

Malika Booker

Sue Speaks To Me In The Swan Room

Now we're old parrots, who have lost their flair,
we've no stories to tell. Back then we were red
breasted robins; bright Dolly, chirpy Chrissie,
flighty Stella and me. No boys on our horizons then.
We were children thinking ourselves grown up, in love
with Shakespeare, this stage, the actors, the dust.
Back then we were blue tits, bright turtle-necks,
A-line mini skirts and knee length boots.
Back then we stood by roadsides, fists mid-air,
thumbs cocked up hitching rides. Back then
we hoarded pocket money for tickets, too poor
to take the bus. We'd ride from Coventry
in Ford Austins, Mini Minors or Cortinas.
Back then it was safe. At the Theatre we queued
for hours, flasks of tea warming our palms,
bare knees cold, for one & sixpence tickets,
then stood at the back for a three hour play.
If our money stretched to two seats we sat
on each other's knees the entire time.
After we'd camp in a tent by the river,
cold little nesting birds, squeezed. Back then
I loved Olivier. His voice, slicked back hair.
Oh he was tall, could charm the pants off me
any day. No man ever measured up to that one,
not even my husband. All these years
we've migrated to return each new season,
until Dolly flew away. It was sudden flight.
That cup of tea and empty chair is Dolly's.