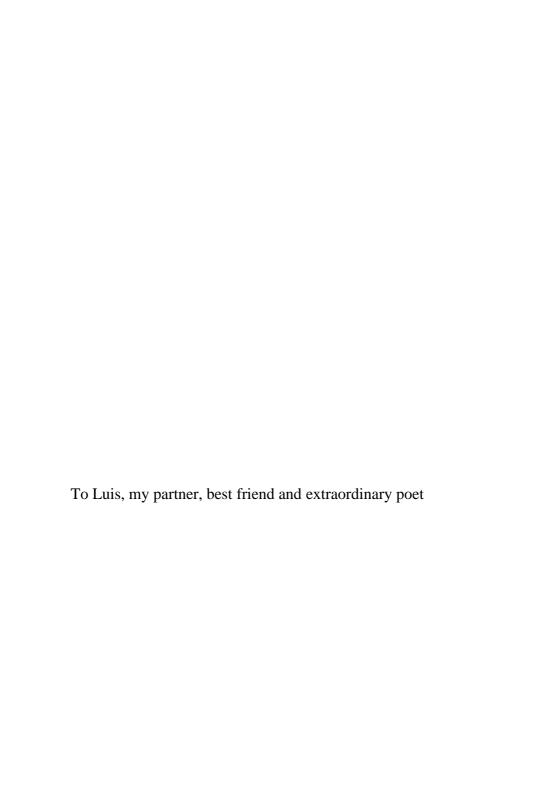
tangents

(written in Spain and Peru 2007 – 2010)



Tangents

Reality is but an image in my mind created by my inclinations.

Where your world ends, does mine begin?

What is the neutral ground on which we meet?

Can love make small of our visions or perhaps it's just a temporary truce of desperate need, seeking respite from solitary walks, lost in a space of our own perceptions to which no other mortal has the key?

Where my world's baleful grey and endless dark melancholy fills cubic miles of empty heart, you dance in light-filled glorious joy, your breath brings colours to a shadow world. A lark in ecstasy, a bird of paradise, a nightingale that sings of love and tenderness.

You paint my black a darker shade of bright. My heart is in your hands – a fearful, breathless bird. The song I never sang for fear of drowning in tears I never shed no longer stays unsung: It can't resist your smiling eyes, your wonder at my sadness and the hope you bring. I always wanted wings.

Where my blue and your yellow meet a bright green has emerged. Stay for a while. We may have birthed a magic space, a summer field that draws its life from winter's death and spring's exuberance. As autumn's gold seeps into the greens of summer, its brilliant colours cheat the mind that knows, saddens the soul that can't deny the signs.

Then winter touches gently but with urgency: My friend, your summer days are done. Remember what you've seen and don't forget that seasons come and go.

Goodbye my love. You taught me how to sing. Although I cannot be a lark, a nightingale, you gave me voice and words and light and memory of more than I alone could ever know.

Abundance

There is no sleep, just deep exhaustion.

And as I probe the mists of life I am surprised by finding unexpected riches.

Like Pharaoh, I have been well endowed with all the preciousness I need for an eternal death time and beyond.

A treasure chest filled to the brim with lasting gifts of boundless value has sprung its lid, its contents spilled into my memories.

Just now I heard the nightingale which sang one night for me and my new love and filled my heart until it broke from too much beauty, too much wonder.

A tango wafts from somewhere, a tender touch floats into vision, shy as a new bride.

Twelve pairs of hands hold ropes to let a coffin slide slowly into newly wounded earth; a solitary bagpipe plays a sad lament. I fill with happiness because I understand. Oh, over there – a naked fiddler sits lotus on a sideboard in the room of a hotel that has seen better days. A bar of Bach or two...

Suspended in mid-air a smile unfolds.

And there – a fish-eye vision of the face my mother chose to use while she was here.

A wisp of wildness from a gypsy violin is joined reluctantly by dancing passion.

Love, awe and hope awaken with whispered words of promise: Yes, I do! From pain unbearable explodes a bolt of life; stark lights that blind obliterate the view.

Oh, over there, between some pillars on a bank of cloud an orphic melody hangs upside-down; pure ecstasy drips from the stars that followed in its wake, while worm-like apprehensions writhe in deep despair.

My body says a slow goodbye. My soul is lifted to the rapturous spheres.

A last regret is gently cut. A candle shivers in a cooling breeze and shadows slowly die.

Miss Worthington

I saw her one last time.

Erect and hating her condition,
she rolled her chair a little more
towards the windows of her winter garden:
"The elms will have to go, you know.
The elms are sick...

"I climbed them as a child."

There was that catch of hidden sadness. Her voice had lost its edge.

Miss Worthington had stayed alone from choice. She'd had her lovers. The spinster word was not for her, a vibrant beauty once and weathered now to autumn's gold and shorter days.

And in that instant, when I looked at her, I knew that winter's crystal hands had reached for her and brittled her resolve. "It's time," she said.

Perhaps she meant the elms.

Then she leaned back and closed her eyes.

"It was just yesterday when I was young. And suddenly I'm being called to give account.

"Oh yes... I know.

"One day, I thought, I will be wise. We shall have time – tomorrow. First let us conquer, change the world. Let's catch the firebird and torch old customs, thoughts, moralities from yesteryear.

"But what is wisdom... am I wise?
All that I've learned is: time cannot be saved.
The time you do not use is lost.
There is no piggy bank in which
you later find those days you wasted
saving time.
And while I lived my life in haste
it passed me by.

"The elms will die..."
Her voice trailed off.
She followed some internal discourse from which I was excluded.

I waited quietly and was at peace. Her triffid garden filtered light and sound, some wild, exotic green caressed her lovingly.

My dear Miss Worthington, you were my teacher and my friend. Because of you my mind took wings, and you it was who taught me courage. You are the wisest of the wise and your accounting will suffice.

Her voice came back,

her eyes stayed closed.
"They fuss so, don't you know?"

A fly, emboldened, settled on her cheek. When no hand waved it off, I knew.

I did not move.
Her eyes stayed closed.
A smile had woven
sunlight in her face.
A sudden ray of brightness
touched her silver hair.

Oh ...

'Miss Worthington' won third prize in the 2009 Margaret Reid Poetry Contest for Traditional Verse (US)

Time

I used to lie awake at night, curving space.

There was no other way to understand Eternity.

I also thought about this thing called 'time'. How does it work?
What does it do?
Is it ever,
will it be
and was it once?

...and thought of you.

You say you see what happened in the past. Another reaches out to what will be.

You both see times that once have been or will become.
How can you see what isn't there?

Perhaps the only way to measure time is draw a line and crawl along moment by moment,

blind and dumb.

And then we think, because we passed, 'it' passed – as though it would.

Is time then but a sphere in which we move, afraid to fly free of the handrail which we call the 'line of time'?

An orb filled with eternal Now holds all we are.
Synchronous potential.
So, what is Time?

New Kid on the Block

(written on Inauguration Day 20/01/2009)

He pushes his hands deep into his pockets. A thick scarf offers scant protection against the wind.

He sits amongst the many where only yesterday he stood cocky and alone.

His face a mask of wistful indifference. He's learned to lie with words, with eyes, with mouth and hands. His daddy taught him all he knows... and then some.

And over there there stands the new kid on the block, the stirrer of dreams, the one on whom everything rides.

'We can!' he says, and then, 'We shall!'
'Yes!' cry the millions, blue with cold.
'Please let it be true!' we ask the Universe.
A tidal wave of love ploughs towards him.
Hosannah.

He isn't the Messiah. Or is he?

The tired man, cut deeply by the sharp edge of the loving wave that passes by him, searches for the one he could have been.

The Actor

I heard some say you were a genius, a veritable master of your art.

And then they added as an afterthought that you were kind, and modest, and — in short — a being of unique perfection.

You're dead. Of course.

And so the vain and empty souls that live still bathe in your reflection, a light which they create by feeding on your flame.

A mighty crowd of hollow spectres became your moons and slowly dance your songs.

They never were your friends.

Just hear the voices in the dark:

I knew him well.

He kissed me once.

I knew him better still.

He was a saint!

He tried to get me into bed, but I refused!
I knew he favoured prostitutes.

He liked the little boys, my dear.

He couldn't get it up, you know...

You just can't get it right.

I saw him in this play – sublime.

Your damaged self sought refuge in your art, a reinvention of the frightened boy.
What did you say to me one day?
"I have to be another once a year, or find myself too burdened by my self."

Nightcall

when night presses down and muffles all sound when your wings are weary and you would be chained

call me

when the chirpy voices of girls under streetlights mute slowly in distended mist eyes drowned by indifference

I'll be waiting

when the wavelets stop lapping and the fish go deep when you don't ask because you no longer want to know

I have the answers

when you drown in unmadeness spooked by hyaline skin lost in amorphous potential greeting your everywhereanytime

I'll unfold with you

Old Rose on Brown

She was new to this world and born in bad times. She could barely walk, yet was accosted by terror, the twin of war. Her nights were the endless shrilling of sirens followed by the droning beasts with wings that lost their deadly cargo so carelessly.

The stench of burning flesh attached itself to her skin. She found her very own square metre of safety. On the stuffed velvet sofa she counted the coloured blobs of old rose on brown.

Even then, even there, she knew that no aegis was offered, and accepted the facts as she found them:

there is no escape fire melts things makes fumes burns stuff kills me just so.

Judas' grievance

This wasn't how it was supposed to be. He'd only said 'yes' because they explained that without him the whole shebang wouldn't work, and for the last two thousand years he's had such a bad press. He longed to set the record straight because every time his name was used with hate and disgust, when they made him into their favourite bogey man, the arch abomination, the cold winds of the ubiquitous void whispered and taunted and lied: reprobate corrupted apostate fetid worm ssssnake... They especially loved to make the hissing sound. Then the winds would regroup, become

But the hissing and yelling continued unabated, and he had a good mind to let the truth hang out.

The truth and nothing but...

boast about his deeds, he had every right to be.

When he'd signed on the dotted line all those aeons ago,

tempests and would scream past his prized spot right near the big guys, where, if he were to name names and he'd agreed to the deal because at the time it had seemed the decent thing to do. *How* he had been betrayed...

He knew his rights, and he knew who was responsible:
The black-robed 'men of the truth', yeah man, a-men,
The ones who don't know what truth is and even less
where it can be found
but keep pointing energetically and zealously
in the opposite direction.

Clarissa on the roof

Clarissa on the roof holds on to the lightning rod. People take her in their stride. After all, the villagers have seen it coming.

"It started when her mum locked herself in and painted tsunamis."

"Yeah, and then her dad built a boat in the living room."

"They had to take out the wall to move it!"

Clarissa above the flood waters waits to be picked up.

600 kilos of Muscle and Bone

Six hundred kilos of muscle and bone shake the ground.

The huge head moves left, right, up, down.

Spittle runs from the muzzle and a sound like the hissing of a steam train shoots towards the lone human figure. The *torero* flings back his head, putting the peacock to shame with his dance stance.

– Hey, hey...hey, *toro*!

His eyes hold death and his heart holds pride.

The bull moves its mass only to be cheated in the game played by the small killer and his helpers. The *picador* cuts the tendon that carries the weight of the powerful head. The *banderilleros* distress with their colourful stings. The *torero* plays tricks with the red cloth while the crowd applaud.

When the butchering's done the mighty bull at last gives in to the monstrous wounding and accepts an inevitable death dictated by the rules of a game written in blood centuries ago.

It's a warm and pleasant afternoon in Madrid's bullring.

Good Friday in Spain

Drumbeats.
Whirling bones on spanned hide.
Pure pain singing lament.
Bearers shuffle.
Cobbles glisten dark and wet.
Blood or tears?

It's raining.

Felt deeply.
Displayed proudly.
The show is back.
¡Maria! ¡Santa!
¡Jesús de los pobres!
Holy Mother of Christ!

Another *canto* streams from a balcony. The gently swaying plaster virgin drips painted tears.

Anonymous faith hides under hood and robe.

Echoes of the Ku Klux Klan let the watcher shiver.

Obscene gestures honour the Mother.

Dark rites.

Dark souls.

Death in the Basque Country

T

It was a day as any other. He didn't say goodbye, just slammed the door. There was the clatter of boots on wet stone steps. I followed his progress from the upstairs window, a little prayer in my heart.

'A mother always knows', they say. Did I? I just don't know.
All days were scary, unsafe, vulnerable, raw

All days were scary, unsafe, vulnerable, raw and naked in the face of sudden death.

Tidal waves, mighty winds, thunderstorms, volcanoes, quakes -I call you friends because you are without intent. You seek no victim, have no preference. Just as my eyeless foot will step on ants, you're blind to what is in your breathless way.

That day – oh God! That day death came his way not blind, not mighty, but cowardly and brought about by lies. My son, my life! It's *me* they killed. I bled to nothing near that roadside puddle, your open eyes a question to the sky. I closed them gently, could not cry.

II
Now that I am undone, I can begin
the battle for an end to killing.
I shall use words.

I'll live again when I become the forge that fashions weapons with names like 'love' and 'learning', 'truth', 'forgiving', 'honour', 'courage', 'kindness'...

The moment wanton slaughter ceases your death has been avenged.

Farewell

I

Soft whirls of almost colours float on the breath of endlessness, passing through each other: a sea of harmonies tuned to the source, the stars.

A soundless voice demands swift separation. The deal was signed in liquid love right at the birth of time.

An ebony sarcophagus, transparent to its only occupant light-speeds through an expanse of brilliant black.

II

A moonless night and yet she can make out a pebble beach, her eyes traversing the polished hardness of her coffin.

Torches light broken faces, lips belch crude sounds, knee breeches and thick stockings on sturdy legs in wooden clogs. Their leader springs the lid of her conveyance.
Touches her.
She never knew such anguish.

Her waking face is bathed in tears.

unlimited potential

choose, they said and opened the door to unlimited potential — your thoughts create your quantum world.

blasphemy, she said yet was tempted. looked deep inside herself – and thought of scones for tea.

Wordwatchers (Inc)

Hello... I'm Emily and I have a problem with words.

2

I can't stop hunting words and devouring all.

I have collected so many that I am swollen like a pregnant sea ready to let go of my swell until it sweeps over the world – a tsunami of cosmic consequences.

?

tatterdemalion lachrymose schadenfreude leitmotif pusillanious latitudinarian parsimonious glossolalia moiety confluence inveigle portent salubrious abulia miasma excrescence woebegone

...and so forever!

Help.

They'll soon be feeding on me.

Per

fi

di

ous

mag

ni

lo

quence.

Need

They bought her a puppy when what she needed was her mum and a ride across the far side of the moon.

Barcelona Nineteensixtyone

(a ballad for my friend)

T

We said we'd meet right where the buses parked. Six o'clock sharp, they wouldn't wait. I came from home; you'd danced the night away and, like a being from a different star, showed up in taffeta and lace, your hair a-sparkle and your lipstick smeared, on bare feet with your shoes in hand, their heels consumed by rock 'n' roll and waltzes.

Your husband, slightly swaying, saw you off. His dinner jacket open, tie undone, he smiled inanely when he saw the crowd and kicked the tyres to make sure they'd last to see you safely to the coast of Northern Spain – and back again.

You wanted to escape the trap you'd fallen into when you wed.
"I am in lust," you said.
And now you hoped – while knowing better – that you and I, just as we used to do, could reinvent the world.

We booked the trip by bus because we thought our fellow travellers would all be young, as impecunious as we. We were so wrong.

They looked at us with something bordering hate.

This silenced us and made us shy.

Two days, one night.

Next morning we awoke to warmth and brilliant sun, to sounds and smells and sights so new that full of wonder we could only stare.

The gentle breeze brought stories from a different sea.

The one we knew was dark and unforgiving.

"Let's go and see the town," you said.
What did we know? We took the train —
third class,
on wooden benches.
We stared at peasant faces, black scarves, black berets.
There was cooked food in baskets, *pollos*, *cabras*...

We wore our best.

Just off the shoulders. Petticoats.

With heels so high we tottered.

Two beings from a planet far from here.

Were we not thrilled, my dear?

Remember Barcelona at the height of noon.
We walked for what seemed hours
through streets wiped clean by midday heat.
Our shoes staccatoed —
hastened heartbeats on those cobbled streets.
The sound bounced back from blackened walls, then lazily unmade itself.
Even the birds were lying low.
There were no dogs, no cats, no life at all, but you and I, two strangers lost on Mars.

We hadn't sensed the man.

We hadn't heard his steps.

"What are you doing in the streets at this time of the day?

My dear young ladies, follow me.

Las Ramblas are not far from here.

I know a place where we can sit and hide from this infernal sun."

Like sheep we staggered after him.

We fell into a darkened cave. It was a bar – an empty, solitary place. The floor, when we could see again, was strewn with cigarette ends and paper, with toothpicks, ash, and spat-out olive stones. "Sit down!" he said, and pulled up chairs. Their legs squeaked on the marbled floor. "What will it be, two lemonades?"

Do you remember? What a day. And what a night...

He was Hungarian. A dentist – so he said. He travelled much, had things to sell. He lived in Paris, France, not Hungary. He smiled and said, "You stay in my hotel."

You hankered after pearls, Majorica. He said he knew where you could buy. You wanted everything so badly and were as bold as I was shy.

We drifted thoughtlessly into a world we only barely understood. Remember? We met his friends – or business partners?

A bit of both perhaps.

They had a car.

There was a bullfight, was there not?

You shouted loud "olé" into tense silence, just when the crowd was yearning for the kill, death in their eyes and death in every heart.

From Gaudi's liquid architecture to the harbour he wanted and he flattered you.

Just when he kissed you (while you held my hand) two figures detached themselves from shadows, stern faces, and the strangest hats: "No kiss!"

We were so shocked.

A chicken roasting in a wall — an oven built outside, right on the street. We gawked. The man took us inside. We ate, we talked, we drank a glass of wine or two or three... Who cares. Nobody knows us here.

We danced our way to the hotel, Two silly butterflies, one predator. An open inner yard with metal stairs that climbed along brick walls and caves that opened from the galleries. How dark it was.

There were two rooms, two iron beds in each. The man, whose name was Laszlo, we had learned, just said, "Look here, that's what I sell..." and from a suitcase spilled a thousand pictures. Pornography for Franco's Spain.

You blushed – despite your act. "This makes me rich," he said and looked at you.

You said, "Don't go yet..." meaning me.

I desperately tried to sleep.
I didn't want to think of you next door – and him.
So many sounds bounced back and forth.
That open yard had no discretion,
night people giggled on the stairs,
a cat was moaning for its lover,
a human voice joined a guitar.
Quick dance steps tapped on wood somewhere.

I must have dozed off after all. A sudden deafening crash made me sit up. I froze, and wondered where I was.

Oh yes... the door. It slowly opened.
The hinges squeaked. I held my breath.
The 'thing' that entered, lit by lesser darkness, was you. You pressed a cushion to your chest.
And with the small voice of a child you said, "The bed broke. Can I sleep with you?"
I silently made room.
We held each other tight all night.

In our wrinkled party dresses, barefoot, and when the sun just rose, we sneaked like thieves into the early morning. Clutched our purses and our shoes.

We'd barely settled in the train,

when – oh our hearts stood still – the face we thought we'd left behind materialised like nightmare apparitions do. He smiled, and offered us his hand. "Here are two first-class tickets, sweethearts. Be well, and think of me... Good bye."

When we arrived at the hotel (full board and wine), we heard the old ones hiss:
"The whores."

The wholes.

We sent our cards: "Wish you were here."

II

We are the last of our sisterhood. Come back from where you are, don't leave me yet.

The room is dark, the day is heading for the night. I had an unexpected call: "A coma," said the voice. "Please do come soon. We found your name and number in her things."

I'll not be leaving for some time, my friend. I'll spin the yarn that holds your dreams like pearls (Majorica) on years of string, you'll yet escape the Minotaur.

I am

Far from me I am, a stranger wrapped in self-made secrets. Light I am.

I touch the untouchable and give it worth. There, here, no-where I am, wandering sub space, quantum time. Immediate and eternal I am, star-like in oceans of dark fluorescence. Love without limit I am, weaving part of the web of deceit. Black and devouring I am, deep cave rounding and treasure-filled, boundless, evil and goodness I am, squatting to bear the world again.

Woman I am.

It was illegal then

We'd been to see the angel maker.

She'd make it go away.

I looked at my friend not knowing what to do. She was still, frozen, her eyes dead windows.

The evening sun searched through half-drawn lace curtains, found her hair and died.

Her hands in her lap — two lifeless animals.

She had abandoned her anguish, had left it somewhere to fester.

The stillness grew stiller still; by now the sun avoided her altogether.

She had not shifted in her chair, her face an empty mirror turned inwards.

I helped her onto the bed, lifted her legs, took off her clothes, and there was the blood.

Life was ebbing from her like a slow-flowing river. Took the blood-soaked pad, threw it into the bucket. Wiped her forehead, sponged her breasts – hard and erect like a man's cock that has its own ideas

about what to do – her breasts which were getting ready to feed the small life which had just been made to leave.

Her eyes opened and two rivulets of tears reflected non-light, glistened like jewels.

I eased her head into my lap and rocked it gently with my pelvis, cooing and repeating silly sounds of comfort,

animal noises of separateness and despair.

The scream

filled the farthest reaches of the universe. Even the devil felt compassion.

We both fell into that scream, moved with it over its zenith, then collapsed at the end of the semi-circle.

For those I love I'll be

How can I know that I am here when no-one knows my name; my child looks past me when it cries. I don't know why I came.

I beg you find the deepest me in subterranean caves of ancient pain and countless scars. For those I love I'll be.

Magic Markers

The memory train passes stations that have long since closed for service. Eyes in windows – hollow black sockets – follow the dreamer.

Nameless things with wings are leaving the eaves, rising up high into mindspace, settling softly on flotsam ostensibly discarded eons ago to lighten the journey.

Wondrous transformation: sackcloth and ashes become precious lace with the help of magic markers.

Tempest

A tempest at the end of space puffs out its cheeks and blows, moves the stars – the watchers – eternal in human time.

The sea responds and mountainous waves roar in frustration, forced to shrink, squeezed between the giant rocks until they submit.

She sits and watches the mirror of her life.
Wants to lose the constraints that bridle her spirit.
Once she'd been permitted to dream that she had power, before her soul was circumcised and beguiled into accepting the limitations others had prepared.

Before the lie took hold she was the world, eagle and lion, stars and sea, marigold, cedar and stallion. She was a god, wounding and healing, burning and soothing, could ride any beast and calm the tempest. Superimposed memories of who she is supposed to be are keeping her imprisoned in a man-made box. But agitators borne on wings of storms remind her of her truth.

Absence

Unquiet, furless animals, her hands are comforting each other on light-blue cotton and a piece of creamy silk.

Still there is beauty in her face – all folded in upon itself.
Her eyes have found a focus in the Milky Way; her ears are tuned to broadcasts from distant nebulae.

Acknowledging my touch she almost turns to me. Her puzzled voice is hesitant: "And who are you?"

the slut

T

there, she's pushing that poor kid through the rain with what's coming down she could of put the hood up couldn't she now she's not even got decent shoes on her feet ought to be reported that skirt's so short you can see her knickers not even a coat on her back and that kid of hers doesn't look happy, does it now bet they're under the doctor and who pays for that I ask all of us I say somebody should do something shouldn't be allowed that should've used condoms that's what I say

II

housing hadn't given Nell her cheque and Pete had pissed off gone to Glastonbury hadn't he never wanted kids he did and she hadn't wanted another abortion

III

the rain washed the tears off her face she thought it would be cool to drown in that huge water tank at the back of the estate

...because he can

This morning he touched my cheek with tenderness where he had bruised it last night. Didn't notice the purple mark left by his rage.

Then he gently closed the door.

Each day I move ever deeper into my mindspace, hug myself with insubstantial arms intent on healing the wounded me, build shock absorbers.

Sucker, martyr, victim, wretch?
The psychiatrist lady insists
I'm seeking punishment for unimagined sins, but I think he abuses
because he can.

His steps on the stairs. Unsteady. I turn to stone. The baby asleep.

fractal eclipsed

he could see the fractal eclipsed reflected from a shard the dancers weaving between.

he knew dark secrets and knew they knew he knew.

there shouldn't be anything to fear but there would be.

he decided what he'd do to save himself: surprise will be on his side when he does the unthinkable acting with unexpected craftiness: he'll take a deep breath, absorb each one of them and then eat the black rose.

Hard Labour

She didn't want me to see her distress I thought, so I stayed in the background biting my nails. Out in the cold, useless, imagining her wretchedness, helpless in the face of what's been dubbed labour. Labour is work and not excruciating agony. I moved closer, saw her for a moment, on her knees my daughter, falling apart, her eyes pleading for release. Eightyeight hours, dear God, have mercy. The doctors had been eccentrically placed where they were least needed. Ignoring her command to 'stay out of it' I went to her, pulled by love and compassion. "Get out! Get away from me! Why the fuck are you here anyway?" The blast burned my face, singed my eyebrows, made it hard to take in air. I became as small as an ant and would have scurried under the floorboards had the hospital not been covered in tiles. Antiseptic. No place for ants. So I decided to grow. To grow up. Mothers are supposed to be grown ups, aren't they?

The doctor appeared as from nowhere and said that it had to come urgently now by Caesarean section and no nonsense about natural childbirth and was she on drugs? Would I please be present, was I squeamish?

She suddenly held my hand and looked at me with the eyes of a wounded animal. "Mum, will you come?"

My heart leapt at the chance to love and be loved. I held her hand.

The green sheet went up.

"I want a baby girl," she whispered. "Please, Mum, let it be a baby girl." Mums do miracles.

A tiny cry. My daughter smiled.
"You have a baby girl," said the young surgeon.

I held her first. She looked me over and I had the feeling she approved.

Know what?

You took off, left behind your memories to seep into my head. My brain's going off orbit, can't deal with mine *and* yours. Know what? As far as memories go I like yours better.

Sitting on a pile of clothes can't find my socks.
Look at my hairy legs.
I'm chaos!
Do you know what drugs do to your notion of self?
Know what? As far as selves go I like yours better.

The big empty house lives, whispers and threatens the shadows behind which I live. I was in need and where were you? Living your own life you selfish cow. Know what? As far as lives go I like yours better.

It's alright now.
No it's not.
Cried when I dumped your painting of the ducks we fed in the park.
Remember? You made them into

an abstract flight. You took off. And so did I. Know what? As far as takeoffs go I like yours better.

There was a time
when it no longer hurt
or anyway that's what it felt like.
No longer hated you.
Lost the power.
Did you care?
You took your CDs.
Know what? As far as music goes
I like yours better.

At night I think of you, and the blue spiders of the early morning hours crawl all over me.

My regrets.

I sent you packing, told you to piss off.

You thought that's what I really wanted. You always thought you knew what I wanted.

And it's all over now.

Know what? As far as endings go, I like mine better.

Beginnings

I

The smallest shorts are still too long. His little legs in mandatory socks and sturdy shoes.

The blazer's sleeves cover his baby hands, the school's coat of arms (bright blue on brown) is prominently displayed on the breast pocket and on his cap.

Our very, very first day. He cried last night. "I won't go to school (sob) 'cause I can't write."

Hand-in-hand we walk up those endless stairs.

His face is all scrunched up, he's trying to be brave. Oh, God, he's only three –

The young one's pretty, has kind eyes, a lovely smile.

The old one has a black moustache.

She is the Director with a capital 'D'.

I bet she secretly tortures animals and should be called a dissector – with a lower case 'd'.

I'd promised him I'd stick around for those few hours. I'd be close. Just over there, in the café.

The young one picks him up. However much he stretches, his little arms can't reach his mum, and he is taken without pity into the belly of that dark hell hole.

I follow him with moist eyes while my heart is breaking and point to the café.
He manages a tiny smile.

I told his dad it was too soon. I did. But he is English and insisted. You live here now, he said.

II

There he is, bursting out of two big green doors. His eyes are shining.

- Oh, Mum, we played and singed, and I can write!
- Look... and he unfolds a badly treated piece of paper. In letters that need crutches it says: 'Ben'.

He sees my tears and pats my cheek, "Don't cry, Mum. I'll always come back home."

Sweet music

The counterpoint has closed its eyes except for two it keeps on flugelhorn who rightly sighs: you're giving me the creeps.

And interlude would dearly lead the madrigal in dance, but overture and chord agreed they wouldn't miss the chance.

Libretto leans against the bar determined to demur.
He is the cleverest by far and won't join in. No Sir.

An octet passes by with friends. The requiem is drunk. Preludium has made amends while fugue has done a bunk.

It's late. The chords have had enough but little coda scores; glissando slides into the trough. Finale shuts the doors.

The Phantom's Lyre

She saw it melt into the wall on this dark Venetian night, there, by the *Ponte dei Sospiri*. Trembling she touches the spot.

Needs to know.

There is nothing, just cold bricks and slime.

Black water laps against dark stone. Ancient eyes caress top-lit wavelets. Skeletal hands raise a silvery lyre above the water.

Sorrowful sounds drip into her heart. Torpor overwhelms her longing.

From the canal rises a cloud of hungry souls seeking not victims but a giver's feast.

Loud voices and bright lights fall from ornate windows, and the girl's cold fingers no longer pluck the strings.

You took off

You left me with your mess, Mum. All that stuff...
I couldn't cope in that big house living with your things.

I needed you and where were you? Left me to decide what to keep of all that shit. I hated you.

It's alright now.
No it's not.
Well, it no longer hurts,
that's something, I s'ppose.
Don't hate you any more.
Don't really care.

Where were you when I came down from the drugs?
You didn't even know.
I wanted you to suffer because I did.
Oh, I don't know.

Look, Mum, why don't you just piss off. It's all over.
Nothing would have changed even if you'd stayed.

You and Dad? Should I care? He's as bad as you. Losers.

Don't cry now, Mum, it's way too late for that. See you again. Perhaps.

Where time goes to die

It's a bad place.
Everyone's left.
There's just me.
Is there a path?
I feel my way
from tears to heartbreak
to despair.

It's a hard earth.

Nothing cushions my bloodied feet.

After the fires
cold, dark, barrenness.

The stones offer me
my own blood.

It's a lone place.
Even the ghosts have been taken by the howling storms.
Desirous ethereal union.
They have each other.

It's a dark world.

I pass through a blackness that opens with reluctance, resisting penetration.

It's the last stretch. Smell it? Water. I need it to receive me.

A Flash of Blue

A serious little town. Grey on slate, as though covered in cement dust spilled by a giant to whom the wicked angels had given free hand just telling him the name of the place where to make mischief according to their intent. Ashen faces on shoulders stooped by heavy souls weighed down by sorrow, out walking to confirm each other in their same gravity of purpose.

Even the small river's as solemn as can be.

Not daring to sparkle, jump, or frolic,
it idles along its course as thick as molten lead;
and no mistake about it, the grass and trees,
bushes and occasional flowers,
birds and butterflies colluded
with the drabness of their host.
I saw no child skip along those sombre lanes,
not one.

Suddenly and without warning, clouds part, and an enormous tinkerbell touches all there is and polishes and sparkles it. You wouldn't believe me if I told you that right there, in the street, I saw the sun make people smile, children dance, green trees bend to kiss the river which now scampered over glossy stones, light as a heart in love.

And then I saw a flash of blue: Kingfisher longbill streamed into the acute azure of water for its silver prey.

Systemised

T

She wheels the drip feed along the stone path, aiming for the solitary bench which tries to hide inside the dead rosebush.

A long black coat covers that undignified hospital hankie called a gown. One hand supports her bulging belly the other holds the fag, longed for, verboten, the drug which will help her endure a further twenty-four hours of suffering if that's what's still to come. The smoke inhaled with need, exhaled with disgust. Her face and hands blued by the icy air travelling from the North to breathe winter onto an extremely early spring day in what they call 'the gardens' at London's Whittington on Archway. She shivers.

II

Stern look and strong hands, imperious voice: "Lie back!
Do as I tell you. Now!"
On her knees, leaning forward, face transparent, eyes focused inwards, calling up a last vestige of resistance:

— Leave me alone. Give me a break!

Pushes back again against the nurse's hands. Her flesh tears, her belly contracts, Her endurance ends.

- Take your hands off me. Piss off.

'Excessive aggression towards staff, probably heavy-drug withdrawal' duly noted in case book. Social workers standing by to save baby from monster mum.

Procrustean system, forced pattern, enemy of self.

Secret Knowledge

The 'p', the 'b', the 'd', the 'q' were shapeshifters.

He had seen them dance away and he couldn't catch them.

His parents called him 'stupid'.

But they didn't know that he flew with blue horses when nobody was looking.

Lima afternoon

In my left hand a beer, an *anticucho* in my right, I sit on a wall watching the beautiful people.

A *tuna* is playing my song. Well, perhaps not. But a jolly lot they are: five black mushrooms on legs almost crushed by the weight of their huge sombreros are strumming guitars and one small mandolin.

Creatures from another planet pass my observation post.
Galleon figures from Venusian ships (inter-galactic standard year 11367) with sculpted, gold-covered curvatures, tightly stretched unsmiling faces, and small turned-up noses showing hints of scars.

Black eyes encircled by forests of enormous black lashes, soft, botoxed, carmine-red cow lips their counterpoint. Deep voices pass throats that have smoked too much. Short legs packed into tightly stretched lycra show between high-heeled boots and miniature skirts.

There is a communal sigh, unheard, just felt in passing, lamenting time's unyielding advance and the Herculean task of standing in its way.

Under the Flame Tree

Soft-fingered wisps of green emerge from many-elbowed branches topped by red, so red it hurts; reach out umbrella-like to give the gift of shade to those who'll stay a while.

Flamboyán, Krishnachura, Gulmohar, Malinche, Tabachine, Poinciana, flames of glorious beauty line the tropical street.

I press my back against its double, triple twine, serene under my royal canopy, watch passers passing, urgent and unseeing, rushing from someplace to elsewhere.

whatchemecallits

rustling things
wrapped in crinkly coats
made of burgundy,
russet and ochre,
packed what they knew
about whirling
and danced away to the autumn flute
played by the fall guy,

swooshed across the widths and breadths against the time zones, only to find themselves in uncharted waters driven by the painful newness of an unexpected spring.

antipodean fauna

the cuculí is neither cuckoo nor li and it's never been seen by me but I suspect it's got a mean beak when it wakes sleepers with -cucoo-li -cucoo-li -cucoo-li pronouncing the second syllable comme il faut and snickering all the way to the pond in the tiny urban park

Where you are not

We have no past yet in these streets of alien sameness and it's the wrong ocean that leads me away from where you are looking for me in places where we encrusted our lives.

At night I cannot feel an imprint of your presence. For lunch a solitary plate, no rice. First morning tea a hurried necessity instead of our ritual celebration.

The toothbrush in its beaker can't cheat me into thinking you will be home tonight.

And so instead of looking for you where we're both still strangers, I stretch to meet you where you search for our love's signature.

did you see the sun?

did you see the sun
reflected in the dewdrop
squatting
on the dogwort
before the tyres
of the tractor
left it squashed
into the muddied
earth soaked
by last night's
summer rain?

Bagua

When your children ask with big eyes, shadowed in their sunken sockets, tell them that a new hunger lies on the altar of sacrifices and that bodies are floating upstream, threatening your president's daughter's patrimony by contaminating the terms of a new free trade agreement.

Go on, dream of oil wells, gold mines and jungles, and new plastic roofs. Your benefactors will soon deal harshly with those who corrupt the people and make them believe that progress is not inevitable.

Mercury laps at the black shores of the Rio Mantoro en route to the Ucayali, rolling with its last lazy move into the mighty Amazon. You won – for now.

Far away
your saviours
are pushing a new model plan
that looks remarkably like the old one.

Pacific Travelogue

The plane hopped along the runway rather than setting down gently, and my body lurched forward against the seatbelt.

We'd hoped to see the whales breach, but they were long gone south where the waters are green and cold. Patagonia probably...

Three sea lions pirouetted in the murky waters by the pier, no match for the pelicans. Don't get careless, fat friends, we saw three of your colleagues washed up on the rocks, big holes in their sides. Someone said they ripped the fishermen's nets to shreds.

A wet, happy dog came from the sea, draped itself across my naked feet and made me shiver.

old rig

rusty tubs lion seals sea lions alien improbable structure points at horizon get bigger come closer black water slaps rusty metal fat bodies blubber over each other bored eyes ask and who are you? black cloud of pollution announces arrival of environmental team turtle undisturbed floats beneath pelican mafias dolphins undulate in powerful waters insignificant surfers find calamity in small waves

Russet rags

Russet rags torn at the leaf obscure the clear waters where Ophelia opens pale eyes behind green veils.

While received knowledge is exposed to the time winds accepted truth is swallowed by the maelstrom between Scylla and Charybdis. Hubris, like a swollen blowfish, floats in darkness.

I watch in silence and wait for zero point while listening for the last time to Bach's latest fugue.

Deep Frozen

That summer's last fair
made me ask the man to dig
a deep hole in the garden,
line it with plastic
and fill it with water.
When the kids came home
11 happy goldfish dizzied in the new pond,
from left to right and up from down,
blobbing the surface with quick mouths.
We added water lilies, iris,
marsh marigolds and marginals
until the dragonflies flitted
across our magic spot;
even the frogs moved in.

That winter's last frost made me ask the man to lift out the huge block of ice.

I thought I saw 11 small orange stains.

Priestly Hypocrisy

The husband had his wife and a cell phone.

The priest had a bed and occasionally the wife. He'd found her stealing the weekly collection coin by coin by secret coin.

A bargain was struck and favours exchanged quickie by quickie by secret quickie. He's only a man. Holy man.

Teodorina, hired to clean the church left it muddied and unattended; the muddied priest attended her well while Yupanki drew his cell and shot the priest and the missus 'en el acto'.

The priest spake unto the TV crew: 'Yupanki has committed a grave sin trapping his wife in this way,' and then proceeded to apologise to his parishioners for having had to watch a pornographic video.

Pecker

There you are, old man. Been on the binge? Waited for yer until I didn't. Fed your cat I did. You were what? Got run over? Can't let you out of my sight. There was a bird what was asking after you and said her mum sent this and I haven't opened the box. Let's see, go on... Have a heart!

Oooh, oh my! It's a dead pecker! I'll be... You think she meant to tell you something?

Mourning

Even the pigs wore black when they buried mole.

Once we were...

Once we were new now we know renewal



After many years spent in pursuit of mammon in the corporate world, Rose Mary Boehm finally graduated to what she was born to do: full-time writing, and her novel COMING UP FOR AIR was published in the UK in January 2010.

A German-born British national, she recently settled with her second husband in Lima, Peru. A bit of a 'Renaissance' woman, she is -

as Rosmarie Epaminondas - an experienced and successful copywriter as well as a gifted photographer and painter. She has won various prizes for her poetry and photographs. The title photograph is one of hers.

However, when pressed she considers her two children (one son and one daughter) and her two beautiful (of course!) granddaughters her most important 'achievements' to date.