

THE PAPER MEN

*In memory these woods will be more green,
greener still than the impossible green
of lemon noon,
greener than tall psalms of cathedral breeze
tickling the bright leaves, playing the trees,
greener than the elusive tune
of birds in branches
fed by the bursting season.*

*The moss will be more luminous in my thoughts
than it was, then, against the faun earth.
The beech pillars will be the insoluble colour
of Elysium. Ferns will be Gods, brambles sacred.
Wood sorrel will be nectar on my tongue.*

*In recollection, this May afternoon will hum implausibly
with dappled shade and improbable luminescence.
The silence of the clouds will be Midas gold.*

*After a morning of things lost,
after the pale blue movement of nurses
on the squeaky beige floor.
After sunlight, forced through closed glass,
harsh as an interrogation beam,
insistent in finding reality, even in sleep,
merciless in its waking claim to the lost things:
speech, memory, dignity, movement,
and the house keys which you had with you when
you were first admitted.*

*There are six of you, paper men
stacked three on each side, each one
dry and white as a clipboard.*

*One speaks in spectral confusion
issuing instructions to those around the waiting bed
a vacant plaque of control and intellect,
encased in scrolls of waxy reason.*

*One sleeps, his bloodless breath flaking
in a confetti of vapour and rattle. Hands folded
like origami, or the membrane of an ending –
tapering, returning of paper to wood,
wood to earth. Dreaming of Fourdrinier.*

*One sits against pillows, drinking from a toddler cup,
a withered calligraphy of hope.
Two more are pages turned to the waiting wall.*

*And you lie long on the bed wrapped delicately in tissue-thin
awareness. Recognition sere but apparent by
the straitened pebbles of nonsense in your mouth,
macerating words, meaning pushing from your throat*

*towards me, unravelled, unsayable thought. Movement, speech,
the accomplished marks that flowed from your hands to your sketchbook,
the Ode of Remembrance spoken on Armistice Day in sonorous tones;
all mashed, lines and sentences compressed into a wafer
of insubstantial pulp.*

*A thin tree outside the window shivers in the sunny stillness
of its outdoor box. A flower in a vase wilts on the sill.
A fibrous cardboard bedpan sits on the chair beside you,
just below the pictures arranged to remind you of
life before these parchment murmurs,
these vellum, antiseptic footsteps,
these cellulose walls.*

*I take your papier-mache words,
carry them like dried glue in my red bag
down hospital corridors, into the lift,
through automatic doors into the sun.*

*Across the car park and away between the hills.
My throat is knotty heartwood, dry as an epoch,
sapwood juices my eyes, swimming
with shaded beech and bluebells and the Chiltern
stories, Hedge and Glory, Ash Mill,
Marsh Green, green, a possible green printed on the road,
an emerald pulse towards Whiteleaf Hill.
I emerge from the haze of echoed
leaf pattern on the soft earth trail
to breathe the light of Aylesbury Vale.*

*I fling the pellets of your words
into an unblemished, hearing sky
and with the quietness of paper birds
they form in memory to fly.*