

The Road

Begins as a simple track from the safety of the home,
Becoming more distinct and worn as it is trodden.
It joins, as it always will, with others who seek to roam,
Far from familiar places, that soon will be forgotten.
What wondrous places for those well shod,
Or those whose steady feet can feel the stony ground?
Through vistas of a myriad of experiences, their feet plod,
Some in silence, like spectral ghosts, without a sound.
At last, when the spirit is willing but the soul may not,
Their once lively steps become more weary
And the journey's purpose is now forgot.
Overhead the darkening clouds make the journey dreary,
But like a story, well told, with bright words painted,
That shows what brightness kindly may begin
To dispel experience that cynicism has tainted,
For the comforting light shines from a distant inn.

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Life's a Journey

The ticket stamped at birth, a journey starts,
From that small suburb deep within our hearts.
At two, the world was rationed, sharp and clear,
Of coal-dust skies and winters of great fear,
Where heavy snow would muffle every sound
Upon the little, newly-pounded ground.

Then, on a bus, the landscape rearranged,
A brighter, louder world came into view.
We crossed the bridge that Westminster bestows,
And passed the great clock tower, everybody knows.
The gilded hands of time began to spin,
A brand-new, bustling chapter to begin.

And Piccadilly's lights, a golden flood,
Meant I no longer knew the night was black,
Just endless amber burning on the track.
The city's symphony was my new score—
The urgent cry, the engine's building roar,
The hum of conversations, thick and deep,
That sang the restless capital to sleep.

A Wren church held our vows, both humble, grand,
A stony promise made by heart and hand.
Then came our son, a child of brick and smoke,
Who finds his joy where city spirits spoke;
A true-born dweller, never more content
Than in its vibrant, loud temperament.

My path wound through the civic and the trade,
In County Hall and export deals, I made.
The journey asked for duty, love, and skill,
And asked again, and I obeyed its will.

Now, retired, the final change of gear,
I've left the clamour for the country air.
The constant sound is birdsong, not a car,
And night is black and pricked with stars afar.
Yet in this quiet place, I am content,
A vibrant community where days are spent.
A different light to see my journey out,
With London's memory, there is no doubt.

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A Litter Picker's Last Words

He walked down the tidy road,
Proudly and without a care in the world,
Not fearing the white vans
Flashing past within his arm's length,
Nor the fast approaching ambulance,
That would launch him skyward, then,
His body, folded into a neat adjacent hedge
He watched the wrapper of his last Snickers bar
Catch the breeze and somersault through the air,
Coming to rest, tangled in the lower limbs
Of a well trimmed aucuba,
His last thought was: "Not more bloody litter".

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Bolivar Sands

Mile after mile through Houston sprawl –
that flashing succession of leering signs:

shopping-malls, car lots and eating joints,
the ferry across Galveston Bay, reeling

at the heat of Texan sun; hassled by screaming gulls
to finally arrive, and have this long sweep

of Bolivar Sands to ourselves. Wind gusts
in from the Gulf of Mexico, stirs up the ocean,

sends rollers crashing on the beach –
to drift back in rasping sighs. We walk in silence,

faces turned seaward, gulping salt-spray air,
bare feet squelching warm, damp sand –

approaching a colony of birds – terns, herons,
pelicans, preening and calling in congregation

all along the water's edge. Lapping up the display
we want to get closer when, as at a gunshot,

they go up as one – an Alleluia of flapping,
a shaken sheet lifted, a skitter of wings

along the ribs, lung-filling gasps as they wheel
the sky and that lone hawk swoops back inland.

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My journey back

The coach drones on, a capsule in the night,
from ancient Aachen towards the Channel's light.
A cargo borne of youth, a mingled sound
Of Deutsch and Dutch on common English ground.

A voice cuts through the hum. A pair, opposed,
a young man's finger, quietly posed.
"Is that your bag?" he asks. A vacant space
beneath the seat, a quiet, foreign place.
The claim is met with silence and with stares;
no hand is raised; no owner claims it there.
"Unlikely," I reply, and glance above to where my own, known luggage sits,
a glove of familiar shape, but duty, cold and plain,
now bids me reach for what I must explain.

My hand descends. The fabric gives, is soft.
A sudden chill, a consciousness aloft of stories written in a darker ink.
The mind supplies the missing, deadly link.
I text the company; the chatbot's screen
gives calm, efficient counsel, cold and clean:
"Contact the driver without delay."
The words impose a duty I obey.

I walk the aisle, a tunnel through the sleep of strangers,
secrets that the shadows keep.
I tell the co-driver in measured, low tone,
of the unclaimed bag, and being there alone,
but then, the detail that the chill defines:
The former occupants, the muttered lines
in Arabic, a phrase that I recall—
a vicious curse—then Dutch, encompassing all.
His face sets. He is professional and grim.
He follows me. I lead the way to him.

He takes the soft weight with a quiet nod,
a potential thunderclap, a gift for God to dismantle.
Gone. I try to read, to breathe,
to anchor thought the world would now bereave.
Ten minutes crawl. Then, a figure at my side,
a young man, sheepish, opening his eyes wide.
Apologies for the mistake, the fright,
for choosing a new seat to be beside his friend,
for leaving his possession at my end.

All now is well. The world is righted, sane.
The coach runs on through darkness and through rain.
But in the settled dust, a tremor lies,
a shade of what might meet unseeing eyes,
and in the mirror, if I look with care,
a few more threads of silver, glinting there.

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Fenland Trip

and we had all afternoon to ourselves
 just had to be back by five
and we cycled round Back Lane
and we stopped to steal apples from Taylor's yard
and we scrunched them as we rode
and we tossed the cores into side ditches
and birds chirped from hedges
and our hair flew with the breeze
and we passed by the rubbish tip
 scrunching our noses at the stink
and we stole our way into the farmyard
 where no one seemed to be around
and we shuffled into the shed
and we climbed up the hay bales
 to reclaim our hidden home
and we listened to the scuffle of concealed creatures
and we smiled at each other – wide smiles
 as we lit our pocketed cigarettes
and we breathed out forbidden steam.
(teenage years!)

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Changing Rooms

It's moving day cos a sister has fledged and gone away
And the girls' room, is room enough for two
And Pamela's on her own, now, so it just makes sense
So me and Ste, we've shared the smallest room
The one at the back, no room for long names
Confined, we were, two boys with five years between us
So this twelve year sentence can end
Bunk beds, clipped together, now easily pulled apart
And set loose in the big room

it's a brand new start, a dream scheme, we're in the front, looking onto the road
There's still an arm's length between us but the height has become the reach
And now i can watch him sleep, or his back, when he reads his magazine
Pam's got her books and her smokes
So, seven by seven makes for a little bit of heaven
At least for now, it won't be long
Vows get broken and she and Jan will be together again

They're living now above two old folks renting out their rooms up the stairs
But temper flares, they've read the situation all wrong
They didn't expect two girls to be so much trouble
Silly old couple
But, me and Ste, we have another chance to be free
And though the elder, he took the little room at the back
And the walls of the room at the front are all mine
Alone at last, for the very first time;
Fourteen years
There's room for friends and homework and music and guitars
Until the day i move out to residential halls
To share a different room with three other boys

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