

## The Long Silver Legs After Midnight

I enjoy driving at night. The world is less compacted and you get a feeling of space now the maniacs have finally given in to sleep. The twenty-third hour is no good as this is pub kicking-out time. Over cautious drivers hijack the road pretending to be sober; driving too straight, driving too slow. After twelve it's taxis paying no attention to speed limits. Their actions dictated by the diminishing returns of the pay meter, their brains filled with the diminishing logic of drunks, their heads a vacuous pit of street names and post codes that brings a certain order to their lives.

I venture out at 1a.m. having spent the evening hunched over a computer screen depositing thoughts into its memory banks. Everything is about putting away, whether my son to bed or thoughts into fonts. Only then can you embrace the roads.

'Where are you going at this time?'

'Nowhere, love.'

'Where's that? You can't just go *nowhere*.'

I don't need a dog to walk in the park and I don't need a destination to drive. In fact the more things I discover that I don't need, the happier I feel. But it's what to keep that is the problem.

I can barely muster the energy to press down on the accelerator. It's as much as I can manage to get the dial flickering between 28-32 mph. But the traffic lights demand effort and blush red, proving the world is still full of unquestioning conformity. I glance at the various road signs which, despite their logic, confuse me, throwing up options I would rather not have to consider. I don't care about the motorway or how far away Stapleford is. I just need to be moving, safe in the womb of this metal vehicle. Heading nowhere.

The trees along the Boulevard arch and bow towards the road, their branches outstretched hands to shake. They rustle in the wind, whispering secrets. I can't quite make-out what they are saying but I feel I understand. They are telling me everything will be alright.

I pull over and begin scribbling thoughts down; everything that *has* happened, *is* happening, *will* happen, into words. The inside of a Rizla becomes my surrogate paper, then a discarded chip wrapper when I require more surface. When it's all out I breathe a sigh of relief and start the car up. The trees swoosh and sway. This way they tell me, this way.

But ten yards later and it starts all over again. There are more thoughts which require more words. My wife is pregnant with our second child. I've been made redundant. I haven't told her yet. I take out my pen. Where to start? Then suddenly, bright flashing lights. But it's not inspiration or a solution. It's the police. They want to know why I keep stopping and starting. What my game is. But how can I tell *them* how I feel when I can't even tell my wife?

I am saved a humiliating explanation as they crave the obvious and produce a breathalyser.

'Bet you a pint he fails.'

'Make it two,' says his accomplice.

When it comes back negative they both look disappointed, even the one who has just won the bet.

'He must be on drugs. Look at his pupils, they're like train buffers.'

'What you on, lad?'

What to tell them? That I leave each morning for an imaginary job with tin-foiled sandwiches from my wife. That I find it hard to get excited about decorating the spare room when I know how much it will cost. And that for the first time, tonight, the world drained of information, the streets felt naked, and the lampposts felt like long silver legs holding up the heavens. I just needed to write it all down, to hold onto it for a moment longer, before the sun comes up and the noise starts again.

As they do not have a drug testing kit to test out their hypothesis I am told to empty out my pockets, then undo the boot. I am asked what is in my glove compartment and if I am the owner of the vehicle. They tell me that the tax runs out at the end of the month but I cannot see the problem. It's only the third. There's time to sort it out.

They look rather offended that I've not broken the law, as if I've deprived them of purpose.

'Do you have any driving documents on you?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Because if someone stole the car, they could fake my identity.'

They mumble among themselves. One burps.

'You need to sort your rear side tyre. I don't like the look of your tread.'

'And no stop starting. It makes folk nervous. There's been a lot of burglaries in the area.'

I get in my car, start the engine and pull out on to the road. A speeding car comes from nowhere and slams on its brakes, the screech cuts through the air and the air stinks of burning rubber. But he misses me. Just. The police whack on their siren and follow in hot pursuit.

I reverse back to the curb and cut the engine. Wind down the window and let in a little air. I shut my eyes and this time there aren't any thoughts, just an image of my son playing happily with my wife. I take my biro and snap it in half and then dump all of my notes into the nearest bin. You can't evidence a life in words.

When I start up the engine, I check my rear view mirror and take a good look behind me. When it's clear I pull out and quickly hit forty. I need to get home.