

SAMPLER

*Ancestral Lines*

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# Ancestral Lines

SAMPLER  
Jeremy Hooker

Shearsman Books

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*For my brother Tony  
and our families past,  
present and to come.*

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'Poems are like ghosts, climbing  
into one's flesh, when it suits them.'  
Andrew Jordan

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# Northover Road

1

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

Blindly

I hold out my hand  
and reach for the door.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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7

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.

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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.

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