

Leaving the Island

We've all gone now, left the place to the sheep
and the gannet, the puffin and the wren.

For decades only a mailboat of whalebone and oak
came and went from here. Then the tourists

arrived to see if we were more than myth in the Outer
Hebrides. We sold them tweed and spotted

bird's eggs, let them look in on prayer meetings, count
the stones in the walls we built to keep out the weather.

When we prayed it was for a cease
to things: the wind, the war, the plagues.

In the end, the land choked us out, carcasses
of sea birds and layers of peat moss turned to lead

the constant fog, the solitude, the slippery grass
by the cliff's edge, that impossible winter of 1929.

We left our Bibles open and handfuls of oats on the floor.
Locked our doors behind us. From this vantage point

our home was just a sketch of land that shrank into the sea—
the island's sharp crags impossible to understand.

This land, so angry and so peaceful now, without
us. The feral sheep bleat into the evening.

Nothing to bother them but old age and the wind
that made us all walk like bent trees.

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