

JOHN PAUL KIRKHAM



REBEL
HEARTS

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Also by
John Paul Kirkham

Poetry
In Violet
Zig Zag Road
Afterglow of Zephyrs

Autobiography
I Saw Her Standing There

Biography
Clare of Assisi
Gemma Galgani of Lucca

Introduction

Poetry is like taking a journey, sometimes quick and simple, moving just around the corner but it can also be a long twisty adventure that takes the traveller to the distant reaches of the universe chasing and seeking that brightest star which always seems just out of reach.

So these poems, many autobiographical, some long, some short are as always written from the heart of a contemporary teller of tales; stories to make you smile or stir an emotion in the light and darkness of an ever unfolding world. Some of the poems recall events past and present as in *"Nagasaki"* or *"Nightingales Lamp"* which are visually uncomfortable and shocking but then as in *"Kenny's Tank"* offer us tangible glimpses of harmony and understanding. So among all the many ghosts and storms that appear throughout the book these chronicles are tempered by other saga's about the mystical, natural and sensual world.

The English summer of 2022 brought that short but intense heatwave set against the drama of an ever unfolding and chaotic descent of our government amid the unrest and uneasiness of rising inflation and national strikes. That climatically charged burst of hot weather brought back to mind those three crazy scorching months of 1976 and as a direct result "*Summer of Ladybirds*" was composed. And still nothing has really changed or moved on since then and the world is still struggling to find peace and love among the turmoil.

The places and everyone that appear in these poems are real and true and among many you will discover *Misters Clough, Entwistle, Mrs Rathbone, The Hangman* and what did ever happen to *Les*?

About having a rebel nature; it may be shown in how a person acts, campaigns and stands up for what they believe in or it can be in subtle ways working in the niggling things of everyday life but beyond all this, there is the power within everyone to help change the

world and make it a bit better. It's when two bohemian rebel hearts collide together - that's when it gets exciting.

And so just when you think you've reached the very end of the book ... that's when another journey begins.

John Paul Kirkham born in the 1950s, growing up in Merseyside, training at the Laird School of Art in photography and design is a poet, photographer and author of over twenty books and collaborations and is the official biographer of two Italian saints - Clare of Assisi and Gemma Galgani of Lucca. John Paul has also written journal editorial, film and book reviews and has appeared both on television and radio.

and thank you

To Suzanne Vega for allowing the use of her song "*Some Journey*" from the album - Suzanne Vega - 1985 and by kind permission of Anaïs Mitchell, lines from the song "*Bright Star*" from the album - Anaïs Mitchell - 2022 that appear as a prologue and epilogue.

And to Roger Hodgson founder member and the voice of Supertramp for his "*Time Waits For No One*" from the album - Rites of Passage - 1997.

www.suzannevega.com

www.rodgerhodgson.com

www.anaismitchell.com

Prologue

*If I had met you on some journey
Where would we be now
If we had met some eastbound train
Through some black sleeping town*

*Would you have worn your silken robes
All made of royal blue?
Would I have dressed in smoke and fire
For you to see through?*

*If we had met in a darkened room
Where people do not stay
But shadows touch and pass right through
And never see the day*

*Would you have taken me upstairs
And turned the lamplight low?
Would I have shown my secret self
And disappeared like the snow?*

*Oh, I could have played your little girl
Or I could have played your wife
I could have played your mistress
Running danger down through you life*

*I could have played your lady fair
All dressed in lace like the foam from the sea
I could have been your woman of the road
As long as you did not come back home to me*

*But as it is, we live in the city
And everything stays in place
Instead we meet on the open sidewalk
And it's well I know your face*

*We talk and talk, we tell the truth
There are no shadows here
But when I look into your eyes
I wonder what might have been here?*

*Because if I had met you on some journey
Where would we be now?*

(Suzanne Vega: "Some Journey")

Afternoon Moon

The late spring day was trying too hard
to turn too early to summer
it had started cooler with a grassy fragrant pollen whiff
and that scattering haze was never going to burn off
and dissipate into a full blue clarity

The bays wet sand trapped the glossy ocean
in its rippled coruscating puddles
thick jute rope washed ashore lay lost and coiled
just then a very pale afternoon moon hung loosely in the
sky like a floating ghostly face peering out of a matt
pastel opalescent heaven

All Very English Again

I enjoyed Chichester and the Cathedral
and the peaceful afternoon in the park
in the shade of the sun
watching the local cricket match
with the breeze
snatching the copper bronze autumn leaves
helping their wistfully aimless descent to earth
all very English again

Beach

The sea shuffles over the shingle and slippery sharp
black flint

withdrawing in a wake of creamy foam

the froth bubbles like a spilt latte slowly popping

to dwindle and be absorbed by the grainy tanned sand

The amber Cromer cliffs

this late in the day put the rock pools

into a welcome shadow

with their waving kelpy lubricious fronds

jiggling and rippling the small crater clear waters

The wide expanse of beach welcomes kite flyers

old and young

the shapes in the sky wail and buzz

then twist ... fold and crash land

with yelps of delight or screams of despair

Beams Around The Bend

The winter months fall dark early in North Norfolk
and a wind as delicate as a whisperers breath
makes diagonal ripples hesitate
then radiate
across the inky blue black Ouse
with the tide guiding the flow to Denver

The weak linen pale sun sets quickly
across the flat landscape
the only signs of life in this veiled shadowland
are from the odd solitary farmhouse
with tiny flickering distant orange darts
like flecks of gold
laid down by the artists fine sable brush

Just when it's time to pull the shutters close
from the chilly vented drafts
... headlamps in the night
shine as swinging elongated triangular shafts of rays

through the descending fog on the fens
like yellow animated twizzin and turnin glimmer beams
around the bend
in the nocturnal owl light

And deep darkness finally falls
over the droves at Three Holes
onwards towards Wisbech
as the stygian skies drop to the silence of the stars

Benny The Box

I opened the garden shed
brushing through the old tinkling wind chimes and
suncatcher

Hiding in the dark corner shadows
there at the back wedged behind the purple wheelie bin
was Benny The Box
he'd been there all through winter
once emptied of an old order of online organic fruit and
veg

A bit of decaying mould was trying to dry out
on the slightly damp cardboard top
strangely the box now appeared much deeper than I
remembered and quivered slightly in the draft from the
open door or so I thought
and now in that cold enclosed space
it seemed like a good idea to rescue Benny and reach
inside the gaping box

Bikini Atoll

The fireball red cloud
plumes into an almighty fist
X-Ray blast ionisation
descending on the local population

A ring of blue turns for an instant into foaming steam
under luminescent skies
the tortured landscape dies

North Pacific streams of wind
skim and shift the toxic sands
now where only poison grows
for miles around the concrete coffin dome

Megatons ... strontium and all is forever done
ugly bunkers all deserted
on this perpetual graveyard of the doomed

The seas are seized with caesium
plants and race deformed
wildlife ... fish and children
radiate and glow as dusk falls
and all failed
for thinking about winning an un-winnable war

Blue Funnel and Dreams of Going to Sea

Berthed in twilight on Birkenhead's East Float Quays
"Achilles" and "Agamemnon" together at peace
at least here tonight

That winter night was still and calm
the dockside lights cast their eerie radium green glow
fluorescing over the smooth water
with just the odd ripple bubble breaking surface
probably from a lost fish

All was hushed almost silent
except the slight hum of the bilge pump
and a late midnight pigeon
marching across the quayside cobbles
picking up the odd spilt Spillers grain
that had rolled under and out of the sliding giant
warehouse doors

Tomorrow you colossal ships will be gone
sailed off to Cape Town, Columbo, Penang, Klang
Singapore and Freemantle
far away places
exotic shores to explore
your moorings will be taken
by "*Perseus*" and "*Prometheus*"
two more titans of the seas

I retreat from my very late night sojourn
the chill and air frosts are descending
onto the hatched decks and derricks
and the pale almost amber moonlight
casts shadows of the mighty skeletal cranes
into the mirror glass water reflections
which are almost immediately broken by stippling
off the incoming easterly Mersey breeze

As I turn to leave
a tugboat belching and casting off
by the bascule bridges
heads into the big river
to guide bigger ships onto the high tide queue
that patiently wait to unload their cargoes
with their tall masted red and green lights
dancing like fireworks in the iron black sky

And tonight I will dream yet again of going to sea

Blue Funnel and Dreams of Going to Sea - is a sequel and companion to the poem "I Dreamed of Going to Sea" published in the anthology of poetry "In Violet"

Blue Moon

The ship sails into Lima
and after weeks away from Liverpool
the sailors of the seven seas
descend the wobbly plank late in the day
heading for the legendary Blue Moon

The sweet and bold aromas of chincho and cilantro
guide the revellers into the twisted back passages
searching for intoxicating mountain wine
and other pleasures
as the Pacific breezes
breathe and brush the flapping laundry lines
strung from balconies bridging the narrow lanes

The dawn chorus of early risers
rouse the still sleepy seafarers
as they ready to leave their Peruvian princesses behind
their memories of light and dark passion
sway the return to wild green sea waves

Buttercup Dawn and The Daisy Chains

My search for buttercups at dawn
laden with cool crystal dew
glistening in reflective yellow lustrous bowls
led me to a single early risen bee
dancing and distracted
by a tract of lawn daisies
just awakening from their heliotropic sleep
opening their petals against the July sunrise
my finger gently brushing the delicate corolla
before caressing the downy carpel

Gently and delicately
I plucked the flower from the moist base
to weave a floral chain
and later in the morning wooded shade
dress your honey curled locks and shoulders
as you lay prone
beside the bubbling brook
and mossy stepping stones

Chen Cuifen

History does not remember the hidden girl
charmed by Zen
concubine lover ... partner of Sun Yet Sen
Chen Cuifen

Dying clutching her precious memory keepsake
engraved in a final embrace
a last breath misting a picture
of her beloved Sun

First mother of the revolution
yet obliterated hardly known
only symbols on a cemetery stone

Conversation with a Ghost - Part II

The young man from another time
but the same place
walked straight up to my sturdy Yashica Mat
in the library foyer
centre frame
never mind I would take it again
cable release still in hand

Smiling with intrigue he quizzed me
about my box of tricks
capturing light on its sticks
telling me about this day
his day
in nineteen thirty three

Forty four years separated us
yet he was younger than I

And as I reset my Japanese square format camera
I re-focussed and he passed right through me
flesh and blood
and as I turned he was gone without a flash
vanished ... a phantom
into the June noon

Conversation with a Ghost - Part II - is a companion to the original poem found in the anthology of poetry "In Violet. Many years have passed since this encounter with a true ghost in 1977 when the original poem was written. It doesn't haunt me but it very much still baffles me to this day, my mysterious meeting with a real and elegant phantom.

Deltic Rebels

We were the least known band in 1972 ... in the universe
... probably
with irregular gigs at The Dale Pub in Seacombe
... Wallasey Town Hall
and a one off at the Grand Hotel ... the one on our prom

Two singles ... "*The Girl With Stars in Her Eyes*" and "*She Was Standing in a Cosmic Doorway*" played for a week and a day
by Merseyside's fab DJ's
"*Galactic Trax*" just the one EP recorded
in a four track studio
the size of granny's spare room
and despite the moody half tone graffiti posters
plastered on disused boarded up shop windows
it went straight onto Phillips cassettes or TDK's

Released from the mystical vaults and ties of splitting up
all those years ago

we sometimes pick up our guitars

Johnny G on vocals toured and recorded with Kiki Dee
then retired to Spain but is back again

Mike on his Moog plays the piano in a church off
Seabank Road

Holty now is a quarter of a barbershop quartet

Trev last seen having a Wendy Burger in Oxford Street

Pete the Lazer riff king some other place

some other where

The Poet and Bass ... still rocking ... well writing after all
these years

we were just too big a band to succeed

All that remains are a couple of tunes floating in space

and a bands name just like its written in condensation

on a dry smooth slate Lancashire flagstone

ready to evaporate into the shadows of the late autumn
sun

Dim the Moon

In your bohemian room
amid the scent of davana and jasmine petals
I turn to you once more
lying on a mattress of brocade quilt
the skylight slightly open
slipping in gently
the silence of the night
save for the lapping river tide
caressing the sandstone walls

Midnight's gathering skies
encircle your flowering bloom
as you turn to me in a sensual embrace
and whisper your request
to reach out and dim the moon

Eric Takes Flight

Eric dashed out that morning
skateboarding round the green
and as he twisted and turned off the kerb
he took off into the sun
and flew higher and higher

Then the green turned to grey
but Eric kept flying ... flying ... away

Looking down Eric saw a spinning blue
bouncing ... flashing
to a distant nee naw
carrying him away
poor Eric is doomed now to glide just a little more
and take flight into that other ... that next world

Eve of Xmas

A twinkling carpet of frost has settled on the lane and
front drive
and it won't be long now ...

The tray has been laid and displayed in the vestibule
just ready
just in case
but it won't be long now

Warninks egg nog ... Sandemans or Emva Cream and
pale mince pies
sit on a tray on a stool
a clang of merry bells descending down
it won't be long

And all the pastries were hastily gormandised
but those exotic drinks were forsaken
as I was asked to scuttle and rummage in the hallway
cupboard to pull out the wooden crates of Higsons Bitter
and Double Top Brown Ale

Ferry in the Fog

It's November and seven forty five in the morning at Seacombe Ferry and a thick milky opaque brume is floating without end and shrouding the Mersey

The waiting commuters

men in herringbone overcoats with Rupert Bear scarves and office girls in cushioned suede jackets with critter collars huddle for warmth in the open landing stage shelter

The damp wet greyness condenses on my permed locks as the fog horn on the ferry eerily announces its imminent arrival berthing against the strangely calm ebb tide

The hefty oily coiled rope is thrown by the deck hand and caught and wrapped around the weather worn capstan and the slack gathered to take the strain

The erect wooden gang plank is let loose from the clanging locking chain and as it slowly descends a single landing crew member has to walk up the timber slats to weight it so it finally bounces down on to the ferry decking with a rickety clacketty crash

And we all march quite quickly as grey ghosts onto the phantom ferry as it brushes and creaks against the rubber jetty fenders before disappearing completely into the dense fog

Four Kings of Comedy

Early that Saturday morning

"She Loves You" was Number One

just a tweak after dawn

"Kwikies" always opened too soon but at night late ...

great ... for some

well anyway! at the crack of dawn

about to go to the till

Ken Dodd shopping in our Wallasey Village Kwik Save

probably supplies for his marathon

later at the Floral Pavilion

bread, butter and a pint of foil top milk

well anyway again! my dad said run on up and say

hello

so I did

and from out and under his light camel coat

came a rainbow tickle stick to box my ears

and the offer to have a jam butty later after his

tattfilarous show

Arriving late at night after around 10pm
our "Rovers" supporters coach returning from
yet another away draw ...

this time at Gillingham

we had 45 minutes at Hilton Park on the M6

the tower cafe was always a bit bleak

and lonely late at night

but we craved a snack and a drink

Sitting alone in a corner

probably on his way home to Lancashire

Les Dawson nursing a coffee, caramel cream and
looking glum

I gave him the thumbs up and a nod of approval

everyone loved Blankety Blank ... and mother in law
jokes back then

time for us to pick ourselves up

as we still had a couple of hours drive through the night

"*See ya*" Les I said

and he raised a thick stubby wrinkly hand

waved and gave us a classic gurning smile
as we left him still lonely in the night

A warm windy September blew me into the Savoy
at least I was being paid to wear a tie
and photograph a princess on the awards stage
in the not so navigable spaces at the very front
laden with flash and jangling Nikons
I stumbled backwards
into the lap of a beautiful blonde actress
let's call her Georgina ... well that was her real name
the one in "*The Boyfriend*"
and we wrapped and tangled onto the floor
till the rescuing arms of Arthur Dailey
managed to unravel us camera strapped together
and old George (King Cole) sat me on his next too
vacant chair
"come an join us and ava free dinner my son"
as his minder Denis offered his crushing handshake
commentating:

"that the beers crap ... but get stuck in to a Savoy steak"

Westfield west London Stratford

opposite where all those gold medals were won in 2012
that park that we the people of London paid for with
our council tax

the top floor mid week Costa in the corner

I accosted thee legend of music halls

quietly and lonely again ... why is this

that great kings of comedy are all alone and dreamy

Roy Hudd cradling a Kit Kat and a very large coffee

looking out over East London rooftops and wondering
... thoughts

I had to tell him that his performance in *"Call the
Midwife"*

left everyone in memorable tears

then I could see he needed to be alone again

and a bye bye nod as he ate that last finger of chocolate

... legend

A long very long hot glarey afternoon awaiting a connection at Bangkok

the British Airways Tristar was going to be late arriving in the evening

then I spied a little fella walking up an into the lounge looking rather smart struggling with his trolley and luggage

I thought I better help one of our finest

"Your one of the four kings" I said to Ronnie Corbett

"Four Kings" said he *"Four Kings"* said I *"of comedy"*

"Four Kings ... Forkings ... Forking"

"There's something to be said there" he said

as composure recovered he headed ever so slightly eccentrically towards his Australasian in transit transfer with a wave and distant murmuring echo *"four kings ... forkings"*

Well all in all that's actually five kings ... but whose counting now!

Geronimo's Ghost

Was it for my rich black wool coat
that I was slaughtered ... No
was I feeble and unstable ... No
then why when DEFRA came
was I tethered and taken away
for that became my pain
to euthanise ... well execute me in vain

Oh Geronimo ... Oh Geronimo
if I had what they say I had
then who could argue about me being slain

But Oh Geronimo ... Oh Geronimo
they will never now know why I was slain
so maybe I will come back
to haunt instead
those that did the deed

Ghost of Myrtle Street

Strolling along a sunny Myrtle Street today is a long way away from the dark past and lamp lights

After fine dining at the Art School
cast your eyes high to the facade
to catch the red brick
and “Sheltering Home” in gold
they say it was full of destitute demons
banging and rattling the basement windows
shivering in the cold eternity of an everlasting winter
lost deprived children of an uncaring empire
looking for a passing friend or family

And so it was ... just before that Christmas 1916
when the cold and snow descended on the sooty city
a young Doctor Blunden exhausted had fallen into
a late afternoon deep fatigued sleep still sitting
at the surgery desk

Woken suddenly from his deepest slumber dreams
the constant jangling of the doorstep bell
revealing a tatty tiny ragged urchin lad
in flat cap and indigo blue scarf
barefoot and begging
"Come sir, me Ma is dying"

Chasing the speeding boy down the darkened alley
to stumble upon a heap buried face down in the snow
cold and frozen and almost barren of breath

Carrying the icy soaked body under the speeding trot of
the Hansom to the dying light of Brownlow Infirmary
the little scruffy ragamuffin was left behind in his
shadowy world

Days spent in a pleurisy sweating nightmare
... but for the miraculous intervention
of Doctor Blunden

“No lass it weren’t me that saved you it was your able and quick witted boy that got you here”

The puzzling look revealed *“my only son died three years ago this Christmas of a chest fever”*

and his lucid patient rummaged through her bedside cabinet

pulling out the only cherished treasured memory

a petite indigo blue neck scarf

the same as that worn by the phantom street child

late on that wintry afternoon as the gas lamps cast their eerie glow to light his return home to the grave

Ghost of Myrtle Street - Part II

I traipsed down the hill
to the end of Canning Street
into the shadow of those great gothic arches of
Liverpool Cathedral

Avoiding the tourists and school party visitors
headed down and through the secret chilly
subterranean passage into St. James Cemetery Gardens
where the city buried its dead long ago
fifty eight thousand laid to rest
ancient mariners ... the rich ... some famous ...
and the unnamed poor souls
and the ragged urchin with his indigo blue scarf
maybe now ... sleeping in peace

Gongoozling

The heady Hertfordshire meadowsweet bow in the listless embankment along the Lee Valley navigation and the scarlet beads of ladybirds cluster among the feverfew and puffy white yarrow wildflowers

The Carthage Lock with its elegant keepers cottage draped by gently swinging baskets of blue geraniums and intense purple campanula often distract the odd anglers attempts to land a barbel or zander

The Dobbs Weir waterside gardens of the Fish and Eels with a summery salad and baked honey and truffle camembert just complement a bright June unfiltered golden ale

The barges gently chug and churn the winding waters as a goldfinch delicately sways its balance on the reed tops but now after all this gongoozling its time to meet up with a friend who is sailing her vessel down from Sawbridgeworth on this hazy lazy summer afternoon

Gruelling Grey Skies

Commemoration not celebration
by the waters edge
for it has been forty years now
since the Exocets struck
Cunard's Atlantic Conveyor
causing crew to duck
and be killed

My mum pleaded with me back then
not to go to war
she was safe in that ... you'd never get me near a gun
after spending my days photographing
and shooting the graphic horrors
they had done

Today old men in their sixties
well not really old
but forlorn and worn looking
in stiffened dry cleaned khaki or blue uniforms

withered a bit perhaps around the cuffs and trims
stand in line at the Pier Head
like old bamboo shoots
slightly yellowed at the tips
wavering under the gruelling grey skies
as the padre prays with words
taken away by the late spring blustery wind
sailing in from the west off our big river

Haiku No 12

Open your petal

Show me your efflorescence

Reveal your fragrance

Hermit of Harwich

The Hermit hand painter of Harwich
looks daily out to sea
fresh from diurnal traipsing
but only in July
across rickety bridges and sand dunes

He doesn't really mind the ills of the planet
staying in first gear suits well
letting the world roll over him
then and when that's all done
meditating on grey will be OK today
cognitive stuff ... thought therapy
doesn't work
otherwise the world would be a happy place
but it simply ain't he says

Waiting and watching
from the box studio on the Penny Pier
as twilight descends

he knows she'll come to him
a rising muse from the darkest foaming depths
glistening and dripping
resisting the beckoning finger and flaxen framed face

The hermit locks up every midnight
heading home to his tiny room
until the next full moon
and the mermaids return

Herringbone Overcoat and a Frozen Perm

The winter cut hard at the top of the hill
at the rising curve of Breck Road
and Saint Hilary's Brow
penetrating the the 1978 herringbone overcoat
that he was wearing ... waiting to recognise
someone who once knew him
on that late November sundown
just greyly illuminating the distant Welsh hills across
the Dee

The sub zero froze the tight curly permed hazel locks
creating a profile of Neptune
risen from the icy ocean depths
only to defrost in a red leather corner booth
at The Ship Inn with a pint of Stones best bitter
and the smell of kerosine
from the Valour paraffin heater
standing upright and ivory in the alcove by the jukebox
belting out "Riders on The Storm"

Hugging The Hangman

For generations they grew up seeing and feeling the
calamities of war
succumbing to the numbness of death and destruction
an immunity to justice quickly dished out to the guilty
and sometimes the innocent by mistake or ignorance and
miscarriages of justice

All those years ago as a child of about five
I was dragged from house to house and used as my
mums petitioning tool
to try to reinstate the heinous crime of capital punishment
following those vile goings on ... on the moors
years later mother would repent of these views
understanding at last that taking any life under any
circumstances is wrong

One of Grandads local pubs ... there were many up
towards Preston
... well one of them's landlord

was well known for executing his duties
dispatching a good few hundred in his time
Albert Pierrepoint had moved on from hanging to pulling
pints instead of levers
and pouring foamy ale rather than that final gallows drop
and wash

I can just about remember through the smoke and
dodging darts thrown by musty raucous old men in flat
caps

a cheerfully sad face over the counter

asking my granddad

“sit the cheeky laddie on the bar whilst I make up a shandy”

ruffling my short back and sides and giving me a hug

his telling telepathic mesmerising eyes

looking back now seem redemptive perhaps

Albert spent his last thirty years in true retirement by the
sea tending his garden caring for the flowers and
rescuing the seeds before they dropped to the ground
preserving life and not taking it

I Need To See The Storm

Rushing in the highest tide

crested waves tall as the low grey iron sky

Descending Tollemache Street to New Brighton Pier

wiping away the salty stinging spray from my face

A lone crazy fisherman casts his line and stands back

against the sandstone damp embankment wall

from the wild whipping hook momentarily suspended

in a cyclonic grasp

and the rest of us clasp tightly

to the marine promenade rusting green railings

showered by the towering then falling crashing waves

A poor dog is caught

and swept out into the undulating river

to the owners stricken distress

only to bash against the protruding beach rocks

and die and rise again in the swollen swell

then float and bloat and be tossed away again

and will not come to any rest
until the storm subsides
but first the tempest
has to drown
and submerge the ferry landing stage
then take New Brighton Pier to a watery grave
all washed away

And yet still I am lured to sea
to see and feel and live the storm

I Need To Feel The Storm

High from the cliff top at Beachy Head
sheltered by the Belle Tout Lighthouse walled garden
under a surprisingly blue bright dazzling sky
there below tossing and rolling
the ferry from Dieppe is cutting through
creamy seas as ivory emulsion paint rolled out
onto an uneven seascape

We drive down dangerously close to the centre of the
brewing storm
to see the sea
in the wind ... wild and strong

White walls of Seaford Head
now oily wet with spray
form rivulets of thin milky gushes
as chalk falls away and disperses on slippery
pavements
like swirling aspirin dissolving at the bottom of a glass

Clusters of smooth black jet
like large liquorice sticks and allsorts
blast and drop away from the craggy escarpment
straight into the palm

The relentless rain now horizontal
urticates the eyelids
as I assist a local artist to drag and carry half a whole
tree trunk up the shingle beach to strap the trappings of
the rage to the Land Rover's roof

Newhaven's metallic grey breakwater
now disappears every few seconds battered by
pulsating foam ...
as thrown ... splashed and dashed crazily from a
painters wide brush

The return ferry to Dieppe
will have to wait till midnight or dawns early daybreak
to tumble and steam back to France

Up among the Sussex Downs at East Dean
beside the Tiger Inn
that rescued thick jetsam stump
will be fashioned into a smooth wooden shanty man
or striking jagged hand claw
mounted and reaching out to sea
as I felt the need to feel the storm

Iron Men

During low tides ever decreasing window
rippled bare beaches reveal the random figures
some erect ... some slightly leaning
watching the passing tankers ... coasters
and tramp traders
but all unaware of their own barnacle encrusted balls
and rusty dicks

Submerging to the realms of nautilus
amid cream flotsam
gasping for untaken breathes
washed away by wild waves
until rising again and again

Destined or doomed to stare forever
out to sea
until the end of the world
and the sun goes down one last time

Katie's Advantage

Katie with her golden tresses
had two big advantages over just about everyone else
by pinching her eyelids and blinking three times
she could see the chemical composition of every plant in
the world

This visual X-Ray spectrum
roughly followed the rainbow
with those colours violet blue being super safe
with greeny yellow offering a rather pleasant aroma
and those at the far end ... the scarlet red ...
well they could be quite hallucinatory
or even make you sleep for all eternity

But Katie's other great skill
was to be able to blend in
and take on the colours
of the environment surrounding her

So just remember

when you are taking a walk in a shady woodland forest
or bright dazzling field of swaying wildflowers ...

Katie is there tantalisingly close ...

watching and waiting

to tempt your tastes and capture you

Kenny's Tank

After all that fishing
with the pulling in of the pots and lobsters
to feed the Dorset visitants
time for a breakdown out of the blue

The stormbringer of thoughts roared
the tempest of the long dark night
the western gales would finally bring
a peace
and pieces of shrapnel and shells
buttons and bones

As rumours raged abound
stories unfold
tales untold
Churchill's paranoia in 44
all those years ago ... Overlord ... Utah
distant places on the doorstep

Shouts and screams
skimming torpedo's
straight as a die
blasting in the early light
landing craft with strikes
sailors and soldiers combat the cold blue
swimming in fear
sinking to the depths
in freezing death throes
survivors sworn to silence for
decades of shadowed years

For that tank did plunge
to sink and settle
upon the soft seabed
to rest for fifty years
snagging the trawl boat's nets
till Kenny's one man mission campaign
to raise the beast from the doomy gloomy depths

Today in Torcross I take a break and a bag of chips
to sit on the bank of grass and rocks
then pat the side of the Sherman tank
resting on its row of beach cobble stones
turret and gun facing to the sea
quietly pointing to the tragedy of war
a memorial to the 800 lost souls
of Slapton Sands
and
Kenny Small

Last Post

As the sun sets each evening
falling over the souls of sons
a lone bugler blows out
and plays "The Last Post"

It was beautiful - emotional
and melancholic
under that shimmering Ypres purple sky
at the end of the day
and a gently descending dusk
enfolding and turning the white gravestones grey

Les ... Where've Yer Gone

For these past few years

Les stood outside Marks and Sparks

by the side exit door in Bassnett Street

quite close to our Ode to Mo Salah mural

Tall and gentlemanly with a waterproof blue rucksack

stuffed full of Big Issues

always a kind word and chat

and a well worn baseball cap

offering to carry old folks expensive shopping

to the taxi rank in Dawson Street

or wheeling a laden trolley

to the car park in Queens Square

Almost every day I would buy you a butty or juice

chilled if the afternoon turned hot to help with hydration

as long as it wasn't apple

too many memories of fermentation and wagon falling

Then after all that time you had gone
the patch taken by a series of shouty magazine sellers
I hope things worked out well
because everyone misses those kind words to all
"You're good you are"

Each time I head off Williamson Square behind M&S
I wonder what happened to Les
and if he found his feet
maybe his number came up ... in a good way
and you are sitting on a balcony overlooking the estuary
at Hoylake or even Llandudno

Melody Makers Part I - Mrs. Rathbone's Refrain

Mrs. Rathbone in her tartan pleats
was our music teacher
she told us that we were talented ... just that bit special
with all our repetitive Doremi Fasol Latido
but the cost of a violin, clarinet or something brassy
was just too much for me Ma and Da to put down on a
seven year old
so footy on the left wing with a right foot
or inside right
with whopping shin pads and a purple shirt
seemed like so much more fun ... at the time

Mrs. Rathbone did get her way with me in the end
by allowing me to bang her gong
and drum
after a well rehearsed *Kumbaya* for the packed assembly
hitting the right notes whilst still dreaming about
yesterdays two goals
that I scored in our our schools 3 - 2 win

Melody Makers Part II - Enty's Ensemble

Mr. Entwhistle in his sharp dark blue suits
and Michael Caine glasses
was our comprehensive music master
he only had a handful of us teenagers to teach
this was a Technical School ... science and stuff
music ... art and such like was for softies
still Graham had borrowed
his elder brothers Epiphone Casino
and Enty lent me his Gibson L5 Archtop
till my nan bought us my first lecky guitar from Bargain
Box Records
a sunburst Kay Tulip for £30

Performances were OK with encouragement
with the regional schools dance band concert nights
and punters swaying and swinging out to our Glenn
Miller sound

Fab Four of our five - Holty, Trev and Feetus formed a band

and with my brand new Stratocaster we were allowed to play a gig on stage in the school hall

but *Spanish Eyes* wasn't rock and roll

and we split up

I got fed up with carting around amps and paraphernalia in 78

if Dylan could switch one way

I went the other and still am fully acoustic

surrounded by sitka spruce - mahogany

and some 1959 cedar

well worn and new

each time every day I pick up to play

I give a quick thanks to Enty

and Mrs. Rathbone's gong

That Kay Tulip 69-E110 electric guitar (1969-74), mine was a 1972 model and is now a rare vintage collectors instrument and in good condition can fetch a few hundred pounds

Memories of a Spring Paris Sunset and Sunrise in The Late 1970s

Waking up to a dawn chorus
of Paris street cleaners
in the Rue de Messageries
swishing water from a hose
sweeping with a broom
the cobbles and kerbs now cooled glistening

The short stay had not started well last night
as by asking the hotel manager *"What time is breakfast"*
in English
resulted in a curt reply *"Petite dejeuner est sept heures et
demie"*

The grumpiness continued when a lukewarm coffee
with a slightly chewy roll and a single boiled egg was
plonked down on the red gingham tablecloth
so today was going to be a good day later to leave
Arrondissement 10 for a few hours
with a walk up to Montmartre and the Sacre Coeur

Mid May the heart of a Paris spring
to wonder among the place and square of artists ...
writers and the avant-garde
and a very shady side street cafe
with its tiny open balcony
serving dark stronger and hotter coffee
married to a freshly filled baguette of ham ... cheese
and a Madeleine

Gathering on the Basilica steps
to take in the setting sun
is a Paris pastime
and that evening the sky was streaked smoky bronze
and purple with the red orb distantly dropping
like a deflating balloon
and the glow from down below of a million flickering
lights softened the glare of the spotlight alabaster white
Sacred Heart

It was getting spring chilly and late
and time to turn to an eventide descent

Walking down the narrow steep alley steps and Rue
Gabrielle

a fat ginger cat knocked an empty bottle off a doorstep
and we both watched it roll and bounce and clatter
down the cobbles ...

and ...

Out of the blue door appeared

a girl in a tie dyed teal headband and bohemian tasseled
dress the colour of the moon

arms bangled and charmed

beckoning me to light her up

from her own special roll ups neatly disguised in a
Gitane box

and after sitting and sharing the wispy white smoke on
her doorstep

a further offer to come inside

with the offer of deep Burgundy wine or something
more sweeter

And as that blue shutter closed behind us
at least I knew I would wake up to something warmer
than the expectation of a hard boiled egg

More Beams Around The Bend

A calm evening is set against the western sunset
the twilight copper and violet dappled scales of the
Mersey mackerel sky
slowly expand then hang ... descend and dissolve over
the darkening steel blue estuary
as the tide swishes along the seafront wall
and a row of anglers
cast their lines out for sea bass
and Plaice

The Perch Rock Lighthouse would send and shed
its sweeping beams
as the big river opens turning to the left
and the tramp steamers and coasters stay in sight of land
whilst tankers long tall or short
aided by the lantern lights navigate the channel down to
the refinery at Stanlow

Occasionally a harbour board dredger will anchor where
the water changes its course and corner
to grab or bucket lift the silting sands with reflective
gantry bulb xanthic rays bobbing in the darkness

Nowadays it can be hard to see the new Perch Rock Light
as the Dutch tugs tow or guide the ships of the seas
those towering gently gliding cruise liners blazing with
thousands of deck and cabin lights
drowning the fresnel flashing white and red sparks
through the night
in memory of those lost days of perpetual bending beams

Mother Redcap and The Mockbeggar Smugglers of Black Rock

*"All ye that are weary come in and take rest,
Our eggs and ham they are of the best,
Our ale and our porter likewise the same,
Step in if you please Old Mother Redcap*

Matriarch of the red stone and timber tavern of Black
Rock and Mockbeggar Wharf

beyond her impenetrable oaken wood doors

safe from the customs

safer still from the press gangers

the candle's burn in the cellar and tunnels

keeping watch over the smugglers cargo wares

rum and tobacco taken off the wreckers rocks

The wooden vane always still on a windy day

pointing to the river signalling don't approach

but twisted around to the house

then the delights of Mother's strong foaming brews

awaits

and porter for the pirates

just in from navigating the gruelling grey seas

Today you may pass the place

and even if the day is warm

a slight chill pervades the space on the prom at Egremont

where once stood Mother Redcap

and her gang of Black Rock

Mr. Clough's Marlow Pie Delight

A very long time ago Mr. Clough ... who lived alone in Marlow

would commute two hours each way ... a day to Barkingside Essex when not campaigning for real ale

But in truth really

his role played out much better in the field and never having any inclination to learn to drive travelled only by train and his British Rail charity warrant unless someone happened to be able to give him a lift to very out of the way places

For forty years since the 1940s and more

Mr. Clough a sensitive man ... selfless and easy going much to the despair of his staff who he could have sent instead

preferred to spend his long days travelling to and fro into and out of the horrible British traditional institute of asylums ... it is surprising how many there are or were

Visiting and comforting adult and elderly orphans or
troubled souls

placed in this scandalous care at birth or beyond for being
simply infirm

Mr. Clough treating them to a quality meat pie carefully
carried in paper bags in a worn scuffed dark mahogany
briefcase ... little gifts and something to look forward to

I would often meet Mr. Clough at a riverside pub
in his only burgundy striped tie and worn pale grey suit
to discuss a story to shoot

but first before any business a pint was ordered and a
Marlow pie

I heard he retired a long long time ago over that Victorian
bridge

with a well earned M.B.E. that he called his Marlow Beef
En Croute

kept on his mantelpiece

paper weighting the Guide to Good Beer

surrounded by pastry crumbs and a life of good deeds

Nagasaki

A burst of rose white light
seen before the shattering sound
with its cyclonic echo
shooting across the plain
as a tsunami of vaporising destruction

The wave of intense atomic heat rips through windows
and doors
tearing flesh from bones
and turns the youngsters in the classroom to charcoal
cinder children melted to their desks

The small boy playing in his mountain village cave
peering through the putrid smoke and dust surveys this
new kingdom of the slain innocents
put to death by the Fat Man
and terror from the once clear skies

He is no more than ten years old as he places his baby
brother into his rucksack
flaccid arms and laden head resting in a deathly peaceful
embrace

A lonely walk across miles of monochrome wilderness
blackened by fine slate grey falling flakes of dust

He silently and sadly waits his turn outside the makeshift
Nagasaki crematorium and shuttles forward looking
straight ahead upright spent and tearless

The Cremator in a white mask takes the dead child by his
hands and feet and tosses him into the fire
the flames danced high ...
another momentary burst of burning bright light
till all that was left was ash

The flames finally burned low like the sun finally setting
and the boy turned and walked silently away

*Between the prologue and epilogue we reach the halfway point,
an intermission on the journey - a meditative interlude.*

*As we travel from the past into the future we reflect on the fact
that time waits for no one in the unfathomable and infinitesimal
space that surrounds us out there.*

*Time waits for no one
Old as the sun
Lying here beside you
Life's just begun*

*Time stays for no one
Old once was young
Life's grand illusion
Two hearts make one*

*Time waits for no one
Old as the sun
Lying here beside you
Life's just begun*

(Roger Hodgson: Time Waits For No One)

Nan's Candles, Porcelain and Perfume

Prices tea lights in wax paper
guaranteed to burn all night
were spread out
around the house
on saucers and in spent old jam jars
just the job
to curb the regular power cuts
and three day week
in 1973

My Nan would have used them in the wars ... both wars
to keep the darkness away
and brew tea over the stearin flames
whilst bombs and doodlebugs roamed and fell
illuminating the metal cage shelter under the table
behind the blackout shutters

Fascinated by the flickering lights
shadows dancing and bouncing off the corner walls
my Nan always liked and lit a good candle
for anyones intentions
at the Dome from Home or St. Albans in Liscard

For those who really needed help and prayers
Nan would scuttle under the river
by the green and yellow buses
to Dawson Street's Blessed Sacrament Shrine
always a blazing beacon back then
laddered rows of white orange flames illuminating the
square
votives lit in prayer
for a miracle
or sought thoughts

I told her my mate Jim was going for a difficult interview
he needed a job ... times were tough then ... they still are
so off she skedaddled again

this time by the ferry ... fancying a walk up from the Pier
head

and the next day ... the miracle job was his

Clearing out Nans parlour in Grange Avenue

after she'd gone upstairs forever

no real treasures to be sure

a lot of gold fleck china

and blue print ironstone from Staffordshire

wrapped delicately in pastel soft tissue and never ever
displayed

Prince Albert ... Duchess and Rosalee

these'll do for a cuppa tea

At the back of a chest of drawers

lined with fragrant floral lavender and violet paper

more porcelain flowers some chipped

some cracked

some intact

Upstairs dresser all those 4711 bottles stacked and
sandwiched between more ancient boxes of emergency
candles

I remember arriving at Cologne railway station a long
time ago and heading to their emporium to buy the
selection of art deco bottles

that I now hold and the empty glass still has more than
the faintest whiff of neroli and pectigrain and something I
can't quite define

Remembering Nan

I always light a candle in our cathedral

or a scented one at home

Lily of The Valley was one of her faves or something
smelling along those lines

and in the shadow of a purple orchid

that light still shimmers and caresses the magnolia wall
after the sun has fallen out of the sky

*Nan's Candles - completes a trilogy of poems and follows Nan's Cabinet from the
book of poems "In Violet" and Nan's Pantry from the book "Zig Zag Road"*

Nightingale's Lamp

Through mud and rain
and encamped tents
the troops trudged
at Crimea's edge

Another war
Scutari far from home
defending for ... fighting for the alliance empire
and borders drawn

Under Balaclava vaulted brick ceilings and coves
Nightingale patrolled her corridors of hope
by night by her flickering flame of light
and lantern glow

No longer is it cathedral bells and smells
but shells and hell
and the falling snow and sludge and slush
with a new reign of terror from above
and terraces of Crimea and Kiev

Families once again torn apart
border refugees and days of queues
take bitter sanctuary in and under
purple brick crypt chamber cellars
basements or metro

A child's white wild eyes
peering out from a different balaclava
looks cheerful and confused
in the deep freezing winter cold
and in the hesitant wavering shimmering light of the
power cutting underground
a strange descending warmth from the overhead storm
of bombs and fires
fans the slightly eerie swinging shadows
off a Nightingale lamp

November

It's November

and time to turn towards the stones

to calm the Holy Souls

a remembrance

a memorial

at Overdale

The morning misty green

has slowly lifted

but still hangs the dank smoggy smell

of wood burning flues

and mushy late petals on the path

The weak white sun

softly burns away the remainder

of the damp opaque air

and I see across the valley of graves

descending to the old railway line and canal bank

You're all together now
on the new small freckled marble stone
life's endings

1965

1987

2017

Grandad

Nan

Dad

The stone is washed and cleaned with a toothbrush
and brightens up the rows of ancient marble blocks
that twist and turn along the mossy path
in this shady grove
under the late autumn chill of falling leaves

Winter Hill and bleak heather moors beckon
as a detour home across the wild arcane vista
the vast emptiness

A stiff brisk wind
oxygenating and regenerating lifts the spirit
leaving behind these
landscapes of childhood memories and dreams
as it is time to turn and return
to the city and the coast

Ocean of Celadon

Above Anglezarke

the Lancashire plain spreads

and teases its way to the distant estuaries and sea

Beneath ones feet

is the beginning of an ocean of celadon fields

the patchwork quilt of the Ribble Valley

The beauty is in the loneliness

and to end this vista visit

I take a short walk up to a forest clearing

and rest awhile in the short shadow

of the stone memorial

remembering that long ago fateful November night

when our returning Wellington bomber

crashed under the weight of winter ice

with the loss of all souls

Old Mr Chan and His Ageing Chow Chow

Old man Chan and his ancient ageing chow chow

at 11.00 am each day

even in the grey

and the rain

leave their Chinatown home in Hardy Street

Chow ... well that's what he's called

limps these days and waddles puffing much slower than

Mr. Chen

some days he makes it without clambering into the back

up plan

the oversized pram

The Cathedral looms high

looking down

on their laconic walk

towards Parliament Street by the psychedelic graffiti

boards

passing Pugin's St. Vincent's Church
and collecting from Chung Wah
his daily chilled Cheung Fun
and siu mai dim sum
then its back home again
for Chow and old man Chan

Old Soldier

The last parking space was there for the taking
in the tree lined avenue of Ilford's Valentines Park
one slot left but doable with a difficult manoeuvre

Stuck in reverse half in half out
a hooting horn deafened my right ear
a pastel blue Morris Minor
a pale irate driver
wildly gesticulating
fists raised

"That's my spot, I was here first"

he clearly wasn't

Here it comes

*"I fought in the war you know
for your lot"*

he clearly did

I had to admit

Wooden walking stick waving
was his choice of weapon
hobbling ... bent and shouting
at my passenger door

This was one battle
I was prepared to lose
how could I begrudge
his joy of a plate
of egg and chips
in the lake pavilion cafe
well not today at any rate

I pulled away slowly
and hesitated
by the park's green iron gates
to catch his final advance
in my rear view mirror

His able cane thrust back into his boot
and a more able
upright healthy sprite quickstep march
towards the desired dinner

My coffee could
and would wait
until another day
free from any more
old soldiers
on the warpath

Peace No 1

I try to make someone somewhere smile each day
thanking those ... anyone really ...
who help in shops ... drive buses and such like
striking a chat with a stranger
often enhances or brightens their day

I've had misfires and backfires calmly offering
"peace bro" to someone causing a traffic obstruction who
replied:

"don't give me that peace shit bro I ain't your brother"
the world can still be full with angry people

I know its easy for scousers we are full of comical quips
but every time someone does
or says the right thing to me

I tell em that they *"passed the audition"* ... and most get it
and and head off into an airy Lennon landscape of
dreams

Peacocks in Prague

Last nights thunder and lightening
has cleared the air and skies
over the Vltava River
leaving a bright mild May Day

Secluded away in Mala Strana
behind Kafka's house
hidden from plain sight
the city walled gardens
of Vojanovy Sady
revealing among the quiet evergreen shrubs
bushes and trees
the muster of iridescent Indian blue peacocks
proudly striding their fashion parade

From behind the strangely cool grottoed Saint Elias
Chapel
stalks the alabaster king of peacocks
trembling feathers flapping the spectral white fan

the honking piercing scream competing

with the distant clanging number 12 red tram

Satisfied that his appreciative audience is content

it's back to pecking some berries off a bush

allowing us to sit calmly

digesting our deliciously spun trdelnik on a shady park
bench

before risking the energetic climb up Petrin Hill and
those terrace steps

Picture Another Time

The bungalow had lain empty for a while
black sacks to charity shops ... lots of those
Age UK ... British Heart Foundation and Barnardo's

But under and behind drawers of socks and shoes
and belts
and stacks of unworn polyester shirts
still in flat crackling cellophane packs and crinkly wrap
... a battered old riveted light travel valise

Sliding the claspy raspy rusty locks
with a resonant clunky click click
to that flipping opening pop
to reveal a wild assortment
of mechanical optical paraphernalia
of cold metal cameras
and flash bulbs like extra large white boiled eggs

I instantly knew the Praktica from Dresden
Olympus OM's ... mine from the seventies art college
days
but rambling and scrambling to the bottom
I found at last what I was looking for
still perfect after all those years
Dad's Voigtländer Vito B from 1955
kept well and still intact
in its stiff bronze leather case
slightly scuffed around the edges

Grasping the smooth sculptured engineered body
I flicked the film lever
and to my surprise
the uniquely West German cocked sprocket system
sprung into a forward wind
signalling after four decades
that it was still loaded with exposed film

Rummaging through the remaining tackle

I spied the cubed Konar viewfinder

and slipped it into place

And as my eyes adjusted and focussed between the

revolutionary two white lines I fired off some shots

firstly of my foot ... by accident

then a landscape of dad's retirement domain

flat fenlands where the wild skies fall down to earth

Tootling and push pulling the rewind knob was always

a fiddly action

dropping the black hinge base plate

there it was

cassette case all stripy yellow and black

Kodacolor II

well it was worth a punt

process C41

still exists ... just

if you know where to look

so ... I may as well pay for fog for what all its worth

Yet a fortnight later
on our Liverpool doorstep dropped
a selection of slightly grainy shots
of
my younger mum in the kitchen
lavender flocky sticky back plastic covered walls
my brother aged about six
walking through Clocaenog Forest beating a stick
searching for a hobbit hole
our Vauxhall Viva Firenze ... cameo colour
then me looking out to sea ... sort of ... the Mersey
I was always dreaming of sailing off
to lands far away and California

And lastly
a shot of my new oxblood made in England Doc
Martens
and the purple gold East Anglian sky that dad loved so
much

Red Sky on The Tay

Its not quite October

but still unnaturally calm and warm

on the banks of Kinraigie and Dunkeld

with the colour of autumn hanging in the late afternoon

An iridescent blue fly whistles past

cast from the anglers rod

hoping to catch a passing shimmering silver salmon

in the fast flowing mid lane of the Tay

The sun drops a little quicker

its setting light spreading an even-glow

through the canopy of the trees and evergreen leaves

For a few moments I hear a light sound of a crackling
crunch

the beavers caught distantly chewing wood

as the reddened sky dusks to a streaky velvet cinnabar

and it is time to turn away from the chill

to head back for a dram of something honey gold and
neat

Requiem

The city was in mourning
that morning
at the gathering of bright colours

The last goodbyes and final farewells
to our city's girl
yet to and never to
experience her teens

The mist and mizzle
had just lifted a little
after all those grey rainy days of early winter
when the white coffin
gaily printed with pictures of her short life
was brought respectfully into the Cathedral
to a ripple then wave of applause

There is little sadder in life
than the death of a child
yet in life you feared nowt
and you will not be afraid this day
to step into the life of God
as heaven must surely now be a happier place
in her presence

Sometimes it is the silence that speaks
when we have not the words to describe
the dying of this treasured young lady

I came in early avoiding the press and television
perched atop the piazza steps
to ready this holy place of service today
preparing and placing the crucifix and bible
on the sanctuary table
with the aspergillum
ready to shower the delicate coffin with holy water

It was my role also to ignite the thurible
and swing the smoke of gold and frankincense
towards the high altar
as the cortege white horses patiently waited
to carry you away to your final resting place
with blue feather plumes in a wavering breeze

As choirs of angels welcomed you into paradise
and the hundreds departed flowing out of the narthex
I extinguished the four advent candles on their wreath
from which the spiralling smoke
danced and twisted its way to the vast lantern
and the eternal light beyond

My last duty of the morning ...
to make safe the burning charcoal incense embers
by emptying the still hot thurible
into the ancient large and deep sacristy biscuit tin
and give it a good shake
our girl Ava would have been pleased I'm sure,
inquisitive perhaps and smiled at that

Sand Mystic

The estuary was silent save for the shimmering
thaumaturgic sandman
standing at the edge of the incoming tide
inhabiting a flapping flowing flaxen dandelion yellow
cape
flicking flat slate and slinging stones into the light
bubbling sea

Pausing he came to sit beside me at the base of the flat
rock
and talked to the distant oceans and cosmos beyond

*“It’s like when you pick up a pebble on a beach ... its worn and
smooth but contains the history of the world and universe
inside and it’s you. Then you throw it out into the sea and it
will live forever and be washed up again and again and become
part of someone else’s past present and future until it finds a
home”*

He placed that shiny pale pebble in my hand
then the sand mystic walked away into the wavering
mirage gleam

Seeking Salvation

Great great great great great ... Uncle Robert

a long long long time ago

ran away

only to be enclosed in Cistercian solitude and silence

a long way from his Preston home

this extreme life before long ... well six months

made him meditate on escape

Walking across fields and vales and wild running rivers

brought him once more and one last time to port

where he sought and sorted a clipper to New York

clearing and sweeping the Atlantic stormy slippery

decks

oiling the mast brackets with grease and fat

Stepping off onto a Hudson River jetty

clambering through the masses of ne'er-do-wells

rescuing a coin from a pocket that had more dust than

luck

was just enough
for the railroad
and the smokey chicanery of Chicago

Without a penny or dime to spare
refuge and a blanket in the nave
of the Cathedral of The Holy Name
sweeping the cold stone floors
carpentering by trade the needy repairs
still a lingering longing heart for a monastic life

Swapping Illinois for Indiana
traipsing alone along the long south shore
Michigan City then bound for South Bend
searching for the Holy Cross and Notre Dame new
vows
after passing the interrogatory with ink and quill stating
"How he wished to quit this world" Brother Wilfrid was
born

My search for him has ended
as he rests awhile ... a long while in a shady corner by
the railing wall
for all eternity in that holy ground
after finally seeking his salvation

Note: my Gran often talked about having in the distant past a priest in the family and it was a cousin who found a letter from America dated 1866 and embossed with the stamp of the Congregation of The Holy Cross that had been written to his family back in Preston, Lancashire. My initial research led me to Rome then on to South Bend, Indiana where Robert Sergeant (born 1833) took Holy Orders and became Brother Wilfrid in 1866. The present day archivist at Notre Dame, South Bend also tracked down his grave for me as he passed from this world to the next in 1896.

Seven Seas of Blue

One of these days

I am also going to write a message

and put it in a bottle

I reckon I'll need

a decent robust dark green or blue wine bottle

tight rubber bunged

and the best place to launch it

is not off our shore at New Brighton ...

it will only get washed up

on the beach at West Kirby or Hoylake just a mile away

round the bend

but throw it from the back of the Mersey Ferry

when the tide is rushing out of the estuary

into the Irish Sea

then it will stand a fair chance of making it at least to

Cork

or who knows all the way to float up the Hudson River

New York

or end up on a far flung beach in Montevideo

Uruguay

and what many messages there must already be

sailing those seven seas of blue

oh well what dreamers I and you

Shame of Our Nation

After signing up for hospital volunteer visiting there
must have been a mix up
for on a midweek in March still without a whiff of
spring save for some irregular bare buds on otherwise
seemingly vacant tree branches
that I found myself walking up the long crunchy worn
gravel drive to Woking's Brookwood

The disturbing silence of the surrounding made an
uneasy welcome before being broken by the hourly
chime of the red brick steeple tower clock looming high
casting a long shadow on any unwary guests

Whilst awaiting matron and my allocation of a patient I
drifted through some insecure oak doors

Here I discovered a lost looking lady sitting on a
tapestry covered bench overlooking the slightly
unkempt lawns

She was wearing a soft white fluffy jumper with a platted dark olive green skirt, cherry red shoes and ocean blue socks and was in deep conversation with the radiator

I slowly sat and observed this inmate with a far away still youthful yet haunted look and ended up talking to the girl talking to the radiator waiting for an unspoken answer after all these years

She turned and opened her clenched palms and a small felt doll dropped softly onto the glossy parquet floor

“For my child, for my child where is she sir”

were her only words as a duet of tears slid gently down her cheeks before turning away to stare yet again through the leaded pains of thin glass

Matron then finally found me and signalled the end of this unscheduled brief encounter and worriedly explained not to rush off with any wrong thoughts

about Evelina and how her lover had left her in this
illegitimate immoral state at sixteen thirty years ago
a sorry lifetime of unnecessary commitment and
condemnation to the asylum

I walked away towards Woking station embarrassed
deeply by our nations shame

but just momentarily I felt compelled to stop and turn
and stare

and wave goodbye forever to the girl talking to the
radiator in the bay window

and just for a second or two Evelina raised her arm and
palm again in an act of distant acknowledgment

Ships in the Night

At the fire glow sundown
the long line of ships in the big river are anchored
awaiting their turn to turn into the docks
to empty their spill into the quayside mills

I take the steamship Tynwald
midnight steam packet crossing to Douglas
and as the black ship turns into the tide and glides by
under the stars in the deep dark
from the stern I see those giants of the oceans
masted lights blinking like sparkly fireworks
glitter yellow confetti swirling as the ballast sways

And slowly the ships in the night fade away
those portholes as a thousand eyes
winking in the gentle ripples of the treacle waves
are vanquished to the fathoms
and the sound of the bow
cutting the crested open sea swell

Sixpence For Saving a Life

Electric warrior had just been played and put away
but the Saturday afternoon just felt lifeless and dull

Staring through the glare of the front bay window
in Wellington Road

the annual bowls tournament had just started
in Marine Park

and the crowds had crossed the road from the seafront
to sit in the sun on the grass bank, benches and deck
chairs

to spectate an afternoon of clacking white jacks and
black balls

Bored with bowls and tea in paper cups

we - that's me

and Alan Fryer

tried our luck in the bubble gum and novelty machines

behind the pale green art deco lido outdoor swimming
pool

the use of a lolly ice sticks stuffed into the coin slot
usually did the trick
producing free bubbly in a plazzy egg
with a key chain or blunt mini pen knife

Whilst the droves across the road
cheered more those woody balls
we heard a distant shout or call
from t'other side of the steep sea wall

A family gathering of four
waving wildly as we climbed the precipice
to witness their picnic caught short
surrounded by the sea
tide fast and flowing
rushing and swirling
like swishing and rinsing coffee grains down the sink

The tide had now stranded them
on an ever diminishing
smooth concave golden sandbank
an island in the sun
shrinking and sinking in the afternoon

The only possible escape we spied
a precarious balance
along a skeletal wooden groyne
submerging beams and sharp barnacles with slimy
seaweed to navigate
we were sprite I suppose in our wet galoshes
dashing to pull in the catch

Held high they pushed the chubby baby with a hanky
on his head into my arms
Alan got lumbered with the picnic paraphernalia
as we eased and encouraged their passage
from the now fast flowing eddy estuary dark waters

We made it with just minutes to spare
to the slippery concrete steps
vertically engraved into the sea wall

Hot ... wet and blistered by the sandpapering silica
grains

the dad said

"Thanks lads"

and out of his soggy pockets
gave us sixpence each
for saving their lives

Snoozy Seas

Yesterday it was winter
today it has turned into summer
a heatwave in March
"Its climate change"
some say
and maybe they're right

Changing from yesterdays thermals
into a teal green soft T - Shirt and fine silk scarf
I venture onto the sand dunes wind cut short valleys
Spread out before me the amber beach was smooth and
deserted
white horse breakers from the departing steam packet
ship
pulsated at the fringes of the beach's receding tide

The late afternoon hazy powder blue cloudless sky
felt like a longed for summer
as it turned the tame water
into a benign snoozy sea
broken only by the slow laconic movement
of the Burbo Bank's wind turbines

Something Anonymous is Nibbling My Euonymus

Our garden is organic ... mostly
no pesky bug control
it's live and let live around here

Beatles like mini scooters scuttle across the patio
before shooting into sprouting cracks
spiders suddenly stop in their tracks
pretending to be dead
they don't fool me!
orange marigolds
are a no no
the feast of them slippery slugs
so its butterflies and bees
that bob from bush to bush
nestling on the angel gold physocarpus opulifolius
and deep scarlet bottle bush

The single variegated lemon and lime euonymus
was placed in the central bed under the large chalk
white bay window
to gently catch the eye
tough strong and stable and glossy tart leaves
but no ... each morning new shoots missing presumed
eaten ... mysterious

Right ... I'm up in the dead of night
after binging on a few black and white
Alfred Hitchcock Presents on SKY TV
reading specs on
iPhone 8 torch light on
flicking back gently a top leaf
sandwiched between the floating purple opium poppies
gotcha
a notcher
just like a miniature alabaster ghost
caught in the act
nibbling contentedly on these bitter greens

After disturbing his nocturnal meal
and waving those antennae above his deep dark beady
eyes

I rest and resign that
my euonymus will never grow old
... never grow tall

Summer of Ladybirds

That was the year of Concorde and our Cod War
when the heatwave drove everyone indoors
or down to the river at dusk to catch a breeze

One hundred days of sunshine
bubbling the already blistered roads and paths
turning grass yellow then brown and then dust
swept away by brazen hot winds

That was the year I escaped to the Lakes
seeking solitude
and the slightly chilled brown ale over bitter in
Windermere
watching the waters gently ripple and sparkle at
sundown at The Swan

The lake had vanished at Haweswater
the levels had simply evaporated and trickled away
revealing the once submerged village and lanes

As I sat on the bone dry brittle bank
crossing the now visible low stone bridge
was an army of a thousand ladybirds
flowing like a scarlet river
heading back into Mardale Green
like a returning river of carmine
reclaiming the villages lost resident souls

Tale from the Crypt

Putting stuff away in the safe for safe keeping

... in the crypt

over my shoulder I sensed something behind me

As a wisp of breath brushed my neck

a girl quietly brushed and touched my shoulder

An inch from my ear

"Hello its me ... I'm here"

Caused me to reply not thinking who

"You're back then"

To respond by turning round to face her

and in an wavy aura of a dizzying swirl

She was no longer there

gone the ghost of the crypt

Tapestry at Glastonbury

There is in a quiet corner
the only memorial to the three Glastonbury martyrs
where in St. Mary's parish chapel the seasons turn and
close
and time goes on
as just over the hill
the band plays on
in a midsummer June
just gone

The simple sacred thorn tree
within the abbey grounds
say some stems from Joseph's Arimathean planted staff
a long way from the gallows pole
at Tyburn and the martyrs earthly journeys end

That Day

Your short dashing note was like a calm breeze
sweeping down a deserted Water Street on a lazy Sunday
telling me of your new lover found in those Kentish lanes

That day our big river was silver ... melting into the
argent sky
as the regular busker standing on the swing bridge of the
Albert Dock rendered "*All My Loving*"

Maybe that was a sign of sorts that your future may end
well after all
mending someone else's troubled and broken heart

The Clock That Only Ticks Lying Down

Under the Cathedral is Lutyens Crypt

and in the crypt

is a clock

that always sticks

on the tock

and stops

when hung upon the purple brick wall

To tell the time it must lie down

prone on the priests bench

flat and it will tick again

But suspend it on the wall

and time stands still

quiet

and stare at it if you will

to never ever grow old

The Dog With Automatic Legs

Our neighbour over the back in a bungalow
have a little fawn frenchie they call him Moe

He's led for a walk at least twice a day
always the same in a figure of eight

On days when its wet he whinges and cries
looking through the window for a break in the skies

The cat called Luna sits on the fence gate
loves to torment and make him irate

Little Moe's always sniffing something to chew
sucking stones or liquorice allsorts he likes the ones that
are blue

As he travels round the block
sometimes skips in a little piggy trot

His little bollocks gyrate as he bounds
like tiny bells bouncing up and down

Moe's automatic legs always cock to the right
he knows his lamp posts quite alright

The Duffel Coat and The Lost Toggle

My love affair with the duffel coat started when I was
about seven years old

jet black and a glossy tartan lining

only extra long

so I could

and would

extensively grow into it

after all

its cold up north

my mum would say

I wore it all the time

even inside our wig wam

in the garden

in Meadowside

deep dark pockets

to store pebbles

as ammo to whack the old wizened oak stump

Raby Mere, granddads last summer of 66
calm clear waters
rippled by the motor boat phut phut
and flapping quacking ducks
paddling against the wake
by this time the toggles were half chewed
as I grew
into its perfect fit
even if the top toggle had somehow
somewhere gone astray

Today I am still tempted to search
for a slightly oversized long duffel
in midnight blue or light CND sand
but small is an alright cut
good for the winter dryer days and mild winds
or the sand dunes
or Egremont prom

After my dad went
mum died two years later
so just recently clearing out her bungalow wardrobes
and cupboard drawers
under a brown paper bag of mothballs
I found filled away
that black duffel coat from the 1960s
and as I pulled forward a slightly loose shelf
I heard a dropping click
falling out
rolling out
my last and lost chewed toggle
that mum had found and saved and put away
all these years
finding its way back and coming to a halt
lying forlorn and stationary on the linoleum floor

The Girl From Vietnam

Escaping horror from a distant shore

by boat and wild waves under open ocean skies

no less terrors of the Saigon terrain are the nightmares

of the mercy of the tides adrift carrying you to possibly

a greater place of danger or eventually a remote village

reception centre in Hampshire and English lessons

You longed to return home to Saigon now gone with a

new name

only to you it would always be *Cotton Sticks*

Every time we moved near to talk about that other place

and life

I remember you lost and staring into a distant far away

space

with only diamond tears evaporating on your cheeks in

the early evening light warm breeze

and the silence explained it all

And then one day like a bullet from a gun you were
gone

no reply ... no calls no post ... no anything

I hope you found your way home

to a Peace

The Kestrel Among The Sparkling Crown of Thorns

High above our city

the Cathedral lantern and glass

catches the daily sunrise blue

and sunset red

sweeping around and over the luminescent Skopje

centre marble

Higher still

and today its steely hot

looking up into the dissolving and dazzlingly

backlit hot candy floss pink sky

Higher still again

amid the shimmering silver sixteen twisty spires

there she goes using those ecstatic thermal uplift drifts

of wind

our kestrel soaring hovering above her nest

of a sparkling crown of thorns

That Last Lost September of Innocence

Remembering those last end of summer
and full autumn days

before the war

a gathering on the Broads

sailing merriment under puffy clouds

amid the reeds and windmills

The party stalked the common snipe

for fun some say

as the prey strayed into the empty lanes

only to be blasted away

but he on his own pointed his gun to the sky

that day the golden plover would live

and be free to fly away

in hope of better things to come

when war seemed impossible to some

those last season's of freedom

with love among the heat and hazy scented days

by the fens and coast ... before the war

In a Norfolk cottage garden
wild jasmine grew
its perfumed sedate draft pervading the sultry hour

And many miles away a gentle rumble of thunder
crackled distantly over the eventide aureolin light

The Longshoreman's Widow

He pushes the rope away from the slippery harbour steps
flinging the coils onto masted ships and mahogany decks
whilst the fenders take the pressure
off the port wall harbour

The pole tackle loosely fastened
to haul the grain
from among the cargo hold with its tricky and
treacherous crates and casks

Oil skins peeled back by the wild wind and rain
the fleets of waiting ships need a quickening pace
as the rogue barrel rolls after the steam crane snaps
and the yell and cry of the helpless is crushed and carried
away in vain

She waits on the wild windy beaches of Northumberland
watching the waves and horizon
the airborne sand thickening her hair in knots
the damp cottage behind the marram dunes

houses the fire drying the single woollen shawl

her soul mate taken

for she knows that he will never return from shifts again

The Silent Drum

'Twas the week before Christmas
as the battle cruiser Derfflinger full steamed ahead
cutting through the midnight high crested waves
steering a course to Dogger Bank
to silently watch and wait
making use of these shortest days
and the cusp of sunrise

At 8.00 am sharp
the three ships resting at Rayburn Wake
did turn south to speed to Scarborough Bay
making use of the fast incoming tidal flow
so close they came ... from the beach you could see
men readying the decks for the devils work

Into the early morning
a wrath of shells flying from flame spitting guns
the bombardment had begun

Streams of falling fire
screams of the innocent child

Scarborough Castle, Lighthouse and Grand Hotel
would take a tumble and some collapse to a heap of
stones
as five hundred blasted shots rained down
most would fall short destroying the town

Scarborough such a quintessential English seaside
resort of no harm to anybody
succumbed to such a reign of death and destruction
as murderers amid ships attacked an unfortified domain
with a ruthless hit and run

At the Sandside Seaman's Mission
their loquacious pet parrot fell of his perch
at the sounds of the thunder strike onslaught
to scuttle through the sawdust into the corner
trapped in his cage ... never to recover or speak again

Salvation Army percussionist Leonard Ellis
attending to his daily porter duties
opening the Clare and Hunts chemist at 8.00am
stepped out through the South Street doorway
to view the hullabaloo on the corner
never to return

Molten hot shrapnel collided with the smell of oil
and choking wall plaster dust
turning the smoky acrid air into a mustardy gamboge
fog

Leonard was civilian number one
to be killed in World War I
to be laid to rest
in his wife and Childs grave sadly gone fourteen years
before
the Salvation Army played on and on a pedestal lay
Leonards silent drum

The Spider who Fancied a Pint

The newly poured pint of mild
stood steadfast on the bar

From high above the Tudor beams
the spider spied this jar

From the corner of my eye I caught
a dangling silky thread

A splashing plop and outstretched legs
landing in the creamy head

One giant leap from the glasses rim
I heard the barmaid scream

And the spider now an ipsy tidsy tipsy thing
staggered up that aged beam

The Tale of Rat a Tat Tat

Rat a Tat Tat

sat on the deck

tying his tiny leather shoes

listing and listening to the the seven seas waves

his bed was inside the captains spare boots

Rat a Tat's brother

Rat a Tut Tut

rocked in the wind on the swinging chair

and in deep midwinter

would skate down the drive for a tail raising dare

Rat a Tat's sister

Rat a Tet Tet

tormented teenagers to make them scream

popping out of the bus station vent

in clouds of steam

Rat a Tat's cousin

Rat a Tit Tit

would hide in the hammock under the sun

then leap at the children

and make them run

Rat a Tat's uncle

Rat a Tot Tot

lived in the heap of cosy compost

always one step ahead of the neighbourhood cats

rustles his whiskers, winks and runs off

So there ends the tales and tails of Rat a Tat Tat

who retired on pink wafers

with his feet up at last

and that's about that

Things That Sizzle

Never quite trust a BBQ
but then I've only ever been to two

A Brisbane barbie
with ... yes prawns the size of Atlas's fists
then that there twist
with burgers and beer in cooler stubbies
and other Pommies on the verandah

I'll give anything a second chance
in that Cambridgeshire garden
and the acrid taste of lighter fuel petrol
that inflamed and flavoured the veggie sausages

I hate em ... I hate em
all things thrown to sizzle on spitting fire

Tobacco Sunset

With a plangent roar
the flock of seagulls takes flight
sailing aloft over the last ferry
that has just departed from the Pier Head

The Royal Iris cuts a creamy swathe with its wake
through the iron grey river
that pulls the boat into the ever descending sunset
of nicotine stained skies
and hanging billowing smokey clouds
tinged with filtered pale yellow layered streaks melting
into a cascading nocturnal dusk

Tsuki - Yo

Midnight letters and writings

the best bits always come out during these silent hours
under Tsuki-Yo

the colour of moonlight

In pre dawn hours

you can and may ramble away

because thoughts and words

however chaotic ... broken down and tangential

often contain the secrets to life and the universe

like a subconscious code

waiting to be released in those unexpected moments

Waiting for the Midnight Hour with the Promise of a Silver Coin in Exchange for a Piece of Coal

I always remember our New Years Eve's

Nan's tiny two up two down

a modest close of cobbles

off Rake Lane

backing onto the cemetery where a few Titanic souls

lurk in the shadows

Waiting for the midnight hour and all the old ladies on
their well scrubbed doorsteps

headscarves now off and in tomorrows wash

Nan always opened the back door onto her yard

to let the old year out ... slipping away into the crispy
cold breeze

as I stood outside shivering sometimes at the front
waiting to swap my coal for a florin

before the clock and graveyard chapel bell tolled

Next door Mrs McNally wipes her dirty dusty coal
hands on her gingham apron and offers a
"How Ye ... Happy New Year"

At the dead end of the road
a dog barks at the smirking and hissing black cat
perched on that graveyard sandstone wall
whilst a full moon beams over those midnight graves
and ghosts
and the distant Mersey foghorn rises in an eerie echo
cutting through the smoky lunar light

That clatter of back alley gates
shutting out the old and the cold year passed
is enhanced by the muffled sound
of Alan across the street
trying to play *"Auld Lang Syne"* on his newly acquired
second hand saxophone behind the green and beige
curtains
signalling the end
and another year is laid to rest

So clutching my spare piece of coal and new silver two
bob coin
to boost my pocket money coffers
I head inside for glass of Nan's sticky egg nog
by a cracking and crackling wood fire

Waiting for the Close of the Day

Tree branches bend and stretch
pushed by a wild wind from the west
in their rise and fall point and beckon
to the weary traveller
the direction of the journey that lies ahead

The sun embers in a pre dusk blush
turning the woolly sheep a pale pink
in the wrap around afterglow of a wavy crimson sky
these timid creatures on the valley sides
stand almost stationary
like alabaster statues waiting to turn into a solemn
slumber

When Rebel Hearts Collide

Somewhere in this sometime world
had our paths not crossed then would they have woven
in a future locus
as I was passing by
passing through on my way to another place
accidentally crashing into you
in an alternative doorway
or maybe where the pier meets the promenade
under the day's end wispy tobacco burst sky
when the dropping of the sun causes the flickering
sodium lights to cast their coral glow
... revealing that girl from another world
two rebel hearts and souls ... blown freely together by
the wind under a bright star

How those rebel hearts collided, fused and carved out an exciting bohemian tale in the late 1970s when it was still cool to be children of the revolution and in a quest to fill lives with freedom and peace there had to be a whole lotta love, other stuff and rock and roll and plenty of it there was ... then you will have to read "I Saw Her Standing There" ... The Autobiography.

Epilogue

Bright star

*When I first laid eyes upon you
I was filled with such a longing
To be with you in the dark*

Bright star

*Since I could not fly beside you
I would chart my own course by you
And I'd sail it by your light*

Bright star

*There's a thought upon me dawning
You have launched a thousand longings
And I don't know who you are*

(Anais Mitchell: "Bright Star")

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