

## The Path Ahead

He was asleep the first time they walked the path  
snuggled in a blanket  
as she heaved the pushchair  
over cobbled stones  
to reach the tree-lined track

Later he would love that bumpy entrance  
taking tentative steps  
a stick grasped in one hand  
her two fingers  
tight in the other

They walked in warm spring evenings  
after long days at school  
and crisp weekend mornings  
before birthday parties  
or football

The tunnel of trees went on endlessly  
so it was easy to talk  
share hopes or heartbreak  
walking side by side  
eyes on the path ahead

The night before he left for uni  
they stepped in silence  
him feigning indifference  
her pretending  
not to cry

Six weeks after she became a widow  
he bought her an overexcited dog

who dragged them along  
their well-trodden path  
with fresh eyes

Two months after he became a father  
she taught him to navigate  
a fancier pushchair  
over cobbled stones  
without waking the baby

Later his child would love that bumpy entrance  
stooping to pat the worn stones  
as the less excited dog  
took the opportunity  
to rest

He once tried to estimate the number of times  
they had taken the walk together  
but it rained  
and he lost count  
somewhere around two thousand

When they walked the path for the last time  
that they didn't know was the last time  
she grasped her stick in one hand  
and held his steady arm  
tight in the other