

## Orphan in the Forest

*Laos 2005*

Abandoned on his search, the venturer  
stumbles into some village where  
children are playing with a tiger.  
Found five years before, a lamb-  
like cub bleating with hunger  
her mother killed by poachers.

*Most of the time she forgets she's a tiger  
and pretends to be just a cat.  
She won't be naughty while we're here.  
Don't touch. She's not used to strangers.*

Taking the children at their word  
he kneels and faces the carnivore  
surprised by her soft pink nose  
vulnerable like a toy.  
Then the head snares him —  
planetary huge with black stripes.

*Most of the time she forgets she's a tiger  
and pretends to be just a cat.  
She won't be naughty while we're here.  
Don't touch. She's not used to strangers.*

Waves of symmetry pulse from  
her eyes, a force field into which  
he sinks as the world dissolves.  
How long does he hang there before  
being snatched from the depths by  
a parent dwelling on the forest's edge?

*Most of the time she forgets she's a tiger  
and pretends to be just a cat.*

*She won't be naughty while we're here.*

*Don't touch. She's not used to strangers.*

## Bombay Railway Station

1983

Promised enlightenment he's greeted  
instead by a sea of misery sleeping on  
the platform. Barely able to balance  
the new rucksack he hopes meditation  
will donate enough courage to over-  
come this test.

Almost, but near the exit a fatal  
misstep thuds him into flesh. Bending  
to offer western amends he perceives  
the man to be dead as a stone.  
No desire to touch such stiffened  
limbs ever again.

As fate would have it, there's a guard  
at the gate to whom he begs *Come quick.*  
*There's a corpse here. Look!* Mustering  
all the dignity of uniform, the officer  
strides through the sleepers leading  
our pilgrim away.

## First Time Overseas

1974

The captain lets him in the cockpit because he's brazen enough to ask. He can't believe his pirate luck sitting in the Jumbo's prow, the all-surround window displaying a continent flattened beneath. Lake Eyre, flooded the first time in decades, dwarfing the horizon.

Because of a Japanese Red Army hijacking, Singapore Airport is in lockdown and swarms with police, mostly conscripts on national service. They don't have a clue what this foreigner is looking for while delayed here twenty-four hours. Finally in a toilet block, the penny drops with one cadet and international tensions are relieved.

It's snowing in Oxford and the cold seeps inside his bones. Luck pairs him off with an American student (master's thesis Theology) who allows him to bed in a warm house for three weeks.

His Irish relatives take him out with horse and cart to cut peat in the village bog. Idyllic summer work but indiscreet foreplay with a cousin one lazy afternoon

means he must beat a hasty retreat. He sighs at Yeats' grave and hallucinates on a Connemara beach, swallowing a tab sent in the post by Melbourne friends.

He's snapped up the first night in Amsterdam's *De Odeon Kring*, Gestapo hang-out during the war and feasted for a month by some smooth talking tri-lingual DJ before being thrown into a canal. Luck again and he's welcomed onto a house-boat occupied by runaways and rent boys, who teach him some tricks of the trade.

The grandmother of a Parisian who drags him home after cruising near the Louvre recounts how as a girl in 1916, she was bounced on the knees of an Australian soldier. Almost sixty years later, she still remembers the tickle of his Anzac laugh.

Hitching outside Juliet's Verona he forgets his passport in the police box, panics that all is lost but some god intervenes and it's still there once he forces the driver to go back. The car owner escorts him to lunch, hoping to calm our badly shaken itinerant but is something expected in return?

Moonscape Dalmatian coast along old communist Yugoslavia. He sleeps in Dubrovnik's park, not to miss the dawn ferry for Greece. Police shake him awake, threatening arrest uniformed in their laughable hats, emblazoned with Stalin's star.

Intoxicated on a summer night, he haunts alleyways beneath the Acropolis. Nothing to lose, he bowls up to a group of young blades and declares what he's looking for. They counter: *We're hunting girls, but if we don't find any by midnight, we'll go with you.*

His luck holds and they're as good as their word. A devastating Attic blonde takes him up to the Parthenon and passes him around. Laughter among the ruins while they're at it.

Tanks in the street as Turkey invades Cyprus. He waits weeks for the border to re-open so he can take the overland route and get wasted in the hash dens of Afghanistan. But the war drags on, his money runs out and he flies back home with tail between legs.

He finds where Malcolm now lives in Fitzroy. Still besotted by the one who abandoned him twelve months before, he stands across the street looking up at the balcony. Waiting for a glimpse.

## Not Knowing What to Look For

Ω

He goes searching without knowing what to look for, except that it has to be MORE OTHER BETTER.

Ω

He ponders if the REASON FOR BEING may be hidden in foreign lands.

Ω

He seeks TRUTH by means of wandering — *by indirections find directions out.*

Ω

He believes being on the move holds more chance of REVELATION than lounging at home.

Ω

He reads meditation and self-improvement manuals. All point in the SAME DIRECTION — that being a quester increases his chances.

Ω

He chants he chants *in my end is my beginning to arrive at a place and know it for the first time.*

Ω

He asks if there really is HIDDEN TREASURE, where does it leave the CLUES?

Ω

He wonders about locations far from the nest. Is ENLIGHTENMENT more likely to be found in the SNAKE-INFESTED zones?

Ω

He goes searching.

## **Sky Burial**

*Tibet 2007*

Hills shrouded in prayer flags, intercession on an industrial scale.

Thousands of petitions thrown to the wind, to speed the soul on its way.

Our wanderer stands where the bodies are exposed, a bare slab of cement.

An inverse boneyard, consigned not to earth but to who knows where.

With ghoulish fascination, he's almost disappointed there are no traces of blood.

The raptors have worked well, filtering bones to nothingness.

Here is the hut where limbs are chopped, a shrine with its panoply of knives.

Lucky the door is locked . . .

Chanting below: a family pays monks to pray before cutting the corpse.

They consider the money well spent, dancing beyond temple walls.

Our friend cloaks himself among the flags, hiding from  
eyes above.

Cremation the way to exit when his time is up. Without  
the hint of a prayer.

## **There is a Type**

who wanders so widely that when he drops asleep, his bed becomes the world while his body grows to encompass it. He does not tell anyone. Besides in the morning all is reduced to normal.

who does not look forward to night's approach. Never knowing which of his limbs will stretch, onto what part of the globe, or by how much. If his head flares northwards, that is familiar enough. But there is no telling and he's spent many vertiginous dreams upside down, sideways or east meeting west.

who is not sure which country or culture is lodged in what organ. However, the weight is tangible.

whose mind broadens to keep pace with the extremities' expansion but as life so often proves, nothing is guaranteed.

Lately new branches appear. Perhaps a flowering  
is on the cards.