

From the Boat

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Myra Connell

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Are you waiting for the dawn?

Dawn may help. But I am waiting for the water. For the pool to fill and
slowly
for the boat – the walnut-shell, the matchstick mast and paper sail – to rise,
float on.

And yes, the house

And yes, the house, the houses.
The wood, the ground, the thick brown leaves –
not that we lay on them, not that,
but standing, felt our bodies skin to skin.
I loved a stranger in a sycamore wood –
and always, now, the house.

It was a white one, on a bank or hill.
Behind the hedge a lawn, but curving;
and steps up to a path. Such blank clean windows.
(What was it that he said? *The hope was stupid.*)
Such an ugly house, so cold,
so stiff, immaculate, so dark at dusk.
So dead.

Note

Note the names of streets, the feel of stones and kerbs on naked feet.

Note distances: from step to shelter and from bench to bus-stop.

Note the number of the chords, and where they start and dwindle.

Note the folded chin, and the camellia they chose,

for knobliness and strength.

Observe: you can't escape the sky,

the sun through glass

contempt.

No-one is immune.

Finally, repeat: *Mersault and the parrot*.

Mersault, God is shaking, dust.

God has agents stained with beetroot juice,

with fake-tanned feet and a disturbing wind. They make

doors swing and new leaves bleat;

are staining pink the towels.

The clouds cross fast, and cheap cold sunshine's

begging us to come outside

although the wind would blow the cup from off the table,

this cup of May, this tattering of polythene, and rain, and sighing pine.

Look out, the cloud is back –

rain will start. The roof is ticking in the sun,

and suddenly it's dark.

Are the children screaming more today?

Or is it that the wind

the door-swing wind

is carrying their screams?

But no, the cloud has missed the sun, the rain has passed us by and now
we're crazy, wild. We have thrown away our boots.

Later we will have to cope – with rain
and nettles
and the cold.

Today we've thrown away our boots.

Note flowers: quince is nearly over
blue-bells
king cups
pear.

Note the names of streets.

Restaurant, first night

Pay your bill, fat man.
The waitresses are clearing up.

The chef breaks eggs, one-handed,
into the pocket of the woman who waits,

and a witch in silk inspects,
condemns, her teeth. It is not done

to ask the cost. Lock the fat ducks
in linen for the night. Lock fat ducks.

Dad's Portrait

Thick dust along the top, and at the back the label:

John Magee, Picture Framers, Ormeau Road.

Just out of ken, that road,

along beneath the hill I think, Cave Hill, and busy, different.

So? *Na und?*

The position of the head's like mine.

He's looking down, and inward, and his neck's exposed,

it could be hanging. He's in a black-tie shirt and jacket.

"Black Tie" made him groan. Did he tie them?

Did he fix them ready tied, elasticked? Either way we saw them,

those bow ties,

loose-folded in a pull-out wardrobe tray.

(Man's walnut wardrobe smaller than the wife's.)

He moved out. He had that cupboard built and painted blue. Lived there in that blue spare room we hardly dared to enter, till he died cold blue.

The wrung out land

The wrung out land. Stapled chits on gateposts:
seed-batch 458, the date. Immaculate vast fields
of grey-green wheat, tractor-tracked from spraying.
The soil is clay, enriched with dust,
and scattered, patchily, with flint.

You are in the way.

The disused scene of the torture of chickens. That
was once a farmyard. The footpath signed to keep us out.
Behind,

(Oh no, not you again)

a ratty path. Passages in splitting concrete; ivy.
On the left a stream and nettles; then the stable,
housing, till it falls, two hunters.

At a council depot in a lay-by, the sign in gloss white caps says
KEEP OUT SNAKES.

And air as thick as tea. Here across the path a puddle like a ford
across a river.

Hoof-marks on the track, and in a field cut out of woods,
four horses. Young and spooked, just glimpsed
through gaps in elder, ash and oak. It's the sycamore that takes the heart,
and too much rain: though hawthorn by the stream, you said,
would flourish in the wet. Home, I'm tired, sick.

I have been born through clay.