

# Breathless

Christian Rinderknecht

rinderknecht@free.fr

November 1, 2022

For the states preceding infancy.  
When we were breathless. When  
we were without light.

---

Pascal Quignard, *All the World's  
Mornings*



Like a cup of tea  
overflowing

she keeps going places  
unexpected  
beyond will and power

drawing silhouettes  
of sweet fragrance  
on the white morning

and I can't help but clutch  
at the burning tablecloth

again and again

I drape this tainted love  
over my broken heart  
and I keep going places  
unexpected

like a make-believe ghost  
haunting every cup of tea  
with a trembling face

Without a thought  
you hand me a second jar

Without a thought  
I open it and you smile  
in profile  
at this intimacy  
like a wife

Hidden in plain sight  
I wish we were them

secret delights  
that can touch  
and be open  
without a thought

Late among the guests  
shining and laughing  
at brilliant jokes

we share one last drink  
with two ice cubes

Side by side  
complicit and beautiful  
reflecting the moonlight

fatal icebergs  
always  
float in a world of silence

always  
shortchange the stars  
ninety percent

below the surface

Her dangling arms  
abandoned to the wind  
like lianas

gently beat to the rhythm  
of her footsteps

oblivious to the choir  
of the forest around us  
whispering

staring  
at the divine pendulums

waiting for a sign

as I do

know the wild deer  
invisible yet so close

Hear its deep chest  
darkly drumming  
an untamed song

about you

What a waste  
I tell myself

this whole bread  
stale  
which you forgot  
at the back of the cupboard

I remember the loaf  
warm and tender  
like a promise  
of young love

and

— Let's make French toasts!  
you say

When you go through my lines  
with me

sometimes  
I slip in my own words  
and you want to slip too

with me

a blank page



Away

birch trees  
bathed  
in warm sunlight

Close

your white fingers  
combing  
your golden hair

Blinded

you guide my hands  
to the clear waters  
of the fountain

Thirsty

from your lips  
the gulp  
eclipses the sun

You used to hide in my books  
like in crannies and nooks

I would find you in Neruda  
sieving my favorite pages  
for a nugget of my soul

But metaphors whispered  
in ways I could not  
in ways I dared not

until I found a curl of hair  
you left in a margin

Suddenly

a prod to the brass spring  
sends my heart palpitating  
like a broken watch

Bent over those pages  
on the corner of a table  
the words fade to white  
like a film overexposed  
to the halo of your blond hair

only leaving behind  
the offbeat heart  
of a blind man

Tonight  
you open for me  
an alchemy book

By the oil lamp  
flickering  
the mute book speaks  
in crucibles and symbols

of wild roses blooming  
on a lover's grave

of a split pomegranate  
under two half moons

of bellows sighing  
over furnace anew

of the mystical kiss  
of water and fire

of the geography  
of beauty spots

a secret zodiac for all senses  
on your body of soft amber  
where I die and am reborn

Do you remember  
how we used to play  
winter in summer?

You'd furrow my hair  
with the tip of your tongue  
and the field would shiver  
under the plough

I'd sit behind you  
and embrace you like a coat  
my breath sending a frisson  
down your spine

I'd pretend to sled  
my hands on your waist  
and your nervous laughter  
would melt my heart

As exhausted as the day  
you'd fall back on me  
and our breaths like geysers  
would ascend into the starry night

slowly spinning  
around our cold noses  
against each other  
in the equator of my arms  
around you

Once  
through a window  
of the log cabin  
at dawn

we caught  
the shivering world  
transfixed  
watching its reflection  
in the dew

In a blink  
the round mirrors  
of iridescent water  
had formed  
a boundless kaleidoscope  
and showed each other

your dreamy eyes  
in vision wide  
  
and wondered

Already the avid hour  
swallows  
the shores of the world

Towards the horizon  
shadows pursue whispers  
lost amongst the graves  
along the walls

From his skull  
the poet sees everywhere  
ink flooding in

Yet you arise  
in the still second  
illuminating the doorway  
of the vault

your bright face  
smiling down on me  
simple and elegant  
like a blade

In a sarabande  
you seem to say  
come outside  
in the fields of blue

and let your heart  
slowly beat the drum  
of another day

let this long night  
surprise you  
with a blue moon

The dying day shrinks  
between the clouds  
and the rain starts drawing  
mirrors in the mud

until darkness drowns  
the match of eloquence  
and needles start piercing  
the firmament  
in suns uncountable

They blink leagues away  
like you used to

when you stretched over me  
like a constellation  
and kissed me distantly

Now on my knees  
my lips still reach for the stars  
but the gulp is dirty water

Quietly set against the light  
you are perfectly framed

I don't care what they think  
about the optics of love  
about the perfect shot  
at wild happiness

Like a forest  
leaning against the twilight

you harbor within yourself  
multitudes  
that murmur darkly like one  
and suddenly go silent  
whenever someone laughs

Slowly I dare a hand  
to your black hair  
shadow amongst shadows

But you are startled by my eyes  
like those of a silent film actor  
in a close-up

Caught in my headlights  
this magnificent soul of yours  
hesitates before flitting away

leaving me in awe

pupils dilated  
quietly peering into your night



*In my brimming eyes*

the hinterland  
suddenly  
met a rising tide

*a painting by Turner*

of ripped curtains of mist  
behind an old boat  
tugged to her last berth  
to be broken up

*where flowing waters wash*

beams and lashes across

*your overcast eyelines*

wrecked by promises  
lying eerily at the bottom  
of your Black Sea

*magnificent and haunting*

you follow again the wind  
moaning in faraway sails

In your secret garden  
when the early light  
accounts for the world  
you prune the rosebushes

like the many queer lives  
within you that ask  
something always refused

You keep saying to them

*If I listened to you  
we would grow wild  
and who would love us then  
You can only feel and I see  
Go to your places and sleep*

But sometimes  
a whisper quivers  
and blooms under the sun

transfiguring you  
and making you divine  
in spite of yourself

before flitting away  
like a dream cut short

Will you ever be  
like that always  
for any one being?

*I raise my banner like a sail*

catching oblique sunbeams  
from the fleeing horizon  
on the seas  
above the firmament

*and I set the course*

for your heart overturned  
like an inkwell on a letter

*to you*

for I smuggle jewels  
from the celestial orbs

*under the cover of night*

I will show you  
how quaint and eccentric  
my buried treasure is

*like a comet*

who always feels the pull  
to your circular orbit

*from an archipelago  
of solitude*

because the island  
comes to the shipwrecked

Under a coat of ermine  
dreams offer the skies  
echos scattered away

on the white page

the inkwell overturns  
like the horizon

Under shroud and vermin  
the yearning soul cries  
echos scattered away

on the snow field

darkness many returns  
flood the horizon

Those clear eyes

clearer yet this morning  
to have loved another

A clearer sky

whose rising sun  
left two blue puddles  
where you search for me  
amid the dew

Hope is the aster  
in the eastern plain  
of weeds and flower  
from last night's rain

Blue is the flower  
under sky unborn  
like secret Easter  
too bright to be borne

Northern breeze whispers  
to the sapphire  
worships of vespers  
and hearths with fire

but wind's promises  
blow the candlelight  
and its soft kisses  
will bid you goodnight

Oh picking you up  
to my bleeding heart!  
Oh drink from my cup  
in my life take part!

No more rolling dice  
your petals like lips  
will touch Paradise  
where love never sleeps

Sleds rush down a hill —  
each bump threading a note  
to the braids of their life lines  
to the necklaces of their laughter

Like them  
I draw on immaculate pages  
invisible parallels  
that conjure up your silhouette

Hide and seek in the mist —  
your white hands over my eyes  
your panting for breath  
sends a long shiver down  
blending with that of winter

I caress the blank pages  
of a book open to the invisible  
invoking your pale body  
under my fingers

trembling on soft hills

my breath is taken away  
at each descent  
so impatient at each ascent!

Exhausted —  
lying on the snow  
we watch passing clouds  
and I quench my thirst  
in the calm stream  
of your words  
before oblivion

Only remain these verses  
in Braille  
where I feel your steps  
towards the white paradise

In this waltz  
of oblivion and regrets

I step forwards  
and I forget  
all the lessons  
I swore to remember

You step backwards  
and you regret  
learning so much  
about me

Come

The third beat  
is not here yet  
We don't have to repeat  
the same missteps

against each other

let us stand still  
like that afternoon  
in the pouring rain  
when I warmed you  
in my arms



Cheerfully  
you guide me through  
your physics book

on magnetism  
between opposites

on forward  
and reverse phases

on tension  
and discharge

Finally  
I listen to you  
only with gravity

weak

within arm's reach

Across the dinner table  
a basin of apples  
where you used to sit  
  
classically framed and lit  
with the soft tones  
of your cheeks  
  
full and ripe  
  
from your wide smile  
where I used to sink  
my teeth for a taste  
of good and naughty  
  
Is this still life  
still a life?