

The First Day of Summer

by Janice D. Soderling

It is the first day of summer, a blue-green afternoon, and we sit beneath the English oak, *Quercus robur*. Everything has at least two names. It is the first day of summer, or the last day of something else.

The catkins, male and female, so tender in the spring, are hardening to something brown and acorn-like.

It is the last day of something, or the first day of something else, and we sit beneath the oak with rosé wine and a platter of new-fried trout. There are plates and napkins and cutlery, and like on every picnic, something forgotten, something left behind.

I pick up a knife, cut off my ear and hand it to you with a slice of lemon. You tell me how busy you have been, so much to do.

To cheer you up, I set my hair on fire and smile and ask, "Do you think I'm beautiful?" Impatiently you say, "Yes, yes, of course," explaining your coming week in London with the rich woman from another country.

The sea lies where it always has, digesting its thoughts. Like onyx, like sapphires, a glint of ruby algae, like a gangrenous wound, its colors stretch for miles.

I pull out all my fingernails, arrange them neatly in a row beside the trout heads with the white-fried eyes. I turn my hands palm up, but there is no future to be read there and no past, only the contours of your body like a second set of fingerprints.

You go on talking. I see your lips still moving. Leaves curl like fetal infants, and autumn has already come.

