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Town Called Distraction

I loosely calculated faint figures in my hand. The bridge to the east side of town would be down and crossable for a quarter of an hour from quarter past twelve, and for ten minutes at twelve forty-five. Even if I were to make the close of the first window, I would still be fifteen minutes late, yet the second window glowed in pink neon next to the faded twelve-fifteen. I knew I would be distracted by the world. The world requests time. I'd been listening to the news on the radio before leaving and had to spring back upstairs to note down names mentioned in the broadcast to look up later on. The bus pulled in while I was scanning the headlines in the news-agent's in front of the bus stop and I rushed out to meet it. It had been the wrong bus, so I waited and wondered how long ago the council had had the bus shelter replaced, if ever.

Once on the correct bus I sat beside a woman completely unlike myself reading a newspaper. I sought out the important parts out of the corner of my eye. I completely agreed with the style of dress chosen by a French politician. I read all the stories about America. I had to unpick the tears sitting on my lower lashes after reading about a memorial service up north. I didn't notice the woman leave, but remember picking up the newspaper from her empty seat to continue reading it. My fingertips felt roughened and dry

from the paper; I looked around in my bag for hand cream. There is so much space between molecules that we never really touch anyone or anything. I moisturised more air than skin. As the bus took a detour due to the Carrutherson Pass being closed on Thursdays, which I'd forgotten about, I was notified that my book was ready to be picked up and would be available for the next three weeks. I got off a stop early to pick it up.

There was no one at the counter, so I went around the back to try and find someone who worked in the stockroom who could find the book. I'd ordered it because the blurb used a turn of phrase I'd always admired and I was half serious about highlighting any word in the book that I felt proved the existence of an ideology I'd been playing around with for almost two years. It started off as a miraculous discovery, a new way of seeing, but now it was the only way I saw, the only way I wanted to see. Not many others knew about it though, so I wasn't a fanatic, I was just very interested. The depot had a TV in the corridor outside the stockroom and I leant as if bored against its screen, with a flat palm on the end of my stiff arm, to twist my head and shoulders in for the thrill of guilt and culpability the international news would give me. Television perfectly illustrates the theory of quantum physics; I birthed this *intellivision* in my head. Those pixels

everywhere in every colour being everything – being there but not being there, I reasoned – they could be everything, though they will never be real, they will never really exist outside imagination. Possibilities mean so much more than reality these days. They certainly do to me. If only he wanted to confuse me or contradict himself and smile because of it.

I started walking towards the bridge, but very slowly. I was worrying, I remember, about whether things would turn out alright in the end, if things had already gone wrong sometime up to this point. On the way I saw a cash machine, but decided not to check my balance. It looked a lot like an arcade game with its fully-flashing colour screen, full quantum. Where is my money? There's more money than there is money, there's more money than is needed for the whole world to be OK.

I thought of a joke I could tell if I thought he was trying to make us feel serious. I read it through in my head while my facial muscles held a tech rehearsal. I knew I'd missed my chance to cross the bridge, but by this I had saved myself.

Literary Quartet

I arrived at the entrance to the Literature House at the exact time set out on the invitation, turned my back on its facade, waded through the orange leaves on the opposing green, and climbed a tree. Sitting on a branch, I thought of the other short-listed writers already inside, the cameras roving around trying to capture their famous targets, the lights heating up, the countdown to showtime running ever faster.

I wish I could know what story I'm trying to write when I'm writing it, was the magnified quote underneath my photo in the concertina brochure for the prize-giving that they were handing out at the Literary Exchange. I scanned it over and over throughout the journey. I go to the Literary Exchange to write. It used to be Bridge Gallery, that building by the river as big and open and bright as an airport terminal. They left the final exhibition up when the place went bankrupt. Now the space is full of reclining armchairs, all pointed at different angles towards different garish, neon paintings. Each armchair is next to a small, cuboid bookshelf, where you can choose from a selection of volumes wrapped in uniform grey packing paper, covering the title page and colophon; inside, all traces of the authors' identities have been erased, too. I had read another Blank Book to focus my mind that afternoon.