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Submitting to Limina

Details about the journal and how to submit can be found at www.limina.arts.uwa.edu.au.

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Jack

Patrick McCarthy
University of Western Australia

I wrote these poems in the ensuing years after the death of my best friend. They are thematically concerned with loss, mourning, grief, and the gradual yet eventual recovery from heartbreak and total despair.

A Lovely Old Man

When the creeping cold of the everyday
Seizes my tongue so I've nothing to say,
Turns my mind to stone, deadens my skin,
And snakes into my heart to plot from within,
I steer my soul to thoughts of you
Imagining what you would do
If you had grown into a lovely old man.

Years before your life had even begun
You were ripped from us so terribly young -
Putting an absolute stop to your clock
By cracking your head on that cold London rock -
But this is a path I prefer to shun
To picture you not so swiftly undone:
I see you recovering from all the shock,
Life returning to you the power to walk
Back into your life,
To dance with your wife,
And the chance to be a lovely old man.

On eluding death you'd have much to say,
Enough so to scribe some wonderful play
In which you alone would take to the stage
And imbue with magic the words on the page,
Where you'd blow the entire cosmos away
With an impossibly poignant display
Of humanity far beyond your age,
Of an artist and man completely uncaged;
A spared soul thirsting for each radiant ray
Bestowed upon him with every new day -
And there I'd sit, in front of the stage,
Hands clasped in thanks that your fate hadn't changed
Because you belong by my side,
And if you hadn't died,

You would've made a lovely old man.

I leap forward in time and hear your name
Spoken with widespread, respected acclaim:
A distant future where an age has gone by,
Your dark hair grown ashen, your faded blue eyes;
Deep wrinkles abound your skinny old frame;
Loved by a family, and perhaps I've the same;
Though still a beauty, none could deny,
The mere mention of sex by then makes you sigh;
Our grips on this life beginning to wane,
Old hearts rife with yearning and nostalgic pain,
We while out our last days waiting to die
On twin rocking chairs on a porch getting high –
Senile or stoned, you can't remember my name,
Yet you smile at me exactly the same.

Yes, I will always wistfully ponder why
We weren't granted the gift of a timely goodbye,
But with you guiding me
I will hopefully be
Something close to a lovely old man.

Leave Me Be

Stay back, old friend, with eyes so blue,
Our days are done, man, can't you see?
You took a piece away with you,
And I beg, I plead, just leave me be.

We two were once the best of friends,
And surely will, when again we meet,
Be bound once more, but until then
I must kick you out into the street.

I've let you fester, raw and red,
But of grieving you I've had my fill;
My loss I wish to put to bed,
For time moves on, yet I stand here still.

You had your chance to see it through,
But now you're gone, and it's just me;
You left my heart with so much to do
That still I struggle with how to be.

It pains me to speak to you so cold –
You are my friend – but life's so long
And I wish to see through eyes grown old,
And with that I see nothing wrong.

I'm sorry, brother, but the time has come
To cast you aside and somehow forget
This agony, for what's done is done,
And look to fresh horizons yet.
I miss you so, but I seek to dream;
From nightmares I will now abstain;
I wish to bathe in life's rich stream
And wash away this loathsome pain, so

Please stay back, old friend, with eyes so blue,
I've come so far, man, can't you see?
I'll forever hold a piece of you,
But I beg, I plead, just leave me be.

The Dust of Days Gone By

When tragedy struck a recklessness loomed
And I dreamt most of running away
To somewhere distant, dangerous and new
To keep all the grieving at bay,
So I studied a globe and found just the place
I could fuck off the map for a spell,
Where I could touch the enormity of space
And where a ginger would feel like hell:
The Sahara desert seemed like the right place to be
For a young fool with nothing to lose,
So I booked a flight in a mad reverie
Fuelled by narcotics and booze
Because I wished to die,
To sift the dust of days gone by.

I met a stranger online who'd take me to see
The shifting sands of time;
He lived in a Moroccan village named Hassilabied
So I set a course feeling sublime;
I put all my faith in this alien's vow
To show me the sandy sea, and
In the face of the risks I refused to cower
For I felt indescribably free;
I journeyed through Tangiers, Chefchaouen, Meknes
With desolation in my soul;
My own life back home was a terrible mess
But adventure filled that hole
And so I said goodbye,
To sift the dust of days gone by.

My bus screeched to a halt in the dead of night,
My bag was chucked in the dirt,
Then off they fucked, and in the ruined light
To grief I did revert,
But before too long I spied the lights of a van
Thankfully heading my way,
And in I hopped with the brother of the man
Who had set this fateful day:
Ahmed pulled up at a nondescript home
Where I was to lay my head and rest,
And he assured me that no matter how far I'd roamed
Just reaching there was the test,
And I could safely lie,
To sift the dust of days gone by.

I awoke in a rank groggy veil of sweat
On the border of Saharan expanse,

And there smiling at me was the man I hadn't yet met
As I looked stupid in damp underpants;
His name was Lhoussin of the Berber clan,
Who said I'd some hours to kill,
So he urged me explore his little desert town,
And man, what a madcap thrill:
A tiny place at the base of a titanic dune
With a vast garden at its feet
Where veggies, fruit trees and flowers bloomed
Right near the main dusty street
Where a thousand camels sigh,
And sift the dust of days gone by.
I ate a chicken tagine whilst a one-eyed cat
Mewled for a morsel or two,
When I looked at the time and realized that
To the desert I was due,
So I bid farewell to my cycloptic mate
And made my way back to Lhoussin,
Where I met Hendrix the camel, who was overweight
And bravely spat into lands unforeseen;
I was wrapped in a headscarf of rainbow hue
For the harsh sun was ready to burn,
Yet in the cold hard light of what I was about to do
I felt refreshed in a way I had yearned,
And I know why:
To sift the dust of days gone by.

Hendrix ambled upon a mountainous ridge
Beneath an enormous blue sky;
Between sand and air I could see the bridge
That would take me through eternity's eye;
A peach-orange ocean in fragments of stone
Farther than any man can see,
Where only Lhoussin and his people call home
For the desert is their reason to be;
They housed me there, his family too,
Who cooked me a hearty meal,
Then we sung and howled in the night, as you do,
And I felt my ragged soul start to heal
As I screamed at the sky,
To sift the dust of days gone by.

At daybreak we marched to the heart of the sand
To find a place yet green,
Where life may thrive by heaven's hand
An oasis might be seen;
The hours crawled by beneath a pale white sun
In that hot and meaningless space,
Where nothing changed, time was dead and done,

And would never again show its face;
Monotonous atoms spanning the earth
Where fuck all lives and dies,
Where the sands mock all in which we find worth,
Where in the dirt everything lies,
Where I break down and cry,
And sift the dust of days gone by.

We eventually see it from atop a huge peak
Winking like an emerald star,
And we barreled toward it for Hendrix was weak
And he could taste the shade from afar,
But when we arrived I was sorely let down –
It wasn't what I'd had in mind:
A hundred scabrous cats, the running water was brown,
And any goats were rude and unkind;
Maybe this is just life, a mere glint in the waste,
Where to struggle is to thrive,
To grin through all the dangers yet faced,
And return home prepared to survive,
No longer wanting to die,
Or sift the dust of days gone by.