

*Footnotes*



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**Footnotes**

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*For my parents*



## Postcards

You have laid them out on the table  
like a pack of cards,  
white reverses facing upwards.  
The pictures (which I cannot see)  
are the world and its faces,  
jagged colours, its pieces of history.  
And I draw a card thick with  
evening and emptiness  
seeping the old quarter, the trickle  
of people thinning along winding  
concave cobbled lanes  
the leaves a rustling vortex  
from nowhere to nowhere, with  
only the streetlights coming to life.

## **At the Breakfast Table**

*for M.B.*

A film forms over my tea –  
cracks sprout at first, then tendrils  
echoing the texture of a leaf membrane  
in silent discrete segments.

Observe each further  
and the pattern repeats, so now  
you see dark clear water, flavoured  
and frond-edged: the peace coast.  
And a child playing by the beach  
who will not come home.

His silence bleeds like a teabag.

## Memorial

A figure hunched in the silent rain.  
Bandage or blindfold around the taut skull  
light reminding what the body had endured  
lashes, blows and bits of rope  
cutting through starved skin, touching bone.  
A single carved head, lowered for many.  
Now write their names:

*Bernhard Fladderack*  
*Jan Johannes Frikke*  
*Alex Kortum*  
*Josefa Paplowitsch*  
*(V)ladimir Snihur*  
*Simon Zoelle*

*Und fünf Unbekannte*  
*Ermordet in April 1945*  
*Durch die Gestapo.*

A storm gathered and it was dark.

Then three children appeared out of  
the night, came and stood  
before the figure. Their faces had  
the look of petals and the scent of rain  
they opened their palms and light  
shone through, warm and whole  
spreading around the square  
then there were voices and the dance  
of feet on cobbled stones and  
laughter and music and light.

## Venetian Sequences

I

At first, there's nothing but the breaking of his song through the fog. Then, expectant, you allow first light into this scene – and the gondolier appears, arms spread out in mock drama, rehearsing a part to his fare of Japanese tourists. The gondola passes in slow motion. The quay, quiet once more, postcard-like. Now call up the fog again.

II

Recycled souls of men who faded in dungeons. Now pigeons haunt the chessboard piazza, drawing shallow shadows in a pattern that mirrors the water's lace. Churchbells and wingbeat create their own music, mingled with voices real and imagined, as the four horses look on; then the light swells, whites out everything.

III

Close-up. A man, middling, comfortable at his writing desk, shirt open at the throat, sea in his glasses. Paper & pen. Stillshot. Distracted, he looks up, away from the camera. Cut. Then, what he was looking at. As I write this (over an indifferent coffee), seated amidst music and a teenage crowd, the real city, far away, breaks into verse.

## Souvenirs from an Italian Shop

*for Joydeep*

Pigeon feet under the eyes of my dream,  
where the piazza draws its hypotenuse  
of sun and sunburn on faces and breasts  
and a waitress whose lips are demerara,  
selling softies to the accompaniment  
of lace-crust and the rustle of epaulettes on silk,  
supplying the movement of a heavy torso  
its touch of mint. Nearby, an old balustrade,  
peeled, reveals flowers – a late blossoming  
of obsidian, red against a black age.

Squads of rain and light. The memory of a night  
sculpted in colour and water – and the water  
in turn all skin, tethered to its native decay;  
and a light, another, tracing a benign palm,  
its shadow freshly painted on two coats  
of wet plaster. Then the light passed  
and the shadow flaked off the wall, bringing

the visitor to a vision of a crowded wait,  
cans and food-packets still held, half-empty  
and hasty, misaimed kisses as the train approached.

## The Cathedral

Two right hands draw an arc  
over stains of wet glass-bottoms,  
fingers inching to a meeting  
half way across the table.  
I look up from the smoky light

and Cologne looms above, darkling,  
tangibly cold. And a voice  
that says: I am the shape  
of all things to come,  
two hands joined in prayer.

## Night in the Schatzkammer

St. Engelbert – recumbent, heavy with  
gold and the passing of centuries,  
having seen the back  
of another tourist-staring day,  
slides the weight of his chin  
along the hand, stifling a yawn:  
all forty seven wounds  
still intact and gilded.

The same routine now for ages.

He looks up. Directly overhead,  
a weightless glassy space –  
beyond, between the V of spires  
rises his vision of the sky,  
complete with soggy blotter clouds.  
And on sudden nights like this –  
the drumming  
of thunder, Beethoven-like,  
splitting Cologne in slices.

Nostalgia. Or call it the wish  
to be alive again, that  
fetches the old memories  
sharp as a nib.  
His fondness for words  
and swords and crusted viziers.  
Power, the servility of men,  
and in draughts,  
stilled candle-smells  
still praying at the altar.

## Humayun's Tomb

Each time you close your eyes,  
you look up a sheen of swords.  
Where their hilts meet, light climbs  
the palm of the dome;  
pigeons animate an irrevocable time.  
Then a swarm of horses casts  
after-images on your retina,  
surrounding the façade stone-scratched  
with heart-signs and lovers' names:  
you hear their hooves in the wind's ear.  
The arches bend and grey like  
the king who sheltered here when  
everything was lost, thinking:  
in this place, I shall be safe,  
my spirits will protect me.  
The breath of guns and traitors  
swims up like shapes in the heat.

Now you may open your eyes:  
they are all still there.

## Flashback

*for Bando and the others*

Muffled rumble of stage-props in the wet dark,  
as unlisted inchoate adjustments reshape  
themselves in the wings  
into a new version of reality.  
Then curtainrise and you're borne again  
into giddy light and Nineteen Ninety Four.  
Young and forever different, arriving  
repeatedly at the same spot, indifferent  
to your changeling existence.  
Nothing tires one out so much  
as the sense of time passed, unused.  
And each fresh year returns blebs  
to brown the reminiscing celluloid.

Memory rewrites itself. *Give it time.*  
I stare at Bando when he says this.  
The moment passes –  
and then we digress. Not the breathless  
rake-like anticipatory thudding, then,  
or my raving over absent heartless sylphs,  
nor even the waiting, but *giving*.  
That one and lonely unrequited verb.  
Like a litany returned. Or airy light  
bursting in with ropy yellow mote-beams,  
as Bando reassesses  
the sloping bluewash anaesthetic  
of his room, shifts in bed, allowing  
the needle to assume an easier pose  
in his arm, sighs and says: *Give it time.*