

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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Diary

Poetry Workshop Weekend
18th – 20th July 2008

Annual Luncheon
18th October 2008

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Members' names and addresses are held on a computer database which is used for mailing copies of the Civil Service Author.

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The views expressed in the SCPSW Author are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Society.

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Editorial

Adrian Danson

I recall reading that when Hammond Innes wrote *Big Footprints*, which was about elephants in Africa, he was living in Canada and wrote a book about somewhere in the snow whilst living in Africa. This suggested that he kept himself warm by writing about a hot region when living in a cold place and vice versa. In view of our recent weather I anticipate a deluge of your contributions about Africa, well at least Bournemouth on a hot July day.

Frankly I have been offered several pieces of work by a few members but nothing from the vast majority. Can this be modesty, or are you saving them for our competitions? At least let me have a few of your memories that you think will amuse or be of interest. I am offering another of my own as an example of something that was inconsequential at the time, yet my memory of more than 50 years now makes me smile.

Memories can so often provide the basis for short stories, or poems, so it is worth thinking back to periods in your life and trying to recall your experiences. Perhaps it was a job interview that led to nothing, but was the reason you were employed elsewhere. Imagine where a successful interview might have led. The day you danced with someone, just once and never again. Imagine what life might have been like if a romance had developed instead. Perhaps you would have wanted to stay living where you were, instead of taking that job in wherever. One of the most enjoyable features is to imagine success, where in reality there was failure. You may have only won a prize in the school three-legged race, but in your imagination you could have been an Olympic medallist. So sharpen your quills and stir your memories. Perhaps it was the day you left school, walked past the Labour Exchange (Job Centre), saw a vacancy for a job in the Civil Service and thought, 'No way'.

Those of you who enjoy writing articles (anything from why black is the best colour to paint your toenails, to why grandmothers don't know how to suck eggs) note that there is still time to enter Gordon Gompers' Article Competition. (See page 14 of Spring 'Author')

If my continued lack of spare time and less than well organised desk has resulted in my overlooking anyone's contribution I apologise. Nearly taking the end off my thumb and breaking off my two front teeth in a recent fall has not improved matters. Quoting the current in phrase 'looking to', I clearly need to take more care if I am not going to be looking to my maker.

Chairman's Chat

Terry Rickson

It was with considerable interest I read an article in 'The Independent' a few months ago, by the author A.L. Kennedy, about the art of short story writing. Alison Kennedy is herself a writer of contemporary short stories. From a certain pessimism concerning recent trends in short story writing, she is, nevertheless, optimistic for the future of the form. She sees in the capable hands of contemporary writers such as Jackie Kay, Neil Gaiman and Tamar Yelling, the art being carried on with vigour.

For Kennedy, the short story is 'an exercise in perfection,' not something ground out with a beginning, middle and an end. It has to be honed and developed - no frills! Intensity and brevity are the key components. The recommended number of words, in her view, is no more than two thousand. She urges aspiring writers to read widely, especially authors currently writing in the field. Some interesting points here on which to ponder.

In addition to the authors named, I dare say many of us have our own favourites, Ian McEwen, V.S. Naipul, Annie Proulx or Kazuo Ishiguro, for example. The past masters in the art of short story writing, should not be overlooked and what a wealth there is to be found, Dickens, M.R. James, Chekov - recommended by Kennedy and H.E. Bates, all spring to mind. The very thought makes one think of summer days in the garden with a pot of tea or a glass of wine, maybe a beach somewhere, and a good book. Now, where did I put down my pen?

Iain McIntyre

Joan Lewis

Further to my brief obituary in our last issue, Ethel Corduff has unearthed a 1996 article by Bill Douglas, reporting on a feature in Scots Magazine by Jenny Chaplin, former Editor of Writers' Rostrum, which reported Iain starting up his publishing company 'Businesslike'.

It cited Iain's perseverance in getting 'his show on the road' at the extended croft at Strathoykel - things like having to run between caravan and barn with metal printing plates, and hoping his printing ink wouldn't freeze in severe highland weather. In spite of all these hazards, our magazine always appeared in good order.

Farewell to Terry Austin

Ethel Corduff

Terry Austin will be very much missed by those who knew him in the Society. He passed away on the 8th March after about six months illness bravely borne. A very cheerful person Terry loved the outdoor life, sailing, walking, caving and mountain climbing. He wrote about these interests extensively.

He was a very enthusiastic member of the Society, attending all the London functions, and a valued member of the article folio. He joined the committee last year but sadly only attended one committee meeting before falling ill.

I attended his funeral in Milton Keynes. Our sincere sympathy to his wife Bridie and his family.

Vincent Brennan Travel Competition

Dear Ron,

Having read through the competition entries for this year, I am pleased to announce that the winner is the author of 'PORTUGAL DREAMING'.

I would also like to give a special mention to the author of 'The Galapagos Islands' for an interesting and informative entry. However, the standard was very good for all the entries. There were no poor entries which could be dismissed immediately and this made judging a difficult proposition. I had to read them through once or twice before coming to the final conclusion and I would like to congratulate all the contestants.

With best wishes

Alan S Watts

Glebe Court Nursing Home, Glebe Way, West Wickham, BR4 0RZ

(I quote our President's full address as I am sure he would appreciate the occasional line from those of us who enjoyed his company when he was still mobile enough to attend our meetings, or those who have only known him through his contributions to Author and his role as Chairman and President – Ed

Members' Successes.

Ethel Corduff

I am pleased to copy the publisher's publicity leaflet for 'The Melody Lingers On' by Leslie Wilkie

'Leslie Wilkie's first success as an author was when, as an eleven-year old schoolboy, he won a prize for a short story. The prize was a copy of 'Robinson Crusoe' by Daniel Defoe, but rather than inspiring him to continue with his writing, that book fired him with a desire to travel the world, to see islands such as Robinson Crusoe's. This desire has never left him.

Leslie was born and grew up in the port and city of Kingston-upon-Hull. Virtually everyone he knew had some connection with the sea so it was no surprise to his parents when he expressed a wish for a sea-going career.

He qualified as a Merchant Navy Radio Officer and joined his first ship at the age of seventeen. By the time of his eighteenth birthday, he had crossed the equator twice, travelled round the Cape of Good Hope and transited the Suez Canal several times. Fourteen years later, having sailed the world aboard vessels of the Merchant Service and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, he swallowed the anchor and came ashore to train seafarers.

Having joined the staff of the college where he had originally qualified, it didn't take him long to realise that teaching is not an easy option. For the first couple of years, he had to work long into the night most nights in order to stay one step ahead of his students. He was involved in the theoretical and practical training of radio staff for deep sea vessels, trawlers, oil rigs and several shore based professions.

He lasted ten years at the college before the urge to travel returned. That led to him moving abroad yet again, this time to Papua, New Guinea, where he continued training radio staff. From there he moved on to Fiji, Vanuatu and the Sultanate of Oman, and finally back home, to retire in East Yorkshire, close to where he was born. Yet he still loves to travel world wide, looking for more human relations stories to capture the hearts and minds of his readers.

The recommended retail price is £4.95, and is available directly from Leslie at 8 Mill Street, Hutton, Driffield, East Yorkshire YO25 9PU, or

from the publisher Pipers' Ash Ltd., Church Road, Christian Malford, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN 15 413W

Tel: 01249 720563

email: pipersash@supamasu.co.uk

Leslie has kindly sent me a copy of another of his successes, 'The Golden Gnome' which I hope to be able to review and in time for the next issue. I regret that circumstances have prevented me from doing so for this issue. Meantime I can tell you that The Golden Gnome is published by Rossendale Books, ISBN 978-0-9557617-2-0, can be ordered from any bookshop or from Amazon on the internet, and should be obtainable from your local library. He also advises me that Constable and Robinson are planning to publish his book, 'The Mammoth Book of Limericks' later this year.

We congratulate Leslie and wish him continued success in the future.

Another Member's Success:

A writing friend handed me details of 'You and Your's Annual 2009' in March. They were looking for stories, articles and tips deadline two weeks from that date. She had been successful the previous year and received a high street voucher from them. I did not have time to sort out a suitable article or story, so I decided to send in a few of my own tips. I could not believe it when three weeks later I received a cheque for £30. So my tip is that tips can be rewarding!

Market News

Ethel Corduff (with the help of Gordon)

I had never thought of writing a review of anything. Then I was asked by our membership secretary- Joan Lewis to review a book by a new member. I was sent the book and I read it. It was not easy but I wrote the review and enjoyed doing it. It was published in Author. I thought that was the end of it. Months later my local writing group held a competition for a book review, which is a yearly event. At the time I was reading Michael's Winners biography 'Winner Takes All'.

As an avid film fan in the sixties and seventies the book brought it all back, also it was quite funny. It was not too difficult to write about it. I sent it to Author and believe it or not a member read it and as a result of my review he bought the book as a gift for his wife. I was really

chuffed by this especially the discovery that publishing a review could influence a reader so much.

An incident that incensed me this year in one of my Christmas books lead me to write a review using the incident as a key point. I intend to write to the author one of these days.

Literature, music and the theatre are the main subjects for reviews by those who enjoy the arts. Gordon often wrote about reviews and critiques. His speciality was tape recording and the theatre. He stressed that if one has a specialised knowledge of a subject one can write with authority on it. Of course the standard of writing is important for publication.

Why not have a go. Write a review of the book you are reading now.

Books for Keeps

The children's book magazine. An extensive review of children's books are featured. They will send you a free copy if you give your details on their website www.booksforkeeps.co.uk Any queries about a review to them by phone 0208852 4953 or email enquiries@booksforkeeps.com

Musical Opinion

If you like classical musical you might be able to get in here. Covers all aspects of classical music. Cordon had success with this. Contact Editor, Denby Richards email –musicalopinion@aol.com

Aesthetica

Cultural Art magazine featuring writing, art, music and film publishes reviews article and features. Published bi-monthly. You can download a free sample and sign up for a for a monthly newsletter, email info@aestheticamagazine.com, or by post to Aesthetica PO Box 371 York YO23 1WL.

The Edge

An alternative magazine. The best new books are reviewed, especially modern fiction also film reviews, interviews and features. Payment negotiable up to £50 per 1,000 words. Editor Dave Clark, 65 Guinness Building, Hammersmith, London W6 8BD Tel 0207 4609444, email davec@edgeabelgratis.co.uk

Literary Review

Contains reviews of new books on history, biography, politics travel and fiction Magazine intelligent, informative and witty. Contributors described as irreverent, amusing and accomplished. Are you like this!

Why not join the big names that write for it? Published monthly at 44 Lexington St, London W1 F01W send an email to obtain their newsletter to editorial@literaryreview.co.uk

London Review of books

Reviews and articles on political, literary, cultural and scientific subjects. Unsolicited contributions welcome over 2,000- Words. Payment is good £100 for 1,000 Words.' sea s.a.e.- to Editor Mary Kay Wilmet, 28 Little Russell St., London WC1A 2HN

Another Memory from Adrian Danson

During my engineering training I spent six months in the Inspection Department, where I met a few elderly gentlemen who were working past the normal retirement age.

There was Charlie Grace, who used to kick the lintel of the door as he passed under it. Perhaps to prove that he would have been better employed by The Royal Ballet. There was Bertie Brightwell, who celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary by waking his wife to tell her he had heard that the first 50 years of marriage were the worst, so he expected an improvement from now on.

Then there was Charlie Ratcliffe, ex fighter pilot, who came to work in a Bond Minicar barely large enough to hold him and an overweight bulldog that was his constant companion. Of course the dog stayed on the ground while Charlie was airborne remained in the car at work, the window open and door unlocked. No one ever tried to steal it. All three had a marvellous sense of humour and taught me a great deal. During my time in the RAF I flew many hundreds of hours in fighter aircraft, but somehow managed without a bulldog.

Poetry Workshop

Mike Boland

Chairman: Liz Rowlands, 19 Arkley Court, Maidenhead, SL6 2YR

Treasurer: Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, TW15 3QA

Secretary: Mike Boland, 11 Boxtree Lane, Harrow Weald, HA3 6JU

PW Weekend 2008

This is the last call for members interested in attending the annual Poetry Workshop Weekend. As previously announced, this will take place over the weekend of 18-20th July 2008 at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Selly Oak, Birmingham.

The Timetable has now been finalised and, along with regular features such as the workshop session and Quiz, will feature three talks, a creative writing session and a poetry slam. The cost per person is £196. This includes all meals, en-suite accommodation and meeting room. A Booking Form was enclosed with the winter issue of *wavelengths*. If you have lost your Booking Form, are a new member interested in joining us or have any queries about any aspect of the Weekend, please contact me, Mike Boland, at the address given above, or by e-mail to pw@gothicgarden.freeserve.co.uk.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Poetry Workshop will be held during the Birmingham Weekend. If any member has any points to raise or motions they would like to submit for discussion, please send them to me by 1 July 2008.

Bill Barnes Competition 2008

Details and Rules of Entry for this year's Bill Barnes Poetry Competition will be given in the summer issue of *wavelengths*. Closing date for the Competition, which this year is for poems that rhyme, is 30 September.

Subscriptions 2008

Subscriptions to the Poetry Workshop fell due on 1 January 2008. Existing members should have received a subscription form with the winter issue of *wavelengths*. Any member who has not yet renewed

will not receive any further issues of the magazine, so if you haven't already renewed your subscription for 2008 do so now.

Please complete and send your form together with your cheques/postal orders to Terry Rickson, whose address appears above.

The cost of membership is £3 for members of the Society of Civil & Public Service Writers. Please remember to make out your cheques correctly: they should be made payable to SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account.

If anyone is interested in joining the Poetry Workshop, please contact **Terry Rickson** at the above address. He will be pleased to provide further details.

Membership of the Poetry Workshop provides:

- four issues of our magazine **wavelengths** each year - contributions of poems and articles on poetry are welcomed from PW members
- the chance of publication in **Waves**, the PW's annual anthology of members' work
- access to the popular Postal Folio scheme
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition (open exclusively to PW members)
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend at the University of Birmingham

Poetry Workshop Web-site

Don't forget that the Poetry Workshop has its own website.

Visit us on: <http://poetryworkshop.mysite.orange.co.uk>

Dates to Remember

1 July 2008	deadline for motions for the AGM
18-20 July 2008	Poetry Workshop Weekend
1 August 2008	deadline for wavelengths #16 (autumn issue)
September 2008	publication of wavelengths #16
30 September 2008	closing date for entries to the Bill Barnes Competition 2008
1 November 2008	deadline for wavelengths #17
December 2008	publication of wavelengths #17

Mike Boland

Poetry Pages

Edited by Terry James

My Case

Fred Jeffery

Although I'm still at school, I am
The kid His Lordship hates,
For I sprayed 'You're a load of snobs'
Outside his castle gates.

Some say that I'm a nuisance, but
It's only for a laugh;
Like when Mum took her shower and
I took her photograph.

My sister hid my roller blades,
So that meant tit-for-tat.
I swapped her pills for aspirin
And now she's looking fat.

The major's a mad driver and
It's me he'd like to seize
For, when he had too much to drink,
I went and hid his keys.

I do not fear solicitors,
The sergeant or the Beak,
For the magistrate's my grandma
When my case comes up next week.

Michael's Box

Fred Jeffery

Michael's in that box; not hiding there,
But he's inside as white as Danish bread,
Unmoving, since we found him on the road.
And stared all open-mouthed and trembling till
The paramedics covered up his head.

We said a prayer for Michael at our school.
And then the Head said, Life must still go on.
So that was it, as if he'd moved away
To foreign parts and left an empty desk.
But no one ever sits there. That's respect.

Michael never moaned he lacked a dad.
But I am really glad that I've got mine.
To make daft jokes and take me into town.
I'm never going to drive when I grow up.
Just in case... Because you never know.

Michael's box is heading for the grave.
'A nice crate, Mike, some buggy wheels and we
Could have a really smashing time
Racing down the slope of Castle Hill.'
If only... hist'ry weren't so full of 'Ifs'?

Mam said that Mike will be with Jesus now.
I wonder if he'll have a fabby time;
With no more homework, nor no errands too;
If Jesus lets him stay out mega late,
To eat junk food and play his music loud?

Do they have gangs, just like we have on Earth,
Teach dogs to sing, pinch apples and the like?
He'd hate it if he had to sit on clouds,
To sing church hymns, to wash his hands and knees,
And make his bed and all that sort of thing.

Goodbye, old Mickey, one fine day, you know
I'll join you for a right old time on high.
We'll go skateboarding down the rainbow's arc,
Toss haloes onto steeples and, perhaps,
Play pranks on policemen, specially after dark.
If Michael's going to a happy life,
Then why, like me, do people cry so much?

Still Waters

Angus Livingstone

Soul deep, soul deep,
Somewhere there is where you meet
your soul-mates from this world of ours.
And only they and blissful lovers
know that place, soul deep soul bound,
within your heart, beyond your mind.

Deep down, deep down,
deeper than the deepest wound
your soul-mates have left their scars,
as they shaped the person that you are
within this special place apart,
in the deep still waters of your heart.

Berne

Mike Boland

Glacial-blue and foaming, Aare powers down
from Alps that thunder-cloud the horizon.
Raging, it wraps itself around the cliff
on which Berne squats, blocking its rush.
A city defiant against both time and tyrants,
where commerce, church and senate intermix,
and bears brood, beg empty-eyed for buns.

Under blue skies, and under grey skies,
when evening comes, people plunge
into the spate, tumultuous for pleasure.
Taken up by the torrent they toss and tumble,
swept like leaves in a mad mill-race,
hurtling round the city's triple face,
unheeding the cries from caged bears.

The river roars an answer.
But the question is unknown.

The Old Lie

Norman Bissett

Because he prostitutes the truth
and trumpets glory,
Horace fills my heart with ruth,
contempt, contumely. Often expressed,
his sophistry distorts the story,
failing to mention war is gory:
*Dulce et decorum est
pro patria mori.*

No, no, my sons. Remember this,
growing in uprightness and health,
with May's rejuvenating breath
and June's caress warming your blood:
War is tragic, faeces, filth,
gangrene, putrefaction, piss,
dissolution in the mud.
War is loathsome. War is death.

Suicide Bomber

Norman Bissett

Afterwards, in the gardens, I shall stroll
among the fountains. I shall not grow old
but, with my virgins, watch the butterflies
among the rainbows staining paradise.
In my *jellabah*-crisp, resplendent, white-
I'll breathe the jasmine perfuming the night,
inhale the scent of roses on the bough,
eliminating putrefaction now.
Through slatted *mashrabiyyeh* I'll observe
my virgins bathing. They were born to serve.
The crystal, sparkling fountains sing and dance
and hypnotise me in their subtle trance.
I'll wash my hands in holy water there
and bow my head, five times each day, in prayer.

Glee!

Steve Glason

Oh I have left a travelling life
Twice a day for umpteen years
Enduring strikes and points which fail
Plus signal faults along the way.

No more the sound of winter coughs
Which penetrate a silent world
Where not a word is said (so quiet)
Last spoken at the breakfast meal.

No more the wait for crowded trains
Which starting late at Hampton Court
And further down West Byfleet now
Repair to tracks on Monday morn.

'The Platform Rush' - I have escaped
Frenzied gallop to the doors
Very dangerous to partake
When whistle blows and sign is 'OFF'.

The world is full of stressful things
Commuting is but one of them
A Memory - this madcap race
To get to work in London Town.

Fallen Leaves

Angus Livingstone

A leaf
travels only
once in its life - to die,
but what a glorious death –
led by the wind in a
butterfly dance to its
Mother Earth below.
Never
catch a
falling leaf,
and tread
softly on the fallen.

The Croydon Man

Steve Glason

The Croydon Man arises early
And sallies forth from distant Purley
Whose heavenly gates swing open wide
To let this fellow step outside.

Sometimes without prior warning
(Normally it's in the morning)
He alternates and goes instead
From adjacent Sanderstead.

This splendid chap now breakfasts brief
A cup of tea at Whyteleafe
Or munching toast with strawberry jam
Awaiting trains at Caterham.

Poetess in a Dressing-gown

Fred Jeffery

Gross Discomfort, Aches and Spasms, do your worse to drive me down:
I'll escape from Pain's deep chasms - even in my dressing-gown:
For my thoughts are ever soaring where the heather insects swarm,
Then by crags with torrents roaring: sunshine breaks to keep me warm.

In my mind, I see emphatic visions of an open moor,
Ponies pounding, free, ecstatic: Inspiration needs no door.
Words describe my rich emotions, rhymes recite each rise and fall,
Tell of clouds and restless oceans: Verse means triumph over all.

Mine the words that beat disaster, mine the pen that clears the gloom;
Boredom never will be master when the mind can grow and bloom.
My friend is Imagination when despair would drag me low,
Lightens each deep, dark sensation; sets me free where I would go.

Though you pity, don't bring sadness, show regret, feel sad again;
For my works are full of gladness, prizes that were won from pain.
Gross Discomfort, Aches and Curses, you will never damp me down,
For I'll fight your vice with verses - even in my dressing gown.

Neat and Tidy

Ruth Sear

‘I need a drink – quick!’

Red faced, sweating and breathless, Len almost fell in the chair; the one with the newly dry cleaned cover. Just as I was about to deliver a lecture (he usually called it a reprimand or accusation) I noticed mud, deposited by his shoes, on the white sheepskin rug! I took a deep breath and was about to build myself into shrieking mode when I hesitated. Perhaps something serious had happened after all. Perhaps this overweight, middle aged agitated human being, aka my husband, really did need wifely solace and sympathy.

I managed to control myself and say calmly, ‘What’s happened?’

‘Give me a brandy Selina,’ he pleaded.

‘Just a minute.’ I went to the drinks cupboard. Good thing I hadn’t chucked out that brandy I’d bought from the Ladies’ bring and buy – was it really ten years ago? It tasted strange; I suspect that silly, snobbish, horsy woman – Mrs Forbes-Hamilton – had donated it. I’d used it in the sauce for the Christmas pudding each year; guests never knew what they were eating by the time they got to the dessert. My nice home made puddings, of course, always come from Waitrose.

I carried a small, measured amount of brandy in a plastic mug to Len (no need to soil one of my good quality glasses), and carefully removed Country Life from the coffee table.

Len – what a common name. But his mother had called him that, and he adamantly refused to answer to Leonard. I had to give way on that one, unfortunately, from the early days of our marriage.

‘Now tell me what happened,’ I ordered as I placed the drink before him.

Len gulped at the drink; it shot down his throat and he began to choke. I passed a box of tissues quickly, hoping he wouldn’t use too many because I’d really bought them for decoration; they had the prettiest border of pink roses. I glanced around the room with satisfaction as Len continued with his performance. It had taken me years to get the place as I’d wanted; clean, smart, modern, expensive

looking, neat and tidy. I felt a glow of satisfaction. Meantime Len coughed and spluttered. My glow of pride changed to a glow – indeed a flame – of anger.

‘Len! Stop that ridiculous noise immediately! You sound like one of your animals!’ (An incongruous statement because he’s a butcher.) ‘And take off your coat, put on your slippers, and try to *look* tidy!’

He dabbed at his watering eyes and spat into a handful of my pretty tissues. ‘Sorry, love,’ he gasped. ‘It’s... it’s me Dad again!’

Well, that claimed my attention. Len had just paid a visit to The Palms Residential Home to see eighty year old Bill Makepeace. My father-in-law was a seriously wealthy ex- accountant (of the turf.) A widower, he’d recently become feeble in body, but not in mind. Always abrupt and outspoken to the point of rudeness, he never minced words and called a spade a spade (or something uncouth.) He’d recently become more verbally abusive than he used to be. He was a problem, but I had to tolerate him because Len was the only child; I hoped we might eventually move to a more expensive house in a better class of the town.

‘Now I know how my old mum used to feel,’ Len continued. ‘How did she stick with him all these years?’ He coughed and stared at the empty glass. ‘I say, Selina, could I just have another...’

‘I thought he was settling in The Palms,’ I deliberately interrupted. Some months ago I’d suggested that my ailing kinsman should move to The Palms (the NHS seemed to have done away with asylums.) The old man refused, saying that his thieving relatives wanted to put him in a workhouse. But I told him about the delicious wine the nice people in the Home served with the evening meals; to my surprise Bill suddenly and meekly agreed to go.

But after a day or two he started terrorising the other residents.

Len continued, ‘He seemed rather quiet when I arrived. Then he told me about yesterday. Well, he asked one of the staff if he could have a fag in the garden, said he wanted some fresh air. He claims they said yes, but you know how deaf he is, refusing to wear a hearing aid. So the daft blighter, who must have his own secret supply, went outside. It came on to rain and he took shelter in the gardener’s shed. The cook

noticed the smoke escaping from the gaps around the door and windows. Fortunately the shed wasn't damaged, but Dad needed oxygen – then a long, hot bath! And that's not all.' Len sighed. 'An old lady was admitted today, her daughter came with her. She called the old dear 'Mum.' Funnily enough, she looked a bit like my old mum, same hair-do an' all. I mean, she *did* look like her, until Dad attacked her. Fairly raced at her and punched her nose, shouted things like 'you old hag,' and 'have you been spending my money again?' It was a proper to-do, the staff said. The old lady had to have five stitches in her cheek, and her face is bruised, but she'll be ok. Her family are taking her away to another place. The manager isn't very pleased, believe me.'

I groaned. Why couldn't Len have been an orphan?

There were no further incidents at The Palms. But when Len arrived home with our shopping one Sunday he was in an agitated state.

'Did you hear about the fire?' he gasped.

'No. Where was it?'

'The girl at the check-out told me. It was at The Palms. You know their rules; the patients are only allowed to smoke under supervision. But Dad secretly lit a cigarette in bed last night, and fell asleep. The sheets caught fire, that woke him, and he shouted for help. By the time someone arrived the bed and nearby screens were alight. The staff managed to evacuate the building before the fire brigade arrived. Fortunately there wasn't much damage, but everything's very wet. It'll take ages to dry.'

I frowned. 'Whatever will he do next?'

A few days later Len almost burst the front door down in his rush to tell me the latest news from The Palms.

'Did the staff phone you about Dad's outing?'

'No. Len, please remove your coat and put on your slippers; it isn't right to charge in here like a bull in a china shop.'

'Sorry, love.'

'It's Selina; I wasn't christened *love*.'

When he returned from the cloakroom Len gingerly deposited his frame on a chair; I watched closely because I was hosting the flower club AGM in the room that evening. My husband's eyes widened at the sight of the wine on top of the credenza, and the china bowls of jumbo peanuts and crisps balanced on the escritoire.

‘I say, that’s pushing the boat out a bit, Sel. Mind if I...’

‘No! Leave alone!’ I snapped sharply. ‘Now hurry up and tell me your story, I’ve got to get ready for ten ladies tonight.’

Len gave a hollow laugh. ‘Ten! And not one under sixty years of age! No one that *I’d* fancy, unfortunately.’

‘You’re being uncouth,’ I said icily. ‘Now carry on with your story. Quickly.’

‘All right. You know Dad gets his good days when he can walk fairly well. Seemingly he woke early one morning and decided to go out. It was Derby Day. Said he wanted a newspaper, so he could have a flutter. One of the staff sometimes goes to a bookie in the town, and has an arrangement with Dad to place bets. It was easy for him to slip out the back door as the milk was being delivered; the night staff were busy elsewhere. He started walking along the road to the newsagents. He saw the railway line, and got onto it. He said it was quieter than walking along the roads, and he could make progress and enjoy the sound of birds singing. That’s strange because he usually hates their whistling, and complains. And he’s supposed to be deaf! Then he heard another sound, someone was shouting at him.’

‘What were they shouting?’

‘*Get off the line! You’re in great danger! There’s a train due any minute!* Or words to that effect.’

‘Goodness me! What happened next?’

‘He said he didn’t take any notice, he thought someone was playing a joke on him. Said he ignored the shouting and carried on walking and listening to the birds. Somehow they managed to stop the train in time, but Dad refused to budge until someone went and bought him a newspaper; then they gave him a lift back to the home. Lucky for him!’

But consequently, people were late for work that morning, and of course it had a knock-on effect to the schedules of other trains.'

I reluctantly went to visit my dreadful in-law.

'There's a problem,' I began.

He scowled at me. 'Are you in the family way?'

I glared at him. 'That is not funny. Certainly not.'

He sniggered. 'You should take it as a compliment, woman.'

I said coldly, 'If you're going to throw insults at me about my age, and my past inability to conceive, I'm leaving.'

And I did.

As I stormed to the car park and drove to work I wished I could never set eyes on him again.

And I didn't. He continued to cause havoc; his fellow residents disliked his rude, blunt manner and the staff lived in perpetual anxiety about his next antics. Then he died a few weeks later!

Len visited Mr Black the solicitor in the High Street. That evening he phoned me on his mobile.

'I'm in Brighton,' he said. 'I've decided to spend a few days away to think things over.'

Wasn't I surprised!

'Len, are you trying to avoid me? What's happened?'

'Call it a lucky escape,' he replied. 'But I must go now. Bye!' The phone was immediately switched off.

Next day I went to see Mr Black. He said, 'I'm sorry to hear about the loss of your father-in-law Mrs Makepeace.'

'Thank you.'

'Please accept my deepest sympathy.' Mr Black's face assumed his professional look of condolence.

'Hurry up,' I thought.

He continued, 'You knew the late Mr Makepeace a long time, did you not? I know he could be somewhat outspoken and impetuous. Tolerance and understanding, that's what it takes in a family.' He nodded wisely. Mr Black always prided himself as an expert on family matters. 'I take my hat off to people like you; your support and kindness during his last days must have been a great comfort to him.'

Known the old man for a long time? It had certainly been a long time. Support and kindness? Ha! I almost laughed out loud.

'I suppose you'd better know about the contents of the will.' Mr Black suddenly looked nervous. 'As you know I'm the executor. I've spoken to your husband, of course.'

'Get on with it,' I thought savagely.

Then came the bombshell. Part of the residual of the money from the sale of the deceased's house was to pay off his debt to The Palms; the remainder, and the old man's savings of just over a million pounds was left to a friend.

I can't begin to describe the shock I had.

'Friend? I didn't know he had any friends!' I shouted. 'Someone's going to have all that money which should be mine by rights!' My face contorted with rage. 'What a cheek! The old vampire, I always hated him!' Down flew my hand on the solicitor's desk. Thump!

'What an ending to years of misery! I'll consult another solicitor!'

Mr. Black examined the mark I'd made on his desk and frowned. 'I can well understand your disappointment, Mrs Makepeace. But the will states clearly...'

He jumped as I made a sudden exit. The door closed behind me with an almighty crash and I left it hanging from one hinge. I was incensed. As I headed angrily for home I suddenly remembered something. Turning on my heel I tore back to Mr Black's office. I barged into the now door-less office and shouted at the unfortunate solicitor, 'Tell me this. Who is this friend? What's his name?'

'I'm not at liberty to divulge the name of the beneficiary,' came the reply.

I withdrew from the office again and marched down the street. I felt so angry that I didn't notice where I was going and bumped smack into Mrs Forbes-Hamilton.

'Oh! My goodness it's you, Selina! My dear, is anything the matter? You look terrible!'

'I've just received some bad news,' I replied bitterly. 'Very bad news.'

'I'm so sorry.' The woman's plump, florid face looked sympathetic. 'Would you like to tell me about it? Is it anything to do with your husband?'

'Husband?' I suddenly thought I'd better pull myself together in case my distraught behaviour got broadcast all over town. 'I haven't seen you at the Flower Club for a few weeks,' I said.

'That's right,' she smiled. 'And I won't be there this week because I'm going to Brighton for a few days. I've been busy house hunting recently and seen a house I like there. An elderly gentleman left me quite a lot of money. He was in a Home, and I felt sorry for him, he was very lonely. Didn't think much of his son and daughter-in-law, called them such names my dear, it used to make me blush to hear him. I used to visit the Home as a volunteer to do the flowers during the week, and we just got chatting, you know how these old people talk sometimes. Told me all about how he won the war, ever so funny he was. Told me to call him Willie; in fact, his surname was the same as yours. He liked horses, so we had something in common.'

'I see. Well, you have had a bit of luck.' I felt like screaming but I managed – only just – to control my feelings.

We said goodbye; I never saw the woman again.

And Len?

He never returned from Brighton. I wasn't bothered, as he was no longer a legatee. He sold his business and sent the money to me. Shortly afterwards, we divorced.

I married a rich widower who didn't last long.

Now I can keep my house as spick, span, neat and tidy as I want.

The History of the Society of Civil Service Authors continued

Beryl Jones.

LORD SNOW - 6th PRESIDENT

1975-1980

The son of a church organist C. P. Snow was born in October 1905, attending Alderman Newton's Grammar School and then Leicester University College, where he obtained a First Class Degree in Chemistry.

Following a Master's Degree in Physics in 1928 he became a research student at Christ's College,

Cambridge, elected to a Fellowship in 1930 and remained a Fellow of the College until 1950.

C. P. Snow's field was infra-red spectroscopy and the ardours and disappointments of scientific research formed the subject of his first novel **THE SEARCH** published in 1934. He did not, however, remain a working scientist for according to his obituary in the Times of 2nd July 1980, 'his work went wrong by oversight' and increasingly he turned to fiction and administration.

When war broke out he became a member of a group set up by the Royal Society, later absorbed into the Ministry of Labour, to advise on the most efficient deployment of the nation's scientific resources. In 1942 Snow was appointed Director of Technical Personnel in recognition for which he was given a C.B.E. in 1943.

In 1945 he became a Civil Service Commissioner with special responsibility for scientific recruitment.

Already a Director of Scientific Personnel to the English Electric Co., he became a full director in 1947 and was knighted ten years later. Resigning from the Civil Service Commission in 1960, Snow was made a Life Peer by Harold Wilson in 1964 and appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary to the newly formed Ministry of Technology, a post from which he resigned in 1966.

In C. P. Snow's obituary in the Observer, Alan Watkins argues that Snow was not sure-footed in the world of Westminster, whether in fiction or real life.

Apparently he embarrassed his colleague Anthony Crossland by addressing him as 'Minister.' Crossland said, 'that was not the way people talked to each other in Labour circles.' But the usage of 'Minister' would have come naturally to a former civil servant who was used to bureaucracy not politics.

It was in 1940 that C. P. Snow first made an important impression as a writer with his novel

STRANGERS AND BROTHERS, narrated by the chief character, Lewis Eliot. This led to a sequence of novels under the same over-all title of which to quote Snow the inner design consists of a resonance between what Lewis Eliot sees and what he feels.' The novel usually considered to be his finest was THE MASTERS published in 1951 which concerned plots and counter-plots of those supporting rival candidates for the post of Master of a Cambridge College. However, Snow was perhaps best known as the author of THE CORRIDORS OF POWER (1964) which commented with 'shrewd discernment' on the Parliamentary scene and also added a new phrase to the English language.

Snow's novels won him a world-wide public, being extremely popular in both the United States and the Soviet Union and it was apparently characteristic of him that he was equally at home in both countries. He was also a passionate advocate of scientific planning and became quite a pundit. According to The Times it was a role probably forced upon him by his almost unique combination of talents and experience, but it was a role he enjoyed and he took pleasure in the fame it brought him, especially the honorary degrees bestowed by universities in Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union.

Adaptations of THE AFFAIR, THE NEW MEN and THE MASTERS were successfully produced in the West End and an original play VIEW OVER THE PARK was performed at Hammersmith in 1950. Snow's non-fiction work included SCIENCE AND GOVERNMENT (1961), THE TWO CULTURES AND A SECOND LOOK (1964), VARIETY OF MEN (1967), PUBLIC AFFAIRS (1971) and THE REALISTS. It seems that Snow's Rede Lecture on THE TWO CULTURES and the SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION, delivered at Cambridge in 1959 caused a famous and much publicised controversy with Dr. F. R. Leavis.

It was said that the quality Snow most valued in men was magnanimity being himself a conspicuously magnanimous man having a very large circle of friends drawn from many walks of life and many countries including new and established English writers, Nobel Prize winners in science, scholars from the United States, visiting savants from Russia and other communist countries and prominent members of all three political parties.

The Times obituary concludes with the observation that it was inevitable that Snow should figure as a character in other men's novels. There is a particularly engaging representation of him as a very young man illustrating both his power and his charm in William Cooper's YOUNG PEOPLE.

Married to the novelist Pamela Hansford Johnson, Lord Snow died on the 30th June, 1980 in his fifth year as president of the Society.

Long John Silver's Magical Bicycle Bell

Tomas Stone

(Froud Memorial second place 2007)

Aladdin picked up his magic lamp, holding it tightly in his shaking hand and walked to the bottom of the marble staircase. For over thirty years, illness had prevented him from climbing the two hundred and fifty steps that would take him to the top of the Palace. Now the time had come for him to face the painful ascent. There was something he had to do; it was something he should have done years ago.

Slowly, very slowly, with aching legs he climbed the stairs. Although he had to stop every few minutes to gasp air into his bursting lungs, his determination to complete the task he had set himself grew stronger with each step.

Hours later, through tears of pain Aladdin looked down at the top of the last stair. With a gasp of relief he rested his weary body against the wall, then, his legs gave way beneath him and he slowly slid to the floor,

Several minutes elapsed before he felt strong enough to push himself to his feet and stumble to the parapet. With the magic lamp clasped firmly in his hand he gazed at his reflection in the worn surface. 'Where have the last seventy years gone?' he whispered. 'They have passed so quickly.' His wrinkled reflected image mouthed the words back at him.

A thin line of vaporous blue smoke drifted from the spout when he vigorously rubbed the lamp with the palm of his hand. Twisting and turning like a snake the smoke climbed high into the air. For several seconds it drifted above him like a translucent blue cloud, then, suddenly it thickened and took on human form. Although Aladdin had seen the strange phenomenon thousands of times before it never ceased to amaze him.

The genie folded his arms across his massive chest. 'I am the slave of the lamp,' he said, in a thunderous voice. 'You are my Master. Speak and I obey.'

Aladdin strained his neck to look up at the colossus towering above him. 'I want you to bring yourself down to yourself down to my size,' he commanded. 'I wish to speak to you face to face.'

The genie frowned at the strange command and disappeared. Seconds later with a blinding flash he reappeared again, this time he stood the same height as Aladdin.

‘I am the slave of the lamp,’ the genie’s voice sounded softer now. ‘You are my Master. Speak and I obey.’

Aladdin handed the lamp to the genie. ‘I command you to crush your prison into nothingness,’ he said. ‘You have served me for the last time; I am giving you your freedom.’

Aladdin waited for the genie to crush the lamp, but he just stood looking at him.

‘I have ordered you to destroy the lamp. Why have you not obeyed my command?’ asked Aladdin. ‘You are no longer its slave.’

The genie handed the lamp back to Aladdin. ‘How I wish that you could release me from my bondage Master, for I am weary of my prison and long for freedom. But alas that cannot be, the sorcerer who confined me to my prison was the evilest of men, a magician without equal, a person without soul or pity. After stealing everything that I held dearest to my heart he cast a spell upon me that can never be broken. I am doomed to serve as the slave of the lamp for all eternity.’ The genie then gave Aladdin a puzzled look. ‘I have served you faithfully for ninety years Master, so why have you suddenly decided to set me free?’

Aladdin smiled wearily at the genie. ‘My time on Earth has almost come to an end, only days remain.’

Sadly, the genie returned Aladdin’s smile. ‘It grieves me to tell you this master, but alas it is something I must do. As you breathe your last breath, this palace, with all its treasures and the results of all the wishes I have granted, will go with you.’

A look of concern grew on Aladdin’s face. ‘But, what will become of you and the magic lamp?’

‘The answer to that question is not yet known. But should you ask me what would I like you to do with the lamp, I would request that you cast it into the sea, so that the wind and waves may carry it along destiny’s path,’

Aladdin looked alarmed ‘I cannot do that, what would happen to you if the lamp should sink?’

‘It is of no consequence to me if it sinks or floats on the surface of the sea, or beneath it, it will always be my prison. The spell the sorcerer caste upon me is that I serve the lamp for all eternity, and eternity goes on for ever.’

Aladdin sighed sadly and shook his head. ‘If I cannot give you your freedom, then my last command must be that you return to the lamp.’

The genie placed the palm of his right hand on his forehead and gave a deep bow. ‘Your word is my command.’ Once again the genie became a cloud of bluish smoke. Aladdin watched the smoke curl its way back into the lamp, then, summoning up the last of his strength, he hurled it into the air. Through tear filled eyes he watched it climb. For several seconds it appeared to be motionless, and then tumbling over and over it fell into the sea. For some time it seemed that it had sunk to the bottom, then, it bobbed to the surface. With his hands shielding his watery eyes from the setting sun, Aladdin watched the lamp drift towards the horizon.

For the next two days and nights he stood like a statue staring out to sea. On the morning of the third day with the rising of the sun, his legs buckled beneath him; with a loud sigh he exhaled his last breath and collapsed to the ground.

For several seconds the palace stood bathed in pure white light, then, it silently exploded in a kaleidoscope of colour.

For over two thousands years the magic lamp was thrown against countless rocks by angry waves, as it drifted back and forth across the seven seas on what seemed to be a never ending journey around the world. Often washed up on a beach, it would lie glistening amongst the driftwood, until far reaching waves snatched it up again and carried it out to sea.

Finally, the lamp’s two millennium year voyage came to an end when it became wedged between two rocks on a deserted Dorset beach. Slowly with the passage of time, incoming and outgoing waves buried the lamp beneath a metre of shingle and sand.

With a name like John Silver, it was only natural that his friends should call him Long John. Although, he didn’t have a parrot or a wooden leg, he did have one thing in common with the legendary pirate. He was certain that, one day, he would find a buried treasure.

Unlike his namesake, John didn’t go sailing the Caribbean Sea with a cutlass in one hand and a map in the other. To find his treasure, he

simply took his metal detector down to the local beach and scanned the sand.

Since he had been given this magnificent present, he had managed to uncover a real treasure trove, including watches, buckles, old halfpennies, pennies, three-penny bits, sixpenny pieces and shillings. These he had put away in his own private treasure chest.

The modern-day money he had found, which when added together amounted to about £12 - had helped to keep him supplied with ice cream and sweets.

Before opening the front door John shouted up the stairs, 'Bye, Mum, I'm off to the beach. I'll probably be back before dinner with a chest full of treasure.' This was something he always said when he left for the beach. It had now become a family joke.

'Don't forget to take those oranges and that bottle of coke I've left for you,' his mother shouted. 'The weather man said, today's going to be a hot one.'

With his mother's words ringing in his ears John walked into the kitchen picked up the fruit and coke and pushed them into his back pack. 'If I'm not back by dinner time send out a search party,' John shouted as he opened the door. 'They'll probably find me heading this way struggling with a leather-bound chest full of gold and jewels.'

'It sounds like the heat has got to you already,' he heard his mother shout as the door closed behind him.

Lady Luck never tells anyone when she is going to call, so when the door closed behind John he had no idea that his wildest dream was about to come true. During the course of the morning he would uncover the greatest treasure on earth.

Except for a few people walking their dogs, John found the beach deserted.

For over three hours he moved his metal detector over the hot sand without any luck. Wiping his brow with the back of his hand, he looked up at the sun. 'I think it's time for elevenses,' he said, 'and then I'll go and scan the beach under the cliffs.'

John laid his metal detector in the shade of a large rock sat down beside it and opened his back pack. 'It doesn't seem like this is going to be one of my lucky days,' he said, as he took out the two oranges and cut

them in half with a knife he had borrowed from the kitchen. Half an hour later, having stowed the empty coke bottle and knife in his back pack, he picked up his metal detector and walked to the foot of the cliffs, leaving the orange skins standing on top of the rock like four empty cups with no handles.

As soon as he lowered the head of his detector it started buzzing madly. ‘Wow!’ gasped John. ‘Judging from the noise it’s making it must be something big.’ Eagerly he started digging between two rocks. With excavated pebbles and sand forming a sandcastle behind him, John dug a hole a metre deep before the sound of metal on metal told him that he had reached what he had been digging for. What if it’s a land mine? He thought, as he carefully eased the sand away. His grandfather had told him once that most of the beaches around the English coast had been mined during the war. Burrowing under the object with his fingers he slowly lifted it into the light. Although it didn’t look very mystical, or magical, as soon as he set eyes on it, John knew that the crushed metal vessel in his hand was Aladdin’s wonderful lamp. ‘It can’t be!’ He gasped, ‘but it is. It really is Aladdin’s lamp!’ John felt tempted to rub the lamp and summon up the genie there and then, but the beach had become quite crowded. ‘I think I’ll wait until I get home,’ he whispered to himself. ‘The sudden appearance of a gigantic genie on a busy beach won’t go unnoticed.’ Resisting temptation, he shoved the lamp up under his jumper, then, he quickly gathering up his belongings and hurried home.

‘You’re back early!’ his mother called from the kitchen. ‘Does this mean that you haven’t managed to find a leather-bound chest of gold and jewels?’

Too excited to answer John ran up the stairs two at a time. On the landing he paused long enough to grab a clean towel from the airing cupboard before hurrying into his room.

The conviction that he had found Aladdin’s lamp disappeared along with the gleam of happiness in his eyes, when half-an-hour of vigorous rubbing failed to conjure up the genie.

Inside the lamp the genie was going frantic; he had been summoned by his new master but couldn’t respond.

Jake & His Teddy

Anthony Murray

(Froud Memorial third place)

Jake and his teddy were reading McAllister's Complete Encyclopaedia of 'Monsters when they heard noises coming from Daddy's room across the hall.

They both knew that Daddy was downstairs watching football on the television – they could hear the muffled sound of the crowd and the commentary through the floor.

Daddy had read them a bedtime story, wished them a goodnight and hurried downstairs to turn on the telly. Jake and his teddy had waited a respectable five minutes before turning on the reading light and pulling out the encyclopaedia from under the bed.

Now they both heard noises from the darkness of Daddy's room, across the hall and through the open door.

Scuffle-scuffle-screeeeeek!

At first Jake tried to ignore the noises - pretend they weren't there - but the noises grew louder and his teddy stared at him in disapproval.

Screek-screek-KERACK!

Finally Jake heaved a sigh, took a sip from his glass of milk and got out of bed.

Taking teddy with him, he moved carefully to the edge of his own open door.

The television downstairs was louder here - he could hear that someone had scored a goal - but the noises from Daddy's bedroom had stopped.

Jake and his teddy peered hard into the darkness, but could see nothing. No movement.

Jake was about to suggest that he had merely imagined it when the Dum-Dum Monster loomed out of the darkness, stumping out of Daddy's room and into the hall.

The Dum-Durn Monster was huge, its head scraping dust off the hallway ceiling. Its shoulders as wide as Daddy's bedroom door. It was hairy, its entire body coated in coarse black fur, tiny striped tentacles writhed about its head, knotting and thrashing so frantically that both Jake and his teddy found it impossible to make out the creature's exact facial features.

The Dum-Dum Monster moved towards them, snufflin2 menacingly, raising two mighty paws.

Jake backed into his room, clutching his teddy tightly to his chest, and the DumDurn Monster ducked through the door after them, its snuffles turning to evil laughter.

Only when Jake bumped into his bedside table and his glass of milk trembled did the Dum-Dum Monster hesitate.

'The glass of milk wobbled backwards and forwards and the Dum-Dum Monster recoiled, backing into the hallway and returning into the darkness of Daddy's room.

Teddy told Jake that Dum-Dum Monsters hate children and everything associated with them. He explained that the sight of milk had caused the creature to retreat.

'But what does it want?' Jake whispered.

Teddy told him that Dum-Dum Monsters were like cuckoos: they were too lazy to make their own homes and instead tried simply to steal those that they liked.

Jake didn't quite understand this. He could hear soft bumps and shuffles from the dark of Daddy's room over the roar of the television downstairs. Getting his torch from under his bed he went back to his own doorway and shone its beam into Daddy's room.

The light caught the Dum-Dum Monster hunched in front of Daddy's wardrobe, struggling to pull one of Daddy's suit jackets over his massive shoulders. Jake and his teddy could see that the creature had already crammed into the trousers and pushed his huge feet into a pair of his work shoes, the sides now split, great tufts of hair spouting from the tears.

With the light on it the Dum-Dum Monster let out a hiss of anger and leapt for the window it had forced open to gain entry, swinging out and disappearing into the night.

Teddy told Jake, in no uncertain terms, that they had to get downstairs. and quickly.

They were only halfway down the stairs, however, when the doorbell rang.

Jake's teddy gravely informed him that they were too late.

Grumbling. Daddy climbed out of his sofa and went to answer the door, the television still blasting away behind him.

He opened the door.

The Dum-Dum Monster stood just out of the range of the porch-light, crouched almost double, arms hanging low, the stolen suit straining on his immense body, tentacles dancing frantically all around its head.

'Yes, who is it?' Daddy asked, puzzled.

'Why, it's Mike, the postman,' the Dum-Dum Monster announced in an astonishingly normal-sounding voice. And he stepped into the light.

Jake and his teddy saw the Dum-Dum Monster standing there, but his daddy saw Mike, the postman.

'Uh ... hello, Mike,' Daddy said. 'Do you want to come in?'

'Yes, please.' the Dum-Dum Monster said.

Halfway down the stairs, Jake looked puzzled, 'Why doesn't Daddy see the monster?'

His teddy explained that the Dum-Dum Monster was good at tricking grown-ups, it had put the idea that it was the postman into Daddy's mind and Daddy had accepted it.

'Are you sure?' Jake whispered doubtfully, watching the Dum-Dum Monster lumber into the living room, the television throwing arcs of light through the gloom and highlighting the many rips up and down the stolen suit it wore.

Jake's teddy reminded him that he had led quite a long life before coming into his possession and, on the subject of monsters, and their many varieties, he could be completely trusted. He added that, although grown-ups were easily fooled by the Dum-Dum Monster's basic trickery, children were not so easily duped, and that was one reason why it hated children, and everything to do with them.

'What's going to happen now?' Jake asked him.

Jake's teddy told him that the Dum-Dum Monster would sit with Daddy and they would watch football, and, while they watched, the creature would study Daddy and slowly take on his form until he fit the stolen suit correctly.

'And then there'll be two Daddies!' Jake protested.

His teddy agreed with this, in principle.

'And then what?' Jake whispered.

Jake's teddy asked him if he remembered what he had said about the Dum-Dum Monster being like a cuckoo. Jake thought about this for a moment, while another goal was scored on the television below them and his Daddy and the Dum-Dum Monster cheered and laughed and talked football.

Finally Jake realised what would happen and looked at his teddy, appalled.

'We have to stop it, before it takes my Daddy's place!' he hissed.

His teddy wholeheartedly agreed.

'So, what do we do?' Jake asked him as his teddy led him to the base of the stairs and from there to the kitchen.

Jake's teddy advised him that they would have to kill the monster before it killed his Daddy.

'How?' Jake asked him, remembering how big the creature had looked, looming over him as it had slid out of his Daddy's room.

Jake's teddy reminded him that the Dum-Dum Monster had recoiled at the sight of his class of milk and he told him that it would also hate chocolate and ice cream, and all things that children liked.

'So, all we have to do is use sweets and milk as weapons?' Jake asked. His teddy concurred.

In the kitchen they kept the light off and worked in darkness while the television continued in the living room. Luckily, Jake knew where all the good things were stored (or hidden) by touch alone and was easily able to bring out chocolate bars, biscuits and then a pint of milk from the fridge.

Jake's teddy got a big saucepan out onto the floor and they both poured everything into it, Jake stirring it with a spoon from the washing up.

When they had finished, the whole mess looked sticky.

Jake's teddy told him that he would hold the door open between the kitchen and the living room while Jake stepped out and threw their mixture over the Dum-Dum Monster.

Jake did not look convinced.

Jake's teddy looked anxiously at the clock on the wall above the fridge and urged him on, advising him that they had little time.

The saucepan was now a lot heavier and Jake had to hold it between his legs, fingers straining as he waddled across the kitchen to where his teddy waited.

They could hear the television blaring behind the door, groans from Daddy and the Dum-Dum Monster - pretending to be Mike the postman - as a player missed an easy chance at a goal.

Finally teddy pushed open the door and Jake staggered in, the saucepan held before him, liquid slopping over the edges as he raised it up, prepared to strike.

But then he froze.

The television threw ghostly light across the sofa. There were two Daddies sitting there watching the match.

Little Bird Down

Fred Jeffery

Long ago in a faraway land, there lived a girl called Zipporah. This means Little Bird, a good name for her, since she was always chattering and dashing about all over the place.

But one day the child was sad.

‘The grumpy gremlin has got into you this morning, Zipporah’ scolded Elisheba as she clouted her friend with a palm frond. ‘Come on. We’ll go down to the stream - and you could show me again how to make pots out of the mud.’

‘Not today, Ellie. To tell you the truth, my dad’s really sick and my mum’s scared that he might... Another day, perhaps.’

‘The prophet could make him well,’ remarked the other in a know-all mode. ‘My uncle says this man can do anything.’

‘A prophet?’

‘Of course. He travels through the land with his followers. Through the desert, everywhere. He is supposed to pass through the next village tomorrow. Your name means little bird, so why don’t you fly over and...’ The rest was lost in giggles.

‘A prophet? Hmm’ she mused. ‘Hey. Maybe I can’t fly, but I can run. If I find him and - if I tell him about how good my father has been to us and how much we love him, then he’s sure to come over and help us.’

‘That’s great, Zippy. He’ll come for sure.’ Elisheba’s grin faded and she gulped, ‘Only, what will you use for a gift?’

‘A gift?’

‘Of course. Everyone takes a gift,’ said Elisheba. ‘Sandals, a robe, trinkets... They’re all great. You see, the prophet has no money. It is the people who give him what he needs. Anything left over goes to the poor.’

Zipporah’s face crumbled.

‘I have nothing to give,’ she mumbled. ‘We have no money now that father is ill. He needs what little food we have to keep up his strength. I’ll just go and see how he is.’

At home her father lay on the bed, weak and frail, not at all like the big man who had carried her on his shoulders and had taught her about life, the land, and what would be expected of her in the future.

‘Mother,’ she asked quietly, ‘They say that a prophet will pass by tomorrow. He could ask God to spare my father. But I have no gift to take. What shall I do?’

Her mother smiled. She had always prided herself on being practical, regarding tales of faith healing as nonsense.

Abishua, her husband, however, was old and his body was worn. With his sickness growing worse, he could soon die. And, since Zipporah loved her father, perhaps she should be given the chance to try to do something for him, even if nothing would come of her efforts.

‘Look through everything we have,’ her mother said, ‘and you may find something.’ Yet, after searching for hours all Zipporah could find was her mother’s ring.

‘No. That is your ring,’ Zipporah insisted. ‘It binds you to my father. If we have nothing else we can give to the prophet, then I will make something.’

But what?’

She went to see Elisheba, but she had cut her foot on a rock and was unable to walk.

To make the cut heal, Elisheba’s mother had made an ointment out of oil which, when mixed together with the white juice of the myrrh tree, not only smelt fragrant but was also very soothing.

‘I know,’ Zipporah cried with joy. ‘The prophet walks many miles through the desert. Even in his sandals his feet must be sore and bleeding. I will make some ointment for him. My favourite little dish will just what is needed.’

Unfortunately, the task of making the ointment wasn’t as easy as she had hoped. To start with she had to travel some distance to find a place where the myrrh trees grew. Then, after she had found them, she discovered that crushing the stems of the branches to extract the sap was really hard work.

Soon she had enough juice in her little clay dish. But what about the oil to go with the myrrh? It was then her aunt, for whom she had run

errands, offered her some oil she was keeping for a special occasion. Showing unusual care and patience, Zipporah mixed the ingredients.

At last the ointment was ready.

Brightly shone the sun shone the next morning as Zipporah, with a bread cake for her dinner and the precious ointment clutched tightly in her hands, set off to find the prophet.

In those days, on the fringes of the desert, there were no roads, merely tracks made by the flocks of sheep and goats as they were herded from one pasture to another. For the most part she had to clamber over rough limestone rocks and squeeze through craggy openings.

After travelling a long distance she became hungry. She looked longingly at the bread cake.

No, she told herself, I can only eat after I have talked with the prophet.

All at once she caught sight of crowds in the distance and guessed that the man she had come to see would be in the middle of them.

Being small, it wasn't hard for Zipporah to make her way between the people who listening to his words and eventually she was close enough to see his eyes. They were such kind eyes. As to what he was saying, she could hear, though she could not understand. Still, she did try to remember some of his words so that she could ask her mother when she arrived home.

After a loud proclamation the prophet descended from the rock on which he was stood platform to resume his journey.

'I must get to him,' Zipporah said to herself. 'If only there weren't so many people.'

There was one advantage, though, that Zipporah had over the others. She knew that the prophet must pass along a ledge in the hillside. All she had to do was to run ahead of the crowd and clamber up through the thorn bushes, though she did scratch her legs horribly as she went.

She was perched above the track, still clutching her bread cake and the dish of ointment, when the prophet and the crowd approached.

Suddenly someone brushed past her and she lost her grip. Desperately she clung to the rock until her fingers bled.

Crack! The rock gave way. Suddenly she was tumbling, down, down, down.

Bruised, shaken and sad, she sat up and looked around. Her precious little dish had also fallen, only to become smashed to a pieces under the feet of the people. As for the ointment, that had soaked away into the ground.

She had failed - and now her father would surely die.

‘Please help me!’ she called. But the crowd surged over and around drowning her pleas in a cauldron of babble and hiding her body in a forest of legs.

‘ Please,’ she cried again, though she knew her voice must have been lost like the chirp of a bird in a thunderstorm.

What could she do?

The prophet stopped. He raised his hand. The milling crowd made a space around him. Now she was at his feet.

As he looked down, tears ran down her cheeks. ‘My father is sick,’ she sobbed. ‘I am so sorry. I have nothing to give.’ And she hadn’t, except... Trembling she held up her dirty, tatty, old bread cake.

He took it from her. It was small and coated with sand. Naturally, he would throw it away in disgust and scold her for the insult?

She cringed, awaiting retribution.

He took a bite. Then he passed the remainder back to her. ‘Your mother bakes good bread.’

‘B - but...’

After picking her up in his arms, he addressed the crowd.

‘Hear this. If you love your Heavenly Father, you will give of what he has given to you. But what do you give? Your time, your skill, your pride, whatever you have. What need has he of gold when the whole world is his? Yea, the heart of a child is far more precious in his sight.’

That she could understand.

To her he said, ‘Do not worry, Little Bird. Your wounds have been blessed. You did everything you could to make your father well. Be it even as you wish. Return in peace.’

Then gently he put her down and went upon his way.