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Domestic Cherry 3 poems

Relocation

The small gods of the geriatric hospital are lost;
they miss the soft shuffle of slippers feet
and the mumbles of confusion. They hunch
in the corners, not knowing how to ease
a last breath or soothe anxious muttering
for the loud men in hard hats who block
old wards with new walls and divert long
corridors into angles and dead ends.

They watch the machinery, the scaffolding,
bewildered by signs that talk of *lifestyle*
and *show apartment*. They filch glossy paper
and puzzle over *retirement in mind*.
They know Matron would scowl
at the dust-trapping draperies and can't see
where the sluice is hidden in the shiny white
cupboards. They retreat to the attics and wait;
time will bring them work to do.

Last Summer

Not just summer, but one of those perfect summers
that you might say is faulty memory.
Blue sky, wisps of white cloud,
some nights washed with enough rain
to keep the grass live and waving.
My knees were brown and scabbed; I called my bike Helen
and talked to her on long rides to visit the horses
on the hill and the kittens in the barn.
The hollow in Steward's Wood, where my climbing tree
overhung a grassy dip was for special days,
when I sat on the wide branch for hours,
peopled glades and paths with a kingdom,
saw stardust in the light-filter of leaves.
Secret, until that last time when I heard steps
breaking twigs on the path, a scrape of something heavy.
My legs stilled from their swinging, pulled up
into the canopy's shelter, my breath stuttered
and slowed as I tried to be silent.
A man followed the sound into my place,
dragging a lumpy bag like dad's army kitbag
I sometimes climbed inside. I saw him in spaces
between green, like the flick-books I made
of horses running. He paced around the hollow,
long grass bending and silvering in his wake.
He stooped and cut down, rolled the ground back
like when I saw Aunty Silvia roll down her stockings.
He dug and huffed and muttered, pushed the bag
into the hole, covered it and stamped unrolled ground
into nothing-happened-here. He stretched his back
and I saw his face, held my breath while he left.

Last year I saw his face in the newspaper.
Rows of photos; young women in grainy monotone,
hairstyles stuck in my childhood.
I could feel bark under my hands,
 smell ripe grasses,
 freshly turned earth.

Vagrant

The Vagrant Emperor has left the Silk Road,
forsaken burning sands and fiery sunsets,
turned away from his rocky citadels.

He slips quietly on to our lands, diffident
in a brown cloak, hiding his tattered satins,
resting by a brackish pool to cool his feet.

He's shy in company, flits away from the curious
to seek lonely places. He'll tolerate no courtiers,
no ceremony; neglectful of riches, he only treasures
his empire of the air, of shaded banks, of dark waters.