

Sara Berkeley

**STRAWBERRY  
THIEF**



Gallery Books

*Strawberry Thief*  
is first published  
simultaneously in paperback  
and in a clothbound edition  
on 31 August 2005.

The Gallery Press  
Loughcrew  
Oldcastle  
County Meath  
Ireland

*All rights reserved. For permission  
to reprint or broadcast these poems,  
write to The Gallery Press.*

© Sara Berkeley 2005

ISBN 1 85235 388 0 *paperback*  
1 85235 389 9 *clothbound*

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



## Contents

### PART ONE

#### *Feet First*

- The Call *page* 13
- Smoke from Oregon Fires 14
- Strawberry Thief 15
- Freshwater Pearls 16
- Feet First 17
- Star 18
- Dogwood and Iris 20

### PART TWO

#### *The Burning Building*

- My First Day in the Burning Building 23
- Wedding Day 25
- Cowboy Café, Sixty-four Miles Ahead 26
- Great Basin, April 1997 27
- First Faun 28
- Before the Wind 30
- Searchlight 31
- Patagonia 32
- Dillon Beach 33
- Last Winter 34
- The Signing 35
- Harmless 36
- Dragonflies 37
- Seven White Deer 38
- Alstroemeria 40
- The River Daughter 41
- Limpets 42
- Hawkesbury River, NSW 43
- Big Island Dance 44
- Approaching Thirty 46

PART THREE

*234a Railroad*

- Emergence 49
- Venus Awake 50
- Musketeer 51
- 234a Railroad 52
- Architrave 53
- How We Meet 54
- What I Move To 56
- Being in the Cave before Time 57
- Eight Months, Fifteen Days 58
- A Thousand Letters 60
- Nereid 61
- Still Life, Yellow Quilt 62

## *Acknowledgements*

Acknowledgements are made to the editors and publishers of the following where some of these poems have previously appeared: *At the Year's Turning* (Dedalus), *The Backyards of Heaven* (Scop), *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *The Black Mountain Review*, *The Burning Bush*, *The Canyon Echo*, *De Brakke Hond* (Peter Pauwels), *The Great American Poetry Show*, *Human Rights Have No Borders* (Marino), *Icarus*, *The Irish Times*, *Lectio*, *Marin Poetry Anthology* (Marin Poetry Center), *Octavo*, *On the Page*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Web del Sol* and *The White Page* (Salmon).

## *Before the Wind*

Under the flimsy  
layer of noise I wear  
I charge the depth of silence.

Outside Goldfield  
the first Joshua trees  
stand guard over nothing.

Snow rushes at our lights;  
the tumbleweeds crouch and dance,  
we turn, drive from the known,

down Lost Section Road,  
swimming into our withdrawals,  
Leopardi's fathomless quiet.

The sky flares yellow,  
losing light over Wild Rose Peak;  
moths hover at the mystery white flower.

My ship is turning,  
big and blind in the night,  
so monstrous it blocks out sound.

By Walker Lake, the first water,  
we enter the final silence;  
bittersweet to sail on it.

## *Searchlight*

*Death Valley, 1997*

In the shadow of the Panamints,  
hushed at a thousand feet,  
this is the garden where we'll walk  
as though nothing broke, no beads spilled.

Salt rings on the Devil's Golf Course,  
we pick our way along the delicate path,  
the desert lands evenly on the skin;  
I snatch up my flame, I put it out in the cold.

Fingers burning as we unravel ourselves,  
set all our carrying down;  
we weighted ourselves so heavily,  
and then we dived in.

Send a searchlight across the alluvial plain,  
the swept area shivers;  
I find myself on the valley floor,  
hunched on the salt pan, breathing again.

Get me to a child's place, a schoolroom, a well of safety,  
here among the toys and alphabets I can say  
in pain like darkness  
I have nothing to draw on today.

Flying low and soundless over our history,  
the bareness, the bare bones, the shabby deeds.  
Hushed, still as a blade, I read the cracked truth:  
we are undone, no one can bind us.

## *Limpets*

*Barcelona, October 1997*

Whatever I put in these empty rooms  
they are still these empty rooms.

Old sun deep on the neighbour's porch,  
recessed sun in the Spanish palms.

One, two little girls, a boy  
stood in their baby shoes in the sand,

sang themselves the glittering sea,  
hid pink shells in their sandy pails.

There I saw their father's smile,  
limpet hands at the ice-cream stall.

Long pale nights in my brother's house,  
toys on the verandah, chairs all round.

I washed my hands of the milky past,  
shiver and ripple of lies dissolved.

I took a leap at the heart of it,  
woke myself from years of sleep.

Giddy with choice in the morning light,  
I got right down to truth and belief,

took things out of the empty rooms,  
let in the sunlit afternoons.

## *Hawkesbury River, NSW*

I was a schooner,  
I was a rigged cutter with sixteen oars,  
fire on a bed of earth in my hold.

I liked to be on the river without purpose,  
the swell from the mailboat washed at my hopes;  
I ran my oars idly through the mangrove swamps.  
At Milson Island the kids from town  
fished from the jetty with silver spoons,  
white prawns for bait,  
and all news carried equal weight.

On the Bauer Point foreshore I berthed in the dawn,  
the river revealed at its own pace  
its purpose; beyond the mouth,  
the trades laughed in the face  
of the great winds that govern hurricane and calm  
and fanned into motion my knot of flame.

I was moved by the tide beyond fear,  
left my old ways by the shore and struck out  
with a good tailwind, plain sailing  
for the Solomons and their bold promises —  
whale teeth, coconuts, and pearls.