

On Fire
for Clare and John
at Liddells
2015

Imbolc

It was night like no other - sky a drum,
orange at the edges, darkening; the beat

of the evening star. I was only a guest
in the field of fire and horses, their pink lips

working the snow to reach the grass prickled
beneath it. I'm jealous of their winter coats,

the stack of heather and gorse someone triggered
with a torch soaked in kerosene.

I had no horseshoe to trim with snowdrops,
no tin of raisin bread, nor Irish to bless it.

Where I came from the lilac and bird cherry were cut
to the ground, a draught where spring might stir,

kick up her windflowers and diamonds.
It was a night to tuck some cunning

inside my glove, a flame to unswear my palm.

Beltane

Amongst the marbling clouds, a green star,
fattening moon, scatter of lights

in the valley, birch trees and their shadows.
The fire is shedding gold - more than sparks -

gasps of gold against hushed blue.
It tumbles into itself, feeds on its own flames,

bones of branches blackening. I walk round

in both directions and leap over the embers,

willing the season to come in
as it must after April's cruel rains.

The woman who speaks in tongues is there
again, brazen in her scarlet.

We walk out past the lamps together
and my mouth is sweet with lemons,

the long heat of evening.

Lughnasa

I come home with the tang of the fire on me,
charcoal and wisdom; the toast-coloured alpacas

in the lower field; beech trees leaning
making a skin for the slope; the silk of reeds

and a hundred thousand grasses - purple
moor grass, sheep's fescue, creeping bent - and the spaniel

up to her eyes in it; slabs of parkin,
ginger sparking in my mouth the way the fire

sparked and belted out a great roar of orange
against the night falling so sudden

out of the blue. I come home with it all
inside me and I am purified by it,

the land blessed with it. There will be grain
and there will be fruit. We are sliding now

in whichever direction the light leads.

Samhain

I had the whole seventeen acres
to myself for an hour so I lay down

and let the wet earth hold me;
directly overhead, the eye of the swan.

I watched the sky through a screen
of tufted sedge and listened for the lost ones.

We were all there, all of us. And then
the people came and the lights and the fire

was set alight. Its stacked tower flamed
and fell. We fed it and fed it with hawthorn.

On the other side of the valley someone
set off a rocket. I will not pretend meaning

where there is none. I will follow through.
In a ring, we lifted glasses of black gin

to the end of things, the fallow, starting over.

LINDA FRANCE