

Vona Groarke

**SELECTED
POEMS**



Gallery Books

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*for Tommy and Eve,
mainstays.*

Islands

In my house at the edge of the lake
what does not end will not return.
A storm may gather in the stance of trees.
I waited for you. I will sing for you.

When you came to my house for the second time
I had gathered the leaves of the dark in our room.
I lit a fire and a candle to burn
in every window that faced towards your shore.

Won't you call for me at my house by the lake?
Cedar of Lebanon. Silver Birch.
Won't you take me in your boat to the centre of the lake?
Wych elm. Wych elm.

The Tree House

Because someone has been building piles of branches
in the wood I have been remembering your hands.
I propose to make a shelter with a roof and walls of twigs
so the close-knit warp and weft will keep us safe.
I am saying that I want you to return
and will show you how by laying down
a bed of leaves and soft pine cones
where I will kiss you so your body feels the sway.

I want you home. I worry when the wind
is getting up. I'm sure it's only a matter of time
before the ragged pine behind the house
buckles and bears down upon the roof
to splay my body with needles
and sweet-scented cones.

For the Unkept House

Fill the bucket with water.
Fill the coffin with stones.
There's a full moon over the river
and there's no going home.

Make a well in the water.
Make a house in the dark.
There's a full moon over the meadow
and there's no going back.

Sweep the stars from the window.
Sweep the dust from the door.
There's a full moon over the kitchen
and there's no going back anymore.

Break off the branches that withered.
Break off the flowers that grow.
There's a full moon over the gatepost
and there's no place to go.

Pick the stones from the meadow.
Pick the weeds from the grave.
There's a full moon over the threshold
and there's no time to leave.

The Family Photograph

In the window of the drawing room
there is a rush of white as you pass
in which the figure of your husband is,
for a moment, framed. He is watching you.

His father will come, of course,
and, although you had not planned it,
his beard will offset your lace dress,
and always it will seem that you were friends.

All morning you had prepared the house
and now you have stepped out
to make sure that everything
is in its proper place: the railings whitened,

fresh gravel on the avenue, the glasshouse
crystal when you stand in the courtyard
expecting the carriage to arrive at any moment.
You are pleased with the day; all month it has been warm.

They say it will be one of the hottest summers
the world has ever known.
Today your son is one year old.
Later you will try to recall

how he felt in your arms —
the weight of him, the way he turned to you from sleep,
the exact moment when you knew he would cry
and the photograph be lost.

But it is not lost.
You stand, a well-appointed group
with an air of being pleasantly surprised.
You will come to love this photograph

and will remember how, when he had finished,
you invited the photographer inside
and how, in celebration of the day,
you drank a toast to him, and summertime.

Rain Bearers

When the others have gone we row out to the island.
A darkness clots the skyline to the west.
There's been talk that summer will not last.

We stand against the trees for an hour or more
waiting for the evening to dissolve in lake water
and music from an endless barbeque.

The seagulls snag on the water.
The line you trace from them across the lake
ends in a beat of pebbles skimmed against the shore.

The fire in the car park eventually collapses.
By midnight they are packing up for home.
We watch until the last tail light

stutters behind the woods and fades away.
You shout out our names to claim possession.
The silence brings a sense of being adrift.

In this first home we sit together
calling out the colours of the clouds
as amber, pitch or amethyst.

We cup our hands around them,
passing them between us like small gifts.
You say if anything is easy it is this.

That seems enough. When I close my eyes
there are shadows where the shapes of cloud began.
Your hand, when you lean to touch me, smells of rain.