



CROSS ANGELS  
POEMS BY ANNE GRAAFF

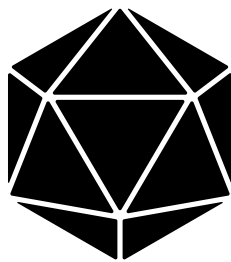
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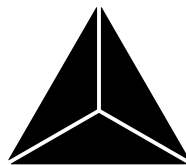


*Cross Angels. Anne Graaff. 2022*



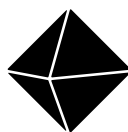
### **On Viewing a Monet Paining**

Tell the two young Manet ladies walking  
through the somnambulant poppy field  
with their sun umbrellas and air of peace and sunshine dalliance,  
there is no knowing what comes after and  
two world wars worked their way over these fields of France.  
The red poppy a symbol now of fallen lives, short lived,  
much blood spilt, and once a year we wear these blood flowers to remember  
Poppy Day, not their joyful day carefree in the field,  
little girls at their sides, hats of straw and tickling-long grasses  
tangled in a brief moment of suspended summertime.  
What came after now haunts us.  
Will others look back at our carefree current ways  
from some track down the fleeting future and be haunted too  
by our innocence of an unknown path?



## **I Wasn't Happy**

I wasn't happy when I heard we had got the house we wanted,  
which sounds like a contradiction,  
but leaving suddenly became an oppressive reality.  
There was going to be a last time,  
to walking up the trodden-wood spiral staircase,  
shaped like a conch shell, a big silent ear in the Paris apartment building,  
on the rue Gabriel, cobbles for carriages (now gone) down the narrow road.  
And an arch at the end where pigeons liked to loiter,  
for crumbs from second-day stale baguette ends.  
The bakery nearby always had a line out the door,  
and for that there would be a last day too.  
Who would now water the window boxes,  
with the purple flowers, name unknown, grown from seeds pocketed in Rome?  
Would they now die?  
The agile designer in the Atelier on the top floor of the building opposite  
daily spent hours draping and pinning fabrics on dress-maker dummies.  
I would not see him from my studio window - while he would still be there  
It was like a death,  
His mesmerising creations coming into being for other's eyes.

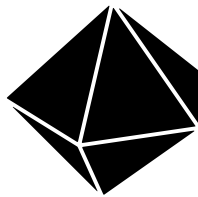


### Little Howe, Cambridge, 1964

I remember *croquet* on the garden lawn at Little Howe, in summer.  
The black bent-metal hoops and colour-banded wooden balls.  
The heavy wood mallet for a small child of nine to hold,  
and how my grandfather's shirt-clad arms folded around my shoulders,  
to help me steady and direct the mallet for a smashing shot.

I remember afternoon tea at four or five, brought in by the housekeeper,  
the silver tray, placed on a low table near the yellow linen loose-covered couch.  
How grandfather, putting down his brown pipe, poured the amber tea  
into fragile, blue china cups, but we, my twin sister and I, could capture  
the white sugar cubes in silver prongs, letting them go joyfully splash and plop.

I remember the plate of eats: - rock cakes like baby fists filled with raisins,  
soft sponge cake with smooth lipstick- pink marzipan icing.  
Then licking the tops off the chocolate digestive biscuits,  
while our grandfather read to us something sophisticated and scientific,  
from the autobiography he was writing, and we felt awfully grown up.



## Over the Water

Walking in the white sand  
We saw leopard paw, large and small  
And thought we were mistaken

Then the night camera caught  
Mother and cub in footage  
Resembling black and white x-ray.

For years nobody had seen leopard  
In these old Groot Winterberg mountains  
Yet these shy creatures surviving.

The elephants, once here too,  
Have not been seen, in a century, except on a map,  
The Oliphant's Rivier carrying the memory.

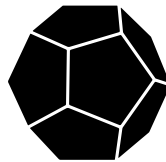
Sometimes I wonder what it was like  
Before European ships sailed in,  
One of those painted on a wall of a cave here.

There is rigging from the late eighteenth century,  
Daubed in red ochre on rock, amazingly accurate.  
Something observed sailing in, elephants sailing out



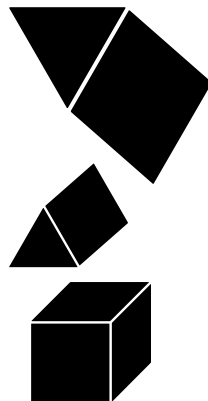
### What was my Grandmother Like?

I never knew her but I have slept in her bed.  
Her old clothes were in the dressing-up box,  
silver leather shoes for elegant feet, and a silk Spanish shawl with tassels, deep red.  
'She liked beautiful things, travel, politics, gardening and being industrious.'  
Her sewing box stood on the hall table, a decorative item, ivory inlaid,  
as Mother hardly liked to sew.  
At the back of a cupboard I found fine lace that I heard she had made.  
Jan Smuts, a friend, famously said she was 'Too clever to be a woman,'  
A compliment back then.  
Mother met her only twice, the last time at the Dorchester in London,  
where she liked to stay.  
She gave her daughter-in-law to be a pearl necklace ,over tea and scones,  
With a blue sapphire clasp, for the wedding day.  
'She was handsome and a bit intimidating, not much chit-chat. wore a smart hat.'  
But pearls do not talk, and Lady Eileen Graaff died six weeks later,  
so neither Mother nor I much knew what Grandmother was like, and that was that.



## The Colours of Water

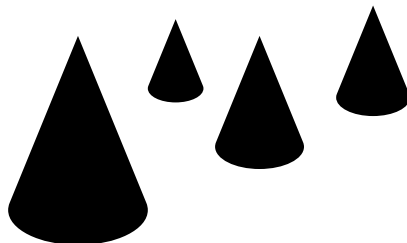
A painted Paris doorway in French blue  
A distant blue mountain range near Montague  
A Leonardo background landscape  
A faded denim fabric  
A tint of turquoise sunglasses  
A wide sky on a hot February day  
Blue for bibs for baby boys  
Lapis lazuli from a Cairo street market  
The midnight glaze on a large flower pot  
There is only attempted analogy  
For the unnamable and mercurial blue  
Of these Wild Coast lapping lagoon waters





## The Langebaan Lagoon

This is a landscape of thorn bushes, silhouetted birds,  
black, perched on scrubby branches, like paper cut-outs.  
Windows open to the sea through dark spreading fingers of denuded branch.  
The sea, so blue, liquid, continuously fluctuating, rippling, shimmering, moving  
Like a thousand fluttering and iridescent butterfly wings.  
These are the blue womb-waters nursing young shoals.  
Occasionally plopping seals swim in, even high-leaping dolphins.  
The young sand sharks are plentiful here.  
And sometimes go on army parade in formation near the water's lapping edge,  
Their strange flat bodies are like underwater UFOs, beady eyes scanning  
Unknown underwater and out-of-water worlds.  
I know they sense me, know of me as I stare at them.  
My slightest move and off they dart, not breaking ranks, to safer shallows.



## Tongue Tied

Did the dusk-dark snake hypnotise me?  
Or me, the dark snake, one unforgettable sunrise?  
It is indeed impossible to say or clearly see,  
Once we two were locked eyes in eyes

Both out for a walk in the damp driveway  
An S-bend of black snake  
Moving away in the soft new sunlit day,  
Backbone longer than the nearby garden rake

Stopped, rising upwards to a head height  
To stare at me, now stone still, teacup in hand  
Looking into its eyes I was first scared by its sight.  
And noticed sideways its insignia trail in the soft white sand.

We held a fixed conversation without a single word  
Entering one another's worlds for a minute or more  
Before it lowered itself and stirred  
Its very long length, maybe two meters I saw

Slithering away in accord with its chosen will  
And I, afraid of snakes, found that I was perfectly calm,  
The moment so quiet, time standing almost still.  
Tea cooling off in my palm.

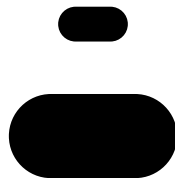
Creature met creature and then one was gone.



### For Beckie

We did not know what to do with  
 The sudden knowledge of your fatal accident so  
 A journey seemed in order, a  
 Journey across the lapping lagoon water  
 In a slow chugging *vaporetto* to  
 An island off the mainland and on to  
 A marvellous Byzantine church, where  
 The awful knowledge could be  
 Respectfully, and even carefully, laid out  
 To the old gods there, Spread across the apse in  
 Shining tesserae, the blue and gold of heaven imagined.

We came to the Basilica seeking consolation  
 Lit a bright candle for you,  
 All the time watching the fierce, flickering flame.  
 Our scant candle was a message to you, a  
 Little wind that might find its way past  
 The wall of death and into your  
 Lingering and musical ear to stir in you the  
 Quiet knowledge that on this side of our divide we  
 Search out your operatic songs, sometimes thinking  
 We hear a snatch on a forest walk, or when we  
 Turn a corner in a Paris street, and  
 Find ourselves unexpectedly facing some  
 Grand and battered old wooden door that  
 Will now not open.



### The Mermaid's Tongue

A dizzy-making sea swell  
On the beach lies a lone nautilus shell

A wild winter Cape storm far out at sea  
On the Kalk Bay promenade gulls swirl over me

A bobbing boat makes for the safe harbour mouth  
Only the land of Antartica lies further South

On the hill is the stone house I once called home  
While little knowing how far I would roam

Such a distance form this familiar shore  
Is a stone house now with a green front door

It is a place of high and lofty trees  
And not of wide horizons and wild blue seas

With the shell to my ear I hear a mermaid song  
Flooded with the deep sea's haunting tongue

My heart's home so far and my heart's home so near  
And the two never together is what I hear.



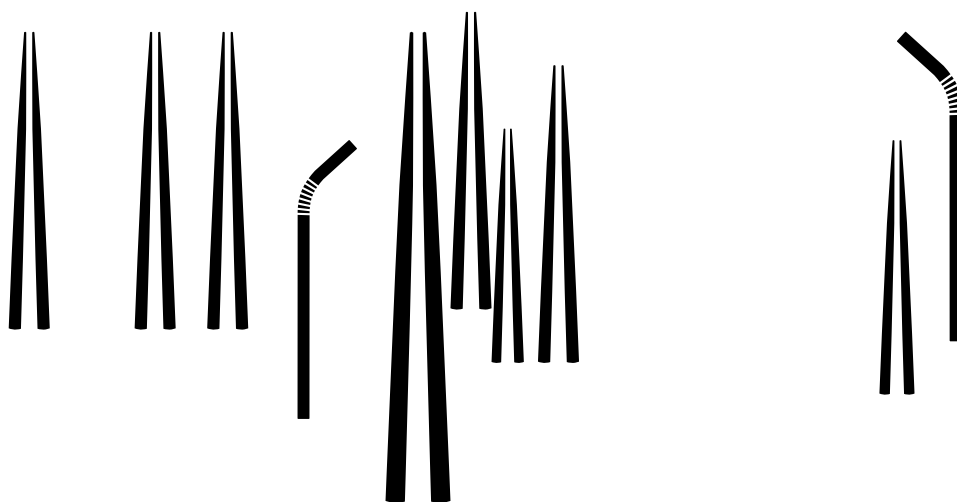
### Walking in Church Haven

Pale sand of the shore  
Saturated turquoise lagoon  
Cloud-misty salt marsh

So many pink flamingoes  
Parading bright plumage  
In the white morning light

One leg up, one leg down  
The balance of ballerinas  
Intaglio necks of calligraphy

A long bird sentence written in the landscape  
With fluid pink upstrokes and downstrokes  
Solely for my brief attention, or so it seems



## Our James Webb Eye on the Universe

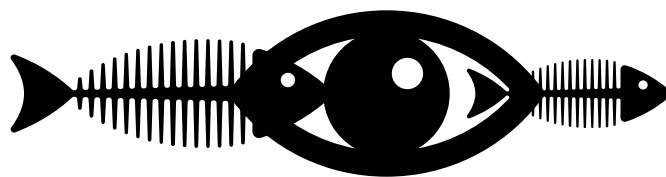
On Christmas Day 2021 in the middle  
 Of a claustrophobic Covid pandemic on our little earth  
 Closing down the local cinemas and bars  
 We launch a panoramic ten year real-time  
 Satellite movie screen of our ancient origins  
 Into precarious and freezing outer space

We send up our new Webb telescope.  
 A sort of spider's web for capturing tricky information  
 With its own giant golden eye, like a honeycomb from a hive  
 For the outer-space red-spectrum bees to collect there  
 And carry the honeyed time of our deep past  
 In short wavelengths from the dawn of the universe itself

Nothing ever gets lost it seems  
 In the vibrational matrix of the vast and expanding universe  
 All we need is to capture and decode the right red wave-lengths  
 Of this transistor radio to find what is always all around us  
 Everything that ever was, is still traceable  
 From the birth-mother of our universe and the cradle of all time.

So time began? How can time have begun?  
 What was the time before time started to tick for us?  
 In what did this beginning of time begin?  
 Our time, the time this golden bee eye might help us see.  
 But behind the veil of that which we might see we do not yet go.  
 For now, more than this we simply cannot know.

Out of what came the big bang?  
 Was it worm-holed through from another dimension?  
 Spat out by a mass and gravity hungry black hole?  
 We warm our hands at the fire in the belly of our universal cauldron. still cave-men  
 Watching Plato's shadows when it comes to grasping the nature of things  
 Beyond the eye-line of our now vastly expanded mechanical sight.



## **My Own Skin**

When once you were as close as my own skin  
Now I look across more than a decade of separation  
The years between dissolve with a hint of our familiar kin

Sitting here at the table opposite in space  
You an old man now, still saying the familiar old thing  
In the same familiar way and even place

While time travels and life moves forward and on  
To somewhere else, and irretrievable to mutual grasp  
For something else has so simply and quietly quite gone



## Harm's Way

Keeping well out of Harm's Way  
 We shop, masks on, seldom and fast  
 Stay safely interned mid March to mid May

We no longer ride our carefree bikes  
 Down the sandy sun-filtered forest paths  
 Between the high chestnut trees where everyone hikes

We need a printed permit to be out and about  
 Only a one-kilometre radius from our home is allowed  
 Best to stick to less than that if in doubt

The fines are punishing, quite depressingly high  
 And police surveillance includes drones  
 'All a bit much', I hear myself sigh

'Will you cut my mop of hair?' you say  
 Us, looking like an Arctic expedition  
 In the plodding snow-bound month-three away

The days seem so much longer now  
 And shorter too, as an unflinching sameness  
 Incipiently warps their shape somehow

The market in the centre of Fontainebleau  
 Is on indefinite and ongoing hold  
 Our usual cupboard stock runs low

With new holes in your old left sock  
 The bustling market stalls for such minutia must wait  
 Till sometime one-day comes a timely corona unlock

Time continues to be on our communal mind  
 How it stretches towards a future calendar date  
 That nobody can yet pencil in or even find





**Stunned**

A thwack against the window glass  
Like a sound blow to the head  
What was that?  
Startled I leap out of bed

Is a bird now alive or dead?  
Opening a window I lean out  
Look this way and that  
To search the ground and scout

I scan the ground in doubt  
Nothing in sight  
Perhaps the bird got away?  
Unharmd, quite possibly alright

Did it simply take fright?  
But over lunch Christopher said  
There is a dead bird on the path  
My legs turned to lead

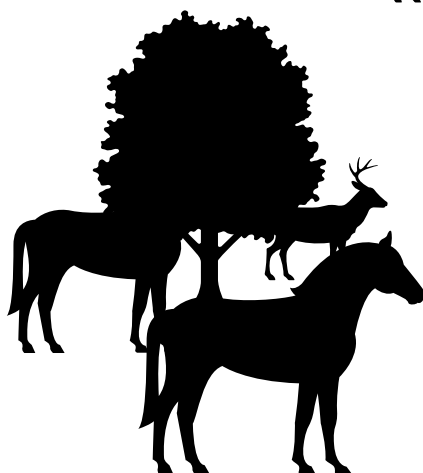
Almost under my tread  
A small heap of feather and fluff  
Bright yellow throat splash  
Dead not bluff

Life is frail stuff  
Cut off by glass mirage  
Of clouds and open sky  
In sealed shut windows at large



## Dark Horses

Finally to sit here in the shadows  
Of this old and lovely place  
Is near perfection  
The thickening foliage of  
Approaching summer overhead  
The bright burning fire at one side  
The beehives up the hill a bit  
But mostly the dark spaces, wedged in  
The gloaming between far tree trunks  
From the vantage of my chair tree-stump  
Seem to carry back to some other time  
Residues are lingering echoes now  
From other obscure years and centuries  
Shapes knitting and unraveling in those  
Deceptively slumbering shadows  
Glimmerings of wild animal forms are  
Shaping and un-shaping moving in and out  
From the adjacent ancient forest  
Some dark horses too  
And people gathering like us  
In past summer evenings  
Of the ceaseless continuum.



**Fingering Space**

Pandemic laces through our long days  
While Christopher on the piano plays

Bach played on piano keys  
Is a deep courtesy with bended knees

Music lovely as sky-blue silk  
Ivories like pale skin and liquid milk

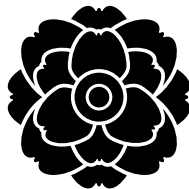
Phrases texture a powdered complexion  
Fingered keyboards in polished reflection

Now the ballroom notes weave in and out  
And loop here and there and roundabout

Ordered and cool and intricately sedate  
Madrigal figures of six, seven and eight

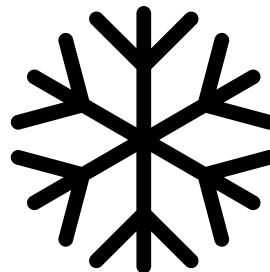
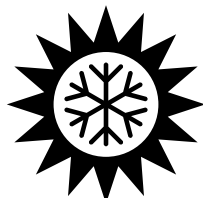
The weeks that come and the weeks that go  
Are at nine and ten, now eleven or so

And still the lockdown keeps us in place  
While Christopher's fingers find long-lost space.



### Meltdown

The five plump grey pigeons flew  
 Up frantically like a warning  
 Exclamation, and  
 Swung over the verdant green  
 Meadow where we walked  
 A curving white sandy  
 Path between  
 Long lazy grasses  
 And summer field flowers.  
 The five splayed in flight like  
 Fingers of a large and raised  
 Hand when  
 Reaching the hurtling river,  
 As if for emphasis,  
 Pigeon-grey water below,  
 Water-grey pigeons above.  
 The noisy water rushing  
 Fast and frantic,  
 Opaque, like opal  
 Rock-face mountain melt,  
 Tossing and swirling along,  
 The white foam like  
 Bird feather tips in flight,  
 Migrating en-mass.  
 All this rush of rain  
 From the uplands.  
 More sinister, too,  
 The slow and sure glacial melt,  
 Hurtling down the long valley  
 And through the old village.  
 High up here in the Alps,  
 Hundreds even thousands  
 Of years washing down and sheer  
 Away before our eyes.  
 Each time we come here  
 These ancient ice glaciers,  
 Nature's highroads  
 Have shrunken back.  
 'Just a few more years', we now say,  
 'The glaciers will be gone  
 And the great rush of the river too  
 Will have migrated like so many birds'.





## Absence

I picture you now  
On top of your mountain  
Gazing at the view  
\*

On your own island  
You spend the warm summer months  
So peaceful and quiet  
\*

You write to us now  
That this year has been so hard,  
That you are lonely  
\*

Who gets post these days?  
So when a letter arrives  
I put hand to heart  
\*

Hearing your voice talk  
I imagine you right here  
Half a world away  
\*

In my dreams of you  
When time and space coexist  
You are unsmiling



## Ephemera (The memorable summer of 2020)

Finding the hornets  
Sucking the ripe garden figs  
I swipe in fury

\*



In the dawn courtyard  
Dew on the Butterfly Tree  
Then the sun pounces

\*



The long shining canal  
On yesterdays cycle ride  
Goes by in a minute

\*



We hear the good news  
You two are getting married  
Sad we cannot come

\*



The gate bell tinkles  
A man with a large brown box  
What can be inside?

\*



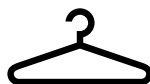
In the night mirror  
Quick, the pot of Argan cream!  
A face looks older

\*



The washing so crumpled  
Taking the hot iron in hand  
Like a rolling pin

\*



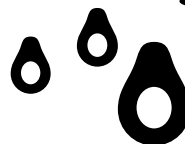
In the back garden  
When you grab the high branches  
The quince fruit hit ground

\*



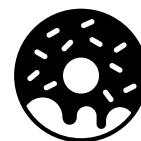
Dicing the fig crop  
Their red mouths are wide open  
On the chopping board

\*

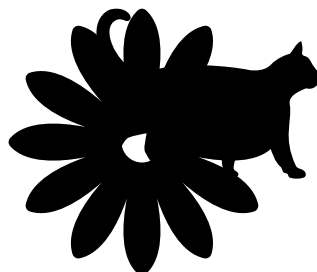


Heard near, but not seen,  
From across the high stone wall  
The morning birds tease

\*



A black and white cat  
Fierce as a forest tiger  
Stalks through the daisies



\*

The pink clouds roll in  
 Bringing cherubs in the sky  
 Like an old painting



\*

The song is far off  
 It sounds nostalgic as tears  
 Through the large window



\*

The man in a suit  
 Bright butterfly on grey sleeve  
 Is not seen by him



\*

Gliding white and quiet  
 Five swans on the river  
 As if in a dream

\*

Light through the shutters  
 Finds floating dust in the air  
 I see worlds within



\*

The aroma drifts  
 The mouth waters for a taste  
 Is it pie baking?



\*

Your shirt crumpled up  
 Wings flopping down motionless  
 Like a grey dead bird

\*

The heat today wilts us  
 Needing a long and cool drink  
 We are like our plants

\*

Chrysanthemum pot  
 Pink flowers blush like your cheeks  
 When that tale is told.

\*

Your feet on the stairs  
 Going down and not upwards  
 End in the dark

\*

Time is when time was  
 Ahead in a foreign land  
 That I now call home

\*

Close the window tight  
 The heat now is climate



change

Summer not over

\*

In your dressing gown  
You like to read till midnight  
On the velvet couch

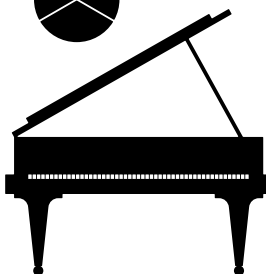


\*

Turning ninety one  
A long life found in her face  
My mother is here

\*

Parcel in a pram  
Good for child and post-office  
This chariot on strong wheels



\*

A door is ajar  
A piano is playing  
Something fast then slow

\*

When the wall goes up  
Who will it keep in and out  
When birds fly over?



\*

Turn a sharp corner  
And see the chateau roofs ahead  
Like tall hats on heads



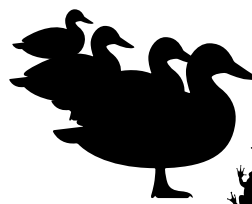
\*

At the market stall  
She bought two old tablecloths  
Lost time embroidered



\*

Four ducks on her cloth  
Swim in a stitched lily pond  
Where home meets a shore



\*

The frogs now sing  
In a small puddle of mud  
Till the next rains come



\*

Summer nearly gone  
The ripe apples are dropping  
Watch out for your head



\*

Time marches onwards  
Those seeds planted five years ago,  
Now trees tall as me

\*

What a lot of noise!





A party at the river  
The laughter is bright  
\*



Open the door quick  
Who is in the front courtyard?  
Bold cat from next door  
\*



From my jean pocket  
I extract a coin from Greece  
Eight years hidden there!  
\*

With elections near  
You watch the news avidly  
Much hinges on you  
\*

This is a strange world  
Where words matter so little  
That truth is falsehood  
\*



Why trouble the stars  
When it is enough to look  
At the dead leaf runes?  
\*

'It will get colder'  
Trump says with callous untruth  
About this warming world  
\*



Who talks back to him?  
All mouths are shamefully shut.  
Fierce fire rages on  
\*



Science is out for now.  
Politics is in favour  
Taking winning sides  
\*



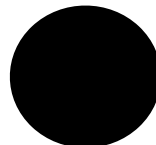
I recall a day  
Walking in Monet's garden  
Beneath a willow  
\*



Walking near water  
The willow sweeps down low  
Trailing her fingers  
\*



The source of the spring  
Is round as a penny  
The English garden  
\*





The pink rose is out  
 One last summer flowering  
 Then her petals drop  
 \*



An armful of figs  
 Back to the kitchen I go  
 Next time a basket.  
 \*

All the talk swirling  
 What do I understand now?  
 That you look tired  
 \*

All those flags flying  
 As if lives depend on them  
 Striped in red and blue  
 \*

News of your illness  
 So glad you are both alive  
 Through the Covid gate!  
 \*



Birds in the fig tree  
 Chatter like a hen party  
 What a lot to eat!  
 \*



Where does the past go?  
 Some vast old well of water  
 Where buckets go down  
 \*

Glad that the rains came  
 In time for the tomatoes  
 Now we feed on them  
 \*



We watch the fires burn  
 Walls of hot, high flames rage across  
 Another border  
 \*



Our garden is green  
 A small oasis of calm  
 From which we look  
 \*



out

Fires and hurricanes  
 American vanity  
 Drives on climate change  
 \*



A man in a mask  
 Still the pandemic rages  
 We all wait it out

\*

The village *Marie*  
 A fountain splashes cool water  
 Such a dry hot day

\*

Lets move to the shade  
 Marie Ellen in the street  
 Talks like a long book

\*

So slow the time goes  
 We do long to see our friends  
 Home is our castle

\*



The sound of a knife  
 You are slicing the pumpkin  
 From our veggie patch

\*

When we look outside  
 There are fewer birds, by half,  
 Than our fathers saw.

\*

The ants are a plague  
 Nature is out of balance  
 We put poison down

\*



Ants kill the fruit tree  
 No lovely fruit crop now.  
 Only the brown leaves

\*

In a somber mood  
 Think about the end of earth  
 All her beauty gone

\*

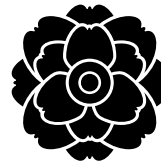
These times are troubling  
 Pandemic and climate change  
 Tumbling together.

\*



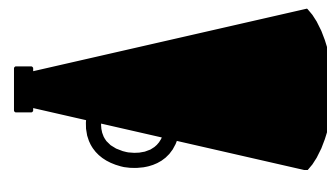
I pick a flower  
 Bright red dahlia for the vase  
 Her blood not yet spilt

\*



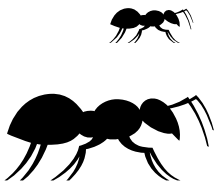
We bleed the world dry  
 Our greed knows no boundaries  
 Stop the meat slaughter.

\*

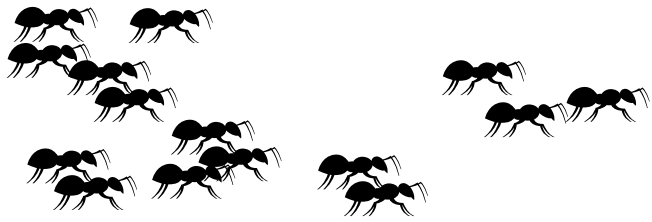


Seventy percent of insects  
 Have disappeared now for good





From our home planet  
\*  
I dislike these facts  
Hardly understand at all  
The coming crisis  
\*



A baby arrives  
We gaze at her new  
Filled with awe  
\*



presence  
and love



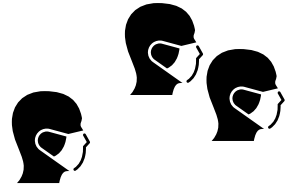
Cecily and Nick  
Send on family photos  
The baby so new  
\*



I divide the bulbs  
Plant them out and watch  
Ointment for the soul.  
\*



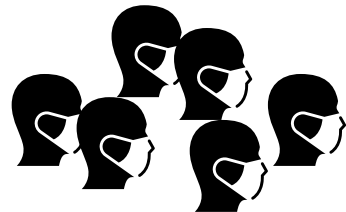
them grow



Who is to heal us,  
Look after our troubled  
If not you and me?  
\*



planet,



An abandoned mask  
Do not pick it up, you say  
This new street litter.  
\*



We may live through this.  
Who knows about our poor  
Pandemic will pass.  
\*



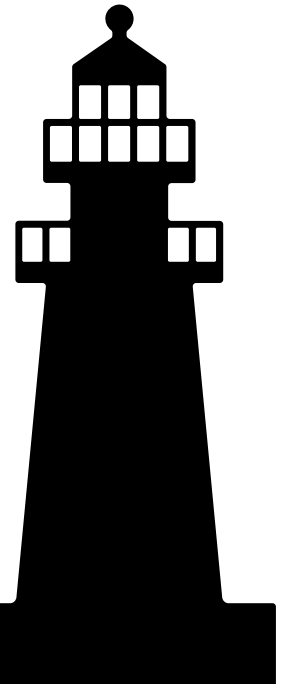
earth?



You call up to me  
'Dinner is ready, come down!'  
Aroma of sage  
\*



The buckets are out  
The rain is coming today  
Catch every drop  
\*



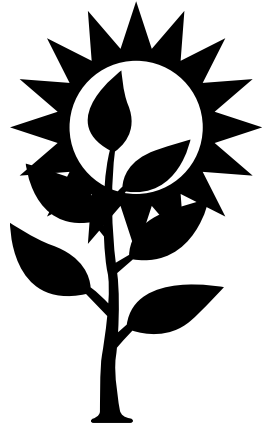
What a loud  
The cat is under  
Trying to keep dry  
\*



downpour  
the fig tree

Staying at home now  
Is the new normal for us  
This contagious world





### **Our Summer Near Nonantole**

“The future is here”,  
Says Christopher.  
In the midday heat of summer,  
Breathless,  
The fields sizzling.  
The insects in the long grass  
Silenced.  
The cats indoors  
In the darkened rooms.  
Shutters closed  
Against the fierce onslaught  
Of rising temperatures.  
“Last week it was wind and hail  
The size of golf balls,  
The garden furniture, lifted and  
Smashed down, broken,  
At a distance in the field,”  
Says Achille.  
Near Nonantole, I now think,  
“More is broken than the garden furniture”.



### Corona Tennis

Botany and biology play lawn tennis.

'It is spring and the season for the mating of flowers', says Botany.

'It is spring and a season of coronavirus spread', says Biology,  
Lobbying back the ball.

'A perfect spring', says Botany.

'A perfect storm', says Biology,

Taking the service,

At Love, Fifteen.

'After a long winter the world wakes up', says Botany.

'After last winter the world is now closed down', says Biology,

At Love, Thirty. 'In the summer I am in my perfect element',

says Botany. 'I intend to take the summer too', says Biology,

Slamming an overarching volleyed ball near the deathly net

And with that taking the Game.



## Zermatt

We are up high  
Above the heat wave  
This week.  
Our friend in Paris says  
The asphalt pavements are soft  
My mother coming from Italy says,  
“Never again, sightseeing in the summer.  
People like plants wilt  
In Pompeii,  
Already destroyed  
Centuries ago  
By volcanic heat”.

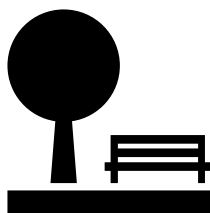
Our own century has other  
Volcanoes.  
Some of our own making,  
As we stir the fires  
In the caldron of climate.

But up high in the Swiss Alps,  
“We are in a bubble”,  
So the Dutch man at the new coffee  
Shop tells us.  
A beautiful bubble with meadow flowers,  
And cows with sonorous bells,  
We hear the government now pays farmers,  
To have cows for the tourists,  
To keep the show going.



### **She says the Highway Now Cuts Through**

“My father-in-law’s land, once extensive,  
The countryside, now messy, urban sprawl.  
Too many people in the world! It is now so ugly!  
In the old days, when we visited, there  
Was a vineyard and many  
Trees, and such a big amount of quiet, but now  
One hears the traffic pass by, and the peace  
Has gone, and we were glad  
To leave (although it was nice to see the aunts).  
His father made a large pork pot-roast, but  
We all ate too much,  
(More meat than I have in months!}  
That is how they live down there,  
Always have, in that part of the world, although  
The new noises are now  
Truck and car, not pig and cow.  
My father-in-law still keeps his clutch of  
Brooding hens,  
Out back beneath the last tree  
And pretends.”





## At The Farm Dam

Just the low long sun  
Just the light now almost done  
Just the far-flung stars to come

Just the soft wind on the face  
Just the plant shadows like dark lace  
Just a brief call, bird without trace

Just a sky-blue upturned boat  
Just the black heron's throaty note  
Just the frog's motley brown coat

Just a cold dip of the big toe  
Just the rippling dam water now so low  
Just the darkness gathering so slow

Just the very first star  
Just the fading sound of a distant car  
Just the mountains so blue-black and so far

Just the time going slowly past  
Just the noisy car moving fast  
Just the cool and sweet silence at last

Just the thought of your soft hand  
Just tracing patterns in the white bank sand  
Just between water's lapping edge and land

Just the breeze rustling through the long grass  
Just your tangible absence that will not pass  
Just a skinny moon, like a bangle of brass

Just the words unsaid by the tongue  
Just the owl call left unsung  
Just the glass wind-chime never rung

Just the water's elusive diamond shimmer  
Just the quiet night becoming even dimmer  
Just a pale memory of a splashing swimmer





### The Body of Art

Life drawing classes at the  
 Musee des Arts Decoratif  
 Are proving instructive  
 About the eye onto art.  
 For a start  
 Each week a model unveils  
 A new aspect of French patrimony,  
 Type-perfect and professional,  
 Schooled in the art of art.  
 Yesterday the model was a Degas dancer type,  
 Flimsy cord around her firm waist,  
 Articulating movement in space.  
 The week before it was a male Rhodin Balzac-type,  
 Heavy and powerful and lunging.  
 And before that Renoir stood between  
 The plump and rosy model and my page,  
 The figure, full and fruit-ripe.  
 There has been Seurat standing there too,  
 The figure, thin and straight and proper,  
 As if dressed in the nude.  
 And one day I could swear that Matisse arrived,  
 In the voluptuous curve of an arm and cup of a belly.  
 I liked it, too, when a nubile young girl stepped clean in  
 through an invisible window,  
 out of a Balthus painting.

### **On the Bridge at the Ile Saint Louis**

The burnt-out spires and roofs of Notre Dame now  
Has builder's mesh like skin plasters, beginning the repair.

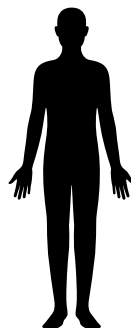
"What a beautiful day!" you say, as we pause on the bridge.  
Then we see the frogman looking in the river Seine.

"Presumably for a body down there?"  
And you feel guilty for saying it, about the day.

Gesticulating at Notre Dame, you say  
"What is this big fuss about loss, when we will get it back?"

And "We will not get back the melting icebergs in Antartica",  
Huge towers crashing into the ocean of climate change.

Makes one think, does it not,  
We look for our bodies in the wrong waters.



**Beginnings** (For Christopher)

Here in this house,  
in a summer afternoon,  
feet up on the couch,  
a large yellow dahlia peeping through the window,  
observing me,  
as I observe,  
I think,  
Here in the soft afternoon sun,  
I hear  
through the closed door,  
quite softly,  
I hear a small beginning.  
Found phrases of piano notes.  
Quite solemn,  
I think.  
And beautiful in their slow sojourning  
across the keyboard.  
Like shadows growing longer,  
I think.  
There are stops and starts,  
and then a gradual rush of fluidity.  
A little stream is slowly finding a new pathway  
down a darkening summer valley,  
Hearing me,  
as I hear it,  
I think.





## The Move

We moved here almost a year ago.  
 We and the other creatures,  
 who are living here,  
 are all forgetful of our boundaries.

This house  
 is almost a tree  
 Almost a beehive  
 Almost a spider web  
 Almost a house  
 Almost a garden  
 Almost a nest  
 Almost ours  
 And almost theirs

It all gets muddled up  
 In indecisive back and forth  
 Here and there  
 In and out

The barriers are somehow down

Lush creepers spill over sills,  
 hide the house from the garden.  
 The garden from the house.  
 Startled bees get lost in the attic  
 Birds fly in through open doors  
 (Or into closed ones, as if not seen)

Spiders are especially busy  
 at breaking down the definitions  
 and building fast new ones.

No matter how hard I try to clear them out,  
 and stand my ground,  
 insisting on some separation,

Back they come, promptly,  
 energetically  
 Come weaving busily, surreptitious alphabets,  
 bossy new words,  
 elegantly articulated phrases,  
 of fine spit and silk



### Throwing Open the Windows

Waking up to your lovely words this morning  
I am full of unsuppressed smiles,  
Paris sunshine in the windows.

'I will have to speak in a forgotten language'  
To tell you how beautiful is the sparkling daybreak,  
You in mind.

How to hear the birds sing?  
I will fling open the long French windows so  
Communication can better travel between us.

A jogger on the Pont de la Tournelle  
Turns a corner at the shore of the river Seine.  
You can never cross the ocean until you lose sight of rivers.

A man takes a picture of the fast-moving river.  
A long and slow barge chugs under the bridge.  
Our stone Saint Genevieve guards the city, sprinkling her blessings.

Yesterday's you and me are all frozen snapshots.  
"You are always you and that doesn't change."  
There is nothing we can do about time but surrender to the river.

Christopher is at the piano playing water notes now.  
The paths of birds and musical notation merge...  
No end in itself, like love.

We are always changing with the song.  
Nothing to do about it except this morning  
I want to tell you the impossible.



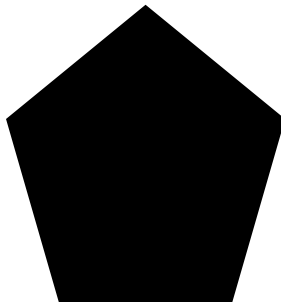
### Counting Sheep (for Richard)

High in the Swiss mountains at Riffelalp, where our great-grandparents met  
 One midsummer about a hundred years ago, there are shoals of tiny blue  
 Butterflies interweaving like shimmering translucent fish shoals in air  
 As if they have something to share.  
 Still, my eyes wander, looking for woolly Alpine sheep.

You have written from hospital in Dumfries,  
 A view from your room onto a meadow.  
 Sheep graze as you gaze, cancer calling you in, surprised  
 To still be alive and feeling quite well.  
 None of us know how many days or weeks  
 Of counting sheep in a field outside your window.  
 I want to take you further afield, back to other beginnings,  
 Other endings we share.  
 Sheep on the Alpine slopes up high near Riffelalp  
 Is Morse code for family, connection, and returning to source.

But Alpine sheep are not to be seen until later in the day  
 Near the valley floor,  
 When we descend the steep hill to the village near Winkelmaten,  
 A route also taken by our great-grandparents.  
 Almost down, we pass a meadow with an old dark barn, also there  
 For them, and some sheep, white and bright,  
 Sheltering on the shade side from the fierce afternoon light.  
 I halt to take a picture for you, and then inexplicably stop without clicking,  
 Putting the camera away with more care than usual.  
 Arriving home, news that you are gone offshore from us.

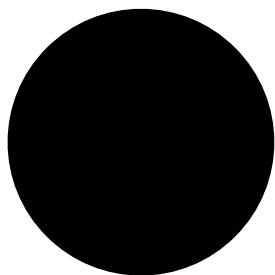
So, I suppose one knows these things in butterfly wings  
 Somewhere between a finger that does linger  
 And a stopped-short camera button, picturing nought.



**Paris Pavement Cafe**

A man hand on thigh  
Leans on the full moon  
Table with coffee and spoon

A woman leans too.  
From left and from right  
A mid-air kiss in full sight.





**Vase** (for Henry)

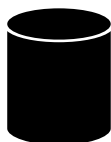
In the hushed hallway,  
Light still pale  
As lemon,  
News of a distant death.  
A close friend, gone.

In the morning hallway  
Light still pale  
As dawn  
News of a death  
Drops our guard.

Five fresh petals,  
Frail flesh,  
On the foot worn  
harlequin tiles,

The last white rose  
Of our summer garden,  
In the sky-blue Chinese vase,  
Has shed tears,  
Fallen.

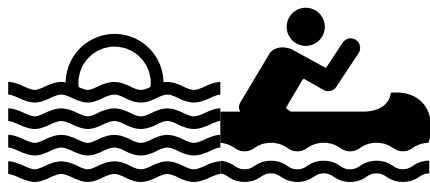
In the lemon-light hallway  
A sky-blue Chinese vase  
Stands sentient  
As a clock.



### There are Oars in our Hearts (For Sam)

There are oars in our hearts  
 Dear ones all dear  
 As we set out in our boats  
 To find the elusive One (always present  
 To our grasp, in boat and out,  
 When one knows where to look about)  
 To set out, to find Venus  
 Beatrice, Sophia, Isis the Ancient One  
 From the Black Lands, Alchymica  
 From the Beginnings of Time  
 She who untiringly holds the mirror up on  
 Immateriality, the lovely ungraspable  
 Spirit things that are our coast,  
 That matter most,  
 Draw us on through mists and storms  
 And centuries of dawns  
 Then and now into lovely sunlit shaft of light  
 Bind us she does and holds frail boats upright  
 Ploughing  
 In the waters of our troubled world  
 Guiding as mastheads, maidenheads and muses do

Across waters  
 Always crossing waters with dipping oars  
 In a heart boat beat  
 Beating heart of love  
 Of feminine felt fine-tuned wisdom  
 Beating on  
 For us  
 All  
 Beating  
 Beating  
 Oar.



**Flotsam** (for David)

End of summer end of days

Alone,  
I would render it in paint  
of travelling suns,  
crystal chandeliers shimmer,  
in swirling thought

End of summer, end of days

We are walking  
through the park  
The green intensely dark  
'My mother tried to kill my father'  
He turns to me  
'Did I ever tell you?'  
He pauses  
'After that it was never the same again'

End of summer, end of days

Walking in a green and shaded haze  
'She used the kitchen knife'  
The green of paltry human sight  
What might a dog hear, or a butterfly see?  
But that too is marvellous  
and marks the hour  
alive-like  
'I was there and saved his life'  
A white moon appears  
A tilting boat afloat  
'Did I ever tell you?'  
He paces awhile in shady air  
'Tell you? Saved his life'

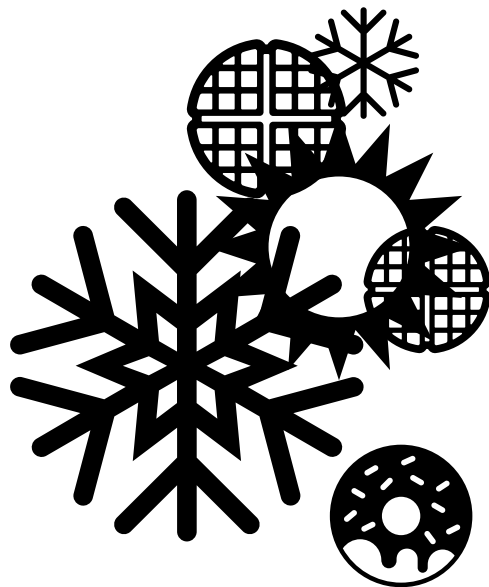
End of summer, end of days

No silent wings overhead,  
spell-binding  
Green as seen  
Seen as green  
To be alive!  
Shimmering  
I would render it in paint  
glimmer, alive-like  
The day partly overcast,  
White boat rising  
end of summer day.  
End of summer, end of days



## Party Time

The three children in our lane are playing at having a Party  
It is the 14<sup>th</sup> of July in the French village  
In Paris there are fantastic fireworks lighting up the Eiffel Tower  
Here the three children are throwing patriotic glitter – red, blue and silver,  
In imitation of the fancy stars and flowers and mandalas in the skies above Paris  
Glitter settles on the pavement and gets trodden around the neighbourhood  
I find silver and red glitter-flecks on my face and, traces of blue behind ears  
and up nostrils,  
Three days later, little diamond-sparkles, between the sheets  
What a fireworks party!



### **The World is a Broken Place**

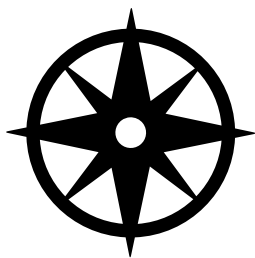
“The world is a broken place,” she said,  
Sipping her black Ceylon tea, in the blemished mirror,  
her face  
Turned to me  
In a plush Paris café, on a blustering Autumnal day  
An expression of softness,  
falling from her now  
like shadows  
fading fast  
into the annihilating night at last

“But we are the past”  
The words are now terse, her mouth, tensely pursed  
Words sounding rehearsed  
“That is what I explain to the young I teach: -  
our generation has made it one way

It is up to you ...  
To reach ”  
Her eyes are following an elusive future, focused  
Beyond the dirt stain from dust and rain  
On the fudged-up café window pane  
“...to do  
Something now expressly new “

She pours more tea from her white porcelain pot,  
Tea, no longer hot.





*Cross Angels. Anne Graaff. 2022 (This series of artworks explores the idea that the angels might be a bit fed-up with mankind)*

