

## *Helicopters*

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

You know we can't hang forever  
don't you? The coast ahead  
of us for miles, the cities trivial,  
dangling while hummingbirds hover.

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.