

Classic Poetry Series

**Joan Barton
- poems -**

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Joan Barton(1908 - 1986)

Barton was a bookseller who had a shop in Marlborough for 20 years, and then moved to Salisbury.

Lot 304: Various Books

There are always lives
Left between the leaves
Scattering as I dust
The honeymoon edelweiss
Pressed ferns from prayer-books
Seed lists and hints on puddings
Deprecatory letters from old cousins
Proposing to come for Easter
And always clouded negatives
The ghost dogs in the vanishing gardens:

Fading ephemera of non-events,
Whoever owned it
(Dead or cut adrift or homeless in a home)
Nothing to me, a number, or if a name
Then meaningless,
Yet always as I touch a current flows,
The poles connect, the wards latch into place,
A life extends me --
Love-hate; grief; faith; wonder;
Tenderness.

Joan Barton

The Mistress

The short cut home lay through the cemetery --
A suburban shrubbery swallowing up old graves
Iron palings tipped with rusted fleur-de-lys
A sort of cottage orne at the gates,
Ridiculous and sad;

And lost in their laurel groves,
Eaten up by moss,
Stained marble, flaking stone like hatches down,
The unloved unvisited dead:

In the no-man's-land of dusk a short cut home --
The exultant sense of life a trail of fire
Drawn into that tunnel roofed with the cypress smell
And walled with silence adding year to year:

Too far, too far: always
Under the smothering boughs in airless dark
The spirit dwindled, and the fire
Flickered then failed:

Gently implacably from the shade
The indecipherable dedications spoke
'Dear wife' . . . 'devoted mother' . . .
'Beloved child' . . .

Joan Barton

Thoughts At Happisburgh

Remember the long combes tunnelling into summer
Cumulus tossed into towers and keeps above,
The trampled cliff paths sweet with gorse and bracken
Around each known, each named, particular cove,
And by this touchstone from the years of promise
Happisburgh cracks in dry impersonal pieces -
The reeds, the marram grass, a north wind whipping
The anonymous flat sea margins, the huts, some caravans,
And over it all the sky enormously drifting
In endless thin layers of cloud: undesired
Featureless landscape where the intruding figures
Loom up too large and loud.
At first when sea meant only the brown flood
Of Bristol Channel, the flats of opal mud
Whitened with dizzying gulls when neap tides came,
Rough dogs, wild tumbling boys, far bathers' cries
And sheltered ladies safe to ask the time -
Through the diminishing glass of childish eyes
The shore was all and only wind and sun
And furious scrunch of sand on wooden spades,
Around the lighthouse bunkered in the dunes
No footsteps save one's own.

Later - in a numinous hour - the lapis bay,
The scent of briar and garlic from lush inland lanes
Blown seaward, the rock pools drinking up the Atlantic sky,
The halcyon daylight sucked down into caves -
Then it was we, not I (but it was plural I),
Sharing the timeless spiral of a day
That was all of light and water, air and fire;
And far below though still on the same shore
The rest were only lilliputian men
Speaking a stranger's language yet unknown:

Learning it is the hard thing. Happisburgh is a teacher
Pounding the grammar, rewarding with a poem:
For here beyond the caravans a village grows
In farms and elms and sheep-pens and a vigilant tower
Where Happisburgh church that great ark of light

Is filled with years of prayers, of griefs and fears
And homeliness, loving memorials no less
Of Kosikot and Cartref than of these generations
Whose tombstone lockers lie awash in grass;
For this is a father's house where children come
And share their equalness: sameness not difference is the stem
For uncounted variations. And each is known by name.

Joan Barton