



HOMECOMING

by Desmond O'Grady

The familiar pull of the slow train
trundling after a sinking sun on shadowed fields.
White light splicing the broad span of the sky.
Evening deepens grass, the breeze,
like purple smoke, ruffles its surface.
Straight into herring-dark skies the great cathedral spire
is sheer Gothic; slender and singular,
grey as the slate at school when a child looking up -
a bottle of raspberry in one hand, a brown bag of biscuits in t'other -
Feathereye Mykie my uncle tole me a man
shot down a hawk dead from the cross
with a telescope fixed to his rifle.

Pulling home now into the station. Cunneen waving
a goatskin of wine from the Spain he has never seen
like an acolyte swinging a thurible.
My father, behind him, as ever in clerical grey,
white hair shining, his hand raised,
preaching away to the Poet Ryan.
And after a drink at the White House - out home.

The house in bedlam. He's here says my father.
Sober? my mother. She's looking me over.
Bring out the bottle. Pull round the fire.
Talk of the journey, living abroad:
Paris and London, Rome and New York.
What is it like in an airplane? my sister.
Glad you could make it - my brother.
Everything here the same tuppence ha'penny - the neighbours;
just as you left it; the same old roast chestnut.
After the songs, the one for the road,
the last caller gone - up to my room.

As I used find it home for the Christmas from school.
The great brass bed. The box still under it full
of old prayerbooks, assorted mementos,
the untouched bundle of letters mottled with mould.

Now it's a house of doorways and walls
and no laughter. A place for two old people
who speak to each other but rarely. And that only
when children return. Old people mumbling
low in the night of change and of ageing
when they think you are asleep and not listening -
and we wide awake in the dark,
as when we were children.