

chris
TSE

Sing Joe



Dig

after Seamus Heaney

Our first back yard hugged
the prickled slopes
of Kelson.

I watched my father dig and
tear his way through bush and clay
to find that richer soil.

The spicy scent of gorse, the path
he zigzagged.

And beyond him, decades
and oceans away,
his father stooping to dig
gathering ginger and spring onion;
dreams of richer days.

•

Between my finger and my thumb
the sticks rest.

•

Below the surface lies
a history of chopsticks.

In the days
of new sight we clung to comfort
as a sign of success.

Eight treasure soups,
the finest teas
ivory and bone over
wood and plastic.

•

I'll dig
with them.

Chinese whispers

Fog on our minds.

Whispers in the creak

of photo album spines.

Tear open the years

discover what history holds court

in the red of our blood.

Cross-fade

He cradles his son and wife, makes promises
out of paper – promises that will wait
in darkened rooms.

In time
they will be torn and cursed in despair.

Rooms will grow
darker.

And like water, secrets will find their way
into everything
muddy the heart and drown all hope.

•

She begged him to stay, asked neighbours
to help change his mind. She did not want
to be one of those wives left to wait

in a maddening shroud, with false glimmers
of return or reunification a doll married
to dust on the highest shelf.

She knew she might never follow.

•

Held in his exhibition of final moments:

her smile like pinched steel
eyes armed with trust.

This is for the best.
[speaker unknown]

•

The seas hold him tight
and he puts the luck of his loved ones
back into the hidden

where unforgettable voices
outstay their welcome
like a child with just one song.

Water and new light pass in circles
terrors in the night seize his tongue.
Her last expression weathers his resolve.

He will ask for forgiveness a thousand times over
but the silence that follows
is the crow he can't shake off.

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Held in her exhibition of the passing months:

an edgeless community cradling
gossip in tea-cups

letters arrive with no invitation
for response.

Landing (A Thursday, A Calm)

Call on those perfect gods and light will turn.

He left familiar doors and their Protector

for a sharper grace to seek what the stars sing. *The shore is here!*

Water loose in the air breath caught in the stillicide

unbearable itch in his mouth white noise crashing through all thoughts.

There is no design. When it comes to solutions he dances in circles
though some would say (through gritted teeth) it was never his turn to lead.

A stained line on his prosperous map

his wife's belief in unison a wave in the dark

with nowhere to crash.

The *Maheno* deposits its contribution to the growing land

of plenty. In single file he passes through

tax paid, no photo provided fingerprints taken for identification.

Joe Choy Kum

arr: 23 October 1919

#853

erin

SCUDDER

Admission



The Former Pastor

He tells me about a cow
that went missing from his farm,
a cow that was pregnant by the time that he found it.
He tells me this as though
it is definitely of interest to me,
as though I know about the country, or anything about animals.
He always talks to me
as though we know each other,
and are accustomed to trading remarks across the dinner table,
or while leaning against a fence.
There's a longing in him that displaces formality.
He redefines the word *pastoral*, for me. His conversation forms the
backdrop
for a sort of ease to which I did not know I was entitled.

Confession

Do you have an eye of God?
Can you sense the lack in me?

A man goes loping
by the shelves.

He has pastoral shoulders.
He has a beard that aches for talk.

But no –
I see what I want.

It's me who aches to talk
beside the sagging shelves.

I entertain the notion that somebody like him
could, with a loping motion,

forgive me for everything
I want to say.

Ancient March

I have spent a night in the hospital.
I have not spent a night.
I have had a night to remember –
I can't remember about my night.
I woke up and my boyfriend said
I don't want you to be scared and the doctor said
I said to the boyfriend I am scared, I am scared.
I remember from then on in scenes.
I am scared I said to the boy.

I, said the doctor, want to talk to you.
I am the one that he wants to talk to well how about that
and how would I know.
I am the last person who would know.
I put my red feet on the floor well after all
I remember about my feet.
I had to go to the other room.
I listened: the physician said may
I have a word with you in the other room.
I had wounds like somebody else's.

I was still getting out of myself.
I was coming out of anaesthetic – well they did not tell me but
I was not still myself.
I'd like to know where I am before I have to talk to you,
I,
I could have said to the doctor.
I would like a word with you.
I would like you to tell me something about myself.

I'm a clam.
I'm a clam today.
I'm a clam on your beach.
I mean something to you but
I'm a shell to itself.

I know about the body, said the doctor. Well,
I said, then you tell me.
I don't think you know about history.

I'll stay here.
I'll otherwise go forward from here to where?
I, reading the moment again, am not convinced I shall, am not
convinced
I did. I wanted something for my feet.
I wanted you not to peer at me with giant red terrified eyes,
horrified.
I wanted comfort.
I, bewildered, I,
I lost a night and you were more scared than me.

Cranes

Inside the hospital lobby,
we pause beside the lifts.
On the directory, the clinic is listed –
that's a surprise.
This ride
up to heaven –
I would be beside
myself without you, here.

The wind rattles round,
but the cranes don't sway.
The old façade – the one they're tearing down – reminded me
of Gatsby, all globe-top lamp-posts and
creamy steps. Our steps
move to the left –
then to the side. Our arms
fly open and snap shut like fans.

I was looking for the future,
and saw some cranes over the harbour.
They always move slowly –
myopic, lumbering.
I go to sleep picturing the cranes.
They hold a vigil over the town,
poised to bow down,
ready to lift up something very heavy,
and deliver it to the right place.

harry
JONES

Beyond Hinuera



Swimming

Swimming, I count each lap
Stroke by stroke, exhale
Number in a rush of breath –
All evens on my back, where
I follow the progress of the moon
Declining into daylight blue.

If this were all there were
To it – physique, number, a blank
Heaven – but it's not.
The mind that perceives, the hand
That pulls, float on depths
That do not light with morning.

Beneath, beyond, the unlit dark
Shadows my progression,
The lengths I aim at, my comfortable
Limit, final number – shadows
My touch to the wall, my climb
Into immediate nakedness.

Three-Finger Exercise

'I think I'll kill myself
When I can't make love.' Thus
You, eighteen, sprawling naked
On a sofa, walking with three fingers
Through the dragging little curls
On a mound above a furrow
Closing heated on my seed. 'Imagine
Being someone's boring wife.
I'd rather take my life.' Below us,
The cars go round Hyde Park. I turn
To you playing in your hair,
Wondering at the rhyme, at a crash
I saw years ago down there.
He wasn't speeding, it wasn't dark,
And he could hardly hold his tears
At a crumpled fender. Most are
Like him at the wheel. They
Can do nothing when they scare.

Freedom

How I love it when you sleep
Without a nightshirt and I wake
To find you naked. It's not
Wanting sex with you – it's more
Some loose idea of the primitive,
A notion of uninhibited self
Being better than covering up,
And there's the feeling too
That body leads somewhere beyond.

It's all pretence, of course –
There is no further knowledge,
No experience to be had beyond
The usual. Every barrier remains.
Body is body still, and ours
Our own. Yet when we move against
Each other, we imagine, or I do,
That there's some transforming advance
From day-to-day realities.

I look around, though, and think
That every such supposed advance
That has been made leads
Nowhere. Your body and mine
Become more common daily.
Ours is a world in which bodily
Obliteration – the finger touch
Shredding limb and limb –
Fixes every fantasy of liberation.

Your body, stretched unawares
On the sheet, has invited murder,
Been slung from ankles, wrists,
Into ditches, ovens, onto stacks
Of countless naked others
By those who know truly that

There is no other barrier to freedom –
Armies, lovers, other willing hands –
Than the purely physical.

One Hour

I was paying a woman
To massage me. I said,
'Let's change – I want to
Do this to you.' 'Alright,
But it's your time
You know,' she said and
Lay where I had been.

Under my hands her skin
Was as fine as planking
Buffed with steel wool,
No blemish to the touch,
And I prepared a boat
For varnish, uniformly smooth
To palms, fingertips.

Then it was the feel of
Polished calfskin, covering
A Book of Common Prayer,
Felt for loss and comfort,
And her lips opened
Like India paper, delicate,
Strange, on a random page.