

SISTERLAND

ROSY WILSON



My Woman

My woman is a gardener
grows seeds in her potting shed
sweet peas, spinach, broad beans
that she plants in beds
dug over with humus
good humour.

My woman's veined hands
knead loaves of bread
cut butter into pastry
weave words into poetry
make patterns, work them
into shapes.

My woman is old
kind and wise, has pearls
in her eyes, tells stories in bed long
after lights out time.

This Indian Summer

Two elderly sisters
set garden chairs
arrange some cushions
under flowering bushes -
hydrangeas blush
scarlet fuchsias dance
gentle hebe welcomes -
all buzzing with bumble
and honey bees.

They reach for pages
of books they're reading
one *The Good Earth*
one *Beekeeper of Aleppo*
drink elderflower cordial
in long glasses, always
minding one another.

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.

Mislaid

She says she is bewildered, loses words
we try to discern gestures and pauses,
'Where are we? How will I get home?'

'You are home, look, your soft sofa,
your round table, your family photos
here is your bedroom, pyjamas, pillows

do you remember now,' 'if you say so,'
she readies for bed, we smile, hug,
kiss each other good night.

In our eighties I have become
my older sister's comfort blanket.

Flight

Today it rains all morning
my sister's taken to the bed
she barely wakes but now and then
her eyelids flutter, she smiles.

Mary elder sister-friend, most
loving and loved woman I know,
breathes quietly, no complaints or pain
we hold her, talk, tell her our names.

I leave her with three daughters
walk grass paths to the sea
the heron rises, flies overhead
guardian of other world he visits.

The tide is full, rough waves
are talkative – I listen, pray.

Old Sisters

Several times a day
I visit my sister for
smiles and kisses -

we sit together on her sofa
arms around one another's
beshawled shoulders.

I show her family photos
read my booklet of our
childhood memories

ask, every few lines,
do you remember? She
nods, points, smiles.

The Power of 3

3 years now since
my sister's words started slipping
and our worlds shifted.

She still stepped out
arms linked with her daughter's
as far as the sea front.

I could help her
rise every morning, ablutions, breakfast
yoghurt, fruit, buttered toast.

3 months since
dementia delirium laid her low, too tired
to stand or sit upright.

3 weeks in hospital
scarce visits, a mission to bring her home
hospital bed, wheelchair, commode.

3 kind carers cover
days and nights, wash, change, feed her meals
mostly she sleeps, we count her smiles.

At least 3 times a day
I visit, say I'm Rosy, your little sister hold hands
hug, kiss her dear face.

After months in bed . . .

Propped in a borrowed wheelchair
pillows under her head, with
patterned cushions either side
we walk down garden paths,

look up to see which birds are
singing, hum our mother's songs
no need to worry words are lost -
fresh air, green leaves, spring flowers.

The sun comes out to warm us
residents gather round, all as
one in welcome of their friend
returned outdoors.

Generations

Our 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.

Water is my Element

Annaghmakerrig Lake
calm ripples, water boatmen
swans, gentle bathing

Killiney Beach

rough waves, seaweed, salt
healing minerals

Clahane, Co Clare

rocks, rock pools, gannets
husband buried nearby

in Kilmacreehy -

these are places where
my spirit is at peace

Morning Ritual Aged 84

Roll back duvet, stretch arthritic limbs
half-fill kettle, take down red teapot
make first cup of tea, read and copy poem
handwriting exercise for crooked knuckles;

mix crumbs, oats, apple cores for the birds
stretch mindfully barefoot on wet grass
breakfast on muesli with prunes and yoghurt
get dressed, check clothes are all the right way
round;

remember to look in mirror, put in false teeth
brush grey hair, when hearing aids are charged
insert them, red on right, green on left, find
glasses, keys and phone ready to go out

call on my elder sister now confined to bed
we smile, hold hands, arm dance with Lyric fm.

When my time comes . . .

and I go to the dark cottage over the hill
I do not want to watch clouds of angels overhead
nor be chosen, after all woolly sheep are no better
than shaggy goats.

When I go to the dark cottage in the far valley
I only want to live, time-to-time, in the memory
of those who shared a life or a moment with me
on this lovely earth,

climb a mountain, skylarks, little blues, white heather
dip again in rough waves – the sea is my element -
grow more flowers, water them, yes sometimes
with my tears.

When I leave you for that dark cottage
do not weep for me, I've lived a long life
through thick and thin, with loved ones
our children.

Enjoy the pictures on my walls, photographs in frames
brew tea in my red teapot, fill the blue-glazed jug
lay food on the table; know that I always love you -
read my poems.



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