

AS IF IT MEANT
SOMETHING

*As If It Meant
Something*

STEVE DENEHAN



RENARD PRESS

RENARD PRESS LTD

124 City Road
London EC1V 2NX
United Kingdom
info@renardpress.com
020 8050 2928

www.renardpress.com

As If It Meant Something first published by Renard Press Ltd in 2023
For previous publication details of individual poems please see p. 276

Text and cover illustration © Steve Denehan, 2023

Design by Will Dady

Printed in the United Kingdom by Severn



ISBN: 978-1-80447-029-9

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Renard Press is proud to be a climate positive publisher, removing more carbon from the air than we emit and planting a small forest. For more information see renardpress.com/eco.

Steve Denehan asserts his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the prior permission of the publisher.

Contents

As If It Meant Something

<i>One of Those Days</i>	11
<i>Long and Thin, from Her Temple to Her Jaw</i>	12
<i>The Murder Face</i>	14
<i>Broken Nail</i>	16
<i>Metallic</i>	17
<i>Desert Cars</i>	19
<i>anonymouse_weezil</i>	21
<i>Cherry Red</i>	23
<i>Fingerprints Are Snowflakes</i>	25
<i>Broken Vacuum Cleaner</i>	27
<i>A Mass Shooting in Boulder, Colorado</i>	29
<i>Purple Skies, Pink Sheep, Brown Grass</i>	31
<i>Apple Cores and Street-Corner Small Talk</i>	33
<i>Different Times</i>	36
<i>The Drive Home on Saturday, November 2nd, 2019</i>	38
<i>Howls</i>	40
<i>Update</i>	42
<i>The Bird</i>	44
<i>On the Escalator in Liffey Valley</i>	46
<i>Vending Machine</i>	48
<i>Time Is a Rabid Dog</i>	50
<i>M Is for Moon</i>	52
<i>The Alchemist</i>	54
<i>A Rainy Evening in October</i>	56
<i>The Truth Is Out There</i>	58
<i>Oddball</i>	60
<i>Thirty-Six Zeros</i>	61
<i>Boogaloo Radio on a Late November Afternoon</i>	63
<i>Roches Stores, Henry Street, a Quarter of a Century Ago</i>	65
<i>Clinking Silence</i>	67
<i>A Knee on His Neck</i>	69
<i>Winter Market, Galway</i>	71

<i>Inverted World</i>	73
<i>The Mayfly</i>	75
<i>Half Lives</i>	77
<i>Pilot Light</i>	79
<i>Bad Days</i>	81
<i>Chimes</i>	82
<i>Learning to Pretend</i>	84
<i>A Part of</i>	86
<i>The Last of the Light</i>	88
<i>Something to Do</i>	89
<i>Barberstown Castle, Straffan, County Kildare</i>	91
<i>Late June, Allenwood</i>	93
<i>Mantelpiece Carriage Clocks</i>	94
<i>He Did Smile</i>	96
<i>The Mystery</i>	98
<i>Winter Yesterday, Summer Today</i>	100
<i>Miles Away</i>	102
<i>Another Question</i>	105
<i>After a Two-Hour Phone Conversation with Amazon</i>	107
<i>Paradise</i>	109
<i>Impossible Questions from My Daughter</i>	115
<i>Prisms</i>	117
<i>Hit the Road</i>	118
<i>Travelling to Work Every Day for a Decade</i>	120
<i>Chocolate Spread</i>	122
<i>Listen</i>	124
<i>Deep-Set</i>	125
<i>Telephone Calls</i>	127
<i>Cream Crackers</i>	128
<i>Light Show</i>	130
<i>Cautionary Tale</i>	131
<i>Of Service</i>	133
<i>One-Way Street</i>	135
<i>The Brain in the Jar</i>	137
<i>Sometimes the Whole Orchard Is Diseased</i>	139
<i>Whittled</i>	141
<i>Edenderry</i>	143

<i>Bullets</i>	145
<i>Ocean Roaring</i>	146
<i>Sometimes There Is Only Rage</i>	148
<i>What to Get the Man Who Has Everything</i>	150
<i>Zipping</i>	152
<i>Another Poem about Time</i>	154
<i>Do Not Feed the Animals</i>	156
<i>Hallowe'en</i>	158
<i>Ace</i>	160
<i>Winter Sun</i>	162
<i>Rockfield Hotel, Brittas Bay, County Wicklow</i>	164
<i>A Visit to the Ophthalmologist on December 17th, 2020</i>	167
<i>Raining Frogs in Tokyo</i>	169
<i>The World Cup Trophy at Brown Thomas in 2001</i>	171
<i>The Magic Hill and the Scientists</i>	173
<i>French Toast Breakfast</i>	175
<i>New Year's Resolutions</i>	177
<i>Another Poet, Another Interview</i>	179
<i>The Joke</i>	181
<i>Learning</i>	184
<i>Still Here but Not There</i>	186
<i>Bursting</i>	187
<i>Roll with It Like Burt Reynolds</i>	189
<i>Turf Stacks</i>	191
<i>Tough Guys Don't Cry Over Spilled Milk</i>	193
<i>Mirrored Shades</i>	195
<i>If Anything</i>	196
<i>The Choice</i>	198
<i>The Nun with No Bones in Her Hand</i>	199
<i>'88 or '89</i>	201
<i>Tomorrow</i>	203
<i>I Am Too Old</i>	205
<i>Run Throughs</i>	207
<i>School Day, Nine Years Old</i>	208
<i>Fistfuls</i>	210
<i>Hidden Depths</i>	212
<i>Forty-Five</i>	213

<i>Sun Shower</i>	216
<i>The Gaggle</i>	217
<i>The Courier</i>	219
<i>Spray</i>	220
<i>July 20th, 2022</i>	222
<i>Sitting at the End of Dún Laoghaire Pier</i>	223
<i>The Long Walk</i>	225
<i>The Duds</i>	227
<i>Fuck, Shit and Bastard</i>	229
<i>McDonald's, Lucan, June 21st, 2022</i>	231
<i>Dublin City, Winter 2019</i>	233
<i>Jardin des Plantes</i>	235
<i>Does Not Mix Well with Others</i>	237
<i>Away from the World</i>	239
<i>Purple</i>	241
<i>Paper Clip</i>	243
<i>The Carpenter and the Crocodiles</i>	245
<i>Gecko</i>	247
<i>The Thief</i>	248
<i>Drunk on a Sip</i>	250
<i>A Cold Cordial on a Warm Day</i>	251
<i>WhatsApp Messages</i>	252
<i>One Small Step</i>	253
<i>Chrysalis</i>	255
<i>Ochophobia</i>	256
<i>Best Man</i>	261
<i>Millennia</i>	263
<i>Mathematics</i>	264
<i>Five or Fifty-Five</i>	266
<i>Emergency Room at the Hermitage</i>	268
<i>The Spot</i>	270
<i>The Band</i>	272
<i>Maybe All Poems Should Be Burned</i>	274
<i>End</i>	275
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	276

AS IF IT MEANT
SOMETHING

*For my family and friends,
and for Will, for taking a chance.*

One of Those Days

There has been rain
lots of it
all morning

wind, too, hard and bellowing
slamming the house
corrugating the canal

no yellow, no blue
just grey and dark grey
Monday May 10th, 2021

*Long and Thin,
from Her Temple to Her Jaw*

We went to lunch sometimes
she would talk and I would listen
while looking at the ducks
in the pond on Stephen's Green

she came into work once
with a bruise
on the side of her face
it ran, long and thin
from her temple
to her jaw

I asked her what had happened
without hesitation she said
that he had pushed her
into the side of the wardrobe

it was not the first time
it was not the last
I told her to leave him
she told me that she loved him
I asked her how
she smiled

AS IF IT MEANT SOMETHING

we sat on a park bench
eating our sandwiches
finding silence in the noise
the ducks swam back and forth
eventually, she spoke
'If you don't laugh, you'll cry,'
she said, as she did neither

The Murder Face

The Murder Face

that is what they call it
my wife and daughter
snickering behind their hands

they always ask what I am thinking of
when I have *the Murder Face*
I always tell them
that I do not know
which is true
sometimes

though sometimes
it is a lie
I do know
I know exactly
I have been thinking of what
given half a chance
I would do to the guy
who is tailgating me
to the woman in the queue
standing far too close behind me
breathing on my neck
her open-mouthed chewing
almost inside my ear
to the cashier who rolls her eyes and tuts
when I mention
that she has left me a fiver short

AS IF IT MEANT SOMETHING

grim thoughts
that do not appear in my mind as a lightbulb
but rather seep
inky, sticky, warm, black
from the edge
to the centre
to my face

they say it again
The Murder Face
they laugh
I laugh
I laugh along
I laugh along right along with them

Broken Nail

I asked her what had happened
she looked down
sighed
said that it had broken so easily
maybe brittle from the cancer
maybe brittle from the treatment

I asked if there were other side effects
she smiled wistfully
her hair was thinning
she had a hell of an itch all over
couldn't sleep
said that she was lucky

though we both knew that was not true
it was eating her
from the inside out
lungs
ovaries
diaphragm

she asked about my parents
my daughter, my wife
only getting breathless once
she looked down at her broken nail again
said that it would grow back
I didn't know what to say to that

Metallic

It had been building for a few weeks
the pain
forgettable initially
bulletproof eventually

the dentist stood over me
shaking his head
talking of bridges, caps and root canals
I shook my head
having been down those roads before
with mixed results
in that it had gone badly
or very badly

he looked horrified
when I told him to take it out
said that we could save it
as though it were a limb
or my sight
not a furious, rotten tooth
hidden in the dark of my mouth

he got down to it
pulled and twisted
pulled again until

STEVE DENEHAN

driving home I tasted blood
warm and metallic
oddly familiar
my tongue ventured cautiously
a tentative slug
I wanted to know
I didn't want to know
and then, I felt it
what I knew that I would feel
nothing
nothing at all

Steve Denehan

Steve lives in Kildare in Ireland with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the author of two chapbooks and four poetry collections. Winner of the Anthony Cronin Poetry Award and twice winner of the *Irish Times*' New Irish Writing, his numerous publication credits include *Poetry Ireland Review* and *Westerly*.