

Morrells Wood Farm

A farm passed down from hand to hand,
from smile to smile, from dad to son.
A farm built from this soil, this earth,
its foundations roots, its soundtrack moos and baas,
the crack of a swishing tail.
A farm opening its gates wide
to primary school pupils visiting,
romping, foraging,
having talks from those in the know,
in an outside classroom whose walls
stretch from here to the horizon.
A farm growing up, branching out
to holiday cottages, special occasions,
a farm for egg-laying and wedding ceremonies,
where a bride walks down the aisle
and the sound of the wedding march
drifts with the light
out to a barn of blinking cows.
A farm opening its arms wide to change,
as the same birds circle there, above,
singing their song.
And everybody on the farm looks up.

Peter

Summers don't seem to be summers anymore.
I remember, 5.30, 6,
the smell of early mornings,
eighty cattle, market day in the pub.
You went to help your neighbour
and your neighbour came to help you.
My father would not retire.
We had to sell up or he'd drop dead.
I went lorry driving.
I miss it now more than I did then.
Now we collect butter churns, this and that,
things given to us by milk factories, farmers.
We've got three barns of the stuff!
People come and see us and say,
Oh yes, we used to have one of those.
Why do I do it? It's madness, it's madness.
A hundred thousand pounds now for a tractor.
Summers don't seem to be summers anymore.
It's a life. It's a life that's gone now.

Sophie

I've been farming for three years now.
My boyfriend never wanted to but I love it.
The night the lambs came,
I had my nice nails for the holiday,
my engagement ring.
I pulled and pulled.
I was given two piglets by my boyfriend's father.
'Great business,' he said.
I bred them until there were twenty,
couldn't bear for them to be slaughtered.
Their faces! I gave them away.
I had a bad year last year
but will have a good one this year.
I can do injections now and trim the sheep's feet.
Sometimes they get this thing called stargazing,
it looks like they're looking up at the sky.
People think that's when they're going blind.
A vitamin B shot will save them then.
Sometimes my boyfriend will catch me looking
out of the window at the field of sheep,
ask what I'm doing.
If you don't look then how do you know,
I say, touching my ring.

The Horses and the Goats

Walking after work now with the dogs,
my holy trinity of lurchers,
walking now up to a field of horses
who look once, twice, blink their massive blink,

then run towards me. Run. There's nothing like the sight
of a full field of horses, running towards you,
the sound of their hooves
the sound of giggles. Oh my cuddly

scratch and sniff horses, I run my hand
through their manes and feel okay. And then
the goats: my cloven-hooved mischief makers,
my escape artists. I like it

in sunny weather, when the horses lie down
and I can curl up with them.
It's everything work isn't
and, when I have to go,

I fold them all up, the field, the goats, the horses,
and put them in my mind,
so when I am not here
I can think of them and grin.

Angela

A city girl in another world
who sees these fields, these trees and there,
these horses. Sat on my first horse

and that was that. Bought my first horse
that same week. Then the second, a big one, Java.
Hadn't been trained. We learned

together. Two chickens, a birthday present
from my mother. Now there are twenty,
a waterproof, sun-proof run, all mod cons,

a list of egg customers as long as your arm,
and a range of strategies for dealing with foxes.
We skipped the cockerel

for its neighbour-annoying properties.
The whole thing is love, this enormous passion,
an expensive business, a reason

for downsizing. My favourite time? 7.30,
8 in the morning, when I give the big girls
their first run. Each night, I like them inside again

whatever the weather,
need to know they're safe and sound, tucked in,
before I can close my eyes, and dream of them.

Jemma

A place where things are done the way they're meant to.
Hedges grown from a cutting of a living hedge,
lambs who are born without pulling,
can live without antibiotics.

A place where the fleece of our sheep
is tanned by one friend, given to another
to wrap my godchild in,
so she can lie, warm and sleeping.

Outside the kitchen window,
that same sheep is now dozing.

My mother-in-law lives up one field,
my sister down another.

It's not a job, it's a way of life.

My husband works twelve, fourteen hour days,
and comes in grinning.

A place where things are done the way they're meant to.

I met my husband on a blind date
and now it hangs there, above the fire,
a year photograph of our college
with both of us in it,
years before we met each other.

Bluebell Wood

I'm starting to turn my place into a bit
of paradise. It's what's supposed to be there:
not sheep and not us. Like all things in nature
I don't like to plan too much.
I'm trying to put back the natural wilderness.
Oak birch hazel thorn mountain ash ash.

It's like a calling. I work in bursts
of nine-to-five. I was up there
watching badgers the other evening.
An old birch is completely different to a young birch.
The dawn chorus oh my god it's almost too much.
Oak birch hazel thorn mountain ash ash.

A whole universe of birds tweeting away.
A good place to relax – I feel at one with it.
It's timeless – come in and hear the silence
of 13,000 trees. I manage my world,
speed the pace of nature up by intervention.
Oak birch hazel thorn mountain ash ash.

The undergrowth changes every year.
I can go in with just a light jacket
on a rainy day and not get wet.
It's like it's protecting,
leaning over and saying *There you go, son.*
Oak birch hazel thorn mountain ash ash.