

The
Night-Side
of the
Country

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The days drew in and the men fell hard.

Not all of them fell, to be sure, not nearly enough. It was a log-roll of men down a long river and you stood on the banks, waiting, watching, taking note as they jostled for space in the water, seeming to steady, seeming to right themselves until – as sudden as it was unexpected – the plunge to the rocks below.

After this, who could go on as before? Certainly, you were changed. And what of the story? At first, you thought of a fugitive, a woman running from her past. A woman tracking the roads her life has taken. The woman is still a fugitive. But in this Time of the Felled Men she steps forward, she speaks up and this has consequences.

In this, you realise she is just like you.

There is the man who suffers and the man who writes, to paraphrase T.S. Eliot. Lucky Mr Eliot, striding to the bank, writing poems in between the ledgers. The suffering man kept separate from the writing man and in any case, there

was always at least one Mrs Eliot to watch over him. But what about *the woman who suffers* and *the woman who writes*? At this particular moment, the one bleeds into the other. You're not blessed with a stiff upper lip, *cojones*, or a gift for compartmentalisation. Art is not life and life is not art, but now everything starts to blur and you've arrived at the point where the woman who *writes* and the woman who *suffers* are not so separate. You front up to the page to confront the woman writing and the woman being written. You are living through night in your country and trying to fend off the night. Perhaps you should become a male poet? A male bank manager? Perhaps you are in need of a wife?

After W, the first man, floods past, you believe that things will be different, even in your own small life. You rake over the years. *What happened back then?* You listen to these other women, some famous and others not famous at all and see that it's no longer about the one woman. No. The one voice now harmonises with the many to form a strange music. Those who hear it for the first time shake their heads and ask themselves, as if woken from a trance – why did we not hear this before? For this music is not new, it's been playing for centuries. But it was women who sang this lament for the fallen, the outcast, the bruised – a lament for themselves – and who, down the centuries, could listen to that?

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