

The Ogham Stone, p. 71-72. University of Limerick, 2024

Child Carer

by Helen Fallon

I still keep her cookery copybook dated 1934.
Blue ink script slants across yellowed pages
mottled with brown blobs like the age spots that
dotted her tissue-paper hands.

Recipes for Pies and Puddings:

Shortbread

Barmbrack

Plum Cake

Ginger Snaps

Apple Snow

Damson Pie

Rhubarb Dumpling

Suet Pudding

Banana Fritters

Jam Roly Poly

Victoria Sponge

Invalid Fruit Tart

and

Lemon Syrup Sauce to serve

Apron billows over slender body.
She dips a blue jug in a tin bucket
beneath the scrubbed wooden kitchen table,
pours the water into a blackened pot,
places it on the AGA, adds the sugar,
and watches as the pyramid dissolves.

Stir, then boil for five to seven minutes.

The clock stopped soon after her mother died.
She grates the rind, then juices the lemon,
adds it to the mix. Citrus scent lingers
on her slender fingers. When the syrup
has thickened she slides it off the heat,
goes outside, finds her skipping rope.

Sunday, she serves her father and brothers
Lemon Sauce on a steamed Suet Pudding.
No record in these pages of her loss:
only a daughter, aged twelve, plucked from school

to play mammy to a house of men.