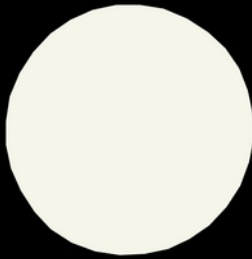
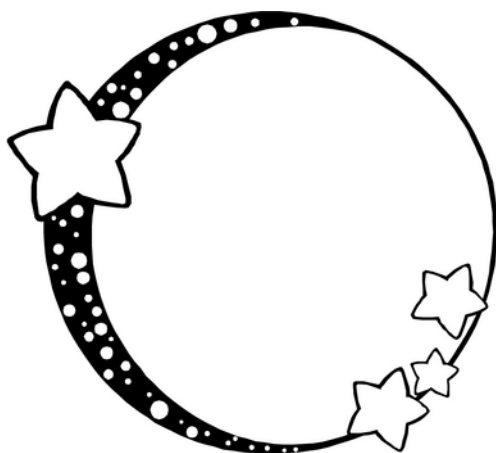


the Moon and the Sea



Stephen Brooke

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Arachis Press 2025

THE MOON AND THE SEA

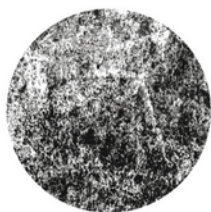
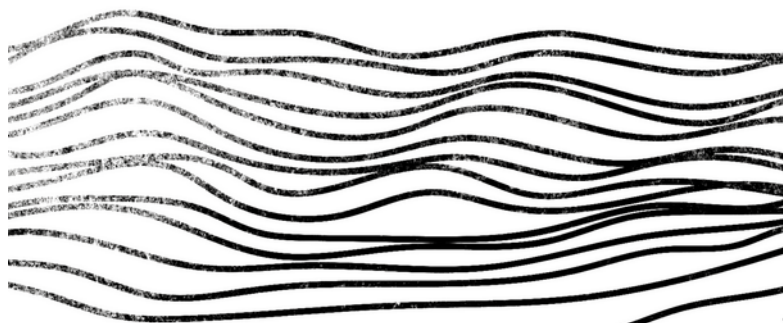
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the moon and the sea
reach ever toward each other
yet may not embrace



Ways

Walk with me to the moon tonight;
tomorrow we'll find a path to Mars
among the overhanging stars,
and following our Milky Way
we'll wander on until the day
hides all behind its rising light
and every twinkling trail dispels.
We'll linger but to make farewells,
a moment in the gardens of dawn
to watch the pale fading moon sail on;
we'll walk again its ways tonight.

I put pin-pricks
in black construction paper,
creating stars.

Did God find it so easy
to fill his sky?

a river of stars
flowed across my summer nights
above dark water

the milky way leads only
to such memories now

Image

I remember meeting
only because someone
took a picture. There
I am, at your side,

on folding metal chairs.
One convention or
another; I'm sure we talked
about books. I probably

called you 'Chip.' Or not.
The image has taken the place
of memory, become memory.
Do you remember too?

both ugly –
that won't matter at all
if we close our eyes

Glimpsed

Illusion's but reality
glimpsed from another angle,
and which illusion to believe
is for us to untangle.
Though all is truly as we see
we little understand;
what tells truths also will deceive.
Go build anew on sand
the shrines of your belief and doubt,
of what is and is not,
and look into your empty hands–
you've found what you have sought.

24 Exposures

It's all digital now. Film
has become quaint, antiquated,

and so, it seems, have I.

There are eight exposures still
in my camera, eight of twenty-four;

waiting. No instant gratification
is in a roll of 35 mm,

no sending it to all your online
friends via cell phone

or whatever. Don't ask me,

I don't own one. No, I just have
an old camera and patience.



Change

All things change:
that which lives,
that which dies
and becomes
as the dust.

Restless dust!
Crumbling tombs
breathe you in,

breathe you out,
covering,
scattering,
on the wind's
tuneless song.

All things dance
and forget
as it fades.

As we fade,
figures shaped,
made, unmade,
of the dust,
dust to dust
and to dust:
forms we may
half-recall

or but dream.

That which dies,
that which lives,
that which is
and becomes.

Breathe deep now
and forget;
all things change.

These Forgotten Skies

These forgotten skies of summer
carried rain across the ridges,
filled the streams deep in the hollows,
when the two of us were young.

All that time and water flowing,
flowing dark beneath the hemlocks,
off toward rivers we'd seen dreaming,
rivers named in songs we'd sung

to forgotten skies of summer.
To the Hocking, the Ohio,
to tomorrow's seas of distance,
so passed all to which we'd clung

and the secrets clouds would whisper
to each other all that season
of forgotten skies of summer,
when the two of us were young.

roots lengthen
as branches spread to the sky
both seeking

Today
rain fell. So what?
It must for life to thrive.
I think I've grown an inch or two
at least.

Softly, Slowly

Softly, softly,
the rain against the window
wakens me to you.

Softly, softly,
in the gray silence
of dawn, I hold you.

Slowly, slowly,
our candles flickered
into yesterday's dreams.

Slowly, slowly,
we made new dreams
for tomorrow.

Softly, softly,
slowly, slowly,
I kiss you good morning.

I allow the sun
to once more rise
surprising myself

Pieces

I try to fit this in here
and that in over there.
Couldn't this corner be
a part of the sky?
None of us are given enough pieces
to finish our puzzle.

Tried

I should not have tried.
There were too many duties
tugging at my sleeve
for me to love you.

I should not have tried
to divide myself and give
a piece to you and another
to the world.

I should not have tried
when guilt told me I was
stealing time that I
could never repay.

There were too many debts
and I chose to slip
away from them all. I should
not have tried.

I own the moon
but share it with the world
tonight

I remember dreams
I once had but no longer
understand them

All My Poems

All my poems are religious.
All my poems are political.
All my poems are about sex.
All my poems are about death.

But then, that's life.

All my poems are about me.
All my poems are about you, too.
Yes, my poems are about us
and the universe and God and infinity.

Even the short ones.

All my poems are humorous.
All my poems are serious.
All my poems are about love
All my poems are about depression.

Same thing, pretty much.

All my poems are about the same thing.
All my poems are about nothing.
All my poems make people go 'huh?'
All my poems eventually end.

I stopped doing all
the things I didn't enjoy
now I do nothing

it doesn't matter
that nothing really matters
does it?

Ecce Homo I

Are you a man
Full of trembling show, a laugh
You fashioned to shield your gut?
You've told the world who
You are, but meant to say something else.

Are you a man
Who put a bag of dreams aside
And left them in the corner,
Forgotten when your way
No longer clearly could be seen?

Are you a man,
Weak like a man, strong like a man,
Ashamed to seem too righteous?
Meek immorality
Condemns he who disdains all struggle.

my masks must whisper
their stories to each other
keeping me from sleep

our only right
is to exist a moment
and then leave

this one gift can not
be taken from us

Ecce Homo II

Nailed to this cross
by the hammer of your eyes,
wearing the crown
woven of your lies,

scourged for all sins
condemned of blasphemy,
feed our torment,
naked on the tree.

Your god of wood
has raised me up whole;
drink of my shadow,
cast lots for my soul.

In the grave,
in the grave,
in the grave
of you
I lie shrouded.

I end myself
to be reborn tomorrow
as whom I choose.

Ground

We have our balancing act,
our tightrope walk, where each
of us must fall off
in the end. How far
is it to the ground?

Comfort Food

Give me a comfort food existence,
a simple, satisfying,
mashed potatoes life.
Excitement is over-rated

and interesting times remain
as much a curse as ever.
Bore me with your love.
I'll fall into the routine

of you and me, of home and bed
and Sunday church and dinner.
What's wrong with that? I ask.
What's ever been wrong with that?

cardinals' whistles
answer 'chuck-wills-widow'
promising dawn

I am
a grasshopper
in this ant-hill world,
living for today and being
myself.

coffee and pie spice
fragrance fills the kitchen –
rain whispers outside

At My Age

It seems a strange admission at my age:
she was the first, the one-true-broke-my-heart
love-of-my-life. The rest just qualify

as ships-that-passed, my turnings of the page.
You love, she said, too much, become my cage,
and we would both be happier apart.

She is, perhaps, but when will life restart
for me? It's not as though I didn't try,
pronounced my empty lines and wondered why

I still perform such roles upon my stage,
I cast myself in such roles at my age.

Intentions

Despite my worst intentions
I mellow as I grow older.
You might even like me
before I'm done. And here

I was hoping to mature
into a white-haired curmudgeon,
my only friends the pigeons
I visited each day,

pockets full of bread.
Maybe someone else
will expect my visits,
yet. It could happen.

Branch

As the branch upon the tree
so love may wither, unattended,
and broken by the tempest wind
or by its own weight, it falls.

What use then is such a stick,
but to return into the soil
or serve as bonfire, come the chill
of the darker longer nights?

Yet at times a branch left lying
takes root, and growing, reaches sunward,
to freely proffer sweeter fruit
than it ever might before.

clouds of starlings rush
across the autumn sky –
their voices fade

Of Forgetting

Why does life go on and we do not?
Memories we think long faded find
ways into the unsuspecting soul;
some bleak sleepless night they will slip in,
whispering of all that we have lost.
Did I truly love her so completely?
There is someone else; let me forget.
Set me free to know such love again.

Passed

Reasons:

not one of them
very good, but together –
ah, together they piled
onto me, pinned me down
until you passed
beyond my reach.

I loved you, I think,

I loved you but pride
and misunderstanding
took me by the arms,
led me away, saying,
Look elsewhere. She doesn't
care. Maybe I believed;

does it matter, now?

The night has grow still;
once I dreamed of you
beside me, of kissing
your ivory shoulder
by the light of a moon
that will never rise

again.

I shut my door
and the rest of the world
is in prison

Balloon

One day, you stopped being mine.
There were a thousand-and-one reasons
why and none of them mattered.

A child lets loose his balloon,
the string slipping through his fingers.
Tears will not bring it back.

Each day, I loved you more
and you loved less. My heart could not
hold you tightly enough.

storms fade
as do the rainbows
that follow

Peg

I hammered myself
into you,
a square peg, snug
in your round hole.

We seemed to fit
together so well
unless one looked
closely and saw

I was broken.

Bandages

Bandages – that's what we are,
you know, the bandages on each other's
heart. And if we stop the bleeding
for a while, is that so bad?

Ah, but you will find, too soon,
all too soon, that I must stab
myself again and yet again.
There is no cure in your kisses –

only these moments of forgetting.
You will learn this and who, then,
will bandage my fresh wounds?

the past fades –
did I once love you that much
or only dream it?

One Leg

My life stands on one leg,
unsteady, reaching out,
hoping only to someday
find balance.

moonlight
through half-closed blinds –
my prison bars

Awry

I have become a bit awry,
leaning off to the one side
as though growing slowly toward
an imaginary sun.

One would not even notice, most
of the time, but there it is –
off-center, bent so slightly, ever
so, and by what unseen hand?

Might each twig that is twisted, given
time, yet curve back on itself,
find a destined way upward
from its birthright of the soil?

Let me sleep and in the darkness
untwine my self, dream into truth.
I am but a bit awry,
after all. Only a bit.

To sleep,
perchance, to dream.
That's the rub; but such dreams
could be no worse than those to which
we wake.

cricket in the sink
hops into the tea strainer
on my fifth attempt

Cast Stone

Pain is the stone
cast into a pond:

the ripples spread,
disappear,

and we see again
the reflected sky.



With each gain something is lost.
Can anything be
without cost?

I am sorry
I escaped into you
and called it love

in my defense
I was fooled too

Far

I threw my heart
as far as it would go.
It should have landed
at your feet.
It should have traveled
all the distances
that lie between us.
Is my strength too small,
my aim too poor:
Did that heart fall
somewhere along the way?
It is lost, now, lost,
and I do not know where
in the miles from me
to you.

time turned upside down
the hours spilling on the floor
who will sweep them up?

That Cloud

We go on, the world goes on,
and all things are forgotten in time.

All we think important right now
we will find to be ephemeral.

As ephemeral as that cloud that looked
like lovers for a few seconds.

Church

What communion is more complete
than when I come to you?

Could choirs sing more joyfully
than in the vaults of my heart?

I find my way to heaven
through the doors of us.

God holds the remote
changing our channels until
he decides to sleep

Prophecy, Fulfilled

Beside me in the dark, you said
you couldn't see us together

in the long run. If ever you
should have lied, it was then.

Then, when I began to leave.

the sun and the sky
know your every secret
but never tell

One More

Light one more candle
in the church of my heart,
to flicker in darkness
if but for this moment.

Sing one more hymn,
your sacred song rising
to echo and fade
among shadowed vaults.

Whisper one prayer;
the words will not matter.
Allow them to wander
to their true amen,

hidden in smoke,
clothed in our music,
one last fleeting flame
before our stripped altars.

Light one last candle
in the church of my heart,
to burn until we
both are forgotten.

Fire

I reach my blackened hand
once more toward the flame.
This time, I'll bear the pain
and grasp your fire.

Friends

Her friends – our friends, then –
I don't see much of them.
But there are times, yes.
We say, *How have you been?*
and *Gosh, it's been a while,*
and *She still speaks of you,*
you know. And how do I
answer that one? *Tell her*
I said hello, I mumble,
hoping they won't. She should
be a memory,
a Christmas card,
this woman I loved.
She should be a poem,
remain the abstraction
I have modeled in vapor
and scraps of truth and dream.
I have crossed the chasm,
my friends, and shed my wings.

the stars wink
telling us jokes
we'll never get

Love without friendship will die.
Is this the lesson
she taught me?

lesser of evils –
life is a succession
of such choices

Vessels

So what went wrong? There are at least
a dozen different answers to that one,
each of them good enough. Ask rather why
we fell in love—that will forever be

the mystery. We mismatched souls,
obsessive seekers, thirsters for the draught
of perfect union life had promised once.
We tried to grasp it, pouring pure through

our fingers, even as we drank
each from the other; faulty vessels, we
for I could not contain you, nor you, I.

it would hurt far less
if I did not still like you
if we were not friends

your smile has become a knife
thrust thoughtlessly through my heart

Cardboard

A puzzle someone put together once,
we made a picture. Nice, he said, and threw
the pieces back into the cardboard box.

The version on its cover did not do
us justice, but it's all that now remains.

Last Rep

The last rep is the one that builds the muscle.
The guys in the gym, the serious ones, know that,
know each rep before that all-out effort
is just warming up for the one that counts.

It's no good to say, *My workout calls*
for eight repetitions and no more.
It's no good to hide behind, *Train,*
don't strain, and believe you've done enough.

You've never done enough. There is always
one more rep left in you, if you can find it.

choosing a helmet
before I ride the bike –
my fashion statement

I'm partial to the blue fade
but all-black does look classy

Matter

It is no great lie
when I claim to care about
the things you love.

They matter to you
and that is enough.

I Grew Up

I grew up
in flat-roofed Florida houses
with terrazzo floors,
neighborhoods where evening
brought the spray trucks, passing
slowly down curved streets,
their insecticide fog
hanging in the dusk,
and kids would follow after
on their bikes.

I grew up
in a town where stores
went dark, locked up on Wednesday
afternoons, but the beach
was always open, the pier
lined with fishermen.
Mosquitoes buzzed against
the screens, the jalousies open
to the humid night,
where I grew up,

and even a sheet
was too much to bear,
fitful in the heat,
but all the stars could still
be seen, against black velvet
skies, stars that have since
disappeared. Along
those palm-lined streets I've sought,
to never find the place
I grew up.

Third Avenue

Third Avenue was the place
to cast around the tall pilings
in hopes of reeling in a sheepshead
or even a red. Yes, snook lurked
there too, from time to time.

Third Avenue was the place
when the swell was small and the pier
crowded and sometimes the sandbars there
were just the thing. Best to avoid
the temptation to shoot the pilings.

Third Avenue was the place
to watch the sun set into
the Gulf and see if we'd get
that flash of green. Maybe we'd wait
for stars to whisper into the sky.

night sky above
still water below
a star is a star

I watch sparks fly
from the relentless wheels
of the universe

sometimes I stand too close
and pretend they are aimed at me

headlights loom
and disappear into night
the stars still shine

Blink

We exist for a moment
and then we don't.
A million galaxies

spin for a moment more
and then they don't.
Look up and wonder

if God might blink
and all would be gone.
Who would ever know?

Murmured

You ask why we exist.
I can answer only, *Why not?*
The viridian pines may have some other answer,
murmured to the mountain winds.



Journey

My journey of a thousand miles
begins with me stumbling
on the first step. I get up.

The only way to keep going
is to act as though nothing
matters. Perhaps it doesn't.

This journey may lead nowhere,
but I get up and travel
another mile. Why not?

Sunday mornings –
Jan and Dean would ride with me
along A-1-A

above empty rooms
a vacancy sign flickers
and goes dark

cars' headlights loom and fade
each bound further into night

The world is my oyster.
Did I just swallow
a pearl?

success and failure
are but stops along the road
the journey goes on

Earthrise

On Mars, that planet far,
Earth is a morning star
to shine above the red
landscape, chill and dead.

Who has seen it rise,
what unknown, alien eyes
in eons past would stare
through thin twilight air

and wonder? Were there none,
dim lit by the ancient sun,
who once knew death and birth
and wished upon the Earth?

the only mountains
left for man to conquer lie
on other worlds

One Star

Might I reach up
and pluck one star
from the sky?
A little one,
to wish upon
when you are far,
allow its light
to fill my heart.
The lonely night
would not seem
quite so dark.

Clings

The fog clings to the fields this morning
as I would cling to you.
I and the mist might linger, dozing
in this half-light of dawn.
Why must the insistent sun
call us both to rise?

morning arrived
in an envelope of fog –
no return address

Forget

I have found it easy to forget,
to lose you in the shadows, gathering
at the edges of my life. I might
have loved you, or no more than wished I did.
Wished I could.
Our picture is too dark with time now. Other
shadows have been cast across what was
and what was not and I know neither can
be trusted. I've found it is easier
to forget.

a May moon
rivals the sun
until dawn comes

Skinks

A big boy skink has been
pursuing a big girl skink
all around my studio floor,
patiently but persistently.

His head is broader than hers
but both are broad-headed skinks
and I suspect that more
broad-headed skinks are in the offing.

Boy artists have been know
to pursue girl artists here as well.
I return to my canvas and hope
the broad-headed skink has more success..

seed catalog –
the first harbinger of spring
sprouts in my mail box

mower sends startled
insects flying for safety
egrets follow me

mower passes –
stinkbug in the grass lingers
on still morning air

things change
as do the seasons –
as do we

Confessions of an Art Historian

I understand Impressionism too well
to really like it. As boring sometimes as
a Flaubert novel, it pursues the truths
of light in a brushstroke, science on a canvas.

The brush speaks only words; there are no stories.
That they, these painters, created beauty still,
despite the theories they carried with their paints,
laid out in care for plein air experiment,

but proves the artist will chafe at any bonds,
no matter that he might have forged them himself.
Some part must hide itself from theorists,
historians. It lies in the artists' souls.

I look too closely, seeing every brushstroke;
I stand too distant, knowing 'this came before,'
'that followed.' I understand Impressionism
too well and not at all. As most things.

so many pretty
talented young women here
today I feel old

I box up my life
for others to unpack
someday

Some will surely end up
in the discard pile

The Tree

The tree came down last night,
in a collapse of wind
and leaves and noise.

The one I'd warned
my mom about: let me
take it down.

Oh, no, your brother
said he would
a year ago.

Rain on the way
and a hole in the roof.
I'll get the ladder.

I am Hurricane, said the wind,
and passed on into midnight
and Georgia. In time, I slept.

Pandora's box
and that of Schrodinger
may be the same

is anyone willing
to open it and find out?

change of seasons –
mosquitoes give way
to biting flies

Raining

It's raining again—raining in Florida,
raining in the Carolinas.
How'd the song go? *I believe*
it's raining all over the world.
Well I suppose it's
a rainy night in Georgia too.

No going out in this weather.
I'll sit here, drink
hot lemon and listen
to the music of this house,
the drip, drip, drip
in variations of time and pitch

as each pot and pan
plays its polyphonic part.
I think I'd miss that
if I ever got out there
and fixed the roof.
Not now—it's raining again.

Each day I win my battles.
Why do I feel I've
lost the war?

These Days

The kitchen becomes my world on these cold days,
revolving around a book and a cup of tea.
Let the north wind call at window and door;
let her voice lose itself among the trees.
These days come and go, clad in their darkness,
and I remain until I may seek spring.

Depart

Let us depart for parts unknown,
beyond the bounds of the maps we're shown,
across high mountains where eagles have flown—
if you aren't coming, I'll travel alone.

Let us embark on barques that sail
into the realm of the shark and whale,
to hear the gull cry in the gale,
to spy the shores known only in tale.

And we shall sing of things that lie yon,
behind every sunset, beyond each dawn,
of seas dark and lost where sea serpents spawn,
of legends that linger from days bygone.

Let us depart for parts unknown;
in dream my guiding star has shone
above an horizon that I must own—
if you aren't coming, I'll travel alone.

the same path
looks different
to each of us.

God's hand
often juggles
this fragile soul of mine
but ever catches me before
I fall.

Sea-Wine

I've drunken deeply of sea-wine
in taverns where old salts
would spin their tales of breeze and brine
and heaven's boundless vaults

where unfamiliar stars fill night
above the ebon deep,
of harbors bathed in golden light,
of jeweled ports that sleep,

kissed by the ardent tropic sun.
Ah, but once more to stand
upon remembered shores ere done,
to once more touch their sand,

to watch the stars' eternal dance,
to name new constellations,
and chart a course of hope and chance
to my heart's destinations.

I'll see such sights no more, it seems,
nor ever voyage away,
for once tomorrow filled the dreams
that now hold yesterday.

I've drunken deeply of a cup
of mists and memories;
among old mates I've tipped it up
and drained it to the lees.

north wind howls –
on the couch two cats
become one

The Crowd

I seek God in your
upturned faces.
He is not here tonight;

down the road, he waits,
in the crowd, at the bar
having a beer. And I

will keep traveling
and each crumb of applause
you drop I will sweep up.

You love me, don't you?
Then feed me again,
as I feed you, of myself.

This is my body, torn
in bite-size pieces
and tossed to the crowd.

I seek God in your
upturned faces.
Whom do you seek?



The Scars I Carry

Too easily wounded, I carry the scars
of many a battle I have lost,
or won, perhaps— it matters not
when one, at last, counts up the cost
of battles that should not be joined,
the borders that should not be crossed.

Aye, many a battle left its mark
and every contest took its toll,
for though they heal, these wounds of mine,
each leaves its mark, on skin, on soul;
not readily seen, the scars I carry
attest I'll not again be whole.

to be myself
I must know myself –
I still learn

This smile
is my defense
when the absurdity
of life seems too overwhelming
for tears.

I costume myself each day.
Which person should I
wear this time?

Morning Symphony

Cardinal, tit mouse, mocking bird –
my morning symphony tunes up.

Enter traffic, molto vivace,
in hurried flight to the city.

How soon will mowers and chain saws
join a raucous crescendo?

Canadian
and Muscovy coexist
at the local pond

crested flycatcher
startles the garden –
a silence

flash of yellow –
warbler plays hide-and-seek
in the magnolia

Love is
not to be saved.
Scatter it on the wind
so the breeze may ever carry
its song.

Blossoms

If you wish, I'll say
I loved you, some long-past spring.
My memory is no better
than yours but I can imagine
us hand-in-hand beneath
the flowering trees of then.
I might even have kissed you,
or maybe it was the other
way around. You can decide
and I'll remember only
the blossoms drifting like snow.

a curtain of rain
hangs from the eaves this morning
the stage is empty

Last Blossom

One faded-red blossom clings yet
at the base of the camellia.

Unnoticed, it blooms amid
a blaze of azaleas.

I fall with that last blossom,
never to know the spring.

the rain stops –
scraps of moonlight hang
from the cypress

Wind-Wise

I am not wind-wise nor do stars
whisper secrets in my ear.
Count the clouds and say to me
our dawn will come gray and rainy.
Should I doubt you? I am not wind-wise;
let others look to the future.

red repeated –
autumn maples, setting sun,
reflecting water

Pears

The last pears of the season
have proven the sweetest.
Share them with me in the orchard
before the leaves also fall.
Too soon, the wind will carry
both of you away.

the mountains
of today erode to form
tomorrow's fields

the wind will carry them
away as well

Lentils

Through windows obscured by evening's frost
I watch the gray ending of another day.
The trees have become their naked shadows;
all the birds are long flown away.
Lentils slowly cook in the kitchen,
with garlic and onions and green herbs.
Their fragrance fills my empty house;
there is none here to share them.
They will warm my body this night
but my heart is filled only with winter.

the little mice steal
bristles from my paintbrushes
to line comfy nests

the board is cleared
the game returned to its box
the pieces forget

did you or I win this time?
the queens whisper in the dark

I survived another day.
Should I thank my god
or curse him?

Pomegranates

Two pomegranates ripen by my door,
dangling in the morning sun.
Share one with me now;
the other will hang there still,
in the lengthening blue shadow
of the house, when we return.

I can't play the hand I'm dealt.
Should I fold and leave
the table?

The truth was behind door three.
Aren't you glad you chose
cash instead?

Review

God has read
every word I've written;
step outside and see
how many stars he gave me.

with knives of language
life is cut into pieces
we can digest

Crockery

Hearts are not crockery,
though as readily broken;
Elmer's Glue won't bond
the shattered pieces into

a usable dish for cat food
or to place beneath
the potted plants. We put
them back together, expecting

they'll be good as new,
our Sunday china to set
before the next guest at
the table, but always after

handle them with too
much care, for fear they break
again.

I've been a fool
more Aprils than I can count
why not one more?

I wouldn't recognize happiness
even if you rolled it up
and whacked me over the head with it.

a full moon
climbs the ladder
of mist

Defense

I have been angry—
angry with my god
and with myself,

and anger has been
my two-edged sword,
defending me,

cutting me apart.
Shall I lay down
the weapon I forged

in darkness?
Shall I make war
no more upon god

and self? My soul
is without defense:
do as you will.

morning again —
giving thanks or cursing
makes no difference.

Sixty-Six

At sixty-six, I train
daily, while my competitors
die off, one by one.
I might yet be a champion.

Pilgrimage

The shrine is distant yet; barefoot I walk the road
in pilgrimage, in search of healing. Spring became
the summer as I made my way, the woods grew green

and cool beside my path. Cool, too, it will be in
that grotto where the sacred waters rise to heal
these fevers. Shall I drink deeply there, slake thirsts,

end weariness? Life may be pain but is pain life?
I ask this of the sun, companion of my days,
and of the rain. I ask the sentry stars each night.

None answer. So I journey onward. So I seek
my sacred destination, emptying myself
along the way. Yes, farther along, farther along,

a prayer dropped each mile to mark the distance traveled.
All roads join as one. I shake the dust from my feet
and walk in pilgrimage; the shrine is distant yet.

razor wire
sparkles in the morning sun
high walls cast shadows

The ghosts of my dreams haunt me.
Should I have let them
fade and die?

right may well be right
and wrong is certainly wrong
who says which is which?

Lovers

We are infinite for We
are persons of the infinite God.
Each of us our own messiah,
each a prophet, a burning spark,

we are the One who dwells within
and yet remains the Other. As lovers
are we, joined eternally
in the passion of our Being.

And if we sometimes feel the hollow
darkness, too, within us, know
that shadow serves but as the vessel
of our light. Fill yourself;

love shines brighter than all the stars.

I need not rid
myself of possessions –
death will tidy up

Box

We attempt to keep God in a box—
an ark of wood, a temple of stone,
a theology of words.

He will not fit, try as we may
to bend him, diminish him.
God is too large

for any box but our heart.

Wheel

Oblivious, uncaring stars above,
wheel ever on and on through darkened skies;
wheel never noting how man falls in love,
not seeing that he lives and that he dies.
Should not your silent riddles be enough?
Yet to you, yearning, now I raise my eyes,
with all my longings given wings to rise,
each poised to soar to heaven as a dove.

Should I strive to be as seem you, serene,
forever stately stepping your ballets,
to follow you in silent timeless ways
across the heavens? Let this course between
eternity and earth remain unseen;
your dim light fades before that of my days.

the crowd's voice
can never drown out that one
that says I will die

It's two in the morning, God.
Can't you talk to me
tomorrow?

I am lonely
the new puppy tells the night
crickets sympathize

Grains

Behold, one grain of sand
on an endless beach,
where lap the waves of eternity.
It would seem unimportant,

unnecessary,
as does the grain
beside it and those
further along the way.

There would be
nothing without them,
no beach before you;
each is as important,

as necessary
as the others.
Each was placed
by the hand of God.

the cat does not need
to be told he is a cat
to act like a cat

first cool morning
bike locks and helmet straps
challenge numb fingers

snow on the fields?
only cotton bolls waking
to the summer sun

the wearing of masks
is a beloved cliché
of the poet

halloween is like
every other day –
always in costume

the closet
I filled with costumes
has become me

mockingbird answers
barking dog across the road
noise becomes music

on the snowy street
ice cream truck rings its bell –
no children appear

purple-stained fingers
pluck another mulberry
birds wait their turn

hiding
in the fridge –
a smell

Danced

I have danced with you
through the years, around,

around, and sometimes you
have tried to lead but, no,

I would not, will not, have it.
Such dark music is too

seductive, your whispered suggestions
far too attractive for me

to ever allow you control.
I should ask the band

to play something new.

Stuck in a holding pattern.
Is it time to land
somewhere else?

I leaped into the abyss.
Why did I believe
I could fly?

In goes another quarter.
How many till life
plays my song?

Ice Cream

God's ice cream shop offers all the flavors.
Choose one you like and if you want
to sample another, that's okay. A scoop
of this, a scoop of that, and you can mix
your chocolate and vanilla and even crumble
in a cookie or two. Yes, the strawberry too.

the string stretched tight
breaks easily but sounds
the clearest music

Waves

Waves break on the sand
and return to the sea.
Trees reach to the sky
then fall to join the earth.
Men stand tall forgetting
they are the same.

I know not God's mind
but only not to test him
in such times as these

Small Gods

The gods no longer believe
in themselves; one after another
they reached for the infinite
and came away empty handed.

Let others make their claims,
they said. Let others seek
omnipotence in dark
corners of existence.

We shall become the small gods
that sleep in forest and field.
We shall not question the stars
but only dance our moment

in their light before
they too stop believing.

Messages

Each wave leaves its mark,
erasing those before it,

and rolls back to the sea,
to be erased by the next.

Can you read what is written
before you too wash away?

Tide

The heartbeat of the moon is measured in
the steady rise and fall of tide on coasts
I've never seen. Ah, but I hear that pulse;
it finds its echo in my yearning blood.

She sinks below horizons, seeking seas
unknown save in my dreams and songs once heard,
forgotten now, save for their whispered rhythm.
That also rises, falls, fades from these shores,

but never stills. The moon returns and I
and all the seas will follow in her dance.

What use is
an empty pinata?
Whack me again.

it is what it is
does not mean it isn't
what it isn't

the full moon told me
stories all through the night –
I will sleep later



The Moon and the Sea is Stephen Brooke's fifteenth poetry collection.. All of Stephen's books – poetry, novels, and more – may be found at Arachis Press (arachispress.com), most as both print and free ebooks