

Lazarus

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The problem for Lazarus is: he's never quite come back. He can cook a meal, he can eat it, but the taste isn't there, not since his tongue got itself snagged on the flavour of something levelled, cold. He can talk with friends, or for that matter strangers, taking in their words as if they were angels or emergency packs of medicine. But as they speak he worries if they're real, if they'll crumble should he grab suddenly their wrists and hold on a moment more than possible. He can read a little, mostly easy fiction but even then he finds it difficult to concentrate; after a while the writing's loose, floating in his mind like crumbs of bread that someone threw on water for gulls to feed on. Before he knows what's going on there's movement, quick, greedy and only the water's left. Empty and nameless now a plastic bottle goes drifting by; it's likely it once gave energy to one of these runners making more and more circles round the water with measured, rubbered feet. He can sleep, but not much because he has to sit upright in a chair, listening to his breath, surprisingly still coming in, going out; he is afraid any moment now his lungs will remember and give themselves back to the soft touch

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of dust, lifting off the sepulchre and lowering itself over him.
He can pray a bit, in bits (perhaps, he thinks, he might himself
be a picking gull), but even though he's prepared to say
there's mystery, even perhaps miracle, at work, he doesn't dare
imagine, whatever he hopes, there's a being sometimes known
as god opening his file and taking out an answer that is kind.
As he can get himself out of bed each day, have his toast and coffee,
and wash, still trying to clear the dark from underneath
his fingernails and rub away what seem to be cinder marks
on his lips. He can get himself dressed, and head to work,
but all the time he knows his shoulders have been
turned down, taking his eyes with them.