

Take Me Down To Hell Mother

by Stuart Finegan

Blackbird.

As late afternoon snow falls effortlessly across the garden, you wait patiently beneath the garden table. Sitting here alone in the kitchen I wonder what's going through your mind.

On the table a black velvet box. It's been a while since I sat here. The large open room, filled with furniture I remember from childhood. This time last week the world was a different place. At home, down by Spencer's Dock, fishing boats returned home in the dark hours with their bellies full. I watched them unload their riches, smiling, without a care in the world. Then the phone rang.

Blackbird.

Just take that first step onto the soft white blanket. You can see your prize that awaits you. The kettle is boiling. Last night's embers still flicker in the heart. Hardened sods of dark brown turf await their fate.

Opening the box I knew what awaited me. Neatly folded in two rows, musty white envelopes with beautiful handwriting. Where to start. Behind me the clock on the mantelpiece strikes three. And still the snow falls.

Blackbird.

I see your friend has joined you. What are you talking about? As mystical white magic falls from the sky. Steaming hot tea. Cremated toast melts golden butter. I remove the first one. They have been carefully placed in order of dates posted. Starting at the beginning would be wise.

August nineteen seventy-eight. Only two pages inside. They had only just met. Kind gentle words. A brief note on a walk down Kill-more-rush. The stone house by the river. It rained. The bus was late. A small sketch on the bottom of each page. A sunflower.

Blackbird.

Why is it you leave such gentle imprints in the snow? Raging violent flames greet hardened turf, as letter number two is carefully removed. A single page written while waiting for the train to arrive. Tuesday afternoon, Tullamore station in the rain. Letter three, four, five and the kettle whistles again. That sweet scent of warm peat brought home loving memories. Restoring the jigsaw together piece by piece. Young love, forbidden, hidden among the stairs. His first mention of the Galway Shawl.

The milky white clouds stretch from Howth Rd to the horizon. The snow is relentless. Two lovers retreat under the garden table.

Blackbird.

I'm watching you. I see you watching me every now and again. Reading out aloud emotions emerge into the room of mother's final letter. It's comforting to know that my hands touch yours on every page. In dark ink and pencil small words say so much. Paint pictures of young innocent lovers, afraid of who will see them. The kettle boils. Sobs of turf nestle into hot ash. And still it snows.

Blackbird.

Goodnight. The black velvet lid returned to its original resting place. Everyone I've loved yet didn't know rests peacefully inside. We clung to letters and to our friends and family; they reminded us that we had another part to us.

Outside the moon among the stars. Lovers hiding in plain view. She wore her Galway shawl he gave her.