

The Woman in the Window

by Paul Alexander

The heat of the summer afternoon hangs in the air like a balm.
As I walk along the sidewalk, I imagine you making your way

through the neighborhood years ago. On an icy winter morning,
you were bundled up in a heavy wool coat, your mind harried,
your face pale as a ghost, as you hurried to the tube stop.

Or on a day like today, so hot the air presses against my skin,
you wore a simple cotton dress on your stroll to Primrose Hill.

Years fade one into another. I continue on. Finally, I arrive
at the flat where you lived the last weeks of your life,
where in rooms with plastered walls you painted white

you dreamed the dream of who you would become.
I wait on the other side of the road, staring up at the second floor.

Then, as if from nowhere, you come to the window,
looming in the place where you stood for hours to stare
down onto the sidewalk at pedestrians caught up in the daze

of their daily hubbub. You wear a white nightgown.
I picture it flowing down to the floor, covering your bare feet.

Your long hair hangs past your shoulders onto your back.
You are the woman in the window, the fatherless daughter,
the mother who bore her children into a life she would leave behind.

Body without a body, poised between two worlds, you
linger there until, as suddenly as you appeared, you are gone.

To Sylvia Plath

by Paul Alexander

In the picturesque village, nestled in the subtle
rolling hills of the moors, lies a graveyard
dotted with towering elms, fat skeletons
in winter, leafy beacons in spring and summer.
Tall grass grows between the graves,
along the walking paths, leaning to and fro
when the wind sweeps down from nearby peaks.
On the summit of one peak looms a stone
monument rising up against the sky,
built in a past era to mark the fall of Napoleon,

his surrender in Paris. Years later, it was
struck by lightning, shattering its gritty shell.
Such are the hazards of this austere countryside,
alluring with its audacious panorama,
its arrogant assault on the senses. Go there
and admire the intricacies of a summer afternoon
or the stoic calm of an autumn morning,
white from the year's first snowfall.
Near the graveyard stand two churches:
one a mere framework of stone, the remains

of the original structure destroyed by fire;
the second, handsome, majestic, named
for Saint Thomas. On the gray afternoon
in February, in the coldest winter in a century,
a cluster of mourners sat in the sanctuary
of the church to hear the local minister,
who did not know you, deliver your eulogy.
He was not there for you. He was there
for the mourners, a solace for their anguish,
an unsatisfying balm. Afterwards, you were

lowered into a grave — a stranger in a country
that was not your own, an interloper
even in death. But you were there, a fact
that had to be dealt with. How the mourners
cried as they lingered at the grave. They did not
comprehend the magnitude of the moment,
so removed, as it was, from the tedium
of daily life, the banality of human desire.
The lurking monument was an omen, or it
should have been — a blow to the face,

a rip in the sky. With the last words
of the last prayer, you were left alone, alone, alone.
In time, a tombstone would mark the grave
using a name that was not your name, regardless
of custom, regardless of your wedding vows.
There is no curse more haunting than that of
an unsettled spirit, a tortured soul. In this graveyard,
there are ten thousand graves, ten thousand souls.
Stand still and hear, when the wind whips in
off the moors, a chorus of voices howling for you.