

Night Fall

Fog lowers herself like a nightshirt over the scrawny cold shoulders of Dogtown. Cats wake up under houses and begin the nights hunt. Ivy trembles on the side of the Post office. The mayor is inside, laying on the floor behind the trash can, about to fall asleep, having a good-nite token out of a pipe made from a Bic pen stuck into a Snapple bottle. The lights of the gas stations are turned off. The pumps, red hot, running since morning, finally begin cooling down. The birds are all in their tree tenements, whispering Dow Jones averages for the day. Street lamps stagger out of bars, lean against the stars and turn on. Waitresses wipe the last tables, Hobos crawl into Hobo holes, the day shift clocks out as the night shift shuffles in. Cigarette butts are dropped into butt cans behind restaurants, dishwashers hustle with the closing rush, a flurry of last minute drug deals, can you say B-double-E- double-R-un? From hotel doorways and bushes along the highway. Dogs taking last craps, chairs put on top of tables. A motorcycle with a poodle in the sidecar wearing a long scarf pulls out of the gas station, by night the city was ours, barked the dogs of Dogtown.

Beans are cooked and pipes passed between the wounded and weary road warriors of hippy hill, Town square turns over and gets comfortable, its head resting on a park bench with a bottle of Eel river reserve malt likker as a pillow. The Bluebirds of happiness depart thru hotel windows and the chickens of depression cluck and settle in for a night of trash TV, huddled around the glow of the microwave. At the Bobston motel, when the smoke detector goes off, dinner is ready to be splattered with mustard packets. In RV's handmade from space shuttle debris, crank dealers are tucked in under crinkly sheets of tomorrows outrageous aspirations, Yes! Yes! Moloch! Moloch! The blue hue of exhaled breaths alive with the hope of tomorrow create a shimmering penumbra of floating luminous kazoos over Dogtown.

Carnival flags lowered, used cars on the lot turn over on their backs and snore, the pennants flap and pop in the fog. Zombie shopping carts march



slowly away from the grocery store, some escape all the way to the river, most caught next day, rounded up and returned to their corrals. Real estate offices roll up their tongues and bury their heads in kitty litter until morning, blinds are drawn, doors locked, and a penny is left on the railing of an overpass. 'Open' signs are flipping around, Crisпитos in the deli are rolled up and snuggled in cellophane, then dumped in a vat of sleep. Land

drips from the roof of the grocery store. A cold sweat is popping out of willows nestled with mossy scarves. The chamber pot of commerce is flushed one last time with a disgusting grunt, the head shops snuggle up with burrito joints, hotel doors exhale lust. The scent of honeysuckle and pizza in the air, diesel exhaust and the sour breath of desperation, of dreams that didn't come true, aspirate the balloons of a Dogtown night, underpasses become overpasses, fog fills the underpants of Fogtown.

Sleeping bags leak from eyes, Banana slugs crawl up Moonbeams. Above Dogtown, the hills rearrange themselves, square their shoulders, round their boulders, sending up great gusts of weariness, tomorrow is a new way, disappointment at outcomes is eternally renewed. 'No Vacancy' signs flicker in the fog, the rumble of generators echoes over the canyons, coyotes hunt in the creek beds.

A car alarm shatters the crunchy light, "It will be alright, it will be alright, it will be alright!" Ghosts gather in front of the grocery, leaning on the wall of fame. The great gears of the whole cannibalistic enterprise, the unholy trifecta of a cannibus-petroleum-water burning machine, grind down, never coming to a halt of coarse but, lubricated by the medium of exchange and the pulped bodies of the working poor, its light switches to a cool, blue energy saving mode ready to blink into action if called upon to mediate an exchange between the damned and the demanding. Hotel managers retire to TV rooms, the last greydog hits the highway with with passengers sipping vodka and listening to headphones, the Amtrak bus roars thru with a puff of steam, taking on water, discharging mail and enormous checks from Ed McMahon for local lottery players, casinos reverse direction mid-river, flowing upstream, burning heaps of junk mail and pouring out money in gushing fountains, salmon walk into gas stations and redeem blue chips for pillows and Robitussen. You don't have to go home but you can't stay here sing the Chickadees in the Hawthorn, the Moon dips down and brushes the Scotch-broom and whisper: "Hey, it's me again."

Okra P. Dingle



In 1939, I didn't hear war coming. Now its thundering approach can't be ignored.

A chill of remembrance has come over me during this August month. It feels as if the 2017 summer breeze is being scattered by the winds of war blowing from across our world towards Britain, just like they were in 1939.

In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia eviscerates Yemen with the same ferocity as Mussolini did to Ethiopia when I was child in 1935. The hypocrisy of Britain's government and elite class ensures that innocent blood still flows in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Theresa May's government insists that peace can only be achieved through the proliferation of weapons of war in conflict zones. Venezuela teeters towards anarchy and foreign intervention while in the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte – protected by his alliance with Britain and the US – murders the vulnerable for the crime of trying to escape their poverty through drug addiction.

Summer should be comforting, but it isn't this year

Because I am old, now 94, I recognise these omens of doom. Chilling signs are everywhere, perhaps the biggest being that the US allows itself to be led by Donald Trump, a man deficient in honour, wisdom and just simple human kindness. It is as foolish for Americans to believe that their generals will save them from Trump as it was for liberal Germans to believe the military would protect the nation from Hitler's excesses.

Britain also has nothing to be proud of. Since the Iraq war our country has been on a downward decline, as successive governments have eroded democracy, social justice and savaged the welfare state with austerity, leading us into the cul de sac of Brexit. Like Trump, Brexit cannot be undone by liberal sanctimony – it can only be altered if the neoliberal economic model is smashed as if it were a statue of a dictator by a liberated people.

After years of Tory government, Britain is more equipped to change the course of history for the good than we were under Neville Chamberlain, when Nazism was appeased in the 1930s. In fact, no western nation in Europe or North America has anything to crow about. Each is rife with inequality, massive corporate tax avoidance – which is just legitimised corruption – and a neoliberalism that has eroded societies.

Summer should be comforting but it isn't this year. Looking at the young today, when I watch them in their leisure; I catch a fearful resemblance to the faces of the young from my generation in the summer of 1939. When I am out in town, I listen to their laughter, I watch them enjoying a pint or wooing one another, and I am afraid for them.

This August resembles too much that of 1939; the last summer of peace until 1945. Then aged 16 and still wet behind the ears, I'd go to pictures with my mates and we'd laugh at the newsreels of Hitler and other fascist monsters that lived beyond what we thought was our reach. Little did we know in that August 1939, life without peace, without carnage, without air raids, without the blitz, could be measured in days. I did not hear the thundering approach of war, but as an old man I hear it now for my grandchildren's generation. I hope I am wrong. But I am petrified for them.

Harry Leslie Smith