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A London Leaving

Colette Bryce

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Colette Bryce is a poet from Derry, Northern Ireland. She has published four poetry collections including *The Full Indian Rope Trick* (Picador, 2004) and *Self-Portrait in the Dark* (2008). Her latest, *The Whole & Rain-domed Universe* (2014), was awarded the Ewart-Biggs Award in memory of Seamus Heaney. *Selected Poems*, drawing on all her books, is a PBS Special Commendation and winner of the Pigott Prize for Poetry 2018. Colette lives in the north of England where she works as a freelance writer and editor. She received the Cholmondeley Award for poetry in 2010. In “A London Leaving,” she takes us to a burial, a border between the living and dead, and a meticulously and beautifully observed moment of the Irish leaving each other in London.

A London Leaving

Out of breath I spot
the polished lozenge of a hearse
pull beside me,
beetle-backed,
nose towards a church.

I quicken foot, I fall in step,
frightened, but of what?
The fear of god is not
the fear of god but fear
of fungi, rot.

Open-arsed it then
from which the surgeons
ease a planky box.
Six, before the entry arch.
Danny Boy, How great thou art.

A husband's silver stubble.
Baritone at the earhole.
A fiddle-thumbed
accordionist from Brecht,
into your hands, O Lord...

Grave politeness.
Blot appearing underarm
at seams of shirts.
A poem fished from Google search,
Do not stand for it, she's dead.

We, instead. Tapered heels
of ladies
sinking into earth.
Athenry: a man recalls
a drubbing at a rugby match.

‘Sorry... trouble.’ Loosened knots.
Uisce beatha,
two fingers, stop.
Smokers in the parking lot,
ashes to ashes,

‘yes, we must
in happier...’ Some awkward hugs.
Glitter webs on the railings.
Travel apps and Uber cabs.
Splash dispersal on a map.