

THE WRITERS' CORNER

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Only a rose

Only a rose
in an area window
telling the tale
of a sportive yesterday

or pressed in haste on someone
by somebody else in a bar
who'd been stood up but even so
wished love to dance over the evening

the rose knows nothing
of what it was meant to say
how it was dressed to say it
all it wants

is to sing back the glow of the moon
which never says what it's said to say either
but happily listens while nosing apart
the dark of the rose's room

fixing the way an old-gold blouse
pours down the back of a chair
the way a clock-hand
tickles the low hours

only a rose
only a moon
doing what nobody sees

free from mortal chat
of urge and contrition
in all the old co-opted places
platform calendar bluff

if the rose dreams
 it's of rain's delirium
 arching clear
 of its birth-soil

if the moon dreams
 it's of birthing its own light
 no more the cold courier
 of sun-sweat

Almost

1961

When you were young, a thousand helpless miles
 lay between, say, the tenth of December
 and Christmas—which stood there, mule-indifferent,
 knowing fine it had you fast in its heart,

that even now you heard the morning roads,
 the last shunt in the fire-pluming night
 as other than the regulated drone
 your breath and bones were made of. Round the school,

the stony faces of alcovod torment
 in Friday church, the iron air thinned out
 and lifted: something else drew on, ahead
 of fidget-arsed nativities, tea-towels

on kingly crewcuts, cards of solder-glue.
 Time softened, the blood rose to its face. Bells
 almost rang beneath the hoosh of buses,
 the clouds were undersides of magic ways

where angels got into first position,
 shepherds took form in sputnik-space, prepared
 to be unprepared, mithering, scared stiff.
 Then all at once the last Wednesday of term

with the ex-Navy barber (Dads and Lads),
and you high in the chair, buffed, clipped, set
to meet the only land you loved. Mirrored,
the brushings of the dead year fell like snow.

Travellers

They are made of mist, a seasoned need
to step light and thin round
the mires of the world. The ends
of unlettered roads will find them,
possibly, if a caravan rocks its green roof,
betrays that it is not after all
the high skirt of midsummer.

But the first steeps of autumn
draw them out: to the broads of grass,
say, beside a rat-run island.
Bits of them appear
with the middle days of October:
a bassinette against a wheel,
tarpred horses posted up and back,
a pot to simmer the damp
of another year going.

Bargees, they could be,
but with a course
laid secret through the earth.
Windscreens show them
seeming to be about themselves
on the usual levels of the day.
Only someone in the back, maybe,
with a child's distaste for wherefores,
might see them truly,
flowing where they stand,
their past dropped over a tailboard,
the future not even the first twitch
of a dream.