

Eamon Grennan

# PLAINCHANT



Gallery Books

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## *Singer in Storm*

*Your question — your answer —  
your song, what does it know?*

— Paul Celan

When in the stormy wet morning a blackbird lands on our erratic-looking young birch and perches there, gazing off at air that's been grey-swaddled by a raincloud swallowing up lake and hill, then I'm struck by the simple endurance of the small heart that composes its own song and lets it out through the tiny open passage of its throat and golden bill as if it were a song of praise, a praise-song absolute and abiding, never mind what the weather-gods could concoct and cast at us: such a small act but it seems of defiance and love — if that's the word — of the life he's been given, come into; the one moment he finds at each breath-beat and must, it seems, relish . . . and I wonder how, in his double life of stress and song, he keeps himself together and free (as any straitened single life might) with instinct and habit directing each of his quick food-seeking hops across the mown grass, scaring away a single shy dunnock before lifting off and being lost to me again in the grey-opaque rain-thickened swirl-about air.

## *Chance*

*Lovely, aren't they? . . . Sweet, too, already,* is what she said, the woman I met by chance on my morning walk as she was reaching an arm clear over brambles to pluck another plump ebony-glinting blackberry from a tangle of briars growing by the narrow lane to the sea. *Here,* she said, turning back to me, *Have one* — holding the flat of her outstretched hand out to me, from which I took (trying not to touch the soft centre of her life-lined left palm while noting the three rings on its fourth and middle fingers — one a simple band of silver or white gold, another glistening with tiny green diamonds, the last a small sapphire oval), took one blackberry, and when she said *Take another* I took another. *Lovely, thanks,* I said, walking on then and saying, and hearing her say as she walked away in the opposite direction, *See you . . .* each of us delivering the farewell that's conventional around here, which all know is not to be taken literally, and I could (knowing she was turning the corner that would put us out of sight of each other), could lick my stained lips at the intense brief sweetness of the fruit and feel the slight hardness of the one seed that lodged between two teeth, which my tongue (hard as I tried) could not dislodge.

## *Biblical Wisdom*

While the Lord Himself may grant shelter from the sharp wind to the shorn lamb it's hard to see how this desolate creature, half black, half white, standing half-shorn by a rusted fence, with its tattered fleece flapping in the wind that's making shards of rosebushes and forcing fuchsia twigs to take flight across the glittergreen flurry of grass, can take much consolation from such tempering sentiments, no more than I can myself, caught out as I am in this stiff tempest of contradictions, the gale blowing all I know this way and that, and no way — as this stricken lamb knows (shivering in the untempered misery of its own lamb knowledge) — no way but by a draught of animal patience to withstand it all, all this buffeting, this way of the world and its weather . . . and so we wait — this half-shorn lamb and I — until there's a little relenting in this indifferent relentlessness and maybe, just maybe, the slight off-chance of an even incomplete rainbow, a shaft of sunlight and promise fighting its way to glory: the way, after a solid week of driving rain that shakes everything to the bone, comes the sudden intervention of a sunny upright cluster of tall foxgloves, trim and jaunty-purple, coming into blossom.

## *On the Far Side of the Thornbush*

Stands a ragged green field arrayed with buttercups, daisies, and a small settlement of recent yellow irises springing out of brown pony-dung, where the white pony slow-swivels his hieratic head in my direction; full-stopped, he surveys me up and down, then slow-turns and is a slow-motion (for the moment) creature until, with an electric twitch, he sudden-gallops to become a beast of fire, until the barbed wire stops him in his madcap pony-tracks, so he offers one quick interrogative whinny at my departing shape: his large, lonesome, sphere-deep black eyes finding my receding shape and — with those flicking ears and fixed inquisitive gaze — following.