

Poems of (Extra)Ordinary Life for Peggy

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(1) Something Understood

Upstairs, on Radio 4, that word 'noetic'
propels me to the time I first read William James.
Downstairs, the scent of stocks my cousin sent
transports me. Yes, the world is very good.
Outside, I taste the rain-washed garden's sharpness,
the year's first raspberries, inimitably red.
Indoors again, espy a treasured photo
of potted snowdrops, hyacinth, daffodils,
azalea, bespeaking nurture, welcome –
it's Peggy's porch, and I remember years
of reassuring cards and timely messages.
Inside, a deepening sense of gratitude.

(2) Blackberry Picking

Blackberry picking, I join generations
of blackberrying women. Nothing needs
concentration like picking berries and not
being pricked, but my mind blurs with millennia.

No need to pay entry to pristinely preserved
dwellings, to ponder the pitchers and platters
in kitchens with hearths and no taps. No need
to wander museums or re-enact battles.

Gathering berries I am with women,
future and past – frugal and fanciful,
opportunistic, picking and thinking
ahead and behind.

(3) For Peggy ten years ago on her 70th birthday

The day that you were born the Battle ceased,
But 1940s fortitude remained
To see you through as challenges increased.

Your humour, love and loyalty sustained
So many, many friends who came to you
For wisdom, hospitality and grace
And memorable conversations too –
The generosity of Northmoor Place.

In far-flung countries memories abound
Of warmth and welcome, wit and whimsy here.
The talent and integrity they found
Inspire so many scholars far and near
Who, once in Oxford, came to Northmoor Place
And glimpsed the beauty of Lord Buddha's face.

(4) Foxgloves

The foxglove plants are £4.99.
How do you price a foxglove? By the back door mine
are random, self-sown, unremarkable, apart
from every scalloped bell hiding a work of art.

(5) The Bush

The bush?

Sudden, red, amber, gold,
Blazing and unconsumed.

The ground?

Like other ground,
Transfigured and
Forgiving, springing green.

My shoes?

I keep them on;
The grass is damp,
Someone might see,
And broom is broom.

(6) Cement Works

For the cement works to look
almost beautiful
takes sunlight after rain,
whipped cloud and windy sky,
the tracery of interlacing branches,
a darting bird,
my heart springing with gladness
on a fleeting train.

(7) Because

Why did I pick them up?
Their glossiness, brownness,
hardness, roundness
reminders of childhood
scrabbling in dewy leaves,
then making dolls house stools,
tables and chairs
from conkers, pins and wools.

I picked them up
because of this week's news:
all over Europe
horse chestnut trees
in terminal decline.

I hold their newness,
wholeness, smoothness,
with gladness
while I can.

(8) Pond

Two or three feet across is enough
and two feet deep
with a plastic lining to hold water.
Edge with agreeably rounded stones.
Add aquatic plants and water snails.
Wait.

Winter will harden the surface, dust it with snow.
In Spring it will seethe
with frenetic frogs.
It will green over with duckweed,
be kingcup-golden,
forget-me-not-blue.

It will be blessed with spawn.
Tadpoles will swim free, stirring the water.
You may see a newt.
Pigeons will drink.

Gold-centred, white petalled,
pristine, poised,
perfection hides under floating leaves.

Remember Monet,
think Buddha.
See.
Be.