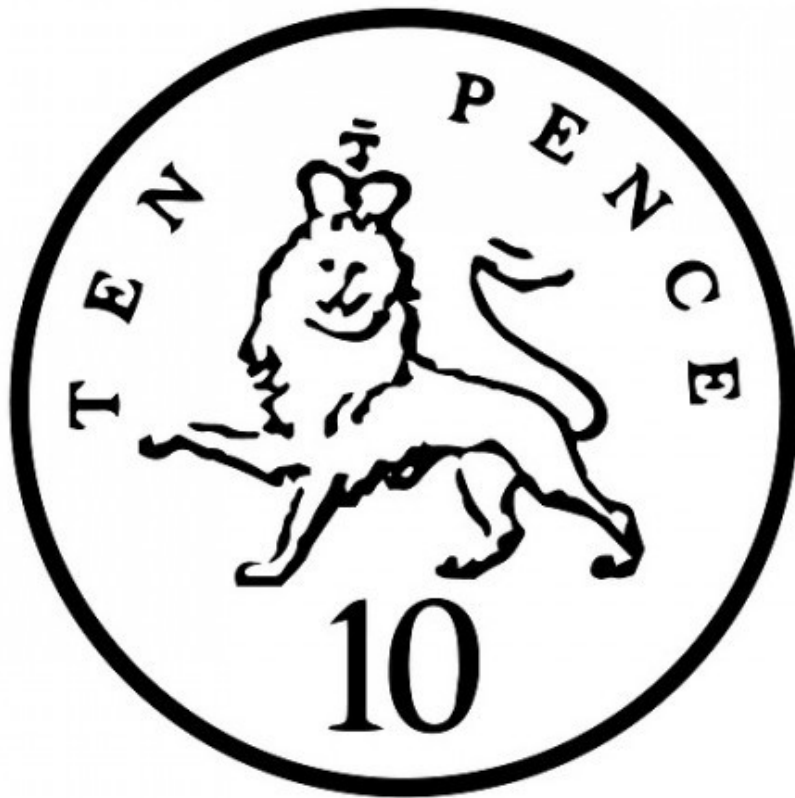


THOMAS OLIVER



10p each*

* OK, they're free really

THIS IS THE END

The spotlight goes out and the curtain falls;
The players withdraw to polite applause.
Close all the windows and lock all the doors
For this is the end.

Emerging to find a dusting of snow
We wander away with nowhere to go.
You take my hand, but it's only for show;
For this is the end.

Our footsteps follow the deserted streets
To the silent house where our children sleep
And the years lie heavy beneath our feet
For this is the end.

We finally run out of things to say.
You don't look back as you hurry away.
I wish it didn't have to be this way
But this is the end.

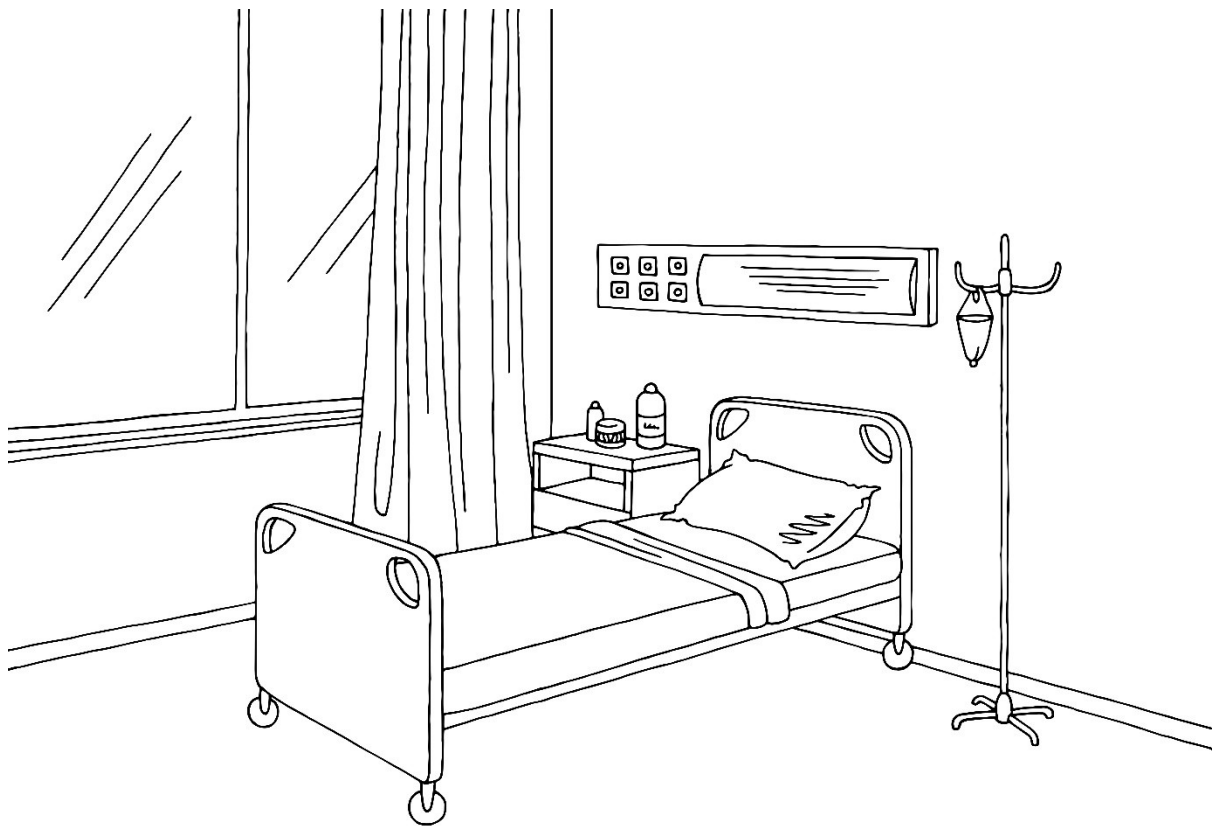


BREATHLESS

The trainee nurse stands nervously aside,
Smiling sadly. The doctor is polite.
“I’m sorry. We did everything we could.
You can stay with him now, if you like.”

He was a soldier all his life, and now
I wish he could have died a soldier’s death.
His staring eyes are frantic, frightened,
Twisted mouth still crying out for breath.

Now all that remains is awkward silence,
Futile regrets and this final horror.
That tortured thing still clawing at the sheets
Is not and never was my grandfather.



GUNSLINGER

Somehow alive, he lifts his head
And surveys the scene.
He is unharmed; dozens are dead.
Only one in-between.

At last, regarding the creature
(now helplessly crawling)
He can think about the future.
He knows time is pressing;

He cannot allow it to go.
In mute confusion,
He waits, willing the blood to flow,
A swift resolution.

Not yet. The silence is screaming.
The ghosts in his head
Whisper that no-one is counting.
He shoots it dead.



LOTTERY

She fumbles for change
In every last pocket
To buy a ticket

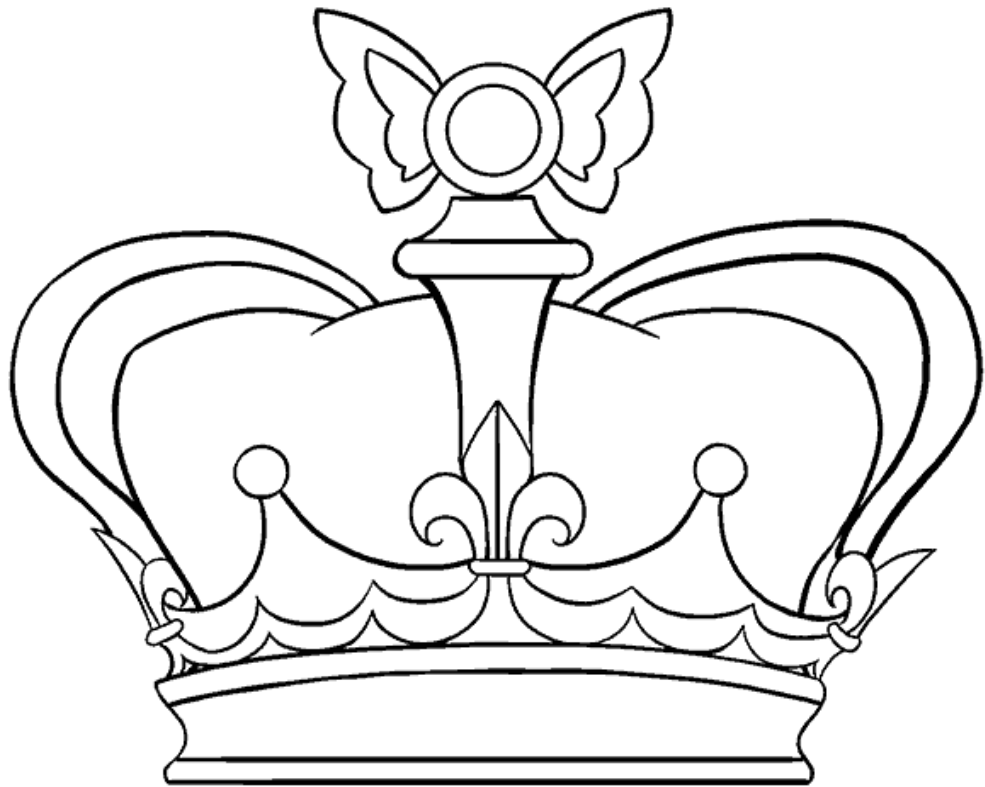
It's taking too long
But the people behind her
Try not to show it

Averting their gaze
While her tiny new baby
Kicks up a racket



ROYAL PREROGATIVE

The Queen looks down upon the knave
And being bored
She listens to his frightened pleas
Unto the Lord
Then judging him to be sincere
But wholly poor
She calls her Guards to silence him
Forevermore



IN THE WOODS SOMEWHERE

At midnight, in the woods somewhere
Six little children, lost and scared
Spy a cave in the darkness, *there!* –
Hurry towards it, unaware
That SOMETHING watches their despair
As they contemplate its lair...

One goes in; the rest don't dare
At midnight, in the woods somewhere



TIMOTHY LUVS TRACY

Timothy luv's Tracy.
He has to tell us all.
It's written on the statue
Outside the City Hall.

Timothy luv's Tracy.
A little heart shot through.
He says that it's "4ever";
If only that were true.

More likely that the arrow
Cuts deeper every day
And *Timothy luv's Tracy*
Will slowly fade away.



WORKS CANTEEN PHILOSOPHY

Behold thy GOD:

Ron in charge of Stores
Who left us last Friday.
He wanted more money.

His loving DISCIPLES:

"It's about bloody time!
I'm due a promotion.
I've still got ambition."

The GOLDEN RULE:

Be seen to be busy
Whilst playing the game
So we get overtime.

Rejoice, O Ye PEOPLE!

We talk about football
And hang on to our pay
Waiting for Saturday.



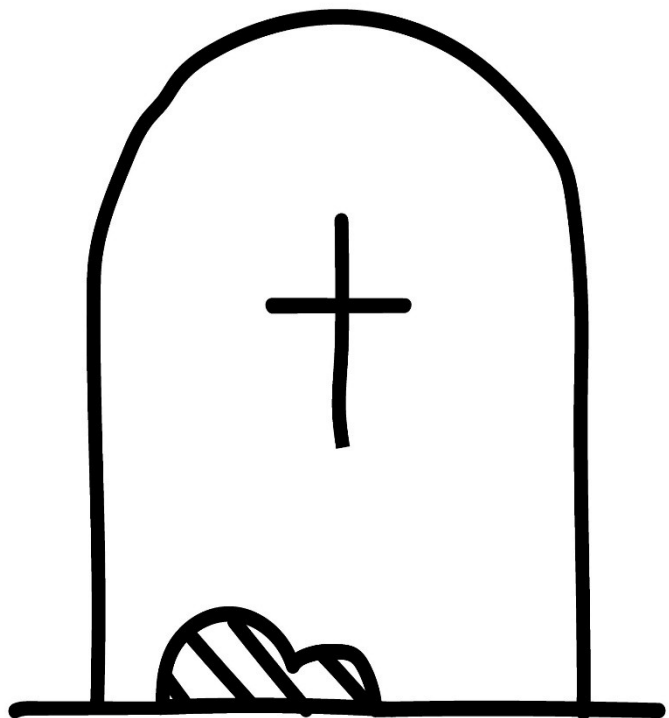
MY FUNERAL NEXT FRIDAY

It's my funeral next Friday.
I'm expecting quite a crowd.
Refreshments have been organised
And casual dress allowed.

I shall die before this weekend.
The doctors seem quite sure.
I hear their measured footsteps
Fade away across the floor.

My affairs are all in order;
My dependants all set right.
A cold machine is counting down
The remnants of my life.

So now I lie here waiting
For a dawn I will not see.
I think of good times long ago
To keep the fear from me.

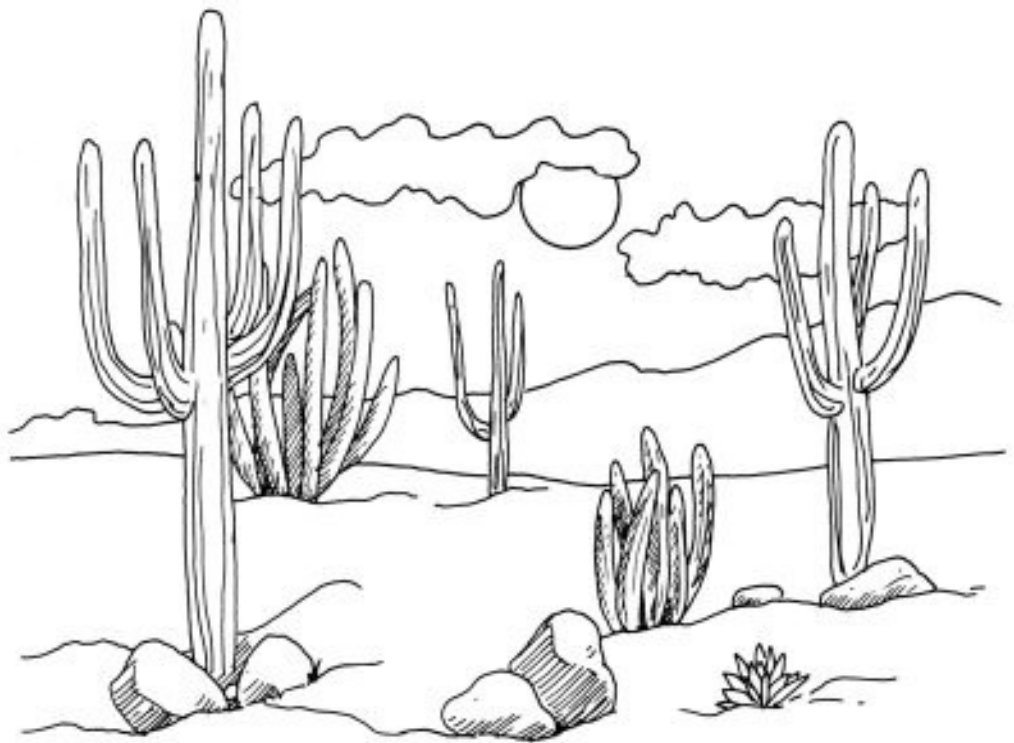


ARIZONA

"Where summer spends the winter and hell spends the summer."
(local saying)

Juan shuffles over to the shrivelled shape.
He rolls it on its back and shakes his head.
Nothing to do but sit here and wait;
The old man is dying, but not dead yet.

I hear him murmur, over and over:
Through the fires of hell my angel will come!
He is wrong. God knows, in Arizona
There are no angels. Only the sun.

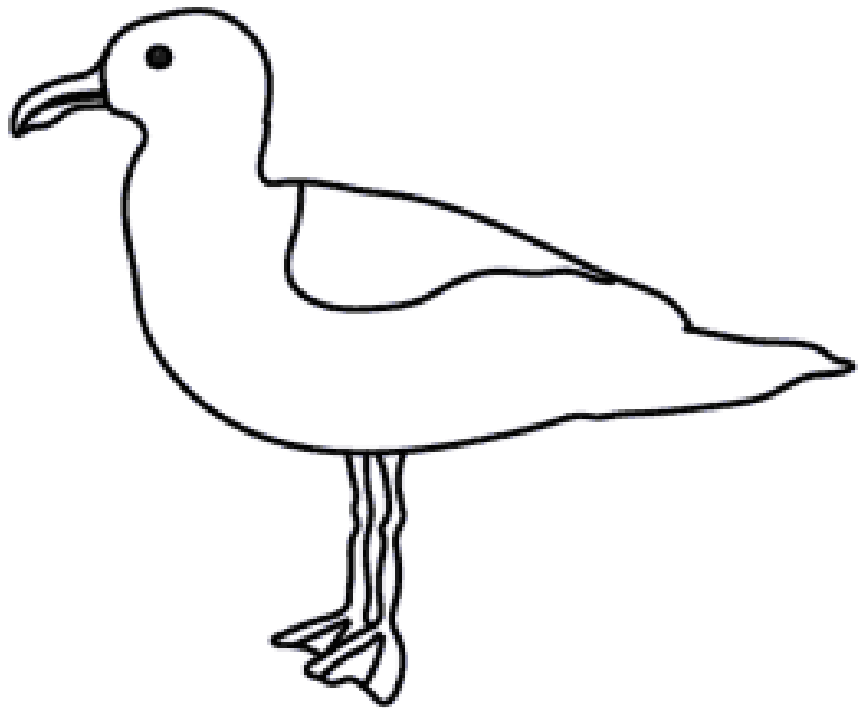


4AM

Taking a short cut
Behind the High Street
Where seagulls gather

Ripping up waste sacks
For rotting remains
They quickly devour

Trapped in our headlights
They return our gaze
And do not cower



DEAR BORIS

I'm delighted to see
That you're back on TV!
Still playing the game,

With that winning smile
And nonchalant style
And your utter disdain

For anyone but you.
Nothing about you is true
Except your ambition,

Which crushes logic,
Destroys friendships,
Devours conviction

And eliminates shame.
For you accept no blame;
There is no contrition.

But Boris, have a care:
To the voters out there,
You act has grown stale;

They will leave you in droves
When the lies are exposed.
Your gambit has failed

And history shall judge
The insincere kludge
Of a mendacious fool

Whose frivolous charm
Kicked up such a storm
It could destroy us all.

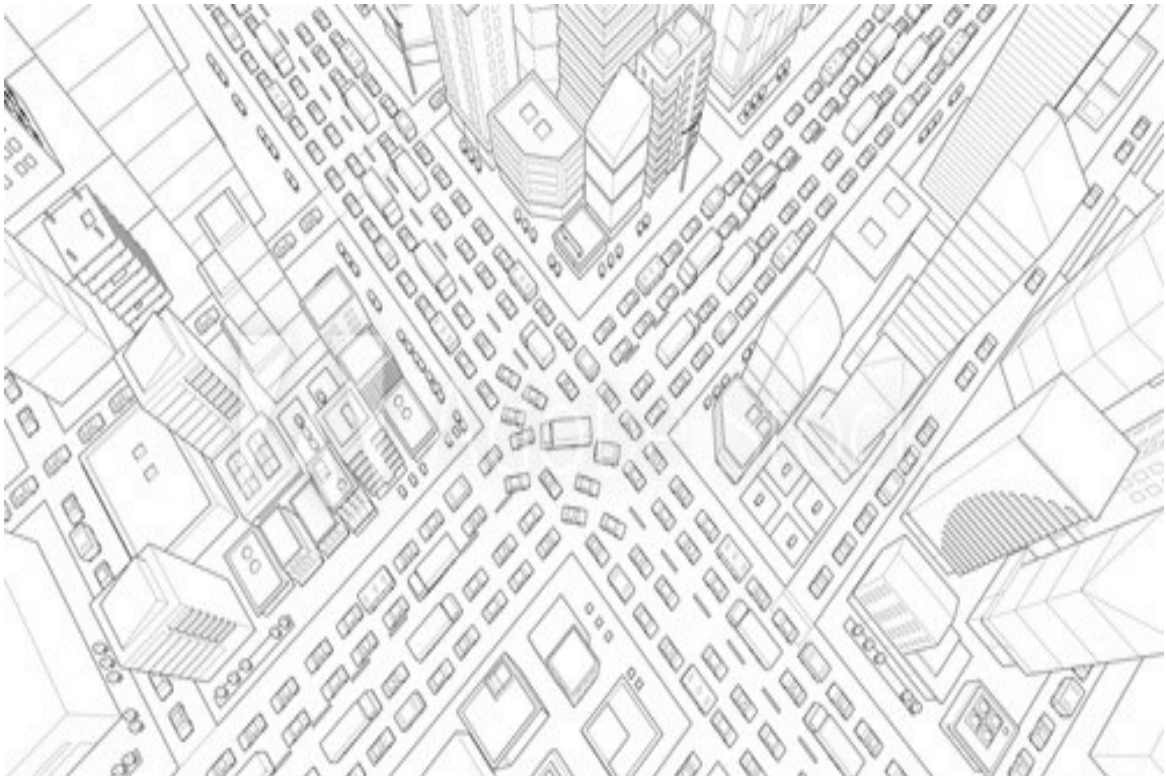


THE ACCIDENT

The little girl lies broken on the ground.
The medics work in silence, by the book.
Flashing lights illuminate the horror;
The passing traffic slows to take a look.

Must we search for patterns in the chaos?
Why reach out to a God who isn't there?
All hope recedes. The frantic efforts fail.
A billion stars look on, but do not care.

Left alone, unharmed but swaying slightly,
The other driver feels a drunkard's shame;
Longs for something strong to put him under
Not knowing he will never sleep again.



GAY

With a nervous nod
 (aware of their
 hostility) he
edges through the
crowd. Crumpled
 cap is doffed
meekly; the hated
half-smile. "Soon be
 time to clock
 in!"

 (behind him
a low murmur)

One such Witness
 to his young
 disciple: "He's
 gay. He touched
young Chris behind
the loading bay.
They should take
him away and
shoot him."



THE LAST MAN ALIVE

From a cloudless sky
The last man alive
Hears scavengers call

As stumbling forward
Through shimmering sands
He finally falls

In this pitiless place
There is nowhere to go
And no hope at all

He lifts up his head
Draws a rattling breath
Then begins to crawl



3AM

I hear soft footsteps behind me.
It seems I'm no longer alone.
A gangly girl with liquid eyes
Is begging for "change for the phone".
Is it revulsion that grips me
Or urges I should have outgrown?
I make my excuses quickly
And pay for her taxi ride home.



THE HOME FRONT

Shaking, he puts down his morning paper.
The long defeat goes on, at such a cost.
German troops have marched into the city
And Paris has fallen; France may be lost.

His medals hang forlornly from the wall.
The splinters in his leg still give him pain.
"To end all wars," they said; but now it seems
A day may dawn when he must fight again.

From the sideboard, his late wife is smiling
Beside his wayward son, who never writes.
Swigging rum to numb the creeping terror,
He shuffles from the room, out of their sight.



THE DEATH OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Observing the room
Through an opiate haze,
His logic floats free
And his life slips away.

The first war is over,
The next one declared.
No time for nostalgia;
No friends left to care.

A perfunctory note
In the back of The Times
Remembers his fame
And is not unkind.



