

The Human side of Nature

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Under the Bridge

Do you remember that shaky, old bridge
With massive stone buttresses where you
Roused me to the glories of the underside?
You accepted the green slime and mould,
And declared this mythical mass, beautiful.

We gazed at the shadowy world below,
To the opaque water, callow and deep,
Where the vertical and horizontal meet,
Where firmness and fluidity reassemble,
Fixed yet flowing, a haunting, terrifying
And beautiful metaphor about what? Us?
Our culture, our ideas, our unconscious?

I had no idea how the word beauty could
Describe this odd assortment of material,
Or how you knew that obscure vegetation
Grows in the depths of this stuff; its black
Flowers only blossoming in the darkness.

You converted dim matter into gentle reverie.
Mysteriously, you knew all this, while I, lost
And shaky, isolated solids, abandoned them.
Artefacts in my dreams were immobile, inert
Stuff, foreign to my nature. I left them dangling.
After our time on the bridge, material was no
Longer an imaginative deficiency I suffered from.

Someone said we have to go down to grow wings.
I was born borderline. I knew it could go either way.
Life was tough, so I went the hard way, it felt easier.
That's OK for now. Who knows what happens later?
We just prepare ourselves for stories and changes.

The Human side of Nature

John Ashbery and Janas Salk both said
There's nothing specific for us to do;
Our wisdom arrives by necessity.
Some growing is crucial, but this we do
Inherently, just by evolution;
We can simply submit to acceptance,
Learn how to anticipate the future,
Track the rhythms of growth and submit to
Inclinations that dance fandango for
Well-being and flamenco for the cells.

We can hear through bones, as well as the ears,
And the spellbinding, multi-layered tales
Told by old shamans cultivate benign
Instincts for our future's broadmindedness.
When frequent blunders become more acute
It is time to start swinging from the heart.
As new loves are born, there is no need to
Immunize against the negative swoon,
The old way of judging is out, it was
Never kind to flowers or buoyancy.

Having experienced the infection,
Shun old paths and the acceptance of fear,
We'll easily recognise the pattern
Of lethargy when connections increase.
Keep open, keep scanning, grow a thin skin,
Have a bird's eye view and a worm's eye view,
Elbow out the dominance of cash flow,
We've no need to carry investors.
Merge with the creative neutral misfits
Who practice positive simplicity.

Discontent expresses the driving force,
But constant interference is the norm;
Let the next evolution process be
Upon us, in us, with us and through us.
Make affection the newfound bravery,
Multiply magnanimous attention,
Send reasoning to the intuition's
Department, observe the new unfolding,
Assist what's unsupported and learn how
To breeze with time at perception HQ.

Attend wholeheartedly to unlearning,
Start giving evolution a purpose.
We're ripe for falling steadily into
Ourselves, making each new day a life-span.
Anticipate the future; it's fine now
To stumble upon self-consciousness.
We had wisdom, without too much knowledge,
Then we developed fear, replaced benign
Casualness with scary risk forecasts and
Stopped the good old carefree buzz from humming.

If we have no wisdom to govern the
Knowledge, let the custard pies be our guide,
They will aid the inception of slapstick.
We have the right genes for this and they will
Activate fast when people are ready;
This affirms the collective certainty
That each of us has a different purpose.
Anything is only worth the candle
If you make frisky hearts the starting point,
And celebrations of beauty the norm.

The Sound of Dissent

We started the next test by buying up
Buyers of a uniform quality
And discovered why these miserable
Old roosters always crowed loudest and won.
Don't misjudge blunt daggers, but do accuse
False astrology on the working knights;
Their resting place is now a power belt.

It's the seat of honour they want and cry
Not guilty behind a team of armed guards.
These days they use long endurance tests to
Block the aural remedies of bird song;
Throw out clockwork birds that gaze at flowers
Just to be and bee and be seen to be
A base, bass guitar accompaniment.

When they add gain to their bran at breakfast,
The men in property girdles find it
Quicker to sing the tricky old hymns at
Daily mass while making dishonest deals
About no pay for the student nurses.
Politics is just a cavalry raid
On voters who start the day with feeling.

It's time to fight this bunch of testicles
Because their auditors trick modest hearts,
Knowing for sure they'll get the top cottage
And control the arrogant and haughty
Dice to win all the bright, heavy gold stuff.
Dynamic gals always expose deceit,
The dull, plagued with doubt, embroider sunshine.

Rumours for Tumours

It is rumoured that all objects
Living in you and out have an
Intrinsic imagination.
This is talked of in fairy tales.
Think of your forebears who escaped
Sorcery with the ancient art of
Projecting identity; they could
Settle their endangered soul in
A tree, threat free, to return again
When calm times favoured connection.

Could you now proceed by walking
Buoyantly into poetry,
Where your body cells commune with
Matter's unspoken narratives?
Could you remove tumours using
This ancient intelligence?
Trust objects, call them your allies,
Teach them to listen and fight for you.
Inspire healthy cells to pester
And break-up your foreign bodies.

To make your body a safe haven,
Forget sympathy, breed great love.
Take all the sunlight you've fed on
High above the clouds, load it in your
Heart's light-projecting ray gun and
Shower the tumours whenever
You have the energy - always
Imagining their surprise and
Magical dissolution, like
Wet snails melting into thin air.

A hundred smiles a day

Living freely, children love to
Test our receptive playfulness.

In the eyes of the ancients, you're
Still young, so gather and unwind.

Today the newly opened dawn
Put fireworks back into cereals.

For sure a spark of energy will
Make a hundred smiles a day.

As for the way, who knows this yet?
First, we must cast out reluctance.

No-one readily shakes the long,
empty sleeve of unwillingness.

The sun is first in, then it's out;
Like this nothing remains static.

The moon facilitates the winds,
So, sit here while I make the tea.

We will enquire of each other,
Then neither of us sits alone.

Love can't enjoy even rhythms,
That works for dancing and singing.

We will drop our eyes to share our
Lifblood and help each other grow.

If love is a state of mind, why
Not go for the upbeat joyride?

This twinkling may be imprecise,
But tomorrow's sparks will shine out.

Love excites cells and the tempo
Of its vibration causes euphoria.

Songs from the woodpile

A girl runs to fabled woods aiming
to sing a forest of songs.

Dreaming of applause, she takes up
residence on a woodpile.

For her it's cheap to repeat verses
from popular chorus lines.

She desires potential, expansion
and radical improvisations.

What happens is that improbable
verses pop up out of the blue.

Secretly she imagines that others
Might like to join in, but who?

Looking straight ahead, she has no
intention of singing a ballad.

She sings oblique medleys that lack
any detectable connotations.

For her, ambiguity and wonder
should sit high on the horizon.

She has never tested sung surprises
on a new audience before.

Her refrains anticipate harmony,
but her voice flies far from it.

Had an audience been present
they'd have labelled it tuneless.

She looks round for kinship and
emotion without keeping time.

She is oblivious to her vanishing
chords and musical silences.

Symphonies resound inside her
head, but her voice is silent.

It doesn't germinate songs as the
chest of another singer would do.

She bonds with rhythms, oblivious
to the merits of transmission.

They rang out once before when she
had fasted from speech for refuge.

The songs she dreams of are subtle,
Personal, ambiguous and obscure.

She can't even imagine singing
them to the people she's closest to.

She sings to the trees about things
It's just not possible to say.

Her unobtrusive sounds fall far
short of anyone who has ears.

In the silence of recovery, she
hears solitude residing inside.

This is a deep place where tongues
fail because intention succeeds.

Her sounds express nuanced truths
that the trees alone understand.

The forest bathes in this sonorous
invitation echoing beyond the bark.

The leaves applaud, they wave,
flicker and join with the singing.

It's rare for woodpiles to pulse
with song or breathe with breath.

Three Sonnets – out of Keats, Shakespeare and Coleridge

True minds for you

When I have fears that I may cease to write,
Lead me not to the marriage of true minds,
For the melodies will clog up my ear
And my pen will join with my teeming brain.
Admit convolutions; song does not sing
Like mawkish romance, or the murmuring
Heard from a wall of earnest, hard bound books -
Sounds alter seasons, while judgement must hear
A hornet's nest on the first day of Spring.
Risk it for wonders that can fill your core,
Bend with removal men, freely add more:
Rhythmic sounds of sev'ral senses will change
The dark starry face of night, while thinking -
Having aimed it straight - will sleep near the mark.

A fancy fling

If your lonely breast rouses a mindful tear,
A huge cloudy symbol of high romance
That looks on tempests and is never shaken,
Then treat forlorn thought to a fancy fling
And know that you will never have to trace
Every wandering star back to base.
Find fragrance and dew under fortune's wing,
Mix shadows with the magic hand of chance,
Whose worth's unknown, though its rule is taken,
And play 'til your sickly doubts are drooping.
After you feel the fairness of this hour,
Sing not the fool through rosy lips and cheeks,
Blossom anew and thrill at the news that
You can turn a lonely breast to fancy.

Love shifts your age

Bend his sickle, invite the compass more;
Duty's strains keep you in memory's dream
Where bright fairy power hardly ever goes.
Love shifts your age, not by filling up weeks
With pale forms of past delights lived by eyes
That can't reflect on zeal in the bedroom,
But by building lights round your edgy gloom.
Paint a peach on love's pale cheek, try surprise,
Start anew in the wide, wide world and think...
If this be error and upon me proved,
That pleasure's smiles are faint and beautiful lies
Voiced to cut love to nought before it sinks,
I never sang, nor no man ever loved
Or pictured a rainbow over a stream.

Three Poems

Nothing is too small

A hairpin of gold wards off the cold,
subtle music sounds when I wrap myself
in a silk shawl: nothing is too small.

In this game of consequences my
duplicitous imagination, like the sunset,
manages to heat the old villages by the lake.

Hidden

In the autumn twilight, my words blend their rhythm
with bird song, dance across bridges and linger in the
summer pavilions, free from their birthplace on paper.

Those that fell outside the garden were covered in blood.
Feeling the shame others should feel, I gathered up my words
And returned them to my heart where I could nurture them.

Decisions

As we were landing on the African
continent, I wondered if now was the time
to admit to my wife that on the morning
I decided we should move our home south
I'd mistaken a cloud of fruit flies for
A swooping swarm of migrating swallows.

Dithering sleep-walk

Another year gone
And still I languish,
Drinking in memory before it dies.

Attending to dreams,
Neglecting the house,
Leaving the garden to butterflies.

Sleep is quite hopeless.
I am a scarecrow,
Standing stock still, with buttons for eyes.

Haunted by nightmares,
The road without rest,
Searching for you to undo goodbyes.

Dithering sleepwalk,
Past the dull wasteland,
Lost, but still eager to fantasize.

Leaving no traces,
Frozen winds blowing,
I cherish the dream, despite the lies.

My hopeless yearning,
Hits fading echoes
On distant peaks and never survives.

Three Haiku

Look for accidental gardens
and talk to the Buddha
as if she's your girlfriend.

*

After the subway's
electronic noise
the sound of steam.
Breathe deeply.

*

A little old woman
In dirty old coat.

With heavy old bags
Of useless old junk

Crawls on old knees
Past the Prada store.

Nadir's strategy to surprise war

1. The rush and billow of fantasies

I'm eighteen and cracked. After the bombings
I can no longer call upon the wit of fantasy to
Inspire sensitivity. I have now lost the impulse
To forge strategies that could keep life alive.

In ancient times, they knew how to honour
Dreams, how to draw their spirit into visions
And play in the rush and billow of fantasies.
They trusted the deep is there for the asking.

I've failed to honour desires, allowing endless
Atrocities to trigger dull colours and muddled
Tones that cannot be enlivened. I must repair
These failed connections with affection or die.

But how? Sympathy's potential does not resonate
In this embattled land. We've lost it. War makes
Us too artless for tenderness. We endure days of
Panic that can never sanction delicate encounters.

I yearn for fanciful dreams, but they're beyond reach.
The inclination to arouse emotions, prompt fantasy,
Re-ignite empathy and excite warmth has evaporated.
My one victory is to sing myself to sleep among ruins.

2, Injured potential

A medical hand softly caresses my
Shoulder, which now revels in the fair
Touch and inspires prodigious feelings
To rise up, each magnifying the other.

The revelation of this momentarily
Hijacks the heavens and hurls flashes
Of certain and uncertain sentiments
At me until I am gulping at the air.

Romantic spirits have been snoozing
Beneath the earth, feeling my evasion
And neglect. Now they've twisted back
To front, restoring my fervent reactions.

The potential is everywhere, inviting
Fresh horizons. Sensitivity, mood and
Delicacy, all, in concert, lean towards
A touch becoming a fortifying embrace.

When the doctor discharges me, I walk
Solitary through the ruined metropolis.
Those who whisper lovingly are in their
Sanctuaries. I sense my reverie sliding.

I'm in danger of extinction and I haven't
Even started. Standing still, I re-assemble
Thoughts and try to move on. No words of
Comfort will enable another step from me.

3. No antidote for the ache

Each night I anticipate the doctor's touch
Waiting always for the hand, but there
Is no antidote for the ache of yearning.

My fiery zeal is in ruins among the ruins,
Leaving trivial memories and a few dreary
Outlines intent on confronting one another.

My fervour, having flown this way and that
Into the air, now leaves its shrapnel around
The dark, desolate wreckage I'm huddled in.

My appetite has dissolved into shadows. No
Longer will I put my finger on the pulse or hear
Tones that beckoned my spirit and led me on.

The ambience, more tranquil than I imagined,
Is the kind of serenity that comes after energetic
Secateurs have diligently secured their plunder.

A lifeless silhouette of my ambitions haunts me,
Making mundane life a series of dry, shattered
Potholes that deny any notion of a finishing line.

I scatter my crushed debris of desired affection
Everywhere to prevent it turning back on me.
Inquiry was the old way out and it always failed.

The debt can't be paid off, but still I yearn to return
To tranquil days, to re-learn lessons of the endless
Opportunities and appeals of the heart's conquests.

I imagine there are persevering pioneers who will
Travers stormy deserts, steering a confident course
To exhilarating futures, trusting in what lies ahead.

But I doubt such a champion is hiding inside me.

4. The vibrant firmament

I want the full range, devotion, fervour, zest and
A collage of bright hues that can fill the heavens.

I want incisive action that prevents my cursors
From converging on conflicts that inhibit dance.

I want this world, this excited sphere, to be
A magnificent stage set that isn't improbable.

I want music of shared gaiety and pleasure,
A song that will light the vibrant firmament.

I want the delights I imagined in earlier days,
An eagerness and a zeal that are everywhere.

I want to flavour my outer limits, to add new
And exuberant expressions to my vacant gaze.

I want deep red waves tipped with honey
And passions of every rhythm to swing to.

I want quick-eyed adventures and long slow
Embraces, giving reign to unexplored desires.

I want days of crazy randomness and not have
Urgent signals demanding that it's time to hide.

I want to live in a smiling house of sensations
Where talk is an incessant wealth of cadences.

I want the floor of my sad defeated heart to be
The place where only vim and vigour explode.

I want hostility to end, the world to mend and
That peace which passes beyond understanding.

5. A web of intrigue

I did not have a golden youth, but I imagined and
Learned about amusement's gaze before I could walk.

Then I could blend with angels quicker than a cherub,
Then I'd weave spicy promises into a web of intrigue.
In obscurity, I moved forward. I created sensitivities
And charted new worlds for the ambiguities of touch.
The sensations came faster than a dart, from the left
And right of me, and my shady desires hurtled against
Titanic dreams, like big waves breaking on a rock face.

These days I trudge wearily out of ravaged stones,
Eyes gaping, searching for tenderness in the rubble,
For those waves of affection that effortlessly explode
And reveal or transmit some longed for enchantment.
Now nothing happens, only the options proliferate,
Reverberating in my head, and my escape from war is
To write love songs that my heart constantly remarries.

Against explosive backdrops, my thoughts become
Plays of emotional sensations, all miracles and fuss.
There are times when a radiance springs off them as
Decisively as the faultless love I long for, all marvels
And rush, but it easily plummets into the calm after
The storm, with apathy and coldness the net upshot.
This is the realm I continually return to. It strolls me
Along and puts me to sleep, always away from myself.

6. A filigree of resonance

My constant, feverish blur is punctuated with bombs
That have been prepared and dispensed out of hate.
Knowing their destination, people in palaces distribute
These explosives with no idea that hate kills the killer.

Metal and stone don't cause sparks for those who hear
Of disaster on the news, but I don't indulge envy. I try
To evoke the times before cynicism won the day, before
Ravaged dislocation inspired resentment and regret.

When every present is a veiled riddle I will linger on, I
Try to harness warm sensations and gather rhapsody to
Keep myself sturdy, but battle-weary misery burns up
Ardour and its blazes eat away kindness by the minute.

When silence surges back I'm left with disorientation.
My naive desire for soft compassion is a wilting joke,
All airy-fairy, like the filigree of resonance that remains
On the air after a distant harp has been gently strummed.

Each day I was raped. I'll never empty my brain of bleak
Orbits or embrace bubbly optimism from guys promising
Remedies for the hostility. The guarantees and rewards of
Liberty and connection come from arm's dealers in suits.

If discourse could disentangle the passions, detonating
Them in explosions of light and sound, I'd have made a
Pageant of it, but revelations can't be found here, where
Silent reflection and cold laments are the only outcome.

7. Love saunters there

Today I stand where the window once was, gazing
Out, whispering a chant; a melody to pacify fury;
A song of resistance to anguish, frailty and doubt.
Behind countless windows, across the metropolis,
Fears are known to diminish during long silences.
The gentle hugging and kissing in dwellings where
Feelings are still expressed, sweetly confirms that
Some are still attentive to the heart's ample seams.

Tongues clasp the mood and love saunters there
Without a fuss. For sure it's the fractures that will
Create the possibility of foundations. Even though
My scarred face, battered limbs and blotched skin
No longer inspires attraction, I repeatedly urge my
Lovable self to rise up, to unearth sustaining peace.

While my conviction waits to be yanked into the night
A truck with broken wheels hits its final resting place.
Inside, a couple hug, escaping multiple interrogations.
All existence is here: a merger of amorous beginnings
And fancying, like blossom dancing in spring; like the
Interactions we wobble over, before gaining our poise.

I allow myself to believe in love, in the same way colour
Targets your eyes, confronts your prickly outlook and
Hurls you brusquely over some unexpected precipice.
I hardly recognise myself when my feet return to earth;
The colour has reconstructed me and prepared me for
New connections, a sense that my aspirations might fly
And make the same kind of racket my lost longing does.

Artists reckon that new thresholds are expressed in an
Idiom called colour and mostly it's discovered by accident.

8. Equilibrium overlaps

Sensations battle: too much remains dark.
Untamed fears seize wavering emotions
And equilibrium either hides or overlaps.

Ultimately there's no computation between
Desire and anguish; it's a ludicrous equation
That drives explorers to seek uncharted land.

I can't determine who's been rewarded or what
Remains unsettled, so it's impossible to blame
My violation on anything I can sensibly gauge.

I sit on, innocent among the rubble, waiting for a
Heart that radiates attraction. I imagine it being
Blown here from the desert on a fortuitous wind.

The Meeting House

1. When memory breathes

Waking up in morning shadows, Céline
Senses what could ripen and grow in her.
She remembers sunlight in her dreams and
Sounds of affirmation; implying that
This old earth might have started to ring out.

Dancing with new determination, she
Greets the vigour of her budding spirit,
Knowing that the nameless hour has arrived;
That eternal hour, when she'll stop looking
At the planet through the eyes of a child.

What was dreaming confusedly in her
Eyes before is now a determined glint;
Her resolute grin clearly affirms it.
With growing anticipation, she sees
Visions of a life she has not yet lived.

Gazing from her bedroom window she sees
The new Meeting House over the rooftops.
She hopes the chance of visiting today
Will awaken long lost memories and
Breathe air into her imagination.

Approaching the House, Céline hears soothing
Sounds pulsing in waves and presumes this is
How the embracing walls invite their guests.
Fountains feed a slender moat, their tinkling
Splashes tuning her to its harmony.

She hears multi-layered vibrations in
Endless variations and sees visions
That wash over her in swells of strange calm,
Mixing a taste of comprehension with
A profound compulsion to laugh out loud.

She knows how to sing in her head, but she
Can't explain how these sounds speak to her.
It's no surprise to Céline that certain
Structures can sensitise guests in this way;
She has played reverie like this before.

Celine believes she feeds on the future;
For her, vague inspirations are a feast.
She knows how to go deep within herself,
Sense what architectural walks summon
And how these journeys affirm her nature.

2. How the world fills its heart

Revived and grateful to her reveries
Céline blesses herself at the threshold,
Vows to stay close to her heart and steps on
A simple bridge spanning the slender moat.
Entering, she breathes in the dimensions.

The walls are lightly touched by the sun's rays,
That dive through windows placed high on the wall.
The mullions rise up and spiral out
Into fan vaults, that end their journey as
Elaborate festoons on the ceiling.

Céline is charmed by the horizontal
Glazing bars that inhale and exhale in
Waves of growth and deposit on the wall;
A dance of colour and rhythm that swims
Into the knots and weaves of the ceiling.

Feint glimmers of indistinct blue light glow
Through the roof's web of interlacing lines
And become dart-like shafts that cover
The marble floor with a multitude of
Fragmented, subdued and scattered sparkles.

From a richly carved seat nestled into the
Wall, Céline gazes at the nature-like
Chamber wondering how the numinous
Half-light creates this solemn silence and
How it offers the generous welcome.

Like birds suddenly waking and taking
Flight, sounds ring out as sweet as silver bells.
They come from nowhere; not faint sounds, but a
Music that fills the heart, making the space
A dense mass of resonant vibration.

Sounds come out of the air, they come up through
The ground and they come out of her body.
The girl sits, eyes closed, legs swinging gently,
Imagining she is roaming through the
Stratosphere, way past the transient stars.

New winds are blowing from distant mountains,
Winds which will clear mists mustering in streets.
Céline senses that water, which has long
Festered in forgotten wells, is flowing
Again, washing the air with a fresh scent.

This girl, nine years old, with the folly of
Love in her walk and poetry on her
Lips, smells perfume on the air and declares
That this must be how the world has filled its
Heart from the very beginning of time.

3. When the sun becomes a painter

Guests arrive at one of four doors as though
They have come to dance, but at sunset new
Forms of provisional theatre begin;
The sun loses its brightness and the hall
Is soon enveloped in thick golden light.

When the twilight begins to flatten out,
Windows take on the onset of darkness
With colourful prospect. During the day,
The sun was a shining architect, but
At dusk, it's a pensive backdrop painter.

The last rays of light are offered like gifts
From a heavenly host, a fluid dance
Of intense radiance and sombre light,
But during twilight, windows, once opaque,
Become a stage for the world's shadow play.

As the luminous sun drops behind the
Roofs, Céline dances with these narratives,
But when the cosmic disc shivers and sinks
Behind the earth, the performance lives out
The final scenes of a short-lived daydream.

4. Delicate traces of connection

Today, Céline was at peace, in love with
A building's heart and at home she tries to
Capture the scene by drawing the promise
Of sunrise and the longing of dusk, but
Her coloured pencils do not assist her.

Her strokes are a profusion of twisting
Contours, not the sparkling ceiling nor the
Gentle waves in the walls. Absorbed by her
Intention, she hopes her rhythmic lines will
Bring honour, but they bring tangled mayhem.

She aims her consciousness at the end wall,
Making strangely waved and indented shapes,
But she is thwarted. She tries long wisps of
Delicate tracery, gossamer-like
Lines that fill the ceiling, but they're a mess.

Disenchanted with her dense mass of strokes
And suspecting her page is an eyesore,
Céline uses tubes of paint to daub spots
On the dark wildness, trying to mimic
The rich abundance of light from windows.

The promise of growth is a losing fight,
Her lavish reveries and subsequent
Ambition produce nothing of merit.
Céline, certain that cosmic ambition
Must somehow be possible, remains calm.

As her lone exertion and brisk dreaming
Do not fill the page with delight and grace,
She takes the view that the atmosphere was
Achieved by benign spells; how else could it
Lure all with its flawless invitation?

Céline's father says the Meeting House is
A robust structure of sound and light and
The many thousands of sparkling stars on
Her page is a moving expression of
Its delicate traces of connection.

Céline puffs, she wants harmony, but he
Insists the drawing is genius, sweet
Enough to lift the nature of us all.
She sought approval, but he received her
Love and for him, there is nothing finer.

The Dream of Nausicaa

While, Nausicaa, the king's daughter, lay asleep, a goddess came with less commotion than the gentle wind at her window and whispered close in her ear.

Careless Nausicaa, how can you let your garments lie unclean when your wedding day is so near? You must go to the river at daybreak and wash all your clothes.

Her parents gave mules and a coach, food and wine and she set off with her maids to the river. There they unharnessed the mules and set them free to graze.

They trod the garments in the river until they were clean, dried themselves, laid the fabric out to dry in the sun and sat together to enjoy their refreshments.

Nausicaa sang to the maids, her voice as sweet as a silver bell, until Odysseus came out of the sea, stark naked. The maids ran, but Nausicaa covered her eyes.

Odysseus picked up a branch to cover himself and gazed at her, dumbfounded, imagining she must be a queen, for she had beauty, elegance and majesty.

To approach you like this is not my intention. I was twenty days at sea and three days in storms until the winds threw me overboard with nothing but my skin.

Pity me, dear queen, give me something to hide my nakedness and tell me where I might go to find refuge here. And he stared long at her and she stared at him.

You seem an honest man and since misfortune has befallen you, I will find clothes for you and escort you to the city. Wash in this river while I ask my maids.

Odysseus fell into a dream that Nausicaa's singing had inspired. He lay in the river talking to himself and walked up and down the beach to dry his body.

He wanted to contemplate the meaning of his feelings alone, but hearing a noise directly behind him, he turned to see Nausicaa and jumped and she jumped.

Years later, Odysseus still speculated how she could give him the kind of embarrassment that kept him dumb in her presence for a time beyond counting.

She had the eyes of a woman born and bred by seas unchanging, yet never the same, unfathomable, yet always inviting, eyes that said she was made for love.

Hers was a figure tremulous with inviting grace, a countenance perfect in its form, full of a natural dignity, yet quick to each emotion and connection.

The mountains had sheltered and nourished her and she coloured like a flower from those hills; at times the pallor of surprise, at times the flush of shyness.

Had she been ordinary he'd have met her square; but there was confusion in his utterance and his manner. Madam...pardon...I was...stirred...by...your singing...

Her silence and smile saw the mirth in the ridiculous nature of this chance meeting. It was her proud calm that made his statement bolder than he'd expected.

I was aroused by your singing and imagined I floated above the sand. It now seems appropriate, with your permission, that I gain my sense and return to earth.

The wind, eddying noisily along the bay, took his daft words. The light penetrated the clouds and a darkish cloud gulped up the blackness and slowly dispersed.

Perhaps she did not hear or fully understand, for she hesitated a moment or two as if pondering, not a whit astonished or abashed, with her eyes directly on him.

Odysseus wished he had lived a cleaner life. He felt there were lines upon his face, betraying him. Her heart was in her eyes, even Odysseus could see that.

He stepped back as if making a move to re-enter the sea and escape. I was just... he began and stopped, not knowing what he should say to explain himself.

Nausicaa knew he was bound for home, intent upon returning to his wife. He was restless and he padded about as if the sand was burning the soles of his feet.

With barely two drops of blood in her lips, Nausicaa tried to laugh, faltered and eventually failed. Taking something from her pocket, she held it out to him.

Odysseus could not get the meaning of her laugh, strained as it was. He did not understand. He was smart among men, but slow in the ways of women.

It's foolish I am, Nausicaa began, I do not know why I do this, but I had a strange dream last night, and amid much whispering I was told to give you this.

He was thinking that maybe the young woman's reason was wandering when, suddenly, she placed a square piece of elaborately sewn cloth into his hand.

Before he could guess, his fingers closed upon it and he felt there a coin. He opened the cloth, held the disc up and gazed at an ancient piece of the king's gold.

Nausicaa's eyes sparkled and Odysseus understood everything. First, he kissed the gold and then he kissed Nausicaa. These two could have been floating.

Hearing her maids running across the sands she turned to them, but they stopped a little distance off. Why be shy, do you think the man will carry you off?

By evil weather he was forced to come here. Have you brought him clothes he can wear into the city? The maids walked on and Nausicaa, turned to Odysseus.

On this island, we live lightly. Singing, shipping and cooking is our pleasure. As for anything that might cause disagreement, its dead, we care not a pin for it.

She handed the clothes to Odysseus. While dressing he was afraid that men would ask why a handsome fellow from nowhere was accompanying Nausicaa.

Where did she find him? Must he marry her? Is he from some far country newly landed here? Is he wandering to seek his fortune? Maybe he is a God.

Did he descend from heaven to live with her always? Does she think no-one is good enough at home? All the best men here seek her. Does any know his name?

Nausicaa declared, it will be to your shame and mine if we ride together; you should enter the city alone if you mean to be conveyed by my father to your home.

When you are near the palace you will see a grove of poplars and when you have arrived you will see my father's vineyard. A child will say where Alcinous is.

Go in and on, until you find my mother sitting by the fire-side, spinning. My father's chair will be close by. Pass by it to my mother and ritually kneel before her.

If you win her favour, you will be given your passage home. Farewell, guest. Even in your own land you'll remember me, for you owe me the price of your life.

Nausicaa turned away. Odysseus, a shiver down his spine, his tongue dumb, flicked the whip. The mules moved swiftly and Nausicaa's maids followed on foot.

There is no finer place for love than here. Where the little stream enters the wider bay, it is possible to sit upon the sand and love as the bird loves, unnoticed.

Nausicaa, in a moored boat, imagined she was out at sea with her husband at the tiller. She snuggled up, glad to be in his arms, singing, her voice in his chest.

Together, beautiful and free, they glided like the wild, white swan, round the coast and into lonely creeks, where only the cliffs could hear her wedding song.

They glided by shallows where birds sang among the reeds, fish jumped in the pools and water from brown mountains stained the white froth of incoming tides.

Then Nausicaa launched her boat and drifted. She felt his breath in her hair and sang to a moon swinging by the stars, filling the heavens with a rosy contentment.

She sailed in silence. The little waves lapped softly, indulgent with her illusion that this was her wedding day and the night was generous with her imagination.

The enchanting sound of a bride's voice, sweet as liquid gold, filled the air with resonance. This sound could silence children and wring the hearts of men.

Entente cordiale

A collage using, in sequence, the first 224 words of Swann's Way, by Marcel Proust, The Geographical History of America by Gertrude Stein and A Damsel in Distress by P. G. Wodehouse

In the month of February were born Washington, Lincoln and I. Inasmuch as the scene of this story is sometimes that historic pile, Belfer Castle, in the county of Hampshire, it would be an agreeable task, when I had put out my candle, to open my eyes with a leisurely description of the reason why they would close so quickly.

These are ordinary ideas. I had for some time gone to bed early. I had not even time to say "place," followed by some notes on the history of "I'm going to sleep." If you please, these are ordinary ideas. An hour later, The Earls of Marshmoreton, who have it since the fifteenth, thought that the century owned it and time was to go to sleep.

Let us not talk about disease, but about death. Unfortunately, in these days of rush, hurry would awaken me. I was still in, and to blow out the light, a novelist half works at a disadvantage. I imagined he must leap into the middle of his tale with as little delay as he would try to put away the book which would employ my hands in boarding a moving tramcar.

I had been thinking all the time, if nobody had to die I must get off the mark while I was asleep. With the smooth swiftness of a jack-rabbit, otherwise surprised, people throw it aside and while lunching, go out to picture what I had just been reading of palaces. How would there be room enough for any of us who now live?

But my thoughts had run into a channel of their own, until I may briefly remark, I myself seemed actually to have lived, to have become the present Lord Marshmoreton, the subject of my book, that is a widower of some forty-eight years.

We could never have been. He has two children, a church, a quartet, rivalry between François I and Charles V and a son, Percy Wilbraham Marsh. Lord Belpher, who is on the brink of this impression. If all the others had not died there would have been no room for his twenty-first birthday.

Now the relation of human nature to the human mind is this and a daughter, Lady Patricia Maud Marsh, who is just twenty. Human nature does not know this. Human nature cannot know this. What is it that human nature does not know? Human nature does not know that it would persist for some moments after I was awake.

It did not disturb my mind that the chatelaine of the castle is Lady Caroline Byng, but it lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact. If everyone did not die there would be no room for those who live now.

Lord Marshmoreton's sister, who married the very wealthy colliery owner, Clifford Byng, a few years before the candle was no longer burning it. Human nature cannot know this. Now the relation of human nature to the human mind is this. People say she hastened that which human nature cannot know. This would begin to seem unintelligible. But the human mind can; it can know this.

She has a step-son, Reginald and then in the United States there is more space. Unkind as the thoughts of his death, where nobody is than where anybody is, a former existence must be to reincarnate a spirit. This is what makes America what it is.

Give me time to mention these few facts and I am done on the glorious subject of my book. Does it make human nature in America what it is? Of the past, I will not even touch. The Marshmoretons would separate from me, leaving me free itself to choose if not.

It does make the human mind in America what it is, whether I would form part of it or no. But there being so much space in America where nobody is, has nothing to do with this; and if nobody had ever died at the same time my sight would return.

