

Grasses for Classes

By Deirdre Johnson

Winner of the 2025 Coleridge Poetry Prize

Resting here
beside the stream
as the late afternoon sun
gilds the grasses,
my companion reading
while I study you
memorising your names.

What hidden beauty:
the tiny flowers,
the feathered fronds
the tell-tale ligules
delicate as a fly's wing,
the drooping blades
or diagnostic ears.

I learn your habits
and like an acolyte
in a dream of summer
chant your litanies:
Sweet Vernal Grass,
Crested Dog's-tail,
Creeping Bent.

You hint of soils
of chalk or acid,
marsh or moor
of woodland ways
or river edges:
Floating Sweet-grass,
Wood Melick,
Soft Brome.

I sing my lessons
to your tune,
my bountiful teachers,
in green-gold classrooms:
Meadow Foxtail,
Red Fescue,
Yorkshire-fog.

