

Black Mascara (Waterproof)

Rosalind Easton

smith|doorstop

the poetry business

Published 2021 by
Smith|Doorstop Books
The Poetry Business
Campo House,
54 Campo Lane,
Sheffield S1 2EG

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ISBN 978-1-912196-41-8
Typeset by The Poetry Business
Printed by People for Print

Smith|Doorstop Books are a member of Inpress:
www.inpressbooks.co.uk

Distributed by NBN International, 1 Deltic Avenue,
Rooksley, Milton Keynes MK13 8LD

The Poetry Business gratefully acknowledges the support of
Arts Council England.



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

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for my nieces
Anabel, Georgia and Margot



Found in Translation

i.m. Nora Newton (1929–2015)

*A grandam's name is little less in love
than is the doting title of a mother;
they are as children but one step below ...*

Richard III

Of course I should have realised you'd come back
as a book. It was in Hatchards on Piccadilly, in the Classics

section; the shelves were out of alphabetical order –
Galsworthy, Trollope, Austen, Eliot side-by-side.

Just as I was thinking *I wonder*, I heard
your laugh, and there you were – a slender, sparkling volume,

looking quite at home in such illustrious company,
your handwritten name running down the spine. Evelyn Waugh

was serving at the till. *There's no charge*, he said.
She's been waiting for you. I took you home and put you

next to Dickens and Gaskell, hoping you'd find some people there
you could get on with. In the evenings I'd sit cross-legged on the carpet

with a glass of wine, listening, enthralled, to you in your element:
on the poetry shelf, Milton's pages ruffled with pride to hear

that you'd learnt *Lycidas* by heart at seventeen; Wordsworth acknowledged
that your annotations on 'The Prelude' had deepened his understanding.

Best of all was the intellectually superior drinking game
with Shakespeare: he'd call out the number of a sonnet,
you'd recite it, word-perfect, your reward a shot of apricot brandy.
You read my childhood favourites to me again, your drama-school voice
(not a trace of Manchester left in it) still just right, somehow, for
The Famous Five and *Malory Towers*, but I liked your New Jersey drawl
for Judy Blume's *Freckle Juice* best, which brought you to the attention
of George Gershwin and Judy Garland and Frank Sinatra
sleeping off champagne hangovers in Biography; the four of you sang
'Embraceable You' and 'Someone to Watch Over Me' late into the night.
How sad, I thought, *that only in death can one keep this kind of company.*
And then it struck me: I moved you to Plays. And oh, you were *away*.
Word spread quickly, and critics queued at my door, squeezed
into every square inch in my small study, climbed lampposts
and garden fences to listen through the open window
to your Lady Bracknell, your Rosalind, your Beatrice –
but also, of course, to your lead role in *Coronation Street*, and even
the brief stint as first woman pundit on *Match of the Day*
(you always had the range). I realised then I'd put you in my library
without reading your words, thought I knew your story, that I might
have written bits of it myself. But when I turned your pages
there was your life translated: how you'd skipped rep altogether,

were plucked straight from training into your debut at the Old Vic;
I saw the RSC, the National, the moody black-and-white photographs

backstage with Olivier, the sofa with Terry Wogan and Parkinson,
the BAFTA red carpet, the BBC Four retrospective,

you refusing a ghostwriter and writing the bestselling memoirs yourself,
Maggie Smith and Judi Dench taking calls from their agents –

Sorry, they've cast her again. I went back to Hatchards,
and Evelyn Waugh. *How might we make this real?*

I asked. He lit his pipe, and smiled,
and gestured at the sky. *No returns*, he said.

Campagnolo Super Record

Even when I asked for your number
it felt like swapping details at the scene
of an accident.

A year after you cleared the glass
from the road, paid off the bill,
filed away the witness statements,

I'm watching from the microclimate
of my Mercedes SLK as you dart
from a side road on your racer,

a fluorescent fish, too quick
for the protecting shoal
of the rush-hour peloton.

Here comes the double-decker,
a warship, cleaving the tarmac
into ripples, rolling you

out of the lane. Your face
registers the shock, the heart
beat in your throat, and you look

the way you looked the night
you found out I'd done
what I always knew I would do,

when your best friend and your sister
were paramedics, saying your name
as you shook the stars from your eyes

and tried to sit upright. But even after
the crunching pavement
of my final text, the crushed polystyrene

of ignoring your voicemails, I'm not sure
I can resist the jolt, the lurch, the slide
of recognition, that I won't

lean out, wave, call your name –

Did I Dent Your Car with My Head?

On the hottest day of the year, news breaks
of the first roundabout to give priority to cyclists.

This is just the beginning. As the week goes on
politicians grip lecterns, lean into microphones
to laud *hard-working couples without children*.

Supermarket shelf-edge labels belt out special offers
in red and white: *Buy Two, Pay For Two! Hovis is half price
only for the widow who takes one slice out of the freezer at a time!*

Lauren from Sidcup becomes the most expensive
care worker in history when she transfers
from Northbourne Court to Smyth Lodge for £100 million.

It is announced that men are more likely to die in an accident because cars
are crash tested for the average female body.
All manufacturers immediately recall and redesign.

And I steam straight onto the roundabout without looking,
slam my featherweight Italian carbon frame
into the ribcage of his 4x4,
send him somersaulting over the steering wheel,
ignore the red light blinking a distress signal on the tarmac
the empty shoe hanging upside down from the pedal
and the blood blooming through the elbows of his hi-vis jacket,
pick up his mangled car with its wheels
in the *calzone* position, hold it out to him and say
Hey, it's fine. You can drive it. Please don't tell the police.

Girl as Bike

The stethoscope answered in fluent Italian:
not a heartbeat, but the humming cadence
of a Campagnolo crankset. My father understood,

painted white lines around my cot, wrapped
childhood injuries in handlebar tape.
The moon's Anglepoise picked out

my race geometry: one knee raised, fists
loosely clenched, hands small enough
to forge tiny bikes from stretched-out paperclips

and roll them round a fruit-bowl velodrome.
In my teens, x-rays confirmed bones
of hollow carbon, ball bearings in the joints,

sinews and ligaments of fine steel cable.
So when I had to try four wheels and an engine
I kept energy bars in the glovebox,

insisted on an open sunroof in heavy rain.
My instructor asked *Why are you leaning
into the bends?* I told him if I couldn't sling it

over my shoulder and jog up a flight
of stone steps in Milan or Barcelona,
it wasn't for me. I sold the car,

spent the cash on seven kilos of hollow carbon,
the fluent Italian of a Campagnolo crankset,
tattooed an oily chainprint inside my right calf.



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Imtiaz Dharker and Ian McMillan for selecting me as one of the winners of the 2020 International Book & Pamphlet Competition, and for their wonderful comments.

Working with my editor, Peter Sansom, has been an enriching and enjoyable experience. I am new to the poetry world, and Peter's comments and insights were instrumental not only in bringing the collection together, but also in my development as a poet. Sincere thanks are due to him.

I would also like to thank the editors of *Fragmented Voices* and *The Alchemy Spoon*, in which two of these poems ('Campagnolo Super Record' and 'Lunchtime on Threadneedle Street' respectively) were first published.

Finally, huge thanks to everyone at The Poetry Business for making this happen.

Stanza five of 'Did I Dent Your Car with My Head?' reverses the genders of a statistic taken from *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* by Caroline Criado Perez (Chatto and Windus, 2019).

The first two stanzas of 'Lunchtime on Threadneedle Street' refer to Sarah Churchwell's book *Careless People: Murder, Mayhem and the Invention of The Great Gatsby* (Virago, 2013).

'Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor Take Over the Academy' includes phrases from *The Richard Burton Diaries* (ed. by Chris Williams, Yale University Press, 2013).

