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Foreword

The first poem in this collection recalls meeting Dominick Browne, Lord Mereworth, in London. As near as I can recall, that meeting took place in 2009. That meeting happened already 13 years ago, when I was 64 years old. (At this writing, I am now in my 78th year). These poems typically follow a pattern that appeared in my verse years ago. Here are descriptive poems, poems arising from incidents in everyday life, eulogies to friends who have passed on, and others still living, a great variety of “metaphysical” poems inspired by the spiritual quest, and the many faces of love—to name some of the more prominent themes.

Most of my poems have a reflective, often passive quality—but by no means uniformly—
simply because my poetry is written in a state of deep reflection, when I attempt to capture in words the intensification of an experience that is rendered by a poem. While the experience itself may be singularly inspiring, capturing the experience in verse becomes an expression of the experience itself. This thought may sound like a truism, but it means, in other words, that poetry becomes, in Marshall McLuhan's phrase, not only the medium but also the message. Without the poem, there can be no experience that can be more widely shared with others. These experiences can of course be rendered in prose, but the poem captures an economy of intense experience that cannot as easily be rendered in prose.

I have written other volumes of poetry that do not yet appear at my website www.jack-mclean.com. Hopefully, I can manage, despite the vicissitudes dealt to the mind and body in one's senior years, to post these poems with the much appreciated help of my friend and electronic wizard, Jonah Winters.

J.A. McLean, Ottawa, December 8, 2022

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Some Poems in Latter Days

Dominick Browne Lord Mereworth
(Remembering our visit in London)

Dominick is a cool dude,
a prince of a man
who is never rude.

He dresses for dinner,
and wears his tie to look his best,
Bahá'u'lláh's man among the noblesse.

He calls the thing just as he means,
spot on with teaching,
but never with preaching.

Lord and commoner all at once,
just the sort of man
you would invite to lunch.

He and I are bosom pals,
closest chums by association,
one of the finest Bahá'ís in all the nation.

Dominick and I are friends for life,
in perfect harmony sans trace of strife,
a fountain of friendship ever flowing,
in a heart of love that is ever glowing.

Jack McLean

After the Snowstorm 2019

The squirrels, those rats with tails,
run along the powerlines,
among the cypress trees,
leap from branch to snowy branch,
as if it's a summer's day.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Snowstorm 2019

It could be a giant snowman
resting on his side,
or a reclining Buddha
lying on my patio,
the frosty hills and valleys of Switzerland.

The Buddha's silent voice
seems to whisper:
'Ah rest weary traveller.
Here is peace for the thorn
in your side.
Look in wonder how my Hand
has covered the land!'

Jack McLean

Fake Flowers

I've given in to fake flowers.
At age 73 I've excused myself
in a concession to convenience.

The form, the colour are there,
but there is no fragrance.

They are never thirsty.
But how can they be flowers
if I dust them, rinse them
every few months?

Jim Desson approached

to inhale their perfume.
Sorry Jim to have deceived you,
your innocent expectation dashed.

But how can they be flowers?
There is no fragrance....

Some Poems in Latter Days

August Stillness

Stillness in the soul,
not in the shade, is outside now,
in the dying days of August,
before the patchwork quilt
of Autumn's changing colours,
is slowly stitched upon these ancient hills.

Supreme stillness is hushed overall,
in an even—ing, a level—ing,
like the calm of Indian Summer
returning in late October, hot not burning,
when the wine-press that yields the drunken
sweet liqueur, purple teardrops that gather
the fruit of summer, looks back on its glory days,
basks in its warmth.

Now all things are weighed
in the balance, but not found wanting,
measured out, scaled in equal proportions,
peace dispensed despite...

Peace that will out,
peace imposed by an unseen Hand
or no hand, the Hand of Spirit or,
the hand of the intrinsic condition.

The red cardinal's song
penetrates the air,
my eyes solaced as he flies,
from branch to branch
on the honey locust tree,
the whistle high and human-like
in tonic tones of strident clarity.

Jack McLean

Whistle like a bird to call him,
whistle like a bird to say:
"I can speak like you little redbird."

This stillness in and out,

a tiny miracle that saves
from chaos and destruction,
the stench of pervasive sickness and death,
our daily bread on this sorry planet,
erased from memory in a golden moment
as we cup to our lips a global goblet,
that works the bliss of forgetfulness,
if only for this passing hour...

Some Poems in Latter Days

Phyllis in the Present Tense

(Dr. Phyllis Perrakis, d. March 10, 2018)

She leads us through forests, flowers,
by paths and streams, imagines us
as shining leaves on one great tree,
bound each to each,
as is root to trunk,
as bud to bloom.

She knows that in these forests, flowers,
paths and streams, we find ourselves reflected,
as in the more perfect mirror of our forms and faces,
entranced by the glancing beauty,
the grace, the symmetry, the majestic circle
in this whirling, cosmic dance, danced by dancers
in trailing robes of purple, musical arrangement,
but not just yet la symphonie magnifique
because we can't quite hear the music.

We watch with her through long years of patience,
the desire of her heart denied, when on a sudden sunrise,
her countenance radiates again, the key turns in the lock,
she escapes the room that held her close,
the easy laughter bubbles up again.

We watch with her a half-a-time,
when troubles come she works magnificent patience,
complaining never, her soul borne up on the ascending wings
of prayer by those who love her,
the whispered entreaties to make her whole again.

Jack McLean

And between times and before times,
the scholar's ink flows, scripting belles lettres,
with sound and sense that seeks to fathom
the obdurate mystery of a broken humanity,
the crooked and the straight of the wily human heart.

She knows that it can be healed
with just the power of a magic Word,
when mankind's shattered soul will yield to Love Herself
and let hungry mouths be fed on cakes of mercy.

We follow close behind her,
the weary hearts that long to follow,
she, honoured on this pilgrimage,
to reach the sacred precincts, the holy of holies,
while others still tread a stony path.

These dark hours will be dispelled by the eternal sun,
splendid in the glory of its spreading rays,
that will light the path leading to her own,
where she will sing a song celestial.

Some Poems in Latter Days

The World is a Remembering and Forgetting

The world is a remembering and forgetting,
or, when learning the most difficult of things:
living in the Golden of Now.

If regret marks losses, the past brings nostalgia
in its wake, like furrowed ground that yields
dry rocks and stinging nettles,
under the ploughman's cutting edge
as he passes on his way.

Or, the world is aglow with sweet content
to read again the silver script of bygone chapters writ,
when we forget the plenteous pain
that stalks us in its need to feed.
That body we do well to starve!

Joy is man's lot, his birthright.
The hidden world beyond,
the ether of the higher realms,
bestows joy only, the Master says.
Its happy beams come down and through,
if our crystal glass be pure and true.

Sorrow, sadness, shadow never enter
this hallowèd ground.
These strangers have no right to pass,
no watchword can they speak,
no sentinel confuse,
nor power to persuade,
no more than one lone warrior penetrates
the castle wall, frenzied swordsman

though he be, to strike wild blows

Jack McLean

at empty air; no more than the blind
hold a flickering flame to the fiery sun.

The joy we seek lies in what we are,
inscribed within the finest strands
of soul and sinew, as close as blood,
bone and beating heart within
our breast, in our breath,
our very being.

These laurels can be worn a crown,
but only in odd hours of our passing days.

In ages even, in time out of time,
when every day is Spring,
we drink at the fountain of eternal youth.

Some Poems in Latter Days

The Part the Whole

We collect memories
not mere, but many,
necessary fragments to make
us smile, recoil, regret, embrace,
while the bird of time is on the wing,
collect then recollect.

Time flies said the Romans,
--tempus fugit--,
but it was said so long ago.

Birds had wings as they do now,
but no airplanes, missiles, laser beams,
speed of light did not measure time,
the bird not so swift as one of these.

A seigneur must recollect
all these fragments in long, slow hours,
both savory and sweet,
--and the sour, the life of:
where we've been, what done, left undone,
who we've loved, thought we loved.

This life has almost spent the part,
but then the whole to come,
when awakening to the brightest dream,
the past regrets shall be no more.

In the there of nowhere and everywhere,
only awake to the Bliss of Forever,
the Golden of Now,
Glorious Reunion of all Souls,
renounce the part, embrace the Whole.

Jack McLean

The McLeans of Duart and Elsewhere
(meditation on a dual-identity)

Gillean means "Servant of St. John."
Gillean of the Battle-Axe, ancestor of the clan,
was borne by his máthair late in the Middle-Ages.
He became the overman.

No royal named me Knight of the Thistle,
but I did grow down on my cheek,
before the beardie came; nor was I made
Laird of the Western Isles.
This McLean of Mull had no pull!

Colonel Sir Fitzroy Maclean,
26th chief of the clan,
with the fortune he made,
restored Duart Castle in 1912,
for centuries long left to degrade,
there on the rock where eagles fly,
high in the sky, over the isle of Mull.

But I will settle for Bahá'í,
if that title I may claim.
One who bears the Greatest Name,
cares not for blood or fame.

Now that the fortress is returned to the clan,
our great chief Lachlan has called us home,
from wherever on earth we may roam.

I'd be happy to greet and shake his hand.
Wouldn't it be lovely if they piped me in?

Some Poems in Latter Days

I'll come the once in regalia full,
all for the showing, robed in splendour,
bagpipes wailing, heart with pride swelling,
love never failing.

Shall I wear the tartan red
or more fitting the hunting green?

On those two colours I'm very keen.

One Persian Herald once wore the green,
while the Persian Prince donned red,
the colour of blood, love, sacrifice and death.

While “Virtue Mine Honour,”
the old standby, is a noble estate,
most honourable and high,
I’ll stake my soul on the name BAHÁ’Í.

Jack McLean

The Consolations of Aging

Growing old is not the best,
Many things I could do with less,
But one thing friends I must confess,
Mornings I do like having not to dress.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Life After Life

The blind priestess who doesn’t like my religion asked:
“So what will you do in the next life?”
“Do?” I replied.
“Whatever the Lord of the worlds commands, I should think.”
“But what will He command you to do?” she asked again.
“I only know that doing it will be my joy,” said I in reply.

“Will there be doing there?” I asked the priestess.
Doing is done in space-time here. No time-space there.

Silence spoke in empty words, eloquent testimony from a psycho-ceramic.

“Teach, learn, study, praise, pray, save souls, dance in extasy,
walk on clouds, ascend or descend on a sliver thread or a golden ray,
gaze on crimson flowers, created by wounds of blood,
watch them vibrate to an inner music,
contemplate liquid sapphire, drain the bottomless wine-cup,
recount the pilgrimage to the Persian Prince,
commune with loved ones once lost in Never Never Land,
the Land of Everywhere and Nowhere,
there where all mourning shall cease.”

“There, priestess, I will be writing no clincher lines.
No clincher lines are there, no last words.
Perpetual being only.”

I said to the priestess now inflamed:
“I don’t care about your tired, old story.
I only want to be with you if love can save your soul.”

Jack McLean

Nine Tercets: Naw Ruz 176
(home because of illness)

A little flaw is often near
to make the day a little drear
and mar our magic moment

Shadows with the sunlight fall
as yellow warblers trill their call
black crows intrude with rakish caw

A lowly worm will creep and crawl
along the earth 'neath soaring birds.
A tiny man looks up in awe.

Does gentle rain from snow-white clouds
to wash parched land descend?
blacker billows pile high Adam's ale to send.

What broken heart can heal again
from its sore wound
were nothing there to mend?

We pause to find a way to see
why our world when we are here
be sliding-scale from dark to clear?

Nights are tinged with soft moonglow
days are spent with friend and foe
to augment our joy, it must be so.

Perfection's bliss cannot obtain
if in this life we strive to gain
to pilgrims all, their joy, their pain.

Days fly by. Then build the world anew.
In that green garden, claim flowers fair
of seeds once sown. To strive is not in vain.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Toronto Then

What did it mean then
to turn that corner
down the hill
to the right up Saskatoon
wheel on by suburban homes
the tree-lined streets
turning green and tender
this coming spring?

I watch the spot

here from this corner
now a café
where I sip my tea
survey it all again.

It meant the eager heart
was coming home
to the fair haven,
place of rest and safety
overlooking the ravine
the creek flowing gently below
where love's fond embrace
would wrap you in its arms
and say:

“Stay! You are home.
Here you belong.
You are ours. We are yours
forever and a day.”

These places in the heart remain
the true landscapes, skylines

Jack McLean

seascapes, escapes,
where you first tasted
ease, prosperity, success
the first great revelation,
joy of spiritual discovery
true joy on true joy.

It meant caring
sharing the passion
watching our numbers grow
increase our communion
in the days of our youth
when troubles never came
and sorrows were not nigh.

The days of our lives that followed
burnished the callow youth
in the baptism of fire,
manhood burned to ashes
all that was to leave us pensive.

Did we but know then
the day of discovery
was to rebuild Jerusalem
stone on stone
in our precious present moments

could we but realize the weight of it all
the chance to build the world anew.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Night Sounds in Lambasa, Fiji
(For the friends in Evin Prison)

Three in the morning.

I lie awake listening to the howling dogs.
Half-wild, they roam the side streets daylong,
neither fearing nor threatening you, giving space,
trotting by to find the next morsel left in the trash.

Once, on a hot afternoon, a pack watched me coming.
Numbers made them brave. They stood their ground, menacing,
fixed their gaze on me.

I stooped and pick up two jagged stones, ready for a fight.
Turning tail, they bolted with fright.
They have known the sting of the stone on their flesh.

I turn on my mattress, wait for the barking frenzy to subside.
The dog nearest seems to be standing below my window.
There is a pause, a welcome momentary silence.
Then, in the distance, another call and a bark.
The howling starts again.
On and on it goes for most of the night.
Sleep comes in fits and starts.

The roosters join the fray.
Aye karumba! It's one flew over the cuckoo's nest.
Mad sounds everywhere—howling dogs,
cocks crowing. All we need is the braying donkey
to make the cacophony complete.
I smile a little smile.

Before I slept, I listened to the mad shouts
of the Pentecostal minister down the road,

Jack McLean

reviving his congregation, and the incessant gospel choir,
rocking on to the beat of the thumping heavy bass,
then soothing, comforting, praising with Hallelulyahs,
not just Sunday but every day till doomsday,
the sound carried by double-decker speakers
invading the neighbourhood with mega decibels,
morning, afternoon and far into night.

Soon the tropical birds will sound the first note of morning.
The muezzin will call the faithful to prayer at 5 a.m.

Even at this hour, cars rumble by on Ritova Street,
kicking up dust, crunching stones, pinging tires with the tension.

I think of the Yaran in Evin prison,
their silence, isolation, such things as I dare not contemplate.
I fix my mind on them, join them in their prayers,
in this world wide web of supplication,
join my thoughts to theirs,
to that love that no injustice can ever defeat,
to that sustaining Spirit that will penetrate the thick walls of Evin.

In the darkness of night without sleep,
breathing the dust, I remember them,
sleeping here on the floor,
bearing the strange noises in the night.

What pale discomfort can compare to their sacrifice,
what small endurance can pay tribute to such nobility?

Some Poems in Latter Days

Meditation on Time and Grace in Latter Days

This suspense of time is grace.
The momentary hush of din that hurts our ears
we greet with a grateful heart at rest,
despite our knowing that motion is perpetual.

The mighty machine of time breaks its silence
lurches to life again, gigantic wheels turning
gears grinding, cogs revolve precisely in the tick-tock
of a mechanical clock.

The giant cyclopes wakes to its own hunger
seeking to devour its harvest of souls.

The bell tolls, its appointed hour sounds.
Another loved one disappears beyond the veil,
while our failing numbers leaves us stranded
on this rocky beach, drenched by raging waves
awaiting the beckoning call, the hour none puts back.
The stalking fowler casts his net, traps a blithe unwary bird,
its singing muted by a sudden silence.
Who will be the last of friends to outlive all the rest?

These shattered fragments of our lives
the blissful moments framed in the picture gallery
frozen once in time, the myriad thoughtful faces
know not how Love Herself raised up such a throng,
a multitude of singers singing Love's exalted song.

Scholars, poets, music-makers, dancers, workers

strive to leave a tiny trace of their life of days.
Will we remember their shining faces?

Jack McLean

In Kullu Shay when the many are restored to the One
we will live again, gathered on the farthest shore
when all earth's thirsty droplets—creeks, streams,
torrents, running rivers will regain the Seven Seas.

There, east of Eden, myriad names we shall be,
pure mirrors in the sun, when being and doing are one
and there are no tomorrows to leave our deeds undone.

Some Poems in Latter Days

A Man Named John
(John Rager, Miraris Amicum)

He walked the path of sorrow,
He's known the path of love,
Told the truth to sway the hearts,
His mandate from above.

Now one more chapter's finally writ,
The sign posts are all clear,
An open road is beckoning him,
Though loving hearts are near.

Our pioneer has made a plan,
For north of Montreal,
With Josh and Min, the grands are in,
He's venturing his all.

For little ones to show the way,
To make the world anew,
In golden years to play his part,
The workers are so few!

Ruefully we watch him part,
To fulfill his noble plan,
Knights, teachers, soldiers, heroes,
Building Glory's caravan.

Prayers sustain him on his way,
For brightest days ahead,
With sheaves aplenty, harvest in,
The banquet table spread.

Jack McLean

Udo in Signs and Tokens
(1926-2019)

(Scholar, lawyer, music lover)

Du lieber Doktor...

You came to me in a dream,
hidden nonetheless,
but you were there,
active sense of humour yet.

I spotted a pencil on the ground
picked it up,
then laughing out loud,
held it high for all the world
to see.

It was just a stub,
the mere length of a thumb,
but still as sharp
as the very first word
on a blank page,
eraser still intact.

How much writing did you do
over all your long days
to wear that Bleistift away!

Then you handed me a bow.

You still hidden,
behind many mysteries,
concealed by a veil,
just out of sight,
until the appointed time.

Some Poems in Latter Days

It was an ancient wooden bow,
well-worn, chestnut brown,
had seen many battles.

I held it in my hands,
that scarred, familiar bow,
marked by wars aplenty,
asked how many pounds of test.

You didn't answer.
No need for word,
your silence eloquent.

That bow had seen jousts,
tournaments and contests,
been passed down
to many hands,

back way back to primeval time.

This life's a roaring daylong battle,
the fate of countless generations,
fighting their way through the din.

Your message in signs and tokens.

Phaidon! Take thy bow!
Waste your life in labour,
do battle while smiling away,
laughing away these passing days.

Jack McLean

Meditation on an Egyptian Alabaster Vase

Our love is a like an Egyptian alabaster vase sitting on an end table.
Beautifully
translucent, it reflects the light in all its purity. I watch it from a
distance absorb the light,
warm, silent, lovely and still. But I am like Wilbur's son, the child at the
window pane,
weeping as he watches the melting snowman, the child's heart so full of love
and terror. I
fear the vase might fall and break, for I know it to be fragile. Redressing
myself, I
remember to trust. I call to mind the words of St. John, the beloved disciple,
that "perfect
love casts out fear, for fear is torment." Anchored to her cell, Mother
Julian of Norwich
knew the human heart. She wrote that love and dread are partners. She
knew...knew all
too well that we fear the loss of that which we love, fear the terrible
deprivation. To love
is to have an open heart. To have an open heart is to be vulnerable. To be
vulnerable is to
know pain. But O Lord, to have an open heart is to wrestle with an angel. To
wrestle with
an angel will make you strong enough to conquer haunting demons, scatter
lingering
specters in the mind, finally dispel the illusion of evil, the curse that
became a blessing,
blessed to enter the magic realm of serenity and peace.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Bank and Hopewell

I am thinking of Bank and Hopewell
in the dead of winter.

It was summer.
I was waiting for you
on the corner.

You did not love me then.

It is still summer.
It will always be summer with you.

Jack McLean

Hidden Treasure

God said He was a hidden treasure
who wanted to be known.

You were a hidden treasure
waiting to be known.

A precious gem lies buried
in the earth.

It ignores its own value,
but I discovered you before the gold rush.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Why Now?

This love seven decades on.

One answer or many?

So little time left to us...

O but live well in the Golden of Now
and there will be eternity.

Listen to these wedding bells
ringing out in the belfry of love,
over the land of heart's desire,
in the country of mystery,
the silver bells that sound
the song announcing
the fountain of eternal youth.

Jack McLean

They Do Not Know

They do not know,
cannot know what we share.

Vaunting would be vain
so I refrain.

A love so holy, so profane,

all of it placed at Glory's feet.

Friends will discover this love
when the final words are spoken.

Some Poems in Latter Days

The Village Nuptials

A small band of revelers
gathers down the village hill
on the bank of the river.

The ancient dwellings
nestled above, look down,
lend a round of comfort
to the celebration.

Prayers are said, hymns are sung,
but no black-robed priest presides.

As young lovers exchange
rings and solemn vows,
a celebrant steps forward.

One lady, dignified in middle-years,
beaming a radiant smile,
steps near man and wife.

No need for words.
There in the sacred silence,
raising her right arm,
she points to the rising sun.

Jack McLean

When the Rains of September

When the rains of September beat at your door
Indian summer still promises more.

When the winds of October begin to blow
they herald the coming of winter snow.

While time yet remains in fields shorn of hay
harvest the crop lest the little lambs stray.

Ere frosty November leaves you forlorn
stay thy small grief, yes, lay it away
and smile in the sun of the autumn morn.

Some Poems in Latter Days

I am a Seeker Seeking Seekers

I am a seeker seeking seekers in cafés

while Kaffee Klatschers read cell phones
laptop computers, tablets in the electronics
of sublime communication.

I am in the here of now, gone moments later
sitting among indistinct human voices
that utter snippets of nothing.
Yet for all my disdain I hear vox populi vox dei.

But in the land of there will that ceaseless
burning search for other souls be there,
there sans body and the searching mind
that depends upon the brain?

Will there still be the hide-and-go-peek
of seeking other souls to stay their search
tell them they need hunger and thirst no more?

Or will seekers still be found from every land
among every bud and flower
with each refrain of enchanting music
in the glance of the fair stranger's face
when eyes first meet in the loving look
of the companions of the Ancient of Days?

Jack McLean

Covid-19 Moment Easy

To sit in the early morning
spinning quiet hours
with a cup and a book
taste on the tongue.

Reading a pretty poem
to think on the greats—
mighty men and wondrous women
is to know a peace serene,
a pleasure almost still....

Alone yet standing
with the chosen one by your side,
the one, the only one you've ever loved
in that one and only way.

For—
resting with a cup and book
in the small hours of the darkened dawn
as misty rain descends like holy revelation,
silent at the statue of a plaster saint.

The liquid veil that drops

from moist grey skies,
when the idle talk of women and men
and commerce sexual does not find me.

Neither—
the doubts, the mind perplexed
by the paradox of relations,
the circles, setbacks, quarrels,
questions, wonderments.

Some Poems in Latter Days

All these things set aside
by the cup, the book,
the taste on the tongue,
and the falling rain
just beyond my window pane.

Wrapt in slumber
with the portrait and pen,
just now, blest
by the book, the cup,
as the heart finds rest.

Jack McLean

The Wedding in St. Patrick's Church (to N.H.T.)

Niels stood up to read that day,
the prayer in the Roman Church,
under the broad white ceiling
of its canopy dome,
while in the alcoves the painted saints
staid, ensconced, smiled their plaster smiles
of mild beatitude.

An experience rare, not of sight
but of sound, the tell-tale sign
of perception transformed,
declared by the sound of his voice.

This man courteous, self-effaced,
almost diffident, read the holy verses
one by one. Each line articulated spirit,
each word a word of power.

Authority marked the inflections
of that voice speaking from the pulpit,
accents to awaken, to make alert,
a very singular thing being born
in the alchemical elixir,

the honey that sweetens,
balm to assuage the wound.

Niels reads and the words ring out!

The sounds are steel bullets that explode
in your heart. Niels is the new man,
priest beyond priest, tower of strength,

Some Poems in Latter Days

index of God's humanity,
divinity that we all are.

What I heard that day—
the lion's roar,
warrior engaged in mighty battle,
while we the timid creatures
shied away in the thicket,
fell silent with the thunder,
listened with ears amazed.

Jack McLean

In Sleep's Shadows

Why am I as sad
To turn my steps to bed,
Instead of being glad
To rest my weary head?

What shadows lie beneath
The gloom I cannot see,
Why do I halt and pause
From labour's tasks to flee?

Why do nocturne regrets
Mar daylight's happy hours,
Wary to embrace the rest
In Morphe's leafy bowers?

The question beckons on
This mystery to disclose,
Do these shades of night
Foretell my last repose?

Some Poems in Latter Days

Fragments on the Wing

Bleeding hearts last but a day.
July has flown; they've had their say.

The Bobolink, its tumbling tune of glee,

feisty Red Winged Blackbird perched on a reed,
plump breasted Killdeer with its plaintive cry
have all passed by.

“Kill deer! Kill deer! Kill deer!” the plover says.
“My little ones are near. Kill me instead!”

A lad I listened then
with heart astir, alert,
quivering with the quiet joy
of innocence’s naïve child.

It was a spot sublime
by Martin’s grove, under spreading trees,
in expansive summer fields that had no end.

They were not mine those precincts pastoral,
but unknowing I did walk and stop,
watched and waited, then passed them by.

The law of compensation now applies
to these three score years and ten.

I’m past my prime,
but returns are not diminished:
They are as they once were,
stored up in treasuries on high,
richer far to taste than

Jack McLean

the doubter’s pie-in-sky
when we die.

We travel down the road
that has no bend.
The sacred shrine’s in sight
at journey’s end.

Golden days are past.
The gold my hands once held
is not the gold of now.

I mourn them not today.
The future’s bright and blessed.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Kafka Sitting on a Cloud

A pall has settled on the land.
Ancient voices out of time,
whispered oracles tell of
plague, pestilence, vengeance, visitation,

voices speaking out of the passing wind.

When India was Vedic,
the she-wolf suckling the twins,
when Greece was seeding colonies,
On the eve of destruction
Hosea foretold the fall of Samaria:
“Because you have sown the wind,
you shall reap the whirlwind,” he cried.

Kafka sitting on a cloud laughs,
then smiles gently. “I told you so.
I showed you it would happen.”

In the 1930’s a little child warned
of a “strangely disordered world.”
The one we have inherited is the same one
we have made.

As I drive by the Experimental Farm
the land looks strong.
Patchwork colours in fields of
barley, corn, oats and wheat shimmer
in the August sun.

Babes-in-arms, adolescents, children, cyclists,
women, men, the healthy aged stroll down the lanes,
walking freely in the open air...

MASKED!

Heaven’s gone wrong.
Earth sings a mournful song.

Jack McLean

How We Die

Some die electrocuted,
others poisoned, still others
shot in the back,
or leave us by degrees.

A few walk through the Fall,
as mellow as Autumn days.
Their hearts have accepted
what cannot be put back.

I think of the gentle crowd
of witnessed gone before me,
just beyond the veil.

I yearn for their presence,

that joyous reunion...

Some Poems in Latter Days

Arabica

I saw you in a coffee cup
on a tiny point of light,
there on the horizon
where the Arabica
mellowed in milk,
meets the fired clay.

Shining steadfast
as the Star of Bethlehem.
guiding the Magi
to the Saviour's birth.

They learned Zoroaster's light
visioned in the heavens,
followed the star East to West,
to where He lay,
the One born King of the Jews.

My tiny point of light became
a shining star, for where you are
"as above so below,"
Hermes knew it long ago.

Jack McLean

Moiras Promise

The Three Fates are weaving their tapestry now.
Moiras holds the thread of life.
Our lot has been drawn.
Shes all dolled up, grinning at us:
"Here," she says. "Take this golden goblet.
Once you've drained this bitter cup,
a gracious god will show his comely face.
Mankind's long return to grace
cannot be purchased in the market place."

Some Poems in Latter Days

No Bird Song This November 9th

A cardinal in a cypress tree
blood orange as a sunset
autumn harvest to dispel ennui.

No haunting strain
did charm the air.

I heard no tune,
no song to sing.
The bird escaped
on the flit of a wing.

I looked again
perhaps to find
some Holy Presence
lingering there.

I fixed my gaze
but there was none,
the cherished vision
all undone.

The sight the sound
did not align,
the bird itself
my only sign.

Jack McLean

The Short of It

I seek
no clever conversation
quick-silver presence yes
like liquid Chinese bronze
or porcelain
singularly staid
light in the eyes
smiles 'n chuckles
deep devotion
a prayer or two
time to while away
sleepy hours with you.

There ain't no more.
But this will be enough
my dears
to still a querulous heart
and calm its fears.

Some Poems in Latter Days

The Passing of JD

The choice is mine.
What shall I say?
"I'm so sad Jim
you're not still here.
Your passing by was

but a day.”

Or better yet
to hear it said:
“I’m so glad Jim
you passed our way.”

Jack McLean

Just like a Child

You were talking
on the phone
your back turned
when I opened
the kitchen cupboard door
quickly unscrewed the lid
plunged my finger into
the almond butter (twice)
furtively put it in my mouth
hoping that you wouldn’t glance
my way and catch me in the act.

Served me right
that three oily drops splashed
on the front
of my hunter green sweater
those drops my punishment
for horrors known and unknown.

I didn’t tell. I couldn’t...

Some Poems in Latter Days

Snowflakes and Gardens

Once there wasn’t
now there is
a silent snowfall
mystery coming down.

Tell me if you can
how many snowflakes
are falling
down down down
down from the clouds
of heaven.

We are snowflakes too
each a different design.
How many are we?
Compute the possibilities.

The multi-billions are we
drifting along in the air
of planet earth
blowing where we will.

With snowflakes we can make
snow babies, snow men, snow women
sparkling white as light,
snow people that will melt
in the spring sunshine.

If we make haste
we can build a world
snow white, designs so bright
reflecting light as to make
the world aglow.

Jack McLean

Snow flakes warm to touch
resist the sun's hot rays
till springtime comes
and summer births
around our earth
the paradise to be.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Happy New Year 2021

What would it be
at the end of the year
not to remember
those who are dear?

A word just might reach them
this word from afar
to bless them and keep them
as safe as the stars.

All through the year
that lies just ahead
may your hearts know the peace
that quells fear and dread.

With a surplus of love
and an excess of joy
I send New Year's greetings
for your hearts to enjoy.

Jack McLean

A Poem is a Metaphysical Thing

The squirrels are always moving
in the trees. They are not still for long.
The birds forage for easy food
at my feeder, then rest in the cedar trees
along the back fence.

The scene calls up “the emperor of ice cream.”

What does it mean to be
the emperor of ice cream?
To have nothing really?
To be a rich business man?
To get the super-duper cone
you wanted daddy to buy you
at the country fair?
Maybe he was at a carnival.

When language can be so ambiguous,
there you have a poem,
or when “seem” and “cream” rhyme,
otherwise the lines make poetic philosophy,
because Plato philosophized in verse.

When intellect and imagination,
the mistress of us all, embraces the mind
in the supreme seduction,
words become birds: then you have a poem.

Or you have poetic metaphysics
because your name is Wallace Stevens,
and your poems are Zen koans,
when the imagination betrays
its intellectual lover, even when

Some Poems in Latter Days

you try with all your might
to give her just what she wants.

A poem is a step into the infinite,
but it is never quite there,
never really anywhere,
no closer than when it started,
never just anything,
even when it seems finished, perfect,
and everyone applauds.

No, a poem is a metaphysical thing,
a verbal architect that builds the Brooklyn bridge,
or erects a building to scrape the sky,
composes a baroque symphony,

sculpts in stone like Rodin,
only to see it evaporate
when you're no longer looking.

Then it's gone, when the words
dry up on the page and you stare
at the blank white screen
when the electronic pulse
beats its drum no more.
No more heart beats.

It is quite the thing,
the line that is never finished,
leaving us with a paradox,
blissful but unsatisfied,
till we keep striving again and again,
like the carnival man who barks out loud:
"Step right this way folks!"
"Everybody's a winner. Only a dollar a toss!"

Just like the emperor of ice cream.

Jack McLean

The Valley of Content

Brightly coloured things that ring,
crystal waters murmur melodies
as they sing.

The spring in the step
that was not there yesterday,
silver bells pealing zeal.

The return to wonder
and the things of youth,
pause in the learning
hard lessons of truth.

Lady Wisdom beckons
in her light, veiled attire;
she directs me to the moon.

In the silent vision
from the time of when,
she raises her right arm,
points an urgent finger heavenward.

I hear her say
--yet wordless is her mouth--
"To the moon!"
"I direct you to the moon!"

Some Poems in Latter Days

The Last Vestiges of Winter

March 25th.

Vague rumblings in the sky
before midnight.

Distracted, I barely notice,
soon forgetting.

At past twelve.
I stand at the window.

In the light
of the outside lamp
a gentle downpour
casts a lustrous sheen
on rebel patches of snow,
remnant fingers of ice,
clinging to the breast
of the still frozen land.

I open the window a crack,
lower the blind,
draw the curtains,
reflect in the still
of the night
on the din of the day.

Perhaps this falling rain
is mercy from heaven,
a cipher to wash away
these icicles in the heart,
cold slivers of resentment
echoes of the soul's past pain.

Jack McLean

A cipher from Sancta Sophia
to forgive, forget, begin again,
let this copious rain melt
the cryptic crystals that exile us
to never-never-land.

Bountiful flood to melt
the last vestiges
of a discordant winter.

To bind each to each
and so dispel
our common grief,

to water the lilies
in the valley,
that bloom again in spring.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Covid Dialog with Self in a Day in the Life

“It belongs to the city,” I said
to her, but did I say it in a dream
or in the other altered reality?

My frail blue forget-me-nots
will soon be pushing their way up
in my garden patch behind the patio,
but the earth is so poor.
I really should add some black topsoil.

Now why did she have to go and say that?
I thought we were only friends.
Complications...What is she thinking?
I am almost 76 years old!
But Covid times are desperate times!

And why doesn't he learn to be gentler
after all these years?
Why does everything have to be so hard?
Does it always have to be a confrontation,
contradiction or a lesson? It seems
some people cannot engage without conflict.

I'm heading for the hills!
Covid is already hunkering us down.
Why should I hunker myself down even more?

Old Laura Davis in Toronto
did say it was “time to go into the picture”
at the end of her days.
It seems there is a movement
toward the center as we age—

Jack McLean

to the central core, the virginal point
that is the soul.

Yes, the soul is the pure point,
the God within. It is the supreme mystery
where only sacred words are spoken.

My inflamed, neuropathic lobster feet!
I never get a break except when I sleep!
But I force myself to walk.

Those newly translated prayers of 'Abdu'l-Baha
are magnificent, encouraging, uplifting.
He must have foreseen this dire affliction.

I am tired of fighting the little birdies.
They can just make their nest
in the rafters above the patio.
Let nature take its course.
Besides, I shouldn't be climbing a step-ladder
anymore to hang my clothes on the lines up there.
Let them have their space and do their natural thing.
Mother Nature has willed it so.
I find small moments of content to see them
flitting back-and-forth with little bits of grass
in the beaks to build their nest.
If they finish their task, soon the tiny birds
will be chirping in the nest above my head,
another generation of avian creatures
starting on its journey.
But then there will be the sweeping up
and cleaning the bird droppings. Ha!

Some Poems in Latter Days

Fareed Zakaria is a brilliant mind.
He has such a comprehensive grasp
of global affairs.
Fundamentally he's an optimist.
He still believes in the American Dream.
It's amusing that he still calls himself
"an immigrant." He is accepted as a 100 percent
American by other Americans.
But his is a nice touch of humble, self-deprecation.
I wonder if he has any relationship with his Islamic origins?
He says that Covid will foster human ingenuity,
the digital economy will make some richer,
others poorer. I think he's right had it not been
for Covid, the terrible injustice of police killings
with impunity and Black Lives Matter
would never have exploded onto the world stage,
even though it has been simmering for years.

Oh here comes a dark-eyed Junco flying in
to capture a white seed at my bird feeder.
Its tiny claws grasp the mesh, then it pecks
through the screen. It takes only moments
and it flies off to rest in the cedar trees
along the back fence.

Well I'm behind the time.
Enough musing.
Rushing off now to another task.

I hear Carl Sandburg's voice
in *The People, Yes*:
"Where to? What next?"

Jack McLean

The Rescue

Hope fades fast
within her breast,
the long slow hours
of anxious waiting,
heart still pounding,
breath abating.

The ladder's raised,
the man above
extends his arms,
her loss turns into gain,
a look, a leap, a gentle cry
and kitty's home again!

Some Poems in *Latter Days*

Father Before the Mirror

Today father I am remembering
the way you combed your hair.
Not that you had much hair on top;
a thin brown slick of it on your crown.

You stood before the mirror,
after taking a determined stance,
facing yourself squarely,
planting your feet,
as if performing a ritual.

You cleared your throat.
Then you passed your small
black pocket comb through your hair
a few times, and it was done.

And I, your adoring child,
stood below, gazing up at you,
the tall, strong man in front of
the medicine cabinet.

So late on in my years now,
I am wondering why today

I am remembering you, father,
combing your hair...

Jack McLean

Truth Be Told

I do not cling to passing life,
It rather clings to me.
No praise of this life do I give,
As long as I'm not free.

The Supreme Servant clearly said,
This body's just a cage,
And the soul a little bird,
I will never disavow Abha's holy sage.

Yes, it's true I still regale,
In a social game or two,
Especially chatting face-to-face,
With Jim, Heather and Lou.

At this golden glow in time,
I yield all woe and sin,
These sorrows soon forgotten,
When we become as kin.

Although you may be weary,
By long, slow hours tried,
As the creeping years wear on,
Life offers still this prize.

Kiss the joy when you may find it,
In large crowds or apart,
The bliss that warms your cockles,
Is found from heart-to-heart.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Brent John Duchesne
(1952-2022)

From an early age,
such a love of cars—
anything mechanical
to see the work of gear on gear,
how cog fits into cog,
to make classic cars
shine again,
like the body of a bathing beauty.

The love of one
whose beating heart

has a passion
for the joy of living,
despite the heavy losses
that could not hold him back.

Speed and thrills:
hot rods, classic cars,
drag-racing down the street
with buddy Dennis Gagnon.

Later on the discovery of cycling
and fat-biking on winter trails.

But even cars he sometimes
left behind to track the beauties
of Larose Forest with Roland and Sue.

His height the measure of his heart,
a giant of a man who spread
joy and laughter to children,

Jack McLean

babes-in-arms, adults in shopping malls,
grocery line-ups, to colleagues,
friends and family.

The essence of love to Sylvie,
so tender and fun-loving,
with the odd raunchy joke
to make her smile.

But some of us knew somehow
that Brent was more than
these oh-so-human-things.

For in that bear-like chest,
those sheltering arms
that hugged her close,
like the limbs of a stately tree,
a nobility of soul,
kindness that could not refuse
service to a friend
even at the cost of life.

And perhaps a hidden longing
to travel in a beauty classic car
at the speed of light.

Some Poems in Latter Days

The Parting
(for Sylvie)

The tears on your cheeks
Were as liquid jewels,
diamonds melted
on the weeping face
made holy now by grief,
a face as pure and snowy white
as camphor.

My arms reached out
to comfort you,
arms among many.

But we stood alone,
quite alone,
in the gathering crowd,
alone, though legions
were assembled there.

Time ceased,
empty words gone mute
in such a scared space.

We remained two souls
united as one heart,
dissolved in the searing flame
of a loss unlike all others.

Silent you were,
as it should be.
Others spoke for you
that day.

Jack McLean

But at the graveside,
above the hollowed earth,
you stood and spoke
with dignity and grace,
words simple, strong and true,
to say the gift of love still means
love, despite the Mighty Hand
that spirited him away.

And on your lips,
a Magic Name was heard,
to plant a seed,
and let it bloom,
in other hearts,
that life may live
and vanquish death.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Phoebe Anne Lemmon
(1928-2019)

Let it be said
she loved soapy water,
yes, doing dishes after lunch or supper.

Standing at the sink,
she would wash and ponder,
if not engaged in conversation.

And in one room, a quiet corner,
a shrine where she might pray
mornings, find strength
for the coming day.

Crowned Queen of the Harvest,
every Fall, sharing the throne
with her King William, the stately two,
sitting near the great black cauldrons
of boiling corn.

She loved and served in a house
on the hill, where a welcome guest
might wander back to the roaring stream
that fell below and feel the dashing spray.

She was for us a strong pillar,
a safe haven for wandering barks
the voyageurs who went astray.

She knew the way.

Jack McLean

It was the way of love and reason,
the path long tried and true,
conforming to the wisdom of the Law.

Loving wife and mother, teacher,
she had known losses,
but patience was her name,
her home a lighthouse for one neighbor
across the way who found illumination
in the brightly beams she cast.

Slowly she walked with dignity and grace,
her piety still showed a laughing face,
a merry heart, a warm embrace.

Transmuted now by the divine Elixir

to become her soul's most golden aspiration,
every heart's desire won at last.

Some Poems in Latter Days

Awakening

Vapors trailing visions
from nocturnal worlds
dispel the stygian gloom.

The upraised Flag of Peace
waves high above
green acres of the mind,
stills discordant voices
once heard at McLean house;
now an Appomattox of carols
upraised, hosannas, anthems of praise.

The sun signals break-of-day.
Spirit guides flesh and blood
the weary soul in molded clay.

Palettes of light splash colors
reflect 'the bright glass of the heart,'
while peace pervades all round
echoes silently, bereft of sound.

— Some Poems in Latter Days (Used by permission of the curator)