

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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Diary 2015

**New Year Party. Saturday 17
January, Civil Service Club, Great
Scotland Yard.**

**Lewis Wright Short Story
Competition, closing date 28
February.**

**Herbert Spencer Poetry
Competition, closing date 28
February.**

**AGM. Saturday 16 May, Civil
Service Club.**

DATA PROTECTION ACT

**Members' names and addresses are held on a
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Editorial

Paul Williams

I was just about to send the magazine off to the printer when the sad news of the death of crime novelist PD James, former Vice-President of the Society and for long an honorary member, was announced. She was also one of the guests at our Literary Lunch in 1979. Before taking up writing full time she had been in the Civil Service and later the Health Service.

I met PD James at a charity garden party in Kensington about ten years ago. The party followed a treasure hunt in and around Hyde Park and she presented me with a prize, a signed copy of one of her novels. She was extremely accessible and easy to talk to, and was an active patron of several charities. Members who have personal or other recollections of her are welcome to share them with us. Perhaps someone might even like to try their hand at an obituary. She was always keen on encouraging budding writers, and I suspect she would have been tickled by the idea that she is still helping members hone their writing skills.

A little while ago I wrote a review of *Alby and Me* by Society member John Bird, which was one of the first books I read on Kindle. I am happy to report that the novel has been named runner-up for the Quagga Gold Medal for independently published literary fiction.

I am afraid I am one of those people who still looks forward to Christmas, something others have told me usually fades with the passing of the years. Miserable lot! Apart from anything else the Christmas period often presents scope for new ideas, and the New Year for (usually broken) resolutions.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to us all, even to those who moan about the season!

Chairman's Chat

Terry Rickson

This year's autumn *Author* provided a good read and items of interest. With regard to the latter, Ethel Corduff's Market Profile, based on her attendance at the Winchester Writers Festival in July, contained some useful and helpful information. I was interested

particularly in the reference to flash fiction writing and had no idea it had become something of the ‘in thing’! In addition to the observations made, the writing should, I understand, encourage the reader to think ‘what happened next’. I’ve tried flash fiction, it’s a good exercise and concentrates the mind expressing an idea or ideas using the minimum word power.

I hope members are responding to the Editor’s piece, Anyone for a Blog; he’s raised some interesting and valid points. I have to confess, I’m one of those who look forward to receiving and reading The Author. Oh dear, it makes me feel a bit like an old Galapagos Island Tortoise! NO COMMENTS, thank you, Mr Editor, nor references to comfort zones!

Congratulations to Stephen Bibby as our writer of the year for his novel Collingwood’s Club. Further congratulations to John Bird, who has been named runner-up for Quagga Gold Medal for independently published literary fiction. Another of our members, Graham Andrews, had a book published in 2013 entitled A Gentle Flow of Ink. If you read Brain Waive in the autumn Author you’ll get a flavour of his style – intriguing. As I’ve said before, if members who have plans to publish or have been published recently, do let us know.

Those who enjoy a shivery tale on a dark winter’s night with the lights turned low might care to try Susan Hill’s new short work, Printer’s Devil Court: A Ghost Story.

With my best wishes for Christmas and the New Year, and enjoy your writing.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

In the Autumn issue you mourn the fact that you no longer receive the amount of letters and feedback there used to be twenty years ago. Twenty years ago parents would ensure their children would write a thank you letter for a gift, a partygoer would write and thank his host. Twenty years ago a business letter would arrive expertly typed on fine vellum paper by a trained secretary. Twenty years ago we would not be constantly diverted by word soup and the telephone, whoops, landline, would be our only method of swift communication. In other words, a discipline has been lost.

A puzzle: From Paul and Ethel’s pieces it appears that many people are keen on promoting their work as widely as possible with a view to self-publication, an

admirable ambition. From what is being said, isn't this becoming a saturated market, open as it is to all-comers? Is there anyone out there in charge of quality control?

A query: Could clear and concise guidelines and rules for all submissions and competitions be drawn up, incorporating the information on The Author's back cover?

A suggestion: To initiate a 500 word themed story competition, e.g. Twenty Years Ago, publish a short list of three, to be judged by Members themselves. Thereafter maybe the Member Judges' comments on the winning story? This might create a sporting challenge, and some feedback !

Vivienne Orr

Thanks for your letter, Vivienne.

I am happy to receive letters, though I am also grateful for the feedback and other items that have recently been posted on the Society's Facebook page.

I presume your 'puzzle' about works published online stems from recent references to publishing on Kindle and to the sites where short stories can be posted. The novels I have read on Amazon Kindle have been surprisingly good, not least Alby and Me by our own John Bird, though I have not yet read Stephen Bibby's Collingwood's Club, which also has very good reviews, one of them from Ethel Corduff in this edition of The Author. Agents and publishing houses now keep a close eye on works that appear online, and novels published on Amazon Kindle and other probably stand a better chance of being noticed by them than books in a slush pile. I was told by an agent that 95% of submissions they receive are clearly from no-hopers, and the process of publishing on Amazon tends to weed out a proportion of these, so that keeping an eye on new (and maybe not so new) e-books can save them a lot of time. Quality control, or at least the search for the very best, has always been compromised by institutional nepotism in publishing as well as in theatre, TV and film. Ever noticed just how many successful writers, TV presenters, actors and even chefs are related to other 'celebrities' or had the right contacts? Don't we all know that if a soap star or politician published a novel it would be given a head start, almost regardless of quality? Online publishing at least gives writers the opportunity to level the playing field a little and some very successful recent titles started life that way.

With reference to your query, the rules for competitions are set out in the relevant notices in the magazine and on the Society's website. There is limited room on the back cover of The Author, and I would rather that is devoted to guidelines for submissions to the magazine. I would also be wary of putting magazine submission guidelines with competition guidelines in case they are confused.

The Competitions Secretary has her work cut out with the number of competitions we have now. For such a proposal to work there would have to be a fairly good response. There is a themed competition judged by members at the

New Year party. Members who wish to judge existing competitions are welcome to make themselves known. I am sure Ethel and Nina would be happy to know who could be called upon.

Dear Editor,

I took Ethel Corduff's advice in the spring issue and bought a copy of *Bon Marché* magazine for research purposes. The young lady who sold it to me (for 75p) said it was a good magazine, rather like *Woman's Own* as I recall it from the 'fifties. The story was right at the back, and I had to scour the page to find the author's name, Merope McGurk, in tiny - really tiny - letters at the bottom of the page. I can only imagine that this is deliberate policy to deny the poor woman all but the minimum scrap of credit. If the story had been written by a so-called celebrity, such as Julie Walters or Anne Robinson, I have no doubt her name would have been in two feet letters on the cover, and her fee would have been many times what the authoress received. The story was about a young woman who receives a sprig of myrtle from her grandmother, then commemorates the dear lady with a sprig on her grave, and a myrtle in a pot, which will be the young woman's companion in life. A clichéd theme, of course, but truly touching, and superbly written throughout. I feel most *Author* writers, and certainly me, could learn much by studying her style. Not that I would attempt such a story, I haven't the flair for sentimental stuff like that.

Douglas Fulthorpe

Apology for confusion of Alans!

Paul Williams, Editor

In the autumn edition I inadvertently referred to Alan Watts as our webmaster. I meant, of course, Alan Gibb. Apologies to both of them.

Annual Subscriptions

Time for the annual reminder that subscriptions are due at the beginning of January. A renewal form is enclosed with this edition of *The Author* for those who are not paying by standing order. The cost of membership remains at £15, or £22 for those who wish to include membership of the Poetry Workshop.

SCPSW ANNUAL COMPETITIONS 2015

Lewis Wright Short Story Competition

Maximum length 3,000 words, clearly typed on A4 paper. Entries will be returned if accompanied by S.A.E. Entry Fee £4.00 per story. Prizes as follows: 1st prize £75, 2nd prize £25. Closing date 28 February 2015.

Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition

No restriction on theme or form, but maximum forty lines and one poem per sheet of paper. (Writers of humorous verse should consider the Vee Bradley Prize.) Entries will be returned if accompanied by s.a.e. Entry fee £2 per poem. 1st prize £50 2nd prize £25. Closing date 28 February 2015.

Several further competitions will be held during the course of the year and details will be published in future editions of *The Author*.

Notes for Entrants to All Competitions:

Unless entrants state from the outset that they do not wish their entry to be published, all first prize winners will appear in *The Author*. If space permits some second and third placed entries may also be published in later editions. The entrants' real names will be used when announcing winners, unless they have advised at the time of submission that they would prefer to be known by their pen name. Entries must be the original work of the entrant and must not have been published at the time of the submission. Entries exceeding the specified length will be disqualified.

All entries should bear only a pen name (which should be varied by regular entrants to avoid recognition) and a separate sheet quoting the pen name, title of entry, real name and address. All entries should be sent to the Competition Secretary, Nina Mattar, 4 Redruth House, Grange Road, Sutton, SM2 6RT.

New Year Party, Civil Service Club, 17 January 2015

The New Year Party will take place at the Civil Service Club, Great Scotland Yard, Whitehall, on Saturday, 17 January 2015. The event starts with a buffet at 1pm, after which the first prize winner of the Children's Short Story Competition, if present, will be asked to read out the winning story. All members

attending are also invited to bring along a short story or poem to read out on the theme: 'Through the Door'. Short stories should be a maximum of 1,000 words and poems a maximum of 40 lines and will, as always, be judged in a secret ballot by all present. Prizes will be awarded to the winners.

Tickets are £16, which includes the buffet and wine. The form, which should be returned to Ethel Corduff, is enclosed

Annual Literary Lunch 2014

Ethel Corduff

The Annual Literary Lunch was held at the Civil Service Club on 18th October, attended by members and guests from London, Middlesex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Rutland, Kent, Surrey, and Hampshire. Apologies were received from Chairman Terry Rickson who was unwell, Joan Lewis, Roy Froud, Beryl Jones and Chris Lambert. We were delighted to welcome Writer of the Year 2014, Stephen Bibby, and his wife Christine. Stephen is a long-standing member of the Society and his book Collingwood's Club has received great reviews and is a wonderful read. On receiving his award, Stephen paid tribute to the Society's competitions, particularly the former Vincent Brennan Travel competition, which he often entered, and the entry which eventually led to Collingwood's Club. The discipline and word count for the competitions helped him to remain focused. Stephen is multi-talented and had a major role as in Twelfth Night. That very evening was the final performance and he had to be on stage at 7.30 pm, so we were grateful to him for coming to the lunch on a very busy but exciting day for him.

The guest speaker, Simon Hall, is a BBC Television and Radio Crime Correspondent for the South West. He also teaches writing and has published seven books of crime fiction. His detective books feature a television reporter who covers some extraordinary cases and becomes so involved in the investigation that he helps the police to solve them. His powers of observations and his study of people help him in his work, and he always has a notebook at hand. He gave us a most entertaining and amusing talk on his vast experience reporting crime and writing about it.

After organising the Annual Literary Lunches for the last sixteen years, the time has come for me to step down. I want to thank all those who have attended them. I reflect on the many notable speakers we have had, including Tony Benn and his biographer Ruth Winstone; Writer's Forum editor John Jenkins; Jean Bowden, novelist; Dr. Ruth Webb, biographer of Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys; Member Steve Pilley, Actor, Poet and Musician; Paul Doherty, Author and Historian; David Tickner, editor of Avanti; freelance writer Wendy Hughes; member Adrian Danson then editor of Author; crime novelist H.R.F. Keating; biographer Marina Walker; Charles Dickens' great grandson, Cedric Charles Dickens; publisher Anthony Wermer; actress Caryl Griffith; and Novelist Adrienne Dines.

Stephen Bibby, Writer of the Year 2014

Ethel Corduff

From an early age, Stephen Bibby has enjoyed descriptive writing and over the years has completed illustrated travel diaries, articles and short stories. After graduating with a BA (Hons) having read History at UCL, he became a VSO teacher in Malawi before returning to the UK and joining the Civil Service. He was seconded to Lesotho in southern Africa for two years in the mid 1980s but spent the last decade of his career in London. He has travelled extensively and has drawn on his experiences in his debut novel *Collingwood's Club*.

Book Review

***Collingwood's Club* by Writer of the Year, Stephen Bibby**

Ethel Corduff

On reading the first few pages of *Collingwood's Club* one is sucked into the world of a London Trader who is obsessed with earning large sums of money that he does not know how to spend. The end of year bonus takes priority in his life, an empty life that seems to consist of work, takeaways and sleep. His huge bonus attracts the attention of veteran trader, Crispin Collingwood, who entices him into his club, where eating a rare delicacy is a priority. The description of the food, and the surroundings in which it is served, is truly memorable. The world Ben now enters is about to change his priorities and his life.

The book is extremely well written and is a very exciting read, particularly when Ben is in South America. I was hooked by the characterisation and the exciting storyline, which leads from one crisis to another. It has had very good reviews on Amazon and I look forward to the sequel which Stephen is working on. Olympia Publishers ISBN 978-1-84897-306-0 £7.99, or on Amazon

Market Profile

Ethel Corduff

Do you suffer from writer's block? Most people do at some time, like David Nicholls whose novel *One Day* was made into a film last year and whose novel *Us* was long listed for the Booker Prize. He struggled to write after the success of *One Day* so he downloaded a software programme called *Write or Die* which is designed to start deleting text if you don't write enough within a set timeframe. Although that first draft ended up in the bin, he continued to use the programme. Then to avoid digital distraction he installed *Freedom and Self Control*, which attempts to cure writer's block by blocking access to the internet. Zadie Smith found it created the time to finish her book.

Woman's Weekly is the number one mature women's weekly magazine selling 340,000 copies weekly. It has been in circulation since 1911. Gaynor Davis of *Woman's Weekly* told author Della Galton about the type of stories they want for the magazine. They should be about people, warm stories, quirky stories, believable stories, stories with ends that do not read like the punchline to a joke. Maybe a bit of something sensual, but still within the *Woman's Weekly* boundaries.

They are always short of 1000 words (900-1000) and 2000 words (1800 to 2000) and also 8000 words for the Fiction Specials.

Unusually now, they do not want submissions by email. They must be typed in double spacing with wide margins and they require an SAE if you want it returned. Number each page and put your name on top of each page. If your writing shows promise they will get in contact. Do not give away the plot in a covering letter. Show, don't tell, they emphasise. They also like mystery, humour, relationships, family issues. Warmth is an important factor. Send your stories to Fiction Department, Women's Weekly, IPC Media, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St., London SE1 0SU. They include sections on knitting, crochet and crafts, and may be open to ideas on these. Study it on www.womansweekly.com

I was rushing through WH Smiths as a short cut to an appointment when my eyes were attracted to a magazine I had never heard of, *The Green Parent*. I did not have time to flick through it then, but later that evening I did an internet search and feel it would be of interest to writers who are interested in green issues, and one does not have to be a parent to write for it. It is now a monthly with an international readership of 100,000. They are open to unsolicited articles from those who are at least familiar with the topics covered and the green ethos of the magazine. The main objective is to provide information that empowers readers to make changes. Articles should have strong point of view and come from the heart. A new topic, a unique presentation and photos would also be what they are looking for. Topics range from birth to alternative education, eco houses, gardening, nutrition, book reviews, food and drink, health, beauty, ethical fashion, and green travel.

Unlike *Woman's Weekly*, articles should be submitted as a double spaced word document, emailed as an attachment. Include your details and email address. Add a brief biographical sketch at the end of the submission as it would be included if the article is used. Length of features 1,500-2,000 words, rate of payment is £75 per 1,000 words. Payment on publication with a complimentary voucher copy of the magazine. Communicate by email only to editor Melissa Corkhill features@thegreenparent.co.uk

American Markets. I did mention in last Author that I would discuss some American markets. One option is *McSweeney's*, a publishing company based in San Francisco. As well as operating a daily humour website, *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, *The Believer* and a growing selection of books under various imprints.

Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern is a literary magazine and each issue is completely redesigned. 'The magazine is written by strangers whose work comes via the internet or in manila envelopes. Mc Sweeny's, want very badly to discover and nurture new and developing writers.' They publish fiction and nonfiction of any length. There are no rules. The best way to get a sense of what they're interested in publishing is to read the *Quarterly*. That is not so easy for UK writers, but if you google it you will get odd articles or a copy can be bought on Amazon. They are not concerned about your background or previously published work; a cover letter should be brief. Work can be submitted electronically via their submit table page on their website www.mcsweeneys.net and their address is 849 Valencia Street, San Francisco, CA 94110. Mark all submissions as 'Attn: Submissions'. As an SAE cannot be sent from UK, give an email address if you do not want the submission returned as they are not keen on getting money orders.

Submissions for the website should be sent to a different address, following different guidelines, which are presented in a different link on their site. Contact information should be on your submission, not just on the covering letter. Please include your name, address, phone number, and email address, ideally on every page if by post. Feel free to include a brief biography of yourself. They reserve the right to publish your brief biography instead of your submission, which I thought was a bit strange but may generate some publicity for you as a writer. Payment fluctuates somewhat. Contributors are paid at the time of publication.

Short story America. Unusually will accept previously published work but need full details of previous publication. They publish stories in several formats, online, pdf, audio and e-reader. Stories can be sent as word document on the website www.shortstoryamerica.com/submission , use comments section to provide additional information. Accepted stories receive \$50, flash fiction \$25 for fewer than 1,000 words. If accepted for their anthology, 15% royalties are paid after all expenses are deducted.

I wish you all a Happy Christmas and try and find time to send off some of your work before the heavy post gets under way.

CHRISTMAS QUIZ

Terry Rickson and Paul Williams

1. Who, according to Wendy Cope, liked to use dashes instead of full stops?
2. Whose ghost appeared to Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*?
3. The author of the short story collection, *A Wayne in a Manger*.
4. In which Shakespeare play does the stage direction *Exit pursued by a bear* appear?
5. 'Open locks whoever knocks,' was said by whom and in which Shakespeare play?
6. What made 'a jug in a bedroom' gently shake?
7. What cargo was carried by the 'Dirty British coaster... '?
8. Who wrote the poem *Returning we Hear the Larks*?
9. A Michael Morpurgo story that has become a highly successful stage play.
10. Whose landmark is '...a kopje crest, That marks the veldt around'?
11. The hospital where Wilfred Owen made the acquaintance of Siegfried Sassoon.
12. What is the meaning of the old English word 'wassail'?
13. The title of a recent Hilary Mantel short story that aroused outrage is some quarters.
14. The title of Simon Armitage's collection of witty poems published in 2006.
15. The film of an Annie Proulx short story banned from cinemas in some parts of the USA.
16. What is the name of Ian Rankin's famed Detective Inspector?
17. The year in which an Act of Parliament banned the celebration of Christmas.
18. Why did the Queen not give TV Christmas broadcasts in 1959 and 1963?
19. What do the G and K in GK Chesterton stand for?
20. Which Christmas tradition did the very busy Sir Henry Cole introduce in 1843?

(Answers on last page)



POETRY WORKSHOP

Review of the Year

I'm pleased to be able to report that the Poetry Workshop continues in a healthy and vibrant condition, with a stable membership. A report on the PW's main activities follows:

PW Weekend

The 2014 Poetry Workshop Weekend took place in July at Launde Abbey in Leicestershire. PW members attending enjoyed a varied programme of poetry-based activities. Details of next year's PW Weekend and a Booking Form will be included in a future issue of **wavelengths**.

Bill Barnes Competition 2014

I'm writing these Poetry Workshop Pages shortly after the closing date of this year's competition, and therefore judging has yet to take place. Hopefully the results will be available in time for inclusion in the winter issue of **wavelengths**. The winning entries and the Judge's Report will be published in the spring issue of **wavelengths**.

Waves 2014?

The 44th issue of the Poetry Workshop's annual anthology of members' work was published this summer. **Waves 2014** contains 50 poems by 17 of our poets. Copies are available at a price of £3 (inc p&p) from **Terry Rickson** at **48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, Middlesex TW15 3QA**.

The winter issue of **wavelengths** will hopefully contain details of how to submit work for consideration for the 2013 anthology, but PW members should note that the closing date for submissions is **31 March 2015**.

Postal Folio

There are four circulating postal folios in which participating members can exchange critiques of each other's poetry, encouragement and news. There is room for any member of the Poetry Workshop who would like to take part. If you are interested, contact me, **Mike Boland**, at the address above or by e-mail to gothic.garden1@btinternet.com

e-folio

The PW also runs an e-folio for members who have access to the internet. Anyone interested in joining the e-folio should contact Sylvia Neumann. Her email address is: sylvia.neumann@btinternet.com

wavelengths

This is the Poetry Workshop's quarterly magazine, issued free to all its members and averaging twenty pages in length. The winter issue will contain the text of one of the talks given at this year's Weekend, a report from our Chairwoman on the events of the Weekend, poems by members and the regular Newsletter section providing news of the Poetry Workshop's upcoming activities.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions to the Poetry Workshop will fall due on 1 January. A renewal form will be enclosed with **wavelengths**. Membership remains unchanged for 2015 at £7 for Society members.

The Poetry Workshop

If you are a member of the Society, have an interest in poetry but have not yet joined the Poetry Workshop - what are you waiting for!

The cost of membership is £7, and for this small sum 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
- Access to the new e-folio scheme
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition (open exclusively to PW members)
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend.

If you are interested in joining us, contact our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, **Terry Rickson**, at the address above. Cheques should be made out to: SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account.

Dates to Remember

1 January 2015

PW subscriptions due

1 February 2015

Deadline for wavelengths number 42

March 2015

wavelengths number 42 published

31 March 2015

Closing date for Waves 2015

I'd like to wish all members of the Society a very Happy Christmas and a successful New Year.

Mike Boland

Review of Waves 2014

Prue Phillipson

As in *Waves* 2013, which I had the privilege of reviewing, there is a wealth of experience and observation of life in this collection which gives great delight to the reader. The cover too was a clever and intriguing design, pleasing and effective.

Now I am sure you would all agree that poetry springs from some intense experience – a sight, a sound, a sensation, an emotional reaction – that takes root in the heart and grows, putting forth words and images like a living thing until you, the poet, water it, feed it and prune it till you are satisfied with its shape and vitality.

While obviously there were some poems in this collection that excited me more than others, none failed to produce a pleased echo in my mind. I could visualise what was being described, empathise with those that evoked a character or place that had aroused strong emotions in the poet and enter into the thoughtful comments on life that many of them made.

It is surprising how much poignant background story can be packed into a few lines as in Jane Arthur's *Darning*, Barbara M Stewart's *Green Algae* and *Seedlings* by Sonia Royal. They made me think about the people involved long after I had read them. Many others that centred on individual characters produced a picture in my mind, like Val Tigwell's *Our Ballet Teacher* and Bill Torrie Douglas's *Shoe-Shiner* and Andy Millican's *No-one Left*.

There were poems inspired by close observation of animal life which gave me much delight. Norman Bissett in *Slater* has a telling image for a woodlouse as a 'First World War tank in miniature' and in *Tawny Owl* he makes me see the 'saucer eyes, pharaonic and eerie.' I could picture the goldfinches too in Terry Rickson's beautifully observed *The Old Farm Wagon*.

Others transported me to places I didn't know but I could now experience. *Berne* by Mike Boland, *Akenfield Revisited* by Steve Glason and *Memories of the Holy Land* by Ivy Hudson were excellent examples, the last named also expressing her spiritual journey which she vividly depicts in *The Princess and the Goblin*.

Deep thought triggered perhaps by a particular image lay behind several poems, notably *History in the Making* by Angus Livingstone and *The Ache of Eternity* by Mike Boland and many of you commented on changes that you had seen in places you loved like Tom Riley in *It Was Once*.

Several poems gave me a laugh which I thoroughly enjoyed. Sheila Nichols' *Picnic*, Val Tigwell's experience *Passing through the Bedding Department of Napenhams* and Tony Oswick's *Crumpet Voluntary* – delightful title – were great fun.

I didn't know the painting described in Bernie Bickerton's *The Wolf of Aggubio* but her lovely poem helped me to see it in my head and anyone who has driven home 'under dark sodden skies' with music playing would identify with Elsie Russell in *Returning*.

I had no reservations this time about some poems being prose in short lines. There was attention to rhythm and internal rhymes and figures of speech which help to mark a piece as essentially a poem, but it is in the way your creation is sparked within you that makes it a poem.

Thank you for inviting me to review Waves 2014 and for giving me so much pleasure.

Note by Ivy Hudson

We are grateful to Prue Phillipson for contributing another Waves Review for us. Her published books (some are only published as e-books published by e-bshop) are as follows:

The Love of Jessie, Hand in the Dark – a volume of short stories: The White Sash- for children 8-12 years.

E-books by e-bshop and also self-published in book form available from Pru: The Rossimon Trilogy – Rossimon, Simon and Ross, Wintertree; Legacy; Siege. Historical Novels published by Knox Robinson Publishing: Heir Apparent; the Horden Quartet- Vengeance Thwarted, Hearts Restored, Rebels Repentant, Height of Folly and The Memory of Rory Beag. All are available from Amazon. Prue has also had poetry published in various anthologies and magazines as well as articles and two devotional books – Lessons of Love and Perfect Freedom, at present out of print.



POETRY PAGES

Platform for my Thoughts

Steve Glason

Seated by a footbridge
Rush Hour frenzy all around
Marching Down from Stratford
People looked determined
As if on a mission.

Short-sleeved office managers – perhaps
Dealing with our money
In far off Markets by the Bank
Rushing back to loving wives
Woodbridge – Melton and beyond.

Young girls in summer dainty frocks
Mobile phones glued to their ears
Checking up on errant Boyfriend
Drinking with his pals
Propping up a City bar.

Then there are just travellers
Bury St Edmunds – heading North
Container trains to Felixstowe
Cause of sudden long delays
Rail replacement buses now.

This ebb and flow of customers
So fascinating – just to watch
Striding through the Barriers
With tickets at the ready
Home to Kesgrave for the night.

On Days of Dark Cloud

Bill Torrie Douglas

When the bulk of the crowd
despair for the sun that is gone
though the dark cloud is there
let the others despair
for the wise know the sun will return

Nine Eleven (Washington DC)

Bill Torrie Douglas

Afternoon was a salad of sunshine and greenery.
There were no cars on Duke Ellington Bridge,
the Afghan restaurant was closed,
streets belonged to joggers
and ladies walking dogs.
The National Cathedral was like a tomb
As a priest prayed to silent congregation.

Walking back to my hotel,
I asked a gardener
How to get to Connecticut Avenue.
He stopped trimming his hedge,
And gave me directions.
On my way a black squirrel
Blundered across my path.

The evening news reported panic
And shock on the streets of Washington.

Forty Winks

AE Hobbs

Come! Friendly pillow
To rest your weary head
Anticipate a good night's rest
In a warm and comfortable bed.

When the sleep is over
And you awake to a new dawn,
Start the day with zest for life
For indeed a new day has been born.

Trouble might look different
Solutions be in sight.
This can be achieved
With a good and restful night.

Pleasant dreams

Life on the Street

Miriam Brown

A life unkempt
Though not her hair
Long but grey before its time.
Her sun burnt face
Betrays the trace
Of cares too hard to bear.
Her constant companion
A precious pram
Neatly stacked with worldly goods
And heavy laden with memories and loss.
A proud lioness
Seeking suntraps in the park,
She's licked her wounds
But some scars never heal.

Valentine

Bill Torrie Douglas

I can taste you in the morning
from the moment I awake,
you're fresh orange for my honey,
you're the porridge that I take.
You're the sugar in my coffee,
It's your sweetness I love most,
you're my perfect little breakfast,
I could spread you on my toast.

You ignite me as I'm leaving,
you're my handbrake late at night,
I can clutch you in the evening
and accelerate despite
all the speed bumps on my roadway,
all the pitfalls on my route,
you're my favourite little roadster,
I just love your sexy boot.

Dress Sense

(Cromer July 2014)

Steve Glason

Oh Anglo Saxon Human Race
Your summer garb is a disgrace
Bermuda shorts and ankle socks
The wearers – Poet gently mocks

Around him – British faces – pale
Protruding tummies – all that ale
Exercise is doggy walks
Stopping for those little talks.

Ladies are such copycats
The Height of Fashion – floppy hats
Identical – to ward off sun
What splendid impish wicked fun!

By evening – it's sweater/slacks
This magnet pier indeed attracts
Then home to Chalets – Runton West
Perhaps tomorrow – Sunday best?

On Distance

Patrick Hickey

Distance lends enchantment to the view;
Sometimes, but detachment too.

Our noble sun, when seen afar,
Is someone else's twinkling star.

So covet not some vast estate,
Tis but a dot from Heaven's gate.

I Know Your Secret

(flash fiction)

Bernie Bickerton

I know your secret. I may only be your cleaner but you can't fool me. You're a bedsit-dwelling, lonely, middle-aged man with something to hide. I've been watching you closely. I know your habits. Your weekly ritual. Each has a fancy Italian name. I recognise the distinctive smell. The horse hair brushes. I'm not impressed with your choice of colours though. It's time to come clean. Why do you have 53 pairs of Chelsea boots?

Meandering with Mackintosh

Douglas and Doreen Fulthorpe

In the early years of Hill House, Blackie's day began with a leisurely ride in a hired carriage to Helensburgh, thence by train through a greener Clydeside to his publishing business in Glasgow. In the evening he would relax in his library, or gaze from his lounge at the white sails of yachts on the river.

Saturday, Oct 24th 2009.

"Mackintosh", I mused, as our coach chugged westward from the fag-end strewn Portico of Newcastle Central Station. The day had begun well, with a chance meeting on the way to Tynemouth Station with a good friend, a cat named Pebbles, christened so on account of black splotches on her pristine, white coat. She greeted me enthusiastically, then cheerfully crunched the cat-treats which I handed to her. I sauntered on, reflecting on my charisma.

Now I was suffering a slight indisposition. Could it have been the ninth Scotch of the previous evening which was to blame? Surely not; possibly the tenth. I resolved in future to stick to my customary, nightly eight, and my mood immediately lifted.

My thoughts returned to Mackintosh as we sped through a lightening dawn along the green and wooded banks of the River Tyne. I leafed through my mental Oxford. Mackintosh: inventor, understandably, of the world's first waterproof raincoat. Who else? Charles Rennie Mackintosh; idiosyncratic architect, artist and furniture designer. Rennies I recalled as a sure-fire cure for indigestion and Lord-knows-what-else. Was that a gift from over the Wall? Any more? My own lexicon regurgitated Mackintosh, maker of fine chocolates, before being gobbled up, first by Rowntree, then, appallingly, by intruding Nestle.

On our coffee-break over the Border we heard the story of the Moffat Ram, a

sculpture which, at the unveiling ceremony, was revealed to be without ears, the omission of which distressed the sculptor to the point of taking his life. Such sad happenings are not uncommon. At our own Wallsend Slipway, a foreman held responsible for the production of twenty large diesel engine cylinders to the wrong size, which made them worthless, tragically committed suicide.

The promised rain and mist arrived, enhancing the beauty of the grey, silhouetted, Scottish Lowland hills, and remained with us until we reached the one-time second city of the Empire.

The House for an Art lover, set in Bellahouston Park, is based upon designs by Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his decorative artist, second wife, Margaret. The designs were submitted in 1901 in response to a competition staged by a German Interior Design Magazine, for a “grand house in a thoroughly modern style”. Although the design won international acclaim, Mackintosh died several decades before its realisation by the City of Glasgow. A heavy-smoking alcoholic, he died at the age of sixty-four from cancer, an illness which, horrifically, led to the amputation of his tongue.

The furniture, curtains, wall-hangings and lighting fixtures were fashioned by contemporary artists and craft workers to Mackintosh’s designs. The plain but stylish effects are far removed from both fussy Victorian and garish modernistic creations. There is an attractive simplicity in the wall and window decorations, and some of the furniture resembles that in current doll’s houses. There was also an example of one of his common designs: extremely high-backed dining-room chairs, created, I was assured, for a race of swan-necked clansmen lost in a remote glen.

Much of the symbolism expressed in the styling of the rooms, furniture and furnishings eluded at least one of our party. That of the Oval Room is, however, strikingly overt. The room, pendant lamp, table, and holes cut in the furniture, are all oval, Rennie Mackintosh’s “favourite symbol for women”, following the euphemistically termed “erotic theme in art”.

After our brief exploration of Hill House, I was unconvinced that others could not emulate his style, yet there remains an effect of timeless and fairly unaffected grace and feeling.

There followed a conducted tour, led by enthusiastic and friendly Glasgow City gardeners, of the well-stocked walled garden, which serves as a trials and development centre for growers world-wide.

Bellahouston Park is extensive, hilly, and comprises woodland and grassy expanses, with far-reaching views over the city, including a strangely silent Ibrox Stadium, where Glasgow Rangers were grinding out a one-all draw against Edinburgh guests Hibernian.

Everywhere rich autumn colours were in evidence, from the trees and shrubs to the carpet of leaves underfoot. Apart from an impressive obelisk, little remains of the great Empire Fair of 1938. Another major event occurred in 1982, when Pope John Paul II addressed a crowd of three hundred thousand. The base of the platform, on which he stood, serves as a memorial to his visit. Several members

watched briefly, but with interest, a hockey-match between two teams of women, wenches whose sturdy, no-nonsense look was at variance with Mackintosh's intriguing concept of ovality.

My hotel room, high above the Clyde, overlooked the river and its environs, laid out like Toytown. Upstream I glimpsed the masts of a Tall Ship, while, nearer, across the river, lay the paddle-steamer Waverley, itself, with its twin, red-and-white hooped funnels and side-paddles, looking for all the world like a child's toy.

Although built in Scotland in 1947 at the very end of the paddle-steamer era, Waverley is a magnificent jewel of Victorian engineering. Saved from the breaker's yard at a purchase price of one pound, she was fitted with new engines, then finished in lustrous mahogany and burnished brass, and now, a proud lady of sixty-two, steams the rivers and seas of the British Isles.

Paddle-steamers have disadvantages, among them the vulnerability of their side-paddles, and the extra width imposed upon the vessel. However, one major advantage is extreme manoeuvrability. By turning its paddles in opposite directions, rather in the style of cartoon-hero Daffy Duck, the steamer can rotate about a vertical axis through its metacentre, a feat beyond the compass, in a manner of speaking, of any screw-driven craft.

To save headroom, Waverley's twin, reciprocating steam-engines are arranged with their cylinder axes horizontal. This imposes a penalty in that the weight and continual rubbing of the pistons, on the lower surface of the cylinder bores, over a period of years causes excessive wear and, ultimately, ovality of the cylinders, an effect which would have possibly stimulated Rennie Mackintosh, were he aware of it, to produce an artwork.

Sunday.

Hill House, now owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland, stands on a hill just out of Helensburgh. As our guide explained in a very well-presented talk, whereas the House for an Art Lover was designed as an artistic expression, and as such became a museum, Hill House was created as a home.

Built in 1903 to Rennie Mackintosh's design for the publisher Blackie, the house is finished in sombre, grey render, an effect in keeping with the continuous rain which marked our visit.

Internally the theme is plain and in places dark, relieved by intricate, sometimes quirky designs. The hall, panelled with pitch pine, gives onto the library, lounge, dining-room, kitchen and butler's pantry. Much of the furniture is not original, but is appropriate to the Mackintosh style. Some of the furnishings, curtains and carpets are original; others are replicas or similar in character, and everywhere there are distinctive light-fittings and wall-decorations, including a form of mosaic installed by Mrs Mackintosh. The settee and armchairs are fitted with anti-macassars to her design, to safeguard against the oil that Edwardian *beaux* daubed upon their hair.

Blackie had an adventurous and varied career before joining the family firm, a quality publisher of educational and children's books, typically *Blackie's*

Bumper Children's Annual, many examples of which line the walls of the library, along with books representative of the early years of the twentieth century. He would also use the library for business meetings.

The kitchen now serves as a tea-room, unfortunately not opened for our visit, to our regret on a cold autumn morning, and depriving the impoverished National Trust for Scotland of a small but welcome boost. Upstairs we explored the tastefully and characteristically styled bedrooms, and the slightly frightening bathroom, with Edwardian plumbing suggestive of a mediaeval torture-chamber, but incredibly luxurious in an era when a majority of the populace relied upon one, frequently shared, outside cold tap.

In the early years of Hill House, Blackie's day began with a leisurely ride in a hired carriage to Helensburgh, thence by train through a greener Clydeside to his publishing business in Glasgow. In the evening he would relax in his library, or gaze from his lounge at the white sails of yachts on the river.

I emerged from the house, and, snug in my modern equivalent of a Mackintosh, braved the drizzle, and, as Blackie and Mackintosh himself, at least in spirit, had done, wandered the extensive garden, with its watery lawn, shrubs, and acers robed in striking, autumnal scarlet and ochre, enjoying the company of a friendly robin, and small birds who flitted from sodden branch to branch.

The House for an Art Lover and Hill House, set in the seasonal beauty of the Scottish landscape, their intrinsic art, and the warmth and helpfulness of staff at both sites, served to make our short break a memorable Mackintosh experience.

Tales of Wells Fargo

Graham Andrews

“My name is Jim Hardie. I'm a special investigator for Wells Fargo.”

Those were the words spoken by Dale Robertson, in his inimitable drawl, to introduce almost every episode of the TV Western series *Tales of Wells Fargo*, which first ran in the USA from 1957 until 1962. The BBC bought it in 1959, delighting British 12-year-olds of all ages. *Wells Fargo* (for short) is one of the best Golden Age of Television ‘horse operas’ (roughly 1956 until 1966). It compares well with the likes of *Wagon Train*, *Bonanza*, *Rawhide*, and my all-time personal favourite, *Maverick*.

Wells Fargo formed a successful fusion between the Western and detective fiction, thanks to the fact that it was co-created by Frank Gruber (1904-1969), who had been a master of both these specialist genres. He wrote 287 short stories, 57 novels, plus umpteen film and TV scripts. Anyone researching the history of American popular fiction should read his memoir, *The Pulp Jungle* (1967).

Gruber based Jim Hardie upon James B. Hume, who was the real-life Chief of Detectives at Wells Fargo from 1873 until 1905. He was over six feet tall and powerfully built. Hume was instrumental in the capture of Black Bart, a notorious

‘road agent’ who robbed 28 stagecoaches in only eight years. The history of Wells Fargo itself is often more exciting than any fictional novel or screenplay. It was founded in 1852 by Henry Wells and William G. Fargo, both as a stagecoach and railroad mail service and as a commercial bank. It is still going strong today. I can highly recommend *Wells Fargo: An Illustrated History*, by Noel M. Loomis, published in 1968.

Wells Fargo was well-served by its star, Dale Robertson, who was born Dayle Lymoine Robertson in Harrah, Oklahoma, on 14 July 1923. Robertson worked as a professional boxer before serving with the United States Army during the Second World War. He was wounded twice and received both the Bronze and Silver Star medals. Afterwards, he moved to California and drifted into acting. A muscular six-footer, he quickly made his mark in such films as *The Outcasts of Poker Flats* (1952) and the cult classic *Son of Sinbad* (1955).

Robertson played Jim Hardie in the pilot, ‘A Tale of Wells Fargo’, on *Schlitz Playhouse of the Air* in 1956, and then in the first episode of the NBC TV series on 18 March 1957. ‘The Thin Rope’ provided an early role for Chuck Connors, who would later star in his own popular TV Western series, *The Rifleman* (1958-1963). For its first two years, *Wells Fargo* ranked in the top ten Nielsen ratings. During the 1957-1958 season, the series peaked at # 3 and during the 1958-1959 season it made # 7.

When asked about the success of *Wells Fargo*, Robertson replied that it was not one of the so-called ‘adult’ Western series – or a ‘juvenile’ series either. He saw it as a ‘family’ show. “If there’s anything that annoys me, it’s the gimmicks. They’ve lost sight of the basic values. Give me a Gary Cooper or Joel McCrea every time. You invest in them and it’s like putting money in the bank. And for good reason, they’re also nice people.” He rode his own horse, Jubilee, in all the episodes.

It was a winning formula, all right. From 1957 until 1961, *Wells Fargo* racked up 167 x 25 minutes, 34 x 50 minutes black-and-white episodes (thank you, Leslie Halliwell’s *Film Companion*). With the sixth season (starting 30 September 1961), NBC expanded the series to an hour, changed the theme music – seldom a good idea, in my opinion – made it in colour, and added a slew of secondary characters. Jim Hardie now owned a horse ranch near San Francisco and only worked for Wells Fargo on a part-time basis. The veteran actor William Demarest played his foreman, Jeb Gaine, and Jack Ging was a sidekick called Beau McCloud. Romantic interest came in the shapely form of Ovie (Virginia Christine), a nearby widow.

As if all that wasn’t bad enough, *Wells Fargo* was pitted against the hugely popular *Perry Mason* series, and it was cancelled after the 34th colour episode, ‘Vignette of a Sinner’, aired on 2 June 1962. Robertson went on to star in another TV Western series, *The Iron Horse* (1966-1967), and later played continuing roles in *Dynasty*, *Dallas*, and *Murder, She Wrote*. He died on 27 February 2013, aged 89, at a hospital in La Jolla, California.

Dell issued nine tie-in *Tales of Wells Fargo* comic books between February 1958 and February-April 1962 (for some unknown reason, the last two issues were

retitled *Man from Wells Fargo*). Whitman published a *Wells Fargo* novel, *Danger Station*, in 1958, which was reprinted in the UK by World Distributors later that same year. It was written by Sam Allison, actually a pen-name of Noel M. Loomis (see above). The British publisher, Purnell, brought out a *Wells Fargo* annual in 1961, written by Arthur Groom and illustrated by Eric Dadswell.

Frank Gruber himself wrote a *Tales of Wells Fargo* tie-in collection for Bantam Books in 1958, with a UK edition from Corgi. He ably compressed plot, characterization, background, and atmosphere into 13 pages (the average length per story). Contents: 'Billy the Kid'; 'The Auction'; 'Belle Star'; 'The Vigilantes'; 'Sam Bass'; 'The Glory Hole'; 'John Wesley Hardin'; 'Doc Bell'. In 'The Vigilantes', Gruber sums up the philosophy of Wells Fargo, then and now. "This strongbox," he said. "It's become a symbol of security throughout the West. Everybody who sees it thinks of Wells Fargo."

But it's the treatment of real-life outlaws that gave *Wells Fargo* an edge over rival TV Western series. 'Billy the Kid' (21 October 1957) is a prime example, although there's no evidence that William Bonney ever met General Lew Wallace, let alone told him: "I read your novel, *The Fair God*." The real Billy was almost illiterate and looked like "a young and half-witted Oscar Wilde" (George MacDonald Fraser, in *The Hollywood History of the World*). Billy was played by a youthful Robert Vaughn.

Tales of Wells Fargo is now available on DVD and it can also be seen on YouTube. Apart from Robert Vaughn, you will find an equally inexperienced Jack Nicholson in "That Washburn Girl" (13 February 1961) – but not, I hasten to add, as the Washburn girl!

A Death in Savile Row

Brian Jones

Sara was determined to find the real reason behind her grandfather's lonely death on the steps of number 6, Savile Row. She was sure it wasn't really heart failure. First she would question Peter, the despatch clerk, then she would hire a private detective. Why had her grandfather, an American, wanted to take personal charge of the business in Savile Row anyway? But he had always liked a challenge. He had planned to transform the old company and ensure its future.

She thought about him lying cold and stiff and felt a renewed sense of purpose.

During the next few days Sara saw the tourist sights of London: Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, the Tower of London, the National Gallery, the Parks. It was as hot as California. The entire city shimmered in the heat and baked in the sunshine. On Rotten Row riders galloped past, rising and descending on their glossy saddles. It was bliss to sit in a deck chair, with legs outstretched, to sift through a selection of glossy magazines and sip an ice-cold cola.

But she had to concentrate at keeping her level of attention, of being interested in her surroundings. She would find herself lapsing into her own thoughts, her sense of injustice and frustration when she thought again of her dear grandfather.

When not sightseeing, Sara shopped. She bought jewellery for her parents and a gold watch for her boyfriend. Her visit to Bond Street reminded her of her 18th birthday. Her grandfather had taken her to the most prestigious jewellers in New York to purchase a ruby ring. It was not her first visit. The people who worked in the store always made her feel very special, from the uniformed doormen who touched their caps, to the sales staff who smiled and whispered complimentary remarks about her looks. Her grandfather had taken her on a behind the scenes tour. The cream of America's craftsmen created masterpieces in silver, gold and platinum. Lapidaries cut and polished diamonds, emeralds, sapphires and rubies, and designers created jewellery for celebrities.

As for Joseph, with his granddaughter by his side he had felt a rush of pride. Sara was such a beautiful girl, an American princess indeed, with her silky blonde hair, deceptively demure face, lyrical turquoise eyes and beguiling manner. He suddenly wished he wasn't getting old, because he wanted to be around to watch her get married and settled.

‘Why do you look sad, granddad?’ she had murmured.

‘Just passing years, sweetheart! I don’t want to get old and decrepit.’

He had smiled and put her small hand into his massive palm. He looked into her serious young face and his heart clenched. She touched the deepest part of him and brought out a tenderness no other had ever done, not parent, nor wife, nor mistress! This was the way it had been since she had been a baby in her mother’s arms.

Sara returned to Henry and Co. at 11.30 to collect the skirt they had made for her. It was a perfect fit, very short and very tight. All the male members of the ground floor clustered around to admire the revolutionary garment, perhaps the first mini skirt in the history of Savile Row. The female members of staff showed less interest.

Michael, the son of one of the directors, took her on a guided tour of the premises. He was an enthusiastic, fresh-faced young man of around twenty. No ordinary customer had ever ventured to the dizzy heights of the top floor workshops. Michael was a knowledgeable and interesting guide.

‘Apart from the best bespoke suits in the world,’ Michael boasted in his plummy voice, ‘in Savile Row we provide the correct items for Ascot and the Derby, Henley and Cowes. Formal wear for social weddings and royal functions, outfits for hunting, shooting and fishing.’

She saw the workshop, the despatch room (where she pretended to take just a cursory glance at Peter, enough to notice his discomfort), the stock room and the uniform section where the resplendent gold, scarlet and blue made a brave splash of colour against the general drab grey and navy. He told amusing anecdotes about the London dandies of old, with their long pointed shoes, droopy side curls, and enormous cravats of violent colours. Michael waved in the direction of

several battered looking metal trunks stacked against one wall and remarked, 'The days when customers waited in line to be attended to have long gone. These days we travel to the customers. Garments, finished and unfinished, are despatched in those trunks to hotels around the world. A couple of weeks later our salesmen sign in at the hotels and set up our rails for fitting. Our biggest customers by far are the Americans, especially from New York and Chicago.'

Michael introduced Sara to the alteration tailors in the small workshop at the end of the basement.

'These gentlemen are mostly Greek Cypriots and have worked here for a long time.'

Sara changed back into her jeans and under the pretext of going to the Ladies returned to the basement. Peter, in the despatch room, was seated on an old chair, using a cardboard box as a table. He was sipping tea and eating a Mars bar. He blushed deeply when he saw Sara.

'Good morning, Miss,' he stammered.

'Oh, please call me Sara,' she murmured in her husky voice, with a dazzling smile.

Peter gasped. There was no precedent for a customer sitting down with him in the basement and treating him like an old friend, let alone one such as Sara. Most of their customers were tired looking, middle aged men, usually affluent businessmen with a small sprinkling of celebrities. Some of them would smile and say, 'hello!' and sometimes someone from a party of students being shown around would ask a question about despatch, but that was usually it.

Peter wondered about her age. He doubted if she was more than twenty. He made her coffee in the kitchen and gave it to her in the best cup and saucer he could find. He searched around in his mind for a topic of conversation and remembered her grandfather saying she was a budding thespian.

'Is it terribly hard work being a drama student?' he asked.

Sara sighed. 'As a matter of fact it is. Apart from classes there are master classes, workshops, private tutorials and opportunities to act on stage in a professional theatre. The teachers are pretty good. We've actually got two English guys from the Stratford Theatre Company.'

'Have you ever been in films?'

'Yeah, but if you blink or sneeze you might miss me. I've had tiny parts in television and on stage. I've also done a soap commercial wearing nothing but bubbles. My finest hour. Peter,' she asked suddenly, 'are you married?'

'No, I'm not married,' he replied completely at a loss. He had assumed she had come to see him on an entirely different matter.

'Do you have a girlfriend?' she persisted.

'No, I don't,' mumbled Peter. 'Not at the moment.'

'Are you free tonight? No? Would you like to take me to the theatre? My boyfriend is in California and I don't know any young men in London except for you.'

In the West End it was another world, a world which never slept. Some cinemas were already crowded. Clubs and discos, theatres, casinos, were preparing to open later. Workers were homeward bound but visitors were pouring in. Peter was ten minutes early but Sara was already waiting for him in the hotel lobby. She was wearing a low-cut black sequin top and her new satin skirt.

‘You look very nice, Peter,’ she smiled.

‘You look... look...’ cried Peter, desperately searching and failing for adjectives to do justice to this vision. ‘You look great!’ he finished lamely.

‘Thank you, Peter. Don't worry about a thing, I have the theatre tickets. *Phantom of the Opera*.’ She pressed a £10 note in his hand. ‘This is for the taxi. You can buy me a drink in the theatre. I'll pay for dinner.’

This was Sara's first visit to an old time theatre. The nearest theatre to her family in California had been built in 1980 and was minimalist in design. It was also Peter's first taxi ride with a beautiful girl and it almost overwhelmed him. The elegant V of her collarbone, the heady perfume, the momentous surge of her breasts as she entered the taxi. The skirt huddled around her thighs, exposing her lacy panties. She noticed his quick glances in that direction but only smiled mischievously and made no attempt to rearrange her legs.

‘What a girl! Nothing seems to faze her,’ he thought admiringly. ‘And I think she fancies me a bit.’

‘He's sweet, but he does look like a giraffe on heat,’ Sara inwardly giggled.

The taxi was caught up in traffic and he felt himself entering a wonderful alien world of heightened and diminished reality. In the lush foyer of the theatre was a tense looking line of people outside the box office and a great air of something momentous about to happen behind the doors leading to the auditorium. Peter, accustomed to the bare walls and stairs leading to the gallery, was impressed by the luxury downstairs. Sara's first impression of one of London's most historic theatres did not disappoint.

‘After dinner we can go to a disco. What do you say?’

‘Oh yes, yes!’ Peter could hardly believe what he'd heard. Why me, of all people? Why not someone from her hotel? Why not one of the good-looking salesmen from upstairs? Well, he did have the advantage of working in a quiet, secluded room. She wouldn't have had the embarrassment of suffering a rebuff in the presence of witnesses, not that she seemed to be the sort of girl who ever would be rebuffed.

Then he remembered, with searing disappointment, that there could be another reason why it had to be him.

Sara was totally engrossed in the play. The Phantom's tender and hypnotic singing voice and the tortured body movements of a man constrained, emotionally and physically, gripped her like a vice. The music was lush and searingly romantic but with a Gothic horror element. When the singers sang she fervently wished that she possessed their vocal talents. When the ballerinas danced she longed to be possessed by the music, to fly through the air, slicing and dicing all around her like a great diva. Sara wondered if she, a pampered rich

girl, would ever possess their talents. Would she ever have enough motivation? Would she ever be a star of the West End or Broadway, with applause roaring in her ears?

Back at Sara's hotel in Park Lane, after what for Peter had been an evening like no other, he blurted out what was on his mind.

'I think I know why you invited me out. It wasn't that you liked me, you wanted to know about your grandfather's death.'

'Yes,' she said, now expressionless, 'I'd heard from his PA that you seemed to want to say something but couldn't.'

Peter spoke very quickly. 'I saw it. They called me upstairs to explain something and on my way out of the office I saw the old man, the managing director, putting a powder in your grandfather's coffee. I was headed for the door but could see it in the long mirror. I thought I might have imagined it, that it might have been low-calorie sugar or something. But why was he so secretive about it? Then your grandfather died less than half an hour later on his way out. If it was poison I think I know the motive. Years ago there was a girl, and your grandfather had plans for all those changes... But I've now found out the old man has a malignant brain tumour and will be dead within weeks. I think that must have been what made him turn strange. He was always a kind, loyal man before that. Please don't go to the police, at least not yet. Let him die in peace.'

There was a long silence as she digested this. She had come bent on retribution: could she let it drop as easily as that? Then she looked at Peter, a nervous, confused boy with none of her advantages. Guilt overcame her as she realised how she had led him on for her own ends. Who was she to withhold forgiveness?

'Well, you've solved the mystery and he's paying the price anyway,' she said, after thinking hard. 'I know now and that's enough for me.'

'I'll always remember, you,' said Peter, wiping away a tear as they said their farewells.

Mulled Wine

By Eileen Mary Sellars

Anne Dempsey surveyed the Church Hall. Stalls decorated with red and green crepe paper, sparkling fairy lights and tinsel, a festive CD playing on a kindly loaned all-round sound system. No sooner had the Women's Institute Christmas Fair been opened by an unseasonably clad young lady than, as if driven by some feudal ritual, there had been an undignified stampede in the direction of the cake stall.

'It's the same every year,' Winnifred Lloyd-Thomas sighed. 'Cakes, puddings and mince pies disappear like snow in summer, and a prematurely empty stall looks so sad, I always think.' She turned from Anne to greet another arrival.

‘Hello, Mrs Jones. Can I interest you in a raffle ticket? First prize, a fresh turkey donated by our local butcher.’

Mrs Jones hunted for her purse. ‘The school children have decorated everything marvellously. It looks very festive, I must say.’

‘No small thanks to Anne, here. She was on duty hours before me this morning. Two tickets? Thank you so much.’

Winnifred surveyed the crowd. ‘Our celebrity is doing the rounds, I see.’

‘And making a few purchases, which is very encouraging because all the fans will follow suit,’ observed Anne with satisfaction.

‘Is she famous? Angela Griffiths organised it; apparently they’re related. The important thing is, she’s popular, so much better than having some pompous old windbag who nobody’s heard of. She certainly arrived in style; chauffeur driven Bentley no less!’

‘She was in one of the soaps, I forget which, and she sings. Not my kind of thing, lots of noise in the background drowning her out, if you know what I mean, and she appears on some of those reality programmes as well, so she gets quite a lot of exposure.’

‘Exposure would appear to be her trademark, if that frock is anything to go by, and I don’t think she’s the thermal underwear type, do you?’

‘I expect the heater in the Bentley is very efficient.’

‘It would need to be. Mind you, I’m sure the fur stole she’s wearing is the real thing but I do wish she’d stop fiddling with that necklace; she had the pendant between her teeth just now. I suppose she thinks it’s coquettish!’

‘Well, she was talking to a rather good-looking young man.’

Winnifred gave a snort of laughter. ‘She’s wasting her time, there! Jordan’s gay!’ She raised her voice to greet a villager wearing a hearing aid. ‘Yes, Mr Owens, a pound each. That’s right, a turkey. The second prize is a box of fresh vegetables, delivered two days before Christmas, or a bottle of champagne. How many tickets can I tempt you to? Oh how generous. There’s tea and coffee on sale over in the corner if you can push your way through, just past the Christmas cards. Mr and Mrs Bevan, how nice to see you, how’s the arthritis? Oh dear! This weather doesn’t help, does it?’

While Winnifred concentrated on selling raffle tickets, Anne wandered around the stalls; lingered over the soft toys and topped up her supply of Christmas tree baubles. As expected, the cake stall was empty; villagers having defeated the strategy of holding back some items for a second display by hovering nearby to descend once again like locusts.

Anne moved on to the jam-making demonstration; the kitchen starkly bright, white and clinical. On the hob stood an enormous steaming double handled pan, and in a spotless overall, Eleri was maintaining a running commentary on the process of sterilising jars while the worktop between cook and audience bore the labels, seals and seasonal paper circles for the finishing touches. Anne raised her

hand in brief greeting and moved on; rather her than me, she decided in admiration.

She paused to watch Santa's Helper, deftly juggling satsumas, a one-man band of tricks with a multitude of pockets hiding presents, puppets and props for his performance. Occasionally, he would stop juggling and lean forward to remove a foil-wrapped chocolate Santa from the ear of one of the audience; delighted children jockeyed for pole position. The celebrity received her chocolate Santa, applauded loudly and smiled the lipstick smile that matched the dress before turning away to bestow it quietly on a child in arms at the back of the crowd, waving her fingers gaily in the direction of the door. Anne's gaze followed the wave, identified the frowning recipient leaning against a pillar; amidst a sea of casual, comfortable, country garb, his dark grey suit seemed oddly aggressive.

It was at that moment that the lights went out and 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer' was curtailed mid-flight as the CD player died. There were a few startled cries; laughter, silence, and then a child began to wail.

'Nobody panic! It's just the trip switch' shouted the vicar. 'Everyone stand absolutely still please and I'll be as quick as I can.'

Torchlight pierced the gloom and disappeared through a doorway followed by muffled sounds. Illumination returned and the vicar reappeared beaming.

'Sorry about that everyone. Possibly the microwaves overloaded the system. Perhaps we could restrict use to just one at a time, ladies? Sorry!'

The CD player moved on to Christmas carols and the general buzz returned.

Anne manoeuvred her way via the silk flowers and seasonal centrepieces, a stall of preserves surrounded by mature women, a cornucopia of jewellery surrounded by young women, and a games area packed with happy, noisy youngsters. Most of the men had made a beeline for the peace of the refreshments and, judging by the regular ping of the microwaves, mulled wine and mince pies were doing a roaring trade.

'Such a crush!' she gasped as she finally made it back to Winnifred.

'Anything less would be disappointing after all the work during the past couple of months.'

'And where on earth did Eleri find enough raspberries to make jam?'

'Bottom of the freezer, apparently, clearing out ready for Christmas!'

Winnifred's gaze rested enquiringly on the white rabbit with floppy ears.

'Neighbour's new baby, isn't it lovely?' said Anne. 'I was lucky to find something. There's been a run on the soft toys too.'

'Always a success; Dilys Evans, seventy-six, sews in the summer, knits during the winter when the light's not so good.'

'Tea, how marvellous; thank you,' exclaimed Anne and took delivery of two brimming cups. 'And none spilt in the saucers! How on earth did you manage that in this crowd?'

'Years of practise, waiting on table,' grinned the hotelier's wife and disappeared again.

‘Isn’t that her husband doing the conjuring?’ asked Anne.

‘Yes, he’s very good, isn’t he, though originally I wasn’t entirely convinced that Santa’s Helper would make a good substitute for Father Christmas, but the children seem to like him. Yes, on balance I think we were right to veto the grotto this year; children expect such expensive presents these days.’

‘Our soap star and her entourage have just gone into the kitchen. The jam making demonstration was in full swing when I looked in.’

‘Considering her outfit, I imagine she’ll be glad of the warmth!’ said Winnifred. ‘Oh look, there’s Angela Griffiths.’

‘Good afternoon Mrs Lloyd-Thomas, yes, two tickets please though I’ve no idea what I’ll do if I win, David has everything delivered from London. I only really came to see my cousin. He’s married to that frightful girl.’

As if on cue, that frightful girl uttered a piercing shriek which cut through the comforting murmur of the hall like a knife through royal icing.

‘My pendant! My ruby’s gone.’

Conversation dwindled in concentric circles, the crowd moved backwards, distancing itself, until the celebrity blonde was isolated, clasping the empty chain around her neck.

The man in the suit bulldozed his way through the crowd and confronted her, hands on hips. ‘You stupid cow I told you not to wear it.’

The star and her husband glared at one another.

‘It’s mine. I’ll wear it when I want to!’

‘Have you any idea how much that stone cost?’ he shouted.

‘Yes I do, actually, but that’s probably because you’re always telling me.’ She flung her arm out dramatically, ‘but do feel free to broadcast it to everyone. After all, you only bought it to show off!’

‘Nobody leaves until I find that ruby,’ the man roared furiously. He extended a commanding finger in the direction of the exit. ‘I want those doors locked. Now! Absolutely no one is to leave this building.’

Reluctantly two villagers moved to block the double doors.

‘Police’ he demanded of his mobile phone, ‘I want to report a robbery...’

Voices were raised in angry denial; a child began to cry.

‘And where’s that magician?’ demanded the man in the suit.

The crowd parted reluctantly to reveal Santa’s Helper.

‘You can turn out your pockets for a start, mate. And will somebody turn off that awful music!’

Winnifred nodded and ‘Carols from Kings College’ ceased abruptly.

Santa’s Helper was belligerent. ‘If anyone’s going to search me, it’ll be the police.’

There were nods and murmurs of approval.

‘Please yourself. But you don’t leave my sight. Understood?’

Winnifred turned away and made for the far end of the hall, climbed the steps onto the illuminated stage, beating the vicar to the microphone by a short head, and clapped her hands.

‘Children, children, everyone over into the corner please, that’s right where the chairs are. Quickly please. And Mrs Wilson will read you a story. Janet, would you mind? Thank you so much.’

She then turned her attention to the offensive man. ‘Now what’s all this nonsense? No one here is a thief. We have a zero crime rate in this village.’

There were approving mutters.

‘Just a coincidence, was it, all the lights going out?’

‘Actually, it happens quite often. This is an ancient building with wiring to match.’

Nods of confirmation from regular users of the hall.

‘Fine, we’ll just wait for the police.’

The man, feet apart, folded his arms across his chest.

Winnifred said, ‘Everyone, could we search please. Stall holders; pay particular attention to the space underneath your tables, empty boxes, paper bags, bin bags.’

Ten minutes of frantic crawling and peering revealed nothing but a sea of glum faces. By this time the celebrity and her husband had joined Winnifred and the vicar on the stage, dragging Santa’s Helper with them.

The husband grabbed the microphone. ‘You’re just wasting time. There will have to be a body search.’

Gasps were audible but before anyone had a chance to speak, Angela Griffiths pushed through the crowd to confront her cousin. Looking up at the stage she said accusingly, ‘Up to your old tricks again, Anthony?’

The man took a quick threatening step forwards. ‘Perhaps you took it, Angela, it’s the kind of spiteful thing you’d do.’

‘But how do we know it was a genuine ruby? It could easily have been a piece of coloured glass.’

‘Yeah! An insurance scam!’ yelled a voice from the crowd.

‘It’s a fake’ shouted someone else.

‘Are you able to validate your claim?’ Winnifred asked.

‘Of course it’s real,’ cried the blonde angrily.

‘I don’t want to be rude, darling, but would you actually recognise a real ruby?’ said Angela.

There was a smattering of unkind laughter.

Her husband, mouth set in a grim line, searched for a number on his mobile phone, checked to confirm that it was ringing, switched to the hands-free option, and thrust it to within six inches of Winnifred’s face. ‘London jeweller!’ he announced. ‘It’s booked in for cleaning and resetting next Tuesday. Check for yourself!’

There was stunned silence, breath held, eyes pleading, hearts expectant, but Winnifred Lloyd-Thomas, liked and respected in equal measure, champion of the underdog, the poor and the good cause, could only stare dumbly at the mobile phone, its steady and persistent ringtone clearly audible while from outside the hall came the wail of approaching sirens.

Into this theatrical arena, quietly and politely excusing herself through the crowd, carefully climbing the steps onto the stage, walked Anne, cradling a very hot jar of freshly made raspberry jam on a thickly folded tea towel. She held it up to the stage lights so that those nearby could see, suspended among the scarlet fruit, midway up the side of the jar, the dark red ruby.

Relief rippled gently round the hall. The man held out his hand imperiously.

Anne resolutely held onto the jar. 'That will be two pounds fifty please.'

Those close enough to hear laughed in appreciation.

The man glared at her, withdrew a wad of paper money and stripped off the top five pound note. 'Keep the change' he sneered.

Anne handed over the hot jar and watched unsympathetically as he juggled it between his hands.

'Oh, do please be careful not to drop that in here' cautioned the vicar 'broken glass is so dangerous with children around. Now, could we have doors unlocked please and I think we were half way through, 'Oh Come all Ye Faithful?'

Winnifred nodded dismissively at the suit. 'You'll explain to the police, of course.' Then she turned to her friend, linked her arm with hers and said, 'Anne, my dear, if the electrical system can stand the strain, I think a glass of mulled wine might be just the thing!'

Anubis Hound

Chester Guttridge

Anubis had failed on the race track although he looked the part. His muscular legs, long flexible back, pointed head, deep chest and shallow tummy defined the perfect canine athlete. So Vickey and Vernon thought, when they bought him from the local pet recycling centre. He was just what they needed, not a stealthy hunter-killer but a fast mover to chase vermin out of their garden. But all was not well with Nubi, as they decided to call him. After a few days they realised that he was psychologically flawed. They lavished him with loving cuddles and fed him on chicken nuggets and turkey twisters, hoping for improvement but saw little, although he put on weight.

Ernie Bigger, his original owner, had given up hope of Anubis ever winning a race or earning his keep at stud, so he put him on the transfer list but there were no takers. Next he advertised him in the local press, again without success, then took him to the local dog's home. They welcomed him reluctantly, demanding a dowry. Nevertheless, compared with the canine norm, Nubi was a sprinter to be reckoned with, that is if he could be induced to sprint.

As are many enthusiastic gardeners, Vernon and Vickey Soake were troubled by garden vermin: crows, pigeons, blackbirds, mice and most verminous of all, next door's moggy, Toff, as his owners called him, because of his superior attitude to all other life. He prowled the Soakes' garden at night, courting noisily,

fathering nondescript kittens, defecating in seedbeds and fishing in their pond. He was loved at home and hated abroad, as are most domestic cats.

Perhaps the near perfection of the Soakes' garden made it attractive to wild life. The flowers were magnificent, the cabbages tender, the carrots sweet, the raspberries juicy, the peas attractive to mice and the fish were fun to catch and delicious to eat. Pigeons had recently stripped a promising crop of purple sprouting broccoli to leafless skeletons. The very perfection of the garden made the spoilage more noticeable, like pimples on a virgin's tummy.

Vickey and Vernon had reasonably expected that a retired greyhound, with a good turn of speed, would help to rid their garden of unwanted pests. Quick sweeps of the garden by a fast dog would, hopefully, turn the struggle in their favour.

But, alas, Nubi was a disappointment. He showed no interest in the task. He would not stir himself to any greater activity than a quiet stroll near the house, unless accompanied by Vickey or Vernon on a gentle walk. He was unmoved by verbal exhortations or Vickey's increasingly vigorous pretend starts. He had been trained to chase an electrified piece of fur and would pursue nothing else. His pointed brain had never rumbled that the hare was an artifice, a rag on a rope, while the Soakes' garden offered real living sport.

Time and again, Vickey and Vernon set Nubi to the task, pointing encouragingly at Toff or a pigeon proclaiming 'go get im' enthusiastically, but nothing would induce the animal to any worthwhile activity. The Soakes were disappointed. 'We've been sold a pup,' Vernon joked.

Nubi was afraid of cats, small dogs, large birds and, strangely, the rhubarb bed, which he carefully avoided on garden walks, although neither Vickey nor Vernon could see any nasties lurking among the stalks. They counselled him daily, to no avail. They had bought a dreamer, a psychiatrist wallet-filler. Bird and beast continued to ravage the garden at will, except on Herbie days. Herbie was the Soakes' part-time gardener. Although not a fast mover, his presence discouraged alien life, although a robin occasionally perched safely on his back when he bent to pull a few weeds.

The Soakes often discussed the problem. There seemed to be no solution. Then one evening, passing the greyhound stadium and hearing the roar of the punters, Vickey ventured the idea that Nubi might be missing the excitement of the race track and the roar of the crowd.

'Very likely,' said her husband, 'but what can we do about it? We haven't got a stadium and two of us can't make a roar.'

As they walked on, Vickey's remark bounced from cell to cell in Vernon's brain. After a few minutes, he said, 'If I made a starting trap like those at the race track, that might get him going. What do you think, dear?'

'A lot of trouble but it might work,' said Vickey. 'It might build his confidence.'

Vernon started making sketches when they got home, getting enthusiastic as he worked out a design. He measured Nubi, calculated sizes and estimated how

much wood he would need. Next Saturday he bought wood, hinges and a latch. The release mechanism needed further thought. On Sunday, he set to work with hammer and chisel, saw and screwdriver. By the evening the trap had taken shape. Nubi showed interest, sniffing with curiosity, peeing on one corner to claim ownership. A week later it was finished and, although involving a complex array of levers and pulleys, the release mechanism worked.

When all was ready, Vernon woke Nubi from his afternoon nap for a trial run but a problem arose immediately, the trap had no back entry door. Vernon hadn't thought about getting Nubi in the trap. Loading required two people and subjected Nubi to an undignified procedure, to which he was physically ill-adapted and psychological averse. His resistance was finally overcome by Vickey folding his back legs under him while Vernon opened the trap door and pushed Nubi in tail first, hastily snapping the door closed, endangering Vickey's fingers in the process.

'Perhaps he'll be easier to back in,' Vickey said, holding up both hands, 'while I've still got a two sets of fingers and thumbs.'

Nubi was impatient to be off. Vernon moved to the back of the trap and set the release mechanism. Vickey stood to one side. Vernon shouted encouragement and pulled the lever.

The trap opened, Nubi accelerated like an over-excited racing car, his legs skidding as he sought grippage on the trap floor. Verbal encouragement had been unnecessary. Nubi was away, gone. Crafted for speed, he reached maximum velocity in a few bounds. He hurtled down the garden, scattering gravel, tearing divots from the lawn, cutting a swathe through the wallflowers, disarranging tender shoots in the herbaceous border, unearthing seeds and seedlings, carving a gap through a new row of pea-sticks and ploughing fearlessly through the rhubarb. Nubi's brain had been unequal to the challenge of avoiding garden plants and minor obstacles, he being used to a clear run on the track. His legs were too fast for his brain. Still seeking the electric hare, Nubi reached the end of the garden sooner than he expected. He swerved belatedly and crashed sideways into the wire netting of the hen pen. Skid marks marred a carefully raked onion seedbed. The wire yielded sufficiently to save him from injury but was itself permanently distorted. Had he not veered to the left, he would have hit the hen house and been injured. The normally contented matrons in their pen were terrified, took to wing, crashed into the netting and fell back to ground, alarmed and disoriented. Their squawking continued for almost an hour, alerting birds of all species to avoid the area and animals to gather their young and take cover. Egg production slowed for a few days, recovered gradually but never regained previous levels, mainly because the eldest hen went into menopause overnight. Several misshapen eggs were laid next day.

Wild birds scattered, wee rodents quivered, a trespassing tortoise retracted his head and legs after the event. Pigeons, feeding on the cabbages, escaped with a mighty flutter of wings and did not return for a week. A neighbour's guinea pig was later discovered shaking alarmingly, but recovered in due course and made

for safer territory. Embryonic blackbirds twitched in their shells. An elderly mouse surrendered his tenuous hold on life. Toff jumped incautiously on to the sundial, fortunately landing on the sloping side of the gnomon or he might have been impaled.

The elderly Herbie was badly shaken and had to be consoled with a cup of tea. He was bending down weeding with his back to the action when he heard the pounding feet, the scattering gravel, the snapping pea sticks, the hens' alarm and the scream as the cats tummy encountered the gnomon. Herbie straightened his back as fast as it would straighten but he was too late to see the action.

'What the hell was that.' he croaked. Vickey, seeing his consternation, called down the garden, 'It's all right Herbie, it's only Nubi, come and have a cup of tea.' Fearing he would resign there and then, she occupied his mouth with a large piece of lemon drizzle cake and his mind with soothing words. When his going-home time neared, Vickey paid him, hoping he would come next week. 'Warn me next time please Mrs Soake,' he said. She read that as a hopeful sign.

The trap had succeeded, Nubi had been motivated beyond expectations. Vernon made plans to make a path along the track of destruction and to adapt the vegetable rotation, but there was a more urgent problem. Nubi was at risk of injury. Vernon and Vickey mulled over various ideas, including a deceleration lane of loose gravel but finally agreed that a catching frame offered the most promising solution. Vernon bought some fish netting from the garden centre, the sort used to keep birds off raspberries, and two stout posts. He set up the posts some six feet apart and five feet from the hen run and attached the netting to the posts with springs from Vickey's disused chest expander to absorb Nubi's kinetic energy. A few practise runs showed everything worked. Soon Nubi became easier to install, Vernon more skilled at loading him and Vickey's fingers at less risk. The catching net proved its worth. Nubi gradually grew accustomed to the recoil which deposited him some two feet back from the net. Soon he was up to racing fitness and competition speed.

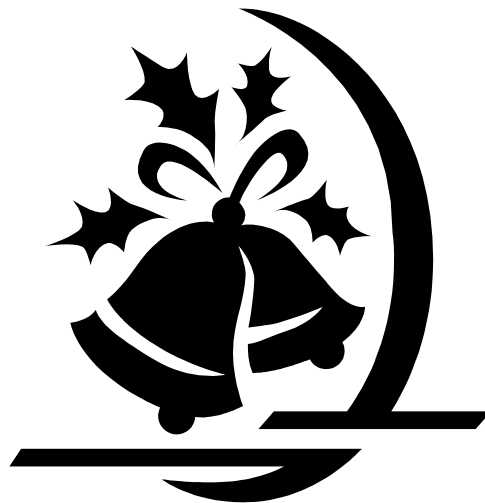
Such was local interest, Vickey and Vernon held a demonstration party one evening for friends; corks were drawn, nuts crunched and nibbles nibbled. Toff's owners next door, alerted by party noises, watched the event from their back bedroom window, having checked that Toff was safe at home. The action lasted only a few seconds, the party much longer. Nubi, excited by praise and patting, revelled in the attention. Visitors asked if they could come again to see the catching net in action. More parties followed. The local gazette sent a photographer with a fast action camera and photos were published. A cameraman from the regional television company filmed a performance and a girl did a 'piece to camera'. Vickey and Vernon made new friends.

An RSPCA man, having seen the pictures in the local paper, came to check for cruelty. After a demonstration, he seemed satisfied that Nubi enjoyed the game and benefited from the exercise but he was concerned about over-weight cats and wildlife generally. However, a chocolate brownie and a cup of green tea weighed the balance in the Soakes' favour.

Demonstrations ceased as the spectacular became the familiar. Nubi, now psychologically adjusted, recovered his love of the chase and regularly patrolled the garden. Winter came, the sun shone deeper into the Soakes' living room, the garden rested, preparing itself for spring. Supplementary measures protected the garden - cat repellent and festoons of old 'girl power' CDs dangling from bamboo canes. Egg production recovered to near normal winter levels. The Soakes enjoyed their new friendships.

The TV crew put their footage into archive and Vickey's newspaper cuttings were relegated to a sideboard drawer, among sundry other abandoned relics. Nubi was loved just for being Nubi.

‘Good dog, Nubi, good dog.’



Quiz answers on next page.

Christmas Quiz Answers

1. Emily Dickinson
2. Jacob Marley
3. Gervase Phinn
4. The Winter's Tale
5. The witches in *Macbeth*.
6. The passing of Auden's *Night Mail*.
7. Tyne coal, road-rail, pig-lead, firewood, iron-ware, cheap tin trays.
8. Isaac Rosenberg.
9. *War Horse*.
10. Drummer Hodge (Thomas Hardy).
11. Craiglockhart, Edinburgh.
12. Be of good health, good cheer.
13. *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher*.
14. *Tyrannosaurus Rex versus The Corduroy Kid*.
15. *Brokeback Mountain*.
16. DI John Rebus.
17. 1644
18. She was pregnant - 1959 with Andrew (b1960); 1963 with Edward (b1964).
19. Gilbert Keith.
20. Sending of printed Christmas greetings cards.

