

## The summer of 1913

On the meadow flats the angular legs  
of horses rise in the air, as they press  
their backs against the grass. The mistle thrush  
cocks its head and listens for the movement  
of a worm beneath the earth; the marsh water  
ticks under the lady's smock while the rag-wort  
picks its colours from the sun. Townhall clock  
and ploughman's spikenard you bring them  
to me with your face against the light,  
as the mustard field steams amongst formal  
trees that stand dark above the swollen hill.

In the garden, the laburnum adjusts  
its yellow feather boa, and lowers  
its perfume to the ground. The flowers move  
restlessly, conscious of the chestnut's  
creamy stiffs. Once more, like an old servant,  
the wisteria flowers against the house  
and pours its scent obediently upon you.  
I feel your hands touch my neck as I stroke  
the iris's soft tongue of yellow fur.  
Your muslin dress sways gently. My tweeds  
are out of season and prickle in the heat.

All over the world now, the musk plant's hairs  
are shrivelling as its heavy perfume fades.  
Today, at the nurse's cottage, you picked  
a monkey flower and held it for me.

Close to my face, your eyes watched, as I smelt  
nothing. Over, for ever. Far from the Aleutian Islands  
the parlour maids are closing up the shutters.  
From my bedroom window, I notice that  
imperceptibly the chestnut's blossom  
has faded. Beside it the lilac shines  
a luminous white in the early darkness.

The summer's programme unfolds as the song  
of a pianola. The syringa shrinks  
into rusty curls, and the hawthorn's breath  
turns sour: the blossom that we picked has changed  
to spikes. The gardener ties up the daffodils,  
and tactfully removes the headless tulips.  
The carcasses of queen bees lie soft now,  
young rooks are falling from their nests  
as their parents starve. A cat hesitates  
among the aubrietia as it watches  
a sparrow crack a snail upon its anvil.

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