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Luanda by Night

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LUANDA BY NIGHT

There was a closet at the back of the room. This was beyond time, or the breakable part. The words woke him and restored confidence in the closet’s darkness. What would become of the closet without words? The rain chatters on the steps. In his dream his hands move to repeat themselves. The beautiful words take up no space. He repeats them, and each time he does, the image is sharpened, consolidated, extended, as a city is, a city growing by a river, centuries earlier. He remembered that London deepened, burned, then crept west, while Petersburg followed the Neva’s left bank, stone houses lining the granite banked Moika. He would have plied the canals, a lighterman, as now, the shallow draft, and inchling wake, the pendulous flex and waft of the surface. Beyond the closet the darkness of the room was like a pond at night, or like wine in a dark green bottle, or like a spinach patch in a dawn drizzle, like cities dreaming of perfect cities—Jefferson’s Hadley, or Filey from the north, with its bluff and rowboats. Below, the village, bursting out of sleep, spreads her awnings, the postman unslings his satchel, autumn leaves bounce beneath tiny boxes of light, housewalls warm like buns, the poets still dreaming in the barbershops, tired of fish sandwiches, and the sky clutching the city like a crutch. A chicken clucks in a tub. A wire salesman laughs at his money. Life hovers like a dirigible.
above the radio tower. A city listening
to rivers. A man dives from a pier.
The sea falls asleep. Lorries flit through
caves of light; traitorous sky,
mornings shaped like desks. A whore
shoos the pigeons from her stoop.
The plangent chuckling of the waves at curfew.
Ships leaning with their cargos like catatonics.
Dockhands diving from docks into indolent slips.
A broken taxi pleads with a tree.
A bed stares at a bunker.
A young boy named Paul Morel scuttles
down a rutted lane on his bicycle.

MAHLER’S SHED

The word order of trees outside the shed
signals a silence inside the head
of Mahler, a white door. A child holds
an orb, palm-sized dream of holding nothing.
We are each of us dressed in our quiet
according to a noise, on the meadow’s
further side, where earth’s narration
is noticeable. How can we be human
sitting alone in a rectangle?

The quiet is not
the sheer quiet
of sounds falling
like pebbles through a shallow pool.
A plop, and ripple, fall in silence, rest
in silence with their brothers,
foreshortened by the concentrating mind.
I am not saying the mind at work
is like a forest pool; but the forest pool
is a mind at work, in the worded quiet of the wood.