



2023  
Poetry & Flash Fiction  
COMPETITION  
WINNERS

**Young Person's Poetry**

- 1st Ankita Kanoor aged 11– The Lonely Vampire  
2nd Charles Cumbers aged 12– Paw Prints in the Leaves  
3rd Meadow Bannard Howes aged 11– When the Seasons Change

**Short Story**

- 1st Arthur Catt aged 9—Change 2043  
2nd Jude Talman aged 10—The Creek

**Adults Poetry**

- 1st Sharon Brown– Midlife Acceptance  
2nd Steve Howkins The World Moves Forward  
3rd Rachel Hull – Some Think of Markets

**Short Story**

- 1st Stephanie Percival– Changing Through the Seasons  
2nd Lorna Holland– The Picture of the Girl  
3rd Joshua Gray– Cleave

## TUNDRACULA: THE LONELY VAMPIRE

Have you ever wondered,  
What cold-blooded creatures are?  
They are merely just creatures,  
Who live in the cold parts.

There is one in particular,  
Who lives in the snow,  
His name is Tundracula,  
And he was born a millennium ago.

He started drinking blood,  
When he was just two,  
But after a long time of thinking,  
He settled on cherry juice.

People were scared of him,  
Although he HATED blood,  
Even other vampires didn't like him,  
And treated him like a puddle of mud.

Alone he sat,  
In a zero-star hotel,  
With no one he could love,  
And no personnel.

One gloomy day,  
A knock came on the door,  
A knock that Tundracula ignored,  
Until a fancy letter landed on the floor.

He sighed and rose to his feet,  
And grabbed the envelope,  
Tore it open,  
And his eyes filled with hope.

Tundracula, we invite you to the Grand Vampire Ball,  
Please wear some formal clothes,  
There will be a refreshments bar,  
Please tell us if you are willing to show.  
Quickly he ran to his closet of suits,  
And picked out the black cloak,  
Then off he ran towards the hall,  
Only to see a crowd of smiling folk.

Tears ran down his cheeks,  
As people smiled at him with delight,  
He was finally accepted,  
Even though he did not bite

Ankita Kanoor aged 11

## Paw Prints in the Leaves

Through the seasons this tree grows older  
When it's warmer and when it's colder  
As its branches spread and bloom  
Beneath the bed of leaves paws will zoom  
The paws grow slowly  
And the tree is no longer lonely  
Flaming sheets flow on the breeze  
Which these precious paws crunch with ease  
Now the paws are as big as can be  
And old age too is achieved by the tree  
But now the pitter patter of feet has slowed  
And the dance of leaves has mellowed  
The excitement of baby paws has grown weary  
And the trees slumber matches it clearly  
Soon the paws will lack behind  
And the stump fears what it may find  
The prints no longer come to play  
No more dancing with leaves throughout the day  
Gliding with flaming sheets a faint joyous bark whispers  
But it's nothing but a memory the tree yearns to remember

Charles Cumbers aged 12

## When the Seasons Change

As flowers blushed the meadows  
bringing life to all  
a little boy lay there  
thinking about things big and small  
Winter had disappeared.  
Spring was finally here.  
Life had changed around him.

Birds and bees fluttered through the air  
singing sweet praises of joy.  
Not one unhappy face in sight  
rained upon the boy.  
Summer had come.  
Spring was done.  
Life had changed around him.

As Autumn was made full of colour  
leaves gradually fell to the ground.  
The boy explored the forest  
with every step a crunching sound.  
Autumn was upon us.  
Summer had forgotten us.  
Life had changed around him.

As heavy snow was left unpainted  
no colour beyond a mile,  
the boy wrapped up warm  
stepping outside with a smile.  
Winter was around.  
Autumn was nowhere to be found.  
Life had changed around him.

Meadow Bannard Howes aged 12

## Change Story (2043) by Arthur Catt aged 9

Once upon a time, there was a caterpillar named Celencé. Celencé lived in a huge garden. Celencé loved her life, since she had lots of food, water, and entertainment. She had a T.V. (the only show being a lonely stick standing upright), snacks (grass, sticks and berries) and water (water!). Her parents were Peyoncé (Mum) and Jeff (Dad).

One day, Peyoncé and Jeff were at a café, so Celencé was on her own. She watched T.V. for a bit but quickly got bored. She went to get a snack, but her pet ant, Agnicé, had eaten everything!

“Bad Agnicé!”, squeaked Celencé. Agnicé’s head dropped to the floor sadly, and he trudged away, not squeaking a word.

Celencé decided to go outside. She slid down the grass, swung on the bush and jumped on the bouncy leaves (random, I know). But, on the bouncy leaves, Celencé accidentally fell face-first into a tree. Celencé had landed on a bird’s nest! She soon heard a deafening flapping noise coming closer and closer. A huge crow landed in the nest, missing Celencé by a millimetre. Slowly, the crow turned its head to Celencé. She uttered a shriek of terror as the crow grabbed Celencé in her beak and launched her across the garden! Everything seemed to go in slow motion.

“Noooooooooo!”, squeaked Celencé so loudly that she lost her voice. All her legs struggled in a flapping-like motion. Soon, she began to fall. Down, down, down. Farther and farther and farther until... SPLAT!

Twenty years later...

Celencé opened her eyes and found herself in a bug hospital. She could hear cheering all around her. She sat up and saw two old caterpillars. It was her Mum and Dad! She dived towards them and gave them a big hug. Next to Celencé stood a mirror. She walked towards it and looked at her reflection. She was a grown caterpillar! She quickly grabbed a newspaper and looked at the date.

“2043?!”, she squeaked. Her eyes grew wide, and she covered her mouth in shock. Still not believing the date, Peyoncé and Jeff led her out of the hospital. There were huge skyscrapers with neon-lit windows. Flying cars hovering above them. Humans as big as caterpillars (wait, what?). Robots racing around. Best of all, there were T.V.’s with more shows (goodbye Mr. Stick!). Music blared from what seemed like the sun, which was blue! Schools didn’t exist, because everyone (except anyone who was a caterpillar) had brains as big as houses with three storeys (and a *really* pricey bathtub). As well as all the wonders that 2043 brought, one thing stood out the most. Green, knobby acorns hung from absolutely everything. They all had tags with names on them. Celencé’s Mum, Peyoncé, said they were Chrysalises. She said to go in, so Celencé did. Celencé climbed into the chrysalis and suddenly had wings. She was a butterfly!

## The Creek by Jude Talman aged 10

It was a murky, misty day, which made the creek look even spookier than it normally did. In the creek there was a monster (it's called the Creek Monster) and every day it's hunched up lonely in the creek shore. A few years later, a ten-year-old boy came to the creek to paddle, then he saw a disturbance in the water. "What's that?" said the boy with a confused look on his face.

"I don't know sweetheart come out the water just in case it's something dangerous!" said the boy's mum with a concerned look on her face.

"Ok!" shouted the boy

"Uhh... he... hello," said the Creak Monster with a nervous look on his face.

"AHHHHHHH!" screamed the boy and the mum with worried looks on their faces.

"What are you?" asked the boy's mum

"I don't know to be honest all I know I'm ugly." explained the Creak Monster.

"Don't say that you're not ugly we were just surprised that's all." explained mum

"Thank you." said the monster with a surprised look on his face.

"Oh, actually do you need a friend because we can be your friend?" asked the boy.

"Actually, are you being serious because if you are I will love to be your friend and I have never had a friend before." said the boy with an unsure look on his face.

"Ok great I will see you tomorrow then." the boy told him

"Ok see you then," agreed the monster "Yes I have finally got a friend!"

A few months later, the friend thing has been working out a lot because they all have fun swimming, playing hide and seek on the shore and even the Creek Monster told them how to speak the fish language.

## Midlife Acceptance

Each morning I rise from my comfortable bed  
The to do list is planned for the day ahead  
Lifting my phone, I scroll through the posts  
Then head downstairs for my tea and toast

My life has changed from much younger days  
Working for peanuts, a challenging phase  
I started a business more as a dare  
But it's turned into something that makes me care

My forties arrived with upheaval and hell  
Going round in circles, in life's carousel  
The menopause hit and I'm hot and I'm cold  
But with confidence and sass, I dare to be bold

The wrong side of 50, but so far so good  
the up and the downs, the pain and the moods  
The last few years have changed my focus in life  
I'm now an entrepreneur, mentor, business owner and wife

Four decades have gone, but I'm happier now  
No ego or pride, but also no WOW!  
I look in the mirror, another line has appeared  
A grey hair, a dimple, it's everything I feared

Each line tells a story of each passing year,  
Adversity, truth, failure and fear  
For the years there was struggle, there was also a plan  
no self-doubt allowed, told myself that I can

I started a business for women alone,  
we talk every day, online and by phone.  
I attempted a man hub but that just fell short  
the silence was deafening so best to abort

My ladies are great, they're funny and bright  
They're very supportive, they don't even fight  
The teamwork impressive, their skills even more  
We all work together, we're all at the core

So don't be disheartened when you think life is shit  
Everything changes... I used to be fit!  
Your path can be written to suit your big dreams  
I know it is hard, but not as it seems

Your life will improve with wisdom and age  
Your business will boom, you're no longer caged  
Enjoy your forties, they go by so fast  
Always look to the future and forget your past

I'll leave you now with an encouraging word  
You're no longer young, you're just an old bhurd  
But with class and finesse, you still look the part  
You're gorgeous inside, SO FULL OF HEART!

Sharon Brown

the world moves forward

the world moved forward with social change  
when slaves were freed from shackles and chains  
the world moves forward, it doesn't move back  
so, let's get this world back on track

the world moved forward from fear and war  
with Human Rights and compassion for the poor  
the world moves forward, it doesn't move back  
so, let's get this world back on track

let's get this world back on track  
let's not repeat the past  
let's move forward, not look back  
the times are changing fast

the world moved forward from racial crimes  
to peace and love and better times  
the world moves forward with love not hate  
that's what makes this world so great

the world moved forward and new hopes grew  
from the Holocaust and World War Two  
the world moved forward for one and all  
when they tore down the Berlin Wall

let's get this world back on track  
let's stand together as one  
let's move forward, not look back  
let's rise up like the sun

the world moved forward for straight and gay  
hand in hand to a bright new day  
the world moves forward with each new dawn  
and each new generation born

the world moves forward and that's the truth  
our children are the living proof  
the world moves forward for black and white  
the world moves forward and the future looks bright

Steve Howkins



## Change of Perspective by Georgina Hull

Some think of the markets,  
Some think of Wicksteed,  
Some think of Butterwick's,  
Yummy indeed!  
Some think of shoes,  
And the factories once here,  
Some think of Kino  
With an ice-cold beer.  
Some think of the Lighthouse,  
The theatre that is,  
Some think of the yards,  
A home to small biz.  
But Kettering isn't just  
Home to these things,  
It's also a home,  
To those beauties with wings.  
The red kites flying high,  
Majestic and proud,  
So glorious to look at,  
Watch them soar through the clouds.  
Alongside them the starlings,  
In their hundreds they gather,  
In glorious murmuration's  
They glide and they chatter.  
But the greatest of all,  
And by far our best feature,  
Has her nest in St Paul and St Peter,  
Her glorious plumage of grey speckled white,  
She blends into the brickwork,  
Until she takes flight,  
She's the world's fastest bird  
She conquers the sky,  
All across town her cries can be heard.  
The peregrine isn't the only inhabitant,  
Look up to the skies and the world of the birds,  
Here in Northants, they are oh so abundant.  
Kettering really is a home for all.

## Life Changing Through Seasons; Our Holiday Home

by Stephanie Percival

We'd discovered it by accident. Blown by spring breeze and serendipity. We laughed when we got lost in the maze of country lanes, delighted to finally arrive at our picture postcard cottage. We had to search for the key. Found it amongst terracotta pots spilling clouds of pansies. Unlocking the door, the air rustled as if we were unwrapping a gift. So eager were we that we didn't unpack, hurried to the beach; smelt the sea and possibilities. In the evening we sat in the garden, listened as the sea sang a love song. We sipped champagne and toasted each other; a tinkle of promises. The grass was fresh beneath bare feet. We danced until we were dizzy, then fell and watched the sky spin. In new moon darkness we saw stars and plotted our path.

We rolled into summer. All day blue skies; endless. Sunbathed under a happy sun, a child's painting. The stone floor had a constant sheen of sand and wishing stones lined up along windowsills. Children's laughter won the contest with the screech of seagulls. We built sandcastles; watched the tide lick them away, no crying at their crumbling; knew we'd build others even taller tomorrow. At first, we splashed in the shallows, learning to swim but gradually became fearless of deeper water. We were at one with the rise and fall of waves, buoyant as we were lifted towards the shore. In the evenings, the sea was a shushed lullaby. Once the children were asleep, the full moon rocked us in the hammock.

We arrived late, rain at our backs, the dusk muting autumn colour. Everything was brown and sodden. The door frame warped; window panes rattling. Slippery leaves on the path made our steps tentative. The kindling was damp so we couldn't light the fire. The sound of the sea was restless, kicking against the shore. Its endless white noise filled my head, made me forget things. There was no milk. You liked your tea white. I ventured out under cloud filled sky, mud underfoot. The watery waning moon, peeked out, blinked blindly at me.

I lose my way, the lanes confusing. Everything winter; black and white. The for-sale sign, stark in the car headlamps, reminds me that my grown-up children prefer foreign holidays. The cottage is granite dark, a crust of snow by the doorstep. The porch bulb flickers, tricking me with shadow play. My fingers fumble with the key. There are no supplies in the cupboards, just cobwebs and echoes. Ashes in the grate shiver where draughts whisper. I rub my arms in my too thin coat and try and remember the warmth in your blue eyes; the sound of your laughter. Frost on the grass crunches like shattered glass under my steps. A sickle moon cuts the cold air. I can't hear the sea though I know it's there. It is a small comfort. The cottage will echo with it even when I'm gone.

## The Picture of the Girl

by Lorna Holland

Every day I look at the picture of the girl.

She sits on the sideboard at the bottom of the stairs, pride of place. I see her every time I go downstairs for breakfast. I see her every time I go upstairs to bed. She's become as much a part of my daily routine as completing a crossword puzzle or taking my medication.

I look at the picture of the girl.

Today, my grandson and his new girlfriend came to visit. I know they didn't want to come. They sat together on the sofa, smiling politely but checking the time every few minutes.

I look at the picture of the girl.

Today, a man came to the door trying to sell me double glazing. I saw his eyes light up when I opened the door. Just for that, I kept him talking for half an hour. When I finally took pity on him, he couldn't walk away fast enough. I had a cup of tea to celebrate my victory. I may be old, but that doesn't mean I'm an easy target.

I look at the picture of the girl.

I'm carried down the stairs on a stretcher. A blanket is tucked over me to cover my nightgown. I'm not sure why; it may be old but it's still perfectly modest. The voices around me are loud and jarring in the quiet night. They use words I don't understand but call me names like "duck" and "lovey".

On the way past, as I'm manoeuvred out the door, I look at the picture of the girl.

The house sits silent, dust motes swirling through the air. The clock on the mantelpiece ticks. Outside, children run up and down the street, cars drive past, a cat sits on the wall. The postman pushes a takeaway leaflet through the letterbox.

They look at the picture of the girl.

"What shall we do with it?"

A shrug. "I doubt anyone will want it. Stick it in the box with the rest."

The picture of the girl goes in the box. It's joined by a half-finished puzzle book, a few tapes, and an armful of last month's newspapers. The sideboard at the bottom of the stairs is sold.

No one looks at the picture of the girl.

Cleave  
by Joshua Gray

The axe rested on the worktop, bloodied. Not human blood, nor animal. Its edge was stained green and reeked of ancient rot, while its victim lay at my feet, withered in form but regenerating. My blows had rained down, splitting the creature asunder and scattering its pieces like Autumn leaves, yet it — *he?* — was being renewed.

Sleepy eyes blinked; stalky arms creaked and groaned. I'd witnessed those exact movements a thousand times. My ears had memorised that same yawn and sigh. A sob hiccupped in my chest: first for relief, since he wasn't dead—I could again see those green eyes I'd loved once more... then heartache poisoned all joy as I accepted what'd come next. His mouth opened and a sound escaped it, one entirely inhuman. This wasn't the man I'd married. This was merely a monster, one who mocked my beloved's existence and stole his face, though it couldn't recreate the whiskey-deep baritone of his words.

With quivering fingers, I raised my weapon again and considering silencing the noise for the seventh or maybe eighth time. Tears spilled out my eyes and down my cheeks. We'd been safe here, in this bunker. We were supposed to grow old together. Live out the end of the world—*together!* How the infection made its way here, and how it'd found him first, I'll never know, not that it bloody mattered anyway. It wasn't him anymore.

The thing that was my husband screamed again, and so did I when I brought the axe down. Not on him, no. This time, my blows bite into the worktop. They smashed all the crockery and tore chunks out of the pictures on the walls, destroying this place where we'd made meals... exchanged kisses, gave caresses, surrendered our love... until, finally, there was nothing left here but him and me. But could it still be him? My John? My world, my everything, even when the world and everything else had gone?

I took off my wedding ring and rolled it between my fingers, letting the light catch the gold and its inscription, yet I couldn't bear to read the text. He suddenly went quiet and reached his weedy arm out, beckoning for the ring. Defeated, I gave it to him. The fight for survival had burnt out. All that was left was weariness, along with an endless heartache.

Yet, there was something more: I missed him.

And if I couldn't free him from this Hell, I'd join him in it.

Only a prick from the axe, and immediately I felt the evolution take root. His blood mixed with mine: our bodies linked. Distinct forms but knotted together once more. My skin crusted over like his, adopting a mahogany hue. Each sensation changed—dulled, expanded, translated, and I heard his lovely voice again—that gravely resonance, now in a language I could understand. He was reading the inscription on my ring, repeating the words we'd said a thousand times before: *'My Love, we are forever.'*