

**Picaroon
poetry**



Issue #16

Picaroon Poetry

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Edited by Kate Garrett

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Dave Stacey

Adverbs

These adverbs that seem to be
back in vogue, & I genuinely believe

this to be the case, they literally
don't even have to be

even remotely accurate
which is ironically annoying

and annoyingly ironic. But,
that said, an adverb-less world

is depressingly sparse, despite
those we now have back in the fold,

like the proverbial prodigal child,
being so maddeningly unreliable

and pissed up most of the time

still we love you & we've missed
you & welcome home!

John Short

Survival

His grandmother made us drink
before work began.
Sour wine and cough mixture
by the taste of things:
a poisonous warmth expanding
like nails in flesh.
It was seven o'clock
and cold fields had not woken
from their early dew.
The cat's called Socrates, she said,
because he ate the hemlock
in the garden, over there
past our broken tractor,
down by the chicken guillotine.

Hello

Granny Ball died before I was born. She was my father's great-grandmother and she made it till she was a hundred and six. Her daughter managed a similar span. We met the week before her ninety-fifth birthday. Granny Ball never had a birthday party. She never had time. She ran the farm until she was seventy and then she gave the big bedroom to her daughter and took up residence in the furnished cellar — where it was cool, and easier to clean. The day she died, she scalded the raw quills from the skin of a chicken and sliced the liver into gravy-ready strips, but I never heard that story until later. Her daughter raised a parcel of children up in that house (where the kitchen drawers slid open, at night) and turned a steady profit from renting out the surface of her land for cattle and the depths to miners for the mineral rights. There were occasional earthquakes but, she claimed, they weren't because of coal. Oh no. You see, our land was the site of a Civil War battle. The soldiers were ghosts, still looking for knives. Granny Ball would not have approved of the waste of a party. Her daughter told me that, one night, when we were in bed. I had just turned seven. Her birthday was the day after mine. My grandparents slept in the room her sons shared, growing up. My great aunt slept in her girlhood bedroom (there was a picture of Fred Astaire, still clinging to the wall, suspended by a rust-red thumbtack) and I was fairly comfortable on top of her white, bobbed bedspread. No one ever slept in Granny's room. They all still talked about her in the present tense.

'Granny likes pepper gravy for breakfast with those lard biscuits.', 'Granny won't like what you've done to your hair.' The morning of the party, Granny's daughter swung a chicken round by the neck. She swung it, hard, above her head. I watched her do it. The chicken was alive. It ate yellow corn, table scraps. It gouged at Granny's Daughter's ankle with its undeveloped spurs. And then it was dead. The party was held in the big barn. They'd slicked it up nice, laid out trestle tables, hung streamers from the rafters, and rented industrial fans to keep the June-heat out. I overdosed on sheet cake, bug juice, and ambrosia salad. Then, I accidentally walked in on an old woman with her skirt down and her beige girdle showing, because I forgot to knock for the John. She cackled at my shock and sent me running back for the house. Of course, they'd locked up. Good country people tend to be careful. But the basement door was open and Granny Ball had a toilet all her own down there. The bed was made (as always) and the ceiling fan was spinning the air cool as you'd like it. The toilet smelled a little bit like groundwater, but that went when I flushed. This was the first time I'd gone there alone and it was the first time I understood that Granny Ball was good and dead. You see, the room felt empty, in a way that it never had before, when Granny's Daughter (or her son) spoke life into the air. That frightened me more than that old lady's underwear. The thought that people die, really die, when their family stops talking. I felt that terrible suck in my guts, the same one I got in church on Good Friday. I didn't want my Granny

to be dead anymore. I didn't want
her daughter to die, or her son — my grandfather.
So I started talking. I talked my throat
raw, and then I whispered, building her
imagined shape into the cool June air.

Steve Xerri

A Million and One Tales

for Alison

1 in 1,000,000

In other worlds, where we're supposed to be tracing different paths through all the possibilities, you're a solid body still reflected in shop windows, chromium bath taps, the bowls of incidental spoons. Somewhere, your illness is failing to reach a tipping point ; elsewhere, the tumour never gets its start.

Here, you end up in a goldframed photo on my desk, your quizzical expression fixed. You have left me, as you loved to, with a question : does it cut less deep or deeper to think of you continuing on every earth but mine, so many variant glints across the multiverse but a touch of darkness here?

1,000,000 to 1

I see you reading a detective novel, a cup of tea going cold on the arm of the chair. All of this pin-sharp, right down to the pattern on the china, the freesias behind you on the shelf drooping in their soapstone vase.

Answering the doorbell you find it's me on the step holding a bottle, having cycled over unannounced in the hope of finding you home. You improvise supper, listen to the tale of my heart's latest battering, draw the sting with a gentle mock. I doze off on this version of your sofa

with its layered throws, soon
to yawn awake and see you lay aside
your book, ready to carry on
from where talk stopped.

Calamities Protocol

Ensure that the person is safe:
away from open fire or large
bodies of water and not
plugged in to any machines or
reading Kafka at the time.

Get help immediately:
Call for help in a loud, clear
voice, several times, in a crescendo,
your tone rising, becoming more
shrill. If you find no sound will
come out and your throat is not
obstructed by any foreign objects,
then you must consider the possibility
that you are stuck in a dream.

Keep talking to the person:
Do not let them slip into the black
but tether them to the present through
songs or stories, ask them if they
remember the name of the prime
minister and the taste of strawberry
jam. Check if they can pronounce
“scone” correctly.

When help comes, step aside:
Do not get involved or come with
alternative care suggestions. Let the
experts do their job. Do not attempt
to do your own job at the same time.

This is important. Do not attempt to
do science while others are in a state
of calamity. Take off your coat and
take their hand and tell unscientific
lies about how everything will be
all right.

Jules Elleo

The Economy of Means

My heart informs me
that I have 2 beats
left to go.
One, I will save
till the day we meet again;
the other,
I will need
to crawl up to the switch
& turn off the light
on yet another loss.

Tim Taylor

Colours

She is talking in purple
the words burst around me
in blossoms of sparks
and the sound tastes of sherbet
the popping of bubbles
makes waves in the
puddle of sludge
at the heart of me.
I try to speak rainbows
but as always
I answer in grey.

Welcome

hello and welcome to your life post major surgery
your new hobbies include:

watching television and not moving for hours

- measuring the fluid coming out of your drain
- asking other people to do simple things for you like make you a drink or put your socks on
- ignoring your friends' messages
- forgetting the future exists
- hiding pregnancy adverts in your social media feeds and marking them as not relevant
- thinking about all the things that are no longer relevant to you

meeah williams

Try Again

Your heart like a frozen gray lump
of something found at the back
of the freezer god only knows
for how long now
that you're afraid to thaw.

Fog of war.

Smog of bickering.

Feeling it as inappropriate
to say "Happy Birthday!"
as it would be to say
"Happy Holocaust Day!"

Every time you look in the mirror
the feeling that someone
is looking over your shoulder saying,
no, that's not you,
try again.

Taking their advice.

Elijah Welter

It's Too Late For a Beat Poem

Black wire trick traps trolley through
gardens of the spring, shouting Kafka at the pedestrians,
walking flowers wilting along the pavement.

The metal-bellied stoplight tips its hat,
I see you, hello.

We move across concrete
derelict and licked by wind,
wet and drunk on weather.

I wait for you, and for the bill.

Ink

They are stuck together
like spunk on velvet
like punk on pale skin
like the sweat-stain's hold
on his favourite T
and the moment close to 3 a.m.
when his rictus grin
reaches for the sky
he has known her since
before she could fly
before the two of them
were drunk, inclined, together
their golden souls on lead-lined boots
neon prayers flashing by
"never tell me your name"
he said, outside the tattoo parlour
"never ask me"
she said, jumping into his arms
"if we ever get to sleep tonight
will you hold me till the morning?"
her fingers pressed against his skin
she breathes in his blow-back smoke.

Paul Vaughan

The repetition of parrots

How's the parrot?

My daughter's voice was distant
calling from the opposite side
of the world
and her sparkling blue bird
eyed me from his perch.

Oh he's doing fine.

Are you settling in?

How's Dave?

She muttered inconsequences
and put down the 'phone.
I eyed the parrot
who spoke for the eighth time this week
in a Yorkshire drawl
the same words again
Jeanette, you fat bitch.
Dave, you bastard.

Brittany Atkinson

Us, a Pitless Peach

Our conversations:
teeth grinding in
a blender, a callus

peeled back, a blister
needing cleaned.
We showered

together
for the first time
(clothed). We lived

together eight years
closed under business
suits ties collared shirts

blazers: even onions
only have so many
layers before nothing

is left but an empty
center. Filling our
dinners with

clinking silverware,
hollow cups, jaws
oscillating up and down,

deconstructing meals made
by neither of our hands.
It is rude to chew

with mouths open, rude
to talk over each other:
silence interrupted with

my signature splicing
the paper. Splitting hairs,
splitting skin, splitting

possessions down the center
leaving scar tissue,
a pulsing pink.

Rupert Locke

The Bad Neighbourhood

Moved into that neighbourhood
Sure you know the one
You think you hang around it

In truth it hangs around you
It's a cul-de-sac
Where you post your own junk-mail

Sneak up to your front garden
With stones in your hands
And walk off treading the shards

I've grown attached to the place
Mowed the grass built a fence
Moving out is hard

Downtown I hear there's a place
An 18inch trip
Where you can watch the traffic

Without stepping into it
Just sit on the kerb
I pack Unpack Pack again

Robert Ford

Monoblockheads

Before even officially buying your house,
they'd evicted the frogs from the pond.

They arrived with tape measures and lockjaw,
hydrophobia, and a pocket in their heads

with a hole worn through to the bottom.
The notices were served. You'd said

farewell to the magnolia, knowing the words
to be vapour, its petals already browned

and wept. The blackbirds coughed an
apology and fled. You consoled yourself

that – save for a few giddy flowers
threatening to run across it like streakers –

it was only grass, an abomination at that.
They waited calmly until your back was turned

before cupping their clammy hands over
its mouth. The struggle, at least, was brief.

The drunktank

the flies were playing up
a better hell than usual.

I'd left out orange peel
and hadn't been home
all week –
when I got in
there were enough of them
that if they wanted
they could have carried me out by the collar
and tossed me in the river.

what to do?
I was hardly going to swat them
and anyway
it was already 9 – I'd be going bed soon.

I settled down,
opened a book and
had a few glasses of wine,
trying to ignore
the air
which spread over me,
chewy as blackberry jam.

when I got up in the morning
they were all in the bottle,
crawling up the sides
in fluid mass,
sipping
the dribbles I'd left.

I hammered in the cork
and left them there - imprisonment,
but only for the drunks.

I threw out the orange peel
and haven't had issues since –
I could check the bottle if I wanted
and see if any are alive –
it's sitting down under the sink
still waiting to be recycled.

Rosie Barrett

Tom Waits Comes to Tea and has a Nice Time

He seemed surprisingly altogether far too big
sitting in my kitchen

I'd steered him away from the bentwood
rocker (circa 1930) to a much sturdier

farmhouse carver. Much less fragile.
He would keep tipping it back.

He takes his tea black with a slice of
lemon and is partial to jam tarts.

We talked about how life moves on and
azaleas. He's quite an expert.

I'd fallen in love to *Martha*
and. *The Piano has been drinking*

We went to Yorkshire up the A1
high on the *Ol' 55*.

'But that was then' he said. 'I felt throttled.
I just found myself *Starving in the belly of a whale*.

He got up and took the iron from me.
Did I say I'd been ironing when he knocked?

'Woman! You're doing it all wrong.
This is how you iron a shirt'.

John Dorroh

My Fried Chicken

I go to Food World at 8:00 PM on Wednesday nights to buy left-over fried chicken, which is just fine, let me tell you, and what a bargain at 50% off. Sometimes the same ole people are there at the counter, waiting like hungry, selfish vultures to get *my* chicken. I am persistent like a pit bull, and don't think that the fry lady doesn't see what's going on. I am cool, and stand back, not causing a scene, making sure that ole Tooty-toot sees me standing there by the pita bread and King Hawaiian rolls. Sometimes I smile and lick my lips when she walks to the check-out with her three bags of *my* bird. As soon as she leaves, the fry lady winks, bends down, and comes up with at least two bags of bird that Miss Priss did not know about. She done left the store, thinking that she got all of it. Joke's on her.

Stefanie Bennett

Overload

She's a mite sore, tired
And querulous
From diving through
Atmospheric
Fish-net stockings
Sucked up
The nebular spout
Where the land
Froze dry
And the turn-table
Tipped headlong...

How great is gravity's
Decline!

It's not
 Hearsay.
The moon's
Got a bad back.

Pat Edwards

gender ghost

drifting into view
your figure makes
a simple outline

there is a smell like air
that hints of nothing
i can know for sure

we kiss
i still don't know
what are you

i am born of ether
cloud space child
who knows no rules

there is nothing
we can do together
no fitting in

Jenna Velez

mermaid lust

He captures my try-hard hair
With treasure hunter's hands
And makes my ear listen
To the quartz vibrations in his
Kitchen counter like trapped ocean

I hold my breath to the sharp metallic
Swoosh like dropping anchor
Leather licking skin
Hiding in fishnet like mermaid lust
Sinking hooks in me like prized prey
Captain's trophy catch
In lover's tackle
It's not enough when I'm
Glittering and gasping
My saltwater pleas and
Gurgling confessions

No matter
His sea-worn hands still splice
Fisherman's knots for the siren
Going off in his head
An oxygen-rich requiem to the ache
Of what lies between us
On this kitchen island I let him
Catch and release the fever wish
He tried to drown in the sea
Like his precious mermaid
Wet and fearful

Cara L McKee

If there's a difference

I think if there's a difference between us
that it's the way women learn to be less
even while we're saying that we're more.

It's not true you know, that we have to fit
ourselves into little conforming boxes
so that someone will like us. It's not true.

Think who you like. Is it because they're good?
Or is it because they tell mucky tales
and laugh a lot with that ugly laugh that

you can't help but join in with. We're all mad
and sad and silly and stuck together
and blown away and bloody marvellous.

We don't need to be less. In any way.

People

I tell my boyfriend whenever I am on my period,
or whenever I'm catcalled
because I want him to know that one is natural,
the other is not, but they both happen
to women all the time.

I told him when a man shouted at me running
from across the road;
when an Uber driver slowed down beside me
and took time out of his day to wolf-whistle;
and how at 7:30am, a drunk man called me "Oi",
asked me where I thought I was going,
before telling me where I should.

His most recent reply was:
'People are so weird!' And by, "people"
He meant, "men"
and he didn't even realise.

Calling Card

I wanted to let you know I was here, so I tried folding you
an origami crane from a scrap of the newspaper lying on your porch.
You would know I had been here, because I leave them everywhere at work
at home, at the park. Everyone knows that's just something I do.
But the wind kept blowing the rain on my fingers, made the paper
thin and transparent, impossible to crease, made my fingers cold and black.

If every crane I tried to make you had been successful, you
would have come home to a flock of them on your porch
gray and white and covered with phrases like "war" and "linen"
faces of politicians half-seen in feather patterns.

But because of the rain, there is just one crane on your porch
and a pile of crumpled, wet newsprint squeezed and balled and ripped
in frustration at the task. I would have written you a poem instead
if I had taken the rain into consideration when I'd started
I probably should have done that instead.

Clive Donovan

The Thing in the Corner

She comes in, ignoring the thing in the corner.
Quickened by that connection, it squirms and begins to stir.
She pours a glass of wine. It starts to beg.
She clicks and switches, opens packets, turns on artefacts.

She slumps on cushions, flicks through magazines.
Pictures and headlines barely make it to her brain.
She has been labouring and needs some rest
But the thing in the corner won't let her.

This is now a test : Shall we let her doze on the sofa,
As toast-smoke creeps its acrid way along the walls?
I should like to waken her from listlessness.
The angel in the corner growls.

John Leo

Broceliande

I'm getting naked
I already have
oils dredged up
from Merlin's tomb

sweet fruit punch smell
with whitemoon still
dripping grailish
on deep & angry fists

did you know Merlin
was buried in a forest?
did you know all the trees
were knights?

this body a nude fir
with foxglove dangle
stomach made for picnics
I can swallow

a whole brick of grubby hunger
seven princes' worth of honey
dip my hands & worm
them into the sticky

hollow of my coward
owlery skull
I set music
for the occasion

a vinyl sundisk
deep mellows
from some Gaulish
minstrel's lesser

revelations intercut
with the murmur
of foreign parrot gods
they caw I love you I love

this moment
before I step inside myself
but just know when I emerge
I will be literal flame

hissing in the wood
& nothing else
I'm still naked lying still
as a pine nut at climax

forests rocket from my bellybutton
they take on pompadours
& mythic names
Galahad boulders

toward Camelot but
in this story the queen
is wreathed in cherry branches
she speaks well

an angel rises from
water on yellow wings
I have already told you
what I would become

Richard Livermore

The Elephant In The Womb

To say with Kant
the concept of
infinity
can never be
empirical
but only
transcendental

is to ditch
the elephant
that made the world
and place it
in an iron lung
for everyone
to gawp at.

The Ones Who Remain

Based on the prompt "it was raining in the operating theatre" from Pascal Vine.

Scalpels, Ilizarov apparatus,
bone saws, callipers, osteotomes,
forceps, sutures, retractors and
tongue depressors lie in a mossy puddle,
that pools in a kidney dish fractured occasionally
by concentric drips.

Haggard in leather, the surgeon moves through the gloom, gloves caked
in filth, scent stuffed beak not masking the stench of offal, eyes glassy lens
fogged.

It would be difficult to say for sure that the liturgist could see at all.

It had been raining for weeks now and the open casket chest of whoever was laid
on the gurney was translucent thick in gore, bile and weather accumulating softly.
The skin at the edges of the incision was paper white and fronds of flesh drifted in
response to no tides in rockpools of bodies the wound of it's limit not healing, the
ragged edges debrided by the downpour.

Complex localised ecosystems, comprised organisms of doubt; microbes
of hesitancy and uncertainty, had been allowed to flourish.

three frugal trees has been allowed to take root in the administrative
corners.

Person most likely to enjoy the taste of human flesh
had been allowed to practice medicine
as if it were a hobby.

There is a anemone of metal, ceiling tile and plaster growing like a
chandelier from where the roof used to be.

The building shudders in the cold every so often coughs fine white dust on
the inhabitants of the room, and is too awkward to apologise for its lack of
hygiene,
to apologise for not covering its mouth.

In the downpour glottal stops are plucked, tendons arranged by pitch and plucked staggered.

Some healing crescendo
dampens the strings.

The anaesthetist twiddles their mallet impatiently, occasionally offers the corvid physician a tool to idle over falsifying it's necessity.

The patient is tutted over, sighed dramatically at and prodded occasionally.

“Until the weather improves”

they say

“there will be nothing more that we can do”

and the clouds gather ominously threatening the encore of a gale that had delayed the procedure already.

First Maps

When we first met, we would camp in the Sierra's, Point Rey's, or at the Mendocino Headlands. By the light of stars & fire, we read maps, some with missing pages. We said topographies are luxuries, and not all destinations are essential.

Cartographers off ramps, tourist traps, and gas stops, simple there's, pulp, ink. We concurred that our maps were not always accurate, some worn, torn, others with abandoned pages. We laughed that at least the missing pages had their own directions, unlike us.

And yet we are compelled to wander lost at times, our thoughts & dreams somehow detoured, together or apart.

Prehistoric maps were unfeigned, scribed in the dirt by the dead, with sharp rocks, fire sticks & finger bone, all manifest etchings, here, there's.

Daily our maps grow more complex, even those patiently waiting in the bookshelf at home for our trips. They know what we fear, that the lost pages, the incomplete directions won't tell us which way to go, or direct us to who we are, guide us on how to live or die, or point our way there.

Mark Lee

A Different Kind of Thief

Instead of hiding trinkets
And other shiny things up your sleeve,
You steal words,
Plucking them from the hearts
Of everyone you meet.
Even the most tight-lipped
Spill their life stories to you:
Every parked car a therapist's office,
Every hushed whisper a confessional.

Ronny Ford

I've Killed Things

purpose

A baby red squirrel in its destructive ambition
had chewed through the poison bag in the garage
and swept itself (broomless, un-witch-like) into the backyard to die.

Something flayed me inside out,
the part of my grandpa that told me he killed and skinned a goat
for biting my mom when she was a kid.

Remembering the time my grandma put an onion slice
on a right-armed bee sting to suck the poison out,
I called her looking for a dirt-birthered remedy.

“Do you have a shovel?” she asked.

I didn't want to have a shovel, but I did.

un-purpose

On the shores of Lake Michigan
I found a baby mouse
and fed it beach grass forgetting to dull the (razored) edges
that sliced dunes into existence.

I might still remember the name I gave it
if I hadn't burned the journal I wrote it down in,
wafting up a smell that brought me to the burn ward
where my dad worked. For that there is no remedy,
for me there is no shovel.

Conkers

That last spring
travelling under the same Chestnut avenue
enveloped by these opening palms
you, in the driving-seat,
 turned,
slyly baited me,
Just wait till conker-time,
we'll see then, you said.

Now, conkers are fusty underground,
these leaves are almost as green
as we then were
and the sleek fibres of your hair last night
only fleetingly teased my face.

Even my son will have travelled
and matured too far next Autumn
to let nature's fruits swing out as playful metaphors
without being protected
by the spiky shell.

if/in #43

somebody loaded
america's starter pistol
with real bullets

somebody
loaded
america's starter pistol with real bullets

somebody

loaded america's starter pistol with real bullets

Stephen Bone

Tongue

Before the twist
and roll of words

licked you into shape
you were there

a shell-less mollusc
sponging up
the sweet and sour

old silvery charmer
doorstep gossip
good and ill slipping from you

plump greedy suckling
rude protruding urchin
love's soft bedfellow

may you always be in the pink

Pink and Bubbly

The bottle says
Champagne,
But she says,
“Champion.”

Oh,
First thing upon waking,
It makes her feel bubbly.

She wobbles out of bed,
Giggles and then says,
“What the fuck
Am I even doing
Here?”

She puts on her jacket,
Hat,
Heels,

Then leaves with an open bottle.

No need for food,
When she is what she drinks;
And that's a bubbly
Champion –

Joe Williams

Nuts

It said on the bag of nuts

May contain nuts.

It did not contain nuts.

I had eaten the nuts.

Thank you for reading!

