

Long Division

Fragments of Conversation Between Day and Night
120 Couplets
By Louise Oliver

**Every minute has sixty tiny heartbeats of time,
counting lifetimes in tick-tocks, in pendulums and chime.**

Within the deepest dark we wait and the world turns.
An endless arc to navigate, an ocean churns.

**Flowers have their unique scent, petals their own colour.
All the cells of bodies sing, marrow to medulla.**

The entire world is frantically devising plans.
The ringing of an empty plate and gamelans.

**The weight of water vapour; of hidden, secret things;
sour thoughts and saccharine; new growth and yellowings.**

Sequences and patterns of growth warmed by the sun.
in a fiery figure of eight, all is begun.

**Your letters penned in saffron are safe in my pillow.
We long to meet at twilight, by the weeping willow.**

To see the joy of opposites in full embrace -
earth and fire, air and water - no hiding-place.

**We are still inseparable. I am your feuding twin.
We are inconsolable, enduring thick and thin.**

If I am bright and you are dark, where can we meet?
If I am high and you are low, how to complete?

**We're perfect for each other, although we never meet.
Each one without the other is always incomplete.**

And in between the in-between, a seed is sown.
and up above the up-above, a bird has flown.

**Making of the heart a book, which beats with secret thought.
Stitching of the heart a cloth, to comfort the distraught.**

Let us hum a favourite tune and keep in time.
Let us eat the fruit of the trees, lemon and lime.

**This world and the far beyond meet at the iron gate.
We hover at the margin and circumnavigate.**

I bring the brightness of morning again, again -
and the blessing of afternoon in sweet refrain.

**Your gaze is like a laser. There is no place to hide.
I lurk amongst the shadows but am electrified.**

None is the first, none is the last, from day to day.
so when the world turns upside down, there's no delay.

**A heart is in a glass cup and set within a stone,
where people speak in whispers and walls are overgrown.**

From the comfort of an armchair, beside the fire,
there's a roar and a red crackle, like a choir.

**Water extinguishes fire, in this bluest of hours,
often turning fast to steam amongst the honey-flowers.**

Can you believe the evidence of your senses?
What of the invisible spark? Who condenses?

**All life is in the spiral and in the moon's eclipse.
there is no separation, only relationships.**

There is no food on the menu, the drink is dry.
There's only the sound of singing - a lullaby.

**The gold is in the shadow, the geometry of life.
near and far and in between, upon a palette knife.**

A coat for the final journey, a farewell hat,
a pair of shoes, a pair of gloves, a silk cravat.

**Your mathematical eye surveys the garden walls.
All the world is locked within, gathering windfalls.**

Drawing a curtain on the stars, to shield the light.
Opening doors and windows - domestic flight.

**Softly humming, the moon sees a whirlwind of ashes.
powdered silhouetted trees and bright lightning flashes.**

Like fishes in an evil net, gasping for breath,
wriggling, thrashing and squirming, all fighting death.

**Lightly dusted grasses bend, as if to kiss the earth,
thirsting for the rainfall now, forgiveness and rebirth.**

The sound of arrows in the dark, a shrill echo.
The sight of sun and sky at last, a bright rainbow.

**This is where the seeds are sown and soil is rich and dark.
Everywhere that green is grown, reveals a watermark.**

A mound of books beneath a tree, pages flapping.
Blurred paragraphs of memory, overlapping.

**Words and laughter, thoughts and song, all echo in the air.
All is gone but nothing's lost, it gathers here somewhere.**

How can a place smell really small, really tiny -
and also of infinity, all moonshiny?

**Questions, answers, true and false join forces in a hymn.
Up above and down below - to fly or else to swim.**

Careering down a leafy lane with wings on feet -
and galloping along the shore in midday heat.

**Watching lips reciting words and eyes that never blink,
far beyond the memories, all teeters on the brink.**

The man in the moon spoke to me, awake, awake!
Utter me a word, speak your part - give me earache!

**Nothing's ever as it seems, nor is it as we wish.
Swirling like migrating birds, our thoughts are feverish.**

The clock mows down the afternoon and evening falls.
every second hand circulates, as night-time sprawls.

**The moonlight is monochrome, stealing all the colour,
white on silver-white, like frost, softest watercolour.**

Do dragons eat papaya cubes? Do they exist?
Do they sleep in caves of silver and amethyst?

**Like wings of mirrored feather, beating in unison.
Like bees amongst the heather, still dancing with the sun.**

If we forever leave, what happens then?
The writing now is on the wall, in fountain pen.

**The heart thinks, feels, remembers and whispers to the wind.
The heart has a secret place where messages are pinned.**

Lemon trees in a quadrangle. Wax, soap, lace, wine,
laid out on grainy marble slabs, as if a shrine.

**The heart is the central sun; it radiates to all.
It helps create the movement of shadows on the wall.**

Earth's sediment is in our cells plus salt water.
We both look the same in the end, son or daughter.

**We stand upon a threshold, in a kaleidoscope.
Every moment brings a gift of wonder and of hope.**

Making mounds of soap bubbles, water swirling.
Pirouetting in the mirror - whirling, whirling.

**In the Book of Antidotes, at the end of the world
and at the point of stillness, a spiral is unfurled.**

To find a pearl, you must dive deep, enjoy the wait,
floating the prize to the surface to celebrate.

**The moment of disruption, miraculous mistake,
malign misunderstanding, cataclysmic heartbreak.**

Move over, make room by the fire and lie with me.
We can still race back to the stars and mystery.

**A disclosure of secrets, an emergence of lies,
getting something for nothing or else stealing first prize.**

Towards the end, the salmon swims back to the start
defying the swirling current within his heart.

**In between the in-between, a stolen dialogue.
This half-place, half-time, half-light is neither wolf nor dog.**

Hear these words that walk on water, harmonious.
Hear these words that fly on the wind, erroneous.

**Where windows swing on hinges, with doors flung open wide,
a cooling breeze is creaking, the air is magnified.**

Who walks beneath the frosty earth, amongst the roots,
mulch and bulbs, seeds and spores and the first fruits?

**At the source of the river, it's believed forever.
At the bend in the river, it's forgotten for good.**

With gloves of the skin of a bird upon the hand
and shoes of the skin of a snake, walking the land.

**The grasses are bent double along the beaten track;
petals slowly drying out inside an almanac.**

Coldly the candle sloughs its skin onto the floor,
amongst the crumbs, half-eaten bones and bits of straw.

**The dream-life of a garden is full of plans and plots,
the warbling of a song thrush and blue forget-me-nots.**

Burnt umber, sapphire, crimson lake and apple green,
lemon yellow, vermilion, ultramarine.

**Numbered, weighed and divided, the writing on the walls
dissolves into the shadows whenever evening falls.**

Things take shape in time and dissolve, as in a dance,
a masquerade of double-quick extravagance.

**Snapshots of a single cell, with tendrils unfurling;
an unseen world of wonders, a hemisphere whirling.**

All the flowers play hide and seek at the day's end
and angels on fiery ladders ascend, descend.

**Masquerading as a bee upon a flower bed,
drinking in the rainbow hues, especially the red.**

Your perfumed breath upon my cheek is like a hymn.
The blossom vanishes at dawn upon a whim.

**At last, no word for worry, after the afternoon,
within the magic hour, upon the harvest moon.**

Hide me from calendars and clocks, the endless chime,
from diaries and timetables and overtime.

**Still drawing in the margin and doodling on the page,
scratching in between the lines, the meanings of an age.**

The blackbird flies at the window till the glass breaks,
the walls crash down, the roof caves in and the earth quakes.

**A fortnight in the forest, a month of mountain views,
a land of perfect emerald, a sky of endless blues.**

The milk is curdled by tea-time, the bread is stale,
honey is all solidified, to no avail.

**Eavesdropping at a gateway, a humming sound is heard;
a whirring and a whistling, a whisper of a word.**

I come from a house of corners into the round.
I come from a place of quicksand to this hard ground.

**In this uneven evening, adrift in indigo,
all eyes are now upon us, awaiting yes or no.**

Still we laced the dough with leaven and watched it rise,
the steady sun and heavy dew before our eyes.

**Where the shoe pinches hardest, where the buckle digs in,
on the heel of achilles, a blister on the skin.**

Nobody sees the exact same, as life unfurls,
as wind is swept, as fire is kept, as water swirls.

**The leaves are slowly starving, the season shrinks the day.
In autumn, all is leaving, the swallows break away.**

Shadowy figures are diving, ducking branches,
swerving to avoid descending avalanches.

**No other means of escape, the tide cuts back the shore,
folly, fate and foreboding are in a tug of war.**

A world within, a world beside, so long ago.
A world without, a world before, with vertigo.

**Thirteen ways of seeing things, all dancing in the flames,
seventeen of everything, in claims and counterclaims.**

In these tiny heartbeats of time, the stone vibrates,
then sings a song of endurance and dissipates.

**Coloured charts on chalky walls, reflections in the glass,
a table strewn with tulips, a drink of sassafras.**

The things that dreamers make come true, will leave a mark.
Like vibrant cloths, these woven dreams contain a spark.

**Water keeps on changing shape to fit the different jars,
gently moulding its own self in endless repertoires.**

You, who held my world together, where did you go?
And you, who tore my world apart, so long ago?

**A box of jewels with ice-cubes and slowly melting drips.
A woman sitting watching, with liquid on her lips.**

Eavesdropping on an argument, crockery breaks -
scattering books and photographs, burning keepsakes.

**To keep the secret sorrows, someone is singled out.
A leaden chest is padlocked beneath the waterspout.**

Your words and laughter, your quick thoughts, your humming voice,
your fierce mind and gentle wit, your song's rejoice.

**Long, exaggerated roots are burrowing below;
above a swarm of insects in buzzing vertigo.**

Sunset rides away in a boat into the dark,
sailing through the gates of heaven to disembark.

**Richly decorated cloths are hanging on the lines,
ragged fragments softly draped amongst the creeping vines.**

And hiding all the secret shame or all the guilt,
revealing nothing of the fear, the milk that spilt.

**A rusty moon revealing a cornucopia,
overflowing, plentiful, a brave utopia.**

Like a bird who flies one evening into a net
and through its final night recites an alphabet.

**Fallen angels on the lawn, faces in the starlight,
flapping wings and sharpened beaks, of quartz and celestite.**

It is an accidental moon; it is a stone;
a concave mirror to reflect, in monotone.

**Now the moon bares the garden, does it like what it sees?
The doors all locked a bolted, naked earth, unclad trees.**

Burning water, red-hot sea shells on steaming sand,
footprints baked for posterity across the land.

**Fruit plummets, then splits apart and softly comes to rest;
a squirrel stores for winter, a magpie raids a nest.**

At the beginning and the end, a trumpet sounds.
In the middle, at any point, the pleasure grounds.

**The journey's never easy - it isn't meant to be.
The way is strewn with boulders and more mythology.**

There is no cloth without a flaw, no skin unscarred,
no physical perfection known, our lives are marred.

**Diving in at the deep end, like little red fishes,
spitting the dark blue water, making waves and wishes.**

To never want what is not ours, to be content
and show a constant gratitude, without lament.

**Making peepholes in windows and seeing things take shape;
turning keys in the keyholes and watching things escape.**

As huge flames grow from tiny sparks to reach the sky,
fire longs to be with ashes, not asking why.

**Those who've never taken wing, still cast their shadows long,
standing still and growing roots from morn to evensong.**

The earth's shadow keeps falling across the moon,
darkening a dusty crater or a lagoon