

Setting Up Statues by Vanwy Arif

Tin-hatted, breeze battered, a soldier
stood silently outside the town hall,
opposite the carefully designed
clutter of the bookstore,
silhouetted in the morning
sun. His sniper's rifle shoulder-slung.
November light, ghost-white,
soaked his iron-grey face.

Neither young nor old, timid nor bold,
the cast matt sculpture bore no
features. Molten metal, fired, poured,
hammered and pressed,
shaped the sentinel.

Here to remind.

To re-wind

the years. That's what
the pedestal said.

It gave a name.

Sepoy Khudadad Khan.

Awarded The Victoria Cross

For His Bravery At

The First Battle of Ypres.

I shivered. Was it the spill
of hoar frost from Colebatch hill ?

Or that word?

'First'.

Icy faced from staring over long, I turned,

tip-tapped on the tourist-dollar
cobblestones, down the hill, past the bakery display
of Shrewsbury biscuits, plump puddings, fidget pies,
mint and gingerbread people, coats
sugar-buttoned against the cold; cakes
for All Souls.

When I reached the chai shop
I pulled the wavy-glass door.
Scents of green cardamom pods
and ochre cinnamon sticks
kissed the crisp air.