

# Meg and I



✿ a short story in verse ✿

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by

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## Meg and I

We had a little farm there, Meg and I  
beneath the widespread, soft blue Norfolk sky,  
along a rutted track that ran through trees,  
to greenhouse, potting sheds and, half-concealed,  
beyond the gusting, haunting April breeze  
a wilderness of grass, a waist-high field  
of mayweed, marigolds and tormentil.  
A lonely place to start, where dawn would spread  
its spectral fingers through the mist, in fact  
through our cramped quarters also, where we bred  
long trays of butterflies. At best a tract  
of market-garden wasteland and one stand  
of pine trees rooting into pebbled sand.

We took what no one wanted, a scattered heap  
of tires, and cardboard boxes, what was cheap  
to rent, a long way out, but all the same  
our point of origin, our childhood's den  
in fields and coppices, where those became  
a haze of sweat and bruises. Then again  
we'd go out, all hours, weeks on end—to put  
the primus on at last, watch cars go by,  
that well-dressed cavalcade of business suits  
immaculate in cuff-link, shirt and tie  
while we stood scruffy in our muddied boots:  
executives who chatted and at ten  
would ask their secretary to phone again.

It seemed unlikely that a tent and shed  
could keep us so contented, warm and fed  
throughout no better than even bet  
we'd ever see a penny. Yet we stretched  
tarpaulins over, watched the concrete set  
as day by day the thorns and brambles etched  
their criss-cross scratches on the skin. How tired  
we were, but stuck it out until life changed.  
Spring came. We planted carrots, kale  
and beet along the field and road, arranged  
for some, if locally, to go on sale:  
Just shaking the loose change from the wind and trees,  
and growing accustomed to it, by degrees.

I'd always known each spread of Norfolk scrub  
that came up under car-park and the pub:  
and, more than that, the ache of afternoon  
when nothing happens and our lives flare out  
to chores and shopping, and then all too soon  
to DIY and car and gardening bout:  
the borders rolled out like some coloured shawl,  
the little pond, the sprinklers, weeded lawns  
that rise to coloured maples, stunted oaks.  
Past parks and shopping malls the summer yawns  
in seaside trips and picnics, but evokes,  
beyond the summertime of silvered haze,  
a something other than those hemmed-in days.

Or so I thought, in what were open lands,  
the haunt of butterflies and Viking bands,  
but now thin pastures where the acid soil  
gave up its treasures in occasional finds  
of musket-ball, a coin, old starter coil;  
a torque of pure-wound gold, a knife, all kinds  
of things with self-importance that accost  
their finder now with otherworld defections:  
identities half lost to rain and frost,  
beneath the topsoil and the wind's affections  
that stir the bugloss and the nodding grass  
where dynasties of lifetimes flare and pass.

What life was that: to go from parking bays  
to airless council offices, for days  
and days shut up in airless cubicles  
with monitors and filing cabinets, doors  
that led to tortuous roughcast ventricles  
down stairs to further cubicles and floors?  
I thought of that, while restlessly the air  
combed through the phalanxes of scented phlox,  
the clumps of lavender, and all the rest  
that speak of gardens set in foot-high box,  
the tame and orderly. The very best  
that life affords, is it, as spire on spire  
of rhododendrons burst in towering fire?

And more: the butterflies, that fluttering wreath  
of shifting habitats from wood and heath,  
I knew them all: the orange tip, the browns  
the ringlet, grayling, marbled white, the small  
fritillaries, the hairstreak and those clowns  
of sunshine holidays as the hot days call  
the brimstone fluttering, and all the blues,  
intense when congregated but still shy,  
and local, camouflaged by leaves and stalks:  
unless in open parts where only I  
had knowledge of them through my childhood walks.  
All were emissaries and led me on  
to where, still far from me, a future shone.

By foot or bicycle I knew all parts  
of Norwich outward, had my bedroom charts  
show views of fungi and the wayside flowers,  
the ferns and trees, and on the downstairs walls  
framed photos of the autumn's golden showers  
of silver birch and beech, their mantle falls  
on man's first habitant, his makeshift camps  
that lie now frost-deep in the glacial drifts,  
those convolutions over caverned Chalk,  
a vague topography where thinking shifts  
between the phantoms of our mundane talk  
to something darker, echoing, that stays  
beyond our ever fretful, passing days.

And not just natural history. Every town  
and village had its origin, its settling down  
by spring or crossing place or pastureland.  
Norwich I saw in zones as through the glass  
were dipped in industry, its shops there manned  
by speech and custom of each social class.  
I was an oddity: my parents thought  
in time I'd turn to other things, be less  
detached and solitary, would learn to act  
my age, as they once put it, or I guess  
go more for girls, the which I did. In fact  
this young misogynist had led the pack  
at first and only later turned his back.

I did not tell them all I did or saw,  
the girls I went with: awkward, wanting more  
than some quick squirming on the sofa bed,  
the fights, the violent kickings, flood of tears,  
the cute, toe-curling dumbness of what led  
to drop and catch up in the change of gears.  
Predictable and bland to one who wanted  
reckless pungency, the smell of streams,  
the rain of pollen which announced the spring,  
long nights unfolding into more than the dreams  
of schoolgirls posing in their latest thing.  
Beyond suburbia and its ordered streets  
were worlds of instinct, and of feral heats.

All my boyhood I had been as one  
who feels the slow migration of the sun,  
the flowering through the fields, a far hillside  
that shows its undertow of aching clay;  
I watched the kestrel and could sense its pride,  
in falling, fastening its sharp claws on prey.  
In the footfalls of the fox my skin  
would raise its thin, tense follicles and tell  
that trees had midnight in them, and bracken scrolled  
in pastorship to spread its rotting smell  
when hares were massing and the vixen rolled.  
A world of blackness where the wild wood's rain  
pressed and was sombre on my window-pane.

I had no patience with the small-town ways,  
that special someone with her doe-eyed gaze.  
I saw too many in their gangling flocks  
of boobs and gymslips, that great moving press  
of legs that dwindled into ankle socks:  
they were the same in truth, and I could guess  
who had and maybe hadn't: did it matter?  
Not to me, and while my classmates talked  
of this or that pert creature, what they got  
or could have got, they said, and pranced and stalked  
behind some fancy pants who might or not,  
I bent continually as though there might  
grow things beyond that were still out of sight.

The why and the sense of it I never knew  
but was as always listening where there grew  
the sound of mosses seeding through the door;  
the whirling sycamores that spun their keys  
at spring-time's end and how the autumn floor  
was quietly felted with its aspen trees—  
to me alone there walking, while back home  
of course my Dad had comments and even Mum  
was half agreeing when he said: *Look, you  
can go on walking out till kingdom come  
but back you'll come when there is work to do.*  
So that was life, a sobering alphabet  
I couldn't spell with much, at least not yet.

I didn't want to: at that corner shop  
where Dad was always working, couldn't stop  
on Sundays, Bank or public holidays,  
it was the same to him: *to make a crust,  
my lad, you go at it, and nothing pays  
you better than to get the public's trust.*  
It wasn't that: he had the franchise, only  
that. They kept him working on until  
you'd think they owned the land and life as well.  
Each week he had to find some gap to fill  
in counter takings or the firm would tell.  
He went on getting greyer and rattier, and still  
they found him further profit lines to fill.

Of course I spoke to him and sometimes aired  
my newest business plan, when he despaired,  
and properly as well: *Is that it, lad?  
What sort of hope is that, except one bound  
for certain obsolescence, just as mad  
as all the others? Youngsters go around  
with nothing in their heads: as proud as kites.*  
I did odd jobs on building sites and cleaned  
in offices and hospitals. Each pound  
I earned was put away. T-shirted, jeaned,  
always scruffy I never bought a round  
for him or friend or went to pictures, took  
a girl out, read a magazine or book.

Dad ranted, hurt his heart condition, I  
stayed just the same, of course, as weeks went by,  
the months to years, and still he pestered, said,  
*Now come on, Robbie, must you waste your life  
on hopeless pipedreams, idiocies? Instead  
of old men's hobbies, think of flat or wife,  
the training needed.* Then a Meg came round,  
no one particular, just someone there  
who helped and sympathized and heard me out.  
*Another loon,* said Dad, went almost spare:  
*Look here, Robbie, it will come to nowt.*  
True, she was an addled-head commodity,  
but also one, I saw, with time for me.

Just what she hoped from it, she never said:  
her pay, eventual prospects, where it led:  
nothing at all, but looked at me instead:  
a sad thing, willing, and was simply there.  
Dad ranted on: *if this is love or bed  
or pure convenience is your affair,  
but not in my house, son: you get a job.*  
Meg took it in her stride. *A day or two  
or weekend at our place, but otherwise  
well, you know mum. I'd cook for you;  
but for the rest, the farm, the butterflies,  
eventual farm: I mean you mustn't quit  
but maybe, you know, you could wait a bit.*

I nodded, said I'd think about it, went  
that evening to the farm, and promptly spent  
a night there sleeping, tried to, under trees,  
until the wind picked up and then it rained,  
and then more steadily: I hugged my knees  
and shivered, waited, senses strained  
to catch the first grey lightening into dawn.  
Hourly I checked my watch as time inched past,  
I felt absurd and out of sorts and wet  
in trousers, underwear, and socks at last,  
but still I wasn't giving up there yet—  
thinking it initiation, test,  
when good old ockardness could do the rest.

Afterwards and shivering, I made some tea,  
when Meg arrived and stood there stupidly,  
just grinning at me, but with breakfast stuff  
which I then cooked. A start. She lived with me:  
throughout that first hard year of sleeping rough.  
It toughened us, and brought us closer, she  
and I became a feature, people called,  
the boys in blue at times. *You two, you've got  
permission, have you, to be camping here?  
You have, now have you?* Seemed amused. *Not  
another Eden, is it? Listen: we're  
always on our rounds, so watch those fires  
you lovebirds, would you, with that junk and tires?*

Something of the woodland grew in her:  
the woody juniper or conifer.  
Resolute but awkward, she would stand  
half motionless for hours, was hardly there  
in talks on things she didn't understand  
or maybe didn't want to: didn't care  
what others thought about her, what they said:  
Meg was that unsociable and out-of-doors,  
tough, independent type who never lays  
the blame on others, but will find the cause  
in plain contrariness that made our days  
still plodding onward through long murk and wet,  
with little hope of happiness as yet.

Of course in looking backwards now they seem  
ragged and extravagant as some great dream  
of hopes that came belatedly to clothe  
those years of being only tired and poor.  
We'd wake up in our little shack and loathe  
the grey light pooling on the concrete floor,  
the boots and sweaters there, the growing pile  
of underclothes we hadn't washed, the shape  
of yet another cold and heartless day.  
We'd brew some tea or coffee, sit and gape  
in silence at each other, naught to say  
that made much difference: in a state  
that said togetherness was growing late.

Frail and entangled was the thin birch wood,  
and even deeper where the old boles stood  
knee-deep in humus and its layer of cones  
that rotted quietly into leaf-mould ground.  
Below were pebbles and the blue flint stones  
that lodged, frost-shattered, in the hills around:  
Above the circlet of the Pleiades  
that every August brought their showers of white  
thin shooting stars. I'd watch them while they drew  
their rays like pencil lines till out of sight  
behind the clouds, and then the moon came through  
to hold a landscape in its silvered spell  
of night's benevolence, that all was well.

Across the interval of years I've learnt  
to see the truth as otherwise: they weren't  
for the most part lost or wasted years, nor yet  
the fruitful partnership that might have been.  
I led, Meg followed. The two of us would get  
some sense of purpose in that pictured scene  
where fields of butterflies were wholly ours.  
That's all. No presents and we never dated,  
went anywhere but weekly to that farm instead:  
all hours, all weathers. If perhaps she waited,  
Meg, for something then she never said.  
Dad continued ranting: *all boils down  
to a tuppenny allotment out of town.*

And then of course he had that wretched shop he'd always hated and would have to stop, he said, and suddenly he did, retired, and missed it, sat around, ran errands, tried to take up interests, couldn't, felt more tired and angry, complained as usual, then he died one early morning: breakfast. Stared at mum, gesticulated, couldn't speak: no hope we'd understood him, loved him, how we'd been his point in living, and would have to cope now on without him in that dog-eared scene he never left in truth, still being there and glaring at us from his books and chair.

Mum took it badly: shook him, cried for days until, bewildered, in a tearful, fretful daze she sold the house and bought a three-room place in Norwich. Gave us twenty grand apiece, both Meg and me, and said: *in case you haven't cottoned on, you fool, the lease is what you'll buy together. Got that? Make a proper partnership for once, and try, just, Robbie, try to be the sort of son your father could have hoped for once. And by the way—I mean this— seeing all Meg's done for you, and always will, you need to find some way to show her you're not always blind.*

She knew that. Living here had made the ground  
the bridge between us, and the trees around  
looked down and were companionable, a lease  
made ours in principle, and known before  
the sun in sinking threw its russet peace  
across the pine-leaf spreads and sandy floor.  
In our small theatre in the woods we heard  
the pine cone crackling as the fox stepped past,  
the field mice rustling through the grass, the weather's  
change in seed pods popping, and the vast  
descent of barn-owls in their outstretched feathers.  
We heard the kernels fall as alder fruited  
and thick dull scratchings as the badger rooted.

Meg knew each creature here, the warning note  
of blackbirds calling and the hissing stoat;  
the soundlessness of kestrels plummeting  
through turbulent and brimming steeps of air.  
She knew the vole and dormouse and each thing  
that had its habitants, that nothing there  
would keep them from their burrows, safe inside  
the thickset winding of their well-made house  
of straw and brambles, where they'd wait,  
all of them: the weasel, shrew and mouse  
each in whiskered and a quivering state  
while high over them, half visible at noon,  
would pass the pale and ever watchful moon.

She knew the dull and grey days when the rain  
re clothed the outlines with a water stain  
birefringent in each leaf and fern,  
that brought a focus to the thin-clothed skin  
of wet and chilliness, when days would turn  
that cold around and push it far within,  
re clothing, embodying us with aches, when Meg  
was first in cheerfulness: the cold and damp  
that came in endlessly, the fuggy days  
beneath the plastic, when the pressure lamp  
would hiss and splutter, and the soft, wet haze  
collect to droplets on the plastic cloth  
and kill each chrysalis or new-hatched moth.

So went November and December, then  
no Christmases for us but shift again  
through January and its long hard weeks  
to mires of February and stinging rain,  
the gloom, the mist, the heavy rain that speaks  
in turn of watery fields and flooded lane.  
Till green things start, and in the trees a sheen  
becomes perceptible, and roadside weeds  
grow thick with caterpillars: every kind  
of bird and animal has busy needs.  
The which we knew, each year by year behind  
the slow encroachment of the summer days  
we watched the occupants of breeding trays.

Those years were hard: the road went on and on,  
and when we got there, half the zest was gone  
in rules and safety, VAT, the books,  
in checking car-park, toilets, catering staff,  
in catching holes the rats had made, or rooks  
and thieving boys the most, on whose behalf  
we had a notice board for name and shame  
which Meg administered, did rather well:  
for all her diffidence she'd go and bawl  
them out, stride over with the list to spell  
their names: a loyalty that I recall  
as though belonging to another day,  
one happier than this, in some small way.

The end came suddenly: the first day fine.  
*I'll soon be out of here. No, that is mine,*  
she'd say and snatch the plastic food away.  
*You get your own, now Robbie: just push off,*  
*and come tomorrow if you want. It may*  
*be nothing, probably is, the wretched cough*  
*you gave me. Just a check.* Of course it wasn't.  
There were the long, long batteries of tests,  
with X-rays afterwards, a certain note  
of seriousness, evasiveness, requests  
for further scans and probes: how doctors dote  
on specialists with letters to their name,  
but Meg was comfortable, about the same.

For her long hours of smiling drowsiness  
but I of course more worried, spending less  
and less on farm and staff and caterpillars.  
I took up residence, the nurses found  
me various time- and conscience-fillers:  
the usual things no doubt. I hung around  
from morning's opening to the close at ten.  
I racked my brains for something she should hear  
about the farm, our parents, what they said,  
and Meg, of course, was smiling, Robbie near  
and hovering, for the first time, at the bed:  
and so we talked the future through at last  
when chance of it was quietly slipping past.

I didn't like to think of that, or dare,  
to be more frank about it: Meg not there.  
I pushed it from my mind as day by day  
she lolled her head and looked on absently  
I'd bring the travel brochures, lay  
them out across the bed so she could see  
and choose the best for us, we two at last.  
Meg more sedated now, but quiet again,  
a comfortable night or so the nurses said,  
Meg still looking at me, smiling, then  
the eyes grew fixed and she was gone. The bed  
they screened off, pulled out tubing, when around  
me came a drench of hard and anguished sound.

A dark and stabbing nothingness that fell  
to hurt my thoughts and shaking hands as well  
But Meg, despite all efforts, died a day  
remembered as no different from the rest:  
a sky with breaks of blue but mostly grey,  
a shifting break of sun that did its best  
to promise summer shortly, easier days.  
Meg's mum was there, and mine: they gave her things  
to me: her nightdress and those woolly socks,  
a change of underwear, those two cheap rings  
she bought. I looked around as though the clocks  
would stop, the world stay silent, then I walked  
out slowly as the women stayed and talked.

I think it was the brightness hurt the most,  
the emptying inwards that had made a ghost  
to go on functioning with all it had.  
That me was separate, though it could see  
the cars processing as they did with Dad,  
his hearse, the funeral ride, but distantly  
across a landscape that was just the same,  
abroad with busy people, occupied  
with just what I was doing, changing gears  
and signalling and turning off: a ride  
as smooth and uneventful as the years  
that trailed on quietly afterwards but not  
with hope and purposes that Meg had got.

Despite the funeral: a sham ordeal  
that drained us even if we couldn't feel  
it much. Our mothers, friends I didn't know,  
and me, of course, the spouse by common law  
but only that: we made an odd sideshow  
so lined up, waiting at the chapel door  
to take our places, stand and sing the words  
above the organ and the preacher's voice:  
a braying confidence that made each tune  
seem oddly other than our simple choice.  
*Our sister Margaret has gone too soon,*  
he boomed, *but to a world where butterflies*  
*will seem much brighter to her opened eyes.*

For all I know they did. Beneath the weft  
of things continuing she still was left  
in farm, apartment and our common friends--  
how very few we had, and even there  
I felt that gnawing guilt that grieving sends  
*to each and everyone as on we fare*  
*along on that final journey all must take.*  
Or so the vicar said, and true, I thought,  
and cast my mind back through the years  
that now had pain about them, as they ought,  
of course, and far more than my stifled tears:  
but unacknowledged, as though nights were full  
of her still awkward but more urgent pull.

That week I thought to let arrivals lie  
uncared for, uncleaned out, and some did die.  
I could have brought more staff in, had  
those weeks when Meg was poorly: now it seemed—  
how can I put it?—a thing perhaps too sad  
to think of even. Here was all we dreamed  
of : farm and butterflies and home. I found  
her raincoat hanging by the door, the boots with socks  
still poking out, her plate and coffee mug  
up-ended on the draining board, her sandwich box  
now empty by the toaster, with the plug  
still in. So real it was, that through the door  
I thought she'd come in, blushing as before.

So that was Meg: a fill-in, nothing more  
in truth, and no one to be thankful for  
you'd think. She got no notice in the street,  
was half invisible, the hair cut short,  
a pair of old scuffed plimsolls, largish feet  
and oil-stained pullover she'd bought  
at Oxfam probably, and tattered jeans.  
Life's scraps and second servings did for her,  
but if where's justice in some further place  
then all who ever knew her would prefer  
that angular and blushing, raw-scrubbed face  
to some exotic minx whose charm and lies  
smile out so prettily from shuttered eyes.

I took myself around: what had I bought her? Little, nothing really: we had fought about her underwear and few cassettes, and as for perfume, tickets, chocolates, what even the most dimwitted boyfriend gets: flowers at birthdays, card, she never got, never, as I recall it. She hadn't asked of course, or celebrated mine, but pressed on busily with schedules, things to see to on the farm, with visitors. I guessed, perhaps I knew, her need for more, but she was strangely still at last, and all I had of her had gone like butterflies, a distant blur.

Those first months hard: the drinking, sleeplessness, the getting up all hours. Now less and less I took a pleasure in the scenes nearby. I looked on dark-green pine trees, warmer claim of market gardens, flowered slopes. The sky was blue, the rapeseed shone, but all became a glaze of hard cold facts in history books: new hopes, new generations: still there gleams for others no doubt where God's fire had shone in furze and coppice and the traffic streams on past in sparkling highways: days go on, smiling or indifferent, but we do not, but come back to that small and rooted spot.

I went to bars, used dating services  
and tried what every helpful column says.  
Besides, I wasn't poor, and spent of course  
far more on strangers than I had on Meg,  
and did ungrudgingly, without remorse.  
But though they kept me going, that square peg  
was still inside me, looking on. I told  
myself remember what our Meg said:  
*You make a new life, Robbie.* So I tried,  
how much I tried, but through my head  
there came Meg's earnestness, who never cried,  
but flipped so sadly through the project file  
I never went with one that extra mile.

So there we are. Months passed, the years.  
Her mum grew older, died, mine, and fears  
that I should be alone with no one there  
to talk of this and that, to ask advice,  
the usual commonplaces we must share  
at times with others like us, which suffice  
to keep us clicking slowly, hopefully on  
at length were answered. I was alone. But more,  
I saw the others there were much the same,  
the same old troopers shambling on. Yet for  
such circumstances we are not to blame,  
I thought, grew steadier and contrived  
to plan again, and so the farm survived.

That past is built on, and our worked-at plot  
was now a walkway and a picnic spot,  
a place for Sunday visitors, and half-hour tour  
for swallow-tails and carpoi where a pool  
awaits them and the plastic panes ensure  
that all can see them: that is kids from school,  
our geriatric parties, photo buffs.  
We tease and keep them on such tenterhooks  
they go round happily from cage to stacks  
of mugs and T-shirts, pamphlets, flyers, books,  
a single butterfly or bumper packs.  
Like my father, in the same old trap  
of carefully filling in each earning gap.

Sometimes I think of him, and as the light  
is turned down on another day, and night  
exults in freeways or in lines of shops  
that cast their tinsel hopes to private drive,  
to car park, cul-de-sac and cold bus-stops:  
on everything that's ordinary but alive  
to what I told him but he couldn't grasp  
or didn't want to, maybe, as that scene  
of earliest boyhood fills with springtime there  
and things beginning as if Meg had been  
some batch of sturdy skippers in my care,  
I think of winds collecting, such as blow  
far over that harsh changing world we know.

Their source I cannot tell, but watch at times  
the gathering morning sunlight as it climbs  
above the pine trees, opens on the road  
or paints in undergrowth a thousand points  
as if that momentary view had showed  
another world in waiting, which anoints  
if that is not too strong a word, a sense  
of time quite other than the past we lost:  
that underlies it, serves as thermostat  
to stem the grief and ever numbing cost  
we recollect and are astonished at:  
something that for a while we once held dear,  
not wholly gone from us, nor yet is near.

The message opens up as sunlight on  
the sodden countryside when rain is gone:  
a brief but rich and sudden transfiguring  
that for a moment flames and has the power  
to resurrect whatever hopes could bring:  
we see the opening radiance of the flower,  
the sharp astringency in April days,  
the sky's expectancy in patchwork blue,  
a world of bowling columbines of clouds  
that lift through ranged horizons out of view:  
a streaming wind that fills and overcrowds  
the mind's receptacles and breathes of space  
so different from this crowded, transient place.

Whatever plans we made, the farm goes on,  
and will, I hope, when Meg and I are gone:  
the first from memory, and I am too  
whatever lawyers call it in some will.  
Our parents now lie quiet, and, passing through  
the loves and sadnesses the landscapes fill,  
I sense the boundaries of Chalk beneath,  
the rain of soft and settled glacial sands,  
the footfall of the fox, the blackbird's call,  
the sunlight falling through the pine tree stands  
from cumulus that is not heard at all.  
And as for Meg, dear Meg, for all I know  
she's still there angry with me, far below.

But these are words, mere breath, and all I own  
I'd give to have her back and with me, grown  
back to that plain creature with her hair  
undone as always, scruffy, reconciled  
to being overlooked, but watching there  
the momentary radiance of a child,  
who sees as we did those enormous eyes,  
the coiled proboscis, the beating wing  
that gathers in its taut, vast counterpane  
of tiny scales: a strange, exotic thing  
beyond the hurt of sunshine and the rain  
and think: if we are interludes, and pass,  
then they are jewelled heaven in the grass.

And then, repeatedly the day is bright  
if afterwards it's vanished, out of sight.  
The past is fading, diminishing, I see  
a purblind, ever-backward-looping path  
across a boyhood to misogyny,  
with someone given me, on whose behalf  
a world of coloured butterflies was sent  
to lead, as parents always said it would,  
across the pebble lands, the heaths and trees,  
to what we never hoped for, parenthood:  
a pool with children bathing, summer's lease  
on holidays we never had, not Meg, nor I,  
beneath that widespread, soft blue Norfolk sky.

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