

Kerry Hardie

**THE SILENCE
CAME CLOSE**



Gallery Books

The Silence Came Close
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 22 September 2006.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

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ISBN 1 85235 408 9 *paperback*
1 85235 409 7 *clothbound*

ISBN 978 1 85235 408 4 *paperback*
978 1 85235 409 1 *clothbound*

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



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*for my cousin Rosaleen Jolley
and my friend Marian Tierney
with love and profound respect for their courage*

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On Not Visiting My Aunt in Hospital

You'd said, 'I don't want you to go,'
and the strange thing was that I didn't mind
though I ached all over and, outside the window,
the afternoon floated, golden with dust motes;
didn't mind sitting on, talking of this and of that,
answering questions I'd answered ten minutes before.
And afterwards, driving the long drive home,
I'd meant to go back the next day.

But along came the world, rattling and banging my door.
It made such a noise that I turned back the key in the lock.
In barged my life,
hands full of e-mails and faxes and phone-calls,
of things to be said, of tasks to be done,
and, fool that I was, I believed in the force of the world.



Now I'm out of bed once again. I could drive,
but instead I'm here
in the poplars' rustling shade.
The mountains are blue,
the wind's in the trees, the bees
are bumping about in the bells of the flowers.
And I don't want to leave this, I don't want to go there
and wilt in a hospital ward.
Forgive me. A few more days. I just can't make myself
stop the not-wanting of it.
And please do again what you did for me
when you told your friend that I came every day,
and then smiled at me with such sweetness
because you thought it was true.

After Rage

It was only
when I had carried the seedlings
out into the cold day,
when I had sat myself down
in the damp grass
and pricked out
hollyhocks, poppies, lavender, pinks —
the young plants,
the fibrous trail of their webby roots —
firming them
into their new places;
only then
did I quiet enough

for the great winds to die down
in the whitethorns of my being,
for the magpies to leave off their rattling
in the grace of the silver birch.

Communication

for my mother

My father wouldn't talk on the phone.
He gave it to my mother,
then told her what to say to me.
He seemed to need this go-between.
As though without, I was too raw —
the whole complicated business
too risky, too much effort.
My brother is the same,
he phones someone and, if they're in,
he hangs up, rings back later for the answer-phone.

I am less sure —
I think I have to do these things, to prise myself loose
from my nature. Sometimes, after a long call,
I feel betrayed into words
I have not thought through, accused
because I do not want this miracle.
I am too slow to move so fast.

Alone in the house, I let the phone ring for days.
I don't turn on stereo or radio or television.
The membrane of the walls thins like muslin, the light
presses through. Wind sounds, bird sounds,
field sounds of cattle and sheep.
The swish of the crows flowing over.
I live deep in the world
and I grow like my father.

Awake

This morning I woke with a flame in my heart.
Grand statement. Yet joyous, playful. Meaning
an open heart at the open window,
air thin and high,
the builders' radio, vapid with music,
the chink of their tools against rock.
Flowers in a jar — stone parsley, vetch,
stalks of late hyssop, violet with blooms.
More hammers and chisels, a moving of timber,
one of them lights up, coughs himself clear.
A magpie sits high on the ridge of the roof
that slices across the ridge of the mountain.

Sometimes these days don't come, or stay hidden,
sometimes it rains so long you forget the sun.
Or the other way round. Now the magpie starts up —
rogue bird of gossip and plague and complaint —
he cackles and bounces his rage, his delight,
at credulous simpletons searching for goodness.