

## Recital: *an almanac*

JOHN SIDDIQUE was born in 1964 and grew up in a house with no books; his discovery of his local library when young began his life long love affair with what words mean and how they sit together. He has published three previous collections of poetry, one of which is for children, and was shortlisted for the CLPE poetry award. He has also co-authored a collection of short stories, and written a short play for BBC Radio 3. He teaches poetry workshops both in UK and Abroad, and has worked with The Arvon Foundation, The Poetry Society, The Poetry School and the British Council. He has been a visiting lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan and Vienna Universities. He is well known for his captivating readings, and his ability to communicate with all types of audiences. He has a website at [www.johnsiddique.co.uk](http://www.johnsiddique.co.uk)

Also by John Siddique

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FOR CHILDREN

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AS EDITOR

*Transparency*

# Recital

AN ALMANAC

JOHN SIDDIQUE



CAMBRIDGE

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*For my beloveds*



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### MAGAZINES

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'The hardest thing in this world is to live in it,  
be brave, live.'

— JOSS WHEDON: *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* 'The Gift'

'Everything that is made beautiful and fair and lovely  
is made for the eye of one who sees.'

— RUMI

'You've got to get in to get out'

— GENESIS: *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*



## Begin

and so this a beginning (I seem  
to know no other way, except the again and again)  
racked up on top of every other beginning  
all the way back to conception.

The again and again, a movement away  
from confidence in the certainties,  
to a confidence in beginning again  
in the unknowing fog of the day which presents  
itself, racking itself on top of every other day.  
I use my fingertips feeling into it,  
I have done this before and am confident  
that the only thing I know  
is that is as different as the last.

## You've Got to Get in to Get Out

The world will impinge into your need  
for silence, into your prayers. In the hardest seconds  
of your life, your neighbours will be drunk,  
booming hip-hop through thin inconvenient walls.

At the lighting of your candles, in the moment  
you need to focus—the apex of your flame,  
the voice of the Holy Spirit, someone  
will be vacuuming, talking, ringing up change,  
a bin wagon bleeping as it reverses, builders  
swearing into the distance you put by pulling into  
yourself. It sounds like they are calling your name.

## Birch Moon

Something to do with January,  
something to do with after New Year.  
Something to do with trying to make plans  
for the year that never turn out,  
but having to make them anyway.

Bootstrapping back to existence after  
the duties of sonhood, husbandhood.  
The hands moving faster on every clock,  
especially the little one in the corner  
of the computer screen.

Something names itself and gives meaning  
under the duvet of last year's expectation.  
Fifteen togs of keeping your eye on the ball.  
Gas fires of ideas writing themselves.

## One New Year's Eve

I drove two hours alone to the sea.  
Stood on the beach at midnight, screaming  
in the rush, while the fireworks  
went off in the Welsh towns nearby.

Drove home slow, left the radio off.  
Not wanting to arrive, the heater matrix  
barely working, damn that old Volkswagen,  
a fleece blanket over my freezing knees.

No one else out until I get to the city,  
I'm so glad to go home alone tonight.

## Facing You

We cannot tame the wind or the sea. Cannot make them roll or blow our way. Taming ourselves comes first, then we may laugh at them, scream at them.

We cannot tame those we wish to love. Cannot make them roll or blow our way, but we can laugh with them, scream with them, or break them in the taming we try, which should be the fixing of ourselves.

We cannot tame love, or the wind, or the sea, we are not here for long enough. There will always be these things. Our joy comes from being the flash, the spark in the eye of forever. Forever is grown too old to laugh and scream.

## If You Want to Find Me

I'm the little boy again  
building sanctuaries under beds,  
staying in his room.

I have left the door on the latch.  
Knock on the door, turn the handle.

It's not safe knowing your secrets.  
You believe in the day,  
I believe in the night.

I have left the door open,  
I look busy but I'm waiting,  
all full of flowers.  
The daffodils of spring,  
the roses of summer,  
I'm green all winter.

## The Other

He crashed into my life, everything I don't believe in,  
took love away in a single action, so that even after years  
it is fresh—the exact moment entwining my core.  
It doesn't matter if I'm doing business,  
or in the arms of my new wife, he is always with me.

Since that day I have had to beat my own heart.  
Each day I have to spend time finding a reason to live,  
the simplest things are heavier than they used to be.  
I would like nothing more than to see a space  
where he used to walk, nothing more than to strike  
him and anyone who is like him from these pages.

It would be the easiest thing to make a war,  
I could take my fury, my hurt and my truth.  
No right thinking person would disagree with me.  
I and all the right thinking people will be wrong  
as we imprint our versions of the same horrors  
into other lives. Once I swore a vow to god,  
before that dust filled day when I cursed god  
right back in the face. My vow was that this world  
would be better for my living in it.  
Now that god is gone I still believe the words.  
One day I will remake something holy  
from the piles of words we have stored up in defence.

Peace will not happen from war. My hurt is not your hurt.  
If I do not choose peace, the terrorist in my dreams is given life,  
so I spell forgiveness, learn it is not the same as forgetting,  
learn that it means I have to stay away from him.  
When the anger rises I have to go away and be quiet  
or weep, or squeeze my fists. He has left me with a task  
that makes me sick to my bones every single moment.  
It is all I can do, no one notices, and this is my war.

# Labyrinth

There is a ladder  
in one of the walkways.  
I occasionally  
find my way into  
a certain section  
of the maze. I have  
come to believe it is  
the centre.

Here too you can see  
a line of spheres on  
the wall tops. I found  
purchase beneath one  
of them, managed to  
climb up and push it,

it did not move.  
It was heavy like  
concrete, but had no  
temperature to gauge,  
like the walls, they  
have mass but neither  
heat nor cold.

I have come to call  
a region home. By making  
marks I have mapped and  
understood the layout.

I am not sure of the purpose  
of the structure.  
There are many stories.  
The drive to go beyond

this section is overwhelming.  
To find a way onto the wall,  
see it spread out and to  
choose a clear direction.

## Rowan Moon

Some days are over before they begin.  
Sleeping past the alarm, eating cornflakes  
standing in the kitchen. Looking at the viewless view,  
the next row of houses, Hannah and her cats  
and children, Graham filling his water bottle.

How do you pull a sickie when you work for yourself?  
You'd be paranoid about running into yourself all day.  
So it's out to the car, making the miles, marking the time.  
A sandwich for lunch. The long drag through the afternoon.

Some days begin where you least expect them to.  
A girl on a checkout pauses the conveyer belt for a moment,  
says something about the DVD you're buying,  
how much the film meant to her. You tell her your little story  
and the day begins for both of you.

## February Verses

Light returns and ice bakes itself  
onto cars. Tentative beginnings  
when I had lost belief in newness.

The inner journey is no escape,  
neither is the outward bound.  
Birds swoop and flock at evening.

Tree branches—ungloved fingers  
against a sky of white paint.  
I had come to believe that nothing existed

beyond the sense that something must.  
A dash of colour through white paint,  
a friend telling a stranger my name.