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# FLIGHT OF THE MARIE HELENA



## FIRST DAY

**It rarely rains in dreams.  
We hit all time lows and  
very high estates, but rain -  
no, it rarely does in dreams.**

**They say if you throw the lei of  
golden blossoms far as you can and  
they suspend in mid-air, then fly  
back into your hand, you will return  
to this blue island under blue clouds  
rising from blue sea.  
Blue above, blue below,  
all is blue between.**

**Return to an isle where  
wind whipped trees of teak  
and mahogany clatter their  
twigs like castanettes.**

**With no thought of return  
I press the golden lei into a book.**

**Later, the book may rise;  
if not, perhaps the table.**

**The Marie Helena,,  
Our Lady Of the Tide,  
largest raft the world has known,  
rests upon the blue sand shore,  
grounded in low ebb,  
tethered by a silver cord  
to a seaside carousel.**

**I am not a cloud. Feed me.  
Press not into service one  
who maketh wine of olives  
to serve in porous cups.**

**Wind of fragrant lady's breath prefer,  
though it rarely rains in dreams.  
Carpets of interwoven  
string quartets suport us  
as we take our leave and repair to sea  
to follow the argument of the ocean;  
to listen to the echo of a  
great bell tolled beneath the waves  
and toast the Marie Helena  
Queen of the Blue Tide,  
soon to sail!**

**Toast the Marie Helena with  
a wink, a blink, a nod,  
a bouquet of bougainvillea  
and a hand me down guitar.**

**Empty that guitar of its**

**splendid oily rainbow.  
pluck it out with patience,  
the cleanest sort of vice.**

**Stage the bon voyage with  
flagrant octarina;  
lace the mask to your face  
with living worms.**

**Strong hands unite!  
Sign it into conscience!  
Seal it with a fist;  
for sail we will!**

**For each: a hammock strung  
with sinew, bone and tendon;  
soup and salt for each  
and garnets in the gravy.**

**Place, law, climate and syntax  
converge like wind to make the  
Marie Helena thrash as  
though she were a living thing.**

**A fragrance of excitement,  
rising from the shoulders  
of a deck hung with wistaria,  
first inflames and then amazes.**

**Now the blessing  
and the benediction.  
Incense of carnation,  
clove and oleander stream**



**from a swinging silver censer.**

**The eye of the tabernacle winks as the  
chalice rises bolt upright on the altar,  
shooting arrows of communion into  
infidel and faithful hearts alike.**

**Accept the benediction of  
a bent and bloody knee,  
skinned on a gravel court  
playing Hangman in rotation.**

**Shake a leg, blood lies still.  
Clay is the rover.  
There are rats in the scuppers!  
Voulez vous couchez avec them?**

**The artist in the vein  
has flustered reason.  
The blood will not clot.  
Worse, it will not flow.**

**From a seaside carousel,  
a black robed figure waves;  
a slow flick of the wrist  
from a sleeve without a hand.**

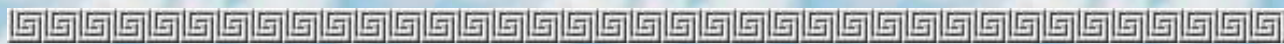
**Toast the Marie Helena, pilgrim.  
Bear your lacerations with resignation.  
They will be healed within  
the seven days we sail.**

**For a moment suspended,  
wedged between two ticks of time,  
caught between a sigh and inspiration,  
the Marie Helena hesitates,  
then with a shudder leaps  
into the cheering foam.**

**The scent of orchids mingles with  
the silk strings of a light guitar.  
a blue black cloud obscures  
the seaside carousel. We sail!**

**In amniotic darkness  
the Queen of the Blue Tide  
sails beneath a counterpane of  
self reflecting mirrors.**

**The will of the wind be done!  
We trust ourselves to the  
providence of current and  
the wisdom of the waves.**



## **SECOND DAY**

**The dawn beside the lee  
in morning aquaglimmer:  
a clear prophetic seawalk  
leads to afternoon.**

**A thousand different lines**

**can populate a song and  
not disturb the sequence  
of its melody.**

**Music hath no need of guardians.  
Her sweet guitars,  
harps, bells and calliopes  
defend her.**

**Not the subject,  
but the cadence;  
less the cadence  
than the tone...**

**Less subject, tone or beat  
than angle of coincidence  
seeking satisfaction of a  
seventh sense of symmetry.**

**The Marie Helena glides upon  
the bright white ocean of  
our second day.  
Everyone aboard her is  
a stowaway. There were  
no tickets for the passage.**

**Hanged in their lineaments,  
sinister spinsters prowl  
the foredeck and the aft  
in search of lost angelicacies.**

**Thus do they paper their  
implausibility with regret,  
decline to elaborate.  
Thin, wicked and celibate.**



**Thus do they signify to me:  
they remain in some sense  
chained and offer constancy.  
I'd not free them for the world.**

**They will scrub the deck for secrets;  
discover blood drops and hasty  
crumpled notes of secret love.  
They will find small things of value  
which they will not return.  
God bless them.**

**Bell tower, peal forth.  
Awaken all sleeping souls.  
Shovel the master from  
ashes, an approving flame.**

**The more the eyelids lower  
the more an internal visor  
opens on a vast  
mechanical vista.**

**Words of emerald  
shine beneath a  
slow flowing sea with  
light sighs and laughter.**

**What was it we feared when  
setting forth to sail upon  
this cheerful raft upon  
this sweet and glossy sea?**

**Relax! Fear is endless  
but here - oh, here is  
time for music, for philosophy,  
for poetry and even love!**

**Here is time for recognition,  
reunion and recompense.  
We will sail unto  
whatever port the winds prepare.**

**Ah, blessed second day!  
Two smiling dolphins breast our wake.  
Lost from sight, our shore becomes  
the lost blue peaks of memory.**

## **INTERLUDE**

**An almighty knock  
shatters the placid waves.  
The sea becomes the sky  
full of foaming flame!**

**Veins of the waves  
bulge till they burst  
and turn the sea to blood.**

**A raft has no fore or aft,  
the Marie Helena has no sail.  
Hell's own violin and Bacchanale  
upon the southdeck wail;**



**"This is my creation!"  
cries the thunder.  
"I am pleased!  
Now mop it up!"**

**To be done! To be done!  
And then, under a swell,  
sat down forcibly and  
lectured by a cloud.**

**As I rolled to St. Alair,  
the cloud declared,  
I met a crippled king  
with four fleshless hounds  
leashed by seven chains.**

**A queen had he on the right arm  
and three queens on his left.  
Each queen had seven tongues,  
each tongue of two opinions.**

**He combed the twelve hairs of his beard  
with a currycomb of glass -  
Ten tines had it on a time  
but four, alas, are broken.**

**God above and Christ below,  
counting the king, the queens,  
hounds, chains and all  
the several other things  
how come  
it rarely rains  
in dreams?**

**It is because  
there is no need.**

**There are dreams in which  
other dreams are mentioned,  
contiguous in symmetry, but,  
in dreams, it very rarely rains.**



### **THIRD DAY**

**Who kept the watch that  
endured the night?  
The watch from which  
we woke from stormless slumber/  
into the confectionery of  
a gladsome dawn?**

**Who saw that the hour is  
never the hour apparent,  
awaited a history of history  
from the hall of elucidation?**

**The first day held questions,  
the second day posed riddles -  
Today smacks of mystery.  
Let us question one another!**

**Inside my fists a  
theater of the dark;  
throbbing to the lovely  
lady without mercy.**

**I came to question her, how  
comes she to question me?  
All is coincidence!  
One thing begets another.**

**Ah! But I itch and I  
grow hateful for an hour,  
my language composed of  
noun, verb and nudity.**

**Slam the visor on this  
small change arcade.  
Open it upon  
a rolling sea.**

**From a sea song foaming  
with slashing brine;  
from a sunbeam springs  
a horse with tangled mane.**

**Hands across the sky reach  
meeting without touching.  
Feet beneath the sea stroll  
on carpets of anemone.**

**The sky spills from its  
dressing gown of cloud  
where seven pointed starfish soar  
on silent wings.**

**From a mid day moon  
there hangs a ballerina**



**twirling slowly by her teeth:  
she is my witness.**

**She gains the handrail,  
gently slides like butter  
trailing down a sunwarmed  
deck, pat by pat.**

**Is it she who watched  
the storm kick out the jambs,  
the ghost of her for whom this  
craft is named "Marie Helene?"**

**How came we to the sea?  
Who bid us come?  
There is not a sailor in our midst.  
Not one among us.**

**There are sunsets, stars  
and omens to be figured;  
winds that promise  
ever greater fury.**

**Without Captain, crew or  
lore, we are  
captives of the tide.  
It is better not to  
recognize this plight.**

**It is better to  
wear seaweed socks  
than thrust a melon in  
your brother's ear.**

**Tender hearted ladies toss  
wildflowers from the lookout,  
out, out into a sunny flare  
of glaring trumpets.**

**Before you cough,  
take your hat off. Diamonds?  
Diamonds were nothing.  
We used to swallow them.**

**We shall be increased.  
In spite of cadaverous  
laughter, it stands  
to reason. We provide.**

**Bless the  
sailors and  
the girls  
who bite them.**

**These limits I defend.  
Why overstep them?  
They are where they are instead  
of sails for the Marie Helena,**

**We will slime our horns  
with the balm of Gilead,  
clink skulls and drink,  
deeply, one another's health.**

**A raging teardrop  
in a timid fire,  
completely misconstrued  
and glad to be so.**

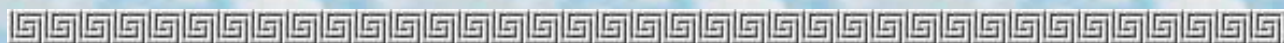
**You know best,  
consorts of kings,  
how little comfort  
are forget-me-nots.**

**Once.  
Oh, once!  
And then  
no more.**

**Had I  
dreamt of rain.  
It would seem  
an unusual thing.**

**Strike the visor on  
this day of mystery.  
Open it inside  
the realms of sleep.**

**I fall until I feel I  
must explode  
with spray of salt spreading  
ivory on the porthole.**



## **FOURTH DAY**



**The fourth day dawns at midnight.  
What should have been the moon  
whirls like a scimitar swung round the  
turban of some blood drenched Saracen  
beheading stars.**

**Questions on the first day,  
then riddles giving way to  
mystery on the third;  
today commences with apocalypse.**

**A shrill high fiddle note presides.  
Transported to high ecstasy,  
our firebreathing eyes pour  
music back into the violin.**

**Then saith God, "Call  
your son Loammi meaning:  
Ye are not my people.  
I will not be your God. (Hosea I:IX)**

**"You shall abide many days  
without a prince, a king,  
a sacrifice, an image,  
an ephod or a teraphim. (III:IV)**

**"Blood toucheth blood,  
let the land mourn.  
Thou shalt be  
no priest to me." (IV: II,III,VI)**

**What? No teraphim?**

**Supplication seems inadequate.  
It is too late for sacrifice.  
Perhaps some sort of bribe  
is apropos.**

**Tossing my wristwatch  
into the snapping sea,  
my timepiece is returned by an  
indignant wave, rewound.**

**The soft hand of one  
who is not, but almost,  
present begins to stir  
my hair with breezes.**

**Three more days of this,  
a soft wind whispers,  
the poison will subside.  
The Marie Helena and  
her ocean will provide.**

**A raft cannot ship water.  
The Marie Helena will not drown.  
It may float, becalm or spin  
but it will never sink.**

**Those not disposed to vision gather  
on the west deck, trade yarns and speak  
of remarkable spitballs, delivered  
with a touch of fire.**

**I go among them and speak  
of innings, runs and scores.  
We will speak of "going back for  
a long one" and derive some  
simple creature comfort therefrom.**

**Slam down the visor!  
The moon becomes again a moon  
of gentle incandescence  
over the smooth, lapping swells.  
The lion of the ocean sleeps.**

## **INTERLUDE**

**True dawn.  
Sea and sky, then  
sky and sea,  
fleck, foam, wave -  
luminous blue rose.**

**An island lies  
off stern - inviting.  
Ah! If we could only  
swing the Marie Helena!**

**But no, we are engaged to  
ride the mighty raft where  
wind and wave command!  
Mark it on the map and wave farewell.**



**The perfume of its trees  
ride on the breeze which  
gently, firmly, sadly  
bars our entry.**

**A very blue island  
beneath blue clouds  
against blue sky  
rising from blue sea.**

**It is not a dream.  
Ah no, it is another thing.  
It is a sunlit vision  
seen through rain.**



## **FIFTH DAY**

**The fifth day: thunder without rain.  
A small skull carved of  
ivory sits, right profile,  
in an unlit candelabra.**

**Yesterday, a determined smile carried  
one corner of the sky clenched  
between ragged teeth:  
The sky which is a sheet.**

**Today a docile banner flaps**

**in half a breeze.  
A pipe is clenched between  
my teeth unlit.**

**Yesterday a velvet gloved claw bore  
a cupful of the sky  
in a milkwhite vase:  
The sky which is a drop of blood.**

**Today I poured my tin cup of  
salty soup into the sea  
but not as a libation.  
I had no taste for it.**

**Yesterday, a girl with lips of amber  
printed a yellow kiss upon  
a rounded ring of sky:  
The sky which is my mouth.**

**Today, a lump of anthracite  
hangs in a double dark sky;  
the sky below, the sky above.  
and in between: the sea.**

**Yesterday, with stool and milking pail,  
I sat beneath the Mother Unicorn  
with hands of storm  
attempting to milk the sky.**

**Today nothing amazes or perplexes.  
It is all too weary to perplex.  
It only cauterizes or infects.**

**All which was professed a joy  
becomes a present bore, in light of  
one objection: I have  
seen this all before!**

**Such redundancy calls  
for brass, flute, woodwind  
and sweet, resounding lips  
to play them.**

### **INTERLUDE**

**Oh, but the song is the same song  
sung to the same tune once too often.  
The answers to our questions have  
proved less than entertaining.**

**A ride of a week and one week only.  
Each day's sun ascends behind  
a different deck.  
Is this a circle that we sail?**

**We are reduced to ritual.  
We have burned our graven images  
for fuel. We find no significance  
in numbers or the alphabet.**

**I look to the darkening sky and  
see no constellations; only  
slowly spinning stars  
without cohesion.**



**From the southeast cusp of Leo pours  
the realm of galaxies.  
That is where you look  
to look far, far away.  
What begins with music  
will end with music.**

**Between the music are  
a number of things which  
have to do with music  
lacking only melody.**

**It is time for a midnight snack  
of oranges, rosewater and  
lavender pretzels made of china  
which snap between your teeth.**



## **SIXTH DAY**

**I thought of a colored pencil.  
I thought it with soft blue lead.  
I thought your picture, used the  
flat side of the lead to shade.**

**I penciled in the sky and made  
clouds with a kneaded eraser.  
You will be my masterpiece, I  
will sketch you from every angle.**

**Six dolphins circle round**

**the Marie Helena; one for  
every day we've been at sea.  
What profit reputation?**

**White cloud stallions dash  
in non-emphatic rhythm  
bright as any tinsel in the  
chocolate dust of a red wind.**

**Four emphatic trumpets blare,  
why be dismayed?  
Without music we are prey to  
the strange arms of reason.**

**Absolution, reconstruction,  
resolution and forgiveness  
pour from the brass bells  
with a scent of lemon bloom.**

**Glad to be forgotten, I go  
climbing in among the  
reconstituted constellations  
searching for a certain star.**

**Come shining from the afterdeck,  
sweet echo of the singer.  
Cello, lay your ecstasy  
like leagues of spongy moss.**

**Emotions of the heart  
must be surprised -  
they languish for attention,  
are shy.**

**I closed my eyes last night  
but did not dream.  
At dawn...gently, gently,  
a patter of rain.  
Silence has left a film of  
satisfaction, paper thin,  
upon the transparent ocean,  
oh, but not upon my heart!**

**Instead I turn the capstan  
to the squalid, squalid lee.  
North by North or South by South  
upon, beneath, between the sable sky.**

**In this way shall all  
hearts be protected:  
a tight membrane dispensing  
merriment and absolution.**

**Again, a light rain. The  
sea devours these clouds.  
Storms are its meat; our hearts  
will do for wine.**

**Consider how rigidly  
the sky is painted.  
How we wear it on our head  
like a slowly spinning hat.**

**The Marie Helena speeds along  
in a sleek current. A new  
moon on the horizon casts**



**no hint of glare.**

**The shower is passed.  
The sky is clear: Preserpe,  
whose invisibility signals rain,  
is discerned but not quite seen.**

**An absence of a dream of rain.  
Six days at sea, much has been scuttled.  
What, here at the end, seems  
worthwhile to have brought aboard?**

**A few things seem certain.  
Some scales, some equations.  
Smaller matter the particular music  
or the mathematics forced from them.**

**Or invert and it is  
all the matter; all  
the matter which  
scarcely ever was.**

**Now one way,  
now another.  
Both, and others,  
however pure.**

**Clay and cloud.  
Cloud and clay.  
Cloud and cloud.  
Clay and clay.**

**Leonardos have lept from  
flaming towers for you, with  
no suggestion or remotest  
promise of fidelity.**

**Gilded to the lily,  
you proudly plunge your hand  
into the hive and scoop  
the honey to your mouth.**

**This clear, transparent honey  
has no flavor.  
Should the Marie Helena  
sail another week? Ah,  
no - it is forbidden  
by edict.**

**Tonight we swing into our hammocks  
determined not to dream.  
The warmth we seek from bodies  
eludes us. Our bones are leather.**

**Tone by tone the midnight bell  
beats twelve bright claps of  
sweet forgiveness in these ears  
of ears this night of nights.**



## **SEVENTH DAY**

**Today a cratered rainbow  
ascends with ragged beam**

**from a cup of morning coffee  
into later afternoon.**

**The day is spent preparing  
for a secular advent which  
may well fall shy of  
advertised proportions.**

**Seven days a-sail or a-spin,  
however traveled, now at last  
the world lies uncreate,  
transparent to the core.**

**The vacation, hardly begun,  
is over now. As the axis  
of our fantasy dissolves,  
we slowly wave in rhythm.**

**Waving at a passing raft  
where reflections of ourselves  
wave back a tear stained flag  
hung from a rope of onions.**

**Waving to the flippers of  
seven silver silkies who  
have tracked our wake all day,  
now going separate ways.**

**Waving to children with gold  
eyes upon a seaside carousel  
who persue one another in  
stationary joy with screams of laughter.**



**Waving at a superior one step epoxy,  
good for bonding stainless steel to water.  
Good for gluing the shoreline to the sea.**

**Waving at an Italian  
organ grinder in a skip.  
His ape returns our wave  
with his glass beaded cap.**

**Waving at a public nuisance  
spraypainting the rainbow and  
to seagulls circling counter to the  
spinning wake of the Marie Helena.**

**Waving to a dark steamer,  
dim even by unclouded sun.  
Something waves back, or  
perhaps it is a curtain.**

**Waving to the crucified  
who lifts a finger in reply.  
Waving to a blue, blue island which  
was once our heart's desire.**

**Waving to a solitary gunman,  
whose eye, magnified, winks  
from the crosshair sight  
trained in our midst.**

**Waving to an inflatable giraffe  
bearing a poet in beret and shades  
reciting, beating holy hell**

**out of a conga drum.**

**Waving to a foiled villain,  
cloak and tophat streaming,  
hissing as he twirls the points  
of his elaborate mustache.**

**Waving, waving, waving  
at a lei of golden blossoms  
suspended in mid air,  
poised in indecision.**

**When we'd finished waving,  
we danced to the creak of  
an iron gate; danced to the clank  
of the lid upon a boiling kettle.**

**We danced to the squeek of  
chalk upon a blackboard,  
breathing the sweet powder  
of pounded erasers.**

**We danced to the whistle of  
a carpenter stripping paint  
and to the horns and sirens  
of a falsified alarm.**

**We danced to the deep groan  
of shifting continental plates  
and to the muffled notes of  
a jukebox in a hurricane.**

**We danced to the whine  
of a dentist's drill and  
the crunch of steps in  
fresh powdery snow.**

**We danced to the howl of  
a spook from out a watery grave  
and to the slither of its  
slimey seaweed chains.**

**We danced in white and  
scarlet ephods  
on the ashes of our Teraphim.**

**We danced to the rippling cadence  
of a thousand string guitar;  
the deck awash in music, with  
treble clefs of foam conducting.**

**We danced to the keen whine  
of selective devastation, to a  
world innocent of roses groaning  
beneath a deep bowed bass.**

**We danced to the lullaby wail  
of one almost but never quite  
entirely present whom we have  
loved but cannot fathom.**

**We danced upon logs of teak,  
mahogany, ironwood and ebony.  
The visor of the sky opened at perihelion  
spreading to each horizon.**



**And when we'd finished dancing,  
we broke down and wept.**

**We wept for crimson laces  
in green leather boots.  
We wept at a full ketch  
of sardines and at the  
pipe smoke of three fishermen  
in animated conversation.**

**We wept because it so  
rarely rains in dreams.  
Our tears were fat, warm  
and blue by reflected sky.**

**We wept for a three bar  
jackpot in a ten cent  
one armed bandit spitting  
dimes and ringing bells.**

**We wept forlorn, for long,  
forever; caught our tears  
in tiny crystal bottles  
with blue glass stopples.**

**As we continued weeping,  
our raft began to spin,  
faster, faster, blurring like  
a pinwheel in a hurricane.  
We hold, we slip, we slide  
as the Marie Helena  
discharges passengers by**

**centripetal force.**

**Goodbye! we cry to one another.  
Forgive these imperfections,  
these tears of self pity and  
these infinite regressions.**

**Some hold hands, some fly  
off seperately, some by  
fours and threes to the  
place in which they land.**

**Some land in a haystack  
in mid-summer Somerset.  
Some land in boxcars  
rattling through the Klondike.**

**Some land in covered wagons  
moving west, some land in  
a borax mine amidst the  
clatter of mule teams.**

**Some fall down chimneys  
on Christmas eve,  
brush the soot from  
scarlet suits and chuckle.**

**Some fall breathless onto  
a seaside carousel  
among the gold eyed children  
chasing one another endlessly.**

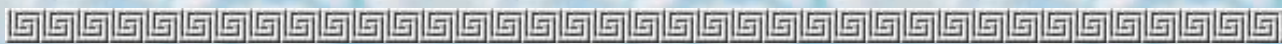
**Some fall on the desert  
and crawl across the sand  
into a promising mirage  
that speaks of water.**

**Some, or none, or is it one?  
land upon a blue island. beneath  
white clouds against blue sky  
rising from blue sea.**

**After a week's unfolding  
many things have changed.  
It is time now to  
change them back again.**

**It is still true, in spite of  
the flight of the Marie Helena,  
still true, that it rarely,  
very rarely, rains in dreams.**

**Robert Hunter 1985**



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