

Glyn Maxwell

Come To Where I'm From

Hard to remember, now there is nothing here,
that there was once nothing here. Hard to remember
they paused in a field with a plot for a field and a feel
of a place in mind and a little knot of horses
faraway in a corner stood there

pretty much where that little knot of horses
stands. The railway ran through the white temple,
the life and death of it, made east and west
of nowhere. North and south it left itself
whichever way one looked.

Hard to remember now that it's all begun
that it all began and, now that it's all over,
hard to recall it's gone. Those who are gone
arrive in a crest of steam and the late-lamented
help them with their boxes.

Those to the east have a shed and those to the west
a greenhouse, it was a field and not a field
hereafter, it was a path through new houses
and a sweetshop. There was a lane and another lane
which, crossing it, was obliged

to name it what it was named and the five things
needed they built buildings for. A meadow
reared its set of gardens like farm-children
edging behind houses to belong there,
to cluster and imagine

a gate that is always shut will be always open.
But for now the horizon was sky and a blackberry hedge
and the north was the nettle-bed, and the south the roses
and the east an archway to those sad allotments,
and the west a banded twilight

as out they build, in the time a bedtime story
takes to ferry me shipshape to tomorrow;
out they build till I wake and the horizon's
gone. It won't be found until it's wept to
on a holiday. The town

is mine, this side of town is mine, the homes
go strolling by, then, bowing out of sight
they scurry round the world to be back in time
for when I pass, as if they never budged,
and a chuckle of wood-chimes

is all I'll ever know. Now they grow names
with care, they name what dreams of being garden
Garden, what will never be a city
City, and they name it for some hovels
in the Domesday Book. Go where

they say it is. Come to where I'm from.
The north is lost in thought: the glance away
from fairytales is a look through time, the south
is sitting me down and standing me up, the east
unnerves me with its look:

I never heard of west, what's west? and the west
goes west in search of answers. Hard to remember
I know what I mean, now nothing's left but a lawn
and me knowing what I mean. The place spread out
like anything being thought of

reddens in shame and joy. So I was thought of,
for the north was a copse of houses to be called at,
found wanting at, found wanting *you*, while the south
got London like one gets a belief and beamed
to find it all leads somewhere.

The east I met in dreams was the east I knew
but enormous, so the west escorted me
where those like me *liked* me, on a singing bus-ride
I prayed would never end till I begged it to.

Things come true, looking back,

things come true I was wishing for, they are gone
and still come true, when north south east and west
flop on a lawn in summer and so do you,
and the time I stare at you and you do
are the same time, are equal,

the same time, same span, like an equals sign
is suddenly loop-the-looping home so it forms
infinity by a hedge in summer – *You*,
I caught your eye in my life. What else did I do?
and the longer ago it gets

the longer it lasts and closer it seems to come.
Come to where I'll never again be from,
you, there are miracles showing up again
instead of us. The shadows comb the lawn,
diligent and discreet

as a search team until I call it off
for want of a clue. South go the memories,
north goes love as I wake, while the east and west
welcome the bright apprentice and dispatch him
daily on his amiable

fruitless errand. My eyes grow books and suffer
books, my ears grow songs and suffer songs,
my hands break news, my feet fetch drinks, my stomach
stomachs it all like something bet it it couldn't,
and out they build, they build,

from the soft incessant fountain they began with,
to the homes we knew and will never, side by side
they build them, like the ones we won't remember
play tag in the park with the ones we can't forget
and the kids they brought together

had kids together and soon the north was the poems
I wrote about you, woods of poems I pass through
guided by a voice in headphones, soon
the south is the realm of Alfie Rose, the east
an airport serving nowhere

and the west the news I brush off like a boy-king
as I stir the foam and find I'm in Manhattan.
And maybe they built out far enough, I wonder,
sipping the wine in a brasserie I always
loved, or I text my exes

in the terminal or I listen to the songs
I listen to. At the rendezvous of evening
I always miss for mulling over headlines,
what travelled outward travels at standstill,
then starts to travel in,

when the woodland path arrives in the blue clearing:
the youngest lad of three is getting ready
to set some last adventure with his soldiers.
But his pals who don't take no for an answer shriek
from the road until he rises,

childhood done forever. The clearing reached,
the path is weeds and litter. Hard to remember,
now I've everything, that I once had everything,
and I drive through a north I cried in, where the council's
nailed up signs and arrows

that *These are trees* and *So are these*, and the south
is so far south it's south of understanding,
and the east is the internet and the west my time here
googled with a whisky. Come to where
I said it was, it's there

I'm gone. The plastic infantryman
dropped in the wood outlasts the wood. I meet you
for the last time but one on a rainy Thursday,
and the street rolls up behind me like a script
unless I turn to stop it.

The fine idea remains just that. The blueprint
flutters down unused, and the children's children
tweet on the ragged swings. There's not a tree,
a yard of light, a lamp-post that won't
tap from me my only

soliloquy *I remember when we*,
when she, declining, like an old-school verb,
to *when you*. Then you, derailed at a dream-junction,
are someone else again, the old first names
step out in their parish beauty,

Rosemary, Clare, Diane... What I want from one
is what I got from one, as if the maths
made sense in the negative: now writing looks
like black on white but feels like flint on nothing.
North they are shutting up

the picture book forever, south the theatre's
pricey card for children, east the warehouse
eats the one beside it, west I set out
seats for relatives and replay scenes
that happened in the west,

right there I mutter, peering into sunset,
pulling a cork among abandoned deck-chairs.
Come to where I'm from, like the bloke I once
got talking to in *The Sun*, on the only night
he spent in my birthplace,

a desolate Sunday evening wiping tables
and he said *I hate it here* and he was gone,
said he'd never come again, come again like him,
when you never will, come to where I'm from
like the glossy editor

in Soho who confided in me *Glyn*,
it does you no favours, saying where you're from:
say you're 'from Hertfordshire', come again like him,
where you wouldn't be seen dead. Come again like one
who's lost, come again like one

for seconds on First Capital Connect,
who meant to lift his eyelids from his iPhone
as the little place shot by but when he looks
we're on Brunel's old viaduct, gone, bygone,
high over the green fields

and lanes of where I'm from. The north is a new
flowerbed from who knows when, the south
four 4x4s on a driveway, in the east
a fellow stops to stare at where we lived
as if he remembered us

when he lived, I remember him well enough, and the west
is me at work on this by the garden gate.
Preposterous, what was. I watch that gate
for you and all the gone. The odds against
are stars to sail between.

Come to where I'm from. Now there's nothing here,
hard to remember once there was nothing here.
Hard to remember we paused in a field in sunshine
with a plot for a field and a feel of a place in mind
and a little knot of horses

faraway in a corner stood right there
near where those horses stand, by the quiet trees,
beyond which all the yellow rising hills
you think are there are the yellow rising hills
you thought were there.