

Childhood: Another Country

‘As people grow up, they cease to play
and they seem to give up the yield of pleasure,
which they gain from playing’ - **Sigmund Freud**

A song will lead you there. Its rhythm
the skipping-rope. Its tune,
sky-bound notes from a small boy’s squeal
at the runaway joke about the supply teacher who crossed the road and....

The colour is always, laughter.

Forget passports, or white papers:
we’re talking Hubba-bubba
and Haribo, as bribe and currency.

You can only enter past the guarded checkpoint,
now, with confectionery, or, bedtime stories.
A hush of pocket-money gets you
through – when – the toy economy is low.

Leave your watch behind.

II

A sandtimer is greedy of the time:
Eternity, here, is a grain of sand.
The state is happiness: every long-lensed
camera that nostalgia owns, and

the confessions of yearning, dream-starved
sleep-starved, routine-burnt, adult exiles,
confirm this. Hopscotch and hullabaloo are laws
and golden rules. A green-eyed girl throws her shout

out into the mid-morning light - and hears it
back, a hundred times a hundred times
a hundred. Times. Hearing your own voice, rising,
raising the roof off everything, leading

vocalist of the Hububsoup of a choir,
is the greatest honour a child can know.
That, and trading off a blue-strawed

carton of lukewarm milk for a piece of Lingo.

It has its own alphabet, this place; a code,
you never entirely forget it, but, thoughts
are butterflies, so beautiful, you have them,
keep them, then, they let you, let them

go. Herding them, is the craft of miracles!
It's what's left that counts. The chants and songs
and games, like a colour, singing its song
in one place,

travelling,
tuning itself, to the weather of another.
Only the tone is different. It's the same root
strain, with an adjustment of light,

or, indeed, shade. But, there will always be light,
enough to guild a pigeon grey-street in the glory
of the sun. Turning its gain up, brightening
everything, making the grime glitter, the ice -

river, the sky bluer: this gift, this
rich potential each and every child's
got: to spin gold, gold thread -
from shoddy cloth.

III

Childhood. Once you leave: you can't come back.
to stay for good! Though, we try to,
through our children, or our students,
godchildren, pet obsessions, other substitutes.

For sale: short-term, daydream visas,
for adulthood-weary asylum seekers.
On the boarder, at the boundaries,
we, watch, this country, our former nation, envious

remembering: how, when a hoop
spun, spun, spins right round the
waist
of things, in hip-induced gravity

we were dancing saturns,
the 'phir phir' of our whirring skirts,
hoop rings round the roman planet.
We were our own worlds

inside our own universe.
And our hands, criss-crossed,
were seats for angels, of course.
And in the dodge of the bullet

where our fingers were the game of the gun
how the slain would always rise,
rise up from the dirt - and walk

again.

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