

PHILIP HANCOCK

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City Works Dept.

**C**editions

for Michael Laskey

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*What matters to me is the passionate energy of the idea*

– Robert Musil

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CITY WORKS DEPT.

## To Carry a Ladder

Daft trying to fang hold of it in the middle  
or grabbing it wherever suits fit.  
Take one end and lift.

Run it up to the sky on its heel.  
Get a shoulder under it – take the weight,  
and feel for the point of fulcrum.

Allow it to settle on the clavicle,  
horizontal, hardly there.  
Fist a rung, no sweat:

between parked cars, down entries;  
one arm around it, the other swinging.  
Beware of washing lines.

## New Shoes for the Parade

Naylors – Boyswear on the first floor.  
Wax polish lingers from the panelled walls  
and oak staircase. I giggle  
as the nice lady lifts my foot.  
She cups a heel, slides the steel gauge  
to my toes: a five.  
Her brooch is a silver spider.

Red flowers on the storeroom curtain.  
I stare at the man  
carrying Clarks boxes, he lumbers  
on callipers. The lady rustles  
tissue wrapping, thumbs the tips  
of my toes. *Just say if they pinch you.*  
She asks me to walk.

## Mobile Library

Landed.

In the grounds of the single-storey clinic,  
the mobile library only stays for one day,  
Monday. It always rains.

Overlooked by the quiet iron foundry;  
surrounded by white and grey horses,  
ranch fencing and lush, wide verges.

It has no window to this world, only a thin door,  
but something makes me want to join.

A filthy great fish tank: olive green,  
two half-moon wheels and County lettering  
in gold leaf. On entry it wheezes.

The librarian has fish eyes behind massive specs  
and stacks of scribbled hair, never smiles  
or speaks. Only claws the spines and lends.

She is a nylon xylophonist.

Every week is towed away  
without sound; leaving a dry space,

a missing final page.

## Fenced Off

Moon face with pig eyes,  
copper tuft, striped pyjamas,  
came shrieking, shaking  
the chain-link fence  
at the end house, jump-started  
our hearts, made us run.

One sticky afternoon,  
must have been his dad  
sat on the step, sleeves rolled up,  
a tattoo, scalp showing  
through his grey. The quiet  
before the school bus with the ramp.

Toys scattering the yard  
always too dear for us:  
Captain Scarlet's patrol car  
in gold, mighty Tonkas,  
a David Brown pedal tractor.  
*Maybe next Christmas.*

Likely he'd be no different from me,  
ticking them in the catalogue,  
outside Playlands kicking up a fuss.  
Lie for ages on his belly  
on the wonky concrete flags  
making engine noises.

## Demolition of the Power Station

Coming back up the A34, counting  
the pylons. The cooling towers  
where the white clouds are made, always there.  
A black-tipped chimney, zigzag ironwork,  
slanted conveyors. Squat transformers  
fenced in. Flashing NCB lorries,  
white-hatted Dinky men.

Dynamite day: crowds stand behind barriers.  
Their mouths come open, thick dust  
boils up and up, and through the clearing  
for the first time what lies beyond:  
the backs of houses, light green fields,  
horses easing up, a line of poplars.

Now the open curve of the new road,  
the billboards for retail and office spaces,  
families strolling by lakeside apartments,  
but the sky's a blankness, nothing but weather.