

Story for performance #995  
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Tags: [architecture](#), [plants](#), [home](#)  
Writer/s: [M John Harrison](#)

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I went down to the houses of sunlight.

Down there the ornamental thorn was flowering, but the cold was still lacquered on to everything—the trees, the railway platforms, the backs of the houses. The cold penetrates everything down there like an additional dimension. You watch and you watch, and the cold seems to have worked its way into the relationships between objects, fixing walls and paths into difficult arrangements.

A middle class man in yellow corduroy trousers and a maroon pullover wandered aimlessly up and down the pavement with a dog bed in one hand. Soon he was joined by a woman in calf-length trousers, and another man with startlingly white hair and two dachshunds on a single leash. After some discussion they all got into an Audi car and drove away. At the houses of sunlight you watch with incomprehension. Why are they dressed like that? Why is this happening? Why are they here at all?

I saw someone looking out the window of an upper room. Like the others, he seemed almost human. It was as if he had come into being in the instant I noticed him. He was halfway through a movement, it was as if he had come into being as the expression of that movement. That movement had begun before he was there. By the time it was halfway accomplished, he was faintly visible. By the time it was nearly complete, he was there, a thing at a window, swinging his arm to slap someone out of sight then calling down:

'We just this morning moved in, if it can be described that way.'

'Do you know where I'd live,' I said, 'if I had the chance?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'Where would you?'

'I'd live in the great big covered bridge that goes over the platforms at Clapham Junction railway station. I'd keep the big drinks machines, and the cabinets with the fire hoses in them, the chewing gum trodden into the floor in perfect little circles. I'd keep it as one big space. No curtains. The light that would fall into that, every morning!'

He reminded me of the platform entrances: 'It might be a bit draughty with seventeen of them,' he warned me. He reached out of sight again. A smile. Another slap.

'I would have doors on them,' I said, 'don't you see? And in the dark it would be just this vast shadowy space, but every so often you'd come upon a bit of carpet and some chairs, a bed. My furniture! It would be lit up like a traffic island, pinky-orange, a little hazy. I'd encourage the trains to keep running,' I said, 'so as not to feel alone. But Clapham would no longer be a stop. People would have to understand that.'

Later that year, all down the street, the gardens were full of camellias and early-flowering clematis. I went

up from there to the hills, where I met a woman carrying an empty coat across her arms as if it were a child. She bent forward from the waist, looking into the middle distance at the white chalk paths, then down again at the coat. Her expression was one of neither joy nor musing. Skylarks sang. Hawthorn trees clustered on the hillside below. People appeared and disappeared on long, rising horizons. Tiny blue flowers in the turf.

At the houses of sunlight, they carry their coats in the exact same way, like sleepy children across their arms, up on to the river-bridge, where they first sing an old Morrissey number, 'Every Day Is Like Sunday', then let them fall into the water. The arms of the coats flutter and gesture as they fall. They are like the expressive arms of performers in a charming traditional drama.

At the houses of sunlight, the known is slicked on to the facades like a kind of grease. The demons wait inside, raising a hand to something out of sight. At present they are watching television. Their heads are at exactly the right angle. Demons curl up tight inside the known, tender as curled ferns inside 'carparkness', 'being a bridge', 'the quality of resembling two dogs on one lead, a payment plan or a Nokia advert'. Eventually they occupy your house too. It's late Friday afternoon, coming on dark, October tottering into November. The key takes time going in the lock. As soon as you're up in the room you can see something has been there before you. As you enter, it's still disappearing, like an oily residue mixing in water. The air is almost as cold as the street outside. You go to the window and pull the blind. Taxis are swishing down the street. People are leaving their work, walking quickly past with their heads down. Up and down the road the neon signs are going on one by one. You can smell the dead leaves. It's a strange smell, acrid and exciting at the same time: the smell of change. It's a smell you can't compare with anything else, or evoke by mentioning some other smell. London draws round itself for a second or two as if it doesn't know what to do.

You call someone you know and say, 'We live in the thinnest of worlds between the past and the future, but they occupy more space than that.'

She says: 'Is it happening again?'

'We never see the whole of them. Even when they're perfectly still, they seem to us to be moving.'

I'm sick of buildings that slide about, and lives that flat-pack into mobile phones. I'll dress instead for my journey into the secret world, and go down alone to Clapham Junction—where the light inserts itself precisely into the arrangement of things and a little green lichen is applied to the railway bridges like a watercolour wash—and live in the remains of my humanity. I'll encourage the trains to run, the way you encourage birds to visit a garden.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by M John Harrison.