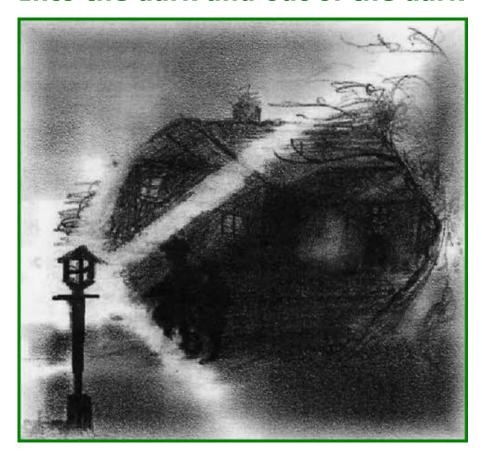
Steve Cartwright

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 guiet 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 broque 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

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