

Poem for a Dying Earth

Spring at last, damp wood smell teasing from the ground under each footfall.
Tightly furled green spears uncurling to reveal sharp bright colours, acid yellow
or translucent blue veined crocus goblets
The same earth heaves and sighs, warming as it swells round to face the sun
Then flattens itself and spreads wide and smooth like tide turning to push away the
bleaknesses
Everything sings, even the grumpy bus driver who draws his lips back to show his broken
tooth
A carousel cacophony rises from the still quiet of winter
The spinning lambs on endless fairground circuits
This is how it begins again and again and again until one day there is silence
Just punctuated by a gentle belching as the last oil well leaks final black tears
Which trickle down into the vast still lake of dark shining treacled depths from which
nothing will swim up to breathe

Sunday Roast

Mum made the Sunday roast last at least four days. She eked out the meat in different guises, risotto or curry or the cold meat minced up for a shepherds' pie. She called risotto 'risee et pisee' based on Italian I suppose, and for years I didn't realise this was risotto of a type, with frozen peas cooked in. The mincing day was great fun, as there was a proper old mincer in the jumble drawer beside the stove, under the peeling Formica worktop in the 1960s fitted kitchen which Jane later told me had been all the rage and right up to date when it was put in. This kitchen stayed forever. My cut finger from the sharp edge of this worktop hurt for a while, bled a little into the kitchen sink stinging under the cold water, then healed and was gone. The mincer lasted longer. It was assembled with bright metal parts and screwed like a bracket onto the worktop. The best bit was feeding the slices of cold meat slowly into the open spout of the mincer. Sometimes Mum let one of us do this, picking up the hardening pieces of meat and pushing them down into the mysterious workings, cranking and turning the handle to see the mince worms falling into a cracked cream mixing bowl. This minced up old meat went into the bottom of the shepherds' pie, topped with mashed old potato. I found this meal tasted better with ketchup. Lots of it, to cover it and almost completely mask the taste. Not because it tasted bad, but just better with ketchup. If I go back to that kitchen tomorrow I think I could find the mincer even in the dark- what was bright and modern then is patterned with familiarity now for all of us. We try and persuade Dad to downsize or declutter but secretly the kitchen anchors us together.