



Charles Borkhuis

## SPECIAL DELIVERY

dressed to the teeth  
the poem makes an entrance  
on a broken heel and ordinary life  
limps in under the footlights  
you are invited to a ghostly striptease  
nothing up my sleeve  
but a long corridor of deep sleep

the dancer kisses the first head  
through the tunnel  
and a name is pulled out of a hat  
this could be me on all fours  
a newborn drawn  
from an alphabet of tiny bones  
or an ancient blood-smear traveler  
crawling across an empty stage

~

forms and faces pass before me  
in dancing underwater light  
welcome to an egg-white canvas  
of squiggles and swirls  
the vacuum of space  
where matter and anti-matter  
annihilate each other over dinner  
what billionth particle of matter survives  
to create the galaxies and stars  
what crumble-mouth talks me into being

now we see through the dancer's veils  
she is unscrewing her body parts  
her head is the last to fall  
on stage with an open-eyed thud

the sun shrinks to a mole  
on her forehead  
something is watching us  
her lonely head on stage  
thinks out loud

*there's too much light in this sentence  
I'm blinded by my own thoughts  
who can escape the unknown for long*

~

they give you a world to stand on  
then pull gravity out from under you  
and your stomach ends up  
in your mouth  
words will be the death of us

no wonder I sometimes revert  
to speaking in tongues  
truth can't face up to its reflection  
it wiggles away through an escape clause

the striptease is never quite over  
there's always another layer of gauze  
another leg moving under its wraps  
maybe identity is empty at its core  
but the sentence strings us along indefinitely

maybe I wasn't born successfully  
the cord between worlds never quite cut  
so I linger with the background voices  
the rattle of a child's comings and goings  
before the curtain drops  
and we are separated from ourselves  
as the audience cries *encore encore*

## GRAND ILLUSION

never quite here  
you're forever elsewhere when things happen  
welcome back stranger  
the world was destroyed and recycled  
while you were away musing about how trees  
repeat their branching fractals at different scales  
patterns hidden under what order of magnification  
the flower of a corpse opens to reveal its elegant machinery  
and your lids grow heavy between the leaves  
you nod off under a ghostly green wave  
pluck a small white feather off the underside of your arm  
and hold it up to the sun

where have you been  
what's the scale of this hidden dimension  
on its way to oblivion  
how easily we fall back into place upon waking  
and the other worlds inside this one silently disappear  
the body sewn up as if nothing had happened

spot check on reality  
that illusive labyrinth that comes and goes in waves  
the everyday shimmers and echoes  
moving toward or away from you  
calling through the canals of your inner ear  
what was your penum  
the impossible task you were given to repeat endlessly  
that set you up to twist and squirm in and out  
of your idea of yourself

not so much a question of identity  
as the mask behind it  
that speaks for you when you've grown silent  
it dares you to cut your teeth on the void  
to break its perfect symmetry and watch  
the rippling outline of a body underwater

the impression of a phantom footprint  
left after a wave has been sucked out to sea

not to worry  
in a perfect vacuum  
particles of matter and anti-matter pop into being  
and devour each other over a fast-food snack  
something keeps bouncing back from nothing  
but it's never the same something  
witness these crumpled drafts of a poem on the floor  
each more or less real than the last  
until one stands in for the rest and says

*I will be your virgil for the evening*

a guide through your memories  
of the living and the dead  
that are equally real and equally illusory  
unless your thoughts  
and the world are irreconcilable  
and we are caught in the forceps  
that tighten the scream between 0 and 1

either the world is the grand illusion or you are  
either something came from nothing  
or it was always there on a loop  
like the eternal return of a forgotten world  
that dies in sleep and is reborn  
when we newly awake

perhaps you are the fragment of an argument  
buried in dream that must be carefully exhumed  
and reinterpreted letter by letter bone by bone  
you see now why we cannot let you escape  
we may have to smash your particles into smithereens  
what is your dark matter made of  
what must we do to make your big bang whimper  
you can't elude us forever either you are a particle  
acting like a wave or a wave acting like a particle  
make up your mind which is it

you can't be here and somewhere else  
alive and dead at the same time  
unless we have made a terrible mistake