

Poetry Series

Jacques Maurice

- poems -

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Jacques Maurice()

JACQUES MAURICE of New Orleans worked in the fields of lawn care and food service before making up the name JACK STRANGE for himself in the fiction, poetry, songwriting and recording industries. His books *Stranger than Truth*, *Stories by Jack Strange* (2004) and *Would-Be Poems* (2002) are available at

I

This is the day I shall be wed;
As I wait my thoughts are dead.
They lie stretched on the rack of love,
Embalmed like so many dirt-filled gloves.
And each stiff finger remembers
Nothing of the cold black embers
It used to caress with so much care
As if each branch would lead somewhere.
But now the fingers of every thought
Cannot remember what they sought.

This is the day I shall be wed;
From my heart all fears have fled.
My heart alone is alive today,
A living beating lump of clay -
Creating life with every pulse,
Incapable of feeling false.
Doubt is unknown to the heart of life;
It was my heart that found my wife.
I love her though my thoughts are still,
And when I say 'I do, ' I will.

Jacques Maurice

Ii

The sea played on and on all day
as we played in its playful waves.
Dodging clouds to catch the sun,
Mommy and Daddy having fun,
we danced to the tune of eternal days -
a foamy white song without words,
a heartbeat without a pause.

And I've never thought of poor Adam and Eve
until now - it all comes back to me.
Now I see the windblown tree
and hear that song, both true and false,
outside the window, all around the house,
and every whimper of every bird
is drowned by that eternal sound.

Jacques Maurice

Iii

She's a regular pigeon with a fancy tail,
And he's an old owl, or a crow that talks.
Now they're together in the very same jail,
Where neither can fly, and there's no room to walk.

No doubt PETA would be displeased
By the cruel entrapment of this mismatched pair.
Owls and crows are happier in trees,
And pigeons belong in the city square.

Jacques Maurice

Iv

She had him shackled to the wall of the cave
After she promised to love him there;
But she was shackled so far away,
He became despondent and had nothing to say.

Long ago he had stared at the sun
Until his eyes were burnt and sore;
Back in the cave he met her hanging -
She pitied him to see him changing.

He found it touching that she should cry
To see him scarred by the sight of the sun;
For she knew only the shadows on the wall,
And he knew fires, and puppets, and love.

And love he offered, and she accepted -
Though he was free, unlike she, yet a dweller.
But even his love left her unaffected,
For she could make nothing of such a strange fellow.

Jacques Maurice

Ix

There's a sleeping child in the garden,
dreaming of an easy life.
But something's buzzing
around his head
to wake him up in the night.

Jacques Maurice

V

The apple rolled slowly down the aisle
And stopped at the heel of his boot.
He turned and saw its warm red glow,
Then stooped to pick up the fruit.

The altar was quiet, but no one heard
The demon's laughing hiss.
The apple soon would take its toll,
Beginning with a kiss.

Jacques Maurice

Vi

He sat in silence as she talked,
but didn't really hear her.

Actually he preferred to walk
alone down frigid suburb streets,
where polished cars along the curb
slept like private birds and beasts.

So freshful was the cold night air,
so peaceably was the starless sky,
he wandered far, content to be
a maginary man alive.

She sat in silence as he walked,
but didn't feely real him.

Jacques Maurice

Vii

I plead guilty to the goddess of art
For doing nothing to promote her cause.
Blindly following a foolish heart,
I've buried myself with my own two paws,
Crucified freedom for animal peace,
Returned to the cave for fear of the sun.
But now that my eyes are beginning to see
This dark retreat where the end was begun,
I'm twisting and turning from blindness to light,
And feeling a need to prepare for a fight.

Jacques Maurice

Viii

The air blows cool and dry
in this rented space,
where the blank walls stare
into my blank face.

Jacques Maurice

X

I fell asleep when the sun came up,
and if I ever wake again,
it won't be until night falls
and grief calls.

Jacques Maurice

Xi

Sometimes the wind doesn't know where to blow,
so it blows upon itself, inflicting
violent comfort on fluid molecules,
making show of its empty substance,
mixing itself with rain or snow
as if this might cool its quickened passion,
like a lonely tyrant, hating his subjects,
ruling with a desperate, grasping hand.

Jacques Maurice

We often sat in her driveway
on cold nights when I took her home
from dates with my dreams.

She nestled up to me
as if my delusions
were body heat.

She understood well
my dreams.

But I misunderstood
when she told me her's
one night: She would be a Star;
this was our Secret.

I've kept her secret
until now
because I always had
my own secret to tell.
Then yesterday I heard
of her marriage and her child.

So I guess I should at least
whisper her secret
for once,
just to myself -
perhaps to make up
for past neglect.

Jacques Maurice

Xiii

Tonight I was sitting in my easy chair,
eating an evening ice cream snack,
when it struck me that I was less a man
than I was when I had no such chair,
when I had only hands and feet and eyes,
and the sense not to think how fast time flies.
But satisfaction is not guaranteed
to those who choose the easiest means
of sustaining their useless existence,
unless they're one of the fortunate ones
who blithely accept their own uselessness.
And so my idleness commands respect
from those who willingly would be idle.
How stupid is all our meaningless prattle!

Jacques Maurice

The day begins to wear on
as suddenly I notice changes
in the texture of the earth and air -
like a holiday, when you first think
of how you will hate to see it end,
when you notice where the sun is,
and yet you cannot tell if it has
reached, or passed, its peak.

Jacques Maurice

Xix

She sucks the breath
from every word,
and chews it up
like bubble gum.

Then, daintily,
she wraps it up
in tissue paper
for the can.

Jacques Maurice

Xv

No idea, no opinion
ever struck a duller chord
than the lack of any
idea or opinion.

Jacques Maurice

It's cold again tonight,
but the air we're breathing
is so stuffy and rank
I feel like a dog
in a cage in a kennel.

And tomorrow when I go out,
I might shiver in the wind,
but my blood will run hot
with the free, fresh air.

Jacques Maurice

Xvii

Day after day my face runs away
and yaps at people,
whose faces have run away too.

It's embarrassing to find myself faceless
in a faceless crowd.

I would speak to my face about this,
but I don't know who
my face is.

Jacques Maurice

Xviii

They say it's selfish to be yourself,
and yet they don't respect you if you be someone else -
as if a newborn baby doesn't know how to breath!
I'll always love you darling, whoever you'll be.

You came out like a perfect puzzle;
only He could have engineered the scramble.
Now His creation is left for us to handle.
Thanks to His indulgence, it isn't "I, " but "we."

Jacques Maurice

XX

Each night, before bed, her simmering blood
rises hotly into her head,
causing a madness to burn in her eyes
that would make any lover wish he were dead.

Jacques Maurice

If your tea cup shivers
too long on the shelf,
sew up your mouth
and have it cauterized
like an orifice
on the face of Misery herself.

Jacques Maurice

Xxii

I broiled a hot dog
and the women cried,
sad to see it
so shrivelled and burnt.

They wouldn't eat it;
they only sighed
when it fell on the floor
and rolled in the dirt.

Jacques Maurice

Xxiii

Now I see what I've done:
mistook the moon for the sun.
And I'm freezing in the middle of the night,
disillusioned by the paleness of the light.

Jacques Maurice

Xxiv

It came and went.
My money is spent.
I'm dazed,
in a sort of dream-world sense –
jilted by a thing
with a five-liter heart,
which never lives,
but is easy to start.

Jacques Maurice

Xxix

The vision is of poverty –
no money
to pay the people who let you live
even after they consent to give
ten extra days.

No it's not very funny.
Poverty breeds weapons
and dangerous games,
with rules made by nature,
not to be bought.

Jacques Maurice

XXV

Once again
I face the wind -
alone, but knowing now
of snares, and how
the pace of time
can exhaust a mind.

Jacques Maurice

Aldous the cockatiel lives in a cage
and loves it – he's comfortable there, and vague
enough to sleep while a man would linger
nearby, free, uneasy, watching the fingers
enwrap themselves in invisible knots,
tighter, tighter, with every sweep of the clock.

Jacques Maurice

Xxvii

Insects abound where we loathe:
in impassable bogs,
chronic shadows, lingering fogs,
and matter decayed.

Others thrive where we live:
on our lawns and our pets,
in our homes, our food gets
eaten but not missed.

And sometimes they grow in our heads:
in electrical nests,
sticky webs, hot threads,
and muffled echoes.

Jacques Maurice

Xxviii

It seems like years and years since I've seen
her laughing face, her lips that made my skin
quiver when I kissed them, her nose, and eyes
that saw the heat in each living thing.

Now I know I'm missing something fine
in the course of living this prescribed life,
for on summer mornings I wake up cold,
clutching the pillow I loved in my dreams.

And houseplants wither, rabbits starve to death;
time is my foe, my opinions are lies;
even my keys cannot open my doors
till the cold witch without them release me.

I might as well have been a bricklayer
building walls and walls and walls and walls and walls.

Jacques Maurice

XXX

Time passes through so many objects
and whimsically decays them
into nothing now dependable –
ashes, for time is the fire.

Spiraling blackbirds resemble
dark billows of destruction,
forever rising to reveal
their headway into nowhere.

And we must even look up
to see the desperate vision,
or down into the fire
to burn our eyes forever.

Jacques Maurice

Xxxi

He fell in a hell of love with her
for Art's sake. She was a pianist.
He thought only of what she played,
and she loved him for listening.

Soon he composed a lyric.
She laughed with such resonance,
putting his only song to shame,
while fingering private melodies.

The walls were rich with hangings:
a mirror for her, a clock for him,
a portrait of a portrait -
all in good taste, for Art's sake.

Jacques Maurice

Xxxii

Something is eating me
just to survive,
to be born, become
more than me
by defeating me.

Jacques Maurice

Xxxiii

Simple times are happiest:
animals' hours,
nature's quiet violence
upon itself, and
silent playgrounds.

Human economies
govern the minutes
of worded poetry,
and trees are stilted
or severed at the root.

What kinds of memories
occupy a stump?
Historians want more paper,
but poets study leaves
in search of wordless dreams.

Jacques Maurice

Xxxiv

The tide receded and left him dry,
looking down upon his grounded, gutted hull.
Broken, he had to begin again, to build
a stronger ship again, to win again.
And knowing he had sunk in battle,
he knew better how to rise in war.

Jacques Maurice