

The Leaves Outside Are

dying.

Cut off from the sap that fed them.

Glowing with bronzed sugar in a final blaze of glory,
glorious gold, red, orange flutter, spin, drift to the damp earth.

They were tight buds,

round hazel,

sharp beech,

fat sticky chestnut.

I watched their bright unfurling,

in the quiet time of birdsong, those clear blue skies.

Through heatwaves their green was my shade.

Now their tree

hunkers down as chill creeps in,

storm rips limbs bare.

Roots

making ready

for the next life.

Rebecca Harrington

I Don't Know When

the rumbles and trembles started coursing,
sap through my veins,
when the russet blood-rust leaves took on
a yellow hue.

But when the time came
it came.
An onslaught.
An axe cleaved down through the trunk.

Half fell away.
The years of retreat, retirement –
reduced now to a rotted heap of ash and fading embers.

But the other half sprang up.

In the breath of a week,
leaf clouds, foliage, new branches.
The boughs alive with chirruping, squirreling, rummaging,
rebel flowers of different colours and shapes –
no care they were supposed to be growing from the same tree.

My birds sing happy songs now,
of me.

But still, sometimes
I think of sending
my birds in your pursuit.

Anon.

Late Leaves

The leaves outside are sodden and form a well-trodden carpet of brown and yellow hues - knobbed with sticks and conkers - stuck like patchwork to the muddy ground.

My fingers and toes are nipped by the bite of winter and seasonal frost - it's cold outside and in - I am cold and numb within – I'm on my way to meet his family.

Yesterday morning, I saw him walk away, leaving the warmth of my bed and strolling cockily down the leafy street. Through the window, I watched him step into a car - a car that would later split in two, throwing the contents out like a furious tombola with an undetected crack – a ticking timebomb.

It was dark that afternoon when a stranger knocked on my door and took me to A&E. Outside, I could see my breath entwined with the smoke of my cigarette as I waited to be called. Inside; the nurse's face was cool, and the bodies were cold.

Later I stumbled back through the hospital grounds; the evening leaves crunching underfoot. I pulled up my collar and brushed aside my icy tears.

Now I'm in the leafy suburbs - walking across this autumnal carpet of brown and yellowing hues – here to share these difficult tidings with estranged relations - like a sorrowful magpie.

Susanna Roland

When I Became an Expensive Truffle in a Box

surrounded by others like me but not the same,
flavoured, scented,
deliciously decadent.
Shaped into a perfect bite, edges softened,
carefully coated in cocoa powder,
I nestled into the paper.
I asked the others what was next,
Why were we there? What were we waiting for?
I remembered being born of seeds and pods and cream and cane,
I remembered the belts and the lights and the fingers that shaped and moulded me.
I remembered that I had been chosen,
not discarded,
that not all had made it.
I saw that those alongside me had their own enhancements and perfections,
all waiting, individual but alike,
to be selected, touched, held, tasted, melted, swallowed.

Dominique Jethwa

when I became the iron

molten core life magnet
spinning in my spherical shape
under rocks and bones and fossils
my tongue was forged a metal weapon

when I became the iron
I left my body in thick red sweat
a spill of melted repercussions
that dripped so much a beam of creation
where all the planets float

when I became the iron
the iron I take a tablet for
I rolled and rolled and rolled
the circle of my belly cored
demolishing walls already fragile

when I became the iron
I smelt my fumes leaking from my puddle
a sweaty pour of addiction
of sleeping rough and needing something
to warm me up

when I became the iron
I split into the shrapnel of the earth
sifted the cast out of me
emptied my belly to build a bulletproof home
and measured the breaths of my stock.

Hayley Frances

I Remember

being scared of people dying.

Hiding away in the bottom of the car in the darkness as we drove past the crematorium to London.

The black Bakelite phone in the dining room that always rang when there was a death.

My Father crying after his father died.

The policeman knocking on the door of our holiday bungalow to let us know that grandma had died.

Coming home on a bright sunny day to find the world had changed and my uncle had died that afternoon.

Leaves

The leaves are suffocating in the summer.

They suck the light and life from the house and garden, stop the plants from growing.

I prefer

the spring, when the leaves are in bud, bulbs are coming up and the sun comes to every part of the garden.

The autumn when the leaves are coming down. Raking and raking leaves from the garden for hours and going to bed exhausted to sleep a long dreamless sleep.

The winter when the leaves have gone. I enjoy the bare bones of the trees against the winter sky. I take comfort from the lights and fires in the house, a prequel to Christmas.

I Am

Resilient, still functioning despite marriage break up, five bereavements, Covid, the loss of my family home and life.

Reflective of the past and those I have lost.

Trying not to be overcome by negativity.

Trying to meditate.

Trying to stay healthy and fit.

Small Kindnesses To Myself

A really aromatic cup of coffee, a piece of chocolate. Eating and drinking sparingly so I sleep well. Listening to a sleep story when I wake in the night. Having a book to read and avoiding social media. Not listening to the news.

Gratitude for my health, a sunny day and for feeling calm. Meeting a friend and running, stretching and yoga. Keeping myself busy so my family don't have to worry about me.

You Do Not Have To

Be on Facebook/WhatsApp.

Post selfies.

Go to the hairdressers.

Go on holiday.

Have a perfect home.

Meanwhile, you remain you, whatever.

All you have to do is be yourself.

Home To Me Is

Sanctuary, light, comfort, food, calmness, peace, garden, cats, sofa, front door and the relief when you put the key in the lock.

A place where I used to live and brought up my children.

I Am Jumping Towards

Life not dark.

Gardens and growing.

Health and running.

Calmness and contentment.

Positivity and pleasing myself.

Peace.

I Believe In

Not overthinking and catastrophising.

Positive thoughts and breathing.

The power of nature.

The will to live.

Marian De Vries

I remember

The blue-grey leg was
exposed by the fall of the cover
(was it a blanket?)

The small bathroom into a narrow hall,
a tight corner to turn.
Of course something would slip.

Their hands full of slanting stretcher
half through the doorway,
the leg revealed itself,
knee stiffly upwards.
(How many hours folded under his body?)

Cold, shaky, silent together across the room,
I alone witnessed the limb.
Our father's good eye wasn't looking.

The undertaker glanced across,
covered the dead flesh one-handed.
Deft.
Soon, on the hall floor,
a shiny black bag zipped shut
containing my brother's dead awkwardness.

I am

Stopped in my track by a stubbed toe.
Flung flat on a grey road.
Strapped, conveyed, x-rayed, diagnosed.
Broken.

Taking time.
Healing.

Rebecca Harrington

When I became a

When I became a river

I used my energy and momentum to follow paths in front of me.

Sometimes they were there to flow down

Others, I opened those doors, or saw the opportunities to take.

Taking things in my flow as I moved along.

I learnt that some places take me to quiet places, stillness, ponds, reflections.

Others I have felt like raging waterfalls, infrequent as control and stability have been my strengths, but as of late leaning into the beauty of these torrentials, too.

I sustain others and contribute like a river, I connect mainly people and places, the flow embodies my skill at communication too.

My tank runs low like droughts occasionally

other times I feel overflowing with love, interaction and connectedness.

I like to think I can appear steady and calm outwardly when really the current underneath is churning.

Sometimes there are deep chasms or obstacles within me

Even my flow has not been able to shift.

Sarah Davey