Poems

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Abstract
STORM LARKS, TIME, LOVE AND TENDERNESS, FOX
Sky is black as a ciné film reeling its last centimetres; imageless, burned by the light, its white-gashed celluloid flickers overhead.

The horizons tremble, then stand still, accepting the warm rain; our breathing falters, uncertain as purple in the sun’s fading bruise.

This frequency is all wow and flutter and rumble on the earth’s slow platter, its grindstone flinting out split-second streaks of light.

The gleam across your face fixes it here: white, ecstatic with shushed exclamations – then bass notes beginning below hearing’s octaves.

It’s ironic we don’t think of God now, only of the ions colliding, those fronts of heated air and copper dousing-rods drinking an electric blue.

But it’s death-sky music, you said so; your hand on mine glimpsed as a claw of bones, so old it could be winged or scaled, half-human.

Lightning fuses air’s nitrogen, cattle stumble, awash in curdled milk; ponies’ eyes panic, their mouths foaming at rain’s polished bit.

The voltage goes to ground, missing the uncoiled helix of acids that wash away, futile for a billion years until the chance of it lights like a struck match.

We’re sheltering by this gable-end, watching the town blitzed to monochrome, seeing skylarks stall then fly on singing into the air’s stunned height.
TIME, LOVE AND TENDERNESS

In this suburb of the city we stop at the Wheatsheaf for a drink, just where the B-road drops us, after the motorway and poppy fields where lapwings skim the cars' hot roofs.

Cooler in here and dim at first: we order cold beers, lean on bar towels, hear pool balls click in their triangle of noon's lubricious light.

The jukebox is hushed, repeating the same song like a wish: *Time, love and tenderness* over and over in this tap-room tiled like a piss-house and kippered with last night's smoke.

We're not complaining, it's the right place to be right now, right here where there's nowhere else: the optics wink, brimful of whiskey and gin, of vodka and five-star forgetfulness.

Dust sequins the air; a rod of light comes in like something you could touch. A girl in stacked heels coils a snake-bite into her belly. She shoots pool with that limping man, laughing, tilting her cue into the table's alluvial green.

Her child bawls from its pushchair, arms waving to some comfort beyond reach, her tongue searching for speech until silenced with a crisp.

From a side-table a youth looks on, conjuring the future from one slow beer. Cyclists pass the open door, wind hustles litter on the street, blowing the day away into the sun's high curve.
The song whispers, wistful, conniving
as they range the balls again onto the felt;
she picks the child’s milk from the floor
like a bottled cloud, or bottled love
or time or tenderness, wiping its teat
on her red dress.

The crippled man cues the phalanx.
It slicks wide open: he grins as balls
fall from cushions into pockets – like money
or virtue or luck never did into his.

The landlord takes our glasses, leans
into another haze of noontime drinking,
hearing the juke-box’s psalm annoint us,
seeing the angles of light fall more narrow,
the hot road glitter as we turn to leave.

FOX

The fox in the headlights
knows it shouldn’t be here,
caught on the road through
the larch wood, just stepping
out to the chicken coop.

The fox is skittish;
it’s made a faux pas,
executes a sorry jump
from pointed toes – a ginger
novice in the dancing class.

This is a thin fox caught
in sharp light, nervously
swishing the white tip
of its tail, painting itself
out into the dark.

A few strokes and it’s gone
into a chiaroscuro dusk;
it shouldn’t have been there
on the road, in this poem –
dancing, up to no good.