

12 Holly Grove

By Lorraine Carey

Granddad John had silk-like hair
white as a dove, hands the size of shovels
and always said *thank you for thanking me*.

Sturdy as an oak, tortoiseshell frames
and striped braces ensured he stood out
like his border collie with three names.

His aviary's canaries trilled our cue to leave
shortly after tea, competing with each other
for a handful of seed or an apple quarter

as dusk put us into our coats, for the dander back
to Cedar's Avenue. I've never lived in a place
with more beautiful names even as acrid

smog coated my tongue and factories pumped grime
bestowing a skyline full of industrial chimney pots
as far as my eye could see.

Clenched in my hand, a fifty pence piece
when Sundays were ice cream van jingles:
pipe smoke and birdsong from a kettle of

swallows. Their scythed wings and forked tails
told of Saharan adventures over dessert sands
and the meander of jet stream winds.

Their acrobatics stayed with me,
a transient magic bordered by
the boundaries of the creosote fence

within the Coundon suburb
and my Granddad's gentle ways
soft as the summer breeze ruffling the hibiscus.

No Goodbye

By Lorraine Carey

You slipped away one winter's dawn
as frost yields to the warmth of the sun.
I never got the chance to say cheerio:
tell you I'd miss our time in the steam filled scullery

licking the creamy spoon between bakes,
from fruit cake creations gifted to others,
waiting on the Tupperware basin of scraps to
take to Rose for her hens just a minute's walk away;

or collecting eggs with you in hen houses dark and warm,
the melodious clucking and pungent straw scent,
a perfect scaffold for memory, gathering berries
for jam and wishing the swallows would build elsewhere

when you hosed down their nests each May,
each stubborn as the other. Your way Gran
was without a fuss, always last in the queue,
as you left in your sleep one December morning
flecked with diamanté frost, sparkly and enchanting as you.

Sunday Walks with my Father

By Lorraine Carey

After Mass each week my father insisted
I accompany him on these three mile treks.
Prayers to Thor for an impromptu appearance
went unanswered as I feigned devotion

with each rosary bead twist, Jesus dangling
between seats with the swing of a hypnotist's watch.
At the beach's car park my sister smirked,
waved her pity with zeal from the back seat window.

One last appeal proved futile, as the Volvo
disappeared around those treacherous bends
laden with a blaze of gorse. Candy striped spiders scuttled
across the road, dodged splodges of melting tar,

stick-scored with my initials. I found fox holes
and a beetle whose treacle-black shell
shone like a lustrous onyx, while wheatears,
finches and pipits flirted over heather and broom.

I could differentiate between swallow and swift,
recalled the latter sleep on scythe-like wings,
heard skylark and curlew melodies.
Their numbers dwindling like father's memories

of these three mile treks, a hazy peregrine falcon
thrill, a ghostly hover over hillock and spruce.