

Steve Cartwright

Into the dark and out of the dark



We're two dark shapes coming out of the cottage
Into the dark and out of the dark
Past the vast grey windy beech
Its scrapey fingers scratching the panes
And spraying a lattice of shadow onto the lane
As the lamp snaps on
Slicing a blinding halogen into the night
And freezing our burred and fuzzy outlines
Onto the inky black beyond.
Into the dark and out of the dark.
Bemused and squinting
Crushing the open crusty beech nuts underfoot
And scraping on the gravel
Aiming for the lane and up towards the tavern
Sploshing in the puddles
Our eyes set against the conical brilliant bursting
Beams of car lights strafing the road.
Bumping our corrugated shadows
Over the gutters and into the drains.
Into the dark and out of the dark
Then on and up the gitty
Past the quiet houses spurting blue telly
In shafts around the curtains
Or gentle yellow arcs from the unshuttered window
Their occasional dogs
Cracking the night with loud and angry barking
Then slowly disappearing as our bouncing echoing footsteps
catch us up and dance us down the lane.

Into the dark and out of the dark
Then it's up we are and out by the dark church
With its sprawling graveyard
Past the garage and out onto the high street
Where half way down the hill
The town lights are calling
And suddenly there's glasses in your fist
And footy on the telly
Dusty easy chairs that gather you up and smother you
And friendly Irish maids that bring your Guinness over
And dance a daft drizzle of limerick out among the men folk
And Willie the milkman and his mate
Talking a soft brogue and taking us on at pool.
And though there's boxes in the corner
And stuff all in the corridor
And chairs all piled up ugly by the other furniture,
And though the new extension's tacky
And the fire's a plastic moulded-coal electric
By God I guess it must be so in heaven.
But then it's off we go again
Into the dark and out of the dark
A mad shiver tightening the coat
And thrusting the fists deep into the pocket
Two Oor Woollies pogoing home together
Our bodies stiff and set against the cold
Our minds still lingering in the Guinness
Relishing the thought of the log fire and the cottage
As we dart into the wind and rain
Down the dark alley
And past the now sleeping houses
Their tumble of paraphernalia spilling out
The lean-to shed, the chucked-down bike,
Breeze blocks half covered under a flapping green tarpaulin
Kids toys left lying in the last gesture of play
Frozen on the flagstone or the crazy paving
And cars half parked up on the causeway
Or perched on ramps their bonnets open
Propped up on makeshift jacks, a prolapse of innard hanging
Awaiting the spare part or the weekend mechanic.
Then others Sporting fancy patios and gardens
Their spanking cars dozing in the driveway
The second tucked up cosy in the dolly garage
Turning up their noses as we clank wetshod down the lane
Into the dark and out of the dark
Then suddenly there's the cat
Mewing and prancing on the wall
Tiptoeing on the fence top Like a ballerina pirouetting
Black as jet Its back arching
Its fur sparkling a hazy spittle of vapour
against the cold strafe of the street lamp-
Scooped op into the cold slap of the leather jacket
In a moment of wondrous spontaneity
Only later to realize the hasty nature of the gesture
As the cat with thrusting darts of movement
Hunts us ever homeward
As the rain pours down
And the streets gleam like the sheen on the wet slack
Bringing back the memory of the fire-poking
And the soft coal gently combusting
Into the dark and out of the dark
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