

Judder Men

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*for my family,
with love*

Go-Kart

We flew through our youth on its bolted back
of scrap wood and salvaged pushchair wheels,
tacked carpet tiles. Slow in that secret shed,
his workbench clamped the parts that met other parts
to bear a grandson's weight. We pulled the thing
like a dog on a lead up Cockshutt Lane to the Birch
where the see-saw and roundabout wanted our touch,
where the rusting rocket rocker that we'd climb astride
got no more than a look. Here for free fall, for the fast air,
to test what had been built, unable to think beyond
the setting off. To go faster we had to share, to bolt together,
to sit between each other's legs and quicken down there,
pull both strings taut lean back as one and steer.

Uncle David

At Southport Pleasureland,
the apple of the Caterpillar ride
behind your grey puffer jacket.

I was no longer six or seven
but there you were, tiptoeing,
beaming at the Big Dipper,
screamers who would survive.

You, about to take my hand,
and carry the fish I had won
with your help for a short while.

The Twangers

Tight brass coils to stop child-thrown doors
hitting walls. When twanged by my father
by trick of thumb, he'd summon them.

And wherever rang that quivering call –
the bellies of beds, the backs of floors,
from deep within the fluid of the eye,

already there in brain or inner ear
at higher pitch that only I could hear –
those sidewise judder men would come.

Tomatoes

They come back to us, the dead, bearing fruit.
Pulling out weeds from the patio's cracks,
I left one greener finger there that had pushed
on through, as I struggled to mow the lawn,
as all else turned to scotch and died.
Without a drop it survived, and day by day
elbowed it out across the paving slabs,
sprouting shoots then leaves from nimble joints.
When the first yellow flower flared, I knew
he was there, and the bloods that would follow –
smooth green balls that would swell and fill
on those little vines, each bearing a dozen disciples.
I watched from the kitchen door, nervous that birds
wouldn't leave him alone or let his apology grow.
At dusk I gave him mist from our uncoiled hose,
pinched purple sprigs from the splits in his arms
to send earth's dark goods back down the shaft
so the fruits could crimson. Under a blood moon,
one night I dreamed I was marooned in him,
the house a jungle of vines and gas and heady oils,
where knobble-knot branches raised me
as one of their own, furring my garden tongue.
I fed from the warmest bombs, filled on the bang
of juice and seed and all that is tomato. And they
were greatly fleshed, and I went beneath the skin –
never to know hunger again in the gorge
and bank of them. I was Mowgli of the mandrakes,
and I clambered through the rest of him for days
to find the root and end of it all, where the codes
of the nightshade hid, where the *solanine tomatine*

toxins lay, safe in low dose, in their subtle supply.
Green with powder and spore, lingering lungfuls
of him inside me and finally freed from language.
Not a thorn or a slug between us. What an Eden
was there, what a greenhouse of atoms, each limb
fused to another, each tomato part of the answer –
a gift of life from my grandfather's second body
for the sun to ripen, for the gardeners' Mass
to be given, to be taken and broken open.

Notes

The sentencing of Ann Salt and Martha Moors ‘for stealing a shirt’ was reported in *The Manchester Guardian* on January 31, 1825 and is drawn from the *Guardian* digital archive record, ‘Seven Years for a Pound of Butter’.

Antony Gormley, *Another Place*, 1997. Cast iron 100 elements / 189 x 53 x 23 cm. Crosby Beach, Liverpool.

‘The Afterlife’ is both in memory of Roy Fisher and uses words from his poem of the same title in *Standard Midland* (Bloodaxe, 2010).

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