One-Eye'd Leigh

Katharine Kilalea

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'You were a bird' by Katharine Kilalea

You were a bird before we met. I know that
because over your skew front teeth
your mouth makes a pointy beak.

I saw you first in Dickens' London,
an evening of frosted windows
and hot steaming steak.

That night we were drinking,
the chimneys were smoking,
and my lips swelled up

like bread baking in the oven.
I met London in your face,
I smelt wine on your breath

and the shape of your mouth
left me feeling slightly lyrical.
We drank a lot that night

we drank so much
you would have seen it from heaven.
With you there, sitting there in my kitchen,

the cooking pots start to sing.
Now the letterbox is a bird
and the telephone is made of birds when it rings.

from *One Eye'd Leigh* by Katharine Kilalea, published by Carcanet

‘Goodbye is a semi-circle’ by Katharine Kilalea

Goodbye is a curving shape
like a sickle
or a cow’s lick

or the way of ironing
a wrinkled shirt flat. Goodbye
is a grip gone slack,

a playground swing
arcing through hurt and confusion
then reversing

to the morning after a dinner party,
packing away dishes.
The last taste was a cheek

offered like a tea cake.
The leaves are rustling.
The wind has grown a long beard.

Goodbye sounds like
a straw slurping the last juice,
and the low hum of trucks in the distance.

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