

Six poems by Richard Walne

I have told lies
as long as the equator
and seen children
French-kissing on park benches.

I have slept on bails
of dead birds
and wept at the sight
of sandwiches.

I have broken violins
beneath streetlights
and thrown lemons at cows
from the window of a train
and danced the polka
in shoes full of nail clippings
and tequila.

I have carved confessions
from telephones
and had my nose broken
by a rabbi who showed me
how fountains
make water and light possible
on Tuesdays when the bakeries
have run out of yeast and flour.

I have filled egg-timers
with gun powder
and waged war on the chaos of youth
and the diabolic indifference
of our broken remaining days.

I have loved so fiercely
that my face is still embedded
in the ceilings of the dance halls
and tobacconists
that I can never return to.

I have built hospitals
in my bathroom
and discovered my ancestors
while shaving for work.
I have been glass-eyed with wonder
and stupid as summer with joy,
as rude as a barber
and as shy as a thief.
But I have never been
as silent as I am now
with my shadow watching
every move I dare not make.

How is it that my trousers do not suffer
from vertigo when they contemplate my feet
and my hands can still shave my face
without changing the shape of my chin?
And how is it possible
that my spine does not fold over a chair
like an undershirt
or my pockets not be full of fingers
or my shoes don't deny the shape of a sock?
And what grubby business allows
towels to be as long as my arms
and sunglasses to have but two lenses?
Was it me who took ownership
of my foolish laugh
and allowed my head
to fit into hats and helmets?
And how is it your eyes
are so clearly placed
that when you speak
even my fears are aligned
to my natural habitat of joy

I walk around
and into walls
and cartoon music makes me weep
on the way to the kitchen
Without looking,
I know there are crippled kites
hanging high and blue
over everyone's hair
and I say things like stirrups and staples
when asked the time
before crossing the road
without looking

I itch at promises
that wade rudely through my belly
made fertile by galaxies and horizons
and other horrors of your universe
and I repair things
that don't exist;
theatres and the traffic
and the plotting of ants
who flee all night
the dripping of my inscrutable wax

When dogs look at me
I shy away-
they know the capabilities of my face
and laugh when I laugh
and laugh when you laugh
at me laughing and expiring
at the thought of dawn's
renewed attack
on breathing, shaving,

kisses and forfeits

And when I watch
my fingers untangle the accident
of another night's knitting,
I hear light bulbs popping
the butchery of limbs
and the heart recoiling
to its basic compounds;
poison, Bovril and milk.

I danced with you
to endorse the rain
one Tuesday afternoon
on the heady shelves
of the Portuguese barber's shop
in Clarence Road
to the drizzle of the radio
that doubled as a book-end
for magazines about
the health of men
and the loneliness
of having a lifestyle.
We knocked inexpensive razors
from their tremulous podiums
with my outsized boots
and your small and edible sandals
and your gaiety made me
as sad as a bride
in the pleasure you took
in the sound of shattering combs
and bouquets of scissors
bristling in vases of deterge rent.
In a warp of mirrors
you led me through a waltz;
through vials and brushes,
colognes and soaps
steeped in rainy days
and pensions;
the essence of our lives
under the demands of sideburns
and eyelashes.
You saw me wince
at the battalion of rubber stamps
and business cards beneath our feet

and as the tiles
peeled from the walls
you covered me
in swaths of your hair
and your strong fingers
curled around my heart,
there where close shaves
are calibrated
in terms of seasons
as soft as a stray spiral
across the impossible circles
of your shoulders

Almost languid and lost to amnesia
I imagine I forget your shoulders
And the twist of orange
In your daylight eyes.
I stray to alleys
Of insurgency and espionage
And defend you from the vigilance
Of my abbey's remorseless fountain
And the bickering pigeons
That insist they understand your soul.
I take you by your sleeve
So that you will be spared
The menstruation of strawberries,
The bleaching of flowers
And the rasping wind
That makes us consider our watery hands.
In a place of shade across the courtyard
Peacocks recycle sunlight
And the infirm sing in thin voices
Songs of what is missing
In forgiveness
And what is to be done
With the shreds of paper
That are hung out to dry
In the damp fears of inconsolable solitude.
But your elbow in my palm
Is like a leaf in a wood
And sitting at the top of the steps
It seems the sun divides the city
Into those who feed the birds
And those who scare them off
With the incessant ringing
Of their predatory bells.
Clasping your knees,

Your woody voice joins in on the choruses
Of despair and delight
While the pigeons clog up the fountains
And the visitors
Shudder in alleys
At their inability to make
An evening as long as an afternoon.

Whenever small fingers, without thought,
Replace a stray strand
Back to the pews of the fringe,
A delicatessen of orange circles widen
And a small explosion
Occurs inside the sun.
And when hands exchange paltry coins
In a garage or a supermarket,
A change in the stitching
Against the hills
Makes a leaf dissolve
In the hidden forest.
And for every howl
Of sorrow or joy
Near the towering plates
Of a ship at berth,
A wing clips the ocean's surface
On the other side of the globe
And it's scar
Adds to the already unavoidable
Siren's song.
And if, before turning out the light,
Someone should hang a towel
Over a painted railing,
Not until it is dry
Will the ghoulish wind
Cease its sway on bells
Or allow the roosting pigeons
To stop the photography of their eyes.
And for every petalled kiss
Reciprocated by a dilation
Of the stomach's stolen flowers,
A flensing occurs

Above the sand and the shells,
Detaching the waves
From the shoreline.