

1975

The Dancing Man

John Cassidy

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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.