

DEBORAH MARRIES MR. MURPHY  
A celebration

written 1964-65  
as a wedding gift  
for Deborah Morse  
(Spring 1965)

TO EXPLAIN

EARLIER ALTARS

EVA: A RETROSPECT

THE BRIDE AT CANA

PENELOPE MARRIES THE SACKER OF CITIES

LADY MALONE MARRIES SIR UPPYNA

GERTRUDE MARRIES CLAUDIUS

KATHERINE VON BORA MARRIES MARTIN LUTHER

MAUD GONNE MARRIES MAJOR JOHN MacBRIDE

(HER THOUGHTS RECUR TO WILLIAM YEATS)

DEBORAH MARRIES MRS. MURPHY

(Tuning up for a Wedding Song)

## TO EXPLAIN

I once gave you a limerick and you said  
You were delighted to be getting it,  
Being without all hope ever to receive  
Some fitter seizure on the lyrical moment  
From my hand. And essentially you were right.  
Plays (and I gave you one) are all I have  
To give, and like to be as long as I live.  
And it may well be that characters in plays  
Have had too much of me; that having stared  
Too deep into those faces from my mind,  
Paid too much heed to voices their own theme,  
It may be I am out of stares to confront  
In your face - and then set down lines of it -  
The wild lyric experience of the minute.

Aware I might have got up something better,  
I might have treasured up more craftsmanship;  
Since, as it is, I had more in my mind  
Is very probably the whole effectual burden  
Of the dinky verses that I do get out.

## II

Of the many things I would not have you think,  
Least well is this: that I strike up this song  
For joy I have in the singing, more than any  
Pride in the event; as if I loved your love  
That it tuned me, and not wed you. But I don't  
Snatch up your marriage as a child a guitar,  
To jangle it, because he knows it as the scene,  
When subtler fingers danced there, of a whole  
Garden-party under Japanese lanterns.  
I sing in the place I love, no general music.

Be done with me  
The day I make the passionate love of a friend  
Serve to spur me into a meditation,  
Or dare to represent love to myself  
As the occasion of an abstract writing,  
Or turn love any way but love's way - yours now.

### III

A moment is when I must be myself  
A little, and yet not too like myself.  
Alike enough if the impersonation  
(For impersonation it must be: I never have  
Been wise or vital enough to do without)  
Ring hollow in a characteristic tone:  
False - but my falsity. Let me but now,  
As Robert Browning prayed, be "once alone  
Myself, and for one only;"  
Write up the role habitually I play,  
Speak something like my own style of tirade  
In my own garb I stitched - self-stitched, self-lit,  
Self-paint-bedaubed: my very own fool, then,  
A playwright thrust onstage to face the house,  
Expected, even as the fruit starts winging in,  
To reveal himself one pretty passionate person -  
Maybe rip off his shirt and show the gem  
There blazing - or this generation's guide  
To the moonlit world, or - gracious! - anything  
But that little fellow there at the footlights.

What is the character it's always had,  
This procession of my character out toward you,  
But rehearsal for a like *début* - you'll say,  
A qualified success, in sign whereof  
(The qualification, ah, not the success!)  
Even now, when I would be at my most plain-spoken,  
I have my thoughts but as I've learned to have them;  
I take my way to yours through earlier altars.

EARLIER ALTARS

EVA: A RETROSPECT

I will not sit by and hear divines disparage  
That applejack we tried: it made our marriage.

THE BRIDE AT CANA

Imagine! to your wedding someone coming  
And starts messing with the liquor arrangement.

God! You don't  
Want to be thinking in those sort of terms.  
It's wedding day! You want to have your thoughts free  
For children (who climb them), for this night debacle  
You're contracted for, and will be having to get through.

And you're working on that,  
And you look over, and there's this mysticist  
Monkeying with the punch-bowl.

Father, it's not  
I'm denying anything, it's just simply  
This is the moment you have to leave, yes.  
You don't know being human well enough!

You don't seem . . .

Come on, now! You don't want to embarrass me.  
You wouldn't want to be here when he comes?

PERENLOPE MARRIES THE SACKER OF CITIES

This, this will be a marriage, I know it, something in  
my heart tells me.

And even as the correct libation sets a shade winging  
toward Death River,

So this ritual action unpins my memory,

Which straight

Flees to a moment in my girlhood when I stood

Holding the wedding leaves for mother's friend, Alkestis:

She will be giving her life for him, it will come to that -

which is what she wants it to come to.

And I,

My life for him - it is as if a god down off a frieze let go with  
the arrow of that knowledge into me.

But giving, with a more heart-assuring complexity,

More of a life.

I am marrying into the distance! My husband,

Conventional buck of a hero though he is,

Yet his fair body

Is as a curtain, swept continually

Aside by a glowing detached hand. So one gets these glimpses,

As one goes about one's chores in a cliff-house,

Of seascape arranging itself in the window-frame:

Endless ocean, a poor island humping out of it, and a

lone palm grows.

I foresee

Parting - much of it - and somewhere

Remote upon the peaks of our middle age,

A moment of the incredible dawn richness.

But if I look into his eyes for comfort,

The view is as a bird-flight over Greece.



LADY MALONE MARRIES SIR UPPYNA

I am the heroine of a romance,  
And I am the Lady Malone.  
It had been all dwarfs,  
Castles and old woods,  
Witches and red birds,  
For a long time now.

Then Sir Uppyna  
Rode into my story.  
He treated my foes  
As if they'd been placed for him.

I felt my passion grow  
From line eleven-oh-two.  
It was most like recalling  
Practically half way through  
Some old chronicle romance  
That -yes! - one had stumbled through  
This once, ages ago.

Then Sir Uppyna  
Rode into my story.  
The perils and the scenes  
Came over to him.

He quested along at a trot.  
What he did was to neutralize,  
Then wipe away, each plot  
Person, passion or event  
In the world I was appearing in.  
As if a witch skimmed above  
The steps you left on a beach  
And effaced them with a rag.

Then Sir Uppyna  
Rode into my story.  
He had the thought to drive  
For the joy in the last line.

All that color in a time  
He went over with char.

But white of the last page  
After the story stops,  
An uncontrollable desert,  
Dangles and rolls on.  
He's out there questing now.

Not one in this generation  
Of minstrellers seems to care  
For any attempt you make  
To live past your happy ending,  
To live with the curtain down.

Thus Sir Uppyna  
Cracked into my story.  
If I'm anything now,  
It's what he's had, the winnings.

For somehow the White Knight  
Has carried the dwarfs away,  
Drained off the verdure from the etchings,  
Stuffed dead rats in the trumpets,  
Held smoked glass to the sun,  
And simplified whole forests  
To char, the smoky framework.  
Whole backgrounds of char! Scenes  
Recover as dotted outlines  
Enclosing fading radiance.

Misty Lady Malone  
Is living among her conventions now,  
She's living out her conventions now,  
Puzzled to be left alone there,  
Standing among her weeds.

Ainsi  
Finit le conte.

GERTRUDE HARRIES CLAUDIUS

Shouldn't be here, shouldn't be here, I know it, I can feel it.  
But this is a good moment for me, son Hamlet:  
Letting the passion flatten me like this,  
The resistlessness be that for a moment.

Try to take your attention from the King  
Poring over me. I do. Since my intention  
Is having the goodness out, and bye-bye person,  
And to really like it, if not myself in the process.

Have you no fear of understanding whence  
Arose that passion twenty winters hence?

Hamlet, stop ringing in my ears like that!  
More sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a quotable child. He wouldn't be  
So quotable if he weren't so right.  
Still, what does he know of being flattened?  
He has all the other kind of passions.  
I knew it when I rose from my bride's bed:  
A tragic actor had been engendered there.

Now on the arm of the Satyr King I go off to conceive his role.

KATHERINE VON BORA MARRIES MARTIN LUTHER

God bless my soul, it's nothing new for Martin  
To be staking love on a created thing.

And if I marry,

I marry into God: which does not fright me.

But a colder hand has laid hold of my hand,  
History is fixing the ring on my fourth finger,  
The Reformation is leading me to chamber.

Charlie!

We ran into the hills with swallows, a-day  
A-doo, and rolls, and cheese. Charlie, remember me.  
Oh, be there with your hills and remember me  
Back to the life!

The Universal Church is winding and winding  
A crux about our marriage. How do I air  
The vastness from the room, where do I begin  
On this drafty dust-heap of signification?

Martin, see over there that Flemish loaf  
And golden wheel-cheese there by the bedpost?  
Dear, would you mind if first we -

Oh, my dear!

How could I know that would upset you so?

MAUD GONNE MARRIES MAJOR JOHN MacBRIDE  
HER THOUGHTS RECUR TO WILLIAM YEATS

He will, I know, hereafter give me out  
For a prominent deserter from all fineness,  
And the one who shares my pillow for a lout,  
And the dropping down beside him for supineness  
No passion could excuse. But William Yeats'  
Opinions, done up into that bright verse,  
Never did ring in my ear like a fate's  
Summons, or cause me to esteem one choice the worse.

Anyhow, need I rise to the defense?  
Whence is that very vigor he brings to bear?  
Mine is the blood of which he writes the sense;  
Say that he write it ill: what should I care,  
Who, by the example of my passionate acts,  
Temper his art as he its artifacts?

DEBORAH MARRIES MR. MURPHY  
Tuning up for a Wedding Song

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I have known marriage made the occasion  
Of one after another speculation  
Past the whole nature of the thing. Spenser, now,  
Was a prime notable offender in this kind.  
For that we marry, he would have it, stars do;  
And the firmament consent to be that window  
On animals and heroes at their dance;  
And the beasts down here leave off their striking long enough  
To take the allegorical hurdle in the mind;  
Oh, and the vegetation forcing a green smile,  
And roses typing everything in sight.

Or if not nature,  
History then: a marriage of tendencies, of interests,  
Of disaffected houses, swirling factions  
Crushed and still in the wreckage between the thighs.  
But no marriage is in history (that instruction  
In the slightness of our historical gift), for history,  
As a process of connections, lets slip through  
Lives built up for their own use. There is no bind  
Of marriage to marriage, even. And to a course of things?  
The view on a rainy Saturday afternoon  
Seven or eight years out from Wedding Day  
Is of seascapes which, for all their pictorial churning,  
No other eye has ever seized upon.

But then,  
It was all through-the-looking-glass from the first day:  
Familiar objects stricken as with moonlight.

Conventional images! The moon, saltwater . . .  
All out of some Canadian wilderness.  
But no marriage is in nature, no more  
Than in history. And most particularly  
The heart as it moves out will never consent to be an emblem.  
Divine love will just have to look elsewhere  
For that sensible expression it yearns toward.  
We will not hear of a marriage shadowing forth  
Reunion of blue ideas in the middle air:

"Marriage of extremes," "marriage of intelligent self-interest  
To the blushing public weal," "marriage of traditions,  
Temperance" . . . Oh, you may say so, you may say so,  
But where is the bed, the bread, the fifty years?  
Images travelled too far from their source.  
I tell you what these expressions figure forth:  
Figure forth the feariness of our conception,  
Reluctance to have it to ourselves, just us;  
Reluctance to lay  
This blinding, flashing, uncontrollable firebrand  
Here, home, to our breasts, just us, just yet.

I have set up altars for you in a temple  
Where, if you've any mind to such a thing,  
    Such purgation,  
You may put from you one by one the accretions  
Of natural and philosophical sense  
On marriage, and stare on <sup>the</sup> thing bare. Ours!  
Ours! There is nothing in the sky  
A book, the mind,  
Of interest in connection with this marriage.  
Look up, make search: it is one perfect day,  
But no bird flies through a consciousness of what  
We people down here on the lawn are binding,  
Nor offers the stiff grace of a passing wing  
In gliding benediction. Search the sky!

And yet, is there need to direct your eye?  
Did ever woman, of all who ever stepped forth  
From this temple-precinct of considerations  
Into the summer afternoon of a marriage  
See her way clear with such a clarity?  
Cut free of illusions as you are cut free,  
Is there this much need to direct your eye?

Cut free of illusion, as you are cut free,  
The gritty bar on which your venture-craft  
Rests without liking it one single minute  
Is rushed onto the stream: insistent eddies  
Swarm in and take her, the shoulders of a mob,  
And the venture-craft bears on where the stream flings her.



Mine are the banks; and they being banks as rich  
As the Thameside reach my Spenser strode along,  
The Boothelavion singing in his mind,  
I keep me from the flood. For look now, I  
Confess it: the steady up-country intent,  
The power moving by like sunlight on a rug  
Yet of a dead pond quality, unfed  
Of an icy freshet - well, then, in a word  
The scornful impermanence of this river  
Roars in my head a heart-exhausting pulse  
And will not let it go;  
But, like all regular oft repeated sound  
Gathers into a sense: No clear-eyed soul  
Who would not screw his lids up for the joy  
Ever steered well my course. I must reject that  
On behalf of my friend, whose stares straight at the hearts of things  
Have won for her a power of rejection past  
The privilege of glimpsers and poor souls.  
I call that one very cynical river,  
And I wonder what, in the experience of all its water,  
Could have led it to prefer this sightlessness  
To the passionate circumspection of my friend

Who now

Comes out into the reality.

Quickly come.  
Everything here  
That once waked fear  
Or threatened pain  
Has a long while lain  
Far from your path -  
Discounted, slain  
Or dissembled through.  
But you know what could  
Be somewhere about  
This temple here?  
The expressive years.

Quickly then, out!  
What have you won  
If not the right  
To ascend your height  
And have your view,  
Pass in review  
Those maundering times  
And send them about  
Their business, too,  
All and some.  
Quickly come

Out into the reality.

Because you drank beer and sat in the haze,  
And laughed a little harder than amused,  
And smiled a richness not befitting that hour,  
And held court for evaporating courtiers  
At a sofa's edge, at night, to a Cambridge party;  
And allowed a mood not one of yours, a mood  
You never were but most impatient of  
To arraign you and march you off in its train,  
With what a kind of safety now you may  
Come out into the reality.

(Can this be sudden strangeness  
In the long supporting arm?  
Ah, but one must be thinking  
That is part of the charm.

Can this be talk of lifetimes  
From those amusing lips?  
Really, one should be working  
To catch oneself in these slips.

For always before appearing  
On her balcony, Real will don  
Her mask of Strange, and risk nothing -  
Nothing! - without it on.)

Because you saw the corpse behind the screen  
At the Loew's 83rd Street, and went on  
Seeing the corpses at so-called great moments  
Of great pictures, where the music foamed like pitch  
To clog the scream of an heroic girl immured  
Somewhere in a remote arbor of the castle keep;  
And saw that what was really fading out  
Was the last look on light of souls near blindness,  
    With what a kind of safety now you may  
        Come out into the reality.

Because impatience with remote abuse  
Grew to the thing itself - abstraction clenched  
In a still unsightlier abstraction - grew,  
Burst, and inclined you, or else forced your hand  
To a marshalling of those strengths that at least could  
Be made to bear, in somewhat radiant fashion,  
On the yielding, yielding, oh, flesh-weariness  
Of a social ill; and get in at the harm,  
    With what a kind of safety now you may  
        Come out into the reality.

Come out into the reality.  
Is that to say, in spite of  
Knowledge? Ah, but no spite here!  
Where is the need, considering  
A lover may belt down knowledge  
Unsettling to the abstemious  
And wipe his mouth on his cuff.  
All is learned may be held to,  
    Not for a pressed-through gateway,  
    Not for a tragic consequence,  
    Nor an exemplification,  
    Nor a staunch shield.

No, but like gold paint spattered  
Among the saints in old pictures,  
(As if, having drawn a curtain  
From before the eastward casement  
Of a house in the quiet world,

One painted upon the day)  
Knowledge, alight, illuming,  
Flashes out just such limits  
As permit the saints of heart-worship  
Their postures of ideal passion;  
Ascends all clearly to knowing  
Itself for its own whole object,  
Makes the final connection  
And comes out at the reality.