

Poetry Archive: Part II

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Section 2: Unrequited, Happily (2001)

Clarity of mind means clarity of passion, too; this is why a great and clear mind loves ardently and sees distinctly what it loves. – Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

I might have been my newfound health, my reawakened virility, or the fact that I was so happy and still somewhat surprised to be alive. It may have had something to do with her beauty, her face; or my eagerness to ply and hone my newly minted voice. And maybe it was just the thrill of the chase. It was all of these and more that conspired to see me woo Debbie incessantly with my words, over most of the first half of 2001, somehow knowing I would never ultimately succeed and steal her away.

But I didn't seem to mind.

I did court her, and there was a spark or two, but it could never seem to catch fire. She would not or could not let it ignite. Knowing her fears and limitations, subconsciously, and maybe even consciously to some extent, I knew it would end up being too risky for her delicate nature. Deep down I knew this would be the result, but I pursued anyway. It was fun. It's as simple as that. And I had nothing to lose anyway. Besides, she was so obviously enjoying all the attention. So...

Several love poems appeared over the first few weeks of 2001. The first came on Old Christmas Day:

Determined

*Last night I made up my mind.
It just isn't going to work.
I simply must stop spending all my time
thinking of her.*

*I do love her,
but she has been spoken for.
There can be no future in it.
It can't go anywhere!*

*And I spend way too much time
thinking of her.*

*It's far too painful, anyway.
Unrequited love can only be
frustrating, heartbreaking.
Especially when I can't stop
thinking of her.*

*Well, I simply must
stop this hopeless obsession.
Starting tomorrow
I will completely refrain from
thinking of her.*

*Yes, last night
I made up my mind.
Tomorrow is a new day,
and I am determined
to keep myself from
thinking of her.*

*Woke up this morning
thinking of her.*

A few days later, I tried a couple of minimalist pieces.

Me Without You

It hurts.

Believe it or not, it took two hours to write. It began with eight lines and, as I struggled to distill the sentiment, it became smaller and smaller until it consisted of just two words and a period. It was soon followed by **My Life Without You**, which was just the title at the top of a blank page.

The next one was on doubt and discouragement, but it was just another way in:

The Wall

*It has finally happened.
I've hit it.
I have hit the wall.
I know now I can go no further.
It can never be.*

*I know now that I am powerless.
Powerless to stop
how I feel for you.
But what am I to do?*

*The wall means
I am forcibly prevented from loving you;
from really loving you,
every day and in every way.
It, and three others,
imprison me.
And the other three?*

*My heart.
It never stops crying
for all that's wrong in this game,
and it will not permit
rose-coloured glasses.*

*My mind,
cannot help but know the truth,
most of the time,
and it will not allow
innocence or ignorance.*

*My soul,
is historically located
here in this
the latest extension of the species,
and it will not tolerate
blind faith or loss of self.*

*These three,
heart, mind and soul,
are at once
my cage and my wings.
What is wrong with me
is also what is right.
I am trapped,
behind me, before me,
on either side of me,
by them.*

And now this.

*The wall now in front of me,
completing the enclosure,
sealing my doom,
is my love.
My hopeless and utterly desperate
love for you.
My love,
a thirst never to be slaked,
will not let me leave.
And staying means enduring
my love for you.*

*But endure it I will.
For you.
Even with this longing
never to be contented.
Even with this aching
never to be soothed.
I will do it for you.*

*I can never be released.
No, I must stay right here.
Behind this wall.
Inside these walls.
All alone,
I am yours.*

* * *

Around the same time, my love of and for children gave rise to a different kind of poem for a friend's thirteen-year-old boy. He was in throes of puberty, and his parents were having a good deal of difficulty with him. As a Christmas present, I wrote for him what turned out to be an epic:

Showing What You're Made Of

*Young friend of mine,
I would like you to know that I understand.
Been there, done that.
But I have not forgotten what it is like.*

*Thirteen is a strange and wonderful age.
Teenage years beginning, adolescence announcing itself,
and puberty (a dreaded word) screaming out for all your attention.
I know. We know.*

*Thirteen is strange
because you are going through so many changes of mind and body.
And while your changing physicality seems to be the problem,
your thinking and feeling are no less challenged.
I know. We know.*

*Thirteen is strange
because all these changes affect everything.
Concentration on schoolwork,
interactions with others (especially girls),
confidence, thoughts, emotions —
all subjected to this upheaval.
I know. We know.*

*Self-consciousness.
Frustration.
Confusion.
And, yes, a good deal of fear.
I know. We know.*

BUT!

*Thirteen is also wonderful.
Wonderful I hear you say?
What is so wonderful about all this?
I will tell you.*

*Thirteen is wonderful
because the changes in your body
are signaling the dawning of manhood.
Hair and hormones are making themselves known,
where once there were none.
You are growing to be a man!
I know. We know.*

*Thirteen is wonderful because,
more importantly,
your mind and spirit are leaving behind
the worry-free innocence of childhood.
Your mind and spirit are adjusting
to new horizons of adulthood.
I know. We know.*

*Thirteen is wonderful
because you are finally gaining
the responsibility, respect, and independence
accorded a man.
What you have been waiting for is finally here!
I know. We know.*

*But how soon you get
the respect and independence
depends on you.
It depends on how you handle the responsibility.
And this is the first lesson of growing up.
I know. We know.*

*Anyone can handle the good times
and having no responsibility.
But what separates the men from the boys
is how you handle challenges
and necessary transformations*

*that come with adult living.
Thirteen is your first chance to begin doing this.
I know. We know.*

*Nobody said it would be easy,
but there is no way around it.
This is the point.
Accepting that what is difficult and needs to be done
must be done,
with a good heart, intelligence and grace.
All of which you have inside you.
I know. We know.*

*You may be all too aware
that someone you wish to impress
is watching you.
What do you think will impress her?
Simply this:
not trying to impress her or anyone else.
Rather a quiet confidence
and determination to do what needs to be done.
You must impress yourself.
I know. We know.*

*We know because we have experienced it ourselves.
We all have.
It is a right of passage.
Without it we remain children,
never knowing the joy of a day's work well done,
and the satisfaction and happiness that comes
from being the best you can be.*

*Dig in your heels, young man.
Decide that today and everyday
you will meet these challenges
with honest effort and a smile.
It is your life to lead,
and no one but you
will enjoy the rewards
or suffer the consequences
of how you lead it.*

*Yes, it is strange and wonderful.
But as strange as it feels,
think how wonderful it is
that you are getting the opportunity
to prove you are worthy
of being thought of as a man.
Odd as it may seem,
most things worthwhile are
both strange and wonderful.
This is life.*

*In dealing with physical changes
employ the good health that you have been given
and which your parents have preserved.
Use it to exercise
as you build muscle and stamina
into that emerging adult body of yours.
You are laying the foundations
for a long and active life.*

*In dealing with mental changes
you must bear down and learn to learn
amid this change.
This will see you through much in the future.
Your mind is asking you
for knowledge and understanding of the world.
Education, wherever it is found,
and your cheerful acquisition of it,
is the key to this.*

*In dealing with spiritual changes
you must turn to your parents and their belief.
Someday you will form your own,
but right now you need a starting point.
Your parents are that starting point,
and you must share their faith in people
and the faith they show in you.
In this respect, you couldn't have it better.*

* * *

In the third week of January 2001 I was moved to finally write a song for Debbie, and I believe it is one of the best songs I had written up to that time. It's also a good love poem for the circumstances:

For a Peach

*I have no right to ask you to love me,
you have a life.
But as long as I live, I'll have you above me
soothing my strife.
So, I'm gonna just come right out and ask you:
Girl, won't you be my wife?*

*For you are the music,
and I am the dancer.
I am the question,
and you are the answer.*

*Things as they stand are not in our favour,
let's turn it around.
Time spent with you is all that I savour,
now that I've found.
A silence each time I tell you I love you,
and that is my favourite sound.*

*For you are the music,
and I am the dancer.
I am the question,
and you are the answer.*

*This is your chance to have what you've wanted,
not just a wasted dream.
Don't be contented to give up on true love.
What is a peach without cream?*

*So, don't turn away, Baby, now that I've found you.
Face up to us.
'Cause I'd make you happy if only you'd let me,*

*tender and just.
It won't be easy. We'll do it together.
I love you, and that you can trust.*

*For you are the music,
and I am the dancer.
I am the question...
Yeah, you are the music,
and I am the dancer.
I am the question,
and you are the answer.
The answer.
You are the answer.*

Then came that terrible day. I went to see her at her work, and she was visibly shaken. He had found all the romantic emails and poetry and was devastated. We both felt for him, sincerely. But she said now we could no longer carry on this way. I understood but left there dejected.

Each time she came a little closer I was lifted up, and each time she backed off I was let down. It couldn't be helped. But this time it felt different. This felt final. Each time before when she needed to withdraw, I would take the time and space to reassess, to question myself about it all; but not too seriously – I didn't want to spoil the fun. Only now, the cat was out of the bag, he was pissed, and it seemed to have finally burst our romantic bubble. 'What were you thinking?' I remember asking myself aloud. To my surprise, I couldn't come up with any kind of answer.

In my heart of hearts, it still didn't seem to matter how things ended up. Even so, I know my feelings were genuine. If she had left him for me, I would have happily tried to make a life with her, and I honestly believe I would have made her happy. As for why I kept going after something I had little or no chance of achieving, I just chalked it up to being happy to be alive, being healthy and back in the game, after years thinking there would never be a game for me again. That's the only reason I can give, even now. It was all in good fun, as they say. I think of that whole period now and it just makes me smile.

A few days later, however, she contacted me again and bid me to continue, but with complete discretion and secrecy. Naturally, I just picked up where we left off. We went for a moonlight winter walk beside the river and she sat in the snow next to me. We talked, then suddenly she just kneeled up straight, looking at the sky; as a tear welled up and rolled down, she closed her lovely eyes and whispered: "I love you."

Inspired by this, I felt another surge of poetic energy. I would overwhelm her again with verse, starting with a poem that makes its own visual aid:

Can't You See?

*Absence makes the heart,
or so they say.
But for me it's more.
And who are they?
Fondness can't begin
to ever get across
what ails my heart.
This great sense of loss.
But how can I lose
what I have not?
This aching fills me.
This pain that I've got.
Aching does not say,
nor pain express.
Living here without her.
This lonely address.
Awaiting the moment
when we can be,
cannot be said here.
Ineffability.
It calls for analogy,
conceptual aid.
In order to imitate
what needing her made.
It made for a love song,
poems and more.
And now it has conjured up
this metaphor.*

*Another expression, a new way to give.
I love you My Sweet One, I need you to live.
I need you beside me forever, My Peach.
Not just making love with my prose and my speech.
For now, I'm powerless. And I cannot make
the future come faster than it's going to take.*

*I've only devices that words can supply, the paper and ink, and an artistic eye.
Put them together in just the right way, and you'll be surprised what one page can say.
Hold this paper out far from your eyes and see why this longing is so hard to handle.
'Cause living without you is very much like, a singular candlestick needing a candle.*

As I look back on these, I am struck by how many ways my loving her from a distance found expression. How my thoughts, feelings and imagination would allow me to be with her in her absence – to be alone with her in a way:

Beautiful Lady

*Once again, I stop and wonder:
Where is she right now?
What is she doing this very moment?*

*I would like to think she is thinking of me.
But if she is like me, she does this
as she goes about her lovely business.*

*Yes, lovely business.
With this beautiful lady
it could hardly be otherwise.*

*If it is morning,
I see her stretch, yawn,
and then, open them.
Those exotic soul-windows
offering testimony
to the depth of her beauty.
From her exquisite appearance
to the even truer splendor of her inner being,
and all the way to her cherished secret hiding place,
she has awoken.
In the morning, I could just kiss her.*

*Maybe it is later in the morning.
I see she has shed the fuzzy warmth of nightwear.
She has arranged and readied herself,
in that especially careful feminine way she has.
Her ablutions,
her hair,
her eyes,
her lips,
her mindfully chosen dress.*

*She is ready to face the world again now.
Later in the morning, I could just kiss her.*

*Perhaps it is afternoon.
She may be at work,
or just out and about.
It warms me to think of her this way,
for then everyone can see
how beautiful she is.
She projects herself,
her face beams,
her carriage confident and dignified,
and she is cheerful.
I know what it takes for her to be there,
and cheerfully,
and I know what it means to those who are there with her.
In the afternoon, I could just kiss her.*

*Or is it time for her to dine?
I see her sitting there
full with a day's experiences and interactions,
silently grateful to have made it through again.
As she tends to the nourishment of her precious temple,
she is reviewing the options for an evening's pleasure,
a necessary self-reward.
Her sensuous mouth
as she sits and pleasantly dines,
her whole day behind her.
When it's dinner time, I could just kiss her.*

*If it is evening,
she is entitled to be anywhere.
If she wished she could be socializing.
She could be sweeping through a glamorous cocktail party,
or formally dressed for ballroom dancing at the cotillion.
Or she could simply take in a movie,
or play a game among the lights.
And wherever she went
she would look wonderful,
and everyone would be happy she was there.
In the evening, I could just kiss her.*

*But if I know this beautiful lady,
more often than not,
she would spend her evening at home.
Clad in sloppy comfort,
cozy and cozy looking,
curled up with a comforter,
bathed in the glow.
And here she would be happiest,
and would never look more beautiful to me.
I would be beside her,
treasuring precious moments spent
luxuriating in domesticity
with a beautiful lady.*

*I would tell her
how beautiful she really is,
and I would show her.
I would begin
By just kissing her...*

This one goes about it in a different way:

Metaphysics

*Here I stand on the edge of forever.
Our forever.
Waiting for you.
I am in love, without my lover.*

*I am kissing her,
though I have not her lips to taste.
I am holding her,
though my arms are empty.*

*I hear her voice, crying,
through the silence that separates us.
I see her face so clearly
in the sky above me.*

*I feel her presence,
alone or in a crowd.
And I feel her pain
as though it were mine.*

But it is mine.

One night we planned to meet, and the discretion we were now using meant our meetings were harder to arrange and keep. On this evening, she called at the last minute to say that something came up; she was sorry, but it meant we would have to meet on another night. I was crestfallen. But after I got off the phone, I felt bad about how my disappointment came across to her and wrote a piece the metaphysical poet John Donne might have fancied:

Silver Lining:

*We have waited, aching so long.
It seems like years, I could be wrong.
Can you relate?
We struggle through a stretch of days.
But time takes time, to coin a phrase.
Cancelled plans and more delays.
Our hearts deflate.*

*Time just plays a game, you see.
We're talking relativity.
For us time varies.
For when we go out on a date,
the clock seems to accelerate.
Yet when we have to separate,
it only tarries.*

*So, when you called me up last night
to tell me of our latest plight,
I almost cried.
My hopes were dashed, my stomach sank.
I tried to smile, but drew a blank.
Like driving on an empty tank,*

my motor died.

*I know that you don't want to hear
this reference to my 'death', my dear.
But worry not.
Have no fear, you needn't fret.
I've come alive since we first met.
And I'm not finished with you yet.
Not by a long shot.*

*As I was hanging up the phone
I realized I'm not alone,
I didn't see.
That as my disappointment grew,
I failed to see things from your view.
That you were disappointed too.
Forgive me.*

*As soon as I hung up, I knew
beyond a doubt that we are two.
You really care.
You hated disappointing me.
You hid your pain courageously,
with sweet concern of how I'd be.
This love we share!*

*Your selfless love has only shown
something we've already known.
We are in love.
You see, we must appreciate
how all of this can indicate
that there's an upside to this wait,
and pain thereof.*

*So just remember when next we find
our schedules put us in a bind,
we must take heart.
If it was easy, we would drift.
So, it should give us both a lift
to see this hurting as a gift
when we're apart.*

*Debbie, Baby, don't despair.
Together we will make it there.
We must be strong,
Our trial will demonstrate quite clear
that laughter deepens with a tear,
and even separate we are near
it won't be long...*

As confident as I sound in this poem, by now it was feeling like the longer it took for her to choose to be with me, the more it seemed like she would not. When this feeling took hold, my only defense and recourse was to keep trying:

Auscultation

*I hearken after you.
Like a blind man,
arms outstretched,
my heart feels to find its way
to you and your heart.*

*But it cannot find you.
It goes on searching, pitifully.
It is needing yours
to hearken after it.
This is all there is.*

*Sometimes I think I hear you.
But I think I am only hearing
the sound of you listening
for me.*

*I drift
in a thick translucent mist.
It is hard to see.
My vision clouded by the confusion
and the futility
of living without you.*

*Without contact, sweet contact.
Contact of any sort
is forbidden us now.
All I may do is hearken after you.*

*End this nightmare.
End this aimless drifting
from one occupation to another,
only meant to provide something
instead of you.*

*It is getting darker,
and I am quite blind.
This deprivation is more than I can stand.
But I will somehow stand it.
And one thing sustains me.
I hearken after you.*

My obsession with the distance between us resulted in me finding a way to express my love in yet another way. This one was written with the benefit of a little fieldwork and research:

I Am Always Aware

*13 days, 2 hours and about 16 minutes since voice.
15 days, 1 hour and about 29 minutes since touch.
This gives rise to another significant measurement.*

*When the day starts it is 0.32 miles.
Less than a third of a mile.
About 1689 feet.*

*Tomorrow there's a day shift.
Then it will be only 0.118 miles.
Just over 623 feet!
I am always aware.*

*Yesterday I went to visit my sister.
I started getting closer at first.*

0.116...0.109...0.072...

Just a couple of hundred feet!

But then ...

0.063...0.241...1.08...

until finally I arrived there.

Then it was 2.23 miles for most of the day.

Last night I had to work.

I returned from my sister's to 0.32 miles,

and from that distance

I showered, shaved and dressed for the show.

Once again

my movement shortened it at first,

but soon it lengthened considerably.

1.48...2.39...2.91...3.14...

until I found the stage was about 3.89 miles away.

More than 20,539 feet!

And I was compelled to be there for the next 6 hours.

Early in the morning I return.

I smoke the day's last and lay down to sleep,

at 0.32 miles.

I remember thinking,

when I wake I will be able to feel

that it has become just 0.118."

The next thing I knew

it was this morning.

A few days ago I went for a walk.

I got closer and closer.

600 feet...500...400...

The intensity

from just the thought of proximity.

Finally, I took up a position

just beside the plate glass window.

I stood there

for a period of about 6 minutes

that felt like 6 hours,

trying to dare to steal a glance.

*I held my breath, turned,
stuck my head around the wall,
and peered in for all of 3.5 glorious seconds.
She was there!
I milked those 3.5 seconds
as I watched her work
with her dear head down
attending to a task.
I love her.*

*There she was.
Oblivious to my nearness.
My love pouring in through the glass,
no more than 30 feet away!
And it may as well have been 30 miles.
Heartsore,
I returned to 0.32.*

*It has now been
13 days, 2 hours and about 59 minutes since voice,
15 days, 2 hours and about 12 minutes since touch ...*

* * *

It was coming on spring, and I decided to make her a gift. I bought all the materials necessary to make her a lasting memento of our courtship, to drive the point home. With a fancy photo album, I chronologically logged every email and poem, with a narrative in between (not unlike this archive) and titled it “Courting a Peach”.

But while I was putting this together, she was making a final decision to stay with him and spurn my advances. She got this across to me in a variety of ways, the most prominent of which was the change in her commitment to time for us. This time it didn’t feel different – it *was* different. I soon got the message and reluctantly withdrew.

Fortunately, it didn’t take me long to get past this romantic failure. I had been preparing all along for the distinct possibility this would happen, and all I could think about was how much I thoroughly enjoyed the whole loving exchange between Debbie and me. Just a few days after it was over, I was unable to identify a single regret. In the final analysis, all was well, and our time together generated a lot of decent love poetry – even more than what I’ve included here.

The damage was minimal. After years in obscurity, I was given a new lease on a life I thought would be further wasted until the end. I had a great time flexing my poetic and romantic muscles with Debbie, using the former in the service of my own literary voice for the first time, bringing the latter back online – and both were running hot.

To show her there were no hard feelings, I sent her a “love resume”, detailed and laid out like any other, outlining my skills and qualifications with the objective of “obtaining a position beside you for the rest of our lives”, should such a position open up. Of course, it came with a cover letter, a knowing smile in words, permitting me one last parting pitch to her heart:

Jeff R. Kelland

St. John's, Newfoundland
Phone (709) 745-3304
Email logost@thezone.net

April, 2001

Ms. Dinah Xxxxxxx
St. John's, NF

Dear Dinah,

Please accept the attached resume for consideration regarding a position with you for the rest of your life. I believe my varied experience and solid record of achievement make me an ideal candidate.

If granted an interview, you will find me engaging, interested, dynamic and well groomed. Furthermore, as good an opportunity as this would be for me, I am confident that my education, experience in a variety of fields, and my people skills would be assets to you in your efforts to be happy.

Aware as I am that you do not have a position open at this time, I respectfully request that you keep my resume on file for future consideration. Should you require more specific or background information regarding my qualifications, please feel free to contact me at any time. I look forward to hearing from you, and I thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,
Jeff R. Kelland

I am delighted to report that we are still friends, no hard feelings, and we are connected on Facebook. And, all things considered, it bears mentioning – she is still quite beautiful.

Jeff R. Kelland