

Laura Spagnoli



My Dazzledent Days

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ixnay press

2012

Thanks to the editors of publications where some of these poems or earlier versions of them first appeared: *Apiary*, *E Pluribus Unum*, *Jupiter 88*, *ONandOnScreen*, and *Sleet Magazine*. Thanks also to everyone who read these poems, especially Pat Green and the other poets of *Suppose An Eyes*, Emma Eisenberg, Peter Reese, and my editors Jenn McCreary and Chris McCreary. Thanks to CAConrad for his inspiring (Soma)tic workshops. And thank you to Sam Durso, for everything.

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Cover Image: Detail from advertisement for Pacific Balanced Sheets, *Life Magazine*, July 14, 1947.

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Philadelphia PA

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Beauty

Today is the first day of June
and I'm ready to explore an array
of firming lotions.

The meadowlands I cross on the turnpike
look like lavender fields from a catalog.

Smokestacks shoot flames above flowers.
Why not mix cool and warm hues? I ask.

My friends are impressed, even though
I'm quoting the woman at the mall
who sold me this lip gloss.

It smells like imitation vanilla, and the more I use it
the more I remember things.

Once I read this book, and like the protagonist
I wept in public places—dry cleaners,
drugstores, frozen yogurt shacks.

I was keeping the character's appointments
with some Russians. *Just meet me in the food court
instead of Paris*, I said. They didn't show.

Another time, fires blazed in a Canadian forest
and sent smoke as far south
as our winding suburban enclave.

*I was sure a house was on fire
and nobody knew it*, a neighbor said,
but I knew it.

I photographed our homes disappearing
behind the haze and submitted them
to a contest on happiest moments.

That summer, marigolds bobbed like meteors
over toxic green lawns.

I was nourished by time and dyed my hair.
Burnished Copper 51 promised the fiery waves
of a large-scale industrial accident.

Shortly after, my sister complained
she could set her tap water on fire.

The chemicals that kill us
do beautiful things.

I feel safest painting my nails
Ambulance Red.

Parrot I

I saw a man walking down Market Street
by Market East station with a parrot
on his arm.

I didn't know enough to say:
what a vibrant Scarlet Macaw.

Pretty bird, I said instead.
Pretty bird, the parrot said.

I thought about how parrots
sound like they're making fun of you
when they're just trying to practice
your language.

They're perfectionists and would likely report
feeling impatient with others
slightly more than average.

I bet individual tutoring is preferable to parrots
over group work.

I thought about pirates, too, but it's not
parrots' fault that Robert Louis Stevenson
and his famous book defamed them.
Maybe there are parrots taunting him
in heaven, dropping seed crumbs
on his velveteen jacket while onlookers laugh,
because if heaven repeats anything from earth
then there's room for mean-spirited entertainment.

Maybe Stevenson thinks he deserves it.
He might regret not remaining

a red hot socialist all his days
after a brief flirtation in college.

That's fair, he says to the chattering flock,
tipping a cascade of seed crumbs
from the brim of his bright white hat.

The way I talk, anyone knows
I don't know much about parrots
or pirates. I just wanted to question
any confusion of the two. They're not even
pronounced the same.

Parrot II

I saw a man
walking down
Market Street
by Market East station
with a parrot
on his arm.

I could have said
what a vibrant
Scarlet Macaw
but I didn't want
to sound like I knew
and start a whole thing.

Pretty bird
I said instead.
Pretty bird
the parrot said
like a happy
inexact mirror.

I felt brighter
for a moment.
It's easy to mistake
repetition for affirmation
anyway.

I stopped when the man
went into the Kinko's
copy center
at the Marriott Hotel.

I waited. I wanted
parrot copies

to emerge—
a thousand pretty birds
rushing skyward
between tall buildings.

I waited and saw
a woman walk by,
lose her red straw hat
in a wind gust
and retrieve it.

I saw a man drop a dollar
and retrieve it.

An empty plastic bag
sailed toward me
and past me.

When I looked through
the Kinko's blue-tinted
glass, the man
with the Scarlet Macaw
was gone.

There was a woman instead
with her baby strapped
into a baby-carrier
across her chest.

The woman looked down
as if at paper
stacking up
piece by piece
in an output tray.

Then the woman looked out
the window.

The baby looked out
the window.

They had the same
look, something
absent-minded, pleasant
or unrushed. I'm not
sure. I wasn't
in it.

Rainy Day

Me: Let's pretend we're characters in a soap opera.

Imaginary Friend: I hate playing make-believe.

Poemfomercial

This poem is clinically proven to regrow hair.
It should not be handled by nursing
or pregnant women.

This poem fights the bacteria that cause sore gums
before the bleeding starts.

The world is a dangerous place, but this poem
is moist and tender, never fried.

It made \$500 in 1 hour, working from home.

It lost 12 pounds in 2 days.

This poem's patented hint of honeysuckle masks the odor
of household pets and your humanity.

Now that creams reverse the signs of oxidative stress,
taking care of my skin is as easy as polishing a statue
I live inside.

Most people = liars.

Stains were a problem, but this poem prevents
unchecked outbursts of affection.

It comes with a pocket thesaurus. When I told
my superiors to go *unswervingly* to hell, I could tell
they were surprised I didn't say *straight*
like everyone else.

This poem kills on contact.

Like most people, I just want to be accepted
for who I'm pretending to be.

I've had strangers check out my sexy core and say
Hey--did you radically increase your lean mass ratio?
Yes, I have replied.

When I hear the suction, I know it's working.

Marilyn Looks Back On Her Dazzledent Days

Everyone should sparkle. I'm just not
as bright as my teeth anymore.

It's late and I feel like a great big fish
in a jar, but a woman never admits
it took hours to get this way.

I used to meet nice guys, gentle
and perspiring. Now they're a bunch
of striped suits.

They say diamond, I say tomato.
Go look for my panties in the icebox
and see if I'm there.

Boo boo bee doo. I may get
the fuzzy end of the lollipop
but I still have my ukulele.
I call this song *You Look Married*.

Is it late where you are?
Which time zone is starboard
and which is port?

I want the sun to rise like a neon yacht
while I drift on Rachmaninoff.

I don't know if I'll remember
telling you these things, but whenever
someone says *happy*
I say *I'll have a glass of that*.

I'm Gonna Wash That Moon Right Out Of My Hair

Because the moon makes people crazy.
From now on I just want them to be
crazy about my hair.

I'm gonna redecorate my healing spaces
so they're ready for sophisticated guests.
I'm thinking granite. I'm thinking beige.
Copper fixtures will enhance the beauty
of my sink.

I'm gonna wash that moon right out of my hair
because a woman's hair is a metaphor
for her life, and I am taking hold
of the steering wheel
of my hair.

I'm gonna wash that moon right out of my dreams
by purchasing light-blocking curtains.
*The moon won't be back in my bedroom
any time soon,* I tell the Target cashier,
but I can see she's still caught up
in the moon thing.

I'm gonna wash that moon that calls itself
a male deity, a female deity, a water deity,
a world-wide deity. The moon wants to have it
every which way.

--*Stop texting the moon,* I tell my friends.
--*Stop going for coffee where you think
the moon will be,* they tell me.

The moon inspires lunar fancies, but not
every woman has a flame to turn

her body into a volcano.

You have to watch what you wish for.
That was me spewing lava that day.
I sent ash clouds to the edge
of animated radar screens.

Everyone knows it. Everyone's seen
the treetops burn. Happy Harvest
Fucking Moon!

I don't know if I can dig those cities out
or that house with the ungrounded
electric outlets. The landlord
called it *spark*.

Maybe it wasn't the right neighborhood
for me. I'm just so over everyone
I loved. I'm trying to uphold
the fine suede social fabric
of this couch.

My Godzilla Top Ten

Godzilla vs. Gingivitis

Godzilla vs. The Origami Crane

Are You There, Godzilla? It's Me, Margaret

An Inconvenient Godzilla

Godzilla and the Towel of Mildew

Godzillas In The Mist

Godzilla vs. Ferret

Godzilla vs. Endive

Godzilla vs. Pilates

The Good, The Bad, and The Godzilla

A Meeting of Minds

I walked past the Center for Psychoanalytic Studies
and a bird flew out.

Marquee

for the Philadelphia PECO building

We are 40-foot L.E.D. words
rainbow colorized.

We are local time and temperature.

It's World Breastfeeding Week!

We welcome you, Anger Management.
We welcome you, Wicker Goods.

Every baby welcomes a breast.

We are local time and temperature.
America's fight against crime.

If it isn't one thing, it's cancer.
Do you know what your colon
is doing tonight?

Happy Birthday, America!

Join us for the festival of Amish meats.

It's a bike race for pets. Wear your helmet.
Get suspicious moles checked.

We welcome you. It's your life!
Always wash your hands.

Liberty Bell

I took my sister to the Liberty Bell, symbol
of our nation's freedom, but nothing
makes her happy.

Clusters of rose hips bloomed
on Independence Mall, round and orange-red
like tiny propane tanks for a thousand barbecues.

So you're packed with natural flavonoids,
my sister hissed at the fruit. *So you*
save chinchillas from vitamin deficiency.
So what?

We found a cool fountain
at a chemical company's headquarters
and dipped our feet in. We gazed
at a milkweed pod sculpture
where steel spores burst through.

A bird was as free as a bird nesting there,
representing the freedom to live
in a representation of nature.

Other birds dive-bombed tourists
in an Old City parking lot, like drones
in a video game. *I feel bad for the people,*
a girl inside a shop said, *but it's so funny.*

Then she was my sister, breaking
our glass harmonica to make a weapon.
She was America, laughing at the news
on TV. She was consumer choice disguised
as Liberty in a Bikini: *on hot summer days*

*the flesh wants to be free of hosiery
and minimizing bras.*

*We're running out of lives, I told my sister
in Washington Square, where grass is a blanket
over the dead, for the dead, of the dead
who buoy up the park from unmarked spots.*

*Then you'd better be a nice to me, she said
and the games went on. You be a Conestoga
and I'm a Paxton Boy. You be a Redcoat
and I'm Mad Anthony Wayne.
You be an abolitionist at a meeting
and I'm a torch.*

She punched my arm and pressed me in a hug.
She fed me calcium-enriched caramels and told me
not to chew. She challenged me to a staring contest
with the Unknown Soldier Memorial's eternal flame
and I blinked.

But sisters have a bond. We lost baby teeth together
as small as the seeds Apollo 14 carried to the moon
and back.

Some moon trees died young.
It's better to plant real teeth, my sister said.

Letters to my Niece

I.

Dear Coral:

Soon you'll be six.

You were born
in the heart of autumn
when trees burst into flame
one after another.

It's like one tree
got this bright red dress
then every tree
had to have it.

Do you read
the fashion magazines?
They predict the future
and it is hot:

Smoldering new looks.

*Self-immolation returns
to runways this fall.*

Self-immolation
is a big-girl word
but everyone's wearing it.

II.

Dear Coral:
How is school?
I bet your teacher
gave a speech
on the beauty of autumn.
You probably picked out
your favorite leaf
on the playground
to seal in wax paper
and the trees just stood
around, dropping more
leaves and being all tall
and glamorous
and *maybe-I'm-dead*.
Trees are drama queens
but people like it.
They like it even if
you might be dying
when you look pretty
doing it.

III.

Dear Coral:

You won't find me
in old family photos.

I'm not your
mother's sister.

I'm a platinum-level
upgrade. See
how shiny?

IV.

Dear Coral:

I bought you a pink

Hello Kitty purse.

It's too small to fit
things in. Maybe lipstick

and a subway token

when you're a big girl

in the city like me

with her own room

called *an apartment*.

But people won't use tokens

then. They'll use plastic cards.

Hello Kitty has room for that

even if she has no mouth

to say it. She's more pretty

that way, when everyone

can imagine she's thinking

whatever they want.

This is the mystery

of feminine charm.

You can tell it works

by the compliments

on her blog:

You're so pretty!

I am your #1 fan!

I love Hello Kitty

since the day I was born!

It doesn't matter

that someone asks

Where is your mouth?

No one will answer.

V.

Dear Coral:

You can't grow up
like me by accident.

It's hard work
to look so good
you're scared
to go anywhere
alone.

VI.

Dear Coral:
Tonight I'm eating
protein bars
specially formulated
to nurture
my femaleness.
They come
in pastel wrappers
like a friend.
Don't tell your mom
but I know a man
who ate so many
he said they made him
grow breasts.
But this isn't true.
Maybe he grew breasts
because he really, really,
really wanted to.
I heard him make a wish
on an evening star.

VII.

Dear Coral:

A wish is a dream

your heart makes.

The heart is busy.

It has to be a factory
of dreams *and* keep you alive.

Lub dub. Lub dub. Lub dub.

You should thank it.

You should help it.

Do some wish work
yourself. Don't tell me
school takes too much time.

It's never too early to start.

You can make wishes
while you do other things.

At recess, on a bus,
waiting with your mom in line
at a store. You can be discreet.

No one will know
while they talk and you nod
that you're strengthening
your wish muscles
in their secret place.

It will make people like you.
Your cake will be the moistest.

When they say so you'll be
happy and a smile
is your umbrella.

You need it for a rainy day.

You need it like a fish
needs a bicycle.

Don't make that face
that looks like you're thinking.
Don't you want to go places?

Wish for the right one.
Don't get the wrong one.
Dumb rusty bike fish didn't
say she wants. Be careful
or it's like that. Wish hard.
Keep practicing. Bike or no bike
you have to ride that thing
the rest of your life.

Pack of Lies

My father was a horse thief.
He brought me on the back
of a Palomino to this saloon.

After a thousand ten-gallon hats
I keep the chit-chat firearm related
and show off my lasso collection.

I work hard to furnish my room
with credible objects. Besides that
it's me on the balcony, looking
for a lurid sunset to burn this town.

I'll be the one spitting whiskey
on the flames, like the dancing girl
in the photo behind the bar.

They'd peg us for sisters but
I haven't cut my hair in fifteen years.
Any cowboy that rides sees me wave it
like a kerchief from my window
before he disappears.

What can I do but wait
for the night I'll cut it, tie it
to the bed post and shimmy down
to meet you, the one true thing
I can say.

