

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

ANOTHER HOT DAY
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BIG BEN RANG OUT
CAT
CHANCE
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TSAVO WEST

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

WHAT WOULD I KEEP?

WHEN THE TEARS COME

YOU HAVE TO CHIP AWAY AT A PROBLEM

YOU WERE STANDING THERE

YOU WERE THERE

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, like a 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?

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 they hold?

What do I value above all else
From which I wouldn't be parted?
What things are so precious?
Which mean so much to me

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 fate.
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On the back a loving line
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.