

PLAYLIST OF THE SAME

What was left and leaving gave itself over to what would come. That moment when your voice sounds so very close to the sound of what happens or is happening. What is happening? Close by, a cuckoo. What makes it so dumb? The bird Ivor Gurney's fellow soldier told him about when cradling another fallen companion. How it made its "Cuckoo Cuckoo" sound while he died. And Gurney wanted to use it in a poem but didn't.

All day the cuckoo makes itself into a never-ending vowel of need. Its calling, its recklessness. And in the book of recorded bird songs it always sounds startled, as I press the button again and again. As if something bad happened or was about to happen. It has that quality. Gurney knew this and so does my friend. *They'll die*, she says, when talking about the soldiers, *they'll die and I'll be glad of it because it means the war will end*. Because this has already happened and is still happening.

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Without diminution, without increase. I know someone who knows someone who knows someone also. Isn't this how it goes? As a sacrifice, your burnt face gives hope to others, all the world, suddenly, larger for our living in it. The fire was "human made" and rose in a kind of grandeur as all that is vulnerable about us came to the surface. Now, almost a birthmark, the injury a mottling of repair and where repair could not change it. It is like a work of art. It is a work of art. The part of you we try not to notice.

Instead the cuckoo's recorded voice, the hand-around-its-throat call—*I want to die, I want to die*. Why do you keep asking? One day I saw you touching the skin graft, like a child. They weigh heavy upon us, the friends who no longer know the way to die. And the birds, so Gurney says, were loath to leave their homes among the battlefield, but hovered around the dead and dying until some of them were burned, their wings, and fell down.

How shall we ever listen again? Faint-lipped, unceasing, a sound that later will seem most precious because made in another country, by someone else's hands, from a recording of a recording of a recording. This insipid, this nominal (which is it you will remember)—"Cuckoo Cuckoo."

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