

GEOFF PAGE

Codas

1.

Somewhere those initial
raptures of the skin
have settled to a pattern

neither could explain.

A turned back makes its statement;

The grown-up children who

had once been such a bond,
and common irritation,
stay in touch by phone.

They notice nothing much

and promise even less.

There are no babies yet.

Habits keep the days

aligned; a calendar

supplies, just like the lawn,

its weekly discipline.

Slowly they have learned,
though neither can admit it,

fidelity alone

will never be enough.

And where do they return to,

those sudden bursts of spleen?

Outside, the streets at night
can offer no direction,

maintain their disregard.

Each day is like a wine-glass.

They know they're not yet ready

for anything this hard.

2.

Often it is civilised.

Their coffee tastes are still the same.

Their politics don't differ much.

They have a child between them and

a grandchild in a distant town

and so it is they need to meet.

The split was eighteen years ago

and followed twenty-five together.

One of them keeps better count.

The conversation starts out well —

harmless recollections or

the latest prat in parliament.

It's not as if they've never had

their shopping list of small agreements

but suddenly, no sort of warning,

the recitation starts again —

details of the dates and times,

the manifold injustices,

the major and the minor slights,

mostly unintended but

their footnotes leave a raw tattoo.

Some errors he'll admit to but

others make a late debut.

She has some spare ones in her purse.

He's parrying as best he can

but nothing much can be deflected.

Apologies were once attempted,

hedged about with exculpation.

'Your memory,' she smiles, 'has always

been conveniently porous.'

Again, he needs to hear her out.

There's little to be added till

she snaps at last 'I've got to go;'

then scrapes her chair abruptly back

and, leaving nothing on the table,

steps into the autumn air.