

AND AGAIN

By Anne Tannam

A long, grey, endless beach, grey overhead
grey beneath feet and in the distance
just out of range, the wind-thrown voices of others.

Time to begin again.

When the tide retreats a little, hunker down
with tools laid out, bucket, spade and coarse grained sand
shells and stones to decorate.

Castle upon castle the beach fills up, monuments to hours
spent crouching. Avenues of shell decked streets
invite the sun to part the clouds and briefly, as the grey divides
and light escapes across the sand, a city of fleck and gold
appears, slivers of silver and dazzling white
shivers of colour reflecting the light.

The waters, lapping their applause, move further back
to grant the vision scope and space.

A moment please, to let the eyes drink in the scene
to let the memory sink and settle, before the waters
change their mind and edge towards the falling down.

Time to let go again.

Gather up the well-worn tools and shake the sand

from knees and hands, stretching those aching muscles.
The empty-handed wind dies down and the others
drift along the beach, moving silently out of view.
No one turns to watch the tide perform its lonely duty.

A long, grey endless beach, grey overhead
grey beneath feet and nothing to fear
but salt and rain and pillars and pillars of sand.

BETWEEN US

There was just fifteen months between us
every early memory holds his imprint.
The smell of his skin I took as my own.

A snapshot

We are four and five in a long back garden
that holds our whole universe.
We crouch, bony knees touching
and build our very first spider house.

There was only an inch between us
but that gave him the edge and the right
to be first at everything.

A memory

Mammy brings me up to his classroom
I root around the desk for a souvenir
to bring home from this strange land.

The tide has brought him far from home
and I'm waiting on the shore for a wave to pull me in.

There was only the landing between us
and when he was scared
we'd whisper across the night-time divide.

A confession

Lying in the dark listening to his voice
that lacked its daytime authority
I relished my power and stretched
a full inch taller in the bed,
sometimes pretending to be asleep
just to hear his plea.

There was more than a foot between us
and from that distance
his words were muffled and hard to follow.

An observation

During adolescence I used his progress
as a yardstick for what success meant
the bulk of his six-foot frame
obscured my field of vision
I choose only to see pint-sized dreams.

In early adulthood
there was a continent between us
and I stretched my unused wings

discovered I could fly

A one-sided conversation

As I swooped and soared a voice inside me said
'Good, but not good enough, bold but not bold enough'.
It sounded just like his voice
and I did not question its credentials.

When he returned our different lives lay between us
and we discovered a shared beginning
does not ensure a life-long bond.

A realisation

It's like I'm visiting a familiar country
but all the old places have been pulled down
the map I've brought is obsolete
and I feel heavy with a peculiar sadness.

Now there's only the table between us
and we nurse our drinks
keeping an eye on the time.

A question

I wonder which one of us is on that far distant shore
and if the tide can bring us back to that time
when we were the small ones
a self contained unit in a world of our own?

TIME OVER

'Yes I'm awake.'

That's the signal.

Leave the fear behind
race across the landing
to my room

tuck yourself into
the warm bed

one small body
two small bodies
armed against the darkness
and dreams of tickling men.

THE WORLD REDUCED TO SOUND

Lying in my single bed
a childhood illness for company
the world reduced to sound.

Behind my eyes the darkness echoed
inside my chest uneven notes
rattled and wheezed
beyond my room a floorboard creaked
a muffled cough across the landing
grew faint and faded away.

My hot ear pressed against the pillow
tuned into the gallop of tiny hooves
then blessed sleepy silence.

In the morning
steady, maternal footsteps
sang on the stairs.

I loved that song.

DOWN HILL FAST

A dog with a bone
my mind takes a phrase
attaches it to images of you
during those final days

I am struck again
by the power of the mind
to go where it needs to go
to write what needs to be written
over and over and over again

until the story of your death
becomes a well-trodden path
achingly familiar
through fine powdered snow.

Bio:

Bred, buttered and living in Dublin, Anne's first book of poetry 'Take This Life', was published by 6tHouse in 2011. Her work has also appeared or is forthcoming in Poetry Ireland Review, The Moth, The Poetry Bus, Prairie Schooner, The Burning Bush, Skylight47, Literature Today and several anthologies. A spoken word artist, Anne has performed her work at Electric Picnic, Cúirt and other festivals around Ireland and is co-founder of the Dublin Writers' Forum.