

The Moles Anthology
2013

THE MOLES' ANTHOLOGY – 2013

FOREWORD

The Moles began in 1999 through the initiative of the Mole Valley Arts development Service. It was known as “The Moles Story-Telling Group”; but the “Moles”, being naturally creative, did more than just tell stories and in 2009 the name was changed to “The Moles Creative Writing Group.”



We meet once a month, normally on the 4th Tuesday, in an informal, friendly atmosphere to share together our own stories, poems, essays, memoirs or other creative writing.

Each month we have a set theme; that is why, in this Anthology, you will find some pieces with the same title. There are, for example, three stories with the title “The Clock Stood Still”; but the three stories are very different. We still surprise ourselves at the very different way each “Mole” deals with the set theme.

Each year we take part in the Mole Valley Arts Alive Festival and have an open meeting on the 4th Tuesday of October where Moles entertain visitors with stories, poems, tea and cake.

In this Anthology we present a small selection of our more recent work. We hope you enjoy it.

If you would like to join us or are just interested to meet us, we extend a very warm welcome to you to come along to one of our meetings in the Parish Room of the Church of Our Lady & St Peter in Garlands Road, Leatherhead.

Why not be a Mole?

For more information, telephone or (01372) 372009 or 379291

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EVOLVE !

The colonisation of land
Began when a pioneer band
Of fishes from water
Decided they *ought to*,
And thus found themselves on the sand.

In time they grew legs and then wings,
Evolved structures: all manner of things.
From the tops of the mountains
Into valleys with fountains,
Of the natural world they were Kings.

The sequel to this, my dear Friends,
Is that, naturally, everything ends.
The strife thus engendered,
To peace has been rendered,
And new forms for old make amends.

Peter Horsfield

NOTES TO THE BUILDER

Monday, 15th June, 7.00 pm

For the Attention of the Builder

When your employer stated that you would be starting work on my en-suite bathroom early this Monday morning, and, as I am out at work in the daytime, you would require a key, I had no concerns. I could, of course, imagine the situation arising whereby you might need to leave and re-enter the flat.

However, as you will no doubt recall, at 7.15 this morning, when going from my bedroom to the existing bathroom at the other end of my landing, I was highly shocked and alarmed, to find you lurking and smirking in front of my bathroom door. Even when you finally had the decency to throw me a small towel from the pile on the landing table, in order for me to cover my embarrassment, you still failed to inform me that I was positioned in front of the landing mirror, thus rendering you a full length, uninterrupted view

of the entire uncovered, rear section of my anatomy.

On reflection, (absolutely no pun intended) I can't imagine how I was foolish enough to have assumed you were genuinely interested in the relative aesthetic value of having the en-suite tiles laid horizontally as opposed to vertically as specified in my requirements. I still don't understand why I did not, at that time, question your motive for seeking to discuss this for a full five minutes!

You will understand, therefore, that in future I require you to ring the doorbell when you arrive in the morning, then WAIT to be admitted. Needless to say, I shall be up, dressed and ready before 7.30 tomorrow. Also, please be aware that I have sellotaped my lingerie drawers in such a way that I shall know if they have been tampered with in any way.

Please confine any temporary mess to the area of the new ensuite. I do NOT want any brick dust or plumbers sticky tape trodden into my bedroom carpet. Also, please adhere rigidly to my instructions for the work. I designed the room with meticulous care and will not accept any deviation from my plans, nor will I accept, without compensation, any exceeding of the agreed completion date. Having builders in one's home is inconvenient enough, without prolonging the disruption beyond the date agreed and contracted.

Also concerning disruption, I do not wish to come home to any signs that you have been consuming food in my kitchen. Should you wish to bring a flask of tea or a sandwich for a lunchtime snack, please consume these items in the garden, and remove any resultant litter.

Rest assured I shall be informing your employer, Mr. Bailey, of the above mentioned incident. I feel certain he would want to be made aware of the calibre of men he employs. And please understand, it is a mistake to imagine that women under thirty are all helpless girlies who cannot identify and reject inferior workmanship.

Tuesday, 16th. 8.00 pm

Dear Mr. Builder

I am sorry I was not at home this morning, I was

unexpectedly required to attend a meeting in town and had to leave home around 7.00 a.m. It will most likely be the same arrangement on Wednesday and Thursday.

I hope you didn't stand knocking on the door for too long before using the key to gain entry, especially in this morning's driving rain.

Thank you for the apology note and the flowers and also for leaving my flat clean and tidy. Apart from the new walls I would hardly know anyone had been working here.

I did phone to speak to your employer about yesterday but he was out. I left a message, but when I speak to him tomorrow morning, I will mention your apology and the flowers you left for me. I will explain that yesterday's incident was unfortunate but, I believe, accidental and that so far you are doing a reasonable job on the en-suite.

On Friday I am at home all day so I will see you then to discuss any problems you may have understanding my requirements.

Julia Westwood.

Thursday 18th 7.00 a.m.

Dear Edward,

I phoned your 'employer' yesterday. We had a chat about Monday's unfortunate incident and misunderstanding regarding starting times, keys, towels, and mirrors etc., and he also apologised for the incident, although I do feel I detected a degree of mirth in his tone.

However, he reassured me as to your character, indeed he seems to be quite a fan, and he told me of the high standards to which you work. He said that your CV cites your college studies in Art and Design, and that you have lots of innovative ideas on the subject of functional interiors. He also told me of the complimentary things you had said about my own design ideas as discussed on Monday morning. It quite made me blush, all over again! He also told me your name - hence my use of it at the beginning of this note.

I have a day off work tomorrow (Friday), so I shall see you then, in the morning, (fully dressed this time), and maybe we will be able to discuss further your ideas on décor, especially for the rest of my flat. I will be there to make morning coffee and afternoon tea and will be happy to make you a lunchtime sandwich, should you wish.

Best Regards,
Julia

Monday 22nd , 6.00 am

My Darling Teddy

What a wonderful weekend! So sorry I have to slip away before you are awake, but if I am to be on time for my conference, I have to catch the 6.45 train.

Thank you so much for the fabulous meal we had last night, and, as discussed in the restaurant, I agree that your revised layout for the en-suite makes complete sense, so please go ahead with everything you suggested. Just let your Dad know there are changes to the plans. By the way, I do think you could have let me know a bit earlier that you were the boss's son. I suppose I should have guessed, considering his glowing reference regarding your personal integrity and his intimate knowledge of your education.

I loved all your ideas for the further renovation of the flat and look forward to having you around for - well who knows how long?

Have a good day, My darling, don't work too hard, and help yourself to anything you want from the cupboards and fridge. I'll bring in some steak and fresh salad for this evening.

Goodbye, till tonight, my cuddly Teddy,
Love and kisses,
Julia

P.S. Have not renewed the sellotape on my undies drawer - There doesn't seem to be a point any more.

Wendy Baxendale

ROTHKO'S *RED ON RED* – THOUGHTS

She walked up the path to the studio
Conscious of no expectation.
Her naivety centering on feelings of the invitation –
To be chosen.

Attention was rare these days, family,
Friends, caught in stories of war, and
Struggling with loss of home.

The scrutiny of her was intense, as his eyes
penetrated her modesty and ignorance,
she saw the amazing transformation of colours into
the gentle tones, shaping the features of the boy.

Her simple water-colours, and drawings now,
no longer held the freedom and challenges.
Here she met skills, beyond her vision –
Few pictures had come her way.
He continued with his work – she watched, savouring
the intoxicating smell of turpentine, of linseed oil,
the easel dominating, massive books, canvases and frames
stacked against the wall as
he mixed the sludgy colours on the palette.

Pausing “Would you like to paint?” he said, offering to share the
oils.

She was not ready to experiment.

* * * * *

She stood alert to the pull of paintedness.
The artist holding her focus on his transcendence within the colours’
depth.

Concealed in the intensity of his tonal intimacy, one colour on
colour abstracted.

Shape, colour, transform before her eyes
Consuming reds into the stillness of dark.
And beyond the fiery movement flowing from her perception
that colour held, the moment of truth.

Gently the heart of the picture
caught her response of joy.
The flamboyant audacity of the artist was creating a freedom
of colour absorbing the viewer

gifting with abstraction, a kaleidoscope of
detachments.
And always against the time of living the indescribable pictures
flowed.

Pat Harris

THE CLOCK STOOD STILL

The Clock stood still, exhausted by its frantic prancing about and cavorting here, there and everywhere.

“Phew!” exclaimed Brian, “about time too! I was getting quite dizzy trying to keep up with it.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the Clock, “it is about time, ain’t it? That’s the trouble – it’s all about time!”

“Now look what you’ve done,” said Brenda. “You’ve upset him.”

“*Him!*” exclaimed Brian, “*him!* it’s a clock, for goodness’ sake. It has no business gadding about like a maniac; clocks should be stationary and tell the time.”

“*Tell the Time!*” exclaimed the Clock. “*Tell the Time?* You can’t tell Time anything; Time tells us. Time tells me what hour, minute, second, microsecond, nanosecond, pico.....”

“All right, all right!” said Brian, interrupting. “You should be telling us what time is telling you. You shouldn’t be gadding about; come to that, you shouldn’t even be speaking.”

“Oh,” groaned the Clock, “haven’t you ever heard of *speaking* clocks?”

“Of course I have,” said Brian, “but they are automated machines that you contact by telephone.”

“Are you sure that they are *all* automated machines? Are you really sure?” asked the Clock.

“Well, er ..” admitted Brian, “well, I can’t be sure that every single one is, of course, but”

“But me no buts,” snapped the Clock.

“Brian,” said Brenda, “do stop annoying the Clock. Look how upset he is; see how his hands are drooping.”

“Quite so,” said Brian, “he’s not telling us the time; his hands are just hanging down. They should be pointing at the hour and the minute; and his second hand should be going around counting the

seconds.”

“Good grief!” exclaimed the Clock. “Where were you brought up? The hand that counts off the seconds and, indeed, the very fractions of seconds, is my *third* hand, not my second hand. My first hand follows the hours, and my second hand follows the minutes; it’s my *third* hand that follows the time between the minutes.”

“Oh,” said Brian, “when I said ‘second hand’ I didn’t mean your *second* hand but your hand that tells the seconds.”

“*Tells* the seconds – *tells* the seconds!” exclaimed the Clock. “How can you tell seconds anything? They’re not things you speak to; and,” continued the Clock, “if when you said ‘second hand’ you did not mean my second hand, why did you say it? You should say what you mean.”

“Oh,” groaned Brian, “I give up!”

“Best thing you’ve said so far,” grunted the Clock.

They all fell silent. Brenda felt that there was something wrong with the silence. Then it suddenly occurred to her.

“I say, Clock,” she said. “Shouldn’t you be ticking?”

“I’m exhausted,” replied the Clock. “My ticker’s stopped. I couldn’t tick to save my life.”

“If my ticker had stopped,” muttered Brian, “I’d be dead. It would be too late to save my life.”

“Your ticker?” queried the Clock.

“He means his heart,” explained Brenda. “Anyway, doctors sometimes manage to get hearts beating again after they’ve stopped. But Brian’s such a misery, I don’t suppose they’d bother with his.”

“Ha, ha!” said Brian.

Then, turning to the Clock, he said: “It serves you right, gadding about all over the place like you were. It’s a wonder you didn’t fall apart. What on earth do you think you were doing?”

“I was trying to keep up with Time,” said the Clock meekly, “but it was no good. Time flies like an arrow.”

“And fruit flies like a banana,” added Brian, collapsing with laughter.

“Oh,” groaned Brenda, “that’s such an old joke. I heard it from my Dad, or was it my Grandad?”

“There are no jokes like the old ones,” retorted Brian.

“No,” muttered the Clock, “I can see originality is not Brian’s strong point.”

“All right, all right,” said Brian, “Sorry I spoke.”

“I don’t suppose you could help it,” said the Clock, “any more than I can help speaking. It’s what we have to do.”

“No,” said Brian, “*you* don’t have to speak. All you have to do is tell the time. Er,” he added, noticing the sour look on the Clock’s face, “I mean, tell us what the time is.”

“Don’t forget, young man,” said the Clock, “that I am a speaking clock. As for ‘all I have to do’, let me tell you that it is hard work tracking Time, which flies so fast, and keeping you wretched humans informed. Why can’t you track time yourselves?”

“Well,” said Brenda, “we can sort of track time. I know when it’s morning or when it’s afternoon; I know more or less when meal times are due, and ...”

“Not good enough!” snorted the Clock. “I have to know to the smallest fraction of a yoctosecond, and that ain’t easy.”

“A yoctosecond!” exclaimed Brian, “a yoctosecond! You’ve made that up just to sound posh!”

“AWW!” began the Clock, whirring furiously.

“I’m afraid he hasn’t,” said Brenda. “If you’d paid attention in physics, you would know that a yoctosecond is a thousandth of a zeptosecond, which is a thousandth of an attosecond, which is a thousandth of a femtosecond, which is a thousandth of a picosecond, which is ...”

“All right, all right,” interrupted Brian. “You’ve made your point.”

“Yes,” said the Clock, suddenly sounding cheerful. “It is all right. Young Brian’s ignorance wound me up so much that I’ve started ticking again.”

Sure enough, as they stopped to listened, the Clock was ticking steadily away and the hands no longer drooped but were showing the correct time.

“Er,” said Brian, “I wound you up?”

“Yes,” replied the Clock cheerily. “There’s no need to wind me up again, so let’s all be cheerful and bright.”

“Yes, let’s,” agreed Brenda.

“Let’s sing a song to cheer ourselves up,” suggested the Clock.

“Yes, let’s,” said Brenda. “What shall we sing?”

“Dunno,” grunted Brian. “Perhaps the Clock can suggest something, as it was his idea.”

“Indeed I can,” answered the Clock, and began signing as it danced:¹

*“Fruit flies like banana splats,
The gard’ner likes his marrow;*

*“Dragonflies like bugs and gnats,
But time flies like an arrow.*

*“Sing hey for the hoe and the harrow,
For time flies like an arrow.”*

*“Whiteflies like their sprouts and kale,
The old maid likes her yarrow;*

*“Firefly larvae like a snail,
But time flies like an arrow.*

*“Sing hey for the hoe and the harrow,
For time flies like an arrow.”*

*“House flies like their rotting meat,
The tom-cat likes a sparrow;*

*“Butterflies like nectar sweet,
But time flies like an arrow.*

*“Sing hey for the hoe and the harrow,
For time flies like an arrow.”*

They were merrily singing this through for the second time when Brian heard a voice calling him: “Brian, Brian! Wakey, wakey, wakey!”

Brian blinked and grunted, “Er, what?”

“Wake up,” cried his mother. “What’s the matter with you? You slept right through the alarm.”

“Er”, grunted Brian sleepily again as he rubbed his eyes.

“And,” she continued, “you were muttering in your sleep. Huh! Time flies like an arrow indeed! You’d better fly like an arrow if you’re not to be late for college again!”

Raymond Brown

¹ A musical setting of the song is given on page 44

BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH

They taught us history at school,
Latin and English, too,
The Roman calendar was cool,
We learned it through and through .
We studied Kalends, Nones and Ides,
The first two were so easy,
But when we knew that Caesar died
On the Ides, we felt quite queasy.
You see, it was the month of March,
The days were creeping by,
When I went through the college arch
Each time I heaved a sigh;
For some few years, through age and rain ,
The stones were seen to crumble,
And from my face the blood would drain
As I heard a distinct rumble.
“Beware the ides of March, my child!
Our teacher wagged his finger
And looked at me with eyes so wild
I did not want to linger.
The fifteenth day dawned bright and fair,
I rose up from my bed;
“Mum, I’ve no clean shirt to wear,
May I stay at home?” I said.
Of course not, dear, don’t think of it!
Retorted mum quite sadly,
“The grey one’s ready, and will fit,
So don’t react so badly”.

I walked along the dreaded road
To the place where I was certain
That evil emanations flowed,
And fate would draw the curtain..
But what was this? – a growing crowd
Was forming by the gate
An ambulance, with sirens loud
Was stopping, just too late.
That arch had crashed, alas, to earth
And underneath was spread

The Latin master, wide of girth
And very, very dead.
So let this be a warning
To all the superstitious,
The Ides of March, especially morning,
Will never be propitious.

Sylvia Herbert

WHY I LOVE SATURDAYS

Saturday is the best day. That's the day we go shopping. We go to a big supermarket. There are three we go to, and we take it in turns to go – Asda, Tesco, Sainsbury's. We go on the bus, so we can't bring too much shopping home with us, but Mum has one of those bag things on wheels and sometimes when it's really heavy she gets someone to lift it for her onto the bus.

The shops are always full on Saturday mornings – loads of people pushing their packed trolleys and I wonder how they can possibly eat all that food in a week 'cos it's more than we get for a month. Maybe they have big families at home? But their trolleys are piled high with packages, bread in wrappers, marmalade, honey, chickens, bacon, eggs, frozen stuff, fruit, vegetables, huge packets of cereals, ice cream. Yum. And it's nowhere near Christmas. They must have lots of cupboards and enormous fridges.

We've got a fridge, but it's quite small. And we don't have a freezer. I wish we did, because Amy my friend at school has one and her Mum keeps ice cream in it, as well as burgers and buns and lots and lots of other things. It's huge.

We never have much food in our house and I'm quite often hungry. I do get school dinners, which is lovely and supposed to be very healthy since that Jamie Oliver decided he knew what we ought to be eating, and when I get home Mum makes me a sandwich, or sometimes beans on toast. On Sundays we usually go to MacDonald's. I like that because the food is hot and Mum says it's cheap and sometimes she lets me have a chocolate milk shake.

I don't think Mum knows how to cook. I asked her one day if she could make McDonalds at home, but she said she couldn't because the oven doesn't work and she doesn't want all that grease. Amy's Mum's oven works because she makes cakes. She made a

big chocolate cake for Amy's birthday and put candles on it. I wish my Mum could do that.

Anyway, on Saturdays we go shopping and we have lunch at the supermarket. It's wonderful. First we get something like sausage rolls, or some chicken bits. Mum opens the packets and we eat them in the next aisle while we are looking at the baked beans and things. Mum puts the wrappers in the trolley while we are eating them, but when we have finished she puts them into her big bag.

Once we got some hot chicken bits from the counter where you see the chickens going round and round being cooked. That was really delicious, hot and soft and a bit spicy in the mouth and the juices dribbled down onto my jumper and Mum said it was too messy and we couldn't do that again. We had to go into the toilets to clean our hands and wipe our mouths and clothes. We left the bag the chicken came in in the bin in the toilets.

Mum says I can have anything I like next but it must be in small packets – something we can finish while we are shopping. I like the packets of round doughnuts with white icing and coloured sprinkles on them. They come in fours, and we have to eat two each, or the chocolate muffins, or the little bakewell tarts – crunchy pastry and soft sweet top tasting like the marzipan on the cake we have at Christmas when we go to Auntie Dees. Two each.

We get little boxes of juice - orange or black-currant - and some fruit. Usually either a banana or apples or those little orange satsumas when there are some there. I like apples too, the really rosy ones. Mum gets a bunch of about six or seven bananas and we have one each, so we have four or five to take home. Then I have to go to the toilets to get rid of the skins 'cos Mum says she doesn't want them smelling in her bag.

Once I was half way through a banana when a lady came and stood in front of me. "I hope you're going to pay for that" she said. And she looked really hard at me, and at Mum.

I knew what to do. I started crying. "Now look what you've done!" said Mum and glared at the lady.

I cried really a lot and Mum knelt down and put her arm round me and the lady went away. But we finished our shopping really quickly and got out of the shop.

After the fruit Mum lets me choose some sweets – either a bar

of chocolate or a packet of something like jelly babies. They don't go in the trolley, but straight into her big bag for later.

So that's why I like Saturdays – 'cos for the first time since last Saturday I've had lots of nice things to eat and feel really full - it's like a feast day, all that lovely food on the shelves and I often plan what I'll have next Saturday or the next time we come to this shop while I'm choosing what to have today. I think I'll work in a supermarket when I grow up.

I've just shown this to Mum, because it's supposed to be my homework, but Mum wasn't very pleased and said I had to write something else. She said the teacher might not like it and it might get me into trouble with the headmistress. I wonder why?

The only other reason I like Saturdays is because I'm with Mum all day and Dr. Who is on the telly.

Jennie Allen

THE VILLAGE SCHOOL, HOLMBURY ST MARY, 1937

You can't drive the car
If only I could.
If only I could be five---

Only Fives Rising in September!
What did that mean? But I was in.
Walking to school with the tall girls
Pauline Facer, June Windsor
Then noticing- noticing
The differences hair clothes-
Their packed lunches, in wrappers!
If only I could have special sandwiches!
That summer outside, sitting on logs under the
Scots Pines of Holmbury school;
Rhubarb and custard in Jam Jars!
If only I could have a jam jar
Full of rhubarb and custard
With a paper lid and a spoon!
Couldn't I, Mum?
If only I could reach the ceiling
If only I could spring high and surprise the teacher
How could my legs do that?

“And, Now” Miss Atkins,
A big lady with a red face with the class of fives says
“And, Jump And, touch the ceiling”
But, I could not
Why did she ask? I tried so hard.
Maybe a term or two, and I was away from the class
And the mysteries of not knowing.
Through endless years, learning understanding
Shifting destinations of Ireland journeys,
Always to Tir n’noge.

If only birthdays rested
Arrested in the year of summer glory
Friends climbing the mountain paths
hopping across the streams and
Sitting on the banks eating the sarnies,

IF ONLY

Pat Harris

DISCOVERY

She woke up early. It felt colder than usual and she drew her blanket closer around her. Her Mother was moving about in the kitchen, putting out the breakfast things, taking milk and yoghurt from the fridge, Soon she would be calling Mitsouko and her brother Jin to breakfast. Her father would have gone off to work some time ago.

Then Mitsouko really woke up. The noises she thought she heard were coming from other people creeping around the vast room which she now recognised as her school hall. There was her picture of children on the beach together with other art works. This must be a dream, she thought. I can’t be at school yet, I haven’t had my breakfast, and Jin isn’t here.

A kindly stranger came to her, pulled her gently from the floor and gave her a cup of jasmine tea and a small amount of rice in a bowl..

Wide awake now, Mitsouko looked around as the sudden realisation of what had happened came back to her. Jin was crying at the other end of the room and after a few moments she saw her mother, Sumi, helping to serve tea and bread in small quantities.

Where was Dad?. He ought to be here by now to sort out the family. Mitsouko's father was a fireman. He was always helping people, and he should be here now, to help them. . Suddenly she almost hated him. Didn't he love his family more than his job? He could take them home through all the piles of debris on the road in his big fire engine which could get through anything. She was anxious to get back to Kobi, her little dog and someone ought to be feeding the chickens in the yard, under the flowering cherry trees.

Sumi came over to her daughter and gave her a hug. "Don't cry, daughter," she said, her face full of concern and sadness. "We've all got to be very brave and support each other. Put on your shoes and socks and here's your coat and hood. It's cold outside. I've got to go to Jin now and get him ready".

"What are we going to do? Where are we going, Mother?" Mitsouko's voice was shrill. "In a few minutes the officers are going to take some of us back to where we live, I mean lived, to see what we can find."

"Why isn't Dad coming with us? Is he there already?"

"May be. Get ready now and stop asking questions."

Mitsouko's mind was teeming with questions and fear crept in with them. What and whom would they find?

Soon they were being helped into a large vehicle along with about a dozen others. Jin recognized a school friend and waved to him and Sumi talked to a close neighbour in low tones. Both had tears in their eyes which spilled over and glistened on their cheeks and became caught up in the black wisps of hair around their faces.

The vehicle tossed and jolted over the huge potholes in the uneven road. Soon they could see from the coach windows cars and boats and houses in a jumble of destruction. Nothing was in order, nothing made sense.

After about twenty minutes they arrived at a scene of waste and desolation which they realised with horror had been their street. The street name on a plaque was jutting out from under a broken door lying flat on the ground.

They came to the place where their house had stood. Nothing. Nothing but a heap of stones and the odd chair poking out from roof tiles and crushed fabrics all mixed up with mud and domestic tools, a rusty cooker and her mother's best obi.

Jin and Mitsouko looked uncomprehendingly at their mother.

“Surely Dad can come and dig out some of our treasures,” she pleaded. Her mother just shook her head sadly and drew her close. Jin had picked up part of an old floorboard and was poking about in the ruins. A dead chicken was unearthed and an old book of verse that had belonged to his grandmother.. It was open at a page of haiku. Weirdly one of them read “Pink cherry petals carpet the gentle earth, perfect tranquillity.” Even Jin recognised the irony as he gazed around at the hell which was all about.

Mitsouko was foraging in another area. She pulled out her father’s helmet and a button from his coat. He would have been wearing them when he went out. The family had been unceremoniously rushed out and up to the school at the time when the approaching water could be heard. Father was already out. He must have come back a little later to look for them. The realisation dawned that he had been in the house when the wave struck

Numbed with grief, Mitsouko sought her mother’s comforting arms. Snow was beginning to fall and it was very cold, Jin came also into the encircling arms and the three of them stood, silently, blinded by tears.

A man came up to them. He had something in his hand. “This a photo of Loki, I think. Here you are; something at least for you to keep and to help you remember him. The three members of the family in turn softly passed their fingers over the dirty glass and stroked the beloved face.

A man in a dayglo green cape came over and told them that the vehicle was returning to the school and they should all get in. Mitsouko gave a last look behind her and suddenly her attention was attracted by a slight movement under some plaster and spars. Going towards it she heard a tiny whining noise, then spotted a gleaming eye. It was Kobi.

“Come quickly!” shrieked Mitsouko. “Someone, please, please rescue my dog!”

The man in the cape came over and beckoned another man. After some heaving of debris and careful seeking with a torch, they were able to grasp the dog and pull him out, dirty, wet, injured but alive. They carried him to Sumi and she tenderly took him in her arms. On seeing them he feebly managed to wag his tail.

The bedraggled little group with their precious bundle climbed back into the lorry and prepared to pick up their lives as best they

could. They were just thankful that amid all the chaos, they had been spared . Mourning would come later.

Sylvia Herbert

A SMALL DOMESTIC PROBLEM

I awoke early on that sunny morning in early autumn from a troubled, disturbed sleep. There was something at the back of my mind - something I should know but which I could not recall. After opening my eyes and becoming fully conscious I realised that I was worried but I did not know why. I remembered that I had been dreaming about a quest for a long neglected treasure whose location was unknown, whose nature was unknown and whose value was unknown. Perhaps I had seen too many Harry Potter films!

Although I was safe at home in my own bed it seemed to me that I had forgotten something, something significant and important. I had the feeling that something self-evident had been overlooked.

I stumbled to the bathroom and, whilst washing and cleaning my teeth I wondered if there was some necessary consumable item that ought to be purchased soon - toothpaste, soap or even toilet tissue. I soon confirmed that I was not short of any of these - supplies were sufficient for several weeks.

Had I forgotten to turn off a water tap the previous day?

I dressed hurriedly and checked all the taps upstairs and downstairs - there were no dripping taps or running water anywhere in the house. Had I forgotten to turn the boiler control back to 'Timer' from 'Manual' after using the washing machine? No - it was not that either. Also all the windows and doors that should have been closed and locked were closed and locked.

I made breakfast, still anxious.

Next I wondered if I had omitted a basic food item the last time I went to the shops - butter, bread, milk or something similar. I could not think of a single essential food item that was lacking or running low in my larder, not even cider or wine!

There were no public holidays for the next few weeks. Christmas was months away. There was no problem over general shopping. Was this the day that recyclable materials (plastic, tin cans, bottles and paper) had to be collected together in a transparent sack and placed on the pavement outside by the front gate for

collection? I had forgotten to do this a few months ago. I soon realised that this was required on another weekday - not today. The problem still remained unsolved.

Perhaps it was related to a telephone call or letter. I checked the saved messages on the 1571 telephone facility. Nothing needed action today. I looked in my 'Current Bills' file - water, gas, electricity, account agreements and necessary insurances. There were no outstanding bills, no final demands. I had no goods to collect. Nothing from dry cleaners, photographic processors, shoe repairers, or other shops. There was no scheduled delivery at home today, obliging me to stay in the house all day, nor was there an arranged visit by a service or maintenance engineer.

Was I supposed to take some necessary medication, starting today? The answer was still, no. Nor had I any medical appointment with doctor, dentist or optician or at a hospital.

In desperation I looked in my diary for domestic arrangements and commitments for this day and for the rest of the week - nothing urgent or unusual was noted for today.

Almost accidentally I saw that a friend of mine had a birthday later in the week - a friend who would be only mildly offended if I did not acknowledge the event by card or telephone - no immediate action was required there either. However this observation was the catalyst necessary for the solution of my small domestic problem, the problem that had been nagging insistently at me all day. There was a commemoration on this day, important and personal, so obvious that it was not even in my diary. Today was special.

Today was my birthday!

Robert Edmondson

THE STAG

Laughing and driving in the car,
the journey was long, we'd travelled far
through the swirling misty dawn.
We left when dew still lit the lawn.

Gaily we travelled until round a bend
in a tree-lined lane, we came to the end
of our lighthearted journey, for there in the road
in front of the car, a mighty stag strode.

He turned when he heard us, we came to a halt
and he wasn't moving, it wasn't his fault
we needed the road, it was his by right
And he knew he would win if it came to a fight.
Huge were his antlers, imperious his glance
at us, poor mortals, and such was his stance
that we waited humbly for him to move on
and into the woods and then he was gone.

We drove on in silence not talking at all.
Both holding the vision, which held us in thrall.
Our previous prattle all gone, it seemed trite,
In the wake of that wondrous, magnificent sight..

Wendy Baxendale



FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD!

Friends say I suffer from acute culinary thrombosis, which is defined as being “a clot in the kitchen.” It all began when I moved from digs into a flat and had to cook for myself for the first time. I rapidly discovered how to turn a banana black. You simply pop it in the fridge.

But I've also had my cooking triumphs.

For instance, I experimented with boiling potatoes in sea water, the delicious results of which I christened "Fruits de Mer." I roasted potatoes in hay, and their delightful smoky flavour would have turned Delia Smith's eyes green with jealousy. I still remember the delicate flavour of slightly burnt porridge which I produced by accident.

No, you won't find me labouring over a hot stove. If someone stole my microwave, I'd starve to death.

However, food brings me a lot of unexpected laughs, because when I feel down in the dumps, I pop my head into my food cupboard and chuckle over my "Best By" and "Eat By" dates. As I think of those years long gone by, I'm filled with nostalgia. But I feel guilty at depriving museums of what could be treasured exhibits.

Lunching in a little church canteen in Dublin, I noticed that the menus were written on the backs of old greeting cards. The back of mine read: "Get well soon."

I was able to assure the staff that I'd made an excellent recovery from the meal.

When I dine out, I've been careful of my behaviour, since I saw threatening notices in a cafe, which read: "Please don't ask for credit, as a smack in the mouth often causes offence." And: "People who think our waitresses are rude should see the manager!"

Ingratiating waiters fascinate me. I once counted how often a certain smarmy one in a posh restaurant thanked me. He thanked me: for sitting down, taking the menu, ordering the meal, asking how he was, telling him at great length how I was, receiving the food and eating it. I seem to confer a blessing on the whole race of waiters simply by being me.

I took an uncle and aunt to dine at Gatwick Airport. As we walked towards the restaurant, we were twice asked: "Are you the delayed flight to Mombasa?"

Twice we denied it, but the third time we let them shepherd us into the restaurant where we ate the free meal as some small compensation for our missed flight to Mombasa.

I exploded on discovering that the menu offered us no choice of food and I burst out indignantly: "That's the last free meal I ever eat at this airport!"

It was an hilarious evening. Later one of us confessed and paid the bill.

My most unforgettable meal was in the “Balkan Grill” in Baker Street, in a room designed to resemble a rural hut. Its greatest charm lay in the gipsy violinists who went from table to table playing diners’ favourite numbers. This often started up a lively friendship between couples on neighbouring tables. I was invited by one couple to their home afterwards.

Another memorable meal was at “The Roman Room” in the West End, where the waiters were dressed as Roman soldiers, and the menu, a rolled parchment, contained such items as: “Sacred fish from the Thracian Sea, brought by Nubian slaves and sliced in half by a legionnaire’s sword.”

When I was young, I took a girlfriend to the Savoy, in order to impress her. We ordered a flambé meal and after it was served, I whispered to her: “You’d think in a posh place like this, they’d have a proper kitchen, instead of having to cook at the table.”

The pudding we ordered was strawberries and cream, described on the menu as: “Dewy-fresh, morning-picked tender-fleshed strawberries with the fullness of English cream.”

Luckily the meal wasn’t expensive. I simply handed over my life savings to pay for it. But of course the wine was extra.

I once ate in an Indian restaurant whose menu boasted: “Every grain of this rice has been washed by the snow-filled waters of the Brahmaputra.

I now refuse all rice which hasn’t been washed by these waters. They simply don’t taste the same.

Desmond Clark



WINTER'S DAY

Within the den there stirred and twisted
In troubled sleep one Bruin Bear.
His empty belly now insisted
That he awake, get up, find fare
To feed himself; and so he grumbled,
And grunted, yawned, arose and stumbled
Towards the cave mouth; there he stood
And blinked and stared. Was that his wood?
Were those strange shapes so white that glistened
The trees he'd known before he slept?
He heard no sound. Did all except
For him still sleep? He stood and listened.
"Where shall I go for food? Which way?"
Thought Bear at dawn one winter's day.

A lone bird chirped and startled Bruin.
"What ho!" cried Robin. "Bear, what ho!"
"This whiteness," Bear said, "all this ruin -
What means it all?" "'Tis only snow,"
Young Robin laughed, "'Tis nothing fearful.
"Come on, Old Bear, come on; be cheerful."
"But why the silence? Why no sound?"
Asked Bear, "Is none but you around?"
So Robin told our Bear the reason
That sounds were dulled, and how beneath
The snow lay woodland, brake and heath,
Protected till the Springtide season.
"But oh," said Bruin, "tell me, pray,
"Where food is found this winter's day?"

"For sure," said Robin, "in the village."
"So come with me. Come on! Make haste!"
"No, no," cried Bear, "for if I pillage
"They'll kill me - trust in you's misplaced!"
"Do you not know," young Robin chuckled,
"What babe was born, what babe was suckled
"By Virgin Mother long ago
"This very day? Do you not know?"

Then Robin told how God Creator
Of heav'n and earth had not disdained
To come into a world all stained
And marred and be its vindicator.
And Bear in wonder made his way
As Robin sang that winter's day.

And Bruin heard how angels bringing
Glad tidings of great joy and peace,
Once filled the sky with heav'nly singing
While fear and death that day did cease.
"So evermore all down the ages
"On this one day are stilled all rages.
"On Christmas Day all fears subside
"And wolf and lamb live side by side,
"And kid lies down beside the leopard,
"And calf with lion cub will walk
"While beasts with men that day can talk;
"For once again the Babe is shepherd.
"So, Bruin, put all fears away,"
Sang Robin on that winter's day.

As bird and bear left woodland clearing
They caught the strains of joy and mirth
Of women, men and children cheering
In song the blessèd Baby's birth.
The smell of cooking and of baking
Led Bear towards the merry making.
And soon they saw the village green
And marvelled at the festive scene.
"Ho bear!" men cried, "we bid you greeting!
"We've food enough for man and beast
"So come and join our Yuletide feast!
"This is indeed a merry meeting."
So bear and bird with no delay
Did join the throng that winter's day.

Thus Bear did feast and join the singing
Of Christmas songs and Yuletide lays;

Their music set the valley ringing
On this most joyful day of days.
And Bear joined in the games and dancing
And children laughed to see him prancing;
For none thought evil, none felt fear
And peace filled all with Christmas cheer.
With pies and puddings Bear was sated -
His belly full and heart at peace.
He wished such joy would never cease,
That love continue unabated.
But Robin said they must away
At eventide that winter's day.

And all were sad as Bear departed;
Each hugged and kissed him as they said:
"God bless you, Bear, so gentle-hearted,
"May angels tend you where you tread."
So Bear and Robin left the village,
And passed its fields and folds and tillage,
All hidden neath the winter snow.
With bellies full and hearts aglow,
The pair in silence slowly wandered
Along the path they'd come that morn
And thought of joy and peace reborn
Each year on Christmas day, and pondered:
"Why cannot peace and love hold sway
"For aye as on that winter's day?"

Then from his rev'rie Bear was shaken
When he beheld the tracks they made.
"To dogs and wolves 'tis unmistakable
"The path we've left," he cried, dismayed.
"Oh Bear," said Robin, "Flakes are falling
"To cover tracks so naught appalling
"Will harm you. Angels tend you where
"You tread and keep you in their care."
Then Bruin gazed in awe, astounded,
As flakes fell fast and swirled around
In flurries, covering all the ground.
The tracks were hid, his fears unfounded;

For nothing would his steps betray
As Bear returned that winter's day.

The pair, by angel guides protected,
Returned once more to Bruin's den,
So Bear might slumber undetected
Till Spring awoke the woods again.
"Farewell, dear Robin," Bear said sadly,
"This day has bless'd us both, and gladly
"Did I the Yuletide message learn;
"But to my rest must I return."
"Sleep now, dear Bear" said Robin, "Cherish
"The Christmas news of love and joy;
"And let not evil thoughts destroy
"Our blessings. May they never perish!"
Oh would we all such love display
As Bruin found that winter's day.

Raymond Brown

THE CLOCK STOOD STILL

Lizzie looked at the stately old grandfather clock with a mixture of surprise and annoyance. Never before had she seen it motionless, unless Henry was standing in front of it "doing the winding". And now with its long, ornate pendulum caught in a bizarre half-swing position, pointing left, it looked so strange. Lizzie giggled into her hand. To her it looked as though the venerable old clock had said "tick" and then forgotten the second part of the sentence, just as she, Lizzie, did so frequently of late.

Perhaps Henry had forgotten to wind the clock this week. If so, it was not like him. Perhaps he also was getting forgetful, because he was very particular where that clock was concerned. It had been his father's and he held it in great reverence. Henry had a very specific routine when it came to winding the clock. Every Sunday evening, he would perform the winding ceremony, slowly, irritatingly slowly, just as his father had done all his life, before he willed the clock to Henry.

And Henry perpetuated the ritual of the clock winding. He would retrieve the key from the top of the clock casing, carefully

opening the glass door front, stopping the pendulum, moving the hands onwards for two minutes, one minute for the amount of time the clock lost every week and one minute for the actual winding process. Henry would then pull up the heavy weights, slowly and methodically, restart the clock then relock the door and reverently replace the key on top of the handsome clockcase.

Lizzie peered at the clock's ancient mechanism, safely housed behind its pristine glass door. She was, she smiled ruefully, permitted the daily honour of dusting the outside of the clock, but only if executed with due reverence. She extended her hand to open the case, but then ... hesitated and thought better of it. Henry didn't like anyone to touch 'his' clock. Many's the argument Lizzie and Henry had had when their boys were small and had played rough games near the clock, or had wanted to help with the winding. They had been told sternly by Henry that, when the clock was theirs they could wind it, but till then, no-one was to touch it. Strange really, Lizzie mused, Henry had been the most genial, accommodating parent in all respects, except where his beloved clock was concerned.

Lizzie decided she would go immediately and tell Henry that the clock had stopped. She thought perhaps she might use a bit of gentle chiding about memory lapse, just as he was always doing with her. To be able to get her own back would be fun and unusual these days.

Actually, Lizzie thought, this whole morning was unusual. First the clock not working and then Henry not being downstairs first. It wasn't like Henry not to be up when she was. A tingle of alarm sliced coldly through her. She hoped there was nothing wrong with Henry, after all, he was getting on a bit. How old was he? 87 last birthday, two years older than Lizzie herself. She decided she would go quickly and check on him and spurred on by a frisson of fear, Lizzie shot up the stairs, faster than she had moved in years. She was grateful that this day was one when her arthritis was not troubling her.

Lizzie stood over the gently snoring Henry. Sensing her presence like a soft breeze, Henry half woke, opened his eyes, briefly smiled at her, and mumbled something about soft hands, then he closed his eyes and continued his rhythmic snoring.

Relieved at finding Henry sleeping contentedly, Lizzie looked down at her hands. Yes, they were soft and quite unlined really.

She looked with pride at her nails which were well manicured, and her skin which was soft and unblemished. “Hummmh”, she thought, “not bad considering all the washing and cleaning they have had to do all these years, even the crippling arthritis hadn’t deformed them. And today they were remarkably pain free; this indeed was going to be a good day.”

Glancing once more at the peacefully sleeping Henry, Lizzie smiled to herself, it was understandable if he needed to sleep late this morning. She had not felt well the previous evening and Henry had insisted that they both have a generous shot of whiskey, “for medicinal purposes.” He had chuckled as they chinked their glasses.

Actually, Lizzie thought she could still feel the effects of that whisky. A sort of light-headed happy, floaty feeling. She quite liked it. She decided she would accept whisky next time Henry offered it, which would surprise him because she had never been much of a drinker, and had always been rather disdainful of Henry’s occasional “snifters.”

Perhaps she would make breakfast for Henry. He had made her breakfasts often enough. Indeed, he always seemed to be doing things for her lately, Lizzie pursed her lips, was she getting lazy? But then she did have such terrible arthritic pain, and just lately chest pains as well, but she thought delightedly, today she was completely free of pain. Up until now anyway.

She wondered what the time was. That stopped clock was a nuisance. “When had it stopped?” she wondered. She looked at it again. Two thirty five. Well it must be well past that now.

She drifted over to the window and peered out. It was still dark outside. She couldn’t see the garden properly, but as she peered harder, she saw there seemed to be people in the garden, lots of people and one of them had a bright light, like the ones used on a film set, she thought.

Intrigued, Lizzie went to investigate. She didn’t query the fact that she drifted straight through the back door, nor the fact that her smiling parents were both waiting for her, arms outstretched at the edge of the light. She just went to them joyously.

And the Grandfather clock in the hall resumed its ticking progress, recording time as accurately as it always had.

Wendy Baxendale

THE IDES OF MARCH

Today I wish to contemplate
A very interesting date;
A date which even now can chill -
The blood and joyous spirits kill.

A date that still has arcane powers
To sabotage our happy hours;
A date that still rings down the years
To frighten ultra-modern ears.

In every life are many tides
That ebb and flow but on the Ides
Of March, the time of sudden death
For Caesar, with his final breath.
A famous and successful life
Concluded by a colleague's knife.
His end became a fate foretold
(Impossible to break the mould)

The soothsayer's doom-laden phrase
"This date will be your End of Days
Your fate's decided by the gods.
You cannot fight against such odds."

Repeated twice, within the play
By Shakespeare, of that tragic day
"Beware the Ides of March" - no chance
To change the movements of the dance.

Would any of us wish to know
The date on which we have to go?
This ignorance we may condone.
Some facts are better left unknown.

Predestination or Freewill?
Just thinking of them makes me ill.
So live life fully and besides -
STOP WORRYING ABOUT THE IDES!

Robert Edmondson

DISCOVERY

Once upon a time there was magic on the earth. Once upon a time a message could fly at the speed of light to a hundred thousand people. Once upon a time people could fly in silver ships around the world and to the moon and children learnt magic at school. Once upon a time. Before the great catastrophe that almost shook the earth from its axis, so that it teetered for hundreds of years like an egg on a spoon in the race that was still run on sports days in the gwartz schools.

Some things didn't change, though the old learning was lost. Few written scripts had survived the fires caused by the intense heat as the earth's crust burnt when the temperature soared as the earth wobbled nearer and nearer its sun. People who survived dug themselves into the ground, creating subway systems, rather like large rabbit warrens. But survive they did, some of them, the ones who knew how to live in such conditions. The ones who had known that not everything could be supplied by a flick of a switch or a push of a button. And gradually the earth stopped wobbling, started cooling again, and the pale, light starved race emerged.

They built homes and scratched the scorched earth to make gardens where they planted their previous seeds, and more children were born. They built temples to the Young Prince Aripo - a long-ago figure who had survived tragedy and come to save the earth from dark forces, and children prayed to his companions, Negra and Ronwe - especially for help in their studies. But now people were losing faith. Temples to the Young Lord were only half full - visited mostly by elderly people. The young ones were looking to the future, beginning to look for something else. It was all too long ago, they argued, it wasn't true, it was only a story. Even the thread of the dark Valdo coming to get them had little effect.

Ronina was one of these young people. Unlike most of her peers, she desperately wanted the stories to be true. That's why she was studying history and archaeology with special interest in the written word. Not that they had found much of the written word - after all paper was flammable. Any they had found was carefully copied by engraving onto thin metal sheets.

There was a shout from the other end of the tunnel in which she was working.

“Ronina, come quick”

Lexi's excited shout brought Ronina to her feet. The stylus she was using dropped to the floor. She had been using it to copy the latest findings which, although she couldn't understand them, read - "Waterstones Epsom - 1000 HP and GOF". Del.28.5.05.

She had only seen one or two examples of this strange script before - so very neat, but nothing like the script they used now in their newly invented printing presses. "Waterstones". The first bit looked a little like something she had seen before underneath the symbol for river liquid, a very old rendering. She wished she could find a clue. Even her teachers admitted they had very little to go on.

"Come on".

"What is it?"

"It's a door"

"What's it made of?"

"Not wood, for sure"

"Some kind of metal?"

"Very thick."

Lexi was scraping away at the centuries of dirt and debris surrounding the opening.

Although the population was recovering, not many people could be spared for archaeology purposes. This was normally undertaken by students as holiday jobs; most people were busy enough growing food and rebuilding to keep up with the growing population.

There was a red button half way down the left hand side.

"Push that Lexi"

Obediently Lexi pushed. Nothing happened.

"Just have to wait for Mika."

Mika was their boss on this project - he had the say so to use the tools to break the door.

Disappointed, Ronina returned to puzzling over the brief script and carefully copying it. If only she could find a clue. There was something behind that door - she just had a feeling.

It was six days later when Mika managed to break through the steel. The smell that greeted them was fetid. The floor was covered with debris, while piles of boxes had disintegrated and spilt their contents around - nothing but dust and shreds amongst the skeletons

of tiny rodents they now called ratlets. Ronina's heart sank.

"Well, that's a nice job for some of you!" said Mika.

"Doubt if you'll find anything of use there."

But she volunteered – along with Lexi, who shared her interest to some degree, but whose interest was also in Ronina herself. He found himself dreaming of her slim young body when he was trying to write his notes at night.

As the days went by Ronina became more and more depressed. Bucket after bucket of dust and bones, carefully sifted, went into the bins. They were down to the last corner. Her brush came into contact with something hard. She swept more debris away. A strange transparent material appeared. Was it glass? No, it was softer than glass. It was firm, yet soft. Gingerly she tried to move it, pushing it with her brush slightly. It moved.

"Lexi," she shouted. "Lexi".

He bounded over.

Together, carefully, they moved the object into the clear area. It was a box. "Fascinating material" said Lexi. There was no lid – the top had a layer of the same dust and debris which Ronina gently removed using her hands, her brush and a pan, and even more gently lifted out the first object.

"A book," she breathed "Oh Aripo, great Aripo – a book".

She put it gently down beside her – afraid it would disintegrate, then looked inside the box again. "Another book". She could see the colours of the cover, red and yellow.

She could see the title – large letters "A B C". The book itself was slim, but it was of a larger size than the previous one, and the writing was much bigger. The pages had come apart, each was like a tablet. The second page said "D E F". There were pictures. Ronina danced with excitement.

"Lexi – this is the key – this is the key. Oh, Lexi, Mika must let me do it. He can't give this to anyone else. This is the key, Lexi".

But Lexi was looking at what lay beneath. There was another book – strange old script again – colourful cover, decorated with the face of a boy. And on the boy's forehead was the symbol that decorated all their temples to Aripo - the lightning flash. He couldn't read the words "HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE", but he smiled down to Ronina, who was still kneeling in

the dust.

“I think you’re right,” he said. “This is the key.”

Jennie Allen

YESTERDAY’S COUNTY

I’m glad I saw the kingfisher
down at the river’s bend.
I’m glad I saw the water vole
And primroses where willows end.
I’m glad I saw a crested newt
Down where the stone wall’s holed
I’m glad I saw the fox stroll by
And the mad march hares, so bold.

As evening softly shades the skies
And swooping bats claimed song birds space,
then also came the mighty owl
To claim his meal with speed and grace.
I’m glad we gathered bluebells,
Poppies’ and cornflowers, all gifts for mother
The seasons we noted without ever knowing
Our world was passing, usurped by another

For now, returning to those places
Again to feel so much enraptured
Nought remains of nature’s wonders
Nought remains to be recaptured
Rows of houses now stand, sullen,
fields are roads of concrete hard
And where we picked the wild dog roses
Now stands a junk strewn, lock-up yard.

Foxes, rabbits, bats and birds,
Stately oaks and tumbling streams
All have vanished under tarmac,
concrete stifling natures dreams.
Once we gazed through wondering eyes,
but took for granted nature’s bounty.
How blest we were, the young ones then,
Dwelling in yesterday’s glorious county.

Wendy Baxendale

JUBILEE BLUES

“This pageant looks as though it is going to be a washout, Philip, just look at the rain lashing down; the Bentley’s windscreen wipers are hardly able to cope with the force of it!”

“This type of car isn’t meant to be out in this kind of weather. Neither should we be at our age.”

“Well, Philip, dear, I did say that you could pretend to be indisposed and I would go it alone.”

“You know that would be impossible. Don’t be silly.”

“Here we are at the river. There’s plenty of bunting out for us anyway. Smile, I’m about to step out.”

“OK I’m right behind you.”

“Getting on to the Royal Barge was a bit awkward to say the least. I’m glad the Lord Lieutenant was there to lend a hand.”

“The paparazzi would have had a ball if you had taken a tumble. Or if I had for that matter.. Look at all the damned photographers just waiting for one of us to make a mistake –and there’s that bloody BBC presenter grinning like the idiot he is.”

“Please, Philip, Noblesse oblige.”

“Grr!!”

“Mind how you go, Philip; there’s a step up to this podium.”

“What naff little red velvet thrones. Even the Beckhams would think them crude.”

“It’s thoughtful to provide us with a seat, dear. We’re here for rather a long time.”

“You won’t catch me sitting on those seats. They are already soaking wet. I dare say the colour will run, too. Just imagine if you sat down in that blue outfit. You’d look like a red-bottomed baboon when you stood up Ha Ha Ha.”

“Philip! Behave!”

“Listen to all those little tugs blowing their hooters and cheering us on. That’s more like it. Oh, and here come the Venetian gondoliers ‘Just one cornetto’, or should they be playing ‘Carnival of Venice’? It’s an anachronism, anyway, on the freezing Thames.”

“Oh, look ahead, Philip, isn’t that that English Olympic oarsman in that canoe breasting the waves?”

“I can’t see a blooming thing. The rain’s coming down so fast. Shift up a bit, old girl. My head’s getting wet because I’m not properly under the canopy. That’s better. Oh, you’re waving. I suppose I’d better make a gesture. I must remember to make the right one.”

“Isn’t it good that dear William and Kate are here. She always looks so stylish and elegant - definitely an asset to the family”.

“In that red outfit she looks a darn sight warmer than I feel. Do you think I could warm my hands on her coat? Sorry, just joking. Charles looks his usual gloomy self. Camilla is making the best of it, not saying much, I notice.”

“Philip, do you see all those little ships, a kind of flotilla. Don’t they look pretty – and aren’t those two little ships the ones that were at Dunkirk or were they at the D Day landings?”

“They wouldn’t stand a chance in warfare today. Give me a good, solid ship like HMS Vanguard.”

“Yes, and do you remember Britannia? How I loved that Yacht. Happy days. I still miss her.”

“Betty, I really want the loo. Do you know how to get there?”

“No, Philip, you’ll have to wait, like me. Smile and look around and wave and you’ll forget that problem.”

“I bet I won’t. Oh God, let this be over. I make it four and a half hours we’ve been standing here in the perishing cold. I wish I’d brought my hip flask.”

“You worry me at times, Philip”.

“There’s quite a trim sailing vessel going ahead. It may be one of the tall ships.”

“Yes, and there’s a police launch speeding by. I’m glad we’re well protected.”

“There’s the orchestra playing Land of Hope and Glory. Rather comical, the rain is just bouncing off the bugles and trumpets. Smile, Philip. Look appreciative.”

“But I’m not. By the way, I think I locked up one of the corgis in the ante room inadvertently. It’s the one that is always biting David Cameron on his weekly visits. I hope the butler has discovered him and let him out, otherwise he’ll tear the place to shreds. Ha Ha, Fred the Shred, we’ll have to call him. Oh, I see you’re not listening to me – smiling and waving and doing your

duty as usual – just like a woman. No time for her husband. Me, Me, Me all the time.”

“Stand straight, Philip; they’re playing our tune.”

“Thank God, it must be over. Now I can get back to a stiff whisky before the next pantomime. By golly, I’ve got an awful pain in the nether regions. Perhaps I can cry off that engagement tomorrow”.

“Philip. We’re going now. Are you all right, dear? You look very pale. Look here we are at the quay and our car is waiting. Just let me give one last wave.”

(To the attendant) “Thank you so much. This has been an extraordinarily interesting afternoon. My congratulations to you all.”

Sylvia Herbert

THE CLOCK STOOD STILL

Our beloved aunt recently passed away, aged 97, the last few months of her life clouded by a painful fight against rapidly-spreading cancer. A lady of indomitable courage, she retained a cheerful and positive outlook right through all the suffering and challenges of advancing age, and remained mentally agile and sharp right to the last, always with compassion and concern for other people. She had lived in her bungalow in Caerleon, South Wales, since 1958, alone for the last 29 years since the death of her husband. Not having children of her own, she had followed closely the lives of her nephews and nieces as they matured.

So it was that my sister Judy and I went to her funeral, and experienced the mixed emotions of sadness at her loss, relief that she was now a free spirit at peace, and joy in celebrating the memories of her long and fulfilled life. Particularly poignant, once all the proceedings were over, was the visit to her house: Judy, and our cousin Trish, being executors for her will, were faced with the unenviable task of sorting out all her belongings, and making endless decisions about which items might be suitable for family members to receive, before handing over the ultimate house clearance to the professionals, so that the proceeds could go to the specified charities. Inevitably, it was a difficult and emotionally charged time.

The light and spacious living room emanated a heavy and

palpable silence. Through the large windows on two sides we looked out on to the luxurious and immaculate garden which Gwen had always so loved. After sitting in contemplation for a little while, we scanned the furniture and items in the room, and my sister asked me if there was anything I would like to have. I had not even felt like considering this question, and needed some prompting. “How about that clock”, she said, pointing to the top of the attractive wooden bureau in the corner. I looked at a medium-sized brass coloured clock, housed in a transparent plastic dome, about ten inches high, shaped like a bell-jar. Its white face, four inches in diameter, with Roman numerals, and the word *Emperor* written in black italic script just above the centre, stood on two slender posts, with a third vertical rod suspended from the back of the mechanism, between and behind them. This did not reach the base, and had what looked like a spiral groove cut into its length. Four small balls were attached at right angles to the bottom of it. The clock was motionless and silent, without a flicker of life, the hands frozen in time at eleven o' clock, and it seemed to reflect the aura of the room, and our dark thoughts. (It was around eleven that Gwen had passed away peacefully on that Saturday evening, nearly three weeks ago.)

I assented, and we bundled the clock into a large jiffy bag.

When I returned home to Surrey a couple of days later, I examined the clock. Not being sure whether it still worked, I experimented by fitting a new battery. To my delight, there was immediate movement. Past memories now began to come back. The clock's mechanism is unique, quite unlike anything else I have seen. Achieving the same end result as a pendulum, the four balls twist round horizontally, describing two complete circles before briefly coming to a halt, and then turning back in the reverse direction. (Each phase, I discovered, lasts for exactly six seconds, so the balls turn backwards and forwards five times per minute.) There is no second hand, and a very faint regular tick, with a slightly louder “clunk” which happens half way through each cycle. I have no idea what was the origin of this clock, or how long Gwen had owned it, but I do remember noticing it on the occasions when I used to take Mum (Gwen's younger sister) from her home in Clevedon, Somerset, to visit Gwen. (Sadly these visits came to an end about four years ago, Mum having become too frail to cope with the travelling.)

The clock's motion has a meditative, almost mesmeric quality,

and while the two sisters were chatting away, I would stare into it, allowing my thoughts to wander.

This clock has now become a treasured item on top of my piano, and forms an enduring link with auntie. Though its motion seems to be superficially smooth and continuous, there is a motionless instant just before the balls reverse direction, when it can truly be said “the clock stood still.” There is stillness within motion, and motion that comes out of stillness, which resonates with the never-ending cycle of life and death, and the natural order of things.

Peter Horsfield

INSIDE ST PAULS

I tread on bones
Of those long dead
Who for God and England
Sang and fought and bled.
Honoured now in stone and brass
They rest forgotten, save by few.
Remembered names from history class.

I mount the stair.

Warmed by jewelled sunlight shafts
Through multi-coloured stain-ed glass
Fanned by angels wings of gold
Etched on lofty ceilinged dome.
Who could not be humbly bold
Whose heart untouched
By the wonder and the awe
That effigy-guarded lieth there
Behind St Paul’ s porticoed door

Jennie Allen

THE BOSS

I had a privileged childhood at my home in Ulster, when we had servants who were our close friends.

Though Mum and Dad might kid themselves that they ran the house, they soon learned that the real power lay in the horny hands of Annie, the little Irish maid.

Mum learned who was the boss when she came down to breakfast, streaming with cold, to be met by an indignant Annie, sturdy arms akimbo, a hand pushing her specs back on her hilarious cherry nose.

“And where d’ye think yer off till?” she challenged. “Yew should be in yer bed!”

“Well, Annie,” quavered Mum, “I thought what with the milder weather ...”

“Ach, shure we were through all this last time,” said Annie impatiently. “Get yew away up till yer bed.”

Mum went and a little later some steaming porridge was brought up to her by a less indignant Annie, who said: “Get them intil ye.”

Mum, who knew her place, complied.

Another time, when Mum was getting out the best silver for a party, she was reprovved with: “Them’s the Master’s good spoons.”

Once, after an exchange of hot words with Mum, Annie burst out: “How the Master suffers yew!”

Mum said, inwardly, she was inclined to agree.

Dad did not meet his Waterloo till months later, when Mum and he had been having “words” at breakfast and Annie said: “Now that’s enough o’ thon!”

Flabbergasted, Mum and Dad obeyed! Annie had her colours nailed firmly to the mast.

Greatly daring, Mum thought her sufficiently trained to risk a dinner party. Hints were dropped about serving the meal, but Mum was on tenterhooks.

The guests arrived and the ladies were shown upstairs to remove their wraps. Annie thought they were being slow, so she came to the foot of the stairs and, arms akimbo, called up: “Come on down, fer Sarah’s the pertaters mashed on yez!” and pushed her specs back, to emphasise the point.

The meal proceeded smoothly enough. Then, towards its close, Annie, ever mindful of her guests, stuck her head round the door and called out: “Anybunny here for chiz?”

History doesn’t record the guests’ reactions, but I suppose she expected a forest of hands to go up.

In these early days, guests were new to Annie’s ways, but she

came to be regarded as one of the house's chief attractions. Few visitors were so indifferent to her good opinion that they did not pass a few words with "the lady of the manor," as she came to be called.

And the greatest compliment you could pay her was to say she was "brave and fat got, and the beef was hangin' round her."

Sometimes, when a favoured guest was leaving, Annie would present her with a cake, as a parting gift from herself, but made with Mum's materials. Annie always accepted to herself praise for the cook's meals.

An overnight guest named Tom, whose tip was thought inadequate, was dubbed "Suxpenny Tom."

She reproved a guest for putting cigarette-ash on a saucer: "You'd better stop that fer I have tae wash them."

When Mum tried to dissuade a visitor from helping with the dishes, Annie said: "Let her. It'll save me."

Asked why she hadn't invited a caller's chauffeur into the kitchen for tea, she replied disparagingly that he was only "a wee nyab o' a man," as though his size affected his appetite.

Years having rolled by since Annie had seen a certain visitor, she greeted her with: "Heth, but yer stannin' it well!" The woman said it made her feel bowed beneath the weight of the years.

With the postman, exchanges ran on economical lines: "Butiful day." - "Ay, beautiful." Or "Damp." - "Ay, damp."

Members of her inner circle of informants were referred to as "a bunny what knows."

After watching the university boat race on TV she rushed in to say: "Oxbridge has won!"

It took Dad some time to understand her turn of phrase. One day she entered the drawing room where he was writing letters and announced: "Master, yer lukin' at th' dur."

Dad, puzzled, replied: "No, Annie, I'm looking at the desk."

Scornfully Annie explained: "There's ... a maan ... lukin' ... fer ... ye ... at ... th' ... dur."

Once she announced: "The milkman's been an' gone an' never come."

She told one caller: "She says she's out," and another that Mum was "in bed wi' th' doctor."

Annie didn't like answering the door and was heard muttering: "Thinks peoples has nothin' tae do only answer th'dur."

When some callers arrived in the evening, Annie - confused by the upper-class use of the word "dinner" for the evening, instead of the midday meal -told them: "They're at breakfast."

Annie, with the Ulster gift of coining phrases, talked of walking across a field diagonally as "trianglewise" or "slantindicular."

She said two wee boys were found by a policeman hiding a stolen bike in some bushes, "and they took to their two wee beaters" i.e. ran off.

She described someone raised in poverty as "riz coorse."

With the Irish love of death, disaster and disease, her favourite song was: "As They Carried the Corpse Down the oul' Bog Road."

Gleefully recounting her brother's operation for a swelling, she said: "They tuk a knife till ut, an' ut hut th' ceilin' wi' a bounce."

That was the brother "who got his temper riz in the war," and also suffered from "various veins." But fortunately he didn't have to go into "a constipation camp."

When he died, it was "with all his facilities," though sadly he was a great loss, as he was described by Annie as "the breadman of the family, with three children living and one in Belfast." One of them did so well at school that he was described as being "as far as the books'll put him."

Hearing that a woman had been taken to an asylum, Mum asked Annie "Did they break it gently to her?"

"No," said Annie, "They jest sprang it intil her."

When she first came to us, Annie was unsure about whether or not we stacked the plates after meals, so she asked: "Are yez gentry or does yez stack?"

Annie was obliging, and when asked to help out on her half-day, she agreed, adding that she "knowed th' way th' family was circumcised."

To improve the servants spiritually, I thought some Biblical texts on the wall of their bedroom might help, and I suggested, from Romans: "BE CONTENT WITH YOUR WAGES."

Desmond Clark

DIALOGUE WITH A TREE

I am a tree
Standing on the path you tread,
If you can learn something from me
Stay awhile
I cannot take you my way
Because my roots are
In my own piece of ground
And my branches reach up
To my own piece of personal sky
If you wish lean against me for a time
And warm in the sun.

I said to the tree!
Yes. I have my own piece of ground,
Waiting patiently for the clouds to part
Bringing light
When the shades of your branches.
Shelter me.
Your roots are strong holding all treeness
Growing tall -- towards starlight
My life goes beyond earth roots and
Without your strength-----

I see in pictures our family
Sitting under your branches,
Babies in prams, elderly grans watching
The gentle movement of leaves
the morning light staring at you
Dearest tree,
Holding up the sky.

Tree - I am here for you
Hold on to all I give
Take care not to cut or destroy me
I am part of this wondrous world-----

I said, in the long winter you stand
In the stillness of your beauty—
On my journey as I grow old
Your renewal brings in
The blessed cycle of yearly changes
And, I take a hard look at the seasons,
Staring at the beyond

Pat Harris



TIME FLIES LIKE AN ARROW

Words by Raymond Brown

Music by Peter Horsfield

Impetuoso $\text{♩} = 72$

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It consists of four systems of music. The first system is in 6/8 time and features a piano accompaniment of chords and a vocal line starting with the lyrics 'Fruit flies like ba-nana splats, The'. The second system continues the vocal line with 'gard'ner likes his marrow; Dra-gon flies like bugs and gnats, But'. The third system includes a tempo change to $\text{♩} = 108$ and a key signature change to two sharps (D major), with the vocal line singing 'time flies like an arrow. Sing hey for the hoe and the'. The fourth system concludes the piece with the vocal line 'har-row, For time flies like an-arrow.' The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support throughout, with some melodic lines in the right hand.

2. Whiteflies like their sprouts and kale,
The old maid likes her yarrow;
Firefly larvae like a snail,
But time flies like an arrow.
*Sing hey for the hoe and the harrow,
For time flies like an arrow.*

3. House flies like their rotting meat,
The tom-cat likes a sparrow;
Butterflies like nectar sweet,
But time flies like an arrow.
*Sing hey for the hoe and the harrow,
For time flies like an arrow.*

WHO WE ARE

JENNIE ALLEN lives in Tadworth. Following retirement from teaching, she is a part-time assessor/examiner of English for speakers of other languages.

WENDY BAXENDALE is a retired school Social Worker living in Chessington. Her interest in writing extends over many years.

RAYMOND BROWN is a polymath with degrees in both the Classics and Computer Science; now retired, he pursues his many interests, which includes the Moles.

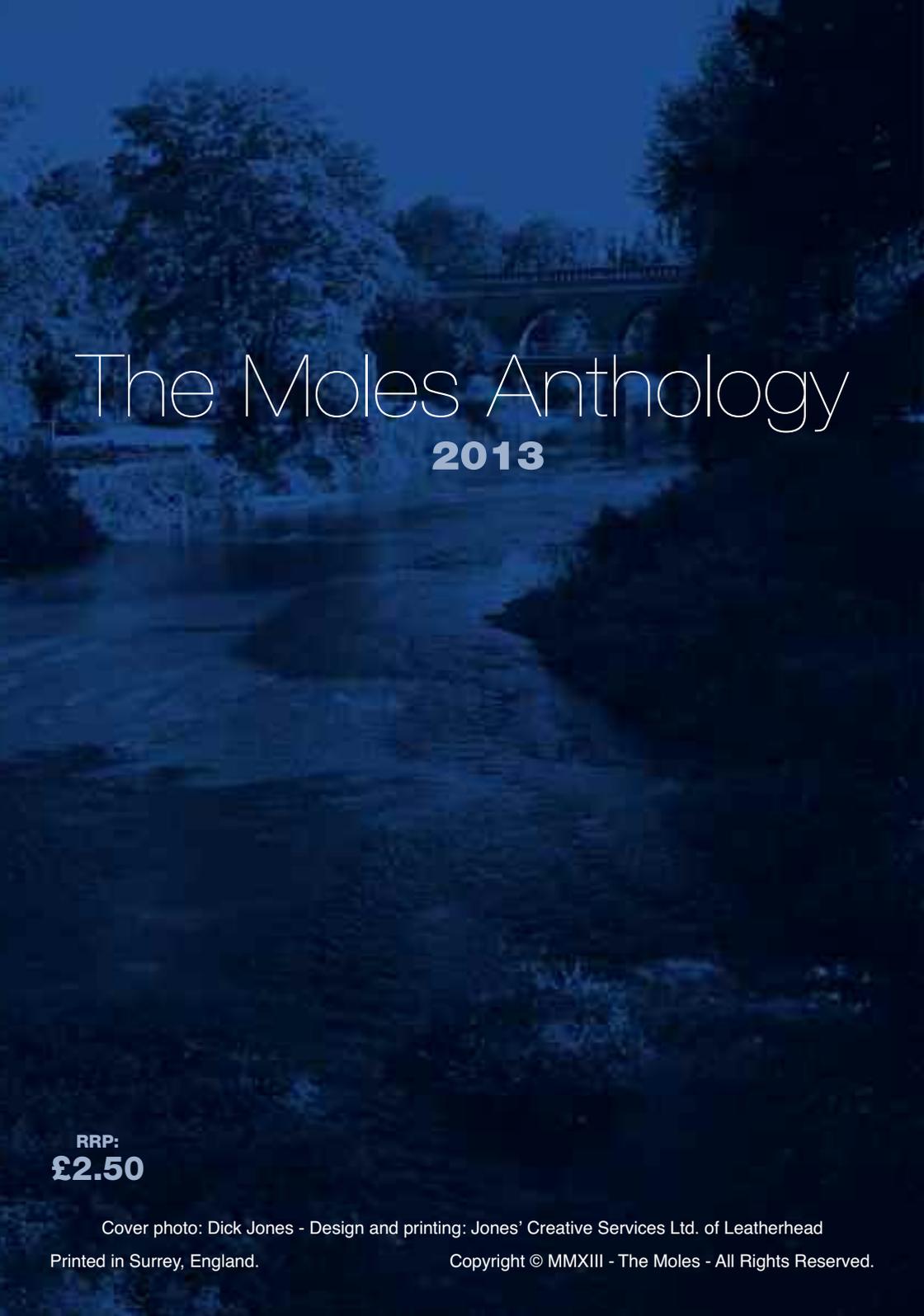
DESMOND CLARK is an 85-year-old ex-journalist from Ulster, who collects humour and has a love affair with the English language.

ROBERT EDMONDSON has a Ph.D in biochemistry and worked for Beecham (now GlaxoSmithKline). Now retired, he has a keen interest in performing and visual arts and is a member of New Wescott Players and a volunteer at Dorking Museum.

PAT HARRIS was born in Holmbury St Mary, a marginal Irish immigrant. She enjoys life in Leatherhead with family and friends.

SYLVIA HERBERT has lived in the Mole Valley since 1970; she is a retired teacher and her interests include travel, modern languages, literature, especially poetry, and writing. She is a long-standing member of 'the Moles.

PETER HORSFIELD began writing poetry nearly five years ago when he retired from his work as a biologist. He is also a singer and musician, artist, spiritual healer, and has been an enthusiastic cyclist for many years.



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