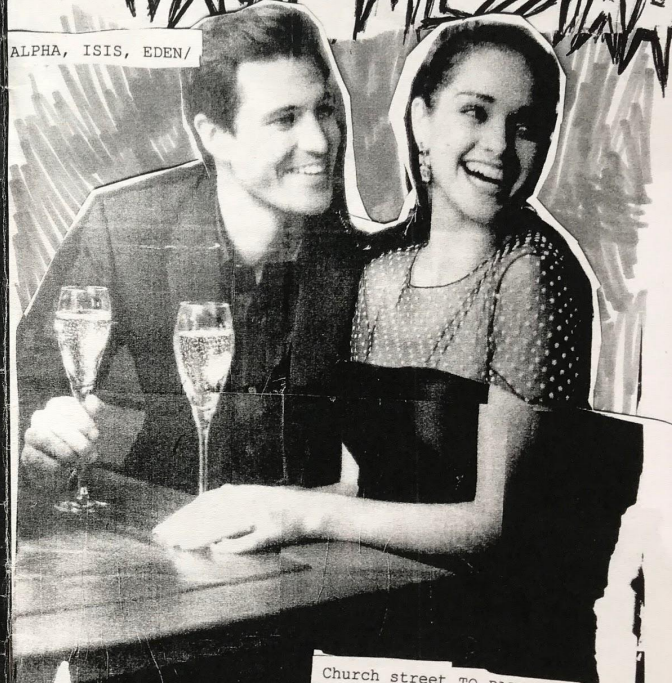




ALPHA, ISIS, EDEN/

# SAVAGE MESSIAH

FEB/MARCH 2017



Church street TO PADDINGTON---  
Eden House Class war rum and cokes,  
mirror shades- microdosing-- Penfold place, Westway,  
-Gucci Mane Edgware Road  
wrecking sprees, borstal dots, a culmination of  
Lion of episodes;

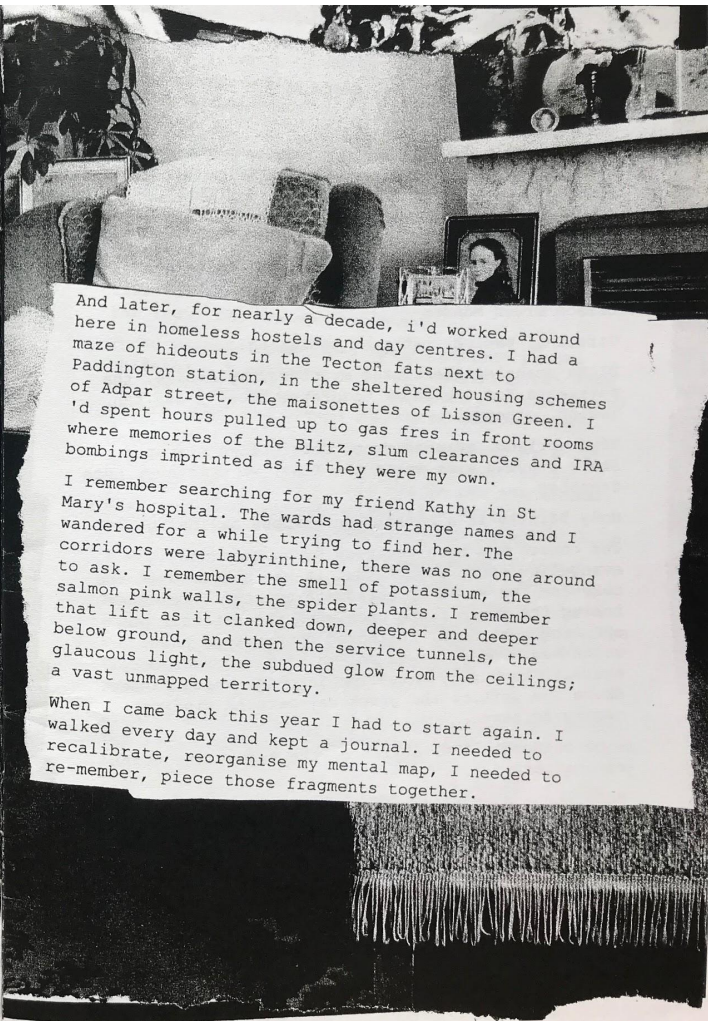
Laura Oldfield Ford



ALPHA, ISIS, EDEN/

We'd been hiding out since the beginning of summer. Eden House, just off the Edgware Road. A temporary bolt hole. Rubber plants, portable television, laundry bags tipped on the floor.

My map spooled back decades. I could trace paths through the squats of Elgin Avenue, the acid house parties beneath the Westway. I remembered nights in breakers yards lit up with fire, strange constructions emerging from heaps of scrap metal. And the Bramley Arms, the Acklam Hall, crepuscular worlds of drifting and dreaming.



And later, for nearly a decade, I'd worked around here in homeless hostels and day centres. I had a maze of hideouts in the Tecton flats next to Paddington station, in the sheltered housing schemes of Adpar street, the maisonettes of Lisson Green. I'd spent hours pulled up to gas fires in front rooms where memories of the Blitz, slum clearances and IRA bombings imprinted as if they were my own.

I remember searching for my friend Kathy in St Mary's hospital. The wards had strange names and I wandered for a while trying to find her. The corridors were labyrinthine, there was no one around to ask. I remember the smell of potassium, the salmon pink walls, the spider plants. I remember that lift as it clanked down, deeper and deeper below ground, and then the service tunnels, the glaucous light, the subdued glow from the ceilings; a vast unmapped territory.

When I came back this year I had to start again. I walked every day and kept a journal. I needed to recalibrate, reorganise my mental map, I needed to re-member, piece those fragments together.

14th September 2016 The most easterly point of our new territory is Great Portland Street.

As I circled the station waiting for Roya I noticed the Green man pub, I knew i'd been in before but I couldn't remember it being called that. The intemperence and loucheness of Mayday, the pagan recklessness. I thought of its brother in the vertices of Marylebone flyover and Edgware Road. The Green Man as double, trickster-

Lisson Green Mandem--

Circling, pacing, patterns radiating. 8.

Bloke scanning the ticket machines, my mobile, the pavements for tab ends. Cigarette smoke , sun tan lotion, cinnamon.

Roya arrived, errands done, dole office placated. She's staying with me in the flat, we came over here together.

Holy Trinity is a marker, an obvious beginning.

The church has been occupied by an American evangelist sect. Before that it was subsumed in the coke-fuelled world of corporate events. I remember seeing the doors flung open when the art fair was spinning next door, it looked compromised then, colonised. Today it was solemn, a pale order crept over it, authority chiselled into the white facade. Above the portico the greek key pattern winding neatly across-

-the meandros, the labyrinth, the twists and turns of the path-

Marylebone Road, Georgian town houses, parched leaves on the dusty pavements.

We were searching for a place William Blake identified as a portal . I've still got a book I found years ago, a self-published pamphlet of sacred sites. I'd always been transfixed by the drawing of a churchyard in Marylebone, a garden encircling an energy field. We'd searched before but it had evaded

us, slipped out of sight in a skein of scaffolding and railings.

Now, it appeared as a hallucination, the conjuration of something numinous and unworldly from the mottled pages of that book. St Marylebone. A Corinthian portico with eight columns, gilded caryatids around the steeple.

A cobbled path, an overarching plane tree in the centre. I felt a euphoric surge , a giddy sensation like clary sage or psilosibin, the trembling beneath the feet, the uneven fagstones.

Those dreams I sometimes have, tectonic plates shifting . I remember someone describing the same dreams to me years ago. I feel sure i've been here before, that the dreams belong to someone else.

Coloured glass from that window smashed by a V2 bomb. We could almost see the fragments of it reassembled, put back together in the new window. Chalky edifice, elegant geometries revealed as we edged around it. Tree doors leading to a vestibule.

I was touched by the melancholy of the alcoves and plaster heads, the graceful winding of the staircase. Roya pushed doors with no entry signs, slinked beneath barriers. She doesn't recognise the concept of private space, she's like a cat, if there's a door open she pads through it. Narrow steps down to the vaults.

Arcs of pale brick and globe lamps like full moons. The walls felt shivery, strange paintings of mothers and children, scenes of jagged separation. We didn't like it. The place was subdued, contained. I knew there were catacombs here branching west, still spoken of in nearby pubs , bricked up passages connecting to cellars, yards, foundations. In 1980 they'd reinterred all those bodies to Brookwood cemetery. I knew there must be sounds, gestures,

saved in the walls.

\*



The territory, our new shifting territory, pulls us back to the tourist crush at Baker Street. ~~we~~ <sup>THAT</sup> Wetherpoons at the station entrance, we went in there sometimes to rest and hide-- canteen, dressing room, spying chamber. But now glass and sitex, heavy chains on the door. A sign said it would reopen in December. I thought we wouldn't be here then. Jay had texted saying he'd be back for the winter and I knew it wouldn't work me staying there, he'd want the rest of them out for a start and I knew he had feelings for me, feelings that would ruin things. The offer of his flat had come at the right time, we needed somewhere and he was hardly ever there, for him it was just a base after stretches on the road salvaging, but I'd be packed and out before he came, better to keep moving than trapped in an arrangement like that.

The Wetherpoons was one more place scratched of the map. I wondered what they'd done with all the Edmonds fruit machines. Deal or No Deal. They used to disturb me, Edmonds face glowing, replicating across that cavernous room. We used to call him the heirophant, the interpreter of arcane principles.

We escaped the crowds, pushed through to the cooler stretches of Melcombe street- mansion blocks, phone shops, Berkeley Arcade. The arcade had a musuem feeling, the windows were like vitrines. Te first unit masquerades as an apothecary, plants and pink leather seats. Ten lanterns above a doorway , a Japanese restaurant hidden behind a dark mahogany grid. Perhaps it was authentic, I couldn't possibly know, the idea of Japan came to me I fragments, fictional moments gleaned from letters and films. It spoke of another time, the 1980s maybe, the way restaurants seemed to be round here then, dark, formal, serious. It looked like the kind of place a

---

philandering couple might go.

We came to the exit, the heat blare of the street. ~~we~~ Islamic bookshop with Eid Mubarak cards in the window.

Marylebone station, the Victoria and Albert, a sepia cave in an expanse of red brick. I like pubs in railway stations, there's the sense of transience, an ever changing cast, the nomadic quality lifts the spirits, reminds you of taking of . But there's a melancholy demeanour in the regulars who watch all the comings and goings, maybe they recognise themselves as the ones left behind.

The heat was overwhelming, too hot to stand out, slops fzzing in glasses, wasps clambering around the brims.

Inside for a quick half. In the Ladies I found one of the cubicle doors completely kicked in. Must have been ambulance or old bill or something. ~~the~~ place felt vexed.

Drinking your first half is a threshold, it's like the steps down to the subway, those moments before the immersion. \*

Te heat slows our walking pace, makes us fall into walls, press into shadows- Blandford Estate , '60s maisonettes, neat gardens behind iron gates. ~~the~~ estate nudges onto station platforms, tannoy announcements drift through rooms like a hypnotic frequency.

Rossmore Road Bridge. Another flashpoint, August 2011. Hooded figures emerging from below ground, crossing bridges, inverting architecture-

~~The~~ Lisson Estate, heating up again. We're not bound by postcodes like the kids on here, we slip between NW8, W9, W2. For them the boundaries are like concrete walls, they go miles to get round them. Until those August nights when Dead the Endz

proliferated in a matrix of BBM and the concrete walls dissolved.



Lisson Green Mandem--

The Green Man, always around, doubling, replicating. We have nests in here, three or four of them, and the hidden garden. Today the gate was unlocked, it's not always, sometimes you have to clamber up a wall and pull yourself into an overhanging sycamore. We come here most days, leave chalk marks, messages on the paths, wait to see who's replied.

Roya with her eyes closed listening. A wren singing, broadcasting from the depths of a copper beech. Domesticity escaping through open windows, enclosed worlds dissipating in a ghostly din. Plates, cutlery, Arabic radio-

Fosithia and redcurrant. Chlorophly light. We sifted through signs, gossip, overheated talk--the latest forecasts, the latest premonitions-

Heat was making us drowsy, making us fpp against each other. We struggled on, felt the pull of the journey.

Round to the fat with faded orange curtains, a flashback to the 70s. This was our other place where Duncan and some of them are hiding out. We have new boltholes connecting , more and more moving across. The curtains were drawn, we decided not to go there just then. We saw the vans coming the night before, people arriving late, bundling in after long journeys. Behind the orange curtains they would be sleeping on the floor, blankets hung aside in the heat.

By then it was getting hot, hotter than it's ever been on our walks around here. I could smell vetiver, a delirious scent of woodsmoke. It was coming from a shisha cafe on church street. We spied through the fence-tv screens, velvet cushions, coiling pipes.



The antiques market, that brick arch opening onto Plympton street. Roya wanted to climb the fire escape to the roof garden. ~~1402~~ These outcast zones belonged to us, loading bays, fire doors, they were ours when we needed to disappear, shake someone of. Today I persuaded her to come inside with me. We moved through a spectrum of light, crystalline shards of amber, colours sliding across parquet floors.

Up the stairs, winding round and round we peered into capsules of condensed time. Coloured glassware, convex mirrors, paintings in ornate frames. It felt like the '80s again, overheard conversations pocked with forgotten idioms. Dressing rooms, compartments, camphor scented clothes

Then the roof, another hide out. You can look down on the interlocking rooftops of Church street and across the city from Post Office Tower to Wembley Stadium.

The place feels fragile, can't see it hanging on for long, must surely be in the sights of property developers. But iconic locations feature in the dreams of others. Since the last wave the foundations have shifted.

\*

Church street, languid heat activating the old ways of Damascus and Aleppo. Zatar, rakaan, cedarwood. The mood was hallucinatory, walls and pavements bending.

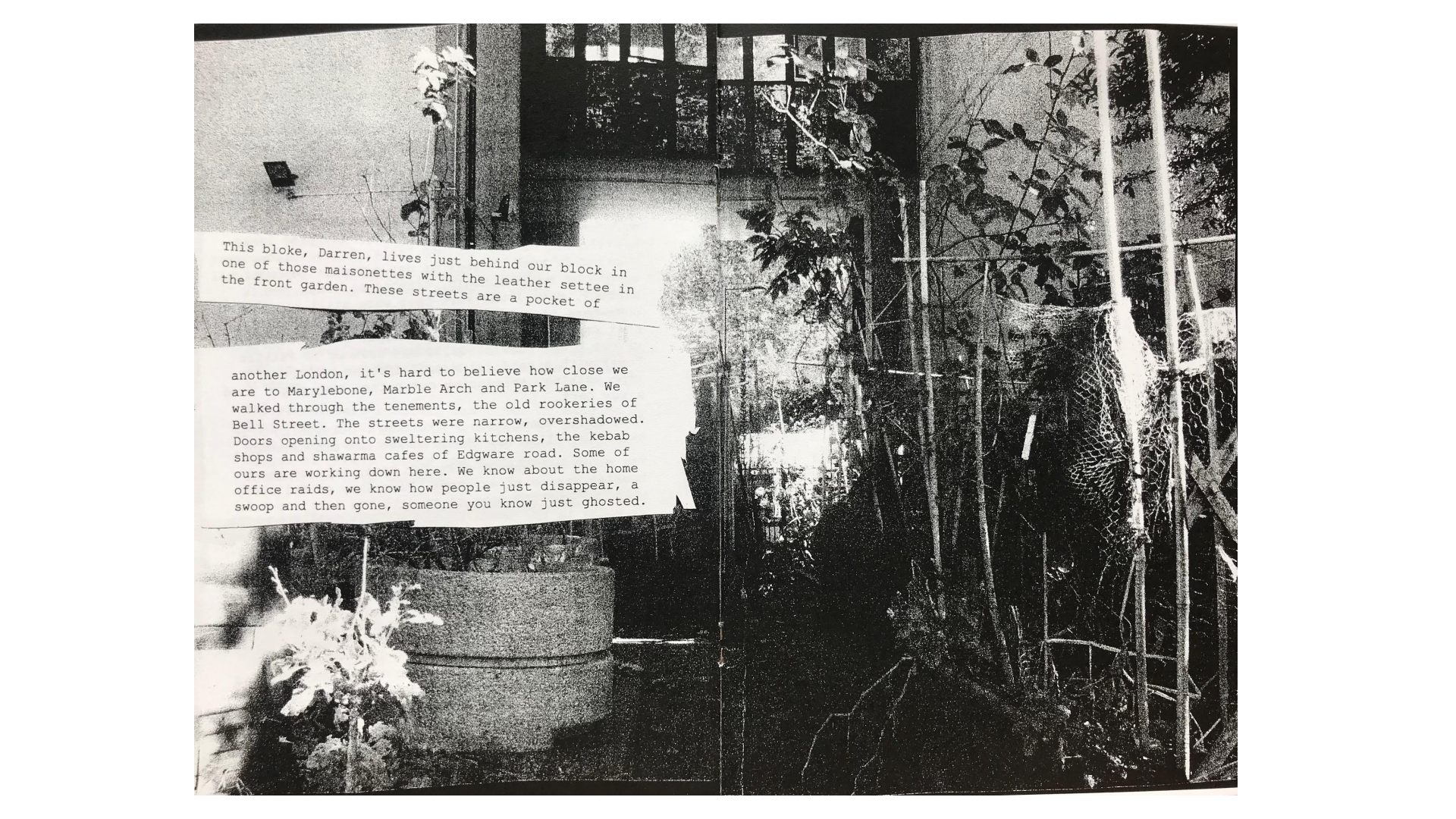
We escaped the heat, slid into the indigo shadows of Isis house. I thought about Winsome, wondered what happened to her. I put a card through a while ago with my new phone number, I doubt she ever got it. I lost track of most of them when I got laid of in 2012. That was the last bit of stability gone. I wish

i'd kept in touch, the ones I used to visit in hospital, go on shopping trips with. Some of them had passed away when I still worked there, dear Ray who adored me, who told me stories of his dancing school, his wartime girlfriend, and Tony in that subdued room in Ada Court with his shopping lists written out on the kitchen table. It was bittersweet working in that network of day centres- an emotional tangle of companionship, kinship and loss. But Winsome, May, I was sure they were still here somewhere if only I could find them. I had posted that card to the building on Adpar street hoping the warden might pass it on, I had been up to Falkirk Tower with a card for May, I thought perhaps if I kept walking, retreading our paths, they might find a way back.

Eden House--demolition, drilling, screeching - It seems to follow us, the wreckage and displacement.

The bloke who always asks for money outside the bookies stared at my phone. Blue Shop on Salisbury street, cans of coke to go with the little bottle of vodka in the handbag. It was never far away when we went down there, the vision of the whole block in ruins, collapsing floors, jagged masonry, the dust and piles of debris strewn across the street. 1941, I opened my palm and felt it settling there.

Red faced throno outside the Admiral, saw one of our neighbours of Eden, says he's been trying to score some decent weed, moaning because he's had to go all the way to Whitechapel. The name punctured the moment, threw me into that other zone. The East End seems so far away now, we haven't ventured back for months. We know a few of them in here, Jay introduced me years ago, his knowledge of local rackets was a gift he passed on.



This bloke, Darren, lives just behind our block in one of those maisonettes with the leather settee in the front garden. These streets are a pocket of

another London, it's hard to believe how close we are to Marylebone, Marble Arch and Park Lane. We walked through the tenements, the old rookeries of Bell Street. The streets were narrow, overshadowed. Doors opening onto sweltering kitchens, the kebab shops and shawarma cafes of Edgware road. Some of ours are working down here. We know about the home office raids, we know how people just disappear, a swoop and then gone, someone you know just ghosted.



Always the Peacock stands resplendent in the sitting room window. To his left is a picture of the wall brought at auction and three cushions and a vase from Hassan al-Lia. From Giovanni



Edgware road, molten and oppressive, window displays around the station seemed incongruous, surreal. Marks and Spencers trying to entice with wool coats, ankle boots , arran jumpers. Outside it was Beirut. Dokha tobacco, cardamon coffee, a wilting, heavy heat.

Green Man, the halfway house, the ex-apothecary- Pub strewn with lozenges of topaz light. We sat in the window, perfect place to spy on that frantic intersection. The lull soon evaporated in the boiling mass of after work drinks. Backpackers, businessmen, Australians knocking back shots of tequila. Our conversation was spliced by their stretchy vowels, the elastic jarring of their laughter.

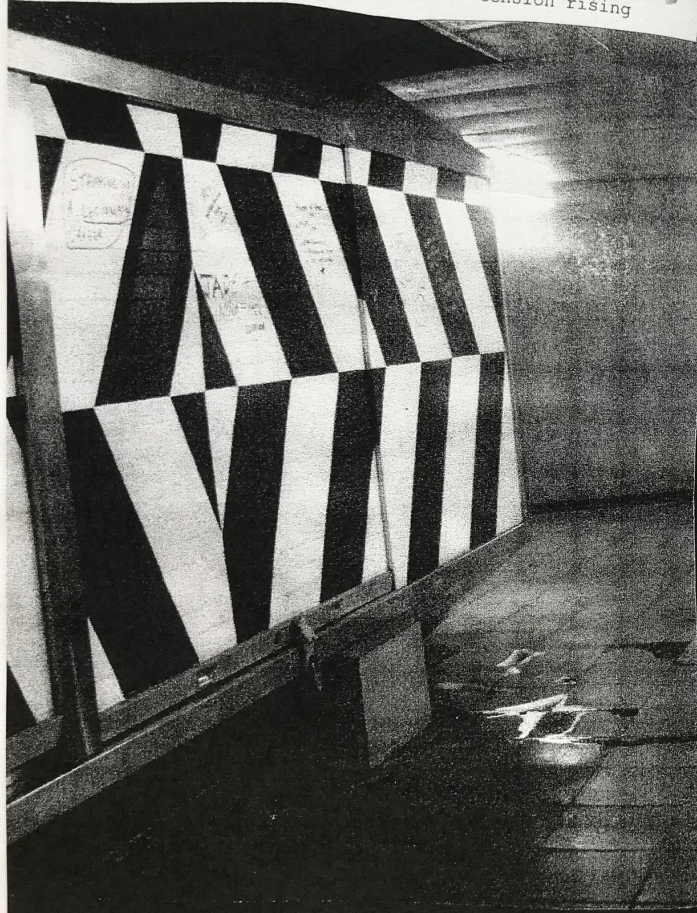
The Green Man has galvanising energies, we use them carefully. if you leave at the right time you can infuse the night with a strange

charge, if you stay you risk sinking into a vortex, hours spinning with a dark, cataclysmic quality. This is an important crossroads, a boundary, it is inevitable that there are tricksters in the midst of it.

The Australians were crowding around, cajoling us to drink with them in the rooms upstairs. I'd seen the rum bottle under the table, the little bags of pills, and though we wanted no part of it we seized our chance to look around. We followed them into a corridor of disinfectant and cigarette smoke and memorised the code as they punched it into a door. As we climbed the stairs, the pub sounded muffled, spectral, as if we were dreaming it.



In the blistering heat you feel the tension rising



and the schisms opening. The crossroads is a site of rupture, it instigates a splintering of ideologies. I remember that demo, Britain First clashing with Al Muhajiroun. I remember the backdrop of the flyover, the sublime camber arching over the febrile, squabbling mass. And Choudury at the centre of it, strident, mobbed by acolytes in black salwar kameez. Now he's been arrested, held in solitary to prevent dawar. They think it puts him out of the picture but he permeates everything as a spectre.

I remember getting hauled in under the prevention of terrorism act just for taking photos round here. Terror suspects, the 90 day ruling. Stacked underground, levels of conjoined holding cells.

Green light, an eerie phosphorescence.

Pale green walls, polysterene tiles. Deep down, the shahada, the commitment to jihad. a bilious regurgitation.-- emotionally walled, stark and mathematical or stretchy and subnormal- and then the others, moving through the estates, the suburban rooms of Slough, Leytonstone, Wembley.

We move beneath the flyover, concrete stanchions wobbly, surfaces crawling in the heat. You remember the maze of streets, the kinema, the Metropolitan crushed under the weight of the new road. Pitched down vocals, Arabic Trap, bass slamming through Mercs and Bentleys, scuttling and warping as it escapes through tinted windows.

That service area behind the Hilton. It wants to give the impression it's a high security zone with its guards and cameras but really it lies prone. We survey the underground car parks and remember that this is the soft underbelly of the city.

Paddington Basin. Muted hostility. Hoardings depicting opulent interiors, the kind we plot about. Waterside cafes, luxury apartments.

We couldn't wait to get back into the labyrinth. We crossed the canal, walked through the old wharf with its whitewashed warehouses. This was the way back in. Narrow paths between portakabins, geometric shadows, a cobbled alley running alongside the station. St Marys hospital, dank atria, moss and brick.

That building that says Cross Rail, I don't know what it used to be but now it's empty, must have had something to do with the railway, a parcel depot or something. I'm sure I've been in before. The faded reds of those huge concertina doors, the ghost writing where initials were wrenched of. I remember Winsome telling me she used to work at Paddington station as a stenographer, I could imagine her here, in the '50s, the same arches, the same web of paths. It was must have been about 7 or something then, we kept losing track. I wanted to walk down that slope to the station where everyone waits around smoking but there were coppers with machine guns and the barriers down.

We crossed Praed Street, escaped the snarl round the station, the side exit of Burger King. A span of cobbled mews, dilapidated squares, that continental feeling you always get round here.

Conduit Place, Sawyers Arms on the corner, standing empty. We recognised it as a way in, we were always on the look out for them, moments when the city softened, became porous. We stepped on the wooden cellar doors, scarred and black where the draymen had yanked them back. The slats were soft, they would easily give. I knew there were hidden networks beneath the streets, I'd seen the unmarked corridors under St Marys. Roy told me there were tunnels connecting the station with a burrow of cold war bunkers. I remember under the Westway, concrete chambers reverberating with deep sonic vibrations; sometimes the walls felt thin, the quality of the echo was different, we always sensed there were

rooms beyond them.

The heat was radiating from the walls, every surface intense and vivid. We were enraptured by the sense of masonry suddenly alive, surfaces trembling with molten heat. Ledges, pipes, railings squirming over hot bricks.

We pressed our faces to the window. The empty bar glowed like an amber capsule. It was a pre-echo of something, that was as clear to me as the moment when I saw the meandros at the start.

We walked through the the gardens and dilapidated hotels of Paddington towards the fat. A knot of streets neither of us really knew. A pub we couldn't remember seeing before. The sound of smashing glass, the euphoria of pavement drinking. A crew dressed in black swarming in and out. The pub was packed, a crush spilling onto the street, a sense of unity like a football firm.

cutting through the heat. I thought I recognised some of the crew, dormant currents radiating out of the Grove, from Acton and Kensal Rise. The bloke serving was one of them, same skinhead, borstal dots, arabic glyphs on his arms. He told us to hang on past last orders, said there was going to be a lock in. It felt like a reliquary or a dream sequence, a London I hadn't seen for years.

A skinhead, onyx eyes, looking over. I felt awkward. I must have looked a mess, make up melting of my face, white stilletos scuffed and dirty. The walls were like lava, molten orange seeping across the bar, I was captivated by the lamp shades, the tangerine halo around them. I liked the estate pub feel, the bunker aesthetic warping and rippling. We'd been microdosing all day, little shards of acid, sometimes it gets you like that, comes on all at once.

But the sonic textures arced forwards, Gucci Mane blasting out on the PA, agitated tremors, an energising discontent rumbling through the floors, the street; we were on the rum and cokes, a wild, intensity transmitted from the orange paintwork, another London coming up through the floor.

He came over and I recognised his voice, the Bradford accent. He said he knew me- we talked about Yorkshire. He said he'd just come back, still had connections there, Anarcho- Islamic- khandan. Bonds, intersecting spheres.

We knew the same places, tuned into the same networks. I knew he was hiding out. There was a heightened sense between us, almost telepathic.

It was late, night sharpening, a woodsmoke scent of autumn. He told me the Eid fireworks in Bradford were more intense than he's ever known them, streets lit up every night, walls suffused with green and magenta. vetiver, amber, scents haunting us ~~in the air~~. I was sure I remembered him, tried to piece it together. So many places reeling then a pause as I seized the moment.

