

A S T E R O I D S

Philip Rice

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COLLECTED POEMS

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*For my mother, who
wrote poems in college*

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“None of these revelations are new, of course, but it seems worth reiterating in light of the fact that I saw the moon steal light from the sun last night and create an iris in the sky. All these things. How do we even live with ourselves anymore?”

—Richelle Wilson,
from a conversation in May, 2012

A S T E R O I D S

CALLING IT HOME

Calling it home means
feeling cool breeze through
a quiet window, and sitting,
silent, not afraid of feeling
empty, because here you
understand, here you can just
listen, and (in)still(ness) be heard.

Home isn't a place,
it's a feeling; it's a knowing
that here (where we are music)
in this place—this feeling—we can be
a kind of love that is always
telling each other that
being together is better than
just being.

THINGS I REMEMBER

I remember (quite more than vaguely)
stretched on giant blades of matted grass
with my sister
while my father played softball.

I didn't care about the game;
only the fictional characters
I had imagined were sitting
with my sister and me.

I do not remember (not even vaguely)
the day I met my first love
nor the day I fell in love with him
nor what I said the last time we spoke.

Yet, I cared more about him
than any game of softball.

Perhaps I was too busy
imagining the characters.

WHAT WOULDN'T I GIVE

oh, what wouldn't I give
to be back on that dark lawn
laid out on damp blankets
under the cold, dry stars,
wide-eyed until our corneas smart
from the stillness of night air.

what wouldn't I give
for those days, when
the greatest joy was knowledge, and
the greatest fear was darkness (say,
how little has changed!)
and everything was smaller.

listen to the since-years,
and while you listen, I'll tell you,
quite simply, exactly what I wouldn't give:

the joy of seeing you grow up,
the music of the latest night,
the indescribable feeling
of being in love with this memory, and realizing
just how desperate(ly hopeful) we truly are.

SMALL WORLDS COLLAPSING

I guess nowadays my small world
collapses smaller and smaller every
day. All my friends know each other,
and I guess that means we're
all bound up in that tangled
web of our electric souls.

But no matter how small it gets,
I still can never guess much
of anything about the girl
who passed me on the street in Manhattan,
except that her hair was golden, streaming
in the wind, and our souls for just
one moment were boundless.

THE LAST REAL DAY

the last real day of December was
three glasses of milk, and
frosting in the microwave,
and red velvet, and
burnt-ended stars, and
poems from 1966;

it was also
a giant chocolate chip cookie
and another glass of milk
over a quiet game of chess,
and breathless laughter
like drowning in silly-putty;

but most importantly, it was
stars—
not burnt, but bright, magnificent, cold,
wheeling out from dark cupboards,
eyes, shining sternly
as if to say,
I am here,
I am here for a time,
for a very, very long time.

MY MOTHER IS A FLAG

My mother is a flag
with a canton of
orange, yellow, and lime-green
stars—Castor, Pollux, and Regulus
and she, during at least one war,
was emblazoned with
the lion rampant.

Ships from a distance notice her fire,
the burning fluorescence of her
clothes, which flash like a camera bulb,
as she waves—quite quickly—
upon a tall, sturdy staff.

My mother is a brave,
righteous flag, and she
stands for a secret intelligence;
maybe it is God, or the universe, or
perhaps it is daffodils (yellow,
orange, and lime-green).

On second thought, no, my mother
is not a flower, nor is she a lion,
nor or a bright bit of fabric—I think

most of all, she is a birthday:
a moment, right in the middle of life,
when a tiny voice cries,
“you are not alone,
you are alive.”

BURNED TOAST

Burned toast

always reminds me of my grandmother,
I don't know why she always used to burn it,
I think she was afraid of disease-ridden moisture,
or maybe she just liked it crispy.

Tater-tots

always remind me of my sister,
I don't know why she loved them,
I think they baffled her mind with the miracle of
 microcosm
or maybe it was because they taste a lot like french fries.

Maple

always reminds me of my mother,
I don't know why she loved it,
I think it made her feel at one with the trees,
or maybe it just reminded her of pancake syrup.

Peanut brittle

always reminds me of my father,
I don't know why he loved it,
I think it reminded him of the rigid fragility of the
 human condition,
or maybe he just liked all the sugar.

Love
always reminds me of God,
I don't know why he eats it,
I think He needs it to survive,
or maybe He just likes the taste.

EVERY CORNER

Every corner I turned
—in the dark—
seemed like Michigan
it's funny how even in a car,
at night, in New Jersey,
music (that I haven't heard before) and
love (that I haven't felt before) can
still make me long
for home.

FINDING MICHIGAN

Finding Michigan
just the way Jesus left it
will be remarkable:indeed
I should say I hope to find
happy families of sunsets; the song of
organstops, souls rising—rushing
into the Elysium of eternal,ecstatic golden
cornfields of memories of mountains
meandering melancholic Christmases, and
yes, I even expect to find my dreams

Finding my way home is not
such a simple thing, finding you isn't
either, and I guess finding love is hidden
more of all—even so(and most beautifully
or)I will come back to find
simple starlight, and
Something softer
than snow

THESE MORNINGS

These mornings are different
sitting next to a coffee cup
and silently remarking how little
it reminds me of you

These mornings
are quiet-strange
they are not bright:they are pale
they are tiny choirs of dust
settling like pilgrims on the chair across the table

These mornings are wonderful—
like flinging onehundredthousandwildflowers
into the air and wondering(not knowing) if
they will ever return to earth

These mornings are not you,
because I have forgotten how much
I need to remember how
to forget you

YOUR BRIGHT EYES

Your bright eyes
keep me awake at night,
they shine into my open mind
like a rude streetlamp;
an icewater blue light
that always seems to sieve
through my eyelids
at just the moment of
unconsciousness.
Strange, I dream,
that your eyes should be so cold,
while your heart so warm.

YOUR WORDS

Your words are daily like
bits of dead plankton, floating
down to the seafloor, where
a tiny water-crab pinches at them,
grasping desperately for
invisible morsels, hovering.

To man's unaided eye,
it seems as if I am grasping at
empty space (well, water).

I cling to those crumbs
(because)
they are the only portion
(of you)
I can reach.

WATER UPON WATER

Like water into water,

Oh transparent seer,
See through transparent me.

Oh transparent singer,
Sing through transparent me.

Oh transparent lover,
Love through transparent me.

Like water into water—
May the somethings of my somethings
diffuse into yours

For the something of my somethings

is you.

DEEP IN YOUR ARMS

When the summer sun shines
so brightly that everything looks green
and all seems a dream,
I find a strange hope
that is no shallower than
a winter sunset or
an autumn leafwind, and
no farther than the burning springtime
deep in your arms.

(San Antonio, TX, 2012)

POEM FOR KANTOREI, FEBRUARY 24

for a while I saw a flower in the corner of the room
pungent, almost uninviting:
its petals were splayed,
stamen glistening (dripping) with moisture,
begging to be dusted
with fertile bits of pollen

[I am afraid to smell it
for fear that I may be soiled
by its pungency]

I am again young,
aroused by the fragrance of spring;
awakened by a pubescent surprise.

RECONCILIATION

Friend, where is the reconciliation of my reality?

Truth, Infinity, God, sleep, death, Love: are these the knowledge of peace that I have so long trusted for reconciliation (one day)? Why can't I touch them like a lake, or a sun (or even a wave or vibration?)

Why must I every night desire not only that which I cannot possess, but that which I cannot imagine? Friend, even our emptiness is unimaginable.

S M A L L E R

if tonight, I find that
the sky is shorter,
I should think I would be taller
if only in comparison.

when you first spoke,
the world shrunk
in response to your immensity
and my soul grew.

but the universe is expanding—
and so, tonight
my heart will be smaller
with or without you.

AUTUMN

Autumn is here! : which means

cold wetness and corn labyrinths!

carving of squash and colored trees!

creepy creatures and cornicopias of joy!

Blow the festal trumpets!

Bring forth the Great Pumpkin!

SEVEN HAIKU FOR AUTUMN

1

the leaves are changing
i am only one person
but they are many

2

winter is coming
soon, it will be time to sleep
there are seven stars

3

orion raises
his mighty bow and arrow
to pierce the earth's heart

4

the cold air enters
through the open front window
i can smell the rain

5

pumpkin pie is here
it's made out of pumpkin flesh
but, of course, it's spiced

6

maybe this year we'll
have time to hand out candy
before the snow falls

7

don't you ever think
coldness is wetness is death?
the leaves are changing

THE EARTH IS CLOSING HER EYES

The Earth is closing her eyes
Like a beautiful lover lying
Next to me in bed.

Her deep, regular sighs are leafwinds
Stripping the colored branches
Of her mind.

Sleep, Earth: the carved, wretched
Faces of pumpkins keep watch
Over our bedroom.

Sleep, Earth: this blanket of leaves
Will shield your skin from
The frosty air.

Sleep, Earth, sleep with me:
For the night is as lovely
As the day;

But the twilight is still more beautiful!

THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE WATER

The intelligence of the water
is in the clear bright reflection of
yellow, red, and peach-colored light
on the stillest calms between waves.
It is in these spaces (these light
places) that the stuff of ocean
speaks the deepdarkestness of
twilight.

(Charleston, SC, 2012)

THE LEA(F

the lea(f

all is peaceful

lo)ves explode:

o(ne) to imagine

everything(liness) it(&)self

(we) singing

f(ar)

or

ever, th(e be)ings

(a)

colo(u)r(ti)ed, a ballad

e(ful)gently

autumn

S U M M E R

Summer is here! : which means

sweet tea and sweet corn

sea swimming and sunburning

sleeping outside and stargazing

Play the festal panpipe!

Dance 'round the solstice bonfire!

THIS SUMMER

I will wander into the Great Laugh of Mankind,
I will touch a hundred flowers and not pick one,
I will praise God for all things counter, original, spare,
 and strange,
I will believe in nothing but Love,
I will find the crystal of peace,
I will look up in perfect silence at the stars,
I will catch October, the moon,
 And drift into Orionid completeness.

(with acknowledgement to Sufjan Stevens, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Gerard Manley Hopkins, E.E. Cummings, Sara Teasdale, Walt Whitman, and Costas Dafnis)

THOSE CLOUDS LOOK LIKE
MOUNTAINS

“Those clouds look like mountains”

she said, smiling.

Moving bodies, ribbons

of concrete, weaving

in and out of space and air.

If you think closely, you can

almost hear the humming, no

the singing of cities, the

invertible counterpoint of

small mountains.

THE RAGGED RIDGES OF MOUNTAINS

The ragged ridges of mountains are
the stern silhouettes of sleeping saints
embalmed by cool rains and
caressed by cloud-angel-fingers, whips
of smokey air, and tears of astonished stone.

“Arise, O daughter of Zion, get thee up,”
they are calling—echoing back across
the lost ages, and pushing forward up
toward a brighter, clearer time.

I heed their call, climb, clamber, clutch
every stone an island in a freezing river
of sinless, pure blood; sparkling,
I find them in glorious light, singing me
into a deeper Heaven.

(Zion National Park, UT, 2012)

P A R A L L A X

A thin jet-stream cloud from airplane exhaust for a moment aligns with a radio tower, and for a half-second you could believe that it was smoke coming from the thinnest chimney in the world. But they are actually miles apart, and while that cloud is a very real remnant of bodies flying through space at hundreds of miles per hour, radio waves are nothing but the invisible smoke of our best attempts yet to speak over great distances.

IN FREEZING WINTER NIGHT

The singularity of existence is a testament
to the natural monotonicity of all things:
Computers are brains are atoms are galaxies.
Thought is art is communication is meaning.

But that is not the point.

The spontaneous generation of the
human spirit is the breath of life.
One begets two—the whole is
greater than the sum of its parts.

SYLVANSHINE

Driving through the deadwood
returning from music
I saw the sylvanshining,
that memorial of twinkling snow

Don't ask me what it was,
all I knew was the sky,
that hugeglowing sky suddenly
sky with the stars, those high
flutes, screeching like owls descending

and the moon—oh my words the
moon, a crescent pointed down
at me just hanging there
like a moon, words cannot

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

I saw a squirrel eating a rabbit

and

the bread and meat crushed inside my mouth

the blood of Christ

the music in my ears (written yesterday)

spoke:

Destruction is often

that which is most necessary

that which is most satisfying

that which is most beautiful

WHEN I REMEMBER THAT
SNOWFLAKES

no flakes are falling
faster than I fall
when I remember that snowflakes
are raindrops which heaven froze
before silence released them

all I want is to sip
cups of boiling raindrops
flavored by flakes which fall
brilliantly burnished
and I want to read you
poetry aloud

DEFIANCE

When there is nothing left, and
I carve our mind into portions,
Lengthening the straight bridges
Between life and singularity,

When silence is the only redemption
For 22 years of contradictory nonsense, and
What ought to have been Love,

Then,
A piece of Christ washes over me, and
Praise is the only peace that fits.

CREDO FOR CHRISTMAS

I believe in the tinkling of zimbelsterns(
which is the tolling of towerbells which is really the
amplified swish-flicking of snowflakes on frosty
leaves of grass)

and

I believe in the lighting of pinetrees(
which is the shining cosmos which is actually the glint-
twinkling of your eyes against a frosted windowpane)

and

I believe in a baby(
who is the reconciliation of all things which is, in fact
nothing more [or certainly anything less] than
Christmas)

BELLS AT CHRISTMASTIDE

DO:

crescendoing (no faster
than snow can slip)
your quiet limbs
sang into silent
fir trees
down

SOL:

growing soft green
foliage of truth,
leaves of my open eyes
hanging from heartstems:
ornaments of deepest
Gabriels shining
up-up-up the loudest
heaven—

LA:

then—oh my
suddenly God—He
appeared, the Son
of all green
flowers, of all
stars

MI:
of all that is
quietly singing
out of my
silent

DID YOU KNOW THAT BIRDS

Did you know that birds
are asteroids, sharp-edged
ribbons of flight that cleave
the stuff of heaven like knives
sharpened by honeyed nectar
dripping from trumpet-shaped blossoms

Did you hear birds hurling themselves
into your almost star?
Can you even begin to imagine
whole worlds alive, singing
from their Krishna-throats?

Even Jesus was a bird once.

STONE BIRDS

What a truly strange day it was, seeing each
child opening his eyes to the starlight, each
barely noticing the death that surrounded each
tiny cradle.

The blue dogs floated gently in the ether,
and the stone birds were more than grounded.

*Dies iræ, dies illa solvet sæclum in favilla,
teste David cum Sibylla.*

WHY BIRDS! WHY MUSIC!

Why birds!

Why music! all are colortied
in a rapturous dance of every
petal, corollas of song

Be mine, dear blossoms, *come*
away sweet love doth now invite
thy *graces* that weave
your every every flight

And now I am
dancing I am awake I am
alive, not alone or away
and I am spinning a delicate

cyclone of all green flowers,
of all stars

THE SONG OF A ROBIN

The song of a robin
is a treatise in three volumes:

Volume I

A comparison of seven beams
of holy light which piercing
the darkness of deadwood,
lift spring out of a black
coffin and into the fragrant
morning air

Volume II

A proof of the properties
of feathers which bending the air
into a funnel of liftingliness
forming a cyclone of flight,
converse with the holy
fire of dawn

Volume III

36 color plates of tiny splendors
which lifting the architecture
of bristlecones and the doom
of golden clouds,
are building heaven
on my back porch

LA NOCHE MOJA RIBERAS EN TU ALMA

"The universe is duly in order, every thing is in its place, What has arrived is in its place and what waits shall be in its place"

(Walt Whitman)

Stretched out on the grass
I am listening to the sounds
of chirping insect
of barking dog
of laughing child

I am listening to the sounds of
Music (on electronic speakers)
and

I am watching a flame flicker
inside a clementine

(and) I know that
stillness is darkness is silence is peace
There is nothing else that
needs to have been

I am alone, yet
I hear the songs of your planets
The polyphony of your stars
You are

IN THE END

in the end, i hope
we will walk in light (moon
sun, suns, fires) the light
of ten thousand candles, of
one-hundred thousand cellphones,
of a million space stations
a billion stars
a trillion galaxies
and infinitudes more moments marching
through emptiness full of you

walking, handclaspd on an endless beach,
longer than any night I spent without you,
any day spent in unceasing could have been,
longer-still-than this one lifetime
we spent apart.

And on that day, we will raise our voices,
we will shout with joy (not just all the earth,
but all the heaven, too) and we'll dance
and for a centillion iloveyous,
and we'll daily make up
for all the lost space, and
all the empty time.

EVERY WORD

Say, for example
you were talking to someone,
you were looking at them
you could hear them
you could see them
when you thought about what they were saying,
as it would look written
on an imaginary page,

it (just for a moment) was as if
every letter was a sentence,
every syllable was a chapter of
every clause which was a book in which
every phrase could be a library, and
every sentence could be the whole world.

Then, my love, hearing your
voice for less than a moment,
could open the most beautiful flowergalaxy, and
it would be the whole universe
in your eyes
without saying a single word.

WE ARE HOLDING EACH OTHER'S
BREATH

We are holding each other's breath,
consuming the bite of another winter
(a little colder and dryer than last)
and wishing for all those times, all
those moments that could have been
different, some warmer but most more
lovely

Being next to you is a banjo strumming
a quiet, tender loveliness a few
shades darker or lighter than the flickering
of your eyes at sunset, your cheeks
in an autumn evening light, or in the glow
of a Christmas tree, left on for
days

Starting tomorrow, I'm going to be
something better than I was today, I'm
going to float above the leaves which move
only when the wind blows, and I promise to find
sacred lightnesses, holy brightnesses
which are lovelier than everything we already
were

YOU AND I ARE NOT SUNS

You and I are
not suns, aeons apart, vibrating
slow churning cello-strings of space;
we are not trees who staring unforgetting
at the sky thousands of days at a time
find that they understand stars
much more clearly than you or I.

No we are not very old yet,
our rings will be fewer than our
backyard tree and still fewer than
Saturn's long strands of ancient hair
(fed by the very stones of eternity)
no, we will never be that far apart—
two thousand miles at the most,
maybe just chairs away at the least.

Still, I hear your voice as clear
as emptiness when I am wandering
down the short trails of your handwriting
on an old scrap of paper, also when I am
praying myself into galaxies so distant
even God himself should sleep
half the journey.

TRUTH IS

Truth is
not an idea, or
a memory, it is not
a creed, a prayer, and
it is not a person.

Truth is a house that builds
itself around us, it is
a fire that warms and sometimes
burns us.

Truth is a fine white linen
that wraps our bodies;
it is a fragrant mist of
pure ocean breeze, and it is
lightningbugs scintillating
the darkness of summernight.

even now, Truth is
touchfollowing us, and we are
breathing in Truth, and (my Lord)
it is so very beautiful.

