**Marked**

Johnny remembers his grandfather's forearms.

Marked, blue scars traced across the sinews,

Parchment skin. Anthracite embedded, worked to the surface,

Picked out with needle and thumb push. *"Black gold"* he'd say.

Never complained, even though his lungs were messed up,

Pneumoconiosis. Could have had worse luck,

Least he made retirement, plenty didn’t. That's just how it was

He doesn't remember the closures, just a baby then,

Brought up on stories, down the club at lunchtime with the men.

*“Don't you tell the old girl. Oy Shirl , give the lad a half a pint.*

*I'll keep an eye and see that he's alright.”*

Change for the fruit machine, a bag of crisps to keep him quiet.

Racing on the TV screen, Maggie’s Dream comes in at 25 to one.

No one in there would have bet on that one

Dad; bad back, arthritic knees, on the sick since 93.

Pills for the pain, pills to make him sleep, pills to keep the side effects at bay.

They say, “*You will have to go some butt*

*To be half the man your Da was way back then”.*

And they tell him of the time when the roof fell in.

Big Al Evans, trapped beneath the rubble.

*“Your Da he saved the day. Leapt in there like superman, pulled him out the way”*

Big Al Evans? gone now, topped himself they say.

*“Duw, what a waste”* but *“proper hero your Da was.”*

And they slap him on the back and raise another glass,

To memories, to Da, To big Al Evans, rest in peace.

It's changed here since he was a kid,

The landscape greened, The river clean,

They talk about regeneration, he's not sure what that means.

No job. There's no jobs for somebody like him.

No cash, no car. They closed the club, there's empty shelves in Spar.

He's still at home with Mam and Da

But this place... this place. God he loves it,

It fits him like a glove.

Family everywhere, cousins by the score.

His auntie Vi lives up the road, his sister lives next door

But this place…this place. God he hates it.

It crushes him, sucks all of the life from him.

He says he'd leave here if he could but he knows he never would.

How could he leave this place?

Love and hate. He blots it out, gets off his face with booze and drugs.

First it was the speed and now the smack.

Everyone he bothers with is on it now.

Heroin. It came up the valley like a dam burst,

Drowned whole villages and towns. Arrived here first from Liverpool they said,

Now half his mates are dead, O.D's, hepatitis C.

That's just how it is.

Black gold under green. Gold turned to brown. Brown into crimson,

Tourniquet twisting. He pushes it in with needle and thumb. Sinks into black.

Blue scar tracks, mapped across his skin,

Like unmined seams.