

## The Golden Age

White moon face of the clock, hands laddering the darkness.

Tick.

The dead queen, a cross for every point her body rested overnight. Guarding cold, still flesh, a pilgrimage of love lavished upon this corpse.

Tick.

Her world still hanging, half-glimpsed in pools of darkness that shimmer beside the flanks of the hulking station, in the lightless eyes of hotel rooms and the winding black-bricked streets. King's Cross locked in the nightmare of that body, travelling slowly back.

Tick.

The motionless constellations written in the secret pattern of her death, steady flaring amber, a puja of headlights like torches against the water, the cars howl onwards, wide green eye winking out to the baleful redevye curse.

Tick

The clock stops, a shudder of old machinery. A wheel cracks, somewhere in the chamber

She flicks her tired and hungry eyes away, not interested. I'm not money, I'm not here, I don't matter, a ghost among the needs and desires of this place, blasted black moon eyes and blood lips stained over grey skin, hair dyed black dyed blonde dyed red whichever way you want it skirts rising over hips cheap and tacky underwear slicksweat parade of mannequins. A smell on the wind, the crude danger of filthy sheets and broken mattresses, walls stained nicotine yellow and spattered with mould, disease-ridden warrens of shifting sweating flesh the fold of money cheap dreams skin stretched in fakery, aching drug longing in crazy mosaic eyes. Shapes softened by the amber smear of the lights, a faery nightmare of darkness and deep colour, nothing real, strange cries and lost looks sunk in the night, and under the cruel light of the sun, this too shall fade and disappear...

A rattle of heels like rain, a parade, promises

plastic women stretch perfect bodies behind windows, clouded in the latest dreams, a mocking echo of the flesh pulled itself up short to watch, open mouthed and wanting, our ghosts escaped through the looking glass and splashed onto the scene of this perfect designer world, faulty goods casting longing eyes over the real thing...

cocktail bars heaving, expensive West End nightclubs opening their doors for the night, strict dress policies and paparazzi skulking by the exits, limos cruising the roads like white submarines. Shops shut, metal rattling down, a trail of gold as the lights lead down Park Lane and off towards Knightsbridge. Photographs, soundtracks, smells, life lived at movie pace, walls peeled back and the floor flickers in celluloid unreality, spine shivers heading down through Mayfair towards Regent's Street and Piccadilly Circus. Everything for sale: priced, tagged, hung in the window. Clothes whispering revolutions, oozing desire, I listen to mantras hissed out through the crackling air of Piccadilly Circus, thumped from Tower Records and the cheap one-slice-stop pizza parlours, fast food chains, the gory publicity for another musical. All the things, the sugar and spice and all things nice, the mobile phone romance and Beatles repackaged hits, a jug of cocktails

down Tiger Tiger watching jawdropping cars slithering down Haymarket, knowing you're watched through the big glass front, another dream shining darkly behind glass, underground cinemas beaming art-house films as the tubes rattle by, the spill of the golden haze out into the night, calling out...

...and it rains, turning the streets into rivers of gold...

The walls blur and shift about her, clothes scraping uncomfortably across skin, stairwell bright white light sharp fingers gouging at her eyes, bare bulb hanging burning at the end of a line, shadows cutouts against greasy gaudy paper, body leaving arcs across space as ghosts fall from her figure, sensation sunk away in dizziness, constant pain of infected cunt burning inwards, upwards.

Out into the soft golden haze of streets, skirt riding high over bruised thighs, trail of headlights like fingermarks drawn upon a window, eyes in rearview mirrors watching back as she falls away from them. Blank glass, the houses she passes, thick curtains and the occasional slideshow splashes of television. Bricks and mortar hiding bodies hung before the screen, food slowly simmering on the stove, the hiss of sweat and violence, rats snapping at binbags, vomit crusting toilet bowls. Her head sings with rumours of gang rape besides the railway line up at Caledonian Park, another girl cut up just off York Way.

just stuff she's been told. Meaning almost nothing, it's happened anyway, been happening for years, it doesn't matter who you tell

nobody does nothing about it

The scent after rain is sick with car exhaust, the drunk and screaming, alcohol running off their breath like fire, puddles in the pavement turning to pools of gold. Photographs pulled when she was twelve, the heat of being wanted, a dizzy edge of power, smash the fucking smooth glass world she sees all around her. Bleed out want

just to hit that peak for one moment, that's enough. Endless hunting to recreate it

She can get away without food, mostly. Keeps herself thin. Waits patiently for her friend to turn up with the methadone. Some shit about a party next week, she nods, heads for home, striated by lights, she's on stage to an endlessly leaving audience of cars

one day...

one day I'll get out, it's not fun anymore

but first get home. Red canals slithering thinly, flushed with toxins, virus, death reaching out its slow hand to every cell in her body, she follows her dreams northwards from the sump of King's Cross, frowning brows of terraced houses, slack-jawed mouths of doors, lost tourists, fat white ladies in big motors, she doesn't really notice now, sees money. Kids still out, teenagers hooting out insults, more sound to her voodoo mantra, waste spreading in her wake. Home, behind a broken gate, a rusted lock, tattered curtains drawn the lightbulb's gone again but she can see, everything tracing its own light, objects leave ghosts, shimmering memories in the spaces they have been.

Shit turned to rock, she's breaking into a sweat, nerves flickering with desperate messages, stomach a rotting bag, punctured, cunt itching head drawn tight skin pounding

visions of lights, elegant legs and good clothes, she hears laughter ringing in her

ears and wonders if anybody's home

but it's just laughter

a fancy, taken wing  
gotta get out but not like this, panting and groaning, hands shaking, she watches herself, a bad reel of film shuddering across the screen, spiders stretched their legs tight across the inside of her skull, white noise hiss in her ears  
breath  
she'll get sorted. But not now. Now she needs the methadone, bitten by air, her itching cunt, skin raising itself and starting to crawl  
open the bottle and draw the smooth silky stuff down, freedom, hands easing her skin  
I'll be okay  
she lays down on the mattress, walls hanging crazily, singing hymns and whispering in unknown tongues, an arc of memories blistering through her muscles  
her eyelids flicker close and her breathing slows...

A dream of boats upon the river, surface smooth black glass. Each boat bearing burning torches, white flame, a kernel of light against the great dark heart of the city. Figures sing, cast petals upon the water, lotus flowers... And in the last boat, bright in firelight, eyes glassy and calm, lips pulled in a cruel tight smile, a carved alabaster form. Durga...  
The boats slide on, into unknown waters.

The night teems - a million million tiny sounds. Distant stars flicker. Centipedes upon the shower floor, the tongueless song of cars, light leaking softly out from windows. Air thick with unheard words, conversations passing through skin, messages filling the sky. Every streetlight held aloft like the warmth of an unbroken heart. Rooftops jumbled in a thousand secret panoramas, tv aerials glistening as cats slip across broken tiles, foxes in narrow alleys rummage through rubbish, rats scatter, squeezing through a rough brick hole and into the warmth to breed. Secret streets drawn against familiar lines, joining the amber dots to form a new city hidden in the drudge and pain of the old. A wild hope hidden just behind the window pane, watching out over the huddled ranks of terraced houses and hump-backed churches, the dreaming lights of towerblocks.

Watching the sleeper with a screaming heart.

Rising slowly from the vales and out towards the massy darkness of Crystal Palace, its crowning needles punched through the membrane of sky, a slew of blood, dreamstuff infecting the air, slithering down the roads and alleys, spreading silently outwards over officeblocks and houses. We hear it whisper and bend to its dreams, watching the vast ballets it plays behind the night, figures of giants acting out a masque, following our fantasies and desires as we remain stilled, this voice to our ears, staring resolutely at its ghostly glow.

Disease taking hold, inflaming tissue  
Slow hand stratching through my body  
Got my throat, muscles contract  
pain  
awake again, unknown faces  
left ghosts against my eyes, memories  
yesterday laid like a floorplan

twists and blind alleys made clear  
as if there was never any other way  
inescapable/smell  
sweating out  
Underground, cattle truck, shit and honking  
scanning faces, limbs  
bodies pushing out at clothes, tongue  
lips slick and dangerous  
black moon eyes, holes in the sky  
tunnels in tunnels, brown-circled eclipse  
she turns two pages, lazily,  
and then sinks her head on his shoulder  
mouth parts  
gaping, incomplete, a questioning 'oh'...  
shivering air, bathed in messages  
newspaper headlines  
text files stored on mobile phones  
dot matrix words slipping away  
voice like a bell, a threat, a promise  
'The next station is Kennington  
Charing Cross Branch'  
clutching at my throat  
these pictures. I snap quick glimpses  
inbetween waking, the cars still hissing  
on wet asphalt below my window  
sliding into metal cracking cyclops light  
roar of stale tunnel air, rivetted bones  
she comes  
swoon across unreachable and minute spaces  
held still from the light scattering from skin  
a resonance, the valkyrie scream of rails  
relentless, relentlessly damned, carrying onwards  
spread like a stain across concrete  
even as it's in you, you're in it, desecrating,  
unravelling  
i stretched a hand out across time  
to touch her, a memory held within glass  
the light trapped, palm to palm with a ghost  
slick sweating skin the distance between us  
a sudden glitch in vision  
warping the windows, she steps through  
shattering the lines and the angles of time  
myself dull, humbled  
feeling sick watching her mouth open  
words whispering out, unheard  
colour hammering down

as the pattern of her alters, swiftly shifts away,  
the one painful moment of hope  
dovetailing with memory  
And I wake one final time  
Hissing latenight cars as my audience  
Leaking out despair into an empty room

Laughter - a dropped stone. The screech of car wheels. Ride the tunnels behind St Pancras, the fleeing taxis, commuters, big spenders, car lights like knives exposing bare legs, the rotted arc of a smile, body held in a desperate sign. The station rises in a hex against the skyline, bad magic, the faery glisten of dreams of gold. A shimmering vision covering a wasted hulk, a longing stretched its arms beautifully at the sky, spell cast over choking streets (insides flowered mould, collapsed ceilings and rotten floorboards, the institution cream and green of British Rail peeling thickly from crudely cut partitions.) I watch a walking autopsy, tape rewound just far enough back, eyes dead moons unlit by any hope, jack-knifed to life only by need...a girl drawing a white line, a tube ride, cracked heart and shattered surface, choked, clogged, wasting, a cradle of needles, visions of rusted motorbikes laying dead in dark canal waters, condoms littered like slugs in an alleyway, churches built on bones and raised to salve the blood of the slaughterers...she sees roses, perfectly formed and fragile, a weal of blood blistered from the stem...the glistening flame of the streetlights reflected from a wet roadway...Clutched pincer closeness like a rush of glucose, the beautiful sky reached down to envelop her, the cold steel line like a friend, the walls bending down to look, stains fading in the roaring light, darkness shrinking beyond the sheen of the windows, all the spires of the churches puncturing the sky, bleeding the river black glass blood rolling outward to bliss, the ghosts of warehouses flooding their luxury rented bones with the memory of grain and spices, inhabitants petrified in this past dream of empire. Following the lap of the river she closes her eyes, whiteness leaking out from her heart and numbing her veins, her skin, the horror of the night consumed in warmth, leaving her body borne out on the water, past grinning lights and golden streets, out towards the sea.

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