

A Garden for Dracula

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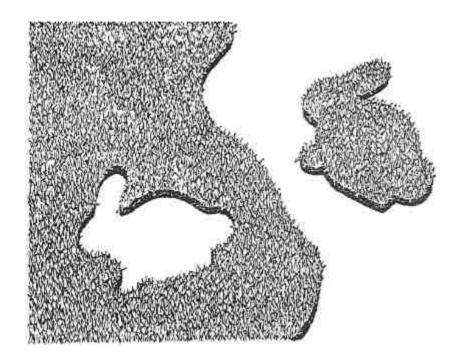
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Dangerous Reading

- a sharply illuminating poem that burns as slowly as a candle & gutters at its conclusion leaving the reader in an even darker night
- a detective novel
 after winding, chasing through
 a tortuous maze, emerges
 denouncing
 its reader as a murderer
- 3. a book that reveals at its end that the writer was the reader; that he has imagined it in his dying moment
- 4. a poem with a great silence at its heart. we approach, & mesmerised, fall in. no words, however loud, can save us. the poem is deaf.
- 5. a novel that describes a situation so well that when it confronts us we feel we have already lived it & in a dream, a trance, we rewrite the novel with our lives

Trench

here is the dark the servant of flesh held in the moon's cold pincers.

Without frontiers the grass bristles roused by the wind

without walls without doors without knocking the wind fingers the grass

they come they hang high lights that do not resemble day they heave barbed wire and big-shoulders (I cannot see the cameras, the rifles)

and earth's flesh is forced by glinting stubby tongues the deeper they press and heave the thicker grow the lips

in the sweat of their faces in the raw of their hands they have shaped a space

through broad lips the space calls out to be healed

(they will fill it with wall)

Foundation

who is this woman with cheeks pitted by rain struggling along the pavement as if rowdy hands were pushing her?

she's thick-set and set-lipped similar to many but I've not seen her before: is she yours? is she mine?

in the brick a trapped pebble or hole of pebble size, in the stone veins of silver or shadow curled-up remembrances

the walls were laboured into being and now oppress themselves, who knows their inward aching or secret longing for collapse?

she is tired she is rotten with the age her face only shows its history of weather the dangerous wounds split open from within: she is yours she is mine who else is there? how can our house stand if she falls?

Dropping slow

I went and told the man my roof leaks it's true it's bad and he tapped his biro he said it'll be a while

o this was months ago sometimes I feel my brain is going mouldy in the smell of sodden nappies incontinent old flesh

The walls crack the mould spreads the walls are becoming soil again leaking like a rotten coffin No matter how we scrabble how loud we scream no-one can hear us now

In the half-light of the back room that looks out on littered concrete I touch the black grime It does smell of earth fine and crumbly and I dream of gardens of their peace under the rain

Keeping busy

Out in the endless plain people are pushing stones together. The landscape is a strange garden of scarred swirls and stiff squares. They are putting a great deal of effort into sticking stones together and so many of them die in doing this; yet, looking over their vast maze, decaying, rebuilt, pruned by artillery, interminable, it becomes more unclear as to what they were keeping in or out: over and over again the builders find themselves on the wrong side of their walls. What is certain is that they are lost within and trapped securely by them.

Between these four walls

this wall is in the blank of my eye it shuts out those that I despise

this wall is in the flat of my hand to crush those I can't understand

this wall supports my mouth's hollow roof to let lies slip out past silent truth

this wall surrounds the core of my brain if the others fall down, it builds them again

High-hat

I put my high hat on your chair and underneath it hid a snare. Now sit on my chair if you dare.

I put my high hat on your room and plunged it in dark felted gloom. I expect you'll all be leaving soon.

I put my high hat on your house: out drop pigeons, fleas, a mouse, a constant leak of grump and grouse.

I put my high hat on your town and pressd between the brim and ground a ring of buildings crumble down.

I put my high hat on your world

Going to the wall

I go to the wall
I feel like a wall
my foundations subsiding weighed by darkness,
clogged by creepers, wall-eyed,
coming apart at the slapped-on seams

I go to the wall down a street marked one way one way to the wall to the weeds and the drunk splintered bottles

I go to the wall on which someone has written in the large spiky letters of someone testing sharp edges of someone in too much of a hurry

dead end

I go to the wall
I come back
I walk down wide streets
among many people:
like trained dogs the walls
watch us, herd us,
with careful menace

The Walled Garden at Edzell

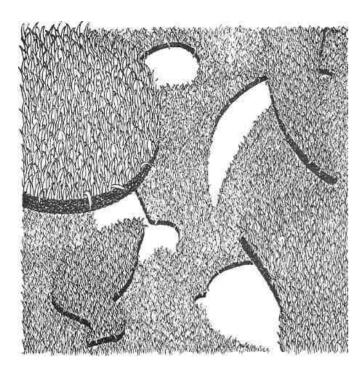
dum spiro spero endure forte

o why did you come from the sea? a small voice was asking me. The flat farmland drifts away under the bombers' roar. But we came from Dundee which is not on the seashore but more on the banks of the Tay. I was muttering to the car door. It seemed oddly important to me.

I am the tower
you are the garden.
You lie beside me locked
and yet to smash the gate
would be ridiculous:
once inside I would not possess
you as fully as I do now with my narrow eyes.
*

No-one is in the garden and no-one can get into the garden (this is, we hope, temporary) The children play on rough grass, fall among wild flowers. Why then do we cluster aimlessly by the locked gate?

A walled square, symmetrical beds, low hedges cut to a repeated motto; a warm wind breathing through late afternoon. The leaves of the trained hedges are breathing too, we hope, and will endure, we hope, though nothing's sure: the gate is closed, the queen still lost her head



A Garden for Dracula

Beyond the gloomy hedge a thin mist lies as fine and sticky as cold sweat on disfigured statues, gaping pits, walls lurking in a tangled mass of cobwebbed ivy.

No wooden stakes in this garden! and the unpinned roses trail in the mud between cracked gravestones where something smells very rotten and the slow drip of dark water is menacing and sudden ...

who knows what their roots are tickling? their curved fangs wait for you to trip - be careful, be careful where you tread! Their flowers are like thin lips that long for blood, the white roses are hungry, the red have fed.

A garden for the first emperor

There's no way out, the walls are all around: down on the lawn stacks of paper leaves wither and burn, untidy dangerous leaves all swept up and smoked out. Now I have sealed the boundaries of beyond and behind. A few words and big-booted men with spades on their shoulders, layers of foundation stones, of gravestones, marked the earth with my order. I do not ask that the trees should be chopped out only that their shape should suit my eyebut even so, bare and defenceless, their thin limbs pinioned against my wall, I feel deep roots feed from all our memories, form secret seeds I cannot reach to kill. Our pasts make us traitors to the present, acts of magic and authority only restrain what's already won. On the other hand, the wall... is that blossom on my cheek or blood?

A Garden for the Hulk

Green. It has to be green.

Not the dull shade of holly and ivy
but bright as new buds,
powerful as young shoots, fresh grass.

Green everywhere, not a flower,
not a blossom, not an inch of brown soil.

And there he is hidden like a gigantic greenfly, can lie on his huge back and pretend to be the spring. His mighty green muscles rippling like the grass his fingers like sturdy shoots his head a small bush fanned by its own breeze.

But only for spring; in summer, in brown autumn and bare winter, he has to stay human, powerless, controlling the green force of his temper.

A garden for Tinkerbell

after the years of flying and dying fighting with pirates who behaved like little boys, and little boys who behaved like pirates

O she glittered, stirred them all, Wrote articles for the *News of the World* "I was healed by faith"

she sits on her verandah among the palms, white rocks, clumped grasses and the odd huge flat flower

Her famous face drawn into harder lines her light grown dim, her face over-painted, haunted by lost power.

at the bottom of the garden the crocodile yawns stiffly, disclosing between his ugly teeth The unclapping hands of time

A garden for the generals

The grass ripens over and over again, each time it ripens the generals think now we must mow

and they sit under the one tree in boots and big hats, on stiff haunches, sharpening blades.

When they rise to their heavy feet a chill wind stirs the garden; each individual and different blade of grass bristles to attention.

Then in the half-light and the gathering rain desperately aware that something is going wrong the generals start to mow

their blades hacking at mud-sodden clumps with a blind insistence on getting the job done

to get rid of a temper, to quiet the wife, to achieve something however ravaged or grotesque, the generals start to mow.

A garden for Sherlock Holmes

The gaslight flowers against the wall of fog, the night throbs like a violin, like bees. Here a beetle has pushed earth, here a worm has left its unique print: something has happened.

The gaslight hums and bellies, all around fog shudders: thin veils, white hands. Here a flower peers over a stone with a red astonished face. And the crime has yet to be discovered.

The gaslight struggles like a dying bee, A careless step grates from the gravel to the lawn, here an old man bends over litmus paper leaves. A scuffle in the shrubbery. Questioning willows.

In the fog your next step could be on the street, across a lawn, into a grimpen mire.

Trees, people, sounds, loom heavily, are recognised,
become logical. But nothing is resolved.

The false light flickers among the dying leaves. The beekeeper throws back his veil, all, all are dying, burying the evidence: there will be no conclusion, no arrest.

He takes his pipe out, eyes alight.

A garden for a politician

These at the front are Honesty, then Thrift and these are Hearts-ease. That's Baldmoney, It gets in everywhere. The Forget-me-nots are dying back. Over there's Loosestrife and Creeping Greed, a few firm clumps of Self-deceit among the Lords-and-Ladies.

But no Falsehoods, I can't stand them, though they grow well across the road.

Plants, damned plants, and Nastursiums.

Look, it's not about the exercise of power it's being able to help those poor plants out there that can't help themselves, to change things for the better. And if some get damaged by the hoe or die of overwatering because the greenhouse leaks that's unavoidable. With respect, you might as well blame the weather as much as me.

Monemvasia gardens

five scrawny chickens scrabble in the yard in the dry the powdery earth scatter in a parody of panic among boxes over high walls among dense creepers

the walls are crumbling and the house too boarded windows flaking skin

in the forecourt above the main gate all words are stifled in our throats to shout would be an insurrection

the cars parked at the road's end gleam fit to burst aflame

and the sound is heat like a heavy hand slamming stone and wood tightening yellow dust in the doors of deserted houses

the desperate fanning of innumerable insects whimper of shade smashed against the wall

we are exiled from ourselves, our voices will not come, the past has filled our mouths with golden dust: among the stones these plants learn to fight, flower where and when they can

2.

The steep walls twist - nowhere is not enclosed, but over these ramparts hidden gardens are escaping: although only their trees can be seen and the ungraspable glimpse taunts through narrow grilles creepers spill over wild as waterfalls and tiny flowers claw rootholds in the stone.

By this buttress the air swells with growing its fragrance overwhelms the walled-up world seeding its pores, crevices, parched mouths with promises, enough for being made. She is beautiful, her eyes are bright. Without a word at the turning of the lane, she touches his arm.

3.

What is dead a thousand years?
her voice rises through the stone.
Under the bush a lizard shuddered
The cisterns are cracked, the walls are broken
Webs flower over every opening and path
Thorns scourge her, stones open her way
Her voice is the one thing alive
all I hear in the thousand years.

They moved from the mountain to the island shore from the island to the unprotected bay, their houses are rough gardens of rock and gorse the past has sunk into soil.

The dead are only dead when they die after that they become other things: useless to talk of being dead, of being not being for thousands of years.

No-one watches us. The world too is dying.

Lift sunlit lips to the shadow of my face.

Schlossgarten Heidelberg

Despite drizzle and the failing light, marauding bands struggle up the driveway, cameras in hand,

to capture, in their bewildered overbearing way, one more battered plaything of the military.

Here Friedrich the Fifth had his gardens redesigned to impress "th' eclipse and glory of her kind"

filled a small valley with terraces, exotic trees, ponds fountains grottoes, bath-houses, orangeries

- a wonder of the world - and planted blazing rosebeds in his main gunpark, which left undefended

two sides of his fortress and the Heidelburgers. This took six years. Then, with a careless swagger

he rushed into the family argument that caused thirty years of brutal continental wars

and within one winter managed to lose everything: Bohemia's king at 23, an exile in Holland by spring.

(His proud new gardens, so expensively created, were good for fighting in, and devastated.)

All invaders, it appears, make a point of being rude about the language, people, prices, food:

these plastic-tagged americans in the Kaufhof store treat the tired shop-girls like prisoners of war. All's the same, Mrs. Blumenstal N.J. - contemptuous pride marches in step with murder towards some form of suicide

and our worst natures are what our rulers thrive on our side, our spite, gives their mad dreams reason;

and whatever so-called glories they produce like Friedrich's garden, there's no real excuse.

Rulers are rulers, and what they spend our money on leaves us in the shambles of their arrogant solutions.

Above the broken courts of the electors palatine american bombers wheel towards the Rhine.

The garden of the assassins

The musicians play discreetly lulling the courtyard, the glittering arcades. Behind the glass veils are displayed voluptuous dances, all the riches of the world.

Wander around, believe completely, if you make the effort it can all be yours: dead or alive, commitment secures paradise - pool, garden, god's blessing and girls.

Just one act will be necessary: a death. How big or small, only you will know when it's time comes, and where you'll go afterwards - to peace or pain, swine or pearls -

won't prove that the bright vision was a liar, only that your own dream, carefully induced, made greed and vanity seem proper virtues rewarded by the tyranny that pays your hire.

If power is fraud, the fraud needs careless buyers hooked on hopes of easy ecstasy. What we want is what we can be bought by, it's not the drug that's strong but our desire.

if the wellie fits - wear it

he goes into the garden he puts his hands in his pockets he looks at a dead slug he goes back inside

the woman is still staring at dirty plates

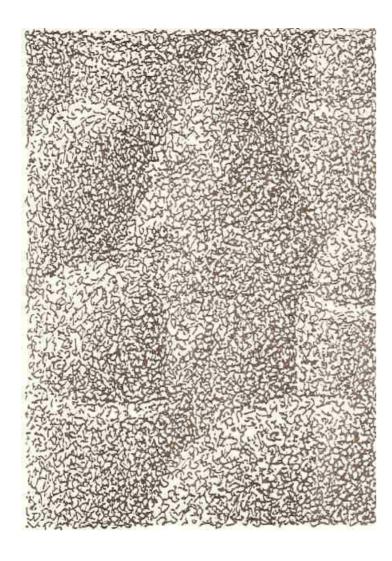
he comes out wearing wellies he attacks several bushes he terrifies the weeds he grinds down the grass

through his clenched teeth come hums and grunts

he makes the garden nervous he thinks the plants laugh behind his back he wears a smelly sweater and torn gloves he calls them his gardening things

they are magic. he cannot garden without them

one day he will come out and the strawberries will trip him one day a gigantic rabbit will be sitting there with the whole lot inside him one day the ground will simply yawn, bored or weary and swallow him up



Oak

The men go to the fields They come back tired And lie down forever In chests of polished wood

And in the wooden walls
The dead men roll and pitch
Turning earth within
Earth within earth

Alder

Crows tumble down the dying light.
The sun has made the stream to blood,
Its shining tears hang on the grass.
A boat runs the current that pulses
As if drawn to a heart. Unmanned,
Nobody. From the dusk owls hoot
The calls of vanished children.

Pine

barbed spears on the sullen carpet here is no charity of sister or brother

we are industrious, we are straight: the silence after our moaning dies away,

the stifled earth, is not our business.

Hawthorn

the matter in hand:

a dour drizzling purity, slate-slip, dank flowers, arc of thin mist;

keep yourself to yourself:

crabbed joints, soiled clothes, blood on the fur on the thorn; and beneath:

a bone, a clutching rib-cage of bird.

Ash

What the branches have not felt, the roots know: where the spear thrust straight, where the drowning were spared.

Glint of tarnished metal in the rain-splattered creek, slave ring, royal armlet or the leaf of cold iron whose whisper stopped the heart's wild babble.

Bull-horned, a rider in tall grasses sits his grey horse like a throne. As the battling tide calmed men clutched their staves like children, finding themselves saved between root and branches upright on the earth that they now are, their fruit still growing like them.

The women have counted the bodies, have spun swaddling, sheets and shrouds; from the hooked, gaping mouths they have heard the lesson before earth gagged the cry.

The limbs fight each other for mastery, the tree is torn and twisted. Like a wind on the deep waters the dead rise again,

are coming, are coming, but never arrive

Tree, moon, woman

the trees tangle their limbs in the moonlight on the wall

her back is the smooth horizon of the gleaming night

also when she touches my thighs her fingers stream cold fire

has the core of the moon held at its small distance such a raging ache as knots my stomach roots?

*

the tree is agitating outside the window, she worries over its disorder.

she polishes the big brass pan, she trims the leaves, discards the stalks.

his mind is pulp, his legs are jelly. she falls asleep, a sweet smile on her face.

in the moonlight his shadow is straight without branches.

*

She was standing by iron railings, where the stairs drop steeply to a long street arched by lights, a tunnel through the darkness to the docks, the sea.

No moon. The plane trees, as ever, gleamed deceptively, the pale stone and high lamps made a pretence, but it was nowhere to be found. It seemed a small defeat.

Then she laughed. And when she turned around we saw the moon was hidden in her eyes.

*

Like livid leaves

Like livid leaves fallen whose flesh has melted into the earth from which rise the same warm generative smells as ever

leaving fish-frail bones as a map to a labyrinth whose openings are not in itself but in its past, its future,

so are these memories of great despairs that now, anatomised, show less

the blind surgery of stabs of fate than a needed acupuncture of the spirit.

Beginning to end

Not that there aren't beginnings but that it's hard to say when they begin; with the look of recognition or cautious hand, with the urge to discover or the sailing out?

still, we mark them, looking back - there was a time before she saw me, before she kissed me but endings, who knows about endings?

Nothing really seems to stop once the energy's gone in: it rolls along, gathering a moss of responsibilities, dislodging pebbles and small plants on some endless slope of time.

I've been at so many beginnings, seen eyes light at the possibility, the new, even at giving an old stone another push; But endings never seem to come and all that you've begun stays with you, incomplete, seeking its shape, still moving with the slow judder of remembering even under avalanches of fresh starts.

Present

I can hardly remember being a child, my life is remembered through my lovers.

I come to you with my arms full of these histories of attics, damp mirrors, sweating lilac trees.

Somewhere I feel there is something I should make sense of, that would be firm ground despite you or because,

but the past say nothing though their mouths are bruised with kisses and leave me to draw lessons and reproaches from myself.

And I am simply so glad of you, of the small mischief of your smile, the delicate energy of your body, that I watch you without need for explanation.

and when unforeseen you flower before me I am separated from riddles and spared from answers

and remember only you, without error or doubt, accepting this as all as simply as a child.

Events at the cottage

Towards sunset she looked, she changed, but could not be pleased. Unhappy with herself she shuffled the colours, she turned back; but too late -

the sun, enraged by her wavering black thoughts, had charged into her room, had crashed, and now lay bleeding slowly, speared on the myriad points of her gallant mirror.

*

She put her arms on the table; she put her head on her arms and she cried without reason, without reason. Each tear was warm, mercurial, and lit up the dark pit her arms so tenderly cradled.

*

First her mouth and then the door slammed shut.
Her sudden outburst left to itself kept walking into walls whining to be let out.

Why I am not getting up

the sun comes from behind a cloud and stretches out beside me

long legs of light lie crossed over my own

the doorbell rings the wind knocks at the window

how I would like to answer all of you

but the sun has fallen asleep on me soft as warm as a drowsing woman

and I have not the heart to disturb her daydream

The lions are on the lawn

The lions are on the lawn

the sand has piled high against the garden gate and stumbling people wrapped in stained brown rags struggle across it. They seem so far away.

The lions are on the lawn the lawn is turning the yellow of lion.

When I heard the people were corning I went out I put bread and water on a makeshift table they looked like birds, they were so far from me.

But the lions are on the lawn their eyes fixed on the house reflect gold like huge hammers their paws stretch before them;

and the people are corning, so many now they fill the horizon south with trudging shadow. From the kitchen they've sent the crumbs, the leavings,

half-bottles of souring milk, whole dustbins full; but the windows are being boarded up armed guards patrol the door

and the lions are on the lawn they have been hungry too long the lions want more.

Dr. Frankenstein Explains

All the way through school it was the same: "Don't be such a cissy, Frankenstein, you're a big boy now ..."

And so they'd pull me, coaxing, mocking, from the only games that gave me any pleasure.

Boys, I was told, make machines, are inventors especially of things that fight and kill; girls get first the dolls and then the babies to hold and watch with love and wonder.

So they pushed me into science - You're a boy. learn how things tick, be logical, ambitious, no more cissy games: if you become a man you can be anything you want.

I thought about this. I became a great scientist. I thought about this. I wanted to sit in a quiet corner with a child I wanted to feel the warmth of life continuing.

My labour has finished, or just begun. I have, in man's way, become a mother. Here is my child: isn't he beautiful?

Snakes and Ladders

alone that spring day on the cliff below the summit face pressed to stone face & fingers sticky swollen in the dusty slits

climbing swift as a lucky counter, until chance made incautious, & spreadeagled limbs began to tremble in their tortion stiff & powerless

before fear the body fell back into space, dropped face upwards to nothing but clear sky thought & image flash as meteors burning unknown out

& then the bracken broke the fall lay staring as if listening to a great shout as if the rope of mind had snapped death crouched

disguised as a boulder an inch beyond his skull.

Near Velez at 9000 feet

Through torn clouds deep valleys drop and vanish, outside a squat house a woman chides her chickens, bright flowers are blooming in old oilcans.

It's hard to think. It's a matter of scale
I suppose. Without gauges we measure mountains
by the going up and down: but only the valley
hints at height, and here who now remembers
how high that valley was?

The simple scene aches like a familiar dream: the scrubby grass is much the same, and yet at half this height in my land there are no houses, buses, chickens.

I say this to a man. He laughs aloud - why, these are only hills, the mountains are over there - he waves a wide arm away, south; then quieter, consolingly - there are always higher ones.

Checkpoint

We sit on the bus in the strangers' country; it is decorated like a fairground but thick-necked men are looking under seats and into documents; they look at ours with less interest than contempt.

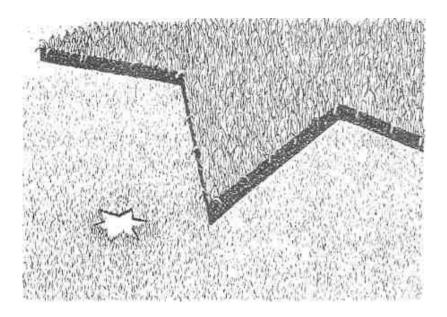
Suddenly she turns in her thoughts and says to me - you can demand anything you like,
I would really go out of my way for you -

I know this; what secret assassin makes me say - the only thing I want

cannot be asked for, is either here or not

Men in grey uniforms with revolvers on their thighs prod under passengers with truncheon arms, their faces resinous with the swampy weight of night are taut, tired, nearly screaming.

No proof of good faith can soothe their fears, something must be out of order. Stuck to our seats, we sit on the bus.



Chevy Chase

one stares angrily through battered eyes swears through a broken mouth his girl is screaming his mate shocked silent cradles a ripped cheek a scooter's torn guts spew oil across the pavement

blood and vomit greasy paper crushed cans

the shouting's further now small bands hunt stragglers show off for newsmen clutching iron bars jagged bottles each others' shoulders

if defeat and victory have any meaning it's not here the mad game breeds new scores to settle reasons for revenge whose patch this is is not the point

Edward

Leaving the tower to stand till it falls down

Going into the room of the world and closing the door behind him

leaving his father dead from the neck up

his mother's persistent where are you going?

he stalks the streets cold iron in his pocket

the taste of blood on his tongue

Young Johnstone

Above the sideboard the mirror was watching him.
On the bed he had hidden under was an open purse.
On the table the sliced bread, spilled beer cans, cold chips,

on the lino the woman, the small knife, the gobs of blood.

Even the plates, the grease stains, seemed precise, urgently real, and still he didn't believe it. Not me, he thought, but them.

And he meant that shit the soldier he'd killed in the bar, his sister's lover, who'd not marry, do the decent thing; and his sister, who threw him out, screwing his alibi, cursing, I hope you hang, who must have grassed; and he meant his would-be wife,the soldier's sister, who'd hidden him when they'd come looking, her most of all

because he didn't know why he'd done this, what pride, what resentment, had spewed up, stabbed out, blind.

None of it was his fault, he was furious with all of them. In his pocket he felt the car-keys. His hand was moist and tight.

Nothing. You could trust no-one. And that was the end of all of it.

He threw open the door. A dog barked at the night below, in burnt-out garages. The concrete walkway pitched,

pivoted on him. A breeze stirred the litter. Yellow light. And in the stairwell, waiting men.

The Wife of Ushers Well

three pools of water on the stone-flagged floor each as large as a man curled up asleep

the long fingers of rain have stopped their drumming the wind is trapped in a net of branches

an old woman, the young girls, pouring out onto the earth, one after another, buckets of living water

sculptures of a second's length, carved in air, in the quivering light, catching its breath

gulls circling the beech trees; the sea sloshing on the cobbled shore, a rattling of brooms.

the dead have gone down to the channering waves; at the height of our storm they were calm, self -possessed.

there was nothing to be done - as cocks crew in the washed-out light they went off, firm and business-like: we dried our eyes and began our work.

Waly, waly

behind the briars a lame horse snorts

white on white flowers, flesh and clouds

put your hand in hers your arm around her waist

ah, there
in the excited grass
standing on end
flecked with fine sweat

a patch of matted weave where warm flesh has rolled.

say nothing. the wind has come. the moon, gone

Sir Patrick Spens

in the dim fluorescent blue their tongues flick like fishes: the councillor, the businessmen

caught out of their depth embedded in the sandy plush: the lawyer, the civil servant

their glassy eyes glisten the foreign girl is too young, surely? the conversation founders, they flounder

the loud voices and waving arms are exhausted, each is drowning inside: what enterprise has failed?

sunk in themselves, their limbs and jaws shake and shudder in response to a deep cold unseen current

Tamlin

The boys parade the streets, proud as horses. how can she know which one to choose?

Secret signs and whispered confidence may reveal him as unlike the others yet she knows how he will act to please them, shift shapes in his insecurity:

will spit sharp like a snake, switch away, swift as newt, roar and race like rutting deer or burn her with words as raw, as livid as fired metal.

But when she takes him naked underneath her coat

on the damp earth beyond the houses

he turns at last to a motherborn man cold and possessed by want and fear.

End

slow so slow

the swing of axe
will fall will fall
will not rise the same

slow so slow through spurt splattered linen the blade embeds

> turns blood in the round of neck worlds overlap curve cutting curve

the urgent chatter among the trees is sliced to silence

earth rolls off with the sobbing cut

and dark

