

From the Books That They Read Us Of Love



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*In Memory of Flynn  
January 9, 1977 – March 5, 2003*

# Contents

White Tents and Green Lawns_____	4
Challenging Bedtimes_____	5
On Happy Endings to Personal Problems_____	6
It's August, I'm Happy Again_____	7
The Eyes_____	8
Theme For a B-Movie With Eleanor Gracie_____	9
Farragut's Plenty_____	11
Now Praise God for Joyful Creatures_____	12
The Geometry of Breath_____	13
Riding Around with You Inside of Me_____	14
Train Gin_____	15
Fuck You! A Magazine of the Arts_____	16
People Need_____	17
Fool's Paradise_____	18
Poem_____	19
As Mattering Ages it Hardens_____	20
Trestle_____	21
Landscape with Laundress_____	22
New Words to the New Congress_____	23
Poem_____	24
Fisheries Fisheries Fisheries_____	25
Poem at the Sleep Factory_____	26
From the Books That They Read Us Of Love_____	27
Of All the Epiphenomena You Were My Favorite_____	28
An Opera_____	29

## White Tents and Green Lawns

What a boring and stupid dumb thing it was to call you.  
Now I'll ever know where the beer is hid.  
Is it over those ridges under plate glass archives?  
In the river with the rushes?

Lazily I spy the Lorelei in the plunked down  
Forests mulching white grass. Does this add  
Spirit to that skier's paradise you call "home" to?  
And where did my sweetheart go? To the monastery.

## Challenging Bedtimes

*for Megan*

Look, it's a cornflake revival right here in my kitchen.  
And the birds come thrumming to you like hand grenades  
in a forest of light. You could be the princess of the  
loneliest workshop and it wouldn't get you so much as a nickel,  
worn and wooden, plied for breakfast in nooks and crannies,  
held hostage for as long as the sun is warm.

It's so calming, this white tear  
that you force from your throat like a song or a piece of algae,  
wheatgrass, watercress, peppercorn, or hornet's nest.  
You have a fierce heart and strange customs. But watch where  
you put your tongue The first thing it touches will turn you to licorice.

## On Happy Endings to Personal Problems

Many of my romances would begin, like this one, as a chance encounter sparked by an obscure hunger, a neat coincidence, and a fatal attraction for the defective.

It was Marcel Proust who taught me that the magnificent and pitiful family of the hyper sensitive are the salt of the earth.

The majority of the models had been culled from this season's crop of inhumanly lovely teenagers.

"We are living in a world of disorder and decadence," he replied. "The struggle for elegance and beauty has been causing me much sadness...I have been feeling marginal and alone."

It shattered him so badly that he was confined in the isolation ward of a military hospital, where the doctors tranquilized him into a stupor.

A common enough story.

*Adapted from a New Yorker article on the retirement of Yves Saint Lauren.  
For Bonnie J. on the fame of her success.*

## It's August, I'm Happy Again

*The thing is, you have to be in the right mood for Fassbinder. Carl's just lucky, I guess, he's in that mood all the time. – Liz.*

This fortune should belong to November, when  
the moat is dry and full of frogs  
and country things. But I take now  
what I find here and I will make up for it later  
with cakes. They will rise  
as my heart rises. They will go on as I go on.  
They will sing *bonne chance* to you and I sing *bonne chance* to you.  
As the markets become crowded and the sun comes  
undone in the winter, they will purl with grey fog.

Even in them the nocturne will find room to warble.  
The harpsichord tuners will find cause for unison.  
A song will make light of the forest gloom.  
And here we are all making plans for it. I will make  
invitations to it. There will be a party to this end.  
No one will be left out. Even the sentimentalists will show zeal.  
And they will whisper, one to the other, with remarkable tenderness,  
Come along with me as I sing to you.  
You are blessed and new, though you are old.  
You are blessed and new, though you are old.

## The Eyes

They are green behind glasses  
And white behind snow.  
They break with the masses  
Wherever they go.

And like Max Ernst they really  
Desire to Know,  
Just exactly what silly  
Desire is so.

Impending on all of this right  
Setting grace  
That has recently blight-  
ed the whole human race.

I am happy! I am.  
Though I admit I have slunk  
From the pale bitter moonlight  
To my home, sadly drunk.

## Theme For a B-Movie With Eleanor Gracie

*I'm signing off for now but first...last night I saw movies of my dreams...I was a gangster's moll and I did a line of cocaine in a crowded restaurant with a whole group of Italian men...and we escaped through a parking deck closely pursued...and I had two boyfriends...most unlikely, I'm sure, but they were nice for gangsters I suppose... -- Letter from A Friend*

It must have been nicer there, out over the ocean like that.  
And firmer underneath that orthopedic  
Attachment that looked like a roofing unit.  
I couldn't have found it anyway. Blow me away.

We all ate dinner together and launched into  
Some old spiel that played itself out and left  
Us speechless and blanketed. Conversation,  
what a lark!

Oh friend, there is never  
Enough isolation when you are around, nor  
Darkness neither. Firmament of fireflies,  
Fruitless vacation loss, element, discovery.

Channel it and force the rest of it out through the nightlights.  
Right where it ought to be, sitting there and resting.  
Two pears in a bowl like Wallace Stevens or Oliver Reese  
Or the withering financier. If only we were all barons,  
And had baronages and cottages and festschrifts  
And potato fields, and could brace ourselves for the explosion.  
Then we would seem younger to ourselves,  
And older to those in charge of us, our boyfriends  
And potato chips. I had two. You had two thousand  
Left. And when I left you were still standing there,  
Broken leg and all, with a winding grin, and cane.

Or maybe it wasn't this way at all.  
And I've forgotten it or distorted it,  
Or somewhere deep inside of me  
(Because we all have deep profundities)  
I found it there and tarnished it.  
Particularly. It was the flavor of your lingering.  
You didn't mean it though. That was better so.  
We left it there. A bungalow.

## Farragut's Plenty

It's a splintering effect.  
Which means from now on  
You must look after yourself.

No more earthly delights.  
Violet panties. Squirreling beers.  
Zipping yourself up in the parking lot.

Rather, it's an inching away.  
An occlusion which means "being there."

## Now Praise God for Joyful Creatures

Now praise god for joyful creatures  
Solemn beauty  
Brazen features.  
Now praise god for silent things,  
Tremor, twilight  
Diamond rings.  
The houndstooth fortress when she comes at night  
The parity, dissembling. The twisted light.  
The moon, sky, spire, trellis,  
Of smile, furrow, burden, palace.  
Now praise god for all these things,  
Hushed and vocal, plussed and true,  
Now praise god for darkened sunlight  
Held in rich, unmeasured you.

## The Geometry of Breath

Something breaks.  
Something goes out.  
And what you're left with  
Is a fist in the mouth.  
A speech without nation.  
Your tears among the lotion.

## Riding Around with You Inside of Me

I was feeling much worse  
When I suddenly felt much better.

After you left, I felt fine, like a curse  
Had been lifted or the weather

Outside had just become beautiful.  
When I finally awoke from death

I felt nothing. Shallow, lightheaded, cruel.  
Then came softness like a breath

Blowing my hair from ear to ear,  
Dropping gentle kisses on my lips.

Why does beauty sometimes feel like fear?  
And fear like truth, and truth like all of this?

And is it truth or beauty that makes art  
As awful as a lover you've disowned,

But still adore—though with a hollow heart—  
And ache, perhaps, that passion once atoned.

Train Gin

*Thin wet silken body*

You took off your shirt

Like a punch in the mouth

*Blood-wet thin and sullen*

Thinner now than thought

This thought of you

*Thin wet drunk and bloody*

Punched like the foreign presses

They sawed off your arms in the closet

*Thin drunk healed and calling*

You remembered the drink at the station

Like the palm of your hand full of lotion

*Think sad pale and sullen*

Wet like a seamstress is

Wet like Oregon

*Thin black drunk beholden*

## Fuck You! A Magazine of the Arts

Sitting in a German bathroom  
reading the poems of a friend  
and thinking well, this too  
could be a reason to go on living.  
Death could be no worse than waiting  
for someone to come who isn't coming,  
who won't come; no, who was here now  
and is gone.

And now, sitting at a desk and  
listening to the songs you sent me from miles  
away in a southern city with the woman  
who wrote the poems and who thinks of  
you fond and droll as a saint,  
I think that to keep on living now would  
Be the worst kind of foolish sentiment.  
Absolute claptrap and unabashed nonsense.

## People Need

Laundry detergent and socks.

Above all kindness.

A reason to think well of others  
and besides religion a sort of philosophy  
or politics of hate.

So that's what we sell them nowadays and they take it,  
eat from it like a plate and are thankful.

Oh!

## Fool's Paradise

I was a gangster once on the Rue du Livre.  
It rained oftener then. Much of this was swept away to the gutters  
of life where they were picked at by birds and by luminary  
musicians. James Joyce once wrote a poem about it even,  
which began with a line he copped from the dictionary  
of Catholic Heritage, "Drunk again and praying."  
This was St. Anselm at his Brussels monastery  
thinking up escape routes and ways to run with nuns  
as far away as Brugges, Antwerp and Ghent.

Is it real. Could it be real?

The answers to this and much more in a moment.

## Poem

The dumb things that our lover say,  
we don't hear them or they don't reach us.  
Their doubts and securities, their slim shadings  
of you-are-not-the-one. Instead politeness  
reigns. We brush back their hair and remind  
them of polar bears and how springtime  
will wash over ice caps and set them to life.  
But even this is not enough. They want a pardon.  
Or a reason to continue. They say dumb things.  
But we don't hear them. We take trips together.  
Some mornings we make them breakfast and ask them  
What they want to do today. In movies we ask them  
politely to hold our hand, to tell us the name of the friend  
of the man. On New Year's Eve we would be nowhere without them.  
But the things they say. The dumb, dumb things they say.  
We don't hear them. Or we hide them in coughs, laughter,  
uncomfortable silences. We make excuses for our appearance. We are late,  
but they don't seem to mind. They are happy to see us. We embrace.  
There is something between us. It is a flower or jewelry box.  
We say dumb things. They are mistaken for compliments,  
and this flatters our rather small egos. Our large egos are undone  
by their kisses and promises or both all in one. They hear dumbly  
what we say softly. They drink tea or coffee or wine with some spices.  
They are nicer than they've been in a while and we like this. We try  
not to notice when they smell of ink or detergent. They say dumb things  
about yesterday. We don't notice. They wince. We pretend they are  
blinking or their contact lenses are swimming in – yes! those are tears.

## As Mattering Ages It Hardens

When I was a little younger,  
Which is not to say that I was  
Confused, but rather, perhaps,  
That there was sand in my head  
And salt on my breast, my dreams  
Came easier than this. As I withdrew  
Into myself and became myself,  
Two small things escaped my notice  
And neither one could be regained.  
Though at the time this bothered me  
Not at all, as hours passed, this luxury  
Of non-remembering grew cursory.  
I longed. And in between pinings  
Came what would later be seen to have  
Been cries of crestfallen biding. Oh! the  
Queen was out of the cage on that one.  
But the precedent continued undisturbed.  
Then it frustrated, pleasant and amused.

## Trestle

I carried my razor around in my pocket  
all day. It was a day like any other.  
The trees were full of loveliness. I thought  
of you flying away to the airport.

When your heart beats, don't you just  
feel like a drum. I know I do.  
Today my heart beat endlessly  
all for the best.

So enjoy Paris. Call me drunk.  
I'm drunk on you.  
And if you stumble, be apparent.  
The French like foibles. It's their flaw.

## Landscape with Laundress

When I was very young  
there was no poetic tradition  
and everyone I loved  
seemed very very big.

But as I grew older  
the world shrank with me  
and soon everything was  
medium sized. Now here

we are on the ramparts of  
some castle whispering  
things like night and fortune  
and it seems to me there

has for a long time been no  
tradition, no solitude and  
no absence neither has there  
been a wish to make it whole

and in the whole range of sighs  
yours was first  
and after that only  
did someone hear rain, then silence, then plunder.

## New Words to the New Congress

Dispense with machinery. Make what you will of the  
Prayers to consignment. Or if you will not, be assured  
That the newest of right spangled holly leaves is present  
And headed your way. So like the prow of some celestial  
Voyager do you plunder on billowing. I made of the ocean sands  
An agent for awkwardness and afforded my function to entrust  
You with both the new syllabic union of function and monument  
And what we call priscargion, or the prelates' decumbritude.  
And thereupon resigning, they walked out and followed us.

## Poem

When the river began, we, the less fortunate but overinstructed, turned our heads first in one direction and then another, looking for the route to our imitation motorboat. This, children, we see as folly now, though at the time it lay unorganized and fallow like a purpose, or a system in whose underlying structures the first beads of thought broiled and expired, leaving only their vermiculate traces as bountiful reminders.

Reentering our building sometime later, we plunged headlong past anxiousness and down thin halls of interested regret, in whose overilluminated corridors the first twin bars of some concerto or other played endlessly, utterly, as the repetition grew turgid, and we aligned almost instantly. My heart beat. I sneezed and everything went black, then came back to me. His pleasant imitations. The burnished nozzle that I gave you knowing its contents would never be used. One little silver box in whose beads of sweat I grow tired too easily.

Forthwith I hesitated. It was such a good first day. And the impressions I made. Endless accompaniment. And people to dine with me all the time, everywhere.

## Fisheries Fisheries Fisheries

Blue skies give me the creeps.  
Especially above those dark fisheries.  
Look. You can even see the pale green  
eggs breaking into splitlevel surfaces,  
making peasoup of this pitfall breakwater.  
Ditchdiggers come once a year  
from all over the country to toss eggs and worms  
and living effluvia into our warm  
fishery waters. And what do we get in  
return? Wonderful round trout making  
headlong rushes for the weedbeds is all,  
where they are found there and caught  
by the dozens; rustled on stringers into warm round mouths.

## Poem at the Sleep Factory

Congratulations! I am the poem  
and you have won me. Keep reading  
to find out how. The truth of course is  
there is no little surprise to be had in  
winning, it is the easier of two choices  
and you made the first one years ago,  
which brought you to this point where  
I am standing now in front of you listening.  
You are breathing quieter now so as not to miss  
a beat. But wait. Here is the furniture sales-  
man. Have you won a divan? Or an ottoman  
maybe. Maybe something for the foyer. Go on  
sit down in it. Luxuriate. It's what we like to call  
'practical design.' It was made of space-  
age polymers just for inclusion in this world's  
fair. It's of no use to anyone if it just sits around  
being looked at, you know. Take your shoes  
off if that makes you feel more 'at home.'  
Here's a telephone, too. Rest it on your lap  
and slip quietly into slumber. We'll make  
lowering noises to wrest you from the blanket  
when your turn is up. See, here's the ladle now  
scooping hot memory over you. You're a big  
globulus of refracted daydreams and there's the  
warm light of nostalgia playing fairyland fancies  
to your slow pattering time. Awaken. You're being tousled.

## From the Books That They Read Us Of Love

The Alexanderplatz took its cue from Waterlooplein and was thoughtful and rain filled. Throughout the homecoming, coffee was poured and bagels were baked and then tossed in the sea. For luck. And for pity.

The worst part about being embossed was that everything tasted better under water. Which is not to say that in other facets of "what happened to be the diligent life" we were not wholesome and lonely. The buggery contained or constrained there.

For heaven's sake, the landslide took care of the rest, and when the children were bustled in they turned to confront others of what appeared to be infinite strength. Don't worry young immovables, it's just the furniture of your mind.

## Of All the Epiphenomena You Were My Favorite

It seems like everything nowadays has something to do with eggplant.  
Not that I'm against this. I'm a product of it. First, of course, a system was  
Erected, which was brash and had lots of thought behind it.  
Several of us planned to put an end to it, but we were  
Neglected by the wealthier peasantry, who were quite pleased  
To see an infrastructure spring up overnight like that. Then  
Came the pleasantly cool complications of  
Aftermath, which will long be associated with a collapse of the fathers.  
Finally, the system produced 'children.' I think that's  
What they were called. Others have called them other things and  
I would not be the first in a long line to call them pernicious.  
They infested us with their *systematics* and put us on the maps  
They were writing. From down there, of course, it all looked very similar  
To another system I'd heard of, and I don't doubt that the two  
Are related somehow and could probably even be triangulated  
With the help of some new third system that is still  
In its operative stages and hasn't been translated yet. Alas  
For the slowness of language to create the bigness of systems.  
We all live in your lack, back to back, castigating our homelands,  
Finding for every correspondence something that responds  
Inadequately and makes matchsticks of our elegant  
Strictness. Belatedly we recognize our eggplant discoveries,  
After years of eating nothing but Cheerios and  
Corn-on-the-cob. My daughter likes to say things now like,  
*Isn't that wildebeest coming too near us father?* And when I  
remind her of principles like Zeno's paradox, she just shrugs her shoulders  
And gets carried off to the wildebeest festivals, where everyone  
seems so 'in the know' all the time. I guess that's youth for you.  
It creates boredom out of things you though were pleasurable,  
Like wildebeests and their grazing patterns. But then, of course,  
It also fills you with a glow of self-satisfaction that looks a lot,  
I'm told, like the glow of self-radiation. So there's another bell jar for you.  
It's a variation on the funnel effect that's been setting outside  
My window for hours now. Tomorrow I will go to school all day and learn algebra.

## An Opera

### 1. The Shepherd's Complaint

Are we to believe what the sleeves  
Are telling us? That their assignment  
Was too short for them to hold out in. Well, I can't  
Believe that. But sadly, I do.

Each one of the four indeterminacy  
Artists withdrew from the furthest pavilion  
In spite of the rain (not because of it),  
And still the papers have been clambering  
All over my hydrangea bushes for days  
Asking: When will the artificial flying  
Machines be marketed? When will we  
Enter into that new age of panic  
That has been gloaming up around  
The edges of our cities like a departure  
Clause or convenience center  
Year after year? And what can I tell them.  
That the shoes are out of stock, or  
The plane is holding. Both these things  
Are true, and yet in some sense  
Not true enough.

I'm just a shepherd.  
My name is Tired.  
The sun is burning a  
Hole in that mountain there and  
Going home to rest in it.  
Both the fiddle and the flute  
Are waning now.  
The axes once accustomed  
To answering brightly are  
Hacking their way *through*  
My argument. That's more or less  
Where we stand. On the Quai de Violence.  
Which is both floating and flirtatious.  
Be ware your kneecaps and your pantaloons.  
I'll be making off with both of them.

Oh! Sparkling darkness, your worrisome  
Birdsong warbles onwards. You are such  
A blank canvas sail that you press yourself  
Into being with your curious sexual energy.  
You are hostile to my ways and means.  
And yet, you are dear to me.

May you answer me. But first,  
Get dressed up as a nymph or something.

## 2. The Nymph's Reply

I'm here. I'm here.  
I'm everything you ever wanted  
And strangely disappointing  
For that very reason.  
I don't know. I can't keep  
My cape on straight anymore or anything.

Why don't you go home and  
Watch *Dawson's Creek* if all you  
Want is my melodrama? I sometimes  
Feel my head's all filled up with poppycock and  
Flaxen like something the world calls  
Nostalgia. It's making me dizzy and pestered  
Like you never used to.

Okay. Given we're not in a movie any more,  
Then how do we talk to each other?  
Do I say 'I love you' and you say something,  
Like, 'That's just delicious.'

It all very well to like Gertrude Stein, you know,  
But we can't have the whole world  
Running around all the time  
Talking nonsense, now can we.  
Someone has to hold down the fort awhile,  
While someone unseen to is writing the National Anthem.

So you see, it's as easy as all of them said it would be.  
Movie or no movie. You can complain all you want to.  
In the end it won't do you a bit of good. Sure,  
There's the chest and what you get off of it,  
But the distortions remain and your bed will  
Be the same size tomorrow as it is every morning.  
And you can rest assured I won't be lying in it,  
Gauging your reactions and whispering condolences.

Oh Shepherd!  
Lonely, lonely vales are darkening behind you.  
Hadn't you best be taking your way back to  
The city that made you. Me, I'm working  
My way up to a very pretty suicide. That's the way these  
Things work you know. Just there on that high note,  
The tragedy of modern life will become unbearable,  
And I'll start burning up in desire  
And toss myself in front of some train or other.  
Thank the osprey for me, and those soldiers  
Over there in the gloaming.

Oh, and I nearly forgot!  
If you find yourself overwhelmed  
With chagrin at my luminous tragedy  
And unable to speak or even throw up  
Little bells through the air to land  
Tinkling at my feet like some aisle of regret.  
It's okay. Some of our bravest young men  
Guard wisely their need to be silent.  
It's an endearing sort of elegy  
And in its own fine way  
An expressive one. The tenderest  
Of the ancients has told us that. His name  
Was Stratrego or Belle Atrice or something  
Else, quite foreign and hardy.

Well, that's enough for the cape.  
It's practically strangling me. And  
One never wants to die off stage you know.  
Buck up, Pioneer, you're no  
Pre-Raphaelite painter. Put your sandals on  
And hack off already. We'll send you postcards  
From the land of the dead with Katrina's  
Young face on them so you don't get too lonely here.

On the back we'll write greetings  
In fanciful tongues that will take  
Decades to translate, but deciphered  
Say something like, "Wish you were here."

Won't that be grand! But I'm practically profligate here  
And I've missed both my trains.  
I'll have to take a bus over to Grand Avenue  
And wait for the EI to come. What will the tabloids say!  
Ineffable beauty's been killed by the Underground.