

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Brian Johnston**

**- 101 poems -**

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### **Brian Johnston (Jan.20,1943)**

I started writing poetry my Senior year in High School and the Muse still strikes on occasion. I also wrote some short stories in college but poetry is my ongoing interest. I enjoy tennis, swimming and backpacking and have become a YMCA member in recent years. My short term memory has taken a hit but I'm physically stronger than I have ever been! It's nice to be able to see improvement in at least one area of my life.

I was in the US Peace Corps twice. The first time was from 1964 to 1966 in Tanzania, East Africa where I supervised the installation of small bridges and culverts on feeder roads in an attempt to encourage local farmers to produce more. I also did some survey work and was lucky enough to spend nearly a month surveying future roads for tourists on the floor of Ngorongoro Crater, an extinct volcano whose rim exceeds 10,000 ft in places and is over ten miles in diameter. The crater floor is a natural game park nearly 2,000 ft. below the rim. The poem 'Venice' was written on my trip home from East Africa.

A 2nd Peace Corps stint was in Malaysia where I taught a two year Physics syllabus to very gifted students in Kuantan, on the east coast of Malaysia from 1970 to 1972. I don't think I ever worked so hard in my life as I did teaching those kids. It was a very rewarding experience.

I wrote a number of poems while I was at the University of Oklahoma and wound up getting a Master's in Physics before I left for Malaysia in 1970. The poems 'Venice' and 'California Montage' both won 'Honorable Mentions' in state poetry contests while I was at OU.

My Masters in Physics specialized in Superconductivity. I was again very fortunate in working on devices used by USGS to do a study of how the earth's magnetic field has changed through time. This study revealed that the earth's magnetic field has reversed itself many times through history and now the magnetic field found in the rock enclosing fossils can actually be used to help determine a fossils age. I also the wrote the computer program that USGS used to analyze their core sample data.

When money dried up for for scientific research under Nixon, my next job was working as one of the first video game designers using microprocessor logic. My first game, a copy of a game done completely in hardware called 'Bi-Plane' was perhaps the first commercially sold video game using a microcomputer chip, the Intel 8080, as it's heart and an Altair Home Computer Kit that a friend and I built as a development station. I wound up spending nearly 12 years designing games for companies like Extensys, Ramtek, Atari and Warner Brothers.

My last programming job was designing a micro-computer driven KSU for TIE Communications which was my most successful programming job. The final phone system sold over a million units and its program contained over 40,000 computer instructions. This assembly language program took me almost 4 years to write before the final version was completed.

The remainder of my career has been in both farming and in real estate management. My father worked largely in farming related businesses and when he became ill I got heavily involved with our farms in South Dakota and Oklahoma, which gave birth to the poems 'A Walk Near Blunt, ' 'Driving Alone Through the Sand Hills of Nebraska, ' and 'Like a Farmer.'

I am retired now and live in Silicon Valley which I have called home since moving here in 1973.

Works:

To my friends and visitors,  
I have had to block the rating system because some people apparently do not think much of my poetry and apparently enjoy giving low ratings to poems that others like a lot. Please give my poems a rating with your comments if you find a poem that you like particularly. I will allow all ratings with comments that justify the rating to stand with my poem if I believe the rating and comment are intended to help me improve as a poet and not just meant to be mean spirited or misleading. I welcome constructive criticism from any serious commentator. Non-constructive comments in my judgement will be removed as quickly as they are noticed.

## **'Fear of Love' Is An Oxymoron!**

If you fear love, Love, love it cannot be,  
Love's always there to lift your spirit up,  
Your sins to bear, like Christ on Calvary.  
With love there's never a half empty cup.

Love's yoke is easy, its burden is light,  
Love's lullaby's there to rock you to sleep,  
Love is never without tears for your plight,  
Love needs no reminder its promise to keep.

It's not love you fear, but death in disguise,  
Love's absence, dressed up in its finery,  
Still what do you gain fearing the moon's rise,  
Or that the sun will sink into the sea?

Death (if it exists) is just lack of love,  
Love's all that's required death to vanquish,  
Life is to love as hand is to a glove  
And to just cling to life is a fool's wish.

So while we have life let's all share our love,  
There's no time like the present to do this,  
Fill hearts both on earth and heaven above,  
The miraculous gift born of a kiss.

Brian Johnston

## **A Prayer of Thanks**

My dear sweet friend, forever love,  
My angel in this earthy frame,  
Every breath I take is a prayer  
Of thanks to God  
For the fresh air that  
Inhabits your lungs.

Now,  
And now,  
And now again,  
A regular rhythm.  
A new prayer of thanks  
Rises up to heaven,  
Pulsing like life's blood,  
Like ground fog rising from the earth  
To the infinite embrace of God's love.

Tendrils of our love,  
Reaching out to embrace  
Every one we love, EVERYONE!  
Helping gravity  
Hold the moon in its orbit,  
And filling the night sky  
With so many stars.

You and I, of all people,  
Sharing the original creation,  
Co-creators of all that beauty  
With God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit!  
What a divine mystery life is!

Brian Johnston

## **A Girl At A Dance**

She sat in her chair unattended,  
Her eyes moist with knowledge of that,  
For earlier smiles had offended,  
And so, thus discouraged, she sat.

She sat on the sidelines alone,  
The flush of her cheeks was no act,  
How could she ever atone,  
To stranger's of innocence's fact?

Not one felt the warmth leave her glances,  
Or witnessed the nights greatest theft;  
A victim to vulgar romances,  
The girl was the last one who left.

Brian Johnston

## **A Lover's Simple Request**

Will you let your hair grow  
Though it's trouble I know?  
Won't you let your hair grow?  
Just for me let it show.

For your hair is a crown  
That's admired through the town,  
And so soft frames a face  
That illumines God's grace.

Let your hair grow and find  
How you're branding my mind.  
Let your whole beauty start  
To embrace more than heart,

In your love I find rest,  
In your love I feel blest!  
Oh thank God....that you care!  
Oh thank God for.... your hair!

Brian Johnston

## **A Mom, Three Girls, Two Cigarettes, And A Sparrow**

### Part I.

Harvest time was winding down,  
I was taking lunch in town,  
After spending six long hours plowing stubble.  
Washing up I met a man,  
Guessed he was a harvest hand,  
His combine crew, he said, was fixin' to move out.  
He was wearing dungarees,  
We exchanged some pleasantries,  
His grease stained clothes revealed he'd no fear of trouble  
As I left to join the crowd,  
Well, the cafe was quite loud,  
Chose a corner seat where I would not need to shout.

From my new seat had a view  
Of the whole room's retinue,  
Men and women who make a livin' from the dirt.  
A table seating seven,  
Which could have held eleven,  
Was where my new acquaintance waited for his lunch.  
A young woman with three girls,  
Blonde hair all done up in curls,  
Joked with and teased an older boy with a clean shirt.  
The youngest seemed the cutest,  
Still with girls there's no sure test,  
It was clear that these seven were a charming bunch.

Well quite soon our meals arrived,  
As I ate I still contrived,  
To simply take in all the action I could get,  
Even though I felt quite blest,  
How I longed to be their guest,  
What a gift to be their dad, uncle, or brother.  
Then, 'Oh God, ' there came a shock,  
And it hit me like a rock,  
As this loving mother smoked her first cigarette.  
It was like my best friend died  
And deep in my heart I cried  
As quietly she lit up and smoked another.

Excuse me if I'm unkind,  
But all this brought back to mind,  
A smoking relative whose life was soon to end.  
Her choice couldn't be undone,  
For her daughter and a son,  
Her addiction's death came too late with no one spared.  
God has a lien on my heart,  
He promised we'd never part,  
Required just that I serve Him by being a friend  
To others in my pathway,  
(Whether they're pure bred or stray)

My most personal assets always to be shared.

I felt God's call to action,  
But doubting words had traction  
I had a C-note that I concealed in my hand,  
Walked to the group of seven,  
Prayed all the time to heaven,  
And as a joke said, 'Are you all on safari? '  
Told them I was a farmer,  
And attempting to charm her,  
Praised her family in some ways I'd fore planned,  
She beamed at the attention  
Was surprised when I mentioned, '  
That I also had designed games for Atari.

I said, 'You might think this strange,  
But do you have plans to change  
Your smoking habits? You smoked two after eating! '  
She smiled, 'Of course I'd like to.  
But somehow I never do.'  
I opened my hand, 'It's yours if you'll quit today! '  
I knew she could feel the Love,  
With one source, from God above,  
It guided her heart to miraculous meeting.  
She looked at my outstretched hand,  
Crying, 'I don't understand,  
This can't be happening to me, there's just no way! '

She still couldn't quite believe,  
And with heart out on her sleeve,  
She looked up at me and said, 'You're kidding, aren't you? '  
I answered, 'Give me your word,  
That these changes have occurred,  
That you will never smoke again, and all is good! '  
She turned to her three daughters,  
As if to check the waters,  
Asked them, 'Should Mommy bid her cigarettes adieu? '  
Well the girls all screamed out, 'Yes! '  
And I really must confess,  
The mother's smile convinced me she too understood.

She didn't try to hedge her bets,  
Handed me her cigarettes,  
She took some paper and a pen out of her purse.  
I guess I looked kind of blank...  
'Write down who I have to thank, '  
She said, 'I want to write and tell you how I'm doing.'  
As I handed back my name,  
She said, 'Oh look! They're the same! '  
And I found myself rejoicing, 'I have done worse.'  
Fifteen years though now have past,  
Oh, My God, they went so fast,

There's been no word, but no doubts am I pursuing.

## Part II.

On returning to the field,  
My work's promise was to yield  
A speedy death to any green weed still growing.  
I have farmed now many years  
Know just how to shift the gears  
Of a tractor which out-pulls five hundred horses.  
Things were going pretty good,  
When, by landing on the hood  
A sparrow made a mockery of all knowing.  
To start off the hood is hot,  
A place to rest, it is not,  
Yet he seemed quite content as I ran my courses.

Engine's roar did not phase him,  
Its harsh sound sure was no hymn,  
I was plowing fast over ground that was quite rough.  
He'd bounce forward and then aft,  
Even slide in the cross draft,  
But it seemed like the little sparrow did not care.  
I thought maybe he is sick,  
Perhaps his brain isn't quick,  
Then I thought, 'He likes me, ' and I stopped feeling gruff.  
Some days I serve sea gull schools  
Circling my tractor's dust pools,  
A moving smorgasbord of insects that rise there.

My friend wasn't there for food  
Which helped establish a mood  
Of brotherhood like I'd felt in the restaurant.  
It felt closer to caring,  
Something more than just sharing,  
Though glass stood inbetween, his eyes stayed locked on mine.  
If our dance was like a dream,  
No enticement did I scheme,  
The sweet gift of his presence wasn't meant to taunt.  
When at last he shook his head,  
And into the sky he fled,  
I understood, by God, his visit was divine.

(In loving Memory of Jetta Larsen who lost her life to smoking!)

Brian Johnston

## **A New Reality**

You touch my battered heart  
Like the feathered wings of angels,  
You burst from my poor eyes  
Like the tears of awakened love.

You flood perfume scarred lungs  
Like the scent of summer roses,  
You sparkle in my rhymes  
Like the sentient stars above.

Your breath seeds sounds of rain  
(Like distant drums) soothing my fears,  
Your presence feeds my verse  
Like mother earth's most verdant dreams.

Your voice calms savage soul  
Like tranquil breeze caresses trees,  
Your shadow shelters all  
Like Light you move (you act) it seems.

You draw me from the sky  
Like the call of nesting falcons,  
You rob me of my breath  
Like lava frozen in the sea

Your spark exceeds desire  
Like a prism, reveals rainbows,  
You fill my life with hope  
Like a balloon that raptures me.

Brian Johnston

## **A Poly-amorous Man**

(One poet's vision of what being indwelled by Christ's heart might look like)

What makes me feel loved isn't easy to say,  
And not because the heart of love is blind  
I can see the ripples form in my own pond.  
And feel the shock of each and every stone.

Perhaps a fear of words just gets in my way  
(I lack the will to open up my mind?) ,  
But I have the key, and for me, words are play,  
Unlocking the gate would surely be kind.

There are many fair maids of whom I'm quite fond,  
But choosing just one would double my moan  
You see for me to win not one must be conned.  
Not one feel my heart was only on loan.

There are women I know who'll not like my tone,  
Though their feet are not bruised by silken frond  
I've laid in their path: truly for them I've pined...  
Whatever my loss, I'll not rue their day,

Chorus (Repeat until you tire of it)  
For I'm a poly-amorous man, I am, I AM!

Brian Johnston

## **A Promise of Covenant Relationship**

### **1. Covenant of Affirmation**

(Unconditional love, agape love) Rom.12: 10, I Thess 5: 11

There is nothing you have done or will do that will make me stop loving you. I may not agree with your actions, but I will love you as a person and do all I can to hold you up in God's affirming love.

### **2. Covenant of Availability**

Phil 2: 2-4, Acts 2: 44-45

Anything I have - time, energy, insight, possessions - is at your disposal as God reveals your need to me, even to the limit of my resources. I offer this to you both in recognition of the importance of covenant relations over other non-covenant demands in my life and to honor Christ's esteem for the value of serving others. As part of this availability I pledge my time on a regular basis, whether by letter, by phone, in prayer, or in an agreed upon meeting time.

### **3. Covenant of Prayer**

James 5: 16

I covenant to pray for you in some regular fashion. I do this because I believe that our caring Father wishes his children to pray for one another. I will ask Him not only for the blessings you need but for wisdom and clarity as to what part I am to play in His answer.

### **4. Covenant of Openness**

Gal.6: 2

I promise to strive to be a more open person, disclosing my joy and my pain to you as well as I am able. The degree to which I do so implies that I trust you with my problems and my dreams, that you contribute to my well being just by listening, even when you say nothing. By this I affirm your worth to me as a person.

### **5. Covenant of Listening With Love**

I will try more often to mirror back to you what I hear you say and feel. I will do this not only to give you confidence that I have understood you but to also test and grow my own listening skills. I will endeavor to view every communication from you as a precious gift of your spirit instead of a potential threat to mine.

### **6. Covenant of Honesty**

Col 3: 9

I will look for ways to praise you when I see you are deserving of praise, I will gently question you if I suspect or believe you are taking the wrong path, and I covenant to pursue your best interests, not mine, in this endeavor. If this means risking pain for either of us, I will trust our relationship enough to take that risk, believing that it is in "speaking the truth in love that we grow up in every way into Christ who is the head." (Ephesians 4: 15) I will try to express this honesty in a sensitive and controlled manner and to meter it, according to what I perceive the circumstances to be.

### **7. Covenant of Sensitivity**

Even as I desire to be known, understood, and accepted by you, I covenant to be sensitive to you and to your needs to the best of my ability. I will try to hear you, see you, and feel where you are.

### **8. Covenant of Confidentiality**

I promise to do all that I can to keep thoughts or feelings you share confidentially with me private in order to provide the atmosphere of permission and safety necessary for openness. Should I feel the need to discuss a confidence from you with another for my own growth or edification, I covenant to never do so without your permission.

9. Covenant of Forgiveness

Matthew 18: 21-35

I covenant to forgive you as often as necessary whenever you earnestly desire this, and, with God's help, to wipe the slate clean between us as if no wrong was ever done.

10. Covenant of Accountability

I consider that the gifts that God has given me for the common good should be liberated for your benefit. If I should discover areas of my life that are under bondage, hung up, or truncated by my own misdoings or by the scars inflicted by others, I will seek Christ's liberating power through his Holy Spirit, through covenant relationships with others, and through other sources of God's revelation, so that I might give more of myself to you. I am accountable to you to become what God has gifted me to be in His loving creation.

Presented To \_\_\_\_\_

On \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_

Brian Johnston

## A Walk Near Blunt

It seems a shame that you're not here  
To share my evening stroll with me,  
As I walk down this gravel road  
That takes off just outside of town.  
Two pheasants flush from bar ditch pools  
(The grassy soup of last night's rain)  
Just as I cross the railroad tracks  
And seem to pass some phantom line  
That separates my world from theirs.

Straight as an arrow (as crows fly?)  
The road swoops long from West to East  
Though now its western half is paved,  
Joins gravel in Blunt's rustic heart  
(Right where the newer road veers north) .  
First down one bank, then up it goes,  
Across the stream cut valley floor.  
A small bridge spans its docile flow  
So pliant now to man's intent.

A meditative sweet montage  
Of birds and frogs has filled the air  
A sound for those "with ears to hear"  
That whispers softly, "I love you"  
And helps me to say 'Yes! ' to life -  
The gravel's grate against my shoe,  
Even the drone of diesel trucks  
That gather speed against the banks  
Do not intrude, somehow belong.

A fox negotiates the field  
By following the hidden stream.  
She trots as if she clearly knows  
That I observe her every move,  
That "safety" equals "distance from"  
(Here men are seldom without guns,  
Her pelt could be worth quite a lot) .  
The stream's ravine is close at hand  
And prudently she disappears.

A hole breaks through the clouds above,  
A giant restless eye that looks  
For something that has not been found,  
For something that the world needs now,  
Revealing angry flecks of red  
Escaping from a setting sun  
That cannot penetrate the shroud.  
I know this emptiness and rage  
And yet, somehow, that too belongs.

A passing man and I both wave.  
And though but little dust gives rise

He still drives wide to give me air.  
I feel some kind of brotherhood,  
A love perhaps we have to share  
(For we both know we have no claim) .  
Yet each one hopes she'll smile at him,  
And wonders if it could be that  
Her heart will miss him when he's gone.

At length I turn to start for home  
And like an afterthought of day  
There's still a trembling shade of green,  
Emerging buds on road side trees.  
A light rain falls from pillowed clouds  
As soft as gnat wings on my skin,  
And blurs nearsighted vision more  
Than if my lenses were bee eyes  
And makes Blunt's night-lights shine like gems.

Then suddenly, beyond my view,  
The setting sun bursts through somehow  
Reflecting subatomic blaze  
On otherwise engulfing clouds.  
The whole horizon seems aflame!  
Even the birds and frogs are mute!  
The cosmic eye has shut, and I,  
I cross the phantom line once more...  
And South Dakota ends its day.

Brian Johnston

## Alone Too

Alone..... what relief in the face of life's riot,  
Alone..... and what sweet space, fragrant air all around,  
Earth's rotation imparts no real sense of motion  
Until stars appear! Their swirling dance makes no sound.

Alone..... tanning by an immutable ocean,  
Alone..... I surf breaking waves on wind swollen sea,  
No hint of confusion, I'm one with the motion,  
No sad message from others that disappoints me.

Alone..... in my hammock beneath swaying palm trees,  
Alone..... time now to ponder just what a cloud needs,  
The wreck of a ship sits rockbound in the distance,  
Its broken spine's now home for disparate life's seeds.

Alone..... with the lost! Are prayers ever answered?  
Alone..... my heart overwhelmed. Could that be a prayer?  
I look at the rainbow as summer squall passes  
And find that I'm grateful that I am a player.

Alone..... strange it seems almost no load to shoulder,  
Alone..... if I fall down there's no one to make fun,  
If life seems too tough, well, whose load do I carry?  
Is it just my own stuff or have others piled on?

Alone..... yes it's true that I miss other's laughter,  
Alone..... of course there is no real sharing of tears,  
Maybe in fact I could set better boundaries,  
Taking charge of protection from all of my fears.

Brian Johnston

## **An Apology**

A building infinite in dimension,  
With many doors,  
Opening to an unsheltered walkway  
That circumscribes the whole...  
Beyond this lies the desert of insanity.

Only one door is said to open to the center.  
You were born behind that door  
In the passage discovered by your father,  
The way he believed would lead you  
To the center in all its centerness.  
You venture forth but an impassable wall  
Quickly crushes that dream with all the pain  
Of man's brief spark, his second of existence.  
Now you creep past your father, asleep in his hall,  
On the darkest night of your life.

Morning passes you on the walkway.  
Soon the heat forces you to shelter,  
A door opens at your touch,  
You step out of the sun  
Into the coolness of an infinite grace;  
But this hall is alive with shadows,  
Slowly pupils adjust, widen to see...  
There at arm's length, the hall's end.  
On touching it hope is reborn,  
This at least is real!  
Could the next door be as easy?  
Trying again you walk a day,  
And suddenly you find the waiting wall.  
Self-confidence blossoms into  
Far more doors than years,  
Affirmed are countless failures,  
Again the new door, the sure step,  
You venture toward the certain ending.

You step boldly through the weeks, the months,  
This is the longest passage yet encountered,  
Now it bends, twists, darkens, lightens...  
Without warning you realize that you are alone!  
The air colder, the shadows somehow less familiar,  
Progress is slower, more cautious...  
Now the first flicker of danger -  
Did the light just get dimmer, the floor vibrate,  
What was that sound?  
A running terror tramples the silence.

In a few short moments the door is yours,  
The months of walking, lost, forgotten,  
You embrace the safety of sure exit,  
And collapse exhausted.

Time passes, but then the door opens.  
The girl, at first frightened, pauses...  
Then empathetically kneels to touch the brow  
Of the pre-natal ball trembling there.  
You slowly uncoil and as unfamiliar  
Comfort chases paleness from your cheeks,  
Tell her of the passage you discovered.  
Enthralled she listens and entreats you to return,  
To both guide and accompany her  
Through your passageway, to the center.  
No longer alone, you agree; the journey begins.

Years later, the pace hindered by both age  
And children, you two pause to rest...  
You tell your children of your discovery,  
The passage to the center, their inheritance.  
One by one they leave you  
Only to find the inevitable wall  
And slip silently past you in the night.  
Yet seeming failure might become success  
If only one could embrace the infinite center.

Brian Johnston

## **Black Body**

I.       Imagine a stack  
Of razor blades  
Bolted together  
Polished edges  
Forming a blunt mass...  
Who would guess the  
Blackness of that face?

II.       Picture Pandoran box  
Harboring atom pulse;  
No less a voyeur  
The scientist peering  
Through revealing keyhole  
Finds an interior  
Darker than any light.

III.      Such an inscrutable blackness  
Is called a black body;  
Acceptance of its existence  
Gave birth to uncertainty  
Blurred the determinism  
Of an earlier age...  
And color returned to God's cheeks.

IV.      Though it might not seem worth mentioning,  
This dark, absorbing mass when heated  
Radiates such bright intensity  
That man has yet to find its equal;  
Long before black bodies start to burn  
All other forms have been destroyed;  
Darwin might have seen a truth in this.

Brian Johnston

## California Montage

From the mountain pass where  
    pioneers ate human flesh  
To survive a winter storm,  
It does not seem far enough  
    Today, by four-lane,  
To the sea.

Under thinly clustered  
    Redwoods, (blood-brothers, perhaps,  
To the silver Mallorn trees  
Ravaged with Lothlorian)  
    A black and white sign reads,  
"Do not pick up cones."

In snow fed streams made sweet  
    By mountain minerals and  
Lichen softened waterfalls,  
Divers breathing compressed air  
    Search the deeper pools  
For nuggets.

Like ducks imprinted on  
the sun, men seek substitutes  
At night, unmindful of waves  
Sweeping civilization's  
    Refuse from miles of shore  
In rhythmic moon praise.

Brian Johnston

## Chasing A Dream! ?

Some people take flack for chasing their dreams  
From plain folks who perhaps don't have many  
They're knocked for not taking life as it seems,  
Risking treasure worth more than a penny.

Dreams are illusive, you're not in control,  
You've, at best, just a slim ghost of a chance  
Unlike real people who come with a soul  
A dream will not ever promise a dance.

Dreams may come quickly then suddenly go,  
In love and in war we're told 'all is fair, '  
Just ask yourself this, 'What does my heart know?  
When the dawn comes is my sweet dream still there? '

Still need permission? My answer is yes!  
I will admit though the wait can be tough  
But joy will be yours when friends must confess  
Some dreams come true and you had the 'Right Stuff.'

Brian Johnston

## **Divergence (from Yuliya)**

Now it ends as it began  
At night on a plane, high over unfamiliar ground  
(On which we would both be more comfortable) .  
Our moods seem different, and though our arcs  
Will coincide for a few hours yet,  
We each nurture a private grief, a private joy.

There have been times when being with you was difficult,  
I had hopes and dreams of being with you  
That did not come completely together,  
Like your embarrassment at my feelings for you,  
Like mine to learn your pictures weren't for me alone.  
Yet, even so, I have loved being your friend,  
Have never wished that you had not come,  
Though it hurts to hear you do not love me 'that way.'

At times I wish that life could be simpler,  
That I could call God on the phone and say  
'Is this really what You want to happen here?  
Did I close my heart to Your guidance?  
Did I not love Yuliya as You wished me to? '

And what of your dreams?  
Your American adventure almost ended,  
You return to family and friends a different person  
For you have touched a dream and made it real.  
I wonder if they will recognize you?

I just hope you will remember  
That touching dreams is possible!  
You have already done it once.  
I believe that you can do it again,  
For I know the joy that helping you brought me,  
Perhaps this remains your real source of power.

Brian Johnston

## **Dreaming of You**

Here I sit once again,  
I'm dreaming of you,  
Even though I'm told  
(Frequently) you don't exist.

You're my fantasy love,  
(Stranger to this world)  
With two parted lips  
Waiting for me (to be kissed) .

We cohabit one heart  
So tight are we bound  
(No jealousy there) ,  
In love choose to serve others.

We accept that our lives  
In service to Christ  
Are open to all....  
Who are sisters and brothers!

We're both fine with the fact,  
Our dreams come second,  
God's plan for our lives,  
We always try to put first.

Our passion's to channel,  
Let God's blessings flow,  
Through work of our hands,  
To hearts of those feeling cursed.

Dear God grant that this dream  
Becomes flesh indeed,  
Our lives tenderly  
Merge in love to serve many.

But if in Your Will, love  
Never comes to my side,  
Pray, quiet my doubts...  
On days in fact I have any.

Brian Johnston

## Driving Alone Through the Sand Hills of Nebraska

My love is light (a fairy kiss?)

Like the pressure of sunbeams on your cheek,  
Ineffable, and yet capable of changing lives...  
Darkening skin to a more attractive hue,  
Pushing spaceships to distant stars (given time) ,  
Even causing cancer given sufficient lack of love for self.  
For love is not about just getting needs met by another,  
No, love is more like a laser's coherent beam....  
For in reflecting back a portion of what is given,  
The power of what is being created grows  
Until it can cut through the hardest steel  
And span the gulf between galaxies.

Poetry too grows through the cross-fertilization of newborn lines,  
The lines of this poem insist that I record their birth.

Each new line grabs me by the scruff of the neck,  
Forces me to hit the brake, grab my pen,  
And claim it in my family bible...  
My only children, clamoring to be set in ink.  
As these Voyagers' pass into the present state of my art  
(Some that I barely recognize in their profligate parentage  
Of older verse's new verse's newer verse still) ...  
Somehow still carriers of my own genetic code.  
They press my design against the blank page  
Flying in search of, homing on... your heart.

My love's intent is simply truth (do you want less?)

Would you have me downplay  
The warmth of our connection  
Because it is complicated by here-to-fore  
Unacknowledged passion, spiritual connection,  
And the remnants of former relationships  
(Even those still gasping for breath) ?  
Or feign a lack of attachment to it's denouement  
In a solitary attempt to feel safer?  
No matter can restrain the effects of gravity  
On the orbits of other bodies in its field of influence,  
Gravity that binds us all in deep wells of space-time.

Your kiss of greeting...

After so many years of imagining such a possibility,  
Imprinted deeper than even my memory of our first meeting,  
Our moonlit shadows touching as we soaked naked  
In the steaming waters of a volcanic mountain spring.  
This new conjunction of souls occurred in God's clear view,  
Without artifice or scheming on our part  
And rocked my inner core to it's depths,  
Organizing molten currents of confused turbidity  
Into a magnetic flare of such intensity  
That iron flew to my spine  
Inspired me to finally declare my love  
To acknowledge your impact on my life...

And after a period of gestation  
Gave birth to this poem of celebration.

Back to Nebraskan reality and a new mystery...

I pass an overturned car,  
Its wheels tied by yellow police tape,  
A metaphor for my life perhaps  
"Damaged but still salvageable."  
The windows are broken out,  
The occupants removed to a distant hospital somewhere  
(Hopefully arriving alive) ,  
Their odds and ends of life scattered like garbage  
On the inverted ceiling of their car.  
The explanation, perhaps, is the water still standing  
Several inches deep on the road side near the wreck?  
A sudden orgasmic release of cloud in a desert...  
The car tops the hill to find the highway  
Buried by a lake of dimensions only God can know.  
Who would expect such a thing in Nebraska's sand hills?

And what does it say about me finally

That I am so drawn to distant objects,  
That the two women given access to my heart are  
Both still tied to failed marriages  
By dark chapters I am not part of  
And innocent children who need their love?  
And at our age where is the partner without a past?

Is this all that God has planned for you and me,

That we "just miss" every thirty years or so?  
I know there are times I am afraid to trust another's love,  
Cannot even hear words of genuine affection.  
Perhaps this explains my attraction to women  
Whose availability might really be in question?  
Maybe I'm afraid to let a real lover in?  
Is the simple dream of love a better choice  
Than the chance of finding real love anew  
(Even love with an expiration date) ?  
I think I'm more distrustful of my own heart's passion  
Than I am of women being unreceptive to my love.  
Do you struggle with similar feelings?  
And is it my lot to only remember passion like this in a poem  
While you spiral away to unimagined rendezvous'?

The coldness of space is not after-all

The simple absence of heat...  
No, in human dimensionality it is more the absence of others...  
Others who both shine life force toward us  
And reflect our own light back to us,  
Who collide with us physically and emotionally  
Altering our pathways forever,  
And who crater the façade whose design

We imagine belongs to us alone.  
The void of human space-time is a true "black hole"  
Sporting only star death fragments of the "Big Bang."

This is all I really know...  
I treasure the memory of our "fly-bys"  
Even if that's all they ever are.  
And if I'm lucky this joy,  
This celebration of your existence,  
Will continue to pour out of me in songs and verse...  
For your ears always (if I am so honored) ,  
For God's heart (as I was born to honor Him) ,  
And to the stars alone if I have only them for company.

Brian Johnston

## Enjoyable

'You are so enjoyable! '  
'I enjoy the hell out of you! '  
Is it possible to give another greater praise?  
What on earth would it be?  
'I love you' is so fraught with expectations...  
Not wanting to be a heartless cad, an idiot,  
Or a soulless exploiter of women  
I hesitate to say 'I love you too sweetheart! '  
Like a common vampire bat  
Hungry for the taste of warm blood.

Maybe 'I need you so much Baby! '  
Is what you long to hear?  
Does it really build you up to hear another say  
They are incomplete without you in their lives,  
That they can never own what you possess,  
That they have a hunger only you can sate,  
That you are everything they are not?  
How does her groveling make you a better man,  
Or reassure you that she's the perfect match?  
Are you really that insecure?

How about 'Your smile gives me Goosebumps? '  
Did you ever try that line on a woman and mean it?  
It's not that I don't miss a woman's exposed neck,  
Rare is the soul indeed that escapes famine's pains  
But what I really hunger for  
Is My Woman's blood...  
The kind of blood that is not available  
From a mobile Red Cross Blood Bank.  
And how is it that another's life force,  
Their totally unique blood can belong to me (or you) ?

A possible answer, one that rings true for me,  
Is the one that Christ modeled for us...  
Certainly it must be a gift...  
But Christ's transcendent gift  
Was not seductive, not meant for me alone,  
He gave freely of himself for all...  
Rich or poor, blessed or unblessed, saint or sinner,  
Most would consider me mad if I, like Jesus,  
Claimed the power to reconcile anyone to the Creator  
And they would be right. So was Christ insane?

Christ's marriage vows contained no words  
Only action... Action intended to lift us up...  
Not to restrain us in chains of guilt or responsibility  
But to remind us all that 'God so loved the world...'  
You and I, We are God's beloved! Unwashed and unsaved!  
So you wonder how it is that you can ever know  
That a woman is your woman?  
The answer is not the quality or volume of her blood,

The answer is not in ceremony or contractual agreement.  
The answer is Grace, the perfect gift, God's Grace.

Brian Johnston

## **Everyone Leaves / Everyone Grieves (Your Choice)**

Have you ever noticed this trend?  
It might be a drought or a war,  
Blows quick to strike and slow to mend,  
And even if I have a friend,  
Everyone leaves / everyone grieves. (your choice)

Strangers tell me 'You seem so sad, '  
Though sometimes I may find a door.  
I know expectations are bad,  
But frequently I just feel had.  
Everyone leaves / everyone grieves. (your choice)

It might be a dog or a cat,  
Acquaintances who are rich-poor,  
Married-single, tall-short, slim-fat,  
What experience tells me is that  
Everyone leaves / everyone grieves. (your choice)

It seems so sad every man dies,  
Still some seem to dare hope for more:  
Though I raise my eyes to the skies  
The beauty around me just flies.  
Everyone leaves / everyone grieves. (your choice)

Brian Johnston

## For Love Of \_\_\_\_\_

In a house by a highway by a railroad  
Eyes open to a self-set sleep-destroying buzzer  
That waking mind impudently pretends  
To ignore.

Penetrating the window barrier  
The air conducts a heavy diesel lullaby.

Over wealthier suburbs slips a transport,  
Supersonic, though no sweeter music,  
For rich and poor alike a boon to sleep;  
Heard only by more wicked insomniacs  
For whom the watch's competent hum is a dirge.

Descending in a shower of metallic disintegration  
Three men ignite the atmospheric blindfold, survive,  
Do not plunge white-hot into the sea, a common meteor,  
But drift coolly down on nylon wings  
To the waiting Carrier of the 300 lb. Angelfood.  
The mind shrinks

From the prospect of that confrontation,  
From the phallic disruption of Christian paradise,  
Then cries,  
"Oh, let there be nothing on earth but leavings,  
Nothing but star-ships on a photon sea..."  
Now begins man's search for a Southland.

Yet, as light passes venetian blinds,  
Like music through classical guitar strings,  
Touching the softened form of familiar Love,  
The rods of the eye wander adagio  
Along the bars of a century-old sight before rising,

"Dethrone the convict from electric eclipse,  
Redress the squalid in disposable, dust-free clothing,  
Release the lovers to their denouement..."  
The earth womb trembles in the last pains  
Of the dark hour,  
Heralding man's difficult birth.

Brian Johnston

## **Forgive My Having Loved You...**

Forgive my having loved you,  
If only on the wind,  
But never will my love rescind.

Forgive my having loved you,  
'Twas impudent I know,  
To seek my rest where flowers grow.

Forgive my having loved you,  
My poem's life so brief,  
It's back's been broken by a thief.

Forgive my having loved you,  
Incline not to despair,  
What fails on earth can meet in air.

Forgive my having loved you,  
If morning spells my doom....,  
Inter my heart where flowers bloom.

Forgive my having loved you,  
The world may yet be fair,  
My essence grace a lady's hair.

Brian Johnston

## How Do I Know That You're Not The One?

How do I know that you're not the one?  
This seems like such a strange opening line,  
It feels like it ought to be the reverse,  
When all of this time we've had so much fun,  
With sincerity, rhythm, and verse.

How do I know that you're not the one?  
The ambiguity is so divine,  
No way to say yet just who's faulting who  
Seems like so far we have had a good run  
Though presently we're feeling quite blue.

It is certainly not that we're right!  
The 'powers that be' will never approve.  
Who else would argue that our love is wrong?  
There is no lawyer to help with our plight  
And our prayer is a personal song.

Morning comes and the day seems so bright  
In your presence I can not think to move  
At my desk there's no escape from your rhyme.  
This love feels like I am flying a kite,  
Its stark flight takes my heart out of time.

How do I know that you're not for me?  
Well for just one thing our issues are tough  
And connections that restrain us are real.  
The poignant truth is our hearts are not free  
And there's no place to file an appeal.

How do I know that you're not for me?  
We know that saying goodbye can be rough  
Could this really be how our story ends?  
Our tears self-contained as casually  
Two lost lovers part ways, but as friends.

Someone calls out, 'Hey! Don't rock the boat! '  
And I'm feeling like we're in a movie,  
Somehow my part has changed to 'script writer? '  
But I'm more inclined to dig us a moat,  
I've never been much of a fighter.

Hold it! The high priest's squeezing the throat  
Of the wrong man! Yes! I'm feeling groovy!  
Wow! This isn't a script I'm defending!  
Rather than become somebody's scapegoat,  
Let's just figure out our own ending!

Brian Johnston

## **I Have Never Lived Yet**

I have never lived yet, there's no use pretending,  
I have never lived yet, my life close to ending,  
From the first hour of my birth, I've had a low sense of worth,  
The truest words of my song, could they have always been wrong?  
I have never lived yet, I have never lived yet.

I have never loved yet, there's no one to hold me,  
I have never loved yet, my kisses were too free,  
From the time of first dating, I saw no need for waiting,  
To escape from my home's strife, stained my soul to be a wife  
I have never loved yet, I have never loved yet.

I've never been a child, I know that for damn sure,  
I've never been a child, no past dreams of nurture,  
A huge helping of drama, and a plate full of trauma,  
Life bereft of Your blessing, THAT dear God I'm confessing,  
I've never been a child, I've never been a child.

But now I'm a poet, my passions at last free,  
But now I'm a poet, fount of my family,  
To God's blessings I came home and promise no more to roam,  
Today Lord, if I have pride, it's because You're by my side,  
Loving just the I AM, and now yours Lord I am.

Brian Johnston

## **I would be a fool...**

I would be a fool  
To love you for your hair alone,  
(Though I could) ,  
The unfurled flag of your femininity  
Stirs my blood like a patriotic song.  
Your curls are dappled clouds  
That stretch like cresting waves  
Across an inverted oceanic sky,  
Fall from the horizon of your face  
(Attempt to draw attention  
From the lovely length of neck  
But fail) , and finally break  
On a quiet beach of white shoulders.

Brian Johnston

### **If Children Count You As A Friend...**

If your smile is effervescent,  
If your time's always a present  
You love to share with others,  
Not just family or brothers,  
If your work's always your playtime  
And your politics are like mine  
(Or not) and still you call me friend  
Then just maybe you are a saint.

If you're not concerned with heaven  
('Cause you still have dough to leaven)  
Maybe you trust that God is fair  
Rejoicing that Grace is your share.  
As for needs you don't have any  
And your tithe's the widow's penny  
If children count you as a friend,  
Forget the rest! You are a saint!

Brian Johnston

## **If Not For You**

'If not for you 'Bri' I might have hated all men'  
Sobering words my 'little sis' said to me,  
But just where it happened, or even when,  
Is a window through which I can't see.

I know we were younger, probably in our teens,  
Between us there was just four years difference,  
But crowding my mind are so many scenes,  
With feelings waiting still for a dance.

If we both hated dad, well mom hated him too,  
Although as wage earners go, he was top notch,  
Problems lay more in what he didn't do,  
And mom's wrath squarely aimed at his crotch.

I think Dad always believed that Mom backed him up  
But in her reality she'd never quail,  
The right hand would show a supplicant's cup,  
While the left tied tin cans to his tail.

It's sad that women's share often goes unstated,  
Men rigidly plan how chores are divided.  
Sure that traditional roles are fated  
And sleeping volcanos subsided.

But such traditions in our home were not honored  
Our mom's eruptions bursting forth from her core,  
Trophy children's dreams were all but interred  
As their parents dreams had been before.

As a young man, my dad dreamed of seeing the world,  
And my mother dreamed of success with her art,  
But war and family these dreams unfurled ,  
Both their fantasies shaken apart.

Their strong differences made their children's affections,  
A battleground that the two would fight over,  
Mealtimes always a time for corrections,  
Food versus rules, all seeking cover.

The affection dad sought was obedient fear,  
While mom seemed to relish her children's terror,  
The upside for her, it brought children near,  
And no one could charge her with error.

I think my dad was confusing fear with respect,  
My mom left looking for scraps at the table,  
And all of us really stuck in neglect,  
Giving love? Well, no one was able.

Of course love was given, of course love was taken,  
This poem, a photograph of a moment,

Pain, tears and fear stirred well and then shaken,  
Of all families, a component.

My parents marriage lasted almost sixty years,  
As children left they finally made amends,  
As her art flourished Mom gave up her tears,  
Dad at last got to travel with friends.

My sister and I throughout time have grown close.  
Perhaps closer in fact than we've ever been,  
To say that she's loved, would that be verbose?  
Thanks sis, you helped me to trust women!

Brian Johnston

## **I'm So Blessed!**

Oh my sweetie is a cutie,  
All she needs do is shake her bootie,  
But what makes me want to hoo-tee,  
Is when she's a dancing nudie.

Oh, she always is in fashion,  
A rockette when she has her boots on,  
But what really wakes my passion,  
Is when her lower parts are flashin.'

When she is near the world's on mute,  
To say that she's loved would be astute,  
No law degree from institute,  
Required to know her case is moot.

No court on earth could ascribe blame,  
Ever cast dispersion on her name,  
A joke, the finger bone of shame...  
Our three year old just enjoys her fame.

Brian Johnston

## **I'm standing behind you...**

I'm standing behind you.  
Lips next to your ear,  
My breath softly saying  
All you long to hear.

I'm standing behind you,  
You're locked in my arms,  
The world is so peaceful,  
No chance of alarms.

I'm standing behind you,  
Your lips turn to mine,  
Your eyes full of promise,  
Your kiss so divine,

I'm standing behind you,  
I'm here if you fall,  
No fault in your weakness,  
For you are my wall.

I'm standing behind you,  
Where else could I go?  
Our future together,  
Is all I would know.

Brian Johnston

## Images

Imagine you and I are free to be  
And chose to be together,  
Embracing life's tumultuous show  
Enchanted with the chance to grow.

Imagine redwoods follow our path,  
Water beckons close at hand,  
Our climb lightened by mountain air,  
Our joy complete in being there.

Imagine concerts at twilight,  
The shadow play of hands,  
The touching gift of melody  
I give to you and you to me.

Imagine a breeze teasing your hair,  
The smell of fresh cut grass,  
Our child pressed tight against your thigh,  
I push the whirring mower by.

Imagine love like summer rain,  
Supportive and yet free,  
If you love me and I love you  
Might all these images come true.

Brian Johnston

## Imagine!

What if a dream should actually come true?  
Can you imagine how that really might feel?  
One day you are laying down flat on your face,  
The next day you are dancing a 'Scottish reel.'

'Good accidents' can befall the unlucky,  
And 'bad luck' can sometimes cripple the chosen,  
A tropic typhoon can ruin a vacation,  
An arctic heat wave can thaw out the frozen.

You should know dreams are not just about venting,  
Not just part of a 'Walter Mitty' life style,  
Your dreams can be precursors to real action,  
The kind that just might make your own life worthwhile.

It is not enough just to want what you want,  
At the very least one more step you will find,  
To visualize first how your life would be changed,  
This act alone might just bring peace to your mind.

To visualize something is in fact to dream,  
The difference is just that you're conscious,  
All the action still taking place in your brain,  
All the chemistry is in your subconscious.

We're all glad God leaves some prayers unanswered,  
Well it turns out that not all dreams are equal,  
Before you say dreams are a waste of your time,  
Think! Any dream can give birth to a sequel.

I hear some of you saying you don't get it,  
And you think that fate is not an elective,  
But don't throw your baby out with 'bath water.'  
Please just reflect on the powr' of perspective.

Brian Johnston

## **Impossibly High Standards**

Just to be present is a blessed event,  
Arguments about form are just chatter,  
The hour it arrives always filled with portent,  
No competing high purpose will matter.

For writing a poem's like creating life,  
An honor to just assist in its birth,  
To battle with muse, fight with clarity's knife,  
What could there be more important on earth?

The paper we write on is like Holy Ground,  
Our ink honors life, its fragrance like myrrh,  
To grind mental gears is a world shaking sound,  
Images form, suggest God's passing blur.

As rainbows crown rain that brings life to the plain,  
So does new poetry honor its source,  
Heals the soul, mends the heart, abolishes pain,  
Moves emotion along God's refined course.

Brian Johnston

## **In My Opinion...**

Even after we have really touched love,  
Even after we've felt its embrace,  
Even after we have truly known faith,  
Felt disbelief disappear from space...

Certainty is certainly a fool's game,  
True faith could just mean we're not lazy,  
Questions are the very air the soul breathes,  
Joy and pain are what make feelings feel...  
If our longing for God makes us crazy  
Could God's longing for us be to blame?

Brian Johnston

## **In Praise Of A Roller Coaster Ride (Revised)**

Version 1:

Some writhe in fear before a roller coaster ride,  
You would think they just wouldn't get on it.  
I think I've felt worse just standing by a girl's side  
Let's forget throwing brains at a sonnet.

Shakespeare was no dummy and to match him is tough,  
Much worse with butterflies in your tummy.  
I have just tried it once and I found it quite rough,  
Made me wish that I still had a mummy!

On roller coasters there's simply no place to go,  
You are forced onto a singular track,  
Your whole body winds up being part of the show  
And no free will could be its only lack.

Every trough that you enter decimates your view  
And the peaks really shake up your guts,  
But once you get started well just what can you do?  
Makes me fond of being stuck in deep ruts.

When you embrace the full range of your emotion,  
Some say is a sign of maturity,  
Both the size and the true depth of that ocean,  
Testify to a spirit that is free.

Let us suppose you think you know what is coming,  
Still my friend there's really no place to hide,  
The satanic banjo of fate is still strumming,  
Each time that you take this heart-stopping ride.

Riding rails has a cost, and your lunch might get tossed,  
But your emotions will never be staid.  
If your ticket is punched, why fret over the cost,  
That's surely the way this life should be played.

-----  
Version 2:

Some  
People  
Writhe in fear  
Before their very first  
Really scary roller coaster ride,  
You would think that they just wouldn't get on it.  
I think I've felt worse standing by a girl's side  
Let's forget throwing brains at the  
Form of a sonnet.  
Shakespeare, too,  
Was no dummy and

To match him is tough, and even worse  
With butterflies in your tummy.  
I have just tried it  
Once and I found it quite rough,  
It made me wish I still had a mummy!

Estate Lawyer's Note: At this point the poet apparently went into catatonic shock at the forced desecration of his almost perfect verse to match a roller coaster's perverse discipline. He is still showing occasional glimpses of what could be sanity but the outcome is uncertain and we ask for prayer. (There's still hope.) Version 1 of this poem was finally recovered by using the remains of his estate to pay poor school children to laboriously piece together the contents of his paper shredder over the space of a few years.

On roller coasters there's simply no place to go,  
You are forced onto a singular track,  
Your whole body winds up being part of the show  
And no free will could be its only lack

Every trough that you enter decimates your view  
And the peaks really shake up your guts,  
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Riding rails has a cost, and your lunch might get tossed,  
But your emotions will never be staid.  
If your ticket is punched, why fret over the cost,  
That's surely the way this life should be played.

Brian Johnston

## **In Spite of Your Silence**

In spite of your silence I still feel you love me  
Though it's true silent days are not many,  
I imagine your soul doing battle with poem  
And that soon your heart's message will fly free.

In spite of your silence I still feel you caring  
And the cost of my doubts just a penny,  
That's not much dear, just know that wherever you roam  
My love's robe for you always I'm wearing.

Will these expressions of our love ever approach  
The love poems of Barrett and Browning?  
The truth of love never fails to tickle God's ear  
Though our fantasies prove a pumpkin's coach.

The sign that will calm you I swear only God knows.  
I just wish I could see if He's frowning  
Though you still could reach out to me through your fear?  
Until then I can only offer this rose....

Brian Johnston

Brian Johnston

## **Invitation**

Do not wait for rain  
To hide your tears  
Like a statue standing  
Alone in a park,

Or evening's shadow  
To mourn the love  
That chose to flee the warmth  
Of your open hand.

Do not be ashamed  
To let men find  
The swelling sea within  
Now overflowing.

Brian Johnston

## **Just The Truth**

Your words are raw,  
Mine more designed,  
Your poems are passionate,  
Mine more refined.

Your heart is everything,  
My heart is cool,  
You are God's favorite,  
I am His fool.

Brian Johnston

## **Just Who Is He (And How Can He Save You) ?**

(The Poet responds in fear to a fearful plea for love. Is love ever easy?)

Just who is this man that your heart's looking for?  
I know I am longing for some clarity,  
In spite of connections, you always want more,  
The dream is fading he could ever be me.

And how's he to find you when bridges you burn,  
Hiding your warmth, with a candle, in a cave.  
You've chosen the dark (that now blocks his return) ,  
Is it a companion you seek or a knave?

What path should he look for, the one with wax dripping?  
Would it cheapen the game to offer a clue?  
Sad to say but I feel confidence slipping  
The desperate words of your poem are true!

Still I can't ignore the panic you speak of  
Though, I say, frankly its source mystifies me,  
In times not long past I proffered Noah's dove  
When the ark of your life was missing at sea.

You suggest that we substitute knight for night  
In the hope that this just might end your pain,  
But I'm doubting this lack's the source of your plight,  
Could the cost of saving you all be in vain?

Are your poems to us simply contrivance  
To see other's hearts just for you disarrayed,  
Keeping your heart to yourself wrapped in silence,  
While the world falls apart, in failure, dismayed?

What are the dangers you say that he's facing  
Or private pain not to be paid for your art?  
For it could be his real life you're erasing  
And for what, just the vagaries of your heart?

He's down on his knees, he's covered with bruises  
Look, he seeks you where nobody else would dare!  
In his heart, it's you, no room there for ruses,  
And when he finds you, could it be you can't care?

Brian Johnston

## **Killing Cicada Killers**

There are things in my life of which I'm not proud  
But my letting friends down tops the list,  
I guess I could let my mind walk in a cloud  
But the friends that I've lost are still missed.

Friendship can be offered to so many things,  
There are 'Friends' of the Earth, Air and Sea,  
But the friendship I now am remembering  
Was unique, just Cicadas and me.

When our friendship began I really was young,  
My back yard's huge elm was their home tree,  
My heart penetrated by song that they'd sung,  
Like lights their voices hung palpably.

New eggs would hatch, their larva drop from a leaf,  
Nest between bricks of Mom's patio,  
For three years drink sap really causing no grief,  
Survive our summer's heat, winter's snow.

Then in the third year adult nymphs would appear,  
Begin climbing whatever they could,  
Propelled up like they knew that heaven was near,  
Split their backs to find true adulthood.

This is where little sis and I would come in,  
We had a whole bag full of tricks,  
The nymphs that we couldn't drown out of their holes  
We would simply fish out with small sticks.

The next step, transporting our catch to the house,  
Just to watch their backs split was so keen!  
We had no TV, and 'quiet as a mouse,'  
We would wait for the show on our screen.

As the adults emerged, their wings would unfurl,  
Gradually harden, taking their shape,  
The very next morn, to the sky they would hurl,  
Buzz our hands with their wings, then escape.

This is the moment my poem must turn dark,  
Cicada killers come to the scene.  
I know that to knock this poem out of the park,  
I must hit you with truth that's quite mean.

We all know the harsh sound that cicadas make,  
Their most sweet serenade for a mate,  
But there's a second sound no one can mistake,  
When cicada and killer conflate.

It screams! Yes it screams! There's just no other word!  
How it is screams all the way to the ground!

Such a cry that your soul inside you is stirred,  
Even now my eyes tear at this sound.

The boy that is me, oh my God! He's angry!  
Watch him search for a stick or a stone,  
The fatal wasp's death his avenging decree,  
Nor can he bear to hear his friend's moan.

The wasp's sting won't kill, just paralyses prey,  
Which is dragged to its underground hive,  
She bestows on her victim a one egg array,  
Which on hatching eats its host alive.

So wasp and friend are now both dead at my hand,  
Though my friend could have come out much worse.  
The wasp might complain I usurped God's command...  
I still wish her more pain than a hearse.

So now that the man is no longer a boy,  
What can we say about him that's true?  
Let's suppose that he knows you're his greatest joy,  
Do you think that he'd kill to save you?

Brian Johnston

## **Lass**

Lass,  
Unblemished by submission,  
Familiar beyond Miss,  
Unshadowed your smile,  
Your modesty of kiss,  
Love's early morning –  
Yet to come the sun-clear day.

Brian Johnston

## Like a Farmer

Like a farmer whose furrowed fields lie pregnant  
yet parched in the sun,  
I search the line that marries earth to sky  
for the faintest slip of white,  
A sign that moisture gathering in those depths  
might offer more than shade.

Men and equipment are still now - all the forces  
that I command.  
Days filled with promise rise and fall like  
children missing their turn,  
While the gesture that could free them lies camouflaged  
in the crazing of the earth.

Mindful that shapes deceive and breezes die, still I grow,  
no longer just a watcher of clouds.  
I sing a primitive song of desire to the power that  
governs her gathering,  
And open my arms to embrace an answered prayer,  
the moisture of her breath.

Brian Johnston

## **Limericks Of Infamy #1**

There was a lost soul, a truly 'Sad Sack, '  
Tried to compensate for genetic lack,  
Dissed poets more famous  
Embracing infamous,  
Dished out low scores as his kind of 'smack.'

Brian Johnston

## **Limericks Of Infamy #2**

There are bullies (who enjoy other's sighs)  
Who on PH site their dark ways disguise  
Voting multiple times  
Just to trash other's rhymes  
It seems like all they are full of is lies.

Brian Johnston

### **Limericks Of Infamy #3**

So PH members, just what would you do  
If your poems were the ones he marked through  
Almost all know his name  
But there's no sense of shame  
And his soul's mantra it seems is F\*\*\* YOU!

Brian Johnston

## **Looking I Desire**

A girl at peace  
Not fashion's face  
Or passion's fire.

A girl who scorns to ask  
Beyond what she can give  
Who lives her life the way  
She wants others to live.

Looking – do I dare  
To trust such dreams  
Or think that heart  
So pure could care.

Brian Johnston

## **Love Does Not Require**

... rain softened air perfumed with pine,  
... a mountain stream's rocky incline,  
... a path untried,  
... truth be denied,  
Love does not require you here with me.

... a gentle touch in morning light,  
... impassioned talk into the night,  
... a fond embrace,  
... a fall from grace,  
Love does not require our alibis.

No need for smiles followed by sighs,  
No need to reconcile the whys,  
No need to change,  
Or rearrange,  
Love accepts us how and where we are.

For love requires just this as rent,  
That there may be no requirement.  
Love's quiet flow  
Proceeds just so -  
Love accepts each of our destinies.

Brian Johnston

## Love On Its Own

Love on its own is still love I declare,  
It doesn't matter what poets may say.  
A rose is not in touch with emotion,  
And plants draw their life from other's decay.

Love on its own doesn't cry this I swear,  
And lilies bend just when water's lacking  
If love causes grief don't cry an ocean  
These new depths might just lead to more fracking.

Philosophy may be no match for pain  
But I think there's no cause for surrender  
You think it does any better with joy?  
Maybe we should just go on a bender?

What may I ask is it you hope to gain  
When your senses around you are reeling?  
Could it be your request's a childhood toy?  
Your adult sees no profit in feeling.

Love on its own never hears its own moan  
Its beloved one's cry never shirking,  
No pause if weather be foul or fair,  
Its empathic power always working.

Love on its own brings to peace every groan  
And it brings every heart its own answer  
And just when you're sure there's no one to care  
Always love is its own tiny dancer.

Brian Johnston

### **Mildly Amusing Limerick #1**

There's no way to leave you and be me,  
No where else I am longing to be,  
The music that's playing  
Is all about swaying  
And there's no cause for fear I can see.

Brian Johnston

## **Mildly Amusing Limerick #2**

A temptress whose first name was Ella,  
Had her best snares set out for a fella,  
He saw through her ruses  
And not fond of bruises  
Simply said, 'You're not my Cinderella! '

Brian Johnston

### **Mildly Amusing Limerick #3**

There once was a cute chick named Nora,  
Who preferred to dress up in angora,  
But her boyfriend got sick,  
To her clothes allergic,  
Now she won't wear a thing but her aura.

Brian Johnston

### **Mildly Amusing Limerick #4**

A beauteous Miss felt attraction,  
And she loved her man Kane to distraction,  
When friends questioned her love,  
Well she gave them a dove,  
Warned, "You all best stay clear of my action!"

Brian Johnston

## **More Tough Choices**

I welcome the night as I welcome the day  
One more pleasurable chance for decision.  
Do I love you, 'Yes! ' Do you love me, 'Indeed, '  
Not the slightest chance of division.

When my head hits the pillow, fairy dust falls,  
And like Hansel and Gretel, there's protection  
By angels that all of our weakness surround,  
And our bed's a seamless cloud of affection.

So fret not sweet poet and sleep well dear one,  
You'll find a good rest is not unlike dying;  
If day breaks in heaven or soft in my arms  
With such love there is no time for crying.

Brian Johnston

## **My Dream**

I seek not to possess,  
But only to belong,  
My dream is not to sing  
But only write the song.

I know that just my looks  
And charm are not enough  
To get me through the days  
When seas are more than rough.

It's such a thrill when words  
Burst forth as if possessed,  
It gives me hope that I  
Someday will find my rest,

A message sweet and clear  
That no one can make wrong,  
And celebrate the day  
When I become my song.

Brian Johnston

### **Note to a floundering flounder....**

While you are floundering there on the beach  
A whole ocean lies just out of your reach.  
What could have brought you into this sad state?  
Are there not tide pools still in your purview?

Eyes that migrated till on the same side,  
You have to lie flat in order to hide,  
And thus camouflaged still view surroundings,  
Evolution's quite strange way to be kind.

Were you not gifted with intelligence,  
Or is your plight simply self-indulgence  
Of a kind that's hell-bent on your ruin?  
Why search for your answers on desert sand?

Depression, friend, may be deep, dark, and cool,  
But its temptations can't very long fool  
You into thinking you don't need to breathe.  
Out of water, the air can't give you air.

Is there no one who's in love with your rhyme,  
None who appreciates your gift of time,  
No gifting from Heaven, just tears from Hell?  
You just need rest, you're far from rock bottom.

Brian Johnston

## Now That You've Gone

Oh the air is not so sweet today,  
Nor, I fear, will it be tomorrow,  
For disgruntled love has left the fray  
Of tortured wills that brought both sorrow.

Are yesterdays now just memories,  
(Though some still may lie sweet on the tongue) ?  
Times' mists flood our love like tsunamis, '  
Burying fields that were green and young.

And just where is it that we've run to,  
All our doubts, fears, and loss to allay?  
Is there sunlight, warmth, and a great view?  
Do we cower in caves of dismay?

Being alone is always a choice,  
The choice to love should be as easy!  
Both suffer times when we lose our voice,  
We sweat when our garden's not breezy.

If your leaving me was just a dream  
Then I'm sure I'd know just what to do  
I'd full rig my sails till just abeam  
Then latch down all my gunnels to you.

The ships we've sailed have known different seas  
And full different arms manned the tiller,  
Compass our guide, we go where we please,  
Our lives are our own, not just filler.

Now, by my hide, we've much to decide  
If sun finds us still hitched tomorrow,  
We're both crusty, not here for a ride,  
What's lacking we'll certainly 'borrow.'

But say I borrow you and you me,  
And betwixt us no party owning,  
Could it be we might both then feel free....?  
Blow me down! Her vows she's intoning!

Brian Johnston

## Ode to a Feather

Is the pen not mightier than the sword?  
Are your words not still thunder and lightning?  
Are they not springs that others have only to sip from  
To see their own immortality in black and white  
Or in tasting your cup, die in ecstatic communion  
Knowing that they have served God in loving you  
And in this sweetest of deaths, awake to God's Presence?  
Like the thief on the cross who in acknowledging Christ  
Was told, 'This day you shall be with me in paradise! '  
How can you not know this about yourself?

You certainly have a following....  
To reverse the usual sexual metaphor,  
Just where is the ink well  
You could not dip your quill into  
And is not the quill (the base of a feather)  
In fact the doppelganger of the same instrument  
That starts wars, beheads kings,  
Draws national boundaries, and dissolves fortunes?  
Do you intend to put us off our guard  
By comparing yourself to a helpless feather  
Enslaved to the vagaries of an unpredictable breeze?

Wow, the tabloids are having a field day!  
Why would you have yourself brought up on charges?  
How is it possible love can be a capital offense?  
Really, dear poet, what were you thinking?  
Please plead temporary insanity  
Or depression that overwhelmed you,  
Blame it on your parents,  
Say that someone put acid in your Dr. Pepper,  
Then throw yourself onto the mercy of the court.  
You know there will not be a dry eye anywhere...

The only love in danger of disappearing is self-love,  
Self-love that is, in fact, blessed by God and not fake.  
Your only real salvation is to realize that you are loved,  
Your only chance for happiness is to give up being a victim.  
If you get that loving another (and being loved)  
Are choices that only you have power over,  
Please let this sink in, being a victim is also a choice,  
And, dear poet, it is a choice that no friend wants you to make.  
It is not now and can not be, a spell others cast upon you  
However sad that might sound in a poem.  
You do not need to win our sympathy, WE ARE YOU!  
The only love anyone can lose, is love that they reject,  
And even then, though they are blind to it,  
It is there (and theirs) , eternally theirs, forever .....

Choose for that reason alone to live your days in joy  
And in the face of the unknown, always choose life.

Brian Johnston

## Ode To An Unfinished Poem

I guess I don't know when a poem is done,  
There's no bell that goes off, no starter's gun  
Which signals to me a new poem's begun.

Although it may feel like a poem I've left,  
I'm still never sure, maybe in a dark cleft  
Of my soul, a neglected thought cries, bereft.

My poem, my child, to it I've a duty,  
To not chose just one because it's a cutie,  
Or elevate one whose airs are too snooty.

A poem once true, it still had the right stuff,  
To me it had value in times that were tough,  
It is part of my past and that is enough.

A poem still true, well there's a small matter  
Of pride to attend to, forget the chatter,  
It's just part of my mind's endless clatter.

A poem once written is life I have saved,  
And saving it, Your path to others I've paved  
That might have just died by darkness enslaved.

Lord understand, I don't always feel stronger,  
Live in fear, Your words won't come any longer.  
This body of mine, it's not any younger.

Imperfect, I know that I'm daily sinning  
But perfection is not Your take on winning,  
Please forgive me thru this drama I'm spinning,

My perfection lies in readers You send me  
My strength is revealed in weakness that all see  
At last, in Your service, my soul truly free.

Brian Johnston

## **Oh Where Is Her Heart?**

Father! Where is her heart?  
She was gifted with one!  
(Though I see it shining  
As bright as the sun!)

God! She's missing her heart!  
She's the suffering one.  
What curse clouds her vision  
Of You and Your Son?

Oh Jesus! I'm begging!  
Please I don't ask for much!  
Just the warmth of Your Heart  
And your healing touch.

Oh Christ! I beseech you!  
It is not just for me.  
This favor I'm asking,  
Could set her soul free.

Holy Spirit! I sigh!  
How could this be Your Plan?  
God's purpose commands you  
To always serve man.

Oh Spirit! We need you!  
Come to us in this hour.  
Surpass understanding,  
Serve all with God's Powr.'

Brian Johnston

## One Man's Miracle

(The Man Who Proved That God Is Real)

You told me you just want to know God exists,  
Oh dear heart, I promise it's true,  
I just worry the person who proved it to me,  
Might not be sufficient for you.

I was young and that alone might give you pause,  
Perhaps six, or seven, or eight,  
But I had not professed my faith, that much I know,  
My elders believed I should wait.

My miracle started quite innocently.  
At Christmas, a party was held.  
There were three different age groups I seem to recall  
And riotous outbursts were quelled.

From the 'five and dime' we all brought back our gifts  
That cost us a dollar or so.  
The day of the party was quite bitterly cold;  
The ground it was covered with snow.

A boy that I liked, one year older than me,  
(Who really had paid me no heed) ,  
Was going to be there. I bought his present with care  
(Anonymous gifts were decreed.)

I guess that I hoped God might alter the rules,  
Let Ronnie suss which gift was mine,  
Just how God would accomplish this I didn't know  
But for this I surely did pine.

But when we were told to line up for our gifts  
'Keep quiet!' I knew all was lost  
For our bad luck had placed us halfway from the tree:  
My dreams were about to be tossed.

I just had to tell Ronnie which gift to choose  
But doing so cost a dear price  
For we both were exiled to the end of the line  
Friend gone on the roll of a dice.

I made sure, you see, to save last place for me,  
So sad that my friend shared my bad.  
Can you believe bad luck didn't end with my dream  
(Though Ronnie the last present had) ?

Devastation was surely etched on my face,  
Crying I ran out of that hall  
Has mankind ever known such disgrace as I felt  
(Wanting only to make myself small) ?

The church basement was nearly dark as I ran  
Into classrooms filled with small chairs,  
And finally found one that looked safe, I could hide,  
Behind boxes they used for repairs.

The basement had many rooms used for classes  
But none of them joined to a hall  
Doors connected each to each and so to pass through  
You simply must pass through them all.

The door opened wide, and not used to the gloom  
He suddenly tripped on a chair.  
I stifled a sob, God did his job, and the Man asked  
(Still not seeing) , 'Somebody there? '

He turned on the light and getting a fright, said  
'Why Brian, my boy, are you here? '  
In that place, on the floor, I made confession to him  
In his embrace, shed many a tear.

Without a word he placed my small hand in his,  
Led me gently up a small stairs,  
A turn, more stairs, his office I knew lay beyond,  
In terror I prayed then all prayers.

I thought the he was going to whip me you see,  
My punishment not yet complete,  
Instead at the half landing he opened the door,  
Our steps leaving tracks in the sleet.

The parsonage those days was next to the church  
A large garage lay right behind.  
And God when I saw that we were headed for it  
Again terror rose in my mind.

But when we reached it he opened the big doors  
And told me 'Get into the car.'  
It started, we backed out, and smiling he added,  
'Don't worry. We aren't going far.'

A drugstore was open and we went inside  
The gift that he gave me reveals  
(Even though he, my pastor, was only a man)  
How meeting God face to face feels.

In Honor Of  
Rev. L. O. McCracken, Woodward, OK, First Baptist Church

Brian Johnston

## Open Letter #A: To all PoemHunter poets.

(A collaborative discussion of Poem Hunter, Poetry Writing, and Intention by Brian Johnston and Dr. Tapan Kumar Pradhan)

Letter 1:

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From: Brian Johnston  
To: Dr Tapan Kumar Pradhan  
Date-Time: 1/27/2014 1: 06: 00 PM (GMT -6: 00)  
Subject: Re: Re: Part 2 of viewing 'popularity listings'

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There is an old English saying 'There are statistics' (meaning those you agree with) 'and damn statistics' (meaning those that you dislike) ! 'Popularity' in the PH vernacular is not tied in any way to the quality or even to the 'ratings' that others give us, it simply means that out of all the poets on the site there are more visitors on your site per day from different computers (the assumption is that this means different people) than for any other poet on average. So I think it is a compliment of a sort, but certainly not an assurance that either of us is going to win a Nobel Prize. Ha! And yes the number of points you receive changes daily so statistics alone almost guarantee that someday your visitors will drop and someone else's will surge and on that day you will of course not be the 'Most Popular Poet in the World' meaning only in reality the most popular poet on the PH web site. Although it is certainly not a gold standard for quality, I do not think it is meaningless however.

I am petitioning PH to improve their rating system in a way that uses a distribution graph of the number of votes for a poem vs the ratings the poem gets. In this way people who actively dislike a poem could do so in a democratic and anonymous way without effecting the fact that many people like the poem and rate it highly. The full range of reader approval could be expressed in this way. As a programmer with many years of experience I believe it would be fairly easy for PH to implement my idea on their site. I think it would make the rating system a valuable resource to both member poets and to visitors as well.

Yes I agree, to have a single person genuinely moved by one of my poems (even if it is a high school girl with an absurd crush) is much more meaningful to me than 5 anonymous 10's on PoemHunter. I have only gotten one 'my most favorite poem award' so far but I have to admit that did feel special.

Anyhow I get that you are a good person, and a good poet. I think it likely that over time we will become good friends. At least I know I am open to that.

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Letter 2.

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From:  
Dr Tapan Kumar Pradhan (Bhubaneswar India; Male; 42)  
To: Brian Johnston  
Date Time: 2/8/2014 8: 10: 00 AM (GMT -6: 00)  
Subject: Re: Understanding the meaning of 'popularity listings'  
Dear Brian

(Of course in our culture it is very awkward to address someone quite elder to you by the first name. Even if my own brother is elder to me by a few minutes, I cannot or won't call him by first name! ! ....but each culture has its own style, and although you are an honourable 71, you can be just Brian for me.)

For a few days I watched this Popularity List and saw how the numbers go up and down. It is really addictive. I watched it again and again, although I know it is quite a meaningless list of quite very ordinary poets. Being in that list does not bring any distinction or happiness to you. And so I stopped watching it.

I read about 10-12 of your poems. They are good and well-written - but they are not very great either. What I like about your poetry is (1) Sincerity (2) Hard work (3) Neatness of composition and (4) Respect and awareness to various poetic traditions - in that order.

But the poems do not do justice to your talent level and hard work. I feel, with your capability and dedication, you can compose poems which are even 10 times better than what you have achieved till now! !

Having analysed a few of your poems, this is what I observe: -

There is a time lag between the time the idea of a poem first enters the mind and the time it comes out as a final product - like (1) Observation / feeling about something (2) Idea taking root in the unconscious (3) Inter-play between that unconscious idea and your day to day mental inputs from other observations (4) Decision to convert your ideas into a poem (5) Ideas further getting root in the sub-conscious (6) First draft of the poem through conscious effort (7) Revision of the poem by drawing resources from the sub-conscious etc & etc...until the product comes out.

What I feel that, your poetry is mostly driven by your conscious effort. You can draw more strength and unlimited resources by relying more on your sub-conscious.

This can be done in many ways (of course you know all of this, being a veteran yourself! !)

(1) Trying to write down the poem the Moment the idea first comes - the music and rhythm will be captured. If you write much later, it will be more of a conscious effort

(2) Writing poetry just before going to bed and revising the first thing upon getting up

(3) Writing down all your thoughts (howsoever banal they may seem! !) without consciously editing them, and later forming them into creative patterns

(4) While editing poem, I feel, we should be ruthless while clearing away the dross (the verbose excess) , but the basic central idea/ rhythm/ cadence/ gut-feel etc should not be edited.

But there is no set rule for any poet. Each poet follows his/her own unchartered

territory. In God's creation there is no dearth of creativity. Billions of rhythms and formats are hidden in the universe - all waiting for Free Download! !

As for myself, I am losing the natural ease with which I was composing long ago as a child. With office workload and myriad family obligation, my mind is rather losing its natural unfettered character. I am seriously thinking of taking a year-long vacation to become a child again and to discover poetry afresh....

For me poetry is all about Freedom. I should be able to write with gay abandon. My poem should make me feel happy, before it can make others happy. I have to re-invent myself. I have to let go. I want to become a child in my heart - although my hairs are all getting white. That is why I write poetry - to attain total freedom within the space of my own consciousness....

Hope I shall be able to meet you someday in person.

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Letter 3.

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From: Brian Johnston  
To: Dr Tapan Kumar Pradhan  
Date-Time: 2/8/2014 12: 39: 00 PM (GMT -6: 00)  
Subject: Your letter does me great honor...

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It would be my pleasure to meet you too someday God willing. There are so many things I want to talk to you about. Start off slow Brian!

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'But the poems do not do justice to your talent level and hard work. I feel, with your capability and dedication, you can compose poems which are even 10 times better than what you have achieved till now! ! ' =====  
From you lips to God's ear! How I long for that kind of ability (and maturity) , not for the fame that might follow, but like in the Beatle's song, 'take a sad song and make it better! My soul's desire is to leave the world a little better than I found it, or in the words of my own poem, 'Separation', 'to bring comfort to Spring's foal and help it to survive.'

My first real success with my poetry was an 'Honorable Mention' in an Oklahoma State Poetry Contest. The judges had written on my poem (called 'Venice' if you want to check it out) 'Most Polished Poem.' Although I was taking graduate courses in poetry in the English Dept. at the time (while I working on my Master's Degree in Physics) I understood the 'coded message' even then, 'Shows potential. You work hard but you channel feelings poorly.' I had written maybe 40 poems over the course of my life at the time I discovered Poemhunter. At that time I was watching maybe 50 hours of TV a week. Since discovering Poemhunter and beginning to connect with people who share this passion, I am watching almost no TV at all. I feel like there is an opportunity to reinvent myself all over again, that I have a new lease on life and even new love.

-----

'I read about 10-12 of your poems. They are good and well-written - but they are not very great either. What I like about your poetry is (1) Sincerity (2) Hard work

(3) Neatness of composition and (4) Respect and awareness to various poetic traditions - in that order.' =====  
Your description of my poetry is really a description of my life as well. As both a farmer and a computer programmer I enjoy the feeling of steady progress toward a goal, the farmer can look at the newly plowed field (see no weeds) and know that his work was valuable, the programmer can look back on blocks of code that steadily build on each other to create a logical edifice that feels so much bigger than his own intellect, the power of logic linking it all together into an almost incomprehensible whole that seems almost to breathe (have a life of its own) . Wasn't it Michelangelo who struck his newly finished statue of 'David' or 'Moses' I think with his mallet on the knee and exclaimed 'Breathe! ' or 'Move! ' I too, with my limited talent, have felt that ecstasy of creating something bigger than myself. It truly is a feeling akin to finding oneself in the presence of God! (See 'One Man's Miracle')

Feeling uncomfortable with my own feelings has long plagued me. I was resistant to sharing either my poems or short stories for years because I felt that they revealed too much about me, that opening up more would expose me to slings and arrows of those who would do me harm, and in my experience there are many who would do so. Any hints for putting that behind me? Clearly that is a core issue for me.

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Thanks again for your amazing letter. I will comment more later. I want to give myself time to take it in even more deeply and think about my response to you so far before I risk more. Would it be a violation of trust for me to share your letter with other poet friends? I will not do so without your permission.  
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Letter 4.

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From: Dr Tapan Kumar Pradhan (Bhubaneswar India; Male; 42)  
To: Brian Johnston  
Date Time: 2/9/2014 10: 52: 00 AM (GMT -6: 00)  
Subject: Re: Your letter does me great honor...

Please share my letter with everybody. I am a public person and do not believe in a secret personal life. I do not mind even if all the love letters I wrote in my youth get openly circulated.

You have all the ingredients for creating great poetry. The only thing you are missing is Total Freedom of Spirit. That freedom nobody can give you. You have to fetch it from within! ! !

Definitely we are going to meet one day.  
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Brian Johnston

## People Jumping

Your daughter has created a barrier out of cushions from the couch  
    In the middle of your living room  
        Which she and her sleepover friend proceed  
    To jump over, entreating you to "judge" the quality of each jump.  
You and I continue a long overdue flirtation as you hand out both  
    Encouragement and mild criticism of the girls' form...  
        Without judgment, could praise ever be believed?  
    But what if both judgment and praise are careless or worse?

I am struck by how powerful a metaphor this game is for life,  
    Children imbue parents with god-like powers of discernment...  
        How formidable the role a parent's most casual words  
    Play in the development of a child's malleable mind.  
Some say Jesus is the lens through which we, as adults,  
    Are supposed to be able to visualize our creator's heart,  
        But God seems more distant as I grow older.  
    Why should I need a telescope to see God's smile?

My earthly father was so damaged that praise could never pass his lips  
    And his judgment, though it came not often,  
        Could be both violent and unjust  
    Inviting me to hate, not love him as he surely desired.  
It was as if he confused fear with respect and thought  
    The infrequency of my beatings meant he was a good parent.  
        The monster living so close only made me more careful,  
    And I soon discovered it was easy to fool him.

Dad was a good provider though (to all but himself)  
    His childhood dream of working his way around the world  
        Never reaching my ear until I had done so twice  
    On my own, without his help, ignoring "family responsibilities."  
The sword of judgment I feared never fell, for irony of irony's,  
    It seems that secretly he was proud of me  
        Or so his friends told me after his death.  
    Where was my telescope when I needed it?

Now I find myself examining the barriers I've constructed  
    That both tie us together and separate us somehow,  
        Dreaming that jumping them will catch your eye,  
    Bring a smile to your lips and your affection to my heart.  
And should I feel embarrassed at how childlike this appears?  
    Did not Jesus say that "No one can enter the kingdom of heaven  
        Unless he becomes like a little child? "  
    Well, let no one say it is not heaven that I aspire to.

Brian Johnston

## **Peter's Pumpkin Eaters**

An early victim  
    Cinderella  
    Destroyed her coach  
        Into fantasy.

Forgotten the fear  
    Of Halloween  
    Masked forever  
        By Armageddon.

Brian Johnston

## **Please Don't Make Me Think**

Tell me I'm beautiful,  
Share with me that you're blue,  
But pretend that you care.  
Dismiss lies with a wink,  
And blow off what is fair,  
But whatever you do,  
Please Dear, don't make me think!

Let those sleeping dogs lie,  
And your sleeping cats too,  
Just cover all insights,  
With black octopus' ink,  
Really, who needs the fights?  
But whatever you do,  
Please Dear, don't make me think!

Reality's too hard,  
Soften it with white lies.  
We'll soon croak anyway,  
Who cares who's in the pink  
Or whose turn it's at play.  
Doesn't matter who sighs,  
Please Dear, don't make me think!

Brian Johnston

## Poet's Mouth

I feel sure mine's a true case of 'Poet's Mouth'  
My fans certainly are precocious,  
My goodness, oh they think I'm divine  
They are all itching to be my Valentine.

I feel sure mine's a true case of 'Poet's Mouth'  
My words like rare jewels are so precious,  
My rhythms like wild bats fly so free  
Folk's hearts skip a beat when they listen to me.

I feel sure mine's a true case of 'Poet's Mouth'  
My thoughts like fresh snow truly pristine,  
My rhymes like holy water quite pure  
This confluence shining because I'm demure.

I feel sure mine's a true case of 'Poet's Mouth'  
My insights are really infectious,  
My verse filled with poetic debris,  
If I wrote free verse they could weaponize me.

I feel sure mine's a true case of 'Poet's Mouth'  
For high honor I'm certainly fit....  
How perfect if the first could be me....  
Winner of the Golden Globes (of poetry!)

Brian Johnston

## Posing for Pictures

What is the secret of your smile  
That seems so fearful to be free?  
(My culture tries so hard  
To show a cheerful face.)

Perhaps you would deny your joy  
(Sharing the Chinese belief  
That the Gods can be jealous  
Of human happiness  
Or any other way  
That we approach perfection) ?

Perhaps you want to turn  
The jealousy of friends.

Perhaps you seek to imitate  
The sultry expression  
Of a Vogue model,  
To mask some hidden flaw,  
Or is it too painful  
To fully experience  
The joy that you fear  
May not come again?

I search through all the my pictures  
For one flash of white teeth,  
One moment of unrestrained joy.  
Perhaps I ask too much,  
But of this fact I'm sure,  
My heart has seen you smile.

Brian Johnston

## **Potentials**

How clearly you appear sometimes –  
Short, tall, fat, and thin,  
Depending on my glimpse of you  
And conditions then.

I have no fairer friend than you –  
True, false, right and wrong,  
Cajoling sense capriciously,  
Fading – to grow strong.

Brian Johnston

## Promises Of Consequence

A promise mitigates so many cares  
Perhaps we should address one example  
And just trust that its truth will be ample.  
A secret shared whose recipient swears  
"This matter I'll keep under lock and key"  
And silently begs, "say you'll protect me..."  
A secret (that's not so big at the start)  
Still is a door leading straight to the heart.  
Oh, how sweet this birth of trust really is,  
Much sweeter even than any first kiss!  
The one emboldened to take the first chance  
The other empowered to receive it,  
Both dreaming of love that never will quit,  
The music just starting for their first dance.

Should a promise once made always be kept?  
Could there be any purpose that's higher?  
And what if God holds your feet to the fire  
For evil into your promise has crept  
With consequence for you and the other?  
Whether they be your sister or brother,  
Whether they be your lover or just friend,  
Is it not clear that this promise must end?  
And if the problem is only for them  
Does that make your duty more of a whim?  
What if they think that everything's dandy?  
If honoring God's purpose is your plan  
With things you can do, you do what you can  
For the best choice is not always candy.

If breaking your word means losing your love  
Could there be any action that's harder?  
To feel the other then doubting your ardor  
Is just pain raining from heaven above.  
Is there no reward for doing what's right?  
You really think evil fades with no fight?  
We know temptation pursues us it's true  
And the stuffed head he is seeking is you.  
Let me ask here just what you are after,  
Besides owning your feelings- Tears, Laughter  
If keeping your love means losing your God  
(I sure know that my stomach feels queasy)  
Well no promise was made that life's easy  
With Abraham quake, 'Could God be a fraud? '

Brian Johnston

## **Rationality Is Way Over-Rated!**

Every true poet is my muse. Their poems,  
The cannon fodder of dreams exploded,  
(Feed me a dark crow) , even if they walk  
With only one leg, or have to be carried  
In the arms of, on the back of a friend.  
Even if they have forgotten their purpose,  
And only in fleeting lucid moments,  
Remember their days as a poet,  
Who could make sunshine last forever,  
A mere smile into Christ's death on the cross,  
I swear to God I will love him/her till death.

And you, you blackguard of Hell's gate,  
This is your punishment, God's justice.  
I bite off your head and spit the bitterness out.  
I drink the warm blood of your still flapping body,  
A flagon of the sweetest wine at a wedding feast,  
My white shirt now bright red with your blood.  
In your days of merciless flight, did you ever dream  
That your death would bring such pleasure? !  
Oh let me till death bring fear to the black heart  
Who cannot distinguish me from its next victim,  
Just by knowing I await you too, like Dexter. (1)

And you, heart of every poet, dare to dream  
Of an absence of crows in blue skies  
For this is God's Grace that awaits you.  
Embrace the irrational, for the joy it brings,  
We are truly the children of God.  
In its time, what is low will be lifted up.  
God is real and His Love is your reward,  
Be your words without rhythm or rhyme,  
For your words are the words of a poet.  
And I do feel (though I am old and getting older) ,  
You have a well earned place in my heart.

Rage with Dylan 'against the dying of the light, '  
Like a child rest your head on my thigh,  
Rationality is way over-rated,  
Just open your heart to my poem and you'll see.

Brian Johnston

## Really? It's That Simple? !

It's really not that pleasant to talk about,  
In point of fact (I'm ashamed if this is true)  
I fear that what matters (at least in my life)  
Is just me, hardly ever (if ever) , you.

It's not like I want my life to be this way  
For if I'm like this, (surely others suspect?)  
'Altruism' is egotistical fraud  
And not only that, but 'redemption' and 'God, '  
That our more intelligent 'souls? ' should reject  
(Nihilism advancing into the fray.)

It seems clear to me now that Einstein is right  
And our 'reality' is just 'illusion.'  
The one eye God got right is Octopus eye,  
And true visual insight is 'pie in the sky! '  
No wonder there's so much confusion.  
What's wrong and what's right rests on the 'gift' of sight.

What if selfishness is all that our hearts know?  
What if love is just a cover for lacking?  
Our birth place so big the Bible rings hollow,  
Our lives here so small God's love's hard to swallow.  
If it looks like a duck, could it be quacking?  
Seems to me I could use a stiff cup of Joe!

Although it seems now that my picture is grim,  
On our own there is no hope of salvation.  
God or no God, the universe doesn't care,  
And it doesn't mean squat that we try to share  
Our own surplus or the wealth of our nation.  
With God all is possible, so 'rest' on Him.

Brian Johnston

## Rendezvous (With Yuliya)

It began earlier for you -  
Packing our clothes in light we could not share  
We began this journey that spans the globe by half,  
Great circles that must eventually cross,  
Bringing together two disparate arcs.

This is a journey of faith -  
Faith in the validity of friendship  
(And the hope of something more) ,  
Faith in feelings fueled by what we read  
In letters where prose stumbles in the dark  
And even poetry misses the mark.

(What vision might surprise  
if your breath should close my eyes,  
What message would you hear  
if my lips should brush your ear?)

Was I asleep when you began?  
It is likely I will sleep again before you,  
My travels ended (you are so young) -  
Still I do not envy you your flame.  
And yet, what joy to wake and find you with me,  
The warmth of your hand  
Like a stone thrown in the pond of my being.

Is it an omen that we both began at night  
And journey toward this bright day of rendezvous  
From different directions?  
For now, however, in the darkness of our flight,  
We are both held aloft by invisible wings  
(As if we rest in God's outstretched hands) .  
Let us pray that it is so!

Brian Johnston

## Separation

If only I could know  
What keeps a heart alive,  
Or plant a seed to grow  
The food to feed a soul,  
Bring comfort to Spring's foal  
And help it to survive.

If only I could touch  
What gives your cheek its flame,  
Or love without a crutch  
That time can cause to end,  
But let this not offend...  
For stillness speaks your name.

Brian Johnston

## **She Never Chose Me**

She really never chose me as a friend.  
At least not to my knowledge publicly,  
(Or any other, ' she once claimed to me) .  
Her photo album empty but for those  
Whose supplicant entreaties did impose  
Themselves upon her hospitality  
Who asked for an honored place there in.  
(She was somehow reluctant to offend)  
But faces that appeared there were just men.

Although this was an honor I declined  
I dreamt some day that I might be her love  
She wanted love too, when push came to shove  
Her verses filled with loneliness and pain  
And yet it seemed only phantoms could gain  
Access to charms which only she knew of  
And though many suitors sought her classes  
No single heart could ever claim her mind,  
She offered only runes for the masses.

Though I may not be publicly chosen  
In our verse I have fared somewhat better  
For in poetry realms I still vet her  
Sometimes echo her rhymes with my vision  
That can sometimes influence decision,  
And with softened reality whet her.  
If not stake a claim, at least touch her mind  
Truly see that her heart is not frozen,  
And find her feelings for me more than kind.

Brian Johnston

## Sketches in Pastel

I

Surely Night is dressed in the dark robes of a priest  
His touch is blessed with peace.

II

Speak softly or you'll wake her –  
Do not let her hear  
Your social voice lest she tremble  
At such blasphemy.

Walk slowly or she'll stumble -  
Build a gentle ramp  
Up to a house so filled with love  
It shelters millions.

III

Love,  
How shall I know you?  
Is love really your name  
Or just an alias for loneliness?

IV

Standing in the doorway  
The light shines through your hair,  
Could your heart show in that light  
Then I would travel there.

V

The question arises again and again –  
Should I chase after chaff  
That blows in the wind  
Or replant the grain.

VI

What kind of man was this –  
Who knew every man for a stranger  
And yet could not restrain His smile,  
Even should they despise Him more?

Brian Johnston

## **So How Has Your Day Been?**

Let me see if I can prognosticate  
The important events of your day.  
HmMMM!  
I see you lying in bed and slowly waking up,  
Then it's a quick trip to the bathroom.  
Yeah, you're brushing your teeth now.  
Looking good so far, UH OH....

Suddenly it hits you like a brick! ...  
Oh my God, I'm hopelessly in love with him!  
You rush to the refrigerator  
For the emergency Dr. Pepper  
That you have hidden  
Way down in the vegetable drawer.

You take a hit and are astounded to realize  
That your robe of solitude has gone missing?  
Suddenly you are naked in my arms  
And I am touching you, kissing you  
Everywhere the sun ever shone  
And some places it hasn't....  
Sound about right?  
Aren't you glad you are keeping those extra  
Dr. Peppers on hand these days? : -)

I am sorry but after that my heliometric axis  
Was so convoluted  
That my apogee aligned itself with Mars  
And all I remember are surges of ecstasy  
Washing over me like waves on your ocean.  
After that everything goes black.....!  
On the whole though,  
It was a very nice day, don't you think?  
I know I wouldn't mind doing it again! ?  
How about you? How's that grab you babe?

Brian Johnston

## So Many Questions!

(A both serious and fanciful encounter with God)

1. There are so many questions that I have for God,  
Oh my love, don't you feel the same way?  
While it's true that we may just have met in this poem  
You must know that I care what you say.  
Like who made the Creator and then who made Him?  
To infinity this clearly goes.  
But a 'whole universe' that 'exists on its own? '  
It's orgasmic! And that curls my toes.

It seems possible God could create this strange thing  
Which some atheists call 'the big bang, '  
Which puts God the creator at source once again  
'Self-creation' becomes boomerang.  
In the end science usually makes simple right  
And in this case that doesn't seem odd  
For it's clear that although God explains 'the big bang, '  
'The big bang' just can't explain God.

2. Now some people think that for the Church to survive  
That the Bible must 'un-airant' be  
Though that leaves many liberals gasping for air  
And I certainly mean to include me.  
Didn't Christ turn established Church square on its head  
And accuse experts of speaking trash  
Their self-aggrandizements the flailings of the dead,  
Their pronouncements the value of ash?

So where in the Bible does it claim to be true  
That each man's take on it is Gospel?  
The foolishness of this thought clearly would make the  
Deity of mere men possible.  
And Christ spoke in parables, while I am on it,  
While they may contain truth, are they true?  
Shifting sand's the ground literalists stand on,  
I don't want God's Church built there, do you?

3. I suspect overall that our God is too small  
Modeled after folks tied down with chain,  
A God that's too small is really no God at all  
And our saying we know Him just vain.  
Today's Kingdom of Grace has become one of fear  
As we try to trap God with His Word,  
Surely our doing battle with Father or Son  
Trying to save ourselves is absurd.

So what does it mean to believe in Christ Jesus?  
And how can I be cleansed in Christ's flame  
I think it is clear you should be different from Satan

And he certainly knows Jesus' name.  
In fact one could divine Satan knows Christ is real  
A fact Satan will take to his grave.  
But Satan's not willing to walk in Christ's footsteps  
And that's whom God chooses to save.

4. Surely there's nothing wrong with our questioning God  
For God commands us, 'Forbid them not, '  
'Suffer the little children to come unto me .'  
Does that sound like God's wrath is our lot?  
It is true of course, we know that God gets angry  
But His essence still always is Grace.  
It is not who you are, it is just what you do  
That can make Him get into your face.

With Karen Armstrong now alive on the scene  
It is clear that God's heart is still showing  
When she says 'Doubt is not the opposite of faith...  
Certainty is! ' A huge debt to God I am owing.  
For certainty is certainly not my standard  
And sometimes that does give me pause.  
But the Grace that I feel in God's presence  
Is what brings me to peace with His laws.

5. So now that we've managed to clear up some big stuff  
Let's tackle some things that are fuzzy  
Like Jesus would frequently call God his 'father'  
But God could not have a thing, does He?  
I'm sure that some ladies will not be too happy  
To hear that God's not one of their clan  
Remember the Bible says God's church is His bride,  
Not much room there for doubt He's a man.

Women

'But if that's really true He's not me, more like you,  
No way could that ever be called fair.  
Thanks a lot! Doesn't seem much like heaven to me  
Woman still dragged around by their hair. '

Men

'Hold on now, wait a bit: Please! let's not have a fit  
Seems like men have a right to feel blue!  
Even though we are all getting married to God  
Recall men are to be His bride too! '

6. If science and traditional faith disagree  
Then it's clear that there is something wrong  
One could ignore it but both come from God  
So take care if the science is strong.  
Intelligent scholars of Biblical truth say

Creation is six thousand years past  
But science proves this wrong over 4 billion years  
In one universally huge blast.

The Bible was written two thousand years ago  
For folks who knew little of science.  
When you speak to a child, you know he's not adult,  
And you use what we call common sense,  
Not hard to accept that the Bible is dated,  
Don't stew over it for heaven's sake.  
This isn't a sign that our God would mislead us,  
He who died for you is not a fake.

7. And now for an odd bit, just where does Science fit  
With God's gift of Grace for the many?  
'Seek, you shall find, knock and it be opened to you: '  
As good a definition as any.  
'Every good and perfect gift comes from the father.'  
I am grateful to God for His Word.  
And you devil's children who call God's gift evil,  
For repentance I offer a bird.

Our God's revelation to man is ongoing,  
With faithfulness through all the ages  
The only requirement of mankind it would seem  
Is willingness to turn the pages.  
Not just pages of Bible but pages of stars  
Which are surely God's heart written large.  
Let us follow Him to where new worlds conquer fear  
And our service to LOVE so discharge.

Brian Johnston

## That's Not Me

I am driving Dad to his appointment  
In a city more than two hours from home  
They will spend a month watching behavior,  
(We realize that he needs a savior  
Or for this testing we would never come.)

My father has shown disappointment,  
Family feels that we must take him there,  
But he's going without really squawking  
And time passes without either talking,  
Though I am sure that he knows it's not fair.

I am having to make tough decisions  
That I really wish were not mine to make  
Though my mother is truly quite fragile  
(Her power of reason remains agile)  
Dad hospitalized for my mother's sake.

My father has been suffering visions  
Which aren't in touch with the real world at all,  
But after a couple of days have past  
It is clear that his confusion won't last,  
Still our hopes for recovery are small.

I was home when his last episode struck  
Mom was up with him throughout the whole night  
'Do I know you?' he quietly asked her.  
'So lucky to have a nice lady care.'  
Even in this state his manner was bright.

That I was home when it happened just luck  
Mom exhausted by the time I woke up.  
'Why do the ceilings here go up and down?'  
My dad's puzzled face was sporting a frown.  
Horrified tears filled my mom's and my cup.

'Pay yourself first!' his best lesson for me,  
'Think of the man that you'll be tomorrow'  
'The man who's a man does work that's at hand,  
His eyes open for an unplanned demand,  
Lest the future be found filled with sorrow.'

My trips home from school had no guarantee  
That a holiday mood would be found there,  
And though the chores were all finally done  
The time we'd spend working was never fun,  
And was no treat for him either I swear.

Mom hoped that I'd be some kind of artist  
Dad dreamed that I would be an accountant.  
But I came to see their fight over me  
Was selfish because it left me not free

Respect for my dreams just a nonevent.

I have always known I'm not the smartest  
I had friends who were much better in school  
It was certainly a tough decision  
But confronting parental derision  
Proved to me at least I was not a fool.

There's always enough guilt to go around,  
There's so little in life that we get free,  
Dad aware on some level he's leaving  
Uncomfortably says (he is grieving,)  
'When bad things happen, Brian, that's not me.'

I watch his tears come and make not a sound,  
Like my dad I face life stoically,  
With my love for the man hardly showing,  
Who to my dying breath I'll be owing,  
I must reverently own 'That's not me.'

Brian Johnston

## **The Abyss of Love**

Know that the abyss of love  
Is up to your falling,  
And lovingly embraces  
The depths of your calling.

Even though your fear cries out  
As you are descending,  
The bottom that terrifies  
Will not be your ending.

The abyss of love's simply  
Fear of your own making.  
It can't be filled by prayer  
Or "tens\*" won for shaking.

Satan's power is always fear,  
God's purpose still is love,  
So share the risk, take my hand,  
Let's trust in heav'n above.

Brian Johnston

## **The Agnostic**

Speak to me with silent lips  
Lest I learn to know your voice,

Touch my hand with fleeting grace  
Lest I find I need your warmth,

Form your smile in flesh alone  
Lest I come to love your soul,

Pass me by in twilight's haze  
Lest I wake to find you gone.

Brian Johnston

## **The Ball's Always in God's Court**

So your name's not Cinderella  
And you're fine without a 'fella'  
If enlightenment you're set on  
(You've no one to blame your fret on) ,  
The Ball's always in God's Court.

Say you're just to numb to hurt more  
And religion seems a big snore,  
Friend's parties bring you no real joy,  
Your Maserati's just a toy...  
The Ball is still in God's Court.

While you're waiting for your slipper  
Your ship sails without a skipper,  
There's only one Big Rave worth spit....  
Believe me God's ToDo is it!  
The 'Ball' Really Is God's Court.

Brian Johnston

## **The Choice**

Why does loneliness seem so attractive?  
(Accepting her love as your fate)  
Is there really much warmth in her arms?

Now just maybe I'm being proactive,  
And come to the party too late,  
Still I'm dazzled, I swear, by your charms.

Safety's not the path you think it to be,  
Danger not just man's companion,  
Or simplicity always God's voice.

The real world you see is never risk free,  
Love's path not just a dark canyon,  
But love begins and ends with a choice.

Brian Johnston

## The Cure

Absolution may not come from a priest  
But confession is good for what ails you.  
Just find some good friends and tell them your sins  
And God's gift of healing truly begins,  
Don't abandon your poor soul in a pit.

Grace is not something you earn by good deeds  
(But that is no excuse to be selfish)  
God's love for you shouldn't go to your head  
For faith without works is most likely dead  
And any life without faith is just shit.

Everyone of us longs for forgiveness.  
But the joke is we have it already  
Even the most bad-ass witchdoctors know  
The blackest voodoo is only for show  
To exorcise evil you just name it.

The naming of evil strips it of its powr'  
Then it's just one more problem to deal with.  
Although playing with troubles can be fine,  
Oh look here, I could loan you some of mine...  
No, let the Devil try, maybe they'll fit!

Brian Johnston

## **The Cynic (At 21)**

I think the sonnet form is almost bare  
Of interest in this modern world so fast,  
TV commercials keep us in our chair  
And all we're taught to value doesn't last.

Our friendships are as vapid as our schemes  
And fortune jeers to think we'd ask for more,  
We throw away our honor and our dreams  
Like babies loose inside a candy store.

And now, my friend, I've come at last to see  
That love belongs to only those so weak  
That thread restrains them, never to be free,  
Mere fools who have but platitudes to speak.

Yet, though I have no virtue left to steal,  
I look at you and hope that love is real.

Brian Johnston

## **The Letter That Wasn't There**

It is difficult -  
Waiting for a letter from you,  
Going to the mailbox,  
Each day,  
Like a toddler to the shining tree  
On Christmas morning.  
The letters, cards, and colored flyers  
Are bright wrappings,  
Teasing me with their layers  
To find the hidden treasure  
(Which I imagine  
Lies already in my grasp,  
Just waiting to be found) -  
A glimpse into your soul.

I'm embarrassed at my disappointment -  
Our love seems so new to mean so much,  
And, for all my years, friendships,  
The vitality of my mind, past success,  
I suddenly feel foolish -  
As if I had attempted to take a treat  
From a jar I emptied earlier.  
Do I mistake the wonder  
Of your unfolding for love?  
Is it the child in me,  
Forced too soon into adult roles,  
That reaches out to nurture you?  
And, more than half a world apart,  
Can love find a common ground?

I shrug off my doubts like autumn leaves  
And wait for the spring of a new day,  
My mind already anticipating the postman's steps.

Brian Johnston

## **The Sandcastle**

The child played on the shore all day,  
Preferring fortress peace to boat,  
The noon-bright gulls knifed waves of air,  
Blurs in the brief expanse of moat.

One tower rose, a stubby knot,  
The grand gate, scratches on a wall,  
And no bridge spanned the moat at all,  
For sea had cleaned the beach of clay.

In half-light limped a fragment moon,  
As youthful eyes watched waves draw near,  
His stark foot left a seaward ruin,  
That sweeping crests rushed without thought.

Brian Johnston

## **The Sawdust**

The sawdust lay upon the floor  
Each speck was well defined.  
'Thanks be to trees, ' one said aloud,  
'That we are nothing more! '

But one poor speck just would not rest,  
'There was a plan! ' cried he.  
'We're not just dirt the wind blows 'round, '  
God loves us don't you see? '

So all the specks contributed  
To God's anointed specks  
Until the day the trash was burned  
And all God's specks were dead.

Brian Johnston

## **The State of Things**

My road map, imaginatiion,  
My poor passion, a horse and cart,  
All my poems are a compass,  
Black arrows pointing at your heart.

My affluence beyond measure,  
My poverty defies belief,  
All my treasure lies in heaven,  
On earth the victim of a thief.

Dreams sail on in search of beauty,  
And music's all that makes me whole,  
Chains that bind me only duty,  
My sole companion is my soul.

Sometimes thinking of the future,  
Loneliness seems to be my share,  
Snow appears on every channel,  
And yet such joy to know you're there.

Brian Johnston

## **The Way It Is!**

### Afraid To Face The World

You may be the one to help redeem my spirit  
For you seem so incredibly inspiring  
Anything I create I destroy  
Save me from destroying myself  
Oh potential Muse  
A wild vision I can't ignore  
A wild shade of cherry red  
Embrace my mind  
And I will embrace your soul  
Despair is the key to failure  
And with you I cannot fail  
And with you I cannot lose  
Let our imaginations bind together  
Let us make something magical happen  
I want to kiss you with my chain of philosophies  
Philosophies that are rational within reasoning  
For I haven't been rational lately  
I am afraid to face the world  
For why is the world so judgmental  
When one is at their lowest?  
So many times I have fallen apart  
Irrational circumstances bring major reactions  
Come to my rescue oh potential Muse  
Drive me wild  
Give me strength  
Touch me with your provocative appeal...  
Do you feel?

Do you feel a little bit of attraction between us?  
This is so wildly tragic I can't explain  
I shall die a little...  
A moment of bliss.

Beauteous Victory  
April 21,2014

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### Rationality Is Way Over-Rated!

Every true poet is my muse. Their poems,  
The cannon fodder of dreams exploded,  
(Feed me a dark crow) , even if they walk  
With only one leg, or have to be carried  
In the arms of, on the back of a friend.  
Even if they have forgotten their purpose,  
And only in fleeting lucid moments,  
Remember their days as a poet,  
Who could make sunshine last forever,  
A mere smile into Christ's death on the cross,

I swear to God I will love him/her till death.

And you, you blackguard of Hell's gate,  
This is your punishment, God's justice.  
I bite off your head and spit the bitterness out.  
I drink the warm blood of your still flapping body,  
A flagon of the sweetest wine at a wedding feast,  
My white shirt now bright red with your blood.  
In your days of merciless flight, did you ever dream  
That your death would bring such pleasure? !  
Oh let me till death bring fear to the black heart  
Who cannot distinguish me from its next victim,  
Just by knowing I await you too, like Dexter. (1)

And you, heart of every poet, dare to dream  
Of an absence of crows in blue skies  
For this is God's Grace that awaits you.  
Embrace the irrational, for the joy it brings,  
We are truly the children of God.  
In its time, what is low will be lifted up.  
God is real and His Love is your reward,  
Be your words without rhythm or rhyme,  
For your words are the words of a poet.  
And I do feel (though I am old and getting older) ,  
You have a well earned place in my heart.

Rage with Dylan 'against the dying of the light, '  
Like a child rest your head on my thigh,  
Rationality is way over-rated,  
Just open your heart to my poem and you'll see.

Brian Johnston  
April 23,2014

Brian Johnston

## Traveling To Yuliya

What a delight to realize,  
While on my way to Leningrad,  
You've given me my first 'White Night' -  
A day stretched out before my eyes,  
A night that won't exist for me,  
As "out of time" as love can be.

The clouds that stretch out without end  
Are dusty white and indistinct,  
Yet textured like a spongy fleece,  
Like water ruffled by the wind  
And frozen then, retains a view,  
Abruptly shorn of azure hue.

Much like a child the haloed sun  
Ingenuously tries to hide  
Though brightly dressed against the cold.  
Invisible but just for fun,  
From cloud to cloud he's pleased to roam  
While playing in a park near home.

With sudden shock I understand  
What must have once been truly clouds  
Are now pink fields of snow below,  
Illusion fading as new land -  
Dark sculpted, rocky slopes suffice  
To shape the glacial flows of ice.

The stagnant sun prisms its light  
Piercing a million floating shards  
And cold coagulated clumps,  
As frozen rivers end their flight  
And spend themselves, collapse, give way,  
Into the depths of Hudson Bay.

Brian Johnston

## **Under Your Blue Sea**

Blue-grey eyes always so striking,  
Like ocean spray on pounding days,  
A cooling vision beguiles me,  
Rip tides draw me into your ways.

Sand clouds swirl against your shoreline, ,  
But clear up the deeper I go,  
Shadow figures flee before me,  
Vague promises I've yet to know.

Oh! My reflection's in beauty's eyes,  
Could being there not be a dream?  
Welcoming arms that embrace me,  
All this without even a scheme?

Like the sea your love engulfs me,  
Reveals treasures no man has seen,  
Fantasy rocked without measure,  
What on earth could all of this mean?

Lunar tides count days of passion,  
Mystic rhythms come into play,  
The gift of menstrual cycles,  
'Love children' who wait for their day.

Let me breathe beneath your waters,  
Live and die under your blue sea,  
The delight of sons and daughters,  
Share with God what He meant to be!

Brian Johnston

## Venice

First lightning, then moon calm mingles  
with her lights, glistens from the fingers  
of salt water, as if jewels rested there;  
Jewels (untouched by velvet display)  
slipped upon the sea's extended hand.

Illumined in this light lie dwellings, dreams  
of a thousand years, settling down...  
fading, as if nature now  
regrets these long fragile waters  
men soil wantonly.

Yet, for a moment, the city stands defiant,  
buoyant, sky-embracing,  
willed aloft by those  
who rose with her, ah...  
from the sea, the sea.

Brian Johnston

## **Views of a Dark Canyon**

(By Youth, Beauty, and Age)

MISS YOU, BRO!

To: My bro, The heaven, God's Palace

Dear One,

All the fights  
That we had in the nights,  
Cross across my mind ...  
And now they all feel kind,  
'Cos they brought me near to you.  
'Cos they made us who we were....  
I remember,  
The thoughts we shared.  
All the dangers we dared.  
All the boats we made.  
And you understood,  
My silence unsaid....  
You were younger than me,  
But in many ways you were the elder.  
More brave, More truthful.  
More loving and More youthful...  
You were there for me,  
When I needed you ...  
But now, you are lost...  
And never to return.....  
Even in the face of death,  
You were brave.  
You died like a soldier.  
And in my mind you,  
Always live like that..  
You could have taken me,  
I would have readily come.  
But you didn't bother to ask.  
And now,  
I am stuck up here...  
I know,  
To die like you,  
We have to be brave.  
Also, I know,  
To live here without you,  
I have to be brave ...  
I don't know how I live,  
Without you by my side...  
But life is a challenge,  
Which you can meet or refuse.  
And I have decided to meet it.  
Face to face, Eye to eye.  
Heart to heart and Soul to soul...  
You are,

One in a million,  
One of a kind.  
Like an eclipse, which comes?  
Once in a year,  
You came to me,  
Once in my lifetime...  
No one can replace you,  
No one can erase you.  
You shall live in My mind,  
My heart and My soul.  
Forever and ever and ever...

From: Your Sis, People's Paradise, The Earth

Neethu Panicker  
December 15,2013

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#### Fallen Riddle

An echo that is deep  
Reaches the very core of my fears  
A rare devotion from a love so dear  
A driven, more compelling earth  
Can't find such a name  
A name I shall not reveal  
For I shall not be so vain  
To feel the presence of the mighty dead  
The sorrow is like a singing sparrow  
Trembling upon my premonition  
As trees howl in this unforgiving wind  
Tragedy, what a beautiful scene we've made  
But a loss can only take so much away  
An echo that is deep  
I know how deep it weeps  
To he who watches over me  
Let life bring what it shall bring to me.

Beauteous Victory  
February 15,2014

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#### Everyone Leaves / Everyone Grieves (Your Choice)

Have you ever noticed this trend?  
It might be a drought or a war,  
Blows quick to strike and slow to mend,  
And even if I have a friend,  
Everyone leaves / everyone grieves. (your choice)

Strangers tell me 'You seem so sad, '  
Though sometimes I may find a door.  
I know expectations are bad,  
But frequently I just feel had.  
Everyone leaves / everyone grieves. (your choice)

It might be a dog or a cat,  
Acquaintances who are rich-poor,  
Married-single, tall-short, slim-fat,  
What experience tells me is that  
Everyone leaves / everyone grieves. (your choice)

It seems so sad every man dies,  
Still some seem to dare hope for more:  
Though I raise my eyes to the skies  
The beauty around me just flies.  
Everyone leaves / everyone grieves. (your choice)

Brian Johnston  
December 21,2013

Brian Johnston

## **What A Pair!**

First 'You and I' then 'Not That It Matters'  
Your versifying leaves even unsung  
Souls shell-shocked in naught but rags and tatters  
Thieves are brought down alive from their crosses  
To join the ranks of the newly un-hung.  
A sigh resonates shaking the whole world  
As it witnesses God handling losses.

You're longing to know you'll always belong  
To me, Yes! (and the one thousand others  
Who would die to be the man in your song) .  
Not one of us ever has seen your face  
Though in loving you we become brothers,  
Are conquered, before lions we are hurled,  
Before slaughter, dream one will win the race.

Look out boys! There is  
Lightning in them there hills!

Brian Johnston

## When You're Old

When you're old, though no one heeds,  
Your mind is verdant with weeds  
And I find I must admit  
Other's problems take a hit.

When you're old, or so it seems,  
You're friends are all just crazy  
And you grudgingly conclude,  
That yep, they're also lazy.

When you're old, oh sweet Jesus,  
You have got so much to do,  
And you're shocked (how'd that happen?)  
Yet another day is through!

You know it really isn't  
That time is going faster,  
It is simply how life goes....  
Disaster, then disaster.

When you're old, this is funny,  
You can't get past your tummy,  
Oh yeah, you've got weight to lose,  
You can't even tie your shoes!

When you're old, wow is this true,  
Other drivers are scary,  
Inheritance from dear Dad  
Gone to someone named Mary?

When you're old, here comes trouble  
She's cleaned house and I'm frantic,  
The last time that this happened  
My stuff sank with Titanic!

We all know that collecting  
Well, it always has its price  
With unfortunate side effects  
Which really aren't very nice.

When you're old, save those kisses  
Who can say what day this is?  
I know they say don't worry,  
But we've flats on our surrey.

When you're old, you want to help,  
But it turns out you're weaker  
And the strength that you're needing  
Now just comes from a beaker.

When you're old, this sounds so great,  
Hey, I've got my retirement  
Perhaps you hadn't noticed but  
There's always some requirement.

Complaints come really easy,  
They cost less than a penny.  
And though this poem is done  
Bet you I'll still have many!

Brian Johnston

## Whistling In The Dark

(A Rave By A Poet)

Remember when you were a child?  
Adults seemed then to be in control,  
Almost like Gods, with special powers  
That almost always knew  
When you'd been up to mischief.  
'Playing with matches again Brian? '  
What a childish view of things! Right?  
And my punishment, how perfect that was!  
'After you've finished lighting two boxes  
Of wooden matches, one at a time,  
You can go to bed, without your supper! '  
Probably the best punishment I ever got.  
I really couldn't believe my luck  
But I was more careful after that!

Of course mom's punishment didn't stop me.  
Do you remember match guns,  
Made from 2 wooden clothespins?  
Oh, my God, what fun those were!  
A little carving with a kitchen knife  
Reversing the spring on the outside,  
And some electrical tape was all it took.  
Really made me appreciate man's genius!  
Hiding behind parked cars (a block from home)  
And shooting flaming missiles in the dark  
At unsuspecting passing cars  
And then running like Hell  
On a preplanned escape route  
When the innocent victim screeched to a stop  
Jumped out of his car to yell at long gone villains.  
Honestly, the 4th of July couldn't beat this!

Carrying out the garbage every night  
Now that was a chore made in Hell,  
Though better than the night pots  
Our forebears had to deal with.  
Wow, thank God for outhouses  
But especially modern sewage systems!  
At my house the trek to the garbage can  
Was a long hike, especially for a kid.  
We burned trash in those days,  
There was no garbage pick up,  
And the can was hidden in an alley way,  
You had to go through a gate to get to it.  
A big elm tree (that I loved in the daylight)  
Blocked even starlight and made the yard dark.  
I always was scared so I'd whistle to and back  
Praying that if a monster got me Mom would know,  
My whistle wouldn't stop without reason,  
That there was a chance at least of rescue,

I think I was too scared though to test it out,  
I needed to believe that Mom would hear.

How insensitive the child is to adult problems.  
But really how's a child to know  
The tyranny of feeding a family,  
Of trying to secure an unknown future,  
Without a crystal ball, only prayer really!  
(Though with luck, maybe some common sense.)  
Parents, really are children grown large,  
Carrying their demons in a sack on their backs,  
Taking them out on occasion to play with,  
Hoping against hope that that's all there is,  
That some special Hell doesn't await them!  
Meteor showers that exterminate all life,  
Dust bowls, global warming, ice ages,  
A new Yellowstone blast that buries our cropland,  
A Canary Island tsunami that wipes out the East Coast  
(A 2,000 foot wall of water now 50 years overdue) ,  
Magnetic storms that destroy all electronic progress  
That we've made in just the last fifty years?  
The universe may seem big  
But there's really no place to hide.

The public school system, what a joke!  
More like twelve years of day care.  
A football coach teaching physics,  
Latin the only language choice?  
(Sure opened up the world for me!)  
The most important job of our lives  
Getting married? Sex? Raising a family?  
Well our parents were screwed too,  
'Pass it on, no pass backs, joke's on you kid! '  
You want to fix the problems of the world?  
Make politicians work for no salary or benefits  
Let them shower us with their love of country,  
Eat cafeteria food every day (no wine) ,  
Random armed guards monitor their calls.  
Let's make teaching the highest paid profession  
With teacher's tenure voted on each year  
(Each kid two votes, parents one vote for both parents,  
Put power where it belongs baby.)  
Well this may not in fact be a poem,  
But it has sure been cathartic.  
Hope my venting at least struck some chords  
And was not a complete waste of your time.  
May God save us every one!

Brian Johnston

## Who's Right?

(Different Perspectives)

Rock Bottom

In pure original science  
I know the true facts  
Behold what is left of me, oh if the whole world could only see  
Dear skies are the truest blue  
In the eyes of a woman who's lost her way  
In tunnels and other dark places  
Praying to God for forgiveness  
So where does my sweet destiny lie?  
My pain and my suffering...when does it all end?  
I feel I am invisible, no longer invincible  
And if I have to fight  
Then come on with it!  
My blood runs deep  
And my feet heavy  
Midst the depths of my breathing  
I am a child of the night  
Searching, searching for the answers I've been seeking  
What, what do I do now  
In this world that is a desperate playground?  
Life on the streets is cold and rough  
My tears are my only fortune  
For they keep me warm  
Mama, mama where are you?  
Did you leave town?  
There is so much I want to say to you  
My cell phone has ran out of minutes...  
Oh please God, oh please God  
Where should I go?  
Is there really peace in heaven?  
Is there even a hell?  
For I've hit rock bottom.

Beauteous Victory  
April 13,2014

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Note to a floundering flounder....

While you are floundering there on the beach  
A whole ocean lies just out of your reach.  
What could have brought you into this sad state?  
Are there not tide pools still in your purview?

Eyes that migrated till on the same side,  
You have to lie flat in order to hide,  
And thus camouflaged still view surroundings,  
Evolution's quite strange way to be kind.

Were you not gifted with intelligence,  
Or is your plight simply self-indulgence  
Of a kind that's hell-bent on your ruin?  
Why search for your answers on desert sand?

Depression, friend, may be deep, dark, and cool,  
But its temptations can't very long fool  
You into thinking you don't need to breathe.  
Out of water, the air can't give you air.

Is there no one who's in love with your rhyme,  
None who appreciates your gift of time,  
No gifting from Heaven, just tears from Hell?  
You just need rest, you're far from rock bottom.

Brian Johnston  
April 13,2014

Brian Johnston

## Why Fireflies Dance

Pausing on a late trip to South Dakota  
I pulled off of the highway  
Somewhere in Kansas  
And shut off the lights  
Reflecting that it might be good  
To clear the windshield of bug carcasses  
That were only being smeared  
Into a thin, barely transparent paste  
By my windshield wipers at this stage.

As my eyes became used to the moonlit hollow  
Where my vehicle purred quietly  
I began to realize something was strange.  
There were stars dancing that night  
Whose light had never been  
Gathered by a telescope,  
A job, better left perhaps,  
To a wide-eyed child with a 'Ball Jar' & lid,  
Than to a scientist living behind thick lenses.

Opening the car door, revelation struck,  
Though alone in the dark, God was with me.  
The valley in which I'd parked  
Was teeming with more fireflies  
Than I had ever seen  
In the entirety of my uneventful life.  
Even in the stupor of mechanical driving  
I realized that by chance I had discovered  
What might just be the 'eighth wonder of the world.'  
The air was full of ecstasy  
And my impoverished heart simply enchanted.

The fireflies in their mating frenzy  
Made the full moon seem  
The victim of an incredible meteor shower,  
Flashes of light exploding on lunar surface  
As each projectile ended its journey,  
This illusion blurred only slightly  
By less ambitious brothers and sisters  
Whose ardor blotted out the milky way  
Stretching horizon to horizon  
As they flashed the opposite sex.

Still, all in all, it was quite a show.  
These moon striking invertebrates,  
Faux-astronauts though they were,  
(Unlike us, leaving no debris behind to litter)  
Giving up their tiny ghosts over and over,  
As if trying to prove to the butt of their joke  
That reincarnation is real...  
And that meteors too reincarnate!  
But I think they went too far, don't you?

Brian Johnston

## **Yes I Am**

Every glass of wine is now spiked with your excess,  
Every breath of air is perfumed with your sighs,  
Every night filled with eyes as I undress,  
The book of life just answers your whys.

Oh tell me please if you know where we are going,  
Oh tell me please just what seeds we are sowing,  
Oh tell me please if you know more than I,  
Who put just one bright star in my sky?

Oh tell me please why my tears will not stop flowing,  
Oh tell me please if I am only a toy,  
Oh tell me please, my fantasy's growing,  
And my heart's filled to bursting with joy.

Every image of yours deep and clear just thrills me,  
Every wave that buoys me up in your sea,  
Every sky clear except for Noah's dove,  
And you long to know if I'm your love? ? ?

Brian Johnston

## **You Know**

You know I truly love you  
    for there was love even before we met,  
    for us -  
Pursuing parallel paths  
    we knew even before words were spoken  
    In trust;  
Our meeting was the recognition of older love.

You know I truly love you  
    for I accept you as you are right now,  
    a bud -  
Whose roots (like mine)  
    seek support for the blossoming to come,  
    grounding;  
Our friendship is the recognition of fertile soil.

You know I truly love you  
    for I speak to you from my heart  
    with love -  
In spite of our fear  
    surrounded by infinite possibility,  
    we chose;  
Our first kiss was the recognition of true beauty.

You know to love me is to love yourself.

Brian Johnston

## **You Know Who You Are!**

I know that you probably know who you are...  
Abusers who prey on women (or men) .  
Your aberrance mostly extends to the weak,  
Your generosity just serves other's pain  
And, of course, their misery's your only gain.  
Do not think that you'll find me turning my cheek  
For doing so would just encourage your sin.  
I'd rather see you in a specimen jar,  
Or displayed on corkboard impaled with a pin,  
Some place where your psyche has no powr' to mar.

Some say that it's likely that you were abused,  
The sins of the parents passed on as it were,  
God forgive me, if you're not really liable,  
But your friendship's not the company I seek  
God grant you don't find fellowship with the meek  
And your progeny all be un-viable.  
It's not that I curse you, but I would deter  
Your excess on innocents already bruised,  
My prayer's not for you but for those you injure,  
God forgives but your deeds cannot be excused.

To see people like you removed from the earth  
Would most certainly fill up my cup of mirth!

Brian Johnston

## **Your Passion**

Your passion is permanently etched on my soul,  
On all flesh, branding skin north and south.  
Even after I have finished brushing my teeth  
I can relive your taste in my mouth.

Your poems play new chords on the strings of my heart,  
The mark your smile leaves? I'm still guessing!  
But the magical way you've touched me from the start  
Poetry has no way of expressing.

Though it's true that we have never met in the flesh  
And no photograph I've ever seen.  
Could it be a connection from many past lives?  
Just the thought of you makes my world green.

The best artist could never capture the beauty  
Of the truth you have let my heart see,  
Only one thing could possibly soften this blow:  
To know that in fact - you are for me.

Brian Johnston

## Yuliya's Dream (and more)

Could it be that I'm the stallion  
In the dream you shared with me?  
I imagine your legs wrapped tight around me,  
Your hand buried in my mane,  
As we rush together  
Through lush landscapes of your imagination,  
Exploring the breadth and depth of every fantasy.

He appeared and disappeared, you said,  
At your will, like the genie of Aladdin's Lamp,  
For you alone to command, you in control.

Now that you've gone home  
I find myself alone,  
Needing you to find release  
From the lamp that confines me -  
My love for you.

How sweet to be your steed  
And yet, poor horse,  
I want much more than that.

I dream of you beneath me too,  
The tender warmth of hands and thighs,  
The mystery of sacred depths  
Where spirit takes on flesh.  
I dream that you are there  
When I want you too.  
I dream you are a canyon  
I can pour myself into  
(Giving you every emotion) ,  
And that I can always count on  
An echo of faithful proportion  
(Though colored by the facets of your life) .  
I dream of another magic too,  
A magic that lies in choice,  
And of wonders that might yet be born  
If we choose each other.

Brian Johnston

## Yuliya's Father's Cottage

The ride to the country is uneventful  
Except that I feel a little like  
A man riding inside a cannon ball.  
Yuliya's father Igor drives  
I'm also up front (the honored guest)  
While Yuliya, her mom, and brother  
Fill the back of the small station wagon  
As we hurtle along roads unfamiliar to me.

There are fewer potholes than in Leningrad  
And no pedestrians to be afraid for  
Though Russian drivers seem not to care  
(As if car ownership sets one apart) .  
Spring is a lush green here as we leave  
Flatter open spaces and fields near town  
And enter a more rolling terrain  
Forested by trees planted for lumber  
With patches that are clear cut,  
Like a crowd chopped down by machine guns.

The war relics and memorials that mark our passage  
Remind us that this is a road won by Russian blood  
And not man's sweat alone.  
We leave the main road  
And the pavement narrows, then disappears.  
The car vibrates to the familiar corrugations  
Of soft dirt sculpted by rubber tires.

We cross the bumpy trestle of a train  
In a country village with a rustic platform  
That signals a return to a simpler life  
For commuters or holiday travelers.  
The pavement returns briefly  
And we stop at a small shop.  
Bread, I discover, tastes better in the country.

Soon we leave even the dirt road for a trail  
More passable to people than to cars.  
Small cottages pass on both sides,  
Some are tightly shuttered as if asleep,  
Others sport a wisp of smoke from their chimneys  
Or a colorful smile of clothing  
Hung on a string between trees.  
But one must drive slowly  
For the road is not maintained  
Except by the hands of those who live here,  
This rural community it seems  
Has no Public Works Department.

Before I'm ready, we have stopped  
And I realize we are "home."  
I like the little house at once,

It has no desire to be what it is not.  
I imagine that it is winter -  
How quickly would its rooms be warmed  
By the simple wood burning range.

In a scene from a favorite Russian film -

Yuliya and I step from the troika  
Alone like Zhivago and Laura.  
The house is piled high with snow,  
The horses' breath surrounds us like a cloud.  
The little stove lights quickly and  
Our bodies absorb its heat like a sponge.  
Content, we pour the excess on each other...  
And dream that we will be safe till Spring.

A picket fence surrounds the house,  
Adds value to the yard it shields.  
I've always liked a picket fence,  
They have unique integrity -  
A stranger always can look through  
And can, of course, also be seen.  
Still, such a fence handles the task  
Of telling others where they stand.

Igor unlocks the gate  
And as we open up the house  
He moves the car inside.  
The cottage has been newly purchased.  
Igor is happy to have found it,  
Proud that it belongs to him.  
Yuliya and her brother Sergei  
Are less excited, their friends are far away.

The building looks sound and has two heated rooms -  
A kitchen and a living / sleeping room.  
A glassed in porch affords some extra space  
Especially for our spring time trip.  
It has electric power and lights  
And yet, conveniences are few.  
The only water is an outside spigot  
(Located near the door)  
With a bench where dishes can be washed.  
Water is stored indoors in milk cans  
As water only flows during certain hours.  
A wood burning stove is the only heat  
Though a propane burner helps with the cooking.

The yard slopes down to a corner  
Where Igor has parked the car.  
This is also where the outhouse  
And a small shed for storage are located.

A lean-to in back of the house  
Holds split wood for the stove.

An orchard and a terraced yard reveal  
Another gardener has loved this place  
Though many of the plants,  
Fruit trees, and shrubs need care,  
A weeded patch of strawberries,  
New flowers, and some cultivated shrubs  
Suggest the family will be good stewards.  
In speaking of the previous owner  
Yuliya tells me in passing that  
His children do not live in Russia,  
And somehow this explains his absence.  
Still I think kindly of the man  
And hope another garden knows his touch.

We enter through the glassed-in porch  
And I feel even more at ease,  
Remembering that as a child  
My own room once had been a porch  
But there are even more windows here  
With glass on all three sides.  
Old curtain rods hang empty and  
The room is flooded bright with light  
(Although it's threatening to rain) .  
But Vera quickly starts a fire  
That takes the edge off of the day  
And puts some water on for tea.  
Simple things are important to Yuliya's mother.

The house has been vacant for awhile  
And requires some 'sprucing up.'  
We move some simple furniture outside  
And Vera and I begin to sweep.  
It brings me joy to lend a hand  
Thus freeing Yuliya for her books  
(She is studying for exams)  
But Igor seems uncomfortable with this  
(Perhaps it is that I'm a guest  
Or maybe this is woman's work) ,  
And asks me to accompany him  
So we walk to a nearby lake.

We walk for almost half a mile  
And pass quite a variety of homes.  
There are summer homes both large and nice  
And many much more basic ones  
(Though none of them appear the same) .  
It's surprising the community's so large  
For there's no real shopping close at hand  
And one must carry what one needs

From more distant towns when he comes  
(For many people live away) .

As we emerge from a ravine  
That once served as a road  
The small lake stretches out before us.  
Two men sit in their row boat fishing  
Their rods as motionless as the day is still.  
The lake bends lazily to the right  
And vanishes behind a point of trees.  
Even as we approach the lake,  
The whole scene could be a painting  
Hung on the wall of a vast museum  
(Except for the ripples of a fish  
That disappear long before they reach shore) .  
Igor and I share my camera  
Photographing each other  
With a quiet reverence for this place  
That would be no different  
If we spoke the same language.

As we return we stop at a house  
Which does not advertise itself at all  
But serves as store and meeting place.  
Its dusty shelves are nearly bare  
And what we find of little use  
But Igor meets someone he knows  
And so we visit for a spell.

The cottage floors are mopped and clean  
And fresh wildflowers decorate the table  
When we arrive, Yuliya is at her books.  
Igor sets out a cot and blanket for me  
And I lay out in the yard for a while  
Under a cold and cloudy sky  
Snug in my blanket  
Until it starts to rain.  
I dash to get the cot inside  
And Igor brings in the last few pieces  
Of furniture from the yard.  
As he brings in a primitive table  
Whose legs and braces still look  
Like the twigs they once were  
(Though the bark is gone) ,  
He says something to me in Russian  
Which I don't understand  
But his eyes joke about quality furniture  
As he sets the table down with a bang.

Vera serves us a fine lunch of boiled pork,  
Dark bread, tomatoes, cucumbers, and tea.  
We listen to the rain fall on the roof

And pour out of the gutters into  
One of two large barrels  
Put there for this purpose.  
It is a time for me to marvel,  
To marvel at where I find myself  
(How strange to feel so much at home  
So far away from all I know) ,  
To marvel at the generosity of friends.

Brian Johnston