

Day 1

*Bristol*

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February 1842

*Wa-Set*

2 (Mekhir). Peret. III. 6 Thutmose I

A boat went past.

It glided by, atop the river.

It took advice from the current and the breeze and compromised a little in the sunlight.

A bird alit along – allegorically – the ripples of its wake, preening with a purpose, picking with its beak, indifferent to the counsel of the elements.

The New Cut – man-made meander – split the south of the city from its core, beginning to show again its brown, sloped banks, the water falling from its peak of fifteen metres. The tide taken from the weir to the basin, the natural course of the river lay retired. Level and still it stayed, keeping England's industry afloat.

Celt, Dane, and Norman walked as one along the tidal stretch. Irish eyes, composite tongue, Norse beard kept back by razor – Albion blood's an isle within the world a-spanning ocean. Grey as the sky, the young man's cap kept clean his brow and forehead, as the dust of dead, time-distant plants made dark his face and hands.

A dock worker of the late revolution, somewhen between the slave trade and the Blitz, he was born before the winter flew in the year of 1817.

He met the city in his fourteenth year, walking into madness on the marsh. From Caegin's settled meadow to the un-housed south-east hills, he took the Roman road through Brislington, stopping in the agri-fields at times to eat 'n lie 'n linger.

Black smoke, deep orange flame: he skirted a riot's edge, the starlight strong with all its fire, finding his way along the cut he came to know, sleeping by a woodpile in a shipyard.

Standing in that shipyard near the tipping point to afternoon, four years on he felt the harbour home.

Staggered stacks of wooden planks, grain playing out across each end, did mediate between the links of iron and the coiled rope. Palpably weighing down upon the stone that's cracked with green of moss and muddy craters, the material he navigated.

Rubbed-brick reliefs abound around wrought-iron brought to build – in sheets; in poles; in load-bearing columns, fixtures, posts – a frame to tent material 'n heaps of coal 'n barrels from the dampening the rain would bring, fleeing from the clouds.

He ofttimes took to wand'ring where he knew nobody'd be (until the dawn broke for th'following day and razed to blue the night-time).

The wooden sleepers  
and the tracks:  
a stream so gilt with lily pads.

The sleeping cranes:  
the peaceful willows  
wand'ers sit beside.

The rows of storehouse  
sheds: a rockface  
painted o'er with vines.

The peace of  
solitude in  
human nature.

One black and beaten boot found footing on the stony edge, while th'other ventured further, finding perch atop the train track. Moving not, the gravel was yet buffeted by a low wind-stream that crashed against flared denim in its passage.

That wind-stream rose and split and fell and coursed past lettered-sheds, lifting up, by one called M, three leaves who'd outlived autumn.

Were he working, left he'd head to the dry dock and its site of grand construction where he'd, among many, bring to life the steam ship.

"To the steam ship *Gert Biggun!*"

"And ta th'tiny man with the biggest plans!"

*\*cheers and raised arms\**

"Wait!"

*\*suspended drinks\**

"And to us – to those here, no longer here, and those who won't be here by the time it's launched to water."

*\*sound suspended\**

"We couldn't of ever conceived of it, but he damn sure couldn't of built it!"

*\*movement, cheer, and drinking\**

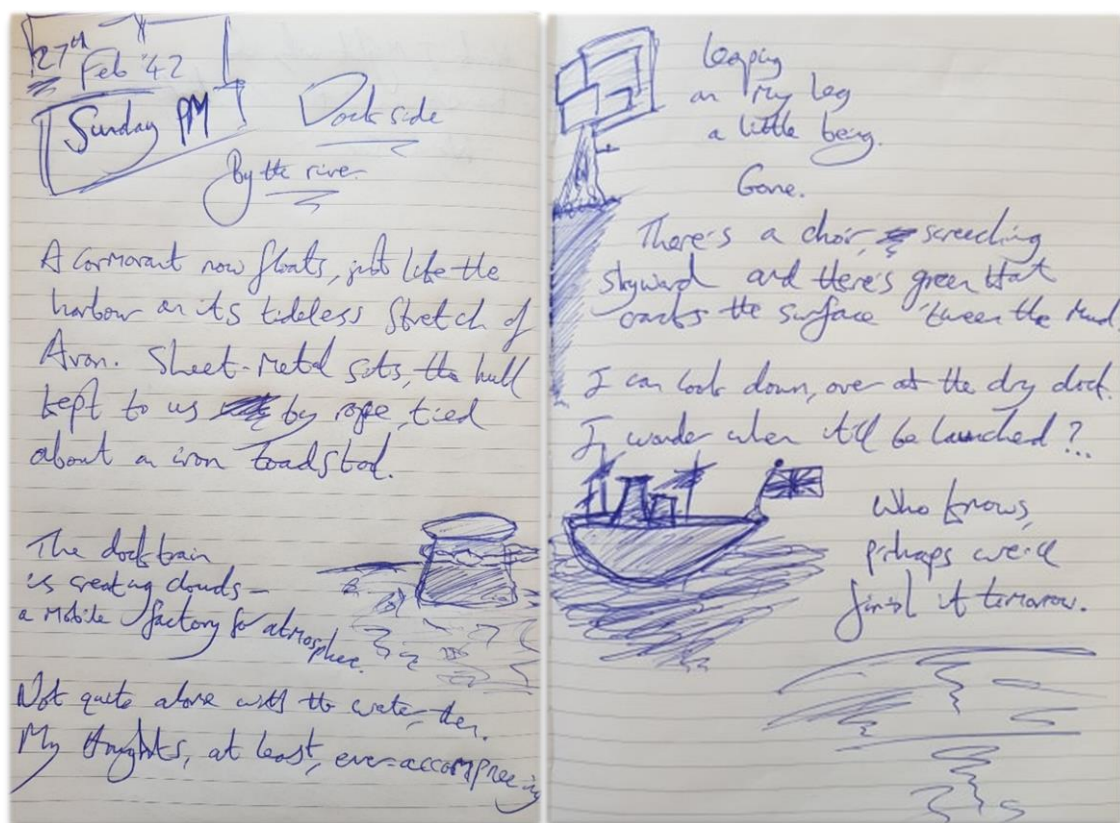
Thought-fed smile; memory-moved muscle.

He rolled up t'the elbow the loose shirt sleeves, too short to place the cuffs over the wrist joint, and folded them again a little further, little tighter in an attempt to keep them rolled a little longer.

The colour of his shirt had been determined by the reader. He let it be and wore it all the same.

On a single shoulder slung, his creased, torn, and cloth-made bag contained all the essentials: a pad of blank/of ink-filled paper, and a fountain pen filled blue. To wash away the morning's coal he splashed on stagnant water, collected on a barrel top throughout the rainsome weekend.

Drying in the cold, cold air, the price of the clean was biting. He sat down on the stony edge, both boots planted on a sleeper, and put track-side the cloth-made bag and took out glyphed-papyrus.



Notebook re-stored, he stood and paced across the tracks and rightward, stopping at a metal frame that perched edgeside and rested – its chain retracted, its head bowed, its skeleton stressless. He placed himself between it and the water and the city, sitting down to click his right-hand wrist.

He drew up against the metal frame, legs out over the edge – suspended in a stretch, then dropped to hang there, 'bove the water.

Inhaling gradually, his chest he filled with wintry afternoon, pressing back into the crane that dried its wings and watched her, with her cheeks puffed out, marking in the sand the seconds that she held her breath, until she startled it by breaking.

PUHHHHHHH

HHAAAAHH

PRPRPRPRPRRRPRPPUUHHH

“Yes!”

Rising – only to a crouch – she placed and pressed her finger to the sand off to the side and circled 'round her record marks. The crane – its legs amongst the reeds – searched for something else to look at, as, less red-faced and proudly chirping, the girl squat-walked about.

The re-born Ra – resplendent – rode the barge that took the solar disc, heading toward the shore of night and the passage of the underworld.

Pushing the world away below her, she stood and showed her features to the sky; below, the sky saw, coming closer, eyes as green as the inundated plains. Her skin? The sand, yet darker still. Her hair? As rope that runs through coal. Matted, dishevelled, it moved a little as she shook her head.

“Not much time.”

Her ragged top with its patterned hem had a hood only half attached; on either side of a sewn line of symmetry, two abstract trees grew, painted. A skirt (of sorts), bare legs and feet: with hands on hips she stood between the city and the river Nile. Tributes of white and blue lay silt at the feet of Egypt, issued forth from the sky and the dark dwelling place no-one knows.

Incontemplatable, mysteriously manifest, and tireless.

The bird which watched still dried its wings, feet amongst the reeds.

She met the city when she met the world – unaware that one was not, in fact, the other. A child of few years when the morning and the evening star merged in the current ruler in the Great House, she grew with the expansion of the Karnak Temple, sprouting with the columns of the Hall.

To her back the buildings ebbed and flowed: thin strips, broad clusters, 'circling lakes of muddy, marshy vegetation. Blocks of diff'ring dimensions – stepped, walled, and windowed – made a mud-brick map of workshops, chapels, warehouses, shrines, and homes for rich and poor. West of the alleyway adorned with sphinxes – hundreds of them either side – the river ran *lunu*, *Iteru* as the girl walked to the pathway from the bank.

Horus hovered high and scanned the North African nation – nephew to the chaos keeping order. Ibis flocked between the ungouged eye and the girl leaving her footprints in the dirt.

Inventing lazurite melodies for to sing semi-precious song, she – solitary – skipped and walked; wandered, wondered, was.

Far from lonely, alone she went on as she'd been all day. Even in the morning, 'mongst the movements of the population, 'midst the structures 'bout the alleyway of sphinxes, though interspersed and interacting she passed through somehow sep'rate – always somehow sep'rate... – in the city – of the city – with the water 'round.

Left over from the moving of some stone or dense brick made of mud, there lay, in front of her, a stretch of smoothed-o'er wooden logs; left between them all a stride's worth (by her legs) of empty

space. Urged on innately, no hesitation: she stepped upon the first, found her footing, created balance, and proceeded to keep up her songs as she walked along, eve-dreaming.

The sun's sole edge now comes to meet th'horizon and the underworld.

"Ooop!" she sounds as she sees the setting.

The girl sped along the remaining logs, reached the last, jumped, and ran her fastest.

The taste of sand-grains and the bits of dirt in every bite of the bread above the mouths of workers in repose to soon be washed away with beer; shaved heads, un-donned're the wigs of status – the labourers who work th'expansion of the Karnak Temple take the evening as their own.

Killed cattle flesh, basketed fish, tired tendons, fissured fibres: the un-yoked phyle members toast their red graffiti markings.

"Ne'er to be found!"

"But there we are, eternal on the temple!"

"Red 'glyphs for the gods to read!"

"To *The Oxen Of Thutmose Gang!*"

Vessels raised to the Ra-soaked dusk; beer emptied, all in tandem.

The cheer? It gently lulls but keeps, mirroring the sunset.

"We should've been *The Hands Of Thutmose...*"

"Gods, man – it's too late! Leave it."

"It flows better!"

"Yeah, but it makes us sound like the king's assassins."

"Or his personal masturbators."

Snorts of alcohol and laughter, like hippos on the Nile, and the men yet keep the evening as their own.

"Fine... better the gods not misinterpret than the phrase sing syllabic'ly."

A breeze patchworked with heat and cool ran through, ran by, ran over. The feathered headdress of the wand'ring Shu passed between earth and sky.

"Here she is."

"Who?"

"That kid."

"The girl."

"Oh, her. She might miss it."

"Nah, there's time. But not if you stop here first!"

Skidding to a halt a heartbeat away from leaping the end of the wall to run atop another, she, breathing hard, put hands on hips, furrowed brow, looked to them and panted:

"**HHUUUUUUHHHH**... what?"

"I was saying:" (one of the oxen grinned) "you won't miss it, so long as you don't stop here."

Narrowing her eyes, she showed her tongue before back-tracking for to run and jump. As she did so, another of the reposed men threw to her – "Here!" – a chunk of bread, which she placed between her teeth, and signalled thanks.

She made the leap to the wall that led to the ascending end of her shortcut-laden journey, holding, as she headed on, the gritted bread between her gritted teeth.

Up she clambered, up and to  
the little gap her little frame  
would muscle-mem'ry through.  
Courtyard-side, she  
kept on through the scene.

Finishing the food that she'd been gifted by the workers, a smattering of groups betrayed a disintegrating crowd. Flies flicked by gesticulating tails from off the hind-side hides of actual oxen – she stepped nearly in shit as she skipped about behind them, weaving through the woven basket reeds.

“You missed it, child. It finished early.”

Acknowledging the aging voice with eyebrows shaped forsaken, she meandered over slabs of stone laid close 'til she saw Karnak – its complex under construction for the guardian of Ma'at.

She had slowed.

The risen moon – resplendent – filled the temple.

She took it on, she took it in, standing still before pathfinding light: the reflection of the sun god shined a crescent.

Her nostrils were inundated with fresh, embracing air e'en as she grimaced at the tight'ning spasm, low across her belly. Wriggling as a fading throb passed o'er her lower back, she raised an eyebrow at the mirrored sun, trav'ling 'cross the night.