

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



After the Deafening

Gerard Woodward

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About the Author

Gerard Woodward was born in north London in 1961. He studied painting in London and Falmouth and anthropology at the LSE. In 1989 he won the major E.C. Gregory Award and he was recently awarded an Arts Council Bursary.

ALSO BY GERARD WOODWARD

Householder

After the Deafening

Gerard Woodward

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

THE BIRDS

You haven't noticed,
But while you've been
Sitting there, nearly

A thousand birds
Have roosted in the playground
Behind you. The roundabouts

And swings are living
And feathery. And now
You remember that constant

Fluttering at the back
Of your mind, the cyclist
You knew about, the rook

That flew in his face
And ruined him.
It makes sense now.

There was a certain
Turbulence up there,
A rumour spreading

Through the rookery. The trees
Were a nightmare
To walk under.

THE PRINCIPLES OF FLIGHT

The astronauts are up
In von Braun's cherry tree
Throwing cherries at his red face.

They boast of their everlasting
Footprints, and the fuss
They kicked up on the Sea of Tranquillity.

Von Braun cries to himself, his
Old, gentle face measles
With these sweet

Little missiles he
No longer flinches from. The nearest
He ever came to the moon

Was when he first met Eva
That night in the Bay of Rainbows.
Christ she was like

A room full of machines, of marine
Engines built by Burmeister
And Wain of Copenhagen,

She was HMS
Cristoforo Colombo inside out.
It was she who severed

His ball and chain of gravity
Teaching him the principles of flight,

Of falling fruit.

And that arrogant
Orchard of Americans were
Welcome to their weatherless world.

THE KIDS

At first the adults didn't notice
When a pulley came into motion
And windmills made of paper
Cups turned as a cupful of sand
Descended. Later a nail suspended
On a length of cotton twisted
So the torque of thread, when released,
Sent it dizzying round like mad
Until the marble was triggered,
Tumbling down chutes, shafts
And staircases of balsa wood
To trigger something else, never
Reaching a real conclusion
Or purpose other than movement finishing.

They realised the rocking horse
Had failed or fallen when Charlene
Gripped her pink hammer and called
'Sue, Sue, give me the nail'.
Lego, Meccano, the dolls' house
Becoming a mansion, the train-set
Doubling its radius every other day,
The nursery couldn't contain them
So they'd moved to the garden and begun
To build. Blueprints were drawn
In non-toxic crayons. Architects
Asserted themselves and spires appeared
From which jacks told any time at all.
And no one noticed even when the house