

WILLIAM BEDFORD

Poems for My Parents

The Beck

(For my father)

You must have played beside this beck,
crossing the cold flood on market days
or cutting down the hawthorns lovers use,
the dog rose hips for wilder autumn brew.
Did water dazzle soul beside that stream,
crow-scaring and church the nightmare dream
that woke you to the sullen trap of school,
your restless eyes on sunlit open fields,
your mind an afternoon of games away?
Some teacher must have called you fool.
You never took to books, ignored their fame.
Your smile was harvests, children's random play.
You gave me berries, gathered from the weed,
forget-me-nots to light this sudden need.

Jubilee

(For my mother)

Jolf Moore showed you how to cut jubilee,
damming the stream from Tinsley Colliery
where the coal dust was washed off coal,
pumped out onto scrubby, derelict land.
A layer of coal dust blocked the stream,
wet and compressed like freshly cut coal.
He said these black cubes were jubilee,
though nobody'd ever told him why.
He tried to hold your hand. Bought you flowers.
Trudged from the waste land with a barrow
made of packing cases, shoes tied up
with strings from his mother's aprons.
Stacked under their kitchen sink to dry,
the cubes whispered like roots of trees,
a singing forest washed from a cold stream.