

**Four poems: Incident at St Kilda, On the thinnest of nights,  
Song of the Nepr, Wardsend**

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**Four poems: Incident at St Kilda, On the thinnest of nights, Song of the Nepr,  
Wardsend**

**CAROLYN WAUDBY, SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY**

**Incident at St Kilda**

As I slept, half-way up the Stack  
on the ledge where moss clings

Malcolm McDonald seized me.  
Ferguson tied my legs. I could see they feared

the white spot on the side of my head,  
my open mouth, the snapping.

Three days in a bothy.  
I blanched them with my shrieks

called to wind and sea.  
The summoned storm brought them to their knees.

Vexed  
that I would not die

McKinnon ordered my killing,  
took up a stone.

One hour they rained blows, weeping, slowing,  
their salt and sweat anointing. Until

my beaten soul, through my bill  
on redundant wings flew.

**Carolyn Waudby**

*Based on an account in which 19<sup>th</sup> century islanders of the Outer Hebrides are said to have captured then killed a Great Auk believing it was a witch.*

This poem first appeared in *Millstone Grit*, Antiphon, 2016.

### **On the thinnest of nights**

I will tiptoe down  
to the towering firs

meet the souls  
who've migrated  
through thick sea mists

to fold brown wings  
and hang clustered  
like autumn leaves.

Their trance is deep:  
more precious  
than long feathers.

They wait  
for the warm breath  
of gods.

You will know me among them.  
I will wear a Tehuana skirt, my red boots.  
I will not sleep.

### **Carolyn Waudby**

*In November every year, millions of monarch butterflies migrate from the United States and Canada to the Oyamel fir forests west of Mexico City to hibernate and breed. Their arrival coincides with Mexican Day of the Dead. Since the time of the Aztecs, Mexican people have believed that the butterflies are the souls of their dead loved ones returned to earth to visit them.*

From *Apus*, The Red Ceilings Press, 2020.

## **Song of the Nepr**

breast hot  
see my hair  
dark

mist  
rapids  
grass  
    springing

summon the wind  
cross  
scream  
my breast hot

storm  
shadow  
teeth

drool  
your fingers  
in my locks

## **Carolyn Waudby**

*\*Nepr – a pagan name meaning ‘water spirit’ and possible origin of the name Neepsend by the River Don in Sheffield, UK.*

A version of this poem first appeared in *The Sheffield Anthology: Poems from the City Imagined*. Smith/Doorstop, 2012.

## **Wardsend**

The lads bear me  
hefters of hammers,  
muck under the nails.

Women washed me  
but soap and scrub would not shift it.  
I wear it with my Sunday suit.

We cross. No sound, the river  
runs heavy, hot.

I'm ready – know  
the deafening din of the dark,  
the white melt.

## **Carolyn Waudby**

*Wardsend is a cemetery on the banks of the River Don, Sheffield, UK. The name is thought to come from World's End.*

This poem first appeared in *The Sheffield Anthology: Poems from the City Imagined*, Smith/Doorstop, 2012.