

CLOSING TIME

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PART ONE

Narrator: Closing time at the Kings Head

Closing time at the Kings Head
and the public bar holds its locals tight.
Reluctant to leave, they know their rights
to stay and nurse their comfort tenderly.

He will be the very last to hoist his arse aloft.
Balancing on rickety stool, the sway
of uncertain body and less certain mind,
stepping down gingerly lest
that tippie too many topples the lot.

Bumbling, unhurried, shuffling
across the familiar, uneven floor
towards the heavy oak door.
He has perfected the ounce of pull
to lift the latch and push.

A shock of damp air sneaks
through the crack, widening now
as he stumbles out into the cold mist,
disappearing like his thoughts.

The woman: Shadow lives

I tread a path not of my choosing
to shimmy with the shadow of his life
while mine steps lightly to one side.

I am vital to his well-being; worn smooth,
the rough edges of resentment
no longer catch on thorns of daily strife.

Sinking into the tick tock of his time
I settle for mysterious packages,
he will not open, arriving at the door.

The world is small and I devour

the foreign food of paint and ink, hungrily
kneading the clay which he disdains.

He dwells deep in crevasses of talent lost,
stretched like an elastic into the present.
Were it to ping, he'd surely die of shame.

The man: Cherries

You two women talk in smiles.

You say some more, it riles
not to understand
what's going on.

You put bright cherries in my bowl.
I catch your hand to keep me whole,
to help me understand
what's going on.

You struggle but I hold you firm.
It's safer, though you twist and turn,
cos you won't tell me
what's going on.

Something's not right. I feel the rising fight in me
with the table tipping and water flying free.

You raise your voice; you scream you shout.
Ok, ok you want me out,
but tell me please,
what's going on?

I've found the sofa, sit and wait.
Kitchen's in an awful state.
I still don't know
what's going on.

It's quiet now, my fight has gone.
I wander back, there's something wrong
"Want some cherries?"

Stupid question. Of course, I do
We eat, wash up; I feel deflated.
All I know is lost, outdated.
Just want to know
what's going on.

The woman: Dear Husband

Dear husband, do stop fretting through the night.
It's hell to lie beside you and to hear
your gasping breath, as if in mortal fight
with double crossing monsters whom you fear.

You twist and turn, take up and fling aside
the bedclothes in an effort to be free,
then turn towards me arms out, stretching wide,
a man adrift upon his stormy sea.

I try to help, I really do my best
to soothe the frightful chaos in your head
which drives your body on some pointless quest
and tips you into feeling so much dread.

My words, my touch, my love all go unheeded.
I'm lost, confused; I don't have what is needed.

The man: Spaghetti Thoughts 1

Excuse me, can you help me? I need to know
where my wife is. She's supposed to meet me but
she might not have the address you see, not
know where to go. Sorry, can you remind me
please, where am I now? 18 Silver Lane? Are you
sure? Yes, that's my home. So, is that where I
am?

I was worried about getting a bed for the night,
have to make a booking you know. What? It's
booked already, has been for months, then where
am I sleeping? Here? Where's here again? 18
Silver Lane? Yes, that's my home and I've got to
get a bed for tonight. I mean, where did I sleep
last night? Here, really? Are you absolutely sure?
Have you got documents to prove that? Because
this address has nothing to do with my problem.
Just a minute, sorry but who are you again?

The woman & the man: Spaghetti thoughts 2

Her

Oh no, here we go. I try and follow
as inner anguish squeezes bitter
sound into crackle glass of meaning.

Sliding slippery as spaghetti,
struggling to ride
the ride with you,

I fail and fall tumbled into irritation
while you go on and on and on....
I have to leave.

You stand there lost, confused,
bent, bereft and small.

I cannot bear it at all.

I try again, pick up my fork and
twist spaghetti thoughts
into a semblance of meaning.

Him

Excuse me, where's my wife?
She might not know and
need reminding where to go,

and with me out of sight
she might forget she's meant to see
about getting a bed for the night.

You see I'm worried that
she may have been hurried
and not made the booking.

I'm home? Don't need a reservation?
Have you got some confirmation?
Will you please just have a look?

No, I'm sure I have to book
Must get a bed for tonight,
then I'll be alright...

PART TWO

The narrator: Tea time

Four little squares of bread sitting on a plate.
One man of eighty-six getting in a state.
Toast spread with butter, oozing thick with jam,
man's all a flutter, he'll eat it if he can.

Questions come a plenty but answers there are few.
His mouth is here, the bread is there,
between them what's to do?
No spoon, no fork or knife in sight to execute a plan,
there's something here that isn't right
he'll sort it if he can.

That woman, who might be his wife,
is sitting there as well,
She doesn't see what's going on,
he knows her, he can tell.
"What shall I do?"
he blurts it out as shameful as it sounds,
for she might know and help him out;
he waits while his heart pounds.

"Pick up the piece", she gently says, urging him to try.
Hesitant and fearful, he grips her with his eye.
Is this right, he wonders as fingers find the jam.
He's grateful for the help she gives,
he'll tell her if he can.

The man and woman: The corner of my quilt

Arriving at the corner of my quilt,
uncertain worlds beckon.
Flotsam and jetsam of time travelled,
the end of all my knowing.

Ice caps of certainty
shift, crack and shudder.
The anarchy of splintered thought
stirring ancient griefs and sorrows.

All is flux and floating.
An endless pull
in no particular direction; always
the fear of tumble, unable to return.

I clamber the angles of your terrain,
to remember the shape of my being,
to enquire into the seed of existence,
to be held captive, rooted and secure.

The woman: Responsibility

I hold your world in my hand
like a blank sheet of paper.

I have the pattern of your days
etched like a map in my mind.
I know the words to soothe,
to remind you who you are.

Eying the door, my fingers
long to curl, crumple, hurl
the yoke, the weight, to escape.

Yet, immobile I sit and wait
for I hold your life
in the palm of my hand.

The man: Losing it

Words seize and shape my knowing,
keep it safe, weave meaning till voice,
the midwife of expression, lets fly.

Abruptly, threads split and fray.
Hydra filaments wave furiously,
failing to find words of similar complexion.

Careless tentacles connect by chance to
streams of otherness, unfamiliar, foreign

but good enough to carry voice.

Stumbling upon strands of anger,
shouting, swearing, making no sense,
I am lost. Help! Call the police! I need help!

The man: He will be heard

He is outraged, seething,
shaking, gut bleeding.
So much has been lost,
there's no counting the cost.
He will be heard.

He wants peace and solitude,
fuck unwanted platitudes.
He'll have no one in his house,
he'll stand firm against his spouse.
He will be heard.

With each snap inside his brain,
she's advanced on his terrain,
she has bled his own authority,
made her wish the main priority.
He will be heard.

He will show her his mettle.
No way will he settle
for half measures, or bin
the deep fury within.
He will be heard.

"Animale!" The wordy weapon flies,
resounds Wagnerian in its guise.
Releasing torrents of frustration
breaching walls of indignation.
He will be heard.

She sits shocked, frozen,
as the venom unchosen
draws on the full weight

of his desperate state.
He will be heard.

His cruel word does not hide
the deep terror inside.
Deflating, she can guess
that she will acquiesce.
He will be heard.

And the glimmer of hope
to step off the tightrope
of tension and strain,
to feel more humane,
will not be heard.

PART THREE

The narrator: Cracking up

For years thoughts were held secure,
catalogued with common logic.
Now a creaking, a cracking
of props which snap,
bring down the roof on reason.

Italian marble fractures.
Childhood marbles roll
and are lost.
Etna's lava bubbles
yeast, raising new worlds
where delusion bounces
into the harsh matter of fact.

Familiar eloquence dissolves
in a wash of fear rising, rising.
It is not a stab wound; it is a bruising.
It is not fatal; it is worse.

The man: Bitch

Where the fuck have you gone you bitch?
 Rolled off my ship? Had your fill?
 Come back, I need you here, you witch.

I toss, I fret, there's no off switch,
 no one but you can fit the bill.
 Come back, I need you here, you witch.

Adrift, with limbs and mind that twitch,
 no soothing hand to hold them still.
 Where the fuck have you gone, you bitch?

Is this the end, is this my ditch?
 Not yet, I haven't had my fill.
 Where the fuck have you gone, you bitch?
 Come back, I need you here, you witch.

The woman: I do not swear

I do not swear
 Fuck
 I do not swear
 Fuck
 I do not swear
 Fuck, fuck
 I have sworn
 in sickness and in health
 Fuck.

PART FOUR**The man: Mutiny**

He walks across the room
 and stands stock still.
 His face a mask, his eyes adrift.
 No longer captain of his mind.

Words mutiny, abandon laws of syntax,
 fret and froth with the spring tide,
 revelling in their new freedom,

not content to follow his command.

The rope of meaning frayed,
 the lanyard snapped,
 the sail askew tearing in the wind,
 it drives him on, pitiless.

A soft moaning, hardly heard,
 whispers to the wanton words,
 which, unheeding
 storm the spaces of his throat.

Lips and tongue thrust forth
 on wings of breath
 a message meaningless
 as the cry of gulls to human ear.

The woman: Shoes which pinch

My mother taught me
 to run barefoot, carefree
 across Alpine meadows.
 To relish the ooze of cowpat
 squirming between my toes.

I learned to wear shoes
 with an easy comfort.
 Feet enclosed and safe
 from worrisome weather.
 An embalming of sort

But they have shrunk.
 Stiffened leather wrinkled,
 cracked and creaking,
 stealing my freedom
 to run, to fly.

I wear shoes which pinch,
 crippling me before my time.

The man with the woman joining him:

Daffodils

I look across the table
while sipping at my brew;
lives cut short before your time,
I am in awe of you.

Brave yellow trumpets
pushing through your green,
cut from your muddied field,
happy to be seen.

Proclaiming your beauty,
not loud but straight and true,
with dainty scent of promise
that winter's almost through.

You speak to me of courage
when fate tears life away
from paths that were expected
and you no longer have a say.

You tell me now's the moment
to grasp, to breathe, to shine.
However changed a life might be
it's there to live, it's mine.

The woman: He peers around the corner

He peers around the corner, silent, unblinking, suspicious, assessing the moment to pounce - but without intention. Who am I now? He stares motionless. A stranger to me. A stranger to himself.

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On this unusually balmy evening I invite him to the terrace. He watches me slip through the door and settle on the bench, then follows.

Inching towards the water butt, he pauses; tentative fingers trace the rough surface finding lines to anchor into the world, into now. Suddenly he looks up and with simple sincerity says, "I'm sorry for what's happening between us".

An unexpected gift springing from the tangle speaks momentarily of love and is gone. He hovers, moves cautiously towards the bench, sits down. In our silence I hold his hand and the moment precious.