappuccinos

in the Cubist café,
marvelling at the *art nouveau* wallpaper

you'll want to draw.
There's a huge storm brewing

I've possibly conjured myself
from the tin of *Smarties*

I also carried in in the bag
and I've just opened. We'll build up

the head of steam
we'll need to launch us off

into the air. It's time
to seize the moment

as the old Greeks advised.
I've waited a lifetime for this.

'Freck the Health and Safety people!
I've no seat belts,

or steel helmets, or harnesses,
but come on, the moment's here,

I think we'll make it. I can see the way,
through the chinks. Trust me.'

St Valentine's Day, 2018

When you were inside
the psychiatric ward

you drew line drawings
of friends as animals,

and other patients as mice,
and weird fantastic creatures

only you could imagine.
I got to see myself

as a ferret, a panther,
a hare – complete

with three nipples.
My split left one

fascinated you
from the word ‘go’ –

and so, you were not that out of it,
right?

But the one I liked best
was me as a rather camp looking fox.

Maybe it was the pink paper,
which provided the base layer,

prompted something in your imagination.
It is in the crossed legs,

the loose hips, and a smile
I don’t quite know how to name.

A fox’s whiskers complete the picture,
and a pair of curled eyelashes. Look,

that could be mascara!
And there was I

thinking I could rival
your mother’s claim

that you were the straightest gay guy
she’s ever known. I’ll take your pictures

and mind them,
along with the lines you wrote

and you may not even recall:
‘the sky’s a blanket

and the wind is chilly,
so keep the moisture out.’

And, ‘I’m excited to be with you.

Wait at the fence. We can talk
through it, and entwine fingers.
I'll play music, so you can find me.'

Prague

We had walked up to the castle
earlier in the day, soaking up
the royal history of this city,

and yet heedful of Kafka's tale

of Joseph K lost in endless
corridors, filling out forms,

seeking an answer from one glass-
panelled window to the next.

The Child of Prague offered
no assistance, and yet,

something in us was thrilled
by the city's tale

of St Nicholas, his stunning
baroque church so far removed

from elves, Mrs Claus, and Rudolf.
This second city of the empire,

with its burnt-umber roofs
and pastel-painted townhouses

was an outpost Mozart loved,
especially when they took

Don Giovanni to their bosom.
And you and I, we sail down

the Charles river digging
Dixieland jazz over exotic cocktails.