

The Photograph

Auld Tomás squints back at me, exactly as I remember
Peering up through the curling, yellowed years
From the bottom of the shoebox.
He lounges, propped against the Aga,
Brows bristling-stern beneath an acrid, vaporous halo;
Eternally smoking in his holy sock-soles.

There was another photograph I think, older still.
A young man caught astride a bicycle,
Grinning wide in a dusty lane on an August evening,
Squeeze-box bouncing from his shoulder,
Off to play for the dancing.
I don't know where it went.

Somewhere along the line, it slipped-
Out of mind, out of mention, out of memory;
Like the music of those distant evenings.
Like the lassie with the hair like a jackdaw's wing
Who was asked a quiet question once,
But turned her face away.

Perhaps she chose another's name,
And lives around here still- I never knew.
The young man asked in earnest, so Auntie said,
But she shook her head and slipped away.
He did not smile so much then,
And eventually the accordion went away.

So did the dancing, and the bicycle.
No other was asked to the house, so Granny said,
Out of earshot in the yard one day,
Pressed by childhood's curiosity.
Eight brothers and sisters, a farm-
Responsibility filled the plodding years.

The young man is gone now, and the girl,
And even this old man who loomed
Grizzled and gruff in my early memories
And slipped us hard-boiled sweeties
When Mammy wasn't watching.
And never spoke about himself.

I wonder about these hushed little stories;
Dewdrops that rest,
Quivering, just for a moment
Before they roll and drip,
Sighing,
From the branches of our family trees.

Jude Alexzander

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