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City State

by Colin Begg

to a young magpie, there is
that ceremonial undocking
from the mothership:

but what makes this civic life?

the old park keeper
mowing in
his ruby trousers

the long-haired broomsman
forensically clearing
yellow-browning oak leaves

the art students' tripod
in the Victorian fountain
documenting hydrology

five schoolboys
texting, eyes turning
in unison at squealing girls

a stream of primary ones
a ratio of eight-to-one adult
heading for the swings

blue-clad nursery nurses
pushing toddlers
four to a pram—

grey altostratus
a wet sun drips through
an adventurous chill,

two for joy

the magpies' deft beaks
seeking acorns in the oak litter,
flashing blue secondary feathers
but blue is not a vivid word
for one whose ruler tail's a shade
between jade and coal,
who wears a pied waistcoat

and a hood as black
as their heart
and ancient eye.

UP THE DANCIN'

by Marjorie A. M. Ferry

The swallay, the glasses, dead gallus the lassies
In mirrored rehearses, with microphone brushes
The routines, the actions, the chorus uproarious
The war paint, the slap, the tender (?) trap

The mobile, the taxi, more makeup, less acne
The perfume, the smoke, the city, the choke
The pub and the kitty, the round then the ditty
Of ' ♪C-r-a-z-y' karaoke queens

The pub crawl, the tables, the poseurs, the labels
The cocktails, the lager, the hair flicks, the swagger
The hunted, the prey, is becoming hazy
As heads start to sway

Last orders! the shutters, the heaving in gutters
The homeless, the chippie, the god squad, the trippy
The soldier, the horse
And the traffic cone of course!

The choosing, the picky, west end or the city
Sore feet, sorer purses, decisions, discourses
The bouncers, the queuing, the two out, and two in

And knock backs at the hippest people market

The music, the throbs, the dance floor, the mobs

Cool DJs, hot chancers, dark corners, romancers

The winchers, the watchers

The sad, holding torches of long dead flames

The patter, the pull, the cloakroom, the drool

The four wheel, the parking, the fumbling, the laughing

The mortise, the Yale key, kettle's on for coffee

Dark warmth brewing

The moment, the stripping, the heightened the gripping

The duvet, the yearning, the wetness, the burning

The loving, the holding, and pleasures unfolding

And bonding in just this

The morning, the dawning, the stretching the yawning

The grin, then the blushing, the nervousness gushing

The politeness, the "Toast?", the crumpled up clothes

Sit just a little uneasy

The shared, the kept secret, at autopsy next day

Your thoughts, their advices for next Saturday's play

Next Saturday's play?

Oh aye, cause they're dead gallus, the lassies.

Seasonally Adjusted Dad

by Sean McLaughlan

'Good in the sun'

Ma mam shouted frae the kitchen

'Nivir

a wrong word'

In the sun

Ah nivir went wae them

so Ah wouldnae know.

Ah nivir seen him warm.

But Ah seen the video

'The foreigners my god, they jist adored him...

He couldnae hiv been nicer in Spain...'

*'He'd speak in his broad Scottish accent (which they loved tae bits)
and they'd ask him tae say it again'*

'God aye, he could hiv stayed 'ere firever.

'Aye, this is the life Fran', he'd say.'

'Yer an eejit fir no comin' way us, that last time.' (She told me)

'That wis wan chance ye let pass away.'

Ma Mam continued tae shout intae me.

'Ah mind the view frae the balcony wis magic..

Yer fether could see right oot fir miles'

Ah rewound it back,

jist tae hear his rough *craic*

an Ah paused it on wan o' his smiles.

Ma Mam entered wi' the tea tray (bought in Mallorca of course)
so a quickly pressed play.

'Aye, good in the sun...

that wis yer poor fether.

'Nivir a wrong word'

In the sun

Ah never went way them

so Ah wouldnae know.

Ah nivir seen him warm.

But Ah seen the video

the shape of your ease

by Fiona Montgomery

lying there vulnerable
exposed, but relaxed and trusting

not posing or thrusting
no arrogance, not macho, not defensive

just natural and nurtured, you nurture yourself
happy in your physicality, not holding in stomach

nor tucking in buttock, hiding folds
I'd like to draw you like this, compare your easy sensuous sprawl

with the man who curls up to protect himself, his balls, his all
you share your body with me, but don't want to share your soul

I'd like to draw you in to mine
draw you into deep connection

verbal tantalising exploration of us
who we are; desires, hopes, dreams, fears

let me draw you without feeling I'm drawing teeth
trace out those tensions, so you can breathe

My Friendship with Moths Considered

by Steven Petchey

The moth is my friend,
My friend of the wax.
If I were his size
I'd be eaten by bats.
And if he were like me,
Not in looks but in frame,
He'd be pulled down by wolves,
He'd be killed just the same.

Research

by Fiona Rintoul

During my readings
an article slips in front of me
written by a man who says
he married for love
but used to walk home at night
wishing his wife
would fall down the stairs
and break her fucking neck.

I cry when I read this
because that is in fact
the very worst part;
reaching that dreich point
where you think to yourself,
well, of course, it would be terrible
if he died, but at least
it would fucking well be over.

The Sacrifice

by Joyce Henderson

She's blushing red and naked. Her hair stands on end. She's perpetually aroused. She wields a meat flailer. She carries a staff where she keeps her male consort concealed till she needs him. Sometimes, after sitting on the meditation cushions at her feet, I get up feeling raw, skinned alive. I know all I am is pure potential, free-floating in a limitless sky. I feel dizzy.

She's called Vajrayogini. She's a Tibetan goddess of the dakini type. Sometimes she's a saint, sometimes she's a witch. Sometimes she demands a sacrifice. Like the day I fell out with the woman behind the glass in the DSS office because she said they'd lost the 20 page form I'd filled in to prove that I was ill and I would have to do it again. I won't do it again, I said. I'm ill and the last thing I need is to fill in another bloody form. In the reflection I saw two security guards appear and hover behind me. I couldn't take my eyes off the wedge-shaped end of her thalidomide arm. I stormed off muttering 'stumpy woman' under my breath.

This time, when I sat on my cushions I could only see the dakini's feet. They were broad and muscular, almost like paws. And the diamond tipped end of her staff. Which she thumped three times on the ground in front of me. A reminder or an exhortation. A phone call confirmed they'd found the form. I knew I needed to do something, offer something up, make a sacrifice. Should I prostrate 1000 times like the Tibetan pilgrims do round Mount Kailash? This was Sighthill.

I took the back stairs out of the estate, headed for the DSS office, stopping at the One-O-One en route. I knew what was required of me. I wasn't sure I could do it. Stumpy woman eyed me suspiciously from behind the glass. I told the people behind me to go to the first available position, I was waiting for her. She was hiding her stump under her other arm. I said, I'm sorry. I lost my temper. I was upset about the form. Could I give her these chocolates? She said there was no need,

she'd just not wanted me to lose any money. I tried to push the box through the space beneath the glass. It wouldn't fit. Come to the door, she said, giving in.

We faced each other. There were no security guards, no glass between us, only a box of Maltesers. She took them with her good hand.

Moving Light

by Jessica Parkinson

Cold air is stiff and hard to breathe. Beyond the parking lot, I could walk in any direction and be lost. I can feel that the clouds have gone and left us too close to space. The sight of the stars is painful. My mouth gapes open and my head hangs back, a weight. I accustom my eyes to one layer and another one emerges behind it. Too cold to look any longer, I go to the restaurant, grasping at its glow.

The drunk is buying us coca cola. I say, 'no, no'. He laughs and shouts, 'veryverygood! Anna, president of Mongolia!' Anna chews on mutton. She grins with a full mouth. They are like old friends. I drink from her can so we can keep the other one. I am thirsty and the night is ahead. Before I get back on the bus I go to the side of the building and pee. I step in someone else's shit. I try to wipe my sole clean on the gravel. There is still a heavy smell when I get in, wedging myself between Anna and him.

The bus is Russian-made, grey. It bounds along tracks in the black grass, headlights pushed forward, forcing into blind night. Two drivers take turns manhandling the crazed wheel. Our heavy treaded tires fly off the path and clunk down. We lurch forward at steep angles. Our bodies are lodged together but our heads are free to loll and knock and bang in and out of sleep.

Nudged with a plastic cup, I wake up. 'Veryvery nice,' his face gleams in the dim interior.

'Vodka!'

'No, not for -' Anna elbows me. 'Take it, they're blessing the bus or something.' I look up. Not just the drunk's, all eyes are on me. The tumbler holds a generous slosh. I raise it to my lips as if to swallow, then pass to Anna who drinks twice. The cup moves round. Later she throws up out the

window. She spits her mutton up in the wind.

Headlights on horse eyes. The animal flees the truck track. The herd grazes sideways, waiting for the rumble to pass. Snorts, soft blows, nothing to us in our shaking, shaken bus.

We can't see, not even a reflection in the dense window. There is only the heavy design of the carpet we drag over our knees and up the steel side to pad Anna's arm. We are packed in, coats, hats, mittens, but the cold cuts under them, between everyone.

Anna rides with her head near the crack of window. She turns often and lets her mouth open against it. He tries to pass her water. He tries to pass her vodka. Anna puts her head on my shoulder. He wants to switch seats. He wants to hold her. I give him the finger. He says he will poke my eyes out and cut my throat. We fight in sign. Then he solemnly shakes his head. 'You,' he says, 'Mongolia, no.' He points out of the bus, past the night, over the border.

The drunk passes out. His unconscious weight tips onto me. I shove him off. He grumbles and falls back asleep. Anna helps me push his head down between his legs. Like a toy, drunk-in-the-bus, he springs up and slumps back where he was. We push him away again; push the side of his head, greasy hair, leather skin. I shout, 'wake up, fucking drunk'. He nuzzles into me.

Anna reaches over and grabs his collar. She pulls him up, shakes. She speaks low and mean, 'stay the fuck away from us or I'll smash your stupid drunk face.' His bleary eyes pop open. Anna's arms stretch across me. He raises his hands and I think he'll hit her. I lean back and they stare into the shadows of the other. Then I make my tightest fist and pummel the roof. Thud thud thud thud until the driver stops and everyone wakes up, looks back. I shout, dirty english, but the message reaches. What I said, I said for us.

The circular ceiling light blinks on while others return to spastic dreams. Anna is white under her blue wool hat. The drunk gets out and throws up. They make the next girl switch seats. He sags against her. Now three, we spend the night banging his head against the window, hard, to hurt him.

We're still. We've stopped. I open my eyes and see. Flat expanse of orange ground and three timber structures surround us. All file out and we follow. Clean light is rising up one side of the world. In the small restaurant, the sober drunk wants to buy us tea and porridge. Everyone is smiling. A woman re-applies her make-up.

The Mettlenesh Troupe

by Steven Petchey

Keith was by far the funniest clown. Gongbash and Yellowface were consummate clowns. Their clothes were ridiculous. They threw themselves around. They fell over. They were always getting wet. Keith, who dressed for comfort and conformity, effected a greater reaction in the crowd simply by raising an eyebrow.

Gongbash and Yellowface discussed the matter between themselves. They decided to discuss Keith with Keith.

“You need a clown name,” Gongbash said to Keith.

“A clown needs a clown name,” agreed Yellowface. “And you are a clown, Keith.”

“We’ve given the matter some thought,” said Gongbash.

He and Yellowface then proceeded to list one hundred and thirty seven possible names that they had thought of, starting with the very worst and finishing with the least bad. They said that the extensive nature of the list indicated that it was an exhaustive list. Keith wanted none of it.

“Keith,” he said, “is an inherently funny name.”

“No, it isn’t!” said Gongbash.

“Keith,” said Keith.

Gongbash and Yellowface tittered.

“Well,” said Gongbash, “if you won’t consider a proper clown name, perhaps you would consider a more outrageous outfit. Your suit... not funny.”

“My suit?” said Keith. “Picture it in your mind’s eye.”

Gongbash and Yellowface tittered.

“Well,” said Gongbash.

“Well,” said Yellowface.

“The act,” said Gongbash.

“The act?” said Keith.

“The act,” said Yellowface.

Gongbash cleared his throat. “This act is a clown act. We respect the tradition of the clown. We dress up. We use silly names.”

“We feel it inappropriate that you do not do the same. We feel we are made to look foolish,” said Yellowface.

“My looking ordinary,” said Keith, “makes you look all the more clownish.” Gongbash and Yellowface smiled. “My not performing slapstick also makes you look all the more clownish.” Gongbash and Yellowface bowed their heads in delight. “I have an idea, though. To improve the act.”

Gongbash and Yellowface looked at each other.

“Improve?” said Yellowface.

“Does it involve clothes or falling over?” said Gongbash.

“Or large handkerchiefs or standing still?” said Yellowface.

“Music,” said Keith. “We need some music. Bespoke clown music.”

“Interesting,” said Gongbash.

“Very,” said Yellowface.

“I should be able to write some,” said Gongbash.

“As should I,” said Yellowface.

“No,” said Keith. “I have a friend. A talented musician. Very talented. He needs the work.”

“Then,” said Yellowface, “he cannot be that talented.”

“Or why would the need the work?” said Gongbash.

“He’s a musician,” said Keith. “I’ve invited him here tonight, to meet us. He should be here any minute.”

“Then he will have wasted his time,” said Gongbash.

“As a troupe we are complete,” said Yellowface.

Keith shook his head. "If you don't listen to my friend's music, you will be missing out."

"I am set against it," said Yellowface.

"As am I," said Gongbash.

Gongbash looked at Yellowface. Yellowface looked at Gongbash. Yellowface and Gongbash looked at Keith. They nodded once, firmly.

Keith looked at his watch. Five minutes to wait. He said nothing more to Yellowface and Gongbash, nor did they to him until there was a tap at the door and a face poked round.

"The Mettlenesh Three?" said the man.

Keith raised his eyebrows. Yellowface could not suppress his smile. Gongbash hid his behind his hand.

The head that raised the spirits of the two clowns was as white as a sheet, as white as the driven snow, as white as a clown's face. The lips, exaggerated beyond biology by down-turned lipstick, were as red as fierce desire. The eyebrows, created with paint, told of such surprise no man could imagine the cause. And the hair was dashing wildly out from beneath the battered hat like an electrical experiment in mid disaster. A hint of what was hidden behind the door could be seen: a dusty black suit, a spotty shirt and a massive, massive tie.

"Ed..." began Keith.

"Goodfeet," said the man. "As a clown I want to be known as Goodfeet."

With that he withdrew from the room and shut the door. Yellowface and Gongbash stared at the door, mouth open, eyebrows raised. Keith stared at the door, mouth open, eyebrows knitted.

From the corridor came the sound of an accordion on which was being played a tune so jaunty Yellowface clapped along and Gongbash began to move rhythmically. The door then burst open and Goodfeet danced into the room with his instrument. Yellowface and Gongbash gasped at the man's shoes. They had never seen such length. They had never seen such bulbous toes. Yellowface gulped. Gongbash inhaled loudly. After a jig round the table that kept Yellowface and Gongbash enraptured, Goodfeet sat down. He struck up another tune as he did so, a slower tune that still held his audience's attention. This became slower still and Goodfeet began to cry. Yellowface put his hand on Gongbash's shoulder and tapped his chest twice with a fist. Gongbash clasped his hands between his legs and hung his head. His shoulders shook. Goodfeet then played a bum note and fell to the floor. He got back on the chair, continued the sad tune and the crying, then did the same thing. He repeated this four more times, each time falling more spectacularly, each time causing Yellowface and Gongbash to laugh and clap and point and look at each other and slap their thighs. Goodfeet then returned to his jaunty tune and danced backwards out of the room and shut the door. The music stopped.

Yellowface and Gongbash leapt to their feet. "More!" they cried. "More!"

Goodfeet came back into the room. "Was that OK?"

Gongbash looked at Yellowface. Yellowface looked at Gongbash. Yellowface and Gongbash looked at Keith.

"We need to have a troupe discussion," said Yellowface.

"Troupe discussion," said Gongbash.

Goodfeet pulled a massive handkerchief from his pocket and ostentatiously blew his nose. He turned to Keith. "I have a little something to say thanks for the opportunity." From another pocket in his ill-fitting, lengthy coat he took a small package and handed it to Keith.

"No," said Keith. "It's not appropriate."

Goodfeet kept proffering the package. "Yes, it is. It's not much."

Keith took the package. He looked at Yellowface and Gongbash whose eyes flicked between his face and the gift.

"Open it," said Goodfeet.

"Yes, open it," said Yellowface.

"Yes, open it," said Gongbash.

Keith opened the package. Inside was another package.

"Open it," said Yellowface.

“Yes, open it,” said Gongbash.

“Yes, open it,” said Goodfeet.

Keith opened the package. Inside was another package, into which he immediately tore. From the final package he took out and held aloft the gift. It was a bow tie. Yellowface and Gongbash immediately knew it was a deluxe model. It would light up. It would twirl. It could be used to squirt water. Wide-eyed, they looked at Goodfeet, then fixed their stares on Keith.

Keith smiled. “All right,” he said. “I’ll accept it.”

“We are now The Mettlenesh Four,” said Gongbash.

“The Mettlenesh Four,” said Yellowface.

“The Mettlenesh Four,” said Keith.

Jamie the Thirteenth

by Tom Rae

There's some that say it was The Smout's doing, and some the foul work o Jim McCandless...the history books will gie us an answer nae doot, aye, an there's mair than enough o them – no' like in the King's day. And they'll spik aboot cessation o French subsidies and oor industries' decay, the northwards march o the Levellers...ach but maybe the King himsel spoke the truest word. Destiny. No' that he wisnae a bit owerfond o the Fates as an excuse: he fair upset folk in the West efter the Inundation. They didnae want tae ken whether it wis Dumbarton or Greenock that the Brahan Seer creature said would be lost tae the waters. Near ten years their baillies had been claikin for the coppers tae put up a fend agin the Clyde. Aye, but ye widnae hae thocht puir wee Jamie's time wis sae near if ye'd seen New Hampton Park first built.

There's nae need tae be going intae dimensions and figures...let's jist say it wis equal the size o the hillock o rock aside it, the castle oan it included...NEW HAMPTON PARK, the great dome o it like a Michaelmas moon; coorse there's them that'll bad mooth onything, the malcontents that cried the park and the auld fortress aside it the Stuart's Paps. Mean-spiritedness. They say the peak o it was cawd the King's View, way up it juttet, a hundred feet above the Restauration Staund, the shape o an etin thistle.

And that's where Lex Smout, the Royal Favourite joined his King that day. Fair pleased the King looked... the game three-quarters gone and Scotland twa stowks up. The first time in mony a year a crowd were cheering him.

The Smout? He was jist his freetit self. Aw the mair so wi the black news he'd had. It seemed that the McCandless had somehow got wind o his plan.

- For God's sakes man, cheer up.

The King was never the wan for long faces when he was brightsome.

- We're winning. Ye were right Smout. Listen tae them oot there, ma people cheer me. Och cheer up Lexy, ye've a face like a frozen mole. We'll soon hae done wi these long-limbed African loons. Then wha's tae stoap us? Some pooky bit islanders or they soor-faced protestant fermers? They'll never beat us at the Ciorbus. Did we no invent the game, eh? The King was aye a wee tait boastfu, that went wi being a King maybe...but it wid be wrang tae tak onything awa fae the Germans, well organised team that they were and beating the Lithuanians in the qualifiers.

- Jist think Lexy...ah'll be the first monarch in history tae pick a side that won the Square and Sphere. Beat that ya auld witch-hunter!

Them that were well used tae King James testified tae this strange custom he had...the casting of challenges at his forefathers. Ach but the maist o them agreed, he was a harmless enough soul.

No like some o the scalliwags that were waiting doonstairs wi a petition. It seems they'd got McCandless, the First Minister tae take it upon himsel tae front their grievances. A cantrim ploy it wis tae, this day o aw days, wi Scotland up against the Ciorbus world champions. Smout mightn't be sae high-handed when the Scots lost, not a body (but the King) expected otherwise. Now was the time tae extort concessions.

At the foot o The Thistle they met, glowerin retinues ahint them; Smout and McCandless squarin up boldly, yin tae the ither. McCandless, wi thon black glower o a Lanarkshire dominie, brimfu o pishery pashery about the people's rights and freedoms. Him wi his poor tenants oan Arran feart tae sweat but wan o his tacksmen would trauchle alang wi a bucket. Still, there was something about his person that the Western Fowk kent. Jim McCandless, even when he togged up in that kilt tae win favour wi the Highland fowk - wis still wan o their ain, a loyal Lanarkshire loon.

No like The Smout. "Wee Smokey" was the name they had for him, on account of he had een like fish oota water; or maybe it was because his faither had been a fishmonger up in Buchan.

Onyway, neb tae neb they stood, till real cauld-like McCandless spiks... They were come tae see the King. There was a petition. Aw the great lords had signed it, the Glesga magnates (right rankled they still wur wi James since the Great Flude) and the professional cronies fae the East that had drafted it... a demand for the revocation o the Assembly without delay.

- So get oot ma road ya putrid wee scag, says McCandless, looking like he'd jist trampled oan dirt. Ma family have served loyally these Stuarts for ower twelve generations... and ah'm no for watching your ambition cost him his throne!

- Loyalty! Says the Smout. Ye've the effrontery tae staun there chirpin tae me aboot that... you that's been cavorting wi the English! You that spiks aboot your sovereign in the third person.

Still, wee Lexy Smout knew how reesky was the grun he stood oan noo that McCandless wis oan tae him. He wis sure o that, as sure as his faither used tae be when a lying fisherman wis tryin tae pass him a catch ta'en fae a polluted stretch.

Of a sudden McCandless cursed, wheeled and stormed aff, still wi a grip o the petition. Muttering, the factions slinked efter him. Syne right slow and sure like, Smout turns and whispers tae wan o his ain men. And whit else could he be saying if it wisnae that the man wis tae go and find oot jist exactly how much McCandless did ken?

The Smout went back up The Thistle. The King wis radioin doon tae the dugoot.

- Get oor players each tae gether a bit dirt and toss it ower their left shooders Wattie.

Whit a birr o superstition and energy he wis that day. As for the favourite? Well he could never abide such enthusiasm. Fair scunnert he got at the sight o a patriotic rabble...ane silly chant fighting against anither. Aye. James was the right King for them. Lex Smout saw how better it wad o been if his mother had been south o the border when ta'en wi him. They were a clear-heided people doon there, kent their ain minds...no' jist a clanjamfrie o spiled bairns, wi the biggest bairn o the lot for a leader.

Well naebody said James was giftit wi that sensitivity that could tell ither men's minds, and he proved as much when he did Smout the "kindness" o offering him a seat beside him at the telescope for the chance o a better view...They say that when ye're irked there's ay something new tae irk ye...and was the first thing Lex clapped his een oan no that scribbler Tam Barliehood, a notorious muck-spreader o sedition that wis in and oot a jile like a well-kent whore. And well-kent wi the whores he wis tae. Aye but he widnae be lookin sae smug when news hit the taverns aboot his daeins doon South. At least McCandless had the sense tae agree tae that bit canny business. Tam Barliehood, jist look at him. Een like an adder. How did that puir wife o his put up with the hairy brute? Lex tried tae point him oot, but was the King no' too busy whittle-whattlin aboot some young loon across in the Waverley Stand. There was a favourite saying he had, aboot how faces such as these met his famous ancestor on first crossing the border...dour, perennial, the face o the lowland Scot.

- The jiles are reeking wi lean types like yon yer majesty. Their mothers were too fond o the drink tae ken their faithers...grandsires fu o stupid tales aboot the glorious days o the rig-building.

But syne he found a good humour James wisnae the wan for listening, especially as he had jist spotted a fine-looking quine oan the terracings. Yet he'd hae profited mair by the words o Lex Smout. The land was fu o dangerous sorts like the loon in the crowd. Or the "Ubies", bad seed o the idle...folk wi neither the skill at the rig-building, or the winsomeness needed tae work in the great parks and mansions o the West...only the bonniest might find themsels serving the travellers at the table o a Lindsay, a Montgomerie or a Hay. James insisted his ain servants hae the finest features features o aw.

But maybe that was because he had such a lack o these himsel. His tongue, too big for his moo, stuck right oot daftie-like atween his teeth. Whenever he wis ower-occupied, aye and that didny

take much some said, it wis then he wis “the slobbering Stuart” wi the drool rinnin doon ower his chin.

And maybe he was drooling right then, for that was a bonny lassie he had picked oot for himsel. As for Smout...well he was mair relieved than offended at his latest task, sae used he wis tae the King’s lustfu appetite.

- Get oot there Lex and gie her loon a shilling or twa, and make sure that she’s cleaned up and brought tae me the night efter supper.

The King widnae be in need o a lass tae keep him warm where The Smout wis planning oan sending him that night. And noo, instead o fetchin the quine, Smout wis strussling tae get himsel intae some auld claes; the last thing he wanted was tae be recognised. There were some oot there sworn tae tear him tae pieces. If it wisnae for but he wis between the devil and the deep blue sea he widnae hae been going oot at aw...

The lang and the short o it wis this. Lex being nae fool saw the wey it was pannin oot. And if James had tae go why should he no profit? The plan wis simple. Kill the King if Scotland lost the match. Ride the back o rebellion. Whit could be easier? Twa men in the crowd tae detonate the bomb: him in the stand tae denounce the monarchy. Alas the best-laid plans...Scotland were winning, McCandless oan the prowl...nae choice but tae abandon the conspiracy. Coorse this wis easier said than done, Garnet and Catesby were men for sticking tae their orders, Smout himsel wad hae tae get oot there and spik wi them. So disguised as a wabster, oot oan tae the terracings he crept.

Hemmed in wi the Westerners, tribal territory well mapped oot though it wis but New Hampton’s first game, he despaired o ever making progress. The Eastern folk, where Garnet and Catesby were, still swayed and chanted a guid fifty yards aff, it might as well hae been fifty miles. An elbow dug

him in the ribs. Twa lungfu's o stale breath he got for complaining. Near sick it made him, the creash o the crowd fair turning his stomach. He'd lang forgot the reek o the people. Blacker and blacker his fish een went...and that's maybe why he wis spotted. For yin o they mean-faced loons James wis wont tae prattle sae fondly oan, sharp and hungry like, suddenly knew who it wis he looked oan.

- Look. It's Wee Smokey!

He tried tae cry for help from the nearest Highland Guards, though God knows how a hale regiment o them wi Lochaber axes could hae got him oot o there. Ach but he wis fair panicking...accounts agree here; folk jist wanted their bit fun. He wis suffering nae mair than a bang oan the heid against the odd girder, or a wee squeeze o his manhood; painfu but hermlless like. And if it wisnae but for the Africans scored jist then and the cafuffle that broke oot oan the park, it wis agreed by aw, the crowd wad never hae drapped the wee man. Or failed tae notice his wee fish-mooth openin and shuttin and gasping for breath doon there among the brown boots o the Western folk. And syne the game got real serious like...well, they jist left him there...deid wi a heart-attack; tae some o McCandless's men found him and brought the guid news back tae their maister.

By the time McCandless got to the King the Africans had struck again. Who wad hae changed places wi the man? Tae report the death o the very wan that had poisoned the King against him; the King who at this minute was already in a rage about Africans and players and coaches.

Well, James took the news right badly. He cursed and ranted sae bad he never even heard the latest animal-groan that went up fae the crowd.

- If this is the wey o ministers and advisers McCandless, only that they lead us tae disaster...then ah'm done wi coonsel forever. And they'll be nae mair o yer Assemblies, dae ye understaun that? Noo is there onything else ye've got tae tell me ya gowk?

It's no easy tae put across the ill-use the King made o Jim McCandless, contempt was the reward for his loyalty. Puir McCandless, who can blame him for his answer.

- Naw Sire. Humbly spoke, in control were his words. He said nae mair and took his leave o the King.
- Well the wan fact Garnet and Catesby were clear on wis that jist afore the feenish o the match the Lochaber Guards seemed tae draw back fae the crowd; this making their task a richt guid bit easier. And they remembered King James come clear out oan tae the royal balcony, fair in a fury wi his players he wis then. Like as if he was dancing a mad jig o rage. And then the Game Ower Klaxon went, and the crowd were booing. They saw the King's heid hung in despair, and well... well, the rest is history.