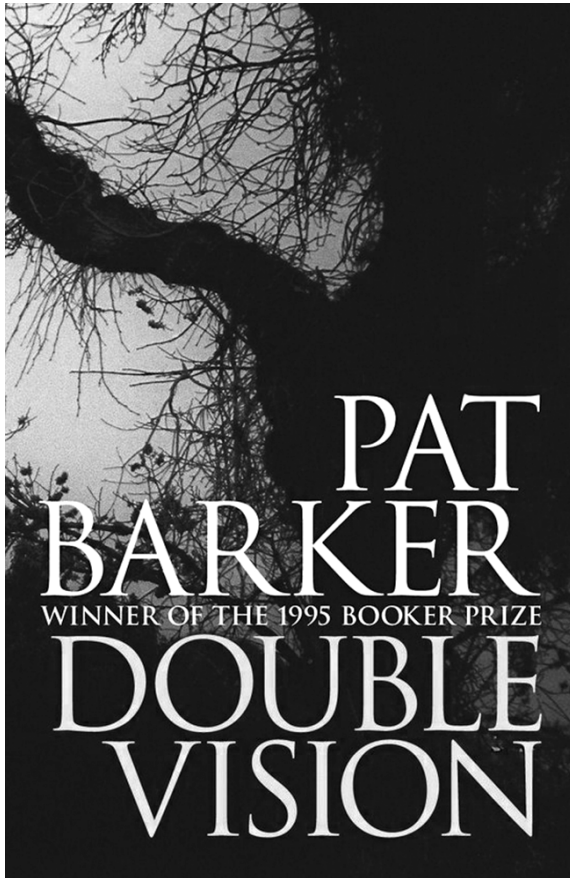


*De volgende tekst is het begin van Double Vision, een roman van Pat Barker.*



CHRISTMAS WAS OVER. Feeling a shame-faced pleasure in the restoration of normality, Kate stripped the tree of lights and decorations, cut off the main branches and dragged the trunk down to the compost heap at the bottom of the garden. There she stood looking back at the house, empty again now – her mother and sister had left the morning after Boxing Day – seeing the lighted windows and reflected firelight almost as if she were a stranger, shut out. A few specks of cold rain found her eyelids and mouth. All around her the forest waited, humped in silence. Shivering, she ran back up the lawn.

Gradually she re-established her routine. Up early, across to the studio by eight, five hours' unbroken work that generally left her knackered for the rest of the day, though she forced herself to walk for an hour or two in the afternoons. The weather turned colder, until one day,

returning from her walk, she noticed that the big puddle immediately outside her front gate was filmed with ice, like a cataract dulling the pupil of an eye. She heated a bowl of soup, built up the fire and huddled over it, while outside the temperature dropped, steadily, hour by hour, until a solitary brown oak leaf detaching itself from the tree fell onto the frost-hard ground with a crackle that echoed through the whole forest.

People had glutted themselves on food and sociability over Christmas and New Year and wanted their own firesides, so the first few evenings of January were spent alone. But then Lorna and Michael Bradley asked her to their anniversary party and, though she was enjoying the almost monastic rhythm of her present life, she accepted. Since Ben's death that had been her only rule: to refuse no invitation, to acknowledge and return any small act of kindness – and it was working, she was getting through, she was surviving.

Once there, she enjoyed the evening, in spite of having restricted herself to just two glasses of wine, and by eleven was driving back along the forest road, her headlights revealing the pale trunks of beech trees, muscled like athletes stripped off for a race. She was leaving a stretch of deciduous forest and entering Forestry Commission land, acres of closely planted trees, rank upon rank of them, a green army marching down the hill. Her headlights scarcely

pierced the darkness between the pines, though here and there she glimpsed a tangle of dead wood and debris on the forest floor. She kept the windows closed, a fug of warmth and music sealing her off from the outside world. The lighted car travelled along the road between the thickly crowding trees like a blood corpuscle passing along a vein. Somewhere in the heart of the wood an antlered head turned to watch her pass. Almost no traffic – she overtook a white van near the crossroads, but after that saw no other cars. The road dipped and rose, and then, no more than 400 yards from her home, where a stream overflowing in the recent heavy rains had run across the road forming a stick of black ice, the car left the road.