

The train

He sits on the bed edge, naked -
Sad eyes sunk in black moon sockets.
Saturated in piss,
His ickle-boy pyjamas lie crumpled on the floor.

In harsh light, mother changes the sheets:
Angry and business-like in terrible silence,
Like a Victorian nurse
She organises a dry bed.
First the plastic liner, next the crisp sheets;
No hugs or reassurance.
Just a veiled threat: don't do this again!

In clean pyjamas,
He crawls into his comfort
And drifts into a troubled sleep,
Until the train arrives to take him away.
The choo-choo motion
Delivers a fresh stream of urine
Onto clean sheets.

Cape St Francis 5 October 2006

Ladies of the letter

I have to tell you this, you scare me oh ladies of the letter
You have permission to lay bare your naked ends
To have insights that leave me stumbling morosely
Sunk and dissatisfied.
And as I lay bare my own sufferings
Directed from within and without through these outsized antennae
I feel so very vulnerable, impotent, unstrong.
I think – could I be wrong? – that you deeply need strong men
Virile hunks who lead from the front
Not soft and pliant, tearful but reliant
Wordy, nerdy almost girlie girlie
And no I'm not seeking sympathy – please no hugs
Just tell me if it's true - or not.

Cape St Francis 8th March 2013

Untitled

This contra-addiction
Is burning my soul
Peeling my skin
Taking its toll

I crawl up the cliff
When I need to flow
I gulp at the whiff
Of the flowers below

This contra-addiction
Is making me sick
Tuning my genes
For the ultimate trick

It's time to crush contra
And addict to boot
Send them both south
On a one-way route

Cape St Francis
17th June 2013

Depression

What is it when my mind does swing
From doom to gloom and back again
Some chemical in the synapse sound
Has gone away, ne'er to be found

Or can I take the moment hard
And break it like a paper card
So swing again to joyous times
And take me to the safest climes

Kaboega July 2013

Abandonment

What does this place want from me
What horror speaks in the wind
Calling like leaves
Whispering pines, shouting gums
Who planted them in this place
Of absence of presence

What memories are hiding in here
Whose hearts have stopped beating
In this room.
Where are the wives with their sharpened knives
Who can claim to belong to this place
Of presence of absence

When last was there life on this lawn
A jovial braai, a gutsy *laat waai*
Where the willow now weeps
I am not quite outside, nor am I in
I have not the strength to abandon this place
Of absence of absence
And presence of none

Kaboega July 2013

Poem for Mary

Mary I must tell you
that when I say bravo! I mean bravo!
and for us to be whole
please approach me
without fear.

Do I come across as lordy lordy – the magister man?
I hope not.
I have struggled too,
and I don't want you to feel that I am preaching.
Oh no! No preacher man.

Mary, lets touch souls.
It's such a wild world:
so much pain,
so much suffering.
Please.
Trust me

Cape St Francis
2 Aug 2013

Advice for L

Go not into the thicket of your mind.
There are thorns in there; snakes and scorpions too.
It will rob you of peace – and sleep:
toss, turn, fret, sweat.

Don't go into the thicket of your mind.
There are people-eating elephants there,
and meat-eating rabbits.
Even the shade is poisonous.

Go not into the thicket of your mind.
Mad pelicans flap like hostile gunships.
Desperate canaries beat their wings in the sewers of insanity.
Don't go.

Cape St Francis
3 Aug 2013

My invisible tent

In my invisible tent
I breathe deeply, sweetly
Massaging my mind into submission

In my invisible tent
No one can see me!
Not anybody, not now
Not this moment

In my invisible tent
Everything is forgotten
And forgiven

Sept 2013, Cape St Francis

Go gently

Go gently from the room:
Leave quietly; do not distress the air.
There is nothing here for you to grow,
Just arid sand, a billion fragments
Of nothing required by you.

Do not foment the froth:
It will cling to your skin,
Make you soiled and boiled.
There is nothing here for you to sow,
Just cluttered and exhausted streets.

Go out into the day:
A new view, bright as light.
Leave behind the vicious vines
That entangle you here.
Breathe the new air deeply in.
It's time to grow again.

Kirstenbosch 1 Oct 2013

The annual checkup

The annual checkup is
when data and emotion
dance over death.
I am on my best behavior
compliant, willing to be probed
hiding my crumpled lungs
beneath a solid sternum
hoping the scope
is deaf to the sounds
that worry me so.

4 April 2014, Cape St Francis

Letter to Gus

I am a botanist, I study plants
And write lots of papers that nobody wants

Sometimes Poetry rams open my door
It sits on my table, it sleeps on my floor

So I jot down some lines that flow from my heart
And forget about science, the serious part

Perhaps others may like them, or perhaps they may not
I'd like to pretend that I don't give a jot

So dear editor please, consider my verse
For a place in your journal, without cuss and without curse

Having had umpteen papers rudely rejected
A "dear John" response won't see me dejected.

Cape St Francis Aug 2014

Olive Farm, Lyndoch

I came upon this place
It had a sign that said
“Please keep on the path”
There was no path

Stellenbosch, Nov 2014

Too far

I'm reeling with feeling
The family flows past
Leaving me stranded
After making it last
I'm left by the roadside
I've got nowhere to go
My suitcase is empty
My jacket is frayed
So good bye to my sister
Good night to my bro
The one is a blister
The other a toe
You think I don't know
Where your deviousness lies
I'm offloading your sleight
Opening my eyes
I will not descend
To your light-leached room
Instead I'll escape
On my happiness broom
But remember bro and sis
Stones that you are
This time
You've gone too far

Cape St Francis Nov 2014

Hope

In the dimness of our decline
There are shafts of light
That erupt in ebullient fervour
Of hope

Cape St Francis 20 Jan 2015

Bloodletting: South Africa April 2015

Let the bloodletting begin
So that we can parse our pain
Express our outrage in its primal form
And then mourn together
The loss of our humanness

Go out and kill your nemesis
Take lives, strangle souls, slice into flesh
Beat the heads of your enemy into pink pulp
Degrade, dehumanize
Go wild!

We have had enough of each other
Our healing is in killing
Until the blood has flowed
Like it did in Rwanda
There can be no peace

So let the bloodletting begin
Let's get over this phase
Now!

April 2015 Cape St Francis

Nothing to do

I have no work to do – well almost

Nothing; tasks I would have called nothing ones

A few years ago.

Can this be true – this victory over slog?

The to do list – scribbled on scrap - is depauperate,

Impoverished, pathetic.

Aah, how I gloat at it; measly thing that once terrified me.

That damn list has been tamed.

Now what? A walk on the beach,

Someone to reach

Something to write...

Cape St Francis 28 July 2015

The abandoned farm

This side

From when they first arrived
Until when they drove away
What lay in between
What did they never say

I wonder how much fun
Was witnessed by this place
I think the Devil's son
Has stolen all its grace

Who beat up the staff
Who planted all these trees
Who frolicked on the grass
Who had a smoker's wheeze

Which ones were to blame
For pillaging the veld
Which ones felt some shame
For the privilege they were dealt

That side

Across the road I go
Where the *volkies* used to stay
These cramped foundation show
Who really had to pay

The paltry garbage shows
That poverty lived here
Bits of tattered clothes
A plastic doll wide-eyed in fear

Did the woman flee
When her man broke down the door
"Where's that bitch gone now
That filthy *fokken* whore"

Did she cast a spell
Could she make you laugh
Did she judge from Hell
Did he steal the calf

We can never know
What hardship here endured
Suffice that we can grow
From their misery inured

August 2015



The *Watermeid's*¹ call

The deep clear pool
Flanked by folds of coarse quartzite
With shrubs and trees to girdle her
Entices me

The deep clear pool
Watched breathlessly by plants
Tucked into their own gardens
In crevices of rock brightly lit by lichens
Entices me

I see the flower has come
As in Bushman lore
It entices me into the pool
Where I have never swam before

Deep into a darkening hole
Falling without murmur or fright
I feel the quiet of my soul
Shining in the *Watermeid's* light

Still Bay, Sept 2015

¹ Therianthropic figures of half-woman, half-fish that are feature of San rock art in South Africa's Klein Karoo

Here I am

Here I am
fractured 'neath the sky
clawing for some cover
crawling from the fire

Here I am
lying on my bed
breathe in the peace
breathe out the dread

Here I am
outstretched on a cloud
soaking up the atmosphere
far from the madding crowd

Cape St Francis Oct 2015