

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/2

Robert Nisbet

Dreamboat

There were plenty of dreams in our music then.
I remember Bobby Darin's Dream Lover, dream girls,
dream boys. But we only have Bernie's word for it
that somewhere in the juke box croon and rock
there was a dreamboat. For that was the name

he gave to the Irish girl, Siobhan, over on holiday
with the Joneses down the road. Bern was our lyricist
from then on, that summer. He gleamed with sentiment,
whispered his incantations, cooed her dreamboat name.
And remarkably they kept in touch, they fused,

those two, in some strange way, in some alchemic quirk.
Years later, in our student flat, we'd plot the parties,
pub crawls, social spin, but Dreamboat's name was there,
a background, mentioned at odd and often serious times,
and yes, he kept her photo on the kitchen shelf.

And then, when they were twenty-two or three, he made
the trip to see her on the family farm, a first meeting
in six or seven years. And yes, so, so predictably,
the crossing, Fishguard to Rosslare, was hell.
We pictured Bernie, heaving by the dreamboat's rail.

Returned, he was subdued. The story we nudged out
was of a charming homestead family, Hollywood log fires,
the captivating girl, by now matured into a brilliance.
And the invitation to her wedding, in the spring,
to a neighbouring farm son, training as a vet.

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All this we gleaned in time, without too much denial.
There was real hurt (there must have been real hurt)
but Bernie sent a present (of Harlech Castle table mats).
With love from Bernard James, your loyal friend.

Sometimes since, I've cursed what seemed such abjectness.

At other times, I've blessed him.

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In Retrospect: A Triptych

When you were twelve, July was all you'd dream of.
There were bikes and beaches, the sand
on grainy afternoons. Woodland's small fires,
the spuds black-roasting.

September was sedate enough.
The school was decent, there were other kids,
games lessons, books and painting.
The tinpot hitler masters grew comical in retrospect.

November's still a generous shade.
School bus, then home by dark,
the supper places, wireless, fires, the hearth.
The beaches six miles distant now
as the four of you sat indoors, mooching really,
in the home's commonwealth.

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Jazzing it up in the Patti Pavilion, 1962

Events sec, wispy-bearded Will,
had hired the Patti for the summer dance,
toiling in his smoky bedroom
on paperwork, assurances
for licensing authorities.

The caretaker, a grumpy sod,
was known in town as Bum-face.
Will needed to cajole him,
damn near bribe, to fix the bogs in time.

The band was local, Gilfach Goch,
the clarinets and drum kit in a dirty van.

From nine we started to arrive
and it seemed to us like a huge rose opening,
a plenty's horn, the jazz, the joy,
the skip jive, bare feet pattering,
the scattering in light and sound
of love and sensibility.