

Ellen Maud Smith

There was no music at her brief committal.
Seven in attendance, two nurses and us
in the small church in the Essex village
where Ellen was born and lived all her life.
The only daughter amid six sons,
she'd cared for her parents and her last brother,
and then, when none of the village boys
came back from the war, lived on
in the dwelling sunk behind a now busy road,
among cow parsley and tottering beehives.
She'd often tell of the day
she won first prize at the singing gala
in the summer church fete.
How she'd sung Ave Maria in her bonnet and ribbons
her voice sweet as a green linnet
above the upturned faces of that afternoon.
How she'd skipped home in the cooling sun
black-blue swallows skimming
evening insects off the long pale grass –
the lights coming on in the village
and her whole life ahead.