

**Apples Galore** by Stella Collins

Leaves flutter reflecting light that's dappled  
Kaleidoscope colours on grass creates.  
The tree stands strong, heavy with rosy apples  
Delicious anticipation awaits,  
Luscious fruit, sweet smelling nectar of life,  
Intoxicating, tempting, just one bite  
Tasting, savouring, then slice with a knife  
Cooking, baking, to make apple delights.  
Jams, rich jellies, savoury chutneys and more  
Cakes, tarts and puddings for everyone's taste  
Use it all, 'cept the pithy, pippy core  
And compost that, so nothing goes to waste.  
But before this tastiness comes to pass  
You must pick the apples up, from the grass.

**One Little Word** by Stella Collins

My brain doesn't work like it should  
When I am desperate it acts like wood  
Shuts down and closes up for good.  
I try to sift and struggle to find  
To unpick things tangled up in my mind,  
Time stops and I am left behind  
Trying to unravel the links of intertwined streams,  
To release the word from locked in dreams  
The harder I try the further away it seems.  
I feel deflated, lost for want of trying  
And would give in, if my brain weren't frying  
With every ounce of brain energy applying  
Super-concentrated effort, to catch that one little word.

**Turmoil Within** by Stella Collins

I expectantly look up to the sky  
As I turn my face heavenward and  
Supplicating the celestial realms  
I sense a dynamic shift  
Hope surrounds me in safety  
As the rain of misery threatens to knock me down  
The cold clouds of despair close in  
Suffocating, paralyzing, dying  
Blackness descends like a shroud  
Overwhelming darkness shuts out the light  
Weakened by thunderous thoughts  
Oh will I ever feel warm again?

Oh will I ever feel warm again?  
Weakened by thunderous thoughts  
Overwhelming darkness shuts out the light  
Blackness descends like a shroud  
Suffocating, paralyzing, dying  
The cold clouds of despair close in  
As the rain of misery threatens to knock me down  
Hope surrounds me in safety  
I sense a dynamic shift  
Supplicating the celestial realms  
As I turn my face heavenward and  
I expectantly look up to the sky

**Scottish Highlands** by Stella Collins

Vast, ancient, imperishable jagged peaks,  
Snow-capped beauty piercing the open sky  
Fast flowing fountains in crystal clear creeks  
Ice cold, life giving nectar from on high.

Fragrant green pines inhabit fertile ground  
Sheltering, sustaining wild birds of prey  
Shedding needles, silently blanketing sound.  
Gnarled roots reaching down, anchoring the clay

Far away stags posturing and strutting  
Echoing bellows and deep grunts of desire,  
Attracting the hinds ready for rutting  
Preserving their herds by how many they sire.

Earthy hued heathers carpeting the highlands  
Rusty bracken feathering the lower gradient.  
Green yellow grasses sprouting like islands  
Autumnal colours vibrant and radiant.

Intoxicating atmosphere, the beauty of nature  
Balm for the soul, lost in absolute adoration.  
A moment of beauty experienced in rapture,  
Overwhelming gratitude for this wondrous creation.

**It Always Rains!** by Ann McQueen

My Father often used to say to us  
“it always rains when I holiday in the UK”  
The plans were a camping holiday with no fuss.  
Still the usual angst about getting away.

We drove to North Devon, planning to camp.  
It was back in the 50's, it was a weekend.  
My mother and I in a tent with a small lamp.  
Father and son in the car, I'd not recommend.

This was the night of the great Lynmouth flood.  
We were camping in a field nearby.  
The tent was awash, all around there was mud.  
The guys in the car were lovely and dry.

I remember we went to look at the chaos,  
fallen trees and huge boulders blocked the road.  
The hills and roads and tracks were all awash.  
Quite an experience this whole episode.

No more UK, my father's mind was made up.  
They bought a caravan and went where it's warm.  
Many years later we all went to Cornwall,  
returning home following the 87 storm.

**The Watcher** by Ann McQueen

Looking out I see  
dazzling diamonds of dew.  
The leaves have a hint of gold.  
The coming of autumn can be rich  
to the watcher whose eyes can see,  
whose ears can truly hear.  
But there is sadness as the year fades.  
The golden leaves are dying,  
flowers past their glory  
will soon wither and fall.

But there is also hope  
when after the winter sleep  
new life will come again  
as sure as dawn follows night.

**City of Joy** by Ann McQueen

The city wakes up as the sun rises  
The rickshaw boys are touting for trade  
A visitor has many surprises,  
even having a bespoke suit made.  
This is Calcutta, "City of Joy,"  
where modern buildings compete with old.  
The hard to find Black Hole may be a ploy,  
possibly a story as yet untold.  
A street vendor sells pakoras and chai.  
Fruit and vegetables ready for sale,  
The shouts of traders wanting us to buy.  
Families on the street are acutely frail.  
Calcutta is marvellous and tragic  
but something about it is magic.

**A Primrose for Hope** by Ann McQueen

In the long dark tunnel there was no light.  
Nothing to aim at, nothing to live for.  
No energy, no reason to fight  
Only those who have walked this walk  
can know the black of it, how to talk.  
But it does pass, the soul will again soar  
to a new height. Maybe a spring flower  
will pierce the dark; a beautiful sight

In December she saw a primrose  
emerge from previously frozen ground.  
At last in the dark tunnel light arose,  
she felt a gradual glimmer of hope,  
as if hanging on to a rescuing rope.  
Amazed by what she had found  
Life or death; life she chose.

**Airborne** by Martin Milmo

Mid-afternoon, warm heat,  
I am mull'd into slumber,  
prone on a garden bench.  
I wake, much later  
into a slow, rising haze,  
sensing ghosts  
passing as a rustling breeze,  
squeezing, sighing through the dry undergrowth.  
I wake –  
to a vast, deserted immensity.  
The soft returning stare of the untouchable canopy above,  
spread, laid out on the truncated support of the three trees  
between which I lie.  
I wake -  
to its still, motionless, unintelligible remoteness,  
the endless sweep of unseen currents,  
the global influences of winds and our contaminants.  
And into this hugeness  
a buzzard floats, high, high above  
in the under-surface of the sky,  
its perfect silhouette navigating a course  
through the uncharted fullness  
of the boundless void.  
Its majesty revealed in the span of its wings,  
as it scans its kingdom,  
gliding in predatory power,  
unconcerned at my earthly wonder,  
unaware of the awesome mystery of its being,  
uncaring of us humans,  
able only to watch its passing glory  
from far, far below.

**Contactless** by Martin Milmo

How do they breathe,  
These sea ghosts of the deep ?  
How do they see  
so far from even the stars ?  
How do they feel the touch of other lives  
In the weight of waters?  
How do they not implode  
with the pressure of the surrounding darkness ?  
How do they converse  
in this impenetrable silence ?  
How do they live  
in this barren landscape  
of lonely trenches, the Everest depths of mountain ranges,  
the darkness of creation's second day ?

Our neighbour opens the door a crack,  
takes the food parcel and retreats back  
to the unreachable deep of a shared fear and isolation,  
the house in darkness, the trees an engulfing curtain.  
What do they think  
in this delusion of living ?  
What fear do they have  
if they could envisage other places ?  
How are they to be released  
into other settings, to be with us, in our spaces ?

**Between Us** by Martin Milmo

How are we sinking  
Into this quagmire of silence?  
Where the gloom is so heavy  
no voices can be heard;  
Where the light is so dense  
the dark cannot even see itself;  
where the slime of reason  
smears meaning from nothing;  
where the weight of the past  
keeps us submerged in its years;  
where the suspense of honesty  
holds doubt on tongues in fear;  
where the surface of the pain  
reaches far beyond the sky;  
where the limitless depths of this watery swamp  
drown any attempt of our mouths to open;  
where the witnesses of unhad arguments encircle  
the leftover fragments of damaged souls;  
where we foundered on the soft tension of lies  
and lost the truth in the crucible of lockdown.

**A Set of Tai Chi** by Martin Milmo

Arms raised,  
torsos gently bend  
on legs which bear the load  
of every sway of weight.  
From feet planted with firm intent  
to hands flowing.  
The tops of trees  
in a caressing breeze  
floating in unseen currents,  
all in togetherness,  
turning, pausing, manoeuvring.  
The searchings of the lips of new lovers.  
This symphony of motion, rotations and transitions  
releases troubled joints and weary minds  
into a vacuum of tranquillity,  
into the calm streams of cleansed souls.

A floorboard creaks, a knee cracks,  
memories lapse, lips tense.  
But all hold still to complete their task –  
seamless patterns of synchronicity –  
until the end...  
when all descend  
and bow...  
and enter other lives

## **A Wish List** by Claire Morgan

### Note to piano teacher

Find me romantic music,  
to make my piano sing.  
I want to pour out my soul,  
pour out my love,  
my sorrow, my anguish,  
to lift up my eyes  
from my dusty feet,  
and send my thoughts  
soaring to the sky.

### Note to recorder teacher

Find me elegant, restrained,  
conversational music,  
melodies decorated  
with trills and fancies  
to remind me of days gone by.  
Send me fast and intricate music  
to make my fingers ripple,  
music that flows  
along even pathways  
to keep my wild heart  
contained.

### Note to gym coach

Find me a gym ball,  
a bouncy ball, a big ball,  
to strengthen my legs  
shake up my brain  
and sort my balance out.  
Find me the right shoes  
so I can walk steadily,

## **Ageing** by Claire Morgan

I hear a scratch at the door.  
Old age is waiting,  
out there in the cold,  
its fur matted together,  
its whiskers drooping  
like a stray cat,  
neglected.  
I shall welcome it in,  
give it special food,  
talk to it in a quiet voice  
until we are friends.  
I shall stroke it  
behind the ears,  
brush its coat gently,  
and make it feel at home.  
If I care for it properly  
perhaps it will purr.

## **To Someone I Love** by Claire Morgan

You hold me now  
in the palm of your hand.  
I am lighter  
than a feather.  
Breathe gently  
till I touch down.

head balanced on spine.  
I wish to stand tall,  
swing my arms,  
go out into the country  
and surprise the world  
with my laughter.

Note to doctor

I know the way ahead  
will not be smooth.  
There will be times  
when I should like  
to turn away,  
give up the struggle,  
say "I am too old".

Yet, bear with me,  
walk with me,  
whisper in my ear  
that I will be strong again,  
that what will come will come,  
however it may be.  
Say that you will trust me  
to try my hardest  
in my unconventional way.  
Say that someone will be there  
To see me through.

**Sycamore Tree** by Claire Morgan

Flowers bloom,  
flowers fade,  
petals fall to the ground.

Seeds grow plump,  
extend their wings,  
soon their time will come.  
Sycamore keys  
must trust the wind,  
however hard it blows.  
They do not know  
where they will land.  
They do not steer their course.  
Where will the wind take me?

**A Mekong Day** by Jill Ruddock

Clouds cling to the mountain tops  
until the sun  
fatally weakens their grip.

Scintillas of sun give warning  
of dangers lurking  
below the seemingly serene surface.

Banana trees bunch together,  
a tell-tale sign  
of vertiginous villages close by.

Swamp buffalo wallow happily  
in muddy waters,  
resting from earlier labours.

Lilting laughter of children  
who wave  
at the long boat rushing by.

Women wash clothes on rocks  
which protect  
the bank from the mindless river.

A speedboat slices its way  
through the water  
and the calm of the afternoon.

The sultry sun slowly subsides  
leaving behind  
a quickly reddening sky.

Dusk descends, swallowing  
all trace of colour.  
Blackness now covers the world.

**Waiting** by Jill Ruddock

“Granny – will Mummy be home soon?  
“Soon, dear, very soon”.

“Granny – how will she find her way home?”  
“What do you mean, dear?”

“Well, it’s very foggy. I can’t see anything outside”.  
“There are lights, dear. The roads have lights”.

“Look at that smashed up car on the telly, Granny.  
It looks just like Mummy’s”.  
“It’s nothing like it, dear, nothing like it”.

“Granny, Mummy said she’d be back before dark”.  
“I know she did, dear, I know she did”.

“Granny, there’s a policeman at the door.  
What does he want?”  
“I’ll go and find out, dear, I’ll go and find out”.

**The Migrant** by Jill Ruddock

I met a migrant the other day.  
Or was he a refugee?  
An asylum seeker perhaps  
or even a displaced person?  
Destiny-defining labels understood  
only by the pen-wielding few.

Behind the label was a doctor,  
a man of substance.  
Once a husband, father, provider,  
now a man alone, with nothing,  
spared the watery fate  
suffered by all those he held dear.

Faceless, homeless and friendless,  
a pawn in euroland's high-stake game.  
Imprisoned by the rubble  
of a carefully constructed life  
which blocks out light and hope,  
allowing in only the shafts of despair.

Will he realise the dream  
which led him away from home  
Across deserts and oceans?  
A dream of a life without guns.  
A dream of a life with love and laughter.  
Will our world let it come true?

**Stargazing** by Jill Ruddock

Sleepless and homeless,  
the pavement her bed,  
the doorway her home.  
She watches the stars and imagines.

Sometimes she imagines  
she can speak to the stars.  
They look lost in the sky,  
she feels lost on the ground.

Sometimes she imagines  
the stars are her friends.  
They each stand alone  
like her on the street.

Sometimes she imagines  
the stars are her roof.  
When she sees them she knows  
that night she'll stay dry.

Sometimes she imagines  
the stars will reach down  
and show her the way  
towards comfort and warmth.

She watches the stars and imagines.  
The doorway her home.  
The pavement her bed.  
Sleepless and homeless.