

## The Birdhouse in the Jungle

casts the shadow of a hunter  
The sky black with swans  
over one flecked egg flushed from bramble.

Nature makes mistakes:

my siblings and I playing orphan  
in the wilds we built with plastic.

What we witnessed of the world was a cloak

cut, sewn,  
then fashioned into tinier envies.

a bird's song  
In the unkennelled cold,

splatters against moist leaves  
its lyric out of sync  
with melody.

## LIKE A SONNET

My mother might be in the room with me, but she was  
like something in the next room, and like  
something downstairs, and something down the street.  
She was like the bridge the next-door mother  
jumped off; and like the sea, the horizon,  
and Cassiopeia. My mother was like  
the chair in her room with a shellacked seat,  
a chair which was like a saddled horse.  
Simile was a way to get  
away, you were safe as long as you did not  
go too far, over the edge  
of sanity, into metaphor.  
My mother was *like* a mother; she was  
not a mother - no, my idea of a  
mother was like a mother, and my mother was a mother.

From *Arias* by **Sharon Olds**, Jonathan Cape, 2019.

## Kid in the Park

Lonely little question mark  
on a bench in the park:

See the people passing by?  
See the airplanes in the sky?  
See the birds  
Flying home  
before  
dark?

Home's just around  
the corner  
there--  
*but not really  
anywhere*

From *Selected Poems* by **Langston Hughes**, (1959) Serpent's Tail, 1999.

### III

This a Vacant lot;  
Impenetrable ground  
Of embedded stones,  
Bottle-glass.  
My shoes grow  
Dusty not of soil.

No nor elsewhere. Simply  
This, and my dissatisfaction.

Between eyes and shoes, a plane,  
A spaced companionship, opposing  
This dust, and some immovable watchfulness

## beauty

all the metaphors  
have failed *the sea*  
*is infinitely breakable*  
my mother is raging  
the way waves do  
*anger is a secondary*  
*emotion* a statement  
from my therapist  
who specialises in  
honesty a rare trait  
that calms me & she  
is so beautiful I wish  
I could summon all  
the beauty in this  
world ward off  
any jagged feelings  
I cannot stand the  
faces of beautiful  
women I feel a deep  
need to protect any  
plausible display of  
happiness you see  
my mother is fearful  
of open windows  
the abiding terror  
of the world's light

## Following Stars

Following stars and maps  
that make perfect sense  
or if they don't  
it doesn't seem to matter,  
roaming the world  
with my cargo of notebooks and tea,  
with my good-looking parrots and babies,  
my good-looking shoes,  
I am myself again;  
and as for you,  
you're better off without me definitely.

From *Violet* by **Selima Hill**, Bloodaxe Books, 1997

## Sunday Night

Make use of the things around you.  
This light rain  
Outside the window, for one.  
This cigarette between my fingers,  
These feet on the couch.  
The faint sound of rock-and-roll,  
The red Ferrari in my head  
The woman bumping  
Drunkenly around in the kitchen . . .  
Put it all in,  
Make use.

## My Future

-- waiting for me somewhere out of sight  
past the betting shop and the Nationwide  
where buses stop  
to shiver in the middle of the night-  
doesn't for a moment doubt  
we'll recognize each other  
when he looks me in the eye,  
but wonders if the buttonhole was wise  
or lifts a wristwatch to his ear  
then sighs before a table  
laid with shiny cutlery and a cloth  
so white  
it seems to generate its own light.  
The napkins' beautiful, useless folds!



## Spring

is here so now the plants and animals  
are starting to have sex again. We've unblocked  
the drain of its crud and bumf; the smell is waning.  
We've washed the gravel, and piled the fox turds  
in a far off corner. We are wearing slightly fewer clothes.  
Our bodies, newly exposed, are strangers to themselves.  
They chime against the air. A thought arrives of our life  
together, yet to come. It configures like a beam of dust.  
*Look, this plant has made it through the winter you say,*  
as millions of photons whoosh through my hands.

From *Happiness* by **Jack Underwood**, Faber & Faber, 2015.

## WALK WITH ME

I walk through Brixton with a young man  
in screw-faced street mode,  
and I tell him it's okay to relax. A  
His temptations course through his blood.  
He calls me witness, he calls me bookish.  
We walk avoiding certain streets,  
Loughborough, the railway. We both know why.

I tell him that under these very streets we walk,  
deep beneath the concrete, beneath the tarmac,  
beneath the rubble, the dirt, and the rock,  
there is a river flowing called Effra.  
A black and powerful river coursing without light.  
That one hundred and years ago  
royalty would sail down this river  
in their best finery into Brixton  
never thinking about crack, never thinking about cafés.

But every now and then  
these towerblocks act like speakers  
and the calming sound of a pure, flowing river  
can be heard throughout Brixton's streets.  
I tell him that even though the river calls,  
things have moved on here.  
Brixton is not its history,  
and neither should we be  
though we hear the call of the past.