

# Best friends

*To Glen*

Jostling, they slip and sway,  
bob and bounce, tremble, shake:  
all a-flutter, they seem  
of a mind to curtsy!  
Fresh-faced, innocent and  
smiling, in groups and crowds.

They dance in silence, sing  
in time to some hyper-  
tune (near), gone long ago.  
They whisper, their shapely  
trumpets mute. Scents, waiting,  
lie funneled well inside.

The face they wear- pale blue,  
a careful blush of pink -  
includes some semitones  
of hue, cream and purple,  
in profusion; lip-shaped  
borders grace the outlines.

Demure, unassuming,  
unpretentious, rustic -  
they seem the essence of  
politeness, patience, trust:  
vulnerable as such ...  
and of no consequence.

How could gentle beings  
like these, survive? No, not  
survive ... but prosper! with  
no apparent effort.  
(They stand there tall, their legs  
green pennants in the breeze.)

Well, they persevere, they're  
positive, show purpose;  
a hint of people who,  
if pushed, just might insist,  
play urgent, be stubborn,  
end up most obdurate.

They raise their offspring through  
the seasons, everywhere:  
among geraniums, herbs  
and succulents, below  
the spreading cumquat bush,  
the wisteria and rose ...

Quiet (and pretty!), gentle,  
certain, busy: they run  
their lives decorously.

- "Oh yes? but petunias  
are promiscuous, aren't they?"

Say 'generous', instead!



## Call of the sun

When we were young and reckless  
(so cock-a-hoop and hopeful),  
when we were young and reckless -  
"Shall we dance?" asked Lorenzo,  
"shall we dance?" Lorenzo asked,  
and did we dance!

Though mother tried to warn us  
("Oh darlings, you'll be sorry!"),  
though mother tried to warn us -  
"We must dance now, we must dance!  
don't bother us!" we said, and  
"please don't worry!"

She'd just made us skirts  
full and voluptuous,  
richly woven and red:  
Yes, what a daring  
and what a deep red!  
The skirts she'd made were  
voluptuous and full,  
richly woven and red:  
Yes, such a daring  
and such a deep red!

"Oh my gosh !" said Lorenzo  
(in an aside that we heard),  
"Oh my gosh!" Lorenzo said  
as we raised them and opened  
them and then spread them out wide:  
quite unafraid.

It was the dance of a day  
(playing with - praying for? - fire),  
one only day for a chance  
of a kiss from Lorenzo.

And that's why hibiscus blooms  
shrivel and fade.



## Chives

Slender tubes  
raised from fine white flasks  
'downstairs',

and capped with  
spheres of purple glass-  
like air,

when finely chopped -  
enhance food,  
and echo notes blown  
silently  
on dark green flutes.



## *Crassula ovata*

Its structure suggests a time at least one hundred million years ago, outlines the moving vision of a draughtsman, architect and abstract poet.

A stem? it doesn't have a stem; it has a trunk compact, solid, thick, and - more than burly - massive, from which further trunks emerge, each more trunk than branch. Its leaves? they're discs, objects round to oblong which stand out fair and square; they're cool-feeling, plump and fleshy, smooth and shiny; they're grey-green - that's when they're not red. Curious creatures! they choose to bloom in the short-day months, making a haze of flowers, faintly scented, pink and white, star-shaped, set in clusters small and dense.

And yet ... its lateral trunks (branches if you must) come away almost at a touch, as do the discs (leaves if you like); it's delicate, and far from tough. But then ... these broken limbs and their dependent bits (such woeful wreckage!) having disengaged and dropped, send out new roots and grow again; resourceful, what.

Called the 'Chinese rubber plant', 'Cauliflower ears', the 'Lucky plant', 'Dollar plant' and the 'Money tree', these common names - profane, clichéd, crude - are wanting.

The Jade, an ornamental up to six foot high, will grow to fifteen feet or more when in the wild, and outlive most of us, living to a hundred. Its importance, though, lies elsewhere: it's the blueprint of a tree (extinct, or which never came to be), huge as the Boab, grander than the Dragon Tree.



## A fresh reflection

*Narcissus*  
*papyraceus* peers  
from white

small-petalled  
sprays, past straps of leaves,  
and smiles:

"Such a height, this  
stem! and what  
a scent! ... so much black  
seed! I'm free ...  
to spread and thrive."



## The full rose

Edith Piaf's  
*"Je ne regrette  
rien"*

seems a bluff, as  
petals fall, and turn  
to dust.

Remember, though  
- before all else -  
the crimson rose, its  
haunting scent!  
(... and thorns, below.)



## Hold-up in a kitchen garden

"Your chife or your life!" the parsimonious gourmet thief called out.

"My chife? - what ever do you mean by chife?" I spluttered, surly.

"Never you mind" he said, "I want it now!" he muttered curtly,

"and I'm not mean! so please watch your words, thanks .. and mind your talk now!"

"I don't understand! but maybe my wife can help ..." I blurted -

at which he faced me with a knife and said (in thoughtful earnest):

"Why do you want to sell your life so dearly? Why set a price as high as that on just a single one of your many chives?"

(Inspired by a Scots recipe requiring one chive ...)

## Love in a mist - *Nigella damascena*

Green lacework,  
a fine filigree  
of leaves;

Blue ballet  
girls, rings of petalled  
flowers;

Gold, the gourds of  
heads to crown  
the stalks (the flowers  
dead), holding  
court all winter.





## Olor que aflora

Es planta  
esquelética y  
cíngara

con pétalos  
monótonos y  
frescos

y hojas chicas.  
Mas, puede  
contrarrestarlo  
bien ... pues que  
es jazmín.



## *Sansevieria trifasciata* (Dad's 'sometime' Army)

A properly constituted army  
once - smartly rigged in light and dark green stripes  
with just a little marbling here and there  
(an older type of 'khaki') - its soldiers  
were lean and upright men with hostile traits  
and leathered skin, each holding high a sharp-  
tipped spear which promised to deliver pain.

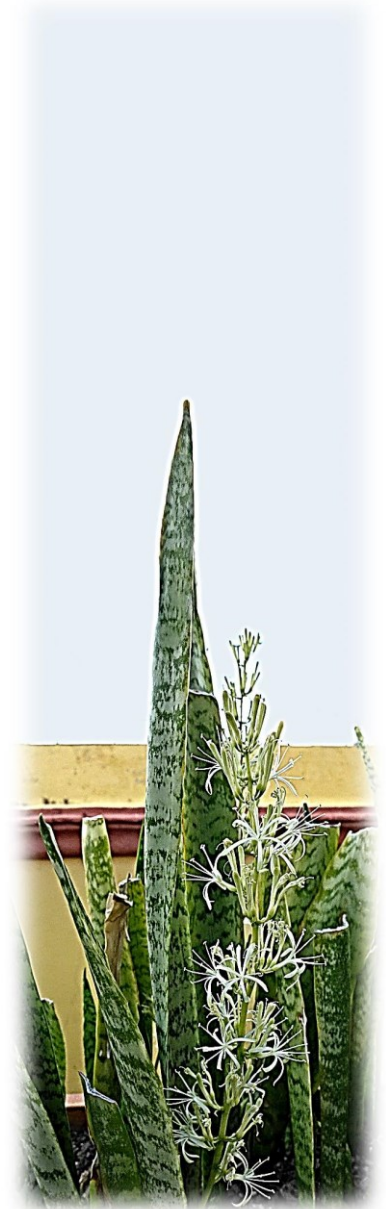
But, later, they'd been billeted in huts  
that leaked, forced to bivouack on windswept heights  
and march exposed to hateful cold and sun.  
You'd think they'd trudged through snake-infested swamps,  
they'd tramped through sand, they'd plodded through thick mud!  
"Enough!" they moaned, "the elements have won!"  
At which ... the enemy they'd lost, appeared.

"Saint George for merry England!" cried Sir Giles  
(praying) ... but silence reigned. Charge? ... there was none.  
Movement? ... not one sword drawn. The army, glum,  
stopped in its tracks and pondered (a smiling  
bed? fresh victuals? safety?). "Back to barracks!  
We'll fight tomorrow ... right?" (rumour has it  
the sullen soldiers said), "if fight we must!"

As it happens, on hearing George's name  
the foe were seized with fear, and fled. Our men,  
who could have heard them claim "St. George's here!"  
were much relieved the day had ended as  
it had (days always do), and filled with wish-  
ful thoughts, heard just "St. George for beer!", and drank.  
(Some couldn't swim, so some among them sank.)

Not exactly 'sank', but grew discoloured  
at the neck; grey, brown then black - they buckled,  
crumbled, rotted, fell; a mortifying  
way to go, depart, pass away (or 'die?').  
Consternation gripped the ranks as sighs, then  
groans, then sobs, then tears made mourning headlines.  
In due course they knew: something had happened!

Blame those elements! and blame thinking thoughts  
(as people do) of leave accrued and not  
allowed, promotion yet again postponed,  
their better half in limbo (up to what?).  
They'd chosen the soft option: they'd chosen  
to withdraw (retreat? ... mutiny! ) and hide.  
They took to drink - drink took them for a ride.



But wives and partners rallied round and cheered  
survivors, while mothers-in-law with half  
an eye on their tongue managed to ration  
reproaches. The time it cost, and the fuss!  
Damage limitation took ... months and months.  
Court-martials were waived and changes discussed,  
drink cut (all agreed) ... to one hour a week.

Sentries now, these calm and much respected  
men - who'd seemed so fierce - watch, intent, ears peeled,  
all geared to sound the urgent call to arms.  
Their ceremonial banner bears a snake-  
plant whose tall stiff leaves shield a stalk (rare sight!)  
of dainty, sophisticated cream-green  
flowers heralding strange orange berries.

## Spider, or Purple Queen – *Tradescantia pallida*

Imperial  
purple, leaves sheathed and  
pointed;

succulent  
hopefuls, stems zigzag,  
hurried;

Schlub! 'Wandering  
Jew'? ... a mess!  
'*Amor de hombre*'  
(restless) .... plus  
blush of flowers!



## Votive offering – a sprig of parsley

Our parsley in Cadiz - though sparse - survives enough to make its usual fancy fretwork canopies.

Far-sighted, I ask Saint Pancras (his statue's close):

"Please intercede, and have this parsley thrive ... for us".

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Though different, the Isla Perejil or 'Parsley Island' (Alboran Sea) and Saint Pancras Station (London) are closely bound by three expectations: a saint, your votive offerings, and some parsley.

I don't think there's parsley now on 'Parsley Island' (Perejil could be just a misnomer, mind you, and not refer to 'parsley', but to 'Pero Gil'), nor a likeness of Saint Pancras at his station.

Heavens! no saint on display? did Betjeman forget - eight hundred million pounds later, crusade fulfilled - that the station still owes its saint some sort of debt?

