

Transport Problems

by Susan Gaukroger

There's a poet in the works
with pretensions to power:
a small-time mechanic,
scrabbling silently
under the bonnet,
down in the engine,
poking and prodding,
probing and pilfering
messing around
with the choke,
with the leads,
with the plugs,
with a woman's best friend,
her sole means of transport,
her motor to freedom,
her mainstay,
her steed.

He's at it again:
deep in the entrails,
fixing the fan-belt
twiddling switches,
feeling for fuses,
wiring up circuits,
groping at gaskets,
and that's before
we've revved up.

As for his tools -
they belong to the dark age.

Give him his due,
he did get us started
the once.
Off we went,
wobbling slightly,
still intact.

Three miles up the road,
just short of Axe Edge
we broke down.
Very symbolic.
It must have been part
of some overall plan
to test my mettle -
ordeal by petrol.

Just a tell-tale trickle
at first
as it seeped
from the sump
and fouled up
the filter,

a steady dribble,
too close
to the manifold,
overheating it
sousing and soaking it
till the smouldering stream
is reeking
like fury
sullen and threatening,
splashing and spluttering
no end in sight.
At a nod from his gods
the whole caboodle
will burst into flames
go up in smoke.
Cry havoc.

A near shave that one.

But I kept my nerve.
I cursed the fellow
back home to his hole
in the hills
which is what he deserves.

Then I called the AA.
The following Friday
just down the slope
from the Cat and Fiddle,
without any warning,
the car gave up trying,
conked out
then and there.

I noted the mischief:
a clogged carburettor
and bits of white dust.
The plot starts to thicken.
Who's been at work
casting spells in the night,
tampering secretly,
meddling illicitly,
who's trying to get me?
No word from the poet.
He is come, he is gone.
Unfaithful creature.
Sham man.

There's a lingering odour of sulphur.

Bad luck comes in threes.
I am on the alert for the signs.
A raven croaks in the garden.
A beech tree falls
Their planes fly lower,
are drawing closer.

The headlines today are not auspicious.
Keep your daughters a home,
do not undertake journeys
Stay calm say the Tories.

I will not be daunted
by enemy omens,
set out with resolve
for the Three Shire Heads
for a prior appointment
My mission is pressing.

I should have known better,
I should have considered
invisible forces,
deadly gases
are wafting through to us
taking their toll of us
one and all of us
not only me.
"Carbon monoxide fumes," they said
as they brought me round
"A leaky system
Faulty connections."
(Right in the lap of his gods
as it happens,
up on Hen Cloud,
there where the road
swings under
The Winking Woman)
"You can count yourself lucky
just to survive".

Still gasping for breath
I booked the car into the garage
for major repairs.
Failing that,
I shall try a new model.

Let that put the poet in his place.