

AUTHOR OF ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT

Jeanette Winterson

'Playful, expansive and full of heart'
The Times



Weight

C

• THE CANONS •

I want to tell

the story again

The free man never thinks

In the beginning there was
space and time. You could
at me and I would have ca
was no universe. It was e

This happy nothing end
a strange time, and wha
radioactive whispers; tha
great shout into the silen

What is it that you conta
patterns of millennia op
minute, in each of you, a f
succumb to radioactive
powers these tiny atom

ks of escape.
re was nothing. Not even
d have thrown the universe
ught it in one hand. There
easy to bear.
ded fifteen aeons ago. It was
t I know is told to me in
at's all there is left of one
nce.

ain? The dead. Time. Light
pening in your gut. Every
ew million potassium atoms
e decay. The energy that
ic events has been locked

inside potassium atoms eventually exploded nothing into being and radium, is a long-lived product of the supernova bang that

Your first parent was a s

It was hot as hell in those days, is where the life we love came from, less burning fires and volcanic activity in us as ultimate fear. The hells we have known. Hell is Science calls it the world of the Hadean period. But life has more than the ability to reproduce through spills and cratered rocks, life is *the almost, the maybe*. Not Ve

Planet Earth, that wanted

Moving forward a few billion years. At least that's what I

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er since a star-sized bomb
g. Potassium, like uranium
radioactive nuclear waste
t accounts for you.
star.

days. It was Hell, if hell
cannot exist. Those cease-
anic torments are lodged
e hells we invent are the
is; *was not, is not, cannot.*
before life began – the
ad begun, because life is
roduce. In the molten lava
e longed for life. *The proto,*
enus. Not Mars. Earth.
d life so badly, she got it.

n years, there was a mira-
call the unexpected fact

I WANT TO TELL

that changes the story. Earth has no oxygen, and oxygen was born in a quiet revolution as cyanobacteria, a star, a new kind of bacteria, began to photosynthesise – and the by-product of photosynthesis is oxygen. Planet earth is now oxygen-rich. The rest is history.

Well not quite. I could list the Cambrian era, push forward to the Silurian, when plants grow daisies, or the Silurian, when plants and gastropods. About 400 million years ago, when the first land animals climbed out of the sea, and the first vast coral reefs. The Triassic, when dinosaurs belong to the dinosaurs, and the Cretaceous, when dinosaurs are common as nightmares. The Pleistocene, 10,000 years ago – chancy and bristling with life – a mammoth and s

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THE STORY AGAIN

Earth had bacterial life, but it was a deadly poison. Then, explosive in its own way as bacteria, cyanobacteria started to produce a bi-product of photosynthesis. Earth had a new atmosphere.

It was for you the wild optimism of the Cambrian, the grass growing up mountains like grass in the Cambrian dream-days of starfish 500 million years ago, shakshuka, fins and scales, the first of the warm lagoons of the Cretaceous and Jurassic periods, efficient murder weapons, Then three or four million years ago, and new – what's this come something like a man?

★ ★

The earth was amazed. Earth new to herself. She never knew what to do next. She never guessed. She loved the risk, the randomness, the possibility of a winner. We forgive what we take for granted. Our failures have disappeared. The obvious and inevitable is the blue ball with the winning

Make a list. Look around you. *trees, roses, spiders, snails, frogs, fall, sunshine, you and me.* This is called life. What could be more

All the stories are here, silted. The book of the world open. It is one method only and not time. Even radioactive rocks, DNA, can only tell time like

HT

ch was always strange and anticipated what she would the coming wonder. She nness, the lottery proba- t, but she never did, that is the success story. The This planet that seems so the jackpot. Earth is the number on it.

you. *Rock, sand, soil, fruit* g, *fish, cattle, horses, rain-* s is the grand experiment more unexpected?

-packed and fossil-stored. ns anywhere, chronology t the best. Clocks are not ck-clocks, even gut-spun ke a story.

I WANT TO TELL

When the universe expands
ticking like a bomb too.
in another hundred million
lights will go out and there
by any more.

'Tell me the time' you
say is 'Tell me a story.'

Here's one I haven't b

THE STORY AGAIN

loded like a bomb, it started
We know our sun will die,
million years or so, then the
ere will be no light to read
u say. And what you really
een able to put down.

Weight of

F the World

My father was Poseidon.

My father loved the mother's body. He loved boundaries. He knew what was solid, certain, shaped.

My mother loved my father no boundaries. His ambition he sank, he flooded, he deluge of a man. Power sometimes calm, but never

My mother and father life. Creation depended on there was air or fire. They were so much. To each other

Both were volatile. M

My mother was the Earth.
The strong outlines of my
her demarcations and her
where he stood with her. She
solid and material.
Father because he recognised
emotions were tidal. He swept,
re-formed. Poseidon was a
blow off him. He was deep,
ever still.
teemed with life. They *were*
them and had done so before
they sustained so much. They
whether they were irresistible.
My father obviously so, my

mother more alarmingly. She
but volcano'd with anger. She
but tectonically challenged.
a plate across the room, to
crash. My father could be
moments. My mother grew
shook for days or weeks or
fissured and crumpled entire
kind into lava-like submission.

Humankind . . . They never
at Pompeii. There they are in
their chairs, wearing skeletal

When my father wooed my
He was playful, he was warm
the bright blue shallows and
drew back, and his pull was
her shore; a piece of coral,
as spiralled as a dream.

Sometimes he was a long

HT

he was serene as a rock
She was quiet as a desert
When my mother threw
the whole world felt the
whipped into a storm in
mumbled and growled and
for months until her rage
re cities or forced human
ion.

could see it coming. Look
in the bathhouses, sitting in
looks of charred surprise.

mother she lapped it up.
firm, he waited for her in
and came a little closer, then
as to leave a little gift on
mother of pearl, a shell

g way out and she missed

—

him and the beached fish
he was all over her again
together, because there was
about my father, for all his
the same kind, just as fire

She loved him because
was her moving mirror. He
the world that she was, and
her beauty of forests and
places. To him she was both
loved both. Together they
ever been. Places only the
could be. Wherever he was
restraint, a serious reminder
that covered the earth. He knew
could not cover the whole
whole of him. For all his

I was born. I was born of
half god, a giant of a giant

OF THE WORLD

...es gasped for breath. Then
...n, and they were mermaids
...s always something feminine
...s power. Earth and water are
...e and air are their opposites.
...he showed her to herself. He
...e took her round the world,
...nd held it up for her to see,
...cliffs and coastlines and wild
...oth paradise and fear and he
...y went where no human had
...y could go, places only they
...ent, she was there; a gentle
...nder; *the earth and the waters*
...knew though, that while he
...of her, she underpinned the
...strength, she was strong.

...ne of the Titans, half man,
...ant race. I was born on an

island where my father could
 a day and a night before
 prolonged intercourse, riding
 crack, I was bound to be a father
 both. I am as turbulent as my
 ing as my mother. I act suddenly
 sometimes forgive, completely
 memory. I know what love is
 feit. At the same time, my
 easy to deceive. Like my brother
 been punished for overstepping
 fire. I fought for freedom.

Boundaries, always boundaries

I keep telling the story
 different exits, the walls never
 out – here and here and here
 but I can't get beyond it. I
 find a way out, but the exit
 inside, leaning on the limit

This is the body, the sea

HT

ld lie over my mother for
e subsiding. From this
dling himself into every
atal combination of them
my father. I am as brood-
ddenly. I never forget. I
passion washing away
is. I know love's counter-
y good nature makes me
other Prometheus, I have
oping the mark. He stole

ries.

again and though I find
ever fall. My life is paced
re – I can alter its shape
tunnel through, seem to
s lead nowhere. I'm back
s of myself.

aled unit that cautiously

—

takes in what it needs to
invaders of the microbe k
boundaries weaken only
dom it brings is useless.
last, I am dead to it.

This is the body, and
little. I am the Kosmos -
at the same time I was
more than nothing. Not

Nothing has an unlike

The story is a simple one
I had a vineyard. I had da
the perfect synthesis of a
father. The Titans bowed
whose thunderbolts were

When I wanted gold ar
where she kept them and
ers indulge sons, and sh
and underground caves.

OF THE WORLD

survive, that stoutly repels
mind. This is the body, whose
in decay and then the free-
United with the world at

my body is the world in
— the all that there is, and
never more outside, never
being bounded by nothing.
ly property. *It is heavy.*

e. I had a farm. I had cattle.
ughters. I lived on Atlantis,
wealthy mother and a proud
d to no-one, not even Zeus,
e like a game to us.
d jewels I asked my mother
d she indulged me as moth-
owed me her secret mines

When I wanted whales or
with fish or pearls for my
father, who respected me and
I dived with him into hot
floor of the ocean. We saw
porpoises. Land and sea were
when Atlantis was finally de
of gladness. All that loss
mother and father's emb
returned to nothing. I wish

*Boundaries, always boundaries,
space.*

I built a walled garden, a
lifted the huge stones with
them carefully, as a goath
gaps to let the wind throu
collapsed. My mother stirr
as much. A wall well built

HT

or harbours or nets lined
daughters, I went to my
and treated me as an equal.
springs that blasted the
wam wrecks and tamed
re equal home to me, and
destroyed, I even felt a kind
was after all, only my
race. I was nothing. I
it had been so.

, and the longing for infinite

temenos, a sacred space. I
my own hands and piled
erd would, leaving tiny
gh. A solid wall is easily
ing in her sleep could do
with invisible spaces will

—

allow the winds that rage
When the earth underne
make room for movemen
stands. The wall's streng
in the spaces between th
me I think, that for all m
wall relies on nothing. I
NOTHING.

This garden is well kn
Hesperides, tend it, and
Garden of the Hesperides. Al
fruit, the garden enjoys a
Earth gave the goddess P
her wedding day, and He
that she asked me to ten

I have heard some men
gold, and that this is the
guarded so carefully. Eve
is valuable to himself m

F THE WORLD

e against it to pass through.
ath it trembles, the spaces
t and settlement. The wall
gth is not in the stones but
e stones. It's a joke against
ny strength and labour, the
Write it more substantially –

nown. My daughters, the
far and wide it is called *The*
long with the usual kinds of
rarity. My mother, Mother
Hera a golden apple tree for
era loved the tree so much
d it for her.
say that the apples are solid
e reason why they must be
ery man assumes that what
must be coveted by others.

Men who love gold, long for
their lives, though life is
metal. My mother has no need
Hera want with gold? No,
in its living nature. Its ap-
scented jewels that hang
covered in dark green leaves
like it. It stands in the center
a year, Hera comes to collect

All well and good. At least
appeared to me in a rage that
a shed of excuses.

My daughters had been so
fruit. Who could blame them
and heavy, and the grass
evening dew? Their feet were
were eager. They are girls and

I did not see the harm
jealous of their belongings
Ladon to guard the tree, and

HT

for gold and guard it with
more precious than any
ed of gold, and what does
the beauty of the tree is
ples are tiny, pineapple-
from fruiting branches
s. There is no other tree
re of the garden, and once
ct its harvest.

st I thought so until Hera
t sent me cowering inside

secretly eating the sacred
n, the tree, sweet-scented
underneath it wet with
re bare and their mouths
after all.

myself, but the gods are
s. Hera sent the serpent
nd there he is now, coiled

—

and watchful, with a hum
in tongues. I hate him, th
my mother's, a solid nigh

When I was cast out of
ing heavier could befall r

I was wrong.

The war between the good
we had preferred to a
versions of this war. O
began as just cause beca
for ten years.

Some say that my fath
brothers and I, especially
him and castrate him. It
off the genitals of Uran
himself. It is certain too
Zeus, who likewise deth
control of the heavens. Ze
and Poseidon, and while

OF THE WORLD

hundred heads and double that
though he is a dark dream of
nightmare birthed into day.
In the garden, I thought noth-
ing of me.

The war between the Olympians and the Titans was a war
that could not be avoided. There are several
versions of the story, but one thing is certain; what
I am told is just excuse. We fought

because my father was Uranus and that my
brother Cronus, plotted to attack
him. It is certain that Cronus cut
off Uranus, and then took power
for himself. When Cronus bore a child,
Zeus, that Cronus bore a child,
Zeus overthrew his father and gained
power. Zeus had two brothers, Hades
and Poseidon. Zeus became Lord of the

Sky, Poseidon had his kingdom, Hades was content with what was left to mankind.

It was mankind who attacked Zeus who helped them to desecrate and joined the revolt against the war-leader, the one who had nothing to fear. What can a man fear?

In the long fighting, mortals were my mother, out of her side I gave victory to Zeus. What Titan was sent to Britain, where the cold was worse than death. I was spared.

In a way I was allowed to

Because I loved the earth. For the earth held no fear for me. For the positions of the planets and the stars. Because I am strong, my power is the Kosmos on my shoulder.

HT

gdom in the waves, and
at lies beneath. The earth

acked quiet Atlantis, and
troy my people. I escaped,
st the heavens. I was the
d lost most and had little
r with nothing to lose?

st of us were killed, and
ecret nature, promised
ns were left were banished
d inhospitable rocks are
red for my great strength.
o be my own punishment.

Because the seas of the
Because I had learned the
d the track of the stars.
nishment was to support
rs. I took up the burden

—

of the whole world, the depths below. All that th
it in my control. This is
boundary of what I am.

And my desire?

Infinite space.

It was the day of my pu

The gods assembled. T
and the men were on t
worked muscle and tied-l
bow so that she doesn't h
friends. We hunted toget

There's Hera, sardon
less. As long as it's not h

There's Hermes, fidge
ble. Next to him lounge
and lame, Hera's cripple
smithy. Opposite him is
loathes his body. We've a

F THE WORLD

heavens above it, and the
ere is, is mine, but none of
my monstrous burden. The

nishment.

The women were on the left
he right. There's Artemis,
back hair, fiddling with her
have to look at me. We were
her.

ic, aloof. She couldn't care
er.

ty and pale, he hates trou-
es Hephastus, ill-tempered
d son, tolerated for his gold
s Aphrodite his wife, who
ll had her, though we treat

her like a virgin. She smiled
one who dared . . .

Zeus read out his decree.
my name, I should have known
it means ‘the long suffering

I bent my back and braced
with my left. I bowed my head
palms up, almost like surrender.
surrender. Who is strong enough
Who can avoid what they must

The word given, teams of oxen
to strain forward, dragging
like a disc-plough. As the ground
ity, pieces of time were
earth, giving the gift of pro
Some were thrown out into
black holes where past and
guished. Time spattered
sinews in my thighs. I felt t

HT

d at me. She was the only

Atlas, Atlas, Atlas. It's in
own. My name is Atlas –
g one'.

d my right leg, kneeling
head and held my hands,
render. I suppose it was
ough to escape their fate?
must become?

of horses and oxen began
the Kosmos behind them
great ball ploughed infin-
dislodged. Some fell to
ophecy and second sight.
to the heavens, making
future cannot be distin-
ny calf muscles and the
he world before it began,

—

and the future marked me.

As the Kosmos came near
my back. I felt the world
my foot.

Then, without any sound
earth were rolled up over
them on my shoulders.

I could hardly breathe.
I tried to shift slightly or
still as a mountain. Motion
me, not for my strength.

There was a terrible pressure
of my neck. The soft tissue
hardening. The hideous weight
me of life. Time was my
me to stone.

I do not know how long
fied and motionless.

★

F THE WORLD

ne. I would always be here.
earer, the heat of it scorched
d settle against the sole of

ound, the heavens and the
r my body and I supported

. I could not raise my head.
r to speak. I was dumb and
unt Atlas they soon called
but for my silence.

ain in the seventh vertebra
ue of my body was already
ision of my life was robbing
Medusa. Time was turning

I crouched like this, petri-

★ ★

At last I began to hear some

I found that where the w
I could hear everything. I
parrots squawking, donke
rushing of underground rive
lighted. Each sound becam
began to de-code the world

Listen, here is a village w
it, and at dawn they take th
and at evening they herd t
limp takes the pails over h
limps by the irregular clan
a boy shooting arrows – t
padded hide of the target. L
per out of a wine jar.

Listen, there's an elepha
men. Over there, a nymph
sighs turn into sap.

Someone is scrambling up
loosen the ground under hi

HT

nothing.

World was close to my ears, I could hear conversation, cows braying. I heard the creak of wheels and the crackle of fires. I had a meaning, and soon I was dead.

With a hundred people in their cattle to the pastures, they were home. A girl with a heavy shoulder. I know she was the one with the buckets. There's a thwack! thwack! into the water. His father pulls the stop-

ant chased by a band of robbers. She is becoming a tree. Her

up a scree slope. His boots are muddy. His nails are torn. He

—

WEIGHT OF

falls exhausted on some
heavily and goes to sleep

I can hear the world b
back for me. I can hear th
tight rest. I can hear pool
I am carrying not only t
worlds. I am carrying the
space. I am carrying the
glories. I am carrying its
has so far been realised.

As the dinosaurs crawl t
eruptions pock my face, I
what I must bear. There
world, there is only the W
am continents. I am the j

Listen, there's a man tel
who holds the world on
laughs. Only drunks and

★

F THE WORLD

the goat-grass. He breathes
).

beginning. Time plays itself
the ferns uncurling from their
s bubbling with life. I realise
this world, but all possible
the world in time as well as in
the world's mistakes and its
s potential as well as what

through my hair and volcanic
I find I am become a part of
is no longer Atlas and the
World Atlas. Travel me and I
ourney you must make.

ling a story about the man
his shoulders. Everybody
children will believe that.

★ ★

No man believes what he d
should like to unbelieve my
wake in the morning hopi
happens. One knee forward
the world.

HT

does not feel to be true. I
myself. I sleep at night and
ing to be gone. It never
d, one knee bent, I bear