



THE WILD WHITE SEA

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TWO POEMS

by

John Jenkins

A LITTLE ESTHER BOOK

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A LITTLE ESTHER BOOK

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Note on the text:

Thanks to Ken Bolton for

2 lines (on p. 38) of 'The High Tides':

"You've heard /the expression 'free as a bird' /
but these were just commuters."

*Ita dum interruptum credas nimbum volvier,
dum quod sublime ventis expulsum rapi
saxum aut procellis, vel globosos turbines
existene ictos undis concursantibus...*

Accius, Aiganautae

(So you might think that a riven cloud rolled on,
now that a rock was thrown aloft by winds
and tempests, or that a rounded mass of water rose,
beaten by conflicting waves...)

THE WHITE LINER

A huge white liner glides into port,
 into the fabulous blue blaze of the new summer.

It is your first morning overseas
 and a creampuff rolls over in the wind across the upper deck
 leaving dabs of white on the pink grid
 of the tennis court.

But no one is playing tennis or even 'bending an elbow',
 it is too early, and only the paint shines
 in the brine-crisp blue air that is cloudless
 except for that one little cloud, up there,
 above the horizon, that Rousseau might have
 painted, had he painted it at all.

Three decks below, Mo 'The Living Target' De-Grass
 is playing patience. Slap! A card skids across
 the table and floats above his bunk, then he lights

a cigarette with another part of his mind.
In the wheelhouse Captain McQuade is taking a bubble
bath with his girlfriend April; she sudses his beard in a zinc tub
and giggles as a tattooed flying fish leaps headfirst
into the beautiful tan sea of her thighs.
All morning sailors' legs have appeared, walking
past the low windows, and waiters with breakfast
trays held aloft have careened in reckless
circles, to and fro, as the boat rocked.
As it does still, and the captain says, 'April
I lerv you, you little firework!' And she explodes
an umbrella-shaped flotilla of slow-arcing blue stars,
with a soft *thoomp*, in his sentimental old sailor's heart.
Above the ship the air shivers as clouds mass,
then lightning strikes the poop deck,
turning the seas about a brilliant white.

'Five days out of port, and now in port again,'
says the 'Glucose Baron', Chesterfield Knute
looking at his talking watch that woke him with
a lecture from the deck chair where he'd slept,
drunk, after last night's 'pirate party'.
It was called that by someone with a wit,
because everyone came dressed identically for it
as a pirate - except one polar bear
in sunglasses.

High above the boat we'll call SS *Trinidad*
another craft rocks on the balmy air:
a sort of dirigible made of inner tubes and
bicycle wheels, drawn, like one magnet towards
the unlike pole of another, northwards, towards the rising sun.
For that is where it flies, ever faster, to Japan,
guided by that man you might have read about in your newspaper,

Prof. Julip the 'Ambience King' who made a fortune
by synthesising sunsets out of coal tar.
Rent your own sunset! Just call the old Prof. up. It caught on
and became all the rage at betel-nut-chewing nights
in Sierra Leone, where the jet-set lounge
on carpets of bongo drums and atmospheric effects
amid glass sun dials on their twinkling patios.
But it ruined the Prof.; not financially, but where it hurt.
He lost his scientific bent and dreamt only of money.
Until - was it but a dream or really real? - A Voice
told him, booming in his ears, to build a fragile,
winged craft and follow a stern mauve Pointing Finger
to Japan, there to find his peace of mind again.
And so, drifting towards the ochre coast of Darwin,
fast he flies, seeking some sort of Eastern solace
under Nippon's cherry-blossom skies.

Meanwhile, below, behind the boat, happy seals are
barking in her wake as she steams out into
the wild white sea. But ... a 'bongo high' has been forecast –
smoking and dangerous – within dark isobars
of the weather chart.

It hits at three bells, like a celestial razor blade
shaving off the tops of the clouds
which turn upside down, such that
the rain spills out of them. Downward
ever downward fall a billion swollen drops,
splot, blat, splosh, against the deck they fall.

But that's not all!

Because each of those raindrops
has the power to turn any *green* thing it might hit –
into a giant marble tennis ball!

What's that? How could this be! Well, you see
it was because of the Prof., old Julip, drifting overhead.

He's just tossed overboard a vial of 'coal tar sunset'
which he'd been keeping 'just in case'. Yes,
truly changed and caring naught for cash, he's
emptied it all into the wind, and now
through science beyond the likes of I, this has led
to upset weather known locally as a 'bongo high'.

Luckily the only green thing under the endless view
of blue and fleeting clouds this moondog morning
is an umbrella left by old Heck on the pensioners' deck.
Splosh, a raindrop hits it, and it trembles merely.
Then, like a barfly drying out in Trinidad
who one day rediscovers his old thirst
in a dockside bar where sullen navvies curse
the whining light, just like that, it soaks
up all that fatal rain, growing hugely white
and marble, and no longer umbrella-shaped but round.

'Zounds!' (does anyone say 'zounds' anymore, or is it a word
best left to thrill odd readers
of The Hound Of The Baskervilles? 'Zounds!'
anyway, says the captain, suddenly turning
the wheel that steers the ship.

This sets the awesome marble rolling,
along the pensioners' deck, with savage power!
between the rows of flower pots, just missing
that old chap Heck who shakes his fist at it
then dives behind a cactus.

'Warp me timbers! Ye lubby hulk o' blanky thunder!'
swears Heck and also swears the captain
as that giant marble rolls like all the rolling
stock that ever rocked the Trans-Siberian Railway;
that rolling stock that shocks the ringing rails
continuously, day and night. Like that it rolls,
shaking from her sleep Narelle La Peep,

'The Songbird Of St Ives', who rescues from a dream
one last image - of a plover with a worm - before
she turns over in her stormy berth, to dream again ...
This time of a monk called Issy who tramps across
the fuzzy tundra of her breath and sighs towards
the last cold stars of Nome.

Is anybody home out there? Or have you, like her,
all gone to sleep? Then let me call you back.
You remember that chap Heck, and that mighty marble ball?
Splat! It crushes a deck chair in its path, then grinds
to dirt a teacup left on deck. Slam! It bounces off
the stairwell of the swimming pool,
onto a diving board which bends
then flips it high above the steaming funnels
of the ship. 'Where will it land?' You gasp. 'Will it crush
the captain, April or old Heck?' Don't bet on it!

Splash! it falls, full fathoms fifty,
into the moonlight-shimmering and frost-enamelled sea.

Why mention 'frost' while we're in the tropics? We're lost for
an explanation, as much as for
the mystery of Linear B, that language of the
ancient Cretans that cannot be read even by
the brightest heads who are dazzled when they
puzzle over it - whether in cafes, beside the
Cretan digs, in their digs or in gay Paree.

But what matter! The danger is past, and passengers
dance and toast the Cap with French champagne
and bright sunlight floods the air again
where raindrops used to be, while happy steam-puffs
dot the blue above a bluer sea -
where nothing stirs, except
a lone sea-bird which soars then strikes into

the sheer tranquillity through
which the ship serenely glides, towing
two ripples that stretch into a V
about her bow. On board, all is still again, except
for idle hands that grope
for suntan lotion or, identically,
semaphore for drinks across the glistening decks.

The ocean is a sheet of light a careless match
might ignite, as the sun stings
the air that is cloudless, except for that one
little cloud up there, within the blue
that Rousseau might have painted,
had he painted it at all.

And the *Trinidad*, now just a dot herself
nears the horizon, beyond a coral island,
where sea-birds trace lazy circles above a reef,

and where the endless cry
of the Didda-Booba parrot echoes still,
echoes as we breathe, echoes bright, yet serene
and far away ...

THE HIGH TIDES

1)

A blue moon rages in the sky above Hong Kong
where glass towers twinkle under starlight.

Down by the docklands a shadow glides
across a pock-marked wall.

A dagger flies and finds Lee Ching
who, with a severed cry,

flops out of sight beneath a neon sign.

It blinks and bathes with bitter blue
his hand, which clutches at,

then quivers on the greasy stones,

and then is still. As the street is still,

except for a scar-faced thug who vaults a wall,

then creeps and glides through a street of bars
where cars criss-cross the night.

While on the right, near a fruit stand,
a band of street sellers shout (in Chinese),
“Come and get them while they're hot,
potato straws, bamboo roots and shoots.”

A bright blade bites a lock
and four thugs burst into a room
where Bruce Fang lies with his favourite girl, Sue Ling.
She is accommodating him in The Bird Cage,
a seamy joint down near the river
where the sampan ply its treacly course
all night long. Fang snatches
a knife from his belt, then falls.

He'd just sobbed and sighed amid Sue Ling's
sweet dark thighs, and now the mob are after him.

He'd spread all his stolen trinkets
before her astonished eyes;
and, as shadows melted across a Chinese screen,
had turned to dream upon a quilt of printed
flowers, waking to the pre-dawn hours
before the door slammed down.
And now, as Sue Ling screams,
Fang collects a bullet in the brain!

The game is up for Fang: four punks stand,
three with hatchets, one with a smoking gun,
staring at the deed they've done; then dash

back to the night... Before the sound
of running feet dies along the empty street,
framed there in the doorway, glaring,
is their boss, Hank Kill. Built like a hearse,
big-boned, American, his eyes smouldering,
he walks to where the dead Fang lies
and takes from his pocket a strange device.
(It was for this he'd just killed Fang.
And for the same Fang had slain Lee Ching.)
“You don't know nothing,” Hank mutters
to Sue Ling. “Now get out of here.”
She flies into the night, her face once flushed
with joy now a lantern pale with fright.

Reader, it might seem trite to say this,

but the underworld is not the nicest place,
not squeaky clean but crude, and like my first
three verses, more than a little lurid: such is vice!
So those fastidious ears I have offended
in these preceding lines should not harken
further to this poem. Nor should those who
care only for conventional sense;
for any stray conceit, I warn, here may trot
or gallop down the courses of my plot.
Lee Ching shot, the knife for Fang! So what
was that thing plucked by Hank Kill
from Fang's bloodstained pock't?
It was a sort of sprocket made of glass,
apulse with fire and tiny dials.
Hank Kill turns it in his hand and smiles,

and into his eyes streams a sinister silver light.

Now some men care for love and some for fame
and some go lame pursuing some mad sport
such as lacrosse or table tennis.

But Hank Kill was not the outdoor type
nor an egoist. For all his days
he had only cared for lucre,
and the filthier won the better.

Lately he had intercepted a letter
sent via a stooge from Bruce Fang to his wife.
This letter told how Lee Ching saved the life
of a certain Dr Lee, and how he, Bruce Fang,
was told of it while drinking with Lee Ching.
Dr Lee was that man who won the Nobel Prize

for inventing light-emitting robot eyes
that allowed those metal men to see through walls.
He had followed this invention with another,
which Hank Kill now holds in his hand:
a 'tidal sprocket' which, if you set its dials so,
tilts the moon a few degrees off orbit –
and makes the sea convulse with monster tides!

Dr Lee had raved of it last spring
that day Lee Ching fished him from the Mekong.
Lee Ching had been walking by its banks
when he'd heard a splash, and had dashed
to where a hand grasped straws above the swirl.
That hand belonged to Dr Lee, who had been cruising
with others of the scientific ilk, aboard a barge,

before - tragedy! Tripping over a chicken
tethered to the bow, Lee had fallen in the drink.
But he 'came to' again upon the river bank,
rescued by Lee Ching. "Tied round my neck gasp
is a pouch," Lee, shivering with delirium, said.
"Inside you'll find my tide device-gasp-sprocket,
all together one world where we'll all be free-
gasp-no more famines for the future-choke-
the waters take me down you see-choke-gasp-
I don't have long to last-gasp-do you hear
take it take it-gasp-the desert sands will bloom again
but if it falls to evil hands-choke-why with this..."
Little does he know that Lee Ching is a thief,
who cuts the cords around the Doctor's neck
and throws him back into the muddy swirl.

Imagine Dear Reader, you are in your office among the clouds,
while other towers of steel and glass rise up around you,
above the city streets where pedestrians mill, below.
In the sky outside, aeroplanes fly with a luminous
drone, while you answer the phone and scribble
on a blotter, doing things other office workers do.
But suddenly you see in the blue out there
a huge white liner drifting serenely past.
You can't believe your eyes, and why should you?
Where air should be, now is water, rising to the 20th floor.
Goldfish swim where traffic lights once punctuated
the daily din with green and red and amber.
And that hamburger stand beside the new gymnasium
looks more like an aquarium. And there! A vast shock

of water swirls where tickets once curled
upon the windscreens of parked cars.
It's like some mad dream of Captain Nemo's.
Someone must have tampered with the tides!

The tidal sprocket in malevolent hands?
Instead of desert lands blooming with new life...
Instead, this? Yes! Hank Kill's fist
slams down as his Lear jet veers over Acapulco.
Slam! against a sink set in the wingside bar
where he's just upset the drink of his dumb
henchman Waldo: a Harvey Wallbanger, double-iced.
"With this we'll be rich," Hank booms,
holding the sprocket high against the light.
"Or that is, we'll be richer," he amends

with an evil growl. "I'll put it up for auction
and anyone who pays the highest price
can have it." The jet tilts through a cloud
above the dazzling beaches of the rich.

Enter then, Baba Ganoogh, chef and chief accountant,
with a tray of quail held high... A lean, sardonic
man, eyeing narrowly the world. A silken
tassel twirls atop his fez, which sits upon a head
that's very good with sums and sauces,
although his heart is numb, like his boss's;
he knows no more mercy than a mantis.

2)

At the corner of the poem is a ghostly light,

you can almost see it if you screw your eyes up, tight,
until a vein stands out upon your forehead.

There it is again! This time like a train
blazing down a tunnel. Or perhaps a fire burning
inside an igloo north of Nome. No - like none of
these! More like a flashlight flaring
through the gloom of sudden storms...

“Mush,” we hear a cry and find
the Arctic sky now poised above our heads.

For here we have been led by that strange light!
It’s time to meet our heroine, Clair Sky,
who drives a husky sled across those frozen wastes.
Clair, an ornithologist, has for months
been tracking the Most Northern Banded Grebe,
never before venturing this far north.

“I must have come too far,” she thinks
and she is right. For there is no life
near the slender ledge of ice where we find her,
but only blizzards swirling above a blue crevasse
and icicles which drip frost onto her tent.
Inside it, she eats a meal of beans
then dreams of pancakes and roast beef,
and of the smiling faces of her friends.
She calls them softly in her sleep then
dreams again, of a silver teapot steaming
inside a cabin, by a sunny stream in Spring.
Outside, fingers more of frozen light
than ice point into the wild white sea.
The huskies howl against the storm

covered in cold sleet, all lie huddled
in their warmth as the blizzard blooms,
until the 'midnight sun' looms again,
flaring on the new horizon.

The next 'morning' finds Clair treading
her first footsteps in the snow, as she
turns the team around and heads for home.
But the ice cracks like a whip when she steps
onto the lip of an aching blue crevasse; she
falls! Her only hope the rope around her waist,
which snakes out quickly then catches on a stake
she has also hitched the huskies to. It springs
and shudders to take her weight, then
starts to inch and jerk from its

shaky anchor in the ice. Clair swings
in a wild arc while, down below, amid the roar
of falling snow, she sees sheer vistas
of an airy nothing: a reeling, delirious view
that knocks the stuffing from her heart.
Wait, her hand now finds the rope
she hangs upon and, against all hope,
she starts to climb it back towards the slope.
But, with a ping, that stake flies
from the ice, and she flings
one piercing scream into the void.

Again! The rope slams taut about her waist
as the stake jams in the husky sled,
which also slips towards the chill abyss.

A near miss for Death and then another chance
for him to clutch her in his bony fingers.
Yet, it's not too late. For her husky team
throw off their docile *doggy* dreams,
wakening to the danger that awaits them, too.
They set their padded feet against a ledge
and strain against the weight that drags
them down. And, doing so, also raise
Clair free from the bleak crevasse.

But the dogs are in a panic, their eyes
are wild, their howls nip at the heels of night.
Clair twists on the rope behind them,
a thing of flung flesh. The dogs drive on,
dashing over hills of ice that twinkle

in the twilight. Clair's mind cuts to black
as endless sheets of snow stream past.
At last, the dogs slow down, padding
through a fissure in the ice where,
the panic fading from their eyes,
they slump into the frost and rest.
Big Red licks Clair's face, but she doesn't stir –
clinging closer to his shaggy warmth
that in the silver chill means life.
Later, Red's face still nuzzles up to hers.
He whines slightly as she finds her feet.

All about the Arctic light glows a ghostly blue:
Wolf, and Big Grey also, begin to whine.
Clair's jaw drops when she looks

where their muzzles point. A shape looms
in a fissure to her right and, in the gloom,
seems to move toward her. What? A mammoth
buried in this tomb of ice for eons? Yes.
And now his eyes drink in the light,
the first time for twelve thousand years.
Clair trembles like a little snowflake
as tilting back his massive head
he trumpets one sweet and piercing note.
For everything he looks upon he loves.
“She has freed me. I must serve her,”
such he might have said if he could talk.
Then, uncoiling the trunk between his horns
without a second’s warning, he plucks Clair
from the snow and puts her down upon his back.

Two months later, Clair, mammoth-mounted,
nears the lights of Nome. Plodding through
the snow, 'the living fossil' hauls her sled
where Big Red and the other dogs now ride.
Each huge stride carries her further down
back streets, where nothing stirs at four a.m.
A prehistoric trumpet blasts the skies
and townsfolk turn their houselights on.
All around her dogs are barking,
people prod the air with disbelief,
but Clair just longs for sleep and food.
Soon, the town blazes with her story,
it startles all who hear it,
like that enterprising local sheriff

who calls Anchorage to tell the nation's press.
Impressed, with this first sniff of news,
they fly up camera crews, arc lamps,
plus reporters who demand instant interviews.
The next day MAMMOTH GIRL makes page one.

Clair's face stares up from the Times as smoke
curls from Hank Kill's cigar, below the rafters
of his mansion in Madrid. A man little caring for that
which fails to bring him instant profit,
even he had raised an eyebrow as he read the news.
Had he read more, not just perused the headlines,
he would have learned how Clair, an expert
on the migratory flight of birds, had been
honored for her amazing find, which was

now in a Quebec Zoo where, daily,
the curious queued to view it. Also, how Clair
was “going back to work” upon her thesis
on the Blue-beaked Fidget Bird. But Hank just
blows another ‘noose’ of smoke into the air.
What does he care for some overgrown moose?
His mind is now occupied by Darker Thoughts.

Hank’s mansion in Madrid is set above the sea
with sheer cliffs on one side, the other fenced
with electrified barbed wire. A guard holds
a vicious dog at bay as he patrols the night
where all is quiet underneath a silver moon.
Its bright light bathes a gravelled drive
that leads up to a high steel gate

at the entrance to the Kill estate.
Here are guards also, machine guns underneath
their arms, waiting in the silent cool of evening.
Inside his Blue Room Hank is also waiting,
playing Snap with Waldo, his private goon.
Hank snarls to him, "Get me a drink!"
Then to his accountant, "What do you think?"
Ganoogh, pausing from the massive tank
of colored fish that forms a feature wall
is a malevolent figure dressed in velvet
flocked into a paisley pattern,
his face set in low relief against the muted
lighting of the room. "Very soon, he will be here."
Then, fingering the tassel of his fez: "Yes,
I'm sure he'll meet our price. I have it

on good advice he has the means...”

His words are cut off by the crackling intercom above the door. “Front gate sir, I see the light!” Words which give no hint of a guard’s sudden transformation into a model citizen. He merely sees approaching cars. We watch them also, purring through the gate and down the drive.

A white Rolls, followed by a train of armoured vans. Hank runs a gold-ringed hand along his jaw and smiles. “Waldo, get the door, if there’s any sign of a double cross...”

The operation should be neat, no wasted words. Baba, you mind that I’m not cheated.”

“Sir it will be done,” Ganoogh discretely nods.
For tonight Hank intends to make the sale.

...To Ibn Umud, arms dealer, who is so enamoured of the tide device he’s offered to meet Hank's price, in gold, before Kill finds other interested parties from among Earth’s scum. For Hank has been ‘talking to the shadows’, hinting of a super weapon, casting in dark waters (as it were) for offers, and holding up a dream of total power, as bait. But cunning, shrewd, is Ibn Umud. He knows Hank owns a secret weakness: for gold, in bullion form, in yellow

blocks, or spun in chains, gold in thick
bracelets, or stamped with the heads of kings
in small round coins. Gold spilling
through the gaudy light of Hank Kill's dreams.
Ibn has conjured a delirium of bright,
buttery bullion, and Hank reaches a quick decision.

3)

Blue-Beaked Fidgits are curious birds:
over Holland's tulip farms their cries
are heard in early Spring, as they wing
towards the windmills where they nest.
In winter they migrate, due west, to Canada,
in boomerang formations, filling the blue
skies there with birdsong until Autumn

tugs them back to Holland. You've heard
the expression 'free as a bird'
but these were just commuters. Clair claims
them as her special 'field' (that is,
of study), scribbling in her cabin
outside Ontario. There she labors upon
this thesis: That if you compare,
year by year, the flight paths of the Fidgit,
related to the monthly tidal charts, to phases
of the moon and to the iconography of the arts
and crafts of the Scatchi Indians, a local
tribe which claims the Fidgit as its totem...
If you do all this, it gives an inkling
of how these four are linked, in some
strange acausal way; a relationship

that may be 'read' as one would a code.
Such is her thesis, that Clair hopes
will startle the dour editors of Nature
and be accepted by them as a major paper.

Clair's eyes are red, a muscle tics
above her jaw, as she pauses over charts,
practising her ornithological arts
all the wee hours. As she does so,
Fidgits wing above a distant ocean,
their beaks tipped with its brine. But wait!
They are not flying in boomerang formation,
but one more pretzel-shaped. Clair checks
her latest calculations. Could it be?
She stares down at the page. Yes,

*Truth's music swells through
the blue din of her statistics!*

Her heart leaps, eyes widen in surprise:
it could only mean one thing: Holland!
Holland! To be hit by monster tides!

Clair's knuckles whiten 'round the 'phone
as a voice from Amsterdam drones on...

"No, we haven't raised a public panic,
we had hoped the tides would fall.

Measures? Yes, yes of course...

We have shored up all the dykes
and have posted extra crews..."

Clair's head nods to the gloomy news.

"Can you be here soon... yes yes..."

there may be something you can do.
What's that? Saturday? Then fly!
Of course we will assist you...
Goodgod... then goodbye.”
Clair packs her bags and Fidgits,
rushing to the airport in a spin.
Over Spain she reviews her thoughts,
which all point to the moon. “That's it!”
she grins as a clue sparks in her brain.

The day is bathed in a grey Dutch light
and streets are hushed below an office suite
where the Chief of Police presides.
His mouth is creased, his eyes are grave,
handing Clair a note above his desk.

She reads: “By now you would have noticed
that the tides are rising fast; as rise
they will, ten times higher, until
all Holland drowns. I control the device
that does this. And only I can stop it,
if you pay my price. And what fair ransom
for your country? A paltry tonne of gold.
To be taken to the Tunis Star, now berthed
at Kliebald Port, and sailing soon to Libya,
where it will be intercepted by my men.”
Signed: “A friend.” “More like a fiend,”
says Clair, eyes flaring as she takes
a wire cage from underneath her skirt.
Inside it, two tame Fidgits peep and chirp –
but not for long. Out they fly now,

through an open window, into the mild air.
And, “beep beep beep,” transmitters on their feet
send a steady signal back to Clair.
“If they veer from Nature’s course,” she says
“it will give an instant fix on the device that is causing all of this!”

As veer they do, towards the town of Grod,
followed by Clair who leads a motorised
police squad. But not so fast! One of Ibn
Umud’s spies posted on the outskirts of
that town (known for the redness of its
tulips) has lowered the glasses from
his eyes to tip his master off.
Ibn’s smile chills the air inside his loft

above the Umud Jam Works outside Grod.
“How could they know!” he spits,
then snatches at the sprocket, setting dials.
The night is quite along the coast,
although the moon is worried in its orbit:
the sea runs in a silver light and all is still –
except for that massive wall of water, spilling
along the Grod Canal towards the small Dutch town!
Ibn frowns, a motor coughs, blades flash as
a helicopter lifts above the roof: a bright
red insect abuzz above the moonbathed night.

Vroomph! Clair’s Fidgits, winging over Brod
are sucked into the copter’s air intake!
The motor coughs, stalls, kicks, stops,

repeats a broken beat, its rotor blades,
once blurred, now tilt against the light.
Ibn frowns and tries to glide it down;
his face breaks in a sweat. Blades
bite air in one final surge of power,
but it's too late! The copter crashes
on its back, he's thrown to the ground.
Flames scorch the air behind him as he
stumbles to his feet; the stricken
insect's fuel tanks flare with growling light
then detonate across the quiet of the night.
Back in his loft above the Works, Ibn tries
to calm his mind. "Keep cool keep cool," he thinks,
"there must be some way out," pacing back
and forth above a din of tin-plate

being flattened into cans, then filled
with jam, along assembly lines of this
outpost of the Umud empire.

Back on the highway, a giant wall of water
gains on Clair. Frothing in the mirror,
it also strikes the Police Chief numb with fear.
Clair slams her foot down hard upon the gas
and a rural landscape liquefies with speed.
Her motor snorts, car scorching over blacktop.
Clair grits her teeth and throws it round a bend
dust spurting from her tyres which, squealing,
bite hard on bitumen. Then once again her car
is a bright blue bullet fired down the highway.
But the water's gaining, picking off the convoy

car by car, until Clair's car is the last,
her motor straining with each bit of grunt
she pushes out of it. And then – she's hit!
The world spins upside-down and crazy in
a cross-whipped chaos at all sides.
Clair's car is catapulted high into the sky!

And there we leave it, flying through
'the blue' towards the Umud Jam Works...
Inside, Ibn hatches strategies to save his skin.
He has set the sprocket once again,
arranging for *a second* wave to intercept the first.
Now, two walls of water burst together,
checking thus the onward rush of each,
and leaving just a mass of swirling slush

where once had been disaster.

Crash! Clair's car rips through the roof,
bursting with a blue cascade of glass
into Ibn's hideout. He sits stunned, as Clair
leaps through the shattered air at him.
"That's it! See, the sprocket round his neck!"
(Years before, Dr Lee had talked of his invention
when he and Clair had enjoyed a brief flirtation
after the Fifth World Moon And Tide Convention.)
Clair grabs it from his neck. The villain's spell
is broken. As he dashes to the door, Clair
picks an empty bottle from the floor,
meaning to bean him with it.

High on a catwalk Clair has cornered Ibn,
below them both a boiling vat of jam.
He swings onto a ladder and climbs towards
the roof, stopping when the rungs run out
above a grate. His razor eyes
survey the scene below, where steam pipes
hiss into the fitful light. And there!
A hand-hold beckons in the gloom,
above a doorway leading to the night.
Climbing ever higher, Clair still after him,
as he leaps into the air to save his life.
But that air is torn by screaming,
then torn and torn again, as he swings
like a gibbon in the gloom. His hands have
found a hold, but grasp in vain: that pipe

is full of super-heated steam! Clair screams also, as something plops into the vat below, then rises to its surface, very slowly.

Clair may have saved the world, but not Holland. Don't forget the rising sea which (thanks to Ibn) is bursting all its banks. From horizon to horizon, tidal waves converge on Grod. The power of the sea unleashed! And each wave reaching out for Clair. They crash together at her feet, and swirl into the sky and higher in a giant waterspout: a blue upspinning jet that pushes past the clouds. The top half, spinning faster, sheers off from its base. And gaining pace, escapes the grip of gravity,

and streams out into space. Clair circles
at its centre in a bubble of trapped air.
Her thoughts float in slow motion amidst
the dancing light, and every moment of her life
is now relived. Voices from the past
whisper close to her and then are still.
Chill light from vanished suns
whitens walls of ice as her tomb
spins into interstellar Night.
Light years later, it melts
above a world in Cygnus Alpha.

And so now is fulfilled that ancient
lore of the Scatchi Indian tribe:
That a squaw with yellow hair

and skin as white as milk
would learn the secret of the sacred
Fidgit, and save the tribes of Earth.
That she would ride the ice-furred
beast and release the water's power.
Then would she be the first of Earth
upon that star that shines above
the tepee, in the first moon of the
winter dawn. And then would meet
a man with silver eyes. And to them would
be born a son, graceful as the slender
Spruce, who would also know the use of fire.
And how he would bring his tribe
to the brink of ruin and glory, and how...
But that, Dear Reader, is another story.

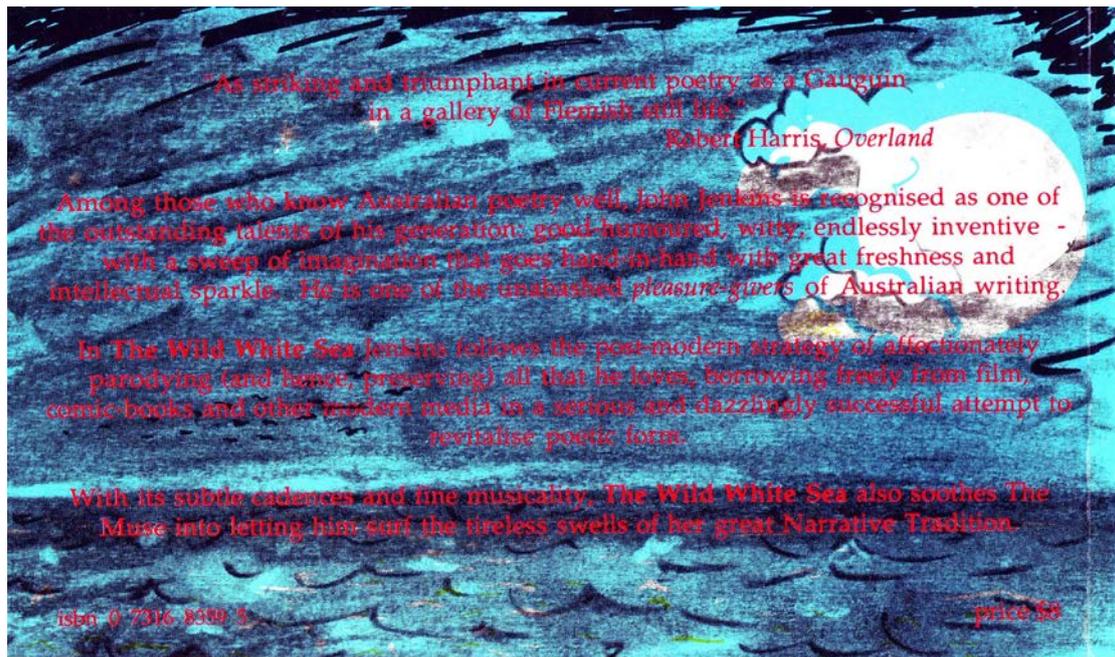
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John Jenkins lives in Melbourne where he works as a journalist. Besides poetry he has written and published prose and criticism and has co-written a number of successful performance pieces involving dance, music and text. John Jenkins is author of the recent study of new music, *22 Contemporary Australian Composers* (NMA, 1989). His poetry appears in numerous anthologies, including *The New Australian Poetry* (Makar/UQP).

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Books by John Jenkins: *Zone Of The White Wolf* (Contempa, Melbourne, 1974); *Blind Spot* (Makar, Brisbane, 1977); *The Inland Sea* (Brunswick Hills, Melbourne, 1984); *Chromatic Cargoes* (Post Neo, Melbourne, 1986); and with Ken Bolton, *Airborne Dogs and Other Collaborations* (Brunswick Hills, Melbourne, 1988) and *The Ferrara Poems*, a verse novel (Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, 1989).



"As striking and triumphant in current poetry as a Gauguin
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Among those who know Australian poetry well, John Jenkins is recognised as one of
the outstanding talents of his generation: good humoured, witty, endlessly inventive –
with a sweep of imagination that goes hand in hand with great freshness and
intellectual sparkle. He is one of the unabashed *pleasure givers* of Australian writing.

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parodying (and hence preserving) all that he loves, borrowing freely from film,
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