

BENCH

By A.M Cousins

My father took the photo before mass,  
caught us in our Sunday best: five girls  
on the garden bench in crimplene dresses;  
three boys with rebel hair and Confirmation  
jackets, standing; Mother – standing too.

Now she sits on the bench to take the sun,  
listens to the seagulls' voices overhead –  
*I feel like screeching too, she says,*  
he promised he would never leave me.

She expects he will walk through the gate –  
bucket in hand – and sit with her,  
whisper something to make her smile,  
then up and back to work – no ease on him.

Over our heads, a hawk rides the air, wings  
fanned to herd a crying bird. *A starling,*  
*he used to call them stares, you know.*  
Locked in their deadly jive, we watch our birds  
until, tired of it all, Mother goes inside.