MAUREEN PAXTON

Four Poems from *Ordeal's Calendar (A Monologue between Eros and Thanatos)*

Dream #33 Bosch-Drawn:

It's night
and Eros flies terrified
through nightmare's metropolis.
This is Europe, the Middle Ages.
In a Bosch-drawn dream,
grim houses pitch and sway;
the earth quakes.
Narrow streets are arranged
on a drunken grid
so intersections
are fluid and changing.
Hand over their faces,
other runaways ricochet
off walls like imbecile marbles.

She is naked. Her robe
has turned coat and taken flight
as a bat. The traitor garment,
no longer is yellow but black.
Sweat streams and freezes
on her fevered body.
The bat will kill
everything it can; it's out
for blood and everyone flees
to a field beyond the city
for safety. In a hurried grid
the hunted lie down.

Dream #38 True Love of Death's Life:

Bitch woman! Human ditch!
Water of my blood! Mud of my gut!

I am bereft, do you hear?
Baby put to sea on a punctured
palm leaf. Infant floating
to the world's edge, snug
as a duck in an oil spill.

I WANT MY MAMMA, NOT THE WANT!

I'd sell my head
for her home-baked bread, waxed
eyebrows and fluttering hands.
But who took she as the beach away?
Who murdered the bank in the night?
Who grabbed the womb from my sleep
and left this crawler no choice

but to leap? A greased pig,
life eludes, its runaway rot
oinking as it runs —

She was the garden,
the gardener. The pointillist,
the point. She lived as bread
to her bairn; meat to her little man;
hand holding down the beast by its knotted mane.

Athene
to centaur, she proved guillotine
and honed civility on my skull'.

I NEED THE GNASHING! I NEED THE PAIN!

Lapsed queen, thorny witch,
love's whiplash; get your ass back to Baby,
brat hooked on habits of death!
Dream #39 A Call to Arms:

Eros sings:

Make nice!
Heal the rift!
Build bridges over hellhole’s
width, failsafe and muscular.
Drape its rails
with triumphant lilies
and orchids erect
with levelness. Stalwart,
come, kiss iceberg’s tip.
Chilled lips an inch above
arctic waters call to you,
hot-blooded ship. Intrepid
friend, our hold must keep
in order that embrace might seal.
Come, span death’s abyss and caulk
that horrid glory hole.

Forgive then —
mouth meet mouth. We two
buffing cloths, chamois cheeks,
are Brasso to a quarrel’s rust.

Dream #40 The Sting:

When Eros talks in her sleep,
I hear muck, exquisitely tooled;
jewels and gold, blender-puréed.

This self-willed deafmute desires
quiet but the bed’s burbling half,
Eros as Motor Mouth, badgers yet:

‘Face it, Deathie,
you, King of the Tied Tongue,
Dullest of the Dull, are the only
match in town left unstuck.
You possess no talents and no
imagination. Like a gerbil
nervous in the crypt, you crave
the cage’s relative liberties.

I am landlady to its shell pink key!
Sinuous custodian to all that breathes!
Your recreations however, are cheap —
claws repetitious on the wheel;
senseless shedding of Kleenex
and tissues otherwise human.’

The diatribe stings for I know
she won’t acknowledge that the sweet
perversity from which she rails
is sleep, a minute sleight-of-hand
performed by myself. A dose of Death,
immunization against and final
invitation to, I am subtle
with the batten that accumulates.

P. FLECK

Summer Thoughts (for Margaret Laurence)

An uneven day —
little clouds, sun and shadow
and sudden sun.

The sky is breathing for us
— long draughts of light and the shadow
is sadness breathing in — and blowing
cloud-puffs at the snow-cool
peaks of mountains. A cloud island
atoll turns into a harp,
unstrung, a swan rampant, a white
hound high-tailing across an azure field,
— a child-smiling kite-flying
innocence of sky.
Deck-chaired, hat over face, head
full of fractals, geometry of natural
repetitions, endless interweavings,

— Gaelic cross in the Book of Kells —
I am lost in that maze
looking for,
finding,
defining, divining
real words for things,
sous-text of the universe.
It begins to come true.
World is shifting into word, poets
into priests or prophets, or
diviners.
No,
Shadow plumb-lines to the heart
The sky stops breathing,
and shows what
sunlight
is.