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Start the Start

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Start the Start

Eleanor's husband is a carpenter who lives inside a window. Inside him is a trapped apprentice plumber. Being Eleanor is a job which she has just started, part of which is to imagine a life for the carpenter in the window.

The man is stuck in the window crying for help again. I go when all the others are passive and try to find out what he wants. 'What is your want?' I ask. He signals there's a man trapped inside him who is an apprentice plumber. So the man in the window wants to start the start again. The trainee plumber who tries to get out is immersed in some problem which won't get him out, screaming in a dream inside the plumber.

This starts when I start to follow Diane to a night club tucked away down a side street between two of the big department stores in the city centre. It is my job as Eleanor to make sure Diane is all right.

Dogged by an imp
A carpenter's vile, obscure mind
Runs on trains, constraints and communication.

He admires his pencil-thin moustache, black as a hole
his eyes are white and he thinks about
the weights of fish, tuna, sturgeon
lost in the deepening deepening.

Stubble sanded down, down the stairs
to greet the table, chairs, the many grains
impy knots.

The man at the window is the very same carpenter who fixed my bathroom doors the other day. He is infinitely in the window, a flattish three-dimensionality, smoke and mirrors, and round his head a hood acts as a ghostly halo, and it's time to recognise him being there, or as some human avatar. I know Diane has begun to think about hoods so perhaps I need to take note from now on. It's not the right time to go back though, I have to go into the club and start.

The carpenter returns to Little Bunting
Youth's workshop, the dreams forge,
The future is Eleanor, children, craft,
A creative, rewarding world, self-built.

He goes back out onto the lawn, tries on Elaine's dream again, see'f he can be eco in plastic.
All those fish bottom feeding.

If only scabble the wood distress
Shaving
Eleanor's scraped tenderness
Where to put the leader's tash
In tenons and mortices
Shoulders cut too deep

Only by screaming in the dream can he get better and then he can start again. He screams all the time after that and he cannot move out of the master plumber, in the real world trying to break through the glass master. Not screaming now the plumber is asleep and he doesn't want to wake him. Mortality now, more mortality, stuck inside eternally. Glass, wood, poisonous lead pipes made from natural poison.

Diane does not crumble when asked if this is her first dance. 'I'm not a beginner' and there's no need for Eleanor to intervene, this time at least, and sips her cocktail. Diane is dressed for horses. It's too late to intervene. Being Eleanor lateness is all. An older woman comes up to Diane and dances on her insecurities and Eleanor lip-reads the charges from the edge of the floor, like not controlling the larger horses, Saracen, Harlequin, Start. Diane says she's here to dance, the woman persists, Diane goes to the cloakroom and hands in her coat before returning to the dance floor, beginning the evening again. The older woman approaches the dancing Diane and touches her arm. Diane goes to the menarche cubicle.

The time behind the window goes dark and Eleanor sees herself in the reflection. Having just started to be Eleanor it's a shock to see the face and how thin she's been starved into taking on the role. Her body is merged within the carpenter's bulk, which signals more information about the apprentice plumber and his current focus on combiboilers. This is what you have to do to preheat water. These are the parameters for pressure, the green arc. This is what you do to cure a frozen outflow pipe. It is just the beginning for the plumber, not so innocent now. He cannot unlearn.

He goes back out onto the lawn, puts on his dream again, to be eco in plastic. All those fish bottom feeding. He doesn't recognise himself in this iconography, a timeless figure pressed into glass pains, a dried flower trapped in the Book of Hours.

Eleanor is back inside the club following Diane, who is now lost. Two jobs in this economy is a strain.

Eleanor's husband is a carpenter who lives inside a window. Inside him is a trapped apprentice plumber. Being Eleanor is a job which she has just started, part of which is to imagine a life for the carpenter in the window. Eleanor was Diane before, so she is now split into two. When Eleanor had the part of Diane it was easier because you went to the clubs and didn't have to be followed, or you weren't followed, or you were following yourself, so there was no job to do. After, it was all performance. Before the split it was easy just to be Diane and not have to worry about the double, or rather, not to have to worry about who would pay for a shadow minder.

The older woman comes up to Diane yet again. 'Can we forget what's gone before this evening, start from scratch?'

'I'm not an idiot. You've approached me twice'. All this is said breathlessly because Diane is dancing hard now. The older woman is about to say something, the words are just about to come out, when Eleanor interposes herself between the two of them.

In the tree is the furniture
 it can be
 thrice removed from what God would make
 your bed
 with his resinous prophetry
 and the black chair black as my pencil-thin tash
 to rule over the world
 God made impitry

DI Tom Strickland has both Diane and Eleanor before him for an interview.

'If you are both in the room at the same time, and all that?'

Eleanor intervenes before it is too late. 'I was definitely Diane before I had to play at being Eleanor'.

Strickland proves to his own satisfaction that this cannot be true when he asks Eleanor to leave the room. ‘You are two different people’.

Diane shrugs her shoulders. ‘Get rid of her, whoever she is’.

The game is up and Eleanor leaves the station corridor and goes to the nearest cafe. On the way there in each window there is the flattish husband. Once inside the cafe she sees him from the back, can’t see his mouth opening and closing, complaining about his father’s disregard for his achievements. Waiting for the barrista to fulfil a function she goes outside and asks him what he’d like for tea. He says he’s in awe of the plumber. ‘Yes, but what would you like for tea?’ She gets nowhere, nowhere!, and goes back inside, drinks her skinny latte and eats her blueberry muffin. ‘Life can’t go on like this, it’s not being eco. Being eco is everything. From now on. He must see that, he must’. At this declaration she goes up to the window and taps on his glassy shoulder. Her husband is incapable of turning round in such a confined space, she has to go outside to the front of the cafe window again and explains this is the start of something, for her at least. Your tea is irrelevant. Make your own. Hunt inside the fridge, the chest freezer, I don’t care, *I don’t care*. A family sitting the other side of the window look in horror so she goes back inside and explains as quickly as she can to them that life can’t go on like this, she’s eco from now on, and how she is breaking free from her husband in the window.

‘Ever since he took on the apprentice plumber, in the hope of building an empire and foregoing wood to realise his version of my dream, he’s, well, he’s not the man I married. You’d think a carpenter would be green’ and rushes back out ‘rather than misunderstand how plastic can ... the tash’ she says, ‘start with the tash. I’ve got to go. It’s too much effort imagining a better life for you, just one person out of seven billion, who won’t accept my imaginings. I’m going to be a councillor first, then an MP. It will take five years to make a difference. Bye’. You should have seen the look on his face!

On the same day Eleanor thought about the Bikini Atoll, saw newspaper items about bird-eating crabs and radiation clouds hovering over Europe (separate stories) and a *Quidnunc* in the local paper which suggested her husband’s tash had taken on a metonymic life of its own, that its potential for adjacency was increasing at an exponential pandemic rate so that everything would become tash-related. This would be the end of the world. The tension in the narrative would be a race between tash-metonymy and eco success. Was five years too long? It could all be over in three pages, fifteen minutes, by the by.

In the fridge bacon and sweet corn. The liquid in the sweet corn can was thick and murky and tasted strange. The bacon was probably out-of-date – Eleanor had blanked out the information in a fit of pique. The carpenter, now eating for two, put on some water for pasta and fried the last four bacon rashers. All he knew how to make was carbonara, ‘bastard carbonara’ he called it when his narrow culinary range was so limpidly evident. Thoughtfully, he heated up the sweetcorn, even though strictly speaking there was no need to. Perhaps it was the stark tash demeanour of the middle rashers. Eleanor had just come back from the library where she had filled in a form to become a councillor and was surprised to see another projection of her husband in the kitchen. She reached through his torso and turned off the two hobs, formulated a complaint to whoever that she hadn’t given permission for him to be released from the window, knowing that there was an implicit agreement when she said he could root around for his own tea but he was confused between wood and plastic because plastic was now wood and he would have to work in plastic. Or wood. Which is it, Eleanor? He was about to tell her that she had just punched the apprentice when she reached through him to the hob and she would say she did no such thing only at the reach through she began her eco career, finally, blazing a trail.

‘Pigs. Methane. Greenhouse gas’.

‘Your tash is becoming darker, Ellie, more Hitler-like. That sweet corn has disagreed with the apprentice. He’s got stomach ache and boy is he letting me know about it. My bowels...’.

Beneath the fingers wood
of all the fingers wood
and this not green
not counsel not balm
for us Elaine
don’t throw me over
for the world

You made me
dream of eco plastic
no such thing Elaine
no such thing Elaine

My, that *is* strong. I'll tell you in five minutes or lose consciousness. The reason I'm here

'I can guess why you're here'.

is about the other half complaints he's in the house wandering and wondering as is his wont.

'You don't believe he's trapped in the city's windows?'

Obviously that distraction is a distraction. I'm eco now. The planet is on a very dangerous path.

'I don't need that lecture. We've all begun being eco'.

'You say that. Did you know...?'

'Probably. Is it about livestock? Listen Elaine, your husband is ill. He tells me you have poisoned him because of your environmental commitments that you've started acting weird'.

'I must bone up on facts and useful statistics for when I'm councillor because, because I'm bound to get asked detailed questions and I have to have the detail to hand. I haven't got time to make my husband's tea, *obviously*, nor should I have to, me making his tea went out with the Ark, he can make his own tea. Don't you see?'

'He doesn't think he can, not with the out-of-date ingredients you've left him in the fridge'.

That's another thing, waste. If he wants to eat livestock that's his lookout, not mine. He must eat everything that's left in the house, no matter how old. The apprentice's difficulties are unfortunate collateral damage. He will have to eat all the leather items as well, belts, boots, his old jacket, the sofa. He will have to adapt to eating plastic, as we will we all if we're to save ourselves. There can be no more wood. Plastic will be an organic compound, I swear, a bastard organic compound, it's the only way.

'That's plenty to drink, thank you. He also says you made him dream eco plastic. Can that be true?'

'Who knows? The past is the past. We must plan for...'

'For pity's sake'.

'Not for pity's sake, no, for the children'.

'You don't have any children of your own'.

'For your children then. You'll have to leave now, if you can walk straight. I'm going to find a protest group'.

'And do what?'

'What do you think?'

‘I don’t know Elaine. I don’t know. Don’t leave the area though. If the plumber dies, or your husband, or the both of them, you’ll be the prime suspect and no longer patient’.

‘What about Diane?’

‘She’s out dancing’.

‘That’s right. Rome burns, Diane dances’.

‘If you say so’.

As if it’s the last time. In the upper rooms’ woollen blankets take days to digest. There can be no category of what is and what is not food for the apprentice plumber is now piping himself to tract either to begin the long trek of self-preservation within a system that will ask him to reproduce more of the same or to be colon to a carpenter. ‘Open the door and let us out’ he now screams ambivalently to the carpenter. Could there be more than one?

Carpenter sicks up the wool. The plastic will biodegrade within these summer months is what she says but a banana skin takes a thousand years. These are facts to be burnished on people’s faces. So... she thinks eco plastic can now be made to replicate second language acquisition. Eating tartan is the worst, it turns your raw marbling tartan, and it does not sustain.

‘Look in the fridge again, will you? Or the freezer’.

The carpenter goes downstairs and finds a key and opens the back door closes it behind him and walks round to the front door out the little bit of frontage through the little bit of gate hanging off the gatepost and works his way back to the glazier who reinstalls him in the city windows. Elaine cannot bear to see him all over yet again, embarking repetitively in flatness, yet again, and thinks it will destroy her nascent world-changing career. All she will say to his flatness is ‘eco plastic’ and the name of the company she will establish to make it and he will keep mouthing it’s wrongheaded that she has failed to anthropomorphise his wooden world and now he has started to card the stray woollen strands caught in his palate with his teeth.

‘I’ve been elected councillor for my new independent party standing on a platform made of eco plastic’.

The plumber inside the carpenter wants to tell her that replacing non-degradable plastic pipes with ones which disintegrate within the year is not a good idea. Diane wearing a fake tash so that she now looks like Elaine’s husband appears from her own world and talks up the wrongheadedness of the plan to save the planet. ‘Wrongheadedness. Only dance’ says Diane and in the middle of the day looks for another night club. It will be the start of a new life with Elaine taking up the cause. ‘Only dance into the future’ is the freshest sound with

the 'without Elaine' remix. It's now the plumber's turn to take the spotlight and he's iller than ever and demands, demands that the carpenter gets his insides (sorted) out.

The making of the corner
cabinet of curiosities
farther, grit hanging over
from skips
nightly creosote
cushions avocet eggs,
lost cockroach virus species type
medicine to save
that looks like curious tash.

THE END