

WILLIAM BEDFORD
IMAGINATION

—for Fiona

We sit on the riverbank like Ratty and Mole,
imagining toasted cheese
and William and Dorothy in the kitchen,
snow at the barred window,
and Beatrix Potter on her way home.
But this is Devon,
and the Doones have stolen the cheese,
a crumbly Cheshire left on the range for supper.
On the moors, Tarka the Otter is swimming upstream.
Frieda and Nicholas are pointing to the moon.
Alice Oswald is telling stories of her wide river.

I cannot imagine there are better stories,
even Shelley filling the sky with fire balloons,
Harriet radiant with delight and surprise,*
and you, young as you were when I met you,
celebrating the sun over the sea-fret waves,
the wild cry of the curlews.

You say:

Let us consider what we do when we leap,**
so we sit on the riverbank like Ratty and Mole,
and high among the moorland heather,
leap together, far out beyond the dawn seas.

* Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*

** Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*

SHELLING PEAS

—in memory of Florence Winifred Bedford

20.10.1915–09.09.2008

Years after you preferred your own peas,
shelled into sunlight in a narrow yard
and rattled round the tin cullender
your father used for sorting out his brushes.

Your mother hated that. Folded her arms,
and glared at the polished doorstep,
her sightless eye glass with a fierce rage,
her flowered apron bright with April sun.

Just right, he claimed, the holes in that tin,
especially when you're working watercolour.
I bought frozen, shocking you with my lies.
They never taste the same. I think of you,

running down the yard, your brilliant hair
stopping their every argument,
shouting to help them shell the new peas.