

Masquerade

Trees dressed in fog, sewn with light's silk thread,

Faces leaf-covered for their Masque.

Limbs parted by the wind

Each couple joins the dance.

Lutes, pipes, tabors sing

As their bark-taffeta gowns reel upwards,

As they spin, spin in all directions.

The wind reveals white cotton-sap

Underskirts, trunk legs twist

With a blush.

The music slow dances them to their lines, they smile

With revelations of leaf-masks removed.

The faces of oaks, ashes, birches, elms, willows

Have been painted by the Red Queen's servants;

At her command they slaved 'til dusk.

The Trees' Ball disguises myriads of bright roses.

They've transformed to beds of pink, coral, red flowers

To waltz among: to turn, to step, to stretch

Out your pearl arms, hands reaching for the midday sun.

By Claire Smith

Tunnel

An arch of darkness makes my way slow;

My feet struggle through the mire.

Bullets of light shoot from above.

I watch as the pale snipers battle

At the other end; advance forward

Through the hazed sky so the ground's shadows

Begin a retreat. A black wound

Is carried away on dawn's stretcher.

While an orange, yellow, pink rainbow

– relief to my eyes – shines.

Bright, polished medal.

Victory marches from out of the mist;

A single bugle sounds meek,

Yet breaks my silence,

As the trees collapse behind me

One by bloodied one.

By Claire Smith

Word-bait

Each one spreads a net,
Hopes to capture the distinct voice;
To reel in the words, the longevity,
The survival;
To pin down that thrashing image
Always too slippery and alive
To hold. It beats
Itself away into the River Wye
Free to swim back
Toward the open seas.

The camera's lens tried to chip
At the Abbey's sandstone arches;
Steady the line to the past.
Yet these broken instances
Loose the ease, serenity, peace.
Pictures are bait:
I fumble tying it to the hook,
Cast it out into the water,
No bite.

By Claire Smith.

Thanks to Olly Smith for suggesting the title.