

1975

# Factory at Nightfall

John Cassidy

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## Recommended Citation

Cassidy, John. "Factory at Nightfall." *The Iowa Review* 6.3 (1975): 187-188. Web.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1941>

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Winter sunlight defines us,  
momentary hill figures,  
in negative on lit slopes:

we are a footstep's shadow;  
we are the echo of light.

As you turn to me, and in  
turning take my arm,  
the sun travels through our coats  
and forms unwoven matter  
on fibres of light

and here  
this slight and linear dark  
where your shadow and mine cross.

Winter heat in the pavement.  
A pigeon suns on a roof.

And for half or a minute  
we are as old as the light.

I have brought the line back to a strict seven-syllable measure, and, I hope,  
to a more lyrical behaviour.

### Factory at Nightfall / John Cassidy

You head north, from the way the smoke  
moves off your stack, lying back as if  
slipstreamed, a ship steaming  
full into the wind's teeth.

Steady though, brick steady, foursquare  
planted on the rolling land, trees  
splurging at the bow, grass whistling  
way out behind in a great wake.

All your windows, hundreds, blazing ports  
challenging the dull dusk, the cluttered  
ocean that you sit on. Travellers  
miles away absorb you, awestruck.

Even at a distance the unvarying growl  
of your bowels has a rare solidity.  
Something is under way, a drive  
with a known purpose, a kind of trust.

Small city with your ordered population  
busy beneath those lights, sail  
north into the darkness, humming.  
I salute your assurance.

Elsewhere the single-handed amateurs  
plunge under the wind, maintaining  
tiny lights and radio silence.  
Engineless, they confront their compass.

## The Dancing Man / John Cassidy

The Dancing Man of my grandfather's day  
Went his rounds of the villages  
And the distant farms, in a routine  
Like the pedlar, the knife-grinder, and those  
Sad seekers after a bed in the straw, men  
Hailed or hounded away as the case was.

Nobody drove off the Dancing Man.  
He carried a concertina that he whirled  
Around his head once under way, clacking  
Across the cobbles in a complicated  
Rattling symmetry. But he began slowly,  
Repetitively positioning his long feet  
To a cautious, almost exploratory whine  
On the instrument. That was the summons.

They gathered then, through doors, round buildings,  
Even out of the fields and schoolyards, to root  
Themselves round the Dancing Man.  
Who began in them a sympathetic, loose  
Swaying, a release of feet, a slackening  
Of shoulders and a crowd of smiles.

Or frowns. Mothers of daughters moved  
Uneasily, farmers lamented the deserted  
Fields, cattle moaned at the late milking.  
It took days, they said, before order  
Could settle again after such  
Disturbance. But nothing is ever the same  
After the visit of a Dancing Man.  
Meet him if you can.