

Aileen Kelly

BOXING DAY

Surrounded all of a sudden
by half-known adult faces
who used to be teenage nieces
shrill nephews and minor cousins

but now have leapt fully formed
from the adolescent frowns
in suits and after-5 gowns
sophisticated, armed

with expertise and credentials
you wouldn't believe. Here's one
talks of "my lawyer"; our son
is her lawyer. The essentials

of solid citizenship
burp on shoulder and knee;
young Dad and toddler agree
or pout the family lip.

In-and-outlaws I've barely met
and more seem pregnant than prudent.
I grow old, we grow old, dear heart
but on average the clan
(says our actuarial student)
is getting younger again.

JUNE 1989

The People's Road is Loved by the People
in English and Chinese near Lanzhou airport.
Ninety minutes of wildly creative driving
heads for town between more potholes than surface,
skimming unimpressible cyclists
and donkeys or longhanded engines dragging traycarts
of bricks that grow more easily from the kilns
all along here than the irrigated vegetables
flanking small walled villages or cave doors.
On campus we wake each day to a rising shush,
the running shoes of Phys Ed Teacher students
out before light, before the quiet music
which gives over to wake-up songs and news
into every window: the People's Loudspeakers
really are Loved by the People, proudly re-rigged
by travelling folk-dance groups and wind quartets