

On the Wing

It's quiet now - away from clattering steel axles and frames in the workshop. Locked inside as lights go out across the Wing, I can't sleep, thinking about her all the time sketching plans in my head for her special wheels - a prisoner like me, she longs to be free.

And I drift back to a time when I was free out in the country as a kid, nerves of steel rattling down hills on Mum's old pram wheels flat on my belly, all shaken up inside ending in the shallows, losing track of time as I watch for the dart of a kingfisher wing.

Distant gulls screech, sweep and glide, spanned wings folding as they land on deck to hitch a free ride on the late-night ferry. It's time for the crew to winch up the ramp, steel chains clanking as day-trippers head inside the cabin, swaying gently as the ship wheels.

And I'm lying awake, thinking of wheels - and how for her they'd be just like wings as she lies prone on her bed, trapped inside her body's prison - she could break free from her mud-walled cell and the clicking steel of her needles knitting - her clock ticking time.

And I'm watching the clock – I need more time
to plan the mechanics, the size of the wheels,
the length of her trolley, her flat bed of steel.
And I can't wait for morning to get off the Wing
back to the workshop, where ideas run free,
sketch plans onto paper, feel a warm glow inside.

This is the first time since they put me inside
I really feel good, making use of my time.
My body's in prison but my mind's still free
to see Africa's colours spin in her wheels,
catch the malachite glint of kingfisher wing,
rich red earth of the tracks, clattering steel

of turning wheels - the caged bird set free
from her sentence inside, flying through time
chasing the wind on wings of steel.

Margaret Beston

*Prisoners in Parkhurst recondition and customise wheelchairs for disabled people
in developing countries which are distributed by www.throughtheroof.org*