THE TRAIN, BEDFORD PARK
for Brian Louis Pearce

You always imagined and wished that this painting of a train was from the cemetery bridge near where I lived in London, a few miles north of this locomotive travelling from the suburbs, steaming its way into town.

Our vocabulary has changed: what was once just noise is now a drone or hum, part of a musical palette. The song shimmers and expands into the cold studio (the sun's now gone) where I'm drinking tea and looking through secondhand art books.

My favourites are this Pissarro and a hardback with plates of Byzantine images tipped in. The colours are all wrong yet glow: a saint in the desert watches a sunset burn, the city's walls are pink, his holy flesh is grey and cracked.

It is about to snow and I miss talking to you about music, art and poetry, letting you quiz me about what I've made. You liked Gwen John's paintings, too, and she's back in fashion; I stood and looked hard for you at her work in an exhibition loosely curated around an idea of Virginia Woolf. How big an influence she was; I'd never realised until the loop of time caught up with you.

The river curves and creeps across the old London map in my studio and I wonder where my paintings that you bought are now, the Roy Fisher book I coveted for years? All sold or given away, all smoke and steam, painted smears swirling above an impression of a passing train.

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