



Ruils Creative Writing Group Anthology

April 2026

Jenny

Margaret

Migs

Hazel

Elizabeth

Voice
of the
Underdog

Prisha

Luigi

Peter

Polly

Goreti

ruils
independent living

Ruils is a user-led charity supporting Disabled children and adults and people with long term health & mental health conditions to live independently, be part of their community and to live life to the full.

We provide information, advice, advocacy, befriending and activities to our clients and their families.

This Anthology was created by our Creative Writing Group, which provides a safe and supportive space for anyone wanting to pick up their pen and share their stories.

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Foreword

The Ruils Creative writing group runs every Monday all through the year from 2 to 4 p.m. We have a small comfortable space at Richmond Age UK in Twickenham. I get there just before 2, collect the milk and make myself comfortable, bringing biscuits. The group also likes to bring snacks, and soon the table is filled with cups of tea, coffee and snacks.



The writers get themes weekly, and the writers like to read what they have written, with the theme they have had for that week. Sometimes this generates a discussion, and the writers feel safe enough to share some of their life experiences comfortably and confidently.

This has created a warm sensitive ambience, in which writers listen to each other, complement each other and give each other mutual support and praise for their writing. Every month, I do a newsletter, and the month's themes. In March we had themes of; Royalty, The Hero, Marble Hill, The Drama, and The History. The writers produced wonderful prose and poetry. As well as writing, the group has emerged in other ways, developing social skills of being altogether, and if they can't come or are late, they send a message. We celebrate birthdays with cakes, and if someone isn't well, it is followed up. I run the group right through the year, because it is those times when others might be on holiday or celebrating, that those on their own might feel more isolated, and the writing group provides a safe haven for writing and being with other like-minded people.

Last year we had a great success, with being a shortlisted finalist for the final four of the Richmond Community Heroes Project of the Year Award. The group also gave a performance at a local café. It was so successful, the writers have been asked to perform again. I look forward to reading all the contributions that our writers have made in our anthology, which is just a small selection of the wonderful, contribution, motivation, and commitment the writers have every Monday afternoon from 2 to 4, with tea, coffee, biscuits, friendship and writing.

Elizabeth Cotrulia

My name is Elizabeth Cotrulia I have been going to the creative writing group for some time.

I enjoy the group very much. I like writing short stories. I find I get a lot of inspiration from the group. Their poetry is very good and I find I also get great confidence from Babs and all the other people in the group.



Time for a New Start

by Elizabeth Cotrulia

Joan couldn't believe it when her husband Bill left one weekend, saying he wouldn't be coming back. He was moving into his girlfriend's flat. She shouldn't have been all that surprised. But she was hoping against all the odds that it wouldn't come to that. She knew it meant another loss out of her life, and it didn't make her feel good.

However, it had to be said, things hadn't been all that good between her and her husband for some time. He was seldom at home these days and away most weekends. She knew the woman he was having the affair with, and that it had been going on for some time. Joan met her at one of the firm's company parties; she was her husband's secretary, and Joan knew right away she was the woman.

Her name was Hazel, and she was very glamorous with long blond hair. She dressed very well, and you could tell she worked out a lot as her body was in such good condition. She was in her early 40s. Bill, her husband, was also a very attractive man with black wavy hair and a good complexion; he was also very charming. He was in his late 50s, but didn't look his age. He worked very hard, liked the good things in life, and did well with his building business.

He was very good at giving the housekeeping money and paying the bills, even the house was paid for. She couldn't say anything bad about him in that way. But as the years went by, he showed little affection for her, and there was no companionship. She knew the marriage was over, and she would agree to a divorce if that was what he wanted. She thought what's the point of holding on to something that wasn't there anymore.

She felt sad when she thought of their happy early years together, when the children were young. They did seem happy then. They did the simple things in life, like going down to Sandy Mount beach and playing with the children, or going walking in beautiful Black Rock Park.

Bill promised he would take her travelling one day when the children were off hand. He said, "Italy would be a delightful place to go". She held on to those promises, but they seemed little more than a dream. There was one good thing about this problem, her children were all grown up and had left home, they could look after themselves and were all doing very well. She knew, however, they would worry about her; now that she was on her own. It was her younger daughter, Kelly, who felt she wouldn't be able to manage. She said, "Mum's got no idea what it is going to be like without Dad". Her son Neil said, "I know you are right about Dad. He was good when it came to money, but he wasn't very loyal when it came to Mum, going off like that with a younger woman. I do think he was out of order, and to top it all, I don't think he ever discussed the problem with Mum, he just walked out".

Joan had to laugh when she heard her children talking about her. She was in her late fifties, and she had lived in Sandy Mount for over 30 years. She'd brought up her boy and two girls, turned most of a rough garden into a green lawn with flower beds, keeping a patch for vegetables. She also seemed to have cooked no end of meals, not to mention the housework and all the other things a wife has to do.

In her younger days, she was very attractive and she had a good figure. But in later years, she was a growing disaster; she had put on a lot of weight, even allowing for the fact that she liked her food. It was much more than that; in many ways, she had lost interest in herself. She knew she had to do something about her life. Left alone in the house every day, she had become a bore. It was some time later, when she was eating a delicious pre-packed vegetarian meal for lunch and thinking how her husband Bill wouldn't have approved. He really liked good meat dishes. She was watching a very interesting television programme about marketing, and she always thought she'd be good at selling.

The idea had been around in her mind for some time. Now she was going to do something about it. Whenever she mentioned it to her husband, he would just laugh and say, "Don't be mad, you wouldn't be any good at that, you haven't got a head for business". He said, "It's best you stay at home and look after the house and garden." She recognised it was an idle dream, but no matter how idle it may have been, she was going to put it to work. She would need help and more advice with this new project, and Joan was more than willing to do that. Even if she had to do a course at the local college. She knew it was time to change the things in her life.

She was feeling very excited at the thought of doing some kind of work that she might enjoy. Since she had been married, she had never done any kind of paid work. She always wanted to work when her children were older, but her husband Bill wouldn't hear of it. He said, "I earn more than enough money to keep this family, so there's no need for you to work".

Her daughter Maria rang in the evening and asked anxiously how she was. Joan said, "I'm fine, and why wouldn't I be? I've had a lovely day, and for once, in a long time, I haven't felt tired, so I'm feeling much better". She wanted to reassure her daughter that she was going to be alright, and she needed to talk to her son, Neil, and her youngest daughter, Kelly. She wanted them to know she was feeling very optimistic about her future, and she hadn't felt this way for a long time.

The Dream

by Elizabeth Cotrulia

I dreamt of you last night
I remember it all so clearly
No, I didn't lose sight

I was dressed in cream, or was it green?
No, no definite cream in my dream
I met you there. Tell me, tell me where?

Why, in the dance hall
You held me in your arms
I unravelled my hair
As we started to dance the dance of life

The Big Mistake

by Elizabeth Cotrulia

It was 1977 when I was in love for the first time. By my side in the sports car sat a very clever, young, adventurous boy of seventeen, my first boyfriend.

It was many years ago, strange as it might seem now. We were speeding through the villages and valleys in his red Ferrari car. I was nervous, but James seemed to be chatting away without a care in the world.

James and I met at school and were bonded by A-Level French and certain big ideas about life beyond the small village in Dursley where I grew up. It's hard to remember now how long our relationship lasted; looking back, I'd say about two years. It shaped and cheered the last chapter of my teenage life.

I had never been interested in boys before, but he seemed really different from the others. I lived at home with my family in a small, terraced house, and James' family lived in a big, imposing country house in the Cotswolds. They had an orchard, a studio for his mother, who was an artist, and his parents were intellectuals with an Oxbridge education; his family seemed to have everything.

James was good-looking, witty, and a bit of a hero on the rugby field. I was especially overweight at the time and didn't feel very attractive, yet it didn't seem to matter to James. James brought me a bottle of perfume for my 17th birthday. He also gave me a framed charcoal sketch he had drawn of me one night after persuading me to pose semi-naked in his bedroom.

We had borrowed his Mum's car and went to see a film. We drank lager and blackcurrant in country pubs and wrote love letters – I still have mine. It was the tail end of the Seventies. If you asked me then if I loved James, I would have said yes, madly. But I don't suppose I really knew what love was then. However, he filled my head and my heart with wonderful memories of our time together.

I holidayed with him and his family in their pretty Devon cottage. James and I went on exchange trips to Northern France, where we got drunk on red wine. It was fun and he was excited, but we both wanted different things from life. I wanted to get into university and become a writer, James wanted to become rich. My Father didn't think much of him, and most of my friends thought he was very superficial because all he ever talked about was money. With the pressure of A-Levels, our teenage love cooled down, and the affair came to an end.

I never forgot James and often wondered what had become of him. I had heard he had become a millionaire. We bumped into each other at a school reunion, where he introduced me to his wife, explaining they were trying for a family. I lost touch with him again, and it was some years later that I came across his name on the internet. I contacted him, asking if he would like to meet for a drink as I was working in Gloucester at the time, where he lived. We agreed to meet for dinner some weeks later. I waited very nervously in the restaurant for him, feeling like a schoolgirl again. He was 20 minutes late, which didn't help. As I glanced up at this overweight, grey-haired man, I wondered if it was the same man. I was stunned at the change.

When we got talking, he was shocked to hear that I'd never married or had children. He was even more shocked to hear I had moved back to live close to my family; he thought I was a glutton for bloody punishment, going back home. We talked about this family, he barely remembered mine, which made me feel sad. He did make some remark about my career as a journalist, but he was very dismissive.

He was very wealthy, and he now mixed with powerful people. His wife was the daughter of a bookmaker, and his two daughters had jobs in a finance company. He had a wonderful house in the country and another in the city.

But James was miserable, and it was clear to me that he was a troubled man. I felt sorry for him when he explained how he had spent time in The Priory suffering from depression. It seemed he was deeply unhappy in his work, but he needed to earn great sums of money to keep his family in the style they were used to. His marriage wasn't all that good either.

Looking back now, we both got what we wanted. I should have said goodbye to him that night and gotten a cab home, but I went back to James' lovely house to have a drink. It seemed wrong to be with him in his family home. We drank champagne and talked about his marriage. I told him I thought marriage guidance might help him and his wife, and perhaps could help them with their money problems. I thought perhaps if he took some time off work, it would help with his health problems, but that didn't go down very well. In fact, he scoffed at me and told me off, saying who was I to tell him anything, I hadn't managed to get married or to have a family. As far as he was concerned, I was nobody.

I realised I had made a big mistake by meeting up with James again. My first love belongs in the past, and that is where I shall leave it forever.

Hazel Davies

I like to write about things I see and feel.

So simply, I'd say even less about me and more about my poetry.



Kaleidoscope

by Hazel Davies

Flecks and twinkles
Like shards of rainbow light
As waking from a dream
Though half-closed eyelids
Winking through criss-cross branches
Sliver of Kingfisher feather
Darting past my line of vision.
Eyeblink, I see a frond of fern unfurl
A fish leaps in the water
Iridescent flash
Then gone
And mirrored in the dancing stream
Water droplets slowly dripping
Each a tiny universe
Encapsulated in a lucid pearl.

Sea Breaker

by Hazel Davies

Far sonorous boom.
Dark thunder gloom.
Approaching fast with mighty roar,
Rise high to the sky
Penundrum doom
A micro-pause upon the peak,
Rolled curling sneak
The shadows fall
Triumphant just before it breaks
Into one oceanic crash.
To smash
A million bubble flakes
Upon the sandy shore.

White sparks that flash and leap
Exploding out in frothy flowers
Of foam and fume
They slip and snake
And slide and slate
To meet their fate,
Which is to be sucked up again
Gathered to the powerful force
That thrust them there
With all its worth.

The Brown Boat

by Hazel Davies

It was the first thing that I spotted
The only one I liked
Because it looked well cared for
Neat and crisp and bright.
Nestled by the pontoon,
Varnished clean and proud,
Tucked among a line of crafts,
The brown boat, made of wood,
Stood out from the crowd.

The other boats
Were plastic fiberglass affairs
Seen through the trees
Neglected most of them
Top-heavy with faded canopies.
But the brown boat sat well in the water
With tidy lines and full of grace,
Lower than the other boats
Well settled in its mooring place.

I imagined that its engine
Was poised to slide away
At a moment's notice
Or at least within a day.
Unlike the other cruisers
It would seem automatic
To imagine they were just resigned
To be forever static.

The only motion that they had
Was from the movement of the tides,
Passing traffic on the river,
Strong winds and other things besides.

Many times I walked this way,
Along the riverbank
And so admired the brown boat,
So glad it hadn't sunk.

Autumn came and then the Winter,
Everything was hunkered down,
Out in the prevailing wind and weather
Away from the busy town.

And then, one day in Springtime,
When the weather was set fair,
I looked out for the brown boat,
And found it wasn't there.

All Put Upon the Table

by Hazel Davies

A woman came in from the cold
And put her shopping down,
She laid her keys upon the table,
And looked round with a frown.
The room was full of things to do,
Half-finished projects all awry,
She started picking up some stuff,
Then stood there with a sigh.
She thought "so little time, so little,
I'd finish them if I were able",
Picked up a piece of knitting
And placed it on the table.
Then suddenly, exasperation,
Around the room she went collecting stuff,
Exceeding all self-expectation.
The papers and empty tins of paint,
The packaging and cellotape,
The cushions strewn across the floor,
And ever more and ever more.
The pinecones and the unused cables,
All were piled upon the table.
Tissue boxes, plastic bags,
Bits and bobs and painting rags,
It nearly sent her heart aflutter,
All those things and all that clutter
She definitely had let things slip
And thought, "I'll take it to the tip
But first of all, a cup of tea"
And second, "Where's my bloody key?"

When I See Green

by Hazel Davies

When I see green
I see leaves, fields, deep water flows
Hedges, wood and lush meadows.
I imagine jungles of ancient trees
And the turquoise green of far-flung seas.
I smell mown grass and moss and pine,
And I taste apples, peppermint and lime,
And I hear the whispers of the breeze
On Summer days through soft green leaves.
And feel things fluid, free and loose,
Alive and fresh and full of juice,
See water tumbling over mossy slates,
Lizards, frogs, green crabs and snakes.
Trickling streams and tranquil lakes,
The froth of seaweed,
Crisp with sea salt lights
Crystal clear river
With submerged trails of macrophytes.

The bright green of a parakeet,
The 'go' traffic light,
Reflected on a rain-drenched street,
Crickets chirping in the reeds,
And waving grasses spreading seeds,
I smell pine needles on a forest floor,
And see lichen growing on an old barn door.
I taste crunchy salad, celery and pears,
Watermelon, asparagus,
Foods grown for people,
Glimpse Verdigris on a distant steeple.
See an iridescent green metallic beetle,
And bright green caterpillars curling,
From fronds flagrantly unfurling,
Dancing fleas that are full of action
Mercurial green in an oil-slick refraction
So much life and so much living,
Green is growing, spreading, giving.

The Fallen Tree

by Hazel Davies

Mushrooms, bird's nests, lice and beetles,
Fungal spores and ivy trails,
Peeling bark and stinging nettles,
Butterflies and slugs and snails.
Creepy crawlies by the thousands,
Worms and mosses, moths and fleas,
Toadstools, mistletoe and slow worm,
Broken branches, buzzing bees.
Buried deep within the woodland,
Still full of life,
The Fallen Tree.

Margaret Kristjans-Joensen

I wish I had been asked to write stories and poems as a child.

Writing stories and poems and sharing them, hence expanding our brains, are the endless resources of knowledge and beauty together! The intelligence of the human mind is endless; it just needs to be explored.



Something which can make us all so happy together. It is such a good therapy! It really should be recognised by the authorities as a proper therapy, for the goodness and the expanding of the human mind.

“Thank you so much to the organisers and the tutors in charge of the Creative Writing Group; Barbara Lee, Gary Williams and Gemma Holburn and thank you to my wonderful Creative Writing Group, I love you all!”

The Wisdom in the Tree

by Margaret Kristjans-Joensen

The wisdom in the tree
My owl of wisdom in the tree
I CAN SEE YOU WELL!
My owl so wise, so free
Sensible and sound
What do you see my owl, from the top of the tree?
do you see all the mountains near the sea?
They say you see it all
My owl so wise, so free
Understanding and all knowing
All the mountains so far away and so very tall
They say you see the waterfalls and it all
My owl so wise, so free
Enlightened and aware
My owl, do you see the woods? They say you see it all
Look at me from your tree, please, send me your wisdom?
My owl, so wise, so free
Reasonable and rational
send me your wisdom, from above, send it to me!
My owl, so wise, so free
Please reach me and teach me, whisper to me in the wind
My owl, so wise, so free
My Wise owl! What do your eyes of wisdom see?
DO YOU SEE ME WELL?
Please make me see it all too, with my eyes
I ask for your wisdom and it all, I need you my owl
My owl so fine and so full of wisdom
So free, please tell me, tell me your secret
You free bird on a branch full of knowledge
Teach me, give me wisdom, tell me it all
so I will never again fail or fall
My owl in the tree, so wise, so free.

The Wedding

by Margaret Kristjans-Joensen

As I wake up, I feel the warmth of a sunray on my face, coming through the window. I forgot to draw the curtains last night. I sit up in my bed, and the first thought to enter my mind this morning is that, today is the day of my wedding.

I look around the room, which is very large with a very high ceiling. It looks grey and doesn't seem to have been painted for some time. The two large sash windows also need a touch-up, I think to myself. The only furniture in the room is my bed, a side table with a vase with one rose, and a large mirror on the wall facing me.

I get out of bed and walk barefoot towards one of the windows. It is a very beautiful day outside, the sky is clear, and I see many people working hard on the terrace, at the back of the house, and on the lawn, preparing for the wedding reception. I notice the long wooden tables. I look at the face of the old grey building. My thoughts go back to the people who are running back and forth on the terrace with food and drinks. The tables are already decorated with flowers, white lilies. I notice that one vase has one black rose and lilies in it. How strange. They are really very busy and in a hurry.

I move away from the window and walk towards the mirror on the wall. I look into it and at myself and the old dress of silver-grey lace I am wearing. Suddenly, there is someone standing behind me. I recognise her as my bridegroom's ex-wife who left him a few years ago. She is wearing the same type of wedding dress. She looks at me with a strange, mysterious expression on her face and moves slowly closer, reaches out, opens the palm of her left hand, and I see her holding some old silver coins in her hand. I look down and open the palm of my right hand and see that I am also holding the same type of coins, but more of them. I look up again into the mirror. The woman has gone.

I leave the room to go outside. I notice that I am barefoot. It is sunny and warm, and I remember it rained heavily with thunder last night. Now the grass and the wooden tables are dry again. I watch a woman arrange the cutlery and watch her long black dress touch the ground.

At last, everything is ready. The guests have now arrived. The ceremony is to take place in the little chapel here. All the people are waiting, but not for me; I am already standing here.

The bridegroom has not arrived yet. I can see his best man and friend look around, worried, wondering what´s happening.

After waiting for an hour, we hear a noise, which sounds like an explosion and seems to come from the basement of the building. The friend decides to go and see what is happening. I decide to go with him.

We enter a room in the basement, which only has one very small window. I look around in the dark room and can see that the room is full of strange things. There is smoke in the room, and there has obviously been an explosion here, I think. The friend goes through some of the things. He picks up a pair of white gloves. He puts them on. Then he finds something that looks like a fancy ball face mask, which has been broken into pieces. He puts it on his face, piece by piece, and each time I felt the shiver down my spine. As he puts on the last piece of the mask, it becomes the face of my bridegroom. The friend takes down the mask and the gloves and looks at me. “I am sorry my dear, but your boyfriend never existed. Did you not notice the mask he was always wearing – and the gloves?”

“We must now go and tell the guests that the wedding is off. You cannot marry somebody who does not exist!”.

We leave the basement.

Shortly after the guests have gone, I am sitting in a carriage, drawn by one black horse. I am not alone, but sitting in a seat next to the driver, who is on my right-hand side and holding the reins, with firm hands. I see it is the bridegroom who is back! I notice the white gloves he is wearing. On my left side, I see a big modern house, which we pass by, and in the window of the house, I see a friend of mine, who once said that my boyfriend was false. I look back at the bridegroom´s white gloves and then at my friend and think to myself, it´s funny, but now that I come to think of it, I realise that my boyfriend always wore those gloves, but I hardly noticed. The bridegroom shakes the reins of the horse and uses a whip.

Behind us, I hear the church bells ring very loudly; they are sounding louder and louder – the black horse is running on the bumpy road, very fast, away from the noise of the bells.

I wake up and see that my alarm clock has fallen on the floor!

The Dance

by Margaret Kristjans-Joensen

Bella was 34 now and an attractive woman, pretty, slim, with long blond hair and growing slowly more confident. She had always been praised for her good looks, but she had really never been confident, maybe because of the bullying she had experienced in her teenage years in high school, by other girls.

Bella had set her eyes on a co-worker, Daniel, since she was a young office worker in a large Norwegian international company. She liked him because she found him to have a very kind personality, or so it seemed to her. Daniel was a handsome man, tall with red hair and very blue eyes. He was 6 years older than Bella. Maybe he liked her. She was very shy, and so was he. He was so different from all the other men.

One of the women at work, Elsa, said that they seemed very well-suited. Of course, when one is very shy, nothing happens. She moved out of the department where he worked to another one down the corridor.

Time passed. She was sorry to hear one day that he was going to be transferred to their office in Paris. Unfortunately, she missed his farewell party, because it was held while she was on holiday. She felt sad about that.

She heard that there was an opening in Paris soon, and she put her name down for the position. Another woman, Silla, also did, but she was very confident and aggressive and always pushing herself forward. Bella heard that once a year, there was a big ball in Paris at the Chamber of Commerce. People from their office would be invited. Bella sat and daydreamed that she was with Daniel in Paris one day, and they would go together to the ball. She imagined the dress that she would be wearing. She saw herself as some kind of Cinderella, wearing the most beautiful dress and dancing all night with Daniel.

She was designing her long ball gown in her mind, of red velvet, decorated with pearls around the low neckline and precious stones of green, yellow, blue, and red, when she woke up from her daydream, from a knock on the door. Elsa was standing in the doorway, looking a bit sad. She was the bringer of bad news. Silla was going to Paris. She was older and more experienced. What a disappointment for Bella! Poor Daniel, having to go to the ball with aggressive Silla, many years his senior.

Bella gave up hope. She started dating a man briefly, but it did not work out. He had lied to her, saying that he was single, then she found out he was married. Just her luck! Why could Daniel not be here!?

Bella was sent to work for 2 years in their office in Stockholm. She was happy about that because she had relatives there. She had busy, happy years in Stockholm, but never met anybody she really liked. It was because Daniel was not there.

Then she was sent back to the main office. To her great happiness, she heard that Daniel was also coming back to Oslo.

Her heart jumped when he walked into the office building. He looked better than ever and was so different and confident. He was still single. All the shyness had gone. However, he was still so kind-looking.

While he had been gone and in Paris, his mother would contact Bella to ask her to come shopping with her to help her buy outfits. Bella did that and heard that the mother really liked her. Bella helped her try on and pick the outfits. They really got on so very well.

Another woman in the office, Bekka, also liked Daniel. She was very ambitious, and Daniel had just been promoted. Bekka had been the mistress of a married man and a father of four. The man had held a high position, but broke up with Bekka when she became too demanding. Bekka was now looking for a replacement. She told Bella that Daniel really liked her and not Bella. Bella did not really like Bekka, as she did not like women who helped men cheat on and betray their wives. She found it so dishonest and wrong. Actually, Bella did not think that Bekka was good enough for Daniel because of her low moral standards.

One evening at a party, Bekka suggested that Daniel and some others go out together to a nightclub. They did. Bekka spent all her time trying it on with Daniel. To Bella's surprise, Daniel asked her to dance with him and not Bekka. Bella became very shy and blushed. Bekka's piercing eyes stared at her. Bella said no, not now. Daniel then grabbed Bekka and dragged her onto the dance floor.

Bella looked around, chatted with some people, and then looked around for Daniel and Bekka. They were nowhere to be seen.

She finally left the nightclub.

The following day, Bekka told her that she and Daniel had danced and chatted a little bit, but then he excused himself and left.

Bella thought about how unlucky and stupid she always was when it came to Daniel. She should have said yes. He would not bite her. It is just that it was so emotional for her, all of a sudden, out of the blue, to be asked to dance with the man of her dreams. She was afraid of fainting from it all.

Nothing special happened, and Bella did not find anybody she liked more than Daniel, who now seemed to be more distant from her. Maybe, because she had said no to the dance, she thought to herself.

She had missed the dance in Paris and the dance in Oslo. She started to get bad dreams at night. She was a nun alone in a monastery, no monks there at all.

One evening, some women at work suggested going out to a bar. They went there and had some drinks. Some people were dancing. Just before Bella decided to leave, she saw Daniel. He was in a corner dancing with another man. She hid and watched them from a distance. They were actually hugging and kissing! She was so surprised.

She went home in a hopeless state. Yes, that dream about the nun would become true one day. She had set her eyes and heart on a man she did not know. Always, the same, loyal, naive Bella. Now she could only dream of going home, to play some music and dance alone to it.

She had loved ballet, was a former ballet student.

That weekend, she bought herself a bottle of Champagne. She put on her favourite ballet music, Romeo and Juliet. She drew the curtains and danced to the music.

She woke up the following morning on the sofa. She could see that she had fallen asleep after half a bottle of Champagne. However, she had finally danced!

Then she also remembered her dream that night: She was in a monastery, but not alone. Daniel was there, dressed up as a monk, and they were dancing together, hugging and kissing.

Only in a dream they once danced together!

On the following morning, Bella was in a rush and with a hangover. Luckily, she did not have to go to work because of her appointment with the dental hygienist.

In the chair and with a hangover, Bella told the hygienist about her strange dream about dancing all night, and now she was so tired. The hygienist told Bella that she also loved dancing and was a member of a rock and roll group, which would meet once a month and dance like mad! She invited Bella to come along next time.

Bella took down the details.

It was on a weekend late afternoon when Bella decided to check out the rock and roll dancing club, which she was not accustomed to. She took a taxi to the venue.

The club was in an off-street location, and she walked through the door of a building with no face. Inside was completely different! Very light and bright, and the rock music was playing! Wow! She instantly felt so happy!

She watched all the people rock and roll dance, and as she stood there, a tall blond man came up to her and asked her for a dance! He had a wide smile on his face and looked very friendly. She answered, "No, I am not sure, I am not sure if I can do it". He replied, "Anybody can learn"! Come with me - have fun! Dance!" She answered: "I do not know you, I do not even know your name!" He replied, "I am a dental surgeon and my name is Ronald, but everybody calls me by my second name, which is Daniel!"

She reached out to Daniel's hand, and they walked together onto the dance floor!

Elf in the Garden

by Margaret Kristjans-Joensen

Sometimes when I walk in the garden,
I think I see something sitting on the top branch of the tree
I can see them clearly, there they are!
The Elves, nearly up to twelve!
I can sometimes see them fly around, happy and free
They buzz like flies around the tree. I can hear them
They have little green hats and are very, very small
Next to them, even I am very, very tall
They fly amongst the colourful flowers too
As I am sitting in the garden,
One of them comes and sits on my hand
Like a little fly, I look at the green hat and smile, how sweet
Only to realise the next day that I was bitten by a fly,
A wasp, disguising herself as an Elf, why!???
I need new spectacles!!!

Peter Marler

Writing is a fundamental part of who I am, and a way to condense thought into communication.

It is important to me to be able to write, whether poetry, short stories, about one of my many interests, or an essay exploring ideas.

There will be an evolution from the first seed of inspiration to a version I am happy to share with others. Even if I'm not entirely satisfied with my work, this group is appreciative of what I produce.

As someone who finds life difficult and lacks much of a social life, it is good to have the opportunity to interact with others, which this group provides.



Change

by Peter Marler

Change never sleeps:
It keeps working away in the background
until it explodes into painful disruption!

News un-welcome
forces us to struggle for survival
hanging on with hopeful hands
waiting for better days
to ease the stress
to relax the burden of loss

The only protection against change
is to choose our own path of change
our own direction of growth
our own way of being and becoming

The Beach at Frinton-on-Sea

by Peter Marler

It's August on the Essex coast
lobsters lying down, cooking red in the heat
Cover up! Before you're toast!
Sand-hoppers having fun in the sun
with bat and ball, or just a football kicked around
disturbing those who only want quiet lazing relaxation.

My sister inevitably finding a playmate
while I was on my own
creating an imaginary zone
with sand, bucket, and spade
castles to keep boredom at bay
and roads leading nowhere
nowhere near any bikini-clad girl's heart

But the East Coast is fickle
my ardour is quickly chilled
a cold mist blows in from the sea
in a rush it's time to get the train home
our trip ends too soon
so back to balmy Brentwood for an early tea
here it's still a sunny warm summer afternoon

The POWER

by Peter Marler

I've made my decision
avoiding vacillation
I have NO doubt
that I will cause division
and there will be derision about my choice.
But I believe my vision is for the best
I am resolved
that my judgement is true
but there will be many
I leave feeling blue
they will glower
but too bad
because I have the power!

Needing Nature

by Peter Marler

The hurly-burly of humans harasses my senses
I need some peace, some stillness
from the natural world

The giant umbels of a purple allium
command attention
(in contrast to flamboyant yellow peonies)
but even humble little pink or lavender flowers
of roadside Storkbills bring a little joy
to my tired mind

It doesn't matter whether delicate native plants or grander garden flowers
I appreciate the variety of forms, a tapestry
of leaf shapes and shades
and for dessert, the sweet almond scent of Mexican Choisya

Light

by Peter Marler

Light is born
with the dawn
a fresh start to energise
the new day promises nothing but opportunity
seize it, believe in it, make it yours!

Don't let dark clouds of despair obscure the sun
have some fun
as well as get plenty done
in a life well run.

Insight strikes!
the flash of an original idea
can push back the brooding darkness
of fear, ignorance, and gullibility.

Keep one's mind open and illuminated
with the light of reason
keep one's eyes open to new knowledge
be curious about the world
be furious about those who tell lies!

When sunset's glorious colours have passed
when the light of the day dies
keep hope in your heart
hold true to what's right
remember, hate burns blindly, leaving only a void
whereas love stays warm
until night fades, making way for light's rebirth.

Every Journey has a Start

by Peter Marler

If you worry too much about how and where to begin, then you will never even start. In some cases, one can keep making fresh beginnings, new, better attempts, try out different plans, until one feels that there is a clear path in the right direction. It helps to know one's destination, a well-defined terminus, a fitting end to a noble project. If the goal matters, then it is essential to be confident that one has the time, resources, and determination to complete the journey, rather than running out of steam or getting sidetracked.

But the end does not always justify the means – sometimes it is the journey that matters, the experience that enriches and teaches. Maybe the goal is merely a placeholder to aim for, before one has a surer idea about the direction to head for. There is always a beginning, but eventually one will not find an end, but simply run out of track.

The Love of Knowledge

by Peter Marler

My longest-lasting love is of knowledge. When I was in my teens, I would often open an encyclopaedia volume at random; few subjects were not of some interest to me. For Christmas, I'd mainly want books - the subjects I was most interested in gradually changed, in approximate chronological order: history, railways, science and natural history, and then art. As an adult, I continued to read on many subjects, including psychology and philosophy. I've also gained knowledge from television and radio programmes.

I'm not one of those people who fritter away time on social media or watching videos of cats. In the digital age, I keep my mind active, listening to podcasts on many different subjects, and often reading up on a subject on Wikipedia. My love of knowledge remains strong. I regularly test what I know on various TV quizzes.

But the most important knowledge and understanding is of oneself. Unfortunately, when I was young, I lacked self-knowledge and did not really believe in myself. Over the years, I've gradually gained greater insight. And there is a wider general understanding of how much human beings vary psychologically. I'm pretty certain that I do belong on the Autistic spectrum - it would have been useful to know this when I was younger, it would have made better sense of some of my difficulties.

Goreti Marinho

My name is Goreti,

I was born in Portugal and have lived in England for over twenty years. I started writing in my diary as a teen, expressing my thoughts and hopes for the future.



Writing in my diary was like writing to a true friend, and sometimes I allowed tears to mess up my words on the page. Diary writing helps me transform negative thoughts into magical hopes.

As I began finding my words beautiful to re-read, I enjoyed writing more and more; it helps me maintain a positive outlook in life.

During the most difficult times, Nature is my friend too, and the greatest gift of all. The sun, moon, rain clouds, trees, flowers, fruit, insects, birds, rivers, mountains, butterflies and much more. The world gives all this to me for free. I feel deep appreciation for this, and know that, taking notice of the beauty around me, improves my daily life.

I like to write poetry as it comes naturally to me. I find it a bit difficult because English is not my first language but these poems are written from the heart. I hope you enjoy reading them.

Dance

by Goreti Marinho

Dance

Dance at any time day or night
When in the dark with the moonlight
Dance when nobody is around
Feel your foot smoothly touching the ground
Dance imagine you are the Queen wearing the gold crown
Dance freely with joy, don't worry if it is with a girl or a boy
Dance with yourself, let this moment bring you happiness
Dance and feel the world belongs to you
Dance until the sky is blue
Remember this dance is the LOVE you have for you

Dance

Dance until nobody is around
Be with yourself
Choose your own loving music and sound
Dance take your soul to a beautiful place
Where you feel happy and safe
Dance not only with your feet
Dance with your emotions when they join the music
With the heart joining too
Dance this dance
only with you

Young

by Goretí Marinho

A young man is in hospital bed
Doctors trying to save this young man's life
Only seventeen years old
Compassionate and bright, he was stabbed early last night
Mum is called with urgency
Tears could not explain why someone will take away
Her son's life, I must say.
Holding her son's hand, feeling so weak
Little breath, then she weeps
I cannot comprehend why this is the end.
One act made that, break everything
In my life and heart
So many suffering consequences of this terrible impact
How long is it going to last?
Let's be stronger and unite
No one has the right to take someone's life.
Embrace the good bravery
with care, understanding, compassion and kindness
Be brave with this value all the time.
Be mindful, do not cross the danger line
Nobody in this world is perfect
Living a happy life without regrets
This kind of bravery
Deserves all the RESPECT

When

by Goretí Marinho

When time comes to say Goodbye
The pain its deep down
Hiding behind the open eyes
Soul bares the emptiness
No time to stop the clock
Not feeling ready for the big shock.

The faster the run, the greater the speed
Life just stops, like you never had a chance to live.
Our souls feel resignation
Nothing we can do
Tears are shared for this wonderful person
So many knew

Not in Control

by Goretí Marinho

How many days and seconds we may have
Our lives belong to the Lord
What do you say, and what is the believe
All we know is
Our souls one day will be
to put rest in peace indeed

Saying Goodbye

by Goretí Marinho

With a deep, broken heart
I want you to know the memories
Won't fall apart.
The smiles, stories, kindness our times together
Will be kept with open door
Every day forevermore.

Waited

by Goretí Marinho

Waited and waited
To be understood
Feeling down, not in a good
Mood
Over the years waited for the sad emotions
To go away.
But to realise that
They wanted with me to stay.
Waited again
Give another chance to see if life
Would improve
Kept believing in a better attitude
Waited over twenty years
To fulfil my dreams
Waited and waited day and night
Thinking one day I will be alright
Never gave up
Waited and waited
Now I found the light
Don't need to wait anymore
I am what I am
Happy it's me I adore.

The Wind

by Goretí Marinho

Blowing strong and faraway
Looking for a place he could stay
Showing his strength and calm breeze
Telling you
When things are hard taken it easy
Breathing slowly, deep down
Feel the calm and look around
Bring light and hope
You are the one deciding where and when to stop
Remember, nothing is all the time alright
The sun hides
So, the stars appear on the dark night

Migs Medina

In my creative writing class, I'm lucky to have an amazing and wonderful teacher, Babs. I also have a great group of classmates who give me a big boost in the sessions. Together, we are writing some amazing stories.

I especially enjoy listening to the other students' work, and sometimes I try to pick up ideas from them for my own writing.



Chapter One - The Start

by Miguel 'Migs' Medina

Once upon a time, there were two kids called Mila and Enzo. They lived in Andover with their mum Sophie and their dad Ivan.

Mila and Enzo had two very special friends they could always turn to—two cheeky monkeys named Charlie and Carl. Charlie was a white monkey, and Carl was brown. The monkeys were not just best friends—they were brothers.

Carl lived with Mila and Enzo in Andover. Charlie, on the other hand, lived far away in London with his owner, a boy named Michael.

Michael and Charlie often thought about Carl, Mila, and Enzo. Even though they lived in different towns, they always felt close in their hearts. They would talk about the day they could all be together again.

One day, Michael had a brilliant idea.

“Why don’t I send an email to Sophie or Ivan?” he said. “Maybe I can arrange a visit to see them all in Andover.”

Charlie bounced with excitement.

“Yes! Let’s do it!” he squeaked.

And just like that, the plan to bring the two monkey brothers—and all their friends—back together had begun.

Boat on the River (1)

by Miguel 'Migs' Medina

I imagine myself
on a boat with no destination,
no rush, no map,
just the river's quiet invitation.

The sea is still—
not a wave in sight,
no storm, no wind,
just soft silver light.

The sky holds the moon
like a secret it keeps,
and I float in peace
as the whole world sleeps.

No past, no future,
just this moment to feel,
with the water below me
and the stars so real.

Let the river take me
wherever it may go,
to the edge of dreams
or the moon's soft glow.

No need to steer,
no need to run,
I am one with the water,
and the journeys just begun.

Boat on the River (2)

by Miguel 'Migs' Medina

Boat on the river,
I imagine myself with no destination,
No rush, no plan -
Just me, and the ocean's quiet vibration.

The sea is calm,
No waves in sight,
No bad weather,
Just the soft glow of moonlight.

I let the river take me,
Wherever it may flow,
Even to the moon,
Where dreams softly go.

No sound but the water,
So smooth, so free,
And I find myself singing -
🎵 "I am sailing... across the sea..." 🎵

The Story of MIX the Draagon

by Miguel 'Migs' Medina

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Valerie. She had a brother called Simon.

Valerie and Simon were always scared to go to sleep because they believed a fire-eating dragon roamed the night, hungry and ready to devour anything in his path - even children!

But what Valerie and Simon didn't know was that the dragon wasn't evil at all. In fact, he was very lonely. This dragon didn't want to eat children - he wanted to make human friends who could help him feel less alone. He was just very big, very fiery, and a little misunderstood.

So one night, the dragon spoke gently into the dreams of Valerie and Simon. "I'm sorry if I've scared you," he said. "I don't want to be feared. I just want to protect kind little people like you."

The dragon began to meet other children too. He told them he would keep them safe while they slept. And he meant it - if anyone dared to hurt his little friends, he would fly them off to his castle, give them a strong warning, and make sure they learned a lesson they'd never forget. In dreams, he could roast the bad guys until they were too hot to handle!

Eventually, this dragon became everyone's protector - a friendly dragon who only asked for one thing in return: "Visit me," he said. "Come to my castle. If the flag outside is flying, that means I'm home."

The dragon's name was MIX. His name had a special meaning - if you were kind, he would protect you. But if you were mean or evil, you would regret crossing him.

If you had bad intentions or a dark heart, MIX would visit you in your dreams, bringing you troubles until you learned to change. But if you were sad or scared, he would be gentle and comforting. He especially loved if you brought him Polos - they were his favourite!

MIX's birthday was on February 26th, 1985, and he always hoped his little friends would visit him on that day. If they didn't, he felt forgotten.

MIX lived in a castle, deep in the basement where it was always cold - because if it got too warm, his fire breath might accidentally burn the place down! The castle was cared for by a man named Michael, who was MIX's best friend and guardian.

Michael helped MIX with everything - placing sweet orders, managing visits, and keeping an eye on his calendar. He even knew when MIX went out on jobs. One day, on a flying mission, MIX got hurt. Someone cruel had cut his wing. He barely made it back to the castle and needed help fast. Michael called the dragon doctor, who said MIX would need weeks to recover, but he would hopefully be better by his birthday.

During this time, Michael took over MIX's duties, helping all the children and making sure MIX had his medicines. Slowly, the dragon got better. After a few days, he was 50% healed - but he needed to be 100% well to fly again.

The doctor, an expert in dragons, came every few days to check on him. When he finally said MIX could return to work, there was a huge cheer from all the children.

The castle, with its grand drawbridge, became a place where people could come to see MIX - but only if they covered up properly, because it was freezing cold inside where he stayed. Outside, in the back courtyard, he would meet his visitors, smile warmly, and share Polos with anyone kind-hearted.

And from that day on, Valerie and Simon - and all the other little children - were never scared at bedtime again.

Because MIX the dragon was watching over them.

Migs and the Shadow

by Miguel 'Migs' Medina

Migs walked down 7th Street like he always did when the noise in his head got too loud to ignore. But today, the street was quieter. Or maybe, it was him who had changed.

Then he saw it.

Not a person. Not exactly. A shadow leaning against the wall like it was waiting.

"You're late," the shadow said.

Migs tilted his head. "You look familiar."

"I'm the part of you you try not to see," the shadow replied. "Name's Anxiety. We've met."

Migs squinted. "You gonna ruin my day again?"

Anxiety shrugged. "Depends. You want me as a friend or an enemy?"

Migs stood there, torn. "Why would I want you as a friend?"

"Cause I know what's hiding in your corners. I know when you're lying to yourself. I know what makes your hands shake at night."

"But you make everything harder."

"I make everything real," Anxiety said.

Migs looked down at his shoes, scuffed and worn, then back up. "Let's try it different. Don't haunt me - help me."

For a moment, the air shifted. The shadow leaned forward, unsure.

"I'll walk beside you," Anxiety said, "but I'll push back if you forget I'm here."

Migs nodded. "Deal."

Weeks passed. Sometimes they walked in rhythm. Other times, Anxiety tripped him up, sent him spiralling back into his old fears. But Migs kept getting up. Kept solving what he once avoided. Kept pushing forward.

One day, Migs found himself standing in front of his old boss—the one who told him he wasn't enough, who called his emotions "weakness."

Anxiety stood beside him, silent.

Migs took a deep breath. "You don't own me."

Then he turned, pushed that voice from his life, and walked away.

He glanced at Anxiety.

"You good?" the shadow asked.

"I'm good," Migs said. "And if you get loud again - I'll listen. But I won't bow."

And they kept walking, not as enemies, not quite as friends.

But as something new.

Voice of the Underdog

The Langdon Park estate, mainly private, but with some social housing, is built on the grounds of the old Normansfield hospital, founded in 1868 by Dr Langdon Down (after whom Down's syndrome was named). It was a pioneering place where people with learning disabilities were cared for and educated. The hospital orchard remains to this day, providing fruit for the residents to enjoy.



I began taking an interest in the flora and fauna of the gardens and orchard after losing mobility, and particularly during Covid. I took part in the RSPB bird counts and Big Butterfly counts and started my own bird monitoring, and discovered just how many red and amber listed birds on the UK Birds of Conservation Concern list nested and reared their young in the orchard, as well as many green-listed ones.

In just three years, however, I've witnessed a stark decline in habitat in the orchard, leading to a dramatic reduction in nesting sites and food sources, driving several bird species out. This loss of habitat is primarily due to wildlife-hostile gardening and tree surgery practices, that prioritise convenience, health & safety and sanitised appearances over biodiversity. Trees, hedgerows and wildflowers have all suffered greatly. Year by year, this woodland conservation area is being turned into an ornamental garden, one to serve the needs of pet cats and dogs, whose ownership has soared since Covid, while the needs of the orchard wildlife have been ignored.

Powerless to prevent this and having no voice (as social housing tenants are excluded from the private resident's association), and therefore no say in service charge expenditure for grounds maintenance, which has shot up in the last three years, I turned to poetry to document and protest this process and advocate for the orchard.

For our last anthology, I wrote poems about two trees bordering it that were felled. This time, I'm writing about the destruction of wildflowers and apple trees, the very trees that define the orchard. Two were lost to vandalism last year. This year the gardeners themselves have been the vandals of the three largest apple trees. Orchards are such important places for biodiversity and community. We should cherish and take care of the few we have left in London lest we lose them, and educate people on their value.

Cow Parsley

by Voice of the Underdog

Cow parsley,
Tall and proud,
Border the hedgerow trees;
A woodland fence of lace,
Bright white edging to a cloak of regal green.
Humming, buzzing,
The delight of bumble bees.
A visual fanfare
Proclaiming to those who pass,
'Behold! You are now entering the orchard!'



Intricate-patterned heads, like doilies,
Fill my camera frame:
A beautiful greeting card to be.

Cow parsley flop
Or lie flat on the ground;
A toppled fence of brown, stricken stems;
Like downed skittles.
Dead.
Silent.
Their crispy, tan heads,
Last week filled with busy bees,
Announce today to my shocked camera lens,
That along this path a visitor has been:
The man with the tank of poison on his back.



Orchard Meadow

by Voice of the Underdog

The meadow brown butterfly loved to flit
‘Twixt dandelions gold, o’er yellow carpet,
Neath apple trees green, an Impressionist’s dream;
Till along came the mow truck and clip, clippety-clip:
From painting to blank canvas in 30 minutes.

As soon as the flowers raised again their heads,
Back came the mower to return them to bed.
They mowed and they mowed and they just wouldn’t stop,
Through No Mow May, when mow you should not.
All through the heatwave when grass was all dead;

All through December when grass was in bed.
“Why are you mowing in winter?” I cried.
“Cos we are professionals!” the mow man replied.
“If you want to see wildflowers, this isn’t the place.
Go next door to the park, not here!” he waved.

The meadow brown butterfly left this place,
With no golden flower left to lay her sweet head.
She wondered why humans hate wildflowers so much.
One lady barked, “Hay fever hurts my dog!”
(That’s dogs that are killing the grass with their wee).

Another said, “Flowers in the grass? They are weeds!”
I guess it’s a mystery of the human race,
Why allergy sufferers move to meadow estates.
After all the mowing the orchard’s half bald
For they killed the grass off turning flowers into lawn.



The Lavender

by Voice of the Underdog

The glorious lavender reached for the sky
with arms full of bees and butterflies.
Four metres of purple, the orchard's delight,
Gifting the residents wandering by,
Who stop to admire; rub and smell a flower.

I put it on pillows to help me to sleep;
I used it for sunburn to ease my skin;
I hung it in bags to stop moths eating clothes,
And used it to make an expectorant tea -
At first sign of sore throat it always helped me.

One day in late summer I went with my scissors
To snip off some sprigs for to last me the year,
But horror of horrors awaited my face -
Where the lavender stood was an empty space!
I stood there and froze, in anguish and grief.

"Oh gardener, where did the lavender go?"
He burst out laughing on hearing my words,
Then face filled with glee, he began his spiel:
"It was in the way of my mower you see,
When going round corners - that was tough for me.
It looked wild, not round and wild don't look nice -
The last contractor left it looking a sight.
So we dug it right up and we took it away
And now it is no longer in my way."

"But gardener, some prefer lavender wild!
And do the bees care if the lavender's round?"
"Don't worry yourself!" he hastily proclaimed.
"For we're definitely going to plant one again,
And this time make sure that round it remains."

Ten years have gone by since that promise was made.
Where the lavender stood is an empty space,
And bees that once flocked to that corner in droves
Now fall on our pathways and die by the load,
Searching for nectar in the summer heat.

The Three Annie Elizabeths (Apple Trees)

by Voice of the Underdog



If you have an apple tree,
Pause before you prune it;
Veteran trees need TLC
So make sure you don't harm it.

Wait until it's dormant,
Before the start of Spring,
From late autumn to late winter,
When it's not in leaf;

Before it wakes from winter,
Before it starts to bud:
Roughly from late November
to the start of March.

How much should you prune it?
Remember these words well:
NO MORE THAN 20% CANOPY
In any one yearly go.

For anytime a branch is cut
A wound is left behind;
Each wound makes it more vulnerable,
Hence a little at a time.

Spread instead the pruning out
Over several years:
Two or three years, four or five,
That the tree might recover well.

For if you take off more than that
From a mature apple tree,
You risk it injury, disease or death,
And you might starve the tree.

Trees live by photosynthesis,
And for this need their leaves;
A poorly tree with no foliage
Will struggle hard to heal.

If more than 20% is cut
from an apple's canopy,
Its stress response is 'water shoots'
That overcrowd the tree:

Upright, thin, unfruitful sprouts
That sap its energy,
Needing frequent, careful removal -
It could take years to control these.

Remove then these four branch types:
Dead, diseased, damaged, deranged;
But when it comes to living wood,
Only 20% - let me tell you again!

So do not rush to prune your tree,
Nor let another either,
For many a gardener and tree surgeon
Has killed an apple in error.

There's plenty more you need to know
On how to prune your tree.
I'm just jotting down the basics
So you don't harm your Bramley.

For guess when they pruned our apple trees?
Guess how much they pruned them?
I wouldn't be writing this poem down
If the answer had been the right one.

We had three veteran apples trees
What brought us so much pleasure,
Till gardeners cut all their branches off
Just as they were about to flower.

Now one is clinging on to life
The others full of sprouts.
No apples this year, nor the next,
Poor Annie Elizabeths!

The gardeners alone seem happy -
No windfalls left to clear.
No branches in their mower's way,
Nor twigs in their eyes or ears.



Little Flower in Tree Hole

by Voice of the Underdog

Little flower peeks head
over round bare patch of soil
left by felled heaven tree

Mauve ball of beauty
What could little flower be?
Too big for clover...

Scabious – field or small?
Blue kiss? Or garden escape?
Look it up in book!

We will never know:
little flower died in bed -
Glyphosate took him

The Old Tree Stump

by Voice of the Underdog

There was a tree stump by the windfalls,
Belovèd by insects and beetles,
Till one doleful day
they took it away.
Was it spoiling the view from your windows?

Jenny Shalom

I've lived in Richmond a long, long time, and am enjoying exploring and expanding my creative side.



Attending the creative writing group gives me the impetus and discipline to actually do some creative writing each week.

If it weren't for our group, it would be one of the activities that drifts out of one's life into the mists of long forgotten to do lists. I relish trying to put into words the thoughts, feelings and sights of the world as I see it.

I love the different perspectives of the group members when presented with a subject. The variety of offerings, the way we support and encourage each other as we embrace our differences is wonderful.

Nature uplifts me and brings joy to my soul. I try to capture how it affects me in my writing, relishing the challenge of finding the perfect words to convey and share my experiences.

Scenes from the Wetlands

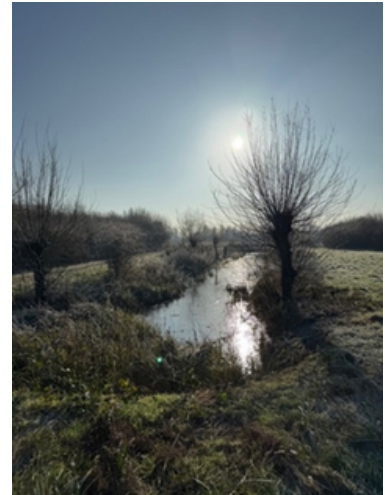
Wet Mirrors

by Jenny Shalom



Cold, ice, sleet and snow. It's below freezing. Most of the lake is frozen, yet there's bright sunshine. On opening the frosted windows of Dulverton hide we see the multitude of gathered ducks on the only open water. The weather has forced a frosty truce. Three little grebes paddle near the reeds. The icicles outside are dripping in the sun, far outstripping the length of the adjacent thorns, their shadows stark. Spattered

sunlight sprays as if from a glitter ball. The sheltered lagoon is icy, beautiful in the sun, the golden reeds reflected in the ice. The channel too is rigid, the low sun reflecting from the mirror surface of the frozen ice. Stunning!



Breath of Spring

by Jenny Shalom

Hear the first chiffchaff calling from atop a blossom laden blackthorn. See its subtle shades of muted yellow against the perfect white flowers and clear, blue spring sky. Let joy lift your spirit as you hear the notes. Spot the red Admiral flying after its winter hibernation. Red flashing from its wings. And there, sulphur yellow flash of a brimstone fluttering along the track. Admire the yellow and orange, pollen-laden fluffiness of the Pussy Willow catkins. Quick, another butterfly looking so dark; black, the Peacock! A flurry of flight, the "eye" on the wing winking red, bright blue and white. Queen bumblebees, solitary and honeybees buzz and drone, sipping nectar.

Admire the dark abdomen and chestnut thorax of the early mining bee probing its way across a dandelion flower. Pause to listen to the robins' melodious songs, notes hanging in the air.

On the water wintering ducks paddle and feed, the widgeon with their orange streaked heads, white breasts of shoveler, black and white tufted ducks and silver backed, chestnut headed pochard. On the lagoon, the great crested grebe are starting to court, heads bobbing and rufous crests out. The tits are pairing up, winter family parties breaking up. Hear from afar the great spotted woodpecker drumming, rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat.



By the unoccupied bat house yellow coltsfoot is blooming, in the watery, Wildside wetlands golden marsh marigolds glow in the spring sunshine, cheerful yellow welcoming spring. The muted tones of the griseous stock doves are transformed, the glancing sunlight flashing bright, emerald-green from their iridescent necks. Cryptic plumage camouflages the wintering bittern against the old reeds. The new reed growth in contrast, is a rich, thick, green of health. Early spring is special with its overlapping of over-wintering and incoming summer birds. Yesterday, the first sand martins

were seen, the first of the Hirundines to arrive. The oystercatchers are back, resplendent in their black and white feathers with carrot coloured legs and bills. The magpies fly with twigs, nest building in progress. Cetti's warblers yell from the scrub. Reed bunting dash from bush to bush. Such busyness in spring, such a flurry of activity and movement, noise and commotion. Revel and wallow in its glory!

Cool Morning

by Jenny Shalom

Chilly Wildside reedbeds, chiffchaff calling. A reed bunting atop a tree, another further back; streaky back, white collar and black head.

A number of crows looking more composed now than in the heat of last summer when they stood still, beaks agape, panting, to cool down. A few shovel-billed, broad, white-breasted shoveler, coot, moorhen, and mallard are dotted about on the water against the budding, fresh green reeds.

Returning, there's a serene scene: a swan nesting beside the Wildside ponds and pools. So calm and peaceful. A sense of quiet joy and contentment pervades my soul: Ullassa; an old Sanskrit word for pleasant feelings evoked by nature's beauty fits the moment.



Hawker Hunt

by Jenny Shalom

I pause to search the flourishing verge for the bee orchid; it looks like a bee taking nectar. Sought and found amongst yellow flowers. A wonderful structure of petals and pattern. Among the ponds of Wildside, we look for the Norfolk Hawker. A large dragonfly, with a straight brown body and sporting willow green sunglasses. There it is busy darting hither and thither defying efforts to photograph it, refusing to pose. Today, it's best to watch and savour the moment.

Dance

by Jenny Shalom

Redshanks strut,
tail feathers flicking white out
beneath the brown.
Lapwing swoop, climb and dive,
calling out.
Drakes throw their heads back,
beaks straight up, vertical salute.
Cooing pigeons bob heads
puff out chests.
Gulls splay their wings,
dip heads in supplication,
bowing engagingly.
Swans entwine necks,

mirroring movements,
hearts displayed.
Great crested grebes tango,
bob, weave, dive, arise,
a gift of token pondweed
to seal the deal.
Skylarks sing apace,
sky high from lofty flights,
parachuting down to ground.
Mallard drakes chase ducks in gangs,
round and round, she's overwhelmed.
Fascinating courtship dances,
unendingly varied.

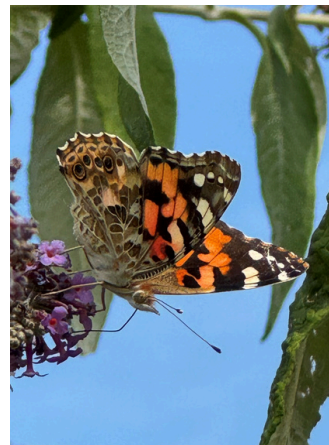
High Summer

by Jenny Shalom

It's a hot, hot, hot, a heatwave, sweltering Sunday! The scorching heat of summer heatwaves has rendered the land arid and parched; grass turned to straw and dust. Vegetation here is flourishing, lush, green, and rich, sprinklings hither and thither of purple loosestrife, marsh mallows and vetches. It's a beautiful balm for the soul to bathe in.

The swooping swifts lift our mood. Busy sand martins search for food for their second or perhaps third brood. Insects are on the wing; dragonflies whizz, darters dart, damselflies mate, and butterflies flit to and fro. Bees and hoverflies are everywhere, listen for their gentle buzz as they forage.

What's that dragonfly? Not an Emperor, similar but its abdomen isn't blue and black, it's dark with a bright patch of blue behind the brown thorax sporting green eyes: a lesser emperor dragonfly. A bright, fresh painted lady perches above sharing her butterfly beauty.



Bird Songs



Les McCallum 2020

The Wren

by Jenny Shalom

Sing loud
Sing proud
My friend
The Wren

The Song Thrush

by Jenny Shalom

Trill song thrush trill
Trill like the trimphones of old
Trill in a trio of identical calls
Trill, trill, trill and give me a thrill
Thrilled to know it's you though hidden from view
Trill to welcome the day and call to a mate
Trill to tell others this is your land
Trill to bring pleasure with the sounds you have sung
Trill, trill, trill and give me a thrill
Thrilled to have heard your voice in a song.

House Sparrows

by Jenny Shalom

Chirp and chirrup so cheerfully,
From cottage gutters and hedges by roads,
from tiled roofs and garden shrubberies,
around garages overgrown by ivy and bushes.
Pockets of house sparrows are to be found.
Listen to them chirp, listen to them chirrup!
can you help but be cheered by the sound?
Joy you bring to we who hear you call.
How kindly you share your sweet, sweet, song.
Thank you, you sweet, sweet birds.

Blackbird

by Jenny Shalom

Blackbird your notes are so round and so full,
full to the brim with rich velvet sound,
clear and pure, bubbling up through the air.
Rich and full, plump with heavenly sound.
Bursting into my ears, transfixing my mind,
a stop in your tracks kind of sound.
A most luscious sound to feed my ears.
Liquid like honey, sugar rich and divine to hear.
Delicious in notes your mellifluous tones
Seep into my ears, into my mind,
seducing my attention with beauty divine.
Your black coloured plumage belies your intent,
your beautiful song many hearts it could rend,
dripping so sweetly from your sunflower bill.

Chill

by Jenny Shalom

“Relax; why don’t you!” he said. “You’ll be fine!” he said in his casual way. Well, you and I both know that if you have an anxious personality, that’s easier said than done. Of course, you want to chill but how to calm the nerves is the challenge. Sometimes when life isn’t too full of those triggering stresses some simple breathing techniques can help. Other times it’s far too hard to get out of your thoughts and worries. Having grown up anxious it’s hard not to be fretting about something that’s really nothing. What to have for supper? Well it doesn’t really matter what you have although sometimes planning ahead gives a sense of control over what’s happening and that reassurance can translate into a calmer feeling.

I’ve recently learnt that lots of reassurance from a friend or loved one can really help reduce the levels of anxiety. We’re built to live as social beings. Historically, having others around you was safer, so humans grouped together. Scientific studies have proven that heart rate, blood pressure and other physiological indicators of stress are much reduced by being with someone you can depend upon. Indeed, it enables us to perform better knowing we have that support. This seems contrary to the modern ethos of being independent, standing alone and being able to do it all yourself. Well, of course you can, but it’s much easier with someone else in your corner.

“I’m just too anxious or excited or both.” I replied. “I can’t sit still. It’s as if I’ve got ants in my pants.” Yes, I knew what was coming... “You’ll be fine!” How he’s mastered that world weary wheeze of the Greenfinch call and incorporated it into the ‘fine’ I’ll never know, but it’s becoming very amusing to us. ‘You’ll be fi...ne’. Is a reassurance to us both and now acts symbolically for us as a shared understanding that there’s anxiety, yet the other one understands and is there for us. Thus reducing the anxiety, taking the sting out of the situation. Drawing out the ‘i’ is the important part of saying it aloud. Imagine the greenfinch atop his tree calling his heart out to a mate ...

“Okay,” I said, “I’ll sit down in a minute.” And I did. It was nice to sit next to him, comforting. “Now we can relax, chill out and watch the film.” I snuggled close as he fiddled with the remote controls to start the film. He put his arm round my shoulders. Relaxing into his embrace I thought “Yes, this is our chill time. And it’s fi...ne!

Japanese Garden Haiku

by Jenny Shalom



Time raking stones of gravel
Joe creates stories
For our minds to unravel

Gravel waves ripple
Milky sunlight dappled shade
Serene enchantment

Cold

by Jenny Shalom

Sneeze, sneeze, sneeze,
She can't breathe.

Cough, cough, cough,
Her throat's so rough.

Ache, ache, ache,
Her heads in a state!

Snotty, snotty, snotty,
She's quite grotty.

Sniff, sniff, sniff,
Not a whiff.

Drink, drink, drink,
How much can she sink?

Tea, tea, tea,
All she does is pee!

Steam, steam, steam.
Make it stream.

Splutter, splutter, splutter,
Her mood's in the gutter.

Snuffle, snuffle, snuffle,
She's had enough-le.

Rest, rest, rest,
That's what's best.

Sleep, sleep, sleep,
Long and deep.

Care, care, care,
Best not to share.

Coddle, coddle, coddle,
Hardly a doddle.

Sniffle, sniffle, sniffle,
Is this piffle?

Breathe, breathe, breathe,
What a relief!

Mist Morn

by Jenny Shalom

Hello misty morn	Still the Blackbird cries
Gentle morning soft	In chorus the Robin
No piercing sun	Wood pigeon coo too
No scalded eyes	Strident against the cool skies
Shrouded in vapour	No rush, no fuss
Risen from Earth	Peace for me and you



Round the Table

by Jenny Shalom

A long time ago, when I was a child, I had a dream. Well, it was perhaps more of a nightmare. I'll let you decide. It was certainly scary and disturbing to me. It took place in our first family home. As I recall the Wicked Witch of the West was chasing me, two friends, and my brother round and round the circular dining room table, on her broomstick. As happens in dreams, she was unable to cross the table. If you've seen the Wizard of Oz as a child, you'll know how scary the Wicked Witch of the West was; with her green face, hooked nose and cackling laugh. Round and round we went, in a heightened state of anxiety, the four of us frantic to escape her.

Somehow, we eluded her and got through the door, racing up the stairs helter-skelter to the front room, known as the nursery. Dashing into the far corner where the bunk beds were. Tumbling onto the lower bunk, we piled into the corner as far as we could; we fitted into a tiny area. There, cornered by the Wicked Witch of the West we trembled! So terrifying, especially as the witch complete with green face and hooked nose turned out to be my mother!

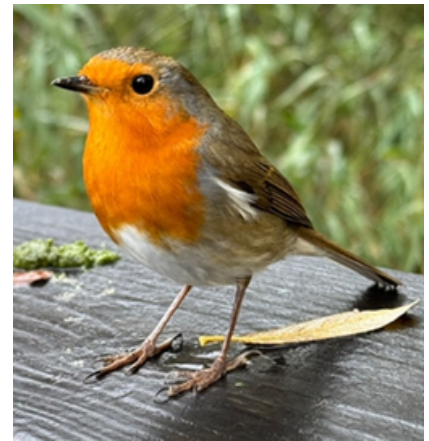
How frightening to be chased by someone so wicked who was my own mother! No wonder the confusion. At this point anxiety overwhelmed me. I woke with a start and the dream ended. So, was it a dream or a nightmare? What do you think?

Feed the Bird

by Jenny Shalom

I finally remembered to take the black sunflower seeds I'd bought. The Robin had been asking for weeks! Singing his solo serenade to me when no one else was around. We'd chatted and I agreed to bring some food. Being me, I'd forgotten. When he came to greet me near the bird feeders, I apologised and glibly said I'd remember next week. He looked disappointed but said he'd wait, or I thought he did, as he sang to me again.

Sadly, the same thing happened not once, not twice, but for the next three weeks. That third week he even dropped down onto the "feed the birds" sign below the bird ID chart on the fence somewhat unsubtly! I felt guilty as charged. The fifth week I forgot! I nearly didn't go to the bird feeders for fear of my reception. However, I girded my loins and approached. Yes, he was there, waiting expectantly. My apologies were profuse. He seemed to accept them, but I had a sense



I'd disappointed him. I promised once again to bring seed next week. He replied with only a short snatch of song; was I worth the effort?

Today was the day; I'd remembered! Armed with my black sunflower seeds I headed to the feeders. Where was he? He wasn't there! Had he forsaken me? I waited. There he was! He didn't seem as glad to see me as I was to see him. I sprinkled some seeds on the fence post and waited. Cautiously, he came and eyed them; carefully, interestedly inspecting. Off he flew with one in his bill. Phew! Was I back in his good books? Curiously, his interest waned and he took no more.

I learned his preferred food was pistachio-coloured, fat pellets. Over winter he'd pick them from my glove. This delightful bird perching, momentarily, lightly, delicately, on my hand quickly, selecting his snack from the seed menu in my palm was a joy! My efforts hadn't been in vain: he shared his glorious, sweet serenades time and again.

Heat

by Jenny Shalom

“Run!” he shouted, “It's the Heat!”

Oh my gawd! They were after us! It was the Fuzz. All the police in the world were chasing us down the street, through the dark night into the alleyway to the railway sidings. “Quick, this way!” Peter leapt up the angled pallet and over the wall to the train tracks. I scrambled after him as fast as I could. We couldn't afford to get caught. We'd be banged up for stealing a tube of smarties just because we were from the wrong side of the tracks. Our society was so divided, even geographically now. Segregation was the norm!

We'd had no choice but to nick the sweets. It was Babs' birthday, and she so loved the coloured sweets. She took such good care of us, making sure to bring out the best in us; it was the least we could do.

Escape we must! Migs was hot on my heels and kicked the pallet over as he leapt to the wall. Phew! That would hold the Bizzies up for a bit. Would Polly have managed to keep a heavy door on the other side open?

We danced, hopping across and along the tracks, dodging behind carriages and engines. We could hear the whistles behind us. The heat was definitely on! Panting and gasping for breath, Peter led us deftly to the sliver of light on this hot and humid night; the silver sliver of salvation held slightly ajar by Polly. She heaved it open as we approached. “Quick! This way!” she cried.

We bundled through the door turning to put our backs into closing it. Dripping in the heat we closed the door on the lights and sirens of the bobbies who were after us. “At least the filth didn't see our faces”, said Migs; heaving a sigh of relief. “I'm so glad the Rozzers didn't get you”, said Polly, relieved.

Catching our breath, we followed Polly with the lantern, up the forgotten drainage tunnel. Goreti let down the rope ladder for us to climb up. It was good to see her smiling face. “I'm so glad you were faster than the Coppers”, she said. We replaced the manhole cover and headed home to our shelter.

There was Margaret at the door looking out for us. She looked worried; perhaps she'd heard the sirens? “Oh, I wondered if you'd make it”, she shared. “The pigs even got the helicopters out tonight”, she told us. “They're really turning the heat up”. “We must be careful. You don't want to get involved with the Old Bill. Those Peelers can be so nasty.”

There was Hazel putting the final touches to a beautiful bouquet from her garden and in the corner was Elizabeth who looked up from scrubbing the potatoes from Hazel's garden. Gary and Emma were in charge of cooking tonight; Gemma's face lit up in her big smile as she saw us. "Did you do it?" she asked. We smiled, nodding back.

"Where's Babs? Where's the birthday girl? There she is!"

She greeted us, "Where have you been on this hot and sticky night? I want to celebrate my birthday with you all!"

"We know!" we chorused. "Look what we got you!" Handing her the tube of colourful chocolates, the smile on her face made facing the heat worthwhile. She beamed with joy. It made us all so happy.

Prisha Bhadusia

We only have one life so live without any regrets.

Mmmmm, ok, I don't know what to say. My name is Prisha, but close ones call me Rupa, which means "beautiful" or "blessed with beauty". I turned 22 last July.



My dreams are many to achieve in this life. So, to start with to adoption. This is deep in my heart because babies with special needs are left. This is because:

- The parents are not expecting them to be with special needs.
- Family is not ready to help out.
- They can't afford to take care of the child because of money.

Luckily, my parents are very supportive of my sibling and me, and so is my extended family. My second dream is to open a cafe in the city and around. My motto is to start small and grow. I wrote down a business proposal stating my goal. My third dream is to go travelling around the world, exploring and getting new experiences.

Recently I started reading again. I really love romantic novels, currently I am reading Hannah Grace. I only read one, called Icebreaker. Out of many more. I really prefer an audio to listen and the book in my hands to follow. I previous read This Wicked Fate by Kalynn Bayron.

Currently, I am in writing, knitting and art clubs on a Tuesday. I joined these clubs in September, to meet other people and to join a community. I want to get my maths qualification out of my way so I can move ahead with my life and follow my dreams and aspirations.

Walk through First day of Winter

by Prisha Bhadusia

Hear that!

The snow is falling and a snowflake fell on my hair. What a beautiful scene to be in. The sun is shining, but it's freezing. It's like a day in Winter Wonderland. As you walk in Marble Hill Park you can see the icicles surrounding the playground where usually there are little kids playing with the equipment. Now the playground has been transformed, quiet with trees sweeping through the breezy wind. The tree's leaves turn reddish brown when it hits the grass. As I lift my hand to take a leaf for the moment, I could feel the pain of the tree letting the leaf go, but it also means that it's time for newbie to bloom till next Winter.

It feels like Winter again!

Winter Time

by Prisha Bhadusia

First Day of Winter! The snow is falling and a snowflake fell on my hair what a beautiful scene to be in. The sun is shining but it's freezing. It's like a day in winter wonderland. As you walk in the marble hill park, you can see the icicles surrounding the playground where usually there are little kids playing with the equipment.

Now the playground has been transformed a quiet with trees sweeping through the breezy wind. The trees leaves turn reddish brown when it hits the grass. As I lift my hand to take a leaf for the memory. I could feel the pain of the tree letting the leaf but it also means that it's time for newbie to bloom till next winter.

Polly Debrunner

Creative Writing is a means of therapy and expression for me.

Being Autistic with comorbid Mental Health problems I find it a cathartic experience. I enjoy writing about various things as well as my thoughts and feelings concerning myself and various topics. It is good for our mental health and a good form of communication.



The Rainbow

by Polly Debrunner

Many colours shine bright in a semi-circle of light. Very vivid against a backdrop of a dramatic darkened sky. I sit looking out of my window and wonder why?

A band of colours: red, yellow, pink, green, purple, orange and blue. It's true, the rainbow's colours look as good as new!

Is there a pot of gold at the end? That would be nice, but it's hard to comprehend.

Somewhere over the rainbow is a song about hope. They represent positivity and belief in ourselves, that is what we need the most!

Shooting out up the sky from the earth below our feet. It seems like that anyway and it's such a treat.

They fade away as quickly as they appear.

The Creative Writing Group

by Polly Debrunner

As I ascend the stairs to the rooms above, I feel anxious of what might be. Will the group be nice and friendly? Will the facilitator be accommodating and approachable?

It's normal to be anxious when doing something new. Maybe there will be others in the room who are too?

I cautiously open the door to the room where the creative writing group is taking place. An older lady wearing glasses and a large smile gives me a warm welcome. "Hello Polly, I'm Brenda" she says gleefully. "Do take a seat". I sit down on a comfy chair that's adorned with a brightly coloured cushion.

Perched on a chair next to me on my left is a lady who wears a hat. “ Hello Polly, I’m Judy”, she says warmly. Sitting next to her is a young-looking man. He introduces himself as Michael. Seated at the end of the long table is an older gentleman by the name of Philip. He seems to be rather serious in his glasses and his demeanour.

Another older lady, Harriet, sits on my right. I presume that she’s recently been swimming as her hair is slightly wet at the bottom! Sitting adjacent to Brenda is a lady called Mandy who wears glasses and is elegant in her gold and purple flowery dress.

A lady with a strong accent sits next to Mandy by the name of Giselle. She’s from Portugal so she says. Another elegantly dressed lady is Emily who is reclining next to Giselle in a red armchair.

There are a couple of other people sat at the table who are also new to the group. They are; Preeti who sits comfortably in her wheelchair and she’s accompanied by her helper Debbie. Then there’s Lorenzo, a young man with Italian heritage.

“Today you’ll be writing on the subject of Animals”, Brenda instructed in an upbeat manner. She loved animals especially cats, so she was looking forward to hearing everyone’s pieces of writing on the matter.

After thirty minutes of writing, we put our pens down and took it in turns to read out what we had written to the group. I wrote about big cats including Tigers and Snow Leopards among a few others of great importance.

Once we had read our pieces it was almost the end of the session. Brenda gave us all a list of the following weeks' writing themes. “Thank You for producing such lovely pieces of creative writing. See you all next week”. She called me aside and asked how I found the session. “It was very enjoyable”, I said with a smile. “Thank You”.

I gathered my things and headed out the door, followed by Philip. “See you next week”, I said to him. He responded quietly, “Yes, see you next week”.

I left the building feeling happy and positive about what’s to come. “What a lovely group”, I thought to myself. “I’ll definitely return for more creative writing group sessions”.

Luigi Jones

I found poems an immediate way to convey feelings and emotions.

My name is Luigi Jones. I live in London, and I was born in 2000.

I am autistic and visually impaired. I am naturally curious. I love reading, films, current affairs and cats. My ambition is to be creative and be able to express myself by writing.



Hyperreal

by Luigi Jones

Sunset , flowers
Dreaming green softly
Birds chirping loudly
Bright red rainbow sky
A multicolour spectrum
Of life and intensity
Vibrant darkness and shadows
Glowing stars of gold and charcoal black
Curly wisps of cottony cloud
An endless vista
Patchwork of colours
Of infinite details

Wealth

by Luigi Jones

Aristocrats, royals, wealth.
Eating, dancing, chatting
Tight, heavy, gold, gaudy clothes
Trying to enjoy it all.
Silk clothes, porcelain, portraits, silk curtains
Waiting, watching, burning brightly and slowly.
An angry golden grimace
Arms draped in leaves and legs curling hooked outwards

Walking Through

by Luigi Jones

Walking though
A lasting view
Fixed in time

Pillars, arches, roman statues
Stretching outwards
A faux folly
A cruel caricature
Of pax romana

The noble started walking
From point A-B
Anachronistic arches
Superfluous statues
Recursively reappeared
In the noble's blindsided mind
Lost in a maze of marble



Becoming
through words

Poetry
brings
joy

Through
writing
we heal

Words
enable
expression

Stories
unite us

Writing is
therapy

Writing
opens your
imagination

Through
stories we
share