

Blind Summits

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ABOUT

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Blind Summits

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In memory of Julie Whitehead Redfern

20 September 1926–14 June 2026

This Late in Life

For a Dedication

Not resting on absent laurels, I tell you
I've picked two new leaves from the bay,
then rinsed them under a tap, I say,
and dropped both in our stew.

One Fine Day

It was one of those days when unusual heat
and light transforms the look of things
like sunstruck silence on big houses
down along the esplanade,
one of those days when the heart
is filled with forgotten, if ever known,
pasts come back to tell you who
or how you used to be...

when even the oldest of us all
can be coaxed out to see how the world appears,
that old familiar world transformed
by time and a cloudless sky,
how it appears to the slow steps and pauses
of mum taking in our afternoon river
or what there may be yet to learn
from the accents passing by...

You're remembering a girlhood on the North Sea's
beaches, piers, and promenades,
its cyclists, dog-walkers, couples with pushchairs,
picknickers under their clump of trees...
but don't tell what this long-drawn-out
life in the promise of one fine day
could teach you after your ninety-five years
grateful as you are, you say,
for sunlight and a breeze.

Their Back Catalogue

for Tony Crowley

1. Sightseers

In this city that's lost its world heritage status
(the Pier Head not the Taj Mahal)
an open-topped sightseer bus
has paused at traffic lights
near the crossroads of Booker and Mather Avenues.
Now back in my Liverpool home
after a four-hour drive up here
I'm taking a siesta with windows flung open,
can hear the pop and boom
of a red-coated tour guide's microphone.

In this city that's lost its world heritage status
he tells his cruise-ship holidaymakers
ashore on the Costa del Merseyside
about Menlove Avenue and Forthlin Road.
But even if it's only blue suburban skies above
and not true all you need is love
there's still no reason to denigrate us, like,
with our accents, cathedrals, our historic shame
as the bus turns left to get on with its theme
through this city that's lost its world heritage status
taking you down in a dream.

2. On Penny Lane

Taking a stroll down behind the old school
– where they'd pay a penny toll –
I'm thinking of that other claim

Mr Penny made his money out of slave ships
and, thinking on, remember how
the Council planned to change its name –
which caused a worldwide outcry
on account of the musical fame...
and that's why over this hump-back rail-bridge
I'm wondering what could Penny Lane mean
given those statues falling
and our want of shame.

3. On Booker Avenue

for Paul Francis

Never too late for a happy childhood!
Especially when a west wind
ruffles waveforms into whitecaps,
we're taken down by field walls
(red sandstone walls from different eras)
fringes of a storm blowing through;
we're going where its tidal river
opens up towards the Wirral
and in this weather, changeable,
these sunny spells between fierce showers,
we're tracing out the fates of ships –
the *Amakura*, our example,
torpedoed 1942
on its run to Demerara,
surviving in a coffee-shop name
here on Booker Avenue.

No, never too late for a happy childhood!
We're pondering the fates of young
people with their body-image
problems, self-harms, their spectre-like identities...

then pile in with our own, for ever,
thinking green-gold tins of syrup
which brought forth sweetness from the strong;
we're talking etymologies –
how *amakura* sounds like Japanese,
meaning 'sweet-store', its hold-cargoes
replenishments for Tate & Lyle
to take the bitterness off our coffees,
as Booker was a shipping line
that owned the *S.S. Amakura*,
even though we've no idea,
no, we can't imagine
how it got its name.

4. My Subject

for Ornella

After the long and winding road
to your naturalization event
(as if knowing their back catalogue
were what being British meant)
it's like an end-of-term prize-day –
you clutching your certificate.
Then, love, I ask you, what else could they play
while those gathered had to wait
to pledge allegiance to the Crown
and all her heirs, become subjects of the same
bird-limed monarchs on plinths outside...
Yes, with a portrait of the Queen
at mid-reign on a schoolroom easel,
what else could they play but 'Penny Lane'?

For my Mother

1. This Late in Life

There's always a need to get out of the house
this late in life and go straight to the ends
of the earth for some tentative steps, no matter
how cold, as wind blows the cobwebs away.
Here on the Wirral where Litherland friends
have long since retired, look, taking its course
towards blank expanses of still dock water
(which we would skirt round later that day)
here's a coaster come homing between terraces.
Yes, there's always a need for some nice café
after silent, desolate, esplanade spaces
(our opposite shore one thin stripe in the grey)
with noises of life, and your need to pray,
especially now it's too late to make amends.

2. At the Delifonseca

Though most of your eyesight's gone
through macular degeneration,
there's nowt wrong with your wit.
When I ask will we make a reservation
for your one hundredth birthday –
'I wouldn't if I were you,' you say,
'you might well have to cancel it.'

Your White Willow

This great tree brought down by a storm,
the one that took out infrastructure,
left stretches from our North Country
bereft of electricity,
how it fills the whole back garden!
Its remnant, shrivelled leafage
quivers in today's slight breeze
and now, once upright, tangled branches
claw across your patio.

But no, you don't remember much now
dozing at a picture window
where first light brought anxieties
and, thank the Lord, your tree fell cleanly,
laid itself out on the lawn
to spare those neighbour fences.
Surgeons booked-up till the New Year,
this tree's not going anywhere,
your blown-down *silex alba*.

Emerging from more murky twilight
of a short December day,
frequented now by seagulls, squirrels,
its dead boughs reaching, reaching,
reaching out towards the window,
how it keeps you company!