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A length of ribbon

by Richard Tillinghast

He was a fresh-minted penny,
 a riff repeated, a flower in a buttonhole,
a pond you could see to the bottom of,
 a man who always knew what to say.
And even if a heron came at the darkling hour
 with a warning in its beak,
he woke every morning with a smile.

She was a row of blackcurrant bushes
 severely cut back, a radio switched off
 so that one might hear the silence.
She was a derelict farmhouse rebuilt
 to her own exacting specifications,
an impossible task necessitated by an arduous dream,
a flowering cherry tree espaliered to a barracks wall.

I picture them sitting together holding hands
 as the light goes out of the day,
 singing some old ballad
till the twilight takes up their song.
Once or twice comes a glimpse
 of an augury awakening in the underbrush,
 but they don't see it—

these figures whispering on turret stairs
 in a tower derelict and wind-bothered
as a stripe of lightning splits the sky.
Though the ink has dried on their story
and their sorrows are wrapped in a length of ribbon,

I take it down off the shelf on occasion
and summon them reanimated and fervent.

Richard Tillinghast's five nonfiction books include *Finding Ireland* (University of Notre Dame Press).

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