

Buoys

Gun patrols declared
Driving boy-packed boats
Into the waves, all maritime
Law lassoed to a
Watery grave, bone clinging
Stupidity of leaders who
Themselves once fled
Under cover of dark
All torched in their wake
In high office amnesia
Seeps, atrophying brain cells
Refugee dementia, empathy free
Whilst her ministry of
Well trained professionals
Operates without her
Deciding, settling, resolving
The boats of child migrants
Lorry loads of teenagers
Evading war, famine, strife
Orphaned many of them
By brutal leadership
Autocratic ambitions
Democracy deficits
Ripping up the fine
Fabric of layers shielding
Rights, ways, meaning.

To stave off the absolute
Keep the barbarians
From the gate, quiet
Sober, implacable servants
Of the state, civil
But un-bowing sentinels
Watchfully plugging holes
That the greedy, untutored
Scrape with their fingernails
As they try to unpick
Hard won threads

Ropes of sand bind them
As they wade through
Equinox waves all
Money, phones, papers
Wrapped tight...tight
In plastic bags to
Keep them safe
From the sea
But they have no coverings

Soaked through to bone
Sinew they walk on
Towards the shore
Dented, bleeding, uncomprehending

So many adults failed them
Over desert, sea on & on until

THE Jungle

Boys running...running
Police bash their tents
Spiked-baton-flailing
Under trees they find
Solace, laugh at caper
Only clubs after all
No AKs here
Just skin eruptions
Scabies, lice, ringworm,
Threadworm wildly wriggling
Pustules popping, scabbing
Drawing crusted maps
On limbs, each boy
An Atlas
Of pain, flight, exile

Jungle to Channel
Sea seems flat as millpond
But weighed down rubber
Sinks down, down
All wet as it leaves shore
Cold strait salting limbs
Hours...hours ripple
Drift and flow
Drift and flow
Huge vessels pass
Hooting, circling to avoid
Boy buoys

Target

On his phone a
Sudanese boy shows a video
Taken by captors in Libya
Half-naked he stands tied
To a concrete slab
Beaten again and again
With an AK47
It is thrown at his body
Pulled back on a long
Leather strap
No other humans can be seen

Only the boy turning &
Moaning, dazed with fear
But he does not cry
Scream, just twists
Writhing, bending away from
The weapon as it pounds
His upper body, lancing
Shoulders, spine, knocking
Him this way and that
Like a pawn in a fairground
Game 'Hit the coconut' &
The boy may die or
He may not
Perhaps they take bets:
'Will he survive? Or perish?'
He has nothing to give them
But his life
Any money he had
Taken long ago
Traffickers will pay though!
He will be sold on
Passed from bad hand
To bad hand
Dimming his shine each
Time
Until he sits before us
In clean old clothes
From a donation box
Smiling as we interview him
In Arabic and English
Inside a South Coast
Boarding house all
Red brick, scuffed carpets
Seagulls and mice fill the
Scabby garden
Replete with worn stairwells
Narrow corridors, airless passages
A creaking ghost ship
Filled with hungry ghosts
Boys of all shapes and sizes
From Vietnam, Guinea, Iran
Iraq, Eritrea, seeking safety
Health & warmth in a
Haywire world where
Adults use children as
Target practice, earnings, slaves
Profiteering off young bodies
Ghastly locusts stripping
Adolescent bones until
They can barely stand

Yet he smiles radiantly
At us as we ask:
What do you need? Are you Ok?
Do you have family in the
UK?
Can you read and write?
Do you have shoes?
Jacket? Trousers? A hat?

Winter is coming, the tide
Rising higher and faster
As we creep towards Winter
In waves

The Uncles

Standing at the door
Bearded and thickset
Looking too old to be uncles
Take two Kurdish boys
Down to the sea
Promising them all the
Security in the world
Just a few years work
Washing cars, cleaning dishes, hoovering carpets
In some outer garage
Backroom diner, shabby down-at-heel Hotel
'You're young, you'll be free
After that, it's just a lot of money to get you here,
I'm sure you understand!
Best interests truly at heart
Boys very young, illiterate unused
To money making ways
Where nothing glitters, not a wink
Out of villages high in the
East, mothers in scarves
Fathers in moustaches
Poor, backward and poor again
Just dust and memory
Remains, ripe pickings for the
Unscrupulous who track
Through the settlements making
Promises as big as Eden
To parents ageing in the dry sun,
Who have nothing to give
But uncertainty to their sons
Daughters do not feature
In these narratives
Not worth bothering
With them, no...no
But sons, sons, money can

Be made out of them
As they give over
Pensions and income
Not nearly enough for
Experienced criminals
So the boys are kept
As collateral in a zero
Sum game
Uncles know well
They wait, then
Appear,
Smiling and smiling
Delighted to find
Their very own nephews at last
Note that staff are busy,
Much coming and going
As floods of boys
Sweep in and out
Tides of lucre
For the trafficking
Kind

Sea Staring

Along the shore lean poles
Watch the water
The glitter from its waves
Flashes in their eyes
As they stand and gaze
It is coming in as they did
Wildly
Its roll and dash remembered
As the dinghy flexed
Letting in cold surge
Pressing against their already
Frozen limbs
Some recall a float of
Bodies
As the craft tipped
Off France
Only swimmers
Survived
Picked up by French Lifeboats
Would make the journey again
Knowing this time the boat a
Rotten vessel liable
To spit them out
Midway
But still they come

Many had never seen sea before
Now it is before them
Behind them
Jag of indigo in Corneas
Souvenir of sorts
Ocular tattoo
Which cannot be undone

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