

Above the Clouds



Poems by Keith Spence

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My first little volume of poems to mark 2026 ... and a change of scenery from our quiet village to a bustling town. As old people it makes sense to be near shops, transport, and medical facilities! So we moved house. See the poem ...!

If we have gone through a big change, the world has made an even greater leap. Into an unknown future with power crazed politicians pulling down democratic pillars at will. War rears its ugly head again, continuing in Ukraine and Sudan, Africa, the Middle East, and South America.

I focus again on enduring things in my verse. Nature teaching us how to survive. Human creativity in music and art. Compassion and human solidarity.

I hope something here will give you pleasure .

As before I offer my poems with an invitation.

Readers can if they wish donate to a local charity I support:

Hospice at Home (Carlisle & North Lakes)

Barras Lane, Dalston, Cumbria CA13 0PN

Keith Spence

January 2026

ABOVE THE CLOUDS

A feeling of being above it all
of entering another world,
striding through a cloudscape
that is floating out unfurled.

From daily routine uplifted
seeing a fresh dimension,
refreshed by high mountains
rising as a cold revelation.

We need space around us
where we can feel release,
from life's incessant stress
a silent epiphany of peace.

It may not be in mountains
but much nearer home,
a favourite tree or local
bench in a park for some.

MOVING HOUSE

No doubt about it, it's hard work,
uprooting familiar routines to
plant new ones in the dark.

Friends tell you it is a bigger
challenge than you expect
with the stress you trigger.

The sheer number of our things,
belongings accumulated only
to face painful removal.

What 's important, what to keep,
family heirlooms or clutter,
frustration digging deep.

Outings to the municipal tip
become a daily occurrence
as our home we strip.

Finally, wilting, we survive
and in our re-located life
we come to rest.

Some like to take flights
to foreign lands afar, or
cruises to the north.

For us the excitement
of our old age, was a
trip down the road.

FRIARS CRAG

(Derwentwater)

It acts like a magnet, Ruskin's spot, where he came with his nurse,
felt nature's sublime attraction.

Thousands come walking the muddy path from Keswick's lakeside,
many with dogs seeking action.

Down the lake from the rocky headland the waters flash and tremble,
as the launches plough their way.

People sit on the large wooden bench that faces down the lake,
and out come the iPhone cameras!

Whatever spirit is here lives in the air and disturbs the water,
Borrowdale's own magic location.



JAZZ HOUSE

The steady deep murmur of the double-bass
underpinning the tune, like a structural
memory.

Catching as flashing windows in sunlight,
the piano, finessing, augmenting, the
melody.

High up on the ringing rafters floats
the trumpet, boldly announcing its
mastery.

Strong and silky, slides a saxophone,
celebrating the fully furnished
music.

In the cellar throbs the beat of the
drums, keeping the syncopated
momentum.

This house is jumping, on a roll,
dancing to the rhythm's sweet
magic.

CLEO

No mistaking the throaty
siren voice,
she could lure sailors
a mile away.

Range was no effort
just a breath,
soaring skywards
on a note.

Jazz was her forte
John her guru,
together they broke
sound barriers.

Solo, duetting, new
songs or old,
a flawless technique
gave us joy.

BURNING BUSH

Like Moses I turn to look,
mesmerised by a fiery bush,
ablaze on a December day
near morning's traffic rush.

Who lit this beautiful flame
sculpted like an ornament,
littering its bright drops
onto a sodden pavement?

Surely a magician of winter
with a bold satirical wand,
lifting our darkened spirits
with his surprising hand.



SMART SPEAKER

A disembodied American voice,
the company robot,
sparks to life at our request with
un-nerving speed.

It is the latest AI expression of
limitless ambition,
to persuade us we are in charge
when we are not.

Suppose speakers also listen,
record conversation,
collect information about us
without consent?

Big brother comes closer,
as we lose control.
'Smart' becomes dumb when
we hand over.

To pursue the myth of choice
we close our minds.
Life is not about instant
gratification is it?

Is it?

DRONES

It used to refer to the piper's art,
a driving tone beneath his tune,
or in the world of bees the big
mating males with the queen.

Now there's a sinister meaning,
corrupted by military tactics,
for a deadly explosive weapon
used in remote aerial attacks.

Once a toy that flew in the sky,
a radio controlled innovation,
it morphed to a flying bomb,
causing untold devastation.

Can we ever be free of warfare,
with its waste of technology,
or must we see lethal failure
to harness it all for posterity?

TEA BOWL
(Japanese Tea Ceremony)

Symbol of serenity
hospitality
one moment
in time
held
by
guests own humility
simplicity
to savour
green tea
with
love.



TV WARNING

Smart suits, casual shirts,
sleek dresses, short skirts,
whatever the sartorial style
their message all the while
is watch out!

Forecasters stand alone
tell news in cheery tone,
whirling storm on screen,
satellites above have seen,
growing bigger!

So give a storm a name
as if it were some game,
measuring wind speed
demonstrates the need
to come out top!

Triangles bright yellow
like town-criers bellow,
danger coming in fast
worse than in the past
a giant storm!

Warnings go onto red
ratcheting up our dread,
global warming is here
everyone should fear
earth's revenge.

TO LES

(A Parkinsons story)

To see you now, my friend, I feel just
as your caring African nurse put it:
“it breaks my heart”.

I have seen you over this ten years
slowly lose the familiar character
you had from the start.

How I wish we could find a cure for
a crippling disease stopping our body
working harmoniously.

We are not finely tuned athletes, you
and me, but you could walk like the
clappers and endlessly.

From Lancaster you ventured into the
Royal Navy, travel was in your blood
and took you to exotic places.

A keen scientific mind prompted you
to become a radio operator, on ships
sailing across the world.

The photos on your wall showed your
proud record, Australia to South
America and Argentina.

How timeless it must all have felt to
see the world from a fighting ship,
and now you are adrift.

O Les, your single life so fully lived
filled with honesty and humour
makes me feel bereft.

Parkinsons robbed you and us.

MOUNTAIN VISION

Why do we climb mountains,
to reach the top?
To stretch our lungs beyond
the need to stop?
Is it bravado and fitness we
want to proclaim,
Or is there another reason
for our little game?

From the early days people
climbed just for fun,
plus furs and long skirts
toiled in the sun.
Testing themselves to the
limit de rigueur,
climb highest and hardest
the cri de coeur.

But long before climbers
were devotees,
people living on high who
fell on their knees,
before the mystery of
the cloudy skies,
saw Gods in the rocks
before their eyes.

Our scientific age has
silenced awe,
with explanations to
close the door.
But, just occasionally
it drops by,
catching us out with
a simple cry.

“Oh, look, a Brocken spectre”!



EPIPHANY

(January 6th)

“Jesus was born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of Herod. After his birth astrologers from the east arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the new born King of the Jews?’”

(Gospel of Matthew Ch.2.v 1, Revised English Bible)

Every Nativity has them, they are part of the tale,
small children with turbans love make-believe,
but seriously, were they real?

Are they just symbols, an international elite,
caricatures of princes travelling long and
hard to fall at Christ’s little feet?

Rome dominated the world, rebellion was rare,
opponents crushed with brutality, so a new
challenger would not dare.

But here something strange, something new,
a divine ruler born into poverty, not riches,
known secretly just to a few.

Matthew’s church battled its Jewish roots,
people who couldn’t accept their God
wearing workman’s boots.

This visitation was a genuine epiphany,
for those who saw in Jesus a new way
of outsmarting Imperial tyranny.

BROKEN THREAD

(a journey with dementia)

Finding your way in a strange land
needs Ariadne's thread to guide
you through the labyrinth. What
if it breaks? The dread clings like
cold misty cloud.

It was ordinary enough to start,
a childhood play and see game
spent with friends, etching
life's pleasures into the mind
sure of everything.

Growing older you found your
way easily from teenage fun
to adult learning, catching
each passing event in time
stored in memory.

But now in evenings land
all is unfamiliar and hazy
roads, leading nowhere
known or remembered
from past visits.

Which way to go when all
the paths seem alike, and
the compass is broken,
feels like a nightmare
that never ends.

I will hold the broken end
of the thread to walk with
you, and together we
will find the way home
hand in hand.

BLACKBIRD BANQUET

Autumn trees, nature's annual
rich kaleidoscopic colours rush;
vainly we try capturing the sight
with camera and painting brush.

Creatures sharing our planet see
a pantry of providential nutrition,
every fruiting branch and leaf
vital to face winter's attrition.

So, in our Himalayan rowan
lots of hungry blackbirds sit,
stripping juicy white berries,
as from twig to twig they flit.

No King's banquet so fine
a dark avian suited meeting,
gourmet appreciation of food
fills cold air with chattering.



BOWDER

(Borrowdale, Cumbria)

There it sits beside a path
dumped by the ice like a
forgotten suitcase,
carried for miles from a
higher plateau as heat
from the sun rose.

This giant rock is famous,
as a tourist attraction
drawing crowds,
balanced on a knife edge
it looks so dangerous
it might topple.

An ice age erratic become
a happy playground for
young and old,
lying beneath you can
join hands in a hole
defying death.

Then climb the rocky side
to stand with pride on
the narrow spine,
around you ancient forest
rich in lichens and ferns
lies sleeping.



BLINDING LIGHT

It's in a good cause, yes I know
Best for safety, and traffic flow.
LEDs for a better tomorrow,
But why a blinding light show?
Motoring, it's driving me mad
Especially at night it's so bad.

New cars may be safer at night
But boy, they give me a fright.
Over the crest of a rising hill
In the glare I begin to feel ill.
Electric cars for a safer future?
I'm hoping to avoid a rupture.