The Last Days of Petrol
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For Faisal and Yousuf

SAMPLER
When everything is water

How did we get here? The roads have gone
once there was a network and we plugged into that

buses came for school only to the road end
now they are swept away by the waves.

We are the central point our island of barn and beasts
three children and many thrushes.

There is nothing left to share.
Fodder all squared up.

Once the helicopter came like a bee,
drawn by the flowers still blooming by the door.
Talking about how blood moves

Your body is a machine, it works. Ducts, pipes, tissue, tubes, the heart belching blood – a saggy bucket connecting to three more – it is impossible to regulate pressure up and down and failing eventually into holding pools or furred and weed-clogged canals to idly loop in the defunct, yes, industrial complex and stop.

Your body is not a machine, the way your heart works is not architecture and not a river system but this map of tattered colours embracing all the ports, the moors, heath, marshes, mountain pass, deserts and the sea; not a road, no, not even the movement of cars ribboning through a long high street;

the commute to necessary extremities. The smeared space between wheel or foot or road and destination
is life itself:
the push forward
flux of messages exchanged

a hurriedly made-up parcel
and the desperate race back home.
At the walnut processing factory

The rattle of nuts in the machinery tings a pitted conveyor belt; piercing
the acrid smell, rich bitter mixed with sweat, zinging through the bright social distance marks, factory lights and faded red overalls. The remaining workers blind taste product intermittently with languid pick out and chew and spit; none of the amateur struggle. Prised kernels are laid bare outwith a forest more imaginary with each harvest.

A rare memory held in one or two dry leaves pounded down in the shell discard echoing beyond the packers’ dance steps; a husk of half-known song on the radio.
Sometimes I can’t see out of my car without the windows open

Inside I am listening to Udo Lindenberg wearing a feather boa in the seventies drinking kirsch snakebite. There are several lorries ahead and they all contain animals or quarried stone; an accident could reinstate acres of field and dyke.

Outside there’s a pink light pressing through twilight like a bruise, the snappy teeth of pine all snarled by winds; but I beast the weather, get the mills generating electricity. They set to it: all the commuters pay my tithe in bread and sugar until the salt-licked windows bow down and reveal

that bit of moor again. And it’s looking the other way.
After new year

can’t be where they are

it is so easy to change them

look at John Clare one day finding signs and fences

and walls

our neighbour cut a copper beech right down

it took one day

or there are no barriers and the light changes

plants grow in different ways

we have the power

we say we can make this happen

but the first birds at the feeder in the morning

are always the blackbirds and dunnocks

the commuter next door triggers his artificial light

which I reflect back from big and little screens

the windows stop everything

mattering

the line of hand-blown glass
New media

that boy on Soutra in his old car
nothing is the same

at the lay-by where the farmer drops
the feed from his quad bike

the cows in a circle
waiting quiet

even when the hedge brash is burnt
the windfarms grind

except the one forgotten by the wind
he types out requests to other officers

at home, in Edinburgh
he manages the landscape

until the top, squall and windbreak
drop off his shoulders

the right man interviewed on radio
lapwings like waves on the plough
Birdwatching

silly fish in the sky almost like starlings
well yes starlings exactly spitting like bacon
or clocks ticking spots knocked and back up

on the toilet they clean the gutter above me
and throw out debris in debt of bugs weevil
anything that takes their eyes

moving in shoals and chattering chattering
imagine them teenagers in the mall
iridescent coats and scarves flying

phones going and noise in all directions
they have sharp claws they are such friends
and then they swim away again
A ling time

Your hair is full of chaff and your head well these little exhalations remove the straw with blood from executions, faces of Jesuits, the sunflower flower stalks dry now heather bells and sphagnum florets, daffodil caulds close and the flaccid fleshy pig’s ear, dock.

All the sad leaves blown up streets and streets of sticky-treed suburbs ending in your quay-wall contained melt lakes and xenolith moraine washed out to sea. Our refuse lands on shale, granite, pea shingle beaches, or sinks undrowned by antler and submerged lea, brash skeleton boundaries, or exhales probed by oyster-catchers, pattered by dunlin, sanderling and above the single erratic skua pierced by a peregrine — you are the only person to kiss me in the fleshmarket —

— the rounded hills, bosomy grass, sheep rocks like clouds, cotton grass smirred with linn spatter and green shine birches, mica glint and that sound, that breath of soft wind, shifts our journey through the black moor on an uncertain path.

Step high, miles to go!

I’ll clear your hair, your eyes stay a formal contract of digital crumbs, field walls, copse, cuckoos like falcons, a clearing — simmer ling — or this winter ignites paper and the empty boxes I collect to sail south all while we breathe in the same air.