

A Shade Disconcerting

By Julian Scutts

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ADIEU, MY FRIEND

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Shall we ever meet again

at the crossroads of the mind?

Shall we ever meet again

in the fragrant fields of thyme,

though memories fade and flowers must wilt

and every heart must fail?

Shall we ever meet again

though none may tell us where?

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What once was good is ever good,

and faithful, true and fair.

This thought assures us we shall meet

and tames my dark despair.

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CONTAGION

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It fell upon a winter's night

as we sailed the southern sea.

We three saw a doleful thing

that ever harrows me.

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Dirk held vigil high above,
Will's task the helm to steer.
I did duty on top deck,
when it did first appear.

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A spot, it seemed, of ruddy light,
and then a ship on fire
before a ghastly sight appeared
and slowly did retire.

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We saw her crew of sallow men,
their limbs of leaden hue.
They paid us not the slightest heed.
Oh, how that night I rue!

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When April came, Will died o' plague
Dirk fell and broke his skull.
No surgeon's skill could save his life.
We buried 'em off Hull.

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I live on, if that I do,
Let this last word be said:
More kindred than with living kind
Feel I for the blessed dead.

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WHERE DOCTORS FEAR TO TREAD

What can match the sheer perfection
of executions by injection?
Every oath that`s ever been
obliges men but no machine.
There's nothing personal in a bleep
uniting brothers Death and Sleep.
From vacant eyes I seem to heed
words inaudible that plead:
"Burn me, hang me from a tree,
take everything save dignity."
No valediction can they log
when you're put down like a suffering dog.

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SORRY MILTON

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When I consider my most likely end
In this the lap of what some folk call "wealth",
I deem it best for heart and soul and health
To hence depart and foreign ways to wend.

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But if cut down by some most dire event,
I deathward wander, blinded or insane,
What had I then that I might call a gain,
And should I then my errant days repent?

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No not for me the slow and graceless death
Of some mad cow, some rabid froth-mouthed hound,
But let me rather, though a captive bound,
'mid cannibals expend my final breath.

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Or with a maid nut-brown and lithe in arm,
And with an arrow sticking in my chest,
Let me, content and grateful, to my rest
Return, and sing my sweetest pilgrim's psalm.

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IN ENGLANDâ€™S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND

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Lambs and cattle burning bright
on infernal pyres of night,
what offense is there to blame
for your consignment to the flame?
What the virus, what the germ,
what the poison, what the worm
vies with the ruthless industry
with which in England`s pleasant land
war is waged on cow and lamb
by what fearful ministry?

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SPRING-HEELED JACK

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Spring-Heeled Jack was a very odd chap,
And a very odd chap was he.

His eyes glowed like a pyre,
He wore batmanâ€™s attire.
He was frightful not least
Because from the mouth of this beast
Spewed forth a tongue of blue fire.

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Spring-Heeled Jack had a very strange knack,
And a very strange knack had he.
By way of a spoof
He jumped roof to roof,
And a ten-foot wall
Presented no trouble at all
To this Jack of the cloven hoof.

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Spring-heeled Jack had a very tough mack,
And a very tough mack had he.
The soldiers might fire
But unscathed heâ€™d retire.
He sure was no pullet,
Distaining each bullet,
And mocking the militaryâ€™s ire.

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Spring-Heeled Jack had a very sad lack,
And a very sad lack had he.
With a talent like his
He could have been king of show biz
And regarding high jumps
Jack would have been trumps.
What a deplorable waste of his whizz!

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Spring-Heeled Jack had a very long whack,

And a very long whack had he.

Despite many a try

No catcher came nigh,

So through Victoriaâ€™s long age

It was Jack who held stage.

Though now, it appears, heâ€™s more shy.

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THE USUAL LOAD OF ROT

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No one seemed to take much note - at first.

Old-times on park benches passed a comment or two.

Somebody wrote a letter to the local rag,

but no one - who mattered, that is -

really seemed to mind.

Of course, you will always have

your belly-achers and woolly romantics

with nothing better to do than whine

about the way things are going.

the loss of bird-life, the silenced dawn chorus,

the vanishing English hedgerow,

you know the sort of thing.

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The leaves began falling long before autumn.

"Funny," they said. "That's one for the book."

This was all very interesting for botanists,

environmentalists, chemists and the like.

Such words as "pollution", "soil erosion"

and "deprivation" were bandied about,
but no one was much the wiser, though
all the experts agreed on one thing:
"Chlorophyll is the basis of all life,"
which was interesting - but nothing like
as interesting as the favourite for Ascot,
the football results, the top of the pops,
the late-night thriller of the stocks index.

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All that changed.

Foresters and timber merchants became concerned
about the decaying cores of the trees.

The establishment became concerned too

(not so much about the fate of the trees

as such as about the effect the scarcity of wood
was having on the paper and furniture industries,
and inflation.)

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Then the doom-watchers caught the scent,
and there was talk of a possible ecological collapse.

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Then Kew Gardens, Epping Forest, Central Park,
the Everglades and the Bois de Boulogne
went the way of all wood.

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A tramp known locally as 'Nat the Nut'
was found jibbering away in the village cemetery.
Before being bundled away in an ambulance,
he was heard to say:

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"With these very ears I 'eard 'em groan

and 'ere's what one of 'em said:

'Tonight we are dyin', yew and I.

The morrow sees us dead.'

And the willows wept in the valleys,

and the trees on the hills pine away."

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When the harvest failed

the church-bells tolled

for a woe no man could gainsay,

for none doubted the

the trees were lost

or held it was only they.