

MAURICE WHELAN

She Was Not Like Anyone

She was not like anyone else I knew in those parts.
She always surprised me and it wasn't just her broad
Welcoming smile, her wondrous eyes almost popping
Out of her head and the genuine joy of her welcome.

It was, and I'm only having a stab here,
It was when we sat, always at the kitchen table, and talked
And drank tea or whiskey and lapsed into silence and out
Of silence things got said. And the whole world—the room,
The house, the garden, the trees beyond, a thrush, a blackbird calling,
A passing car, a tractor revving, a dog barking in the distance
—the whole world and everything in it started up anew.

She'd often say it was the poems I'd written and read to her
That took her far away. I'd say it was her way of listening that
Made me pass through places never seen and to ground I had
Never walked upon.

Let me have a second stab.
I was never the same when we bade goodbye. When I left her house
I'd be a changed man, without knowing it at the time
Or indeed needing to know it. That would come on later.

Pardon. Your patience please. A third stab.
She was a great friend of my mother. She told me—I knew you
As an infant in the pram—she herself then being a young mother.
I only really came to know her sixty years later.
Or, is it that we have always known each other?
What is not a question is we always will.

Sometimes I put aside the printed word and spoke the poem
By heart as well as from the heart, and strangely—this, in my life
Has only happened with a few—strangely, I felt every syllable, every
Part of the poem's creation, every sight and sound, every comma
Erased and replaced, was known to her, as if, somehow, she had been
Present by my side through the long making.
Now explain that to me!

She made it to one hundred and one. A steady touch and reading the winds
Steered her life's course between *lacrimae rerum* and *Deo gratias*.
She lived all her life in the house she was born in and seldom travelled
Outside Ireland. But she knew the world. With a sideward glance or a
closing
Of the eyes she saw things beyond the edge of the wide, wild universe.

Some have spirits of rare quality. Like the threads that anchor
Spiders' webs as the sun rises, glimpsed but briefly and only
From a certain angle, the finely-woven fabric of their soul shimmers,
For the eyes, for the eyes that catch and keep such treasure.

(cont)

A telephone call from Kilmoroney to Chatswood, from County Laois,
Ireland

To Sydney, Australia would return the two of us to the kitchen table.
Eternity is closer than we sometimes think. Time place distance dissolve,
Disappear. That which gifted us a life to live receives it back again.

May was one of those people—we all need to know a few to live
A life and justly call it privileged—to whom we can say, you live in me,
I in you, love and friendship has made us one. Come to think of it now,
She was not like anyone else that I have known in any parts.