

Spring

Like a lot of us I'm being good against my better instincts.¹ These things are tricky. Snarking, snarling harsh, even if no one's got an ear out. Cryptic, off his head on a few quid. Things don't have to be easy you know, it's about stimulation. Lowbrow spit. Attach, attack, elbows and knees. Face a mess, scratching, feeding the fruit machine. Eyeing up the botched swoon. Mwah, shiver, he says. I'm trying to grasp it between my fingers, but I'm clawing at air, she says. My peepers bulge. Kisser bends. And watch. If the eye could roam, untethered and settle where it liked — places people believed they were alone — what would it see? What would it want to see? Through the bulls-eye glass, it moves towards the edge of the city — what can I make mine? Circling Grain battery tower. A stamp of detritus, another one. To the brim of the brimming estuary. Hysterically sensitive to the thing. I want it to be everywhere. Noise. Interference. Derangement so potent that it feels like clarity. Trying to ascertain what is the real real, what is the prop prop? Mumbling, gurgling, but feeling gold-like?

God, I miss the hedgerows, the corner shop.

Landing on the last of things. Nettles grow in the landfill. Aerosol blinkers and jabbing fingers. Next to the horses, a pale boy, roughly shorn hair and filthy nails, filthy bare shoulder blades, grinds his denim pelvis into a newspaper reproduction of *Sick Bacchus*. He's a rough little number. The heat is misplaced for this time of year, the air stale, the sky white and low, the heat comes from the ground, the dust, not from above. Fear in the dust. The kid has a mate nearby, tumbling and balancing on old timber. Dirty plastic. Ignore each other. Lurching through in too-small clothes that he's had since he was a child, trying to find something. Make something from the things that he comes across. Bits and bobs he cobbles together — attempts to flog the stuff. It's difficult to discern what this place is, apart from it being their home. A large state of desertion, of desert, of things bombed, structures brought to their knees, revealing their foundations. And the weeds. The buddleia, straggly, all stem, reaching up and with pin points of purple ascending, trying to throw seed as far from the rubble as possible. Towards more decaying mortar. A smell of cinders. The waste!

Buildings and trees mimic each other, twisted, blackened, muscular. A roar becomes a retch. A ribbon of fag smoke. A violent lurch towards all that is not itself. Walking briskly in high shoes, eating an ice cream for breakfast — we can still do that.

—Ethan Price

¹ Derek Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks* (London: Vintage, 1996), p.194