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Live encounters

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JUNE 2023

JANE FRANK
Poetry and Dreams

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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JUNE 2023

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Jane Frank is an award-winning Brisbane poet and academic, originally from Maryborough in the Fraser Coast region of Queensland. She has previously published two chapbooks of poetry—most recently *Wide River* (Calanthe Press 2020)—and *Ghosts Struggle to Swim* (Calanthe Press 2023) is her first full-length collection. Her poems have been widely published in journals and anthologies in both Australia and internationally including *Antipodes*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Westerly*, *Cordite*, *Takahē*, *Meniscus*, *Shearsman*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *StylusLit*, *Heroines: An Anthology of Short Fiction and Poetry* (Neo Perennial Press, 2022), *Poetry for the Planet* (Litoria Press, 2021), *The Incompleteness Book II* (Recent Work Press, 2021), *The Newcastle Poetry Prize Anthology* (Hunter Writers Centre, 2021) and *Hope: 2022 ACU Prize for Poetry Anthology* (2022). She has a PhD from Griffith University and previous qualifications in both art history and arts and cultural management. Her monograph *Regenerating Regional Culture: A Study of the International Book Town Movement* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017. She teaches creative and professional writing and is reviews editor at *StylusLit* literary journal. Read more of her work at <https://www.facebook.com/JaneFrankPoet/>

JANE FRANK

POETRY AND DREAMS

I always dreamed of being a writer. In the solid, stable, predictable provincial town where I grew up, it felt as if I was always waiting for something to happen. There was a wide river that moved slowly through the centre of my world, yellow-green parks lining the banks where banyan trees grew side by side with gums, the broad streets with deep verandahed shade. The town was fringed by cane fields and forestry plantations. Day-dreaming and writing poetry, I found, were ways to not only navigate daily life, but to reimagine it more boldly. I wrote poetry in A3 scrapbooks, illustrating the opposite page with drawings in coloured pencil. A dreamy pastel light of possibility shone through the west-facing windows in the afternoon as I sat cross-legged for hours at the coffee table on the yellow shag-pile carpet. Some of the poems from those years are quite fantastical.

My favourite Emily Dickinson poem—I Started Early, Took My Dog—reads as a marvelous daydream in which a young woman takes a morning stroll on the beach with her dog and imagines the sea as a house occupied by mermaids in the basement and frigate ships on the upper floors, while her shoes become oysters filled with pearls. As the poem intensifies, the mystical power of the sea takes on human characteristics, and we understand that the sea, while welcoming, can also be intoxicating and potentially destructive. This heightened experience of awakening is contrasted, at the end of the poem, with the no-nonsense reality of the town. Of course, there are many readings of this poem and the sea's vastness hints at the depths of the unconscious beneath the surface, but fundamentally, the magnetism of escape, adventure and temptation are key ideas. I definitely relate.

Dream poems are peppered throughout history, where they often held considerable weight. In ancient times, dreams were desirable because people believed there was a close link between dreaming and the divine. The ancient Egyptians practiced dream incubation, employing dream guides who lived in dream temples. These dream whisperers were known as The Masters of Secret Things. The aim was to protect or influence the future by supernatural means, and the ancient Egyptians regarded sleep as a stage of consciousness in which meeting with a god or ghost bearing some kind of message from beyond, was possible. Dreams were thought of as acts of sight: visions.



Jane Frank

The Egyptian *Dream Book* (1297-1213 BC) was found in an ancient workers' village, Deir el-Medina, in the Valley of the Kings. Each page of the papyrus starts with a vertical column of hieratic signs which translates as 'If a man [sic] sees himself in a dream'. In each following horizontal line, a dream is described with a diagnosis of 'good' or 'bad' and an interpretation. Good dreams are listed first, followed by bad ones that are written in red, signifying bad omens. More than 100 different types of dreams detailing almost eighty distinct emotions and everyday activities are noted in this book.

Dreams are, of course, embedded in one of the world's oldest literary works, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. An ancient epic poem from Mesopotamia, it tells of the adventures of an ancient Mesopotamian king who resides in a mythological empire of gods, fantastic beasts and portents. Several dream sequences include strange symbolic images: meteors falling from heaven, an axe representing Enkido's role as battle companion, a bird-man in a dream of the underworld where the dead appear cloaked in feathers. The avian emphasis reflects a deeply-rooted symbolic association of birds with the souls of the dead, also present in imagery and stories from Hindu and Egyptian mythology. This epic poem reflects the ancient people's understandings of the divine and the afterlife.

This ancient thinking that dreams arrived from outside the dreamer's mind—from gods or spirits—abruptly altered at the end of the nineteenth century when Lucien Freud proposed that dreams are the work of the unconscious mind, an expression of repressed desires or conflicts. The study of dreaming has continued to flourish ever since within the fields of psychology and neuroscience. The connection between poetry and dreaming is a strong one. Poets are often called dreamers: throughout history, they have distilled their dreams. This is now backed by scientists who assert that creative people have a greater capacity for accessing and harnessing dream experiences. Experts have established a relationship between dream recall, creativity and openness to experience. When we dream, entering REM sleep, we forge immeasurable numbers of connections between recent and more distant experiences. The process of successfully connecting these abstract and disparate experiences forms the basis of our human capacity to be creative.

Poems as dreamscapes draw me to them, so I enjoyed a recent series of conversations with award-winning Australian poet Anna Jacobson for an article about her poetic process for TEXT journal. Jacobson's work—most recently in her collection *Amnesia Findings* (University of Queensland Press 2019)—interweaves visions and memories, interweaves visions and memories, mining dreams for the purposes of writing and healing. She refers to some poems as "dream diaries" explaining the short and condensed

poems that dreams bring to her. Her chapbook *The Last Postman* (Vagabond Press 2018) consists of a series of unusual poetic letters delivered by a girl to characters on a train that allow intimate glimpses into the lives of everyday characters, incorporating themes of the domestic, yearning, hope and "a hint of magical realism". Jacobson uses the epistolary form of a letter, so "the poem, through these two lenses, seems the perfect medium to capture dreams."

On waking, Jacobson writes down any images she can remember from dreams; words, numbers or simply a feeling that lingers. Other times, dreamscapes are created strategically when the poet takes an extended metaphor and "runs with it until it seems dreamlike". A dreamlike effect is created when she is able to push images and behaviours to the extreme. She regards dreams as a kind of magic that can infiltrate her writing, help her untangle and discover life's mysteries. Her poems, rather than being about inventing imaginary beings or worlds, are about uncovering the mystery of the relationship between herself and the world.

And there is such mystery about the process of creation. As Alice Oswald says, "Poems, like dreams, have a visible subject and an invisible one. The invisible one is the one you can't choose, the one that writes itself." Similarly, the surrealist poet John Ashbery, when interviewed for the *Paris Review*, compared the writer's mind to an underground stream where it is possible to "let down one's bucket and bring the poem back up." Some poets tell of poems arriving fully formed, and others speak of imagery that arrives from a place beyond conscious knowing. Others are carried along at the poem's bidding, line by line, unsure exactly how the poem will, itself, decide to end. For me, it is about reaching a flow state where magic is more likely to happen!

I can still vividly recall the first time, in my teens, that I read Samuel Taylor Coleridge's hallucinatory poem of 1797, 'Kubla Khan'. Despite learning the poem was written under the influence of opium, I remember being astounded at the power of the imagery describing the Chinese Emperor's summer palace in Xanadu. The poet's exotic imagining channeled pure imagination in a way I hadn't encountered before. I was reminded of this a couple of years ago when teaching a popular culture course where students examined the films of David Lynch, and I became interested in his theories about tapping into endless creativity. I'll close with this poem from my new collection *Ghosts Struggle to Swim* (Calanthe Press, 2023) that references Lynch's ideas about accessing endless creative inspiration, mainly through use of transcendental meditation. Keep dreaming, poets!

The Huge Abstract Fish*after David Lynch*

I tell him I've tried meditation
but they only seem to swim to me
in dreams—

the huge abstract fish

There are others, smaller,
glowing
in a peaceful way:

the striated surgeonfish
the sweetlips,
the golden damsel fish
the spotted cod that eats from my hand

I remember He said that in an ocean
of pure consciousness
there is a happy unboundedness
of blue

The ocellus markings on sleek bodies
are eyes in the dark

bait still dangles in fragments
of desire

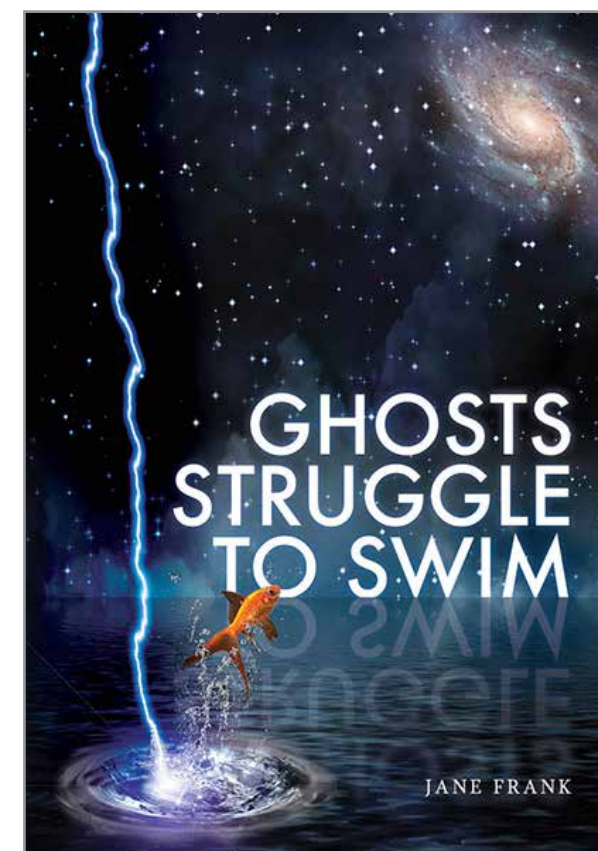
Close your eyes He said
feel the bliss, and I do:
ideas unfold like origami

I see their shadows

but I am too close to the beds
and lagoons
and rock shelves
of other minds

When I surface
there is a rugged and forlorn coastline:
eroded cliff faces that drop directly
to the sea

a long line of others waiting
to dive



Available at:
<https://www.calanthePress.com.au>

Edward Caruso has been published in *A Voz Limpia*, *Australian Multilingual Writing Project*, 'La Bottega della Poesia' (*La Repubblica*, Italy), *Burrow*, *Communion*, *Kalliope X*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *Meniscus*, *n-Scribe*, *Right Now*, *StylusLit*, *TEXT*, *Unusual Work* and *Well-Known Corners: Poetry on the Move*. His second collection of poems, *Blue Milonga*, was published by Hybrid Publishers in 2019.



Edward Caruso

BEGGAR

Thirty-eight degrees
in the shadows.
On lumbering from one end
of the city and back,
my cup overflows:
two gold euros.

By a stadium,
large drops of rain
mix with the sweat of a forehead
burned countless times.

A blurred figure offers a euro.
Someone lunges for my arm.
'We're in this together,' he says.
I frown.
Each day I'm on the streets.

A colleague stays
on his knees all afternoon,
eyes shut.
No one stops.
The disbelief
a pain as hypnotic
as a free cup of coffee
on a January morning.

Each street a site reserved,
pedestrians coming and going,
when rivals move in,
at my next spot by a church,
blood, phlegm.

OCEANS

1

Sunburnt figures. Refuse floating on waves
devoured by the heat of a June evening.

The port, blurred by surf,
it's been some time since I've felt sand
on my feet and laid beneath a fading sun.

Environmentalists with drums,
placards and outcries at the multitudes on shore.
A yellow moon rises. It will turn red over Bologna.

During our return trip much will be said
about the life you choose, dedicated to letters
and to the Adriatic's salt,
your wish to live in poverty in a country of wealth.

2

You study me raising
a glass of whiskey to my lips.
We coordinate clothes,
conversation and shades of booze.

3

Let go my hand ... lesson number one:
why I've learned so much from you;
the pain in love, the love in one's own pain.

Lesson number two: we're partners in fate,
masters of emotions, kindred liars of the heart
and infinite diviners of signs
(your heart, my heart; my city, your city).
Never give in.

Every time we talk, no matter how much I know,
how little of you, it makes for the whole,
and in that whole lies another whole.

Never feel let down.
Lesson number three ... No, lesson number four:
no matter how much we've discovered of each other,
it's lesson number one again.

4

Let's reconfigure the humidity and summer of false moves
(forget the winter freeze of six months ago).

Though it's been one long night of traffic,
our moon refuses to be seen too far above the rooftops.

5

What if we don't see each other for a year?
We'll return to the shore and its crowds,
even if the moon reappears with a different hue,
and there'll be more talk of wanting to see its phases
as if it were our hostage.

If we could become more like each other, live
by our pub at Milano Marittima, by its sea of bodies,
discordant beach umbrellas and salt in our hair,
you'll be reading Emily Dickinson.

Your memoirs to be written,
I can be relied on for a line or two.
In them I'll toast the mid-afternoon breakers,
our reserved banquets and idealised summers.

THAT THING CALLED 'PAST'

To lag among shadows
Sabine hills, a road's curvature into nimbus

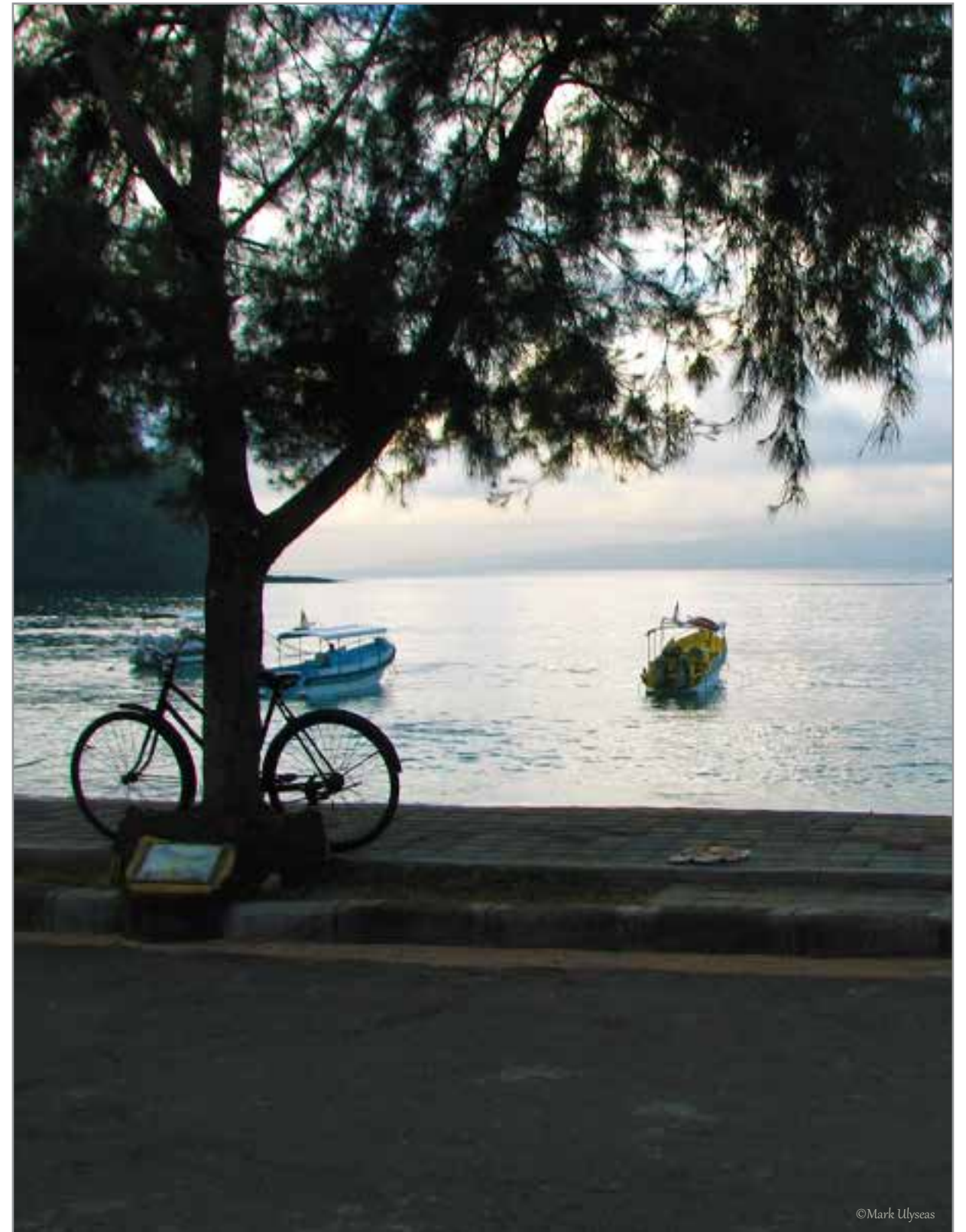
Widows, souls captured in black and white,
peer from balconies

Memories,
recognition as a past neighbour approaches

To be known as the figure that left,
and the person who returned

Sixty years after my first leaving,
rain restores these hillsides to how I remember them

Years lived elsewhere
Future departures



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Jane Downing's stories and poems have been published around Australia and overseas, including in *Griffith Review*, *Big Issue*, *Antipodes*, *Southerly*, *Westerly*, *Island*, *Overland*, *Meanjin*, *Canberra Times*, *Rabbit*, *Cordite*, and *Best Australian Poems*. In 2016 she was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize. A collection of her poetry, 'When Figs Fly,' was published by Close-Up Books in 2019 and her novel, 'The Sultan's Daughter,' was released by Obiter Publishing in 2020.



A WIDOW'S WEEDS

Out on the verge
kneeling on Marilyn Monroe's face
not praying
not in any ordinary way anyway
Making wiry green rings about
her fingers before
each yank
of the blades
sends her rocking back
the smell of fresh onions rising

He hated onion grass
growing high unchecked in his lawn
she loves the tiny star pink flowers
come spring

Their war
 No amount of tugging at the roots
 can clear them all
 unlike life this work will never end
 the yellow throats in the pink
 have a chance to call out again

Her job to try and get it done now
he is dead
his false teeth still
on the bathroom sink
A daily ritual it reassures
the neighbours
no need to call another ambulance
she is up
she is out
she is pulling the onion grass out

The underside of the novelty pillow
dries out on the verandah at night

Jane Downing

I HAVE FOUND MY FINAL FORM

I have found my final form –
the outer carapace
of a *matryoshka* doll
hiding my former selves
locked within me
rattling

On the outside I pose
my *babushka* bust
as wide as my ample hips
hair a wisp under a knotted scarf
and beneath this hardened skin
my younger self less
faded less grimed by dust
with rose-spotted cheeks
still smiling

And within her
is her younger self and within –
pazhaluysta – please search us out
all the way down
crone mother virgin child
to the swaddled babe
a solid nut of wood without
face

We have not died
our paint shines fresh
light on memories – one of us
stands an almost adult
in Moscow at the *Beryozka*
buying her first doll
 listening to the crack
of each new waist
anticipating the reveal
through sawdust motes
settling

Soon to grow an outer
shell around herself and
another and another and
yet and yet I still can see
the world as through
her eyes

WELL / UNWELL

He takes the stairs
Lifts: the domain of the frail trapped
in wheelchairs / triangulated with drips
reminders and forecasters
of what awaits on the fourth floor

The stairwell whispers
a lie about healthiness and wishes
that-might-come-true wellness not
deep and dark and falling-to-the-
bottom-of-the-pit wells

The fire door fits the frame
with precision / vacuum seals
the cement stairs' clickety
clack after the carpeted hush
of hospital corridors

He takes two steps at a time
spending the energy / surplus
to requirements up there
Collapses three flights up
lungs bust, shins malleted to the bone

His child, his sleeping
beauty lies eyes never open
amongst the spaceship
controls / the alien lighting
like you find nowhere else

He will read a book by
the bedside, make the voices
of wizards and forest animals
A drip snaking into her / strapped on
with mummifying bandages

RITUAL

Ghosts materialise in the darkened doorway
one enters a godly shaft of light

is revealed clothed in a crimson gown
beneath a flowing white surplice

A candle burns on the high altar inside
it is firefly bright and flickering

The road dividing this café from the church
drowns in its river of noise, the hymns sung

As the coffee machine hoots
like an anachronistic steam engine

Frame of the arched doorway parishioners
perform shadowy rituals of body and blood

for a moment witnesses too
enfolded into this celebration of life

Coffee arriving with a heart drawn in its creamy foam

I am a native of Montgomery County, Maryland, USA. My poetry has been published in numerous journals, including Beltway Poetry Quarterly, Evening Street, Steam Ticket, Potomac Review, Little Patuxent Review, and Main Street Rag. My work has also appeared in several anthologies, including "Secrets & Dreams", Kind of a Hurricane Press; "My Cruel Invention", Meerkat Press; and "Written in Arlington", Paycock Press. I am the author of four poetry chapbooks: "*Not Quite: Poems Written in Search of My Father*", (Finishing Line Press, 2015), and "*Our Situation*", (Prolific Press, 2018), "*Everyone Disappears*" (Finishing Line Press, 2020), and "*Little Wars*" (Kelsay Books, 2021).

HOW TO RIDE A BICYCLE

Let memories pile up
in your yard. Let them rust red,
then scrape off the oxidation
with a butter knife.

Cultivate weeds.
Give them all names.

Save what others have
no use for. You never know.
No-one ever knows.

Carry your weight but travel light.

When someone tells you
they will make you rich —
believe that they are lying.

Sleep with your windows open
so birds can sing their secrets
into your ears.



Luther Jett. Photography by Serena Agosto-Cox.

KITE-FLYING

We remember
more the idea of a kite
than the act of flying one —
not tug of string,
nor buffet of wind,
bright flag aloft yet
tethered — And what
will we treasure
tomorrow —
the idea of a heart,
pasted paper, crayoned
vow — instead slow grace,
cautious as continents
which through millennia
join to form a range
of sky-dressed mountains?

LAMENTATION FOR A LOST STAR

Wind unseen, yet heard, seeps
into broken rooms
where we hold all we have lost.

The nightbird weeps for the jackal
drunk with sorrow,
and the moon brings no relief.

Ice marrows our hollowed bones —
we cannot fly
down the river, across the sea.

The sharp-eared jackal in the reeds
sleeps — his paws twitch.
He dreams he runs through forsaken grass.

Moon does not leave us at dawn —
Let go the wish
you made once upon a lonely star.

All the lost birds will return
from their hidden
roosts behind silent western hills.

ANTHEM FOR EVERYWHERE

Because so many people
were moving it was easy
to be overlooked. Voices
claimed the streets, then faded.
Tread of a thousand boots,
next, screams — next
cries, next a song.

From deep in the belly — words.
Body overhead suspended.
Uplifted eyes narrow,
stomach clenches — and then
the song. The song they would
ban that cannot be erased, cannot
be unheard. The street
is not theirs — it is ours. That sky —
ours. The song is ours. Our lives
belong to us. They cannot take
what we refuse to give.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Gopika Nath is a textile artist-craftsman who stitches and writes, threading her syllables into poetry, creative non-fiction and art reviews, where her art practice provides a mirror to the self. Her writings have been published in Bengalaru Review, Brown Critique, Lakeview International Journal of Literature, 100 subtexts and others. A Fulbright Scholar, alumnus of Central St. Martins School of Art and Design [UK], Gopika lives and works in Goa, India. <http://gopikanath.co.in/>



BAMBOO DANCE

Like fingers pointed downwards
green fronds are gathered in groups
of five, six, seven and more
They droop stilled, as if immortalized
by a painter's brush

She breezes in and they nod
to each other. And settle down again
She moves swifter and stronger
And the boughs stir from their slumber
of rice-paper (sumi e) simulation

As sun dapples its hue and then refrains,
the awakened bamboo leaves dance
They sway: rising high with wafts, bending
low with grace. Shimmering and pulsating
bowing and billowing; they breathe

Gopika Nath

MONSOON, MONSOON

Days come and go with the bleakness of stratocumulus in a million shades of dense, mesmerizingly, melancholic grey. Foregrounded by piercingly tall, dulled palms, embellishing their despondency with curving, drooping lace-like pinnate fronds. Stilled. As if in rapt attention to a chorus of birds unseen. Chirping, whistling, twittering in differing keys. Unintelligible, but possibly, the same song in perpetual canon.

The wind breezes in from the South-west, whispering among the leaves, then blows in gusts. Alternatingly, lifting them up with her velocity or pushing them down, under their own boughs. Arrhythmically, dispiriting and elevating. Again and again. Nagging, coaxing, clamouring for their submission.

The bamboo leaves, like fingers of a hundred balletic hands, soar and wave. Then bowing low, so low, that their stalks might break. And, in a flurry of frenzied desperation, they lean forward, coming closer and closer. Green fronds reaching out to clasp the black, painted frame of an opened window. Then retreat, retrieving their limbic height. Mocking the sanctuary of my bedroom.

The stolid trunk of the Kaju has neither the bamboo's flexibility nor anguish. Its whorling folioles move, as if in a contained stupor, drunk on its own fermented Feni, shimmying nonetheless, with the dexterity of Michael Jackson's moonwalk. Heightening the anticipation of wetting, drenching, endless rain.

And then she comes. Mostly with a thundering usher and alarming bursts of lightening. But settles down to a calming, whispering, reassuring pattering-pitter. Kissing the earth until she piddles, puddles and bleeds russet-red. Caressing verdure until it glistens and glows. Romancing the scud and fogginess of gloom. Compelling a slackening grip, that lets azure steal in and out. But, just for a while. And then it pours and pours.

And melancholia sticks to the bone.

PAINTED HUES

If I could
what wouldn't I do
without the writhing of
those sleepless nights

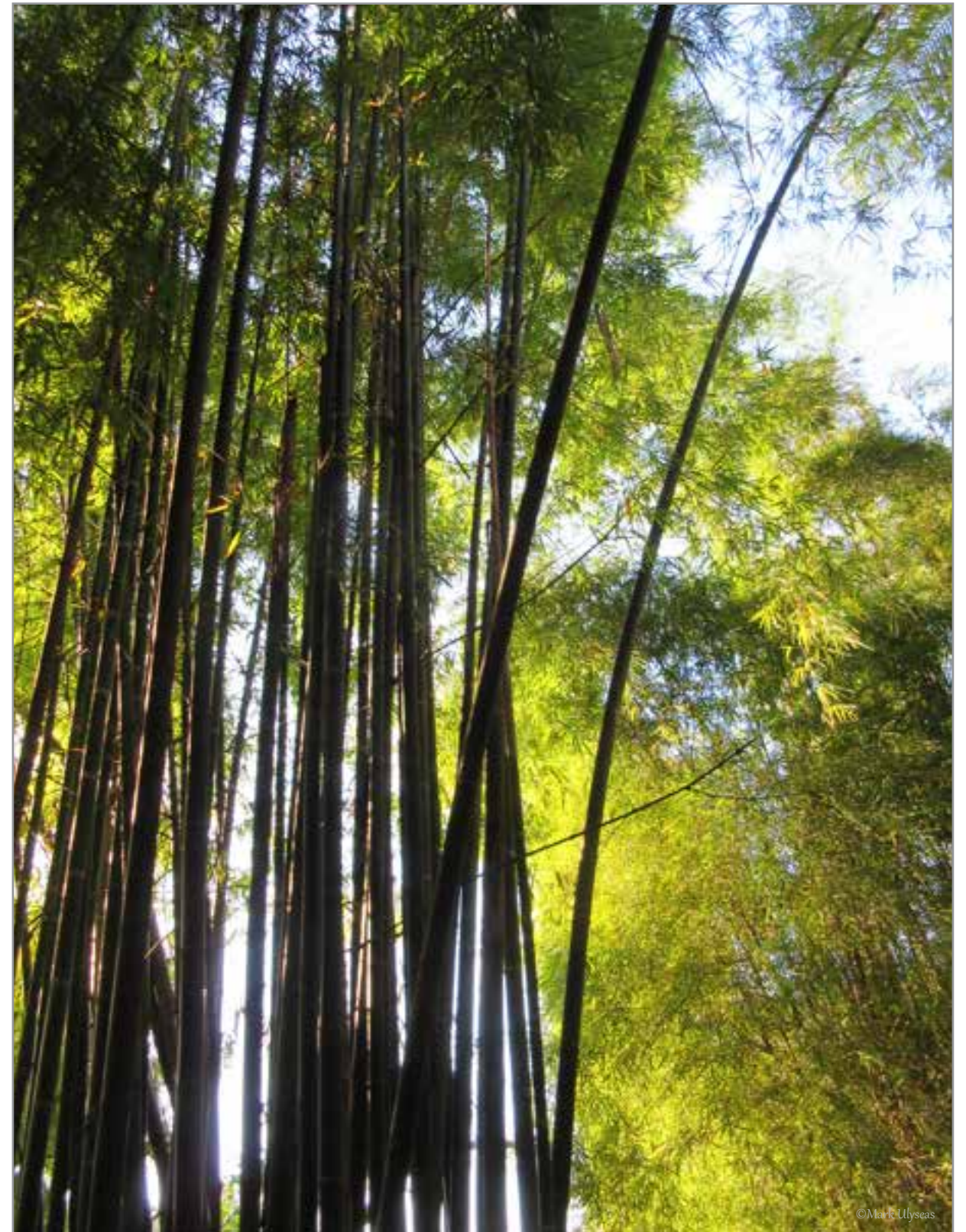
If I could
what wouldn't I do
without the errors
of my judgement

But, if I would
perhaps it's best
not to imagine
changing or altering
the way I stumbled over youth

For, triumphant of not sinking
with every wave
that went its own way
a tenure
experience-steeped it's been
Rich in nuance and timbre
though never enough to comfort me.

And even if I could envision a life
better than what I have breathed
I doubt

I could have done better
or painted in another hue



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She now lives in Melbourne, Australia. Hecq writes across genres and disciplines—and sometimes across tongues. Her creative works include a novel, six collections of short stories and fifteen books and chapbooks of poetry, including *After Cage: A Composition in Word and Movement on Time and Silence* (Liquid Amber Press, 2022) and, most recently, *Songlines* (Hedgehog, 2023) and *Endgame with no Ending* (SurVision, 2023), a winner of the 2022 James Tate Poetry Prize.



GORGE

so cold the ends of twigs burn white with frost
 voices hover over flames sing to the fire's crackle
 silent cadences squeeze the breath out of your chest
 you wait for daybreak's natural selection to lisp
 moonlight prayers dyed bright orange yellow blue
 enter the freezing dawn sorrows fist in your pocket
 head straight for the falls your pursuer a ghost
 you twist up the path foot lighter at every step
 to the highest point of the cuesta brushing
 past bush peas orchids pincushion lilies
 myrtle showy bauera trymalium – narrow leafed
 as the path climbs into infinity tints
 where a child stirs opens an eyelid
 you swoon on the edge inches from a lip
 here hard rock layers overlie soft shoulders
 pressed into lichen moss periwinkles
 you stray outside of yourself breath captured
 high up on the ledge you look into the earth's
 throat – the lake a crescent moon shimmering
 eye half shut on cut glass shades reflected
 so brilliantly it hurts this is the moment
 to lie down from deep in the earth a cry
 the echo throws back voices cascading the day
 the world crumbled mere wafer in memory's
 tremulous granite inexplicably
 this exquisitely winged blue butterfly
 flutters in from glittery mists waxing air
 cymbals! is what you want as it unfurls

Dominique Hecq

continued overleaf...

GORGE *...contd*

gossamer in gold filigrees green sky
glints a tempo tears trickle into folds
of time your wings so old they shed smoke
blue dust frames of canted bone fault lines
of stippled faith passing through shadows
your breath returns in a foreign tongue
harmonies soar shatter frost wings feather
the depth of walls on the verge of words
you pick up the butterfly's dance leap
along the cuesta's crest time's ligatures
tremble in the breeze the dawn's patina
glows against sheets of basalt trills
flit rise and fall in vocalic folds



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Laurie Kuntz has published two poetry collections (*The Moon Over My Mother's House*, Finishing Line Press and *Somewhere in the Telling*, Mellen Press), and three chapbooks (*Talking Me Off The Roof*, Kelsay Books, *Simple Gestures*, Texas Review Press and *Women at the Onsen*, Blue Light Press). Her poetry is inspired by living in Asia for over thirty years. She has been nominated for three Pushcart Prizes and one Best of the Net. Her chapbooks, *Simple Gestures*, won the Texas Review Poetry Chapbook Contest, and *Women at the Onsen* won the Blue Light Press Chapbook Contest. Currently residing in Florida, everyday offers an opportunity for a much needed political poem. Otherwise, happily retired, she lives in an endless summer state of mind. Visit her at: <https://lauriekuntz.myportfolio.com/home-1>



TURNING OLD

We're likened to flowers--
delphinium, crocus, forsythia,
names that color the raspy throat of time,
fill the air with familiar gray tones,

but consider the hydrangea
kindred to diminished hues of November
it shutters from wine to teal till petals
gleam like burnt sapphires, pearls, bronze.

Pansies, petunias, zinnias
in their crimson dresses
tear in October's rush of wind

the hydrangea remains steadfast
bleached from wind and time its colors turn
from lavender to sea-shades,

turn from summer's incense
to the perch of night with distant
sounds of bells and strength of chimes.

Laurie Kuntz

PORTULACA IN SHADOW

August in L.A.

a litany of the familiar,
delphinium, dianthus, columbine,
each flower, a vise on the redolent pocket of time,

You seek deliverance
among red palmed petals of portulaca,
transplanted from a garden in Vietnam,
now wrapped tight in evening's bud.

What grows in L.A.

is common to both lands
and you listen for sounds of Asian gardens--
bamboo creaking in an October wind,

bike wheels on gravel,
the clink of a teaspoon
against the cobalt rim of china
and in high grass, feline declarations.

But, here, in L.A.

under the drone of imminent freeways
the purple vine of morning glory
chokes the trellis and the memory

of an egret's call ascending
from rice fields pales
against the clamor of the angel's city.

An unspeakable loneliness
claims your life as the past
clenches shut, like portulaca in shadow.

TERMINALS

If a moment can summon desire,

a bus depot in Hartford,
the February wind blowing curls across your neck,
your gloveless hand reaching for me, does...

On a wooden bench in that bus station,
the morning's rage, the slam of pay phones,
the bite of words from hours before,
a sting in my ear as I watch
revolving doors ease you into the crowd.

It would bemoan us to talk of such things now...

when now what we talk of
is measured by snowfall and taxes,
our days no longer torched
by the slender slice of time
or pickup points.

Decades from depots,
the same haunted light breaks our sleep,
we recognize our stale smells
and wake armed with dreams
of parceled moments...

morning's arc profiles your face

and I am back on that hard bus station bench,
like a ghost, you loom, angry and in love in Hartford,
then the station empties of bums and bag ladies
and in our measured stares, our fretful embrace,
the place ignites, once more, in the terminus of our lives.

COUNTLESS CONCUBINES

Hunched under oil scented tarps, protected against damp drizzle,
a boatman rows us down the Perfume River in Hue,
we turn a cold shoulder from vendors on mossy banks hawking brass idols.

Only eleven, you tire of dog-eared tour books,
museums and motorless boats,
playing your *Gameboy* you wish for wonders
of everything battery operated.

We reach the tomb of Tu Duc, the Vietnamese Emperor,
who had 104 wives and countless concubines.
His tea, made from drops of dew,
condensed overnight on the leaves of lotus plants,
yet, imperial luxury brought him no sons.

None like you, who sit next to me in complaint
of yet another tomb, another hundred steps to climb.
I tell you all monuments are built because of love
made of rock and surrounded by walls to protect.

In downpour we embark, mother and son,
up frangipani-lined paths to Tu Duc's tomb.
It is then, you relish, as only a boy in awe of kings
and their gluttony of passion can,
the thought of an emperor reclining on high
stone columns fanned by countless concubines.

And, I feel lucky not to crave kings and concubines,
but just to relish as a mother can, in all that can not be counted.

GORGEOUS GIRLS

The resplendent foreign girl
threw up in class last night.
Everyone forgave her,
offered to copy lecture notes,
lend her a cell phone,
e-mail her mother in some faraway land.

I imagined her 200 pounds,
with pitted cheeks, and a bowl haircut,
her vomit would have flurried
chairs from desks,
opened winter windows wide.

When I dared to look at the gorgeous girl's vomit,
it was just that--
dainty, pearled balls of rice, almost edible white

Having been a gorgeous girl once,
I know how it is to get away with everything,

how the air parts with the scent of jasmine
and allows the swallow's song to linger,
commanding all that gorgeous girls need
to return to their seats and pretend
that nothing has happened.

Anna Yin was born in China and immigrated to Canada in 1999. She was Mississauga's Inaugural Poet Laureate (2015-17) and Ontario representative for the League of Canadian Poets (2013-16). She has authored five poetry collections and one collection of translations: *Mirrors and Windows* (Guernica Editions 2021). Anna won the 2005 Ted Plantos Memorial Award, two MARTYs, two scholarships from USA and grants from Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts. Her poems/translations have appeared at Queen's Quarterly, ARC Poetry, New York Times, China Daily, CBC Radio, Literary Review of Canada etc. She read on Parliament Hill, at Austin International Poetry Festival, Edmonton Poetry Festival and universities in China, Canada and USA etc. She has designed and taught Poetry Alive educational programs since 2011 along with her daily IT job. In 2020, she started her own small press: surewaypress.com for her translating, editing and publishing services.



LISTENING TO LEONARD COHEN

In some summer nights
I listen to your low soothing voice
as if a secret river whispers and confides.
There are charming currents and surprising turns
as honey sunlight pours through ragged seaweed—
the blind journey led by Suzanne, then hearts broken,
now all I see golden and purple blowing in the wind...

In such lonely longing nights
I play familiar songs for myself—
a girl from China not named the same.
I would make your tea perfectly sweet and bright;
I would show you where sunflowers grow high—
even if my heart too would be broken.
But the morning dewdrops roll down before my touch,
now I count how many roses closed in a void...

In some summer nights
I listen to your meandering river whispering...
In some summer nights
I seek the stars in the distance emerging...

Anna Yin

FOR DON GUTTERIDGE

The ink in your pen
seems never dry:
one after another,
poems flow through long
longing sentences,
filling your solitary rooms
as unforgettable songs.

Light shifts the silence
between day and night,
dream and dialogue -
you wait for your
loved ones' echoes.

Let me record the rhythms
in your mind and your pages:
they are your heartbeats,
your lifeline from many years ago,
a simple and joyful "Yes", and
they continue to this day
and forever.

THE BLUE DOLPHIN

The three names I gave to him
he chose *Dolphin*
not knowing the other two
are dearest to me

Panda is my son's favourite
Sailor meant my first boyfriend
Dolphin is new, a warm healer,
I found from wikipedia, in ancient time
once saved a poet whom I never read

So it could be my fate, I
never supposed to be a poet, now
am a die-hard one...
In my dream, I swam like a fish
and left a fish tail in my poem

So that is it, that will be...
In the open ocean
I let him sing blue dolphin songs
and swim with his dreams into the dawn

BLUE SONGS

He says he wants to save me
He offers taking me to the bay
The night is long
The river sings with Mr. Cohen's song

Sorry, Mr. Cohen, Sorry, Mr. Dolphin...
I only see the blue, blue, half moon
I fill in my pillow with a long-due poem

The passion flower is pretty, pretty, pretty,
but I fear it may fade away, away, away
The passion fruit is sweet, sweet, sweet,
but life is heavy to sail away, away, away

Sorry, Mr. Cohen, Sorry, Mr. Dolphin
The night is long
The river sings with a blue song
I will wait nine moons for my turn
I won't bath in the hot sun and burn



Photograph courtesy by Oliver P. Quillia - Own work, CC BY 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4502307>

Richard W. Halperin's poems are published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher and by Lapwing/Belfast. Salmon has listed *Selected & New Poems* for Autumn 2023; it will draw upon poems from Mr. Halperin's four Salmon and sixteen Lapwing collections, on the occasion of his 80th birthday. A new Lapwing, *The Painted Word*, will appear this Spring.



FERRYMAN

Ferryman, bring her across the river.
 It is evening in every sense, it is evening
 and I ask, Ferryman, bring her
 across the river. Who is her?
 Is it the Madwoman in Britten's
 brilliant *Curlew River*? Is it
 Macdara Woods's mother in
The Nightingale Water, which should
 have won him the Nobel Prize
 and which I must have read
 a hundred times at least over the years.
 Is it my own mother, Ferryman?
 I was not there when she passed.
 I can hear the river, I can hear it loudly now,
 like a good slap in the face,
 like the torrent that it is, but with
 calm moments, the moments
 when you, Ferryman, can cross.
 I can see who is on the boat,
 they are glad to be on the boat,
 they are glad there is a boat
 and a Ferryman. With his pole.
 With his competence. He is not
 a Daddy, he is not a gondolier
 with a hat and ribbons flying,
 he knows the river, he sings
 but far too softly to be heard.
 There the boat is, on my side of the river.
 Ferryman, bring her across the river.
 Ferryman, at last she cries, at last she asks,
 with dignity, bring me across the river.
 She does not know that I have been
 asking the same thing for her,
 she is not thinking of me now.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Bertrand A.

Anne M Carson is a poet, essayist and visual artist whose poetry has been published internationally, and widely in Australia, receiving numerous awards, including winning and shortlisting in the Martha Richardson medal, a shortlisting in the 2023 Ada Poetry Prize and Longlisting in the 2023 Fish International Poetry Prize. Her work has been broadcast on national and community radio and she has curated a programme of poems on disability on ABC's Poetica programme. Her most recent publication is *The Detectives Chair* (Liquid Amber Press 2023). She has initiated a number of poetry-led social justice projects, including *The River Project Soiree* as a fundraiser for the RiverKeepers and a greeting card as fundraiser for the Carbon Positive Charity. She is on the final stretch of a PhD in Creative Writing at RMIT, writing a poetic biography of George Sand.

from *George Sand (and me): a poetic auto/biography*

A YOUNG GEORGE SAND, (AURORE), RIDES DONKEY TO MASS

1809, Nohant

Donkey is his name
and we love him.

Patchy ragamuffin coat
slow and steady gait.

Ursule and I are lifted
up into his woven panniers

one on each side, settled
in the straw, and Donkey

carries us to Mass –
a joyous, plodding

processional. Mesmerised
by the rhythm of his rolling

gait I imagine us into
stories – we are royal

children returning from
exile, we are being

spirited away from one
world into the next to

continued overleaf...



Anne M Carson

A YOUNG GEORGE SAND, (AURORE), RIDES DONKEY TO MASS *...contd*

help rescue the people.
The great blue vault of

sky above is a perfect
backdrop for my wild

imaginings. Donkey is
a docile and respectful

rascal, able to nudge
latches open with his

muzzle. One day he makes
his way to grandmama's

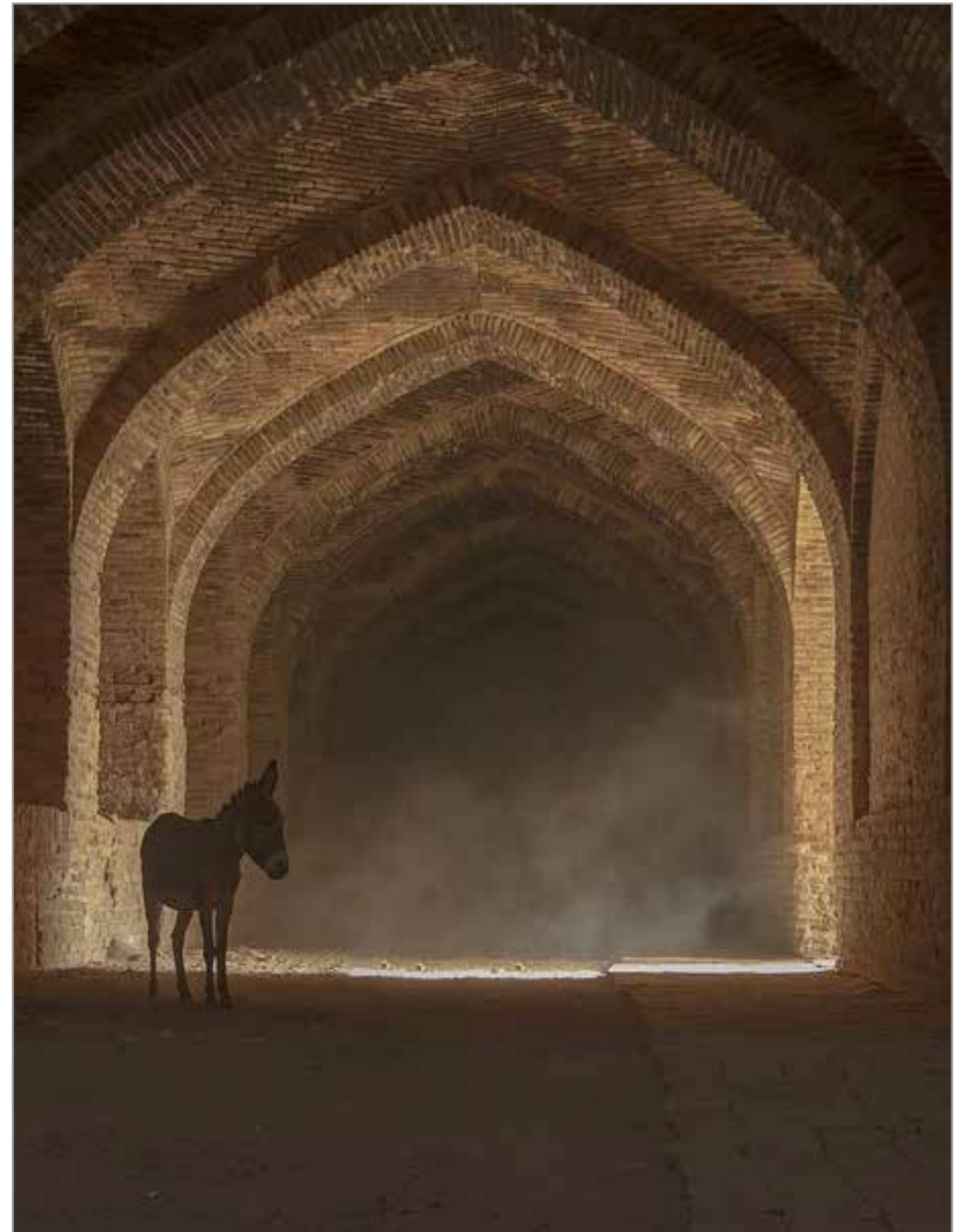
chamber – manoeuvring
his four legs down eight

steps, across the kitchen
through the scullery, (hard

hooves clack-clack-clacking
on flags), to her bedroom

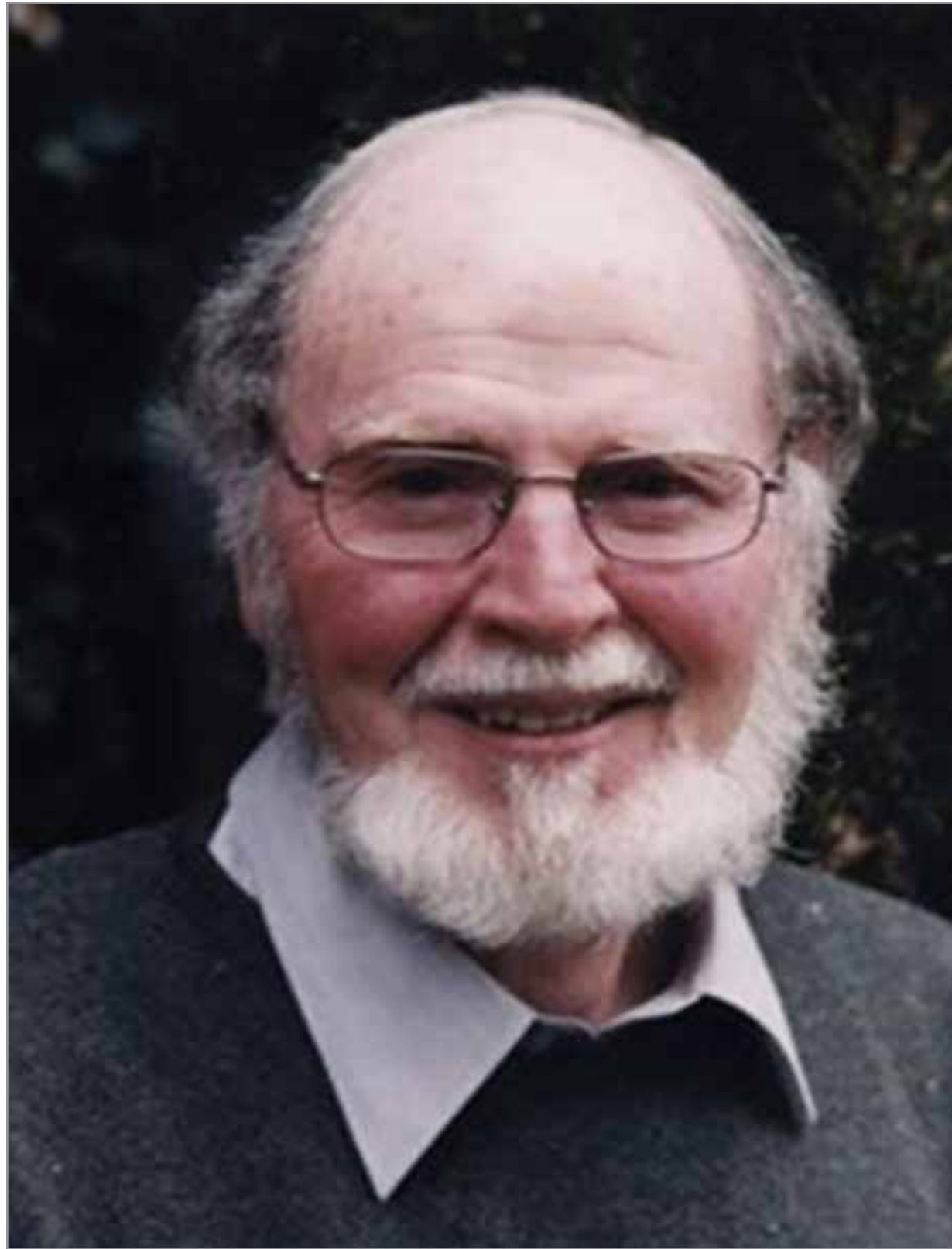
where he expects and
receives her most tender

scoldings, and delicious
dainties from her hand.



Photograph courtesy by https://pixabay.com/users/mostafa_meraji-13551092/

Don Gutteridge is a Canadian author of 40 books: fiction, poetry and scholarly works, one of his poetry books was a finalist for Governor General's Literary Awards in 1973. He taught at Western University in the Department of English Methods. He is now professor emeritus and lives in London, Ontario.



MARA'S LAMP

Mara's lamp was only
a street light like a
crumpled cookie-cutter,
scattering its lambent glow
and luring us night
after night, like mesmerized
moths in a candle's flare,
to re-enact our ritual
game: hide-and-go-
seek: we became denizens
of the dream-dark, huddled
in nook and cranny, beyond
its radiant reach, we were
shibboleths of shadow
in the utter absence of light
until the "all free"
drew us running like shepherds
below a Bethlehem star,
whose bright beam
steadied our furled world.

Don Gutteridge

INK-BRUSHED

For Anna Yin

You offer to translate a dozen
of my poems into ancient Chinese,
and I imagine my verse as ink-
brushed slashes in their picto-
graphic simplicity, like just-
bred syllables scrawled
on a Neanderthalian wall
to be read in some far
century, when words have lost
their lustre, by a mendicant
mandarin with a passion for poetry
and the prick of its puzzle

TILL THE MUSIC STOPS

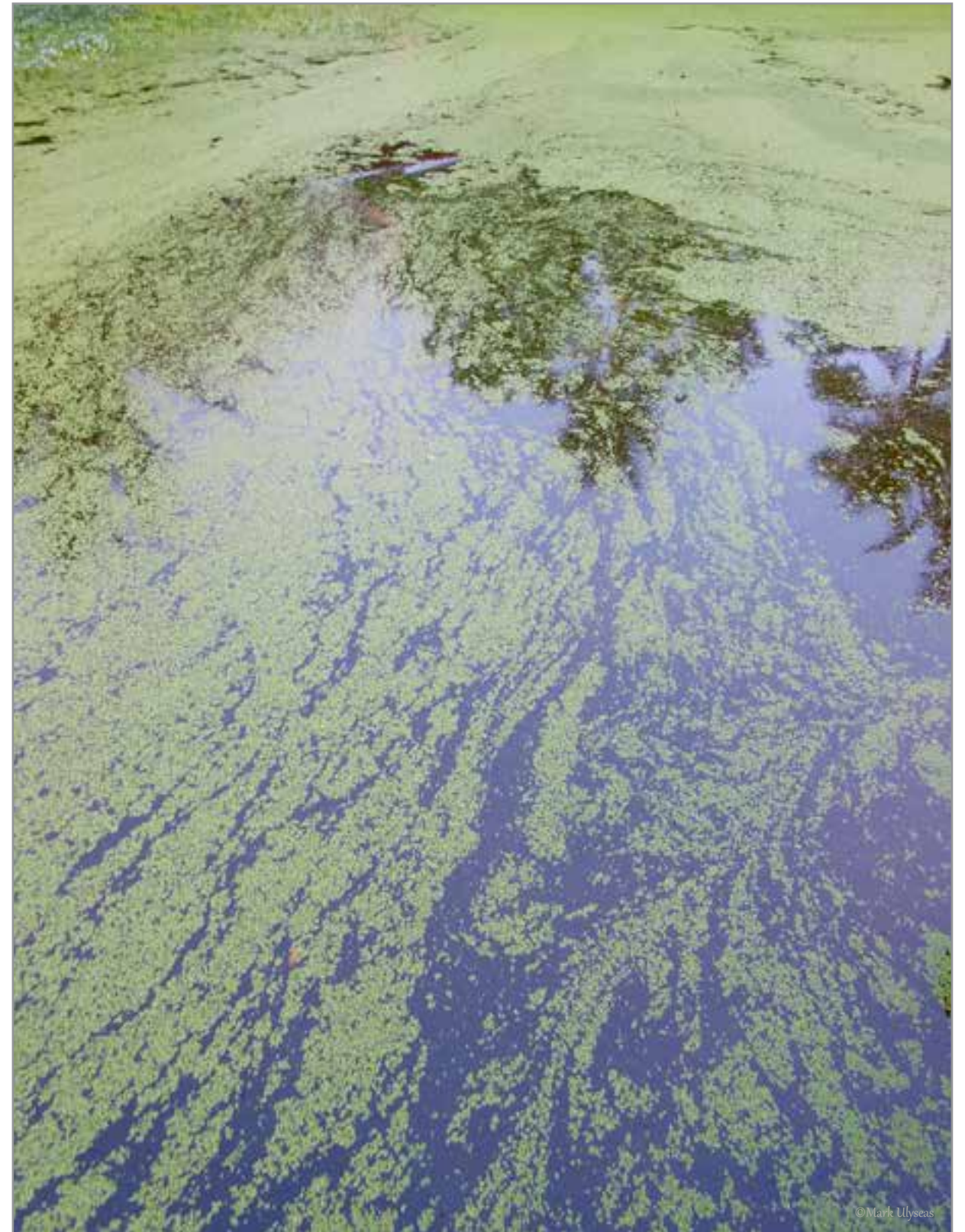
For Anna, again

My poems were not penned
with a quill, plucked from some
luckless bird, or a stiff-
nibbed instrument, pummeling
the page (with more splatter
than matter), or the fancy 'fountain'
brand, where the fluid flows
like a cut carotid, but I've since
found that a thirty-cent
biro would do if the words
were willing – still, I hope
one day, like you, to dip
my brush in an ink-clotted
pot, and stroke the syllables
singing inside till the music
stops.

SYLLABLES

For John B. Lee

We started a conversation
about poems and their making,
about the inheld breath
before we say the syllables
to ourselves and dream
them onto the page,
willing some meaning
that seems beyond knowing,
some home-truth
that needs no proof
to startle the world we build
together in a friendship
welded by words.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Translated from Arabic by Dr.Salwa Gouda. She is an Egyptian academic at The English Language and Literature Department in Ain-Shams University. She is a PhD holder in English literature and criticism. She received her education at Ain-Shams University and at California State University in San Bernardino. She has published many academic books including Lectures in English Poetry, Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism and others. She also contributed to the translation of The Arab Encyclopedia for Pioneers including poets and their poetry, philosophers, historians and men of letters.

Mostafa Ebada (1965) is an Egyptian journalist, poet, essayist and critic. He works as the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Al-Ahram -Arabi Magazine. He is also the cultural advisor to some of the most important Egyptian publishing houses, such as: The Egyptian Lebanese House, Al-Mahrousa Center, and Dar Batana. He published more than 10 books in different creative genres such as poetry collections and cultural and literary studies.



HER NAME IS MUNIRA

With heavy, red eyelids
On the threshold of the house she sits
With needle and thread
And with every "stitch" she nurtures a soul
And pities for another
Or revives a third
She never distracted by dreams
And she does not know about tomorrow
Except when the goblins wake up
They stir up the dust in the path
And she is behind them, mending
And sewing days and hunger
And when the needle pricks her finger
And a blood thread appears
She sleeps
And we rejoice because her shadow sings while she sleeps

I did not cry her when dead
I stood counting her next age
I lick her secret wound
And her secret sadness and happiness
And her soft soul
She gathers Children and neighbors
She fights boredom
With needle and thread
Then she looks at my loneliness
"Shall I make you tea?" she asks.

continued overleaf...

Mostafa Ebada

HER NAME IS MUNIRA *...contd*

When she died
 She took her homes with her
 And all the wounds she nursed
 People rejoiced for her
 And I am like a silent rock
 Water and sorrow erupt from it

I did not cry her when dead
 I cried her alive
 She is crossing the distance between the old house
 And the new in a blink of an eye
 Because little "Mustafa" is crying
 She fears for "Bashar" from the scorpions of summer
 Covers "Nesma" or feels
 "Khadija"'s head
 Then look at my loneliness:
 "Shall I make you tea?" she asks.

Believe it or not
 Days will brighten
 With my mom's story
 Who does not know poetry
 And It does not fit her the description of an "angel"
 She who raised a flock of angels
 And no word describes her
 She will stand before God

Before the angels
 And she will name them for Him
 This is the angel of sadness
 And this is for the balance of tears
 And this is for sorrow and sucking lips

Her name is tent
 And her shadow is a garden from the sky
 Her footsteps on the ground
 Are greetings to dust
 Her name is salutation
 Her name is "The Wind as good tidings before his mercy."
 Birds roam around her and around the poems
 I walk behind her
 Like I am a kid again
 Whenever I feel incomplete or lost
 Language follows her
 When it feels thirsty
 Or when the metaphor leaves.

If I say hello to her, she cries
 And if I say goodbye to her, she cries
 As if, I am going to war
 She does not ever look at my back
 Her eyes are fixed on something in the distance
 With tears
 Tears are her Holy eloquence
 Her name is Munira.

WHAT CAN POETRY DO?

I am here to tell you something:
My dad
Sacrificed like all of your fathers
Then he leaned against a wall he knew
To count the number of years and the reckoning
He alone tended to his mood
And hides the details even from himself
Befriends little demons
And brothered the goblins of the night
The fairies of the earth landed at his feet
And he is chaste
Who ran his race
On mounds of gravel
He lived at the wrong time
And the place that dives
In the kingdom of dust
Who set fires
For a little spark
He knew some of his soul
And some words
And failed to speak

A pile of mud up there
Behind an old house
Where I lived
And where every light appeared
And everyone
Ordeal or test
Where the angels are frustrated
And despair eats them
And where every tomorrow
Not tomorrow

I want to immortalize my father
I did not consider his sorrows when he was old

His long embrace is over
His silence, his prayers and his supplication
I am, here, far away
Show his biography
And walk through his path
We were two prophets out in the open
And two days in a blind night
And an untrodden walking road
He is the master of his soul and his singing
And his faint chant is his melancholy

I am here
Welcome his presence
Like I am him
Or
Like I am his echo

I am looking for a way to say:
I AM sad
And my memories that dive
In the kingdom of dust
Are sad

continued overleaf..

WHAT CAN POETRY DO? *...contd*

There is nothing but demons and lusts
And strange emotions
Nothing but gravel and dust
Then gravel and dust
A clean heart and dirty shoes
Short way
A life imperfectly perfect
And it is only glass
Fractured in the sole of the foot
And scratches in the rib cage

I tried to sing once
Defeats jumped out of my mouth
And broken glass
And thorns on the soles of the feet
And my father

Women bounced
And cold mornings
And deaths

I sang once
Then my mother's voice:
What do we do with all these books?
Eat paper?

A quarter of a century later, I heard the same phrase
The whole pain
I did not stop at the right time
I never stopped

And I kept feeding the angels
And bring out the music
From anger like a butterfly
And a fragment of forbidden light

No river passes in front of our house
And I do not know of trees except thorny
With poor shadow
Acacia or camphor
Which contains eternal serpents and fear
I sleep not like the rest of creation
No pillows under my head
I forget a lot and get angry even more
When I sleep, I do not sleep
I dare not say:
I am dreaming
As I dream very much
And non-stop
I mislead myself by contentment and travel
And you ask me when I shut up:
What is with you?
You lost everything
And revived as a survivor

continued overleaf..

WHAT CAN POETRY DO? *...contd*

On a dark night like all nights
 Terrible like southern nights
 We heard a gasp
 A black desperate cry
 The men are silent
 We stopped playing on the cotton hills
 Lights out
 And the singing fell silent

I wake up before everyone else
 I got closer to the light
 I traced the blood thread
 And the fragmented head parts
 As children's snot
 Under a palm tree
 And the body is half in the water
 And half of it is on dry land
 In a channel of silence and flies
 I woke up before everyone else
 And I knew
 I ran towards the houses
 To my mom
 Until the idea of homes faded in my eyes
 And it became a mirage
 Driven by fear and asceticism

Since that date
 I have no home
 My homes are all inside my heart
 But I didn't stop
 The breathless running
 And the dead man's head did not stop

Visiting me
 And you ask me when I shut up:
 What is with you?

A long time ago
 It grows around my body
 Thorny trees
 I am a serf of the land
 I still am
 My back broke

I have a latent wealth of grief and horror
 Haunting me for half a century
 Without hope of recovery
 A long time ago
 I take the gravel off the soul
 As if, I had never been there

I do not want to go home
 Listen:
 I do not want to go home
 I hate the way home
 And every time I say:
 This is my last grief
 This is my last time
 And I don't know what holds my body
 To there.

Anne McDonald is a spoken word poet, artist, creative writing teacher and festival curator. Her work is centered on the challenges we face in a society that is changing rapidly and how we respond or react to those changes. Through her writing she explores themes of parenthood, aging, death, loss, inclusion and response to the human condition. Through her art she explores our connection and sometimes disconnect with nature, and the effect mankind has on nature. She is interested in the power of enabling people who would otherwise not be considered “writers or artists” to find ways to give voice and space to their own creative experience. She was awarded The Irish Writers Residency in Cill Rialag, Kerry. She has had work published in *Women’s News*, *Hot Press*, *Electric Acorn*, *Woman’s Work Anthologies 1 & 2*, *The Blue Nib*, *The Strokestown Anthology*, *The Waxed Lemon*, *The Storms Inaugural Issue*, *Fragments Of Time*, *Blue Mondays’ Anthology 2021*, *192 Magazine*, and several issues of *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*. Her work has also been featured on collaborations with musicians and animators and reviewed and broadcast on RTE Radio. Anne has an M.Phil in Creative Writing. Her first collection of poetry *Crow’s Books* was published in 2020 and her second collection, *Clothespeg in my pocket*, will be published in Autumn 2023.



TOO LATE TO FLY

It was the fourth day of the fourth month
since you died when I found it.
Hiding in a Cadburys bisect tin,
in a plastic folder,
in the back of a cupboard,
that we somehow missed
during the big clean out.
-Your first ever, never used passport.

Good for ten years after April 2020,
it wasn't a pandemic or an air strike
that stopped your first flight.
Nor lack of determination on your part.
A clean shirt and good tie,
for a head and shoulders shot,
“You should always look your best” you said,
and even on a week day, in the local chemist
against a plain beige backdrop,
you did.

A haircut every six weeks,
an account in the local cleaners,
to keep your only Louis Copeland suit
tickety boo, you said you never knew
who you might meet when you went to get petrol,
or to Tesco's, or if you had to wait
until your prescription was ready.
I wonder now, did you know
that it was way too late?

continued overleaf...

Anne McDonald

TOO LATE TO FLY

...contd

That you would never stand
at a boarding gate, or check in luggage,
or grip the sides of an airplane seat
when you see above the clouds
for the first time, and wonder
if there really is a God?

Or did you want to let us know
that in your 90th year,
if you wanted to,
and,
if there was a good
enough reason why,
you *could* actually fly.

BUSINESS ADVICE AND MISSING BILLY

The best bit of business advice I ever got was from Billy,
the car park attendant, in the Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda.
I handed him a ticket for one hour and one minute
through a hatch in the plexiglass window of his prefab hut.
“Seven fifty Missis” he shouted over
a howling wind in late November.
“Seven fucking fifty? Are you serious?” I shouted back,
as my umbrella took off in the direction of the exit,
crashing into a sign that says
“Remember don’t forget to validate your ticket.!”
Billy smiled, took my money and slammed his hatch door shut.

“Do I know you, Missis?” he shouted in December,
From the sanctuary of his one-bar electric fire.
“You should” I shouted back above the hailstones.
“I’ve spent half my life coming here,
or to some other hospital car park,
after a while, they are all the same.”

He winked and said “You’re in the wrong game.
If you ever have a few bob in your hand,
buy or rent a scrap of land near a hospital,
open a car park. Take it from me, it’s good business advice.
Mind you don’t slip on the ice!”

Winter passed, the sun came out,
I didn’t see Billy for a while,
almost missed his sunny smile when I handed over
my hard-earned money.
Last time I met him, I remember he said
“you know it’s funny, when someone is dead,
I wonder do people wish they could still come here
and moan about the cost of the carpark?
I knew your father. He was a gentleman.
Coins would be great if you can,
He loved putting a few bob on Lester Piggot.
I assume this will be your last ticket?”

CLOTHES PEG IN MY POCKET

I found a clothes peg in the pocket of my dressing gown today.
Yellow, plastic, metal spring ready to hang anything.
But that was not what I saw when I pulled it out into the midday sun.

No

I saw what it was not.

Not a diamond
or a pearl
or a piece of antique glass real enough to pass a jeweller's eye
and be considered precious.
Not a piece of silver jewellery like an earring with a turquoise stone,
or a piece of satin ribbon,
or a slip of paper with the line of some remembered poem.

Yes

Families are eared through styles of pegs. I know that now.
From wooden, plain, to coloured plastic, back to wooden
to save the trees and thousands of years of toxic waste.
I could only taste the disappointment

That it was not a locket with a photograph of a secret lover,
or a number for a tryst,
or a date on which to wear a gown of emerald
to dance until the sun went down on board a gleaming yacht.

Yes.

I saw what it was not.

So

I passed the bins saluting in their different hues.
Green for newspaper, brown for compost, black for every other thing
that will never morph into something beautiful,
a genuine "rubbish" bin.
I chose the black and dropped,
the peg and my disappointment in.

Karen Greenbaum-Maya is a retired clinical psychologist, former German major and restaurant reviewer, and, two-time Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee. Poems have appeared in *CHEST*, *B O D Y*, *Spillway*, *Comstock Review*, and, *Rappahannock Poetry Review*. Kattywompus Press publishes her three chapbooks, *Burrowing Song* (2013), *Eggs Satori* (2014), and, *Kafka's Cat* (2019). Kelsay Books publishes *The Book of Knots and their Untying* (2016). She shared her life with her late husband for 34 years, which were not enough. *The Beautiful Leaves*, a collection of poetry about his illness, death, and her grief, is forthcoming in August 2023. She co-curates Fourth Saturdays, a poetry series in Claremont, California.



ALBUM: PORTRAIT WITH PANAMA HAT

Ganders at the field's edge guarded the goslings and fledglings,
honked once when we approached. See, they've all turned and fled.

Here we are standing deep inside the hawthorn bushes.
Proust had allergies, dared view flowers only through the window.

Our friend made a special detour to this village,
all streets paved with unself-conscious cobblestones.

That's the village bakery renowned for the true macarons,
the best macarons, the ones worth the excursion.

She took us to this auberge whose resident dog
favored you with chin on thigh, true love from liquid brown eyes.

I remember air heavy with humid heat. The photo shows only
the warmth I found against your shoulder.

After that luncheon, we ambled through the town.
Here's the local Gothic cathedral where we ended up.

That parabola of bullet holes in the limestone wall must have been
from *métrailleurs*, Resistance machine guns driving out Nazis.

Here. Let me show you.

Karen Greenbaum-Maya

FIRST RESPONDERS SUITE

1.

I tell 911 *Look for the jacarandas.*
 to find our house, at the basin end of the cul-de-sac,
 flanked by the lemon tree, the plum,
 where all things come to rest.
 Four thriving firemen overflowed our little bathroom
 when he couldn't hoist himself from the tub.
 He and I, we'd tangled for an hour, tried
 towels and grips and leverage,
 realized at last we were both too weak.
 Firefighters picked him up easy as I pick up a cat.
 He was wet, leg muscles wasted.
 They wrapped him gently in towels.

2.

Three laid-back firemen parked
 under the jacarandas, sauntered
 past the lemon tree into the garage
 to extract him from the car, passenger side.
 He'd wedged himself into the passenger well
 trying to stand up and grab his walker.
 He'd forbidden me to buy a wheelchair.
 He didn't want to look old.

They told us to find wheels or else
 go to the ER, that summer Saturday night.
 How, how to roll him into the house?
 Clever firemen, they propped him on a hand truck,
 secured him close with bungee cords.
 My pacifist husband, now turned parcel and patient,
 slumped against his binding, turned
 into Hannibal Lecter minus the muzzle.
 They wheeled him like a water heater.

3.

His heart trilled like a woodpecker
 when I laid my ear to his chest. So fast
 the blood can't move. Then it clots. It stops.
 Now he lacked the oxygen
 to hold himself upright.

Six sturdy firemen plus a farm boy of a trainee.
 And a gurney plus equipment. And paperwork.
 I'd become prepared. I handed them
 the printouts I kept ready:
 the list of meds, the timeline
 of diagnosis, surgery, recent treatments.
 The IV, inserted quick and any old how,
 to stop his heart to restart his heart.
 That unspeakable event.
 They exuded health
 sweet and elusive
 as lemon blossom, plum blossom.
 The living room, big enough to receive them,
 suddenly vacant. Sunlight
 laying chambers on the carpet.
 Trampled jacaranda blossom trailing
 where they'd rushed him to the ambulance.

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 DESIRE OF NATURE

Daydreaming
I listen to the wood pigeon
Cooing from the lime tree,
covered in pale spring green.
Wild garlic's white flowers
Along the path,
Forsythia yellow shines,
Luscious tulips in mauve and pink
Crowd an earthenware pot.
The desire of nature
To live and create
Shakes me up
Intensely.



Dr Greta Sykes

THE SACRED MARRIAGE

The old buried me
Beneath layers and layers,
Surfaced again
In the park at night,
Where the silent lake shone,
Late summer Rubeckia, Echinacea,
Scented the air
With magic.
I could feel you again
Who has now passed away,
Desiring me breathlessly,
With ardent kisses
And a body that coiled
Like a dancer
In desire,
when we created
The original sacred marriage
Again and again.

IN THE BOAT

In front of me
A girl with a soft brown face
And chubby arms.
Her thick brown hair
Curls over her back,
Her fringe a cheeky
Strip of brown colour
Above her brows.
As the rocking boat
Glides and shivers
Like an erotic encounter
Everyone smiles
At the feel of pleasure.
The sea, though, is inky black
Like my fountain pen,
When I was fifteen.

Kate McNamara is a Canberra based poet, playwright and critical theorist. Her plays have been performed internationally. McNamara delivered the opening address to the Fourth International Conference of Women Playwrights in Galway (2001). She was awarded the H.C Coombs Fellowship at ANU (1991) and elected to the Emeritus Faculty. She won The Banjo Patterson Award for her short story Verity. Her published works include *Leaves*, *The Rule of Zip* (AGP) Praxis and *The Void Zone* (AGP). Her poetry, short fiction and critical theory has been published in a number of anthologies including *There is No Mystery* (ed. K Kituai, 1998), *The Death Mook* (ed. Dion Kagan, 2008) *These Strange Outcrops* (2020) and *The Blue Nib* (2020) She has also worked extensively as an editor and has only recently returned to her first great love, poetry. McNamara is currently working on *The Burning Times*.



Kate McNamara

VERITY

Verity is thinking back to the wintry night that her great aunt had always described to her with such clarity and more than a touch of venom. Night, snow and the full moon under which she had been born, first daughter to a woman whose life had been moulded by hard men. A woman far too frail for the basalt soil of the high country, a woman who insisted she be named Verity, like a promise or a faith to keep. The woman had held to living long enough to name her and then with a sigh she had loosed her fragile grip on mortal life and crossed the last great border. Her great aunt would always begin to cackle in this part of the story.

Must've been the sight of ya. Morly, mucky little thing with lungs like a bloody Clydesdale. Lord Almighty you did scream and she did bleed, girl, ain't never seen the like of it. Lord Almighty she did bleed.

It was a gruesome tale to tell a young child, Verity thinks, a tale, a name and a winter's night, all she had left of her mother, an image of blood flooding out into the snow. It has become a kind of ritual with her over the years on the eve of her own birthday to try and picture the quiet woman who birthed her, who melted into the woodsmoke of memory, who was never spoken of by her husband or her sons. Her brothers had become more embittered with the drought years, the sun became their enemy, the weather became a cruel and capricious God. And her father was not a man for talking, a grunt, a lifted eyebrow, he did not put his trust in words. She had always known how much she surprised him with her chattering, her little songs, her menagerie of invented friends and animals. She knew this as a child knows the truth of many things, as she knew how much he loved her. They were all dead now, all the ungentle ghosts, and tomorrow she would be 84 years old.

She looks out into the dappled night and watches the moonlight sift through the ancient pines to lie in patches on her quilt and the old tortoise shell cat turns to find a warmer place in the small of her back, seeking warmth against the midnight cold. She contemplates the growing sheet of frost on the roof of the hen house, her own personal barometer of the bitterness of the night and thinks how the ice will lace through the old willows like an unearthly spiderweb as the light sits in great unfractured pools in the still waters of the creek.

How many nights has she lain in this old bed and thought of the frost as the wild night birds called and the wind unhoused the ghosts that lived within her. She knows she'll not sleep awhile now, not once memory takes her inexorably like a great tidal pull, down the ancient pathway to the creek.

Sweet, sweet water where her daughter, Imogen, named in deference to the Gods, had drowned herself in the summer of her life when the land was rich in produce and the cattle were fat and her cottage garden spawned such a wealth of excess that it had quite amazed her. She remembers that she had thought how strange it was that the old Gods could shine so gloriously on this barren land. Until she found Imogen and the curtain of nightmare fell over her life for what seemed an eternity and even now Imogen sits in her heart with a bruising weight she'll not take lightly to her own grave.

Life's a perverse old bitch she murmurs to the cat who ignores her with his placid wisdom and turns to have his ears rubbed purring like an old man snoring and cantankerous, yet apparently content with his lot.

Wish I was a cat she continues absently *though I don't fancy having nine lives, one's enough, I couldn't go through this lot again, it's enough to make you fuck spiders.*

A vivid memory of Imogen surprised on the brink of womanhood assails her, a shining girl whirling through the red dust with the chooks in her best white broderie anglaise frock and Verity shouting out that she'll ruin the bloody thing before she's even been to town in it.

Ophelia, my Ophelia, o lovely one, how did we fail you? she mutters despite herself and turns restlessly against the pain to find memory waiting in another crevice where Chen, her husband, stands whispering to the wicked brown horse that had defeated every man in her family, with his Queensland red kelpie sitting softly at his feet and her father never taking his eyes off this legendary Chinaman who could tame anything they brought to him.

Bloody foreign devilry he reckons quietly to himself but impressed and trying to hide it. His admiration did not survive her elopement with *that bastard yellow peril* and after he had cursed her with a quite bewildering array of pejoratives he had never, not once, in the next thirty years either spoken to her or even acknowledged her in the street when circumstances conspired that they should meet.

She had simply ceased to exist for him. Nor did he acknowledge her children, the thought of mixing all that pure white blood with a heathen would have curdled his stomach. How Verity had missed him, years later when he lay dying of the canker that twisted him into a thin gargoyle of his former self she had come to visit him in the hospital but the snooty bitch who ran the ward had tried to forbid her entry on the grounds it would have upset him. But even she had quailed before Verity's fury, she would not now be denied, not by God himself, this last chance to see him, to talk, whatever. But in that quiet room where death hovered so patiently words deserted her and she knew he had been waiting, had fought the pain for weeks so that he might stay the time to see her one last time when so many bitter years had passed, so much unsaid, so much anger. She remembers that the tears poured down her face and dripped onto his withered old claws and she laid her head on them.

Make a good passage, Dada, I love you she had whispered.

Bon Voyage he replied in a thin, almost unrecognisable, voice *O Verity, beloved, how I missed you.* And then smiling at her he died as the afternoon light spread across the common, he left her with all those words unsaid and unsayable.

Afterwards, of course, the old nurse had said that she'd practically murdered him and she should be called to account for her actions. Verity didn't bother to defend herself, she'd lived on a farm outside this old vicious town, outside its contempt and its palpable hatred of her and her mixed marriage and her half breed children that were as wild as crows for so long that it hardly seemed to matter.

Chen had been her universe with his fabulous tales of the decaying splendour of the Great Celestial Empire, stories from his father's province in Kwangtung, of the dragon river and the counting songs of the Wooden Fish while the children sat with their eyes reflecting the firelight and laughter flowed like honey and the world outside was exiled from their home. Occasionally he would speak of how his father was sold like a slave to the masters of Gold Mountain and lost his soul to it. He rarely spoke of his own youth and never mentioned the woman who had been his mother.

Chen with his impossibly alien eyes, his spirit wrapped in mystery and whom she had first seen in high summer when the light was spinning silver in the dead grasses of the treeless plains and her life trembled on the wind.

Fate shapes us all so the sage Ho-Tou said and we must all dance on the wheel of eternity. I would dance there with you. No man had ever said words like those to her, no man nor woman had ever come close to the secrets she cradled in her heart. Chen who had died from a bizarre tractor accident and left her so alone she had nearly gone mad. She suddenly remembers old Doc Jenko standing on her verandah one afternoon and telling her straight:

Verity you've got the constitution of an ox, grief can't kill you. All you Pendergasts are the same, take a bloody pick axe and then some before you lot shuffle off the old mortal coil, so like it or lump it you're in for a life sentence girl and you can do it easy or you can do it hard but either way you could spare a thought for these poor bloody kids.

So she gave him the entire speech from King Lear on the death of Cordelia, bellowing it out like an animal, before he threw up his hands and drove off in a great rage in his battered old car.

Verity knows she has not been an easy woman, stubborn and black-hearted when the mood took her and proud as sin, the same pride that kept her securely beyond the reach of the mealy-mouthed gossips of the town.

See how the mighty have fallen she whispers into the night, it has never ceased to amuse her that she had out-lived so many of them, the irony of it all. Somewhere she can almost hear her great-aunt's half-senile cackle but wise, so wise, in the ways of life, and her broken, tinny voice.

You was always wild though many's the time I took the twitch to ya backside but there was no taming ya, it's what's bred in the bone, girl, and Lord knows you got a power of devils. You watch your mad brothers, they reckon that Chinaman has bewitched ya with heathen love potions and they're looking to shoot him, give 'em half a chance and they will, girl. You mark my words Verity, your poor mother died hard, so you take your slant-eyed lover and run like hell. These old mountains will kill us all soon enough.

Night crawls restlessly through the room, soon it will be the hour before dawn, the hour of the wolf. Her gaze shifts, noting again how the room seems to be falling in on itself and she lets herself drift back through time to when she first transformed it into an exotic love nest, like something out of *The Arabian Nights*, shifting panels of gossamer and her young limbs entwined with Chen's, so close even skin could not divide them.

In this room she birthed all her children though old Doc Jenko complained bitterly that there was a perfectly good hospital not four miles away. Here she nursed Chen through his last agony, white-faced and stony cold with rage at him and his dying. Sometimes it seemed to her that it was a room in which all her dreams had been conceived and then they died, one after another, and after that they had gone wild and taken to living in the walls, furious like the rats raking their nests in the architraves, never satisfied. She knows the geography of her mind very well and she repudiates this weakness that age has brought with it, how she loathes self-pity; she'll die just as she lived, without compromise. Occasionally she has wondered what has kept her here all this time and yet she knows, as deep and old and unknowable as the cycles of the moon she is yoked to this land, to the texture of its soil, to the caprices of its climate, to the vast serenity of its night skies where the stars burn so far beyond her earthly tempests. Looking out again she welcomes the faint light of dawn coming and sits up in bed decisively ignoring her rattling breathing and the racing in her heart.

Well puss she says, willfully upsetting the cat it's me bloody birthday and I mean to celebrate it, so you can shift your arse and go make me tea and I'll have a spot of them Eggs Benedict with Melba toast. You could clean this pigsty while you're at it because young Gabrielle's due for her mercy mission today and we don't want her wasting time with the old house, do we, bet she's got you mince, ya great spoilt brute.

Almost despite herself she has come to enjoy the company of the young community nurse who has so much more gumption than her predecessors.

They had always been so easy to shock, she'd taunted and teased them mercilessly. They could never cope with her ribald, running commentary on their sex lives or her bewailing the fact that her own old hole was dry as a bunion and she was losing the memory of a damn good fuck but she wouldn't mind one last go at it because it was a sovereign remedy for almost any ill. She'd never had time for do-gooders, they disgusted her.

Verity is only too well aware that she is a nuisance to their fancy new community health services and their pathetic ideas about geriatric medicine. One of her recent triumphs has been her successful intimidation of young Doc Jenko, not a patch on his father, whom she'd attacked with such vitriol that he was only too happy to leave her alone.

You reckon to murder me, do ya? Young cock of the walk, well you try it, you take me from this farm and I swear I'll neck myself, so be it on your head. I'd not last a week in that mausoleum in town. Leave well enough alone, even your father knew that much, its only age, boy, one out of one people die. Now get ya great feet out of my garden and off my property. If I need ya, I'll call ya, the rest is between the devil and me and none of your goddamn business. So piss off and find yourself a real emergency.

But it is time now to re-enter the present and leave the night to its shades. It is her birthday and she has been preparing for it for some months. It is over forty years since her vital, brown-skinned twin sons had left home to travel the rugged country of the Northern Territory rodeo circuit, there they had fallen in love with the wild free spaces of that place and made their fortune. For they had both inherited that gift of calming and then taming almost any creature brought to them, in this they carried on the legend of their father. Like Chen they seemed to contain a quality of serenity, a deep pool at the very centre of their beings. Verity had often wished she'd had some of it.

They'd both settled and married and provided her with a glorious tribe of grandchildren and she envied them their gutsy wives, those endlessly competent women of that great northern expanse. Once she had been much like them but now it seems as if all her energy has gone to ground.

Peering at herself in the mirror she notes the slow fading of her eyes, the cataracts are encroaching; sometimes she feels as if she has let the land itself into her, that her eyes are full of clouds, the blue rushing through the sky and the wind is a constant pressure in her ears and her gnarled feet are like withered tree trunks. Shaking herself and with the same indefatigable spirit that has sustained her all the seasons of her life she gets up to prepare the surprise she has concocted for her rascal sons.

Hours later young Gabrielle arrives to find Verity, a vision splendid, perched in her old cane chair like an ancient and most exotic bird of paradise and is rendered speechless for a moment.

My God, Verity, you look astonishing.

I'd frighten the bloody angels, Gabrielle, but I promised them bastard sons of mine a formal bloody portrait of meself and they're been plaguing me for years. So this year they'll finally get it, since I've always been the Mata Hari of the high country I thought I'd tart meself up as her, just like Hedi Lamarr, always fancied her. Time's a wasting girl, so lets git. We're going to that young Peter's Palace of Portraits for a sitting. Christ, I feel as uncomfortable as the friggin' Queen on a Royal Tour.

Oh Verity what would I do without you!

Years and years later a young girl will sit in her sun-filled bedroom and once again pore over a startling portrait of her great-grandmother taken the day before she died. She is beguiled by the complicity in the woman's smile and she can almost sense the secrets she somehow enfolds, it is a portrait of mystery and something else, something much less easy to define. Turning the picture over she traces the spidery, copperplate handwriting on the faded, brown backing of the photo and she repeat the words to herself *like a mantra or an invocation*:

There's no closing date for the getting of wisdom. Remember you were born to dance on the wheel of eternity with joy so take risks, my darlings, and take care. Love Mum.

2010 - 2022



Live encounters

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