

The Odds

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For my friend Alex

Frogs

It startles you –

 this leap

from the wet saucer
of the dahlia pot
while watering, late June.

You'll stare at rain
through kitchen windows,
and there one is again –

 a sudden splashy hop
 across the decking –

rippling thought.

 Look you'll say –

but there's just sodden garden,
your small patch
among the trampolines

 and concrete patios.

No one has a pond. The Roding
is a major roundabout away.

No flat-ironed froglets
pockmark the walk to school.

Do frogspawn fall
in fat drops of rain,

wriggle through tadpolehood
in dregs left in the watering cans,
puddles under hoses?

Or newly-limbed crawl up
through muddy beds
seeking air?

Once, we left the plant pots
steeping in a paddling pool.

When we returned from holiday
the pond-like sludge
was livid with them.

Lugging containers
back to sunny spots
we wondered

how they knew
this plastic-walled
oasis

was waiting there.

Who can know plagues from blessings?
It's only now
years later

we've thought to ask
where they all go.

The Dissolution of the Libraries

Words whirled away like thought untethering
itself. Stand here – dugdeep in boneshells
of abandoned bookbanks – and hear
their *whisperlong* as winds blow in.

The ransacked sky-stacks row after row
reaching to a roofdome now rent weather-wide.
Mouldmaps inbloom between bird-shitsplat spines:
gnarly nooks for house-spugs & mouserats.

Gone all the idolgold: the glimmerings
on paperthick and parch, that flare, facelit,
matchbright – magick as moonglare
suddenly uncloudclothed – picking out a path.

Wonderwhen whole worlds were ribbed in rhyme:
scriptsafe, bookbound. A hoard of heartsong.
Secrets storied like spels to ken, to keen,
to kindl warmfire in winterdarks.

O weary word-wanderers travelsore and tired
hopesmarched so homefar home. Timesgone
when sounds ink-sketched slipt moutheasy
into meaning. Didn't fur tongue taste foreignfull.

Mushrooms

They take their vow of silence seriously.

Absorb the crunch of leaf litter, the creak
of rotting trunks into their hooded caps.

All plants know quietness, but mushrooms feed
on it. They suck all calm, all sense of ease
from autumn evenings, mulch it to monkish hush.

They practice stillness: gills unfluttered
by the breeze. No silky petal swish.
Their very noiselessness seems held in check

deliberately. Mouths buttoned up. Their thoughts
sprout in the darkness, take pale shapes
of mothwing whiteness, like shadows on a scan.

They know it's will not words which give prayer
power. Stood circled, smooth heads bowed
together, morph into things we cannot say.