

Vespucci Ice Cream (The Line)

On a dream- slick floor I trudge between
the humming, churning vats and *The Line*
where a dozen white linen and plastic-capped women
milk tub after tub of the on- tap gold
streaming from silver faucets
hour after hour, till they run dry after dark.

Days I toss boxes in and out of freezer trucks,
see a brave new world of previously unheard of
seaside towns from a smoke-filled transit cab, collect
a surprising amount of nods, winks and advances
from around posh supermarket *Goods In* entrances.
But it all comes back to the factory floor
with a longing I see mirrored in the drivers' and helpers' faces
as we all drift back there near close of business
to gaze at the women on *The Line*.

Made anything but shapeless in their overalls
they sway a beat or two behind the rhythm of excess,
taming the spiralling swirls of vanilla, raspberry-ripple,
chocolate and banana, gushing in unceasing surfeit;
such grace under the pressure of an unstoppable clock
is something you see every day
but can somehow never get enough of.

Unless it's erased, by the sudden whim of a boss,
a roving manager, or one of the owners, some emperor
of everything, stepping up behind that day's candidate,
one of that line under orders not to waste a drop.
Holding her helpless in his arms,
hands busily out of our sight,
he nuzzles her stiffened neck
or nibbles the lobe of her ear,
with his hips clamped on to hers,
constricting her already tiny orbit-
in that space where you can't hear yourself speak
for the precision-timed grind of noise-
till his moment's hunger is gratified.

And we are sickened, then, us grunts

and fork-lift jockeys of the ice cream business;
queasy with a mouthful of outrage, a splutter of envy
and a few other mystery ingredients
you wouldn't have thought would go together,
but do, every day, like the taste of ice-cream,
the brain- freeze that silently runs whole
glittering universes of work
and a lifetime's work of dreaming
yourself elsewhere, its hands daily upon you.

The Workshop

When the heat miraculously did make waves
and shadowless twos and threes of things
I didn't want to climb or scald on,
the workshop with its underfoot murk
of machines and tools was an eye-rest.
I rarely saw a car deflate itself to a fuming
stop inside those breeze block walls but I did believe
the smoking kitchens of some squat city came
to cool their heels there: More than one
Bain-Marie reclined in grease-stained aprons;
up-ended potato-peelers sang their lowest notes, at a push;
fan-blades lay like a rainforest plane-crash;
cold-steel canopies were lava- blackened.

And my father made his own weather:
inside, through an elephant's graveyard
of scaffolding poles and un-walked planks
the sparks from the orange flame shooting
from gloved fingertips illuminated an underworld
reachable only by way of his black- masked eyes.
He did not need to pick apart what he had on his hands
to master it, completely. As he lay the torch down
and the blue flame sighed at our feet
the storm that had passed over, as they all did,
left us silent and sweat-stung in its wake.
The cauterised scar on the mended machine
mirrored the smiling lips that would emerge
from behind the mask into that idling future
I was careless enough to wish for.

The Quiet Ones

Back in the Old School it must have been thought
that in quiet there resided some powerful magic;

Otherwise how credit our elders' relentless pursuit
of it. Not the ringing silence of the classroom,

counting itself out *fingers on your lips*.
But the quiet that came later with dead wide grins

after the huddle in the factory yard was broken
at the approach of the foreman, for instance,

him or his clueless, blabbermouth nephew;
or the quiet enforced by rattled newspapers,

and dry coughs, by stadium roars and stereo wool-gathering;
the throat-clearing quiet of rooms without books,

or any to speak of; the quiet in refusing not only to speak
but even to read, never mind sing, *ever*, in "public";

a quiet that meant anything but consent
when it couldn't manage exile or master cunning;

a quiet nonetheless accommodating
generation after generation in their showing up

at roll call, absenting themselves from the dawn chorus,
the quiet ones who could tread

the murky water of silent newsreel footage
but who now, having deserted the cemeteries

as definitively as they always have,
are wondering what it is that detains us,

as they gesture unflaggingly from the other side
of our hand-held screens, trying to attract our attention.

Exercise

This is just to prevent me falling
into The Error of the Thirty Two Views
of one screen too many,
each with its own dog to be walked
around the sloughs of inertia
without once wetting my nose, a killer
if you've got X amount of work
to hand over to a heavenly
watcher in the woods

where it's *all* go still despite
recent poor attendances,
the definite article
for a first person singular
to get lost in, a thief
hungering to be caught
since the law first stood up
on its hind legs.

This is just not bothering
your heavy duty self
with emissions, roundelays
and bottled tries for an acceptable
slice of grandeur, all under
the one tin roof.

Outside, it seems
there is a village, after all;
beginning just now to stir
in this last first light
recalling the neat trick
of inducing terror at the look
of teeth, a quickening of the breath
with the noise of too much hair

(All this before the livestock
developed their actors'
voices and all the daytime
shows began to revolve
around the fridge)

That sweat you wake in,
after dreaming you've lost your phone,
is in your blood and your grandmother
now wants the tears she shed for you back.

Repossession

Suddenly, under three quarters
of the moon's perfect bauble,
I take a notion to go
among the missing.
To just fade out, one day,
from this large, bad picture,
unnoticed amid the clutter
of La-Z-Boy sitting-rooms,
to leave unannounced,
storms threatening, reckonings pending
to wind up where they all,
I am now certain, wind up:
at that rip in the pitch-black mountains,
arrived at by touch, blind man's buffed,
crowd-surfed across the arms
of a mob of brambles,
led, toe-wise, by the clouded
anti-current's keeper,
bundled upriver to one source
after another; as far as it takes
for the spell of glowering photographs
in newsagents windows to be broken,
to that place where they will hand out
new souls, clean as pebbles,
and from which, in the fullness
of time, we will clamber back down
in sloppy single file,
our almost but not quite familiar
faces drying in the breeze
and with the light in our eyes
that makes all the difference
go our separate ways
to specialize in odd behaviour
like sitting on shaky perimeter fences
of properties no longer our own,
getting double-takes from new residents,
on their knees shaving grass verges
to within an inch of their lives,
keyed up to resist an invasion.

About the Author

Alan Weadick has been publishing poems widely for over ten years, most recently in The Irish Times New Writing, Cyphers, The Honest Ulsterman, Skylight 47 and in the Culture Matters anthology "Children of the Nation". He has been short and long-listed for competitions including the Strokestown Poetry Festival, Listowel Writer's Week and the National Poetry Competition (UK, 2016), been nominated for a Hennessy Literary award (Emerging Poetry, also 2016) and won third prize in the Red Line Book Festival poetry competition in 2019. He also writes prose fiction and three of his short stories have been shortlisted and broadcast on RTE Radio for the Francis McManus Short Story competition. He lives in Dublin.