

## Burlish Meadows

PETER FREEMAN

*'Old Blood and Guts' General George S. Patton*  
(This is the site of the speech he made on 31st May  
1944)

It's all quiet now. I'm standing on  
a replica wooden platform overlooking the meadows.  
Beside me is a 'steel pot' helmet mounted  
on a concrete plinth softened with moss  
and surrounded by nettles.  
There's white deadnettle and black horehound  
still in flower; it's milder than it should be.

It's the 11th of the 11th. Armistice  
from *arma*, 'weapons' and *stitium*  
'stoppage'; the cessation of arms.  
I've no speech to give but I can at least  
stand here in remembrance of those soldiers  
assembled on the slopes below.

It was farmland then; the ruins of a golf course today.  
Silver birch saplings rise out of the bunkers  
with seed baskets of wild carrot and domes  
of earthy powdercaps. Dung fungi grow  
where Shetland cattle have grazed the fairways  
and greens, opening up the turf to give beetles,  
bees, badgers, moles and voles a foot-hold in.

Evidence of summer is all around: ragwort,  
mugwort, ribwort plantain, heartsease, chamomile,  
knapweed, charlock, bristly ox-tongue.  
A kestrel hovers between oak and maple  
as they shed their autumn colours.

The meadows are peaceful but the world is at war.  
And we're all enlisted. At the eleventh hour  
speech-writers are looking for words on which  
their leaders can hang pledges before they fly home  
to floods, droughts, heat-waves and forest fires.

I promise myself to come back in the spring  
attentive as my granddaughters when they look  
for pieces of jigsaws; another creature for the jungle,  
bird for the sky, fish for the sea.  
I have my wish list ready: woodlark and sand martin;  
lizard, snake, slow worm and hare; brown argus  
and small copper; grey hair-grass, green tiger beetle,  
blood bee, six-belted clearwing.



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Peter Freeman