

Chopper

Flight is just a fling – I said
as we first twisted,
two pivoting feathers,
the ground fallen away.

Up here, ahead the coast
for miles, the cities trivial,
hung like hummingbirds
hover, we can't hang forever.

Some night, compelled
to scoop you into whirling arms,
I'll hesitate, whisper you are safe
and hoist you up
into the rotor blades.

Dungeness

We came across a place the sea could not haul back.
A gravel tide of huts clinging to the gorse
in stern focus, sufficient, direct
and not without charm. The town's
off-grid reactor was being closed down.

We studied its redundant calculations:
a pebble dash geometry of forgotten outbuildings;
and under a damp grey that hovers milkily,
the sea. We fought through flights of shingle.
It felt like loitering.

A gull marks the grey above, a scratch on metal
over a hazy film of industry. The power station
glistening cold, a squint like an old dog
relishes its role, a reputation that precedes;
without it the beach would have a pier.

At the Pilot Inn Brenda deals in disinfectant,
the radio blasting off last night;
sets scorching tea succinctly on coasters
next to pictures of the food; whilst in the corner,
somehow congruous, sits a television star

and photographer to decorate him against the shore;
because this place is not unconscious.
It sees its reflection in the guttering of things,
in the damp gallery of salvage
strewn like pagan relics on the beach,

in the brown field sketches of homes
tethered loosely together in the shadow
of Vesuvius. Plant traffic beats up
a smoke of grit: they're shoring up the shingle
before the coastline is gone forever.

The Flat Upstairs

Recently, a soft piano tune
of pee on water moves this
house to waken. A splash
of summer wine as familiar
as the upstairs yawn when
drenched from the shower
- - - she answers the phone.

Here is below a fabric of
syllables, muffled and low,
that settle like a gently
intruding conspiracy of
snow; barefoot in her element,
honest as a broken chandelier,
if only she could hear herself.

Framed is a partition of lives
a constant, unflinching
portrayal of what this is and was -
underneath a warm roof of sex
I sleep, his car parked outside,
what can't be forgotten set in
the stone of a retaining wall.

Laid out like a city sprawls
she walks all over me,
but later, as evening softens
the din of the street, entwined
we lie, inkblot copies through
a paper floor as meaningless as
our separate rental agreements.

Curley's wife

For Jyoti Singh Pandey

The barn door frames, exposes
a small poetic disturbance
to which the men like killers turn.
So she pulses; throws this gist,
all twisted polishing. Those curls
on the hay are kindling, the softness
of the light reposes, the air thickens
with the scent of *joy* artfully applied.

Rouged lips, a smear of signature
on a modernist massacre and angles
like a mocking question mark
that looks for Curley but won't stop billowing.
It's a glob of something fissile
this cotton thing, this apparition
that speaks so brittle; liable for attention
in the dullness of this place.

Those shapes have scattered now
but something of them infiltrates
too often. The high pink walls
are tantamount, a feather down
the back of invitation. A conscience
that wastes half the world to purge
the vying gods within them:
its women are prey.

Out there in the hot sun
Soledad feels like the world sometimes,
that grinding sweat of desperation.
Beneath the leathery tarpaulin
of the ranch, men go to sleep
with thoughts of error on her lips,
knowing that one thing is certain, it is she
who started the fire; it is she who must burn.