

Alan Gillis

**HERE COMES
THE NIGHT**



Gallery Books

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Contents

Down Through Dark and Emptying Streets	page 11
In the Shadow of The Mournes	14
In Whose Blent Air All Our Compulsions Meet	19
Looking Forward to Leave	31
Graduation Day	33
Fledglings	35
The Debt Collector	36
Prelude	38
In a Nondescript Town	41
Rush Hour	42
In These Aisles	46
In a Glass Darkly	48
Eloquence	50
On Cloughey Beach	51
Everyone a Stranger	53
At Dawn	56
At Dusk	59
With or Without You	62
The Blue-ringed Octopus Found on South-Australian Shores	63
Memory	64
Sifting Through	65
The Green Rose	67
On a Cold Evening in Edinburgh	75
Here Comes the Night	80
Approaching Your Two Thousand Three Hundred and Thirty-third Night	88
If There was Time All Day to Wait	92
Whiskey	95

Notes and Acknowledgements 98

The Debt Collector

Between the anticipation and aftermath,
the trickle of water and quenching of thirst,
between the wish and what comes out in the wash,
the seed packet and gladioli bloom,
between now, then and when,
all you know will vanish down the plughole.

No matter how ripe the fruit in the bowl,
erotic the violets, erratic the stars,
at night empty rooms gather you in their claws.
Their silence licks you. All that is lost,
all that is botched streams into one strange image
in the mirror and wears your eyes.

Darker by the day, you feel a stranger
hover at the window, eavesdrop on your calls,
at your shoulder in darkened corridors,
head bowed two seats ahead of you on the bus,
in the shade of the lindens and silver limes,
adept and ready, wearing white gloves.

On a bare wall the clock face ticks.
That you were never liable is a myth
like easy money. So live accordingly.
The hours are long, the months disappear,
and the moment nears when he will come.
He will speak with your voice.

Only if you're lucky will he come without hurt,
steal into your borrowed home
and lead you through this town's coil
of limbs and longing, bear you through the rain,
along nameless roads to a green wood
whose river weaves its murmur with conifer song.

There he'll lay you down in the riverweed,
clubmoss, hazel scrub, witch butter,
covered in a shallow night of crawling soil.
So make the most of your loan, though all that
is gone, or is going, will never let you go.
In our deaths our debt will grow.

Prelude

Soon enough you start to wonder
who you are, ache to reach within,
clear the clutter and discover
your exact life, the real thing, the looming
contours of yourself from core to brim.

You enter a room rid of everything
but paper, pen, couch, slim volumes,
Bushmills, coffee, a stack of CDs
and a succulent. You wait to begin.
Soon enough you start to wonder.

You thought in space and silence the hub
of yourself or the moment or the thing
in itself might orbit, but the thing is
there is no silence, but a bluebottle's huzz
and a creak on the stairs, though no one's there.

You doodle. Doze off. Come to.
Murder the Bush. Sloom off again.
Wake up in darkness and wonder
where you are. The water pipes are rats,
the wind against the window is water.

The door is open. There's a mirror
in the landing but you don't realize
and blench at its glim of noctilucous
light in the gloam. You are drawn
goose-fleshed towards its lurid glare

when something hideous lurches from there.
Your eyes clamp tight. Though not turned on,
the stereo suddenly squawks into song.
Voices start to rise, murmur and creep
from the walls. You peek an eye to peer,

but now the walls have disappeared,
and the voices grow louder to babble
and trattle over karaoke country
ballads, for you've found yourself stranded
at a party where people wear Sarah Palin

plastic masks, their skin like clingfilm,
and they turn on you, laughing and gawping,
glaring at you. They are turning to eyes.
They are nothing but eyes, a swarm of wasps
boiling towards you, each one a jewel

or a star, many stars, a galaxy
of seething, ravenous fulguration
on a canvas of venom as your head
peals in dark matter and you yawl and mewl,
but the sole sound now is of wind or water.

Then she appears, like the moon, out of nowhere,
and the thing you were after suddenly
becomes the thing she once whispered to the swoon
of your ear, her mouth's tincture, the melting
of her eyes, her calligraphy in motion

as she turns away. You follow her through
the hall, a garden, down a twisted lane
to creep through hushed rain and high grass,
but you've lost her. Everywhere there's a hiss,
a voidance, a crackle rising like mist

from the green and the graves, and you succumb
to these revenants and succubi of sound,
running in rings that circle no thing,
no nothing: you are ghosted from bone to skin,
nerves, pulse, waves rising, falling within.

Soon enough you start to wonder
who you are, ache to reach within,
clear the clutter and discover
your exact life, the real thing, the looming
contours of yourself. You enter a room.

In a Nondescript Town

Gulls crawl and cry over rooftops and sirens,
evacuated schools, outraged streets, fire engines,
while families hunch and huddle in their drives
watching TV crews, news reporters gather.

Tight-lipped plainclothed officers sip coffee
on a floral sofa. A neighbour explains:
'When he stared at you. As if he'd cat's eyes.'
His mother slumps alone in the kitchen.

A tap drips. Light glades her still head.
Upstairs on the landing a detective
breathes deep, pushes the 'Do Not Enter'
sign of the bedroom door and takes it in

as if standing on the threshold of hell,
trying to make sense of a small made bed,
flat screen, consoles, notepads, posters,
so many books stacked neatly on their shelves.