

KATIE JUKES

### Queen's Gambit Accepted

my father lowers his fist to the table offers me knuckles fingers uncurling  
like a fern a black rook he schools me in zugzwang fianchetto the power  
of a pirc defence in that high-ceilinged room a summer storm could scatter  
our silence from nowhere like an after dark shouting match what does a girl  
want from her father he pushes his specs back up his nose studies black  
and white squares rubs his pale forehead *watch out for discovered attacks*  
he cautions between Miss World & Top of the Pops I take my special place  
win cash prizes for being female he signs me up to the local club church  
halls musty coats *make the centre ground yours* he grows poorly I travel  
alone to play in St Bride's crypt ride the 43 night bus home he swallows  
tablets charcoal sodium waits for me ready to climb the stairs later I lie  
in my bed sugary tea pumping through me wondering how the squares  
around my king became so empty why his book of unrespectable verse  
is untouched why the skull what the sound of him crying would feel like  
I keep a small photograph on the wall bonfire night slicked-back black hair  
pencil tie sheepskin coat smiling at me from his black & white world  
still teaching me *don't wait for the endgame play your best moves now*