



HOMEWARD
BOUND

54 POEMS

STEPHEN HANCOCK

HOMeward BOUND



54 poems

Stephen Hancock

PIG & INK BOOKS



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MMXX

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“Whoever brought me here
will have to take me home.”

Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī



PRINTS BY EMILY JOHNS

Dearest friends,

Given that it's my 54th birthday today, and given that we're all currently under lockdown and you can't shower me with the usual presents, I thought I'd send you a present instead. I've spent the last week choosing – and tweaking, and occasionally remixing – fifty-four of my favourite poems from the last thirty years.

I always write my poems for you lot. I'm fundamentally a village poet. Maybe with a bit of village vicar and village idiot thrown in the mix? Whatever my specific job title is – I can't even remember the interview – it's an honour.

As some of you are aware, the last few years since my mum died have been really tough – fair to say, I've been through a proper and prolonged breakdown. I am – after several false declarations of spring – wary of making any pronouncements, and wary of metaphors too. But there's a lot more sunlight streaming through the trees – and through my heart – right now, of that I'm sure. And that sure is worth celebrating.

Fuck, the forest got very dark back there, and I got very tangled and desperate and lost, and didn't know how to ask for help. Thanks to all of you who held me in your hearts whilst I self-isolated and disintegrated, and thanks to Mother Nature too. Ah, I'm tearful writing this. Most of us, by now, know friends who never made it through their dark and tangled places – profound love to each and every fallen comrade.

Apart from the opening and closing poems, these poems are roughly in chronological order – beginning in 1989, and then following my steady but inexorable rise through the innocent nineties, the psychedelic noughties, and the challenging teens...

I hope you – and all those you love – are safe and sound during these strange and stressful times. And heartfelt thanks to any of you working at the frontlines. May kindness and care surround us all.

And still the hedgerows blossom... And still the buzzard roams on high... And still the young rabbit sits on my doorstep, right ear slowly flopping as it enters its mid-morning snooze...

Ah, my safely distant friends, this little birthday collection is dedicated to you – in all your moods, in all your seasons, and in all your mud-splattered glory.

One Love

Stephen

April 17th, 2020

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rock

rock has met this other rock
they are entering one another
as slowly as only rocks know how
with exquisite geological pressure

this takes a million years

then they roll over
and grin
as rocks only know how
grinning like granite
eyes a-twinkle like pins and needles and stars

rock lets out
a breath of tired and quiet satisfaction

and in the passing of this rocky sigh

I am born

I live

I die

tiananmen bicycles

tiananmen bicycles
and
tiananmen tanks
hurry along
beijing streets
to different
rhythms

you can't freewheel in a tank
you can't feel the breeze in your hair in a tank
you can't ring your bell and catch a smile in a tank

tiananmen bicycles
and
tiananmen tanks

you can't crush tents on a bicycle
you can't crush bicycles on a bicycle
you can't crush people on a bicycle

tiananmen bicycles
and
tiananmen tanks
hurry along
beijing streets
to different
tunes

your freewheeling
your risktaking
your bravedancing
stopped us in our
tracks
– threatened to melt even hearts of armoured steel

tiananmen bicycles
and
tiananmen tanks

out of the buckled frames
of your dreams

we will salvage
and remember
and forge
new bicycles
to carry us along

tiananmen bicycles
and
tiananmen tanks

out of the buckled frames
of your dreams
I will salvage
and remember
and forge
a new bicycle
to carry me along
so that
one day
we may pass each other by
freewheeling and
conspiring with the breeze
ringing our bells to the winds
stealing laughter and smiles
from one another

tiananmen bicycles
and
tiananmen tanks

we will couple
the courage
and the compassion
you left behind

tiananmen bicycles
and
tiananmen tanks

tank tracks
leave marks

bicycle wheels
make revolutions

tiananmen bicycles
and
tiananmen tanks
hurry along
beijing streets
to different
rhythms

we ain't marching any more

upon the turning brow of that wintered hill
the army finally tired
and their tiredness it slowly turned
from exhaustion into rest

wearied of war
worn to the bone by lock-step, march, manoeuvre, battle
weighed down by the curses of those they had killed
they planted their ragged banners of war
upon the tired brow of that turning hill

vowed never to return
to such things as they
had done
and seen done

beneath the rhythm of sun and clouds and moon and stars
their banners too let their exhaustion show
blood and regality draining back down
into the dirt

and
slowly
new colours rose up through the pores of the earth
and began to flow
and fly and shudder
in the snowdrop sun

and
the army finally slept

and finally they all slept well

then woke
dug deep
struck water

Song Of The Court Of Cyffdy

(to my fourteen years old long-haired miniature daschund)

All Hail To Thee!

Oh Mighty Guardian Of The Trans-Kitchen Sub-Carpet Hot Water Pipe!

Oh Mighty Stubby-Legged Snortle-Worthy Crumb-Snuffling Vacuum Cleaner!

Oh Mighty One Who Buries To The Bottom Of My Bed And Refuses To Budge A Doggy-Millimetre!

Oh Mighty Worshipper Of The Great Ball Of Fire In The Sky Who Can Hear Sunlight Fall Onto The Carpet In The Deepest Of Doggy-Dreams!

Oh He Who Once Somehow Climbed Onto And Off The Dinner Table Having Licked All The Fruit Topping From The Cheese Cake!

Oh Mightier Occupier Of Seats The Warmer And More Temporarily Vacated The Better!

Oh Mighty One Who Knows Not That He Is Not Human!

Oh Mighty One With So Much Love And So Shocking Little Loyalty!

Oh Mighty One Who Knows Not Obedience And Cares Not A Disdainful Sniff Neither!

Oh Mighty One Who Is Named After A Farm We Stayed On During A Favourite Childhood Holiday Near Bala In Wales!

Oh Mighty One Who Hides In The Depths Of The Carpet Lest He Be Called On To Perform Some Onerous Task Such As Being Awake!

Oh Mighty One Who Leaves His Pedigree Chum In His Bowl For An Hour Or Two In The Hope Of Something A Lot More Interesting!

Oh Mighty One Who Scoffs Cheese Like It Is A Class A Drug!

Oh Mighty One Who Also Loves Porridge, Nut Roast, Marmite On Toast, Turkey, After Eight Mints, Baked Beans And Chips!

Oh Mighty One Who Come To Mention After Eighty Mints Once Intersected One In Mid-Air Having Accelerated From Total Sleep To The Speed Of Chocolate In Less Than A Hundredth Of A Second!

Oh Mighty One Who Accepts Bribes And Bribery Without The Slightest Nose-Twitch Of Scruple Or Compromise!

Oh Mighty Linguistic Prodigy Who Can Just About Now Tell The Difference Between "Lounge!", "Television!", "Washing Door!" and "Bedroom!"

Oh Mighty One Who Sleeps A Mighty Amount Of The Time!

Oh Mighty One Who Greets Life Belly-On!

Oh Mighty One Who Greets Me Belly-Up!

Oh Mighty One Who Seems To Like Me A Lot And Me Him!

Oh Mighty One Who Will Probably Die Soon And Who I Will Miss!

Oh Mighty One Who Will Probably Soon Saunter Off To The Eternal Glow Of That
Great Three Bar Electric Fire In The Sky And Who I Am More Than Happy To
Remember Here Down On Earth In Poem!

All Hail To Thee Cyffdy!

Dog (yes, you're a dog) And Friend!

Fourteen Human Years – Ninety Nine Dog Years – Old And Still Going
Soft.

Poem upon the 4th anniversary of disarming an F-111 fighter-bomber

the purity
of the pivot
of a hammer happily swung
against the cold metal
of a machine designed for death

bang bang
you're disarmed

the joy and the taste and the clarity
of that morning
transformed by our
precious
little
act

upon the cusp of the dawn of the first day of spring
birds wake
we smile
one less warplane flies

the first frisbee of spring

this morn I awoke
to the hum of the song
of the first frisbee of spring
calling me forth
from duvet'd slumber
down dusty stairs
overstepping the morning's manila-hued mail
and out, out into the morning air
still chilled and cool and charming

across Rymers Lane she called me
along Saturday's sunlazy carstrewn streets
through Florence Park's dewy budding splendour
still wet with promise and gently steaming with earthy sighs

past Larkrise school
now hollow and childless
along two sides of the Boundary Brook Road
fluttering past the bookies on Howard Street she flew

in and out of sun and shade
now cold now warm now warming
my body hairs bristled in the ripples of her wake
shimmering through shady pockets of nocturnal air
bristling with a wintered but now vernal joy
along the Iffley Road
she cruised
and then down, down the welcome riverbound slope of Jackdaw Lane
to the bumpety football pitches of Meadow Lane
I followed her sound and song

and there
in the cool valleyed lowlands of east Oxford
I caught my first glimpse
of the first frisbee of spring
hovering there
above the penalty box
dervish and steady and strong
she rises and then she falls
in such gloriously spinning murmur

symbiosis

me and the earth
we're like that
can't live without one another

when I jump
she jumps to catch me

when I fall
she meets and holds me
can't stand the thought of losing me

she pulls me to her centre
I pull her to mine

the earth clings happily to my feet

I affect the earth
as much as she affects me
no more
no less
just equally

and when I die
I'll return to the earth
and the earth
will return to me

and we'll lie within one another
symbiotically

one for the road

*Reclaim the Streets, M41, Shepherd's Bush, Saturday July 13th 1996
(for Paul)*

oh
there were cracks as wide as our smiles
cracks big enough to swallow cars whole
she moved so gracefully
along that liberated mile
her dress pink and proud and billowing

sailing down the motorway
bestowing confetti blessings
upon us revellers and levellers
us ravers and rovers and raucous ranters
as we danced in the wide wake
of her carnival joy

this motorway
shatters beneath our feet
its linear and harsh intent
scattering into a million brilliant shards

the music kicks off
and the rhythm kicks in

overdressed for the occasion
the cops bow out

this motorway
buckles melts dissolves
beneath the warmth of the sun and
the fierce heat of
seven thousand pairs of daring dancing summer feet
cut loose foot loose
fancies unfurled and free
engines of desire
and purpose and pleasure
externally combusting

along the brimming beaming marvel
of this motorway turned upside down and inside out
floats the manwoman of our dreams

twenty foot high
as proud and graceful as the summer sky
her dress pink and billowed and promising

the sun watches over us
ensures no harm
the rhythm keeps its promises

the police keep their distances

paint and poetry and song show their true colours
sand and sweat and smiles merge and mingle and shine
bodies cavort collude collide
within this sweetest of human traffic jams

and
as the sun begins to set on our banners of outlaw victory
and the lingering warmth of the day enters
the welcoming cool of the night
from under the folds of her dress so pink and so proud
can be heard the repetitive beat and hum
of a mischievous pneumatic pleasure
accounting for the depth of her smile
the grace of her poise
the madness of our dancing
and the grinning of our eyes

this motorway
yields
is drilled, rattled, levered, shattered, prised
and planted

trees blossom where she once stood

barefoot breakfast inside the mulberry trees of Florence Park

high up inside the mulberry tree
my eager limbs mysteriously grow
arms elongating with an ape-like reach
following my eyes to the darkest fruit
as my toes hold good and true

my fingers stretch
and reach
and tug each blue-black berry from its umbilical stalk
with such an ancient sense of harvest satisfaction

and the flavours that now burst between my palate and my tongue
are brimful, pressed down, and overflowing still with
the night's black splendour
and the morning's sweet and earthy dew

(summer's other berries pale in comparison)

and as the rising sun wraps itself around my kitchen canopy
I let the alluvial juices dribble from my mouth
and tumble from my chin
onto skin and cloth and leaf and bark

thus blood-stained by my early quarry
deep, deep from within my happy belly
rises a greedy
and prehistoric
gratitudinal groan of mulberry joy

all power to the allotments

Elder Stubbs Festival, Oxford, Saturday 31st August 1996

humanity is born free
but everywhere is in supermarket chains
buying 14.7cm long carrots
stripped of dirt, geography, effort, labour
stripped of content, context, joy and flavour

buying 14.7cm long carrots
stripped of carrothood

No! This Can Not Be So!
This Can Not Be Right
Carrots have rights
essential, self-evident Carrot Rights
to be accepted in their diversity
encouraged in their deviancy
to be eased and shaken from their familiar earth
with inefficient and unprofitable gratitude
to be greeted by the eyes that have
 followed them from seed to seedling to maturity
 to be welcomed by the eyes that will eat them

only thus
only thus will we see the demise
of the 14.7cm long carrotless carrot
and
carrot by carrot by carrot
shall we pull the synthetic rugs from under
the well-heeled feet of our Super Market Masters

So
More Power to Our Elbows!
& All Power to the Allotments!

power comes from the water barrel
 of an allotment shed
power comes from the meeting
 of rain and earth and sun
power comes from the blade of a spade
 the turning of a fork

the rhythm of a hoe

power comes from the raw materials and means of production
– seed, earth, trowel, spade, watering can –
being in the hands of the proud and sweaty producer
in generous, toiling, filthy, happy hands
connected to generous, toiling, supple wrists
connected to generous, weathered forearms
connected to generous, toiling, unsung elbows

Yes! More Power to Our Elbows!
& All Power to the Allotments!

from each according to their agility
to each according to their taste

this land yields food fit for
neither a king nor a slave
but fit for a human being

this land levels pretension
this land plays host to the revolutions of the seasons
this land cradles
roots that undermine
this land is shadowed
by the joy of leaf and flower and fruit

this land is an earthy barricade
against the fascism
of conformist
uniformist bourgeois counter-revolutionary
counter-evolutionary petite bourgeois imperialist
materialist xenophobic terraphobic petty petite bourgeois
consumerist illusionist confusionist reactionary
refractionary petty petty petty bourgeois
fascistically lit super market vegetable displays

this land is an earthy barricade
this land is an earthy serenade
this land is an earthy cascade
of root, fruit, shoot, leaf, flower
of pod of sod of
fodder for stomach, heart and soul

Comrades in spades!
Let a hundred courgette flowers bloom!

let allotments roll higgledy piggledy across the land
like a harlequin's haphazard cloak of earthy hues

Comrades in spades
we have nothing to lose
but our neonic, demonic, necrophiliac, necrophobic
supermarket chains!

More Power to our Elbows!
All Power to the Allotments!

More Power to our Elbows!
All Power to the Allotments!

More Power to our Elbows!
All Power to the Allotments!



25 reasons why men should wear skirts and dresses

because you will be teased by delicious breezes
because men's clothes can be so fucking boring
because your father will be proud of you
because you will feel vulnerabl
because you will feel powerful
because, man, you will look gorgeous
because people *will* stop and stare
because that fluorescent pink tutu is calling out to you
because, when she cradled you as a baby in her arms, it was your grandmother's secret whispered wish
because you'll be able to ask your friends to zip you up
because it *will* lead to tights and lipstick and eye shadow and mascara
because your son and his school friends need good male role models
because it'll broaden your career opportunities
because your soul will billow as you run through the meadow
 and your spine will unfurl
 and the warm sexual vapours of the earth will rise up and greet you
 and your sexuality will dissolve into fluidity
 and it'll increase your shopping options
 and your lover might well just lift up your hem
 and fuck you
because your daughter will raid your wardrobe
because you will be able to raid your daughter's wardrobe
because your legs deserve it and
because the world deserves your legs
because it'll make not wearing underwear all the more exciting
because, man, it will tickle your fancy.

triangular view of the end of the year

i human eye

dog disembarks itself upon my horizon
black dog chasing the winter sun
obviously oblivious
and admirably so
to person rhyme or reason
no purpose informs the galloping limbs of this lolloping being
beyond its dogslobbering intent
to pursue absolutely nothing in particular
across the field of my view

flying across the winterwheat
with an enthusiasm
no number of harvested weetabix could supply

ii dog eye

i'm a dog there's a rabbit no it's not i'm a dog now where's my tail i'm sure i saw it
this morning i will run and look for it i'm so happy i'm a dog look there's a tin of
dogfood where nowhere only joking ha ha ha i'm so happy i like sleeping too and
eating there's another dog no it's not it's just me i like running i could run for ever i
wonder what's for dinner smells smells smells i like smells i like my nose i know i'll
run after it and i'll catch my nose and once i've caught my nose i'll go and catch
those smells i'm a dog yes i'm a dog am i chasing a rabbit i can't remember now
how many legs have i got oh i can't count i'm going so fast i could do with a screw
and some chocolate i wonder what's for dinner no i've wondered that already i'm a
dog actually i think my tail is stuck to my bum i can't tell i'm going so fast i'm a dog

iii owl eye

there's a dog in the field
there's a human in a window

there's a mouse on my mind

April's clock

how delicious the taste of the weave of the air
with its murmuring warmth
and echoing chill
how lipticklingly sweet
how incomplete
how promising, how sticky, how still

how fecund the fulcrum of this season's seesaw
from celibate winter
towards summer's open thighs
how tantalisingly light the green of the trees
how edible the blue of the skies

how elusively poignant spring's clement increments
which permeate and aerate the blood of our veins
how quickly, how slowly
how horny, how holy
this tension of sun
and rain

how fertile the juices which percolate and undulate
through every fair creature, through each leaf and flower
how lazy the daisies embroidering my blanket
how timely this dandelion hour
how timely this dandelion hour

A quick ley line

I wanna be an urban shaman
jay-fire-walker, neo-pagan
I want one-minute-microwave-instant-magic
I want voodoo pills and juju gadgets

I wanna live by Greenwich Dream Time
I wanna singalong those neon song-lines
I want primal ecstasy and dervish whizz
I want astrological certainty and cosmological fizz

I want Microsoft Spell-Maker integrated software
I want Amazonian Witch Doctor kinky underwear
I want pick'n'mix goddesses and big-pricked gods
I wanna tread my vegan trainers where they have trod

I want the key to my chakras – I want instant access
I want karmic fame and fortune – I want New Age success
I want Mayan love potions and vanishing creams
I want an Astral Projector and a Lucid Dream Machine

I wanna build a concrete totem
I want yogic flexibility so I can lick my own scrotum
I want crystal suppositories and pyramidic pills
I want tantric thrills and tantric spills

Yeah, I wanna be an urban shaman
jay-fire-walker, neo-pagan
I want one-minute-microwave-instant-magic
I want voodoo pills and juju gadgets
and *Hare! Hare! Hare!*
I want it all by the power of NOW!

god she was

she dealt with dirt and glory
never kept nothing clean
she was a god
forgetful and passionate and proud

didn't do the big miracles
but things strange enough
to get her noticed

she lived in dirt and glory
never washed with soap and water
just scrubbed her pores open
with a gnarly garden stone
crisscrossing her body with fiery paths of pain
shedding her skin
as sacred dust

she rolled in dirt and glory
never stayed in
shone quietly in her drunken majesty
downed and drowned their pain
drank each and every one of them under the table
and then wandered lonely puking praying singing home

she dealt in dirt and glory
never once said please
only threw punches if she loved you
only cursed you if she cared
wrapped you in jokes and hugs and laughter
till your ribs were fit to burst

she died in dirt and glory
never saw it coming
jigging across the road to an ancient tune
pitched up into the air by some twatted joy-riders
singing bacchanalian Alleluias as she spiralled from life into death

at her funeral
her mourners' tears joined as rivulets rolling down the nave's cold-stoned floor

she watched them from the rafters
bathing in the rising vapours of their voices
booming along to her favourite hymns
let fall a tear or two of her own
salty droplets bouncing off their mournfully-hatted heads

and later
after all the fuss had settled down
half a dozen of her disciples gathered at her favourite watering hole
and tried to make some sense of it all
spent several days and nights
and countless doubles and countless pints
pulling together threads and stories and one-liners
into some roughly embroidered gospel
until her family's lawyers got wind of it
and threatened to sue them all

so they scitter-scattered to the eight gates of the city
with their tails between their teeth
and the barman at their heels

but there was one
who remained
an apostle too sozzled to shift
stayed put and stubbornly persisted
used up every damn beer mat in the whole damn place
penning and re-penning
a liturgy to do her proud

and thus
she lived on
in ceremonies of words and wine and salt and kisses and song
and the dirt of her glory
formed pearls in the fractured shells of their hearts
which ached
for her return

kingfisher kingfisher sing me a song
(Isis Remix)

i caught this morning
your electric blue flight
spearing through the airwaves
oblivious to the gravity
of the slow green water below

you flew past me with such eager recognition
that I found myself whistling across the river
as you dived down to its surface
and skated so swiftly and breathlessly away

i have a fuel tank inside me
marked "Kingfisher Joy"

you filled me up

i can run for years

Strung out

Sometimes I feel like I'm a washing line
with one end attached to an erect metal pole
and the other wound and knotted around an old garden tree
my underwear dangling and fluttering for all the world to see

And atop the aforementioned erect metal pole
perch a merry scrattle of productivity gods
voracious little devils
greedy beaks wide open to the air

Feed us our daily busyness
Feed us our weekly success
Feed us with constantly unrealistic and unachievable work loads
and lead us not into unproductive idleness
Feed us with Escheresque tail-chasing
Feed us with never enough
Feed us with the tautness of your trapezius
the perplexity of your solar plexus
and the pounding temples of your mind
Feed us with endless pages of
tick tock tick tock tick tock tick tick tick tick never completely ticked boxes

Thus do the cackling gods of doing tug upon my washing line
like a hoard of randy Morse code operators on speed

And at the other end of the garden, wrapped around the aforementioned old garden
tree
lounge an ooze of existential goddesses
sexy little devils
armpits wide open to the breeze

Come, laze with us
loiter, linger, lie
dilly dally your willy-nilly and watch the clouds go by
feed us on éclairs of unearned bliss
feed us on the royal jelly or your best intentions
the sweet treacle of your spongey brain
the honeyed yearning of your sultry groin
feed us with the sacred mantra of indolent Nirvana:
mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmañana mañana mañana

Thus do the siren goddesses of being strum upon my washing line
like a orchard of fertile double bassists on opium

And I find, in this back garden of my soul
that if I run too much with the must dos
then the unbusy bees sting my body
but if I hang out too much with the let it bees
then the doers they do me in

(sometimes I feel like a bewildered child
caught in an ancient custody battle)

But on a good, mortal washing day
when I manage to hang out my laundry
with a reasonable rhythm of
do
be
do
be
do be do be do
then these clothes peg deities allow the sun to shine
and sometimes even harmonise on that well-hung washing line

allowing me to ease into bed at night
with a well-laundered satisfaction
and enough clean, dry underwear
to see me through the approaching storms

The Guest House (Old Peculier Bed & Breakfast Remix)

This being human business
it's a bit like being a bloomin' Bed & Breakfast
Every morning someone new on your doorstep

A joy, a depression, a betrayal
or perhaps one of those little flashes of sweet clarity
amid all the milk bottles and bin bags and bills

Open the door and greet them all
Even if they're a skulky hooded bunch of crap moments
who end up running off with
all your bars of guest soap and towels and prized consumer durables
(including the stereo – which was bolted down)

Whatever, treat each and every new guest with respect
You never know, they might be ransacking you
to make way for some new delight

The exhaustion, the grief, the guilt, the self-judgement, the despair,
all those gnarled and gnarly beings you'd rather turn away
Meet them all on your doorstep
with a big smile on your chops
and a couple of open bottles of Theakstons Old Peculier
and welcome each and every one in

Yes, give thanks for whomsoever crosses your threshold
because every single guest has been sent
by the Great Tourist Board Beyond
to test the strength of the springs of your bed
and the mettle of your heart and soul

thus do I cuckold

my duvet and me have
come to a loosely monogamous arrangement
at least
I don't tell him
who I've been sleeping with or in or under

I just let myself in
and sneak quietly under his gentle lonely skin
and play slightly deaf and cute and nonchalant
in the hope that my adulterous absence
hasn't banished the welcome warmth he offers
(which is what attracted me to him in the first place)

it's true, though, some of the excitement
has gone out of our relationship
the passion too
I don't jump on top of him like I used to
his tog-count is down
he sometimes forgets to wash
I have problems getting up in the mornings
and he no longer takes much of
an interest in what I wear

but, there's a certain
predictable domesticity
to what we've got going
that I'd be loathed to leave for long

still, at night I
harbour unfaithful dreams
of my sleepingbag lover
her purple sheen
and eager lips
the way she guides me inside her
lets me enter her silky depths
and when she has had
her fill of me and
me my fill of her
she mouths and murmurs
such sweet and forbidden lullabies

Irritable Vowel Syndrome

A!
E!
I!
O!
Fuck U!

Holy Communion

Ah!
The unsung beauty of ink
eking its fluid soul
into the open pores
of an open page
staining the pulp of a tree that once raced for the light
its branches and leaves dancing sunward bound
to the arterial pulse of its deep-rooted trunk
swelling each intricately persistent vein
with the wisdom of the earth
and the wordless glory
of a star-speckled night
conjuring from
its depths
a lover
dreaming of the ripeness of his beloved
the hushed prayer of her breath
the fine weave of her skin
the scent of the waxing moon within her blood
the sleepy rise and fall of her tidal belly
the sweet nothings
whispered
upon the cusp of dawn
the pressing nib of his desire
the royal plumage of the rising sun
the single breath of their tangled bodies
the witty laughter on the roof of the rain at play
the incremental yawn of her welcoming thighs
and then
the joy
the pitch black ink black joy
of a parched and thirsty quill
dipped into the liquid song
of an unfathomable well
of sacramentally inky
splendour

One Time! (a blessing for my friends in South Africa)

that we find our tails
today rather than tomorrow
and only go chasing after them when
we need the exercise, excitement or entertainment

that we find our true love
and she/he/it loves us back
and only gives us the hassle we deserve

that we find our feet
and like the look of them

that we find our voices
and like the sounds of them

that we find our callings
or they find us

that we find our paths
and they cross often

that we find our vocations
and they beat all our expenses

that we find our favourite party clothes
and all the best parties

that we find our joy
and don't get locked up for it

that we find our passion
and don't give a fuck about the stains

that we find our keys/wallets/purses/glasses/drugs
where we last put them down
and that we remember where we last put them down

that we find our children
forgiving and loving

that we find our marbles

before we lose them

that we find our food
and selves
and lives
to our liking

Greasing the Maypole

Mayday 2001

Come workers, come witches
Come socialists, come elves
Come wizards, come peasants
& break your sleepy spells

Yes! Arise ye from your covens & squats & slumbers
in unvanquishable numbers
& greet the May morn

Come communists, come shamen
High priestesses & worker priests
Come alchemists & anarchists
& join in May Day's feast

Hecate call Emma Goldman
Vanzetti call on Pan
Woman call Woman
Man call Man

Ye Haymarket martyrs
& oak-rooted satyrs
Ye rank & file goddesses
& divine shop stewardesses
Come marry your colours & dreams

Let red & black fly from the green Maypole heights
Let riots of wild flowers spread like wildcat strikes

Yes, come all ye Wiccan-syndicalists & eco-agitators
Ye anti-fascist faeries & allotment propagators
Plant those Beltane barricades of hawthorn & yew
& in the seasoned pagan cauldron cook an anarchist stew

Come all ye soviet astrologers & pantheistic punks
Ye cannabis conspirators & anarcho-Bacchanalian drunks
Come all ye pacifist pixies & direct action druids
Celebrate your fluid bodies & all your bodily fluids

Come ye all

& let whatever is
tight
in your ideology or psychology or theology or pantheology
be gently loosened by the rhythms of the earth

for a pleasure to one is a pleasure to all

Yes! Down with the bosses & up with the sun
Phone in well
& clock in for fun
"If I can't dance, it's not my revolution," the fiery Emma said
& the cleverest cops are often those ones patrolling inside our heads

So raise your embroidered banners & drop your underwear
& show your arses to the ruling classes & have no care
for tomorrow
for Mother Earth will carry you
& knows a thing or two or three about revolutions

Yeah, come workers & come witches
Come revolutionaries, come elves
Come anti-warlocks & anti-warriors
& snap out of your sleepy spells

Oh, arise ye from your covens & squats & permaculture plots
in unvanquishable
& deliciously banquetable numbers
& greet the fair, sweet, budding & bursting
& horny May morn

bodhisattva dribble

(i)

you slip into sleep in my october arms
and become my mid-morning meditation

I follow the shadow of the smile of your milkywise mouth
trace the fine lilac streams upon the dreamy lids of your eyes
breathe in the dusty strawberry warmth of your scalp
and my eyes
come to rest
upon your cradle-capped crown
quietly open and pulsing
invisibly umbilical to the unboned unknown

you my little laptop buddha
in your saffron elephant-patterned suit

(ii)

over our babysitting weeks
I have watched your chubby arms and monkeygrip fingers
from random forage
discover a predictable reach and tenacity
and
no doubt
your unwritten mind and voice will follow suit
and your open crown will close over
with the skulled plates of language
and you will gain
deliberation
consideration
a dictionary of ordered sounds

but
my little forming friend
(as your marrow knows full well)
the good times
the really good times
don't play by the book
are always outside the skull's enclosure
wordless and porous
unspeakably beautiful
unspeakably good

Cycling back from Kirtlington quarry along the Oxford Canal one early Sunday morning

hooray for water and waterways
hooray for the unsung navigators

hooray for nettle stings
and blackberry lips
hooray for dogs' damp noses

hooray for the oxford boaties
and their animal warmth
hooray for floating bedrooms

hooray for beerbottle laughs
and redwine smiles
hooray for foiled potatoes

hooray for woven flames
and embered eyes
hooray for grassy dancefloors

hooray for repetitive beats
and quarried cliffs
hooray for smoky bodies

hooray for mushroom tea
and wishful stars
hooray for dreamy children

hooray for the gawky heron
perched on the pipe
hooray for august's plenty

hooray for the pyjama clouds
and the breakfast sun
hooray for morning's glory

yes
hooray for water and water's ways
and hooray for the unsung navigators

God's spittle (*doof doof* mix)

Oh you fuckedup angels dancing on the head of a pin
You madhatted tranceheads with your Cheshirecat grins
You jawclenchers and heartwrenchers, you dancefloor divas
You limbflailing ravers and you dodgy wheelerdealers
You lysergic acid diethylamide droppers
You triphop losttheplot dilated pupilpoppers
You gossamer faeries, you ganjabrained freaks
You luddite cloghoppers and you cyberpunk geeks
You shamanic depressives, you sheer magicians
You overcooked cosmologists and mashed metaphysicians
You holographic harlequins, you floozy oozers
You peyote coyotes and you cokehead cruisers
You magic mushroom chowers with your topsy-turvy spores
You wellturfed virgins and you dustbowl whores
You ravishing scavengers, you ignorant gurners
You 24-7 doublewick burners
You rizlaorigamists, you merrily mulling mullers
You bellybuttonpushers and you nippleringpullers
You fluffy rainbowchasers, you skulky hoodedtops
You swirlingdervishdykes and you proud cocksinfrocks
You psychedelic psychotherapists dancing out your karma
You wannabe yogis with your DIY dharmas
You charas aficionados, you sweetlyskanking tokers
You waybeyond GMT DMT smokers
You absolutely schmangled under the starspangled sky
You acidraw souls with your openbook eyes
You voodooDJs spinning spells like spiders' webs
You wellseasoned ferals with your welltendrilled dreads
You methylenedioxymethamphetamine chewinggumchewers
You vodkaqueens and lagerlouts and homesweethomebrewers
You vampyres and nighthounds skewering the night away
You sunworshippers praising at the break of day

Yes! All you glorious, you furious
you fuckwits and fuckwise
For an hour or two we just broke on through
broke on through
broke on through
to the other side

(I saw it in the spinning and the grinning of your eyes)

Like scattered shards of something greater
each a dog-eared jigsaw piece
when we get our acts together, wonders will never cease

Yeah, we may be fuckedup angels with disobedient wings
But our humanity sometimes sparkles when we dance upon that pin

Yeah, even our divinity sometimes winks
when we do our
doof doof doof doof thing

the mourning after pills

after the ecstasy
the laundry
after the glory
the skuzz
after the release
the bogbrush
after the satori
the fuzz

after the angels
the traffic wardens
after your heart
your head
after your fluidity
your mortality
after the party
bed

after the flying
the comedown
after the oceans
the coast
after the dancing
the aching
after the nectar
burnt toast

after the soulmate
the stranger
after the vision
the quest
after the love queen
the lone ranger
after the acid
the test...

Hobo poet

Hobo poet worships the spirits of the hedge
a dry ditch makes the perfect bed
he does not judge the weeds
he often envies the nimble excitement of the bees

Hobo poet knows the long loneliness
drinks from forgotten wells
pleasures himself amid the hawthorn
cries blue moon tears on the shoulder of a stoical oak

Hobo poet feels at ease
in the strangest of places
wakes up besides a silent sea
breathes in life's airs and graces

Hobo poet pockets abandoned words

Hobo poet silently skirts any fearful town
lest the townsfolk accuse him of stealing their dreams
and put him in the stocks
as a warning to their children

Hobo poet dares the young boy with the dreamy gaze
to join him and run away

Hobo poet remembers and then forgets he smells
would give all he owns to touch a pretty woman's pretty skin

Hobo poet dries his socks upon the brambles
and rubs his fingers between his toes
till the raw gaps peel and gleam

Hobo poet bimbles
as aimlessly as a lazy cloud
and when he is sure that nobody can hear him
sings bashfully to God

Hobo poet leaves his hobo mark
on the lintel of every kindness

Hobo poet knows not to argue with ghosts

Hobo poet often dreams of home

Wakes

Moves on

Saint Sid of Corby

Just east of Northampton
(by the Lumbertubs roundabout on the A43)
you pull over for me and my outstretched thumb

I throw my rucksack up into your cab
and climb up and over and in
excitedly
(for lifts from lorries are a rarity nowadays)

Five minutes in
as if on an angel's nod and wink
you quickly cross-fade our conversation
over to that Deeper Stuff we wayfarers are always hungering for
and I feel that hitch-hiking glow
in my hitch-hiker's heart
at the meeting of two apparent strangers

"See that, Stephen," you say
pointing to the army of hairs on your forearm
now standing to attention as one

"That tells me something important is happening in here right now"

You drop me off just outside Corby
and as I climb down
you call me back up

"Stephen," you say
"If ever you find yourself
standing on the edge of something
you know you've got to do
but are dithering about doing it
just think of Sid
right behind you, mate
giving you a big royal kick up the arse"

Ah, Sid, many times over the years
have I remembered you and your words
(and blessed you and all that you love)
but until now

I've never dared redeem the threat of that promise that you made

But this side of midnight
and the turning of the years
it's time for this hitch-hiking English poet
to pull his poetic finger out
lick it
and stick it in the air

and thereby set my course

Ah, good Sid, wherever you are
by the hairs on your arm
and the hairs on my arse
let your sweet boot swing, my friend
let your sweet boot swing

The Realm of the Beggar King

When there are no keys in your pocket
and no cares on your mind
When you don't know the day
and you don't know the time
When the sun's your only compass
and the moon's your only lover
When the stars are your ceiling
or a yew tree is your cover
When you envy no creature
except the bird on the wing
Then you know you're at the helm
of that liminal realm:
The realm of the beggar
king

When your sweat smells of vinegar
and your underwear smells of cheese
When there are outbreaks of mutiny
amongst the fibres of your knees
When that blister on your sole
is beginning to slip and to slide
When you've been waiting three hours or more
and still ain't got a ride
When your belly begins to howl
and your socks begin to ming
Then you know you're at the helm
of that liminal realm:
The realm of the beggar
king

When you're in a foreign land
yet feel totally at home
When the sunlight on the mountainside
thrills you to the bone
When that complete stranger at the wheel
feels as easy as a friend
When you've pitched your tent on a western shore
and don't want the day to end
When the dawn chorus wakes you
and makes you want to sing

Then you know you're at the helm
of that liminal realm:
The realm of the beggar
king

When some boy racer's just given you the finger
and some snotty brats have just given you the thumb
When you're tempted to hurl curses back
When your faith in life's gone numb
When you daydream of past glories
and fear you've lost the knack
When you wonder why you keep on doing this shit
but there ain't no turning back
When all the spiritual tomes you've ever read
no longer mean a thing
Then you know you're at the helm
of that liminal realm:
The realm of the beggar
king

When you're in the middle of nowhere
yet in the scheme of things
When the hobo angels by your side
are pulling all the strings
When you've remembered the rules of thumb
and life is but a game
When that vehicle on the horizon
is calling out your name
When that old red Porsche has just pulled over
or that family of six has squeezed you in
Then you know you're at the helm
of that liminal realm:
The realm of the beggar
king

In the commonwealth

Somewhere
between music and ink
between dream and water
between fire and laughter
between rock and calling
between skin and thought
between pearl and wind
between salt and insight
between blood and song

there lies a realm

in which
the Queen rules naked
and the King sips nectar
and old elephants give counsel

and you know that you're finally home

Them Babylon Blues (cabin remix)

We used to be hairy and sweaty and burly
But Babylon grabbed us by the short and curlies
Now we're all smooth and perfumed and compliant

We used to be wet and fecund and rude
But Babylon's sweet and easy food
Has left us parched and sterile and reliant

We used to know our true size and our true worth
But Babylon weighed us all at birth
Now we're branded with facts and figures

We used to look directly into our enemy's eyes
But Babylon taught us how to hide
Behind pulleys and levers and triggers

We used to tell stories that never ever ended
But Babylon was mortally offended
Now we're benumbed by the crass and fantastic

We used to honour both cock and cunt
But Babylon feared the vulgar hunt
Now our meat comes wrapped in plastic

We used to see visions in the flames of the flickering fire
But Babylon stole our burning desires
Now we watch a dimly-lit box

We used to stride across hills and mountains and streams
But Babylon enclosed our common dreams
Now we fiddle with keys and locks

We used to feel the earth's rhythms thrumming through our naked feet
But Babylon made us walk its jagged streets
Till we silenced our soles with shoes

We used to dance through the night as a tribe
But Babylon scattered us far and wide
Now we just sing them Babylon blues

Them Babylon blues

Them Babylon blues
We just sing them Babylon blues

Them Babylon blues
Them Babylon blues
We just sing them Babylon blues

Three poets intercede

William Blake &
Allen Ginsberg &
Adrian Mitchell
all refused to enter Heaven's gates
until every single last name
was written down in the Book of Life

"All for one!"
exclaimed William
brandishing his Bow of burning gold

"And one for all!"
his brothers replied

"All or nothing!"
intoned Allen
brandishing his buddhist Cock

"Ameyn!"
his brothers declared

"Because an injury to one is an injury to all!"
chanted Adrian
brandishing his Heart upon his sleeve

"And another's delight is my delight too!"
his brothers they merrily sang

St Peter got on his radio and called for back-up

Azrael and Chamuel appeared
with twelve van-loads of well-togged riot-cherubims

William Blake &
Allen Ginsberg &
Adrian Mitchell
were hauled before Lucifer
who showed them the sulphur-belching canyons that house the vast hoards of hell

"I shall pay their ransom,"
spake William

“with the ink of my arteries.”

“And I shall pay their ransom,”
spake Allen
“with the ink of my veins.”

“And I shall pay their ransom,”
spake Adrian
“with the ink of my capillaries.
However
if it is within your
albeit fallen
angelic powers
would you be so fair as to release
the war-mongers
and the fascists
last?”

William Blake &
Allen Ginsberg &
Adrian Mitchell
were bundled up to Heaven and
paraded naked before the Lord upon His Throne

“Where’s your beautiful wife?”
asked William
“For were not both Man and Woman made in your Image?”

“And where’s your beautiful lover?”
asked Allen
“For surely a man must be able to receive
at least as well as he gives?”

“And where’s your beautiful dog?”
asked Adrian
“Because you’re looking rather glum.”

And the Lord of Lords
and Host of Hosts
He smiled

for the first time
in Ages

Bemused

Sometimes she comes like a kitchen spider
Sometimes in a randy dream
Sometimes she takes me deep inside her
Often she is nowhere
to be seen

She says ink is blood
that she's a vampire
She says loads of crazy things
She says she's sorry that she ever left me
and then she sings

Oh! how she sings

Such thirsty sounds
such hungry songs

And my ink bleeds sweet
and my ink bleeds strong

Fire Water (King James Version)

And on the twelfth day
God harvested the golden barley
and steeped it in the waters of the purest mountain stream
and slowly roasted it over a peaty fire
and milled it to a grist
and mashed the grist within a tun
and poured the holy brew into a vat
and stirred in some fresh and restless yeast
and instructed a couple of cherubim-technicians
to manifest the visionary distillery conjured by His mind

But He rejected the first batch as little better than fortified wine
and told them to boil and cool it once again
and then weather the best of it in barrels of wise and welcome oak
until
in His vast yet gentle hand
He raised a glass of fluid amber fire
to the fully ripened evening sun

And God tasted that it was good

and suspiciously dangerous as well
as He watched the virgin whisky vapours
helter skelter down to hell

And Lucifer he rose
like a wintered bull in Spring
his nostrils flaring and flickering around the sweet and fiery fumes

"My Lord and Master!" said he
"Quite what You – in Your boundless wisdom – have just created, I know not,
but I fear it is no meek and angelic concoction.
Its mere scent has roused me from my deepest slumber with promises beyond my
sober grasp.
What then might it do
to mortal man or woman?"

God passed Lucifer the crystal glass
and Lucifer drank
and drank

till his eyes turned green
and his tongues turned numb with liquid song

“Dance!” commanded God

And Lucifer danced
a drunk and impudent jig
and his cock it rose
and his wings they grew
and he danced right through the night
he did
till the morning star shone through.

And the evening and the morning were the thirteenth day.

A Grandfather's Blessing

Arise beautiful man from your slumbers
Your boyhood days all were numbered
and now are gone
That cygnet between your legs
is become a swan
who needs to fly far away from home
before he finds his song

Arise beautiful man from your well-fed sleep
And though your mother may weep
at your departure
let your heart be sure
that from the very start
she knew this day would come

Arise beautiful man from your innocent rest
And should your father invest
too much of himself in your progress
then put his spies to death
wish him all the best
and journey on

Arise beautiful man from your childish dreams
And leave these pleasant, drowsy streams
for the raucous river that will cut your skin
that will let you drown or make you swim
that will open up and let you in
and race you back home to the ocean

Triptych

(i) Mother and son

It's when I open your wardrobe
to hang up one of your blouses
or to fetch a cardigan
to drape over your skinny autumnal shoulders
that I suddenly feel like weeping

For I glimpse the hollow sight
that will greet me when you've gone:
these same clothes
hanging from their wiry coat hangers
charity-shop-bound

Oh that your body was not wasting away like this
that we could walk
hand in hand
around the garden under this generous October sun
sharing love and smiles and health
both confident of spring

(ii) Prayer for mum

Call ahead to the angels
and let them know:
A faithful servant
approaches your gates

Ask them to prepare for her
a place at the table of her Lord
in the presence of all those
she has ever loved
May her eyes behold His grace and glory
May He call her by her name

May she drink from the living waters
of the river of eternal life
in heaven
as on earth

Quench, oh Lord, her pilgrim's thirst
and may the cup
of her loyal heart overflow with
kindness and with joy

(iii) Leaving Iona

The firm geography of the island
dissolves before my tearful eyes
as we cross
The Sound of Iona
bound for Mull
and then the mainland
and then the long journey southbound home

Swiftly the village
shuns the Abbey
forcing it to seek sanctuary
within the eastern lee of the flanks of *Dun I*
upon which the ash
of your flesh and bone
now lie cradled
by that elemental trinity of rock and sea and sky

Beasts and demons

(i)

The slightest flutter of nerve impulses
registers in my brain
and I look down
to see you standing there
six-leggedly astride the small but weeping wound upon my foot

With instinctive disgust
I flick you off

But you have a taste now
for my excretions
a palpable hunger too
and even though I cup my hand around my foot
you flit and scuttle about my toes and fingers
like a greedy little monster
who knows neither fear nor shame

(ii)

During the Crimean War
nurses noticed
that the maggots of *Calliphora Vomitoria*
which hatched within the soldiers' wounds
would feast upon the dead flesh
and thereby keep them clean

This soon became deliberate battlefield medical practice

(iii)

If ever you find yourself giving thanks
for the beauty of this world
then give thanks also
for its apparent ugliness

For those monsters and beasts and demons
(of all shapes and realms and sizes)
who feast upon our human waste
who carry disease and cure and revulsion
upon their limbs and tongues and backs

Who hold our ambivalence and our darkness
within the gossamer prayers and curses
of their sturdy adult wings

Lilith
for Lil

first born of the garden
first born of the garden's clay
first born of the morning star
first born of the waking day

perfectly sufficient to her creator
formed from heaven and earth's first touch
but too challenging for immature Adam
too potent, too free, too much

tarred and feathered by his slander
she offered no defence to what was not true
swallowing his curses as a blessing
upon those dark wings she rose up and flew

first born of the open sky
first born of full flight
first born of the moon and thunder
first born of the night

The gardener of Aleppo

For Ibrahim, son of Abu Ward

Oh, Ibrahim, my beautiful boy
how my heart quietly sang
every time you filled
your watering can
and overflowed with joy

No prouder father
has this city ever known
for in our bones
we both knew
what we were risking

For this is the garden's song
we heard each and every dawn:
Today a seed must give its life
for beauty to be born

Here, my son
my comfort
Here, my son
my hand
And here, my son
my gardener's heart

May one day it bloom within your broken heart
and across this broken land

My heart sings

Like an open book
that gently rises and falls
upon the chest of its dozing reader
is my love for Thee, oh Lord
Who art the ink of every word
and the very heart of the sun
that gave the light
that fed the tree
that made the page
upon which each and every word is printed

Paper and skin and ink art Thou
Intimate with all things

Like the sweetness
of the salt
of the tears that mark the end of suffering
is my gratitude to Thee, my Lady
Who art the very iron in my blood
and the pulse of the heart of the moon
that pulls the earth
that tugs the tide
that makes the waves
that wash about my feet

Sea and flesh and sand art Thou
Intimate with all things.

Like the song
of the petals
of the flower
that opens each morning
to the grace and the hum
of the humble bumble bee
is my praise for Thee
oh Creator and Creation

Nectar and pollen art Thou
honey and taste and tongue

Intimate with all things

aka Kalika

She threw the slickest moves on the dancefloor
hardened many a soft man
oozed rich and sticky promises
upon the threads of the web that She span

She wore the blackest skin on the dancefloor
blacker than a tar black night
No man who entered Her ever returned
not even the Son of Light

She wielded the keenest blade on the dancefloor
could slit a throat with just one glance
wore like jewels the severed heads of all the fools
who'd ever asked Her for a dance

She yielded to no one on the dancefloor
except the whims of Her scimitar mind
but she could turn cruelty into kindness
like water into wine

For She shielded the most tender heart on the dancefloor
behind a breast plate of Time
Destruction was Her rhythm
but creation was Her rhyme

Destruction was Her rhythm
but creation was Her rhyme

Middle Aged Ravers

for Jennafire

We used to meet front left of the dance floor
Now we meet back right
We used to stay up for days on end
Now we rarely make it through the night

We used to go heroically high
And we used to go epically deep
We used to brag about our levels of consumption
Now we brag about our hours of sleep

Coz we're the middle aged ravers
Whom fortune once favoured
We should know better
(but we don't)

We used to lose our inhibitions
We used to lose our minds
Now we just lose our marbles
And stumble around half-blind

We used to rage like digital demons
And groove like analogue nuns
We used to travel to the thirteenth dimension
But now we just wanna have fun

Coz we're the middle aged ravers
Whom fortune once favoured
We should know better
(but we don't)

We used to take it to the limit
And then shove it into overdrive
We used to cruise at 148 bpm
Now we rarely make it past 135

We used to be the cool cat's whiskers
We used to be the queen bee's knees
Now we're just the old dog's bollocks
(but they still taste good to me)

Coz we're the middle aged ravers
Whom fortune once favoured
We once knew better
but now we can't even remember
what the original question
was

Amazon Grace

Sometimes she comes as an invitation
whispered upon the breeze
Sometimes she comes as the eye of the storm
that bends you to your knees

Sometimes she comes as a kingfisher's
shy and electric flight
Sometimes she comes as the endless play
of the surface of the river
and the surplus of the light

Sometimes she comes as the medicine
of a rich and bitter brew
that turns your insides out and outsides in
and shows you what is true

Sometimes she comes as
an ancient song
sung on the cusp of dawn
bringing tears of wonder
to those who suffer
and tears of joy
to those who mourn

Praise Pachamama!
Praise Pachamama!
from whom we all are born

Pilgrim's progress

Just put one foot
in front of the other

Leave all fancy
angelic-apparition-beatific-vision-instant-enlightenment
plans behind

Instead
pray constantly
that sore twinge
on the bottom of your big toe
doesn't rub into a blister

Trust the path before you
and if you believe in God
trust God
otherwise
trust your legs

Trust the path
trust your knees
trust your feet
trust your toes

No fancy pants
no fancy plans
just one pilgrim foot
in front of the other pilgrim foot
and then that one in front of the other

And when you ease into your wayfarer's bed
at the end of another well-trod day
let your aching salty faithful body
softly open its pilgrim belly
and to the rafters raise
exhausted hymns of gratitude
and silent songs of praise

Keeping the faith

To open the stove door at dawn
and find some embers still aglow
within their comfy bed of ash

To build this morning's fire upon their promise
and with focussed breath
to burst it into flame

It's as if some kind old soul
has been praying for me all night long
watching over me
keeping the faith

To peg my shirt and underwear around the warming chimney pipe
to put the kettle on
to make my morning cup of tea

To clothe my nakedness
in the welcome warmth
of this relay race of grace

To sit by this window
and write this poem
whilst the sun
(from whom all fire and flame proceed)
rises gloriously through the morning clouds
to burst upon the sea
a path of such dazzling and inviting light

This
is the medicine
that daily
brings me back to life

A day so silent

(i)

A day so silent
it makes me wonder if perhaps something
momentous is happening in the outside world

or maybe it's because
I didn't have any breakfast
and haven't yet had any lunch

(ii)

I cut a twig of rosemary from the garden
and snip its needles
into the simmering rice
grind in a little salt

The cabin windows begin to steam

Perhaps this silence is the sound
of my soul returning?
I whisper cautiously
to myself

(iii)

I let the fire go out last night
because the chimney sweep was coming this morning
I wasn't that keen on getting out of bed
there were traces of nocturnal ice along the bottom of the windows

After he'd gone
I made and lit the fire
swept and mopped the floor
and then walked down to the sea
past bundles of quietly joyful snowdrops
and a solitary primrose
gently beckoning spring

(iv)

Upon my return
patches of the floor were still wet

so I put on some old odd socks
and danced the floor dry
sliding and shuffling and skating
to some comic and silent song

(v)

And to think:

only yesterday

I'd seriously considered throwing those mismatched socks away

Every day a gift

Monday morning blues
of the rippling sea beneath
mother of pearl skies

Tuesday brings strong winds
and rivulets running down
rain-freckled windows

Wednesday's clouds meld sky
and sea – whilst through the salty
mist white horses roam

Thursday's storms wake me
at dawn and carry me down
to a raging shore

Friday brings Venus
diamond sister of the moon
calling forth the sun

Saturday's drizzle
serves me porridge and coffee
by a faithful fire

Sunday's golden sky
soon clothes herself in grey – but
I've glimpsed her glory

Man down

*"I wish I could show you,
when you are lonely or in darkness,
the astonishing light of your own being."*

Hafez

Ah, James
party buddy
frisbee partner
coastline walker
witty talker
mushroom hunter
mandala maker
plant whisperer
music lover
dancefloor groover
funny and faithful
friend

you
beautiful, fragile
(occasionally really annoying)
ever so human being:

it's ages since we last saw one another
but I left you two messages this week
inviting you over for dinner
and you never replied
because you were already dead

What kind of excuse is that?

I woke this morning long before dawn
with your life and death and friendship and suffering beating within my heart
played "Another One Bites The Dust" in honour
of your dark sense of humour
and your love of a good tune

And at the break of day
I walked down to the eerily mercurial sea

a bright waning moon hovering high above the cliffs

and on the edge of the shore
I let the incoming shock waves of your departure
unburden my belly of grief
felt the absence of your presence
and the presence of your absence
and the nonsense of it all
let them salty tears fall
let them salty tears fall

And then
with futile rage
across the oceans of time and space I roared
"James, you ***** twat!
James, you ***** twat!"

Because all of our love
and all of our grief
can never bring you back
my friend
can never bring you back

(peace to you, buddy
perfect peace)

Auguries of Innocence & Eternity (mindfulness remix)

Joy & Woe are woven fine
A clothing for the soul divine
For under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine

He who shuns a visiting sorrow
Invites three to call tomorrow
But he who welcomes Sorrow on his step
Lives for ever without regret

She who binds to herself a joy
Does the wingèd Life destroy
But she who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise

It is right it should be so
For we were made for Joy & Woe
And when this we rightly know
Thro' the World we safely go

humankindness

it only took a few days
for her precious little act
of kindness
to leave the village bounds

it only took a few days more
to infect the local town

then it spread across the country
like a riot of wild flowers
and soon city walls were tumbling
as they lost their ancient powers

over lakes and seas and oceans
it spread from shore to shore
picking every lock on every heart
and opening every door

her kindness disarmed enemies
her kindness disarmed friends

her kindness knew no borders
her kindness knew no end

open up your hearts
she sang
open up your minds
for only human kindness
will prove we're humankind

yes

only human kindness
will prove we're humankind

Closing Prayer

May your dreams be wet and filthy
May your deepest wounds be clean

May your warriors all be dancers
May your king be a raging queen

May whatever tickles your fancy
Tickle your fancy pink

And may whatever your favourite tipple is
Topple you over the brink...





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