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TIGHTROPE



Gallery Books

Tightrope
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 22 November 2007.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

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ISBN 978 1 85235 435 0 *paperback*
978 1 85235 436 7 *clothbound*

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.



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*No more à propos preface is there than
your heads going heavy hearing out my heart;*

*and then my thinking: finally, now, I can
send you both to bed and play the part*

*of staying, praying, saying all a man
can hope for for you both and for us all. A start.*

The Stain

I might have gone in just to see
the megapixel make-up of
some shading round your eyes and mouth
evocative of a brightness that
it would be nice to bring back.

I promise though I've touched up just
a stain on the hand-me-down wedding gown
the healing tool made light work of.
So much more I could have done
and no one would ever know a thing.

Swimming at Barley Cove

Leaving the grown-ups to reapply sun lotion
on the little pitch of strand between two headlands,
when the only cloud around trawls off the ocean
a more than momentary darkening of the sands
you've left prints on, and wading out past hyper children
mollycoddled in wetsuits to body-surf the crests
of waves that drop them safely back, and swimming then,
beyond the warm undertow, where buoyance broadcasts
your exercise of freedom,

your toes discover
awareness first, your feet so long kept on the ground,
and then your loins constrict to check all life before
you overhear the heart, above the whistle, pound
the newfound blood in ways that make no nonsense
of these near-life, out-of-mind moments, the far-flung
sun back out of the blue to overhaul what chance
you have, and nobody near to hear you sing your song.

The Book Her

1

On a tumble of stones beneath an O
in the wall around the Mental orchard
Rosie fishmouths out a wobbly halo,
lassoing me to accept the Silk Cut
she cups professionally forward
to my lips. A gun goes off. The racket
of inner overgrowth is beyond us:
dizzing flies in shot shrubbery, a slug
worming in every windfall's suppurant bruise.
We lie low in the wreckage of rock and rings
scarved around us, the faintly crackling drug
inhaled, puffed sunward, making light of things,
how the book her and the real me got mixed up.

2

Would you, she laughs, when I give her the gist
of last night, jooked beside her, take a drop
with me perhaps? Her mouth makes a light twist
round a gorgeous strawberry popped in whole,
its hot flesh melting, about as sassy
as they come. Harry looms behind her, rolls
his one straight eye, turns back to his Massey
and pulls her throttle for the ride back in,
patients drifting back with half-full buckets
to climb up on the trailer. Is it acting
the Oynie you are? I hear him nosey
through the slid window behind his bucket
seat where Rosie reads *Cider with Rosie*.

Survival

Scant caveat for the double hairpin turn
our 2CV failed to quite negotiate,

that sigmoid a hundred yards back, squiggled
on an amber triangle behind a tree,

would echo the roadkill we ended up beside,
over-easy, driver's side, a few miles

the far side of Falcarragh, were it not so far
along in its excited decomposition,

less the *bourdonnement* of bluebottles
than the cooperative wriggle of maggots

making heat in the bloated carcass someone'd
flung into long grass, roiling like a motor

at the heart of the badger, our own still ticking
over, one wheel spinning in mid-air, till

we tip it back on all fours and carry on,
the top rolled back, to the *Ostán* in Gweedore

for a swim and sweat, our pelts carving water
above our trawled shadows, then glistening side

by side on cedar bunks, aglow and pulsing
in the kind of heat that would make your breathing

something to think about if we hadn't talked,
then touched, putting all account behind us.