

Outside the Laddie Shop

one journey : thirty poems

Di Sylvester

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London, 27 October 2023

at The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

We roam the many-acred grounds
and breathe the greens:

the luxuriant green of well-watered lawns
—thick and willing,

the fluted green of glass-house palms
—bright-striped in the seeping sun,

the humectant green of a fractal cactus
—prickled, with rosaline edges,

the giant, waterlily green of *Victoria boliviana*
—pinked rims upturned,

the primal green of a ginkgo tree—an alchemy,
turning Lilliputian hand-fans into gold.

We wonder at these commonplaces,
at the splendidness of our small lives.

Newcastle, 14 November 2023

at Grey's Monument

He stands tall yet strangely small
atop his towering column.

From here, I can barely make him out
—his balding head, his raffish curls.

I guess, up there, it's blowy.
I read the sign:

*Charles Earl Grey K.G. constant advocate
for peace, fearless champion of civil liberty*

*under whose guidance parliamentary reform
was triumphantly achieved in the year 1832.*

He surveys the sandstone streetscape;
admires, I assume, its four-storeyed solidity.

He must see the rows of windowpanes,
reflecting, as they do, the cloudless light.

Does he notice the *For Lease* signs behind them?
The namesake bistro must catch his eye,

The Charles Grey: Food, Wine & Beer of Great Distinction.
Does he realise it's permanently closed?

Maybe he can see the HSBC cash machines
offering withdrawals.

Maybe too, Doc Martens
offering yellow-welted boots.

But how could he foresee the fully franchised
still waiting to matter

in hoodies and trainers,
swiping at smartphones

two centuries beyond
and forty metres below?

North West Highlands, 25 November 2023

in The Geopark

North of Ullapool
the world changes.

The land lies wide
and bears the air faultlessly.

The rocks lie slant.
Here, the pinks and blacks

that are Lewisian gneiss
have been cut through to make way

so that we see into its folded soul,
into its three billion years.

I reach out and touch.
The rock is cool and steady.

Yellow grasses shiver in the wind.
Heathers cling like frightened

children, gathering themselves
against the world.

Below, a loch smiles bright-blue
back into the sky.

Maybe a dozen birch float
on a tiny island.

Their skinny limbs glaze white.
Their thinning leaves drip claret.

They huddle, reflectively.
Can they see themselves in the water?

Can they see anything at all?
O their courage! Their wonderful courage.

Standing while the world ends.
Standing still, and free.

Maybe this is grace, this ever-widening sweep,
if we could only step into immensity.