Rumors| Poems

Edwin F. Meek

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RUMORS

Poems

by

Ed Meek

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[Signatures]

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hotel And The Carrousel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What You Must Do</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything Has Been Said Before</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Room</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching The Storm From The Barn</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Is It</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing Matters</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scars</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble In Tamany's Bar</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flamingo Lounge</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Health</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Toy Factory</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Edge</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote Regions</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream Of A Wash At The River</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In The Forest</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grave Mistake</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Way It Happens</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Times</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything You See Is In The Past</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These Days</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hub Mail</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When The Door Closes</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Hotel And The Carrousel

Wives and children rode wooden ponies and soldiers drilled and fought mock battles. Years later everyone said, Some sweet time--Bainbridge Island. Now the motor is out, the canvas roof torn, bottom sunk in mud. Across the road what's left of a hotel, the west side burnt beyond belief. Fire must have caught there and wound up scorching the walls black till the roof exploded and the stairs gave. I remember my house burning when I was 8 and what remained was splintered by axes. Here sticks and glass cover the floor. When I look up, it's half roof, half sky. Nothing lasts, you say breaking the silence but it's us you're talking about not the hotel or the carrousel. Outside a Great Heron settles in the marsh. A Red-tailed hawk glides overhead. You climb on and when I push my feet sink in the earth, the carrousel frees from mud and slowly turns, you go away and come back smiling, a strong wind blows off the water. The carrousel turns on its own.
What You Must Do

In the event of a fire
dial 5-2111.
   Like eyes in the wind of hurricanes
   clouds turn within themselves.
Give the nature, location, your name.
The sound of planes passing
   in the distance means nothing here.
Use the street fire alarm box
when telephone is not available.
The moist earth
   stirs. Behind the barn
   cows rumble. The grass blows
   in filaments, a thousand small birds
clap their wings in the wind.
Remain at the box until the Fire
Department arrives.
   Now you hear the roar, sense change
   in all things. Fire burns
the horizon into the sun.
Everything Has Been Said Before

We all presume too much. Your hand stiff on my neck, the forseeable dream tomorrow: draw water, work the plough, patch the south field fence in the green sun. Already words repeat themselves from memory. You taught me the boundaries of land. White hills shimmering to the north, an unending river flows east, to the west, desert, south--swamp and beyond all this more of the same. We go back inside the kitchen of our beliefs. Here tendency looks beyond hills and deserts. We all know, even I know more than this. Behind our eyes we see our eyes and everything they see, deep down we know.
The Room

It's darkest at the far end. No surprise when the walls fall away. Wind passes through a blind hawk. My eyes turn backward and I fall turning, head in my hands, chest in my knees. All motion rests here. It is here in darkness where wind turns into itself a hawk circling the desert at night and the cry for death becomes the cry. The eyes, the mountains turn this way. White waters of the dead flow from cactus and Yew trees. The wind whispers. When I return, words come out of nowhere, the whisper of distant lightning suffering winds.
Watching The Storm From The Barn

Broken door swings open, hay blows away from itself. The wind comes in green waves. In the field you chase our cows. Stalks of plants break beneath your feet. Heat lightning flashes, the sky appears and disappears.

In a burst of light: wild stems, leaves in the wind, the bright yellow flowers of our garden.
Mushrooms

Suddenly I lose my sense of humor. Where does that leave me?
On the backside of a flat rock prostrating myself to Loki in the desert sun, the old ten pound hammer at my feet?

When they come for me, hide the rags, burn the relics. Tell the old women, the sisters I owe my life, I have returned to sacred grounds bordered on 3 sides by shrubs, cactus and mushrooms running clear to mountains.
Storm

Leaves of wind shoot through us.  
I see a black hole in your iris.  
The sky grows suddenly dark. In the back of my ear I hear a high wire of sound.  
To the west, a long dark cloud winds down, turns the wheat black.  
The mad wind tears up the cornfield.  
Cows are swept up and thrown.  
A tractor leaps a hundred feet.  
The whole farm flies up. My hair pulls the eyes out of my brain.
Wind

In Africa, Rhinos turn trains upside down on a whim.
This Is It

Put it on.
It isn't the wrong size.
It's not your left foot.
The shoe flies out of the past.
You aren't the last man.
The shoe of the future.
The shoe is a present.
The shoe gives itself away,
dies laughing, goes on
and on. The tongue goes
slack, laces knot. The shoe
wears out. New sole, new
heel, a new image. The shoe
in the room at the back, back
in the room the shoe lies
waiting at the foot of the bed. Ha.
Nothing Matters

Say what you like, some days the wind calms, I hear voices and words fly to the page. Today the sun shines, I don't care. Who am I, I have to deal with day in, day out? And who are these people in my house?

When I'm ecstatic, loving you or leaping off the edge of my thoughts, it's the angels who carry me in flight and when our dance loses all sense to ritual, I see the dark and sensuous spirit in you. Love is a bottomless well we draw from and fall into but today, moles bury themselves in my ears and my thoughts limp like rats. I have no part in the world. Things go on, a top spins in a vacuum.
Absence

In darkness the dog's growl becomes you. There is no moon. Make no mistake. My bones scrape like nails. The legs of the bed, broken. I'm lying flat-backed, the smell of mothballs in my mouth. The closets lie open, hangers without clothes.
Love

Sometimes it gets to where I can't stand to hear another word. Lips up, eyes wide, I smash your face close fist. It changes a minute, then it's back, the same.

So don't ask why, half way through cutting fresh salad, I slash the left side of your face--eye to chin and the knife is clean again at the tip. You cry two days and I think now we start again.
Scars

Her eyes open doors. My drink half gone, The present, she says, is all...we have. At 90 her Jag cuts time in half. Her place

she pulls my belt and blows the doors off. Before dawn cracks she's up and dressed to kill. Not one good word all the way to my Sausalito flat. Out front I turn her wrist till it snaps, you get no thanks. Three months later at Kings I ask, How's the wrist,

sweetheart? She laughs and that night we come together. She leaves 8 cool lines from my chest to my prick with her nails. You'll remember, she says, my name.
Trouble In Tamany's Bar

Nine times I've swallowed your bait, every time I'm left cold alone. Your words ring, 22's in my ear.

Slick rain shoots holes in my shadow. I don't check back. Fog hangs a trenchcoat. My reflection in the bank window, not half bad. I swing into Tamany's. Who's here tonight, looking for trouble?
Suicide

Live fast die young, have a
good-looking corpse.

No melodrama. Outside
a 62 Vet, bored out
to 451, holds the moon
in a split-glass, blue tint
windshield. Maybe tonight
when the life-lights of the city
turn back, and young girls
and old men sleep
house by house, maybe
tonight when my right is fast
on the stick as William Bonny
and my left foot clutches
slick as a well-oiled
Smith & Wesson 38, my right leg
will stiffen like oak in winter
and I'll meet tomorrow right then,
between the eyes.
Flamingo Lounge

Faces you've known years grin when you dance. The girl you knew in school returns your gaze. Two drinks and she's sister. You tell her The dirt you love is so dry
the crow scoffs. No crops means no way out. The floor erupts and a bottle shatters someone's ear. Fists hammer home everything wrong. You can't get out of your own way.

John Bull and Cheryl get nailed. You cup your ear and hide in pain. Everything you thought you knew means nothing now.
Christmas

This is the city. Open the door. Let's go. Balloons rise and converge. Sounds run together in tracks and overlap. Hold my hand, we'll lose each other. Flowers, statues, tall buildings.

Sidewalk's jammed, a party of strangers buying presents for friends and relatives they see buying presents for friends and relatives. Bells and music do not get in the way. People are happy. Jack says, the crass commercial quality does not detract from real emotion. Is that a geranium? I ask, in your buttonhole.
General Health

In the cornfield wind rips the stalks in half. Pick them up, you say, your hair in wind. Sun pulls sweat from your shoulders. Look at me you say, the shirt you throw in my face filled with the dust of the past. Your dress half off. Whatever was, is gone. I want you now, like always. Life has no next scene.

...

Life is a soap apera. I am divorced. My wife is having an affair with my best friend. Occasionally I see his secretary. Everything is just so.

In the eyes of the audience I am a hero, a misconception, no doubt based on my life-position. Still I give advice, smile innattentively, put words in here and there. People tend to gather, What are you, they ask, thinking of? Oh nothing, I quip.

...
"Who did kill Dr. Brewer?" Nurse Kelly asks in the cafeteria on break.

"I resent your asking."

Her eyes flit about the room. "I know you've been seeing his former wife," she says, "you had an affair with her sister-in-law, your wife's sister, who Dr. Brewer raped in blind fury one night because she brought up his son as a homosexual whom you also had relations with though no-one knows but your wife's sister, the only woman you ever loved despite her sterility from Dr. Brewer's rape. She tells me everything because I am her one true friend."

Perhaps, I think, but how in God's name did she get all that out of Sandra unless there's something I'm not in on. And if Nurse Kelly knows, who else? The police?

"Alright," I say, grasping her hand under the table, "let's go."
The Toy Factory

Days pass like plastic airplanes on an assembly line. I screw springs into pilot's heads and at home, attach them to my bedroom ceiling.

Juiced one night I collided with seven planes. King Kong swatted them on the Empire State. I see what he meant. Knock one away, another springs back.

After that it wasn't the same. I couldn't put another pilot in the cockpit, send him out into the blue knowing I had destroyed the work of a dozen men and women. Never again between George, old enough to call dad and Mary, so fat she took up her space and half mine.

Now when I get my socks I say, Hello George, to the pilot I keep in my bureau. Late nights we talk shop. He has an orange face, goggles, mustache, helmet and a red suit with black gloves. No legs, he doesn't have any legs.
We're fooling ourselves. Laughter floats up in balloons. We tie ponies to our seats. Impossible shapes surround us in unanswerable questions. Sad wonderful words in disparate groups huddle in corners and run laughing away. You grow old before my eyes and smash the last pane of glass. Your hand shatters, my thumbs go up in smoke, we drop to all fours and come up with a handful of dust—Shake hands, mark the dry clean quality of our palms.
Remote Regions

Our cabin breaks up the wilderness. Polar Bears roam the white horizon. My wife burns the deer steaks. Pojo, half dog, half wofle, eats the remains. At the table I fall into deep sleep and my life runs out my hands. My wife sets a pan for the blood. Pojo's eyes burn through my pain, and I wake. The door of the cabin bangs open, roaring wind, a white bear.
Dream Of A Wash At The River

Sun blinks behind a mountain.
A shirt finds the eye
of a whirlpool, the dirt
of the past washes up. Fresh
footprints lead to the river's edge.
Three hills line the horizon, shoulders
of sorrow where shadows double up
in pain, you appear, pale
and elegant, walking my corpse.
In The Forest

My brother, \( \text{last of his tribe} \) soaks his hands in the blood of an antelope. In a thicket the antelope sighs under mountains of ants. Faint stars stand back. A bluebird makes horrible sounds, leaves torn from the trees cry in the wind.
Birth

I was born dry. That was your first mistake. You thought you'd die, then you thought I'd die. They soaked me in oils till I grew soft and beautiful. Now I wake at night scraping my skin with my nails till it bleeds. I am again dry. In darkness I scratch, slowly at first then my nails are yours and the blood is warm. I am alive. I am alive.
Grave Mistake

Janice was bewitchingly beautiful. At least I thought so. Surprisingly enough, others found her utterly repulsive. She had been gone for over a year when one afternoon I heard loud pecking sounds at my door. I live alone in the country and people seldom visit. I opened up to an enormous chicken. Oh I'd say five feet tall. It came in clucking three years ago and hasn't given me a moment's peace since. I hear it pecking now in the other room. It takes all the grain I have and I had to sell the other chickens and my last cow. The few guests who used to stop in won't come anymore. I can hardly blame them. That chicken is very rude. Dresses have been shredded. Rugs, furniture, everything I own is a shambles. What am I to do?
The Way It Happens

Swimming upstream in Glacier, six eagles wind their hunger down and lodge claws in my back. Screeching and the muffled clap of wings. Half unconscious, dull with pain, land and river fade, everything I once loved gone. The air impossibly thin, an aerie, nowhere in sight, birds of misfortune where are you taking me now?
Matt takes us out back and we all watch him bring up a bucket from the well. You'll see, he says, (what a character this Matt is). Well the bucket comes in sight and it's filled with something thick and bright. Matt swings it out into the crisp air, it's blood alright. Fresh too.

Since we're out of water, Matt says, it's all we have. Sandy, Josie and Matt head back to the house with the bucket. I'll be along, I call. I turn around and look down into the darkness. What have we done?

Jump. Jump, the well says. And I walk quickly away from the well and the farm and Sandy, Josie and Matt, into the dark sounds of the woods.
Anything You See Is In The Past

Blue stars burn the darkness. Cirrus clouds glisten like toenails. Every time I look into your eyes I see a cave. Find me the sea, I ask your hand and hope leaves for home.

Instead wanders into the mountains where losers sight each other forever. No-one's heard word in years don't lose faith. Killer turn over, I'm talking to you. Outside the animals conspire unconsciously.

Panda Bears press close to the glass, eyes like peas. Questions, black and white faces.

Running away slowly comes to the peak of a rise a wind of change in my hair.

Taking my time in a presence of mind until I reach sanctuary I refuse to wait or even think.

Often anything disturbs me. Will you come? I call knowing you out of earshot, lying somewhere arms crossed, you are drifting in darkness I know the zenith of everything lost.
These Days

(grains of sand)

Let the dead concern themselves with death.
I'm happy to get through this day
with its unending corridors
and innumerable signs. It's not
an unusual day. So many things, you say
going on in the world. Armies of men
and factories of women. Children dull
in classrooms and outside playing children.
How many on the other side of the world
asleep in canoes drifting on dreams
of rivers while scientists again test
and again. Police patrol alleys
anything can happen. Soldiers cover
the map with blood. Grown men go limp
from hunger on the sides of unfinished
roads and children collapse like dolls
in Bengal. Beautiful women and men
change their skin and grains of sand
shift in Acapulco.

(letter home)

Dear Ed, We ignore our own death like a bad cousin
and waste everything in sight. We have hidden
the parts of ourselves we don't understand
with inventions. We cover the earth with tar
and drive it at 60. Mountains loom
in the distance through windows, "that land
is no good for cattle," Peaks of the Tetons
cut through clouds before the desert—
"no crops grow there," the desert, foreign as the moon. "The good thing about rivers," Thoreau said, "you don't have to float anything on them." Yours, Yours.

(off the road)

At dawn a tandem oil tanker rumbles the rest area. Baltimore blazes blue the tint windshield. Chevy Two's, Volkswagons and Swingers—someone I don't know drives them. On the dash a telephoto aerial shot: Baltimore in rows, boxes that cover everything once believed in. Someone I can't imagine is responsible for this. On my way to visit some other lover, I'm off the side of the road. Hail dances like electrons on my hood. Darkness contracts and light lines the delicate edge of an oil refinery. Yellow Calf said, "The world is cockeyed." I don't know him either. All I know, dawn, I'm hungry, can't get this damn thing started.

(traffic jams)

Executives sip martinis 50 stories up, the city below is a map. Pan Am and United talk traffic jams in the sky and U.S. lands Mars July 4. Tractors tear up earth in Carolina, Montana, Arizona. Hopi says, "these machines make great holes in our grounds." In Glacier Park a ranger shoots a snowmobile six times.
(stars, cards, bones)

In Russia a woman stares at a fork and it warps. Arizona Indians soar in Astral flight to the fatherland. Hindus dance on burning coals. Solar power is food for the church of the new Christ. Psychic heat survives the winters of Tibetan monks. In seance the dead talk, they want help. Energy burns up the backs of Yogis. Clairvoyants map the future in stars, cards, bones.

(these days)

Friends, we have been moving slow as caterpillars. "You better forget about machines." Let the reptile brain wander off to the burial grounds. "Better stop messing with grandmother moon." Buddhist scriptures and Zen parables have floated across the great waters. Time the opposed turn to face their other halves. Roll the heavy stone intellect uphill. Friends, you better do what you know right, the spirits of the dead will carry us in flight through the gateless gate.
Hub Mail

You wheel push-button jacks in the back of 20 wheel trucks. Green sacks tagged Austin, Phily, L.A., chew the fat on break. Luis says, Leathers for 50 at the docks, need a tape deck? The bells rings. Swing the jack in an arc. Where does this sack go? You hear Frisco is ok. 2 an hour isn't much. Your wife so full of love at first. Little Maria is her smile. You write home. America is hard. Don't let on how hard. It's only right relatives die at home.
Spring

Asleep, six years old
in the treehouse, my older friend Johnny
tells stories: Africa bananas big as trees!
Sounds of the woods breathe around us.
When I wake it takes time to remember
which year this is, Am I really 30?

Friends where are you? Outside
the mountains are losing snow.
The sun rises through a tree behind
the house. It will be another
beautiful spring.
Cancer
for my friend's father--
bombardier over Nagasaki

Your son Charlie died of cancer
and sometimes in dream it's him
you drop the bomb on. Reporters
ask how it feels. Your wife

and children never ask. At dawn shot
with gin you fly a high whine
into the sun. Grip the stick. 30
seconds, think everything in flames.

For 30 years you've buried the crew.
Some nights swear everyone
in disguise. Everywhere you look,
no-one you know looks back.
When The Door Closes

Cool air lies in my head, the soft pelt of a possum.