

DEFENDING ONESELF

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Beard of Bees
Chicago
Number 18
July, 2004

Contents

<i>With a lonely girl's lust...</i>	1
<i>Fresh happiness!</i>	1
<i>If you'd only try a summer in pastoral poverty...</i>	2
<i>Knocked up on demented love...</i>	2
<i>The finest I could've afforded...</i>	3
<i>True and False Heart...</i>	3
<i>Just stop speaking to me, Petticoat...</i>	4
<i>That's it for our time-scarred friendship...</i>	4
<i>Don't turn to me as a friend two months late...</i>	5
<i>What more can I offer you, Pudding Mouth?</i>	5
<i>Those upperschool poets pelt us with dried mud...</i>	6
<i>That unlucky filly, Small Talk...</i>	6
<i>I know where you're hiding, Crumbly...</i>	7
<i>Now what has possessed you?...</i>	7
<i>Like panthers in a parking garage...</i>	8
<i>He detected fear in my early work...</i>	8
<i>A nasty and persistent hobby...</i>	9
<i>At a singing match to exchange insults...</i>	9
<i>Into the dumpster down the dead end...</i>	10
<i>Yell yourself sick to death...</i>	10
<i>You say I'm being too sensitive...</i>	11

*I hate and I love. And if you ask me how,
I do not know: I only feel it, and I'm torn in two.*

Catullus, translated by Peter Whigham

With a lonely girl's lust
For allegorical violets, for violent underbrush
Symbolic leaflet and narrative bractlet
She fell hard for the actual facts

With a tender girl's deliria
For the interpretation of dreams
For inflorescence and shaping fantasies
Sleep finally brought her night thoughts

Fresh happiness!
May much gelato melt on your face
May you be indifferent to street humidity
And your meteors arrive on time

Come, when soaked with sweat or dew
You send up bubbles into the half-distance
When singed, you give off a sweet odor
Hey, shed ironies! I'm not so ugly

If you'd only try a summer in pastoral poverty
Green looting and roaming at will
We'll perform classical rituals of battle and mating
Watch the satellite flicker in the evening

August urgently agrees with fall I'm ready
For youknowwhat don't change your mind
Let's exchange numbers and forked lightening
Let's do what's sure as fate now

Knocked up on demented love
Fucked up on powdered swallow's heart
Laced with a scruple of heron's liver
That was merely the beginning

Dispatched down perplexed paths
Why the hand-cuffs? he asks
Since I can read sun-spots I knew
He grew Love-in-a-mist with another

The finest I could've afforded
I sent him ten pairs of antique Levi's
Ass soft as a rabbit napping on moss
I'll overnight twelve more Tuesday

Forget it all, Leaf Litter
Your letters shredded in the Reign of Terror
Then used to cover potatoes from frost
It was a fairy vision

True and False Heart
She'll do it too you can count on it
Chop off their candied heads
And pretend not to like the sound effects

I'll still speak to her reddening while we talk
But only in answering couplets
She celebrated oil of vermin
Me genuine dust of scorpion

Just stop speaking to me, Petticoat
Better not invite your legendary wrath
(A rumor spread by the Crusades)
I gave away my copy of your first book

Busy with the history of your problems
Your fretful singing swept through an abandoned lot
Throw it in the East River
And never look back

That's it for our time-scarred friendship
I must be viewless in a no-place place
Scratching at my sticky wounds
Half-crustacean half-alicorn half-orangutan

All brightness spent like play money
Fistfuls of frozen words that won't crack
Even if you jump up & down on them
And you didn't call me even when I was sick

Don't turn to me as a friend two months late
All innocent like a new spatula
I expect you for dinner promptly at eight
One sip of this and you're finished

Why be so awful to yourself?
I'm not neglecting your messages
At least stop sulking & kicking up dust
Like an ant swallowing aspirin

What more can I offer you, Pudding Mouth?
Not gorgeous no-trouble loans
Not weekends on rented islands
Nor crazed pleasure gripping protected wetlands

You astonish me
Like a trapdoor in the superhighway
G'head, sink the whole convertible in the ocean
Just give me back my money

Those upperschool poets pelt us with dried mud
We duck and run for cover
Any fruit aisle at the bodega will do
Or just move to another borough

Errant intruders were ripped to pieces
And wounds, well-aimed, were self-inflicted
Then they drifted to the infamous islands
Wordless & Formless & Artless

That unlucky filly, Small Talk
Fancies herself a bite of the sublime
Vulgar errors in form and content
We'll overlook no more than five

Don't look so stricken
She'll won't notice you in that ineffable jacket
She goes by if stepping on knives
Doll-Heart goes only for the real article

I know where you're hiding, Crumbly
You can't escape me now
I'll unravel every secret code
I have Night Vision goggles

I can't think of you that fondly
When much precious juice was pressed
For the hung-over city
But that's a pregnant question

Now what has possessed you?
You drag me off to see the trolllike art
Of some leading man of the young foresters
Whose skull was split by snapdragons

The choice was made, wholesale
The bumpkin sucked up, a herald of things to come
Now she's well-connected, that social evil
In royal ballet ecstasy circles

Like panthers in a parking garage
Consents & Disagreements did terror to each other
What do you want me to do about it?
I'm under the thumb of a tyrannical waiter

Seen kissing the worst ex-novelist downtown
And fifteen other egregious charges
You have my deepest sympathy
You could do better

He detected fear in my early work
“But this is what I see, this is what I see”
Is it really his and not someone else's venom?
Now who else would want to poison you

Hanging about shifting for invitations
Now everyone is amused with your heartsleeves
Even their hounds are whipped into a frenzy
Hurry, they're starting the dying of the Republic

A nasty and persistent hobby
You foolishly believe is funny
You borrow a book without telling me
My only signed copy of *The Eclogues*

Annoyed too long with apologies
I want my copy of *Comus* back too
Which you fake is your own first edition
Imposter! Why not move back to Boston

At a singing match to exchange insults
Stop writing like you're minting green stuff
Stop fumbling with high-toned language
Like the doleful penis of a Formalist gentleman

The time for flayed rhymes has ended
You'll succeed in your objective to wreck my confidence
Unless crushed, Pot Licker
First and completely, by me and my band

Into the dumpster down the dead end
Vapid verses & so-called knowing
Chasing barren ideas in a gritty wind
Into the gutter into the sidewalk trash can

In the Battle of the Books they will surely lose
Fatal as they are fee-faw-fo-fum
Those words will fade from the universe
No one will daydream of them

Yell yourself sick to death
Cruel words like yours inspire no fear
You're jealous, your poems bereft of ideas
But I drink at the fountain

It's not what you expected
I only wanted the actual facts
You can't touch my mind
With all your false charms

You say I'm being too sensitive
You say "That's so over" So what
It's not the what it's the how
I don't want your truthless love anymore

I know what you'll deserve in the afterlife
Surrounded by your moldering theories
I can predict this by my art
We who burn in a purer fire

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Chicago, IL

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