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LIBRETTO

End of Season

Clare Best

Author's note

I first visited Cannero Riviera, on the northern shore of Lago Maggiore, in 1994. Since then I have returned again and again – often with family, sometimes with friends, occasionally on my own. I have always found peace and solace in the vast waters and ever-changing colours, and in the warm hospitality of the people.

Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to Franca Mancinelli and John Taylor for the Italian versions of the poems.

Clare Best has published seven volumes of poetry, and a prose memoir *The Missing List*. In 2019 she was awarded a scholarship to study for an MA in Opera Making at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London. She graduated with Distinction and then took up a year's Fellowship at Guildhall, 2020-2021, to work on libretti for chamber operas and other vocal projects. She lives near the Suffolk coast, in England. clarebest.co.uk

I dedicate these poems to the Gallinotto family, and to all my friends in Cannero Riviera. Thank you for the gifts of time and place you have generously shared, and for receiving me and my family into your hearts.

Qui riposa ogni brama. Piero Chiara, 'Ritorno (I)'

The following six pomes are the selection from the full collection that have been set to music.

Return

If I forget these short days
and cool nights, the lack
of screaming swifts,
I can pretend today is summer
and we are here together

but cruel waves come
from nowhere, tipping boats,
slapping harbour walls.
The lake speaks to me
and I must listen.

Postcard from Cannero

Would you like grey, my love?
This place lures me to a window
where a world is framed:
hazy slopes tilting into water,
islands, boats. More haze,
more rain, lightning (fork and sheet),
a copper sun, and grey –
more grey, my love.

The name of a mountain

The hill behind the village has no name.
It should have a dozen or more:
mountain where palm trees thrive,
where the Rio Cannero roars,

where mules clamber over cobbles,
stone curtain, shield against the north,
place of orange and lemon trees,
ancient terraces – long overgrown,

high land with a view to Luino,
home of lake-winds finding their way,
mountain of shade, mountain of dreams,
dark mountain without a name.

Walking

My boots are rocks,
acorns for studs –
ground rises through me,
rides in my gut
with sweet chestnut tannin.
Lake-water runs in my veins,
dust sleeves my bones.
Fool's Gold glitters
my fingers and pockets.

Museum of citrus

Amanatsu
Bergamot orange Buddha's hand
Chinotto Cleopatra mandarin Desert lime
Florentine citron Grapefruit Hernandina
Ichang lemon Key lime Kumquat Lumia
Mandarin Moroccan citron Myrtle-leaved orange
Oroblanco Palestine sweet lime Pomelo Rangpur
Satsuma Sweet limetta Taiwan tangerine
Ugli fruit Winged lime
Yemenite citron
Yuzu

End of season, Lago Maggiore

Out in the Golfo d'Oro
the dreadlocked summer man
buzzes to and fro, towing pedaloes
to be tarpaulined.

At the hotel by the harbour
the carpets are rolled.

There's one last chance
to make that passeggiata
along the silver shoreline
towards the hollow trees,
down the path spotted scarlet
with magnolia seed.