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Editorial Note

This is a very difficult editorial note to write; after years in the Poetry Editor’s chair, the April – June 2018 issue is the last to have Mandy Pannett as our Poetry Editor. It has been an incredibly good journey. Mandy’s commitment to the Sentinel Literary Quarterly magazine, as I have noted in several other issues, has sometimes seemed, in my view, stronger than mine.

For some time now, I have personally not been particularly satisfied with the overall working of the magazine, and I just do not want the magazine to simply publish a bunch of poems, short stories, books reviews and plays. I want this magazine to have more character and gravitas. The vision I am articulating will task us all, especially time-wise, and the processes I would like to put in place will not fit in to the way Mandy works, particularly, considering the time she needs to devote to her teaching, and own writing and readings.

It has indeed been a great honour and blessing to have worked with Mandy on various Sentinel projects, events and publications. We still are in agreement that she will remain a part of our events and readings, and SPM Publications is looking at publishing a new poetry collection from her.

The SLQ Poetry and Sentinel Champions sections in this issue have Mandy Pannett’s signature on them. In the former, we encounter a range of voices that she has chosen from submissions to the magazine, showcasing her exquisite poetic taste, and in the latter, we meet the winning, commended and specially-mentioned poems from the Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition (February 2018) which she judged. This was not planned to pan out this way, but truly, it is an awesome way for her to drop her editorial pen at the SLQ and she shall surely reap many blessings and continued goodwill from me, the rest of the Sentinel crew and our readers who have been touched in some
way by her sensitivity and generosity, but most importantly, by the respect with which she has treated people’s work as an editor or Judge. Oh, by the way, we have an agreement that Mandy Pannett will judge the Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition every February for the foreseeable future.

As I consult and pitch my ideas to the team I hope to work with from January 2019, I shall be the sole editor of the July – September 2018 and October – December 2018 issues.

Back to April to June 2018, due to space, we do not have a play this quarter. Expect a good one in July. There are three short stories here by John P. Asling ‘A Time for Every matter’, Frank Scozzari ‘Defenders of Misrata’ and Ian Inglis ‘The Beautiful Game’ As I read through these stories, I considered the importance of how human beings treat each other, and the depths of wounds that follow every unkind act, and a statement I saw on a friend’s Facebook page recently resonated really loud: “If you have to be something in this world, be kind’.

There is something about the musicality of Peter Taylor’s Morningsong and the penetrating observations he weaves into words that stir and invite change; “A bird’s feathers suffice in any weather – / whereas man, on the other hand, is born / and stays forever naked, forever vulnerable, / forever bartering for wraps and paints to / warm his body, adorn his head and limbs, / to hide his nakedness and shame.” Man’s greatest shame comes not from being naked, but from not being there for our friends and our neighbours, and from pretending not to see the evils around us. As we search those things that cover our inner and outer nakedness, we become savages. We lie. We cheat. We kill our own kind.

Happy Reading.
Nnorom Okezie Azuonye, Managing Editor
Essays & Reviews
In 2015 I had the pleasure of reviewing Neil Elder’s pamphlet *Codes of Conduct* for the winter issue of Sentinel Literary Quarterly and so was delighted to hear that *The Space Between Us* was the winner of the Cinnamon Press debut poetry collection prize in 2017.

*Codes of Conduct* was largely anecdotal and took an ironic and witty look at daily life in an office block, a superficial and emotionally bleak place in which to work. In spite of the humour, the poems had an edge to them, an understated but grim look at issues.

This collection, *The Space Between Us*, is equally enjoyable though different and more varied. It is less anecdotal and ‘funny’, but the edge is still there, albeit with a light touch: oblique but sharp, understated but keen.

The poems, as the title implies, are concerned with gaps and vacuums, aspects of spaces between people, objects, events, stories, words, ideas and historical time. Sometimes the situations
are grim and the tone downbeat: *Believers* depicts ‘The blackest of years’ where ‘Roughened up and frightened,/we need an axe/to break strange doors/we find ourselves behind.’ The mother and child in *Removal* take with them ‘souvenirs of fear.’ *Auction Room* is particularly hard hitting as memories and objects that have been loved and bequeathed are ‘cashed in’ and ‘The patina of lives is rubbed away.’ In the last two lines the comment is brutal: ‘the hammer will fall on the past/while I start counting the cash.’

The first poem in *The Space Between Us* is called *This handbook remains out of print* and introduces an important issue. The swimmer who is addressed is told not to try going ‘uphill with a snow suit on’. The safest approach, it is suggested, ‘is to lie on your back/Letting the current take over.’

Earlier I mentioned the quality of understatement that is a strong feature of Neil Elder’s work and the more I have read the poems in *The Space Between Us* the more striking it seems. He is, I feel, a master of juxtaposition and the apparently simple metaphor. The two-stanza poem *Grief Stricken* is a perfect example of this:

‘What strikes me is the way grief
clings to you like wet clothes.
What pains me is that you have grown
into them as though they are a second skin.

I remember returning from school
soaked through and dripping.
*Get those clothes off quick –
they’ll be the death of you.*’

*After Sun* uses a similar device of implication to suggest menace behind the everyday. People on the beach have packed up their costumes and towels because of a change in the weather which is now ‘broken’, causing the sky to be ‘the colour/of the seals we watched/this morning in the bay.’ For some reason, however, they
don’t leave but continue to stay ‘rockpooled in silence/rueing the change’ although they know that if they don’t make a move soon they’ll be ‘washed away’. At the end of the poem there is a hidden threat that is more than just bad weather. ‘The gulls know what is coming’ says the narrator, ‘and fly inland.’

Another aspect of Neil Elder’s writing that I admire is his skill with the striking phrase. Among my favourites in *The Space Between Us* are ‘the ammonite queue’ (*On the Rise*), ‘rubbing out life’s cramps’ (*What We Could Not Give*), ‘only at high noon will bats return to caves’ (*3.7cm (or 1.48 inches) Every Year*), and, perhaps best of all, ‘In beige afternoons, when I feel/fur growing around my strawberry heart …’ (*Descaling*).

There is a fine and memorable set of poems in this collection but there are some that stand out for me in particular. *Thank You for Visiting* conveys an impression of the pointlessness of life reduced, in the end, to gift shop trivia, but stronger than this is the sense of yearning and nostalgia for what might have been: ‘Our tea-towel designs show all the women/ you ever wanted to make love to, while fridge magnets illustrated with your darkest fantasies/ may also be purchased/ ...these are situated next to the life-size cut-outs of the man you hoped to be.’

Three ‘relationship’ poems that I find particularly poignant and moving are *Portrait with Orange, Arles, and Tired of London*. They are beautiful in tone and craft. For poetry that is exceptional and way beyond the ordinary, I must recommend *The Fish and the Jay* and *The Gaps*. Both longer poems, they are stunning.

At the end of *The Space Between Us* the question remains as to whether or not life should be a matter of doing nothing, going with the tide and letting oneself be absorbed by and into the spaces between us. Mostly, as said, the mood is downbeat, describing a mental feeling of dread with ‘the photographs you take inside your mind’ (*Spotlight*) and a physical state whereby
we’ve ‘been eating the land.’ (Earth Eater). Overall, however, grimness is leavened with a light touch: the narrator in Flatpack feels something close to joy in the way he/she has ‘learnt the ways to improvise’ and has managed to bodge an item together although ‘it looks nothing like the picture on the box.’ There is a feeling of epiphany in Stargazing where the couple, observing the stars and ‘joining the dots as we go’, walk together on the beach ‘beneath the darkest-brightest sky’. In What We Could Not Give the poem ends on a note of promise and warmth: ‘The only thing that we can give/is the space that stands between us;/not as empty as it seems’.

Finally, I’ll end this review of Neil Elder’s remarkable collection with Claude Debussy’s apt quotation that is used in the preface: ‘Music is the space between the notes.’ SLQ
SLQ Poetry
Edited by Mandy Pannett
JANET MURRAY

Brock

Whacked onto frosty grass,  
his fur coat’s soaked in melting ice  
but his teeth don’t chatter. His tribal stripe’s there,  
tapering arse curved to stumpy tail, muscly shoulders  
bolted to giant feet, tipped with muddy claws.  
I turn him with both hands, ruffle the fur along his spine,  
part thin hair combed over belly-skin,  
expose two pink studs, his baby nipples.  
They prickle my DNA.
JANET MURRAY

How to write a conceptual poem

Don’t just watch the bees
building in the crevices of your house —
see the house from inside the cracks
through bee-eyes. Cast thin chasms
with cold cure rubber, squeeze out the mould
like jelly-on-a-plate, fill with black bronze,
bash the crumple, create a petrified meta-script.
Bend into a hopscotch, lay on a pavement
number the squares with chalk, throw
a small cinder — follow it— jump between edges
judder the mortar and erase it again.

Fold A4 paper, then scalp-cut
an Amazon journey along the crease, unfold
and cruise a picture-poem — melt a silver teaspoon
pull a metal skein, spin the tallest story so it crashes down
the full length of Niagara. Search the margins
of old books, find the stain of an ancient flood,
give it centre-stage and re-invent again.

Slash your forearm, forge the blood
into alphabet shapes. Read the letter A aloud
or a word containing A which can’t sprout
from the ground without the pollen-dusting
that attracts the bees and, unlike the bees, resist
the scent of orange blossom wafting through the flues.
JANET MURRAY

A boy and his dog
(Byron at Newstead Abbey)

A boy limps round a gargoyle quad
kicking Autumn crocuses, runs
after Woolly his dog whose mother
was a wolf. The boy always lags behind
because of his damaged foot. They rest
by the Mirror Pond, he trails fingers
for the carp to nibble, regards his reflection.
He eats a bag of figs and peaches picked
from the North wall, and watches wrens flying
round walnut trees. He keeps the Abbey ruins
in sight where he daydreams monks flitting
in and out of cloisters, their faces hidden
by hoods; smells the fragrance of the lavender
garden wafting from their robes, gives names
— Harold, Manfred — to the satyrs made of lead,
who stand either side of the orangery.
PETER TAYLOR

What’s Left

She left two years ago, saying she’d let him know when she’d found a place that might be right – more right, at least, than what she’d grown used to over all those years: those first few good growing seasons, followed by the fallow. He’d tried to lie to her that this was to be expected, that they should respect the laws of nature and adapt as the heat passed and love became something different, more enduring. She’d warned him of her fear of the cold, the fear of growing old, all ardour gone, forgotten.

He looks at a mirror in the bedroom – same double bed, there over his shoulder, no longer warmed, no longer full of writhing limbs, bed and bodies blended into a single proposition. Once, they knew its seas and skies, its undulations; and when the church bell rang at dawn, they began again to pledge their all, thinking this call would always sing loud and strong and be answered; no question of doubting the word, no question of flowers turning away from the sun; forgetting, both, that a flower has no mind, no time to doubt, to build a counter-argument, to hear and think about the devil-made screams of the danger in staying, slowly decaying, the dull ache of dying inside.

The mirror, as usual, wants to help, as a tear – saving more for later days that he knows will make a lifetime – clouds the glass; and that single tear turns him into her, the her he chooses to remember,
to taste the hurt clean off the scale of crippling human pain, again. He touches the glass, more gently than he ever did, with the tips of two fingers and sighs with relief at the feel of hers. He presses, lightly, a little more, and she the same; he finds her pulse, still there, faint but fair for the hour; she is sleeping, somewhere. Sweet innocent drug, the plug he employs to stop it all, for another day, washing down to barren ground, to be swallowed up, all gone, all done. He fears that day but, nonetheless, blows a kiss; and the mist recedes while his face, full of dried, ringed, tired eyes, tries to smile
PETER TAYLOR

Morningsong

Awake with aching limbs before the mid-spring sun is to be seen, just as the ancient basement boiler coughs and lurches into labour, the stretch and knock of water pipes the only sounds to mark the day.

But, as my sleep-shy night recedes, a new consciousness starts to spread, restoring daytime faculties; and in quick succession morning songs in diverse melodies claim the air, the singers still unseen – I wonder if they wait for light to sing in flight; and then realise I’ve all my life assumed that birds can sing and fly at the same time, almost involuntarily, as if by design, a thing that’s not to be bargained with, not traded, crudely, for fur or fleece.

A bird’s feathers suffice in any weather – whereas man, on the other hand, is born and stays forever naked, forever vulnerable, forever bartering for wraps and paints to warm his body, adorn his head and limbs, to hide his nakedness and shame.

I bargained too much with my own body, over-sold my legs, arms, head and torso, not knowing that I did so. And for what?
For the searing pain when I mount the stairs,  
for the scribble that must pass as calligraphy,  
for the haze in my mind when I need it cleared?

A day has passed since the early birdsong;  
I’ve thought more on my ornithological doubt,  
the one about flying and singing. I’m not sure:  
I think my head says it simply can’t be done  
because flying needs jealous concentration –  
and, while I’ve not looked, I’ve never seen it.

But my heart pumps much more rapidly and  
barks out these unrehearsed words – *sing to fly  
and fly to sing* – unheard by any bird, of course;  
and I see and hear them do exactly that thing;  
my limbs loosen a little and I remind myself  
that drugs are only part of the story.
KYLE HEGER

The Morning News Never Stops

The fun never stops around here. And neither does the morning news. Even after I step out the door with my Eggo Breakfast Sandwich tight in one fist and a Disneyland travel mug in the other, it’s as if I’ve never left behind the TV celebrities who dish up such a delicious mix of stimulation and comfort from my flat-screen Hitachi. I stay surrounded – during my commute, at work, while I’m at lunch, when I return home – by people smiling from ear to ear, transfixed by paroxysms of laughter nodding their heads to the point of whiplash, agreeing, congratulating, greeting, sympathizing, and, over endless cups of coffee, keeping each other up to speed on the latest news about what’s hot and what’s not, sports, the weather, traffic conditions, new product releases, holidays, bargains, diets, amazing animal rescues, murders, house fires, truck accidents, contest winners, red-carpet gala events and the fashion faux-paux, wardrobe malfunctions and arrest records of celebrities.
JOE WILLIAMS

Shadow Puppets

We cast shadow puppets
on the bedroom wall,
in the circle of light we’ve made,
the lamp angled up so it beams across
the single mattress, and us.

I can manage an adequate rabbit,
and a Homer Simpson that’s good,
or bad, enough to make her laugh.

Like this, she says, feathering my palms,
turning me into an eagle.

Together, four-handed,
we figure out ways
to create fantastic creatures,
alien worlds,
visions of the future.
RANALD BARNICOT

Translation of Two Sonnets by La Compiuta Donzella

(Translator’s note: it is not known whether Compiuta was her given name or La Compiuta Donzella was a nickname, meaning The Accomplished Maiden. She apparently lived in Florence in the second half of the thirteenth century. She left only three sonnets, of which two are translated here. They describe a situation which is still a very real, and pressing issue. The third is a fairly conventional expression of courtly love and not so interesting.)

1

A la stagion che ’l mondo

In the world’s leafing, flowering time of year,
Joy in all gentle lovers finds increase:
Together to the gardens they repair
Once small birds’ throats sweet melodies release;

The noble-hearted then fall to love’s care,
Hasten to serve their loves in bliss and peace,
And every damsel takes of joy her share;
And me, my pain and weeping never cease.

My father, see, has driven me to despair,
Has wrecked my life with hurt I cannot take:
He’d force a husband on me, only aware

Of me as asset on which he would some profit make.
But hours, all torment-packed, refuse to spare
Me, and neither flower nor leaf will ease my heart’s harsh ache.
Lasciar vorría lo mondo, e Dio servire

I wish to leave the world, and, in God’s service,
Sever myself from every vanity,
For everywhere I see put forth and flourish
Falsehood and folly, madness and villainy;

And, furthermore, I see all virtue perish,
Kindness and wisdom, honour and courtesy;
Wherefore I wish for no husband’s high lordship,
Nor in this world would I stay willingly.

Recalling all men flaunt foul finery,
I look on each of them with deep disdain,
But turn to God to give my life in worship.

My father has inflicted this deep pain,
Barring from Christ my soul’s wished fealty,
Nor do I know to whom he’ll marry me.
GEORGE FREEK

In Imitation of Tu Fu

During nights of in-terminable length,
I curse the sky.
I now live in the past.
I’m nearing sixty.
It happened so fast.
My dreams are dust,
blown away with the wind.
I have a wife,
but we rarely speak
I wish things were different.
She stares at the moon.
It never looks back.
I look at the stars.
The stars are far away.
They give me no answers,
They have nothing to say.
STEPHEN BETT

Lift Off 10: bite-size
(after Olson)

Was it gurry
or offal?

A bird at sea,
surely

Gulls all over the
edges of my
childhood

Never expected
to be one

The scraps she
throws me
the innards
of a bruised
woman

A Borderliner
doesn’t have
a clue what
she’s hurling

It’s always
too big for
bite-size

And it’s always
filled with a
jelly of raw
hurt
STEPHEN BETT

Lift Off 17: our own stunned heads

This bird was blindsided in a cartoon sky

Feathers blown out in all directions floating groundward

Like a rain of fluffy mass abandon

And then fine white snow fall

On the tops of all creation

Especially on our own stunned heads.
SHARON SCHOLL

Perfidy
as related by Jane Goodall

One Black Robin, sees the end of all Black Robins in the dwindling clutch of seven clinging frantically to their twig upon the species tree.

Her feathered mate, gray and tattered in his infertile age, lacks the somatic lifeline to effect their rescue. Five females are long past nesting and egg laying.

Across their branch a young, glossy male paces the bark, twittering impatiently as the only fertile female shudders against her old mate’s failing bones.

He makes no effort at defense – no contest of slashing beaks, but simply turns away as though to hide his weakness. When he turns again, she is gone.
BRANDON MARLON

Outcry

Legal remedies await their own enactment, an inevitability inexcusably overdue and far too tardy for the departed, their lives taken abruptly and arbitrarily by actants callous, unhinged, frenzied, eager to go out with a bang-bang-bang, not a whimper, indifferent to the carnage left in their wake in the streets and squares, in the hearts of loved ones lorn and bereft of cherished treasures.

At such hours customary bromides—"our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims and their families", "everything happens for a reason", "life goes on"—are exposed as less than worthless, availing none, not even their well-meaning, mechanical espousers.

The insane, often responsible, ever remain unaccountable; patently unpalatable is the fact that those invested with authority pretend helplessness as horror recurs and the same, tiresome questions arise, the same solutions suggest themselves with unrealistic hopes of being implemented.

Only an outcry piercing the heavens, rattling the skulls of sluggish legislators dozing in power's corridors will suffice to disrupt the pattern; shriek with me, then, on behalf of the needlessly deceased, for the sake of injured survivors;
wail by day and howl by night for the waste of life, the animating impulse, the original surprise present; shriek in righteous indignation, at the top of your lungs... ...or brace yourselves for the foreseeable.
SIMON PERCHIK

Untitled

*

You lower your voice and dig
till it comes up empty
stays in place though you

are the only one who talks
as the sound dirt makes
when taken away night after night

to fill the hole in this bed
–from such a darkness
you carry up the Earth

to look for the sun
where an afternoon should be
and there you wait

gently pushed along
by some hillside on tip-toe
quietly leaving your mouth.

*

You lean into this tree as if its roots
struck something made from wood
no longer moves, became an island

with mountains laid out in rows
and though they have no arms
they open them when someone

is left close by –under such a weight
their hands break apart the Earth
from feeling their way around it
grave after grave, blinded by moonlight
as the chunks you never saved
form this nearly empty night

with nothing but the bright green hole
this dying tree drains, keeps dry
between what you wanted and the shine.

* You dead still look out at water
are sheltered inside these row-houses
laid down along the shore —each grave

waiting for your Moses-like wave
the way a valley is dried
for rafts made from stone

though water never leaves you
covers each afternoon
with the few hours it needs

between your hands
kept separate to clear a path
as if nothing happened.

* You squint as if its cries could fit
and in the same pot this egg
lowered to the bottom —each wave

learns from the others just how much
end over end heats an inside
that has no shell, becomes a sea
overflows the way you dead are buried
embraced by a room filled with water
by walls built from wood and knots

and nails, has a door that opens up
whitewashed, sent out as daylight
all the time adding shoreline and salt.
BENOÎT GRÉAN

From Tepid Monsters
translated from French by David Jacobson

1
We cleavers
of imperious desires
when two thousand years streak
down furrowless brow

memory spanned by throbbing avowals

Master of chiaroscuro
bitter-heart-shaped mouth
he surveys his lives
with assumed stride and name

to tell true lies
not
undress

He swims in a stew
tricked out in loose jackets

heat waves make
marble
fresh angel flesh

let's see that bareness cloy the king
down off his plinth

Virgin and martyr
amid raw recruits
she'd polish their guns
for some practice as target
and never tell
her boyhood name

What beast will hatch
from that tousled hair

in Ariadne mask
a Minotaur
whets his whips

bad love in the boroughs

She wants
does not want people to know
since they have such a perfect opinion of her

what a drag if
they won't suspect
even a bit

Back to the point
of nondeparture
time when a subject bites his tail

be he funster or
tepid monster
hide gets stretched in blue-green sun

He’d walk around naked
well-built and twenty
wide-eyed swaying his
hips though discreetly

who would have thought it
his first word
so foul

Our alphabets disseminated
under an armpit tourney

on the rebound I give birth
to the noxious rush
of hellions’ orgasms

Bodies pudgy and stuffed
pigheadedly yielding
to stupid sun

and your jabber
flatter than a
Sunday beach

Shavings of laughter
where the tales shatter

our bruised lips
met to quench thirst

a future-packed memory
haunts us incestuously

Though to hold him
by anarchic force
scamp of our bodies
with their well assigned wrongs

beauty in this world can only be right

Sun at ebb
on deserted beach
gazes to break the breakwaters
groin drenched in its after-draining
shall we brew up inborn sea

These lungs screamed out
under blinding light

our wavering steps
fleecing caresses

distance slight
from desire to horror

Where sweet-and-sour
plucks laughter’s flower

gala feast
more flayed than naked
beneath the trimmings

now is the summer of bitter skin
JOHN GREY

A Storm Passes Through

A violent storm last night
but the bed was too soft,
too comfortable
to keep us informed.

Trees uprooted,
power outages,
leaves covering the neighborhood
like green snow –
now that must have been something
except that it was nothing.

Then we awake
to much more subtle lightning,
unspoken thunder,
winds, strong as they may be,
that bring only tremor to the finger
around the handle of the coffee cup,
and the kind of rain
that leaves us drenched but dry.

Nothing flattened.
No loss of control.
You’d never see it on the news.
You have to be here.
You have to be us.
JOE BISICCHIA

statue of poseidon

I can imagine what he suffers, I think. I know more than thing or two about anatomy and morbidity. I didn’t go to med school but I can tell he barely breathes.

There’s the apparent dementia, or aphasia or whatever divide betwixt the cognitive and the communicative, maybe even my own fatigue or misdirection, and all of it shall collide here where all the sea meets Ventnor to stay or to leave.

When this was just a childish dream, such a gift of beach, the thought of the sand castle alone would be satisfying. But knowledge is so much more than this, and I’ve got an arsenal. Look at how I am blessed, and yet, here he is supposedly in charge of it all, and stands on a beach block lawn overlooking the boardwalk, and still remains rather motionless and emotionless. Why does he not too breathe in and breathe out the delicious breeze?

I know what I think. Must stink being such a god.
JOE BISICCHIA

Poor Historian

Time flies.

If only I had been a fly on this guy’s previous wall, then I’d know it all. His ailments, his anguished bones. I could then give the blind side due hell. His demons might fall with justified smart bombing. And yet, what of any collateral damage? What of children still stuck in his head?

I know I know so much. I know I care, and maybe that’s most important. It’s why for now at this very moment, I know I have the world to learn. I start with the vitals.
KEVAN TAPLIN

Brighton, New Year

A haunting sax played across twilight gardens,
the pavilion was bathed in yellow light
against a darkening sky.
Hurrying in the lanes
to the accompaniment
of slide blue guitar blues
and meeting you huddled in your collar
against the deepening cold,
I was drawn towards the lights of the pier,
breathing with contentment,
against all the odds.
TONY HENDRY

Pilgrim

Storms cut off the Cantal mountains and sent me two stops on to Aurillac. Black Madonna and Bleeding Christ railed off in a Romanesque church. Feral cats. Espresso cup, beer glass, dozy fly on dimpled zinc counter. Mud brown Jordanne river in spate. Euro for beggarwoman in hijab.

Back at the station, on a quiet seat away from three wired druggies, I met a scrag man with a backpack, returning to a harder path than mine – the Way of St James, from Auvergne to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. His hazel staff rested between us as his words overspilled like the river.

The stormy start had rattled him. Sleepless night in a derelict buron, flash flood, a rib-cracking slip demanding a detour to a hospital. But, in a mix of French and English, he told me he’d be resolute in faith and meet good folk of many nations on the wayfaring. We shook hands -

Go well, my friend! Bonne chance! - then caught our separate trains. Two days later, comfy on Eurostar as it raced past Calais razor wire then dived beneath the Channel,
I found a blank page in my guidebook and sketched a line of scallop shells. South by east, borders were closing.
LIN LUNDIE

**the wide Wye and a woman**

the wide Wye, silty, hawk-hovered
bird-dipped, trout-holed

nettle-flowered and flowing
river

gaced by Tintern
bridged at Kern
bookish above Symons Yat

flows through our young lives
below the Pluds

her full and new moon bore
pleats the water, look, look it’s coming –
past the war memorial at Bishops Wood
which names a few boys,
knee-scabbed, patched-trousered,
in pass-me-down jumpers
knitted from unpicked wool
by grans and aunties
boys who left the valley
saw a bit of the world
and died for it –

whips above the range of the Oxlett
roman coins under the floorboards
of the ancient cottage
where the woman reigns supreme

up in the peri orchard
stands the cider press
hailed up the steep wye side
by seven heavy horses
beside the spring
under the blossom and the snow

across the tar melting road
to her father’s house
downhill to the stone crenellated
tower we run, waist deep in buttercups
to the soft water

no going in mind, no going in!

we dip toes, tickle trout
tuck sunfrocks into home-made knickers
get wet, splashed and splashing
sunburnt and gnat bitten

always, Brooke’s half remembered
half-forgotten river smell
sickly sweet and rotten

on Sundays we suck lemons
by the bandstand in Ross
run off laughing
chased and threatened with
no supper by the woman

who feeds nine children every day
more when visitors arrive
or a neighbour is too sick
to go down the mine
in the Forest

we learn so much from our country cousins –
how to swish a stick with attitude
shoot peas, draw water from a well
turn a teat to a cat’s mouth
and watch it paw its milky whiskers and

we learn when enough is enough
when auntie Lily turns her head on one side
like a blackbird
and looks over her glasses
AMLANJYOTI GOSWAMI

Magic Mountain

I missed the bus, caught sunset
Night hushed by.

I missed dawn sun too
Found pencil yellow sketched across morning

The mountains looked on from a distance,
Bare, snow-clad blue.

Roerich blue.

I waited for them to say something.
Fiction
This is Grace’s moment.

Just step into the aisle. Make your way up to the front of the church. To the microphone standing erect beside that man framed in the colour photograph. That man perched on a pedestal. That man smiling down on the incense-shrouded congregation. That man dwarfed by the looming wooden cross.

It is the first moment of silence in the hour filled with precious words sung by the royally garbed women’s choir, spilled with tears of grief, solemnly pronounced by the ageing pastor before the grey suits, black dresses, bowed heads.

Like ‘hero’, ‘courage’.

Clutching a scribbled note in her blood-red painted nails, Grace turns toward the aisle. She’s a bloke away from stepping from her usual seat in the back pew and she hesitates, hoping he will discreetly let her past. In that moment, Bible words read by the dead man’s brother echo in her soul.

‘For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.’

For everything? Every matter? There is no season for what he did to me. No season and no reason.

* 

Everett and Grace were paired for the night at the homeless shelter in the basement of their church not far from the city centre. This was the first time they had worked so closely together, though she knew him from church. He talked to her a little about his children.
‘Thanks for taking care of the girls. They love you looking after them. You’re so good with them,’ he said one Sunday.

She didn’t offer much in reply, partly because she was shy, but she was also somehow wary. If you asked her, she couldn’t tell you why.

‘It’s okay, they’re very well-behaved, those girls.’

Everett and Grace worked side-by-side, blowing up mattresses, putting on the thin fitted sheets, threadbare blankets, bleached pillow slips. How uncomfortable those narrow beds looked to Grace crowded into that basement meeting room, but at least it was warm inside. Outside it was a bone-chilling January.

Everett and Grace made tea and set it on the communal table and kept the supply of broken biscuits donated by the factory replenished. The men and women booked for the night – twenty-five – were hungry and thirsty when they first arrived from around the borough. Some of the ‘guests’- the shelter leader insisted on calling them that - perused the box of used clothes Everett and Grace had set out, trying on woolly hats and jumpers.

Grace was always surprised they never looked like the homeless people she saw on the street near the station. They didn’t look to be much worse off than her. And that scared her. Was this her next stop now that she had been let go at the nail salon, her rent overdue? Everett explained that the borough had ‘screened’ the people using their church shelter because it was run by volunteers. ‘We do this out of our best Christian instincts, but of course we aren’t trained.’

Everett and Grace warmed the lasagnes baked by the church ladies group, prepared the garlic bread the men’s group made, set the tables, prepared the tea and filled the water jugs. Then they took a break.

‘The demographics are changing,’ he said, adding milk to his mug of tea. And to hers. She just watched. He was up on the refugee situation because he is an elder and spoke often to the minister. Grace listened, blowing softly on her steaming tea.

These ‘guests’ were mostly Eastern Europeans and North Africans working in restaurants or doing day labour. One was a
tall man with a thin moustache who grew up not far from where Grace’s father was born. Grace heard him talking to one of the locals who got tired of sleeping in his car and came to the shelter for the first time.

‘I can’t go back to my country. I’m a dead man if I go back there. No way, I’m going back there. But God, it’s cold here now. I sure could use that hot sun on my back,’ the African said.

The other man laughed a moment then caught himself. ‘You’ll be alright here. It’ll come good.’

Grace was wiping tables nearby, took it in, especially the part about her father’s country in Africa, but kept her thoughts to herself.

Two volunteers were missing from the overnight roster and Grace said she would stay on, not having to get up for work in the morning. She’d get breakfast, cut down on expenses, every little bit counts. She was thinking that way more and more since losing her job.

Everett said he was available too.

‘Keep the team together,’ he laughed easily but his eyes were stern. She had noticed that over the years since Everett joined the church from the other side of the city. She knew him from his greetings at the church door, his speeches at meetings and the time he preached on ‘charity’ when the pastor was on leave. Some Sunday mornings she worked in the nursery where his two youngsters were an island of serenity in an ocean of manic children.

Grace wondered why Everett wouldn’t want to get home to his wife and two small girls with bows in their hair. Grace had looked after them in the church nursery again last week. They played together with Barbie dolls and didn’t need any fuss from the carers. She guessed he just wanted to help out. He had that kind of reputation at the church.

It was a long night at the shelter. The aroma of the vegetarian lasagne eventually gave way to the stench of men’s feet, body odours. The three women in their curtained-off corner hid under their blankets. Just before lights-out an older man with
shaking hands began cussing out the youngster next to him for shifting his mattress too close. Everett went to calm them down. The leader had to step between the two labourers wearing coloured ball caps trying to use the same plug for their phones. Grace finished cleaning the kitchen. Things quieted down by midnight.

Grace looked through her emails on her smart phone, then closed her eyes, just resting. Everett read a book in the dimly lit hallway, stayed awake all night. The leader read her Bible.

In the morning Everett offered to drive Grace home. She usually walked but agreed when the shock of frigid air hit her as they left the shelter at six o’clock. Frost enveloped Everett’s sleek red car but it started immediately. He reached very carefully across her to help with the tangled seat belt.

‘There, that’s better, Grace. The children get them messed up,’ he laughed. Those eyes. Grace nodded, thinking of the pretty bows and the Barbie dolls.

‘Those girls are lovely,’ she offered, too tired for much talk. ‘The joy of my life,’ he responded. ‘They love it when you take care of them.’

They drove in silence towards Grace’s cramped flat but Everett suddenly steered the hummin red sports car down an alley, stopped abruptly, and locked the doors. Grace’s heart nearly stopped. Her mouth was dry. She couldn’t speak. This time Everett’s reach was sudden, brutal. She smelled his foul breath, felt her clothes ripped from her body. She gritted her teeth, managing to spit out, one word, ‘No.’ He was deaf to her. The touch of him, the sound of him, the rocking of the car. Grace thought she would die, wished she had died.

Back in her flat, Grace let the hot water of the shower mix with her wailing tears. She stayed under for a long time, thinking. I am no longer a woman, just a piece of dead meat. Because of that man. Everett. He has eaten me up, tossed me aside like a carcass. She tried to pray but somehow God had died when that man, that Everett forced himself on her.
‘Where is the pastor’s loving God now?’ Grace collapsed onto her bed, falling into a morbid sleep.

Grace stayed in her bed for days, ignoring her buzzing phone, not eating, not answering the door, not caring about anything, anybody. Like she was dying. That man, that Everett, he did this.

Then she got up, pulled her curtains. Fuck him. I ain’t letting him kill me.

*

‘It’s not your fault just because you got in that posh car with that Everett,’ Grace’s friend Frankie fumed a week later. ‘You gotta say something. You gotta go to the police. You gotta tell.’

Grace knew Frankie never trusted Everett, his young wife, perfect kids. She’d say, ‘What’s the matter with women his own age? There’s something about that man, Grace. You see it too.’

Grace never responded to Frankie on this.

*

Frankie sent Grace a text early one Saturday morning a few weeks later saying Everett had been stabbed to death. Grace felt like her heart stopped beating. Again.

She went online and read about it herself, sitting up in her frigid flat as the groan of morning traffic started growing on the street below. ‘Jesus,’ she whispered. ‘That man, that Everett. Dead.’

‘A 45-year-old man was stabbed to death early this morning as he attempted to stop a gang fight outside an after-hours club. Everett Winston, a broker, was pronounced dead at University Hospital at 4 a.m. A Met spokesman said the investigation was ongoing. However, one woman, who refused to give her name, hailed Mr. Winston as a “hero”. ‘He told them all just stop fighting. He put his body on the line, took a blade.’ The Met said while they were still gathering information, it
appeared the slain man’s “courage” prevented major bloodshed. Mr. Winston leaves a wife and twin three-year-old daughters.’

Frankie phoned Grace a few minutes later. ‘Hero? What’s that Everett doing down there at that hour? I’m sorry ‘bout those two little kids but what’s that man doing there with all those bling girls and those gangsters?’
‘Looks like he was some kind of hero, Frankie.’
‘You know better than that, Grace. It’s like that Hollywood guy. They never who they say they are.’
‘Maybe none of us are, Frankie.’
‘Don’t talk shit to me.’
‘I just don’t know.’

*

The bloke looks over at Grace like he knows what’s on her mind. Was he Everett’s friend? There’s nobody at the ‘open mic’ and the pastor is asking if anyone else has anything to add about ‘Brother Everett, who laid down his life for others’. There’s been plenty of folks talking about all the good things Everett had done at the church, leading that building committee last year, donating money for Syria. Grace makes herself skinny so she won’t be touching the bloke beside her as she moves closer to the aisle. He doesn’t move but Grace gets by. The pastor is talking about what the newspapers have been saying about Everett but Grace still hears those Bible words spoken by Everett’s brother.
‘A time to be born and a time to die.’
Shit, when’s my time to be born, my time to live?

*

Grace never told Frankie about the envelope. Frankie would have shrieked like the time her father hit her for smoking weed. She’s loud about protecting her rights. That just scares Grace.

She had stopped helping at the shelter after Everett attacked her. She told the shelter leader she needed to spend more time looking for work after losing her job. Grace had done
Frankie’s nails and then Frankie flashed her silver sparkled fingers at the mall and told their friends Grace needed business. Grace set up shop in her squat kitchen and a few of the girls came over the next week and got their nails painted. She charged them a few quid, helped her get groceries. But she knew she had to find another job.

Then the envelope arrived.
‘Sorry for what happened the other night. I possibly misread the situation. Hope this ends the matter.’
‘This’ was £100 in twenties. Grace looked at it spread out like a fan as it fell from the envelope. Misread? Fuck. The matter? The rape.

She took the envelope to church next Sunday, sat in her back row, eyeing Everett and the pretty wife in their pew. When elders came for the Offering she put the envelope with the £100 in the basket. The note was there too.

Grace met Frankie after church for coffee at the cheap café beside the station. Frankie grabbed her best friend’s cold hand across the table at the back where they always sat.
‘You gone to the police yet? Grace, you can’t keep this all to yourself.’

Grace took a sip of her coffee, dabbed her unpainted lips with the napkin.
‘No police, Frankie. I got other plans. Maybe I forgive him.’

‘Well, maybe I’m gonna’ talk to his pretty wife, then.’
‘No, you ain’t.’
‘Yes, I am.’
‘No, Frankie, this is my battle.’
That was before Everett became a hero.

*Grace thinks the pastor is going to close down that open mic before she gets to the front of the church. Grace moves toward that stiff microphone, thinks about those Bible words read by Everett’s brother.
'A time to mourn and a time to dance.'
I’m not mourning and I am not dancing. I am moving up there.

* 
After coffee in the café, Grace ignored Frankie’s phone calls for a few days. She didn’t tell her about the envelope and she didn’t tell her about going to the ‘Memorial for a Hero’ at the church. Frankie’s folks would be there so she would know about it but Frankie mostly does the opposite of them, like staying out late and avoiding church. Grace used to be like that. Since her father died from drinking and her mother moved to America with that Warner, she’s got no one to protest against. Except now there’s Everett. Fuck him. What’s he done to me?

Grace dressed for church like it was Sunday, sat down at her kitchen table and took her notepad, ripped out a few sheets and started scratching out all the words that had been bouncing around inside her head. Her whole body shook like she was on some carnival ride while she wrote. Then she headed out the door to church.

* 
Grace’s short legs are moving quickly towards the front of the church and she is almost there. The pastor doesn’t want her up here. His drag dog face is telling her that. The choir of sweet-scented ladies are glaring down at her. The big cross is judging her. She hears those words again, ‘hero’, ‘courage’ and but can’t fit them alongside Everett’s - ‘Keep the team together’. She can see the fan of twenties on her kitchen table. Grace hears those Bible words read by Everett’s brother.

‘A time to keep silence and a time to speak.’
Grace’s time of silence is over.
‘The Good Book says…’ SLQ
The missile came crashing down to the earth in a huge plume of sand and dust, skipped twice through an open field, and slammed into the concrete barricade. Mussa and Abdelfatah remained motionless on the opposite side with their arms still over their heads, expecting any minute it would go off and kill them both.

But nothing happened.

Mussa, the brave one, was first to lift his head and take a look.

“Today, we are the lucky ones!” he exclaimed.

There on the other side of the concrete was a sleek, tangelo-colored, air-to-ground missile, its nose dented, its long delta wings bent like the blades of a blender. It was still simmering from the heat of its flight.

Abdelfatah rose too. “Praise Allah,” he said, looking at the long, cylindrical device.

For a moment, they studied the missile. The boys had seen older Soviet-era rockets before, but nothing like this one. This one was space-age in appearance, and it had numbers along its side and the writing, which was in English.

“Is it NATO?” Abdelfatah asked.

“Maybe,” Mussa said.

“What should we do with it?”

“We must take it.”

“Take it where?”

“Back to the compound.”

“To Shinabah?”

“Yes, to Shinabah.”

“What if it goes off?”
“Then we die.”
Abdelfatah did not answer.
Mussa leaped over the barricade and took hold of the missile’s nose and he strained to lift it. “It is a gift from Allah,” he said. “Come on, help me! We must take it.”
Abdelfatah reluctantly climbed over the barrier and together they tried to lift the rocket, one on each end. But the device weighed nearly four-hundred pounds and they could barely budge it. Mussa joined Abdelfatah at the tail-end of the rocket and together they were able to lift it off the ground. They dragged it around the end of the barrier and began to drag it down the street.

“Is it okay? It will not go off?” Abdelfatah asked.
Mussa looked back at the rocket, its nose having left a squiggly white line on the asphalt. “I don’t think so.”
“What if it does?”

“Then we won’t have to worry anymore.”

They stopped periodically to take deep breaths and rest their arms. And they admired their newfound treasure. What few victories the rebellion had known had been celebrated exuberantly, generally in the form of machinegun-fire from the beds of pick-up trucks and rattling off AK-47’s indiscriminately into the sky, and the screeching out of the ancient Arabic battle cry—an oscillating sound made by forcing air through the windpipe while simultaneously flapping the tongue against the roof of the mouth. Now Mussa envisioned a victory celebration of his own. In a city besieged by rockets and sniper fire where NATO war jets screeched through the sky every morning and where CNN news coverage was filmed on a cell phone, coming close to death was an everyday occurrence for two fifteen-year-old boys. But it was not everyday that a weapon of considerable strength was delivered to one’s feet. Now he thought of how he could use it. And he thought of the Soviet-manufactured T-72 tank, a forty-ton monster which had been raging havoc in their neighborhood. It had recently shelled the marketplace where his mother bought bread and had destroyed the apartment building where his
brother lived, nearly killing him. This rocket was just the weapon he could use to destroy it, he thought. If only he could figure out how.

He stopped again to take a breath and rest his arms. He looked over into Abdelfatah’s eyes. “We’ll use it to destroy Gaddafi’s tank!” he said.

Abdelfatah didn’t know how to reply. He simply nodded, “Praise the Rebellion.”

***

The main rebel meeting room was lively with discussion and strategy when the loud thud of the missile being dropped turned everyone’s attention to the door. Nouri Shinabah, the self-appointed leader of the ‘Martyrs Company,’ turned his eyes to Mussa and Abdelfatah, who stood there in the doorway light. The air-to-ground missile was resting at their feet. Mussa was straddling it, his right leg pressed firmly against it.

“What is it?” asked Shinabah.

“It is a missile,” Mussa said.

“I can see that. Where did you get it?”

“It crashed into a barricade.”

“But it missed us,” Abdelfatah said.

“What?”

“We were behind this wall when we heard something whistling down from the sky. We could hear it coming down fast and when we looked up, we saw this silver streak coming straight at us.”

“It came out of the air?” asked another man.

“Like a spear,” Mussa said.

“Down from the heavens,” Abdelfatah said.

The men in the room exchanged doubtful glances.

“We ducked behind the barricade and covered our heads. We thought we were dead.” Abdelfatah was rattling now.

“But it didn’t explode,” said Mussa.

Shinabah stared at both of them, as did everyone else in the room. But slowly all eyes turned back to Shinabah. It was he who formed this rag-tag militia, consisting of students and bakers.
and craftsmen and lawyers and mechanics and businessmen. They all stood there, dressed in all kinds of different clothing, some in traditional garments, others in western-style suits, and others in combat fatigues, waiting for him to speak.

Shinabah said nothing. He walked silently over to Mussa and Abdelfatah and knelt down beside the projectile. He studied the device, running a hand along its side. Then he tilted his head and read the numbers and writing on it.

“It is NATO,” he said, “an AGM-65 Maverick. It will be useful in the rebellion.” He rose to his feet, took off his cap, and looked around the room until his eyes found a stout man with a large moustache. It was Hakim Audin, their ordinance expert. “What do you think?”

Hakim came forward and looked at the missile.

“Can we launch it?” another man asked.

“No,” Hakim Audin said, “but we can remove the warhead and use it. It’s a blast-fragmenting warhead. We can use it as a mine or make some kind of road IED of it.”

“Yes, of course,” Shinabah said. He stepped aside and Hakim leaned in and wrapped his big fingers around the nose of the missile. Shinabah waved a couple other men in to help him, but before they could step forward, Mussa held out a hand and spoke loudly. “Wait! We have plans for it.”

Shinabah looked at him, waiting for further explanation.

“It is ours,” Mussa said. “We found it and dragged it back here. It belongs to us.”

“It belongs to the rebellion,” said a voice among the men.

It was young lieutenant Haftar, a twenty-five-year-old who had recently joined the group from Benghazi. He was from the Senussi tribe, an elite political-religious order whose Libyan blood was considered stronger than the other tribes in the region; much stronger than Mussa or Abdelfatah.

“It belongs to us,” Mussa cried. “It fell from the sky into our lap. That we were not killed by this device, that it came to use like a gift from the heavens, is divine providence. It belongs to us.”
“It is nonsense,” the young lieutenant said.

“It is not nonsense. It is Allah’s will and we will not give it up.” He straddled the missile in a protective stance, turned back, and looked to Abdelfatah for support. Abdelfatah only offered a shrug.

“You are both correct,” Shinabah then said in a calm voice. “It is divine providence that this fell out of the sky and did not kill these two. That is a miracle in itself. But it also belongs to the rebellion, like every one of us, and all that we own, and all who we are, and the air and the wind that we breathe, and the life that we love.” He looked at Mussa. “Tell me... what is your plan?”

“The tank in the city center, the one that destroyed the port shipment last week and that destroyed the apartment where my brother lived—”

“Yes.”

“It is a coward. It kills and then hides beneath the palm trees.”

“Yes.”

“I want to use this missile to destroy it.”

“How?”

“We will bury it in its hiding place when it is gone, and blow it up when it returns.”

“Is it possible?” one of the men asked.

“Yes,” Hakim Audin said.

“Then how will they detonate it?” the young lieutenant asked.

Hakim Audin, who was still on one knee, held his thick fingers over the grey circle at the tip of the missile. “A simple shot from a rifle,” said. “It has a contact fuse in the nose. One bullet in this area will detonate it.” He looked up at Shinabah, who nodded his head in agreement.

“Then it is done,” Shinabah said.

“They are children,” the young lieutenant objected. “Let the men handle it.”
Shinabah ran a careful eye over Mussa and Abdelfatah, measuring them up. “There are no children in Misrata,” he said. “Only men. And we need all the men we can get to win this war.”

The young lieutenant, Haftar, shrugged his shoulders. “If it is your will?”

“It is my will,” Shinabah replied.

“Then so be it,” the young lieutenant said.

Shinabah knelt down beside the missile and cupped his hand over the grey-circled tip. He looked into Mussa’s eyes. “One round here.”

Mussa nodded his head.

“It is yours, then.”

Mussa smiled widely and looked back at Abdelfatah, who smiled back, nervously.

“But if for some reason your plan doesn’t work, you must bring it back here and we’ll decide another use for it.”

Mussa nodded.

***

When the meeting finished, Mussa and Abdelfatah dragged the missile back to Mussa’s apartment, to his mother’s disapproval. After a short argument, they took it from the apartment and hid it in a vacant building across the street.

The next morning they scouted the place where the tank parked each day beneath three palm trees. It was cater-corner to a little café, which the crew frequented. They found a large oleander bush on the other street corner and hid in it. They sat and watched the tank.

The tank had flipper-like armor panels and a 125mm gun. It was a leftover from the Afghan war, but still a powerful weapon against unarmored street-fighters. For the past three weeks it had been targeting small factories and apartment buildings, and the shops on Tripoli Street where Mussa’s mother bought bread and women stood in queues for hours at a time waiting for flour, sugar, and pasta. And it had been targeting the marina too, where storage sheds kept the munitions and water, which were the lifelines of the revolt. He knew he could always rely on the tank.
being gone at night, out for its nightly runs, shelling and refueling, and back in the morning, to hide beneath the palms during daylight.

For the entire day they watched the tank. It did not move, but men with machineguns came and went from it to the little café. In the afternoon, they saw the tank Commander. He came walking past them with a young soldier. They knew it was the tank Commander because he wore a tank Commander’s helmet equipped with a microphone and earphones. It had a pair of goggles strapped to the top of it. On their return trip, the two men stopped near the oleander bush, not more than a few feet away.

“Rebel bastards,” they heard the tank Commander say. “Scum of the earth, ungrateful for what has been given them. Ungrateful for what the great one has done. And they will all die for their ungratefulness.

“They think the world will care,” he laughed. “The world does not care. The world only cares about money, and oil.”

“They are nothing but idiots,” the young soldier said.

Mussa looked up through the oleander leaves and he could see the Commander’s dark face, half-shadowed by the helmet. There was a military insignia on his sleeve and a portrait of a woman pinned to his lapel. The Commander unwrapped a stick of gum from a pack he had in his hand and offered it out to the young soldier, who took it. Then he unwrapped another stick and tossed the wrapper, which floated down into the oleander bush and settled near Mussa’s foot. Mussa looked at Abdelfatah and put a finger to his lips.

“This war will be over soon,” the Commander said.

“Finally, these rebel pigs will all die,” the young soldier said.

They walked back across the street, climbed up the side of the tank, and disappeared inside of it.

Mussa felt the blood rise in his veins. They will see, he thought. They are cowards who hide beneath palm trees!
Another couple hours past before the long shadows of late afternoon stretched across the street, during which time Mussa thought about the rocket and how best to bury it beneath the tank.

“We’ll leave the nose tipped up,” Mussa said, “so that we can put a bullet in it. We’ll cover it with something. Maybe some grass or a palm leaf.”

*It made sense,* Abdelfatah thought, looking over at the tank. “Yes, of course.”

They were both still watching the tank when the powerful V-12 engine first came on and they saw diesel fumes spew out the back. The tank remained idling for twenty minutes, maybe more, while the early evening light faded. Then it moved forward, slowly leaving the dirt shoulder and clanking onto the pavement. It stopped for a moment, then came rolling past them, its huge revolving tracks slapping hard against the asphalt. They could feel the earth vibrating beneath them. The sheer size and power of the thing made them feel small.

“Where is it going?” Abdelfatah asked.

“Don’t know. Different night, different target.” He turned and looked into Abdelfatah’s face. “Last target.”

Abdelfatah smiled. “Yes, last target.”

They stayed hidden in the oleander bush until the tank completely disappeared down the street. Then Mussa sprung to his feet and hurried across the street to where the tank had been. Abdelfatah followed.

Deep in the dirt were the track marks. They could see where the tracks had come and gone many times. They could see an oil stain in the sand where the belly of the beast had rested. They could see where it entered the street, the deep lines carved into the asphalt.

Mussa looked up into the foliage above. He could barely see the darkening sky through the fanning palms trees.

“Right here!” he said, pointing to the place in the long shadows where the belly of the tank had rested many times. And looking around, he saw a white cardboard box lying in the street.
“And that!” he said, pointing to the box. “We’ll use that to cover the tip of the rocket.”

He ran over to the box, picked it up, examined it carefully, and holding it out before him, tore open one side. Its shape and size was perfect, he thought. He carried it back and set it down near the base of the palm trees.

An hour later, the boys were struggling in the dark. It was no easy task dragging a four-hundred-and-fifty-pound rocket four blocks with a shovel strapped to it and a blanket over it. But the boys were strengthened by their faith and desire for freedom, and the cleverness of their plan. They were full of gallantry, which always makes such a task simpler than what it is.

When they arrived back at the palm trees, they were happy to see the street-lamps were off and the café was closed. There was no moon, which was good. The Arabian night was pitch black and speckled with stars. They dragged the rocket to the far side of the palm trees and hid it behind the trees. Then, with the shovel, they began their work. They took turns digging, piling the dirt carefully to one side so as not to disturb the tracks.

“It is like digging a shallow grave,” Abdelfatah said.

“A long and narrow grave for a big monster,” Mussa replied. “We will be the heroes after this.”

“Yes.”

After a long turn shoveling dirt, Mussa stepped aside and let Abdelfatah dig again. He sat quietly at the base of one of the palm trees, leaning against it. He felt a jubilant elation, confident that their plan would work. As the pile grew, he stared at the dirt. Once again, he imagined a victory celebration of his own and he smiled inwardly. It was the earth of his father and grandfather, he thought. It was the sand of all his ancestors; the birthplace of all his generations, and would be the birthplace of his descendants. It was the good Libyan earth, in which his forefathers rested and in which he would rest one day.

The ditch formed nicely, angling deeper at the backend so that the tail of the missile would be deeply hidden. When the hole was ready they dragged the missile around the base of the trees,
rolled it into the hole, and covered it carefully, spreading the dirt and sand so that it looked as if no one had been there. They carefully swept away the drag mark and their footprints with a palm leaf. Then, with the long stem of the palm leaf, added lines in the dirt which closely resembled the original track lines. As planned, Mussa took the box and set it on top the protruding missile tip. But it looked too big, so he tore off a piece, folded it with a crease down the center, and carefully laid it back on top. Then he stepped back and considered it.

“It’s perfect,” he said, confidently. It looked like a wind-blown piece of cardboard which had just settled there accidentally.

“I think so,” Abdelfatah replied.

Abdelfatah took the palm leaf and evened out some irregularities in the surface and covered the remaining footprints. As they walked back onto the asphalt, he tossed the palm leaf off the side of the road. They found a perfect place down the street, behind a stone wall, from where they could get a clear shot at the cardboard. It was some fifty meters away; far enough for their presence to go undetected and close enough for them to make the shot. Then they left, back to Mussa’s mother’s apartment for some tea and bureeks, and flatbread.

They could not sleep, nor did they want to, and time passed.

In the early morning hours, before the sun rose, they returned, now each armed with a Kalashnikov AK-47. And to their grateful surprise, they saw the tank had returned and had parked perfectly along the roadside beneath the palm trees in the same exact spot, its belly, presumably, resting squarely above the piece of cardboard.

They took their position behind the small stone wall. They positioned their rifles above the stone, and they waited. It was still too dark to see the piece of cardboard clearly. They could barely see a vague grayish thing beneath the outline of the tank.

As the light increased and the tank took form, the turret facing them, the grayish thing beneath it remained obscured.
Despite the coming light, the cardboard was difficult to see because it was in the shadow of the tank, which was in the shadow of the palm trees.

“Can you see it?” Mussa asked.

“Barely, but I can feel it,” Abdelfatah said. He leveled his rifle.

“Not yet,” Mussa said, wanting to wait for more light. A few more minutes passed. Now they saw the front armored plates and its running gear, and the machinegun on top the turret.

“It is my shot,” Abdelfatah said.

“Who is the better shot?” Mussa asked.

Abdelfatah turned and looked at Mussa. “I can hit it.”

“Who is the better shot?”

“We’ll shoot together,” Abdelfatah then said.

Mussa nodded. “Okay, we shoot together, on my count, when I say so.”

“Okay.”

With the accelerating light of daybreak, the piece of white cardboard came into focus. But it was farther beneath the hull than they had anticipated, and at this distance, it was impossible to see the circular grey nose of the missile.

Mussa looked at Abdelfatah. “We can hit it,” he said.

“I know.”

“Just hit the cardboard.”

“I know.”

Mussa pressed his cheek against the wood stock of his rifle. Abdelfatah did the same. And with both barrels pointed over the top of the stone wall, they each centered the blurry grey thing in their circular sighting apertures.

“Ready?” Mussa asked.

“Now?” Abdelfatah replied.

“When I say ‘go.’”

“When you say ‘go’?”

“No, on three.”

“Okay, on three.”
Mussa took a deep breath. Then he began to count, slowly; “one, two…” and on “three,” they both pulled their triggers. Their rifles bucked, and the bullets careened off the side of the missile and ricocheted and pinged off the belly of the tank. But nothing happened. Mussa shot again, quickly. And again, and the bullets continued to careen of the side of the missile and smack against the front armored plates of the tank. Then they heard the tank engine come on, and saw a puff of smoke come out of the rear exhaust.

Mussa flipped the rifle’s switch to fully automatic mode, held the stock tight to his shoulder, pressed his cheek firmly against it, and pulled the trigger again. The rifle spit out a fierce, rattling folly of rounds, hitting the dirt before the tank, ripping the ground beneath it, shredding the cardboard, and ricocheting off the gilled-armored plates. Abdelfatah did the same, both rifles now rattlin in fully automatic mode, the bullets ripping through the air, pinging against metal, uprooting dirt, and obliterateing the cardboard. But still nothing happened.

Before they knew it, the turret began to move, ever so slightly, as to center in their direction. The boys exchanged horrified expressions.

Mussa sprung to his feet, as did Abdelfatah. They both ran with all their might toward the café, the tank’s 125mm cannon following them, its turret turning diagonally. Just as they reached the sidewalk, the building above them exploded into a fountain of pebbles and smoke. The entire structure was in a large ball of flames and smoke. Mussa was hurdled off his feet, as was Abdelfatah, and they were both buried in an avalanche of plaster and brick and boards and splintered wood.

There was that moment of time lost, when one doesn’t know what happened or how long ago it happened. When Mussa awakened, he heard nothing, only a loud humming in his ears. He pulled himself from beneath smoldering boards and plaster. He saw Abdelfatah beside him, also rising from the rubble. His body felt numb all over. He had cuts and bruises everywhere. His shirt was torn and smelt like burning sulfur.
Through the haze of smoke, both boys saw the tank. It had come out from beneath the palm trees and was stopped now in the center of the road. Its barrel had come around again. They could see the tank Commander’s helmeted and goggled head protruding from the turret. They could see him shouting commands and pointing in their direction.

Mussa tried to move, but his limbs didn’t seem to work. Or maybe it was because of the weight of rubble on him. It didn’t matter. It was as if time stood still. And now he could see the barrel of the tank’s cannon fully upon them, pointing squarely at them. He could see the black hole at the tip, which he knew would soon flash white.

Then, suddenly, there was a loud screeching sound from above. Mussa looked up, as did Abdelfatah and the helmeted and goggled head of the tank Commander. Two laser-like beams streaked downward through the early morning light, and, in the same instant, the tank vanished in a huge white flash of flames and smoke. The turret flew skyward and a high-arching geyser of fiery debris reached above the tops of the palm trees. A second explosion engulfed the entire roadside where the tank had been and took out the palm trees as well. At the same time, the roar of jet engines sounded overhead as two NATO F-16s screeched away toward the Mediterranean.

The shock waves had smacked against the two boys. They had involuntarily flinched and ducked below the rubble, which already covered half of them. Swirls of dust and debris were still settling around them when they lifted themselves a second time. They pulled themselves from the rubble, dusted themselves off, and looked at one another, not believing what had just happened. In the same moment they thought their lives were gone, they had emerged virtually unscathed, except for the bruises and scratches and ringing in their ears. Meanwhile, what was left of the tank was a burning plume of black smoke that rose high into the bright morning sky.

Mussa let out an involuntary yell. Abdelfatah did the same. Their faces shone with elation. They both grabbed one
another and hugged tightly, as brothers do, and before they broke their clutch, a beat-up old white pickup truck came careening around the corner at the far end of the street. The truck rushed down the street and came to an abrupt stop in front of them. Clinging to the fifty-caliber machinegun in the bed of the truck was young Fathi al-Kharaz, a fellow soldier of the Martyrs Company.

“Get in,” he yelled.

The boys leaped into the bed of the truck and, as it zoomed off down the street, Fathi al-Kharaz began yelling jubilantly and he pulled the trigger of the machinegun, sending useless follies into the sky. He had very clean, white teeth and he showed them generously now in the morning sunlight. “You did it! You destroyed Gadhafi’s tank!”

“But our missile did not destroy the tank,” Mussa said.

Fathi al-Kharaz looked at Mussa. “Maybe not. But you brought it out of hiding so the jets could kill it!” He pulled the trigger of the machinegun again and it rattled indiscriminately into the sky. “You are the victors!” He fired again. “We are the victors!” He fired again. “Tonight Gaddafi sleeps with one less tank!”

Then he let out the long, oscillating, Arabic battle cry.

The truck careened around a corner into a plaza where stood two dozen rebel soldiers of the Martyrs Company. They were all holding their AK-47s triumphantly skyward, shooting rounds off into the air. Shinabah stood in the center, waiting.

“Tank killers!” he yelled. “We greet you and celebrate your victory!”

Young Lieutenant Haftar, the elite-blooded Senussi, stood beside him. His eyes looked to Mussa. His head nodded. “Yes, you are men of the rebellion,” he yelled out. “You are soldiers of the revolt!” Then he raised his rifle high. “To the tank killers!”

The machinegun in the bed of the pickup truck spoke loudly again, pounding off rounds into the blue Libyan sky. And when Mussa looked around he realized he was surrounded by an army of men celebrating a victory that was his; that was theirs. All
around him was the rapid cracking of gunfire, and the loud chorus of tongues, flapping out the old Arabic battle cry.

“We have won, Brother!” Mussa said, looking over at Abdelfatah.

Abdelfatah nodded his acknowledgement. His face was bright and proud too. “Yes, we have won, Brother!”

Together, they watched over the many rifles pointing skyward above many heads, wasting rounds triumphantly into the blue Libyan sky. Then Mussa tilted his head back, filled his lungs with the warm desert air, and let out a long victorious war cry. He felt the warm air rushing through his throat as his tongue flapped rapidly against the roof of his mouth. Abdelfatah did the same, and their battle cry rose in a crescendo with the others, over the sound of the rifles, into the blue Libyan sky. And it was taken by the warm, desert wind. SLQ
IAN INGLIS

The Beautiful Game

A short story

He was one of the most assured players I’ve ever seen. Duncan Lacey had it all. Speed, balance, vision, and above all, time on the ball. Even as a youngster, his maturity set him apart from the rest of the squad. At twelve, he was holding his own with the fifteen and sixteen-year-olds. At seventeen, he was in the first team. Some of the older, seasoned professionals tried to intimidate him, but soon stopped when they realised the extent of his talent. At 18, he won his first England cap. He went on to win more than a hundred. He was named European Footballer of the Year three times, and World Footballer of the Year twice. He won the European Champions League on five separate occasions with three different clubs. He famously retired from international football after England had surrendered a two-goal lead to lose 4-3 to Germany in the UEFA European Championship Final, and two years later, at the age of thirty-six, he announced his retirement from the game.

He was never a prolific goalscorer, although he got his fair share. I recall one of his – the clip is always on the TV – in a World Cup qualifier against Italy. He picked up the ball just outside his own penalty area and feinted to pass it out to the right wing. As soon as the opposition started to move in that direction, he turned and chipped it to the left wing. Then, while the Italians were trying to recover their positions, he sprinted through the centre, taking two or three defenders with him. By now, they were in total disarray, stretched out across the pitch and with no idea of what might be coming next. He arrived in their penalty area just as the cross from the left came in. He controlled the ball with his chest, allowed it to drop on to his left thigh and, as it fell to the ground, struck it on the half-volley with his right foot. It hit the back of the
net like a rocket. The goalie hadn’t a hope of stopping it. It was the most complete piece of football I’ve ever seen. Direct, effective, and effortless. It summed up his style completely.

I first got to know Duncan in his early days at the Rovers. After being on the club’s schoolboy books for some years, we’d both left school at 16 and, together with a dozen or so other young hopefuls, were looking to progress through the Youth team, into the Reserves, and eventually into the first team. That was the dream, anyway. Of course, we all knew that only a handful of the young kids attached to professional clubs up and down the country ever make a successful career from it, but we were all equally convinced that we would be among those who did. Even then, there was an air, almost an aura, of total confidence about him. The rest of us might skip training, sneak off for an early drink, have the odd cigarette, go to the clubs in search of girls, but not Duncan. He never saw the point of it: he wanted to play football, and anything that might interfere with that was simply a waste of his time.

In view of the different paths our lives took, it seems odd that I was the one who made it into the first team squad before Duncan. It was just luck, I guess. Playing at centre-half for the Reserves the previous week, I’d had an outstanding game. Don’t ask me where it came from, but any professional will tell you that there are matches – not very many – when you never put a foot wrong, and everything you try comes off. That was one of those games for me. I cleared off the line, out-jumped their centre-forward, covered for the full-backs, and set several attacks in motion. As a reward, I was drafted into the first team squad, and named as one of the substitutes for the next game. To be honest, it was an end-of-season, middle-of-the-table fixture with nothing at stake – the kind of game where a lot of clubs rest their senior players and try out some of the youngsters with an eye on the next season. I was brought on midway through the second half and did well enough. As I recall, it was a 0-0 draw. The manager was
pleased, my parents were as proud as they could be, the girls who hung around the club started to take more of an interest in me, and the local paper singled me out as “a young man with an old head and a bright future.”

The only person who didn’t seem satisfied was Duncan. It wasn’t that he thought he should have been picked instead of me – after all, he was a midfielder, not a defender – but there was a definite change in the way he behaved. Nothing you could put your finger on, nothing you would have noticed, but it was there all the same. It was difficult to explain. He must have known – the rest of us did – that he had a tremendous future in the game, and it made no sense for him to resent my own good fortune. But that’s exactly how it appeared to me. And our relationship shifted after that. On the surface, we remained friends but we were never quite as close as we had been. And it wasn’t long before our friendship ended completely – not just because of what he did, but because I knew about it.

At the start of the next season, the manager – Billy Simpson, a canny old Scot who’d been a fearsome right-back in his day, and who was the only man to have been sent off for violent play in two successive Wembley Cup finals – decided to give some of his young lads a run in the first team. The Rovers had its fair share of expensive players bought from other clubs, but we’d never been one of the elite teams and had always relied on a steady supply of home-grown players. Billy called four of us into his office: myself, Duncan, Joe Hastings, a big strong centre-forward who’d just joined the club, and Sammy Carr, another midfielder who’d played alongside Duncan and myself in the Youth teams. Everyone loved Sammy. He was a natural comedian, with a string of wisecracks, and took no offence when we teased him about his ever-changing hairstyles, his obsession with the latest fashions, his extrovert behaviour.
'Football’s changed,’ Billy began. ‘In my day, the majority of players were locals who’d been spotted by the scouts and come up through the ranks. But that’s not good enough for fans today. Or the owners. They’re not prepared to wait. They want big names, instant success. That’s the way the game’s going. In my opinion, it’s the wrong way. But what do I know? Eh? What do I know?’

He looked at us as though expecting an answer, but we knew him well enough not to interrupt and stood there quietly, waiting for him to continue.

‘Well, I don’t want to go down that path,’ he resumed. ‘So this is what I’m going to do. The four of you will be in the first team for the first half-dozen games. The fans might not like it. Not at first. The press certainly won’t like it. But you’ve all earned your places. You’re all good players. You’ll play like your whole career depended on it. I expect you to come off that pitch completely exhausted. Let me down, and you can start looking for another club. Prove me right, and you can look forward to many years in the game.’

He sat behind his desk in silence. We wondered if he’d finished, but as he hadn’t dismissed us, we stayed where we were. After a while, he spoke again.

‘Sammy. It’s going to be especially rough for you. Your opponents will try their hardest to unsettle each one of you. They’ll threaten you, curse you, kick you. If they can provoke you, if they can wind you up, they will. You’re all young and untried. But you, Sammy...you’re young, untried, and black. You’re still a novelty. The bastards will play on that. Their managers will tell them to. They’ll call you a black this, a black that, a monkey, a nigger, a wog, they’ll insult your mother, your father, your sisters.’
‘I know they will, Boss,’ said Sammy. ‘They always do.’
‘Ignore them. Don’t react. Don’t do anything stupid. That’s what they want. If they know they can get you booked or sent off, they’ll do it the next time, and the time after that, and the time after that. Oh, I know it’s easy for me to tell you how to behave. I don’t have to stand there and take it. Answer them by playing the way I know you can. Show them how good you are. Beat them. Don’t let them win.’

I’d seen for myself the kind of treatment Sammy received on a regular basis. Even in the Youth teams, the opposing players had no inhibitions about insulting and abusing him. They called him names, they spat at him, they goaded him, they punched him, but always when the referee wasn’t listening or looking. And he put up with it. Occasionally, one of us would try to intervene and tell Sammy’s tormentors to lay off him. I confronted one of them once after I’d seen him spit down the back of Sammy’s neck.
‘You do that again and you’ll be sorry,’ I warned him.
‘Fuck off,’ he replied. ‘We’re here to win. Get real.’

A little while later, the same guy challenged me for a long cross coming in from the wing. As we both leaped to head it, I brought my elbow back as hard as I could right in his face. I heard the bone crack and saw the blood spurt out, as he collapsed on to the ground.
‘You’ve broken my fucking nose!’ he screamed at me.
‘I’m here to win,’ I said. ‘Get real.’

But I wasn’t always there to protect Sammy, and there were times when he had to put up with a hell of a lot. But he never complained and he never retaliated. I knew though – I think we all did – that the abuse would be different in the first team. And it was. It was more nuanced, more disguised. Well used to TV coverage and large crowds, our opponents would rarely resort to outright violence. Instead, they relied on subtle provocation, whispered insults and a fair share of racist jokes which, if overheard, they would dismiss as banter.
‘They’ll have to put the floodlights on soon. I can’t see you in this light.’

‘When did you get off the banana boat?’

‘I’ll give you a couple of quid to shine my shoes after the match.’

‘I think I fucked your sister last night. Or was it your mother? You all look the same.’

And Sammy took it all. He wasn’t going to let a few idiots ruin his chances of making a name for himself. Although they were as different as chalk and cheese – not just in their personalities, but in their styles of play – he and Duncan were the perfect pairing in midfield. Where Duncan was unhurried, graceful, relaxed, Sammy was busy, flamboyant, and energetic. They complemented each other beautifully and shared a footballing brain, which came from having played together in the Youth team and the Reserves. They could anticipate each other’s movements, they knew when to offer support, when to fall back and provide cover. We all played well in those first few games, but Sammy and Duncan were brilliant. They controlled the middle of the park completely. Of the six games Billy had promised us, we won four, drew one and lost one. Joe was a real handful at centre-forward and scored four of the team’s eleven goals, and Sammy got one himself. We were third in the league, the fans were chanting our names, and requests for interviews flooded in.

‘No. No interviews. Not yet.’ said Billy. ‘They’ll put words in your mouth, try to get you to say things you’ll regret. You’re here to play football, not to look pretty for the TV cameras. Keep playing like this and the sky’s the limit.’

Joe had picked up an injury and was ruled out for a couple of weeks, and Billy decided to rest Duncan and myself for the next game.
‘You’re still young. You can’t go out week after week without feeling the strain. I need you to take it easy. You’re seventeen, for Christ’s sake! Most kids your age are still at school. You’re going to be playing football for the next fifteen or twenty years. The odd week here and there doesn’t matter. You’ll be on the subs’ bench in case you’re needed, but I’m not going to overload you.’

‘How come Sammy’s playing, then?’ asked Duncan.

I knew he’d gone too far. Billy brought his fist down on the desk with a force that made us all jump, and glared at him.

‘Did I hear you right, son? Are you asking me to justify my selection to you? I really hope that’s not the case.’

Duncan shuffled uncomfortably.

‘No... of course not. I just meant...no. I’m sorry, Boss.’

Whereas some managers always made use of their substitutes, Billy’s policy was only to bring them on in case of injury. So we watched the next game from the bench. It was a walkover. At half-time, we were 3-0 up and well in control. Sammy was having a great game. He set up two of the goals and never stopped running. He pushed forward in attack, dropped back in defence. He was everywhere. As the players left the pitch for the interval, Duncan and I walked up the tunnel with some of the other team.

‘You’ve got a good player there,’ said their goalie, nodding in Sammy’s direction.

‘Yeah, he’s not bad for a poofter,’ Duncan replied casually.

I pulled him to one side.

‘What are you doing? Are you crazy?’ I demanded.

‘Come on. It’s just a joke,’ he protested.

‘Just a joke? You don’t start taking the piss out of our own players with the opposition! And you don’t put ideas like that in their heads. What do you think Billy would say?’

I pointed to the goalie hurrying to catch up with his teammates.

‘I hope he thinks it’s just a joke,’ I said.
Ten minutes into the second half, one of our defenders took a painful knock in the back. It was nothing serious, but Billy decided to bring him off and sent me on in his place. By then, we were 4-0 up and their team was responding with a series of bad-tempered fouls. I was standing next to Sammy as we lined up to take a free-kick just outside their penalty area. As the referee moved away, one of their players – a veteran defender named Berry who was nearing the end of his career – trotted past us.

‘There’s only one thing worse than a coon, and that’s a queer coon. Don’t come anywhere near me, you fucking black cocksucker! Fuck your friend here instead! Stick your black dick up –’

Before he could finish, Sammy had him by the throat. He forced his head back and punched him over and over in the face. I tried to pull him away, but he knocked me aside, and carried on hitting him until the other players waded in and separated them. Sammy’s face was contorted with rage, his eyes were bulging, his breath coming in short gasps. As the referee ordered him off the pitch, and their trainer rushed on to tend to the injured Berry, I put my arms round him and escorted him to the touchline. He was sobbing. I caught sight of Duncan. While everyone else was up on their feet, shouting and gesticulating, he remained sitting on the bench, his eyes fixed on the ground. He never looked up.

The incident received nationwide coverage, but TV footage revealed nothing of the exchange that had led up to the assault. Instead, it seemed to show Sammy launching an unprovoked and savage attack on a player who was innocently jogging back into the penalty area. When Billy took me to one side after the game and asked me what had happened, I lied and said I’d been too far away to hear what was said. I didn’t want to get involved, and I knew that nothing I could say would make any difference. Whether Sammy told Billy the full story, I don’t know. What I do know is that he was given a three-match suspension by the F.A., fined a month’s wages by the club, and ordered not to come into training until further notice. Before the week was out,
rumours about what might have led him to attack Berry were rife. When a couple of the tabloids printed a photograph of Sammy and some friends outside a gay nightclub, it was quickly followed by a flood of allegations and accusations. One of the Sundays devoted three pages to what it termed “Explosive Revelations About Britain’s Brightest Young Soccer Star”, including detailed accounts of “Sammy’s Secret Life” from “insider sources, friends and associates, and trusted personal companions”. Gutter press? The gutter was too good for them.

Sammy’s career ended then. In those days, the levels of hostility and the extent of prejudice were so entrenched they were regarded as normal. Labels like “homo”, “fairy”, “puff” and “nancy boy” were in common usage. I don’t think the word “homophobia” even existed. The idea that an openly gay footballer could continue to play at a professional level was unthinkable. A gay footballer who was also black might as well throw away his boots. In some sports – figure-skating, maybe, or tennis – you might be able to carry on. In football, you had no chance. The certainty of constant and vicious abuse from fans, from opposing players, from sections of the media would have made Sammy’s life unbearable. He left the club. Some months later, he tried to make something of a comeback with a non-league club but was forced to quit after a handful games. He received death threats, the club’s ground was vandalised, his team-mates were threatened in the streets.

I never saw him again. Duncan, Joe and I became first-team regulars, and midway through the next season Duncan was drafted into the England squad and won his first full cap in a friendly against Hungary. From time to time, we heard stories about Sammy – he’d moved to London, he was drinking, he’d got into trouble with the police – but we never knew how much to believe. When he was twenty-one, Sammy died. He was driving a stolen car that failed to take a right-hand bend and smashed into a brick wall at 80 miles per hour. One passenger was also killed,
two more escaped with serious injuries. The inquest revealed he had three times the legal limit of alcohol in his blood, and there were also traces of cocaine. Billy sent the entire playing staff to the funeral, where he was described by the vicar as “a troubled, confused and misunderstood young man”. That wasn’t the Sammy I knew. The Sammy I remembered was none of those things: he was precocious, entertaining and funny. But I don’t suppose the vicar had ever met him. The only person not there in church was Duncan, who was away training with the England camp.

I held my place in the team for several seasons, but when Billy retired and the club brought in a Brazilian coach with very different ideas about the way the game should be played, it quickly became evident that I didn’t figure in his plans. I moved around from club to club, I made a decent living, mainly in the lower divisions, and I was regarded as a reliable, workmanlike player. Then I broke my leg in a pre-season friendly, and decided to call it a day. Duncan also moved on, of course, away from England to big-money clubs in Italy and Spain and finally back to England, building his reputation and his celebrity all the time. Whenever I ran into him, we avoided talking about Sammy, although there were lots of unanswered questions. Did Duncan know what he was doing when he said what he did to that goalkeeper? Had he realised that Sammy was gay? Was he envious of Sammy’s success and his undoubted popularity? Did he regret his actions? The last time I saw him was when he was in town to promote his new autobiography, Keeping My Eye On The Ball. I wanted to ask him why there was no mention of Sammy in the book. But I didn’t get the chance. He was surrounded by photographers and reporters, minders and security staff, fans looking for autographs, people wanting to take selfies with him. I couldn’t get near him.

I don’t know. Why rake over the past? If I sound overly critical of Duncan, I don’t mean to. He’s been a tremendous player.
and a good ambassador for the game. And in many ways, Sammy’s was a familiar story – a promising young footballer who doesn’t quite make the grade and goes off the rails. Except, of course, that Sammy did make the grade. If not for that one afternoon, who knows what he might have gone on to achieve? He had so much talent, so much natural ability, that he could have become a genuine sporting icon. Then again, perhaps it would have been just a matter of time before his sexuality became public knowledge and he would have been forced out of the game. As it was, it’s unlikely that many people even remember him. Why should they? Who was he, after all? A local lad who played a few games for the Rovers thirty-odd years ago. That’s it.

I think about Sammy a lot now that I’m in management myself. When I stopped playing, I drifted out of football for a while. But I missed it. When my marriage broke up, I knew what I wanted to do. I got my coaching qualifications, and after taking a couple of smaller teams with very limited budgets to promotion, I was offered the job at the Rovers, where it all started for me. This is my second full season there and I’m doing well. Last year, we qualified for Europe, for the first time in several years. I don’t kid myself. I know that as soon as we have a run of bad results, my job will be on the line. Until then, I’m going to do everything I can to take care of the youngsters we have on our books. I see elements of myself in some of them – steady and dependable, grateful to be given a chance, optimistic for the future. And there are quite a few Duncans – ambitious and dedicated, with a touch of arrogance about their play. I hope they all do well. I think most of them will. But all the time, I’m looking for another Sammy. I haven’t come across him yet but one day, with a bit of luck, I might. And I’ll know him when I see him. SLQ
SENTINEL CHAMPIONS

The winners, highly commended, commended and specially-mentioned poems in the Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition (February 2018) judged by MANDY PANNETT.

First Prize
Karen Morash - Things I Have Advertently and Inadvertently Taught My Daughters This Past Year

Second prize
John Freeman - Opus 131

Third Prize
Margaret Wilmot- Game in a Dutch Castle

Highly Commended
Andy Dean - Into the Wood
Laura Potts - The Wise Child
Pamela Scobie – Anorexic

Commended
Lesley Burt - Parish without postcode
Marion Hobday - Bird in Me
Sandra Galton - Unrequited

Special Mentions
Gabriel Griffin - Noosing the Dead
Audrey Ardern-Jones - Benches on the Prom
AUDREY ARDERN-JONES

**Benches on the Prom**

he fed sea birds here  
still they squat beside his seat peck air  
stare sideways wish that his orange quilted anorak  
would reappear throw crusts  
*

if you are here I am with you  
two men in black brimmed hats  
sit side by side most days they save a space  
sandwiches on their laps tea in flasks  
*

once more unto the beach  
friends crowd this bench velvet coats  
high boots they speak in actor’s voices drink bubbly  
take it in turn to recite his lines  
*

smoke me a kipper I’ll be back for breakfast  
some nights he sleeps here wrapped in a brown duffle coat  
smokes roll-ups same as his old pal  
dips digestives in his flask of coffee  
*

I’ll see ya on the ice kid  
binoculars focussed on skit-skat clouds  
he tracks her skates sees her diamante skater’s skirt  
she’s dancing backwards
GABRIEL GRIFFIN

Noosing the dead

I am tired
of trying to noose the dead
on their blind paths
with my garlands of musty flowers,
daisy chains
and the prickly bracelets of roses.

I have laced
violets to tenuous ankles,
bound ghosts
with lily latchets, set
a thousand wild flower snares, thrown
nets of jonquils to haul in
the memories rattling in the dry skulls.
Yet I cannot stop
the petals from withering
or the dead
from slipping through their bones.

I light candles
to dazzle their sightless eyes,
so they will flutter softly
towards me
like moths mouthing in the dark.
I hold out thorn-apple to
their bloodless lips, hoping the scent
might drug their will to leave.

And all the time I know
it is wasted. The dead must be set free
to shift shapes in the dark, to plunge
further, deeper, into
cavernous shadows, flicker
under high vaults of alabaster, roar
voiceless into black waters,
lose themselves in the night
which has no end.

Sometimes they leave
soft tracks in snow, a handprint
blown in dust on a rock wall, a pool
of light shimmering in
dark shade. And sometimes
they leave nothing at all.
SANDRA GALTON

Unrequited

I walk into a room and
the way you pull back a chair for yourself
tells me how afraid you are of hurting it.
I say are we two peas in a pod?
and you stare like there’s never been a yesterday.

I say I have a nightingale, it’s caught in my throat,
will you help me to release it?
Of course, you say.

I say where is your heart?
and you cross your legs, taking care
not to hurt the chair.

I say I will tell you things –
look into the black spools of my eyes,
lift the child who has discovered
gold in a buttercup she has plucked
from a nameless lawn.
Lift the woman, all her laughter.

Yes, you say, but do not move.
I say maybe you see a cauliflower that’s bolted,
maybe – ?
You shift in your chair, but do not answer.

I say please then,
please may he walk sweetly away.
MARION HOBDAY

Bird in Me

1.
Candle the shell of me, there’s
the fledgling trapped inside.
It took a long time to chip my way out.

I stretched my baby bird beak wide
to the world, featherless, ravenous, insatiable.

2.
You know you are turning into a bird when:
you think the view would be better higher up,
you’re attracted by feathers rather than clothes,
you stand on one leg and bathe in dust,
your skeleton becomes pneumatic, light,
you eat less, defy gravity.

3.
Here’s how they catch you –
lure you with whistles, a decoy and limed sticks.
One minute you’re gorging on grain
then blind and drowning
in a barrel of Armagnac.

The song of the ortolan contains the opening notes
of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.

4.
Stand amongst Salicornia, waiting, silent,
another snipe hunt?
The courtship of snipe in wind
rushing through tail feathers,
a humming vibrato like a goat’s bleat.
Roast in the oven and baste with butter, 
layer the breasts in bacon, 
serve on toast, baked in a potato or over a bed of sea beans.

5. 
Night, three blackbirds 
circling her studio, 
the next morning her children, drowned.

Blackbirds divide up their fledglings.

The male usually cares for his group 
for longer than the female 
who leaves hers early 
to start another brood.

6. 
Fairy Terns do not build a nest 
but stick their eggs to a branch. 
I suspect my parents were ostriches.

7. 
I am a quail plucked and scalded, 
a pigeon rising in a clap of semaphore. 
I am a widowed swan, a captive albatross, 
a canary down a mine, a goose honking an alarm, 
a starling, as the year turns, 
weaving a dance of murmuration.

I am no-one’s chick or hen or turtle dove 
I am a chiffchaff calling out my own name.
LESLEY BURT

Parish without postcode

A sink-hole opens, just where the Priory sat in scrutiny of tweedy textures on Hengistbury Head and, beyond, on asterisks of sunlight that dazzle jet-skiers who ruffle the Solent. Bones of a thousand years drop in underneath daisies they pushed up, plus the man on a sit-on mower who beheads them every week. The confluence of Stour and Avon cascades in, mingles with mill-tail and Mill. Dozens of dinghies wobble among bobbing ash-filled urns. Ducks dabble in horse-chestnut leaves, mackerel gleam between dandelion clocks, salmon leap over slouching gravestones and swans bow necks before guardian angels. The clock paddles its hands and chimes out waves of Westminster Quarters. Brides are bedecked for the bells on Saturdays and a choir sings on the cusp of Christmas. The mower-man hears nothing beyond ear-defenders as he navigates undercurrents, sticks, stones and bones. Street signs are buried beneath the broken church that named the town. Parishioners flounder in all directions.
PAMELA SCOBIE

Anorexic

The elephant in the room
is growing smaller even as we sit here.
Her skin today is somewhere between grey and khaki,
and I am fairly certain that underneath the gorgeous shawl
soft hairs are growing along her spine.
The crashing of our cutlery
deafens. Our voices strain to rise above it,
hoarse with jollity.
We are discussing the elephant’s bright future.
She is only a baby elephant, though her smallness
threatens to buckle the walls and push the roof off,
but she is ready to go out into the bush.
We cannot chain her up.
We cannot tell her she is too puny to survive;
she possibly knows that already.
So we chatter and laugh and eat
as if we were not all aberrations of some sort.
But baby is tired; her eyelids droop.
She is dreaming of the apple waiting for her back at the house.
She has been holding out for it all day.
Daddy Elephant steps into the garden for a smoke,
while I help the others pack the car.
Something has been forgotten – I nip back,
and through the open kitchen door
I hear a terrible stampeding in the shrubbery.
Daddy Elephant trumpeting in anguish.
LAURA POTTS

The Wise Child

I remember he fled from the fogdrop moors with the dawn
and the bells of December beyond, calling morning to the streets
while winter wept beneath the trees. A sleeping me before the door
glowed on behind my mother’s knees. With holly-forest at his feet
from leaping long the brawling leas, he brought the loss of blossom-
blush to fall upon the breeze: he the keeper of the keys to all our stars
and northern storms, who never knew that news he bore would bruise
the husk of heart and more, poured a prayer into the pram and handed
up a telegram.

Pass the years upon the land, a scrap of shying light I am. My splash
of laughter never sang the spring to swing me in its arms, ever since
that winter when my eyes lost all their stars. Oh father in the terrace
dark, that vast cathedral of your heart never called a patch of moon to
squin

a light into our room, when looming in the corners slept the soldiers
in the gloom. I saw the sun forever as a wet and sunken wound, and
knew the black that cooked the blue when I was only two. And you?
The colder soul that spat the gas to phantoms that would nev
er pass,
who blew

the saplings ribbon-black and burst the buds beneath your tracks,
would always be my father but never once my dad. Last and ever after
that, here where War had torn us sore and mauled our bruises black, I
heard the chant of thousands calling to the stars and back: for all the
years

and eras came that postboy down the path. He always was, perhaps,
and is; and leapt until we lost him to the dying mouth of mist.
ANDY DEAN

Into the Wood

3.15 Relaxation. A new class. It makes us anxious.
She places a white orchid on the padded table.
There is a torn label on the plastic pot saying REDUCED.
Something for you to contemplate. Nature is so healing.
She laughs a bit. Looks around the relaxation room.
A zipped anorak fur lined hat sides strapped under chin stands statue-still. A woman with tattooed arms bare against the cold twitches and murmurs. A man winces with deliberate movements. The clock says 2.30.
And sit. In hospital chairs and anchor. Eyes closed and breathe in. Out. Smell of bandage in the relaxation room. She begins.
Picture a forest. You are sitting under a beautiful tree.
The broken basin in the corner. Paper towel dispenser. 
Fire safety notice.
Window too high for views safety catch closed.
Eyes tight. Picture a forest. You are sitting under a beautiful. 
We stop. Anorak is still standing. Twitch. Orchids need light. 
Picture a forest. You are sitting. CD clicks and music jolts on. 
Sirens call. You are peaceful and calm. Wince. Twitch.
Feel the moss beneath your bare feet. Sun on your arms. 
When an orchid flower dies the stem must be cut away. 
To ensure new growth. You have no worries. The door jerks. 
Half-closed eyes. Anorak has gone. Orchid under arm. 
You have left your concerns behind. 
You have all the time in the world. 
A man in pain shifts in his hard chair. Tattoos twitch. 
I am in a forest. Sitting under a tree. 
With all the time in the world.
MARGARET WILMOT

Game in a Dutch Castle

It is the pity of it, all those lives stuffed on their pedestals, dead. And a kind of shame pervades my pity too – as if voyeur at some nasty game. I shouldn’t be here looking, no. You wouldn’t want it, would you, Bear? More small birds than one can bear in glass cases around the walls. Alive, these little throats were singing – now it’s like seeing the dawn chorus, dead. So tiny . . . their very size the game . . . Dead true, alas, the hunter’s eye. Pity didn’t come into it. Now pity overwhelms – I want to stroke the boar, badger, feathered heads; say you’re not game, you’re you. We’re all in this life together. Out the window a dead landscape stretches under snow. No hop or bob, flick of wing or branch. No rabbit, fox. Still and white. What pity winter? I turn back to the dead beaver, cougar, antelope, wolf . . . remembering a green meadow, elk alive and sparring for a doe. Not a game. Yet I went hunting once. Not a game at all the silence, early mist. No – it was almost holy, life breathing everywhere, beyond pity or our small selves. Then bearing the deer home after one shot only, dead.
How I loved Robin Hood, his skill, death only the next stage in a game.
The merry men then cooked the hart and ate . . . But, my lovelies, no, you shouldn’t be here. Pity’s no substitute for throbbing life.

I feel trapped, life beating plover wings against death’s glass, and pity futile. No. This is an awful game.
JOHN FREEMAN

Opus 131

That opening slow rising-and-falling tune on the first violin, emerging out of silence, descending to the understanding welcome offered by second violin, viola, and cello so discreet I scarcely hear it, does for me what I think the face of Jesus must do for a suffering believer, acknowledge all the sorrow in the world, and with no pretence of having cancelled the hurt and loss, and aching deprivation, accompany courageous recognition with a tenderness of such commensurate proportions it seems, if not divine, human imagination and feeling making real for us what divinity is, or – even for the unbeliever lurking in me, and absolute in many other listeners – would be, if there were such an entity. And now, thanks to deaf Beethoven, there is. By itself the opening minute or so goes far beyond most other consolations, but it gives way to a long meditation, built on its foundation, which continues with courage, sometimes with a forcing will, insisting on a jerky, dancing tempo, to say that even among tragedies to be alive is to know gaiety, as much as to have breath and circulation, at other times achieving, always under the shadow of that comprehensive vision, which overarches the entire quartet, sublime rhythms of serenity.
Combative struggle is not missing either. The players urge their instruments like horses, galloping into some desperate battle, a rising vehemence of affirmation, in spite of, in the teeth of, everything that might offer to defeat and thwart us. We are not immortal in the body, and our lives may be cut short, broken off by malevolence or random accident. A day may come when hands that can execute, ears that can hear this music will be lacking. While we still have them, those of us gathered in this small church in the west of Ireland on a gloomy day in mid-September feel something not unlike a candle, lit in our collective consciousness, by us all, signifying an immortality, though of whom, or what, we can’t be certain.
KAREN MORASH

Things I Have Advertently and Inadvertently Taught My Daughters This Past Year

No one is wholly good or wholly bad.
(with one or two exceptions)

A movie scene with a woman being a warrior can make up for badly-written dialogue

Their mother is not a morning person.

How to use the pressure cooker safely to make a boiled egg.

The joy of quiet, contemplative work.

How to do a backwards roll,
(But not, sadly, a cartwheel,
being never able to do one myself).

What puberty is
(deftly managing to avoid the why).

The sad story of Princess Diana.

How to walk home from school by oneself,
and
What to do if a stranger, friendly or not, approaches.

And if they are in a public space, and a person, or perhaps persons, are behaving in a way that suggests they intend devastating violence,
Get out of there as fast as you can,
Please, my darlings, fast as you can
and if you can’t escape,
Promise me that you’ll hide
Where only safe arms
Can find you
(But how will they know if the speeding van is just a bad driver
or someone, deluded, demanding their sacrifice to make a point?)

What to do in case of fire.
Otherwise known as Don’t Trust Authority,
(I haven’t yet taught them that for some, this is useless knowledge.
Perhaps I should teach them to pray.)

Techniques for sprinting.
Contributors

**Ranald Barnicot** is a retired teacher of EFL/ESL who has worked in the UK, Spain, Portugal and Italy. He has a degree in Classics from Balliol College, Oxford, and an MA in Applied Linguistics from Birkbeck College, London. He has translations of Verlaine and Catullus due to appear in Acumen, Ezra and Stand this year and next.

**Stephen Bett** has had eighteen books of poetry published. His work has also appeared in over 100 literary journals in Canada, the U.S., England, Australia, New Zealand, and Finland, as well as in four anthologies, and on radio.

**Joe Bisicchia** writes of our shared dynamic. An Honorable Mention recipient for the Fernando Rielo XXXII World Prize for Mystical Poetry, his works have appeared in numerous publications. His website is www.widewide.world


**Amlanjyoti Goswami**’s poems have appeared in publications in India, Nepal, the UK, Hong Kong, South Africa, Kenya and the USA, including the anthologies *Forty under Forty: An Anthology of Post-Globalisation Poetry* (Poetrywala, 2016) and *A Change of Climate* (Manchester Metropolitan University, Environmental Justice Foundation and University of Edinburgh, 2017). He grew up in Guwahati, Assam and lives in Delhi.
Benoît Gréan is a French poet. Born in Strasbourg, he moved first to New York City in the late 1980s then settled in Rome. He has published ten volumes of poetry in French. Several of his works have been translated and published into German, Greek and Italian. Fascinated by lapidary or fragmentary form, from Martial to Sappho, he is equally intrigued by the explorations of contemporary music.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in New Plains Review, South Carolina Review, Gargoyle and Big Muddy Review, he has work upcoming in Louisiana Review, Cape Rock and Spoon River Poetry Review.

Kyle Heger, former managing editor of Communication World magazine, lives in Albany, CA. His writing has won a number of awards and been accepted by a great many publications, including London Journal of Fiction, Nerve Cowboy and U.S. 1 Worksheets.

Tony Hendry has been writing poetry seriously since 2014. He has had poems published in The North, Acumen, The Interpreter’s House, Dream Catcher, South Poetry, Reach Poetry, The Dawntreader and Poetry Space. After a career in London, he lives in Carlisle and is active in its lively poetry scene.

Lin Lundie lives and writes on the South Coast and keeps a poetry diary. She is a textile artist and her special interests are antique lace and interior design. She runs a poetry group ‘The River Poets’, in Arundel, West Sussex.

Brandon Marlon is a Canadian-Israeli writer. He received his B.A. in Drama & English from the University of Toronto and his M.A. in English from the University of Victoria. His poetry was awarded the Harry Hoyt Lacey Prize in Poetry (Fall 2015), and his writing has been published in 200+ publications in 27 countries. www.brandonmarlon.com.
Janet Murray is a Northerner. She grew up in Lancashire and has spent a large part of her life in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. She completed an MA in Writing (with Merit) at Sheffield Hallam University in 2016, and previously gained a BA Hons in English at King’s College London. She has worked as a Senior Manager in public service. Her interests are in visual art and people. These, she says, are her landscape.

Simon Perchik is the author of several collections including ‘Almost Rain’ (River Otter Press) and ‘The B Poems’ (Poems Wear Prada). His poetry has also appeared in Partisan Review, The Nation, The New Yorker and elsewhere.

Sharon Scholl is a retired college professor of humanities and contemporary world studies. Her chapbook, Summer's Child, is from Finishing Line Press.

Kevan Taplin says ‘I come from a working class background and my formal education was initially poor. Luckily this was the ‘aspirational’ sixties where we believed ‘anything was possible.’

Peter Taylor’s work focuses on links between human beings and the physical world and the enduring significance of relationships with other people and the things that surround us. He won the Paragram Chapbook Prize for his pamphlet "Perspectives from an Open Heart”.

Joe Williams is a former starving musician who transformed into a starving poet in 2015, entirely by mistake. He lives in Leeds and appears regularly at events in Yorkshire and beyond. He has been published in numerous anthologies, and in magazines online and in print. In 2017 he won the prestigious Open Mic Competition at Ilkley Literature Festival and had his debut poetry pamphlet, ‘Killing the Piano’, published by Half Moon Books. www.joewilliams.co.uk