

Balancing the Moon



Poems by
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BALANCING THE MOON

This collection pulls together a mixed bag of situations, experiences and comment on life's changing scene. Inevitably, I find myself reflecting on growing old, because that is an everyday challenge.

It does have the advantage of making one aware of small events, and of how we never seem to learn the important things about living in this beautiful world, alongside people who may differ in language, culture, or race, but share our common fate.

I have an adopted philosophy that has enriched my awareness, and it is called serendipity, from a work by Horace Walpole. It is the art of making happy and unexpected discoveries. Like balancing the moon on a church steeple...

BALANCING THE MOON

I look for serendipity,
the art of finding
beautiful things
that produce
a happy
feeling.

It's childlike play,
taking each day
as it comes to
make each
moment
joyful.

So, there I was
this night-time
idly looking
at a church's
soaring
spire.

A dark silhouette
against deep
blue evening
sky, framed
by trees
fingers.

Then, the moon
moved slowly
into place,
resting on
the spire's
point.

My camera's eye
caught that
impossible
moment as
the moon
balanced.

DAFFODILS

*(In a vase at grandma Wild's house,
when she decided to go into a care home)*

Yellow mouths wide open at the upheaval.
Of course, they understood being uprooted,
they have been cut off from their roots
and set in an alien environment.

This is different, the whole house knows
who has lived here, and for how long,
now the family saga ends, she is moving
and leaving the place empty.

All the family dinners, and high teas ,
into the sitting room on the old settee,
the lantern talks and slide shows, and
silly party games and jokes.

Great grandad's furniture in daily use
alongside old books of maps, walks,
and special china. Paintings from an
uncle fading on the walls.

Daffodils have seen it all before, used
to nature's changing of each day,
gestation, flowering, blooming ,
then fading, all familiar.

We, resistant to the changing of our
surroundings, must come to terms
with the demands of age seeking
some rest and tender care.

The daffodils, of course, will bloom
anew another year, for another
family gathering in the same
house to celebrate life.

ANEMONES
(a painting)

It was a memorial picture
painted with tears
coloured pain and loss,
the flowers so clear
in soft pinks, mauves,
and white petals.

Behind, turquoise curtains
blow in a gentle breeze,
light falling on a vase
of quiet grey, one sees
fragility reflected
in its contents.

HAIKU FOR ERIC

*(My eldest brother died in Canada
in September 2009)*

A loon calls across the lake
solitary bird;
The earth shed her tears for him
I weeping, join in.

ROSES

You know summer is here
when the roses bloom,
their colours and fragrance
brighten every room;
our old bush heavy with
blossom bending low,
dominates the garden
with her annual show.

What is it about the rose
that makes us smile?
Is it the scent I wonder;
telling us all the while
of forgotten places and
times long since past,
people and events that
like flowers do not last.

Perhaps it's the colours
and the exquisite petals,
each one a work of art,
copied in wood or metals,
to remind us of nature's
vastly superior skill,
creating beauty in form
that surprises us still.



MOTHER'S PRIDE

Growing up in Yorkshire smoke
during a life threatening war,
our daily routine was clear,
“don’t panic, dear”
mother said.

She had the lifelong habit of
keeping up her standards,
no matter what occurred,
“Keep calm and carry on”
mother said.

Through times of austerity,
she saw three of us fed,
performing miracles,
“Dinner’s ready”
mother said.

She ran our house alone
as dad worked away ,
her word was law,
“Do as you’re told”
mother said.

When dad died she stayed,
we had all moved away,
everything in place,
“ Must look my best”
mother said.

After years on her own,
she needed hospital,
as she left the house,
“I’m not coming back”
Mother said.

SENTIMENTAL VALUE

They sit, on dusty shelves
in unopened drawers,
not kept for their value
but sentimental power,
gifts from someone met
at a significant hour.

Objects, a stone, or leaf
pressed in an old book,
record of a lived time,
event I cannot overlook,
held in perpetual stasis
like photographs I took.

They are a tangible link
to a person I once knew,
place and time long gone
when I was younger too.
Handling brings a frisson,
something that is true.

A small wooden carving
chubby robin on a stone,
done by my big brother,
living in Canada all alone.
Carving his one obsession,
after his work was done.

Little wood cigarette box,
with a neat pecking bird,
reminds me of my father,
at home, he preferred
to relax with a cigarette,
cancer he never feared.

Each item tells a story,
of family or of friends,
telling us who we are,
with mem'ry blends,
some say sentimental,
I say love never ends.

ON THE BEACH

1.

The sky a blue canvas spread
with air-brushed clouds,
beneath our feet long terraces
not of sand but stones.
Billions, polished, glittering,
wet, sifted, drifting down.
A lone gull laughs out loud
in sunlit surprise above.
Wind blows wild messages
in our ears fortissimo.

2.

Here, we are lost in a vast
echoing sea-sound, space.
Shakespeare's words float
into my mind like surf;
"As the waves make towards
the pebbled shore,
so do our minutes hasten
to their end, each
changing place with that
which went before."

3.

So, time shapes our lives
as the sea does the land.
Our thoughts like birds
whirl around within, as
lying on stone cushions
we recall the past.
Was it really thirty years
ago we built a tower,
of discarded plastic cups
and seaweed ropes?

IRAQ 2003
(and every war since)

Last time it was 'desert storm',
now it's 'shock and awe'.
Last time it was 'smart bombs'
now it's 'precision munitions',
it's always the same.

Incinerated soldiers in skeletal trucks;
incinerated children in family cars,
the shock and awe of pitiless war
waged in an enemy's back-yard,
it's always the same.

They tell me it's in the name of peace
this blasphemous slaughter;
they tell me it's in the name of security
this choreographed chaos,
it's always the same.

It's 'good versus evil', can't you see,
it's them versus us, can't you tell?
No, I can't when we bomb and maim
yet more innocent civilians,
it's always the same.

War doesn't cast out war, it breeds more,
feeding on the hate it sets free;
it seems ridiculous but true that we
have not learned from the past,
that's why it's the same.

PEACE LILY

A pale cream flame rises from green darkness,
a slender pinnacle of grace and beauty,
long branching leaves support the
fragile stem of the peace lily.

The flower is wrapped with its shielding hand
to protect the vulnerable seed, like
an embrace from a close friend
keeping away any dangers.

I like the name for its connection with our
continuing search for peace in war,
so fragile, a candle flame in dark
and destructive places.

Peace makers stand alone and yet have
strength from surrounding friends,
who give the courage they need
to bring light in darkness.



A GREEN AND UNPLEASANT LAND
(*the Illegal Migration Bill, July 2023*)

A beacon of democracy,
is how we call ourselves,
a light in a dark world,
but only if you have skin
of the correct colour.
Now we know that this
jewel of an island set
in a silver sea, is truly
a fortress, closed to those
who seek a better life.

No matter that we are
seen as a place of hope,
a place of respect, now
that must be replaced
by open hostility.
True, you can come in
with lots of money,
our door is wide open,
but not if you are poor
or plain desperate.

Thousands try every
year to cross the
channel to safety, to
find a new life free
of crippling fear.
In panic, our leaders
slam the door in
their faces crying,
“you are not welcome
in our fair land.”

“I was a stranger and
you did not welcome me”,
said Jesus.

TINNITUS

Of an age to remember
cat's-whisker radio, a
wash of background
interference, so
I can accept
tinnitus.

Like hearing the news on
a radio unable to keep
itself on station,
everything is
hissing with
static.

You can try self-help apps
and books on healing,
to find a lot of advice,
but not stop the
persistence of
sounds.

Mine is a soundscape
that accompanies
me all the day,
so I find I can
tolerate this
intrusion.

Like an old sweater
it wraps me around,
part of who I am,
it will always be
a sly constant
companion.

Many have new forms
of tinnitus infection,
with ear plugs for
constant music, or
smart phones'
insistence.

INVISIBLE

We pass you in the street,
or sit near you in the bus,
there's lots of us to meet,
take time and you'll see us.

We sit in cafes all the day,
go shopping in the mall,
oh yes, and by the way,
we're long, short and tall.

Daytime cinema audience,
some theatre buffs as well,
in the country's ambience,
we're regulars, truth to tell.

We're the hidden majority,
not on your social apps,
a quite invisible seniority,
occupying all the gaps.

Politicians love to court us,
make promises galore,
then somehow lose focus,
our problems they ignore.

Who are we, you may ask,
whom you cannot see?
It's quite a simple task,
we're elderly, aren't we?

HOTTING UP

Science says the planet's
getting hotter by the year,
you would not think so
in wet, windy, Windermere.

Look abroad to burning
Rhodes, Greece and Spain,
and tell me if those people
would not like lots of rain.

This year's thermometer
broke the hottest records,
for countries in the south,
reporters lost for words.

Can we afford to carry on
as if everything was well,
the climate going crazy,
heat rising up from hell?

Surely, now's the moment
for politicians of renown,
to step up all their efforts,
help the earth cool down.

No, despite the warnings
they still hold on to oil,
prosecute all protesters,
green energy they foil.

Nature has made it plain,
there is no planet B,
the planet will not alter,
chaos is all we'll see.

BLENCATHRA

A day of racing clouds
and tumbling birds,
trees creaking and
dancing grass;
a day not to climb
the serrated teeth
of Sharp Edge.

We chose an easier
route, sheltered,
suiting aged legs
and lungs;
steadily gaining
the summit of
Blencathra.

The wind hit us,
whirling words
away in space,
so strong, and
cleanly cold.
Clinging together,
we descended.

In the wide space
of the valley
spread below,
were tiny cars
whizzing by,
oblivious to our
battered selves.



A BIGGER HOCKNEY .
(*The Lightroom, London, June 2023*)

Ageing, we're meant to slow down,
make do with a limited scope,
with Hockney the reverse is true.
Restrict him, you have no hope!

In a vast warehouse show,
we hear him at full volume,
talking us through his paintings
projected across the room.

His youthful California days,
full of colour, and vivacity ,
in a video drive with his friends
you admire his audacity.

Pushing boundaries all the time,
arch showman and explorer,
he paints the world as he sees it
always blinding us with colour.

Play with classical perspective,
unrolling the Chinese scroll,
images with camera obscura,
photography, digital and roll.

Displayed as high as a wall
filled with booming sound,
East Yorkshire trees blaze ,
nature, simple yet profound.

Hockney writ large and bold ,
rebel smoker, gay and proud,
pursuing his passion for paint,
now in digital, big and loud.

TAKE FIVE

(Homage to Dave Brubeck)

You can't mistake the sound,
it is the epitome of cool,
Brubeck turns time around
maestro on a piano stool.

The tilting melody expands
Desmond's sax cuts in,
the quartet shows its hand
the fun about to begin.

Silkily the fine tune grows
effortless the groove,
into a theme we all know,
nothing here to prove.

MODERN JAZZ QUARTET

When Bach met be-bop, the result
came softly, as in a morning sunrise,
to mark the unique and silky style
of the MJQ.

Canon, fugue, and concert formality
took the group on new paths for
musicians schooled in hot jazz,
now the MJQ.

Dark suits and white shirts were
a far cry from sweaty Birdland
gigs with Gillespie and Monk,
MJQ were new.

Piano, vibraphone, drums and bass
wove music crossing borders,
elegant and fresh, effortless
sound of the MJQ.

SOLITARY BLUES

Piano tinkling right next door,
faltering fingers on the keys,
nothing is working any more,
music doesn't seem to please.

Phone rings, an official voice,
issue with your bank account.
Don't reply, you have a choice,
if you do then troubles mount.

All alone in a shopping mall,
people rushing everywhere,
you need help but cannot call,
for if you do, the people stare.

Loneliness is like a sentence,
without there being a crime,
nothing quite makes sense.
for all we possess is time.

RUSHBEARING

Bright summer day at St. Columba's,
the village church for Warcop, the
time of an annual tradition.

A narrow country lane snakes past
the Church, and the school, going
down to the village green,

A small crowd gathers all waiting
for the sound of a band, as the
banners get into position.

This old celebration links village,
and church through the school,
where ancestors have been.

Young girls wearing flowered
crowns, boys carrying small
crosses of twisted wood.

A throwback to the time when
rushes laid on the church's
stone floor were young.

Renewing them every season,
symbol of the change where
each generation stood.

Grandparents, parents, and
children, all join together
as old hymns are sung.



DANCING LIGHT

Of all simple pleasures none can match
the miracle of light upon our eyes,
from window blinds, bright moving bars
chase across the wall as if surprised.

Along a river beneath bending trees
swift jewels flit across it's face,
each chasing the rest in a sensuous
dance of shimmering grace.

And who can resist the candle's charm
upon warm wood and silver dish,
filling the room with shadows, and
softly answering our every wish.

Light fills our emptiness with longing
for a world just out of our reach,
where pain has vanished and our soul
learns the lessons love can teach.

COPPER BEECH

Bit of a surprise these trees,
when you pass by each day,
among all the leafy greens,
a sudden deep red display.

They're common enough but
seem rather improper,
why this change in the tones
from green to dull copper?

We know from our science
about arborial factories,
turning sunlight to carbon,
is the gameplan of trees.

So where is the chlorophyll
that makes them green?
Some beeches have a fault
that can rarely be seen.

Protecting spring leaves is
a red-coloured stain,
but as they grow bigger
the colour remains.

Copper beeches for us
are a constant delight,
but the absence of green,
- it's a trick of the light.

STONEHENGE

Brooding over the windswept grass,
shadows dark beneath the stones,
keeper of its ancient secrets, lies
Stonehenge.

Summer's solstice draws crowds
of worshippers and dreamers,
seeking lost wisdom from
Stonehenge.

Reminder of the tribes that lived
and built their huge monument
celebrating life and death,
Stonehenge.

Do we, the visitors from today
understand any better that
life and death are sacred, at
Stonehenge?

Pillars of wisdom stand strong
defying time's destruction,
show us your silent power,
Stonehenge.



THE LISTENER

Help me to embrace
the pain I feel,
it is my soul's dis-ease
I want to heal.

My words are pulled
from a scalding pool
of time-locked tears,
Oh, what a fool
I have been.

And then I read
within your eyes,
a tear-deep love,
and no surprise
that I should touch
the ancient scars,
and let you see
my deepest fears
within.

What alchemy is this
when bitterest pain
brings not defeat
but richest gain?
My shame is naked,
waiting for the blow,
yet what I find is
an accepting glow
of love.

My dearest friend
I owe you much,
for a caring heart
and gentlest touch;
forming a bond
too strong for speech,
yet I must utter the
truth you teach
my heart.

UNSUBSCRIBE

Knowledge is power so they say,
the more you are in tune, the
more will come your way.

So, follow each easy email link,
designed to lure you in, and
capture what you think.

Soon, you will be bombarded
by a stream of choices, in
hope of being rewarded.

It does not take long for you
to spot all is not well, as
emails begin to queue.

Information spewing forth,
fills up your inbox, with
most of little worth.

Take heart! All is not lost,
with a trusty mouse, you
can stop the post.

Just press 'unsubscribe',
one click you're free, to
join another tribe.