Rootless

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Rootless
For Daithí Mór and Monkey Óg
Settlers

My ancestors found the word
*pioneering*

a map to reckless country
all trails ending in gold
lust.

Not for them
*the green breast of the new world*;

better a homestead
near a muddy river
to perfect the craft
of traps,
the sale of flesh and fur.

They fed offerings
to the ravenous current:
broken wagons,
rebellious slaves,
spent horses.
Any body
yoked to sorrow.

Every Sunday they wove
baskets of prairie grass
to sail, empty,
down the water,
lifting a song of praise:
Make my home
in Saint Forget-me.
On the banks of limbo,
give me an eternal bed.
Piety is for sale on historic Main Street
where mock-Amish quilts boast ‘Humility Blocks’
honouring God by deliberate error,
one square turned contrary to the larger pattern.

In my mother’s kitchen a fond confession
is folded tidily over an oak rack:
Great-Grandmother’s work isn’t fussy cut,
refuses patterns — no broken-stars, no log cabins.

Stitched simply in squares to mark each family birth
with the best of a farming woman’s education:
Mary Pledger Fowler borned 1892.
Wanda Lea Bice borned 1938.
Breakfast with Bonnie
For WM

Wake to small footed pyjamas,
small footed minutes
and the thick
second hand tock
insists, insists
I wait on my pile of pillows.

The burbling percolator
is pre-set to hiss,
fat seizes on bacon;
for now
the kitchen is ticking
over without you.

In some other room
your spiky rollers,
your economical lips.
I know you
by your starched robe,
its bleached
blue.
I know the scuff
of your thin house shoes.
Every fixture in this place
either clicks or spits,
not at me, but for me.
Soon
my breakfast.
Soon your cigarettes.
Bone Woman

I am your centre,
the scaffold
to which your meat clings.
I am
your ill-fitting
puzzle:

the jaw bone click and slip,
gritty grinding neck,
vertebrae twists and cracks
sore knuckles
and ankles
joint to joint
rubbed bare.

Within, holes
blossom,
consuming the calcified
lace of me.

Minute
to day
to decade –
soon
I will be
more
than skeleton.

more
Tenancy

Rentals have no grandchildren
to attend creaks and drips,
so long
as the skeleton stands
the house is self
sufficient.
The entrance wall weeps
where the neighbour's chimney
has crumbled in disrepair.
Bricks sprout
a wig of weeds;
terraced gutters are clogged
with a hairline of grass.
Into the bedroom ivy creeps
under the windowsill,
an encroaching strand, unwelcome
as newly sprouted ear-hair.
Fungus blossoms
a Rorschach test above the bed
where the ceiling is befuddled
under an exposed attic,
to be covered
in emulsion upon tenant complaint.
We’re told: *Cosmetic concerns –
expect mould and damp.*
We don’t mention
the séance knocks of walls settling,
the dirge of pipes
clanging for visitors.
You were a timid flatmate
winter-huddled and crouched
in a dark corner
hands fidgeting, eyes watering
waiting for me to go.

I was advised our relationship
was unhealthy,
my keeping you as a pet.
You’d mistaken my crumbs
for sympathy; I hid my food.
I’d mistaken your peek in the room
for a greeting; you scrambled
retreat.

It was clear you’d never leave
so I set the latch to wood,
queasy when it flapped back
and nipped my fingertips
‘til I could commit
to the necessary force for a trap.

For two nights, you rejected homely
dinners of cheese and peanut butter.
On the third I tried seduction –
a chocolate square, caramel oozing
around the hidden spike.
It seems you were a romantic.

I woke to a smear of red on the floor
where your soft body worried in circles.
I stooped to clean our mess,
discarded the evidence,
and set out my apples again.
The poppy’s lips promised escape,  
a birth in reverse,  
its roots curled like beckoning fingers.

I plucked it, shook free  
the clinging dirt  
and the ground ripped open for me.

Through the gash a dark man came  
and I dove into his river  
to my marriage bed.

Neglect wintered the world behind me,  
above me. My twin-mother’s grief  
took every living thing hostage.

Under world, I sucked pulpy seeds,  
nails hooked in the rind of my husband’s fruit,  
juice seeping in streams down my chin.

Witnesses would return  
to advise her  
this was no kidnapping.
Alone on a mantel coated in dust, a Child of Prague won’t meet our gazes.
You think the nest in the fireplace romantic;
I trace the wall’s mouldy cracks
to their conclusions –
dead-ends in cobwebbed corners.
A bee bashes his soft body
at the other side of the window, testing
again and again the invisible barrier.

Not yet woken from what ifs we walk
the small road to the beach, single file,
keep clear of cars rushing home.
Facing the ocean we sit side by side
to play make-believe, old as we are,
calculating every imaginary resource
save the change
in my pocket.
Silent,
I dig my feet into sand.
You bury your hands.

Before us, waves
tumble and grasp –
failing
failing
failing
to leave the shore.
Daithí Mór

Man of deep chest
there are stones inside, swallowed whole
next to a child’s song and a child’s tractor.
You make a well inside for me to drink.

Man of long arms
they are branches that reach over oceans
retrieve histories, leaves
your fingers. You let me pluck them
before autumn.

Man of broad shoulders
you hold graves and grandfathers on them,
they pull roads behind you as you run.
You make a house with them for my head.
Planning Permission

We built our home on the back of an old god
being lovers of big sky and flat roads.
Careful to follow sound practice, we kept
far from karst pits, stayed well above flood plains,
read our prayers to the bruised sky,
and made sure the basement door was unlocked.

One night the winds shifted, unsettled.
Inside me, the baby swam somersaults.
Our cats retreated to nowhere.
When the cicadas’ metallic shiver
gave way to the kettle-cry of the siren,
we descended into the god-body – our bunker
where we knelt on rugs, foreheads to the floor,
hands on our crowns, as the vortex
rumbled and raged above.

We crawled, at dawn, from under the walls
we were still paying for, reborn,
but could not find words to praise –
surrounded by a litany of blasted windows,
a road lined in medals of crumpled cars
and a congregation of debarked trees,
their long arms pointing away from the earth.
We made a game of disaster.  
Above fishbowled shops  
swapped cups of tea  
for cigarettes with neighbours.  
Perched in windows  
over roads that became rivers,  
watched the defiant glide  
of kayaks out for sport,  
for laughs lapping their oars  
into the tainted deep  
and slicing back up to the light.

By evening the question  
of water deepened: its absence  
in homes where the hiss  
of air through shower heads  
echoed hollow hope,  
mothers tested taps cold and hot,  
twisting on and off.

When the Lee unclenched its grip  
from the city centre  
our divers dispatched to canals,  
met first their own reflections  
on the brown-black water  
before the plunge and search
to retrieve our evening news:
the body lost,
the grief deluge
that rose above our bolstered dam,

the flood that was invited
to keep a lost boy home.
Ghost Driven

Your children are ghost driven,
their tiny voices hoarse.
Lamp post, glowing rusted
light against dark.
Rattle of loose pram wheels,
of growing into hearse bones.
Your oldest flat on the pavement,
his dome cracked open,
a blue yolk inside. Dying direction
of idolatry, of fathers.

Your internal clock clicks
*midnight midnight midnight midnight.*
Sticking up to centrifugal heaven,
your dreamspine –
Look up:
a balance of shoes,
strung on telephone lines,
buzzing nonsense. Headspun.
Starstruck. Skull down
in two hands, like the family cat.
Prayer

Branches puzzle-cut
the morning
light. I
step forward,
inspect
a waiting web,
then
wake.

Spider
retreats
as cones and rods
take in the low relief
darkness
of a borrowed room.

In the hiss of heaters’
shush,
I cannot
discern
if I should rise
or fall
back within
my cloth cocoon —
no answer

offered by spider
or radiator
   the question lies
on my chest,
night-feeding.
Arms branched for balance
you flap flightless, bend
to the flesh of the apple
I’ve just bitten open.
Gums rake the grainy hollow,
press and press again. Nothing
breaks. Eyes wide, you suckle
what sweetness you can,
while I promise you
something cutting
will come through the pink.
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