

## Poppies

Three days before Armistice Sunday  
and poppies had already been placed  
on individual war graves. Before you left,  
I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,  
spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade  
of yellow bias binding around your blazer.

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,  
I rounded up as many white cat hairs  
as I could, smoothed down your shirt's  
upturned collar, steeled the softening  
of my face. I wanted to graze my nose  
across the tip of your nose, play at  
being Eskimos like we did when  
you were little. I resisted the impulse  
to run my fingers through the gelled  
blackthorns of your hair. All my words  
flattened, rolled, turned into felt,

slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked  
with you, to the front door, threw  
it open, the world overflowing  
like a treasure chest. A split second  
and you were away, intoxicated.  
After you'd gone I went into your bedroom,  
Released a song bird from its cage.  
Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,  
and this is where it has led me,  
skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy  
making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without  
a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves.

On reaching the top of the hill I traced  
the inscriptions on the war memorial,  
leaned against it like a wishbone.  
The dove pulled freely against the sky,  
an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to hear  
your playground voice catching on the wind.

By Jane Weir