

Dear Optimism

By Harula Ladd

You've been a little quiet of late.

Are you ok? Is it busy where you are?

Too many demands on your time

for you to pop by mine so we can

 sing a little

 hug a little

 dream a little

like we used to. You taught me that,

the potent power of the little things;

songs, hugs, dreams, butterfly wings.

I miss you.

Have you seen Justice lately? I hear

she's been asked to lose some weight.

Seriously! If she loses any more she'll be able

to slip out the door without opening it,

a ghostly draft easy enough to keep at bay

with an old blanket rolled up or snuggled under.

I miss her.

Now I think of it, did I pass you the other day?

When I was out walking, all slouched back

and dragged feet until I passed a bramble

bush and an apple tree holding branches

like lovers hold hands, all entwined.

It made me laugh. I started imagining the berries

and apples getting married in a crumble,

**all icing sugar veil and pretty pink blush,
and wondered if I had enough butter
and flour to play celebrant.**

Was that you?

**Would you have dropped by if I had accepted
that wedding invitation, baked the crumble,
taken that brief smile between my fingertips
and rubbed it, to sprinkle on top, ready
to turn gold?**



Harula lives in Totnes, in a self-contained studio. Actually, it's a converted (half) garage. Well, ok, basically it's a shed at the bottom of someone's garden. It's cosy. Ok, it's tiny. Life has shrunk, in so many ways, so she likes to go for long walks and write words in the woods with leaves and conkers and things. She thinks of these as her Wild Words. She loves to be under big sky to remind herself there's plenty of space really, and to let her senses feast again after days working in a pie factory with no windows and only florescent light.

Recently she started writing and sending out postcards of acrostic poems made from beautiful words. She wants to send out 100 beautiful word acrostics before spring. Would you like one? She also had fun writing poems for local school children live via Zoom. She loves writing poems for other people, and helping other people share their poems. She chooses a new poem each week, submitted by local poets, to display in the window of her favourite local community second-hand bookshop. She loves how happy people feel to have their poems on show.

Dear Optimism was a poem written for a friend's birthday, and Harula also recently made a video of it, so you can watch it on YouTube.

Right now Harula gets quite scared for the world at times, but writing and connecting with others through poetry is keeping her going, and she hopes reading all these wonderful poems will help keep others going too.

Making Friends With My Shadow

by Tia Meraki

I take my black dog walking
Up over the torrs
The further we walk the more he frolics along the cliff path
A pup, racing from one moment to the next
Pausing at each new
Sight...sound...smell...taste...touch...space
I play my black dog music
It seems to soothe his soul
Each plucked note weaves around him
He rolls onto his back, soft underbelly exposed
Peaceful in his vulnerability
Eyes half closed
I take my black dog swimming
He loves salt water best
He taught me to swim across the current
To duck dive
To float until I find my breath
Then plunge, submerged, just the expanse of sea and me
My black dog watches me skim stones
Taking little leaps and bounds
In time with the beat of every skip
Each new arcing trajectory followed with delighted eyes
Our record is seven
And we're not done yet
I named my black dog Shadow
And we're fast becoming friends

Sometimes...
My black dog scratches at the door
He growls and whines in the dark
My Shadow's shadows swell and lengthen

**Stretch to fill the walls
He gnaws plaintively at my stomach
And so I draw him closer, murmur softly in his ear
My black dog's heckles start to fall
He softens in my arms
I ask him to tell me his fears
And he names them one by one
I tell him that I feel them too
And I'm glad that he is here, that together we are strong
I named my black dog Shadow
And we're fast becoming friends**



Hello, I'm Tia Meraki, a poet and musician recently relocated to North Devon, after a decade spent in Bristol. I hold an LLB in Law and Politics and an MSc in Development and Human Rights, both from Swansea University. This led me down the obvious career path of writing and performing songs and poetry, making jewellery, doing a lot of the behind the scenes stuff that makes festivals and events happen (in a world where live events are a thing), and teaching yoga. I love sea swimming and surfing, music and dancing. And people. I love people and I miss (most of) them dearly.

I've chosen to share a poem that I wrote during the first lockdown, about Jungian shadow work, being kind to yourself and taking care of your mental health. Or dog walking. A lot of people think it's about dog walking. Interpret it how you like. Either way, I hope you enjoy it :-)

**New glasses - faded eyes glisten
The iris' shine like long lost diamonds
And stare out for rose tint and nostalgia towers.**

**No more rosy pink or familiar shades
Now a morose and ghastly leprosy white
Which clings to lungs like lonely limpets.**

**Comfort comes from beautiful music
I can still hear from ages before
When years and life were easier.**

**Watchless hands tell of no years
Spent alone or waiting for that wondrous epiphany
Now left with darkness and an abyss.**

John is a performance poet, jazz musician and actor not to mention a returning face to our pages. He originally hails from Warwickshire in the West Midlands came to Bath for Uni and is currently out questing to save the day but he's here, in Poems to Keep You Company today and that's all that matters!

His unique and vintage take on poetry draws as much from the beats as Keats. He has always enjoyed the opportunity to perform and writes about what he knows, thoughtful, prosaic and controlled. It's an absolute pleasure to have him in our pages.

He has recently released an absolutely stonking (as we understand is the proper parlance) jazz album, which dips into swing and big band classics and is available here <https://soundcloud.com/user-779714663>

He's as mean on the keys as he is kind in person and we thoroughly recommend you give it a listen if you have an opportunity. A well known face on the Bath Poetry scene, his support and contributions to the artistic southwest are never ending.



Apocalypse Daydreams

by Aiysha Humphreys

12 weeks without you

I say

I'll try not to fall apart

perhaps it will give me time to make friends

with my own breathe

count my eyelashes like

change.

I remember nights like these

that I survived once before

with just the ink and

my daydreams.

I imagine us laying on marazion beach

at sunset

me, painting a masterpiece with bare feet in the sand

you, writing a story I'll read to my nephew one day

when all of this is done.

All the love I lost this year

is the raft we build together

someday I'll sail home

and feel safe again

we're all just trying to grow flowers in our beds

someday we'll come home

to a garden, blooming

with nothing but

tulips

and our beautiful hearts



Another returning Poet, the fabulous, undefinable, Aiysha Humphreys! Aiysha's poetry talks on heritage, gender, sexuality and loving stupid boys who aren't deserving of their affection. It's not all bad as they manage to get a good poem out of bad relationships, so ultimately it could be argued that it's a sound investment. Currently exploring looks and serving them, in lockdown they have been either dancing or face painting to stave off the blues.

They enjoy exploring graveyards, fluffy cows, missing Cornwall and crushing the patriarchy. Available for gigs and catwalks once this is over, Aiysha is a poet fairly constantly in demand making waves in the Bristol Poetry scene. They hope you are looking after yourself, being kind to those you love and if you EVER need tips on eyeshadow or David Bowie impressions they can be contacted in all the usual witchy rituals such as sage burning and by pigeon mail.

Talking About Mountains from the Point of View of Pebbles

by Sam J Grudgings

**100 years spent cultivating
bonsai mountains;
the valley fold of
origami attrition.**

**Potted majesty,
prematurely wintered
in seclusion. No fault of the molehill
that it cannot be
borne in good spirits.**

**Does not the glacier
question it's slow oath?
Does the summit
not long for the plain?**

**In transience, the perspective
of tectonic plates is revealed.
The difference between a hobby and an obsession
is that no trace is left.**



Sam J Grudgings is a poet, storyteller and creator of Poems to Keep You Company, and (depending on who you are) could also be your grandson.

He started this in order to reach out to people who may be isolated and lacking their usual communities due to the pandemic, calling in favours from poets and friends to use poems, stories, recipes and tall tales as ways to create connections.

He can be found in Bristol, online or at most poetry events. He is fond of pizza, painting and perhaps

unsurprisingly, poetry. He promises he will remember to post the postcard he has on his shelf that is addressed and ready to go, and has kept every single postcard you sent him in this weird year and before.