

## POETRY SELECTED BY CAROLINE PRICE

### **Fear of Drowning**

Rain fell for days  
Prophetic relentless rods of silver  
water swirled and rose in the dry river bed  
until the flood broke the drought-shrunk banks  
slaked the cacti's pale green thirst  
ran across the dusty path  
and invaded the house.

Then came the toads  
an endless biblical stream  
poured past the door  
headed for high ground  
their brown backs  
an undulation of pulsing rhythm  
unholy refugees  
escaping the wrath of what gods?

Afterwards sun-scorched earth cracked and sere  
as if those rains had never been.

We found a baby toad  
poised on its back legs  
like a runner on the blocks  
mouth open gasping  
for air – dead –  
petrified mid-motion  
its wizened skin dried to a crisp.  
Nothing else remained  
to imply  
we still might drown.

**Kathleen Roberts**

### **Waiting for morning**

The room's sloped ceiling  
holds night in the crease  
by the window.

Darkness freezes time.

You don't want to return  
to that dream –  
the one of travelling on a train,

missing your station, unsure  
where you are heading,  
where you came from.

Neither do you want to lie awake.

On a slipstream of thought  
you arrive in a garden overcome  
by the weight of the sun,

where you search for shade.  
A night-heron perches on a rock  
in the creek, watching the ripple

of water for the possibility of fish.  
Each of you aware only  
of this particular time and place –

the moment deepening like sleep.

**Yvonne Baker**

### **Donbas Daydreams, 2023**

On up-turned crates they sit, day after day,  
in the cold and damp, Julia, Tatiana,  
Ulyana, Svitlana, companionable silence  
like a shawl around them. The regular crump  
of artillery fire marks the day, the ticking  
of a clock in happier times.

They sit, their minds focussed elsewhere  
reliving the lives they once knew:  
meeting neighbours in the market square,  
stirring borsch on the range.

Their sons are somewhere on the front line,  
husbands in the cemetery, *keeping  
the plots warm for them*, they used to joke,  
when laughter was possible, their faces  
lighting up, gold teeth gleaming.

**Anna Avebury**

### **Spring**

Small, swift bumbarrels see-saw from branch  
to window, meet their own reflection and tap  
against hard glass, waking me from disturbed

*dreams. Somewhere a woman stands shaking  
among ruins that were once her home, picks up  
a shattered photograph of her late husband,*

*wonders how she will live.* Outside, the cherry tree  
is a bridal veil of white blossom. Long-tails gather  
moss, cobwebs, lichen, layer each in strands of

last year's clematis. Feather upon feather is carried  
to line a bottle-shaped nest. *She finds another  
photograph beneath rubble, her small children  
now grown, then walks the wasteland of the city*

*she loves.* Here, a blackbird crosses the lawn  
and rooks take flight across fields where shoots  
of green have emerged from ploughed earth.

**Anne Kenny**

### **Epiphany**

For the bird flying into the sun  
For the bird that arrived unnoticed  
For the bird that hasn't stopped singing  
For the bird that saw the bulldozers coming  
For the bird flying on through darkness  
For the bird that sings in a cage  
For the bird that sings in the memory  
For those that sing with the bird.

**Katherine Gallagher**

### **Reversal**

My strange Avernus is this hospital at night,  
emergency entrance where the living come.

Did I say night? Inside, the dazzle is denying  
shades or silence. Half sensate, I crave texture.

I'm brought in feverish, my face pre-swollen,  
angry-red one side; eyes now officially 'raccoon'

from where I've fallen, though I don't see these.  
A medic asks me if I know the date today.

Dates themselves do easy splits when midnight falls.  
Fully clothed on trolley, hour by hour I check my watch.

An x-ray; and soon after dawn a kindly doctor  
brings me paper empathy: The Times from yesterday.

By afternoon, day two, I've risen to a ward.  
But I am no Penelope, more elderly Demeter.

My daughter and my son-in-law have searched for me,  
bring wonderfully imaginative and practical support.

Three days later I've come home. White hyacinths  
remember, offer quietly perfumed light.

**Belinda Singleton**