

This Anthology is Dedicated  
to the Memory of  
**Elizabeth Ann Bradshaw**  
1937 – 2015

**VIVALDI AT ST. JOHN'S**

*The consciousness of what is observed shifts  
according to the consciousness of the observer.*

*Walt Wangerin, Researcher and Novelist*

The Greeks would say akoustikos,  
for clear music borne on air.  
Vivaldi livens the harpsichord.  
Cellos and violins  
lock my mind in,  
to Venice, water bound, full of sound,  
thoughts of masques, mardi gras,  
bizarre happenings.

Yet, silent, through the glass  
of the chapel window-pane,  
the on-off flicker of lights  
mark a modern aeroplane.  
Aero-dynamically held aloft,  
oblivious totally of where we are;  
unaware of the harpsichord, gentle, soft.  
Its lights become an imaginary star.

*Elizabeth Ann Bradshaw, October 2005*  
*Written for Peta – to make up for the rain!\**

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*\*after a concert at St John's School, Leatherhead. Ann and her friend, Peta Calcutt, were active members of the Moles for many years until health sadly made regular attendance difficult.*



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## A WINTER'S DAY



Huge waves were hurling themselves against the rocks, sending up a cloud of spray. Meg could feel the cold droplets on her face as the wind veered, sending them in her direction. It was as though the elements were conspiring to drive her away from this hostile environment. She pulled up the collar of her anorak and wrapped her scarf more tightly round her tingling ears. These rough December days were exhilarating and, at the same time, frightening: a serene, steely sea could be whipped up fury in less than an hour. Woe betide any small boats which had gone out fishing unprepared .

Meg crunched along the beach. The shingle rattled like coal being sent down a chute as the receding water sucked back the pebbles, shifting and glistening in the weak winter light. Now Meg marvelled at the changefulness of her island home; though at times appearing confining, it could feel strangely comforting, too. This invigorating walk had cheered her up and it was time to get back to the house.

It was nearly four o'clock and it had hardly been light all day. Meg trudged up the steep slope to the slipway, stamping the warmth back into her chilled feet as she stepped on the granite setts.. At the top she turned to take a last look at the expanse of the bay. The small lighthouse on the point to her left was sending out its reassuring beam at regular intervals; the

darkening horizon was almost lost to sight.

Meg started the car and turned on the headlights as she began the short journey home. The deep lanes became tunnels with the overarching trees casting strange shadows on the roadway, despite their leafless state. At the top of the hill she took the right fork towards the village whose twinkling lights were already beckoning her. Her thoughts turned towards the cheery wood-burning stove and her cat curled up in his favourite chair. It was good to think that the end of term was near and she could put up some modest decorations for Christmas and perhaps invite a few friends for festive punch.

Through the top corner of her windscreen she noticed a plane descending to the airport on the other side of the island, its landing lights bright against the darkening sky; it would probably be the last aircraft allowed in before the weather worsened. Again Meg thought of the restrictions of island life, its connection with the wider world so much governed by the vagaries of the elements.

In a few minutes she was home. As she turned into the drive she could see the glow from the stove through the uncurtained window, its promise of cosy warmth welcoming her home.

For months she had been getting used to Harry's absence and had almost conquered the sinking feeling she experienced whenever she came back to an empty house - not quite empty with Samson there for company. Here he was, mewing at the door to greet her. A sudden gust of wind slammed the door on her and she sighed, shut in safely from the night or shut out from the freedom of the world and away from Harry.

Samson led Meg into the kitchen, tail erect, purring in anticipation of his tea.

After hanging up her coat Meg busied herself with cat-feeding and preparations for her own supper. She switched on the TV; it was news time with more lurid descriptions of losses in

the Middle East – Afghanistan, Baghdad and Syria. The hot, dusty scenes seemed surreal compared with conditions at home, and at once her thoughts turned to Harry, fighting in the danger zone. He was on a six-month stint, due back in February. Being at the Front, his letters did not always get through punctually. He would tell her how he missed her, complaining of the scorching days and chilly nights and the constant fear of being gunned down or blown up though he played down the last point.

Meg snapped off the TV and sat down at the kitchen table, trying not to imagine too much what Harry was suffering. She glanced towards the window, resolving to draw the curtains as soon as she finished her meal. The wind had become stronger and brought with it a flurry of snowflakes which began to settle on the window sill. Somewhere a shutter banged angrily against a stone wall. How lonely Meg felt and how these short, gloomy days depressed her – and another two months before Harry would be home. She forgot about the curtains and settled in her chair by the fire in the sitting- room, Samson on her lap, and the papers she intended to mark scattered on the floor.

What had roused her? Startled, she looked at the clock. It was only quarter past eight. She felt sure she had heard a voice and yes, someone was outside, looking in, a man, his hair tousled by the wind. She ran to the window and peered out; a face was pressed close to the pane; only a centimetre divided them. The face looked vaguely familiar through the whirling snowflakes. A voice bellowed “Will you let in a poor cold fellow and give him food and shelter for the night? I’m starving”. Meg ran to open the door, still thinking she might be dreaming, rashly forgetful of her own safety, but the draught of cold air blew in a very real man, her man – Harry! Speechless with joy she flung herself into his arms pressing his cold cheeks and lips against her own warm ones. At last she said “Oh Harry, I can’t believe this, even now. I thought you weren’t due back for ages!”

He set down his case and took off his coat. “ A colleague, Geoff, was allowed home on compassionate leave. He’s in a terrible state, already stressed out by his work. The boss decided he needed an escort, so I was detailed to take him as far as London where he was to be met, and I could come home until Boxing Day, 6 whole days with you, Darling. We flew in from Helmand this morning and I was able to catch the last plane to the island; it was touch and go”.

Meg remembered the wavering lights she had seen on the plane earlier, indicating a bumpy, even precarious landing.



“We had to abort the first attempt at landing,” went on Harry, “and we circled for over an hour before another opportunity arose.”

“Never mind, you’re here at last, my dearest, and we’re going to make the most of every second of your leave,” cried Meg. “Sit down and get warm and talk to me while I make your supper!”

Suddenly the bleak winter day was bathed with sunshine, which was odd, as it had been dark for hours!

*Sylvia Herbert*

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## INNOCENCE

*(A sonnet for Alex)*

Your world knows nothing yet of war and death  
Whose cause is just, or whose is borne from hate.  
Cocooned within your mother's armour plate  
Of love that lasts until her final breath.  
Your world is unaware of right and wrong  
Of choices you may make, and will detest  
Safe in your mother's arms you're truly blessed  
The tears you shed wiped dry with soothing song.  
Enjoy this time of innocence so brief  
And blameless moments only filled with bliss.  
Take pleasure in your loving mother's kiss  
These days you know just happiness, not grief.

Stay sheltered here in love and just dismiss  
The world's attempt to shatter your belief.

*RosemaryDudley*

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## KIDS' TALK

What funny sayings do you remember your children saying?

A grandma, while talking on the phone to her granddaughter, asked her: "What are you doing now?" Surprised, the little girl said: "*I'm talking to you on the phone, Grannie!*" Grown-ups can be so dim.

When dressing my seven-year-old niece for a party, her mother told her how good she looked in her blue top and white shorts. Diana asked: "Would God wear a blue top and white shorts?"

After my great niece went to school for the first time she was astounded to be told that she had to *return* to the school the next

day! She thought going to school was something you did just once.

When a nine-year-old boy, who was studying the Great Fire of London at school, asked his dad: “Did they give you the day off for the Great Fire of London?”, his dad collapsed with laughter.

The boy’s parents each banked at a different bank, which were referred to in the family as “Daddy’s Bank” and “Mummy’s Bank”. So when the boy saw a man drawing money from the wall of his dad’s bank, he burst out: “*Daddy, a man just took money from your bank!*”

When John, aged three, was asked by his gran: “How old do you think I am?”, he replied promptly: “Twenty-one.” Asked why he chose that number, he said: “It’s the highest number I know.”

When six-year-old Jordan was teaching his grannie to play football, he’d scold her: “No, Grannie, you don’t trap a ball like that - you do it like this.” He insisted: “You must practice more.” But I fear she’s little future outside the minor league and could face relegation at any time.

While David, my brother, was a toddler, seated in the back seat of the car Mum was driving, he called out: “Mummy, look at this!” “I can’t, I’m driving!” “But only for *five minutes*, Mummy!” David said!

When I took a nine-year-old boy round the Tower of London, I told him bits of history and took photos of him, till we came to Traitor’s Gate and I told him about it and asked should I take a photo of him there, he said: “No, because then people would think I was a traitor.” But I can assure you that he wasn’t.



*Desmond Clark*

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## OLÉ!

Two old ladies, wrinkled and gray  
Chose Madrid for a short holiday  
Lively City, plenty to see  
Prado Museum and Reine Sophie.

They walked and walked  
Till their feet were sore  
Ordered G and T  
in the Plaza Mayor.

Back through the streets they gaily tread  
Till a voice from a doorway spoke and said  
Ladies, ladies, come and see  
Flamenco dancing - the wine is free.



So inside the darkened bar they went  
(Most of their Euros having spent)  
Enthralled by the music and the sight  
Of dancers in their costumes bright.



With beat of Flamenco still in their ears  
And heedless of advancing years  
They stomped and jiggled all the way  
Past Palacio Real to Hotel Bray.



“Oh” they said – “Madrid” was so nice  
But our two old ladies paid the price  
For back in Sussex by the sea  
One needed a new hip and the other a knee.

*Jennie Allen*

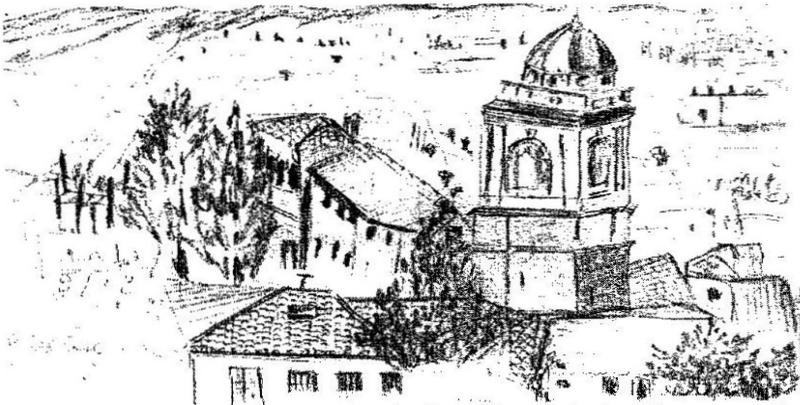
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## LAGO TRASIMENO

A day to relax on the island  
On this day, and then!  
Only sound,  
Rippling water -  
The sun warming  
Comforting stones.  
Stillness of the heart  
Transformation, fills again that poverty  
With true joy.

The swooping bird skims the surface  
Delighting as the water breaks  
Races back to the sheltering trees.  
Perfection and glory, a woodland beauty  
The lizards move slowly  
Caressing the stone  
Anticipating contentment as the zigzagging colours  
Merge broken in the wonders of light.

Praise! And Praise!



*Pat Harris*

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### THREE DAY MILLIONAIRE

I had been there for over a week but still there was so much to see, so much to stimulate the imagination and so much to enjoy. This was my holiday of a lifetime in that country visited by few casual tourists. The weather had been largely sunny and warm. There had been some uncertainty in recent years after the political turmoil and the earthquakes which had deterred most travellers but the country was now officially classified as "safe" by the Foreign Office. The people there, including the officials, were friendly and hospitable, polite and helpful. Significantly however we could never forget that this foreign country was genuinely foreign. The language and the culture were different from ours. Even the alphabet was different with its strange combination of straight lines and curlicues.\*

On that memorable day there were still three days to go before the long coach journey to the capital and the flight home. Our group was in a remote mountainous area viewing the temples, the wildlife and the beautiful scenery with the lakes. Our cameras clicked incessantly. By chance I had separated from the others when I noticed an odd unnatural shape half buried in the grass, near the base of a tree. It was a small plain wooden box. On impulse I picked it up and quietly put it in my rucksack. Since nobody had seen me I decided not to mention my acquisition to the others until I knew what I had found. In the privacy of my hotel bedroom I examined the box properly which, without any lock, opened easily. Imagine my surprise when I found that it contained several large bundles of high denomination bank notes in the currency of that country, with pictures of the current president and the value clearly stated. With increasing excitement I added up the values- the total came to over a million, made up of 10,000 and 50,000 unit notes. I was now a millionaire! I wondered about the legal system in that country. Did they have

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\*Curlicue - an intricate ornamental curl or twist

laws about “Treasure Trove” or , as children would say, was it “Finders Keepers”?

I decided that on our departure day before checking in at the airport I would take it to the bank and exchange it all for dollars or sterling. I would tell the authorities exactly how I had come in possession of such a large fortune in their money. At the worst there should be a substantial reward. I had a closer look at the box and then I noticed that some of their strange alphabet was neatly inscribed on the lid. It would be useful to find out what it meant before visiting the exchange and therefore I copied the strange symbols into my notebook, carefully and slowly. During the next three days, keeping silent, I idly wondered how I would spend my new found wealth before returning home- perhaps on a feast at the best hotel in the capital or by purchasing one of the elaborately carved chess sets as a souvenir.

It was the morning of our departure for the capital. I saw Dr. Pritchard, our English tour leader, having breakfast at the next table. He lectured on the language, history and culture of the country and he would certainly know the meaning of the unintelligible inscription. I walked casually over to him and said that I had seen some strange words on a poster stuck on a wall and I wondered what they meant. At that stage I still did not want to reveal to anyone what I had found until it was necessary to do so.

He looked closely at the page of my notebook with wry amusement. He was obviously puzzled.

"Why was this on a poster?" he said, "It means ' Play Money for the Game of Monopoly ' "

So ended my three days as a millionaire.

*Robert Edmondson*

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## THE DEBUTANTE

I had a talk with mother, she said I should take care,  
And only ever marry a multi-millionaire.  
She said she knows that handsome's good and kindly's very  
pleasant,  
But I should strive to rise above the income of a peasant.

But I just laughed at mother, poured scorn right in her face.  
I said I found her attitude "Quite shocking, a disgrace";  
And I maintained quite blithely, by all the stars above,  
That I would marry only for passion and for love.

But mother said "Consider, what if your funds are meagre?"  
But I said I'd crave nothing and neither was I eager  
For aught but simple life  
And the bliss of being a good man's wife.

I said the simple life to which I do aspire  
Is rustic and home spun, and all that I require  
Is a modest estate, a small country seat  
With home help and ground staff to make life complete.

Though the place will need stabling attached for our leisure  
And a tennis court laid on our lawns for guests' pleasure,  
A ballroom, quite small, to entertain  
And a gunroom where the wellies and ground staff remain.

A small flat in Mayfair, for shopping and for plays  
And a cottage in Cornwall to pass summer days,  
The winter month in Val d' Isère won't need a lodge as well  
'Cos we'll give the staff a holiday and stay in a hotel.

As I recount my life-plans, I notice mother smiling.  
She says she likes the outline plans and finds them quite beguiling  
But wonders how we'll buy food, or even pay the rent.  
She feels it could end badly with me living in a tent.

So I've rethought my life plans and I'm being nice to you  
In case you know a millionaire: I'd like to know him too.  
For while I long to fall in love with a good man, wild and free,  
Mum's right, I need a millionaire, to fall in love with me.

*Wendy Baxendale*

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### **SOME GREAT ECCENTRICS**

No less than three generations of Charles Darwin's family were wildly eccentric. When Charles was reading a book which he found too heavy to hold, he unhesitatingly broke it into two pieces.

When his son attended his dad's funeral in St Paul's, watched by the nation, he was irritated by a cold wind on his head, so he placed his black gloves on his head, where they remained throughout the service.

His grand-daughter, as a child, believed that if you swallowed the tiniest bit of cork, it swelled up inside you and killed you and that if you broke the skin between your thumb and first finger, you'd get lockjaw.

A certain Marquess of Salisbury attained everlasting fame for actually yawning while delivering his maiden speech in the House of Lords.

Never to be outdone in eccentricity, P.G. Wodehouse regularly threw his letters out of a window, rather than post them, confident that if people found a stamped addressed envelope, they'd post it, a belief which never let him down.

When the playwright Sheridan sat on a chair watching his London theatre burn down, and a cop told him to move on, Sheridan replied: “Since when has it been wrong for a man to sit by his own fireside?”

Professor Haldane who went upstairs to change for his own dinner party, found himself undressing, thought it was bedtime and went to bed, where his wife found him later.

When I went to stay with an eccentric Irish schoolfriend, he welcomed me into his hall, carefully steering me past a couple of lawnmowers and showed me up to my bedroom where I found to my astonishment that he’d stopped a window from rattling by shoving two screwdrivers and a chisel into it, as I live and breathe.

He told me that as a member of the local squirarchy he made a point of not attending church every Sunday, so his absence wouldn’t be too conspicuous when he was on holiday. I praised his noble self-sacrifice in forcing himself to lie in bed an extra hour out of loyalty to his fellow-worshippers.

His uncle, a company director, sent a shirt to have its collar and cuffs replaced because he said the rest of the shirt was perfectly sound. He also wore shoes with a hole in them, which he said were good for summer wear.

Our curate couldn’t reverse his car so he only visited parishioners if he could drive in and out of the driveway without reversing.



*Desmond Clark*

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## DARKNESS



In the darkness I can see him  
ghostly figure lurking there  
when I check he has vanished  
figment of my frightened stare

On the landing now his footsteps  
creaking boards as he draws near  
when I check he still is hiding  
adding to my state of fear

I flood the house with lots of lighting  
switch on music read a book  
drown out noise the dead of night brings  
that gives my face that haunted look  
Why is it when I am alone  
the house seems different in the night?  
The friendly sounds that make a home  
can only fill me full of fright

I count off dragging hours until  
morning birdsong greets my ears  
and only now does time stand still  
the dreaded darkness slows the years

*Rosemary Dudley*

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## PROGRESSING IN A NEW DIRECTION

A couple of months ago, for the first time in my life, I began to play the trumpet, or more accurately the cornet, which is a smaller version of the instrument, and sounds very similar, although with a mellower tone. My musician friend, Geraldine, had a brief dabble with one, before deciding to take up the oboe, and become a regular band and orchestral player. The cornet had been stored in her attic for at least twenty years, and I persuaded her to dust it off, as I fancied having a try. I have always loved the sound made by brass instruments and brass bands. On the face of it, playing should be quite simple, as the pitch of the note is altered by just three valves, operated by the three middle fingers of the right hand, in a variety of combinations. (Players in the Baroque era didn't have this luxury, and had to make all the notes by varying mouth position, utilising the natural harmonic sequences.) I downloaded a page of diagrams from the internet, and soon familiarised myself with the sequence of opening and closing. However, my initial attempts to produce any kind of musical tone met with complete failure: air escaped everywhere, and only faint, muffled and strangled sounds resulted. I hadn't appreciated the importance of lip pressure and mouth shape on the outcome in vibrating the column of metal in the desired way. I struggled with this situation for a while, until, after looking at some internet video clips on Youtube, I made an initial breakthrough and produced a musical note. My lips quickly went numb with the effort, and I found that practising for ten or fifteen minutes at a time was all I could comfortably manage. Before long, I was beginning to produce quite a few notes, and even stringing together basic scales and a few simple tunes – at least over the lower octave of the instrument's range. (I also found that I could produce a few, rather rude-sounding, notes far below the official lowest pitch, by vibrating just my upper lip in the mouthpiece. I later learnt that experienced trumpeters often use

this technique to warm up.) The fact remained that my range was still limited, and I struggled to play any of the higher notes at all reliably. Although I felt that I had maybe embarked on this project about fifty years too late, I was getting enough motivation from it to want to play at least for a few minutes most days. Being a trained singer, with many years of performance behind me, I realised that there are certain principles of technique which hold true for both voice and instrument, namely the balance between breath pressure and speed of breath flow, and the use of abdominal muscles in supporting the column of air. To put them into practice is another matter, and I get the feeling that I may be trying too hard – I have yet to cultivate the use of dynamic relaxation with it.



It seems that there may be a long journey towards the goal of playing in public, or in a band. But the next logical step in this journey would be to find a teacher to give me a few lessons, and at least to correct any bad habits I may be developing through playing on my own. I have the resolve to attend to this in the New Year, especially as I know a local contact in this respect.

This situation reminds me of a quotation from Verse 64 of the *Tao Te Ching*:

*“A thousand mile journey begins with one step.*

*This is an ancient tale.*

*Those who procrastinate,*

*And those who take premature actions fail.”*

For the sage Lao Tsu, timing is always a matter of becoming in tune with the natural rhythms of processes – a case, in modern language of *going with the flow*. Thus, not only does one need the courage, persistence, and stamina, to follow a path to its conclusion, but also the wisdom and intuition along the way to pursue action at the right time, when the process is ready, and requires that appropriate action; without forcing or interference.

A breakthrough along the way – the “Aha” moment – is always a source of delight, and a blessing for which to be grateful.

As has been illustrated by the careers of innumerable musicians, innate talent, although a valuable starting point, is not on its own enough to succeed in life, but has to be nurtured at the right time and in the right way, and usually requires dedication and a lot of hard work.

One also needs to develop the resilience to cope with setbacks. Good examples of this are the recovery of oboist Leon Goossens after a car accident which caused him serious dental and facial injuries, and soprano singer Lesley Garrett, who developed nodules on the vocal cords, aggravated by stress and emotional problems – after surgery she returned to her teacher, and had to re-learn her singing technique from scratch, note by note. Before long she had regained her former professional operatic skills.

In my own case, I adopt the philosophy that age is never a barrier to the development of new skills (for example, since retirement, I have greatly enjoyed my art work and poetry writing), but I am under no illusion that the journey is necessarily an easy one – it requires a combination of determination, sensitivity, and a focus aimed at being in tune with natural dynamics. My friend Geraldine took up harp playing in her early sixties, after being offered a small Celtic harp which belonged to a friend of hers who had died, and which was discovered in a cupboard by her family. Largely self-taught, and acquiring along

the way several larger and more versatile instruments, not only does she now play the harp with skill in musical ensembles, but she also plays in the corridors of the hospice where she works as a voluntary chaplain, providing valuable therapy to terminally ill people and nursing staff alike.

The serendipity of the cornet has started me on a new journey, and I already know by this stage that playing it is not just a passing fad, but something worthwhile which holds its own fascination and excitement as I step into the unknown.

*Peter Horsfield*

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### **RWANDA.... THE SILENT CRY**

I look at my window to the world  
and see a long queue of hope,  
ebony skin and wide fearful eyes.

A child's clinging hands  
as her turn for the needle draws near,  
in a war against disease.

I remember my own childhood,  
a smallpox jab in a comfortable clinic,  
my distraught mother at my banshee screams.

But this child cannot scream,  
she has been taught the silent cry.

The needle may give her life,  
but her scream could end it  
in another war she is no part of.

And so this child, no more than five,  
stifles her sob and is silent in her pain.

*RosemaryDudley*

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## OF NATURE, POETS & MALT

It was a long climb up to the pass and the day was hot.

“Come on, Gerry!” called Henry. “Not much further, and it’s really worth the climb!”

“I hope so,” mumbled Gerry, who was feeling somewhat exhausted and wondered if he had put on too much weight over recent months.

After about five minutes they did at last reach the summit of the pass. There before them stretched out far below was the valley and over on their left they could just make out a silver shimmering which they knew was the sea. Across the valley was the whole range of sierras in all their grandeur.

“Now!” said Henry. “Look at that view! Isn’t it worth the climb?”

“It’s certainly a very fine view,” admitted Gerry, getting his breath back.

“A very fine view?” said Henry. “Is that all you can say? Just look at it! It takes your breath away.”

“I’ve hardly got my breath back,” laughed Gerry. “I certainly don’t want it taken away. It’s a very fine view today. But can you imagine it up here in a raging gale with the rain beating down?”

“I can! I can!” cried Henry excitedly. “The wind howling around and lightning playing on the mountains opposite. Wonderful! Fantastic! Nature in all her splendour and power!”

“You’re an incorrigible romantic,” said Gerry. “You’d have been at home with Byron and Shelley and that crowd.”

“I would, I would!” agreed Henry. “Nature’s wonderful. Don’t you feel the appeal of nature? Doesn’t it tug at your very soul?”

“Not sure a soul can be tugged,” muttered Gerry. “Nature’s, well, just nature.”

“You’ve got no imagination,” said Henry. “Just look at the view before you. It would be glorious at any time of the year, in any weather. Can you imagine it in winter - all the sierras covered in snow?”

“With the odd avalanche to add to the fun, I suppose,” replied Gerry. “Not nice if you’re caught in one.”

“Well,” replied Henry. “You’ve got to respect nature, of course. She is beautiful and magnificent, but also deep and mysterious ...”

“A *femme fatale!*” interrupted Gerry.

“All right,” said Henry, “a *femme fatale*, if you like. You need to respect her; if you don’t, you get into trouble.”

“Tosh!” rejoined Gerry. “Stop the silly personification! Nature’s a force and you can suffer at the hands of nature even if you do respect it. It’s all very well saying nature is appealing on a day like this with that view in front of us; but admit it, Henry, nature can also be downright appalling.”

But before Henry could admit or deny anything, Carol and Stephanie came over the ridge on their right and called out to them.

“What?” said Gerry in surprise. “How did you two get there? You don’t look at all exhausted!”

Henry laughed. “The road over the pass comes near here; there’s a view-point and car park a couple of hundred yards or so on the other side of that ridge.”

“You mean,” said Gerry “we could have come most of the way by car instead of trudging up that path this morning?”

Carol laughed. “You needed the exercise, Gerry; you’ve been getting too flabby around the middle. I’m sure you’re all the better for it.”

“Um,” grunted Gerry, “and what about you two. Wouldn’t you have liked the exercise as well?”

“Probably,” said Stephanie, “but we didn’t think you two would manage all day on just water and energy bars, so we’ve been putting a picnic together and we didn’t fancy carrying it all the way up.”

“Picnic?” said Gerry. “Oh well, fair enough.”

“Yes,” said Carol laughing as she and Stephanie took off their backpacks, “there’s some stuff here but the rest is back in the car. Perhaps you boys would like to go and fetch it.”

The thought of a picnic had given Gerry sudden energy as he and Henry hurried off to the car.

They soon returned and as Carol and Stephanie were sorting out the picnic, Stephanie said: “I guess you two were admiring the view before we arrived. Spectacular, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I was admiring it till old misery guts here,” said Henry nodding towards Gerry, “started saying that nature wasn’t appealing, it was appalling.”

“All I said,” said Gerry, “was that nature is not always benevolent; it can be malevolent also.”

“Like,” said Carol coming to her husband’s defence, “Tennyson wrote when he said that nature was ‘red in tooth and claw with ravine’.”

“You see, Henry,” said Gerry, “Tennyson was a bit more realistic than your Byron and Shelley.”

“Umph,” said Henry, “the ‘Idylls of the King’ realistic? I don’t think so!”

“Sure,” said Carol, “the stories are all myths; but Tennyson’s descriptions of nature are accurately drawn from his own observations over many years.”

“Oh come on,” said Stephanie, “stop all this nonsense about

nature being benevolent or malevolent. It has no will, so how can it one or the other? Nature is nature.”

“Nature is nature,” repeated Gerry. “Is that why you always eat organic stuff, Stephanie?”

“Certainly,” said Stephanie. “We’re products of nature, so what nature produces is good for us.”

“Cocaine is an entirely natural substance, so I guess it’s good for you?” asked Gerry, mockingly.

Henry kept quiet; he was only too well aware of his wife’s obsession with all things organic. But Carol could see that Henry was looking uncomfortable.

“Stop it you two!” she said. “Stephanie, you said ‘Nature is nature’ - so leave it at that, with warts and all. And you, Gerry, stop teasing Stephanie. Let’s just all enjoy the picnic. That empty plastic box there can be the forfeit box. Anytime anyone says ‘nature’ or ‘natural’ they put a pound coin into the box.”

“Good idea,” said Henry. “Let’s get stuck in. Glad to see you girls put in a few beers.”

“Ah yes,” mused Gerry. “Malt does more than Milton can to justify God’s ways to man.”

“Eh?” queried Henry.

“Housman,” answered Gerry. “It’s in the ‘Shropshire Lad’. I think we can both agree with Housman on that one.”



“I think so too,” laughed Henry, tucking into his picnic.

I am glad to say that the malt worked its magic (though sensible Carol refrained, as she would be driving). They all enjoyed the sun, the view and the picnic; and when at last they had packed up to drive back to their holiday cabins, the forfeit box was still empty.

Raymond Brown

**RECUMBENT FIGURE**  
*(Apologies to Henry Moore)*

C'mon love it'll pass the day,  
into this Gallery out of the rain.  
We'll wander around, not have to pay,  
Then back to the Flea market again.

'Recumbent Figure' it says 'ere,  
but it's got no shape  
and it's got no ears  
There's a great big 'ole  
Where the stomach should be  
And instead of an arm  
It looks like a knee.  
I suppose 'e knows  
what 'e's trying to say,  
but I think I could look  
at this thing all day,  
and not get the message  
the sculptor is sendin'.  
If you ask me love,  
'e wants 'is 'ead mendin'!



*Rosemary Dudley*

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## THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

(A send-up on that jolly yarn: “The Fall of the House of Usher”  
by Edgar Allen Poe.)

My old pal Roddy Usher buzzed me on my mobile, to say he was in the dumps, and could I drop in and cheer him up a bit. so I nipped down to his mausoleum in my jolly little roadster, knowing it wouldn't be one of my jolliest visits. But I hoped to jolly things up a bit by making some of my funny faces and ripping off a few of my riper stories, with maybe a spot of Wooster and Jeeves thrown in.

Arrived at his grotty pad, I saw the old sod wasn't in the best of form. In fact corpses could have taken his correspondence course. But he never was the life of the party, so I knew my visit wouldn't be like a night at the Palladium, however I thought I'd cheer him up a bit.

Now I'm exceptionally sensitive to atmosphere, so I began tactfully by saying: “I gather your sis, Maddy's not too chirpy?” He grunted hollowly in reply.

I advised him: “Roddy, you old bastard, you should cheer yourself up a bit. Why don't you hire a jazz band for the odd evening and get smashed with some of your pals?”

He groaned even more hollowly at this. Then I suggested games of charades, or hide-and-seek and he gave his hollowest groan yet.

So I switched tack and suggested we pretend the walls were slowly closing in on us, pushing us over a pit, but even this didn't lighten his mood. So I nipped outside for a swift fag and a bevy, and while I was doing this all the walls fell down, and the old place collapsed. so I scarpered.

Well, you can't say I didn't try. You win some, you lose some. I certainly lost that one.

*Desmond Clark*

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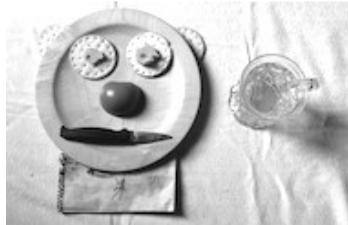
## HENRY HOOK

I'll tell the tale of Henry Hook  
Who would not teach himself to cook,  
But at a table, roughly laid,  
Ate microwaved and readymade  
Convenience meals, all by himself,  
Bought from a supermarket shelf  
And full of sugar, salt and fat.  
He'd tell his friends and colleagues that-

-Health warnings he would treat with scorn  
For since the day that he was born  
His food was either tinned or wrapped.  
He'd never learned how to adapt  
To eat fruit raw, an egg to boil  
Or stir fry onions in hot oil.  
He'd never learned to steam his greens  
Or 'top and tail' the runner beans.

He did not think it was his job  
To simmer porridge on the hob  
Or crush the garlic, make some broth  
Or whip up cream into a froth.  
He'd never tried to learn to bake  
Some buns or a Madeira cake,  
And cutting lemons with a knife  
He would not do to save his life.

He'd never quite learned how to roast  
A joint and even making toast  
Was far beyond his mental powers.  
He'd gaze at market stalls for  
hours.



He'd stand and vacantly he'd stare  
At apple, orange, peach or pear  
And ponder, in a pensive mood,  
Just how a carrot could be food.

He'd walk by all the butchers' shops  
With trays of sausages and chops  
But Nemesis was close at hand.  
His future was not what he planned.  
For suddenly a Power Cut  
Kept all the supermarkets shut.  
And though fresh produce could be bought  
This was not food that Henry sought.

His ready meals went one by one  
Until they were completely gone.  
Now only personal cooking skills  
Could ward off malnutrition's ills.  
But Henry, lacking all of these,  
Could not relax and eat with ease.  
All he could do was sit and mope,  
Complain and grumble, lose all hope.

He curled into a ball and cried,  
Grew thinner, turned pale, starved and died.  
His freezer empty, cupboard bare,  
But should we sympathise or care?

The Moral is: "No Microwave  
Will keep the Moron from the Grave."

*Robert Edmondson*

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## THE STRANGE EVENT

I'll tell you of a very strange event;  
this is how the circumstances went,  
someone said to David Cameron,  
“We have to have a referendum  
about our place in Europe, don't you



know?  
Some people want to stay and some to go”.

The date of poll was June the twenty-third,  
the politicians gave their firm and solid word  
that all opinions would, of course, be heard.  
They tried with all their heartfelt might and main  
to make us want to go or to remain.

The day arrived, with wild and stormy weather  
and hordes of people setting off together  
to put their cross upon the ballot sheet,  
then scurry home, at last put up their feet.  
They knew that on the very stroke of ten  
the counting would begin, and then, oh, then ,  
results would fly in very thick and fast  
and in or out would be resolved at last.

As Friday morning dawned it became plain  
that “Brexit” voters were the ones to gain;  
the people who had wanted to remain  
discovered that their campaign was in vain,  
and now our country has to find a way  
just to keep calm and carry on each day.  
With David out and Jeremy on his way  
who is there left to stop a grim affray?  
Will it be Boris or Theresa May?

And we are left with one more big conundrum -  
Should there have ever been that referendum?  
Though Europe was a lumpy bed to lie on,  
at least we had good neighbours to rely on.

Yes, as things go, it was a strange event,  
Of which we'll have a long time to repent!

*Sylvia Herbert*

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### THE LURE OF THE SEA

“I must down to the sea again.  
I must down to the sea again.  
I must ...no GO – down to the sea again.  
NO GO. NO GO.”

That's what Miss Kemp drummed into us. With her horn rimmed spectacles and salt and pepper hair pulled back into a bun. That's how it was in Dad's Albatross Book of Living Verse that stood between the Tennyson and the Longfellow in their leather-bound covers on the shelf in the living room. I remember. I do remember.

I must - No GO. No. GO. Down to the sea. Again.

Shoes on. Coat on. No. Blue sky. Not cold outside. Go to the sea.

This is the way. This is the way we go. My feet know the way. Down the hill, down the steps, over the rocky bit to the sandy beach. It is steep now – steeper than it used to be and there is nowhere to hang on to. I look around for Jeremy, but he isn't there to hold my arm. The rocky bits are slippery but I make it to the beach and sit myself down on the last large black rock where the still damp seaweed has gathered. I sit to watch the waves and wait to see if the children come.

I can see the children – they are where they always are – playing round the old rowing boat pulled up by the black rocks a little further along. Four children in shorts and vests digging in the sand, looking up and laughing. I catch the sound of their chatter and laughter over the calls of the seagulls and the soft sounds of the sea. Sometimes they run to the sea, filling up their little buckets with water and I strain to catch their names for sometimes names escape me.

Then they are gone and the mist closes round me again and for a moment I wonder where I am until I see Jeremy striding along the sands with a brown dog at his heels. So there he is – he must have come down before me. He looks across and waves and I wave back, then he is gone too and the dog is gone and I can't remember its name but I remember Jeremy's name. But I don't know why. I'm not quite sure now who he is.

It is like the tide is throwing up little bits of driftwood – little bits of memory that appear and then are snatched back again as the waves ebb only to pop up again to tantalize me because I cannot hold them. "To catch at and let go". Where did that come from? The phrase bothers me for a moment, then fades and I find I am thinking of spiders. Did it have something to do with spiders?

I have – had? – have? A picture in my room of those children – some children – playing near the boat and it reminds me of me and my brothers and sister. The clothes are different – we girls have little smocked dresses and the boys wear longer shorts. Freddie and George and Pammy and me and there are times when they visit me – grown and strong now - and we chat about the things we did as children. Those other children - the ones in shorts whose presence fills me with joy – I know I should know their names, but they are gone.

My shoes have slipped off my feet and I can feel the sand tickling between my toes – I will go and paddle in the sea – it is a

little nearer now – so I will go to it before it comes to me and then I can stay and maybe see the children again before I have to climb the steps back up. I always love the sea – it is always there and I think how lucky I am to always be near it.

So I walk to the edge and let the little waves lap over my toes, feeling the thrill of the coldness of the water. Oh....I go a little further – the water is past my ankles – it is up to my shins. I feel a little pebble between my toes and look down to see my mother reflected in the water. Her face is thin –almost bony. But what is this she is wearing? It looks like a nightgown. Why is my mother in the sea wearing a nightie – a white one? I am puzzled by this.

“Helen! Helen! A voice carried on the breeze. Is that Miss Kemp’s voice?

“Helen” Nearer now.

I look down to where my mother was and realise it is not my mother but a reflection of me. Oh dear. I have come to the sea in my nightie. Again. I am embarrassed and wonder briefly what I should do. But I wonder only briefly. I want to linger by the shore, though I know they won’t let me. So I do nothing and let them come to get me and take me back to the home that used to be my home and pretend that I don’t know that anything is wrong and that I didn’t know what I was doing. Which of course I did. I had to – not go - down to the sea again to let those few precious memories ebb and flow through me. Once again. There are so few left.



*Jennie Allen*

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## HEATWAVE SUMMER

*(Two Acrostic Sonnets)*

### I

How joyfully we frolic in the sun,  
Extend our holidays on glorious beach,  
Alleviate our stress with endless fun,  
To bask in blissful warmth; to it we reach,  
Withstanding overheat, until we find  
A sheltered spot beneath the willow trees;  
Variety of mottled shade so kind  
Enhances comfort as we feel soft breeze.

Such hedonistic life might we prolong  
Until the cows, proverbial, come home;  
Must change, however, with the season's song,  
Make large adjustments, no more freely roam.  
Exceptional the weather that we face –  
Responds to challenges our hardy race.



## II

High temperatures in summer seventy-six  
Expanded railway lines in buckled tracks  
Across the country – rarely happened since.  
The sun-scorched earth in drought was riven by cracks,  
Withholding sustenance from withered plants.  
Accelerated dust bowls' ravage spread  
Vertiginous bush fires, by gales enhanced –  
Emergencies that fuelled people's dread.

So many perished from the searing heat,  
Untimely global warming's dire effect.  
Meanwhile, the year reverts to rain and sleet,  
Malignant floods the landscape's architect.  
Extreme conditions may become the norm –  
Reverse *two fine days and a thunderstorm*.

*Peter Horsfield*

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### A DAY TO REMEMBER

A cool dawn breeze  
flutters the ash leaves,  
pale light above the woods  
promises fine weather,  
and we stroll, my Dad and I,  
this summer morning  
along the lane behind our house  
towards the field where Eric's cows  
are munching grass.  
Soon they'll be in the milking shed,  
placid and beautiful.

Surprise! Around the corner,  
drawn up on the verge,

a gypsy caravan,  
old-fashioned, painted bright  
in greens and reds.  
Sitting on the steps between the shafts  
the owner and his wife,  
drinking their early tea.  
Brown hands are curled around the mugs,  
the black-nailed fingers  
shiny with gold rings.  
A short way off a sturdy horse  
enjoys the tender grass.

Dark eyes flashing, the man gives us “Good Day”.  
The woman weighs us up, tosses her proud head,  
then takes a gulp of tea.  
Noticing Dad’s pipe, the man seizes his chance.  
“Can ye spare a plug o’ baccy, Sir?  
I’ve smoked me last few shreds”.  
So Dad, reluctant but polite, pulls out his Sobranie tin  
and sees the fragrant strands pressed deep in waiting clay.  
“Thank ye kindly, Sir”. A slow smile curves the wily mouth.  
“Good fortune go with ye.”  
We nod and wander on towards the wood.  
When we look back  
a distant wisp of smoke is spiralling to the sky.

So many years ago.  
When I look back  
I wonder where the gypsies travelled next.  
My father's journey was to be cut short,  
but I still tread the lonely road  
towards reunion.



*Sylvia Herbert*

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## JOURNEY THROUGH DUSK

It had taken Lynda some weeks to recognise the pattern. As a student, undertaking a college placement in a home for elderly residents, her observations had yielded the usual well documented ageing traits but, the more Lynda interacted with the residents of the ‘Glenmore Care and Nursing Home’, the more she realised that each resident was a unique soul with their own story, if only you had time to listen. Even the outwardly unresponsive had, buried in their past, their own good reasons for their disillusion and mistrust of the world.

All the residents of Glenmore displayed, to some degree, the recognised characteristics of an ageing mind and body: failing hearing and eyesight, physical frailty, the dimming of short term memory, characterised by the misplaced personal items, books, spectacles, even teeth. For most, there were forgotten appointments and the occasional, and sometimes hilarious “wardrobe malfunctions,” all of which were dealt with patiently by the staff of the Glenmore Home.

This home was very well run, and as Lynda’s placement there was supernumerary, having assisted with the breakfast and lunches, she spent a lot of time chatting with residents, which they almost all seemed to enjoy. Encouraged by the popularity of these informal chats, and with the approval of the Glenmore Head of Staff, Lynda organised “themed” memory sessions in which residents gathered in groups to share their memories of past occasions, such as the Coronation, Royal Weddings, the War etc. - anything, in fact, that the residents wished to discuss.

The sessions could be serious, funny, sad or argumentative but, Lynda noticed, they all had one thing in common. As the light faded and afternoon shadows lengthened, casting a different light into the normally sunny lounge, all the residents without exception seemed to lose interest in that day’s subject. All

stopped presenting their side of a discussion and fell silent. Some began mumbling, most fidgeted, clearly wanting to be elsewhere. Others made no pretence of retained interest, they simply got up and retired to their own rooms. Strangest of all, Lynda noticed that this disengagement seemed to be synchronised.

She was baffled. At first she imagined that she had allowed the sessions to go on for too long and she tried terminating the sessions earlier, but this resulted in the residents carrying on their discussions without her. But Lynda noticed that in this case the groups would carry on chatting, but only until dusk fell, when at what appeared to be a pre-determined moment, all the gathered residents would cease to be interested, sometimes, it appeared, even in mid-sentence.

Mystified, Lynda confided her puzzlement to another Glenmore care worker, the merry young Myra who laughed heartily at Lynda and said “Have you only just noticed? It happens every day. It’s a ‘dusk’ thing. I have no idea why, but it is as though every resident, bless ’em, becomes confused and worried when dusk falls. But it doesn’t last long, only until it’s dark, then they feel ok again. No one has any idea why it happens, but,” Myra widened her eyes and lowered her voice dramatically, “I do have a theory. No one here has anything to be afraid of or to worry about, so I believe that it is a sort of throw back from ancient times when we were hunter-gatherers. Sort of nature’s way of saying,” and again Myra lowered her voice, this time to a menacing growl, “beware the monsters of the night will soon be upon us. Let’s quickly run back to our cave.”



Then both girls fell about giggling at Myra's graphic depiction of an approaching 'night monster'. "But seriously," Myra confided to Lynda, "All staff have noticed the disorienting effect that dusk has on the residents, but it lasts only until night falls completely, then they're perfectly OK again. Strange isn't it?"

"So just you remember, Lynda, when you feel it yourself, you know, that feeling that dusk monsters are about to get you and you need to head quickly back to your cave, you will know that old age is upon you," and Myra made another growl and playfully leapt at her younger co-worker. And with that a giggling Myra and Lynda began to prepare the residents' supper, laughing at the thought of worrying about unspecified dangers lurking in the dark.

..oo0oo..

Lynda was driving carefully back from her daughter's house where she had enjoyed lunch and spent the afternoon cooing over her latest grandchild. She had realised with some dismay that she had spent more time at her daughter's house than she had intended and that it would soon be dark. Lynda no longer liked driving at night and she avoided it if she possibly could. She found other road users more aggressive than they used to be and the lights from the oncoming traffic, especially the halogen headlights of modern cars, seemed to momentarily blind her and turn her into a nervous driver, which she never used to be. She sighed; she used to be so confident in her driving as in everything else, but these days there seemed to be so many things about which she was hesitant.

Looking back, Lynda realised her loss of confidence had begun when her dear Ted had suddenly died. They had had a lovely life together, raised their son and daughter, and retired to their lovely bungalow, where they shared life's tasks. But now Lynda had all the tasks on her own shoulder.

Lynda and Ted had always lived sensibly in order that their retirement would be comfortable, as indeed it had been for a few short years until Ted began getting the persistent indigestion which turned out to be fatal heart failure. But now Ted was gone, and Lynda wondered “Would she cope with everything? Would the garden prove too much for her? Would the money last?” Without Ted to reassure her, Lynda could not be sure about anything. She tried to look on the bright side. After all, she did have her lovely family nearby and her life-long friend Myra to turn to for steadfast support.

Lynda tightened her grip on the steering wheel as a wave of panic swept over her, but still she drove steadily homeward through the gathering gloom. In the past, Ted had always done the driving. She wondered for the 100<sup>th</sup> time how was she supposed to cope alone for the next 10 or even 20 years? So many worries swirling in the chilling gloom.

On arriving home, Lynda edged the car carefully into the garage and let herself into her homely kitchen. The cat ran towards Lynda and rubbed her soft body against Lynda’s legs, doubtless anticipating supper.

Lynda felt herself relax at the touch of the cat and the warmth of the kitchen. She felt the tension of the drive ebbing away. “We’ll manage everything somehow, won’t we, Puss?” she murmured as she walked to the window and looked out at the night. “Good to be safely back in the cave,” she smiled to herself gently as she began her evening meal.



*Wendy Baxendale*

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## A STITCH IN TIME

“A stitch in time?” young Alfie said.

“That don’t make sense.” He scratched his head.

“You can’t sew time; it’s not like cloth.

“The saying’s daft; it’s tosh – it’s froth.”

“It’s not,” he heard a voice reply

“For time with space, we can’t deny,

“Does form but one continuum.”

Young Alfie scowled; he looked so glum.

“Good grief,” he moaned, “This is confusing.

“I fear my marbles I am losing.”

“Oh come,” the voice said, “Cheer up lad.

“You’re fine; don’t worry. You ain’t mad.

“Remember what your teacher said

“That spacetime’s like a fabric spread

“Which gravity may pull and bend.”

“I do,” said Alf, “I’ll not pretend

“I followed all ’cause it was weird.

“For space and time, so it appeared,

“Can be distorted, can be bent.”

“And even,” the voice added, “rent!”

“You mean get torn?” said Alf alarmed.

“That’s dangerous; we’ll all be harmed.”

“Oh yes,” the voice replied “it’s scary

“When such a tear greets the unwary.

“But those who know just what to do,

“Just like my able space-ship crew,

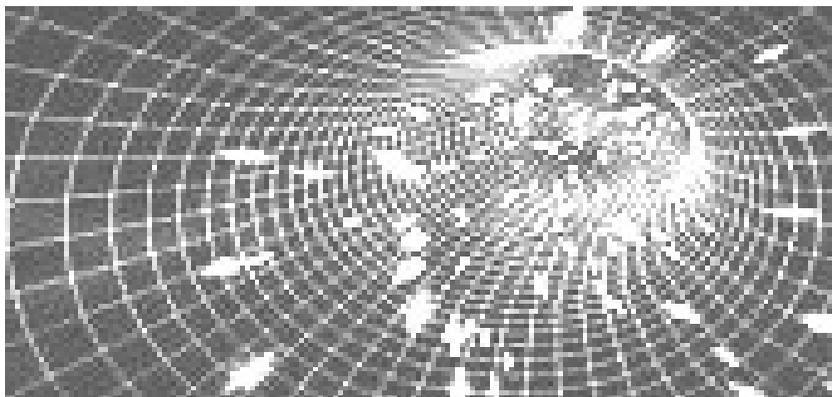
“Will stitch the spacetime fabric’s tear

“And thus their universe repair.”

“Oh wow!” cried Alf, “they sound so brave.

“But what’s the nine the stitch does save?”

“The nine were me and colleagues eight  
“Whose job it is to investigate  
“Irregularities reported  
“When spacetime fabric is distorted.  
“On that occasion when we stitched  
“The dang’rous tear and were not pitched  
“Into another universe  
“Wherein our atoms might disperse,  
“The news was given this headline:  
“A STITCH IN TIME HAS SAVED THE NINE!”



“I guess,” said Alf, “my teacher did  
“Misquote it slightly, or amid  
“Distracting murm’ring I misheard  
“And did not catch quite every word.”  
“No matter,” said the voice, “for it’s  
“Uncommon that something transmits  
“From universe to universe.  
“And Chinese whispers intersperse  
“To change the wording here and there  
“Which may the message thus impair.”

“But tell me, please,” young Alfie said,  
    “Just where you are; from overhead  
“Your voice does seem to come, and yet  
    “There’s no one there; and I’m beset  
“With fear and doubt and dread confusion.  
    “For are you real or just illusion?”  
“I’m real enough,” the voice replied,  
    “But can’t be seen for I abide  
“Within another universe  
    “And can’t from mine to yours traverse.”

“Oh wow!” said Alf, “that’s great - that’s cool!  
    “Just wait till *I* tell them at school  
“A real live alien’s spoken to me  
    “And talked as if he really knew me.”  
But when next day he told the class,  
    They laughed and cried: “You silly ass!  
“You’ve told too many lies before,  
    “We do not believe you any more.  
“Your story’s daft, far-fetched and tosh!  
    “Stop telling us such awful bosh!”

The moral of this story’s plain:  
    If you tell yarns time and again  
    To trick your mates, you’ll be a pain.  
    And if one day you should obtain  
    Some startling truth, ’twill be in vain  
    You tell your tale. So use your brain  
And do from telling lies refrain!

*Raymond Brown*

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## TIME

The girls now graduates rush in from hockey  
amazing exuberance bursting with joy.  
“What are you doing Granny?” “I’m thinking about Time”  
“There’s no such thing as time” Alannah says, giggle giggle.  
“Time is a concept” Ellie says as they collapse on the sofa.

Giggle giggle giggle. Their voices now --  
Tick - tock, tick - tock tick – tock - tick- tock!  
24 tick tocks later tick tock, and the clock’s stopped.  
The girls, so full of energy alert to structures,  
Texting! Phoning! planning  
Mobile Rituals! Sustaining relationships  
Meetings, Arrivals Departures!  
Trains, Plane’s on “Time”

TIME,  
Taking Time, Time !!  
Projects on time,  
over weeks, months, years.  
Contemplating my Time,  
I am trying to hold that thought,  
trying to catch and hold that quiet  
as moments move forward.



Meticulously, spacing my time.  
Looking back, the minutes pass, into days, months, passing  
years.

The past, yes that past! always against the present,  
Then back to my age of twenty,  
And, Wow Lord, help that Past  
Always present, Failures, Successes!  
Now, Their, endless, time! Tick! Tocking!! pulsing away  
My time, to a pace of moderate management, into  
The present joy of each moment.

*Pat Harris*

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