

Poetry Series

**Tony Jolley**  
**- poems -**

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## Tony Jolley(17th June 1958)

I'm a University Lecturer who loves teaching, but who is beginning to find that the yen to write from the heart for a non-academic readership is more important than to write from the head for a narrow academic audience of cognoscenti. That said, I have started my own business in France: 'Tonyversity' () doing management and English coaching for business people and finessing of English translations. Am presently building a personal poetry website called 'Tonyverses' () but it is slow work!

I used to play guitar and write music in my early years and had, until recently, thought that the muse of my youth was lost to me. She isn't. She took me by the hand and led me home to a place where there is no barrier between the heart and the page anymore.

I no longer have an office. It has become a study, a library, a haven where small miracles happen every day between nib and nap.

Oh, and did I mention... at long, long last, I love and am truly loved.

## (red) Indian Summer

Today you'd have been a happy-go-lucky girl:  
A teenager up to your eyes in make-up and Maths,  
Chatting on MSN and mobile,  
Reading chick-lit  
And surfing certain bits of the Web  
You'd probably prefer  
Your parents didn't know about.

But you were born into a nation and tradition  
'On the cusp':  
One Custer your clans could have coped with  
(And did, rather comprehensively, I recall) ,  
But countless, crashing waves of White Custers flooding relentlessly West  
From Prairie to Pacific,  
Set upon pushing you 'into the sea' both literally and historically....  
That would be another, all-too-short a short story:  
The peoples of Manitou, the Mystery,  
Driven out by bigotry, technology, opportunity and inevitability.

One man saw the extinction in action: the dimming and dying of your light,  
realised that the last echoes of the oral tradition torch that had sustained your  
culture for thousands of years was all-but snuffed out forever:

One Edward Curtis.

There was just enough of the fading light left to leave an impression on  
photographic plate; so while that first and last, sad Red 'Indian Summer' lasted,  
while you were being shouldered aside and swamped by civilisation's wake as its  
ship of state drove thoughtlessly through your still waters, he toiled this thirty-  
year twilight with a more benign white technology to act as witness to the last  
will and testament of your way of life.

Somewhere in this Herculean task of 20 volumes and 40,000 plates, his lens  
happened upon you, captured your carefree essence peeking playfully from  
under Buffalo hide....

And there it was  
There it was in you – for it was you:

The heritage of generations,  
The hopes of your nation.

You're long gone now, Clayoquot Girl, I guess,  
So I lift you and your peoples' mystery  
To the mercy of The Great Mystery  
That you might not be forgotten,  
That we might be forgiven.

Tony Jolley

## 00.04 25.12.04

Don't understand deliberate hurt.  
Just don't.  
Never did.

Can't conceive of the calculation:  
The clinical cut to dead centre;  
The surgeon's pinpoint precision;  
The coup-de-grâce, graciously granted,  
With all the blunt, high-impact benevolence  
Of a snub-nosed shell,  
Shot, point-blank,  
From the barrel of a smoking phone-gun  
At precisely 00.04 on 25.12.04.

Tomorrow's fish 'n' chip wrappers will read:  
"Just another Saturday night, drive-by texting".  
But I won't be around to read it.

Don't understand.  
Never did.  
Don't want to.

Tony Jolley

## 14: 18 Old Armand [hartmannswillerkopf]

Armand.

Vieil Armand.

Old Armand.

Almost silent Armand.

....Almost....

There were birds.

They were singing ....

[... Though they obviously hadn't read the script

And the more muted kind of respect

Required by visitor expectation

Of one of the hallowed shrines of the nation...].

None, however, seemed at all anxious

To break cover and perch like a sitting duck

Upon any one of the army of marble and granite markers

Ranged, row upon row, irrespective of rank:

Generals, Colonels, Privates and Majors

Parading in permanent, parallel immobility

Toward their own, cold immortality.

Resting places of the high-born and the low,

In death, all level now.

Strange.

Strange to learn

It was far quieter back then

Up here where the lines were drawn and dug

Well within whispering range.

Silence broke out suddenly on both sides like a plague:

Sergeants still barking their bubonic commands,

But now as laryngitic shadows of their former selves -

Too many secrets to harbour and hide

From too many an enemy ear and eye;

'Til, in 1915, the silent stalemate shattered

And its loud, hot lead shards

Shrouded the hopes and hearts

Of thousands who mattered

To thousands who now

Lay entombed and battered.

The first of this far-too-Many:

One: 'Armand' –

Perhaps the eponymous 'Old Armand' himself:

Lying, first cross to the left of the left hand path

Leading down from the rather bleak memorial,

His legend [like all the countless others']:

'Mort pour la France'

Really?

Was he?

Me, [I think],

I could chose to give my life for family,

For friends ... possibly,

But for country?

Could I?

Three or four rows on -

To the Christian headstone, a solitary exception:

For Saïd Saïd-Arab, one of Islamic tradition;

Called by dint of French colonialisation

To defend the borders of the 'Mother Nation':

Plucked from life under an African summer sky

To serve on Alsatian winter soil, wither, and die.

His marble is sadly all too new to be 'true'....

No doubt replaced after being vandalised:

Brutalised by a bunch of bigots

Advertising nothing but their own ignorance

In taking it out on the softest target

Who didn't deserve it;

And with whom the lying legions would have stood

Shoulder to shoulder, as one, if they could

To defend their comrade's humanity and honour

From those who are simply not worth dying for.

'Mort pour la France'.

Really?

Was he?

The concrete commemoration platform appears to me  
To be less architectural memorial and more monumental 'folly':  
Sculpted after Mayan temple design  
With a large bronze 'altar', North-South aligned,  
Bearing reliefs all around of the regions and regiments  
Whose 'young guns' were sacrificed without ceremony  
To the unworthy gods of this world  
Who wouldn't rank humanity over nationality.

'Mort pour la France'.

Really....?

Was he ... ..?

I looked at my watch on leaving the scene:

It had stopped.

The time...?

14: 18

Tony Jolley



# 7670

7670

A number very much towards the thin end of infinity:  
Three times the number of Tesco stores  
But only a third of McDonald's;  
The number of years needed to take us back to the dawn of recorded time -  
Well past the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Maya and the Pyramids  
To the very first 'modern' human settlements,  
To the beginning of the end of transhumance,  
To Sumer and signs and shapes in clay  
That would be buried then uncovered & decoded in our day.

7670

Someone's PIN number,  
Tapped-in times daily like a crazy magic,  
Translating digits into all kinds of currency:  
Food, clothes, cars and iTunes downloads -  
A sort of key to the Door of Infinite Variety...  
Provided the software sentinel guarding the gateway  
Gives you leave to enter,  
Else you'll be locked out of your personal Eden  
Like Adam and Eve after that Tree of Knowledge apple.

7670

A product number for a Star Wars 'Hailfire Droid' Lego construction kit;  
The Paris postal address of a Chambre d'Hôte  
Beside the famous Père Lachaise cemetery  
Where serious types like Balzac, de Lesseps, Molière & Champollion,  
Rub cold shoulders with the likes of Marcel Marceau, Oscar Wilde & Jim Morrison;

A Gas Cloud in Pisces, recorded and catalogued -  
23: 27.2 (hours: minutes) : Ascension,  
-00: 11 (degrees: minutes) Declination.

7670

The grand sum of the days of twenty-one years  
[Duly calibrated for the 5-odd February 29ths]:  
The time you've been 'Grace', my daughter,  
[Though I had been wishing you into being from far earlier,  
I so wanted to see you, hold you and talk with you].

It's been a privilege to watch you grow into yourself, your prime  
And I hope, at 21, the life of your time.

Tony Jolley

# A Breed And A Half Apart

She made my day,  
Though she will never know it this side of Heaven.....

Sitting in the lee of a wonky, wooden beach-hut:  
An amiable old codger of a bulwark  
Against the rising tide of brick-built ne'er-do-wells,  
Faces hove vaguely into view barely half a groyne away,  
Resolving themselves, grey and damp, from a feature-fogging mist.  
Few showed sign of a smile for their life or their lot,  
A monochrome veil of melancholy drawn down from faces to feet  
Dragging their personal contribution  
To the woes of the world  
In their wake.

Kids were a good breed-and-a-half apart from adults:  
Capable of seeing through anything the day threw at them  
To the potential for play  
Hiding, but never beyond the seeking and finding,  
In every waking moment.  
A vanguard of high-velocity voices  
Heralded the charge of a small Seventh Cavalry  
On skate-board and scooter-back  
Looming, ghost-like, out of the mist  
To put the fear of god  
Into any under-employed deckchair attendant  
(or other available 'enemy') .

From above a pretty pink 'armour' of elbow pads  
And below the protective presence of a sturdy cycle helmet,  
Two dark brown eyes met mine.  
I didn't see the whole smile –  
Her bike-speed saw to that –  
But the first half alone was more than enough  
To burn off all the mist  
In a month of Bank Holiday Mondays.

Tony Jolley

# About Your Skin

What is it about your skin?  
I touch you and it is as natural as breathing,  
As right as being  
That I don't even have to think about it.  
It's not about conscious or subconscious:  
Just about us.

Wonder whether Adam knew Eve  
With such insouciant tenderness:  
Love in a unique completeness;  
Whether what we feel has ever been felt  
By anyone in this life, anywhere, anywhen.  
Like being deep in a natural forest  
Wondering whether anyone has ever set their foot  
Beneath my soles,  
If he or she had ever wondered whether  
Anyone would ever follow in their footsteps: -  
A virgin moment:  
Unbroken snow  
Stretching to History's horizon  
In all directions;  
A whole world:  
Our world;  
Populated only by the desires of our hearts  
And our limitless imaginations  
Of the infinite possibilities  
Of you  
And me.

A whole world.  
Our world.  
My world.  
Your skin.

Tony Jolley

## After Me

Mostly I'll be steam.....

Plus the smoke of the elements of me light enough to fly  
And small enough to squeeze through the crematorium chimney filters.  
Some of me, maybe, will have to be cleaned off these scrubbers  
By someone with a high-pressure hose  
To surf and sluice me down some drain or other  
As dirt destined for culvert or watercourse,  
To become a silt deposit at the mouth of a harbour  
Flushed twice daily by fresh and salt water –  
Who knows:  
Maybe I'll become the grain at the heart of a grey pearl  
Strung about some sophisticée's neck or studded to her ear.  
Me, more likely,  
I'll be stuck between the treads of a wading kid's yellow wellies,  
Hosed off at home in some suburban back garden,  
To enjoy a traditional eternity of pushing up daisies.

The me too small to be caught in the filter's clutches  
Will rise and fall and fall and rise to meet and mingle with moisture-laden air  
Becoming cloud-seed, molecules of damp clinging,  
Making of me a droplet, then a dropp too dense to dance upon cloud nine,  
Falling earthward as stair-rodding summer rain  
To smash myself to smithereens on a steaming patio  
Sizzling like the sausages on a now deserted barbecue.

The me that didn't smoke or steam himself up and out of the last place I rested  
entire  
Would be ash barely an eighth of my baby-weight  
[Strange after a lifetime of growing and living I'm set to leave as so much less]  
I'll be scattered along Dancing Ledge: the cliff coastline of our courtship -  
I like the idea that that'll produce infinite possibilities and permutations  
Of the what-was-once-me meeting the what-was-once-you  
And falling into each other's arms again and again  
In a wished-for wheel of somewheres, somehows, somewhens.

Whether we're sand grains together,  
Cheek-to-cheekily conspiring  
To nourish Marram Grasses deep down below Studland's dunes  
As private places for young lovers to do what young lovers love to do;

Or once in a Blue Moon falling as dancing snowflakes:  
Spiraling and pirouetting around each other  
[just as we did around the kitchen],  
To settle, side-by-side, into a perfect, soft, linen-white bed  
[just as we did under the beams of Bruebach];  
Or gushing out of the Earth's mantle in our deep red-golden, newborn glory,  
Metamorphosed and molten-married for the millionth and not one time too  
many:  
Whether and whatever,  
My Darling,  
I long to love you in all Eternity.

Tony Jolley

# Against The Weave

The Crack of Dawn  
Rent the sky's heavy grey winter greatcoat  
From seam to boring seam,  
Tore it the hard way:  
Against the weave,  
For all the world as if  
God were revisiting His moment  
Of Temple-curtain-tearing violence.

Now, as then,  
Few people pondered  
The sight or its significance  
As day drilled down,  
Linear and bright,  
Upon the quick and the dead alike.

The Heavens opened  
And for once it wasn't rain  
But light, streaming like stair-rods,  
Breaking all the Torah  
Of simile and metaphor.

Tony Jolley

# Airport Lounging

Sometimes there's nothing will placate them,  
Can stop them bawling and wailing  
Like inconsolable, Eastern, coffin-cortège mourners,  
Being torn away from what they're wanting.  
No degree in Toddler Distraction Technique will do,  
Not even promises of more and greater later;  
Above all when it's a:  
Purple-sparkling,  
Wheel-a-steering,  
Moving,  
Turning,  
Revvng,  
Driving  
Toy to end all airport concourse toys.

Wild horses wouldn't drag them away, the boys,  
Just one desperate dad, to a whole lot of noise.

Tony Jolley



# An Elephant For Aristotle

Whatever possessed him? –

King of the greater half of the Earth in his mid twenties,  
Founding force behind wonders of the world:  
The Library at Alexandria  
And the Pharos,  
Now both lost to antiquity  
And almost consigned to the realm of mythology  
But for intriguing slivers of surviving history.

Whatever possessed him? –

Of all the riches of countless conquered nations  
On three continents,  
Of all the jewels and marvels of life and learning,  
Of all this,  
What does he see fit to send to his old friend and teacher,  
To Aristotle...?

An elephant.  
An elephant!

Not the easiest of parcels to freight, I'll warrant,  
But why on earth [or on Alexander's half of it] an elephant?  
I don't suppose it would have fit in the schoolroom.  
Was it a sort of an outsize playground prank:  
A power-play from the student-turned-master –  
A sort of apple-for-the-teacher  
Any ruler of the known world might send? ...  
... Or perhaps a bit of 'payback'  
For his having published the keys to the learning 'kingdom'  
Which his prodigy feared might inspire threat and competition?

Fine present or fit of pique....?  
Either way, I hope he also shipped a shovel.

Tony Jolley

# Are You Sitting Comfortably? (I'M Not)

Plugged in, powered up,  
Clicked-on, dropped down,  
Zoomed in, scrolled up  
I-conned, let down  
Frozen cursored, screen stuck,  
No escape, my luck.

(That's 'luck' as opposed to a f-f-familiar rhyme  
You'll surely have used in moments like mine)

Do I want to send an error message?  
No I bloody well don't  
Even if I wanted to,  
The computer damn well won't.

Control-Alt- Delete - what stupid command  
To crash a system in trouble unplanned.

May I make a few suggestions?  
What about one nice, new:  
'Beam me up, Scotty',  
'Go sit down and have a nice cup of tea while I sort this out for you',  
'Don't Panic Mr Mainwaring! '  
'Are you sitting comfortably...? Then we'll begin (again) '  
Button.  
I'd even go so far as to be not too unhappyish with one that said:  
'Sorry about that, I'm as confused as you are, I'll see what I can do  
(but I'm not promising anything) '.

Is it too much too ask Mr Microsoft-in-the-head  
For the merest bit of humanity in adversity? ...  
(Like Heineken) ...Probably.

All that just to face the fear  
Of the empty page.  
The final frontier.

I'm told there is a non-PC way  
Of writing available offline today

They call it something like 'paper and pen'  
I'll be off to try some then....

Tony Jolley

# Autumn Crowds For A Second Coming

They'd been waiting, moments, minutes or hours  
After their air-borne journey down.  
Dressed in their finery:  
Every conceivable shade, fashionable and seasonal:  
Yellows, reds, golds and browns,  
From bright amber to burnt umber,  
They thronged the pavements and verges,  
Feet deep and desperate to dance.

At my coming,  
They came alive,  
The crest of their Mexican Wave of colour  
Constant at my window  
No matter whether I speeded or slowed,  
The more impetuous among them  
Spilling onto the road behind me  
Like some glorious wake,  
Frantically rushing and racing to keep up:  
Failing of course,  
Gradually to scatter to the gutter,  
There to await a second coming.

Tony Jolley

# Back To Bruebach

Me, I'm in Bournemouth,  
You, you're in Bruebach:  
Only just got here;  
Can't wait to get back.  
The hours don't fly,  
The days drag by  
And as for the weeks:  
It's enough to make you cry.

I'm stuck here  
And you're over there:  
You're set to come here  
But I long to be there.  
Roll on the day  
When neither is away  
And wherever we are,  
Together we stay.

Tony Jolley

## Ballet 'In Flagrante' [the Modern Ballet Virgin]

They say you'll love it or hate it and there isn't much room in-between.  
I was sure I was going to squeeze into that slightly grudging middle ground:  
Appreciative of training, skill, strength, grace, movement and artistic  
interpretation,  
But left slightly untouched because I've two left feet and little affinity with the  
dancefloor  
And even less for tutus and tights.

I was wrong.  
How I was wrong.  
Not a tutu in sight last night;  
But a sublime release of energy in nano-degrees of expression  
A perfect continuum between the still and the explosion:  
Beauty at rest and Beauty in motion;  
The epitome of supple gracefulness when need be  
Shape-shifted at will into a contrasting angularity.  
An overwhelming sense of shared spirituality, complicity,  
Never so uncouth as to be launching and catching,  
But all Mantra, Kata, 'Pushing Hands' and Tai C'hi'ing:  
Bodies at worship of one another, weaving and writhing,  
Slow arcing, Space-Time warping and bending,  
Rendering Gravity's unavailability a mere inconsequentiality  
Overcome, at will by liberating choreography.

I can't begin to explain or even to understand: it didn't work at that level with  
me -  
I simply didn't have to disassemble or analyse anything to appreciate its  
staggering beauty:  
It embodied the human form and all its potentials and possibilities;  
Entwined in the arms of its lovers: lighting, staging and musicality  
Making a love so tender, yet with such intense expression  
I felt and shared their in flagrante delicto passion.

Tony Jolley

# Battle Lines

We got more poetry than we bargained for:  
Poetry as per the programme;  
Poetry under the Plane trees;  
Poetry conjuring other places,  
Other times,  
Other insights  
Through other eyes.

Yes, all that and more  
As the soft, stone façade  
Glowed the warm jaune-crème  
Of a quiet understanding  
Borne of generations of learning,  
And, en face,  
Upstart acres of glass  
Glowered back their pretensions  
With an assurance  
Only the arrogance of youth may afford.

Between these battle lines,  
Oblivious to their meagre histories and vanities,  
Nature was quietly busy  
Writing her elegant, eternal poetry  
Upon the wind  
In fresh, green symphony,  
Strolling and stroking its way  
Through the forest on my forearms,  
Stealing me away from listening,  
To writing:  
Recording the history of the briefest of moments  
Perhaps no-one else noticed.

More than I bargained for too.

Stephanos, thank you.

Tony Jolley

# Beached Bamboo

It lay incongruous:

At an angle oblique to its own belonging,  
Languishing lonely between retreating tide  
And the blind feet of the Good Friday beach brigade  
Displaced,  
Disinherited,  
Denied even a footnote  
In the watermargin of either world,  
A shadow of its former self,  
Reduced in circumstances and stature:  
Stunted;  
Truncated;  
Torso slit and split from navel to neck,  
Innards systematically shredded  
By the assiduous attrition of salt and sun.

One knot remained resolute,  
Its tightly-drawn integrity  
Girding and guarding  
Its fast-failing fibre 'wives',  
Husbanding them,  
Hopelessly,  
Heroically,  
To the very last vestige of its tender tension.

Tomorrow there would be another leaving,  
Another landfall to test its ring of wedded resolve;  
But for today,  
Today it had been enough.

Tony Jolley



# Being 'It'

No, not the school playground game of 'tag' –  
That marginally less aggressive version of 'British Bulldogs'  
Where whoever was slow and out of favour:  
Inevitably the 'swot',  
Was condemned to a playtime purgatory  
Of so near yet so far  
And put out of his misery  
Only by the bell.  
No, not that 'it'.

Not even the girls in the 20s,  
Screen-testing upon countless casting couches  
To establish whether or not they had 'it' -  
Or at least enough of it  
For a slot on the chorusline.  
No, that's not the 'it' I'm on about.

The 'being it' that bugs me  
Is the motorbike morons  
And scooter cock-a-snooters  
Parading their 'Look at me: I'm it' shit  
At an ear-splitting, baffles-out volume  
Even a heavy metal rocker would have a problem with,  
Helmetless at a hundred mph or more  
In a sleepy village where kids still play out of doors..

Feel like an old fart making mention of this,  
But it seems life has become a one-sided coin:  
Heads their 'right' to do just as they please  
Tails an empty space for 'responsibilities'.

NB. Please note I have nothing against bikers - they are mostly great people relaxing with the wind in their hair, but rather it is the teenage poseurs with the 50cc bee-in-a-bottle at full throttle that get my goat.

Tony Jolley

# Being One

Being One:

Neither

Dependent

Nor

Independent:

Inter-dependent.

Being One:

Self

Becomes

Neither

A

Necessary

Nor

Sufficient

Condition:

Shared.

Being

One

.

One

Being.

Tony Jolley

# Between 'Now' And 'Then'

Life.

It starts.

It ends.

It's the bit between  
That depends  
On the vagaries  
Of the lottery  
Bound up in the verb to be.

Some with an average life expectancy of many years  
Barely having time to take a breath  
Before being taught their first and fatal lesson  
By the chalk white claws and incisors  
Of the jungle blackboard's hunter-teachers.

Mayflies draw the shortest straw:  
Just a single, solitary day,  
And then only if they keep well out  
Of the Rainbow and Brown Trout's way.  
Dragonflies don't fare that much better  
If the truth be told,  
Four or five glory-filled days at most:  
Enough to mate – never to be old.

Most birds manage to see the seasons turn  
Once, twice or more  
Provided they aren't taken  
By heatwave or winter's ice-white jaw.  
And Man's Best Friend is thought generally lucky  
If he gets to see the other side of a decade  
Even with the benefit of the comforts of home  
And all the veterinary advances made.

Man.

Theoretically three score years and ten,  
But really just the time between 'now' and 'then'.



# Biography

If someday scientists could reconstruct us from scratch –  
Not just the skin and bones  
But the personality to match:  
Mind, emotions, values, judgement, belief, sensitivity:  
The long and the short of it, not part of it: all of it,  
I wonder how close a copy they could create  
Using just our biographies for their 'Us Two' template.....

For all the painstaking research,  
The pouring over periodicals and journals,  
The meticulous validation of sources,  
Interviews with all and sundry who claimed to be 'close'  
To get a 360°, wide-screen, hi-definition picture  
To project onto the printed page:  
Just what proportion of a person can be pulled together  
Piecemeal, like this: 70%,37%,11% or less.....?  
Can anybody be really 'known' in fact not fiction or faction?  
Construed, surmised, approximated, guessed-at at best, yes,  
From events, decisions and second and third-hand recollections.  
But how reliable are our witnesses in the courthouse of our lives,  
Seeing all too often only what we want seen or they wish to see  
And misinterpreting us innocently, negligently or downright deliberately?

If the individual at issue were to scan the sum of his biographies,  
Would he recognise himself at all  
Or perceive just a poor pastiche with a passing resemblance  
To someone he might almost have been on a good or bad day?  
But then again,  
Can anyone really know his 'me'?  
We all spend a lifetime exploring our undiscovereds  
And seeking solace and meaning in our uncovereds....  
Perhaps we're what we're believed to be:  
The sum total of who we think we know we are  
And what others suppose us to be.  
So I don't imagine an autobiography would be any the better,  
As Counsel, Judge and Jury in the Tribunal of Me,  
Painting myself and my image by numbers to the letter  
Prosecuting one water-tight, me-monopoly  
With a 'Get out of Jail Free' guarantee.

So why do we do it?  
What's this fascination that fills our shelves  
That we have to know so much of our otherselves?

Is it for the comforting feeling of knowing we're not alone  
In our confusions and delusions;  
To satisfy some voyeuristic impulse  
To get under someone's skirt, shirt or skin;  
.....Or might it just be  
That life lived is all we have for certain to hang on to  
And we would willingly bequeath it to others  
If it turns out we don't get to take it with us,  
For fear,  
That otherwise  
We might ourselves leave  
No residual ripple  
On the eternal Lake of Life  
To say we were ever here?

Tony Jolley

# Bloodied But Unbowed

He wasn't carried from the ring  
Upon shoulders of adulation and adoration.  
He wasn't paraded before the populace  
As 'Local Boy Made Good'.  
He was neither victor nor vanquished:

He simply went the distance for you.

Tony Jolley

# Book Of Days

Yann Arthus Bertrand's  
Photo-Book of Days  
For the 8th of January  
Shows a field of pack-ice forming.

To me the magic of this frozen moment  
Lies and lives in the layout  
Of this hyper-natural jigsaw:  
Billions of bits and pieces of blue-white ice  
All growing,  
All changing,  
Reshaping  
And moving to the muses  
Of the cold currents and freezing forces  
That dominate this bleak but beautiful Arctic domain.

Are there bored deities looking down from the skies above  
Or their immortal cousins of the deeps staring up  
Possessed of the power  
And depressed enough in eternity  
To want to puzzle this puzzle out  
And fit the fragments together  
With no box-lid template to go on,  
'Til there is nothing  
But a seamless, uniform nothingness,  
Stretching endlessly north,  
Sealing the sea for six months or more  
Beneath a solid shell of itself?

No?  
Then maybe it is just Mother Nature  
Playing with herself.

Whatever it was, is, or will be  
It will forever be a photo that affected me.

Tony Jolley



# Bottles And Buts

All the anticipation, expectation & prognostication having systematically considered

Every one of the almost infinite permutations and possibilities,

Assigning each its own probability,

The mediation meeting should surely have held not a single surprise.

Sure enough: it didn't...

I'd plotted the point with such microscopic measure.

Then why, when it came,

As familiar as a family face,

Did I feel my fingers fumble

For the business-like bottle of branded water

Only to feel it flinch, frozen from my grasp:

Its condensation recoiling

From an unwelcome arranged marriage

To the sweat standing proud on my palms –

Palms that felt as dry as the strangled cry stuck in my craw?

Maybe it wasn't me.

Maybe the water-with-a-will

Was simply sneering at the no-name plastic cup:

Its all-too-unattractive, decanted destination.

"Love you.....but can't.

Love you.....but won't.

Love you.....but....."

But to me, everything but love can have but;

But then..... is this love?

Tony Jolley

# Bovington Ranges

Beauty upon a battleground.  
Wilderness within a war-zone.

..... Ironic really.....

On the ranges  
Nature appears to prosper  
Far better under fire  
Than elsewhere under the protection  
Of peace and planning control.

Tony Jolley

# Brazen

Not caring for cover of darkness,  
She ran,  
Naked as the day she was born;  
Ran,  
As if she heeded  
Nothing  
Of convention,  
Needed  
Nothing  
For protection;  
Threaded her way  
Between the knots of courting couples  
And the solitary strollers,  
Between the push-bikes  
And the rollerbladers,  
All strutting their respective stuffs with style  
Along the prom.

She turned heads –  
How could she not,  
As she sauntered and slinked  
Her hips down the steps  
To the sand,  
Her body language subtly changing,  
Responding  
To the soft feel under heel  
As she made for  
The water's edge,  
Head thrown back,  
Hair streaming in the breeze,  
Breathing in the ozone  
As if it were her own personal Ambrosia.

She paddled her way away along the shore  
Until her dot merged  
With the monochrome of dusk  
And we could make her out no more.

We were all thinking it:

Brazen!

Brazen vixen.

PS. Yes.... she really was a fox..... what WERE you thinking!

Tony Jolley

# Brief Blindspot

She wasn't exactly labouring  
Under the lop-sided load,  
But 'listing', rather;  
Her frail fingers paying the price  
Of having the temerity  
To wage a Wednesday afternoon war  
Against the god of Gravity.

Through the lens  
Of a vacant stare  
She might once have called  
'Resignation',  
She appeared motionless:  
A metaphor  
Hanging  
Between the here and the hereafter.

Then she was gone:  
Lost to that brief blindspot  
Between rear-view and wing mirror –  
To become the bent back  
Of a fast-fading memory:  
A memory of someone.

Someone.

Someone I'd never know.

Tony Jolley

# Caught By The Cold Callers (For Kev)

Good evening,  
May I speak to Mr Wells, please,  
Mr, err, sorry, can't read the screen...  
Mr ... Krevin (?) Wells..?

Already you know  
That he knows  
You know  
He doesn't know you.

It's about our new deal:  
We're in your area, see,  
And have double-glazing  
On offer for free...  
But sir must understand,  
It's for this week only.

No thanks.

But it really is free,  
Honestly...

Still 'no thanks', honestly.

Not even one window?  
No weathered wood frames  
Or need of some panes?  
A new set of patio doors perhaps?  
For the attic conversion, maybe a Velux?

I live in a brand new bungalow  
That hasn't got a patio.  
So, no-go:  
No thanks.....  
No.

No need to be like that, Krevin -  
May I call you, Krevin, Krevin?  
Or do you prefer Krev, Krevin?

Only trying to do my job, Krev  
And earn a crust  
As everyone must

Cold-calling's dire in these difficult days  
... I take it there's no aquarium or greenhouse to glaze?

Tony Jolley

# Chameleon The Great

Saw my eldest daughter yesterday  
For only the second time in seven months.

The first I nearly didn't recognise  
Her high-heeled, turquoise, spectator-out-of-water,  
As the Blood Red Sea parted and drained down  
Upon the floor of the marriage morgue  
To leave her all the higher yet none the drier-eyed  
Between a father's rock and a mother's hard place.

The second, she didn't deign to register me  
Upon her Richter Scale of Consciousness:  
Absorbed, as she was, in plaintive prayer  
To Chameleon, that Great god of Camouflage,  
Bidding him blend her blondness  
Into the bus queue blandness  
And cloak her with invisibility against only me.

The look didn't quite kill  
But her words mugged me  
Of my wallet of hope  
Of any real reconciliation  
This side of the summer and  
This side of the sea.

Tony Jolley



# Changing Sides

For no reason I can rightly recall –  
Maybe curiosity,  
Or just a change of scenery,  
Maybe not sleeping so soundly:  
Anyway, one of those times  
When even your favourite duck-down pillow  
Won't do its duty  
And stubbornly refuses  
To contour itself to your nape  
Or to cosset your aching neck,  
Declines even to hold your head  
At anything like the right angle  
To draw you near to the Land of Nod.....  
For no good reason like that,  
Last night  
We swapped our sides of the bed.

I felt as weird as a Thirteen Pound Note:  
A country mile from legal tender,  
A shilling and sixpence short of shrift.  
Suddenly I understood  
Cups with left-handed handles,  
Why McCartney's Rickenbacker looks wrong,  
How my Dad could play cricket the right way round  
Yet swing a six-iron only as a sinister.

Even the heat of your body  
Came out of leftfield.  
Your breathing sounded strange  
In the wrong ear.  
My left foot didn't 'breathe' for my body  
As efficiently  
Stuck out of the duvet  
As my right leg,  
Now marooned  
Deep in deep-heat middle ground.

Changing sides:  
I'm a sort of dyspraxic, insomniac Mata Hari...

At least dawn came  
And I woke up unshot.

Tony Jolley

## Changing Sides (Me 'N' Mata Hari)

For no reason I can rightly recall –  
Maybe curiosity,  
Or just a change of scenery,  
Maybe not sleeping so soundly:  
Anyway, one of those times  
When even your favourite duck-down pillow  
Won't do its duty  
And stubbornly refuses  
To contour itself to your cause  
Or to cosset your aching neck,  
Declines even to hold your head  
At anything like the right angle  
To draw you nearer to the Land of Nod.....  
For no good reason like that,  
Last night  
We swapped our sides of the bed.

I felt as weird as a Nine Bob Note:  
A country mile from legal tender,  
A full shilling and sixpence short of shrift.  
Suddenly I understood  
Cups with left-handed handles,  
Why McCartney's Rickenbacker looks wrong,  
How my Dad could play cricket the right way round  
Yet swing a six-iron only as a sinister.

Even the heat of your body  
Came right out of leftfield.  
Your breathing sounded strange  
In the wrong ear.  
My left foot didn't 'breathe' for my body  
As efficiently  
Stuck out of the duvet  
As its mirror brother,  
Now marooned  
Deep in deep-heat middle ground.

Changing sides:  
I'm a sort of dyspraxic, insomniac Mata Hari...

.... At least when dawn came up  
I woke up unshot.

Tony Jolley

# Coffee Event Horizon

First it was a foetus  
[Naturally enough]  
Umbilical cord and all  
A la Leonardo,  
Until it became a pint-sized Pangea  
Parting its continental components  
Like mega-mitochondria  
Courtesy of tectonic contractions  
Borne upon convection currents  
Surging from the scalding café core.  
Next a face:  
Frowning,  
Stretching,  
Whirling like a spiral galaxy,  
Trying to squeeze itself  
Into some sort of cosmic, coffee 'singularity'  
Before whose dark eternity  
Millions of nano-sun supernovas  
Exploded then faded forever  
Beyond the event horizon.  
Eventually even the broiling brown vortex  
Shallowed and slowed  
Then fell prey to the pull of surface tension,  
Its faint remnants  
Skidding and sliding down the cup diameter  
Like unlike poles to each other.  
Spent,  
All that remained  
Was perhaps coffee background radiation:  
That faintest of echoes  
In the taste of a cooling libation.

[Was idly watching Ellen stir her coffee and when she lifted out the spoon, the Brownian Motion, centrifugal force and surface tension of the liquid began to interact and play with the creamy froth.... ]

Tony Jolley

# Colossus

So large in life  
He  
Bestrode your childhood  
To motherhood:  
Your personal Colossus.  
Held you so safe  
In the arms of all he was:  
Father  
And Godfather both –  
An impossible alloy  
Of tempered steel and tenderness,  
With, as you would say,  
'Not just a little of the tarbrush  
About him'.

For all that,  
Chocolate looms strangely large  
In his legend:  
The Bourneville Boy  
Sporting Cadbury's  
Tin lid soles to his shoes;  
His WW2 medals  
In pride of place  
On our mantelpiece  
Inside his Dad's  
WW1 trench-Christmas chocolate box:  
'For Services Rendered'.

So many little 'lights' like that  
For memories to hide him in,  
Residing there like  
Manna and milk  
In a daughter's desert;  
Yet never enough  
To even begin to assuage  
The hunger  
Of your yearning soul.

Not a trace.

No map or marker  
To anchor your sailor  
To a time, a place...  
No stone or inscribed seat.  
No plot in perpetuity.

Not a trace.

No brass plaque  
To be wax-rubbed and wondered at  
By Future's carefree children  
Trying to make sense  
Of life,  
History:  
His story,  
Their story.

Not a trace.

Not a trace,  
For you,  
Looking out,  
Of your Colossus.  
But for us,  
Looking in  
At you,  
He is ever with us.

Tony Jolley

# Coming To Terms

Silent steps from the deep end of Eternity  
Seem to echo more mournfully down the corridors of your life.  
The long march of a tall man  
Casting his lengthening shadow slowly toward your fretful feet

Every minute: missed  
Some days: distressed  
Every week: wanting  
Some months: mourning the more  
Every season: seeking still

Each year, a year of no lesser yearning  
A year yet lacking resolution: learning,  
That a coming to terms with 'coming to terms'  
Comes only in its own time...  
Only on its own terms.

Tony Jolley



# Concave

Winter 1963 –  
You know,  
The one that makes you think  
Of that line from the carol:

“Earth as hard as iron ...  
Water like a stone”

Or possibly  
Frankie Valli’s  
Impossibly tight-trussed:

“Oh what a night –  
Late December back in 63 ...”;

Well yes,  
That one;  
That one I learned the time-honoured tradition  
Of ‘joined-up writing’  
[Do they still call it that now? ],  
Not from my class teacher  
[Mrs Troke or Mr Ingram – I can’t remember],  
But from Mr Brooks, the Headmaster himself  
Who clearly saw writing as a rite of passage  
Demanding none other than he at the helm.

I thought I’d done well enough –  
At least it looked more than a bit like it should have,  
But then his shadow eclipsed  
My bright hopes and slight self-confidence  
With his well intentioned ‘help’.  
Apparently,  
[though my words were as well-formed as anyone’s]  
My fore and index fingers  
Were pressing with too much pressure,  
Were ‘concave’ and ‘stressed’  
[Not that I knew what either meant then],  
Weren’t convex,  
Weren’t relaxed.

I couldn't for the life of me see  
How it could be  
As lighter meant looser  
And loss of control to me.

Fast-forward forty-odd years  
And maybe forty thousand self-penned pages  
And I can still recall his reproof  
Clearer than his face and his pinstripe suit.  
But today I watched you writing your journal  
And marvelled as your words  
Fountained and flowed their way across the page  
With all the effortless elegance and grace  
Of Torvill and Dean in their 'Bolero' prime: -

Your fingers as wonderfully concave as mine.....

Tony Jolley

# Condemned

Faces.

Faces fashioned by the genes of a generation long-gone.  
Faces sentenced to serve an eternal half-life after death  
Imprisoned within the walls of a single, monochrome microsecond.

Faces.

Faces exposed in life to light on plate  
Caught and condemned by judge and jury in camera.

Faces.

These faces and their past-time porters  
Have gone to ground, to grave,  
Dressed in all the pomp and circumstance  
Their hopes and dreams could muster;  
Naked but for faith  
And the Ferryman's fare still glinting dull in their eyes.

Dead, they died a second, slower death,  
Fading from the collective recollection of family and friends...

First the hole each left in life was full-size:  
A made to measure grief;  
The solitary seat where none would sit in spite of its vacant comfort;  
The suit he once wore, steeped in his smell,  
Still remembering his shape with fondness  
Like some old and faithful hound pining for his departed master,  
And holding fast to hope against a rising tide of reality.

Later, hand-me-down tales, mementoes and memories –  
Those legacies of a life lived and lost –  
Suffered in translation  
Like autumn leaves blown free from the family tree.

Eventually even the dying out, died out,  
With none to mourn its passing.

Faces.

Faces in a photo.

Faces out of their time-frame....

..... but somehow still in mine.

Tony Jolley

# Conjuring Lead From Gold

Object of your gruesome experimentation,  
You stuck their megavolt electrodes  
Of hearsay, revisionism, hatefulness and received un-wisdom  
To my temples past, present and future  
Like some screwed up anti-chemist:  
A Pavlov with no need of dog  
Salivating at the prospect  
Of conjuring Lead from our Gold,  
And threw the 'Old Sparky' switch  
With such dispassionate detachment  
I couldn't recognize you  
Though you looked so much like me.

I convulsed silently, internally,  
As ampères of indifference and rejection  
Surged their shockwaves through  
Rivers of blood suddenly thinner than water,  
Feeling my DNA helix slowly unravelling:  
Unpicked at the stiletto steels  
Of knitting needles and crochet hooks  
Cropping me head-first  
As fast as your Mme Defarge fingers  
Could unmake me.

Static.  
No longer shaped like me.  
No more kinetic.  
No longer shaped like you.  
Relegated to an inert element  
Not even a sun's nuclear reactor  
Can transmute:  
.... Only a daughter's.

Tony Jolley

# Connoisseurs And Counterfeits

Branksome Beach had a 'feeling' about it this morning,  
(Less of a one this afternoon)  
Only it was playing its cards too close to its chest for me to call.

The haze was part of it, but it wasn't it.  
It was something more, rather than something else:  
Something related -  
Related in the way that time relates to life  
And pain relates to pleasure:  
Implicitly, imprecisely,  
Interestingly: unsettlingly.

It was so very near to the natural,  
Close to congruent  
But for that haunting, sneaking feeling  
That Nature was somehow lip-synching  
A tune intended for a decidedly different day,  
As if its attention lay elsewhere,  
Upon some better beach.

Put 'Today': the original and the counterfeit together  
And there's not a connoisseur could divine between them:  
To all intents and all purposes the same.  
But I'm the poor painter who intended and purposed  
And to me they're both original, both authorised;  
Still one doesn't 'feel' right – and even I don't know why.

Tony Jolley

# Contradiction

You say: "I love you",  
And you do:  
To the uttermost limits of yourself and of all eternities.

I say: "You are my world",  
And you are:  
There is no horizon for me beyond you.

We say: "We are one",  
And we are:  
Rossetti's children, we neither have use for 'I' or 'mine'

You say: "Distance has no dominion over us",  
And it hasn't:  
We remain 600 miles close.

I say: "You never leave me",  
And you don't:  
Your heavenly hands stay ever about my spirit.

We say we are: "Home... and home for all time"  
And we are:  
Safe, secure, content, in our one-up-one-down-with-a-sea-view.

Yet today .....

Yet today:  
I could not touch your cheek – not even to make a fleeting moment of memory;  
You could not share the deepening orisons of my eyes;  
We were not free to be one for anyone;  
I could not catch a plane to you – not even with ticket and passport in pocket;  
You could not find my fingers upon your silent, lonely frets;  
We were both 'a la maison', yet we neither were 'home'.

Yet today....

Yet today:  
We both knew that had we heard 'anything' had happened to the other  
We would have moved all heavens and every Earth without a thought

To be where we know we must be.

Then why, Oh why, My Love, does 'nothing' keep us from 'we'?

Tony Jolley



# Cook-In Sauce

The Old Beams

Was an 'oldey-worldey' pub

On the right-hand side of the Ringwood – Salisbury road,

Rather too rich for our combined, courting-couple resources:

The sort of place parents would prefer

To go of a Friday or Saturday evening

To wine and dine

And wind themselves down from the working week;

Gracefully leaving available in the process

Six sweet feet of green Draylon sofa

Or the significantly more explicit

Adult invitation

To that dark, horizontal heat

Beating black and deep below

The duck-down duvet

Spread

Wide and linen-white upon my very double bed

Offering infinite,

Intimate

Night-time opportunity

To explore and exhibit

Each other's unseens and untoucheds

From a variety of interesting, only-imagined, angles

More advantageous

And far more adventurous

Than the average vertical would allow.

Sometimes it had all the Seventies sophistication

Of a Homepride White-Wine Cook-in Sauce,

Coupled with the soft, seductive shades and shadows

Of candlelight,

Romancing us along a teenage, hormonal highwire,

Teetering precariously but deliciously

Between

A very nearly chaste,

Hour-or-more-long, breathless embrace

And tearing off each other's clothes

As frantic to feel as to be felt

Barely before parents' backs were turned

And the sound of their car slid,  
All too slowly out of earshot...  
...Still that stirs in me  
Far more than mere memory.

Yes, the Old Beams, ('though of course it never knew it)  
Provided much-needed possibilities  
To our youthful means and seriously playful motives.

Now, a generation on,  
We live, love and lust  
Under the 'seen it all before' benevolence  
Of far older beams  
Which frame and brace our French farmhouse  
After a fashion with which  
Shakespeare would have been eminently familiar;  
Spanning the centuries  
With that same, timeless ease  
Which carries his plots and sonnets  
Safe and sound into our present day reality.

These older beams  
Present even greater potential  
For us to pursue our pleasure,  
Vaulting and thrusting at obscene angles  
Above our heads,  
Over our bed:  
Mortise and Tenon couplings and socketings;  
Ten-inch, heart of Oak dowling pins,  
Thicker than my thumb:  
Males hammered hard home  
Into their accommodating, made-to-measure,  
Female mate-holes,  
Forcing and fixing each hip joint  
In the perfect position  
To spread the load  
Along the length of these splayed limbs  
And bear its weight,  
Compliant,  
Without complaint.

Tony Jolley

# Couldn'T Call

Couldn't call.  
Wasn't sure why.

Couldn't face the mournful music of polite rebuff:  
My own words deflected  
Or reflected as if in some strange, monosyllabic mirror -  
Dirge-like delivery,  
Devoid of intent to introduce  
One single shred of personality,  
Or of any promise other  
Than putting this pretence out of its misery.

Couldn't bear the charade  
In which I would 'play the part' of a parent  
Because she wouldn't let you let me be me.

Tony Jolley

# Cruel Comfort

He

[Or 'she' – how does one tell? ]

Was some:

2000 €,

10,000 km,

200 vertical feet,

20 °C,

40% humidity

Infinitely too much humanity

And a continent and a country

Away from the company

Of its own kind:

Of home.

Yet,

So desperate for even caged consolation

He inclined his head,

Offering his nape,

As if before the Sultan:

To strike or to stroke

Inviting contact,

Any contact:

Cruel comfort or sweet release

From a steel-bound existence

Prey to a gravity

He once could negate at a thought,

His former unchained reality

Now sadly relegated to fleeting dreams

Be-deviled and broken

By 24-hour daylight security.

Alone in abject slavery,

Yet still he craved contact with me.

Me: representative of all who would not see him free.

We don't deserve animals, do we?

[Lament for the lot of the Gabon Grey Parrot in a cage in the Botannic Garden Centre]

Tony Jolley

# Deep And Indelible

Rooted, by pride restored,  
In the rich, Rhine-wrought soil of Bruebach  
The very day the Bosche were booted out  
(The second time, that is) :  
Now ramrod straight and mast-high,  
Competing only with the medieval church tower opposite  
For lofty ascendance and local reverence  
Our garden's 'Sapin de la Libération'  
Seems to bear all of its 65 rings  
With the quiet, green dignities  
Of memorial to the moment and to French 'Fallen',  
And of the visceral memories of survivors of invasion and occupation,  
Still bearing the scars more openly than inwardly  
As if it were yesterday....  
And 'might just be again another day –  
Who knows anyway? '.

History writes itself deep and indelible in the souls of its witnesses.

The young, nouveau poor come touting for work  
[and who can blame them for trying? ]  
Offering to lop it, chop it and otherwise reduce it  
To sap-spitting fuel for a winter open fire  
And sadly, but understandingly, forego  
All hope of its exploitation  
After our short explanation,  
Leaving, head bowed,  
In regret or recognition.

As ever, it's not that simple –  
This is Alsace, after all:  
A land with a long-chequered heritage  
Of belonging and language,  
A prize of enviable proportion;  
A pawn at the mercy of powers and princes  
Who would possess her for her position:  
Cradled between the blue hues of the Vosges  
And the stark black of Schwarzwald,  
Gateway to Swiss Alps and south to Italy,

Rhine and plain, vine and wine.  
'Leben wie Gott im Frankreich'  
So the (German) saying goes:  
And as they've tried it at least twice  
I guess they should know.

The 1939 blitzkrieg across the Rhine  
Saw Fernand, our old French friend and neighbour,  
Conscripted at the sharp end of a Schmeisser  
To wear Wehrmacht grey  
And frogmarched to the Eastern Front as expendable,  
Non-Aryan fodder for Operation Barbarossa.  
Some major miracle or ministering angel  
Spared him from Stalingrad  
And Stalin's standing orders  
To take no prisoners.  
Retreat before the Red Army,  
Inevitably,  
Brought him hard up against the Western Allies  
As their two-front trap squeezed and finally snapped shut  
Upon the remnants of the 1000 year Reich,  
Whereupon he was mortared  
And almost mortally injured by the Americans,  
Saved from the foxhole that was fast becoming his grave  
By some foolhardy-brave Ranger Medics  
Who heard him praying to his Father  
And self-administering the last rites in French...  
Only to be shot on his way to safety  
By a bullet from a German machine gun.

Targeted by two sides,  
Touch and go,  
He woke up in England:  
A German POW  
Until somebody with an ounce of sense  
Realised the reality of his nationality,  
Separated him  
And then, promptly losing the plot, tried to repatriate him  
To a country rife with lynching-party reprisals  
Exacting summary justice  
Upon the heads of all easy targets like conscriptees and collaborators,  
Which would certainly have finished the job in peacetime



Which neither side had quite managed, despite their best efforts, in wartime.

He was helpfully, and, I hope, deliberately 'lost' by the British system  
And spent a good few years re-building a bombed-out Southampton  
Before daring to embark for his home in Bruebach  
And the Libération sapling  
Which would shelter and shade his twilight aging.

No hero's reception or victor's laurels for Fernand:  
His own, beloved country, for whom he would have fought  
To his last breath if he only could,  
Had revoked his French nationality -  
So he had to suffer the indignity heaped upon multiple injury  
Of applying for his own 'Re-integration'  
Like a criminal to be released back into society  
In the face of all the anathema  
The much diminished, yet still imperious,  
Might of the State could muster.

No wonder Alsace is somehow 'separate'.  
No surprise some of its older citizens  
See themselves  
As Alsacien first and foremost  
And French a long way second...  
Or, unforgiven,  
Unreckoned.

The wounds of history everywhere run deep,  
But here, unhealed, the blood still seeps.

Tony Jolley

# Deer-Ly Departed

Just before: it saw.  
Just perhaps, it knew.  
But in that fatal, final second  
Did it think like me and you?

Just before: it saw.  
I hope to God it knew,  
That in that frantic, braking battle  
I'd done all that I could do.

Tony Jolley

# Departure Lounge Diva

"DIVA"

Declared the Darling's pink Tee-shirt, departing.

"SO MUCH TO DO"

It announced, emphatically, arriving.

[Yet thankfully without the obligatory adult addendum of:  
'So Little Time']

Unbidden, the plea surfaced:

'Pray God she has the time –

But let it be for the being:

Let not the daily doing crowd to cloud

The long view from a young life'.

Then I allowed myself a little rumination, reflection.

As a child I was, on all accounts,

A whirling dervish of doing

[Except when there was no doing to be done]

and having nothing to do was the end of the world.

Yet now, au contraire,

Having to do nothing seems a luxury locked away at the world's end.

Surely, between these polarised positions

There must have been some equatorial equilibrium –

A day when the doing beautifully balanced the being...

...But when?

When was that?

What year?

What date?

And how did I not see it and protect it, preserve it?

How did I fail to feel the see-saw's slow swing away from me?

No lament.

No blame.

No recrimination

No pain...

Just a not-quite-so-academic-a-question

From a not-quite-so-career-peaked-academician

Who tips his own mortar board today

To the tender, timely teachers who taught him lately

That between his all-too-short coming and going  
He is a human being not doing.

So may the Diva grow.  
So may the Diva know.

Tony Jolley

# Deus In Retriever

...And God saw that it was good...  
But perhaps it could be better,  
So like any a craftsman worth his salt  
On his 'day off' he was tempted to tinker.....

So to that pint-sized brain, he came again,  
Focusing all his creator power,  
Vowing to beat the 'Big Blue' he knew  
Would beat Spassky in under an hour.

Never has the world seen such a probability machine  
All wrapped in a russet-blonde suit:  
Four paws, one wet nose and a waggy tail that shows  
She knows that she's just too damn' cute.

But what if they knew (as you and I do)  
She's a food-seeking missile inside,  
That guides her every action with no hint of distraction  
To have her 'cake' and yours besides.

That playful look is just a 'hook':  
A man-trap for the unwary,  
For she never misses with her sloppy kisses,  
Seduces hearts by being so hairy.

Giving paw's a sign she aims to dine  
'Pon whatever is there on your plate,  
So keep a weather eye on that table top high  
Or for your dinner you'll be too late!

Tony Jolley

# Diab[olical]etes

Sometimes from birth.  
Something inside that just doesn't work  
Or that gives up the ghost without much warning  
Much later when you're not looking.  
It can be like that, 'Type 2': sneaky -  
Creeping around camouflaged under cover  
Of pregnancy recovery,  
Everyday tiredness  
Or typical, middle-aged, weight-gain discovery;  
Only poking its head above the medical parapet  
At the hypodermic point of a routine blood test:  
Results within bounds of the 'normal' distribution  
One would expect within the population...  
All bar one or two,  
Off the scale,  
Under the heading of: 'Sugar'....

Diabetes.

Bugger.

Tony Jolley

# Different

"It'll be different! ",  
He said,  
Not perhaps knowing  
Quite how right  
His light-hearted line  
Would prove to be.

"It'll be different! "  
It was one of any number  
Of comments and encouragements  
Rather than judgements:  
More excited exhortation  
Than portent or prognostication.

"Let's see if I haven't got this right, "  
He said....

"You're leaving your country,  
Your home and your family,  
Going to lecture in a French university,  
Reawakening a long-lost language facility,  
Moving from town to a village mentality  
To marry the lass you lost in your history  
To love her and the kids and give them security...?  
It seems a pretty tall order to me  
But to you it doesn't appear to be –  
The weight on your shoulders has lifted: you're free;  
So JFDI, no more wait n see! "

Well, I went  
And it was  
And we are  
And will be,  
Just as my old Dad  
Told it to me.

Tony Jolley

# Dining Out

Happy 75th Birthday, Mum...

Though' I guess you're not keeping score anymore

[Unless it's 21 and never, ever 'out'! ]

It's not too easy either to envisage

Anything you might need or want in your mansion,

Which, come to think of it, is just as well

Given the delivery distance

And the price to be paid to The Ferryman.

I'll play postman when I'm in the neighbourhood, ok?

No – I don't know quite when:

Sometime between 'now' and 'then'

But probably sooner than I would wish

And a whole lot later than others might want!

They say: "Life is in the journey" –

Ironic really, given giving up the ghost is the one-way ticket.

Bet you dined out on that one!

Point of fact: can you dine out on any one?

Indeed, do you dine at all?

Despite the distance

I guess you'll have heard the news

That I finally allowed myself to admit

I couldn't make the marriage work

And faced up to the fact

That it was pointless pretending

I could survive a loveless life anything like intact.

For Life is the only ocean of opportunity to love and be loved,

Time the tide that sweeps it to our shores

And Will the power that pitches us headlong into the current of our choosing.

So I finally left upon the late tide,

My Ever Love to stand beside.

I've tried all I know of right and reason,

Applied all I have learned in the way of wisdom and waiting,

Sought the sanctuary of justice in extremis

Only to find a travesty where a father doesn't feature

And possession is ten-tenths of the ass of law.

So, Mum, could you keep a weather eye on the kids for me?



No matter how far in space or time  
I guarantee your vantage point is better than mine.

I miss them as you know I miss you...  
Yet they feel more lost: my two.

Tony Jolley

# Divorce

“Don’t give me all that! ”

She shouted,

Her bitter barbs flaying the skin off his spirit’s back

For the god-knows-how-many-hundredth time.

So, for the first and last time –

He didn’t.

Tony Jolley

# Do Dreams Dream?

I am watching myself, well a part of myself  
Apart from myself,  
Watching my left thumb absent-mindedly caress  
The you that is the soft, fist-furled index finger of my left hand.

You are my index, My Love, the first and only finger,  
The doyenne of digits who catalogued and kept my dreams vouchsafed  
In your world without walls.  
You set them free and freely to you they returned,  
For in truth they never left you, Love -  
Why ever would one dream-dropp dream  
Of exile from its own Eden?

Why is it, when I'm writing that the thoughts I want won't come,  
Whilst those unwelcome and unsummoned announce their arrival with a drum?

Today's uninvited...?

"Do dreams dream? "

There was a time – a dry desert of a half-life of a time  
I would wilfully lose myself in dreams,  
In dreams of anything but the guttural, discordant tones  
Of a language I no longer wanted to hear or speak.  
So I would court their seduction of me,  
No, rather I'd run to the open arms of that sweet siren song  
Whose melody and harmony:  
Unique;  
United,  
Sprang as sparkling water from the very moment when discovery dawned,  
A new breed of mathematics was born  
And 3 x 2 became forever one form.

But now my dreams, themselves they dream – they would that they will wake,  
For what is not has had its day and this they would forsake  
To walk into no waking dream but love's reality,  
That sweet oasis-ever, that is known to both as 'we'.

Tony Jolley

## Do The Math.

Go...but don't leave my side.

Add altitude, but don't subtract your feet from my terra firma.

Multiply the miles, but don't divide me from 'My Slice of the Divine'.

Go...but please stay.

Tony Jolley

# Don'T Dig Dog!

No more holes  
Like upside-down moles!  
Minty, don't you dare dig, dog!

No more mucky paws  
Making prints on the floors!  
Minty, don't you dare dig, dog!

No more shaggy coat  
Black from tail to throat!  
Minty, don't you dare dig, dog!

..... But if you really, really can't stop:

Please bury your bone  
Not my mobile phone!  
Minty, please don't dig, dog!

Tony Jolley

# Dust Dances

Dust dances but on borrowed time  
To some unfathomable, divine design  
'In his image', we are told, 'a trinity':  
Body, soul and spirit: me.

A thin-skinned, sensory mobile-home  
With stature and features all of its own  
Mind and emotions – to think and to feel  
But the spirit alone, he sits at the wheel  
(Until body and soul – both are spent  
when spirit lives yet to pay God's rent)

Woman, we learn, was drawn out of man  
Re-uniting the two is God's precious plan  
Alone neither party can hope to fulfil  
His (or her) true potential, despite force of will

So just how might love seek to intercede?  
And what the conditions for it to succeed?  
Two bodies, two souls, two spirits: all six  
Can there be such a thing as the perfect mix?

Tony Jolley

# Ecce Everyman

Everyman came to town today:  
Didn't roll in effortlessly by the wide white route,  
But came the long and narrow way round,  
The only way round  
Via the hard ground:  
Via Montgomery,  
Via adversity and history:  
Via Dolorosa,  
Nunc Via Gloriosa.

He looked like me –  
Though we share nothing remotely  
In the way of height or weight,  
Neither colour nor race.  
Still we looked the same  
In the singular mirror of that moment.

He resounded in me;  
Struck a chord so deep below the waterline  
I felt sea speak to sea  
And hope's high tide of possibility  
Drown dither and doubt and float free  
A whole fleet of opportunity  
To catch the winds of change  
That wait beyond the lee of party politics and nationality.

Friends, though we've never met  
And almost certainly never will  
Outside those quiet places of the soul  
Where we share and dare wonder  
Who, how, what if and why not,  
I hope he'd recognise me, on sight:  
I'm not of the US,  
But I am of the kind of 'us'  
That is ready for the kind of United States of Mind  
He has in mind.

Tony Jolley



# Elemental

An Espace with space to spare  
Skidded and skitted slowly  
Round our snow-cosseted corner,  
Retreating from view.  
Retreating with you.

Six seats empty -  
Room enough for another  
Swedish forest of furniture  
From IKEA Fribourg -  
Yet full to the gunwales  
With my world:  
The warmth of you,  
The want of you:  
The wonder of you.  
A world the entire Earth couldn't contain  
Between its Big Bang beginning and its final fiery curtain;  
A world within a world  
Yet beyond the bounds of East and West:  
An elemental identity Mendeleev never mapped  
And neither Magellen nor Cook ever charted.

My world is in her classroom now,  
Playing large upon the stage of her life  
And I wonder whether there might just be  
Another living soul there alive to see  
The glory my heart finds in she.

Tony Jolley

# Eleven Past Nine

The angle of light cast by the low-voltage downlighters  
Produced a seagull-shaped shadow  
On the station-style clock face set upon our piano,  
Banking the bird ever-so-slightly to the right  
On its eleven-past-nine wings.  
Even manufactured, artificial,  
Contrived in my mind  
It was still effortlessly beautiful -  
Metaphorical:  
Time;  
Time flying;  
Time flown  
Above the photo of my parents:  
That photo.  
That last photo.  
The one before I became singularised  
And downsized  
In the only heritage department that matters  
Or ever will.  
You brought me into the world,  
Though you paid a daughterless,  
Son-plus-less price for the privilege.  
I took the photo:  
That last photo,  
With my beloved OM 10,  
Your 18th birthday present to me  
Which faithfully served its in-built purpose  
And registered your image:  
The pink blouse with the high, ruffed neck  
You'd bought in M&S;  
The green, so-soft-it-felt-like-velvet denim jacket,  
Size 8 or less, that you'd had off Tess,  
All leaning into Dad's neck  
And his pride and joy, Pringle polo-shirt  
The same way you used to slide  
Your gammy leg behind the good  
Out of comfort and habit  
To hide the hurt scored into the scar  
That Time would never heal,

Could never heal,  
And I could never undo or unmake  
No matter how hard I might hope or try..  
Or pray.

I squashed a chocolate marshmallow once.  
Squashed it right into the suit skirt  
You were shot wearing on your Blackpool honeymoon,  
Your legs still strategically crossed, of course,  
[Though that was a barely-acquired and not yet ingrained habit  
Courtesy of the bike crash on the East Lancs Road  
Which almost swept you and any hope of me away with it.]  
For the life of me,  
Or the death of you,  
I can't remember whether  
I really remember it,  
Or whether I only remember being told I did it.  
Either way,  
You were beautiful to me  
In a way that language can't contain.  
You were amazingly you  
Though I wasn't yet me  
Any more than  
'Could be', 'might be',  
Or 'maybe someday':  
I was merely possible, potential...  
Conceivable.

In 25 years you would leave early.  
Abruptly;  
Carried off by a coronary:  
A 'myocardic infarction' –  
A line that lives only in 'Emergency Ward 10' scripts  
Or in your worst nightmares –  
Which dropped you like deadwood to the carpet:  
The last chime of the genetic timepiece ticking you down inexorably  
After all the illnesses insurance proposals prefer you not to have  
Had taken their toll and stolen your future from us both.

Freak chance dictated that, for once, I wouldn't be there...  
I would be masterminding some senseless, meaningless  
Shopping centre exhibition somewhere.

'Masterminding' be damned:  
I was no more than a glorified mule,  
Humping and heaving supposedly easy-erect stands  
And reams and reams of pointless promo-paper  
Extolling the pleasures of:  
'Poole: it's a beautiful place'  
Or 'Christchurch: where time is pleasant'.  
Maybe I should turn my toes up in Christchurch, then;  
But you died that day in Poole  
And whatever beauty it might have had died to me too.

Me, I ended up returning Dad's call  
From a piss-reeking phone-box  
In a dirty grey loading bay -  
God forgive me  
Irritated that he'd been ringing me  
When I'd got more than enough on my plate.

No more doing when he told me.  
No thinking.  
No more being:  
No nothing;  
No feeling.  
Nothing:  
An eternity where not even deity can hear you scream.

In your sudden prison  
No walls to give the comforting reassurance of an echo:  
No rebound;  
No reflection,  
No reminder.

Memory frantically ransacking its cabinets  
To find something of you to hold on to  
And scraping its fingernails down the cliffs of failure  
Like Wile E. Coyote  
Falling out of sight in slow motion down the canyon wall  
A look of sad resignation set deep in his eyes.

She'd gone.  
She'd gone and some bastard had stolen all I had left of her.  
Or had I just lost her myself?

And could I handle the guilt if I had?  
Surely I could conjure her.  
Who could know her better?  
For god's sake I'd kissed her forehead at 6AM,  
Leaving her a PG Tips tea she probably wouldn't wake to find warm,  
But I'd smiled and left it anyway...  
Maybe I left toast too, I can't say.

No going back now.

No going home.  
No going on,  
Just a going.

Going like an Okie in the Dustbowl days:

Somewhere;  
Anywhere;  
Out of her;  
Out of here.

Eyes raw, glazed and open  
Like a stuck sash window,  
Staring blankly as the scenery streamed past  
Like the backdropp to a poor stage show you'd prefer to sleep through.  
Only way to stop the tears from coming  
And my heart from leaping out of my throat  
And hurling itself willingly to whatever oblivion  
Might be waiting outside the carriage.

Taxi rank for Waterloo was 50 deep.  
Waited for 10 minutes,30 seconds or four hours  
And it was still 50 deep.  
Couldn't take it.  
Walked to the head of the queue.  
'My Mum's died... would you mind if I....? '  
Don't know if they did.  
Took the next one anyway in a trance.  
Couldn't have taken any more unwelcome time to think –  
Hurt too much.  
Had to be moving.

Must have been about  
Eleven-past-nine,  
But there were no bloody seagulls around the station clock this time.

Tony Jolley

# Eleventh Hour

The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month,

Loaded with significance,  
Charged with a memory of a reality  
We shouldn't want to even try to imagine –  
Even if we could.

Just one life left now,  
Just one solitary one  
To bear witness,  
At 106,  
To that insanity heaped upon humanity  
Upon a continental scale  
Known as The Great War, The War to End All Wars,  
[Subsequently sadly revised to: World War One  
After its inevitable sequel-working-on-a-series successor].

Warfare where the weapons were human,  
Sacrificed as expendable political pawns  
On a battle-board of notional national boundaries  
In some sadistic parlour-game of attrition  
Played by knights and kings of both sides  
From the safety of their castles and shires.

Today the leaves were more eloquent  
Than all the statesmen and commemorations put together,  
Falling, as they were, in battalion strength before the biting wind  
As men before the bullet, bomb and blade  
Went, whistled on and over the top by others' whims,  
To their early, unmarked graves  
After so sad and short a summer.

I never realised,  
Perhaps I never noticed,  
But the buds of the next generation  
Are there today on twig and branch  
Waiting to be born.  
Perhaps they spend their winter gestating,  
And wondering

Why man, with all his freedom and wisdom,  
Can see Spring yet scorn Summer so  
That he could contrive to leave this life before his season is through.

Tony Jolley



# Ellie's First And Forever Rose

I brought you roses on your sixteenth birthday ...  
Nearly twenty-six years ago.  
The stems were long, lean and elegant  
In almost exactly the way that I wasn't.  
There were thorns to cut to the quick  
With the razor sharp wit  
Of the suave, sophisticated and stylish  
Which had somehow passed me by on the other side,  
Giving me berth wide enough  
To show me the mark I'd missed.

But the buds were all 'me':  
A little shy in the knowledge of their own simplicity,  
Giving themselves entire, safe and free  
Into the care of your lovely young life,  
Your tender touch;  
For there lay neither fear nor judgement,  
But the gentle eye of grace,  
The sweet heart and hands of honour.

Every petal was me, My Love:  
My outer layers some had seen,  
Yet beneath lay your realm alone:  
An ethereal land of spirit and second-sight.  
Even I didn't know  
How my interior would look in the light,  
But I did know you wouldn't turn away  
And you knew how I longed for you to stay.

That first bouquet was me - is still me, My Love:  
We both knew what lay soft and eternal in the gift,  
And had I by divine design my time again,  
I would always choose to be:  
Ellie's First and Forever Rose.

Tony Jolley

# Eternity's Sell-By Date

“What if there ever comes a day  
When you no longer feel this way.....”

Then Mankind will have chosen peace,  
The Raptured risen to their release,

Everest worn as flat as a board,  
History will have ceased to record,

The Sun will have swelled and swallowed the Earth,  
The universe enjoying a constant re-birth,

Past the sell-by date of Eternity,  
Time itself will no longer be,

Even then, My Darling,  
Our love will yet be young,  
And 'we' not 'I'  
Will be where we both belong.

Tony Jolley

# Everything's Gone

Everything's gone.

Everything's gone tender,  
gone soft,  
gone - between a breath and a sigh,  
gone down the dawning distance between My Love and I

Everything went.

Everything went with her,  
went with her falling tear,  
went with the sound of her unseen footsteps,  
a l'Est de St. Lazare.

Everything's gone...  
Everything went ...

So why am I still here?

Tony Jolley

# Faultline

Shot.

Don't think I'm dead.

[Checks self for signs of entry or exit wounds]

No Blood.

Not yet.

Too soon, I guess.

[Blood takes a long time to well up from the soul]

Different.

Feel different.

Something living lopped off the family tree.

Felt it crack the length of my faultline –

Spirit torn from flesh before its time.

[Eyes too hot, too raw, too dry for tears]

Felt it fall,

Fall free of me,

Fall headlong, slow and silently screaming

Into the black beyond redemption's reach.

No echoes, reflections, reminders, recollections.

Less.

Shrunk.

[Not missing a bit of me at all, but a bit of all of me, that's all.]

Tony Jolley

# Fire On Your Finger

Fire on your finger,  
Fire in your eye,  
Fire in your spirit,  
Fire that won't die.

Fire in the bare bones of being,  
Fire to uphold what's right,  
Fire in the heart of darkness,  
Fire to fuel Love's light.

Fire to burn but not consume,  
Fire to learn and not assume,  
Fire to live and give living room,  
Fire to love and sing her tune.

Tony Jolley

# Fishing

Still can't believe it.

Still reeling from the six-word shock

From a future, former friend who was never a father:

"Maybe they're better off without you? "

Torn between being appalled

By the bite of the barb on a man-hungry meat-hook

Spliced to the end of a 25-year-friendship-breaking-strain line

And being too damn' tired of dealing with unnecessary hurt

To bother to rise to the bitter bait,

I watched the weeds of blind judgement snag fast his fatal intent.

He cut the line without trying to loose it.

I cut my losses: no choice but to choose it.

Tony Jolley

# Flamenco Fan

At times a whale tail, diving slowly, elegantly,  
Sliding through the surface tension to a ripple, barely.  
At others, flashing fast as a Hummingbird wing:  
A red-black blur of will she / won't she seduction activity;  
Then graceful, slender fingers and a supple wrist  
Arcing and wheeling in a heady, Iberian ballet  
Being all but explicit for those with blood red enough to see.

Tony Jolley

# Forgot The Dog Food

There was the not wanting to get up, for a start:  
The insufferably-insistent, banshee-wail of the alarm  
Slicing its shrill through my sleep like a searing hot knife through butter;  
The vague, dull awareness of there having been a dream,  
Now shrouded by a bleak and impenetrable pea-souper of Dickensian proportions,  
Forever beyond the reach of recall.

Creeping gingerly, still-half-asleepedly over a pair of Retrievers on the stairs,  
Toes cursing mildly under their breath at the cold french carrelage  
And the long-lost intent to replace the slippers the dogs had dismembered.  
Discovering the storage heaters had not delivered  
On their remote-controlled, digitally-confirmed promise  
To charge up cheap overnight and take the edge off the morning chill  
Habitually creeping its unwelcome way round window and door frames,  
And that one unit was still stubbornly stone cold,  
Even if it's circulator fan was faithfully wafting  
Glacial air to all four corners of the lounge.

The dinner party crockery we blithely decided could 'wait 'til tomorrow',  
Now making more than a compelling case for our immediate attention:  
Congealed 'Yeller Fish' leftovers merrily self-supergluing knives & forks to plates,  
And producing a feline olfactory orgasm to attract every stray in our street.  
The bathroom linen basket skyscraping its raffia coolie hat heavenwards  
Under the uncontainable, volcanic magma-mound of a weekend's family washing.  
The car engine taking that extra heartbeat or two to cough into life  
As the winter mornings begin to take their toll and thicken my engine oil  
Making me wonder whether it'll make it round to Spring without a full service.

No space in the car park.  
Having to prowl the one-way system like a panther  
Hoping to make a parallel-parking kill before the lion's close in.  
Booting up, plugging-in and logging on  
Only to find that someone's stolen the data-projector  
Leaving three wires and a ceiling pole  
As some kind of annoying memorial.  
'Plan-BLT', then: 'Before Latest Technology'  
Better known in the trade as 'chalk & talk'.



Quick trip to the supermarket on the way home,  
Trolley pulling relentlessly to one side like an over-sized, headstrong puppy.  
'Where d'you put the ones in need of repair? ', I said, helpfully.  
Came the one word reply: 'Nowhere'.

Home.

Some sign of heat – Hallelujah!

Forgot the dog food: Bugger.

Tony Jolley

# Forty-Five

I am forty-five  
Born barely three months ago,  
When I crashed into my new world  
Shocked and shaken,  
Naked but for  
The twenty years of blood and hope  
Harboured by she who birthed me –  
She who propelled me into be-ing  
By the impassioned contractions  
Of her certitude and faith in the me I knew not,  
Her tender, rhythmic determination  
Bearing down upon this child of potential unrealised  
That I must become, must be,  
Be never less than me.

She was there: one thousand miles close  
When my eyes first opened  
To an assault, a riot, a rage of clear, bright colour  
Sometimes whispering, sometimes shouting for joy  
In tongues this newborn alone could understand instantly:  
Words, which wrote themselves, their glorious simplicity  
In a most delicate hand  
Upon the pristine folios of my spirit.

There in his Lakeland delivery suite  
God himself appeared to hold me,  
To dangle me upside down by the ankle  
And deal my tend'rest parts  
A single, stinging smack  
From the Truth of His right hand:  
A stimulus to awaken to Beauty.  
My first intake of breath lasted a full two hours;  
Not so much changing or adding to the range of senses,  
Rather altering their focus and my perceptions.  
Spirit was speaking to spirit  
Without the soul or the hand holding the pen  
Getting their well-meaning preconceptions and stereotypes in the way.

In the exhalation which filled two pages,

I became me.  
I recognised myself in the mirrored surface of the Lake  
And now, a stranger to self-deprecation,  
I liked what I saw.  
I had seen the reflection before in her words:  
"You have to write, Tony. I have always known.  
You have to write – You'll see. You'll know."

As ever, her Love knew, knew me; knows me naked.  
I was born, of her, a writer in my forty-fifth year.

Tony Jolley

# Found In Translation

After a while you don't think about it anymore:  
Don't translate,  
Don't worry,  
Don't try.  
On est Là  
[Or at least close enough to 'Là' to Rock 'n' Roll]

OK, it has to be admitted -  
There are moments and messages  
That fall through the listening 'net',  
Odd things that appear, well, odd,  
Or suffer in non-translation,  
Especially at dinner parties,  
Where the cut and chase of exchanges  
Can get away from you  
Faster than a Ferrari from a feu rouge.  
But that's just how it is -  
There's no 'playback' facility in real time  
And 'rewind' comes with too much of a price,  
Is a bargain bought and bought dear:  
A chance to maybe, (just maybe)  
Understand marginally better  
The fast-fading echoes of phrases past,  
Set against the almost certainty  
Of the loss of the present sentence.  
It's a no-brainer;  
No goer,  
No pointer:  
A conversational, translation,  
Lose-lose situation.

So cut yourself some slack,  
Get out of the linguistic pressure cooker,  
Turn down the self-inflicted heat  
To the temperature of a well-chambréd Claret  
And relax into it as you would  
Snuggling up with a good book  
Under a duck-down duvet  
Gently pre-warmed by electric blanket

And having your lover come climb in beside.

Now that type of translation  
Is pretty much guaranteed appreciation.

Tony Jolley

# Friday-Night Elephant-Keepers

Is the Pope Catholic?

Does the Sun always set in the West?

Is grass green?

Is water wet?

Are 'The Poor' still with us?

Do Elephant-Keepers grow great roses?

Do Donkeys like Strawberries? .....

"Would you like me to stay Friday night as well? "

Tony Jolley

# From Everyman

You were the background music and accompaniment  
To my first, and as history would have it, only real love.  
Our lips touched to 'Something Fine's 'You say Morocco'.  
Her hand nonchalantly, desperately upon my thigh in the car,  
Windows down, hair in the summer breeze,  
Alive and vocal to 'Runnin' on Empty' and 'Rosie',  
We were living the story you were yet to write:  
Turning pages we were years from the learning.  
We had no barricades in our heaven, Jaks,  
But I built one anyway called:  
It would be better for both our sakes  
To which there was no earthly redemption she might bring.  
'Stay', your loving anthem, I turned to our mournful retreat:  
An emblem of what might, no, should have been,  
Retiring over some rational hill and out of earshot  
Yet still within the reach of one  
Who should have recognised himself as The Pretender  
And turned himself in.  
We had sung it so often – had it down word-for-word  
Yet still I failed to see it: the pretender in me.

We fell in love to you,  
Loved to you.  
I lost her to you,  
Gave her up to you:  
Saw our future evaporate into history to the strains of you.

You stayed friends with the both of us,  
Though we fell out of touch with each other  
Yet not out of wondering, not ever out of yearning.  
Your grand career continued as our shared and singular life's soundtrack.  
She held on to some of your vinyl and my trusty 12-string:  
Talismen of forlorn hope or faith?  
Time would tell.

We 'wrote' to you in our loss and lack  
And you replied with tender comforts  
Of 'Shape of a Heart' and 'Call it a Loan':  
Never quite healing, but keeping alive the possibility of 'interest' repayment.

I, we, have to confess that we deserted you too at times  
For the exquisite pains of Linda's 'Prisoner in Disguise'  
And Karla's 'Water is Wide' and 'Someone to Lay Down Beside Me',  
Still....we always came back to you, you know.  
By then we were separated  
By continents and commitments of twenty years standing;  
Yet you sang us together again after my years of searching  
'Had come up torn and empty':  
She found me - her heart had been 'looking for mine' all the time.  
The time? Well I had just bought tickets for your Bournemouth gig  
(remember you saw a film before the show?) .

Le premier pas – j'aim'rais qu'Elle fasse le premier pas  
Out of your 'Sky Blue' and into the 'Black' where my life languished,  
She found me -  
Found me in time.  
Our hopeful hearts rubbed shoulders on the telephone.  
First we talked in code  
Using your lines as our own  
To find our feet and our voices  
Which surely brought us to that point of no return,  
That Rubicon of admission, confession and absolution.  
It was mine to swim to her;  
So like her, she chose to meet me half way across  
In the deepest and most dangerous curl of the current.

The pretender received more forgiveness than he deserved,  
His tears filling the pitcher of his Lady of the Well to overflowing  
With his life, love and future.  
Now the 'Naked Ride Home'  
Is no longer an event we shared in our history, Jaks,  
Not a blessed, painful memory,  
But a truth.  
On our ride home, which will take us a lifetime,  
We both are become transparent to one another again,  
Yet this time the moreso: known. Utterly known.  
Do you know Mary-Chapin's 'Naked to the Eye':  
'When you look at me Baby, I haven't got a prayer, naked to the eye.'?  
Home is naked now, not merely the ride.

Now 'Sleep's Dark and Silent Gate' of regret



No longer preys upon my troubled slumbers.  
The past is truly another country,  
The future is guaranteed to none,  
But the present,  
The present, Jaks,  
Is ours to sing with you  
Now that together we live, we love, we am.

One day, if you don't mind, (and even if you do)  
When she and I are together in a place not unlike Isla Negra  
Where watches can be cast into the sea of pointlessness,  
Then we will play 'Stay' no more.  
Till then it will underscore our stolen moments:  
Borrowed and brought forward from this future  
To accompany our longing, our desperation for one another,  
Just as it always did.

We began together with you, Jaks.  
We came together again on an English summer hillside:  
We two, a blanket, a guitar and you:  
Your anthology and our history.

'To the Dust', Jaks, 'To the Dust' is our toast to you,  
But this is our song in the writing: hers and mine....

One day we'll play it for you.

Tony Jolley

# Funeral (Of Being Bereft)

The funeral was an 'event':  
Carefully catered and choreographed –  
A place for everyone  
And every one, most assuredly, in his allotted place.  
A forced march of the malingering  
Heading for Hamelin rather than heaven.  
The Pied Piper of Protocol  
Paid from beyond the pale  
To make the lifeless limbs of liggers  
Dance to a dowager's dirge.

Now think on this if you will  
(and even if you won't, you ought) :

If life be the ability to choose,  
The power to move,  
Then who is most lost to life....

- The deceased who pays the piper and still calls the tune?
- Mechanical mourners thoughtlessly following her feet to their own funerals?

OR....

- The one who sees, knows and writes (or reads) yet has not the courage to change and vote with his own feet before he find them pointing, pointlessly, endlessly skywards?

Your call.

Tony Jolley

# Furrows

Furrows in the aching brow.  
Furrows in the wakening earth.  
Both scored deep by the power of the plough.

Furrows in the brow:  
Following fault-lines,  
Beaten into submission  
By circumstance and situation -  
An unattractive portrait of aging and suffering.

Furrows in the earth:  
Parallel productivities in loam  
Dug, dark and lifted  
Aired, turned and shifted -  
A masterpiece weave of technique and mystique.

One fruitless: turned astern - stunting pain and past history  
The other fruitful: looking ahead - all growth and creativity.

Tony Jolley

# Gabardine And Greatcoat

Gabardine neatly folded and draped,  
Public school-style,  
Over my left forearm;  
Cap in hand,  
Parents to either side of me,  
I was shown around the school  
In which I was about to spend  
More years than I'd been alive,  
Let alone years I could remember.  
An eternity yawned and fell away from my '11-Plus' feet:  
A sheer 'O' and 'A' levelled hangman's drop,  
Vertigo rearing up, clawing at my fragile confidence  
Drawing a cold-sweat noose tight about my neck  
While I waited for the trapdoor  
To snap.

.  
Greatcoat hanging heavier over his right arm  
Than the Steppes snows  
That soon would be his shroud and stone,  
He was halfway into the pit of inhumanity  
Dug and now filled by friends and family,  
Positioned so that the murderous momentum  
Of a single lead Luger slug  
Would topple him and lay him out  
Atop all he had ever loved.  
"One for the album! "  
And some sin-sick Sonderkommando  
Snapped his shutter  
Before the trigger  
Was squeezed by another  
And he fell, left-handed,  
Into Heaven from Hell.

Tony Jolley

# Gentle Gravity

Silent at first;  
A duet danced and sung by eager eyes  
Across a distance ineffectually imposed  
By dining-table dimensions,  
The conversation continues.

The merest movement of the least lash or lid  
Received and read at the Speed of Sight,  
Yet Einstein's Constant seems somehow estranged,  
As if the gentle gravity of our love and longing  
Pulls, bends and slows every photon almost to a standstill.

The image of my face plunges, headlong  
Through your beautiful pupil portals,  
Those dark, dilated isles  
Set in their emerald oceans,  
Diving deep to register upon your retina  
An upside-down reproduction of reality  
Ready to be righted unconsciously.

Thereby miraculously inverted, translated  
Am I to multiple memories of me related:  
All I am, have been and ever shall be  
Gathering about this new comrade captive –  
An orderly crowd of possibilities  
Vying for the opportunity to be selected and connected.

You orchestrate your instruments of mind and matter.  
You choose and your chosen memory  
Is matched and married to the moment.  
You find yourself a well-wisher  
Watching her newly-weds  
Run gaily giggling  
Under the blade-sharp incisors of a pearly-white guard of honour,  
Through the Kissing Gates  
And on into revelation:  
Conversation.

Yet before they set sail in their romantic carriage  
Bound for sound:  
Exotic lands of hearing, listening, thinking and responding,  
Know, My Love, that I see your Spirit,  
I know your Soul,  
That an 'Iowan Conversation'  
Though silent's still whole.

Tony Jolley

# Girls Don'T Always Have Fun [with Apologies To Cyndi Lauper]

Girls don't always have fun  
When you stop to think about it.  
If you stop to think about it.

For some, early-onset puberty arriving inconveniently.  
My wife tells me of a poor friend  
Who got the shock of her life in the Primary playground -  
Thought she was bleeding to death:  
At 9, far too early, really, to understand  
Or to have to live with too grown up a concern,  
Beating her Mum's half-dreaded and wholly unprepared  
'Birds and the Bees' talk to the punch by a good few years.

Then a repeat performance pretty much every four weeks  
From fourteen to forty or fifty-something:  
Four or five hundred months  
Of three or four days ache and discomfort.  
That's 2000 days or more:  
A full five years of the tiredness and tension  
Associated with Mother Nature's egg-relocation,  
Plus further symptoms one might mention.  
And that's when the tell-tale cramps do arrive on time -  
But what when they don't...?  
What of being 'late' and of the 'waiting game'  
When she'd give anything to feel that familiar pain  
Rather than have to entertain  
The possibility working on a probability  
Then facing up to the 'clear-blue' certainty  
Of an unplanned or sadly unwelcome pregnancy?

And what of those for whom 'late'  
Would be cause for cautious celebration,  
Who've tried it all:  
From time-determined copulation  
To programmes of in-vitro fertilisation  
So desperate are they for conception?

Girls don't always have fun...  
There seem to be so many risks to run.

Tony Jolley



# Goodbye Edith

Awkward silence  
Darkened room  
Drapes drawn  
Hearse soon

Sombre suits  
Best plates  
Small talk  
All wait

Limo leaving  
Glad to go  
Bentley black  
Stately, slow

Short service  
Production line  
For eighty years  
So little time

Silent tears  
Family, friends  
Life remembered  
At its end

Ashes scattered  
A final goodbye  
By your beloved  
Forever to lie.

Tony Jolley

# Gratuitously Retrieved

Sunday 07.30

Felt like 05.30, frankly:

More a case of over-indulgence than overtired;

But most of all it felt like

A long, hot, rasping Retriever-tongue

Bed-bathing my face

With its own personal hygiene system...

... And that would be because it was.

Ever had your nose-hair meticulously showered,

Flanneled & hot-breath blow-dried

And your ears surgically Q-tipped

By a living, shape-shifting

Boring and drilling machine

With copious saliva lubrication....?

No?

Then keep it that way.

As wake up calls go

It falls well short on sympathy

Even if it makes up for it in efficacy:

Believe me -

You DO wake up.

If by (hopefully for you) remote chance

You find yourself in the self-same situation,

May I offer you one important and impeccably-researched

Piece of advice....?

.... As you struggle desperately

Towards the surface of consciousness,

Resist at all costs the all-too-natural temptation

To open your eyes

To see what the hell might be happening to you -

You'll only find your eyelids snapped up and out

Whilst the tip of a tongue

Windscreen-wipers right round the back of your eyeballs

Like an old-school, Fifties femme de ménage

On her first visit

Lifting the edges of your carpet

And tut-tutting deliberately not quite under her breath  
In that accusatory tone  
She has spent a whole lifetime refining and honing  
Before shoving the Dyson's Dual-Cyclone nozzle  
Unceremoniously underneath to slurp and choke  
On the muck of ages past,  
Simultaneously casting a condemnatory scowl  
In your direction  
Fit to convict a saint  
And sentence him to eternities of torment  
In a Hooverless hell.

But think before you shove or shoo  
Your assailant away too –  
Or you may find  
The weight of one 30kg Retriever  
Transferred through the small surface area of two paws  
Amplifying the pressure impressively  
And applying it mercilessly to what the French call:  
'Les Bijoux de Famille'...  
Believe me,  
If that doesn't get your attention,  
Nothing will.  
It certainly did with me!

Tony Jolley

# Guilt-Edged

No foregone conclusions  
No faites accomplis  
No ducking of decisions  
No get-out-of-jail-frees;  
No rocks or even hard places  
No devils or deep blue seas  
No copper-bottomed promises  
No gilt-edged guarantees;  
No time for fence-sitting  
No more 'wait and see'  
No reason to do nothing  
No room for apathy;  
No moment like this moment  
No better opportunity  
No time but the present  
No other certainty.

Tony Jolley

## H(Anna) H Akhmatova

You surprised me – and I am not easily surprised.  
You amazed me – though I am not easily amazed.  
You brought to me the song of your spirit  
On the very day you gave it voice.

Duschinka, Daughter,  
In all my years  
No such sound has reached my ears,  
Soft and gentle as Nat 'King' Cole  
Yet possessed of the power of Rock 'n' Roll.  
You're a balladeer: a Sting, a Jackson Browne –  
Your 'Message in a Bottle' profound.

You set it free so all could see...  
Yet, you gave it first to me.

Tony Jolley

# Hairsbreadth

They're our stock in trade:

Persuasion;

Coercion;

Negotiation;

Compulsion –

We wield them all as weapons of war undeclared

Upon the eternal theatres of 'Us and Them'

And the only slightly smaller stages of 'Me and You';

Determinedly pushing back the other's frontiers and frontlines

To where we would personally prefer them to be

In some spectacularly myopic perspective on reality

With attacking formations of Division-strength information,

Artillery bombardments of laser-guided arguments,

Platoons and dragoons of situational analysis

Designed to decimate and induce paralysis.

To every proposition a counter position,

For every suggestion a stock 'No' rejection,

Ever a ploy or a trump to be played,

Every inch of ground - a mile to be made;

And yet.....

If we ever would wish to take the peace dividend

Recall our forces, put this madness to an end,

What on earth could we hope to hold in common

With a foe whose injuries can't be forgiven or forgotten....?

Stray a hairsbreadth from where you know your heart true

No matter what anyone would have you to do,

No matter how close or loved they may be

It'll rankle and hurt you eventually,

And similarly.....

Try to think before you would seek to implore

Someone else, for your sake, to leave their own 'shore',

For they're sure to leave something of themselves behind

Not the least of which, their peace of mind.

Tony Jolley

# Heart And Hand

They were suddenly all around me.  
Every sense told me they were there.  
Then they gathered me to them  
As if the eye of History  
Had blinked, stayed open  
And sucked me in through its black pupil  
To free-fall down the long lens of time  
And see, simultaneously, recorded upon its retina,  
Every soul who had ever set his heart and hand  
To some purpose within narrow compass of me:

The master carpenter who cut and crafted the beams  
When power tools were but unimaginable pie in a very future sky;  
The mason who set the cottage cornerstone firm and fast  
With nothing more than bare hands and a keen eye;  
The wheelwright whose work once made the world go round  
Amazed to see it now static,  
Adorning drive gates in some quaint, faint echo of local tradition,  
And giving way, every day to its rubber-shod, horseless carriage successors;  
The lads who laboured long to dig the drains and tarmac the tracks,  
Seeking respite from the heat in the cool, tripping waters and shades of La  
Natte;  
The old boy who jury-rigged his fence, pro-tem, with a spider's web of wire  
But never quite got around to doing the job properly;  
The couple who built a summerhouse, one spring, for the autumn of their life,  
Glad they never lived to see it forlorn and failing in its own last winter years.

You know,  
I could even feel the carts rolling, rumbling, swaying and grumbling their way  
Over the river-rounded pebbles under my feet,  
Carrying the harvest and a whole host of families' hopes  
For a fair price from the maize market merchants  
Who would sell it on up and down the Rhine for a far fairer profit.

Why there? Why then? Why me? ....  
I don't know;  
Perhaps those whose lives were played out upon another shore  
Are closer to the surface of Time's ocean than we suspect  
And sometimes,



Just sometimes,  
Its tide sweeps them across our beaches:  
Grains of sand that slip through our hand,  
But in that moment they glint and gleam  
A whole lifetime,  
An entire eternity.  
At least they did, today, for me.

Tony Jolley

## Hope Hurts

Left no stone unturned, fighting to be the father I am,  
Though frankly, it feels more like 'no turn unstoned'.  
Pray God, may the years be kind.

Never stopped hoping – though the hoping hurts:  
Weighs dull and heavy along the shoulders of the soul  
Yet sharp as a blade, slicing belief from man into meat.  
Pray God, may the years be kind.

My voice returns void: an unheard echo  
Off the distant, implacable walls of regulation and mediation,  
Those walls without ears,  
Without hearts to hear.  
Pray God, may the years be kind.

In what warped world can't dads see daughters?  
In this one, it seems;  
In this one, where justice hides its face  
And jaundice usurps its place.

Please God, may the years be kind ...  
...for the Law is uncaring and blind.

Tony Jolley

# Hot Salt Rain

Tropical torrent:

Hot, salt rain pouring from my every pore,  
Splashing, soaking, saturating your heaving, forest floor;  
Each and every dropp shining, shaking,  
Surface tension fighting for foothold  
Upon unusually unstable ground,  
Wracked and rent by fearsome, feral forces  
Raging from the epicentre of the earthquake  
Deep in the pit of you,  
Where your body, soul and spirit,  
Made molten in the furnace of desire divine,  
Are fused, aflame, afresh with mine.

Through a stinging veil of involuntary tears: joy & salt-sweat,  
My focus shaking to the random rhythm, two-left-feet-beat,  
Of twitching nerves in locked-out arms on their last legs,  
I watch in exhausted wonder,  
Beheld and beguiled  
By the utterly uncontrollable beauty  
That is  
You.

Tony Jolley

# How The Moments Come

Strange.

Strange how the moments come;  
Those moments upon which one's world turns.

Some seeming insignificances - pure coincidences:  
Chance at its most mercurial  
Dealing hands which break the bank or bust,  
Or less a case of 'Lady Luck'  
Than life's 'Savings & Loans'  
Finally coming good for work-weary bones.

All moments could be of the former form  
Or just as likely the latter,  
Or maybe 'fate' or the finger of God  
Seeking a dividend on his investment divine.

So where do you and I stand on probability and providence...?

Me? Well, I wouldn't bet against 'chance' –  
Let's face it, it's an odds-on favourite!  
And though the justice the world metes out  
Falls far short of fairness for all,  
Generally the books seem to balance.

... But fate? .. Fate I can't fathom.

Maybe I'm too mechanical,  
Too straight-laced, too stupid  
Or just too plain rational,  
But for me fate flies full in the face of free will –  
Presumes I'm powerless - my preferences pointless:  
So I don't 'buy'it.

[Sly thought: if fate existed, it would have to be free –  
After all, who would buy fait-accompli? ! ]

Unless, of course, fate really is  
Nothing more than holding by chance a 'Royal Flush' in hearts, or  
Nothing less than deity dealing your cards.

Tony Jolley

# In Every Sense Of The Word

Touch: Our first kiss: light, lingering and yet so explicit and explosive  
I can still feel the reverberations behind my smile.

Taste: You, so sweet on the tip of my tongue I didn't dare drink for a week  
for fear of washing 'you' away.

Hearing: Your singing, ringing bright as a bell chock-full of Rock & Roll angels.

Sight: You almost wearing that bikini!

Smell: Your Aqua Allegorica Parfum in kiwi.

Touch: Baby's fist furled around my little finger – all pink and perfect.

Taste: Freybourger's Jambon au Crémant at Félix's First Communion celebration.

Hearing: Jackson Browne's 'For Everyman' from first time on the turntable  
[and every play since, from vinyl, via tape and CD right through to MP3]

Sight: The Girl in the Yellow Kagoule beaming from my start-up screen.

Smell: A noseful of Minty's 3-month old puppy fur.

Touch: The strong arms that kept my head above water and towed me stiff to  
shore when cramp and cold had got very much the better of me off Durdle Door.

Taste: José's Sylvaner Cuvée Particulière and Chandesais' St Aubin Les Charmois  
deux-mille trois.

Hearing: The rain beating its rhythms against our bedroom Velux window  
tumbling Matrix-like patterns down the pane.

Sight: You spinning me round on our first ramble up to the Reservoir  
to face a panorama of Alps viewed from our own 'back door' –  
and knowing you'd saved up that surprise rather than merely tell me.

Smell: The olfactory orgasm that was the old 'Transport Caff' at Fisherman's

Walk where Dad used to take me for a bacon butty of a Friday lunch if I were lucky.

Touch: The sleek feel of the fretboard on the Taylor you treated me to for my 50th.

Taste: Sunday's beans on toast brunch [courtesy of the 'Bruebach Breakfast Fairy'].

Hearing: Laughing together fit to bust in bed last thing the other night and, in fact, giggling most other nights.

Sight: Did I mention: that bikini.? Ah, I did? Well, it sure rates another, believe me!

Smell: Nuzzling your neck on the pillow, drawing a last deep draught of your sweetness to keep me company me 'til morning.

My Darling,  
You are all of the above:  
All ways and always.

Tony Jolley

# In The Shape

This was written as I saw it happen on a No6 bus to the train station in Bournemouth on 6th Nov '03. Oh, and the 'JT' is James Taylor and the 'Shape of a Heart' song is Jackson Browne....

They sat opposite me, 'side by each' as JT might have observed,  
The young mother, perhaps 20,  
Her daughter, maybe 9 months  
Cosied in pink Parka and pushchair  
She was almost at the last stop on the Sleep Express:  
Eyes barely open,  
Widening a fraction  
Only in response to the bus'  
Steep right hand turns,  
Chattering change machine  
And raucous air brakes and doors.

At one particularly loud and unwelcome interruption,  
Shocking her to wakefulness  
Her arm stretched left across her mother: a signal –  
A left turn to reassurance and comfort.  
A single finger found her palm  
And she closed her tiny fist around it:  
Safe; secure; certain.  
The relief spread to her features  
And her windows on the world saw their heavy drapes slowly drawn.

So right, yet worthy of remark.  
Wouldn't one expect  
A mother's wagon train  
To form its surrounding circle  
About the most defenceless young settler  
In her land  
And not the other way around?

Gradually (it took three stops)  
The slumber suffused her frame  
And the increasing weight of her little arm  
Overcame the weakening grip on her mother's reality.  
Such gentle parting brought neither sorrow nor disquiet,



For the impression, the image, the reassurance remained

□. In the shape...

I have to say it. I have to.

Have to interrupt the flow, the story, the very last line.

Do you know how hard I tried to struggle

Against the urge to write:

"In the shape of a heart"?

How the luscious lyric and melody

Invade my creative consciousness?

How much I want to give myself over to it

And all its precious connotations and associations?

I even wondered if I should tell you at all.

But I have.

Was I right?

.... In the shape....

□ ..... in the shape of a hollow fist.

Tony Jolley

# It's

It's the hollow at the back of your neck, just under the hairline.

It's the infinitesimal, yet infinitely significant gleam of incisor:  
That infallible indicator of your soon-to-be-smile.

It's the shape of your amazing mouth,  
Redefining perfection as it does so effortlessly.  
And those are your lips at rest! –  
But, Oh, My Love, when they move,  
Whether to speak, to sigh, to kiss,  
Ah, then maybe Moyet made it right:  
For my knees do go 'weak in the presence of Beauty'.  
You don't see it, do you?  
You really don't...  
And that is lovely too,  
But, My Darling, it is as I wrote before:  
Whole worlds live upon those lips:  
Vast vistas of kissing;  
Entire empires of earnest conversation.

It's the glances you steal  
When you think I'm not looking,  
(But I am and you know that I am!) .

It's the words we don't have to say  
Yet delight to say anyway!

It's the last line you leave  
This side of Lethe's leisure...

It's my whole life, Love:

It's you.

Tony Jolley

# Last Leaf

The Last Leaf of autumn's last lease  
Fell under leaden skies  
Weeping winter over the lanes of Landser.  
Torn from its twig  
It rode the wind a while  
Upon brittle-brown Sycamore wings  
To 'land' in a puddle  
Of soft, yellow-orange lamplight.

No mulching for the forest floor  
Or succour for the pulsing shoots of spring,  
Not even the faintest memory  
To remain  
Of that lush, green former glory;  
But the ignominy  
Of being drowned,  
Then ground  
To little more than nothing  
Between tyre-tread and tarmac.

Gone,  
But in these few lines,  
Written  
Upon this shroud-white, memorial  
To its family felled and fallen:  
Not forgotten.

Tony Jolley

## Last Pick

Against the elegant, if ageing, shuttered façades of Old France,  
Sweeping their stylish, nineteenth century architecture in voluptuous curves  
Along the avenue  
Toward the high-glazed garishness of the new concrete city,  
The house was an anachronism:  
It stuck out like the sort of sore thumb  
Only ever to be found on the non-hammer-hand of a carpenter's first-day  
apprentice.

Squat;  
Square;  
Unwanted;  
Unwelcome;  
Indecent in the insufferably uncompromising rectitude  
Of its highly-calculated horizontals and verticals.  
It had not learned the lesson  
That too much precision  
Just offends the vision.

It implored.  
It insisted.  
It imposed  
With all the immaculate symmetry of its walls and windows  
And the dead-centre design of its doors.

It failed.

It was the wallflower by the dance-floor,  
The suit at the party kitchen sink,  
Last 'pick' in the playground football team.

It was a house.  
It would never be a home.

Sad to say, it seemed to know it.

Tony Jolley

# Laying The Bones

While the going was still good to firm underfoot  
And well before Nightmare armed itself to the teeth with hot-lead terror  
And stormed the barricades of the waking hours;  
Under skies so benign and benevolent  
As to belie the sea-change in the weather to come,  
Which, in a mere few months, would transform  
Peaceful, green-gold to live and to love in  
Into grey-brown mire to fear and to die in;  
Under this pristine, endless-summer, cerulean blue  
They came, with their khaki-clad camaraderie,  
Marching and singing of invincibility  
And an 'in the bag' victory:  
Fodder straight from square-bashing on provincial parade grounds,  
Buoyed up by an incendiary cocktail of bullshit and belief,  
Seemingly without a care in the world,  
Most away from home for the first time,  
Apron-strings as fresh-cut as their pudding-basined hair,  
Hell-bent on adventure and learning enough of the lingo  
To hope to persuade une (ou peut-être plusieurs) des belles filles françaises  
To consent to what the girls back home didn't, or wouldn't dare do.

Soldiers?

Lads barely out of boyhood,  
Apprentices in life and love as much as in trade and travel:

Innocents abroad

Their billett and board found and generously funded by the General Staff  
Acting as some sort of Army Thomas Cook parody,  
Packaging all the pieces: the trains, the boats and planes  
To get them safely to their overseas destination,  
[Or rather date with destiny].  
Tickets issued were only one-way:  
The return leg  
Would depend on how many might still have legs  
...or a lease, however tenuous, on life-force.

But they didn't know that then, of course.

Thousand upon thousand of bed and battle virgins  
Ready to be blooded:  
All too eager to lay the bones of both to rest,  
To be able to say that the deed is done.

September came in Spades.

Someone somewhere cut the first sod,  
Slung forward the soft, loamy soil as ordered:  
A supposedly impregnable shield against enemy snipers and shells,  
The space it once occupied now an embryonic trench-womb  
To shelter safe the nine months until it must surely all be over  
And, born-again, Life resume.

But in an agonising irony far too few would live to see  
No earth-mother proved their Mother-Earth...  
Her womb-waters bringing only Death to birth.

Tony Jolley

## Like The Second Kiss

Dawn comes soft here:  
Soft like the second kiss –  
Long, deep & languorous,  
Pale light and pastel land  
Lip-to-lip  
Conceiving colour  
To birth their dawn 'baby'.

Contours come slow here:  
Slow like shape from shade and shadow-  
The first faint tint of a thought  
Glimmering toward the realm of consciousness,  
Yet still unformed, unborn.

Tony Jolley

# List Of The Lost And Missed

'Lazy Ginger' for two very laid back chefs;

Malt vinegar because carpe frite is the better for it  
(even if it is [not exactly] 'fish 'n' chips' as we know it):

Wyth Hazel for bumps and bruises because it works and they don't believe in it here;

Tamanu (and some orange-coloured ingredient I can't remember) massage oil from Boots if they still do it because there's nothing like it;

Terry's Chocolate Oranges because you wouldn't swap one for any amount of Suchards or Lindt;

Ten ton of tins of baked beans in tomato sauce (anybody's!) because we're desperate for a bloody good fry-up and it just isn't the same without it;

Boring British sausages because the Minister of Administrative Affairs, Jim Hacker (of 'Yes Minister' fame) , was right when he said that no amount of Bratwürst or Salami saussices can ever hope replace the humble banger in the hearts, (or stomachs) of those home grown on memories of heroic holiday guesthouse breakfasts.

Thai sweet chilli sauce because all the natives think it's wonderful...and I've kind of hinted I make it - so I'm loth to own up to it! !

....Next to none of this will go in our cases, I guess  
So I know dwelling on it's pretty much pointless  
But I like imagining nevertheless....

Tony Jolley



# Little Yellow Hands

'Yellow. ... Little yellow hands', you said.

Geography of rivers of love  
Flowing through palm plains  
Formed of graft and grist;  
Deep fjords cutting cleft to cliff  
Your lifeline long,  
Born of ever having your hands  
Where your heart says they belong.

Traces of skirmishes past  
Scored in a host of scratches and blemishes  
Obstinately refusing to relinquish their remembrance in the flesh.

Little yellow hands.  
Hands of a Far-Eastern dancer  
Painting exquisite tapestries and histories  
With such elegance and mystery.

Little yellow hands.  
White gold, diamond hands,  
Hands that hold the whole world in their thrall.

Little yellow hands:  
Hands helping, holding,  
Making, moulding;  
Hands comforting, calming,  
Soothing, stroking;  
Hands blessing, bestowing,  
Balming, booning;  
Hands tending, tracing,  
Gentling, gracing:

Your Little Yellow Hands.

Tony Jolley

# Loving You Quietly

Today I love you quietly, softly.

Why?

I don't know – I just do.

Amidst the cleaning and the packing,  
The last minute floor-washing and drying,  
Quietly is just how I've been loving you.

Today I don't have words.

Don't know where they went.

They're not on strike,

Not taking a private holiday

Or jour de congé,

They just seem

To have curled up inside me

Like a contented cat on a carpet,

Basking in the deep red heat

Of glowing embers and coals in the hearth:

Replete;

Complete;

Asleep;

Yet no further from awake

Than spark from flame.

Today I've been loving you quietly;

But then,

There's always tonight.....

Tony Jolley

## Low-Fi

The face was far older  
Than either of us remembered:  
The 'laughter lines'  
No longer a laughing matter –  
More Vulture talon-trails than Crow's feet  
Scored into once soft flesh  
Like a low-fidelity, analogue recording  
Of the years past and passing faster,  
Awaiting only a suitable 'stylus':  
An occasion of some sort,  
A good bottle of St Aubin  
To produce the best playback  
Memory can provide: -  
A little bit rough round the edges;  
A little 'rosy';  
A little scratchy and hazy,  
Maybe,  
But they're my memories,  
My mirror recollections:  
The sum of all the histories  
That make me me:  
Visibly.

Tony Jolley

# Man Maid

Monochrome motoring: gloom; glare.

Ruling red: stark; stare.

Systematic standstill: ahead; astern.

Window watching: look; learn.

Passenger profile: female; face.

Driver desire: touch; trace.

Silhouette shapes: locks; lips.

Heavenly highway: hearts; hips.

Colour command: green; go.

Kiss curtailed: seductive; slow.

Moving merging: further; fade.

Timeless traffic: man; maid.

Tony Jolley

# Mankind

Though I accept that our planet's fruits are finite and failing,  
The rate of population growth rapidly rising,  
And that somewhere along a line I'll probably not live to see  
This is doubtless going to force mankind  
To do very much more with very much less than it would like it to be,  
I reckon our problem's got more to do with distribution  
Than overall resource diminution:  
It's always those with next-to-nothing  
Who end up with nothing next.

Whilst we are arguing how to 'draw in our horns a bit',  
Cut back, cut down and 'live within our means',  
'They'...  
[Meaning anyone that is not 'we', ie:  
Anyone out of sight,  
Out of mind and  
Outside our 'I'm Alright Jack' island mentalities],  
This 'They',  
This growing majority,  
Lack not only the means to live,  
But the meanest of means to survive.

I don't see this getting any better – do you?

With 'Globalisation' and 'Global Warming' on the world's agenda,  
Our 'First World' will be watching with one eye  
Its money literally evaporate 'into thin air' -  
[Going up, but for once, not 'in smoke']  
In hope of slowing the rate CO2 makes it thicker;  
Whilst the other will weep bitter tears at the sight of jobs hemorrhaging  
Eastwards  
As our own industrialists move technology and investment  
To sources of lower & lowest cost labour in China and India  
In search of higher margins, profit performance and better yield management.

If that all adds up (or rather subtracts) to stagnation,  
What then becomes of the 'First World' nation? ....  
More insularity, I guess, and 'starts at home' charity.

The 'Second World', I might venture to suppose,  
Will be frantically focused upon its own, long-overdue, industrial revolution,  
Relishing the realisation of its potential,  
Consumed by its own myopically kinetic energy  
And it's world-beating, and above all, West-beating, opportunity.

Most of the models and projections I've seen appear to predict  
That the 'Third World' will be hardest hit  
By the dramatic, sadistic indifference of climate change  
Which won't lose sleep at kicking the world's weakest and poorest full in the  
teeth.

Prophet I am not,  
But sadly I foresee  
Whole nations,  
Entire 'Third World' populations,  
As refugees,  
Walking for Water,  
Fighting for the Right to Food.  
Darfurs will become a common occurrence:  
Ever at our doorstep,  
Ever on our conscience.

Are we who have only just less than everything  
Prepared to share with those who have all but nothing  
The benefits the accident of our birth came bringing?

We don't do it now if we're honest,  
And if I'm right about the way we're headed  
[And I hope to hell I'm not ...],  
I can't see us delving any deeper into our pockets – probably the opposite.

If we don't, or won't then I for one am resigned:  
We should change our name for shame we're not ManKind.

Tony Jolley

# Meltdown

How come some elevate annoyance to an 'art form'  
Have got Degrees in 'On-Goat-Getting',  
Masters in 'Mucking People About'  
And PhDs in 'Pissing Off' *summa cum laude*:  
Red Brick, Ivy League, cast iron, copper-bottomed  
Pains in the posterior all.

What is it makes them so  
And grates them so with me?

Maybe my 'suffering-in-silence' threshold  
Has subsided with the years and the miles  
'Til there's no tread on my temperance tyres.  
Maybe a sort of societal 'global warming'  
Has brought about a meltdown in manners:  
The sea level of stupidity, senselessness and selfishness  
Steadily swamping my soggy, sandbagged refuge.

Then there's Tsunamis –  
Confluences of circumstances and certain people  
[you know who they are – they know who they are]...  
It's as if they've been biding their time  
Waiting for propitious portents,  
To vent their volcanic vitriols at the vulnerable.

Their waves roll & roil and break and boil  
Yet in the end they must come to an end:  
For every inundation a dissipation.

The barefaced lie and seek to deny:  
"Never happened. Never did. Never would."

The bullies defy and dare to justify:  
"I did it – just because I could."

Then there are those  
[God knows why – who knows],  
Who think they can choose to 'take it all back'  
By demanding to be forgiven

And a right to absolution  
With 'sorry' their one-word restitution.

I may be softer in the middle these days,  
But I'm not so soft in the head –  
No more the silent, 'sitting duck'  
They can aim at their mirrors instead.

Tony Jolley



# Memories Of 'Walkin' In Memphis'

I remember the moment  
You first learned to play this line  
Back in those 'kinder years'  
When I was yours and you were mine.

I remember watching  
Your quest for every note  
Slowly building, bar by bar  
Upon the stave there as you wrote.

And I distinctly remember feeling  
When it all clicked into place:  
The sudden freedom in your fingers,  
Success' smile upon your face.

I remember hearing you  
Sound exactly like Marc Cohn  
And wondering if one day he'd  
Try learning one of your own.

Do you remember me sitting  
And silently willing you on?  
Is it a moment you treasure  
Wherever you have gone?

For Grace, wherever life may find her.....

Tony Jolley

# Mercury Rising

Mercury rising to three-figure Fahrenheit.  
Fridges working an overtime freezing frenzy.  
Tarmac turning back to its gloopy, embryonic glory.  
Scorching sands searing young and old soles.  
Lobsters on loungers thermidoring themselves  
Slowly but surely  
In a haze of factor eight bronzing 'baste'.

Kids crying with sunburnt shoulders,  
Suffering the inevitable shivver-shake, after-sun shock.  
Calamine, caladryl and sundry creams and concoctions  
Selling like ironic 'hot cakes'.  
TV weathermen's warnings gone unheard or unheeded.  
Hospital burns units overwhelmed  
With the all-too-casual, self-inflicted casualties.

Melanoma, for so long biding its invisible time  
Under cover of cloud,  
Now making its mournfully malignant move  
In some baleful, doleful holiday 'lottery':

"This time it could be you."

I pray God it's not.

Tony Jolley

# Middle Man Sandwich

In the beginning .....?

In the middle: Man

In the end .....?

In the beginning: who knows?

In the middle: Man

In the end: who cares?

In the beginning: ... God ...?

In the middle: Man

In the end: ... God ...?

In the beginning: The Big Bang

In the middle: Man

In the end: just a Big Nothing

In the beginning: God.

In the middle: Man

In the end: God

Tony Jolley

# Monet Morning

Yesterday morning,  
Monet  
Must have had a meeting with his Maker:  
The mother of all masterclasses  
In Pointillism Perfection  
Was being played out  
Upon a December dawn  
Hung between here and Heaven,  
Framed by the ruggedness  
Of the Vosges and Black Forest ridgelines.

Their palette awash  
With violent purples, preternatural violets and marauding mauves,  
Raging reds running the whole range of hues  
From the palest pink to the blackest of blue-black royal bloods,  
And golds:  
Golds that glisten and glister only in realms of Glory,  
The immortal pair painted upon  
A cloud-canvas of cirrus and cumulus,  
Leaving Light to stage-manage  
The slowly-changing, mise-en-scène:  
The Sun's inclination  
Altering the effect of the illumination  
For the benefit of those yet a little lower than the angels.

God must have got hooked on the whole idea,  
For today Turner's hand clearly lay behind  
The watery mists and limpid shades  
Softly shrouding and muting  
All figures and forms  
And hinting at what might lie,  
Lightly veiled from view,  
Just a little further off  
Behind the stroke of the brush.

We saw Monet and Turner's  
Work and pleasure  
At the Paris Grand Palais,  
But never did I expect

To see them at work  
On my way to work  
Taking turns on our slice of sky.

Tony Jolley

# Neither Here Nor There

'They've all gone....'

Sorry?

'No-one left....'

Left where?

What are you on about?

'Gone.'

Oh... I get it:

Were in Neither-Here-nor-There-Land:

Between Living and Nod.

Nod:

Cain's exile East of Eden.

East of Eden.

Film of Steinbeck's book...

James Dean, wasn't it?

Was it?

Not sure now..

Who else?

.... If it was him in the first place.

'No-one left. ... All gone.'

Who?

Where, Love, who's gone where?

Hmm, 'Who's on First':

Abbott and Costello.

Is that Abott or Abbot or Abbott...

And why don't I know?

Did I know once?

'Where's on first' wouldn't have worked,  
would it?

Wonder if they wrote it,

Or if there was some

Barry Cryer-type gag-writer

Paid a pittance

To make them look good?  
Did they have movies then?  
Maybe it was just 'sound good', then.

'On the beach...'

Which beach, Love?  
Shell Bay?  
Dunes to hide and make love in;  
Or that time Barry Pike  
Kicked the football into the nudist camp  
And hadn't got the balls to go and get it.  
Wonder where he is now ...  
And whether his nerve arrived with the years.

'But they're gone! '

Yeah, I've got that, Love:  
They've all gone...  
To the beach maybe?  
Would be fun today in the snow.  
Snowball-fighting on the beach: crazy!  
Then maybe a dare to plunge in.  
Hang on you idiot, you did that once in 5°C  
But that was well before you were 50 -  
You remember the statistics  
For middle aged heart-attacks:  
You don't need me to tell myself again do I?  
Mum died at 56.

You're right, Love,  
You're right:

They're gone.

Tony Jolley

# Netherworld

Chance, shrouded by his sombre suit of grey fatality,  
Stalked the campus corridors  
With an implacable, yet indiscriminate, finality.

He'd been there before:  
Knew every room and hall,  
Window and wall,  
Better than the back of the hand  
That held the Book of Time  
Which would draw one last line  
Under a life not unlike mine.

And we who remain  
Will reduce the rubble to reason:  
The science of Chemistry  
Systematically employed to deduce its own demise  
In some bitter (yet inevitably successful) irony  
As effect is wedded to cause:  
Mendeleev's magnum opus  
Its silently compelling witness.

Though evidence will doubtless be found  
To fully explain the What, the Where and the How,  
The Why will lie,  
Forever buried,  
In that faint and foggy netherworld  
Whose compass points are:  
Fact and fiction,  
Action and inaction.

But what of the Who? .....  
Not the one who did or didn't;  
Not even the one who once could and now can't:  
Rather, what of the Who that is me and you?

Who are we? -

Are we more, or less, than we were?  
... Or merely more-or-less as we were?



Written a few days after the Chemistry School at the University of Haute Alsace, France, had been destroyed by a massive explosion with the sad loss of one soul and more injured and 'not yet out of the woods'.

NB. Mendeleev was the Russian scientist who first had the vision of the complete Periodic Table of Elements...despite the fact that a little over half the elements were actually known in his time [and therein lay his genius]

Tony Jolley

## Nine Years On

Bought a bottle from our local supermarket –  
They were clearing their cellar  
Of the odds and sods forgotten and forsaken  
At the bottom of their bins.

You never know how it's going turn out:  
Corked, turned to vinegar or barely drinkable:  
Maybe better if you're lucky....very.

Took our chances with a Cahors 2000  
For no other reason  
Than we like Cahors  
And someone's taken the trouble to store it  
In controlled conditions  
For some eight or nine years.  
If ever it's going to have the chance  
Of being good or great  
On the back of a thirsty throat  
Then it's now (or never) .

Uncorked.  
Not corked, but ever-so-slightly vinegary, maybe.  
Decanted.  
Carafed.  
Sort-of ushered up a bit of a wino's prayer...  
Are you allowed to pray for wine?  
If so, to Belteschazzer, Bacchus or le Bon Dieu:  
Who knows?  
Well anyway,  
Time bided and a little bit of room temperature  
Did it no end of good.

Not going to lose you (or me)  
In a whole lot of guff about  
'Romantic tones of smokey, autumnal fruits' –  
My palette is not nearly so sharp or sophisticated,  
But it knows what it likes,  
And this....

It likes.

Tony Jolley

# No Need

We have no need of trust:

For this implies a lacking - an absence of some vital commodity  
Which must somehow be made good or compensated.  
We have no lack; no lack in need of filling.

We have no need of hope:

A suggestion that there is yet more to be secured  
Which requires a deposit as evidence of eventual guaranteed delivery.  
We are already completely given in all the presents that will become the history  
of our future.

We have no need of time:

No time for the stereotyping of young and old  
Which pointlessly measures glasses half-full or half empty.  
As Jesus gave - so is our love become: once and for all time.

We have no need of doing:

The desperate cramming of all available time with white-knuckle movement and  
activity  
As if to win some lifetime 'doing race'.  
We have learned that our life is in the be-ing and the be-coming (And the doing  
we do will flow from this) .

We have no need of judgement & second-guessing:

The fear of treading on toes and the overstepping of marks;  
The slide-rule calculations of others' actions, perceptions, interpretations and  
reactions.  
For we have no limits now we are utterly open and completely known to one  
another.

We have no fear of loss:

The haunting, back-of-the-mind worry that 'easy-come' may also become 'easy-  
go'  
At the will of some dice-throwing, malevolent deity.  
We do not 'have'; do not possess anything capable of the losing: we simply 'am'.

We have no fear of death

That great unknowable leveller and disrespector of persons  
That antithesis and implacable enemy of all the living.

Our loving dust dances yet - and will waltz together the eternal winds upon  
Dancing Ledge.

Tony Jolley

# November In The Rue De Mulhouse

It's heavy.

The kind of heavy you can't carry,  
Aching dull down deep to your marrow,  
Weighing against all your good intentions and better inclinations,  
Slouching your whole being steadily toward the 'slow' end of the spectrum,  
Grey-washing your entire outlook on life  
And synchronising you subconsciously  
With Nature's inaudible, yet inescapable, hibernal heartbeat.  
Lethargic as the tired smoke that took one look at the sky  
And decided that 'up' just wasn't worth the effort;  
As bored as the wind that had clocked off early and headed home  
To its slippers and armchair by the fire.

As day's go, this one seemed be staring Eternity full in the eye...  
... And it wasn't for blinking.

Tony Jolley

# Obama And Cleopatra

Saw you when I least expected to:  
There in the front row of Obama's election celebrations,  
Your face full of exultation and expectation,  
Cheering and waving  
As the words that would be cited a trillion times tomorrow  
Made their dramatic debut on the world's stage  
And wafted and weaved their well-crafted magics about you.

See you often.  
Often when I'm least expecting you.  
Sometimes only one sense gets the slightest scent of you,  
Then you are gone, having never quite arrived,  
Leaving me in a momentary flat spin  
Wherein  
Faint hope, hibernating in a four-or-more-year winter,  
Metabolism slowed to the faintest fraction of its full force,  
Is woken with a jump-start, lightening-jolt  
Your name surging to my heart and catching in my throat,  
Thumping against eardrums and ribcage,  
Crashing against the walls of the daily absurd reality  
In which you are...,  
Yet are not,  
My daughter.

Then, like the crowd in that Chicago park  
That eventually took its leave,  
You left,  
And I was your empty stage,  
Your forgotten flag underfoot,  
The rapidly-receding echo  
Of something once of singular significance:  
Perhaps never to fade fully into the forgotten,  
Yet never, ever, so visceral or vivid  
As that moment ago, now gone.

Then, for me, came the slowing down,  
The curling up,  
The final furling of hope's flag  
And its ritual burial, but deeper this time

Than daily consciousness can divine.

Then welcome, like Cleopatra her serpent release,  
The so-tired-of-it-all, steep descent into sleep.

Tony Jolley



# Obverse

Will I go singing: looking ahead?  
Will I go mourning: looking back instead?

Looking back at the mayes and the might have beens;  
Looking back at lost days and the almost seens.  
Wondering what poor proportion of potential  
I realised within my span existential.

Where does it go: that famous: 'what if? '  
To some parallel universe at the end of a spliff,  
Where some other me was never a poet  
For the lack of a love if he did but know it?

Are there lives lived there the mirror-match to mine  
Lying just the other side of the clock face of time,  
Where my right is his left, his up my down,  
His better side a smile to my frown?

Do I, then, ride his roads not taken,  
Walk the miles he missed, take his turns forsaken?  
Does he toss a coin to help him decide  
And does it fall on my mistakes-down side?

I wonder if he wonders what it's like to be me:  
The antithetical obverse of all that is he....  
Am I the living sum of his greatest regrets:  
The thing above all he'd prefer to forget?

Tony Jolley

## Odd Bits Of Today

Breakfast with a breathtaking view:  
Tuscan hills, Val d'Orcia, but most of all: you.

A strangely cute but short of cuddly  
Underwater aqua-vac  
Patrolling the pool deep end and back  
Like some scuba-puppy on a long leash.

Cursing at every corner our hire car  
Whose windscreen frame seemed  
So absurdly wide at the side  
It'd hide a ten-ton Italian truck:  
More 'See it No-No' than Fiat Bravo.

Playing 'Hunt the Ospedale',  
'Dov'è Doctore? ',  
'Trouvare la Pharmacia':  
'Medicino in Montalcino'.  
'Good Game. Good Game'  
As Bruce Forsyth might say.....  
Not!

Finally to the winery: Brunello di Banfi and Fontanella,  
Served by Antonnella, Daniella and Francesca.

Tony Jolley

# O-Le-Coma City

On the leading edge of life  
Where the world no longer turns  
And the Sun neither rises nor sets,  
Where even Time is held 'on-hold',  
His hourglass grains frozen in freefall  
Upon the bitter cusp of Forever;  
There slumber the grey, unwaking shades  
Of that other world  
That lies within, yet without, the Land of the Living:  
Those silent citizens of sad O-le-Coma City;  
Immobile flesh and blood,  
Unwilling or incapable of movement:  
Some from shock;  
Others from falling into an auto-hypnotic sleep  
Where the magician-self has 'gone under' too –  
Both now lost in depths far beyond the reach  
Of the emergency services of consciousness;  
Souls incarcerated in personal prisons of perfect inertia,  
Dreaming unknowing,  
Or silently screaming  
To be let back into their own life  
Before it passes them by.

Miracles sometimes happen in O-le-Coma City:  
Some find their way back.

No one knows why.

Tony Jolley

# One-Horse Town

The Stars & Stripes flew, or rather hung, from the horizontal:  
A startling statement in this 'one-horse-town'  
That has, today, become my home.  
It's not the 'Land of the Free',  
Yet, at the risk of rhyme, it is to me;  
Hidden deep in the green of another red, white and blue,  
This Tricolore Francais of we: me and you.

In another age, une autre langue  
It was 'Left at the Carpenter's Arms',  
Now it's 'A droite a la Rue de la Natte  
En face du Horseman's Store.'

It qualifies as a town in exactly the same way  
As AFC Bournemouth qualifies for the European Cup:  
Never in a month of Sundays  
And only in its wildest dreams.  
To take the title of 'village', even,  
Bruebach would have to punch way above its feather-weight.

As places go, it's a bit short on stature.....  
But then, that makes two of us, I guess.

Tony Jolley

# Our Birthday

Love waited to deliver,  
Had been waiting more than 20 years  
To give birth to the potential she felt steadily, beautifully, growing inside her.

Contractions had been getting stronger, more frequent;  
Even back then, past the point of false alarms and flutters and fantasies:  
Way past the point of no return.  
Love's labour had emphatically begun  
A fact which wouldn't have required a midwife's meditation  
So much as the merest look from lovers  
Who would instantly have recognised their own reflection.

But children can be awkward in the womb....  
We were.

Somehow, somewhy, we weren't ready,  
Or were ready but didn't realise we were.  
Love lost that life-launching rhythm  
And the tempo slowed;  
And the music faded;  
But the tender bassline remained,  
A deep, dependable underscore,  
An entrée to an inevitable encore  
Which would slowly seduce  
Fingers onto fretboards and keys  
Making fresh melody and harmony  
Bringing into being Love's long-overdue creative crescendo.

Contractions commenced with a phone call in May,  
Took-off with tender texts,  
Intensified in email,  
Lengthened with letters written in an o-so-familiar hand.  
Love's hips splayed at our summer sharing.  
Waters broke with words more potent than time or tide.  
Head crowned to Cotswold confessions and communions.

Love delivered us upon her Bledington bed  
And holds us to her breast as none before.

Tony Jolley

## Papal Bull [aka Re: House Of Card(Inal) S]

A nine-year-old, for God's sake,  
[yes, for God's sake]  
Even less than a slip of a 'slip of a girl'  
Reportedly, repeatedly raped  
And now impregnated by a father-in-law  
[what sort of 'father' and what sort of 'law'? ]  
Dying from the twin lives growing inside her.  
It would have been murder by life  
Had she not lived for the tale to be told,  
Saved by surgeon's scalpel and incision  
Rather than a cardinal's holier-than-thou  
[and wholly ineffectual]  
Intercession.

Then the hell she's been spared is vented  
Like a bitter spleen of vindictiveness  
Upon and around her trauma recovery:  
Cardinal Re backs the Archbishop of Recife  
[Re for 'repugnant', presumably]  
Laying about him  
With the well-honed weapons of his work  
Excommunicating all and sundry in sight,  
From any doctor who might have touched her  
To a mother who sought only to save her;  
Excluding, of course, the father-perpetrator-in-law  
He, apparently, is not to be condemned so utterly and irrevocably  
For the so-called 'sin of nature'  
Which, so committed, would have otherwise slain her.

Sure as sperm fertilises egg, the cardinal's pontification  
Is followed by a pope without equivocation  
Wrapping his man in his 'cloak of infallibility'  
As if we're too stupid to see through such insanity.

Did God create Adam & Eve, and maybe on the 8th Day,  
After sober reflection, a remedy,  
A sort of 'God's out-of-office' service:  
An Earth-based 'papacy'  
Blessed with inhuman infallibility?

No way. Not any God I could believe in anyway.

And who dares dare the wrath of the Almighty  
In condemning any man to severance from sanctuary,  
Excluded from a love bought by Love's crucifixion  
Making shameful dilution of the power of resurrection?

To the grace of God commend the inconceivable,  
But for God's sake don't give us all that Papal 'bull'.

--

Musing upon the story of a young Brazilian girl in the news  
in March 2009 and the inhuman reaction of the catholic church  
and cardinals to the saving of her life. If you can find it, listen to  
Francis Cabrel's 'Les Cardinaux en Costume'.... in the same  
vein as this poem... but you'll need some 5th form French!

--

Tony Jolley



# Patient Place

Two steps,  
Three feet  
And twenty-odd years  
Down below these ephemeral footprints  
In the surface of the sands of our time,  
My fingers found the frets,  
The shapes on strings,  
The songs to sing  
To make you mine.

From above and behind me  
You denied yourself  
What everyone else sought to see  
And sat at an angle too extreme to the eye  
Yet with perfect 'line of sight' to 'me'.

Though I found myself facing the faces of friends,  
I couldn't concentrate at all on the chord runs and ends;  
For I was feeling the defining moment of my life  
Steal soft about my spirit in the shape of you: my wife.

I felt you walk freely in my patient place  
Where the husband was waiting to be  
And watched as you honoured all that you touched  
With a grace meant only for me.

The world in front faded - fell silent and still  
As if all creation bowed low to our will  
And blessed this first moment in which our eyes met  
And the charts upon which our life's course was set.

In that instant Love's wisdom dispensed henceforth  
With all need for knowing and seeing  
And bound us forever, our spirits together  
In a life of Becoming and Being.

Tony Jolley

# Pavements And Partings

The pavement waters parted...  
No need for a Moses:

On one side an old man  
Engaged in an eternal struggle  
Trying and failing  
(Or succeeding so excruciatingly slowly  
It was impossible to tell which)  
To evenly balance the two meagre shopping bags  
On each side of his rickety old handlebars  
As if just an ounce or two either way  
Might topple him from his precarious perch,  
His bike frame,  
Tailored to the length and strength of his youth,  
Now seeming to have outgrown him  
By a good two or three sizes:  
His 'S' to the stainless steel and chrome 'XL'.

On the other,  
Another was lovingly easing his lady's delicate bones  
Into the passenger seat of their car  
As softly as one might set down  
A see-through bone china cup upon its genteel saucer.

The mountain ranges of older ages  
Were casting their first faint shadows  
Upon our middle ageing valley.  
The metaphor wasn't lost on me:  
We would be raised up  
Before we're finally laid low –  
That much was plain to see.....

Tony Jolley

# Pete Townshend, Shakespeare And Penzias & Wilson

Does the 'Big Bang' of living  
Leave a sort of Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation behind it –  
The faintest of faint echoes  
Reverberating below the waterline  
Of the hubbub of everyday life,  
Softly whispering of who we once were  
To ears that can't hear?  
Like the last vestige of some gargantuan  
Pete Townshend power chord  
Struck on a '58 Gibson Les Paul Custom (in black, of course)  
Thrumming through an over-driven Marshall stack the size of the Moon  
The sounds of humanity's poor players  
Who once strutted and fretted  
Their short 60 minutes or years and now are no more.  
Is the 'idiot's tale' still told?  
Does its sound and fury  
Signify some nano-mote more than nothing after all?

..... Where are our Penzias and Wilson  
When we need them? .....

[Don't suppose you'll believe me if I said that the spur to this was seeing an old house knocked down..... I just wondered where all the echoes of the lives and loves lived therein went. Hope you get the allusions: and science-loving guitarist will... or should....! ].

Tony Jolley

# Petulance

In their impatience,  
In their petulance,  
And with eider elbows flashing fit to fly,  
They jostled and jostled  
For position 'A' precedence  
Hard on the heels of mother in her web-foot wake,  
Squabbling and babbling their battle around the lake shoreline,  
Whilst, some hundred or so metres beyond,  
The same scene was being played out -  
The mother of all petrol tankers  
Steaming steadily up the forest road to Feldberg,  
Followed, line astern, by her brood:  
A restless road-full of four-wheeled frenzy  
All overanxious to overtake:  
Accelerating,  
Risk-taking  
Then frantically braking  
Their way up the ranks,  
Throwing all caution to the little wind there was  
As if they were one-down and last-ditch-effort desperate  
In the final few cup-final seconds.

That would be me in the morning,  
But today it was 'for the birds'.

(After watching ducks on Late Titisee (Black Forest, Germany) during the morning rush-hour and seeing the traffic on the mountain road beyond...)

Tony Jolley

# Pigtails

Pigtails.

She had pigtails.

Long pigtails:

Out of the ordinary pigtails,

A too long to be true,

Can't help but stare

Sort of pigtails.

You're picturing a young girl,

Aren't you?

A Heidi.

Fourteen or fifteen

Running across a prairie....

She was tugging them down

From under a black, tea-cosy-type hat:

All warm and waiting for winter,

Pulling them about like a pair of unruly puppies

Who wouldn't stay where they were put.

60 rather than 16,

Toting all her worldly goods about

In a big, black, bin-liner bag;

To those 'above the lifeline'

A lost soul falling off the frail frontier

Of self-respect and state subsidy,

Sliding slowly but surely into invisibility

To our supposed civilised society.

But she still cared for her hair:

Her own small glory.

Clearly, so very evidently:

Here was a lady.

[Just a brief glimpse of a woman on the Rebberg Hill - a rich area of Mulhouse, France - her situation contrasted dramatically with her surroundings, but in her 'previous life-before-the-fall' I have this feeling she knew the area well]

Tony Jolley

# Plastic Fish

Beats me they're still there, actually,  
The amount of time our Félix forgets to feed them;  
But they're there alright,  
Still swimming round and round:  
A constant contradiction  
To the configuration of their aquarium  
In defiance and negation of its angular tedium  
Demonstrating a degree of demersal distain  
That only fish can muster and maintain.

The filter clogs and the power's been cut,  
The temperature falls and the curtains stay shut,  
Holidays come and holidays go  
How they survive God alone knows;  
But winter, spring, summer and fall,  
They're there like ducks on a sideshow wall  
Every young kids easy-care wish:  
Live and kicking, plastic fish.

Tony Jolley

# Plenty More Fish In The Sea

'Plenty more fish in the sea! ' .....

No. There aren't.....sadly.....

Tony Jolley



# Poetry Before Birth (With Apologies To Mr Macneice...)

I am not yet born; O hear me  
Let not the daily distractions  
Or the inane chatter of fools or the wise unto themselves  
Cheat me of my birth and breath.

I am not yet born; console me  
For I fear that life's long lists  
Will with doing divert me,  
With bureaucracy pervert me  
To timetables tie me  
Upon lonely shelves lie me.

I am not yet born; provide me  
With quiet to quicken me,  
Paper to page me,  
Pen to procure me,  
Memories to muse me  
And a song I can see in my soul and hear in my hand.

I am not yet born; forgive me  
The call irrevocable I must make,  
The ache endured for my stanzas' sake  
That itch where you can't scratch me  
The frustration of failing to find me  
My meanings when mistaken by many  
Or not known to any.

I am not yet born; rehearse me  
To be poetry-prete-a-porter for the world of today  
Where precious few mind me or make to unwind me  
Some they despise me, revile and revise me  
Publishers move to marginalise me  
Where wise and fool alike lack the time for me.

I am not yet born; O hear me  
Let not the moribund mind  
Or the soul sans compassion come close to me.

I am not yet born, O fill me

With light against those who would quash and quench  
Would consign me to a rest home of irrelevance  
Would make me a mere mark on a school syllabus,  
An unlearned lesson, a bore  
And against all those who would choose not to see  
And deliberately, casually, carelessly  
Or with apathy underscore me.

Let them not make me unheard or unread  
Let them not deplore me...  
Otherwise ignore me.

Tony Jolley

# Refused

Saw your picture  
From a year,  
A country,  
An imagination away.  
Drank you in  
Like cool spring water  
But your refreshment  
Refused me.

Wondered.

Do you love me,  
Hate me  
Or just not 'do' me?

Wondered.

Would I ever know?

Don't know.  
Just don't know.  
Don't even know  
What good the knowing would do.

Tony Jolley

# Ridgeline

In wild abandon we made our love on the ridgeline of our youth  
Our bodies spoke of intervening years, our spirits only truth:  
Truth dormant not diminished  
Truth yet incomplete – unfinished  
That our love, long-left to linger,  
Is our life's song and we its singers

Tony Jolley

# Rummage Bag Raf

Form the bottom of the rummage bag,  
Buried under assorted pendants and brooches,  
Their chains all mused up like a bird's nest on a fishing reel  
(and I've had a few of them in my time!) ,  
A fresh-faced, freckled smile  
Beamed up at me  
Perhaps as surprised to be found as I was to find it.

It was a smile now almost certainly long lost,  
A headshot of less than a thumbnail,  
The size of a sixpence,  
Set in a silver round  
And pasted, dead centre, to an inch-square of Mother-of-Pearl  
Hanging from a small chain  
Attached to a safety-pin-type clip:  
The sort of affair a wartime Ward Angel  
Might have worn  
Fastened to her breast  
To suspend her upside-down watch:

Watch. One.  
Blood Pressure timing for the taking of.

The pearl plaque, chained at one corner,  
Would hang diamond-like  
Rather than square on.  
The maker had set the photo in the same orientation,  
And, with a suitably dry sense of humour  
And not a little eye for the aesthetically pleasing,  
Had aligned it to the diamond points and chain  
By an arrow-straight vertical  
Running along the razor sharp ridgeline  
Of the young RAF officer's cap,  
Perched, as it was,  
Almost more off his head than on it,  
Courtesy, perhaps,  
Of the gravity-defying properties of Brylcreem  
(A not altogether inappropriate a talisman  
For one of The Few) .

So young.  
So very, very young.  
A boy,  
Barely a man  
But for his being on intimate terms  
With burning lead and fuel-flame,  
And being frightened of counting his friends  
For fear he'd have far too many fingers.  
He measured his minutes as lifetimes,  
Riding his luck on Fortune's filament  
Trying to trust to God, his skill  
And RJ Mitchell:  
Any or all of them –  
Whoever, Whatever would bring him home.  
Victory?  
Victory would have to pray for itself.

Am I looking at a 'keep-him-safe' keepsake  
Worn religiously  
By a proud and prayerful mother  
Or a fearful and desperate lover,  
Or maybe a memorial medal  
That could hold its head up high  
In the company of a whole host of  
Victoria Crosses?

I would like to think this badge of honour was borne  
Upon a mother's breast  
His young face, forever,  
To his Mother of Pearl pressed.

Tony Jolley

## Sanglier... (Wild Boar)

Saw Fear today.

It was pounding its grey-brown hide, very literally hell-for-leather  
Across the fresh-ploughed slabs and furrows  
Bolting for hoped-for cover  
Like the bullet that would otherwise overtake it,  
The product of a primeval 'fight or flight', self-preservation mechanism  
Triggered by acutely mortal senses, simultaneously overwhelmed  
By what had 'no right' to be there in Danny's Wood:  
Luminous, luridly unnatural 'Don't shoot me – shoot anything else that moves! '  
vests;  
A cacophony of football rattles viciously clacking and gnashing their teeth  
Like a pack of ravening hounds baying for blood,  
And, above all, that unmistakable, sickly smell,  
Harbinger of the ultimate predator,  
Spreading and encircling like a stalking plague,  
Cutting off escape,  
Closing in for the kill.

It was still going,  
Charging over the ridge  
And lost to line-of-sight of one rifle  
After both barrels had missed their mark.

Seconds later, from the other side of the hill,  
One solitary shot rang out,  
Its six or more distinct echoes  
Ricocheting and reverberating off every slope between  
Brunstatt and Bruebach:  
A sort of sorry, last salute for a Sanglier:  
A worthy adversary,  
But for me more a sad memory  
Of a man-made murder unnecessary.

Sanglier = French Wild Boar. They keep themselves pretty much to themselves in the forests here, but that doesn't stop hunters from hunting them down for

sport. This was the first I'd seen not in bits on a butcher's block.... Ten frantic, fearful seconds later that was exactly where it was headed.

Tony Jolley



## Sat. Sitting. Still.

Sat here,  
Right here,  
Once in the snow  
And thought about  
That dismissive message of yours.

Sitting here again.  
Thinking again.  
Again.  
A gain?  
No.  
A loss.  
Still a loss.  
Still at a loss  
To understand.

Tony Jolley

# Sciatica

The heavy amour rolled through my Poland late last night  
Gouging and spurting flesh like mud under its tracks,  
Scouring deep welts down my flanks,  
Spitting out gristle, guts and gouts of blood  
To seep back and fester, black-red and congealing, in the ruts  
Whilst the feral me  
Convulsed in agony  
Transfixed in the cross-hairs  
Of the unending lines of Stukas  
As they steep-dived their unmistakable dihedrals  
At the base of my spine  
Pulling out only at the point calculated as most critical to my pain  
Dropping their singular back-busters  
To explode in my lumbar  
And concatenate and concentrate their concussions  
Down each leg and back  
In some murderous, magnified, sadistic echo.

No defence,  
Not even a pain-killing wall was left standing....

....It finished only when they were done with me  
When there wasn't much left of me.

Tony Jolley

# Settled

The seat was a settle:  
Lighthouse Lime and Puce –  
More modern art than padded pew.

That strange 'flat' at the back of my skull  
Fitted flush to the headrest:  
Familiar;  
And, eyes shut,  
This time-transporting seat  
Brought me hard up against  
The rough stone bar-wall at Bledington  
And soft up against you:  
Temple-to-temple;  
Thigh-to-thigh;  
Touching your dreams  
Tasting your desires  
Sharing soul and spirit:

Settled.

Tony Jolley

# Shore And Simple

Shells and Stones.

You and Me.

Singular, simple Majesty.

Tide and Life.

Sands of Time.

Nature perfect: Yours and Mine.

Weathered, Worn

Clean and Pure.

Home, upon this Shared Life's Shore.

Tony Jolley

# Short Of Home

Lost.

That's the word to describe it.

Not the only one perhaps,

Might not even be the best,

But it's the one that springs to mind with economy

Rather than a restless search for the 'mot juste'.

Lost.

Dark doorway;

Little light

Emphasis on emptiness:

A house in mourning-

A long Ellen way short of 'home'.

Cold hall.

Silent lounge.

Put music on.

Loudish -

The sort that can still

Dance the feet off a reticent, two-left-footer at 50.

It's there in the background right now

But sounds somehow powerless,

Distant,

Disinterested.

It's caught wind of my mood maybe,

Or can't play off the hair rising up on the back of your neck,

That sends that 'irresistable tap' down your back, hips and legs

And shifts you into your joyful overdrive,

Sets you off spinning, floating, flying, singing

And careers you across the floor, beaming, into my arms.

Put pen to paper.

Cheating really.

Not planned.

Just to be doing.

Doing something.

Anything.

Anything to swallow the pill of time

That stands obstinately between me and mine.

Should stop there.

Makes poetic sense of a sort;

But this isn't poetry as I've told you:

It's cold-blooded murder –

The killing of time.

Going to crank up fingers and fretboard

And lose myself

In some amplified rock 'n' roll somewhere,

But no matter the volume

I'll hear her key in the door

And feel the house become a home once more.

Tony Jolley

# Shut Eye

Eyelids shut.  
Paltry protection  
Against the teeming billions of high-energy photons –  
Those rejected scion  
Of the atomic anger  
Of the First Lord of Fusion,  
Ejecta of his immutable law  
Of nuclear reaction.

Barely eight minutes  
And ninety-eight million miles after their creation,  
At the envelope-edge limit of Einstein's Constant  
And what God (that well-known non dice-player) will condone,  
Those estranged sons of Sun  
Smash into my flesh  
Bleeding a raw, raging crimson curtain  
Across my vision.  
Strange shapes:  
Dark-dot islets  
Tossed and tormented  
Upon waves and cascades of corpuscular lava  
Surging and seething across my sight  
Like Odysseus at the mercy  
Of Poseidon and Aeolus,  
Running the gauntlet of Scylla and Charibdis.

Strange....  
Eyelids shut  
Yet still I can see,  
But were I to open them  
Then blinded I'd be.

Tony Jolley

## Sirius ('Jenny' To Us)

She was a small, slate-grey & white ball of frightened fur,  
Cuddled deep down in an old cardi'  
Cradled on our knees  
As we cornered carefully home to Kinson from Hampshire....  
... Remember? ? ?

Her fear fell away with evidence of safety, security and love  
And she grew happily and shaggily enough –  
[All bar the odd vet-visit and Cleo's perennial hissing].  
Then came the first outing  
Supposedly by the riverside  
Where her exuberance and speed  
Exceeded her cornering control  
And she careered over the bank  
Like an unguided, hairy missile,  
Her first flight  
Cut sudden-short by ice-cold water fright.  
I slid down the sludge into the Stour,  
Wading out into the current to grab her  
And throw her terrified form  
Up to the comforting heaven  
Waiting inside warm winter anoraks.  
Sadly, she was never much for water thereafter:  
Not past the 'undercarriage' her mantra –  
.... Remember? ? ?

Once had a full-blown asthma attack  
With Jen still attached.  
I collapsed;  
Spectators watching dog drag man  
Face-first along pavement  
Spluttering to catch an ounce of breath:  
Her turn to rescue me:  
Taking me home  
The only way she knew how.  
.... I remember.

In that photo: the one above Warbarrow Bay  
There she is snuggled between us –



A fully fledged member of the family  
In her rightful place:  
Front and centre.  
What can I say? –  
Jenny:  
Our One and Only,  
Our Own Hairy Dog Star.

Tony Jolley

# Sisyphus Hill

Thinking.

Not quite thinking.  
More aware of being aware of  
Not quite thinking.

Like seeing a sign:  
'Thought ahead',  
And absent-mindedly  
Turning off the road  
Before being stuck  
In a traff-think jam.

Or  
Relentlessly rolling  
An overweight  
Almost Thought  
Tantalisingly close  
To the top  
Of  
Sisyphus Hill  
With its  
Promised perspectives  
Clear to  
Heaven and Hell,  
Only  
To feel the failure:  
The fallback:  
Its faintest echo  
Evaporating,  
Fading forlornly  
Through the misty  
Fingers of intangibility  
Toward its own, unborn, infinity.

Tony Jolley

## Six Degrees

Gate 13 wasn't overly busy:  
Just one or two persons per row of seats;  
Still there were some 50 of us  
And still there would be  
The customary, unnecessary crush,  
That unseemly scrum of ruck and rush  
The moment the flight was called.  
[And sure enough: there was].

But I saw hundreds more in the shadows  
Hovering around the heads of the 50:  
Each person spawning  
The collection of connections  
That make a life indisputably unique:  
Husband, wife, 'significant other'  
[What a stupid, made-in-America descriptor],  
Sons, daughters, father, mother,  
Famille du sang,  
Famille du coeur,  
Acquaintances, colleagues  
And the occasional neighbour.  
A list never-ending –  
Except that it isn't:  
It gradually frays at the edges  
With a whole host of  
Lost-touches,  
Cooling feelings,  
Fallen-out-withs  
And dearly departed;  
All sliding off the slippery slopes of our lives  
In a sort of strange slo-mo,  
Like a song lacking a proper ending  
Fading softly into silent oblivion.

We've all heard about  
"The Six Degrees of Separation"  
And its test-bed, cinema proof-game:  
"The Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon",  
That so-implausible-it-must-be-possible theory

That any two people on the planet  
Can find a connection between them  
In fewer than six moves  
If only they look closely enough –  
Well, I wondered,  
Was my life in six-step range of any of them  
And if so, who and how and when?

The French girl with the high, Indian cheekbones  
And impeccable fashion sense? – Perhaps.....

The thirty-something strutting his be-jeaned stuff  
And boasting of his business successes? – Hope not! .....

The lass with the impossibly thin legs  
Confined to her wheelchair  
And in need of special assistance,  
Or, better yet,  
[May it please the God of Airport Departure Lounges]  
A minor miracle  
From the crumbs from his Starbucks table? – Maybe....

One day, perhaps, I'll know.  
One day, maybe, I'll see;  
Until then I guess its time  
To toe the scrum-down, party line  
And board the great be-wingéd beast  
And head for home and South by East.

Tony Jolley

# Size Matters

Size matters –  
Doesn't it just...

Not the hoary old joke  
About how many inches of English oak  
A man's member must be to make a maid happy,  
But size of an altogether more cosmic proportion...

Saw a shot from the Hubble Space Telescope  
[After the astronaut-ophthalmologists had fitted  
Its new prescription lenses]:  
A cluster of five, stunningly-beautiful galaxies  
Some 260 million light-years away  
And maybe hundreds of light-years across...  
And all that ineffable glory named after one human:  
One 'Stephan'.

'Stephan Who?' I thought;  
Who can possibly rate such an outsize accolade?  
Général de Gaulle has a street named after him  
In just about every town in France;  
Robin Hood gets countless cafés and a Kevin Costner film  
[The one without 'tights' in the title  
But with the Bryan Adams/Michael Kamen anthem];  
Nelson gets a column – though I guess he'd have settled for  
Another night with Lady Hamilton;  
Wellington, remembered not for Napoleon's defeat,  
But for rubber galoshes made for de feet.

So who is this 'Stephan'  
With more Milky Ways to his name than Cadbury's....?  
Who knows – surely someone does?

But here's a thought –  
Maybe [just maybe],  
On an insignificant planet  
Circling and equally insignificant sun  
Somewhere in a quiet backwater of one of Stephan's Five Galaxies  
There's intelligent life...

No, really intelligent life – not like here;  
And maybe they've got their own Hubble aimed at us:  
A pretty, faint nano-pixel lost in the 'Kevin Cluster'.  
And maybe that eponymous Kevin:  
Is the boyfriend of the girl astronomer who discovered us  
As a smudge on her lens;  
An inter-planetary, rock-guitar superstar  
Hero-worshipped in as many languages as there are suns in the system,  
Or a quiet, unassuming poet who speaks to the heart.  
Maybe all of the above...  
It figures:  
In space, there's a hell of a lot of 'above'....

Tony Jolley

# Sleepers

After a life lived lying down on the job,  
(Mostly with an uninterrupted view of the sky  
Save for the occasional blinding blur of bogies  
And clanking carriages overhead  
Which rattled ribs in serried rank  
And spattered their unblinking wooden eyes  
With great gobs and gouts of grease and oil) ,  
They were unceremoniously  
Uprooted  
From their hard-hoggin beds:  
Unspiked;  
Stripped of the twin steels that measured their meaning;  
Craned onto a rickety old flat-bed  
That had seen better days itself  
And carted slowly up the line  
As the line itself was being steadily ripped up behind,  
To be racked and stacked  
And stranded in some siding somewhere:  
Then stamped:  
'Surplus to Railway Requirement'.

Jammed cheek by jowl,  
Having ridden the rails now themselves  
(Apologising all the while to their wooden brethren passing below) ,  
They reflected, in the way only the old and retired can,  
Upon all that had ridden rough-shod and unaware over them: -

The mail-train racing billets-doux between beloveds  
Faster than her fragrance could fade from the pores of the paper,  
So her essence could caress him  
Even before her words could kiss his heartache  
And leave so much lipstick upon his longing  
It'd last til their lips touched again.  
All this at the same speed as the last red bill before the bailiffs  
Could hunger and salivate its un-thinly-veiled threats  
Onto some poor sod's unwelcome mat.

The troop trains of two sides in two wars,  
Chock-full of bravado-fueled fodder for the frontline.

Standing room only for the outward journey  
Towards the known, but never spoken, statistics of attrition  
Whose deathly truth has its living memorial  
Graven in the granite countenances of widows and combat veterans:  
That the return service will have seats to spare  
Whilst new ghosts strap-hang a silence the living may not dare.

Freightliners hauling and drudging coal, ores or other heavy-duty cargoes  
Bound for the factories and furnaces,  
Then returning with the gleaming firstfruits of their productivity:  
Cars hitching a free ride like well-heeled hobos;  
White goods heading for the family kitchen and indispensability;  
DIY bits 'n' bobs looking for a mug like me.

Passengers from first to economy class  
Eating up the meals and miles  
Trying to make sense of the high-velocity scenery  
Streaming past them more rapidly than the eye can see.  
Sabbath-keepers herded more cruelly than cattle:  
Compressed, choking, dehydrated, starving  
To freeze or fry the distance to death or death camp.

The sleepers, they remember -  
And their memories are long,  
They're deep ingrained with our joy and pain  
Our silences and song.

The sleepers, they remember -  
They have nothing else to do  
But to pour over the sounds they've been under,  
And wonder about me and you.

--

Upon seeing and ruminating upon railway sleepers used as a garden fence /  
retaining wall of a home in Didenheim, France. Strange that sleepers spend all  
their working lives in the horizontal plane but are raised to the vertical when they  
pass away... whereas we spend our lives in the vertical and finish up flat!

--



Tony Jolley

# Slow Down

Slow, down duvet  
Hanging, 15-tog heavy,  
Hugging  
The early morning valley floor  
In its ephemeral embrace:  
Smother than silk,  
Softer than baby hair `gainst cheek.

Valley villages  
Nestling still,  
Cuddling down deep  
Under the warm caress  
Of their Sunday slumbers;  
Hoping not to hear,  
Trying not to heed  
The call they knew would be  
Shortly sounding  
From every sainted steeple,  
Resounding off the walls  
Of consciousness and conscience  
In search of that  
Long-installed, ritual response  
To its insistent invitation.

In stark contrast to this comfy lethargy,  
Life above the snowline was  
Crisp air,  
Children shelling each other with snowballs,  
The crump of snow under boot-sole  
And squint-inducing, streaming sunshine.

Such a different day  
On either side of the duvet.

Tony Jolley

## Softer Incline

No need of a 'cru': grand or otherwise –  
The wine of 'nous' is simply sublime:  
Vines grown in groves of tenderness and grace  
Upon the softer incline of our lives.  
Rooted a country and almost a generation ago  
In the sandy soils of the chalk-contoured coastlines of our youth  
Tended by the sweet kisses of the Daughters of Destiny  
And the safe hands of the Sons of Steadfastness,  
Our lately-come fruit is grown ripe and plentiful,  
Watered by the cool, plaited streams  
Tripping down from the rolling hills of our home.

The taste on the tongue is neither rich nor regal –  
Lacking that confluence of complexities  
Of the twisted plots and dramatis personae  
So beloved of the 'buffs' of Love  
That mewl and moan from Mills and Boon  
And leer lewdly from the outer reaches of the top shelf –  
Yet it is life-long and true:  
Laid down at first sight, first song, first kiss  
And husbanded and wifed in careful constancy  
In the safe-heart-cellar of our spirit.

Now family and friends drink the draught  
Of the love of our lives  
And see  
And know  
And share  
The patient fruits of our years of waiting and wanting  
And the Singular Beauty of the Time of our Being.

Tony Jolley

# Spermatozoa And Shooting Stars

Silver trails streaked down the green-waxed slope of our parasol  
As raindrops gathered,  
And their combined surface tensions couldn't contain their contents  
And submitted themselves joyfully to the laws of Physics,  
Two seconds of high-velocity glory  
And a spectacular swallow dive into granite shale  
Turning its muted shades into richer reds and brighter blues.

At first I thought:

'Shooting stars',

But the tail-wagging shot that idea down

Faster than the rain was falling:

Shooting stars seem straight as an arrow

(Even if the both are bent a bit in reality

Courtesy of Newton and Einstein's Relativity) .

Then it came to me:

'Spermatozoa'.

Flashback to a school hall

Full of embarrassed and uncontrollable, catholic Testosterone

Forced by the Fathers to face up to countless images

Of ejaculation and conception:

[but strangely, I recall, no copulation]:

Manhood to fatherhood

In one not-so-easy lesson.

We all said we knew it all,

But even our long tried and tested, boy-bravado

Rang all too hollow in our own ears to bear belief.

Here am I:

Two daughters and thirty years on -

But I know a tail-wiggling spermatozoon when I see one!

Tony Jolley

# Starbucks Stanstead

"Harvey! ! ! Come Here! ! ! "

Your Latest delayed departure time is now 6.15.  
EasyJet apologises for this delay.  
Refreshment vouchers will be distributed in 15 minutes

"...Yeah! Not Half! We sat on the plane for 90 minutes,  
then they off-loaded us: 'Hydraulic System'."

This is another boarding call for Flight EZ 311...err.....9..?

"Two Chicken and Smokey Bacon Ciabattas and a Skinny Latte! "

....Wish you all a very pleasant flight.

"I'm coming! ! I'm coming! ! Mummy: I'm coming! "

....Will be boarding in ticket number priority order.

"I know: it's just the way Mother was..."

...In the meantime, please remain seated – your flight will be called shortly.

"...'Scuse my French – but I'm frightened of flying! "

....Wish you all a very pleasant flight.

".....If I ever get there: yes! "

Tony Jolley

## Start Point: Geology

This middle-aged Man o' the Bay  
Wasn't so much Starting out  
As already sailing, full-steam for France,  
Arms spread wide in greeting  
From Start Point to Stoke Fleming;  
Solid shoulder cliffs  
Leaning lovingly into their future  
With such tender intent;  
Headland eyes scanning horizon for sign  
Of that long-awaited, approaching coastline.

My ancient orogeny was Hercynian:  
A gently-dramatic, moving magma of feelings  
Molten from man-mantle to core,  
Which set solid our state  
For all human history,  
All geological time:  
Her life metamorphosed  
Beautifully, inextricably, into mine.

But the erosive agents of teenage time and tide  
Wore down and weathered our ground  
And an unintentional, unforeseen Atlantic  
Seeped, then suddenly surged,  
To form a formidable blue barrier between us:  
A featureless,  
Future-less  
'Gulf-of-less'.

Yet, at the continental end of our syncline  
Your bedrock remained the same as mine:  
Joined below the surface of life and living,  
Deeper than the depths of all other loving.

Tony Jolley

## Still There

She's still there, thirty years on,  
Smiling and glinting from the mother o' pearl fretboard inlays  
Of my 21st birthday Ibanez Vintage acoustic guitar:  
Though gone twenty-five summer seasons now - my mum.

Auntie Alwyn's contagious, heart-as-big-as-a-cabbage eccentricity  
Running deep in our refectory table grain  
And in the comfortable, convivial creak of chairs  
Drawn up daily by family and friends  
To eat the meat and chew the fat.

Nell's open-featured, rosy round face,  
Stroke-riven arm crooked rigid to her chest,  
Her voice's criminally constricted, yet infinitely expressive vocabulary  
Of: "Aye me" and "Tanley"  
Echoing warm and tender down a lifetime of lost years  
As I stroke the name she wrote (when she could still write)  
In the flyleaf of her copy of Emerson's Essays  
That now occupies pride of place on my bedside shelf.

Liz's grit, guts and dogged, ever-so-slightly cantankerous determination  
Ringing in the memory of every turn and twist  
That Tuscan country roads could offer  
And in the impossible range of tones of green  
In landscapes that have to be tasted  
As much as seen to be believed  
And sparkling in the wedding ring of white diamond fire  
Reflected and refracted like rainbows in my Ellen's eyes.

Granddads' World War 1 chocolate boxes  
[their contents long gone but for the faintest whiff of Woodbine],  
Their brass bumped and bruised  
From almost a hundred years of battle  
In the trenches and in the hands of kids and grandkids,  
Now resplendent records and reminders of the valour  
And cussed sense of survival  
Which came home against the odds  
And cast the family tree forward to you and me.

The half-hunter and chain  
Ever setting off all the airport metal-detectors  
Giving you the opportunity of showing and sharing the pleasure  
Of feeling the Waltham weigh its solid-silver, Empire quality in your palm  
Gently ticking your father's time from past into present.

They're there.  
All there.  
Still there.

One day, when I've long gone over 'there'...  
I wonder if I'll be found by those still here.

Tony Jolley



# Stuck For Words

Not very impressive is it, for a poet:  
"Stuck for words",  
Yet I am;  
How could I be otherwise  
On a day I've longed for half my life  
And feared I might never see the other?

I'm soon to walk with you, arm in arm,  
And friends and family in tow,  
Across the way to the Mairie and our marriage.  
I'm shaking my head now and pinching myself  
That it can all be so true and truly beautiful:  
That you love me and choose me as I do you.

My Slice of the Divine,  
A greater grace than even heaven can afford,  
You seem to be to me in every shared moment  
Between waking and sleeping and sleeping and waking.  
You're the same Girl in the Guernsey from all those years ago,  
The same lovely lass still sitting watching the sunset on Evening Hill,  
The same seductress with the merest hint of a glint of a glance in my direction,  
Yet you are so very much the more a 'grown into you' you now:  
The woman who marries life and experience like no other can or ever could,  
As mother, friend, partner, teacher and lover  
And makes of it a simple, everyday wonder of wonders.

You're not aware of any of this are you? ....  
You can't be, I think, for then perhaps you would not be who you are.

Ours is to be, My Love;  
So come be just and only ever you:  
Come live out endlessly the love in your heart with me  
As will I fearlessly with you,  
And let our one being always lead our doing  
For therein lies the sheer joy of the 'we' within our 'wedding'.

Tony Jolley

# Supple Spines

Twilight gave you to me,  
Framed your delicate forms and features  
In a way the summer sun could only hope,  
In her wildest of dreams, to do.

Gentle curves,  
Supple spines:  
Altogether Grace-ful,  
Hannah-ful lines.

At once:  
Two girls-a-twirling,  
Leaning into their spinning  
And unashamedly courting the centrifugal force.

Then again:  
Two elegant Edwardian ladies,  
Best bonnets borne and all dressed up for dancing.  
Yet the occasion got the better  
[Perhaps even the best] of them  
As they threw back their heads,  
Reeled, rolled and raised the rafters  
With their infectious laughter.

Today Twilight painted pictures  
In shades of silhouette,  
Talking tenderly to Tony  
Of his lasses and losses.

Sometimes she's silent, Twilight,  
But not tonight.

Tony Jolley

# Survivors

Just five or six still standing.  
Five or six from fifty or sixty thousand.  
The rest? –  
Mown down mercilessly  
By sharp and unforgiving steel:  
Shorn, shredded and spat out  
Or ground under relentless wheels.

The miracle: that these solitary sentinels  
Survived at all  
When the grim reaper came for them,  
Scything whole divisions in one fell swoop,  
Driving a broad swath,  
Right through the ranks  
From front to rear.

Now the frontline has moved on afar  
And the noise of one-sided battle  
Has subsided to a dull rumble  
From a roar.

No army medical corps  
To patch up and mend;  
No nurses to minister  
'Til the shipping up the line  
And home to a hero's welcome...

Wasteland.  
Just a wasteland.

A wasteland with arterial maize-blood  
Forming congealed rivers in furrows  
Striping the field with parallel yellow: -

After the harvest,  
Come winter,  
And the harrow.

Tony Jolley

## Tail-End Charlie

My mother had an older brother –  
Name of Charles: 'Chuck'.  
Think she must have adored him all the more  
As her feckless father had upped-sticks  
Before she'd even entered the world.  
Not sure how much older than her he was,  
A fair bit, I think,  
But anyway it was more than enough  
To have him 'called up' in the 'Last Lot'  
When she was barely in her teens.  
He became a well-named:  
'Tail-end Charlie, from Lancs on Lancs'  
Who, with the luck of the Irish (tho' he wasn't) ,  
Managed to run the gauntlet of the ever-increasing  
Regulation number of 'Tours'  
'Til he was 'stood down':  
The 'Old Man' still well shy of his mid-twenties,  
Talisman to the Squadron:  
A living, breathing proof  
That survival in a battle of attrition,  
Outnumbered by shrapnel shells and lead-spitting Messerschmitts  
Was at least a statistical possibility –  
Well at least you knew it had happened to somebody.

So the second-hand story goes,  
Some wet-behind-the-ears 'Charlie'  
Wanted to bunk-off base to propose to his sweetheart,  
So he needed or pleaded a one-off swap  
In which, somewhere over Essen, Düsseldorf, Hamburg or Dresden  
Chuck's luck finally fled the fuselage at fifteen thousand feet  
Leaving him to fend for himself  
Against conflagration, airframe failure, panic and explosion.

His spirit never touched down,  
His body never was found.

One Charlie got wed,  
My only, never-met uncle, sadly, dead.

Tony Jolley

# That Last Damn' Duck

Your voice wore a 'different dress' tonight,  
One that didn't sound quite right –  
A tender pale-tone shade of blue  
That couldn't keep the tears from shining through.

Prosaics and pleasantries – a thin disguise  
Insufficient to hide your water-welled eyes:  
Eyes invisible on the end of a phone  
Yet not to the one by whom you're known.

One who cannot bear the thought  
Of not being where he knows he ought.

One whose spirit, tho' with two-left-feet,  
Would dance the miles your toes to meet.

One who's simply marking time...  
Until that last damn' duck's in line.

Tony Jolley

# That's Life

Esther had a word for them in the 70s:

'Jobsworths'..

As in: "More than my job's worth.": -

Petty-minded, embittered 'desk-jockeys'

Poorly positioned, overpromoted and empowered

Way beyond their deserving or discerning,

Determined only to wreak as much gratuitous pain and grief

Upon others as is possible;

All in aid of washing water under the keels

Of their own unsinkable, Titanic egos.

Bears of very little brain

And even less inclination to use it

For anything remotely helpful, positive and sensible,

They brag and bluster up their own fundamental orifices,

Trumpeting the discordant brass of their own self-importance

Like some 'C-List' sometime starlet

Lately to be seen hawking her tawdry wares at the darker end of Downtown,

Or one of Wharhol's deluded, 'fifteen-minuters'

Whom Fame conspicuously eluded.

One such picked on our lad today,

Sought to put him down and lay him out

By inventing spurious rules and specious regulations on the spot

To deny him what is rightly his and honestly earned.

This Jobsworth crowed his supposed victory from the rooftops,

Preened his feathers and clucked like a barnyard Turkey

Who doesn't know it's Christmas Eve;

But he couldn't look us in the eye today:

He knows we know he knows he can't win,

Yet still the Jobsworth won't give in:

More fool him.

---

In the 1970s the BBC had a programme called 'That's Life' fronted by Esther Rantzen that had a long-running slot on 'Jobsworths' and gave a 'Jobsworth Award' every week for the most stunningly ridiculous piece of unjustifiable action by officials from parking wardens to bank managers. They ought to introduce it here in France....



Tony Jolley

# The Alchemist's Feet

Invisible to the mortal eye, but not to the spirit's sight  
When you move – it moves, goes everywhere with you  
Softly, unobtrusively, but surely;  
Neither leading nor following: accompanying.

Your touch is its living origin,  
Whence, at a radius of less than an arm's length,  
Extends its creative, protective compass.  
Attached, seamless as a shadow, to your feet,  
It lives and breathes:  
Your sweet and constant companion.

For this circle is to me a special place: the special place,  
The Point of Presence where the world meets 'My World'.

Boundless within this small border  
Lies a realm of pure and gentle alchemy  
Wherein you engage with all the elements in the Periodic Table of Life  
And where, with such simple apparatus:  
A clear eye; a listening ear; a quick mind and an open heart,  
You reduce and refine, catalyse and create  
Upon a workbench forged of love and experience  
With two wise and willing hands for tools.

This is a blessed marriage of the magical and the miraculous,  
Where the 'simple' is queen and the 'ordinary' king  
Whose children are known as Beauty and Honour.

No traveller in time or territory leaves this land as he came: unchanged;  
For the treasurehouse is full, free and open  
To all who would invest themselves in life and love;  
Whereas, woe betide those poor fools in search of easy-pickings:  
They will find themselves caught between tigress and cub:  
Beyond the help of hope and prayer.

I have been searching all my days  
For the place where life and love meet,  
And finally now I've found my home  
Beside the Alchemist's feet.

Tony Jolley

## The Answer's 'No'.

No where you are not there  
No moment you are not present  
No time you are not mine  
No thought where you're not sought  
No step ever taken where you are forsaken  
No single sensation:  
No tears, no elation  
No sleeping, no waking  
No giving, no taking  
No reading, no writing  
No losing, no finding.....  
No thing;  
Nothing I am or ever shall be.....  
.....has not its root and branch in we.

Tony Jolley

# The Armchair Of Inevitability

Sometimes it used to get me like that:  
Hung me up,  
Wrung me out,  
Seemed to stop me doing what I knew I should  
For some reasonably unconscionable reason  
With just about enough momentary validity  
To be sufficiently attractive to me,  
And send me sheering off tangentially  
In search of that which shouldn't be.  
Then I'd sink (not entirely unwillingly)  
Into an armchair of inevitability  
Clawing at me,  
Clutching at me,  
Sucking me slowly and steadily  
Toward a comfortable, mild insanity  
In which I'd be short of salvation by phone or pen,  
But no longer caring much, by then.

Tony Jolley

# The Belltower Ghosts

Bruebach's early medieval church belfry doesn't have bats,  
I'm willing to bet,  
But this year it does have as pretty contradictory a bunch of bedfellows  
As one might imagine:

Kestrels with an early-bird baby taking to its first flight  
A full month or more early, perhaps thanks to global warming,  
About as warily as Wilbur and Orville Wright –  
Stayed airborne only about the same time too  
Before a not-too-controlled a crash landing  
On the church's steep tiled roof  
Then slipping and sliding down and off it  
Like some virgin ski-jumper  
Just making it to the top of our tree  
To the loud rebukes of its mother wheeling above  
Admonishing this poor performer  
With the Kestrel equivalent of a frown and a sternly wagging finger  
Whilst the pigeons crowed their derisions from a safe distance  
Fatally forgetting that once he wins his wings there'll be no such place.  
Still somewhat ungainly, he barely made it back to the belfry.

At their customary eleven-thirty  
The unseemly wails of a pair of Screech Owls  
Heralded the arrival of these graceful ghosts,  
Reverse silhouetted, their long wings  
Scoring stark, white arcs against a squid-ink sky.  
I wondered why God had given one of his more beautiful creations  
One of his all-time worst voices: a real discordant, ear-rattling rasp:  
A bit like having Claudia Schiffer  
Speak like a Scouser  
And swear like a trooper –  
Perhaps he'd knocked off early from saint school  
And left the job of finishing off  
To some trainee angel suffering from  
A long, Good Friday liquid-lunch date  
With a bunch of cute seraphim.  
Also, why handicap a night-hunter  
With those great white wings:  
A dead give-away to intended prey?

Maybe he was evening up the odds  
Or embodying his legendary sense of fair-play.

They circled the tower together the once,  
Then one peeled-off this close-formation flying display  
Like some Spitfire closing in for the kill,  
And shot straight into the belfry,  
Via an aperture that seemed all too small  
While its wingman mate did another tour of the tower  
Before streaking on in.

Three Kestrels and two Screech Owls  
Using the same entry and exit  
To a space barely six metres square  
Seems uncomfortable, even improbable  
(Or in this case improba-bell, if you'll forgive the pun) ,  
Yet they appear to have come to  
Some kind of an accommodation with each other  
And with loud, peeling bells on the hour, half and quarter.  
But if push comes to shove as it just well might,  
My money's on the belltower ghosts in white.

Tony Jolley

# The Day That Never Was

Day off.  
Hot.  
Too hot.  
Swim.  
Salad from garden.  
Wine.  
Itchy eyes.  
Streaming nose.  
Hay-fever.  
Tablet.  
Double dose.  
Weary.  
Woozy.  
Siesta.  
Bed.

Later.  
Storm.  
Lightning.  
Bolt upright.  
8.10 panic:  
Got get Nathalie.  
Friday morning.  
Is...is it?  
Isn't it?  
Calculates.  
Yesterday kids off -  
Ascension Day.  
Thursday.  
Holiday.  
Morning.  
Friday today.  
Got to be.  
20.10 Teutonic, synchro-clock.  
Never wrong.  
Storm stopped it.  
Short circuit.  
Must be.  
Dresses.



Shorts.  
First foot.  
Second catches crutch.  
Falls.  
Bed-post.  
Thigh.  
Pain.  
Curses.  
[Softly]  
She asleep.  
Stirring.  
Confirmation:  
'Friday...? '

'Thursday'.

Thinks:  
Yesterday Thursday -  
Today Friday.  
Checks.  
Double-checks:  
Had kids yesterday.  
Thursday.  
Slept.  
Woke up.  
Friday.  
Must be.  
Friday.  
Not Thursday.

'Thursday.  
Still Thursday.  
Evening.'

Evening?  
Just up!  
Evening! ?  
Don't see it.  
Can't be.

'20.10  
Siesta.

Evening.  
Thursday.'

Evidence.  
Fact.  
Disoriented.  
Thursday...  
Thursday again?  
Thursday still?  
Hard take in.  
Need lie down.  
Sleeps.  
Wakes.  
Tentative:  
Friday.  
Friday?

'Friday! '

Go get Nathalie.

Tony Jolley

# The Day There Was No Tomorrow

The day there was no tomorrow  
No-one stopped to care;  
No-one paused to ponder  
That it might no more be there.

The day there was no tomorrow  
Was a day like every other,  
Was the day that life neglected  
The wisdom of its mother.

Tony Jolley

# The Edge Of Thirteen

Silence is loudest  
On the end of a phone,  
When the one you want answers  
But there's no-one home.

You can hear the sound of thirteen  
Around her,  
You can just 'see' to the edge;  
But beyond,  
The view is obscured to you  
By a bitter Ex's hedge.

No Christmas window,  
No Birthday gate:  
An exclusion zone  
Policed by hate.  
A moat as wide as former friends  
Too blind to see  
They're pawns to such ends.

An open line:  
Eleven minutes unspoken.  
A loving Dad  
Even less than 'token'.

Tony Jolley

# The Edgington Boys [two Sides]

I knew them.

Knew them as well as one can know two names engraved,  
Side by side in granite, lead inlaid:  
Henry and William Alfred, a brace of Edgington boys  
Born and bred in Mickleham,  
A mere speck on a map so much shorter than its name,  
More hamlet than parish or village;  
To this day still a little lost in a rare, rural timelessness  
That seems to have hung on here against all the odds.  
Whilst others capitulated to life in a faster lane  
Mickleham has resisted and remained all but the same.

The 'Great War for Civilisation',  
Stole a baker's dozen from Mickleham,  
Their names solemnly recorded on the front of the memorial:  
'To the glory of God and of the Fallen'.

Less than twenty-five years later  
That 'War to end all Wars' would prove a horrible misnomer:  
A localised precursor to a more murderous successor  
And a second side of sad, lead-inlaid letters.

The warning is there if we've eyes that would see:  
That leaves two other sides still ready and free....

Tony Jolley

# The Flesh Of Heaven

The Vosges are blue:

A function of moisture in the air and refracted sunlight.

Not yesterday evening they weren't.

Oh no.

Yesterday evening above Cernay they were all moody, black and magnificent,  
Stark-silhouetted against a raging, blood-orange sky:

A ridge-mouth full of bare, jagged teeth

Tearing a bite out of the flesh of heaven.

Tony Jolley

# The Glass God

There's this old guy, you see,  
And he's sitting in his back garden with his back against the wall.

He's basking between radiated and reflected heat:  
A late septuagenarian lizard lounging  
In a warm September siesta sandwich,  
Dozing his dotage, glass in hand,  
And wondering whether his life will cast a shadow  
On next year's summer walls.

Head bowed,  
His body as ruffled as his half-buttoned raglan,  
He looks as if he looks at life still  
From a 'glass half full' perspective.  
Even if his glass is statistically far more than half empty,  
He would admire the glass,  
Remember when he held the rod,  
Turned and spun it and its molten maw in the furnace  
Feeling afresh the fire searing and scorching his fingers and forearms;  
Then the magic,  
Then the miracle,  
Then the craft the Guild had guarded like a sacrament  
As his breath gave birth to his imagination's Adams and Eves:  
Gave them form,  
Gave them purpose,  
Gave them life,  
And in return they had given him his living.

Even empty,  
He would always have his children:  
Even empty,  
He would always have his glass.

Tony Jolley

# 'The Glorious Dead'

The cenotaph sighs  
Under weight of the words:  
A marble-white marker  
Bridging two worlds.

To the Living, still searching  
For meaning in mourning,  
It's the solace and strength  
To survive through 'til morning.  
Finding glory in death  
Not some future foregone  
But a timeless, selfless triumph  
Over power of gun.

But for the Lost it was nothing but slaughter:  
Meat and blood upon the block,  
Murdered to Hell or to Heaven  
With the rest of that pitiful flock.

The cenotaph cries,  
Tries to make itself transparent  
So the Living will learn from the Lost, at last,  
The lesson all too apparent,

That our glory lies only in life as it's lived -  
Never in death and the dying.

The cenotaph knows the truth:  
Its very own legend is lying.

..... 'The Glorious Dead' is the most prominent phrase emblazoned upon the  
London Cenotaph.....

Tony Jolley



# The Gossamer Ghosts Of May

I was on a 'bit of a roll' really:

The day, thus far anyway, had not lounged as some somnolent Lion,  
So much as chased the day's prey like a hungry Cheetah  
Out on the endless plains of Higher Education.

Tutorials – showdowns for angry young 'Rhinos':  
Lazy 'Johnny-Come-Latelys' – all bulk and no brain.

Seminars – exam revision for mercurial Meercats,  
Suddenly transmogrified into question-spotting sentries and sentinels  
Scanning the far horizon for the merest hint of a hint.

Email Inbox – herds of digitally-enhanced Wildebeeste  
Driven by some primal urge  
To hurl themselves headlong and senseless against the other side of my screen.

To this point I was still in control – still 'on that roll':  
Nothing on the plains to phase me  
Yet for all my native training and vision  
Unaware I was being softly stalked,  
Tenderly traced and tracked.

A shrill cry from the office undergrowth nearby –  
My hand shot out without look or thought  
To fasten my fingers around  
The slender, yet surprisingly cool, neck of my quarry  
To lift the creature, suddenly shocked into silence, aloft,  
Its open jaw pressed firmly to the side of my face.

"Good afternoon...Tony Jolley...".....

The call of the wild duly answered with the traditional ritual,  
I waited.  
Waited; coiled yet confident.  
Still in control.  
Still 'on that roll'.

I knew.  
I knew before I knew who,  
That this was an encounter of an altogether different dimension,  
For the answering silence was too loud...too long;  
Effectively giving away your position  
Whilst yet concealing your identity: your mission.

"Hello, Tony.... It's Debbie.".....

The tall, sun-scorched savannah grasses  
Waved, unhelpfully, across my memory's line of sight:  
A veil too light, too intangible to lift,  
Gossamer ghosts, morning mist.

'You could hide an entire pride in there –  
At three or four Debbies a year for fifteen years –  
A pride of fifty....'  
...Then- it hit me:  
Not a Debbie:  
The Debbie.  
My Debbie.  
And not fifteen years: twenty.

My coil relaxed, unwound, serpent-like, of its own volition  
Its widening orbits releasing captive muscles of ancient aspiration  
From their life-sentence incarceration  
To flex free and move and breathe  
And dare to dream and hope again.

I saw this slow-motion unravelling,  
Watched it, as if a spectator, from the bleachers in the Stadium of Me,  
It was so slow as to be almost imperceptible  
To all but the naked heart of the most ardent of supporters.  
The process began after realisation -  
Was finished before any conversation:  
Less than a second on the telephone line  
Relativity at work wound back to our time.

Small 'how are you' conventions completed,  
I could feel my spirit shouting; no, singing:  
'She's here! – She's here! My Debbie's here! '

And wondering whether you might hear,  
No.  
Hoping you could.  
Praying you would.  
Thereafter I would know why the disciples were  
Thought to be 'drunk' at Pentecost  
For I had both Joni Mitchell's and Diana Krall's  
'Case(s) of you' inside me:  
Sweet white invasion -  
Tender red intoxication.  
[I Preferred Diana's wine – but that is for another time.]

I could recount the sad news imparted:  
The friend we loved barely days departed.  
I might equally mention milestones shared  
And not forget those moments compared,  
But that would be to miss what words could never say:  
That our future had become one that day.

Receiver to rest, the sounds of the Savannah returned  
But kept a respectful distance  
As if they were aware the world had changed its tune.  
The peace confirmed what Silence already knew  
That Iowa was once Savannah too  
That you love me and I love you,  
That we would soon be one, not two.

Tony Jolley

# The Healthcare Hydra

Full surgery – caseload queue surging out of the waiting room door  
And curling down the corridor  
Like some sick snake  
Swallowing a cocktail of complaints  
From Portnoy's to the all-too-common cold;  
Bemoaning (albeit quietly) it's lot:  
Patients waiting as patiently as impatience can permit  
For prognosis or placebo –  
Medicine or minor miracle.

Most seeming fit as fleas or fiddles  
Yet harbouring some undiagnosed weakness or other  
Within the bounds of their brick and mortared mortality,  
Staring all blank and unfocused  
At grey-wash walls and faint-faded woodcuts  
As mute as the naked hat-stand  
Wasting away in the corner like a leper reminder  
That sometimes there is no cure.

Every now and then the doctor decapitated this unhealthy Hydra  
But it merely grew another head just as sullen as the former.

Tony Jolley

# The Indispensables

Some of them walk the world unrecognised,  
Barely known beneath the skin,  
Dwelling far beyond the ken of myopic minds  
And the pernicious prejudices  
Of those disabled by dogma  
And blinded by bigotry  
(Yet suffering at their hands all the same) .

Some of them don't know how not to give:  
Are attuned to the beats of others' hearts  
And share their burdens  
With never a thought of thanks.

Such are the world's 'Indispensables':  
More often than not taken for granted,  
Far too often forgotten  
When life's 'laurels' are lavished upon the 'deserving'.  
They are the unassuming, gentle giants  
Upon whose broad shoulders we stand  
To scale the walls of our worries  
And see beyond the bleakness of our most difficult of days.

May they be blessed above all measure and means.

For Nassim.... April 06

Tony Jolley

# The Isle Of We

Sometimes,  
Sprawled in bed,  
When we've tumbled  
Into a tired tangle of arms and legs,  
We stumble  
Upon an entwining par excellence  
Devoid of the usual numbed nerves,  
Cramped calves  
And pins and needles,  
In which neither dare move a muscle  
For fear of perfection interruption,  
But instead send out stealth signals  
Up and down the highways and byways  
Of our bodies:  
Reconnaissance missions  
To reconnoitre and report,  
To seek and enjoy  
The feeling of not being able to feel  
Our respective frontiers:  
No Checkpoint Charlies;  
No 'Nothing to Declares';  
No lines;  
No signs  
To demarcate,  
To separate;  
No border,  
No boundary –  
Not even a nomansland  
Between you and me.

Sometiimes,  
For whole minutes at Eternity's End  
We lie like this:  
I'm you  
And you're me  
Or there's no you and me at all:  
Just we.

Then, inevitably,  
Involuntarily,  
There comes a twitch or stretch  
To cut me off and cast me loose again  
Upon a singular sea of me,  
And I find myself Odysseus,  
Seeking landfall on the Isle of We.

Tony Jolley

# The Latest Acquisition In The Library Of What Might Have Been

The puppy-cut had me fooled for a moment:

A blur of overly-lanky limbs

Rather than the usual shaggy Beardie-coat

To disguise the four pounding paws –

But there was no mistaking the lass on the end of the lead

Hurtling headlong toward her next 'target':

- The red car in 20 paces

- 'Beat the Bus' to the next stop

- Three lamp-posts in under 30 seconds:

Hannah.

My Hannah.

It all passed me by so quickly,

Seeming in slow-motion.

Do we really see it like that? ...

Or are such impressions

The singular province of those of a 'certain age'

For whom The Six Million Dollar Man

Resonates with an embarrassed (yet unadmitted) recognition?

Couldn't say for sure why I didn't shout:

- Worried 'Hurricane Jenny' would veer to my voice

And trail Hannah, helpless in her wake, into rush-hour harm's way.

- Wondering what in the world to say after: "Hey! Titchey! ! "

- Hoping against hope she wouldn't just hear and hasten on home.

Don't think my thoughts really ran that far

Before all the potential present in the moment passed its peak

To languish for evermore in the Library of What Might Have Been.

I didn't see her face,

But she's running faster these days.

Tony Jolley



# The Maker, The Made And The Maid

It doesn't matter who plucked it, who picked it:  
The damage was already done.  
It doesn't matter whether literal or allegorical:  
Autumn had already come.  
And as Adam and Eve's eyes were opened  
To a knowledge they instantly regretted,  
The Garden gate closed fast behind them  
And to time were both now indebted.

But in that time before Time, before talking needed tenses,  
God fashioned Man from the dust of the Earth,  
Formed him body and soul, two-thirds of one whole,  
Breathed His spirit and gave Man his birth.

Though in Eden they walked, the Maker and the Made:  
The Lord and the lord of His creation,  
God saw Man, like He, would crave company  
And determined to make him a nation.

He could have called us into being, made us from a mould,  
But He had known the joy of making life,  
So he passed to Man this power in a single sleeping hour  
And Adam woke to Woman: to wife.

Tony Jolley

# The Man From Martinique

They say of John Wayne that he `walked with a drawl',  
But `though he always seemed somewhat slow  
And to be veering [even steering] more than slightly to one side  
[Picture any picture you ever saw him in  
And find yourself smiling in recognition],  
You could never accuse him of being overly leisurely –  
[He'd have shot you, had you! ]  
For he exuded a tightly drawn, kinetic intent  
Which filled every frame  
And carried him far faster than could his feet.

Well, the Man from Martinique  
Walks a little like, yet still a little unlike, him.

Wayne shot from the hip  
Whereas Mr Martinique walks from it  
With all the unhurried grace  
And languid, lilting pace  
Of a man who measures his days  
In value, and not what it pays.

What strikes one above all is the ease  
Of movement from neck down to knees  
Devoid of ungainly, angular motion  
Or of anything at all to gainsay the notion  
That here is a man completely at home  
Whatever the road he chooses to roam.

Tony Jolley

# The Mouth Of Babes....

'I Will Survive...'

She sang,  
With all the garnered gravitas  
Of the fifteen carefree years behind her,  
Emerging from the bathroom  
Robed and wrapped in chenille  
Topped off by a nonchalant towel-turban  
Of the type every lass can throw on in a trice  
And lads would have to plan and plot for ages  
With set-square, protractor and calculator  
Before even daring to drape.

'I Will Survive...'

'Survive what? ', I thought,  
Laughing inwardly at an innocence and insouciance  
That can sing words with audacity and sincerity  
Devoid of the vaguest idea of their veracity.  
Putting my pyjama seat to the freshly-laundered bed sheet,  
It occurred to me,  
Not for the first time,  
That she might have been right...

Unemployment up 11% just in the slide into recession –  
And god-knows what that'll turn into  
If it becomes a full-blown depression.  
How can we expect her to get interested in employment choice  
When some careers may not even be here  
By the time she arrives  
At the end of the educational production line?  
Production lines? -  
They're already on half-time  
At Peugeot and Renault,  
And to save their automotive bacon  
Amidst the current crisis  
And its dramatically falling prices  
Citroen announces a new luxury model:  
Exactly what planet are they on?

Forgetting the Economy

For a moment,

[... If only ...],

There's the Environment:

Mother Nature;

Well, what's left of her

After we've plundered and squandered

So much of her riches.

Now she seems to be settling in

For a long siege around our beleaguered cities:

A siege she must win.

She has to protect herself

To protect us from ourselves

Or we will be the ultimate losers.

No snowcaps for Kilimanjaro or FujiYama.

Basic crops set to yield less

In the prairies of the Steppes and the US Midwest,

Prices soaring and a real breadline appearing

On tomorrow's downtown horizon

For those formerly economically well above it.

Water down the Yangtze and Hwang Ho

Reduced to a trickle, no longer a flow,

Whilst the Chinese millions continue to grow.

The same scenario being played out

From Pole to blue-water Pole.

'I will survive...'

She's got more than a point

Whether she yet knows or no.

Tony Jolley

# The Naked Estate

You are all the ages you've ever been: all of them,  
Right now as you lie beside me sleeping just a little restlessly.

Age has had a hell of a bad press - is massively misrepresented:  
It's merely a matter of measurement:  
Measuring how far you've come...  
But it says  
Sweet FA  
About what you carry with you,  
What you may (or may not) have done -  
Even less about who you are.

To me, today, you see, it seems  
You never were that girl of seventeen -  
['were' like a Tantalus-Odysseus  
Fated nevermore to find Time's landfall,  
Lost to yourself, the world, to me and fading memory] -  
Rather you are and will ever be forever she:  
That beautifully unsure, unknowing beauty  
Upon my teenage beach,  
Yet at the selfsame time  
Mother, lover,  
Orchestrator, maestra  
And hub of a home  
Warmer with all its windows open to the wide world  
Than a mansion with its hollow heart hidden  
Behind layers of triple-glazed privacy.

You turn toward me as you sleep,  
You and all your years in concert,  
And we're singing harmonies to Ronstadt records  
In my front room:  
'Prisoner in Disguise'  
[and wasn't John David Souther's pirouetting around  
Linda's voice in the last verse and chorus just spell-binding?  
...And why could I never quite pitch it right? ].

Your outstretched leg grazes mine  
And you're my co-conspirator

In the fine art of 'Community Cooking' –  
[Don't ask: it's complicated recipe:  
Ingredients: cooking, singing, dancing -  
Garnished with lots of gratuitous kissing activity! ]

Your arm wraps over my hip,  
You snuggle into me, and suddenly  
You're the shattered one some Sunday mornings  
That my 'Coffee Fairy'  
Loves to let lie and let caffeine  
Slowly, intravenously.

A hand upon mine  
And we're walking the dog down to Flaxlanden in 10 degrees of frost,  
And it's Sandbanks, Kew Gardens  
And fingers entwined  
In every road crossing we've ever made together.

Let's say it plain:  
There's no such thing as time –  
There's just today  
And every today you're you  
And every today I'm me  
And we're all we've ever been.

The more todays,  
The more I believe we free ourselves  
To become who we really are at the core  
And the less we can countenance  
Anything getting in the way of being me,  
Being you  
Being we.

The way I see it, we enter the world naked,  
Spend the early part of our lives unaware  
Letting the world weave its will around us  
And the rest of our days working our way  
Back to our natural, naked estate,  
To live, 'til we leave, as we are.

We've always been naked to one another,  
My Love;

Now we share a beautifully singular nakedness  
Knowing no shame, no time, no fear, no death:  
Knowing only Eden, only Love, only we and this breath.

Tony Jolley

# The Naked I

What can you spy with your naked I?

My life's landscape: its topography? its geology?  
The obvious landmarks and the hidden histories of my archaeology?

My spirits ache: the constant craving to be free to be me?  
To find and to love that one who needs me just to be?  
My need to give: to give beyond giving's measure, without caring to calculate the cost?  
To share: naught held back with no shred of fear of loss?

My love: tell me you see my nakedness...  
Tell me  
Tell me.  
Tell me you see and know my spirit and that it holds no fear for you  
Tell me you feel free to walk in me  
Tell me you know I am forever yours  
Tell me I am lost, lost in you, welded, wedded tenderly to you.

Tell me there will be a time. Our time.  
Tell me we write our future...that we see its history.

Tell me soft that you are mine.  
For,  
As God, Nature, Love and Beauty are my eternal witnesses: know,  
Know  
That I am thine.

Tony Jolley



# The Old One

The Old One stood,  
Stock still and staring,  
Somewhere between  
In-depth contemplation  
Of life's deeper mysteries and meanings,  
And intense concentration  
Upon some feature or creature  
Just a few metres or so from his feet.

His robes were as weather-worn,  
Grey, faded and blanched  
As the years that furrowed his brow  
And had bent his upper back  
Into a pronounced, round-shouldered stoop.

He was still there, hours later,  
Having moved not a muscle  
As if in training for eternity:  
A shade only slightly more sombre  
Than the shadows of evening,  
Falling, more curtain than veil,  
Upon the bleak winter landscape  
And upon the gnarled, lopped tree  
I later found my Old One to be.

Tony Jolley

# The Old One Trilogy

Old One (01.07 Bruebach)

The Old One stood, stock still and staring,  
Somewhere between  
In-depth contemplation  
Of life's deeper mysteries and meanings,  
And intense concentration  
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Than the shadows of evening  
Falling, more curtain than veil,  
Upon the bleak winter landscape  
And upon the gnarled, lopped tree  
I later found my Old One to be.

-

The Old One Two (13.09.07 Bruebach)

Haven't seen hide nor hair of his familiar stoop  
For a good while.

Miss him.

Miss his comforting solidity,  
The slant of his shoulders -  
Even his cardinal's hat:  
Its corners so riveted to his cranium

They had squared off his head  
And become as much a part of him  
As the gnarled hands permanently jammed inside his bark-jacket pockets.  
There had been a time  
I could catch an occasional glimpse of him from afar,  
Ministering stillness and silence to the swaying flock thronging at his feet  
Like a rock, so rooted with passion for its place in the world, it would never roll.  
But that was well before he had become obscured  
By tall walls of green youth  
Reaching for the ripe skies of adulthood.

He'll be back though – he always is:  
For his season's disciples will bow before the blade,  
Or fade before the Fall: -  
It's the way of it.

I'll be waiting.

Then will he preach to a broader church  
Drawn from the soils beneath his soles  
And souls on the road to wherever they are bound,  
Who, like me,  
May well wonder,  
Might just see  
The strange yet welcome spirit  
That is he.

-

The Rags of the Raptured (a.k.a: The Old One Three) 16.10.07

He came back last week.  
Seemed as if he'd changed his coat and his tune,  
Having worn terribly,  
And faded four or more shades the deeper  
In tone and demeanour.

His silence had put on a few pounds  
Since his acolyte audience  
Had been raptured without him:  
Translated at the metal angel's last trump  
From brown, down-at-heel, stick-in-the-mud  
To gleaming, yellow-golden glory

And housed in one of the many mansions,  
Prepared as promised,  
Where the weather of the world  
Would wear and weigh no more.

He alone was left in the landscape.  
A Jean Baptiste, confused and crying voiceless in his wilderness;  
Wordless against the wind  
Now sweeping away the rags of the raptured  
To rob him of even the faintest echo of his faithful service,  
Helpless against a Nature who would no more nurture him.  
He was become the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil  
After the apple had been plucked:  
A blameless metaphor for something once pure,  
Now unimaginably wronged as much by Creator as created.  
Condemned..... yes,  
Yet never without consequence  
In this world....  
And maybe even the next.

Tony Jolley

# The Old One Two

Miss his comforting solidity,  
The slant of his shoulders -  
Even his cardinal's hat:  
Its corners so riveted to his cranium  
They had squared off his head  
And become as much a part of him  
As the gnarled hands permanently jammed inside his bark-jacket pockets.  
There had been a time  
I could catch an occasional glimpse of him from afar,  
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Who, like me,  
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Might just see  
The strange yet welcome spirit  
That is he.

Tony Jolley

# The Oracle Of Delphi

Then,  
They came in selflessness:  
Sacrificing;  
Sanctifying.

Now,  
They come in coaches:  
Crowding;  
Consuming.

All in all, it's got me wondering  
Whether The Oracle saw it coming;  
And if she did, well, where she went,  
And if she didn't, why she was bent.

Tony Jolley

# The Picardy Poems

Not Silent but Screaming (02.04.07 - Island View & Bruebach)

"The War to end all Wars"....

"Dulce et decorum est" ...

Stirring sentiments and epitaphs all:

Familiar footprints

In blood-black sands

Upon body-strewn beaches

Stretching the endless coastline

Of all human history

Half a heartbeat,

Barely a breath,

From bare bones

To bullets and bombs:

Here, all the way to the Hereafter.

The fear-stained fire-step:

One command to Nomansland

To do or die, [more likely: do and die].

Sheep:

Dumb, yet not silent, before their shearers:

Screaming their last gasp of life

From lead-riddled lungs,

To their holy mothers on Earth

Or not-so-holy Father in Heaven

Who could let this happen:

Whoever would have them.

Whoever might save them....

...If only they had that long to frame the thought....

Easy for me to say:

I wasn't there [thanks be to them].

Haven't seen war.

Haven't felt fear leak hot down my leg.

Haven't heard a man plead to be put out of someone else's misery.

Haven't smelled the red-acrid stench of the charnel-house

And known it would never leave my nostrils.

Never had to clean a man's guts from my blade

After rattling it around his ribcage  
To find and cut the last cord holding his body and soul together  
Like some sort of sick midwife to the afterlife.

□

Never had to pray:

O God, please God, forgive me,  
Though I know exactly what I do.

O God, Dear God, forgive me,  
For those souls I've sent to you.

I've never had to live with death for the duration:  
So what the hell do I know.....?

I know those who knew the fields of France  
Are all but fallen now:  
Are barely, but a handful;  
Ten old men with tales to tell.

I know those who knew the fields of France  
Are all but fallen now.....  
But their lives are living legacies  
That can keep us from that hell.

-----

Off the Hook. (02.04.07 Island View & Bruebach)

In Picardy I saw the wraiths arise  
From every hallowed foot of greenfield peace,  
Unscrewing themselves slowly,  
Solider by soldier,  
Spirit by spirit,  
From the coffins death never afforded them,  
To spiral in their misty millions  
Before the sun of my generation.

No ranks.

No dog-tags.

No uniforms.



No sides:  
No 'Us';  
No 'Them'.

Under the earth truth taught them  
What they already knew full well  
But were forced to deny for nations' pride:  
That they were all the same:  
The same under the uniform;  
The same under the skin.

They're quietly impatient now:  
Marking time at the end of their time;  
Waiting for the last of their legion  
To close the final few gaps in the ranks  
Before marching towards what we owe them.

I wonder.....

When they're gone:  
All gone;  
When the last of the very last has left  
And the direct line to the living  
Finally rings off the hook forever,  
I wonder.....

Will we really be any the wiser about war?

(.....for the few soldier survivors from WW1.....)

Tony Jolley

# The Pink Black Golden

Got a Golden non-Retriever:  
Goes and gets it  
But can't be bothered to bring it back.

Noticed her nose turning pink from black,  
Then that there seemed to be a series of stitch marks  
Attaching it to her muzzle.

"Our dog's got a sewn-on nose! ", I said...  
Then the realisation dawned:  
The nose is fine .....  
We've got a sewn-on dog!

Tony Jolley

# The Rags Of The Raptured (A.K.A: The Old One Three)

He came back last week.  
Seemed as if he'd changed his coat and his tune,  
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And housed in one of the many mansions,  
Prepared as promised,  
Where the weather of the world  
Would wear and weigh no more.

He alone was left in the landscape.  
A Jean Baptiste, confused and crying voiceless in his wilderness;  
Wordless against the wind  
Now sweeping away the rags of the raptured  
To rob him of even the faintest echo of his faithful service,  
Helpless against a Nature who would no more nurture him.  
He was become the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil  
After the apple had been plucked:  
A blameless metaphor for something once pure,  
Now unimaginably wronged as much by Creator as created.  
Condemned..... yes,  
Yet never without consequence  
In this world....  
And maybe even the next.

(The third in a series of 'Old One' poems.)

Tony Jolley

# The Secret Lives Of Shirts

Folded my shirt for the shelf, and wondered.....

In some machine-shop somewhere: India, Malaysia - probably China,  
Some poor sod at the sharp end of the piece-work penny  
Must have sewed & stitched and collared and cuffed her way  
Towards a barely living wage;  
And I wondered if she wondered where her output would wind up.

Further down the production line  
She was pinned to card in a manner sadistically calculated  
To frustrate and cut the fingers of the purchaser,  
Cellophaned and slotted in beside 49 other daughters of the 'grand design'  
Then subjected to the unspoken fear  
Which is universally known in Shirt-Speak as:  
The Despair of the Long Dark,  
As the box leaves were closed, one by one,  
Blotting out light by quarters in seconds  
Until the hard day's even harder night  
Had been sealed inside the box with them like a living nightmare.

Frightened and fork-lifted, stocked and stacked,  
They were unceremoniously consigned and crated, labelled and loaded  
Then containered and carted off on their long haul to wherever  
Nested within a box of boxes like a sorry set of Russian Dolls.  
Seven rolling roads and seas and a sharp slit later  
Light razored its violence down on them  
Making them wince involuntarily at the shock and screw up their button eyes  
And before they knew it they were counted and bar-coded,  
Priced and prepared for profit  
Then displayed under spotlights and lurid 'come-on' promotions  
To sell themselves to passers-by like pavement whores touting their wares;  
Potential 'clients' picking them up, manhandling them,  
Fondling them under their plastic 'skirts' to get a good feel of the goods on offer  
And haggling over the price relative to the quality of the 'services' promised.

Decision made.

Deal struck.

I paid the price to your high street pimp,  
Walked you to my car,

Settled you into the seat beside me  
And drove you home.

Pleased with my purchase, yet wanting to reaffirm my decision,  
I slipped you out of all your see-through outer layers,  
Draped you over a chair-back, compliant and yielding,  
Spread you out,  
Made you ready for me;  
Stripped you slowly,  
Enjoying you the more the more naked you became,  
Until the moment you were made for arrived  
And I slid into you  
Feeling you open to accommodate and shape yourself to me.

I watched us writhe together in the mirror:  
Watched myself move inside you;  
Watched you shift your position to give me greatest pleasure.  
You followed my lead:  
Never did I sense you were losing my rhythm  
Or scratching or chafing as others often do:  
Rather you wrapped your warm arms and legs around me,  
Held me, caressed me and kissed me  
Like the courtesan you were meant to be.

I loved you.

But beware,  
I have a harem of former conquests here  
Calling upon them as I wish to cater for my needs and desires  
When the occasion arises.  
You will have to live shoulder to shoulder with them  
And learn not be too jealous when I choose one of them over you  
To be my consort and companion.

This, will I promise:  
That I will love you and keep you  
And should I outgrow you,  
I promise never to throw you,  
But to find a new love for you.

Tony Jolley

# The Silica And The Sand

From beyond the multi-cultural throng  
Weaving and waddling its ponderous way past  
Like some monstrous, badly-dressed, be-sunglassed millipede,  
Its middle hunched and bunched up,  
Marking time:  
Vanguard stopped;  
Rearguard clattering clumsily into the main body of the beast  
Like a bunch of squaddies on Basic Training.  
From the other side of this wobbling wall  
Of congealed and compressed humanity,  
Came the shrill shriek of shattering glass,  
Closely followed by the ritual restaurant ribaldries:  
"That's coming out of his pay! "  
And "Butterfingers! ",  
Accompanied, to be sure by the necks of countless kids  
Craning to follow the fuss and find some distraction  
From the inevitable, interminable wait for waiters  
And their coke, chips and chocolate ice-cream.  
All this in a torrent of tongues familiar and foreign.  
Yet one singularly silent voice cut clear to my ear:  
The last gasp of the departing spirit of glass  
Making its death-bin confession  
To one who might listen  
Before heading to whatever kind of hell or heaven  
Is reserved for him and his kin.

According to the ancient Lead Crystal Lore  
Forged in The First Furnace  
In The Time Before the Breaking,  
Each must recount his last encounter  
Over the Sacred Rim  
Before taking his leave.

I am honoured to have been his chosen confessor  
And to faithfully record hereunder  
The last testament of his brittle glass life.

He'd been be-lipsticked,  
Smeared and smudged with a soft-sheen shade of 'Richer Rouge'.

She had lifted him gently,  
Rolled his stem slowly between thumb and forefinger,  
Bedding him down, feather-light, his rim to her lower lip,  
Sinking him softly into her warm, wet colour contours,  
Marking him,  
Imprinting herself upon his soul's surface.  
He felt himself raised and tenderly decanted,  
Felt his white wine waters course and cascade  
Over his ultimate extremity  
And into her dark, oval lusciousness.

Emptied in waves faithfully obeying her desires,  
She lowered him,  
Seeking to prize him from her,  
Her lip sticking ever-so-slightly to his sheen,  
They parted in the languorous dance  
Known only to lovers in the afterglow.

Perfect his foot, flush to the flat,  
Yet the table seemed as solid as a sea swell  
As she set him down,  
The memory of her so vital  
It refused point-blank to leave his present tense.

She toyed with him casually, absent-mindedly,  
Running her fingertip around his rim,  
Drawing from him a thrummed response  
That no-one could hear below the dining din  
And she alone could feel  
In the slow and steady vibration  
Against the most sensitive ridges and valleys  
Of her fingerprints:  
The sound of a glass heart breaking.

She poured herself another,  
Taking care not to bring the bottle,  
Glass to glass,  
And shatter his spell...  
[and for this he loved her all the more].  
He felt himself stiffen at the swift temperature change,  
The cold Muscat connecting with his innards  
And settling, unsettlingly to await her pleasure.

Caught between the cool libation  
And the heat of her lips  
He never saw it coming;  
Never knew what hit him.

Better that way.

He never knew what careless gesture  
Caused his demise  
And sent him shocked to slivers and shards  
Into the after-existence.

Better that way.

No slow descent into the ignominy  
Of scratches and scrapes,  
Or the cancer of the abrasive, daily, dish-washer chemistry  
In which crystal turns  
Milky-white as a cataract eye.

His transparent heritage hung in the air  
Like her perfumed fragrance: following everywhere.

It behoves me to leave you with his parting salutation: -

'To the Silica & the Sand and the Creator's Guiding Hand''.

Tony Jolley



# The Story Of A Life Lost In The Telling

## Reflection

It didn't look good, that barely recognisable reflection –  
Didn't look at all like it should.  
I could barely make me out –  
Appeared foreign to myself:  
A stranger to all I considered and hoped I might be, might become.

I had caught me like this before  
Out of the corner of my eye when I wasn't looking  
Yet always refused to pause  
And enter into any painful dialogue with myself.  
But not this time.  
Not this time.  
This time our eyes met: me and me.

The stranger looked, well... weary:  
Care-worn and stooped under years of excess baggage  
Which hung heavy along the length of both shoulders  
Making knuckles white at the weight  
And brow too beaten to get its back off the canvas for one last round.

I could just about have taken that:  
...Just...,  
But not the eyes.  
Not the eyes.  
The eyes were strangely silent, eerily so,  
Speaking volumes sans volume.  
There Hurt and Hope waged their wordless war of attrition:  
Hurt marshaling a fifth column of hopelessness  
With which to infiltrate his enemy's meagre last lines of defence.

"Put the bags down... For God's sake, put the bags down."  
I heard a voice plead;  
My voice;  
"Talk to me."  
Slowly, seemingly unused or perhaps afraid of letting go  
He unslung the rucksacks and shoulder-bags  
And set them down at his feet.

Most were well-worn with many uncomfortable miles on the clock.  
All seemed to bear the prominent tag:

Trying but failing.

Realization.

Released from the relentless pressure  
He grew in stature before my eyes –  
Seemed to straighten somewhat: became taller.  
The distressed camouflage jacket  
Hung so far off his bones  
It appeared to have been sized for another soul –  
Any other in fact:  
Any, other than such as he  
Who would only be found, be seen, be known:  
Be anything but hidden.

An exercise in pointlessness in the face of dawning consciousness,  
He sloughed the tired fatigues to the floor.  
Shorn of this ragged layer, he was more recognisably himself,  
Yet still adrift amidst an ugly sea of bags and tatters from which he recoiled:  
Suddenly he saw they weren't his, didn't belong and stared in disbelief at the fact  
That they might ever have claimed him as their own,  
Amazed and appalled that he must have swallowed their shallow charms  
And chosen to take them upon himself in some self-less, mis-guided orgy of  
doing.

It is one thing to be set free of something, even everything....  
Quite another to be freed unto something else.  
Absence of pain is just that: absence;  
And absence may bring relief, but never, ever joy.  
At that thought a momentary panic sought to grip his spirit  
And strangle at birth this newborn of freedom:  
What if there is nothing left?  
What if this scattered, joyless ruin is me –  
The life I have squandered myself to make?  
What if there is nothing left....  
Nothing of value...  
Nothing of me?

Into the void inside he threw himself  
Silently, desperately in search of the truth:  
Not a knee-jerk, sticking-plaster, convenient-crutch of an answer,  
But the truth unadulterated;  
Which he would accept, though it slay him then and there.

Stripped, naked to the self,  
In that place, that holy of holies  
Where only the truth may dwell,  
He saw;  
Saw but one thing:  
The jigsaw of his life:  
All outer edges and no middle.  
Patterns and designs were evident  
But they made no sense as they converged upon an empty space  
Where seeming thousands of pieces were conspicuous by their absence:  
The story of a life somehow lost in the telling.

Hidden under the jigsaw board  
He reached from memory for his old treasure chest  
Wherein his heart had laid down,  
Those things immemorial, eternal:  
Those things indivisible from himself:  
His mother and father;  
His children;  
The child he had wished for (and yet strangely had and had not) :  
His youth:  
They fitted themselves to the jigsaw effortlessly  
Yet still the overall picture remained unclear, impenetrable,  
As it cascaded into the sense-less emptiness at the core.

One further piece remained in the chest,  
Wrapped protectively, lovingly, securely in pristine black and white paper  
Reminiscent of all the style and seductive elegance  
Of Hartnoll's dressing of Hepburn's 'Eliza'  
And of the timelessness of an Ansel Adams print.  
Slowly, with reverence, he unfurled the paper,  
Admiring the precision creases and folds and smiling at the memory.  
Peeling away that seventh veil  
Her glory surrounded him.  
For a moment he felt it would overwhelm him,  
Yet she knew,

She had always known,  
Read him like the book she loved,  
And as her gentle waves washed over him,  
He let go and abandoned himself to her.

Taken by the hand to the jigsaw board  
He saw it, saw it whole, for the first time.  
He was there  
She was there:  
In everything.

She completed the picture.  
Gave it meaning.  
Finished it.  
Made it.  
She:

Elle.

Research

The emotions played fast and loose with him:

Shock.  
Shock that she was indeed the answer incarnate  
Or shock that he had always known yet failed to admit it to himself, to her?

Confusion.  
Confused that he had found her, that she was his answer,  
Yet was lost to him in all but memory.

Love.  
Loved her.  
Knew it better than his own reflection.  
Recognised it more readily than his own name.  
But could she love him?  
Would she love him?

Fear.  
Fear of not finding her.  
Fear of finding her and finding what he feared most.

The decision was alive in that first moment of truth:  
Had no need of the making, the taking,  
Had already begun working itself out from the core.

I would find you.  
The years and miles would not stand in my way.

I would speak.

You would answer.

The chips would fall where they may.

Tony Jolley

# The Sun, The Sea, The Oyster-Catchers And Me.

For all his indisputable majesty,  
King Sol's royal arrival was accompanied  
Merely by the muted, grey obeisance of the occasional, low-lying cloud  
And the discordant, yet somehow strangely mournful anthem  
Of a lonely, wheeling Herring Gull who had obviously set his alarm all too early.

Even the sea seemed mildly disinterested,  
Indifferent to the first subtle reflections and refractions  
Graciously gifted by the sovereign's slow ascendance,  
And washed and lapped rather than waved and crashed  
An altogether bare acknowledgement, well short of a welcome.

It appeared that only the Oyster-Catchers were gathered in greeting,  
Their seek-in-the-sand, strict-tempo formation  
Elevated to an energetic splash-dance of quickstep and stab  
Sixteen to the dozen in all directions  
As if frantic to find pearls to present to their coming king.

Then there was me.  
I saw his gilded state-coach crest the faint horizon  
And burn a bright hole clear through Old Harry  
To cast a chalk eye at his slumbering, coastal kingdom  
And upon one subject who couldn't meet his glowing gaze  
And bowed before his glory.  
A 'Moses moment', I mused, looking vainly  
For a cleft in the concrete sea wall – a cleft that wasn't there.

They don't make rock like they used to.

Tony Jolley

# The Teflon Kid

How long, O Lord,  
How long?

How long before  
Teflon loses its slick on our non-stick kid?

How long, O Lord,  
How long?

How long before  
The message finally sinks in:  
He realises that keys are to be kept safe and secure,  
That wallets aren't for waving about any more,  
That coats shouldn't be just shucked off and chucked,  
Neatly folded, ironed clothing is for putting away  
Not for sitting on, creasing, screwing up  
And dumping back in the laundry basket the self-same day.

How long, O Lord,  
How long?

How long before  
Plates are cleared without stares and glares;  
Before feet don't stomp routinely up and down the stairs,  
The dishwasher is emptied just occasionally,  
The realisation dawns that other people's property  
[and yes, parents do qualify in that hallowed category! ]  
Is not to be 'borrowed', purloined or otherwise 'acquired',  
The torch has 'live' batteries in it when desired  
And not dead duds cunningly covering the lack  
When mine are become the integral power-pack  
In your X-Box-ed, PlayStation-ed entertainment rack!

Leaving a lick of milk or a dropp of orange juice  
Or a bit of bread & butter for someone else's breakfast use  
Might just be nice in the kitchen tomorrow morning  
Other people live here, lad ... is the idea dawning?

Tony Jolley



# The Tigress And The Teacher

The Tigress roused herself:

Her firstborn cub had been rounded upon

By 'One Who Should Have Known Better',

So she swiped him,

Paw and claw,

That he should mind

The madness in his method

And not mistake

The method in her madness.

Tony Jolley

# The Time Being

It hit me the moment you said it:

"...For the time being..."

It was so much more than just 'for now'.

It spoke of life:

Life in the being.

The Be-ing.

Gettit?

Being.

Not doing.

No-one ever says:

"For the time doing"

Being.

In the end,

Time is all we have.

Time is for being.

Our whole lives are simply

The

Time

Being

Tony Jolley

# The Timetabler

Strange perfection.

Unexpected.

Tenderly playing in the corner of your mouth.

A single ivory gleam glinting between lightly-lipsticked lips  
Slightly pursed in pixel-point concentration;  
A hint of a smile dawning upon  
Darker matters in hand:  
A double tasking,  
A parallel processing,  
Veneering what you'd rather be and be doing  
Over the bland screen-scapes of spreadsheets and cells  
That you had no choice but to fill.

I caught it nevertheless,  
Even running at right-angles to me:  
A flat-out, full-length, outstretched arc sort of a catch:  
The type that leaves you sprawled, winded yet triumphant, in a pall of dust,  
The ball clasped tightly between your fingers,  
A gratified grin from ear to ear,  
A tear in the sleeve,  
And a friction-red scrape in the skin as a memory medal  
That won't be felt or even found 'til morning.

You can throw me that kind of smile anytime.

Tony Jolley

# The Trooping Of The Colour And The Changing Of The Guard

Evening greeted night with a butterfly kiss  
So soft it'd make the angels jealous.

Colour gave way  
Gradually,  
Reluctantly,  
Yet as gracefully as  
The final, fingertip leaving-longings  
Of parting lovers,  
Where the fading traces of together  
Still tingle and teeter  
Upon an intangible high-wire  
Strung insubstantially  
Between two and one,  
Between there and gone.

Shifting twilight tones of shade and shadow  
Insinuating themselves silently  
Into each and every corner  
Colour had so carefully colonised  
Since its morning victory over dark's nocturnal hegemony: -

An eternal, natural, changing of the guard -  
Not so much Buckingham as Bonoty.

NB. Bonoty = Mas la Bonoty, a lovely little 8 x bedroom converted farmhouse hotel in the Vaucluse, south of France. Sat there on the verandah one evening being served a lovely dinner and watching the light fade slowly from the sky and candlelight take over.

Tony Jolley

# The Wicked Wisdom Tooth

Would have sat there by the chair and cringed for you if you'd really wanted.  
[Thank god you didn't ask! ]  
Better yet would have taken your place if I could...  
But I'm short on wisdom as you know.

All today's modern, mouth-sized drilling rigs  
Ranged, ready to torture, in their racks and ranks,  
Their high-tech, high-velocity, diamond-cut, cutting heads  
Desperately champing at the bit to turn up their turbines  
And bore and bite into that troublesome tooth.  
Micro-thin hypodermic needles  
Dying to deliver a dose of Novacaine  
To ease the pain,  
To lull your brain into believing  
Where there's no sense there's no feeling.  
Try telling that to your tongue when it discovers the truth:  
A gaping hole more crater than cavity  
Where an ivory-enamel peak used to be  
And the odd clot of blood  
That cuts loose and breaks free  
From a wound that's all too plain to see.

A final word of advice.... A film you should ban:  
Don't ever watch Hoffman in Marathon Man.

Tony Jolley

# The Wilder Mile

She ran right over me ....  
Across the motorway footbridge  
At a perfectly carefree tangent to the traffic,  
Her long, brown hair streaming behind her  
Glowing gloriously in the lengthening light  
Of the late afternoon sun.  
She was all freedom and free spirit  
And breathlessly bound for the beckoning Surrey greenery,  
Whilst we,  
Confined to our air-conned, black-topping tin cans,  
Stop-started in our serried ranks  
To the sick tune of Kafka, Huxley and Orwell's  
Dark distopian machines  
Of still darker demons and imaginings,  
As they conducted, instructed  
Admonished and punished  
Our every minute and mile  
Almost ad infinitum  
[Well at least all the way to our destination].

May time and tide daily divert me  
From the course of the rank and the file  
And take me to that tender tangent  
To walk the wilder mile.

Tony Jolley

# The Wishing Line

Hung his hopes out on the wishing line,  
Daring to believe that his daughter might shine,  
Pegged them neatly, side-by-each,  
Like a parasol parade on a summer beach,  
Wetted finger to the air  
In search of whatever breath be there.

But Wind's a capricious and fair-weather friend  
She alone wills how the story may end.

Tony Jolley

# These Small Fingers

What eternities have these small fingers fashioned  
From the realms of the spirit  
And made the living folio of a life:  
Love watermarking all your learning -  
A haven to those whose souls are searching.

The gentle gravity of a wisdom,  
Clothed in such pure simplicity  
Only its wearer cannot see,  
Singing its sacred song  
To sailors of those oceans uncharted,  
Beyond the bounds of the temporal  
And the means of the mortal heart.

Satellites (not acolytes) are we become,  
Fired in the crucible of your morning sun  
Reflecting first your practised light  
'Til our own small incandescence ignite.

Where once reigned but lack and naught,  
Eternities have these small fingers wrought.

Tony Jolley



# Things I'LI Never Be

Pregnant.

Young again.

Thin.

Rich.

Unhappy.

Cat-lover.

Cheeze-eater.

City-dweller.

Harangued.

Alone.

Decent piano player.

Drunk.

Unloved.

Short of kids.

Totally impulsive.

Dog-less.

Entirely English.

Entirely French.

Muté en Alsace.

Published (... probably...) .

Tony Jolley

# Thought Not

Just how far would you go? .....

Fly a thousand kilometres for a friend  
To have to drive home the selfsame day? .....

No.

Thought not – no way.

Sit naked against the slanting rain  
As a sheltering warmth  
About a cold-shouldered soul? .....

No.

Didn't think so.

Content to sip vin ordinaire  
In a world awash with appellation contrôlée? .....

Hardly.

Be taken for granted  
Yet grant it no mis-taking? .....

'You kidding?

Be married in spirit:  
Short of sixteen,  
But focused on forever?

No. No chance.

Never.

Say: "Come with a guitar  
And the clothes on your back  
And we'll make it" ... and mean it.  
Forget it!

.... But then your name's not Ellen, is it? ....

Tony Jolley

# Thousand Ships

Felt this feeling once before,  
Wine and low-lit lights of yore.  
Yours it was, conjoined with mine  
Overture to our love's own time  
Launched like Helen's thousand ships  
With hopeful hearts, down tender slips,  
Tuned to the wavelength of 70s youth  
Exploring only naked truth  
Sailing seas in search of life  
Lass her husband ... Lad his wife.

Tony Jolley

# Timeshare Trousers

Caught myself thinking I'd been 'hard done by', today...  
And, in a fiscal, Einsteinian, Relativistic sort of way  
I guess I had been, I could well say:  
More 'F=TJ shafted' than E=MC squared,  
As one client had 'forgotten' to pay me for months,  
And two others had lopped 20% off my gross  
For Social Security, Retirement and National Insurance  
When, as a sole-trader, I've already paid these in advance!  
Short on the mortgage, it's a fairly big deal –  
The idea of 'disposable income' now completely unreal.

Then I read it:  
An article about a present-day Chinese village  
In the backwoods beyond the back-of-beyond,  
Where, 'corporately',  
[literally],  
The destitute community  
Owns but a single pair of town-going trousers,  
Timeshared, in turn,  
By whoever the Elders mandate to visit:  
The best man for the job  
[provided the pants fit].

Puts it into perspective, doesn't it?

Looking up the 'food chain' from me,  
I can see the 'Corporate Carnivores',  
The Killer Whales and the Crocodiles  
Decimating their workforces in precarious times  
To massage the proverbial, all-important 'bottom lines'  
Screwing untold billions in subsidies from state silos  
Which the small-fry fill  
And these Great Whites filch  
So they can drive away into the wide blue yonder  
With obscene stock option milch.

Gold Bullion Handshakes  
Going grasping hand-in-hand  
With Silk and Silver parachutes

Straight into the next Non-Executive Director seat:  
Half a day a month, if available,  
For half a million passed under the table.

From down below the bread-and-waterline, I guess,  
I must look not unlike this:  
A Pike in a pond  
Resting and basking  
Until the need to feed  
Forces a frenzy of activity:  
A blitzkrieg war,  
A snap of jaws.  
Prey paid a pittance  
That keeps them in the penury  
To which they have had no choice but to become accustomed.  
Tressells' Ragged Trousered Philanthropists,  
So it would seem,  
Are with us still - alive and (not so) well  
Out of sight if not of mind  
At the sharp end of the capitalist production line,  
Ground down daily like the grain they grind,  
Donkeys, born nose to the grindstone,  
Condemned all their days  
To the millstone's tune,  
Fed on fallen husks, but never the bread,  
While my mid-chain miller counts his profit instead.

This current Crisis teaches the cruel, but obvious, reality  
That we rich are rich but not without impugntity.  
We can't call upon the Third World to 'bootstrap' itself  
Without shouldering some responsibility ourselves  
And changing a system in which the deck is 'stacked'  
In favour of one player whilst the others get wracked.

Tony Jolley

## To Bend But Not To Bow

If he were here, I'd tell him that I've loved you from the start.  
If he were here, I'd tell him that to each we gave our heart.  
If he were here, I'd tell him of the fool who thought to part.  
If he were here, I'd tell him we will no more be apart.

If he were here, I'd tell him of the forgiveness that we shared.  
If he were here, I'd tell him in our absence, how we fared.  
If he were here, I'd tell him of our souls and spirits bared.  
If he were here, I'd tell him how for each, we've always cared.

If he were here, I'd tell him both came looking just for 'we'.  
If he were here, I'd tell him that your eye-fire burns for me.  
If he were here, I'd tell him to touch our love and see.  
If he were here, I'd tell him how we learned, at last, to be.

If he were here, I'd tell him I will love and honour you.  
If he were here, I'd tell him of our Neruda goblet too.  
If he were here, I'd tell him of my delight in all you do.  
If he were here, I'd tell him by my life, my love is true.

If he were here, he'd tell us what matters is the 'now'.  
If he were here, he'd tell us to love while time allows.  
If he were here, he'd tell us to let our spirit show us how.  
If he were here, he'd tell us to bend but not to bow.

Tony Jolley

# To Boldly Bogart

'Of all the gin-joints....'

Sounds 'big'.

Sounds Bogart.

Sounds improbable,

Unbelievable.

But what of you and me –

Is it really that impossible...?

Hominids, latterly humans,

So the anthropologists say,

Arrived on the scene

Some 70,000 years before today:

A whole continuum of space and time

To have missed each other in

By kilometres and minutes,

Yards and years,

Countries and centuries.

Any miss is as good as

A million miles or lifetimes.

But we didn't miss, did we?

Our trajectories intersected

The cross-hairs of probability

And our love leaped out of mere theory

And into daily reality:

A history inconsequential to History,

Maybe,

But indispensable to you and me.

Is it too preposterous or pretentious

To purpose

That somehow the world didn't

Want to do without us? .....

Probably;

But then we'll never know, will we?

Does the ripple know the pebble?

Does the shadow know the light?

Does the winter know the summer?  
Does the left hand know the right?

Can beginning know its ending?  
Can tomorrow know today?  
Can morning know the evening?  
Only Love may know its way.

Tony Jolley



# To Hell With Hamelyn

Arras.

Ypres.

Somme.

Verdun and

Vimy Ridge:

Roadsigns to yesteryear and the former frontlines

Echoing a deeply and deathly-familiar refrain

From the fading pages of a history

Scarcely spoken by its own dramatis personae.

Names to conjure grainy images in black and white,

Of mud-caked men and machine-stoked might

Jerking and flickering awkwardly across

The cathode-tubed Nomansland of time

Like marionettes whose strings are strung

To some mad fool's sick and arthritic fingers,

Evoking pride and pity,

Reverence and repulsion,

Gung-Ho and going to a Hell

Even Danté at his darkest couldn't have conceived –

Entire empires of Hamelyns pied-piping

Their youngest, ripest, strongest and brightest

Like Lemmings to the slaughter:

Enticed over the cliffs of imperial vainglory

By 'Duty to country', 'Defence of the family',

'Home before Christmas! ', (or so lied the story) ,

To be murdered in their untold, un-graved millions,

Not by Maxim guns and mass-produced machinery,

But by the all too casual machinations and chicanery

Of the powers behind The Powers that Be

(Powers that should have long been .... and gone)

Playing 'Political Poker'

In the dim-lit, after-dinner Smoking Rooms of our stately homes:

Men's lives just a convenient, expendable 'stake' in their gruesome game:

"See your Company and raise you a Division"

The full-house sending the short-straight to hell.

Read them and let someone else weep.

Can't you hear? ....

They're weeping still.

Tony Jolley

# Today I Fell

Aujhourd'hui Je Suis Tombé

Today I fell.  
I fell a lot further,  
I fell a lot faster.  
Further than distance;  
Faster than speed;  
Way beyond want  
And far beyond need

Tomorrow I'll fall.  
I'll fall even further,  
I'll fall even faster.  
Further than possible;  
Faster than light;  
Way beyond day  
And far beyond night.

Way beyond wrong,  
Yet far beyond right;  
Faster than thought  
And further than sight.  
Faster than life;  
Further than time;  
Far beyond forever,  
And purer than prime

Do you feel the falling?  
Are you falling too?  
I know you'll catch me  
As my love catches you.

Tony Jolley

# Velocité D'Amour

My life changed again today –  
Took a quantum leap of such unique proportions  
That it defied Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty Principle',  
For I know the time, the place and the velocity:

The time: right now  
The place: right here  
The velocity: Love.

The time is now.  
We are ready for each other and our life.  
We choose and are chosen.  
We choose: "we",  
Choosing complete: fini.

The place is here  
I fell in love with your town, your country,  
Your life's location and hinterland  
The way I fell for you on our teenage summer beach:  
Instantly, freely..... totally.  
I have been walking around saying "âllo"  
To the new, yet somehow through you, familiar,  
Feeling welcome and wanted.  
The sad goodbyes of leaving and uncertainty are over.  
'Walking the Talk' of 'Just Come' is already begun.

La velocité d'amour: c'est toi; c'est moi  
C'est cette alchimie parfaite  
Qu'on ne peut pas expliquer;  
Mais on voit, on sent,  
On connaît sans raison  
Mais sans aucun doute.  
'Just Come'..... 'Just Come'...  
'Just Come' has already begun.

Tony Jolley

# Walk This Way

Think of all the ungainly gaits you've ever seen:

Mr Hobson in his polio callipers  
Clomping his exo-skeletal, leg ironwork  
Down the wooden school stairs  
Drumming our approaching doom  
Like tumbril to Madame Guillotine  
Before he arrived on the scene.

John Cleese's, Monty Python  
'Ministry of Silly Walks' walk:  
100% gold-plated, bowler-hatted, pin-striped,  
Umbrella'd, be-briefcased, British non-sense of humour  
Parading its lanky angularity and ultimate ambulatory insanity  
Down the pavements of 70s Whitehall  
And into comedy history.

The former East-German Army's ceremonial Stechschrift:  
That straight-legged, one-party-state showcase  
On its short march to ideological extinction and failure's museum.  
Their Greek guard comrades-in-choreography  
Sporting their flouncing translucent skirts  
And pumps with absurd pom-poms  
Waving like the bobble on my granddad's winter-night bobble-hat,  
Their legs extending and down-setting  
Like a Crane fishing and desperately trying  
Not to disturb anything.

The first research-lab robots  
Labouring jerkily under terrabytes of programme code  
To do what an adventurous sperm and awaiting egg  
Plus a bit of nature and nurture  
Can do without computation or calculation  
No matter what the terrain or conditions.

Astronauts with their super-heavyweight boots  
And movement-constricting survival suits  
Dealing man-in-the-Moon-fully with 1/6th Earth gravity,  
Trying not to make a fool of themselves on a billion TVs.

Drunks reeling and careering,  
Unhinged and unbalanced in mind and body,  
Their brains soused in Scotch  
Or pickled in pints  
Until thought and deed  
Become estranged or deranged  
For the duration of their alcoholisation.

Take all of the above.  
Then, like God,  
Or Dr Frankenstein, combine  
Catalyse and electrolyse....  
.....And there you have it, improbably:  
Me in my ski-boots last Saturday.

Tony Jolley

# Walked Far Woman

Bruebach to Brunstatt to Didenheim  
Every day, without fail, rain or shine.  
Stick-thin – and a thin stick at that –  
No 'old stick' though:  
Young, but with far too many miles on her clock;  
Calves the size of your wrist,  
Arms thin as a doll's,  
Waist of one teetering on the short side of teenage,  
Ploughing her lonely furrow  
Hard as the miles and Macadam underfoot,  
Her flint face dead-set against the god of Distance  
That dared deny her:  
A rock in a very hard place -  
A singular human in her solitary race.

Wager she never felt a following wind:  
She'd have turned and faced it down  
Rather than have it lighten her load  
Or goad her glory.  
Not for her the easy victory –  
She wore the curse of her indomitability  
As a brand seared stark into her soul  
Still smouldering on the surface:  
A moving volcano spewing and strewing around her  
The sulphur and silica of some secret suffering  
Like a billowing cloak of nuée ardente  
Flaying flesh from bone.

But no longer.  
No more.  
Snuffed out like a candleflame  
By unbridled horsepower  
And unyielding steel  
With just a mere kid at the wheel.

-----

1. 'Walks Far Woman' was a Raquel Welch film about a Balckfoot Indian woman whose family were gunned down in cold blood by some cowboys. She learned to

shoot, treked and tracked them down then clinically finished them off.

2. This poem was about a middle-aged, local woman who was always seen too-briskly walking far too far for her own good along country lanes with no verges. We often thought she might meet her end that way. A lantern and shrine on a country bend in the road this week tells us she did.....

Tony Jolley



# What Is 'Green'?

..... 'Green' is the very incarnation of infinite variety  
Running tranquil riot beneath a Tuscan summer sky.....

Tony Jolley

## What Makes A Man...?

What propels a man to climb out,  
At night,  
At 200 mph,  
And 20,000 ft  
Along a the burning wing of a bomber  
Over enemy territory  
Amidst flak and fighter fire  
Holding nothing but a small extinguisher,  
With neither harness nor hope of return?

Only 905192 Sergeant Norman Cyril Jackson knows.

What makes a man  
Spend a day and a night in Nomansland  
Reportedly as close at 25 yards from enemy defences  
Raining fire at all but point blank range,  
Repeatedly to-ing and fro-ing  
Carrying the wounded to safety  
And a future they'd given up all hope of having  
Whilst caring nothing for his own wounds?  
For most mortals that would have been more than enough...

But then they weren't with Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse later at  
Paaschendaele  
To see him do it all over again.

From whence comes the courage  
Of a child with Leukaemia  
Knowing he will never see next week  
Investing his last reserves of life in comforting the living? .....

Perhaps even parents don't know.

What makes a man...?  
....God alone knows.

Tony Jolley

# What She Sees

Wonder what she knows:  
Whether she hears what we hear,  
Sees what we see,  
[Though I was once told  
She sees whatever she sees  
Only in monochrome tones].

If so,  
Pity God couldn't have spent  
A bit more time and effort  
On the Best Friend known to Man:  
His Name's all too easy, three-letter anagram.

Still maybe she smells in colour instead:  
A spectrum of fragrance filling her head.  
Whatever it is, we'll never know  
So I'll just think it is just so.

Tony Jolley

# Wideasleep Dancing

In those last, lingering moments  
Just this side  
Of the pillowed timelessness  
That lies  
Beyond the bounds of the wideawake world,  
As the vanguard of the forces of unconsciousness  
Reports to relieve  
His daylight 'brother-in-arms'  
From his sentry duty  
In the service of the sentient....

....I summon all my senses,  
Send them you-ward  
To ward you,  
To soothe you,  
To settle upon you  
And sink softly through  
The silken skin of your soul  
So our spirits can dance à deux,  
Barefoot beloveds in our sleep,  
'Til the morning when we'll smile:  
Dancing shoes still upon our feet.

Tony Jolley

# X-Station-Box Generation

A not-yet-out-of-nine year-old  
Gleefully decapitating countless passers-by  
In a frenzied orgy of Samurai sword slashing  
Just to revel in how the dark lifeblood  
Pumps, spatters and spurts  
And to leer and laugh at the deadweight drop  
Of headless torsos and torso-less heads  
Decanting their precious Ichors  
To slowly pool and congeal in the gutter.  
Doing it all over again  
For the craic  
And a crowd called to witness  
The murder and slaughter of innocent medics  
Whose only 'crime' was to exist as  
Avatars in exactly the wrong virtual place  
At precisely the wrong digital time.  
Loading up a double-barreled shotgun  
(As if one wouldn't be enough)  
Bought with hard kill-count currency,  
Prowling the ghetto  
For easy meat and soft targets  
To 'blow away',  
'Take out'  
And otherwise 'terminate' with a degree of gratuitousness  
Alien to both sanity and humanity  
Just to steal a ride for a couple of blocks  
Until the next 'hit' opportunity walks into harm's way  
To shrug off a fatal few seconds boredom,  
Satisfying the all-too-itchy urge  
To squeeze the trigger and watch 'em fall  
Like sitting ducks against a fairground wall.

Parachuted into a war-world  
Where progression and promotion  
Demands an even higher body-count  
Borne of bomb and blade,  
Gun and grenade  
In scenes of such utter carnage  
The real-life victor's laurels can be nothing less

Than a lifetime's subscription to Post-Traumatic Stress.

Sold disingenuously as 'games' of skill, craft and strategy  
Such insidious software has infiltrated and invaded leisure time  
And imprisoned and poisoned the minds of our most impressionable  
Whilst we battle-weary parents are overwhelmed and in retreat  
Before rampaging hordes of DVDs and downloads we can't screen or quarantine.

How did we get from brick-in-the-wall, Pac-Man, Space Invaders and Tetris  
To today's high-definition, 360-degree, death-driven, heavy-calibre insanity  
Lurking under the camouflage of the family console or PC?

What's next, now blood and gore and the race to sell it clearly knows no limits:  
Celebrity concentration camp?  
Columbine: one more time?  
My little ethnic cleansing kit (kindergarten edition) ?  
The innocent's guide to genocide?

These grotesque dystopias are sick stimuli  
To evoke even sicker Pavlovian responses  
On the part of children barely able  
To hold a conversation –  
Much less a weapon.  
And when not locked into these nightmares,  
Blacked-out and blinded against light literal and moral,  
What is left for them to do  
But to corral all other conversation  
Inside the barbed-wired and guarded limits of these 'games',  
Confined to discussing 'shortcuts' and 'cheats'  
To get them ever deeper and quicker  
Into internet enabled death-debt?

'Games'?

Games these are not;  
But rather 5th Column Programmes:  
Calculating;  
Mind-warping;  
De-sensitising;  
Anaesthetising  
Weapons of mass de-construction and manipulation  
Detonating daily upon screens before our children's eyes...  
And inside their minds with the megaton message:

THIS IS WHAT ADULTS DO

'Programmes' is the right word –  
Not programming the what, so much as the who:

Who, then.....?

.....Yours?

.....You?

Tony Jolley



## X-Station-Box Generation 2: Sewing The Wind

[Reader: if you have not done so, please read 'X-Station-Box Generation' first. Thanks.]

Every slug of lead bulldozing its girth through soft tissue,  
Every pressure-pad mine erupting to separate sole from soul,  
Every bomb-blast concussion wave  
Crashing its super-power through internal organs,  
Every laser-guided, precision excision,  
'Taking out' its target.....

... in their world they all add up to a competitive gore-score:

Points making prizes as if in a sick version

Of a seventies, Saturday-night game-show

Hosted by some faded, sometime almost-star:

"184 dead,376 maimed and injured:

Lance-Corporal Jones, your score entitles you to.....

[Pause for effect and Foley Artist-faked, audience-excitement noises]: -

- A medal,

- The personal use of no less than two 'comfort girls' for a week's R&R,

- A promotion to sergeant

- 24 hour air support for your next-level mission

[Pause for applause]

- Of course, never forgetting this show's fabulous helmet-mounted webcam so you can stream every second and shot of your next battle direct to your beloved at home in 10 megapixel, full-colour, digital surround-sound quality: It'll be....

[altogether audience...! ]

The Next Best Thing to Being on the Battlefield!

In my world there is a worried wife who hasn't seen you for months on end,  
Who can't pick up the phone or answer the door for fear;  
Who can't sleep without the nightmare of your nightmare gnawing at her soul;  
Whose love and lips can tremble but can't touch, comfort or be comforted;  
Who has to be strong when there is no strength to be had,  
Who hopes to recognise your heart when you come home  
From a world that might never quite release you to be the you she knew.

In my world there's a wife with no news,

Crushed hopes and dreams,  
No body to bury,  
No grave to weep over  
And no words for her young son and daughter.

Children who will remember their childhood only with pain  
[If their poor battered minds (closed to protect them) permit them ever to  
remember anything]  
Children with stolen youth and no parental hand in loving guidance,  
Nothing normal,  
Nothing safe,  
Little or nothing human, like compassion, to enfold them,  
No-one to say: "It's alright", and just hold them.

Then there's 'collateral damage' -  
Kids killed or maimed by the long-left mines of political and military expediency  
Consigned to a future of impossibility and impoverished opportunity.  
The months in agony, the years spent scratching painful itches in limbs long-lost.  
Sightless sockets never to be reconstructed,  
Groping blindly in a loud and dangerous darkness for some sort of hold on life.  
Children inches shorter than the guns thrust upon them  
Forced to fire upon friends and family to prove a misplaced gun-gang-loyalty,  
Scared, scarred to the soul and dead to the domain of feeling.

Women and girls escaping machete and bullet  
Only to be subjected to repeated rape as a human weapon in an ethnic, inhuman  
war:  
Condemned to carry a child, conceived not in shared love and longing,  
But in hate and despite of all that is sacred to life.  
How does she feel about such a child brought to term -  
Can she ever see him and come to love him  
In such a way to cancel out his innocent living representation  
Of the result of her own private hell and violation?  
Some do,  
Though God alone knows from whence comes the unaccountable grace so to do.  
Some don't I guess,  
And I don't pretend I can even begin write their agony or story.

Our kids don't see any of this on the other side of their trigger-happy, war-game  
play.  
I'm sure the manufacturers and retailers would claim they are 'far too young'.

Not too young to kill at will, to murder and slaughter at distance, mind:  
Just too damn young to have to see or understand the consequences of their  
actions  
And feel the blood on their hands and heads.  
After all, that might spoil their fun, mightn't it?  
And we can't have that, now can we?

First saw the wind.....

Tony Jolley

## You Are Not. Are You Not?

Can't control my basic being –  
It's all gotten away from me  
As I went away from she  
And both went away from we.  
Seems I keep forgetting to breathe  
Till something stirs and stretches  
And yawns me away  
From History's ever-open jaw  
And never-sated stomach.

Sometimes I sense it first  
As a lump in my throat:  
A living lump  
With its legs wrapped around my memory  
And arms up to the elbows in my emotions,  
Not an Everest (too high / too sharp) ,  
More a rounded how, a high, hemispherical hill  
That extracts its heavy toll  
For every hard-swallowed, upward step.

At others it seems my 'Fill' is full,  
Full of great guttering gobs,  
Strong silent sobs  
Born in my gut  
Contr-actions of my spirit:  
Actions-contras our two-from-six bereavement.  
A crushing caress, yes,  
Yet a caress nevertheless.

How dare I breathe without you?  
Why should I breathe without you?  
How can I breathe without you?  
How can I not?

You are here,  
Yet you are not....  
Are you not?

Tony Jolley

# Younger For The Latter Years

Area 51.

Unites State Secret.

UFO's

And who knows

What:

Ion-drives, anti-gravity propulsion

Ray guns and Martians in cryogenic suspension.

Age 51 in an hour from now –

Two if I count by GMT

And not where I happen to be,

Rather than by this Wehrmacht grey, teutonic timepiece,

Synchronised with clinical efficiency

To an atomic clock

That loses barely a millisecond in a million years...

Unless someone pulls the plug out, that is,

Like that Stateside hospital cleaner

Who couldn't find a socket,

So she unplugged intensive care machinery

[albeit temporarily]

Diligently hoovered

And dutifully re-plugged

Before leaving the room both

Spotless

And, sadly,

Lifeless.

Countdown academic.

Slipped away and fell asleep

Well before the 'witching hour' -

Woke to find myself 50 no more.

51's a strange age though:

At 35 you feel too young

To be half way through the three-score and ten.

51,

However,

Tells a different tale –

Over the 'hump' and heading

Slowly down the slow-but-sure slide.  
Paradoxically I feel the younger for the latter years:  
More alive to life and free of fears.

Tony Jolley

# Your Call Is Important To Us

[yeah, Right! ]

....Ah, no, not us, I'm afraid...

[Trans: for 'I'm afraid' read 'hallelujah! ',  
What did Douglas Adams call it? –  
An S.E.P.: Someone Else's Problem', thank god! ]

Why don't you try this number – I'm sure they'll be able to help.

[Trans: they won't have any more of a clue than me,  
But at least you'll be off my back  
And I can log you as a 'problem solved' and a 'happy customer'  
On my spreadsheet  
And all under the 'three minutes a call' target too! ]

I'm sorry, all our agents are busy at the moment –  
We'll be with you as soon as we can.

[Trans: if we can keep talking long enough  
The call queue will get fed up and ring off anyway,  
Then we can nip off for an early lunch]

Welcome to our new 'CDS' Caller Direction Service...  
If you have a star button on your phone – kindly press it now...  
You have not pressed the star button on your phone... kindly press it now...  
You have failed to press your 'star button'..  
We are unable to direct your enquiry  
And have placed your call in the general queuing system-  
One of our operatives will be with you shortly.  
Your waiting time is estimated at 3 minutes.  
In the interests of security and for training purposes  
You should be aware that this call may be being recorded.  
This is a premium rate line charged at £1.08 per minute:  
Please hold the line.....

[Trans: The call centre cost us too much (yes, even outsourced to India)  
So we've put in this cheap and nasty barrier to annoy you while you wait.  
You don't have a 'star button' or you are not pressing it –  
Are you so thick you don't know where your 'star button' is,  
Or such a cheapskate you haven't bought a new phone in the last 10 years?



Our operators are thinner on the ground now than ever  
And haven't had a rise in ages  
So don't expect too much: we pay peanuts – so you get monkeys:  
That's the law of the global, economic jungle: just live with it, why don't you? .  
Your 'waiting time estimation' is a figment of our creative imagination  
Based upon what we feel you might like to think it will be  
Rather than what will prove to be eventually...  
...If, that is, you can be bothered to hang on that long (which we doubt) .  
Your call is being recorded for use at the Christmas party  
'Most Abusive Caller' competition –  
By the time most callers actually get through they have had ample opportunity  
To stoke their impatience and turn it into some pretty impressive invective!  
The premium rate: yeah, well, where do you think the Chairman and MD's  
Platinum Parachutes and Golden Handshakes came from? ]

Your call is important to us.  
Our agents know you are waiting and will be with you as soon as they can.

[Trans: your call isn't important to us: you know it and we know it.  
If it were you'd have been directed to a bureau full of staff  
And picked up within three rings,  
But you just want to cost us time and money  
And give us a problem we don't need –  
So we'll be with you if and when we damn well feel like it.]

Your call is important to us  
But, sadly, all our agents are still busy:  
Kindly ring back later when convenient.  
Have a nice day!

[Trans: Wake up!  
Your call hasn't suddenly become anymore important to us than it was  
When we first started trotting that line out 28 minutes and 19 seconds ago.  
Our agents are ignoring you – but don't feel aggrieved:  
They ignore all callers fairly in accordance with  
The company's published 'equality policy' (see website for details) .  
If you can be bothered to ring back after this ghastly experience,  
Please do so when it is convenient to us...  
ie when we are busy, you end up in a queue, and we don't have to speak to you.  
We don't care what sort of a day you have  
As long as you don't spend any more of it bothering us....

.... But thanks for the 28 minutes and 19 seconds at £1.08 per minute:  
That's £20.87 you owe us.]

Tony Jolley

# Your Cloudy Day

Do you know how much I want you on those cloudy days?  
Want to be there?  
Need to be there?

This is part of my being:  
I am built to be like this,  
Built for you,  
To want to be there to be 'me' to your unspoken need,  
For, miracle of miracles,  
Being me seems to meet the need of the woman I love  
As being her more than meets every need, want and desire in me  
Before I am aware of any one of them.

I love you in your strength -  
especially that strength that says:  
'I do not fear to be me to him'.  
That strength that says:  
'I have no defences to him. I want no defence from him'.  
The strength of character,  
The strength born of love  
To be you,  
To be you without worrying what he may think or may or may not do.  
To never have to censor yourself or second-guess.

Be strong:  
Allow yourself to be weak when you feel so with me.  
Be strong:  
Be 'cloudy' whensoever you feel you are, feel you need to be, just have to be.  
Be strong:  
Be naked for me...

...And you will find that I will be your clothing for your weather  
And if I have no clothes, then I will hold you in our nakedness and share it till the  
clouds part...

Or the heavens break upon us both.

Tony Jolley

# Your Left Hand

...For my daughter, upon watching her play piano and finding melodies of a beauty so far out of my reach...

Your left hand looked a lot like mine – but it wasn't.  
Your left hand moved a little like mine – but with far greater grace  
[well, it would, wouldn't it – you suit so well the name we gave you].

Fluency flowed liberally from your fingertips,  
For all the world as if the keys were calling for your caress:  
Attending upon your attention.  
Michaelangelo sought the shape in the stone –  
Do you likewise feel the form in your compositions unborn?  
Do you hear the harmony sing to your soul  
Before it finds its way, unchallenged, to your fingers?

I sat entranced, captivated, taken to another time,  
Moved by the gentle motion  
And the familiar sensation tickling my spine  
From both sides of my skin  
Making my shoulders hunch to nuzzle  
That spot on the nape my neck I know they never will reach.  
That's how I know.....that's how I know.

How do I tell you?  
How do I make you understand?  
You are special, yes, because you are mine  
And I am proud of the woman you are walking towards,  
But how do I get you to see  
That what comes now to you so naturally,  
Bearing all the hallmarks of the exceptional, the extraordinary, –  
Is not great because you are my girl,  
But is great because it is.  
There are no means to measure what you can, or cannot do:  
No rules to restrict or to regulate you,  
For this is the world where you write as you wish  
Where you are unfettered, free and fearless,  
Where you answer to no-one,  
Where the choice is all yours and infinite,  
Where you transcend time and teaching

To become, in your own way, a teacher eternal.

You are still learning, My Little One.

You will always be so because you love and love to learn,

But here, as they say, is 'the thing':

All the skill and dexterity you command,

You use;

And you brook no barrier between

Your spirit and the sound you bring into being.

Oh how rare is this, do you not know how rare?

How rare you are, my love, how rare.

Tony Jolley