

Summer’s Farewell

The last blackberries,
sour as broken promises.
Behind cobwebbed curtains
the loosestrife unties its hag-hair,
discards the purple petticoats.

Summer writes its final letter
with a grey shadow pen –
green is no colour for a suicide note.

The woodland’s scapegrace suitors
leave with treacherous kisses,
confetti that dances down
in crimson, orange and gold.
Farewells are rarely so beautiful.

Remorse

You can make a fresh start... Bertolt Brecht

You can lay it down now
here in the nearest wood,
deep in the forgiving mulch
under your feet.
Your remorse is a small
dead creature ready for burial.
Don’t wait until tomorrow.

The time has come
and in this green silence
you can hold your own
private ceremony, and remain
for one last moment
of clean and wholesome sorrow
before you head for home.

Bernadette McCarrick

A Rare Talent

A song thrush lands before me in the lime,
Blocking my way, and will not meet my eye.
He firms his gaze an inch beneath my chin
And puffs his tweedy chest as if to say:
“I’m going to recite – this may take time.”

I search for exits, but it’s all too late.
He’s sensitive as butter in the sun.
I won’t disturb his flow, I’ll have to wait,
But on and on the endless stanzas run.
“Told you!” Is his opener, “Told you so!”

Repeated twice, then; “What’s for tea?” Four times.
Poor bird, he does his best. He takes a breath,
And trickles notes like rivers catching rain,
Then eyes me proudly, knowing I would stand
All Summer, just to hear his song again.

Marian Griffin

Late October

This light always takes me back
and hits me a glancing blow of regret.
Even when I was away
I tried to remember the clouds and the stone
when I stood beneath the berries and the bough.
I saw the fence, the marshland and the Westport train,
all headed for November
with the prospect of north wind and frost.
You are part of this as well,
the falling away, the giving up and letting go.
You are all this cool silence under the sky.

Eamonn Gordon

Moma

We’ll remember her –
Not coffin-bound in a Strokestown graveyard,
but vigorous –
a lover of the great outdoors,
attuned to nature and with God,
gathering in hay, forking,
twisting ropes,
or tying, stooking, golden
sheaves of corn.

I’ll remember her –
planting potatoes,
spraying blossoms, purple,
white – on a November day –
digging, heedless of bitter,
frosty air,
I could not tolerate –
“I’ll pick them, run home and
warm yourself”, she’d say.

Her kindness infinite.

Brigid Kavanagh

The Dig

They turned the green sods
with spades and picks, found
the outline of a road,

clay and more clay, then stones,
but nothing to show the presence
of a man or woman,
no clay pipe stem, no broken plate;

they knew the date of the road,
unfinished as it was
and going nowhere.

When they finished the dig
the display trays were still clean
and artefact bags unopened;

they washed clay from every trowel
and spade, from every boot and glove,
knew this was a graveyard of the spirit.

Mary Turley-McGrath

Fat Women Dreaming

Fat women also have their dreams
that fill the sky by night and day,
spinning in beauty, power and grace.

Fragile and delicate as lace,
strong, mysterious, stark and fey,
fat women also have their dreams.

Fettered by flesh, to you it seems,
yet thoughts soar lightly as they may,
spinning in beauty, power and grace.

The eye of the mind dictates us realms
of fire, joy, passion, to sing and say,
fat women also have their dreams.

Ideas are sewn with fairy seams,
fantastic costumes in which to play,
spinning in beauty, power and grace.

Blinkered is he who, righteous, deems
Flesh must weight thoughts, to sluggish lay.
Fat women also have their dreams,
spinning in beauty, power and grace.

Carol Wilson

Ross

Where are you now?
I wonder and wait.
Will I see you in the clouds,
or in the reeds by the lake?

Will you blossom as a daisy,
or hover close as a bee,
or come again as the robin
that graces the evergreen?

Might you be the wind,
that blanketing breeze,
or the dramatic lone headland
that towers over wild seas?

No. You are the Light,
that brilliant white ray
that softens all nature,
and brightens all days.

Riona Egan

Closing In

We made an orchard of the straggled plums,
a single Bramley’s Seedling, damsons, pears.

Their harvest now is meagre, but they earn
their keep as high perches for garden birds:

dunnocks, chaffinches and bramblings,
blue tits, magpies, a pair of collared doves,

and two robins, Christmas card bright,
ever at war over territorial boundaries

in a place so lush, so fecund, it could
support a flock of thousands each winter.

But sole possession is what they fight for,
in a bloody battle to the death, when

the loudest redbreast banishes the weaker
in feathered squabbles, to starve in full sight

of laden feeders, tasty titbits. He’s chased
away until the inevitable happens, and one

robin is left, alert to feathered invaders,
unaware of feline intent a whisker away.

Louise G Cole

Dreaming of the Boar

The boy walks on water, the early mist curling like smoke about his bare legs. His
movements are slow, his gaze fixed on the silhouette of the ancient fir that cuts the
skyline, stabbing like a spear into the belly of the heavens.

A weak light flits across the lake, the moon blurring softly against the sacred
mound of Keash. He stops, feeling the weight of the old ones, as though they breathe
still beneath their temple of stone.

Something shivers against his skin.

He grips his spear tighter, takes another step, exhales slowly as his foot finds the next
placing.

He stops again, rubs the sweat from his brow, wishes for the splash of his
father’s passage to guide him, looks towards the sky.

There is a sun, half-buried in the folds of an aged night, pulling itself slowly
into the world. The horizon bleeds, a hint of red dripping onto the eastern ridge above
the lake. He feels for the pouch about his waist, thinks of the days spent sharpening his
flints, the claps on his back as the men saw him off, the glimmer of fear in his father’s
eye.

He’d told him he’d been dreaming of the boar.

The leather thong hangs empty against his chest, waiting.

Before him, the mist is lifting. He can see his foot in its watery grave. He
smiles, takes another step...

Stones, black with age and moss, crawl like slugs onto a broken shore.

People pass; some sit, taking in the ill-formed islands, the darkened humps
like whales that break the surface, the fern-smothered trees.

The old ones watch from their shrunken temple.

A boy bends, pulls something from the crush of pebbled stone.

They watch as he presses the slender curve of bone to his chest.

The lake stirs...somnolent...remembering...

Anne Byrne

Feathers

Her mother’s gifts were practical. After Dadda used the oak in the lower acres to
gasp and claw his way to heaven, the farm had no place for dollies and fancies. One
Christmas, Mother gave her a clutch of chickens and Baby Sister a pup.

Sister and the pup bonded in mischief. Mother grumbled half-heartedly,
tolerating gnawed shoes and furniture. Her chickens grew into layers, each known by
cluck or splash of feathers, each named by quirk or gimlet glance.

The day everything changed, she traced feathers from coop to kennel.

Mother rang Uncle Freddie: *that dog has to go*.

She offered to help. Mother shrugged, indifferent: *a bit late now, girl*.

Sister was sent to her room once Freddie arrived.

She waited outside the bedroom, whispering a litany while Sister cried.

Catweazle, Touchwood, Carrot. Downstairs – *no place, sentimentality on a farm* – mother
plucked the birds. She pushed open Sister’s door.

‘Uncle says doggie’s gone back where he came from.’ Sister clutched the dog’s
blanket. ‘I didn’t even say bye-bye.’

Nor I, Sister. She fingered Uncle Freddie’s 12-gauge cartridge in her pocket,
the New Hampshire feathers she’d slipped inside the spent casing. She bit her tongue
and tasted blood, managed somehow to reach out and stroke Sister’s hand. She thought
to keep her powder dry, for now.

Kevin Hora

St John’s Wood

I sense the forest’s lore, its motherlode,
as a humid, fragrant stillness,

as if all the secrets of the universe,
its portals and intuitions, all its runes

and infinite blossomings are hotheaded
beneath this ancient canopy.

The only wisdom here for me; the slow waltz
of dandelion seed, the bluebells’ blaze,

and along the lakeshore, the windtossed
swash that bleaches rocks bare as potholed skull.

When I take my measured leave
I will transport nothing from this place.

Though I cannot tap its bloodstream
or feast on the fruit of the hazel,

it is enough for me that it is still
here, ungovernable, knowing everything

and nothing and that when the rain dances
on the treetops and upon the Shannon swell

someone will always feel the rhythm.

Tadgh Carey