


Pen Reid: InValid*****


'Our song began by a loch...the fish lay still listening to our words' (Awakening)

InValid, artist and poet **Pen Reid's** new pamphlet, tells the story of a marriage – hers. It begins with the first meeting, with that dazzling discovery of new worlds, new beauty, new spiritual freedom (no longer 'subjugated into parent  pleasing'), new physical joy;

*'my tentative shuffle admiring the way
your hips tucked in neatly:'*

Pen's finely crafted words take us all back to that first rapture. Things change after that for most of us – but for Pen and her family they have changed in a particularly drastic way. After her husband's diagnosis with the degenerative disease multiple sclerosis, Pen began writing poems to find a way through the family's experience, something that she has achieved with awe-inspiring skill;

*'Poetry has provided me with a voice to express the
unspeakable'*

 Here in **The Whole Works'** cosy Old Town sitting room, Pen's readings are accompanied by **Emma Scott's** moving violin music; the two are in perfect harmony, Emma's playing reflecting the various moods in the poems. When Pen talks of a robin, Emma's violin fills the room with bird song; as leaves fall the music becomes slow and wistful.

Pen lays bare the simple truths of a life with MS, but she also finds hope in the smallest details. Her poems follow the seasons of the year, and the seasons of her marriage. In **Autumn** she is

'....vivified by

the vulgarity of

the chrysanthemum...'

but also wistful, 'longing for the return of his summer.'
In ***Fall in the Garden*** we are not spared her husband's embarrassment in ending up with his head in a plant pot – but

'my heart is buoyant

that you are bleeding

and alive.'

It is, of course, not only a partner who is affected by illness. Children have to live in a situation quite different from that of their peers. Pen uses the analogy of water suddenly crashing down over a weir (fabulous, shattering music from Emma), and in ***We saw bunnies playing below the ramparts*** she likens her children to rabbits playing on a cliff edge;

*'despite the steep precipice,
they play on'*


She desperately wants her daughters to know their father as their father, to understand that he is still the same person;

*'Lengthening your marrow
will not journey you from pain.
Stay with your father's degeneration;
know love lives not in the physical.'* (Fridge Light)

And after all, they are still children doing childlike things – 'My daughter stands in her pyjamas/singing to the cat'.

☒ In a particularly poignant moment, Pen goes into her husband's workshop, picks up some of the curly wood shavings and wears them on her fingers 'like rings' (***Redundant***).

The final poem in this reading *Meeting with a tree in a park*, embodies all of Pen's sadness, but also all of her hope; the tree is trapped in the park, but its petals still fall free, nothing can prevent them from flying; 'My increasing belief that we are never truly trapped'.

'Invalid', Pen says, is a label too often applied to ill  people, too apt to make them 'in valid', unimportant, unheard. A neurologist once told her that 'grieving is critical to adjustment', but in this brave and beautiful collection, Pen not only grieves – she validates her husband, their family and the power of love.

InValid is published by Appletree Writers Press and will be available online from [Bowdy Kite Books](#).

Pen will launch *InValid* at the [Scottish Poetry Library](#), 5 Crichton's Close, Canongate, at 1.30pm on Saturday 10th September. All welcome.

