

Alan Gillis

HAWKS AND DOVES



Gallery Books

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You'll Never Walk Alone

She's dead set against the dead hand
of Belfast's walls guarding jinkered
cul-de-sacs, siderows, bottled sloganlands,
and the multinational malls' slicker
demarcations, their Xanadu of brands
entwining mind and income. Yet these replicas
atone for the brouhaha'd blare of the zones
she walks among, the bricked-in vigil of her home,

where they axed and hacked bark-stripped trees
and razed grass clearings, piled varnish-caked
crates and oil-slick tyres to a fire and stoned
dark-skinned refugees, broke Bacardi-Breezer
empties off kerbstones, paint-bombed windows,
raised their spray cans to new tenements,
built-up cans and butts like battlements
outside her door, and dreamed of burning green,
white and orange to ribbons that would rave
and rip through the dawn's zit of orange.

She walks by Little Britain merchandise,
made in China, and waits like a leper
in the darkened corridor of a debt advice
counsel room, listening to gangsta rappers
rapping that days slip by like grains of rice,
so she should shake her booty; that she is tapered
by time; that she should shed another skin;
that some days trampoline, flipping you outside-in.

'Such was the day' — I later heard her say,
soused in gin or doused with fontal waters
fallen from the apple-sliced, orange-peeling sky,
her shadow flaked as she wrangled for just

words — 'such was the day, not when guerrillas
ate the protestors' livers before a village
crowd for opposing oil drills on TV;
nor when the bright lights flared over Baghdad's
orange, rose and *Tomb Raider* blue targets
trained by oil wells firing a welcome, or adieu;

nor when the dawn green ocean's heart attack
churned coastlines into troughs of corpse-stew;
when the earthquake turned tenements to smokestacks;
but the day I broke down and bawled myself blue
by my front door's graffiti, falling on the cracked,
coloured kerb with every bill overdue,
wishing the ground would gobble me whole, and
a neighbour asked if I needed a hand.'

For What We Are About To Receive

Five million to one are the odds
against pulling fish for five thousand
from these two loins I bought from the reduced to clear
stall at the snubbed end of the pine-
fresh mall, so I'd have money left over
for five Belfast baps and twelve green

bottles of beer, although the green
splotch of the loins might stack the odds
against wanting such wonders to be worked over
their flesh in any case, even if it were to feed five thousand
gathered under alder and pine
to hear the Word spelled out loud and clear,

just as you laid down the law that night I bought clear
spring water and readymade greens
that I sprinkled with toasted pine
nuts as you spelled out loud and clear that the odds
against us keeping faith were five thousand
to one, and that I needed to get over

the fact that we were over.
And just as when the Word was spelled out loud and clear
and the herded five thousand
set their teeth into twelve green
creels full of fragments and fish and ends and odds
left from the dais under alder and pine,

now I chew over my five Belfast baps and pine
for your loins forevermore, picking over
fragments, ends and odds
and leftovers I'll never clear

away as I splutter on my twelfth green
bottle amid breadcrumbs in their thousands

watching fifty, one hundred, two hundred thousand
loincloths on my pine-
framed TV, coming over pukey-green
as I work the figures over and over
until it's spelled out loud and clear
that five million to one are the odds

against anyone feeding those five hundred thousand spread
like odds
and ends who pine for bread and clear
spring water, their skin gangrened, the broadcast over.