

Poetry Series

Alison Cassidy
- poems -

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Alison Cassidy(6th August,1945)

The urge to create is universal. As a yoga teacher, I have been tapping into this universal source for more than twenty years and as an actor, since the tender age of five.

In May 2006 I wrote my first poem, inspired, I suppose, by the same spirit that has driven my yoga and creative dance classes for so many years. Experience is slowly teaching me about the technique of writing poetry and giving me the confidence to experiment with different forms, but the initial creative springboard has never changed and continues to fill me with awe.

I feel humbled when I read comments on my work and excited when I am able to offer the occasional insightful one on other people's. I am far less judgmental than when I first joined the site.

My favourite poet is still William Shakespeare and I continue to visit my beloved Jerry Hughes' words when I need a refreshing clarity of vision and absence of bullshit.

My website is

! ! ! The Dead Leaf

I saw it at first light,
suspended above the road -
brown and mottled
and slowly turning.

I fancied a puppeteer
with white gloved hand,
might be holding it
by an invisible thread.

Or perhaps a wily spider,
crouching high
on the branch above,
was using it as bait.

I blew on it gently,
as if it were a candle
and it spun -
like a sugar plum fairy.

I suppose
a careless car
will drive by later
and break the spell.

Alison Cassidy

!!! Trading On E-Bay

Rows and rows of tiny heels
teetered in pairs
on the dolls house shelves.
So she was a collector.

She was not what I expected.
Dressing gowned and ugly
(a botched face job, perhaps?)
with a small dog squirming under her arm.

The curtains were drawn.
The television flickered
in the summer heat.
She didn't turn it off.

An exercise machine
sat unwrapped by the coffee table.
'I must lose weight -
but with my bladder condition? '

I showed her the boots
worn once for my son's wedding
They were crimson – Italian suede.
'I'll take \$350 for them'.

'The photos don't do them justice.
They're gorgeous - perfect.'
Her voice trembled as she
forced a fat foot into the high arch.

'They're too bloody small!
I knew they would be.
It's this bloody weight.
Can't seem to shift it.'

Where would she wear them, I wondered -
these four inch pedestals of podalic grace?
Then I noticed the long fake nails
that sprouted from her hands.

Alison Cassidy

! ! A Graceful Octogenarian

She smiled as we passed her table -
a nod of politeness, rather than recognition.
She was lunching with her husband -
and thinly clad in the summer heat.
She must have been in her eighties,
but remarkably elegant and self-assured.

Her hair was swept up in a messy chignon,
Her voice was cultured without being posh.
She reminded me of mum -
without the cringe
and the scoliosis.
Same generous mouth.
Same kind, deep-set eyes.

After the meal
I noticed her leave the table
and return with a new coat of lipstick.
I thought how gracefully
she carried her years
and what a salutary lesson
she offered
those sad souls
for whom cosmetic surgery
seems the only option.

Alison Cassidy

! ! A Guilty Secret

Next doors' grass had greened
and the honeyed light of autumn
spread thickly over thirsty trees
not quite ready to turn.

I heard her ugly honking.
Incongruous really,
considering the feathered charm
and pert uprightness
of her maternity.

Her four new chicks
were cute and ping-pong light -
their day old voices peeping,
their yellow legs a-creeping
like ants around her.

Next day she honked again -
but alas, I was too late!
My canine scavenger
was sunning herself
guiltily on the back step -
a mouthful of feathers
palpable evidence of her crime.

Miss P honked again
and strode aggressively up the drive.
Her sole surviving chick
scuttled after her.

A few days later
I heard her honking sadly.
This time she walked alone.

Alison Cassidy

! ! A Practical Kind Of Loving

Your perfume lingers on my clothes,
like the image of your small determined face.

You watched me hug him – your husband of sixty odd years;
His thin body craving the closeness;
His eyes twinkling at the remembrance of woman's flesh;
His hand squeezing mine with relish still.

'You know I can't give him that'
you say without bitterness
'I never could.'

Dear Jeanie,
you visit him every day
and chat brightly
to his far-away eyes.
A pity his illness scares you so.
Your love was always of such a practical kind

Alison Cassidy

! ! Aging With Grace?

The temperature was pushing forty
as we limped into the swanky cafe -
air-conditioned, thank God!
The patronage was mostly middle class
and middle aged,
save for a few ancients
shuffling tentatively
behind their Easy Walkers.

The meal took ages,
and you were hot and bothered in the heat,
so I filled in the time
perusing the faces around me.
A sour sexagenarian
caught my eye.
She had the face of a bulldog
and an ample rump that overflowed her chair.
She stuffed food into her mouth
with dogged determination
and unreliable dentures.
Her shapeless frock had wilted
and her gray locks
hung limply beside long-lobed ears.

Another of a similar vintage,
teetered by the till.
At first I thought she was young.
Her shoulder-length hair
was dyed and tipped
and her scarlet three inch heels sparkled -
but as she turned toward me,
the heavy makeup and designer spectacles
failed to fully mask
a lined and leathery face
that had baked too long
under Melbourne's blistering sun.

As the waitress placed
our 'chili squid' before us,

I remarked to my grumpy companion
that these two were probably our age!
Sad, how one had given up completely,
while the other hung on so desperately
to her brightly painted youth.

Alison Cassidy

! ! Alan's Alzheimers

He stared at us sternly
from his oval frame above the table -
a rugged, handsome man
in his early fifties
with neatly clipped moustache and cowboy hat.

Later, at the nursing home,
they wheeled him toward us -
breath whistling through ancient lungs,
toothless mouth gaping,
eyes fixed inanely on the ceiling.

I used not to like him.
Dogmatic and dictatorial,
bossy and bellicose -
a man too fond of boozing
and laughing at his own jokes.

But today, when milky eyes
lit up in recognition,
and skinny hands clung-
I felt a wave of such tenderness
as I could not have imagined.

I took him in my arms
and kissed his scrappy hair,
and felt strangely at peace in his company.
Dementia had lifted the mask
to reveal the soul smiling beneath.

Alison Cassidy

! ! All Cheeks

All cheeks -
and two blue eyes
that stare
so gravely
one minute,
so merrily
the next.

All cheeks -
and a mouth
so serious,
so solemn,
that breaks
so suddenly
into a toothless grin.

All cheeks -
and skin
so plump
so soft,
that demands
to be kissed
again
and again.

All cheeks -
and hands
so small
so fine
that grasp and hold
a grandmother's face
without minding
about the wrinkles.

All cheeks -
My grandson
My joy.

! ! Dancing With Dylan

He is propped on all fours
when I arrive -
almond eyes grave,
face strangely serious.

I smile and say hello.
He doesn't respond at first
but continues to stare -
like a deer
cautious, intent.

I kneel before him
(not too close)
and show him my new red nails.
He moves a little closer

I pick him up
and press his warm, sunny body
against mine.

He doesn't resist
and for several minutes
not a sound passes between us.

Later at the tavern
he laughs, hiding his lips.
I have abandoned my new pink glasses.
He has my chin in his mouth.

I carry him to the dance floor
His laughter is infectious.
We glide across the parquetry,
Dean Martin spins on the turntable.

Alison Cassidy

! ! Dirt Under The Fingernails

I'd ignored the garden
while you were mending.
Even thought of moving
somewhere smaller...

Hardly felt the scorch
of summer's heat -
(except during the firestorm)
and Monet's autumn palette
lay unnoticed.

But as winter wrapped the house in mist
and you sat once more
in the driver's seat of your recovery,
I donned my Redbacks* and gloves,
and began on the onion-weed.

What an earthy way to scratch the creative itch!
What a perfect blend of violence and nurturing.
What a singular chance to grunt and strain,
to coax and cajole
again and again.

As time and order grow,
so I become more ruthless,
attacking fatter and fatter branches;
Till the woodpile doubles and trebles in size
and my face is flaming.

Now spring blossoms,
and I walk on new paths,
breathing change into my lungs.
The familiar star of anticipation
twinkles within me.

Today is raining
and yesterday's camellias
are settling happily into their new homes.

I wonder what tomorrow will bring.

*A brand of workboots made in Australia.

Alison Cassidy

! ! Hand-Fed

A scarlet beak
tapped at my kitchen window.
A scarlet head
stared at me through the glass.

A dog barked.
The bird didn't flinch.
It perched insouciantly -
head tilted to one side.

I opened the back door -
the bird turned its head.
I held out a handful of seed.

A pair of green wings
flashed.
A pair of soft claws
fastened companionably around my finger.

Seconds later
the mate arrived.
She landed on my shoulder
fixing me with the brightest eyes.

My beloved grabbed the camera.
No battery!
No matter.
The image is indelible.

Alison Cassidy

! ! It's The Tattered End Of Autumn

It's the tattered end of autumn,
when the beech tree's yellow dress
has rusted
and a thick carpet
of mustard
lies rotting underfoot.

It's the tattered end of autumn,
when the white bones of the birch
are exposed
and its last leaves
cling
like baby koalas.

It's the tattered end of autumn
when single leaves
dance solos
and next door's blower
disturbs
the stillness of mid afternoon.

It's the tattered end of autumn
when bed beckons
and the moon is bright,
and you and I touch toes
tenderly
under the doona.

Alison Cassidy

! ! Just Gus

The Gossips
stand proudly
on their shelf above the kitchen -
a singular reminder
of Gus McLaren -
friend, cartoonist, animator
and potter extraordinaire.

I remember
pouring Gus
into his battered Combi,
after many a Sixties party -
when the claret
came in flagons
and cigarette smoking
was still sexy.

Gus was an artist.
Everything he touched
drew the eye.
A leftie and a larrikin,
he threw pots with ease
and a precision that amazed.

Gus never stood upright.
He leaned.
He was loose-limbed and affable.
His long hair hung limply,
His head listed to one side.

Mum didn't really approve of Gus,
but she liked him, I know.
She used to boast
how Gus told her once
that David and I were
'the best brought up kids in Warrandyte'.

I think she agreed with him.

Gus loved chess.
In his cups,
he could take an hour
to make a single move.
And he usually won.

His pottery was original and quirky.
Each piece held a fragment
of his cartoonist past.

He died last year.
I heard he had dementia.
Apparently the family are still fighting
over the will.

Alison Cassidy

! ! Mother's Last Mothers Day

And on that last Mothers Day,
when the birch leaves
fluttered pale gold,
and the magpies chortled
in the garden,
and the children gathered
round the big bed
clutching the presents
(all edible)
that they knew you'd share,

You looked into their eager faces
and their cards (hand made)
and said:
'I'm so lucky.
So lucky to have
my lovely family all around me'.

And your eyes sank deep in their bank of pillows,
your back bent into a question mark,
your knees making a tent of the doona.

The books that lined your room,
you'd read again and again:
'I've usually forgotten what happens,
but they're always pleasantly familiar'.

The children opened the sugared almonds
(your favorites for as long as I can remember)
You handed them round the circle,
sucking yours gingerly:
'Don't want to break these teeth
now that Malcolm's not round to fix them'.

Eight weeks later
pneumonia allowed you a graceful exit.
It was your eighty eighth birthday.

! ! Poe-Tree

New poems fall
like apples
from a tree,
like berries
from a vine,
like buzzing
from a bee.

Mostly I dropp them,
'cos there's no keyboard handy.

But sometimes
I catch one
- all new and hummy -
and polish it brightly
on my sleeve.

Alison Cassidy

! ! Roadworker With Sign

He stood
to stiff and starched attention
slap in the center of the road,

He gripped
his red STOP sign
majestically, like a spear.

He barked
into his walkie talkie
with the all puff and passion
of a sergeant major.

His striped yellow vest sparkled
in the setting sun.
His work boots spat dust
as he paced
back and forth,
peering suspiciously
down the road behind him -
like Maxwell Smart on a mission.

An ambulance
(minus siren)
pulled up at the intersection.
He gave it right of way
immediately -
waving it in front of the rest of us
as with all the pomp and aplomb
of a royal.

Minutes later,
he nodded to noone in particular
and reversed his sign to SLOW.

I waved and smiled
as I touched the accelerator.
He ignored my salute.

! ! St Andrews Market

It was six o'clock when I dropped them off -
cheeks flushed,
eyes sparkling,
hair freshly laundered.
'Home Made Sponge Cakes for Sale! '

Merry and Rosy -
best of friends
in their best dresses
and their bare feet
dreaming of customers.

And six hours later
when I came to pick them up,
the six cakes
sat untouched
on the old card table.

We threw the sign in the bin
and drove home in silence.
And the following year
when Rosy died in the fire,
I remembered that day.

Alison Cassidy

! ! The Empty Nest

It happened in an instant-
the wild wind whipped
and the trees tossed their leafy hair
like teenagers
at a rave party.

It was over in minutes -
but the results were catastrophic!
Trees fell,
roofs lifted,
roots sprouted from clay,
like a Dali birthday cake.

Later I ventured into the garden
(tidy too after recent endeavor)
to assess the damage.

Then I saw it -
a tiny bundle of twigs
that lacked the randomness
of the rest.
A perfect sphere of sticks,
carefully chosen
and woven...

By whom?
Was it an old home
abandoned years ago
and dislodged by the wicked wind?

Or was it a more recent affair -
an unfinished
cradle awaiting
the nudge of spring?

I picked up the nest
with tears in my eyes.

How humbling -

to witness nature's beauty and her terror
on a single day.

Alison Cassidy

! ! Tiny Fingers

Tiny Fingers

Tiny fingers
pat the window
and squeal at the dog
wagging on the other side.

Tiny fingers
tease the gap
between door and jamb
and sneak them apart.

Tiny fingers
press pea and pumpkin
into orange-green
and decorate the dish.

Tiny fingers
prod my wrinkled face
and let me know,
without words,
how much I matter.

Alison Cassidy

! ! Two Galahs

Two Galahs
with blushing bodices
and snow capped heads,
alighted on a steel pole
high above the busy intersection.

The winter wind whipped
and bumper to bumper traffic
growled and fumed,
as these rosy roosters
chatted and preened-
blissfully unaware
of peak hour,
or petrol prices,
or the agonizing effort of commuting.

Soon the traffic moved off,
and so did they -
leaving me with a smile
and a heart lighter than before.

Alison Cassidy

3.00am

I lie beside you
pillow propped
waiting
for you to take
the next breath

I try to stop
my racing mind
and stuff
the old fear
like wadding
deep inside

the old fear
of croupy childhood nights
when David
stood on tiptoe
in the red cot
reaching for breath

and mum
in her nightie
poured steam
from the kettle

Alison Cassidy

A Birthday Night Out

Tall and slender,
she graced the noisy restaurant
draped in Madonna blue.

Her laughter sparkled.
Her pale skin revealed
a filigree of venous lace.

Her eyes bubbled, as she
poured the veuve clicquot,
and read aloud the words of wit
penned by her wild and woolly brothers.

Tonight my daughter charmed.
Bright as the shooting star
that exploded
the day of her birth.

Alison Cassidy

A Birthday Poem For Keppel

'a cone all alone on top of a hill'
was a sad little character
from your very first story

at Bellbird lane you slept
in the hallway lined with books
absorbing words like a sponge

at two you were king of the highchair
in the middle of the kitchen
demanding names

at the Learning Co-op, Pat
let you use rude words
like bum and pooh and fart

at Steiner your words were clever,
and essays discerning and witty -
even when the black dog bit

since school, through the Melways
Directory of your life, your words
have nourished and sustained you
and amused and charmed those around you

you, my firstborn, whom I cherish beyond words
who reads my poems and encourages
me honestly and diplomatically
on this soft day on September 8,
I wish you a very HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Alison Cassidy

A Bit Of A Fizzer

The hype had worked a treat.
Stern credentialed faces
stressed vigilance.
The text to five million mobiles
was unequivocal.

Schools closed.
Streets emptied.
White faced citizens
bundled their belongings
and drove away.

But we stayed -
Just a few of us locals
who dared to believe
it wouldn't happen again.

All night we waited
with bated breath
for the lights to black,
for the wind to whip,
for the flames to crack.

But the new day dawned
uneventfully
and our beloved mountain
took a long, deep breath.

I guess you could call it
a bit of a fizzer, really.

Alison Cassidy

A Blue Of Little Brain

Poor Rommy is dumb.
He's also blue - a Russian Blue.
A dumb blue, I s'pose you'd call him.
(It took him three months
to work out the cat flap)

He's also beautiful,
beautiful and idle,
idle and aristocratic,
aristocratic and really dumb

with tall ears,
whisker pads to die for
and a silvery coat
that could grace the finest opera house.

His fur is thick and soft,
soft and warm,
warm and everywhere.
(I am forever picking him
out of the vacuum head)

His given name is Romenov -
Koshka Silver Romenov.
His pedigree reaches
from the end of his nose
to the tip of his perfect tail.

Rommy's purr is persisitant -
a powerful basso profundo.
It fills the house
from morn till night
in quadraphonic hi fidelity

Rommy may be dumb,
but he's certainly not stupid.
He's fed and watered,
cuddled and cared for -
a thoroughly contented cat.

Alison Cassidy

A Bump Under The Doona

A bump under the doona,
there
to share
the emptiness.

My mute companion,
licking me
lovingly
over eight tangled weeks.

I listen to the wheeze
of her doggy breath
and drift into dreams
of trolleys and hospital corridors.

I walk her before dawn.
She doesn't complain,
but bounds to the door
to bark at the moon.

My faithful Ella,
watchdog without peer
lifts a paw quizzically
'I'm here. I'm here'.

Alison Cassidy

A Doggie Miracle - Thanks George

Her coat shone silky smooth that afternoon.
Her tail wagged like a metronome.
She raced the local kids around the oval.
They laughed and called her 'sausage dog'.

That night she stumbled on the stairs.
She whimpered when I tried to pick her up.
By midnight she was shivering with shock.
The vet suspected herniated discs.

Next day - incontinence and paraplegia.
The suited specialist duly kept us waiting.
Offered surgery (without a guarantee) .
Two thousand dollars? You must be joking!

The breeder said 'Give old George a ring.
He'll soon have her on her feet again.
He treats them in an open fronted shed.
Calls himself a canine chiropractor.'

George Schofield - nearly eighty five years old -
A nugget of a man with heart of gold,
Placed his stumpy hands upon her spine.
In seven days, my little dog was fine.

This happened four years ago. As far as I am aware, Old George is still
manipulating dogs from all over Victoria. He works every day from 10.00am till
4.00pm. He has Tuesday's off. He must be pushing 90 by now. I'll never forget
him.

Alison Cassidy

A Happy Birthday Sonnet For Jerry

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
I think I'd better not because you'll say
'You silly cow, you know I hate the heat.
It makes me cross and grumpy, and I'll beat

The living daylights out of those who sigh
And dream beneath a cloudless summer sky.'
How sad for you, the Aussie eye of heaven
Shines hot and hellish from around eleven.

By three o'clock you're panting in the heat.
This blood summer really has you beat.
Oh what the heck, no matter what you say.
Let's have a drink and celebrate YOUR day.

So long as you can breathe and I can see.
So long we'll share this muse called poetry.

Alison Cassidy

A Last Farewell

Rose of Lancaster

Divine diva

My eyes fill

When I hear your voice

'Das Lied von der Erde'

Deep like the earth

Warm like the sun

Soft like the spring

Alison Cassidy

A Little Glitch?

an unintentional remark
AND

with the flick
of a switch
your face
grows tight
and white
with rage

and I stand
heart hammering
helpless
to stop your hurt
and frustration

your habit
from along ago
when you hid your face
from the jeers
of your peers
and pretended you didn't care

I made
a terrible mistake
and caused you more pain
than I could have ever imagined

I know
deep down
you have forgiven me

but sadly
I also know
you'll never forget.

Alison Cassidy

A Moisty Under Milkwood Morning

On this moisty Under Milkwood morning
I walked buoyantly,
briskly
through late summer bush.

Recent rain
had settled the dry
and grateful leaves
sighed,
new-washed.

On the uphill side,
the aged eucalypts
stood sombre
and wallaby grey -
untouched by last year's furnace.

On the downhill side,
charcoal
hollowed ghosts
genuflected,
leafless and barren,
to their god, the sun.

While bold young saplings
black and supple thin,
sprouted epicormic
new green
as if to say
I am
I am.

A chorus of air-born squeaky toys
broke the silence
and
in the distance,
dawn danced.

A Morning Melody

Two black and white choristers
visit us each morning,
tuxedoed chests puffed,
heads tilted to one side.

We broadcast mince
which they attack greedily,
sharp beaks clicking,
black feet scurrying.

When breakfast is over,
they pose, side by side,
(like Domingo and Pavarotti)
stretch their black and white necks
and chortle magnificently.

Alison Cassidy

A Morning Poem

They sit at the table
with their crumbs and unwashed cups -
a companionable ease between them.

He is reading the paper,
struggling sometimes to turn the pages
'Bloody broadsheet! '

She is watching him -
the shape of his head,
the unconscious grace of his hands.

Occasionally he interrupts
'God, the world's gone mad! '

She smiles, remembering
their passion of just an hour before.

Alison Cassidy

A Night With Nyman

It had been an effort -
the getting there.
A long way too
and the weather was foul.

As for the parking?
Superlatively expensive -
like the glass of Shiraz
(gulped hastily to beat the bell) .

But when the house lights dimmed
and the band lifted their instruments,
and brass and woodwinds
burst forth with bright voices,
my heart danced.

'Chasing Sheep is Best Left to Shepherds'
(I know every bar)
had accompanied my Alice and her White Rabbit
on their looking glass journey
ten years ago.

'An Eye for Optical Theory'
was there in the flesh,
rhythm upon rhythm
punching the air.
Frenetic,
compulsive,
effervescent.

The master himself
spoke not a word,
but sat black-coated,
driving his piano -
like Schumacher behind the wheel.

When the night was over,
I floated home
clutching my new CD

with its autograph in black texta.

Alison Cassidy

A Nonsense Poem - A Villanelle

A little mouse sings in a bowl
A little fish runs on a wheel
A little worm hops in a hole

A little hat has lost its sole
A little petal has no peel
A little mouse sings in a bowl

A little dog dances a reel
A little frog jumps on a mole
A little fish runs on a wheel

A little boat rings out a peal
A little bell loses its keel
A little mouse sings in a bowl

A little rock slips on a seal
A little perch walks on a pole
A little fish runs on a wheel

A little card shakes on a deal
A little sigh fancies a meal
A little mouse sings in a bowl
A little fish runs on a wheel

Alison Cassidy

A Peaceful Death - Kedvelt Kutya

They found you
at the shelter -
skin and bone.
A beautiful Vizla,
pedigree pure
and aching
for love.

They called you Max.

Always a follower
(Nicholas took all the bones)
your rubbery mouth
would crumple
as you lay -
all legs and love -
on the couch.

When Nicholas died
you were lost.
Then Sam arrived
and gave you permission
to follow
again.

They removed
the tumour a few years ago
(a third of your body weight)
and the very next day
you were down at the park,
burnished coat gleaming,
bursting with life.

Today they took you
to the vet
for the last time.
You were seventeen years old.

A Pocketful Of Sympathy

A pocketful of sympathy
Is really rather wonderful
To stop a scratch from stinging
Or a bruise from black and bluing

A pocketful of sympathy
Can stop a heart from hurting
Or catch a tear that's falling
Like a raindropp down a cheek

A pocketful of sympathy
Costs absolutely nothing
It's the cheapest kind of plaster
That you'll ever ever find

And a pocketful of sympathy
Is like Lindsay's Magic Pudding
'Cos the more of it you give away
The more you leave behind

Alison Cassidy

A Question Of Trust? *

butter wouldn't melt...

Eyes, soft grey blue and perfectly set
Lashes to die for
and such a clever mimic
He taped the Karate Kid
and played it so many times
he could recite every line by heart
He was only eight, too.

then one morning....

I knew it had gone
- the fifty dollar note
It was definitely in my purse last night
I remember checking
and I knew who'd taken it

What to do...

Confront and condemn?
(and guarantee more lies)
Confront with understanding?
(he's a good little actor)
Pretend I haven't noticed?
(and let him get away with it)
No way!

that night after story....

Sweetheart, I've been thinking...
What?
Well, some kids bring money to school, don't they?
Dunno...
To buy lunches and stuff.
no answer
I guess sometimes you wish you had some?
Maybe...
To buy stuff yourself, I mean...

S'pose so...
Would this help?
I handed him ten dollars
he blushed
Thanks mum

When I checked my purse
next morning
the fifty dollar note
was back

*inspired by A S Neil

Alison Cassidy

A Slow Day

It's a slow day,
a 'nothing much to do' day,
a laid back, andante sort of day.

No clock to watch,
no phone to ring,
no people
around
worrying.

So I sit on my chair,
place my fingers on the keys
and watch
words
appear,
(as if by magic)
on this linen white
snow bright screen.

Where do they come from
I wonder?
These words
that pop
like rabbits
from a hat,
like notes
from a bird,
like bubbles
from a pipe?

These fancies
that start in my head
slip into my fingers
and reveal themselves
like strangers
before my eyes?

And does it really matter anyway -
On this slow, lazy Sunday?

Alison Cassidy

A Son Is Born

I place the peonies on the windowsill -
a perfect present for the new mum,
flushed and furry-eyed on the unmade bed.

A bonneted bundle lies in the crook of her arm.
He is small and neatly wrapped
as if he had been sent by post.

The new dad gazes at his little boy.
He looks younger than his twenty nine years
and still slightly drunk from the exhaustion of support.

Young Dylan Brendan sleeps contentedly,
his tiny hands curl and uncurl his dreams,
his mouth makes high pitched kitten sounds.

I find myself humming 'The Water is Wide'
and nestling into my new name -
Grandmother.

Alison Cassidy

A Strictly Not A Poem Birthday Greeting For Tara

It is late afternoon
this first day of winter -
electric cold and amber warm.
Long shadows dapple
and the light twinkles.

It is your morning,
your first of summer morning,
your birthday morning -
dear Tara McHale.

Your compassion and tenderness
have lifted my spirit
time and time again.

Your pain and tears
have touched me
beyond words.

Your poems
reveal your life -
with honesty and charm.

Your comments
seduce without flattery
and inspire me to write.

Your hundreds of messages
are always 'interesting'
and often make my day.

The last year's soap opera
has challenged you -
demanded monumental courage

and patience from you,
but now you've turned the corner
and sweet love beckons...

Dear Tara,
poet princess,
spiritual child,
Have a Happy, Happy Birthday.

Alison Cassidy

A Tasty Morsel

I rest my cheek upon your freckled thigh
and smell the salty softness of your skin.
I hear you grunt, asleep and musty warm
enjoying softness of oblivion.

I take you in my mouth, all dormouse curled
taste each curly lettuce nook and cranny.
I play you sotto voce like a flute -
you rise in a half hearted sort of way.

How sweet it is to let my senses ride,
to pause, to take my time and feast my eyes.
When morrow comes you'll rise and shine again -
For now, let me enjoy the tenderness.

Alison Cassidy

A Visit From Royalty

Royalty perched on the
bare birch this morning,
neatly costumed in scarlet
and shamrock green.

A pair of king parrots
with silvery voices
fluttered so close
I could have touched them.

They took the seed daintily,
not rudely like the crimsons
who squabble and squeak
like cheap bath toys.

Their soft fragile beauty
filled me with awe and
champagne bubbles
danced in my eyes.

The royals won't stay.
They'll be off in a couple of days,
but while they're around,
I shall delight in their reign in my garden.

Alison Cassidy

Acquired Brain Injury

I wish that I could turn a key
and open wide the mind
that hides behind
the eyes that frown
so bright, so brown.

I wish that I could find
the door into the mind
that hides behind the words
that say 'My mind is fine -
It's just my bloody hand'.

I know how hard you try
to plug the holes that gape
and fight the fear that lurks
when moonlight bathes
the room in silver light.

Perhaps in time you'll grow
to understand, and learn
to love the you that is,
instead of mourning for
the one that used to be.

Alison Cassidy

After Steady Rain

My lover's grateful lungs
savor the freshly laundered air.

The rain-drenched mollis azaleas
spill over-ripe apricot petals.

Young green camellia leaves
show off their new cut and polish.

Treeferns, flushed with spring growth,
wear diamonds in their hair.

And the old dog lies at the back door
snoring comfortably.

Alison Cassidy

After The Stroke

Oh let us celebrate this first of spring
And slip the rosy sun between your toes
And warm the frosty cup of your complaint
And ease the pain of your imagining.

Oh let me fill your head with daffodils,
And melt the fear that lingers in your brain
And light the fire of your belligerence
That you might laugh and make a fist again

The jonquils are a-nodding in the garden
The kookaburras joke upon the fence
The brave new world of now is round the corner
Oh let's not waste this precious second chance.

Alison Cassidy

Akeylah

How do I describe her -
this child/woman
sitting before me
in a state of grace?

Her name is Akeylah
her skin is brown
her demeanor is shy
her posture is perfect

Her grandmother has cared
for her since she was five
Her beautiful African mother
tries so hard, but...

Today she came to Yoga
she loved the meditation
She sat with legs crossed
hands resting on her knees

I couldn't believe it -
She was in that place
beyond the beyond
My eyes filled with tears...

Alison Cassidy

An Attachment To Autism

Bjorn's
Nordic locks
shine like curled butter.

He's been labeled
a 'high functioning autistic'.

His eyes
stare -
with the candor
of an animal
or a baby.

He is eager
and interesting
and interested
in everything -
particularly if it has a remote.

Bjorn
has imprinted on me
like a baby duckling.
He follows me
(too close)
watches me,
notices everything I do
and reminds me
when I don't.

Stunningly beautiful,
fiercely affectionate,
irritatingly underfoot.
Bjorn is one of the most lovable ten year olds I know.

Strange...
I thought they weren't supposed to show emotion?

Alison Cassidy

An Ideal Travelling Companion

I think
travelling with Kep
would be rather fun.

For one thing,
he doesn't make lists.
(I loathe lists!)

For another,
he doesn't panic,
even if we're running late.

He's also really nice,
with a Pooh Bear sort of humour,
and he listens,
even when he's not really interested.

Of course, he listens mostly
because he IS interested,
REALLY interested
in all sorts of things.

Like keys for instance -
'Mum, which key do you like best,
F major or D major? '

And capitals -
'Dad, what's the capital of Ecuador? '
(he used to collect capitals like some people collect stamps.)

And silly names -
'Dan, would you like to be called
Lady Lavinia Dunfunkin Trumpet? '
(Poor mum was called Enid, which she hated)

She adored Keppel.
Used to take him for 'drives'
when he was small.
'Dan, let's go for a drive down this road'
and they'd set off for the afternoon

exploring.

Later he would make her a map
with tiny icons neatly penciled
(he is a Virgo after all)

Yes,
travelling with Kep
would be fun.

Alison Cassidy

An Unexpected Meeting

I squeezed
through rows
of knees
last night
to clasp
the hand
of one
whose music -
sparse and rich -
has long
inspired
my dance.

My hero,
Peter
Sculthorpe,
softly smiled -
intrigued,
but also
chuffed,
I do believe,
at my ebullience.

Alison Cassidy

An Unlikely Contemplative

Rob
is a slob,
they say.
Doesn't have a job,
they say.
Never cuts his hair,
they say.
Too lazy
to get out of his own way,
they say.

But they're wrong, you know.

Rob
is OK.
He feeds the birds
(gives them names) ,
potters about
his tumbledown house
contemplating
(ruefully)
the jobs
he'll never finish.
Sits quietly
strumming his banjo
listening to his voices.

Rob
is happy.

An unlikely contemplative
whose wild and woolly hair
belies a thoughtful soul,
destined
to leave
a gentle footprint
on the planet.

An Unlikely Dancer

I wondered if she had come to the right place
as she stood square
and stocky
before me.

Angela -
grey hair cut short,
mannish square face,
mannish square body
that had, she assured me,
hardly moved before in its life.

She's been coming to class now
for nearly two years.
Never misses.
And although the yoga postures defy a body
that hates to bend,
the music of her soul is gradually
transforming its brittle shell.

This week we danced as mannequins
posing for photographers.

'You know Allie, ' she said afterwards
with mock surprise.
'I've never thought of myself
as a mannequin before! '

Alison Cassidy

And Cousin Bruno Came To Lunch

seventy something
small like a gnome
and olive skinned
with shiny mottled pate

bright blue jacket
mobile phone
hanging from a bright blue cord around your neck

always flirting
and telling jokes
the same old jokes
- very funny too -
the same ponderous delivery
the same beautifully modulated voice
the same generous use of expletives

today was different
you spoke
of the Somme
of the pale green grass
of the bright red poppies
of the endless rows
of crosses
of white crosses
of small white crosses
as far as the eye could see
as far as the eye could see

and your face crumpled
like a paper napkin

Alison Cassidy

And The Room Was Filled With Hats

Old hats new hats,
short hats, tall hats,
red hats blue hats,
big hats, small hats.

Hats on sticks,
hats on chairs,
hats and music everywhere.

And the little ones dusted
the hats on the chairs,
the hats on the blankets,
the hats on the stairs.

And the parents looked silly
in the nicest sort of way
as they rolled on the floor
while the Klezmer music played.

And I danced and I smiled
and I wore a bright mask
of Chaplinesque lunacy
and Tommy Cooper class.

Cos my heart was a thumping
and my stomach was a knot.
My mind was a racing
and it kinda hurt a lot.

But the world keeps turning
and the dancers keep dancing
and the poems keep churning
and the music keeps prancing.

And I sorta kinda know
that we'll both be OK.
That we'll live and love and lust a lot
and kiss our cares away.

And The Trees Roared

What a blustering morning!
(images of Owl's house)

What a wild and woolly morning!

What a wind-moaning
face-freezing
push-me-pull-you sort of morning!

I fought my bucking umbrella.

The air was strewn with bark
and the trees roared
like a woman in labour.

A faint murmur of fear
hissed conspiratorially
What if?
Remember owl's house?
What if?

I clung to my dog's lead...

Later that day
seventy trees
crashed to the ground.
Seventy trees
uprooted in their prime.
Seventy trees
from the womb of their mother
untimely ripped!

The next day
when the wind had died,
I offered a silent prayer
to life
and my dog.

And You Tried So Hard To Be Good

I hold you
tenderly
between my hands -
you must be about twelve.

Your hair
is neatly parted,
your eyes are bright
and beautifully set -
and yet
I know
how oft they spilled
when the children laughed.

How hard you tried
to be good.
To please
with pleases
and thank yous
the grownups
who scolded
when you couldn't read -
when you couldn't read the word.

Then I smile,
kiss the glass
and pop you back on the bookshelf.

Alison Cassidy

Anne's Kookaburra

She was lunching
outside
as is her preference
when the day is fair

Her garden is natural bush
dry and dusty
hiding bright surprises
(like purple sarsaparilla)

She didn't notice him at first
perched high up in the eucalypt next door

Till he dived
suddenly
like a raptor
and stole a morsel of chicken
from the bowl in her lap

Surprised
she watched him fly back to his branch
and whack
his prey
against it
several times

Then he lifted his magnificent cream head
and swallowed his prize

He looked down at her with
fierce intelligence
and shook
his head
from side
to side
his beak
made a loud clicking sound

intimidated

(a flash of du Maurier)
she retreated into the house

she didn't finish her lunch

Alison Cassidy

Anniversary

Soft yellow stippled through the windowpane.

The beech tree's skeleton is brushed with grey.

Its Monet carpet has a sombre pile.

I watch the fluttering of a single leaf.

Alison Cassidy

Annual Pap Smear

Compassion and poverty
sit side by side
at the family clinic
where I wait this morning.

The walls of reception
are papered with notices
of flue shots and heart disease
and paintings by children.

Old couples natter
through cheerful false teeth,
tired chests heaving,
breathing too hard.

Doctors move swiftly
in sneakers, speak kindly.
Treat patients like family
with dignity and humour.

The air is bustling
and sprinkled with coughing.

An hour later, I am called.
The nurse completes her examination.
I leave with a smile.

Alison Cassidy

Another Blood Test

We sat for ages in the waiting room.
You were fidgety - clasping
and unclasping your bad hand.
'I wish to hell they'd get a move on'

She shuffled shyly through the door.
Her right arm was curled against her chest
like the claw of a parrot.
She wore the face of fear.

Her husband sat beside her with tight fists.
He picked up a magazine from the table.
She attempted to straighten his collar.
He kept his eyes averted.

At long last the nurse called out our number.
I kissed you lightly
as I helped you up.

Alison Cassidy

Arachnological Persistence

A tiny umbrella spider
fastened his thread of pearl
to a water fern
and jumped...

PLOP!
He fell into the swirling water
and was swept away.

Next day
he was there again -
same place, same fern.
He jumped again...

PLOP!
This time the current was stronger.
He nearly drowned.

Next day,
he was there again.

This time he crawled
to the very edge of the fern's green lace
and studied the water
for a long, long time.

Then he began to bounce
up and down,
up and down on that tiny fern
till it rose really high.

When he finally let go...

HE MADE IT!
(holding on tight to his pearly umbrella)
and was carried all the long way to the opposite bank.

And so began the widest pearl net in all the world.

This poem was inspired by 'The Education of Little Tree' by Forrest Carter - one of the most beautiful books I've ever read.

Alison Cassidy

Aunt Margaret

He always called her mummy
after they adopted the boys -
back in 1950 during the polio scare.
I still remember the whispered white faces
and stories of iron lungs

She used to polish their shoes -
every night before she went to bed
and lay them out neatly at the foot of their beds.

Her kitchen was a flurry of flour.
She measured the dough with a ruler
(So much easier to get them even)
Christmas cakes too,
wrapped in brown paper,
heavy with cherries and brandy.

Trained at the Alfred with mum
(She was a much better nurse than me)
mum said, though she didn't mean it.

Worked with Benny Rank too,
in the plastics unit during the war.
Held many a young soldier's hand
while Benny cut and sewed.

Hated talking about it afterwards.

When Rod died
she sort of shrank somehow
and her buck teeth stuck out even more.

Later her memory began to go
and the nursing home,
where she had reminded others
for so many years,
became her only reality.

The last time we saw her,

they were feeding her with a spoon.
We didn't go again.

Peter rang earlier this year
to tell us she had died.
She was ninety six years old.

Alison Cassidy

Autumn Is Singing In The Hills

Autumn is singing in the hills,
Sunshine is laughing on the breeze,
Red leaves are dancing from the eaves,
Wood-smoke is ribboning the trees.

Autumn is singing in the hills.
Pale moths are speckling the light,
Moonshine is silvering the night,
Two hearts are purring with delight.

Alison Cassidy

Autumn Poems

Crisp morning
Walking the dog
The sky blushes with russet light

Burning off
Fire crackles
Smoke curling through the trees

Sun setting
Long shadows
Leaves floating one by one

Dusk brings
cheeky possums
Scampering loudly through the trees

Alison Cassidy

Autumn Relaxation

This morning words flowed like silk...
Fully present to the moment,
closed eyes became one.

Like the red grape vine at our centre,
we absorbed colour
like a sponge.

Then, weightless,
the softest release of breath
became a carpet of grace.

Alison Cassidy

Babysitting

It was an empty sort of day -
one of those that merely fill the gap
between Christmas and New Year.
The air hummed with the sounds of suburbia.
A train rumbled by.
A dog barked
and the tiny bundle
in the sling at my breast
slept.

I set off with a light heart
and a certain déjà vu
as my childhood stamping ground
Tintern CEGGS -
came into view,
grander now than I remember her
and smaller too.

The old pine forest,
where cubbies grew
and secrets were confessed,
had been usurped
by shiny new houses
and gardens wilting in the summer dry.
But the odd cream fifties' brick
still peeped through the trees -
then newly planted,
now huge and white
and home to caroling magpies.

I remember those bricks
and the terror that gripped,
when - eight years old -
I was instructed to
take off my outdoor shoes
and put on my indoor shoes
and brave a mob of girls
who all knew each other.

Later I pass the railway station
where we sat for hours
as smelly adolescents
embarrassed by bloody evidence
of a change longed for
yet not fully understood.

And Stanley Avenue,
where we trailed our heavy bags and hockey sticks
and whispered wide-eyed tales of Peika Gaye.

I recall the madrigals
and the dying Silver Swan
and the trembling fingers
of Mozart's Fantasy in D.

Miss Wood must have long since gone to God
and taken with her
her love of Latin
and Jacquie Halpern,
my best friend
killed in a car accident
at sixteen.

Young Dylan was still asleep
when I returned.
I must offer to babysit again.

Alison Cassidy

Back With A Vengeance

This afternoon
we witnessed
three incarnations of Barry Humphreys
supreme Australian comic

Dame Edna Everage
glitzy, outrageous
larger than life megastar -
who descended from the flies
with Cecil B DeMille extravagance
in mauve bouffant wig
diamond studded glasses
to charm and embarrass her adoring audience
with her often cruel
but always topical wit
and her armfuls of long stemmed gladioli

Sir Les Patterson
spitting with enthusiasm
and alcohol
A grotesque parody
of an aging uncouth Australian bloke
with his vulgar sexual innuendos
his sleazy persona
his ill-fitting food stained suit
and his bloated
over-made up face

And best of all
Sandy Stone
resurrected from the grave
of the Nineteen Fifties
A gentle and poignant
portrait
in dressing gown
and tartan slippers
reminding us of the days of
Ball & Welsh,
Foy & Gibson

Buckley & Nunn
blotting paper
and telegrams

Seated in a faded armchair
under the light of a standard lamp
he showed us
with understated simplicity
and extraordinary poignancy
the appalling reality
of modern residential aged accommodation services
(nursing homes)
and their lifeless residents
who have their hair done
all the time
because there's nothing else to do

Except die...

Alison Cassidy

'Be Noble My Child'

(for Elisabeth Schwarzkopf 1916 - 2006)

Her face was angelic.
Her voice not huge
but it shone bright
and flawless
like a diamond.
She was the lieder.
She sang its soul.

She died last week
at the age of ninety.
Sublime diva
'Be noble my child'.*

*Advice from her teacher Maria Ivogun to the very young Elisabeth.

Alison Cassidy

Because By James Mcauley

My father and my mother never quarrelled.
They were united in a kind of love
As daily as the Sydney Morning Herald,
Rather than like the eagle or the dove.

I never saw them casually touch,
Or show a moment's joy in one another.
Why should this matter to me now so much?
I think it bore more hardly on my mother,

Who had more generous feelings to express.
My father had dammed up his Irish blood
Against all drinking praying fecklessness,
And stiffened into stone and creaking wood.

His lips would make a switching sound, as though
Spontaneous impulse must be kept at bay.
That it was mainly weakness I see now,
But then my feelings curled back in dismay.

Small things can pit the memory like a cyst:
Having seen other fathers greet their sons,
I put my childish face up to be kissed
After an absence. The rebuff still stuns

My blood. The poor man's curt embarrassment
At such a delicate proffer of affection
Cut like a saw. But home the lesson went:
My tenderness thenceforth escaped detection.

My mother sang 'Because', and 'Annie Laurie',
'White Wings', and other songs; her voice was sweet.
I never gave enough, and I am sorry;
But we were all closed in the same defeat.

People do what they can; they were good people,
They cared for us and loved us. Once they stood
Tall in my childhood as the school, the steeple.
How can I judge without ingratitude?

Judgment is simply trying to reject
A part of what we are because it hurts.
The living cannot call the dead collect:
They won't accept the charge, and it reverts.

It's my own judgment day that I draw near,
Descending in the past, without a clue,
Down to that central deadness: the despair
Older than any Hope I ever knew.

Alison Cassidy

Birthday Girl

a decade ago
I discovered quite by chance
my child father's
early scribbling to his 'Nan'.

'HAPPY BIRTHDAY NAN
WITH FONDEST LOVE
MALCOLM'

Today I received
a perfectly ordinary
birthday card
from you.

Its child-like letters
tiptoed
across the page.
Its message of devotion
was unequivocal.

'ALLIE PIE
HAPPY BIRTHDAY
SWEETHEART
MY FONDEST LOVE
ALWAYS
JERRY'

Perhaps one day
my children's children
will find it tucked away among my things.

Alison Cassidy

Black Holes

I lifted my foot...

and it appeared
from nowhere
A hole
A deep black hole
deeper than the deepest mineshaft

Mum had warned me about them
over and over
(So deep you'd never reach the bottom - so don't go too close!)

I stopped
in panic
and turned...

and there
in front of me
was another
and another
and another

I was surrounded by them
hundreds of them
deep black holes
deep black holes
of
FEAR

There was nowhere to go
so I stood
immobile
face white
heart beating like a demented drummer

And suddenly...
the ground opened
and I felt myself falling
down my very own Alice in Wonderland rabbit hole

F
A
L
L
I
N
G

into
nothingness...

Alison Cassidy

Bloody Parkinson's

Your hug is huge
unlike the rest of you –
which is rather small.

You loved to run as a kid.
Told us about 'that race'
when the big six footer beat you by a hair
and the whole family cheered
'Best bloody footrace we ever saw.'

I stroke your hair
(still auburn thick at fifty seven)
and listen to your eyes
as they try to hide.

Your voice
slurs just a little
'You'd never know'
and your long fingers
(apologetic somehow)
hardly shake at all.

'You look so fit'
they all told you at the party.
But you don't, do you?
Not a bit.

Off tomorrow
back to Queensland.

Sad about the guitar.

Alison Cassidy

Blue Roses

I weep for you little Laura
Fragile and flat-chested
Clumping awkwardly
Through life shyly
Averting your eyes from
The incessant ramblings of
Your one upon a time mother
And her once upon a time jonquils

In your menagerie world
Of fragile glass, you had
Something to take care of
The unicorn your favourite
Because he was different
As you were different
And your gentleman caller
Called you Blue Roses

Alison Cassidy

Bush Lawyer

Guillem was five.
Talked to himself
all the time.

Bright too
- as a shiny coin.
Bit of a bush lawyer,
you might say.

Nicked a banana
one day at school.
Stuffed the whole lot
into his mouth.
Then tossed the skin.

The teacher saw him.
'Guillem...'
'Put it in the bin! '

'Why should I?
'It wasn't my banana...'

Alison Cassidy

Butterfly Dancing

She stood crookedly at the desk
on that first day.

'I'm Jasmine.'

(Surely Kate or Jane would have suited her better)

Forty-something and heavy,
with a body
that had rarely moved,
and a sad pigtail
that hung down her back
like Eeyore's tail.

I wondered how she'd go -
If she'd turn up again
next week.
And was pleasantly surprised
when she did.

Even more so
as the weeks
turned into months -
and the butterfly
that had been for so long
cramped in its lumpy chrysalis,
began to emerge.

Seems she's doing something else
on Tuesday nights now.
Pity.

Alison Cassidy

Cliffside

Perhaps it was the light
she found so irresistible,
or the bold Moroccan colors
or the spectacular 270 degree view.

She discovered it quite by accident
one bright spring morning
clinging ridiculously
to the edge of the cliff -
1 Old Mountain Road.

She fell in love with it
immediately, obsessively
and resolved to buy it
and live in it forever and ever.

She stalked her house for weeks,
visiting it each morning,
and checking it out
(it was currently a B and B)

And when the asking price
proved way beyond
her meager resources,
she dreamed of loans...

Then one day she heard –
quite by chance -
that Cliffside had sold
(for twice what she could afford) .

And all of a sudden
she couldn't understand
why she had needed
that house and that dream so desperately!

A few months later
she found out why.
The love of her life had found his muse -

an ether love that took his breath away.

But this all happened years ago...
and today, Cliffside is but a distant memory
and the love of her life
is snoring beside her.

Alison Cassidy

Cloud Gate - Dance Theatre Of Taiwan

amber light
falling sand
dancers move
with effortless grace

afterwards
a lone dancer
takes a spiral
to a Gregorian chant

Alison Cassidy

Constance Wood - Headmistress

How she charmed and terrified me!
I can still see her
(fifty years on)
winging her way
across the quadrangle-
black gown flapping,
small laced feet
pecking the gravel.

I used to imitate her
in my senior years.
(I wonder if she knew?)
I loved the titillation
of risking detention
in the pursuit of peer approval.

Miss Wood was quite an actress herself.
Each Monday morning she took
centre stage at assembly.
Diminutive and domineering
(Queen Victoria minus the veil)
she would issue her orders for the week,
before leading us in
her favorite hymn
'Morning Has Broken'

I was about twelve
when she took us for Latin -
and for the first time
I met the teacher behind the gown.
She was magnificent -
a brilliant educator
with a passion for her subject
and a devotion to her students.
(Such a generous marker too!)

I heard she died last year.
She had just turned 104!
She must have spent

the last forty years of her life
without her girls.

How terribly sad.

Alison Cassidy

Co-Op Tales - Damien

Hey!

Hey!

Come see!

Come see my rock band!

The rocks were smooth and carefully placed.

He played them

purposefully

with a stick.

His disability

defied labeling.

But odd he was –

no doubt about it.

His over-sized head

beat time

to the music in his mind

His lashes (too long for a boy)

laughed in a sea of blue.

Hey!

Hey!

Come see!

Come see my rock band.

When he started secondary school

I heard he got an A in drama.

Alison Cassidy

Dancing The Music

When I was small
I learned the piano.
I didn't practice,
I didn't have to.
It was so easy.

When I was eight
I played in a concert.
I was super confident,
I 'froze' half-way through.
I nearly died!

I practiced and practiced
'till I got very good.
I was school pianist,
I sat for exams,
I always got honors.

When I left school,
I stopped the piano.
No time to practice.
I bought recordings
and listened to them.

Now I'm older,
I've learned to dance.
I don't practice
I don't have to.
It's so easy.

Alison Cassidy

Dear Old Macca

The yellow cab pulled up by the curb.
Twelve o'clock on the dot.
Trust Macca to be on time for a feed.

'Hello Big Boy! Lovely to see you.'
His blancmange face was unresponsive.
His oversized glasses glinted in the sun.

'Better buy some beer, I suppose...'
He shambled off to the pub round the corner,
his stick pecking the pavement.

I remembered the Macca of old,
with his scented baby skin
and his lovable teddy bear frame.

The rich Macca with the Merc
and the plethora of credit cards.
The Macca before bankruptcy and the stroke.

He had always been huge
and his love of the female form
and his delicacy with watercolors were legionary.

These days he has put down his brush
and the food he has craved all his life,
can no longer compensate for his decrepitude.

Alison Cassidy

Defiance

There was something defiant in your delivery:
'I've got a huge bloody carcinoma
of the stomach -
Inoperable they tell me.'

But there was relief too -
I know how much you dreaded
being left...

'Take care of your mother, for me.
Promise? '

I didn't cry.
I didn't need to.
I just held your hand
and looked gravely into your green eyes.

I remember noticing
your moustache -
every defiant ginger hair of it.

'He loves that moustache' -
Mum used to say.

It disappeared soon after -
along with the rest of your hair
and the hale and hearty
proportions
of your Henry the Eighth body.

Chemotherapy does that.

You were ridiculously small
when you finally died.

Alison Cassidy

Du Pre Plays Elgar

She warmed the Davidov
between her thighs,
like a lover;
fingers yielding
in sensuous vibrato,
blond head tossing,
face like an Angel.

Never did Elgar
sound like this...

Alison Cassidy

Eucalyptus Polyanthemus

The young red-box
balance on straggly trunks
beside the track
where
fourteen years ago
I lived and loved and reared
my madcap family.

Their blushing bark
is rough
and paper dry.
Their coin-shaped
leaves glint
in glaucous profusion
like blue-grey sentinels
on guard
beside the road.

A sudden childhood flash
of marmite jars
with lids nail-stabbed
and gentle beetles
hiding
from eager
grubby hands.

Alison Cassidy

Faces Of The Moon (Haikus)

the horned moon swings
a fingernail of silver
in a velvet sky

tonight I saw her
an ivory dinner plate
bordered by peachlight

the moon is beaming
silly, it's Snug the Joiner
holding a lanthorn

following the road
the moon winked at me last night
like the cheshire cat

Alison Cassidy

Farewell My Love

A year ago
an ashen face begged forgiveness
for ether love.
I took his hand in mine,
I had forgiven him already
even as I planned a life alone.

Today I asked for his forgiveness.
Alas, twas not to be.
How sad that love - so dearly penned
and tenderly expressed -
could turn to hate.

Farewell my love...

Alison Cassidy

February Fire Storm

It was theatrical -
the amber light
that slowly penetrated the sky.
It hung like a cloud
over the gasping garden,
masking momentarily
the harsh forty six degree sun.
For a few moments
I watched
euphoric,
transported,
omniscient...

The next day
170 deaths were reported
on the morning news
and the corpses of 700 homes
lay baking in the dust.

Alison Cassidy

Fighting The Frizz

When I was a child
my hair was frizzy.
'What lovely curls! '
Mum's friends used to say.
I smiled and hated them.
I hated my frizzy hair.

'Mum, why can't I grow it? '
'Because you'd hate it.
Mine was fizzy like yours.
It was long and full of knots.
When my mother brushed it
I cried and got a smack.'

Mum cut it herself
with kitchen scissors.
She was a practical woman
with no sense of style.
I thought I looked awful.

When I was eight
I went to a posh private school.
The girls there giggled
(having curls was as bad as being fat)
The girls there spent their lunchtimes
doing each other's hair in the mirror.
I sat by myself with my frizz.

Now in my sixtieth year
my hair is straight and extra short.
It's smartly styled by Gary Meddlers of Toorak.
who has made me look the way I feel inside.
And I like the way I look.

Alison Cassidy

Filthy Phil

His broken face was patched
(a motorbike nearly killed him years ago) .
His crooked eyes squinted
through filthy glasses.
A Temple Bar always hung on his lower lip.
He must have been fifty.
I was thirteen.

His wife had died some weeks before,
horribly, of lung cancer.
He took to visiting the family.
He stayed too long,
He drank too much.
He and dad got on really well.
They talked about racing cars.
Mum said 'Poor Old Phil. He's lonely.'

Once he took us all to dinner.
He wore patent leather shoes.
He danced with me - sublimely -
foxtrot, quickstep, waltz.
He moved like Fred Astaire.

Then one stinking hot December night,
he drove David and I
to the old stone lookout
at Kangaroo Ground.
The view was stunning.
The 'lights of Melbourne' twinkled all around.

Later, as we felt our way down the tower steps
in the narrow dark,
he pressed himself
hard against me,
opened his slimy mouth
and poked his slimy tongue
deep into my throat.

I pushed him off and ran

back to the car.
On the way home,
he slid his hand
across the front seat.
David didn't notice.

Next week, he rang -
Could he take the kids camping?
So I had to tell.
Dad said 'I'll have a word.
It won't happen again.'
And it didn't.

Alison Cassidy

Finger Painting

yellow dollops
on polished paper
chubby hands sunshine circles

scarlet red
slips through fingers
streaky sunsets autumn lights

little thumbs
press cobalt blue
purple dots and scary things

vivid green
mixed round and round
until the whole is yucky brown

Alison Cassidy

First Smile

Last Sunday

I held you between my knees -
all freshly changed and milky.
Your butterfly eyes
flitted about the room,
while I sipped the sweetness
of your chubby face
burbling
before me.

Suddenly

those restless eyes
locked
onto mine,
and in a twinkling,
my eager smile was rewarded
with one of yours -
the first solely for me.

Dearest child,

The miracle of that smile
will linger long in my remembrance.

Alison Cassidy

For George With Thanks

We played at the park that afternoon
She chased a football, wagging her tail
And barking at the local kids who
Laughed and called her 'sausage dog'

That evening she stumbled on the stairs
And whimpered when I picked her up
By midnight she was shivering with shock
The vet diagnosed herniated disc

Next day she was paralyzed and incontinent
The specialist was aloof and kept us waiting
Suggested surgery and wouldn't guarantee it
His fee was two thousand dollars. We said no

The breeder said 'Give old George a ring'
George Schofield, chiropractor for dogs
Eighty-four years old. Works from home
In an open fronted shed. Charges ten dollars.

George Schofield, a nugget of a man
With stumpy fingers and heart of gold
Adjusted her spine and performed a miracle
In seven days, my dog was walking

Alison Cassidy

For Jerry Hughes

You trawl the sea of your anger
You cast your laughter
over the waves
You dip into the well
of your soul
To leave your mark
on the rock
Namaste

Alison Cassidy

For Kelly Neville

Rainbows of images
Absurd topsy-turvy
She plays with words
Like a conjuror

Alison Cassidy

For Linda Ori

A tiny time ago, I found
A Leo of some distinction
Crouching in the P/H den
Her name was Linda Ori
And she was only seven
Days younger than me!

Who could she be, this
Lioness from Ohio?
No ordinary poet she,
But one with flair and style
Whose skill with rhyme and meter
Makes my fur stand on end.

Dearest Linda, on this
Your special day,
From one Leo to another,
I give you a lusty roar
And wish you love,
Joy and contentment

Alison Cassidy

For Michael Shepherd

To ride the wings of breath
And swim the body into the deep
Place between the in and out
The before and after
The now and now

To dive so deep
So beyond into the bliss
And even further
Into effortless effort
This is just the beginning

Alison Cassidy

Friday Morning

Friday morning
Early, still dark
A magpie warbles prettily
You roll towards me
And squeeze my rump
Possessively

A kookaburra laughs
Followed by another and another and another
You chuckle
And place my hand firmly
Between my legs

My heart rate changes
As you harden against me
And, back to belly, we take
The first slow steps
In our pavane of love
No vivace
Not yet

That comes later...

Alison Cassidy

Full Circle

A small child
stands barefoot
under the Hills hoist.
She holds the pegs
carefully,
handing them
to her mother
one at a time.
'Thank you sweetheart.
You've been a great help.'

Forty years later
an old man
stands in his slippers
under the same Hills hoist.
He too holds the pegs
carefully,
handing them
to his daughter
one at a time.
'Thank you sweetheart.
You've been a great help.'

Alison Cassidy

Full Steam Ahead - For Jerry

Like Puffing Billy
under full steam,
you chuff and chug
your way into the shower.

At high speed
you shed your clothes,
revealing battle marks of recent surgery
that join those now long faded,
when bottles, bikes
and boxing gloves
made their indelible stamp.

You stand under the water,
cursing, when the new control refuses to obey -
'What's the matter with this stupid thing? "
and lather your body
compulsively,
belligerently,
as if soap and water
might somehow wash away
the helplessness you hate so hard.

I scrub your back
'Yes please...'
and wash your pretty feet.
The steam fogs up my glasses.

Your skin is smooth as soap,
your buttocks, freckle-cheeked
(and sexy still at seventy eight) .

I notice your fresh clothes
(old habits never die)
laid out in regimental order
on the bed -
shoes carefully polished,
socks folded just the way mum used to.

I help you dress, trim your mo'
and comb your hair.
Your good hand squeezes me cheekily on the bum
'My poor little girl.
Fancy being stuck with an old cripple.'

Oh my darling, you don't know the half of it...

Alison Cassidy

Gentleman Jim

James Gwyther
Eighty years old
Fiercely Welsh
Aggressively deaf.

Thin leather face
Rippled like sand
Grandfather beard
Cowcatcher dentures.

Deep ocker voice
Exceptionally loud
Belligerently proud
Passionately Masonic.

Jim lost his wife
a few years ago
to ovarian cancer
Never got over it.

On Christmas day
he stays at home
with Maeve, his staffy
and a good bottle of malt.

Alison Cassidy

Georgie

She looked out of place somehow,
at the diagnostic clinic,
surrounded by all those withered, empty faces.

What could be wrong
with this enchanting girl
whose body could bend like plasticine?

'I suppose we can tell Allie?
We're here for a bone density scan.
Georgie's got an eating disorder.'

So that's why she stopped the classes...
I took her thin cool hands in mine,
'How are you? '

She looked fragile
and small - like a windflower.
'All over the place, really...'

Last year she danced the moon
(with a huge white balloon)
light as tissue paper.

She'd seemed so self-assured
and confident,
so gracefully alive.

How easily one can be fooled
by bright laughter
and sparkling eyes...

Alison Cassidy

Geriatric Pas De Deux

The morning was damp and misty
with a faint smell of smoke in the air.

I saw them walking together - ever so s l o w l y
She must have been well into her eighties,
a large woman with a face like a hairless bulldog
He limped beside her on the end of a lead,
his coat identical in colour and texture to her hair.
When they reached the milk bar
she lowered herself laboriously
on to the seat outside the shop
and waited for him to lift his leg.
Then he wagged his tail
gazed at her quizzically
and sat down at her feet.

I smiled at this geriatric pas de deux
each totally absorbed in the moment...

Alison Cassidy

Glenn Gould Plays Bach

Your long fingers
Attack each note with precision
So clear, so bright
The left hand, so strong

No one plays Bach
Like you
Genius eccentric
Pill-popping
Hypochondriac

Your humming
Like a beauty spot
On the face
Of God

Alison Cassidy

Global Warming?

Strange light of summer sun
hanging like orb of copper
suspended in soft gauze

Strange smell of summer smoke
oppressive like winter fog
but much too hot

Strange sound of summer birds
with the soft pedal on
subdued, surreal

Bushfires far away seem much too close
and yet the light is beautiful
almost transcendental...

Alison Cassidy

God, I Wasted Thirty Years Of You!

You grin at me
flirtatiously
in black and white.
Your hand sneaks
mischievously
inside the blouse
of the laughing blond
beside you.
The caption
(tossed off with flourish)
reads
'Tit-illating to be sure'.

Your body is lean,
your lips pursed,
your hair much too long.
(how you hated the seventies)

I close my eyes
and try
to picture you
at thirty two,
but it's difficult...

You see
I was too subsumed
by me,
too fond
of my own reflection.
Too keen
to please,
to 'strut like a favorite to applause'.

The car door slams.
You're back from the gym,
sweaty and full of life.
You peck my lips perfunctorily
and complain
about some 'idiot on the road'.

I re-read the title of this poem
with a smile.

Alison Cassidy

Goodbye 2007

the black
cockatoos
hang
like heavy fruit
from the old cootamundra

their bolt cutter beaks
rip
rhythmically
and relentlessly

a marcato
a marcato

the ground
is peppered with discarded bark
and memories of 2007

Alison Cassidy

Goodbye Autumn

Today is suddenly fiercely cold,
as if winter had nosed autumn out of its way.

The Van Gogh carpet under next door's elm
is thick and spongy after last night's rain.

On a barren branch, a single leaf
pirouettes like Pavlova.

Alison Cassidy

Goodbye Trevor

The Rug -
we always called him that,
from the day we first saw him
sitting behind the counter of his shop,
Super Natural Health Foods.

The Rug -
the name sort of stuck,
like the hideous
brown appendage
that covered his hairless pate.

The Rug -
not the greatest advertisement
for his biodynamic flour -
a Fred Flintstone look-alike
with sweaty hands.

He's been sitting behind that counter
for years
and losing money and customers
for years too,
as the Two Dollar shops take over.

The final crunch came last month,
when a mountain of pigeon shit
brought the ceiling down
heavily and expensively
on his bins of organic sultanas.

We took him a 'goodbye' card today
and his flaccid face
flushed pink.
He's looking for another job.
I don't suppose we'll see him again.

Alison Cassidy

Gravity

Gravity
is the expression
on the stern teacher's face,
the voice
of the wigged judge
passing sentence.

It is Wol's
'crustomary proceedcake'
and Eeyore's 'how'.

It is the root
that holds us to the earth,
the anchor
that settles the restless boat of our desire,
the spark
from which our poetic fire
ignites
with light and lust
to touch the sun.

It is
as 'constant
as the northern star',
as predictable as the next breath.
It reminds us
that we all have faith -
even the atheists.

Alison Cassidy

Great Aunt Constance

As I turn the pages of your life
I see a darkened room lined with books
And a small hunched figure, pen in hand
Dabbing at the corner of her mouth
With a man's handkerchief

As I search the bookshelves of your life
I see sonnets and novels and plays
And piles of letters to friends and students
You taught with your funny little voice
High pitched, like a child's

At twenty you opened your own school
Rosbercon, where children were allowed
To write with their left hand
And where no one was punished
Because they didn't understand.

Years after your death, I read your diaries
And learned about your friend Mrs. Jose
Whom you had loved passionately
And platonically for sixty years.

Alison Cassidy

Guitar Concerto - Senryu

silky fingers stroke
Takemitsu's edge of dreams
water colour light

Alison Cassidy

Hard Rubbish

Birch leaves flutter over
dearly departed PCs,
their CRT monitors,
empty and out of date.

Autumn light dances upon
once upon a time mattresses,
limp and soggy -
after recent rain.

Sulphur-crested scavengers
gossip amid corrugated iron
and broken chairs,
discarded for want of glue.

O, you tidy consumers of Kalorama!
How eagerly would the untouchables of Calcutta
pick over your waste.

Alison Cassidy

Helen Mirren Was Elizabeth

Elizabeth
face chalk painted
flirting outrageously
with her red hair
and her elfish nose
and her bright royal wit

Elizabeth
wearing her sexuality
like a corset
and remaining fiercely
the virgin queen

Elizabeth
commanding parliament
Ruling England
like a man
demanding
total obedience

Elizabeth
ordering Mary's death
- it took several blows
and broke her heart

Elizabeth
standing
fiercely immobile
for her last ten days
defying death

Helen Mirren was Elizabeth

Alison Cassidy

Her Name Was Madge

Rum-balls and marzipan
announced her appearance
every Christmas
in those far-away tinselly days
when I was small.

Her name was Madge.
(the term spinster never suited a soul so well)
Stooped and bony,
she had long hair coiled up on top
and ankles that could have turned men's heads.
She grew lily of the valley
in her garden
'on the west side with just a hint of the sun'.

She adored me.
Minded me often.
Reminded me
of the need for family.
(even though we weren't really hers)

She lived alone in the big house.
Nursed both parents
into their graves, apparently.
Mum said 'he' had been a tyrant.
'Drove away the only gentleman friend she ever had'.

Later she gave me recipes
penned in her perfect copperplate
'It's the J nib that makes the difference'.

I recall the story she told each year
about the only time I saw her with her hair down.
'Madge... (she liked me to call her that)
You look just like a girl -
from the back.'

She died of cancer in the end.
Left all her money to her proper family -

the ones who never bothered with her.

Alison Cassidy

His Name Was Stan

A gentleman he was, indeed -
and handsome too,
despite the teeth
that flashed
(too bright, too white)
when he smiled.

He'd been a good looker
I'm sure, in his day.
Tall and shapely
with chiseled cheeks
and that faintly deferential manner
of one who has followed orders.

He was sitting on the couch
when we arrived,
surrounded by birthday barbecue buzz.
He cradled a small pink bundle in his arms -
his old hands patting, rhythmically
(and ever so fondly)
the new great grandchild.

His eyes were far away -
remembering perhaps
a time long ago,
when he was denied
such a feminine expression
of devotion.

There was something compelling about him -
the unconscious grace
of nearly ninety years.
His name was Stan.

Alison Cassidy

Honoring Peter Sculthorpe

Such a paltry sum*
to acknowledge
such a giant
of music

Kakadu
Earth Cry
Left Bank Waltz
and most memorably
Chorale Requiem
for the victims
of Iraq

You bare
your soul
We share
your voice
and dance
your dreaming

Peter Sculthorpe
Your music will live on
when all the celebrities
and their millions have been forgotten

Alison Cassidy

I Carry You In My Heart - For Jerry

I carry you in my heart
rock you in my dreams
hug you with my pen
marvel at your nowness

I carry you in my heart
laugh you in my song
sing you in my dance
trust in your tomorrow

Alison Cassidy

I Don'T Deserve You

'I don't deserve you'
says the sulky mouth
the wrinkled nose
the crumpled face.

'I'm so bloody useless'
says the wooden arm
as it spills
the pills
on the floor.

If only you knew
the buzz I feel
when I kneel
at your feet
and dry your toes.

Oh you struggle so hard
to turn back the clock,
you don't see
what's ticking
before your nose.

Alison Cassidy

I Love Loving You

I love
loving you
ridiculously often

You
encourage me
to savour the ecstasy of us

You
share my bliss
respond like no other

I love
loving
you

Alison Cassidy

I Love Red

RED balloon
floating through frames
of Thirties celluloid

dusty RED
dreamtime
black feet dancing

rhode island RED
bustling scratchily
in the poo speckled straw

RED back
hiding in the cupboard
spinning her web

marxist RED
hiding under the bed
spinning in the Fifties

RED shoes
shining, dancing
dancing till death

carmine RED
shining on clowns' noses
audience laughing

RED wine
dancing on drunks' noses
everyone laughing

the RED queen
running faster and faster
growing smaller and smaller

deep RED
roses, richly perfumed
always remind me of you

I LOVE RED

Alison Cassidy

I Love You Best Of All...

...when you settle the cat
companionably beside you
and stroke his soft fur
with your beautiful hands.

...when the Wizard of Oz
tickles your fancy
and unleashes a roar
from the depths of your belly.

...when Sinatra sings
'only the lonely'
and your face crumples
like a paper napkin.

Alison Cassidy

I Never Would Have Had The Nerve

I never would have had the nerve
when you were around...
With your bright mind,
and your academic prowess
and your acerbic
(adorable)
wit.

A wordsmith par excellence -
published no less -
you penned
persuasively,
pedagogically,
perspicaciously.
(I often needed a dictionary)

I never would have had the nerve
when you were around...
so I hid in the shadow
of your intellectual rigor,
typing your scrawl
(you should have been a doctor)
and offering you
draft after exhaustive draft
until it was perfect.

I never would have had the nerve
when you were around...
but you're not here any more
are you?
And I am learning,
day by day
to tell MY story.

Alison Cassidy

Images In Black*

silky black legs shimmer
as she stands
he beckons the waiter

ebony black Cornish Rex
sits on the newspaper
her back to you

velvet black sky reveals
a pale thin moon
jealous the stars stare

ugly black despair
tortures his soul
empty without her

Alison Cassidy

Images Of Obsolescence*

The bits and pieces
from deceased estates
waiting to be priced
or sent to the tip.

The faded boxes
of once upon a time photos
with fixed faces
forever smiling.

The battered bodies
young couples once dreamed in
left at the wrecker
to pick over for parts.

The rows of idle hands
on rug-covered knees
sitting in chairs
waiting for visitors.

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Aboard The Diagnostic Train

A disembodied voice echoed from the lift:
'The Alfred Center – Ground Floor'
It was 8.45am.
We'd made it.

The Alfred Center -
a Government funded,
recently completed
'Care Facility'
providing a 'one stop' service
for those like us
tiptoeing into the terrors of surgery.

At least it was heated.
heated and uncluttered,
uncluttered and impersonal
with cold hearted LED lights
and unimaginative modernist prints.

After half an hour and a coffee
(percolated, surprisingly good) ,
Mat beckoned.
He was blond and easygoing,
a male nurse with dreadlocks that didn't offend.
His sphygmomanometer
was digital and deficient.
After he'd fiddled with it,
he recorded 140 on 110
'Blood pressure's a bit high.'

Chris was next cab off the rank.
'I'm the anaesthetist.'
A solid, forty something
he wore a charcoal grey pin striped shirt.
(I meant to ask him where he bought it)
He was friendly but non-committal
'All I've got here is 'repair aortic aneurysm''
(I felt like we'd turned up on the wrong night) .

Pharmacist Rhonda was pregnant with her first.
A recent arrival from New Zealand,
she chatted brightly about your medications
and her new baby.

Elle took blood.
The needle was fine and sharp,
the blood deep purple.

Joanne was Chinese
and earnest.
She spent much of our consultation time
on the phone.
I enjoyed watching her
examining the pulses in your groin.

Finally it was over.
We went for a limp lunch and an X-ray.
We were home by 4.30

To be continued...

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - After The Angiogram

'Left past the red lifts, then through the curtain, OK? '

And there you were -
propped up on a bed of white pillows.
You looked so well
(and naked too under the hospital gown)
'Hel-lo'
(that familiar upward inflection)
No one says 'hello' quite like you.

The nurse looking after you
was pregnant
and dressed in purple.
She did your obs,
and checked your groin -
neatly shaved and Betadined.
Then she sat you in the chair beside the bed.
'You can get him dressed in fifteen minutes'.

I knelt before you and held your beautiful hands,
smiling - as I noticed
your dangly bits peeping
(like a pair of ripe plums)
beneath the gown.

'For Chrissake. Give me my bloody underpants? '

To be continued...

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Beyond Intensive Care

Trapped in your Lazarus' cage,
you shake the bars of your rage
and hiss and curse
the nurse
the drip
and me
sitting beside you
helpless, but not helping -
'Allow me a vestige of independence please? '

Your good side claws at the sheet,
your frog voice struggles
to spit
the venom
that once flowed so effortlessly.
'No! No! No!
Jesus F-cking Christ! ! ! '

Then suddenly
you are asleep again -
the deep sleep of the stroke dead

And I ache to wake you.

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Category 1 (Urgent)

I wonder what they mean
by urgent?
How close to death
must a person be
to qualify?

And how many other urgent's
are waiting in the queue?

Now a body in an ambulance
is always urgent -
siren screaming,
pulse racing,
'pain level from one to ten'
sort of urgent.

But a name
on a computer screen
is simply that – a name.

And so my love,
I stroke your feet
and listen to you cough
and wheeze your way to sleep -
night after
night after
bloody night.

We must be patient,
we patients-to-be.

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Couples

I remember
noticing
the couples
walking
side by side
along the hospital corridor.

Pairs of people,
two's in tandem.
Familiar hands holding,
familiar voices scolding,
murmuring,
comforting.

Husbands and wives,
lovers old and new.
Some bustling,
some shuffling,
others fit and sprightly young.

And I realized
suddenly
joyfully
how lucky I was
to still be one of a pair -
the other half of one love.

To have and to hold
from this day forward
till death us do part.

I know you're back
reluctantly, my love,
but I'm in your corner, no matter what.
Remember that.

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Dealing With Recovery

It irritates you
the way the curtain droops
and I can't quite reach
(even when I stand on a chair)
to hook it back.

It irritates you
the way the taps
(those hospital ones with wings)
drip intermittently -
even when I've turned them off tight as tight.

It irritates you
when I can't understand
what you're trying so hard to say
(even the second time)

'It doesn't matter...'
But it does.

Oh Jerry
the beautiful bits and pieces of you
have been tossed on the bed
like a careless jigsaw.

Alfred the bear
sits on the pillow
with his head on one side.
The first Daphne from the garden
scents the room.

Pity you don't notice.

The nurses do though.

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Held Up On The Tourist Road

Mount Dandenong
Olinda
Sassafras
Ferry Creek
Ferntree Gully.

I snake my wintry way
through tree ferns
heavy and dripping
with their drink.

I despair
of timid tourists,
brake lights blinking
winking
bright as fire.

I watch the white line
beckoning,
ribboning,
disappearing wetly
before me.

And wonder,
with fluttering heart,
what I'll find
today
when I peep around your door?

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - 'He's My Patient'

'A dumpy little Jewess' you call her,
but you always bring her flowers
(roses from the local fruit shop) .

Her office is poky, half hidden
in the rabbit warren that is
Box Hill Cardiology
The walls are smothered
in certificates of her accreditation -
Associate Professor Gishel New.

Today I shook her hand.
'A dumpy little Jewess'
to be sure, but more,
so much more...
A lively interesting face,
jet-black golliwog curls
and a voice bursting with authority.

They say she's a bit of a harridan,
but I can see why you like her
and why you always bring her roses.

Thank God she's doing your angiogram!

To be continued....

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Independence Is Coming

And then from Eeyore grey –
a pair of eyes, sharp focused
and a pair of wooden fingers
poked and probed
the leather strap.

And a Cheshire cat smirk
spread across your face
as you unbuckled the watch
and placed it
triumphantly
upon the table.

Ya dun good, my love.
Independence is just around the corner.

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Justin Negri

Clown fish cavorted
in the waiting room -
The John Olsen painting
was perfectly placed.

'Coffee?
Mr. Negri's running a bit late...'

Mr. Negri
proffered his apologies.
Affable and modest
his suit was immaculate.

He asked questions with interest,
examined without rushing
and delivered his diagnosis
without bullshit.

A fiendishly complicated
ten hour surgical challenge
with significant risks
and a week in Intensive Care.

Odd how we felt better
after hearing the news?

'I am in your hands'
said Jerry as he shook his.

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Little Steps

your little steps
grow bigger
every day

your shuffling steps
tread tentatively
bravely
veering
mysteriously
to the right

How odd
for you -
you old leftie
you true believer
you dear defender
of the underdog!

your beautiful voice
grows stronger
every day

You talk now
on the phone
(a minute is your limit)
But you talk
and laugh
and say
aawhooaooaooawhooaaaooo
(echoing your beloved Goons) .

your dead arm
(firmly muscled
still five weeks on)
reaches now -
Reaches
for life
for love
for recovery

And your left hand
has learned to wipe your bum

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Part VIII - A Foggy Day

This morning
fog clothed
the street lights
in Bergman black and white

Later
at the hospital
another fog
lifted a little,
to reveal
more
of the you
that used to be
before.

And when I left you tonight,
you remembered to say
'Drive carefully.'

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - Professor Rosenfeldt

'I'll bet he's Chinese.'
you said smugly,
as we sat
like a pair of timid bookends
on the stiff chairs
of Outpatients.

Wrong.

He was tall -
and older than we expected
(he looked older than you, my love)
with a painful sort of uprightness -
arthritis perhaps?

He offered his hand.
He had musician's fingers.
'Rosenfeldt's my name.
I'm not your real surgeon
A 'stand-in' I suppose you'd call me.'

He looked faintly ill at ease
as if trekking in unfamiliar territory,
yet he gave us both
a cautious sort of confidence
borne, I suspect,
of years
of cardio-thoracic experience.

His voice was hesitant,
but his hands were sure
as he checked your pulses
and listened
intently
to your chest.

The ancient sphygmomanometer
had a tired face.

It seemed a long time
before he said:
'Blood pressure's up a bit.
Probably white coat syndrome, eh? '

Then he unscrewed the cap
of a fountain pen.
and carefully
and thoughtfully
recorded his diagnosis.

'You're going to need an operation, I'm afraid.
Any questions? '

To be continued....

Alison Cassidy

Jerry's Journey - The Light At The End Of The Tunnel

'I gather there's not much hope'
you sighed this morning,
all boggy and sad.

Till we met Kirsty,
fine physiotherapist,
who took your 'crippled' hand in hers
and worked it
gently
intently
like a sculptor
molding a masterpiece.

And little by little
your sleepy muscles
opened their eyes.

'I think she's kidding...'
but you knew she wasn't.

And when she told you
you could walk
without the frame,
you didn't believe her.
Till you tried
and you did
and you cried.
And so did I.

And tonight,
the psychologist
called Diane
(sixty something
with a kind face
and the grace
of a saint)
said simply:

'You don't honestly imagine they'd bother with all this rehab

if they didn't think you were worth it, do you? Do you realize,
you're costing the government over \$500 a day -
And that's just for the bed? '

No prayers.

No promises.

No bullshit.

And you believed her.

Alison Cassidy

Johnny Walker

'Mind if I join you?
The name's Johnny Walker.'
He extended his hand.

He was tall and gaunt -
six foot something
and thin as a pretzel.

'Visiting the wife.
Poor old thing
had a fall last week.
Mind you,
She's pretty good for 93.'

'Excuse me, John,
but how old are YOU? '

'I was Ninety last birthday.'

I couldn't believe it.
Sure, there were a few
liver spots on his face
and his dentures
were more than obvious -
But ninety!

'Hearing's pretty poor
these days.
Damn nuisance.'

He spoke of jazz -
played piano
from ear.
Loved Coltraine and Bill Evans.
Rattled off a string of titles.

Then just before he left,
he mentioned
(quite casually)

the Tiger Moth he'd flown
on his 90th birthday.

'Hadn't been in one since the war.
Such a thrill to loop the loop again.'

He left shortly afterward.
Strode down the corridor,
hands clasped firmly behind his back.

Alison Cassidy

Kagemi* - Beyond The Metaphors Of Mirrors

a floating forest of giant lotus leaves -
real but not real
Amagatsu alone
(every movement of his hands is perfect)

the lotus leaves rise
six dancers curl under the water
tragically absurd
beautifully grotesque
(their hands never touch)

Butoh in seven scenes
and relentless slow motion
a mirror of life and death
ash and blood
sand and water

as the giant leaves fall
six pairs of hands open like lotus flowers

Alison Cassidy

Late To Bed

Late to bed
Winter night
Freezing cold
I wriggle into you
Curled like a snail
And feel the intense
Furnace of your body

I hold on tight
Absorbing the warm of you
Breathing the smell of you
And for the few moments
It takes to drift
My body
My mind
And my heart
Let go

Alison Cassidy

Let There Be Light

Harsh light
Summer sun
Baking the earth

Autumn
Soft light
Long shadows

Winter light
Cool blue
Shivering

Spring-time
New light
Bright jonquils

The light
Of understanding
In your eyes

Alison Cassidy

Let's Dance

To live life as it is unfolding
under my nose
Right now

To accept myself as I really am
in the core of my being
Right now

To let go of the need to change the way I am
and love myself warts and all
Right now

To move to the rhythms of my true self
and allow myself to feel the tenderness within me
Right now

Life - I offer you my hand
Let's dance...

This poem is inspired by The Dance by Oriah Mountain Dreamer.

Alison Cassidy

Lexie

Lexie Emery

(no, she's Blake now, of course) ...

Hadn't seen her for years

- fifty to be precise -

It was the reunion of the drama group,
couldn't believe she was still with us.

Recognized the awful voice,
deep,
noisily penetrating.

She used to play piano,
belting out familiar tunes
with more enthusiasm
than accuracy.

Mum used to say

'I wish she'd use a few more chords.'

She also trod the boards of the old hall
with great ebullience,
memorable as the headmistress
in 'The Happiest Days of you Life',
eyebrows drawn on with black pencil,
rough as bags.
Audiences loved her.

Her second child was born at home
Mum told me,
delivered her on the floor by herself -
Such a plain baby...

Re-married after John died
(suddenly of a heart attack) -
a younger man,
much younger,
'So embarrassing,
but he really adores me, ' she said.

Funny, she outlived him as well...

I promised I'd visit,
put her number in my phone.
I must give her a ring -
I suppose she won't be around for much longer...

Alison Cassidy

Like Any Other Day

These paragraphs begin the afterward of Donna Farhi's book 'Bringing Yoga to Life'. She expresses eloquently what I have come to believe after 24 years of continuous Yoga practice and teaching.

Does Yoga practice make life easier? Most assuredly, all that is onerous and cumbersome does not go away. Yet our once implacable desire for certainty wavers in the face of something better: Living in awe, wonder, and delight. Life does not become easier; we become easier with life just as it is... We become less hindered by our past and less invested in our fantasies. Instead we begin to live with a sense of immediacy and lucidity that makes everything we encounter—good, bad and indifferent—illuminated through awareness.

We practice on and off our mat to enlighten our living. Nothing has changed. Still the difficulties, the challenges, the moments of doubt, the evening time of aloneness.... Practice cannot and does not eliminate these extremes. What practice does do is give us direct access to an internal and ever-present refuge of peacefulness that exists inside of and despite all polarities. If our practice has tethered us to life, we stop feeling so threatened by all these comings and goings.... We thread our foibles and strengths side by side. We thread the seemingly incongruous nature of everyday life, full of awkward irregularity and irony, with our aspirations to clarity, calm and order. Threaded to everything, we can take delight in this peculiar and perplexing thing called life. We make it our task, then, to love what we cannot possibly understand by letting mind lie down and the wisdom of the heart take over.

Does Yoga practice change who we are? We remain exactly the same except for one extraordinary difference. We see ourselves and the world differently, for we see ourselves as the world, and in doing so we find we have less need to barricade ourselves from a perceived other. In dismantling these barriers of separation, we develop a fearlessness in relations to this largeness that allows us to step forward when we once held back. We see the same things, but now we actually notice what we see. We hear the same things, but now we notice what we hear. We feel, taste, and touch the same things but through an intensified register.

Alison Cassidy

Little Indian Boy

The row of empty faces
stared - or thumbed
well worn Women's Weekly's
with the idle curiosity
of daytime television viewers.

The waiting room was cold,
much too cold
for such a blistering summer's day.
I sat well away
from the air conditioner.

A little Indian boy
in smart red jumper
played with the toys on the floor.
He looked about four.

After several minutes or more,
he stood before me
smiling shyly:
'Hello.'
'Hello' I replied.

The little boy greeted
each patient in turn,
offering his hand politely
and beaming his big brown eyes.

There was a general stir
(of recognition perhaps?)
and a roomful of strangers
became friends.

Alison Cassidy

Looking Glass Reflections

When I was a child
the glass on the wall
was a mirror of me.
I put on faces and hats
and spent hours imagining

When I was thirteen
I hated the mirror,
for it showed me
the spots on my face
I spent hours attempting to cover.

When I was twenty
I would look in the mirror
and create each new face
that appeared on the stage
for the evening performance.

When I was a mother
I sat with my daughter
and showed her
the 'girl in the mirror'
and told them both stories.

When my children were grown
I met an old lover, who said
I was sexy and stood me
naked in front of the mirror
and forced me to look.

Now that I'm sixty, the image
I see depends on the mirror.
I like the one in the bedroom
because it faces the window
and the light is flattering -
especially if I take off my glasses.

Alison Cassidy

Lusty November Morning

I waken to the screeching of cockatoos.
The sticky scent of jasmine fills the room.
Dawn's watercolor fingers touch the pillow.
It's been a long, hot night.

I press myself against your naked back.
You're cooler now than you were before,
when you were struggling to breathe
and pushed me away.

Your skin is smooth as soap this morning.
Your shoulders broad - familiar.
I smell the heavy rhythm of your breathing -
oblivious to my desire.

My skin is smarting from yesterday's sun.
My fresh haircut is shorter than ever.
I slip my fingers shyly between your legs.
My pulse quickens.

Alison Cassidy

Masonic Christmas Party 2006

The lodge in harsh fluorescent light
is hung with tired pre-loved tinsel
and orange vinyl chairs sit side by side
in even rows and trestle tables laid

with paper cloths are red and green
and chipped glass bowls hold chips
and nuts and brightly colored sweets
and cans of coke and lemonade

The room fills up with suited men in ties
and wives in fancy frocks and pearls
The women gather awkwardly in groups
The men stand with their cans of beer

A five-piece band plays swing
and rock-n roll with equal verve
The pianist young with Liberace flare
The others play in tune and laugh a lot

At eight o'clock the supper is announced
The men and women form a tidy line, which
shuffles past the salads, chicken, ham
and cutlery like porcupines in jars

And then the couples make their way, in
ones and twos toward the polished boards
George is blind. His wife, a large and loving
woman guides him deftly across the floor

At nearly eighty four Bill Blood is slight
with light grey shoes and awful greasy hair
He holds his dumpy mottled little wife
with confidence and graceful easy flare

The other couples shuffle back and forth
some in, some out of time, all comfortable
The band plays numbers everybody knows
and those still seated nod their drowsy heads

At ten o'clock the raffle draw's announced
and patrons view their tickets blue and green
and happy winners rise and make their choice
from awful gifts gift-wrapped upon the table.

It's late before we bid our fond farewells
to gentlemen who gather once a month
and share Masonic camaraderie
that happily inspired this little poem.

Alison Cassidy

Matilda Is Autistic

Matilda is autistic -
intense and strangely beautiful.
Trapped in her clockwork body,
she talks at the top of her typewriter voice.

Matilda's eyes are dusty blue.
They flit back and forth like a frantic moth.
Course tangled curls shower her shoulders.
Her rigid hands clutch at the air.

Matilda is strong.
She frightens the others.
No one wants her for a partner.
She's too fiercely physical.

But today was different.
She touched the soul of Piazzolla.
With tambourine fluttering and eyes shining,
she lost herself in the pounding bandoleon.

And when we waved goodbye,
her cheeks were aflame.

Alison Cassidy

Meditation Haiku

sitting in stillness
a carpet of butterflies
rises on my breath

Alison Cassidy

Miss Jones

Her lower jaw
(a class three, my dentist father
would have termed it)
juttred forward pugnaciously.

He hair hung limp,
pinned at the side.
Her body hunched crab-like
(probably osteoporosis) .
She wore cream blouses,
stout shoes
and a cardigan
when it was cold.

She adored Mr. Cuthbertson
(head of radio drama)
with the fierce passion
of a lonely spinster.
She fussed over his tea,
typed his memos lovingly.

Her Christian name was Aimee.
Sad really.

At her retirement party
Mr Cuthbertson pecked her on the cheek.
She blushed hotly
and happily.

Alison Cassidy

Miss Slater

I adored
Miss Slater
our literature teacher
Fiercely attractive
(she had a female companion)

Passionate
about the books
she loved

Slim
as the red
pen
she used
so ruthlessly
to scratch out
my stumbling attempts

Her writing was appalling
like a doctor's
She threw her words
at the page

'Explain? '
'This doesn't make sense! '
'Where is your conclusion? '
'Nice is not a word! '

Once she gave me an A
and my heart sang.

I found out later
she had lung cancer
- no wonder -
she smoked like a chimney!

Alison Cassidy

Modern Muslims

They were standing
just below me
on the escalator -
makeup artfully applied,
head-scarves framing honeyed skin.

They were smiling
with perfect teeth
and chatting brightly
about the evening's performance.
I couldn't take my eyes off them!

Their designer clothes
were elegant
in black and white.
They wore them with the easy assurance
(and stunning legs)
of those who tread the catwalks of Paris.

The production had been
confronting to say the least.
The program warned of
full frontal nudity
and cigarette smoking
(tobacco free) .

I wonder how these two enjoyed the show -
these modern Muslims
in their mini-skirts
and stiletto heels?

Alison Cassidy

Morning Has Broken

a tiny fire-tail finch
ducks and weaves
furtively
amongst the grevilleas.

a flash of red
a whirl of wings
a cheerful chirp.

a huge cockatoo
lands on the power-line,
peers down at me
and slowly raises his magnificent crest.

a flash of yellow
a white tailored suit
a blood-curdling screech!

an old Rhode Island red
scratches dustily,
feathered bum drooping,
eyelids wrinkled.

a flash of childhood
a warm brown egg
a comfortable clucking.

Alison Cassidy

Morning Yoga Practice

As I stood on my head
in front of the fire,
two black and tan faces
settled beside me.

The dachshund's
long nose
sniffed the heat.
The tortoiseshell
licked her
lingeringly -
presumptuously.

The usual growl
didn't eventuate
and for several moments more,
peace reigned
in the pale autumn light.

Alison Cassidy

Mum's Ashes

We didn't give you
a proper send off mum.
(I regret it now)
but then,
I resented
the 'friends'
who never bothered
when you were old
and irritatingly frail.

So we filled the house with flowers
and Bach
and the bunch who cared.
And dear old Ted
(who used to prune the garden)
offered to
'do the honors'
with the rose bush.

Later,
after sandwiches
and Gibran
we traipsed out into the garden.

Unfortunately
the ashes proved
a tad voluminous
for Ted's carefully prepared resting place,
so I concealed (surreptitiously)
the excess in the cupboard in the hall.

When I left the conjugal home
some months later,
my ex found your 'brick'
and dumped it on the drive
with a rude note.

So I took you home
and scattered the other half of you

over my new garden
with my new lover standing beside me.

And something tells me
dearest mother,
you would have smiled.

Alison Cassidy

Mutton Dressed As Lamb

I noticed three servings
yesterday at the local café -
sixty something retirees
nibbling on entrees
of empty, idle chatter.

The first (the bossy one)
wore a generous head of hair
(or was it a wig?)
Bootlace brown and brazenly 'bouffant',
it failed somehow to compliment
the loud and overcooked face
that scowled beneath it.

The second had 'done' hers herself.
A Decore 'natural' blond
trying (unsuccessfully I fear)
to mask the pale pink pate
that peeped from between
a stand of meagre stalks.

The third was 'tipped'
(a suburban salon for sure)
in red and Munroe blond.
Her foundation, applied
generously and myopically,
served only to emphasize
the murder of 'crows feet'
that ravaged her face.

Their 'other halves'
were balding, bespectacled and paunchy.
They didn't say much -
Out voiced it would seem
by the generous servings
of mutton dressed as lamb
bleating beside them.

My Daughter On Her Thirtieth Birthday

A naked girl in the bath
Suds floating, eyes shining

A BIG girl riding Mr. Horsy-bike
Birthday party, green balloon

A special girl grooming Sheike
Sweat streaming, cheeks flaming

A Co-op girl in the kitchen
Baking sponges with her friend Rosie

A magic girl playing Ariel,
'Merrily, merrily shall I live now'

A gentle girl at my bedside
When I was sick with pneumonia

A grown-up girl working hard
Errol Street, massage

A beautiful thirty year old girl
Ready to fly

Alison Cassidy

My Father's Feet

I saw him lying in the hospital bed
He looked small and shrivelled
I recognised his feet first
sticking out from the covers
They looked just the same -
Those feet he always powdered
'Your father loves his feet'
Mum used to say.

Then the nurse drew the curtain
And I saw his face
And he was not the same
His eyes were empty, and dull
With none of the mischievous twinkle
That used to embarrass Mum.
'Malcolm, stop it! What will people think? '

I kissed his cheek.
They'd taken his teeth out.
He looked awful.
I'd put on some makeup. He liked me to.
'My daughter's on the stage'. he used to boast.
'I look after all the Melbourne Theatre Company.'
He was a good dentist.

'How are you feeling, Dad?
Are you in a lot of pain? '
'Not really, more discomfort'
His voice came from far away
'Can I get you anything? '
'I don't think so'
I'm just so bloody tired.'
He closed his eyes.

Alison Cassidy

My Feeble Response

You introduced me to Dawe*,
do you remember,
during those heady adolescent days
when life was high drama
and the parties went on all night?

And later, in the Seventies,
when you finally conceived
(at forty, just like mum)
we caught up again
over birthing and babies and breast feeding.

You'd bought the old house
in Research Road, remember
and it mattered enormously to mum
that you loved living there
just as much as she had.

She was thrilled to see the kids arrive
and the garden fill with their laughter.
You two shared such an easy rapport
as you nattered over cups of tea.

Then in Eight Four, your Jonathon fell -
your beautiful brown-eyed boy.
The school community was shocked.
They'd never dealt with tragedy before.

I couldn't imagine how you would cope -
you, who were never a confident parent,
despite being a brilliant teacher;
You, forever torn between
your rigid Catholic upbringing
and the fierce independence of your academic mind.

I didn't know what to say.
Should I ring or write?
I procrastinated for days.
I so wanted to express

the depth of my concern...
but in the end,
I offered nothing
but a 'Sorry for your loss'.

Mum had no such qualms.
She wrote in a trice
in her Charlotte's web hand
the sweetest, simplest note.
And you were touched enough to respond.

I felt so ashamed
that Mum in her dotage
could express her feelings
with such grace and honesty.
Whilst I allowed those around me
to dictate my feeble response.

I wonder how differently I'd behave
if it happened today.

*Bruce Dawe - Australian poet.

Alison Cassidy

My First Orgasm

it wasn't
for want
of regular experimenting,
but somehow
I could never achieve
that blissful state that others
told me I'd definitely recognize.

I looked
in books,
but they were anatomical
and talked of labia and uteri
and eggs and swimming sperm
and weren't much use
at all.

I filled my mind
with images erotic
from well-thumbed paragraphs
in Portnoy's Complaint and Lady Chatterley,
but these served only to intensify
the awful realization
that I would never enjoy
the mind-blowing experience they all wrote about.

And it wasn't
that I didn't delight
in the act of making love
and feel intensely erotic sensations
in those places I imagined I should.
It's just that I knew that there was something more.

And then
you came along
and with obstinate patience,
placed your hand in just the right place
and stroked and rubbed and coaxed until
my body felt a new and pleasant sensation
that vaguely mirrored childhood in the bath

and slowly the sensation grew
until I knew
that something irresistible would definitely happen
and found myself without pretense
as my body writhed and squirmed
and screamed
in tantalizing ecstasy.

Thereafter, I did it regularly
After all, practice makes perfect...

Alison Cassidy

Neglect

The shiny new pram
was screaming
at the top
of its lungs.

The young girl
in charge
(odd these days to see a mum under twenty)
seemed unconcerned
as she scanned the shelves -
iPod in ear,
face miles away.

I peeped under the cover.
A pair of pale blue legs
kicked frantically,
a tear-stained face,
contorted with despair.

As the young girl
left the checkout,
I wondered how long
It would be
before she'd notice
and pick up the poor little mite.

Alison Cassidy

New Years Eve

At the stroke
of midnight
I stroked
your back
as you slept
naked in the oppressive summer heat.

The fan purred contentedly
at the foot of the bed.
Your cheeks moved
in and out
like tiny bellows.

I placed
a row
of kisses
(salty warm)
along the length and breadth of you.

You didn't stir.

I wanted to wake you,
To take you in my arms.

But instead,
I turned out the light.

Alison Cassidy

Night Child

The house is cool at last.
I turn down the volume on the TV
so as not to disturb you.
I watch the ceiling fan slowly revolving...

'Allie? '
'I'm out here, my love.'
'When are you coming to bed? '
'Soon, sweetheart.'

At ten thirty,
I turn off the fan
and climb in beside you.
You are musty warm and purring
with your feet sticking out.

I close my eyes
and drift off.
Suddenly you snap on the light!
'Allie! Allie!
There's something the matter with this pillow? '

I pretend to be asleep,
trying hard not to react.
Remembering what it felt like
to be small and afraid of the dark.

Then dawn opens her eyes
and you slip your hand
between my legs -
and the child of last night
becomes the man
I fell in love with forty five years ago.

Alison Cassidy

No Trouble At All

I couldn't take my eyes off her...

Such a serious little face,
(she looked about two)
with skimpy flaxen hair
and a faint flush
on her cherry blossom cheeks.

Her eyes were widely set
and of the palest blue.
They stared intently -
mesmerized
it would seem
by the pink plastic screen
carefully placed
on the table before her.

The restaurant was busy.
The grownups chatted
brightly
between forkfuls.
Every now and then
they would smile and nod
approvingly
in her direction.

She must have sat there
(without a murmur)
for over an hour.
'She's no trouble'
I heard the mother say
as they got up to leave,
'No trouble at all.'

Alison Cassidy

Nodding Greenhoods

The familiar homeward track
wound its way up the hill.
I stumbled along it,
trying to avoid
the shale
that nipped,
the heat
that gripped.

The sun overhead
burnt my bare skin.
The scrubby wattles scratched my arms
(deliberately,
it seemed to me) .
The native grasses
sang thinly
in dusty clumps.

Then -
a Cootamundra blocked my way.
and I saw them.
An army of orchids
of such fragile beauty,
they took my breath away.

Nodding green-hoods.
Spielberg aliens
en masse,
with ridiculous oversized heads
bowing
obsequiously
in pale translucent green.

I went down on my knees -
and without thought,
my adolescent angst
had melted into air
into thin air.

Noisy Still Life

twenty three
bold cockatoos
in freshly laundered
white suits
and flamboyant yellow
feathered hats
perched
on a single tree
gossiping
in unison

Alison Cassidy

Non Je Ne Regrette Rien

Edith
little sparrow
foraging for love.

Edith
little sparrow
with a needle in your arm.

Edith
little sparrow,
open the wings of your voice -

And sing.

Alison Cassidy

Ode To Ella - A Little Doggerel

Ella is my sausage dog,
Her legs are undersize,
Her tail wags like a metronome,
Her brown eyes mesmerize.

Ella's nose is polished black,
Her sense of smell's acute,
Her stomach is an endless pit,
She's really rather cute.

She's fond of eating Rom the cat,
He doesn't seem to mind.
She bites his neck and chews his head.
She isn't very kind.

She also chases cockatoos
And lies beside the fire
Upon her back like snoopy dog
Replete with Mr. Tyre.*

Ella is my dearest love.
I walk her every day
I know she loves me eagerly,
She licks my face away!

*Mr. Tyre is her favorite toy, a present from the one who feeds her.

Alison Cassidy

Oistrakh Plays Bartok

Sweet strings

Aching tension

Ecstatic resolution

Oistrakh and Bartok

Effortlessly

Together

Alison Cassidy

Olfactory Memories

My nose has always guided me
Across the roadmap of my world
From long ago when I remember
The bliss of my cream viella nightie

An ever cautious child, I used to
Open the book of each sandwich
And sniff its contents rabbit-like
Before trusting it to my tongue

And after dreams of bogeymen
The smell of mum beside the bed
Stroking my hair with wrinkled hands
Would always settle me softly

Bumping in the back of the old Buick
I would ask dad to open the window
To catch the seductive smell of creosote
When the men were tarring the road

And winter roast on Sunday morn
From slow combustion stove
With gravy brown and garlic lamb
Was always such an incentive to get out of bed!

Summer smells of rain on dust
And fresh baked crusty bread
And homegrown roses velvet dark
that filled the house with blackberry jam

And now though sense of smell is less acute
I hold your face between my hands
And let the powerful pheromones of you
Carry me to heaven and beyond

Alison Cassidy

On The Death Of A Child - For Tara

Words cannot change what happened
Words cannot heal the hurt
and yet there is comfort
in your words:

He was perfect
He was smiling

Alison Cassidy

On The School Bus

She caught the school bus
every day,
Margaret Kennedy,
plain and pigeon-toed.

She chose the same seat
behind the driver
(we liked to sit up the back) .
She'd bury her face in a book,
hiding her freckles under her hat.

She was a school prefect -
a real goody-goody -
who always wore her gloves
and 'reported' us
when we didn't.

She sometimes sucked sweets
which she'd smuggle
surreptitiously
from gloved hand to mouth.

Margaret was a loner -
aloof and without friends.
She was older than us
and we were all a bit scared of her.

One day she missed the bus.
We were told her mum had died
(she'd had cancer apparently) .

She never caught the bus again.

Alison Cassidy

Painted Pollution

Driving to Apollo bay some years ago
with a car full of buzzing kids
all summery and silly and high as kites,
I noticed the daylight change suddenly
from crisp starched white
to golden pink and rusty red
and the sky slowly painted itself
the most beautiful sunset.

I stopped the car beside the road
overlooking the sea
and we all stared in wonder
as the sun gradually disappeared
beneath the watercolour waves.
There was a moment
of breathless awe
before one of the kids broke the spell:

'My dad told me what causes that...
It's the pollution.'

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story - 12 Love Blossoms On A Spring Morning

A pair of proud heads
pose
beak to beak

The spring sun winks from a cool sky.□

The peahen peers at her regal mate
myopically,
hypnotically,
pecking him
provocatively
on the cheek.

The camellias smile with fat pink faces.

The peacock can't believe his luck.
He stands trance-still,
crop full with desire,
train trailing long and limp
behind him.

Almond petals cover the grass in pink confetti.

I suddenly notice the time -
Crikey, I'm late for work!

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story - 7 Peacock Indifference

Miss P and Mr P
always perch separately -
she on the rubbish bin,
he on the balcony.

Miss P and Mr P
turn their backs emphatically,
preen themselves singularly,
poop away contentedly.

BUT LAST SPRING...

Miss P and Mr P
sang in feathered harmony,
brightly in the key of D -
'A girl for you a boy for me'
and four fat fledglings* followed.

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story 8 - A Sad Poem

yesterday
five freckled eggs
nestled under warm feathers

today
they have gone
there is not a shell left

and poor Miss P
is calling
sadly

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story 1 - Mr. P

We call him Mr. P.
He stands at the door
each morning
like an emperor -
aloof, with jeweled crown,
and heavily mascarared eyes.

We offer sunflower seeds.
He hesitates, then
with cautious grace,
steps toward the offering,
head jerking awkwardly
from side to side.

He has no home,
this wondrous miracle
of feathered cobalt blue.
At Christmastime,
his tail full-grown becomes
a fan of shimmering eyes.

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story 10 - Oh Pretty Peacock

Oh pretty peacock,
why perch you thus,
so haggard and so woebegone,
upon the wooden rail?

Is it that recent hail
has bombarded your skinny body
and left you primping your wet feathers
with a cold beak?

Or is it perhaps
that your bonnie mate (too late)
has left to nest elsewhere
after last month's lusty cacophony.

I'd like to invite you into my warm house.
But sadly I have two hungry cats...

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story 11 - Priscilla Queen Of Peacocks

The house lights dim.
The sun snaps on.
We hear the opening notes of 'I Will Survive'...

Priscilla Peacock,
drag queen par excellence,
makes a spectacular entrance,
(teetering on three inch heels)
along the veranda railing.

She turns a glittering head toward us,
her eyelids dripping mascara.
Her cathedral train reaches
meters behind her -
a thousand jeweled eyes
glinting in the light.

Every now and then
she fluffs out her feathers
with the careless abandon
of a Marilyn Monroe.

Then, as the music reaches its final crescendo,
she wraps her wings
around her shoulders
and saunters off.

The young tree-ferns
watching from the front row
uncurl in erotic response.

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story 2 - Pretty Miss P

She appeared from nowhere,
out of the blue, this morning
like an early Christmas present -

I little hen for Mr. P
our wondrous miracle
of shimmering cobalt blue.

A little hen quite small
with softly rounded brown bum
and pretty creamy chest.

Her neck with emerald sheen
beneath a feathered crown.
Her feet a size too big.

Where did she come from -
this perfect companion
for our adopted son?

I do hope she stays...

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story 5 - Poor Little Miss P.

Bedraggled, she looked this morning,
standing at the back door
in her oversized feet.

We'd not seen her since she lost the chicks -
all four of them.
Foxes, I suppose...
(I guess they get hungry too)

Next door told us she'd grieved
for ages afterwards,
pacing up and down
and making hollow honking sounds.

Her topknot looked chewed,
as if the mice had been at it,
her dusty feathers lace-like,
transparent in the sun.

She pecked the seed I gave her
compulsively,
percussively,
head lifting up and down
like a tiny jackhammer.

Poor little Miss P,
how I longed to hold her in my arms...
but all I could do was to call off the dog.

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story 6 - Confrontation Witnessed Through The Kitchen Window

She stands her ground -
magnificently.
Gone is the insignificant pea-hen
with head bowed.
In her stead, a terrifying Brunhilde
fiercely flaunts her feathered shield.

Her armoured feet are placed in fourth position.
Her eyes stare intently at the ground.
She backs up,
step
by step -
as in a trance.

Suddenly she turns on the intruder,
feathers fanning furiously,
beak making a sharp clicking sound.

The little red wattle-bird
flits in and a out of the azaleas
enjoying his game of hide and seek.
Every now and then,
he sneaks
another morsel
of Brunhilde's feast.

The heroic shield-maiden
attacks again and again -
eyes focused hypnotically,
neck plumped to twice its size.

All at once, the drama is interrupted
by a black and white magpie
who swoops down beside her,
stands on one leg,
and chortles appreciatively -
like a Greek chorus.

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story 7 - Interrupted Courtship

I saw him through the kitchen window -
resplendent in turquoise blue,
emerald train erect -
a hundred eyes thrumming.

She stood nearby,
pecking the dirt.

He circled her in a slow foxtrot,
his tail vibrating in rhythmical pulses -
like a dozen brushes
stroking a dozen drums.

She walked about
seemingly oblivious to his amorous advances
(I do believe I saw her yawn) .

Suddenly a small dog broke the spell
barking happily.
The peacock shrugged his feathers,
lowered his extravagant tail
and sauntered off.

His female companion took no notice.

Alison Cassidy

Peacock Story 9 - Joy Of Joys

They call her Milly
next door,
but we think Milly
is rather silly.
She'll always be
Miss P to us.

They knocked
round lunchtime yesterday
excited
'Milly's back
and guess what? '

We crept up the path
(tinder dry after summer heat)
and spied her
wandering casually
and maternally
among the dead azaleas
with three young chicks
in tow -

Joy of joys!
(we thought she'd flown) .

We watched
enchanted
as they wolfed
the crumbs of bread -
hungry it would seem
and completely at peace
with their world.

We spoke about
'last year'
and the lone chick
who lingered... not long enough.

And shared a prayer

that the cats,
the kookaburras
and the currawongs
might leave them alone this time.

Alison Cassidy

Piglet - For Marion

Piglet was a very small animal
with a little crooked leg
and a great big heart.

His shaggy coat swept the floor
and his nose was so long,
it arrived before the rest of him.

The other day he got sick
and you had to have him put to sleep.
Your bed is empty without him.

Alison Cassidy

Poemhunter

I joined the site
to keep an eye
on goings on
behind my back
that threatened to
destroy my world

I found instead
to my delight
a family
and a voice

Alison Cassidy

Political Storm

A vortex of dry twigs spirals.
The three Koori women
turn their backs,
squeeze their eyes tight
and let the willy willy
lash the air around them.

It dances like a dervish
up the dusty track,
dissolving in a puff
as if it had never been.
The Koori women laugh,
loud and darkly:
'Well, there's your message.'

The Territory is the vortex
of a new storm -
a willy willy of well-intentioned words
from well intentioned officials
seeking quick fix solutions
to decades
of poverty and neglect.

Sadly the Koori women know
that the dust will soon settle
on this willy willy of new promises
dissolving it in a puff
as if it had never been.

They've seen it all before.

Alison Cassidy

Pooh Bear And Cr Discuss Listening*

'Tell me about listening' said Winnie the Pooh to CR one day when they were sitting together in a thoughtful spot and the sun was hummy.

'There's lots of different sorts of listening.'
CR explained. 'It depends.'

'On what?' said Pooh amiably.

'On how you feel, I suppose.

For instance, there's the 'listening when you're not' sort of listening which you do when Rabbit is rabbiting on about something that doesn't really matter.'

'I know that sort', said Pooh.

'Then there's the 'half listening' sort of listening, when you sort of do and you sort of don't.'

'Like when Piglet's telling you a very exciting story and you can't listen properly cos your tummy's rumbling? '

'Precisely'

'Or when Eeyore's feeling particularly gloomy, so you make 'there there' sort of noises instead of listening.'

'The very same'.

'What other sorts of listening are there? '
Pooh asked eagerly.

'Then there's 'real listening' when you put aside everything else and turn off your own mind completely.'

'Like I'm doing now?' said Pooh

'Like you're doing now.' said C R.

'I like listening to you Christopher Robin' said Pooh.

'I like listening to you too, Pooh.

* (inspired by Michael Shepherd, M. Scott Peck and A A Milne)

Alison Cassidy

Poor Old Autumn

Poor autumn limped
into the Hills this year,
without its usual notes
of oboe gold.

I guess the summer dry
proved just too much
for frizzled leaves
too hot and tired to rust.

A sad and sorry April,
till this week
when hazy smoke hung
silken `cross the sky

And ornamental vine
donned scarlet coat
and kookaburra
laughed upon the fence.

Alison Cassidy

Poor Old Joe

His hands were coarse -
Blackened nails stabbed
out of filthy fingerless gloves

he refused to take off.
Talked to himself constantly
restless eyes flickering -

they called it shell shock.
Slept in an ancient caravan
with a mangy blue healer

he used to abuse.
Drew his navy beanie down tight
to keep out the fear.

poor old Joe.
He used to be a gardener
before the war.

They say he grew beautiful flowers...

Alison Cassidy

Recollections Of My Father

He was always there, my father,
constant as gravity.

And photogenic too,
with scrubbed square hands
and a pugnacious Roman profile.
He looked just like Henry XIII.

His surgery was his kingdom
and he ruled over his patients
with firm benevolence
and a twinkle in his pale blue eyes.

As children we didn't see much of him
- mum made sure of that -
but he was always there,
dependable as the Herald Sun.

He adored mum with fierce,
uncomplicated tenderness
and they fought long and hard
(mostly about me) .

He used to stamp his feet
(literally) over trivial things,
yet when the final diagnosis came,
he took it in his stride.

Latterly he grew thin and grey
and lost his colonel's moustache,
but he always enjoyed his glass of red
and watched the Channel 2 news every night.

My last picture of him
was a pair of pretty feet
at the end of a hospital bed...

Alison Cassidy

Release

To release the one
And enjoy the many
Makes the one
So much more

Alison Cassidy

Remembering Amita

Amita lived alone
walked the hills
for years
loved the dogs
remembered all their names

Amita leaned,
like the tower of Pisa
wore long sleeves
and braces
parted his thin hair, carefully

Amita spoke
eloquently
pedantically
articulating the names
of all the roads for miles around

Amita died alone.
'Topped himself, '
the locals said.
'Refused the chemo.
Can't really blame him? '

Alison Cassidy

Remembering Bill

He threw me across the stage
Wildly, night after night
'Get thee to a nunnery! '
Black eyes blazing
Gay, but you'd never know
He kissed like a dream

'Hath not a Jew eyes? '
He clutched my sleeve
Imploring, night after night
Hands deformed like claws
Body shrunken, transformed
Into the embittered Shylock

As Prospero he was massive
With staff and book and magic cloak
Commanding the stage
'O, a Cherubin thou wast, that did preserve me! '
He kissed my forehead
Tenderly, night after night

'Little Allie Bird, well bugger me! '
I hadn't seen him in years
He was working at the local tip
Slim and energetic as ever
The theatre work had dried up
'Can't seem to remember the bloody lines! '

Last week his partner brought him to visit
He was wearing a red baseball cap
They'd just got him into a home
He was so pleased to see me
We hugged and laughed a lot
He couldn't remember who I was

Alison Cassidy

Revisiting Walhalla - Valley Of The Gods

Trekking through memories
of lamp-lit holidays
choked by thorns and leeches,
I find myself revisiting Walhalla -
old gold-mining town,
old ghost-mining town.

There, in damp and misty air,
shrill bellbirds ring out loud
and chilblained hands
catch frogs in Stringers Creek.

Small feet in gumboots
creep by luck and match-light
through long abandoned
dry and musty tunnels.

Eager eyes read words
of anguish and despair
on tombstones half-buried
by time and blackberries.

Today the town is flooded
with tourists and electric light*,
yet that intangible spirit
of pioneers and pickaxes
still haunts Walhalla -
old gold-mining town,
old ghost-mining town.

*Walhalla was Australia's last mainland town to be connected to the national electricity grid in February, 1998. The resident population is nine.

Alison Cassidy

Richter Plays Beethoven

Sviatoslav Richter
Your German heart
understood Beethoven,
Your Russian hands
expressed his music
with consummate skill.

Sviatoslav Richter
Giant of the piano
You attacked the keys
with blinding technique
uncompromising honesty
and purity of soul.

Sviatoslav Richter
You spoke these words
shortly before you died:
'If one can only find
the necessary harmony,
life can be so wonderful'.

Alison Cassidy

Rosalyn Tureck Plays Bach

Her fingers
Tread lightly
Over the keys
Like the paws
Of a cat

She doesn't intrude
But allows the notes
To stand alone

A classical
Bill Evans

Alison Cassidy

Rows Of Eager Faces

Rows of eager faces
smile at me
from the front page
of the Age
this morning.
Friendly faces,
familiar faces.
Some old and crusty,
others,
terribly young.

Rows of eager faces
(too many of them)
are no longer with us.
They died
last Saturday -
suffocated
in their cars,
in their homes.
Swallowed by an inferno
that engulfed
without malice,
without warning.

Rows of eager faces,
are neatly folded now.
I can't quite
bring myself
to throw them away.

Alison Cassidy

Sad Is Stupid

I'm sorry you're sad

'I'm not sad.
Don't use that word.
Sad is stupid.'

... cos when you're sad
you're always angry
and push me away

'Of course I'm angry.
I'm pissed off
I'm allowed to be angry.'

so I guess I'd better
leave you alone
- and not show I mind -
till you're happy again

'Happy?
I'm never happy.
Happy is dumb and stupid! '

Alison Cassidy

Sadie Sits

Sadie sits
atop the breakfast table
spread-eagled in her favorite square of sun.

Sadie sits
stand-offish by the door,
when strangers seek to pat her tortoiseshell.

Sadie sits
a-snoozing on the couch,
her fierce white whiskers twitching in her dreams.

Sadie sits
discretely on your lap
her purring motor soothes your grumpiness.

Sadie sits
behind me on this chair
she's taking up more than half my buttock space -

but I haven't the heart to kick her off!

Alison Cassidy

Salt Of The Earth

'Tell her I've gone out...'
Mum used to say
as I handed her the phone.

Lil rang every week,
regular as clockwork:
'Hello Darling. How's your poor mother? '

'That woman never stops for breath.'
Mum was right.
Lil could carry on in a conversation
with a corpse.

She lived alone after Frank died.
Poor Frank.
He never got over the accident.

He used to drive the school bus.
One of the kids ran out in front.
She was only six.

He never drove the bus again.

Lil had knobbly hands
and a voice that could polish brass.
Her chest was flatter than Mum's.
Her neck was even scrawnier.

Mum used to laugh about it.

She'd brought up four kids of her own
and a whole string of other people's.

Lil never learned to drive.
Walked every where.
Smoked like a chimney.

I invited her to Mum's send off.
She wore a fur coat

and clip on earrings.

I noticed her blowing her nose
as we emptied the remains of Mum
around the rose bush.

'Dear old Niddy, ' she said softly.

'She was a real lady.'

Alison Cassidy

Sans Leaves (Haiku)

the sleepy maple
stretches out her naked arms
yawning for winter

Alison Cassidy

Saving The Wedgies

They were truly magnificent -
circling high above the pines, without wing-beat
way above the other birds
sort of small and insignificant beneath them.

You could tell they were wedgies
because of the tail spread out like a fan.
The kids liked to pretend they were ours -
our very own wedge-tailed eagles.

We found their nest one day
by accident
round mid-summer
when we were having a rather hot adventure
tramping through the dusty grey bush

You could pick the nest at once
a huge mound of sticks and white poo
around the base of the old stringy-bark
like a gigantic Christmas wreath.

And the nest above at least a meter across
really messy and rough as bags
They had probably been using it for years
(wedgies mate for life)

And then we read in the local paper
that the Council was subdividing
and our wedgie's nest was threatened

A young boy from the Steiner school,
his name was Marcel Cameron,
scawny kid with glasses - bit of a nerd -
decided he would 'save the wedgies'.

He wrote a petition and his mates
helped him collect signatures
He organized a demonstration
and over a hundred people turned up.

Next week Marcel's picture was
on the front page of the 'Warrandyte Diary'
The headline read 'Local lad saves Wedgies.'

Fortunately for Marcel, his father just happened to be on the Council.

Alison Cassidy

Seasonal Tongue Twisters - Not Quite Haikus

a carpet of amber -
fallen leaves flutter
their final diminuendo

a carpet of white -
a pair of cold magpies
print sets of maple leaves

a carpet of buzzing -
pink prunus blossoms
tempt Winnie the Pooh bees

a carpet of red dust -
Rhodies* fluff feathers
in forty degree heat

*Rhode Island reds (hens)

Alison Cassidy

Shadows Of An Ex

You always kept the curtains drawn
when the northerlies burned
and the children laughed,
naked and wet from the dam.

You always kept the curtains drawn
when the pot belly hissed
and smoky dust settled
on the books in their shabby rows.

You avoided the light (too bright)
and the sun (too hot)
and laughed long and hard
at a world you loved and feared.

Your voice grew tight
when I said goodbye
and your Irish eyes were hollow.

But you could not stop me,
nor ultimately the cancer
that destroyed your liver -
but never your will to live.

'Goodnight sweet prince
and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.'

Alison Cassidy

Shiatsu*

soft light
tinkling water
linen white futon
her thumbs walk
cat-like along
my resistance
body yields
mind opens
timeless tranquility

*for Mary Ingram with thanks

Alison Cassidy

Charlie took no notice.
Finally dad grabbed Charlie under the armpits
(he was taller than dad)
and dragged him out the door.

The crowd that gathered
gave us pitying looks.

I felt humiliated
and helpless
and angry

with dad for being such a dickhead
and Charlie for being my brother.

How I hated them both!

*inspired by the 2007 Australian film 'The Black Balloon'

Alison Cassidy

Silent Commuters

Walking the dog
through autumn's first mist
I noticed
five strangers
at the bus stop

A young female
in school uniform
awkwardly
studying her shoes

Three skinny youths
staring purposefully
and separately
straight ahead

And an elderly man
bespectacled and brief-cased
peering myopically up the road

As I passed this group of silent commuters
five pairs of eyes averted their gaze

And without warning
a local kookaburra
laughed uproariously...

Alison Cassidy

Simon's Hallelujah

I met you,
sweet prince,
on Christmas night
in the Choir of Hard Knocks.

You fascinated me,
reminded me
of another Simon
much like you.
A long-haired loner
who loitered
for years
by the river
of my childhood.
Who strummed his guitar
and talked to himself
and frightened the tourists
with their fat wallets.

I watched you sing
your Halleluja,
standing tall
on the Town Hall stage.
The words in your hand
shook uncontrollably,
the tremor in you voice,
you just kept at bay,
But the light in your eyes
flooded the room:

'And even though it all went wrong,
I'll shout before the Lord of Song
with nothing on my tongue but Halleluja.
Halleluja, Hallelujah,
Halleluja, Hallelujah.'

Alison Cassidy

Six Weeks Old

Dear little boy,
so deeply loved
and still
a stranger yet...

What mystery lies
behind those eyes so wild
that seek in vain
to still the wide world spinning?

What secrets hide
behind that tiny mind
that tries so hard to understand
the scary stuff that flies around inside?

I watch you now,
at rest upon my arm.
poised on the brink of becoming...

And long to see you jump.

Alison Cassidy

Slicing The Beans

Mum always sliced the beans for dinner -
using the old carbon steel knife,
that was pliant and paper thin
from years of sharpening.

She wouldn't use the plastic peeler
I bought her for mother's day.
'I'm used to doing them like this...'
she would explain, as she sharpened
knife on steel with purposeful relish.

I can see her now, perched on the edge
of the old kitchen table,
removing the strings,
meticulously, like a surgeon,
before slicing each bean
into ribbon fine slivers.

I never developed her skill with beans -
much to my chagrin.
I use a peeler and
cut them into chunks.

But they never taste the same...

Alison Cassidy

Smokers

Mrs. T
twelve inch holder
shiny nails
arched eyebrows
smoky voice
glamorous
actress

Mr. B
breakfast time
feet astride
newspaper wide
fanning smoke
with pudgy hands
dentist

Mr. C
Six foot two
Hudson car
maroon upholstery
corduroy coat
pipe to match
brainy

Mr. H
rolled his own
deftly, neatly
arranging them
in pretty rows
almond nails
sexy

Alison Cassidy

Snapshots 1963 - 1993

A brief encounter in St Kilda
With a brash young man
Who smoked cigarettes sexily

A weekend of physical education
For a young girl with curly hair
That made her toes curl

A black and white photograph
'The promise of things to come? Uh?
Signed Fred Hughes,1963'

A solemn promise made to
An older woman with red hair
In the dressing room of the Union Theatre

A pile of love letters hidden
In the drawer of the old chest
And read guiltily from time to time

An unsigned poem dated 1993
'It is so still.. so still..
I'm sure that you must hear me'

A figure in a red jumper
In Lygon Street, Carlton
Looking younger than his sixty-two years

A memorable kiss
In the front seat of the old Skyline
That released an avalanche of longing

A decision three months later
Made unequivocally
And painfully, SO painfully

A beautiful 49th birthday
With a dozen red roses
And blissful love-making all day

To be continued....

Alison Cassidy

Snapshots Of Christmas

1947

The lumpy pillowcase
is scary at the end of the bed.

1950

Saving the best parcel for last -
a beautiful walking doll with stiff legs.

1957

Suffering the wet kisses
of moth-balled aunts.

1960

Lazing about in the river
filled to the brim.

1975

A welcome break
from 'The government Inspector'.

1972

A pair of new grandparents
beaming in the doorway.

1978

Holding my slippery son
against my belly.

1983

Kissing the cheek
of my dying father.

1993

Larking around
with my lusty new lover.

2005

Trying hard to hide
the pain of betrayal.

2006

A familiar suitcase
packed in anger.

2007

A family gathering par excellence -
All's well that ends well.

Alison Cassidy

Snapshots Of My Brother

a small naked boy - holding a hose
blond hair smooth
mine was always fizzy

a curly-headed girl running,
running, face white as linen
'Mummy, David's stuck in the drain! '

mucking around - down the river
on Christmas holidays in the boat
pinching apples from Wagner's orchard

always too slow - running away
from mum, armed with a gumboot
God, she could be fierce!

dangerous folly - towing me in the A30
on your Harley Davidson
with only two meters of rope

so creative, lighting my shows
sliding the dimmers, never fazed
when things went wrong - ever

teasing me - first dinner with Roddy
my creme caramel like
'pieces of broken tile'

Christmases at Manningtree Road
where all the crockery matched
and the grand piano needed tuning

passionate dog lover
thumping Nicholas
tenderly when he was very old

the spare bed you made up
for Jerry and me to share
when I left Bellbird Lane

sitting beside my hospital bed
when I had pneumonia
holding my hand - every day

my dear and only brother
sensuous and compassionate
lover of beauty, I offer you
these lines with sisterly affection

Alison Cassidy

Snapshots Of Walhalla 1950 - 1960

A silver ribbon of a road
threaded through vertical hills
a shallow creek sparkling cold

Rainbow trout caught
with stick and sharpened nail
and fried in flour

Blackberries everywhere
scratches and thorns
and purple fingers

Beds with lumpy pillows
kettle whistling on the primus stove
slippery paper in the outside dunny

Mum cutting kindling
with hatchet and determination
her face red and shining

Dad cursing and swearing
installing the new gas lights
which hissed affectionately

Saturday afternoons
straining to hear the Goons
on the radio which crackled

Daily visit to the General store
with hand petrol pump and
milk in bottles and licorice straps

The band rotunda
with memories of polished brass
before the gold dried up

Torchlight journey through the long tunnel
a tiny circle of light
slowly growing bigger

Exploring the old cemetery
with gumboots full of leeches
and sad inscriptions to little souls

Walhalla - old ghost town
threatened by this year's fires
Thank God you escaped...

Alison Cassidy

Spartans Gym

Spartans has balls.
It's your kinda place.

Walled with mirrors,
ringing with rock,
stinking of bodies
pumping iron.

Machines like robots
stand to attention,
row upon row
heavy with weights.

Gym junkies pump
ridiculous muscles
straining like Arnie,
pushing their edge.

The fat over fifties
(dripping with sweat)
rekindle the spark
of their pimply days.

You step on the treadmill,
increase the speed,
check out machines,
test your new body.

You don't give a toss
for the new rehab centre
with its air conditioning
and manicured programs.

Spartans has balls.
It's your kinda place.

Alison Cassidy

Spring Is Sprung

spring is a -springing
the sun is a-shining
and daffodils dance in the dew of the garden

horses are necking
and neighing and whinnying
and chasing each other all over the paddock

birds are a-nesting
and preening and strutting
about with their feathers all ruffled and polished

children are laughing
their faces exploding
with smiles and giggles and games of pretending

lovers are lusting
and cooing and kissing
and dreaming of yellow and sunshine and flowers

Alison Cassidy

Stainless Hygiene

In Croydon town last week
I chanced to have to use
The fully automated
Hygienic push-button
Toilet complex - recently installed.

Confronted by a row
of gleaming stainless doors
labeled aggressively (and also in Braille)
I pressed the 'vacant' button.
A door opened automatically
and I entered the stainless world.

Inside the sound of stainless music
filled the air and a stainless voice
(American) said emphatically
'Push button to close door.
You have ten minutes.'

With some trepidation,
confronted with such a time limit,
I sat upon the stainless seat
and pressed a button
which released paper - slowly
one sheet at a time.

After hastily completing my task
I stood and failed to find
a button to flush the stainless bowl
(without the usual lid to close)
Again I heard the steely voice command
'Wash your hands and the toilet
will flush automatically'

Guiltily I held my hands under
the stainless tap and let the water run.
The door released, the music stopped
and I made a hasty retreat.

Henceforth when taken short,
I'll use the dunnies at the railway station
despite their broken seats
and piss-stained concrete floors.

Alison Cassidy

Stelle

She must have been quite a beauty in her day,
(and talented too, so they say)
but pregnancy forced her
to say No to Europe and
master classes with Arrau.

Later, in the silent days,
she played the old upright
at the Mechanics Institute.
A bit of a come-down from soirees
in the ballroom at Fernhurst Grove.

But when George died,
his money died with him
and you all had to move
to the cheap fibro cottage
where I lost my virginity
in the bed with grey sheets.

She called him Timmy.
You called him Stench.
She fed him rump steak.
the house stank of dog.

How you hated that dog
with its constant yapping
and its thin wire hair
that covered the furniture
and clung to your clothes.

The night she died,
when you sat by the bed
and held her hand,
you couldn't understand
why she kept asking
(with fear in her grey green eyes)
'What's going to happen to Timmy? '

I suppose that's why you wouldn't let us have a dog.

Alison Cassidy

Still Life

They sat
motionless,
back to back
in the bright ginghammed cafe.

(Their carers had left them
to pay for scones and tea)

He stared with empty eyes
at the blue green hills
spread out like a quilt.

Her eyes were empty too
as she studied her hands
gnarled into soft claws.

Two strangers
who didn't know
where they were
or who they were
or why they were sitting
so still
so still
in the bright ginghammed cafe.

I folded my unread newspaper.
A small wisp of distant smoke
curled like a ribbon.

Alison Cassidy

Suburban Labor

The plane trees stand in ugly rows,
branches parted in pruned lithotomy,
vulgar and naked to the winter sky.

Alison Cassidy

Sugar Daddy

And they stood in the waves -
he with his camera,
she without her clothes,
nervous and shivery -
but determined
to play it cool.

The pics were ordinary,
nothing out of the box,
but she kept them
and forty years later
one adorns her lover's study door
with others of his mates,
dearly departed mostly
(so many of them too) .

He was her mentor,
brilliant and irritatingly obsessed
with his work and her.
He taught her much.
She adored him -
especially playing Lady Anne to his Richard -
but never fancied him,
not like that.

Though one night
after his wife left
and left him bereft,
she did succumb
(and never regretted it) .

Not lust, but compassion
prompted her to open her legs.

She couldn't believe the urgency
of his need
and the tears
of his joy
afterwards.

Today
when her other half
flirts with young girls,
she takes comfort
from remembrances
of one
whom she loved
but never fancied.
Of one,
too old -
who really loved her.

Alison Cassidy

Sweet Sixteen

Concealing

letters in a familiar hand
that charmed and tantalized.

Kissing

a black and white photograph
hidden beneath her pillow.

Remembering

a pair of lips
that kissed her upon the eyes.

Resisting

confident fingers
that excited and embarrassed.

Emboldened

by claret courage
to offer her tongue.

Adjusting

reluctant suspenders
as the outside light was flicked on and off.

Sweet sixteen?

What a waste.

Alison Cassidy

Tantra

Like waves against the sand
Your breath ebbs and flows
Cool lips brushing the lids of my eyes

Like waves against the sand
Your breath rises and falls
Warm and salty against my throat

Like waves against the sand
Your breath opens the shell of my heart
And drinks the tenderness within

Like waves against the sand
Your breath corkscrews deep into my belly
And our bodies join and become one

Alison Cassidy

Teaching Dance

Today was perfect...

allegro

Bach's oboe

ribbons dancing

oranges and lemons

vivace

feet flying

faces bubbling

eager arms outstretched

adagio

soft circle

candle dancing

supple bodies stretching

presto

in the air

donkey kicks

higher and higher

God I love doing this...

Alison Cassidy

Tete De Clown

Seated upon the dunny*
in contemplative
post luncheon reverie,

I glanced upon
his melancholy face
with painted nose
and pencilled
downcast eyes

and in a moment -
softly surreal,
I saw the frame
surrounding him
slide slowly
down the wall.

My eyes blinked
in wide surprise -
as a single tear
trickled
down
his cheek...

*toilet (Australian colloquialism)

Alison Cassidy

Tharindu - For Nimal

A pair of shining eyes
hides under dark lashes,
almond skin
blushes - satin soft.
Fine spun tresses
cascade down her back.

She doesn't say much,
but when he tells us of
the three miscarriages,
I see the flash of pain -
as her lips part
in a shy smile.

Alison Cassidy

The Affair

The
Suspicion
Discovery
Betrayal
Pounding heart
Fearful imaginings
Awful sadness

The
Questions
Recriminations
Ultimatum
Uneasy forgiveness
Reluctant understanding
Beginnings of trust

The
Lesson
Listening
Sharing
Steely determination
Cautious acceptance
Unconditional loving

Alison Cassidy

The Aftermath

sitting at the table
sipping water
watching the fan
revolving in the gold rim
of the Chinese plate
on the shelf

Shostakovich
playing on the radio
aching with sweetness
and you working in the kitchen
all Chekovian anguish gone

the light is golden
the air is still

Alison Cassidy

The Birdsong Is Harsh This Morning

The birdsong is harsh this morning.

Messiaen cacophony -

strident,

raucous,

squawking.

Crows, cockatoos, currawongs,

even rosellas

with their squeaky-toy voices

sound

so loud.

Perhaps they remember

my screeching last night

when I couldn't make you understand.

And now my throat is sore

and you have turned your back.

The birdsong is harsh this morning.

Alison Cassidy

The Bright Side Of The Road

Come, my darling, come over
to the bright side of the road.
It's gloomy over there
and boggy and sad,
like Eeyore's 'how'.

Hold my hand, I'll take you
to the bright side of the road,
so you can turn your back
on scary shadows
lurking in corners.

Let's hold hands - you and I -
on the bright side of the road
and lift our faces to the cloudless sky
and feel the happy sun
upon our backs.

Alison Cassidy

The Challenge Of Change

A year ago, the earth under my nails
was friable and musty with life.

Today I pour my love
on to parched ground.

I thank God for the mystery of tomorrow...

Alison Cassidy

The Children Carry Your Genes

Battalions of books
stood to dusty attention
on their rough sawn shelves
of mission brown.

Piles of papers
from eager undergraduates
teetered in unsteady piles
all over the house.

Meters of CDs
wallpapered your study
awaiting your daily dose
of Beethoven or Brahms.

Your behavior was eccentric,
your language academic,
your brilliance knew no boundaries,
your kindness overwhelmed.

Romantic and incorrigible,
you were Irish to the bone.
A mix of Marx and Milligan,
your lunacy touched my soul.

You died too young, my love -
cancer doesn't discriminate.
The children carry your genes,
rather gracefully, it seems to me.

Alison Cassidy

The Coolest Teacher I Ever Knew

Pat was the coolest teacher I ever knew.
My kids adored him.
He hated hypocrisy
and cant.

Pat loved kids.
Had two of his own
and a wife called Jan

whom he didn't like much.
Actually Pat didn't like ANY grown ups
very much.

He was belligerently left wing
(got into politics later)
Hated injustice
and most grown ups.

He used word conversations
to teach kids to read.
Let them use rude words too -
like bum and fart.

First time I saw him
he was covered with kids -
reading Mr Silly on the old couch.

He had a curly beard,
long hair tied in a rubber band
and blue eyes that really twinkled.

When he took the kids
to the local oval to play cricket
he always guaranteed a draw.
Said no one should take sport
too seriously.

Pat was the coolest teacher I ever knew.
My kids adored him.

He hated hypocrisy
and cant.

Some people said he was rude
(I suppose he was) .

Alison Cassidy

The Dear Old Alfred

Red brick on Commercial Road -
where mum did her training
some eighty years ago.
Where white veils sailed
across polished floors.
Where pennies were spun
on mitred sheets,
'5.30 nurse. 5.30 nurse.'
mum used to say.

Red brick on Commercial Road -
where they took dad
when he was picking at the sheets.
(they call it carpology)
'It's a bit impersonal'
was his only complaint.
He was dead within the week.
'Cancer is such rotten disease'
said mum with dry eyes.

Red brick on Commercial Road -
where they are waiting for you, my love,
(with your blue pyjamas
and your brave belligerence)
to open your chest
and patch up your heart.
'It's the best bloody hospital in the state.'
mum always said.

I do hope she's right?

Alison Cassidy

The Faded Ford

Forlorn,
forsaken,
the faded Ford
sits by the side of the road.

Pushed carelessly
into a tangle of ivy -
this shabby reminder
of an earlier decade
has slid into the steep bank below.

It's been there for weeks
and each day
it disappears deeper
into its coffin of green.

It may have been 'dumped',
passed its use-by date,
not worth fixing.

Or perhaps its driver missed the turn
one foggy night
and simply left it there.

In any event
I feel strangely sorry
for the old girl.

I wonder when they'll tow her away.

Alison Cassidy

The Final Curtain

Beryl, his wife of sixty years,
Studied the coffin through
the deepening fog of her dementia
patting her son's hand as if to reassure.
He, wheelchair bound and dribbling since birth,
was oblivious to the sombre ceremony.
The organ sang 'Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring'.
The mourner Masons carried rosemary.
I held her afterwards and told her
how much he had loved her.

Alison Cassidy

The Fraying Edges Of His Mind

'We thought he could try Yoga?
He used to love it before...'
She brought him the next day
He had eyes like a child
He was fifty four.
He found the postures difficult
Especially the lefts and rights
When we were sitting in meditation
I wondered what he was thinking
With the fraying edges of his mind.

I saw them the other day
Walking hand and hand.
He looked the same
The same childlike stare
And friendly smile
'Did you hear Maria's selling up? '
'That bitch?
She wouldn't give you the steam off her piss! '
We all laughed
There was still a fragment of the old acerbic wit
In the fraying edges of his mind.

Alison Cassidy

The Gossips

Glazed and hollow
(mouths forever open)
'The Gossips'
stand
conjoined
in ceramic surprise.

Slip cast
in the Sixties,
'The Gossips'
took their name
(so story has it)
from two well loved local thespians:

Jeanie White - passionate,
one-eyed producer of plays,

And Enid Bird (my mum)
Jeanie's best friend and shadow.

My dentist father (never arty)
bought the pair in Sixty One
(cost him sixty pounds!)
They sat for years
atop the new Astor.
Visitors always noticed them.

These days
'The Gossips'
chatter together
in our new kitchen
beside the granite and stainless steel.

'The Gossips' -
a comical reminder
of adolescence and arty crafty days.

Alison Cassidy

The Grandfather Clock

Dad bought the grandfather clock
in 1969 after they moved house
got it cheap 'through a patient'
He'd always loved them -
grandfather clocks and grand pianos -
thought he wasn't particularly musical.

It stood near the new front door
with its walnut case gleaming
and its mellow chimes
announcing each new hour
in a comforting sort of way.

They loved that clock - both of them.
Mum used to wind it and dad
made sure it kept strict military time
- a challenging job, but one
that suited his deft dentist's hands.

When dad died, mum moved house
and the grandfather clock moved too
and the daily winding of the clock
became a sort of ritual -
a coming to terms with widowhood.

After her heart attack she lived with us
and the grandfather clock was installed
in her tiny overstuffed bedroom
The chime sounded much too loud
but she didn't mind.
(she refused to wear the hearing aid)

The night she died, I noticed the clock had stopped
I didn't wind it straight away.
It seemed impertinent somehow.

Alison Cassidy

The Horse

An ordinary sort of horse
stood in the paddock
one morning.

A blanketed bay -
not in his first youth,
nor his last.
Coat shabby,
head erect,
feet soggy in the winter mud.

There was nothing special about him,
but the stillness
he carried with inconspicuous grace.

Alison Cassidy

The Kiss

Two mouths touched
tentatively
almost chastely -
dry and soft as moth's wings.

Then...

Four lips lingered -
savouring

s

l

o

w

l

y

a moment of
absolute tenderness.

Alison Cassidy

The Letter

'My darling angel
I have a bleak and empty feeling -
not due to Alison Mary's exit either'

I smiled...
Strange to read the familiar hand
penned just four days after my birth.
Where was my father?
Why couldn't he share
this miraculous moment with her?

'I do hope you're not getting frozen my darling,
and that everything is going according to plan.'

They'd met on board ship
at the end of the war.
She was an army nurse,
nearly forty when he asked her to marry him.
'Oh Malcolm, I'm much too old for you...'
But he was persistent -
so she did.
He'd always wanted a little girl 'with dark curly hair'.
That's precisely what she gave him.

'I think the milk supply might be starting -
which I hope to goodness is alright.
I can't bear to think of starving the poor little thing.
Though no doubt someone is making up for my deficiencies.'

She ended up bottle feeding us both.
(David was born thirteen months later) .
She'd give us a little aperitif first,
then finish us off with a bottle.

'I'll stop now because it's almost lunchtime.
Bless you a million times, dear heart.
All my love and come back quickly.'

The Love Is In You

All the longing
and the dreaming
and the yearning
and the scheming

All the wond'ring
and the musing
and the what if-ing
and the perhaps-ing

All the tears
and the fears
and the sighing
and the dying

All the tenderness
and sweetness
and ecstasy
and joy

boil down to
this
simple
truth

The love is in YOU
Nothing else matters.

Alison Cassidy

The Old Dot Matrix - For Jerry

I listen
to the whirr
of the old dot matrix -
agonizingly slow,
irritatingly loud,
yet strangely reassuring.
So much a part of you,
my lusty love
and your Luddite ways
and your fistful
of blissful
words.

You dumped
(after much persuasion)
the electric Brother
you'd used for years
to record
(with two fingers)
those lines of love
and tears
that opened my heart
(and my legs)
some fourteen years
ago.

But the old dot matrix
stays -
(you've even found a source
of black fabric ribbons)
and every time I hear
its rhythmical, intrusive sound
(reminiscent of a dentist drilling)
I smile -
remembering
how much,
how very much
I love you.

The Old Grey Mare*

She was resourceful, my mother,
she'd been an old grey mare* after all
during the second world war.
'You'd need a face like horse '
she used to say,
'not to find someone.'

After the war, when the magpies dived
during the Spring, she found
an old pith helmet to cover her head
as she braved the washing line.
'I'm not sure where it came from.
It was probably your father's.'

My mother was the best prompter
in Warrandyte. 'Never fear, Niddie's here'
I found written on a card from the cast
of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'
thanking her for all her loud whisperings
from the prompt corner.

When she was old and bed-ridden,
she came to live with us. She dozed
a lot, and listened to 3LO on the radio.
'You know darling, ' she used to say
'However awful things get
There's always tea and bed'.

She had shelves and shelves of detective stories,
which she read and re-read daily.
'I've usually forgotten who did it,
but the stories are pleasantly familiar.'
She died on her birthday, June 28
with Agatha Christie beside her on the pillow.

A poem for my mother, Enid Mary Bird 1905-1993

*This was the term used to describe the Australian Army Nurses during the
Second World War.

Alison Cassidy

The Old Organ Seat

You hardly notice it has gone -
from its cobwebby corner at the yoga studio
where it stood graciously
and humbly for ten years.

Baltic pine and always wobbly,
the old organ seat had been polished smooth
by bums of ages pumping out
the music of Bach and Handel.

I first made its acquaintance
during rehearsals for Macbeth
at the de-consecrated Catholic church
in Middle Park in the sixties.

It served well as Scottish throne
and a place to sit for 'notes'.
I even recall thumping it with eager fists:
'...but who would have thought the old man
to have so much blood in him! '

After the church was demolished
the organ seat found its way
to our rambling cement rendered
house in Kangaroo Ground.

There it sat for years, covered with clothes
at the foot of the king sized bed
where we raised our three children
with love and silly voices.

I left it behind when I chose
a new fork in my emotional road,
but gladly embraced it again
when the old house was sold.

I wonder why they broke in -
these strangers who invaded my space?
I wonder what they were thinking

as they jemmied open the studio door
and took it away?

Alison Cassidy

The Persuasive Power Of A Pretty Peahen

You hobble and stumble
and snuffle and snuffle
and snarl at the dog
and shout at the cat

You grumble and fumble
and mumble and moan
and dropp your knife
and trip over the mat.

You push me away
when I give you a hug
'I'm in a bad mood
and I'm feeling like crap! '

Then Miss P turns up
and your face cracks a smile
'Good Morning Miss P.
Let's get you some breakfast! '

Alison Cassidy

The Red Rose

You offer me a red rose
The little prince loved her

I hold her carefully
Because of the thorns

I breathe your rose
And am transported

Alison Cassidy

The Right To Choose

Late '63 one summer night
when the termites were swarming,
a young girl with curly hair
gave herself somewhat impulsively
to an angry young man
- older, very attractive
in the back seat of the old Rover
- awkward with the gear-stick in the way.

It was a combination of summer sun
and eyelashes ridiculously long for a man,
plus one too many local reds,
that released her inhibitions,
and although the union was not
altogether satisfactory,
she nonetheless floated home
- feeling slightly smug
with a light in her blue-green eyes.

A few months later,
with tender breasts and heavy heart,
she phoned the angry young man,
who understandably became even angrier
when he heard her news
and hastily consulted a mate
who lent him a hundred pounds
and gave him an address in Sandringham.

The two arranged to meet one night in Kew,
he puffing seductively on his pipe,
she barely able to control the nausea
that poured over her in waves.
A couple of hours later
they were traveling in a car
hiding behind the front seat
on the floor, like criminals
- for safety you understand.

And later in a very ordinary

brick veneer by the sea
- she recalled the salt tang in the air -
she was instructed to lie
upon a very ordinary kitchen table
and spread her legs.

The procedure was performed without anaesthesia
and preceded by the words
'This isn't going to be pleasant'.
It wasn't.

Afterwards, lying in a strange bed
in a strange house in Warrandyte
- the angry young man couldn't stay -
she felt amazing relief that the blood
was finally flowing between her legs.

She rather hoped though,
it would stop soon.

Alison Cassidy

The Tears Of Things*

the Mock Turtle sobbed
his eyes full of tears
as he danced to the lobster quadrille

Pooh Bear understood
and Piglet too
though he was a very small animal

Alice found it curiouser and curiouser
and the duchess dug in her sharp chin
'and the moral of that is...'

Mole scabbled and scabbled and scratched
and Ratty loved messing about in boats -
just messing about in boats.

Flopsy and Mopsy and cottontail
were good little bunnies
their naughty brother Peter
found the eating of lettuces to be quiet soporific...

...the tears of things*
memories of a happy childhood

Alison Cassidy

The Three Of Us

I lay awake last night -
belly in a tight knot.
You were on the couch
under the mohair
holding stiffly to your fierce rage.

This morning you were quiet
and calm
as you demanded
the ultimatum
neither of us wanted.

And later
Mark sat between us.
Mark, your firstborn
with his red hair
and his gentle gaze
and his diffident manner.

And little by little,
the mist began to lift
and we resolved
to try again...

Alison Cassidy

The Trolley Song

I saw them at the supermarket
moving slowly together

She was small and softly grey
in her wheelchair
(more like a pram really)
arm in a sling
eyes dull
and faintly hostile

He was neatly dressed
and stooped
carefully maneuvering the trolley
and the wheelchair
inspecting the shelves
for the items
neatly printed
in large letters
on the list

He consulted his companion
about every choice -
smiling and nodding
for her approval.

He received none.

I felt a surge of compassion
for this gentle man
and his once-upon-a-time bride.

Alison Cassidy

The Two Of Us

They were identical twins,
Laura and Amy,
shared a humidicrib
and clung
to one another
with tiny pink hands
two halves of one

They both loved to run
running was freedom
faster than everyone
they ran and swam
hour after hour
lap after lap
they were fantastic

'You'll have to eat'
their mother said
'If you're going to run
and swim so fast.
You can't do it on nothing! '

But they could
and they did
and pretty soon
at age fourteen
they were diagnosed
with anorexia

'Let's get down to
twenty-five kilos? '

I saw their picture in the paper
the other day
they were thirty-six
and skin and bone
they looked so old
like victims from Belsen
- only their hair was dyed

and cut in yellow spikes.

They live on the pension
they have osteoporosis
they don't run any more

Why don't you get better?
'Get Better? What is better?
We love our anorexia
It's the only thing
we've got left
to make people
care about us.'

Alison Cassidy

The Young Girl Laughed

Born to a pair of child parents,
a young girl too fell at sixteen
madly in love, or so she thought,
with an impish freckled face
and a pair of pale blue eyes.

He, at twenty-one, found her
vulnerability attractive at first,
but soon tired of her neediness
and eagerness to please
and left for pastures greener.

She, devastated and forlorn
and hurting so hard she couldn't
bear the agony and despair,
ran the bath and swiftly stole
the blade from daddy's razor.

But just before the deed was done
in a gesture of unusual maturity
she phoned the local lifeline.
Sadly, the line was busy
but happily, the young girl - laughed.

Alison Cassidy

Tiger Moth

I wasn't sure at first
how you'd enjoy it,
but I knew you liked adventure,
so I booked
and kept my fingers crossed.

The tiger moth stood to immaculate attention,
a giant insect marooned on a grassy sea.
Smaller than I had imagined her
and lighter too,
with silver fabric wings
and a lone propeller
balanced on her nose.

She might have been left over
from a Forties film set,
or a toy abandoned by a spoiled child.

You donned the flying jacket
they offered
and stepped
(with surprising agility)
into the forward cockpit.

Then belted, capped and goggled
you awaited the 'contact' command
and a firm hand upon the propeller.

I shielded my eyes
as the ancient bi-plane rose into the air,
pirouetting amongst the clouds
and looping the loop with terrifying grace.

Your face was pink and pleased
when you alighted.

'It was fabulous' you said -
and meant it.

Timelessness - (Haiku)

a single white cloud
moving imperceptibly
across a blue sky

Alison Cassidy

To Michael Connor With Love

dear little man of smiles
your innocent perfection
has given your mother
permission to become
the beautiful person
she has always been

Bless you both...

Alison Cassidy

Togetherness

When we cocoon together
on autumn nights,
I pretend we share
the same skin.

If I close my eyes
and listen carefully,
I'll swear I hear
a single heartbeat.

Alison Cassidy

Tonsillectomy Circa 1950

A little girl with curly hair and a white face
A box of toys to be opened 'afterwards'
Two stern nurses in crisp white uniforms
with crisp white voices and disinfected hands

Lying on a narrow hospital bed
Trying to sleep without sucking her thumb
The embarrassment of a soapy enema
and not enough time to get to the toilet

The sweet suffocating smell of ether
She thought she was going to die...
Waking up with a throat of hot needles
and a fierce determination not to cry

Seven long days of pain and loneliness
and the niggling fear of abandonment
A tearful reunion with Mummy and Daddy
who believed they were doing the right thing.

Alison Cassidy

Transformation

Martina with the wooden face
is late to Yoga every week -
without fail.

Her eyes fidget.

She stifles yawns.

She sighs and complains
in her clipped German accent.

I wonder why she bothers?

'I have to tell you...'

the words spilled in a torrent,

'Hans and I...

We're going to adopt
some children.

Can I bring them
to your dancing classes? '

Her face reddened
suddenly, beautifully
and hot tears exploded
from her eyes.

Alison Cassidy

Tsipie Sleeps Here

There's a native fuchsia
growing fiercely in the garden
where we buried her - near the compost heap
nearly eight years ago.

The mattock was leaning by the back door
when I brought her home.
'I've dug the hole.
I won't come down...
if you don't mind? '

I can still see the old towel
that covered her soft grey fur
and the pink petals
you'd scattered at the bottom of the hole.

Alison Cassidy

Twelve Months On

A year ago,
the surgeon
(in the coolest glasses
and Armani suit)
said he'd ring
the moment he was done.

A year ago,
the patient,
shaved and gowned and terrified,
clasped my face,
as they trolleyed him
through the grim green doors.

A year ago,
the children
danced my heart out
and helped me still my silly mind,
as the obstinate hours
tick tick ticked
tick tick tocked.

A year ago,
the phone
refused to ring -
and six
and seven
and eight
went dawdling by.

A year ago,
I rang
Intensive Care
and heard the words
that sent my heart a-thumping
with relief.

I wonder if the surgeon
(in the coolest glasses

and Armani suit)
knew how much
his silence mattered.

Alison Cassidy

Two Sides Of An Unresolved Argument

Your voice of beaten bronze
that seduces and charms
can deliver expletives
that would make a sailor blush

Your eyes, dark chocolate pools
that swallow my gaze with desire
sometimes glare with such
ferocity they terrify

Your arms that hold me with
protective tenderness
can deliver punches that
KO opponents in the ring

your pen that coaxes words
from deep inside to touch my soul
can fire poisoned arrows
to disfigure and destroy

I need the black and the white of you
the sun and the moon of you
I need both sides of this
unresolved argument that is you.

Alison Cassidy

Uncle Malcolm

Uncle Malcolm
never married
Bought a house in Carlton
round the turn of the century
without electricity
or running water

Uncle Malcolm
never had a job
Invented ink in his spare time
Sold the patent
to Collies
who made a mint

Uncle Malcolm
walked to the cemetery
every morning
to fill a bucket
from a tap
by the gate

Uncle Malcolm
didn't have a bath
When Mum laid him out
she said his skin
was beautiful
and soft like a baby...

Alison Cassidy

Uncle Tissie's Secret

His face seemed to sag -
after the stroke.

He'd been a real stunner too,
a Cary Grant look-alike
with dark fizzy curls
Brillcreamed
into corrugated order.

'He was the only one of us
I saw mother cuddle'
mum used to say.

But 'something happened'
at boarding school
and he 'went quiet'
and ran away.

Joined the navy
during the war.
Married his 'Jeanie
with the Light Brown Hair'
who drank and smoked
at bright parties
where Tissie sang
and charmed.

A handsome couple -
they loved
and hated
each other
in equal measure.

After the stroke
he grew happier somehow.
Enjoyed his disability pension
and made furniture
with his good arm.
Turned many a stick of old cedar

into a chest of drawers.

Never sang again though...

He was well into his eighties
when he died.

Took his secret with him.

Alison Cassidy

Urban Charity

Dirty dreadlocks
(are there any other kind?)
and fingerless gloves
sprouting nails
blackened
by tobacco and neglect.

'Can you give us a cuppla dollars for a coffee? '
his voice wheedled like Uriah Heap.

I looked at my daughter,
groomed and city slick beside me
and felt almost embarrassed
as I parted with a twenty dollar note.

'Cool, mum'
was her unexpected response.
'You know they'll spend it on drugs.
But, what the heck?
At least they've met someone
nice
for a change.'

Alison Cassidy

Velvet Goddess

I am hypnotized by her grace,
as she moves
languidly,
seductively
like a Thirties movie star.

I itch to touch her skin,
this velvet goddess
of the silver screen,
her silk chiffon sleeves
swirling about her.

I watch her mouth
pouting provocatively,
her grey goggle eyes
unblinking
mesmerizing me.

She is centre stage.
She is glamorous.
She is the Bette Davis of the fish tank.

Alison Cassidy

Vip Customer

Acres of 'stuff'
fill this brightly lit superstore,
where fabric junkies
shiver in air-conditioned
summer cold.

Big Brand Sale signs
beckon bored Crafties
and Do It Yourselfers
with too much or too little
time or money to spend.

Disinterested staff
prop behind tables,
scissors snipping.
Next please...

Bleating customers
laden with fabrics
clutch plastic numbers
mindlessly...

The small leather 'scraps'
are not what I want -
but packaged so prettily,
and marked up to buggery...

I have no choice,
I pick my number,
I wait my turn.
Do you have your Spotlight VIP card?
My what?
Do you want to become a VIP customer?

You must be joking!

Alison Cassidy

What Is Yoga Practice?

to lean lovingly against the edge
of the body's resistance

to float on the river of awareness
beneath the thinking mind

to follow the music of the heart
beyond the ear's hearing

to touch the pillow between
the in-breath and the out-breath

to delight in the bliss
of being gloriously present

Alison Cassidy

White Ibis With Plastic Bag

I was pushing the laden trolley

when I saw him - flying low
with long outstretched wings
and something blue
like a parachute
trailing behind.

A white ibis!

He dropped out of the air
close to me
and staggered
drunkenly
into the Safeway loading bay.

I crawled after him on hands and knees.

He was utterly helpless
helpless and ridiculous
wearing that silly plastic bag
like a necklace.

A moment of hesitation
- as I perused the long curved bill -
then I lunged quickly
and held the bird tight
(Mum used to keep chooks)

His trembling body felt warm
and fragile beneath my hands
and his beak wasn't sharp at all -
but rubbery when he pecked me.
It didn't hurt a bit.

I removed the bag
and the bird flew away
leaving me strangely elated.

Wild Geese By Mary Oliver

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

Alison Cassidy

Winter Song

Watching the children
Through a gauze curtain
Damp eyes shining
Cold breath steaming

Mud-speckled trousers
Feet red with chilblains
Noses red with wiping
Dog damp and smelly

Bright woolen colors
Growing on needles
Hot soup bubbling
Sprinkled with parsley

Cockatoos screeching
Sulphur crests reaching
Perching clown-like
On bare branches

Opening the curtains
On a white blanket
Snow-flakes are falling
Winter is with us

Alison Cassidy

With This Ring

He'd planned it
months before.
A special surprise
for the woman
he had loved
for forty three years.

A band of whitest gold
(he'd checked the size)
set with his mother's ruby stone.

He was pleased with the card
two dogs embracing
- she'd like that -
and tender words of love
penned from his romantic soul.

And then...
that fateful night
when she knelt before him
eyes downcast
heart hammering
stammering...
I'm so sorry.

He hurled the ring at her feet
and stormed out
of her life.

Years later
they buried her
with the ruby ring still shining on her finger

Alison Cassidy

Words Words Words

Oh you shapers of words
You have the power
To touch the reader's soul.
Tread lightly
Lest you break the reader's heart.

Alison Cassidy

Writers' Block

Writers' block
Poppycock
Early morning
doodle do.

Writers' block
shepherd's flock
take a Peep
baa baa

Writers' block
knock knock
bell rope
sorry tail

Writers' block
tick a tock
croc a dile
Captain Hook

Writers' block
shell shock
turtle soup
mock mock

Writers' block
Mister Spock
vulcan light
night night.

Alison Cassidy

Yarra Days

Tip-toeing gingerly
over slippery rapids,
I remember the feel
of the slime
on the rocks
and the oily black surface
that was always alive.

Standing on the bank
summoning up the nerve
to jump,
(Mum - are you still watching?)
I remember the fear
of snags
and a deep
bottomless bottom.

Standing on the bridge
watching Mrs. Couch
float like a whale,
I remember the myriad lives
she saved each year.
And the one
she didn't.
(they wouldn't let me look)

Lying languidly
on a damp towel,
I remember the intensity
of pre-pubescent lust
and the lean summer boys
who smoked cigarettes
and weren't very keen on kissing.

Alison Cassidy

Yes

I remember your velvet tongue persuasive,
your velvet hands, insistent,
exploring those parts of me
I so wanted to know, but
felt too shy to share.

I remember the child of me
and the man of you, .
and that moment of surrender
when I yielded to your touch
and answered 'Yes'.

Alison Cassidy

Your Hands

Your hands are always warm,
smooth and good to hold.
Still amazing beautiful too,
despite the scars and spots of age.

Your hands are broad and strong,
with Mount of Venus high
and nails (always manicured)
shaped like fine almonds.

Your hands move confidently,
deftly, like a woman's,
performing mundane tasks
with easy grace and style.

Your hands, some thirteen years ago
in Lygon Street, held mine.
And at that moment, I knew
we belonged together.

Alison Cassidy

Your Voice

Your voice was always hushed,
like a cembalo or harp.
A drawing room sound,
muted yet sweetly attractive.

Your eyes were hazel soft,
distorted through thick lenses.
Makeup covered your acne scars
and shy Diana smile.

You were my only friend
in that Teachers' College world
of beehives and pale pink lips
and repetitive, mindless assignments.

They called us the two Alisons.
We did everything together -
seated snugly side by side
in the black cheeked baby Austin.

We both left college hurriedly.
I to chase greasepaint
and audience applause.
You to join young Bob (too hastily)

in an awful wedding
that produced (too soon)
a pair of raw boned boys
and years of disappointment.

At the reunion, I didn't recognize
the heavy matron
shambling toward me
blind, with stick in hand.

But when I heard your voice,
still soft and whisper quiet,
the veil of forty years was lifted
and tears welled in my eyes...

Alison Cassidy

You'Re Real

You're flesh and blood
and taste and smell
and skin and soft
and body familiar

You're forty three years
of history and hurting
and lusting and laughter
and passion and pain

You're breakfast and dinner
and shopping and habit
and taken for grantedness
and here and now

You're the love of my life
- I forgot for a moment -
I adore and desire you
you're real.

Alison Cassidy

Zero Population Growth

Twenty-eight years ago
one stifling afternoon in April
squatting on the red brick path
weeding her Double Delight
(roses grew so well in the clay soil
of Kangaroo Ground) ,
she suddenly felt light-headed
and passed out
and she knew...

What to do?

He was always on about it,
Zero Population Growth.
He argued fiercely
and eloquently
from his lecturer's platform,
laughing scornfully and often
at his careless
older brother
with his three
daughters.

What to do?

To tell or not to tell.
To tell or not to tell?
Oh, what the hell.
She didn't tell -
she couldn't tell!

And four months later
after the checkup
from Dr. Heath.
Is it a fait accompli?
I'm afraid so.

Three children is a lovely size for a family -
don't you think?

Alison Cassidy