

## 2021 LORD WHISKY ANIMAL SANCTUARY COMPETITION RESULTS

The titles of the winning and listed poems and the names of the poets are below, after the report. **Congratulations to all who entered – do not be discouraged if your name is not here, the judges enjoyed far more poems than they were able to list. We hope you will enter again next year! Thank you for supporting the Sanctuary.**

### Judge's report

What an honour, and what an impossible task it was to judge the entries for this competition on the theme of Healing. A fat blue folder sat on the kitchen table for several weeks while, like a clumsy conjuror, I sifted poems between the piles labelled, Yes, No, and Possible, only to pick them up again and decide on different permutations: Probably, Unlikely, Almost-certainly. Themes began singing to me: dogs, kindness, the solace of the natural world, complexity, cooking, loss and memory. Like a bird watcher, I clocked the shapes of ballads, sonnets and sestinas and, on subsequent readings, heard the subtle subsongs beneath the regular calls.

As I finalised the long-list, I began to get to know certain poems well and feel that they had become friends. All of them fulfil Robert Frost's requirement that a poem should be 'a fresh look and a fresh listen'. As a result of reading them, the world is made slightly different, windows I didn't know existed have been opened, new connections formed and there is a sense of things well-made and satisfying.

The short list comprises poems where I felt the poets knew what they were doing with language. Subject matter and form matched, there was attention to detail, and when read aloud they sounded both natural and beautiful. There was often a turn where a new thought collided with what had gone before, like a light going on in a dark room. Some poets coined new words or phrases, some used familiar words in new ways, others delighted in patterns of sound and metre. All of them could have been in the top three.

So, given that I was choosing between oranges, bananas, blackberries and watermelon – and I love all of those – I plumped for the following.

1<sup>st</sup> Prize – The Mender – this one seduced me with its mixture of concrete imagery and sense of mystery. It takes us into that open metaphor of the garden and the wonders of creation. It describes a healing process that is not specified but in which we can find our own story. There is a subtle music and use of rhyme, alliteration and repetition. It is both transparent and opaque and I find new resonances on every reading.

2<sup>nd</sup> Prize – Casualty Dog at the Somme – the familiar horror of the battlefield in the First World War is conveyed in the rattle of syllables in the first line and then we learn that the speaker of the poem is a 'casualty dog', one of those used to find the wounded and dying, who is being coached by Bull, a more experienced dog. Such a poem is very hard to pull off without recourse to cliché, but the poet here is in total control over their material, and I found it deeply moving.

3<sup>rd</sup> Prize – doing it properly – this poem is full of precise description of a person doing things properly, beginning with lying on the floor, to releasing a mouse outside, to providing comfort and food. I love the way the poem moves between specifics and abstractions, and the sensory details that are vivid and also feel delicious on the tongue when read aloud.

Unpublished poet prize – I love the song-like quality of 'Oh Healing Well of Harbledown' and its evocation of both the leper hospital of medieval times and our current pandemic.

**Victoria Field, July 2021**

### **MAIN COMPETITION Prize-winners**

- 1<sup>st</sup> - The Mender LOUISE GREIG  
2<sup>nd</sup> - Casualty Dog at the Somme SHEILA JACOB  
3<sup>rd</sup> - Doing It Properly LUCY CRISPIN

### **Short listed**

Ewe JANE BONNYMAN  
Heavenfield MAGGIE DAVISON  
Why all dogs are kind JANE BURN  
Jossing with the Grandkids about the healing of the Melanoma Scar ROGER ELKIN  
She remembers ANNE STEWART  
Reconciled CHRISSIE DREIER  
Underneath your heart KATHERINE PIERPOINT

### **Long listed**

Creature Comforts KERRI SIMPSON  
His Art of Restoration SARAH LEAVESLEY  
Grave gifts A C CLARKE  
Healing Hands JOYCE WALKER  
Simon GIACOMINA LAURA SHERIDAN  
Rescue-Donkey sonnet JOHN GALLAS  
A Hankering for Dog ANNE STEWART  
Only To See Them MICHAEL SWAN  
Whole SARAH TAIT  
Air Rescue CHRISTOPHER JAMES  
Dog and Salmon KATHY FINNEY  
Midwinter Morning – Retreat Centre ANNE BALLARD  
Allotment DONALD ADAMSON  
At the Mobile MRI Unit CHARLOTTE MURRAY

### **UNPUBLISHED POET PRIZE – judged by Victoria Field**

Oh Healing Well of Harbledown SUE BAKER

## **RESCUE CATEGORY – judged by Margaret Todd, founder of the Sanctuary**

### **1st place: The Ballad of Best Friends PHILLY STOCK**

There is something comforting about older animals; they have seen and learnt so much about life and often experienced sorrow and yet they still have so much love to give. Although we know their time with us is limited, it makes it all the more precious and the author of this poem experienced the very special relationship and the joy of sharing the love between them.

### **Shortlisted: Song Thrushes, gathering nests GLEN WILSON**

The wonder of nature and how the beauty of birds and their song give so much free pleasure to our lives. We have many orphaned or injured birds brought to us during the summer months. Some, sadly, don't make it but others make amazing recoveries and when we are able to release them and wish them well, it makes it all worthwhile.

### **Shortlisted: A Second Chance JADE WOODS**

A poem which says it all about two hearts becoming joined together and travelling along life's journey, sharing that special kind of love. I dread to think how many 'pitter-patters' there will be when I knock on Heavens' door!

### **Shortlisted: Healing the Wounds TIM CONSTABLE**

This poem reminds me of several bitches we have had in this year having been abandoned after having many litters of puppies, all of them loving dogs who have been treated so badly and yet are still ready to love and trust humans again.

### **Shortlisted: Paw Prints on My Heart SANDRA REED**

A poem which says so much about our relationship with animals of all kinds; the companionship, trust, comfort and love they give us which we know we can depend on and will never change. Although they break our hearts when they have to leave us, part of them stays with us forever.

It has been a very hard decision to choose the winners and all the poems tug at the heart-strings. Perhaps the ones I have chosen have been because they had a special meaning to me. Thank you so much for all your entries and for supporting the charity.

We would like to say a very big thank you to Victoria Field for all her time and enthusiasm in judging all these wonderful poems, all written with so much feeling. We would also like to thank Derek Sellen, another well-known and respected poet, for organising the competition. Finally, thanks go to everyone who entered poems for consideration and helped to raise vital funds for the sanctuary.

**Margaret Todd, July 2021**

## **1<sup>st</sup> Place**

### **The Mender**

The mender lays out his mending things;  
A jug of red.  
A needle and a spool of white thread.  
A swan's wings.  
A glass jar of leaves.

He stitches long loops of love over and over  
under the milk-sleepy light.  
The little swan waits.  
*Was it the storm?* I ask her.

I follow the mender into the garden.  
He is pouring red into the roses.  
They are lifting their startled faces.  
They think they are dreaming.

Next come the trees.  
He is a slow and careful mender.  
Not a single leaf is missed.  
Now, everything is back in its place.  
The trees lean greenly. The roses bloom.  
The swan is in the sky.  
They did not die.

The mending is done.  
But, what of the memory of the storm?  
The mender looks up.  
*They have chosen to remember the sun.*

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **Casualty Dog At The Somme**

The guns are silent and he's slipping.  
*Takes everyone different,*  
Bull explained after my first death,  
*I've watched 'em bawl like babbies*  
*for their mums. Others stare past you,*  
*like they see something you don't.*

This poor blighter's a khaki scarecrow  
splayed on the ground, oblivious  
to my backpack of bandages and tape.  
He opens his eyes, turns his head.  
*Gem, lovely girl! Been out ratting?*  
I'm not Gem but I've learned to speak

the language of the dying. I slobber  
his face and he ruffles my curly fur  
until his arms droop. I lean my front paws  
on his chest, ledge my chin  
on the run of torn wool. Keep him warm,  
hold steady, breathe together, in/out.

I catch whiffs of muddy blood, can't  
look at the mush that used to be his leg.  
I cowered at wounds in the beginning.  
*There's a war to fight* he grumphed  
*and we're good company for the boys.*

Later, I tell Bull how I rode part way  
with my lad on the stretcher. Bull sweats  
in the rainfall. Sarge plumps him on his lap  
croons *It's A Long Way To Tipperary*  
and Bull snores. Sarge and me stretch out  
for some kip before the guns rumble again.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Place** **doing it properly**

There's a knack to it, the expert's trick:  
being at ease, half on side half on back,  
the arm tucked round cunningly  
and the head right down for a careful look  
under the floorboards or up into the greasy mysteries  
of a car. There might be a truckle trolley,  
blue overalls, some rags; a wrench, the grubby tub  
of Swarfega. It's about taking the time to be there:  
about patience, and doing things properly.

And your long muscles have this knack:  
easy, there on the living-room floor,  
pyjama-ed still, with Stan Laurel hair  
and your torch clamped between your teeth,  
you peer under the piano at the field mouse  
whose fright-bright eyes shine in the dusty dark.  
You have a system of rulers, books,  
a humane trap; you work to catch that tiny life-  
release it, scrabbling and scampering,  
into the rain-misty, shrubby back lane.

Watching this, I'm hollowed  
by how grace translates your own damage  
into the care you take with other fragile things.  
Those last chance 10p plants you soak and coax;  
the leggy voilas trimmed and glowing in the jar;  
me, beyond-words weeping;  
how you stroke my hair and then  
when I am spent and tearless  
bring me some fragrant steaming bowl  
of veg meticulously chopped, noodles slippy with soy,  
sparkling with chilli and ginger;  
and how the blackness empties from me for a time  
as I sup, as I slowly sup.

**Unpublished Poet**  
**Oh Healing-Well of Harbledown**

Oh Healing-Well of Harbledown  
Sores bedevil me foot to crown  
Leper now is what they say  
O Healing-Well of Harbledown

They say that pilgrims pass this way  
Resting night and travelling day  
Setting star towards the tomb  
Shirted hair and bare of foot they

Tread the last miles to martyr's doom  
Woodsmoke rising in upright plume  
As for me to here I'm bound  
No sweeping fate with new made broom

Travellers approach within the sound  
Of begging tongues upon this mound  
Where sanctuary is given to contain  
No touch policy coins on the ground

Some not flat roll down the lane  
Scrabble for those few that remain  
Oh Healing-Well of Harbledown  
Into me your waters drain

Spring well pour me a watered gown  
Healing mantle foot to crown  
Give me thy strength the healing balm  
Oh Healing-Well of Harbledown

Wash my soul with waters calm  
Peace is all I need as charm  
To hang around my clappered bell  
So to do none other harm

Give me a mask so none can tell  
If I am plagued or indeed quite well  
Oh Healing-Well of Harbledown  
Wash away this living hell

Paint me a rainbow base to crown  
As my bones into earth go down  
My spirit freed like thistledown  
By the Healing-Well of Harbledown

**Rescue Category**  
**The Ballad of Best Friends**

I used to say she was my sidekick,  
She would have said I was hers.  
A small distinction,  
But an important one.

We knew at our meeting  
Our time would be short.  
As if we met at a station  
My journey only beginning,  
And she on her way home.

Not healing, but caring –  
Hospice is the word.  
Tiptoeing around the eggshells of heartbreak  
Bound to crack sooner,  
Not later.

It's funny to think back  
On the pain,  
And the grief,  
For that is not what I remember.  
I remember the joy.

So much life in her small frame  
Like a painting that has outgrown its canvas,  
And coloured the gallery walls.  
You could not contain her spirit -why would you try?

Knowing what I do now,  
Knowing the end, and the hurt ending brings,  
Without hesitation, without even a blink.  
I'd love that little dog again.