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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

ON THE RADIO, THIS IS NOT THE ONE, THURSDAYS

Ian Saw

ON THE RADIO

there's an interview with the mother
 of a young bloke
 killed by the I.R.A.
 in The Netherlands
 by mistake

they were deeply sorry
 they said

and she is breaking down
 and I am coming up
 to this green light
 and I can't
 get in the middle lane

in front
 someone is turning right
 but I'm not
 I'm going to get stuck
 behind them

and there's this wog
 in a battered white
 Nissan van
 won't let me in
 and I'm waving my arms
 and cursing

bloody wogs
 but I accelerate
 through a gap
 and I catch
 the amber

and
 I wish they knew how I feel
 she says.

THIS IS NOT THE ONE

you see
 head down
 jabbing and hooking
 weaving
 and dancing
 his way down Pitt
 like Joe Louis

the one who somebody said
 nearly fought
 for a Commonwealth Title
 once

and
 this is not the one
 with the contorted face
 you hear
 mouthing obscenities
 so incoherently
 and mysteriously
 to random appalled faces
 along George

and
 this is not the one
 whose bare
 swollen
 purple feet
 are so rivetting
 outside the Lebanese take-away
 on Kent
 the one who is always in the same place
 and looks like Tom Waits
 in *Ironweed*

somehow
 he always has
 a steaming-fresh cappuccino
 and a long butt hanging from his lip

and
 this is not the Asian one

Korean?
 Vietnamese?

who haunts Broadway
 with his beatific smile

and his magnum of champagne.

No

this one
confronts strangers
with an awful vacant shrug
on the upper
end of Castlereagh
this one's arms dangle
loosely
as he opens his hands

palms front
thumbs sticking out

and continually
pulls his head down
between his shoulders
and just shrugs
as if those whose paths he blocks

momentarily

each ask him
some terrible searching question

like
is there a God?
why are we here?
do you believe in destiny?
what about the theory of chaos?

or some other question

repeatedly

but they only frown

in reality

they step aside
or look at him incomprehensibly
or simply smile
and hurry on
and there are no questions

ultimately

there is only the man
in the thin tee-shirt
denying his way along Castlereagh Street
in the brisk wind.

THURSDAYS

when the people have been paid
 he plays the flute
 near the base
 of the escalator
 at Hurstville station
 where the herd
 of commuters emerge

sheep from a stock-shute

most barge
 past him
 most ignore

or simply do not hear
 or abjure

the sweet surge
 and flow of notes
 he executes
 so perfectly

even
 to a good ear

and the urger
 at the cut-price
 sell-out
 closing-down-sale
 sooper-doooper
 battler's-bargain
 store

bawls into
 the microphone

it has a built-in
 cockney accent
 always
 the same flat vowels

about your last chance
 to buy
 the tops and sweats

not at last year's price
 but the year before's

eight bucks

he says
 but you know he's thinking
 in quids

and you bend
deliberately

place
a dollar
in the flautist's hat
and

playing on
he bows

oh
gracefully
Thursdays.

and continuously
pulls his head down
between his shoulders
and just shrugs
as if those whom paths he blocks

each ask him
some terrible searching question

or some other question
but they only look
they stop aside
to look at him incomprehensibly
or simply smile
and hurry on
and there are no questions

there is only the man
in the thin tie-shirt
draying his way along Castleburgh Street
in the brisk wind.