Ancestral Lines
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Ancestral Lines

Jeremy Hooker

Shearsman Books
SAMPLER
For my brother Tony
and our families past,
present and to come.
'Poems are like ghosts, climbing into one’s flesh, when it suits them.’
Andrew Jordan
Northover Road

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The sheer quick is a torrent
I glimpse but cannot see.

Blindly
I hold out my hand
and reach for the door.
Plums drop on the lawn.
Mating house sparrows fall
on the sunroom roof with a bump.

From the garden
the distant island appears
a blue hill, and far off
across the fields
Fawley Oil Refinery, a blue flame.

Almost blind, my father
sits among his paintings,
colour flowing from his hands.
I know the boys playing
on the grass and gravel track
under the tarmac road,
the red-faced angry young farmer,
cow pats and black and white cows.

I delight in the rough plot
where a new house stands –
a pile of bricks
in long grass, the blackberries
and sandy bank, where a lizard lives.
Each detail is distinct, present in place,
yet also a life dissolving with lives that gave life –
just here – and passing on, children and children’s children
reaching back, moving on.
One moment held still:
she called it
*Hamlet and the Gardener:*
my father with his spade,
hair springing up,
that smile of his, myself
in the role of poet, a young Olivier.

How typical
that she did not
assign herself a part,
as if she were not in the picture,
the one who sustained us all.
Young grass fills the ditch, 
a bramble reaches out. 
The hedge is touched with green. 
White flowers on blackthorn. 

Walking on the Common 
I listen for a stonechat on the gorse. 
Water brims the pond, where 
ponies stand at the edge. 

The stream is alive 
with sunlight and shadow. 
Poets fill my head with words. 

I sit on the bridge with a notebook 
learning to see.
It’s the sheer livingness
I love, and have no word for –
faces, voices, rivers of colour
that are the very walls.

They are not ghosts
that inhabit me
but living souls.
Moment before, 
moment after, each 
distinct, with a fullness 
that will not hold.

Some ghost appears, 
as if complete, 
a bloodless shade.

Each image shatters. 
Colour dissolves the walls. 
The sheer quick is a torrent 
I glimpse, but cannot hold.

I reach 
out my hand. 
I touch the door.