



Nutshells and Nuggets

Edited by Kevin Reid

In 2014 there seemed to be a lack of opportunities to have very short poems published both online and in print and so *Nutshells and Nuggets* was born: a web-zine for poems no longer than nine lines.

I subtitled the zine *silence gets all the best phrases*. This was a something I once heard John Glenday say at a festival when talking about space in poetry. When asked, John agreed to me using it with no hesitation.

Poets were invited to submit up to three poems of no longer than nine lines each and a short sentence on why they liked short poems; a collection of these sentences may become a separate publication.

All the entries in this selection (one from each poet) are taken from the poems published in the first six months, July – December 2014. From 2015 – 2019 many short poems of no more than nine lines were published. The intention is to compile a selection from each year in PDF format.

Despite all poems being available to read online, I thought a selection would be a kind compliment to all the poets who submitted work and to all loyal and new readers. In other words, a way to show my appreciation and share something I am very grateful to have been a part of.

To all printing publishers out there. I would be delighted to see these little treasures in a printed book so don't hesitate to contact me via my website [contact](#) page should you wish to discuss the idea further.

Many thanks to all *Nutshell and Nuggets* poets and readers.

Kevin Reid

New Words

Before our godforsaken bust-up on the phone last night
I learned a word. A fragmentary rainbow is a watergaw.
Today I walked down to the pewter loch: turned slowly back
toward the house to see a grey sky stoked with colour.
You'll be here soon. There is everything to play for.

Jo Bell

The Lepidopterist Falls In Love

He can't resist her flimsy frocks,
that slim, firm body.
Crazy for her black eyes

he stalks her,
hangs around her favourite haunts
with net and killing bottle.

No-one else's specimen comes close;
only the best parchment will do,
the sharpest pin.

Carole Bromley

Two-Man-Saw

When she returns his arms are a cross bar,
set apart to measure her and draw their lines
over. To haul her up out of her abstract torture
and sway together, into a rhythm that sings
through the wood's grooved armour.

The horse rocked to to where they stood,
face-to-face, tensed against
the lopped ends of their embrace.

Edward Ferrari

Translation

Sometimes I think the birds
are speaking French, a language
I understand, but a dialect, a rare
variant, just out of my reach.

Tania Hershman

My Mother's Apron

How much my mother's apron
with its convoluted folds
and unforgiving eyes
follows every move and choice I make
as boy then man
always tangled in its strings
in a life I thought my own
how much of me is her.

Neil Ellman

Stories

Between the crofts
they found
a pile of discarded leather boots
a horse shoe
the metal end of a hoe
a milk bowl teapot storage vessel
clay marbles and a toy
sheep for young John to play with.

Petra Vergunst

The Iron Lady

In her arms-dealer days, the world dissolved:
black scabbed white and the red of a child's coat
burned. Less a woman than a general,
Maggie crushed it all under tidy feet.
She preened beneath the stiff bouffant, grim face
packed its lipstick and powder into smiles;
the beam struck the land, her head turning, swept
a path, seeking her own yellow brick road.

Irene Cunningham

Fledglings

That last time I cupped
my palm between your legs,
I thought of a bird
I caught in the kitchen
- cold fingers, warm breast,
I cradled so long
I didn't know
where feathers ended
and I began.

Angela Readman

eternal

trees are immortal
the boy said
& so are the birds
I'm sorry
said the mother
he watches too much TV.

Reuben Woolley

Other Versions

One was given the right name;
did not discover fear at the top of a bell tower in Siena

Another had no doubt,
was not drunk in Soho at 2am
did not lie and say 'I am in love with you'

One was not as clever, nor as stupid
One did not wish herself elsewhere
One left much sooner
One stayed.

Natalie Shaw

vitruvian man

so it turned out
he wasn't the perfect man
after all

maybe he just wanted
to have some fun

the gasp of knickerless star jumps
the burn of naked snow angels

Laura McKee

Faded

I think of you always dressed in black
your darkened hair at odds
with your pale blue eyes.

Now I don't know what your colours are
only that once I saw you
wearing a red scarf

looking more real than the winter
that misted around you,
not looking at me.

Elaine Taylor

Flight Path

When I was a kid in Elmdon
gripping chain links on the swings
I'd welcome the jets' booms
as they trailed across the sky
and think that was the sound
that nice days made.

Ben Banyard

Dance

Two carrier bags on Parliament Road,
filled with nothing but the breeze,
breath together, synchronised, and circle,
rolling in an ever decreasing spiral
until, at last, like mating jellyfish,
they meet in a brief brush and tumble
until a family's 4 X 4 rolls over them both
and drags one along in its back-draught
as it turns the corner onto Union Street.

Bob Beagrie

Night sky, Lesson 1

Our first meal in the desert,
silver service, damask cloths,
chai from china cups,

overhead Andromeda,
and her satellites, The Crab Nebula,
Ptolemy's Cluster, Yed Posterior,

I ask about the difference between
a planet and a star, you answer
- stars twinkle, planets are.

Marilyn Hammick

Dear Adolf

Know that I am here
and you are not.

Despite your satanic efforts
your industrial solutions

from Mittel-European
to the Middle East

they say every solution
creates another problem.

And we have you to thank for that.

Rachael Clyne

The first time we went to bed

you wondered at my deconstruction and its precision.
I was careful, you see. I wanted to melt slow as tears
welling under my skin. I wanted to be perfect

complete, didn't want to be the holes you'd fall through
later. I wanted to know I couldn't ruin it, wanted to
pretend I had nothing to hold back. I wanted to act

like it was nothing, knew wholly it was everything.

Zelda Chapel

Edward Hopper at Bicester Station

In morning light the station's Hopper-real
ruled lines of rails, white-painted fence. Detail:
Helvetica Ticket Office, Waiting Room
bright, silent, waiting for the London train.
The track's a dry riverbed. A jackdaw pecks
at sunlit chippings, shadowed mini-rocks.
We stand like extras in the expectant scene.

Then, like a fresh horse the seven-ten thunders in.

Sarah Watkinson

Peace Poppies

For Harry Patch

I thought
someone had lain
white poppies
on your grave
but November rain
had bled
into chippings, bleached
petals underneath
your name.

Karen Jane Cannon

The Winking Man, Staffordshire Moorlands

He does not speak
because all he could say
is how he loves
to be made
of these rocks.

Ailsa Holland

uist triptych...

(i)

morning yawns blue-grey
before sipping coffee-brown uist
under the light northwesterly breeze

(ii)

silhouetted hills of uist
graph the telling of warm tales
in undulating rock and heather

(iii)

fury woven into
the net of white threads
that rage across the Sound from mist-hidden uist

Peter Kerr

Comforts

The wind seeks comfort
in the leaves. It nestles there
like a frightened bird.

Uncomfortable
comrades: the pew, the workbench,
the desk and the field.

Let us take comfort
making beds we can lie in.
Let the sheets be cold.

George Szirtes

Late Hues

Under sodium light
we argue colours.
That 4x4 is never green,
that post-box never yellow.
Your fake-tan skin
I know is flesh-healthy,
your lips as pink as piglets.
We agree on one thing;
silver hair turns gold.

Simon Williams

School Run

A man, 48, will not speak.
He hauls home his hormonal cargo
in a kind of fretful armistice.
He knows, too well, how the trespass of a word
might gridlock the hours ahead.
In his rear-view mirror
he can still make out the time used up,
bottlenecked, behind him.

Michael Brown

Scar, Underneath His Eye

Its horizontal crescent echoes the
lopsided smile a few inches below.
That skin - clean as milk, brand new;
hair, black as a Snow White story.
Scented breath, flavoured kisses.

His mouth, snagged mid caress
by rough skin on my finger -
hands that work too hard
touch lips that kiss too little.

Jane Burn

Lost and found

dawnlight and firelight
curdled on the bedroom floor
the night her lover went away

making him love her
had been like trying to draw water
from the moon

so she made a song
and she ceased longing for him:
it was as easy as that

Mandy Macdonald

The Gift of Tongues

My thousand breezy tongues are the sea
but I have no waves to crash, only me.
Shaking the sunlight hexagonal,
I pulse rings from my heart like ripples
spreading from a stone thrown long ago.
Sit here for a lifetime: watch me grow.

Anthony Wilson

Shipwrecked

A chocolate ocean
Laps sponge cake shores.
From marshmallow clouds
Spiced sugar pours

Dusting marzipan trees,
And sticky toffee highlands.
Yes, I'm macarooned
On a dessert island

Mark Neil

Brake Boy

Brake Boy sneezes violently at the stop,
Jerking his head as the bus arrives.
When it moves off he repeats his pantomime.
But this isn't a sneeze – it's a disguise
That mimics the air brake being deployed.
Grabbing the headrest of the seat in front,
He smoothly turns his fabric steering wheel.
It's the only vehicle he'll ever drive.

Michael Jarvie

Window seat, quiet carriage

The faces in carriage D look down on Kindles,
paperbacks, or tap on keyboards, earplugs in.

Outside, the rushing landscape. Here,
a woman combs her hair. Her reflected face stares back.

Then a tunnel brings sound momentarily.
Lights flicker. Brisk breeze from nowhere topples

empty paper cups. The woman's mobile chimes.
She answers it, forgetting all the rules.

Pam Thompson

Deep colour

Isaac Newton – magic man,
numbers nut – thought a rainbow
should count to seven, match the intervals
of the major music scale. He bodged in indigo
between blue and violet.

Listen to Ellington's Mood Indigo,
a masterpiece in a minor key,
hear that wistful, knowing, sadness
go beyond the blues.

Colin Will

The Zen of Turning the Page in a Book of Haiku

first there is a haiku
then there is no haiku
then there is

Bill Herbert

1st September 1939

The air tastes old today
the sun is cold
the water's oddly off
my shoes don't grip -
beneath my feet the whole of Europe slips.

David Costello

have you ever gone back,
that painful journey,
watching swallows dip
as if they had never been away.

staggering the stones
you may find god in
water falling.

echoing all the tears
of your life, while throat's grip.

Sonja Benskin Mesher

High Life

We lived it up close to heaven.
In a slice of light we were, a small-town population,
the view from windows far from ground yet grounded.

High-density lives began and ended here
in little boxes, coloured, transformed, made our own.

Friendships formed bound by our common thread,
the stigma of Geldof's rat-trap not at all how it felt then.

We remember past lives in buckled windows once looked through,
floors once walked on now rubble-reduced.

Fran Baillie

Hums

The air-con's broke again - I miss its hum;
too quiet to be crammed in this lift,
clammy wet with the strangers
I ignore every day. An armpit
squelches too close to my nose:
we try not to notice; someone coughs
and I yearn for the sigh of the doors
releasing me to my floor. Or any other.

Holly Magill

Gentling

On the eighth day, tiring of rest,
He made something so beautiful
it required a special verb
for touching it.

Norman Hadley

Lifers

Those who carry their houses don't get attached
to next door. Encircled by the sound of sea
they live soft and fragile under brittle armour.
They go out and come in. Go out and come in.
They like it here and there, but don't go far.
Being born under worry makes them
slow. Sometimes they stand at the door
for the longest time / half in the world

until the sea calls them back in.

Janet Rogerson

Rumplestiltskin

She wonders sometimes about the friends
he didn't like. Of how much he needed
to be aligned, like shoes on a single

hanging branch. The sun sets red so
tomorrow, shepherds and sailors will
find what they are looking for. She

will work the night sky for all its worth:
straw can be gold even now. Babies grow into
looking glasses and remind her of her name.

Hannah Linden

Candle

Aide-memoire of torn skin and stitches

You illuminate the distance from Maternity Ward to Funeral Home

Perfumer of sex

Lighter-up of bedsits

Flatterer of badly painted walls and faces

Serenaded

Spat upon (inadvertently)

Blown out

Josephine Corcoran

A Walk Home

Someone's painted the Lomonds today
with confident brushstrokes, 'fat to lean',
mixing winter whites
to silver-blue with linseed oil.
I struggle over a deep freeze patchwork
carved in ragged strips and ruts,
leaning on dykes, now the granular rims
of deep bowls of powder ice.

Maggie Mackay

How to lose a game of table tennis in the Dordogne

Drink too much red wine and flirt with Jean-Luc;
at match point, become acutely aware of your husband
and how wobbly your upper arms look in a vest top.

Catherine Ayers

Scrap #2 (winter)

Winter is buried in the frosting berries/
skin-stiff and windless
the evening dies.

Under grey furs the squirrels rest
dreaming of their secret seeds.

The bitter air clots with sorrow/
a cluster of cloud bloodies the sky.

Gillian Prew

Isle of May

AD 875

Certain we were dead, they took ship
and quit The May. Coward, I crawled from the drain
I'd stuck myself in: counted amongst the dead,

now counting them. Something
had left us, empty, bone upon the rocks,
flesh torn, as hawks would a hare, as eagles, a lamb.

Brian Johnstone

Closing Windows

I decided to delete your files,
but you kept on running in the background.

I tried just shutting down. Don't think I didn't.
I hoped I could lose your unsaved work.

But while I long to end now,
your programme is not responding.

Your virus left my system compromised and unprotected.
My firewall is in flames and you tell me to restart.

I wish I could.

Andy Blackford

Moot Hall

Step out of unbroken sunshine into
a discovery - a former seaport's past.
Deep in the basement, pinned moths
appear to fly from drawers, perfect in
death, oblivious to the naphthalene
they thought they could escape.

Nicky Phillips

Creek water, Deptford

The river's dead end,
a turbid wash of muck
and floating debris,
its scud and slap against
the scummed wall as one
loose timber rises and falls,
the twice-daily knock
and sink of the tidal flux,
brown water, brown mud.

Imogen Forster

Night Terrors

M6, fifty-six, sixty. I am drawn
through sodium-lit night by your muffled cries,
by this strange reversal of umbilical cord.
M62, M1, the thrum of tarmac.
When I let myself in your breathing will be soft, regular.
In the morning you will wake me with a cup of tea
as though it is perfectly normal to find me
on your settee fully clothed,
asleep beneath my grandmother's quilt.

Angi Holden

Nightmare

I dream I'm in an airport
running for a plane. Last and final call
for Flight 15. When I reach the gate,
heart drumming in my ears,
the flight has closed.

Heart drumming in my ears
I reach the Gate for Flight 15,
Last and final call. The flight has closed.
I dream I'm in an airport,
running for a plane.

Susan Castillo

The Coat

The truth is Martine, I am wearing the coat that belonged to you, and this coat belonged to your mother, who belonged to your father. She belonged so much to him that he chose this coat for her, though it didn't suit her. I think I am looking very awkward wearing all this belonging.

Hilda Sheehan

Wall

My new neighbour manoeuvres his bricks one by one.
Gritty mortar oozes from trowel-smoothed trenches.

Monday to Friday, we nod good morning, reversing
our cars in canon off our drives.

But every Sunday he continues - nails scratched and blunted,
T-shirts wet with sweat - until there's a great wall between us.

Next morning, as he revs his engine,
the magpie on my path raises its tail like a flagpole.

Sarah James

Roofers

They opened a neighbour's roof, skimming down tiles
with ringing shouts, a clatter like tephra falling,
then left for other jobs. If the rain came heavy,
would the van race back? Would they fling up a tarp?
Like hell they would. After days of drizzle, I saw
their boss up there alone,
musing, it seemed, on the flow of things,
cloud-movement. The beauty of blue.

Edmund Prestwich

4 artists at the Optician's

I

So, you're seeing spots?
Describe that rather better
please, M. Seurat.

II

We could always test
your colour vision, if you're
worried, Mr Beardsley.

III

So many request
X-ray specs for your show, Herr
Klimt... Ah! Ms Riley

Beth McDonough

Under My Heel

Ice. Crusted upon a dirty puddle.
Does not reflect the cow peering,
crystal wrapped branches,
loose-tooth rattle of pale gravel.
I resent its sheer dullness,
refusal to reflect a world of beauty.
Bring my heel down like a slow steam press.
Hear the cackling crackle.
Destroy its mud-brown misery.

Miki Byrne

The Calf and his Shadow

He catches the edge, his nose in profile,
turns away, finds me, then back
to the bark-faced reflection, a mask
slipping down the tree, so sharp
in the sun-dipped hours, hours
that have seen him wander alone,
as the rest of the herd play fools,
he knows something they don't.

Kim Moore

A Reprs. Progress.

There were empty lanes, sandwiches wrapped
in cellophane, lay-bys where I poured from a thermos,
shaking crumbs from a map, avoiding fat worm roads,
the crow's obvious choices.

Today I'm locked in a three lane jam, fiddling with air-con
and Sat.Nav, throwing back dregs of service station coffee.
The mobile vibrates like a jarred insect
insisting on release, now.

Roy Marshall

Blueprint

The titanic iceberg
started to form
centuries before the draftsman
raised his pencil.

Pauline Rowe

Go Forth

Spurred by a Lothian hireath,
I leave the Hielanman's Umbrella,
no longer the host of Clyde Model Dockyard,
now rank as a silo of binned school dinners.

I'll empty my bottle of warm water
at the foot of a bench in muggy brick park
where trees are feathered with torn cadavers,
the tatters of bin bag crows.

Roy Moller

Something Else

Funerals
take place on this side, empty hearses,
then boxes

slowly shouldered in. Next door
in the hall
a yoga class

then after, upstairs, ju-jitsu,
and every other Tuesday
something else.

Rob Miles

Overtalk

I know how much it irritates you
when I interrupt and try to take
the conversation rapidly to where
I know you think it ought to go.
It has been pointed out to me
that my impatience may deprive you
of the chance to say it for yourself.

Kathy Gee

Louder than Words

The world is full of brave men
like the soldier at the gas-station
who held his bloodied hand before him, silently,

as though beseeching me to tend his wound.
I lifted my bag for the first-aid box.
Bandages in Tupperware.

He smiled at me. A slow smile
which seemed to say 'You'd make a good wife.'
I pulled the veil more tightly across my face.

Sue Morgan

For Sale

He's driven a stake
through the heart of our front garden
to ward off vampires of the sentimental kind.

This sign will be a stent,
an open valve to other flowerbeds

where familiar garlic doesn't grow.
Where pretty maids will get it in the neck
and cockle shells are waiting in a row.

Sue Kindon

The Last Time

I can't remember the last time I swam in the sea -
felt the ebb-pull on my legs, let its rhythm
hit my body in pulses, then - open surrender
to its buoyant coolness to float effortlessly
examining every cloud in that particular circle of sky.
And I probably wasn't thinking it was going to be
the last time I swam in the sea.

Peter O'Grady

Beermat Angst

Though you might undress me
in the stale light of the music lounge,

tattoo my skin with your doodles
and vagrant words, I know

that, when the shutters close,
you will scribble your number,

tempting someone else
to take me home.

Maurice Devitt

from Lessons

The sky touches the ground.
That's what Mrs Lewis
used to tell me
when I drew that

ribbon of blue across
the top of pictures.
She also said
the sky's the limit.

David O'Hanlon

Scree

In dark times, I climb mountains
that begin with adamantine crags
and end near peaks in chips of scree.

It's like the rock has waited until
it is alone to fall to pieces. Here
I begin to gain the strength

to go back and face the lowlands
and the weather you only get
behind doors, brick and mortar.

Richie McCaffery

When we were nine

you called yourself Si
traded cords for jeans
a scooter for a chopper
rode roughshod through the cut
and across the strand
joining your new tribe
by the spillage of cycles
outside the chip shop.

Clare Hepworth-Wain

Riding the storm

We've spent nights squeezed
in tiny cabins, tossing
on rough seas.

So as the rain descends
and water levels rise, I wonder
when the waves will start to rock us.

Alwyn Marraige

Negative Equity

I told you to be careful, my words
Washed away by hedonism, and now
I can cancel anytime, free of interest
No strings attached- no obligations

My clock asks how you do it
Yet we are mortgaged together
Beyond our time, sullenly paying debt
Gnawing our reserves, already I see it
We're bankrupt.

David Smith

On hearing news of an ectopic pregnancy at breakfast

The striped bowl offers
texture to the dawn.
The banana falls apart
from the centre
at the promise of heavy raisins,
the sturdy weight of satsuma segments.
And raspberries
their fluid held inside
season the feast.

Sarah L. Dixon

Square Peg

He was different.
He could see sounds, feel colours.

When people tried to get close
he threw tantrums,

pressed his hands against his ears,
his cocoon.

The doctors diagnosed him with fancy words,
dosed him with drugs;

branded him unstable, and filed him away in a locked cabinet.

Clifton Redmond

On the table

I leave a hand here
on the table
for you.

This hand
is unlike your hand
in many ways.

See?

I hoped that might interest you
the way it interests me.

Tom Sastry

CERT.

This is to certify that the bearer
having satisfied the Board of Examiners and
having demonstrated a certain level of proficiency
may without let or hindrance
fish the river
daydream
doodle, dawdle
may slow time
until it almost stops.

John Lanyon

When Life Gives You Lemons...

Spring hugs an ice sculpture in Canary Wharf
drunk on Limoncello, sticks its tongue
out at the past, sings in falsetto like a bird
cutting wings on its first migration north,
raises the flag of every nation and salutes
the after-dinner digestivo for complimentary
burst of life, a hoopla after a winter caught
in reverse, extracting the zest of life.

Sharon Woodcock

Page

The moonlight used to read from us -
the bed sheet a blank page inked
with resin and lubricant, flesh's dissolution
into duvet like a fountain pen to cotton.

Somehow the bookmark strip slipped out -
now when the day wakes and stretches
each morning sun sits down at the sky
and writes its way ever further from you.

Sam Kolinski

The Local Park

Gobbets of grey snow
around the park's rim
cloak dog turds and fag ends
but also emerging snowdrops
to be revealed by Spring.

Meg Cox

The Waitress

Some woman turns your head
the waitress, of course, who else?
We pretend not to notice
though I drop the thread
hanging slack between us
some topic of importance
some road we've walked before
words dry on my tongue
as I watch her cross the floor.

Rachel Coventry

Breakfast Recipe

One cup of oatmeal,
a cup of water,
equal amount of milk

stir over heat
to a thick cream consistency
add a pinch of salt

and the lifetime's work
of three worker bees.

Elizabeth Williamson

Biscuit Tin

One word on whether our cupboards
Need more pasta or who moved the salt
Brings on a frenzy of words.
When our heat ebbs, a silence
Like a metal box, a biscuit tin dented
By years of companionable grabbing,
Grains of white sugar on the silvered bottom
Bleared faces stare up through smashed biscuits.

Ken Evans

Coffee in March

I'd pictured a breathing space at a clean café table,
obligations tucked into the shopping bags
under the chair and coffee made by someone else:
an earned moment of escape.

Instead I paid by adding up for staff with a faulty till,
listened to a stranger's problems, played peekaboo with a toddler
on the verge of a tantrum, felt the thud of a snowball,
the window pane's shock waves ripple through my shoulders.

Emma Lee

The Snowdrop

At the tail end of winter
just as I doubt
the world will wake

the stoic snowdrop
spears the soil
bobs its humble head

This modest mark's enough
No need to trumpet victory
like the vulgar daffodil.

Lydia Ebdon

The Selkie

Sea bride, you've shed your skin once more.
Our children fetch the swash in wooden pails,
careful not to spill as they scurry ashore.

You scrub your whiskers with salty promise,
dream of your kin on far flung skerries,
hearts beating slow under blubber and dermis.

What you'd give to glisten in that midday sun,
skim the spray and twist through depths,
leave to waste each last trace of being human.

Paul Clyne

Grounds In Winter

Winter sun casts a soft bleached light.
Bare sycamore branches score the sky.
A twist of fence, furred by frost, separates
loamy banks from the neglected lawn.

I stand in the clearing by the dovecote
watching the flight of ash flakes chase
smoke across the sky. Behind me, the hall,
a dark, decaying box, looks on in mute disgust
as the grounds dissemble; the earth divests.

Alexandra O'Toole

A Postcard from Devon

Dad snaps open his silver lighter
and draws on a Rothmans Kingsize,
leaning against the tor,
hefting smoke over most of Dartmoor,
while the rest of us scrabble for whortleberries,
our skirts fluffed up, like bantams.

Dorothy Yamamoto

Debris

When man's meaning multiplies,
it gyrates on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch
twice the size of the USA.
Baby albatross feed on discarded coat hangers.
Whales swallow lost golf balls,
and I wonder, wtf.

Kate Ennals

On The Street

I want to be
the lady in the window
legs up
licking fingers
neon pink and black

tea cosy beside her
lamplight and telly
warming and cooling
her domestic bliss

Bernie Cullen

Gold Strike

A dirty brown jerkin thrown over a branch
turned to a speckled moving concentrated mass
that shifted shape of its own accord

Dropped into a hive after capture
it calmly set up residence

Shapes shifted again –
into frames that turn to dripping scented gold

to be poured into jars given away
to be eaten on crisp brown toast

Sarianne Durie

How Facebook Began

Long before
there was Mark Zuckerberg
or Jesse Eisenberg
in the biopic
Narcissus gazed
on the millpond surface
of the first selfie
and made a “like” button
of his anatomy.

Neil Fulwood

Paper Dolls

I am thinking of the dolls I played with
as a child. The ones made of paper, carefully pressed
from books with small light fingers. The way their outfits
tabbed in place: held at shoulders, gripped round the waists.

They knew themselves, those broad-smile women.
Despite submitting to unknown hands they bathed
in endless options afforded by flat pack
wardrobes and the confidence
of permanent underwear.

Claire Walker

Clearing the Flat

In Edinburgh New Town flats
there are cupboards with stairs
that rise to a blank wall.

My brother's shoes stand in rows,
all set to explore these stairs
that stop at the wall.

Jinny Fisher

Spinning

Turning through 360 degrees
I see primordial forest
pines, ivy ascending birches, holly,
sea, sea, sea. Then back
to house and garden, the small fixings
and bright colours of human craft:
two worlds, the door between
still ajar.

Angela Topping

High Street

Narrow, winding, steep,
our main street is my Himalaya
I make it to the foothills, then turn home.

I will get a donkey, name her Friend.
We will go climbing to market.
She can have the shed.
We may reach the summit.

Rose Cook

The Igloo Girl

When the igloo girl told me that the sky was green and the grass was blue, I turned all of my pictures upside down because I knew she was right. She saw them once and said they were more honest that way. I think the igloo girl was the most honest person I've ever known. I never knew her to say a word that was anything other than what it was. When she left, the world literally turned upside down, tumbled over on itself until it steadied again. Only then, the grass was green and the sky was blue.

Sophie Boyce

Flowers on the A59

There are fresh flowers tied to the fence with blue ribbon.
On the verge, faded and decaying blooms pile up
in silent homage, a floral cairn to mark the spot
where someone died.

On the lea-side, winter fields thicken with frost, the pools,
where sheep drink, exhale mist under a slurring sun
and old ewes rest to coddle grass and ruminant
on falling petals.

Lesley Quayle

3.

Matthew, your mouth spools
skeins of song; spun tales
I wind in my fists,
a golden thread-trail
that leads me back home.

Bethany Pope

House Guest

After supper, he took the cup of tea she offered
and put his feet up on the sofa in front of the TV.

Unusual, for a visitor, she thought.

He just kicked off his shoes
and smiled at her until her eyes watered.

Later she fetched a washing-up bowl
from the kitchen, full of warm soapy water.

No, that's my job, he said, handing her a bottle of
J'adore.

This is yours.

Sharon Larkin Jones

A Sailor in the Midlands

He was forever telling tales
of the sea. But it was the tattoos
that told his truth. Blue blurs sailing
under sunburned skin.

Sat there on the pub wall one day
he coughed so hard he fell back
onto the briny concrete.
Someone threw him a line, 'Man Overboard!'
Then everyone rescued the old sea dog with laughter.

Peter Raynard

High Viz in People's Park

That glint of yellow's
a workman. He is turning
over stubborn clods.

In the dead season
he sinks his strength
into the prospect of growth.

The waterlogged field
is like a mirror. Trees stare,
naked, dreaming leaves.

David Cooke

Lipstick

Mum always said lipstick
was for whores, or for special occasions,
which didn't come around often
because hers stayed in her top drawer, waiting.

Just nick it, she'll never notice, my sister said.
But in Mum's room, God
was always watching from above the bed, peeling
at the corners, tacked to the left –
side Dad used to sleep on.

Rachel Long

Stairs

He leaves the pine stairs half stripped.
At his stage completion means 'The End'.
The splash of Nitromers burns the skin.

After a few Stellas he sits, unsteady,
half way up. Thoughts prolapse, making sense
of scratched paint before pushing them back.

Onwards and upwards to the top step.
That's where they found her. Odd times,
he sees her beneath the gloss.

Helen Kay

Almost There

A distant voice, so close, telling me.
About what? It rarely matters.
Plans for tea, her dad, scrapes
of two young boys and guinea pigs.

Two happy little pigs in a hutch,
two bigger on the trampoline,
kept high in the air by rubber bands
and their devoted, catching mother.

Seth Crook