

'Blue Dress'

Rachel Burns

You have been here before, but not often
in the woods, with the smell of wild garlic,

you sit on the damp sand, watching the river flow
wearing your blue dress, the one with upside down umbrellas

the pattern facing the wrong way. Your mother's friend,
your neighbour, made it. She makes all the children's clothes.

You stand on a stool in your underwear, in the front room
it is hot, and your bare feet sweat, sticking to the red leather.

Tina talks with pins in her mouth, you fidget with your hands.
Was it Saturday or Sunday? You can't remember, the memories

blur around the edges. She has a teenage son who stares.
He whispers in your ear when Tina leaves the room.

You can smell Vosene shampoo, and the sun shines brightly
through half closed curtains, big yellow sunflowers,

the pattern garish, the ugliness hurts your eyes, and you are glad
when Tina returns with the needle and the thread.

She likes to finish the dress with you wearing it,
you stand head bowed while she stitches the hem.

Stone still, watching the needle and thread going in and out,
in and out, till she is done. You go outside and show off

your new dress to the others, playing hop scotch
and skipping games in the lane. Only you don't join in,

you walk to the woods, towards the river, in your new blue dress,
with upside down umbrellas, the pattern facing the wrong way.

A pheasant spooks you out of your skin, hurling itself into the air,
the harsh rasping ricochets through the trees

the noise scraping at your insides, hurting your ears.

