

\* CARRYING ON \*

Gudbrandsdalen, Norway, July 2018

My mother is shouting up the stairs, Stop that bloody carry-on. She means something terrible will happen if me and my sister keep carrying on. My sister Cara will verify this as she can verify many things. Cara knows about carrying on.

There was a time when I could no longer carry on and it was my sister who carried me on and this at a time when she herself was broken and black and blue. I crouch in an adjacent room to the noises of black and purple and blue.

In Barter Books I come across postcards, mugs, totes and teeshirts, all pronouncing in red and white, *Keep Calm and Carry On*. It's some good British slogan from World War 2 and, you know, I'm thinking, is this for real? *Keep Calm*? A massive great big fucking war on and it's *Keep Calm*? Not always the best instruction, is it. Not always the best thing to do at all

now here's an orange butterfly on a pinky purple blue meadow cranesbill

and frankly sometimes—often—*Calm's* not an option, like now when you're watching the loom of resurgent fascism, like when you see in conflict zones women raped and raped and girls raped and refugees having to flee and when home is no place to be; no, *Calm's* not an option when your world's turning upside down for whatever reason or no reason

so many harebells in the hedge here, so blue, and a yarrow

Throw yarrow stalks for the I-Ching to help you decide

what is a good decision and what is not, what might be a good way forward, out of some predicament, or towards some desired goal, personal, political.

The yarrow flower, white, with red ladybirds walking on top isn't here, it's somewhere else; a green grass verge in Brewery Lane by Davy Cox's Milk Bar, the brewery gone even back then, and the Milk Bar sold and sold again and recently all painted up in National Trust colours in the current fad for before. Yarrow can be white or pinkish.

Here growing tall in the shelter of the old furu fence are the tall blue-purple monkshood that stop your heart. Keep calm. Stop your heart. Hold a buttercup under your chin. Does it shine?

Carry on.

Do you like butter? Yes, I think you do. You do like butter, My turn please. See if I do. No me. Let me.

The sound of sheep bells. Two ewes and four fat lambs snatch at young shoots of dwarf birch as they make their way up the road that passes along the forest edge.

The sound of water. You picture a stream, how it comes splashing over the mossy rocks where little blue-purple butterworts cling on at the sides and how the water lashes narrow into the culvert to flow under the road.

Keep Calm. Carry on.

You've had a lot of anxiety lately when your heart beats too fast and you sweat and go cold and feel like you'll pass out and you have to lie down and you tell yourself very sternly Keep Calm.

Mind over matter. Keep calm. Carry on.

You had a boyfriend once called Michael Sterne, in Brewery Lane, when you were eleven. Can people have boyfriends when they are eleven? You did.

Dwarf willow, do you know your leaves are almost

furry, almost silver. You have made your home in the ditch where the damp is. If you land in the ditch, make use of the damp, you'll win out there if the weather stays warm.

The old furu fence slopes and peels its bark in the short hot summers and long cold winters, it weathers what comes and what goes, it does its thing, keeping animals in and out or out and in, enclosing the kve that runs all the way down to the Feforvann, steep and purple-blue with cranesbills and knapweeds, and where have those sheep gone with those clanking bells

where all the people from those bombed places their houses rubbed their hope boats trying to steer the wide sea

Some things carry on over time, echoes of voices from far from calm. Here by the wide lake sounds carry across the water and arrive as full as when they began.

Listen. Late spring. A blue-black cuckoo on the other side makes himself known and known and known again.

Red clover, a bee, and the gate that creaks and the cattle-bridge that rattles. Cross over. Go through. Carry on. Keep calm.