

This document represents a sample of poems included in the full collection, *The Book of Hours* by Lucy English, published by Burning Eye Books.

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The Book of Hours is a contemporary re-imagining of a medieval book of hours. These were collections of exquisitely hand-illustrated religious readings and accompanying images. They were created in a handy size so they could be carried by the owner and read on a daily basis. This book of hours is secular but the general mood is contemplative and reflective. The poems can be read individually or as a story of growth and change throughout a year. These are the poems from the poetry film project <http://thebookofhours.org/> which has been made in collaboration with an international community of film makers.

A MANUAL OF WONDER

Memories crash in my head. That night when we camped in the land
where great shadows of mountains rose above us
as we listened to the river churn.
How I sat with Rich in a room in the church
filled with stained glass and paintings of angels.
I had returned from a week of dark.

And next to that memory,
I was on the green hill in Radnor.
The storm clouds twisted through pastel over the river.
I said, "I can do this. I can."

Now I am silent. The light drains outside the cottage window.
My head is heavy. My back hurts. My brain is frozen.
I need to re-draw my days. Turn hours into new works of art.

I begin. I begin again. I make a new mark.
My brush touches canvas with blue. My pen slides across smooth paper.
A crow crosses the sky.
I draw this. The crow, black on the page before me.
I add touches of watercolour. Orange seeps into the blue. Then I write.

Begin with this. Begin here and do not stop.

LOOKING FOR EURFRYL

We came here when you were
looking for Eurfryl, Uncle Glyn. He walked out in 1972
and never came back, you said.
Not your favourite Uncle. A quiet man and thin.
He wore three ragged jumpers and ate dry crackers, you said.
What happened to him?

That warm day and the light so clear
it made the edges sharp on things,
like the Great Tit's song, *teacher, teacher*,
and the cluck of Jackdaws. *Cluck*.
The A4 hummed a low note and a peacock squawked.
The gardens all fresh; late narcissi, wedding white
and the bright Cataylpa leaves nearly out.

January now and daffodils are pushing through.
A moss filled pond and a sundial with no shadow.
Moss is the only green on trees. The cluck of Jackdaws. *Cluck*.
Correct, correct, coming from the dismal yew.
You found his name on a certificate, you say.
Eurfryl Glyndwr. Died in 1988.
Died of a wasting disease in a Brighton flat.

The slop of the fountain in the pool.
The background slur of the London Road.

MR SKY.

You were my neighbour all this winter, Mr Sky.
When I left my house you were trying to impress me.
In your best shirt, all pink patterned with aubergine.
Silks and satins with a new tie of rainbow.
On Sunday you wore gold trimmed with magenta.
You were the bold one, Mr Sky.

When it rained for seven days even then you cheered me.
Your workaday suit was iridescent. A pigeon's breast
never shimmered like you did. Two tone mauve and lavender
and grey like the softest wool socks.
Smoke in my fireplace and smoke in my eyes.
I opened my door for you, Mr Sky.

I loved you, but you were the mad one.
When I locked you out after a late binge
you threw the moss off the roof tiles.
You rattled the windows and kicked at the door latch.
I was afraid so I slept in the cupboard. Wrapped in the cat's blanket.
I couldn't keep my drink, could I, Mr Sky?

But in the morning, I was sober and guilty.
When I opened the curtains there you were.
Your face pressed to the window. You, all pink fresh and sweet smelling.
You, in your best gold and aubergine;
silk and satin with a new tie of sunrise.

DO NOTHING

I will lie in bed and do nothing.
I was dreaming of lino floors and pastel blue cupboards.
A Formica table top speckled like sand.
Lakes and rivers in the lino. Rivers of mud.
My chair was a ship
with a red plastic seat.

If I turn I can open the curtains
with my toe.
I used to think clouds were like pillows.
And the turn of an Easy Jet landing at Lulsgate.
There's a crack in the ceiling looks like a river.
The delta end is near the window.
I'm in a plane looking down at the estuary.

Merging in strands. My hair on the pillow.
I used to think clouds were like pillows.
I jump from the plane and I'm hurtling down.
I'm shocked. Clouds are just water. Droplets of mist.
I fall from the plane and onto my bed.
Soft. I am soft.

Under the covers.
I'm thinking of you. I'm not fifty four.
I'm seventeen and my tummy's flat.
But it's not you. It's my first love.
I stroked his hand and he pulled my panties down.
We did it on the floor. In the car. Behind the shed.
In the garden. On the floor.
But seventeen means too much crying.

He was crying and I was crying.
So I'm not seventeen. I am seven.
The pillow is a snow slope I can jump on.
Tiny me in a snow field.
On a cloud. The sun's gone in.
I was dreaming of a kitchen. Was I?

A red plastic seat?
I'm fifty four and it's my day off.
Get up. Breakfast. Coffee. Toast.

THE SHADOW

I said to Rich, 'I do not understand this country.
These freeways lined with motel signs.
These great empty sweeps of land and sky.
I feel so unimportant. So unconnected.

In my cottage I used to walk beyond my garden
and straight into the woodland. That was my refuge,
my consolation. I stood there under the arms of oak and birch,
my feet sunk into the layers of leaves. And I was held, Rich,
I was held.'

I was crying then. He walked across the room and took my hand.
'Come with me,' he whispered. I trusted him and so I did.
We drove for four hours. Way beyond any town.
Way beyond the freeway and right into that landscape
that left me blank with wonder and arctic cold.

'Can't you feel it?' he said, and I said, 'I feel nothing.'
And he said, 'Look.' I looked. At the sky. The snow
on the distant mountain range. He said, 'No. At us.'

The shadow of our little car against the land
touched the winter grass but did not bend it.

'That's the only mark we should make on earth,' he said.

He wound the window down and the air blasted in.
The smell of nearly Winter and the song of distant birds.

OUR LADY OF THE ROCKS

Dear Children, I beseech you to turn your hearts to love.
The burning love you find in the driest of places.
Grass still grows in the crack of a rock
and twisted roots push further into the sand.
The red sand ripples with the force of the wind.

Dear Children, I beseech you to go down the desert road,
where the thorn on the dry bush pierces your skin
and your blood is the colour of the crooked strata.
There are many layers between life and no life
and I am the purple flower that blooms without rain.

You are the dirt in the wind and the discarded blue plastic.
The branches stripped white and the flakes of old paper.
I am the wet split in the stone and the salt crust of the seashore.
The scorch of the sun on the pelt of the lizard.
The last circle of water on the bed of the lake.

Dear Children, I told you all which was necessary.
I gave you this knowledge which you must carry with dignity.
Think of me now and how I shed tears at this vision.
You must decide to surrender everything to me.
You must decide to surrender everything.

SOLSTICE

Hush.
Even in the dark days
there is hope.

Think beyond the light failing
on this grubby afternoon
when all the room turns to shadow
and the grey shapes rise
in the corners of your eye.

Hush.
Turn in your bed now.
Turn again and let your life fade.
Beyond this night
in the dark garden the snowdrops
have already found
their white petals.

The lace of your wedding dress
you are ready to wear once again.

