

## Tom's Pouch of Cure-Stones

When Tom was still alive  
I would often see him  
looking up to the sky  
while standing out in the field  
at the back of his farmhouse –

and when I had the chance  
to ask him, one day in the local,  
what he was looking at,

Tom took a black felt pouch  
out from his pocket  
and handed it to me.

They fell from the sky,  
he said, cure-stones,  
for curing elf-shot in cows,

when the cow starts to pine away  
for no reason – hit by the fairies,  
the old folk say.

As I clutched the clutch of hidden stones  
and went to untie the pouch's lace,  
he told me the pouch must never  
be opened nor can the stones  
ever be looked upon or counted.

\*

The pouch of cure-stones  
was given to him by his father  
as were the words of the cure,

he said, as I turned the concealed  
cure-stones within the palm  
of my hand. The stones were round  
and smooth, the size of marbles –

blind eyes kept in the dark  
from where they see  
into the sickness of the cow.

\*

The pouch is passed  
over the cow's back,

*(Cont...)*

in the sign of the cross,

Tom explained, while reaching  
his blue-veined hand out to bless  
the air – and I imagined him

at the afflicted animal's side  
caressing the top of its head  
with one hand, the other hand  
blessing the pouch over its back,

the Braille of stones praying in  
through the animal's hide  
as Tom whispers the words of the cure  
into the felt conch of the cow's ear,

an incanted bovine language  
handed down from the wind  
that blows the slow dreams of trees  
into the ghost-birds who haunt  
the fallen autumn leaves.

\*

When I suggested to Tom  
the stones may have been coughed up  
from the smoothing gall of a seagull's bladder  
whilst flying high overhead, he just smiled,

\*

as the wise are known to do  
when mocked by the foolish,

\*

and when I gave Tom his pouch  
of cure-stones back, he returned it  
to his pocket and stood to go.

The stones were needed, he said,  
by a neighbour's cow.

\*

Although Tom passed away  
many years ago, I've heard

*(Cont...)*

some people still see him,  
standing out there

in the middle of the same field  
at the back of his now derelict,  
roofless farmhouse,

looking up at the sky, they say,  
while quickly raising his right hand  
up above his head.

\*

I just smile, when people wonder  
at what he might be doing,  
as I know that Tom

must have finally untied  
the lace on his pouch

\*

and, one by one,  
he is throwing  
his clutch of ghost-stones

\*

back up into the sky.