

TALES WE TELL

BY JOEL STICKLEY

The devil breathes on Boston Stump,
where saintly stones resist his power;
the wind is high on blackened nights
and as it whips around the tower
it will rise,
it will rise.

A Tetry mountain built from glass
where trees with golden apples grow;
an eagle lifts the young boy up
where armoured knights have fallen so
he may rise,
he may rise.

These are the tales that tell us –
these are the tales we tell.

A monk at Swineshead Abbey plots
to slip a poison to the king;
he knows the taxes must be stopped –
unless he does this wicked thing
they will rise,
they will rise.

To bury some poor fallen wretch,
a scholar donates all he can;
the scholar dies, but at his side
the spirit of the buried man
says arise,
says arise.

These are the tales that tell us –
these are the tales we tell.

An imp is sent to taunt the choir
and so the angels make him stone;
he's forced to stay eternally
and hear their songs – he sits alone
as they rise,
as they rise.

A princess flees her father's house
with soldiers chasing close behind;
she gives herself a river's shape –
the soldiers watch her waters wind
and then rise,
and then rise.

These are the tales that tell us –
these are the tales we tell.

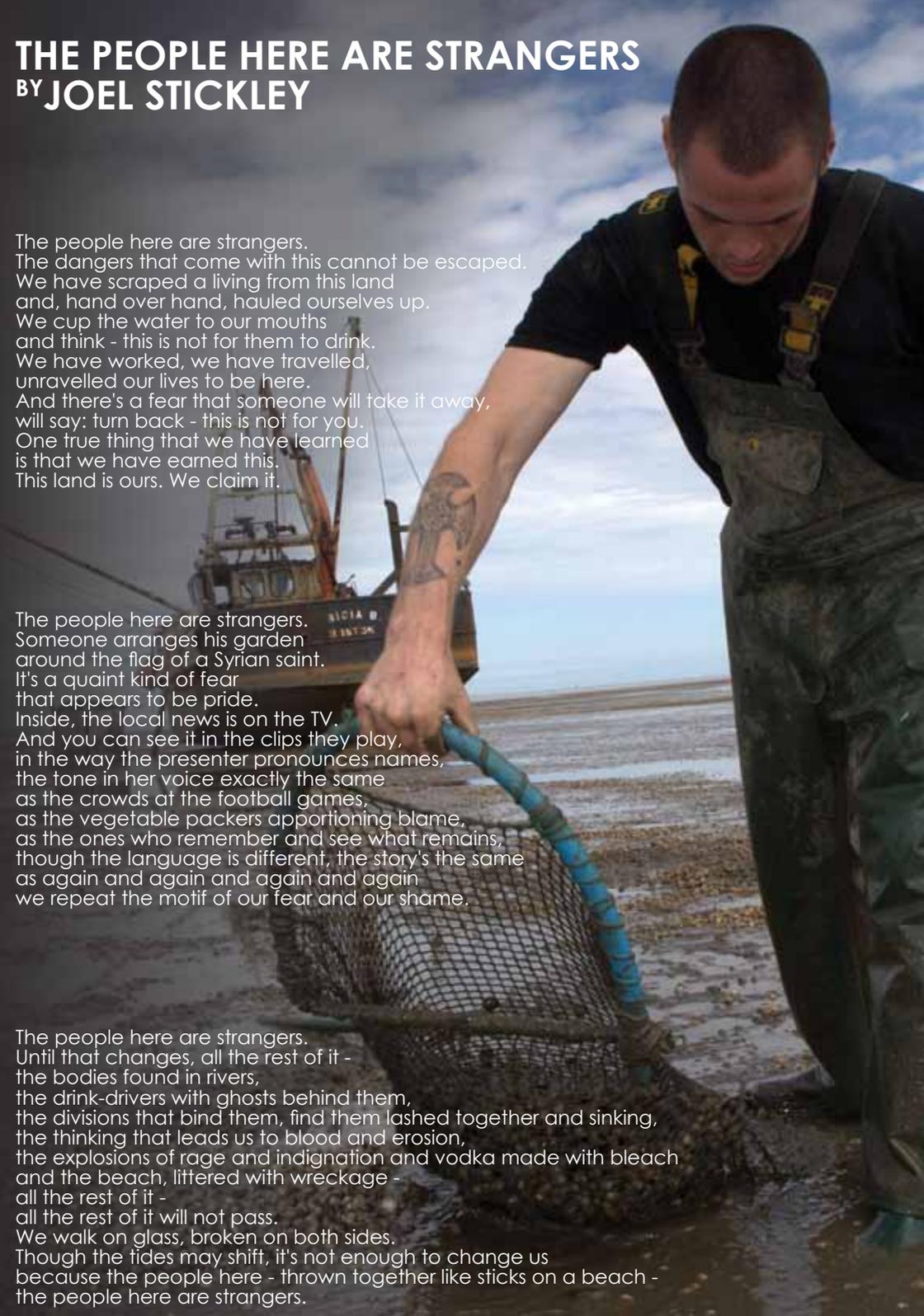
The fenland rivers run to red,
the devil's breath sings in the trees;
a hatred rises from the soil
to overwhelm such songs as these –
yet we rise,
yet we rise.

We share a faith in stories' power,
we share the land we walk upon;
when all around us falls to hate,
the tales we tell, we tell as one
and we rise
and we rise
and we rise.



THE PEOPLE HERE ARE STRANGERS

BY JOEL STICKLEY

A fisherman in dark overalls and a black t-shirt is leaning over, pulling a large, dark fishing net onto a sandy beach. The net is filled with dark, possibly seaweed or small fish. In the background, a fishing boat is visible on the water, and the sky is overcast. The fisherman has a tattoo on his left arm.

The people here are strangers.
The dangers that come with this cannot be escaped.
We have scraped a living from this land
and, hand over hand, hauled ourselves up.
We cup the water to our mouths
and think - this is not for them to drink.
We have worked, we have travelled,
unravelling our lives to be here.
And there's a fear that someone will take it away,
will say: turn back - this is not for you.
One true thing that we have learned
is that we have earned this.
This land is ours. We claim it.

The people here are strangers.
Someone arranges his garden
around the flag of a Syrian saint.
It's a quaint kind of fear
that appears to be pride.
Inside, the local news is on the TV.
And you can see it in the clips they play,
in the way the presenter pronounces names,
the tone in her voice exactly the same
as the crowds at the football games,
as the vegetable packers apportioning blame,
as the ones who remember and see what remains,
though the language is different, the story's the same
as again and again and again and again
we repeat the motif of our fear and our shame.

The people here are strangers.
Until that changes, all the rest of it -
the bodies found in rivers,
the drink-drivers with ghosts behind them,
the divisions that bind them, find them lashed together and sinking,
the thinking that leads us to blood and erosion,
the explosions of rage and indignation and vodka made with bleach
and the beach, littered with wreckage -
all the rest of it -
all the rest of it will not pass.
We walk on glass, broken on both sides.
Though the tides may shift, it's not enough to change us
because the people here - thrown together like sticks on a beach -
the people here are strangers.