

MADE IN DUBLIN

THERE IS A THREADED PULSE that runs beneath the surface of this street. Sometimes, in one of those quiet, eerie moments of the night when the city briefly stills itself, as if to open out its sighs, you can almost hear it — you can hear it as a kind of low, insistent throbbing, almost a rhythmic sequence, and at once you'll know that it contains dark information. It tells us that we are all being drawn in the same general direction. It tells us that we are all being led along the thread of the pulse. It tells us that we are all on the way out.

The city is disappearing all around us. Day by day, and night by night, we are drawn down beneath the surface of its streets to its underworld, and here we will for a short while linger and learn to leave our time behind.

Here, too, each of us (every guttersnipe Orpheus and every bargain-shop Eurydice) will suffer the cuts of memory's knives —

First love.
The last time we knew bliss.
The music that we heard.
The pain that was suffered;
the white screech of our anxieties.
The faces of our enemies and worse,
much worse, our friends.

Diminuendo, in musical notation, marks the fade out or the dying fall. Age, too, is measured out in a slow diminuendo. Slowly we make the distance from ourselves. The movement of the street becomes slower, the street becomes longer, and the city becomes the body. It speaks to us in a dying fall.

And we can hear, just now, as a pocket of silence opens and allows it, the threaded pulse that tells us again our time is passing.

ONE NIGHT IN EARLY JUNE I was crossing O'Connell Bridge heading north with no notion on my mind more complicated than a bowl of noodles on Parnell Street when I was stopped up by a young addict.

You were supposed to meet me here last week, he said.

I had never seen the boy before, but I was not surprised by his delusion — as we spoke, he was dreamily popping little blue pills from a plastic card and swallowing them. These are the opioids that are bought over the internet to break down reality and wipe the identity clean.

I don't think you know me at all, I said, and I gave him a couple of euro and I made to move on, but gently he stopped me up again with a palm pressed lightly to my shoulder.

Come here and I tell you, he said. I think I seen the angel.

When was this? I said.

Just now, he said.

Where? I said.

Along the quays, he said. Just here.

And yes, he told me, in an awed but certain tone, yes he had seen the angel above the river, and she had spoken to him even, but he could not recall exactly what it was that she had said.

I walked on, drawn on the threaded pulse that runs beneath the streets, past the taxi rank and the Garden of Remembrance, and I wondered what it was that the angel above the river had said.

She said —

This place will endure and you will not. The flesh will fall from your arrogant bones. But these streets exist through each of their every moment still, because on the surface of the city all of time is unfixd, and the river will move as it always does through these gaudy lives and carnal songs, and the buildings and the bridges will creak and sway and collapse; and there will be nights again when better men and women come by here for a while, and there will be nights again when worse.

The Poles were drinking in their Parnell Street bars; the Chinese ate busily at late suppers; the rainbow flags flew all along North Great George's Street.

THE AGONIES OF LOVE —

She was supposed to meet me on Tuesday night — and I'm stood there, I'm like a bloody sap, I'm jawing on the air — but she did not show up. I waited for an hour. Now I don't think she's that into me anymore.

He was supposed to take me to meet his mother but he did not turn up. I think what it is? Is that he's ashamed of me.

I can't stand not to be around her anymore. I don't want to see her happy with him. I don't want to see her happy with anybody else.

His family? They all hate me. I know this. They all go quiet when I come in. They just look at their phones. They don't talk to me. I can see what they're thinking. They're thinking... her?

I believe she's sleeping with somebody else.

I can't get him out of my mind.

I'm obsessed by her. I can't sleep or eat or live right because of her. All I want to do is think about her and think about what it would be like to get to kiss and hold her.

I never believed in this old talk you hear about thunderbolts and the sky opening up and instant love shooting down and all the fireworks and the earth moving and all of that stuff but then what happened? She opened her sweet mouth and said like five kind words to me and I thought I was going to have to be hospitalized. I thought I was going to have to be put on a drip.

So I turned, acting all casual, or as casual as I could make it, and I dropped the hard word on her — I said, are we on?

We love each other. That's all that matters. And I would kill for him, actually.

I want her to know one thing and one thing only. She will regret this. I was the one for her. Until her dying breath. She will regret this.

He think he Daddy Cool. He think he Mister Somebody. But he an Ass Wipe is what he is.

Love? Don't be talking to me about love.

I LISTEN TO MONEY SINGING every day of my life. It is the mad song that sends me helter skelter around these streets. It calls to me from the high windows. It belts a brassy chorus from the rooftops. I try not to let it get into my head but it gets into my head and turns it into a sack of snakes.

Money makes my lips move as I walk down the street. I do my sums on my lips as I wait for the lights to change. Is it money that will tell me when my light turns green?

I am down on my knees for it.

I am racing through the night for it.

I am hurting people for it.

I want it so very badly.

I need it right now.

But then at the edges of my life — and always this is towards the end of the day; it’s a feeling of the dusklight — I can see the limits appear and I know that I will never have enough. I feel like I’m constantly battling through my life about, I don’t know, about five grand short? Five grand would sort out absolutely fuckloads. But where is it going to come from?

I can hear money singing to me in the night. It is like the taunting of an old love song. It says that I am all you’ll ever need of sweetness and light — this is what money sings to me.

Money could turn my life into cinema.

I can taste it on my lips.

I need its protein and its salt.

I need its sugar-love.

AND THE NEXT THING, I was walking down from the Five Lamps when something very odd happened to me. As I came along Summerhill there was a sensation of floatiness — is all that I could call it — and it was by the moment getting stronger. By the time I hit Parnell Street I could feel the surface of the path falling away from beneath me — it was as if I was rising up. I don’t know how to describe it really. It was like that feeling from years ago when you have a whitener in a nightclub. That feeling when suddenly the music goes woozy and your tongue goes thick and you feel as if you’ve been lifted up away from yourself. Hoisted! Hoisted is the word I am looking for. And suddenly in this way I was lifted above the street — I was way, way above it — and I could see it clearly for the first time.

I could understand then the way that it makes us move. The way that it dictates the pattern of our stride. The way that it makes our forearms beat back the fume-thick air.

And as I looked down I saw the way that time could come loose. And then the traffic disappeared. And the Chinese writing faded away. And the horses appeared. And there were gas lamps. There was a fight outside a public house between men in hats. There was a brasser in a doorway, calling. There was a child looking at her face in a puddle and clowning.

It became still an older time down there. I could smell the countryside nearby. The wailing of beasts. The heavy, thudding movement of a stockyard. Animal screams.

And then it started to spin forward again on a loop. The Chinese writing emerged again. The traffic announced its recovery with coughing and barks. I was suspended above the future of the street. There was music of a type I could not identify. It came from a kind of underground cavern. Faux-leather suits were in and these came in fabulous tones — there were inky rioja reds, hot pinks, cool forest greens. There were big silver boots and wedge heels. There was a new type of streetlight that was dimmer and gave a somewhat gloomy air, an eeriness even. But the people moved in the same way still. They beat back the air with forearm smashes. They did not pause to check their stride.

And then a great silence enveloped the street and it held for a moment, and then more, and everything stopped, and was frozen, and it felt something like peace.

THE EVENING IS SPREAD OUT across the sky.

A child’s bawl flies from a high window.

Guided by voices, a taxi-cab roams.

Sometimes it feels like you’re on the next street over and you can’t quite hear yourself.

There is intrigue on the street.

There are assignations.

A moment from 1965 plays out again.

A moment from 1843.

A moment from 2134.

Night falls.

The lights rise up.

There is laughter in the crevices.

The fat man shows a mouth of vandalized teeth.

The sexy young woman walks a ritual path.

Until morning comes...

... and the beer barrels are sent to bounce and roll into the basements of the pubs — the sound of this has both a timeless and a jaunty quality.

A sizzle of fat from the fryers of the Vietnamese.

As we walk we sail into clouds of

hilarity,

rage,

lust.

And beneath the street now there is a threaded pulse.

It tells us once more that

time is passing.

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