

Poetry Series

**NORMAN ROSS**  
**- poems -**

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## NORMAN ROSS(Feb.27,1924)

After he graduated HS in the Bronx, Ross joined the Navy in Nov.1942. He was discharged in Nov.1945 after having flown 60 combat missions in the Atlantic, the Pacific, the North Sea, the English Channel, and the Bay of Biscay. For his service he has been awarded ten Air Medals and two DFCs-Distinguished Flying Crosses.

Following the war, Norman spent six months in the Bronx Kingsbridge VA Medical Center with what was then known as "battle fatigue" and now as PTSD. Upon his discharge Norman attended Columbia University where he earned a Ph.D in English Literature. He was married in 1947 while going to school, and he had four children. After teaching a year at Columbia, he began teaching high school and college in 1952 and retired 30 years later. He served as Chairman of the English Department at North Shore HS on Long Island, and was an Adjunct Assistant Professor of English at CW Post College in Greenvale, NY.

Divorced in 1978, Dr. Ross retired to Florida in 1982 and married Rhoda a year later. He led a fairly peaceful life in Delray Beach until 1988, when his Marine son-in-law Col. Rich Higgins was captured and murdered by terrorists in Lebanon while he was serving as Commander of the UN Peacekeeping forces there. Since then, Norman has seen the commissioning of the USS Higgins, a guided missile destroyer named for his son-in-law. His eldest daughter, a 20-year veteran of the Marine Corps, retired as a Lieutenant Colonel and also served as an Acting Assistant Secretary of Labor, as Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, and as an Undersecretary in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. His eldest son served his country for 20 years in the Central Intelligence Agency. His youngest daughter is an award-winning dog groomer and his youngest son, a photographer and a top Sales Associate for Harley-Davidson.

While enjoying retirement, including the six grandchildren he has jointly with his wife, Rhoda, Dr. Ross has performed frequently in his condo community's Theater of the Performing Arts, with starring roles in various shows including HMS Pinafore, The Mikado, Music Man, Show Boat, Fiddler on the Roof, The Pirates of Penzance, and My Fair Lady. Since 1982 he has written and published 10 books.

# Battle Fatigue (Ptsd)

I lay upon a fallow slab, like stone;  
My eyes read Death within the white-walled room;  
The wild mind whirled, in eddies to despoil  
The twisted nerves, the blood, the sallow bone.

They knew no reason for my sense of doom  
Those learned doctors of the living soil;  
The sword, the fire and the blood-red sea  
Locked me firmly in a fathomless tomb.

I waited. Cold. Stark as a serpent coil.  
No shock. No ice. No words had set me free.  
And now-pentathol. The watery flume sluiced  
Along my veins from a slender foil.

I wept. The blackness funneled through a cone  
Of swirling tears. I slept. Alone, alone.

NORMAN ROSS

# Bell, Book, And Candle

There is some magic binds me to your eyes-  
Witchcraft, born of Sorcery and Guile;  
And yet they look so innocent all the while,  
A necromantic, star-bright blue surprise!

Did Merlin out of Camelot devise  
the runic incantation of your smile?  
Is Circe's song one half so volatile,  
enchancing, or bewitching as your sighs?

There's wizardry in sunlight on your hair;  
and conjury in the curving of your breast;  
You walk and create music everywhere  
to cast a spell and leave my heart possessed.

For when you're near, like alchemists of old,  
You turn my life's base metal into gold.

NORMAN ROSS

# I Am The Life...

They lie who say the stalks of corn are sleeping-  
Their midsummer greenness more than  
memories  
In the wild euphoria of human weeping.

I groped out there in darkness on my knees  
Prayerfully clawing kernels in the earth;  
In the rites of spring, at least, there is no  
dying-  
But only sprigs of green and  
Graceful golden tassels in the sun  
of Spring  
Exploding toward some unseen stat and  
Birth.

But silence in a deluge; in a wave!  
The corn is ashen, is always dying.  
No resurrected Lazarus come from the grave.  
But only ritual blood and deathless sighing.

O! Will you copulate with Spring?  
The corn! Remember?  
The corn is dead;

...and the heart is stunned.

NORMAN ROSS

# Reliving Flights (From Hospital)

I

Recall love, Recall hate,  
Recall palm trees, pine trees, oaks.  
Recall fate.

Recall dreams,  
Recall fears,  
Recall oceans, rivers, lakes;  
Recall tears.

Dry them, the all consuming oceans,  
The rivers  
The lakes.  
Dry the seas of tears.  
Suck them up through parched lips  
Quench the overwhelming thirst-or die!

II

Recall desire,  
Recall lust,  
Recall friends, enemies, fleeting acquaintances,  
Recall dust.

Recall dark, Recall light,  
Recall purple hills, mountains, jagged rocks-  
Recall night.  
Thunderous rain!  
Silent snow!  
Deep, misty fog!  
Gray, shadowy dusk!  
(Recall these)

III

Over bottomless chasms,  
Still, soundless villages,  
Sleepless cities and sandless deserts-  
Over the steaming jungle's bomb-sprayed beaches.

Over hills, perilous mountains,

Parched fields, fruitless harvests.  
Over rotted, rusted ships beneath the  
channels  
And white-stoned graves and crosses  
Row on row.

Recall the birth of life!  
Recall the advent of Death!  
Recall a mother's womb.  
Recall the final breath.

NORMAN ROSS

# Sestina For Winter

The city's trees are shriveled, bleak, and bare.  
The matted clouds are gray with threatened snow.  
The people scurry home in bristling cold  
with finger-tips and toes like beaded ice.  
One last ribbed leaf goes tumbling in the wind  
which fiercely rattles every window glass,

as eager children, huddled to the glass,  
peer into the streets now almost bare.  
At last, in flurries, it has begun to snow,  
and stragglers bundle up against the cold,  
(which turns the first few early flakes to ice) ,  
their bodies bent to spear the startling wind.

Frost-fettered branches snapping in the wind  
rattle to the street and crack like glass;  
And now the frost-packed earth is quick to bare  
the swift but silent cataracts of snow  
and piercing sleet—and still, so pinching cold,  
the river stands amazed and turns to ice.

Thin saplings in the park are cased in ice  
and quiver numbly in the aching wind,  
much like slim sticks of polished glass  
or giant icicles. Stark and lean, they bare  
their crystal branches to the glacial snow  
and stand imprisoned in the chill, hibernal cold,

naked and lonely. While the parching cold  
transforms the wandering rills to paths of ice,  
a squirrel trembles in the chattering wind,  
treading nimbly on the brooks of glass;  
His autumn hollow echoes, being bare  
of acorns, or else is blanketed with snow.

How beautifully the earth is banked with snow  
and soft white drifts. The world is marble cold  
and static—sculptured crystalline in ice—  
willing subject for the keen-bladed wind



that burrs and burnishes the lakes, like glass  
or iridescent prisms glazed and bare.

Look now! How bare the sky is all of snow,  
Though still it's cold; and skaters on the ice  
Ignore the wind and skim along the glass.

NORMAN ROSS

# Shadows

I walk the streets of foreign soil alone—  
And look for you in every street café` ;  
Lovers' laughter bubbles everywhere  
Like pink champagne. And flowers, multi-hued,  
The golden hyacinth and orange mum,  
The purple primrose, like myrrh and frankincense  
Pervade the air with fragrance sweet and light—  
(Like your body scent one loving carefree night) .

And every corner that I turn, I hope  
To find you waiting there—in black and white.

I follow endlessly the peopled walks  
And turn each way to peer into the crowded shops.  
I squint above the sun-sprayed windows  
There to find you smiling down on me.  
But then you vanish as an image in  
A mirrored pool disturbed by pebbles cast.  
I wander through the parks along the shore;  
I trod the squares and peek through every door

In curiosity. But when night falls, I pause  
In silence, to listen to your voice

Once more

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# Tell Me, Which Is The Way To Ithaca?

Love:

My love is as the love of Heroes  
For I have conquered the World  
And moved the Stone of Sisyphus  
And my house is the house of the High Tower  
    I am not an anachronism  
    On the running heel of Time:  
    For Today and Tomorrow  
    I am the wind of Camelot  
    The rain of Troy  
Flooding you with a hero's love.

Are you not Isolde of the White Flower  
Whom I, as Poet, reach out to touch with my wild kiss?

Do you rather turn majestically away  
    From dreams  
And burn the Poems behind you?  
The sun you love is at your back  
Behind the window of your house  
The shadows fall across the soil-white pages  
    Of non-words  
And there, chained upon the Hearth  
You busy yourself  
Waiting, waiting...  
A Penelope out of Time, living  
Not Poetry, but  
The news of the day.

Ah! My love!  
On the beach  
Where the never ending surge of water  
Changes  
The face of earth again and again  
Each minute of the day, night, and always  
Then and there when I recall the change in this thing called  
Me...  
The new sides, new forms, new shapes of me

Which came when you washed across my being  
Like a wave retreating to the wine-dark sea  
I will think of you.

For you disappear in the mist  
Around a far corner  
In a green Impala  
And you are not of my house  
The house of the High Tower  
And I who have been touched by the eternal spark—  
A Tristram, a Leander, and Odysseus  
For me there is nothing left to do  
But return to my house  
There to lie in the street  
And toss grapes at the moon.

NORMAN ROSS

# Vignette

I saw the sun set, a jelly omelet in a frying pan sky.  
I saw a house, too, with brown shingles  
Sprawling like tobacco leaves  
Over the frame.

It stood alone on a hill. A dark and lonely house.  
With stovepipe chimney-a tin soldier  
Sitting in a beach chair.  
I saw a path that led to the door...  
A crooked smile on the dark earth's face.

I saw a visage peer through the pane.  
Opaque, disfigured, a dumb portrait  
On a glass canvass.

I saw dignity. A television antenna  
Pedantic, geometric,  
Questioning the sky.

Then pouring over the house  
Like coal from a chute  
Night came...  
I closed my eyes  
And saw-nothing.

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