

Our Weird Regiment

SAMPLER

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Our Weird Regiment

Martyn Crucefix

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‘make music and work on it’ (*Phaedo*)

‘to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates’
(Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*)

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Heal Thyself

*This one believed
I maybe had the brains
another that I had
the right demeanour*

*but the Schools denied me
till it was too late
then reprieved me
with the offer of a place*

*that by then I knew
I could not refuse
(such anticipation
had struck such roots)*

*so I've no recall
of the moment of choice
before those appalling
digs in Eltham*

*where I had to stow
my dislocated skeleton
by the bed—crammed
one side of my head*

*with tendons muscles
and pharmacol
with biochem and
bright nets of nerves*

*everything spilling out
the other side
into failure—fallen
to wandering streets*

*to stealing Everyman's
Selected Wordsworth
I was John Stuart Mill
hoping my soul*

*might be saved I felt
love etiolating
the girl from home
now a girl from home*

*her kisses like drugs
at London Bridge
saying go your own way
at least not imposed*

*not merely allowed
and if you want to live
deliberately first
you slit the shroud*

1

Ida Belle

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Ping

I can talk of course
but mostly listen
and at lunchtime
snowflakes crashing down

onto London tarmac
though you'd hardly
describe this as snow
not even sleet

yet something more
fleecy than hailstones
making a noise
in the instant of falling

a kind of shuffling
one thing on another
as the waitress runs
to the plate-glass door

where she holds out
her mobile phone
for just a moment
and presses record

because it's there—
this strange rustle-
swoosh—worthwhile
this muttering noise

gets whatsappped
to her older sister
an exclamatory caption
pings on her phone

where it lies face down
on a cluttered desk
gazing for a moment
up at the clouds

where they drift over
Manchester's river
warily she stops
what she's at to listen

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How to Send a Plain Dispatch

Hemingway dodged snipers and shells
here in nineteen-thirty-nine

making his way up the Gran Via
to the Telefónica building

intent on filing his plain dispatches—
now lines of taxis shimmer here

each flaunting the official livery
of a blood-red stripe on a white ground

like ambulances—each one purrs
nothing can be simply what it declares

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Stepping Out

A breeze blows up as the pressure drops
and there's something wrong
with the steps ahead
 though a jaunty tub
 of scarlet geraniums
 wriggles its flowers to and fro

but start at the top where a few begin
 where the treads and risers
appear level and steady
 though if you set out
 from down below you face
 instead this lop-sided grin

this prospect of roughened stones
 tipped and tilting
beneath dressed slabs rising
 straight and apparently true
 (yet splashed with lichen
 as with sickness—yellow—white—

or is it no more than paint
 daubed and spilled
by some earlier child)—yet step
 if you dare and halfway down
 the right side's faulted
 if you set out from above

though if you started from below
 you'll catch a glimpse
of sealing cement dabbed here

and there on the left
where slant treads appear
affected by frost or summer rain

though perhaps every riser rakes
left as much as right
to make balance awkward
yet some fleeting grace
in having come so far (or
the breeze) makes you look back

with your feet at the summit
from whence you return
into the garden or if you began
above then on to where a tub
of scarlet geraniums
spills its petals on the ground

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Descent from White Hill

Come down at dusk
from the mountain passes
a mountain moon
my sole companion

glance over my shoulder
at the path taken
hardly a gleam of blue
under the skyline

a thread-bare blue
but you grasp my hand
on the last incline
lead me to your house

where there are children
quick to draw down
rose-bloom blinds
against the running briar

frugally we eat
then we each carry
uncertain candles
to the damp backyard

where whips of new growth
honeysuckle
stoop low to bless
the traveller's head