

The Plain Light of Day

Phillipa Hardman

Let us praise the plain light of day --
Not the tuppence-coloured sunshine sparkling on moving water or on
parked cars,
Not the glorious glare calling us out to wonder at the bluer than blue sky,
Not the subtle dancing sunlight playing with any slight wind in the leaves,
Or glancing through glass, to throw miraculous colours on an unsuspecting
ground.

Plain daylight --
Not the mysterious, dangerous, secretive light of the moon,
Or the poet's fancy owl-light, or the almost impossible starlight.
Not creeping twilight, slowly, slowly morphing into night,
Nor dawn, swelling with promise of brighter, of better.

Let us rather praise the plainness of daylight --
Plain like dependable vanilla,
Like clear water -- not the startlingly lucid flow of a chalk stream,
But the still, calm simplicity of safe drinking water;
Plain like fresh air -- not exhilarating as it rushes and gusts over the meadow,
Or soothing as it holds the scent of garden flowers in a balmy peace,
But cool and pure, clean and wholesome air.

So let us praise the plain light of day that is just there --
Steady, unasked, unblinking and shadowless,
Like the truth.

When The Sun Comes To December

Jeanette Collis

When the sun comes to December
And the light shines in his eyes,
I will leave and not turn back.

Walking down the frosty track,
I will follow where ever it takes me;
Leaving all my cares behind.

When the sun comes to December,
I will follow the road less travelled -
Over mountains and rocky ledges,
My inner compass will be my guide.

Into fate my life I trust,
Just as I have always done.
When the sun comes to December,
I will know I am there when I arrive.

Cloister

Jane Spiro

Suddenly finding ourselves at dusk,
in a cloister, a symmetry of arches,
names of war-lost youths lingering
unobserved in shadow

we feel the awkwardness of awe,
the intruder's prickle of guilt,
when, from a stone face, a door
falls open,

and a file of white-robed choristers
processes out, glow-worms
lit by candles, floating in the cloister-dark,
chanting ancient prayer.

We watch as if uncovering, in the heart
of an unexpected cave, a coven of ghostly moths,
spreading paper wings,
thinking they are alone,

a shadow life where the dead
have carried on living, half-lit,
unreachable, faded to filigree
in the light of day.

LIGHTNING

Nicholas Aldridge (aged 12)

On the thundery morn of the day I was born
 From my Heavenly home I was hurled,
Like a galloping mare, through the high upper air,
 And then down to the tropic-hot world.
I am flame very bright, I give brilliant light,
 And a man I can kill with my breath,
A great tree I can burn, I can scorch a small fern,
 But, whatever I do, I bring death.
From my home in the sky, which is Heaven so high,
 Angry Vulcan has sent me in ire,
Him alone I obey, and do all things his way,
 And his enemies kill I with fire.
But all humans I hate, so no longer I wait,
 For a place down in Hell I have won.
So beneath the green grass, in a hurry I pass,
 And no more do I burn — I am gone!

Travelling Light

Ros Bleach

Thin and nineteen my rucksack and I
Boarded the train at Helsinki.
We were travelling light.

It was late June and my rucksack and I
Were heading north
Leaving the night to the South

Picking up speed we racketed
Past unknown towns,
Their names reeling down bare platforms:
Ruhimaki, Seinayoki, Kokkola.

As streets gave way to woods,
Grey trunks of pines
Blurred by for hours and hours.
Pines and pines—then suddenly a lake—
Then pines and pines and pines...

Their canopy closed over us
Blacking out the sky, but

Thin and nineteen, my head was light.
It filled with arctic sun
Imagined up ahead.
Dreams lead me into sleep,
Leaving the dark outside.

I woke as the racketing slowed and jerked and stopped.
Rovaniemi—only the name—stood at my window
To say that we'd arrived.
Thin and nineteen my rucksack and I
Swung off the train and stood there,
Adjusting our straps.

I cleared my throat and my crusted eyes
And what I saw was tundra,

With bilberries, silver birch and moss
And clouds scudding in a wind
And low fells humped with arctic snow.

And just for a minute
The sun reached out, like a lighthouse beam.
It gleamed across the snow,
And was gone. “Ah!
Travelling light”, I said out loud.

**A Religious Rubaiyat For those who keep chickens in Wolvercote.
("Lighten our darkness, we pray")**

Lorna Logan

Foxes screaming in the dark
Would like to tear my hens apart.
If I fail once to shut them in,
The foxes check and they will mark

The un-dropped door, the flagrant sin:
My lack of care and discipline.
Again they bark. I hear again,
Almost I see their lolling grin.

So often, feathers in the rain
Spread round the garden, death and pain.
Because I let my memory stray.
My wandering mind, my poor hens' bane

Down upon my knees I pray
The Lord will keep the fox away
For I am only useless clay.
Please let me get it right today.

Paris – Cité de Lumière

Jill Elliott 1979

Place du Tertre: sur une toile luisante
On représente Paris en jaune et vermeil,
Car, ou par nuit ou sous les rayons du soleil
Cette ville paraît toujours étincellante.

Sur les Champs Elysées, sur la poussière blonde,
Une douce lumière à sept heures du soir
S'épanouit derrière un rang long, raide et noir
D'arbres entourés chacun de sa grille ronde.

Le quatorze juillet, nullepart ignoré,
Quand les feux d'artifice éclaircissent les cieux
Dès les marchés près de la Porte Saint Denis
J'usqu'aux paisibles rues de l'île Saint Louis
Et chaque coin devient tout à coup lumineux
On danse à mon Paris – le doré, l'adoré.

Alight here for Victoria: a fantasy on an underground theme

Gillian Somerscales

Poor girl, she cannot see her way ahead
Along these warm and windy tunnellings;
She pauses, steps aside, inhales, looks up, and then—
Plunges yet further into dust and dark.

Who is she, running quick of foot and breath
Alongside all who ride this labyrinth,
Behind the sway and rattle of the ever-passing trains,
Ahead of every quick electric spark?

Do you hear her feet's uneven pattering
In echo ricochet and back again?
Her exhalation in the sigh and seal of closing doors
Her thin metallic scream scrape through the air?

What drives her on in panic or despair,
or calls her through the pulsing space ahead?
Does she know the step behind her, hear a voice familiar
around above below I know you're there—

Or is she chasing safety as it slips around the bend
Pursuing something lost, or never known?
Or is it strangers of the mind who tread so softly in her skull
That though she flee for ever they will go there too?

Is light behind the goad that sends her on
Into the darkness past her vertigo?
Would light ahead be rescue or the final reckoning, show her
run to open arms or run her through?

A voice imparts polite admonishment.
Alight here for Victoria. Change for Bank.
Which way, said Alice? In the empty dark there are no signs.
Mind the gap between the words and the meaning.

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Forked Lightning

Strike One

An Academic Distinction

Seamus Rainbird

Strike one is addressed to dictionary nerds
Who seek to shine light on correct use of words.
Right word in wrong place or if the contrary,
Both cases behove us to be very wary.

He had no desire to offend her,
He had no desire to vex,
But he didn't know how to use gender
And he didn't know when to use sex.
So he opened his heart to his tutor
Who opened his mind to his plight
And advised that the word that would suit her
Should be quietly whispered at night.
But the girl was both coy and contrary,
And determined to frustrate her swain.
She just smiled and said: 'Sex is so scary;
Could we have gender again?'

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