

Flares

Carol Watts

I learned to live by secret geometries, a caging that takes place in time.

As if by endless repetition of the architecture, the gateways, the skin and housings.

It had nothing to do with my desires but it was a teaching of them without remainder.

Like my grandmother watching Peyton Place alone in the afternoons, it was all laid out for me and no-one questioned why, ever.

At 55 still tooling on autopilot, that ache of compliancy returns even under powerful refusal, dragging like a trapped nerve.

I remember unspoken conversations at 9, knowing that safety wasn't a shared sofa.

Already we knew that, and the violence possible in other curious bushy exposures.

Still I have a tendency to walk down the middle of roads, even in cities.

As away from the open mouths of alleyways, even if hallucinated.

That night I had crossed from one to avoid another.

Out of the frying pan. Left me regretting I had not thought to scream Fire!

In my kicking out of platform heels uncertain what this was.

As if more people would have valued me that way and broken from their tv to open the door.

The next time he had a knife.

This was ahead of years when I could treat my phone like an attack dog, or make myself larger in stride.

Walking in that greasier mid street light, or even in the broad day, you'd think so much visible.

I had to turn guerrilla to get home, that was another time, stalked under plain afternoon gaze.

Fire!

All those endless fears invaded dreams, turned into constraint, and there, a normalised good, shaped at the perimeter fence.

So I walked its damage for forty years.

That's before considering stupefying visions of entitlement, their forensic cost, etc. etc. etc.

Like when on a jury listening to the shock of no being turned to yes, the acute torture of that.

Instances come in rafts.

Imagine you could track all of this with coloured flares, time-lapsed.

You'd see the indelible strangulation of freedom, marked out, choked up and rendered, and no-one picking up the SOS.

Over and over and over.

Like some military parade.