

Winnowing

She was piecing together her reflection
whilst leaning on the lock arms.
Each chained to its partner,
shaking hands through the winter,
chevroned against the cold pressure.

Thoughts treading water like a typist's fingers.
Eyeing up the mud that just kept deeping
where histories went down with its sucking.

The home straight of Neville Street
might just serve as a springboard
to open up a new future,
if only she could cut her ribbon clean.

She would have to swallow knives.
Speed up the time inside her
fold back her wings
and execute the perfect dive.

Winston Plowes

River Fable

One night too many under the bypass bridge
with a bottle of *White Lightning*, and she woke

her face tight with gem-cut feathers
a set of folded wings, and before her eyes

that fish-knife of a beak.
Fast she found the whole contraption

of her body could fold up sharp
as an origami plane, dive like a bullet

and that she knew the warm pockets
of the river, where fish wintered

how to swoop and sleeve one, fast
as a sleight-of-hand in the corner shop.

She saw the missing posters; another
teenage girl gone bad, but never tried to tell them

she'd just gone fishing for frogs,
that she didn't want to sit her exams

or that she kept better company now –
the dusk bats, the quiet heron.

Suzannah Evans

Zoetrope

With this fleet new world
tucked neatly inside her.
The old stained thoughts sank to the bottom:

The top room with the locked door.
The Madonna behind the daffodils.
The earworms in the water pipes.
Police in pairs through the spy hole -

All this faded in the swim.

Back then she was a flagging crocus.
A limp purple balloon, bowing to the spring
and watching another season sour.

And every now and then,
a flicker of contrast.
A floating memory
of when she cut her mouth on the sunflower seeds
that fell from the cage.
Maybe that's when her rivers ran together?

And now it was all tight lines, thrust and purpose.
Peppering the light with her dazzle
Cutting along the dotted line of life.

Winston Plowes

Ornithomancy

When the police told her the trail had got cold
she took the counsel of birds –
laid out a plate of seeds and in the circling
of the pigeons every evening
read her future obstacles.

She let the house sparrows in the hedge
predict the return of domestic bliss.
She saw the wren on the first day of spring
luckiest of all the birds
but still her girl does not come home.

From the river-bank she watches the water
brown and swollen with rainfall.
A hovering kestrel tells her to beware disguises –
the kingfisher hits the water like an arrow.

Suzannah Evans

Pluviophile

It was dry here, back under the bypass
but you were always the rain.

The rain that dressed the Headrow and The Calls.
Made footprints up Adelphi stairs
and drumrolled through the Granary arches.

You ran into this city's private corners
and into mine while we slept.
But you never overstayed a welcome.

Look at you from one angle
and you were as deep as the night.
Pulseless, cold and slow,
as still as iron.

Yet from another,
you gave up little secrets.
Like jewels torn from a starling's back,
candles behind stained glass.

The nights here are the worst.
Playing hide and seek with sleep.
Endlessly counting cars
as the clock hands wither.

You were the rain –
And I'm spending my days
dipping my toes in your puddles
waiting for the ripples to bite.

Winston Plowes

The Source

Watch the sky for days before you lose it underground.
If water comes over your boots you're in trouble, but otherwise
become part of the invisible conversation of this city:
the homeless and addicted, the artists, the vandals.
Go gently. Trust the culverts, the covered bridges.
Keep on past the dripping of mill goits and drains,
the hidden rooms where only the flood can find you.

This is Gipton, then Sheepscar, then Meanwood Beck.
Above you is a world of changing coffee-shops, car showrooms,
greasy spoons. The tunnels you navigate are stained
with phenols from old tanneries and dye-houses.
You are knee-deep, time-travelling backwards,
until you break cover at the park where Sunday walkers
throw sticks for dogs. You could make a home here
in these woods, between dusty rhododendrons
but your goal is beyond, and beyond is Breary Marsh
where this water comes to the surface, singing clean
of where it has come from, where it will go.

Suzannah Evans

Tourniquet

We lay in each other's echo.
Your belly, a dead dish
I'm not allowed to touch.
Shallow with losses

and white in sleeplessness.
I am the gaunt beat of your drum,
the snail trails across your chest.

Tethered by the space between us
and with static under our fingernails
we are set for the longest night –

But every year the birds still come
and darn our bond enough
to last us one more summer.
Threading the weather
underneath our nights.

Winston Plowes

The Angler

I get here early as I can every weekend –
it's just me, and her perched on that stump
while the fish keep their secrets in the depths.
We're in this together, though of course
I'm supposed to put mine back
even when there's nothing in the freezer
and I've got a fat trout struggling on dry land.

When the sunlight bounces off her feathers
she winks like a witness and I feel safe.
The beck spools out below
towards the well-heeled city
and there's no-one around to ask questions.

Suzannah Evans