

Prize winning poems.



18  
**Autumn Stroll**

Grass under my feet,  
I think!  
It crackles and crunches with the frost,  
I can't see where I'm walking,  
In the dark,  
I know where I am going  
I hope.  
The path sounds hard and hollow  
It must be the bridge  
The bridge goes up and over.  
There's enough light in the sky  
To see the railings  
Along the sides.  
I stop and lean over the railing,  
And look down,  
All I can see is nothing,  
No light for the river to reflect.  
I wait,  
And listen,  
The croak of a sleepy moor-hen  
And a plop  
Of a water rat in a hurry.  
Ah! I see the shimmer of light,  
Ripple on the water's surface,  
It expands slowly from bank to bank,  
I see the silver path  
Across the river.  
The wind has blown away the clouds.  
The shining moon  
Looks down on the glittering path.  
Time to go down the bridge.  
I climbed the gate  
And jumped down into a field,  
Dark shapes lie close by,  
Cows I see talking,  
But hear no words.  
I walk on  
Leaving them having their committee meeting.

A familiar shape  
The pylon  
I must now turn away from the river.  
Bother! the moon has hidden herself,  
I grope through the darkness,  
Suddenly I feel something ahead of me.  
It is hard and cold,  
It's the pylon, I've turned too soon.  
I walk on again,  
Feeling for the path,  
Mud!

The path is muddy and I know where I am,  
And in two minutes  
Lights  
The village  
And Home.

*Catherine Hooper*



3rd

**I Went a Fishing**

I went a fishing  
I took some bait  
Didn't go early  
Didn't go late  
Caught eight fishes  
To put in my pail  
Seven were mackerel  
But the eighth was a whale  
Seven were easy  
To put in my pail  
The whale caused me trouble  
Because of his tail  
Took my catch home  
But what did Mum say  
"Take those fish out,  
Were having steak today."

*Helen Oliver*



## Gnomerie

Some nights I dream  
The gnomes will rise  
and take the Country  
By surprise.  
With fishing rods  
And gleaming eyes —

And I awaken screaming!

Out of suburbia  
Like a tide  
Their scarlet caps  
In flaunting pride  
On powered toadstools  
Fast they rise —

Their plastic eyes a-gleaming

A garden found  
Without a gnome  
Will spell the owner's  
Certain doom  
And rabbits  
Larger than the moon —

Will make a bloody gleaming

The angry  
Pixie hatted band  
Sweep like a scourge  
Across the land  
Burning and killing  
All who scorn  
Those frightful figures on the lawn —

(or was I just day-dreaming?)

I waken  
With a strangled shout  
And from the window  
Peering out,  
Decide without a moments doubt  
I'll buy a dinkie pixie scout  
Complete with fishing rod and trout  
And Bunnies scattered all about

And toadstools simply teeming.

Joyce Mary Stewart Scott

## Shelf Encounter

It stared back at me from the cluttered, mysterious  
Shelves of crystallised time.  
Past the chips of china and cobwebs of glass,  
Through dimming mirrors and hesitant chimes  
It stared back at me.

I came here to hide  
Drawn through the rain and the cold by an ill-lit window  
That promised treasures inside;  
I dreamed around the so-called antiques  
Then felt old myself, because it stared up at me.

Self-portrait; I had proudly signed and framed,  
Poorly painted, now fading shades,  
With slanted smile and uncertain eyes,  
The nervous face of youth; a present gladly given  
To ageing aunt, and then forgotten.  
It stared back at me.

Aunt Victoria, I think she was named; then we moved away  
And I would write a letter another day.  
Another day, another week, another year.  
"I wonder what happened to Auntie, dear?"  
It stared back at me.

A canny, persistent old lady was Auntie,  
Her soul now securing a strange immortality  
In this grubby damp shop, through a portrait of me.  
I stare back at it.

A shuffling sound, a crafty-smiled man,  
Who blames him for making what profit he can?  
No interest displayed in self-conscious explanation  
But an eye on my purse and a mounting impatience.  
I reach for the money, then leave without buying  
Foolish in the rain, hopelessly crying.  
As I ran through the door I stared back at me.

Realisation dawning of nothingness yawning;  
When I am dead and gone, I'll be sold for a song.  
In that second of time, from the dark of eternity,  
I stared back at me.

Elizabeth Shepard



The Parrot (*With humble apologies to Edgar Allan Poe*)

Freezing in a grisly garret, as I chewed a frugal carrot,  
Suddenly there came a Parrot, rattling at the attic lock.  
Opening the grimy portal, I expected some poor mortal,  
Not a loud satanic chortle, which was something of a shock  
Followed by assorted noises borrowed from a Cuckoo Clock  
And the question, 'Wotcher Cock?'

'Fiend or ghoul!' I yelled, affrighted, wishing I were better sighted,  
Or the candle was ignited and I hadn't lost a sock,  
'From what aviary infernal, relict of an Indian Colonel,  
Came you with your gaudy stern all decorated; tell me, Jock?'  
'Why the unexpected pleasure of your presence in the block?'  
But he answered, 'Wotcher Cock?'

Through the door he sidled, hopping, never stopping, never stopping,  
Till he reached the bust adjacent to the broken china clock.  
Reached the Bust of Buster Keaton which he placed his lordly seat on  
While I saw he had no meat on, but was something of a crock.  
He was bleary-eyed and moulting and his knees began to knock  
Though he murmured, 'Wotcher, Cock?'

'Idiotic Bird!' I muttered, 'What a hovel, locked and shuttered,  
'You were choosing when you fluttered here to share my humble stock  
Of vegetables, long un-dated, from a dust-bin liberated;  
What a stupid addle-pated bird, inviting budgie-mock!  
This is England, where a poet's pad's no place for birds to flock!'  
But he answered, 'Wotcher Cock?'

Doubtless, then I thought, he's happy to repeat what some poor chappie  
Muttered, hoping it was snappy, at the Dorchester or Troc.  
But the Bird became more vocal. 'Take me, moron, to the Local!  
Just a sip of rum-and-coke'll do me, while you drink your Hock,  
And, perhaps, some kindly party gives a bird a lump of choc  
If he murmurs, 'Wotcher Cock?'

'If my moulting makes you pensive, cease to be so apprehensive;  
I was punished as offensive where my glowing colours shock,  
In South Africa, where any birds but white ones hit the dock!  
I was friendly with a pigeon, which offended their religion;  
In a dungeon, dank and Stygian, darker than the lair of Brock  
'They imprisoned this old cock!'

'My political offences do not mean I have no senses,  
I can earn my own expenses from Skegness to Abersoch.  
Every bar will be inviting you to bring a Bird reciting  
All the Limericks I'm writing — better than a talking croc!  
You will find I earn, I promise, more than Coco or Grock,  
'Not by saying, 'Wotcher, Cock?'

I accepted what he hinted; soon his Limericks were printed;  
Publishers with joy unstinted advertised his shameful stock.  
Sometimes as we feast together or disport us in the heather,  
While he preens a gaudy feather, still he murmurs, 'Wotcher, Cock?'  
Sips Champagne and winks and murmurs, 'Here's to writing! Have a choc?'  
'Here's to writing! Wotcher, Cock?'

'Kratos'



Death Shall Have No Dominion (Parody of Dylan Thomas)

In the cockcrowing night  
That light denies, lying for lovers  
Innocent as blackberries,  
Ferrying eternity on breath  
Of lyric rhyming barleycorn  
I scorn my dew-day's death;

With bardbreath I broadcast  
A bleak past pitched black in time but crow  
Now that once upon a tomb  
I, womb-wistful in my birthday shroud,  
Sowed salty spendthrift syllables  
Ineffable and loud;

And while embattled dons  
Joust on or prattle paltrywise by  
Oil light, fuss and toil to teach  
Each pun-wondrous alcoholic trick,  
The elixir is mine! I live  
In D.T.'s rhetoric.

Roy Bateman



**Bell-Ringing Classes for Teenagers Tuesdays at 7.30  
Everyone Welcome (after John Betjeman)**

It's amateur night up the steeple;  
The bells ring all wrong round the air;  
And sensitive musical people  
Are driven indoors in despair.

But proud casement windows stand open,  
And Fishburger suppers must wait  
For Tina from Manor House Cottage  
And Kay from the council estate.

No public school voices at tennis,  
The dews on the mossy court fall;  
And the shiny new Slazenger racquets  
Lie under the macs in the hall.

Up the damp steps in the tower  
They are counting in fours and in threes,  
While the faded red plush vestry curtains  
Are stirred in their sleep by the breeze.

The vicar is nodding with pleasure;  
'How healthy – what fun for the young!  
We'll soon have a team fit for Sundays  
To greet us when Matins are sung.'

Ah, sweet summer pastimes of children –  
So rich, yet so suddenly shed;  
For when Autumn's short evenings grew darker  
They all took up Judo instead.

*June Goodenough*

**A Marble**

One Wednesday, I saw beauty in a marble rolling round.  
It was just a plain blue marble, a rolling on the ground.  
But as the sunlight caught it, it glistened and it shone.  
And it really looked quite pretty as it went a-rolling on.  
But then it rolled into the shade and I came out of my dream.  
There was no fascination now, just a marble could be seen.

*Rachael Bletchly*

**Little Mok**

"She'll never rear that child," they said,  
Whispering, with shaking of the head  
As if he were already dead.  
But there was kindness in their hearts. One look  
From the wan smiling mother  
At the black kettle swinging  
On its smokey hook, and they made tea;  
Sat with her  
Till her man came home from the fields.

Lovingly, clumsily, he tended her and the puny child.  
The mother smiled. "Isn't he lovely?"  
Bravely the father lied. "Aye, he's grand."  
Laugh now if you will.  
"Aye, he's grand."  
The three-fold strand of sound  
Compact of father, mother, child,  
Went as a life-line out.  
The weakling, all unknowing, seized it,  
Took what the lean breasts could offer,  
Crept into life.

Later, on spindly legs he went to school.  
"This boy's a fool," the master said.  
"He cannot learn; he wastes my time."  
Then that one left  
To earn more money in a more important school.  
Another came. He said,  
"This boy has genius in his hands;  
He shall not waste his tears on books."  
He found him pieces of wood,  
Sycamore, maple, box,  
The twisted stem of a blown down ivy tree  
bereft of its supporting bole.  
Cunning tools were got for him.  
Pointed, curved, or straight,  
Each to its purpose, each one singing  
Its own secret music in the mind.

*Rachel Murrell*



Under the boy's curved fingers Dead wood lived again  
In semblance of bird or beast,  
Of creeping things, or water dwellers,  
All that he loved in his loved countryside.  
Acorns too, and comfortable ears of wheat.  
And the school's darling dunce became  
The pride of the village.

After many days  
Winding into some small need of fame,  
There came a splendid van  
with apparatus in array  
For the making of pictures on T.V.  
Little Mok smiled inwardly and played his part,  
Head bent in serious concentration,  
And so was seen by a million people  
Of all ages, agape in wonder,  
Watching the frail hand  
At work on a delicate scroll.  
He looked up  
And smiled at the million people  
He would never see.

Soon afterwards  
His candleflame of life flickered, and went out.

Progress  
Has demanded that the cottage where he lived,  
Must go.  
One standing by, pleaded  
And with good humoured indifference was given  
A small panel that hung above the door.  
It showed a carven hare,  
Wary and alert.  
Below the upright form were words,  
Scratched with a good heart, if less of skill,  
"LITTLE MOK LIVED HERE".

*Evelyn Madge Russell*

## The Eagle

Eagle, eagle red eyed eagle  
Turn your skull and look at me  
Make your eyes look big and evil  
And pierce your claws right through the tree.

Eagle, eagle large and splendid  
Spread your wings and catch your prey  
Come to life — no more be blended  
With the Inn sign night and day. *Heather Manly*



## Bath Fever

I must go back to the bath again, to the steamy  
bath and the heat.  
And all I ask is a back brush and flannel  
for my feet;  
And the hot tap and the cold tap, and the soap  
bubbles blinking,  
And a bath cap and a nail brush and a long time  
for thinking.

I must go back to the bath again, to the deep  
and fragrant tub,  
And all I ask is a bath cube and a soft sponge  
to rub,  
And my toy ship and my rubber duck and my  
big yellow swan.  
And the nice noise when the plug's pulled and  
all the waters gone.

I must go back to the bath again, to the towel  
warm and dry,  
And all I ask is a tin of talc and a nightie  
by and by  
And a warm bed and crisp sheets  
and my blankets bright and gay,  
And my Teddy Bear, and my pillow soft and a  
dream 'til another day.

*Rachel Murrell*



### Pain, Divided by Three

There have been three sad, thin women (and others),  
Sisters in their self-devouring despair  
Gnawed away by the blunt, persistent teeth  
of unspecified grief;  
Divided by time and place from each,  
United by the terror of living;  
Hard, black hands squeezing their corporate heart,  
Their one mind clogged with coagulant fear.

One was known as Mad Maud, her real name lost.  
She seemed to inhabit the Ladies loo,  
In that tired city where disease and death  
Were part of daily life.  
She'd Ancient-Mariner you, embarrass  
With her wretched litanies; you'd smile, sick,  
While she prodded, full stops and question marks,  
At her punctured arms, worm-eaten wood.

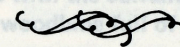
The other was quietly breaking down,  
Year later, leaning over park railings,  
Shouting in stage whispers at nasty things .  
Fidgeting in the shrubs.  
People stopped, mildly curious, seeing nothing  
Where she saw threatening dirty old men.  
She stopped, minutes later, shoved her terror  
In her bag, zipped it up, went home.

The third sat on the polished, slatted bench  
Of the juddering, brass-tacked Dart steamer,  
Tight scarf a helmet, adult son a guard,  
Both failing to protect.  
She saw no tree-tiered banks, no driftwood  
Simulating crocodiles, heard no shouts.  
Her eyes were tear-gummed, her ears deaf with pain.  
Twice she screamed, though, small sounds, a mute child's cough.

They were three, treble, triplicate, the same,  
Each with only half enough rage to rage  
Against *their* dying light, with just enough  
To keep themselves afloat,

Flotsam of an age undesigned for them.  
Do we, in our rented-rooms of confidence,  
Our thoughts on present, future wars, big things,  
See them as mad aunts, not the future us?

Abigail Bennet



2nd

### The Rollright Stones; A Winter's Evening

Bleak,  
With the blind, spiteful wind biting at their skin,  
The stones stand;  
Bent or upright,  
Always desolate in their togetherness.

Cold stone

Under cold sky;

Colour reflected and repeated —

Grey-stone and sky.

The hills roll away behind,

Retreating — in fear.

Cold stone

Striking the soul;

Cold wind

Striking the stone, then

Caressing;

Touch of Death.

Soon the darkness will come rolling in,  
Advancing, unlike the hills;  
Unafraid.

It will encompass the stones,  
Enfold them,  
Cloak them in a garment of satin black  
Untouchable.

Will it restore to them —

Life?

A deadly life, bleak and cold as the wind.

What will they do  
In the night . . . ?

Liz Mathews



## Snail

He stands on a golden blade

Still as stone

Still as stone

His eyes on rods like pogo sticks.

His silhouette

House and all

Slide along

S-l-i-i-d-e

A terrifying shadow crosses his path

A swoop

A swish

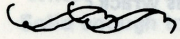
Blackbird dives

Blackbird carries him high

Smash crack

Gobble gobble gulp

*Alexander Keyser*



## Red

Red is the ladybird

Red is the flame,

Red is the face when filled with shame.

Red is the pimperl,

Red is the cherry

Red is the flowing hawthorn berry.

Red are the falling leaves,

Red is the brick,

Red is the poppy where the weed grows thick.

Red is the ruby,

Red is the plum,

Red are your fingers cold and numb.

Red is the sunset,

Red is its rise,

Red is the anger in tired eyes.

Red is danger

Red is blood,

Red is the heart of my true love.

*Nina Edge*

## Ethelred The Unready

'There's a time to be born

And a time to die

So the Bible says

And so do I'.

Said Ethelred the Unready.

'But it wasn't like that

When I was born

In a hospital bed

On a Monday morn.'

Cried Ethelred the Unready.

'I should have been born

On Christmas Eve.

But the unsocial hours

Were certain to peeve.'

Sighed Ethelred the Unready

'So what with the drugs

And the thing-a-me-jigs

They hauled me out

The Lazy Pigs!'

Yelled Ethelred the Unready.

'And to tell you the truth

I've never been sure

If I'm coming or going

Or felt quite secure.'

Whined Ethelred the Unready.

'But now I'm back

In a hospital bed.

And Dr. Who is shaking his head!

Howled Ethelred the Unready

'I'm just coming up to seventy-three.'

And 'You're quite worn out!'

Says Nurse to me as she slips a powder

Into my tea.'

Screams Ethelred the Unready.

Poor Ethelred stands

At the Pearly Gate

*Joy Salisbury*



And it's all the fault  
Of the Welfare State  
That he came too early  
And left too soon  
And won't be let in  
Till the next blue moon

POOR Ethelred the Unready. *Joyce Stewart Scott*



340  
Wild Cat

Wild cat, wild cat,  
Scratching at our door  
Yes! I know you, wild beast,  
For you've been here before.

Walking up our bannister,  
Instead of on the stairs,  
Covering the furniture  
With tangled moggy hairs,

Leaping at our curtains,  
Leaving them in shreds,  
Running up into our rooms,  
Lying on our beds.

Remember, if you care to try,  
You found our bathroom shelf  
And tipped, well, almost everything  
Upon your hairy self.

You're not the sweet, domestic type  
That lucky people get.  
No! You are quite the opposite,  
A crazy, wild-like pet.

Wild cat, wild cat,  
Scratching at our door  
Go away, you tearaway,  
You know our word is law.

*Anna Ochman*

Tergiversation

Until they are laid to rest  
It takes so long  
9 months, 3 weeks to form  
Be born  
70 years to grow and die  
Slightly unnatural I felt  
Slightly ludicrous I felt  
And not sad at all.

A man stood up today  
A fine upstanding man  
Always put his ideas first  
'Here I stand' he cried, with fervour in his eyes  
But he was wrong,  
Had to recant as he lay bleeding  
Callously squashed by an unbelieving generation  
'Apostate' his followers called him  
Wretchedly disillusioned  
'Fool' his enemies called him  
Gladly grasping the deadly weapon.

Finding it all too much  
And not willing to be a dead hero  
My friend left the field  
His conscience telling him he was a coward  
A bit of a rat his comrades said  
He felt vaguely relieved when he fell  
He told me, as the fire was burning out his mind  
'Political suicide' the coroner said.

Hoping to avoid dedication and decision  
I lived my life in a vacuum  
A man asked me to defend my reasons  
So I turned and ran  
Falling over a precipice as I went  
Onto a bed of glass  
Broken and sinking I remember the man and my friend.  
Until we are laid to rest it take so long  
9 months, 3 weeks to form  
Be born  
Who knows how long to grow and die.

*Joy Salisbury*



## Struggle for Hope

He stood behind a mask of false pretences  
He showed the world how strong and brave he was  
But when his mother, full of kisses, said goodnight  
He was left alone

### ALONE

To fight the night  
Night lubricant and black went past, as if wading through treacle  
Slowly drops of tears jeopardised his plan  
With his mind fighting his brain  
He hesitatingly put his arms around his pillow  
He embraced it several times, then lay still

### STILL

As a new born lamb  
Voices, sounds, all in varying volumes  
His beloved cat wailing for a husband  
He wished to be a male cat, how happy he would make her  
Now I can only carress your velvety coat of warmth  
From which I obtain the strength that feeds me  
When I grow hungry, I yearn for you  
My craving becomes a dilemma

I must

### MUST

Touch you  
His thoughts begin to collide, like dodgem cars  
When they are battered they are thrown out  
Just as his thoughts are  
But he is bleeding

### BLEEDING

Internally as well as mentally, from the knife that struck him  
It was put in his back when he was born  
Society thrust it there, and now the wound is too deep  
It has rotted and grown mouldy  
but the boy who silently

### SILENTLY

Suffers, like a dog with a bitten leg  
Snaps and growls when sympathy is given  
His heart lies deep in solitude, but how long will it take

### TAKE

for the anger and the hatred  
To worm itself in, and corrupt the steady pumping of life

*Sue Jefferson*

## Things That Grow in Elizabeth's Garden

We loiter, silent, down the path of the garden  
Where she grows lean and brown with sun smudged hours spent there  
Half shadowed by the town.

Mounds of potatoes, green plumed  
As heads of tribal warriors,  
Crouched to prance a wild, yet regimented, dance.

Runner beans with small red face  
Excited children at the start of the race to climb the frame;  
Neat with new string, all in place.

Veiled white onions strain virgin breasts,  
To rend the cloth of earth;  
Tomatoes trussed against a sun-baked Cotswold stone,  
Are prophets awaiting death by firing squad,  
Condemning us with dying breath.

New bedded lettuce, pale ladies swoon in the passion of heat,  
As sturdy cabbage strive to beat the cauliflowers and sprouts,  
Athletes competing in the field to shouts of "Victor Ludorum".

A pear tree, set in ground one other shiny day  
We friends had danced around,  
Wine and sun-happy  
To keep grey death at bay and ensure fertility.

These things grow  
And friendship  
And a gooseberry bush, too small to hide a baby.

*Barbara Ponton*



## The Cat & the Butterfly

A cat came prancing along,  
Singing his song  
He saw a butterfly upon a flower,  
Then he looked at the church tower  
About playtime he said,  
He pounced on the butterfly  
You'll soon be dead,  
The butterfly flew high  
It laughed and said,  
You're daft.

*Miranda Dawe*

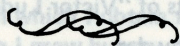


## Life

Upon the wind  
The wind of life  
Upon the wave  
The wave of love  
Upon the air  
The air of hope  
I found them in the sky at night.

Upon the tree  
The tree of growth  
Upon the bird  
The bird of beauty  
Upon the land  
The land of nature  
I found them at our country home.

*Cora McIntyre*



## The Daisy Cow

The daisy cow she is all yellow and brown  
Yellow as the butter in the kitchen.  
Brown as the brown eggs  
That the old hen lays in the yard.

The daisy cow took ill on Wednesday  
The vet came out on the Thursday  
The daisy cow got better on the Friday.

The daisy cow was sold on the Saturday  
She died on the Sunday  
I feel sorry for the pretty daisy cow.

*Neil Comley*

## Mischief

Mischief and I walk hand in hand  
Always have and always will  
Playing tricks all over the land  
And laughing away till we've had our fill.  
We listen to the peaceful band  
And even then we can't keep still.

Mischief and I walk side by side  
We break the cup and drop the plate  
We knock on the door then run and hide.  
We're never early – always late  
In the snow we like to slide  
Sweets we love cabbage we hate.

*Katie Buckley*



## Autumn Boys

Sweeping in and out of the house  
like the flowing leaves  
they kick and toss  
in their surge and crackle of noise  
and buffeting the morning  
with their swooping gales of laughter

Riding the day with galloping ideas  
cloud-castles of constructions  
crushed by a careless shout:  
mini male malefactors  
laying waste the hours  
with magnificent mud.

Dropping like winds at evening  
to sleep eyelashed as angels,  
remote as stars.

*Anne Cookes*



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