

A Familiar Path

It's a familiar path, steep, but not too much so,
only this time my wife has gone on ahead of me,
moving away – she moves away so fast! –
impatient as always, wanting the view, wanting an answer,
different from me, who never liked to think too much
and have always relied, in the past, on my luck.
But there's something odd about the here and now,
something I've failed to notice, or understand, somehow:
there should be cliffs, with the sea on one side,
Beesands behind us and the incoming tide
rising, but what's rising now is darkness, not water,
with my wife's frail figure in outline too near the top,
moving away – she moves away so fast!
and it's quite a balancing act up there with the wind off the sea
and a heart-stopping drop, but on she goes with no thought
of turning or stopping, of waiting for me,
soon she'll be over the hill and out of sight,
yes! there she goes, left leg up and over the style -
But wait a minute, that can't be right.
There is no hill, no style, only a carpeted flight of stairs
and my wife, like a tired old woman, is hitching up
her plunge-neck nightie and slowly climbing into bed.
I can't fathom where I am:
there's gravel crunching underfoot
and the wind that's blowing chill is in my heart
while *she*, with a groan of satisfaction,
lets drop her earthly powers and sinks
as low as she can go under the counterpane,
pulling the bedclothes up to her nose 'till only her eyes show –
but no! Not bedclothes, two yards of turf, and as she does so
a strange lost look comes on her face,
a mixture of curiosity and disbelief,

before earth covers her over, mouth, eyes and nose,
her brow a pale glimmer, then all of her goes
and the grass, like her bedclothes,
is dotted with flowers.

Maggie Wadey

1st Place in the Open Poetry Category

2020 International Competitions - Wells Festival of Literature

www.wellsfestivalofliterature.org.uk/2020-competitions#open-poetry-competition