

Picture Maker

When she entered the clearing
with its guardian rock, her feet
had strayed a long way in search
of these, her people. They took her in,
her head thrust low for the overhang,
and found her a place at the fire's ring.
They filled her hands with a bowl
and pressed their faces close,
women, men, children of all voices
and skins. She was the one
for whom they'd waited through moons,
the warm-eyed woman, they insisted,
with a heart they could break into
and cool hands for those who needed
more attention than all of them
could provide. She looked in the bowl
and saw a fish swimming in a pool,
she looked at the faces and saw
a need she could not meet jumping
from their mouths, she looked
in the fire and saw the tongues
of wolves. Her mind unrolled
a cave wall restless with carved figures,
her destination. Untangling herself
from their arms, she gave the bowl
to another, stepped through the fire
and ran from them all
for her life.

Creature

You should not have been surprised by its ghost
in St Vincent sur Oest. You knew of the trench
and those led, crunching leaves through forest,
men of the Resistance.

Some young soldiers and their officers
had been sent across borders to clear
this space for a dream of world domination
after their country had endured
from the Great War so much loss.

But, in small lives, the presence
constantly surprises. They have a new roof,
she wears silver on Sundays
and the community representative is at the gate.

A man worked all his days
on a farm then left by boat. Some blamed
him for letting the ti-tree take over
but most for when
he returned as negotiations over
his fertile acres had begun
with a sister from the other side.

After the racks have been collected
from the bee hut and you
have received a delivery, you step out
into a green lit morning.

Perhaps because someone remembers
your parents paid for the travel
and there are warm ties between you,
voices rise, rusty on the path.
And it's there.

Sidelined

Who knows what swung him
to the Cape twenty years downhill
to a sudden gift of water.

Everything fell off
on the way, his origins
pushed aside along with
those ideas of playing life.

A car seat rests
in the grass beside the house
he built towards the sea.
Every night the floorboards
lift and roll beneath the weight
of immovable conversation
and a guitar becoming fainter.

There's no way back.
Few would remember him
anyway against those
white-walled seas, so bright
they slashed his eyes.
But some day soon
he'll tear down those walls,
come right, begin framing
for that boat to take him on.

Out there, the island
and no-one yet has told him
that, within its blue ring
and unencumbered ways,
it too has its skua's nest
of refuse.

Cycle, Weather

On a train to the coast,
torn from seat to seat by green views
and villages, she rehearses the welcome
a pile of kelp might provide.

When you're a legend, you're all over
the beaches. She remembers the king's daughter
pushed off her horse into the waves
for her wild ways but never quite
drowned enough, always beating at the rocks,
"Let me up! I'll learn to sew a whole
tapestry, give up dancing the man!"

This was a far world from when
she lay all day on the bed
in a powdered room while voices
in her head told of world's end,
let the fruit rot downstairs.

The weather turns and she's back
so long winter has splattered the fields
and the animals' trough is solid She's back.
The cycle, the weather, has turned.
For now she holds this view through
the back doorway – two goats frozen
in anticipation at the gate, a donkey
and horses on the skyline among mist.

Story Factor

Digging in the earth
we're out of our depth.

We're looking for that vein of truth
at the superpit where
a company prophecies
there'll be forests
some day, back to a green
there never was.

Looking for a practicality
we can only dream of
we're outdoors where
we're always visitors.
But the fascination
drags us again to letters
over the ground
we try to read
and the rising scent.

Any way we can
we're looking for history
and meaning behind eyes,
behind the way so much
dust has risen. Out here
narrations come from the dry
throat of these diggings.
We're listening, cruising
the desert of these lives.

Becalmed

Between harbour
and island,
the wind falls asleep.

We surrender the sails,
switch on the engine.

The shore lies flat
though broken by high rises
and looming cranes.

A raft of cormorants,
hundreds stretching their necks,
lifts off, leaving a scent
of guano on wrinkled water.

A man in a black coat
and hood on the boat *Primo*
reels in, ignoring his companion,
the pelican, metres away,
a splash
of white on the wide sea
off this southern continent.
He's come as far
as he needs to.

In this man's old country
we'll cut through
the waves of language
and the experience
of a wiser land,
a different opening in the season.
The sea is quiet,
honeycombed with light.

Siesta

Comes full circle from one to four.
The shopfronts become a wall, the traffic
stops shouting, the lift sleeps on
the seventh floor. So this is where
the plans sit down in a tower room
after the flight while pigeons pursue
their chances under the eaves. Windows
open on green hills that, in the haze,
become a bank of clouds. Daytime
in old Rome, horses and wagons
stopped clattering and insomnia vanished.
Everything stops at this skyline crocheted
with spires. The opposite apartments
also doze. Washing hardly quivers,
strung between pot plants. The sound
of bells comes through all absences
as we take in this city, feel its blood
beat, with the shutters half closed,
the broom fallen on the terrace floor
and a white butterfly going all the way down.