

Rosy Wilson

Rosy Wilson grew up in Dublin and worked as Lecturer, Access Development Officer and Open University Tutor and Counsellor in London Colleges for over forty years. She retired home to Ireland in 2000, living in the Wicklow Hills, before moving to Dalkey in 2015. She has volunteered with Glenree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation and Fighting Words, and is very active in the campaign for a human rights model of mental health provision. She recently completed a year-long, Arts Council Ireland project of work with migrants from Direct Provision Centres that comprised of creative writing workshops and subsequent anthology, *Everyone Comes from Somewhere Else*. Rosy's work is widely published in anthologies and poetry magazines in Ireland and England and she was a Poetry Ireland Introductions Poet in 2000. *Everyday Memoryscapes* is her ninth solo collection.

Rosy's work is excellent in her observations of 'life' and concerns for other people over a long period. Loving-kindness marks her poems, which is a balm and blessing in these mad modern times.

Dennis Greig, Poetry Publisher & Editor, Lapwing Publications

This poet's gift of imagination and insight draws us in, causes us to breathe with synchronicity, to share conversation, keep her secrets. The honesty of her allegorical words, inlaid with love, is a testament to the use of language in her poetry.

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Thanks to my son, Paul Haydock-Wilson, for publishing
these poems and for his beautiful design and cover artwork.

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publishing my previous six collections.

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Writers' Group, and Second Light, for close reading and
advice.

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especially Mimi Khalvati, Gillian Clarke and Paula Meehan.

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these poems.

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Part One

Seas, Lakes, And Trees

Rhyme Sea with Trees *

These long-drawn-out
covid-restricted days
without kindred spirits
we lean into nature:

I cuddle up to broad trunks
of Scots pines, hug slender silver birch
reach spreading ash tree branches

stroke different-textured
bark, breathe in scents of
these native Irish trees;

on daily walks along sea-walls
of *Carraig na Gréine*, Coliemore
Harbour, I watch waves curve

as they rise and fall, silver, sea-green
or dark, hear their roar or range of music
feel showers of ocean spray;

I miss sea-shore sand, coarse shingle
long to paddle again, join early morning
swimmers, run into chilly water

skin glistening with sea minerals
we'd rub down with rough towels, share
the day's news, thermos coffee;

trees and sea-water bear
my weight, free me from
a cluttered mind, in my being
sea rhymes with trees.

** from The Patternings by Paula Meehan*

Bathing Places

My daughter swims in Bristol Lido
my niece in Hampstead Ladies' Pond

a son jumps into the River Thames
swims upstream with royal swans

another son breaks cold sea waves
or swims lane lengths in Wavelengths Pool

I paddle gingerly in Annaghmakerrig Lake
or hobble down to Coliemore Harbour

or breast the swells of rougher waves
with motley swim group on Killiney strand.

Take the Plunge

With every stroke old cares begin to fade
sunlight shines a pathway over water
so calm not even fishes break the surface;

three props of oak trees lean towards a hawthorn
that reaches the clear sky, its turning leaves
reflect their shades, green and gold of autumn,

but do not fall on water where I brave
the stones and weeds, the breath-taking chill
colder even than familiar waves

of Greystones beach where I often swim.
I turn onto my back, float for a while
absorbing elements, air, water, sun

until I feel my fingers turning white
then swim ashore before my body cramps
wrap round a crimson towel, welcome the sight

of fellow-writer walking on damp grass,
arriving at my side to take her place
claim the boathouse jetty, set up camp.

We talk about how hard it is to take
the plunge into cold water, into making books;
I leave to write, my friend swims in the lake.

Annaghmakerrig Lake . . .

like a magnet attracts me
to its mirror reflection of trees
swans are gliding, cygnets in tow
mayflies skim surface, all is calm
I succumb, walk into the shallows
gravel, sand, lake-weed under my toes
swim in soft water that welcomes my strokes
supports every part of my aging body.

In changing lights of evening
pink streaks the sky, *corr eisc*
our Irish grey heron spreads his
great wings, flies the full length
of the lake, shelters lake-life,
our ancestor's messenger between
this world and another, at home
on water and land, in the air.

Tyrone Guthrie Artists' Retreat

with Bealtaine Writers' Group

Warm welcome to the Centre, wondrous rooms,
cool swims in the lake, weeds, moorhens, swans,
as Judy pushes an old wooden boat into the water;

walks in groups naming wild flowers and trees
scrabbling through bushes, losing track, coming
out into a field, Marguerite feeding donkeys;

we help ourselves to breakfast, tea and toast
elevenses – coffee, fresh-baked scones,
salad lunches from the well-stocked fridge;

evening dinners are cooked and served
to twenty creatives at the refectory table
fresh food, wine, laughter, conversation

with writers, painters, dancers, musicians,
who invite us to studios, paintings, vibrant oils,
pastel shades, play recent compositions;

I mind Mamo in our coach-house lodge
write poems, make my books, help others
take part in workshops and our evening soirées,
share insights with this commune of creatives.

Sea Therapy

Now is time on a shingle beach -
together we run into the Irish Sea
waves knock me down, shock me
bear me up, raise my spirits.

I yield to elements, air, stone, water
to skies, grey, sun-rise red, cerulean
to hills we climb that frame the bay
Carraigoona, Sugarloafs, Bray Head.

We are born in rush of water,
waterborne, I give thanks for
the oceans' freedom, release from
every day preoccupations.

Saltee Islands

As I walk, meditate
along the sea wall
contemplate gulls

roseate terns as they
swoop and turn, a flight
of ducks in formation

I long to dive in, swim
with seals as once
on the Saltees,

off Kilmore Quay,
we swam together,
our family with theirs.

She says, *sing to the seal*

Sea splashes rocks
plays water music on my morning walk
to the very end of the sea wall

where the seal swims.
I remember our mother's soprano
Oh what a beautiful morning . . .

echoing through the house
as our sleeping children dug in deeper
under their duvets.

I sing this song to the seal
who stretches and dips to the rhythm
or so I imagine . . .

Shelter

i.m. Jacqueline Morreau

from buffeting winds
sharp rice grain snow
and spray thrown up by
unruly waves, all chill
elemental;

blown indoors I don
thick knitted poncho
my sister-in-law-artist-friend
brought me from Mexico
fifty years before;

Aztec patterns, black
yellow, red, enhance deep
borders of unbleached woollen
tepee, my refuge here until
days get warmer.

Some Native Irish Trees

Along the river willows overhang
saileach, sallies, pliant wands for osiers
nearby, alders keep their feet in water,

shaking aspens, *cran creathac*, give
their name to Glencree, *Glan Critheac*
quaking valley where my friend lives

in a wooden house nestled among trees -
oaks, silver birch and her fairy tree, hawthorn,
whose early blossom we may not bring indoors.

Druids know oak groves are sacred
places of wisdom, rituals, sacrifice
rowans have powers of enchantment

hazel wands divine where water lies
hazel scrub with holly is understorey
for taller forest trees.

On my way back I hug an old Scots pine
recall a walk under an arch of yews
towards the altar, a giant tree, two
thousand years of age, still standing there.

Lives of trees and people intertwine
rooted in cycles of the natural world.

Walks in the Woods at Devil's Glen

for Gail Varian

These late Corona days, we walk again
in Devil's Glen, sculptures in woodlands,

Seamus Heaney's lines inscribed on benches
The river bed's dried up half full of leaves

Us listening to a river in the trees.

We stare up through over-arching branches

then remember when you drove me to this glen
away-day from the nearby hospital,

a fine October day, you brought a picnic, autumn
raspberries, home-made quiche and apple tart,

conversation, a stroll on fallen leaves, searching art-
works in trees, discoveries - I was reaching for recovery;

healing autumn walks, soft underfoot, light falls
through branches, brightens our days, illuminates.

On Killiney Beach

17th August, 2023

A sunny day
our son and I have put aside
to swim and lie among the stones as
gentle waves are to-ing and fro-ing
every seventh rushing and breaking.

A rare warm day this wet summer
but few swimmers or children are
cavorting in the water; a walking party
of elderly women and men lean on sticks
and search for fossils.

On this day, seven years ago,
our son was facing hours of surgery
leg broken to insert *Precise Nail*
to grow his leg one millimetre a day
regain seven centimetres shortfall.

Also seven years ago, on this day,
baby Ocean was born, our youngest son's
first child, seven years old today, I wish
you happy birthday dear Ocean and
calmer years to come.

Today we feel sun warm bare legs
toned by cold Irish Sea, salt, iodine
listen as waves rise and fall on sand
shingle, seaweed, stones -
music of oceans.

Musings

*after Lemn Sissay**

as the sun rises
I awaken, stretch, breathe
give thanks for the elements
air, earth, changing seas

...

dress up warm for morning walk
down frosty paths to sea wall
take care with footsteps not to fall
inhale sea air, hear waves' call

...

walk in the woods with grandson
who asks me why I hug trees
to share their strength, endurance
I say – and he copies me

...

once more my son's Deptford home
hosts me for the Christmas season
familiar streets, trees, Twinkle Park
local welcomes, families feasting

...

grey clouds mount evening sky
move behind tall silver birch
I watch them from front window
imagine snow in the air

** Let The Light Pour In*

Part Two

Shades and Shadows

Shades of Blue . . .

follow one another
as I look out to sea, sea-green,
cyan, turquoise, cerulean, azure,
cobalt, almost navy blue. The sky is
paler, a lighter palette, but still a
rich variety of colour blue.

Beside the sea
I rarely feel blue, but sometimes
indoors, between blue painted walls,
my mood is low. I listen to the blues
Nina Simone sings Mood Indigo
I hum along.

Once in a blue moon, or
maybe more often, there are times
when the blues overtake me, even
darker tones, the black dog bites
I am in thrall, smothered by a heavy
Prussian blue blanket.

I struggle to escape
return to the seaside, change
into dark blue togs, plunge into
crashing waves, overwhelmed
in my element, blue with cold,
I wrap up in my sky-blue towel.

No one owns any of this . . .

the old woman sweeps her arm
across the vista of Teesside
seaside harbour

strong currents, rip tides
gravel beach, fishing boats
engines chug, cranes reach.

*My grandfather came from Ireland
trudged forty miles up the coast
looking for work, taking any old job.*

She is talking to a young, veiled woman
who was stowed away with others in
a trawler engine room, landed on this shore -
fishermen trying to keep afloat, earn a few bob.

Yes, the old woman is right:

no one owns hills, rivers, valleys
least of all the loud and soft rising
falling music of waves rushing
over rocks, pebbles, sand.

Loving our countries
we welcome all comers
of all colours

to lands we have
no right to claim
as just our own.

Earthquake

February 2023

Gold aura circles silver moon
while mindful I exercise barefoot
on icy grass behind my house - but

in Syria, Turkey, cradle of our
civilisation, massive earthquakes,
so many thousands dead.

In freezing conditions heroes excavate
bodies, a live new-born is cradled
in her rescuer's rough hands,

he holds her with tender care,
loving as a mother, if only
she also had survived.

Confirmation Day – 1948

after reading Sebastian Barry's *Old God's Time*

Nuns in black habits, fearful, stern faces
framed in white wimples, line us up -
His Grace, Archbishop of Dublin, is coming
to put us ten-year-olds through our paces,

an inquisition to shame children who
don't know the catechism backwards
nor seven deadly sins and myriad mortal
ones sure as hell to toss our souls into

ever-lasting flames, sooner or later. He puts
the fear of God into us, before we kneel in turn
to kiss his ring - he slaps our faces, RC rite
of passage those bleak days when

Archbishop McQuaid and DeValera,
Taoiseach, later President, of our Republic,
held the country in their clutches,
long black cloak and coat throwing,

like heavy cloud-blankets, a pall over
the *jouissance* of young lovers. They
covered up sins against little children,
crimen pessimum that should be punished

with maximum sentence, millstones
like dog collars, hung around those
unholy necks, but the guilty are let go
to carry on wrecking our innocents.

Sunday morning in May

Zen breathing, mindful stretching
barefoot on wet grass, coloured
with clover, buttercups, daisies;
I hug Scots pine, slender silver birch.

Now it's time to light candles for
Common Ground meditation,
alone yet connected; later, with
my sister, familiar prayers and hymns.

All this, as I grow older, a welcome
change from old Sunday Masses, rush
to be ready - milking done, churns
on stands - listen to lengthy sermons.

Meditation Table

In front of a framed photo
red sun rising over the sea
I light three small candles
in round glass holders named
lily water honeysuckle sweet pea.

In front of these I've placed
three dried, pressed straw-
flower heads, circles of gold
and russet petals, tiny seeds
falling on colourful cloth.

In harmony with the circle
of friends meditating in a loft
at Common Ground, I sit at home
quiet, images of autumn trees
blue waves, firelight in my mind.

Treatments

In their urgency to cure my psychoses
anti-depressants, SSRIs, are prescribed
with lithium to settle moods and,
as a last measure, twelve sessions
of ECT under anaesthetic.

No one slows down, explores reasons
for extreme symptoms at this stage of
a long life. Can they be traced to early trauma,
father's death when only nine months old,
mother smothering her own powerful grief?

My friend says this is not a breakdown
but a break through. Maybe afterwards
we find deeper insights and compassion
for ourselves and others.

We ask for respect, gentler places
than mental hospital detention - rooms
for rest and recovery in communities,
care and helpful conversations.

BREAK DOWN - MAKE UP

When I go M-A-D
I break completely
body and mind
won't comply.

Defences are broken
I've reached the depths
chaotic P S Y C H E
fractured psychoses.

Cutters tear fences
no limits to spaces
reality recedes
fearful intensity.

A kind of necessity
to cut through pretences
uncover a pathway
towards self-awareness.

Assisted by friends
kindness of nurses
determination
I make a RECOVERY.

Shapes and Shades

I raise my arms
mindful stretching
barefoot on frosty grass

look up at banks
of clouds like
mountain ranges

sunrise borders
ridges before
transforming

dark clusters
chalk-white while
the sky above

becomes cerulean and
the sun shines even though
cold winds blow

.

O the mind has mountains
I've struggled up many
reached rugged cairns

lost my footing
fallen into crevices
felt torn apart

sharp stones pierce
granite rocks bruise
thorn bushes prick

hand over foot
I clamber out
of the abyss

gaze upwards -
fireworks of
falling stars

Everyone Comes from Somewhere Else

Our family ancestors were

Levis, wine growers in Bohemia before pogroms drove them from their vineyards and homes as far as Berlin, nineteenth century city of welcome for Jewish people until

anti-semitism spread through Germany. They landed up in Manchester long before Hitler raised a storm of stormtroopers before Kristellnacht and the Holocaust.

And

O'Flanagans, peasant farmers in Roscommon who emigrated after the Famine to Manchester where my grandfather studied to be a doctor a much loved GP in Walley Range.

Our parents grew up there in the North of England our mother an Irish Catholic nurse in the Infirmary our father a non-practising Jew, an architect our Anglican Gran blessed their marriage.

When Daddy died five months before World War Two, already signed up with the Sappers, Mum brought us three children under five, home to Ireland. We grew up Irish Catholics, convent schools.

Yet

In these years, migrants flee countries, driven out by wars, famines, fanaticism, undertake dangerous journeys in leaking boats, airless container lorries, seeking asylum

but we people of diverse ancestry, a nation of emigration, begrudge the rights of newcomers, far from beloved homes and families, to come and settle here in "Our Country."

Colours of the Wind – Ariadne's Thread

*from Anne Madden's exhibition,
Hugh Lane Gallery 2017*

Light and the Dark

painted on linen
the height of a woman
a spear of white light
pierces layers of colour
cream orange silver

reaches the dark where
the Minotaur waits
Lord of the Underworld
horns at the ready
always in charge.

Ariadne

bands of yellow orange red
backcloth of her golden thread
spinning and weaving
a trellis of webs

lover's gift to Theseus
so he can find his way
out of the Cretan maze
into her waiting arms.

Part Three

My Kind of People

Calling Colours

for Leon

my grandson and I name all the sea-colours
of Killiney Bay, where we are walking:

copper-green, sea-green, silver, grey
pink, cobalt blue, navy, azure

changing shades as clouds move over
or later when the sun sinks lower.

Strawberry is the name of June full moon
season of red fruits, red roses, red clover

crimson sweet williams, scarlet geraniums
common poppies, dancing fuschia flowers.

Last night, a young, tawny fox, bright in
moonlight, crossed my path, paused

on the grass, looked all around, shook
his white tip brushtail, scampered on.

Solidity

for Paul

Holding this powerful clam shell
in the palm of my large hand
I feel the grooves fit old life lines
am reluctant to let go.

Colours shade outward, semi-circles of
yellow, autumn umber, olive green centre,
a crinkled edge and on one side
an angel indent.

Some bird's beak pecked the solid shell
as it lay on the rim of the sea, a tern
a herring gull, an oyster-catcher's orange bill
or heron, spirit of land, air, water.

I'll give it to my artist son who laid
his copper plates to weather in Deptford Creek
withdrew them, etched mud traces, water-weed
created prints, earth colours, ochre, green.

Ring the Changes

for Anna

I had to tug hard
to remove rings
embedded in my old
arthritic fingers

engagement ring, old gold,
set with tiny diamonds
my husband placed there
sixty years ago

my mother's wedding ring
plain gold band of love;
twelve years after my father's
O too untimely death

she wore the same ring
at her second marriage service
and all her long life.

I moved them to my little finger
but they flew off, my friend and I
recovered them from the floor.

I brought them over
to my only daughter
perfect fit for her
slim ring finger.

We agree when the time
comes her daughter will inherit
these rings, natural passing
across generations.

On sunday Anna calls me
*Mum, I think of you anyway
every day but, wearing your
rings, many more times*

*and of Dad who gave you one
and Nang, they both loved
me so much and I them.*

Summertime

Starlings return
to our sycamore tree
sky dance in harmony
gather at twilight
for murmuration.

Anna and Rosi
visit my cottage
family laughter
sea-water swims
fly home to Bristol

celebrate birthdays,
late august, september
Rosi, thirteen, on the cusp of
womanhood, self aware
good-hearted.

Anna, fifty-three, an artist
who works with refugees,
young people, paints
murals, makes gardens
combats climate change.

Daughter and granddaughter
hard working, creative
caring for others, strong
active feminists - my
kind of woman.

Twenty-third Anniversary

for Parfaite and Patrick

elderflowers, blackberries grow
along the path of your marriage
sometimes prickly or hard to reach

but as your three sons grow taller,
together you watch them, realise
how you are bound within this family

you've reared, cared for all these years
and by a lasting love for one another.

Bar Molo, Laigueglia

Riviera dei Fiori

Dopo i nostri bagni sulla spiaggia pubblica,
dove i giovani giocano a volleyball ed
i bambini costruiscano castelli di sabbia,

Euri Predonzani ci aspetta, il nonno
l'artista, una volta un parteggiano con Tito
nelle montagne di Jugoslavia, sempre
il centro delle nostre reunioni.

Ci sediamo fuori, sulla tavola aperitivi
olivi neri del paese, noccioli, antipasti,
soprattutto la conversazione,
parli Rosalinda, racconti . . .

Nel frattempo i nostri figli, ancora ragazzi,
si tuffano sotto le onde grande, insieme
alle ragazze del posto - ci salutano dal mare.

Pier Bar, Laigueglia *

Riviera of Flowers

After our swims from the public beach
where young ones play volleyball and
children build sandcastles

Euri Predonzani awaits us, grandfather,
artist, one time partisan with Tito
in mountains of Yugoslavia, always
the centre of our reunions.

We sit outside, table laid with aperitifs,
black olives of the countryside
nuts, antipasti; we converse, talk
Rosalinda, what's the story?

Meanwhile our sons, still teenagers,
throw themselves under breakers
with young friends from the village -
they wave to us from the ocean.

(Translation from Italian)

**Laigueglia is a small resort halfway along
The Riviera from Monaco to Genova*

The Day We Didn't go to Amsterdam

for Anna

Bear Hug backpack ready,
passport, euros, mobile, glasses
in the pouch around my neck
taxi booked, arrives in time;

nostalgic drive past childhood places,
Dun Laoghaire sea-water baths, streets
we lived in, Merrion Ave, St Helen's Road,
the RDS, our family library in those days,

through Centre of Dublin, so much changed
but in essence still the same. River Liffey,
Anna Livia of myth and literature, flows,
life-stream, origin, strong pulse of our city.

Airport kind assistance sees me through.
Just boarding when my phone rings, my daughter
says she's not allowed to board her flight
from Bristol, her passport date not right.

We both turn back, struggle to find ways out,
so sad to miss this three day holiday - we need
the break, some mother and daughter time,
Van Gogh and Rembrandt art I've never seen.

This morning I walk the road
to my Safe Harbour, Coliemore,
wash away tears, drown sorrows
in healing powers of sea-water.

Last Orders

*You must come for a drink
our Friday night out.*

Reluctantly I smarten up,
join regulars in McGann's pub,

they're already dug in, welcome us,
Good woman Rosy, Chris, a gentleman.

Six rounds, black pints, whiskey chasers,
I nurse my single glass of guinness

that lasts all evening. As songs start up
I watch our pensions downed.

Bench Photograph

We sit close, hold hands under
trees in our London garden which
slopes downhill to railway arches

adventure playground for our children
with their friends, wood piles are
climbing frames, trees for hide and seek.

In this photo we look different ways;
in retirement you choose an old
farmhouse to rebuild, garden to dig,

evenings down the pub, while I
return to old haunts, wider family,
teaching, peace work, poetry.

we buried you in Kilmacreehy
on the Western Shore, ancient
graveyard where our children may
bring me, a double grave to share.

Generations

My three grandsons visit my sister
still in her bed, six months since
delirium dementia set in, little
mobility but some words recovered.

All over six feet they stand by her bed
like guardian angels, say who they are,
Maxime holds both her hands, gazes
into her eyes, she gazes back, they smile

in communion; my sister opens her arms
Maxime moves into them, Alex joins their
gentle cuddle, says *We love you so much*
Aunty Mary, Jamie watches benevolently.

Where are they? she asks me next day.
You mean my family, they've gone away
Alex to run in World Championships, USA
the others to family-friends in North Wales.

Wise Woman

for Mary O'Flanagan

When we asked Gran *is there anything you want?*
she'd look around then say *no thank you, I have*
all I need and more than I deserve, smile
at our mother, apple of her eye, at geraniums,
every hue, nourished with dregs from teapots,
contents of chamber pots *but if you're going*
to the library, bring me piffle. We'd cycle off.

Years later, our mother abroad with new husband,
we'd visit her nursing home, say *are you lonely here?*
No dears, I'm never lonely, I have my poets with me
then recite favourite lines by Shakespeare, Milton,
Wordsworth, all learned by heart many decades before:
Earth has not anything to show more fair . . .
Shall I compare thee to a Summer day . . .

Now, ten years older than my Gran was then,
I remember her words *have all I need . . .*
poems to read, write, review with friends,
my sister nearby, bed-bound but we share
smiles, kind words, kisses. Today I swim in
the sunny harbour, dry off in Bear Hug robe
go home, pick up a thriller, my kind of piffle.

Changeling

for Mary O'Flanagan

Comparing me with my cheerful elder sister
I was always a puzzle to my loving mother
shy, over-sensitive, unmaternal – never
played with dolls, only my blue elephant.

When Poppa died Gran sold up their house
and GP Practice, bought us our family home,
two widows, three children, a cocker spaniel,
walks in Merrion Woods, tadpoles, kindling.

Our widowed mother with her mother, never a
cross word; one day I overheard Gran tell Mum,
who was again worrying over her strange girl,
Rosy has something special . . .

Although I didn't know what she meant
those words rescued me, reaffirmed me then
and in hard times over a long life. Thank you, Gran
and for all the poems you always used to recite.

Sisterland

Mary and Rosy, *little giggling girls*
summers in Blackrock Baths
steam train to Killiney Beach,
two trams to Dublin Zoo.

We helped the elephant keeper
scrub Sarah with pumice stone
I was standing at her rear-side
when she stepped back on my toe.

Bike rides to the RDS
change our library books and Gran's
who recited poems and speeches
of Shakespeare, Shelley, Milton

yet asked us to bring her *piffle*
detectives of her era
Lord Peter Wimsey, Albert Campion
Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot.

Now we are in our eighties
living almost next door
looking out for one another
as my sister's memory fades.

Mary

I say good night.
Where are you going?
To my little house
almost next door.

Don't go far!
I never do
visit twice a day
here for you.

My sister's lovely smile
our loving embrace
her dementia is kind
her good nature shines.

Even bed-bound
she seems content
thoughts move in her head
she finds more words.

Web of Women

A waking dream: we are composing poems
under a weeping willow, *en plein air*,
a web of women sprawl on woven rugs
warm shades of autumn, orange, crimson, brown

like falling leaves that scatter on white pages
make patterns, italic letters, Cyrillic script,
we try to catch them, promise of happy days
but they evade us, float that way and this.

We play with words, open our picnic basket
home made scones with butter, wild flower honey,
above in branches chaffinch, sparrows chatter
a blackbird sings, we throw crumbs, pour our coffee

a seagull swoops, our bird friends all desert us -
alone in bed I toss on memory mattress.

A Flurry of Sparrows . . .

fly over fuschia
land on hydrangea
flowers still waving
in late November

interrupt old women
sharing news of the week -
arthritic pains,
sad separations,

voluntary work with
migrants, asylum seekers,
mental health campaign
for human rights treatment.

The flight of sparrows,
scarce birds this season,
lightens our conversation -
poems, gardens, nature.

In the End . . . A prose poem

1

One poet preaches *Death be not Proud*, another declaims
*Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against
the dying of the light.* We all die differently, there are no rules, no
directions, no best ways. Now in my eighties I've kept
watch with loved ones as they pass over the hazy threshold,
shuffle off this mortal coil.

2

Our father died suddenly, age only thirty-three, a tragedy
for our mother and us three children under four years old
bereavement not acknowledged in those years. My mother
smothered her grief, got on with life, the way you did back then.

3

My husband's last months were spent in Ennistymon
Community Hospital, once the workhouse, stone font
still standing there, but now transformed, a haven for
palliative care, kind nursing of the dying. For months
I was at his bedside as the crab side-stepped through
his system, gardener's strong body failing, our children,
neighbours, priest visiting as they could, informing him
of family and local stories. In the end he departed
peacefully, breath changed and failed, second son and I
each held a hand while eldest sang his Dad's favourite songs
The oak and the ash and the bonny rowan tree . . .
Nurses lit candles, we joined their prayers.

4

Our mother, good to everyone, exchanged rose-coloured
glasses, Gran's words, for dark-smudged ones when she
reached eighty, an age she always dreaded. She'd call me
on the telephone, *I want to be D - E - A - D, can't spell
suicide.* So, as doctors tell me she has pneumonia but they
can treat it, I answer, *No, she really wants to go,* my sister
and brother agree, nurses settle her in warm hospital bed.
I sit beside her, sponge her mouth, she smiles, says she
loves me, while I stroke her hair, kiss her brow. She lasts
the week, in time for my sister and my husband to arrive,
then leaves us in the middle of the night.

5

Even during this Corona Virus pandemic I get to spend
some hours with a dear friend, mother of six, artist-poet
founder of Shed Poets and still our inspiration. She
embraced us and her life, only regret, *I have not picked
more daisies,* nearly ready to die age ninety-six. Her
daughter is with us, the priest comes to give last rites,
we respond, my friend rests on her right side, half-asleep.
Two days later she dies.

In Praise of Lapwing Publications

*The lapwing is a bird in Irish lore
-as it has been written-
indicative of hope*

I have few heroes, most of them women,
but Dennis Greig of Lapwing is to the fore
publisher/editor, earliest small poetry press
on the Island of Ireland, he opened a store

of poetry books, welcomed all writers,
women, men, old, mid-life, young, not
just for 'elite writers', whoever they are,
for us all who choose Lapwing, bird of hope.

When, tentatively, I approached Dennis
he said *Send me ten poems*. These I chose,
emailed, sent hard copies, he wrote by return,
I like them, they look clean, send more.

No long waits, no big cost, no fancy work,
my son sends a cover image, his etching
Leamore Strand. Within weeks I receive
Bright Water over Grey Stones, box of books.

I love the form, cream card cover, ivory paper,
clear print, good to hold, read, turn over pages
stroke their texture, breathe in words. In all
Lapwing published six books of my poems.

Thank you Dennis, you kept going through
thick and thin, grave illness; a family man
caring for wife, sons, grandchildren and
all of us, your poets, even at death's door.



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