

Kerry Hardie

**THE ASH
AND THE OAK
AND THE WILD
CHERRY TREE**



Gallery Books

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is first published
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Being Here, Now

*A suede-coloured bull, two cows and a calf in the pasture.
A blue seep under spring's green sting.*

*Swallows flicking about on the face of the river.
And swifts, their cutlass-play that cleaves the air.*

*This day — a round place of clean brightness,
a drop of rain laid on a pleated leaf.*

*for my brother, Paddy,
who died in Delhi
on 15 January 2012, aged forty-seven,
and for Lu and their little sons,
Ned and Thomas*

Sixty

Everyone is slowly going home.
The shadow of the pine
lies stretched and sprawled across the trodden sands.
The waterline creeps close.

I am watching my husband grow old —
the stoop in the lines of his bones,
the hesitant note in his gait
where once there was ease and strut.

This mirror his form holds to mine
is not how I want things to be.
It cancels the contract of life,
it stifles our birth-howl with clay.

But everyone is slowly going home.
The shadow of the pine
lies stretched and sprawled across the trodden sands.
The waterline creeps close.

Visiting

Sometimes these days I fold my hands and sit quietly,
a good child.

I think of hair ribbons and fear.
An upright chair beside a half-closed door.

Dishes and bosoms. Voices.
Closed things
laid out and looked at, lives decided.



Why would I want to belong
anywhere?

Otters

Fuchsia flowers weighted with rain.
Black bog-flesh, sodden and dense.
Nowhere to go but within.

Last night I was far out at sea.
Winged otters gambolled black rocks.
Cresting waves crashed, then slid back.

Now the rain comes, the rain goes.
All day the otters stay close.
The fuchsia flowers hang, small red stabs.

I sit at the window and think
of the body gone back to the earth,
of the end of myself to myself.

But the otters with wings come and go.
They are marvellous, fearless and bright.
And I shine and I shine and I shine.

Letter from the Old World

for my brother Paddy

The rain has stopped.
Someone is moving
sheep on the road.
Blue shadows shift
like a hung wash on the mountains.
They follow the clouds.

How is New York?
The shops and flats and people?

Seán is digging out the winter spinach.
I hear the scrape of steel on stones.
It is May, a wet Sunday in May —
the air, greenish and moist.
Sweet rocket splays
its mauve fronds on the air.

Yesterday

I placed its flowers in the blue glass vase
and set them on that bookcase that we use
for gloves and keys and mislaid things.
I catch its perfume as I turn the stairs
and trail the sweetness with me down the hall.
Sweet rocket, sometimes called dame's violet,
carried here by Huguenots who fled from France.
Slips packaged up in moss. What do hands fumble for
when dread comes calling?
Ah, but there's nothing in the world to match
this lush, damp garden in the damp, green light.
Not much in flower yet — all grows out and up.
The cow parsley's waist-high, the nettles rise.

For me, the world is well because the pigeon's call
lets slaughter sleep.

Those Huguenots —
their flight-route signalled by these unprized flowers
that rise by paths and ditches everywhere.
All roadsides in the world are unmarked graves
for those that strife or famine dispossessed.
Green places, where the spent lay down
like bundled clothes too worn to wear.

I can smell cattle on the wind now, a hot stench,
they bellow in the field behind the ash.