

Laying Ghosts to Rest

My father, raised in Skye, believed in ghosts.
I went with him to feed the hens at night
and came to share his fear that hellish hosts
were prowling in the trees just out of sight.

At ten years old I thought it time to purge
this nonsense from my mind. One night I walked
three long, dark miles to where I planned to scourge
myself with wraiths by whom I might be stalked:

Kilmorack Churchyard. I unlatched the gate
and entered. Gravestones, indistinct and dim,
loomed round me and I felt the hand of Fate
come close, no doubt to tear me limb from limb.

Then I recalled the poem Thomas Gray
had penned about the dead and their past lives
as village folk who whiled their years away
as ordinary husbands, kids, and wives.

From such reflective calm, foreboding fled
and all I sensed was kinship, sadness, peace,
and freedom from suspicion that the dead
have bones to pick with those they predecease.

My father's in the darkness now, alone.
On writing this, the thought occurs to me
that maybe I should stand before his stone
and read him Thomas Gray's dear elegy.

John Beaton