

INTRODUCTION

Poetry is absolutely ideal. Byron, Pushkin, Rudyard Kipling: these guys are superb, in my opinion. Keats. These clear-headed maniacs. These profound beasts; spunking their imagery onto paper for our pleasure. Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson. I love having such books on my shelves and I waft my arms at them triumphantly as I plod about my flat in my gown. Occasionally I will remove one of these books – by Dylan Thomas perhaps, or possibly Auden – and I’ll just sit there, thumbing it. Occasionally I will allow it to fall open and I’ll gaze wistfully at the form. When witnessed at first hand, smeared on the page like that, poetry is sublime. There is something about the look of it that is almost painfully satisfying. There is so much space there. So much white. Each poem is like an island. We are invited to explore it if we wish, but we can, if we prefer, simply relax in the space around it. If I had it my way, all books would contain poetry. I hate the feeling of opening a book and being faced with a novel, say. Disgusting, confusing swathes of dense text, charting the inconsequential lives of made-up guys. You have no idea how disappointed I am when I infiltrate a book and I find that, instead of verse, it is stories, or recipes, or porn, or lists of businesses’ phone numbers, or things to colour in. I once opened a book and found it to be full of diagrams and instructions. I hated that. I threw it across the room with great force and my lover had to duck.

2 So imagine my delight when I was approached by a man in his thirties. Well spoken and smartly dressed, he sat me down, bought me a plateful of oil-drenched English breakfast food and proposed that he publish a collection of my poems. I honestly couldn't believe it. I told him I thought he was teasing me and he assured me that, no, he was not. He had been exposed to my poetry and wanted it to find a wider audience. I still didn't believe him and ultimately a waitress had to come over and placate me because I was waving a tomato in the guy's face and shouting at him and loudly referring to the situation as 'a fucking wind-up!' I ordered another black coffee and allowed the man to speak. His suggestion was that we dip into my wealth of poems, drag some out and stuff them in a book. I nodded, mopped up some grease with some bread and did him the courtesy of listening to his proposal in full. You may not know, but in meetings such as these it is the responsibility of the man in his thirties to foot the bill so I ordered another black coffee as he set out his ideas for the collection. Once or twice I referred to it as an anthology and each time he would quietly correct me and say that it was a collection. I asked him what the difference was and he said that an anthology is what the great poets like Rupert Brooke and Rabbin Burns and Wordsworth would have. This is much more of a collection. I just thought, 'who cares?' A book's a book. We left on good terms. I shook his hand, and ordered one more full English; he settled up and drifted off into the morning. And then I sat back down at my plastic table and started sifting through my poems.

The collection comprises some three hundred of my first twelve hundred poems. They have been handpicked and splashed onto pages by a paid designer. They range in size, length and theme, and, by and large, don't rhyme. This is because I have no mind for rhyming. Indeed, the fact that I have overcome that and become a poet at all is a triumph in itself. In this regard I liken myself to Beethoven or the drummer from Def Leppard – both of whom have become legends in their artistic fields in spite of effectively having one hand tied behind their backs. And so, now, have I. I am proud to have had my poems published. Damn proud that, finally, my poems have become islands on white oceans. Footprints in the snow. You can do with the spaces entirely as you will. You can feel free to scribble, doodle, scrawl obscenities in the margins. Kiss these white spaces; place your snail on them; allow her to crawl about the poems. For what it is worth, I will not be doing those things. I will be given a copy of my book by the man in his thirties. I will sign it and then I will lid my pen and place it back into its mug. I will treat the book with awed respect. I will keep the space around the poems pristine. I will dance through the book. Float through it. Eating biscuits. Enjoying the poems. Wondering what it's all about.





Chris darned his condom in front
of his electric fire.
Then he slung it in the tin,
Popped it closed
And set off for Clara's.

'While you're down there . . .'

Mike Bates said to Candy.

He'd vaguely thought people would laugh at this.

Unfortunately, the reason Candy was crouching
near his groin was precisely to pick up a glass
which Mike had broken.

And also she was his daughter-in-law.

So it didn't get a laugh at all.

Maria sat sobbing in her cell at the
all-women's prison.
Why had she stabbed the old man from her
drama club in Leicester?
And why wouldn't the prison governess let
her put on *Shakers* by John Godber?

The Queen took a normal job so the public would
hate her less.

She became a lollipop lady.

Some hoodlums soon found out about this.

They started goading her; calling her posh and
firing ducklings at her through a homemade
bazooka made out of catering-size cans of beans
fastened together with gaffer tape.

It started to get to Her Majesty.

She would get home, throw her lollipop stick onto
the couch and be a right cow to the D. of E.

He'd say things like, 'If you don't tell me what's
wrong I can't help.'

She'd just fart and eat her crisps and carry on
watching *The Apprentice*.

A website was developed.
Homeless guys and people who had mansions
they weren't using were hooked up.
Suddenly tramps were living in luxury.
They were exultant!
Some of them had staff!

