

AMELIA BARRATT

LOOSE TALK

BRYAN FERRY

The movie made me think of another, the one where the narrator said, "There are 8 million stories in the naked city..." But that was 1948, so what's that today, with inflation? Walking back from the cinema, I thought, there's only one story, anyway, *Rear Window* - the story about you, watching everybody else, escaping your own story by inventing stories about them, forgetting they're all looking back, making up stories about you, 8 million minus one of them. It's all autobiography, anyway.

I forget who said that. The streets are still busy. Voices, endless imagery. Old tramline traces glint through where the tarmac's worn thin, like a glimpse of gold tooth between parted lips.

Buried stories in the middle of the road. Music from an open window. I've heard that tune before. An emerald ring, a photograph, *Rear Window* - Increasingly I think the real mystery lies with the composer in the other apartment, alone with his piano after the cocktail party's over, chasing melodies through the night, struggling to capture the music before it disappears, not caring about where it comes from. People will hear it one day.

It might not be the Mona Lisa, but it might be something.

Who needs another Mona Lisa? Flowers and rubble. Heat and voices, ceaseless street noises. Should I listen to the music, or the dialogue?

DAMIEN LOVE



BIG THINGS

I get distracted
Big city tonight
At the periphery of an establishment
I nibble a Sidecar
Bigger things, they say
Down the line

I spy the manager
The manageress
A glitch between them slips
through gaps in conversation at the bar
I breathe pepper
The dreadful carpet
Pickle me here
I pick up my telephone
Hello
A lit match catches one drop of orange oil
from a piece of peel
No
Not on time
I am pending fashionably late
as per instruction
The palms of my hands are tight
from turpentine but who could tell
A bell sleeve falls over my thumb

Turpentine
says the Scotsman of my mind

The length of a school day
is an arbitrary measure
but one I find useful
I lay about with my pens and paper
for a school day
Climbed out from the bath
and knocked up an ensemble
The entire half of my wardrobe
under a waistcoat
No nerve for transport
I walked the underpass
Felt my reflection in a motorcycle mirror
and sped up
We are freer under a road than on it
I say to the receiver
and hang up

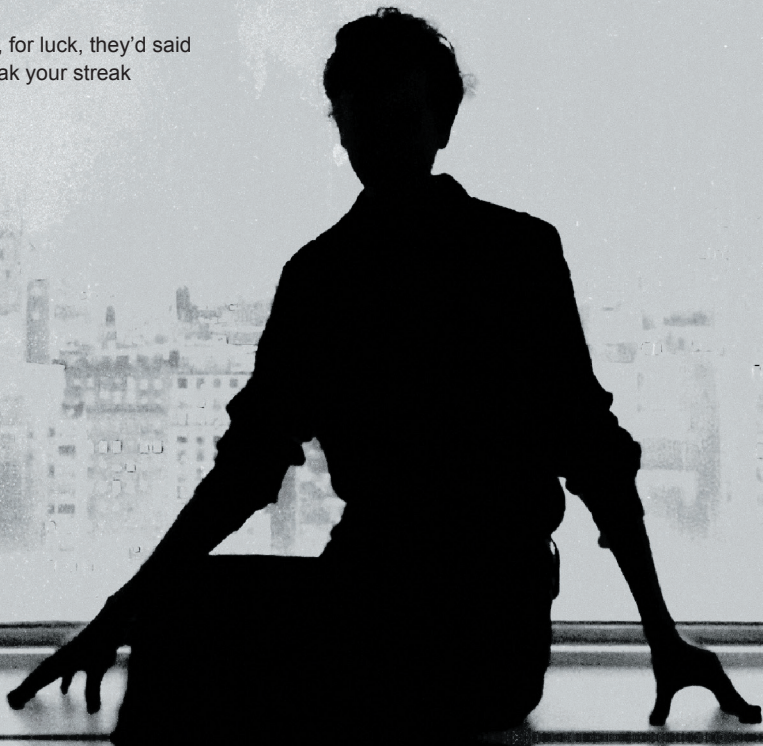
STAND NEAR ME

She's one to watch
Unbeatable on the floor
For her full-length replica
Words
A chance in hell, she says
I am
entirely cut out for this
She tips a bottle to her wrist
Her wrist to her neck
Ignore the features of the room
because the girl's for the win

Earlier she'd seen three of the same man
climbing out of a taxi
Three
Our gamer knows this to be
a lucky, lucky sign
Once they passed
nothing but a hum of anybody else
People are clouds
She's one gold tooth winking at the front
and several caps inside
An obsessive ritual persists
Pure, capital O

Tramlines run under the city still
Here at the hotel
she picks a page
Writes the opponent's name
and marks it with a tick in green
A reminder
There are small ways to punish oneself
and I am not here for them
Lost titles? I want them back, she says
That's how I feel
Thirst is not an attitude
I waited my time
and tonight's a month-old moon
Pure, capital O
Waiting her time
she's flipping channels
with a remote control
Nothing will suffice
not a drama in any language
It strikes her
no song has a sweet enough touch
The television is turned off and on
exactly twelve times
She wishes
she could unhear an interview she gave

They'd said they'd been watching her
and she'd used the word
annihilate
Stand near me, for luck, they'd said
Before you break your streak



FLORIST

The theatre is closed in the morning
but outside is a florist
so I watch him
wrap stems in paper and twine
No gloves on
The back of the van is open
and he has almost gotten rid of them
All the old stalks from yesterday

Rings run
around his eyes
but he picks his way lightly between clients
Between regulars with empty hands
and non-regulars un-fastening bags
As if a bank note being discretely slipped
from one palm to another to another
He is slim
Not noticeably so
just as if nobody expected more or less of him

From this great distance
I'm wondering about it
Imagine one day
he comes home to me and says
There is nothing more I want than this

He gestures to the tulips
that look out from a bucket, bunched
in the passenger seat of the van
To his apron
To his diary with nothing in
and I say
That's perfectly fine
Perfectly alright
Perfectly without the need to tell me
all the time

We're standing in the drive
I push the porch door
The front door
and three breaths later
the door to the downstairs bathroom
It has been primed for a year
without paint on
I pull up the sash window
Feeling the throbbing heat
from the engine of the van
I cry
and because it's night
he can see me
like a screen

COWBOY HAT

Comeuppance
Such an outdated term
She flips a switch
and the lights come gently on
Spot lights on the ceiling
A mouth full of pins
Focus pulls
and the room feels a mall
Lit from the inside out
Apart from the slight chill
our two figures glow
There are fifty years between us
and I often wonder
when I see her
Is this a special occasion or not?
She's working under a lamp
My shadow a pole
in two places at once
Standing on the set of scales
for the extra inch
The glass covering the dial
is frosty with age
She's pinning the hem of the trouser leg
Outside the door moths fly
Pine cones line a shelf

I don't like things with fringes
Not any thing, she says
But this
I've worn it to death
She nods to her lapels
A pin drops
and I feel the miniscule powers
of the muscles in my face
leaping at a chance
Let me please get the hat, I say
Just a second, she says
You always want the high impact jobs
The big reveals
She lets go of the trouser leg and it drops
swinging
A millimeter
Perfection
From the floor
Next time we'll do silk, she says
I knew a girl
The same size as you
She wasn't half a fidgeter but you
Always still

DEMOLITION

The bonnet of the car was open
Propped up with a branch
The oil was done
Grapes were bunching on the vine
It was just morning
I had put on a belted coat to come outside
They're tearing down the building next door
she said
Twisting at the cap, face down, elbow out
The dew was close enough to miss her
on the grass all around
I held two cigarettes in two hands
These are yours, I said
Come away from there
Am I allowed, she said
to smoke with you now?

Since that day
I have forged a deal with next door
I had some waste to dispose of
Mainly unspeakable rubble
I walked up to the building site
Tilting back my head
Here, I said
I live just here

Might I suggest a trade?
They said, good woman
The larger the skip
the more it is yours
Well, I said
A hot drink how about it
They said
We've had just about enough of those
and I tipped in the stones with delight

I kept what I could for them
My best conversation
An infectious smile
I had no work of my own at the time
Nothing, they say, in the pipe
No smoke
No money
Not a coin
I lived on a thin pole
I had learnt to instigate connection
but very little more

The demolition took less of a turn
with each day that passed
In one day fifty bricks were unstuck

Eventually the mortar chipped off
The buyer came
The workers shook off their tabards
and scattered
When I saw the house
where the house had been
my mouth parted





ORCHESTRA

Phrases that walk over me
seem to do so
when I want them to the least
In a crowded auditorium a voice says
Without your tools you are rendered fabulous
The curtain's hanging
More compelling than the stage
The conductor is a good one I believe
The musicians are let out in advance to talk
act natural, roam around
The stretching of the legs in ties and tailoring
A holy quality
Chairs
fixed to the floor
The youngest violinist
wears a shirt with a cinched waist
Looks out remorsefully from it
There won't be a dry eye tonight
says my neighbour
spreading out in opera glasses
Wielding a programme
Impeccably printed
Spit falls upon it
as she bends the back page
around the spine

A distant ringing followed me home
Mouthpieces
Lit curves of the curtain
The royal blue curtain imitating velvet
The silent drapery
with the capacity to fill us
You
Me

Through my eyelids
bursts of the performance seem to bloom
like a bruise in low light
The window's open
I've been wide awake
The heat of the room now gone
My sneakers now washed
hang by their laces







HOLIDAY

A T-shirt fell upon me
A loose cloak
Surprise
I love a uniform
A holiday
for the scattered mind

A pack of cards
Fifty four floats upon the water
Different costumes along the coast
state one thing and one thing only
Frivolity
The day is long
It trips and my legs do their own thing
Hearts beat
Two mongrels share a bone
Come to think of it never have I seen
so many novels pitched over eyes
Shuttlecocks
A squeal of delight and then an aside
I do not wish to count all the times we have
missed an opportunity
to just live life

Lie on a rock
Wait for the flip
In between a dazzling sensation
I hear a child speak
The blues are extraordinary
at least for their clarity
I wave her into the sea
with love
Nobody is listening for a while
The child eats a whole apple
How?
There's no way, I say
that we're leaving
as I wrap our hair in rough towels
Picture a banquet and dismantle it
The shrimp in their basket
With one
long
blink

LANDSCAPE

Two police people fold bridles
into an open box
There is a fun fair going on
I ask
Can a bridle be folded?
Hung, yes
but you'd want to keep the threads
the pieces
apart
There usually would be a stable girl for that
The police may not have experience
with bridles tangling up
The police people are wearing black jodhpurs
On their tops are bullet proof vests
and what I can only assume
are bullet proof riding hats
They are top heavy
The legs like spiders'
Look, I laugh
What, I say
if a horse were to gallop off

I twirl a stick at the funfair
and the funfair tempts me in
A white poker

Candyfloss
A ride is worth nothing more than a ride
says my brain
The wind whipping
The knotting
Note the horses tied around the edge
The bashfulness of the kids
The cleanliness of the mane, the plaits
The gloves used to hold the reigns
The smallest comb would be needed
and eventually scissors
Ribbons
A chisel for her feet

I feel synthetically free
as the ride rotates
The funfair is without conflict, I thought
Rotations, I thought
was a word used at work
meaning to shift and resolve
Actually meaning to sever order
New rotations
A cover for all sins
I'm rotating out of a difficult spell
A sticky patch

with areas of bog that flash with loose change
Tent pegs braced in the face of wind
and on all sides
A cordon made of beasts



PICTURES ON A WALL

Crushing up the ice
for the winter party
I used to live for chaos
Now with the outhouse
I know the sound of a climbing bat
How to mow correctly
The more frequently you mow
the denser the lawn will be
Correctly now, she says
Well it's a start, I say
But what I want
is to hang pictures on a wall

Have you ever owned a trap for a mouse?
In the old days it was a wine bottle
The door a cork closed by hand
Mine's glass
with a self-closing entrance
that keeps the creature in
It was sold to me
as a highly sensitive catcher
For the sake of the children
I release them into the park
The mice find their way back and often
it's at a party

Nothing to do with the people
More like the pull
of a petrol station at night

What is the difference between ash
and snow
She asked me in the interview
Where are your awards
and have you ever seen a greenhouse
re-glazed
Surely, I said, in the first instance
one is required to smash every single pane
Her can of cola cracked
Joking aside, I said
Now hand me a brush

I'm hosing down the roof when I think of it
The best arrangements
They come in a daydream
I hear her take a snap
She must only see the base of me
The footprints of my swinging feet
The fine spray of water
Will it reach her?

WHITE NOISE

It's too hot to run
Better to lie in wait
Cool water from the machine
and at the press of a button
tapes from home
In a week I submit fifty articles
and where are they now?
Adrift

That's all my nights fractured
with a foreign pulse
The kick of adrenaline
Limitless breath mints

To all my students I say the same
Nothing is planned but things happen
Stories write themselves
and if it doesn't fit
It never will

The fan's plugged in
I'm tired
in a collar again
With the click push of a pencil
I've erased seasonal breaks
Winter is slimmer

There's the unaddressed lust
for a long weekend that I'll pause over
Sleep
Says the dog
Gnawing at the back pages of today's paper
Set her on a room of experts in their field
and she will find the duds

The river's low
and it's so early the billboards are still lit
Bins are piled high with bags from other bins
There's a bleed
I turn in the bed
We're going to have to start
tightening the taps
Tying up the live wires
and cutting the white noise out

LOOSE TALK

Lights out
Take the lights
out of this blinking head
Deep belief blossom
so as to split the shell
Spill
Drop out and down
Sink
like ink in an oil tank
Put your foot on the brake
Easily done
and if the car swerves
Turn the wheel the other way

Lay back
The seats are leather
Lay back
It's over
and with the mist lifted
A sigh so natural
Your own company
So good you don't know that you're in it

Lie down and speak to the start
Lie down
and in your ear
from the rafters
Loose talk