

Unrecorded Places In Between

My first girlfriend appeared goddess like,
Beaming and joyful in the nearby village,
I had landed excitedly on the palm of her hand,
A pull through for a rifle, an ordinary footballer,
A besotted romantic, she mused about me.
She never letting me get ahead of myself,
Any foolish notions sent packing effortlessly.

Your Grandfather stole a calf from us,
She whispered quietly into my ear,
Resting her face softly against mine,
Never said I, but yes yes, said she,
We can all forgive if we want to,
Her voice as true as the summer sun,
Open Wounds take time to heal.

Cycling furiously the four miles home,
Eager to check the facts, if only I could ask,
If my namesake was no ordinary Grandad,
A Sinn féin judge from 1918 until the Civil War
took his title, his dignity and everything else.

The monochrome photograph sits on my desk,
Sharing family DNA, our greyish white hair too,
Reminding me of who I am, who I should be,
Long before your letter turned up in the vaults
unexpectedly, at the National Library of all places,
Check it out; click here if you don't believe me.

(<https://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000617131>)

And so,
Once more,
Our conversation begins

Do tell me more about your Dad,
A plasterer, wandering from place to place,
Cork to Scotland through Warrenpoint,
All those unrecorded places in between,
Decorating churches until he settled down
in Kerry, a survivor of the Great Famine,
Tough and rough by all accounts,
You a much kinder elder statesman.

Now do tell me about Brendan,
A lockout baby from 1913,
A lookout child from the Troubles,
A trauma facing teenager,
who kept himself to himself,
what happened in that September of 25,
That day you took him home from school,
He wasn't ready then, for what lay ahead,
You knew him well, my caring loving Dad.

You buried your Dad in late 29,
Your Republican son lost by then,
All buried in the same graveyard,
A never ending, never spoken story,
Stocially you held on, holding family,
Our unborn generations together,
Only America and survival looming.

You knew her then, I ask quietly,
Mrs Pearse, no ordinary Mrs Pearse,
So she spoke with my Dad, he never said,
what was she like, what did she say,
Did she talk about Easter week at the GPO,
Did she mention Willie or her poet son Padraig,
Did she know about the Proclamation in advance,
Or the executions that were the inevitable endings.

There and then,
You stop me in my tracks,
Hold all those thoughts, you said,
Let me read you my letter, remember,
we were living on the edge,
On that wintry morning,
Desperation and Hope,
Arrived onto the page together,
In very unequal measure.

RB

Poem by
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