

## *Astonishing objects*

I don't know if I should make a metaphor  
out of everything that astonishes me.  
For instance, the fact that on board the Columbia  
space shuttle that burnt up on February 1, 2003,  
killing everyone inside, there was a box  
containing eight spiders spinning  
huge webs in zero gravity  
that must have glimmered faintly  
under the lab's fluorescent lights  
like the remnants of a constellation  
composed entirely of dying stars.  
Or the fact that on January 27, one of the crew  
observed a new airglow phenomenon  
that had never been recorded before,  
a pale crimson light in the night sky  
caused by electric currents  
shooting up from lightning clouds.  
What are we supposed to do,  
knowing that all this happened?  
Knowing that one day the universe  
might cease expanding, or that it might not?  
I have collected up so many astonishing objects  
that I have nowhere to put them down.

## *If Katherine Mansfield were my best friend*

*It was only when she came out of the tunnel into the moonlight or by the sea  
or into a thunderstorm that she really felt herself.*

— Katherine Mansfield, ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ (1921)

1.

She would teach me how to apply winged eyeliner  
in a moving vehicle.

She would write long, passionate texts to her high-school crush,  
then screw up her eyes and ask me to press ‘send’  
quickly before she changed her mind.

She would let me borrow her vintage coats,  
her bright silk scarves, her oversized sunglasses  
and her Frida Kahlo socks.

When I’m in the middle of a break-up  
she would come over when I can’t get to sleep  
and we would sit on the floor eating Russian fudge  
watching documentaries about serial killers.

2.

once we’d saved up enough money  
we would go see the cherry blossoms like she always wanted to  
and drink chrysanthemum tea beneath the moon  
and we would climb mountains that look  
just like the mountains in Chinese paintings  
and we would sit on the cliff edge  
eating mangoes out of our hands  
dangling our feet into the clouds

3.

then we would move cities / then countries / at the beginning we would  
write / then we wouldn’t anymore / but sometimes I’d get an email from an  
unknown address / (subject line: MAGNOLIA FLOWERS) / and then  
we’d collide / by a river in Shanghai / or on a crosswalk in New York / and  
we would spend one sunburst afternoon / running through art galleries /  
watching dogs at the dog park / taking pictures of each other’s / shadows

the years would pile up / and she’d get harder to find / but I would always  
remember one New Year’s Eve / when we were young / when she decided  
not to turn up to her own party / sneaking out instead to light sparklers  
/ and swim naked in the cold sea / white-gold fireworks exploding like  
lightning / in the sky over the harbour / lights blooming in her eyes

## *Her and the flames*

WELLINGTON, this day.  
The mishap to Miss Phyllis Porter, one of the Peep Show ballet, had a tragic ending, for she succumbed to shock and injuries, and died last night.

It was originally supposed that the incident was due to the bursting of a fuse, but it now appears that some metal on her tinsel dress flicked against the terminals on the electrical switch board, which happened to be open at the time, and caused a short circuit. Some boys shouted "Keep away from the other girls" and she rushed off the stage. Coats were thrown over her and the flames were extinguished, but not, as it turned out, all her injuries were very severe. She was only 19 years of age, but had been with the Williamson Co. eleven years. Her father left Sydney on Saturday for Wellington.

WELLINGTON, this day.  
During a performance of "The Peep Show" at the Opera House last night, an accident happened to one of the company, Miss Phyllis Porter, by which she was severely burned about the arms and shoulders. The audience heard a loud bang and simultaneously a girl's scream. There was a moment of pause in the performance when one of the performers whispered to the orchestra, who struck up an air out of the usual routine, and the play went on. That was all the audience knew. Behind the scenes Miss Porter's costume was alight, and before the flames could be extinguished she was badly burned. First aid was rendered by a member of the audience and later Miss Porter was taken to hospital, where she is now reported to be doing well. The accident was due to an explosion of a fuse.

## *A pattern of waves*

She sits next to him in the firelight  
talking about fruit trees, birdsong, cargo,  
types of clouds, types of tides.

It is like this every night.

She is sewing a small pattern of waves  
in sky blue running along the edge

of his pillowcase—she pricks her finger  
and can't stand it anymore.

She must have the truth of it.

She must know if the blowhole spurts blood. *It does.*

She must know if it hears them coming. *With luck it doesn't.*

She must know if it makes sound. *It does.*

She must know if it is true that after the last hit  
it twists itself in circles and the circles get  
smaller and smaller until at last it smacks its tail

down hard and thrashes onto its back,  
fins out, signifying it is drowned  
and that this process is known as 'the flurry'. *Yes, it is true.*

She must know how many waves it can create  
at this moment, and how big they are,  
and if the moon is envious.

## *The ghost at the school dance*

(the flowers on the bannisters glow like  
they have moons inside them) (I reach for  
one but my fingers clutch at air) (pink-  
and-blue lights blink above me) (here) (in a  
crowd of girls with glitter falling from their  
eyelashes) (onto their cheeks) (girls  
ignoring boys gaping at them in the dark)  
(girls so close) (if I had skin) (there would  
be goosebumps) (and when I raise my arms)  
(into the rippling light) (my hands look  
almost real) (and do they remember?) (do  
they remember all the times they asked  
me?) (to say my name?) (to make a sound?)  
(and all those times I answered back)  
(causing them to run away?) (now here I  
am) (dancing in the shifting air) (in my  
white dress that only I can see) (flaming)

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