PENNING

PERIL



APRIL 2016

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Funny Stories

EDITOR'S NOTE

When we decide on our one-word themes, we cannot know what responses will be triggered over the months between setting the theme, and the deadline for submissions. So perhaps it's indicative of the times in which we live that this theme – peril – attracted more submissions than we have had for several issues.

The plight of those who feel forced to leave their homes, travelling in hope and danger featured in many of the poems and stories we received. Jim Aitken anchors *Beachcombing* within the George Mackay Brown poem of the same name, but visits different beaches, witnessing 'real human flotsam' washed up on Greek seashores. *Rhythms and Aromas*, by the same poet, offers delicate images of a couple for whom home became Scotland, 'an Arab in Scotland and home in Scotland/ transported way beyond the madness of borders.'

It is impossible not to be shocked by *Unpolished and Black* by Vikkie-Dee Nyanga. An angry poem, it tells a story of chaotic desperation in which the narrator has no choices. 'I thought I was a 'polished' black woman/but I have been living within a system that has turned me into a criminal.' *Funny Stories*, by Donald Adamson is less direct, but every bit as discomforting. A child to whom the funny story is told

may be reassured, but the reader is not.

Border Incident by Ian Crockett describes the discovery of a deer, dying, trapped on a barbed wire fence, a country walk made horribly memorable, the animal felled by something brutal and industrial, while further down the path, a cow scratches an itch on the same line of barbed wire.

The peril in *Riviersonderend* is subtle, nearly invisible. Lynnda Wardle's short story, set in South Africa, about a return to a farm after 25 years is full of possibilities and dissonance, of images of light and shade. For the driver, the return has significance which isn't shared by the passenger.

The Toadstone Amulet by Anita John is suffused with peril and threat. Compact and squat like the amphibian at its core, the narrator promises safety, protection - but puts a price on that promise.

Our guest editor for PENning Peril was Elizabeth Reeder. She was joined by Linda Cracknell, Lindsey Fraser, Moira McPartlin and Liz Niven. Many thanks to Christina Neuwirth for her careful collation of all the submissions, and to Becca Inglis for her skills in creating this online magazine.

FEATURED KISHWAR NAHEED



We're honoured to feature in this issue Kishwar Naheed, a leading poet of her generation in Pakistan, who was one of the first Pakistani poets to write in blank verse in Urdu. Known for her brayely feminist voice and activism as well as poetry, she is credited with giving women in Pakistan an anthem: Yeh hum gunahgar auratein (translated as 'We Sinful Women'), a poem written in response to the violence meted out by police on a demonstration for women's rights in Lahore in 1983. She also wrote passionately in the wake of the attack on Malala Yousafzai. Alongside a number of Scottish writers including Ryan Van Winkle, Gerry Cambridge and Jim Carruth, she recently appeared Lahore Literary at the Festival which attracted capacity crowds despite coming close to being cancelled due to security fears.

She was born in Uttar Pradesh, India, and migrated with her family to Lahore during the Partition in 1947. Her first collection of poetry, *Lab-i-Goya*, published in 1968, won the prestigious Adamjee Prize for Literature and has been followed by many further collections as well as public work to promote women's rights and the education of girls, and positions in national organisations. She also founded the NGO Hawwa (Eve) to help women become financially independent through cottage industries and handicrafts. She was awarded the Sitara-e-Imtiaz in 2000 for her contributions to Urdu literature and was one of the 1000 women nominated world-wide for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

TRANSLATOR ASIF FARRUKHI

Asif Farrukhi is a fiction-writer, critic and translator of prose and poetry from modern and classical writers including this issue's featured poems by Kishwar Naheed, who he has described as : '... a topographer of discomforting experiences, fragile and splintered relationships and of private sorrows overshadowed or underpinned by public events'.

He lives and writes in Karachi where he was born, and is a public health physician educated at the Dow Medical College, Karachi, and Harvard University, USA. Seven collections of his short fiction and two collections of critical



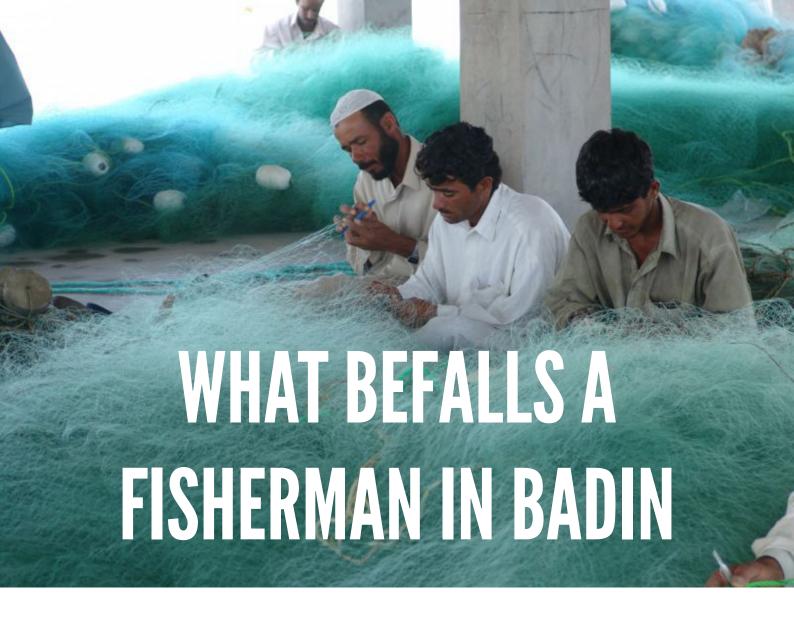
essays have been published including a collection of new critical essays on Manto and *Look At The City From Here*, an anthology of writings about Karachi, published by OUP. He is working on a book length study of Intizar Husain. He contributes regularly to the English-language press and is editor of Duniyazad, a literary journal of new writing and contemporary issues in Urdu. He is a founder member of the Karachi Literary Festival and the Dean of the School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the Habib University, Karachi.

Poems from Kishwar Naheed's latest collection entitled *Dehshat Aur Barood Main Lipti Hui Shaeri*, or *Poetry Wrapped Up in Terror and Gunpowder* translated from Urdu by Asif Farrukhi

MANKIND ON TRIAL

Somebody asked the judge, what is punishment? He replied, Life.

Somebody asked a handcuffed old woman, What is imprisonment? She replied, Obeying Orders. Somebody asked the jailer locked away inside his jail, What is the prison cell? He replied, The darkness in you. Who were the people asking such questions? Countless people. But only one woman standing up to respond, Tahira Abdullah. In view of all such questions, Tahira pronounced the verdict: The present order should be placed under immediate arrest and mankind should be free from all sentences.



Reading poetry gives them a headache as they read life and wisdom in jokes, trotters and fast moving cars. The ball of string grows bigger and bigger but they make no effort to catch the other end. Nature's fury lashes in the shape of a storm but they call it a nightmare and bury it somewhere deep. The ball of string grows even bigger. We are clutching uprooted tree trunks, swept away by the storm. Boats and fishing nets have been taken away from fishermen, fish grow old in the sea. What they say is a wall growing even bigger than the Great Wall of China. In this land where even houses of mud and grass cannot remain standing, what can the nuclear bomb do?



COMMONPLACE MIRACLES

I heard somebody calling out with love.
I followed that call.
I keep walking and the earth does not come to an end.
The calling voices
are sometimes in front of me
and sometimes behind.

Harvests ripening in the fields narrated accounts of journeys still to come. I stopped by the potter. I thought I will give shape to the face, I will form the figure at whose beck and call the earth could not come to an end. But pouring rain did not let me complete the features. Parted lips kept opening and asking me. How does one mend dreams? How does one cross rivers made out of storms? My feet were tired before reaching the threshold of answers. I go down on my knees and begin to move, I keep the wick of the lamp on the palm of my hand, I read the thirst of birds in their nests. The earth comes to an end but not my journey.



THE POISON CUP OF MOTHER'S LOVE

You look at me and become sad, a sadness which reeks of boredom. You meet me and make an effort to come back. an effort which hints of symbols of fading attractions. You sit next to me and are in doubt. a doubt with the overpowering desire to move away. Walking along with me you do not feel any pleasantness. This too is like carrying a heavy burden, the burden of continuing a relationship, the burden of having to say something, the burden of insisting on some kind of love! Thank you for carrying such burdens and for letting it be known to me that you paid its price from overseas. Why did I not insist to you that carrying your burden for nine months, I never let a mother's love become a burden for you. First I became a shack-labourer. Now earning the wages of emotions, I have turned into a tornado, a whirlwind in the desert of love. People look at it and make-up stories.

POETRY

ANITA JOHN

Anita John is a poet, short story writer and a creative writing tutor who has run Edinburgh courses for University, the RSPB and Abbotsford House (see www.anitajohn.co.uk). The Toadstone Amulet was inspired by a necklace found Walter Scott's in Sir collection of iconic objects at Abbotsford House the Scottish Borders. Anita's first book, Child's Eye, was published by Biscuit Publishing in 2013 available is from Amazon. She is a member of Scottish PEN.

VIKKI-DEE NYANGA

Vikki-Dee Nyanga lives in Edinburgh, near someplace that allows her to escape to the sea if life becomes too hectic. She currently spends most of her days in the company of her two youngest daughters, watching Peppa Pig and building Lego. Some people say that Vikki-Dee is impulsive, spontaneous and awkward but warm. She sees herself as a dreamer, an optimist with a huge heart and a good mind. She is a wonderful woman, a sister, an activist, a life explorer, a community builder, a traveller, a good food lover, an obsessive recycler, a theologian and a work in progress. Vikki-Dee also loves art, growing her own food, crafts & music.



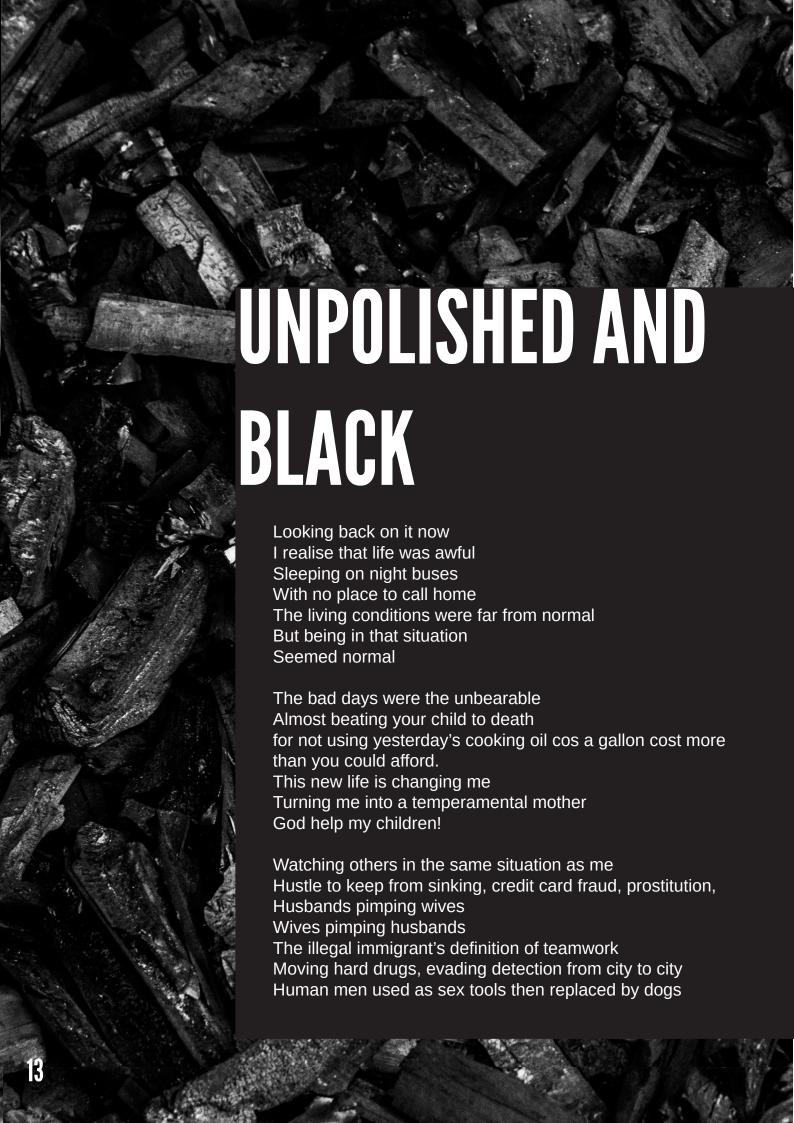
THE TOADSTONE AMULET

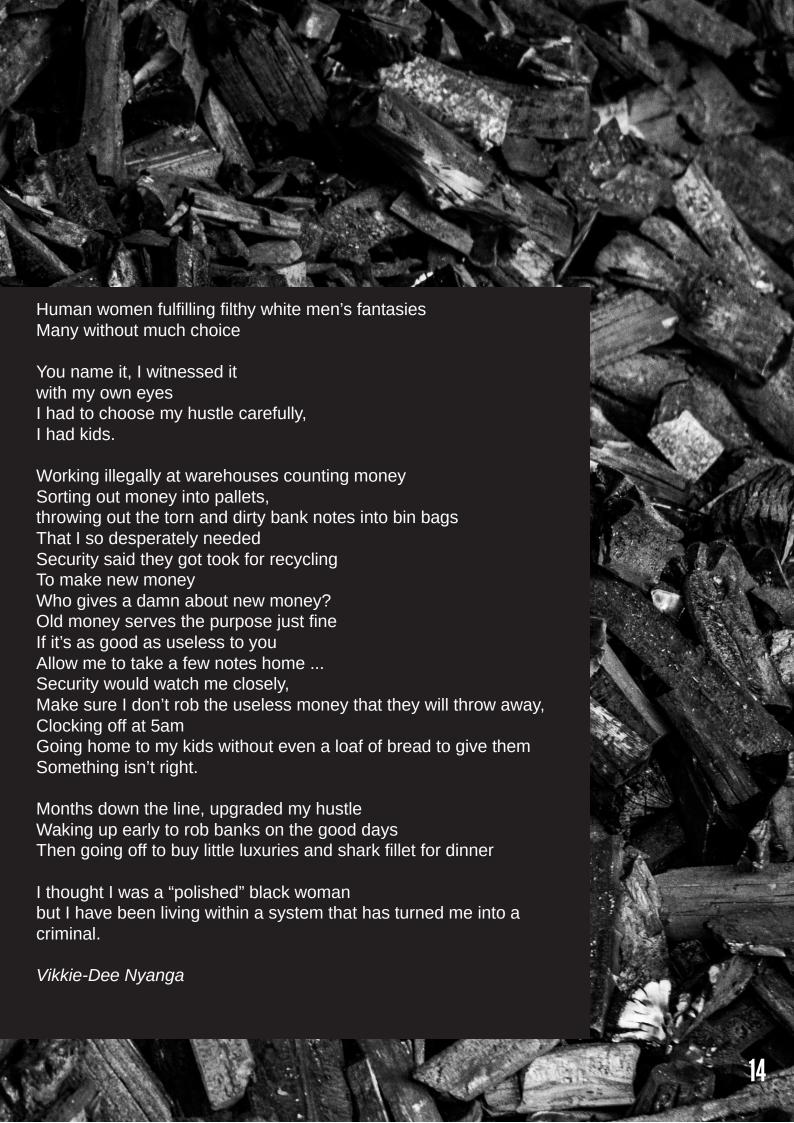
For one thousand merks you may borrow me to place around the sweet, plump neck of your new-born babe.

I will protect her from peril, for I am toad and what is toad remains toad. I will not allow misfortune to enter her cradle.

Wear me and she will not prick her finger, eat the poisoned apple, be sequestered away in the secrecy of night.

One thousand merks, you say?
Am I not worth it? For I am bufonite,
cast from the head of a living toad,
placed in ritual on the red-cloth bed.
You have your doubts?
Oh, but I will smooth your brow,
watch over your whelp while crows clamour.
Look! See how they circle overhead,
caw-caw for a change, a changeling?





Donald Adamson widely published is a Scottish poet and translator. His translations of the poet Eeva Kilpi published were Arc Publications in 2014. His latest collection. Glamourie, which has Scottish background, a appeared in 2015 (Indigo Dreams Publications). His poem 'Fause Prophets', which in 1999 won Millennium Poetry Competition. the Herald buried in a time capsule under the walls of the Scottish Poetry Library.

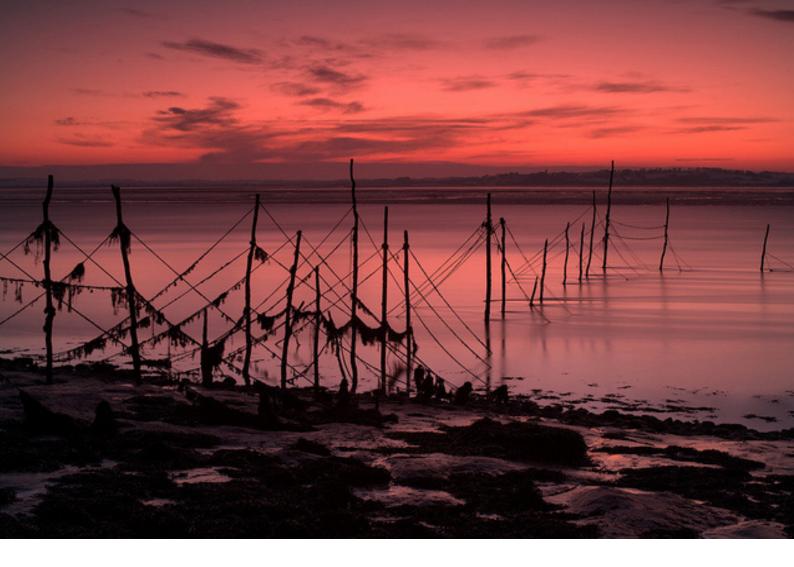
DONALD ADAMSON

Jim Aitken is a poet and dramatist who also Cultural tutors in Scottish Studies at George Edinburgh. His last play Leaving was produced by Spartaki Theatre for last year's Leith Festival and explored the Scottish Referendum. The poem Rhythms and Aromas is dedicated to Ivad Hayatleh and his late wife Lamese. Iyad is a Palestinian poet and friend of Jim. It was the late Tessa Ransford who encouraged Iyad to join Scottish Pen and translated together they co-wrote and other's poems in the collection Rug of a Thousand Colours, published by Luath Press in 2012. The poem came out as a result of a conversation between Jim and Iyad after both attended Tessa's funeral. The poem Beachcombing is dedicated to little Aylan Kurdi who died tragically in the Mediterranean in 2015.

JIM AITKEN

Ian Crockatt has published several collections of his own poetry, has been a prize winner in a number of national literary competitions, and was awarded Writer's Bursaries by the Scottish Arts Council in 2004 and 2008. Pure Contradiction, his selection of translations of the poems of Rainer Maria Rilke (Arc Publications 2012) was awarded the Society of Authors' Schlegel-Tieck prize in 2013. His translation of Old Norse skaldic poetry, Crimsoning the Eagle's Claw: The Viking Poems of Rognvaldr Kali Kollsson, Earl Orkney (Arc Publications 2014) was a Book Society Translation Recommendation.

IAN CROCKATT



Naa, ma wee lamb, naa, yir mammy wisnae screamin, she wis lauchin at the funny story the men telt her. It wis that funny she hud tae lauch and lauch till the tears cam tae her een and the men tuik her awaa for mair stories.

We're aa gaan, you and me and the neebors but no yir daddy, he hus tae byde ahin.

It'll be a lang journey traivellin throu the nicht. In the morn ye'll see the sea.

Snuggle doon, lay yir heid on ma knee and Ah'll sing tae ye.

FUNNY STORIES

RHYTHMS AND AROMAS

For Iyad and Lamees

I can see him – though I'm nowhere near him – making his way back from Pollok Country Park. Like me he has rejoiced in all the recent colours – the reds and yellows and golds, all fading shades of green as Autumn exhibits before Winter comes.

The show of colour he finds uplifting, comforting as he heads back home in the faltering light to his house in Crookston by Levern Water.

Now I think of him thinking of her, of all that they had come through together; their arrival here in the cold and the dark and their children who speak now with Glasgow voices.

I can see him, sense him as he shuts out the night listening to his Arabic music and sipping at his Arabic coffee and then reaching for his shisha.

These rhythms and aromas really do bring her back.

Sometimes tears can fill his eyes and not just for his wife but for the lands that are within him. Being a Palestinian from Syria his salty beads of prayer could flood the Clyde with all the perils he has known and all the ones he can vividly imagine sitting in his chair.

Yet he is here with us and at home with us; he is one of us, he is one of our ain folk extending us with his experience — an Arab in Scotland and a home in Scotland transported way beyond the madness of borders.

Jim Aitken

أستطيع أن أراه عائداً من منتزه بولوك الريفي على الرغم من أنني لست قريباً منه وهو مبتهج مثلي بكل الألوان الجديدة الأحمر والأصفر والذهبي، كل الظلال الخضراء المتدرجة التي يعرضها الخريف قبل حلول الشتاء.

معرض الألوان ذاك يرفع معنويّاته ويواسيه وهو يتوجّه عائداً في الضوء المتعثر إلى بيته قرب نهر ليفين في كروكستون.

أفكّر به الآن وهو يفكّر بها بكلّ الذي مرّوا به سويّاً وصولهم هنا في البرد والعتمة وأطفالهم الذين يتحدّثون الآن اللهجة الغلاسكويّة.

أستطيع أن أراه، أشعر به وهو يختم الليل مستمعاً إلى الموسيقا العربية، مرتشفاً القهوة العربية وصولاً إلى أركيلته هذه الإيقاعات وذاك العبير يُعيدانها إليه حقاً.

يمكن للدموع أن تملأ عينيه أحياناً ليس على زوجته فقط، ولكن على الأوطان التي بداخله كونه فلسطينيّاً سوريّاً، مسبحة صلاته المالحة تستطيع أن تجعل نهر كلايد يفيض بكلّ المخاطر التي عرفها

وكلّ تلك التي بإمكانه تخيّلها بوضوح وهو جالسٌ على كرسيّه.

ومع ذلك فهو الآن معنا هنا في وطننا ولحد منا، من شعبنا نفسه يغنينا بتجربته عربي في سكوتلاند ووطن في سكوتلاند

طريقة نقل وراء جنون الحدود.

يْمَر: جنم آينكن، (إلي إياد ولميس)

جيم آينكن، ترجمة: إياد حياتله

TRANSLATED BY IYAD HAYATLEH

A hind, held by a red-flooded gash six inches below its hoof, hung

head down so that heaven became her earth and earth her rockfilled sky.

She'd leapt but the top wire strand had noosed her trailing leg

in a barbed twist round the next, braking her flight and flinging her stretched length back

into the fence, leaving her body slung like a fur over a chair,

a shocked carcass. Our terrier found her too pathetically still, not worth

the worrying, and sniffed off over the road. When we freed her, gloved hands

struggling to unravel the bladed strands– she found her bleat then –

the dislocated thigh of the leg by which she'd dangled refused to stand.

We fetched Bill who fetched his 2.2 rifle, dragged her out of our sights and shot her;

he said he'd lift the corpse in his digger-bucket and bury it on his land. We walked on, hand-in-hand, aware of cows scratching their throats on dividing wire,

and, numbed, bore witness as foaming hogbacks assaulted the harbour wall.

Ian Crockatt

BORDER INCIDENT



BEACHCOMBING

1.
Mackay Brown once combed the beaches of Orkney. Once he found a boot of salty leather, throwing it back into the white foaming waves.

And once, like Hamlet before him, he brooded on a seaman's skull with sand rather than earth dripping from the base. He threw that back too.

Usually it was just seaweed strewn over the shore like mulched leaves but he would always return here to raise the profile of his place.

2.
Once we called it Mare Nostrum and it was where the real action took place. It was there, we were told, that civilisation started.

And now the Greek beachcombers would welcome salty leather boots that had danced the waves from Orkney rather than real human jetsam.

More troubling still than traffickers are the voices further in land proclaiming their Christian values by telling them to go away.

3.
The universal brotherhood
of brine understands no borders
and would crash through all razor
wire

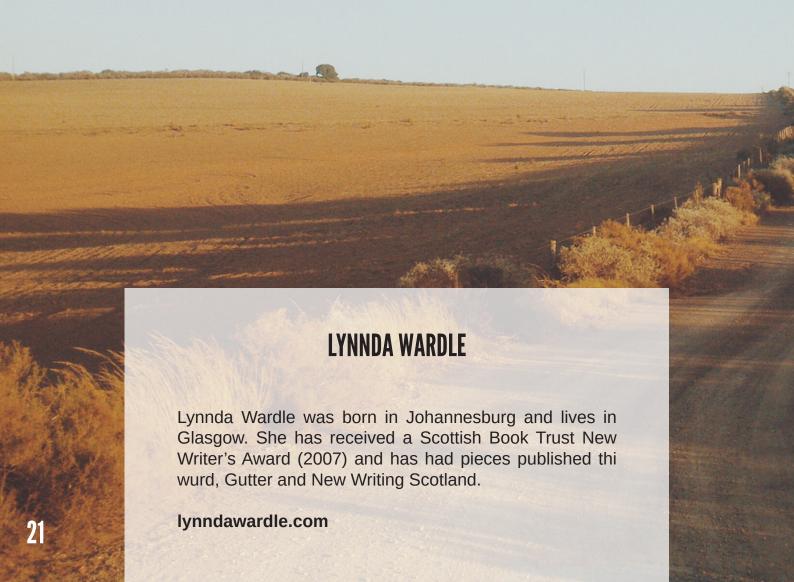
smashing down all fences and walls.

For fragile is what we all are, vulnerable our condition.
And what should flow, should surge from this is nothing less than compassion.

We are all at sea, all at sea in the same sea that soaks us all and only by us reaching out can we hope to keep our boots on.

Jim Aitken

SHORT STORIES



RIVIERSONDEREND

Lynnda Wardle

They drove for hours along a straight road. The sun baked on the car roof, and her father wound down the window to rest his elbow on the metal. She noticed how his one eye was streaked with red where the wind dried his eyeball. The hot wind brought no relief, but it was better than having the window closed. The tyres hummed on the smooth N1, towns thinning out as they left Joburg behind. Her head lurched as she dozed. As the towns grew smaller and further apart, the landscape flattened and became more khaki coloured and the sky was the whitestshadeofblueshehadhadeverseen.

After many hours of driving, they stopped at a small town for lunch and her father drove up and then back down the main street, looking for a tree that would offer shade to park the car. Just when she thought they would never stop, her father spotted what he was looking for and turned off the main road into a side street where a large jacaranda tree shaded a car park. They walked back along the main road, holding hands, to where they



had seen the hotel. She had brought her swimming costume along, rolled up in a towel in case there was a pool. The main street was deserted, everyone inside to avoid the air thick with heat and the hum of insects. Inside the hotel, they sat on the stoep near a slow fan, shaded by palms and she could hear the sound of children shrieking and splashing as they dived into the water. She drank her coke quickly, slipped out of her sandals and ran to find the pool.

It was more than twenty-five years since he had been back to Riviersonderend. The road to the farm was clear in his memory but already things along the route appeared different. This town, for instance, was smaller than he remembered and there had never been a car park. He had never been inside this particular hotel but he was certain that if he had, it too would have been different; perhaps more grand; or perhaps less so. The waiter approached and he ordered another Castle lager, two burgers and jelly and ice cream for dessert.

By the time they reached the turnoff the sun was low in the sky and she had fallen asleep with her head on the rolled up damp towel. The avenue of bluegums which had lined the driveway to the white farmhouse had been cleared. There were only two trees left standing at the entrance where the farm gate had once been. Even the farmhouse seemed smaller, the land around it now cleared and bare, no sign of the evergreen shrubs or the deep orange Cannas his mother used to plant. He drove up the long dirt track to the house and turned off the engine, listening to it tick as the car started to cool.

He climbed out of the car and left the car door open. The girl slept on. Around the side of the house the weeds were as tall as the windows and the blackjacks covered the legs of his trousers. He could not see into the house because the interior was dark and the glare of the sun on the walls so strong. He sat on the steps of the front stoep and lit a cigarette. Eventually when she woke, she walked across the hot dust and sat next to him on the step. They did not speak as she picked a small scab on her knee until she released a drop of blood.

After they drove away back up the dirt road, the red sand floated back onto blades of grass and coated their footprints on the stoep. The low sun lit the roof with a glow the colour of dust, until it sank behind the mountains, as it always did; and the house retreated, a white speck disappearing in the dark.



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