

The Boys of Summer Zoe Mitchell

For Edward 'Ted' Tedman

They weren't boys to me, then, but men.
It's only looking back I see what they really were –
and yet I still remember that time

as a perpetual summer and those boys, drinking
in pub gardens, talking about bands I'd never
heard of, playing their guitars. Home town

rock stars, that's what they were – and I was in awe
of their confidence, the music inside them.
Standing in dark pubs with sticky floors, long nights

and exhausting mornings. Heartbreak, too, how quickly
the thin veneer tarnished under salt water.
When I moved on, I filed only the shining moments.

For example, I remember every word he said
against a backdrop of fireworks, the sea air cooling
my sunburnt skin, a band in the distance playing

one last song. Even though most days I know better,
there's a part of me that still wants to believe he meant it.
I know I believed it then, for a while at least.

Those rock stars became middle aged men
while I wasn't looking and it's a shock to see their hair
thinning, their own children not that far from the time

we had together. I thought that was the worst of it;
the heavy tread of the real world, diminished wonder.
It's sobering to discover that their fire

was nothing but a last burst of colour and light
before they settled into grey days and the cowardice
of mortgages and career plans, of toeing the line.

One of those boys died today. Him. His final age
is as much a shock as his absence from the earth.
I will keep him in the same place as all those boys,

before the quiet autumn of their suburban lives, as if
time never caught us and never could because I know
even lost souls could be found in such a summer.