

The Hare



*The sky is clear tonight;
late frost sparkles the rushes, casting back
the light of distant suns
The moon, full as a silver thruppence,
shines the trackless grass pure white.
No shadow moves but one.*

*Lopsided loping leather-horn
crouch back, old-woman-wise, she comes.
This is her world, and yet
she does not sleep.*

*For she, of many forms and names,
long ears and head-top eyes,
always alert, living her life
beneath the churning sky,
never forgets the ancient rule –
when dangers come, keep watch;
you're fast enough to get away.
Lie still, for they may pass on by.*

*Last morning, with the dew still fresh
where once the plover made her nest;
she sat beneath the rising sun,
she heard the distant rumble come.
Then she lay flat disappeared
although she felt no danger there –
only a sudden mist of rain
that wet her fur and tasted strange
then passed on by.*

All places are alike to her, the meadow-cat

*who has no home. She dare not keep an ounce of fat –
she feeds by night,
chews through the winter's roots.*

*But now she has forgotten cold,
the heat of mad March days
the buck she never met till then
whose ears she boxed, but let him mate.
And in a week the four
strong kits she bore,
eyes open, fit to run,
no longer hidden, disappear*

*But now... she gazes at the moon,
the shadows there that form
long ears like hers,
for now, her dugs are full.
The kits are hidden well.
She sniffs. She cannot trace their smell.
She cries, and waits, and cries again
hoping that three, or two, or one
will answer then.*

*But they are lying still, for with the rain
they used their tongues – as children do:
They licked their paws
and washed their face, like her
They wiped their ears and licked their fur.*

*and licked again, until there was no trace
– no outward trace –
of herbicide.*

Jenny Brien

This poem was inspired by a hare seen at Common Ground. The painting is by Bidy Lee For more information on the problems hares face from modern farming, see the Hare Preservation Trust