

The Water Harvest
By Chris Lee

Jim - Audition Piece 1

When I think back it is always summer. And the rocks are covered with a sea green moss and the wind is gentle with slowness.

The days are heavy and long and I am tired from running about. A child, in the lap of the mountains.

This is a locked and perfect memory and I will not yield it for any careless wish. Mine to cherish and save. Mine to hold and believe.

I recall one day among all the days. The days with him.

How old were we then? It doesn't matter. We stuttered the passage from boy to man. We were waiting for great things to happen and for wonders to arrive. It was then.

Restless and unable to be still. There's more strength in a boy of that time than in any man he might choose to become.

Mad on blue sky and light that stretched for years. We started in the village and climbed up out of the valley as the shadows grew.

We had no purpose but movement, no plan but to climb. Past the sodden grazing land and across the sloping fields. On and on till the farms had gone and the earth was soft and peat laden.

The sun grew colder and the high air sharp and clear. The march forward, our bodies dragged on by thoughts tossed far ahead. The sound of breathing and heartbeat.

We weren't climbing one mountain but all the mountains.

Rising up. Scrambling and clattering but rising up.

We came to the forest of thick set pines. A fringe of darkness. A black green army of trees that had dropped from nowhere, blocking our way to the space beyond.

To go around would have taken us through to the evening and we did not want to waste the hours.

So we plunged into the world of sap and amber. Matted branches scratching at us every heaving step of the way. A real fight. Needles piled on the treacherous ground and no noise at all but ourselves pushing through.

We had to go down on our knees near the end as the trees pressed closer and closer. But we slithered out into the light at last. Grazed and battered and clawed at. Victorious. And the day still generous.

We caught our breath and gathered ourselves and started off again.

And he noticed it first and pointed and stopped and we asked each other what it was.

So of course we approached and our eyes soon made out a fire of some kind and a man standing tending it, gazing into the flames.

Coming closer we were surely in the man's line of vision. Yet not once did he look at us or acknowledge our presence. Strange. He was staring deep into the fire.

He was lost in its blaze. Yellow and red splashing heat on the blue. Beautiful at first.

Then we saw it. Charred and scorched on the piled up branches, lying, smoke filled and burning. A dog. The man had built a fire to burn a dog. And we now caught the smell of it.

The smell of death.

Rich, meat stained air, with the hum of decay and the spitting of boiled fat. Eyes melted out of their sockets and the guts burst to stink out the onlooker.

We felt the rise of disgust in our throats and backed away from the rot laden pungency.

The man continued to stare at the pyre he had made. His reasons stayed with him, sealed away in his chosen silence. We were not of his world.

We turned our backs and marched.

Jim - Audition Piece 2

Three months, two weeks and four days into the exile a postcard came. My sign, my proof, my talisman. I was unforgotten.

There it was, Trafalgar Square with its pigeons and its red buses. Scrawled on the back were a few sentences, read and reread for more clues than any five lines could ever yield. No wish you were here, but evidence of his continued existence, evidence for my doubting mind that he was as real as ever and as wonderful as ever and my place in his thoughts was not ridiculous fantasy but firm fact.

He did not say where he was living, it was unlikely to have been Trafalgar Square, and he did not say if he was coming home. But I hoarded the meaning in my postcard and stared at the brash colour till Trafalgar Square was burned on my eyes.

And then, without announcement, without warning or premonition, he was back.

He was returned to me.

And he sought me out and shook my hand and talked and talked and talked. He was sorry for not writing he said, but it had been a difficult time.

And then he told me that London was an evil place and that he would never return there and that I had been wise and prescient in my decision to stay at home. And I saw in his eyes, eyes which I knew so well, the signs of disturbance. And I heard in the driven intensity of his speech, a dangerous alarm.

He told me of a girl with whom he'd been living, and how she had died. And I felt the rush of jealousy calm to pity for my friend's great sadness. And he told of how they had taken him to a hospital without his consent and how they had given him drugs which had made him sick. And I joined in his anger at the cold cruel world and how it harbours spiteful plots and means us harm. But most of all, as I saw the madness rising up in him, most of all I rejoiced at the thought that he would need me now.