In Our Tenth Year
Simon Armitage

General Information
This poem is about a couple’s relationship and the way in which it has changed/developed over the last ten years. It has the feel of a sonnet or love poem but the content isn’t necessarily romantic. The title of the poem, ‘In Our Tenth Year’ suggests an anniversary or celebration but the tone of the poem is quite sad and reflective rather than celebratory. The poet uses a harebell (otherwise known as a Bluebell) to explore the state of his relationship. It is called Harebell due to the folk belief that witches used juices squeezed from the flower to turn themselves into hares. It is also known as Goblin’s, witches’ or Puck’s thimble and was traditionally linked to fairies, witches and the devil and ‘should be picked at your peril’ The sense of danger associated with this flower might suggest the danger inherent in their relationship or it could suggest that there was once something magical and mysterious about their relationship, which perhaps no longer exists.
This book, this page, this harebell laid to rest between these sheets, these leaves, if pressed still bleeds a watercolour of the way we were.

Typically beautiful paintings so perhaps suggests their relationship is or has been beautiful but watercolours are pigments suspended in water so perhaps it suggests their relationship has been watered down or is a pale reflection of what it used to be?

‘that’ suggests it is one particular disagreement or day that they both remember well.

‘Inventory’ is linked with being methodical and clinical and therefore lacking passion. Did she keep detailed records of their time together, his affairs or is it a reference to the organisation of the wedding day? However, there is also, the idea of ‘taking stock’ which could link to the fact that the poet is clearly reflecting on his relationship.

Those years: the fuss of such and such a day, that disagreement and its final word, your inventory of names and dates and times, my infantries of tall, dark, handsome lies.

A plant with bell-shaped flowers, otherwise known as a Bluebell. It is interesting that the poet has chosen to use this name for the flower. (See above)

Suggests death or being at peace – is this how the poet feels about his relationship and if so, is this negative or positive?

Suggestion of death or pain

Just like water and colour is forced out of the flower, if forced to think about it, the couple can still find something to cherish in their relationship – there is still something between them.

Literally this poem or it could represent the stage this couple are at in their relationship/lives. Also, the fact that it shifts from a book which contains many ideas, to a page which contains a few and then to one lone flower might suggest that the hopes and dreams they once had have dwindled.

Reference to nature. Perhaps Armitage is questioning how natural this relationship is.

Suggestion of death or pain

He doesn’t remember any specific dates – are they unimportant, too numerous to remember (the repetition of ‘and’ in the next line could relate to this) or did he not care as much as she did?

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Is this a reference to their dating days, reference to an affair or simply their wedding day?

That disagreement and its final word, your inventory of names and dates and times, my infantries of tall, dark, handsome lies.

Personification - the reference to foot soldiers suggests a battle took place, or he felt as if he were battling with something. Tall, dark and handsome are usually positive, attractive qualities but the poet then follow this with ‘Lies’, a negative word. Perhaps the ‘handsome’ lies he told were told with the best intentions or for the right reasons. However, ‘tall’ could suggest that the lies were substantial and ‘dark’ could suggest there was something sinister about them. The fact that the lies are described as soldiers suggests that the lies were numerous and they were used to defend himself or attack. This supports the idea that he had several affairs.
A decade on, now we astound ourselves; still two, still twinned but doubled now with love and for a single night apart, alone, how sure we are, each of the other half.

This harebell holds its own. Let's give it now in air, with light, the chance to fade, to fold. Here, take it from my hand. Now, let it go.

They have been together a long time.

Repetition of ‘still’ suggests he can’t believe they are still together.

They seem surprised they are still together.

Their love has made them better people or their feelings have ‘doubled’ over time.

‘Two’, ‘twinned’ and ‘doubled’ are followed with ‘single’, ‘apart’ and ‘alone’ which highlights a sense of isolation and loneliness when they are not together.

This flower is capable of remaining intact. It doesn’t need help or to be fussed over. It is capable of survival – just like this couple.

An imperative at the end suggests finality and the fact that he wants her to ‘let it go’ might suggest he wants her to let go of the past or to let go of her anxieties. The reader is left questioning what will happen to this couple in the future.

This is an element of trust between the two and they know each other well.

They are no longer separate beings – they are two halves of one whole.

‘let’s’ suggests that this is a joint decision and something they should do together.

He is telling her to give the flower chance to breathe or for nature to take its course and let the flower die naturally (‘fold’, ‘fade’). This could be a metaphor for their relationship and allowing it to be natural and take its course (‘fold’, ‘fade’). He might also be asking her not to stifle their relationship and give it chance to breathe. The fact that positive, life-giving qualities such as ‘air’ and ‘light’ are mentioned supports this.

He gives it to her and so they both take responsibility for the flower and by extension the future of their relationship.

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