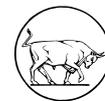


John McAuliffe

**THE
KABUL
OLYMPICS**



Gallery Books

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is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
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for Nancy

The Kabul Olympics

i.m. Caroline Chisholm

She decided on swimming the Channel
to think through the chances
of a character escaping the camps in Calais.

When the weather turned the organizer
had to cancel, but training in the murky Dover water
was not all beside the point:

Swimming Pool Hill
would be the name of the novel.
The hill was where a swimming pool had been,

built by a Russian
dreaming up an Olympics in Kabul,
before the rise of the Taliban.

She lived with story. She added one word
to another, to make more probable
what ought to happen.

The unfinished novels were visitations,
chances we should take. While she wrote
we listened, friends

piling now out of the slow black car.
When the weather turned
she knew what it meant.

She had terrible luck is what she wouldn't say.
Her laughter started at
the back of her throat

and tilted her head. She'd call up,
after writing her character
into the Channel;

chances were she couldn't tell
from day to day
where she'd be living herself.

Younger, she rode off on a horse, it was a white horse,
seen from an orchard: her amazed father,
diminishing on the border,

is unforthcoming on the details.
They didn't matter, this isn't a story.
That noise is probably the wind.

They drained the swimming pool at the top of the hill,
a quiet spot, to test for innocence.
She could hear its dry echo.

Something unspoken can be something known.
Saying it
would be another desperate matter.

Ledwidge in Manchester

Having made mincemeat of his shoulder he convalesces,
not knowing, but — really — *knowing* that some Father
will sooner rather than later record he was blown to pieces
stopping in out of the drumming rain for a cuppa

with his unit . . . In Ypres. A different unit
from the one he has left in the Balkans for the upset assembly
around him in Lily Lane, in a schoolroom they've had to refit
as a men's ward, so national is the level of casualty.

This is in the run-up to Easter, April 1916.
What catches his attention in the tightening plot is new
daffodils
bending under the northwest wind. It's been and gone.
The not much that lies ahead of him, and helpless symbols.

A Rest

Manchester, 1848

The money that brought him over
came from low-grade calico.
He wished he had stayed at home.
On the night, the Irish composer —
Osborne, a friend from Paris,
who knew how unwell he was —
disobeyed Chopin's instructions
and attended the performance
which, he would say later,
he found 'disappointingly quiet'
until Chopin's exit
at page 3 of the 'Funeral March',
having seen, he told Osborne,
a figure emerge from the piano.

Suit

for Róisín, 23 August 2019

Our eldest likes its cut
and keeps her eye on it,
would take it in at the waist,
a jagged shorter hemline, pleats . . .

My father's sober suit
has lived upstairs
through half-frozen nights
to which I wore shop-bought suits,

which have returned, dry-cleaned,
unrepaired of tears,
fraying seams, a stain, one time burned
(it was the age of the cigarette),

while his unreplaced outfit,
wide as boards in leg and sleeve,
has ghosted each house move,
the children growing out

of what we meant for them. The extension
might have been built around *it*.
'I could,' she says, 'always try it on,'
what I call *my suit*.

BBQ

July 2018

The chestnut tree has put out its candles,
the sun's at its zenith, the forecast's for higher,
and higher. Flowers wax, and attention will wander:
time for T-shirts and shorts and sandals,
a 99 and a *tank* of water.
A G&T and a margarita,
and *Paracetamols* for after.

I can't see the smoke for the fire.
Looking no further
is a skill it seems easy to master.
A 99 and a *tank* of water.
A G&T and a margarita,
and *Paracetamols* for after.

I have it down to a fine art
when a blackening breeze from the east
introduces an indoorsy atmosphere
around the barbecue and garden furniture.
A 99 and a *tank* of water.
A G&T and a margarita,
and *Paracetamols* for after.