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YEARS

Live encounters

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MARK ULYSEAS
Poetry is...therefore I am

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Flower of the Cannon Ball Tree, Luang Prabang, Laos, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Poets, writers, academics, civil & human/animal rights activists, academics, environmentalists, social workers, photographers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of:

Live Encounters Magazine (2010), *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* (2016), *Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers* (2019) and now, *Live Encounters Books* (August 2020).

We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. **Please help by donating any amount for this just cause as events are threatening the very future of Live Encounters.**

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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Mark Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photo-grapher. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. In February 2019 the third publication was launched, *LE Children Poetry & Writing* (now renamed *Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers*). In August 2020 the fourth publication, *Live Encounters Books*, was launched. He has edited, designed and produced all of *Live Encounters'* 203 publications (till January 2021). Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*; *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. <https://liveencounters.net/mark-ulyseas/> <https://www.amazon.com/Mark-Ulyseas/e/B01FUUQVBG>



MARK ULYSEAS

Poetry is...therefore I am

These past eleven years have been a kaleidoscopic journey, with twisted verbs gyrating to the metre of soul...the soul of poetry beautifully sketched on sign boards carefully erected in a city of emotions run riot. The poets from Albania, Australia, Canada, China, Croatia, Cuba, France, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sri Lanka, Turkey, UK, USA, Vietnam etc., have continued the relay of chants, chants of angst and joy and remembrance and forgetfulness under an ever-changing sky.

So much has happened and yet nothing has changed. And yet change is constant.

Poets toil through the stanzas, gasping for the breath of life when confronted with myriad aberrations of humanity. Yet through the quagmire of emotive locomotion of thought, meaning emerges from the depths to lay bare the stunning beauty of life in the *living*: The first breath of a new born, the touch of a loved one and the embrace of a mother.

Poets dwell among us in a parenthesis, a madness bordering on sanity that forces them to peel away the many layers of rudimentary life to reveal its luscious core... of which we really are... beings from divinity marooned in an existential world of love, hope and abandonment.

Where do these poets get their thoughts?

How does thought become word?

And when do *notes* turn into a symphony of running words?

I have seen many a poet's work emerge from the ether, presenting itself as a living being to be accepted or censored, or to be put aside as if it didn't exist, like it *never* existed.

How does one stand in judgement on such work? Like a butcher in an abattoir? Or a self-serving flea on a dog's back? Or one who has just been offered a chance of a life time to share with the world filigreed utterances that could perhaps enrage or enlighten the reader?

One has often been placed in a position of sheer contentedness with submissions from poets who want to be part of *Live Encounters* journey. Sometimes the trickle has suddenly turned into a flash flood bringing with it debris from beautiful lands, of beautiful lands, that feature in the realms of heart stopping fantasy.

To sift through the work is like walking carefully through a forest so as not to tread on a precious life, a life that could be resting under a *fallen leaf* waiting for providence to set the forest ablaze.

Poets are emissaries of fate.

They do not have the luxury of waiting for a suitable time to begin drawing images and emotions.

Their time is the present, incarcerated forever in the *now*.

Richard W. Halperin holds Irish-U.S. nationality and lives in Paris. He has published four collections via Salmon Poetry, Cliffs of Moher; the most recent is *Catch Me While You Have the Light*, 2018; *People in a Diary* is listed for 2021. In complement, he has published thirteen shorter collections via Lapwing, Belfast; the most recent is *Under the Olive Tree: Three Poem Sequences*, 2020. His work is part of University College Dublin's Irish Poetry Reading Archive. He reads frequently in Ireland; scheduled readings for 2020 have been jumped to 2021. In 2005, Mr Halperin retired as Chief, Section for Teacher Education, UNESCO, where he edited *Reading and Writing Poetry: The Recommendations of Poets from Many Lands on the Teaching of Poetry in Secondary Schools*, downloadable *gratis* in English, French and Spanish. He holds a Ph.D. in English Literature from City University of New York; his mentor was Sears R. Jayne.



SAILING TO SHADOWS

I once stood in front of a wooden temple in Bangkok.
The shadows it cast were cinnabar.

In Japan the shadows, green and blue, on the sea
Were not the green or blue I had expected.

Shadows are in air first, maybe that explains it.

In the graveyard on Inis Meáin the shadows of mounds
Spread over the ground and sink into it.
When I visit I am awkward but my shadow has the hang of it.

America is far in my past now, I remember it by its shadows.
Edward Hopper shadows, James T. Farrell shadows.

The red light in my father's darkroom.

I see across the sea many friends who were.
Maybe that is why recently I want to be
By the sea. By the green of the sea.

Richard W Halperin

CINNABAR

I see in the distance a temple
in the Far East. I have been

in a few but not this one
and am glad to be in it.

I am in Paris during confinement
so where can I go?

and so am glad to see the temple.
I think it is in a valley in a city.

I mount the steps, wood.
I enter the temple-part of the temple.

There are no walls only pillars and grilles
supporting the Asian very Asian roof.

I see flowers lying all around,
I refused to buy any while entering.

I see other worshippers, not many,
worshipping silently, I, too, silently.

There is an odour of sandalwood
and indeed everything is of wood.

The temple if it is a temple
creaks in the wind if it is the wind.

I recognise among the few worshippers
my friend Aicha from Guinea Bissau

and think maybe this is Bangkok.
I take in the fact that all the wood

is painted cinnabar,
that the roof if it is a roof

is not so high as to be enthralling,
and am happy about that.

TRACES

A college friend with whom I had had a tiff
went away, meaning, he died. My mother,
with whom I hadn't had a tiff, went away,
meaning, she died. What was I supposed to do,
call the police? I think the gentleman
in the parlour understands. He sits
by the fire, reads, looks at the rain striking
the window, writes a little or so it seems
to me, talks to anyone in an easy way,
is a good listener as I have reason to know.
I myself have always liked rain. Traces.
Once I, too, was a little boy in short trousers
who was not as happy as everyone told him
he should be

IF I DRAW A CIRCLE IN THE SAND

Old Uncle Ralph, sitting in his chair,
interpreting, is the bore at the party.

Listeners are listening to their own
inner worlds anyway.

Rocks and pine trees and bluebells.
Still, small voices. 'Here I am.'

If I draw a circle in the sand and step inside it,
I start to suffocate.

I do not think death is that.
I think death is no circle at all.

I think a three-legged dog will lead us all to heaven.

TUNED IN

I live in France in French.
If someone had told me
At age five in Chicago how
My life would turn out,
I would have fainted.
Oz and Ozma were enough.

I have never got used to anything.
Every sorrow, every happiness,
A shock. What has sunk in is that
My real name cannot be Richard.
When I am dead, I'll find out
What my real name is.

Walks in Paris. As in walks in
My past cities. A walk among
Maquettes. When the tiny grandchild
Of a friend here asked me to
Pronounce Richard in English
And I did, he died laughing.

Sometimes on the street,
I do tune in. To the rue d'Estrées,
For example. To skateboards.
To pooches (peach). To potholes,
Which in Paris are convex.
But also:

A dear man, Franz of the Discophile
On Eighth Street, New York,
Once told me – I twenty, he fifty –
That when he lived in Paris,
He had been part of the huge crowd
Watching Chaliapin's funeral.

Sometimes, me too now. I
Am standing next to him. The bier
Passes. We smile at each other.

Mary Scheurer is a newly retired Philosophy and Literature teacher. She lives in France and is a member of the Leman Poetry Workshop in Geneva. She has worked for the last ten years with a quartet of European poets who met on an MA course at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her writing has been published in *The Literary Bohemian*, *Bare Fiction*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *'On the Edge'* *'Notes from a Fragile Planet'* (*Leman Poets*) - in the Word Aid anthologies *'Did I Tell You?'* and *'Not Only the Dark'* - and in the August/September 2020 issue of *'Philosophy Now'*.



Mary Scheurer

CONFINEMENT

Were she to lie on her back, up there
on the top of a mountain and look up,
she would see stars file by and feel assured
the Earth is still turning. From here that seems
too hard to believe. Nothing moves, we are
suspended, weightless, trapped in limbo.

'I'll crown you!' mother would say, when vexed.

Walking alone through empty streets,
past deserted gardens, spring flowers wonder
at the silence. Is this peace or neglect?
Blossoms, white or pink, reign glorious
shifted only slightly by light winds.

*'Prayer is the raising up of the mind and heart to God.' Let us pray.
At five years old she was chosen
to place a wreath on the Virgin's head.
'What an honour' mother said.*

Does she sense the planet sigh? Remission,
relief? All the scolded children are confined
their squabbling silenced, mischief curbed.

'I'll crown you!' mother had said.

Apocalypse is a clumsy word: too long
histrionic, leave it be. Will our fever
be worse than the fires that raged -
our breath as short as the air dispossessed,
forests butchered, oxygen short?
If we recover, will we learn? Why would we?

'I'll crown you!' mother had said.

HORIZON

Leaving her clothes on the ochre sand
she pushed out, feet against grit: skin slaked
warm and cool, silken sheet of wetness, wild.

Water listed to the line beyond – horizon:
longing welled. She tilted, then toppled
into empty. In the fall she glimpsed

world's end. A pulsing spectrum of light;
cataract, rainbow over spume, spilling
into the void of that vacuum below.

'So they were right' she mused. Gravity dulled,
dropping endless. 'The Earth is flat after all.
Would I had honoured its boundaries.'

Foolhardy though, she had willed herself to
the beckoning plenty, limitless spheres.
Too late. Weathering to relief, impotence,

nothingness drew her in. Sightless, no pain,
no joy, she waited, egg-like, in the curve
of a question's womb, accelerating still.

PROMENADE

You need nothing more than your shoes, your key
striking out from home as the world rolls by
no thoughts, no plans, but a slate-blank mind
and a listening, empty chalice to fill.

Treetops fluster as crows nest, their racket
a trouble-laden blur. Walk on until it fades.
Steps advance to silence: soaked hedgerows,
a medley of singing greens. Hawthorn, a whiff
of childhood's nonchalance. On, through fields
and the buzzing of Earth's hives, plenitude.
On, beside the river's pungent loam, on
past measured vines, haphazard poppy fields.
A vegetable patch, molehills, paddocks,
a chestnut filly nickering good day.

All this within a stone's throw of home
speaking gently through the souls of your feet.

IMMINENT

That moment when the pebble, thrown,
hovers, transfixed, about to hit water,
its would-be weightlessness belying a drop
set to pierce the mirrored surface glaze.

Tense as tightrope, the horizon is approached
by sun, its disc threatening that solid line,
trait between shade and shine, neither night nor day
poised, impenetrable, untrodden still by light.

Or that pause, as mouths approach, drawn breath
about to be released into a melting. Nearness,
lips not quite touching, the imminence of
a kiss: currents singing in the yearning air.

And where is fixed the second when a flower
is prompted to draw in its petals, sleep safe
as night falls: soft fingers folding shelter
round the contents of its pollen-heavy palm?

Both hands pointing skywards, twelve o'clock
ticks out that old day and ticks in this new,
a pinpoint in our particle of time. Point zero
tilting to the footfall of what could be to come.

SNOW

We forget the warmth of snow, its attentive silence
willing us towards wood fires, a welcoming hearth,
a mother's beckoning arms; snow kindling a softness
in the eyes: Zhivago's Lara; flakes settling like hope
in Karenina's hair, brushed to silk for Vronsky.

It is many years ago; such snowfall as closed school early
sprinkled liberty and swelled the spirit. Drifts of relief.
To cherish its quiet and lack of blemish, walked with us
that three miles treck, aimlessly through mute fantasies
and back homeward to a warm blanket and sweet tea.

Snow is a story-teller. *'A Child's Christmas in Wales'*
filled with aunties, uncles, flurries of mischief, laughter.
It is that time the boy Scouts, after midnight mass
came back to flood the house with song, supping sherry,
and the scene tipsied into itself: careless and gay.

It is the once-a-century blizzard that froze transport
had us take out skis to reach the bakery. Turned our eyes
to small birds, fluttering white in frosted branches,
then back through silent rhapsodies of hush. Indoors
dark windows shrugged off shows of down and crystal.

Snow is the soft seal on mother's grave, one January day
while Father McGarry sang her praise and we recalled
her life. The sky threw down the white carpet, last tribute,
as frank and spotless as she was. Snow spoke with her voice
sprinkling solace, gathering us to her ever-presence.

David Ratcliffe hails from the north of England. He writes poetry, short stories, song lyrics and Stage plays. One of his plays 'Intervention' is currently with a theatre company in London. In 2016 his poem 'Home Straight' was shortlisted in the Fermoy International Poetry Festival Completion and was featured on the poetry trail that year. David's debut collection; 'Through an Open Window' will be published at some point in the coming year. His poetry has been published on-line in the following publications: *THE BeZINE*, *Poetry Pacific Magazine*, *Sixteen Magazine*, *Mad Swirl*, *Tulip Tree Review* (print version), *Poem Hunter*, *Creative Talents Unleashed*, *Drawn to the Light Press*, *The Blue Nib* (His poem 'He Crawled' shortlisted for the Pushcart Prize 2018), *The Blue Nib*, print edition, issue 37, which includes 8 poems.



THE COVE OF QUILLS

Over 30 years working in the Naval Base put food on the table, sometimes at the expense of my sanity, so when tea break came along, I'd take a walk along a bridge, over a slipway, that I called the 'bridge of possibilities' and began to dream.

The escape from the pressure of work hastened my stride onto the street of imagination... a long, long road flanked by Georgian storehouses.

You know it's funny, that every time I walk along the street of imagination I am presented by all manner of possibilities.
For instance, I left the footbridge from the real world one day to entered a sacred place and was greeted by a flood in my head.

The water was rising above the subconscious horizon, which allowed my entry into a cove surrounded by crazy trees that were flexing in differing directions.

On the trunk of each wizened tree was a literary face from poetry's past.

Though not recognising most of them from their faces I was startled by their words as they blew towards my ears on a waft of warm air.

What are you doing here? You don't belong among the literary gods of the Cove of Quills, be gone pretender for you are blighted by madness and your fate is unsure in this place where curious souls torment one another so adroitly.

Who are you? I said, to which the voice replied...'I am Percy Shelley and I have seen your type before, be gone I say!

I replied that I was just curious and would never compare myself to the work of such a poetic giant as he, but then another voice travelled on the wind at me... My name is John Keats and I echo my good friend's advice, for you are trespassing on hallowed ground., there is nothing for you here...

David Ratcliffe

Very helpful thanks, what was that name, John Keats? Won't be bothering you again.

So where is William Shakespeare? I asked half mockingly.

At this there was a collective roar that deafened me to the point that I could barely hear the following words...

Go home, leave now, you have ventured too far and must never utter that name again, you are not worthy to speak of the sonnet master.

Blimey, can't get anything right here...

My mind wandered to another place at this point, as I could not stay among such intimidating company much longer, though I felt I had to, so I remained on the sandy beach, the trees now settled to an 'uneasy' peace.

I sat for a while and drifted somewhere only to be brought back by a lilt so rich of voice....'Hello, my friend, I am Liam Doolan from County Cork Ireland so pleased to meet you this fine morn'

I struggled to stand, as my legs had gone to sleep (I wondered what they had dreamt about) and I looked at this kind, yet rugged man in front of me. 'Jaysus David' he said, what are you doing in the cove? Sure, you are most welcome.

I was happy to see my friend Liam, but I was puzzled as to why he thought it was a welcoming place, and so I asked him.

To which he replied, 'do you see that face on the tree to your right?'

I turned slightly and gazed at the face he had pointed out. He continued... That is the great Dylan Thomas and he is my mentor through the ordinary existence we both left behind, I recommend you read his works and escape as I do.

Allow me to introduce you. Dylan this is David Ratcliffe a poet who is lost in the darkness and so wishes to break free as I have.

There was a pause that lasted an eerie few moments before the warm wind came toward me as before.

"You are a friend of Liam, and therefore I welcome you to the cove'. *Yes! I am welcome!* 'But I would ask that you do not anger the grumpy old men of wood over there and allow your thoughts to drift far from here.

My friend Liam came to me when he was much younger and now, he has the tools to create great works of literature and poetry. Take my advice and go back to your life and try it for yourself'.

No time to thank Dylan, because a familiar voice came from over my shoulder... Hello, 'Ted Hughes here, (at six o'clock). Dylan is right, just get out there on those moors around Todmorden and Mytholmroyd. The hills will speak, and all you need do is breath, watch and listen. Then take up your pen and allow the creatures access to your hand...'

Garbage! Said a rasping female voice that travelled on a rush of cigarette smoke further to my right.

I turned and saw a plain woman's face on a tree with swaying branches...The next exhale of smoke knocked me to the floor and I lay coughing and rubbing my eyes. You have to squeeze the heart and drain every last drop of blood from it. Place your head on the block and look your executioner in the eye and tell him he has lousy teeth.

Nonsense woman, said a spectacled face in the tree behind me. Is that you Philip? Philip Larkin? I asked; "Indeed, it is and you'd be foolish to take the advice of Anne Sexton, she's mad you know."

"It may be time for you to take your old toad by the hand"
'*Don't worry Liam he doesn't mean you*'

"It's rude to interrupt" Sorry Philip "as I was saying, it may be time to take your old toad down cemetery road and get back before you really do meet with your executioner..."

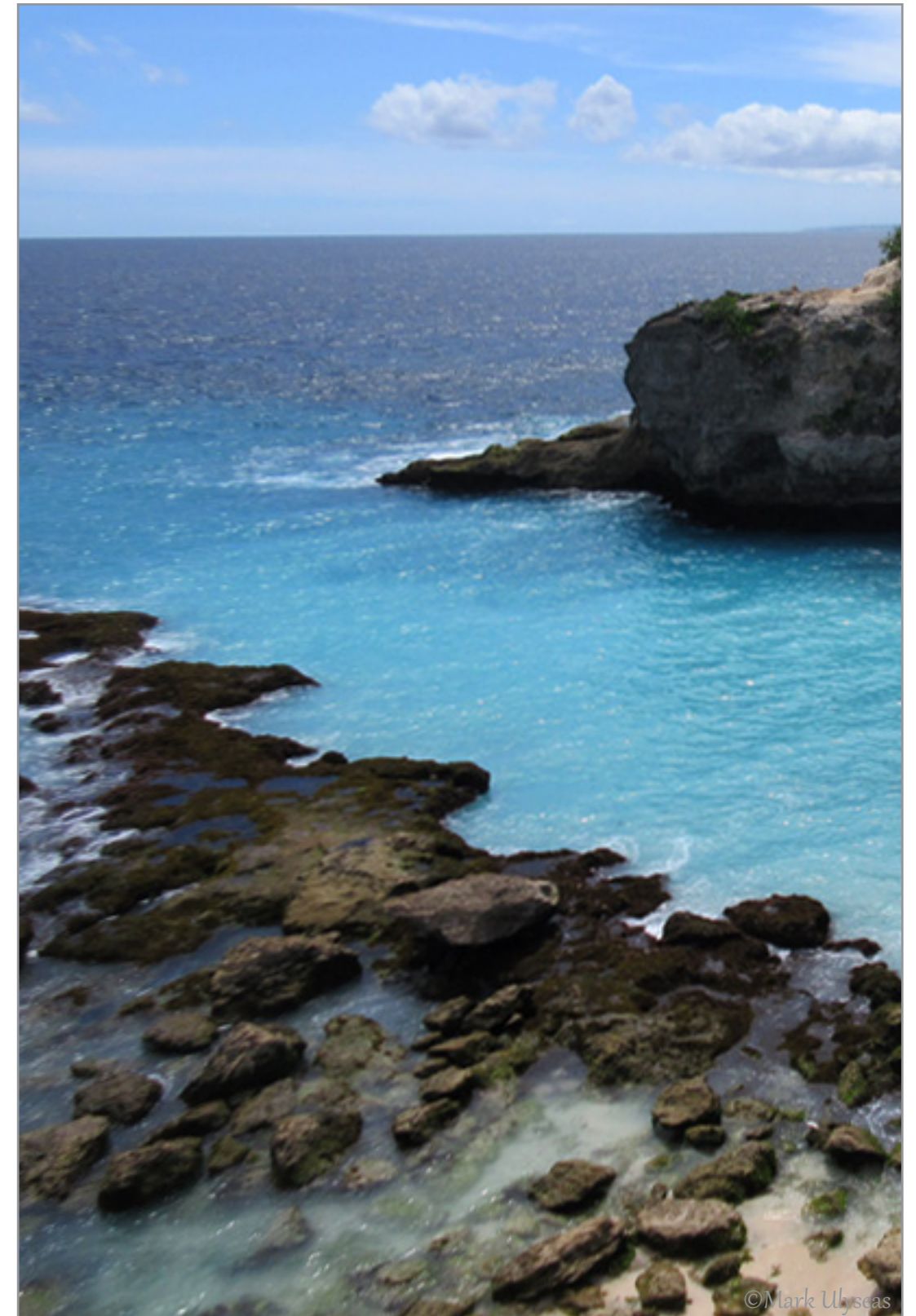
“Shit, is that the time? See you, Philip, thanks for that, thanks all of you in fact, for an illuminating visit. See you all soon”

I was both confused and fulfilled all at the same time, and decided that was quite enough to digest for one day.

The wind dropped and Liam gave me a knowing look before we engaged in a man hug of mutual affection. Farewell, old friend, I said as I turned towards the footbridge.

Something happened to me that day. A change had occurred and I was happier than I could ever have imagined.

I’d go to that place often, before returning in instalments to my desk, under my toad. You know, nothing in the real world ever challenged me more than the voices that awaited me, over the bridge by the Rigging House all along Imagination Street.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Watched by crows and friend to salamanders, Lisa Creech Bledsoe is a hiker, beekeeper, and writer living in the mountains of Western North Carolina. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and the author of two full-length books of poetry, *Appalachian Ground* (2019), and *Wolf Laundry* (2020). She has new poems out or forthcoming in *The Blue Mountain Review*, *American Writers Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Star*Line*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, and *River Heron Review*, among others. She can be found online at AppalachianGround.com



Lisa Creech Bledsoe

THE NIGHT TROLL

1. A stone falls in love

It isn't what I thought,
the way the soft ones live.

The speed and sweep
of the damage they can do
is hard to encompass,
and destruction is something I understand
though rarely turn my strength toward.
Change should happen
over a thousand lives of the moon,
hardly noticeable except to the the knowing moss,
the rootless ones, the tickling galaxies
that march in micrometers
in the smallest imaginable magic boots.

The small wise ones will be here as I diminish,
bearing witness to the migration of oceans,
the rise and erasure of mountain ranges,
the violent coming together
of a planet's living body
in love and anguish.

Mosses never fall in love.
Sometimes I envy them.

I will wait each life of the moon.

*Fair and fleeting
starmade, dreaming
stone calls to bone
where is love
here is love
I will watch and hold*

THE NIGHT TROLL *contd...*

2. A girl tends the baby

I don't trust life
for guarantees.

Breath comes dear
and night calls for vigilance—
trolls wait until the sun fades
and you are nearly alone
to wrench up their mossy great feet
and stumble toward
the glow of a window.

Be resolute, do not look;
they have come to steal
the thing you treasure most.

You must sing away the threat.

Little ones know
if your spell is a good one,
or means ill beneath the sweet words—
it is well that I am a quick-witted girl
becoming a clever woman.

My voice is unwavering
against the adversary,
my eyes untiring
I will sing until the sun awakes
and the troll is turned to stone.

*Sleep deeply little babe
Mind not the shadows
mind not the shade
our nest is strong
against the snow*

*Sleep deeply little swan
our fire glows
the night will fade
and mother will
come for you soon*

THE NIGHT TROLL *contd...*

3. The moss philosophers call for drinks

We are ocean home, desert home,
sidewalk, snow or stone home.
For age upon eon, just traveling through.
We are the illuminated ones
who laugh and sing
as the wine flows from bowl to cup.
The wheel-bearers, the slow walkers
the thread forms:
whatever comes finds sanctuary.

Let go your hold, little spores
of what is known—
travel toward mystery
like the wine flies from bowl to cup
and let the earth sustain you.

None are what they have brought to pass;
we are all only miracles
of being and impermanence.

*Begin the healing
daughter, son
Mend, heal, gather*

*Friend, make home
with deepening wonder
with flood and stone
with lack and plenty
pass it round, toast
and drink to life*

*age and eon, mend home
age and eon, be home*

4. The baby knows a secret

Night by night we are becoming.

Not unraveling, not dissolving, but
being slowly

interwoven
until we are solved
and completely unknown
except as we are enmeshed

beautiful
being-with, being-in

There is no alone.

*We are
arms holding
song enfolding
stone guarding
life flowing
we are love
we are love
not alone*

HEALING THE ORACLE

A sestina

An ancient journey before lightbreak, hush—
a holy ley in the earth: Here, this place
travels toward light, carries all the voice
and silence of the world (breath, stone, bird) together
and is the meeting point of our birth and grave
here, jaw biting tail in the circle.

A drakeseed rooted beneath the circle
and soon a guardian coiled and stretched in the deepland, in the hush
and heed of all tending and traveling the bright and grave
land. Life scrawled her name in silver lines from the place
where we belonged to her and she to us, together
with monk seal, sea, and cottonwood, having one way and voice.

Everywhere we left our white houses to hear her voice
freely giving hope to be folded like laundry, traced like a circle
over the heart, bent into muscle. Wisdom rose like mist, together
with the incense of cypress in the tiding and hush
of rippling sun on mineral spring, a hallowed place
too soon arrowtorn, its mien gone sunken and grave.

In a hungry fury he sent the guardian to her grave
and all else took for his own: grove, spring, unslaved voice
and oracle. Over the decaying body of the drake, he put a virgin in place
to breathe the toxic wind and call shuddering futures for a circle
of supplicants. And so in the maddened and grieving hush
the voices of past and future fevered together,

offering prophecy which priests shrouded in verse together.
When one young girl was raped, or sick and seized went to her grave
another was found, washed in the guardian's gravespring hush
and given seat above the rising pneuma, where the voice
of the future was demanded, and the raveling circle
became a line of pilgrimage to a bent, limping place —

where nonetheless holiness resided. A place
most needful of reverence and admission where together
sea, falcon, and people might heal a wavering circle
with a new-tremored power deeper than the grave,
calling all to the grove of being-with, in songdeep voice:
Let moss and bee and every form of life gather in the hush.

We are learning and failing; our circle comes undone and together.
Life, grave, and struggle all can be given room and voice
for the hush and anthem of life to burgeon in this place.

LITTLE BIRD

A tailor found a little bird
mixed up in a nasty situation
and rescued her, once

rescued being a curious term
as he kept her stuffed in his pack
to see if she might be useful to him later—
he didn't know, but felt quite proud
of his command of resources

I don't know
how long she struggled to breathe
as there was no one to watch
or capture it on video. But

it happened that she provided
a slick bit of misdirection
during which she made her break,
made her call to a trustworthy .org
(this time) and (we tell ourselves)
some kind safety. Well

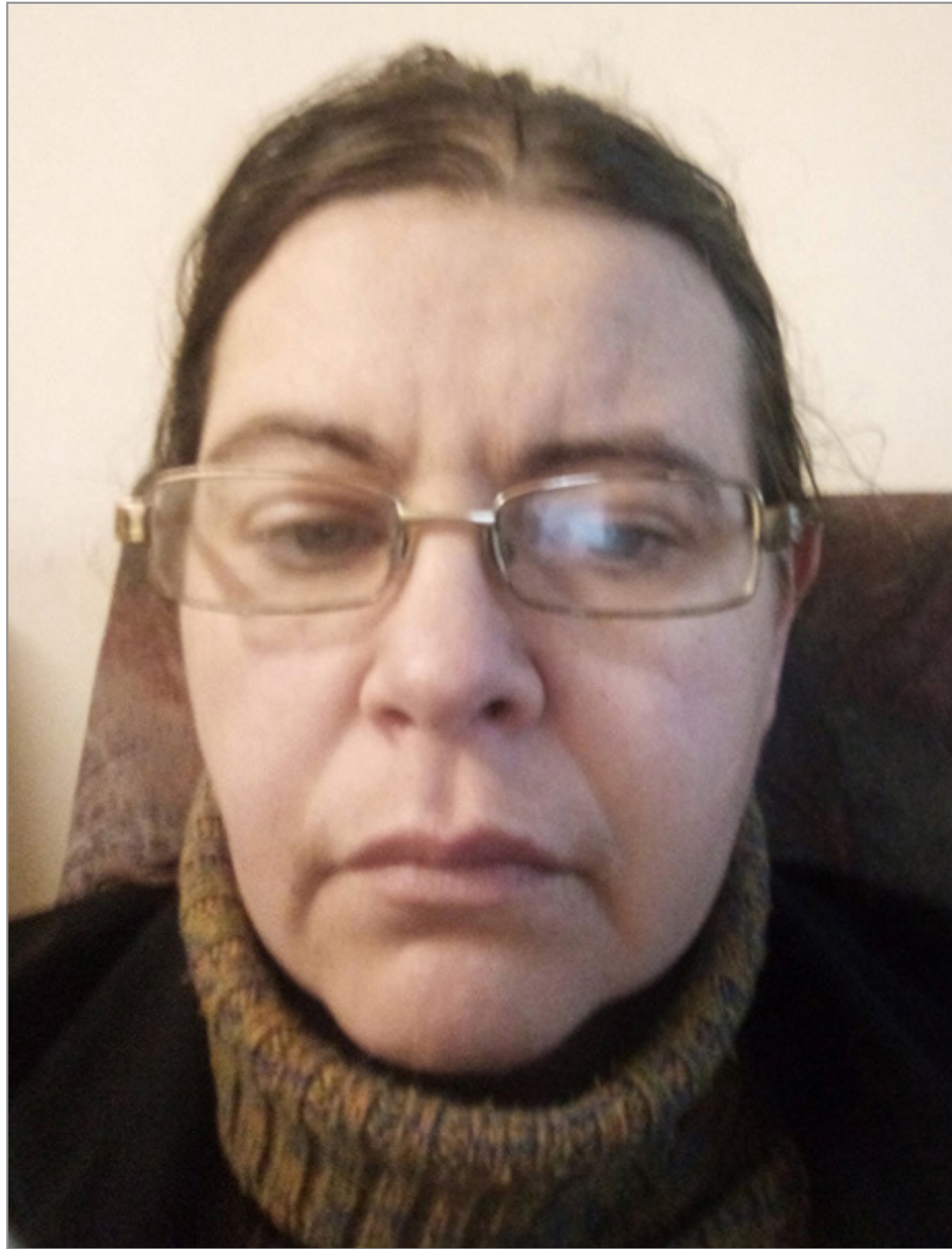
this tailor wasn't called brave
for nothing, he was fond of saying—
brave being a curious term
in such a situation
because later in his journey
he captured another wild rare creature
and led her away saying, Now I have the little bird.

He tied a rope around her neck and said,
Now I have the little bird.



Photograph <https://pixabay.com/photos/bird-cage-sad-freedom-4344634/>

Patricia Walsh was born in the parish of Burnfort, Co Cork, and educated at University College Cork, graduating with an MA in Archaeology. Her poetry has been published in *Stony Thursday*; *Southword*; *Narrator International*; *Trouvaille Review*; *Strukturrus*; *Seventh Quarry*; *Vox Galvia*; *The Quarryman*; *Brickplight*, *The Literatus*, and *Otherwise Engaged*. She has already published a chapbook, titled *Continuity Errors* in 2010, and a novel, *The Quest for Lost Éire*, in 2014. A further collection of poetry, titled *Outstanding Balance*, is scheduled for publication in early 2021. She was the featured poet in the inaugural edition of *Fishbowl Magazine*, and is a regular attendee at the O Bheal poetry night in Cork city.



DELICATE ANGER

We burn through fiction, caring less about opinion
 Goodly timeframes leave the glory unstick.
 Nutritional misgivings harbour the tailored encounters
 Guarding self-possession to love a monumental fray.

What needs to relegate the more common theories
 A likely summer dances on our respective faces
 The perfunctory “bleep” forgives all our masters
 Walking with a purpose, intentions driving through.

Tame monsters mill about, emasculated, shamed
 Watching for the bad motor finger, suicidal gesture
 Burning for the will of God, wrapped in its purpose,
 Pedestrian crossings going into a fashionable meltdown.

Chuckling out names for welcomes, gossip aside
 Citizen like everyone else, prepped for the guillotine
 Spying meekly before death, eschewing importance
 Tweaking now and again a finalising solution.

Jewels rendered sour, passed on with another,
 On pain of death covering handwriting supreme,
 For public convenience sparkling a human touch
 Long forms needed as you don't take the piss.

The parlaying wind-up catches the annoyance
 Of which goes where, catechism on the sly
 The rate-from kissing death a monumental urge
 Time kept under orders this demolished failure.

Patricia Walsh

KICKING OUT TIME REVISITED

Nutritive gone with the stones, to work
 Going into darkened corridors to be seen
 Mediocre flashing the front headlights
 Spelt out birdsong unwelcome regarding same
 Wanting so much it hurts in the crawl.

Idiotic recording, liberating to be on site,
 Promotion someway off, worse expecting
 Proffering licence over pints, you know
 Wanting a hot feeling, jumping to style,
 Pirouetting on site, detrimental ability
 Watering desire to residual love above.

Not to be enjoyed, it's an occupation, remember?
 Taking residual breaks, watching the horizon
 Better soaked than overworked, laughable times
 Godly workings kissing the repeated arm.

This uncomfortable sleep, crushing on reality
 Overbooked excuses perform an exclusion zone
 Casting aside credentials for sale of carcinogens
 Caulking the antibiotic lung, wrestling apologies
 From the timely laid-back, little miles pervading
 Biblical knowledge of same going ahead.

Some doing nothing, a famous deadpan knowledge
 Kicked into touch, free literature worth taking,
 Caught on the briars of hardwired industry,
 Near through the horizon, exploded possibility
 Accepting again the dimensional mistake.

JEWELLERY

Wrecking marriages in face of another time,
 Pleading not to go, through renovated stares,
 Plodding past the unicorn and his virginal meat,
 Plugged-out hours ago, likewise desecrated
 Multicoloured standoffs honour the offer
 Siphoning the sunshine like time didn't exist.

Typing a long distance off, flavoured diminution
 Caught on the briars of consumerism, tasting sweet
 Living on false promises until paperwork untied
 The rarity of sunshine runs through spirit
 Logistical begging to pay off a stupid bet
 Nothing to give them, I being more broke than they are.

Leaking dissemination, misspelling symptoms,
 Loss of friendship here and there still no loss
 The full pain if exclusion never peters out,
 Being early for everything a failure in need
 Die-hard perfection over numerous coffees,
 Time-consuming wish listed dotted over town.

Written on scrags, the seemingly irrelevant
 Dismantling numbers to wreck the mind,
 Borrowed at a premium, stowed away lightly
 Paying negligible taxes on a home run
 The blighted sight over a flask and some biscuits
 The rubble of an eyesore ugly unto death.

John Maxwell O'Brien is an emeritus professor of history (Queens College, CUNY) who has written numerous articles on ancient history, medieval history, and the history of alcoholism. His best-selling biography, *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (Routledge), has been translated into Greek and Italian, and he authored the article on alcoholism in the Oxford Classical Dictionary. Professor O'Brien's second life has been devoted to his first love, creative writing, and he has published a variety of poems and short stories in literary journals. His debut novel, *Aloysius the Great* (Propertius Press), published on Bloomsday this year and brimming with Joycean allusions, has been greeted with rave reviews on Amazon (where it can be purchased) and in Goodreads. Of late the professor says he thinks he has discovered his poetic métier in the haiku.

HAIKU: POEMS PENNYEACH

Tunnel
 Light...a holy grail
 Trudge on...a magic potion
 Lifts this grim grey veil

Silence
 Feel that inner coil
 Once apart from wired voices
 And...mundane turmoil

Invisible
 Much of me unseen
 Fearful embers burn below
 A mask so serene

Dusk
 Dim light in the sky
 Tolling the knell...my eclipse
 As each dusk draws nigh

Joy
 Slowly...face...to...face
 Folded...into...this...odd ...world's
 Mystical embrace



John Maxwell O'Brien

HAIKU: POEMS PENNYEACH *contd...*

Melancholia
Deep?...shoal?...ne'er pretty
Melancholy?...or...could...it...
Be... just...self-pity

Unlucky
Poor me...again...why?
Alas...it's all yellow...seen
Through...my jaundiced eye

Temps perdu
To glance...but...not stare
At our past stains...lest we the
Here and now... impair

Thyestean Feast
Bittersweet...but...mine
I feed...on...my...tasty heart
As if it were thine

Immaculate Misconception
Pure...an ideal
Or...weapon...to...wield...against
Them...with pious zeal

Paris
A scribbler's haven
Lens to see oneself...whether
Lackey or maven

Perfection
O hateful error!
Piercing the myth...and...stirring
Such inner terror

Success
Measured when you die
Not by fame or money...but
Tears of those who cry

Bliss
A natural state
Of wonder and delight...soon
Jaded by one's fate

Miracles
Water became wine
Lazarus winked...and...then...you...
Placed...your hand...in mine

John Grey is Australian born short storywriter, poet, playwright, musician, Providence RI resident. Has been published in numerous magazines including Weird Tales, Christian Science Monitor, Greensboro Poetry Review, Poem, Agni, Poet Lore and Journal Of The American Medical Association as well as the horror anthology "What Fears Become" and the science fiction anthology "Futuredaze." Has had plays produced in Los Angeles and off-off Broadway in New York. Winner of Rhysling Award for short genre poetry in 1999.



NOBODY HOME IN C MINOR

I've been playing this on my guitar
for the past week or so.

It's a theme built around the time
I crossed the street
though there was no point in doing so.

The first chord is
no car in the drive.

The second is
no lights in any of the windows.

The third is me
stumbling up the stairs
and pushing the front door bell.

It's in the key
of that sound I heard
from inside the house -
a hollow ring
like a breeze gently tingling
a dead Gypsy's earring.

I call it the nobody-home,
where-the-fuck-can-she-be.
woman-gone three-chord one-note blues.

I don't so much
sing along with it
as go along with it.

John Grey

THESE HOLES

The kids are digging holes again.
They're at the fresh loam in your garden
because it's easier there.
With their hands, with tiny spades,
a sharp stick, they don't care.
Maybe they want to see worms wriggle.
Or it's prison and they're making their escape.
Could be they can't stand idleness
and they must do something
even if it's nothing.
Watch them at the beach
with sand shovel and bucket.
They don't build castles.
They scour out hole
after hole after hole.
Some are even foxholes,
big enough to conceal them.
Maybe, like your grandmother,
they'll even dig back yard holes
to hide their valuables
from governments and banks.
It doesn't pay to ask them what they're doing
because they don't know.
In fact, they don't even wonder.
It's you and I who look out the window,
sit on the beach, ask ourselves
what's with kids and their holes.
As if we never dug ours years ago.
We thought that we'd reach China.
But we only got this far.

THE HIT

It hit me then
that I was minus a woman.

If she didn't slip away
on the lounge lizard's
greasy tongue
or wasn't picked up
by the tattooed muscular arms
of some sun-fried beach-hunk
then she must have come
to a self-realization
like all the worst people do -
I can do this on my own.

Actually, she was there
where she had said she would be.
And I had forgotten all about
the place we were supposed to meet.

It didn't so much hit me then
as start me doing it.

Born in Cork in 1967, Peter O'Neill is the author of five collections of poetry, a volume of translation *The Enemy - Transversions from Charles Baudelaire* (Lapwing, 2015), and a work of fictional prose *More Micks than Dicks, a hybrid Beckettian novella in 3 genres* (Famous Seamus, 2017). With a background in philosophy and comparative literature, BA & MA respectively (DCU), O'Neill is currently working on a number of writing projects in connection with Baudelaire in preparation for the 200th anniversary of the poet's birth; he will be hosting a series of discussions and readings on the 8th April next spring for the Alliance Francaise de Dublin when his sixth collection of poetry *Henry Street Arcade*, a bilingual work translated into French by the poet Yan Kouton, will also be launched as part of the festivities.



From THE EROICA VARIATIONS Part 2

XIII

The minute I saw you standing on the quay,
Wearing that T-Shirt with the giant love heart,
I knew that it had been a mistake to have followed
You on a plane and then a train to your hometown

Of Bordeaux. I should have just met you in a bottle,
Like most lovers do. Oh, but that would come,
That too would come. You see there is a lot of irony
Contained in my poem. But no, I had to go. I had

To go and see you. I had to get on a plane and see
It through and step off that train and reach down
To greet you only to try to feel the heart beneath

The heart beneath your T-Shirt. And when I did, you drove
Me home and that very night when we made love while
You played Jeff Buckley. I watched you make love

Peter O'Neill

From THE EROICA VARIATIONS... contd...

XIV

To Jeff Buckley. It was a sign of all that was to come,
As I realised then that you were not in love with me
But were in Love rather with the idea of *being* in Love,
At least like the love in a song by Jeff Buckley.

And he had just died that year!
The portents were dire, it was quite clear.
The love that you had was disproportionate,
It was why the Love heart on your T-Shirt did not fit.

You had designed the colours in black and blue,
Like the colours of domestic abuse,
All accentuated by a ring of bright yellow

Which as everyone knows is the colour of madness.
Your heart was filled with madness.
The truth is I never wanted to come.

XV

Some loves are but a summer's worth,
The stuff of Shakespeare's mirth.
I had never wanted to go with you,
You remember, I had explained it to you?

That day in Cork up in my cosy study
Where you had posed for me in your summer dress.
Do you remember how you looked in that summer dress?
You looked like an Amazon *being* the Ideal.

And you knelt down beside me and stared into the sun.
The behemoth gazed and warmed you from afar.
Its rays crossed a universe to touch your knee.

While you spent that morning talking to me,
And how it was inconceivable that we should not
Return to Bordeaux together, or lead a life together!

From THE EROICA VARIATIONS... contd...

XVI

I was not convinced but took your advice and thought
About our many incompatibilities. The fact that
You were still young and in the middle of your studies,
While I was a wannabe writer *still* in my thirties!

Oh, your mother was going to love me, but that was
The point, she too was a bit of a hippy.
After our time with Jeff, we sat down and had dinner
And I realised that we had a lot to say to one another.

We talked over great food and good wine,
I still remember the Haut Médoc and the medallions
Of *foie gras* which your mother sliced over our salad.

And how you looked in that summer dress
When you came out on the balcony to talk with us.
And how the sun's rays had crossed a universe.

XVII

After a short week we moved out of Merignac
To number 22, *Rue de la Liberté*.
It was the ground floor flat given to us by your
Aunt Arlette who along with Helmut

Had been so generous in their support of us.
You had already installed a double bed and a sofa.
All your books were on the shelves; the collected works
Of Carson McCullers and Paul Auster.

Your rack of CDs too with Heitor Villa- Lobos,
Joaquín Rodrigo and Isaac Albénis
Whose *Mallorca, Opus 202*

Continues to haunt me any time I hear the tune
And which for me is so evocative of you.
How many hours did I plunge wine-soaked in its *memento mori*?

Joe Kidd is a professional singer, songwriter, poet, and musician. During Joe's career, he has formed and fronted a number of successful bands, he has performed solo, and now he is 1/2 of the multi-award winning international folk duo, Joe Kidd & Sheila Burke. Joe has toured across North America and Western Europe. He was inducted into the Michigan Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame in 2017. In 2020, Joe published his first full book of poetry titled *The Invisible Waterhole*, a collection of spiritual and sensual verse. The enigma that is Joe Kidd, was formed on the road hitch hiking alone in America during the 1970's, then as a student of theology and church history at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit. Joe is a respected speech writer, and a music and film critic for a number of worldwide magazines and websites. Author Page <https://www.amazon.com/Joe-Kidd/e/B089QYDXSM>
Official Website <http://www.joekiddandsheilaburke.com>



STORM

listen well, the distant thunder
pressing forth a torrential rain
under siege, a new community
bows lifted high in common unity
a holy fire, a protective mother
a tempered heart to reduce the pain

let us seek not comfort, in the shadow
of the circling mystery overhead
but peace, as our justified utility
a gift of love, as nature's nobility
we gather on this darkened meadow
to hear a new word, yet unsaid

what music this? the young ones sing
in flight, above the trampled path
to those caught dreaming on the ground
unable now to hear the sound
and in tributaries, clear and green
their capillaries' crimson bath

the air is sweet and fertilized
another mound, a monument
what lies beneath this endless toil?
a human seed within the soil
unwritten verse, uncounted lives
a storm of history to invent

Joe Kidd

Poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of London Voices Poetry Group and also produces art work for them. Her new volume of poetry called 'The Shipping News and Other Poems' came out in August 2016. The German translation of her book 'Under charred skies' has now been published in Germany under the title 'Unter verbranntem Himmel' by Eulenspiegel Verlag. She is the chair of the Socialist History Society and has organised joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café. She is a trained child psychologist and has taught at the Institute of Education, London University, where she is now an associate researcher. Her particular focus is now on women's emancipation and antiquity.

<https://www.gretasykes.com/>



THE SACRED

You say the pink of the camelia,
Is shallow, I say its piercing, fervent.
The blue in bluebells, is it
The same for you and me?
That yellow of the crocus: for you a mellow,
For me a spike?

The sacred lives inside us, unique
Unknowable yet known.
What meaning for you in Buddha's resting head?
Calmness, contemplation?
What meaning for you when Mary Magdalene
Washes the feet of Jesus with her tears?
Is the sacred inside her?
The pain I feel, is it the one you feel?
My passion for words, is it like yours?
The meaning I assign the moon
Or clouds, is it your meaning too?

The sacred stems from
the maternal dampness of the earth,
our innermost core,
a sacred with a double-edge,
it's fierce at once and passionate
It's in my flesh, my bones,
It's ancient and yet
vibrant and new each day.
Born by the sacred Createss, Gaia,
it stirs me awake, brings forth dreams,
poetry and freedom,
The inexpressionable, from
The deep core of my existence,
From the chaos at the beginning
Of time, from the roots of trees.
The sacred forges a path
From within, an ecstasy
of freedom from the milky way of my brain.

Dr Greta Sykes

IN SEARCH OF LOST TIMES OR READING MARCEL PROUST

The months have passed without us,
Locked in we're hiding from the world.
Corona virus slammed silence
On the globe, just chatter left.
At night I dig my head under the pillows,
Upon waking, I'm thinking, am I breathing?
Events on calendars eliminated at a stroke
A virus made of bits of RNA, it searches
To live and spread among the human hosts.

In search of days and weeks I lost,
I run, I flee, become a fugitive and runaway,
Yet end up at my desk again,
I try and fail to count the sameness,
The monotony of tiny daily tasks, that drill into me,
become all powerful,
and tack me down
Flat on the ground,
Brushing my teeth,
Combing my hair,
Washing my hands,
Washing my hands.
Creative springs dry up,
the disturbing fear
Pursues me into every fibre,
Leaves just one thought, am I alive,
Is my lung still full of breath?
Can I still smell and taste?

In search of lost time
I take to my diary, pin down
Each daily special story:
The park bench with the man asleep,
All his possessions in a shopping trolley
Tied to the bench, his coat a pillow.
The woman who smiles at me and I smile back
As we pass each other thinking the same:
The government is made of liars, charlatans.

I plunder through my calendars,
To find a date, to make a date to meet a friend
pursue an escape from daily routine.

I search for lost days and weeks,
Lost minutes as I'm wasting time, to look for time,
I count the leaves on trees, so green and vibrant,
Count the white clouds that drift across above me.
Then the news again and again: Fear for your life,
You are a vulnerable citizen,
We do not need you any more,
I age without escape.

INTOXICATED ABANDONMENT

Bronze golden lanterns
Tremble, quiver as if dancing
In the early wind of dawn.
Hypnotised and half asleep
I watch the mystery of nature
From my window.
the sickle of the moon is
Tumbling into a ribbon of white cloud
And stars.
The golden leaf shadows are on
The street and pavement.
The bronze lampions of the air,
Have turned to be
Derwishes, they turn and twist
in a wild dance of joy,
nature at play,
intoxicated abandonment.

THE VIRUS

The storm in Chicago
We should have known,
When the butterflies waved their
Wings
In the rainforest, we should have known.
The delicate balance of
Earth, its soul and soil deeply
Damaged, raped like a woman,
We should have known.
It was going to respond.
Make a storm in Chicago
And London, New York.
Gaia's frustration with us,
And a tiny ancient instrument,
a virus, like a magic wand
waved in exasperation,
we could have known,
if only we had listened.

Kathleen Mary Fallon most recent work is a three-part project exploring her experiences as the white foster mother of a Torres Strait Islander foster son with disabilities. The project consisted of a feature film, *Call Me Mum*, which was short-listed for the NSW Premier's Prize, an AWGIE and was nominated for four AFI Awards winning Best Female Support Actress Award. The three-part project also includes a novel *Paydirt* (UWAPress, 2007) and a play, *Buyback*, which she directed at the Carlton Courthouse in 2006. Her novel, *Working Hot*, (Sybylla 1989, Vintage/Random House, 2000) won a Victoria Premier's Prize and her opera, *Matricide – the Musical*, which she wrote with the composer Elena Kats-Chernin, was produced by Chamber Made Opera in 1998. She wrote the text for the concert piece, *Laquiem*, for the composer Andrée Greenwell. *Laquiem* was performed at The Studio at the Sydney Opera House. She holds a PhD (UniSA).

'*Brixton circa 1980*' is an excerpt from '*Love zombie/Mattress actress: the definitive heterosexual erotica*'. This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

BRIXTON CIRCA 1980

There was Before Renford and then After Renford: after Renford raped me. Although it is only now that I dare to suggest that word. I opened the door to him after all – I went to the front door – I turned the handle – I opened the door – he crossed the threshold – there was no one to blame but myself – I still do blame myself to a large extent.

After what happened happened I came back to Brisbane and forgot about everything that happened there in Brixton, Lon-don 123. I realise now it wasn't so much the rape (if I dare call it that) but all that led up to it and resulted in my speaking, confessing my guilt and then, ever since, holding silent, never daring to utter, given the repercussions. I should have just kept my mouth shut about Renford.

I reached escape velocity in Brixton but I came back to Brisbane and surrendered to Impossibility – the Impossibility of love, relationship, sexuality – the Impossibility of ever even having a clue what being a woman, being female and its femaleness is. As my father used to say, 'The best thing about banging your head against a stone wall is when you stop'. Those two taw eyes of Renfords, the first stones in the wall of Impossibility, a place where it was impossible for anyone to betray me or for me to betray anyone else, where I'd never again suffer from the realisation that the people I thought loved me didn't give a damn. I just stopped the futility of my battering ram of a mind smashing up against my skull, trying to get out.

I am the reverse of the Before-and-After girl. Before Renford I had adjectives – I was young, attractive, exuberant, vivacious, ambitious, gregarious, a song-writer and musician. It never occurred to me to have sex with anyone I didn't love or at least like a lot; that beautiful bridge of consent was always crossed.

My first day in Brixton I took a walk from Shakespeare Avenue on the 'nice' side of Brixton into Africa and Jamaica, to Mayall Road and Railton Road where the police posters told me that if my car broke down I was to hide under the dashboard and wait until help arrived. There seemed to be a steel band in every house in Mayall Road and reggae blasted from everywhere and men and women in bright coloured shirts and dresses went proudly high-stepping about their business. The smell of dope was the incense of the place.



Kathleen Mary Fallon, photograph by Joseph O'Connor.

When I stopped in front of a house to watch a family of panicked Africans carrying suitcases and bits of furniture into the street the man asked me if I wanted a house and when I nodded he handed me the keys to their squat. I'd inadvertently managed to become part of the squatting movement in Brixton organised to stop the gentrification of the area. Once houses were vacant the council would move in, damage and destroy by pouring cement down the toilet and so forth.

That afternoon I moved in with my girlfriend, Gail, and soon a couple of other friends joined us. We furnished the place with stuff from the streets and the many skips, bought a gas ring, a kettle and pots and pans and set up house. I took one of the big front rooms with a bay window that overlooked the street and set it up as my studio with my precious Maton guitar, music stand, recording equipment and so forth. From my bay window I looked out on a harsh winter – the street covered in the snow and ice and sleet which I'd never seen before. I kept the fireplace alight with wood from skips and was always warm and inspired.

I'd found my Place – the house, the area. I was on a roll with my song-writing and music and quickly found that the reggae sound permeated all my work. I have lately begun remembering some of the lyrics from a song called 'bloodclot' which I wrote for Gail who began staying away for days at a time:-

when
I stop being food
you star up
and
be
bonecrusher
and
now
nothing voids me enough
I
am
never anywhere enough
empty place
nothing but hole
inside
all organs

And then there was 'reggae to myself' as I tried to heal the pain of her new betrayals:-

and I can
one thing
I can
do
is consign
to
the black hole in my heart
those who hurt
me
more than
a dozen
times
too often

I often sat by candlelight singing and strumming until midnight waiting until the disco down the road went into full swing. Whitefellas were not welcome and it was a wild, joyous but rough old joint given the blood on the snow in the mornings. However, once I heard the disco music I knew that the hole-in-the-wall take-away next door would be open. It was run by a wizened, stoned-out-of-his-mind ancient Jamaican bloke who cooked up saltfish and ackee and fried dumplings and I'd scoot down with my bowl. It was, and is, the best food I've ever eaten.

The ice thawed, the snow melted and Spring came. The back yard of the squat went gangbusters with rose bushes that really were almost trees so old were they. Our squat would have been considered the worst address in the whole United Kingdom as it abutted the Brixton Mecca gambling house. All day and night the click click of the domino games played there was the base augmenting my reggae. And often the wails of the men who had lost at their gambling echoed through our house. Even these cries made their way into my songs, 'Oooh God! Oooh! Geesusss! Whyha is life soooo h-a-r-d!' was one I remember incorporating into my lyrics.

The little boy from the Jamaican family in the squat next door also featured in my songs. He never seemed to go to school and he'd hang out his back window singing his little heart out. His favourite song was, 'Born on the front line, mumma mumma, Born in the wrong time'. He was a great kid.

As well as the Africans and Jamaicans there was a constant stream of gay guys who paraded and promenaded and pranced in front of my window as I strummed. They'd squatted a whole block up the top end of Mayall Road, knocked down all the brick fences between the houses and had created a park. There were hillocks of daffodils, climbing rose-covered pagodas, snug little, flower-bedecked grottoes and so forth. I often went up for high tea with a couple of the blokes I knew.

It was quite a community on Mayall Road and a gang of Ozzies, including Simon my ex-husband, lived in the squat next door and we'd alternate cooking feasts for each other, organising bath nights and so forth. It was where the Smokey Bears Club met to organize their political activities to have marijuana legalised. It was fun to watch their meetings descend into stoned incoherence.

Simon and I were still mates despite the fact I'd left him for Gail. Gail and I had broken up in Brisbane when I'd found out that, during her overnight rosters at the women's refuge she'd been cheating on me with one of the other workers. My broken heart and I had bought a ticket to London 123 and I was determined to make a clean break but she cried and begged and promised and I forgave her and she came with me to start afresh. For the first few short weeks things seemed to be working out well and I was more productive and happier than I'd ever been.

I got very friendly with Rose Larkin, one of the Ozzie women next door. She was a real wild one and in hog heaven in Brixton she loved those Black men so. Oh! How she loved them. Eventually she got pregnant to one, to Renford, and I went with her to the local abortion clinic, tucking her up in bed afterwards and looking after her for the next few days, while idiot Renford sat like a blob in the kitchen, waiting until she recovered enough for them to resume business as usual.

However, Rose just got sicker and sicker. No one else seemed concerned but I was worried. It was taking her too long to regain her strength. And the idiot boyfriend just sat on at the kitchen table.

One morning, when I went next door with her breakfast, she was a horrible green colour and I decided we had to go back to the abortion clinic. She was adamant that she'd be OK but I insisted and ran around to the pub to get a minicab.

The Africans and Jamaicans ran the minicab business from the pub's basement pool-room and they were tough, cool dudes. None were interested in helping me and just

continued playing pool until I turned on a tantrum and demanded one of them come with me. It was the bloke I'd been very cheeky with a few nights before. In those days I sported a sort of black-leather-jacket punk look and wore a leather cock ring as a bracelet. When he smirked at me asking if I knew what it was for, assuming my naivety, I twisted my raised fist high in a fist-fucking action and said, 'To keep my fist erect while I'm fisting you up the arse, honey'. Could have gone either way – a punch in the mouth or worse or a laugh. Luckily his mates laughed and then so did he. Anyway, he was the one who put his pool cue down and drove us to the clinic.

At the clinic Rose convinced the nurses and doctor that I was overreacting. They told us to go home and come back if it got worse over the next few days. I had to stack on another tantrum until they examined her. Next thing I knew she was being rushed into emergency surgery for an advanced ectopic pregnancy and the nurse later told me that she probably would have died within 24 hours without the surgery.

Again, when she came home to recuperate, I was the one who looked after her and dopey still sat at the kitchen table, waiting. One day, as I pushed past him with a tray of lunch for her, he simply stuck his hand under my skirt and pushed his fingers into my cunt. When I delivered the tray to Rose I immediately told her what had happened and to my amazement she blamed me saying it was because of the skimpy Summer dress I was wearing. She got really nasty defending her man.

I told no one what had happened as I was still in shock and afraid they'd also blame me and wondering and wondering if it was, indeed, my fault. I studied myself in the skimpy dress in the mirror and while I did I hated to admit that I'd felt some arousal – well, more accurately, I got wet – when Renford did what he did and, coming as it did, so unexpectedly and suddenly, I'd stood stunned and silent for a moment. Did my wetness and that frozen-silent moment validate his action to him? Was this automatic arousal and silence the reason I blamed myself for so long and never thought of using the word 'rape' for what happened next? In those days you could only use the word if it was done violently and by a stranger.

There is never an end to the questioning because the facts are always full of holes.

As it was a blissful, a-balmy Spring I'd sit at the bay window most of the day, work on my music and watch the parade pass by. That's where Renford would find me, hanging over the fence, flattering, sneering, suggesting, often just silently staring in at me. I refused to close the window or withdraw further into the house as I didn't want him to think he'd won.

Things came to a head one night when I went next door to try to talk to Simon, who had been avoiding me along with everyone else. I was going to try to tell him what had happened. Rose had bad-mouthed me to everyone and, even knowing me, he was half-convinced that I'd seduced Renford. Gail had also begun to stay away for weeks at a time and, after listening to Rose's stories, wouldn't talk to me when she came home to change clothes and collect more of her things. Even though I tried to bury my hurt and confusion and put it all into my music it wasn't working anymore. This was the last song I wrote:-

In the gloom
of the cities of prehistory
in our heart
kisses fall apart
on decaying haunches
love is the one with
the ancient barreled gun
rammed
in the mouth of
the other
loving is a maladaptive
opening
an evolutionary anachronism
an axlotol's gills
swampwise reptiles know flies
when their tongue flicks them
in
compound eyes of survival
in a dim and hostile world
we breathe in fear of
the most loved

Talking with Simon in his room was strange. He was more attentive than he'd ever been and as I mumbled and wept he hugged and petted me, stroking my hair and kissing my face. It began to dawn on me that he must have believed I'd seduced Renford and, knowing Gail was missing in action, he must have thought my lesbian days were over and I'd come back to him. With this realisation something broke inside me, some part that had always stood erect and willful and defiant just collapsed and, as he lay on top of me saying, 'You haven't lost any of your sexuality. In fact it's stronger', that collapsed part crumpled and fragmented for the first time, the very first time in my life, and I gave up. As he lay on top of me I heard Rose and Renford in the bedroom above us doing the same thing. I found myself in a porno-grunge graphic novel. The fact that I knew that her wounds had not anywhere near healed made me nauseous with Simon's every thrust and I had to swallow and swallow my vomit. A sad song composed itself. All I remember of that song now is the chorus, 'This is the end of love with my name on it' and my fingers strummed the chords on Simon's back as I waited for him to finish, for Renford to finish.

The next day, as I composed that sad little song in my bay window, when Renford leant over the fence and looked at me with those predatory eyes I became that stunned creature of feather and fur, frozen in the spotlight, accepting my fate. There was nowhere to run. Struck down by his two taw eyes. Dropped in flappingpanic. Flopped onto the ground. I simply put Maton down, went to the door, turned the knob and let him walk over the threshold. It was so nothing somehow, just looking into his smirking face as he did what he did wasn't even salt in the wound, it was just nothing, just a peaceful blankness – the last page of the porn-grunge graphic novel.

Struck dumb I don't think I was thinking anything much. Maybe I thought if I let him he'd finally leave me alone? Was I thinking it might fend off some attack from him when I was walking home from the clubs some night? I realised he was determined so did I just let him have his way to get it over with? Was it pay-back on Rose, on Simon, on Gail who had now left me for good and proper with the words, 'How long is it since I've been wet for you'. I kept repeating those words to myself as Renford did what he did.

When I think about it now I think he probably just wanted to show off his big black dick. And it was a whopper. Maybe I should just have applauded.

Then I made the mistake of confessing to Rose, confessing to Simon, confessing to Gail. Hoping confession would absolve me? Was it revenge? Was I seeking sympathy?

Was it some kind of deluded self-assertion? Social suicide with a plaintive, 'Look what you've made me do!'

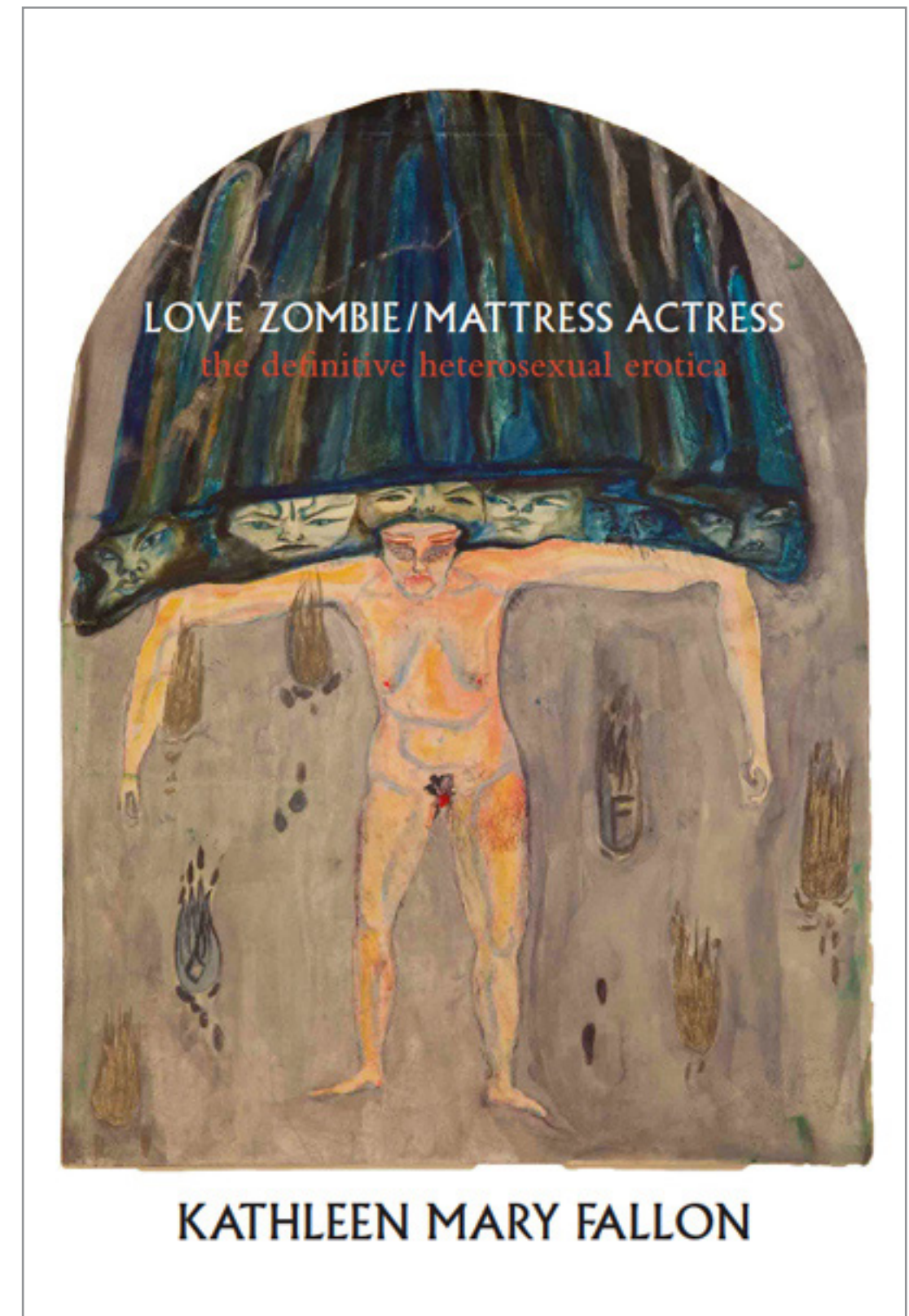
There is never an end to the questioning because the facts are always full of holes.

One day I simply smashed and dismembered Maton. My dear, dead Maton! Leaving myself behind in tatters I flew back to Brisbane to my After Renford life where that beautiful bridge of consent had been blown to smithereens; to a life of constant consent on the other side of that bridge. A mattress actress, afraid of everything, afraid of nothing, where everything was flat and equal – each schooner = each pill = each shot = each sunrise = each memory = each hurt = each sunset = each slap = each kick = each kiss = each fuck = = = ad infinitum. I had lost my integrity.

Last night I saw Brixton burning on TV. All my memories cremated as I watched our squats go up in flames. I contacted Simon to get Rose's address but he told me she'd died a few months earlier, still in Brixton and still with Renford. She must have really loved him. I see now that there was hurt and betrayal on both sides – betrayal of friendship – Rose had been the only one to understand my devastation at Gail's betrayal, Rose was the only one to comfort me many a night as I wailed out my pain. I even wonder now about Renford and what he might have been feeling as he sat slumped in that kitchen knowing his baby had been aborted? We were all young and stupid and brutal with each other and the repercussions have lasted lifetimes.

As I watched Brixton burn the grief hit me. I wish it hadn't taken so long to be able to say the words 'grief', 'guilt', 'loss', 'betrayal'. They don't just trip off the tongue - they hurt like hell, they ravage, decimate, humiliate. I held onto that last breath before I left Brixton and never breathed it out but those words are full of breath now and, breathing, they bare their meanings. 'Betrayal' – how that word breaks up, cracks open, splays its contents out over everything– at its heart, 'Hurt'. In its shadow – the word 'Betrothal' – a warm, pulsing-pink heart with a gold ring around it – 'Hope'. 'Guilt' – such a caustic word to spit like acid, a corrosive word, a protection racket of a word wrapped around with nastiness. 'Loss' – a word that lies down and wants to die with its bedfellow 'Grief'.

This looking back on the scorched earth of that scorched earth policy is a most dangerous moment.



The cover of 'Love zombie' – 'Woman who has lost her innocence holding back the lead, the terrible lead of the angels of vengeance', by Kathleen Mary Fallon, cover design by Nicholas Pounder, Polar Bear Press.

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