

Featured Stories

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Spring

Lucy Carrick

It has been one month. One month without a mother. It hasn't gotten any easier. I've always known I would struggle without her, but the missing is a strong, sharp pain pressing against my skin and I'm scared that it will dull one day, that I will somehow get used to living without a mother.

I decide to go to the remembrance garden today. Mum was cremated; we don't have a grave or a memorial plaque, but we know where her ashes were laid to rest. I can still see the tiny pieces of ashes scattering through the air, falling ungracefully onto the grass with the lack of wind. I wonder what happens to those specs of ash, whether they seep into the earth, whether they dissolve, whether they later get carried away in the wind and drift indefinitely.

The grass is lined with fresh flowers at odd intervals; some are muted orange and yellows; some are a deep plum color. There's one plaque that has artificial flowers laying over the top. Mum had always thought that was tasteless. She had said it was a fact of life that flowers would die. I place my own flowers down and try not to think about it.

I sit down on a bench and watch the grass, as though the ashes will rise, and I will be able to talk to my mum again. I feel an overwhelming sadness that grips my throat. I think about her voice, about the soft feel of her skin, about her laugh I will never hear again. I feel tears heavy against my eyelashes, not quite ready to fall. I decide not to be embarrassed by them.

The sun beats down on my face; it is still cold, but I can tell myself I should be warm if I only look at the crisp blue sky. The trees surrounding the garden are starting to pick up color, developing some leaves that have been missing for months. The smell of grass being cut clings to the air. It was always mum's favorite season.

It was just the two of us growing up. As a ritual, mum and I would have a picnic together as soon as it became warm enough to sit outside and the ground became dry enough to rest on. Mum had a collection of wicker picnic baskets which now sit in my dining room because I cannot get rid of them, and I do not know where to put them.

She would pack baguettes and cheese and grapes and apple that she would chop up into thin slices. She would bring pastries for dessert, chocolate twists and hazelnut croissants and pain au chocolates. We didn't have holidays growing up, we had picnics.

I haven't brought anything today. I couldn't face it.

There are some elderly men and women walking around the grounds. I realize my face is wet, I have been crying and I can't recall how heavily.

It's been one month, and I cannot think of how many more I will have to go.

I feel tired of crying. I focus on the feel of the sun against my cheeks. I imagine the sun drying my face. I imagine my mother drying my face with one of her handkerchiefs. I miss her. My whole body misses her.

I place a hand against my stomach. I feel the baby kick. I am still not used to being pregnant. It feels foreign, uncomfortable, swollen. Mum had been so excited; when she died, I was sure the baby would float away with her.

I imagine the baby swimming around inside of the sponge of my stomach. It is a girl. She is due at the end of April. I have almost convinced myself it will be a reincarnation of my mother, even though the baby was formed before mum left this earth. Mum became ill at the time I found out about the baby.

"I want you to meet her." I had said to mum as I held her hand in hospital. The life was draining out of her by the end, her hand becoming limp and cold. I felt like I could have crushed her bones with a gentle squeeze.

"I will." She had promised.

"I will not be as good a mother as you."

"You can only try." She had joked. She had felt my stomach and her face had become brighter for a moment. I wished she had been able to hold her, to see her, to know her.

"I think you're having this baby now for a reason." Mum had said. At the time, I thought it would be the string keeping mum tied to this earth, keeping her desire to stay alive burning. Now, I wonder if she meant the timing was for me all along.

I imagine all the picnics I will have with my daughter. I wonder if it will hurt a little less, or a little more in time.

Lucy says, "I currently work full time as a solicitor but enjoying writing in my spare time."

The Old Ladies

Joeleen Dodd

They were in their seventies, eighties and nineties when I met them in my twenties.

I'd married a farm boy who'd tired of asphalt and concrete and wanted to go home to where there was nothing but miles and miles of miles and miles. I'd never seen so much green grass in my whole life, and I instantly fell in love with it all.

They'd lived in and around that small town tucked away in the Sandhills their entire lives. Once a booming city, as its population dwindled and their individual churches closed, they ended up every Sunday morning sitting together in the pews of the last struggling church.

As we entered the church doors that first Sunday morning, a warmth washed over me. A warmth I'd never known in the church I'd grown up in.

Soon our little girl was up on stage singing her heart out with six or seven old ladies that comprised the church choir. It didn't matter the level of noise our infant son made as the minister talked louder. The old ladies professed our little boy was cute as a button, for joy was in that church once again.

Come spring, I received blue canning jars from the old ladies who wanted to pass them onto the next generation and in the fall, flower bulbs from other old ladies that felt their flowers needed separating. Thus, I learned to mix brine and put-up pickles for my husband and at what depth to plant tulips and irises.

During October, the monthly women's church meeting met at my home, as our living room was large enough to accommodate all twenty-six members. October was the one monthly meeting the snowbirds, as they were called, attended before they flew south for the winter.

Early that morning, my husband started a fire in the fireplace so the living room would be toasty warm as it was damp and chilly outside.

Every member showed up, and soon they all were chattering away, giggling with excitement.

While I was in the kitchen, an uproarious burst of laughter came from the living room. Upon returning, I found one of the ninety-year-old ladies with her skirt and slip pulled up around her waist, warming her backside in front of the roaring fire.

"Come on," she said, waving to the others. "You know you want to warm your behinds. It's just us girls here." That's all it took for two more of the old ladies to jump up, pull up the back of their skirts and join her, while the room exploded in laughter again.

Soon everyone took turns warming themselves in front of the fire while reminiscing about the tons of firewood their husbands, brothers, parents, and grandparents used to chop. They talked of

the old recipes their mothers cooked on wood-burning stoves and how, as little girls, one of their chores was gathering the kindling.

With all the tomfoolery going on, it took a great deal of cajoling to get the old ladies settled down so we could get back to the reason for the monthly meeting. However, it wasn't long before it became apparent that we needed to table the usual items on the monthly agenda and adjourned the meeting. Everybody just wanted to sit back and enjoy the warm fire and each other on a lazy afternoon.

Season after season, their lessons continued. The most heartbreaking was entering each name in my bible, as one by one, they fell by the wayside.

As the years passed, I silently shared each joy of my life with them and leaned heavily upon them in my darkest hours.

Now, fifty years later, as the dead of winter passes, once again I yearn for spring in the Sandhills. To see the new green grass spread over miles and miles of miles and miles.

The old ladies are out there, waiting for me.

With each blooming iris, memories of their smiling faces and joyous laughter welcome me once again.

Joeleen Dodd, raised in Denver, moved with her husband and young children to her forever home in Long Pine, Nebraska. While life directed her labors towards her burgeoning family, her north star continually shone a bright light on life's joys and sorrows, as remembered in "The Old Ladies".

The Creation of Adam

Tabitha Bast

If you don't know Etchy, you'll know someone like him.

He's in the corner of the pub when we enter, and I put on a smile that's a bit tight round the edges. Jack's is stretched anyway because he's thinking about his Mum in the Bexley Wing and what the cancer has left of her bowels. Etchy's a couple of pints in already, though whatever he used to buy those will inevitably dry up on our arrival.

"Buckle in" Jack whispers, leaving me at the bar to get ours, "And one for Etch" Etch shouts over waving one of his big hands to welcome me to his domain.

Etchy isn't his surname or even a play on it, it's short for Etch-a-Sketch, which comes from Sketchy because of his long anecdotes. Etchy: lean, voice like ripe figs, leading the charge for a

fresh adventure, regaling you on the way back from another rave in a field with terrible, terrific stories three-quarters true, everybody's favorite. That's Etchy in our 20's.

Some of Etchy is the same. He's never paid back his debts and he doesn't now, he still regales you with terrible, terrific stories but now you've heard them before and they're three-quarters untrue, everybody rolls their eyes at Etchy. That's Etchy in our 40's which is the one I'm putting a drink in front of now.

He's looking pale and not very well. The light is dim, the way you want it to be in a bar, a kindly, warm yellow to conceal stains on the green velour seats. It's faux-faded glory but with a modern menu full of old-fashioned classics, concertinaed between time hops. Which is how it feels with Etchy sometimes, and his stories. When the spot's scratched right you're back in the 90s leaping to some tunes with 300 of your closest friends. Then when the lights come on all you can see are the spills and the cracks and you catch the scent of the men's toilets and wonder how you never noticed before.

"I've bad news" He reaches for both our hands across the wood table, holds mine with the tattooed one. His hands are faux-faded glory too. His fingers look plump next to Jack's although maybe it's Jack that has got too thin. Jack runs a lot nowadays, always between half-marathons and fell races and I like to shout through the door after him that he can't out jog the grim reaper. I find it more amusing than he does.

"Sam's dead." Etchy's blinking slowly and seriously at us, and I can see he's been genuinely crying. Sam. I gasp and then he clarifies "Not girl Sam. Boy Sam. "He cocks his head at me and then unravels his fingers from mine. He still holds onto Jack. "Actually, was before your time."

So it's Jack and Etchy's tragedy now, not ours collectively. Me, I'm back on the sidelines, like I am cheering Jack on when he's in the race and I'm there and I'm not there, just a blurred cheering face he zooms past, or on the balcony at a party, watching the unfolding tensions through a French window. Or, more frequently, on the other side of a lens in some forest or desert better off without bipeds like me bothering it. I work with cameras. And wildlife. The cameras I handle, operate and maintain. The wildlife I just pray for. So, I'm patient and I'm used to just sitting, waiting, while my leg gets cramp and my fingers freeze to the inside of my insulated gloves, poised for that chance moment of beak, fur or claw. That's my time. Weeks and days and hours for a two second flash.

If you hear me called Ever Ready, it once was because I was first and last on the dance floor. Now it's because of that one fingered sure fire click. We've all changed. It's not just Etchy who's got fat, I've put a bit on and always seem on some diet that doesn't shift it. One New Year when Etchy was really nasty drunk he kept chanting the Jack Spratt nursery rhyme and looked at me unflinchingly while I tried to stare back and not cry. He won't remember. And I try not to because what's a bit of a hurt for two decades of friendship?

Jack is grabbing Etchy's hand back with those skinny fingers and his other hand is over his own delicate mouth. It's been a while since my lips were there, somehow, we forget to kiss these days, though we're close, really close, the best of friends.

“Sam was Jack’s best friend once.” Etchy tells me in his musky voice, like he’s seizing on this to make an outsider of me, using their longevity of familiarity as a stick to push me back with, as if he knows Jack better. He doesn’t. Anyway, I know of boy Sam, I’ve met boy Sam, it was ever so long ago, and he wasn’t close to anyone then, he had already changed. Gone to the dark side as hippy Liz says. She’s still a hippy and she’s got fat too. Women get fat and men go bald, she told me, as if it didn’t matter and everything was equal.

We get in another round for the rest of the story, and it’s me that goes to the bar again. When I walk back, the two of them are still holding on to each other, reaching across the table with their hands stretched out like that painting by Michaelangelo. The Creation of Adam. Which, I found out a couple of years ago, is Etchy’s actual name.

Jack takes his pint and then puts it down to take me, solidly, in his arms, head burrowing into my neck, damp. And there. Ever Ready, I click, focus on him not on how I feel, this force of nature and the wild ecology of grief and sorrow.

“Sam hung himself in his American office. He was like one below CEO or whatever they are in oil companies - directors? He’d not written a note but, this is so weird, he’d written on himself. He’d written sorry. Across his own feet.” I notice Etchy’s hand is actually shaking now, without the lifeline of our palms, left alone on the table. Last man standing.

“Jack, I think this is about...the man. The Green Man.”

“What?” That’s me.

“Did he have kids?” That’s Jack.

“No. He never had girlfriends, worse than me, ha.” Etchy grimaces as if he’s laughing but he’s not. We’re not.

“What do you mean, The Green Man?” I ask and now Jack sits up to tell it, wiping teary snot off his eyes and nose.

“Back in the day, before you, we were stoned and gone up to Milner Field Ruins where that big mansion was, and you can see the mosaic on the forest floor. We went once, remember?”

I nod yes, though I’m not sure I do, and in the pause, Etchy grabs the story. Like he always does.

“We were reading about the hauntings there and how every owner dies tragically within weeks of moving in. One guy had died of hiccups, one from a thorn in his foot, probably one of consumption back in those days, you know the thing. We were just freaking each other out and laughing. Sam took his shoes off and was pretending to dance with one of the ghost wives around what was left of the ballroom, making out she kept stepping on his toes and shrieking.”

“It’s not a ballroom, it’s a greenhouse. Where the mosaic is.” Jack butts in to correct which Etchy hates. I see that look, that thin darkening behind the eyes as if Etchy will store this and take it out somewhere. Maybe on me. He puts his finger on his lips to shut Jack up.

“Then I say, let’s take a souvenir. And we all find a bit of crap, you know, the odd bit of ceramic, a bit of rock, brick, offer it to each other, giving it some speech like this is us forever bonded. Hippy Liz is the only one who objects though she’s simpering and hanging onto me because she was always trying to get me in bed.” Etchy looks fleetingly smug, proud to remember the glory days, when women put aside their integrity for a night of his affection if they were super lucky, a few minutes in the disabled toilet of The Cock and Ball if they were just averagely lucky.

“Then it got really strange. For all of us. Little things, like Jack slipping over and breaking his ankle, and I had a car crash; minor one; and Liz who got crazy good grades started failing everything, but like every day something bad happening. Then Liz tells us it’s not just ghosts of rich men and their wives up at Milner Fields, but The Green Man has been seen. So, rumor goes. Playing on his pipes or whatnot. She goes on about how if it’s not just ghosts but Gods we can’t mess with them. So Jack says we’ve got to return the stolen items.”

I am incredulous. Jack said that? About ghouls?

“It’s the 90’s,” Jack tells me, like I really hadn’t been there. “We were into a lot of things. Obviously I don’t think anything is in that now. Liz made us return everything and even bring something extra for The Green Man to apologize, from some ritual she’d found in her witchy books. But Sam can’t find his, and he doesn’t come. He can’t really walk at that point. And Etchy...”

“I came!”

“And Etchy came but his gift was an apple, and he ate it on the way there. So Etchy returns his stolen relic but doesn’t make an offering, never seen Liz madder than that.”

“Was it just the 4 of you?” I don’t know why I ask.

Etchy looks sly. “Carol Weaver, she was with us, well, with Jack.” He lets out a long, low, provocative whistle. “She was a hottie.”

If Etchy’s trying to stir things up between us he’s going down a dead end. Jealousy is one thing that isn’t a problem for me and Jack, and knowing this is what he’s up to just makes Jack giggle, swallowing the tears he hasn’t left on my jumper.

They go on, taking turns with this story they share, how Carol, Liz and Jack all leave present for The Green Man and give it this humble hymn of an apology, how Etchy’s dicking about in the background and how Sam never showed because of the lost relic and the septic foot injury. Just from a thorn from when he was dancing about barefoot at the fields. Which Liz of course says is absolute solid proof because that’s what one of the owners died of. You can look it up. His foot swells, and doctors start muttering about him losing a toe. None of them found out if he did or

not because Sam just stopped hanging around, started ignoring everyone, literally blanking people in the street. Perhaps he's gone a bit psychotic from the skunk he smokes. He's always been the joker but now he smartens up and works all the time, he's into making money, sells up the clapped out mini and buys a ridiculous SUV. He leaves Yorkshire and ends up in The City trading or something none of us understand.

"He changed," winces Jack "Becomes one big capitalist bastard. None of us can work it out."

We have another round, to Sam as he used to be, not the Sam he turned into. Etchy wants us to stay longer but we have to go see Jack's Mum in the morning, so we say no. I glance behind when I'm putting on my coat and Etchy mouths a request, so I lend him £20 I don't expect to see back again. We leave him in the pub drinking that money alone.

"Do you miss those days?" I ask Jack. back out in the quiet and warm winter that's even milder than the last.

"Nah. I'm very glad I met you." He answers tipsily, kissing my ear.

But I'd meant those days just after we'd met, my glory days, when it was all of us together, not before me.

A few days later Jack's Mum takes a turn for the worst. He's been there every other day recently, taking time off work. The weather's been so funny we've had to rent a car though Jack's dead against driving usually. But the train keeps getting cancelled with the floods. Dead boy Sam's a bit late saying sorry for the havoc he's helped wreck upon this planet. Damage done. When Jack answers his phone and starts crying again I guess that his Mum's died but it's not that at all.

"It's Etchy." He says. "He crashed, driving drunk. Into an orchard of all things, back up near Shipley."

"Is he okay?"

"He's not conscious, in hospital. Liz says she's going in to see him and we need to come too."

"Was he going to Milner Fields? To make amends?"

It doesn't seem very Etchy but then I'm thinking of how he transferred me some money just after the pub, and put "sorry" as a reference. I didn't know what the sorry was for, if it was for the meanness he sometimes showed me or if perhaps something once had happened, back in the day, that I'd not recalled. I'd been uncertain and embarrassed by the shy apology and I'd not said anything in response or to Jack because I didn't know where the story might go and I wasn't sure I wanted to. But it had happened, most unlikely and out of character. Unsettling.

Jack shrugs, after all how would he know what Etch was thinking? Who ever knows? We're just staring at each other, stuck in today, Jack in his sweaty running clothes, me in my pajamas. Then

it's old Jack, the one from the 90's, and he says "let's go, meet up at the hospital. Let's get an apple and go see that Green Man on Etchy's behalf. Get the gang back together. "

"Our gang?"

"Of course." And then I'm the me I used to be too, the one that seduced and won him good and proper. I snake my arm around him and I'm kissing him on those not too thin lips and they're swelling like sin underneath my mouth because whatever the oil men are wintering upon us we're going to make spring rise again.

Tabitha Bast lives in Bradford, UK and works as a therapist. Writes a personalised feminist blog on positive masculinity <https://theboysarealright.substack.com/>

Tabitha has 10 short stories published, most recently "Because of What is Out There" in "Hunger: An Anthology" with Urban Pig Press 2024 and "Finished Symphony" in "Oluwale Now" with Peepal Tree Press in 2023. Has delivered 3 creative writing courses as part of Creative Future's development programme for award winners.

Spring

Sylvia Wilson

The smell of dung freshly scattered over the fields registers dully in my brain. After a lifetime living on a farm, the strong odor is commonplace. This manure will add richness to the tired fields, giving them sustenance to provide new growth. And so, the whirling wheel of life will continue - the grass will grow; the cows will rhythmically yank out the cool, green deliciousness and chew for hours with mechanical jaws, ruminating peacefully; warm factories processing contentedly from stomach to stomach.

But for now, this joy is denied them as they stay in the huge cowshed, mooing, tussling and scattering liquid brown dung up the walls and over the hay and straw.

It is my job to clean this detritus. The little Dexter tractor wheezes like an elderly smoker, but once it receives a hearty swig of "Easy Start" spray, invigorated by this inhaler, the gnarled tractor hoists up its trousers and reluctantly coughs to life, allowing me to scrape the dung into the manure pile where it ferments in the cold air. Round the small farm, it is normal to find water pipes frozen after the biting, starry night. Before the morning milking can proceed, pipes have to be thawed and morning cow nuts made ready.

The "girls" as I like to call them, nudge each other into the milking parlor, seduced by the promise of cow nuts and easing of their full udders. The milking cups rhythmically suck the fresh milk from the distended udders until they are flaccid bags. By this time the nuts are gone and the girls are becoming fractious, some kicking out in frustration. I feel their dissatisfaction and watch them leave, some skittishly, some plodding like wise matrons. This process will be

repeated at tea time. In the meantime, the girls will eat, sleep, shit, piss and either bicker with, or hang out with, their inmates in their clean cowshed with fresh bedding and plenty of silage and hay to eat.

It is a simple life, but in my heart, it somehow feels wrong to keep them inside. Common sense says it is far too cold for them to be outside in bald, wet fields where they would trample the wet soil into thick sucking mud. Yet somehow, I feel like a jailer.

As the days begin to elastically stretch and the mornings brighten, this glimmering light offers hope. I can sniff anticipation in the air. The first signs of rebirth come in the form of timid snowdrops, shyly dangling virgin heads in the frost. Then the crocuses arrive in swathes of puffed violet, yellow and white dresses. Their color is an antidote to months of hushed grey and cold. Hardy little daisies magically appear like dropped pins. Their happy little white and yellow faces smile innocently in the sprouting grass. And hot on their heels comes the unashamedly bold yellow dandelions.

By the time the giddy daffodils arrive, the sun is gently easing heat into my static, stilted bones and I can feel my soul expand and spread in answer to its warming yellow fingers.

Little Spring lambs appear in neighboring fields, staying close to their disinterested mother, nudging her urgently for milk. They scatter randomly to explore and to play, their knobby, woolly legs comically uncoordinated.

As the days lengthen and the heat from the reluctant sun builds, the fields cast off their grey muted sulkiness and begin to absorb the energy. They clothe themselves in vibrant greens and yellows and jewel themselves with colored flowers like shiny yellow buttercups and alizarin crimson clovers. This is Nature's version of a powder-scattering celebration. The riot of color builds and builds until by May the world is bursting with energy and promise. The hedges are every shade of green from deep viridian to lime. The hawthorn bushes are lavish with white petals, morphing to blush pink. The thorny whin bushes are thick with the brightest of yellow blossoms wafting glorious marzipan aromas. Blossoms are everywhere.

I am a child in a sweet shop of colors and smells - the sweet shop of my youth where heavy glass bottles on tall wooden shelves held wonders to be pointed at with stubby fingers. After somber deliberation, items were gravely chosen and pennies carefully presented. This world is now my sweet shop - a huge expanse of pregnant wonder.

And on one momentous day, after months of incarceration, after a normal morning of cow nuts and emptied udders, the girls stand dazzled in the yard beside the green fields, their sides stained by indoor living.

I open the wooden gate.

Confusion.

Some unsure nudging.

They gaze disbelievingly at the wondrous emerald field – a true banquet.

They lift their heavy heads and sniff with fleshy, moist black nostrils at the wafting air and puzzle at the wide, wide sky and the light....so much light.

And the smells – the intoxicating sharp, sweet smell of young grass.....

One cow steps forward, a young heifer. Her youthful urges are strong. She is ready for hedonism.

Another steps in front of her and puts a dirty hoof on the grass. She looks around the vast expanse and slowly lowers her head to sniff, then taste.

Like an alcoholic reunited with gin, she tugs at the tufts, tentatively savoring, then with increasing urgency, grabbing in ecstasy.

The first young cow enters the field. Encouraged, the others follow, and soon the sound of grass being pulled by frantic, strong gums is the soundtrack of the morning.

And suddenly they randomly begin to cavort and dance and race in wanton joy, kicking their legs behind them as if they could leap over the moon itself. They revel in the endless space, the cleansing sweet air and the gentle, kindly warmth of the sun. Young and old alike celebrate until, purged of euphoria, they settle calmly to feast on the glorious green.

I smile and close the smooth wooden gate.

Sylvia says, “I have been an Art educator all my life, but before that I was a child growing up on a dairy farm, where Nature was the educator and freedom was the catalyst. I love driving on wide empty roads with wide glorious skies and cuddling a warm black cat or husband on dark winter nights. I love night skies, Christmas lights and 70’s music. And chocolate.”

Featured Poems

1. A Good Spring for the King by Chris Krechowiecki-Shaw
 2. Joyful Udders by Dubai Phoenix
 3. A Lifetime by Glenis Moore
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 5. The Fresh Waves of Spring by Moore Ngwenya
 6. The Morning Bird by Tamara Jackson
 7. A Light Time of Year by Vita Luna
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A Good Spring for the King

Chris Krechowiecki-Shaw

“Wettest Spring On Record” the experts pronounced.

“Flooding Chaos for Millions” shrilled the papers.

And yet, unstoppable, the flood waters rose.

Forming the land anew in their soggy image.

Roads became rivers, fields became lakes.

Bridges left as islands, cut off by the torrent.

Patient and inexorable, the waters found their way.

Slipping fingers through defences, filling helpless homes.

The King sat and watched, in finery of green and gold.

Once, his domain was peripheral and shrinking.

Now, he felt his fortunes rise, lift as a tide.

What the water touched fell under his dominion.

Satisfied, the King quacked, ruffled his feathers, and let the current carry him onwards.

Chris says, "I am a UK-based engineer by day, turning to writing to release excess creativity in the evenings and forget about nuts and bolts for a bit! I tend to jot down ideas that occur to me while cooking, gardening or walking the dogs, to see if they grow into stories later." He can be found at <https://mastodon.social/@ASprinkleofSage>

Joyful Udders

Dubai Phoenix

Can you feel spring's warm breath knocking on the door?

New life is in the air, dew drops on fresh leaves.

I greet the cows, big and friendly, eager to escape winter's cold,

Away from the barn where they have huddled close for way too long.

They burst forth, like eager dancers waiting to perform.

With clumsy tread, they frolic and jump,

Hooves sinking into the soft, verdant carpet,

Udders tingling with the anticipation of release.

Who can resist the sight of such happy cows?

Their joy is infectious, contagious even,

I too want to shed my winter's cocoon and feel the sunshine,

Released from the constraints of hibernation, life is beautiful!

Kirsten Westholter, originally from the Netherlands, embarked on a transformative journey in 2016 and left behind her life in Amsterdam for the vibrant landscapes of the United Arab Emirates.

Drawing from her own experiences, Kirsten embraces the Phoenix as a symbol of resilience and rebirth. Writing under the name Dubai Phoenix, she believes in our ability to rise from challenges.

Her poetry reflects her personal journey and observations, exploring themes of love, loss, and passion. Kirsten's debut poetry collection "Whispers from the Heart" is set to be published in the United Arab Emirates this year.

A Lifetime

Glenis Moore

In the beginning the spring's just a child
peeking around while adults talk of snow,
creeping in places where frost has no hold,
snuggling neath bushes when ice starts to go.

Then in her teens all the buds love to swell,
birds think of romance and raising their chicks,
flowers push out fondly from winter abodes
and hedgehogs build nests from piles of old sticks.

When spring is an adult the daffodils bloom,
the blossom of fruit trees like stars in the sky
that twinkle in daytime while birds sing their tunes
as summer is coming, the warm breezes sigh.

As old age falls on her the spring withers but
her end brings the sunshine so it's not to fear.

She packs up her things and retires from the world

to rest till her rebirth in winter next year.

Glenis is a relatively new poet working in the flat lands of the Fens near Cambridge, UK. When she is not writing she makes beaded jewellery, knits, reads and runs 10K races slowly. She has been previously published by Dust Poetry, Impspire, Litbop, Constellations and Cosmic Daffodil.

A Spring Symphony

Ilfa Ijlal

In a meadow kissed by dawn's maiden light,

where blossoms bloom in colors bright.

A crystal-clear stream weaves its way,

Through the fields where little ones play.

The aroma of mangoes occupies the air,

As lovely birdsong echoes everywhere.

Green hills rise with ceremonious grace,

Their cliffs an oasis, a holy space.

Under the vast sky of endless blue,

where hazy clouds dance in figures anew.

A spot unspoiled by time's wicked hand,

Where tranquility governs supreme across the land.

Here, worries melt like morning dew,

As nature's elegance displays anew.

In this ideal place, hearts seek ease,

And souls are free to stroll as they please.

The outstanding voice of Ilfa Ijlal, a Sri Lankan, enthralls listeners with her poignant poetry and insightful observations. She is a passionate poet and a lecturer who skillfully incorporates themes of identity, belonging, and the human condition into her writing. Ilfa's poetry takes readers on an empathetic and self-discovering journey with a competent mix of lyricism and reflection. Her contributions to literature have a profound impact and inspire both established poets and up-and-coming poets.

The Fresh Waves of Spring

Moore Ngwenya

The sun awakes from the distant horizon.

To grab away every trail of frost.

As the clouds separate in clutters,

Opening a way for the fresh waves of spring.

The sun shooting down spears of life,

Reliving the withering plants.

Sprouting the dormant seeds,

laying in a decade moments of sleep.

Heating the pearly petals till they blossom a magma of fragrance.

Fruits already folding into a bolus of juices and ripes.

All humming a tuneful melody of rejoice.

To the fresh waves of spring.

Grass slowly growing into green velds of spring.

Beaming tassels leaping with trails of rejoice.

With wildlife bustling in the area aborting migration.
Their stomachs bulging sideways like a roll of haysack.
The skin gleaming with gratitude
to the fresh waves of spring.
People slowly defrosting from the freezing houses.
Slowly rolling jerseys in packs
and stacks.
Connecting to the colorful community.
Cutting the tight chains of isolation free.
Greetings being the grail of every tongue.
Embracing a shoulder of unity
and reassurance.
As culture and heritage unleash its brightful glimpse of existence.
Celebrations slowly crowding every corner of the place.
As camp tents erect in every green sport of nature.
All in adoration making a grand parade,
to the fresh waves of spring.

The Morning Bird

Tamara Jackson

Tweet tweet,

Tweet tweet,

The morning birds are not asleep.

Whistling and chirping to start the day,
Springing into action out of dismay.
Buzzing and humming means it time,
The fresh spring air is just sublime.
Mother earth begins to call into action,
For it is time to whisk into a new olfaction.
Daisies, peonies, roses and more,
Different aromas, what more can you ask for?

Tweet tweet,
Tweet tweet,
It is time to ground new pairs of feet.
Spring begins to bring in a new season,
One with baby fever, just a breezin'.
Starlings, songbirds, blue jays, and cardinals,
An array of life which is just remarkable.
Many begin to be booted from the nest,
Beginning their journey is the grand ole forest.

Tweet tweet,
Tweet tweet,
Mothers still can not take a seat.
This is the time mothers are needed most,

To make sure their babies can get off the coast.
Sheltering, feeding, and nurturing the youngins',
All so they can grow up free and bucking.
Young and wild, mothers must handle,
For who else would deal with the little rascals?

Tweet tweet,
Tweet tweet,
The morning birds can finally sleep,
For spring is over and obsolete.
Time to bring in the hot new season,
Summer has come, and it is nicely brazen.
Say goodbye to spring and its new beginnings,
It is time to take flight for the young new fledglings.

Tamara says, "My name is Tamara Jackson, I'm a 10th grader located in a small town in Georgia. I have recently gotten back into writing, as it used to be a strong passion of mine, and I hope I can spark this passion of writing back to life through short stories and poetry exhibitions."

A Light Time of Year

Vita Luna

Spring for me
Is the possibility
Of reading in the park

When flowers bloom

There's a little less gloom

In the brightening dark

Suns set later

Streets adorned with skaters

That is Spring, alright

Iced cream cones

And cinnamon domes

And sweet dreams in the night

Vita Luna (née Vita Luna Jansen) is a Dutch graduate of English Literature. She has published two romance dramedy novels, 'Love and Loss in Camden' and 'Daniel, David & Denise'. She also released another novel, called 'Breckan and Co.'s Strange Discoveries Volume 1: The Facility', which is a kind of science fiction thriller for middle grade and up. 'Volume 2: The Aftermath', 'Volume 3: The Search', 'Volume 4: The Escape' and 'Volume 5: The Finale' have just been released. She hopes to continue sharing her imagination with the world.