

WE CATER FOR
DEEP FREEZERS

WONDER
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Editorial

Welcome to the fourth WonderZoo anthology, 'We cater for deep freezers'! This edition features fabulous artwork and writing from WonderZoo crew Slain McGough Davey, Queen Chi and myself, as well as amazing pieces by WonderZoo veterans William Telford and Robert Garnham, plus work by newcomers Veronica Aaronson and Jack Hopkins, plus much more.

This edition also has the new and exciting addition of music/spoken word recordings by Rob C, Julian Isaacs, HiP.P and Slain McGough Davey, Aztec Tree, and MCMC Spoken AKA Megan Chapman - just click on the page to listen.

The collection also features images and a specially created artwork by Queen Chi, from an innovative new project on Plymouth's Union Street. The Random Art Corner, which is opposite Plymouth Pavilions, is a project organised by Mike Vosper. He works with young people to cut up wooden boards with power tools, which artists then paint on. The young people then create frames for all the pieces and screw them to the hoardings. For more information, go to the Facebook group run by Mike called Plymouth Artists Together. Queen Chi has created a handwritten poem as a piece of art for the Random Art Corner. Enjoy reading and don't forget to keep an eye on our Facebook page, YouTube channel and website for details of upcoming events and opportunities.

Gabi Marcellus-Temple

Cover image: Slain McGough Davey and HiP.P

Back cover: Tree Shadow, by Gabi Marcellus-Temple and HiP.P

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Wildlife and Countryside

Sweepings of dead reef, bone-white dust,
in the Mariana Trench, coca cola tins rust.
Sea stocks diminish, temperatures rise,
hedgerows removed, more soil erodes, more pesticides.

Sea myrtle shrubs take over habitats from native species,
American mink prey on water-voles,
Japanese knotweed damages buildings and drainage.
The Asian beetles kill honeybees.
The Asian hornet damages broad leaved trees.

Ships are clogged by mussels, waterways blocked by weeds.
Crops and timber are ruined by pests,
Ash dieback, Dutch elm disease.
Humpbacks, elephants and pandas hunted to extinction.

Some insects carry harmful diseases.
New non-native invasive species are increasing.
Otters, skylarks, brown hares are protected,
numbers of yellowhammers dwindling,
Red-legged partridges decreasing,
Reed Buntings threatened by loss of wetland habitats.

But red kites and wrens are thriving,
the white tailed eagle returns after 240 years.
And thanks to the robin, blackbirds and sparrows
who come down to my bird bath and drinker.

Heather Grange

©

AN UNGODLY PLACE - William Telford

It was Sunday morning on the Planet of the Apes and all the ape infants and juveniles were in their Sunday School and their ape Sunday School teacher, an orangutan called The Lawgiver, was giving them the lowdown on the Ten Planet of the Ape Commandments, which said stuff like ‘thou shalt not kill’ and ‘thou shalt not steal’ and ‘thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s bananas’, when one of the chimpanzee pups, a cute-faced sprog called Marco Antonio, put his paw up and said, ‘Hey, Mr The Lawgiver, is there such a place as Planet of the Apes Heaven?’

And The Lawgiver dude said, ‘Why sure, most certainly, kiddo.’

And this little gorilla girl called Kim Kardashian said, ‘What’s it like? This Planet of the Apes Heaven locale?’

And The Lawgiver put down his banana sandwich and said, ‘It’s the most wonderful place. The most wonderful place on earth, although it’s not on earth, it’s, like, way up yonder.’ And he raised his ape eyebrows in the direction of Planet of the Apes Heaven.

‘Cool beans,’ said all the teeny tyro apes.

‘Is it like sunny all day long?’ asked a baby bonobo baby called Dirceu. ‘You know, in Planet of the Apes Heaven?’

‘It is, and all night long, too,’ said The Lawgiver, he being all knowledgeable and well briefed.

‘And is the food there like well tasty?’ said Carlos Roberto, a young chimp with a squint and a rumbling tummy.

‘Indeed,’ said The Lawgiver, taking the weight off his loafers. ‘It is the best food imaginable, and it’s all free too.’

‘What, like the bananas are free?’ said all the little ape kids, now getting to be as excited as a class full of infant apes, which is way excited.

‘They are,’ gushed The Lawgiver, waving his arms about, no one knew why. ‘And the banana splits, they are free too. And the wifi. Interest rates are pretty low as well.’

‘Cool motion,’ said all the ape fry, starting to cheer and do a sort of Mexican wave around the Sunday school classroom.

‘So, this Heaven place,’ said one young gorilla, a girl gorilla called Britney Spears, who wore her hair in a bob. ‘Who gets to go there?’

‘Well, that’s the thing,’ said The Lawgiver dude. ‘You’ve got to be special to get into Planet of the Apes Heaven.’

‘Like special how?’ said Britney. ‘You’re making it sound like Cirque le Soir.’

‘Like specially well behaved,’ said The Lawgiver, suddenly all a bit relieved he’d remembered. ‘Only really good apes get to go to Planet of the Apes Heaven. Little apes, who monkey around, and don’t learn their catechism, and pull little girl apes’ pigtailed, Leonardo,’ he gave a stern look over his spectacles, ‘and invest too much in crypto currency, Ze Maria, well, they don’t get to get into Planet of the Apes Heaven.’

‘And eat free banana splits in the sunshine?’ said Ze Maria putting down his iPhone.

‘Precise,’ said The Lawgiver, and all the ape ankle-biters gulped.

And then little Britney Spears piped up and asked, ‘So where do all the chugs go? You know, the rotters?’

And Leonardo said, ‘Yeah, is there a place where they get sent?’

‘There is,’ said The Lawgiver.

‘So, what’s it like?’ asked all the ape whipper-snappers.


And The Lawgiver told them. He told them of a place where everyone hated everyone else, and for no good reason. A place where there is always a war going on, somewhere, where there is always a famine, somewhere too, where there is always despair and misery, everywhere. He told them of a place where everyone just threw their crap away wherever and whenever they damn well got the urge, and made needless journeys in vehicles that caused a fiery inferno to ignite and burn other apes and their stuff. He told them of a place where there are floods, and deserts, that didn’t need to be. A place where everyone lies and steals and imprisons other creatures and tortures them and eats their flesh and winds up causing plagues and pestilence, and poverty and unhappiness and death.

The tiny apes all sat in silence. Agog.

‘That sounds like...’ one small bonobo started to say.

‘Where the humans live,’ said another.

~HOME~

I wish I could be chillin'
In a forest full of friends
No laws, no government
No jobs, no SCHOOL, no rent
Just living free, climbing trees
With old and young
Feeling like we are One
Not a day going by
Without a smile and a laugh
With friendship all around
The closest friends on earth.
What shall we do today?
Build a house or simply play?
Making things out of clay
Following our own way
Not forced into a corner
Like rats in a cage
Separated in our boxes 
Where we exist until old age
I can only dream of a home
But dreaming is where it starts
My imagination is a weapon
And my tools are the Arts
Somehow I will change my life
And find the love I seek
With friends who search for
a new world, too...
Because reality is looking bleak.

Created by Queen Chi - Oct' 2020
(written in 2018)

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An English Airman Foresees the Death of His Son

Phil Smith

It was just the other morning, about nine forty-five, a Cold War jet
Ran high over the scarp at Berry Head, veered left, like me in later life.
This was 1955, when I was still keeping company with a muffled ocean.
In 1969, a year too late, "same again this time" the graffiti in Paris read.
Sixty five years later I overslept and the emptiness crept in
At the edge of the mirror; cawing through a hollowed crown;
An oily thing shaking its rings. I pulled the represented thing apart,
Like a gatepost creaking, it unhinged a moth-eaten ghost – baddah! – and
Everything after that happens really fast. The two jets
Roar over the beach foam. My Dad's machine salutes my pregnant mother,
Waggles its wings, and is gone from the sky over Sandy Bay.
I wash the soap from my chin, dab my cheekbones with a towel;
I can see the eyes behind the goggles, hear the absence of the engine;
Such is the way the deadness breaks in, passing a generation over,
A wave cracks a shore. No more, says the void in the basin, no more.
I owe nothing to the banks or to the law; I've never been mortgaged or
insured;
My stretch served; the only debts unpaid are to the betrayed I called
friends.
High above whatever ends, the everlasting UFO, I board: how did I get
away with all those things?
Fixing the books and squeaky baseball boots on a parquet floor, Delaware
Road, 1964:
Kids dancing in stockinged feet; I can still smell the polish;
Rolled carpets stacked in the corners.

Hearts like raw fireballs; a child nurse and a baby playwright
Twisting to TV themes, zooming to Venus
Under the gazes of our mothers, one
Who'd midwived the other in a thunderstorm in that same room.
This is where we're born and this is how we die;
East meets West. Scythes cross harmlessly in a cold sky.
Life is packed with more certainty than concrete.
Was it the two knifed skinheads bleeding in the yard
That drove us to ask for more?
They pulled through, but kids could survive anything in those days;
Waking every morning in different sheets;
Till the bed was worn down to its coppery springs
And there was no bouncing back from autumn; time to take stock,
Change my diet, cut down on the Special Brew,
Submitting to rearrangement by ancient forming, cutting, joining;
Guided by the plan of my Pop's pattern-making;
I was glass shaped experimentally by the ghostly breath of my Nan.
Then who were we and what were our destinations?
Did it add up to much more than my Mum's calculations at the working
day's border?
Or my Dad's tweak of an aileron, the fin of his Vampire tipping towards the
East Germans' radar,
Lighting up the Soviet Bloc's treason against blacksmiths, pattern makers
and lampworkers.
Today I was served notice to quit by the landlord who owns my rented
heart;

Yesterday's damp gathers darkness round the roots of an introvert
primrose,

My morning shave is as dry as a split hose, a screen in place of a face.

Almost before we'd begun, the vampire has come out of the sun.

I wash with soap, the accusatory bar screaming about bare faced lies,

I scrape away the fireflies and lost chimeras of the night;

An undoing morning in the middle of time.

The mouth in the mirror's seen it all before.

Hanging open in a last yawn; no one dies alone,

But in the filth of what they own

Under the careless stare of representations of what's no longer there.

Good morning, with stiff toes touch this ocean floor.

The pebbles run out into the forest to make a bed for dissolving on;

And we are finally free; a flicker of glass, a touch on the joystick, a shut of
the till,

A word of dialogue, a last dose, a flash of pattern, all cashed up, then
everything is until.



Hoke

Le Sabot (The Clog) - Roland Chesters

It lies at the back of the shoe cupboard. Hidden behind that pair of shoes that are just a tad too small but that I don't want to get rid of because they were so expensive and surely one day my feet will shrink enough to fit into them. Just one wooden sabot, the French version of a Dutch clog. The left foot. It is small – appropriately sized for a child or a woman. Roughly hewn and crudely shaped with some ugly dark brown stains marking the wooden inside. It was my mother's.

Born in Paris in 1925 my mother, Claudie, and her twin sister, Claudine, were 14 when World War 2 erupted. They, together with their elder sister, Elyane, and their parents lived in a 3-roomed second floor flat in Les Lilas, some 5 kilometers east of the Gare du Nord. Madeleine, my grandmère, was a seamstress and Henri, my grandpère, was a carpenter, working for the city of Paris. The flat had a 'kitchen/living room', a tiny bedroom for my grandparents and an even smaller bedroom for the three girls who all shared the one bed. The only sink in the flat was in the kitchen area and it was in this one sink that crockery, laundry and bodies were all washed. The toilet was in a shed in the backyard. The lighting in the dark communal spiral staircase was operated by a minute switch and it was always a rush to get up or down the stairs in time before the minute switch clicked off.

When Germany declared war against France and Great Britain in September 1939 Henri and Madeleine were concerned but not unduly so; after all France had built the Maginot line against such an eventuality. But as the German army broke through into France in May 1940, circumventing the Maginot line, their alarm grew. It soon became clear that the invading army was rapidly approaching Paris.

Madeleine, ever pragmatic, felt that it would be useful for her three girls to learn some basic German in case they needed to interact with – or indeed, defend themselves from – the foreign soldiers. She could not afford lessons for all three of them so Claudie and Claudine were sent to alternate lessons without informing the tutor. They were identical twins, so identical that sometimes not even their parents could tell them apart. The tutor, never realizing that he actually had three pupils and not two, was confused as to why Claudie/Claudine was not making as much progress in learning the language as was Elyane.

And then the Germans entered Paris in June 1940. Panic stricken, my mother, her sisters and their parents joined the general exodus from the city. A cousin had an ancient car. They all piled in, together with the neighbours from downstairs, M and Mme Surcouff, and merged with the thousands of Parisians filling the roads out of the city with automobiles, tourist buses, trucks, wagons, carts, bicycles, and on foot with no clear idea of where they were actually going. The slow-moving river of refugees took ten hours to cover thirty kilometres. After two days the car gave up the struggle and died on the roadside. Henri decided that his family would be safer returning to Paris, so they abandoned the vehicle and retraced their steps, struggling against the tide of those still fleeing the city.

Once home they took refuge in their flat and from its safety and security watched the German troops entering the city, always apprehensive, always cautious, ever on the alert. By this time Claudie and Claudine had learned to understand "Guten Abend schönes Mädchen, wie geht es Ihnen?" and learned even more quickly "Daß ist verboten!"

But the war eventually shattered their family life. Henri was identified as a civil servant and was taken from his family by the Germans to live in a work camp and dig graves in the Bois de Boulogne for members of the resistance and other 'undesirables' shot by the invading force. He had no means of communicating with his wife and his 'filles', nor they with him. They could only hope and pray that the loved ones were safe.

In early 1943 the Allied bombing of Paris started. Les Lilas is not far from the Gare du Nord which, as one of the main entry points into Paris for German troops and supplies, was a prime target for the bombing. As the bombs dropped ever nearer Madeleine, yet again, made plans to leave Paris with her daughters, this time to join her family in Foligny, on the coast of Normandy, some 250 kilometers away. She could not get word to Henri that they were leaving but she left him a detailed note of their proposed itinerary pinned to the pillows of their bed, should he, somehow, be able to get home and find them gone. They left on foot, no transport being available for them, carrying what little they could. They would camp in the fields by the roadside at night, buying what little they could to eat from the residents of the villages they walked through.

At a certain point, about 100 kms from Paris they spotted an empty open-topped cattle truck train trundling slowly across the countryside, heading towards the Normandy coast. Together with other refugees, they made a dash for the train and were able to climb on board, the girls hauling their mother up behind them. The children were relieved – no more walking! There was enough room for them to spread out in the cattle trucks and although they were a little smelly this was a much better form of transport than continuing on foot!

They had only been on the cattle truck a few hours when a lone German aircraft flew low over the train, recognised that it was carrying refugees and circled back to start strafing the occupants of the trucks. The train pulled to a halt. Madeleine, Claudie and Claudine jumped out. Elyane was trapped under the body of a refugee caught in the hail of bullets. Madeleine fractured her elbow in the fall and crawled under the truck. Claudie and Claudine ran into a nearby copse of trees, attempting to hide in the foliage, but in the mad, terrifying panic lost their shoes.

Once she was sure the strafing plane had disappeared Madeleine gathered her girls together. Elyane was uncovered unhurt from the corpse lying on her and helped out of the truck. She strapped up her mother's elbow. Claudie and Claudine were found still hiding under the trees. There was no time to try and find their lost shoes as Madeleine was concerned the airplane would return and perhaps this time accompanied by other flyers eager for some target practice. The twins were told to tear up some of the clothing they were carrying to make covers for their feet so that they could continue the long walk to Normandy. And off they set once again, turning their faces to the coast and leaving behind the bloodied and tangled destruction of lives and train.

Off in the Bois de Boulogne Henri heard that a pair of twins had been killed during a bombing raid on the street where his family lived in Les Lilas. Frantic with fear that this could be his beloved daughters, he escaped from the work camp and made his way to the flat. There, neighbours told him that it was not Claudie and Claudine that had been killed in the air raid and, once he found Madeleine's note pinned to the pillow, he knew in which direction they had been heading. Henri stole a bicycle and set off after them. Somehow, miraculously, he managed to follow their tracks and eventually caught up with them, exhausted, on their way to Foligny. By this time, the rags covering Claudie and Claudine's feet were in tatters and their feet sore and bleeding. They had no money to buy new shoes and indeed there were no shops selling them. They had already used all of whatever spare clothing they had to make the rag shoes. But they could not walk the rest of the way – at least another 150 kms - to safety completely barefooted. Henri still had some of his carpentry tools with him; he had thought they may come in useful as weapons, should the need arise. He used them to cut branches from a tree and to make sabots for the twins. He was not a sabot-maker, he was a carpenter. But this rudimentary footwear would suffice to get his children to the safety of Foligny.

The twins walked the remaining distance in those sabots. Undoubtedly in severe pain, but uncomplaining, sustained by the firm belief that shelter and safety would be provided to them at their grandparent's farm in Foligny, they walked on in silence. By the time they arrived at their destination their feet were lacerated and blistered and all the small bones in the front of their feet had been broken. The insides of the sabots were bloodstained. Their feet were twisted and misshapen, never to recover. Henri was distraught that his handiwork had reduced his children's feet to this sodden mess of broken bones. But the twins reassured him that they were grateful, and just happy to be in relative safety with their family and their grandparents, away from the bombs and the terror of Paris.

The family eventually returned to Paris. But to the safety of a luxurious apartment right next to the Eiffel Tower. Henri had been given the keys to the apartment by a Swiss businessman who wanted to take his family back to his home country during the war but needed someone to live in the flat to keep it secure. Henri and his family were glad to move in. Being so close to the one monument that personified Paris the world over and which nobody would dare to bomb, gave them reassurance that there they would be safe. The last air raid sirens over Paris were sounded on the day of the eighteenth birthday of the twins.

Paris was liberated on August 25th, 1944 and Claudie and Claudine, together with their sister and parents watched from the window of their loaned flat as a French matelot climbed up the stairs of the Eiffel Tower to hoist a French flag from its topmost point. When Charles de Gaulle marched triumphantly from the Arc de Triomphe to Notre Dame de Paris, my mother and aunt were in the adoring crowds welcoming him. However, not everyone was so happy to see him. Communist partisans had hidden in the rooftops along the way and tried to shoot at de Gaulle. Although their shots failed to reach him some people in the crowds were hit. Amidst the ensuing panic my aunt managed to jump into the River Seine and had to be rescued, a dripping soggy mess.

Although over the years the blisters, scars and lacerations on the feet of Claudie and Claudine healed, the bones never recovered. My mother and my aunt had grossly deformed feet for the rest of their lives. Walking was painful and difficult and they had problems maintaining their balance. Often they would have to stop, take off a shoe and rearrange a bone or two in their foot to enable them to carry on walking. Both women loved to dress well, with a certain Parisian flair. All apart from the shoes. My mother hated going into shoe shops to buy shoes. Her feet would never fit into them. The shop assistant would be horrified by the ugly deformation of mother's feet and then embarrassed by their horror.

But she kept the sabot her father had made her. Just the one, the left one. For her, it was a testament to the love her father had had for his children. He did his very best with the tools that he had and the skills that he had to provide for them during the very worst of times so that they could get to a better place.

I remember seeing that sabot in my mother's shoe cabinet. She wouldn't let me play with it, but she never took it out of the cabinet. She never talked to my brother and I about her teenage years in war-stricken Paris. It was almost as if, when she came to England to marry our father, she drew a veil over the life she was leaving behind and all the memories that it contained.

After the war my mother went into a deep depression and was subjected to electric shock therapy. It is a brutal, frightening form of treatment and must have been even more so to a teenage girl nearly 80 years ago. She never spoke of it but after she died in 2007 at the age of 82, the French Health Authorities released all her historical medical records to her GP, who also happened to be both mine and my brother's GP. He passed those records on to us.

In her later life mother took to writing her memoirs. They contained no mention of the electric shock therapy but did tell the story about the sabot. And at last I understood.



Asperger's and Epilepsy - James Bridgwater

When I was 5 I was diagnosed with epilepsy. A couple of years ago when I was in my mid 40s I did a self-referral which led to my diagnoses of Asperger's syndrome. I pretty much ignored it back then and so it's only now I'm looking at YouTube films and websites to find out about it. It explains a lot about my childhood and indeed my isolated adult life. Now I've been in contact with other syndrome sufferers, I'm getting a much clearer picture of our world and that of neurotypicals and the differences between them. Recently I've had an interesting day learning from top professors giving lectures about the science and neurology of the condition.

I've spent some time watching short YouTube films on living with Asperger's and why it is so hard. These have been from real people and suggest real solutions to real problems and issues. I'm already familiar with depression and anxiety but now I'm understanding a lot more about the base underlying conditions relating to being on the autistic spectrum and not knowing it for years.

I was very impressed by Chris Packham's film explaining the effects on his life and why he prefers to live alone with his dog than have many social interactions. It makes sense to me that autistics are all seen to be animal lovers. Understandable behaviour not disrupted by emotions is far more understandable.

Looking back (a common autistic trait) it seems to me probable my father and grandfather were on the spectrum but were unaware of the condition. Both were Royal Navy engineer officers which is a career ideal for the autistic man. It is very much seen as a genetically influenced disorder. I think they would both have been unaware of the state and seeing me were distracted by the epilepsy which is a far more obvious disease when absences progress to seizures.

After retiring from the Navy my dad taught engineering, maths and physics in the College of Further Education, as City College was. He had a specialised knowledge, having done a degree in Glasgow University in Naval Architecture. Four years of study including working in drawing office of John Brown's shipyard on the Clyde. He was involved in designing the 'T' class submarines still in service now.

As he got older he discovered Christianity, which has a lot of characteristics appealing to autistics. To the extent that he went and studied Theology to become a lay reader and followed it by doing an MA in Applied Theology at Marjons. Like many autistics, I believe I went to church to try and find a group of people who would accept me as I was and not pass judgement. I have done this all my life, enjoying, rituals, repetitive routines and actions such as in church services. Therefore I'm re-evaluating my ideas about faith and belief and atheism presently.

GONE PIANO - Danny Strike

Oh gone piano play for me.

She sits beside drift wood fire;
listens to her man at the
gone piano, empty white
space on smoke tired wall,
releasing plaster hid notes
to flood salt-blue lit hearth,
clear as when alive he played
in concert with the wind
...fickle, teasing, caressing,
gusting, roaring, abating.....

Her son comes and goes
in polished four by four
salt purged, well able for
tufted dune track, making
money out of money; not
work to compare with cat-gut
sliced fingers harbingers of
tripping summer,
autumn enchantment,
ogreous winter,
spring promises.

He'd buy her a T.V.
Tin eared to his father's notes
Spilling golden from a chest,
wants to Technicolor that
space- rich space.

Gone piano
deserves to be a sea thing,
keys current plucked, along
with her man. And would be
had she her way, not her son,
would empty house and her too
in his caring way.
Better come the day to launch her
gnawed away by light waves
rather than worms working at
gone piano stumps in junk shop.

So play on gone piano.
Drive me, nudge me with
your hidden frescoed
ferment and finesse
so that I am dervisher
and debutant in one cool swirl.

Wing the blood oh gone piano
and play once again for me
the whispering roar of the sea.

On a Spring tide - Poppy Jones

The moon slithers,
tumbles across the, wide as ocean and sky,
and I howl up to her, in her glory
still,
as days before
when choruses howled at the Penumbral
cloaked in cloud. I give
guttural
thanks in smallness,
for the suffering within womb,
walls crashing in, storms rushing through
as if carried upon a Spring tide.
The neap is a-coming.
I hold my stomach,
nothing
numbs the aching,
a home remains.
An age in the back, hips, wrists, all quite quietly lost in grieving.
It was never wanted and not used
but a loss of opportunity,
of female,
of ownership
and youth.
I place cloth against flesh, attach between thighs and allow the relief to wash over, to reel me in
and comfort me.
I allow the gentility of my being to send me out into reality,
give over to acceptance.
I lift a pencil from a dresser and imprint
on my lunar calendar the day. A small grey speck on pale printed circle
becomes a sum of my parts, history of creating or not creating.
The recording of patterns
brings a pleasure
a cycle unmarked cannot.



The Seckford Tap

We meet in a back room in Woodbridge,
fallen through a flume of history,
unknowingly ended here again.
Fingers clutching black russian,
blushing at a dull conversation
I have no place in, my eyes
baubles on your tongue, strung
about the roof of your shoulders, catching,
older than I remember, folding
in on themselves as if shelved more reading
than I've had in me.
Simply Red plays on the jukebox,
a fluke of mass proportion
as I pass myself back to playing
pool in your old watering hole,
passing out in front of the TV,
pattering at midnight desperate to pee,
losing it over the idea you might hear.
And we're stood here in this dank congregation, they've
grown their hair, they're
droning on big balls about which falls short another one.
I imagine watching the Sun hinge up wallside
reflected on the dullness in your eyes
that once rolled as baubles on my tongue.
I hum Simply Red,
imagine the things we may have said or shared
before the affair went stale and I moved on.
The feeling prolongs as if an off beat metronome.
There's a home in you,
where a restless version,
as a short nasturtium built to inflict pain,
heals sane and well rested on the sofa.
You pinch a cigarette, the rest did
find a place on an old pub pew
and I looked at you, with the same
wide eyed, long soaked saliva love-dust
somehow rusted, unchecked with age,
turned meek and beige in the lull of us.
I wonder what the fuss was then, riddling your body
as an unplucked hen to the naive and hungry,
too in a hurry to be cherished.
When it was dished we didn't want it,
that's the truth, ain't it?
That's the truth.



INAAS AGED 15

The Storyteller's Tale – Veronica Aaronson

On the thirteenth day of the thirteen month
as our son slipped into his thirteenth year,
he didn't appear for breakfast or lunch.

We didn't worry –

he'd been playing Hendrix all night.

We didn't expect
what came next.

We found him unable to move,
tomed in brambles.

After thirteen hours physicians were called.
The first said: The **worst** thing you could do
is let him sleep! The second said: The **best**
thing you could do is let him rest!

Neither mentioned the vegetation.

Each day of the first thirteen-day week,
spiders cobwebbed windows, tits hung
on feeders and we randomly shook
our son.

Prayers were followed by gong baths
and Vedic yagyas.

Nothing changed.

When the bramble stems thickened,
friends, teachers, colleagues, everyone we met
gave their advice. Acupuncturists,
dietitians, and others were consulted.

Each day spiders wrapped flies in silk,
sparrowhawks eyed tits. Each week
rubbish was put out, shopping trolleys
were stacked.

After thirteen full moons, a specialist was summoned.
He brought a dousing stick, leeches, danced long and hard.

Still no change.

We were willing
to do anything,
but the gods had
blocked their ears.

After thirteen equinoxes, a shaman chanted prayers
to animal spirits over his body and warned:
The roots have penetrated his heart,
are hungry for his soul.

Knives, axes, swords and scythes were sharpened.
Each day spiders sucked out body fluids,
 sparrowhawks filled their bellies,
each week more pill bottles entered our home,
 vegetables and gluten-free everything
was put in the shopping trolley,
 each month the moon waxed and waned
as if everything was normal
 and we, hackers, hacked.

The brambles bloodied
our fingers and hands,
our arms and legs,
our eyes, ears,
our language,
our lives.

But nothing,

not one thing

changed.

Then we knew we would never
be rid of the curse.

 We downed tools,
 walked away,
and waited.

Waited.

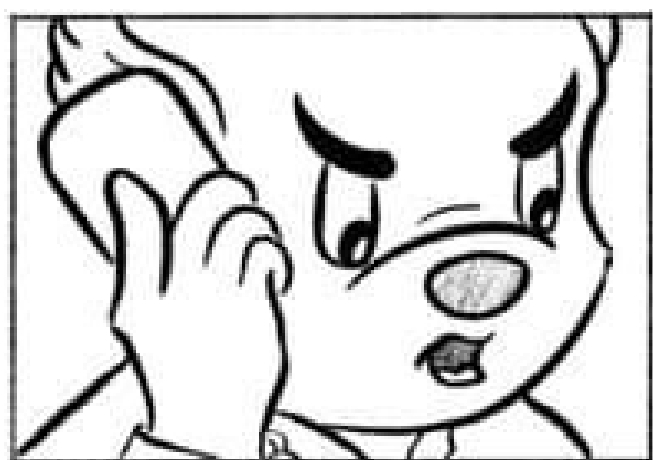
Waited.

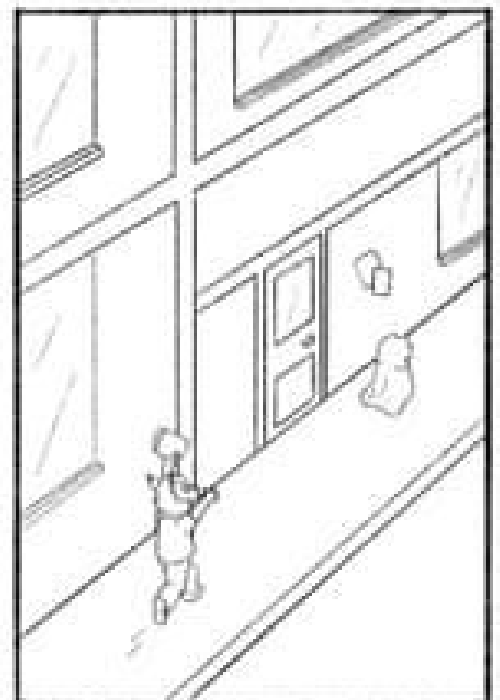
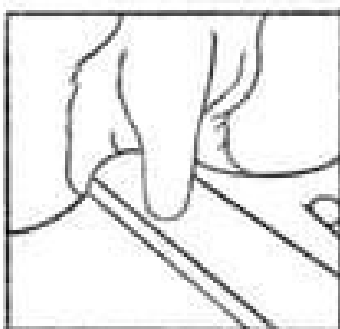
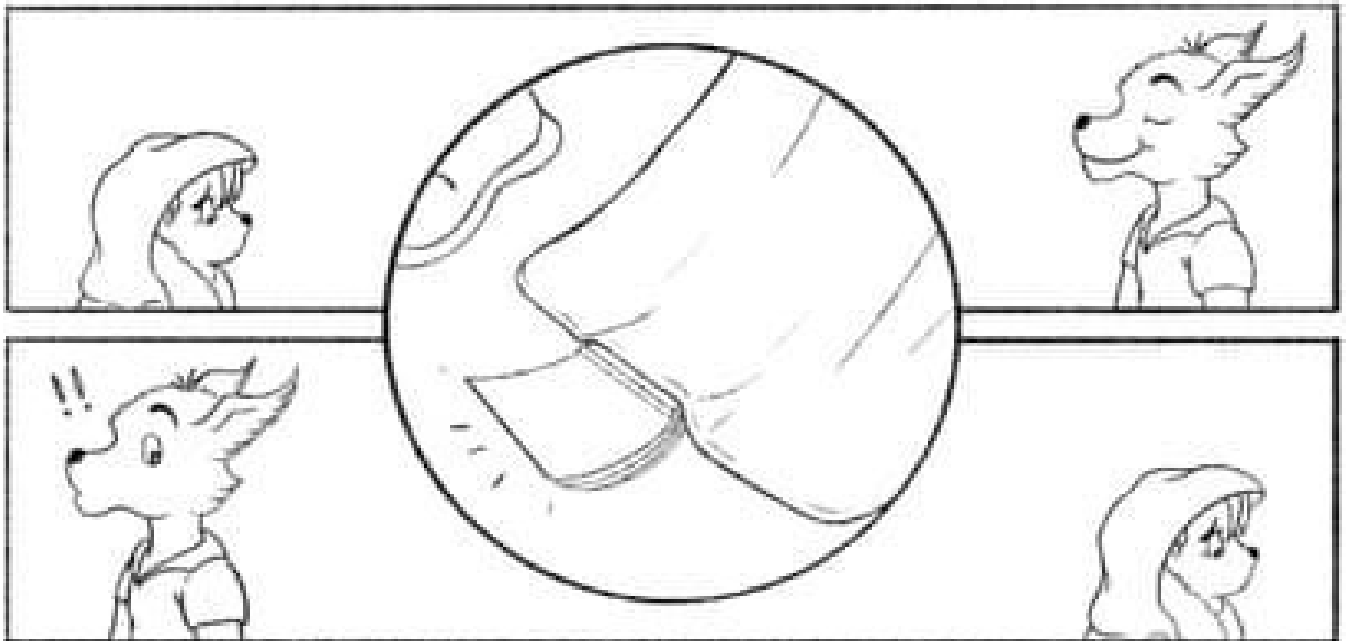
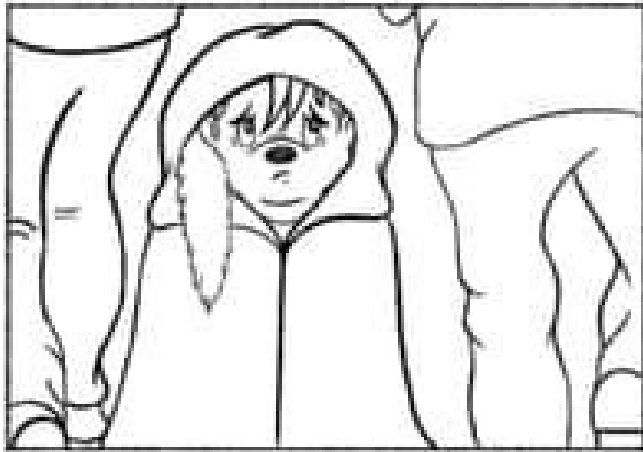
Waited for months and months

Waited for years and years.

Until, as if he'd been kissed by his true love,
the bramble leaves started to brown, curl at the corners,
the stems became brittle and colour
seeped back into our son's skin.

By the time his eyes had unglazed,
he'd outgrown his child's body.
By the time he could speak,
his voice was weighted by
the grief of a grown man
who understood the cry in Jimi's voice
and why his guitar wailed.





Humpty Furloughed - Samantha Carr

Humpty was furloughed due to his size,
so the call to retrain was no real surprise -
not safe any longer to sit on a wall
with Covid in the air it wouldn't
do at all. He fancied himself as maybe a spy,
but cracking codes brought a tear to his eye,
was it the hidden secrets, he just didn't know,
so off to the benefits office he had to go.
No box there to tick for his shape, size or colour,
to wait cold and hungry he did discover,
whilst shivering in silence he held in his hands
a photo of the king, and all and his fine merry men
of better times, he so wanted to wish
life really shouldn't be as bad as all this.



Little Red

Little Red wanted to visit gran, but they weren't out of the woods yet. Dad said a wolf lurked round the corner. Red hadn't seen him, didn't know if he was true. Was it something daddy lied about to get her to do what he wanted her to do? Like being watched all year round by Santa's KGB elves... She slipped on her cape, her first big mistake. Picked up her basket and skipped through the trees. Old wolf rubbing his paws with glee. A crunch of some leaves, a broken tree twig, she knew she was followed. She tried to run but tripped on her untied lace. She lay there expecting to see a scary wolf face. Instead of sharp teeth, hot breath and angry eyes, a cough, the only thing she caught - to her great surprise. Dusting herself off, she laughed at her daddy, if only he'd known the wolf was no baddie. Knock, knock, hello grandma, Little Red is here. Poor granny might not make it to next year.

Pinocchio's Peg Legs

Pinocchio's CV was somewhat embellished,
his Nobel prize, although lies, was something he cherished,
he had walked on the moon, his wooden peg legs,
defying gravity, or at least so he had said,
but about one thing he just couldn't lie,
a catching virus that might cause people to die,
to help spread the word ,he handed out masks,
but people just kept walking right on past,
they'd heard his fables for long enough,
if he believed in fairy tales, then that was just tough,
but, he cried onto deaf ears, my nose hasn't grown,
not at all this year. If only he'd known,
where his lies would have led. He might have been
honest about his wooden peg legs.

Cassandra - Claire Duthie

They named me Cassandra
That just made me look, feel and act madder and madder
When Apollo approached me
He told me to swallow
When I told him no, no, no
He turned away
Now all I do is go a screaming and a shrieking
A room to room.

Circe

My name is Circe
Some have entitled me
" Evil Enchantress."

But that is only Homer's account.
This is my story
They approached me, one by one
And then all in a hurry
For, I was to be their delight
" For the night."

Yet, where was to be mine?
They should have considered that!
As I turned them into piggie-wiggie wiggies
One, two and a three
With only the tone of my voice

Penelope

I'm the ever faithful wife
Odyessus my beloved, ever full of strife
Suitors I have many
With my loom and needle keep them at bay
Then Anonymous Odyessus returns

He sets me a challenge
I see through his disguise
From my rough hewed and mannered pursuers
He rescues me again and again
This is the end of my narrative.



YAZMINE LABBAN: yazlabban@gmail.com

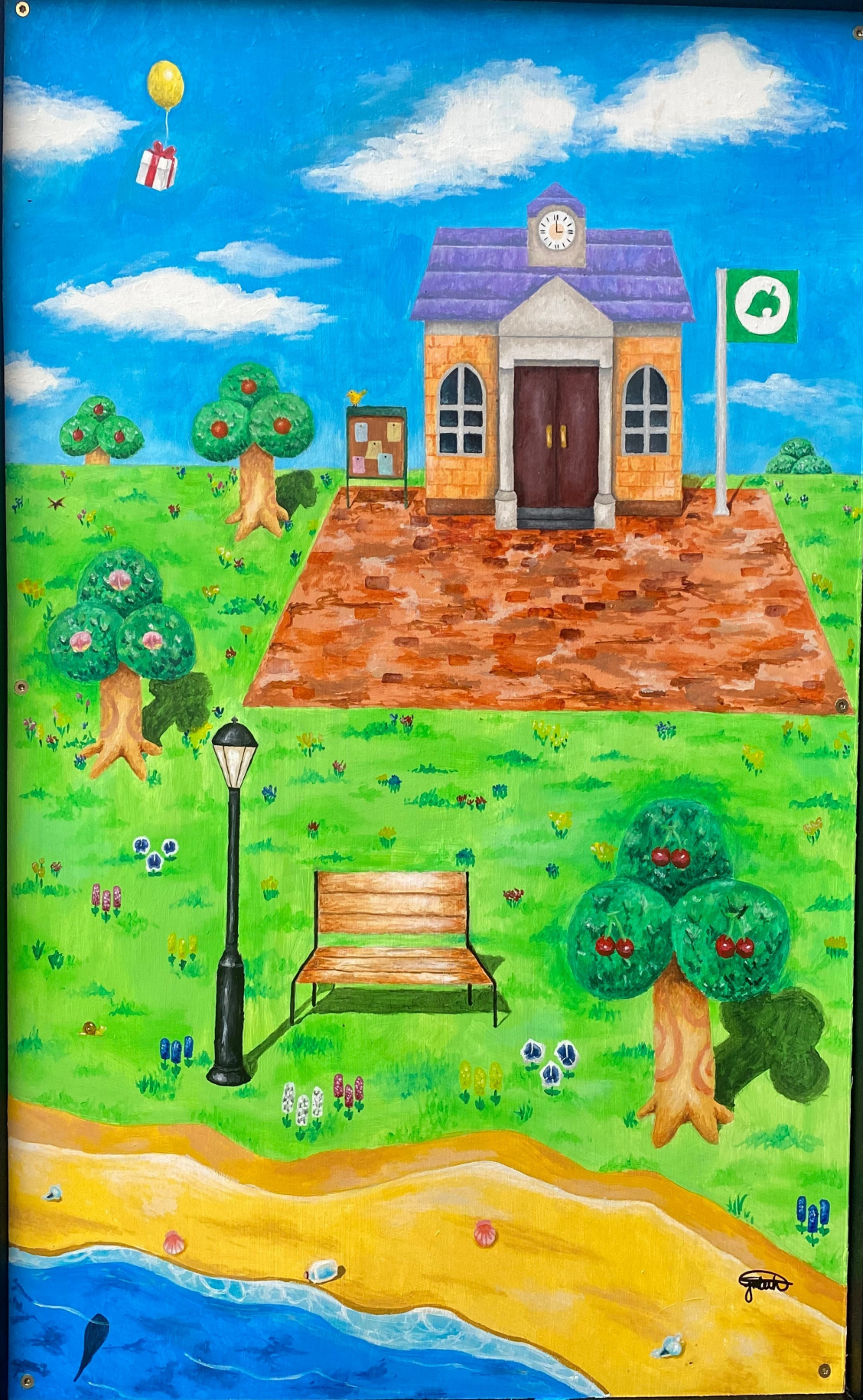
When you open yourself up
you are offering someone the key to your vulnerabilities .
There will always be someone waiting
to slam that door.
That is why I threw away the key,
so everyone has to wait outside.
Until I'm ready to break it down
from the inside out.

- Locked

Ryan Burle



Hoke



'All Hallows' Eve' - **Fiercesister**

The incense swirls around her fingers; she places the candles at the corners,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

She takes down sweet lavender from the wall and crushes it into the mortar,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

She lays the crystals and waits for the moon to enter the heavenly Quarter,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

She puts on her sacred red gown and hood, the one that her mother bought her,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

She writes out a sacred language to speak, and places it onto the alter,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

With a flourish of the wand, in her hand, she casts a spell Grandmother taught her,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

And when it is done, she snuffs out the candles, blessing the Moon and Great Mother,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

She looks to the stars, as she follows her words, hearing them speak of their author,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

Before she sleeps, she silently prays to Great Ancestors that came before her,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

And when she awakens, she feels their presence gathering in all around her,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

She heals, and soothes and walks among them, aware of what magic has brought her,

Earth, Air, Fire, Water,
She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

And when it is time for them to go, she remembers this hour with importance,

For she is connected to all on this Earth,

She is one of Gaia's Daughters.

Aperture, an incantation

Open wide the lens from which the all-to-all, the eye-to-eye sees, the eye unblinking, the eye unflinching and ponder. Look and look AND look through each veil upon veil, part the curtain and look into each depth upon depth radiating outward and going inward further inward and further inward still into the reach beyond possible that you can see and go deeper traveling into this, this hallowed inner sanctum, the inner and the outer world of being.

Then open to that which surrounds this which you see, side to side, each to each, before you, behind you, above and beneath you and survey this dominion.

What does it hold? First it holds you, the seer, the sacred seer, which you are, of the light as it hits the lens your eye that shines unfiltered from the heavens, by day, the dim and sweet filtered light of the cherished orb, the moon, at night and survey this all, all that you see, all that wanders, all and everything which flies, take your eye and travel in your mind, turn inward and in imagination see all that IS in the deep seas of the earth and all that which swims within, the colours and delicate lines of each leaf, the scents you discern while traveling through the air.

Watch it all, watch US all, who are with you, as we travel through our days and our nights. This is all. This is it. The seeing eye, the knowing eye, the ready-of-open-heart-to-all that the eye sees.

Cherish this all, the depth, the breadth, the height, the lower reaches. Travel into it, through it, be it, taste it, roll in it over and over and over like a child rolling down, dizzy, from the top of her hill in the spring.

This is ours, this is life, this is you, the all-seeing, the ever seeing eye.

October 18, 2020©Lesley Constable





Ripe Fruit

The thinking is not in my head, the thoughts are NOT just in my head. I have to stop this, this separation – I need to let go these heated thoughts - now ripe as plums, ripe and over ripe, fermenting as fruit that drops to the ground heavy, the bees to await the softening. BUT, but I withhold these thoughts they cannot have these thoughts easy as flowers the secret riches deep hidden in each crotch of flower.

They are mine, these thoughts, for me to allow this time, or not, the traveling down, to not stick in the throat on their way going down from the brain on the way but first settle in the mouth so as to chew and chew and chew until the words, softened as pulp, softening as they slide down the throat (instead, not sticking but) into the gut and become food, the food of thought, the food for thought to nourish and strengthen me – to add the gleam to my eye, the bounce to my step now visible. Nourished by thought, the vitamins of life, the bones become stronger,

The stomach glows content, radiates from all points outward, emits light that is seen at night glowing in the darkened streets. I walk holding this orb of thought inside me.

The heavy matter condensed and lightening now as it moves THEN reversing, moving upward, moving back up to source upward again to give tongue, to give voice, to emit sound.

The words, sourced from being, come strong, the words, this poem that comes to me from source. And I sing the deep song that is mine. And in this time, beginning in mind, being in mind, resting in body, I sing.

September 10, 2020©Lesley Constable

Loam - Brian Herdman

It's quarter to midnight 'n
in my 2 by 3 box 'n
is it the room that's singin'
or tinnitus in my ears 'n
the books that groan on their shelves 'n
paper over the decay 'n
so many words here 'n
so many worlds 'n
they're not mine 'n
I stand and raise an arm 'n
scratch at the ceiling 'n
smell loam 'n
it's sweet 'n
it's cold and fertile 'n
threads of mycelium needling
through it 'n
I scoop it up 'n
press it to my face 'n
breathe in
another place so far away 'n
the vast night 'n
all that came before this
forgetting all that came
before this became
before 'n after

People like you - Hannah Gardiner

People like you
I hate people like you
What's the deal
with people like you?
Don't you want to hang around
With people like you too?

What about us
and them?
Are we neighbours?
Are we friends?
Do we dance
to the same heartbeat?
Do we marvel
at each other's thumbprints,
in the beautiful
plurality of oneness

You, you are
A person, I am
A percent
Representing my percent



brexit britain - Jack Hopkins

Dear Mr. Cameron I'm writing to you,
please don't let the referendum go on through,
Us working class folk without a penny,
Don't want our lives to go down the swanny,
Oh would you look at that you didn't listen,
Just like the rest of this infernal system,
Now you're out of your job, go back to fucking swine,
I never voted for you, you're a waste of time.

Who's taken over now? Anyone good?
Nope just Palpatine without the hood,
Thatcher Mk.2 I know what you're about,
Trying to kill us poor people out,
All us people with disabilities,
Snuffing us off, fuck the casualties,
"our forefathers made this country from blood"
The blood of the meek, you rat faced snob!

Try as I might, there is one thing that is dire,
how your backbench cronies cause all this mire,
sparking hatred and racism, of other cultures and creeds,
of gender equality and the special needs,
all the beautiful work we've done since the forties,
all destroyed in the damn noughties.

"oh you with the hijab,
or you from the Punjab,
you're not from our country,
now you've seen what you've come to see,
Fuck off home, this land has democracy"
Clearly not equality,
It doesn't matter if you're generation four,
you've got different skin, get out the door,
Don't let it hit you on the way out...
I didn't realise that's what we're about,
I like diversity, seeing different cultures,
but that's being ruined by these Tory vultures,
the ones that control all mainstream media,
TV, radio, it just makes them greedier,
Price hikes, less pay,
More tax, Less say.

You've taken what it is to be British,
Stiff upper lipped and rigid,
and you've turned us all into drones,
Our new idiosyncrasy, right from our homes!
You've placated the masses,
It's taken some thought,
Some real bypasses,
So who was bought?
You've removed our choice, without us even noticing
To line your pockets, you aim for our throat again,
our final blow, the National Health Service
not enough doctors, it makes you nervous
Not to mention that if you get sick,
These fucks stop you for claiming for PIP,
Or anything that could help get you back on your feet.

It's four years on, no deal in sight,
the world is laughing, we've no will to fight,
we've been ravaged by a pandemic,
us and America homosystemic,
neither of us seem to learn,
"whats that Bojo? Another U-turn?"
His ally Trump, the SS enforcer,
Getting his greedy mitts all up in our border,
I'm not sure how much more I can take,
the world is much darker now,
where's the handbrake?

This is Brexit Britain, placated and weak,
being ruled over by sadists, the malicious and freaks.

Sonic soup - Robert Garnham

1.

It's all about the reverberations, Doug said, leaning over the table and putting his ear over the bowl of minestrone.

Outside it was early winter. Skeletal branches zigzagged across a battleship grey sky.

I can't hear any, Felicity said.

You wouldn't.

What's that supposed to mean? I hear birds, don't I? Birds in the forest. I take after my grandfather. He also had good hearing. He could hear things deep in the woods that nobody else could.

Maybe he was making it up?

What do you mean?

If he could hear them and nobody else could . . .

I despair of you.

That morning Felicity had seen an airship and she knew it was some kind of portent. The airship threw its shadow on the ground and blocked out the sun as she was raking leaves. Doug was becoming insufferable. She had seen him in the marketplace, he was standing on a wooden box giving a speech about the sonic reverberations of minestrone and nobody was taking the slightest interest. She had been embarrassed to know him. She had decided not to go to the market today because she knew he would be there. And then she saw the airship. It was not a good week for Felicity.

2.

She went to an art gallery.

There was an exhibition of watercolours and the gallery smelled of fresh paint and glue. This is what she liked best about the gallery, the smell. The watercolours were mostly still life pieces or landscapes and the colours were dainty pastels.

It's all very samey, isn't it?, a stranger said.

I like the frames, she replied. It seems to me that the paintings are very formal, yet the artists let themselves go when it comes to deciding what kinds of frame to use. That's what makes the picture. Some are ornate, some are plain, some of them are more interesting than the paintings themselves.

Still, the man said, for he obviously felt that he wasn't being listened to, and felt slightly inferior for not noticing himself, it's all very samey.

She walked around the rest of the exhibition but she felt that he was following her. He came into every room that she was already in. I bet, she said to herself, it's because I saw that airship.

3.

Are you seeing this?, the scientist asked.

His colleague came over and looked at the screen.

Is it a meteor?, she asked.

Yes.

Where is it heading?

There's a valley just outside of town. By my calculations . . .

Both of the scientists were very quiet.

You've been wrong before, though, haven't you?, his colleague asked.

Yes, frequently, but even so . . .

4.

She came back from the art gallery. She was surprised to see Doug still there, with his soup.

How was the market?, he asked.

I went to the art gallery, she replied. I didn't go to the market.

Oh. . . No potatoes, then?

I'm thinking of taking up watercolours, she said.

She went and sat in the other room.

The sonic reverberations, she said, shouting to the kitchen. Do they sound like whistling?



toke

Within - Munteanu Mihai

The air is cold, the sound is blurred,
The eyesight of a simple mule,
The sky is red and blue and gray
but my heart shares no sympathy
for those of you that cannot see
the beauty of what stands within.
The moon is shining like a beacon
for those who dream of pleasant reasons
to move a mountain just to prove
or to deny the only truth.
The clouds are settled onward
together we feel proud-full!
but once they move or drift within
the risk of failing gets so slim...
so you must feel the need to trust
even the ones who broke your trust.
The wind is softly touching nothing
or do you feel like a great something !?
The help is all around you seek,
where you don't hesitate to pick
another path that's blown before
and what you chose or could ignore.
The message is a ... metaphor
we are not bound to ever know.
What could have been instead of this !?!...
but you are glad to understand

even the tiniest detail and just the joice
of that whole moment is knowledge for the
broken,
so let's try all to just let go
and breath within this whole new world...
to bring a reason back to life,
we are not here to fall apart.
I am just standing still
looking at this picture near,
with no movement and no stress
just the breathing feel's immense.
Nature gives us one good look
to what lies beneath the "truth",
that they sell and they imply
you could never just deny,
What they want and what they bring
just to take your mind, how weak,
using tools to just destroy
where there could be so much joy.
I am settled to fight hard
and to bring an empty start,
You are settled and you care !?
Go and tell Him, He is there !
Search within and know yourself
there's a war, we need you braced!

It was imperceptible at first
the way the rot began,
it was not noticed as the library was young
the pages of the books were pristine
when all of a sudden the rot blew in the open door...

Nobody noticed at first
But at the back in one of the stacks furthest away from the door
Books began to curl at the corners
The pages began to fade

One small child noticed it and made a comment
No-one listened

And slowly book by book the bookworms came
Through the books they weaved and wove their way
Cracks appeared and holes

But the librarian kept it all a secret
They didn't want to lose their job
Blame them.. someone might blame them
Someone might notice....
So over the years the library went into Decay
The stacks at the front had the good books...
People came and went and words were shared and spoken
Answers found and ideas birthed..
The librarian was subtle clever and able to deceive
And hide the rot that hid behind their lies

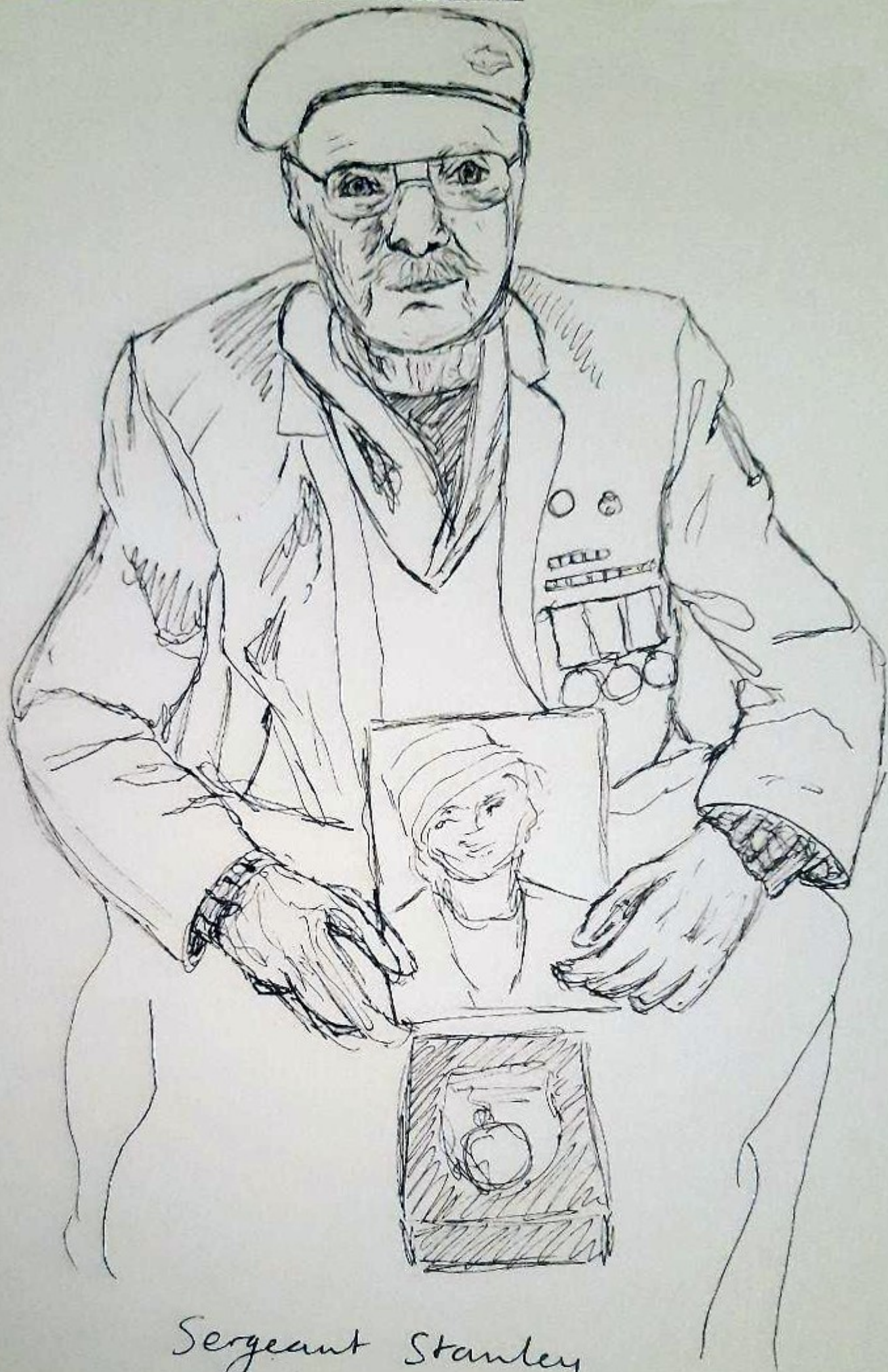
But slowly wisdom gained through years and ages began to fade and drop Away
The people who love the library began to see the gaps

But the librarian made up stories

The books were out on loan.... and other tales were told

To hide the rotting decimation

And suddenly one day a little boy came to the library to find the books
And instead walked into an empty space
with cobwebs covering shelves of rotting words



Sergeant Stanley
Arthur Mullans

Stanley - Slain McGough Davey

Rifles saluted him as the beagle called.

Crowds shuffled to a standstill.

A few tears here and there, from those who gathered to outlive him.

They all raised a glass in his name.

To the man who would tell stories at The Oasis Project,

Who would buy you a cup of tea with a few pennies to spare.

A laugh and a chuckle, a friend to all.

His life was most remembered by those most dear, like a silver Jubilee on
a mantle piece.

He forever carried a small Bible on him, with a love letter from a lost
love, passed away in the remembrance of time.

A sad letter of longing and belonging and love.

From she who took her own life and the tears of a man who outlived her,
but never forgot.

A veteran, a doctor, landlord, father, husband, and most of all, a friend to
all.

His memories are like a secret drawer, only revealing what you want to
hear.

Just like the Queen's speech and the birthday card.

Heroes on parade, and love crushed in a letter within a Bible.

A secret that can be told no more, like a parting glass and a salute on
your death bed.

All memories fade to ash.

The Other Shore of Peace

When I was a small boy I heard the sound of engines over the city.

I was so small, I had to stand on my tip-toes to see the search lights out of my bedroom window, watching the city burn.

How vast and alluring seemed the sea of flames.

The night sky freckled with new stars, like picture frames.

I did not know how quick a journey could start and how quick a journey could end.

Curled up in a plastic chair, asleep as if it was 1940.

But I feel so much freer now, knowing the flags on the other shore are no longer burning.

The strangers that once were, are now my friends.

For it's peace we bring between our two shores.

How great are our memories, stood on a shore line, staring out to sea, like generations that come and go, like a film score with no sound of laughter.

But like a clear compass that guides you like a tide on a river.

You shuffle back and forth til the memories take you back to that clear day when you hear the boy in the street shout, "Come and get the news! War has broken out!"

How our world has changed.

Who once were our enemies are now our friends.

As if the river of time changes all perceptions, all animosities, once come and gone.

Now we hold hands as sisters and brothers with no flags to divide us.

But only love to conquer all.

Young Lovers' Love

I met a girl with jet black hair under The Palace Theatre

Just like a Laurel and Hardy sketch in a film sketch

Curtain calls, ice-cream melts.

But her kiss was more delicious than any strawberry, as we kissed at the bus stop.

Altogether, I still don't recall, I still don't recall her name.

Her dress shone like a search light

Louder than any bomb, sweeter than any death, greater than any birth,
more surreal than death.

If only all of love could be as good as one night, one passion, one kiss.

Young lovers, running under the sky and starlight, as the curfew sounded
and the air raid sounded.

Love is better than any war.

But the curtain calls, and I still don't recall her name at The Palace Theatre.

Laughter and tears, fun filled evenings, a shadow of its former self.

A ghost of a memory, long lost.

Boarded up and broken down.

A shadow of its past glory.

But I still cry mostly, every now and again, from the sweet memories of
the girl with the jet black hair, who had lips like pillows and a tongue like
a snake.

Boarded the 42 bus, never to be seen again.

Ken - Gabi Marcellus-Temple

Pipe cleaners twisting in the wind
Above the highwayman's hill
Where Cornishmen trapped
A small boy and his mother
Sobbing in the tower

There we stood, us two,
You were nothing to me
And I was less than nothing to you
We had one foot in the east
And the other in the west
And the clocks ran on around us.

Perhaps you were mad
Heaped up shoes and empty beer cans
Cast about your mother's empty house
The electric bill was never paid

No-one should ever love her, yet you did
After all she put you through
Not us. We had no-one but each other
Ten long years until you were beaten
The phone ripped out from the wall

You slipped one day, getting out of the bath
A life turned frail, damaged, older, and alone.
You told me about the place where the bombs had never fallen
Told me about the place where you always wished you were

You laughed when you heard I'd lost my accent
And I sounded just like you
You're out of her reach now, and so am I
We've both moved on to freedom.



INAAS AGED 15





The Minutes of a WonderZoo Meeting Recorded as Surrealist Poetry

He's stealing my broth for the second time out.

Yeah, so that's noted for the record that Peter Davey has tried to steal my underwear.

Noted for the record that she is not surprised as she knows the most about his sexual predators in the northeast and oh god did you...

Oh nothing has happened between us, though, also, a lot of us mind it did.

She's like yeah, I know you'd be asking me to join in. Christ now, she's like yeah, you would want me back for more, I just didn't know where to put my faces on my God. Your voice doesn't.

Still up on the window and his hair all fluffed up and shouting at the garden. You know.

Okay, no, you pretty much slept throughout. That didn't really come about. Onions, oh, you've got the internal.

You're in a hornet town anyway.

But then if it's a lockdown, I might be stuck on my mind.

We're gonna be okay.

Make a bomb or you're gonna go to mice.

I painted my kids with acrylic slides at times. I'm not sure. Powdered it like power.

She offered us all the cupcake she gets 8.42 for cleanliness and at 8:40, she approached the water filter.

She has still not read Pete his rights. Mike is acting as Pete's solicitor and I am the inappropriate adult. You should be smoking inside the police station, shut up. I'll beat you.

Isn't it so obvious, the most hallucinogenic plant you can ever encounter, honey

You can make things happen, can you make orbs appear?

Many possessed by the ghost of the small dead child, yes, well, that was that job.

I can do that, look famous in the north

Right, where is he? Where is he? What's upstairs? He's flying. I can't see him. I heard him.

Sounds like when you sleep.

Keep it a dream.



SUMATRA PROTEST
A TAIGAL MASK IS WORN
TO WARD OFF EVIL SPIRITS
WHO IS THE EVIL SPIRIT NOW?

HUGS WITHOUT RISK ASSESSMENTS - Tia Meraki

Precious flashes of normality
In sharper relief here in this strange-familiar city
Where my memories of life as it was
Have found themselves couch-surfing
Not wanting to admit they've been homeless for months
Negative images that illuminate the strangeness
Light writing, photography; and I forgot to capture a single image
If I had, they'd have looked like:
A black and white cat curled up warm into backs of knees at 3am
Grey skies framing paint pastel houses that totter up and down and up again
Breakfast becoming brunch becoming lunch, and most of all I savour the kitchen table chatter
Relishing the accompanied silences, the conversations about everything and nothing
Afternoon cushions and blankets and teenage wizards saving the world on a TV screen
An hour spent stabling unicorns and narwhals that threaten to turn into pandas
Post graduates still learning the geography of Europe through card games into our thirties
Around a kitchen table adorned with rizla packets and hand crafted flowers
And another kitchen table, this one in a house I used to live in; I retrieve a rescued hula hoop from a hook on the wall
A brown and white dog bucking this year's trend, her anxiety subsided into calm now her human pack is always home
A song about blackberry picking in the dark, barely audible, still tastes sweet
One hug a solid, soothing kind of magic; another at arm's length, a distanced reminder that we're not supposed to be here
Not supposed to touch
Treading rain sloshed bridges over mud brown Avon swell
We're all strapped down, ship shape, ready for the next ebb and list
Or as ready as we can be
And I don't know how much longer we can bridge this social chasm
With typed words, or talking in yellow boxes and distorted voices
And it's good to see your faces, even at a distance
And I feel overwhelmed and underwhelmed all in the same moment
And I always thought the apocalypse would be more dramatic
If I had to choose a film of this year, then maybe Bokeh
Beautiful and slow and vast and lonely with an impending sense of emptiness
So here I am, here we are, stockpiling sanity and connection
And dreaming of hugs without risk assessments

