

## **the yellowest bucket in the world**

the wagon roaming freely in Regent's Park  
is known as the smallest cinema in the world  
and is painted bright yellow just so you won't lose it

somehow it reminds me of the tortoise I had as a boy  
a hard dome  
containing something quite exotic  
we called him Tank  
let him roam freely in the garden  
and, just so we wouldn't lose him  
tied a bright yellow bucket on a long piece of bailer twine  
through a little hole in the back of his shell

to this day I can see the tortoise's powerful forearms  
pulling him forwards  
his long yellow nails gripping the turf  
his Jurassic head jerking side to side  
his toothless jaws decapitating dandelions  
and the bucket dragging behind him

Tank dragged that bucket wherever he went  
it helped us find him in the surrounding farmlands at the onset of winter  
when, he'd burrow beneath a dry stone wall  
or into a mound of dying bracken

my dad said tortoises can live for over a hundred years  
but would probably die if left out during a cold winter  
*a hundred years that's older than granny*  
*that's almost forever*  
the thought gave me a warm feeling  
it made me happy for Tank

each year before the cold weather set in  
we'd search for Tank's yellow bucket  
follow the bailer twine through leaves and dying undergrowth  
and then, very carefully, we'd lift the sleeping Tank  
into his box and put him in the loft

*a hundred years that's older than granny*  
*that's almost forever*  
the only trouble was he'd outlive me  
and then  
who would look after him?

one year we were late finding his bucket  
or slow to remember  
the first frosts had turned everything white  
dad said if we bring him in now  
it might be more of a shock to his system  
than if we leave him out  
I was sick with guilt  
prayed for a mild winter

and before long his bucket disappeared under the snow

I can't remember how he woke on that occasion  
perhaps like Jesus he just re-appeared one day  
(and at first we didn't recognise him or thought he was the gardener)  
I can remember him waking in the morning of other springs  
the anxiety uncovering the box  
the patterned shell, the dinosaur feet, the relief on seeing his eyes blinking  
my mum would bathe his eyes with cotton wool  
and I used to stroke his cool, dinosaur throat with the back of my forefinger  
I liked that  
I like to think we both did

I'd also like to think that's where the story ends  
and the farmer carrying the yellow bucket  
and puzzling over its contents  
the remains of Tank following his passage through a combine harvester  
never really happened - as unreal as it looked  
an outtake from the film *The first 100 years*  
now showing at the smallest cinema in the world

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