

The View

I

From the balcony, I can see a red hat, shaped like a pear when you are looking directly down on it. A woman is wearing it. She is walking up the hill and will soon move out of sight. A cyclist is passing her and there are three other people on the street walking also and two cars, all at different places on the street.

Last night the view was beautiful from the balcony because there was a fog which made every small thing one large blue thing. This was at sunset. The view is always beautiful, being panoramic and ever changing, but today, now as I watch the red hat passing, it doesn't seem particularly pleasant. The objects are hard, they are a jangling kind of collection, like a collection of facts; there is no sun and therefore no shadow.

This view, of the hat, the woman, the street, the bay and the city beyond, always has something emotive in it – past everything else is the distant eastern sky and the horizon which is always vague and misty. It evokes nostalgia and particularly urban nostalgia. That is, your past experience in and with the city, and on the other hand, the desire to escape out there, beyond it, when you remember times which have made you bitter. Then there is a longing or a hope about the future – that maybe out there one day you might be really happy.

At the moment, the view is flat and dull, not depressing but simply present and actual.

II

A woman in a red hat is walking up the street. A car passes her and another is coming down the street. She notices a man she knows walking ahead of her and on the other side of the street is a woman pushing a baby in a stroller in the opposite direction. With a quiet swishing sound, a cyclist on a white bike moves past her, very close because she is walking on the edge of the footpath. The man ahead turns around as he reaches the corner, recognizes her, waves and walks on. She waves but stops and turns back to look at the bay. Today, the view is quiet and grey and on the other side of the water a flock of seagulls flutters over the wide ripples made by a fishing boat. She knew that man very well once, she had been trying not to catch up to him. He had seen her and walked on. She continues up the street and goes into the fruit shop.

III

A man wearing a green T-shirt is walking up the hill slowly. As he reaches the corner of the main road, a cyclist draws up and stops to look for cars. He stops too, stretches his arms behind his head and looks back at the bay. On the other side of the road is a woman pushing a child in a stroller. Then he sees a woman he knows coming up the hill. She just looks at him and keeps walking slowly. He hesitates and waves to her. She waves back as though she is tired and can hardly lift her hand, stops and turns her back to him. He turns the corner and walks up the main road. He reaches the letterbox, takes a blue letter from his pocket and posts it. He starts back again for home. A semi-trailer is coming slowly round the corner into the main road, swinging over onto the wrong side of the road. A white Volkswagen is coming along the road towards the semi-trailer and runs straight into its huge front tyre, bonk, no squeal of brakes, nothing. The driver is slumped over the steering wheel and the man in the semi-trailer sits, shocked and upright, for a few seconds, in the cabin.

Behind the blue container on the back of the trailer, he sees a red hat appear just above the level of the tray and move off down the hill.

IV

Sitting on the balcony, I hear a thud and glass shattering, as though there has been a car accident. A few people come out into the street and look up the hill, it must have been an accident. Then the red hat appears again, and the woman wearing it is walking down the hill quickly. The man in the green T-shirt is following her, catches up with her. They stop and talk, then he appears to lose his temper and shoves her so that she loses balance and falls off the kerb into the gutter. He picks her up again and she runs off down the hill with him following. They disappear from view and I look out over the bay again.

The sun must be setting somewhere above the clouds and the view is growing darker, softer. Lights in the city come on, one after the other and on the road on the opposite side of the bay, the headlights of cars are like a subdued shower of sparks.