

people:
Unfinished Poems

RUTH IRWIN



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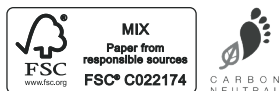
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‘Central Line Sonnet’ first published as ‘London Sonnet’ in *Earth-Quiet: Poems from Tower Poetry 2012* by Tower Poetry, Oxford in 2012
‘Dig’, ‘Capital Story’ (originally titled ‘July’) and ‘On Those Cold December Evenings’ first published in *Goldfish 2015* by Goldsmiths, University of London, in 2015
‘The Greenfinch in the Garden’ first published in *Red on Bone* by Poems Please Me in 2015
People: Unfinished Poems first published by Renard Press Ltd in 2023

Text and illustrations © Ruth Irwin, 2023

Printed in the United Kingdom by Severn



ISBN: 978-1-913724-99-3

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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people:

unfinished poems



DEDICATIONS:

For my parents,
Stephen and Deborah,
who gave me my first words.

For my editor, Will,
who gave me the space
to make this book.

And for my partner,
Pradyumna,
who gave me his heart.

THANK YOU.

- love, Ruth.

Why Do I Never

Why am I never doing
what I'm supposed
to be doing?
I could be writing a poem –
should be writing a poem.
This better not become a poem
because then I'd be doing
what I'm supposed to be doing
and I'd stop.

Friendship for a Season

We lay all night on the cold grass
under sharp stars
and talked,
and as we talked
discovered how different
we really were.

This was the closest we had ever been
and the start
of our friendship's unravelling.

Funny, really, how we both went
from that pin-bright moment
into such separate lives.

Sometimes I'm sad
I could not love you.
But both of us have
that night –
that wide open talk,
those stars.

Sometimes I Wonder

if the people who educated me so well
stole a capacity for believing,

left me grieving the parts I was
told I had to lose.

I was too weird, too scatty, too confused
by the need to draw an A4-sized grid

and fit the figures neatly into it.
I'd rather let a daydream

comfortably defeat me than
grapple with a straight-line graph.

I learned, in the end,
as all good girls must do.

But I still wonder, sometimes,
how many poems

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were lost to the strictures of
assessment objectives and analytical paragraphs,

how many drawings were defeated
by the need to solve a simultaneous equation –

an intellectual operation I managed simultaneously to
achieve and forget, the knack of it slipping

promptly from my head the moment I left the last exam.
I'm grateful to those people – please don't get me wrong –

many of them cared, and most of them tried to –

but I wonder if there's maybe irrecoverable treasure
that their didactic scales weighed as trash
to cast away.

I wonder if I do the same thing
to the minds I measure every day.

The Greenfinch in the Garden

I was five the day I first discovered death.
A cat-got songbird on the lawn, frail, prone,
some final beauty to a mangled chest
that had been crushed mid-flight, a life undone;
I found a counting in my numbered breaths.

I carried the body about with me,
smoothing short feathers on the perfect head,
alive with a new-born empathy –
and then Dad saw us. *Wash your hands*, he said.
Instead I made a grave by the chestnut tree.

Once burial was done, I fled to my room,
sat cross-legged by the boarded fireplace
and one by one imagined every future tomb,
each person I loved in a cold, tight space,
their eyes limed over into sightless stones.

I stayed, there stuck in this enormity,
until, again, Dad came along, saw tears
and sat to share the carpet, growing kindly.
He listened as I gabbled out my fears –
why live at all when death's a certainty?

He did not laugh, or speak of God Above.
Instead he put a huge arm round my shoulders
and silently reminded me of love.
Then he said, *Why live? Well, for each other.*
Besides, we've all got so much left to prove.



SOMEWHERE

Somewhere is the quiet we seek.
Somewhere in this dark.

Sometime is the time when things
are right. Some time, some right.

I'm not sure who you are,
or where you are, but hopefully
sometime, somewhere,
you will appear.

When you do, I hope we both
have the right words.

Sometimes I worry that we may
have met and

parted,
with the right words trailing
between us, half-mumbled.

Hopefully somewhere, some time,
you will read this and smile,
knowing I was wrong,
knowing we said the right words,
knowing we made something
TRUE.

SOMETIME

