

C O N O R O C A L L A G H A N

Ring

It's funny
the way things go.

I go to speak at length
on the length of a lunar cycle

and bite my lip.
It's as if I think

those words for love
I love

are tied on the tip
of someone else's tongue

and think again.
I have learned.

I have learned to mosey
downtown in a hand-me-down suit

when it suits me
and the light shines gold

like the gold of apples
through the shutters of half-shut stores.

I have learned to sing dumb
halfway between

the song of a brass band
a handful of blocks behind me

and the harbour in its finery
until now whenever now comes.

Whenever it comes
to language and the heart

and not meaning to sound phoney
I am in the dark. I mean

I could hold and hold
on some corner

hoping for a start
and start hearing myself breathe

the silence of silent callers.
So tonight for one night only

this caller's pronouncing "moon"
as if the moon were a freckle

like the freckle on your wedding finger
and my mouth were full of quarters.

from *Loose Change*

I. THE PEACOCK

We've perfected the disappearing trick.
I'm thinking especially of that old lie
called sentiment and sentiment's rhetoric
that we, together or alone, no longer buy.
Remember reading Carver's "Feathers" to me,
the one about the meal, the peacock dancing?
When you were done I offered you a penny.
You shut your eyes and said exactly nothing.

II. THE HERON

Dead master. Old posturing taxidermist.
Forgive me when I can't help but hear
my granddad and his like being dismissed.
Or call it, if you prefer, a bookish night too far,
contemplating sonnet after well-made sonnet,
when I think "Stuff that... ignorant men!
They knew what they knew and acted on it,
as opposed to some folks I could mention."

V. THE BULL

I once hitched a lift in a pick-up
from a senator with a thing for voodoo,
and I once got legless in a china shop
with Lee Harvey Oswald's widow,
and I once left my mark on the divan
of twins who grew up in Daytona,
and I once got through to Bob Dylan
but omitted to push Button A.

X. THE SALMON

St Brigid's night and we lie in separate beds.
All about us the flood-level raises the stakes
above regret's loose change and our heads.
I know, even as I go through whatever it takes
and fuss over the blister on my thumb again,
you're swimming away from me in darkness
where the Castledown crosses into the Cleggan
and silver water is given to breaking its banks.

XX. THE HORSE

A spin in the roles we've saddled on each other:
the upholder of vision to see the abstract through
and the pleb with a bag of chips on his shoulder.
The last straw is an *assiette Anglaise*. I ask you
"How would the horseman know to pass by
if not by whoa-ing his nag to a standstill?"
We tour the landmarks of Roquebrun, badly,
stopping off only for Camels and petrol.

L. THE WOODCOCK

There are five sides to every story, I'm told.
So let me raise a glass and toast this much,
one last time. Let love come in from the cold,
even if love finds you in someone else's crush
or someone else in yours that's grown too long.
Let us greet the leaf, the blossom and the bole.
Let us praise, together, the harbingers of spring
in your step and your girlish way on the mobile.

C. THE STAG

Nineteen hundred and ninety-nine.
I test it between my teeth
when it drops again from the phone.
Take it from me, my sweet,
a high hill is a lonely place.
If only I had the exchange rate
I could begin to pay the price
of screwing my way out of a rut.

Rightly or Wrongly

I have spread my towel to dry on the bonnet,
and yawned through a tome on the Wars of the Roses.

I have forgiven myself my own trespasses,
and eaten sweet corn past its sell-by date.

I have wasted all June in pool-shoes and shades,
and taken my turn at skimming duty.

I have renamed us "The Escape Committee",
and bought the evening air for a song.

I have washed my hands of the day just gone.
I have made my bed, and I am lying on it.

Other Titles in This Series

“Creation Myth”

“In Your Room”

“Songbirds”

“The Bottom Bell”

“Winging It”

“The Land of the Midday Moon”

“Present Perfect”

“Children at Play”

“Furniture”

“Going Through Your Papers”

“Anymore”

“A Piece of My Mind”

“Square One”

“Unbecoming of You and Me”

“Post-Dated”

“We’ve Discovered a Great New Restaurant”

“Between Positions”

“Waiting at the Island”

“Evergreens”

“This Train Will Terminate Here”

“Volume”

“A Shot Glass”

“Freefall”

“Under Separate Cover”

“Touching Down”

“The Dawn Thing”

“Bluegrass Country”

“No New Messages”