

## Group C

Lyra

'A ghost story for winter'

Headlights like imposters weave through the invisible silhouettes of trees, luminous, radiant in this encapsulating world of darkness. Shadows pass beyond my hazy protection of glass, time has stopped. We are trapped in an endless temporal sphere. The road lies ahead, twisting through the civilisation of trees, unspooling eternally, its curves and bends seeming infinite. We are foreigners in this land. He sits beside me, motionless, his profile unmoving, like that of a classical portrait. Like his very being, his face now lies in shadow. Only the bridge of his nose is clear to me, a silvery crescent in the darkness. I have spent years studying the face that still remains a mystery, following the echoes of his footsteps in a relentless chase. He stares into the inky night, his eyes inscrutable, as though gazing into another world, his reflection multiplying in the window, splitting his face into glinting shards. I have looked for his soul in his eyes, and in turn lost mine, his glance revealing only fragments of memories, intangible, woven deep into the endless thread of time. I cast my eyes back outside, the rain tracing shapes on the clouded window.

My thoughts travel to a time when his face was unfamiliar, elusive, its angles and lines unknown to me, like a newly minted coin. Crossing a metaphysical threshold, the imposing door solemnly closed behind me, immersing me in a world of arches, pillars and hollow, soothing silence. The last farewell of November sun cast a stream of colour through the painted glass, blessing the cold slabs with a soft hue. My entrance into this world initiated a lively dance amongst the devotional flames, causing them to abandon their purpose of piety and pirouette in unison. Bathed with the scent of wax and incense, the church held the memories of generations in its vaults and crypts, its walls radiating wisdom, reverberating the faint chanting of centuries. My eyes were drawn to the heavens, a vibrant constellation of indigo and cerulean, cascading through an arched window and illuminating his silhouette in its kaleidoscopic radiance. Standing in the triforium, beside an intricately ornamented column, his face was turned towards the light, allowing him to melt into his ornate surroundings. My gaze remained anchored to his figure, burning into his back, the image filling me with an overwhelming sense of haunting familiarity. Soon, he disappeared from view, his footsteps echoing across the stone floor, fading into silence.

Eventually, his footsteps returned, years after I had first seen him, striking cobbled ground. I followed them through alleys, squares, streets, determined to reach him. Paved surfaces, glinting with the shine of rain, reflected the muted light of lanterns. His figure was surrounded by a canopy of mottled umbrellas, rising like dark domes in the rain slicked night. Pools of water caught glimpses of his face, fragments of his movement, dissolving quickly in undulating ripples. Splinters of conversation mingled with the distant chime of a bell as I pursued his outline, the turn of his collar, the curve of his shoulder, in an endless journey. Cloaked in shadows, he weaved skilfully through the town, his crimson scarf my north star in a crowd of empty faces. Slowly, I began to sink into the turbulent sea of umbrellas and rain, his silhouette becoming more distant, his scarf like a dying ember fading into the dark. Slipping from my sight, he once again becomes a spectral memory.

Reawakening, I stare into the advancing velvety darkness. The withered limbs of trees connect in a frozen embrace above me, framing an archway in the incorruptible night. As I drive along the lonely road, pearls of rain begin to make their descent from the heavens in a sporadic pulse, gently drumming against the windshield. My hands clutch the steering wheel, frozen in place, as though my body has become stone. Glancing to my side, the seat is now empty, cold, untouched, only my own reflection lingering in the window. His absence lingers like ephemeral fingerprints on frozen glass.