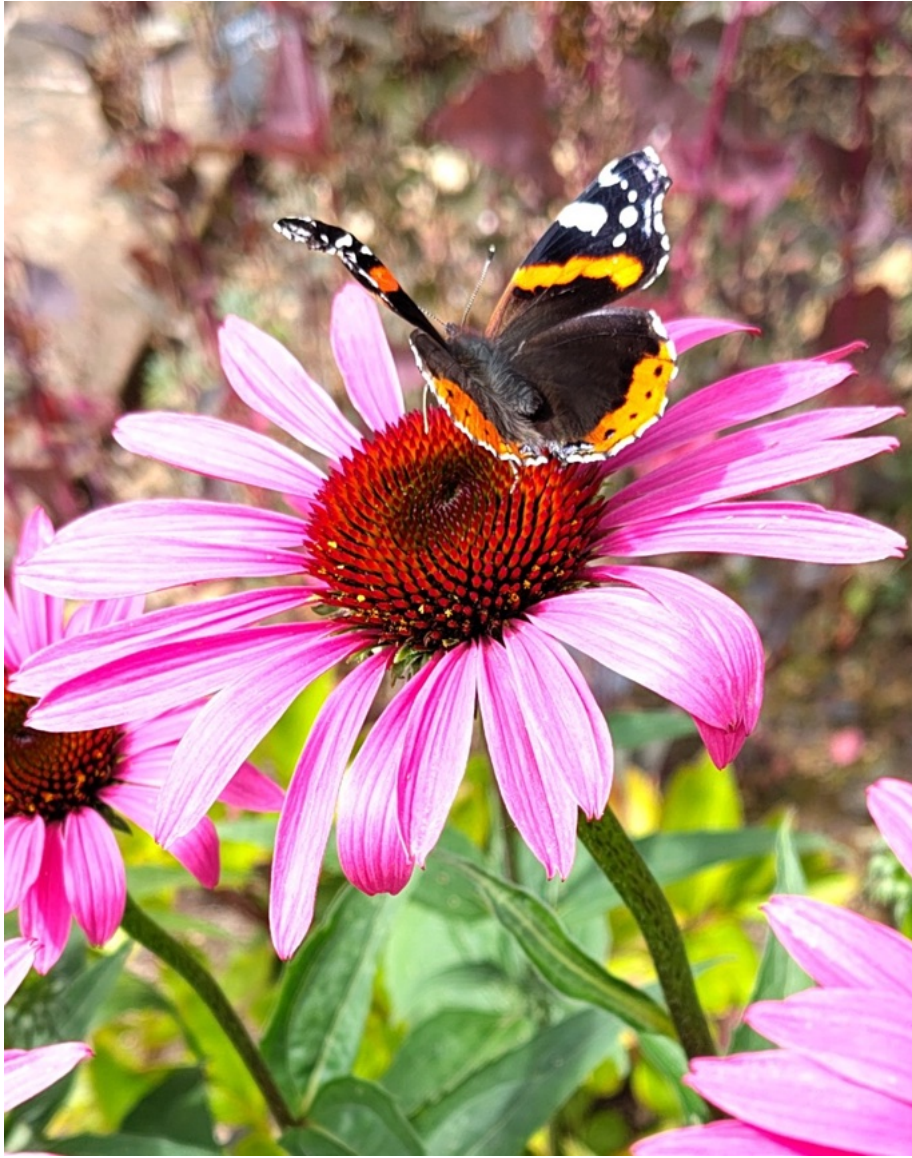


A Fragile Beauty



Poems by
Keith Spence

A Fragile Beauty

“Pleasure is spread through the earth in stray gifts to be claimed by whoever shall find” (Wordsworth 1807)

One of the joys of old age is slowing down. Not seen first as a benefit but gradually acquired! I am now into my 90th year.

This brings pleasure in small things which are overlooked in a busy life. I have more time to see a bit deeper into life, my own and nature around me.

Of course it's easy to drop into the grumpy old man who thinks everything now is worse than in his youth. I try to avoid that. I like to find something that brings me pleasure or joy even in each day. I also reflect on changes that challenge how we live, such as dementia and climate change.

What comes across is the beauty, struggle, and fragility of life. I have tried to catch something of that in this collection of poems.

I hope you will enjoy something in here.

Keith Spence

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This booklet is free but you can donate if you wish to the work of:

Hospice at Home (Carlisle & North Lakeland) ,
Barras lane, Dalston, Cumbria CA5 7NY

Tel: 01228 475025

Website: www.hospiceuk.org

A Fragile Beauty

Faint hum of summers past
when flowers were young,
days flowed until the last
rays of sunshine left the sky
sending insects to their rest,
replete with nectar's gift.

A time when living grace
painted the woodlands,
brilliant debutants in place
in an annual dance of life,
all pirouetting in space
with their glowing gowns.

Flowers like suns on earth
powered butterflies who
danced for all their worth,
out of the joyous need
to bring new life to birth
in nature's glad cycle.

Out to Lunch

A simple pleasure it can bring
as friendship blossoms freely,
we forget the urgent pressing
of daily life's tasks that nearly
swallow the times that sing.

To enjoy a meal out together
in a favourite unfussy place,
with folk not minding whether
we're successful or in disgrace,
friends despite the weather.

Capturing time in memory
unlocked with gentle care,
remembering an old story
of which we're not aware,
events now seeming hoary.

So good to have time to talk.

A Little Rain

Who would think it worth
writing a poem about rain?
Maybe the thirsty old earth
watching clouds all in vain

for a good old downpour
or at least a fine soaking,
longer than just an hour
to show they're not joking.

But weeks of hot sunshine
with taps running dry,
the national alarm online
made us all wonder why.

Water companies, so poor,
protect their investors,
and built not one reservoir
to protect the rest of us.

Our fields turned to dust,
for many a water ban,
while the companies just
make us carry the can!

National Treasure

(David Attenborough at 100)

Seems as if he has always been there
clambering through bushes, voice
hushed with reverence for nature's
myriad creatures, our guide to
the world around.

Public school poise matched with a
boyish exuberance, ready to plunge
into mud or jungle in search of a
bird or animal unknown to us
but dear to him.

No matter the terrain his unequalled
composure made it safe for us to
sit with gorillas, or dive in oceans
with sharks and see marvels on
tropical beaches.

Youth and age do not normally mix
but they do with David, for he has
both, he is ageless in enthusiasm
blended with knowledge that
opens our eyes.

I salute a man with unrivalled
ability to communicate the
priceless inheritance of our
planet, and challenge us all
to preserve it.

Living Silence

The path threads thick woodland
winding round old tree trunks,
many fallen in the undergrowth,
past brambles branches twined
with head-high nettles.

This is uncultivated scrubland,
cycles of growth and decay,
hiding place for small animals
and shelter for myriad birds
hidden in the branches.

A hollow shaped by a stream
filled with irises and grass,
makes a spreading pond with
rotting trunks lying fallen in
leaf speckled water.

Sunlight filters through leaves
high in the canopy above,
dancing across still water in
a silent celebration of nature
waiting our response.



La Mer
(*Claude Debussy*)

Capturing the restlessness of water

Debussy turns atmosphere into
music that ebbs and flows,

now placid and reflective, then
suddenly violent brass

crashing waves against rock!

only to retreat with
strings creating

calm

fading

into

soft

ripples

as the sea

retreats.

Running on Empty

Strange how as you grow older
even simple tasks seem harder,
like dressing, washing, eating,
even your best friends meeting,
I must admit it feels defeating.

Mentally I'm still a youngster
most certainly not an oldster,
with the world still at my feet,
not sitting exhausted in a seat,
uttering words, I can't repeat.

To face the facts I know is hard,
like a boxer dropping his guard,
life rises and hits you in the eye,
and it makes you wonder why,
have I too many anno domini?

Growing up in a land of plenty,
we are now running on empty,
medicine makes us live longer,
but doesn't make us stronger,
somehow it all seems wronga.

Old age is no time for regrets,
long life does not cancel debts,
we learn to live well each day,
treat folk in a respectful way,
and keep on having our say!

Secret Garden

(the chapel)

A place of true tranquility
hidden in gardens full
of exotic plants.

A chapel built for marriage
for the owner and his
beloved wife.

Frescoed with familiar
and not so familiar
faces and people.

Tucked alongside is the
resplendent pond
ripe with lilies.

It is a place to dream or
watch dragonflies
kiss the irises.

Visiting this tiny paradise
costs a donation for
Hospice care.

Here is beauty capturing
our fragile existence
with deep love.



Vespers
(Monteverdi)

Unmistakeable richness of sound
voices blending, rising, in his
masterpiece of choral music.

The Renaissance flowing towards
a Baroque successor lifting old
worship to new horizons.

Venetian wealth filling St. Marks
and the Ducal Palace of Mantua,
both sounding his praise.

Music to lift all human spirits
inside and outside church,
harmony for the ages.

Open Air Bruch (*Violin Concerto No. 1*)

A busy market street
in a provincial town,
folk rushing to and fro
getting shopping done,
when a sound filled
the dull mechanics of
daily life with
magic.

A young man in jeans
holding a violin, an
amplifier at his feet,
caught us by surprise
with the sudden sweet
harmony of Bruch
rising above the
noise.

His gifted playing of this
great Romantic piece, so
entranced the public,
talking stopped, bags
were dropped, as the
sensuous music wafted
along the crowded
street.

Music has such charms
to capture our minds,
bringing an inner calm
to stressed people,
making us think other
than routine thoughts,
and feel life to be
richer.

Moondance

(the eclipse)

Jumping cows! The moon's pretty cool.
No wonder we're excited, because
Not content with romantic light
invading every song we write,
it has taken centre stage
with a display so big
we need glasses
to watch the
show and
it's only
there
for
a

bit
before
the sun is
pushing past
spouting flames
annoyed that it has
been displaced in the
celestial playground by
a tiny chunk of empty rock
just happening to pass in front
of its favourite target called earth
where it has thousands of followers
using glasses to watch it go by instead!

Terra Incognita

Where's the map I have lost
telling me where I am,
why do all roads seem as
if they are the same?

How did I get into this land
familiar yet strange,
where everything is alike
and just out of range?

Like explorers years ago
I travel on in hope,
something will appear
somehow I'll cope.

The mind's complexity
despite the damage,
gives me some relief
that I can manage.

I have guides to follow
when feeling lost,
loved ones who care
and help me most.

Tree Sculpture

Seems out of place in lakeland
close by a boat full of tourists,
cameras out to capture the scene
soaked in a heatwave mist,
it stands alone where sheep sleep
in the shade of living trees.

This once proud specimen rose
from the ground breathing,
sown by a farmer or passing bird
in ground rich with flowers,
a time when the land flourished
before disease took control.

Now it stands majestic in outline
bone sharp in the hot sun,
symbolic of nature's struggle
as we cope with our failure,
to limit our carbon emissions
in time to save the earth.



To the limit

Sport's said to be good for health,
keeping active a blueprint for life,
but how people tackle it these days
you'd think they just like the strife,
of ending up in a comatose state
totally exhausted and lost in a haze.

Pushing yourself to an absolute limit
seems to be the recognised creed
makes you stand out from the crowd:
extreme action is what you need,
with running, swimming, cycling,
knackered is the way to be proud.

'Course when you're old it changes,
we have less need to impress,
no need to keep up with the Jones,
gone days of extravagant excess,
pacing yourself is the new mantra
by keeping fit with doing less.

Robots are Coming

In Chinese laboratories and American factories
the new revolution is brewing, for many
strange creatures are emerging, angular
and awkward but mobile and strong,
the new army of robots.

Science fiction has known all about them,
but now they are linked to big business,
and the military are getting excited with
the prospects for war beyond drones,
a remote Armageddon.

Politicians and businessmen pontificate
about the benefits that they will bring,
removing the drudgery of factories,
bringing relief to overworked doctors,
making our life easier.

As our ordinary tasks are computerised,
and we have more time for ourselves,
will the robots become better than us
and begin to take over our lives,
someone answer that?

Repetition

In a blur of the moment it's gone
I had a thought now there's none,
so tell me what I was thinking
else I'm certain I will be sinking.

Please don't be offended if I ask
my question again; it's the task
I must complete, to make sense
of chaos, without giving offence.

Repetition's got a good pedigree
from learning at mother's knee,
to mastering a foreign language,
I beg you not to take umbrage.

If you ask me I will recite latin,
or guide songs from Prestatyn,
but don't ask me where we are,
when travelling along in a car.

I find the nicest people I know
accept me and go with the flow,
they don't mind my confusion
but gently repeat the solution.

Flying Fingers

(Art Tatum)

The piano has all the same keys
for every pianist to play, only
he seems to increase them,
Art Tatum in his day.

Glittering notes, arpeggios,
this blind genius stroked
from battered upright
or smart Steinway.

From smoky blues cellars to
elegant halls, he dazzled
audiences and jazz artists
with his display.

No need for an orchestra
with Art in the house
piano solos danced
his exquisite way.

Anniversary

We cannot bring back the past,
but visiting it with love makes
for a revaluing of our lost time,
so we gather in the cemetery.

Beyond loss and pain is peace
in memory's uncertain grasp,
polished treasures rising with
fresh immediacy and laughter.

A date, a place, beginning to
remember events and faces,
sitting with photographs that
recapture lived experience.

A silent graveyard in summer
light glinting off polished stone,
here and now the past with us
in a name and dates held dear.

So the past becomes present
the forgotten is remembered,
our love is celebrated again
with flowers and fresh tears.



