

### Philosophical Tadpology

Have you noticed how prolific buttercups are,  
Scattered along the hedgerows, near and far?  
Their glazed colour shining so brightly,  
As though painted with varnish oh so lightly.  
Fieldside. That's the lane that leads to the wood.  
Bordered by cottages, looking just as they should.  
A riot of colours of every shape and hue,  
Facing Nature's magic, changing through the year.  
After that pleasant walk, there is a pool,  
Protected by the trees, it's clear and cool.  
Yet beneath the surface, a squiggly, wiggly mass  
A crowd of energetic exclamation marks,  
With flimsy tails, propels them round and round,  
Like children in spring's school playground.  
I remember when first I saw such a sight,  
In a pond in a park returning from first school.  
I asked my granny "what could they be?"  
I always remember what she said to me.  
"A little piece of Nature's magic."  
But as I looked each and every day  
I saw their tails slowly shrink each away.  
Little legs would appear, front and back,  
And tiny eyes where once was black.  
Finally, this so-called Nature's magic,  
Became something much more tragic.  
What was once carefree tadpoles with no fear,  
Became something else, to me made clear.  
Nothing ever stays the same.  
Perhaps that could even be a tad polosophical.

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## Eygalières Swifts

Curbside table, Boulangerie de Provence,  
Avenue de la Legue, shaded from sharp sun  
by beige awnings, iced pastis to hand –  
rampant jasmine stems fondling posts  
at our sides – steaming intoxicating scent.

Across the street, water dribbles from the mouth  
of a limestone lion, trickles into a trough  
at the foot of the war memorial – a golden Labrador  
lies still, limbs spread across paving stones  
beneath wide-armed plane tree branches –  
  
and they choose this moment to appear, en masse,  
to loop across bright blue sky in weaving displays –  
to dog-leg, oxbow, snake, swivel, soar –  
darting arrows, dappled, flickering in sunlight,  
screeching delight and self-applause – Encore! Encore!

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**ARABELLA AND FRISBEE**

Two adorable Gerbils  
Who were certainly no Whisbees  
Brought in to teach young children about animals,  
What they preferred, how to look after them, their special needs  
And they were loved.

Matthew was 3 and Serena 4, and these are the names  
They gave the two hapless Creatures,  
But, who turned out not to be so,  
Their wonderful rooms, wheels feeding stations, water bottles,  
lived on top of our old upright piano, in the playroom.

After school every day was exercise and playtime,  
A highlight of everyone's day, they were cuddled, stroked,  
And given freedom, and did they enjoy it.

After a few laps around the room, and a few strokes,  
They always showed their spirit of independence.  
A mad spurt. And so behind the radiator or better still,  
under the Piano they went.

Two parents spent many an evening catching these errant souls,  
Worried were we of impending Gerbil domination,  
In the end, after battles of collecting sawdust and cleaning out cages,  
Poor Frisbee, after 3 years of fun, frolics and much love.  
Gave up his life.  
Oh so sad, two little children learned that animals have a short life.  
Arabella carried on without Frisbee, without so much fun,  
And she too, gave up life.

So , we progressed to larger animals, still furry still much fun,  
Two guinea pigs, who lived outside for 5 long years, until to nature succumbed,  
Father said NO MORE RODENTS to clean out etc.,  
And so Jet, our first Dog came next and he was so much loved.

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## Cassandra, who was Cassie to us

*On the moments we shared with our feline love-child*

For a time we were three, a Pythagorean *triangle* with all the right *angles*  
And any room that held us resembled a trinitarian heaven  
When you shared our *bed* and even rested your *head* on my pillow, eyes closed  
Pressed against my back, your *paws, claws* primed to tell me you were there  
And you'd crawl out when it was all too hot, and your small body, heavy, lay berthed between  
our legs

The home breathed when you moved through its smaller spaces  
We moved with unconscious *care* \_knowing how you were always *there*  
Walking downstairs in step with your hurry to see me fill your breakfast *dish*  
And when your disappointment left some food untouched -- not so the tuna *fish*  
The excitement in those eyes when you sensed that signature *prise*...  
If i could make that happen for you every day i would, now

There were times when we would look into each other's eyes  
Our hearts would sing together, harmonised spectral *lines* of a wordless aria  
Did you foresee our shared destiny?  
And as you passed, when those orbs of life were *clouded*  
The light, thus *diffused* into elemental *hues*, the bridge between us turned *skyward*  
And with their *closing*, the *sting* of *finality*...., something awful slipped out of *me*  
Something that had the imprint of life, of hope, and the DNA of Cosmic love  
To leave this fissure, this gaping wound that never heals.

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## The Raptors' Parliament

Upon the crags where shadows loom,  
The birds of prey convene in gloom.  
Each one perched with piercing sight,  
To claim their piece of fading light.

First, the 'Eagle', bold and grand,  
Claims to rule o'er all the land.  
Yet his talons, sharp and cruel,  
Grip the weak with practised rule.  
"Strength and freedom!" loud he cries,  
While lesser birds meet hungry skies.

Next, the 'Vulture', sleek and wise,  
Waits for weakness, feasts on lies.  
Circling high on hollow breeze,  
Profits off the dead with ease.  
"Patience, friends, the end is near—  
Why build nests when prey's right here?"

Then the 'Hawk', with speed untamed,  
Strikes before his prey is named.  
Swift in act but short in thought,  
Leaves the ruin he has wrought.  
"Deeds, not words!" he shrieks with pride,  
Yet never asks who lived—or died.

Last, the 'Owl', with solemn stare,  
Whispers "Trust me, I know where  
All the secrets lie in dust,  
Who to fear and who to trust."  
But his wisdom, dark and deep,  
Lulls the flock to silent sleep.

Oh, behold the Raptors' game—  
Some by force, and some by fame.  
Some by stealth, and some by speech,  
All ensuring they stay perched on high.

So when you hear their piercing cries,  
Look beyond their grand disguise.  
For power wears a feathered mask—  
Will you question, or just bask?

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### High Island Spoonbills –

like dabs of candy-floss caught  
in Texas oak branches, to take off  
in clownish flaps – stick legs,  
wide wings, spatula bills – all strange,

like most things since arriving here –  
a far cry from shy sparrows,  
goldfinches or mottled thrushes.

Showy, undignified, I'm thinking – until  
they are right overhead – a whoosh  
of electric pink, soaring swan-like  
into a wide sweep of sunlit blue.

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### Toby's cough

*On picking up a small terrier, lost in the snow  
From Animal poems for children*

Toby dog was a very old dog  
Whose really bad cough was worse in the fog  
But sure enough he'd be out in all seasons  
Running with his pack, barking for no reason  
Save loving the feeling of being out with his mates  
Chasing rabbits across fields and under gates  
He's slower now, slower than all the rest  
But being at the back's ok cos he's giving it his best  
In the snow it's more tricky – everything looks the same  
Then he gets lost and people who don't know his name  
Take him home to keep him from freezing,  
And they get awful worried when they hear him wheezing  
But Toby's chest has always been bad  
He inherited that from his dear old dad  
But running's the thing he really enjoys  
Especially in the summer, out with the boys  
And the boys love him too, so they won't go too fast  
Running with Toby's an honour, and they want it to last

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## Beasts of No Nation

We marched with hymns upon our tongues,  
with flags, with faith, with fire.

They told us 'kill', and so we did—  
then called us 'liars'.

The blood was thick, the nights were loud,  
the trenches gnawed our bones.

We learned to bark, to bite, to howl—  
to leave the flesh unmoaned.

No saints were we, but men at first,  
with names, with homes, with hands.  
Then war peeled back the skin and showed  
the wolf beneath the man.

Now time has passed, the guns are cold,  
the fields stand green again.

But in the dark, the ghosts still ask:  
'Was all that blood in vain?'

We wear our suits, we speak in church,  
we kneel, we beg, we pray.

Yet when we sleep, the teeth return—  
the beast does not decay.

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