

Congratulations missus, I've just come round to say  
That you've won the competition to hear the poem of the day  
And it's no just any poem, you'll be delighted that you've won,  
It's an ode to say we've come of age, we've just turned twenty-one.

Supporting folk in Inverclyde, with volunteers, what's more  
All highly trained and eager when they come round to your door  
Supported by a team of three, all able, heaven knows  
The volunteers are amateurs, the team of three are pros.

There's Liz, the boss, who with Irene, has been here from the start  
They're women, so it's obvious, they must be mighty smart  
And diplomatic for I'm told, that every now and then  
They have to bite their tongues in all their dealings with mere men.

One day I overheard them as they sat and had a laugh  
When Liz said it's a miracle that my tongue's no bitten off  
And from Irene a quick reply, she said Liz, you're quite right  
The trouble with male volunteers is that they're none too bright.

Up piped Fiona in a voice both loud and clear, that carried,  
"That doesn't say a lot for you, considering that you're married"  
Aye right enough, says Liz, that makes us look a pair of fools  
Till Irene chips in, Liz...we picked...exceptions to the rules.

And then Fiona speaks again, she's warming to the task  
The anniversary's coming up, do you know who you could ask  
That clown who used to volunteer, that we sent out to old biddies  
Let's save ourselves the hassle, let's give him a world class riddie.

Let's get him to give a speech in verse, or even write a play  
And when it falls down flat we'll all just shrug and then we'll say  
That asking him just demonstrates our commitment at this time  
To letting you, the audience, be victims of a crime.

But even though he's daft, Liz said, we really have to stress  
That when he rises to his feet he has to try his best  
And though his best is pretty poor we have to help him say  
The reason that we're gathering is we're twenty-one that day.

Then Liz's face grew thoughtful and she nodded to Irene  
For it set them both to thinking about the victims that they'd seen  
The bells they'd rung the doors they'd chapped the high rise lifts they'd entered  
The forms filled in, the funds they'd raised, the volunteers they'd mentored.

Does it seem that long, Liz asked, and wished her voice a little stronger  
Then listened as Irene replied it seemed a damned sight longer  
Then quickly held a hand aloft and added, I'm just joking  
This way at least I'll save myself from filling up and choking.

Sad memories came flooding back ; housebreakings, thefts and stabbings  
Assaults and murders, nuisance calls and even handbag grabbings  
Oh yes, those girls had done the lot, supported til it hurt  
Seen the movie, read the book and worn the wee T shirt.

Now here I'm going to try a trick with this, my humble rhyme,  
So step inside my Tardis while we all fly back through time  
It's nineteen eighty-seven, Margaret Thatcher's in her lair  
(And if that memory makes you ill, there's a sick-bag on each chair.)

So fasten up your seat-belts as we take a trip through space  
What's this? the Tardis falls to earth, the street sign says "Shaw Place"  
So take my hand, I'll lead you up a narrow winding stair  
No prizes folks for guessing who we're going to find up there.

Och well, perhaps, a little prize, I'll give you all a clue  
Her first name's Liz, well done, you've guessed, her second name's McCue  
And turning round to greet her yes, you've got the hang of this  
Is my friend, your friend, our friend, give it up for...Irene Smith.

Liz says Shaw Place was wee and dark, it started to torment her  
And so they took their files and moved...into the Westburn Centre  
Ten years later, moved again, but only round the corner  
Another move, she's for the chop, the management have warned her.

And yet they need the space, you see, to process all the cases  
That the polis send, detailing crimes in quite exotic places  
I'll not name them as I wouldn't wish to risk some strong objection  
For nowadays all data has the need of much protection.

But what I can reveal, and here you'll think I've been out boozing,  
Is what started out as hunners has now grown into thoosans  
All of which just goes to illustrate a fact that's crystal clear  
Is that what we need to deal with them is loads more volunteers.

All prepared to give an hour or two, just one day every week  
To lend a sympathetic ear, occasionally to speak  
To help the victims...whether young, or old or middling  
Regardless of their colour, race, their politics or religion.

And though there's times we might return from visits, rather stressed,  
On hearing that there's no-one of that name at that address  
There's bags of other times we'll find, that having climbed the stairs  
We'll hear the words "I'm glad to find there's still some folk who care."

Society, you'll often hear's beset by an affliction  
The criminal's the one who counts, forget about the victim  
And that, for me, is one hard fact that seldom ever fails  
Each visit to a victim helps to balance up the scales.

And there's aye the feel-good factor, here's ma cue tae start the braggin'  
When I tell ma mates ah've been tae see the victim of a stabbin'  
Help m'boab they'll say, eyes wide, wis it someone that you knew  
I didn't til this afternoon...but I ken them fine the noo.

No names though, that's agin the rules, the names are confidential  
Disclosing names is guaranteed to drive Liz radio rental  
And if you've written details of a victim on some paper  
You have to stick it in your mouth...mind, you'll pass it on much later.

Ach here, I'm blethering on again, you'll think me awful boring  
I finally take the hint when I detect the sound of snoring  
So happy birthday, twenty-one, you've chapped on many doors  
I have one wish, may you go on, to chap on many more.