



Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2021 Written entries 2021

White Horse Hill on the Ridgeway

I Comfort

It wasn't as if we went up White Horse Hill
for the view of the Vale spread out below
because it wasn't there to see yesterday.
Yes, we knew it was there under the mist, although
that wasn't what we'd come for anyway.
What I had come for was comfort of some kind. The sheep don't care if you howl and
run and shout and neither did my friend much seem to mind. In fact it was her idea to
take me up White Horse Hill and walk in the grey and murky, rainy afternoon.
Perhaps she hoped the struggle would wear me out.
When you're scared of yourself and ashamed of what you might spill
that is exactly the sort of friend you need
and exactly the right kind of thing to do:
trudge stoically up White Horse Hill not for the view.
On the other hand, if the quite bad cough she'd got
develops into pneumonia, perhaps not.

II Spring

Same old White Horse Hill, same good friend
but different reasons for going and different end.
We went up there again in the mist today
but as we stomped along the Ridgeway we could see
all the standing water in the valley below
and I had something to say, well, something to shout about
and there weren't many people around who might take fright
or only my friend, who by now must be resigned
to certain slightly quirky behaviours when we are out.
And then, on this day, when everything was wet
and the sky was full of rain that had yet to fall
and leaden and sodden and not at all promising,
out sprang the spring!
We heard the scratching noise that is larks in the low sky.
I said: you can never see a lark, they deceive you
and you never get to see one.
Then there was a lark in a slice of sun
there for a moment and then gone
flying up with the others who sang, and hid.
I could have jumped for joy. Well, I did!
Because real as the lark was, something else was true:
for me it was a metaphor for
You Know Who
who I mostly do not see and then I do.

III Sheepish

I had forgotten that on a Sunday
there would be so many visitors about.
But not so many wander where
sheep may safely graze,
though the hill is steep
that I choose to hurtle down
as I shout.

I'm sure the sheep
whose eyes are horizontally arranged
so that she's scarily aware of me even with her head down, has worked me out.
She's thinking, 'They err and stray from thy ways
like lost people.'
Give her the benefit of the doubt.
I do feel lost, likely to err and stray,
kept by the tiniest strands
and by my friends,
in my right mind.
And can I trust Him to know His stupid sheep,
to seek and find?

Patience Tuckwell
