

Waving from (t)here

Poetry created
between residents
of London and
Coventry, in
response to the
pandemic

We have been living through strange times.

Often things make most sense when we are able to be in each other's company. But life with the virus has kept us apart.

We have sometimes felt lost for words.

The teams at Entelechy Arts and Coventry City of Culture invited two poets, Joelle Taylor and Remi Graves, to have conversations with older people living in Coventry and south London. People living in care homes and people who are living home alone.

Down phone lines and with exchanges on postcards new collections of words began to appear and from them Joelle and Remi have created two beautiful poems.

They speak of the past and present, both. They speak of love and hope.

Entelechy Arts
Coventry City of Culture
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Waving from (t)here

Her voice brightens through the phone
sending light to my ear, as she remembers

the whale, how its tail fluke emerged
out of the endless South Pacific, the way

memories hook us by the cheek - pulling
our full bodied weight to somewhere far away

but vivid. I can almost hear the splash echo
whilst we lament having to wrap our arms

around ourselves or the voices of the ones we love,
when they can't come close. Anne hugs her knees

to her chest, dive bombs into Lough Owel,
a teenager giving herself to the open water,

the lake braces its liquid body for the weight
of children who know how to jump free

warmed by the crisp slap of cold on their
bodies and the insulating laughter it brings,

now weekly phone calls to a sister in Ireland
teach how to find warmth in words shared

at a distance, how to make home out of a voice.
Who knew a hug could be heard?

Maggie still hears the ripe fruit falling
from the pear tree years and miles away

in St Elizabeth where the land needs no fertilizer,
so full is it of god's grace. Still tastes

the mannish water, still sees the goats
climbing the hill and lawd she nearly run away

with Esme at 16 - almost, but she fell
asleep for three days and three nights, woke up

in the church and never left, wrapped
a life around the bible and found strength

even in this cold new place, though she miss plenty,
plenty, plenty people her heart stays open,

prays for her children and her children's children.
Masks in the car, masks in the garden, but never

a mask on the heart, we try to prise ours open
and keep them that way, like the whiterose

in Julia's garden that flowered despite
the first frost and all through winter -

nature doesn't know how to break promises
or move against itself, the body infallible

does its best and we are learning daily
from the quiet ways the unspeaking world

tells us never to give up. So we wrap our minds
around what we'd like to keep close. Bert holds

his past in laughs, the 273 bus he drove
from Lewisham Tesco to Grove Park.

The front doors he'd leave open to nip out
for a paper, how no one dodged the fare,

his throat cracks with tears as his memory
unwraps the retirement gifts from the girls at the back

of the bus: champagne and chocolates, weaving
care together to fill a man's heart full as the buses

he manned. Ray tells me how he met his wife
at Welling Hall – now a big Tesco's - how they wrapped

themselves around each other, dancing in sickness
and in health for 62 years. His daughter keeps bees,

stewards the humble things that are keeping us fed,
carrying our future on the backs of their legs,

pulling pollen from plant to plant, knowing
the flowers can't bare fruit without one and other,

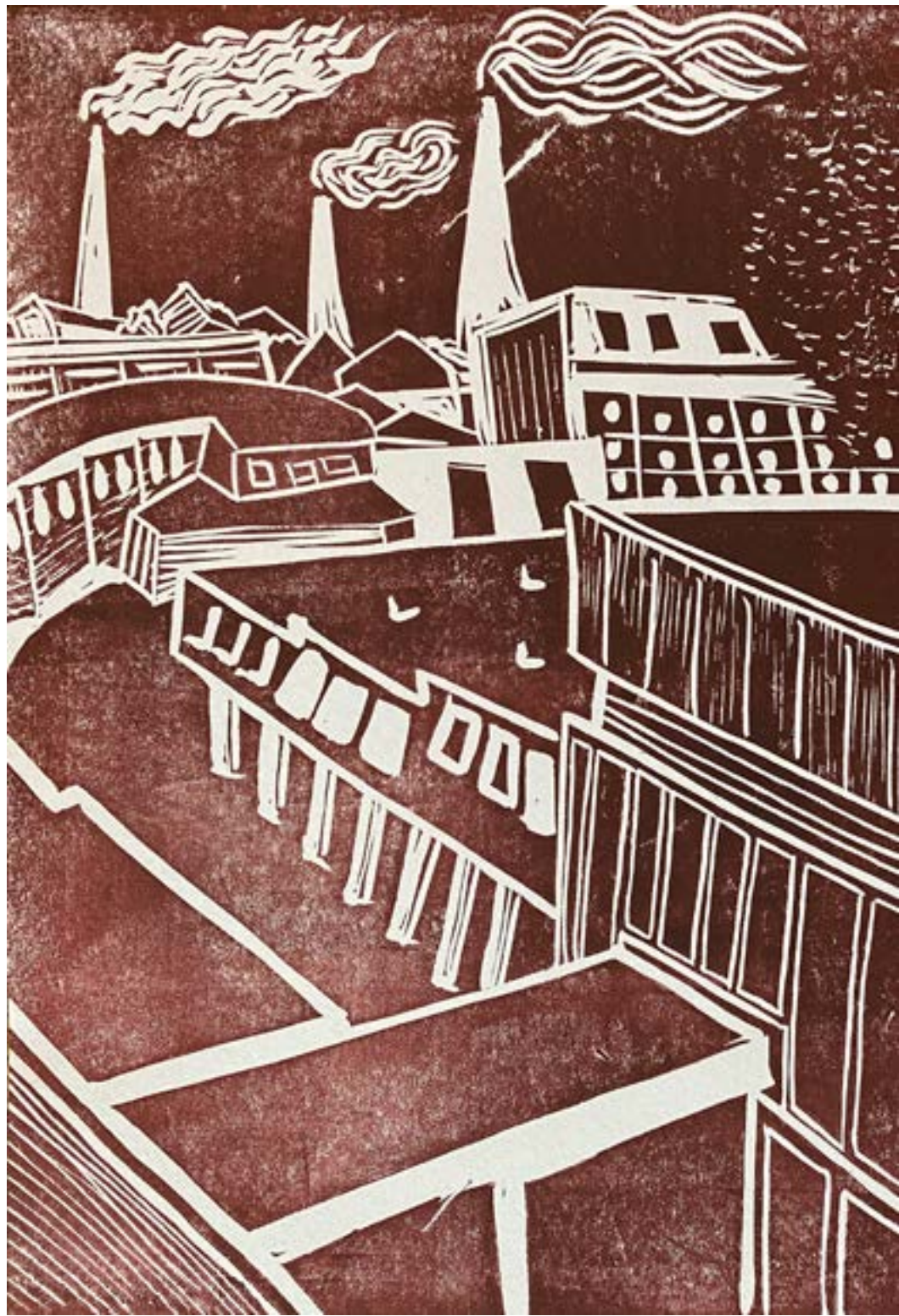
and can't reach each other alone, wings forever beating,
waving at the moment, whilst they work for our unborn
gifts.

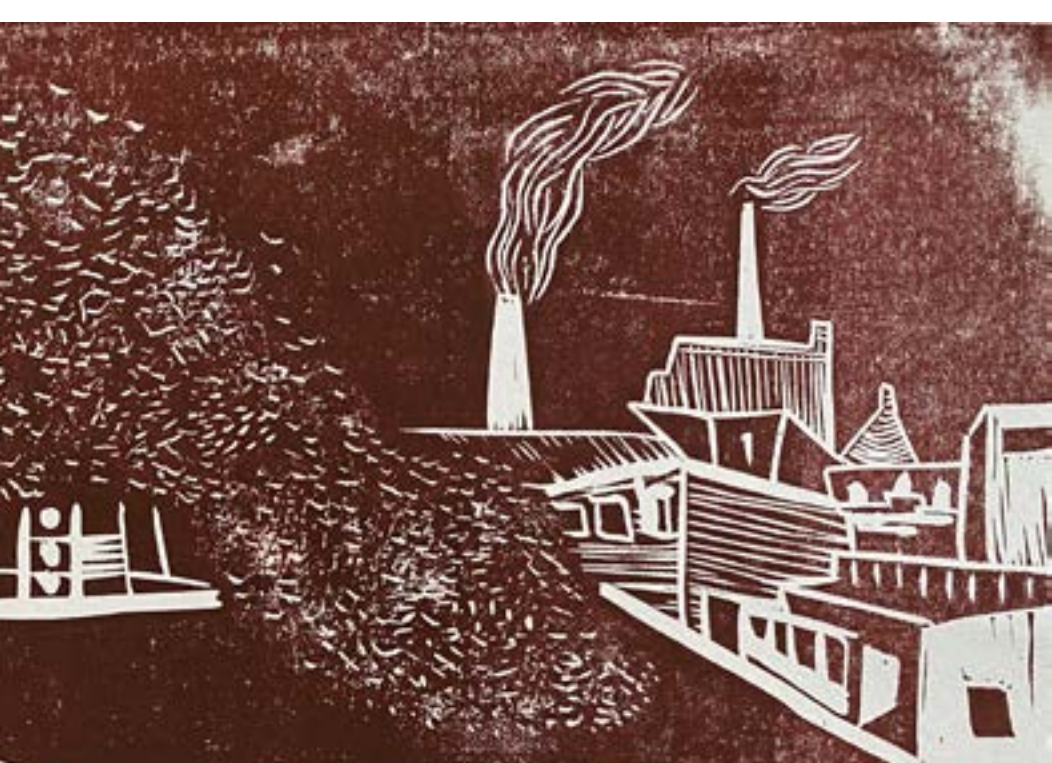
I've wrapped these stories like neat parcels to hold
what we surely can never let go of, all the ways to

live a life, all the ways to keep waving
at what is yet to come.



Remi Graves





LOCARNO

Messa
Danung

How the dance remembers you

(i)

remember

remember

when smoke rose from factory chimneys
and you recognised its face
how the smoke knew your grandmother
remembered her
sewing your family together
in dim light with blue thread

remember motor city?
How you were the small part that made the whole
wheel turn
Remember clocking in?
Fingers performing engine surgery
at the Jaguar factory
& afterward
your hands were blueprints
that left maps all over the hallway Anaglypta
& the white gloss bannister
(How could we forget you Grandfather? You're
everywhere.)
There are still oil wells beneath your fingernails
& your grandchild has inherited your overalls
hangs them by the front door
& thinks of you

Remember the library when it was still the Locarno?
How our feet forgot the ground
I think they were birds, James
I think feet from all over Coventry
Migrated to that dance floor
Every Friday eve
And flocked to the sounds of 1963
Onwards into the early 80's
A murmuration of dance steps
from across the globe

Remember
Jonny O'Rourke and his orchestra
Chuck Berry recording Ding A Ling there
remember the Specials
two tone ghost town

remember the factories closing down, &
signing on in the DSS
for a fortnightly giro check

How you wrote your name and thought
This. means. something.

remember hunching
under the weight of mass unemployment
Thatchers' Britain
The Great Recession
our spines as crooked as politicians
as signatures

remember
when the lights went out?

we got through that. we will get through this.

remember
Fear spreads faster than any virus

& though we are fighting an invisible enemy
& some are afraid of the air

(How it moves
What it wants)

We are each a defending army
& pull together as one community

we cannot see the light without the dark
there are hidden galaxies in the distance between two stars

remember

we swapped hearts when we married
I can still feel yours in my chest
next to all my buried treasures,

and although you have passed through now
your heart taps a Morse Code
so, I know we are still together

(ii)

we are

some mornings I can see my daughter
smiling back at me from the shaving mirror
and know it is impossible for me to be alone
while she lives in my face
or while my heartbeat is the sound of
my son's footsteps
coming home late
or while my skin
is the colour of a June morning
a photograph of a wedding
or while my mother peers out between
the drawn curtains of my eyes
and my father whistles through my lips
a swing tune from '45

the song is within us

my whole family
is inside me

DNA branches into a family tree
Whose roots grow deep
and blossom into children



(iii)

together

and after all this
my family of care workers
substitute sons, surrogate daughters
will no longer be dismissed as unskilled labourers
but the very best of us

cleaners and nurses and counsellors
and neighbours, bad joke purveyors
offbeat dancers, domino players
leaders of prayers
they are the first face and the last
they are carers

there is more love, more respect
in a freshly made bed
than in all of Westminster

Sue made Mrs Simmons bed tonight
While Deb got her into nightclothes

And Dave was playing something soft in the lounge
he found scanning the radio -
a playlist from the old Locarno

close your eyes
breathe deep
imagine you are still there

Tomorrow is an empty dancefloor
And you and me, James
You and me
will move across it like
air.

Joelle Taylor



The song is within us

Poems by Remi Graves and Joelle Taylor
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