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## Poems

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## Poems

### **Abstract**

Birds in a tree

The precious thing

Fruits instead of flowers

Burial

Late afternoon

Granite island

Knowing Anna

# ALAMGIR HASHMI

## BIRDS IN A TREE: AN ELEGY\*

Before they took wing  
the legend was there.

They sat together (which  
seemed like necking to some)  
on this branch for a spring.  
It was an old tree,

an oak, sans intention,  
and free.

*Come September, the air  
goes nipping through the woods  
instinct to the root,  
keening.*

Of a feather,  
they chirped a while

and fell silent.  
Up in the blue turning to look

at this vanishing sight,  
the sunset gold of leaf-fall,

a tree  
that is wood to a fault  
yet live from its own convention.

\* From an earlier draft manuscript by Alamgir Hashmi, in the archives of the Dickens Memorial Library (U.K.).

# SYD HARREX

## THE PRECIOUS THING

I heard him say 'I've lost it'  
and being but a small child —  
for I was affectionately attached  
to him — I wondered anxiously  
what it was he lost. His cigarette  
lighter perhaps, his wallet thin  
with poverty but fat with black  
and white photographs. Or his smile  
which was of the trickster gentle kind.  
So being an innocent I went  
looking in the garden, down the street,  
by the river, across the foot bridge, searching  
for the precious thing he had lost  
because of a bad-luck accident.  
But all I found was a rabbit  
palpitating in a trap, its leg  
askew and leaking dark blood.  
With all my puny strength, I freed  
it, cradled it, avoiding its stare  
so hypnotising and so like my  
ancient uncle's who had lost  
something I had gone looking for.  
'Look,' I said, giving him my  
tender precious burden of pain  
to hold and make better with  
his healing hands. 'Ah, you found  
it,' he whispered, stroking its fur,  
'my lucky charm, my rabbit's foot  
I always keep in my pocket,  
But lost somewhere yesterday long ago'.

## FRUITS INSTEAD OF FLOWERS

*(in memory of Lauris Edmond)*

'Fruits instead of flowers,' you said  
when last we spoke.

    You were an expert  
at tucking into bed the demanding  
villanelle's rhymes and stanzas,  
its courteous and wicked refrains,

like a dinner host pouring each glass  
at the right taste-bud moment.

Always the children of your heart  
anticipated the pure trance of art,  
yet your muse was never weary. Two

lines of yours chandelier the candlelight  
as we raise crystal goblets to your flame:  
On sinful days and nights red wine is right  
*The wine of absolution is always white.*

## BURIAL

How the things that seem to touch you least  
can hurt the most, how the elegy lingers.  
Like our cat's fur between my fingers, as I  
prepare to carry her in a sling of a blanket,  
sunset-faded pink, perforated by mice,  
to the grave I have just been digging.  
I know this is a truly family event,  
and heart-juggling, when body contradicts  
the soul, and maggot eaten-out the mouth  
and crow-plundered the eyes, the jugular wounds,  
are belied by dreaming tortoiseshell beauty  
sleeping in the sheltering grass under  
an olive tree.

And so it is we're reminded  
that every death-drifting phrase must rest  
somewhere, a hillside perhaps, where the grief  
cannot quantify either the pleasure or the pain  
and the mind is a trap-door to an undefined  
elsewhere, or otherwise, or distant nebula.  
Neither letting in nor out the very word  
that is unsaid by being said  
summoning the living, comforting the dead.

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## LATE AFTERNOON, GRANITE ISLAND

I hadn't realised before how grey greyness is,  
that most boring, uninspiring of colours  
in the rainbow spectrum; much maligned  
and totally neglected as a source of beauty.  
Here, now, grey infuses everything: the light  
that wants to be milky, the sea that wants  
to be a coat of many colours, the sky  
that wants the credit for everything  
(beautiful moon, mystical sun, enchanting  
star ascendant), the hills that want to be green,  
the rocks ochre, the ripples crystal-glinting.  
Yet I take heart from the majestic endorsement  
of the jetty whose wood has greyed to total greyness,  
while generations have sulked and cried spilt  
milk, and does its job as it always has,  
supporting departures and arrivals greyly  
in a black and white movie as time goes by.

# BEVERLEY FARMER

KNOWING ANNA

i.m. Anna Rutherford

## 1 *Paskedag*

Remember the dinner we all  
gathered at Anna's for

on the Easter Sunday  
Grey trees in the windows

in grey light the snow  
gone the lake loose

a hare the kids set off  
on the brown fur of the bank

—whoosh! of a train—  
Anna upstairs taking her time

the colours of water going lake—  
deep in the table cloth

and the shimmer of wine  
glasses raised come nightfall

## 2 Midsummer

The last time I saw  
Anna we saw the New Year in

here they had a fire sculpture  
all set and ready to go

in the park down by the pier—  
black water underfoot

a black lighthouse on the hill—  
only this fierce icy wind

kept putting it out flare  
fizzle flare

fizzle not that we minded  
Give me a fog sculpture any day

Or the bonfire burning mmm?  
like old times on the other shore.