

Poems
by Florrie Crook
2020

The Great Rush

That star keeps moving, night by night
How did I never notice that before?
Too much stuff to do
Like I never noticed you

When I liked that thing you posted
I mean I like you.
It's reassuring to connect,
old friends around the world

Now we take a break
from the Great Rush

I wish I could just pop to the shops

Just three and four feet tall
these gatekeepers may be small
but the jail they keep is fearsome,
ferocious love makes up the walls.

Each little chance to take a breath
is snatched and stamped to death,
each repeated plea for mercy
ignored way past the hundredth.

This prisoner's tongue has been silenced,
deafening sirens wail if she requests compliance.
She shouts and whispers and clucks
and controls the urge to break out in violence.

From dawn 'til nightfall they call out for meat,
for sport they whip her then refuse to eat.
In her mind's eye she pulls the trigger
for they shout again for something sweet.

Alone in the cell all is quiet,
who will clean up after the riot?
She creeps to watch the sleeping jailers
chastised by penitence and divine bias.

When it gets too much reading the news...

When it gets too much
she puts on her disguise.
Make-up and filter: ON.
It was hard to tell
on Zoom, in the front room,
if she had a black eye

When it gets too much
he can't contain his strong anger.
He has cancer.
His treatment has been delayed.
It's life prolonging.
He doesn't know how long.

When it gets too much
families send their most precious away
hoping it will be safer elsewhere.
Densely populated refugee camps
are Virus Hotspots today.
How horrific.

When it gets too much
there will be a fundraising concert
probably online.
By the by, delayed vaccination programmes
will inevitably lead
to more child polio in Africa. I want to cry

When it gets too much
she goes for night time walks.
She can see the stars and hear the fox.
She hasn't touched another human
for fifty days.
Not that different to normal.

When it gets too much
she hides in the car.
There's no escape at home.
Her daughters haven't seen the sun
since Friday afternoon.
Using the filthy lift is too risky for the shielded.

In extreme cases
the choice is going hungry
or getting ill.
When it gets too much
I worry and worry and worry
if that will ever be us

When it gets too much
they keep busy and exercise.
They have a beautiful garden.
They dress for dinner every Saturday
and eat like kings to pass the time.
It keeps their love alive.

When it gets too much
no one would know,
she deals with it alone.
On clear days Mount Fuji is in sight.
Last night she found a nearby bar
still open 'til midnight.

Andy invited me to his live event.
Nonsensical art, remotely
with old friends is a joy.
When it gets too much
I shut down.
It's not too much yet.

I worry and worry.
This is the calm before the hurricane.
I feel blissful but it's starting to wane.
When it gets too much
what on earth will I do
when we get back to normal?

Everything Needs Devotion and Luck

All the roses are in bloom
but not for Betty Blue.

Sun beams hit the roof tops,
she's looking at you with your tops off.

In the garden, plant seeds,
then watch the slugs feed.

Raindrops hit the roof tops
and the flowers are weeds. It's all lost.

Everything needs devotion
and luck.

Feels like nothing, just empty earth,
a drop in the ocean, but it isn't the first.

Sun beams hit the roof tops
and Betty Blue has had enough.

Now – train of thought.

I'm too old for this.
This tempestuous life just keeps on giving me shit.
Too old to swear, too old to be a parent.
Most of it's in my head, isn't it?
Angst and heavy imagery has always been my thing.
Shy exhibitionist

Well, we sat in the kitchen having a drink
Watching the rain turn the country green.
Watching him cook is nice.
Here with him is where I need to be.
It's not exactly dismal, not exactly empty
but emptiness is what we want just now I think.

What age does nostalgia start? When does it end?
I'm loving it now in lockdown

A hack for old age:
Keep fit, live your life, keep memories,
to replay as you go 'round the bend.

I'm loving it.
Nostalgia, that is. Lockdown is shit

Mr Spark's Lost Love

And in a second, She left.
And not a second went by
would He forget Her.

And days were left behind
and not a minute went by
without Her mentioned in His mind.

And a year turned to more
and hours go by before
He thinks of Her (And He thinks of Her).

And could a day go by
and the endless sky turn
deep, deep blue?
Could it go by without Her
his true, true lost love?

I met Mr Graham Spark on an aeroplane returning from Spain last year.
My seat was next to his. He was asleep when I embarked and he was so dormant, sunken and grey.
I thought he was dead.

I was quite alarmed but he suddenly woke up. Blood returned to plump out his papery skin and he was no longer ashen but sparkling and he didn't stop talking all the way back to Edinburgh (apart from momentarily when I responded to his polite questions).

However, he was absolutely fascinating and told me his life story. Even the person sitting behind us sat forward in their seat to listen to his charming chat.

A great traveller, he had spent many years in Africa and Asia since the 1950s.

He told me that his wife had died. He told me about when they first met and it was a romantic tale of love at first sight and they were together for more than fifty years.

He'd prepared financially for him dying first, but sadly she had died a few years before, leaving him with money to spend and in his 90s he now regularly travelled to Spain to learn Spanish.

He always thinks of her, in almost every situation in his life. Daily. Hourly. What would she say to him? What would she do?

He told me a poem he'd written. I interpreted his idea and wrote Mr Spark's Lost Love. But in essence it's his poem, not mine. About love and death.

When we arrived in Edinburgh to my surprise he had to wait for a wheelchair to disembark. What an inspiration!

Lean into it

I always think I'll get somewhere divine,
I always plan for better days,
I always think the sun will shine,
didn't believe the sea could know the meaning of the waves.

And the silent tide flows
along the path it chose
picking colours from the sky to show
along the way.

The man at the bus stop told me 'Life's a breeze'
and 'every day's a good day'.
I don't think he meant it but he believes the sentiment,
It's something positive to say.

I always listen to the birds,
I always love this time of year,
I always run late and morning's not for me,
didn't believe there'd be a time we wouldn't care.

I'll lean into it.

Greedy Heart

I close my eyes
Escape from here
Remember the sun rising
I feel the pull
Another life
We collided
Now I'm rooted
To this cold, cold place
My greedy heart
Feels the pull
It's a secret
That we share
Can't have it all
I would bring myself
Alive
I feel the pull
You are so much
Freer than me
I gave it all up
For them
I would give it up
Again
And again
And again

The Two Potters

He sits under the elder tree
He burns wood and elder leaves
He turns the ashes into dreams

He lives beside me
I used to know another man
Who lived beside me
In another land
Far, far away
Far from different, anyway.

He sits under the tamarind tree
He burns wood and tamarind leaves
He turns the ashes into dreams

They make colours from the land
They live alone and they don't mind
People come and go they find

These two potters calm as clay
Serene like the break of day
Shattered cups turn back to earth anyway

Jane
(Ghazal poem I)

Kiss me kiss me kiss me October Friday night.
Velvet jacket. Legs of mine. Black lined eyes play Night.

Crushed under a dragon, my mother came too late.
Consumed by fire and claws I stayed the mighty night.

Receive. Cushion deft blows soft musky forest floor.
The tree is felled. Under echoing sighs lay night.

Hide in water. Darkness cool down this burning skin.
Shiver, give your heat to me in the white bay, Night.

Humble motorcycle's pulse. Bound like ravelled vines.
Breathing, weaving, deceiving. Redolent highway night.

It is not me, Jane. Be quiet do not wake me.
Enter this willing stranger's dream. Defile my night.

Fiona
(Ghazal poem II)

I can make you feel like a Mughal King. Fine!
Late in the night, foreign fruit and everything fine.

Treats. Strange, sweet snacks. Prepare them and feed us them.
My mouth and yours, together. I can sing fine.

Songs that you love. Talk to you. Call memories
of youth and wit. Innocence. All being fine.

You will sweat wine and I will drink it all up.
In your trance you'll forget all but feeling fine.

You remember you were so illuminated.
Regal. Your crown enlightened and shining. Fine.

I, Fiona made you that and you made me
be your dear queen. Our kingdom is looking fine.

Inspired by an article I read about young Afghans turning to poetry during lockdown, specifically erotic poetry of which there is a long Persian tradition. I learned about a unique form of poetry called the Ghazal and discovered that it's rules are both tricky and compelling. Trying to write a poem a day, I gave it a shot and found it both satisfying and slightly addictive in the same way that a crossword or Sudoku can be. And very meditative. I want to write more of them.

You go first

The way the road ended just like that, no one ready with a boat, nothing for it but to set up camp and take turns at night watch.

We began dancing to our shadows and were merry but wondered why the signs had not been better prepared so we could have chosen if we would still come this way.

Merry until our tiredness took its toll and we let down our guard and started to turn on each other.

Staring at the marble sea, we can swim I know we can.

But you go first

The Ladder

We climbed in
and pulled the ladder up behind
not looking back until later
when we watched them all make hay in the burning sun.

We rested there, the four of us
calling out from our hiding place
every now and then,
getting fatter day by day,
trying to keep the weeds from growing around the ladder.

I said "there's hay to make"
he said "it doesn't matter"
but his eyes said more and he took the ladder
to go a bit further
alone
and he pulled it up behind
and we listened to him sleep.

Then his fingers got busy
tap tapping away
planning our escape.

A Promising Morning in the Back Green

The birds are bickering.
Gossiping and singing their plans for the day
that stretches ahead like the untrodden dewy lawn.
Unmown grass eagerly points skyward, twinkling.
Lilac trees dream of a purple summer heavy with heady scent.
Heaven sent fruit bushes send out their blossom to work,
cascading like shaken out sheets.

In fresh made beds
eager flowers greet the sun.
Shining outstretched petals,
children with an arm up
calling 'me me me' to the bees.

Oh, what a promising morning!

But last year's Christmas tree still sits in a pot
wishing she was hidden in the forest
and the chard has bolted before the race for dinner.
A little pile of wasted sticks waiting their true fate
make a home for squatters.
The glorious sun ticks like a minute hand across the sky

and my tea leaves tell my fortune:
You will go inside and face the day.

Side by side

Side by side, digging the earth
Father and son
Side by side with where he dug
Neighbour and neighbours

Side by side eating a pizza on the lawn
Brother and sister
Side by side we watch them
Husband and wife

Side by side on the chimney
Crow and pigeon
Side by side on the hanging feeder
Tit and finch

How difficult it is to keep apart.

In the distance

He woke from a dream
where he stood two metres apart from me
and from our friends who were there too
all in our garden
drinking beer.

Lining up to buy our food
that day put me in a bad mood.
Pawns following the rules of play.
Touch – move.
How queer.

New habits take shape
as if eye contact is rape.
Keeping people safely away.
Who will it take?
What a kind of fear!

The thing that's strange,
in the distance the view hasn't changed.
Will you walk by my side one day
when we walk that far again?
I hope so my dear.

Birds I

Jet black gleaming in the sun,
with his marigold jewel of a beak,
his lady blackbird's a fussy one
He's the coolest kid in the garden bar none.

Unselfconscious, so quick and smart.
As I open the door to peek,
at this hint of danger, he starts.
He's in a class apart.

The most beautiful I've ever seen,
not normal, this one has mystique.
Nonchalantly he eats while she preens
the nest, where she will sit serenely.

I'm surprised I've not heard him sing.
I wonder why he doesn't speak.
Then on cue in the cacophony of spring
I think I hear that beautiful thing.

Birds II

Oh Magpie
Where is your pal?
You know I'm a superstitious gal!

"Is that the Clangers?"
Asked wee Pearl.
Sounds like it doesn't it, my girl.

Birds III

When the sun comes up
behind the tenements
the music of wood pigeons
comes with the wind,
resonates from the walls
surrounding our home,
the dreamy wind that blows far from them.

When the sun comes up
behind the back fence
the cooing of wood pigeons
comes with the wind,
drifts around the trees surrounding them.
The childhood home.
The bird-call of love.

As the sun sinks
It reflects on the tenements.
The wood pigeons still call out
so comforting
as the wind drops
calling the cold night,
calling me home, when home was them.

Into the blue

What's that in the mist?

Icebergs

Looming white titans

shimmering into the blue

lined up like battleships

rising from the hazy white horizon.

White Star, Princess, Diamond,

home to the forgotten thousands

abandoned by their patrons,

left with the stench of tan and perfume

hanging in the air like gunpowder.

Waiting and waiting

to finally deliver the weary personnel

to their worried homes.

Then what?

Whimsical, fanciful, romantic,

dormant floating follies.

Are they pointless?

Who will now drift around the earth

keeping up their daily reading and rituals

finely dressed and enjoying being served?

Thank you

Thank you, April.

Thank you for springing home rest upon the weary.

Our buds grew ripe and vigorous,

we tended and nurtured and fussed like the nest building birds.

We gradually moulted our winter layers

and felt grass in our souls at last.

Thank you, May.

Thank you for turning the blossom rosy,

for warming the buds and bursting them from their skins

face to the sky every morning,

every single day

roasting like nuts.

Fuck off June

Frank the centenarian

The engrossing story of Frank the centenarian
entertained me in the car,
his end of an era voice
transmitting through the airwaves
without a crackle
about building the railway
from Thailand to what was then Burma
through the wild mountainous jungle,
the din of cicadas
drowning out the surveyor's cautionary words,
the jungle that stretched north to the top of the earth,
buzzing and hooting,
tangled and gushing.

Each day focussing his mind
on the moment,
the strike of the pick,
making it to the next.
One step
to survive the unforgiving burn of the sun.
Focus,
one more step.
The humidity, the flies and bees pestering for salt.
One more.
Gashing the earth.
One more step.
The maddening itch of mosquitoes, the acid bites of red ants, the painful hunger, the
monsoon rain, the ulcers,
all of it.
One more strike,
the sorrow of death.
One more,
the sting of the beatings on skin and bone, the dirt and sickness,
a prisoner.
Just focus on the next step.
Get through that.

He returned home jubilant
How can I imagine his joy and relief?
And his life played out for seventy-five more years.
But no one wanted to hear his story when he arrived to the arms of his family.
They didn't want to know
a stranger,
some things
are too bleak to share.

Cutting the grass

Today despite the blue sky
a crow's wing across my mind
unkindly blocked the light.
By late afternoon I cut the grass
sweeping up daisies and buttercups.
Ruthless slaughter of their simple cheeriness,
the numb sadness at their waste
petered out as I gained control
over the space.
Mindful, rhythmic, methodical rows
back and forth I mowed.
Looked up and saw that crow pass.
Away at last.

My New Glasses

The new lenses arrived.
Disoriented then habituated
the first thing to shine in clarity,
accentuated
was the intense blue unpunctuated sky.

At home red poppy stems,
growing in all the wrong nooks.
Lines in the mirror like rivers run dry
with littered banks of family debris.

Domestic neglect.
The waste and excess
more colourful than rainbows,
popping like gala flags (hung despite no gala this year).

Weeks down the line normalised,
faded, forgotten, foggy,
smudged by wee sticky fingers,
scratched by careless haste,
no longer My New Glasses 🕶

Shake it up

Shake it up
That's how to shake it up
Not by design

Down this rabbit hole to hide
Fetch the ferrets
Fetch them quick
It's so pleasant here I could die

Shake it up
No one knows where they are
Til the dust falls

I'm staying here a while

Lockdown, so far, in short.

BAME

BLM

GDP

LFC

NHS

PPE

R

WFH

WTF

Afterthought

I wonder what the dole office would look like
If we didn't have computers.....