

THE WATCHERS

and other poems

by

**ADRIAN
GREEN**



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ON THE ESTUARY HILL

The curlew and the heron call,
the hissing mud and whispering wings
sound eery through the idle air
until the moonlit midnight silence falls,
and then the tide flows softly
through the gut and sluice of estuary sands
and dark against the dreamlit sky
the trees arise from hedgerows,
and the hills
alive with monstrous shapes
are menacing with soundless fear,
and still below the blundering man
the beery and uncertain head
the stubbled fields hold secrets now
and silence fills the river bed.

SAILING BARGES OFF SOUTHEND

Drifting on a tide from long ago
They swing at anchor silently
Wreathed in early morning mist
Like ghosts grown mellow with antiquity.

With names like Gladys, Will and Edith May
Heroic legends motionless on ancient bows
They are waiting for the breeze, patiently
Submissive to the whim of air and ebb.

Later with windlass rattling as anchors are raised
Sails set at the stirring of wind over tide
They bear away a pageant of remembered trade,
A flock of stately seabirds through the lanes.

TERMINALS

1.

A series of departures and arrivals remembered
not the in-between sitting down
and staring out of the window silences,
the real attrition, grinding down of love
between terminals, space
filled with paperback thrillers
and auto magazines

the first touching

- uncertainty -

smell of an unfamiliar body

then, too soon, like waking
in the damp aftermath of dream,
a sense of something not recoverable.

2.

Outside the window:

a landscape webbed with cables.

I wake between deaths
in anticipation
of another beginning.

Only at the terminals
or point of damage
are the nerves exposed,
made visible -
a blue spark burning,
molecular re-arrangement
the senses remember.

At each birth
a new rhythm, at death -
silence.

Between concussions
there is nothing to remember.

I FELL IN LOVE AGAIN

I fell in love again
from the other side of the country
where we danced so long
a dance in lights so low

I fell in love again
to the music we played
your head thrown carelessly high
wild rhythms in your hair

I fell in love again
across the winters passing
since we chanced a love
to dance a lie so long ago.

THE WATCHERS

There's no ignoring
the roomlights suddenly off
or curtains tweaked aside
in the camouflage of darkness
or the broken conversations
or coitus interrupted
at the sound of the car
stopping.

There's no ignoring
your ring's glint
in the streetlight.

The faces
at the window see
everytime
that I am black
and your are
scarlet.

THE NIGHT I WANTED YOU

I wanted to follow
you walk away
from the place
where we met
and had lately
been introduced

I wanted to hide
away with you
chase shadows
from your face
beyond the whispers
and the lies

I wanted to taste
the night in your arms
the streetlamp's light
beyond the room
illuminating emptiness
we'd leave outside

I wanted to live
forever
the night I wanted you.

A RICE GRAIN

Something new
from the hothouse today
to be rolled, cut, and crushed
for those who have the palate
and educated tastebuds.

Others are small boys
wondering what happened
to the emperor's clothes,
metaphorically speaking.

MODEL

You didn't think of posing for a poem
or the hours pencilled into memory,
the unconscious camera
shuttering your image through my eye.

You were not draped as a statue
or seated like stone
for hours in a leg-stiffening trance.

No studio set or pedestal staged
save the moments caught
and movement remembered -
a dance of unintentional desire,

and yet, no less than paint or photograph
your image forms itself across the page.

MIRROR

There are no lies
in the morning
no cheating of age

an illusion of eye
smoothing skin over bone.

No portrait hidden away
becoming skeletal
and demanding release.

Another day to face,
my confessor, so laugh
at this charting of years.

SENSUAL

to touch and be touched
feel the pendulum swing
this way and that

brush lightly with fingers
a soft texture of velvet
smooth ripples of warmth

to touch and be touched
lips parting on lips
tongue taste of sweetness

leaning softly together
skin pressed against flesh
the real sense of touching

to touch is being touched
touching touched.

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER YOU BY

The room sweet
with your perfume
enthusiastically used,

the glow of smouldering coal
near spent,

the tumble of clothes
on a chair
and wine half drunk,

your eyes half-closed
to the music we played:

how could I know
the snare of your smile?

FROM THE PIER AT SUNSET

Nameless we are
over the tide
our sun
falling westward
the estuary afire.

Our fingers touch
a new love
not caring for the ebb
tomorrow
or the draining of desire.

SEAGULLS INLAND

Love is a stranger here, too,
skirting the fragile pond
these seagulls strut, warnings ignored.

Winter has driven us all inland
to be torn apart again,
the frozen park a battleground

where spirits of the ancient castle
are besieged by new invaders,
a conflict of centuries.

We watch the stream,
ice-fingered in the aftermath of flood
and straining its banks,

an escape by attrition, trees left
vulnerable now in the crumbling earth,
a tangle of roots exposed.

When the season retreats
the birds will return, as we will
to opposite ends of the country.
The winter scars a healing memory.

TOO SHORT THE DAYS

Too short the days
we sighted perfection
or thought between us
it might be achievable.

We have been apart too long
to recognise the changes,
to match now with the unaltered then.

We meet again as strangers
not certain
in the formality of silence
what memories
are left to be shared.

OLD MAN WALKING THROUGH FIELDS

Past blackberry, hawthorn,
His stick probes at the ground.
He has passed through many fields
Reflecting on love and nature
And the nature of love.

The luggage he carries in his head -
A rough bundle of what might have been,
What is, and what never will be.
His face is mountain-scarred with shadow
As daylight tumbles away to the west.

And memories add up to what he is,
An old man walking through fields -
Acres of wheat and barley
Where children talked about love.
He has passed through many fields.

TWO DRUNKEN NIGHTS

1.

The loneliness hour
colours the fuzzed edges
of consciousness with dark
empty desires to be somewhere
else have someone to be with
talk to a different glass
see a different face lying
beside this one and other
hands to make coffee
when morning calls.
The loneliness hour
dissolves into images
behind the eyelids of
the same room.

2.

It is the end
of a working arrangement,
the time to call the boss
by his christian name. It is the
chance to kiss the secretary
in public, and private lies
will be denied. The hours
are breathed out in cigar
smoke and laughter
until the final bell when
jokes are drained and
smiles spilled in the air.
A new beginning staggers
into a sense of
emptiness.

ENIGMA

An egg
waiting
 to be broken
waiting
to tell me
about something
 or other

THE DYING PLACES

Breached in old rages this stranger,
This old man wandering through the rusty jungle.
He hauls his feet - great weights - so
Slowly, ah! so leadenly
Along the dust filled wheel tracks.

His eyes, trained through another landscape
In certain grey memories,
Half close and do not want to see
The colour, subtle shades of yellow and brown,
The hulks, starkly silhouetted in decay,

Or sun, the relentless beating down
Dry haze, the sifting primordial dust.
He reaches out a claw
To touch the twisted computer frames,
Silent lathes and pitted filing cabinets,

These tin bones, these skeletal monuments
Disintegrating as surely as Earth,
In the aridness of unknown spaces, where
There is no one to feel, to remember
This place in another continuum.

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

As an exercise in solitude -
those lonely walks
and early-morning rides -
there is no measure
of what constitutes success.

The evenings spent alone
within suburban walls
confine a hope remembered,

and yet attempts at definition
are more frequent with age:

a star's movement explained,
but still the sky
is out of reach

and mountains recede
in familiar landscapes
you have abandoned to the past.

FACADE

This place again
of repeated farewells
a newspaper scuttering through the alley,
shards of late bottles by the door.

I have accepted your different faces
and fashioned nostalgia from your clothes.

A girl's mind hard as concrete
her body slender, pale
with the fingerprints of too many users,

you are many things to many people.

RED LION, ALDGATE EAST

Dick Turpin sat here, they say,
Was arrested, shot his mate and got away.

Easy, in rhyme, to imagine the legend
Made glamorous by time

But here there is no smooth fiction,
No gloss or adventure.

A dancer strips to scratchy music
On an improvised stage

And the only relic of history
Is last year's Christmas decorations

(Or perhaps the year's before)
Torn, but hanging still in May.

The bar is seedy with strong-ale drinkers
Measuring their lives between hostels,

The decay on their faces
Probably much like Turpin hid amongst.

MAN SLEEPING

In the sunlight a raggedy heap,
smell of stale piss in the afternoon,
his body still, as if not breathing.

I pass both ways, at a distance,
afraid of disturbing
something that remains human.

LADY....

LADY, YOU IGNORE MY POEMS

and do not trust the words
I use to make promises.

Your are probably right, also
to disregard the kisses
and the way our bodies dance together
as if hungry for love,

for when the music stops
we are trapped by silence,
caught between worlds
and awkward in each other's space.

You talk of indifference
and I sense the conflict of flesh.

LADY, YOUR VERSIONS OF TRUTH DIFFER

in the details of perception
and their recalling:

Your face a dance of lies
you would have me believe
the dreams you stage
a fantasy for unravelling
a rhythm played for illusion.

Your versions of truth
are the imperfections of which mirror
you made up to this morning.

LADY, THERE IS A WALL BETWEEN US

of old windows and mirror glass,
a tangle of light in our eyes.

We landscape each other from fragments,
the pieces of now and then we recognise
go together in memory,
make up the lives we imagine.

We are each side of a dream
we built for ourselves,
made fools by a structure
we thought we made sense of.

There is a wall between us
of shattered illusions
and decisions we'd rather not make.

TO THE LADY IN BLACK

(who bought Dante's Inferno from Oxfam)

Some tortured love
dark veiled across your face,
small hands betray the certainties
your eyes have lost.

Is it such mourning of the soul
displayed in darkness over livid cheeks,
or pale awareness of the spirits
restless yet in other worlds?

Though now you seem a gentle witch
when, having plucked
the Dante from the shelves,
apologising for your lack of change
you meet the bleakness of the cashier's stare.

FOG

Listening
for the lighthouse
drifting closer

its horn
a cry of ghostly cattle
lost at sea.

We know what it is
to be blind and afraid
of what monsters may lurk
beyond our ears' reach

or what it is to be small
and afraid of the dark.

In the morning
watching for shadows
and hearing the mournful call
of the island

I think of you waking
at home and unaware
of the ship
about to cross our bows.

TRAPPER

His shotgun loaded
and knife honed
as an argument for death,
he has laid his traps and snares
but has no time for polemic,
only for splitting hares.

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ADRIAN GREEN was born in Essex (1946) under the sign of Gemini. He has published in a number of magazines and local anthologies, and has one previous collection "BEACHGAME" from SOL PUBLICATIONS. Having been a member of the editorial collective which produced BANG, an arts/poetry magazine in Southend, he now edits SOL magazine with Malcolm Wright, and has read his poetry on local radio and at readings in various parts of the country. Married with three children, the cover design was produced in collaboration with his daughter Vanessa.

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