

# Only the Oaks

On a May evening, dusty heat  
and moisture rising on the Yorkshire moors,  
they meet to tread their way along  
the familiar route. Scabbed knees, once-scaled  
trees and first furtive cider swigs  
saturate the unspoken geography  
of their youth spent here by the stream.

He, bespectacled boy, a pond-dipper  
now biologist, just returned  
from two months observing natterjack toads.

A big man now, 6' 2", but stoops.

She clutches a book, (*like she always does,*  
he thinks) studies Literature now.

She watches a murmuration of rooks.

Deftly, he overturns rocks, sure  
as an aged conjurer of the insects

he'll reveal; beetles' backs marbles  
that gleam like quartz under the shrinking sun.

His palms cup for sanitiser  
she proffers, as if he were receiving  
sacrament. A newt lays near, dead.

Only the oaks to see him teach her to  
nurse a dying goshawk; watch her  
salvage his love of writing with her own  
and Ted Hughes's poetry. Not  
aware of their love and yet they somehow  
accept it, nature's wild whim. They  
bury the newt, beneath an arc of oak.