

The Clockwork Gift

Also by Claire Crowther:

Stretch of Closures

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The Clockwork Gift

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for my grandchildren

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I

THE HEREBEFORE

PETRA GENETRIX
for Selima Hill

I won't replace lost wedding cutlery,
its broad straight limbs,
with new shallow spoons,
their writhing shoulderless handles—

Lines get broken.
All I see in museums
is the frozen watchfulness of a previous home.
Ancient knives found under Eden Walk are flints

polished in an age defined by how it ate.
There's no matching greenstone and dolomite
though I could still buy old patterns,
shell, feather, rat tail.

'Granny, did you throw away your silver?'
'The table of the moon is laid with it.'

LIVE GRENADE IN SACK OF POTATOES STORY

The schizoid boy who never takes his pills
and has been ordered not to visit any female
family member, here he comes, half-naked,
down to my basement. Later, a police dog bites
his scrotum. I buy chips and biscuits. Mutter
names. I take care of these grandchildren.
Like that unfed, sleepless child – the number
of games I thought up, but she's live, a grenade,
buried and ready to explode, dug up
decades after the war, lost in a sack
of potatoes. They come for my expertise.
It's worth their battering the door
to share my anger. *Nonna, oma, nain.*

ONCE TROUBLESOME

*'Let them call her a wicked old woman! she knew she was
no such thing.'* Vita Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent*

It isn't New Year yet so Happy What?
Till then, it's Boxing Day every morning.
Empty bags hang off the radiators.
Chilly: hot

cold

Cordelia position.

Did it mean
we didn't love each other
that morning he gave me up
though that same night he said let's marry?

My striped dress hung
along my body
bounced
boldened
bitmapped
my abdomen as I walked, a balloon
sinking back down
its own string
after the decision.

The baby would have had to sleep in a drawer.

Immortalists

(not you who refuse to believe improbable notions)
think:

the smallest cell refuses to die
in its everness.

Now I live in an attic
garden is the chewed melon skin of sky.
Old bins, old books. Death's hardly ethical
in the light of such continuity. Last week,
the CEO of a charity named in my will
wrote to suggest ways to retrieve what I've lost.

Look, Christmas photos
of others' other
children. After
Pocoyo, Juggling Balls.

OPEN PLAN

They took the walls away without warning.
The roof floated, a miraculous *over* of shelter.
We were caught out. We cooled quickly. A sty?

My hands made paws? My lover stamped in the open.
Who took the decision? Editorials argued
about iconoclasm. We'd had a tradition

of opening the inside but obscuring doors.
But doorlessness isn't just trailing ivy
over a letterbox or bricking the front

to look like the side. Our family walls were all sides.
The trick was to show passers-by a gleam of room.
One of our walls had had an exquisite *trompe l'oeil*

library. No stranger could find a way in
and no one knew how we had done it, which book
the idea came from. Every unwalled home

can't be called a ruin. I missed the rally.
Thousands met in a park—that seems so ironic.
Were they protesting about their gazebos?

My bed is a perfect copy of straw, comfortable.
I hold you as close as when we were walled in,
though nearer the pavement, though clearer to them.

MINE, THEN

for those grandmothers who parent AIDS orphans

We sat on the bench outside the clinic
and I explained that they might need medicine.

I said, "There is weather coming,
full of variety.

Wouldn't you like an umbrella
if it rains?" On the way home

it was as easy to make them laugh
as to find a vein.

I could see straight through that mousey light
to evening,

past houses pale
as my own finger,

across the pewter surface of salted road
edged by leafless trees.

The ground heaved
with sealed-in bluebells.

They worried I would be less upset
than when my own child died.

You need one person to be loved by
like a lightning flash needs dousing in a peach cloud.

XYLOTHEQUE

My husband mocks the ghost who hovers near me
on walks. A ghost wouldn't climb a stile
or skirt cows so widely. And why would she edge
round barely flooded fields? Leaky shoes?

Aren't ghosts violent, my husband suggests.
No, you need a body for that, to be
as well as mean and seem, though the ghost wears
blue jeans, sequinned boots and says

she was bullied for being beautiful
as a teenager and loved a mechanic
from Dollis Hill at twenty. The ghost noticed me
in the doctor's surgery. I held

a child who snuffled my hand like an animal.
Dying is being born. You imprint on the person
you see last. I remember her panic.
Receptionists corralled the waiting room.

Calling her up now seems like human-stealing.
My husband mocks: 'You saw a death. Why
exaggerate?' Maybe because, without ghosts,
we are a wooden library, books about wood

bound in wood with leaves for pages, words,
the seeds and nuts of ancient beech, birch, oak
and rowan. I look for her where
box trees curl like knots of neglected hair.