

# Dancing Light



Poems by  
Keith Spence







## **DANCING LIGHT**

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”  
(John’s Gospel ch.1 v.5)

We live in dark times. It’s not just winter wrapping itself round us, with storms and cold, but the bleakness of the day’s news. Warfare, hunger, poverty, injustice and crime all adding to human suffering.

It is tempting to hide one’s head in the sand. But this doesn’t help. Better to look , and work with hope, for a transformation to come. For light in the darkness.

This collection explores places I know, people who give hope, art and music and a bit of political comment. The older I get the more important simple pleasures become, and the richer my friendships. Sparks of dancing light in a dark world!

As with earlier collections, the money raised from sales goes to our local Hospice at Home (Carlisle). They are true lights in the community. I am happy to receive any donations for their continuing work.

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## **DANCING LIGHT**

Light dancing in waves  
off water, blazes a path  
into our startled eyes,  
this alchemy of ages  
born in dead stars, is  
both our gift and prize.

The universe of starlight  
empowers and gives life,  
reaching over space time  
creating lasting witness  
by atoms forging new  
worlds at snail's pace.

Amazing benediction  
is ours to see starlight,  
source of our nature,  
opening our minds eye  
to cherish and enjoy  
our living planet.

## **DANCING IN THE RAIN**

Visiting our daughter on a wet winter day,  
clouds weeping across a grey sky, bravely  
we set out to walk her dog, dodging safely  
around ponds and puddles on the way.  
It's hard not to feel gloomy, as on we plod,  
dripping December wrapped all around us,  
only the dog was happy, sniffing every bush  
I would sort out the weather if I were God!  
And then it changed, with a spring-like burst,  
round the corner came a bouncing hound,  
oblivious to rain, an old friend he'd found,  
they danced together with joy unrehearsed!  
Canine wisdom than humans is much better,  
delight in friends expands when it's wetter.

## **WINTER TREES**

Dark winter, walking through cold woods,  
old leaves underfoot, becoming loam,  
bare sky above filled with rain and gloom,  
you can scarce believe the stark grandeur  
of naked trees etched upon the clouds.

Such beauty born of nature's activity,  
creatures hibernating deep and long,  
sap slowed to hold the fading song,  
of bursting branches climb to the sun,  
now frozen fingers pointing to the sky.

In high beeches rooks clamour loud,  
their bundles of balanced black nests  
ever vulnerable to the wind's unrest,  
they wheel over the sculptured giants  
making sleeping woodland proud.



## **HEALING TOUCH**

(Luke's Gospel Ch. 8. v 44)

In the daily rush of work routines,  
ticked by clocks and machines;  
in the kaleidoscope of dreams,  
no space to pause or so it seems,  
comes a moment unexpected,  
as with love we are connected.

It catches us by sweet surprise,  
it could be in someone's eyes,  
a hidden blessing in disguise,  
as if we had won first prize,  
or just a touch upon your arm,  
a gentle offering like a charm.

With the woman in the story,  
encountering a moment's glory,  
changing what we knew before,  
taking us through a new door  
into a world renewed by grace,  
putting a smile upon our face.

## **RESILIENCE**

You hear it all the time, a lucid word,  
and uttering it a charm against fate,  
sure sign of progressive education,  
and bulwark against a failed state.

When events conspire to unravel life,  
violence or poverty crushes grace,  
a worldly-wise politician uses it  
to cover nakedness, to not lose face.

Our human condition ever changes,  
old securities crack open and fail,  
bureaucracy purrs with reassurance,  
people are resilient, they will prevail.

Of one thing we can always be certain,  
that unthinking use of a catchword,  
that demeans by patronising people,  
will get the due contempt deserved.

## **OVER THE HILL**

You sense a vibration in the air  
entering a room quite unknown,  
a polite stare, pause in speech  
that tells you, you're on your own.

Hearing aids just do not help  
as much of the chat passes by,  
youngsters don't stop for breath,  
'speak up', you want to cry!

Now, everyone sits in a bubble,  
glued to their mobile phone;  
all online, perhaps gaming,  
have they been turned to stone?

The generation gap gets wider,  
us oldies are falling through,  
pensioners are over the hill,  
there's not a lot we can do.

Our music is now old or retro,  
vinyl has made a comeback;  
if only we could hear words  
beneath each thumping track!

Remember, we were young once,  
thought old people a bit of a bore,  
finding it hard to get through,  
preferred to run out the door.

## THE COST OF DYING

The channel wind cuts like a knife,  
whipping loose plastic sheets off  
sheltering women, children and  
desperate young men. Calais,  
or elsewhere else on the coast,  
they wait, dodging patrols, with  
silent determination.

What have they to lose, these holy  
vagrants, seeking a better life?  
Home, work, families, friends  
all swept away in the tide of  
violence and oppression in  
countries broken by lies and  
betrayed promises.

The fragile boats, secretly slide  
into the cold northern sea,  
pushed out by men who will  
disappear into the dark night  
clutching blood money, as  
orange coated passengers  
face a pitiless sea.

If the waves and wind relent,  
and a coastguard rescues yet  
another overcrowded craft,  
then, with overwhelming joy,  
this band of courageous  
travellers, young and old,  
will celebrate escape.

Why should we then be so  
afraid we make them into  
prisoners again? Shutting  
them away as if they were  
criminals? These are the  
people who know the cost  
of facing death.

## **MARKING TIME**

(Millenium stones, Derwentwater)

We want to leave our name in the story  
to let others know we existed here,  
for many it is a quest for glory,  
out of pride or fear.

The land bears scars, silent testimony  
to industrial ambitions now past,  
rusting ruins of broken money,  
dreams that did not last.

Art rises above our desire for fame  
in statues and imperial hubris,  
leaving a legacy of quieter name,  
beauty's silent kiss.

Here, on Derwenwater's flowing shore,  
a volcanic rock split in two pieces,  
marks a modest millenium encore,  
until time ceases.



## **HEADLINES**

ATTENTION ! ATTENTION ! hear this,  
something terrible you must not miss,  
you'll be disgusted, appalled, and sad,  
that events round the world are so bad.

Tabloids, broadsheets, they're all alike,  
screaming headlines, battles, a strike;  
make the readers want to know more,  
shout in their ears, kick in their door .

Out of life's riches, why pick the worst?  
It's almost as if the editors rehearsed,  
to make us feel angry, even depressed,  
about our existence, to give us no rest.

Look a bit deeper, read on in the news,  
somewhere, quite small, in the reviews  
or reader's letter, there's a revelation,  
heroism, courage, or just human elation.

There can seem no end to bad stories,  
telling of human suffering not glories,  
that's not the whole picture you see,  
look out for good news, let the rest be!

## **PASSING BY** (Luke 10: 31)

Election year, coming we know  
promises, promises wall to wall,  
different parties wanting to show  
they, no question, are best of all,  
but will they deliver for you now,  
or are they passing by?

Homeless people on the streets,  
wanting a warm place to sleep,  
slandered by wealthy cheats,  
'it's a lifetime choice they keep',  
easy phrase it's hard to beat  
but they are passing by.

Thousands waiting at be seen,  
in NHS hospitals countrywide,  
doctors on strike have been,  
the Government tries to hide,  
behind a callous smokescreen  
and they are passing by.

Sending letters is getting dear,  
via a Post Office sunk in mire.  
with a scandal now quite clear,  
to lawyers as they enquire,  
into corruption officials fear  
as they are passing by.

Migrants landing on our coast,  
risking lives in leaky boats,  
causing panic here the most  
by politicians losing votes,  
Rwanda is their empty boast  
for they are passing by.

Oh, for someone to be strong,  
tackle problems without fear,  
make sure people all belong,  
inclusive caring that is clear,  
and a ringing empathic song  
we are not passing by!

## **LARCH COTTAGE**

(award winning garden centre)

Tucked away in Melkintorpe,  
a gem of warm Italy, resting  
here in rural England.

A village street, Cumbrian barns,  
hide a gardener's paradise,  
through a stable arch.

History meets horticulture with  
ruins from Carthage or Rome,  
resting in full gardens.

This beautiful deception built with  
love, is Larch Cottage Nursery,  
garden centre supreme.

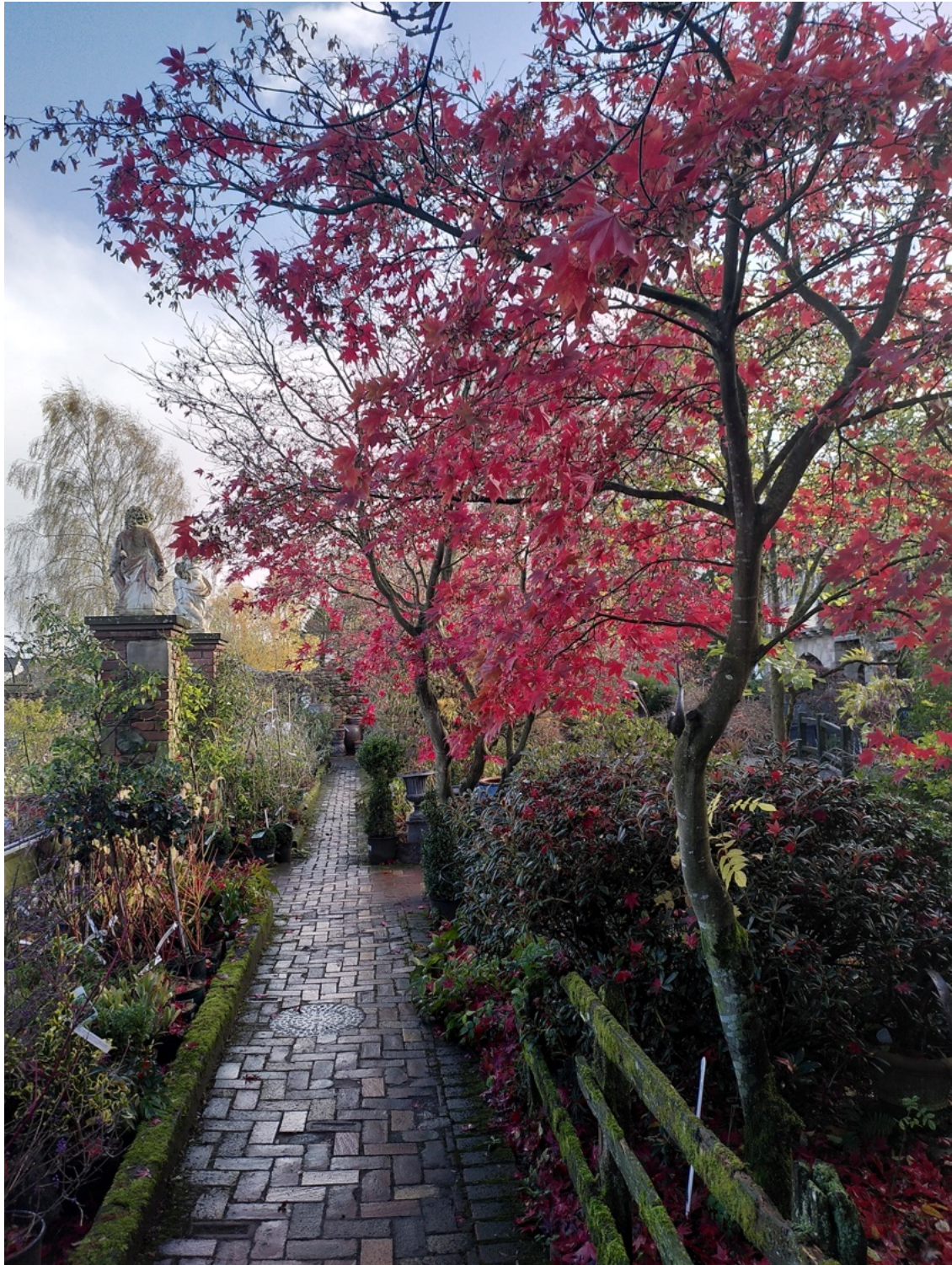
Trees, flowers, plants of all kinds  
flourish in Cumbria's climate,  
nurtured and displayed.

Two ponds, one sitting beside a  
small chapel sporting a bell,  
hold fish, water lilies.

La Casa Verde sits modestly  
above a flowering terrace,  
serving Italy's cuisine.

Beside a giant bird fountain,  
statues point the route to  
the Red Barn gallery.

This treasure of art and nature,  
one man's dedicated vision,  
enfolds every visitor.



## **Pictures on the wall No.1 PATTERDALE CHURCH**

Spring slips shyly over the fells  
disturbing the ancient trees  
that surround St.Patrick's  
memorial church.

Away from rushing traffic  
this oasis of calm breathes  
a peace carved from stone  
capped hills around.

Here the Christian message  
becomes wall tapestries  
lovingly hand crafted by  
artist Ann Macbeth.

The spring daffodils burst  
Wordsworth-like among  
the lichen'd graves that  
fill the churchyard.

There quietly set back lies  
that of hymn writer and  
pastor Fred Kaan, keen  
social justice fighter.

His words are carved into  
the polished headstone  
for every generation to  
see and emulate.

'Put peace into each other's  
hands and like a treasure  
hold it, protect it like a  
candle flame, with  
tenderness enfold it.'



**Pictures on the wall No.2**  
**BEECH WOOD**

On soft foot enter a rustling cathedral  
tall spreading trees, branches shutting  
out the afternoon sky. It is silent.

Like Cathedral rushes laid on stone flags  
the carpet of leaves moves underfoot,  
inches thick with old nut kernels.

Source of ancient timber for forest folk  
made into chairs and tables that sat  
in parlours and farm kitchens.

In the dappled light across the glade  
a tiny grey squirrel runs leaping,  
startled, into the lichened trees.

This is England, this is our land to  
cherish and enjoy, as we walk the  
inherited paths of history.



**Pictures on the wall No.3**  
**NIGHTFALL ENNERDALE**

An owl call across the echoing lake,  
startles starlings circling to roost,  
evening sun dims behind the hill,  
pale light too weak to boost  
sunset on the water still.

This solitary gem of lakeland hides  
in the far west beyond mountains,  
wrapped in its own cold history  
from ice age frozen fountains  
a place of ancient mystery.

No steamers break the placid lake  
and tourists cars depart for now,  
silence settles like an old friend  
Arctic charr swim deep below  
safe at the summer's day end.



## **STRANGE FRUIT**

(for Billie Holiday)

“Wonder why I’m feelin’ so sad”...  
her voice breaks into silence,  
her life full of pain, abuse,  
breaks through the song.

The sighs are deep, the scars  
remain to blight her career,  
but singing saved her from  
poverty’s hateful slavery.

The ringing tone, the simple  
smile, hiding the heartbreak  
from drugs and predatory  
men hanging on her.

At her best with Lester Young,  
a soulmate and musician,  
bringing out her genius  
for tender jazz gems.

The blazing denunciation of  
slavery in “Strange Fruit”,  
challenged the insulting  
cold white prejudice.

She faced it all, in the end  
alone and ill, her voice  
cracking under the strain  
of life’s hard blues.

## **FUNNY VALENTINE**

(Ella Fitzgerald)

There are voices we cannot mistake  
that enter our hearts with great ease,  
songs that are sung with delight, or  
ones that are destined to please.

Ella's harmony, grace and inflection  
make average songs sound divine,  
this lady sings ballads or blues, so  
pitch-perfect notes are like wine.

Gershwin, Rogers and Hart, she  
distils all their music with style,  
bending tunes with a magic, as  
effortless as her warm smile.

Jazz has great instrumentalists,  
Louis, Lester, Miles, Thelonious,  
she makes her voice resonate, to  
make each song as harmonious.

Cole Porter, or Irving Berlin she  
gave their best music her name,  
"every time we say goodbye", is  
a way to celebrate her fame.

## **BENJAMIN ZEPHANIA**

(In memoriam)

Jamaica's son, England's Rasta poet,  
words are bullets, words are fire,  
nothing like the beat of dub to  
silence racist hate.

Brummy streetwise performer  
made it to the top, literary idol,  
but never forgot where he  
learned his craft.

Poems for kids, poems for dads,  
plucking rhythm out of the air,  
making life sing, stopping  
by to grace our poverty.

Poets are rebels, the jokers in  
the pack of dull conformity,  
looking to shatter rules  
that hold us back.

Thank you Benjamin, voice  
of radiant wit and humour,  
disturbing the dead peace  
of white complacency.

You're silent now, but your  
words strike fire.

## **THE FIFTH**

(Beethoven)

I remember when I first heard it,  
back in youthful days, still green;  
back then all I knew was jazz and  
brass bands my father had seen.

A church organist, a cheerful man,  
had invited me to his house for tea;  
afterwards he said casually, "Do you  
listen to classical music like me?"

Shamefaced, I replied I didn't as  
our record collection had none;  
with brass bands, jazz and pop,  
an ear for the classics had gone.

Smiling, he said, "Let's see what  
I've got you might like to play";  
put an LP on the gramophone,  
four notes transformed my day!

I never felt such energy in sound,  
a great river, tumbling in spate;  
the Beethoven Fifth Symphony ,  
an epiphany that came to me late.

It's towering cathedral of chords  
took me out of myself, in awe,  
to a journey in classical music  
where I keep discovering more.

Now in my eighties I can revel in  
Beethoven, Schubert and Britten,  
with Louis, Coleman, and Fats,  
but it's joy in the Fifth as I listen.

## **MIRROR IMAGE**

Still and silent the water,  
no wind to ruffle waves,  
clouds brush over the sky  
the lake each one saves.

This beauty is ephemeral,  
just a passing glance,  
by being there you see it,  
nothing but a chance.

You can climb mountains,  
or sail across the sea,  
seek excitement in cities,  
speed to set you free.

Here is the fabled pearl  
people want to hold,  
one of nature's miracles,  
better even than gold.



## **THE STARLINGS DANCE**

Nothing prepares you for the sight  
of whirling birds blocking light,  
swooping, soaring, like a dance,  
so disciplined there is no chance  
a collision will spoil the night.

Maybe a hundred start the show  
collecting more birds as they go,  
stretching across heaven's arc,  
as if they were flying in the park,  
enjoying parading to and fro.

Darkness creeping across the sky  
brings new urgency as they fly,  
and ever tightening circles boost  
their chances of a final roost  
in local trees as they pass by.

This miracle of avian balletics  
nightly delights our aesthetics,  
lifts our spirits, brings new joy  
no entertainment can employ,  
and it silences all critics.



## **CAMERA IN THE SKY**

(30th anniversary of Hubble telescope)

Tiny in the great vault of space, flies Hubble  
circling the earth each day on a mystery tour,  
flashing back on computer screens the wonder  
of an unfolding universe in photo after photo,  
opening our minds to the infinite.

Triumph of science to build this mobile lens  
that sent us images of terrifying giants, and  
whirlpools sucking matter and huge worlds  
beyond our comprehension, into black holes  
where light itself is extinguished.

The reach of our tiny minds has expanded  
through this eye in space, to encompass the  
beginning of time and origin of the universe,  
to see God at work birthing stars and worlds,  
or cosmic chance creating life?

Now James Clark Maxwell enters the arena,  
earthed in Hawaii, largest telescope around,  
able to search the cosmos at sub-millimetre  
wavelength, programmed to go deeper  
and count the dust particles.

Once we know all, will we change our ways,  
become much better human beings?  
Learn how to respect the universe, with  
all its many manifestations in space,  
how to live in peace together?



