

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright yellow orb on the left side of the horizon, casting a shimmering reflection on the water. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of trees and bushes are visible against the bright background.

Incidental Light

Christian Ward

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For Sara

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Contents

Hikmet	5
Fulton Street	6
The Conjuror's Monkey	7
Moth	8
Public Concern	9
Downwards We Fell	10
Gas Prices Fixed Until 2012	11
Paul	12
Baker, Population 600	13
El Campo Santo Cemetery, San Diego	14
Marker Buoy	15
The Line	16
Shifts	17
The Astronaut	18
The Colour of Zinc	19

Hikmet

i.m Nazim Hikmet

A little unknown folktale
is that Nazim Hikmet could tune
into radio transmissions using
the power of his heart alone.
Guards at Bursa Prison noticed
he used to stroke his breast
and a loud transmission
would start to come out of his
mouth. He liked to listen
to broadcasts of Shostakovich,
the news, underground speeches.
Months before he died guards
reported that he was curled up
in his cell, frantically trying
to tune into the weather report,
eager for news of thunder.

Fulton Street

After Walker Evans' photo 'Girl in Fulton Street'

This is not the city Frank
wrote about. There are no
hum coloured cabs or men
stopping for a cheeseburger
and malt shake. Lana Turner
has not died and the sky
has not worn its funeral coat.
This is the city made of glass
where people wear alien nouns
like fedora and cloche hat
and sniff the air like gundogs,
eager for the scent of their identity.

The Conjurer's Monkey

Locked inside the cupboard
I began to peel the wallpaper,
eager to find a source of light.
I found only the full moon

and several undiscovered
constellations, each orbiting
a former assistant's heart
held in place like a binnacle.

I swear I saw them wobble
when he walked past, each
footstep dragging them
to the cold lurking outside.

Moth

Landing on a photograph
of my father, it must have thought
the bulb of his scalp was a source
of light; just as for years I thought
the transmissions from his heart
were love.

Public Concern

Poverty was always expected
in our house, like train delays
or running out of money
before the end of the month.
We would hear it running up
the communal stairwell,
knocking on letterboxes
as if it was a figure of authority.
None of us said anything
when we watched it from the gap
behind our bedroom door,
silently taking an offering
of moth-worn socks, half eaten
packets of Walker's crisps
and a ham and cheese sandwich.
The goose-grey tower block
never fell when it finally left
decades later, kicking us in the back
when we weren't looking;
like the donkey in a game
of Buckaroo, eager to shed years
of unwanted weight.

Downwards We Fell

Facebook was the first to go,
followed by MySpace and Bebo.
Nobody could text or IM.
Phones drowned conversations
as if they were kittens.
Rolling blackouts preceded
the emergency broadcasts,
the tower blocks on the horizon
collapsing like a game of Jenga.
Knowing our fate was inevitable,
we made a bonfire of everything
we once held dear: laptops, iPods,
mobile phones and Blackberries.
Our bodies spun like electrons
around the flames as we danced
back to a freer age, back to a
feckless age.

Gas Prices Fixed Until 2012

i.m Laura Ward

The electricity bill came the same day
she died. But not the gas. That night

I dreamt of waiting by the letterbox
for it to arrive, sitting cross-legged

like a Buddha on a pile of flyers
for Domino's Pizza, the local Chinese

takeaway and the curry house down
the road. Months would pass, but no

bill would arrive. Out of desperation
I would pick up the phone and call

the gas company, listening to the
automated voice as if it was a priest.

Press 1 to report a gas leak.

Press 2 to tell us if you are moving.

Press 3 to update your account details.

Press 4 if you are changing suppliers.

How I hoped I would choose the first
option, reporting the made-up leak

like a confession I wanted to force out,
all the time remembering how

our relationship was invisible
and flammable like escaping gas.

Paul

used to carry his weather around with him
during lessons, clutching it tightly as he ran
from Physics in the morning to Maths
in the afternoon. We never saw him feed

it during lunch, but once, during Chemistry,
a rain cloud started to swell as the other boys
poked fun of the way he accentuated
the vowels whenever he spoke. One time,

he burnt my hand for fun in Biology
and that was when I caught a glimpse
of the lightning Paul rarely showed – horned,
and hungry for my tongue sharpened like an eroque.

Baker, Population 600

Everything in this town is melting:
Billboards for Las Vegas acts
Lance Burton and The Amazing
Jonathan. Signposts to Death
Valley. A pair of locals dressed
in cowboy hats and camo shorts
are becoming part of the pavement.
Even the Snow Patrol CD playing
in the car has started to drip.
Stopping for petrol, I notice three
Chinese women stepping off a coach.
They stare at their melting bodies
and kneel on the boiling asphalt,
pleased to be listening to a god.

El Campo Santo Cemetery, San Diego

I walk and study the graves.
Some are surrounded by large pebbles,
others by cast iron fences. Bill Marshall
and Juan Verdugo were hanged

on the 13th of December 1851 reads
one inscription. Jayme Lyons died
in November 1859 reads another.
Palm and yew trees dotted around

the cemetery act as watchmen, ready
to defend the dead against those
that desecrate their earth. Such
as the homeless man trampling

on their graves, for instance;
the noose marks around his neck
glowing like the remains of a dying star.

Marker Buoy

Marker buoys always float, even
in the absence of human paraphernalia
like cars or cities. We often forget
this, preferring to examine
their distinctive shape and colour.
The redness, for example, being
a protective layer against the sea's
encroaching mycelia. But we must
remember that this erosion
is not an act of warfare but a way
of understanding their solitude
and how it is possible they have carried
more weight in their small, hollow bellies
than all of the oceans put together.

The Line

He would utter it as if it were a Hollywood cliché, a throwaway line from one of the greats: *Stop worrying, everything will be okay.* But things often didn't, like the time he was short with the rent and ended up pawning most of his stuff, not knowing it was a load of old tat. *Stop worrying, everything will be okay* was his response, before he started to choke on a forgotten ruby lodged in his throat, snapping his trachea as if it were a wishbone; ready to pass on his luck.

Shifts

The picture framing shop
on the high street
has become the latest casualty
of the credit crunch,

its boarded up face
slowly being dismantled
by surgeons demanding
payment for the numerous

operations done over the years.
The neighbourhood dogs
have been seen near it at night,
dragging their bowls closer
to feed off its dripping blood.

The Astronaut

The astronaut you married
looks nothing like the photo.
His head is elongated
like a horses and there is no

mole on his left cheek.
Perhaps it was the way
he toyed with the Earth's
gravitational field during

spacewalks that stretched
the bone like silly putty,
desperate to be dragged
down so he could circle

your body once more
and rediscover its topography.

The Colour of Zinc

i.m Margaret Pierrepoint

Did you ever find out
the secrets he kept in the safehouse
behind his smile -

how many men and women
he really hung,
whether their children watched
as the floor slipped

from beneath their parents feet,
followed by a short, sharp crack
like the sound a horse makes
after it has finally been broken.

Did you ever notice
the marks they made around his neck,
forming a perfect O.

*Did he ever realise
you were the lithium to his zinc?*

Margaret Pierrepoint was the wife of Albert Pierrepoint, England's last executioner

Incidental Light

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