POETRY FOR OTHER OCCASIONS

Martin Nelson

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For Diana without whom these poems would not have been realized.

*‘There was once a road through the woods*

*before they planted the trees.’*

from ‘The way through the woods’ by Rudyard Kipling

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# ANOTHER HOT DAY

Lying in the sand, sweltering

Watching the sea, approaching,

Hearing sounds of the waves pounding,

Feeling breeze on my face cooling.

The salt in the air, tasting

The sand through my fingers, running

Alone but not lonely, dreaming.

A mere child of seven years

Here on my own, no brothers

They've gone to search for shells

I was tired and wanted to rest

And watch the clouds scurry by

Seeing all sorts of shapes and sizes

A face, a cow, a building, a ship

Changing and disappearing.

High up are four vapour trails

Wispy traces left by an aeroplane

Widening and breaking up,

No sound from the engine yet.

Just a silver speck in the sky

With people sitting in rows eating

Travelling to distant lands

# ARTHRITIS

You are not walking right, the big man said.

The hip bone's really a terrible sight.

Your X-rays look like Mars at night.

Wait, I 'll see if I can get you a bed.

Have you seen your GP and got a letter?

There is a waiting list, six months or more,

I think I'm right, I can't be sure.

The sooner you get it done the better,

But if you wish you could wait

And depend on the largess of the state.

Or dig deep and find the cost.

I'll see to it that no time's lost,

To get you in and get it done.

You'll soon be a new man my son.

# BIG BEN RANG OUT

Big Ben rings out to welcome the New Year.

To each is wished happiness and good cheer.

Alone the poor, the sick, the weak,

Sit and wait for a better break.

The wealthy dance and drink all night

Mindless of those out of sight.

The millions hungry, sick and frail,

Praying to a God but of no avail.

He, if he exists at all

Seems to be deaf to the urgent call,

Of those less fortunate than us.

Must it always be thus?

It is our task a promise we give

To create a reason for which we live.

To shape and mould this bright New Year

So no one cries a single tear.

# CAT

What are you thinking sitting so still,

So wise and smug with a smile.

Hardly moving just purring

Sitting curled up on my lap.

Who do you really love

As you lap up your milk?

When you rub against my leg

And lick my outstretched hand.

I can be fooled that it’s me

That I am the centre of your life

But at night when I’m asleep

Where do you roam who do you meet?

My neighbour thinks you are his

He says you eat at his table

When I think you are upstairs asleep

Unknown to me you are wooing him.

Are your feelings only for yourself?

Just waiting for your dinner

Lying so peaceful, so at ease

As if you have no worries.

Perhaps you could explain your secret

So we can all share it.

Do you really have the answer Why?

The reason for all this pain.

# CHANCE

Was it chance that made me listen that afternoon,

Because I had some time to pass?

Why did I reach for that particular CD?

When I could have chosen so many others?

Was it destiny that on these days of Awe

Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

I chose to listen to those haunting songs.

When I could have selected others.

Was it a chance that caused me to reach for them?

When I was waiting for a telephone call.

I had some time to pass.

But why I chose those and not others.

It made me think again of why I’m Jewish.

And what that Jewishness really means.

The simple fate that I was born,

To be one of those whose destiny

Has shaped the world since it began.

Who carry a heavy burden?

A weight that increases day by day

A people protecting a country

A place to live in peace.

Could there be a reason?

Had a hand held mine,

And directed me to that music and not to others.

Could it be a spirit, as many people believe?

Which in an unconscious way directed me?

In a way I will never understand.

Could there be some unconscious force.

That shapes and helps us make our choice?

Invisible, untouchable, out of our reach,

That aids us in the continual search,

To find some sense, some purpose

For a world that’s full of danger,

And individuals who do no wrong

Yet suffer from disease and hunger.

These questions have been asked

Since the creation of time

Yet the answers remain hidden

And alone we are left in pain.

# CHOSEN

Another kick and that’s for you, Jew.

Chosen people indeed?

Yes! You? – Semitic pig.

Scum, Hitler’s target practice

Get down and kiss my boots

Line up for target practice

Ready steady, fire

All fall down.

Who said?

We stole this land you own?

My people were here first

And will be last.

Who gave you the right

To light Chanukah Candles,

And say?

‘Next year in Jerusalem’

‘I did,’ said God.

It’s in my book.

My chosen people

Weak, frail, they are but if they fail

So do we all.

# DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

The death of a loved one is a prison

From which one can never escape.

Time does not fill the hole that remains

It’s a space that cannot be sealed.

No matter how many years have elapsed

The ache doesn't ever go away

You are solitary even in company

With a loss that cannot be healed.

Locked in your lonely misery

Racked with pain and guilt

Why did you not do more and sooner

To save the very one you loved

Her memory stretches into time

Unlike elastic, it never breaks

Returning time and again

To torment you in your grief

Seasons still come and go

The trees flower and leaves fall

The sun rises each day and sets

But my world seems never to change.

I read a book and her name appears

I sing a song and it brings on tears

I take a walk and I am always alone

The sun may shine but my hearts a stone

There seems no release from the sorrow

Until that day which must come I know

When all sadness is washed away.

# ENTERING A ROOM

I walked into the hanger-sized room

With voices reverberating and music insisting.

Standing alone and afraid.

I was a small boy on the first day of school,

Stuttering my name, which I had almost forgotten.

Loneliness and emptiness engulfed me

Alone, I asked where has my life gone?

Why am I so unprepared?

Why do I want to hide, feverishly I looked around?

Grasping for a hold on anything, for a face I recognise.

At last she comes towards me.

‘Hello! John, Welcome,

Come and meet some people

And I re-enter the human race.

# FITNESS

How significant has the gym become?

Now so very important to my being,

That the feeling for it builds up in me,

So that I can’t pass a day unless I succumb.

To the need to attend though my doubts have begun

With those feelings of loving and loathing ,

That disturb my sleep with dreaming

About it, a fear I must overcome.

I set my alarm, put out my things,

Wind up my watch, lay out my towel,

Preparing for sixty minutes of running.

Making sure I bring my water bottle.

I anticipate it notwithstanding

And despite the thrill I am only mortal.

I start to feel the unaccustomed strain,

And ask again do I have to go through hell

To remind me why I am here at all,

And then begins the familiar pain.

Those first feelings are always the same.

But they are so necessary I can tell

For there is no other way to keep well.

And To have the fitness which is my aim

The uncertainty that the pain will ease

But soon it lessens and becomes routine.

And despite my doubts I mobilize

My aching muscles and my joints,

Giving me the incentive to stay the course

When my whole being is saying there's no point.

# GOAT

The herdsman, slim like a palm, sits in its shade

Watching his charges as bowed-necked they mow the dry grass.

Their shiny hides of white brown and fawn twitch to shift

The flies that taunt their sleek muscled flanks.

The horned Billy pushes his kids aside

To reach the lushest leaves,

While his Nanny looks on unconcerned.

As if she had no young.

Capricorn, horn of goat signifies hard work,

Climbing rocky outcrops,

Scavenging sparse terrain,

Living rough in all weathers.

The tenth sign of the zodiac

An earth sign at the northern winter solstice

December the twenty-first.

These sure-footed agile, virile quadrupeds

Have roamed the hills since time began

Descendants of the God Banebdsethis

Whose wife Hatmehit spawned their offspring Horus.

While the four Ram-headed Ptah begat the great Ramesis III.

Pan the Greek God in the form of a man

With the legs and tail of a goat wandered

The hills and mountains of Arkadia,

A mountainous region in Greece.

Amalthea tender Goddess, the nurturing goat nurse of Zeus,

Lives in the hills of the sky as the third moon of Jupiter

The first nanny she goat to nurture her young.

Roasted on a spit turning slowly

They are sacrificed at every Asian celebration,

Who savour the strong flavored tough and chewy flesh,

Unaware of the uniqueness of the meat.

# GREY

Cold grey pavements stretch out before my eyes.

Tall grey buildings reach up to meet the skies.

While the city’s held in winter’s grip.

No one has time for the passer by,

Each hurrying, careful not to slip.

Thoughts lie deeply within their minds

Conscious only of their daily plight.

The pedestrians in dullest grey

Search out any glimmer of light,

To guide them on their journey home.

The sky and sea blend into one

Beneath a lid of featureless tone.

The heavy fog dulls every sound

And clothes all, in a blanket of grey.

Ashen people in grayest clothes

Like zombies pass each other by.

No eye is raised to catch another

Head are bowed against the wind.

The artist, seeking colour for the scene

Choses Payne’s grey to match the view

It adds a sombre shade to the sight

And hides all in a charcoal gloom.

# I FORGIVE YOU DAD

I forgive you Dad for the many ways you failed,

Now that I am a Dad I understand much more

How difficult it is to be what we should be.

To be there when they need us most.

Not finding an excuse to be elsewhere.

To listen to what they say and wipe away their tears.

To kiss and cuddle them when they fall

And not be angry when they fail.

But just be there to commiserate.

Wouldn't it be great if we could be like that

And not lose our tempers and smack.

Because we remember our own past

When you thought smacking was all dad's did

I forgive you Dad, I love you even so.

So many years have passed and I am a Dad again,

I have been given a second chance

Not to make the same mistakes again

Not to allow my ego to get in the way

So that I listen more and say much less

I hope my sons will not need to forgive me

But just grow with the love I give

I'll tell you stories about the Lion king

And meet you after school and read

I will follow your progress to manhood if I’m spared

And be there when you receive your degree

And toast your success in champagne

And organise a slap up meal at your favorite restaurant

You can invite your best friends, a girl or two if you so desire.

# I LIT A CANDLE FOR YOU TODAY

I lit a candle for you today

And watched it glowing in the dark.

A symbol of my eternal love

To remember my loss so stark.

Reminding me of our love now gone

And memories of you flying like a lark

Into the sky above so blue.

I search and search but there is no you

To guide and comfort me

During those dark and deep deep nights.

When all is still yet rushing by.

Those memories I cherished so,

Getting dimmer as each year passes on

Into a future I do not want.

Alone and fragile I search for your face

But cannot find it in any place

And especially today, five years on

When you faded into eternity.

And left me alone holding your hand

As your grip stiffened and grew cold.

# I MEANT TO LEAVE YOU BEHIND

I meant to leave you behind

Trying so hard to move on

But instead I brought you with me

In your paintings , your pictures, your song.

You are there upon the mantle piece

Smiling and looking down

I am lying still in the bedroom

Staring up from the floor.

Your presence is all around me

No matter which way I look

You enter my life while I’m sleeping

And tease me while I am awake.

I thought that time would fill it

That empty space in my heart,

Instead unknowingly

I have stored you in my head.

# I SAT AND WATCHED YOU SLIP AWAY

I sat and watched you slip away.

But didn’t realise it was so.

It was the beginning of the end

And then it was done.

In the morning I fed you porridge.

Thin slightly sweet. You ate it slowly,

You smiled and whispered something I couldn’t hear.

The nurse came in and puffed up your pillows

And later gave you something for the pain.

I knew it was at the beginning of the end.

And nothing I could do would prevent it.

Slowly you’re breathing eased, long gaps.

Then, one long gasp and silence,

So loud, I could hear it.

I closed your eyes no longer seeing.

And I was alone, and you had gone.

# IS NOT KNOWING?

Is not knowing, a sort of knowledge?

The fact that there are no facts.

A truth that cannot be proven

An impossibility that could be possible.

That may be there’s life after death

Although there is no evidence to prove it.

So perhaps it could still be so

But we have no way of knowing.

Science tries to answer our questions

To give us reasons why things are so.

Perhaps we have to wait to find out

That so much of what we know is wrong?

But also the absence of evidence

Is not evidence of absence so we are told?

So much could be that we cannot possibly know

Which some attribute to God.

# IT CAN’T BE RIGHT

Why do I bother, why do I care?

Does it really matter, should I interfere?

Let them do it their way

Even if it makes no sense,

Let them stand and falter

And allow the quality to alter.

Does my best really matter

Shouldn’t I just seek the middle ground

And not bother if I am bettered

What is it really all about?

No I can't let it go

At least without a fight

Otherwise nothing really matters

And that just can't be right.

# IT’S ON DAYS LIKE THIS

It is on days like these that memories return

Her image grows fainter, but I remember her still.

No longer can I hear her laughter so caressing in my ear

Or see the smile as her face lights up.

She now seems far away, so distant and so pale

I want to call and say hello, don’t go away, please stay.

But I know the moments passed and cannot be relived.

Those priceless memories that I so missed.

I am not ready to be alone as we all must be.

To live my life I need you still.

More than before to help me through this strife

This lonely life, which is all, I have.

It will never come again, that time I spent with you.

I must learn to stand and face the world alone

And find the strength to say ‘thank you’

Too late, sadly you’ll never hear.

I feel my power returning, my confidence and resolve

To make my life worth while without you by my side.

So grateful for that love which sadly is no more.

But you gave me the strength to carry on

To find the peace of mind I so desire.

# JANUARY 22ND

It's just a date in the calendar,

Which comes round every year,

Never falling on the same day

But it's different for me.

On that day she was born.

A unique and irreplaceable soul,

Different and yet the same as us all.

She is reborn in every generation.

Somewhere in the world,

In a different coloured skin.

Speaking a different tongue

She's part of the greater community,

Of all living things and objects.

Communicating and sharing in this world

Breathing each other's exspiration.

Living on each other’s waste.

Never to be made the same again

Different genes having been inherited.

And a new life has begun.

But nothing is lost, it is just recycled.

# LOOKING BACK IN TIME

It was a long journey so I thought

Tedious, likea snail crawling across a road

But on looking back today, it seemed to fly.

In the blink of an eye.

The yesterday I had has gone forever

Surviving only in my memory.

Different for each of us,

You recalled the surprise of my call

I, the deep blue of your eyes.

You, the sweet music they played.

Me how short a time you stayed.

You, wondering would I phone again.

Me, thinking how soon and when?

What a chance to find your name

Thumbing through my diary

You hadn’t changed your number

It was so scary

Waiting for you to answer

After so many years

And your voice I remembered

You hesitated then said yes.

# LOVE

It's a long time since I didn't want to go to bed.

A long time since I was so excited I couldn't sleep.

A long time since you made me want you so

That the thought of sleep was a waste of time.

Eight hours of slumber when I could be with you,

To see your eyes sparkle and your lips move,

To touch the silk of your skin and smell your sweat.

Why sleep when I can get so much of you?

Why waste my life with dreaming

When the real thing is by my side?

Your warm flesh pressing against mine.

Its a long time since I felt so alive.

Wanting to devour you with my eyes.

Reaching for you in the twilight of the dawn,

Sinking my soul in the promise of your flesh.

Into those hidden folds that embrace my being.

The momentary pleasure of being alive

When no other thing can compare

To the fusion of mind and body.

In that frenzy of pleasure that blots out the world

And leaves me alone, sad and replete.

# M.I.

Out of the blue it appeared.

No invitation, no sorry, just I'm here.

Why had it decided to be such a nuisance?

Inside me, unknown yet so recent.

It stayed, silent, waiting its time,

Showing no sign of its presence

Everything seemed to go on just fine

Until it made a sound, its essence.

It was heard by a diligent doc.

Ho! Ho! She announced with a smile.

You have a wrong noise in your chest

A foreign sound that must have be there, a while.

We will need a few tests to find out,

What that strange sound's all about.

An echogram was the one of choice.

At last MI, had been found out.

M1, what is that you may ask?

Not a Myocardial Infarction I hope.

No, Mitral Incompetence, none other.

So what's to be done, you dope?

I must wait to hear the deliberations

Of the man with the cardiac touch.

Months later and many tests more

He announces with a smile.

You seem very well despite MI

Go forth and multiply.

What if I had never found out

That I have MI in my heart

Did I need to know about it?

I was happy in my ignorance.

# MOMBASA CLUB

Light breezes blow ‘cross waters blue

In the still haven of the Mombasa Club.

Friends and guests are put at ease

In this calm and tranquil place .

Smiling waiters go gliding by

Providing all a guest desires.

We sit and share a drink or two

As time passes in a most pleasing way.

A distant sail. gently swaying palms,

Sand bars exposed when the tide is low,

Soft voices exchanging pleasantries

Song birds sing in whispering trees.

No traffic sounds to spoil the peace

Or disturb the calm in this quiet retreat.

Which seems a million miles from a nearby town

A most select place, the most renown.

# MOUSE

Mean and moody, she sits unmoving besides my screen.

Her one eye blinking appealingly as if to say

I’m ready just press me here and I’ll obey.

Inanimate and docile so I thought, when I bought her from the shop.

She responded for a while and then her sulks set in.

I’m not moving, she declared, despite entreaties and appeals.

Her battery needed renewing I assumed, but still no life.

The gauge said full and ready to go but she said no.

I don’t like the surface I’m on, she snarled.

So a mouse mat was bought, on which she curled and smiled.

Now I approach her with trepidation and wonder,

Will she reward me with a click and send a message

To my screen that all is well and we’re friends again?

# MOVING HOUSE

They come in quietly, one by one

Whispering, they smile politely.

Shall we remove our shoes they ask shyly?

It’s a lovely house, how long have you lived here?

When was it built? May we see upstairs?

It is so solid, the rooms so large.

Am being invaded by people from Mars?

But I made this decision myself,

To move after so many years.

So many memories, so many tears.

No one made me change my mind

It is because of the passing of time.

It was like this when we first arrived

Living here in someone else’s home.

Until sometime it became our own

Each lives here on the life of another,

Each leaves an imprint of his presence.

Now it reflects our taste, homely and warm.

I stand in the sunshine as it streams in the window

Knowing that this decision will take me away

As it has taken so many before me

It will become part of my memory

And I will speak of it as when and not now.

# MY BEDROOM

I adore my bedroom.

So cool and quiet.

It's on the ground floor.

So I could visit it,

Without feeling embarrassed.

As an old man would.

I can go there any time.

To lie down and think.

Reminds me of so many places.

So many beds in so many rooms.

In so many houses, in so many cities.

In so many countries, each different yet the same.

At night, it invites me.

Its cool sheets envelop.

It's the place in which I dream.

And where I shall probably die.

It's where I rise from in the morning.

It releases me.

Waiting for my return.

Always available.

Patiently awaits me.

Soon we shall be together.

You and I

On a bed somewhere.

Sleeping or loving, anywhere.

# MY WORLD

We can never get away from ourselves

No matter how hard we try.

Though distant fields may seem greener,

As we approach, they turn grayer.

The peace that we seek outside us

Can only be found within.

Our world may seem all around,

In the sky the sea and the trees.

But the true world we seek is not found,

In objects or riches, or pleasures.

It can only be reached by a journey

Which begins deep down inside,

And explores those dark hidden places,

Which we fear to expose and hide.

We so need to have the courage

To go where we dread the most.

To ask the questions that confuse us

And seek the peace that eludes us.

And then we may have a chance

A slim and tenuous one

Of becoming the person we are.

And not the person we seem.

# NEW YEAR

Big Ben rings out to welcome the New Year.

To each is wished happiness and good cheer.

Alone the poor, the sick, the weak,

Sit and wait for a better break.

The wealthy dance and drink all night

Mindless of those out of sight.

The millions hungry, sick and frail,

Praying to a God but of no avail.

He, if he exists at all

Seems to be deaf to the urgent call,

Of those less fortunate than us.

Must it always be thus?

Isn't it our task a promise we give?

To create a reason for which we live.

To shape and mould this bright New Year

So no one cries a single tear.

# OBAMA

The world is on the brink of disaster.

But a new voice now offers a fresh vision

With a plan for a better world,

A revitalisation of hopes and dreams.

While an old man is fighting any change,

The same old approach to problems.

Innocent youth engages with aged maturity

An opportunity for a new voice.

A change from the old approach

Drive and enthusiasm against stagnation

A conflict between racial prejudices

A journey from poverty to power:

Untried versus proven:

A gamble into the unknown:

A conflict between hope and despair:

A young aspirant on the world stage.

# ODE TO AIR

Invisibly I breathe you,

Untouchably I feel you,

Essentially I need you,

So why can’t I see you?

My breath is your breath,

My voice is your voice,

My smell is your odour,

Where have you come from?

Without you I’m nothing,

Just a drum full of water

And a handful of dust.

With you I'm alive.

# POT HOLES

Just a few days ago, I was born

A very small pothole was formed.

A tiny break, you could mistake

If you didn't know what I was.

An insignificant being, compared

To my grand friends over there.

I had big aspirations to be more

I was not pleased to be ignored

But you rode over me as if I wasn't here

And clearly wanted me to disappear.

Then you conveniently forgot my presence,

Letting your wheels crush my very essence.

Desperately I looked around for other holes

Making their way in this world of woes.

Oppressed and feeling alone

I began to make my plans

The rains soon became my ally

And slowly I filled up with water

Thus expanding my walls

And you began to notice me.

You started to drive round me

At last acknowledging my existence.

That was not enough for me.

More rains came and filled me.

My walls began to crumble and

I became deeper

But still you drove round me

Ignoring and ostracizing me.

But I was not daunted.

One night, it rained all the time

And in the morning

I had become a sizable hole.

I was now so much deeper.

Happily you could no longer see

At last, I was a real hole almost a small pond.

Time and again you drove into me.

Jarring your chassis and throwing up a sheet of spray .

I was especially happy at night

When you couldn’t see me and drove right into me .

I shouted for joy as you bounced and shuddered.

The big trailers with their large containers

Couldn’t avoid me and would crash into my sides.

Cyclist and motorcyclists were thrown off their bikes.

Tuk Tuks would stop in mid-stream unable to mount my walls.

Then the rain would evaporate,

I was exposed in all my glory.

A magnificent deep wide hole in the road.

It said , I am here you can no longer ignore me.'

Sometimes I had moments of grandeur

When I imagined I was a lake,

With fish and tadpoles and all manner of watery things.

But then in a moment of reality

I would see myself for what I was

A piece of road that had failed,

Failed to provide the smooth surface

That drivers could expect,

That they had a right to enjoy,

That drivers had paid for.

And then at another time

I exalted in my power,

As masters of the road the have to bow down to me and acknowledge me.

Now in dark moments

I wonder how much longer

I can command the high ground of the road

Pushing you further into the hedge

Before someone decided to fill me in.

Friends my worst fears have been realised

A fundi with broken tiles has arrived

Bent double he is filling me in

My days of glory are running thin

Soon I will be no more

Just a memory of glories past

A brief candle shining then doused

A hole that was once and is no more.

But guess what, I was wrong

Happily happily wrong,

They came and worked and filled

But only half, so half remains

To torment and slow them down.

I lie there, smug and content,

Knowing I have more time to be

A nuisance to one and all,

They can’t ignore me no.

# PROBLEMS

You have to chip away at a problem

Solutions don’t come easy right away.

You know what the challenge is

But don’t know how to solve it.

So you take it little by little

Not certain really where to start.

The first answer seems so obvious

But it may not be the one.

The second solution may be erroneous.

So what do you do next?

You try another and another

Until you've found the best.

# RAIN

The lowering clouds heavy with rain

Stand afar, threatening

As a bull preparing to charge

Waiting for a signal to start.

A burst of thunder like a starter's pistol

Triggers them to release their offering.

Sheets of shiny glistening water

Descend and fill the air with coolness.

Gone the fiery heat of the foetid air

The cloying heaviness no longer there.

When sweat lay damp upon the brow

With nothing to vaporize the wet.

In the distance a blue line appears

Heralding the passing gloom

Soon the whole sky brightens and clears

And the sun returns to warm the soul.

# ROUTINE

I need a routine in my life

To help me get through.

The long list of chores.

That are becoming such a bore.

I need to introduce change

To help me get through the day

How am I going to manage?

When everything is left to me.

There is not enough time

I just can't fit everything in.

But why can’t I stand and stare

Like other people seem to do.

Carefree and act irresponsibly,

Have a bit of freewheeling.

Responding to my every whim

Exploring the wide-open spaces.

Searching for inner peace.

Just live and accept myself

To be free to come and go.

But there is so much to do.

# ROYAL ACADEMY

I first felt your presence

Your essence,

A soft-bodied girl

In front of a Gill Figure

Still, carved in stone.

Your fascination was not

The tilt of your nose

The soft lilt of your voice

Your mouth wrinkling

When you smiled.

But those small lines around your eyes

Your warm hand in mine

Squeezed when you understand.

Is this what love is?

That incredible feeling I have

Another person filling my life

So many forms of it exist.

That defy logic and understanding

In my everyday experience.

Knowing you makes me smile

A warm emotion inside.

Not sexual or lustful though there is that

A sense of love and trust.

I hardly know you-we have only just met

What is this strange feeling I get?

No longer young am I.

Still just as strong an urge

Unsullied with the passage of time.

As if twenty-one again,

Heart leaping, high soaring

I cannot explain it, how?

It’s owed to you my love.

# SAILING INTO THE UNKNOWN

The sky so distant and remote, looks on

Whilst invisible wind, full of spite,

And seas, boiling with hidden rage,

Engage in deadly argument.

Waging an ever constant battle,

Jabbing, straining, pushing, prodding,

Propelling this man-made floating form,

Into this shadowy world, the craft writhes,

Leaving behind a tell-tale wake,

Whilst cleaving the water as a scythe.

The slapping thud against the hull,

The wind roaring as it hits the sail,

The mast heels over against the strain

And spray rises as the boat speeds on.

With man helpless and alone,

No match against this unseen power unleashed,

Battered and bruised he sails on

Until a safe haven is found.

# SNOW

Like the whisper of a lover, it falls,

Clasping all within its frozen might.

The air fills with fluttering feathers

Erasing all shapes in sight.

Birds cease their song of love

As silence like a heavy veil

Descends to cover all

In a thick blanket of white.

Searching deep, the cold seeks out

Pockets of warmth from every crevasse

No place is spared, no home is safe

From its icy caress.

Distance and sky merge into one

As the hills and fields contours blur

Travellers lose their way and stumble

Into hidden ditches and gullies.

Cars are marooned on snow ridges

Their wheels turning helplessly in the air.

Only the bulldozer plough can make its way

Through its giant waves frozen in space

And free those trapped in its grip

To save them from an icy grave.

# SOLEMNLY WE SIT WAITING

Solemnly we sit, waiting.

Each in his own world

Hoping to see the doctor.

Worrying, could I be ill.

Is it serious, what will happen?

So little is known.

And so much is guessed.

Now I wait, just breathing.

I see her smoothing the hair.

She, lolling to sleep

Checking her face not satisfied.

She combs her hair.

Large pale blue ring on her left hand

No music, time passes slowly.

The air feels heavy with silence.

Footsteps, a sneeze, swine fever?

A nurse in black leaves the sickbay

Another nervous, voices can be heard,

A key is turned she enters

Journals are opened and perused.

We look at the poster, my name is called.

# STANDING ON THE CUSP

Standing on the cusp,

Kenya waits, holding its breath

As building after building, blocks of coral

From beneath the waves,

Rise into the blue sky

And blot out the sea.

Uncontrolled these monoliths

Grow without planning.

Here and there, seemingly

Like a cancer spreading into the land.

Destroying the beauty and plan

That is nature.

Soon the real Kenya will disappear

Under a blanket of stone,

And what is left is a coral jungle

In which nothing lives

And days are spent watching

Others live on TV.

# SWEET MEMORY

O memory! Why taunt me so

With sweet images of a love now passed.

A life shared with one so dear,

A partner, lover, mother and friend

With whom my true life really began.

Behind us our children carry our genes.

And their children, until eternity

Are living evidence if need be

Of the life and love we shared.

That is now gone and all that remains

To taunt and reduce me to tears

Are those memories now fading fast?

To reappear at times like this.

When alone, they return and I see your face

And even hear your voice, amongst a crowd

And stop, stunned and dejected

When it is someone else

Who looks and sounds like you.

# THE HEATH

The river Fleet flowing since the heath began,

Still feeding heron, great crested

Grebes and cormorants

I turned and missed your flight,

A flash of blue then gone

You shy beautiful kingfisher.

These ancient trees under which we walk

Have seen three hundred years or more.

Silently, like sentinels they guard the forest.

Here stood Gibbet Elms from which

Many a highway man did hang.

Pitts Garden now in ruins

Overgrown was once in prime.

Poets lane where Coleridge and Keats

Listened to the nightingales.

Kenwood house saved by Henry Goodison

For whom a Fountain was erected in his memory.

You were there when I arrived,

Sitting waiting, what a wonderful surprise.

I felt shy but your warm smile enveloped me.

We shared a pot of tea and a bun,

I heard music and we were one.

# THE HUMAN BODY

In a house of inspiration,

A retreat of peace and calm

Lives a spirit that can’t be stilled.

Where expectation and imagination

Provide the food to nourish it,

There's a battle ever raging ‘tween

The twins of good and ill.

To decide if health or disease will win.

Its bullets are the cells both red and white,

Used by its soldiers waiting to do battle.

It's a concert of life and death.

Ever changing ever still.

In a skin of many colours,

The living juice is always red

It’s a universal fluid available to us all

A vital essence in the chemistry of life.

Skin and muscle hang upon a bony frame

A skeleton, a symphony of strength

With joints sliding like ice that bend and move.

With its sinews of muscle

Between valleys of sweat

It sits on hillocks of buttocks.

The light in its eyes gleams with excitement

At the sounds all around

Guided by beams of light

It moves like fluid.

Its covered with a skin of feeling

in a thick forest of hair

in a miracle of a warmth

It maintains a circle of life.

Each creation holds the secret of the next,

Shaping the bricks and mortar to form

The future generation, It’s a chance

To begin again and correct the mistakes.

# THE SHADOWS LENGTHEN

By five the tree shadows have lengthened

And the bougainvillea’s bright glow has dulled.

It is a time of calm reflection

It is my time to walk and ponder.

The breeze from the sea has sharpened

And workmen walk with a springy step

Glancing at the pretty young girls

With welcoming smiles and warm Hello’s.

Unfinished buildings rise from the ground

Like maize stalks emerging from the soil,

Climbing starkly against the blue sky.

Walled compounds ,Guards stand lounging

A school bus stops and unloads a solitary child.

Birds perch immobile on the wire

Their high shrills echoing in the calm.

Others chirping welcome to their friends

Children shouting and laughing after school.

The world has calmed after that frenzy

As the heat of the day subsides.

The demands of the now are no more.

This is the time to smile and love

And thank those whose lives we share.

# THE THINGS I LOVE

What would I keep if I had to leave?

My home and all that I love,

Or risk my life like so many others,

Because of the beliefs I hold?

What do I value above all else

From which I wouldn’t be parted?

What things are so precious?

That I couldn’t leave them behind?

So many have faced this dilemma

And how have they decided?

I think of this question in the cool of my room

And ponder what I would take

As the setting sun leaves me alone

With my thoughts and my dreams.

People are more important of course

But things carry memories.

A gold leaf watch with an automatic wind

So few of these now remain

On the back a loving line

Engraved with her name and mine.

My wedding ring a simple cast

Holds so much history for me.

It symbolizes a love that’s gone

Whose mortal flesh’s no more.

A book of poems I gained at school

Engraved with my name and date

I recall the moment when I won it

And the pride I felt inside.

A fountain pen, the one with ink

That flows and soon runs out.

I used it in my final exam

I think it brought me luck.

An album of photos of those I love

Sadly many no longer here.

Others are family and friends

Whose love I cherish beyond all.

These are the things I treasure

And want them with me always

They tell me who I am

And more, they reassure.

# THE TUBE

They walk steadily eyes staring forward

Marching at their own time and pace.

Intensely alone, isolated and rhythmic,

They replicate the same dance day by day.

No eyes meet, no contact is made,

As they remain locked within their heads.

Desperately as if rejected by the world outside

They stream down the escalator,

Each tracing a path into that hell of noise and smell.

Like a line of ant’s intent on their purpose,

They gain the platform,

To await the rumble of the approaching train.

As it slowly grinds to a halt.

A door opens and they hasten in

To disappear within its belly.

Others inside standing and waiting

Are disgorged onto the stage.

To reappear each day,

Reborn to trace the same journey to hell.

# THEY CAME TOGETHER

They came together, men from many places

To describe the journey they had undertaken.

Proud and brave they stood

To confront the world and say-

I am here. Me!

A unique and whole man

A special being ready to play my part

Ready to support those in need.

Confidently they proclaimed,

Confronting their battle between good and evil.

Men, standing eye to eye,

Supporting each other.

Hugging men for the first time without fear.

Smiling and laughing, unashamed by their new familiarity.

Men showing courage, honour and strength.

O love! My friend. My heart. My all.

# TSAVO WEST

The stillness like a heavy weight cloaks the land,

As the wind a gentle whisper caresses the soil.

Nothingness fills the vast expanse of Tsavo West

As soundless birds swoop and roll in the cloudless sky.

Like a peaceful spirit drawing the viewer in,

The sun rises slowly in the East warming the land.

Insects hum greeting each other in its sultry rays

Mesmerized by the echoing nothingness of the void.

Above, the sky, a huge panoply encloses all.

Now the distant horizon blurs and slowly disappears

In the haze of the approaching storm.

As a tide of rain advances like a wave.

It strides stealthy across the barren earth.

The sky darkens and black clouds menace the scene

The pale yellow soil is replaced by a sheet of grey.

Dark shadows hover and stretch with bursts of light within.

Peels of rumbling thunder accompany them,

As forks of lightning pierce the sombre clouds

Illuminating the sky like flashing bulbs.

At last the rain falls splattering and hammering on the roofs,

A dozen fists punch the receiving earth,

Rivulets become rivers of roaring water.

Torrential streams transform the dusty soil

Into a landscape of mud, ponds and lakes.

Then as quickly as it came, it stops

And a calm descends upon the sodden plains.

Within days green shouts spring forth from the parched acres

And waiting wildlife return to feed and mate.

# WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

Every now and then I get that feeling.

That what I'm doing is just waiting,

That all I'm doing is just doodling,

Until that moment when I am no more.

That my whole life has been a nonsense.

That all I have been doing is passing time.

I arrived some three score years ago,

But what I have achieved, I do not know.

What difference have I made, I ask?

Is there any evidence of my being?

Can I claim any credit for my past?

What can I point to that will last?

Have I changed one iota of this world?

Or will I disappear, like so many others.

With not a trace to show that I was here

What a waste of all that pain and tears.

# WHAT WOULD I KEEP?

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Or risk my life like so many others,

Because of the beliefs they hold?

What do I value above all else

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With my name and hers.

These are the things I treasure

And want them with me always

They tell me who I am

And more, they reassure.

# WHEN THE TEARS COME

When the tears come, hot and heavy,

Nothing can assuage the pain,

The empty ache within my being

As I recall your memory.

Alone and lonely,

I sit and muse

Of what could have been,

But is no more.

A life ended by such cruel an act.

You now resting in a bed of soil,

And me struggling,

To make sense of it all.

# WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG?

Why does it take us so long?

To see the things that really matter.

Why do we rush hither and thither?

Avoiding the questions that we need to answer.

Why do we sleep for so many years?

Avoiding ,stopping, standing and staring.

Looking and feeling, touching and being

The only things that are really true.

Why does it take to the end of our lives

To see the drop of dew on a leaf,

To feel the breeze on our faces

See a child break into laughter.

And watch her face as she smiles.

To hold her hand so she does not fall.

These simple things are all there is.

Yet we wait so long before we see them.

# YOU HAVE TO CHIP AWAY AT A PROBLEM

You have to chip away at a problem

The solution doesn’t always come right away

You know what the challenge is

But don’t know how to solve it

So you take it little by little

Not certain really where to start

You suddenly get an answer

But wait there may be more

The first solution may be obvious

But it may not be the best

So what do you do next?

You try another and another

Until you’ve solved the puzzle.

# YOU WERE THERE

Unaware that you were standing there,

I turned and saw your face.

You smiled and I felt something dawn,

Suddenly a new world was born

We shared that tiny moment alone

In recognition of a common bond.

We talked as if old friends,

You, I had always known

Partaking the moments freely

Walking together around the gallery.

I wanted to take your hand

As in my dreams I always had.

We met again and strolled alone

Through wooded paths and under leafy trees.

Arm in arm, I recall it still

Moments, which remain so real?

And then farewell a smile, a tear.

You walked away up on the hill.

I watched you go, you turned

And waved and then was gone.

MARTIN NELSON was born in London in 1932. During the Second War he was evacuated with his family to Bermuda and returned in 1945. He attended Mill Hill School and then studied Medicine at St Mary’s Hospital, London. After a career as an Orthopaedic Surgeon, he returned to college to gain a BA in Fine Art and an MA in sculpture.

He began writing in the years after retirement, following courses at NEC, Arvon and the Open University. His wife Diana died in 2005. He has a daughter Sarah and a son Paul and four grandchildren.

He has published two earlier collections: Poetry for All Occasions 2009

Poetry for More Occasions 2013

His poems cover a wide range of human emotions and experiences.