

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Francis Scarfe**

**- poems -**

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## Kitchen Poem

<i>An Elegy for Tristan Tzara</i>

In the hungry kitchen  
The dog sings for its dinner.  
The housewife is writing her poem  
On top of the frigidaire  
Something like this:

'Hear in the kitchen  
The crows fly home  
Into the red-robed trees  
That walk across the sky.

Hear under the floor  
The three fountains rising and  
Trickling through the bridge  
Into the sea of poems.'

In the kitchen the housemother  
Pours soup for her thousand children  
As her man eats his silence  
And the dog swallows its poem.

In all. the kitchens of Europe  
The radio shouts good news:  
'Millions have had no accident today  
All wars have come to an end  
An honest politician  
In another country  
Wants to become a plumber  
All men will be equal, next year  
Volcano vomits ice-cream  
A silent poem has been invented.'

In my holy kitchen  
I draw the blinds of night  
On the homes of sleep.  
I hold the world in my palms.  
Now that I am old  
I can measure life with words.  
There's a nightingale in my coffee.  
My bread is buttered with memories.  
Since the old woman died  
I have two souls.

When I was small we had a lucky black cat.  
We had a magic horse-shoe on the wall,  
It was rusty and brought no luck  
But fetched the fields into the kitchen  
And made us not forget horses.

When you are old you make your own magic.

You speak oftener for the dead.  
You move free in the wonderland of the past.  
You invent a future on the other shore of death.  
You must speak for the dead,  
You are their rusty horse-shoe  
In all the kitchens of the world,  
Not the mug on the radio  
But a thought rescued from the past.

(There was love in the thin soup  
A bone some lentils and great love.  
My mother's hands were clouds.  
There was a bluebird in the gasjet  
When she bathed us by the kitchen fire.

There will be no such soup again  
Nor such transcendent poverty.  
I have lost the treasure of poverty.  
The old woman is dead and buried  
In her wonderland of oblivion,  
But lives in my kitchen poem  
In this 'sentimental' aside.)

Now that I am an old man, I think in bed.  
I think nothing. I think poems -  
The metronome of sleeplessness and death,  
The art of being deliberately alone and yet  
A centre in the vortex of the world,  
Feelings stretched drum-tight on the grid of thought  
As your decaying flesh taut on its bones,

Sensations phantom ideas dreams, pinned bugs  
On the living conveyor-belt of experience,  
While in the poem you are everybody else,  
Each poem merging into another construct,  
All poems rationally absurd impermanent  
-----DADA-----  
There being no poem ever, no poet ever.  
An old man in a kitchen, cooking words.

I am no poet I am  
Lived by unfinishable poems,  
The horse-shoe hammered  
On the anvil of my brain.

I think nothing. The poems think me.  
I do not often write them down,  
Being a structuration of the unknowable  
That dies upon the page,  
My inward poems whispered for the dead  
While the living bury the living  
With foul political slogans.

An owl is hooting in my poem  
Which sleep will end.

Good night, poet of life,  
Be with me always.  
I give you my kitchen poem,  
Immortal TRISTAN.

Francis Scarfe

## Ode in Honour

Evening is part of the jig-saw truth of her,  
ply-wood ply-flesh, her insolent reply  
blinding the ace with a straight shot to centre,  
the woman's a delicate devil in twenty places  
blander and blonder, tinder tenderly  
setting the smiles on fire in men's faces.

On any evening gets you ready for dark  
swathes and saves you for the magic carpet  
spirits you anywhere anytime anyhow  
over the bridges the tunnels the hills the foothills  
the pools lakes oceans cataracts crystal floes  
the mountains and fountains the antique windows of space,  
the deserts orchards vineyards milky ways,  
over pontoons and the silting tracks of moons  
over the decks and the docks where the clocks  
chime, anywhere anytime, anyhow, any fresh place.

Anywhere where winds blow and babies grow  
where poor men wait for money in a row  
where magnates buy and sell your heaven and hell,  
anyhow whether the storm runs over the roof  
or hollow tooth aches or gangrene takes the soul,  
anytime when the sun splutters and throws shrapnel  
between the legs of dead men and mad lovers,  
she will be there to hold you by the cuff  
to give you all her stock of luck or love.

With  
two round lips and two round eyes  
and two round ears and two round palms  
and two round arms and two round thighs,  
any child, any girl, any woman, any surprise.

Francis Scarfe

## **The Merry Window**

The alabaster legs of the lonely woman  
hang from the window like white ensigns  
out of the laughing window like false teeth  
sheets, flagstuffs, telescopes, rolls of music,  
or you would say beheaded necks of swans  
or the electric horns of factories  
where foreign dreams are nightly fabricated.

Yearning for her coal once heaved in the seam  
for her the sewers shrieked their way through London  
and pigeons ate each other in the air.

But the deserted lady is frozen to the marrow  
her heart has floated into her left leg  
and her forked tongue asks in three languages  
for a bassoon, a pyramid, and an egg.

All the white birds have flown out of her lips  
the Polar Bear has eaten her left breast  
her eyes are covered with yellow webs of dust,  
in fact she is what a Saint would call abandoned  
since even her own self has forgotten her.

Francis Scarfe