

I am telling you because you are far away





There's a woman in here with me now waiting for the same train - fiftyish, she's wearing a bobble-hat and brown boots and thick stripy tights - looks a bit funny, really, but I like her, I think - we smile at each other a lot. In the black glass over her shoulder I keep catching sight of my face - and I can see a light on the next platform, I think - it's moving in the wind.

Oh God - why's it so cold? Why's it have to be so cold?

There's a half-bottle of vodka in my bag - we're going back to her parents' after, that's the plan, to sit in her room and get drunk and talk about things - I bought it in town this afternoon after she phoned. I still do everything she tells me. I don't care, I really don't. I use the cap as a measure. The woman smiles, offers me a cigarette. "You look cold," she says. I say, "I wish I had your hat."

Eighty minutes. Eighty fucking minutes late and no-one tells us a fucking thing.

And then when it does come I almost don't notice - but suddenly the woman's saying goodbye and opening the door to the platform and I realise there's lights and people moving outside - but now I can't move, I'm shaking, sick-feeling... so I wait, all hunched up in my corner - and suddenly she comes through the door, her green coat all speckled with snow -

- her face glowing -

And I - I've wanted all day just to talk - to tell her about everything that had happened, about the Christmas tree by the platform and I realise there's lights and people moving outside - but now I can't move, I'm shaking, sick-feeling... so I wait, all hunched up in my corner - and suddenly she comes through the door, her green coat all speckled with snow -

And my voice sounding like I'm at the bottom of a swimming pool -

And she looks at me sitting there, clutching my bag tight, and she ruffles my hair like I'm a little kid and suddenly I start crying and I don't know why. "Come on," she says, "let's go somewhere warm. I can't face mum just yet."

There's a pub just outside the station, The - Greyhound? I think. We sit in a corner and I say: "But I wasn't there alone, there was this woman with me."

And she smiles and fingers her glass; she's got a broken nail, first-finger-left-hand, and her hair's like a fabulous soft blonde cloud against my face - my head swims, I think: I'm losing this. So I start to talk and talk and talk with my face all flushed and puffy, and I knock her drink skidding across the table, and the glass smashes on the imitation flagstone

hearth thing they have there and the barman shouts over at me to behave and - somewhere in the middle of it all, the middle of all that teary wanting to curl up and sob mess-I've-made, is the gorgeous, foggy, alcohol-softened moment when I realise she's wanting to kiss me as much as I'm wanting to kiss her, and she moves imperceptibly closer -

(Later in the taxi I think: I want to build a whole lifetime from that moment, repeating endlessly; why can't I? What else is life for?)

Jesus, I say, I've missed you, I didn't realise how -

And she says yes but -

No, that's not right, it wasn't till the Boxing Day she told me, and it was in her father's car, just the two of us, driving over to Harper's Pond to see if it was frozen - I just always have it down in my head as that bar, that Christmas Eve - I like things - poetic.

In her father's car she told me there could never be a future and that I shouldn't sacrifice everything for a few silly moments, those were her words.

Five Christmases ago.



Today was New Year's Eve. This morning I tried to write, but just froze - the heating's fucked and this room gets no sun at all - so I went for a walk, and walk all day because I love the lack of people and the weird stillness, and I walk and walk until the sky fades and seems to grow solid - a horrid, thick, sick-coloured sky - and then I come home, down through the muffled dusk, but for some reason when I reach Fairfax Bridge I stop and lean against the iron rail and gaze up past the flyover ramp and up the hill to where St. Mary's is looking sad as hell now, her spire-top all lost in a yellowy lamp-lit cloud that's billowing out to fog across the river, and suddenly I'm beginning to shiver and I'm thinking of my room and the evening ahead and tomorrow being a New Year and everything all cliches like that and I'm looking around at the few people still out, still creeping home, and suddenly I'm thinking of her again and I'm thinking is this it, is this what wasn't worth sacrificing?

At midnight I hear fireworks and go upstairs to where the big top-landing window looks out over the city. I pull it open. The mist's thickened now and the roofs of the houses on the street below are just dark grey shadows; beyond and above them the fog is everything. I smell the gunpowder, hear the scream and crack of rockets, see nothing -

You know how you think the worst thing in the world would be waking up one morning and finding you've gone blind, or deaf, or paralysed?

I didn't go to her funeral. Well - I wasn't invited. You know why, we all do.

Oh fuck them, fuck every one of them - I don't need people like that. "People like that" - her mother's phrase for me, ha-ha.

It's got kinda dreamy round here.

I spend an hour in Kwik-Save
in some sort

of aimless daze because I can't think
what it is I'm supposed to be doing,
or why.

I listen to people talk and

I stare at price-tags till they become
a blur.

I listen to people talk and

I watch them move and I become

uncontrollably sad.
Christ, this is the real
dim end of town

these days,
people getting by -

Outside I step past kids begging and

I don't know what's real and what's not;

the middle-classes have

taken to the hills
and cower behind private security;

our house got done over

twice last month -

WHY for fuck's sake,

there's nothing here.

The searchlights picked me out tonight as

I crossed by the BUPA Hospital gates -

I don't shoot!!!

I'm a stranger here...

I made that up.

I'm a writer, I make things up.

On the city rim the avenues

have become suburban drag-strips.

Each morning

I walk in through the estates and

smell the burnt out shells -

Granada, Sierra,

I crumble the misty grey ash in my hand.

I feel like a small boy on

the 6th of November.

I feel excited.

Listen: it seems more and more now like
we were the only ones stupid enough to
think there could ever be much else to hope
for beyond a few beautiful silly moments;
suddenly looking for order and logical
step-by-step progress to some marvellous
unspecified end, some reward for endeavour
and virtue, seems hopelessly old-fashioned
and out-of-tune. Suddenly all I want is
chaos, stupid, irresponsible chaos - you
think that's wrong, you think that's
immoral? Well, maybe I've stopped
believing in morals, those morals. I'd say
I've stopped believing in the future if it
didn't sound so

I've stopped believing in the future.

But then I just tear myself to pieces
again, because I know I always shrink back,
that whenever I glimpse that chaos through
some accidental chink or piece of
uncharacteristic daring I just HATE HATE
HATE those who sparkle and whirl before me,
because they don't sparkle for ME, because
I'm old, and too-late. And then I think
how did they KNOW, how did they find out?
Or is it all part of growing up these days?

And I'm scared. Lonely. Jealous.

Tonight I dream

that her tiny ghost

comes scampering

about

the late-night

streets

of this wretched town

hurling

handfuls of sparkly tears

into the

sad grey eyes of passers-by who pause

bemused,

oddly blissful,

while she puts on her shades,

and offers to kiss them away -