

Come, Walk With Me

My fingers brush holly's prickles, console ash trees painted with blue crosses, marks of death on not-so-old trunks. I take and shake a twisted limb of crab-apple to release lodged fruit, frugal of flesh and abundant with seed, nectar for bugs and slugs in the protectorate below. My boots scuff larch's discarded needles and I breathe the must and crusts of predator's meals, provisions for the colonies of fungi forests waiting to claim the rottings.

Beyond the wood a car backfires. A rabbit panics, runs a crazy race, a mouse scuttles, a starling chakerchaks, and a fox, quick of eye and fleet of foot, is gone.

A rain-jewelled cobweb glitters in a cleave of sunshine and I blow, see the spider. Breezes whisper, spin leaves as sound settles, becomes again the crack of stick, the crunch of autumn cast-offs. My feet stumble on a snaking root, I catch a gnarled bark, caress it, let my fingers trace fissures, discover crimson, emerald, plum, where remembrances had only brown.

A faraway dog barks. Remote traffic whines. A lone, waist-high nettle shivers alongside last spring's saplings, wondering at nature's mixed messages. Now a new sound. Voices, closing. A susurrant of tyres on wet. Cyclists. Chattering aliens in a track behind blackthorns preparing sloes for winter gin and briars with never to ripen blackberries that tease my taste buds with the lie of liquorice and honey whilst above, another two-minute Heathrow plane sprays graffiti across the heavens and croons its insistent song.