The Scaur Pencil

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The Scaur Pencil
Phil Sawdon

A morphemic drawn fiction by dint of obsolescence; drawn using occasional relic words.

[In the quiet of one evening.]

Gabriel Chêne hums: he is busy with a sharpened pencil whilst practising his sleight of hand. He is accompanied by the smell of seaweed, flesh and fish, the hawthorn is in blossom and several white petals fall on the dark paper. He hears the approach of several sheep. In his haste he drops the pencil. There it rests on the neap tide whilst the sheep search in the long grass under the gibbet, picking over a bone here and a feather there and examining the skull of a stoat. One of the sheep took up the pencil and silently began to draw … unable to encourage even a few words or marks the pencil was inconspicuously regurgitated and disgorged into the blue mud.

The pencil was, for millions of years, lost. Local wisdom maintains that it was retrieved by René Hector allegedly accompanied by Emily Blaireau erstwhile curator of The Fictional Museum of Drawing whilst they snatched at an attenuated nothing searching for fossils in a clearly marked Lost and Found box. Ms Blaireau of course now prefers to dress in diamonds and pose as a pantomime sheep. Her current position is at The Drawing Frame in the House of Le Singe.

[Anon and on anon.]

René, pencil in hand approached a blank piece of white paper. Without further ado, subdued and bated breath, almost apologetic he traced: Do you want it here?

I watched his pencil … to and fro … there’s … so much mettle … hither and thither, so many evasions, disappointments, erasure … marks at loggerheads … in the offing … wrought and sometimes stumped … I guess, lies maybe … even the whole shebang … so much kit and caboodle, so little that’s settled … the eraser appears to wreak havoc on the support … he mutters, sometimes, but mostly … no.

[Brief silence.]

It doesn’t … ‘draw’. Oh sure it ‘draws’… and it’s in fine fettle but any scaur pencil is inevitably from a bygone era … time immemorial … always a little reluctant – gruff, we know, and … cautious. And René isn’t happy … it sticks in his craw, continuously at the pencil’s beck and call whilst he ekes out a sketch – I suppose that’s it.

[Brief silence.]

René unrolled more paper where he hopes it has a coign of vantage and is tracing, with a grubby finger, the course of his next work. Whilst locking the door he looks around with a little apprehension, then relief as he realised that he can let the pencil run amok. It’s time to batten down the hatches.

[There is a knock at the door.]

My last glimpse of him he was with various kith and kin including Mary Anning, who was in conversation with Elizabeth Philpot, their crooked shadows drawn on the interior of an old
hollow oak. It appeared that they were as ever at their remorseless toil of revivifying ink from the fossilised ink chambers of belemnites known locally as scaur pencils.

[A burst from an accordion.]

I left them in high dudgeon chuntering as they had done for a thousand cuckoo years and untold days of yore.