

A Place of Last Resort

A Federation of Writers Scotland Patchwork Poem for National Poetry Day 2023

Here is a fugitive looking for a place to stay,
isolated by language,
separated by experience, bound by experience,
exile, outcast and stranger in a foreign land.

Who are you, brittle warrior?
A mermaid safe on dry land,
shielded from tooth and claw of wild nature,
from summer's callous heat?
If a boat's the way, I wish you one,
lifted out o the treacherous sea into walcomin airms,
but you dived too deep, stayed down too long,
blunted by the sea's arguments.
Without more words, you were gone.

In my hand rests a book -
oh, how many tales I could tell,
etched on to bomb-shelter stone;
scrambling words, whispering trouble,
dissolved on my tongue for a while.
Now there's nothing left to say but close my eyes and pray,
search for clues, dust for fingerprints
's biodh do dhùil ri briseadh fàir'.*

We've all seen the images;
the palaver of colourful birds,
a fluttering of feeble hands,
a sinuous line of lampposts and lights,
a deflated dinghy on shingle,
smoke on the horizon,
vulture helicopters rattling overhead.

** and await the breaking dawn.*

Wintering in the harbour rests the weary ferry -
not everyone who puts to sea is a fisherman.
Hands stretch out from the sand,
seagulls screaming around them as they leave the shore.
We are sitting here in the haven inside the bay
like all the others, looking out to sea,
outlined against the pencilled mountains,
and sometimes drowning doesn't look like drowning.

I once believed that this was my domain;
a place where I could build
a gallery of love letters,
a room with sounds as safe as yours,
a place of heroes, culture, democracy.
No refuge now, even in the womb.
I gather up the shreds of former ways,
tumble into longshore drifts, lost.
Chan e an t-àite ach thusa mo thèarmann.*

Twelve months have thinned a new sky-light
in our digital Dickensian days.
Scunnert folk in sad worlds hunker doon
among the quiet debris,
fitiver is left o their brukken life,
places they knew but were unaware they loved,
not much better than where they escaped from.

When we are old we will rest in our homes,
leave our cares behind us for good.
Maintenant en ce moment l'avenir est ici,
the thunder of revolution roaring in our minds.
My mission: to find a safe haven,
steer the safer passage we sailed before,
pull you and the ghosts of our ancestors ashore.

* *It is not the place but you that is my refuge*

** *Now in this moment the future is here*

*This poem was created by taking a single
line from contributions by the following*

writers:

Anjali Suzanne Angel
Susan Barnard
Mandy Beattie
David Bleiman
Antje Bothin
Elizabeth Carey
Anna Cheung
A C Clarke
Anne Connolly
Matthew Connon
Catherine Conoboy-Reid
Janet Crawford
Kahlil Crawford
Laurie Donaldson
Anne Dunford
Catherine Eunson
Rona Fitzgerald
Rose A Fraser
Jane George
Kris Haddow
Jenifer Harley
Andy Jackson
Karen Hodgson Pryce
Beag Horn
Caroline Johnstone
Gordon J Kerr
Marie-Therese Kielty
Slava Konaval
Jane Lamb
Rob Leiper
Joan Lennon
Marcas Mac an Tuairneir
Mandy Macdonald
Beth McDonough
Karen Macfarlane
Margaret McGrath
Joe McGurk
Victoria Maciver
David McKinstry
John McMahan
Julie McNeill
Keren Macpherson
Normajeane Monroe-hutton
Richard Munro
Eleanor Ness
Lindsay Oliver
Stuart A Paterson
Maggie Rabatski
Jean Rafferty
Colin Rutherford
Chrys Salt
Roddy Scott
Martin Stepek
Marie-Therese Taylor
Sheila Templeton
Val Waldron
Stephen Watt
Elaine Webster
Damaris West
Kate Young

*Poem collated by Andy Jackson
With many thanks to A C Clarke*

Image courtesy of www.pixabay.com/illustrations/poster-migrants-refugees-7297156/