

DAVID HERD

Tuesday

Called Jack. Jack sounded edgy. He said to put all my money into government bonds pronto because the whole fairground was about to hit the tracks. Belly up. I listened. Jack was a good talker. But some days it wasn't good to talk to Jack. I put the phone down. Jack was still talking. Jack was always talking. It had been a long day. What with the news from home, and now Jack's metaphor. I tried to remember when I had last slept.

Slumbered. I thought. But for some reason my thinking was in decades only. The 1970s. that couldn't be right. And now I was tired. Maybe if I lay down for a moment. I lay down. On white linen. Sweetly aware that of all the hotels I had ever stayed in, these were probably the heaviest, best pressed sheets. If stiff. Someone knew hospital corners. I smiled as it dawned. The death-bed fold.

I was woken by the sound of a small French petrol engine abruptly occupying the public square, a display of shallow, alluvial sunlight; strangely certain where my money should be. I dressed, if largely involuntarily. Within minutes I was walking down the central street, which was wider, somehow more prone than I'd realised; locomotive, like there was sufficient space. Which is to say *was* [my emphasis]. Which is to say *is* only in the past tense. Which is to say I walked, prone, wider, in alluvial sunlight, along the central street. Past trees. Seagulls flocked ceaselessly. A woman shopped, from a comprehensive list, plumpish, visibly in her element, carrying on as if she carried on routinely, about the way things had changed recently, about the way things changed. Chatting, on, as the sun loped westward [*sloped*]; on, as a new set of particulars became clear. Drawing gratefully on a friend's cigarette. "Mr. Fredericks, it's September." *September*. "It's here."

[this piece used from Mandelson! Mandelson! A Memoir (Carcenet, 2005) by kind permission of Carcenet Press UK.]
