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CHAPTER VII

OF FAITH AND FAIRY DUST

Heidrun Kaletsch

translation by Julia Griebing

Music:

Brass trio

Bach, J.S. (Arr. Gordon Cherry)

Fugue # 11 in F Major trio (trumpet, horn, trombone)

Flying Pickets: Only you

Paul McCartney: Blackbird

Speakers

C – trumpet – female

B – horn – male

A – trombone – male

Explanation of symbols:

/ The next speaker begins their text here.

- Direct connection to the text that has gone previously, without a breathing space; continue speaking immediately as if in one voice.

Part I

A Is there anyone we like?

B Is there anyone we trust?

Pause: they look at C.

C I have to ask as a Christian, are there any Christians ruling us today? Does anyone ask God before making a decision if it is the right one? (*Pause*). They should.

B Are you sure?



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C Certainly.

A Tony Blair slept with a Bible on his bedside table. –

B/C I wouldn't trust Tony Blair.

Pause.

A Is there anyone we *can* trust?

B Back then I trusted in the mining community.

A Did you?

B Well it was a community.

A Was it.

B We had something in common.

A Did you.

B We knew what we would stand for.

A And.

B We knew what we wouldn't stand for.

A And.

B We depended on each other more than nowadays.

A Could you trust those you depended on?

B Community was different then.

C We had a marvellous social life. We had everything going on for us in the valleys...

A ... pictures twice a week.

B There were choirs –

A brass bands –

B male voice choirs and –

A accompanying brass bands –

C there was something going on all the time.



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Pause.

C We had a drama group,

B amateur pantomime,

A a cycle club,

B a cricket club,

C a drama society

A a young wives club,

B the youth club,

A the Guides,

B the Scouts,

A the Brownies,

C the drama club,

A/B Already been said!

C Oh.

B Oh well. Never mind. People lived very different lives then. There weren't any computers to stop people talking to each other 24/7, they didn't have things permanently plugged into their ears whilst flicking at their phone screens.

A People used to talk then.

C We were all in the same boat. You know, your father worked down the mines, your mother stayed at home with the children, you didn't have mothers going off to work like they do now.

B You didn't have much money.

C Well for a start we're better off now -

B Everyone shared, if any one was in deep trouble, you'd have people round to help you. You don't get that now.

A Finding people to help you now isn't easy.

C Really it's the state that does more for us now.



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B Does it.

A But the valleys. They're dying. Now.

B The valleys then were grey.

C Now they're green, the valleys, green and lovely. Before renaturation –

A They were a part of Britain where the people had vision -

C Vision -

B Vision. You won't get that now.

C The valleys are lovely now –

A Dying now, those valleys. Still... (*Pause*). Still. I remember then –

B Back /then

C Back then well, it was long ago...

A Well it was thirty –

B Fifty –

A Eighty years ago –

B Back in the twentieth century

A When all around the valleys miners built –

B miners' institutes and hospitals,

A libraries,

B welfare-

C neighbourhoods and togetherness. (*Syncopated pause*). I felt very much a part of the mining community. What I got from that... because the job was so dangerous and harsh, you had to escape, there had to be a way out. Out of the dust. And the way was learning and education. The miners struggled and they founded working men's clubs and they had libraries. That was the only way we could see out of it. Working towards a better life. I still feel it. The community. The drama club. I still feel a part of that.

B We were always on and off strike.

A on and off -

B on and off -



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A united we stand, divided we fall -

B on and off and -

A on and off and –

B eight sons down the mine -

A they would rotate -

B day shifts -

A and night shifts-

B and they would rotate -

A their use of the beds -

B at home. And on and off and –

C the men, all black
with little circles
round their eyes -

A they fought for
showers at the pit -

C and they won.

B After a good shower
faces red and shining
neat and tidy they'd enter -

A their good old miner's pub
and a pint or two would be waiting
to bathe a dusty mouth and throat -

B shining outside, shining inside -

A and still, yet still, each time I cough
I get a mining souvenir.

C Call it a cough first
then call it dust
and early death

A And we struggled all the time. For better working conditions. For better
living conditions. For a better life. We were on and off strike all the time.

B We fought for this and fought for that and we got it. Well. We fought



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and we won.

C Not always. (*Pause*). Often, yes.

B The pit baths –

A The wages –

B The working day –

A The holidays –

C The miners' institute.

A We were strong then. We got what we fought for.

B More often than not. But we'd all say wouldn't we –

C We'd all say/ we didn't want

B we didn't want/our children

C our children to go down the mine.

Music. Blackbird, Paul McCartney

Part II

A It was long ago.

It was more than 30 years ago,
September '83

it was still the twentieth century
when MacGregor, known as Mac the knife,
when Mac the knife got NCB
power and an order to:
Fight the enemy within!

B Careful of him! Said comrades,
He destroyed British Steel
80,000 jobs, just be watchful
butty boys, just be watchful and alert,
do your shifts, but be on guard,

A your life revolves around your mine,
your pit day in, day out, day out, day in
and after the shift in his pub
stands the enemy within and drinks



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his pint or even two or three.

C Autumn goes and winter comes
And the New Year – what will it bring?

A In January: we'll make a resolution,
In February: we'll forget it. March!

B When spring is in the air and when the blackbird
sings from the roof, it's March, the 6th of March.

C There, outside, the blackbird sings on the gable

B and here inside the BBC says it knows the news.
Now Mac wants to close 20 mines:
20,000 on the dole.

A scream goes through the land, a scream.

United we stand, divided we fall.

And Scargill the president speaks,

King Arthur, the miners' hope,

A Remember says Scargill,

it's 15 years since they said

who needs coal anymore,

who needs miners,

when oil is so cheap,

B and shortly after, says Scargill,

C as the wheel turns

B oil will go up,

the country will grind to a halt,

in empty streets

the lights will go out

and everyone will shout for coal,

shout for black gold,

A And here we are,

C the wheel has turned

A We were strong

we were important

our voices carried weight

B Even now, says Scargill, remember,

it's been 10 years

since the Tories fell upon us.

C Don't forget it. You shouldn't forget it.



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A Now it's time. We'll stand and show how strong we are.

C We'll get this old wheel turning.

B We miners united will never be defeated.

C And the following Monday my blackbird on the roof,
sings a duet with a blackbird
on my neighbour's roof
they sing and chirp,
calling in all registers
from the gables, resounding in competition
a yellow beaked singing war
in a battle for territory.

A It's the 12th of March and Scargill
calls for a strike.

B Against MacGregor and against Thatcher.

A King Arthur against Mac the Knife and the Iron Lady.

C It's not about money anymore
It's not about fewer hours

A It's about saving the community

B It's about life in the valleys.

C It's about work.

B To be or not to be.

A Nobody wants to see their child in the pit. But you want to see your
child in the dole queue even less.

B King Arthur versus the Iron Lady

A It's about two massive egos.

B About ideology.

C Scargill wants no settlement.
The Lady wants no settlement.

B It's about death or glory.

C Glory or death. My blackbird wins
the duel, the opponent withdraws, my blackbird victor



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finds a wife who likes him
and at the end of March they build a nest
and fly to and fro and to and fro
beaks full of grass and stems, tirelessly
they build a house for their brood
right at the back of the lilac against the wall.

B Scargill doesn't call the miners to a ballot,
He calls on them all to strike instead.
United we stand. Divided we fall.

C Sons divided from their fathers
as one strikes
and the other keeps working

A And Thatcher sends the police
to the picket lines
to taunt the strikers.

B United we stand. Divided we fall.

A The South Wales police
are sent from the valleys
because they treat
the miners with respect.

B The Metropolitan police
come on buses waving £10 notes
at the windows to people
who haven't been paid for months.
It's June and the blackbird has hatched 5 eggs
and flies to and fro and to and fro
on and off and on and off
stuffs thin worms in the huge beaks
of tiny birds. They're never satisfied
and the blackbird never tires.
Never tires.

A The people say that there is war in Orgreave.
Thousands of miners gave battle
to thousands of police on the 18th June.

C There's no strike fund. There's no pay.
No money for coal or food or clothing.
Children collect coal to heat their homes.
No money for the mortgage or beer or cigarettes.
Men order halves when they meet.
The women pull together and collect
what they can. They organise soup kitchens.
To donate you can leave food in a box at the



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supermarket. Women demonstrate and campaign for solidarity. They campaign for donations and they succeed, even abroad. They hold fast, they don't give up, they make ends meet. Women are the backbone of the strike.

B At the picket line in Merthyr the police catch people with cameras and smash them on the pavement. The BBC are with us. The day is hot. The picket line is in jeans and t-shirts. The police lay into us with truncheons, fists and boots. A few of the boys are put in hospital. The BBC are with us.

C The BBC makes no report. And in July the small black birds have been fattened and fly about a bit. In August they catch their first worms and a couple of days later they're gone. Forever.

B At the picket line in Merthyr the police lay into us and we are outnumbered around 10 to 1 and about a 100 of us walk all night over the mountain because they won't let us go home. They won't let us travel by car or bus from one place to another, so we walk all night over the mountain. The BBC are with us, but never report it.

A And after that night,
The morning after that night,
Dean and Russell stand on the bridge
at Rhymney bridge roundabout
and wait for the taxi
scab, scab, scab
which brings a strike breaker to work
scab, scab
and throw a block of cement from the bridge
scab
to scare the strike breaker.
The block smashes through the windscreen
and the taxi driver is dead.

B At the picket line the police are beating some of the boys up on the other side of the fence,



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kicking them on the floor. The BBC are there filming it, but it's never shown, never shown.

C What stays in my mind is
the noose coming down
when they had a big meeting.
The TUC chairman came down,
he wasn't a miner. He was campaigning
to get everyone back to work.
While he was speaking at this meeting
a miner went behind the scenes and let
a noose down behind him. It was shown
on television.

B That was shown, that they would show.

C There was violence in the air.

B There's a picket line at Dawn Mill Colliery
somewhere in Warwickshire. We're there so
the other boys can go home –
we'll do a few hours on, a few hours off.

A on and off and
on and off and –

B There's no traffic along the road,
no cars except police cars and with that
a car pulls out of the colliery, they stop it.
Well they beat these two men unconscious
and we stand there.
They drag them out of the car,
they beat them with truncheons.
And we stand there. Watching.
We leave the picket line
we phone ITV in Birmingham:
Listen they beat these two men unconscious
listen please you've got to know what we saw
but they don't want to know.
They don't want to know what we've seen.

A And in the autumn when there's the possibility of a settlement
because the governments coal reserves are dwindling
the Lady is prepared to make concessions
to find a compromise,
when the miners hope is up
and the unions' too
when light is visible at the end of the tunnels -

B We miners united will never be defeated.



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A Then, King Arthur refuses to compromise:

C “No compromise as compromise leads to mass colliery closures”.

A Arthur doesn’t see that the movement has won.

B Arthur wants his solo.

C Arthur wants his victory.

A That’s the beginning of the end.

C After the killing of the taxi driver
it did feel as if things had gone too far.
It felt like war.

A The victims, the dead – six pickets,
the taxi driver and three boys who were collecting coal,
thousands injured. Ten thousand arrested.
They say that the strike cost
three billion pounds sterling. On what altar
did we place that sacrifice? On what altar?

B At the end of the strike
they all marched up to Maerdy.
The band was out. It was a joyful day,
well they wanted it to look like a victory
instead of the defeat that it felt like,
but at least they’d survived to fight another day.

Part III

A Who/ am I?

B Who/ am I?

C Who am I?

A This is not about me or about you. Or you. This was about US. About a community.

C No question.

B We were somebody.

C We were a part -



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B of the laughter and the struggle and the tears -

A a part of birthdays and mortal accidents -

C listening to ambulance sirens
worrying about my husband,
is it him, oh don't let it be him
I was a part of the relief
-it wasn't him, not him!-
and I was part of the grief
of the neighbour's widow.
it was then me and more than me
being part of the mining community
being part of the miners' institute
and its choir, its brass band and the drama club.
It was OUR place. A common space.

A There was this WE. United we stand.
I still feel it. I really felt a part of it.

B The miners' strike destroyed that belief.
It destroyed the hope and destroyed the pride.

A The valleys now are lovely and green.
Grass has grown over
the battles of the past. A lot of grass.
On the green meadows grow call centres
MacDonald's and supermarkets.
The miners' children
no longer go underground.
A dream has come true.

C Years ago the church
was a sanctuary for everyone
I mean, from it came
a cycle club
a cricket club
drama society
everything...
We've no young wives clubs now,
no drama,
pantomimes,
now there's nothing, is there?
The youth club,
the Guides,
the Scouts,
the Brownies,
that pride.

B Close a pit



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kill a community
we said and we were right.
There are scars now. Mind and body.
It's left marks all over us, all over the valleys.

A And these marks and scars will pale
and someday they'll disappear
under green grass and car parks
and become fairy tales beginning
once upon a time, long, long ago

C There is no future round here.
The valleys will empty themselves
nature will recover and perhaps tourism
will take over, leaving its traces
and maybe that's a good thing.
Young people have to go,
there's no work, they have to go

A find another community

C found another community

B so yes
it will get emptier and emptier

C so yes

A it's time to go. And leave / the valleys

B the valleys / to echo

C to echo their emptiness.