

## In This Sequestered Place

Ida down in the village told me. Her mum, when she was young she had TB, I think it was. They brought her to a bothy away up the glen here and left her with a dog for company. For months. Someone from the family would bring food every week and place it on a big rock at the turn of the track. She'd look up from her quiet work tidying about the place, and the furthest bit she'd see of the road home was that twist in the path, and the rock.

It's a ringing rock - a rare thing - and the air would carry a hollow sound to her clear and sharp when a milk pail was placed on it, or a muffled noise if it was maybe a wooden bowl wrapped in a cloth. Ida said this was all that tied her mother to her former life. A distant bending figure and the clink of a milk can on the ringing rock.

The news-chatter is relentless, now. Unbearable. I threw my mobile in the bin this morning. Smashed it into pieces against the house wall so there was no going back. I need peace from it all. Silence. There are stores enough in the shed and the garden's doing well, I had energy for it in the spring as the clouds were gathering.

I taste my first raspberries as I move along the canes, pressing their fragrant warmth between my tongue and palate. For a second I feel each tiny roundness, every resistant seed. And I think of the days when the old double-deckers drove out from Dundee full of hard women from the housing schemes, heading for the fruit picking.

Those women ruled the berry fields, and their contempt for the gaffer was heady, their language foreign to me, shocking. I listened to their stories as I picked alongside and they pulled me, a solitary child in a cotton frock, into the generous

hurly-burly of their summer lives. At night, they told me, they soaked their hands in bleach so they could go to the pub unstained by the deep purple of the rasps. Those insolent, powerful women - how could they know then, that the bleach might kill a virus? How would they know that now, in these strange times, their raucous gatherings could kill them?

I'll take one last walk up to the ringing rock and strike it with a pebble, in memory of Ida's young mum. I'll listen to the peewit's strange call twisting across the haughs. Then I'll close the gate at the bottom of my track and strand the barbed wire across the top. I've drawn in all the threads now.

Word Count: 455 (including title)