

Two Birds and a Boy (jerry simcock)

The curlew with the beautiful soft drawn feathers summoned me back.

Afternoon in the classroom, the boy is delivered back in by the nurses, quieter now, withdrawn.

He takes the paper and brush and, working silently, straight from the paint, a pheasant appears –
the soul of this ten-year-old boy.

One day he had tried, unsuccessfully, to hang himself in that other, quiet, village classroom.

The next day he had taken his father's shotgun to the school, to threaten the teacher and end the torment.

He hadn't fired the gun, but thrown it and fled to the woods where the police, eventually, found him.

He'd been caged, boxed in and tormented. A boy from up on the forest, who could fix a broken wing or nurse an orphan lamb but neither read nor write.

Where is he now? Does he still paint?

He'll be nearly forty, if he, like me, survived.

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The Night You Died (jerry simcock)

I was not by your bed the night you died.

In the evening we had found something that was frail and gasping, scrunched like a discarded paper bag. We sponged your dry lips and let you sup.

But you were not there; you'd long sloughed off these last remains –

You'd upped and gone, no doubt twirling your stick as you went.

But you were there before – when, blinded by panic and the sun, I crashed the car through the barrier to get to you.

This morning we kissed a skull, touched a hand, tidied some hair But, as I say, we knew you were long gone.

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Oak Apples (jerry simcock)

I help him from the barrow and we begin to pull and trample the bracken.

I uncover the first light starved oak - branching upwards its delicate leaves unfurl and seek the light.

I have uncovered the deceptive fruit of wasp work. These well-sculpted nut-brown spheres hang tightly from the small branch as if they had always been present.

I glance towards him, intending to show him, but he has stopped trampling and stands forlorn, statuesque in blue against the greens.

‘You Okay?’ He shakes his head And opens his hand to show a deep red stain.

We wander back to dress the wound in autistic silence.

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Released to the Fells (jerry simcock)

Driving North after the snow, the grey, blue-black fells are topped with white

Purple clouds push up the lake.

At Dale Head we park and greet, muffle up against the chill and begin to walk, into the swirls of sleet, the box in the pack on my back.

The grandson leaps and skitters, hare-like, exhilarated.

Wind sears our faces. Shining blue breaks the cloud. Conversation burbles, the dog meanders and we step stones at the beck.

A view up valley: sheep pens, Scot's pine, steadings, scree.

Distant figures process up to the cross gates.

We find an outcrop over the valley.

The wartime boy rowed the deep lake, climbed sheer slopes, gulped mountain air and was enchanted. Never free of the lure, he kept returning.

My fingers ease off the lid and reveal the white bone dust.

Then he's there - white hair, brown eyes sparkling, stick prodding. The day we walked Caburn in the snow.

We tip the box and he soars out. A wild, guffawing genie, released to the fells.

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Bio Jerry is a retired teacher of children in a Child Psychiatric Hospital and of others who'd fallen through the education net. He lives in East Lothian where he helps run a garden, writes and meditates. Vagabond Voices will publish his novel, Giselle and Mr Memphis, in 2022.

Favourite poem – Gary Snyder – Riprap