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(Second Part – Section THIRTEEN)

the garden was our haven and our book
we read in it the seasons' vital changes
snowball fights took winter off the hook
and spring was loved for what spring rearranges
its upward thrusts and green in its fresh ranges
summer gave us golden leggy room
and autumn piled up wealth against the gloom

the garden let us loose and our minds bubbled
with games and dreams that took the real for granted
we had such space mere measurement was doubled
we were as earthed as anything you planted
yet magic days we could have been enchanted
we mocked your digging with a rash *don't care*
but in fine weather what a joy was there

the land was orcharded (i've said already)
plum and damson saplings had run wild
to mask the bricky waste that made us heady
with shaking knees (they can be reconciled –
as above below – no mystic would be riled)
well anyway the garden had more space
it grew its fruits with dignity and grace

adam and eve would have been spoiled for choice
no serpent lay in wait that we encountered
and if it had it would have cried *rejoice*
mankind expelled from eden – no *re-entered*
think *so much to regain if only ventured*
apples galore – each with distinctive taste
all history then be sweetly re-embraced

crab apples lay beyond perfection's pitch
within its bounds the noble blenheim soared
the tree was tall its fruits were out of reach
to climb would risk a serpentine discord
you ritualised the picking – apples stored
in layered drawers for ripening in the dark
their smell seeped out to drive keen teeth berserk

we prowled beneath the tree all summer long
watching the firm calm fruit stay vainly green
it wouldn't even blush give reddish song
but took its time to show a hint of sheen
it scorned our focus group (can apples preen)
you knew the day exactly when to rise
and take each apple lightly as your prize

the russet too sought autumn for its tryst
but what a soft forgiving flesh it had
a wind would knock it sideways with its fist
and in a moment time would turn it bad
its casement shrank and insects would go mad
nudging its pips aside to suck the goo
what blenheim scorned to bow to russet knew

its yielding skin was almost like a pelt
it couldn't shine (its brown was quite resigned)
it had a starchy taste - its sweetness felt
as though it shouldn't be there but yet refined
in a way that old maids were and just as kind
it took me years to love the russet flavour
maturity maybe responds to such behaviour

if a russet spoke it'd have the softest voice
a codlin's would be sharp and full of spite
it hung around in gangs and cried *rejoice*
as christians do who think they've seen the light
but sour as sin when taunting others' plight
the kind of apple that gave us belly-aches
the first to come it preyed on our mistakes

[that's twice in the last six stanzas (addle-pated)
i've let *rejoice* be cried to do with apples
well a serpent first (with apples implicated)
i half expect to be grabbed by my lapels
by some teacher – *a proper poet grapples*
with memory lapse and repetitious rhyme
go back and change it – well i won't – no time]

anyway with apples my mistakes were legion
(i can't go back and change that – done is done)
a poet ought to ape a roman legion
take a town and leave it – march straight on
don't waste your fighting skills on dull discussion
turn your back on dead and wounded errors
you need your skills to face the coming terrors

you called them codlins – apparently not so
proper codlins sport a tapered body
(the oxford dictionary would have us know)
and any apple classified as shoddy
not to be eaten raw (spat out by nobby)
half grown came to be called a codling
a nasty type for sure (a little sodling)

titchy cod raw youth – types inviting scorn
bastards (vagabonds) in all locations
a codlin tree should wish it wasn't born
where blenheims russets occupied their stations
the sour fruit though made its reparations
good pelting ammunition against foes
a well-aimed one could bring a bloody nose

a well-hit one at cricket made it splatter
a one-off ball that took skilled eyes to see
you could either hit the wicket or the batter
the best of aims could whack him on the knee
the game would then descend to battery
the shaken tree would breed a missile hoard
and every wall around was apple-cored

but as the summer bloomed and these green yobs
filled out their bitter skins and caught the sun
they changed from being hard as nutty cobs
(read how the ugly duckling turned to swan
a cob as well to overstretch the pun)
became a luscious yellow and so sweet
our juicing mouths were swept right off their feet

the secret was the little green-eyed sods
were far too many for the mothering tree
so we were there as agents of the gods
to cull the brutes and by such butchery
to reduce the load and set the old tree free
to give her milk (well sap) to the chosen few
(as ever gods require and children do)

we were so proud to serve the heavenly scheme
we'd reward ourselves with apples even more
and then be blamed that we should so misdeem
the sacrificial spirit of folk-lore
greed was a sin and greed would never score
the coming strife was easy to predict
and stomachs always listened to the edict

another apple-tree (its name not known)
rounder than the codlin a lighter green
with reddish threads of colour round the crown
a cheeky fruit that jostled to be seen
but had no class (a saucepot not a queen)
the slightest breeze it cluttered to the earth
its tartish taste outspoke its little worth

a paradise not short of ranking order
apples expressed its social commentary
the noble blenheim was its moral warder
its bearing proud distinctly military
the gentler russet was more vaginary
its flesh was soft seductive yet perplexing
a lady (sure) demure and quite unsexing

the codlin was the hoi-polloi (the rabble)
used to hard knocks and not that bothered
it did its job and lost a lot at scrabble
those that survived turned into something other
workers are kings when their true worth's discovered
and then the nameless apple (social cast-off)
on any ship of state the lost and last-off

the bramley apple kept its roots apart
it almost stood astride the deep old well
we knew it as *the cooker* (none too smart)
it distinctly looked upon us with a chill
and high disdain – to us it was unreal
we couldn't scrump its fruits so we forgot
their sunday presence (baked and steaming hot)

its apples sat like tomes within its branches
a learned useful feel came through its leaves
they could be judges squat upon the benches
ensorious to our crimes and no reprieves
a tree that had us down as arrant knaves
the ancient well had clearly fed it water
good use was all (all else be shown no quarter)

this a professional tree that stood between
noblesse oblige and proletarian pips
it had a solemn aura – could not be seen
to bring desire to any casual lips
a stickler for routine it saved its quips
till the oven had spiced up its fine aroma
and the table graced it with a cook's diploma

[the well itself was like the garden's nub
so deep it had a link line to earth's centre
to sip its waters would have turned a grub
into the world's most fructified inventor
or (let us say) the universe's mentor
we never had a chance to prove this though
the well was barred – we rarely saw the glow

of that bright eye so far down underground
that light itself was privileged to touch on
you were mundane – you feared a poor sod drowned
who slipped and fell without a hold to clutch on
(you'd see it as a blot on your escutcheon)
especially as the poor sod would be us
the well (just like a hernia) wore a truss

forbidden places bring on mighty wishes

the thought of on its edge would cause us shivers
we took its waters once – they were delicious
cool and sweet as lost arcadia's rivers
but no one learns to trust the purest givers
we feared the fall (the loss of mortal hopes)
but tucked away in dreams its timeless tropes]

apples ruled the garden – there were pears
that mostly took backseat with praises singing
they clung around the edges – had few shares
in the total view my partial mind is bringing
one species though has set my brain-cells ringing
an old gnarled william splayed along a wall
old as adam and in its dying fall

its rare shy pears were precious reared with love
even to breathe on them was to risk life
you handled each with awe (as noah the dove)
or like a baby you the gentle midwife
a fallen one would herald a weeklong strife
your dad was a william – maybe the pear
touched an old quick (in ways both shy and rare)

gooseberry and currant bushes stayed in favour
and blackberry brambles hugged the lower fences
the chore of picking them we did not savour
thorns and squashed ones waxed our reticences
to raid the bushes though inflamed our senses
what could be sneaked and got away with (fine)
why live in paradise and have to be divine

two cherry trees expounded good and evil
the far side of the field a dark one grew
its branches maybe got at by a weevil
loured even when the sun was shining through
the leaves it sprouted looked a black and blue
its cherry-fruit was withered tough and mean
inedible and to the taste obscene

but in our garden in its own fair space
the goodly cherry rose and brushed the skies
its copious leaves proclaimed a serried grace
and fruits-a-plenty dangled in our eyes
(maybe now's the time to sermonise)
what lovely yellow globes with bright red blushes
but birds as much as us enjoy the luscious

by time the cherries chimed their ripened bells
the spotter birds had chirped their call-signs out
and every bird within a hundred miles
had whipped its wings in frenzy so devout
just to be there to share the beak-about
before we had a chance to mouth a cherry
the birds had nipped the lot and gone off merry

nets and things and scarecrows improvised

were joked about as birds enjoyed sweet flesh
leaving the naked stones as waste unprized
they even had the cheek to rip the mesh
and leave it dangling (intendedly slapdash)
to mock our impotence and wrangling tongues
their hoots of joy belied their titchy lungs

the cherries black and white are my two poles
i hated one – the other burns my dreams
yet though they each tattoo their different roles
and starkly stand at visionary extremes
they complement a circle - each redeems
the failing promise life is up against
what shrinks what blooms cannot be recompensed

the fruits at hand are there for other beaks
the stony flesh is not far short of spring
it's common sense not to expect the breaks
and where the hope has failed some dark birds sing
expect the lot or set your sights on nothing
you have to tread the ground your feet seek out
water's both goal and demon in a drought

i must have thought all this when i was lying
beneath the ravaged tree mouth open wide
praying the lovely birds would soon be flying
so cherry drops could sweeten my inside
cherry trees and georges (o bugger pride)
more likely scheming hard (my hopes defaulted)
how the fat horde could best be catapulted

i mustn't exaggerate - they left a few
we dangled them in pairs to look like ear-rings
dancing around like pirates to imbue
our hearts with courage to hide our inner fearings
(the birds ferocious in their cherry-tearings)
and they came in their hundreds beaks-agleam
the few of us were offal in their scheme

Fifth Part – Section TWENTY-SEVEN

in truth we kids of yours preferred ungodly
sabbath games to being locked in among
the pious who loved the godhead madly
(with shining eyes pursed lips and like a gong
striking the same cracked note – its dong gone wrong)
knocking doors and belting up the road
gave us more holy joy than preaching could

but any sunday morning bright and early
simply to walk the high street (odd shops open)
loving fresh air (behaving jocularly)
gave us a keener faith to set our hope in
a long straight laughing walk and back to ripen
appetites for the best of all roast dinners
worked wonders for the innards of us sinners

especially once when someone laid a purse
with something like nine shillings tucked inside
across our path (temptation first of course
tickled our empty pockets) *just think* we cried
and listed all the goods our yearning greed
could lick its tongues on – o damnation
(not a stone's throw away) the bobbies' station

we might have hummed and arrghed a little while
weighing the joy against the sunday guilt
we might have coveted the silver pile
and striven not to let our longing wilt
but a moral sense from you was too in-built
holding the found-purse tight we boldly strode
to where the blue-lamp was and dropped our load

the copper at the desk looked rather shaken
he scratched his head at honesty so blatant
it took him fifteen minutes to awaken
he stared us in the eyes to see what latent
mischief could be brewing here – it was patent
no local lads with nine bob come to hand
would give the lost loot in – unless they planned

some larger deviation from the law
like nip his helmet whilst he turned his back
and had to find in a godforsaken drawer
the proper form to record in white and black
(the wrong way round but he was on the rack)
this opposite (he reckoned) of demeanour
he looked at us (his face was going greener)

*you mean he says you want to hand this in -
it don't happen here that often i'm not sure
what the – you see – no-one's said it's missing
if i turned my head you could sneak out the door
our daring ruse had knocked him to the floor
no sir we said (our voices like shrill beepers)
our dad doesn't believe in finders keepers*

*for nine and fourpence thought the copper blimey
there could be hope for the working classes yet
then looked at us as if to say just try me
if you're up to some new trick i haven't met
i'll bang you (as the frogs say) tête-a-tête
then with disdain (amazement) he went looking
for the form he had to have to do the booking*

we had to sign to say it was above-boards

that the money in the purse was all there was
the silver coins sat in their nest like love-birds
and the copper said the copper i suppose
is proof enough you're thick as two dead crows
an honest crook would have that in his pocket
in here it goes – i take my key and lock it

he bent down to a safe beneath the counter
with hand on head in case we gave it blows
of course you know he said it isn't downter
me what happens next – god only knows
and here he had to stop to blow his nose
if some poor sod – i mean good sir or madam
(and from the purse you can't tell eve or adam)

does come in and claims they've lost a fortune
they do - you may get fourpence for your pains
they don't – we'll know the gods are playing your tune
in a month or two (get adding up your gains)
we'll send a copper round to mend your drains
you'll be much nearer to being millionaires
by four and eightpence each (if you go shares)

you've signed the bloody form – now will you hoppit
when you walk this way again keep noses high
or see i'm not the bugger here to cop it
when you barge in like mice to play i spy
a decent copper needs a jaundiced eye
it's not done round here to be so honest
you'll get locked up elsewhere and that i've promised

two months went by before the policeman came
you answered the door and thought you had been shopped
for being a bookie's runner (shame dad shame)
you stood there speechless waiting to be copped
but the copper asked for us – your anger popped
what have they done you cried we're law-abiding
(already promising us a damn good hiding)

i've come the rozzar said to bring their due
their honesty's an honour to the town
you must be proud that they've turned after you
(did you feel like a fine lawn freshly mown –
no not at all – you hated you'd not known)
this purse is theirs and with it nine and fourpence
you thought the secret sods – they'll have come-uppance

we had to see the bobby (get rewarded)
you stood at our backs trying hard to smile
the blue-man went and we were left unguarded
the front door shut we tried to run a mile
you not telling me you buggers cramps my style
but authority not there you couldn't hide it
relief fought anger – came to override it

so we had to sit and tell you all the story
and what was hard in you was quickly melted

the family came in to share our glory
(and we suffused our honour was not belted)
in fact we were embarrassed we were pelted
with praise and adulation - we suspected
shares from nine and fourpence were expected

the kind of glow that episode created
infused my heart and thoughts on many outings
the house was but a base from which i floated
(i hardly touched the ground in my aboutings
imagine a pied piper and his flutings)
i seemed to follow a tune (my flesh composing)
that sped my legs and had my instincts nosing

with brother (cousins) friends i brushed the pavements
hardly daring my feet to touch good earth
as games and japes and places brought enravement
a magic something lingered from my birth
enchanted me beyond a moneyed dearth
space was not a far-dream of the cosmos
or wealth tied up with hiring clothes from *moss bros*

i hadn't a clue or worry how the worlds spun
i had no entry into but could gape at
i guessed i had to take my pleasures homespun
and what i couldn't have not worth the grope at
o lucky me not existing in a cowpat
for good or ill the things that came my way
i struggled with or laughed at (work or play)

in percy road my cousins had a stream
that cut below the bottom of their garden
damming that or racing twigs between
this wood across and stones the stream had jarred on
were fooleries long hours were not bored on
and in green park we dipped for tadpole spawn
and promptly smashed the jars on our way home

or on hot summer days we'd pick the berries
and make a gooey squash with added sugar
then boil the lot (a self-invented mores)
and strain or maybe not - to wit like degas
(who seemed to treat his paint as added extra
and left his canvas bare in many places)
we'd paint ourselves inside with its sweet juices

and there were recs in shirley and in millbrook
where always groups of boys were picking sides
for football (cricket) sprees and if we ball-took
we'd get a game and have a say besides
on who could join (as lions do their prides)
of course this meant much squabbling and debating
and what it started as would end up fighting

millbrook saw the worst of all such games
when ron and i went down through royal streets
(prince of wales - king george's - edward's - names

two coronations spawned on these leg-beats)
when cricket was the best of summer's treats
to join a match – i to play he to enquire
(being older) did they want an umpire

yes they said – so ron became dictator
gathered himself some stones and took his stance
the game went well – the sun was there to cater
to all good moods and so the joys advanced
(when cricket's good it flows just like a dance)
as umpire ron's impartiality
had every cricket buff there nodding wisely

until (our fielding done and their score modest)
my side went into bat (our hopes uprising)
and wickets fell but yet avoiding protest
since ron's decision-making and surmising
seemed still to reach beyond bad analysing
until i (last in) first ball (and not a *love-you*)
my brother raised his finger – *lbw*

i was outraged – i seized an angry wicket
and hurled it down his end – the missile missed
i grabbed another – he (*this isn't cricket*)
repeated his decision – said *dismissed*
then saw me coming (wicket in my fist)
and tore away across the furious ground
with me hot on his heels and murder-bound

it could have been a war-dance or a rat race
the stump was being brandished like a hatchet
i hated him for being such a fat face
the ball was wide – he didn't even watch it
too busy twiddling with his stones – so much it
rankled in my pride i would have stumped him
or maybe if i'd caught him at least thumped him

the sun was giving up – the other players
(having gawped and laughed) were heading homewards
i hurled the stump towards those dumb make-hayers
and sank down on the grass – there wouldn't come words
to frame the seething spite i panted ron-wards
he looked at me (decided i was demonic)
and went home on his own (i felt moronic)

i was abandoned in a sea of grass
the dusk strayed in and nullified the green
the sky above had not yet let the day pass
no clouds about but stars were not yet seen
i felt what worlds there were i was between
and like a wraith bereft of worldly substance
(and all wrath gone) i was a no-time's utterance

i can only say i drifted from the parkland
and moved towards the church whose silhouette
above the trees was now king of the darkland
a haunted church that i had never yet

dared to break into (much to my regret)
its gravestones knelt or stood like hunchbacks moping
and bats of course were clinging to its coping

the trees were maybe elms (they couldn't tell me)
they whispered to themselves but disconcerted
this outback church loomed at them like ned kelly
(well - i was on my own - i felt deserted)
the stone walls gleamed (they could be metal-shirted)
because by now (as all ghost tales demand)
the moon was stamping down with its silver brand

a breeze (i forgot to say) had come from nowhere
(that's why the whispering trees were on the go)
was sending shivers creeping through my hair
and hands (whose hands – i did not want to know)
were plucking at my clothes in a fussy show
of wanting me to notice what the names said
on moss-encrusted tombs that murmured *not dead*

i was being drawn (not willingly) to shadows
that clustered by the porch ensconced with lichen
something could be lurking by its dadoes
i pinched myself and hoped i would awaken
at home in bed or eating in the kitchen
a sudden leap (some animal shot by me)
a bawling baby then could not out-cry me

and racing clouds streamed over from the west
and a riding moon was bucking in its courses
a ghastly ship was hooting on the test
and the trees began to snort like wild horses
a wind blew through to cut my legs with tawses
i had to stumble to the porch for shelter
my mind was all mixed up (and in a welter)

the road was less than twenty feet away
but i had trespassed where no road could enter
the only street-lamp had a dismal ray
as if its feeble role was as lamenter
the storm between us played the part of ranter
it preached its sermons with a gusty rage
and i was congregating in a cage

i could have run – my legs were stony pillars
the ghostly church consumed me as i shuddered
(a devil's dog mistaking me for spiller's)
or should i say my heart within me mouldered
and then (*howzat*) i found me lightly shouldered
a darkness stood between me and the moon
a kind of vicar – then a saintly tune

(as if it had thin access to an organ
and only wistful notes on its high ranges)
began to tempt the buried ones to burgeon
to push aside the ugly weeds' revenges
and from dead earth with blood be-curdled lunges

bodies (fleshless) diaphanously plain
rose up in joy and greeted me again

greeted me again – as if i was the long lost
tragically departed and now reborn
who'd come back out of nowhere time re-tossed
and they were still the living – such return
could only mean one thing (o dire concern)
embraces hugs *come come this way dear ray*
and down we'd go – to home sweet home (in clay)

the vicar had a smile like early hallowe'en
the moon was smirking too (it had ron's face)
ned kelly soared above (a death machine)
wind and clouds kept up their frantic race
the dead ones beckoned me with ghastly grace
the trees were chanting (leaves like tambourines)
and then i screamed – fed up with in between

and i was on the road – the gauzy church
(i'd never dared go into) boarded up
and dusk was still the daytime in the lurch
lost out to night but still not given up
the tombstones looked like giants doubled-up
i felt remiss (my sportsmanship was bad)
i had a home to go to – i was glad

along from millbrook church towards the town
two buildings on the left disturbed my mind
they stood beside each other large and brown
both open-handed (factories of a kind)
it had to be their contrast was designed
were poles apart when gauging their true worth
one dealt in death the other handled birth

blightmont hall - territorials played games
an amateur army deadly in its earnest
and *toogood's seeds* (much docketing of names)
where procreating energy was harnessed
to deep research and packaging was garnished
with painted plants so tasty to the eye
any potty gardener would have to buy

in one the bullets brandished to take root
in fertile enemy bodies offering soil
the other concerned how best to make seeds shoot
and find their flesh in unrelenting toil
within each one a dedicated turmoil
side by side the two encompassed all
that life and death between them held in thrall

the seeds *too good* (much chemistry involved)
the natural given over to a need
beyond what nature ever might evolve
industrial thought linked with commercial greed
and men gave up their time to learn what deed
what might well be asked of them (and shortly was)

unnaturally to do down the natural cause

to shoot – *to shoot (to be or not to be)*
the kind of horn dilemmas have to sprout
and here they were next door – a fine degree
to split them yet at each other's throat
ironic match (symbolic knockabout)
when i went past a splinter must have lodged
that only in my sere has clearly budged

across the road and past the railway line
that millbrook station owned a bridge to saddle
there couldn't be a more dramatic sign
a single time could offer such a muddle
that barrenness and beauty had to straddle
close at hand a lunar landscape ruptured
and in dry dock a queenly liner captured

a lunar landscape yes – or so it seemed
to a young boy's eyes before he climbed the gravel
heaps of which remaining had been schemed
as huge machines moved in there to unravel
a vast expanse of nothing on the level
but underneath – o when the diggers started
the precious stuff was gouged out and off-carted

the building of the new docks needed sand
and stones to mull to yards and yards of concrete
appropriately the mixture was at hand
and the gravel beds were raided till the complete
waterfront had been docked in and yet the done feat
had left behind this giant wounded landscape
where dizzy mountains rose to hide its ground-rape

a barren lunar landscape (or distraught)
but the mighty pits the diggers had created
had tapped on clay and this had kept in water
which heavy rains and seeping test had sated
and lakes had formed and locals were elated
at no-one's cost cheap swimmers were attracted
and civic health officials were distracted

urchins mainly found the sport galactic
as if from holes that no one knew existed
these brown-black bodies (apt at every tactic
deep fish adopted) became like stars - enlisted
to prove by how they dived and curved and twisted
that water was no more than cosmic air
and comets less at ease than they were there

and others too in briefs or blandly naked
from gravel heights or handy planks would dive
into the viscous water - more a liquid
(ship-oily) no decent microbe could survive
but close your nose no better sight alive
it was as if the moon had come to millbrook
and our gift to it was water – o then hell broke

a death – a diving accident – a sickness
(i'm delving back and groping if it happened)
or maybe fear itself had bred a thickness
and official hatred went right off the deep end
well anyway there came a fit of clap-hand
and councillors and doctors cried out *listen*
and all the brown-black bodies could not glisten

but went back to their holes or outer spaces
and all the blandly naked covered up
the lunar visit slimied with dispraises
and if they could they would have put a stop
to this germy view which (like a betting shop)
gave the oiks rude glimpses of a fancy
to stoke their dreams (though riskier and chancy)

i couldn't swim (we went when we felt daring)
but on this day alone i walked the ridges
and seeped the strangeness sunny sky was sharing
from waters flaky black and buzzed by midges
as rusty fragments wood-scrap huggd their edges
the whole place had the feel of raped neglecting
its silences were not the least dejecting

i had no more meaning there than one lost ant
the water's eyes were hooded in my presence
descend a slope my touch with millbrook scant
familiarity was oozing from my essence
i was too small to rank as an excrescence
i was a pip in a dinosauric tooth
i'd never felt happier in being so aloof

but i moved on (another leviathan
my legs were set on making me confront)
i upped and downed across the gravelled scan
and several times i heard the stone beast grunt
its stony scales had had to bear my brunt
(i know i keep changing here my image
let's say it was hard work this gravel scrimmage)

at school and every school a competition
was raging round the classes asking lists
of words that without a single repetition
could be made (by those with good and proper zest)
from *queen elizabeth* - and (brains a-twist)
we'd struggled (cheated) cribbed - then learned with shock
the ship was soon to hoot into the dry dock

we saw the queen arrive with fussy tug-ins
were proud the town contained the only dry-dock
and it was there for every mutt and muggins
to gawp from millbrook road with rigid eye-lock
but only i (it seems) sought out a nigh-look
and now my head was down and gravel-weighted
and would not look until all space abated

a long grey railing (quarter- half-a-mile)
and far too high for legs like mine to clamber
cut off the lunar landscape's gravel pile
(which in the deepening sun had turned to amber
or maybe in the dark parts almost umber)
from the staggering view beyond (or rather no view)
it should have been the test and not a pink hue

that soared up from my face pressed hard to iron
(the gap too small to get my swelling head through)
and went on up much higher than a pylon
and made me crick my neck to get this high view
and everywhere this pinkish paint that smelled new
my eyes were like two periscopes defeated
their goggled lenses seriously depleted

i'd read and heard so much about the vessel
that john brown's yard had built on clydeside
that now had come down here so men could wrestle
to fit it out and buff it on its pride-side
and here it was – i couldn't grasp it wide-eyed
nor understand how meagre men could build it
if olympia were here it would have filled it

i almost could have stretched my hand and touched it
but if i had i'd be a dab of paint
a lunar landscape couldn't have too-muched it
its smell of pink was making me feel faint
but i was bolted there without complaint
i couldn't even see the mighty funnels
the hull alone was earning all the laurels

i loved the curves and graces of the eyeline
the dips and gentle changes in the planes
the way the cutting edge that was the bow-line
fattened out towards midships and then again
thinned slowly back towards the stern's domain
how (keel to rail) the smooth ascent unfolded
without a glitch so delicately was moulded

(i'm not so sure about the pink – it could be grey
or even black if the hull was near completion
a lighter colour though seems in my eye
an undercoating smell denies deletion
i leave the readers here their own discretion
i've said before my facts are likely lying
we all know laughing's very close to crying)

at last i stepped right back until the deckrail
no longer cut apart the super-structure
the funnels red and black the sun bestriding
denied the sky its all-embracing stature
they could have been a piece of modern sculpture
that trumpeted the grandeur of the oceans
brought down to size by engineering notions

the empresses of britain canada

the iceberg-hit *titanic* (local crew)
the ships' names ending *-aria* and *-ania*
all *cunard* ships that still the ensign flew
la normandie (to name a foreign few)
on top of these her sister ship *queen mary*
on this sea-cake this new ship was the cherry

i can't refuse the sense of awe and pride
that (that lone day) infused in my young brain
as lunar-gawped (belittled by its side)
i knew the ship as part of my own grain
how dwarfed i was – i felt a giant strain
to teach me secrets fashioned by great size
and i grew up and looked with wider eyes

and next down into town and round the old walls
or through the parks that kept the centre crammed
those greys and greens have set their own stalls
out in me – or flowed as streams i've never dammed
a colour scheme (my quieter self reclaimed)
that seemed to match the peace my deepest strivings
have yearned for all my life against deprivings

(inside the walls a creepy smelly dark)
and then the royal pier that skittish outreach
between the two docks close to mayflower park
from where the pilgrims shipped themselves to preach
their new world faiths beyond the old one's reach
and the long new docks appreciated with aplomb
and rank's flour mill (foresee its burning bomb)

the royal pier had many things that piers had
and a ballroom there that classier folk attended
and *what the butler saw* machines and that bad
maybe their very thought had puritans offended
that's why they took their families and up-ended
and probably quoits and deckgames on the boardwalk
but we were deaf to adults' games and bored talk

ran past the quays where local boats were tied up
ran past the strollers sniffing river air
ran past the lovers trying to keep their tide up
ran past the café (no money to spend there)
and flopped down nearly at the pierhead – where
the weathered boards gave way to deepdown water
no let or hindrance stopped us from wet slaughter

so we sat down and dangled legs sublimely
pulled out a stick some cotton and likely bait
(maybe a piece of bread gone stale long-timely
or a worm or two not conscious of their fate)
connected all and desperate not to wait
heave-hoed the lot (not letting go the stick)
deep-downwards (hoping that would do the trick)

it never did – no fish would play the sucker
or think the tiddly worms worth any sniff

we had great dreams – a shark (a mighty shocker)
might knife its way upwater for a whiff
or a barracuda give our bait a biff
we saw upheavals where the flow was deeper
but no fish looked to us to be its keeper

the pier became a mecca – and the fish
an exotic kind of prayer we weren't quite up to
rewards were rarely tied into a wish
the joys we sought you couldn't put a cup to
the doing did it – we reached but not on tiptoe
(except with hidden sweets or christmas presents)
the doing done the next deed showed its presence

southampton took the whole of our place-loving
a town so well spaced out there were no limits
and legs and bikes and trams and buses moving
made sure the ever-widening of our ambitions
there's no one's life that doesn't have its thin bits
but being poor we were our own best makers
beheld the town and worshipped it like shakers

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