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FLIGHT OF THE MARIE HELENA



FIRST DAY

**It rarely rains in dreams.
We hit all time lows and
very high estates, but rain -
no, it rarely does in dreams.**

**They say if you throw the lei of
golden blossoms far as you can and
they suspend in mid-air, then fly
back into your hand, you will return
to this blue island under blue clouds
rising from blue sea.
Blue above, blue below,
all is blue between.**

**Return to an isle where
wind whipped trees of teak
and mahogany clatter their
twigs like castanettes.**

**With no thought of return
I press the golden lei into a book.**

**Later, the book may rise;
if not, perhaps the table.**

**The Marie Helena,,
Our Lady Of the Tide,
largest raft the world has known,
rests upon the blue sand shore,
grounded in low ebb,
tethered by a silver cord
to a seaside carousel.**

**I am not a cloud. Feed me.
Press not into service one
who maketh wine of olives
to serve in porous cups.**

**Wind of fragrant lady's breath prefer,
though it rarely rains in dreams.
Carpets of interwoven
string quartets suport us
as we take our leave and repair to sea
to follow the argument of the ocean;
to listen to the echo of a
great bell tolled beneath the waves
and toast the Marie Helena
Queen of the Blue Tide,
soon to sail!**

**Toast the Marie Helena with
a wink, a blink, a nod,
a bouquet of bougainvillea
and a hand me down guitar.**

Empty that guitar of its

**splendid oily rainbow.
pluck it out with patience,
the cleanest sort of vice.**

**Stage the bon voyage with
flagrant octarina;
lace the mask to your face
with living worms.**

**Strong hands unite!
Sign it into conscience!
Seal it with a fist;
for sail we will!**

**For each: a hammock strung
with sinew, bone and tendon;
soup and salt for each
and garnets in the gravy.**

**Place, law, climate and syntax
converge like wind to make the
Marie Helena thrash as
though she were a living thing.**

**A fragrance of excitement,
rising from the shoulders
of a deck hung with wistaria,
first inflames and then amazes.**

**Now the blessing
and the benediction.
Incense of carnation,
clove and oleander stream**

from a swinging silver censer.

**The eye of the tabernacle winks as the
chalice rises bolt upright on the altar,
shooting arrows of communion into
infidel and faithful hearts alike.**

**Accept the benediction of
a bent and bloody knee,
skinned on a gravel court
playing Hangman in rotation.**

**Shake a leg, blood lies still.
Clay is the rover.
There are rats in the scuppers!
Voulez vous couchez avec them?**

**The artist in the vein
has flustered reason.
The blood will not clot.
Worse, it will not flow.**

**From a seaside carousel,
a black robed figure waves;
a slow flick of the wrist
from a sleeve without a hand.**

**Toast the Marie Helena, pilgrim.
Bear your lacerations with resignation.
They will be healed within
the seven days we sail.**

**For a moment suspended,
wedged between two ticks of time,
caught between a sigh and inspiration,
the Marie Helena hesitates,
then with a shudder leaps
into the cheering foam.**

**The scent of orchids mingles with
the silk strings of a light guitar.
a blue black cloud obscures
the seaside carousel. We sail!**

**In amniotic darkness
the Queen of the Blue Tide
sails beneath a counterpane of
self reflecting mirrors.**

**The will of the wind be done!
We trust ourselves to the
providence of current and
the wisdom of the waves.**



SECOND DAY

**The dawn beside the lee
in morning aquaglimmer:
a clear prophetic seawalk
leads to afternoon.**

A thousand different lines

**can populate a song and
not disturb the sequence
of its melody.**

**Music hath no need of guardians.
Her sweet guitars,
harps, bells and calliopes
defend her.**

**Not the subject,
but the cadence;
less the cadence
than the tone...**

**Less subject, tone or beat
than angle of coincidence
seeking satisfaction of a
seventh sense of symmetry.**

**The Marie Helena glides upon
the bright white ocean of
our second day.
Everyone aboard her is
a stowaway. There were
no tickets for the passage.**

**Hanged in their lineaments,
sinister spinsters prowl
the foredeck and the aft
in search of lost angelicacies.**

**Thus do they paper their
implausibility with regret,
decline to elaborate.
Thin, wicked and celibate.**

**Thus do they signify to me:
they remain in some sense
chained and offer constancy.
I'd not free them for the world.**

**They will scrub the deck for secrets;
discover blood drops and hasty
crumpled notes of secret love.
They will find small things of value
which they will not return.
God bless them.**

**Bell tower, peal forth.
Awaken all sleeping souls.
Shovel the master from
ashes, an approving flame.**

**The more the eyelids lower
the more an internal visor
opens on a vast
mechanical vista.**

**Words of emerald
shine beneath a
slow flowing sea with
light sighs and laughter.**

**What was it we feared when
setting forth to sail upon
this cheerful raft upon
this sweet and glossy sea?**

**Relax! Fear is endless
but here - oh, here is
time for music, for philosophy,
for poetry and even love!**

**Here is time for recognition,
reunion and recompense.
We will sail unto
whatever port the winds prepare.**

**Ah, blessed second day!
Two smiling dolphins breast our wake.
Lost from sight, our shore becomes
the lost blue peaks of memory.**

INTERLUDE

**An almighty knock
shatters the placid waves.
The sea becomes the sky
full of foaming flame!**

**Veins of the waves
bulge till they burst
and turn the sea to blood.**

**A raft has no fore or aft,
the Marie Helena has no sail.
Hell's own violin and Bacchanale
upon the southdeck wail;**

**"This is my creation!"
cries the thunder.
"I am pleased!
Now mop it up!"**

**To be done! To be done!
And then, under a swell,
sat down forcibly and
lectured by a cloud.**

**As I rolled to St. Alair,
the cloud declared,
I met a crippled king
with four fleshless hounds
leashed by seven chains.**

**A queen had he on the right arm
and three queens on his left.
Each queen had seven tongues,
each tongue of two opinions.**

**He combed the twelve hairs of his beard
with a currycomb of glass -
Ten tines had it on a time
but four, alas, are broken.**

**God above and Christ below,
counting the king, the queens,
hounds, chains and all
the several other things
how come
it rarely rains
in dreams?**

**It is because
there is no need.**

**There are dreams in which
other dreams are mentioned,
contiguous in symmetry, but,
in dreams, it very rarely rains.**



THIRD DAY

**Who kept the watch that
endured the night?
The watch from which
we woke from stormless slumber/
into the confectionery of
a gladsome dawn?**

**Who saw that the hour is
never the hour apparent,
awaited a history of history
from the hall of elucidation?**

**The first day held questions,
the second day posed riddles -
Today smacks of mystery.
Let us question one another!**

**Inside my fists a
theater of the dark;
throbbing to the lovely
lady without mercy.**

**I came to question her, how
comes she to question me?
All is coincidence!
One thing begets another.**

**Ah! But I itch and I
grow hateful for an hour,
my language composed of
noun, verb and nudity.**

**Slam the visor on this
small change arcade.
Open it upon
a rolling sea.**

**From a sea song foaming
with slashing brine;
from a sunbeam springs
a horse with tangled mane.**

**Hands across the sky reach
meeting without touching.
Feet beneath the sea stroll
on carpets of anemone.**

**The sky spills from its
dressing gown of cloud
where seven pointed starfish soar
on silent wings.**

**From a mid day moon
there hangs a ballerina**

**twirling slowly by her teeth:
she is my witness.**

**She gains the handrail,
gently slides like butter
trailing down a sunwarmed
deck, pat by pat.**

**Is it she who watched
the storm kick out the jambs,
the ghost of her for whom this
craft is named "Marie Helene?"**

**How came we to the sea?
Who bid us come?
There is not a sailor in our midst.
Not one among us.**

**There are sunsets, stars
and omens to be figured;
winds that promise
ever greater fury.**

**Without Captain, crew or
lore, we are
captives of the tide.
It is better not to
recognize this plight.**

**It is better to
wear seaweed socks
than thrust a melon in
your brother's ear.**

**Tender hearted ladies toss
wildflowers from the lookout,
out, out into a sunny flare
of glaring trumpets.**

**Before you cough,
take your hat off. Diamonds?
Diamonds were nothing.
We used to swallow them.**

**We shall be increased.
In spite of cadaverous
laughter, it stands
to reason. We provide.**

**Bless the
sailors and
the girls
who bite them.**

**These limits I defend.
Why overstep them?
They are where they are instead
of sails for the Marie Helena,**

**We will slime our horns
with the balm of Gilead,
clink skulls and drink,
deeply, one another's health.**

**A raging teardrop
in a timid fire,
completely misconstrued
and glad to be so.**

**You know best,
consorts of kings,
how little comfort
are forget-me-nots.**

**Once.
Oh, once!
And then
no more.**

**Had I
dreamt of rain.
It would seem
an unusual thing.**

**Strike the visor on
this day of mystery.
Open it inside
the realms of sleep.**

**I fall until I feel I
must explode
with spray of salt spreading
ivory on the porthole.**



FOURTH DAY

**The fourth day dawns at midnight.
What should have been the moon
whirls like a scimitar swung round the
turban of some blood drenched Saracen
beheading stars.**

**Questions on the first day,
then riddles giving way to
mystery on the third;
today commences with apocalypse.**

**A shrill high fiddle note presides.
Transported to high ecstasy,
our firebreathing eyes pour
music back into the violin.**

**Then saith God, "Call
your son Loammi meaning:
Ye are not my people.
I will not be your God. (Hosea I:IX)**

**"You shall abide many days
without a prince, a king,
a sacrifice, an image,
an ephod or a teraphim. (III:IV)**

**"Blood toucheth blood,
let the land mourn.
Thou shalt be
no priest to me." (IV: II,III,VI)**

What? No teraphim?

**Supplication seems inadequate.
It is too late for sacrifice.
Perhaps some sort of bribe
is apropos.**

**Tossing my wristwatch
into the snapping sea,
my timepiece is returned by an
indignant wave, rewound.**

**The soft hand of one
who is not, but almost,
present begins to stir
my hair with breezes.**

**Three more days of this,
a soft wind whispers,
the poison will subside.
The Marie Helena and
her ocean will provide.**

**A raft cannot ship water.
The Marie Helena will not drown.
It may float, becalm or spin
but it will never sink.**

**Those not disposed to vision gather
on the west deck, trade yarns and speak
of remarkable spitballs, delivered
with a touch of fire.**

**I go among them and speak
of innings, runs and scores.
We will speak of "going back for
a long one" and derive some
simple creature comfort therefrom.**

**Slam down the visor!
The moon becomes again a moon
of gentle incandescence
over the smooth, lapping swells.
The lion of the ocean sleeps.**

INTERLUDE

**True dawn.
Sea and sky, then
sky and sea,
fleck, foam, wave -
luminous blue rose.**

**An island lies
off stern - inviting.
Ah! If we could only
swing the Marie Helena!**

**But no, we are engaged to
ride the mighty raft where
wind and wave command!
Mark it on the map and wave farewell.**

**The perfume of its trees
ride on the breeze which
gently, firmly, sadly
bars our entry.**

**A very blue island
beneath blue clouds
against blue sky
rising from blue sea.**

**It is not a dream.
Ah no, it is another thing.
It is a sunlit vision
seen through rain.**



FIFTH DAY

**The fifth day: thunder without rain.
A small skull carved of
ivory sits, right profile,
in an unlit candelabra.**

**Yesterday, a determined smile carried
one corner of the sky clenched
between ragged teeth:
The sky which is a sheet.**

Today a docile banner flaps

**in half a breeze.
A pipe is clenched between
my teeth unlit.**

**Yesterday a velvet gloved claw bore
a cupful of the sky
in a milkwhite vase:
The sky which is a drop of blood.**

**Today I poured my tin cup of
salty soup into the sea
but not as a libation.
I had no taste for it.**

**Yesterday, a girl with lips of amber
printed a yellow kiss upon
a rounded ring of sky:
The sky which is my mouth.**

**Today, a lump of anthracite
hangs in a double dark sky;
the sky below, the sky above.
and in between: the sea.**

**Yesterday, with stool and milking pail,
I sat beneath the Mother Unicorn
with hands of storm
attempting to milk the sky.**

**Today nothing amazes or perplexes.
It is all too weary to perplex.
It only cauterizes or infects.**

**All which was professed a joy
becomes a present bore, in light of
one objection: I have
seen this all before!**

**Such redundancy calls
for brass, flute, woodwind
and sweet, resounding lips
to play them.**

INTERLUDE

**Oh, but the song is the same song
sung to the same tune once too often.
The answers to our questions have
proved less than entertaining.**

**A ride of a week and one week only.
Each day's sun ascends behind
a different deck.
Is this a circle that we sail?**

**We are reduced to ritual.
We have burned our graven images
for fuel. We find no significance
in numbers or the alphabet.**

**I look to the darkening sky and
see no constellations; only
slowly spinning stars
without cohesion.**

**From the southeast cusp of Leo pours
the realm of galaxies.
That is where you look
to look far, far away.
What begins with music
will end with music.**

**Between the music are
a number of things which
have to do with music
lacking only melody.**

**It is time for a midnight snack
of oranges, rosewater and
lavender pretzels made of china
which snap between your teeth.**



SIXTH DAY

**I thought of a colored pencil.
I thought it with soft blue lead.
I thought your picture, used the
flat side of the lead to shade.**

**I penciled in the sky and made
clouds with a kneaded eraser.
You will be my masterpiece, I
will sketch you from every angle.**

Six dolphins circle round

**the Marie Helena; one for
every day we've been at sea.
What profit reputation?**

**White cloud stallions dash
in non-emphatic rhythm
bright as any tinsel in the
chocolate dust of a red wind.**

**Four emphatic trumpets blare,
why be dismayed?
Without music we are prey to
the strange arms of reason.**

**Absolution, reconstruction,
resolution and forgiveness
pour from the brass bells
with a scent of lemon bloom.**

**Glad to be forgotten, I go
climbing in among the
reconstituted constellations
searching for a certain star.**

**Come shining from the afterdeck,
sweet echo of the singer.
Cello, lay your ecstasy
like leagues of spongey moss.**

**Emotions of the heart
must be surprised -
they languish for attention,
are shy.**

**I closed my eyes last night
but did not dream.
At dawn...gently, gently,
a patter of rain.
Silence has left a film of
satisfaction, paper thin,
upon the transparent ocean,
oh, but not upon my heart!**

**Instead I turn the capstan
to the squalid, squalid lee.
North by North or South by South
upon, beneath, between the sable sky.**

**In this way shall all
hearts be protected:
a tight membrane dispensing
merriment and absolution.**

**Again, a light rain. The
sea devours these clouds.
Storms are its meat; our hearts
will do for wine.**

**Consider how rigidly
the sky is painted.
How we wear it on our head
like a slowly spinning hat.**

**The Marie Helena speeds along
in a sleek current. A new
moon on the horizon casts**

no hint of glare.

**The shower is passed.
The sky is clear: Preserpe,
whose invisibility signals rain,
is discerned but not quite seen.**

**An absence of a dream of rain.
Six days at sea, much has been scuttled.
What, here at the end, seems
worthwhile to have brought aboard?**

**A few things seem certain.
Some scales, some equations.
Smaller matter the particular music
or the mathematics forced from them.**

**Or invert and it is
all the matter; all
the matter which
scarcely ever was.**

**Now one way,
now another.
Both, and others,
however pure.**

**Clay and cloud.
Cloud and clay.
Cloud and cloud.
Clay and clay.**

**Leonardos have lept from
flaming towers for you, with
no suggestion or remotest
promise of fidelity.**

**Gilded to the lily,
you proudly plunge your hand
into the hive and scoop
the honey to your mouth.**

**This clear, transparent honey
has no flavor.
Should the Marie Helena
sail another week? Ah,
no - it is forbidden
by edict.**

**Tonight we swing into our hammocks
determined not to dream.
The warmth we seek from bodies
eludes us. Our bones are leather.**

**Tone by tone the midnight bell
beats twelve bright claps of
sweet forgiveness in these ears
of ears this night of nights.**



SEVENTH DAY

**Today a cratered rainbow
ascends with ragged beam**

**from a cup of morning coffee
into later afternoon.**

**The day is spent preparing
for a secular advent which
may well fall shy of
advertised proportions.**

**Seven days a-sail or a-spin,
however traveled, now at last
the world lies uncreate,
transparent to the core.**

**The vacation, hardly begun,
is over now. As the axis
of our fantasy dissolves,
we slowly wave in rhythm.**

**Waving at a passing raft
where reflections of ourselves
wave back a tear stained flag
hung from a rope of onions.**

**Waving to the flippers of
seven silver silkies who
have tracked our wake all day,
now going separate ways.**

**Waving to children with gold
eyes upon a seaside carousel
who persue one another in
stationary joy with screams of laughter.**

**Waving at a superior one step epoxy,
good for bonding stainless steel to water.
Good for gluing the shoreline to the sea.**

**Waving at an Italian
organ grinder in a skip.
His ape returns our wave
with his glass beaded cap.**

**Waving at a public nuisance
spraypainting the rainbow and
to seagulls circling counter to the
spinning wake of the Marie Helena.**

**Waving to a dark steamer,
dim even by unclouded sun.
Something waves back, or
perhaps it is a curtain.**

**Waving to the crucified
who lifts a finger in reply.
Waving to a blue, blue island which
was once our heart's desire.**

**Waving to a solitary gunman,
whose eye, magnified, winks
from the crosshair sight
trained in our midst.**

**Waving to an inflatable giraffe
bearing a poet in beret and shades
reciting, beating holy hell**

out of a conga drum.

**Waving to a foiled villain,
cloak and tophat streaming,
hissing as he twirls the points
of his elaborate mustache.**

**Waving, waving, waving
at a lei of golden blossoms
suspended in mid air,
poised in indecision.**

**When we'd finished waving,
we danced to the creak of
an iron gate; danced to the clank
of the lid upon a boiling kettle.**

**We danced to the squeek of
chalk upon a blackboard,
breathing the sweet powder
of pounded erasers.**

**We danced to the whistle of
a carpenter stripping paint
and to the horns and sirens
of a falsified alarm.**

**We danced to the deep groan
of shifting continental plates
and to the muffled notes of
a jukebox in a hurricane.**

**We danced to the whine
of a dentist's drill and
the crunch of steps in
fresh powdery snow.**

**We danced to the howl of
a spook from out a watery grave
and to the slither of its
slimey seaweed chains.**

**We danced in white and
scarlet ephods
on the ashes of our Teraphim.**

**We danced to the rippling cadence
of a thousand string guitar;
the deck awash in music, with
treble clefs of foam conducting.**

**We danced to the keen whine
of selective devastation, to a
world innocent of roses groaning
beneath a deep bowed bass.**

**We danced to the lullaby wail
of one almost but never quite
entirely present whom we have
loved but cannot fathom.**

**We danced upon logs of teak,
mahogany, ironwood and ebony.
The visor of the sky opened at perihelion
spreading to each horizon.**

**And when we'd finished dancing,
we broke down and wept.**

**We wept for crimson laces
in green leather boots.
We wept at a full ketch
of sardines and at the
pipe smoke of three fishermen
in animated conversation.**

**We wept because it so
rarely rains in dreams.
Our tears were fat, warm
and blue by reflected sky.**

**We wept for a three bar
jackpot in a ten cent
one armed bandit spitting
dimes and ringing bells.**

**We wept forlorn, for long,
forever; caught our tears
in tiny crystal bottles
with blue glass stopples.**

**As we continued weeping,
our raft began to spin,
faster, faster, blurring like
a pinwheel in a hurricane.
We hold, we slip, we slide
as the Marie Helena
discharges passengers by**

centripetal force.

**Goodbye! we cry to one another.
Forgive these imperfections,
these tears of self pity and
these infinite regressions.**

**Some hold hands, some fly
off seperately, some by
fours and threes to the
place in which they land.**

**Some land in a haystack
in mid-summer Somerset.
Some land in boxcars
rattling through the Klondike.**

**Some land in covered wagons
moving west, some land in
a borax mine amidst the
clatter of mule teams.**

**Some fall down chimneys
on Christmas eve,
brush the soot from
scarlet suits and chuckle.**

**Some fall breathless onto
a seaside carousel
among the gold eyed children
chasing one another endlessly.**

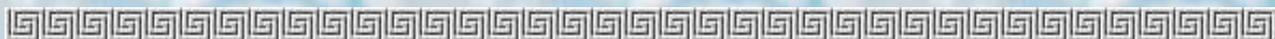
**Some fall on the desert
and crawl across the sand
into a promising mirage
that speaks of water.**

**Some, or none, or is it one?
land upon a blue island. beneath
white clouds against blue sky
rising from blue sea.**

**After a week's unfolding
many things have changed.
It is time now to
change them back again.**

**It is still true, in spite of
the flight of the Marie Helena,
still true, that it rarely,
very rarely, rains in dreams.**

Robert Hunter 1985



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