

Jenny Mitchell

Safe to Hug

A giant birch tree near a disused playground
stands taller every day since local children
line up at a distance, groan to wait their turn.
Time moves much too slowly now. One by one,

they hug the swelling trunk, cheeks skimming bark,
eyes clenched shut. Strange to watch lips move but
hear no sound. At times, this quiet communion ends
with a fleeting kiss given to the trunk.

It does not respond though roots appear to move,
settling in the ground as if for the last time,
deep-planted, here to stay when other trees
are long-since sacrificed, made a field of stumps.

As children walk away, chests wider now,
the birch stands backbone straight, achieves new height.

Soothing Song

I want to dance with all of you,
closely as we can, at once,
cheeks pressed together tight,
group hug for all the world,
no matter how you pray,
what languages you speak.

Let music blare, cacophony
of breath, a quick release
for all the worried sighs.
Come to my waiting arms.
The room will spin, hope
dance into the sky, sent back

as we revive. Each step
explores a different way,
leading to a stream that flows
until it makes a wondrous noise,
soothing song to help us
know that we are one.

Late Flowering Dad

It grows out of his grave, the love
he never showed becomes the grass,
green breath thick on the ground,
leading to a field with each embrace,

once held back, now rife except
there is a tree for every slap.
The forest looks so dark till nature blooms.
An alchemy of hugs denied hang low.

Reach out to pluck that goodness down,
hold against your heart, breath calm
for once, knowing death does not end life.
It only means he found a way to grow.

Jenny Mitchell has won several poetry competitions, most recently the Folklore Prize. She is widely published in magazines and anthologies, and is a Pushcart Nominee and 2 x Best of the Net Nominee. A debut collection, *Her Lost Language* (Indigo Dreams Publishing) is One of 44 Poetry Books for 2019 (Poetry Wales) and a Jhalak Prize #bookwelove recommendation. Her second collection, *Map of a Plantation*, (IDP) will be published in April 2021.