

The Light

On the morning of his eightieth birthday, a tunnel of light waits for Henry Randall beyond his bedroom door. A day like any other, he thinks, the thrill of surprise long forgotten, and he pulls open the curtains to a rose morning sky, pink cumuli inching drowsily past the dreaming spires, like the raspberry slime mould he sees creeping across the forest floor in warmer months. Then comes the body's summons to the bathroom, the colours of sunrise still bright in his eyes.

But oh! A tunnel of light is blazing through the hallway and pointing to his cellar door, and then up and up and there are the death camps, the cattle cars, his grandparents waving and smiling in striped pyjamas through smoke and dirt; then his father, 'Vati', in a prison cell, weeping. Then he's over the sea, the vomit, the sighs, the slow ship to England, to Liverpool Street station, a peculiar house and unknown parents, and through silent school rooms where they don't know his name, then to his mother, working in London, a maid, her arms burned from baking, the skin scarred from slicing, and on to the stables where they lived at war's end, she is bent over, darning his socks.

Now again the scent of home, the wall of his landing, a prickle in his fingers and he moves to the bathroom, a slipper slapping loose at his heel, his dressing-gown catching the blue veins in his calves. In the washbasin mirror, his ancient morning face, the silver beard needs a tidy, and what explanations could there be? A turn, perhaps, though turns come with illness. Dizziness, but that follows standing too fast. A dream, except dreams happen asleep. Memories, hallucinations. Madness, delusions, perhaps it's best not to dwell.

A blood pressure cuff says no heart attack, and his pupils are normal, of equal size. The tap runs, he flannels his face, crisp water, the cloth on his eyes, and there was the light, now he's