

Alvy Carragher

**WHAT REMAINS
THE SAME**



Gallery Books

What Remains the Same
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 18 April 2024.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

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ISBN 978 1 91133 876 5 *paperback*
978 1 91133 877 2 *clothbound*

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

What Remains the Same receives financial
assistance from the Arts Council.



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*for Stephen Murphy,
mo chroí*

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Mallacht

My grandmother told a story
about a man who put a curse on our family.
I imagine a silver beard with puckered skin,
stepping out of the forest, laying his curse
at my grandmother's feet, *a son haunted by water*.
Nobody ever said what my father had done
to deserve it. All my life water followed us.
In a country of rain my father believed
his own damnation. Every burst pipe and wet day
came back to a stranger laying his words
at my grandmother's feet, how she chose
to pick them up, pass them on, give them power.

Reduction

I keep writing my mother into kitchens
as if I cannot imagine her another way —
cake cooling on counter, knife on table,
the disturbance of us in the background.
A life in dollhouse proportions —
a stove, a child, four walls pressing in on her,
never the sharp turn of her head,
never her dark and restless silences.
Maybe this is how I want her preserved,
bending over ovens, crooning to the radio,
a careful sketch contained by the page.
How can I write the word mother
and not reduce her to the idea of one?
Like berries cooked down to a sweet jam
after all their wild and irresistible living.

The Newcomers

Sometimes the cows
graze behind our school,

the black and white
splotchwork of their bodies,

fresh against the patchwork
of fields and sheds.

We gather
under the high wall

until a great head leans over,
big velvety pools.

We stand before her
as others have stood.

Down through the centuries
one stranger faces another

across a divide, time distils.
The imperceptible passes

as one hand reaches
to touch the other,

as warm breath
blesses that hand.

Among Treetops

Our apple trees touch at the top
as if having grown up separately
they decided to turn to each other
before it was too late.

I climb to where they meet,
light enough to inch along
their thinnest branches,
not for the apples, but the thrill
of stepping from one tree to another,
testing the strength with my foot,
balancing, aeroplane arms steady
in the land of wind and branches.

Coming down to earth scares me.
I call my mother, she climbs halfway,
Why go up there if you're so afraid?
Though she knows. Which of us doesn't?
You never lose the taste for sky walking.

Let me show you. Close your eyes.
It is late Autumn; most leaves have fallen.
Climb with me, up, up out of the earth;
feel how cold it is here; touch a wet leaf
to your cheek. The sky is only inches away.