

## Glitch

It happens every day, little by little. A stealthy creep through the pages of the calendar. Ink fading, paper yellowing, words slipping away. Shadow fingers reaching across walls and cracking plaster in their wake, crumbling mortar, staining the vast concrete hides of tower blocks. A figure caught in the folds of air, in the moment before blinking, in the liquid curls of aqueous humour. Seen in rubbish, bursting binliners spilling their guts over the Clapham Road kerb, landfills oozing unnameable shit of a thousand varieties: plastic; paper; aluminium; animal, vegetable and mineral rancid stinking seagull magnet. Rats, chewing leftover takeaway, slipping through the sewers, scuttling up drainpipes, living in walls, floors, scratching over ceilings, dropping a crazy trail of shit in an encrypted word of warning...

Something that's been going round in his head for years.

You know it. Videos for sale down Tottenham Court Road, a big sexy bit of gash, huge silicon tits to jerk off to. Top shelf porn, newspapers, a bit off a laugh for the lads. Cars outside spewing lead and toxic gases. Shop fronts bathed in monitor radiation, phosphorescent glare, electromagnetic fields. A soup of analogue and digital messages leaking through us, the scream of microwaves splattering outwards from handheld transmitters, mobile phones clamped parasitically to ears and feeding from brains, squawking out their message in a baptism of cancer.

That should be enough. But somehow it isn't.

Glitch. A hole inside us. An aching desire for plot and structure, for everything to stop at the right moment, for buses to run on time...

How we stagger day to day. Hoping that one day the credits will roll, the sun sinking gorgeously against a flat horizon. Hand in hand...

unchanging

loving forever in a happily ever after

THE END

life cut like the reel of film. So that all of this doesn't keep on happening...

Doesn't keep on happening the way that it does. His body itches and he is hungry. He is sick of the summer heat and the lust it causes in the pit of his stomach. Cropped tops and short skirts bring it all back, a desperation for the oblivion of bliss. Like he would do it all over again...

I probably would, he thinks. I probably would.

I see I see they're holding hands, their images splashed across the mirror of a window, a ghost world of translucent shadowed colours, skins a hole upon ranks of newspapers and magazines and adverts in Punjabi for rooms to let. Hair black... Hands mesh, a bridge of veins across the dizzying space, the wall of skin too much, not enough just to love or to want to be / fascinated with her hands the pitch black depths of eyes, raven's eyes / his dog-eyed look, he wants to put her on like a skin, absolve himself, disappear into his fantasy.

The Shambling Mound, down by the Strand or seen crossing Waterloo Bridge, face pulled in a growl, wandering into the traffic and scattering cars, tourists stopping to point or take photographs. Moving wreckage, a record of lost city detritus, saving the unloved and giving it succour. Gotta keep warm, gotta keep dry, bag after bag after bag wrapped round the unseen body, eyes and beard and snarling mouth the only clues to humanity, a Wizard of Oz anthropomorph, trash made man, the shifting forgotten rubbish of our lives touched by a shadowy hand and given motion, suddenly driven on with all the same burning and pointless desires

warmth

food

a good fuck

love, if we can get it. Someone else to call our own, to hope to melt into, to hate, to fight.

Too much happens. The skitter of rats across back alleys pillaging rubbish. Fleeting shadows across the

amber pools of streetlights. By the pub a drug deal, black supplying white, a tiny package left behind as the dealer walks away, white man's hand closing.

"I've just shot someone in the chest with a .22 pistol" told over the phone to the emergency services. Drowning, lungs stuttering in blood, high walls of the estate closing in upon darkening vision. Two other men get shot, both in Kennington.

We saw the police lights further up the road as we crossed to enter the park. Sat within the rose garden as the sky greyed to blackness overhead, the flowers growing darker and more dangerous, petals gaping open in deep reds and blues, inky shadow spilled out from rich infected throats...the silence hummed, last insects mazily threading a path towards the dazzling constellation of streetlights lining the road.

Maybe it was the heat, grinding down, bleaching colours towards grey, the air shuddering. Bodies reduced to dark wraiths slipping through its veil. No let up, no escape, cafes verged with tables, the young and rich and in it for kicks khaki pants fat wallet pushed up cleavage, laughing, hair scraped back behind one ear, competition, the alcohol makes you good, gives you a walk, colours sliding to every side, balled and distorted as if slipping through water. It makes you so good you drink more, body loosened, sweat standing out like jewels

all this stuff

drink and cars and shit, barracked in the bogs, foot planted against the door, snorting white dreams from a carefully cleaned patch on the cistern lid

remembering for a second all the shit she sold you, that scornful mockery, that laugh like light fingers slithering across flesh

It's okay, it's cool, cos we're having fun

drink

car

girls

light a spliff, kick back and try to chill but there's them fucking cunts stealing our show, our fucking shit, some talentless shite anyone can do it better we do it better voices on TV, splashed against walls, shop windows, sports pages this car this fucking ring this is what I think ghosts of German bombers thunder overhead, timeslipped, payloads dropped into the future: streets ripped from foundations, towerblocks blossom in sheets of flame, ruptured innards, metal piping and iron rods, burnt PC casings, a television, shattered, tumbling slowly earthwards...A bloody fantasy flooding the body as the sun dies, a bloated burst yoke sack, a failed birth, split and diluted slowly into blackness, lights slipping by, numbers, pedestrians clustered by bus stops, leaving off-licenses, women closing curtains, police cars sliding the other way, blue electric flicker of light, accelerate, street after street ladders past, shift the handelbars and weave through the cars, road lit like spun amber glory - follow the yellow brick road, devil's eyes hanging in red mocking threat, go on, do it, step up a gear, the constant rage of speed, white lines slithering beneath the wheels, the hungry waiting asphalt

Oval station flashes past, blue rimmed floodlit mouth to hell, war memorial, the White Bear, Kennington Station freeze frame blur, pulling level, slowing for the lights

reflections gleaming back from the car windows, streaked amber lozenges of light, reach into your jacket and watch yourself pulling out the gun, levelling it, like pointing the muzzle straight back to yourself (another man inside, yourself, trapped into exactly the same actions)

firing at that thing you know. She's in everything

self shattered in the rain of glass, the sky falls in, trigger squeezed again and again as the lights change, something screaming, a squeal of brakes and the burn of hot rubber

gaining speed slipping crazily across the road

shattered the dream, heading further in towards the gory heart of Elephant and Castle.

Something seen in the eyes of men. We who do not create. Black empty spaces cupped by gristle, twin holes, depthless. Corridors into the sucking entropy of our hearts, the cold...that flick of violence like lightening against the stillness, anything to move our limbs...knifed in an alley, a fight down the pub, glasses smashed and face ripped, hot blood jetting into cold air. Tramps kicked in at night, dogs killed with catapults, the unanswered South London dead weeping their lives out over dirty paving slabs. Oliver Cromwell, masked by Milton as the fallen angel, leading out what he thought would be the war to end wars, a desperate hope for apocalypse, to usher in the New Jerusalem, the Eternal End, the righteous dissolving into heaven. And maybe he's up there now, a cloaked and bloody warrior angel laughing down.

The longest day. Sunset has swept its bloody beam over the brick and asphalt maze of Kennington, lingering like a lover over the horns of tower blocks even as the earth falls into shadow. The horizon becomes dark and muddied with cloud, the sky a dying blue. It is over, city lit by the dim aurora of a million electric suns, jewels cast upon a dark lake.

Sunrise saw revellers and protestor break the cordon around Stonehenge, dancing on the stone lintels and mocking the cameras. Several days before, two of the Avebury Avenue stones had been defaced with paint, in an apparent protest over GM food.

Waters rising from the dams, sinking whole villages in India.

Lowest ever turnout in European Elections. Seventeen million people in the UK watch Edward marry Sophie. I got home and switched the TV on to hear the BBC discussing Sophie's shoes. I recorded the event, a series of faulty scratches upon paper later translated to low res laptop fonts.

Friday. City workers warned not to wear suits (but hey! it's dress down day! who would have anyway?) for fear they'll be attacked. A march goes through the City, fronted by various protest groups, that soon burgeons into a protest about *everything*. Smash capitalism, starting with the McDonald's on Cannon Street, the Futures Market. Graffiti flung up like barricades. A former Reclaim The Streets marcher, I was asked by a friend why I wasn't there this time. "Too much work - couldn't get the time off." I was standing by a cash machine in Clerkenwell when the riot vans sped past, eight of them, the police inside frantic and eager, hauling on the battle gear. Pictured stones and spraycans, bodies clambering over London Wall, smashed glass hanging in shining teeth before the throats of expensive lobbies - fitters dragged out over the weekend, cleaners wiping at daubed tags and slogans. Debris, flyers, all kinds of promotional litter and trash smeared across the streets. Welcome to the party.

On the tube, the everyday stuff. A girl with an elided past, sitting opposite me in the carriage and talking in a loud voice about her line dancing classes and pop songs on the radio. Plainly showing off, dark eyes wide and shining like pools of black water, lip curled in an elegant derision she's plainly seen somewhere and is desperate to master. Knows she's good looking, knows she's got attention, singing to her kid sister who covers her ears and wails...Staring across, hungry for eyes, any eyes that will confirm what she thinks of herself, waiting for that chasm to open and swallow her.

People on TV, cattle carcass bodies heading for the hills with a crate of beans and some ammo, convinced that the whole shit's gonna blow, the computer glitch that'll launch the world's atomic arsenal...

...it would be so easy. A simple end to all this schlock and horror...

But life does insist on living.

He dreams.

A buboe of light blistering up from the valley, the sky peeling back, bruised with a sudden flush of cloud. Ground welded into a glassy sheet, shock-rocked, firestorm riding the soundwaves, windows burst, walls explode, a hail of burning masonry, skin torn from bones, cars stripped back to blackened and twisted exoskeletons. A roar of fury, roads cracked and buildings sliding into a collapsed carnage of metal and glass, forests grilled to charcoal stumps, rivers boiled to their bare and ugly beds.

No survivors. No resurrection.

In the silence of the aftermath, fires licking the knuckles of skeletal buildings, dead fingers raised up towards the hidden heavens, there is the sudden hush of rain...Thick like blood, and hot, and sick with poison, hissing and slithering down upon the fevered earth. The mark of the end.

It would all be so easy.

And then there is life. Harsh, impossible life.

Everywhere I go I see the same thing. The same body. In squat brick buildings, heavy shouldered and heaving from the earth. Stark and beautiful, poured from concrete and caught in moonlight, cutting a shape against the stars. The dancing Shakti forms spilling out from car exhausts and cigarettes, asthma and cancer maidens. In faces splashed on newspaper covers or staring up from the gutter; in drops of blood falling against asphalt. In the empty waste of a hot blue sky her eye is the sun, searing down, nurturing and killing.

She is destruction. The Power of Time, the fault that brings a building down, a heart attack, a car crash, a baby opening its eyes for the very first time. She's the beauty of the web drawn in hunger. The will to survive. The terror of every day and the impossible hopes of escape. She is the Glitch, the faultline

shimmering in air, the world ending day by day in cancer, murder, love, desire. She is the hope in us that it will all one day stop.

And yet she drives it on. She is the one who keeps us alive.

Jethro Perkins

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