

## **A Wednesday in February.**

The air smells crisp today, as though the storm has cleaned it.

Above the crackle of leaves skimming  
across the garden's surface, a bird whose  
name I don't know is singing.

I was expecting a deluge of rubbish this morning;  
I knew we'd be the first people in the garden  
since Storm Ciara. As usual, London caught the  
lightest touch. The garden has amassed more trash  
than usual but thankfully, not the destruction  
I'd anticipated.

sweeping for litter, I find  
chunks of soggy cardboard and  
plastic bags billowing  
through the pond

I'd been worried about the Mizuko  
Jizō statues, who looked so  
disturbing when they lost their heads  
to vandalism before.

But they stand here still and nonchalant  
she's passed them by.

two years on

February,  
again

I remember feeling that the  
storms were getting worse.

(the storms before the storm)

now

as Storm Eunice rattles at  
my windows, I realise that  
this storm season we have  
made it down the alphabet  
to 'E' already.

Born on this side of the  
great storm of 1987, I have  
never seen  
    heard  
    felt  
    anything quite like this  
before.

The various offerings throughout  
the garden seem more or less  
intact. A few more ribbons than  
usual have disentangled themselves  
from the gates.

I pick them up and tie them back  
onto the cold, robust frame. Its  
touch is as grounding as ever.

opposite

One of the paint-  
splattered plastic  
skulls is so nearly  
perfectly in place,  
resting on its side.

now and then she sends a ripple through the Borough  
It's blazing bright again and the stones ingrained in  
the surface shimmer, breathing with her.

Ciara didn't manage to take down  
the hollyhocks. They are still  
here; still lanky, still rooted.  
Still flowering in spite of  
everything.

Last week, Jen mentioned how  
strange it was that they were out  
already. I didn't have the heart  
to tell her that they never left.

in the southeast corner

Red and white tape has been strung  
up above the biggest and messiest  
crack. One end tied to the haggard  
old buddleia that spills from it,  
the other to a rickety salvaged  
chair, spray painted gold.

It has the feel of part crime  
scene, part deranged seaside  
visit, part maypole. The chair is  
placed as it never would otherwise  
be, facing the wall, and I sit in  
it. I wonder what happened here to  
merit this - this crack seems no  
different than it did two weeks  
ago.

underneath  
crevices  
converge  
messily  
approaching  
but never quite  
reaching  
a centre  
cobbling  
together  
indeterminately  
instead

I sit down to write in the garden's  
sunniest, most naked spot, which in  
this moment is the Northwest  
Irish Corner.

The daffodils are out in force.  
Behind the pyramid, the grass is  
alight with those starry-cradle  
purple flowers. Above them, the  
mistletoe long-since-grafted onto  
the floundering crabapple tree is  
thriving.

I look over to the ribbons blowing in  
the wind and listen for a gentle  
swishing sound.

They undulate endlessly but still I hear  
nothing.