



ELAINE
HEART SONGS

Heart Songs



p swanson
june 84 ~ vii

2
i have waited far too long for trees
to throw their blossoms wild - too long
too long for warming winds and mornings
yellow blue - i want the softening
the richer hues that melt inside the eye -

tonight tonight i'll dream the radiance
of snow white apple trees and weaving grasses
brushing past my knees and dandelion gold
reflecting earth smells rising damp and clear -

tonight i'll dream the summer rolling thick
in leaves and vines and sleepy afternoons
and shining thunderstorms in thick and hot
that gather faces laughing into rain -

and tomorrow i will waken to my dreams,

ii

december twenty one nineteen fifty
seven - i saw you first on christmas day -
small - smaller than my giant doll
called margret ann - the doll had silver hair
you had none - none that i could see -
and crawling up your forehead was a cross
of brilliant red that darkened when you cried
like some strange omen walking on your skin -
we waited all our gifts until the day
that you came home - wrapped three blankets deep
in arms that shielded you from outside cold -

i see you now - i see what you were then -
elaine kathleen - who would dare to guess
that you could be a winter sacrifice ?

this is an hour of remembrance ~
the sunshine summer opens into june
in backwards forwards touching of our hands ~
tree blossoms scatter petals to the wind
revealing a brilliance of new leaves ~
this is an hour spiralling between
memories of days that have not come
and yesterdays that twist outside of time ~
of copper evenings - snowdrop afternoons ~
a child's startled gaze ~ an ice cream smile.
and popcorn midnights gathering our names
through words that somehow never slipped to sound ~
and flowers root and bloom and bloom again
to celebrate the worlds we are growing.



a summer moving house - another home
 for worlds to grow within - burning days
 of rubber swimming pools and sandboxes
 and bookmobiles and fairytale beds -
 your tricycle was green - the hedge grew tall
 and thick - star shaped thistles spiked the lawn -
 a little corner shop made fish and chips
 where once you pushed a penny on the counter -
 I tried to stop you but the lady filled
 a paper bag with french fries when you smiled -

then school - the beginning of the end
 you did not fit and hid beneath a table
 to escape - so doctors put you into
 hospital to see if you were real.

the winds are rising - hold me in your mind
 to share this calm - this daydream gentleness
 lazing in the summer of the sun -
 we knew so many spells - and will know more
 drowsing without words - sharing a still
 that liquifies the stiffness of our bones -

we have shared many hours of quietness
 talking depths that grew into our cells
 and rearranged the whispers of our skins -
 and now togetherness returns again -
 the breeze is slow - close your eyes and spin
 loose thoughts twisting in and out of mine -

apartness is illusion - we are near
 wandering this breath of afternoon.

a tiny figure on a window ledge
in white pyjamas ~ crying three floors up ~
we waved at you but you did not wave back ~

it was a month ~ a month of incomplete
till you came home ~ re-described in labels
that did not fit the child that we knew ~

a special school ~ a special child ~ we listened
and obeyed but did not understand ~
another year in days of upside down

and thunderstorms where lightnings forked and speared
the afternoons ~ severing the air
till everything smelled strange and crystalline ~

then you moved away ~ too far to see
and we moved further than the voice could reach.



your birthday ~ this day of thunder rains
 of winds and clouds ~ of sunshine crevasses
 streaking sudden radiance to haunt
 a cabin and a cedar grove in gold
 and then to disappear ~

you dove the aura
 in and out ~ an almost presence that was
 never there ~ two years of distances
 shift between the letters of our names ~
 two years of change ~

did thunders split
 your ears today? and did you think of me?
 I heard your voice but could not place the words ~

now the evening rains to nothingness
 of half forgotten hours to recall
 a half remembered presence that was not.

I think we lost you then ~ like cataracts
 thickening your sight you felt the loss
 and slowly slowly closed your ears and mind ~

safety in infancy ~ remember when
 you were a christmas sister bundled pink
 taught in mysteries of nursery rhymes?

no more bicycles no swimming pools no paton
 leather shoes ~ no flowered easter hats
 no family to throw your arms around ~

you twisted spine and dream to rearrange
 the regiment of walls where there was no one
 with the time to teach you how to sing ~

no sunday schools no backyard barbeques
 only rails jailing your bed.

it is late ~ one lamp against the night
 windowed to a pale yellow square ~
 no other light disturbs the outside street ~

this is a quiet time ~ a time of ghosts ~
 of almost real shapes that swell and sway
 and mumble in my ears ~ more real than

the days of cardboard peoples flashing
 automatic guns and practising
 the rush to isolate each place in time ~

endless endless plastic coated words
 entombing surfaces ~ hiding depths
 that silent nights recall ~

now faces merge
 timeless spaceless unity with dark
 shadow selves awakened from their sleep,



x

another year another year another
year ~ i see you now - a skeleton
moving moving moving hands and feet
and eyes and mouth and head - you do not see
me standing at your side - you do not hear
or answer to my words - you do not laugh
but rough and harsh and loud you cry and cry
and rage against the nowhere of your world ~

days and days that i can never know ~
your memories, of ritual and rules
and pills to keep you quiet - make you fit ~

even then it seemed no one believed
that you were real ~ and everyone agreed
that unreality must be a crime,

xi

whispers creep the walls and swell the doors -
it is your voice - i know the rhythm
lifting through the shivers of my mind -
i feel your sudden nearness circling
and turn to look - but lamps are lonely
throwing golden greys across the floor
and chairs reach out to no one - all is still -
muted into evening sleepiness ~

am i dreaming? conversations sweep
my thoughts and trigger answering ~ i speak
startling the air in syllables
that do not fit - silence responds -
dreaming or awake ~ i only know
my hands are warm in hands that are not here,

twenty seven years - unstructured long
in anonymity ~ now no one is
allowed to penetrate your privacy ~
secure in eyes that do not see the bars
on windows - ears that will not register
in sounds ~ skin no longer sensitized
to gentleness ~ shelled too deep for touch -
shelled inside the long of tearless cries
that grate your throat and drive your arms and legs
pushing endlessly against a flesh
that will not let you die - whose was the kiss
that nailed you so deep in separateness ?

no more laughter ~ years since you have smiled
years since you have understood your name.



xiii

the shadows of my thoughts have been unleashed
and, thrown to dusk ~ a thousand birdflights blurring
my horizons ~ growing into yours ~

elusive thoughts ~ i cannot call them back ~
like children gone ~ like children never grown ~
the you that was ~ the you that will not be ~

memories i could not hold inside
burst my ribs to mist ~ massing wings
and feathers-beating ~ beating silver grey ~

a thousand phantoms rushing ~ soaring clouds
filling skies in promises ~ in words ~
in silences ~ the unshared days and years

melting grey on grey ~ a part of me
escaping skin to be a part of you.

xiv

a dozen phone calls and i hear the claim
of governments to close down institutions ~
now you do not even have a bed ~

a dozen people rearrange your files
i collect old snapshots ~ and we meet
suddenly deciding you are real ~

is it too late for miracles? i will put
a tulip in your hand ~ brilliant red
the inside crawling black ~ and when your arms

swing back and forth against the padded bed
the flower will fall apart ~ you will not notice
petals bleeding sheets ~ but i will see

and gather each one carefully and press
them dull between your childhood photographs,

what is love ~ if not the sun reflecting
dust in silver phantoms of disguise?
look now ~ can you see it? window panes
opening to sun with dancing spinning
leaping spectacles of pantomime ~
eyelashes tip the spectrum and we see
rainbows flash on walls and slip away
through strange familiar ghost realities ~
our ears whisper in songs as if each laugh
grew lives beyond our breath and multiplied
the richness of the air ~

what is love?
something that the hands can't hold ~ webs
of silver glistening through alter suns
springing into worlds that we share.



xvi

child - you are no child now - nor are you
 grown up - you've grown away - away
 from our uncivilized humanity -
 we hid you walls away from sunday picnics
 baseball parks and trees - we taught you how
 to breathe in stereotype - no one would
 stand up for you - you would not stand alone
 and grew an ocean none could penetrate -

now a thousand pages fill with ink
 and multiply in programs that would like
 to call you back - no one quite knows how -
 no one knows if you would want to trust
 our transience - we talk sandcastle loves
 building dreams the tides will wash away.

xvii

it is not summer yet - the long of spring
 finds all things waiting - hovering the brink
 of new discoveries - mountain snows recede
 and skies stretch out to claim a slower sun
 promising a time of breakfast mornings
 bending cherries to our open hands -

the cherry tree is white and crimson lined
 in flowers swelling thick and rich between
 reflected snows and heaviness of red -
 and on the wind the sweet of days to come
 when leaves have widened deep and strong and green
 with ladders climbing branches to the birds -

and we will rise into the birds and song
 feasting cherries through the heights of june.

there is truth ~ the world is alive ~
 we are the caretakers who took no care ~
 now we try to turn the clock around
 and everything sounds great in triplicate ~
 a dozen people rush to help you stand
 but no one can untwist your spine or close
 the open scars of cheeks and feet and hands ~

are we kind? to want you to rejoin
 uncertainties of our inhuman kind?
 where are your thoughts? do you sense or almost
 understand our starlight plans? or will you
 throw the whole thing back into our eyes
 leaving us with papers collecting dust
 in files ~ and no one to practise on?



XLX

yellow green the hills stretch out of sight -
arm in arm we stand beside a road
watching quietness - drinking in
the vastness of a treeless countryside -

a melting sound of wind and i awake
to rainstreaked windows - and a radio
in last night's bomb attacks and politics -
gradually i feel you return
inside my thoughts - your arms around my waist -
your tossed hair - a wordless love
that underlies the difference of our worlds -
there is no answer to the tears we cry
but deep nights find us travelling through skins
until the days become our sleep disguise.

XX

we try honestly - as honestly as finances
permit - as honestly as textbooks will allow -
as honestly as schools teach us how - trying to
believe in people who've forgotten how to
believe - there are deadlines to observe -
this is the longest spring - winter waits -
you will not be allowed to keep your room -
it is no room for keeping but the years
of washed out walls and corridors and doors
that echo every step - and wheeled beds
and wheelchairs and mealcarts and pills
accumulate the patterns you call home -

we taught you institutions - are you ready
to disrupt foundations once again?

we do not write - I walk the raspberries
tasting red - and taste a cottage clay
of wild raspberries bushed deep in thorns
where we ate all the fruit that we could find -

we do not speak - I walk towards the lake
and see the sands of now and then converge
with giant waves and blue blue sky and sun -
no mountains there - but here they overrun -

we do not touch - I sit a pale log
and glimpse a plastic pail shining green -
a plastic shovel - yellow - digging sand
to watch the waters fill each hole again -

strange how we can be so far apart
yet always close enough to overlap.



xxii

there is a time for miracles ~ if not today
maybe tomorrow or the next day or
the next ~ no one knows your thoughts
but sometimes when the midnight close around
I feel your dreams ~ images that dance
and grow beyond your skin ~ I do not know
if you would want to try again ~ returning
to a body twisted small ~ eyes
of damaged sight ~ with strangers bustling
around your bed ~ a kinder world perhaps
of closer hearts and hands ~ coaxing you
to share a new reality ~

and I?
I almost think that hours and hours of talk
have said again we think you are not real.

xxiii

gigantic maple leaves in purple red
thrown ankle deep and crinkling toes ~
a brittle sound ~ a smell of moss and age
waiting to return to earth again ~
gold and orange and brown ~ every leaf
creates another moment to absorb
until somehow somewhere it disappears ~

but never gone ~ only grown to change ~
trees rise taller fuller into spring
wiser in another year of leaves
that fall and grow again into themselves ~

and like each leaf ~ we chase and touch and collect
and move a little closer to the earth.

adventures ~ adventures of pursuit ~ we try
to catch your dreams and make them fit with ours ~
benevolence or menace ~ gods or demons ?
I do not know the roles that we will play ~

communication ~ we cancelled sight and sound
to prison you in flesh ~ now we try
to free your spirit into our ideals ~
what is free? no one knows the answer ~
only that we have to try and crack
the guilts that ride us now ~ my secret guilts
my silences ~ do I want to believe
in you or do I only try to ease
my long term absences ~ I cannot promise
that I will not disappear again.



xxv

cold and cold december - cold and dark
 waiting on the winter equinox -
 a time to hibernate - a time to pray
 to meditate the strengthening of sun -
 i grow more and less the winter child
 in knowing you - the strangeness of this night
 trembling silver snows - it is your night -
 everything begins and all things end
 stretching moon and stars and promises
 through magics deeper than our thoughts can name -

jagged shadows write into the stillness
 of these hours - these hours of between -
 these hours sacrificing last year's sun
 to move into the next year's waking.

xxvi

the night is dark - i feel the misted edges
 of your mind - i almost hear - as if
 you try to comfort my confusions - yes -
 yes there is a truth - the future waits
 and i must follow dreams - if all things fade
 it will not be because i did not try -
 that is my truth - and you? are you willing
 to try one more time at love - at trust -
 at intersecting worlds? there are people
 wanting to believe in something new -
 should we share those beliefs? repainting walls
 and washing windows to admit the sun?

for us or you? i think you are the teacher
 teaching us that we know how to care,

this is our secret ~ they will never guess
those who walk the lines of documents
and rearrange legalities to prove
i have no claim on you nor you on me ~

i draw strange pictures thrown from your heart
you cry my tears ~ i write the ice and fires
of your spaceless wanderings ~ we share
the rage and laughters of a midnight sun ~

you are prisoned flesh ~ i am prisoned
thought ~ the bondage of our distances
cannot be erased ~ but love expands
and joins the inside reaching of our minds ~

our secret and our truth ~ that we are one
exploring alternate realities,

