

SINGLE BOUND

KRYPTON NIGHTS / AMAZON DAYS

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BOOK ONE
KRYPTON NIGHTS

*He thought according to the Law, spoke according to the Law,
and did according to the Law; so that he was the holiest in all
the living world, the best ruling in exercising rule, the brightest
in brightness, and most glorious in glory, the most victorious in
victory. And at his sight the demons rushed away.*

—ZOROASTER

The Zend-Avesta, 591 B.C.E.

*Superman never made any money
For saving the world from Solomon Grundy
And sometimes I despair the world will never see
Another man like him*

—CRASH TEST DUMMIES

The Ghosts That Haunt Me, 1991

I, KENT

Listen, it isn't even my planet.
I just work here. A man of letters, mild
mannered, nerves of less than steel. Yes, I can
outrun most anything—thieves, mid-range sports
sedans, Shoemaker-Levy—can chew
a mouthful of coal to a cud of diamonds,
but I'm not as Delphic as you dream. I get
sleep apnea, hemorrhoids, runs in my tights.

I like *Gilligan's Island* and late night horror
flick medleys. Thermonuclear trust funds,
Greenpeace for guns, heavy metal milk lobbyists . . .
None of it gets me wet the way it used to.
If I could, I'd curl up in my cape
with an old comic, an orange soda,
a little Vivaldi. No telephone
booths; just Ming the Merciless to take me

away. Oh well. Shit happens. Worlds collide,
babes fall out of the sky, grow up, get lives.
My flat's just over there. No, the brownstone.
Yeah, that one. Corner room, third from— No. Up, up . . .
Anyway, I took this position because,
frankly, it looked like a job for me. Now
I'm not so sure anymore. I'm tired of being,
well, necessary. You don't know what it's like.

Hardly feeling a thing, seeing through
people, overhearing assassination plots

two countries over and still needing
new underwear every Christmas. One day
I hate the boots, belt, bikini, this *S* appliqué;
the next, I feel like punching every hornrimmed
dweeb I see. Dad warned me it might be like this.
“Son,” he said, “you’ll just wanna come home.” Problem is,

I can’t.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A CAPE

A Crown of Sonnets by C. Kent

*“Fair enough.” Perry came around from behind his desk.
“We all have a life outside these walls, and what you do with
yours is none of my damn business . . . as long as it doesn’t
reflect badly on the Planet.”*

—ROGER STERN

The Death and Life of Superman, 1993

I. THE FOURTH MAN IN THE FIRE

Home from a hard day's Armageddon,
slipping out of spandex and into spectacles,
from one high life bold above the abandon
into another (shall we say less Pericles

than Prospero), I find that I suspect
this Superman I've become. Dressing down
is easier, the lie somehow less circumspect.
And though this *too* is dressing up, the clown

suit *cum* reporter's wardrobe boasts less blood
between the seams. I don't mind the dumbing
down, really. Being the neighborhood
god, all guts and gusto, well, it's numbing.

But here, just another byline for a vast news magnate,
I can stumble, fumble, fail. I can always quit the *Planet*.

II. THE TRIALS OF JOB

I could stumble, fumble, fail, quit the planet,
head for the first unrehearsed star to the right
and then vanish, over lunch, say, some strange event
horizon. My alibi? Space frenzy. Airtight.

But, approaching omnipotence, where does one run?
I suppose I just feel torn sometimes, between
cape and capacity, between what I've done
and what you've *let* me do. The half seen

gestures of this politico, that pontiff,
the anchor's sly nod at half a hundred stations,
editors, my boss (most people, really, if
you want to know the truth), they, their nations,

whole parliaments have ratified me.

What happens, then, should I turn? Back toward eternity?

III. THE THEFT OF THE FIRSTBORN

What happens then? Should I return, back toward
eternity? Start over, seek that old crabgrass orchard
deep in the Kansas scree and wait for my metal
cradle, the star that chose Pa's field, to settle?

Actually, it was all corn where my crib
came down, but if I *could* go back, trace time's rib
around to come out thirty years more whole
than any toddler, ostensibly, set before me; if I stole

myself from then, left only a smoking husk
behind; if I raised myself on some dead, dusk-
less world, that violet-blue one just off the edge of M31,
how, then, would I explain this suit to my "son"?

How define crest? How, without wars, Czars, rules?
On a field, yellow, the letter S, gules?

IV. THE LETTER OF THE LAW

On a field of yellow, the letter S, gules.
This is how my parents found me, flames
cutting a swath across the farm road near the school's,
only stopping their red weave where the James'

property ended and Pa's began. The sign
my folks followed, then—that cosmic spoor
which led to a small, blue craft cratered to the spine—
spelled not so much a warning as the future.

When my mother—unaware of the root
of her design, that red, ruthless curve—stitched
something less letter than Kansas cornfield
to my chest, anchored me to my past, affixed

me to an arc dark as blood, was it heraldry or shield?
She and Pa still read the sky. I've tried to follow suit.

V. THE FACE OF THE DEEP

My folks still read the sky I've tried to follow. The suit,
though, gets in the way of being human.
Even *being* human, stubbing one's foot,
say, or regretting the blood-letting of all but a few . . . Man,

it's rough. There are times I've had to reset teeth, back
into laws I've broken myself, ensuring
some purer notion. Two selves then. Each a plank
for the other's platform; each, a hasty mooring.

Like some deranged Phoenician navigator
set adrift on theory molded mostly of the paper
he's penned his calculations on, I guess I find my taste
for figures growing thin. And how odd to waste

time hanging sky, when I'd rather be down
here anyway. Deep, where Superman may drown.

VI. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

Here, anywhere, deep. Where Superman would drown.
Why even ask? Of course that would be untimely
for us both. So maybe I step into a ray gun,
one of Luthor's, burn away the steel. Finally

farm myself out to a sun that doesn't heal
so well. Or, what the hey, go ahead and steal
one of those Green Lantern rings, wish myself
no longer bird but plain. The thing is, your health

has depended on me, this antibody,
too long. And you would, I suspect, *still* see
me, bring me back like some dead, desert King,
refit me in his sequins. No, nothing

I can do, then, will relinquish me my cup.
These days I flee to where the ice is calving, cracking up.

VII. BEHOLD THE MAN

These days I flee to where the ice is calving.
Where cracking up comes easier on reflection
of each high white embankment, each rose erection
the sun makes of glaciers here. This is where traveling

stops: Waste of iced barrow. Fortress of bone. Naked
Eden. Here, nature's choices have narrowed to death,
to survival of those too fit to be kind.

This is necessary, how we lie. When that Lord High Breath

came to Eve, demanding the source of the seed
on her thigh, He knew, of course, already.

For her, then, choice was not at all some rash, heady
option. Not till *after* the eating. Indeed,

it's the same for Clark, Superman, me. Fruit, fig leaf, fakery,
coming home to a hard day's Gethsemane.



BOOK TWO
AMAZON DAYS

*You may break your chains. But you must wear these
wrist bands always to teach you the folly of
submitting to men's domination!*

—APHRODITE
Wonder Woman #1, 1942

*And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare . . .*

—T. S. ELIOT
"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," 1915

I, WONDER

Question is, would I matter if I didn't
tout these tits? If my legs weren't, total,
seventy-two inches of eye candy?
And get a load of the get up . . . Well, if
it doesn't get you up, you're more than
mostly dead. Whitman said *there is that lot
of me and all so luscious*, but then he
didn't have to hide the *lot* in a hanky.

Try fighting Hirohito in heels, Nazis
in a nightie, crazed crackheads with the wind
wolf-whistling up your crack. I defy
you guys to name just one super savior,
one with a prick, who lets it all hang out.
Sure, they leap about in longhandles, uber
Underoos, but even Underdog unzips
more than me before hiking a leg.

So, okay, definitely not a dog.
It could be worse. I could look like Lois,
maybe Hawkgirl after a turkey shoot.
But when I hear that other busty bombshell say
I'm not bad, I'm just drawn that way, I have
to wonder, do alien androids really need
to know I have nipples? Does Wonder Man
buy Nair by the crate? Shanna the She-Devil,

does she worry over her pits? I don't
suppose I've ever had another option.

It's all about cleavage, and I don't just mean
what I could do with an arrow and a dozen
ax heads. To do what I do—saving you,
in this world that would, otherwise, have me
Amazon, Amazon only—to do it dirty,
hairy, in a jumper, to do it plumper

would beg the old joke. You know, the one
about that kid. Let's say Tim. To save himself,
his town, and the like, he had to stick his finger
in the dyke. She beat the shit out of him.

OUR BODIES, OURSELVES

An Echo by W. W.

It's funny how one girl can be two people.

—WONDER WOMAN
WONDER WOMAN #4, 1943

PRINCE

*If Mother could only see me now . . . as a very feminine
woman . . . a nurse no less, in a world full of men.*

—PRINCESS DIANA

Sensation Comics #1, 1942



I. UTOPIA

We all leave Paradise. I left my prints
there, on everything, when I was young.
Each orchid, every smooth grove of olive, tongue
of Turk's cap, on silverswords, archer fish, hyacinths,

on even the tarsiers and turtles, as if my hands
had to know the shapes of all I would soon be
letting go. The trade I made was no Thermopylae,
no Miletus, but my mother's promise, these bands

I wear, bound me to more than just my sisters,
their island, their Amazon days, my own lonely nights.
So when, near the end of Paradise, down by its bights,
that man washed ashore, a man as lost to the bluster

of disaster as we had once been; when, still waterlogged with war
he saw me, said, *Woman* . . . Why wonder that I brought him to my
door?

II. ESSAY ON MAN

He saw me, said woman, as wonder, what brought
him to my door. Both urge and end, his own long fall.
But I was no soldier, not then. The din and drawl
of war remained as abstract as his fever-fraught

dreams. Oh, and what fine fancy I must have starred
in! Though I spent days tending my flyboy's wounds,
though he understood, intimately, the sound
of my voice, the fact of my hand as it carried

his own to my breast before he died, even then,
with memories of his mission, his crash, returning,
with all the inconvenient evidence of my being
real, still he wanted me as Valkyrie, as sin.

Me, from a land where he was just in jest.
He, from a land where I could only arrest.

III. COMMON SENSE

He, from a land where I would only arrest,
where kiss and fist were lovers that caressed,
where men were women's last excuse for less.
History-, mystery-, breast-, vagina-less.

It's a wonder we could communicate at all.
Even when I brought him back, used our science—a small
matter, but as far from his own as cathode from caul—
even after I'd dragged him back from death's mead hall,

even then, he imagined me imagined manna,
saw me as a proof of God, perhaps Valhalla.
But then I guess *he* . . . He was what? Shangri-La
to me? Abomination? Something new. Our law

said he could not stay, but also not to kill.
They'd need a hero to bring him back. They need one still.

IV. VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN

They needed a heroine to bring him back. Need?
One still wonders if indeed they needed *me*.
Then. The distance from that world to this, agreed,
was not so fraught with fright as mine to his, but he

was still with me then. I counted myself
lucky to have a steady job. Though keeping him
out of trouble left me breathless, it's not as if
there was a dearth of dastardly to help keep trim.

No, I don't know that—on coming to your shores,
on finally finding a place for the plane, the rest
all which vanishes desires—that the mores
of this land struck me as particularly less,

or how you herded unheard women was, well, surprise.
All I knew was what I gained, a ewe lost in eyes.

V. THE RIGHTS OF MAN

All I knew was what I gained, a ewe lost in eyes.
Here, they were ubiquitous: catcalls, gawks, cocks,
assward assumptions. After one has fought for the prize,
beaten better sisters to blood and sand, one balks

when, even *after* the arena, the audience remains.
Back in Paradise, I had to earn the *right* to be banished,
had to win the Games, master chains, take the reins
of my kanga mount and—so tasked, masked, I vanished—

prove myself to my mother, placate the Queen,
salve the substance of my dream. Saving even one man?
It seemed, in the end, such a small endeavor,
returning him to what he was: Capt. Steve Trevor.

But leaving didn't relieve me my star status. It stuck,
the liberty of the lamb. I never learned to pass the buck.

VI. THE SECOND SEX

Libertine or lamb, I never learned to pass the buck.
But *had* I passed him; had I left him to another,
to my sisters to save, let him die, invited a quick fuck
and even quicker forgetting; had I made him brother,

friend, astonishing but temporary, acquaintance
only; had I left this world of yours to its own
devices, all that power piled up (no maintenance)
between your legs; had I eschewed the throne

of this Regent, that Reich; had I abhorred your war
altogether, left you, left him, to fend for yourselves;
had I abandoned you all to sea, to mountain, at my door,
all I ever learned from dodging bullets—shells,

lead—would've been to not end dead. Instead, my blunder?
I shared with him my shackles. Is it any wonder?

VII. THE PRINCE

Woman I shared with him. But my shackles?
I wonder. Perhaps that's what I've left on the altar
for all of you. By being this being that's lack-less,
eternal, Hercules strapped in a backless halter,

by sharing my shoulders, my ripples, my pecs,
my faith in the failure of some guy with specs,
by fighting, as praxis, your axis, your evil,
becoming your Eve and survival, your rival,

by leaving my land for apotheosis,
by being both symptom and prognosis,
well . . . Bombshell or no, I've left you ticking.
I've left you what's left after apple picking.

I've left you it all. Pain. Common sense.
What we all must leave. Paradise, I left my prince.

About the Author

BRYAN D. DIETRICH is the author of a book-length study on comics, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, and six books of poems, *Krypton Nights* (published previously by Zoo Press), *Universal Monsters*, *Love Craft*, *Prime Directive*, *The Assumption*, and *The Monstrance*. He is also co-editor of *Drawn to Marvel*, an anthology of superhero poetry.

He has published poems in *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Paris Review*, *Harvard Review*, *The Yale Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Open City*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Witness*, *Weird Tales*, and many other journals.

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