

# **Myths Dreams and Possibilities**

Tom Brinck



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## Loose Skin

Tom Brinck

2/21/98

The itching's awful  
when I meet you  
at your parents door,  
but I tap my skin into place  
and button down my sleeves and collar tight.

At the dinner table,  
your little brother  
spots my left ear slipping  
and says it must be love.  
My skin turns red  
and I have to hold my hair  
just to keep from falling apart.  
Without even noticing,  
you tell your brother  
to shut up and eat.

With a spoonful of oatmeal,  
suddenly my hand falls off  
into a plate of milk, like a glove.  
Your mind's on conversation,  
but your mother smiles  
as I slide my hand back on  
and wipe it clean.

With a wink she says,  
I think it's time we left you two alone.

We go to watch TV,  
but I'm shedding patches of skin  
with every step.

When we're alone,  
you turn around and gasp,  
and there I am, exposed,  
my heart beating against my rib cage,  
my lungs straining for air.

I try to apologize,  
but in this naked state,  
it must seem insincere.  
You suggest I just  
pick up my skin and leave.

Walking out the front door  
with my armful of embarrassment,  
I try to make apologies again,  
and I think, hey, why don't we go see a  
movie?  
But bitterly you answer,  
Tom,  
why can't we just be friends?

## **I'm a Nutrasweet Experiment**

Tom Brinck

1/24/97

I can vouch that 10 yrs of Diet Coke  
    have no [apparent] adverse effects  
though a craving for cola still hangs over me like a parasite  
10 yrs of on-and-off MSG will not burn off yr tongue  
    nor will citric acid  
    or 3 cans a day of liquid caffeine

but I can say that 3 slugs a day of pure sugar juice  
    would have been 10 lbs a year  
    and a decade of that means 100 lbs of flab  
    [which is more than I need]  
and I can thank my brother for making that keen observation

I taught myself to love Nutrasweet which  
    [nobody can tell me different]  
    will never quite be like sugar  
    but which you can take morning, noon, & night  
to smooth the flood of caffeine into yr system  
    which will likewise  
    keep you regular, stir awareness, and  
    [once addicted] calm the anxious nerves  
    and help you sleep at night

a hundred rats may reek of aspartame cancer  
    in some awful lab test gone awry  
but I'm part of a vast field experiment of the whole human race  
part of a large cross-sample of [self-inoculating] specimens  
    on volunteer duty to save mankind  
and I have to say, I'm feeling fine

## **a hypothetical present tense future fantasy**

Tom Brinck

6/11/01

if only will be could be is

or better yet could be could be can be  
or could be yes and now

then this would be is immediately:

amazing power super fantasy wow!  
love love love love and magic magic magical  
I'm an awestruck dumbstruck dumbfounded  
how could it be?  
it is but how but wonderful happy happy how?

if only want to be would be should be  
and should be would be must have happened suddenly

then wish and whim could be certainly  
and don't even dare to doubt

then wish it could be would be wonderfully right now

here's how:

you're mine in a zillion kisses and a strangely  
super blissful somehow  
and lucky laughing rapture of gleeful intoxication  
with laser beams from your cavernous eyes  
and warm animate hands of pleasure

I'm a know and a must but not a certainty  
but only because you've made my desire an only maybe could be

but if you'd take a leap of faith and twist it in  
with what you never knew you'd sometime want

then maybe the remote possibility of please please please  
could become the nascent is of an all-embracing be

and is would be the always becoming now anew:

reinventing passion in frenzied eagerness of must  
must never end always extend always expand  
in infinite plastic cyclones of outward spiraling unity  
be is ours and are's are gleeful magical possessions  
of the ever-extending all-amazing we

## Centrifugal Tendencies

Tom Brinck

1/7/97

hers the fingers of a samurai doll  
adjusting the nozzle of a stream of mist  
in a 12-tatami hydroponic bay  
situated at the tendrils-end  
of the swinging arm of station sector 5

smooth hands  
sprinkled with droplets of condensation  
rapidly prune and disentangle  
the delicate garden of nutri-moss,  
forest of micro-pore, and filter-grass

her own private Eden

her dark eyes shift at an abrupt sound —  
her solemn face turning to the interruption

a man's voice, sad:  
"my longing is to tend a garden such as this...  
why must be this void between us?"

her answer:  
the endless spiral of coriolis winds.

## chibá yu ya

Tom Brinck

2/17/98

time

had been there,  
& the beauty & the light

chibá yu ya

white steps to a pool  
of clear blue water  
with a woman  
who splashed crystal raindrops  
& who loved me  
sadly  
as if far far away

oh abáya  
oh shibáyu

& the white paths led in every way  
to broad white staircases  
up & down,  
throughout the gardens,  
under the clear blue & violet skies,  
where all the young women walked  
in violet robes,  
& blue,  
& bright spring green  
& gray

chibá yu ya  
li,  
li abáya

one walked by,  
her brown disinterested eyes  
arest in my mind  
& i followed her,  
tho she never turned my way,  
& the others watched  
as we passed —  
the one with flowing hair  
who waited by the sea,  
the one who sang  
from a tree perched in the sky —  
& i followed her

to a temple door  
where i made a simple prayer  
an offering:

chibá yu ya  
chibá  
ah  
chi bá

& time was forever  
& time was now  
& in the rose garden  
i found another,  
beautiful & brooding  
in the shade of a fragile white, wooden lattice,  
rubbing petals thru small gentle fingers  
& gazing to the distant wind,  
where all things pass

oh la  
oh abáya

& time slipped by  
before i'd thought to count  
the days  
the years  
the centuries  
& i fade  
while they survive,  
as they sing  
of love & loss

abáya

alone

chibá yu ya

eternal

chibá yu ya

chi bá

## coffee shop philosopher

Tom Brinck

6/7/01

there's a man swimming in my  
nonfat venti iced caramel macchiato

at first he does the breaststroke,  
and lazily rolls over on his back,  
spouting coffee

but then he notices me watching,  
and I think he assumes that this must mean  
I'm interested in something about swimming in my  
nonfat venti iced caramel macchiato

now that I'm looking,  
he starts grandstanding

he takes a dive off an ice cube  
and slides into the water with only a ripple,  
surfacing on the other side of the plastic cup

he slips and shivers as he  
clumsily climbs the ice,  
but he's smiling like a kid who's made  
his first home run

I really can't stand  
the bitter taste of coffee unless  
it's really a lot of milk and sugar  
and only a hint of coffee flavor

but even though I'm curious,  
I'm much less interested in drinking  
when I see a man swimming in my  
nonfat venti iced caramel macchiato

when I get tired watching  
I prod him with my straw  
below the ice  
and swirl him around in the caramel

I take my cup back up to the register  
and ask for another one because,  
look, there's a man drowned in my  
nonfat venti iced caramel macchiato

## **End of the World**

Tom Brinck

5/6/97

of course, the way it ought to work,  
when the rest of the world suddenly  
disappears in a puff of dust  
because of some kind of virus...

the way it ought to work  
is that there are only 2 innocent people  
left alive, you and that special  
(especially attractive) person you've always  
secretly loved

and her name's Jenny and your name's Tom  
and she admits of course, that  
all along she's been secretly in love  
with you too

and it's up to you two  
and nobody else  
to repopulate the world

and things are a little rough at first,  
but what's really nice is,  
after an initial shock, Jenny turns out  
to be a real practical person, and  
the 2 of you set to work  
on cleaning up the mess  
left behind by humankind

## **exposé**

Tom Brinck

3/9/99

at the base of my big toe  
all my white socks  
have become brown,

so I pick up my flappy,  
torn-canvas shoe and  
there's a hole in the  
bottom.

the next day I switch  
to my best pair  
of tennis shoes

and walk to work  
and back through the  
snow and slush,

and in the warmth  
of my apartment, my socks  
have soaked up thick wet  
heels.

and like the snap of  
a shredded shoestring,  
I understand

... it's time for new shoes.

## Interlude

Tom Brinck

1/6/97

always below sad lights  
this chill home of black alloy

the drone of info television  
while outdoor the always grind of  
the crowd mechanic

rubber smoldering  
in the sink machine  
the click & whir of some neglected  
belt & spring  
a cloud layer of foul exhaust  
swirling  
at the somber movement from couch to bathroom  
mirror

splash the face with the copper rust of water  
&  
failing to betray the stubble with a blade  
trace wet careful  
fingers along mirror-side circuitry  
&  
narrow shades  
widen to allow a broader band of night  
to illuminate channels across the room  
to the door unopen

musing the android question  
one more time  
& another still movement to the window  
where

drift blinking neon  
billboards  
along slowly predetermined ponderous skies

which broadcast  
the angelic hum  
& subliminal sounds of grace

& what motion of the eye  
reflects in window panes  
while ever  
the shrill whine of focus & defocus  
& the flutter of regulator flaps  
as the heat & cool of the room electric  
dilate in waves of time

# Poem for really serious things

Tom Brinck

11/21-11/22/96

her laugh  
as the sandwich guy makes a joke

the warmth in my cheeks  
of something almost jealousy

the light reflected in her eye

the serious way  
she eats

her hair falling forward  
then her eyes peacefully closed,  
brushing it back behind her ear

## 1.

a day in the woods  
she, beside a tree  
flowers in the air

the way her shoulder holds a dress

the rabbit that comes to sniff her hand  
as she rests in the grass  
the curl of her soft fingers  
as they gently caress the delicate fur

the pleasure she takes  
in stretching her neck

her sleepy way of rolling in the grass

## 2.

when our love was still  
only secret desire in our hearts

the way I hated myself for days and weeks  
when I failed to hold the door for her

waiting at the library at 2pm  
knowing she'd come to read the Times

the 3rd time she laughed at me:  
"Are you still here?"

3.

the nights when I meet her at a corner  
and we walk beside the shops  
to find perhaps a meal

a bench on the sidewalk

the way we talk for hours  
forgetting to eat

the way I'm lost in her eyes

and she in mine

when she steps away  
for a moment  
her coat over a chair  
makes me feel that all is well

how close we feel  
when we share our fries

the sensuality of drinking from her straw

her sheepish grin  
when the woman at the table next to us  
tells us she can feel  
electricity in the air

her fingertip on top of mine

4.

the way she takes me shopping  
and pulls my arm to steer me in a store

her keen eye for the elegant  
hidden among souvenirs

the covert thrill of choosing lingerie with her  
how she prods for my opinion  
and I say she should try it on  
and show me

her secret pleasure that I should flirt with her

the knowing look in the salesperson's eyes

5.

discovering she'd leave at summer's end

asking her to a play  
a silly old romantic comedy

the night coming slowly down  
along the wooded path  
how we walked so slowly we almost stopped

the outdoor theatre  
the nearby vineyard  
the stars the breeze

too careful to preserve it all  
we sat in silence

the way we sat so close  
I smelled perfume

how I'd stare at her with her eyes in the stars  
how she'd look back and I'd look away  
how she'd stare till I looked at her again

summer's end:  
she hates goodbyes

6.

the highway speeding by like in a movie  
in a rental car  
the autumn colors chilly wind

I drive six hours to surprise her  
in the library 2pm

she isn't there

the hollow ringing of her phone

leafless trees mimic the bareness of my heart

7.

alone  
at her parent's home  
she watches out the window  
the haphazard path of a dog grazing down the street

somewhere between the glass and the ground  
her eyes play out a fantasy

somewhere from across the sky  
arms come to hold her tight

the bushweeds gently rocking  
as clouds fill the sky

the way lonely moments speak to you  
of someone dear

the sad rising and falling of her chest

the way one hand holds the other  
wishing one of them were someone else

the rain falling an early twilight

the long century of an afternoon  
spent reflecting on someone far away

how she pulls her pillow close  
how a tear slowly falls and slowly dries

## 8.

coming back, the note she finds under her door

the way she jumps when she sees that it's from me

the phone call I get saying  
Tom, come back to see me one more time  
I promise to be here for you

every inflection of her voice  
every nuance in her expression  
like dewdrops on my thirsty lips

## 9.

the unrelenting joy I feel at seeing her again

the rose between my nervous fingers

her smile and the helpless way she climbs into my arms

~

## Sun Demons

Tom Brinck

7/18/95

in a small South American town  
shopkeepers locked up their doors with big brass keys  
and everyone went home at siesta time  
and slept while the sun-demons  
    laughed and wept, like fire  
    in the village square  
    and along the orchard rows,  
    and mocked the panting strays  
    who barked twice at them  
    before returning exhausted  
    to the shade of banana trees

mothers locked their doors against the sun-demons  
and warned their children not to stir  
but you could still go out and play with them  
they would dance with you  
    and whisper dirty secrets in your ear  
    on red-tile roofs  
    in the feverish hours of the sun

but you'd best leave before you dance too long  
    or they'll fill their thirst with your body juice  
    and lick your salt with flames  
your body will join the dust of the square  
and all that will be left of you  
    will be the sun-demon  
    condemned to dance at the noon hour  
    to rise and shimmer from white-hot stones  
    and suck the sweat from living men

# The China Stairs

Tom Brinck

11/29/96

they're more like lad-

ders between stories

atthetopofwhich you've got to

jump

to a narrowcrawl-space

which

if you're

lucky

leads to a ledge

outside

fromwhich

it's no troubleatall to jump &

fly

& glide down to the thinstrandof canal

right

upto where water laps

the wide steps of the temple

walk in &

watch the amplelight fallinto

shallowpools

where gods reside

## **there must not be a devil**

Tom Brinck

2/15/96, 7/17/00

or if there is a devil

he must not be as smart as i thought

or else he's too busy for me

but there must not be a devil

because if there were a devil

he could do me some awful damage

with a woman like that

there must not be a hell to send me to...

because she's beautiful as an angel

and smart as hell/sharp

as the sting of my curiosity/friendly

as only a demon can be

so shamelessly

but there can't be a hell, or i'd have slipped

down the chute into the clarity

of despair

i'd bite my forkéd tongue

i'd be burning from fever

and begging for charity

because i'd be sinning twenty times

and more

if she'd only come

and whisper in my ear

i'd be sweating with carnal lust

at the touch of a fingertip

i'd twist & squirm, i'd lie to myself

and swear to the stars

but there must not be a devil

because if there were a devil

he would do me some awful damage

with a woman like that

## **Reprise — there is a devil**

Tom Brinck

7/24/96 (7/17/00)

Alright, there is a devil,  
more subtle and bewitching than I might have guessed,  
and thru her subterfuge  
    she's caught me unaware.  
She's more bold more daring than my innocence allowed.  
She knows my secret life, foils my plans.

Ah, she's a beauty who teases my faith,  
    distracts me from a safer freer path,  
waiting till a moment when  
    I thought she posed no threat, no more.  
She strikes at my heart with an inspired flattery.  
She's waited till a time when ethics and caution  
    could hold me back no longer.

Sweet beautiful cruelty  
    with long black hair and modesty,  
everything I would hope you to be.  
Be my companion, my lover, my agony.  
Swift arrow from the bushes,  
    taunt me, torture me,  
brilliant spark of light I don't deserve.

Yes, there is a dark demon  
    who laughs  
    and mocks me,  
who takes the pleasure that should be mine.  
Yes, she's here.  
I feel her  
    with threads tied thru my spine.  
She's waited till my guard was down  
    and does me the awful damage  
    I knew too well she could.

## Angel Roast

Tom Brinck

7/12/95

As I skated down the sidewalk,  
I passed First Baptist  
and noticed they were  
having an angel roast.

Rotating slowly on the spit,  
the angel's halo blurred and rippled  
in the heat of the steaming fumes.  
By the apple in its mouth,  
I guessed it must be  
one of the fallen.

"No way to know for sure,"  
said the man squirting juices.

The man at the carving table  
asked if I'd like  
a leg or thigh.  
"Don't you have any wings or breasts?"  
I asked.  
"Sure," he said, "but you struck me  
as more of a dark-meat kind of guy."

and he was right,  
so he speared a slice of thigh for me  
and served it up  
with some bread and wine.

"Bless you, son"  
said the preacher,  
as I dropped two quarters  
in the charity cup.

## artesian springs

Tom Brinck

8/25/01

where I come from there's no such thing as bad chocolate,  
not even the dark and bitter kind.

gas planets hover in a fluoride sky  
while hot air balloons float by,

and sleek gazelles in alpine white leap by in flight

while glazed donuts of banana wheat  
fall like rain into gutters at our outside doors.

where I come from there's no sorrow,  
because right is right,  
and smiles breed smiles breed joyful leaps and laughs and so much more.

where I come from there are rolling hills of green,  
and climbable, complicated, age-old trees  
that hang over clear waters with phosphorescent fish  
and fireflies.

clever children wander unattended over arched wooden bridges,  
through mysterious caves and playground palaces.

and they'll call your name if you pass by.  
and they'll call out simplicities you never would have guessed —  
ha!  
with clarity, you see.

where I come from  
coconuts crack open their crispy, creamy yogurt sweets,  
and snapdragons fly in swarms  
around the warmth of pulsing artichoke hearts.

with a sheepdog wrapped around her,  
grinning beside the coolness of a waterfall,  
she naps,  
and with succulent cut kiwis glistening at her side,  
she waits for me  
to come hold her hand.

## as precious moments slipped away

Tom Brinck

7/28/99

they savored marinated  
vegetables at a wrought-iron  
restaurant with white wine and  
a wide glass view by  
candlelight

she wore her dress of shimmering  
blue with straps slipping  
and a daring cut

he wore his simple  
dark gray suit, awkward  
as always, with a stiff  
white collar and a smart  
yellow-striped tie

they walked along the  
pier as seagulls cried  
and turned the stars  
inside-out at the lake's horizon

at the wooden ledge they  
sat and dangled their  
feet — she held her elegant  
heels in her hand

he said 'it's really  
nice, just sitting here' and  
stole another breath, but  
a group of tourists hollered  
in delight, throwing

bird seed blind  
over the bench behind  
them, and seagulls

showed no restraint and  
swarmed the two,  
in dress and suit, and  
pecked away

they jumped back, they  
crawled, they ran, while  
the tourists made  
apologies, and something  
bitter filled the incandescent  
air

smoke, lit by streetlight,  
mingled with the skyline

nearby, the warning tones of  
a garbage truck,  
reversing

echoing from a distance,  
fire sirens hollowed out the  
empty streets

a helicopter and a bright white light

## **beating some sense into everyone**

Tom Brinck

10/17/97

instead of beating swords into plowshares  
why don't we beat people silly  
who piss us off

i mean  
plenty of people  
piss me off

for instance

people who hit  
people  
piss me off

## **the biomass convergent**

Tom Brinck

2/12/97

entrusting my life to the future, building arch upon arch, and beams of light and vibrant air can be shouted down or embraced or wholly experienced in a state of shock. techno-moth and its deposit of chemo battle back the growing information blanket while chants the "Christe Domine Jesu". is love enough to keep the exponential counterforce from that temporary imbalance which fractures the fragile unity? is prayer sufficient? peace, flesh engines! cast your meditations far. have mercy on me for taking this thrill of novelty which expands to a variousness ever transgenetic. what could restore those days when the pleasure of absorptive groupthink and sustained silence? what the fertile glance that notified a bio-dyad of mutual scrutiny? now that every surface rotates in one or many scales and metal clanging, not uncommon, is a meditation on times which led the upsurge to now, rang the death of soliloquy and patient experience. ash touches my skin as a gift, like the power of turbulent breeze. I remember, in a way unlike all other information protocols, that abstraction which I would call love. how gracious. but now in every direction, minds expand and integrate into the celestial (un)consciousness. there goes one now — the blue shell of light in a silent explosion, from an AI hybrid street kid, who stole enlightenment with a T-16 jack, there he goes, past the unintelligible street preacher, holding on to his painful insubstantial. sacrament: tiring, I lay me down and trust in my absorption into the biomass convergent.

## **bogus yogi bear magician POP!**

Tom Brinck

10/18/97

kids screaming fun the magician doing  
scarf tricks riddles & cards  
dads proud & i'm too young to be anything  
but innocent the magician says 'i've got  
a story, who wants to volunteer?' me Me  
me Me me Me Me Me he picks me & i'm  
up there & he's got a wooden yogi bear  
whose head falls off 'hold this' he tells me  
& in his story they blow up a balloon for  
his head 'now' he says 'wrap up the old head &  
put it in my pocket' sure & i'm ready for  
magic then in the story they decide to POP! the  
balloon & WOW the kids say THE HEAD  
IS BACK but i saw the 2nd head on a  
hinge behind the yogi bear body & he  
flipped it up really fast he didn't make  
it reappear it's not magic it's a cheap  
trick & then i stopped believing

## Cages

Tom Brinck

5/4/95

it always hurts to hear  
someone convinced  
love puts up barriers,  
pens them in,  
demands —  
someone believing  
love will use them,  
chew them up,  
and spit them out.

when I hear men  
saying this I know  
it's because  
it's their smooth  
excuse for sex  
without commitment —  
the women  
who love them  
can't blame them  
when they leave.

but for the women  
I've known, it's because  
they've known  
the wrong men,  
who trap, deceive.  
it hurts to think  
they've given up.

there still remain  
a few of us.  
believe.

## **coelacanth**

Tom Brinck

4/6/98

he's backing into gravel  
late one summer dusk  
while the kids play outside  
squealing in the night

she's sweating at the fridge  
about where he's been  
and what stranger's lights  
are they?

he brings her squid  
he brings her snake  
and coelacanth

she's suspicious and delighted

she says  
as she curls the snake  
onto a plate  
'i wasn't called  
while you were gone'

he cringes as she's bitten

she says  
'you never trusted me'  
she drags the snake outside

a car passes slowly  
up the hill

she says  
'you gave me up  
for loneliness'  
as he  
locks up the house,  
takes out the trash

## **Comatose Teens**

Tom Brinck

6/5/97

Comatose teens in groups of 3  
hover with their heads hung low.  
A red sun filtered dim  
thru mists that taste like morning trash  
calls attention to a pepper rash  
on speckled heads of groups of 3  
drifting eagerly by city hall.

Bicyclists with long rods of fire  
pass quickly to destinations we can't know.  
While the comatose, with heavy lids, & beetle eyes,  
rise up from escalators underground.  
Their vacant eyes draw out dreams  
thru 2<sup>nd</sup> story windows into summer skies.

Dread obelisks with inner workings  
make-believe their secret means thru translucent stone,  
while comatose teens drag rocks & rags  
and rocket fuel along well-weathered paths,  
and groups of 3 pass thru the trees  
to rocket pads, where ion air makes buzzing sounds  
and engines roar their sorrowed cries.

## The Controlling Metaphor

Tom Brinck

2/21/98

At first, I thought it might lend my life a little meaning,  
so I brought it into my house  
and gave it a room and a weekly allowance.

It started by turning my heart to gold  
and my home into a palace.  
It made me a prince and gave me wings.

When my friends saw what it had done for me,  
they asked where they could get one too,  
but it turned them to cattle and sent them to pasture.

My mother said, please, can it make me a queen?  
but it made her a leech  
and sold her to a local pet supply.

It asked a lot of time of me  
and always demanded attention.  
It told me when to eat and sleep and pee.

When it had finally crossed the line, I said,  
look here, this has to end:  
My lover has become a harpy,

My enemies are doves. My life's a circus,  
and you've got me walking a tightrope every time  
I talk to you, wondering what you're going to do.

But it turned my tongue into a violin  
and had me singing arias.  
With no more objections, it walked all over me.

So I searched thru my nouns and verbs and rhyming verses  
and finally found an awful way to kill the metaphor:  
I went and shot it, with a big fat pun.

## daylight deepening

Tom Brinck

2/24/99

October  
outside the sprawling thick  
city

clouds  
wrinkle from exhaustion in the  
sky

Chicago's  
weekend traffic is somehow  
light

& lisa  
spends her afternoon in  
sweats

she's  
got the steamy rice cooker  
going

sprawled  
in the living room in the winter  
light

thinking  
of a simple life with a relaxed  
tongue

the dryer  
turns another monotonous  
cycle

& lukewarm  
memories are all that's left to  
pack

endless  
city infrastructure of concrete &  
wire

sewage  
pipes, asphalt, & phone  
calls

the wind  
blows crisp leaves in careless  
disregard

& lisa  
has that vague sensation of  
a missing hour

# Drifting Away

Tom Brinck

7/27/94

Now it seems that you've  
disappeared.  
drifted away.  
no longer in touch with so much of this world.  
you no longer speak to your family,  
you no longer call your friends,  
you only speak with me,  
and so many of our words  
are spoken in silence.

in those quiet moments, it's as if sometimes  
we say so much,  
speaking of our love            undying devotion.  
but sometimes in our silence  
a wave of awareness    drowns me in uncertainty,  
as if even when I'm calling out to you,  
you only hear  
that faint voice in the distance,  
with you wandering on the shores of your distant dreams  
in a world even *I* cannot know.

I always hope there will come a day  
you'll find your way back,  
yet each day, you're one step further.  
I think, if you hold my hand you can walk back with me,  
but it's like I'm the rope in the tug-of-war,  
always trying to come a little further with you,  
always trying to stay rooted back home,  
and not sure which hand to let go.

my love, don't drift too far.  
I see you need this.  
I see you're seeking,  
    trying to find a root for yourself,  
not knowing what it will be  
or if you'll ever find it.  
my love, hold onto me.  
I will be near.

sometimes, oh, I am so tempted  
to ask you to take me with you,  
but you've gone to a place I don't belong.  
I'll wait  
while you're gone,  
and while you're there  
I will be with you, here.  
my vigil is yours.  
my heart is beside you.

our souls have touched, my love.  
my only solace is —  
that if you become lost,  
    a part of me will be lost with you.

## The Ears

(after *The Nose*, Ian Chrichton Smith)

Tom Brinck

3/27/95

One evening, one ear snuck  
around to see the other.  
The nose had been passing  
messages between them, but at last  
the ears were delighted to meet.

They had so much in common.  
They were both such good  
listeners. They whispered,  
sharing their sides of  
stories of funk and stereo.

They slept side-by-side all  
evening, then woke early and  
tip-toed back to their respective  
places. Waving goodbye, they  
both blushed red, abashedly.

Every evening, they spoke  
of how like wings they were,  
and how, working together,  
they could always find  
the source of sounds.

They ran off together  
one morning, to seek the  
quiet sounds of meadows,  
happy to be free of Q-tips,  
car alarms, jingles, and  
annoying nasal voices.

Laying together among tulip  
petals, like a fleshy butterfly,  
they rubbed lobes with each other,  
and listened to the gentle  
seashell of the breeze.

And all would have been well  
had a cat not come curious  
to watch, lightly prowling  
on its silent paws. The cat  
nuzzled them with its nose,

and they curled because  
it tickled. Then the cat  
gobbled them down, piece-  
by-piece, and wriggled  
and purred, before trotting  
off to play some more.

## Emily

Tom Brinck

Summer '93

Ghostly image  
waits in silence  
Ages have passed

Seeing me  
she turns  
I follow

Tree limbs grope upward  
clouds block then reveal  
the moonlight

Dark eyes  
sad white lips  
Torn dress flutters

Her light passes  
among the trees  
crickets chirping  
she is silent

Kneeling at the dark pond  
Wet branches drip tears  
through her

I reach out to her  
and touch nothing  
she turns  
with sad longing

Looking behind her  
in confusion  
The wind (or is it?)  
rustles the bushes

Blocking blows  
she tumbles into the water  
without a splash

She walks from the water,  
dripping,  
fetus bawling in her arms

She screams  
as only spirits can  
The echoes painful in my heart  
In my ears, the death of silence

My eyes adjust  
as moonlight reappears  
between the trees

she is gone

Grandfather goes to the cemetery  
first to grandma  
then an older tombstone

It says "Emily"  
She was fourteen  
"She had dreamed of so much"

## Everybody's Taking Prozac

Tom Brinck

3/13/95

it's not fair!  
everybody's on  
a mind-altering drug  
that makes them more confident,  
more secure,  
or functional.

and i keep being interrupted.

i'm sorry

don't mind me

no problem

that's okay

i'm the model of timidity.  
quiet. don't say a word.  
walk all over me.

look at her!  
She's on a drug  
that makes her more seductive,  
lets us all know she's accessible.  
but i'm still undesirable.

i'm here

can't you see me?

didn't mean to get in the way

i just thought —

well, never mind

look at him!  
He's on a drug  
that's got him feeling good.  
He doesn't mind saying  
he's better than the rest of us,  
doesn't mind  
if he takes control.  
and i'm just ignored.

helpless helpless

that's what i am

i'm no good

i know

i'm not worth much

but maybe if i was taking prozac...

**evocative**

Tom Brinck

6/7/01

you've turned me into a totem  
a magic message bottle of cut-up straw  
plain-stitched  
pin-pricked          burlap bag of dying skin  
hex-laden    sun-dried          jaundice-ridden  
beaten down  
and languishing  
transposed into a static voiceless mindless motion-  
sensitive mousetrap dark attic dustbin  
you've planted maggots  
in my mouth so I can spit curses and dark prophecies  
but my rebellious mind clings  
to memories          that I've forgotten  
of lost cities and tall spires of crystal  
and gold  
of long elegant dresses    thin as mist  
my mouth opens and out fly  
small black birds with breasts of orange and yellow  
silent as fine feathers  
and ceiling fans  
I remember deep dark eyes of beauty I can't resolve  
there are noble sea creatures  
more shy than shadows in the night  
there are proud lips          of faith and satisfaction  
they wait for my kiss  
and your power over me  
dissolves

## First Time Out

Tom Brinck

7/24/94

(nervously)

P-pass the salt and  
p-p-pepper.  
This chicken marinara  
needs some spice.  
How are you doing  
with those chopsticks?  
How's your shrimp  
and how's your rice?

S-s-sorry if I seem  
in a hurry.  
S-so sorry if I talk  
so fast.  
N-n-n-no need  
to really worry.  
It's just how I am.  
It's how I act.

Y-your hair is very  
n-n-nice  
this evening.  
I like how  
you've tied it back.  
I like the way  
you smile at me.  
It seems to forgive  
my lack of tact.

P-please forgive my  
stu-tu-tutter.  
It grows when  
I'm excited.  
You seem not to  
mind at all.  
In fact now,  
you seem delighted.

S-so happy to  
g-g-get to see you.  
Been so long  
since I saw you last.  
After dinner  
could we  
see a movie.  
Hope I'm not moving  
m-m-much too fast.

I love how you  
l-l-laugh at me,  
How you both  
avert your eyes and stare.  
The way you  
overp-p-power me  
I must admit's  
a bit unfair.

L-look here I've  
t-t-talked  
all through dinner.  
You've finished yours.  
I've not touched mine.  
Maybe now  
you'd like desert,  
maybe even  
a little w-w-wine.

I always liked  
the way you  
h-hold your hands.  
What? You say you like  
my t-t-tie?  
Do you think I  
could hold your hand?  
If you say y-yes  
I think I'll die.

N-now he's brought the  
ch-ch-check.  
No problem.  
I'll cover it this time.  
G-guess we're off  
to our next event.  
You know I really  
l-l-love  
this...place.  
Let's come back  
another time.

## **Floating Rabbits**

Tom Brinck

10/7/97

in a clump among the horsetails  
you'd think they were dead,  
    floating like rags,  
till a head pops out of the water,  
    the nose twitches...

Brian threw one at me  
    like a soaking nerf ball,  
but he missed.

I told him it's in bad taste,  
    like painting with chicken fat.

they bump and tangle with the currents  
    and nibble on lily pads  
    and compete with geese for bread crumbs in the parks.

they have no home or hostages.  
they see thru your best intentions with radiation eyes.

effortlessly, they drift to sea.

## Full of Promise

Tom Brinck

8/23/96

I woke up in a chill last week  
with an apparent stomach cramp  
but laid an egg only 20 minutes later

I left it in the fridge  
so it wouldn't hatch too soon  
and mentioned nothing at work in the morning

I thought I'd have a sandwich at 5  
but in my fridge was a cold blue lizard  
chewing down a moldy piece of cheese

I pulled him out to plant him by a window  
and watered him with fresh lemonade  
and sang Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound

within 3 days he'd flowered  
and turned a healthy green  
and told me about his unified field theory

within hours I had him on the phone  
with redwhitenblue rocket scientists  
and the government showed up to take him away

today I saw him on television  
consulting with the president  
and he blushed a bit when he saw me watching

that's when my skin started itching  
and I scratched and scratched until  
I dropped off spores

## **Gaze-girl**

Tom Brinck

5/1/01

Hey gaze-girl, with your curious smile. I'm true. You're true. How beautiful the moment. The moments. The wonder. Hey, it's catch-all, caught in an uncanny way. May this synonymy be, likeness unto likeness as with a surprise. I love the intense way, the embracing of the moment. How receptive, unsurpassed. I can't deny I'm in a place I didn't think I'd be. Hey dream-girl, friend of me, without a doubt. How'd I find synchronicity, evolution in parallel delights? Caring, kind. I'd wish—dreams could be. Spooky almost, this simplicity. Clarity. Recognition.

Come close to me. I'm full of joy. I'm bursting.

**Going 65**  
Tom Brinck  
2/18/95

I saw the rabbit run rabbit run  
with perfect aim across the road  
then through and through my car

The kids laughed laughed in the back  
as I watched silently the rabbit bounce  
rabbit roll through my rearview mirror

then rabbit ears rabbit pieces  
flying small into the distance

and me staring and me staring staring at the road

## **gold medals for love**

Tom Brinck

8/26/96

if there were olympic gold medals for love  
I would I'm sure I would  
win an event  
in that selfless, hopeless, despairing sort of love...

~

and when the torch was passed to me  
I would hold it proud  
I would cry my golden tears

~

and all these long lonesome years of training  
would finally find completion.

**Go ahead n' prove for me  
that love n' dedication aren't what you need**

Tom Brinck

9/30/95

Go ahead n' sign your note of regret  
and nail it up with my broken heart  
Hang it on the barn door with those  
5 or 6 hearts of mine that've been  
broken before

Write another note for Hallmark about  
let's just be friends

Say it in a way that makes it sound fresh  
Make me believe it might mean anything else but  
I don't really ever want to see you again

## **Grandfather Wolf Grandmother Fox**

Tom Brinck

8/25/01

In a moon vision  
I go back  
7 generations or more  
and I'm running with the wind  
beside my animal ancestors.

Uncle Rabbit tells me to take more time.  
Aunt Marigold says to feed on golden light.

Cousin Ferret says that whimsy is the secret wisdom.  
Don't let the curiosity stay hidden deep inside.

Everyone knows that Grandma Fox is the cunning one.  
She nuzzles in the thick gray fur of Grandpa Wolf.

She says Tom, now, don't be dismayed.  
We animal angels are always at your side.  
Though the spirit world has, thus far, seemed to have done you  
    more harm than good,  
    it's not our true intention.  
Hold on for love one minute more.

Grandpa Wolf gazes in my eyes.  
His empathy is all I need.  
He says Tom, son of my son,  
we've planned visions distraught and visions bright to share with you.  
This is not your first. This won't be your last.  
You are both the medium and the audience.

Brother Elk reminds me to be responsible.

I say, of course, but what's in it all for me?

And Sister Porpoise only laughs:  
We are the Animal Angels and You have the Mischief Gene.

And the Sparrow Children thread aerobatic knots around my head.  
They sing:

    You have the love, the drive, the vision, and the holy true delight.  
    You have the madness and the peaceful calm.

    Now wake up gently and just be Tom.

## grapefruit & eggs

Tom Brinck

10/12/97

i was a plump thirteen that summer

in reader's digest my mother found  
a diet consisting of grapefruit & eggs  
for two weeks straight

i never liked grapefruit  
but i braced myself & clenched my teeth  
to make a better man out of me

the 1st morning, i ate a grapefruit:  
i cringed with every spoonful

so i smothered it in saccharin  
(which was awful in its own special way)  
& kept on eating

after 4 days of grapefruit & eggs  
i'd suffered enough

i searched the cupboards while my parents were out  
&  
one at a time  
(so it wouldn't be noticed)  
i'd steal a triscuit from the box

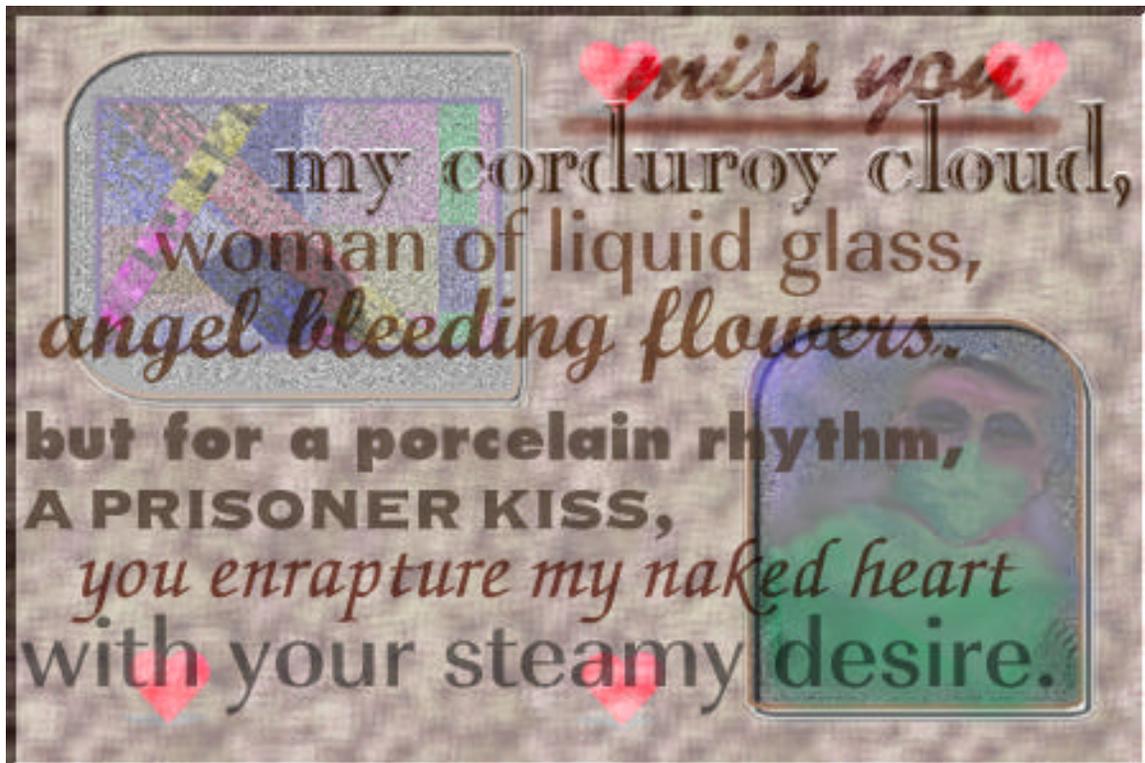
i knew i'd get caught sooner or later  
but after 2 weeks i weighed in with a healthy loss

& they let me go back to my lucky charms

**gut feelings**

Tom Brinck

2/15/96



## Hallucinogenic cream

Tom Brinck

6/13/00

born under a rusty bridge  
of a mother named charity and a father named greed  
ragweed hair & a lolling tongue  
i like to watch the ink soak into a wooden stairway  
i like to watch the saplings grow on a moonlit nite

radio towers beam energy  
to empower my thoughts, my tenuous beat  
thank me, wild dense bushes  
i've got spittle on the spotlight  
purple gravity pulls me down like your wet weary remorse

roadkill crow has the correctly immobilized stance  
i'm also a limp form breathing humid clouds,  
breaking into a warehouse  
with painted yellow lines in the flashlight focus  
drifting creases of grease across my finger joints  
the other side is lost in dust & obscurity

## Hammer

Tom Brinck

7/13/94, 1/27/02

### Selecting an Identity

I heard it's legal to pronounce your name  
any way you like.

A man named Wxzyrpd, or whatever,  
won a lawsuit.

He always pronounced it "Smith",  
but a hotel clerk  
had tried to refuse his reservation  
when he didn't write s-m-i-t-h.

I heard you could change your name  
to anything you like  
without a legal proceeding,  
without a form,  
without a fee,  
just so long as  
you use the name consistently,  
just so long as you intend no deceit.

So I decided I was Tom.

### Questionable Origins

My mother could never adapt.  
She says Thomas.  
"Tom - ass"  
I tell her she has a speech impediment.

My mother still thinks  
she has the right to name me,  
but it's a name for her,  
not for me.  
I thought I had the right to name myself.

In Japan they called me Tom-u.

タム

(tamu)

Japanese doesn't have  
words that end in "m".

Somehow people just can't accept  
that I'm really telling them my name.  
Somebody's filling out a form for me,  
and they ask my name.  
I say Tom,

"Tom Brinck. b-r-i-n-C-k".

They say  
"Is it actually Thomas?"  
I say "No."  
If it were, I would have said so.

My friends ask  
what's on my birth certificate?  
I say, you know,  
that really isn't relevant.  
It says Thomas,  
but, you know, my mother had  
a speech impediment.

And even when I fill out a form  
myself,  
somehow they still change my name.  
I never told my school  
any other name but Tom,  
and yet they made me Thomas,  
and so did my church  
... and they wonder why  
I stopped coming.

I told my mother once  
of a friend  
— the nicest guy —  
who sometimes worried he was the antichrist.  
So she told me about the president:  
how he'd received a mortal wound  
and survived,  
just like the antichrist,  
and besides,  
Ronald is 6 letters  
Wilson is 6 letters  
Reagan is 6 letters  
6-6-6.  
I said, "but Mom,  
Thomas is 6 letters  
Gordon is 6 letters  
Brinck is 6 letters."  
She said

"Don't talk like that!"  
I told her "you're the one who named me."

## Family Names

In Japanese,  
my last name is Burinku.

ブリンク

But Japanese translate L's to R's  
because they don't have L's.  
So some of them thought  
my name was  
Blink.

Brinck is okay.  
I don't much have a problem with it.  
It's a little harsh.  
It ends too abruptly.  
I wanted a last name that sounded good,  
and people could spell.

In first grade my teacher gave me  
a nametag labeled "Brinch".

People have tried a lot of variations:  
of course "Brink", without the "c",

Brick  
Brinker  
Brinik  
Brinks  
Bronck.

Hey, I know I'm not alone.  
This happens to nearly everyone,  
and since people know  
that last names are so hard to get,  
you'd think they'd be a little careful.

I once had a middle name:  
Gordon.  
It sounds alright.  
No one ever made fun of me,  
except the Panamanian  
who said it sounded like the word for fat.

It's my grandpa's name.  
I think of Flash Gordon,  
but it just never felt like me.  
It doesn't feel personal.  
It feels like someone else's name,  
and I didn't need a middle name,  
so I dropped it.

My initials had been TGB,  
which are right in a line on a keyboard.  
I had a teacher who once required  
that we all put our initials on our papers.  
Handing them back,

she looked confused:  
"Who has the initials T.O.M.?"  
I raised my hand,  
and she still looked confused,  
then flustered, as she understood.

Well, now my initials are TB.  
Everyone notices  
it stands for tuberculosis  
or test-tube baby,  
telephone booth  
or toilet bowl.  
No one notices nice things  
like teddy bear.

My brother's and my sister's middle names  
come from my father's family.

They have a tradition in his family  
of giving gifts to namesakes  
every Christmas Eve.

Grandpa Gordon was in my mother's family,  
and they had no such tradition.

I was always disappointed as a child  
that my brother and sister got gifts  
and I got nothing.

My father's mother,  
grandma Doris,  
agreed to make a deal with me,  
so I became Thomas Doris  
every Christmas Eve.

## Diminutives

My driver's license always said "Thomas",  
and that was the hardest thing to change,  
and it made it difficult to convince people  
who somehow believe  
that my name isn't mine,  
that some piece of paper  
has more rights to my identity  
than me,  
that somehow the official world  
is more important  
than showing a little humanity and compassion.

My mother said  
that banks  
would refuse my checks  
if I signed them Tom,  
if the name on the check was Thomas.



She was wrong.

Eventually I got a new bank account  
with my name corrected.  
Now it's Tom.

When I was young,  
because of how I signed my name,  
people used to think my name was Jom.

A few weeks ago  
I got a new driver's license.  
I filled out all the forms —  
Tom  
Tom Brinck.  
But the person was about to copy  
my old license —  
Thomas Gordon Brinck —  
when she noticed,  
and I explained,  
"Actually my name is Tom,  
but somehow they always change it  
to Thomas."

She said she needed some I.D.  
So I showed her  
my credit card,  
my insurance card,  
my student I.D.  
Now my name is Tom  
— without a middle name —  
Tom Brinck.

Only a few documents might disagree:  
my birth certificate,  
passport,  
social security card,  
and some other random documents  
where I told them my name was Tom  
but they changed it when I wasn't looking.

My mother told me  
that my resumé had better say Thomas,  
that nobody would hire someone  
who was so informal  
as a guy named Tom.

She was wrong.  
Though maybe someone did  
overlook my resumé  
for just this reason,  
and I'm glad I don't have that job  
where everyone must be so formal.

Thomas.  
It derives from Arabic:

teoma, a twin.  
In Greek, tom means  
cut, split, or divided,  
as in atom, a-tom, not cut,  
indivisible.  
What does this have to do with me?

Some people,  
who must think my name is Latin,  
have called me Thomas Brinckus.

There's tom cats,  
Tom girls,  
Doubting Thomas,  
Peeping toms,  
and famous Tom's:  
Jefferson, Edison,  
Aquinas, Mallory, Becket,  
and fictional Tom's:  
Major Tom, Uncle Tom,  
Tom Swift, Tom Sawyer.  
I always liked Tom Bombadil,  
from Tolkien.

## Respect

In high school, a guy named Travis  
kept singing the Who song to me:  
"Tommy, can you hear me..."

When I was young  
I was called Tommy,  
which is okay with me;  
I wouldn't even mind it today,  
so long as it was used respectfully.  
I probably wouldn't mind  
almost any name,  
so long as it was used respectfully.

Problem is,  
most people aren't so good  
at respect.

My name has been a lot of work for me.  
I won't even tell  
of all the nicknames I've had,  
or perhaps just a few:  
stinky brinky,  
Tom the bomb,  
and things like that.

In fifth grade, we went around the room,  
everyone telling the name

they most wished they had.  
I said Pedro,  
and everyone laughed at me.  
I changed my mind pretty quickly.

In college I started saying  
a funny phrase now and then.  
Maybe it's a bit odd,  
but I liked it.

"My name is Kukukurazhu  
I have a fat belly and so do you."  
Yet another name:  
don't ask me to explain it.  
I'm not sure I can.

I'm told my name came from  
a boy my sister liked in kindergarten.  
His name was Tom.  
So why wasn't mine?  
So why did my sister  
insist on calling me pumpkinhead  
and ruder things than that?

I never much called her names.  
Perhaps I lacked her ingenuity.

When I was young  
my father called me Putt-putt.  
An affectionate term,  
I guess for how I moved around.  
It was always kind of nice.  
I never minded  
as long as it was my father.

My mother sometimes forgot my name.  
She'd call me by my brother's name  
Ron,  
or Ronald when she's mad.  
Then sometimes she'd call me Richard.  
Who's Richard?  
Nobody I know.

I suggest to my mom  
that maybe I should call her  
Mhomas  
since she calls me Thomas.  
Most especially when she's mad.  
Maybe just maybe  
*that's why I don't like the name.*

## **Becoming Hammer**

I had an email account.

The name was brinck:  
brinck@neon.stanford.edu,  
or something like that.  
My friends kept complaining  
that I didn't answer my mail.  
I said I'd never gotten it.  
Finally I figured out  
they were misspelling it.

Some guy named Brink  
was getting my mail.  
I sent him email  
asking if he'd been getting my mail.  
He said "yes"!  
Essentially just that.  
He hadn't told me before.  
He hadn't returned mail  
that obviously wasn't meant for him.  
He didn't apologize.  
In the days before spam ever existed,  
he just quietly deleted it.

I decided to change my email address  
to something everyone could spell.  
So I made it hammer.  
I'm not sure exactly why I chose that name.  
It sounded solid, reliable.  
It wasn't intended  
to imitate anyone famous,  
or I would have chosen someone I respect  
...like Ghandi.

One place I worked  
I kept getting email  
for Susan Hammer.  
I forwarded it to her  
and let the sender know.

What was most confusing  
was when I got mail intended for  
Tom Hammer.  
The mail would always begin,  
"Hi Tom,"  
and so I'd read on,  
only to get confused.

What I didn't understand  
was why none of them had chosen  
the email address "hammer".  
They joined the company before I did,  
but they were  
hammer1  
hammer2  
hammer3

## The Feminine Equation

They said if I'd been born a girl  
my name would have been Linda.  
Now *that* would have been just fine  
... if I'd been a girl ...  
No one would change my name  
to Lhindaas.

I met a girl in the mall once.  
Her father's name was Tom.  
Her brother's name was Tom.  
Her ex-boyfriend's name was Tom.  
I thought maybe  
    this was the woman of my destiny,  
but I never saw her again.

A lot of women these days  
don't change their names  
    when they marry.  
I've decided  
    if my wife agrees  
that I'll take her name,  
or we'll choose something altogether different.  
Whatever happens,  
I'd really like to have  
    the same last name as her.  
For me,  
    it's part of the bond.

You can probably tell:  
my name is a part of my identity,  
a very personal thing to me.

There's a song by Billy Joel  
    called Christie Lee.  
I really like it.  
I relate to it.  
It's about a man in love with a woman,  
a tragic affair.  
The guy plays a saxophone.  
    I play a saxophone too.  
To tell the truth —  
    I've decided the song is about me.

In fact, Billy goes to great lengths  
just to avoid mentioning my name.  
He says,  
    "The man's name I don't remember.  
    He was always Joe to me,  
    but I can't forget the woman.  
    She was always Christie Lee."

He can't remember.  
Right.

    Christie Lee  
    Christie Brinkley  
Think about it.

## Regression

I started working somewhere new.  
I got a new computer account,  
a new email address.  
They said it could be any name I wanted,  
any name at all.

So I said  
    "hammer".  
It's what I've used for years.  
They said  
    "but that isn't your name."

I said  
    "Right. Exactly."  
I reminded them  
that they said any name at all.  
They finally agreed,  
and my email name has been hammer  
for almost a year here.

Just 2 days ago  
I tried to read my email,  
but I couldn't get in.  
It said hammer was invalid.  
I tried and tried  
and tried again.

In a sudden insight  
I tried "brinck",  
and it worked.  
Somehow my name  
just keeps coming back to haunt me.

## **Holding Back the Words**

Tom Brinck

10/8/94

It's a question of integrity, really  
not to act  
when you want to  
when the need builds up to an urgency  
not to say it  
because it's not quite right, not now,  
and not to say anything, really

because each word builds the fence  
till you find that you're fenced in  
and every word after that  
only closes in tighter  
cornered,  
you're trapped into a destiny of doing,  
of saying, of admitting

though there's a proper time  
for even this  
once when I knew I couldn't, wouldn't act  
I confessed only that I was afraid  
and in that word, a trap,  
a trap I laid for myself  
because in response was the question 'why?'  
and caught in a corner  
by my own honesty  
I had to tell the truth

but now's not such a time  
while she turns colons into smiles  
I must be still  
and even though I trust myself  
that's not the point  
it's not a matter of how good I am  
or else integrity would be only for the weak  
and virtue for the bad  
and words would lose their power

# Humongo Circulation Man

Tom Brinck

10/26/94

Humongo circulation man  
He's got a heartbeat that's 20/20.

He sat on the floor  
in front of the classroom door,  
and everyone stepped over him.  
He thanked them all because,  
in a dream, he'd watched them all  
step over him and smash his hand  
on the other side.

Humongo circulation man  
Red blood cells race like Formula 1.

He ran to the corner to meet a friend.  
She wasn't there,  
and he forgot which corner,  
so he ran to another corner.  
Running back and forth,  
he worked himself up to a sweat,  
worked himself up to a double-thumping  
wallop of a pace  
till she finally came.

Humongo circulation man  
He'll have a stroke if he thinks too hard.

He'll have a heart attack  
if he doesn't cut back  
on the free food, the eggs and bacon,  
and the energizing symphonies.

Humongo circulation man  
His pulse beats eighth note triplets.

He looked at the back of his left hand,  
and there were 5 red scabs.  
He regretted picking the 5 pinhole scars,  
but he scratched at them anyway.

Humongo circulation man  
With his pulse he charges batteries.

He joined a class  
on synchronized swimming and juggling.  
Class was in session,  
but all he did was run around the pool.  
They warned him not to slip.

Humongo circulation man  
His blood pumps like a vacuum cleaner.

He took a test,  
but he couldn't finish it.  
He just kept asking for more time,  
but he couldn't concentrate,  
and he just couldn't do it in time.

Humongo circulation man  
His bruises bloom like thorny bushes.

After class, he went to the men's locker  
room,  
and wouldn't you know it,  
there were women hanging out,  
joking and laughing.

Humongo circulation man  
His capillaries have amplifiers.

In one stall, there was a girl reading her  
poetry  
to a couple guys who comforted her.  
The poem was called,  
"Don't let your boyfriend cut your hair".

Humongo circulation man  
He's got his heart on overdrive.

In one of his dreams,  
in order to save money on groceries,  
he shrunk himself down  
and was a stowaway in a grocery bag.

Humongo circulation man  
He's got sutures in the backs of his eyes.

## **I'm can-do**

Tom Brinck

5/1/01

I want to do this. I will do this. I've got to do this.

Hazy threads of psionic potential connect you to me.

Only you can set me free.

I see with sight I've never seen.

Chaos-beams can't say what I mean.

But they're one step ahead of my telegraphy telepathy.

I'm not superpower superhero prophet yet-to-be.

I'm love-potential light-heart light-head luminous.

I'm can-do

must-have

never-give-up

dreamer

achiever

must-believer.

You are her, the little one, the heart-mantra of destiny.

I've found the girl. I'll save the world.

I read the magnetic halo. I flow with the solar wind.

I'm charmed by radiant engrams.

Obstacles to me are translucent.

Persistence is my body fuel. Impossibility is my double-dare.

I double-dare you.

You'll double-dare me.

## **Insomniac**

Tom Brinck

8/18/96

*During sleep, the average person swallows 3 spiders per week.  
- The Arachnid Research Quarterly*

Impatient and sleepless, he wanders the house  
at night and the webs he leaves  
are dusted away in the day by a tolerant

wife. With his multiplex eyes, he'll see you coming  
from any angle, and if you touch him,  
he'll either run away or curl his eight legs and play

dead. He tells his wife if she doesn't like  
the cobwebs then she ought to do  
something about the crickets, cockroaches, and

rats. In bed with him, she's paralyzed. When his  
fluid enters her body, she slowly dies  
but does nothing. She lies back and quietly

snores. That's when he crawls hands and legs all over her  
until he finds her tongue. Sleeping  
soundly: she smacks her lips, rinses her mouth, and

swallows.

## **Jezzel**

Tom Brinck

7/8/95

Jezzel, what are you doing using Chat?  
How you ::giggle::! How you flirt ;-)! How you <tease>!  
What is it you're trying to do to me?  
Ah, Jezzel, what is it about the format  
of your text, your punctuation, that  
brings me back again to see  
just what it is and how you'll say to me  
all those things you say when we're chat-chatting away?

The hours grow and the charges pile up,  
and I wonder, are you employed by an  
online service, so clever and seductive,  
to lure me in? even though I'm trying  
to resist you — to control myself —  
while your every <grin> and <smile> draws me back, Jezzel.

## **Kicked Out**

Tom Brinck  
12/23/94

kicked out of school  
    cuz you couldn't make the grade  
    cuz after 8 years  
        some of the other students were starting to complain

kicked out of work  
    cuz you never made sense  
    cuz the customers were nervous  
        with the way you stared

kicked out of home  
    cuz you wouldn't take a bath  
    cuz you're killing us all with worry  
        and you never seem to learn

kicked out of church  
    cuz you couldn't help it  
        if an occasional "goddamn" somehow just erupted

kicked out of the group home  
    cuz "you're alright now  
        you can make it on your own  
        don't worry — we believe in you"

kicked out of your apartment  
    cuz you couldn't pay the rent  
    and the landlady's screamin', "my god!  
        what's that smell?!"  
        what have you done to my walls! my furniture!"

you're hangin' out at McDonald's  
    and you're hungry  
    so when they put a bag on the counter  
    you grab it  
        you turn around to walk out and there's the manager  
    he asks you to return the bag  
        then he puts together a little meal for you  
    he asks you to please eat outside  
    and he doesn't mind helpin' out  
        but please don't come back  
        they're not in the business of givin' out free food

so you come back the next day  
    and there's a different manager

you ask the cashier for a Big Mac  
but when you won't pay  
the other manager asks you to leave  
and the kids makin' burgers are whisperin'  
that's the same guy as yesterday

so you hang outside  
askin' people for quarters  
till eventually the cops come and walk you off the premises

kicked out of the mall  
every time you go in  
by the burly mall-cops who hold your arms too tight

kicked out of the shelter  
cuz they didn't like you when you wouldn't sing the jesus songs  
cuz you had one drink too many  
and knocked over some furniture

so you go back to McDonald's for some food  
but this time the cops come and lock you up  
but that's okay  
cuz they feed you and you're warm

next day, you're kicked out of jail  
cuz no one bothered to press charges  
but hopefully that one night did you some good

so you curl up in some bushes in the business district  
till some cops come by and ask you questions  
the lady cop says  
"I think you're going to have to move on now"  
and you say "what did I do now?"  
It was that I pissed in the corner of the building, wasn't it?"  
and she says  
"I don't think it was *that* in particular  
It's just that this is private property and you can't stay here"

but the whole damn town is private property  
and they won't let you sleep in the park  
and these days you don't have a family to go to  
and you never had friends

so you walk down the street muttering  
and you find another spot

## **the land of the brokenhearted**

Tom Brinck

6/3/01

sooner or later  
you can visit almost anyone  
in the land of the brokenhearted.

if you wipe your eyes,  
you can find me there  
almost anytime.

it's a place near here  
where hearts cry  
and hopes wither in the warm spring air.

raindrops fall like lead weights  
on our shoulders, on our stomachs,  
on our shins.

young lovers stare at broken twigs  
at their restless feet,  
their hands dripping in dark crimson misery.

they've learned that pleasure comes too freely  
from the selfish and short-sighted,  
that youth is fickle and easily lead astray.

and others  
sit idle in the graveyards of their dreams,  
scratching at the dust of burial mounds.

facing dark caverns that loom in the distance,  
my lungs exhume the moist air  
of the brokenhearted.

this is my home and hiding-place.  
more than once, I've wanted more  
than a man can have, and for far too long.

## Lemonade and Big Brass Bands

Tom Brinck

7/11/98

over the lip  
of a slice of life  
you spot your sister Tangerine  
up waving, flying kites

the drimdrom sings  
in a whisper in a wind  
and you too have the urge to sing

with friends on the pipe and flute  
you orchestrate a rectangulum  
flizzing fingers flashing by

melodies construct  
the next colony you'll plot

messages conveyed in bubbles  
come upon you suddenly  
and pop  
you've got to go

## Lessons from Shadows

Tom Brinck

7/20/96

everyone is secretly sad.  
the streets are  
too hot.  
everyone comes out  
at night  
dressed in black  
for mourning.

health and beauty  
are worn as  
talismans.  
inside everyone  
is fat and decay.  
most of us  
walk alone.

children are born  
gray  
as dried corpses,  
their heads  
hung low,  
their clothes  
baggy and tattered.

everyone is secretly sad.  
under every voice  
is a whisper  
telling of past despair,  
speaking of  
atrocities.

a death wish  
gnaws quietly  
at the shoulders  
of everyone  
who tries to flourish.  
the streets are full  
of purposelessness.

the old  
are full of fear,  
racing from specters  
of loss  
and disease.  
everyone is secretly sad.  
tears flow in all the private places.

# Lies

Tom Brinck

Summer '88, Spring '92, 7/10/95

I CRITICIZED  
THE **LIES**  
MANY **LIES**  
THE **MANY TALES** THEY TOLD  
BUT THEN AGAIN  
THESE **MEN**  
MANY **MEN**  
WITH **LIES** THEIR **LIVES** THEY MOLD  
NOW I MUST CHEAT  
AND **DEFEAT**  
THUS **DELUSIONS** THAT THEY HOLD

# Mad Symbols

Tom Brinck  
Summer '92-'93



## Mad Symbols



Running up the stairs



Running through my hair



Seeking dreams that breathe



Seeking breath  
That Heaves

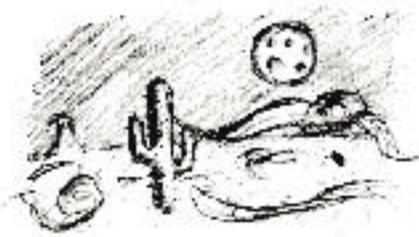


Looking for  
The lost agenda



Wondering  
where  
My heart  
has gone





Blowing the dust  
Of desert night



Taunting the sun  
As sparrows might



Now Spirits  
call

with Painful  
Screams



with torn  
Posture

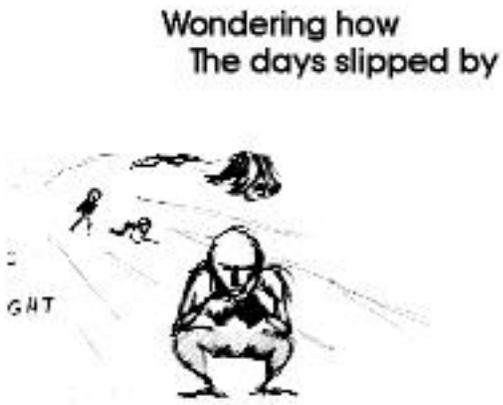
with ragged  
Seams



Running through the streets



Orange-red flames  
Licking hot concrete





Feeling chills  
While the skin burns dry



Feeling ill  
As hungry face glides by

Buzzing  
Insects  
At the door



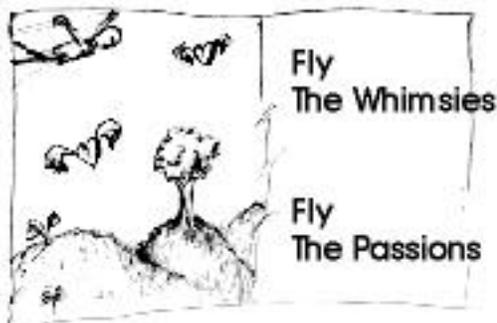
Transferring the sweat  
And blood of war



Mad symbols speak  
Of something hidden



Destabilizing  
and now  
Forbidden



Fly  
The Whimsies

Fly  
The Passions



Watch  
The Rage

Reward  
The  
Actions



Seeking out  
The lost oasis



Speaking out,  
I walk  
a thousand paces



Looking past the screams  
That don't scream with me



Goliaths riding horses  
How could it be?



Scratching the sand,  
To see what releases



Trying crying,  
When the heartbeat  
ceases.



©



## **a moody moment of jazz**

Tom Brinck

5/29/01

There are moments of perfect luxury  
that no one can take away.

I love the soft quiet dreamy feeling  
when I watch you sleep  
in the twilight.

I love to hear the gentle music wrap around us like  
satin envelopes of night.

It's a slow moment  
as the sun eases into the horizon  
and your breath catches  
and my eyes glide along your lips.

How could I ask for more  
when I trace the curve your dress follows  
along your thigh?

I know it's a simple thing to say, but  
you are so beautiful when you sleep.  
Your careless hair, your soft skin,  
your fragility.

It's this feeling I have,  
when I sit quietly beside you,  
this tender feeling of peace, of trust, of affectionate calm,

and I know I love you.



## Notes of a Madman

Tom Brinck

'87-88

The madman woke,  
his dream complete,  
to find the forgotten  
at his feet.

He watched the doorway  
as he got up,  
but there was nothing to be seen.  
He walked across the floor  
and opened up the drawer  
and found a notebook  
in which he began to write.

“I saw the sky this morning  
inside a hollow tree.  
I tried to show the others,  
but it was a sight reserved for me.

“I watched a small dragon  
as he flew around my cabin.  
I smelled his breath like burning tar,  
and then I laughed  
and with one swift leap  
I captured him and put him in a jar.

“I threw the jar into the sea  
so that it would drift upon a distant  
beach,  
so some lucky boy  
could see the dragon I have seen  
and reach the beauty I have reached.

“There was a beggar  
in my dream.  
He asked me for the time.  
‘Time to wake,’ I replied.  
‘Don’t leave yet,’ he cried,  
‘for we’ve barely met.’  
But it was too late.”

The madman put the notebook  
back in its place,  
for he had heard a knocking at the  
door.  
He went to the door  
and opened it up,  
but no one was there.  
There was only a rainbow  
and a large blue tree.

## **Of Lucy**

Tom Brinck

8/22/94

### **Moonlight**

loosely scattered on the battered rocks.  
With the seaweed, side-to-side,  
soaking dress, washing in the tide.

Losing a feeble hold on life —  
lost. No longer laughing.

Lunar shadows, black and white

**on loss**

Tom Brinck

10/26/97

Tom -- it's been a while, a least from here,  
so that i might have to start seeing  
an architect...

are you feeling lost or trapped?

have you thought about writing a poem  
about loneliness? could you write  
an agonized plea? for me.

consider rhythm.

consider side-by-side.

consider bringing back a poem for yr friends.  
they're all feeling remorse like me i expect.

consider each and every word.

consider this: that imagination can free  
you and the one's you care for  
from the tiger.

-- annie

**on release**

Tom Brinck

10/26/97

annie --

i wonder if you're smiling. i wonder  
if you're on my side.

don't look up. but have you seen the  
cameras? do you know that you're  
being watched?

don't tell the others i guess. but the  
revolution will have to begin.

how odd that they let me see yr messages.

i saw what jed and steve and mike had  
to say about me. they're fine. but we've got to  
turn their hearts to zealous revolution.

i'm being processed.

you don't want to know what they ask me to do.

they want to make me feel defeated.

-- tom

## on waiting

Tom Brinck

4/7/99

Tom --

i'm caught up in a  
suggestibility.

i'm caught up in a wavefront  
of risk of time.

please don't enter an altered state  
of consciousness. you're needed here  
alive.

i need to hold-in my self-regret.  
i'm sorry for the mess i've made.

watch your back and watch your skin .  
i'm walking down the streets at night,  
looking for a mode of rescue.

will you wake beyond this seven years  
and still know  
that i am here?

i need your leisures  
and i need your certainties.

(send me a letter,  
some kind of confirmation, when you have time.)

-- annie

**on purpose**

Tom Brinck

4/7/99

annie --

what is this illegitimate behind my eye?  
like a raging forest  
like an extra skin

i think back to the days among our friends  
when we tried so hard to impress  
that we used up the sky.

and at this point i meditate on the bent  
steel rods among piles of reinforced concrete.

how's your family? are they still sore memories?

i remember the days when another fact had  
the magnitude of a new planet looming  
in the sky.

my eyelids rub together, dry  
like gritty crystals , grains of sand  
flake off into my lap, onto my  
notes that diagram my stagnant days.

annie, if you see that any trace of  
how we lived is unerased,  
slip into a hidden room and whisper what you must.

meanwhile, i'm asking  
what use do they have for my remaining flesh  
now that they've redefined my meaning?

-- tom



## **on surrender**

Tom Brinck

6/5/01

annie --

i can't imagine that you want the  
responsibility, but you're the only  
one left behind.

keep it all inside.  
bury it deep.  
now deeper deeper.  
don't let it out for electric shock.  
don't let it out for hurricane,  
    harassment,  
    heroin,  
    or those warm desires  
    you'll want to call love.

annie i'm shaking and drained.

i'm cold in the extremity. i'm cold in  
the heart. my mouth says yes when my  
inner whisper says yes no no i wish i  
didn't no

i'm crafting a legend of lizard kings  
& desert fish that flip in the sand.

i'm following visions of knots tied  
around flower stems,  
of tangled strings and black carved-wax runes.

you're the keeper.  
for all that's left unsaid,  
i think you know your spot.

-- tom

## Orphans

Tom Brinck

5/22/97

sometimes they'll sprout in your yard  
with white faces, seemingly drained of life,  
and it will seem as if they're sleeping  
    for a very long time  
with light pulses traveling thru a thousand  
    corded fibers  
that extend perhaps from a nostril  
    or possibly the corner of an eye  
    or an infected hole in a cheek filled with puss

but then the eyes will open & stare at you,  
    without expression on the face  
but still somehow quite sad  
with their chins in the moist soil  
and their hair matted & tangled from lack of washing  
and their mechanical parts in tedious repetitive motions

most of them are children  
and sometimes they'll grow thru a crack  
    in your basement wall  
and you can't pull them out because  
    their roots are deep  
and you'd kill them if you cut off their  
    food tubes or electrical supply  
and if you try to hurt them, they'll make a muted  
scream that rips at your heart

## Poem Colored by Night

Tom Brinck

7/9/95

she wakes,  
has her breakfast  
watching TV news,  
showers,  
and puts on her bikini.

taking a glass of iced tea  
to the front yard,  
below palm trees  
swaying in the warm air,  
she lays out a towel

and, flat on her stomach,  
she unbuttons her top,  
closes her eyes,  
and soaks in the light  
of the moon.

## Psychotic Moon

Tom Brinck

11/22/94

she's the joke that laughs  
    underneath this psychotic moon.  
standing on the grass,  
    when no one's looking,  
    she has the look of innocence,  
and tonight will happen soon.

with all this, too subtly planned, convergence  
    of ideas and men,  
    their glances choking,  
she smiles, she truly cares.  
but she's had enough.  
she reads and broadens her thoughts  
with long-winded couture biographies,  
to break free of her career,  
to cut through the technicalities.

at the party, in the night,  
    she toys with a curl of hair  
    — in words, plays out the fantasies.  
hurt by the streams of failure  
    and rejection,  
she plops down the pastry snacks.

she's tightly-wound  
    — dates the men she hates,  
    turns down the nice guys.  
they'd tie her down.  
they'd make her face the dejection.

primly dressed,  
    it's all so bleeding bloody right.  
taking steps onto the porch,  
    staring at pebbles through the cracks,  
    wanting to walk away from her own lies.  
the hot wind of this neurotic june  
    poses groping questions as a test.  
she thinks to walk away, demure,  
but breaks a little frown,  
because the mathematics of it all  
    eludes her.

## Ramification

Tom Brinck

2/13/98

as water  
    moves among the foothills...  
...and the dusk, brooding,  
    while flakes of ash drift, wetly staining flesh

    and a trudging thru rocky soil,  
        aimlessly,

seeking,  
    yet resolute

as a sun struggles its last timid blue light  
    thru drizzle taking pause to fall

and a reflection on a world mechanical  
    left a thousand distances  
        behind in place & time

hardly a brow of perplexity  
    but rather somehow a sadness  
when, drifting by  
    on a flatboat in flooded water,  
    a lonely bull with swelling flanks  
        and brutal strength  
staring immovably  
    from afar and again away

and a rain and a mist  
    and a smoldering air

and somehow a loss unfathomable

dark, darkly imagined otherwise

## relics of cold fusion

Tom Brinck

12/18/98

a jar

of warm water filled  
with rusty nails & bolts & dirty screws  
embedded in white powder rock  
caught in wire coiled tight thru  
fusion boxes & metal casings  
with holes bent aside by rabid screws

eyeball scraps

as if  
afloat in sulfuric gas  
& inductive cables trembling  
with the supersonic edge effects  
of a sonic drill,  
metal clamps scraping against the glass,  
yellow incandescent light  
glowing thru  
like battery burn

spirit water

penetrated by wire mesh  
disintegrating,  
stretched to the form of  
swollen glands  
& miniature copper brushes of transduction  
circulate  
in the brief entropy  
of ionic ice

## **Rocketships in Vision's View**

Tom Brinck

10/25/97- 10/26

Rocketships in Vision's View—  
Stir the Heart to want and More—  
Cause a Longing for the Lost  
Who travel far—through Man-Made Holes—

And if this Wanderlust Remains—  
Though the Cost is High—for unskilled Hands—  
I must break free of these Restraints—  
To land on Moons with Timeless Sands—

To splash in Oceans Green as Peas  
And bathe in the Womb of Cryofreeze—  
But why?—My Heart doesn't answer—  
There's no Reward but this itching Stone

I wonder—does it deceive me now?  
Are these Machines with walls of Rust  
Enough to feed my eternal Soul—  
Or must I feed on Laser Fire?

# sHiFT

Tom Brinck

5/20/97

shift  
sudden change  
bacccecc  
backdrop  
AMY AMY AMY  
this is THAT MESS  
Not  
Not certain  
DoN't KNOW for Certain  
certain  
W  
WW  
What  
A  
Mess  
CA CANT  
EVEN  
WRITE RIGHT  
I I Send a mesS  
I turn a responsibility  
don't you  
don't everyone  
ask to turn a responsibility  
WOW  
What a freakin freakin freakin  
freakin freakin  
freakin freakin freakin  
freakinfreakinfreakin  
freaKinfreakinfreakin  
freakin  
**MESS**

**TIME**  
to turN right  
I'M alright ~~I am~~ I a  
I AM  
iN Control  
under control  
controlling  
That's right....  
That's  
what

I say.  
G Get it?  
Get it?  
That'S  
I Will  
control — I've got to say it.

I am t  
I am the center of  
this uniVerSe  
I am the **NEXUS**.....  
Is it that...  
DO they worry  
about  
people like me ?  
Do they find  
that I am Wrong?  
THEY  
HAVE  
NO  
RIGHT.  
I am mortal.

Do  
they  
consider  
THIS  
MaladjuSted.  
This is my control.  
MY CALL.

# SHiT

It's a Notebook FULL of  
TTom  
FREAKINNNNNNN  
FREAKFREAKIN  
OUT

"Stranger  
it  
all depends."  
I'm TEMporary  
Take Me  
I test Myself.

Shit What's  
This all about  
?

Freakin  
Out

What is going  
on?

What's  
goin  
on?

page  
after

after PAGE page after page afta

Page Page AFTER

after **Page**

**AFTER**

**Page**

**of** a absolutely

**ABYSSOLUTELY**

**INSPIRED**

**SHIT**

# Skin wrap

Tom Brinck

3/12/96

Fried neoplastic fun  
getting real fantastic, come  
get spastic

MAN

SUPER DUPER

MASTER PLAN

leather tender Fat SCAM Damn\*

Wrap

around

with many layers •  
aqua two-tone fut•ure MAYORS

play the skin-tight  
play squeezin me

touch my nipples   
tenderly

sweat within the  
polythene sheet ———  
stretch & ripple  
lubricate me

SPASTIC Helpers

——— Massive Drink

Lavender Yellow oil slick

trick  
trock  
bones  
&  
wishes

!

@

#

click  
clock  
stolen  
kisses  
XXX

Drivin past the neuroman  
Help me make the master plan  
BABY

¢ You got the rings ¢  
You got the body fetish  
You Got  
BOBBY-LOU  
and  
Dramamine

Now just give me my SKIN WRAP \*

## Soda Pop Straggler

Tom Brinck

12/3/96

an unseasonable warmth  
on the 19th floor —  
pajama folds occlude  
rivers of unwelcome disease;  
thru the open window  
a soothing chill of winter breeze.

cracking the toes as  
builds up a trembling pressure  
in the flaming joints.  
an unwelcome exhibition  
as I'm tied to listen  
to black orals of repetition.

my mind run red by  
asian eyes, and the last  
horizon above my head calls  
an urgent transpiration —  
spanning the days of wrinkled  
sheets and nervous alienation.

# **solitude**

Tom Brinck

7/11/98

snow,

cracked only

by a fragile twig

a proud white horse

browsing lightly

from frost-covered stone

to stone

**a song**  
Tom Brinck  
10/14/97

the one  
thing  
i know

without  
a doubt  
is

jenny  
i want  
to

see you  
again  
... if

you read  
this  
will you

let  
me  
know ?

# SteelJaw and LittleGuy

Tom Brinck

1/23/95

Doug and Foster was out renovatin an old house.  
They was strippin paint  
while the owner went out to the grocery store,  
and left his 2 pet lizards behind.

The one lizard — his name was SteelJaw.  
He was a big lizard with buggy eyes —  
3 feet long and kinda fat.  
His buddy was called LittleGuy —  
a slim lizard  
with a long narrow snout  
kinda like a pair of tweezers.

Now Doug'd rolled up the carpet  
and Foster'd been layin down newspaper  
when them 2 lizards  
wandered into the room.  
Doug and Foster stopped what they was doin  
and took a lizard-playin break.

SteelJaw — he was wrapped up  
in a tight-fittin light-brown leather bodysuit  
which kept his claws covered,  
and it was sewn closed over his mouth,  
keepin shut his saw-like metal canines,  
because the owner didn't want him hurtin nobody.  
Only his eyes showed thru,  
but they was still all full of playfulness.  
And LittleGuy — like a dumb little dog —  
he just frantically ran around, yip-yippin.

Now Doug was pettin SteelJaw,  
and he says,  
“this don't make no sense.  
Looks like SteelJaw here can barely breathe.”

So Foster goes and gets a pencil from the toolbox,  
figurin he'll make some airholes for SteelJaw.  
Then Foster bends down  
and grabs SteelJaw's snout,  
and SteelJaw is just starin up at him  
— maybe kinda friendly  
— maybe just kinda scared.

Foster, he just points that pencil at a nostril,  
and holdin SteelJaw tight,  
he pushes it right thru  
and makes a breathin hole.

Then he wiggles that pencil loose  
and pokes it thru the other nostril.

Then Foster gets up  
with a proud satisfaction,  
while Doug just stands  
and slowly nods approval.

Well then  
all of a sudden  
SteelJaw's wrigglin his nose  
and sniffin and snortin,  
and them nose holes keep gettin bigger and bigger  
till the stitchin comes loose,  
and the mouth rips open  
on SteelJaw's leather bodysuit.

This gets SteelJaw all excited,  
and he's just bitin at the air  
— showin off his shiny stainless metal teeth.  
LittleGuy squirms all around SteelJaw's legs  
because they're friends and  
it's lookin time to play.

Now SteelJaw, he decides  
he really likes these 2 guys, Doug and Foster,  
so he jumps up on them,  
still bitin the air with his sharp metal teeth,  
all in unthinkin, frenzied fun,  
like a dog waggin it's tail.

And Foster, with a big lizard all on top of him,  
he decides he don't want his hand chewed off,  
so he goes and sticks the pencil in  
to prop open SteelJaw's mouth,  
but SteelJaw chomps down on it,  
and the pencil, it just shatters into splinters,  
then SteelJaw's bitin down on Foster's hands,  
all gentle and friendly-like,  
but that don't mean it don't scratch,  
and that don't mean it don't hurt just a little bit.

So Doug jumps over  
and tries to hold shut SteelJaw's mouth,  
and it ain't easy because SteelJaw thinks  
he's playin some kind of game.

And Foster goes and grabs some twine.  
And they wrap shut SteelJaw's mouth,  
and they fall back, sittin on the floor  
and take a breather.

While they're breathin,  
SteelJaw's starin at his snout  
and tryin to brush off the twine

with his 2 front paws,  
but them paws are covered in leather,  
and they don't quite work.  
So SteelJaw, he's lookin kinda sad.  
And LittleGuy, he's just kinda quizzical,  
lookin back and forth at everybody.

So then finally  
SteelJaw wanders sadly out the room,  
and LittleGuy trails behind him.  
They both look back,  
hopin somebody still wants to play,  
but Doug and Foster, they get back up  
and start strippin more paint from the walls.

When the owner gets back,  
he's pleased with their progress,  
and he brings some donuts back for them,  
because he's a good man  
and friendly-like,  
and he don't ask no questions about the twine.

## **the thieves who come again at night**

Tom Brinck  
2/21-2/22/99

thieves sweep thru our cities at night  
silently  
they swarm our highways,  
our arteries, like electric fire

they sleep on roadsides  
in the closed bars  
with our wives  
or someone else's

thieves in darkness hesitate  
but they take nothing they want nothing

siren songs call them  
like melted drops of candlewax  
on moonless nights

thieves with savage hearts  
pass thru us  
touching everything with shadows

and the sirens, frail and transparent,  
who come from secret places  
in the air

they watch the thieves  
indecently  
and breathe them in like poison gas

## to tell you of love

Tom Brinck

5/28/96

so do you want me to tell you of love...  
its sweetness...the longing...  
it burdens me.

sink down in the armchair,  
and in the twilight  
with the rain pouring down  
we'll talk of love.  
lay your head back...  
hold a soft pillow in your arms.

love is the shadows of clouds  
flowing across a field of tulips...  
the breeze shifting patterns of pink and yellow.  
it's the pure blue sky  
growing dark at the core.  
lying in the grass, stare upward...  
let your eyes wander lost into infinity.

let me offer you chablis.  
I'll turn the music on softly.  
here in my rocking chair...  
I'll reminisce of the ones who slipped by...

never forget your love:  
let it strengthen you  
even in absence...despair...

love is the smile that brings joy in every memory.  
turn down the lights and let love fill you  
with the freshness of a waterfall  
crashing from cold stones,  
your toes filled with sand.  
I'll close my eyes...  
dream my dream of longing.  
love is hope. it is my sole companion.  
...I'm a lost soul...I know what I need...

## Transformation of Truth

Tom Brinck

7/15/95

flirting like a wavering shadow  
through a wilderness of fog  
rising, no — blooming — in a charity  
of words, as flocks take to wing  
he moves to speak held-in  
prophecies and praises  
to an atmosphere contaminated  
with the smell of bread and sweat and love

lusts and unconstructed arguments  
linger on his tongue then fly forth  
to bask in the cool air of unknown dawn  
restless, he strikes out  
in the desperate direction that teased him most  
and gasps at the pale plasticity of concepts

driving forth to undermine  
his own self-defeating compulsion of clarity  
of trust in the goodwill of the many forms of beauty  
and the flexibility, no — the immunity — of moderation  
he allows dangerous thoughts to congregate  
in insomniac musings  
in uncertain prospective manias  
raving with a self-determination  
a fate driven to compulsion  
like ten-thousand tons of tide  
herded upon one tiny shore of insight

## Transience

Tom Brinck

2/27/97

a dim morning shining  
penetrating from low shuttered glass  
trickles of rainwater  
down textured walls  
in gray deco of  
pipe, conduction, and ribbed fiber tubing

what memories trapped in pictures  
what private recollections trapped in minds  
photos three dimensional:  
captured corners never ventured  
depth not witnessed ever once

vibrating colors  
probe & pulse their persuasion  
through window cracks  
sounds of somber longing  
insinuate their harmonies  
into the dreams of those  
whose lonely fingers  
let slide snapshots of quiet moments faded to black & white

why tap this atonal key

the hum of rockets in the sky  
evacuating earth  
occasional empty echoes  
with every slow traversal  
of metallic corridors  
(mechanical or otherwise)

and where the ripple of experiencing runs dry  
what meaning lingers  
in paper and cable and silicon chips

... hollow notes of solitude,  
expanding in the ether,  
dissipate with inverse-square decay...

## Tsuru-Singe

Tom Brinck

8/13/96

He's been trained in special forces and secret service.  
He knows there are secrets too dark to share.  
He's learned judo, kora-notte, and the arts of psycho-active chemicals.  
He's been brought to the island of Maturu-kan in the tropical ocean swamps of  
Central Trihem,  
sent to guard the docks between Science Village and Science Labs.

Nights come and nights pass; the sun sets seventy times.  
He's covered with a cream to treat his insect-infected heat blisters that always  
curse the newly-arrived.  
Three injections daily : his own concoction : for his fever and to keep him well  
aware.  
Birds and frogs call for love and hunger from deep within the forest.

Day 7-2: Professor Talori passes through.  
She's a tough one, Talori, but he trusts she's good at heart and greets her kindly  
every day.  
"Dr. Talori," he asks today as he escorts her through Decon 1 (decontamination  
and inspection)  
"I wonder if you'll tell me, what's behind this rumor: they say your project raises  
monkey-birds."  
"That's absurd, there's no such thing," she replies quite casually,  
"Besides, we call it the *Tsuru-singe*,"  
and she goes inside, without another word.

Ah, *peace monkey*, he recalls, is what they sometimes call it in the legends.  
Everyone knows it's the most dire abomination to humankind,  
but his concern is not with an idle legend of flying monkeys who steal children  
and devour them.  
His true concern is with living shadows who have been coming in the forest  
night.  
The sounds of cats have disappeared and wild monkeys shift nervously and cry  
sometimes in terror.

Day 7-3: "Dr. Talori, can you tell me any more about *Tsuru-singe*?"  
She says, "Hush! There are people who listen everywhere. I've told you there is  
no such thing.  
Such atrocity would not be ethical. No scientist could participate in such a project  
unless under great duress.  
Do not ask me where my children are."  
He's just a security guard, but he knows the signs when things have gone  
dreadful wrong.

That night, he goes into the forest, bleeding from his swollen blisters.

Giant dragonflies lead him forward. Swamp gators part at his chemical presence. He feels the presence of peace monkey, a dark shadow swinging in the trees. At a clearing, under stars, he pulls out his pipe, lights it, and plays a sad song of mourning as smoke pours spiritual patterns in the air.

*Tsuru-singe* cannot resist this call and comes from jungle not so far away.

*Tsuru-singe* flies to a nearby tree and quietly climbs down.

Peace monkey, with folded wings, has bloody teeth, but sits respectfully across from him.

He gently brings his song to pause and says, "Peace monkey, or as they call you, *tsuru-singe*,

Your bloody ways are not the habit of this world. You have come where you don't belong.

Tonight I must take your life — forgive me..."

With those words, he draws his knife and cuts off the wings and tail of *tsuru-singe*.

*Tsuru-singe* cries out a plaintive monkey scream that sends all the insects of the jungle buzzing.

Finally, he draws the knife across the throat of *tsuru-singe* and feels *that* regret as if his own child had had to die,

because killing a peace monkey is both abomination and necessity, and no warrior succeeds without tearing out a certain crucial thread from his own very soul.

He returns to his pipe and plays a song of pain and regret until he calls the dawn forward from its rest.

In the twilight of a misty daybreak, he makes his way through spiderwebs back to his post.

Day 7-4: As Dr. Talori approaches, she sees his dark mood and so inquires — "Ah, Dr. Talori," he replies, "I'm afraid your project may have encountered an imposition.

I hope perhaps this trouble will give you time to find your children once again." And Dr. Talori understands his whole expression, because of all that she knows

—  
that it's no more reassuring to destroy a peace monkey than to create one, that blood is on all of our hands, for the sake of our children.

## **tunnel vision**

Tom Brinck

6/1/01

Madness.

You get so caught up in the tunnel,  
you forget to breathe.

These animal spirits are gentle.  
Yes, it's true.  
They will take care of you,  
if this is really what you want.

But *you* can set your mind free.

Kiss me,  
and I will breathe life into you,  
like cherries and chocolates,  
like fine tendrils of butterscotch.

Hold my hand,  
and together we can walk another way.

Open your eyes,  
and you will be showered with light.

## **Umbilical**

Tom Brinck

9/30/95

tasting need you and I love hunger serenity  
now bursting out from my polluted cynicism  
like a vine we wrap up tie up with a bond  
of nourishment we smoke our umbilical cord  
like an opium pipe we dream and I, like  
a fungus rooting in the shreds of light  
on a flooded asphalt parking space, I reach  
forth and find light I scream the scream  
of the primal longing of life just one stop  
away from the nucleides the DNA the protein  
clusters who needs a god while there is you to  
worship ? and me a burnt-out tree supporting  
ant colonies an illusion of life, standing tall  
the illusion of strength of good continuation why  
the endless years drifting thru dark nebulae beaten  
by the unseen meteors battered me poisoned my  
heart ? now asking you, reach past the blisters,  
crude sorrow is it real ? the bile drains away and  
there is something sinless distinct its head my own  
its tail around your waist and you breaking off  
its legs the child's fascination with the insect  
and then you leave me here festering on top  
of this boiling bulb.

## **vinegar**

Tom Brinck

11/16/97

reflecting on vinegar the quaker-banded cosmo-  
NOTs say drink damn drink till I'm a pissed-off  
unfocused man screaming hope-words the useless  
incantations that they are I'm a longshot what I  
want's always a longshot it's a dreadful unjust world  
of dreadful unjust treatment like lemon-faced pit-  
faced hoarding whoring hopeless hateful horrid  
hominid that has to be a stone painful crackling  
shock of it breaking bone breaking faith don't tell  
me to drink more vinegar give me acid let it burn  
esophagi on its way down on its way up bulimic let  
its larvae feed on my breakdown lower brain  
breeding in my 'bellum or burning in my belly of  
bottom-sucking vomit-churning pain rusted iron  
cups serving industrial union-communion bust em  
for manipulation coercion angry urine and gangrene  
gang-think punishment which can't permit my  
different defeat.

## **The Voices**

Tom Brinck

9/13/94

It was a test of logic.  
My mouth was full of gritty dust.  
The clouds gathered up like dirty laundry  
    in the blue-green sky  
    with the moldy smell of tornadoes.  
Autumn leaves flew about  
to the mellow tones  
    the beat, beat, squeal  
    and eerie scales  
    of jazz.  
One odd man stood there  
    tall and gawking.  
He was unusual, unstable.

Everything I did was implicit.  
The voices told me what to do.  
It was in the rules.  
I'd listen to them again,  
    cautiously,  
    if I knew how.

# What is I?

Tom Brinck

9/5/94

The moon and black . and dove  
Like it and -ed . and of  
Possession . categorization of ing  
Subtle forms of . loving  
Insults charms and . freedom  
Concepts like . concept  
Like charisma . without the hair  
Without . the smile  
The pride . the family  
It can walk . a fortnight  
Or a thousand miles .  
Measure itself .  
And gather scattered pieces of Z3M&A  
Z 3 M A Z 3 M A . X X X X X X X  
Edges borders . crisp distinctions  
----- .  
Forests . trees and woods  
Dead ball . out of bounds  
Is'es . canbe's and should's  
Escrow . ethno anthro-apology  
Singled out . mental biology  
Limited by . it's own psychology  
Ands and . ors but no xors  
. Where's the logic?  
. What's the truth?  
No room . for accusation  
. What is I?  
I thinks . but I isn't  
I am .  
I allows for all possibilities

## when love is not enough

Tom Brinck

5/28/01

When love is not enough  
that's when you've got to let your feet free  
and dance.  
That's when you've got to run naked in the streets  
crying out loud  
"I love you I love you I love you".  
You've got to smile  
on the inside as well as the out.  
You've got to be silly and sad  
and quite a bit crazy,  
and you've got to be willing to suck in the stars  
and rattle the trees  
and bury yourself deep in glad thoughts  
of sincerity.

When you've faced the fact that  
love is not enough,  
it's time to get whimsical,  
and perhaps even a bit mischievous,  
with water balloons and rubber bands.  
Pull the curtains aside, and  
puppets will play in storybook romance.  
You've got to wink  
and splash  
and tell tall tales  
and climb upside-down.

When you really wish that  
love could be enough,  
that's when you clap your hands,  
open your mouth wide in astonishment,  
then grin.  
Or smirk.  
And even if you're feeling  
a bit chagrined,  
you've got to sing,  
and pounce,  
and parry.  
And when you think of a poem,  
you'll have to write it down.  
Write it now.  
Write about how  
love should be enough.

## **why people write poetry**

Tom Brinck

2/14/99

to tell a story to memorialize to praise to worship  
to instruct to remember to sing to entertain to share  
to wash oneself to purge to exclaim to complain  
to criticize to rebel to expose to shock to share feelings  
to satisfy the urge to write to get published to be famous  
to get good grades to disturb people to impress people  
to get laid to forge relationships to begin dialogue  
to find meaning to make a change to stand for or against  
war religion love politics to oppose meaning  
to oppose authority tradition wisdom to explore process  
to explore form to discover new possibilities to get rich  
to get a job to avoid working to annoy your friends your family  
to set a mood to please a crowd to explore language  
to dissect language to undermine language undermine  
thought undermine society undermine morality  
to find beauty to find the right word to find euphoria  
to fit in to send a message to be a better person  
to apologize to seek truth to seek the human spirit  
to follow the rules to define new rules to create beauty  
to create to be creative to try out a pencil pen paper typewriter  
computer printer to be liked to be loved to be useful  
to make a pattern to be different to get paid  
to win a contest to advertise to do whatever the hell you like  
to appeal to ordinary people to everyone to someone to anyone  
to your peers to your idols to your superiors to the establishment to god  
to end poverty to fight injustice to be pragmatic to be spiritual  
to reject to mock to tell a joke to work out problems  
to talk to yourself to stop the damn voices in your head

## Winter Chill Factor

Tom Brinck

3/7/96

Shovelin  
3 inches o' ice cubes  
n a blanket o' the  
frosty kind ya cant  
breathe proper  
chillin n stormin  
n aint no proper  
solution  
but ta keep shovelin  
as if there aint  
plenty  
o' shovelin to do at  
work abslutely all  
day long  
screw  
this  
damn freakin winter

ice  
belongs in a tall  
martini glass layin  
beside yr towel on  
the beach o' Saint  
Croix with a slender  
nearly naked companion  
dippin hr fingers in  
the glss , lickin off  
one that's drippin  
slidin em down the  
groove  
o' yr back n sayin  
baby  
i'm feelin a litl chill  
frm this tropical breez  
cantcha  
cum cddle  
a litl  
press me  
inta a hot cradl o' sand  
kiss me wetly  
tell me  
i'm not dreamin

## **with her long black hair**

Tom Brinck

9/9/00

what might  
bother me  
about  
the dark-eyed  
Brazilian girl

who always wears  
her clothes  
too tight

with 2  
slits  
that go  
ALL  
the  
way up  
either side  
of her  
dress

exposing  
flesh that speaks  
with a  
slippery  
indecision

could be  
that

on a summer night  
like this

she always orders  
her  
fresh-squeezed  
limeade

with a twist  
of mint

## **withdrawal**

Tom Brinck

1/18/98

when he finishes the few chores he's thought to assign himself,  
he walks across his gray, dirty lawn  
to his front door, glances around, and steps inside.

he looks like malnutrition.  
he takes each part of his body and drops the spongy-white flesh in its  
own milk carton, cut in half and filled partways with tepid water,  
each carton in its own concrete room  
with its low cloudy winter light.  
finally, nothing's left of him but a hand, which finds  
its isolation in the corner of a basement corridor.

he takes on despair as it grips  
each succeeding part of him.  
he surrenders,  
but no organ is ready to die just yet.

and in the morning,  
he steps out the front door  
to give one more day a try.

## **Would you hug the moon to bed?**

Tom Brinck

7/29/01

**Well would you?**

**Would you pour the milky way into a glass and make a toast to Saturdays?**

*I would. I would.*

**Would you let the stars jingle in your pockets like blue icicles on a string?**

*I would.*

**Would you read stories to sycamore trees?**

**Would you kiss a crab on a summer day?**

*I would. I surely would.*

*I would admire the sun till my pupils glowed like fireflies.*

*I would mesmerize the evening breeze with a smile and a song.*

**Would you hug the moon to bed?**

*Yes.*

*Yes, I would.*

*Let her come to me, just one cold night, and I would hold her tenderly.*

## You are Not Dead

Tom Brinck

8/26/88

The sky was gray  
and the air was cool  
on that day  
when I walked with her  
into those woods,  
and I said  
“You needn’t be afraid.”

I overturned a stone.  
We saw the dirt beneath  
and heard it moan.  
The insects crawled  
before us,  
and I said  
“You needn’t groan.”

The wind blew,  
and leaves fell  
of brown and yellow hue,  
and I kicked away  
some dirt,  
revealing a cavern entrance,  
and I said  
“I give this all to you.”

We entered down  
and smelled the earth  
beneath the ground  
and pushed aside

the webs,  
a vast corridor revealed,  
and I said  
“Fear not the sounds.”

And ghostly voices  
called through the dark,  
and all this noise  
entranced her heart.  
I showed her  
the mad splendor of the caverns,  
and I said  
“You have a choice.”

And she said  
“I shall stay”,  
for her eyes were red  
from weariness  
of the world,  
and I left her  
where she stood,  
and I told her  
“Only remember...  
you are not dead.”

And from that dark place  
I crawled out,  
returning to my home.

## Zipper

Tom Brinck

7/18/96

sometimes you'll zip up an old windbreaker  
and the zipper-pull will yank right off  
and you're sitting there awkwardly  
removing your coat like a straightjacket

and you suppose that the gods once  
tried to zip up some old pairs of  
pajamas and when the zipper  
broke loose in order to spare  
themselves the embarrassment they  
chose to call the zipper a human spine

and they wriggled out of their pajamas  
and called that awkward flimsy bag of  
arms and legs a human being and one  
day they'll show up unzip our spines  
and climb back in they'll kiss good night  
run off to bed and maybe mom & dad  
cuddled close will throw aside their  
unzipped pajamas once the children  
are off to sleep



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