

nticelli, Naples New Year 1999

In the kitchen sink

a writhing mass of black eels

fatter than bicycle tyres

slither from the clutches of two women,

who would wilfully wrestle with vipers

armed only with innuendo and scissors

and a grandmother's cooking advice.

Three old men laze on a bed

exiled wisely from the world of a woman's bustle

swapping *Lucky Strike* smokes

and sharing their worries

of fishbones, disease and the sanctity of a daughter's virtue

like that of Lucia and Rosa locked in the bathroom

turning eyelashes into tarantulas,

jealous boyfriends into husbands,

and grandmothers in their graves

with their curling false lashes and counterfeit perfumes

In the apartment below an old lady shouts,

'Number Ten, Maradona!'

where a camorrista clan captain

obediently plays tombola with his one-eyed mother

and from her balcony across the square

the prostitute laughs unbothered

at loathing lamenting neighbours

in a perpetual uproar

about the volume of her CD player.

In search of a signal at the salon window

Francesco and Ciro explore the uncharted menus

of brand new cellular phones

while Johnny bambino

cutting a tooth in his cot

wakes in the hullabaloo

and cries a moment like a ring tone that nobody knows.

In the forecourt, flat as a boomerang

squashed in the dust by the road

the desiccated fur of a dead cat grins at the kerb

where cocksure boys revving scooters

and a puppety tangle of junkies

shadow the litter-choked paths between blocks

at a bus stop where nobody waits and no bus ever comes

as the sun goes down

with the aluminium eyelids of shuttered-up shops

in a graffitied backdrop of twilight, broken streetlamps

and street-working girls

the headier hubbub of an evening

spices up the drone of the day

with its usual simmering fusion of restaurant smells

partying traffic, club beats and yelping strays

tonight, on the stroke of twelve the city explodes

like a land suddenly freed

with the shriek of whistles, hooters, horns,

claxons, bombs, fire crackers and howls

and the crash of old furniture thrown from the windows

of a lawless mob embracing mayhem

and the promise it brings

with the purging of chaos

prised and vandalised from the soul

until it sneaks slowly back in

in the morning of the new dawn

two thousand years since the birth of Christ

where a listless church bell clangs

like a ghost ship lost in fog

a wheelie bin smoulders at a stop

where no one waits

and the bus never comes

where a dead cat squashed in the dust

grins at a world that burns

like the long abandoned care of a dream gone wrong.

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