

PICKING BLACKBERRIES

The wind ruffles my hair with a father's touch.

I pretend it's you, centre stage in a hybrid sky.

Overhead, I see clear blue innocence,

a souvenir of summer, but white clouds

are massing to the south, beyond the church,

towing a long, dark-grey threat of winter.

I knew skies like this, long ago, every time

we tracked late blackberries to secret places.

You'd grin and say *One blackberry won't kill you*

offer me unwashed fruit, direct from the bramble.

Now, marooned in a strange town, I pursue

dusty berries through petrol-scented hedgerows.

Every year, I sneak a single, tainted fruit,

continue the tradition. *One blackberry won't kill me.*

On days like today, when the pain of losing you

feels new again, I eat a death-defiant handful.