

My American Chair

Elizabeth Smither



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for Lucy Dougan

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I

Cranes

All day in the hotel room
in a red chair by the picture window
I am looking at cranes.

On the fourth floor I am level
with the new fourth floor they are building.
Seven cranes stretching into the distance.

Three quite close and moving together
in a choreography that causes them to cross.
I see their drivers climb up, wearily

or is it caution, pausing at each level
their spines – if they lean back – protected by a cage
up to the solitary cabin where a vest awaits.

Seven cranes, a new casino.
Floors with blue portaloos placed
so no one can enter unobserved

little rituals: sitting for lunch on planks
last inspection when almost everyone has gone
a solitary workman, invisible except for his legs.

At dusk one of the cranes unfurls
two flags as if they are all at sea
and a diamanté bracelet along its boom

and I think: we have come this far
we have built ourselves up by our own efforts
we live here, thanks to cranes.

Chimney smoke

No cardinals are balloting below
and no one is putting on red shoes
the smoke that rises is not white but greyish-hued

but still it conjures a room: vast or plain
the highest art is in the lighting
and rising: the sign

of smoke dispersing to the heavens
and all those eyes, like mine
watching the smoke rising from your chimney.

A new planet

A strange and large new planet
slightly ovaloid like a baby's head
delivered by forceps, swims past
with its sun swimming in front.

Containment is the word for it
as all things on earth are contained
flower or fish or animal in their boundaries
the light moving around them, in outline.

But how delicious it sounds. The sun
that belongs to this planet (still unnamed,
just a number) as close in its orbit
as a woman is to her handbag.

The girl with the dog made of cigarettes

Making a tower of leaning cards
turning cigarette packets into a dog
a girl in a velvet jacket and pleated skirt
carries in the street. Above her head

hangs her mother's handbag. The Pall Mall dog
looks up and down the street. Air flows
through its body, the gap-spaced teeth,
nonetheless it guards the girl who holds it

sometimes by a rear leg, sometimes its torso
like a clutch purse. An accessory for the well-
dressed girl shopping with her mother. On a shop
counter the cigarette dog sneaks a rest as if

smoke from old cigarettes and stubbed-out butts
escapes through the slits. Smoking helps
you relax and gives the hands something other
than a fumble. The little girl who wears red

boots to match the cigarette packets knows to
hold something is halfway to confidence. 'A dog?'
someone exclaims as she thrusts its muzzle forwards.
'How cute, how darling. But don't start smoking yet.'