

An Away-Day with the Shadow

Under the trees the chestnut cattle
are munching slow bunches of sweet young spring.
The heron is pretending to be invisible
and mayflies glitter in the sycamore shade.

Who'd have thought that ill could thrive here
and yet it does — in every one of us.
That kind and supportive manager, over there,
is eating her young team: snapping their bones,
sucking out the marrow, destroying their careers
with her relentless care and devouring nurture.
The brilliant enthusiast, jumping up and down,
with fifteen solutions and a re-design for breakfast,
is sending his colleagues into spirals of despair;
firing off ideas like a Catherine wheel,
never allowing any one thing the time it needs to grow.
The mean-lipped little man, sitting in the corner,
who's been there, done that, seen it fail
a thousand times; who knows a dozen creative ways
to strangle an idea, is poisoning the company
he loves, with his bile and his fear of change.
And I who worked my way up from nothing,
who built a career out of ashtrays and beer mats,
gaming chips and coffee cups, nightshifts and overtime;
who worked all the hours the gods of money sent,
who hit my targets year on year. I have stood
in a London Street as one of my team,
my chosen crew, dropped his gaze and walked
right past me, too ashamed to look me in the eye:
afraid of the tyrant that he was working for,
afraid of the bully that I had become...

A slow carp stirs the lazy water. A moorhen putters.
The mallard shepherds her two remaining chicks.
Somewhere in the depths the great pike is stirring,
The water birds pretend that he isn't there.

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Chateau St Just
May 2011