

## Round Robin

Dear Distant Friends,

Surprisingly we've still got your addresses,

So here's a list of all our latest triumphs and successes.

This year we've been as busy as a family of beavers

(Though they're just furry animals, while we are high achievers).

We've bought a big new house (my wife corrects me - it's a mansion).

Emily's verses won a prize for prosody and scansion.

Timothy got his partnership and Claire her PhD

Which all reflects extremely well on Dorothy and me.

Our trips abroad (for which we didn't even have to save)

Prove that we're cosmopolitan, cultured and fit and brave:

Kilimanjaro, Venice, San Francisco and Belize.

(Sorry if you can only dream of holidays like these!)

We're thinking of you, humble friends, in terrace/semi/hovel.

We'll be in touch this time next year, but only if you grovel

And say you wish that you were us so much it makes you sick.

Happy New Year to all of you!

Love, Dorothy and Mick

SOPHIE HANNATT

## Christmas Circulars

This is the season when the myth-makers play Holy Families - their filtered lives appropriately merging with the stream of set Nativities, Madonnas, doves.

'Robert has been promoted yet again!  
We're all extremely proud of him, although it means he has to travel quite a lot.  
Sam's football-mad, but passed Grade 5 oboe.

Jean took an evening class, Renaissance art - meals in the oven, but we were amazed at all she knew on our super stay in Rome.  
Beth triumphed in GCSE - six As!

And from the emigrés, 'We came in June... appalled at how run-down England's become - no really open space...how did we stand the weather all those years we lived in Brum?

We have a lovely place near Armidale.  
Kate is the tennis champion of her school.  
You wouldn't know us, we're so brown - think of us all celebrating Christmas round the pool'

They say, between the lines where they regret there isn't time to write to each of us,  
*Our life is an accomplishment, a pearl whose perfect shape and sheen deserve applause.*

*It's hard, of course. But when we see our lives reflected here, we're almost led to think that that's reality. So though poor Jean's on Prozac for her nerves, and Robert drinks,*

*and though the children quarrel constantly and Kate won't eat, and sometimes wets the bed, and though we often seem to feel the draught knife through well-fitting doors - it can't be said.*

CAROLE SATYAMONT

Albatross  
 Begins his flight  
 Cruising high  
 Day and night  
 Eventually he  
 Finds his pace  
 Gaining speed  
 He flies with grace  
 I hear him now  
 Just out of sight  
 King of the skies  
 Lord of the night  
 Master of the Universe  
 No fear, seldom attacked  
 Only when drifting he's  
 Prey of shark in fact  
 Questions are asked  
 Regarding his past  
 Squid-eater with  
 Twelve foot wing span  
 Unlikely mythology  
 Various rumours of  
 When... (very  
 eXciting tale)  
 Yes - he was hanging  
 Zestless on the Ancient Mariner



The new day slaps me  
 Feels like a musty flannel  
 I crawl into it

The red-eyed fuel gauge  
 Winks on-off spitefully again  
 Limited cruising

Tyres crunching gravel  
 In the vaporous morning air  
 Birds sing tunelessly

Porridge or boiled eggs.  
 Tackle the slopes of the stairs  
 Descend to the chair

Back again later  
 Smile fastened firmly in place  
 Climb up now - bedtime

1939 - 1945

Rabbit-shaped shrapnel  
In my dad's cold hand: I note  
Skin and bomb are mauve.

On the map black and  
White arrows lock like antlers:  
Monty v. Rommel.

And at Stalingrad  
A goitre forms, shrinks daily:  
I'm numbed by snow-deaths.

Latin lessons, I'm  
Fulvius against Goths; play-  
Ground, I dogfight Huns.

Steamed up, sweat in my  
Eyes, the gas mask<sup>31</sup> flaps and farts  
Like a bladder fish.

mask

From bedroom darkness  
The aurora at the docks.  
Is Hitler Guy Fawkes?

At the wire boys Sieg  
Heil, achtung. The inmates stare:  
Italians all.

In the B.O.P.  
Maxim gun fights assegai,  
But I dream Stukas.

Terrors of sleeping  
Under the stairs: mice, sirens,  
Hearing Poe's black cat.

Best about shelters:  
My mother's scotch broth and plaid  
Lapping<sup>we</sup> in warmth.  
h

"Roll out the barrel!"  
"There'll always be an England!"  
Nice Alvar Liddell.

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
Whatever I see I swallow immediately  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.  
I am not cruel, only truthful—  
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long  
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

## Happiness Blake Morrison

"... but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain"

— Thomas Hardy

Cloudless skies, old roses coming into flower,  
a breeze flicking through *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Toasted granary bread with damson jam,  
a pair of goldfinches on the bird-feeder.

The whiff of fennel and rosemary,  
the farmer's quad bike leaving the field.

Two deckchairs in the shade of a weeping birch.  
Everyone you love still alive, last time you heard.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,  
Searching my reaches for what she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.  
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.  
I am important to her. She comes and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises towards her day after day, like a terrible fish.

Sylvia Plath

## CASTAWAY

He grabbed me round my slender neck,  
I could not shout or scream,  
He carried me into his room  
Where we could not be seen;  
He tore away my flimsy wrap  
And gazed upon my form—  
I was so cold and still and damp,  
While he was wet and warm.  
His feverish mouth he pressed to mine—  
I let him have his way—  
He drained me of my very self,  
I could not say him nay.  
He made me what I am. Alas!  
That's why you find me here . . .  
A broken vessel—broken glass—

• • • • •

That once held Bottled Beer.