

## The Rising Sun

Suddenly, after the heat of day,  
the air turns cooler, shrinking each breath  
to fit the lung.

On the hillside, blue-grey mist evolves  
among the static forms of trees  
so that the distances between them,  
so clear in the brightness of the sun,  
have evaporated.

Now, they acquire the character  
of trees in a painting, a horizontal band of greying green  
beneath a massive weight of empty sky.

Strange how emptiness can be so tangible,  
how space sometimes has greater presence  
than the things within it.

The sky is the colour of empty air,  
cooling from the side of the Earth  
tilting steadily away from the setting sun.

Through the open window,  
the scent of honeysuckle swells  
to fill the vacuum of the sky  
and a distant curlew flutes its piping call.

I open the cupboard, take out a tin,  
pull the ring and pour the stout, dark as soot,  
into the empty space of a sky-coloured glass.

The sharp tang invades my being  
and time spins away, flicking through the archive  
back to videos of early days.

I am wearing a fox-coloured tweed suit,  
with short trousers, socks pulled up to my knees,  
shiny black shoes, short back and sides.

I am nine years old and waiting  
on the corner of Shrewsbury Road  
outside the Rising Sun in Forest Gate.  
holding a cellophane bag of crisps,  
unwrapping the dark blue paper twist  
and shaking on the salt.  
I hear the crisps exploding inside my head  
and they taste of potato.

My father returns with his mother  
and she walks towards me in a peculiar way,  
gives me a kiss that tastes of stout.  
She smells of ashtrays, smoke, urine and vomit.

We walk to the house in silence  
and I play in the back yard.  
Over the wall, where the jelly factory  
was bombed to the ground,  
the rubble is overgrown with willow herb  
and the air is full of butterflies,  
small tortoiseshells and red admirals,  
their flight undulating and jerky  
as if they had been to the Rising Sun.

I hear voices from an upstairs window,  
Come and say goodbye to Gran, but I refuse.  
We catch the trolleybus with smoked glass windows  
made for Africa, but never sent,  
and head for home.

We are walking up the lane  
past Miss Emberson's weatherboarded bungalow,  
dark green with cream windows and door  
and a nameplate announcing Sunnyside.  
Miss Emberson taught me at infant school,  
how to thread a needle and sew blanket stitch  
with coloured wool.

I finish my stout. The air is still and has a chill in it now.  
The trees and mist have coalesced into a greater shape,  
an amorphous forest of dark and bulbous imaginings.

The sky is colourless,  
a neutral space impossible to focus on.

The eyes struggle,  
interpret a pointillist galaxy of flickering stars,  
small pulsing points of light  
within small darkening points of night.

Day is almost over now.  
Tree shadows rise from within the grass,  
drift upwards into empty air.