

Poems

Edward Arruns Mulhorn



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When there is nothing left

When there is nothing left to give,
And none to take that I desire;
When all affection has dried up,
When love, when even kisses tire,
Yet we remain, the seeming pair,
Is there not something wrong, my dear?

When we complain but not delight,
When we look back yet never on,
When we are too estranged to fight,
Removed too far from times long gone
To even think we once could care,
Is there not something wrong, my dear?

When kindness fails for being forced,
When sex appears a just reward
For all the hardship we endure,
When out together both are bored –
So bored there's nothing we can share,
Is there not something wrong, my dear?

When sitting here, alone, away,
Torn from you by your own consent,
I find these words come all too fast,
Too easy, as if they were meant,
Is there not mischief in the air?
Aren't we, together, wrong, my dear?

Over the tracks

Over the tracks,
Alongside the muddied ocean,
Watching the waves that have turned
That have turned,
And the ships sunk into the sea

Between barbed wire
And the tambili tree,
Pushpi and me

I watch your hair in the wind
In the wind
As you curl it back behind your ears
As it frets against your neck.
I search
In the furrow of your frown
The shock of your smile
Those eyes which drown,
And I see

Between barbed wire
And the tambili tree,
Pushpi and me

Yet all I have wanted to say,
All I have practised so hard,
Falls away from my lips like tears;
It dissolves in the sand,
It is washed
It is washed from the sea-wet rocks
Where we stand

Between barbed wire
And the tambili tree,
Pushpi and me

In the fool of the moment
When fear has no voice
And longing no words –
When awkwardness sits
On my shoulders
And smiles to witness such perfect shame –
All I can hear is the sound of my silence:

Of the barrenness of being alone,
Of this ache in my heart which has no home

How could you know,
When here there is no one to tell
And nothing to see

Besides you and me,
Watching the waves that have turned
And your hair in the wind
And the sea-wet rocks,
The sea-wet rocks
Where we stand

Between barbed wire
And the tambili tree,
Just you and me

You will never see me

You will never see me,
You will never know,
Because I will never show

Not in my eyes,
Not in my words
Nor actions,
Not even in my smile

So stay awhile,
Come talk to me,
And in the gentleness of words
Which are so slight they beggar meaning

Know not my heart
Know not my mind
Know not the dreams which every dawn
I bury with the night

So every day I can be here –
Your gentle fool,
Your simple friend

Who till the end will never show,
Will never let you know,
Will never let you see
The agony of
You in me

If you scream in the night

If you scream in the night, scream softly
Lest any hear your cry
And hasten to your lone bedside
To ask the reason why,
For aught you say against me
Still never can you prove
My guilt in our redundant love
Which your love can't remove

If you scream in the night, scream softly,
Drown the past in tears,
Hug your distress around your breast
And cushion all your fears
On that, your joyless midnight bed
Whose stains you can't remove;
There suffocate in our thick love,
That love you cannot prove.

If you scream in the night, scream softly,
If any ask you why,
When hastened to your lone bedside,
Suppress the truth and lie.
For no one will believe you
Or will tenderly remove
The symptoms that you cannot prove,
You cannot prove, my love

.

Time to Go Home

Last lonely moment

On the watch-face of the moon –
In those granite eyes, that head of stone
So far removed, and so alone –
Casting a bald, unbroken light
On the smoldering, shrinking lips
Of the street.

A shadow shrouds the shape of her face,
Her hair awash
With the wan, spectral glow,
Eclipsed in the snow-damp car
With another fag
As a final fleeting hour
Slips through the slow-frosting windows.

Last lonely moment

As she crosses the road,
As she walks to the door,
As she pulls on the bell –
As she tears her eyes from the sickening day,
Cloaked in the shivering dusk,
Shrugging the darkness away.

Last lonely moment
 As the door opens wide,
As, for an instant, from the inside
 She is melted with light;
An electric dawn
Prematurely born
 Spreading its warmth across her skin.

The door half closed:
 Half way she's in.
The final thread of day
 Snaps, unwinds, and falls away –
She is gone
In that moment
 From the door.

These hands

These hands
Which held you,
Which captured your form
Drugged on the toxic of flesh,
Love-drunken and warm

These fingers
Which traced the paths
Of your face,
The curl of your neck,
Of your breast, of your waist

These lips
Which slipped
Round your shivering skin,
Which married your mouth
And breathed you in

This nose
Which blindly sought the curves
Of your half-clothed body,
Trembling with life,
Christened with sweat

This body
This brow
This being
This now

Time

Time

Time that we never had
That we trapped between our fingers
In our embrace –
That drained from our skin
However closely we pressed

Time

That instant from the first kiss to the last
From that moment I dissolved
In your love,
In your eyes;
That gasp of light when I was locked with you

Time

That chattering tube which wrenched me from you
That silence between each text, each mail
That unknowing,
That scarcely daring to know
That night after night after night alone

Time

Time that I cannot recreate
That wraps about me now in folds,
In a stifling embrace –
That closes and closes relentlessly round me,
Abandoned and ravaged by you

Mother and Child

The man that gave me breath
Did I once know him?

No, little crow; you are black, little crow,
And always have been black.
Black you were born, black you are now:
For that I love you so,
I love you so.
Think not on that,
The thing that gave you breath.

What burnt within his breast
That he desert me?

None, little crow; there was no fire, little crow,
No fire in his soul.
He hid from the break to the curtain of day,
And twisting his fingers
He sat out the night.
There was no light
To burn him.

What breath is breath if breath disown it –
Flesh from flesh removed?

Hush, little crow; I am tired, little crow,
Too tired to set forth.
Let sleep what comes not, wake what will,
And think no ill of that,
The thing that made you –
Black and black –
For thus I love you so.

She looks at me

She looks at me with eyes
Like cold blue cauldrons,
Frosted with disinterest or disdain;

She twists her crying shoulders
From the calling of my arms,
She leans aside against my touch
Till nothing more remains.

Who can tell her meaning
From the motions that she makes?
Who can hook upon her mind
From what she neither does nor speaks?

I stare into a wilderness
A lost, unloving place –
Those vacant cold blue cauldrons
Which simmer on the palate
Of her face
Like frozen eyes.

I turn against that wilderness,
I steal into the night;
But sleep is branded by that face –
Those vacant eyes which cast from mine,
Which sow derision's barren crop,
As if myself the crime.

You are haunted by the dark

You are haunted by the dark.
All night you sit in a sailboat
On the open seas
And smile in sleep;
You inhale the Solent's breeze,
And wrap the pillow
Closer, closer round your head.

Your feet are cold,
You toss and turn,
Lost in the giggling waves.
And it's ever so wet
In the sea.
You sneeze,
And pound the surf with furious arms.
Are you dead yet, darling,
Are you dead?

Night on the Town

Weak whisky fumes still in my hair,
Still washing round my throbbing head,
From last night's last term's devil-may-care,
When I should be in bed instead
I marched the pavement down Sloane Square,
Across the road to number three –
My mind filled with your face, your hair,
Your smile, and my timidity.
I found your flat, I rang your bell,
I waited, anxious, at your door,
I heard that voice I know so well,
Then there you were – the same once more.
We went downstairs, across the road,
The pub invited, we went in,
My love encrypted in Morse code
Was tapped unheard beneath your gin.
We shared some chips, another drink,
I paid the bill, I held the door,
The air was chill, your cheeks were pink,
Your eyes more emerald than before.
I told you that I loved your smile,
You answered it was very cold;
And cold the empty half a mile
Back to your flat. And then the bold
Insane attempt to say goodbye,
To kiss your cheek, to grasp your hand,
To share my tortured soul, and my
Heart, in the hope you'd understand...

Victoria isn't quite the place
To hide from midnight and the pain
Of feeling your disarming face
Dissolve in darkness once again.
Each time we part the distance grows
Between us, as a riven void
That won't, despite my efforts, close
Till all I yearn for is destroyed.

Nothing can last

Nothing can last

And when this future is past,
When I turn around the clock
And I see

In all its wretched agony
This moment, this time

Only then will I divine
The stupidity
Of being me

The absurdity
Of this illusion,
Of this false fusion

Cementing me
To an insanity,
To a need I cannot break

To one immense mistake

So real, so true –
So bound to you

Unwilled, unwanted, unnoticed, unseen
Obscene

Yet beautiful
For having once been there,
For having once aroused a care

A silent shame
Fretting around me again
And again

Till I cannot move
For the pain

Can you see me now

Can you see me now
Here
In this room,
Can you see me
Watching you?
Can you feel my eyes
Sink through your skin
And stare within your soul?

Can you hear me now
Here
At your back,
Can you hear us
Breathing as one?
Can you feel my breath
As it fills your chest
As it fires up your lungs?

Can you feel me now
Here
With you, now
Can you feel me wrapped around you?
Can you feel the strength
Of these arms which enfold
To lock you in,
To lock you, here with me, now?

When this ends

When this ends
It ends because of me –
Mine the jealousy
Which spits its treason in my ear
Contorting reason, whispering
The sly, seditious truths
I loathe to hear,
But still hold dear

When this ends
It ends because of me –
Mine the family
Which lives, deluded, on,
Which knows no wrong
Save its own absurd deceptions,
Its own home-fashioned lies,
Which lives, which dies

When this ends
It ends because of me –
Mine the absent honesty,
The certainty, the constancy
That I have locked away from you –
The hope I have defied,
The promised love denied –
For want of being true as you

Once Upon a Time

When Time was young
When minutes passed
The more they passed,
The more they burnt away,
I had no thought to count the clock
Or tinker on my fingers precious hours

For wake seemed much as sleep –
A thing of dreams –
As careless to my reckless self,
As when surrendered
To my slow-sprung,
Sympathetic bed

Why should I else? I was a creature then
To whom this counted state was artifice;
My mind and senses were my world –
Awake, asleep –
A rich illusion
Which grew the more fantastic by the day

And still it grew

Now I am tired and lame,
My mind is worn –
I am a spot, a stain upon humanity;
No longer can I process what I see
Without imposing factories
Of cultivated space and time

What once was mine –
Space without limit,
Time without cause –
That infinite being
Beyond question or pause –
Is lost

In the stillness that has come

In the stillness that has come there is nothing –
No laughter, no tears.
I am barren.
I have reached that tranquillity of despair
In which nothing is left me –
Nothing is all.

It is so long,
This age which I must tinker out,
Peddling through the hours;
So long before we meet again

An hour ago your eyes were buoyant,
Were radiant, as they sought my own;
Half an hour, and I saw the crest of your
Round-turned head slip beyond all sight

So easily I thought nothing of it,
As I have trained myself not to think

So it is now

Only now

And the passive infinity to come

Which is full of what and who is lost,
Of what I have become
And needs must be

She is gone

She is gone

Camilla
It is so long –
These unfocused months which spread before me,
To be filled with feinted life.

How, how is it to be borne?

I know nothing but this loneliness,
This utter isolation
Which cannot be breached

I reach out
And there is nothing

In the stillness that has come (2)

She was
And it was
And there was some hope –
Just a sliver, a fragment, a fleeting breath –
Not one that was breathed,
But contrived into breathing
A shadow of being, a phantasmal essence:
The vestige of dreams, of what might be left –

The vestige of something more fragile than nothing
For lacking the mettle to forge in the flame
Some substance from passion that shivered to cinder –
Consumed by itself – its self-pity, its shame
Even before it was born

Time and again
And fading each time
Till it slipped into myth, into mist,
Till it died

So silently breathing its last in the shadows
I thought it could somehow survive

That was then, this is now
Four decades removed
Still fool to the lie that she has not gone –
She has left, but she has not wholly gone –
Not on that day, nor the one that followed
Nor the next, nor what has proceeded since then

Inevitably, inexorably,
Till this very moment

Still not believing that she has departed
Not quite believing that now she has gone

Till when I look round and search with my eyes
I see her no longer standing beside me
I see the stark truth she was never beside me

I see that, at best, she was somewhere inside me –
A sliver, a fragment, a half-fashioned breath
Of unspoken passion –
A torment, a yearning
Lacking the substance to come into being
Dying before we were born

Madam, I'm Adam

When God said unto Adam
‘Guess what I'm going to do? –
I'll knock you up a woman
Who'll be just right for you’,
He little knew the consequence
To post-primordial man,
How great would be the recompense
For such a mighty dam.
(This shows how even Godhead,
With charitable cause,
Can turn man's grand design instead
To fights and menopause.)
He little thought man's lofty aims
And dignified desire
Would all go up in carnal flames
And cinder in Eve's fire.
For man, he is a gentle fool,
Though bold and brave and strong:
He took the thing he thought he'd rule
And ere the day was long
He'd fawned and grinned, he'd begged and knelt,
He'd grasped both heart and gun;
She'd gone at him with tongue and belt,
She'd scratched and kicked, and won.
And ever since, in servitude,
He's lived beneath her will –
The victim of each changeful mood,
The one who pays the bill;

And still, yes still, she tortures him
With threats and well-spun lies,
She subjects him to every whim,
And will, until he dies.

Drowning

Hold me here, on this wind-worn cliff,
Above unwinding shores
Stung with the pallid glow of dawn
Released from night's chill claws,
For yawning life is waking
To its cyclic genesis,
And the dew-sweet mists of morning
Wash upon me with a kiss.

Each day and every day I hear
The sea-surge pounding in my ear
Its frightful warning, cruel and clear,
That it will rise and take me.
Yet come the curtain of the night
That flame of darkness flickers bright
And fuels my dance, my eager flight,
Down to that selfsame sea.

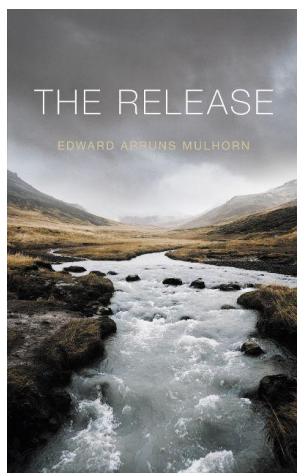
But should I go what follows on,
When I am lost and there is none?
When, even if alive, inside
I'm hid from that wherein I hide?

Is this, this populated land,
Too hard for such a man as me –
Trapped in a bald humanity
I cannot come to understand?

Is this, the salt that stings my eyes,
This thing, with neither form nor guise,
This demi-hell, this paradise –
Is this where my true future lies?

No! Let me rise and drink again
From pools where once I cried;
My listless, wishless world of pain
And anguish will subside

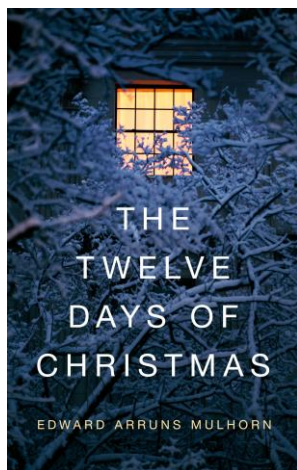
By the same author –



The river is life. It gives life and it takes away. It courses through the heart of the valley, nourishing the earth and sustaining the creatures around it.

Polson lives for the river. But he takes it for granted, and betrays the trust of those closest to him. He's pursued by tormentors and by his own demons, and abandons the world that he knows.

As the river dries up in the heat of the summer, Polson looks for a way to return, sensing that only within the river can he ever hope for redemption.



An eight-year-old boy witnesses the violent death of his mother. What will it take to make him believe he is safe, and give him the confidence to tell me who did it?

Simon is a pale and awkward child. But he's reached out to me. I can see he needs me. There's no one else he can turn to.

What I can't understand is his seeming reluctance to come clean and tell me the truth. Something or someone is stopping him from saying what happened that night.

All he needs to do is simply to tell me. Then I can guard him and keep him safe.

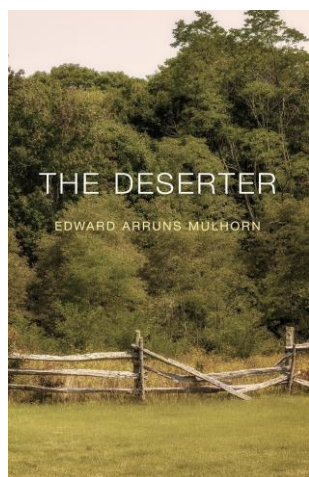


Loss is the only truth we can know.
Everything else is a lie.

Six students arrive on a summer island.
It may only be a mile from the shore,
but it feels removed from reality,
as if part of a different world.

Nothing they see appears to make sense.
Nothing they say can be trusted.

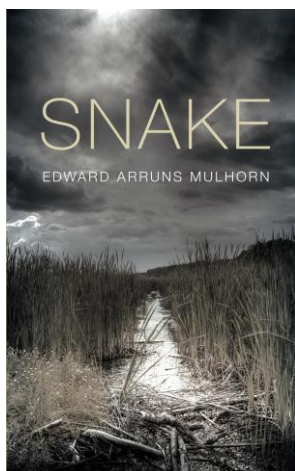
They find themselves drowning in
resentment and fear, and it seems there's
no way to escape.



Living in fear of the unknown, Katie's
instincts are to protect her brothers,
while trying to carve out a haven for
them in the fragile and unfamiliar world
into which they have been thrust.

As the threats around them grow, she
strives to keep them safe, while struggling
to convince herself they will ever win
through.

It is only by gaining the trust and drawing
on the strength of those who have turned
their backs on the world, that she is able
to face into the challenges she encounters
and dare to believe they can survive.



The ley is a world apart. A paradise, a prison. A raw and elemental wilderness; a place of lost innocence. Bowing to seasons, to wind and to fire, to the shocks that nature thrusts upon it.

Within its labyrinth of reed, creatures search and stumble blind. Vengeful, beautiful, unforgiving. Living and thriving, surviving and dying, feeding off themselves.

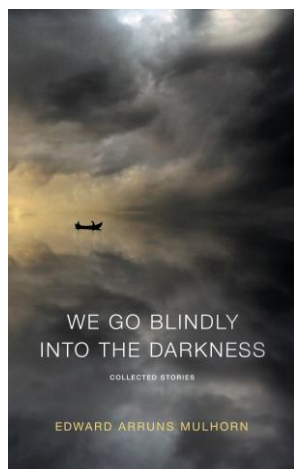
Into this merciless world the girl is lured irresistibly. She is drawn to it, repelled by it, drowned in its subterfuge and shame.



Ever since he arrived in the village of Nettlesden, Matty has been warned not to enter the wood. It has lain undisturbed for years. The trees within it creak and groan perpetual pain; they yawn an invisible agony at the life that lies buried within. No one has reason to go near, except for Uriah.

But Matty is enthralled by its savage beauty, and entering deep into its heart he begins to discover its secrets. Things that the villagers thought dead and forgotten; and things they thought were alive.

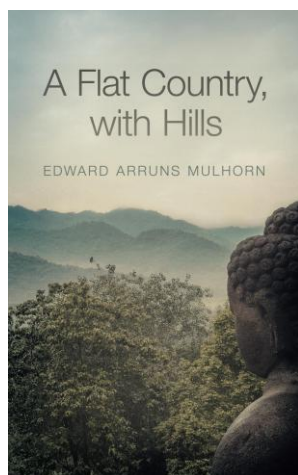
What Matty uncovers prompts shame and denial, setting the village against itself, and threatening all those who live there.



Children play Frisbee on a beach; a man borrows his friend's boat to go fishing; a couple move to the Highlands to retire; a chance conversation is held in Gatwick Airport. These are ordinary events experienced by ordinary people. What makes them extraordinary is where they lead.

The stories in this collection are diverse. What unites them is a search for meaning and closure. The characters exist in a natural world that is as mysterious as it is majestic, and they struggle to find their place within it.

Mulhorn's stories touch on the transience of human existence. Frequently, they are unresolved. They acknowledge life's hardship and disappointment, yet hint at the promise of hope beyond – a hope which is never quite satisfied.



Fed up with London and my job, it's time to escape. Why not Sri Lanka, I think. That's idyllic and sunny and covered in palm trees, and half way across the world. A good place to chill.

A little research might also have revealed that it's reaching the height of an internal conflict. So probably not the best time to go and work for a peace organisation.

Let alone to take the kids.

Written in the moment and blind to the future, this is a voyage of discovery where nothing is what it seems, and the end of the journey – if it is an end – is far from where it began.

Visit www.edwardarrunsmulhorn.com to find details of future publications, or contact eam@edwardarrunsmulhorn.com