

Limpet Stew

Ken Jones

Rank grass spurts –
the bracken fronds uncoil
and so time passes

At my back, the stony cove of Port an t-Sluichd. Before me, a rough sward some thousand yards across. It is girdled by dense, stunted woods clinging to heather covered crags.

The only way down into this Gaelic Shangri-la is by a few precipitous paths gouged out by the deer. Beyond lies an hour's slog up a boggy valley which finally reaches a rough stalker's path and then another hour to the road.

An unknown place, difficult to find. Yet once there, some old pull of gravity roots me, some older peace holds me here.

Solitude
comfortable
as an old jacket

But this is not the whole story. I am not altogether alone.

"Fish or die!" ordered the land agent. Scattered about are more than half a dozen roofless houses of crofters forcibly cleared from the inland glens to be replaced by sheep. Fine crafted masonry of poor, forgotten men. Over the years poverty tightened its grip. In hungry winters they hammered limpets from the rocks at low tide and ate limpet stew to stay alive. Finally, some two hundred years ago, they were forced to board the emigrant ships, to a piper's lament.

Township of stones
sorrow, silence
and the breaking waves