

Springs weep between mosses and beech roots,
seep over glacial gravels atop London Clay.
Regulated by knickpoints, Staples Brook
trickles through Epping Forest,
watershed for Rivers Lea and Roding,
Thames Essex tributaries.

Where brook feeds river,
my life mewled into World War II
in aunt's downstairs flat
adjacent to our troglodyte shelter,
should the air-raid sirens wail.
Window cleaner washed mother's view
into my childhood "peacetime",
a soon-abandoned fallacy.

Chilblained children hushed to Uncle Mac
on the BBC at five o'clock,
"Are you sitting comfortably – then I'll begin."
Little Red Hen, Three Billy Goats Gruff,
and scarecrow Worzel Gummage,
mice living in his chest,
regaled our innocence.

I budgeted my sixpence allowance;
tuppence for a comic book,
a farthing for the vicar's Sunday liquor,
threepence three-farthings
for Dolly Mixtures and Liquorice Allsorts.

I ran father's army boots across
the Roding's alluvial plain,
along meandering banks
where iridescent blue Kingfishers
darted death to Sticklebacks;
Wood Pigeons and Cuckoos called.

An Italian ship with a Russian crew
tramped me away from familial country
with plans for an American dynasty,
ten offspring to bear my name.



Fecund Central Valley ripened
my cherry bowl of peeled grapes,
slivered almonds, and wined roses;
but three sons brook no toddlers,
no grandchildren for me,
my dynasty dead from filial tube snips.

Remotely, I view youthful treasures
engraved in Italian marble.
1956, by the Yew tree,
farthing rests in peace.
Obverse; Defender of the Faith;
Reverse; Jenny Wren – silent for eternity.
1967, by the vestry, lies Uncle Mac,
Derek Ivor Breashur McCulloch OBE
minus a leg and an eye
lost in the War to End All Wars.
That did not.
1970 in oak shade, dodecagonal threepence.
Its crowned portcullis forever shut.
1972 Taiwanese scrapped liner Castel Felice.

Father, sister, mother, two cousins,
childhood neighbors
and many friends returned
to dust and ashes, repurposed.
Dwelling elsewhere,
I did not see them go.

Lament not the emigrant's lost country.
Bewail not the unborn dynasty.
Shed few tears for passing friends,
ineluctable time fells us all.
Save your grief for unknowable peace,
because, as Thucydides, wrote:
*The kind of events
that once took place
will,
by reason of human nature,
take place again.*

The sirens wail, the void begins
beyond your garden wall.