

Judith Barrington

## Lone Fir Cemetery

Wetherbees, Birrells, Odells, Simpsons, Flemings  
rot under urns, carved trees, stern upright slabs;  
an angel spreads chipped wings.

Dew-drops pearl the net of the spiders' webs  
that drape the iron bars  
of the mausoleum where jars  
of slimy water hold yellow mums long dying.

The further back you go, the younger they died:  
"Eighteen eighty-one to nineteen nineteen:  
Margaret Ring." The shade  
of the oak is deep, the shadows serene,  
chilling all the faintly etched stones.  
Are these the broken bones  
of a woman lost in childbirth—a hopeful bride?

More and more black shiny graves arrive,  
each with a photograph of one who has gone.  
These pictures make the dead look alive  
as they looked when arriving in this new land. Neon  
balloons duck in the air  
and headscarves capture the hair  
of women who place plastic flowers before they leave.

I used to think I'd like to be buried here  
in a neighborhood I know, a good place to walk.  
I'd gently molder near  
to the voices of those who, in death, still want to talk.  
But someone decided to ban

the dogs, who would sniff and run  
and dart behind the graves, then reappear

grinning and drooling, startled by some quiet ghost  
that rose to meet them whispering dead man's words—  
a friendly poltergeist  
familiar to foraging squirrels and skittish birds.  
That's why I'm no longer sure:  
without the dogs' quick fire  
mightn't we dead be trapped under endless frost?

