

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

THE SUN-FISH



Gallery Books

The Sun-fish
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 15 October 2009.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

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ISBN 978 1 85235 482 4 *paperback*
978 1 85235 483 1 *clothbound*

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.



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*To Niall Woods and Xenya Ostrovskiaia,
married in Dublin on 9 September 2009*

*When you look out across the fields
And you both see the same star
Pitching its tent on the point of the steeple —
That is the time to set out on your journey,
With half a loaf and your mother's blessing.*

*Leave behind the places that you knew:
All that you leave behind you will find once more,
You will find it in the stories;
The sleeping beauty in her high tower
With her talking cat asleep
Solid beside her feet — you will see her again.*

*When the cat wakes up he will speak in Irish and Russian
And every night he will tell you a different tale
About the firebird that stole the golden apples,
Gone every morning out of the emperor's garden,
And about the King of Ireland's Son and the Enchanter's
Daughter.*

*The story the cat does not know is the Book of Ruth
And I have no time to tell you how she fared
When she went out at night and she was afraid,
In the beginning of the barley harvest,
Or how she trusted to strangers and stood by her word:*

You will have to trust me, she lived happily ever after.

A Bridge Between Two Counties

The long bridge
Stretched between two counties
So they could never agree
How it should be kept

Standing at all
(In the mist in the darkness
Neither bank could be seen
When the three-day rain

The flood waters
Were rising below).
On that day I looked
Where the couple walked

A woman a small child
The child well wrapped
Becoming less visible
As they dodged left

Then right, weaving
Between the barrels and the planks
Placed there to slow the traffic
And something came

A brown human shape
And the woman paused and passed
The child's hand
To a glove and a sleeve

And very slowly
At first they moved away, were gone,
There was the mist,
The woman stood and seemed

To declare something
To the tide rocking below
And for the second time
In all my life I saw

The dry perfect leaf
Of memory stamped in its veins
The promise I heard
Val Kennedy making

At my sister's funeral
In his eightieth year: *She will live
Forever in my memory.* So her words
Floated out on the water consonants

Hardly visible in the mist vowels
Melting and the scatter of foam
Like the pebble damage
On a sheet of strong glass.

I watched the woman,
Memory holding the bridge in its place,
Until the child could reach the far side
And the adjoining county.

Ballinascarthy

Is marach an dream úd Caithness dob' ag Gaeil a bhí an lá.
— Pádraig Óg Ó Scolaídh

There, where the bard Ó Scolaídh tells the loss
Of the great fight when the Croppies met the Caithness
Legion: the date, 1798, cut in brass,

The man driving the forklift truck said: Keep on
Straight up the road and you'll see the monument
And turn to your right. But when I had gone

Up the long hill to the cross of Kilnagros,
I saw only the spruces that had grown
Darkening green on either side of the stone.

After a mile I turned back and drove west, blinded
By dancing flaws in the light, as I passed
Under the planted trees, like dashed foam

Or the dashes of yellow and white on an old headstone.
Yet in that darkening light I saw the place,
Turned left and followed the falling road

For the graveyard. I searched for my great
Grandfather's name, Charles Cullinane, but I found
Only one Daniel, 1843, one headstone,

And in Kilmalooda I found Timothy's name
On a headstone in the long grass almost lost,
And Jeremiah's, and I found the name *Bence-Jones*,

1971, cut by Séamus Murphy who made my father's stone
In 1970, in the Botanics, and below that another name
In a different hand, Ken Thompson's, I recognized:

Ken Thompson carves the figure 9
In a different style, as in the stone he made
For my mother and her second husband in their Offaly grave.

I left the Bence-Joneses in the long grass
And drove back to the cross
And downhill again past the secret monument

To the dead of the great battle of Kilnagros
*Where the spruces whistle to each other and the carved stone
is lost.*