

THE BIRD IN THE GARDEN

Over two weeks
Since New Year's Eve
And the word the surgeon said
Won't leave. My thoughts try
To break through the ice of it.

I carry a bit of death for now -
Until it's removed. January
And a dunnock bird sits
In the swaying round feeder,
Unbothered by the cold breeze
Of a grave, grey winter, He pecks
At the hard, dry pool of seed.
I smile at the beauty of him.
He warms my emotions.
I love the positivity

In his need to survive.

THE WORLD IS WIDER THIS NIGHT

I get into bed, having to take my time.
My first old man's walk to the toilet,
Since I was un-tubed by the young nurse, apart
From the wound drain in my aching side.
In pain, I move my body to find some comfort.

The lights are out and Barry and Martin,
My fellow patients, are both now sleeping.
The world is wider this night, my gathering
Thoughts are as deep as those long moments
When one recalls a time of early grief.

This building of illnesses and slow
And quick cures, of good and bad news,
Never closes. It confirms, each day and night,
We humans are, indeed, mortal: yet power
And greed still add to mankind's suffering.

Beyond the covered windows of Room 12,
Beyond the car-park and the road to Mumbles,
No doubt, the moonlight is soothing the sea
Of Swansea Bay. Morning seems far away,
Like the good health all we bedded wish

For once dawn unfolds the light of a new day.
The world is wider this night and my thoughts
Drag through the darkness of eternity.
I close my watered eyes, I think of those I love,
And I lie as though my body is a prayer.

WOMEN'S WARD

Midnight. I pass the women's ward,
As I struggle, so slow, to the men's room.
I momentarily think of their possible
Pains, maybe the loss of the features
Of their womanhood, the scars they
Will own for the rest of their lives.

The moon has always tracked their days,
Decided their mothering blood.
The ages enslaved them to kitchen
And bed, denied them the schooling seeds,
Denied them the flourishing voices
Of men. I pass their ward again.

'The eternal note of sadness'
Is always with us, it seems, unsettling
Our lives and all that we are as humans.
Sleep well, sisters, caught by this thing
Called cancer, and may your journeys
Be one to a safe and long future of wellness.

Note: 'The eternal note of sadness', a line from Matthew Arnold's poem
Dover Beach.

WORDS

(for Shane)

There are words far too heavy
For human beings to handle,
Their weight too much for mortal
Beings. Other words, like hope and love,
Find them too much of a burden.

There are words far too heavy.
They quickly anchor one down
To a graveyard silence, crush
The moments of normality:
We try to avoid them like grief.

Ultimately, all words seem to fail.
They're mere shadows of the canyon-
Deep thoughts and the emotions
That will visit us all in this life, that lodge
In the fear-made caves of the mind.

ONE MAN'S NOTEBOOK

Four weeks since my surgery.
What deep songs can I pull up
From the well of my experience
Of this thing called cancer?

I check my scar, healing to a crisp
Dryness. Confined to my home
For now, unable to lift heavy things,
Restricted physically, I feel like a man

Stood at a crossroad with a number
Of signposts. Will I ever be the same
Again, after tasting a droplet of death?
Words have been the religion of my life,

The worship of their weights and sounds.
My mind pulls up emotions from the bright
Bottom of the strangest of months.
The splashes of inspiration will become

Phrases, lines, stanzas, and then poems,
One man's notebook trying to record
The imagined and challenging road
To a place I'm told is full recovery.

ANCIENT CHURCH, WEST WALES

It is the sheer craftsmanship
Of the building that impresses,
More than the fact it is a place
Of God. The careful placing
Of each stone, over years and years,
The slow labour of pride and focused
Work, like a Welsh-language poet
Shaping lines of cyghanedd.
This is a work of art, an everlasting
Prayer below the cloudless sky.

Outside, I sit on a dry-stone wall,
As other visitors pass, accompanied
By their shadows, some taking
Photos. The afternoon sun eases
A half-hearted breeze, the warmth
Like a blessing across each moment.

I look towards a lone distant tree.
Those that need and have their faith,
Will find a comfort here. For me, four
Months on from my open surgery
And still in post-cancer aftercare,
I'm happy to worship the living air.

Note: Cyghanedd means harmony; and is an intricate system of alliteration and internal rhyme in Welsh-language poetry.