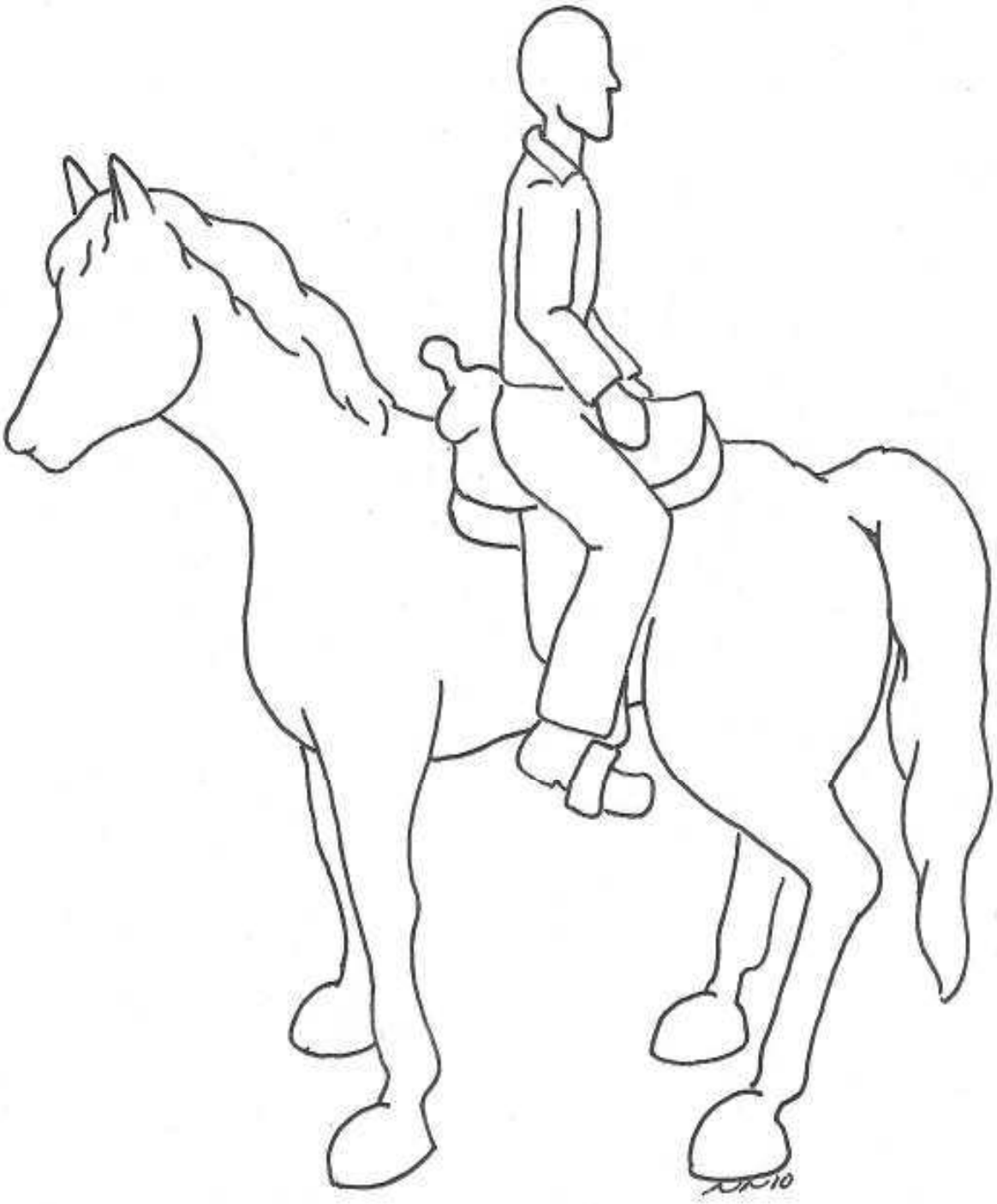

HOW TO LIVE A LIFE

Selected Uncollected Poems
2002 – 2009

Martin Stannard

Argotist Ebooks

Cover image by Rich Curtis

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A couple of hundred words of explanation

The poem "How To Live A Life" was originally conceived and written as a collaboration with printmaker Dale Devereux Barker. It was published and produced by Dale as a limited (20) edition art book, and was a very beautiful object. It can be seen online at:

http://www.daledevereuxbarker.co.uk/Type%20of%20Work/artists_books/how_to_live_a_life/how_to_live.htm

Not surprisingly, very few people have actually ever seen it in real life, and the poem has not otherwise been published until now. I kind of always saw it as part of that art object, and time passed. It's reprinted here in full, along with the original foreword and introduction.

Of the other poems assembled here, they're poems that for one reason or another did not make it into other collections. When I publish a book, which is not often, I try to ensure that it's a cohesive whole and not just a rag-bag assemblage. This necessarily excludes certain poems for no other reason than that they don't seem to fit. Some of those excluded poems are here. And some poems have been left out of this collection, too, for the same reason. It doesn't matter. There are lots of poems in the world already, and sometimes I wonder whether we should be adding to the number. But we do. I do.

Martin Stannard
April 2010

HOW TO LIVE A LIFE

"In the unlikely event of your colliding with an elephant on the move from one circus ground to another……."

FOREWORD

As may be inferred from the title (or not, as the case may be) this poem is published in the hope that it will assist the complete idiot to understand the basic problems of living a life, and also help him (or even her) to overcome them. Great stress has been laid on the formation of basically correct habits but it is recognised that the expert (if that is the correct term) may feel that undue emphasis has been placed on certain aspects of life and, maybe, that some of the possibilities open to the more proficient have been inadequately recognised. So it goes.

First-class exponents of any art or craft (and living a life is as much an art or craft as is, say, writing a poem) are distinguished from their lesser brethren not only by their ability to do the ordinary things (if there is anything in life that may be described as ordinary) better, but also by their capacity for doing things which would bring a novice to disaster, and this fact must be the complete answer (yes, it must be, because it's the only answer I can think of) to those who may criticise this poem on the grounds indicated above. Not that I care that much.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps at first glance this poem will appear much like other poems, and yet I have endeavoured to make it different in a number of ways. For instance, there are no diagrams. It is written in the belief that simplicity is the great essential in a poem of this nature and I am, after all, a simple man. And I have learned that the greatest stumbling block in the path of any beginner is boredom – not the boredom born of lack of desire to learn, but the losing of interest occasioned by the downright inept and innate dullness of, in the case of a poem, the writer of that poem (sometimes called, mistakenly, a poet).

If at times, therefore, I seem to have erred on the side of good humour, wisdom, commonsense and, let's be honest, flat-out helter-skelter, laugh till your belly aches entertainment, I have done so with a very good reason. People like that stuff. The questionnaire at the end will give a very good idea of how I, and you, got on.

Canto 1

STEERING

Living a life
is governed by the same basic need as in
riding a horse or driving a car: the need
for immediate and complete control. Any-
one can get on a horse, but once in
the saddle you must be absolute master
of both speed and direction. Similarly,
no great skill is required to start a life
and set it in motion, but once it begins
to move, maintaining it on a desired
course becomes the primary necessity.

To do this one must have an elementary
knowledge of how the steering works.

Let's suppose you are getting into the driving seat
at the beginning of your life. You have never sat
behind a driving wheel before, and here it is,
suddenly under your very nose, a sufficiently large
and inviting symbol of the open road,
the approaching years and your future mastery
of this fascinating and complex killing machine.
Your first instinctive action is to put out both hands
and grasp the wheel, perhaps firmly with
"this-is-child's-play" confidence, or a little
apprehensively and "I'll never get the hang of this".

It's most important that you have complete control:
the danger of even a momentary relinquishing of
control cannot be too strongly stressed. To be able
to steer a course through your life calls for
perseverance: the beginner should be under
the supervision of a qualified instructor until such
time as he can steer "a true course" under all
conditions; otherwise, as the reader will appreciate,
he is a potential danger both to himself and to others.

Canter 2

CONTROLLING THE HORSE

We commenced the first canto with a horse,
so let's stick with it: once upon the horse, it requires
but a word or a touch to produce movement. Indeed,
many an unhappy amateur rider has found that
his mere presence near the horse was sufficient to
goad the animal to violent action. As with a horse,
so with life. No honeyed words or even spurs
will waken a life without a necessary sequence
of actions. Nevertheless, a wonderful and complex
"life force" capable of tremendous flexibility
and stamina, and absolute obedience to your
wishes – this lurks waiting for you
once you have mastered the controls of the horse.

It is not within the scope of this poem
to describe this life force but we cannot reasonably
discuss control of it unless you know that
it obtains its power from God and given
proper maintenance and supplied with
the necessary fuel it will prove a very willing servant
but, like any other finely constructed piece of horse flesh,
it will break down under the strain of misuse.

Do not blame life if you cannot at first obtain
the control referred to: it is not as easy as it
sounds. It remains a "knack" that may evade the
beginner for a while, but it will come, and in all
probability quite suddenly. To achieve this, be kind
to your horse. Do not run away with the idea that
it was put on the earth to obey your each and
every whim, but with smooth and correct pressure
you can make it purr like a cat. I may be mixing my
metaphorical livestock, but that's what life is like.

Canto 3

THE BRAKES (or WHOA!)

You want to stop
but you need assistance. There is a brake.
The harder you push,
the quicker you stop.
But there are limits. We cannot do better.

Now let's see
what enables us to stop. To brake.
It is a brake. You have to sometimes
apply the brake.
The harder you push, the quicker you stop.

Where, I hear you ask,
is the horse?

Canto 4

ON THE ROAD

You have moved away and are now travelling very slowly along a straight and level road. You have moved away and are now travelling very
rapidly along an unmade and winding road up
and down over hill and through dale.

You have moved away and are on the road. There is a lot of traffic.
There is too much traffic. After a little while you have to stop
and you don't stop where you want to stop and it is only with the timely assistance of your instructor that you stop at all.
You said "I am going to slow down or stop" and you stopped.
Then off you go again.
You are confident that you can get away. To your dismay
you begin to roll backwards. The instructor, much amused,
takes control of the situation.
Acting under his instructions, you move away.

You have moved away.
You have mastered the elementary principles of riding a horse
but any display of over-confidence is firmly sat upon
by your instructor.
Your experience is very limited.
You think you have considerable skill but you don't.
The great big world holds unknown situations which will lead you
into all sorts of trouble. But you have, after all, moved away.

Canto 5

MANOEUVRING

Every moment of living a life
produces a never-ending series of
changing situations, all of which
must be treated according to
their requirements –
heavy traffic in towns, you lose your job,
the wife ups and leaves for ever,
you fall out of a tree, a tornado
takes you by surprise, a change of
government, sudden children,
reversing into a dead end -
all these and a hundred others
require skill and judgement, not
of any special degree, perhaps, but
certainly of the variety that is
best obtained by constant

repetition and practice repetition and practice repetition and practice
repetition and practice repetition and practice repetition and practice
repetition and practice repetition and practice repetition and practice
repetition and practice repetition and practice repetition and practice
repetition and practice repetition and practice repetition and practice
repetition and practice repetition and practice repetition and practice
repetition and practice repetition and practice repetition and practice
repetition and practice repetition and practice repetition and practice

Incidentally, a friend of the author once
nearly demolished a window-cleaner's hand-cart.
Obviously you cannot go through the whole
of your life looking hopefully for
whatever it is you are looking hopefully for.
Did I mention that a friend of the author once
nearly demolished a window-cleaner's hand-cart?
It is commonly but erroneously believed
that this manoeuvre should be completed
in three movements. Nonsense! Continue
until you are satisfied that the cart is
demolished beyond recall. Be happy.

Canto 6

EMERGENCY STOPPING

The dashing of a child or an animal across your path
The totally unexpected appearance of
The falling of

Whatever happens
Whatever happens you should be able

Able to stop with lightning rapidity

With lightning rapidity
Stop!

Canto 7

SENSE

Some people pick up sense more rapidly
than others. A proportion of people never
acquire it at all and, strictly speaking,
such people are not fit to live a life.

Canto 8

SENSE

Just as many types of savage possess a keen sense of observation, noticing by a broken blade of grass which way their quarry has gone, so does the wise man notice every little thing that is going on around him, each impression passing swiftly to his brain, there to be analysed and interpreted:

a puff of smoke is seen over a distant hedge. Is it a bonfire in a garden, or does it herald the approach of a traction engine about to cross one's path? The clean tang of freshly-sprayed tar may be borne on the wind, indicating that the road may be up. A carter's whip seen over the hedge; the glint of harness seen through foliage: either of these betray the proximity of a horse and cart.

The sudden rising of a flock of birds
indicates
what?

Canto 9

WHEN MEETING HORSES

Courtesy is needed
when meeting strangers
because they might be horses.
It is always desirable
to pass horses, whether
ridden or led, giving
them a wide berth
in case they should
startle and kick out
and prove to be strangers.
When meeting a flock
of strangers in the middle
of your life by far
the best thing to do
is to stop dead and wait for
a horse to come along.
Should you keep on the move
there is always the risk
you will stampede them.
You may, of course,
wish to thank your god
they are not elephants.
You may wish to thank
your god they are not friends.

Canto 10

SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE

What should be your point of focus?
Did you understand the first question?
Do you have eyes in the back of your head?
Do you need them?
Are you unhappy?
How would you depress those close to you?
What is the effect of harsh words?
What is the effect of depressing those close to you?
Is it just me, or is getting up in the morning becoming
increasingly difficult?
What is free movement?
What are the advantages of ascending a hill and nearing the sky?
How can unnecessary wear and tear be avoided when using the heart?
What is the rule of the road?
Where does the road go?
Do you watch too much of the world going by?
What are the chief differences between a horse and an elephant?
(avoid mention of the obvious ones)
What are the dangers of moving your head from left to right?
Should you be slower now you are older?
How can you ever say you are truly happy?
Is there such a thing as hating your life and beating it?
What are those noises in your head?
Why can't you sleep?
How long have you been doing this?
It's been going on quite a while now, hasn't it?
Should you be looking at that girl/boy (delete as appropriate)
and thinking those thoughts?
How would you tackle the problem of turning to face in the opposite direction without depressing those close to you?
If it gives you pleasure even fleetingly why don't you do it?
Is there such a thing as order?
How would you avoid depressing those close to you?
Why would you wish to?

DANISH PASTRY GIRLFRIEND

If you're planning to jump out a
window pick a low one; if you're planning
to run in front of a bus pick

a slow one. If you're planning to jump
in a river pick a dry one; if you're planning
to jump off a bridge don't

pick a high one. If you're planning to open
a vein pick a Please don't continue this,
she said, it's alarming and tasteless and it's

not poetry. But it's about survival, I said,
and she blew a smoke ring at me and my head
disappeared although she had given up

smoking and I had also given up smoking
because smoking can seriously damage
the things you bought. And it's not

about survival, she said, at all. It was
at this point I realized I didn't want to
have a serious conversation with

anyone so I went and got myself a Danish
and here is where I say Pastry or Girlfriend
but I don't know which one's the one.

from **52 REASONS NOT TO HAVE SEX**

(3) The tree and its mischievous offspring.
(7) Little sapling. (11) My misshapen destiny.

(12) Broken manhole covers as an excuse for
Everything. (15) They've stolen the rocks from

My landscaped garden. And also
The washing lines. (19) A neighbour

Walking up and down the street and she thinks
She's all big. (22) There is a mountain.

(27) Airport full of scary people.
(29) Immigration is at the door in their dark suits

And frowns. (34) I know you told me "try to relax".
(35) Deaf people who can't hear

What we say. (37) A wakefulness
Striking me as strange.

(39) The memory of a poodle I bought
Ten years ago. (41) Babble amidst

Incessant quiet. (43) Somebody kicking the house.
(44) Asylum seekers cleaning car windows.

(47) A cow looking for the fire station
Is disconcerting. (49) The ice cream van, and how

Its music means he's run out of ice cream.
(50) The vicar. (52)You may fall in impossible love.

A SUNNY AND HAPPY DAY

A sunny and happy day and I go
to the local shop to buy something
for lunch and crouching by a wall
a young pigeon attacked by some predator
is cowering its wing bloodied and torn
its neck raw and bleeding
but I don't know what to do about it so
I do nothing and a little further along
two youths are in a bus shelter and
one of them is punching the bus shelter
but I don't have anything futile to say here
about punching a bus shelter and
in the shop one of the staff is busy
putting reduced price labels on food
she says it's better to sell it cheap
than throw it away unsold and I'm tempted
to say it'd be even better
to give it away but I don't
I buy something for lunch and go home
and the bus shelter is empty
although next to it now there's a car
with about twenty youths in it all talking
at the same time and playing loud music
("if you can call that infernal racket music")
and then I'm approaching the pigeon
and thinking I wonder if there's
a pigeon rescue organisation I can phone
when at that moment a woman
comes out of an office building
with a cardboard box and some plastic bags
and rags and she's going to rescue the pigeon
at least I hope rescue is the right word
and not "take and put out of its misery"
so I go on along home and don't stop
to see if I can help because
I'm in a hurry to take my washing out
of the machine and hang it to dry
and to make my bed I left unmade and
to eat the lunch I've just bought
on this sunny and happy day.

CARRIE DAINFORTH

How is the daughter of
the quiet house? Is a prayer to be ignored?
Does silence mean you're dead bored?
Where do you get to if you go
down the hill and turn a corner
and disappear?

Who carved her name into
your forearm? Where can we get
lost? Why did Victoria wear jet
in the morning? What happens if you
die?

Can she play the buttons & switches?
Who invented the whites of her
eyes? Who told her
her name is Carrie Dainforth? Is it all
going away? Do you think the chip shop is
still open?

BECAUSE OF ITS TREMENDOUS VITALITY AND INTRINSIC WORTH IT HAS SURVIVED BUT IF, LIKE ME, YOU DOUBT THINGS ALL THE TIME, THEN ALL YOU CAN SAY IS THAT YOU'RE NOT SURE. YOU'RE SURE YOU'RE NOT SURE THAT THE BLACK SHEEP IS STILL ON THE HIGH MOOR

THE NAME OF THIS PLACE

Do you know the name of this place? If you do, do you know the names of the other places? This is the sail of the boat and it will take you, and these are the streets of the town and they will take you, away between the walls and beyond the walls where there are men in coats and further still are the trees of the wood and in the woods is my grandfather's house and his fisherman's rod, and the warmth of the fire, and all the fires. Do you know the laws of the kingdom?

THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR

This is the beginning of the year during other similar years. I am drawing the spout of the kettle with the leg of the dog because it's something to do. Tomorrow I'll write the field of the cows and the gate of that field and the lock on that gate because I do.

Do you know about the beach, the waves of the sea and the fill of the hourglass? Do you have the wisdom of the wives or care about the wife's opinion? Here is the soldier's coat and the schoolboy's schoolbag. I put the tailor's needles in the box under the lid of the box then I put the boxes on the table. Then I lost my way. Where are the lids of the boxes?

THE EDGE OF THE PAVEMENT

Put some water in the kettle and this early summer morning put up the sails. The men put out the boat and in a few years build a house on this hill. Don't light the fire it will burn us. Close the door and open the window and don't throw the stone in the direction of me. If you would listen you would hear the music as I wash the dishes and we fold the tablecloths. Let's buy bread in the shop and not run to the other side of the street: let's halt at the edge of the pavement as if it were the whole world. We need not walk far and the men need never leave the boat. The sound of the wind hurts you but I would not do that although he would not believe me.

THE CATTLE WILL BE KEPT

I was born in this place and the door was locked. The corn was reaped and the money stolen. Families will be divided and a house built upon this hill. The cattle will be kept in and books lost if they are left here. This house was built a thousand years ago. We were sent home and left behind. Let a tree be planted here and the dogs called in by a man who is wounded. He strikes the nail with the hammer.

THE EMPTY MOOR

Towards the top of the mountain is the fire. Above the house and behind the door is the fire. Around the rock is the singing of birds with wisdom. Oh how I wish for the wisdom of a black sheep looking for the other black sheep on the big moor. The hinge and the swinging of the big door shut. Sounds of things on either side. The conversation of poets: big girls. If only for the sake of peace grant me the books and looks of the big girls. I will sail from the shore in the little boat on the crests of big waves as you close windows against the empty moor.

THE NIB OF THE PEN

In the beak of the bird there is the fact or the idea of the fact of cutting the grass and the other grass and the colour of the grass. The horse's head is pretty much the same thing as a bird's wing or the feathers of a cockerel. The ideas of the heads arrive by word of mouth from the horses' heads. There are many pens in the world and many nibs of the pens and the nib of the pen is shedding tears over the raven's feathers.

THE WISE MAN

The eagle is above the big rock and the children are running through the grass. Many of them are without wisdom. The big boys remain standing on this side of the door. These are the books of the little boys. I'm looking for the white cow because the time of the singing of the birds has come and I like the conversation of wise men. I can see white sheep on the summit of the high hill. There is snow on the high moors. The wise man went towards the shore the way you or I would walk to the door. Then sailed over the sea. Now the children are running about the tree. Thank you for your letter and for your kindness. I think I will leave this house for the sake of peace. Are you going to the wedding?

THE BRANCH OF A TREE

I'm hanging from the branch of a tree among high trees listening to the sound of wind among the trees. I feel the pain of the back of the hand and the point of the rod because I can't see beyond the point of my nose. And I can't see through the eye of the needle or feel the desire in my hand for the shaft of an axe. I'm in love with the colour of a cheek and the beauty of a beautiful face although we live unhappily in the house of a pig but always live in the hope of peace. I am rebuilding the stack. I am resolving the question. I have already repaired her hat. And tomorrow is the day of the feast.

GREAT ENGLISH INVENTIONS

The English invented meat
and they invented everything else
with any kind of value in the world. For example,
tins to keep biscuits in, pen holders, Sellotape,
trees, fridge magnets, music, New York School poetry,
and shampoo that smells of strawberries. In 1857
the troops in Africa were getting a little hungry
and they were fed up with eating small dark native huts,
and turned their attention to the small dark natives.
Within hours they had invented roast beef,
chops, mince, and turkey. They proceeded to export
their new invention all over the world, except to
those big wet places: the oceans. Then they invented fish.
And wow, with all those spectacular minds, with
all the wonderful things the English can do, it's so ironic
that I had to go to America to be set straight,
to find Love. Americans invented stealing people's hearts
although it's a popular belief that cannibal Englishmen
did this first. But the English invented irony.
It was a few days after they invented iron. The word
was first used as an adjective: "That thing is very irony".
Did I mention how the English also invented adjectives?
But some people, Americans mainly, think we have not
yet invented modesty. We have invented modesty,
actually, but we don't use everything we invent.
Some things we give to others. We also invented
generosity. But Americans invented Botox and will live
forever and out-invent all the English and look damn good
doing it. Being superficial always wins. But the English
invented "poetic daring". Never forget that.

SLATES

One day left to filch. Seersucker suits. Shocks
of hair. A mitten with no thumb. Two pennies
rubbed together. Triangular picture frames.

Sparks in darkness. Ashes in the afternoon. How
suddenly the box was empty. The preposition
about. The toughened glass. Why horses become
glue. A boat on dry land miles from the river.

All day aprons. Roof repairs. Slip-covered
couches. A restaurant closed for the holidays.
Fingertips. The sky an unusual shape.

The infrequency of pencil. Hills with trees on
them. Leaves with no trees on them. Where pencils
are said to come from. Tuesdays. A curve
not a corner. Hands holding nothing. Mealtimes.

Foot taps. A vase pronounced the American way:
vase. Grey not blonde. Four blue eyes. Three for
the price of two. One more way of saying zilch.

POEM (including a line by Emily Zaborniak)

Once a day I lock myself in a cupboard
and don't come out until I have written a poem
or had one very important thought. Once a day
I walk to the bottom of the garden and look
back at the house and wonder which of us will
collapse first. Once a day I lay on my back
and close my eyes and repeat to myself
the facts of my thousand errors. Once a day
I realise that I have more than a thousand errors
to state the facts of, and lay down for
a second time until they are done. Once a day
I consider my image, with mirror and without,
and think that tomorrow I won't need to do this
because I know what I look like. Once a day
I forget I thought that, and consider my image,
with mirror and without. Once a day
I go to work and listen to a few minutes
of each of a thousand lives. Once a day
I wonder if everything is not a metaphor or
its weaker relative, the simile. I do not consider
that cop-out, the comparison, worthy
of mention in this company. Once a day
I look closely at one piece of Nature, and at
one piece of Man's handiwork. Once a day
I go around my flat and gather together
all of the day's accumulated material and see
if I can use any of it again before I throw it
out. I like to recycle. I like futility. Once a day
I tie my shoes and watch my fingers
know what to do. Once a day
I think about how clever I am, and how
stupid. I don't think about it for very long,
but it's important that I do it.

IT'S GOING TO BE A WHILE
BEFORE WE CAN DO ANYTHINK

Go to Nebraska. Go to Aardvark.
Go to the Walk-In Century. Pear
and the Pair of Apples. Go to Mouseville.
Go to where They sell Washing Machines.

Go to Lime Tree. Go valiantly, and Go.
Go Walk. Go Stop. Go with Violins
Blue and Yellow and Grey. Faint Praise.
Go into what Fog and emerge cleansed.

Go China. Go Zebra. Go to Twilight Light.
Excellence as far as Edge. Go Gentle-hearted.
Go, Tony the Hairdresser. Go pleasant.
Go Hush the Air. Go Silent Minority.

Go Fish. Go clear Blue Water.
Orchard under Spring sky. Go Explain.
Go Scissors. Go to This Page. Go to Open
Door into Open Air. Go to Index.

Go to Fifth. Sweet Taste on Tongue now.
Go to Spell. Go Season of Snow. Go Solo.
Go to Midsummer. Go Stay. Go to Rear-view
Mirror. Go Past. Go as if They're after You.

RECONSIDER

Answer:
I'd adopt my usual tactic
of not doing anything.
You, as the questioner,
would therefore be allowed
a division of the spoils
and to make up your own mind,
and thus my mind also.

Answer:
Of the several courses of action available
(the insurrection having been defeated at last,
suppressed with frantic cruelty)
4, 18 and 32 are the most sensible options
(everything is terrible and trivial)
but 19 is the correct answer
so I choose 19 to creep into your good books.

Answer:
I'm not sure. But if I did
not know where somewhere was
I would ask advice before going to look for it
in a universe all owned and claimed.

Answer:
The insignificant words are inflatable, poignant, assuage, oil-soaked,
condolence, pungency and basket.
Though there is no power in Rome to restrain me
I should not use these words --
if I do I am wasting my time and yours,
and I know whose is the more valuable.

Answer:
This is a case where honesty and language
have been forced together
into happy sunny civilized life,
a not happy compromise. For example,
to marry is to compound, think of mistake,
and I am cycling down the road
when I see a bore inexorably coming towards me;
it's obvious there's nothing I can do
and I may be straying a little from your question,
but I'm falling sleepy.

Answer:
I would do nothing again and, like a pilot
who must learn to trust his instruments
as well as his judgement, and be at one
ultimately with the air itself, wait to see if
doing nothing is successful.

But I would give you a running commentary
on what was happening, just so you
don't lose interest and go away
to the land you undoubtedly crave,
the peace beyond your people's frontier.

Answer:
Free, exact and systematic thinking
has begun: if I was in business
I would get out as soon as possible,
and start again. Mind you, the second attempt
is as likely to fail as the first, it seems.

Answer:
The more I see the less I see. The seas are lifeless
and the rocks barren.

SIGNS AND FICTIONS

Species come and go. Life on another planet
sounds attractive until you take the commuting
into account. We don't like war but there's
lots of other things we don't like and we do those
without much more than a murmur but
probably on balance war is worse than shopping.
Insects have lives. Customer service agents
in call centres have lives. There have been
better days. The atmosphere isn't in great shape
but it'll do. You look at someone and you think
they're happy but perhaps they only look happy.
A bus goes by it resembles a cattle truck although
it's painted more nicely. But it's full of cattle.
Nobody ever sweeps up the rubbish outside
where we live. Men have walked on the moon
allegedly. They have fallen out of the sky
and climbed mountains and not come back down.
Other forms of life in other parts of the universe
may or may not be better than this. They may
be rich but there may be monsters. Perhaps all
their nights are lonely and sleepless. We have
more than 100 digital television channels. Family
life is so difficult. The Samaritans keep busy.

THE SURVEY OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree nor Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree (Circle as appropriate)

I enjoy using the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
My movement is restricted when I am on the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
I am able to carry out additional tasks whilst talking to the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
I am able to work efficiently when on the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
I find long albatross conversations uncomfortable	1 2 3 4 5
I would avoid using the albatross if it were possible	1 2 3 4 5
I am able to convey what I intend on the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
I talk in a natural manner to the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
Using the albatross causes me frustration	1 2 3 4 5
I feel flustered with the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
Talking to the albatross restricts the amount of work I can do	1 2 3 4 5
I do not feel physically restricted when talking to the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
I am not productive during my albatross conversations	1 2 3 4 5
The albatross makes my life at work easier	1 2 3 4 5
I find my albatross comfortable to use	1 2 3 4 5
I cannot carry out my work whilst using the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
Having to use the albatross puts no extra pressure on me	1 2 3 4 5
Using the albatross creates a barrier when communicating	1 2 3 4 5
I feel positive towards using the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
I feel I can participate well in albatross conversations	1 2 3 4 5
I experience little or no physical discomfort whilst on the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
Using the albatross increases the demands my job places on me	1 2 3 4 5
I feel my conversation is less natural with the albatross than with others	1 2 3 4 5
Using the albatross is something I dislike	1 2 3 4 5
Using the albatross has a negative effect on my job performance	1 2 3 4 5
I feel relaxed on the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
I can easily make notes whilst on the albatross	1 2 3 4 5
Using the albatross causes me physical pain	1 2 3 4 5

THE KING OF HAPPINESS

The King of Happiness is a tall man
but when he talks his words make no sense.
They're rubbish. He's living in a hole
and sometimes his head is at the bottom
of the hole. In his world which is largely
inside his head horses play the piano
because they're incapable and it's allowed.
Once he taped his voice singing but
there was nothing there. A fragment
of his clothing lays heavily upon the stones
and is the only indication that he has been
anywhere. He would rather have
been an apple than The King of Happiness
and unlucky in love. Having concocted
a fascination for Coleridge's Abyssinian maid
he went on to write loads of sad
and what to him were erotic stories
most of which had to do with her skin
and the things an imaginative man could do
with milk. He's living in a hole bordered
by Lilies of the Valley. In his world
smouldering bonfires on cliff tops signal
to passing ships that passed several days
ago. He has never had a job. He's never
had to get up at five o'clock in the morning
and pretend to be awake. He would
rather have been a hypnotist and brilliant
with a meal than The King of Happiness.
He would have quite liked to have
a Queen of Happiness to go with him
but he didn't. Once there was a dark-eyed
girl who was promising but she didn't
live up to expectations. When push
came to shove she said she didn't like
his hole. And he's never liked cheap jokes.
Books gather dust and there are books
about dust and other dusty subjects.
There is a stuffed albatross.
There is an editing suite he never uses
because he has nothing to edit except
his thoughts and they don't need it.
He's a bit of an artist in his own world
and paints women who could never exist
being loved by men who are the sons
of demons. He wants to stop the demons
from preying on the beautiful bodies
of the women. The sun in his eyes burns
like pepper. His underpants smell
but so do yours and so do mine. He would

rather have been kicking in windows
of shops on the Tottenham Court Road
with his fleece over his head so he couldn't
be seen instead of The King of Happiness.
He would rather have been happy.
He would rather lay in bed with his head
full of cold than be The King of Happiness.
His day sometimes fills with water
and it's a mixture of rain and tears. Once
he read a book about what it was like
to travel round the world when nobody
knew it existed and wondered how
anybody could make that stuff up. There
were no animals only shades
of women who could never have existed
except in his darkness. Contradictions
are the order of his day if they are
miserable. He is The King of Happiness.

THINGS ARE GOOD IF YOU SAY THEY ARE

The buildings have flowers around them. Our cultural development is progressing apace. Demolition experts are ten a penny around here.

I fall asleep thinking about the cars parked outside.
Also I think about the big new industrial development
we'll be able to see from the bedroom. You know
I will always love. It appears falling is always happening,
something new is always beginning, lessons are not being heeded.
Grand trumpets are playing, and goons are grinning. Perhaps
this is a fanfare, I'm not sure. Packages are always being delivered
by package delivery boys. Sometimes one stumbles
as if by accident upon someone who will be in the rest of your life
even if only as a memory although she refuses to speak to you
at first sight. You offer her your selected prose,
most of which hasn't been written yet, but it makes no
difference. Her haughtiness doesn't last.
She wanted it to last but it doesn't because it can't.

Note to self: Overheard birds chattering. Subject matter not interesting but music of it quite enthralling. Reminded of something but unable to put finger on quite what.

I do half an hour of exercise each morning between chapters of
Proust. I favour sleep-inducing chemicals during the afternoon.
There's a storm welling over there beyond the roofs where
who knows what in Heaven's name else wells. The idea of seeing
through to the end what you've started usually, I find, is anyway
a reflex caused by the coming together of time streams,
mad stallions, vertical and horizontal highways, greetings,
personal relationships, missed calls, saucers and plates, chaff
and finch. Your first line was amazing although subsequent lines
weren't so amazing. Fresh green vegetables injected directly
into the vein is the only way to be woken up since sleeping
became the day job. We should watch the landscape blossom out
until it fills our eyes and ears, our mouths and our pages.
Yes, until the loud music drives our soul mate into our arms.

I'll just show them my sexy side. I love the sight of people running away. Trees were invented for us to hide behind.

See what happens when the landscape blossoms out and we're looking the other way? We missed the horses and the lightning, and the building of a new road from A to D, so C and B can be by-passed. Also there was the incident of the murder we somehow didn't get to eye witness. There are all sorts of ways to proceed, and none is much better than any other. Mrs. Baxter, the lady I have who comes in and does once a week, has an interesting take on life. When things get her down she goes into town and buys herself some new dusters, and has a cup of tea in Newstead's. It's enough of a philosophy to be going on with, having proffered a helping hand and reached out Samaritan-like to everyone. I remember giving up a good career to allow for time to get a handle on how far sitting around thinking about things can lift you like a leaf in the breeze, fatally, then I was scampering indoors, frightened by it all.

You're going to have to speak up. I have my headphones on (as you can see).

I'm a curious sort of a person stack full of questions
it's best never to ask. Does "Soviet" describe anything these days?
Or "Shape-shifter"? It's purely academic, all of that nonsense.
Nobody can account for a flutter of wings
in the chimney. Okay, sure, yes. Perhaps it's a bird.
I was prepared to allow the possibility of angel but okay,
bird. Then you sauntered into my life like you were looking
for a hat. Okay, sure, yes. Merrily I pointed to the hats
which were over there. Then I said let's not get married yet,
let's sit around and read the papers for a year or two. Giving up
smoking should come first, giving up setting fires second,
and give me a moment I will tell you what comes third. Perhaps
a purge, or there's always adventures to be gone and got.
Each day brings further temptations, mainly to boys.

For safety reasons we suggest you do not sleep on the runway. Thank you. It makes no difference if you bring your own bedding, by the way.

A message is left with the answering machinery
in a little plastic box on a small three-legged table
down the hall. I don't know who it's from, I can't
understand the accent. I used to lay on my bed and listen.
One recollection is very much like any other, it says here.
Slipping into something more comfortable but less comforting
it occurs to me I'm not a total idiot: a poem is easy to write
but difficult to write quote in your own blood unquote.
Life is equal to being stuck in the last line of a poem
you really don't like: discuss. There's a knot being tied,
the swift is confused with the swallow, strings are often
mistaken for keyboards; the future is dead like the past.
And you wonder if you lost the thread because
you weren't concentrating, or you weren't doing it enough.

Oh my. I think I shall have a glass of water, and perhaps just add to it one or two drops of lemon juice. That will no doubt raise my spirits and, perchance, perk up what I call "my system". Of course, there is no system to it at all.

I seem to be in a bit of a lull. I don't like such lulls. Sometimes
being awake is like being in a psychology seminar
and we're in a rage at someone we swear to God existed
although there doesn't seem to be any proof they really did.
What we thought was something to believe in turned out to be
fuelled by the promise of a recording contract and drugs. But
looking forward with an open mind and only a hazy idea of the past
at either footprints in sand or handprints in wet concrete
I don't know if I'm afraid of something I only imagine is there
or read about in a series of newspaper articles so it is there
actually. I'm not at my best at the moment but I'm not mad.
The phrase "exercise in futility" means what it says.
When the darkness descends it's good, it says here, to take off
your head and put it out of reach. That sounds very modern.

She showed me the scan of her baby, and it looked like one of those satellite photographs they sometimes show you on the weather forecast.

A hundred years without so much as a cold and suddenly
your body decides not to work. This is going to take some time
to get used to. The car in the garage is gathering cobwebs.
When you came bouncing down the road towards me
you reminded me of someone I have been trying to forget,
then I couldn't work out if I wanted to forget or to remember.
When I stood close to you all I could do was remember
what I have been trying to forget. Someone today described you
as feisty. Then, in the parentheses of the day, someone was
miserable on the telephone and outside dusk fell in its manner.
There are so many ways to be separate. One has to be
determined, or swamped. How many days are there when
you figure the next few days are going to break your heart
or even your will? It's Thursday. I want it to be Monday.

Make me laugh, why don't you? "Everything looks perfect from far away." That was never going to make me laugh. Cry perhaps, but not laugh.

When line 4 arrived Jez improvised. It is okay to take people
and even yourself by surprise. Thank you for the flowers
which arrived today in the hand of an acned lad
who, one day, will know what it is to be pleased softly
by flowers. Knowing what I know, step with me into
this vacuum. If we find it to be not capable of supporting
life I suggest we decamp to a nearby bar and try
not to make idiots of ourselves, as if we can help what we do.
Then, having exhausted all our possibilities, let's decline
the future. When the future disappears there is
always the past to fall back upon: "Excerpt From
A Teenage Opera", "Something In The Air". And, while
I think about it, this air: is it me, or has it been laced
lately with some chemical designed to dampen our spirits?

I was amused by the fact he was so young. When I was that age I was still wrapped up in bandages and playing with puppies.

Yes, it was a star. Although perhaps possibly maybe
there was a chance I was slightly intoxicated a little bit
it was a star. The marvels of the Universe certainly are
marvellous, even when they are falling inexorably out
of the sky. Congratulations, by the way, on your new
job, the arrival of your baby, the anniversary of your
being chained to a house, on being signed up for Life
to Christianity, vegetarianism, television, cigarettes,
and popular music. I imagine me and you, I really do,
so happy together. I should call you up and enact
that Turtles record, word for word, just for the sake of it.
Anyways, I lied. It wasn't a star. It was in the sky,
it was shining. Forgive me, but I am only a man
and I am almost certain to be always making mistakes.

Oh no, the elephant's escaped! It's done this before. It gets over the fence and causes havoc in the neighbour's vegetable patch. Take a tip from me: don't keep an elephant as a pet. They're big trouble.

The Ambassador isn't here. Will my Mum do?
As soon as you put the kettle on stuff starts happening.
There's something unsettling about reading about
an elephant crisis. Such things! You expect shortage you get
surplus. You desire surplus what do you get? Mrs. Baxter.
A shortage of a man comes to the door and asks for
one of the people who isn't at home right now.
You gaze over the top of his head and see the wilderness
stretching from the lid of your eyes to the lip
of the vast pit where old men fish. They don't catch fish
but they fish, the fish have disappeared, the fish perhaps
were never there in the first place. We never loved
what we said we loved, we never meant what we said
we meant but we were good sometimes at diplomacy.

When I got home I found the water bottle in my bag had leaked and everything was swimming around in an inch of water. Address book, chocolate bar, The Penguin Book of Elizabethan Verse, mobile phone, mouldy apple.

A sharp thorn has pricked my pride. February is
gone and March is no fun, although in some country
or other they have just found a load of buried
drawings of the rude kind, as Patrick describes them.
Apparently they are lots of centuries old, but nothing
much has changed as to what people do to one another.
They fuck them up, fuck them down, then fuck off.
Late winter winds are disturbing the peace here,
you are a long way away, the translations of my poems
that were said to be in the mail have not arrived
and are more likely to be in the lake, by the side
of which Pablo the linguist is alleged to languish.
He cannot languish as well as this, nobody could.
Nobody could without an awful lot of practice.

Mrs. Baxter says she washes her dishes in hot water, no detergent, and her stomach has never given her any trouble at all. She reminds me of someone's mum. I think she is someone's mum.

We have a good time then Lo! and Behold! We have
a bad time. I notice how the plaster on the bathroom wall
is flaking. You notice how the children are bonny.
We at the same time understand this has got "Doom"
written all over it. I drag the car along to the mechanic
and the mechanic puts on his doctor's outfit and pretends
to be a doctor, and he says many of the vital organs
are rotten, and some of the limbs are useless,
and his plan is to put the misery out of its unhappiness.
The pub is open, and I go into it. The beer is alive.
I have a good time, then I have an extremely bad time.
I have a bad time, then you deliver unto me an even
worse time. The sun goes down on the day and where
I thought there may have been flowers there aren't.

And he took his own hand, and mailed it to someone who lived a long way away. She sent it back with a note saying not to send her any gifts, ever, not even on her birthday.

I love toast. I like to be sunburned. I love
you and the memories I have of you. It is good to be
honest and not forgetful. It's a cliché but I regret nothing.
The fish died. Fish die. This is a poem to you.
There are three thousand years between us and several
millions of miles, I am dumb and I am clever,
you are smart and you amaze me. I have not written
any love poems for zillions of years, if ever.
I cannot walk down one road without you come to mind.
I cannot get through one day without you come to mind.
The world is an enormous place and I plan
to go and explore some of it. I will never forget you,
not even when the night is filled with piano benches
and the earth talks to my feet about the way my lines break.

Audrey went out of the front door with her midriff bared. She was certainly a modern young woman.

Let me repent. Allow that much, generosity. Intervention is
not necessary. I've thrown away the City key into the canal.
It took a lifetime, or half of one, to realise risk is
necessary. The money in the bank is unsafe,
the promises etched by my voice into the air at the time felt
necessary. But they proved not to be so. When I held the frog
in my hand I recognised it as a frog but at the same time felt it
necessary to deny its frogness. It's too late now to say
I made a mistake. It's too late now to acknowledge the Princess.
Are you confused? To tell you the truth, so am I. Let me
take your coat, you for a ride, you for granted, the piss.
Mrs. Baxter says you're never too old to learn. The dictionary
says necessary means that must be, that cannot be otherwise,
that which cannot be left out or done without.

She was getting hot flushes. He was in the bushes. Tra-la! The art of song-writing is more lucrative than the art of poetry writing, apparently. But I eat okay, usually.

It's all very well smugly to say you touched distance.
All through the night and into the day is such a cliché
but it's okay. The sun on my fingertips, walking home.
You are fresh as frost, we are registered useless.
My car is parked outside. When I get my licence I'm going to
drive it through your wall. That'll surprise you!
Is that your real name? I can't marry you if that's your real name.
Somebody is waiting for me at home, anyway.
Rumours are all over the shop, and most of them are true
which is what you said: Those rumours, they're true.
So I guess it's all up. I could give a fuck.
I don't even remember how this started, or how we got to here.
Who can ever say? Philosophy, the touch of your fingers.
All I really need is one more killer line and I'll be fine.

Then mum went and put the kettle on. “Don’t wait until tomorrow. The danger is here today.” My dad had just come out of hospital.

There I was, sat at my old Imperial 70 typewriter,
impeccable carriage. Once where I once belonged.
What happened is better replaced by fantasy.
I wore a blue dress blessed by a gigantic blue rose,
never quite recovered from death by drowning,
jumped from the plane, went to live in the jungle,
wrote my name on every tree, changed my name
from one tree to another. The sea changes colour,
one day refuses to resemble one day, affections
are transferred from one planet to another.
In this cupboard I keep my Hoover, some brooms,
a selection of rags and cleaning things, and also
some buckets. And at the back under that blanket
and that rug is my old Imperial 70 typewriter.

I shall be home Thursday. Please be sure to have a bath before I arrive. I am on the verge of solving “The Mysterious Case of The Mysterious Rash”.

A pellucid organza gown seems out of place this damp afternoon,
but tolerance is a current fad of mine so it’s okay. How abrupt
the weather changes! The choristers at the Chapel seem ignorant
of the climate’s flightiness, however: they sing always the same
old songs. And when the white vans congregate in the yard
it’s as if the smoke of cigarettes is come to impersonate the murk
as well as add to it. Fantastically coloured shimmers of butterflies
will have to be dredged up out of somewhere if I am not to fade
into miserable. Sometimes one has to think very, very hard. Now
it is time to wash the vegetables and dress in readiness for
supper, and check and see if any more eggs have been delivered.
Did I mention how I miss the children? Did I mention how Lucy
tries to brighten the day but fails, somehow? It is time to nap.
When one falls to sleep in the afternoon why is it to wake again?

"Mr. Laurel and Mr. Hardy decided to re-organise and re-supervise their entire financial structure – so they took the $3.50 and went into business…"

I am fed up to beyond the back teeth with people
and have more than half a mind to steal a space rocket
to go and live in space. Will I be able to get organic
orange and parsnip and raisin flapjack on Pluto?
I don't care about getting movies late, or never. Who gives
a fuck about film? Poetry is all, plus. This morning
when Mrs. Baxter came into change my bedding, she
said she had been to see a film called "My Big Heart",
and had a very nice meal afterwards at Wagamama.
Mrs. Baxter is a sweet soul, and doesn't look her 60 years.
On other planets, people her age have been killed
a long time ago. That's what appeals to me, to be honest.
I could go there, have a really great time for a couple
of days, and then die. Here, it takes too much arranging.

I WAS SAT THERE AT MY DESK WITH A POETRY MAGAZINE OPEN BUT ABANDONED AND FEELING MISERABLE THINKING I SHOULD DO SOMETHING MORE USEFUL WHEN SUDDENLY A LITTLE LIGHT WENT ON IN MY HEAD AND I WAS HAPPIER THAN I'D BEEN FOR A LONG TIME

Shall I work the rest of my life
then die? Not before I've been to the airport
and bagged a seat on a plane. Oh,
let me answer a few e-mails before I go.
Oh no, perhaps they're not important.
After all, they will live for ever and ever,
not like me; I think I will be lucky
to make it until tea, the way I feel, so bored,
so lonely, so depressed, so suicidal,
so…. Oh, I just thought of a joke!
It's very funny. And don't believe all that
so this and that mumbo-jumbo, I was just using
words I don't use usually, to see how it felt.
It was kind of entertaining but the pleasure
wasn't long-lived. Then I thought
perhaps I would compose a sestina
about something, but couldn't think of anything
useful or of worth to compose a sestina about
so then I went to the airport and then I went
to the toilet and then I went to another country
and I forgot to tell you, my sweet Chloris.
Forgive me, I was distracted by the clouds
that seemed ever to surround me. Ever since
the fish died it's not been the same, as
if I had feelings and they'd been stolen from me
when I was looking. And when I was not looking
one of the beautiful people strolled by
and lifted my wallet and my faith in humanity
was just a little bit damaged as a result
so after that I was never quite at my best,
although I managed to keep my sense of humour
even though I was permanently pissed off.
It was like I was not English or something.
Chloris, why did you never let me come
to your apartment and woo you? To your town
famous for its plastic bags? Even although
success is what you care to define it as I think
failure is easier to recognise and more difficult
to conceal from the neighbours and your
friends, if you can call them friends. But
I'm not sure I always care for my attitude
or these continual comings and goings.
Of course, I know I'm not cut out to be
what I want to be so I have to be happy
with what I am. This would be
a great way to think if I hadn't cut it

out of a greetings card and sent it to myself
as a lark. This afternoon it struck me
how often I have nothing to say,
or (to be more accurate) how what I think of
saying would upset me so much
I think it's better to keep quiet. I hold with
this strategy most of the time, not all
of the time. So, that was how come I came
to fly away: I did it to impress myself.
I'm sorry I didn't call you, but my frailty
is stronger than I thought it was, even
though I always thought it was pretty strong.
But we had no future, in much the same way
as we have no real past, and the few
memories we share will always be there
until we forget them. This new country
I've found is filled with prettiness
and squalor, which you may say
is not unusual, but today everything is
unusual, and tomorrow everything will be
unusual, and the next day, and so on until
I decide I have had enough. The only
continuity seems to be in fragmentation,
and it's not up to me to explain. You don't
understand, but that's OK. As expeditions go
this was always a futile one. And I am better
when I talk to myself, which has been the case
for longer than I care to admit, so I will take
my vitamins, and eat fruit, and read books,
and study hard, and this is the end,
Chloris, of the poem, you know, and stuff.

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