

AGAINST THE CLOCK



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for Sarah



We commune, she and I, in silent privacy, ribbon and paper glimmering. I wait, she waits, for a first word to communicate itself with a hesitant beat to the white sheet.

A second word, a short pause, then a third; and now there comes a fluent stream of them. The two of us together find a rhythm. So we begin the dance of keys, the trance

of composition.
Quick and slow, we fashion
what was demanding to be said in words.
A sumptuous black register records
the notes of the concerto.
On we go,

clickety-click (each imprint an antique ever so slightly out of the true as if handwritten, as if with its own personal life stretching back to a past lost in the mist,

old dust and fluff hiding with other stuff in the dark places), page after rackety page, two crotchety relics of a previous age jazzing it up again as in the great days.

A Clearing

A clearing in the wood beyond technology, with two car doors disintegrating in a ditch; a listening light, domain of fox and witch and, stiff with sudden tension, you who dubiously intrude,

fondly imagining like someone in a fairy story strange beings — *sídhe*, *fíanna*, dwarves, elves — will part the leafy boughs to show themselves, to shed light on the mystery and let the magic in.

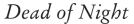
The glade, an open space alive with immanent potential, pours impersonal warmth into your narrow field of sense; but something vital is withheld. You wait, but nothing notable occurs in this mysterious place —

or seems to occur, although a wood-wide web is hard at work reporting on your mischievous invasion while secret presences obscured by sun, revealed by shade, define the dark and shine with their own glow.

What on earth shall we do with this silent conventicle? Install a picnic table, a building site? No, this is where the angel will alight. Just let it be, let be, until the avatar is due.

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Arc lamps so bright tonight the thrushes sing as though at daybreak or the start of spring thinking it's sunrise, and in fun or fright pursue their thing at dead of night in light of or perhaps in spite of it —

a pop group piping in the branches, one clear blackbird noticeable above the din, not like McCartney's learning how to fly with broken wing and sunken eye, but loud and clear in its anxiety.

He'd rather be presaging lousy weather — a downpour or a storm, one or the other; but the blaze gets him going, the gold beak wide open with a frightened shriek in a far, hidden corner of the park.

Not for the lying light and not for us he sings, distinctive in the midnight chorus, but for the living shadows whited out, his fierce song an indignant shout in the bright piercing dead of night and light.

Fitzwilliam Square

Botany

Wildflowers familiar once to 'country folk' we only recognize from the botany book. I couldn't identify (say) tormentil, eyebright or scabious, not until I've checked the pictures on the page where I first make the acquaintance of self-heal, heartsease, leafy spurge — these never to be known at a quick glance.



