

# Kissing in glasses

Lindsay Camp

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A few poems that I was sorry to leave out of my 2014 collection, *After the breeding season*, and a few more I've written since then...

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# Thank you

With warmest thanks to Dana Robertson,  
for designing this so beautifully.

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## Watching Masterchef

Harsh words sear  
*that fondant hasn't worked at all*  
*oh dear oh dear*  
*your duck breast's dry*  
*that's horrible I think I'm going to cry*  
make anxious smiles freeze  
and faces fall  
like unsuccessful soufflés.

But harder still to bear for most  
*I'm lost for words I really cannot utter*  
*oh my that truffle toast*  
*I'd eat this all day long*  
*I thought it wouldn't set you've proved me wrong*  
is praise which makes  
tears seep down cheeks  
like pearls of tarragon-infused butter.

## Dream:

*And I was clothed again*

And I was clothed again in my boy's body  
and yet it was a perfect fit  
not tight (I think there was a zip)  
and nothing hurt or ached  
and every part of me felt light and free  
and as I climbed the stairs  
I knew just knew somehow that  
when I reached the top  
there'd be no end  
to my ascending  
and I would be  
exempt  
for ever  
now  
from  
gravity

## Neighbours

7.30, Wednesday morning,  
heavy rain.

I watch the guy across the road  
(Phil, I'm pretty certain) load his car.  
A case, a bag, a suit.  
A business trip.

His wife appears.  
(We've nodded once or twice,  
I see her pushing children to the park.)  
She's in her dressing gown.  
Nice that she's willing to get wet  
to see him off.

I turn back to my work.  
Minutes pass.  
An engine revs. Again much louder.  
She's lying in the road across the drive,  
blocking his exit, dressing gown  
darkening in the rain.

It may not be a business trip.

## Longsightedness

As I grow older,  
things closest to me  
go out of focus,  
blur,  
stop making sense.

Most things, I ought to say.  
Because with every day  
and week and year  
one thing – how  
beautiful you are  
to me - becomes  
more clear.

# How the passage of time seems to accelerate in one's mid-to-late 50s

Wednesday already

# Unperturbed

The way that places we've been  
continue to exist, quite unperturbed  
by our absence, after we've gone.

## Anyone else predict a riot?

To surge, to be part of something  
seething, to run where no one runs,  
to see men bearing shields fall back  
before you, hear above your head  
the whack and thrum of rotor blades,  
and, as the camera moves in  
to frame your close-up, bend and lift  
some heavy object which, propelled  
by you, will make plate glass explode . . .

Nope,  
can't think why that might sound like fun  
to a boy from an estate with no job,  
no dad, no plans, no place to be, and no  
immediate prospect of an interesting  
though sadly unpaid internship.



If I could have one wish come true  
I'd press rewind on me and you  
and go back to before we two  
first met, and then without ado  
we'd fall in love, my love, anew

## Rather as if

Rather as if  
a pair of transatlantic rowers  
should find themselves upon a pond,  
or the chief exec of Waitrose  
were to wake one morning  
with just a village store to run,  
we're here now, together, in this house, alone,  
the whole intricate superstructure  
we spent the last 30 years assembling  
dismantled now, or rusting in a shed.

How does it feel?  
Too soon to say.  
Here. Put your hand in mine. Breathe.  
Listen to this empty room resound.

# Parisian embarrassments

## *I. Place de la Bastille*

Crossing the Place de la Bastille, through crowds,  
in rain, I mis-step, fail to gain traction  
on a steep-sloped kerb, and go down hard,  
limbs splayed, head coming to rest with a dull  
thunk against unforgiving street furniture.  
Looking up, three quarters stunned, I see  
neat Parisians swerve on polished feet  
like woodland creatures barely perturbed by  
the fall of a mighty British oak.

## Parisian embarrassments

### 2. Gare du Nord

Gare du Nord: we're leaving town  
weighed down with far too much  
and as I struggle on the stairs (the escalator's out)  
a hand relieves me of the biggest case  
the one that holds the lead shot and the baby rhino's corpse  
and then before I'm sure if I am being mugged or helped  
he, half my age, is at the top,  
putting the case down,  
smiling, notably untaxed,  
not even slightly out of breath  
I mutter thanks not altogether graciously  
*De rien* he says without a hint of what he really thinks  
*Sweet Jesus let me die a thousand thousand painful deaths  
before I grow that weak and old*

It isn't helpful that the case is candy-pink

## One long holiday

This heat,  
that lizard skittering across a poolside rock,  
those cicadas ceaselessly celebrating  
something or other,  
the way we eat, under bougainvillea,  
tearing bread with our hands,  
drinking rough wine that never tasted so good.

It feels like we've been here before.  
No, cancel that.  
It feels as if we've led this life these last 30 years,  
with short cold grey interruptions for  
giving birth,  
building a career,  
buying and selling property.

# Nostalgissima

This glass of water:  
I remember it when I'd  
only just poured it out

## New Victorians

Back then, we lived as New Victorians. We knew what dado rails were, and cherished cornices. We stripped the floors back to the lovely wood and, laughing scornfully, ripped out the 60s hearth to make room for a vast cast iron one.

And when we'd bathed the children, in our roll-top tub, and put them in their wooden beds (to dream, we hoped, of hoops and spinning-tops), we'd flick the screw-top on an Aussie red, and turn the heating up a notch, then settle down to watch TV.

## Needless love

I've read that love attains its highest state  
when we divest it, totally, of need;  
become the gourmet gazing at a plate  
with admiration, but no pang of greed;  
the mountaineer who climbs for climbing's sake,  
not out of lust to own another summit;  
the guru who gains wisdom's highest peak  
and doesn't think to make a penny from it.

Could you and I, one day, be needless lovers;  
glide forward, frictionless, unhindered by  
desire's drag?  
Why not, if such a thing's achieved by others?  
But first, if you don't mind, before we try,  
let's have a shag.

## My mother hums

Whenever my mum's  
not talking  
she hums  
no tune, no words  
just tum-ti-tums,  
she'd say it's just like  
twiddling thumbs  
or maybe idly  
picking crumbs,  
a careless thing one does  
when thought succumbs,  
no meaning in those  
pum-padda-pums.

But I would say  
my mother hums  
to drown out how  
the silence thrums  
and not hear how  
her heartbeat drums  
and not think how  
the darkness comes;  
I think for her,  
it numbs.

*continued...*

I find that  
gin or rum's  
a better bet for that,  
but my mum's  
sticking with what works for her:  
she hums  
she hums  
she hums.

## Two middle-aged blokes are served by an attractive young waitress

She pours the wine for one of them to taste.  
They watch the bottle in her hand; the wrist  
to which the hand's attached;  
her bare, bangled forearm.

The one who isn't tasting tries a joke.  
It does no harm. The sense of decades  
hanging in the air between them  
grows no more overwhelming.

She smiles and fills their glasses,  
then turns to go. For both of them,  
the pain of parting is intense.  
But neither follows with his eyes.

They sip their wine. They wonder if  
it might be just a little past its best.  
Around them the room that she inhabits  
explodes with sweetness and longing.

## How middle-aged men look at attractive much younger women

Adoringly, imploringly,  
yearningly, burningly,  
sleazily, queasily,  
creepily, weepily,  
needily, greedily.  
Longsightedly, shortsightedly,  
nostalgically, neuralgically,  
Hungrily, angrily,  
wishfully, bashfully,  
ruefully, raffishly,  
rakishly, resignedly.  
And sadly, so sadly,  
with so much longing,  
but no hope.  
None, you dope.

## Kissing in glasses

Last night, before we went to sleep,  
almost 35 years and seven months after  
we kissed for the first time,  
we kissed for the first time  
while both wearing glasses.

(Bit of frame-clash, when we went nose-to-nose.  
Kissing with our teeth out next, I suppose.)

## Heart trouble

*On being rushed to hospital with chest pains  
shortly after our first week apart in 20 years*

Just as I thought: my heart couldn't take it,  
seven days, seven nights - enough to break it,  
or at least, do some damage; I hope it'll mend,  
though, whatever its state, it's yours to the end.

## Growing uncertainty

As I get older, one thing I would like to grow is more uncertain. Less wedded to my point of view; a little less convinced the world has much to gain from hearing my opinion.

Oh lord (if you existed - which, of course you don't - although I can and should attempt to feel a bit less sure of that) - spare me from living out my life decidedly.

## Glitter

Where are the platform boots of long ago,  
Where the embroidered velvet loons?  
Where are the girls in cheesecloth smocks,  
the imperfect kisses under perfect moons?

Where the patchouli-scented afghan coats  
that smelled of dog at the first drop of rain?  
Where are the boys with sequins on their faces,  
applied with care, removed with rending pain?

Where are the vinyl discs of yesteryear,  
the friendly drugs that drove nobody mad?  
Where is the knowledge that the things you loved  
were hated by your mum and dad?

All gone, the glitter of what used to be,  
Except in vintage shops, and memory

## Low-hanging fruit

When we arrived the figs were hanging  
heavy round our heads,  
gorgeously bruised, so ripe they almost leapt  
into our hands.

The end of our first week found us  
stretching, standing on tiptoe,  
starting to shake the branches.

Now even the lowest fruit is far beyond  
our reach.

We leave for home tomorrow

## My father approaches a familiar-looking stranger

According to family legend, my father, separated from his parents for five years or more - having parted from them a boy on his way to school, now a soldier about to go to war - approached a familiar-looking stranger on the platform at King's Cross, and said, "Excuse me, sir, I believe you may be my father."

Whether they threw heavy great-coated arms around each other, and wept wordless tears of joy onto each other's faces, family legend does not record.

But in the light of everything that's happened since, it seems unlikely.

# Looking at ancient photographs

*Versions 1 and 2*

How beautiful we were back then,  
how little happiness it brought us.  
How blankly unprepared our faces look  
for these hard lessons life has taught us

*Version for Anna (who has a positive outlook on life)*

How beautiful we were back then,  
and how much happiness it brought us.  
We're going to buy a Labrador quite soon  
(we have two rabbits and a tortoise).

## No great epiphany

There hardly ever is.

We hope there may be, but, in the event, what really happens, while not without significance, is nearly always:

- incremental
- inconclusive
- unsatisfying
- somehow

## Driving at night

Have you ever, driving at night,  
been tempted to flick your wrist towards the right  
and merge yourself to smithereens in the advancing light?

# DQSN

*Busy, busy, busy*

I have a busy day ahead of me  
some work to finish coffee with a friend  
an urgent dog to walk a bite of lunch  
a conference call then actions that result  
a quick beer with another friend and then  
I need to shop and cook and eat oh yes  
recycling doesn't sort itself you know so that's  
another thing I have to do before I go to bed

DEAD QUITE SOON NOW

## Decisions

I've made up my mind. Well, very nearly.  
How was I so blind that I couldn't see clearly?  
Why wasn't it obvious - glaringly so -  
that the choice I've made was the right way to go?  
What was it, I wonder, that made me unable  
to see Option A was the best on the table?  
It's true, I'd concede, that to follow this track  
means spurning all others; there's no turning back.  
And yes, it's a pity I'll never find out  
how things might have been; but no room for doubt.  
Though, oddly, I find I'm beginning to see  
there's a lot to be said for Option B,  
the one I rejected so cavalierly...  
But I've made up my mind. Well, very nearly.

## Cold comfort

Funny how your comfort can come to be  
a sense of being permanently aggrieved;  
the plaintiff in a case that never ends,  
a man obscurely wronged, deprived, deceived,  
awaiting payment of forgotten debts  
that now, it's clear, will never be received.

It's cold out here. Inside, you've laid a fire.  
I hear you strike a match.  
You've left the door unlocked. My fingers, numb,  
are fumbling with the latch.

## Division of labour

This morning you changed the cat litter tray  
when it was almost certainly my turn  
while I just sat and drank my coffee

But I seem to recall a few weeks back  
I loaded the dishwasher three nights in a row  
or was it four

## BOOK REVIEW

*Care of the Soul by Thomas Moore*

It says here that we all have one,  
deserving our attention.

To cater for mine's every need's  
my firmly held intention.

But there's just one little issue  
that I think I ought to mention  
(I wouldn't, but my ignorance  
is causing hyper-tension):

I haven't found my soul yet,  
I don't know where to look.  
Perhaps location's covered  
in another self-help book.

## Buying a paper at my local Sainsbury's

Every day you ask me if I  
need a bag  
possess a Nectar card  
want a receipt  
and every day I say  
no that's OK  
no I don't  
no thanks  
bye now

I think it's time we moved things on between us:  
my Nectar application's in the post.

## A young man's game

This seems to be going well, although,  
against the mild hubbub of the crowded café  
I struggle to make out all the client's  
softly spoken words.

And when he flourishes the flow-chart  
that makes everything clear, my misted eyes -  
the lighting's dim - see nothing but virgin snow,  
traversed by aimless birds.

The meeting's drawing to a close;  
it's time to go.  
There's one last pressing thing  
the client needs to know.

Am I sure that I can meet the deadlines?  
(They're very tight, he's well aware.)  
I am. Quite sure. (Or would be if I'd clearly heard  
him tell me what they were.)

## Make do and mend

Of all the things we can't afford to junk too soon,  
to chuck out while there's still some wear left in it,  
trade in for something similar but new,  
this is the one we most need to hang onto.

Patch it up;  
refresh it if it seems a little stale,  
replace the parts that haven't worked for years.

Renew old love. Make do and mend.  
Sustain and be sustained by it, until the end.

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