

Glass heart

They wanted to make her shave her head
Thick hair falling like snakes against the lino
He had laid down twenty years before,
A sacrifice
Smash glass jewellery, wipe away make-up
Hungry, body failing, skin hung heavy over bones
Insulin injections, friends retreating one by one
Over the rim
Her actions, they told her, could send him straight to heaven
She must act the good wife
Even if she didn't believe
Because who could tell?

He isn't going anywhere, she thought
Half to herself and half to her saint
A gift from her family before the wedding
In a locket, on a silver chain, a picture
Something to say she believed in
She defied him now to answer back
(half afraid that he would)
And listened to his silence map the sky
Reading the brutal whispers of the cars outside
The shriek of jets, airbrake banshees
Heading for the fatted ox of Heathrow
Wondering where was his voice,
The word of God through him defying her
But reminding herself that she wouldn't hear miracles
If she didn't really believe...

II

She's gone, much as if she was never there
The smell of her drained from his sheets
Her hair no longer wound through his clothes
They were just incompatible, she said
Chalk and cheese
He had told her that he loved her
That she couldn't just walk away
But she did, leaving nothing
The little bottles gone from his bedside
The clothes strewn across the floor just his
And the spaces where she used to be
Her shape a hole inside his heart

He still dreams his dreams of altered lines
Hopes hidden behind screaming prophecies
Gods of analogue wires, conjurors of money
Animal fat pumped in lips, graphics packages
Airbrushed carcasses into animal perfection
And postcarded, cooing from every secret space on the wall
An itemised list of premium rate numbers
In the cul-de-sac of flesh,
The tangled hands of chemical anticipation

Hunched over the Mirror, watching himself watching,
Twitching beats, an accidental heart
Beating outside of him, keeping him alive
A thump from the sky, bringing music to the masses
Another crime in the cradle of streets
Helicopter illuminations, the only chance of fame
Heavens cracked and on fire
Visions of hands in star bursts
Letters inscribed across his mind
Every word slowly breaking across his skin
Spilling like tears, painting him in
From his space against the void
Half held conversations haunting every step
Shadows condensed from the skin of his palms
Pressed against the screen, still wanting her
Whispers of mechanised voices
Pixilated colour
250 million hues
Screamed in phosphorus, electromagnetic fields
Particles bent to smash against glass
Crystals switching position
The chasm between the toll
Of imagined syllables, all the things she could have said
And has said since, but only in dreams
Utopias formed after dark
A mask of make-up leaked across the gulf
Running rivers over lips in an unfelt kiss
Drinking the genie from the TV
(no subtitles
A salacious fear of sex and violence
Mirroring his own, a hideous pantomime
Accidentally caught after the watershed)
The voices of authority
Light entertainment no surprises
Every suspicion he ever had confirmed

Their denial that there was anyone else
Was a mask of vanity, looking into eyes
In the hope of seeing the ghosts of others
The space in his dreams where her lips should whisper
The plea
'fall in love with me'
Never admitted, but never denied
Her skin become a mask of waterfront light
Eyes black holes into unspoken want
Her game pieces shifted around him
Sick with possibilities he could never acknowledge
Alcohol making him dumb
And longing for music
Two step thunder, deep house, dub
Anything to drive the angels from him
Flesh luxuriantly exposed in shadows
Hungry mouths painted over
The sick suck of possibility
(skin of the nose perforated
And swaddled in mucus
A nosebleed every night but glittering eyes
And an irresistible smile
New skin every Friday
Scattered clothes across the floor
In sacrifice)
And a babble in his head, frequency drifting
Plug pulled, the voices continue
Fogged in static, the sound of her new life
Speaking in a thousand tongues

III

Stars dropping to the city's rim
The falling arms of dancing figures
Written in the dreadlocked trails of smoke
Bowing to the waiting river
Bombs shuddering through the city's bones
And echoing into the future

The old man's dead
All his Bollywood dreams and Bombay nights
Washed away on the tide of the Thames
A flock of cheap paper petals following him
Like butterflies, colours that burn the skin

The chemical kiss of Durga's fire
Dancing on the wind

And the empty fist in the chambers of her heart
Forty years closed liked the shutter of the camera
Left her twenty years old, drawn into the hall
To the man she never met
The cinema reel of memories
A good film on a warm night
Walking wide boulevards, watching the ocean
The rusted hulks of broken ships
Their orange bones rearing from the sand
City luminous with noise at their backs
Heaving with blessings, whispered sweet nothings
She still hoped would one day come true

Watching her daughter in the cold grey drizzle
A dream in her hands, moulded
To the right shape
Named for every fading moment she could never rescind
The ghosts of her summertime
Remembered as a lover's touch
Nerves still aching, a bridge back to him
When even the pictures have gone.

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