

To Posterity

A sequence of poems by
Rik Roots

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First published in the United Kingdom
and worldwide in 2011
by Rik's Sparky Little Printing Press

Smashwords Edition.

This chapbook forms part of the [RikVerse](#).
The RikVerse is a living book,
updated regularly and available for viewing online at
poems.rikweb.org.uk

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Dedicated
to those who are
gone before their time,
too many of whom
I knew and loved.

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[Manhattan Flower](#)

My tall dahlia. Scythed
by the wings of dragons,
white flies on the blue sky.

Litter caught in the storm.
My fiery bright dahlia,
it blooms: it blooms.

Switch off my cold eye. Frost
blackens its lace-vein leaves,
my dragon-axed dahlia.

Plus

Today I tested positive
for the blood plague. I watched
for corpuscle explosions
as the tech pulled more red pints
for the counting of things -
I saw no telltale fizz in the tubes.

Do the motes whistle
as they busy themselves constructing
new motes? They're happy
to theive the labours of my cells,
rip apart the curtains
of phospholipids and take the stage.

Beyond the clinic walls
a cleaner sweeps cherry petals
from asphalt - she sweats
in a slip of sunshine between clouds.
I am as numb as flowers:
I still have much sunshine to catch.

Novel

The last word typed, I thank
my characters. *'No problem,'*

says one as it plucks away
a face and wipes clean

its head. *'We are always happy
to help birth a new story.'*

Already I see a sketch of webs
I could lay on their shapes -

these dolls who halter my text
and make eyes skip through scenes.

*'I believe you know the way
out,'* the faceless one adds.

Gossip

I heard your news. A quarrel of tits
clamp claws around the sprung twigs
of the sycamore - huffs of warm air
have cracked its buds; so pale,
these new leaves, as they stretch.
The sun plays catch-me with the clouds,
a roil of damp shadows battling
across a pitch of sky. Your news -
flew from mouth to ear by wire and wave,
it sets like bark around memories.
'Why do you break us?' creak the buds
to the wind; *'why do you rip us?'*
bluster the clouds. Around the twigs
claws dig in, beaks bicker, wings flap.

Mandarins

(This being a True Account of an Occurrence taking place on the Second Floor of No. 1, Horse Guards Road, in the Offices above the Chancellor's Suite, working Necessarily Late one Evening in the Month of March, 2006)

It takes a squint to glimpse him:

don't look -
he's there! A man
who stares across the room,
stippled from his rightful time,
bemused by desks and wide glass
panes, woodless screens, sootless lights
that make his inky fingers glow.

I see him frown beneath
his tattered wig, a blot of mud
or shit still wet around his calf.

Why is he here? His arm
curls around rolled parchments
wound in cotton ribbons.

When I twitch my head
a touch, he starts, returns the glance.
See us, his eyebrows arch,

*both lost within
this Treasury, too poor
to seek escape.*

The Office as a Form of Inspiration

These angularities that pin me in
are pinned with cloth of woven mauve and I
must pin instructions here. The plastic rails
enforce confinements, one to each square cell;
there are no doors. A circle sequence keeps
me close, its arcs and sweeps a sturdy guard.

No doors - an oblong bright in blues and whites
displays an arc of planes, each green and shaped
identically from some machine within
its pole. They wave at me: *look how we break
from shells! Look how we swing in puffs and scuffs
of molecules that buff us, stroke our dance!*

No doors - I hate the dance of shapes across
instructions pinned by me to my mauve cloth.
They say: translate us while the arc sweeps low.
I bow my head and worship; fingers pray
across the coded blocks that bounce and click -
my alchemies dissect some thoughts and pin

them on a screen that feels like silk when stroked.
As sigils grow in rows I meld, become
the incantation. Between the pulpy flats
that hide my desk a cupid stalks, its jaws
are primed to stab results together, sense
from nonsense - still the fingers sweep their arc

across their sequenced numbers. Still I pray
and my release remains a sentence away.

Locus Delicti

Would you wear a killer's cardigan?
It's only wool, see, a weave of sheep
caught on needles for the looping.

And that ring, a sweetheart's gift,
has no magic; the stones glint
metaphors - a garnet's love.

Those locks of your hair I curl
in my wallet? A keepsake, no more:
a clipped crime for a stolen moment.

Slap Stick

Imagine a copse of clown-trees,
she says, with revolving bow ties
for leaves and bright red nose buds.

Do the flowers squirt brass bees
with nectar, I ask. Oh yes,
she agrees: it is a necessary prank;

how else can the shoe seeds form?
They dangle in long pairs from the boughs,
you know, and drop with the first frost

to the hard ground, slapping down
among puff balls and stinkhorns:
who painted your face so sad?

In Dark Places

Cold in the ice - sparkles on needles
shaken as chips skip from the trunk,
resin-scent curls moulting: a death
of seasons. That axe is treasured.
Old wood slots within the steel that lops
root from bole, warming the hands
that swirl it in arcs through air
as brittle as decorations.

Good will requires flames, a heap
of amber tongues licking goose meat
turned in lines over the stony pit.

We are in dark places, my love.
We can sit knee to hip and wait
beneath our stencilled angels -
but he won't come. He has no trust
in scratch-mark wings or cold hearths.

Still, I treasure these bricks, know:
our darkness has warmth, a comfort
of arms and dry cloth for the wrapping.

A stew needs more than one bean
to thicken the broth. We could plant it,
climb high and sleep in his beard tonight.

I bought you a present, wrapped
in scraps as torn as pockets. It is
- a bribe, I suppose, a new axe -
its shiny shape caught my eyes
like decorations dangled from boughs.
You can keep it by the door, if you like,
or hung on the wall where our fire burned
before I bricked it away, for safety.

The Lammas sun has gone

Beyond the glassed face, fish
swim through mulm like ghosts
who haunt cellar barrels
sifting gassed yeast broth;

I'll net you a drink, neck
the skin that sheens from nape
to blade, sift the hairs
weaving your back in whorls -

and after? There is no after.
This face is glassed, the glass
is froth; ghost-white worms
sift mulm, feed fish, swim on.

Prophets

Her pivot is her globe.
It sits between us, a gem
of unbubbled glass swirled
in translucent reflections.

Her hoops are for show:
I show her a palm, pin
my eyes to her pulled lobe
as she seeks secrets in lines.

My lode is her creased face -
matching gulleys channel anger
from the nip of her nose up;
botox could veil her pain.

'I can see money,' she says.
I can see addictions etched
in her jaundiced fingers
as they stroke my wrist.

We thank each other, sip
at thin china, guess weather.
As I leave, I see patterns
in clouds: ill omens in greys.

Things I Love About My Bed

The bole of the headpost has faces
caught in the vein of the wood, dryads
set to guard my dreams from harm.

Slats keep my flesh from sinking
into forgotten, unvacuumed carpets
and the moths who feast on threads.

I could surround my head with pillows,
helmet my skull in space-tempered
foams; one is enough for my neck.

Sheets knot my limbs to the frame,
cot me safe as I sail on breath
to the statics that wash the stars.

Reverie Inc.

We've assembled a new dream for you,
as per spec, with added colours
enamelled on the spelter frame.

The cellar is fresh-hewn, with frets
of lime for the dangling of drops:
that pool of neuroses comes gratis.

We can supply extra veneers
of your deity of choice at cost,
and laminate the clouds with eyes.

For maximum pleasure, the fancy
should be applied with even strokes
and allowed to leaven in sweat.

Remember, there's no shame in nudity,
not in your head; these strangers
who stare and chase are bespoke.

We thank you for your custom. Please
dispose of your delusions carefully
after use. Consume before midsummer.

Elemental Friend

Peter watches his lion lie
in the bucket where he set it:

first to flare is the tuft
of the beastling's tail-tip, curled
in the pail's cylindrical seam -
its tempo twitch a cub's annoyance
at the chafe of infant constraints.

Peter, too, is impatient.
He coils a smoke-rope tendril
in his lung as his toy's loin
grows tufts of lemon-lick curls.
As a chesty ember glows and dims
and glows amid the shoddy; he smiles
and shifts on his knee, and watches.

The lad claps as a collar of mane
erupts from the neck - a pride
of flames set to stalk and chase
across the dry-weave carpet savannah.
His lion looks up at the sound,
lifts a paw to let the lap
of heat sharpen claws; it pounces

at Peter, struggles to lever
its haunch across the melted rim
of its lair, leaps up to reach
the table hide where the boy
huddles with his matches; when
he proffers a hand to ruffle
the singed fur the toy roars -

a deep rumble that sets a gale
among the bedroom curtains
and drives the angel mobile
to dance on the pins of soot
snowflakes blooming the air;
across Peter's peach-fuzz wrists
a tight new glove knits to skin.

Banshee

She dabs his hot form
with damp cloths, smooths
tremors from his limbs.

*I see two faces: bliss
amid the scale hide
and eyes that sing.*

Zinc balms swathe blisters:
she wraps him in swaddle;
snow on a new-sown grave.

*My lungs rack at
each breath. She reeks
of rose and soaps.*

Wires weave monitors to skin
and graphs dance on screens;
Her claw rests on his brow.

*Cool, she is; calm.
I am at her mercy
and all is good.*

She slips away and a machine
wails an escape: his crisp
flesh shackle falls still.

Lych Woman

They hoist old grandad Clegg
across the stiles and down
the track feet first, their arms
a sheen of moonlight joined
around his final box.

Eyes closed, she sees parades
not yet come along the road,
each witnessing a source
of strength. The bench beneath
the churchyard gate is damp
against her legs, now numb
from sitting still as a ghost.

Old Clegg was good for the gossip
shared over steepened tea -
she'll miss his smutty wisdom
when he pops his clogs, she thinks.

There's more to view: A coffin
tops the hill, so small
a man can lug it alone.
Her John was four when Jesus
called him back home one day,
an autumn drowning. Thumbs
of fog massage her shoulders,
ease her sticking joints.

The last to pass is fuzzy -
just a shape of muddy light
above the path. A voice
long buried hints in her ear:
'... a crate for her who waits.'

Portsmouth Thoughts

With the marksman's lead threaded
in his spine, they took him down
to settle in the rocking dark, alert
to the cracks of battle: splinter spars;
powder pillows heft from copper store
to cannon; sharp wine in water; shouts;
sweats. He bled in his ship of skin,
three hours to reach death's dock.

Another man has no plaque, nor grave
beyond a weight of water. He has instead
a glass display, labels to mark him:
'barber-surgeon drowned with his chest.'
Here are his knives, his herbs, a leather
of shoe, some dice, some coins, a bone
nit-comb. He has no face; his blood
rusts in Solent muds. Still he was here.

This boat is all lignin bone in mist,
a preservation of what was once great,
and lost, and rescued. I pay good coin
to view her - for she is my history
as much as the bricks and stones
of the town surrounding us, the heroes
who watched these docks slip past,
a clinch in our tide's slow pulse.

To Posterity

*'Greetings. It is possible that some word of me
may have come to you, though even this
is doubtful ...' (Petrarch)*

I. For Poets Eighty Years Hence

I am not your friend.
I have no ears to hear you.

My teeth - mere rattles.
My dirk tongue - dissolved in dusts.

Your breath is not mine.
Your dreams leave me unshaken.

In myriad ways
we are separate species.

II. The Lazarus Sign

When my neighbour dies she crosses
her arms to her breast; her trembly fingers
butterfly around the sags of her neck -

*'a reflex, no more,' says the nurse
who cradles a slosh of warm plastic
bed pan. 'You should not be here*

to see it.' I nod my thanks, watch as
her hands fall still, settle in the curl
of her collapsed chest, and cool.

III. The Bones of Levissi

After the bus departs, silence. Ahead
the town invites us to walk its streets, a wreck
of tumbled roofs and weed-blown mortars stacked
within its bowl of suntan hills. Instead
we sit and read the guide, a summary
of dates and states and settlements that ripped
the artisans from hearths and tools and shipped
them overseas to Rhodes. We scope the debris

and climb a path to view the churches; here
we whisper comments, offer hands to push
ourselves through glass-less window gaps and bash
the thorny brush apart, two pioneers
discovering - a well. I look within:
an oubliette of strangers guised in grins.

IV. We Make Room in the Ground for Incomers

In Crete they pay a priest to bleach the bones before
the village gathers round to check the dead for worth;
the struts of good and pious folk are free of stain.
My bones are cracked to charcoal. I am not your friend.

[Beko CDA648FS Silver](#)

My new prize sits in a corner,
a man-tall coffin of containments
finished with spun-chrome doors
that puck-pucker when I tug at
the gully handles, then sucker back
to the square when I let go.

It is a beautiful void, my box,
a puzzle of diamond shelves
and drawers hung on white grooves,
uncluttered invitations
for the stacking of meats,
cartoned milk, pickles.

It hums at me: *see, I work
as you fight grime in wet suds.*
It wants me to feed it, let it hug
the souls of breads and cakes
in its timeless chill. So easy
to clingfilm memories and pack them

safe and fresh in its cuddle
and forget them for a while. '*Alan
would have loved you,*' I tell it,
aloud, as I turn back to my stack
of spattered plates and resume
the wiping of patterns from clay.

Painting

Walls are not blank. They soak in lives, each pore
in the mortar a pit to house outbursts and tears.

We chose the scheme together: a brush of faint cream;
a slice of simnel; a feather of fresh-hatched chick.

And so we paint: this emulsion stroke shall cover
the time we argued the length of a bottle of whisky.

I texture the colour with cobwebs, old nets to catch
forgotten meals, parties; the husks of anniversaries.

As the room grows in its new coat I follow your lines:
dab wet gloss on the skirting, wipe spats from my hair.

When it is done, we make a good memory - a kiss -
for the walls to record. A cat-hair glides in the fume.

Driving, not Driven

Did I notice the signs? Perhaps
it was the tone to your parked purr,
or the way your seat cuddled into me
as I pulled the belt to a hug
across my full-inflated chest.

At every junction you chuckled,
the choke from your old dirge gone.
Each time my hand reached down
to re-gear our touch lingered, warm.

No, I caught no sign of our truce:
the metal fretworks decking the street
stole my eyes from your dash. Today
we fought killers beyond the windshield,
partners in our driving crimes.

Anniversary

The shock wears thin
after a while, like skin
punctured once too often.

I have grown a callus
smile, wry and polite
- almost honest.

Ruby and I check my numbers
like forensic accountants,
a joint taskforce:

my flesh-economy saps
are trending higher
for whites this quarter

and I no longer suffer
blue burps after meals,
which is positive news.

About the author

Rik was born in the small village of Dymchurch on the Romney Marshes in Kent, England. Dymchurch has three Martello Towers and a station on the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Light Railway. This was Rik's world for the first 24 years of his life, except for those six terms away at college - the North East Surrey College of Technology, that is: Rik somehow managed to fail his final school exams and thus never made it to university.

Poetically, Rik has been writing since he was 14 or 15. He happily acknowledges that no work from that early period survives, thanks to a fortuitous kitchen fire which may or may not have been started deliberately. The kitchen was relatively unharmed, in case you were worrying.

Rik's major claim to 'proper' poetic fame is being part of the group that established Magma Magazine - he even edited Magma 6, for his sins. The magazine's subsequent success has nothing to do with Rik; he left the Management Board a few weeks before Magma 7 was published.

Rik's main publishing credentials are, strangely enough, in Magma Magazine. Nowadays he rarely submits poems to journals and has no plans to seek 'proper' venues for his chapbooks and manuscripts - Rik has a website, after all, which makes him very happy!

On a broader note, Rik is currently studying for that elusive degree with the Open University, and writing science fiction novels. Rik used to work for Her Majesty's Civil Service which is, he says, a perfect training ground for people wanting to write novels based on alternate realities and fantasy.

Rik currently lives in London, for his sins. His hobbies include causing trouble in various online venues and inventing languages. He also codes up websites - like this one.

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Other books by Rik Roots

The Gods in the Jungle



'Maeduul? What's wrong?'

He turned to look at the woman. She was staring at something just above them. Intrigued, he made to turn around to see what she saw.

'If you love life: don't move!' the woman hissed.

Suddenly, a flutter of fear tickled in his stomach. He could feel Delesse searching along his arm for his hand. When she found it, she grabbed it tightly.

'What is it?' he asked the woman, his whisper as loud as he dared.

'Turn your heads very slowly. Don't make any sudden movements! Don't shout or scream!'

He complied with the Servant's orders.

It was sat on its haunches no more than a couple of metres away from them, with only the boulder they had been leaning against between them. It took all his resolve to stop his muscles throwing his body down the hill.

Delesse breathed next to him: 'She's magnificent!'

He could see the outlines of muscles beneath the creature's fur; the long, sharp fore-claws resting on its hind limbs. It seemed ... interested in them.

'Dear God,' he whispered, 'it must be almost as tall as I am!'

'Maeduul, what are we going to do? Can you stand up and get the guards' attention?'

The woman didn't answer. He could see clearly now the alien-ness of the animal; the fur-clad scales that lay over its skin. From its mouth a thin, blue tongue emerged and waved through the air, as if tasting it.

'Maeduul!' he hissed. 'Do something!'

'I think,' said the woman, 'that it's up to you to do something. This little god has come visiting you for a reason.'

'What?'

'I think your contract is being blessed by the jungle itself. I think this might be a good time for you two to make a baby ...'

He couldn't move, but the woman's words seemed to mean something to Delesse. Slowly she leaned her head towards his and whispered in his ear.

'It's certainly a novel way to die ...'

Her hand let go of his, moved down to the leather enclosing his crotch. Not believing what was happening – not believing he could stiffen so rapidly while the demons of fear beat on his chest with hammers – he did as the Servant suggested: slowly; silently. Relentless until his release.

~ ~ ~

The jungle city of Bassakesh holds the keys to the future of the Vreski Empire. It is the sole source of the valuable Vedegga dye; it is also home to the mysterious Servants, who harvest the dye.

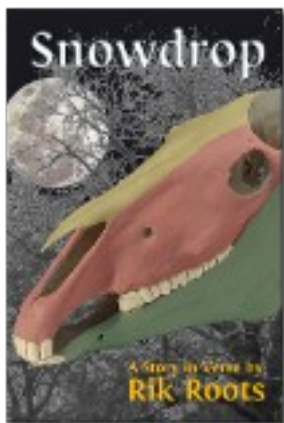
Delesse, the Bassakesh Governor's daughter, is marrying Loken, heir to one of the most powerful Clans in the Empire - whose leaders, Loken's own Father and uncle, are plotting to disrupt the dye harvest as part of their wider plans to win the aged Emperor's throne.

When those hasty plans go awry a terrible plague is unleashed across Bassakesh, bringing widespread death and chaos.

Aided by a collection of survivors and Servants, Delesse and Loken must travel through the jungles to face down and defeat the people who not only threaten the Empire's stability, but also ruined their wedding.

Set on a planet far from Earth, The Gods in the Jungle is an investigation of the drives and desires, fears and beliefs of the various peoples and classes in a crumbling society, through the eyes of those most immediately involved in events which threaten to bring an Empire to its knees.

Snowdrop – A Story in Verse



For most people, Christmas is a time of joy; for some it has become a time of lonely sorrow.

For Snowdrop, Christmas is about to become a timeless place of fear, horror – and unimaginable loss.

On the hill above the Marshes, someone watches; *some thing waits ...*