

Poems

1

Light the first light of evening, as in a room
In which we rest and, for small reason, think
The world imagined is the ultimate good.

This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous.
It is in that thought that we collect ourselves,
Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:

Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,
A light, a power, the miraculous influence.

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves.
We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,
A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous,

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
We say God and the imagination are one.
How high that highest candle lights the dark . . .

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

2

If the moon smiled, she would resemble you.
You leave the same impression
Of something beautiful, but annihilating.
Both of you are great light borrowers.
Her O-mouth grieves at the world; yours is unaffected,

And your first gift is making stone out of everything.
I wake to a mausoleum; you are here,
Ticking your fingers on the marble table, looking for
cigarettes,
Spiteful as a woman, but not so nervous,
And dying to say something unanswerable.

The moon, too, abases her subjects,
But in the daytime she is ridiculous.
Your dissatisfactions, on the other hand,
Arrive through the malislot with loving regularity,
White and blank, expansive as carbon monoxide.

No day is safe from news of you,
Walking about in Africa maybe, but thinking of me.

Prose

On Sunday, just after lunch, with the weather still warm, George and Nancy and Jim pulled up in front of her house on Friary Street. Jim held the back door of the car open for her while she got in. He had a white shirt on with the sleeves rolled up; she noticed the black hair on his arms and the whiteness of his skin. He was wearing hair oil; she thought that he had made a real effort in how he dressed. As they left the town, he spoke to her quietly about how the pub had been the previous night and how lucky he was that, even though his parents had made it over to him, they were still willing to work there when he wanted to go out.

George said that Curradoe might be too crowded and he thought they should go to Cush Gap instead and make their way down the cliff. This was where Ellis had come with Rose and her brothers and her parents when they were children, but she had not been there for years nor thought about it. As they drove through Blackwater village she almost pointed out the places she knew, such as Mrs Davis's pub where her father had gone in the evenings, or Jim O'Neill's shop. But she stopped herself. She did not want to sound like someone who had come back home after a long time away. And, she thought, this was something that she might never see again on a summer Sunday like this, but for the others it was nothing, just a decision George had made to go to a quieter place.

She was sure that if she began to talk about her memories of this place, they would notice the difference. Instead, she took in each building as they drove up the hill before the turn to Ballyconigar, remembering things that had happened, small outings to the village with Jack, or a day when their cousins the Doyles had come to visit. This made her silent and made her feel withdrawn from the ease and the quiet sense of comfort and cheer in the car as it turned left and made its way along the narrow sandy lane to Cush.

Once they had parked the car, George and Nancy walked ahead towards the cliff, leaving Jim and Ellis walking behind. Jim was carrying his own togs and towel as well as her bag with her swimmit and towel. When they came halfway down the lane, they stopped for a moment at Cullens' house, in front of which Jim's old teacher Mr Redmond was sitting wearing a straw hat. He was clearly on his holidays.

'This might be the only summer we'll get, sir,' Jim said.

'Best take full advantage of it so,' Mr Redmond replied. Ellis noticed that his speech was slurred.

As they moved on, Jim said in a low voice that Mr Redmond was the only teacher he had ever liked and it was a pity he had had the stroke.

'Where's his son?' Ellis asked.

'Ramon! He's studying, I'd say. That's what he usually does.'

When they came to the bottom of the lane and peered over the edge of the cliff, they saw that the sea below them was calm, almost smooth. The sand close to the water's edge was a dark yellow. There was a line of sea birds flying low over the waves, which seemed barely to swell before they broke quietly, almost noiselessly. There was a vague mist that masked the line between the horizon and the sky but otherwise the sky was a pure blue.