

The Homing Instinct

Oz Hardwick

Overnight they have carpeted the street and papered across the spaces between houses, shrinking the city to my grandparents' living room. There's a wireless in the market square, with Jack Emblow playing 'Secret Love,' and a jam jar full of coloured spills to light the fire when the weather turns. Low clouds from ribbon cut tobacco breast lavender-polished air and passing red buses glimmer like brass fire dogs. The Sun hangs from an elaborate rose. I leave my shoes at the door and my coat on the arm of an overstuffed chair, then sit in silence beneath the leaf of a folding table until I become as invisible as dropped cotton reels and forgotten birthdays, and I follow the carpet's pattern, willing abstract whorls into parrots, carriages, and a flurry of swords. There's a message. There's a map. When I blink, I am barefoot in a dried-up fountain, with traffic tumbling like china nick-nacks from a mantelpiece and birds nailed to the Town Hall walls. See how they fly. It's a long way home.