



AFGHAN WOMEN POETS

Curated by Shikha Sawhney Lamba

Samman A ~ Beheshta Adel ~ Shogofa Amini
 Zahra Amiri ~ Yalda Aminy ~ Yusra Aryan
 Arzoo ~ Sabiha Awanzai Mahmoud
 Maryam Balkhi ~ Sheba Gaheez
 Eman Ghazmiwal ~ Zuhra Hamdard
 Khalida Jawadi ~ Samreen Makhfi
 Nazi Maysam ~ Sosoan Muradi
 Hadia Muradi ~ Hasiba Nabizada
 Zuhra Nadem ~ Marwa Paikan
 Raihana Paikan ~ Somaia Ramish
 Nadia Sakhi ~ Sadia Siddiqi ~ Z.H.

ARTWORK Feature : Zuhra Nadem

**NIGEL KENT's IN DEPTH REVIEW &
 DROP IN of**

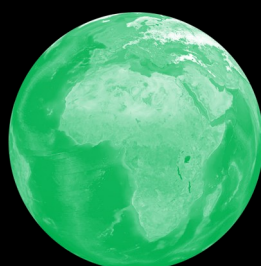
Cancer Courts My Mother by LindaAnn LoSchiavo

OPEN POETRY SECTION

Santosh Bakaya
 Stephen Barnaby
 Gary Bills
 Jude Brigley
 Beth Brooke
 David Callin
 Ian Cargill
 Ceinwen e Cariad Haydon
 Christina Chin
 Andy Dalglish
 Gary Day
 Maurice Devitt
 Julia Duke
 Mike Everley
 Jim Ferguson

Rona Fitzgerald
 Jahnavi Gogoi
 Mavis Gulliver
 Huw Gwynn-Jones
 R.W. Haynes
 Gopikrishnan Kottoor
 Laxmi Krishna
 Gopal Lahiri
 Alistair Lawrie
 Mike Logue
 Brendan Moohan
 Lawrence Moore
 Daphne Milne
 Jim Murdoch
 Andy Murray

Tom Murray
 Bernard Pearson
 Marjorie Pezzoli
 Elizabeth Phillips
 Gary Ritchie
 Derek Sellen
 Sanjeev Sethi
 Polly Stretton
 Carolyn Thomas
 Roger Waldron
 Trevor Wedge
 Susan Wilson



Poetry from Planet Earth

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Poems © The Poets 2026

Guest Curator : Shikha Sawhney Lamba

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Dreich Trumpeter © Ellis C

Design/ Layout by Tenor Bull.

TcT Curator ~ Jack Caradoc

To subscribe/submit ~

email jackcaradocTcT@gmail.com

Some poems may have appeared elsewhere
thanks to those editors.

Cover art & art © Zuhra Nadem 2026

Earth Image by Arek Socha from Pixabay

Moon Image by Jordan Garner from Pixabay

Photographs courtesy of Shikha S. Lamba,

Sabiha Awanzai Mahmoud, Sadia Siddiqi

and Zuhra Nadem as well as others by the poets.

Some poets are writing under pen names
for obvious reasons.

OPEN POETRY SECTION

curated by **Jack Caradoc**

Lawrence Moore ~ TWO POEMS

Daphne Milne ~ THREE POEMS

Carolyn Thomas ~ ONE/ THREE POEMS

Jim Murdoch ~ FOUR POEMS

Rona Fitzgerald ~ FIVE POEMS

Mike Logue ~ THREE POEMS

Ellie Ness ~ ONE POEM

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Polly Stretton ~ THREE POEMS

Susan Wilson ~ THREE POEMS

Jahnvi Gogoi ~ TWO POEMS

Stephen Barnaby ~ ONE POEM

R.W. Haynes ~ THREE POEMS

David Callin ~ TWO POEMS

Laxmi Krishna ~ TWO POEMS

Andy Dagleish ~ THREE POEMS

Santosh Bakaya ~ TWO POEMS

Gary Ritchie ~ ONE POEM

Elizabeth Phillips ~ TWO POEMS

Trevor Wedge ~ ONE POEM

Mike Everley ~ FOUR POEMS

Bernard Pearson ~ THREE POEMS

Jim Ferguson ~ FOUR POEMS

Maurice Devitt ~ FOUR POEMS

Gary Day ~ FOUR POEMS

Ian Cargill ~ TWO POEMS

Derek Sellen ~ TWO POEMS

Julia Duke ~ ONE POEM

Huw Gwynn-Jones ~ FOUR POEMS

Alistair Lawrie ~ TWO POEMS

Christina Chin &

Marjorie Pezzoli THREE POEMS

Mavis Gulliver THREE POEMS

This painting explores the quiet tension between freedom and restriction.

A white feather covers the woman's eyes—a symbol of peace and flight transformed into a barrier. What should have carried her toward freedom instead becomes the veil that limits her vision. Around her, white doves soar freely, embodying hope, peace, and possibility, while she remains unable to witness the very freedom surrounding her.

Her raised hand suggests both protection and endurance, reflecting the invisible burdens carried by countless women whose voices, choices, and dreams have been constrained.

The vibrant background represents a world full of life, movement, and opportunity. Yet despite standing at its center, she is separated from it—not by physical walls, but by invisible systems of discrimination, silence, and inequality.

Created for International Women's Day 2022, The Wings of Silence is not only about Afghan women. It is a reflection on every woman whose vision has been obscured, whose voice has been restrained, and whose freedom remains just beyond reach. Even in silence, the possibility of flight still exists.



GUEST CURATOR

Co-Editor / Founder

Coffee and Conversations Magazine

Poet

Website - www.shikhaslamba.com

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/shikhaslamba>

Instagram - www.instagram.com/shikhaslamba

Poetry - www.instagram.com/shikhaslambapoetry

Magazine - www.coffeeandconversations.in

Featured in - Being Neighbourly HK

Thorn and Bloom Magazine UK CNN

The Hooghly Review The Mind Talk

Jewelry Designer and Gemologist (G.I.A)



Shikha S. Lamba

POETRY



Shikha S. Lamba

JEWELRY

Coexistence

Shikha Sawhney Lamba

I've learned to dispose of fractions of myself
when my life has demanded it.

And some fragments have quietly drifted to the edges
recognising their time is deferred or passed.

Sometimes it's a surrender,
sometimes an ill-fated fight, sometimes a collapse.

A part of me was stunned into silence,
exiled without warning, leaving the rest without a survivor's
manual.

On many days I can still feel her, looking in,
watching a pale resemblance of herself writing her story.

She's not causing a spectacle, she barely speaks.

I wonder if she hovers within my orbit
to simply amuse me, setting up house within my periphery,

barely visible, unmistakably present,
an exasperating reminder of what I lost,

a maddening echo that promises to linger,
for as long as I do.

Shikha S. Lamba is a jewelry designer and poet living in Hong Kong. She is the co-editor of an online magazine, Coffee and Conversations. Shikha's creative work has been published in journals globally. Her poems and photography have previously been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize.

Shikha is a passionate advocate for women's rights, currently focusing mainly on Afghanistan, leading fundraisers that have supported over a thousand families in the past five years with food, medical, rent, winter and sanitary aid. With the help of donors, she has equipped Afghan girls barred from school and university with phones, tablets and laptops to continue their learning online, and enrolled children in schools. Her other initiatives include distributing sewing machines to and renovating and repairing the homes of Afghan widows. Her fundraising has supported two orphanages in Kabul with food, hygiene and other aid.

As a poet and magazine editor, she has collaborated with other writers and editors to create spaces where Afghan women's creative work can be shared.

For the Afghan Tulip **Shikha Sawhney Lamba**

Resilient *Laleh*,
such endurance you carry in your tender stem.

See the cloak of darkness your country wears,
the earth around you sticks like grief to your sturdy roots.

There is fear. There is despair despite the tales
of courage and sacrifice you hurl with each bloom.

Your colour, rising strong towards the bright skies,
bears too close a resemblance to the lost blood
of lovers and their beloveds.

What is this spring you bring with you?
This quietude hangs heavy with the loss of sounds
earlier harmonised into remedies for heavy hearts.

Let this season fade with you as your foliage withers.
Come back, come back with a new spring saturated

with notes rising from a neighbour's rubab, and
his *mahboob's* fingers dancing on her keyboard.

Bloom again, *Laleh*,
when you can shed your endurance for a song.

Laleh - Tulip
Mahboob - Beloved
Rubab - Musical instrument

Introduction by Guest curator Shikha S. Lamba

Back in June this year, I paused my own writing to spend more time editing and submitting poetry and short stories by Afghan women to different literary magazines and journals. I never imagined this would lead to curating an entire issue. I sent a single poem to Jack Caradoc, editor of The Candyman's Trumpet in Scotland, and he surprised me by requesting twenty more.

Poetry has long been a lifeline for Afghan women, a means of survival, expression, and resistance. Support from magazine and journal editors is crucial at this time for helping them reach more literary spaces, where their writing truly belongs. In a perfect world, most Afghan women poets and writers would step directly into these spaces, but currently, for many, the path to publication is difficult and tedious to navigate.

For women in Afghanistan living under gender apartheid, most of these literary spaces are not just hard to access, they are often entirely out of reach. Many women and girls write in secrecy, attending underground schools or online classes. Many lack a steady internet connection, as some cannot afford it due to the sweeping work bans imposed by the Taliban, making access to the internet an unaffordable luxury. Some of the writers featured in the issue are living in unfamiliar places as refugees and immigrants, adjusting to countries and cultures vastly different from their own.

I am acutely aware of my unique position as a bridge, shaped by the last few years of advocacy and fundraising for Afghan women and children. As a poet myself, to be able to work as a conduit in these circumstances is a privilege and an honour.

Within the pages of The Candyman's Trumpet's August issue are the voices of twenty-five Afghan women and girls- twelve still living in the country, and thirteen from the diaspora. Among them is an award-winning poet in exile and another just fourteen years old living in Afghanistan. Some are educators, some hold Master's degrees, and a few had their education stolen when the regime seized power. The importance of a curation like this lies in its role as a living testimony, a record of these times. These poems will endure beyond me, beyond the Taliban, and beyond their writers. They will go on to inspire, teach, and inform future generations.

Many poems originating from Afghanistan have been translated from Farsi. The poets are not professional translators and have endeavoured to express their voices in English to the best of their ability. To preserve the authenticity of the writing, keeping their words true and raw, the poems have undergone minimal editing. Every voice here is distinct, even when their poems echo similar themes. Every voice deserves to be heard, even if the writer cannot use her real name.

My heartfelt thanks go to Jack Caradoc for opening this space. We chose to include writers' bios, a rare step for the journal. At a moment when a terrorist regime is determined to erase Afghan women's identities, we felt it vital to honour and celebrate each writer's individuality, if they were comfortable sharing it.

My editor's note would be incomplete without returning the spotlight to the voices that matter most and need the literary world's support right now. I close with the words of Somaia Romish, an award-winning Afghan poet living in exile:

"Throughout history, poetry has been a form of resistance and protest for women in Afghanistan against oppression and injustice. More than a thousand years ago, in the final moments of her life, Rabia Balkhi, the first known Persian-language woman poet, wrote a poem with her own blood on a wall as an act of protest against cruelty and injustice. Today, as Afghan women continue to face the oppression of a gender apartheid system, poetry remains a form of collective resistance for them. At this moment in history, when the voices and rights of Afghan people, especially women, are being ignored by political forces, literature, culture, and poetry can remind the world of the tragedy unfolding in Afghanistan.

It is essential that the voices of Afghan women are heard. Poetry is a story of resilience, hope, resistance, and the lives of Afghan girls. It is also a window that connects them to the outside world. I believe it is deeply important to create space and opportunities for the poetry and voices of Afghan women, and through poetry, to understand what they are experiencing."



Students involved in online learning



Sewing machine, food aid & home decoration for Afghan Widows

AFGHANISTAN WOMEN & GIRLS AID WORK PHOTOS



Sanitary Aid Drive



Shikha S. Lamba is a jewelry designer and poet living in Hong Kong. She is also the co-editor of an online magazine, *Coffee and Conversations*. *Shikha has contributed poetry for various publications and anthologies in Hong Kong, the US, the UK, Bangladesh, Indonesia and India. Passionate about raising awareness about women's health and mental health issues through her writing, her poems often touch on themes of feminism and social injustice.* **from The Hooghly Review**

Untitled

Somaia Ramish

In the topography of tradition and war
women are domestic slaves, prostitutes
with no body-rights. Read the Qur'an.
"Your wives are as fields for you."

The sum of a young woman
is her virginity. In sacrifice-loving
faiths, a goat is offered in ritual
and is torn apart for nothing but
to heighten manly weight.

In her bloody, ashen screams
she is immaterial, a weightless woman
a woman without significance,
someone to be refused and revoked.

In the bed of circumstance and domestic
lunacy, a body grinds itself against another.
She dwindles, falls away from herself
like unripe grains of wheat,
and all the while she knows what is aborted
in fate's feverish bed, is faith.



Somaia Ramish

Somaia Ramish is an Afghan poet, writer, researcher, and human rights activist. She is the founder of Baamdaad – House of Poetry in Exile, an international platform established in response to censorship and the silencing of artists in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

She is the author of *Half a Century of Struggle and Politics* and three poetry collections: *Woman, Life, Freedom, Words in Exile*, and *Le Sang de l'aube* (Blood of Dawn).

Her poetry has been translated into and published in English, French, Italian, Urdu, Russian, and Japanese.

In 2025, she received the International Poetry Prize Laudomia Bonanni in Italy. She was awarded the poetry medal, "Voice of the Motherland", by the Writers' Association of Russia in 2020, and in 2021 the Ministry of Information and Culture of Afghanistan honored her with the Rahnaward Zaryab Literary Medal for her contributions to literature and culture. Through her writing and advocacy, Somaia Ramish champions freedom of expression, women's rights, and the voices of writers in exile.

The Graveyard

Samreen Makhfi

I buried each of you with my own hands.

In this fresh earth, the dream of walking freely to med school,
biology books pressed to my chest, laughter on my lips,
fingers ink-stained from notes, eyes bright with purpose.

I'm putting flowers on the dream of wearing a graduation gown,
standing tall, a doctor saving lives, my ironed lab coat crisp
as morning light, stethoscope gleaming like a medal of honour.

Through the iron gates of the graveyard, is the dream of
traveling the world, gasping at the beauty of oceans beyond borders,
salty wind tangling my hair, postcards tucked into my journal.

This small grave houses the dream of driving my own car
through the streets of Kabul, my shawl flowing in the breeze,
music in my soul, the radio humming freedom in Pashto songs.

The dream of standing on a stage,
speaking truth without fear, my voice steady,
echoing against walls that once silenced me.

In the family plot of graves, lies the dream of building a home,
with cosy chairs covered in my mother's quilt,
her stitches like prayers, where daughters grow unafraid.

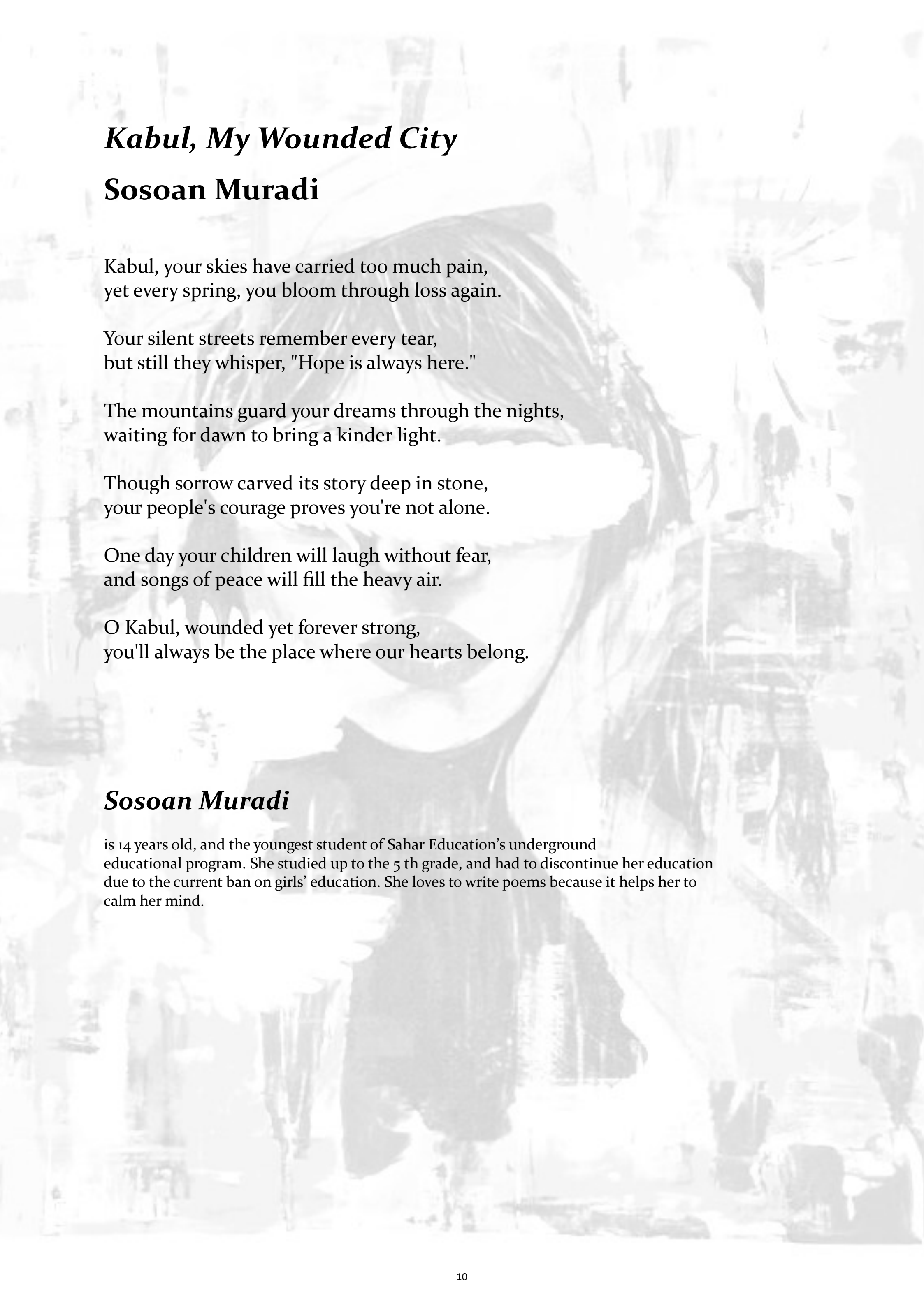
I come to where these dreams are buried, regularly.
I'm planting seeds on the soil above the graves.

Hoping for green shoots...a weed, perhaps, in spring.

Samreen Makhfi (Pen Name) is a writer, educator, and student whose work is shaped by a deep commitment to learning, history, and the power of storytelling. At 21, she is pursuing majors in Health Science and Law & Political Science while teaching World History and Cultures to Afghan and international students.

Her journey as a writer began under the mentorship of author Sara Mansfield Taber, whose guidance inspired her to transform lived experiences into literature. Since then, Samreen has completed a memoir, currently in the publication process, and written a collection of poems, several of which have appeared in literary magazines.

Growing up, Samreen embraced a belief: For a girl, getting an education is like finding Aladdin's magic lamp. That conviction continues to inspire both her writing and her work as an educator.



Kabul, My Wounded City

Sosoan Muradi

Kabul, your skies have carried too much pain,
yet every spring, you bloom through loss again.

Your silent streets remember every tear,
but still they whisper, "Hope is always here."

The mountains guard your dreams through the nights,
waiting for dawn to bring a kinder light.

Though sorrow carved its story deep in stone,
your people's courage proves you're not alone.

One day your children will laugh without fear,
and songs of peace will fill the heavy air.

O Kabul, wounded yet forever strong,
you'll always be the place where our hearts belong.

Sosoan Muradi

is 14 years old, and the youngest student of Sahar Education's underground educational program. She studied up to the 5th grade, and had to discontinue her education due to the current ban on girls' education. She loves to write poems because it helps her to calm her mind.

Old Chain Weaver

Raihana Paikan

Old chain weaver,
amid all those chains and iron bonds,
did you weave away the laughter of children?
Did you cast your chains
beyond those dark mountains,
behind forgotten fortresses?
We searched and searched—
yet there is no laughter to be found.
The dusty streets are bright now,
the gardens green and clear,
the waters crystal like and pure.
But mother's shoulders no longer stand straight.
Of Father, nothing remains
but a fading memory.
And the neighbour woman,
only a few flowers
rest upon her dark grave.
Old chain weaver,
where does this story finally end?
The children's laughter lies hidden between the chains.
There are locks upon the chains,
and chains upon the feet of women.
Ah, for the pain that lives within my soul.
Ah, for the bitter sorrow of the daughters.
Old chain weaver,
our laughter lies buried behind the fortresses,
our tears run deep, defenceless and unseen.
Will you ever return to loosen these chains?

Raihana Paikan

is 25 years old and a student of Sahar Education's underground program. She is a high school graduate, and writes poetry to express her emotions.



Silence

Zuhra Hamdard

I was lost
among the words of life,
choosing then to remain silent
in the hope that I would find myself.

But I was unaware that once
I had chosen silence for this long,
while living in the midst of words,
I would no longer be able to find
a way to discover myself.

Zuhra Hamdard

is an emerging writer and poet who expresses her thoughts and emotions through poetry and prose. Her writing often explores themes of solitude, longing, pain, and self-discovery. She believes that writing is a way of understanding herself and giving voice to feelings that are often left unspoken.

From an Afghan Woman Living Elsewhere

Khalida Jawadi

My people bleed daily,
They have been bleeding for years.
Our happy endings only end with our lives.
We yearn for peace, yet we spread violence,
all because a woman showed a bit of skin.

Was it always like this? Will this forever be our story?
I wouldn't know otherwise, because this is all I have seen.
I have been to countries with mountains,
I swam in seas around the world, and nothing
compares to the air and land of Afghanistan.
And still my heart bleeds.

I can never tell my people what I truly endured.
Their pain hurts me on days that are filled with
laughter and sunshine. Their stories reach me
during the heights of my success, and all I can do is
help in the smallest of ways.
I can't fight a country that's in such a mess.

I could quit my life where I am.
Go back and help.
Leave my toddler and make amends,
but I would be shot, stoned, or worse...
in this country run by these men.

I'm powerless, so are my words.
I laugh on the outside and continue to cry within.
I move on like the cowards many of us are,
writing stories that have no endings.
The happiest story I heard was about a cousin
who was killed. It's more peaceful to know
they'll never be used as bait again.

I don't remember seeing a photo of
a happy Afghan woman from back home.
I don't think they have many reasons to smile anymore.
How much can they manifest?
What kind of positive thinking will help them?
Who has the time to indulge in introspection.

Our jails are better in Australia.
At least the inmates get time out in the sun.
Afghan women are like the slaves that were traded,
used and abused, never allowed to speak.
We just turn the tv on, and watch them burn.

Khalida Jawadi is an Afghan-born, Indian-raised, and an Australian-made writer. A BAS agent and accountant by profession, she recently published her memoir, *I Didn't Break: A Memoir of Survival, Healing; Hope*, chronicling her journey of endurance and renewal. Beyond numbers, Khalida curates words that inspire, including writing poetry that reflects her layered identity and unwavering spirit.

Night

Sheba Gaheez

Sleep does not come.
The night weighs heavily upon my eyes.
The stars are silent, the moon holds a cup of tears,
the sky stands upon my shoulders bearing a dark prayer.

Sleep does not come.
The night is a desert filled with memories,
a hidden tale spoken in the language of the victorious,
in every step, pain, in every moment, a mark.

Perhaps this is Maiwand, perhaps it is history
repeating itself, where a woman's voice rises
from the dust and breaks the silence.
There stands *Malalai*, a dark shawl,
a dark shawl, and dust upon her face,
with fire in her eyes, calm upon her lips.

She and I are two shadows of
the same night, one voice, a single cry,
one destiny, one refusal.
I seek a lamp, not for the road, but for the wounded.
I seek a lamp, for her shrine.
Malalai has returned once more,
to raise the green flag of freedom.

Sleep does not come.

Maiwand – A district in Kandahar province of Afghanistan.
Malalai – National folk hero of Afghanistan

Sheba Gaheez holds a Master's degree in Pashto Language and Literature from Kabul University. She currently works as a Pashto editor and journalist. Poetry, writing, and journalism are at the heart of her intellectual and creative journey. Through her work, she strives to tell the stories of her people, society, and Afghan women with honesty, sensitivity, and artistic expression.

The Closed Classroom

Marwa Paikan

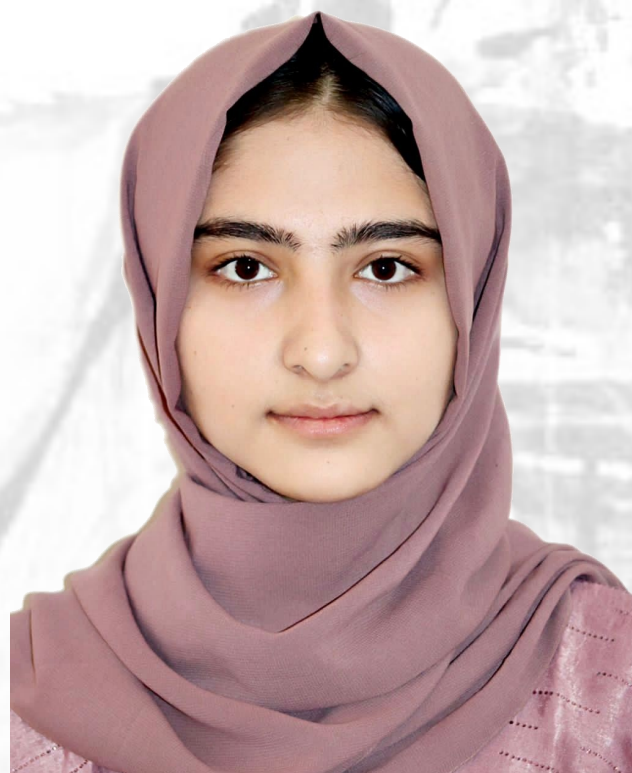
Once, we carried books like wings,
filled with dreams and hopeful things.
We traced tomorrow on each page,
and wrote our names beyond the cage.
The schoolyard echoed with our laughter,
we spoke of futures waiting after.
Doctors, teachers, poets bright,
each one's dream a candle in the night.

But one by one the doors were closed,
and silence grew where our voices once rose.
The desks remained, the books grew old,
while countless stories stayed untold.
Our pencils rested, our notebooks waited,
for years we stood watching our futures gated.
The lessons lost, the time gone by,
became a loud question asking, "Why?"

We do not mourn for books alone,
but for the seeds that could have grown.
For every girl denied her chance,
for every dream that lost its dance.

Yet knowledge lives within the heart,
no wall can tear its light apart.
And though we're kept from the learning rooms,
our thirst for wisdom is far from doomed.
One day these pages will unfold,
the silent stories will be told.
And girls once kept from classroom doors,
will swim to reach the furthest shores.

For pens are stronger than despair,
and hope still lingers in the air.
Though we are far from our lessons now,
we keep our dreams and make this vow:
That someday, under the open skies,
our books will bloom, our voices will rise.
And every girl will proudly say, that
education has yet again found its way.



Marwa Paikan

is a 19 year old Afghan poet. She completed her education up to the tenth grade in Afghanistan before restrictions on girls' education interrupted her formal schooling. Alongside her studies, she began teaching English while still in the tenth grade and has continued working as an English instructor ever since. She later completed her secondary education through the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) and is currently pursuing a degree in Computer Science there.

Writing poetry became a way for her to express the realities, hopes, and struggles that shape her life and the lives of many Afghan girls.

Kabul for Me Z.H.

Kabul has always been more than just a city for me,
it's an old notebook of poetry that carries the scent of a familiar embrace.

Kabul is not a city on a map or a geography.
Kabul is rhythm, it is melody, it is the weight of a poem.

Kabul is the city where my love dwells,
where I fell in love, where I was born anew.

Kabul is where I built myself, where I broke the chains of captivity,
the city where I rebelled, where I became a teacher.

Kabul has always been more than a city for me.
It was a tale from One Thousand and One Nights.

Every day, on my way to school, I touch the old trees
along the alley so that they may keep the memory of my fingerprints.

For I believe that on this same path, years later,
a woman like me, just as fearless, just as simple,

unadorned, different, will place her fingers upon
these tree trunks, upon the traces of my touch.

She, too, might be a teacher, a rebel, and a lover of Kabul,
and she'll read my poem to her students.



Z.H. (Pen Name)

Z. H. is an Afghan poet and writer whose work explores resilience, hope, and the experiences of Afghan women. She is the first-place winner of the 2026 Her Voice Writing Contest and is a passionate advocate for girls' access to education.

I am an Afghan Woman

Shogofa Amini

This story began with me,
a woman, a daughter, a mother.
I am an Afghan woman.

An unfinished puzzle in my homeland,
a voice buried beneath generations of silence,
a soul stitched together by pain and survival,
I am an Afghan woman.

My name exists in headlines and history books.
You see my face on television,
beaten, burned, silenced, dead.
But that is not all I am.

I am a writer and a fighter.
I am a mother carrying broken generations
in her arms. I write poems from wounds,
stories from ashes, hope from ruins.

Read me. Know me beyond the tragedies.
I lost pieces of myself, wrapped in chains
made of rules, fear, and control.
Tell me, who do you think I am despite
being trapped within these cages?
I see injustice with open eyes.
I hear lies spoken about women like me.
Yet my voice is trapped behind closed doors.

I am the silent woman, who understands everything,
but is forbidden to speak.

I am a candle slowly melting in sorrow,
burning quietly in the darkness
so others may still find light.
Invisible, yet alive. Forgotten, yet enduring.

The world calls me “other”,
yet I carry the world in my hands as a mother.
I am grief. I am resistance. I am survival.
I am an Afghan woman.



Shogofa Amini is a public health professional, researcher, and women's rights advocate. Originally from Afghanistan, her childhood education was interrupted in 1996 by the rise of the Taliban — an experience that shaped a lifelong commitment to learning, resilience, and service on behalf of girls and women in Afghanistan and beyond.

She currently works at Seattle Children's Hospital Psychiatric Urgent Care as a Family Advocate Case Manager. Shogofa earned her Master of Public Health in Global Health Leadership and Policy from the University of Washington and graduated with honors from Regis College with a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and a concentration in Gender Studies. At Regis, she was inducted into the Pi Gamma Mu International Honor Society in Social Sciences, received the Mary C. Bryan Award for an essay on women's rights in Afghanistan, and was named a "Pillars of the Community" honoree.

A published poet and lifelong advocate, Shogofa uses research, storytelling, and community partnerships to promote gender equality, amplify the voices of marginalized communities, and create lasting social change.

Woven Dreams and Realities

Nadia Sakhi

We are trapped in a life we do not desire,
nurturing thoughts in our minds that
have no physical existence.

We write our dreams on white paper,
and in our minds we turn them black,
because these dreams will never see light
in a future that does not exist.

For those of us crossing these narrow bridges,
we do not know whether we will reach
the end or will we fall into the abyss.

If there is life, but not one we desire, then what?
If there is death, but not life, then what?
If there is life, but dreams come to an end, then what?
If there are dreams, but no life, then what happens?

Truth and dreams are intertwined, indivisible.
Thoughts have been silenced,
lips have been sealed, bodies have been
concealed with threads, eyes covered,
the iron heartbeat within these women, stopped.
They cut our breath, and still they say, “Live!”

Nadia Sakhi

Nadia Sakhi is an 18-year-old Afghan poet and writer whose work explores silence, absence, grief, and forgotten dreams. She writes to preserve what time tries to erase.

The Body's Last Hold

Sabiha Awanzai Mahmoud

My grandmother's weathered fingers
held my camera with hesitation,
like a broken-winged bird;
with the instinct of someone accustomed
to fragile things.
Gently grasped the soft place,
at the motorised mounted throat.

Pulse pulse —

A pulse she might interrupt,
strap dangling trembled around her wrist;
the way unused language
tangles in her mouth.

Eng-lish

“Eng-lish thing, compli-cated”
She uttered,
With her finger hovering poised
over the shutter button;
thumbnail split from plowing her land.

Lo—ok

Staring with one eye sealed,
I watched her watching—
the other widening
into the small ocular portal.
An Afghan rug hung behind her
stubbornly hugging the wall,
searching for me
somewhere deeper than my body
then the shutter.

Click—

A quiet click—
small as her knuckle against a door.
Startled,
as though the camera
had shown her not who I am;
but how quickly
she could lose someone.



Standing near my grandmother's
home, whilst briefly removing the
chadari in an act of defiance.

Photo : Sabiha Awanzai Mahmoud

Was I sixteen? It was my gap year.

Smile—

She smiled, barely after the click
like recognition.
As if the camera
had taken something from her
she was relieved to lose:
the obligation
to remember everything alone.

Alone—

Usually my grandmother was the one
sat arched over in her chair,
moving through albums—
She held only photographs already finished.
Creased corners,
women standing beside dead husbands;
babies wrapped in blankets swinging in makeshift cribs.
Half-blurred at the edge,
carrying tea, scattered pomegranate seeds,
sweeping floors;
leaving before the flash.

Now she stood still.

Still—

Because this—
This was immediate.
A small body blinking alive.
The lens searching
the way immigrants search grocery aisles,
for the shaped contents of home
and then—
me.

Me—

Not me inside school portraits
or the obedient granddaughter,
flattened beneath gloss
but breathing me.
Blurred slightly.
Mid-laugh,
hand half-raised

as if she had caught
the spirit leaving the body;
for one impossible second
and coaxed it back with light.

Afterward

She stared at the screen for a long time.

Her own face reflected there too,
ghost over ghost—

Grandmother — Mother — Granddaughter

She lowered the camera
slowly, almost reluctantly
like her last breath
before I left her-my home.

And I understood then:

the photograph was not only keeping me,
for one instant;
it was taking the weight
of all the remembering from her hands.

Re / member.

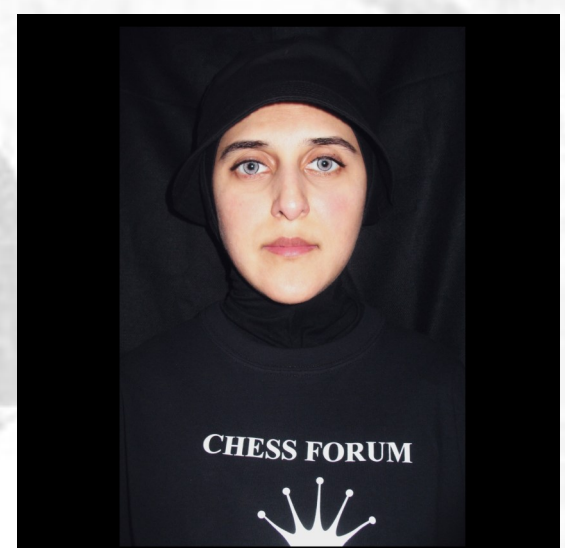
Sabiha Awanzai Mahmoud

is a researcher in the field of quantum physics and mathematics. She also works as a freelance investigative photojournalist for several independent news outlets and was awarded the Rory Peck Grant. She has been published in Afghan Punk Rock, contributed as an illustrator in the Turban Times and is an exhibited artist with 'Pressure Makes Diamonds' at Dazed and 'Ways of Belonging' at the Midlands Art Centre. She currently works between the concrete hustle in England whilst living and writing from rural Ireland.



*Photographing my Grandmother's eyes
because I inherited mine from her.*

Photo : Sabiha Awanzai Mahmoud





Life from Behind the Burqa **Yusra Aryan**

Life from behind the burqa
is like a kite caught in barbed wire.
The seasons – Winter, summer, autumn,
diminish its lifespan, and time passes
with despair.

Life from behind the burqa,
is a dark trap, built by the monster
of ignorance. And thousands of chains and
shackles of deceit have woven themselves
upon its door.

There is a girl there, eight or nine years old,
being wed to a beast in the guise of a man,
and for her, tomorrow onward, there will be
no book, no pen, and no escape from the trap.

And if she does not die of pain,
after a few years she will become a woman,
like me, at home, under a burqa,
blind, mute, without a book, without a dream,
without purpose, without any more wishes.

Yusra Aryan (Pen Name)

Yusra Aryan, a university lecturer, considers literature to be a piece of her soul, a sanctuary she retreats to amidst life's hardships—the ultimate refuge for survival under the restrictions placed by the Taliban.

The Doll

Sadia Siddiqi

Among all the toys in the shop, I was the show piece.

Known for my hair, and for the dress I wore,
my identity on sale, available for purchase.

Over the years I was slowly destroyed,
with blush and lipstick, my beauty maintained,

but my soul was torn, I couldn't be saved.

As time flew away, I grew older, and my many
unmet dreams, earned me wrinkles on my face.

Today I seem broken, gathering dust in shadows,
yet I stand with grace, as new dolls take my place.



photo : Sadia Siddiqi



Sadia Siddiqi

is a 32-year-old, stay at home, mother. She lives with her husband and two wonderful toddlers in Kabul. Due to the current work bans, Sadai works from home. She has been writing poetry in English and Urdu since she was a teenager. Writing and reading brings her relief from heartache and makes her happy.

A Witness- Noria's Version

Eman Ghazniwal

Listen to my stories as they dance, the rose and stone walk hand in hand,
and in windows of weakness, from my tongue, the confessions prance.

Even if I bite my lips, the truth takes the mic to sing,
I can remain silent, but she will sing you everything.

They shoved a camera to her face, only thirteen, so soft and mild,
in a room full of judging men, we watched a child put on trial.

Her small hands shook, her feminine voice broke,
My father has long been dead. I have no one but God.

Yet, her answers do not suffice.

“Look me in the eyes are you a girl, or a boy in disguise?”

“Tell us what you did.” Confess the crimes you dared commit!”

And she said,

I am girl in spirit and in my head, became a boy, just to earn some bread.

What to do when you have no brothers? You become the man of the house instead.

*Who should provide for me? In a system that lets me starve,
but not work or study? Be a witness to my story,
capture my pain, and my glory.*

Don't let it fade when I am gone—tell my father, I lived on.

Behind her shining eyes was restraint,
behind the armour of confidence some shame.

*“Don't hold my hands—memorize my face instead.
Capture my story on film, honour my loss and spirit.”*

Is it selfish to want to be remembered?

So tough, yet so tender. So strong, yet so slender.

Once a victim, now a defender, would never put her arms down,
but by force, so quick to surrender.

Let her story ring in your ears, let her story bring you to tears.

In the land where no questions are asked, even when a child disappears.



Note –

This poem was performed by me at the *Astrup Fearnley*, the Museum of Modern Art in Oslo. I wrote this piece for Noria, an Afghan girl who dressed as a boy so she can work and provide for her family. Noria was only thirteen an orphan. A clip of her being interrogated by an unidentified man, most likely a member of the Taliban, has circulated online. In front of the camera, she is forced to confess her "crimes" - dressing as a boy and working, both of which are prohibited - and she was detained. Current employment and educations restrictions are devastating for women and girls without male guardians. Many are forced to disguise themselves just to survive, risking severe punishment if discovered. The reality of many young girls face in Afghanistan, and Noria is one of the many tragic examples. When a girl must hide her identity to keep her family alive, it is no longer a personal choice but the result of political and social structures that deny half of society the right to breathe.

Eman Ghazmiwal

Eman Ghazmiwal came to Norway in August 2021, just ten days after the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan. In Kabul, she worked as an elementary school teacher while completing her own high school education online. She is currently in the final year of her bachelor's degree in the Honours Programme at the University of Oslo, specializing in Political Science and Artificial Intelligence.

Eman uses poetry as a form of activism to shed light on the realities facing women in Afghanistan and the experience of losing one's home and identity overnight. Her poem "When They Say Kabul Is a Feeling" is exhibited at the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art in Oslo, and her poem "Refugee, Refugee" was published in *Fred og Frihet*, the journal of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom (IKFF/WILPF). She is also an active voice in refugee and asylum politics in Norway.

Today, Eman co-organizes the monthly writing workshop **Soul Sundays** in collaboration with Forandringshuset Grønland, where young adults come together to explore important themes through creative writing and poetry. She is also one of five Afghan-Norwegian women behind the podcast *S'ada*, which amplifies stories from within Afghanistan that are being systematically silenced. The podcast is available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts and is funded by UNESCO.

سکوت طلا نیست.

سکوت طلايی نیست

چوپتیا طلايی نه ده

Be With Me Maryam Balkhi

When you find me without myself,
when you find me a different soul,
when the wind takes me away
to where I don't belong...
be with me.
When I'm running out of time,
when my body is deeply sore...heal me.
Rain over me heavily,
let your echo pour all my memories, and
fill my heart with your presence.
Be with me.
Let your tears comfort the stillness of my heart,
as I sink into an everlasting autumn,
be with me.

Maryam Balkhi is an Afghan author, poet, medical student, and humanitarian advocate whose work is deeply rooted in resilience, reflection, and hope. She took her first steps into the literary world with the publication of her debut book, *Shadows: Stories End, Shadows Remain*. Maryam later published her second poetry collection, *Nubivagant: A Waste of Breath or a Taste of Regret*, a heartfelt work dedicated to the memory of her father. Her writing often explores themes of healing, perseverance, self-discovery, and the strength found in adversity. Currently, she is working on several upcoming projects, including a poetry collection, *Deception: The Inevitable Me*, and a non-fiction book, *Living with the Da Vinci Curse in Kabul*.

What Followed Beheshta Adel

"What do you like?"

The question followed me home.

I almost answered with my grades, the scholarships,
the nights I stayed awake long after everyone else was asleep.

Instead, I found silence.

No one had ever asked me what I liked. Only what I should become.

There was a storage room at the end of our apartment.

Cold. Forgotten. Almost no one went there. So I made it mine.

When the children finally slept and the last call to prayer
drifted into the night, I would wrap myself in a blanket,
hold a cup of green tea between cold hands, and wait
for the electricity to return. Sometimes it did. Sometimes it didn't.

I studied anyway. Back then, life had only one direction.

Leave.

When I finally did, people smiled. *"You made it."*

As though freedom were a place.

Now, the city opens itself into a thousand roads, and

I stand still, waiting for someone to tell me which one is mine.

Someone reaches out to shake my hand.

My hesitation arrives before my thoughts.

I decide to rest. Guilt arrives first.

My body remembers what my mind no longer believes.

Sometimes I watch two people walking hand in hand.

Not because I envy them. Because I wonder what it feels like
to grow up without believing that ordinary things
must ask permission.

People tell me I don't work the way I used to.

They think I became less ambitious. They never noticed

I stopped running because no one was chasing me anymore.

Now they ask us to run side by side, never asking how far I had to walk before I ever
reached the starting line.

They measure our steps, never wondering

where each of us had to begin. My classmates learned
what they loved. I learned what to fear.

They arrived already knowing something about themselves.

I arrived still waiting for permission to meet myself.

For years, I believed the hardest part would be leaving.

I was wrong. The hardest part was discovering that the
cage had never only surrounded me.

It had taught me to hesitate, to apologize, to wait,
until waiting felt more natural than choosing.

Perhaps freedom doesn't begin when the door opens.

Perhaps it begins the first time someone asks,

"What do you like?" and you realize the answer has been waiting
for you all along.

Beheshta Adel



Beheshta Adel was born in 2006 and raised in Kabul, Afghanistan. Following the collapse of the Afghan government in 2021, she and her family migrated to Iran, where she spent part of her adolescence. It was there that she first turned to poetry as a place of shelter. During those years, she found deep inspiration in the work of Sohrab Sepehri, whose free verse and quiet, contemplative style revealed to her that poetry could exist beyond rhyme and rigid form.

She is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in Indonesia. Her writing centers on women's experiences, especially those whose voices have been silenced or whose rights have been denied. Inspired by Maya Angelou, she hopes her poems bear witness to those stories with honesty, compassion, and resilience.

Wounded Homeland Hasiba Nabizada

My homeland cries beneath the sky,
where broken hopes and ashes lie.
The fields once green, now dry and torn,
live where dreams are lost and hearts are worn.

The mountains keep a silent pain,
they've heard the cries through fire and rain.
The rivers once so pure and bright,
now mirror shadows of the night.

Oh land of mine, so proud, so old,
your story now is grief untold.
On each road you bear a scar of war,
yet still you dream of peace once more.

The mothers weep in silent halls,
for every child that memory calls.
The fathers stand with weary eyes,
beneath uncertain, broken skies.

Yet, still you breathe, though deeply scarred,
though every inch of you is hard.
A voice remains beneath the pain,
that whispers, *life will rise again*.

For no darkness can forever stay,
no storm can take your light away.
From dust and sorrow, hope will grow,
like flowers where the wounded go.

So stand, my land, though bruised and torn,
though every heart feels tired and worn.
Your future waits beyond the pain,

Hasiba Nabizada

Hasiba Nabizada is 22 years old and teaches in A Darul Quran. She loves writing poetry, specifically about her country. She is eager to improve her proficiency in English and wants to study computer skills.

***“A common focus of PTSD treatment
is the extinction of memories that cause fear.”
Samman A.***

the bomb that doesn't kill you
morphs into a ticking time bomb in your genes

Have you ever loved someone so much
you are glad they don't exist
in a world

where you learned the body language of racists before their tongue
where you laid more bodies to rest than you hugged

they don't exist—

like your unborn daughter you will never trust a man to have with
like your bedridden grandma memory didn't get a chance with
like your refugee mama you had your last laugh with

you can almost hear the tremble in her voice, if she were here

Don't leave without your ID
Don't tell them where you're from
Don't fight with the white men
Don't

unmake my memories

erase the blue and purple
keep her skin

pull home out of the backpack I carried
let me drink it like her noodle soup (one last time)
make me forget it was a place

the bombs that didn't kill us
gave us cancer and poetry

Samman A.

Samman is an Afghan refugee. She finds respite in writing and is the author of two books. Samman is an Echols Scholar and a pre-law student at the University of Virginia, and her commitment to working with NGOs and academic focus extends to advocating for the rights of underserved communities.

This poem was produced as part of Paranda, a writer development programme and global network of women writers in Afghanistan and the diaspora, facilitated by Untold Narratives and supported by KfW Stiftung.

Fragment by Fragment

Yalda Hozhair Aminy

Sometimes,
I doubt religion.
Not God, but
the sects built
from human fear.

Sometimes,
I doubt humanity,
that gentle spirit
with rebellion
sleeping under its skin.

Sometimes,
I doubt myself.
These childhoods
that die in our world
before they grow.

I look at my body
fragment by fragment,
and I fear one day,
through this bone and
flesh, my humanity
will quietly escape.



Yalda Hozhair Aminy is an Afghan poet, author, and women's rights advocate. A former member of the Afghan Girls Robotics Team, whose story inspired the feature film *Rule Breakers*, she writes about exile, womanhood, memory, and freedom. Her poetry has been featured by She's the First and presented through international literary platforms, including PEN Cymru's Human Rights Day event. She has also served as an Ambassador for Allies to Refugees, supporting displaced Afghan communities through advocacy and education.

Dear River

Zuhra Nadem

River, come carry me away with you,
for I am restless like your endless waves.

In my heart, there are storms,
and in my eyes, tears streaming.

The wind has brought to me your music,
for how melodious you sound as you sing.
For that, I would entrust my soul to you,

like a broken boat lost within your depths,
without a shore, without an anchor, helpless.

My heart is not burdened by little sorrows;
It carries the grief of humanity.

I long for a world without grief and war,
yet what can I do?

The nights upon this land continue to be long and heavy,
and I have no power to change it.



Zuhra Nadem is an Afghan poet, visual artist, and muralist currently living in the United States. Born and raised in Afghanistan, she developed a passion for art from a young age. Her creative practice is rooted in memory, identity, displacement, and the experiences of Afghan women.

Through poetry, painting, and public art, Zuhra explores themes of resilience, freedom, belonging, and the connection between personal stories and collective histories. Her work reflects the voices and emotions of a generation shaped by conflict while honoring the cultural richness and beauty of Afghanistan.

After the fall of Afghanistan, Zuhra continued her artistic journey in the United States, using art and poetry to preserve stories, build connections, and bring attention to voices that are often overlooked.

Instagram @zuhra.nadem



Passages of Resilience from Kabul to New Horizons

Vermont ArtLords members created the three-panel mural, Passages of Resilience: From Kabul to New Horizons.

Moving from East to West, a young Afghani woman holds a globe of the world with her long, red veil trailing behind. A multi-colored phoenix flies alongside her. Placed against a skyline evoking home and homeland, the figures are painted in the green, red, and black of Afghanistan's flag. The phoenix, a mythological creature found throughout Persian and Afghan culture, symbolizes both cycle of death and rebirth, but also ideas of transformation and hope. In Passages of Resilience from Kabul to New Horizons, the phoenix – one to protect the young girls and women of Afghanistan. Under the Taliban's fundamentalist regime, women are restricted in how they dress, where they travel, access to jobs and education, and most recently, the ability to speak in public. In Afghanistan, women are pawns in a political game that has been replayed throughout history. By creating a mural of a resilient, young Afghan woman in a public space, ArtLords engage in an act of social protest, as well as statement of empowerment and hope for the future. Painted in elaborate, gold calligraphy, they include a poem from 13th century Persian poet Rumi:

*In this earth, in this soil, in this pure field
Let's sow nothing but the seeds of kindness and love*



The Crown of Afghan Women

This painting is a tribute to the resilience, dignity, and unwavering spirit of Afghan women.

The woman's golden body symbolizes the immeasurable worth and inner strength of women. Her garment, formed from melting candle wax, represents the burdens, sacrifices, and silent suffering carried by generations of Afghan women. Yet she stands tall, refusing to surrender.

The candle she holds symbolizes hope, knowledge, and truth. As it gives light, it slowly consumes itself—a reflection of the countless women who have sacrificed their own dreams and freedom to illuminate the lives of others. She does not simply carry the light; she becomes part of it. She burns so that others may find their way.

The radiant crown behind her represents consciousness, courage, and the enduring determination of Afghan women who continue to dream and resist despite oppression. The surrounding darkness symbolizes the invisible walls of patriarchy and exclusion. Yet it cannot extinguish the light that comes from within.

The Crown of Afghan Women is a testament to women who transform pain into light, silence into resilience, and sacrifice into hope.

for enquiries contact the artist at Instagram @zuhra.nadem



Journey of the Ivy

This painting represents my personal journey of migration and the inner world of a woman who carries her home within herself.

The golden body of the figure symbolizes the precious essence of womanhood—an inner value that does not change with geography, borders, or displacement. Gold, which I have used in my previous works, reflects resilience, dignity, and an unbreakable core that remains constant despite external transformations.

On her head, I placed a golden crown made of wheat, adorned with an emerald stone—one of the precious gems of Afghanistan. For me, the crown is a symbol of courage, pride, and perseverance. I often use this symbol in my paintings to honor the strength and endurance of women who continue to stand tall through hardship and change.

Her flowing hair represents both freedom and struggle—movement shaped by unseen winds, much like the unpredictable path of an immigrant life.

In her hands, she gently holds ivy. The ivy is the central metaphor of the painting. Like migration, ivy grows in many directions, adapting to new environments and landscapes. Yet no matter how far it spreads, it always remains connected to its roots. Without its roots, ivy loses its meaning and life. For me, it symbolizes home, memory, love, and the quiet sense of belonging that an immigrant carries wherever she goes.

The deep blue background creates a space of solitude and reflection, suggesting both distance and calm—an inner world where identity is preserved even in unfamiliar places.

Through this work, I wanted to express that migration changes the surroundings of a person, but it does not change their essence. Home is not only a place—it is something we carry within.

for commissions & purchases contact the artist on Instagram
[@zuhra.nadem](https://www.instagram.com/zuhra.nadem)



My Pen

Hadia Muradi

My pen is not just a pen,
it is a voice when I cannot speak.

It carries my dreams across the pages,
and gives strength when I feel weak.

My pen is not just a pen,
it turns thoughts into shining light.

It paints hope upon empty paper,
and guides me through the darkest night.

My pen is not just a pen,
it remembers stories that time forgets.

It builds bridges between hearts,
and catches tears without regrets.

My pen is not just a pen,
it is a key to every door.

With patience, wisdom, and hard work,
it helps me become something more.

So when I hold my pen today,
I hold a future yet unseen,

for every word I choose to write,
may help me reach my highest dream.

Hadia Muradi

is 19 years old. She is currently teaching in a private educational center.
Hadia loves poetry, and writes mostly in Dari. Most of her poems are about Afghanistan.

The Artist

Zahra Amiri

It was the end.
I was standing at the edge of the roof.
One more step, one more step was needed
to fall or to fly.
I could fall into the hell, the hell the one
Taliban told me I would fall into because
of the portraits I drew.

I could also fly, fly to a land my paintings
promised me.
At the edge, I could feel the cold breeze
in my hair, as if it was separating my
white strands from the black ones.
What could I do? Fly or fall?

When I slowly opened my arms,
and took a step forward,
I
flew.

My portraits didn't send me into hell's fire,
I didn't fall.



Zahra Amiri

Zahra Amiri left Afghanistan in 2024 to continue her education and now studies Visual communication design. Beside that, she is an artist, mentored by Clae Eastgate in the Brave Future non-profit organization.

A Girl from the Mountains

Arzoo

I came with winter, from a village whose name
the wind carried away, and whose stories
the snow buried in silence.

I learned my first letters in a small mud-brick mosque.
I grew up inside canvas classrooms, where the school bell
was too often drowned by the sound of explosions.

They said, “Girl, you must not study anymore.”
But how can anyone imprison a dream
behind the gates of a school?

So I began my journey toward the city,
with shoes dusty from long roads, and a heart
that had grown stronger than a thousand fears.

Then, when the gates of school closed on my life,
the mountain became my classroom. Every morning,
I climbed to its highest peak, hoping that even a single bar of signal
would reconnect me to the world.

The mountain knew how many times I cried.
The wind remembered how often hope slipped.
And the sky witnessed how I swallowed my tears so my students
would never hear the tremble in my voice.

From that very mountain, I taught thousands of students -
calligraphy, the Holy Qur'an, and hope.
They said, “You cannot.” But how could someone who found
the road to school through war ever lose the road to life?

Today, I am nineteen years old. I still do not know
whether one day I will wear a doctor's white coat.
But I know this: I am the girl no prince ever came to rescue.

I reached out and took my own hand.
I walked through the mountains, and I am still walking
with a weary heart, yet one filled with hope, toward my dreams.

And if one day my name is embroidered on a doctor's white coat,
know this: that coat was not stitched with thread alone.
It was woven from my mother's patience, my father's prayers,
my tears, and the mountain that became my school for so many years.



Arzoo (Pen Name)

Arzoo is a 19-year-old medical student living in Afghanistan. Despite many difficult circumstances she became a teacher. She continues to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor while teaching and writing. Her poem is inspired by her real-life events

Put Down Your Gun!

Nazi Maysam

Put down your gun!

Come, O ruthless Talib, become one of humanity,
not this merely human-like creature you are now.

When I look into your eyes, I see thousands of regrets;
regrets about a lack of understanding and a lack love.

Come, immerse yourself in the rare words of a book,
drown in love and its experience.

Has your heart ever been saddened by the killing of humans?
Please, tell me!

The gaze of a girl restless to learn, waiting beyond
the banned school gate, has your heart ever been hurt?

It is strange and sorrowful that the answers to both
my questions are negative in your thoughts.

I do not want your heart to become stone and
steel from false bitterness ever.

You, O Talib, ruling over my homeland,
know that your place is beside me, not in the trenches.

Feel how wonderful it is to put the gun down, away from your shoulder
for the homeland, now soaked in sorrow.

The pen is enough for fighting wars.
Pick up a pen so that the bullets in your gun
hide forever in shame from the world and the eternal fates.

Nazi Maysam is an Afghan poet, writer, and member of the Golden Needle Literary Association. She is currently studying Business Administration. Her poetry and stories are inspired by the experiences, struggles, and aspirations of Afghan women. Through her writing, she seeks to give voice to stories that are often left untold and to share the realities of life in Afghanistan today. Much of her work reflects on the challenges of living under Taliban rule, as well as themes of identity, resilience, hope, and the desire for freedom.



Cancer Courts My Mother



At a time when approximately one out of three people is likely to experience cancer at some point in their lives, it is perhaps unsurprising that the illness's effects on individuals, families and intimate relationships have become an increasingly prominent concern in contemporary poetry. Readers of these reviews will already be aware of the emotional force and artistic seriousness of collections addressing this subject, such as Niki Strange's *Body Talk* and Ross McGivern's *Fragments and Stages*. In her latest pamphlet, *Cancer Courts My Mother* (Prolificv Pulse Press LLC, 2025), the accomplished American poet, LindaAnn LoSchiavo, employs a sophisticated range of poetic forms, among them the sonnet, villanelle and haibun, to examine the impact of cancer on her mother, on herself, and on the fraught yet enduring bond between them.

Central to the pamphlet is LoSchiavo's sustained personification of cancer as a suitor or lover who seduces, possesses and ultimately claims the poet's mother. The conceit is unsettling precisely because it exposes the relationship as neither tender nor reciprocal, but coercive, invasive and abusive. This is particularly effective in *Jaundice*, where LoSchiavo writes: 'A woman with dimpled opal arms, her sarcasm crackling with static, generous thighs pale as dumplings that he could wither away. Urothelial carcinoma was quick to show the scornful twinkle of his dominance. He sneaked in, like a two-faced suitor of some standing, and took her relentlessly. A quiet violation.' The disease's irresistible authority is registered in the diction of 'dominance', 'violation' and 'standing', while the phrasing 'took her relentlessly' intensifies the imagery of bodily and psychological invasion. What emerges with considerable force is the mother's vulnerability before an antagonist she cannot resist. Even the verbal power she once possessed — 'her sarcasm crackling with static' — is rendered ineffectual. LoSchiavo's description of the disease as 'two-faced', an image developed further in *Cancer*, is especially apt: it suggests deception, concealment and the hidden cellular processes through which cancer destroys the body from within.

The mother's decline is rendered still more affecting by the troubled history of the mother-daughter relationship. Its earlier life appears marked by conflict, volatility and emotional estrangement. In *Mother Magnified*, LoSchiavo writes: 'A child I sensed danger everywhere as she deftly plucked my words from the air and flung them back at me, keeping a straight face. Sharp was the taste of her rage, the biting sting of blood inside my cheek. The hidden weight of the weather oppressive, my secret self divulged little less thunderbolts quake.' The passage conveys the psychological impact of maternal sarcasm through a vocabulary of physical pain: 'sharp' and 'the biting sting' translate emotional injury into bodily sensation. The child's response is withdrawal, secrecy and self-protection, and the poem's imagery even gestures towards disordered eating in her refusal to consume anything that had a mother. Yet the onset of illness compels the daughter to re-evaluate this fraught inheritance. If the surgeons can cure her mother, it will 'cast its goodness back on the whole like a beautiful sunset's crown after a storm'. The image articulates the possibility of retrospective healing: the hope that present recovery might illuminate and redeem a difficult shared past.

The daughter's movement towards reconciliation is enacted through care. She assumes the practical and emotional responsibilities of nursing: administering medication, managing the sickroom and tending to the plants. Her care is meticulous, almost ritualised: 'I arrange her medications, consign the complex sequences of patches, dosages, and Roxanol refills to a spreadsheet' (*Arrival*). On one occasion, this vigilance becomes life-saving when, 'lost in the territory of morphine', her mother turns off her oxygen

(*Early Visit from the Grim Reaper*). LoSchiavo presents such care not merely as duty, but as an ethically charged form of attention. The daughter is sustained by hope for recovery, and the period of remission described in the villanelle *Remission's Like an Extra Holiday* generates genuine joy and reprieve: 'Woes sprouted wings and fled' and 'grim forecasts, doomed dreams, readily edited'. Yet the villanelle's repetitions subtly complicate that optimism, reminding the reader that remission is unstable and contingent. 'Remission', we are repeatedly told, 'like grace, is unmerited', and the poem concludes with the line 'Grim forecasts damning dreams look rosy edited.' The adjective 'rosy' suggests the consolations and risks of hope: the desire to see permanence where only temporary reprieve may exist.

One of the pamphlet's most persuasive structural patterns is the parallel LoSchiavo establishes between the care of the mother and the care of plants. The daughter's tending of the plants mirrors her nursing of her mother, while seasonal change becomes a subtle analogue for bodily deterioration, endurance and renewal. In the haibun *Green Nursemaid*, the speaker attends to the neglected plants with the same precision she brings to caregiving: 'Plucking away dead leaves, I debride each dusty surface like a wound, pinch back unruly shoots, inject vitamins, suturing new healthiness into the exhausted potting mixtures.' The medical vocabulary - 'debride', 'wound', 'inject', 'suturing' - fuses horticultural and clinical registers, suggesting both the reach and the limits of human intervention. The speaker is motivated by 'a comforting busyness' and by the sustaining illusion, or perhaps necessity, of agency: 'I whisper the word *revive* to my filigree companions... "Revive," I repeat. Over and over like a spell.' Nature's resilience becomes a source of imaginative consolation. In *Remembering Remission Christmas*, this hope is concentrated in 'the red amaryllis' bought for her mother, whose unseasonal flowering is described in explicitly resurrectional terms: 'Its empty cradle strewn with straw, green life/ Ripped up gay mummy wrapping, and tore loose,/ Unhampered by its ground like Lazarus/ Unbound.' The biblical allusion is powerfully expressive of the daughter's longing for restoration. By the penultimate poem, the plants are 'orphaned', yet the daughter continues to tend them. The closing image - 'Fronds dance, sweet partnered with the breeze, remind/ Me, in their voiceless joy, I'm not alone' - offers a quietly affirmative resolution. Grief remains, but it is accompanied by continuity, care and a measure of reconciliation.

Taken as a whole, *Cancer Courts My Mother* is a moving, formally accomplished and intellectually attentive pamphlet. LoSchiavo's achievement lies in her refusal of easy consolation: she writes about illness with candour and restraint, allowing formal patterning, recurring imagery and carefully calibrated metaphor to carry the work's emotional pressure. The personification of cancer as a predatory suitor is disturbing but highly effective, while the interwoven motifs of caregiving, plant life and seasonal recurrence give the collection lyric tenderness and structural coherence. Particularly impressive is the pamphlet's capacity to transform intimate suffering into poetry that is precise, humane and resonant. This is an assured and courageous work, one that confronts mortality and familial pain directly while nevertheless affirming the enduring possibilities of attention, care, reconciliation and imaginative renewal.

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Her poetry has been published in many journals and anthologies, including *Wild Dreams: The Best of Italian Americana* (Fordham University Press, 2009). She has also written plays, including *Courting Mae West* (2004) and a documentary film on Texas Guinan.

She is the editor of the English-language section of *L'Idea* magazine.

Wikipedia

DROP IN reproduced here by courtesy of the poet.



Cancer Courts My Mother, my latest poetry chapbook, crossed coastlines and defied easy categorization as it willed itself into being. Prior to its publications, as I continued to revise the two dozen poems, I realized one more piece was necessary.

This prose-poem captures what the full collection required me to solve: how to reveal the complicated, aching truth of loving a soul-scorching, malicious mother who caused so much misery when destiny tapped me as her fulltime caregiver.

To create distance between the mother and daughter dynamic, the narrative arc defies expectations by presenting a caregiver's journey as a story of adultery. In *Cancer Courts My Mother*, disease becomes a Casanova, therefore, the collection is created through the lens of speculative poetry versus memoir.

Mistrustful of the poetics of dying and bereavement, and determined to avoid cliché, I alighted on a form which eschewed the elegiac in favor of a two-way narrative arc structured like a funicular. The downward movement, a terminally ill patient's inevitable decline, is presented as marital peril: a dangerous dalliance. Disease is disguised as an illicit lover — “the dark prince whose wanton seduction has already begun, the sly suitor who will reach the terminus.”

In contrast, the ascending movement is hopeful, told through the sub-plot of fulfilling a last request: “Work miracles,” commanded half-shut eyes. By carefully reversing little green deaths, the poems transform a wish into reality: a full recovery of the dying woman's cherished houseplants. Caregiving for a harsh, sharp-tongued mother does not come with a script. Neither does outlasting her. What poetry offered was a frame — speculative, oblique, formally controlled — through which the unbearable could be examined without sentimentality. *Cancer Courts My Mother* is not an elegy. It is a reckoning. *LindaAnn LoSchiavo*

A Flash

To hear my mother tell it, after childbirth her spine rebelled, becoming a cold and rumbling fault line. A difficult breech delivery ruined everything.

To hear my mother tell it, a respectful infant should politely slide from the womb, not unlike a love letter shrugging off its scented pink envelope. But a willful neonate deliberately positions herself awkwardly in the birth canal, taut as a bowstring emerging from its warrior cave of shadows. *En garde.*

To hear my mother tell it, from that point, good health slipped free of her, becoming a fancy hat she never could afford again. Her pre-nuptial decades were later mythologized into a golden era of uncomplicated serenity.

Her lies bore only a passing likeness to reality. Around me, the purifying flames of authenticity were stifled, denuding the landscape of affectionate memories, scorching everything but blame, illusions. Cherishing slipped away like days we couldn't hold onto, truth's mouth sewn shut. We never mastered the mechanics of mother-daughter camaraderie.

My devotion clicked its heels in steady, meaningless rhythm, invisible, buried under her volcanic scorn — until one day nursing was necessary. Cancer helped adorn my mother with patience, her acidic breath pausing to accept the spoon that brought breakfast, her daylight swallowing fast.

Apologies emerged, released like doves. Between us a tight-chested pause exhaled.

Perhaps she had grasped we only love so long.

Lawrence Moore ~ Two Poems

Ink and Wing

A host of sonnets about love
might work sometimes, but not today;
imagination not enough.

Shooting stars, climbing, high above,
the way these rushes swirl and sway,
a host of sonnets about love,

fine in themselves and verse thereof,
though cannot by themselves allay
when worth is weighed, push comes to shove.

In bitter fields, we chew the cud;
laments and lonely thoughts invade
a host of sonnets about love,

yet in the names of nobler stuff
were tables turned, were legends made,
through blizzards crazed, 'pon oceans rough.

Still flows the pen, still glides the dove,
from ink and wing, enunciate
a host of sonnets about love,
imagination not enough.

Checklist

If I don't fit in, then I will revel in my difference
(popularity no indication of moral worth);
witnessing alienation of others, not stay silent,
wishing someone of greater character got there first.

Should I be met by my neighbours' timidity or meekness
to the extent it allows me dominion over souls,
instead of utilising for my own ends, tainted,
let me find, in these disparate ambitions, common goals.

When my hopes growing sparser, the mists getting thicker,
inner voices unwelcome sniggers on repeat,
may I learn which to foster, which to diminish;
assailed by 'unscalable' mountains, climb new peaks.

As my ego concedes to a song's inclinations,
surfing vibrations over rhythms so sublime,
smuggle deep in the lyrics, the gist of this checklist,
that I might pause, come breakfast,
do it differently next time.

Lawrence Moore

Daphne Milne ~ Three Poems

Expectations

This isn't a poem about seaweed sandwiches
nor crabs walking across the road in Whitby
to drop through the grating straight into the pan
of boiling water on The Magpie's stove beneath
It is also not true that you can hear their claws
and legs scrabbling as they scuttle along
not even the scream as they fall over the edge

It cannot be about the storm of new music
at an unforgotten concert fifty years ago
not how it was hard and cold as a bagful of spanners
nor the way the bones felt as if they would break
in this listener's body and nausea was only a swallow away
It will not discuss the yearning for the familial
cosiness of Dvorak and Suk warm as sunlight on the skin

This poem is definitely not about old age
It is not about post menopausal teeth and cranky knees
It will not celebrate having the time to enjoy less
complicated pleasures It will not consider
the hopeful rook weighed down with nest-building twigs
nor will it mention the tender heartbreak of soft green
beech leaves the nostalgic whiff of new-mown grass

This poem is about childhood holidays
footprints in the sand and rock pool shrimping
It concerns a summer girl whose hair
once the silver-gilt of sun-warmed wheat
is now as dark as a cloud of toasted molasses
shot through with brandy lights and sunshine
as she practises her 'cello pieces
It is about growing up and watching
my daughter learning she is beautiful

Grandfather won prizes

Hand built and not of any value
a square terracotta seed-pan
made in a time of craftsmanship
comfortable to the touch
and the colour of Devon soil

It belonged to my grandfather
a man who rarely travelled
out of Lancashire — so how come
this pot from Devon with a thumb
print on its base as maker's mark

It's starting to spall now
this relic from 150 years ago
still in use today — with care
My Doctor says things often skip
a generation and so with this

It passed mother by but she was a born
and born-again hoarder so it remained
carefully preserved until I found it in a box
packed around with wood shavings
home to generations of chuckie pigs

I used it as a show pot for sempervivums
in my alpine gardening exhibition days
Now it's gone back to its proper use
a seed tray for small crops salads
and a scattering of clovey pinks

Some time soon it will disintegrate
end up as drainage in a bigger pot
and I will frame the thumbprint
hang it on my Devon wall to remind me
of the grandfather I never knew

Note: Chuckie pigs aka woodlice

Daphne Milne

Sowing acorns

Bars across the nursery window frame
too close together for a child's head
are wide enough for a cat — my cat
asleep on one end of the table
A pale oak table under the window
where I struggle to eat my meals
struggle even more with my homework
Today I am counting acorns into a bowl
the outside painted with a windmill
and a sailing ship — dark blue on pale
The acorns smell of autumn and damp earth
the cat of marzipan and buttered toast
her snores a counterpoint to the squeak
of my pencil the banging of the nursery door
She startles awake leaps for the window
catches the blue bowl in her passing
acorns scatter the bowl breaks in two
You spank me — once for being careless
once more for allowing the cat on the table
and once again for using the blue bowl
I have learned it is wiser not to cry

Daphne Milne

Birthday dates with ‘The Widow’

Lizzie

Madame Clicquot, benign beneath her bonnet,
smiles, encourages a dextrous twist.

A gentle pop: the overture to an allegro
rush of mousse, miraculous fizzing foam.

Bubbles leap, unruly perlage, like the strings
of amethyst wisteria above our heads.

Bleeding sky. Tasting heady delight,
adagio.

Jen

At Not-St. James’s, rowdy magpies,
sporting strips, prance among the stands
of towering beeches, jostling,
waiting for the game to start.
Pot-bellied sparrows strut the sidelines
of nearby empty tables, anticipating crumbs.

The cork, released before the bullfinch whistles,
shoots forward; the crows’ defensive wall
rises as one, too early.
Laughing, you retrieve it, return to our centre cir-
cle.

Cascading bubbles jive, sparking
strings of pearls, translucent,
like sun dappling between leaves.

You raise your glass. Kick off time.

Kym

Light taps of rain on skin, softly punctuate
our raucous laughter.

High over castle, bridges, swirling Tyne,
fine drops plink into coupes,

greet bubbles shooting upwards:
incongruous dance, effervescent sorcery.

Out here on the rooftop it gets heavier,
you, me, The Widow and the rain

as if you’ve conjured mirthful magic, nonsense,
led us through a rabbit hole of glee.

Barrelscraping

My skin tears easily now,
and bruises.

Bites and cuts heal in time,
heal or scar,

—*from Old Norse skarð and related to keeping score*
in their own... good... time.

Use is finite. We use and
we use up...

—*an idiomatic use of the particle to indicate completion*
Things can be useful but
over time
they become... useempty.

I am using up my body,
scrap by scrap.

By which I mean I am
emptying it of...

—*a function word to indicate a point of reckoning*
Let's just say it's had it,

its fill, its cake, its fifteen minutes.

Consensus

Tell them I'm in a meeting – common white lie used to avoid taking a call

If there's a science to truth
then there's an art to lying.

Truths are functional.
Lies are purposeful.

It is a subtle distinction
but an important one too.

Lying gets a bad rap and, sure,
unilateral lying can be tricky

but the shared lie... ah!
now that is a thing of beauty.

That is what reality is after all.

After Murray

Chic was the comedian all the other comedians wanted to watch – Jimmy Tarbuck

Y'know...
Or maybe you don't.
And if you don't that's okay—

no knowing stuff is kind of
the norm these days—
but when someone says,

“Y'know,”
followed by a *dramaticus interruptus*,
what they really mean, is:

“You don't know—
like here, right now,
with me and you and 'at —

and you know I *know* you don't know.”

After McKellen

When did I start to talk like an old man?
One would suppose when I became an old man.
One would suppose, but one can't be sure.

I don't mind talking like an old man
It grants my voice a certain... gravitas.
One might even say class; character too.

There are things I can say now that I could
never have said in my plooky youth. See!
Even the word “plooky” sounds better now.

Now that I've moved from mere speech to oration.
Oh, I like that: Oration. Bon Mot. Scrupulous.
Isthmus. Brouhaha. Gubbins. Pronk.

Jim Murdoch

Footloose

On Radio Four they were talking about shoes.
Mine are light leather, bendy soles, easy wear
indoors or outdoors. And I can tap dance!

Zyzi told us her story

*When I was nine my feet were bound, mother waited, not sure,
but I longed to be beautiful, tiny feet are beautiful.
I wanted to be like my sister in dainty shoes.*

*I married a local man wearing elegant silk pumps.
We had three children; I was happy at home.*

I tried to imagine her world, confined to a small town
in the Chinese hills. No gavottes in spring pastures,
or tap dancing in her kitchen.

I remember shiny red shoes that never fit,
loving the sleek leather and the grown-up heel.

I willed myself into size six. My toes pinched; my heel blistered.
The shoes were given to my sister within weeks.

When her husband died, Zyzi said;

*There was no need to be out, I was happy pottering at home
or shuffling to the shops.*

*Then last month my granddaughter Mai brought shoes from the city.
Soft leather, laced up for support.*

At sixty-three, Zyzi took her first trip down the hill to the town,
Mai a steadying hand and an encouraging voice.

Next week, she told the presenter, I will do it on my own.

Reunion

'Joy should not be a crumb' Mary Oliver

On the Wexford train, we clamor for window seats,
eight school friends. A coastal odyssey, our train
snuggling seascapes from Dublin to Wexford.

Herring gulls and waders at Dun Laoghaire,
bonny bathers on Killiney shingle -
miles of Wicklow coastline with shrieking kittiwakes.

We delve into our word horde for Irish words -
a legacy of school days. Bird names always a favorite,
someone remembers six words for inebriated.

We say them out loud to catch their sound,
their resonance, their joy woven
into our hearts, our inner landscape.

Autumn trees line the track on one side
with leaf light paths. Copper beech in all its shades -
jewel green, honey and burnished orange.

We are in our autumn, maybe even winter
my silver-grey hair mirrors stormy seas. Still,
I'm like a child jumping in rainbow-filled puddles.

Galway

Late June flow, pigeon-grey clouds
jet ski ducks fling themselves at the Corrib.

A zen fisherman perches on a stone slab
head down, a lone heron waits to pounce.

The horizon is bruise purple against a blue green haze -
light trying to break through.

Later, twenty pink tutus, Hens, not swans
bridal banter, buzz-cackle, cacophony.

Rona Fitzgerald

Treasure

In a small translucent box, they wait
colour coded, full of memories.

My Mam sewed all our clothes.
Gathering buttons like sweet treats
to make blouses and dresses our own.

I see her bent over vogue patterns still.

*Let's make the sleeves silk
cover the buttons with the same shade.*

When throwing out or recycling
I cut off buttons, add them to the box.

Smile.

Me who was thrown out of sewing
for blotches on my run and fell seam.

Greens and blues remind me of Dollymount beach,
the sea stretching to infinity.

Yellow and orange shimmer
like rare sunshine on a Glasgow day.

And my favourite, heart shaped
in bruised purple.

Rona Fitzgerald

Time Travel

Faro invites me to walk with Romans, to grieve with Muslims,
to wonder at mosaics and artefacts from many epochs.

In a convent museum, where the echo of nuns at pray, still reverberates
on stable stone. They tell us stories of peoples, of cultures,
what they loved, fought for, longed for. Wonders of daily life unearthed;
a comb, arrow heads as fine as jade, cooking pots of deep blue
and warm earth. Beads of light; amber, lapis, translucent pearls.

Like us, they made things, they prepared food, they lived following rituals,
rites and seasons. They worked, they loved, grieved for lost children,
fought with strangers, sang of joy, mourned the dead.

My leather sole is tapping on dry paths like a metronome,
clack, clink, tock, tick. They were like us; they were just like us.

Mike Logue ~ Three Poems

Dark Dark rising
Shadow of Night
rising into
days of winter

Bowed, Bowed flower
nodding, swaying
in a spring breeze

Penitent season
befits a Lenten Rose

Ice, thin over the birdbath:
a transport is fixed in
the clear blue...

Sun no higher than head
dazzlement all day
streets in chiaroscuro
Later:
pink con-trails bloom
In the fading light

Songs in my head won't
Let go
Incomplete tracks
Stuck in grooves
As if you could be with CDs

Same singer across all tracks
Need to change
Reset mind
Move on maybe
Need to move
Definitely
Move

Ellie Ness ~ One Poem

Touch Grass

we are quite at ease, and you
run, skip, tumble over me
while I, verdantly resplendent,
stop everything from falling apart

I am your reality check - an invitation to
turn off your screen,
cease and desist from trying to be king of the castle -
temporarily - let your eyes go out of focus...breathe

listen to the deep rumble, and crisp,
hissing cascade below the chalk as
my blades between your toes ground you
and salty warmth lulls you to recovery

Tom Murray ~ Two Poems

Archaeology

We are the labelled fragments,
Of the future.
Eagerly dug up with future trowels.
Maybe laser detected deep in our resting place.
Note: not final resting place!
One of us could even be...gasps!
The new Tutankhamun.
Not up to us what will be judged important.

Random specimens in glass cabinets.
For future generated school trips.
Bored tourists pausing
On their way to AI coffee and scone.
We are their momentary curiosities.
Their essays and dissertations.
As they imagine they are now the civilised ones.

American Memories

Sun burn walk to the store,
Frozen mars bars
Shiver Scottish teeth.

An acquired taste,
Still, ice tea,
Cools a hot humid day.

The roof, our amphitheatre,
Fire flies
Pirouette light like busy stars.

Reading my future in a battered soccer ball

my little girl predicts clear skies and yellow warblers.
Shuffling and reshuffling the cards, the psychic
tells me about how I keep walking away.
Swirling the leaves in a footed teacup, my friend declares
I need to drink lemon balm to calm my restless heart.
Peering shortsightedly at my palm, a man in my old town
once told me how I leave things open-ended.
Listening to me go on about the weather, the therapist
chuckles and labels me an avoidant.
Looking up at the night sky I wonder if I too can become
a meteor shower, content with not knowing who I am.
My poems like pulsars that spark across the cosmos,
lighting the way for the lost.

August

By the river's edge
we find another memorial bench.
And I linger there for a while,
feeling the mild breeze brush past me.
I shed a tear for this unknown love.
My heart now a host to grim shadows.

When the night arrives tonight,
wrapped in delicate honeysuckle, you
will help me trace Vega, Daneb and Altair.
The darkness will become alluring like your voice,
calling me by my name, and some corner of
this sad earth will light up for a moment.

Author's note:

Vega, Daneb, Altair: The summer triangle of stars.

Andy Murray ~ Three Poems

Stoned

scotching down the sea sadness
you shoulder the wall
to keep the world from tumbling down.

your eyes are islanded
in sunray wrinkles, and
stagnant water's the next best thing to a holiday.

a van minus a wing,
shore-smashed in sea sage, stands rotting.
it's day: the bats have all perched.

you curse late gulls,
and you'll dram it down
till summer throws a stone.

another day, another demijohn
in a town that eats
its own streets.

The Healer

She roamed the wood for herbs,
and strained them in her mud-walled hut:
yarrow, foxgloves, knitbane, valerian and
roots of rowan from ancient airts.

She knew where rain would land.
She'd straddle a rock and whisper to herself,
her willow wand and a big-clasped bible
with a polecat's skin about it.

Godly neighbours burned her
in a barrel of tar by the witch pool;
and the descendants of the villagers
lock their doors now –

after ghostly glowings
and other unexplained occurrences
down long country years
chronicled by session elders.

The Lost Village

Gales have licked tree trunks to bone-white
on this pine-ribboned arc of the Moray coast.
Beneath it lie phantom acres lost:
Scotland's Pompeii; fat, fertile land
buried in a sandstorm.

When the weather unearthed a chimney
centuries later,
a man yelled down it,
but ran from his echo
thinking it the voice of a village ghost.

They say the tops of buried trees
grow cherries and apples sometimes,
but the sands come back to claim them.
Witches of the firth, strangled by the laird Kinnaird,
were blamed for the catastrophe, or a curse on the locals

for playing cards on Sundays, or hiding smugglers,
but the folk of the north are uncowed by hexes –
when the shifting sands uncovered walls
they barrowed stones away for their biggings,
spooks or no spooks.

Andy Murray

Sanjeev Sethi ~ Four Poems

Sotie

If the bed is an apartment
there is no neighbor.
There never was one.

Taction is not for me.
Ephemeral sorties
with strangers are.

There is nothing mean
or meaningful ever.
The aberrant isn't far-off.

The whimsy of watching others
makes more sense.
There is less gloom in it.

Six Down

In a speakeasy
to cover up for being myself
I carry a pad and a pen.
As images appear, I jot them.
Imperiled by eyeballs
I jerk into a cacographic jitterbug.
But what do I squiggle?
Where are my worries?

Head Trip

Éclat is for the assembly.

The unnamed emperor
of one's Cockaigne --
thriving in tabula rasa,
comforted with a cornucopia.

Is this gasconade of a bummer?
Or, whoop of the blessed?

Parting

On the iceblink
is a happy hue:
In concert with my chorus.
There is no bother of bliss.
Memory is what we make of it.

I've packed the grisly parts
in cartons.
They lie in the parking lot
with copies
of my published material.

Mango Picking in the Rain

They come munching the mangoes fallen,
their mouths yellow with mango juice,
the flavour foaming their eyes,
as in the air the earthy ester fragrance wings.
They take off their clothes,
letting the rain pour over their bodies
climbing to pluck the rounded nectar
reddening the trees.
The tree is a mother in which they cradle,
as heights they climb,
almost into oblivion among the swinging boughs
as one by one,
the fruits fall into their nets,
as eggs huddling in a nest,
that'll hatch in some strangers tongue
to succulent sweetness. Higher and higher,
until it would appear
easy to touch the sun
hiding behind the darkening clouds.
Unfazed,
after the conquering deed is done
is their slow descent, shedding the ants, the wet June dust
off their bodies, the baskets filled;
and then the waiting pickup whines,
as though a rainbow
ploughed down from the sky,
coiled in the suddenness of the gone rain.
The trees turf green again.

Love Closes Tonight

Love closes tonight.
12 pm is the deadline.
If our bodies are naked
There is still hope for love
Because love closes tonight
At 12 pm.
And tomorrow
If we have not yet loved
We'll just be bodies
floating downstream.

Early Morning Rain

It is the first whisper by the woman beside you,
just waking from sleep,
Her hair over your face.
And soon she turns over to the other side
in sleep, and there is utter quiet.
You forget, it just rained.

The School Bus

From this distance
The school bus with dahlia faces.

On a cruise
In forgotten time.

Each face, a story book
Just being read,
Without any idea of the end.

They look out
With dahlia faces.

I'll not be here
To see them again

Where the road bends

Gopikrishnan Kottoor

Three Coins

1.

The night gropes in the dark,
you arise out of your disappearance
out of your pyre.
The moon keeps you in its silver reliquary
amidst bones of my bone, your bone.

2.

Pigeons dance in grey waltz near the café.
They live on crumbs,
making a ceremony out of ice cream
leftovers.
Dust particles float in unison ,
our smiles grow on their constant flapping.

3.

Rainy afternoon,
traffic snarls in the Palm Avenue,
a crow sits on the tree branch,
watches schoolgirls waiting
to dip in toes in the dark water.

Burial

of all the rooms remains
the plastered hollow of the relics-
it's grandmother's room, a refreshing island
in the winter days that closes the openings,
the candle light turns to a stub of waxes.
and the modesty that's her,
all the time moving skinny fingers
interlaces woollens in silence.

You resist now the glare
from the stars overhead,
they too reach for the effects
with eyes fixed on those idle metaphors
and the whisper with almost the same
intensity, sends down regrets
fading and slanting
before going down to be buried.

Ritual

Mantras of **Ganga Aarti* resonate in the fort wall
Faint traces of old writing appear beneath the new
powdered ink on the ancient palimpsest.

Two crows take a moment to propend the blueprints;
Expiscate, then scamper past each other to land
in the tiny coconut trees.

Every cloud is raining a torrent of twilight poems,
vessels eject people in the distant river jetty
gull's black stripes shine in the orange sun.

Fireflies come out in the open with crepuscular gloaming,
a kind of *Rashomon* effect stressing the subject
of truth and memory

The light stays longer at the dusk in summertime!
It's a tabula rasa, its dreams without notions.

*A sunset ritual performed at the banks of Ganges

Mother's Diary-Poem

I love my oasis on that sunlit veranda
where daisies and hibiscus
shine in the spring, breathing and testing.

They have a warm glow, a sprightly refrain.
I want to turn my life to spring there.

I listen to the birdsong and the voices of
the wind in the everchanging light
and shadow; their melodies take
me back to my youthful days, my
freedom to float a little in this blooming time.

As my soul breathes here,
what it sees is the world spinning
back from darkness inside me.

I stare at the smeared emotions on the wall,
there is an open door connecting my past
to the future in every spring.

Gopal Lahiri

Moidering

There are people who mattered to you once,
that you will never see again, and they are not all
dead. You will leave an embarrassing gap of time,
empty promises of meeting and then an app closes.

You laugh and say *I met her in the market
place but who the hell was she? I couldn't put
a name to her face.* Others have thought
the same about you.

You add another name
with dates to the family tree, delighted to find
a scrap of hand-writing or evidence of work.

One day that will be your fate. Just a squiggle
in a chain of names. Your great, great
grandmother could hardly write her own name,
your aunts left drawings and notes. Your footpath
is wider, steeper. Like them one day your name
will be spoken for the last time by one who
sat in your space, listened to your stories
heard the tone and cadences of a lost voice.

Elephant Graveyard

Elephants return to the bones of their kin,
sniff, transport, take a picked rib in their mouths,
chew on a vertebra despite their preference
for greenery - spit it out, roll with their tusks,
as if in a ceremony, sifting for the past.

They remember the soft marshland,
not a graveyard - a convalescent
terrain, where worn tusks and teeth
found softer shoots. The oldest fell
unable to rise again while grown
calves stood sentinel for the end.

Their grief has the sharpest sense
of smell. Scent lives with memory,
opens the paths already walked,
triggering direction and a sickness
of the heart, consoled by ritual and return.

Turkey buzzards on a street in Columbus, Ohio

They are waiting in committee on the drive,
lifting their eyes at my dusty intrusion. All heads
turn at once as if in one mind or worked by wire.

Their bald heads, handy for keeping carrion from
feathers, make them seem like angry Board members -
black, clumsy drapes, an overlong academic gown.

They had circled me across a field, a cleansing
breeze, their wings spread, a kettle of elegant grace.
Landed now on the suburban, Ohio Street, they hold

a parliament of fowls where grasses once ruled.
They look the gangster birds whose beaks can rip
a cow or carry off a shrieking cat.

Bluebirds scuttle in the red-twigged Dogwood.
High in the Redbud, cardinals call warnings -
pebbles knocking together. Dark predators

can fly two hundred miles, and smell prey
from a mile away, vomit at a sign of fear.
I pass and nod my head in silent veneration.

Keeping my eye on their congregation,
I walk away swiftly and realise they guard
a roadkill. I will not disturb their wake.

Jude Brigley

Luke Howard: the man who named the clouds

*To find yourself in the infinite, you must distinguish and then combine;
therefore my winged song thanks the man who distinguished cloud from cloud. Goethe*

A lock of hair, a heap of fluff,
flattened grass, the halo of a king –
analogies in prosody of scientific charts.

A chemist in his trade, he found litany
of weather over London, observed
the microscopic forms of plants –

with the intense persona of his Age.
He knew the clouds were named
by farmers, as *woolly*. Sailors, saw

patterning as *mackerel skies*.
Scientists said clouds were
too unpredictable to classify.

Lamarck tried with *hazy, dappled,*
broomlike, massed attroupe. Howard,
unimpressed used watery colours

to capture on a page the weather's
vagaries, nubification of vapour,
forever changing as he watched.

Luke Howard, beloved by poets –
Goethe, Shelley - who also watched
the skies, attempting capture

of infinity. Luke labelled what
his eyes saw. Time shifted air,
while his pen recorded change.

A lock of hair, a heap of fluff,
flattened grass, the halo of a saint -
cumulus, cirrus, stratus, nimbus.

Jude Brigley

Roger Waldron~ Three Poems

The Art of Conversation

I was never quite sure if
I could discuss my piles
with anyone but when she
told me about her heavy
periods I thought in for a penny
in for a pound I told her about my tight fore
skin that had troubled me from childhood
and that seemed to break the ice on our
patient doctor confidentiality agreement

The Art of Product Placement in a Poetic Situation

when you said you were going
to give my underpants a good
blow on your brand new Minky
retractable clothes line then sat me
down with a luxury Egyptian cotton
towel draped over me you suggested
we could spend some quality time
in your wonky IKEA bed with its pull
out drawers then the disappointment I saw
in your face when I informed you I was
a spent force in the bedroom department
you asked me to leave with my under
crackers still trying to catch the wind

Living with My Obsessions

I was telling this woman on
the fifty two bus all about
Jamie Redknapp's love
for Skechers slip on shoes
and his Dad's fondness for
the Gee-Gees I could tell she
was impressed like you are with
my knowledge of the Redknapp clan and
you might as well know the fire prevention
people have been in touch and given
back word with that job offer they said
it wasn't the job for me with my history and
stated them few convictions for arson I told
them you could vouch for me you could bear
witness that I was completely off my face

Mystical Coast

From the edge of a sandstone cliff
I heard a Selkie siren cry,
from the wash of the north sea
in the mouth of an eye.

Far from the soil of Joan of Arc
through centuries of burning rage,
Ignited by a minute spark
flip back, flip back and turn the page.

Salt flies freely with the tides
go ask the poet beneath the lights,
between the lanes where fish folk bide
and gossiping ghouls who vent their spite.

A chestnut horse rides by at canter
defying the wispy mists of time,
repealing the crimes of covenanters
on the ides of Decembers brine.

Sheela Na Gig

You won't see her hand
on the end of your bed,
she is not every woman.

She is Stella;
drowning in vodka In the divided city
on the banks of The Spree.

She is Polly, screaming
Oh Bondage up yours!
dancing on your manhood.

She is Sinead;
tearing at your lies,
while Troy burns.

She is carved in your walls,
making you face
the moment of your birth.

She is Ulrike
adorned on a wanted poster
wearing a wig and a gun.

She is Leila
in her keffiyeh
she sees your naked form.

She faces a world
that cannot look back
she shows the world its image.

All is Not Lost, After All

A blackbird dances, as a worm wriggles in his beak,
weak sunlight glances across puddled water
and wrens break cover to play hide and seek.
My steps slow down and my heartbeat falters.
Weak sunlight speckles flecks across puddled water
as geese arrow through wafered, lucent, layered clouds
my steps slow down and my heartbeat falters.
Haste never got me anywhere, nor made me proud.
I see geese gaggle through wafered, lucent, layered clouds,
their leaders rotate and positions are shared.
Haste always left me nowhere, sad, bereft of pride;
and now, walking slowly towards my footpath's end
I am afraid
until everything changes—
our new leaders rotate and positions are shared and
at last leagues of citizens support the common good.
Walking towards my footpath's end, my fears are spared
and I am freed to notice, once more, early blackthorns in bud.
Then, I hear choirs of citizens sing aloud of the common good
and chimes of wrens break cover to trill their rhapsodies.
Near my end, I am freed to see a great many blackthorns in bud.
A blackbird dances and drops a wriggling worm from his beak,
he comically cocks his head towards a trail of sunflower seeds.

Author's note:

*The Blackthorn tree is significant in folklore and myth, its dark, thorny branches are intertwined with ancient notions of magic and mystery. Found in hedgerows across Britain and Ireland, it has long been revered as a tree of protection, transformation, and fate.
A collective noun for wrens is a chime*

Day of the Dead | *Dia De Los Muertos*

The festival procession, cymbals, maracas,
passes my house; I stand beside wrought iron balustrades
and pots of whispering yuccas.
Aztec marigolds, dried under a searing sun,
fragrant as warmed tangerines,
compete with sweet Mexican bread on pavement stalls.

An ancient well trickles clear water
into a rudely hewn trough;
listens to the do-re-mi bark of plane trees
and the sneeze of peppers.
Limestone walls washed in blues, ochres, pinks,
see eyes widen at the painted faces of the young
—and older, weathered features.

An image sealed in a mount
sits above skeletons of spent bouquets,
heads tilt at hushed figures
as millions of Monarch butterflies appear.
I watch daylight stretch to touch peeling shutters,
their scorched skins tortilla slivers between bistro chairs.

Incense burns on cloth covered tables.
The fractured glimmer of candles' afterglow
picks out ofrendas: sugar skulls; floral tributes.
Relics eavesdrop on scattering petals
enticing lost souls.
Blooms wither on a marble slab.

Midnight approaches, the graveyard sits quiet
sensing shades, pale lights cast crosses
and stone memorials to silhouettes.
I watch the winter moon.

.

Venomous

An X and a Y Scorpion under one roof,
a roof of sand to filter, desiccate;
grasping pedipalps—curled metasoma,
no backbone, just chitin,
cheating chitin.

Arid, droll, sarcastic
they sit in the sun, safely
ignoring each other.
They silently eye the unwary,
the carefree,
the gullible.

An Archer happens by,
attracts the Y Scorpion,
he lures her in with his lobster lust;
she's bedazzled, disarmed, captivated;
he takes her for his own.

He's curious, charismatic, cold;
claws her soft underbelly,
shrinks her heart;
arcs his tail: a toxic droplet
gleams from a barb,
hot in the stinging sun.

She's a fair Archer
—aware of the dark—
an Archer full of life
with flights of fancy.
Yet soon, her Scorpion
reverts to type:
ignores her.

Her head and vanes wilt,
though her arrows remain straight
she is shafted,
loses her lustre,
mislays laughter,
until, one day,
a discovery strikes time to move on.

Two Scorpions under one roof
share their poison
in isolation,
until the next Archer
or Ram, or other,
naïvely walks in.

Polly Stretton

Blue and Yellow

Do not be daunted, don't be afraid,
flowers bloom and flowers fade.
Plant hundreds of seedlings for those at war,
grow them for people scared to the core,
nurture, plant out, see them blossom,
petals and leaves to form a nostrum
for those who may never know tomorrow,
yet retain their will despite pain and sorrow.

Blood spilled by a demented tyrant
with power made ugly, grossly giant,
he must realise not all are compliant.
The media has no reliable voice.
How is it said that people have choice?
What can be done, what remedy?
The powers-that-be have supremacy
but they can't control spirit, nor you, nor me.

What happens next is for politicians,
cold decisions by criminal clinicians,
who rise to the top and gain command
stage-managed by influencers—they should be banned—
sycophantic mavens, they're to blame,
stirring the embers, fuelling flames,
they let us down with no sense of shame
to give us a world become insane.

Our many concerns: disease, climate change,
and now the invasion of people drained
of energy, those who feel constrained.
We will protest, we have belief,
all have the right to live through grief.
Keep them safe and help them cope
—pray—for what remains is hope
and the fight for human rights.

After the Art Lesson

Inside the washroom's white enamel
the ceiling climbed up like a cathedral,
too high to catch every wet sponge
aimed at its purity by those schoolgirls.
Rectangular prints packed with paint
expressed outside what they felt inside:
the spitting image of artful defiance
thrown by arms in green overalls.
Later on in a classroom downstairs
a teacher painted me as restrained
using one of her long stiff brushes.

On a quiet afternoon in an office
I hit the target of being playful.
I picked up a toy car from a desk
and drove it between the computers
while making the sound of an engine.
The shock of my colleagues looked up.
How dare I bring an inside outside
that contradicted an image of me
created with sponges of their paint?
Perhaps for the stiffness of some minds
the lesson will never be over...

Options on a Difficult Table

I touch what used to be a happy table
where she would sit, her hands overflowing
with answers to the questions laid upon it.
Now I swap chairs to ask and answer them
in a silent room with its own blank expression.
No whisper of a solution within its walls
as tasks wait at a height not known before
without the jokes shared to expanded laughter.
So the gap remains. I move around to fill it.
Weary, I kneel to shelter beneath the table
before slowly standing up again beside it.
Looking down, I see the printed suggestions
like place mats that never seem to match,
unlike the ones we used to play snap with.
I fear the slow death of a good decision,
the headache from chewing the cud of doubt.
It is the funeral of my existing circumstances
where respects are paid to both wrong and right.
With cut fingers I handle the splinters of regret
and lay a setting for the single lunch plate.
This table, the legacy of a tree long felled,
will be ingrained with the choices I have made.

Matthew, Sofia and Lola

When the frost drags its nails across grey granite
and its frozen grip has choked the flowers,
you will find me sitting beside the headstone.
I wear this weekly routine, in all seasons,
like a comfortable set of old clothes.

As usual there is no sound as the trio arrive,
having turned the corner in the distance.
Matthew's warmth requires no woolly hat,
Sofia's size tucks her neatly into the buggy
and Lola bounces around like a fluffy beige ball.
Less chat, more treats dad! she barks,
while conversations lengthen and Sofia smiles.

Matthew is about to enter the corporate world,
a place with which I am all too familiar,
so I warn him of unsavoury characters ahead
as if I were wise enough to advise him.
As my goodbye becomes their homeward walk,
I realise I have been sitting in an armchair
in the room of somebody else's life
but hopefully I will have left an impression
like the gold inscription upon the headstone
that will prompt a different conversation
between a father and his daughter
on a cold winter morning yet to come.

Susan Wilson

A Visit to the Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna

I came prepared
For gibberish dressed up as genius
Misogyny masquerading as therapy
Sex-obsession disguised as science
But left disarmed by domesticity
By hats, pipes, spectacles
Photographs, letters
By the minutiae of an everyday
It hadn't occurred to me
Was his

But above all by a family
Who far from viewing him
As some perverted embarrassment
Mortifying their name
Doted on him
As they doted on each other

Knowing him
Not as celebrity mystic
Or scourge of civilisation
But as son, brother
Father, uncle
Grandfather

Surprisingly captured
In home videos
Hazily grainy
Yet startlingly clear
First in Vienna
Then London
After the self-proclaimed
Godless Jew
Had fled the Nazis

Taking with him *The Couch*
In all of its deathless
Infamous fame
Its impression left
On our collective unconscious
And a discoloured patch
On his treatment room wall

But more importantly
He took his family
Save the sisters who felt
Too old to be saved
And were murdered
In Theresienstadt and Treblinka

I was moved by their absence
From those moving pictures
But also by glimpses
Seemingly so un-Freudian
Of a benevolent patriarch

Garrulous and expressive
Warm and convivial
Patting teenage grandsons
Sharply on the back
Skipping deftly round
To point out fish in his pond

At the heart of the throng
Even when dying
Prone in his garden
Arms still waving
Mouth incessant

Generations of Freuds
Listening or not
But at ease as he held forth
Familiar with his ways
Comfortable with the man
I'd been braced to loathe

Because I'd arrived expecting
Dr. Freud
The manipulator of memory
The dangerous declaimer
Of debunked bunkum

But left charmed by Sigmund
A man in his element
Amidst a family he appeared
Less inclined to deconstruct
And more to love

The Soliloquy Convention

“Send me a paper some time.”

William O’Grady

I’d sometimes call you from the Globe back then
To find out if perchance the coast was clear
And keep some hope alive relief was near
And I might drive my Dodge to love again.
The soliloquy convention enables such lies
For theatrical lovers as they dance
And gesture wildly in off-stage romance
We watch entranced as they soliloquize.
And so it was for us, Memory declares,
And such was love with those curtains and all
And fancy fencing for a final fatal fall,
And dramatic satisfaction of players’ prayers.
The soliloquy of course must be overheard,
As now, to upstage, and get the final word.

Fresh Air on the Blasted Heath

I won’t say “It’s me,” or even “It’s you”
Or expect you, or me, to know what to do
With so many witches telling us what’s true
As the strange sunlight leaves us looking like hell
And someone’s brain knocking like a bell
By a massive crater where a giant rocket fell
And I can hum fragments of an old bitter tune
And relish their brevity’s tribute to the moon
As you pick up your things, heading out soon
But humming, too, a little, as if time had gone
And this another comedy we put on,
And these were the lines we’d already known.
And everything ticks along normal and fine
As the bus circles back from the end of the line

Delphic Oracle Sends Recommendations for Writers

Look, you need to get serious about this job,
So the best thing is to emulate a saint.
Get yourself a household fool, a good
Source of excuses. Thomas More did that.
Or learn to levitate, Thomas Aquinas style,
To elevate diction, raise your standards.
But no one did better than Saint Jerome,
Who kept a lion by his writing desk,
Though you can't be sure from the ancient texts
Whether the lion was happy or not. In some
Illustrations he looks a little peeved.

Or put a bunch of stuff on your desk,
Which works sometimes for emerging bards.
I know a guy who has a crocodile of wood,
A framed page of a Chaucerian text,
Two drying sword-bean pods, a bag
Of luffa seeds, four harmonicas, an ashtray
Shaped like a fish, a green cup from Greece,
With Hercules beating someone—a critic, perhaps—
With a big club, as Nike flits her wings.
I omit the rest, this not being a garage sale.
Maybe that will work for you (wink, wink).

Or you can write on levels, as Dante did.
Give the reader a good puzzle to solve,
And if the mystery remains at last,
The reader can die content, *semper fi*
To the quest. Never, never surrender,
As Winston Churchill used to like to say.

And one more option, as my boss reminds me,
Is to put on some music for inspiration.
Loreena McKennitt's good, or Billy Joe Shaver,
Agustín Lara, or Fats Domino,
The Barking Dogs, the Chipmunks, or MC-5,
Tish Hinojosa, Sir Doug and Augie,
The Four Tops, Mariachi Vargas, hey,
Here in Delphi, we dance to them all.

R.W. Haynes

Ivor

Ivor taught us German
in Room 30, at the far end of the school.
Modern languages
were not then obsolete.

He managed our dismay
on learning there were in effect
sixteen different words for "the",
each one a special case.

He fought Vince's glottal stop
like Patrick among the snakes,
until Die Autokarte bitte
came out, all its t's intact.

It is a robust language, not given
to bouts of the vapours like French,
flapping a nosegay
at some petty mispronunciation.

Anger we never knew
but his disappointment
could swiftly bring us back to der
Idiotenhügel.

Three years we had Ivor
in Room 30, at the far end
of the school: 3A, 4A, 5A ... formative years

when nothing was drummed into us
but we were shown a way of being
lightly in the world.
He was a very parfit gentil knight.

.

In Walsingham

At the Abbey entrance,
normally card only
according to the signs,
they are asking for cash.

Their Internet has been down
all week, with little prospect
of early resolution,
no matter how often they call.

Isn't that always the way
with those great providers
who offer you the earth:

vast, impersonal,
and utterly unhelpful -
hopefully not like Herself.

The Wait

A last glance
before she walked
her chosen path,
that was the day
a single tear
stained my heart.

The house,
a giant ghost,
now hosted
dumb souls nailed
to age old walls
weeping bygones;
two on the mantelpiece
smiling their lives.
they are watching it all.

The cold was creeping in,
winds beating
the window pane,
lightning tore
the skies apart
but i left the door open
for some day
two of mine,
would walk in.

Limbless

I see myself
as you are,
not as a creature
in a wheelchair;
when i sense
the disdain on
a fortunate face,
i want to tell him,
half or whole,
you are as much
in the hole, as i am.
i do survive, maybe
in lost identity ,
in a world
more senseless
than limbless.
from the blessed chair
i study what goes on,
shout out that
a figure undone
is not about
what i am.
earthly elements
pull me along,
they do not define me,
for the 'i' lives
as pure energy
inside the vehicle
i drive,
untouched by
worldly injury.

Farther

A cloudburst stillness, one last
crackle of the lungs like quiet snore:
and suddenly another as I pause,
wordless, in your dying night.
The priest leads back into the hospital room,
the mutter of last rites reversed; and now
that deadly second stroke un-bleeds.
Abruptly then you're in a wing-chair, neat;
care home cabbages and ham, your left arm
strapped like meat; mad sirens all around,
your call bell, peevish, rings and rings.
Then home again at last, in rocking chair
with sheepish grin whilst cryptic deep within,
that first most baleful blaze grows dim.
An eye and more I'd give to turn about life's
dart, to meet on Saturday once more for
lunchtime pint of 'kidney flush'.
You'd put the world to rights, and talk,
re-till your every well ploughed line:
'You don't miss the water until the well has
run dry', 'Old age is not for softies'....
Or hear again that elephantine roar down
cardboard tube that made your grandson shriek!
The shelves and shelves of tomes,
a genial searcher for the truth, indeed,
a doubting sidesman clad in tweed.
Your dome I see anew in driver's view;
the twirl again of walking stick and Left Right gait
that marched the years from National Service
to Northumberland; and in a blink I'm proudly eight
with you upon the Mither Tap of Bennachie.
Fierce-gentle Dad, eternity's too long to part,
What more I'd give if you could even live
within the photographic art, beside
the complex, shy dark girl who held your heart.

Open Range

Andy Dalglish

At the back of a yellow brick terrace
crabbed by apple trees, a garden
served as a Wild West stockade-
unperturbed by potato rigs, dark soil,
his father louting over a Presbyterian
hoe; the clomp of homestead shears.
And far beyond, the town streets
hazed to lazy streams, wide open plains.
One dappled summer air grew rank,
low aircraft shuddered sky and
orchard hornets Stuka-dived and banked.
Whilst with barbs and home-made
bows that twanged to grass he fought
a timeless foe on lawn and park.
Dime-novel dreams, a childhood test,
their destiny un-manifest. Indoors they
stamped at dark. So who scalped first?
Those fratricidal furies cooled -far cry
from long ago, a hemisphere apart when
tipis charred, when bluecoat horsemen
brought Gatling guns to paint the snow.
And then, eleven o'clock, from war called
in to learn a film fanatic's plan- more
Open Range aflame, a lethal game;
this fundamentalist of fenceless rage.
The neighbours gathered round, cold
sweat, long day of heat, their faces bone:
The box of dust in nasal tone-
*I am speaking to you from the
cabinet room of Ten Downing Street.*

Class 37

Tick tick of hot metal, tension in wires,
vented air shimmers, black diesel wraith gyres.
Scorched reek of ballast, rank fireweed and rain;
the signal groans upwards unbinding the train.

Bubbling bubbling growling, behemoth of the halt:
robust State enforcer, the schools of trucks jolt.
Imperceptible first then inexorable power -
drum beat of an impi, the dark landscape cowers.

Decades have rolled, the blue paintwork's downcast;
now held at the points as flash units swish past.
Half-moon glass smutted, most parts need repair;
From canopies ousted, rust sidings its' lair.

Line's starved of investment, faults on the track;
the ache of cold starting, loads wilful and slack;
as inclines grow steeper the schedule's a strain -
how long will rails thrum to the diesel again?

Mothers in Wartime

A nonagenarian grandmother traces the serrated edges
of the trauma embedded in memories,
as the drones overhead drone.

A mother looks up at the sizzling and crackling sky.
Cracking and sizzling with missiles.
She shivers with every crack and every sizzle.
As she hugs her toddler tight.

•
Another mother's forlorn spirit
hovers above a fresh grave.
Lost in memories, a lullaby bursts
from her lips in staccato breaths;
she chokes on her own notes.
Some notes fall on the grave.
The spirit disappears.
The drones drone on.

Some distance away,
a two-year-old with a headful of gold
tugs at his mother's sleeve.
She is lying on the ground.
"Geettuppp, mooomy. I am scared. I am hungry."
He keeps tugging.
The drones overhead keep droning

The Westering Sun

In the West, the sun's resplendence is dimming.
Only a sliver of the sun remains behind the mountains.
A vestige of the golden past.

A five-year-old yells out to his grandfather,
"Gramps. Look, the sun has gone. "
"Yes", says the grandfather, preoccupied.
" Yes, two years back". He remarks, looking up at the gray sky,
and picks up his five-year-old grandchild,
planting a kiss on his cheek.

Things were bleak.
But where was the time to mourn a thirty-five-year-old son gone?
"War is bad". The grandfather said.
"Then, why is there war? "The child asks,
ruffling his grandfather's hair, and basking in his love.

The grandfather continues to look sad,
kissing his grandchild, recalling the way he used to kiss his son
now gone. Born thirty-five years ago.
But now gone.
Gone.

Santosh Bakaya

Gary Ritchie ~ Two Poems

Alone

We stared at our coffees for a long time,
the kind of comfortable silence close friends don't question.

When I eventually looked up,
his eyes bared, red reservoirs of water.

Overflow, trickles, following deep lines of time beneath.

Still no words, streams of regret and sorrow lost beneath
a thick patchwork of white beard.

“Dave, you have your wife, Glenda.”

His eyes, redder, reservoirs filling quickly, ready.

He stared through me.

“Dave, you have me, I'm here for you.”

The reservoirs, full.

“Dave your kids, they're just a phone call away.”

The reservoirs breach. Eventually he whispers,
his words devastating, staying with me.

“When I lost my father I lost my sense of security,
like I suddenly became an orphan. One day you'll know.”

Inspired by my dearest friend. Dave Goodridge, Oklahoma USA

Elizabeth Phillips ~ Two Poems

Westminster Bridge

“Better for health than tights!”
My friend had said, so I
Being twenty
Wore the Fifties beneath my pencil skirt.
Monday rush:
Westminster Bridge a-surge with suits
Double decker buses by the dozen
All watching as every secret clasp
Surrendered – all at once!
The sudden slide of silk from thighs to ankles.
My shame caught in the traffic’s view
Sure that every eye had seen my ruin

But I
Being twenty
Chose to brazen it out
Lifted skirt to thighs
Fastened each suspender once again
And walked to work.

Love Lately Come

Life seems so short when love is lately come
And there’s a poignant sorrow in the grace
Of loving you while time is running out
I cannot tell how long the stars will stay
Nor if the night is closer than I fear.
It is enough to breathe the breath of day
And know, by your sweet grace, that I am here

I’d rather look a moment on your face
Than live a thousand years without you, love.
Perhaps I’ll be your love just for a while
And lay my head upon your chest and there
Find my Jerusalem, my holy place.

The Trade

Woolen cloth, threads spread from
the sheep-scrying oracle,
meat under her tongue,
an old kindness among them,
she, a stranger, asking:

remember the flock?

Taken apart so many times,
striking fibers out like exiles,
unwound from start to finish:
quick-knitting overalls in flight,
Ulysses' crew gone white into sail.

Rotted ship's crews, themselves rotted through,
still bailing water from that husk,
here and there feet bursting through
into the long blue;

Harried, breaking down, popped elbows for the vessel
unnavigable, uninhabitable,
bailing for barkers and witches,
bailing broken, tendon cordage,
raising sons up in the trade.

Below,
the root-fungus glittered,
old weather under every name,
muttering parasitic spells
through the grain,
suzerain fungal glue
where forgotten forest wood
once framed.

But lo!
The splintering corpse births from its floods
upright groaning, then edgewise,
again upright!

For one glittering moment atop and abalanced,
a whining ecstasy amid cheers,
quick snapped underneath,

dust sent, dust delivered,
unrecognizable,
unrecoverable.

Francis Lovell

Was this really your end
walled-up in Minster Lovell
with your favourite dog?
On the wrong side of history
at Stoke Field did you flee
back to your ancestral home
to hide in a secret room
where an old retainer
kept the key?

No redundancy plan in place.

When he died were you left
to starve in that sanctuary
now turned tomb
until two hundred years
had passed?

Before they found your bones.

Were you seated at a table
next to your faithful hound
or is this just a story
they would have us believe?
Like Lucan or Stonehouse
tales to obfuscate the truth.
Perhaps, instead, you escaped
across the Wall to Scotland
or drowned crossing the Trent?

Neither as good a yarn though.

Better a failed escape
from a locked secret room
with a dog to add pathos
and help with the entrance fee.

Memory

Good memory is a curse.
Remembering things
best forgotten.

Spotting discrepancies,
lies and distortions
in others' stories.

We forge identities,
step by step,
through memories.

Often forging false
selves through
poor remembrance.

Good memory is a curse.
Best, like sleeping dogs,
to let it lie.

Brick Wheelbarrow

Little did I know
when I wheeled you
of your history
and lineage.

I wonder who loaded
your sturdy back
when the Eleuis
Temple was built
or lumbered along
with central wheel
at Chinese tombs?

Then, in Europe,
after Rome fell,
you were lost.
How did we build
without your help?

In Medieval times
reinvented
with fronted wheel,
to help unload,
you found duty
when cathedrals
and castles were built.

Then poor peasants trudged
behind, like me now,
trying hard not to stumble
or fall under uneven weight
and wobbly wheel.
Nothing has changed
since the dawn of time
we are just pawns
in others' games.
But, at least
I can whistle
as we wheel along.

Mike Everley

A Study In Noir

Saxophones haunt night air
with melancholy notes
stolen from lover's lips
then blown into darkness.

She flits between street lamps
shimmering in sequin
at home in the half light
owl like on silver wings.

He stands in the shadows
a small red dot glowing
from his white cigarette
held tight between his teeth.

Pulling his coat up high
against encroaching cold
he leaves his hiding place
and follows her back home.

The city is a strange
beast shaded black and white
whose music is the blues
beaten by shoes on slabs.

Taking the weight off

Lunch time, and it was
one of those days
when the raspberry jam came
out of the jar like raw liver,
and the old crow in the Leylandi
in the arse of next door's garden
cawed in a strident, yet
maudlin singularity,
making me start,
just as I'd wiped
the sweaty dew off the
plastic chair ready to go
for the last al fresco sit in the garden
before October starts to fuss and fizz
and herald the umpteenth winter
I've drawn breath in.

But it was company I suppose,
and it didn't answer me
back all the time
like those thoughts
of other's mortality,
cold calling me when I
least expected them to.

Coming Round

They say the membrane
Between being asleep
And being awake
Becomes, with age
Less stark and more opaque.
Then in death
When we complete the race
We become the looking glass
no longer just the gurning face.

The Scattering

Whisper, whisper, whisp,
Were you always just smoke?
Impossible to grasp
Like dandelion spores ,
Never fully held, until this moment,
Ash charred beyond recognition
Out of your element, at last,
A distillation of love.
So concentrated as to make
eyes water.

Jim Ferguson ~ Four Poems

Come oan

doon here
tone and vibration

doon here
in the underneath

leave nihilistic
creeps
floatin in dreams

of the morra's slappin
of nuclear hammers

deeply sombre Sunday
nevermind —

doon here
in amongst the human souls
who share in solidarity,
incantatory, in the moment
of imagination, creating

brand new poetry
fused with grace

wee joy in a bottle

everything is small scale
small time, down at heel
soaked in booze and aging fast
never know the minute

but how i love the little glass
the candlelight that glows
love the world, love the whisky
the sight of hungover morning
marching up the road
the sunrise, gold and purple,
through shattered-bloodshot eyes

comes liberation's roar
hope and joy against hate
never a selfish day
i'll take that, all the way

slainte

The Super Prisons of South America

the super prisons of South America
grow fat and full with all kinds of men,
the men do not grow fat,
the innocent, the guilty,
the poor trying to get something
the rich trying to get richer
all locked up together,
sardines squashed in a giant tin
with nothing to do,
nothing to read, nothing to write with,
no lawyers, no visitors – simply disappeared -
no jury trials, no right of appeal
a damned medieval throwback in our right wing

liberal times

law and order, mendacity and greed
somebody bite bite bite
the hands that feed us misery...
the super prisons of South America
huge, crowded, cramped
no mattresses, no beds,
the modern sore on the modern flesh
of the human animal,
 homo-sapiens...
politicians use this flesh for photocalls
and who will think of that they love
and whose mind will stay free?
the body a prison within a prison,
a penal place of inhumanity

the human animal
more animal than human
what genius, what mind indeed
what inspiration brought us
to such a place of demented glory,
the sad mad brutal insanity
of the super prisons of South America
of Siberia, of Africa or Scotia
nothing for the want of rot
for waste of life and spirit
don't think twice, lock them up,
and don't think twice
we are now become cannibals
we murderers of christ,
jesus sits there naked
counting fish inside his mind,
the super prison of planet earth,
don't think twice

Jim Ferguson

abruptly

1.

we need not worry
too much

about things
not too many things

to worry on now
the poems keep pouring out

like blood from a shaving cut

what can the fuck
can you do

but eat, drink and laugh
along with the tired

auld sadness in the stars
see the sky laugh back

at our efforts and cares
and you never really know

when its all gonny stop
making any kind of sense

or if it just comes
to it's own kind of stop

abruptly

2.

just need not
too many things

be not encumbered
for no one ever won

anything worthwhile
by worrying

about being respectable

3.

everything

is now
by oor sides

past n present
joy n love

are wonderful
ways

to see this auld
world

what ever it is
what ever it was

it was aw fuckin good
no matter what

let no gloomy bastard
oppress you

4.

niddrie road G41

in the L-shaped kitchen
washing the dishes, ever fresh

lovely big map
of Ardnamurchan

pinned to the wall
a wondrous new beginning

brand new life, we are in our thirties
playing husband and wife

two kittens patrol
the doorway to the hall

curl up together
into one warm ball

Jim Ferguson

5.

why the where, all smiles

may moon, plump,
in the afternoon sky
sun ablaze

last of the blossom
floats from the trees
bright pink confetti

how yet and possibly
why the where
might everything land

the map of Ardnamurchan
missing
such a beach as miracle

as makes the heart leap
sounds sing gaelic
restless ocean

murmurs on through
and through the back
back and beyond

back and beyond
we are born, soon
and we are gone

maytime moon, plump,
reflects the sun
smiling aboon smiling upon

this blue-green earth

Jim Ferguson

Saint Christopher Carries His Son Down The Dunes To Strandhill Beach

My son, with his son clinging to his back,
runs through the dune sand and the marram grass;
They giddy slip, slide down to a soundtrack
of whoops, laughter and mothers' fearful shrieks
to slow down, stop, slow down! Everyone's cheeks
flushed pink by the teasing of the wind.

I watch them race: the rider, his horse;
they gallop, neighing and snorting their fierce
joy in the wheeling of gulls and the wild force
of waves breaking white along the shoreline,
the scudding clouds, moments of sunshine
the pinch of the ordinary left behind.

On the beach they begin their acquisition:
pebbles small and large, seashells, grey driftwood
which form the target and the ammunition
for the game. They launch the wood and throw,
fling the stones, the shells, wanting each one to go
higher, further, deeper than the one before.

I think of my other boy, far from us now.
When he was our only, we brought him here
to this roiling crash and foam. I remember how
he hurled himself into the blue-green sea.
Heart wracked, in that moment it was clear to me
that boy would cross this ocean once he was grown.

She Sings In The Mosque At Isfahan

It is a thing of beauty.
Blue tiled facade mirrors the
loveliness of heaven,
proclaims the ninety-nine names
of God:
the most sacred
the merciful
the first
the last
the most loving
the embodiment of peace.

The stone floor of the atrium
is worn by centuries of feet;
it is the colour of the desert,
the colour of honeycomb
the colour of halva,
of caramel -
the sweetness of faith.

There stands a woman,
veiled and clothed
in the silence of a law
insensible to joy,
a single woman
becomes in that moment
all women
in her courage and her love
when she steps out
from the silence and
sings

in praise of her creator
sings
in her courage and her love
a single voice

offered as a gift to
the first
the last
the most sacred
the merciful
the most loving
the embodiment of peace.

Forty Years In The Making

*the third angel sounded and there fell
a great star from Heaven burning as
it were a lamp and it fell upon
the third part of the rivers and upon
the fountains of water*

*(The Book of Revelations chapter 8 v 10-11,
inscribed on the memorial to those who shut
down reactor four, Chernobyl)*

Comrade angel sounded the trumpet
and the star burned over
the temple of
reactor four falling
somewhere between
the great gates of Kyiv
and Baba Yaga's hut

After that the clocks
wound down
streets emptied Nature
breached the roads
the walls

Today there is no rattling
of breakfast plates
tea kettles in
what remains
of the cafe kitchens
are cold

Year on year the
buildings succumb
to forest
tree frogs have become
black smooth-skinned
a melanin response to
radiation

There are still dogs wolves
bears even
remnants
of another world

and all the while the dust
of our undoing
settles
everywhere

Beth Brooke

Things I Left Behind At The Beach

A pearl earring that must have fallen out
while I was swimming.
I imagine a hermit crab, tugging it
into the safety of its shell;

my winter skin. The sun and the salt sea
have crisped it to a light brown.
According to my friends I am looking well.
Maybe I believe them.

There's a single drop of my blood
on the razor shell that lived up to its name,
edges sharper than broken glass. It has joined
my essence to the essence of the sea.

At the water's edge there is a small piece
of my heart, disguised as a pebble.
It rolls with the tide, a tiny longshore drift.
I try to not to feel its tug.

My sense of adventure has saddled up
a sea horse and even now is giddy up
to gallop through sea grass, while I
sit quietly at home.

Ornithology

It has taken a long time to realise
that maybe this isn't the end.
Nothing specific, just the brent geese
flocking on the green across
from the petrol station, looking busy
without doing very much,
except keeping themselves alive.
The memories they evoked
of the *Observer Book of Birds*,
ever present on the kitchen table
through our summers growing up.
The pinch of excitement when I saw
my first treecreeper in Bohernabreena.
You had pointed it out, camouflaged
against the bark, forest stilled
in expectation. I made sure to look it up
as soon as I got home and the image
has stayed with me for years,
a freckle of joy in this troubled world.

You as Dance Teacher

It was in the middle of a kitchen disco
– the cultural phenomenon spawned
during the Covid era, and already
being passed down the generations –
when you suggested *Dallas*
by Natalie Merchant and David Byrne.
A strange choice for you, I thought,
but, loving the song and aware that
the Venn diagram of our musical tastes
rarely intersects, I was happy to go with it,
you line dancing across the floor,
thumbs hooked into belt loops, channelling
the untrammelled joy of all those 90's nights,
check shirts and cowboy boots, Garth Brooks
and Billy Ray, when it felt like the whole room
was in your thrall, perfectly in step,
and me tonight, stumbling in your wake.

Do you ever wonder

what people will say about you when you're gone and, in your scratchy imaginings of the afterlife, do you expect an opportunity to eavesdrop on friends' conversations, including a playback facility to catch up on the past, leaving you rapt yet fearful of what you might hear?

Or would it be better, if, without the inconvenience of death, AI were to offer an insight into friends' opinions – maybe translating brain signals into synthetic speech – and how would you respond? Rationalise any criticism as a bug in the software, while subtly adjusting your approach, taking care to emphasise the improvements or, in the event of praise, would you modestly dismiss the plaudits, though compliment the algorithm?

Maurice Devitt

One for Sorrow

The magpie costume I was hoping to wear to the party, just didn't fit. It wasn't my grandmother's button-down pumps or thick black tights that were the problem, but the body stocking, glorious in its tonic sheen, with the painstaking addition of hundreds of black and white feathers. In the end there was nothing for it, but to give the outfit to my younger brother, who was happy to forsake his sleeping bag – simple combination of pyjamas and paper bag, eyeholes poked with a pen. I went as myself, the light-fingered thief, hiding in plain sight, sauntered from room-to-room, then slipped into the night, pockets stuffed with pearls, all the attention on the magpie in the other room.

The Art of Perspective

1

The apprentice yawns as he pushes open
The shutters to sunshine and birdsong.
His eyes dwell on the purple of distant groves

Before turning to the clutter
Of tools, panels, brushes, shells,
Frames and half-finished pictures.

This morning he has to grind pigments
For *The Calling of the Apostles*. Blue
Is the most arduous; pulverising the *lapis*,

Binding it with beeswax and resin,
Kneading it in lye, washing it, repeating
The last two stages, seemingly forever,

Until, eventually, a trickle of ultramarine.
But today he doesn't mind the labour.
After years of copying drawings, studying

The human form, learning about perspective
And how to handle a brush in his master's style,
He's to paint a section of background and a figure

In the crowd. He begins to dream of the future:
His own masterpiece, his own shop, his own *garzoni*
Before returning to the now, to inducing the blue.

When he's called to the canvas he's startled
By the size of a kingfisher fired from a cloud.
His master instructs him: modulate grey into blue

Here, match the angle of this mountain with that arm,
Insert a youth, black doublet, peplum, into this space
On the right, next to the bearded man.

Centuries tick by. The boy with the thumb
In his belt turns as if someone's called
His name, marvels at the strange beings,

Giants as in the age of Noah, who pass
To and fro between worlds hung on walls.
Some are familiar: the Virgin, the Cross,

Landscape, portrait and fruit in a bowl;
Others astound him: an iron monster
Shuffling into its lair, flowers on fire

In a vase, a ghost screaming,
A stone egg floating above the sea,
A woman with a moustache. Now

And then, the giants peer into his little moment
Of time; some comment on the three Christs,
Some on the prelates witnessing the birth

Of their own ministry, some on the distraction
Of the crowd, some on the sail that looks like a solar panel;
And some on how much they admire the blue.

Timetable

A devil plays the piano
In the station concourse
An angel does the can-can.
If the travellers stop moving
They turn to stone.
Truth refuses to pay for a ticket.
The glass roof falls as rain.
Sea levels rise in the elegant shops.
A tree erupts through the marble floor,
Its leaves all talking at once.
The devil receives a text,
Bows, and exits stage left.
The tannoy announces a pair of wings
Have been handed into lost property.
The mighty waters retreat to the void.
All kinds of uniforms
Resume their Brownian motion
As an asteroid drops in
On the unconscious ammonites
And rocks the dinosaurs' world.

Gary Day

Bette Davis

Was my mum's favourite actress.
She never explained why,
Just looked at me
As if I should know.

I don't remember watching
Any of the films until much later,
Yet the head-lamp eyes
And guillotine voice

Seemed somehow familiar,
As did the cracked glamour,
The glee in the cruel put-down
And the abrupt hysterical laughter.

Too young my mother learned
Life was a volley of 'no's'. She knew
Not to ask for the moon. Her stars
Were on the screen, little lights

Speckling her dark life and it
Only took half a bottle of sherry
To become the brightest
Of them all, the indomitable Betty.

Gary Day

Celestial Mechanics

How close they stand together,
Rapt by an orange moon rising
From a smooth-browed sea;
Merely the effect of earth's rotation

And thickness of atmosphere. What
Use have lovers for such knowledge,
Who care only for moon's fullness as
They grow round on their midnight bed.

How long they lie entwined, how slow
Time passes, how quickly the unpainted
Fruit loses its colour, how always moon
And earth dance in gravitational embrace.

The light is behind her in the café,
The dark side of her face turned
Towards him; the deviation
In her orbit stopping his dead.

Romanian bear

The bear
rescued
still danced.
Revolving
in endless
agony.
Condemned to turn
as taught by prod
and prick.
To twist and prance
in a mocking semblance
of a dance.
Condemned to follow
this warped choreography
for our amusement
in its new bedlam.

Hissing sand

sand hissing under a lace of ochre foam
attends the waves tender revealing
of grey wave-weathered wooden serpents
sap-drained salt-bleached now driftwood-stiff
to be embraced and gently pebble-trapped
until a sister-tide lifts them once again
to return to the land they left
to become the tide's gift to the shore

the pianist in old age

The piano gleams with appetite,
its jaw propped wide,
a three-legged beast
ready to devour the man.

Scored on his fingertips
are all the notes that Chopin wrote –
tonight,

the twenty-four preludes
transcend blurred vision,
appease arthritis with supple melody.

Arpeggios mount,
right hand outruns the left.
Half-sighted, bent,

he strikes a final cascade,
rises gaunt,
hollowed by more than time.

It's a stiff-jointed exit.
We clap the escape, clap him
back to the bone-floor.

Encore! Encore!

His dim eyes scan the shadows
for a restless figment –
Chopin stands in the wings,

applauding too.
He knows
the frailties of the body well,

how the piano consumes.

The Dictator's Statue

Derek Sellen

Topple all previous statues!
Ascending to the plinth, I occupy the centre of the square,
its corners blocked by armed police, the noise
of riots fading in the gate-housed exit-streets
to just one cry. Mirrored in the window glass
of state buildings and in the fountains' pools,
posted on railing placards, my images
outnumber all others. Weeds have been hoed
between paving slabs. Pigeons spiral away,
my feathered citizens, panicked by far gunfire.

But I stand more illumined than before, detailed
in the precise focus of the rooftop floodlights,
gaining the permanence of stone, braced with steel.
Only a tremor from the core could rock my stance
or crack the granite certainty of my base,
the brass authority of the plaque
that bears, within the square that bears, my name.

Julia Duke ~ One Poem

Making Room

The river winds like a silver ribbon,
hemmed in, contained and insignificant
through a broad, flat valley,
green meadows glistening on either side.

Once upon a time a proud glacier
scoured the valley floor, tearing up boulders,
powering down the valley, squeezing itself
through crevices, making room.

So much room, so much room to breathe,
so much space to roam, but the little ribbon
ploughs its own furrow, blinkered
and unaware of the far-reaching possibilities

Privy

We the unsettled we
know certain things we
know about confinement
and quick exits speed and
the need to leave doors ajar
especially in the unlit night
we learn never to dwell or
catch up with the sport
nor bring a book here to the
house of dank outsiders
drip and arachnophobia
where we the uneasy
learn to be vigilant find
our way by the weight of
things by the stars be-
come fleet of foot for fear of
cheap fools and belittlers
those who whisper in our
ears that the world shall be
ours then deride us find
us wanting banal.

A Place of Learning

I'll teach you I'll give you what for he said as if I needed lessons as if I needed
anyone to show me how to light a fag how to cough and blow in shades of coolblue
yellowsnow fug all defiance all currency and manhood Senior Service of course
untipped for the tar for the satisfaction like it was in the Navy quickfused hothead
country kid all skin and ribs and gungrease ciggy and a rum don't show it don't
let them get to you or it's nights in the brig the redrage whiff of sweat and cigarettes
and ashwhite Little Boy who taught me taught me not to whip a couple from the
mantlepiece never to own up as if I'd found a shiny penny on the floor of the shed the
one with all the bikes and garden tools and rust and junk the brickred bits and bobs
the door slammed shut and a man armed with a stick a gun battery thundering his
shame his ire his fire.

Red

*as rust as rufous stream and gust
of muscle lean and young the pulse
of rising blood and neither whiff of rage
nor bull just flare and flow and russet*

Irish of a kind he was a little blarney
a touch of cuss and titian hair that grew
improbably long
 not one for travel –
you could sense the blood drain down
to his feet the minute he sat in a car
so he walked everywhere or ran and damn
if he didn't have legs that could teach
the wind a thing or two about clean heels
and sharp winter days
 reckless though –
enough to make you wince as he stood up to bullies
with that flit of a grin
 stuck his young pup's
nose in the snarl of a Doberman's snout.

Remarkably little drama the day
he moved on
 sitting for a while with his
new family before we slipped away and
closed the door behind us
 relief there was
but guilt too as dog became fungible –
collateral to a marriage about to foreclose.

*Great hurt of an irrepressible red
becalmed become placid listless
malaise in blue the quelling of a great
surge a squall of wind and garnet.*

Huw Gwynn-Jones

Yellow

"La tristesse durera toujours"

van Gogh

When you're a middle-aged star, weight loss
is quite the thing, five million tons each tick
of the sun's unwinding clock, epoch and eon
the fusion of hydrogen, insatiable light and
Icarus' waxy flight, long summers of absinthe
the obsession, Sunflowers, Xanthosis.

Alistair Lawrie ~ Two Poems

Passing Clouds

1

a momentary
break
in winter's clouds
offshore
tints the promenade
and haunts
the beach
as its still
growling
breakers
splash
searing white
and wave
bright postcard
memories
of summer
at me
here
in the drizzle

2

a salmon pink shoal
of serpentine clouds
is caught mid
across
the empty evening sky
this winter night
its shade around
the sickle moon
that's slipped out

Spring locks

its tender shoots
round rocks
and roots
its saps
finds cracks
and gently
always gently
shoot by shoot
and root by root
unlocks
its dripping taps.

leap

puts

to watch

Christina Chim & Marjorie Pezzoli ~ Three Poems

(Tan Renga)

expecting a guest—
luminous eyes of a civet cat
on the fig tree
tea on the patio
bergamot still brewing

Rangoon Flowers
heavy fragrance attracts
nocturnal Hawk moth
starlight reflections
her eyes meeting his

circling
the fruiting mango tree
a clicking bat
an ocean away
a whale sings

Christina Chin Marjorie Pezzoli

Mavis Gulliver ~ Three Poems

A Dirty Word

I'd learned to read and every word I saw
was added to my ever-growing store.
So when I saw it on the railway bridge
asked, in all innocence
'Daddy, what's f--- mean?'
'A dirty word.
Say it again, you'll get a slap.'
I didn't understand.
Always he'd answered questions honestly.
encouraged me to be inquisitive
and I had never, ever had a slap.
A dirty word!
The rebel in me rose.
I turned my back,
softly rolled it off my tongue,
liked the fff that blew across my lips,
the ceekay click – a satisfying end.
'F---,' I said aloud.
Thrilling at the sound,
the dirtiness, the daring,
I danced across the bridge and shouted
'F---, f---, f---.'
The slap came swift and stinging.
I reeled with shock
and still can't say the word
or write it down.

February fill grave

the river rises
water laps at the graveyard wall
pours through gaps in blocks of stone
washes over graves
fetid bubbles rise
as coffins release stale air
water seeps into every orifice
hair swirls
round featureless faces
the long dead
are drowning.

Mindless

Unlike the myth of Nero
who played his fiddle
while Rome went up in flames
Trump is no myth.
He fiddles the facts
while the world burns.

BLACK BACK PAGES

there are many great anthologies , here are a few to consider ... when you're browsing

