

## **Doreen Balances on a Plinth**

*Helen Sheppard*

**Doreen skips school,  
snips chrysanthemums  
with trench-head dad.**

**In service and drudgery  
she scrunches the Daily  
Herald to set parlour fires.**

**Evacuees arrive. Her task  
to scrub city boys clean  
of swagger and desires.**

**They give lip and fancy  
words. Doreen learns her  
letters, applies to nurse.**

**She swaps food rations  
buys sturdy brown brogues  
from a rogue at the door.**

**Dodges Doodlebugs to  
dress wounds, and deliver  
babies in sooty terraces.**

**She knows poultices  
soothe, and treats bomb  
wounds with kindness.**

**Doreen says she's lived  
life a plenty for a thick  
kid from the village.**



Helen writes poems about birth and those unheard, inspired from working as a midwife. She started writing poetry in her forties and is thrilled to be part of Bristol's community of poets. Part of the Satellite of Love Spoken Word team and Poet in Residence, she enjoys providing the alchemy of open platforms for new writers. She also organised Bristol Literature Festival events Bring your own language and Sufi Poetry.

She is a fantastic gardener, and a pillar of the Bristol Poetry scene, always supporting everyone and giving people the space to perform their own work as well as running workshops.

Helen loves people watching, day dreaming and scratch prompts

## **I Hope I'm (in) clover**

*Fay Roberts*

**Some people are like the plants  
the gardener never intended.  
And I mean that in a  
whole host of ways.**

**Like the bright-tongued  
dandelion people.  
Putting down roots deep in  
Other people's pastures  
Networking on every breath of wind.**

**Bramble folk sprawl, broad-shouldered  
Laughing sharply at attempts to move them  
Shifting to block your way  
At every turn.**

**Still others lurk on the borders  
Pale and weak-looking,  
No barbs or stings, just a quiet rustling...  
And yet every day... There are more of them...**

**I knew a woman once like rosebay willowherb  
Thriving on the sites of disasters  
Softening sharp shrapnel edges  
With a laugh like a flamboyant velvet splash.  
Incongruous purple boa  
Among the widow weeds.**



My name is Fay Roberts and I'm a performance poet, event host and organiser, workshop leader, and musician based in Cambridge. My day job involves wrangling computers and people who use computers.

Like most people, I started writing poetry in school.

Like most people, I stopped writing poetry in school.

And then, 15 years later, I made friends with some poets, got something printed in Milton Keynes's premier "arts'n'stuff" magazine, [Monkey Kettle](#), which was encouraging, and then... entered their inaugural poetry slam in 2006. Just to be supportive.

This backfired when I got through to the final, ran out of poems, and caught the performance poetry bug, which I just can't seem to shake.

## **Dog burglar**

*Beth Parker*

**The beds a king, I fit right in, a huge dark wooden frame  
But in the night a burglar comes and starts a bed war game  
He burrows down from head to toe and nicks the bloody cover  
Now I cant sleep, he dreams of sheep, the canine duvet shover.**

Beth Parker is a poet who very kindly offered this poem to be added. Not much is known about her, she's a mystery, enigmatic and hard to describe. Brilliant poem though!

## **Wild Geese**

*Mary Oliver*

**You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.**

Mary Jane Oliver was an American poet who won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Her poetry combines dark introspection with joyous release. Although she was criticized for writing poetry that assumes a dangerously close relationship between women and nature, she found that the self is only strengthened through an immersion with nature.

She is one of my favourite poets but this particular poem was chosen by a friend Megan Mckie Smith who, perhaps unsurprisingly, is also a poet.

## **I Smell Like Popcorn**

*Stanley Iyanu*

**I smell like popcorn**

**I remind you of a smell**

**Resplendent**

**Similar to your past**

**I remind you of the nostalgia of a sunny day, pebble beach and salt & vinegar chips**

**I'm your afternoon treat after a trip to the pictures**

**Before a midnight boogie**

**I give you that warmth you need**

**That reminder of home**

**That sense that you are not alone.**

**Holding my hand down the winding road.**

**You said I "smell like popcorn**

**A smell so good**

**A smell so inviting"**

**Popping kernels in a white flame**

**As the oil burns, a chemical reaction**

**This image locked in your memory Popping up, readying your path to follow as I lead you into that familiar sense of home**

**Pretty box, yours blue stripes, mine has the ribbons you gave me**

**If I remind you of popcorn**

**I remind you of a home**

**A home away from home**

**A home where you are not alone**

**A home where you can be at home with me**

**I hold you close to my memory**

**Building sandcastles**

**Sand grains on our palms**

**Sand in between our toes**

**The water is cold but dipping your toe in it, is fine**

**Playing bucket and spades in the rock pools, crabs flitter by**

**If I smell like popcorn then I'm your sense of home and you are my sunshine and bright blue skies.**



Stanley Iyanu is a writer and spoken word poet currently based in the West Midlands, down in Leamington. He regularly attends open mics and poetry slams around the South West and West Midlands.

## **FOSSILS**

*Taran Spalding-Jenkin*

**When I was young I wanted to be a palaeontologist  
I was excitable, curious  
I read ravenously  
Was everything a scientist needed to be  
Until I buried it under the sediment  
Of hormones and complacency  
My lust for adventure lost to history  
Fossilized into memory**

**It's now my job to uncover that childhood wonder  
Liberate my blood from a mosquito  
Trapped in ancient amber  
Fill the blanks in the DNA  
With alcohol and coffee  
To reanimate my petrified bones  
Free me from the sand  
And dust which clogs my joints**

**You are my missing link  
My archaeopteryx  
Able to excavate the optimist  
No one believed existed  
Least of all me  
For you I'll work diligently  
Finally get my hands dirty  
Use the tools you've given  
To brush away the soil,  
Reveal what's underneath  
And warm my blood in the baking sun  
To save me from the thick, black oil which clings  
To the rock hard imprint of my skin**

**Then, only then  
Free from the nostalgia  
Of friendships long dead  
Can I live in the present  
With your feather in my cap  
To protect me**

**And when the next cataclysmic event,  
From outer space comes crashing to Earth  
To wipe the smile from my face  
And return me the dust  
To hibernate for a million years  
I'll keep one eye open for you  
For your guardian wings  
And your trowel grin**



My name is Taran Spalding-Jenkin, I am a poet and storyteller from Cornwall. I write in order to put home on paper, to bring memory in from the cold. I think we could all benefit from a little childhood innocence once in a while - sweets, muddy faces, dragons - so sometimes I write about dinosaurs.

## **Sharp Tongues**

*Aiysha Humphries*

**The women in my family are both sandpaper rough and beach pebble smooth  
they have tongues sharpened by oppression/ but hearts softened by their  
children**

**Urdu, my mother's ancestral tongue no longer falls from our tightened lips  
my Arabic name welcomes questions of where I am from  
but I was born and raised on Cornish sand  
far away from the Margalla hills of Islamabad**

**I like to think I carry pieces of my Papa's culture in my dark cocoa eyes  
and the moles that stretch across my olive skin  
look just like my mothers  
connected together they are a map  
leading to a city I hope I can walk through one day**

**But just for today**

**I shall wear my name with honor**

**I shall carry the parts of me that used to be shameful;**

**the hair between my eyebrows/ my arm/ my top upper lip/ the yellowing tone of  
my skin/ the mole maps across my cheeks**

**they bleed the blood of the women with sour mouths and sweetened smiles  
sugar and spice**

**all things nice,**

**all things nice**



Hello I'm Aiysha, a poet and performer based in Bristol. I write about gender, mental health, heartbreak and sometimes my love of oranges. I hope for my poetry to be a place you can feel at home, even if just for a little while.

## Singing the Songs of Our Mothers

Rebecca Tantony

*I asked individuals from eight different countries, 'What is your mother's song'?*

**Our mother's song alone: smoking out a window, wearing red lipstick for the moon. Our mother's song for lost lovers, lost keys, for those teenagers wearing the faces of lost time.**

**Your mother's song longing to fit that yellow dress, gasping into her jeans, agreeing on salad, aching for substance. Your mother's song a kitchen of red wine and Beyoncé's waist spinning.**

**Their mother's song a war cry, an activist's banner, a protest before bed that moved them into revolution by the next morning. Their mother's song chanting a bill of change, shooting them from sleep.**

**His mother's song slept in a barn with no roof, ate pilchards and problems. It became a verse for the working classes, it knew the grating of teeth, knew the underdog, knew how to bark.**

**His mother's song unaware. A secret hum set to washing up. A whistle as the mop trailed behind the clothesline, how soft her sound blew through it, how quiet her voice made the beds.**

**Her mother's song as Tina Turner's sequins. High heels clattering the lino, squeezing out high notes for everyone to hold. Something that shakes, gets deep beneath the marrow.**

**Or could it be in the gaps left behind? Something soundless and stuck, removing furniture because nowhere's comfortable anymore. A single parent surviving on lullabies alone.**

**It was the song that struck a match: we, the children who became people of the world. How she set us all alight, a blaze of purpose, full of unstoppable power.**



**Rebecca Tantony is the author of three collections and has read her work in a variety of locations, from the Royal Albert Hall, U.K to Wits University, Johannesburg. For the previous two years Rebecca has taught Creative Writing to BA students at Bath Spa University.**

## A man learns to live with fire

*Tom Sastry*

I fed my life to the fire but it wasn't hungry.  
The smoke crossed out the air  
but was somehow breathable.

Sometimes I placed a hand and took a burn  
but mostly the fire was content  
to be feared

and I, obediently, feared it  
wearing wet clothes at night and day  
taking the flames at a blind dash.

I had never lived at the pleasure  
of an emergency that doesn't stop:  
an illness, a tyrant, a God.

I had to learn to carry the feeling  
like a stone in my head  
that sometimes remembers it is molten,

I came to know it  
as my endurance  
my aftermath.

There was no-one else  
to embody it.  
It was mine.

