

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

THE BOYS OF BLUEHILL



Gallery Books

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T H E B O Y S O F B L U E H I L L

An Information

I returned to that narrow street
where I used to stand and listen
to the chat from kitchen or parlour, filtered
through rotten tiles. I thought
the rough walls seemed higher than before.
My cheek against the stone, I noted the new door
since last I'd been there, began to count the years,

to count the questions I couldn't ask now
(Did you sit apart? Had you washed your hands
before entering the room? Was the water laced
with vinegar? What did you say while it thundered?
And what did you say when you went out
so the crowds that danced at the wedding
would not know your whole story?)

They are dancing still beside the river,
and now I see her climbing towards me
up the long flight of steps that winds
beside the fever hospital,
in her covered basket, the makings
of the meal. I had never
found out the certain day.

And now I must not ask, where did you buy the bread,
and did they guess, in the shop where you got the duck eggs,
that you had a guest? Along the alleys
the wind whispered to me: Open your hand,
let it fall down, whatever you were holding,
let it lie until the day after, let it go,
let it lie until it is blown to the river;

do not look back to see whose hand
finds it, or where it is hidden again when found.

Fainfall

It's dawn, she opens the door to the yard.
Twilight is framed. A pillow of fog.
No sign of the cat. She stands there, inhaling fog;
this is the time when she is almost at ease.

Something stirs, a binding slipped
gently slides down. Is she alone
in her house? A rustling answer
clears away to silence, which lasts and lasts.

With the door wide open, still hesitating,
this is the moment when for once she feels at ease.

I Used to Think

I used to think I needed to sleep —
it sucked me down
in long dreams of daybreak.
I used to say, do what you know
how to do. I do,
nervously I enter the ruined priory,
I greet the bats and pigeons,
I fall asleep,

and at once
roaming again backstage,
a new step feels higher than the old one,
the dressing-room door's rehung,
but the old tune played on the keypad
freezes in memory, locked
in the moment I wrote it there —

The knitted shawl dumped when the moths riddled it,
gone, the car scrapped long since,
discs and logbook, squashed in the wakeful mill
that once consumed the house keys years ago
saved from Córdoba: the tunes, though,
The Boys of Bluehill, *Miss Canty's Reel*,
the orchestral variations
with the lewd words added to the symphonies,
will follow me when I wake, if I ever wake again.