

Eskimo Advice
(an ebook of poems)



by

Edward Denniston

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Some of the above poems have already appeared in print: *One For My Father* in Stet Magazine (1991), *Killary Harbour View* in the anthology *A Conversation Piece – Poetry & Art* (2002), *Deals* in Paris/Atlantic Magazine (2003), *Eskimo Advice* in Imagine Magazine (2003), and *Spring Drive* in Heritage Outlook (2007).

Introduction

I first became aware of the poetry of Edward Denniston when we were both members of Initials, a group of Waterford writers, in the mid 1980s. His writing was tensile and strong and its sinewy soul intrigued me.

Denniston's poetry is like theatre-in-the-round -- constructed with a minimum of architecture. No wasted words. No pointless movement. No props for the reader. You have to work with it. Poetry that makes you work a bit is good poetry.

The poems in this ebook have a quiet, almost understated power. They take you on seemingly familiar journeys and take unexpected turns. I read *Listening To My Mother's Voice* and thought: that could be me in the poem. I shared the boyhood irritation at the raveled jumper sleeves under my coat. I heard my own mother's voice again. But the most memorable thing about this poem is its powerful final image -- this journey's unexpected turn -- its startling denouement.

Edward Denniston's first book, *The Point of Singing*, was published by Abbey Press, in 1999. That title is a good metaphor for his poetry overall. A Denniston poem often begins with the relaxing 'slackness' of the familiar, but before long, like strained wire, reaches a tense point of singing. Sometimes, as in *Eskimo Advice*, the title poem of this ebook, he gets right in to it: *Parcel up your anger in quires of crêpe* makes you feel you are already in the thick of things.

Denniston explores the domestic and personal landscape with a keen and quirky eye. In *Eskimo Advice*, strange poems about the familiar, the inner world of the poet -- his great creative waste land -- edge against the world of work and domesticity, and find common ground in the rituals of family, wife, children.

I hope, and I believe, that his poetry -- and these fourteen poems in particular -- will find an appreciative online readership. These are poems that will richly repay downloading. Read them. Enjoy them.

Edward Reid Power
(Poet & Editor of Rectory Press)

Listening To My Mother's Voice

I'm standing in the hallway at the bottom of the stairs
late at night with my arms out for my mother
who's just behind holding my coat.

Come on, come on, hold out your arms.

Grip your sleeves. Her voice is hurried but calm.

I grip the plucked-at, ravelled sleeves

of my woollen jumper. My mother knows
it's what upsets me most - jumper sleeves
crumpled under my coat. Beneath my feet

just inside the door, the pale green lino's worn
to its frayed jute backing; there's a floorboard
with two black knots – eyes I stare at

listening to my mother's voice.

One For My Father

You tilt a mixer with care.
The bottle neck rests on the rim.
There's the glug and splash into your brandy –

half a mixer to a half measure.
The bottle, placed on a beer mat
is pushed to one side.

Forcing a gap between pursed lips
you drink. The after-taste
almost closes your eyes,

furrows your forehead; then
there's the gentle smack of tongue on palate.
When your eyes fill up

you press a palm into each socket,
pause for a moment
before drawing the skin on your face

downward. You exhale with a rounded mouth
and look up.

Attention

Now, my children watch me carefully;
rehearse how not to walk, how not
to glance sideways at a mirror,
how not to lift a glass or cup,
how not to tilt the head back
saying, *what of it;*
how not to fall silent
like an uneasy guest;
how not to greet a visitor
with gushing pleasantries
or say goodbye too enthusiastically,
or repeat with melodrama,
the human interest story
in tones of, *I told you so*. Carefully
they watch me, my children.
I carry on, as normal.

From A Window

Nothing is contingent upon the rusting wheelbarrow,
the proffer of its obtuse handles afloat
in the yellow depth of unchecked buttercup,
seeded scutch, wayward lemon balm, purple vetch,

calm in the sunless, walled corner of a small garden
that was once an arbitrary spot in a tillage field
at the end of a lane – beyond street names, door numbers.
In the balm of a fine, tickly

perpendicular rain, the wheelbarrow's
sober with efficacy, has no intention.

Spring Drive – *The Vee*

For Hannah

Whin. Heather. Scraggy thorn.
Boulders like dollops of mud.
The air whetted with chill.
Weak and bright, the sun strikes
the bare knuckles of a sandstone ridge.

On this narrow, high road
I clamber to a vantage point
to watch a hen harrier fall from its brink
in the air; sweep down-valley to where
a patch of spruce borders the sky-

or is it sea? A steely blue -
and lingering for a while, my longing
shies, holds me back
from the slow, inevitable descent
to a floodplain.

Killary Harbour View – a painting by Paul Henry

Map L Grid Ref. 897 625

Painter, would you have me sit
before Dawn's worn, faded vestment?
Would you have me at the edge there
leap, and fall headlong into it?

And in falling for dear life, in hope,
would you have me cling to folds
of holiness, all frayed and tarnished
like one in search of guiding stopes?

In broad daylight, when things are clearer
and there's nothing like an evanescence
or revelation, forgive me painter
if with compass, map and heavy boots

I revisit the cold and dark of the water's depth,
the roughness in the grits and quartz.
Though I can almost touch the purple veil
you've draped across the slopes, sea and sky,

carefully, I wipe your vision from my eyes.

December 31st

A year doesn't go by but the man who listens to engines comes to mind. Whether I saw him do this or heard it I don't know. He's always in the passenger seat, head turned sideways, tilted towards the dashboard, listening, as if the engine's viscera pressed against his being – ring, tappet, piston, valve, cam; having considered, he'd get out, lift the bonnet, stare at the vibrating block on its mountings – all without saying a word – before pronouncing what needed to be done to have it run smoothly, sweetly – like a torque of angels heading uphill, homeward.

Retire Me

Retire me to perpetual autumn.
I'll have my stoutly bristled yard brush.
My store of jute sacks for packing
the rusted, scarlet ochry leaves,

even the slimy, sodden leaves;
leaves that fall and collect
at the footpath's edge, on lawns,
on driveways. I'll sweep

curled, knarled or mushy leaves
into hillocks, neatly, perpetually
as they fall. Retire me now
to autumn. I'll be happy,

sweeping leaves.

Deals

The man in the crowded dining room who wants
to sit beside everyone, sits beside no one – never
ever again – because, he says, he has his freedom.

*

The woman who gave up her job on swivel chair
at a cash register cycles with her basket on narrow roads,
between high ditches, in search of a blackberry harvest.

*

In his sickness, in his dying, she gave herself
to his contentment. When it came to it,
she forgot the line in the sand she'd drawn;
could count love-making on the fingers of one hand.

*

The boy who knew so much about cooking for so long
emptied all the kitchen on the kitchen floor; painted sofa,
walls and carpet with a heavy gloss called *Hi Electric Blue*.

Eskimo Advice

Parcel up your anger in quires of crêpe.
Walk away, out as far as you can go
across endless sand or blanket snow,
or over raised bog where the prospect

is dim and hazy; or along a greening lane
narrowing, meandering on the way –
you and your parcel of anger on the day,
lightening, careless of sun or rain.

When you feel lighter, tired, almost lost,
stop. Find a hiding spot or dig a deepish hole
to put your anger in, along with – the cost's
a fine delicate flaking – a scintilla from your soul

that'll shine in time, while you let be
what you've buried, without thought of return,
until one day, you stroll there, with a loved one,
ready to confess how far you've come.

For S.C.

- missing since New Year's Eve 1999

My thought, like the first but only neat pencil line
on a clean, white sheet of paper, goes nowhere.
You walk from the door of your house, again and again.
You stand by the ditch at the roadside, arriving there,
again and again. The glare from the headlights
is the same recurring glare. There's the night-sky,
fields, shadow – the sound of the sea. Close by,
you're in hiding from the end of a story.

Moon

The terror he felt while looking through the telescope –
stopping for a moment on his way to bed on a freezing
brittle night when their love was true and toughened –
he kept to myself.

Moon, draped across the covers and half the floor
was a balmy blessing for their middle-age
as he stared out over her shoulder, at the terror
he kept to myself.

Isn't an embrace like a holding on?

What do you wish for under the moon?

This passion – where does it come from?

Anniversary

(sponsalia per verba de praesenti) *

Over eight thousand nights we've lain side by side
under duvet, linen sheet, woollen blanket, canvas.
We've talked into the small hours, been silent.
We've woken up to torrential rain, a shocking phone ring,
footsteps in the garden, the drone of a machine,
the crash of something falling, our dawning selves.

Eight thousand nights of intimacy however slight
or haphazard, although of no consequence, amaze,
frighten us – are worth some kind of tribute.
I'm on the look out for the discarded useful bits `n pieces
with which to build a monument to our excess
of eight thousand nights: an installation of some sort –

expressive, solid, materially textured, subdued
with the odd colour splash; climbable on, weather resistant,
rust proof, with some enduring wood – all housing
a reclining seat on which to lie, sit, talk or make love,
where, now and then, others might come and vow
impossible vows, with the promise of eight thousand nights, or more.

* Early 17th century: a legally binding declaration by both parties who, without religious ceremony, take each other as spouse.

Toast

A heady drunkenness leads me

Without fear of keeling over

To stand up and make this toast – Stephen Mallarmé

to the point of vagueness
the limit of blur
the line in the fog

Nothing to be done

keep between the ditches
keep soft and deft footed
keep your tuppence worth

Nothing to be done

bend over backward
bend in the wind
bend like a sally rod

Nothing to be done

amble the least line
amble the least said
amble what's mended

Nothing to be done

stand to reason feeling
stand in good stead
stand corrected

Nothing to be done

hold good, hold water
hold harmless
hold tongue