

Golden Dust

A Spring morning, a blackbird hopping about in the hazel.

I flicked a little bunch of catkins. The cloud of golden dust blew away, vanishing like smoke. It was the hazel on the corner by the bus stop, where he'd bring me to catch the bus.

His little trick, that flick.

'Real gold', he'd say, adding after a moment's pause, 'now you see it, now you don't'.

Then he'd leave, aware that with the gathering of others, his granddaughter might feel embarrassed. Once he turned and said 'invaluable, you know'.

'Look!' I said, flicking again. But even as she turned, the golden smoke had gone.

Invaluable.

I flicked the word in my mind, turning it over.

So valuable, it's beyond value – it can't be valued. Or the opposite of valuable – no value at all.

Catkin gold dust, pollen grains, free as the air that takes them. Catkin gold dust, packed with the future, a wonderful artefact of micro-engineering beyond man's power to create, so valuable that no money can buy.

'You can make it happen too'.

She flicked a catkin and watched the cloud billow, then smiling turned to me – me, now the grown-up.

Once more, the cloud had gone. Dissipated, dissolved in air, disappeared.

Gone, like him – my own childhood, school, surprise at what a parent or even grand-parent could show.

But there, with hopping blackbird, the hazel goes on growing catkins each spring, and the pollen has settled somewhere.