

The Frozen Field



Lynne Greenway

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THE FROZEN FIELD

Winter was beginning.
In my house, the light had flown by 3 pm.
The candle fixed in its own gold wax
Illumined the stopped clocks, the dust
On landing walls, two jugs of dead chrysanths.
But out along the low humped lanes
Light lingered still - shone bold and brilliant,
Altering my perception of things,
Changing my landscape.
Reeds swung together in the wind.
The snow fell blindly on the frozen field.

AGE

I am a tree, relic of a first star.
Moonmouth; my tongue hangs up in a cranny of sky,
Will float through rivers in the gills of the dead pike.
My feet pound the red earth. I walk where the willow
Stands bunched to a knot. Old
Grandfather, rooted in the soil of ages, old
Comforter. I step out.
The red earth utters what I cannot comprehend.
The low, deep call of moans. Beneath the surface,
A star glistens; many worms lie coiled.

A DARK BRIDGE

Something shimmers above me.
I feel it, cool and silent, melting through my skin.
It has a blue light, blue and secret. It hovers
over the delicate trees of the heart.

I am quite alone. Mystery has settled in my hands
like a butterfly. A spread of wings are glittering
in my palm, white as washed pearl. They rise
across a sweep of metrical distances.

The night too has wings.
They flutter noiselessly beyond innumerable stars.
White against black, they are pieces of snow in
darkness.
They drop onto dusky plates, patterned and empty
as leaves.

My thoughts are turning,
cooling in the seas of the mind.
It is for me that life shimmers, there, in that
blackness,
and eternity arches before me like a dark bridge.

AUTUMN EVENING

I sit on late, long after you have gone.
The cold clock ticks time, nowhere.
The darkness drops;
some stars unfold the fingers of a world.
Ticked time is nowhere.

It is Autumn. The big rains sweep and gleam.
I sit alone, a star dissolved in water:
my flesh a hill; my blood
a salt-hot sea.
Ticked time tells nothing.

You won't come back. The rain
comes down in scarves, cast off.
The gardens are abandoned.
And quietly, the night
hurls its hours into darkness.

2A.M.

What does it mean, that dream?

2 A.M. I wake. The cold
phosphorescent
dreamscapes melt. The silence
sits up, re-arranging
itself.

I haul out of bed.

The new moon assails me;
the eye of my sister;
my sad, silent one.

It is she
who rains ice-blue
waters of light into windows.

I blink.

In the yard, apple bloom
glistens like snow.

A stone has the look of a wet star.

THE GIFT

It is not there. It is not there.
I have sought it in the flesh of a rose
When each spectacular August sky
Exerts an influence of heat or cloud;
And does not notice me.

And sometimes I think that it sleeps in the grass
Where, having no face and no voice, it cannot
Smile or cry
Or indicate to me the place it lies
- And only cold clouds signal.

So do not show me your factories; your hen huts;
The warm, sweat-smelling laboratories
Where the nervous,
Blank-faced students sit
In groups of two and three.

This is the region of the dead star.
This is where the stars go out.

THE STAR GAZER

In the dark room
the cold stars slide through the window strip.
A queue of women, all furs and eyes, nestle like
quiet cats.

Soon they will enter the blue door.
Its blue face leans, silent and mystical,
over the shapes of the women.
The room
will glide to meet them one after another.
Its spaces will swallow them up.
From a soft hand
the women will lap pieces of love.
They will start to glow.

The reader sees the stars in teacups.
She spells names and faces
in a flicker of candles.
Over the crystal,
patterns are flowering, white and hot
like planets. The reader
is a glitter of rings. Her strangeness
melts through the walls
and into the arms of the waiting women.
Her words are comets, plummeting to dark wells
of secrets and drowning.
A blackness of hearts.

FIRST GLIMPSE

I would have liked to die last night.
Quietly and without fuss, I could have just
Stepped off into oblivion.
How peaceful to have been nothing at all:
To have lain on the floor, arms crossed,
And melted through the boards
To a coffin of worms;
And a darker chamber than night housing my bones.

But I did not die. Instead I sat at my mirror.
The face bounced back from the black,
Sleek surface and just did not mean a thing.
I wanted the dead eyes, the lips, the soft moth-breath
to stop,
To peel away the mask and be faceless. - And I don't
deserve a face.
I am much too numb. I think I died three years ago.
I know it's been some time.
Breasts, little roses opening to a perfect sun,
Are withered. I see them. They are dead.

And I see my eyes, two hard stars in the night of my face.
They are also dead. My body is a bandaged egg,
Where the sea at each full moon
Heaves under the influence of that polar ray
And floods out and out, and wastes itself again.
The dark interior trees release their moons to no avail;
The black, salt shell is empty, ineradicably
Sealed against future tenancy.

If God exists, does he not hear me?

 Will he not shimmer tonight? Something
shimmers in the blackness,
But it is not God. It is not peaceful.
Its colour is red. It is angry and I think it hates me.
Like me, it has no name and its face has gone.
I hear it moving, later, as I try to sleep. Its mouth
Is red and open. It swallows me like a fly.
I see its breath next to my breath, glowing, and I fear it.

MEMORY

Hushed fields in a dream.
Old griefs flake white

ash. Mouth of memory. Mountain
ash foams like a cold sea.

This midnight's road is paved with stars.
What do I seek?

And now the world turns,
turns from surfaces.

Time turns - I remember.
Shadows. A blue light. Old absences.

Tumults of blue breath
are flickering through distances -

Let the night plunge its pieces of time into
blackness, blackness.

GHOST

What is so real as that echo
at midnight?

... The wind in the porch,
the rustle of leaves, the wild, high cry
of the child in his crib.

Then there are echoes without sound
- the visitations -
the lilies at the door of the cathedral,
the new thin moon, sweetening in the throat of the
night flower,
a dark silhouette of owls.

A floorboard creaks.

A cold wind stirs in my ear,
is this the sea, then?

Something has entered the room.

I turn, hearing the ghost move.

GOODBYE TO THE PAST

A moon ago, you buried
The bones of a previous world
In naked earth. That moon,
Your witness. That moon
The inheritance of a guilt you cannot wash away.
For the moment, that guilt is necessary.

In a new, strange place
A flower unfolds in your hands.
Struck by blue bolts from the sky,
A great lake comes clean open.
A final trace of regret registers in the far depths -
Then the first blue, fluid smile appears.

MERSEYSIDE POETRY MINIBOOKS SERIES

LYNNE GREENWAY was born in Lancashire in 1957 and qualified as a teacher in 1978 since when she has done a wide variety of jobs. Since 1980 she has been writing short stories and poems which have been published in magazines. This is her first collection.

WINDOWS

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