

Two poems, 'The Ghost Walks' and 'A bell on every tooth', .

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A bell on every tooth

I've got peas in my fridge older than you, she said,
and his head is full of slamming doors. Who
are you calling thicker than a Boxing Day shit?
Look at you in your matching shoes, you must
have had a hard paper-round. What did you come as?

The day felt back-endish, quiet as a bit of bread
could send a glass eye to sleep. So mean
it only breathed in. Yer arse in parsley, boy!
Like piffy on a rock-bun you are, so don't
piss down my back and tell me it's raining.

I never regret what I said, just where I said it.
They'd fight with their fingers, some people,
but you couldn't knock snow off the washing line -
go anywhere for a little apple, that one would,
not as green as she is cabbage-looking,

and all over me like a cheap suit, or a rash,
then on him just like a tramp on a kipper,
so hungry she could eat a buttered clog
or a scabby horse. Not my circus, not my monkey -
and hasn't been since Nazareth won the Cup.

It's fine having lead in your pencil, but you need
someone to write to. You had time to kill
a donkey with soft figs, you weren't run off your foot,
and you still don't know if you're punched, bored,
or countersunk, you grubby little tuppence.

Come here, or you'll go home lost, she added,
like your life. More holes than an Aero bar in that,
though it should be good, it cost enough. Get in,
soft lad, the cat's been out longer than you have. It's not
the end of the world, but you can see it from there.

The Ghost Walks

That evening I stood astride the mid-road line
one minute, two, soaking in the hush. Clear
a mile each way it was, clear as lanes entangling
the distant Minster it stretched to, where ghost-walks
had gone from streets that were ghosts of themselves -
though choked now with ghosts more than ever
in Stonegate, picadilly, Pavement, everywhere
unapparent on our screens thickening sick air
where it slid, invisible, pronged, aghast. Daft
with abandonment a few still took selfies
defiant down snickelways; but fog, as in some
crazed newsreel, was congealing. No bombs
would fall there, but the masked cortèges filed by
to curt interments. Past curdled unpeopled
presents, phantasmal, briefed with lies. Just days
before, beneath the walls, we noted the hostel
from which its spilth issued, the index case.
By the blue plaque to Snow of York, who blocked
off Soho's cholera well, by the station-yard
where bubonic plague-pits groaned, by the Ouse
you could now hear sussurant, a dissolution
in which dead selves might rise unappeased
supped at the blood-trench dailiness once filled,
immersed in mortmain hurts all had hoped
long solved, like trains being chartered to run on
that still ran on empy, bright windows bodiless,
like the dying teen who Skyped home one final time
still saying *Don't cry, Mum, I'll make you proud.*
Should that make me angry? Sad? My brother says:
It was just like someone was standing on my chest,
as I halt to rest against the doorpost of Margaret
Clitherow always struggling for her last breath.