

EIDOLON

by Romola Parish

He came from Scotland
 where it's called driebh,
she from the land of tARTH and the Brenin Llwyd,
but in this in-between place
 I don't have a word or a myth
for a day when the fine mist is not fog, or murk
 or haze but, too heavy for the air,
 it banks up
behind the belt of trees, filters
through the fire-break to mingle
 with the river's breath,
and the sheep-bitten turf
pulls the damp over itself
and my skin
 is cauled with moisture.

And in the half-light
 a mink
slinks soundless under the belly of the cloud
 at the interface of earth and sky,
 pauses
 not quite close enough to touch,
turns its sharp face to mine,
 stares
with my father's penetrating gaze,
its pelt the colour of my mother's hair
 beaded with prisms casting
 pearls into grey

 then fades

 leaving musk wraithed in the chill
 and the formless whiteness
 and the bones of the trees
 leaning into the absence.

WHATEVER IS FOR EVER

By Diane Tang

*A blackbird or a robin will nest there,
Accustomed to them, thinking they will remain*
Edward Thomas, 'Fifty Faggots'

Yes, they will outlast the war, these fifty
bound bundles of thin branch and twig the poet
himself has lugged this hot spring day from copse
To field to stand close-packed against a hedge -
so dense as to seem a thicket. Enough
for several winter's fires, he thinks, though none
to warm him. And that too we know: he'll go
to war; he'll die; we understand. Yet still
we watch as he wipes his brow and walks out
of the poem into his own thinning future,
leaving us to creep with fancy, mouse and wren
through the strange new thicket and, like the birds
that will nest here come next spring, be content
that such a gift as this must be for ever.

DEER WALKING

by Stephanie van Driel

Once, with a mother's vision, I could hear
the squeak of cell division through the night air;
the humming of a tiny ribcage

wrapped in milky darkness; and
later, the crash and plunder of a teenage sulk landing,
a meteor in the porch. With no advance warning

silence thundered through these rooms. Fragments
of their smiles chased each other
like shrapnel,
lodging in all the crooked spaces.

Time heaped up against the doors,
blocked the chimney till it smoked, obscured the glass
thicket of blown fuses, kicked over the traces of corroding studs,
self-seeded
in forests of abandoned football boots.

Tonight, for the first time, outside
the rise and fall of my own breath,
I hear a nightingale on the Common.

Slipped, in my nightdress
I steal out and see a shadow
in the hazel scrub, standing motionless.

I know you. I remember.

Once, I saw you gaze helpless through deadwood

*as your fawn, pursued by dogs tore
screaming through a chaos of bluebells; and*

*later, felt you watch me gather up those little cloven hooves like sticks
in Marks and Spencer fleece and carry him away.*

Braver now, I cross the ripe belly of moss on tiptoe.
The doe follows; she presses her soft ear to my thigh,
and I can feel the earthlight flow through soles as thin
as deerskin.

Weightless, she sidesteps hawthorn hurdles,
guides me over fissures deep as oceans, past the boulders crouching
in the moonlight's shimmer.

I know you.

I rub her tufts of hair
in place of velvet nubs between my fingers, and stroke
the white curl beneath her chin. She unfurls her tongue
to lick the corners of her eyes,
and sighs.

Like me, she knows how the lightness of nothing
draws down the curtain of the night.