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Opening Extract from...

Kinch

Written by Laurie Evan Owen

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kinch

a tally of unravellings



Laurie Evan Owen



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‘In my room, the world is beyond my understanding
But when I walk I see that it consists of three or four hills and a cloud.’

(Wallace Stevens – from *Of the Surface of Things*)

‘He had bought a large map representing the sea,
Without the least vestige of land:
And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be
A map they could all understand.’

(Lewis Carroll – from *The Hunting of the Snark*)

‘The Dust behind, I strove to join
Unto the Disc before –
But Sequence ravelled out of Sound
Like Balls – upon a Floor.’

(Emily Dickinson – *poem no. 992*)

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to E. M.

... sine qua non ...

tab: 1

which observes the man Pigeon in sporadic flight

The narrowness of the way took him by surprise.
Between wiremesh and logbark,

... coat, heavy,
flapping heavy
about his legs

... *not thought...*
... *not seen...*

... coat, heavy,
heavy, snagging
on fallen sycamore.

Clear. At last.
He looks back.
Makes his way
through grass.
Easy.
Laughs up,
oh yes,
into glare, heat...

The field is large and flat. Away to his left stand a pair of dutch barns,
open-sided, tin-roofed, empty, their fragile legs quite eaten through
by glare, heat...

He laughs.
Stops. Takes off his coat.
Regards the torn pocket.
Lets the cloth,
brother cloth,
slip from his hands.

... not thought...

... not seen...

Drift down.

This field. The parched spring is on it.
Couch grass is here. So is hairgrass, wild barley, wood millet,
the bleached ochres unrolling to a mile-long trapezium wedge.
The man is located with his back to a wiremesh fence. Before him,
beyond the field, stretches a rank of chalk hills, treeless but with jigsawn
clusters of black gorse scattered on the slopes – short grass, tight skin of
soil – the pale scars of four, maybe five, disused chalkpits –
the White Mark triangle, isosceles.

Drift down.

Drift.

Behind the barns, extending to the base of the nearest hill, is a forest of
young spruce, confined uneasily, at waist height, by a single-wire fence.
Nailed to each fencepost is a sign warning would-be trespassers of the
‘strictly private status of the aforementioned plantation and the legal
conditions appertaining thereto’. If the man’s face were not hidden by
his outspread hands, his nostrils would be able to detect, now and then,
the acrid whiff of creosote.

Uneasily confined,
and yet...

Listen.

Into the silence, at the forest edge, a seepage of low sound.
Halfway along its length, the greenery splits open.
Something liquid, brutal, curls out, is sucked back in again.

On the opposite side of the field, to the man's right, is a concrete levee built to carry one of the earliest narrow-gauge Stevensonian locomotives to a tunnel drilled into the soft chalk of the first hill. At this end the ridge drops to show a glint of rail and beyond it a sky webbed in pylon cables. Going north the track rises sharply before levelling out near the tunnel, at which point the levee is far above the field, a grizzled thigh in the migraine heat, sprouting sorrel and buddleia from its broken veins.

The spasm fades. The head lowers. Past his fingers the man sees a dim savannah crisscrossed by chalkhill blue and brimstone and tortoiseshell, an endless throb-and-shift of heat and honey-brown and silver.

Detaching hands from face,
he starts walking toward the hills.
Big-boned, round-shouldered, arms loose at his sides,
all about him the high tinnitic roundsong of the grasshoppers.
Bent forward, thick-necked, long-headed, bull-headed, hair a thin white fuzz, he lifts his feet out of and back into the dying millet, savours the hiss of it against his shoes, its whip and tickle on his hands.

The eyes are small in the oversize head.

Covering the right side of his face, from high on the forehead to just below the ear but entirely missing the nose, is a foetus-shaped purple birthmark. Elsewhere the face is wax-white, reddened only slightly, down the rim of his nose, by the long weeks of heat.

Hot all day,

but the day nearly over.

Midges smoke-ring his head,

but he doesn't mind.

From his left trouser pocket he extracts a tiny furl of screwed-up paper.

From the right pocket he pulls more scraps of paper and a block of roseate nephritic jade worked into the likeness of a seated monkey.

Breath clouds its surface.

The man's lips form a smile.

Or half-smile.

A fly crawls up the birthmark.

The eye wrinkles.

The fly drops off.