

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 16 July 2023
7.30pm

This be her verse

Golda Schultz soprano
Jonathan Ware piano

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Liebst du um Schönheit Op. 12 No. 2 (1841)

Warum willst du and're fragen Op. 12 No. 3 (1841)

Am Strande (1840)

Emilie Mayer (1812-1883)

Wenn der Abendstern die Rosen Op. 7 No. 3 (pub. 1848)

Du bist wie eine Blume Op. 7 No. 1 (pub. 1848)

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Down by the Salley Gardens (1919)

The Tiger (1929-33 rev. 1972)

Cradle Song (1929)

The Seal Man (1922)

Clara Schumann

Lorelei (1843)

Emilie Mayer

Erlkönig II (1870)

Interval

Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979)

La mer est plus belle (1910)

Prière (1909)

Elégie (1906)

Cantique (1909)

Kathleen Tagg (b.1977)

This be her verse (2020)

After Philip Larkin • Wedding • Single Bed

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'What's it like when women tell their own stories?' This question underpins today's recital of songs composed by women. Although song repertoire today tends to be dominated by male composers, song is a genre in which women composers have traditionally thrived. 'This Be Her Verse' illuminates this history of creative expression, bringing together two hundred years of women's songwriting with a new commission that explicitly foregrounds women's experiences - telling 'our stories in our own voices', as the composer puts it, 'not those of "women's stories" as told from the outside with the woman victimized or placed on a pedestal'.

The opening songs by **Clara Schumann** come from one of the rare instances of her collaborating on a joint publication with her husband Robert: the *Rückert Lieder* (1841). Written in the early years of their marriage, the set comprises 12 songs in total. The publication did not indicate who composed which pieces, but Robert contributed nine of the songs, and Clara three, of which we are hearing two today.

Given the origin of the songs and their focus on true love that overcomes all hardships, it's tempting to hear them biographically. The two composers had a tempestuous start to their relationship, having to defy Clara's domineering father to marry. The gentle lyricism of 'Liebst du um Schönheit' expresses a plea to love for love itself - not for beauty, wealth or youth. One reviewer judged this song to be 'especially lovely', because it was 'so pure, so truthfully felt, in every way so smooth and flowing, its form so consummate.' The style of both this and 'Warum willst du and're fragen' is tender and intimate, as the speaker compels the listener to listen only to them. 'Am Strande', however, written a year earlier and setting a translated text originally by Robert Burns, opens up a wider vista, with a restless piano part evoking the waves of 'the waters which separated us'.

Schumann's contemporary **Emilie Mayer** gained significant public recognition for her eight symphonies, concert overtures and chamber works. Mayer composed on a grand scale, as is evident in these songs whose style tends towards the operatic. The luscious 'Wenn der Abendstern die Rosen' is gently sensuous, the vocal line soaring as the singer is 'seized by an ardent longing', lying in their lover's arms. Heinrich Heine's 'Du bist wie eine Blume', comparing one's love to a flower, proved astonishingly popular among Romantic composers. To date, it has received over 400 settings, including by Robert Schumann and Franz Liszt. Mayer's setting has a sudden forcefulness when the singer appeals to God to protect their lover, almost transforming the text from a plea to a directive, before closing with a vocal flourish illustrating 'fair and sweet'.

In her lifetime, **Rebecca Clarke** was considered to be at the forefront of 1920s modernist composition. These songs demonstrate why, showcasing her sheer compositional range. 'Down by the Salley Gardens' is exquisitely simple, the stripped-back piano part allowing the singer's voice to shine. She penned it in a single day

while on a performance tour to Hawaii, and the delicate accompaniment may have been evoking the Chinese music that she heard there. 'The Tiger', by contrast, is perhaps best described as an expressionist work. Beginning with a bass growl in the piano, Clarke's setting of William Blake's famous poem is relentlessly intense. She wrote 'The Tiger' in the same year as 'Cradle Song', and although they are superficially different in style, they share a sinister and unsettling tone, and a lack of commitment to clear resolution. Clarke draws out the 'little sorrows' and 'dreadful lightnings' that lurk in Blake's poem, sounding doubly sinister in the context of what is ostensibly a lullaby.

From here, we move into songs peopled by dangerous, fantastical beings. Schumann's 'Lorelei' tells the familiar story of a woman luring sailors to their deaths. The opening is tense and agitated, which Schumann amplifies over the course of the song. In 'The Seal Man' Clarke inverts this gender dynamic, setting John Masefield's text about a *woman* who drowns after following her lover into the sea. In Clarke's hands the sea is mysterious, sensual, and brutal. The low piano part evokes the rumble of the rising ocean, and like Schumann she gives the final moments to the pianist as the waves roll away, having consumed their victim. Finally, Mayer tackles Goethe's popular 'Erlkönig', describing a father trying to hide his son from the Erlking who calls him away to die. She fully exploits the expressive opportunities offered by the text's changing scenarios and speakers. Both this and 'The Seal Man' are among the composers' most difficult and theatrical songs, requiring the singer to act the texts' different characters and moods.

Daughter of a composer and a singer, **Nadia Boulanger** grew up at the heart of *fin-de-siècle* musical culture in France - as can be heard in these songs composed between 1906 and 1910. Like her contemporaries Fauré and Debussy, Boulanger was drawn to the allusive, symbolist poetry of writers including Paul Verlaine. In 'La mer est plus belle', a hymn to the sea's beauty, her shifting harmonies and sparkling textures are characteristic of French musical Impressionism. 'Prière' and 'Cantique' are more introspective. Catholicism was extremely important to Boulanger, and she evokes cathedral bells through sonorous piano chords as the singer offers up a prayer in Henry Bataille's devotional 'Prière'. 'Elégie', meanwhile, laments loneliness, Boulanger conjuring up an ambivalent, detached atmosphere as the singer expresses pity for those without a lover to hold close.

Kathleen Tagg's *This Be Her Verse*, commissioned by tonight's artists, sets texts by Lila Palmer. 'We began the process by sharing stories deeply personal and mundane', Tagg writes. 'From there the works were written.' The songs mix humour with tragedy, vulnerability with strength and defiance, altogether creating a sonic portrait of resilience and endurance - 'not a pantheon to female perfection', in Palmer's words, 'but a mirror to everyday women's hopes and fears'.

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Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

**Liebst du um
Schönheit Op. 12 No. 2**

(1841)
Friedrich Rückert

Liebst du um Schönheit,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe die Sonne,
Sie trägt ein goldnes Haar.
Liebst du um Jugend,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe den Frühling,
Der jung ist jedes Jahr.

Liebst du um Schätze,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe die Meerfrau,
Sie hat viel Perlen
klar.
Liebst du um Liebe,
O ja mich liebe!
Liebe mich immer,
Dich lieb' ich immerdar.

**If you love for
beauty**

If you love for beauty,
O love not me!
Love the sun,
she has golden hair.
If you love for youth,
O love not me!
Love the spring
which is young each year.

If you love for riches,
O love not me!
Love the mermaid
who has many shining
pearls.
If you love for love,
ah yes, love me!
Love me always,
I shall love you ever more.

**Warum willst du and're
fragen Op. 12 No. 3**

(1841)
Friedrich Rückert

Warum willst du and're fragen,
Die's nicht meinen treu mit dir?
Glaube nichts, als was dir sagen
Diese beiden Augen hier.

Glaube nicht den fremden
Leuten,
Glaube nicht dem eignen
Wahn;
Nicht mein Tun auch sollst
du deuten,
Sondern sieh die Augen
an!

Schweigt die Lippe deinen
Fragen,
Oder zeugt sie gegen
mich?
Was auch meine Lippen
sagen,
Sieh mein Aug' – ich liebe
dich.

**Why enquire of
others**

Why enquire of others,
who are not loyal to you?
Only believe what these
two eyes here tell you.

Do not believe what
strangers say,
do not believe your own
delusions;
nor should you interpret
my deeds,
but instead look at these
eyes!

Are my lips silent to your
questions
or do they testify against
me?
Whatever my lips might
say;
look at my eyes – I love
you.

Am Strande (1840)

*Robert Burns, trans.
Wilhelm Gerhard*

Traurig schau ich von der
Klippe
Auf die Flut, die uns
getrennt,
Und mit Inbrunst fleht die
Lippe,
Schone seiner, Element!

Furcht ist meiner Seele Meister,
Ach, und Hoffnung
schwindet schier;
Nur im Traume bringen
Geister
Vom Geliebten Kunde mir.

Die ihr, fröhliche Genossen,
Gold'ner Tag' in Lust und
Schmerz,
Kummertränen nie
vergossen,
Ach, ihr kennt nicht meinen
Schmerz!

Sei mir mild, o näch't'ge
Stunde,
Auf das Auge senke
Ruh,
Holde Geister, flüstert
Kunde
Vom Geliebten dann mir
zu.

On the shore

Sadly I gaze from the
cliff
on the waters which
separated us,
and fervently my lips
implore:
spare him, elements!

Fear is master of my soul,
ah, and hope all but
fades;
only in dreams do spirits
bring
tidings from my beloved.

And you, merry friends
whose golden days have
not seen
tears of woe shed for joy
or sorrow,
alas, you do not know my
pain!

Be kind to me, O nightly
hours,
may rest descend upon
my eyes,
blessed spirits, whisper
tidings
from my beloved then to
me.

Emilie Mayer (1812-1883)

**Wenn der Abendstern
die Rosen Op. 7 No. 3**
(pub. 1848)

Wenn der Abendstern die
Rosen
Still mit Sehnsuchts Blicken
grüsst,
Und bei lauer Weste
Kosen,
Blume sich an Blume
schliesst,
Dann ergreift mich heisses
Bangen,
Ach! zu ruhn an deiner Brust,
Und von deinem Arm
umfassen,
Zu vergehn in Schmerz und
Lust.

Wenn in grüner Waldung
Mitte,
Rings von Blum und Busch
umkränzt
Nun des Landmanns stille
Hütte,
Friedlich süß im Mondlicht
glänzt,
Ach! dann wünsch ich mir
hienieden,
Solch ein Hüttchen, still und
arm,
Seelger Unschuld
Himmelsfrieden,
Und den Tod in Deinem Arm!

**Du bist wie eine Blume
Op. 7 No. 1** (pub. 1848)
Heinrich Heine

Du bist wie eine Blume,
So hold und schön und rein;
Ich schau' dich an, und Wehmut
Schleicht mir ins Herz hinein.

Mir ist, als ob ich die Hände
Aufs Haupt dir legen sollt',
Betend, dass Gott dich
erhalte
So rein und schön und hold.

**When the evening
star silently greets
the roses**

When the evening star
silently greets the roses
with yearning
glances,
and, caressed by balmy
west winds,
one flower clasps
another,
then I am seized by an
ardent longing,
ah, to rest upon your breast,
and, enfolded in your
arms,
to perish in anguish and
delight.

When, amid green
woodlands,
surrounded by flowers
and bushes,
the countryman's quiet
cottage
shines sweet and peaceful
in the moonlight,
ah, then I wish for myself
in this world below
such a little cottage,
tranquil and humble,
the heavenly peace of
blissful innocence,
and death in your arms!

You are like a flower

You are like a flower,
so sweet and fair and pure;
I look at you, and sadness
steals into my heart.

I feel as if I should lay
my hands upon your head,
praying that God
preserve you
so pure and fair and sweet.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Down by the Salley Gardens (1919)
WB Yeats

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.
She bid me take life easy as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

The Tiger (1929-33 rev. 1972)
William Blake

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare sieze the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Cradle Song (1929)

William Blake

Sleep, sleep, beauty bright,
Dreaming in the joys of night;
Sleep, sleep, in thy sleep
Little sorrows sit and weep.

Sweet babe, in thy face
Soft desires I can trace,
Secret joys and secret smiles,
Little pretty infant wiles.

As thy softest limbs I feel,
Smiles as of the morning steal
O'er thy cheek, and o'er thy breast
Where thy little heart doth rest.

O! the cunning wiles that creep
In thy little heart asleep.
When thy little heart doth wake
Then the dreadful light shall break.

The Seal Man (1922)

John Masefield

And he came by her cabin to the west of the road, calling.
There was a strong love came up in her at that,
And she put down her sewing on the table, and 'Mother,'
she says,
'There's no lock, and no key, and no bolt, and no door.
There's no iron, nor no stone, nor anything at all
Will keep me this night from the man I love.'
And she went out into the moonlight to him,
There by the bush where the flow'rs is pretty, beyond the
river.

And he says to her: 'You are all of the beauty of the world,
Will you come where I go, over the waves of the sea?'

And she says to him: 'My treasure and my strength,' she
says,

'I would follow you on the frozen hills, my feet bleeding.'

Then they went down into the sea together,
And the moon made a track on the sea, and they walked
down it;

It was like a flame before them. There was no fear at all on
her;

Only a great love like the love of the Old Ones,
That was stronger than the touch of the fool.
She had a little white throat, and little cheeks like flowers,
And she went down into the sea with her man,
Who wasn't a man at all.

She was drowned, of course.

It's like he never thought that she wouldn't bear the sea like
himself.

She was drowned, drowned.

Clara Schumann

Lorelei (1843)

Heinrich Heine

Ich weiss nicht, was soll es
bedeuten,
Dass ich so traurig bin;
Ein Märchen aus alten
Zeiten,
Das kommt mir nicht aus
dem Sinn.

Die Luft is kühl und es
dunkelt,
Und ruhig fließt der
Rhein;
Der Gipfel des Berges funkelt
Im Abendsonnenschein.

Die schönste Jungfrau sitzt
Dort oben
wunderbar,
Ihr goldnes Geschmeide
blitzet,
Sie kämmt ihr goldenes
Haar.

Sie kämmt es mit goldenem
Kamme
Und singt ein Lied dabei;
Das hat eine wundersame,
Gewaltige Melodei.

Den Schiffer im kleinen
Schiffe
Ergreift es mit wildem Weh;
Er schaut nicht die
Felsenriffe,
Er schaut nur hinauf in die
Höh'.

Ich glaube, die Wellen
verschlingen
Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn;
Und das hat mit ihrem Singen
Die Lorelei getan.

The Loreley

I do not know what it
means
that I should feel so sad;
there is a tale from olden
times
I cannot get out of my
mind.

The air is cool, and
twilight falls,
and the Rhine flows
quietly by;
the summit of the
mountain glitters
in the evening sun.

The fairest maiden is sitting
in wondrous beauty up
there,
her golden jewels are
sparkling,
she combs her golden
hair.

She combs it with a
golden comb
and sings a song the while;
it has an awe-inspiring,
powerful melody.

It seizes the boatman in
his skiff
with wildly aching pain;
he does not see the rocky
reefs,
he only looks up to the
heights.

I think at last the waves
swallow
the boatman and his boat
and that, with her singing,
the Loreley has done.

Emilie Mayer

Erlkönig II (1870)

Johann Wolfgang von
Goethe

Erlking

Wer reitet so spät durch
Nacht und Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem
Kind:
Er hat den Knaben wohl in
dem Arm,
Er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn
warm.

Who rides so late through
night and wind?
It is the father with his
child;
he has the boy safe in his
arms,
he holds him close, he
keeps him warm.

„Mein Sohn, was birgst du so
bang dein Gesicht?“
„Siehst, Vater, du den
Erlkönig nicht?
Den Erlenkönig mit Kron'
und Schweif?“
„Mein Sohn, es ist ein
Nebelstreif.“

'My son, why hide your
face in fear?'
'Can't you see the Erlking,
father?
The Erlking with his
crown and robe?'
'My son, it is a streak of
mist.'

„Du liebes Kind, komm, geh
mit mir!
Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich
mit dir;
Manch' bunte Blumen sind
an dem Strand,
Meine Mutter hat manch
gülden Gewand.“

'You sweetest child, come
go with me!
Wondrous games I'll play
with you;
many bright flowers grow
on the shore;
my mother has many a
garment of gold.'

„Mein Vater, mein Vater, und
hörest du nicht,
Was Erlenkönig mir leise
verspricht?“
„Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein
Kind:
In dünnen Blättern säuselt der
Wind.“

'Father, O father, can't
you hear
the Erlking's whispered
promises?'
'Be calm, stay calm, my
child:
the wind is rustling in
withered leaves.'

„Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit
mir gehn?
Meine Töchter sollen dich
warten schön;
Meine Töchter führen den
nächtlichen Rein
Und wiegen und tanzen und
singen dich ein.“

'Won't you come with me,
fine boy?
My daughters shall take
good care of you;
my daughters lead the
nightly dance,
and will rock and dance
and sing you to sleep.'

„Mein Vater, mein Vater, und
siehst du nicht dort
Erlkönigs Töchter am
düstern Ort?“
„Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich
seh es genau:
Es scheinen die alten Weiden
so grau.“

'Father, O father, can't
you see
the Erlking's daughters
there in the gloom?'
'My son, my son, I can see
quite clearly:
it's the old willows
gleaming so grey.'

„Ich liebe dich, mich reizt
deine schöne Gestalt;

'I love you, your beautiful
figure excites me;

Und bist du nicht willig, so
brauch ich Gewalt.“

and if you're not willing, I'll
take you by force.'

„Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt
fasst er mich an!

'Father, O father, he's
seizing me now!

Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids
getan!“

The Erlking's done me
harm!

Dem Vater grauset, er reitet
geschwind,
Er hält in Armen das
ächzende Kind,
Erreicht den Hof mit Mühe
und Not:
In seinen Armen das Kind
war tot.

The father shudders,
swiftly he rides,
with the groaning child in
his arms;
with a final effort he
reaches home;
the child lay dead in his
arms.

Interval

Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979)

La mer est plus belle (1910)

Paul Verlaine

The sea is lovelier

La mer est plus belle
Que les cathédrales,
Nourrice fidèle,
Berceuse de
râles,
La mer sur qui prie
La Vierge Marie!

The sea is lovelier
than the cathedrals;
a faithful wet-nurse
lulling those in the grip of
death,
the sea over which
the Virgin Mary prays!

Elle a tous les dons
Terribles et doux.
J'entends ses pardons
Gronder ses courroux.
Cette immensité
N'a rien d'entêté.

It has all the qualities,
awesome and sweet.
I hear its forgiveness
scolding its wrath ...
This immensity
is without wilfulness.

Oh! si patiente,
Même quand méchante!
Un souffle ami hante
La vague, et nous chante:
«Vous, sans espérance,
Mourez sans souffrance!»

Oh, so forbearing,
even when wicked!
A friendly breath haunts
the wave, and sings to us:
'You without hope,
may you die without pain!'

Et puis, sous les cieux
Qui s'y rient plus
clairs,
Elle a des airs bleus,
Roses, gris et verts ...
Plus belle que tous,
Meilleure que nous!

And then beneath the skies,
reflected there more
brightly,
it seems blue,
pink, grey, and green ...
Lovelier than all,
better than we!

Prière (1909)

Henry Bataille

Ô Marie ! soyez-moi Marie, et
mon cœur vivra...
Qui me séparera de l'amour
de Marie ?
Les ténèbres ne
m'empêcheraient pas
De sentir sa douceur. – Ô
Marie,
Vous m'avez fait perdre la
paix, et pourtant
Je vous ai aimée d'une
charité éternelle...
Peut-être si Dieu, qui nous
entend certainement,
M'avait créé selon
elle,
On aurait été bien
heureux !
Mais ce n'est pas pour être
heureux,
Ce n'est pas pour cela que je
l'ai attirée...
Qu'elle vive sur mes volontés
comme elle veut !
Je n'en demande pas tant, et
s'il vous agrée.
Simplement douce ou tendre
ou pas,
Soyez-moi Marie et mon
cœur vivra.

Elégie (1906)

Albert Samain

Une douceur splendide et
sombre
Flotte sous le ciel
étoilé
On dirait que là-haut, dans
l'ombre
Un paradis s'est écroulé.

Et c'est comme l'odeur
ardente,
L'odeur fiévreuse dans l'air noir,
D'une chevelure d'amante
Dénouée à travers le
soir.

Tout l'espace languit de
fièvres.
Du fond des cœurs
mystérieux
S'en viennent mourir sur les
lèvres
Des mots qui font fermer les
yeux.

Prayer

O Mary! Be mine, Mary,
and my heart will live.
Who will separate me
from Mary's love?
The darkness would not
prevent me
from feeling her
gentleness. – O Mary,
you have robbed me of
my peace, and yet
I have loved you with
eternal charity . . .
Maybe if God, who
certainly hears us,
had created me in her
image,
we would have been
happy indeed!
But it is not to be
happy,
it is not for that reason I have
drawn her to me . . .
Let her live on my wishes
as she likes!
I do not ask so much and,
if it please you,
simply, gentle or tender
or not,
be mine, Mary, and my
heart will live.

Elegy

A sombre and splendid
sweetness
drifts beneath the starry
sky –
as though up there, in the
darkness,
a paradise had crumbled.

And it is like the ardent
fragrance,
feverish in the black air,
of a beloved's tresses
loosened across the
evening.

All space languishes with
fever.
Deep within mysterious
hearts,
words that cause eyes to
close
come to die on
lips.

Et de ma bouche où
s'évapore
Le parfum des bonheurs
derniers,
Et de mon cœur vibrant
encore
S'élèvent de vagues pitiés

Pour tous ceux-là qui, sur la
terre,
Par un tel soir tendant les
bras,
N'ont point dans leur cœur
solitaire
Un nom à sangloter tout
bas.

Cantique (1909)

Maurice Maeterlinck

A toute âme qui pleure,
A tout péché qui passe,
J'ouvre au sein des
étoiles
Mes mains pleines de grâces.

Il n'est péché qui vive
Quand l'amour a parlé;
Il n'est âme qui meure
Quand l'amour a pleuré...

Et si l'amour s'égare
Aux sentiers d'ici-bas,
Ses larmes me retrouvent
Et ne s'égarent pas...

And from my mouth,
whence the perfume
of my last joys
evaporates,
and from my still vibrant
heart,
vague pity surges

For all those who, on
earth,
reaching out on such an
evening,
do not in their lonely
hearts possess
a single name to utter in
silent sobbing.

Hymn

To every weeping soul,
to every passing sin,
I open my hands full of
grace,
surrounded by stars.

Sins cannot abide
when love has spoken;
souls cannot die
when love has wept...

And if love loses its way
along terrestrial paths,
its tears will find me
and not go astray...

Kathleen Tagg (b.1977)

This be her verse (2020)

Lila Palmer

After Philip Larkin

Woman's no island (would she were!)
Her life, the deep'ning coastal shelf:
Ambition's shore swept by demand;
Her time against His ego self.

Escape, resist, build up the wall
Still body, Tribe, Bond, Love! Seeps through...
You'll be up nights, to hold them all,
And hate and love the trespass too.

*Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment
have ended.*

Wedding

No confetti crowd.
Just a bride and her witness,
Blinding sun, cement
Baking the just completed act,
Into sticky reality.
The bride, shifting in her dress.

Waiting, waiting for the groom.
The men tumble outside.
The bride seethes
Royal displeasure.

She laid a hand on my arm.
'Dearest, you should know...
You will always be waiting
Waiting for him
To catch up.'

Single Bed

Single bed – I state – Proclaim!
My solitary intent
Single bed: my estate,
The regal bier of Queens
And Holy Women.
I am not afraid. I am not
Afraid of dinner parties,
Smooth refills and wives
Too frightened to get ugly
Or fat. I will be fat and ugly
If I choose. But I do not.

I claim my bed,
My solitary chamber
With its clean sheets.

Listen! I am not afraid
Of babies, endless talk
Of teething, training,
Cracked nipples, biting
(not the pleasant kind).
I am not afraid
Of puckered intimacy,
The gathered folds of life,
Pulled together by some
Escaping thread.
I am not afraid of love
Aged down to top-shoulder level.

I am just afraid
Of waking to Prince Cha-
'Prince Almost...Close Enough.'

No that's not worst,
Worst, the lemon mouth
And bird sharp eyes of
Woman Who Finds Fault.

Oh let me be soft edge-smudged
Tenderized by toil,
Let my eyes water pink
With nights awake locked tight,
To keep all fear at bay;
And coiling blue beneath skin
Now smooth with little service
Let work and living intertwined
Map and etch our life so deep
That compass lost, the track remains.
And so for fear of Her
Much more than He
Unless He comes,
Here will I be.

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Translations of 'Erlkönig II' and all Schumann except 'Am Strande' by Richard Stokes from The Book of Lieder published by Faber & Faber, with thanks to George Bird, co-author of The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder, published by Victor Gollancz Ltd. 'Wenn der Abendstern die Rosen' and 'Prière' by Charles Johnston. 'Du bist wie eine Blume' and all Boulanger except 'Prière' by Richard Stokes.