

Nordic Sublime

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Matt Haw

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Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2026 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
PO Box 4239
Swindon
SN3 9FN

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB
(this address not for correspondence)

ISBN 978-1-83738-030-5

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OSLO VARIATIONS

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Everything in the World Said Goethe Can Be Endured Except a Succession of Fine Days

February blued
like steel like cyanosis

though people spoke
of the potential for spring

in whatever the lark agreed with the linnet
overheard along the river path

in what the water meant
by continuing to hurry away to its mouth
singing the song of its being

or the bony motions birches made
to drifts of crocus & snowdrops

all the cold flowers of the season

*

On the high street
the fruit & veg shop was offering
a discount on woody rutabaga

to keep me feeling outwintered
by vegetable matter

which holds for itself
secret stores of warmth & light

receding snow in the city parks
returned a vision of things as they are

after all silt & sand & water—

*

& with them a familiar
sense of dread

as with the end of a bank holiday
& questions
of how exactly I plan to endure

even with assurances
that a new season
would be surely achieved

& the finely frayed fatigue of living
with winter's constant sense
of precarity migrated
in search of new bodies to graze on

in pyrrhic celebration
I bought myself a cellophane cone
of imported daffodils

in the parking lot spilled rare tears

AFTER OSLO

beginning with a line from Ana

Loneliness is a city
of scarcely a million

everyone a version of one another

where it rains & rains often
each downpour pronouncing
the city's name anew

diversions take you the long way
around endless urban renewal projects
& the shops close early

long evenings are given over
to a pursuit—
döppels to their gangers—
through streets obscured by a lacquer
of grit & impacted snow

*

To live in the city of Loneliness
among its austere lindens
& redwings
is to realise you also are a version
of another

that you'd rather not pay further regards
to the value chain & neither would I

but do care about catching the front wheel
of your bicycle again in the tramways
profaning the asphalt
with the skin of your palms

*

At a Sunday flea market you bought
an outdated city guide to Loneliness

among the listings for restaurants
bankrupt these past fifteen years

a previous owner had underlined—

Hole-in-the-wall noodle bar
serving Sapporo-style miso ramen
pot-stickers & edamame
nothing less nothing more
open noon til midnight's
eating at the bar

*

If eating there alone
late night
you find yourself struggling
to put a name to the familiar
petal-pale face of your fellow diner
slurping nourishment against Loneliness

fear not
it is only your image reflected
in the shop-front—

the trick is not to put your trust in the glass
believe in salt in the broth

you may yet thrive here

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MALE PATTERN

after Steinar Oppstad

There was a tall Scots pine
in the garden of the house I grew up in

rooks nested there

in the oblique sun of summer evenings
the tree & its crosshatch nests
lit up with yolky light

*

Father went out with his chainsaw

the tree was too near the house he said
one family shouldn't live
so close to another

then the tree lay in the yard
cut down to its knots & heartwood

& from the dark mess of needles
sharp-sweet pinenes rising in elegy

*

I scoured the brash
found not a feather of the birds

only the derelict nests mottled flakes
of shell something yellow
seeping into the grass

*

The evening sun continued to touch
my face my palms the evicted day

with shades of meaning & so

I took up a fallen nest
wore it as a mummer's mask

went forth from that garden with little
more than a father's lesson

in callous love

& years later

an inherited chainsaw

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