

Clare Rainsford

Hollow Way

Hollow way (n.)—a road which over time has fallen significantly lower than the land on either side... Where ancient trackways have lapsed from use, the overgrown and shallow marks of hollow ways through forest may be the sole evidence of their former existence.

Horse hooves sunk deep into sticky clay.
Between rutted mud and thistle bloom
We pick our path along the hollow way

Handfast; we unscroll your youth
When ash-keyed branches dipped and prayed
Not to hollows, but hellos—the crying of news

(“She’s birthed! She’s birthed!”)—children at play—
The carter’s mare as she wheezes on through;
The triumphant honk of a goose (astray)

Or the farm-wife, with clippings from the youngest ewe,
who cursed as the basket spills in sticky clay
and scraped the mud off of her own caked shoes.

The feet that passed here have passed away.
Handfast couples picked their path and left you
Deserted. Only bramble blooms; only ivy strays
Through the hollows the years have worn away.