

## **ABERGAVENNY EISTEDDFOD 2012 LITERATURE COMPETITION**

Poems. Key image: windows/glass

### On that dull May morning

On that dull May morning the yawning doors  
Fell fast together, hissing, a gathering hustle  
Passing blurred moments into past, blurred back  
Into present. Fond faces racing  
Snagged on slow-burnt lagging last thoughts,  
As the Skirrid hunched over the soft scarred plains  
Sat, like a dead king's head still singing.  
We rolled away through hops and lowlands lying  
At the steps of giants' stones, spirits' chairs,  
A castle country dressed with dusty fairs.  
The winding Wye streamed past the sky  
A flash, a glance, a glaring dream  
Delayed behind a filmy eye, a foreign fancy;  
Cutting cultures down the seam  
We sat, in silence, in between.

Far off the plains through window-panes  
Press further away, the mountains merge,  
Eyelids scratch in vain against the surface;  
This place an ever-burning blur.

Owain Jevons (Owl-Moose)

### **The Jumper**

From my window I see it all.

The October skies hang shroud heavy

licking once white hungry bed linen eagerly tied to a cold bridge.

'Welcome home from Basra Daddy.'

Traffic chokes the dank air. Night falls effortlessly.

Curtains mostly drawn. Breath exhausted.

A bridge. A choice.

Grief-filled time thief waits aloft,

counting cars, standing aloof,

choosing the one,

alone.

The silhouette shadow existence notes the flow

of endless endings and selects her executioner.

Nearly home and keen for warm embrace and wanted smiles,

a longing driver edges unsuspecting.

A bridge. A choice.

She jumps.

From my window I see it all.

Jo Smith (Pedro Galactico)

Limericks. Phrase to include in line 3 or line: 'roll of the dice'

In his tent by the Rubicon stream  
Julius dreamed the impossible dream.  
Got confusing advice.  
Tossed a roll of the dice.  
Right result – Till that Capitol scream.

Bryn Seabourne (Max Speed)

Tom gambled his savings away  
He thought he'd be rich any day!  
The roll of the dice  
Just took one more slice  
He's broke and his hair has gone grey!

Glenys Moses (Tom Thumb)

Monopoly

I was winning the game by a mile,  
With my banknotes stacked high in a pile –  
Till the roll of the dice  
Turned up doubles – but twice!  
Now I languish in jail for a while.

Dr A F Bissell (Sid Bells)

Story: Coming Round

### Coming Round.

*'Sorry, Manuel. "Out of sight, out of mind" is not 'invisible and insane.'*

*That evening, the ceiling fan whirred as he drowsily marked exercises in his apartment above Havana Language School. A spicy pizza inside him and the rest of a bottle of red waiting, he day-dreamed. Surf rolled soothingly up the beach and cicadas chattered in swaying palms. Brenda Lee was crooning;*

"I don't want to play in your yard,  
I don't like you any more,  
You'll be sorry when you see me.  
Sliding down our cellar door..."

*Owen wondered , again, how to explain the vagaries of dreaded English verbal phrases.....  
Like ' Coming round',...*

"You little sod!" That was all he heard before his head bounced off the curb. Then, coming round, he recalled that November dusk, their gloomy street, the frightened stranger girl - her music case. Perfect. He lobbed the penny banger to explode at her feet. A terrified screech set smartly polished shoes fleeing to the sanctuary of ballet lessons around the gas-lit corner. Had he known that bigger brother Ken was on his shoulder...Too late. The sudden clout lifted all three foot six of him in the air.

"P'raps that'll learn you. No bloody bullies in our house, see." Owen stifled a sob. "No Jessies, neither."

It had been a painful, puzzling year. First coming round to 'Big School' and scary stories of the playground initiations. Standard One. The threats had never materialised. Older brothers with handy fists were useful. But he was glad to escape Miss Hardacre, his Primary

Headmistress. To start he had been a star pupil. But street-wiser mates had lured him into several scrapes. Then came that shaming last Monday Assembly.

“And I regret that on Saturday morning **someone** here ruined our **perfect** road-safety record by letting himself get knocked down outside the Town Hall”

He felt as if the steely, lowered spectacles would scorch him.

He barely remembered the luxury of regaining consciousness in lovely soft sheets at The Cottage Hospital, where the other Miss Hardacre was matron, worried as he was about the lamb chops he had queued for.

It helped to agree with the gang that she was a sour old bitch.

But then came that farewell school service in The Congregational over the way. “And let us not forget, either, those starving, suffering German children” she had insisted. He was reconciling himself to the feeling that he would never understand grown-ups. Only days before had they joined hands for his mate Wallop’s dad, who had ‘copped it’ at Anzio.

And now more trouble. In that rough and tumble after quarter to four, ahead of him he heard Pauline, pleading yet determined.

“But Lizzie, I do not wish to fight you.” The words, the tone, the accent were all wrong, a red rag to a tomboy such as Lizzie whose nose was severely out of joint because of this outsider.

“Hoity toity. Little Miss Frilly Knickers. Too good for the likes of us,” taunted Lizzie in exasperation. She lunged at Pauline’s neatly braided blonde hair. The other shrank back, but got no comfort from the ring of, mostly girls, to a man eager for some Friday afternoon entertainment. Lizzie changed tack, and grabbed the smart new music case from her tearful victim.

Owen was surprised to find himself barging through the ring, yelling “Pick on someone your own size, you witch!”

“You keep out of this, professor,” countered Lizzie, big bones and all teeth. But he and Billy Wallop were forever practising the moves and clinches they admired – and booed – at Market Hall Wrestling Shows. She managed to elbow him in the right eye, but a quick arm-lock, a few sharp twists, then – “Ow! leggo’ me. Take the friggin’ case. Our kid’ll murder you for this!”

“Not if he doesn’t want another leatherin’ from **our** kid, he won’t!”

Next Monday he had a shiner worth the Desperate Dan beef-steak treatment. But Pauline didn’t seem to mind that, nor, now they sometimes sat together, that he never had a change of clothes, and after Nit Nurse visits, sported a close crew-cut, like the Yanks they cadged chewing-gum from. He was beginning to see that she could no more stop talking posh than his gang could start. Without making it obvious he ensured she got fair play. She quietly adapted, even being a bit naughty herself at times, and the admiring girls, particularly the motherly Twins and Lizzie, smartened up, he thought.

The handmade card read simply, in Bulldog type, “This is to invite you – *Owen* - to my Birthday Party, Saturday.” It was their Eleven-Plus Year, - the parting of the ways. He was torn between vague ambitions for ‘The Grammar’ and old loyalties. Lessons from the probationer teacher had become a curious mix of ‘First Aid in English’, ‘Sums,’ and anecdotes about Eastern Valleys Rugby. Sitting test papers for the first time, ignorant of their importance, was sobering. Before the starting gun Owen turned innocently to welcome mate Billy. Darting round from the back, an invigilator, from a rival school that caned its way to pass success, snarled, “Do that again and you’re out, sonny!”

He kept out of trouble that Saturday Matinee, and tidied up as best he could at home, where they never asked questions. Coming round the Williams’ tidy hedge he heard strains of

‘I don’t want to play in your yard

If you won’t be good to me.’

He thought he’d done well enough - for his first party. The Twins were there. No Wallop, naturally. Then little Christine blurted out; ‘Mummy, who’s that funny boy with the hedgehog hair and plimsolls?’ Mrs. Williams, at the piano, looked uncomfortable. Mortally embarrassed Owen said not one word more.

‘ We are off to Porthcawl, for the rest of the summer. Then we’ll both be busy getting ready for our new schools, won’t we? Mummy was asking if ‘ that nice boy’ would be coming round again... before that ... soon...’

Bryn Seabourne (Max Speed)

## Coming Round

'He'll be coming round in about an hour.'

Carol stood at the window, the obtuse watery light making her seem paler than usual, her long hair even more tawny. She turned towards me.

'Did you tell him?' she said.

'No, I thought I would leave it until later.'

'It will come as a shock.'

I went over to her. We stood together looking out at the persistent drizzle, the Brecon hills hidden away in rain leaden mist. Our hands found each other's and clasped.

'That's the idea,' I said.

She turned to me, 'What is?'

'That it should come as a surprise.'

'This is going to change lives forever.'

'I know.'

We heard the car a few moments before seeing it. A red Lamborghini snaked its way up the gravel drive, scattering white hens from out of its path.

'He's early,' she said.

I let go of her hand and headed to the door.

A fresh breeze tousled my hair as I stood on the doorstep waiting for my brother to park his car. A slam of a door, then footsteps on gravel, then from the side of the house strode Jim, his business suit matching his business-like manner. Jim and I had never got on, ever since mother died. I left the family firm and moved out with Carol to a small Welsh farm, an idea my brother never came round to. He thought it an incredible waste of my small inheritance.

But I knew that's what mum would have wanted. She hated the engineering firm started by my father, thought it sucked the very soul out of my family.

'Jim pushed past me into the house saying 'whatever this is, let's get this over with, shall we? I'm very busy.'

'Nice to see you too,' I said to the retreating back.

Jim gave Carol a curt nod. She half-smiled back, she knew Jim didn't like her.

Jim settled on the sofa and, in an attempt at being civil, said 'so, how's life treating you out here in the backwaters, then?'

'Much better than Bristol,' I replied. 'Look, Jim, I've something to tell you.'

Jim glared at me, his coiffured eyebrows arching. 'Look, isn't about time you gave this all up,' he said. 'We could do with your help in the business. I hoped by now you'd be coming round to my way of thinking.'

I opened my mouth to reply, but Carol interrupted.

'Paul's won the lottery,' she said.

Jim laughed and threw his hand in the air. 'Oh, come on!'

'It's true,' I said.

Carol grabbed a piece of paper from the desk. She brought it over and handed it to Jim. He studied it, at first with disbelief, then a smorgasbord of emotions swam across his face. He leapt up.

'But, this is fantastic!' he yelled. 'We're saved, we're rich!'

'Jim,' I said. 'Don't you think there is more to life than money?'

He wasn't listening and instead paced the room talking to himself. 'Of course, this is a serious amount of capital. First thing to do is get an accountant, invest it wisely; bonds, I think, no, no bullion, yes that would be best.'

'Jim,' I said, trying to get his attention.

He continued to ignore me, continued to plan, oblivious to our presence.

'Jim, we've given it all away,' Carol shouted at him.

Jim froze and glared at her. 'What?'

Carol became excited. 'We've already donated it, all of it. We're building a township for destitute aborigines in Queensland. We're going to live there. We've always dreamt about...'

Jim spun towards me. 'What on earth is she babbling on about, Peter?'

I smiled at him 'That's why we invited you over here; to tell you. We are emigrating to Australia; use this money to do some good for someone.'

Jim's mouth opened and shut like a goldfish. 'Give it away?'

He looked at the piece of paper. 'You're just going to give it away?'

'Yup, that's what we're planning.' I said.

Suddenly, the colour drained from his face, his eyes rolled back white. He crumpled, fainted clean away onto the floor.

Chewing her lip with anxiety, Carol stood looking down at him.

'It's okay,' I told her 'I'm sure he'll be coming round soon.'

Barry Chantler (Rigel)

Race for Life

'Where will she be running, father?'

'You see that track circumnavigating the hill? She'll be coming along that.'

'Coming round the mountain, father?'

'Just so, my boy. Not so much up and down as round. Kinder to the legs.'

Why do you not run too, father?'

'It is for women only.'

'Not because you are too slovenly?'

'No.'

'See father, someone moves in the distance.'

'Ah, the leader already. A fair speed she is doing. My goodness, yes.'

'How will we recognise mother, father?'

'She'll be wearing pink pyjamas, my boy, so you'll spot her when she comes round.'

'That is unusual, father.'

'Not at all. Many runners wear fancy garb. It is a festive occasion over and above the fund-raising.'

'I can see the leader more clearly now, father. It seems to me she has four legs. How can that be?'

'Through my binoculars, I discern that she is a centaur. That gives her an unfair advantage in my book.'

'But father, centaurs have beards and hairy chests. Can they truly be women?'

'Of course, lad. Where do you think little centaurs come from? There she goes. What a turn of speed!'

'See, there is a knot of runners in view now, father. One is dressed in bright red. And yet, the way she moves, she looks like mother.'

'That cannot be. Your mother is wearing pink pyjamas, as I have said. Yet I agree the movement is familiar. And viewing through my binoculars, I can confirm that however unlikely, it is indeed your mother, apparently now dressed in a scarlet, figure-hugging, full-length leotard.'

'Made of leather, father?'

'Certainly not. That is an unseemly thought. She is running easily and seems full of energy.'

'She moves with the grace of a gazelle, father. Long-limbed, she floats over the ground. The others seem pedestrian in comparison.'

'My thoughts exactly, my boy. As she approaches, let us celebrate her progress in the usual manner.'

'What is that, father?'

'We applaud, young first-born. We give voice and cry "Bravo! Well run! Only two miles to go! Bravo!"'

'Bravo, mother! Well run! Only two miles to go! Bravo! I think it is leather, father, whatever you say.'

'Nonsense, boy. She would overheat. And what of the pink pyjamas?'

'Look, father, they are coming thick and fast now. Coming round the mountain. Shall I persist with the applause and shouts of "Bravo!"?'

'As you please. It is optional and can prove tiring. However, since your mother has only two miles to go, we should hasten to the finishing line in order to cry "Bravo!" there.'

'Surely father, unless we run faster than her, we shall be too late.'

'Not at all, my boy. Though your reasoning seems sound, the route your mother runs describes a large loop finishing a mere 50 yards from where we are now. You can see the flags over there. We can stroll over in a leisurely manner with time to spare.'

'How far is 50 yards, father. You forget I am born into a metric age.'

'About 50 metres, give or take.'

'If yards and metres are equivalent, why have two names, father?'

'They are not identical. I said "give or take", thereby indicating the approximation.'

'I hear applause, father. I think the centaur lady has just finished and taken first place and the winner's trophy.'

'We cannot be sure there is a trophy, dear boy. The honour of winning may be adequate in itself.'

'The glory, father?'

'Indeed.'

'When mother finishes, shall you treat us with ice-cream?'

'It will be my pleasure, my boy. What flavour would please you?'

'Caramel and haddock, father.'

'That is an unusual combination.'

'I propose to be an innovative chef when adult, father. It is best to start young.'

'As you will. It is possible the ice-cream vendor will be unable to oblige. Be prepared for that.'

'I anticipate many slings and arrows, father. But look, I think that mother approaches, head back, knees high, despite the crinolines and petticoats.'

'Bravo, my dear! Bravo! What a stylish conclusion to an excellently-executed race, my boy, do you not think? Bravo!'

'Bravo!, I echo in my childish treble. Surely father, this is a remarkable achievement, to manage such a time with two changes of costume?'

'It is possibly unparalleled, dear child. But stay. Your mother does not have cloven hooves as this runner does. I suspect something. Woman! Your attention for a moment, if you please. Well, upon my soul!'

'Where's she gone, father?'

'Winked out in the blink of an eye, leaving naught but a wisp of mist. But more to the point, boy, where's your real mother? Transported, I'll be bound. Ah well. Ice-cream first, and then I will look for another wife. What goes around comes around. Never forget that, my son.'

'It shall be my watchword from henceforth, father. I shall have it inscribed over my first Michelin star when I achieve it many years from now. Meanwhile, may I request a hot dog with a scoop of banana ice-cream and no mustard?'

Oliver Barton (Temple Meads)