

Poetry Series

Terry Collett

- poems -

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Terry Collett(13/12/1947)

Terry Collett was born in London in 1947. He has been writing since 1971. He lives in Sussex in England with his wife and three of his eight children. His eldest son died from sepsis in 2014 aged 29.

1066 And After 1957

Mr Finn wrote
on the blackboard
about 1066.

I sat watching
what he wrote
in his neat hand.

The Battle of Hastings
was underlined
in red chalk.

I'd been
to Hastings once
with my grandparents
sat on the beach
with bucket and spade
and ice cream
the hot
orange sun
in the sky.

King Harold
got an arrow
in his eye
the teacher
had written.

I tried to imagine that
bad enough getting
a fly in the eye
or piece of grit
but an arrow
O shit
I mused.

William the Conqueror
won the battle
brought the Normans

with him I read.

Dennis next to me
whispered there are
some Normans
up our street
tough buggers
he said.

One of the sisters
is on the game
my mother said
Dennis informed.

I tried to guess
the game
that sister played
but gave up
maybe rounders
or netball
I mused.

The teacher stood
by the blackboard
and talked
about the battle
the weapons used
the numbers killed
and what
happened after.

Dennis talked on
in an undertone
of the Norman mother
slept apparently
with her husband's
brother.

Terry Collett

2am Wake 1967

At 2am
in the morning,
Nima woke
in her hospital bed,

looked about her,
wondered what Benny
was doing,
wished he was there,

thought about
the weekend away
at her aunt's place,
how the sex was good

in her cousin's bed,
Benny sleeping with her,
now here she was in
some hospital bed

with others sleeping,
snoring and moaning
in their sleep,
the night nurse

wandering about
like some Florence Nightingale,
but at the moment,
Nima thought,

even she seems
sexy enough to keep
my urges at bay
o what a night

to be without Benny
o what utter
night-time blues,
she gazed at the moonlight

slice of light
through where
the curtains joined,
sighed and wanted Benny

so much
this time yesterday
we were well away,
now I'm all alone

with snores and sniffs
and some old girl's moan.

Terry Collett

A Better Way

There's a better way of digging
Than that, Uncle said, taking the
Spade from your hands and showing
You with a craftsman's touch how
It should be done. You watched in
Wonder how with ease and skill he'd
Made the trench begin to shape far
More quickly than your frail work
Produced. He handed you back the
Spade and you noticed the calluses
That years of using spades and other
Workman's tools had made. He took
Hold of your hand and turned it over,
Gazed intently and smiled and shook
His head. Such lily-white hands were
Made for pen not spade or hoe or rake,
He said, finish what's started, lad, then
Return to your studies and pen instead.

Terry Collett

A Blue Irish Sky 1963

It's Sister Lucy not Sister Bridget
who's the crush on the young priest
Father Joseph Magdalene said,

Mary said is she the one? as she sat
on Mags bed listening to music
on her record player I thought
you said the Bridget,

Magdalene sitting beside Mary
passed a glass of lemonade to her
and said nothing certain
you understand just the rumours
I've heard but don't tell
the parents or my arse'll
be slapped for spreading the rumour,

have you a giggie? Mary said
putting the lemonade and glass
on the bedside cabinet,

Magdalene poked under the mattress
and took out a squashed pack
of 10 Woodbines and said
open the fecking window
or Ma'll know we've been smoking
and she'll have a moan
and passed the packet to Mary
who took a cigarette
and put it in her mouth
and went and opened the window,

Magdalene took a cigarette
and stuffed the packed
under the mattress again,

Mary sat down and said
have you a light then
or are we to fecking suck on air?

Magdalene took out
of the pocket of her dress
a box of matches
(liberated from the kitchen)
and struck a light for them both
and put the matchbox away again,

they inhaled and sat in silence,

the record played(Billy fury)
and they tapped their feet softly
and nodded their heads,

so what are you doing
about Brian Brady?
Magdalene asked,

what'd you mean doing about
I'm doing nowt with the fecker
it's him who thinks I'm going
to be doing things the soft loon
Mary said,

you seemed to be encouraging him
the other day Magdalene said,

ah was fun only I'd not let him
near me in a serious way
no more than the holy Joe himself
Mary said,

smoke filtered ceiling ward,

a car backfired from the street below,

Magdalene leaned in close to Mary
I'm your best friend
and I get jealous of the likes of him
being too near to you,

O he's nothing to be worrying yourself

about him Mags he's just a loon
as boys are Mary said,

Magdalene held the cigarette
a way from her lips
and kissed Mary's cheek,

Mary sighed and said
he's nothing I just give him
the tease he'll get nothing
from my sexual money box,

they both inhaled and exhaled again
and watched the smoke
rise ceiling ward,

the sound of Magdalene's ma
downstairs singing along to the radio,

Magdalene's hand went on Mary's thigh,

a bright sun in a blue Irish sky.

Terry Collett

A Bride

I am a bride of Christ, said Sister Bede;
He kisses me with a thousand stars.
My bridesmaids are the angels
At elbows and head; the wind
Of the four corners my choristers;
The wounds of my groom, my wedding ring;
The hammer on the nails in His hands and feet
Are reminders of His love for me, I swoon
At His touch, for His love is overmuch.
I am but a grain of sand beneath His feet,
An echo in the desert of His wanderings,
A lost sheep of his multifold flock; He holds me
In His arms when I am found, angels in His kingdom
Rejoice at this, but I am as dew
Upon the morning grass,
A speck of dust in the world's whirl,
A mere grain in His creation of worlds.
I sit and wonder at my gain,
My bridegroom's touch, His saving arms,
His blessed hands, His finger pointing
At His sacred heart. Nothing in the universe
Can match His power, nothing can separate me
From His boundless love: I feel myself as saved
From darkness and gloom, my sins mar my skin,
My faithlessness taints my breath,
My lack of love hangs in my hair;
But He is my groom; His love washes away
All that taints; His coming is as the sun
On a morning's break; He has brought me home
To my heart's desire; He has set my soul alight
With His love's deep fire.

Terry Collett

A Cheek Kiss.

Yochana
waits for me
to get off
the school bus

she stands there
in her school
uniform
black straight hair
thin features

missed me then?
I ask her
getting out
of the bus

not really
she answers
her thin hands
are clutching
each other

can we talk?
she asks me

sure we can

so we walk
towards school
kids passing
beside us

what is it?
I ask her

Angela
my best friend
at the school
says not to

talk with you
but I must
I can't sleep
otherwise

we pause by
the school gates

what is it?
I ask her
noticing
just how thin
her frame is
her features

you kissed me
why did you?

why did I?
I wonder
watching her
on her cheek
it had been
just like that

felt like it
I answer

is that all?
nothing more?
she asks me

I like you
I tell her
think of you
all the time

so you say
she utters
shouldn't kiss
just like that

hurry up
get in school
a prefect
near the gate
says to us

what's the rush?
I ask him

just get in
he utters

we go in
the school grounds

don't kiss me
any more

she mutters
and goes off

I watch her
her thin hips
do not sway

she looks back
towards me

I blow her
a palm kiss

she grabs it
and puts it
to her breast
then walks on
out of sight

Reynard R
my best friend
comes over

who's the bint?

he asks me

just a girl

aren't they all?

some are more

girl's a girl
bit of skirt

then he talks
of football
and would I
be in goal
at lunchtime
on the field

I guess so
I reply

but it's her
Yochana
I think of
and the kiss
on her cheek
at the start
of the week.

Terry Collett

A Christmas Visitation

Anny stands by the door. Anny
Watches as your grandchildren
Open the seasonal gifts. Her blue
Eyes follow as toys are investigated
One after another. You see her there,
Her ghostly hand brushing back her
Curly blonde hair. She smiles at you
As she lifts her eyes from toys to you.
None of the others see her as she walks
About the room, her hands wanting to
Touch the toys, to finger the doll, to hold
Against her chest as once she may in
Better days before the Auschwitz death.
You sip your beer, your eyes watching
As she sits by your wife, taking in excitement
Of voices and grandchildren's laughter,
Her bright eyes moving from you to laid
Down toys, maybe remembering her own
Childhood excitement of Jewish celebrations,
The candles, the singing, the feel of love,
The sense of awe. Speculation on your part,
You and your tender heart. Anny studies
Your wife as she talks of this and that to those
Around the room. Anny looks back at you,
Those blue eyes, that curly blonde hair, that
Ribbon tied in the hair, those 1940s clothes,
That sense of sorrow that follows her like
Perfume. You smile back and want to say
Other words you have said to her before,
But others might wonder why you speak to
One they cannot see, thinking maybe your
Dotage has taken a turn or that you've sipped
Too much beer in celebrational cheer. Anny
Understands these things and much beside
Since that Paris betrayal and train trip to
Icy Auschwitz where in 1942 she died.

Terry Collett

A Clown Poodle

And so
I said

to the lady:
there are no

wild animal acts
in the circus

which is coming
to town.

She wasn't
entirely satisfied

with the term 'wild';
it suggests

that domesticated ones
might be involved,

but people dress
their pets up

all the time,
who doesn't

want to see
a clown poodle! ! !

Written by my late son Oliver Collett(1984-2014)

Terry Collett

A Coming Gloom 1997

Where shall we meet?
Nuala says over the telephone.

She hears Una tell her
a place in Dublin and the time.

She hears the front door open
and Brian call out:
I'm home, Nuala.

She holds the phone
close to her ear,
listening to Una's voice
on the other end.

Brian enters the room
and sits in his armchair
and studies his wife's behind.

Nuala knows Brian's in the room
and tries to talk to Una
without her husband realizing
who she is talking to.

Una asks her if she is all right.

Yes, I'm well,
she replies,
trying to convey a sign
of Brian's presence,
I think he is there,
why don't you go see?

Una hesitates,
goes silent,
falls in and says,
Ok, I understand,
meet me there
if you can.

Una puts down the phone
on her end.

Nuala holds the phone
and continues a conversation
with herself:
yes, try that, bye.

Brian notes the lovely legs
his wife has,
the way they go up
to her fine behind.

Nuala puts down the phone
and smiles at Brian.

A friend has mislaid her husband,
she says to Brian,
how was work?

Work is fine,
he says,
how about me and you
and the bed before dinner?

Nuala wishes it was Una
asking that;
she who wanted
to take her to bed.

Nuala nods and he
takes her hand
and they walk
to the bedroom.

He is thinking
of the sex to come,
she sensing
a coming gloom.

A Cough 1997

Nuala watches
her husband Brian
snore as she lies
beside him
in the bed.

Early hours
and birds beginning
to sing in dawn's light.

She thinks of Una
in another bed elsewhere
and wants her there
without Brian
and his snores
and fumbling sex.

Last night
was a chore.

Two minute wonders.

Half a dozen kisses
at most.

Into her
then out
and on his back
panting like a dog.

No prince
from this frog.

Una had kissed
each part of her
from head to toes
and likewise to her
the day before.

Brian grunts
and turns away.

Broad back
like a bull
sleeping there.

Little foreplay
with him.

No prelude or overture
to his opera of sex.

Just down to it
like a dog
on a bone.

Una plays her
to a sweet melody.

Fingers her
to high thrills.

Brian mutters
in his sleep.

Nuala turns away
and faces the wall.

She muses on
the first date
in Dublin.

He dressed
to kill.

Suited up
and thin green tie.

She'd worn that
skinny dress
which showed off

the outline
of her arse.

Gagging for it
he was.

First date.

No way Mister.

Chaperoned anyway
distantly by her sister.

Nuala wishes
Una was there.

The body of her
near or next.

Lips to her.

Kisses placed
here and there.

Putting Smarties
on her and saying
suck these off.

Brian snores.

A small cough.

Terry Collett

A Dark Gloom 47bc

While Marcus
is talking
of some war

some campaign
he's been on
Annona

in their bed
beside him
wishes he

was still there
(far away
in some war)

they'd had sex
two or three
times during

the night
in which she
pretended

to enjoy
making noises
but really

it was shit
she hadn't
liked it one

little bit
but when he
was away

and Amy
was in bed
making love

it was one
big thrill ride
small kisses

soft touches
exploring
doors opened

places kissed
bodies hot
and o that

do not stop
do not stop
but Marcus

tells his tales
of war games
who killed whom

she sensing
in her heart
a dark gloom.

Terry Collett

A Deep Down Dread.

Shlomit sat
on the corrugated roof
of the pram sheds

gently kicking
the heels
of her battered

black shoes
against the brick wall
and she told you

her mother wore
more makeup
than usual to cover

the bruises
her father gave
but don't tell anyone

she said
I'm not supposed
to say anything

mother said
you know
in case he hears

she mouthed off
to neighbours
you said you'd

tell no one
looking at her
beside you

her hair pinned back
with grips
her thick lens

spectacles
blowing up her eyes
her black skirt

and stained blouse
with the plastic
necklace you got her

from the fairground
around her thin neck
you'd seen her old man

crossing the Square
some nights
three sails

to the wind
singing sometimes
cursing others

and one day
you saw her mother
black of eyes

and spilt of lips
carrying shopping back
from the shops

you don't wear make up
you said
guess he leaves you alone

her eyes looked away
her drowned kitten
perfume took

your nose
and as she moved
you saw the bluey

green skin

on her upper arm
but you knew he did

the screwball
talked with his fists
if his words failed

but Shlomit said nothing
of that she talked
of her wedding day

when she grew up
and how many kids
she'd have

and she having
a white dress
and a big house

although you knew
she thought it
even if

it wasn't said
that her future husband
maybe like

her old man
or maybe just
a deep down dread.

Terry Collett

A Good Night's Rest 1971

Stood in the cloister
with the other monks
in the evening chill
before Vespers,

Dei orment in omnibus,

all things in God Gareth said
quoting Spinoza,

cold water in morning wash
in icy jug of water into a white bowl
hands to face and neck,

lavabis me et super
nivem dealbabor,

these are my pearls she said
and this is my purse of joy
plunge into me,

I passed the tall monk
on the stairs he nodded a notice
he carried a big book
beneath an arm,

if every tiny flower wanted
to be a rose spring would
lose its loveliness Therese said,

Hugh said perfection lay in
doing God's will but without
God we cannot reach
perfection at all,

I cleaned the toilets
on the upper floor
with mop and bucket
smelt of disinfect,

the old monk was dying
and once talked of Plainsong
in high places and I
washed him and dried him,

in the shadow of her wings
I made hot love
like one possessed,

the church so silent
so utterly still I felt it
in my bones and soul,

the monk with a limp limped
into the choir stall
bowing his tonsured head,

refrain from evil words
on account of the penalty
of the sin Benedict said,

some evenings before Compline
I would wander the drive
towards the road and curse
in the night air
to get it(frustration) out there,

moon in shadow of a cloud
in the night sky and stars
sparse to the eyes,

when I see the short
duration of my life
used up in the eternity
before and after
the small space which I fill
cast into the infinite
immensity of spaces
of which I know nothing
and which doesn't know me
I am frightened Pascal said,

pour voir à l'infini,

the space between her thighs
where the body lives
but the soul part dies,

enjoy me she said enjoy me
as if a small boat on a vast sea,

the French peasant monk
dug the ditch with an angel
at his shoulder whispering
the Notre Père
his hands calloused
but maybe blessed,

I turned out the lamp
by my bed and sought
(without her in my bed
or head) a good night's rest.

Terry Collett

A Lost Love.

Her brother stopped
you in the high street
and said, Have you heard
about Judith? No, you

replied, thinking maybe
she'd divorced or won
the lottery or had another
child. Her brother hesitated

momentary then said, She
died of cancer. It seemed
as if he'd stabbed a knife
into your gut and twisted

the blade, all the memories
of you and she walking home
from school, arm in arm,
laughing, kissing, the lessons

of school gladly forgotten,
or sitting by the pond in summer,
the birds in the trees overhead,
she and you holding hands,

kissing lips to lips, those alone
moments, those long ago summers,
those dark wintry nights,
she captured in the car headlights,

you wanting her closer and all
those images flashed before your
eyes as her brother's words sunk in,
he standing there, knowing even

after all this time how you and she
had once been lovers, childhood
days like shadows on a far away wall,
the trees swaying and her saying

back in that moonlit lane, I'm engaged
to another, after you had proposed
innocently some years later, once
school had done its worse. Now her

brother's words had pushed their
way into your mind, her smile, those
eyes peering into yours, that I love
you gaze, long ago, in happier days.

Terry Collett

A Lucky Woman's Daughter.

Helen and you
walked home from school
the long way
you wanted to show her

the man
in the pie and mash shop
cutting up eels
for jellied eels

or for the pies
how he would stand there
with his knife
and take up an eel

and holding it
firmly on a board
would cut off its head
and then proceed

to slice it up
into small pieces
and into a bucket
on the floor

and when you showed her
standing outside the shop
peering through
the window

she said
O my God
and put a hand
to her mouth

and spoke
through her hand
and added
poor eels

to end up
in someone's stomach
and the way
he cuts them up

and the pieces
still moving afterwards
and she moved away
and walked up the road

still holding a hand
over her mouth
you don't fancy
pie and mash then?

you said
not with eels in it no
she replied
through her fingers

you smiled
not funny
she said
poor little eel creatures

yes I guess it is
a bit brutal
you said
but fascinating

to watch
I don't think so
she said
taking her hand

from her mouth
you both went under
the subway of the junction
she slightly

in front of you

her two plaits of hair
bouncing
as she walked

her green raincoat
tied tight about her
you whistled
so that it echoed

along the subway
bouncing off the walls
all along
the artificial lights

giving off
a surreal sensation
how can people eat eels?
she asked

just the sight
puts me off
don't know
guess they don't think

of it being eels as such
just as something to eat
you said
you both came out

of the subway
on the other side
and walked along
the New Kent Road

by the cinema
she looking
at the billboards
through her thick lens glasses

are you sure your mum
doesn't mind
having me for tea?

she said

well we're not actually
having you for tea
we usually have
beans on toast

or jam sandwiches
she slapped your hand
you know what I mean
she said smiling

no Mum don't mind
you said
she invited you after all
I pleaded against it

but she wouldn't listen
you said smiling
Helen's face frowned
and she stood still

really?
she said
no I'm joking
you said

and she nodded her head
uncertainly
looking at you
through her glasses

I'm just kidding
you said
you touched her hand
she smiled

and you both walked on
and across the bomb site
the uneven ground
the puddles of rainwater

you your mother's son
and Helen
a lucky woman's
daughter.

Terry Collett

A Matter Of Trust On A Summer's Day

Jane's mother said
she was up by the church
and so you went up

the path leading
to the church of St Mary
and there she was

laying some flowers
on a gravestone
she looked up

as you approached
and smiled
your mother told me

you were here
you said
I think Mother

must like you
she wouldn't
have told you

otherwise
Jane said
getting up

from the graveside
and brushing her hands
on her summery dress

who are the flowers for?
you asked
looking at the flowers

placed in a small jar
on the grave
a parishioner

we used to know
who used to like
this type of flower

oh I see
you said
looking at the graves around

and the Downs further back
and the trees nearby
where did you want to go?

you asked
how about a walk to Cocking?
we can do some shopping

while we're there
and enjoy each other's
company in the process

is it far? you asked
a mile or so
she replied

ok
you said
and you followed her

down the path
and along the lane
to her house

and you waited outside
while she went inside
after a few minutes

her mother came out
with her and said
it's very good of you

to go with Jane

all that way
I wouldn't like her

to go alone
that's all right
you said

and she smiled
and went in side
and Jane said

see she trusts you
not many boys
around here

she'd say that to
oh right
you said

looking at
her dark hair
and her eyes

gazing at you
and her hand
holding a shopping bag

and her lips
breaking into a smile
come on

she said and
so she took
your hand

and you walked
along the lane
keeping close

to the hedgerow
the sun warm
and the sky blue

and you sensed a joy
of it being
just her and you.

Terry Collett

A Mother And Her Dead Child

Looking back
it seemed
the child

was not to be
always there,
not through lack

of love or care,
but something
that came to her

in dreams of dread
at night asleep in bed.
She tries to retake

in dreams
the child back,
to pretend

that through
wishful thinking
she can make up

the lack.
Arms fold
into cradle

as once they had
when child lay
in arm's hold,

snuggled
and warm,
alive and moving,

seeking out with
eyes and fingers
her mother's dug.

Rock-abye-baby
no more,
the arms

and hands
redundant,
the last time

she recalls
the dead child
in arms,

rocking
back and forth,
as if this might cure

and bring back
to life,
might stir open

eyes, jog open
lips and mouth
to suck.

Not to be
just the memory,
ill luck.

Terry Collett

A New Day 1970

We stopped
for a short while
at Orleans,
after passing through Paris
in the early hours
by coach.

Miriam lifted her head
from my lap
and looked out
of the window:
where are we?
She said.

Orleans,
I said.

I feel a drag,
I must have
gone off
into a deep sleep,
she said.

You did,
I said,
I dozed off,
but you
were well away.

O Benny
you should
have woken me,
it must have been
uncomfortable for you
with me
sleeping on you.

The music on the coach
was some Mozart piece;

others moved about
around us.

Just for an hour,
then we must
move on,
the driver said.

Let's go find a cafe
and have a coffee
and croissants,
she said.

So we did
(after she had
brushed her red
haired head) .

We found a cafe
and ordered
and sat down
by a window;
others were
there already.

What do you think
of it so far?
I said.

It's good,
but I am so tired,
she said,
I could sleep
for a week.

Well it would
save you
on food money,
but a bit
boring for me,
I said.

She smiled;
I guess so,
she said.

We drank
our coffees
and ate
our croissants,
and went out
to look around
and have a smoke.

We sat on a bench
for a few minutes
before returning
to the coach.

She kissed me
and I kissed her.

Best get back,
she said,
taking my hand;
I felt a tingle
go through me
stirring my fellow.

So we went back
to the coach,
and sat in our seat,
and the coach
started up,
and moved away.

It was good start
of a new day.

Terry Collett

A Peaceful Feeling Mcmlxviii

I followed the thick set monk
along the silent cloister
him white robed
hooded against the cold
hands hidden
in deep pockets,

in tasche profonde
hands formed into fists
to hold the cold in check
as I entered the work shop
where a tall monk stood
bearded un invité à voir
he said smiling,

smell of incense
and baked bread
and monks,

feel of rope between hands
rough pull down
Dom Peter said
then let go
so I did
son de cloches
in the afternoon air,

I gazed at the cloister garth
from the common room window
pacem and my hand
on the radiator
a book by Marmion
before me resting,

Deus caritas est
the old monk told me
as we sat on the seat
under the shadow of the tree
ipse novit nos he added,

I walked the cloister
towards the refectory
for supper
my hand against
the orange brick
as I walked past
rough and smooth
on my finger's touch,

ascoltare Dio
the Italian monk said
as He listens to you
listen to His voice,

Dom Joe(dear Bunny)
spoke of simple things
in simple things
we find Truth he said
vérité dans
les choses simples,

silence in the half dark
before Compline kneeling
watching the red light
at the altar end
and a peaceful feeling.

Terry Collett

A Question Of Love.

After climbing off
the school bus
she grabbed the sleeve

of your coat and said
I want to talk to you
and so you stayed behind

as your sister and hers
walked on ahead
and her brothers ran off

in a game of tag
she released your sleeve
and brushed the hair

out of her eyes
what is it? you asked
walking beside her

along the side of the road
the winter afternoon darkening
what was Roland

saying to you in class?
she asked
Roland?

yes Roland
in the last lesson of maths?
you looked over

at the tall trees
becoming tall giants
as the sky began to dim

he was talking about his sister
you said
then why was he looking at me?

perhaps he finds you attractive
you replied
she slapped your arm

with her hand
don't talk nonsense
he wouldn't find

Marilyn Monroe attractive
if she sat
on his bony knees

she said looking at you
with her big blue eyes
you rubbed

your injured arm
playfully
he was saying his sister

had found his collection
of dirty magazines under his bed
you said

a car whizzed by
and she turned
and shouted back at it

some words her mother
would have slapped her
for saying

she sighed and said
why can't you tell me the truth?
you stopped and stood facing her

her blue eyes gazing at you
searching yours
as if she'd left something there

on a previous occasion

he said he didn't know
what I saw in you

her eyes enlarged
and what did you say?
she asked

in the sky over her shoulder
the moon was beginning to shine
in competition

with the weak sun
I said you snogged
pretty good

you said
she slapped your arm
and walked on

no
you called out
I was only joking

she stopped
and turned
and glared at you

I said you were the best thing
to happen to me
since God created Sundays

you're lying
she said
all right

you said
seeing her eyes watering
I said I loved you

you said
looking at her
wondering if her hand

might slap you again
did you?
yes

and what did he say?
she asked
he just shrugged

his shoulders
and drew a picture
of Mr Parrot on the corner

of his maths book
she was silent
and looked by you

at the incoming traffic
then kissed your cheek
leaving a damp patch

like a small oasis
on a dry landscape
of your 14 year old skin

conjuring up images
her mother
would define as sin.

Terry Collett

A Quiet Sea 1957

Enid and I got the bus
to the South Bank.

The sky was blue
and cloudless.

We walked along
the embankment
looking over
at the River Thames
at the boats passing by
and tugs and pleasure boats
with passengers onboard
and we waved
and some waved back.

Are you sure my dad said
it was all right for me
to go with you today?
she said.

Sure it is
I met him on
the stairs of the flats
and he said yes
but not to be late
I said.

She looked
apprehensive.

I wouldn't lie to you
I said.

No I know you wouldn't
she said
but he didn't seem
in a good mood
this morning

and him and Mum
were rowing when
I got up.

Well he was all right
when I met him
I said.

She nodded
and we walked on
past the tennis courts
on our left
until we came
to a shop selling
ice creams and drinks.

Want an ice cream?
I said.

I haven't any money
she said.

I have some
I said
so we bought two ice creams
and sat on a seat
and watched the boats
and tugs go by.

I watched her sideways on
as she licked her ice cream.

She looked happy briefly
as if she'd put away
her fears and anxiety
and sat like a gull
floating on a quiet sea.

Terry Collett

A Room At The Top.

It was a room
at the top of the building

music being played
from some hifi system

and Judy said
you dance quite well

thanks
you said

haven't seen you
here before

she looked at you
with her dark eyes

I come for the drug aid
they help me here

to get of the junk
oh right

you replied
looking for signs

of needle marks
or signs in the eyes

you take junk?
No I'm a booze clown

you said
she nodded

and danced to the music
for a moment or so

my parents are doctors
in the City and have put me

in the hospital but I get out
for a few hours

and they let me
come here for the help

you looked at her dressed
in her tight slacks

and over long jumper
her breasts small

compact
untouchable

her hips swaying
to the music's beat

the way she moved
drawing you in

smelling her scent
her words lost

in a singer's voice
a guitar whining

in and out
maybe I can come see you

you have to shout
over the music's rising sound

sure
she said

moving her neat ass
as she moved around

and she whispered
the address and where

the hospital was
and how to get there

then she was whisked away
by some guy

with a drugged out
look in his eye

and you watched her sway
moving off

going slowly
but sexily away.

Terry Collett

A Silent Applause 2010

Watching a woman
eating a muffin today

at the cafe
I thought myself

viewing a show
of performance art,

the way she
broke it apart

in her hands
and lifted

a small piece
to her mouth and ate,

wiping the crumbs away,
with the finger just so

and she so unaware
she was being viewed,

her art performance receiving
a silent applause.

Terry Collett

A Smile

A smile
and that was it
she had you captured
and that was

the first time
you saw her
as you climbed aboard
the school bus

that November
and as you took
your seat toward
the back

you carried her smile
with you
and it seeped into
and seemed to enter

every pore
and veins
and artery
of your being

and when you
looked up front
there she was
sitting with her head turned

still gazing at you
and that smile
and those sparkling
blue eyes

and all the rest
of the kids on the bus

seemed not to be

seemed elsewhere
it was (at least to your mind)
just you and her

and that smile
and those eyes
and as you looked away
out of the window

the sun seemed
to make efforts
to shift clouds
to bless your day.

Terry Collett

A Still Born.

While her husband was off
fighting a war
in a foreign land
she gave birth
to a dead child.

He could have had home leave
have left the war
for other men to fight
have been by her side
in her darkest night,
but he chose to go to war
selected some overseas conflict
to get engaged in battle
leaving her an empty womb,
and a still born babe,
a vacant cot,
a silent rattle.

How long that one hold?
That caressing of one lost
what emotional cost?
While he was off
spilling blood
on a foreign shore,
she buried the child
in a small coffin
of her choosing.

While he was at war
in some other land,
she felt her grief grow;
all else, marriage,
mind's peace,
heart's love,
she had lost
or was losing.

A Stone's Throw 1958

I knocked
at Lydia's front door
there were voices
beyond the door.

Then the door opened
Lydia stood there.

Coming out?
I said.

Not sure
if I can
she said
they are rowing.

I looked at her
the unbrushed hair
lank and straight
her pale face
and staring eyes.

Why not?
don't they
always row?
I said.

Can't just ask
while they're rowing
Benny
she said.

Ok I'll be on
the fence round
the corner for awhile
I said.

She shut the door
I walked

round the corner
sat on the green fence.

The sun was out
but lukewarm
the sky was dull.

Rowing parents
was nothing new
but I had to admit
her parents rowed often
usually about her
old man's boozing.

The milk man
came past
on his horse
drawn cart
the brown horse
had a nosebag
looked disinterested
in his surroundings.

Lydia came
around the corner
and sat on the fence
next to me.

Can't go far
Dad said
not more
than a stone's
throw away
she said.

Depends who
is throwing
the stone
I said
and how far
they can throw.

You know
what I mean
Lydia said moodily.

So what do we do?
I said.

Talk about going
to Edinburgh
she said
on that steam train
we saw.

I mused
on the train
ok so when
and what we
will need
I said.

So we got
off the fence
and sat
on the grass
within a stone's throw
of her flat.

We talk
about going
to Edinburgh
on the steam train
but just as we got
to the list of things
it began to rain.

Terry Collett

A Thing Burned 1997.

Nuala introduces Una to Brian
as he enters the lounge,
Nuala and Una stand apart,
gaze at him.

Brian smiles awkwardly
and says,
so you're the Una
who Nuala 's been
rushing off to see?

Una looks at him,
tries to gauge
his thoughts and reactions,
yes, I am she,
Una says smiling,
trying to make it seem
a casual thing,
a mere friendship.

He turns to Nuala
and says,
we lost,
2 goals down,
fecking ref
had his eyes shut
most of the time,
couldn't find his arse
if his eyes were wide open
and both hands searching.

Una sniggers,
takes in Nuala's features,
the anxiety she sees there.

But did you enjoy it
apart from that?
Nuala says,
wanting to move on

and settle him down
and Una away
before words slip up
and reveal things.

A few lilies,
that's all,
and a talk with the boys,
Brian says,
eyeing Una,
taking in her
short pink dress,
the nice thighs,
hair.

Been friends long?
he asks Una.

School friends,
Nuala says,
way back,
just found her
in recent months.

Is that so,
Brian says,
don't recall you
from school.

Even your sex brain
can't recall all the girls
from school,
Nuala says
sitting on the sofa
beside Una.

Guess not,
Brian says,
sitting in
his favourite armchair,
his eyes searching Una's,
lowering his gaze

to her thighs again.

O,
Joe's wife's
pregnant again,
that's her fourth
in four years,
he must spend
most of his time
between her thighs,
Brian says,
eyeing Nuala.

Coffee or tea, Una?
Nuala says,
ignoring Brian's words
and news.

No, I must be going,
got a date tonight,
Una says,
pretending,
winking at Nuala
so Brian can't see.

Who's the lucking buck?
Brian says,
grinning,
eyes large.

Just a friend,
Una says,
rising from the sofa.

Jammy fecker,
Brian says,
eyeing her
as she turns to go,
taking in her behind.

Good to meet you,
Una says to him.

They shake hands
and she follows Nuala
along the passage,
away from Brian
who turns on the TV,
cracks open
a can of beer.

Sorry about him,
Nuala says in a low voice.

Una shrugs her shoulders,
no problem.

They stare at each other,
then kiss on the lips,
holding briefly.

See you soon?
Nuala asks,
releasing Una
reluctantly.

Una nods,
smiles and goes
out the door and away.

Nuala closes the door,
turns back towards
the lounge,
passing the bedroom,
where she imagined
she and Una could
have been making love,
before Brian returned,
and as she thinks that,
she inwardly hots up
like a thing burned.

Terry Collett

A Thousand Dreams

And she's no more
A virgin than that
Magdalene who

Dried the hair
Of Christ with
Her hair, said

O'Brien, giving
You the wink and
Nodding towards

The girl at the bar
With the skirt way
Above the knees,

Carrying a tin for
Some charity, laughing
With O'Connell, giving

You the eye and O'Brien
The pip and shaking
The tin around the bar,

Like some leper in
Biblical times ringing
Their bell and old Mrs

Murphy smiled a smile
Broader than her hips,
And you shaking your

Young head, looked back
At the girl and her tin
And the way she walked

To the door with the
Backside sweet enough
To fill a thousand dreams.

Terry Collett

A Warm Shore 47bc

Amy's there
beneath me
Annona

tells herself
her slave girl
fingering

to heaven
or such place
the kisses

on my breasts
on my neck
on my chin

I sense her
wanting me
her hunger

nibbling
at my flesh
with love bites

(just as well
my husband
old Marcus

is away
at battle)
she fingers

my garden
through dark pubes
like bushes

my lips kiss
her forehead
our mouths meet

our tongues touch
I wonder
how Marcus

is doing
and whether
he battles

with those wild
warriors
or young whores

Amy's brought
to hotness
in my bed

sensuous
as dark grapes
in my mouth

she's opened
me up now
she on top

me beneath
swallowing
each mouthful

of her rich
honey breath
o come now

enter more
flush me out
as wild waves

a warm shore.

Terry Collett

A Woman Called

A woman called for you today said Max's wife.
Oh said Max who was she?
She didn't say Max's wife replied.
Well dames that don't leave names
Aren't worth worry over Max said
Lighting up a cigarette and sitting
In a chair by the window.
She seemed to know you Max's wife stated stiffly
Seemed quite put out when I told her I was your wife.
Dames are always put out over something or other
Max said noticing his wife's beauty spot
And how it moved as she spoke.
She was a brunette.
Ah a brunette huh?
Yes a brunette his wife said.
Well? She said after a minute's pause.
New York's full of brunettes.
This one came to the apartment and rang our bell
And stood at the door asking for Max.
There are plenty of men called Max in New York Honey he said
Comparing in his mind his wife and the brunette
He'd met at a bar the other night.
She seemed your type his wife said sulkily
The type that sways her hips and sticks out their ass.
Yes I know the type Max said and sighed
They can never leave me alone.
I tell them I am happily married to the best dame in New York
But they seem not to hear Max said
Watching smoke rise upwards.
Best dame in New York huh? His wife said.
Sure you are he said taking in his wife's plump ass
Hanging over the side of the chair like melted cheese.
She smiled and said must have been a mistake
On her part coming here and asking for Max.
Sure it was Max said dames sometimes make mistakes
They have no sense of direction.
His wife smiled at him sexily hoping.
Max smiled back and hoped for erection.

A Woman's Touch

A woman's touch. Yet to
another woman applied,
towelling dry, older, hands

slightly more worn, eyeing
the young woman, secretly
wishing. The young woman,

naked except the pink bow
in brown hair, thinking of
something other, not sensing

anything of the woman drying,
the touch, the towel, is far
from her thoughts, maybe some

boyfriend and his recent deeds
or words or both. The bath
had been refreshing, the water

just right, the older woman
always has it so, the towel laid
out, the soap prepared, washing

the back, places she cannot reach.
The older woman seems to take
her time, drying each area of skin

with some daintiness, a delicate
touch, wanting more maybe or
nothing very much. The younger

woman, feeling dryer, more in
touch with self, thoughts ordered
into place, takes no notice of the

other woman's rub of breasts or
under arms, no thought of hers at
all, no grace, no charms, the recent

boyfriend, he who made to her such
passionate entering and kissings,
she feels like a fatted calf, some well

stuff bird, pleased with her self, her
sense of need fulfilled, the pleasure
dome having been reached and done.

The older woman drying now the thighs
has no wish to end her task, no other love
or want, except what's there before her eyes.

Terry Collett

A Word To The Wise 1965

I didn't know
you would be here,
Tilly's mother said,
when she came in
and saw us sitting
on the sofa together.

She stared at Tilly
more than me.

Benny just popped in
to see me as it's
my half day off work
and we've had a chat,
Tilly said.

Her mother stared at me;
have you offered
Benny a drink?
She said.

No not yet,
Tilly said.

Well get him one then;
I don't suppose
he will want to hang
around all day
waiting for a drink.

Tilly got up,
and went to the kitchen.

I was left alone
with her mother,
who sat down
in her armchair
still looking at me.

Is it your
afternoon off too?
She said.

No I work in two shifts;
I go back to work
about 5pm,
I said.

She looked at the clock
on the mantle-shelf
which showed 3.25pm.

She nodded her head,
and looked around the room
as if looking for signs
we may have been
up to something(trusting soul) .

It is not any young man
I would have here with Tilly,
you know,
I know your mother
has brought you up
to honour and respect girls,
so I am trusting in your case,
she said,
looking back
at me again.

I was thinking about Tilly
and me up in her room
about half hour previously
lying next to each other
after having had sex
a couple of times.

That is nice to know,
I said,
that you trust me.

She stared stiffly;

her eyes narrowing.

It is important that girls
appreciate their virginity,
she said.

I listened out for Tilly;
that she'd come back soon,
and wouldn't put
her foot in it
as she nearly did
the other time
I came around,
and her mother
interrogated me.

What are your prospects
where you work?
She asked.

Prospects?
I said.

What are the future developments
at your place of employment?
She said.

Upward and erect,
I said.

She stared at me.

I erect
and pull down marquees,
I said smiling.

She did not smile back:
and the future?
What are your prospects?

I have no idea,
I said.

She sat forward,
and looked towards
the kitchen:
where has that girl gone?
Visiting India
to buy it?
She said.

I smiled;
she didn't.

After a few minutes,
Tilly entered
with a tray of cups
and saucers for three,
and set it down
on a small coffee table
in the center of the room,
and stood up smiling.

Done it,
she said.

You took your time,
her mother said,
where you been, India?

Tilly stopped smiling,
and sat next to me.

What have you two
been doing this afternoon?
her mother asked.

Talking about our school days,
Tilly said.

Is that all?
Her mother said.

Well we did talk

about other things too,
she said.

I mean other
than talking,
her mother said.

Benny kissed me once,
Tilly lied.

Her mother eyed me:
is that all?

Well maybe twice,
I said.

Her mother selected
a cup and saucer
and sipped from the cup,
and stared at Tilly
and not me.

Virginity is highly prized
in our family,
her mother said,
not until marriage
is it to be relinquished,
her mother said.

I nodded,
and Tilly
went red.

Terry Collett

Abbey Musing Mcmlxx

I walked the cloisters
smelt the incense
listened to the birds sing,

discamus aliorum merita
cicatricesque cautio
saith Jerome
Dom Charles said,

the old monk sliced
a thin slice
of brown bread
with slow deliberateness
as if he prayed
as he sliced,

I hoed the flower bed
at the back of the abbey
sun on my shoulder
shadow playing
before me,

l'ombra giocato prima di me
I told the Italian monk
as we sat peeling potatoes
in the cloister after Terce,

dans le cloître après Terce
that time I hoovered
the cloisters
deep in thought,

nel pensiero profondo
I mused on that death
and the after affect
and how it hurt me,

mi ha fatto male
the Italian monk said

to relate that my uncle
was one of Benito's followers
but we all make errors,

tous font des erreurs
to err is human
to forgive is divinus
the monk thin
and haunted looking,

I opened the breviary
and read
moving my finger
following the chant
in my ears,

the sky dark
sprinkled stars
I mused on
Pascal's fears.

Terry Collett

Abbey Visitation Mcmlxviii

Incense in the abbey church
old monk in choir stall
mediating in the stillness
and silence
I watched
his tonsured head
bowed,

Ipse primus in pace
et tunc alios
quoque pacem
Thomas A Kempis
in Imitatione Christi
so I read,

common room
warm and cosy
book case
old sofas
stood looking down
into the cloister
just the tick ticking
of the clock,

la foi croit quelque
chose de vrai sans
preuve ou preuve
the French monk said
in the guests'
breakfast room
after lunch,

if there was proof
or evidence
we wouldn't need faith
the Colonel said,

plainsong Vespers
sensing the world

beyond the high windows
voices chanting
from choir stall
to choir stall
back and forth,

prayer è operazione
spirituale
con il Creatore
del Cielo e della Terra
Italian monk said
quoting Spurgeon
as I helped him
weed the cloister beds,

a spiritual transaction
is prayer with God
he translated for me
his fingers covered in earth
his dark eyes on me,

cloister in evening
walking with moonlight
causing shadows
where moon left untouched
and peacefulness
and a feeling of sanctity,

faith is accepting
without proof
Dom Joe said
and I conjured
these thoughts
like a balls
in my young head.

Terry Collett

Abela After Sex 1972

You pick up the book
on Schopenhauer
that Benedict had been reading.

You scan a few pages
then put it down.

Benedict is in the shower
showering after the sex
half hour back.

You had been first
standing there
feeling the hot water
freshen you up.

Soon you are going out
to the City to go see
that pianist play
a selection of Chopin
and Debussy.

You go to the window
and look out
on the grounds
of the hotel.

After the concert
dinner at that restaurant you like
and hopefully be served
by that Croatian waiter
who sends a tingle
through your nerves
when he speaks
and his eyes are on you
and he does stare so.

Benedict doesn't notice
he is so busy ogling

the passing female
waitresses to notice you
fluttering your eyelashes
at the waiter.

Hurry up Benny
you call out
over the Puccini aria
on the radio
nearly time to go.

Won't be long
he answers back.

You remember him
the night before
humping you
from the rear
saying
won't be long dear.

Terry Collett

Abela Asleep 1972

Abela had gone to sleep.

You lay there awake
listening to her breathe
and late night revellers
along the hotel passages.

You had both been
to a concert in the city
a string quartet had played
late Beethoven stuff.

Afterwards you boozed
a bit at bars then came back
to your room and undressed
(quickly) and had sex
no foreplay too urgent
she had said.

Now she slept
sound as a child.

You lay awake
thinking of
the Croatian waitress
with the bright eyes
and smile
and tight black dress
and how she swayed
as she walked.

Abela hated that
how you watched
the swaying.

Now she slept
and maybe dreamed
of you and her
or not as the case maybe.

You lay there
like some sea captain
gazing out
at a dark sea.

Terry Collett

Abela In Dubrovnik

Abela
sips her wine
wipes her mouth
looks around

love it here
Dubrovnik
she utters

I sip beer
turn a page
of my book
poetry
D. Thomas
Welsh poet

lovely wine
why don't you
try the wine?

I like beer
I reply

why do you
have to read?
she mutters

why do you
have to talk?

she cold stares
sips more wine

cigarette?
I suggest

get your own
she replies

I sip beer
close the book

nice place this
beer's good too
and that girl
that waitress
she's good too

what's so good
about her?
what's she got
that I've not?

I don't know
not seen her
undress yet

I light up
a hand rolled
cigarette

those two guys
she tells me
at the bar
the other night
are gay guys

I inhale
hold the smoke
exhale it

you think so?

it stands out
a wide mile

you liked him
the dark one
his dark eyes
wavy hair

she closes
her eyelids
zips her lips

what makes you
think they're gay?

I saw them
lip kissing
she whispers

we lip kiss
we hand kiss
we thigh kiss
we breast kiss

THAT'S ENOUGH
she bellows

I think they're
nice fellows
I tell her
not my scene
but nice guys

Abela
drains her wine
glares at me

another wine?
I ask her
cigarette?

I want gin

I signal
a waiter
one gin please
I tell him
and whiskey

he goes off

she lights up
a French smoke

about the girl
the waitress
just a joke
I tell her

(but the girl
the waitress
occupies
a small room
in my mind)

how days go
she utters
how time flies.

Terry Collett

Abela's Dreams 1972

That string quartet
last night in the City
Bartok and Debussy things.

Then the dinner
and then drinks
at the bar.

Benny eyeing
the waitresses
and I the waiter
especially that
tall dark eyed one.

I drank too much
got to our room
and undressed
and I lay there
wanting him
but I drifted off
into sleep.

He said he slept
on the small sofa.

I woke this morning
with a heavy head
and sour mouth.

Now we sit waiting
for breakfast.

My stomach doing
somersaults
my head unclear.

Benny looking
at the passing waitress
and her neat butt

or so it seems.

I dreamt
of that waiter
such are dreams.

Terry Collett

About Abela

There's butter
on her lip
from the toast

and bread crumbs
on her cheek
where fingers
have been there

and she moans
endlessly
about my hair
or my beard

Abela
I tell her
there's a blob
of butter
on your lip
at the top
hanging there
for dear life

and those books
that you read
she moans on
those deep books
with long names
of writers
why read them?

I like them
I reply

as she talks
the butter
on her lip
rides like some
horse breaker

Abela
how's the toast?

she gazes
at the toast
in her hand

it's quite good
she replies

the butter
is still there
on her lip
hanging like
some kid's fresh
smooth bogey

I see it
look away
nothing more
I can say.

Terry Collett

About The Virgin 1960

The tall thin nun
opened the book
scanned the page
then gazed
at the children in class.

What relationship
does Our Lady have
within the Holy Trinity?
She said.

Fay sat at the front
hands in her lap
eyes looking
at the nun
and her bony fingers
holding
the black book.

A boy raised his hand:
yes Borrows?
The nun said.

She's the daughter
of God,
the boy said.

Fay knew the answers
but felt shy
to raise her hand.

Yes she is
the daughter of
God the Father
but what other relationship
does she have
within the Trinity?
The nun said.

A girl with pigtails
put up a hand:
she's the mother of Jesus,
the girl said.

Yes she is
the mother of Jesus,
but who is Jesus?
The nun said
her eyes scanning
the class like a hawk
for prey.

Fay shyly lifted
her hand:
Jesus is God the Son
and so Mary
is the Mother of God,
Fay said.

The nun studied Fay:
so Our Lady is both
a daughter of God
and the Mother of God,
the nun said.

Fay wondered
what Benny would make
of this lesson.

She would see him later
after school if she was
allowed out after dinner
if her father
was in a good mood.

What other relationship
does Our Lady have
within the Trinity?
The nun said.

Fay knew but felt

unsure if she should
raise her hand or not.

No one know?
The nun said.

No one replied
but sat there
eyes on the nun.

Fay knew but it
was too late now
the nun was about
to explain.

Our Lady is
the spouse
of God the Holy Spirit,
the nun said.

A boy put up
his hand.

Yes O' Connor?

What's a spouse?
He said.

The Holy Spirit
came upon her
and she conceived
of the Holy Spirit,
the nun said slowly,
so Our Lady
is the spouse of God
the Holy Spirit,
the nun said.

The boy nodded
nonplus.

Fay understood

but had said nothing.

She would ask
Benny later
if he knew
he would probably say:
haven't a clue.

Terry Collett

About To Begin Day 1958

Lydia's mother stood
in the doorway
of her ground floor flat
arms folded
cigarette in the corner
of her mouth.

Yes?
she said.

Can Lydia
come out?
I said.

Out where?
she said.

Out with me
go see
the steam trains
at Waterloo
train station
I said.

She puffed on
her cigarette
and gazed at me.

You went there
the other week
she said.

I know but we'd
like to go again
I said.

She unfolded her arms
and took the cigarette
out of her mouth

and held it
between fingers.

How you
getting there?
she said.

Getting a bus
I said.

And who's paying
the bus fare?
she said.

I can
I have money
I said
rattling some coins
in my jean's pocket.

LYDIA
her mother
bellowed.

I raised eyebrows
and looked back
into the Square.

Kids were playing
by the pram sheds
the milkman was
delivering milk
over the way.

Lydia came
to the door
and look at me
what is?
she asked
her mother.

Benny boy

wants to take you
to the train
station again
her mother said.

Can I go?
Lydia said.

Her mother sighed
if you must.

What now?
Lydia said.

Yes go before
I change my mind
her mother said.

She put
the cigarette
in her mouth
and went back
in doors.

Lydia smiled at me
and she closed
the door.

We went
on our way
a warm sun
on a just about
to begin day.

Terry Collett

Accent

I had
an Australian lady

on the phone
yesterday;

the longer
the conversation

went on,
I started

to adopt
her accent;

I couldn't
stop it;

I had
to end it

before it got
too noticeable.

Written by my late son Oliver Collett(1984-2014)

Terry Collett

After A Dance At Malaga

In Malaga
at the base camp
you danced at some disco
and drank Bacardi

and coke and it was
well into the early hours
of the morning
when you left

with Mamie
tiptoeing between
tent ropes and the unlit
areas between

and she said
I can't find
where my tent is
and you said

I'd let you share mine
but that young army guy
is in mine
and three in a bed

is a bit cramped
but where is mine?
she said
searching around

touching tent ropes
as she went by
you stood watching
trying to decide

where your tent was
what are we to do?
she asked
let's go back

to the club
until it gets lighter
or we remember
where our tents are

you said
but I'm tired
she said
I want to go to bed

and sleep
you searched around
by the hedge of the field
and then said

wait
I know where
mine is now
and you led her

to the tent
and unzipped it
and there inside
was the army guy

fast asleep
you can come in here
if you like
you said

but she just stood there
in the semi dark
cussing into the night
come on in

and be quiet
you said
I want my tent
she said

I want my own bloody tent

ok go find it then
you said
and began to climb inside

wait
she said
in a hushed voice
and came over

to your tent
and looked in
what about him?
she asked

he's asleep
you replied
what will he say
and finds me here?

you gazed
at the sleeping soldier boy
his mouth open
his eyes closed

a soft snore
filling the air
either come in
or go elsewhere

you whispered
I can't
she said
not with him there

and so she turned
and wandered off
into the semi dark
another chance walking off

into the night
some things you hope for
you murmured

never come right.

Terry Collett

After A Wedding.

After singing in the choir
at the major's daughter's wedding

you were all invited
to the posh reception

and you watched
the other guests

move around
the gardens and marquees

feeling rather out
of your class and league

and then she came
along side you and said

maybe one day
we can get married

like the major's daughter
and have children

and be happy
and not have to feel

out of our class
and utterly lonely

and not have
my mother breathing

down my neck
to marry some schmuck

and you said
who knows maybe

and you smiled
and she put her arm

through yours
and you walked together

amongst the guests
and other members

of the church choir
beneath the summer sun

not knowing then
that it was not to be

that she would marry another
under a different sky

and not live
happy ever after

but get cancer
and die.

After singing in the choir
at the major's daughter's wedding

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that it was not to be

that she would marry another
under a different sky

and not live
happy ever after

but get cancer
and die.

Terry Collett

After All Said And Done.

After Friday choir practice
in the church

after the other members
had gone to the vestry

to ready themselves for home
she stood in the darkened church

looking at the altar
and the high windows

where only moonlight
shone through

and she said to you
we'll stand here one day

and get married maybe
and say our vows

and there will be
our families and friends

and the parson will say
kiss the bride and you will

and she smiled
and looked at you

standing in the quiet church
and you said

some years off maybe
we're only fourteen

and still at school
and we've got to get pass

your mother yet
like trying to get a ball

by a fat goalie
who fills the net

but she just shook her head
and smiled and said

don't be so negative
look on the positive side

look to the future
with bright eyes

and it seems strange now
and sad to look back

at that night
with you and she

standing in that aisle
in semi-dark

while outside
in the night sky

fate was working out
a different answer

where you
would marry others

and she would die
from cancer.

Terry Collett

After Bad Cowboys.

You used to cross
Rockingham Street
to the bakers
on the corner

of Meadow Row
and buy 6 crusty rolls
and a white loaf of bread
and carry them back home

to the fifth floor
of the flats
where your mother said
keep the change for going

and you pocketed the change
to save for the 6 shooter gun
you'd seen in the toy shop
along the New Kent Road

and your mother
would butter a roll
and put in a slice of cheese
and you would go sit

in the window
over looking
the railway
shunting yard

and eat
taking in the rail trucks
loaded with coal
being shunted into

the yard and the trucks
unload and the coal
would fall down through
to the coal wharf below

and then you saw
the coal carts loaded
with sacked up coal
and the horses in harness

waiting to go
and you imagined
one of those horses
in saddle and you

taking off across
the Wild West
with your new 6 shooter
in your hand

tracking the bad cowboys
and dropping into
the public house
for a glass of redeye

or lemonade
don't be too long
your mother said
nearly time for school

and as you ate
the last few crumbs
and sipped
the last drops of milk

from the glass
and wiped your mouth
with the back of your hand
a steam train

crossed the bridge
and you thought
of the bad cowboys
on Bank's House Ridge.

After Bike Ride

Jim's younger sister
Followed you everywhere
and stood watching

as you rode the old car
around the field
or whizzed around

on their motorbike
to the cheers and shouts
from the fence

Monica why don't you
go off and play
Jim said

yes
said Pete
her other brother

go play with your dolls
go take a run and jump
she said

and still stood watching you
her eyes fixed on you
like wasps on a jam jar

I want to watch him ride
she said
and stood with her hands

on her hips
waiting until you stopped
the bike and got off

and wandered over to you
and said
I like the way you ride

like how you sway
and swerve on the bike
and you smiled at her

and took in
her short stature
her dark eyes

her determined expression
and as Pete rode off
on the bike

and Jim stood
on the fence
calling to him

Monica put her hand in yours
and said
wish you were my brother

I know you'd let me ride
the bike or car
and not tease me

or bawl me out
I guess I would
let you ride the bike or car

you said
and sensed
her small hand in yours

her thumb rubbing
against your skin
but seeing

as you're not my brother
she whispered
maybe you could

marry me one day

and we could ride off
into the sunset

like they do in the movies
in Jim's old car
yes sure maybe

you said
knowing inside
that'd be a bridge too far.

Terry Collett

After Brian 1997

Nuala had left Brian,
he'd found out
about her and Una
by following her
into Dublin
and watching her
and Una meet and kiss
and followed them
back to Una's place.

Nuala knocks on
Una's bedsit door anxiously.

Una wide opened eyes
what you doing here?
what did you forget?
Una says.

Nuala is red eyed
and tearful:
I've left Brian
or rather he told
me to go,
Nuala says.

Why?
What happened?
Una says.

He followed me
into Dublin and saw us
and he guessed
that something
was going on
and we rowed
and I confessed.

She stops and stares
at the floor.

Come in,
Una says.

Nuala goes in
and Una shuts the door.

Did he follow you
back here?

Don't think so,
I didn't think,
Nuala says.

Una looks out
the window
onto the street:
can't see him.

Nuala sits on the sofa
and cries softly.

Una sits next to her:
what will you
do now?

Feck knows,
can I stay here
for a few days
until I get
some where?

A few days?
You can stay as long
as you want,
if you don't mind
sharing my bed
and what I have,
Una says,
will he have
you back?

I don't want
to go back,
I want you,
Nuala says.

Una smiles:
you can stay
here of course.

Can I?

Of course,
Una says.

What if Brian comes
and causes trouble?
What about my things
I left behind?
Nuala says.

We'll go get them together,
Una says,
he didn't touch
you did he?

Nuala shakes her head:
no he never has,
not even after this,
he just said to go,
and I packed a few items
and left and got
the bus and it was
like my world
was upside down.

Una kisses her cheek,
and goes and gets
her a coffee
and chocolate cake
and says:
eat, this is
an emergency

for fecks sake.

Terry Collett

After Church Going 1958

A GIRL AND HER ABUSIVE FATHER IN LONDON IN 1958

Terry Collett

After Dinner Out 1940

I am back on the ward
after Philip took me out
to dinner in a restaurant
with the others

Nurse Kavel
undresses me for bed

I look at where
I think she is
with my blind eyes

was I good?
I ask

yes you did
very well
she says
her fingers remove
the red dress
and pull it over my head

then I sit there
semi undressed
balancing on the bed
feeling with my fingers
the aching leg stumps

legs hurt?
She says

yes a bit
I say

she finishes undressing me
then puts on my nightdress

I am on my back
staring into darkness

as she rubs my stumps
and unfolds the bandages
then re-bandages
them slowly
she talks about
the night out
and how well I did

were people
looking at me?
I ask

of course
she says
but they couldn't see
your leg stumps under
the red dress

then she has done
and is gone
and I lie alone
looking at darkness

I try to put together
the various words
and conversations
that went on
around me
putting lips to faces
that I couldn't see.

Terry Collett

After Father Died 1968

After my father died
they brought his body back
in an open coffin
to stay over night
in our chilled front room.

He looked peaceful
lying there
no longer racked by cancer
no longer in pain
just at peace
no lines on face
no furrowed forehead
from worry and anxiety
just wax like smooth
and a sense of calm
unknown since his life began.

I stood looking down at him
taking in his waxen face
his dark brows neatly trimmed
his sealed lips pinkish white
his greying hair combed
into a neatness as if
for a wedding or funeral.

I kissed his
chilled forehead
with lips
sensed him loss to us
in another place.

I moved back and stood
and stared and said goodbye
with love and tear in eye.

Terry Collett

After Grace's Wedding 1941

After the wedding and small reception
Philip carries Grace over the threshold
of their new home. Iris the maid comes
behind them ready to help set Grace on

to her legs again. He sets Grace down
carefully with Iris's help. Grace stands on
her artificial legs balancing herself. They
walk into the lounge, Philip guiding her

along as her blind eyes stare into the room.
Wish I could see the room. Wish I could
see Philip and Iris. Philip takes Grace to
the settee and she sits down slowly. A home

again. Hope this one doesn't get bombed.
Well Grace you are home again, Philip says.
Yes, its good to be out of hospital and in
a new home, she says. He takes her hand.

Want you to know this is your new home
forever, he says. New home. I'll never see
it or him. Where's Iris? She says. She's putting
your clothes away in our bedroom, he says.

Bedroom. Bed. And he will want to make
love to me tonight. How will he be when
he sees me naked and legless? He's seen my
stumps, but never naked and half a woman.

She grabs his hand tight. You have never seen
me naked, what will you think when you see
me without clothes and legless? Will you really
want to make love to me? He leans in close

to her. Of course I will, I love you, Grace,
he says softly. But I am only half a woman,
a blind one too. She cries. He hugs her closer
to him. She can sense him near. You are a complete

woman to me, he says. Iris comes running into the room. What's up? She says, going across to them. Grace is worried about tonight, he says. Iris kneels down beside Grace and whispers: you have your

husband who loves you madly and me to care for you in all things I can. Grace cries as she has not done for sometime. In her mind's eye she thinks of Clive who died at Dunkirk the year before and who made

love to her before the bombing and his death. She senses Philip kiss her cheek. And Iris's hand touching her thigh. Now she wants to live, last year she wanted to die.

Terry Collett

After Gym

After gym
before the tediousness

of double maths
she went with you

and sat on the bench
on the playing field

watching the sky
turn from blue

to grey
rain

she said
is on the way

but still you sat
and talked

of this
and that

away from the ears
and tongues

of others
especially

her mother's
and you knowing

that soon
the bell would ring

for end of recess
and the brainwashing

begin again
and you put out

a hand
and touched hers

feeling excitement
and the start of rain.

Terry Collett

After Hamburg 1974

We'd left Hamburg
and got back into the minivan;
Dalya beside me,
the others in their usual place.

I opened the Gulag book
by Solzhenitsyn;
it was a depressing book
but I read on.

It's about the labour camps
in Russia isn't it?
Dalya said.

Yes between
1918 and 1956,
I said.

Why read it
if it's depressing?
she said.

I want to know
the truth,
I said.

Truth about what?
she said.

What happened in Russia
during that time,
and the camps,
and why so many people
went there and died there,
I said.

The Polish woman
and her daughter
said nothing,

but looked at the book
I had in my hands.

I remembered
the woman
had said that some
of her relations
were in the area
occupied by the Russians
in the war,
and the others
in the part run
by Germans,
and both suffered
and some died
or disappeared.

I wondered what
she thought
about the book,
and if any of her relations
ended up in a camp
on either side.

I said nothing,
but read on
page after page,
with Dalya's thigh
close to mine
warm and tender.

I recalled
the other night
in her tent
making love to her.

Terry Collett

After Her Bath.

After the bath the drying of,
the white towel under the
arms, over arms and breasts,
between thighs, all over until

all dries or near so, and while
drying, she thinks of the long
afternoon spent, the meal, art
gallery and back to the hotel

for sex and talk and sex again.
She smiles, drying along her thigh,
here where he put his lips, kiss
planting, lips damp and wet, his

tongue lick lick, she laughs softly,
dries her buttocks, rubs and rubs,
and him reciting some short bawdy
poem, tapping his fingers along her

spine. She pauses the drying of, sits
and recalls the kisses set, the places
laid, the excitement caused and
raised and she in giggles near to

wetting and he laughing. After
the bathing, the rumination and
towelling all over, skin rubbed,
bath oils, powder, remembering

embraces, touching in places (what
would Mother have said?) , and
he running finger along her nerves
and setting her juices to flow, then

have to leave, said he, have to go,
then gone, bed empty, space vacated,
scent left, odours lingering, still on
fire, unsatisfied desire. She sits and

puts down the towel, takes cigarette,
lights, inhales and thinks on and when
next and where, and if in truth, he'll
come and (God be praised) ever be there.

Terry Collett

After History With Helen

about Saxons or Vikings
or some such thing
you walked home

from school
with Helen
along St George's Road
the afternoon traffic

hustling and bustling by
and Helen said
that Cogan boy
pulled my plaits

and called me four eyes
and said I looked
like a pug
I think you look pretty

you said
do I?
she said
yes

you replied
and don't mind
about Cogan
you said

tapping your jacket pocket
(where you kept
your six-shooter cap gun)
he said he'd smash my face

but he never does
he's all mouth
and short pants
you said

Helen put her arm
under yours
and squeezed it
nice of you to say

I'm pretty
she said
no one's said that before
and she looked ahead

and you stole a glance
sideward on at her
her plaits held in place
by two rubber bands

her thick lens spectacles
which made her eyes
larger than they were
and her small nose

beneath the bridge
of the wire frame
you looked away
carrying the image of her away

storing it in your mind
and she said
my mum likes you
she said you're not like

the other boys
around here
o
you said

thinking of her mother
large as life
pushing the big pram
squeezed into

the huge coat
nice of your mum to say

you said
she pulled your arm closer

to her
her dark blue
raincoat
against your black jacket

you sensed the six-shooter
against your ribs
thinking of Cogan
and firing a cap bang

in the back
of his head
my mum said
I can go

to the cinema
with you
on Saturday morning
matinee

Helen said
o good
you said
not caring what

the other boys might say
with her along side you
in the sixpenny seats
you in jeans

and open necked shirt
and she maybe
in that flowered
red dress

white socks
and black battered shoes
sensing her arm
on yours

as you approached
the traffic lights
at the big junction
catching a glimpse

of her smile
as you both crossed
the road
when the lights

turned green
the afternoon sky grey
rain seeming near
smelling it in the air

thinking of Helen
and of a snatched kiss
but you didn't think so
or didn't dare.

Terry Collett

After Martha Had Gone 1963

Martha's gone home,
Magdalene watches her go
from her bedroom window.

She got a kiss
nothing more
not from Martha,
unlike Mary
who was up for it.

Martha had been fascinated
by the crucifix
above Magdalene's bed,
had climbed on the bed
and touched
the Crucified's feet
(Magdalene had been tempted
to embrace Martha's legs,
but didn't.

Martha's out of sight;
the record player
is silent now,
the Billy Fury LP
is unmoving.

Wish Mary was here,
Magdalene muses,
feeling hot and bothered now;
two empty glasses
sit on the bedside table,
the ashtray has
cigarette butts lying there.

The sky is cloudless.

Her mother comes in
the front gate
carry shopping bags.

Magdalene tidies up the bed
and hides the glasses
under the bed,
and goes down the stairs.

Her mother is in the kitchen,
bags on the table.

What you been up to?
The mother says.

Nothing,
Martha was here,
Magdalene says.

What did she want?
The mother asks.

Talk and listen to music,
Magdalene says.

She's the one
who wants to be a nun
isn't she?

Yes so she says,
Magdalene says.

The mother puts
the shopping away;
Magdalene helps her,
wishing it had been Mary
in her bed
them at it.

The mother sighs
and sits in a chair:
put the kettle on
I need a drink.

Magdalene does

as she's told;
she thinks her mother at 42
is old.

Terry Collett

After Mozart 1962

Yochana closes
her bedroom door;
her fingers ache
with the hard practising
of the Mozart
piano sonatas her mother
insisted she play.

She leans against the door,
staring at the desk
where her study books are;
the print above her desk
of Beethoven(her mother's gift) ,
then at her bed
where she wants
to lie down and sleep.

She goes to her desk,
sits in the hard backed chair.

She opens the maths book,
glances through a few pages,
closes it again.

She can't be bothered,
not before bed,
not in the mood
she is in.

She opens up the book
of poems by Tennyson
(gift from Father) ,
and in between pages
is the photo of Benedict
which he gave her
secreted there.

Out of her mother's gaze
and possible confiscation.

She looks at him:
the eyes staring,
the Elvis smile,
the quiff of hair.

She hugs it
to her small breasts
with her hands.

Wishes he was there,
there now,
hugging her as they had
the night before
when she crept into
the guest room
and climbed in the bed
and they kissed and hugged.

She would have had sex,
but neither knew how,
or what to do, so didn't.

Downstairs she hears
her mother playing the piano:
Schubert piece.

Father probably
in his downstairs study
with his book of birds
or butterflies.

She sighs,
puts the photo back
between pages,
puts the book back in place.

She opens the book
of maths again,
but nothing will
enter her head.

She wants to be
with Benedict in bed.

Terry Collett

After Orleans 1970

Miriam laid her head
in my lap.

The coach was travelling
through towards Sans Sabation,
the scenery changing
as we past.

I studied the scene
for a while
then looked down
at her lying there,
her pale cheek
and tight red hair.

I wanted to lay a hand
on her back and rub her
to consciousness,
but did not,
not sure what
she might say.

Her cheek was on my thigh,
her red hair spread there.

I wished to kiss that cheek,
place lips softly
on her skin,
but I let her lie asleep,
it would keep.

The coach radio
was pushing a soft
Chopin piece.

Others sat and looked out
at the passing views of France,
others chatted in soft voices,
pointing out

at this and that,
usual chitchat.

We had kissed back in Orleans
where we'd got out
for a coffee for a while.

Warming kiss,
lips to lips
kind of affair.

I wanted to part
the strands of her
red loose hair;
place kiss there
on her ear,
whisper words to her
with warm breath.

She slept on deeply
like one in death.

Terry Collett

After Prayers 1962

Prayers said,
hands together pressed,
Shoshana imagined
it was Naaman's hand
pressed against hers,
his flesh on her flesh,
warm,
silky.

Amen uttered.

Her father sat
and talked of his work,
loads done,
tiring,
but work nonetheless.

The mother sat listening,
eyeing him.

Shoshana mouthed food,
watched one then the other,
her thoughts on Naaman,
how close his thigh was
to hers on the bus,
touched,
and promised kiss,
yes she had promised,
but where?
(place at school,
secretly,
not openly) .

Her brother sat
and forked food,
his eyes downcast,
thoughts on the motorbike
he wished to buy,
if parents allowed

and when.

And you,
Shoshana,
her father said,
what of your day?

She gazed at him,
broken from her thoughts
of Naaman,
the boy vanishing
from mind.

All right,
she said,
watching the father's dark eyes,
the thin line of lips,
pushing all traces
of the boy from mind's hold.

Just all right?
the father said,
nothing happened?
no lessons learned?
no teacher imparted knowledge?
he stared at her.

The mother fidgeted
in her chair,
haemorrhoids maybe.

Shoshana looked at her mother,
sensed Naaman's thigh
touch hers,
warmth,
had French,
she muttered,
not my thing,
double maths,
did my best
(bored to tears) .

The father thinned
his lips more,
then said,
application is the key,
without that
you will flounder,
sink into the sea of ignorance
like the mass.

She struggled with flounder,
the word,
mouthed it like
an unpleasant morsel.

Apply yourself,
Shoshana,
or we will need to have talks,
the father added.

She nodded,
thought of the promised kiss.

The mother shifted
to get comfortable.

The father talked
of packed trains,
thin mouth opened
and closed like a fish
out of shallow water.

Shoshana licked her lips
with her tongue,
moistened,
softened as if
a kiss had begun.

Terry Collett

After Rain In Stockholm 1974

It rains as they put up the tent
they work as fast as they can
but still get soaked to the skin.

Once the tent is up
they climb inside.

I'm going to the shower block
to shower and change
into dry clothes
Dalya says.

The other girl
mumbles similar
and they grab their towels
and walk through the rain
to the female shower block
and go inside.

They peel off
the wet clothes
and put them under a bench
and go into the showers
and turn on the taps.

Hot water
Dalya closes her eyes
and lets the water
rush over her body and hair.

She wishes Benny was there
to wash her body with soap
his hands moving over her curves
and between her thighs
under and over her stiff breasts.

But he is not there
and she must do it herself
and pretend with eyes closed

that it is him there.

His hands not hers
his breath on her neck
as he whispers words.

His hands about her body
smoothing down skin.

She spreads her thighs pretending
letting out sighs.

Terry Collett

After Sammy Left.

Dottie has the made the
bed where Sammy slept,
bakes a cake, picks flowers
from the garden to put in
the small vase on the table.

Sammy has gone away
after his three day stay.

Willie's asleep in bed,
his window open to catch
dawn birdsong, smell of
flowers, air's heavy scent.

She pops a pill that Sammy
left; will help you sleep he
said, during their late evening
walk in the nearby woods,
as Willie recited his poetry.

She puts two teabags in
the pot, pours in water,
lets it stand, hot steam
coming out the spout.

They have the house
to themselves again,
no more having to keep
the sounds down, no
need to whisper anymore.

She pours the tea
into Willie's cup,
adds milk, sugar and
stirs, pours tea for herself
with no milk, or sugar, sips
slow through pursed lips.

She climbs the stairs to

Willie's room, teacup
and saucer on a small tray,
few biscuits and a pill.

She watches her brother
sleep, his head facing
the window, his arm
outside the duvet, his
hand open, a finger
pointing unwittingly
towards the pillow
where she had lain
the night before.

He breathes slowly out,
a gentle exhalation, no
snore, as she studies
him as he sleeps and
wonders what he thinks
or dreams; what poems
are born there, what
worldly wants or care.

She leaves the tea beside
the bed, she'll not disturb
his dreams or thoughts;
she gives a final look and
goes downstairs; the pill it
seems has begun to work, she
has no worldly wants or cares.

Terry Collett

After School Tea.

Mother said
you were to go back

to Mrs Clark's house
for tea after school

and she would pick
you up later

after work
and so when

the bell went
for the end

of the school day
you went with Mrs Clark

and her daughter Helen
for tea and Mrs Clark

talked all the way
to her house

her words rough
as hewn stones

going over your head
to which you just nodded

or shook your head
and when you arrived

at the house
which smelt

of past dinners
and washing drying

and the baby's nappies
she said

What would you like for tea?
Bread and butter

bread jam
bread and Bovril

or dripping?
and how about

a large mug of tea?
Helen said

I'm having bread and jam
and a mug of tea

why don't you too?
you said

Yes that will be fine
and shyly sat in a chair

by the window
looking out

at the backyard
where washing hung

on a clothesline
and an old doll's pram

sat rusting by a wall
and Helen came

and sat next to you
in her grey skirt

and off white blouse
and swung her legs

back and forth
under the chair

her white ankle socks
and black scuffed shoes

coming in
and going out

of view
and she said

After tea
I'll show you my dolls

and the doll's house
my daddy made

out of orange boxes
and as Mrs Clark

made the tea
you sensed Helen's small hand

run along your arm
which set alarm bells ringing

in your head
and a sweating in your palm.

Terry Collett

After School Walk

After lessons at junior school
coming down the bricks stairs

Helen said
can I walk home with you?

Sure
you replied

and she set off with you
along St George's Road

the traffic and smoke fumes
setting the scene

she in her school frock
and cardigan

and white ankle socks
beside you in your grey jacket

and grey short trousers
and she said

I don't usually walk home alone
but mum said I can walk home

with you save her coming along
to the school with the other kids

and pram with baby
you took in

her two plaits of hair
and thin framed glasses

with large lens
which made her eyes

larger than they were
her small hands

by her side
a small school bag

over her shoulder
and did you know

Janice likes you?
Her grandmother

told my mother
the other day

after school
but I like you better

do you like me?
she asked

you noticed
she had small white teeth

with a thin brace
along the top

sure I do
you replied

I like Janice too
but you I like more

and she smiled
and put her right hand

in yours and squeezed it
and you smiled

but hoped none
of the other boys around

noticed the hand holding
after all a tough boy

has a reputation to maintain
and as you squeezed

her hand back
clouds darkened

and it started
to piss with rain.

Terry Collett

After Shopping 1964

Milka and Benny
get back from shopping
in the town

she with a few items
he with an Elvis LP
he bought

there is no car
outside the farmhouse
so they assume
her mother's
not back yet from town
and go in

Milka says
if we are quick
we can maybe in my bed

Benny isn't so sure
what if your mum
comes back and sees us?

Milka looks at him
if we're quick
and not arguing
she says

she grabs his hand
and takes him up
the stairs to her room
and begins to undress
come on then
she says

a car comes up
the drive from the road
passing the fields

it's your mum
Benny says
looking out the window

what? already?
Milka says
putting her clothes back on

I'll go downstairs
and keep her talking
Benny says
and goes out the door
down the stairs

he sits at the kitchen table
just as Milka's mother
comes in the back door

o hello Benny
you're back
where's Milka?

Benny smiles
a call of nature
he says

Milka's mother puts
her shopping bags
on the table
and begins to unpack

put the kettle
on for us Benny
she says smiling

sure I will
he says
and gets up
and puts water
in the kettle
and puts it
on the stove

he stands watching
Milka's mother
putting away
her shopping
watching the sway
of her hips
the motherly bosom

Milka comes down
the stairs sulking
her face unhappy

you're back early
she says to her mother

could say
the same to you
her mother says
Benny's been
a good boy
and put the kettle
on for us
isn't he good?

Milka pulls a face
behind her mother's back
as her mother puts
away the last
of her shopping

yes he is
Milka says
eyeing him
wanting him alone
by herself
sitting beside him
squeezing his leg
under the table
touching him
the best
she is able.

Terry Collett

After Such What Then?

Johnny sat in thought;
the room was chilly,
the light was out,
he was in the dark,
just the moon in the sky
with a sprinkle of stars,
a hum of traffic
down below.

Frankie died slow,
slower than we thought it'd be,
her there wired up,
lights flashing on and off,
voices from along the ward.

Not as we thought it'd end:
too soon, she too young.

He took out a cigarette
and lit up, watched the smoke
rise upwards as he exhaled.

What was it Pascal said
of the night expanse?
He couldn't recall now,
didn't seem to matter somehow.

She liked talking deep things,
looking down dark places
for truth whatever
that was or might be:
in dark you can't see.

He inhaled slow and deep;
she died slow, not how
we expected years back.

He sighed, recalled the first time
they met: she in that long

slim dress all in black,
and she said: I mourn
for the world.

Who mourns for her now
except for me?

I feel her near
or is it just waves
from some distant sea,
or her talking
inwardly to me.

Terry Collett

After Tea And Sandwiches.

You watched her run
the bread
and butter knife
along

her inner arm
blunt blade
gesture only
enough to give

the nurses
something
to think about something
to make them

take the knife away
and sigh or curse
beneath breath
she walked about

the locked ward
in her light blue
nightgown
no shoes

or socks
or stockings
sometimes she'd search
through the men's drawers

for razor blades
or something sharp
no doing
you said

I've looked already
she said
heard you tried
to string yourself up

in the john?
had those damn nurses
wetting themselves
and banging

on the locked door
and god
how they nigh
wet their panties

with it all
she said
almost managing
a small smile

bags
under her eyes
her pale skin
thin lips

sans lipstick
how do you think
it'll go?
waiting

your next chance?
maybe
you said
she touched your hand

ran a finger
along the wrist
and scar
her gentle skin

setting fire
to tired flesh
then after tea
after the sandwiches

which Big Ted

brought up
from the canteen
watching

the sky
turn blue
to black
you knew

the dark was approaching
and the Black Dog back.

Terry Collett

After Tea And Tv 1969

After having tea
with her parents
and watching TV
and a load of questions

from her father
in Polishly English
and none from her mother
who spoke little English

but frowned at me throughout
as if I had made
some rude suggestion
Sophia walked me

to the front door
and we stood there
looking out
at the night sky

moon and stars
sorry about that
she said
Daddy has my best

interests at heart
I suppose
I smiled
yes of course

(a bit late
as we had had sex
a few times
unknown to them

once in her parents' bed)
I understand
I said
I'd be the same

with my daughter
if she were going out
with me
she laughed

then put a hand
to her mouth
in case her parents thought
I was tickling her

when can I see you again?
I said
at work I suppose
she said

apart from work?
I said
she looked back indoors
in case her father was there

beady eyed
overhearing
I'll see when I can
find out if they

are out sometime
she said
what about the neighbours?
I said

they almost got you
in trouble that time
they told your dad
we came in alone

I hate that
she said
spies everywhere
peeking through gaps

in the expensive curtains

have to come
in cover of darkness
I said

she smiled
I wish they'd go away
for a weekend some place
she said

some Polish friends thing
or some religious
meeting in London
must go

I said
and kissed her lips
we held it there
then parted

in case her father
wondered what we
were doing
and came out to spy

see you
I said
and kissed her again
and walked off

in the dark and night air
looking back
and giving her a stare
standing there.

Terry Collett

After That Is This 1969

Sophia closed
the front door
of her parents' house
after seeing Benedict
go off home.

Her father was in the lounge
sitting crossed legged
in his armchair.

Her mother was clearing
the table in silence.

You were a long time
seeing him off,
her father said in Polish.

Sophia looked
at her father
as she passed him by
to sit on the sofa,
just saying goodnight,
she replied in Polish.

It takes that long
to say goodnight?

Just a last few words
and a kiss,
she said.

In my day
we just say goodnight,
a kiss,
then off to leave
the young girl
to be home,
he said.

His features
were stiff,
unsmiling.

He doesn't know
our ways,
she said,
sitting down
on the sofa.

Then he must learn,
if he is to continue
going with you,
the father said,
squaring his shoulders.

I will tell him,
she said,
thinking of the moment
she and Benedict
had made love
in her bed the last time,
how she loved it,
him there
making her feel
so fulfilled
at the same time
fearing the parents
might return any moment
from the dinner dance
of the Polish families
in the area.

If not,
I will speak to him,
her father said
like some
Mafia godfather.
Yes father,
I will tell him,
she said,
seeing Benedict

standing naked
by the bed,
and she lying there
open to him,
and so warm
and so hot.

He has gone?
her mother said
coming into the lounge
from the kitchen
clearing the last items
from the table.

Yes he has gone,
the father said.

Her mother looked
at Sophia:
I don't understand
a word she say,
the mother said,
does he not
speak any Polish?

No he doesn't,
Sophia said,
(only a few swear words
she had taught him
which made him laugh.)

He come again?
The mother asked
the father.

Yes if he learn
our ways,
the father said.
Sophia smiled weakly,
thinking of Benedict
that time in her parents' bed,
beneath the crucifix

on the wall,
and she saying:
more more.

He will learn,
she said,
looking at
her father's slippers,
she going red.

Terry Collett

After That.

After that
the only
thing she thought

mattered was
the sunlight
coming through

the tall trees
as you and
she lay on

your backs by
the large pond
listening

to birdsong
and the wind
coming through

the branches
and she there
full of life

breathing in
the sharp air
and she said

Van Gogh could
have captured
this morning

with the trees
and sunlight
and the way

the wind moves
through branches
and you said

but Renoir
despite his
arthritic

hands could have
captured your
young beauty

on canvas
somewhere off
a dog barked

a cow mooed
and your hand
like a crab

moved over
the green grass
and touched her

small warm hand
and she smiled
like da Vinci's

painting of
the Mona
Lisa you'd

seen in that
old art book
in the school

library
tucked between
a battered

old atlas
and book of
poetry

which no one

ever read
no doubt the

pond's still there
the sunlight
and the wind

but she's not
she gone now
all silent

amongst the
peaceful dead.

Terry Collett

After The Concert

After the concert you went
around the back and there
was the bus with John Lewis
talking to some guy by the

door and having got by them
you climbed aboard the bus
and saw the other members
of the MJQ and having made

your way towards them Percy
Heath gave you a big smile and
you said who you were and he
gave you the low down on his

double bass and signed your
programme and so did Connie
Kay although he didn't have a
lot to say and then there was

Milt Jackson who was sitting
in a side seat a guy you wanted
to meet who had played with
most of the jazz greats years

before and he said a few words
and signed with a quick squiggle
and then as you departed the bus
John Lewis all gentlemanly and

soft spoken signed the programme
too and then you were off back
home to play the record of the
MHQ you'd bought carrying your

images of the MJQ guys in your
memory that you'd caught.

After The Dinner Party

The small dinner party had gone
Off well, Hazel thinks, sitting at
The dressing table, gazing at herself
In the mirror, seeing her hair done

Up just so, the way her maid, Dunne
Painstakingly did it for her. She begins
To unpin her hair, placing the pins in
The small glass dish, her fingers unused

To the task. Dunne is down in the kitchen
With the temporary cook, helping to clear
Up, tidy things away as is her want, her
Tidiness part of her character. She sits her

Hair unpinned, staring at her features,
At her eyes, the mouth slightly open, the
Teeth even and white. In the mirror she
Can see the made up bed, the covers

Turned down, the china hot water bottle
She knows just under the covers, put there
By Dunne. She'll be there soon, Dunne,
Her maid, her lover, undressing her and

Herself. She has her own room and bed
Up in the attic, but she seldom uses it unless
Guests are there over night or are staying
For a few days. Tonight she will be here,

Hazel muses, rubbing a tongue licked finger
Over her brow, and they will snuggle down
And talk of their day and then make love,
Then sleep. Since her father's death and the

Truth of his deeds and what he made Dunne
Do and the forced sex, she feels a mixture
Of anger and grief mixed into a compound
That makes her tired and confused. She waits.

She wants Dunne there, wants her fingers
To undo her zips and buttons, brush her hair,
Feeling the fingers on her skin, in her hair.
She wants to feel Dunne's lips on hers, needs

Dunne's fingers moving over her body, wants
To know each aspect of her maid's body. In
Her mind she can sense the feel, remember
The point of high sensation, as if her whole

Body was taken to the limits of exhilaration
Of passion, as if she might explode and all her
Being be scattered into balls of sensuality.
She can't find the exact words to express it.

She sits and waits, waits sitting, breathes
In, breathe out. Dinner had gone very well.
The evening guests talked of this and that,
Had their laughs and jokes. Mr Phibuster

Had lectured to her on the economy, how
Some upstart in Germany was stirring up
Trouble. She couldn't have cared less. Her
Eyes kept going to Dunne, watching her

Coming and going with dishes and glasses.
She sits up straight, Dunne is coming, she
Hears her footstep in the passage, her voice,
Some Mozart aria is tunefully humming.

Terry Collett

After The Judo

Monica watches
as Benedict and Jim
practise judo on the grass
off the path
to the farmhouse.

She cheers Benedict on
standing on the edge
clapping her hands excitedly.

Her other brother Pete
leans against the fence bored,
hands thrust
in his jean's pockets.

How long are you going to be
practising this judo shit?
the film starts
in half an hour,
he says.

Benedict throws Jim
to the floor
in a quick movement,
Monica raises her hands
to the air.

Knew you could do it,
knew you could,
she says, patting
Benedict on the back
of his jacket.

Jim dusts off
his jeans
with his hands,
looks at Pete,
then at Monica.

Caught me off guard,
he says,
she put me off
with her yelling
and clapping.

Can we go now?
Pete says,
moving off the fence,
now you've done
your judo stuff?

Can I come?
Monica asks
looking at Benedict.

No way,
Jim says,
don't want no girl
dragging us down.

I am not any girl,
I'm your sister,
she says, staring
at Benedict.

He looks at Jim
then at Monica.
I don't mind if she comes,
he says.

I do,
Pete says.

Monica pouts
and folds her arms
over her small breasts.

The farmhouse door opens
and their mother comes out.
I thought you
were going to the cinema?

she says.

We are,
Jim says,
just going.

They won't take me,
Monica says.

Of course they don't
want you with them,
her mother says.

Anyway I have some chores
I need help with.

Monica pulls a face
and glares
at her brothers,
but looks at Benedict
pleadingly.

Maybe next time,
he says.

Not with us she don't,
Pete says.
With me though, maybe,
Benedict says,
giving her a wink.

Come on in Monica,
leave the boys be,
the mother says.

Monica follows her mother
towards the farmhouse,
gesturing her middle digit
at her brothers
while her mother's back
is turned.

Benedict smiles,
watches as she sways
her small hips,
blows him a kiss
from her open palm.

Jim shakes his head
and follows Pete
to the bikes
by the shed,
while Benedict,
takes a kiss
from his lips
and throws it
at Monica's
departing back.

her head turns
and her hands open
to catch the thrown kiss
moving slightly forward
so as not to miss.

Terry Collett

After The Munich Putsch..

After history
something to do
with the Munich Putsch

in 1923
and going out
on to the school

playing field
Rolland said
That hot lips chick

is waving to you
from the outer fence
and so off you went

leaving Rolland
to go kick ball
with others on the field

and as you strolled
towards Christina
she came towards you

leaving her giggling friends
behind and met you
half way on the field

and said
I dreamed of you last night
her voice floated

around you
for a moment or two
and you saw across

her shoulder
Rolland head the ball
towards the goal

between two jumpers left
on the ground
then looked back at her

standing there
bright eyed
with her dark brown hair

and you said
Did I behave?
And she took your hand

and walked you across
the field slowly
and replied

Of course you did
Oh good
you said

wishing you could
have shared her dream
making it your own

she squeezed your hand
and said
Do you dream of me?

Yes
you said
Most nights

trying to make the lie
convincing you dramatized
a scene that never happened

and she smiled
and laughed
and you noticed

out of the corner

of your eye
Rolland kicking the ball

goal ward and waving
his hand then
having reached

the boundary of the field
at the wood's edge
she kissed you

on the cheek and said
I'm glad you dream
of me as well

and smiled
and lay her head
upon your arm

and soon you knew
the bell would ring
for end of play

and maybe
you thought
smelling her perfume

and shampooed hair
kissing her head
you might

dream of her
for the first time
tonight.

Terry Collett

After The Talking 1973

Sonya talks
endlessly
her Danish

stark beauty
saves her from
boring me

to no end
the Wagner
opera

in London
had gone well
a good meal

and fine booze
then back home
to her place

a snatch of
Delius
then it's bed

lying there
after sex
she talking

of the art
of being
what we make

of ourselves
from our birth
to our graves

I'm thinking
of the dame
singing loud

in Wagner's
Das Rheingold
how her breasts

stole the show
as they say
the show's not

over till
the fat dame
sings her last

ending note
then Sonya
talks no more

and we lay
down in bed
to make love

with Wagner's
opera
going round
in my head.

Terry Collett

After The Tea Party 1969

How did my interrogation go
at the tea party
with your parents
last night?
I said to Sophia
the next morning at work

she smiled
it went well
to bylo dobre
as my mother would say
she said
it was good

I smiled feeling relieved
I was beginning to think
it was going to be
the thumbscrews next
I said
your father was hard going

she gestured with her hands
as if to say
that is normal

I was afraid
you might say about us
having sex
she said

I'm not that suicidal
I said
although he did mention
sexual relations

she frowned

he asked if I thought
sex after marriage was good

as taught in the Catholic Church
I said
and I said yes
I added
seeing anxiety
etch itself
on her face

Mother was unsure of you
Sophia said
after you left
she spoke in Polish
and said you smiled too much
and your tie was loose

I raised an eyebrow

she's fussy
Sophia said
but Father likes you
and if he's convinced
then you are
half way there

half way?
I said

yes he wants you
to come again
for dinner this time
Sophia said

thumbscrews this time?
I said

she shook her head
no just have a talk
and eat and have wine
and relax

then sex after?
I said

she frowned
no that's not
a good idea
she said

I was joking
I said

she nodded and smiled
I see
and she went off to clean

I went to get Sidney
up and dressed
for breakfast
thinking of her
and wishing there was
no dinner to go to
with her parents

but it seemed settled
and I didn't want
to upset her father
or cause him concern
even if seeing her
walk that way she did
made me burn.

Terry Collett

After The Ten Commandments

The day after
Janice's gran
had taken you
to see the film

The Ten Commandments
you had gone with Janice
to Jail Park
to ride the swings

and she talked of the film
and the parting
of the Red Sea
and the drowning

of the Pharaoh's men
and the horses
and the writing
on the two tablets

of stone
shame the horses
had to drown too
she said

they hadn't done
anything wrong
it's a matter of being
in the wrong place

at the wrong time
you said
but those poor horses
they didn't ask

to be the Pharaoh's horses
you swung high
on the swing
your feet reaching up

towards the sky
Janice was beside you
she wasn't swinging so high
and those poor slaves

she added pushing
her swing higher
by moving her legs
and arms

why were there slaves?
why can't people
be nice to each other?
I can imagine Cogan

in my class
being a bit of a pharaoh
given the chance
the fat git

you said
maybe he's not
treated right at home
she said

maybe that's why
he's like that
no he's just a prat
you said

who likes to bully
other kids
does he bully you?
she asked

he promises
to smash my face in
but when I waited
for him the other day

after school

he didn't show
you said
my gran said

to be kind to people
and try to see
their better side
Janice said

I do try
you said
but his ugly dial
gets in the way

and she laughed
and said
we mustn't laugh
it's a shame when people

have to bully others
I'm sure he's got
a good side
your feet were now

almost touching
the sky's rim
well if he has
he must keep it

in his pants
you said
she smiled
and shook her head

her brown sandals
and white socks
seemed to scrape
the sky's skin

but gran said
Janice almost sang
that none of us

is free of sin

and her voice drifted off
into the blue
just the two swings
on that Monday morning

and Janice
and you.

Terry Collett

After Thoughts 1962

Benny got off the school bus
and walked up the road
to his parents' house.

His mother was in the kitchen
preparing dinner.

How was school?
She said.

The usual,
he said,
boring.

She smiled:
off you go and get changed;
I'll call when dinner is ready.

He went upstairs to the room
he shared with his younger brother
who was out playing.

He changed out
of his school uniform
into jeans and shirt.

He looked out the window;
Brittlewaite was in his garden
opposite, digging.

He took the book
of birds he had
and opened it.

There was a robin
by the fence;
it sat there watching
Brittlewaite,
looking for worms.

I can still sense
Sheila's lips on mine.

He licked his lips:
wonder if part of her
is still here on my lips?

When we hugged
in that doorway at school
I felt her breasts against me;
softly moving.

If that prefect
hadn't come along
and told us to move on,
we could have been there longer
and late for the next lesson.

He gazed at the apple orchard:
his brother and sisters
were playing a tag game
amongst the trees.

Had my hands
around her waist;
kissed her.

He sighed.

He closed the book of birds;
he wasn't in the mood
for bird watching.

Wonder if we'll get
a chance tomorrow?

Ships passing
in the night
kind of thing.

Rennie said girls

were a waste of time.

Felt her close to me;
did strange things to me.

Felt like a sailor
lost on the sea.

Terry Collett

After Watching Mother.

Your mother
stood over
the washtub
the steam rising upward

she poked the boiling wash
with what she called
her copper stick
pushing it down

and around now and then
wiping sweat
from her brow
and you stood watching

seeing her push
the washing down
with the stick
as if she were a good pirate

plunging with a sword
the bad pirates
from some skull
and crossbones ship

and when she lifted the stick
water fell back down
like grey watery blood
what's for dinner today?

you asked
it'll have to be cold meat
and beans and mash
as it's washday

and I still
have much to do
she said
and yes it was Monday

and Tuesday was stew
and so you left her
with the washing
and imaginary pirates

and the steam
and heat
and went out to play
in the Square with Jim

then along under
the railway bridge
to meet Helen
with Battered Betty her doll

and take a walk
to the Neptune's
fish & chip shop
for 6d worth of chips

and held Helen's hand
on the way back
to the Square
then to that place

under the railway bridge
and kissed and left her there.

Terry Collett

After Willie Had Gone

Dotty lies in Willie's bed,
he's gone to fetch Sammy
his poet friend and will return
in a few days. She sniffs
her brother's pillow, smells
his hair oil and aftershave.

She snuggles into the bed
for warmth, pulling his duvet
tight around her, imagining
it's him holding her, his arms
about her. She has a headache,
a coming near the edge, migraine.

Feels sick, light leaking through
the curtains makes it worse.

She puts her head under the
duvet, shuts out the bright light.

She smells him better here, his
love of scent, his personal choice.

She hears birdsong from the garden,
a blue tit, great tit, unsure which.

Willie'd know. She squeezes her
eyes tight keep out whatever light
might intrude. Willie's left her some
of his poems to type up and file away.

Later in the day, she muses, once
the sickness and migraine's gone.

He had a good day yesterday with
the poems, she recalls, him reciting
over and over as they walked, her
scribbling down, pencil and pad,
her finger and thumb holding the

pencil tight until they felt numb.

After they returned home and sat
by the fire and he spoke them out
one by one. She loved the one about
winter dawn. She turns over, faces
the wall, her head buried into Willie's
warm indentation. In the darkness
she recites the poems one by one,
the words pouring from her lips,
following each other like children
out to play. She shuts out the dawn
chorus of birds that celebrate the day.

Terry Collett

Aftermath 1971

You walked on eggshells;
peered through narrow gaps
where curtains never met,
at moon's glow or sun dull

or bright, wishing it gone,
wanting it to be night, or
at night wanting it to be day.
You sat in dull rooms listening

to birdsong, or the sharp barks
of hounds and other odd sounds.
Where you had slit wrists scars
were; where you had once dreamed

nightmares came out of the walls
of sleep, if sleep came at all.
You lay on the sofa by the wall
of the lounge while others watched

TV soaps with constant chatter
of no matter. You drifting in and
out of sleep or musing on her
that time, how it had all been

so close and hot. Have me, she
had said, before my husband
gets home; or that time you
played chess games with him

letting him win(out of a sense
of sin): and her saying, take me
from the rear quickly my dear.
The eggshells are fragile and so

were you. Undone, done well
by that two timing beautiful girl.

Afternoon Sun 1971

We walked through the woods
of the abbey to the beach,
sunlight on our heads,

Gareth talked of Wittgenstein,
Dom Joseph trudged forward,
his black robe like a huge rook,

the sea sound filtering
through the woods,
I lay upon her stomach,

gurgling sounds heard,
lay here, she said, soft fuzz,
gulls cried overhead,

the beach was private
and wood debris lay
strewn on the sand,

sad is my soul and it cries,
George sits on the sand,
his arms around his knees,

Hugh thin faced
threw pebbles to skim
across the waves,

Dom Joseph said,
God is our judge
there is none other to equal,

she held me close,
her tongue tongued mine,
the bed was warm,

the sheets strewn,
I sat on the sand
watching Hugh at his task

of skimming pebbles,
Iúdica me, Dómine,
the abbey bells tolled,

the echo sounded
through the woods,
for a truly religious man

nothing is tragic,
Gareth said that
Wittgenstein had said,

I lay my head there,
she smiled,
I heard the voices

of the unborn,
He will not grow tired
or weary, and His

understanding no one
can fathom,
Dom Joseph said of God,

hands about his knees
on the sands,
the sound of bells tolling,

best be getting back,
Hugh said, he rose
in his black robes

like a raven taking flight,
we walked back
through the woods,

I brought up the rear,
the sea sound saying goodbye,
a hot sun in the afternoon sky.

Afternoon Sun Mcmlxxi

Bell tower
against the afternoon sky
and the tolling of bells
for the office of None,

Domine labia
mea aperies,

the sun in the church
through high windows
pouring in the light
and we stood
chanting in Latin,

siamo come Dio
ci ha fatti
said the Italian monk
as he aided me
in the sacristy,

see I am as Eve
come enter my valley
she said and I obliged,

pray as if everything
depended on God
but work as if everything
depended on you
said Augustine(saint) ,

the feel of the rope
between hands
as we pulled down
to toll bells
for the office of Sext
George smiling
and I too,

Dieu se trouve dans

le silence the French monks said
as we walked
the abbey woodland
after lunch and birds sang
from high trees,

she peeled down her clothes
and revealed her soft fruit
partake she said,

Hugh stood in the shade
arms folded
gazing at the tree
in the garth
and the fruit it bore
still unpicked,

I polished the choir stalls
with a yellow duster
and red polish
the smell mingled
with incense
from mass that morning,

sprechen mit Gott
the Austrian monk said
as we walked
from the chapter house
one early evening
and I did but
was he listening?
I wondered,

perfect numbers are like
perfect men they
are very rare Gareth
said quoting Descartes
as we washed up
after supper
in the small room
by the kitchen,

my husband will never know
she said if you want to,

Deus qui possit ita
salvare te,

but I closed my ears
and even in the dark hours
I saw little light,

and I closed the shutters
to the departing day
and gazed at the Crucified
on the wall
above my bed
but small connection
to Christ in my head.

Terry Collett

Afternoon Sunshine 1965

Afternoon
sunshine shines
through the glass
of my room
(small bedroom)

Tilly's there
beside me
on my bed

all's quiet
we're breathing
quite heavy
after sex

both naked
lying there

her half day
off from work
me between
my work shifts

when's you mum
get back home?
Tilly asks

bout an hour
on the bus
I reply
your old girl
will wonder
where you've gone
I tell her

Tilly sighs
I'll say
it was stock-
taking day

she mutters

you said that
the last time
you were late
home from work
I tell her

Tilly looks
at the sky
shall I say
about the sex
between us?
She threatens

what'd she say
if you did?
I reply

belt me one
I dare say
Tilly says

want a smoke?
I ask her

no not here
best get dressed
she got up
from the bed
and got dressed

so did I
watching her
nakedness
disappear
into clothes
underwear
dark stockings
a white blouse
a blue skirt
then black shoes

make the bed
then downstairs
out the door
at the back
down the path
to the back
wooden gate

then she goes
with a kiss
into woods
to her home
in the lane

till next time
sex again.

Terry Collett

Afternoon Visit 1940

Guy and Donald visit me
in the hospital grounds
where I sit in a wheelchair
in the warm sun.

My blind eyes
look towards each one
as they speak.

Philip's away
a few days
he told us
but he'll be back
within the week
Guy says.

Where has he gone?
I ask.

Can't say
hush hush
but he'll be back
Guy says.

Back safe
Donald adds.

Where is safe
in this war?

Good point
Guy says
taking my hand
but he will back.

How are you
getting along?
Donald says.

I am to be measured
for artificial legs
I am told
I say.

That'd be good
Guy says
back on your
feet again.

Not my feet though
I reply
I'll have to fit them
on each day
and take them off
at night before bed.

You'll manage
Guy says
you are
a determined woman
who knows her mind.

Am I?
not sure I have
that mind any more
lost my legs
and my sight
and Clive.

Someone up there
has it in for me
I say.

Yes the Germans
Donald says
and you will
show them
you have courage
and will not
let them
see you down.

I wipe my eyes
with a handkerchief
from my
dressing gown pocket.

Shall we push you
around the grounds?
Guy says.

It is all
the same to me
I can't see anything
I say.

It is silent
for a few moments.

Look Grace
we have to go
keep your chin up
Guy says.

Yes be strong
Donald says.

Then they go
after kissing my cheek
and I sit feeling
undone and weak.

Terry Collett

Against A Wall 1961

There is silence
over dinner.

Lizbeth's mother sits
stern and unsmiling;
her father sits opposite
eating and gazing;
Lizbeth nibbles
at the food on her plate.

So how was your day?
the father says,
breaking the silence.

Someone needs
to learn manners
and respect for her elders,
the mother says,
staring at Lizbeth.

The father gazes
at Lizbeth too:
what's up?
He says
looking back
at his wife.

Your daughter
has no manners,
and has a book
she ought not to have,
the mother replies.

Book?
What book?
He asks looking back
at his daughter.

A sex book,

the mother says,
spitting the word sex
out as if it
were poisonous.

Lizabeth stops nibbling:
its not a sex book,
its a book about sex,
she says.

Sex book?
Why would you want
a book on sex?
he says shading
a red in face.

To learn about sex,
Lizabeth says.

But you're just 13
why do you
need to know
about that now?
Her mother says frowning.

Where did you get
the book from?
the father says.

From a girl at school
that's where she got it,
the mother says.

The father nods:
I see,
he says.

See?
See what?
She has a book
about sex
what do you think

about that?
The mother says
angrily.

He looks at Lizbeth:
is it educational?
He says.

Lizbeth nods:
very,
she says.

Educational?
The mother says,
its about sex,
its not a history book
or book on science.

The father eats
a mouthful of pie:
best give it
back then,
he says,
if you've read it.

Lizbeth looks
at her mother:
I will tomorrow,
Lizbeth says,
then nibbles
her food again.

Her mother resumes
her silence
grim-faced.

The father
eats more pie.

Lizbeth thinks
of Benny
at school

that brief moment
she had him
and kissed him
against the wall.

Terry Collett

Against The Cold Mcmlxx.

The French peasant monk
scythed the tall grass
by the drive to the abbey
he spat
on his creased palms
before work,

Dio è lontano
ma vicino
the Italian monk said
after Mass
clearing the items away
and I aiding him,

deep bell tolling
from the tall bell tower
echoing across
the surrounding area
down
to the seashore,

sans nous Dieu
ne nous sauvera
pas sans Dieu
nous ne pouvons pas
the the French monk said
quoting someone religious
from some book,

incense
in the air
mixing
with baked bread
and cold stones aged,

I gazed at the cloister
felt along
the waist high
orange brick wall

musings on the flower bed
where a monk
on his knees
weeded,

la confiance en Dieu
et non votre
propre faiblesse
the French monk
chided me
as I peeled potatoes
for lunch,

silence after Compline
deeper than an ocean's depth
more profound
than Plato's musings,

pale moon
casting shadows
in the cloister's hold,

I hugging myself
during Vespers
against the harsh cold.

Terry Collett

Alcohol 2006.

Alcohol that time
in Lourdes, sneaking
into a bar, while
others walked around
chanting their Aves.

Sitting with a beer
listening to the locals
chat in French. Nurses
from the local nursing
homes, laughing. Es-tu
seul Monsieur? One said.

I made gestures with open
hands, as if to say I don't
know what you are saying.

She smiled, and a Frenchman
near by said Es-tu Anglais?

Yes I am I'm with the Lourdes
group I said. Ah these women,
he said, they are thinking
you are one of their escapees.

I smiled. He laughed gently.
The women looked and laughed.

I supped my beer, looking
over as members of my group
went by. Another beer would
be nice, a glass of scotch, then
back to the coach, back to the
hostel. But time was running
out for alcohol. So I finished
my beer said goodbye to those
nurses and the old guy who spoke.

The nurses smiled. I think they

had a small titter at a lewd joke.

Terry Collett

Alice And Her Wonderland

I am a practitioner of art,
said Alice, oil and canvas
are my daily bread, charcoal
blackens my fingers, darkens

my soul, my dreams are of
sex and men lost, I bed sad
men in my thoughts. My art
keeps me from asylums, takes

me from the doctor's couch
to the lonely studio, the air
full of fumes and stale food
and my unwashed body.

My mother was a slave to
the kitchen sink, her life spent
in domestic chores, in my father's
bed, in the worrying times she

popped the pills, drank the
bottles dry. I am the spyer of
secret lovers, my sister's men
in her double bed, the laughter

and tears in equal measure,
the flowers and bruises all fondly
kept, the split lips and black eyes,
she wore with pleasure. I am

the painter of other's souls, images
oiled in with the darkest colours,
their features blended with the
darkness of their lives. My brother

sat with his demons, supped with
them in his lonely hours, injected
the nightmare makers with the
addict's skill, he slept uneasy in

another's bed, chased by his
demons and women until he died,
a bullet in his head. I listen to Parsifal
on the old Hifi the Wagnerian opera

is my secret drug, my opener of days,
my closer at nights, the background
to my daily arguments and fights.
My father was my only healer, his

loving touches healed my hurts,
stitched my cuts and wounds, he
watered down my temper's scorns;
he alone shared my soul's foul deeds,

knew my heartaches, my scars of sex
and doctored my soul's lack. He was
cornered by the cancer's hold, its
icy fingers in his bones and skin, its

deadly smell in his breath and flesh
and his parting words were lost in
the final rattle. I am the artist of life's
dark wars and ancient wounding battle.

Terry Collett

Alice And The Photographer.

The photographer
says to sit
and be at ease.

You sit on the chair
he has left for you.

Eye the studio
old photos on the walls
a tripod and camera
in front.

He standing there
bespectacled
dark haired.

You want
your photograph
with the headpiece on?
he says.

Yes it was my mother's
you reply.

He nods
and arranges
the headpiece
to set it straight
and even at the sides.

You have very
distinctive eyes
he says
standing back
gazing at you.

Your nose
is straight
and aligns

with the center
of your chin.

You say nothing
your nerves are bad
you want him
to get on with it
but sit waiting.

He takes the camera
and sets it before you.

He disappears
behind the camera.

You freeze
frightened to move
your hands stiff
in your lap.

Relax
he says
the camera
won't bite.

You feel hot
in the black dress
you sense
your underclothes
stick to your skin.

You try and relax
pretend he's not there
but behind him
over his shoulder staring
is your mother's ghost
or so seems
like a figure
haunting dreams.

Terry Collett

Alice's Love.

Alice liked the soft
voice of her mother,
the telling of stories
as she fell into sleep.

She liked it when her
mother hugged her
tight and kissed her
goodnight. Her father

seldom came to story
tell or hug or kiss or
such; seemed it was
too much. His voice

was deep and harsh
as winds, his eyes
dark and shark like,
peering without those

feelings of love or
want or admittance
into his realm of deep
concern, cared neither

if she drowned nor
burned nor if in her
dark hours she counted
unhappiness on her

fingers and toes; he
was her father, but
one of those. She liked
to hug and kiss her

doll, poor substitute
for a father's love,
it sitting there in hers
arms unblinking and

smile-less as her father
did; feelings not there
or if so, well hid. Alice
kissed her mother's brow,

her arms, her hands,
her fingers, too, what
was a deep sad fatherless
or seemingly so, girl to do

to bridge the space or gap,
but sleep in her mother's lap

Terry Collett

All Aglow 1965

Tilly's there
by the pond
(her half day

off of work)
I meet her
in between

my work shifts
and we sit
watching ducks

on the pond
afternoon sun
shining down

on our heads
won't your mum
wonder where

you have gone?
I ask her
I'll just say

I helped do
stocktaking
she replied

I eyed her
sitting there
on the grass

we first made
love back there
behind us

I tell her
yes we did
and she smiles

looking back
in the woods
and Mum said

about mud
on my dress
and I said

that I slipped
by the pond
hoping she

didn't see
my hot flush
and grass stains

on my blouse
and did she?
I ask her

I don't know
what she thought
or she saw

but I was
sexually
all aglow.

Terry Collett

All Alone.

All alone except for
The dame sitting across
The way drinking coffee
Her lips ready to sip her
Hands holding the cup
Her finger looped through
The handle and she closes
Her eyes as she sips and
You notice how the lips part
And how the raised cup touches
The softness of her and you
Watch and imagine the lips are
Touching yours and she is
Emptying you of all your juices
And swallowing you up and
Draining you away just like the
Contents of the cappuccino cup.

Terry Collett

All At Sea.

He holds the tiller
of the boat with
his left hand, white
pants and tee shirt,

boater just so, and
the young dame there
reclining to one side
dressed to the nines,

yakking away, hat
plonked on her head,
him thinking of the
one that got away,

his arms stretched
out wide kind of fish,
the other guys so
impressed when he

said, but the dame,
all she yaks of is how
long it for took her
to chose what to wear

and what went with
what, and does my
ass look ok in this?
or she talks of what

one of her next-door
neighbours said or
did or didn't do or
she yaks of shoes

how she saw this
pair to die for O,
she says, you should
have seen them,

my eyes were oozing
eyes of joy just to see
them, but he, letting
her words drift by,

thinks of the boat he
almost bought, the
one he saw in port
the other day, god

how he loved it, the
size and colour, the
way it was set out in
the water, floating

there, bobbing slowly,
like some beautiful
dame ready for the
off. Sea breeze moves

the boat, wind shifts
the sails, she still sitting
yakking, her lips opening
and closing, fish out of

water kind of thing, he
wonders why he brought
her along, why he didn't
set sail alone, the whole

horizon of sea and sail,
and not her constant
yak and miserable moan.

Terry Collett

All My Days Mcmlxxi

Introite portas eius
in gratiarum actione,

I entered the porter's lodge
and monks awaited me
three walked with me
up the drive
taking my bags,

bell tower against
a blue sky
bells tolled,

Hugh showed me my cell
and where to put my books,

sorrow can be alleviated
by good sleep a bath
and a glass of wine
said Thomas,

what can I get you?
she said unbuttoning
my flies with her
nimble fingers
and tongue to one side,

toccare la mano
di Dio the Italian monk said
as we placed books
in the shelves
of the library in the abbey,

Dom James talked
of the plainsong
and when we would need
to sing Latin by
and small lines of chant
and I tried,

parler à Dieu et
il répondra
the French monk said,

a dry desert of prayer
I told him,

she put her legs
about my waist
and I entered her
garden of Eve,

the French peasant monk
sythed the tall grass
like death sweeping
through a plagued city,

smell of incense
as I entered for mass,

choir stalls highly polished
smell of wax in the air,

yes my Beloved it is thus
that my life's brief day
shall be spent
before Thee
Therese said,

we walked the cloister
George and I
morning Terce hour over
and onto work tasks,

vertrauen auf Gott
und seine Liebe
the Austrian monk told me
as he sawed the wood
for log fires
and I held the end firm,

one can find out more
about a person in one hour
of play than in a year
of conversation

Gareth said quoting Plato
as we sat on the beach
in the abbey grounds,

amor Dei in veritate
Dom Joe(dear Bunny) said
trust to God and his love,

she milked me off
thoughts of her
drained my days
in all ways.

Terry Collett

All My Seeing Mcmlxxi

I touched
the wooden choir stall
as I entered
the abbey church
felt the smoothness,

tactus Dei,

Dom Joe walked me
to the sacristy and said
help Dom Charles
he will show you
what he wants doing
and remember
it is God's work
you do,

habitavitque
in domo Dei,

George was Hoovering
the cloister getting
into the corners
with a dedicated skill,

always do
the smallest right
and do it for love
Therese said
Faire le plus petit droit
et le faire pour l'amour,

I did it because
I was asked and even
when Dom Charles
was so finicky
I did it,

kiss this she said

he will not do so
so I did,

the abbey bells rang
while I walked back
to the abbey
from the gardens
carrying the apples,

prunelle de mes yeux
the girl in
Paris had said that time
but was I?

le monde est ton
vaisseau et non ton foyer
Therese said so I read
a ship not a home
this world,

Gareth cleaned out
the latrines
on all floors
beginning is the most
important part of work
he said quoting Plato
but he in the Greek,

she knelt on the bed
and said
take me take me
so I did so quite slow,

en silence Dieu
nous parle
the French monk said
as we stood
in the cloister garth
sipping afternoon tea,

I smelt incense
as I waited

for the office of None
to begin and watched
the birds dive
into the cloister garth
for the bread thrown down
by the old monk,

feel Him there
Dom James said
speaking of God's being,

I looked at the moon
and lost Him
for all my seeing.

Terry Collett

All Right My Child 1969

Sophia's father bellowed,
he bellowed loudly,

Sophia's mother
crept from the room,
crept quickly,

Sophia large eyed
stared at him,

(it was about
the boy Benedict) ,

her father,
like some Italian
Mafia don, short,
stocky, walked around her,

if I found out that you
have slept with him,
her father bellowed,

nigdy, nigdy,
she said in Polish in reply,
never, never, she said again,

(pushing images of her
and Benedict having sex
in her bed from her head) ,

Sophia's father paused
behind her, his dark eyes
on her back, slim, curved,
her bottom caressed
by the tight dress,

you swear to me that
you have not had sex with him,
her father said, softer now,

but more menacing,

him unseen by her,
behind her, feeling
6 years old rather than 19,
perspiring, never would I
have sex before marriage,
she said, imagining herself
that moment a virgin princess,
untouched, pure as new snow,

her father walked to face her,
(she knowing one swing
of his hand would send her flying) ,
gazed into her eyes,
looking for falsehoods, for lies,

I am a virgin, she said,
closing her eyes, (images of her
and Benedict humping
on her bed still there in her head) ,

Sophia's father walked again,
muttered in his Polish tongue,

she opened her eyes, opened
her eyes wide and large like
pale blue gems,

her father turned and smiled,
his voice softer,
he is all right, Sophia,
he uttered, all right my child.

Terry Collett

All Sins 1959

Sister Paul
walked across
the green lawn

her flowing
black habit
billowing

behind her
then she stopped
right in front

of the white
steel table
where Anne

and the Kid
were sitting
eating tea

(sandwiches
cut into
triangles

and pieces
of iced cake)
I've been told

the nun said
that you two
have said things

to Lulu
and young Colm
that were rude

and unkind
is that right?
when was this?

Anne asked
after the
afternoon

siesta
the nun said
don't recall

anything
Anne said
do you Kid?

Benedict
shook his head
Sister Paul

looked at him
it's a sin
to tell lies

Benedict
the nun said
are you sure

you recall
nothing of
what I've said?

but sister
are all lies
said sinful?

Anne asked
yes they are
the nun said

so if I
said you were
beautiful

would that be

sinful too?
Anne said

Sister Paul
tut-tutted
you are not

so clever
as you think
the nun said

so you too
can tell lies
Anne said

the nun stood
taking in
the young girl

sitting
her one leg
poking out

of a red
patterned skirt
her leg stump

visible
where the skirt
had ridden

up the thigh
don't be cruel
to other

children here
with your words
the nun said

Anne stared
at the nun
then picked up

a sandwich
and ate it
as noisy

as she could
Benedict
sipped his tea

as the nun
walked away
and wondered

how easy
it would be
for the nun

to pull up
all that gear
(the habit)

to go pee
that's a good
example

Skinny Kid
of Christian
love and such

did you see
her hard face?
what love there?

where God's grace?
Benedict
said nothing

just sipped tea
(warm and sweet)
recalling

Sister Paul's

long and white
naked feet.

Terry Collett

All That Way

All that way
and all that time,
and still we never
got to bring you home,
my son.

We left you where you lay
most of the day until the end
came quite suddenly
out of the blue
and we lost you.

Looking back I imagine
there was more
I could have done,
more I should have seen,
but the councillor said
it was just the mind playing tricks:
you can't have know what was wrong
and even the medical team
had no clue what it was or what to do
until it was too late,
and you were wrecked,
my son, through their neglect.

I wish we had talked more that day,
had discussed the whole
panorama of the day,
but we sat and talked
now and then as time
went past us as we sat,
and that sadly was that.

Time has flown.
The grief of losing you
retains its hold,
the memory of those long days
and the loss remain and hurt,
and darkness comes and plants

its seeds on which
my Black Dog feeds.

All that way and time
and you gone and me here
listening to the tides of time
flow by and those dark
grey clouds in the sky.

Terry Collett

All The Way 1973

We'd done the Eiffel Tower
and the art galleries(again)
and went to a few museums

Sonya said
what about going back
to our hotel for a while
to relax and then maybe
have a meal out
at some restaurant
and ease out the night?

I stared at her
in the small cafe
where we'd stopped
for coffee and smoke
what do we do once
we get back to the hotel?
I said

she sipped her coffee
she was gazing at me
depends
she said

on what?

how you behave
she said

a waitress went by
in a short black skirt
with legs eye worthy
I tried not to gaze too long

how you behave
she repeated
watching my eyes follow
the waitress

otherwise we'll just read
and lay on our bed
you with your Dostoevsky
and me with my romance book
she said

I let the waitress's legs
and backside go
you have my full attention
I said

good wouldn't want to
deprive you of your art studies
of waitresses
and their backsides
and legs
she said

all gone just you and me
I said

she nodded her head
and we drank and smoked
and went back
to the hotel
(some cheap joint)

and she said
I'm going to shower
you want to join me?

is it big enough
for us both?
I said

best way to find out
is to try
she said

so we did and it was
and I never realized
what you could do

in a small shower
and they say you can learn
something new every day
and I did
and we went all the way.

Terry Collett

All Was All Right 1974.

We are each of us
the center of the universe,
Dalya said,
our universe.

I watched her sitting
on the bar stool
at base camp
outside Hamburg,
her dark hair
tied back
in a bun,
her eyes on me.

How are we
the center
of the universe?
I said.

We each perceive
the universe
through our senses
and conceive
with our minds,
we cannot know this
without our senses
and our mind,
she said.

She crossed her legs,
her tight skirt
showing thigh.

I think I read something
like that
in the Solzhenitsyn book
I'm reading,
I said,
turning my eyes

from her thigh
to meet her
dark eyes.

What book's that?
She said.

She lit up a cigarette
and offered one to me
which I took
and she lit mine
with her cigarette.

The Gulag Archipelago,
I said,
it's back in my bag
in my tent,
I'll show you later.

Show me what
in your tent?
She said smiling.

The book,
I said,
unless you want
to see anything else.

She smiled:
have to see
how it goes
won't we,
she said.

It's a depressing book,
I said.

What's it about?
she said.

About Russian
labour camps

between 1918 until 1958,
I said.

Light reading, then,
she said,
why read that it
if it's so depressing?

Sometimes you
have to read
depressing things
to get at the truth,
I said.

Want a beer?
She said.

I nodded,
she ordered two
German beers.

we sat
and talked of other things,
and I eyed her thigh
whenever I could,
wondering if she'd
come to my tent
later that night,
if things were quiet
and all was all right.

Terry Collett

All Wonder Gone.

All wonder gone
all satisfaction dissolved
as ice in summer hot sun,

she sits in
frown-eyed gaze
musing on better times
better days,

dark of hair and eye
red-lipped unsmiling
all attendance
she has sent away
offers of help or want
waved with thin hand
disdainfully shown,

where joy has fled
or kind-hearted feelings
frozen iced she cannot recall
whether now or when
or before the fall?

frigus corde,

cold hearted in veins
and breath and touch
and feel,

she knows nothing
now of love or being loved
or of the skill of making
it once more,

hears only
cool winds
and ships wrecked
on some faraway shore.

Alma Notices.

Alma notices
the minutest

degree of chill
from him. He

may make love
and he may not,

but she can sense
if he's been else

where in times
between. She can

smell another girl.
That time he said

all those words,
brought flowers,

perfume and chocs
and such, but she

knew they were
for some other or

seemed as much.
She looks at him

sitting there, that
glint in his eyes,

that devil may care
stare, that smile,

but all the while,
there's some other

girl's assets he's
musing, some other

he's had or soon will
do, he's there, but

he's not with you,
she says inside,

keeping it all in,
holding back tears,

stomach in knots,
heartbeat racing,

wanting him, but
not, trying to act

cool, but all too hot.
She allows him to

make love, feels
nothing, permits

his kisses, touches;
wonders who he

pretends it is he's
making love to,

which one he's
kissing in his head.

He's gone now,
she's undressed

and scrubs him
off as much as

water, soap and
brush allows. She

lies in the bath,
water like menstrual

flood, slit wrists,
cool dampness,

soaked in blood.

Terry Collett

Almost Made Out

You almost made out
that day

but her parents
came home early

and you had to sit
all boiled up

while they came in
and greeted you

with their middleclass kindness
not knowing

you had almost
made out

with their daughter
who sat next to you

like some pious nun
preparing for prayer

and her mother said
how about some coffee?

You'll stay for tea
won't you?

Sure you said
that'd be nice

and she went off
to the kitchen

while the father
stood gazing at you

his middle class pretensions
and memories

of his own youth
maybe gave him

a clue as to
what may have happened

while they were out
or not

as the case
may have been

and he said gruffly
how are you?

Terry Collett

Almost There

She had that look
that turn of head
that stare
and you weren't
the only guy
to have been moved by her

or whose boat
had been almost
capsized by her
but there again

these dames
don't come along
every day
and there was that Sunday

you took that trip
over to her place

thinking of maybe
a good time
and there she was
with two other guys

and each one smitten
like you
hanging on her
every word and glance

and hoping for the chance
and wishing the other two guys
would go off
and fish

or drink
or find some other
but there you were
and them following her

along those country lanes
listening to her words
and quotes
from this book and that

who she'd read about
and what art work
she liked
and how she was looking forward

to going to collage
and all you could think of
was how cute
her ass was

and how she could
hypnotise you
with just one sway
of her hips

or a look
right into your eyes
and you thinking
after such love

or lust
all things fade away
or as a distant star
slowly dies.

Terry Collett

Along Bath Terrace.

You walked down Bath Terrace
having been to Jail Park
on the swings
and slide with Janice

and she had her red beret
on the side of her head
like some French girl
I nearly bayoneted

my old man last night
you said
I had my toy rifle
he brought me

with the rubber bayonet
and I was charging out
of the sitting room
into the passage

and caught him
in the guts
as he entered the room
what you doing?

he asked
I was bayoneting Germans I told him
I'm not German he said
I'm your father

and he stormed off
into the sitting room
to his favourite chair
by the fire

and I stood there thinking
it's only a toy gun
and I was only having fun
Janice looked at you

and said
if I'd done that
to Gran she'd have spanked
my backside

but you wouldn't
have had a rifle
with a rubber bayonet
you said

girls don't have rifles
with bayonets
I might have done
she said

ok
you said
you can borrow mine
and see what happens

no thanks
Janice said
I know what would happen
you climbed over

the metal fence
by Banks House
and sat on the concrete remains
of the bomb shelter

looking toward the coalwarf
where coal wagons
were being loaded
with black sacks of coal

and the horses stood there
in front patiently
eating from nosebags
Janice was sitting pretty

in her red beret

her hair tied
in a ponytail
her coat buttoned up

to the neck
talking about her gran
and the pet bird
in the cage

and you listened
to her taking in
her hands on her knees
her small fingers

not the kind
to hold a rifle
with a rubber bayonet
more the kind

to hold a baby
or rock a cradle
or stroke brow
you wanted to ask her

for a cowgirl's kiss
but didn't know how.

Terry Collett

Already Dies.

After the service
at the church

on Sunday morning
in 1962

she and you
leaving the choir

and she taking your hand
in hers and staying behind

until the others had gone
she kisses your lips

and the echo
of the organ's drone

silent and the smell
of her mother's

borrowed scent
lingering in the air

and knowing her sister
would be waiting outside

prepared to tell her mother
if she caught glimpse of kiss

or any hold of hands
and half deaf organist

Mr Lundon stomping about
in the organ loft above

and all you wanted
was to stay there

with the kiss and love
and her lips and the look

in her big blue eyes
not knowing then

that all things
however good

move on and something
inside her already dies.

Terry Collett

Altercation

He altercated
with Mrs Orbeck
on the stairs.
Something to do

with him
sneaking women
into his room at night.
None of your business

if I do, he'd said.
But it was of course,
written into the tenant's
agreement he'd signed

the year before
when he'd been desperate
and she seemed nice.
I will not have

that kind of women
in this house of mine,
she'd boomed, rattling
the rafters, shaking

the windows in their frames.
He noticed as she spoke
a thin fine moustache
on her upper lip

where sweat seemed
to have gathered
threatening to jump
like some weary suicide

on the lip's edge.
He promised her
he'd not have that
kind of women

in his room again.
She wiped her upper lip
to remove the sweat.
He thought her an ass,

she thought him a pain.
They never had (about
women at any rate)
an altercation again.

Terry Collett

Although Blind 1940

I'm outside in the wheelchair,
sitting facing the sun,
my blind eyes sense,
but do not see the light.

My leg stumps
are covered by a blanket,
I am tucked up
neat and tight
like a parcel.

Hello, Grace,
a voice says to my right.

It's Guy.

I smell him,
the scent he wears
is overpowering.

Hello, Guy,
how are you?

I hear him take a chair
and sit beside me.

I am fine, but busy,
Hitler's being
a pest in France,
and hush hush work
in progress.

He is silent;
his hand touches mine.

Enough of me,
how are you?

I am unsettled,

I say,
my legs ache
and the stumps are sore.

How are they
treating you?
He asks.

Very well,
but I am impatient,
depressed,
want answers where
there are none,
ask questions,
but know the answers
before I ask.

How do you manage?
He asks.

I am getting there,
slowly, but surely,
I reply.

His hand rubs mine gently.
It reminds me
of Clive's hand on mine
that night he stayed
and we ended up
making love in my bed.

I miss that.

Making love.

Clive dead,
killed in Dunkirk.

How's Donald?

He is busy,
Gus says,

can't say what
he is doing,
hush hush stuff.

I see, I say,
although don't.

Philip is in the States;
he hasn't forgotten you,
Guy says,
he will take you out
for dinner once
he is back.

I can't imagine
going out for dinner;
people watching me
being wheeled into
a restaurant with no legs
and blind,
them staring,
and me unable to know
if they are looking
and what they
are wondering.

Guy talks on,
but I am
thinking of Clive,
of his kisses,
of his body
against mine,
seeing it in my mind,
even though
I am blind.

Terry Collett

Always On Your Mind 1917

I helped old Albert to his room
and he softy said:
sit a while,
I want to tell you something
I've told no one before.

So I sat in the chair
by his bed.

Mud, you would
never believe
the amount of mud;
bomb craters big and deep
filled with dirty;
men drowned in them
if they slipped off the boards
especially at night.

My friend Charlie
died like that:
wandered off and slipped
and drowned.
Knee high in places
and deeper in others.

Young men fresh out
to the Front
cried out when dying
for their mothers;
waiting to go over the top
when the whistle blew
you knew it was them or you.

He paused and stared at me
with glassy eyes.

Beyond the news
they broadcast home
was the dark reality of hell;

rats, lice, mud and blood
and dead mens' eyes and limbs
or bodies lying out in No Man's Land.

O yes, sometimes we sat
and smoked, laughed and joked,
thought of home and fire sides
and the girls we left behind;
but always the War
was on your mind.

Terry Collett

Always To Please 1970

Miriam came
into your tent
at the camp base
a few miles from Tangiers.

She zipped
up the tent
behind her.

I saw your friend leave
he's gone
to Marrakesh with others
on the yellow trucks
she said.

I know
you said
he asked if I was going
but I said no.

She knelt
as the tent
was too low
to stand.

Shall we?
She said.

If you like
you said.

She took off her top
and her bra
and her small tits
hung there
the brown dugs
smiling.

You undressed slowly

all the time
watching her
as she sat
and slipped off
her jeans
and then
her underwear.

Outside there
were voices
of those who
never left
far off
and some nearby.

You were both naked
she kneeling
you lying
on the sleeping bed.

She crawled
towards your bag
and lay beside you.

I hope it's
a long way
to Marrakesh
she said.

Far enough
you said.

She gazed at you
and you drank in
her stare.

She touched your thigh
you touched her nest.

A slight wind outside
rattled the tent pole.

You entered
her smoothly
as a ship
into a fine harbour
and sailed her
over seven seas.

Always to serve
always to please.

Terry Collett

Amongst The Best

My mother's
at the sink,
doing washing
or washing up,
I think.

My old man
made her cry
earlier that day,
but she's humming now,
so must be OK.

I watch her
as kid's do,
study how
she moves her hands
to work and such,
but the old man
did not care
or do as much.

My mother's
drying dishes,
eyes about to cry,
I look away
wondering
what or why?

My mother's
dead now,
laid to rest
with Jesus
or God or both
amongst the best.

Terry Collett

Amsterdam Base Camp 1974

Amsterdam, 1974,
base camp.

Dalya and Benny
were lying
in the tent smoking,
watching the smoke
hit the roof
of canvas and twirl
about their heads.

Did you know canvas
is the Dutch word
for cannabis?
She said.

No I didn't,
he said.

And when Thomas Jefferson
wrote the draft
of the Declaration of Independence
he wrote it
on hemp paper,
and hemp is basically cannabis,
she said,
eyeing him,
releasing a flow of smoke.

Isn't it illegal?
he said.

Not back then it wasn't,
she said,
in fact in 18th century America
in Virginia it was illegal
not to grow it.

You ever smoke it?

He said.

Tried it,
she said,
but not my thing.

It would soon be time
to return back to Blighty,
across the Channel
on the ferry.

Would he see her again
once they returned back?

He doubted it;
they lived in different
parts of the country;
lived different lives.

Music was in the air,
pushed out
into the base camp
from loud speakers,
some heavy rock stuff.

They lay there
watching the smoke rise,
loop and twirl and twist
before their eyes.

Terry Collett

Amy Blessed 47bc

The lady Aquila has left
and I clean up
and clear away
the things used.

Annona has gone
to lie down;
the constant chat
has worn her down
and out. Aquila eyed

me with disdain,
talked to me as if I
were her slave rather
than Annona's,

beckoning me for
this and that, sitting
there like some princess
from some foreign shore.

Annona raised her eyes
at me behind Aquila's back,
and blew me a kiss
when she could, and

smiled as if to say bear
with her she has no power
over you, she loves
only her own soul,

if soul she has.
Come to me
this night, Amy,
Annona said, enter

my bed and love me
as you do and I do you,
and Aquila had just left,

her shadow only just

gone from the walls' hold.
If only Annona's husband,
Marcus, saw how we
love and kiss and hold

and lie, both of us would
be slain in the bed and die.
Last night, how her lips
kissed upon my inner thighs,

reaching up to my
sexual nest, there
she kissed and in
Latin words, blessed.

Terry Collett

An Adventure 1969

Sophia lies beside me
on Mr Cutt's bed.

Mr Cutt died
some weeks before
and his room's still empty
waiting to be filled.

I watch her lying there,
her blue uniform
pulled down now,
her underwear tossed
across the room somewhere.

It hadn't been the best sex:
having to keep quiet
in case others
in the corridor
heard us at it;
she having to quieten
her grunts and woos and ahs
that she usually did.

I lay there now dressed,
slightly out of breath,
taking in her quietness,
her Polishness now silent.

She raises a hand,
fingers thin,
nails painted
a pale red.

Is that someone
calling you?
She whispers.

I listen,
straining for sounds,

staring at the door,
wondering who it maybe
calling me?

I rise from the bed,
zipping up my zip,
going to the door,
noticing her underwear
lying on the floor.

I stand behind the door,
ear to the wood,
wishing I'd become
invisible if I could.

Sophia gets off the bed
and stands by the sink,
just out of sight.

I open the door
and go outside
and peer along
the corridor.

O there you are,
Matron says,
could you meet me
in the entrance:
we have a new resident
coming today,
a man,
a Mr Gent.

Of course,
I say,
closing the door,
wondering if Sophia
will pick up
her underwear
from the polish floor.

I follow Matron

down the stairs,
a stickiness reminding me
of the deed just done,
an adventure Sophia
would say
for another day.

Terry Collett

An American

An American,
she thought he was,
the hair cut
and the style of clothes

gave her a clue,
at least that
and the drawn out
drawl like he was drawing

the words
from a deep well.
Her father called him a Yank,
didn't take to him at all,

wouldn't even speak
when he said, Hello Sir,
all kind of polite,
thoughtful and well bred,

and her mother
was always gazing at him,
taking in his walk,
his talk and remembering

years before,
some similar American
with his big blue eyes
and wide wallet

brushed her off her feet
and broke her heart
and left a bundle
in her womb,

a daughter,
wanting to go
with an American now,
history trying to repeat,

break a heart
after sweeping of her feet.

Terry Collett

An Angel's Touch

It was Wednesday morning service
in the church next to the school
and Helen sat next to you

in the old wooden pew
her eyes peering
behind her thick lens glasses

at you and she whispered
your mum's meeting my mum
in the street market after school

and then we're going to my house
for a cup of tea
and I can show you

my doll's house
that my dad made
out of an orange box

and it's got lights
and everything
you leaned your head

towards her and said
in a low voice
oh right yes that'll be good

hoping none of your mates
could hear
especially Cogan

who only the other week
threatened to bloody your nose
but he didn't show after school

and she smiled
and you looked at the altar
where the vicar

was lighting candles
and Mrs Murphy
was walking down the aisle

like an aging storm trooper
in her hand knitted cardigan
and brown pleated skirt

Helen whispered
and you can see
the tiny furniture

I've got too
that my mum bought
from a second hand shop

off the market
you looked at her
sitting there

in her grey jumper
and white blouse
and grey skirt

and her plaited hair
parted in the middle
and her bright eyes

magnified by the glass lens
and you said
I look forward to it

and she rubbed your hand
with hers
and then looked ahead

at the lighted candles
and sniffed in the incense
in the air and her hand

moved to pick up

a hymn book
and you sensed where

her hand had been
like some angel's touch
as if to bless

well that's what
it seemed like to you
more or less.

Terry Collett

An Inner Art.

Elisheva pinned back
her hair, her thick lens
glasses enlarged her eyes,
she eyed her lips
fresh red lips ticked.

She pressed
her lips together
as she'd seen
her mother do
to spread the red.

She put away
her makeup case,
clipped up her bag.

Tuviya took in
her plump frame,
his eyes wandered over
the tight jeans and top.

She had ordered
latte and cake.
The counter girl,
thin and pale,
took money
and tilled away.

He followed her
as she walked
to a table
in the corner
where another sat,
a female of older years,
plump but not fat.

Elisheva mouthed words,
gestured with hands.

Tuviya studied her
with an artist's eye,
took in fingers, nails,
gestures and moving lips.

Imagined her
in his studio,
the sharp light,
the battered sofa
holding her frame,
her hands in lap,
her naked breasts
like piglets
in deep sleep.

A girl served Elisheva
her drink and cake,
then walked away.

Tuviya drank
his Americano,
his eyes moving over
Elisheva's moving hands
and lips, the taking
of the latte and cake,
red lips opening
and closing
like fish on land.

He painted her
on his mind's canvas,
set her down
with inner eye,
shaded in
the dull beyond,
filled in
with inward paints
her outer being
as he saw.

He could have
snapped her

with his Smartphone
camera, captured
in the state of now,
but it may have
spoilt it all,
he thought,
somehow.

She licked her fingers,
removing crumbs
and cream of cake,
mouthing each one.

He smiled,
imagined another game,
which she'd not play,
he thought,
least not here
and now in this cafe.

She talked on,
her fingers clean,
the dampness shining
in the overhead lights.

Tuviya closed up
the studio in his mind,
put away
the inner paints,
the canvas set aside,
she on the inner artwork,
on battered sofa,
legs spread wide.

Terry Collett

An Inner Glow 1964

Is Milka in?
I ask her mother
who has opened the door
of the farmhouse.

Yes, but she's
in the bath
at the moment,
but come in Benny,
if you don't mind waiting.

So I go
into the warm kitchen,
sit on one
of the kitchen chairs.

Would you like something?
her mother asks smiling,
to eat or drink?

Tea would be welcome,
I say,
taking in her smile.

She nods,
turns around,
walks to a cupboard,
gets down a mug.

I watch her move,
her motherly hips,
her cosy behind,
the loose dress
she is wearing.

She turns
and says,
sugar?
or are you

sweet enough?

Two please,
not quite sweet
enough yet,
I say.

She laughs,
and I note her
motherly breasts
held in loosely
by her bra and dress.

She'll not be long
in the bath,
her mother says,
we can hope.

I have a vision
of Milka in the bath,
wishing I could be
washing her back
with a sponge or flannel,
kissing her,
and holding her.

You are patient with her,
Benny,
her mother says,
I lose my temper with her
and have to bite my tongue;
not that she does,
not like that
with her father though,
he'd not take her backchat,
he'd soon tan her behind
as old as she is.

I say nothing,
take in her mother's hands
as they go about
preparing my mug of tea,

the ringed finger,
the red washed out skin,
the nails well cared for
despite the housework.

Going anywhere nice today?
she says,
eyeing me,
a smile there.

Cinema probably,
new Elvis film,
I reply,
thinking of
the previous Saturday
in Milka's bed
while her mother
was in town shopping,
her father on the farm,
her brothers fishing
out some place.

That'll be nice,
she says,
where is that girl?
time she takes.

She gives me
my mug of tea
and I sip it.

She walks out
to the passage.

I watch her go
and sense an inner
warming glow.

Terry Collett

An Invisible Stain 1957

I stand on the balcony
of the flats where I live

early morning
dry sky

the milkman
and his horse
drawn wagon
appears on my left
he is pulling the reins
and the horse trots onward
head in a nosebag eating

kids are playing
on the pram sheds or
in the Square

Enid comes along
my balcony towards me

she has no visible
bruising or bruises
no black eyes
or split lips

you're up early
I say
fall out of bed?

She shakes her head
no I had a lie in
and Mum got my breakfast
and Dad sat
and talked to me
about last night
and the meal we had
and the cinema afterwards
she says

still hasn't hit you
yet then or your mum?
I say

she shakes her head
and looks over the balcony

the milkman is right
below us now
and the horse
lowers its head
eating from the bag

has he gone all religious
your old man?
I say

she looks at me
don't know
he doesn't talk
about God or religion
or nothing
she says
but I am still fearful
that he will one day
hit me and Mum again
and leather me

she looks out
at the sky
it's in his eyes
that's where I look
she says
they tell me his moods
but at the moment
I can't see
like I did
is your dad religious?
She asks me

don't think so

I say
he never talks about God
he does sometimes say
o Christ
but that's usually
if he has no money
or something like that

she looks at me
and kisses my
9 year old cheek
with her 9 year old lips

hope my dad
is religious
she says
I don't want him
to become like
he was again

I feel her damp kiss
on my cheek
like an invisible stain.

Terry Collett

An Invitation.

She invited Joey
to her apartment
on the second floor

and as she opened the door
her dog came
barking along the hall

Shut up Bonaparte
she said
Go away

and the mutt walked back
with its tail
between its legs

to its basket
under the table
and she ushered Joey in

and closed the door behind her
and said
What would you like to drink?

tea coffee coke beer?
Coke will be fine
he said

and she told him
to go sit in the lounge
and once he sat down

he looked around the room
and on the small table
by the sofa where he sat

was a photograph of her
and her husband
taken on their wedding day

she dressed in white
and smiling
and he in a black suit

like a hit man
in a mobster movie
and she came in

with his coke
and set it on the table
by the sofa

and then went out again
swaying her behind
which made him smile

then she was back
with a tall glass
of white wine

and she set it down
on the table beside him
and sat down

and began talking
about the night
he had met her

and her husband
in the bar in town
and how she had invited

him over to meet her husband
and he had bought them
both a drink

and while her husband
talked to his friend
she had flirted with him

and made him laugh

and how after that
they'd all meet

on Friday evenings
in the same bar
and her husband

had invited him
to their place
to play chess

and he remembered
how he used to play chess
holding off letting

her husband win
so he could stay longer
and see her more often

and then she leaned over
to get her drink
and she put one hand

on his thigh
and reached over
for her wine

and he smelt her scent
and the brush of her hair
as she leaned over him

and having her glass
she leaned back
her hand still resting

on his thigh
and that look of mischief
burning in her eye.

Terry Collett

Ancient Bed And Sonya 1973

And the waiter said
Puis-je vous aider?

You looked at Sonya
who said in fine French
two coffees
and croissants please.

Oui madame
the waiter said.

You watched her features
how she sat
her blonde hair
long and loose
from bands or ribbons.

I love the Renoir print
in the cafe
we went into last night
she said.

You listened
but did not reply.

I could see you
in the man
she added.

Which man?
You said.

The young man
sitting at the table
looking at the girl
and her dog
the man with
the fine moustache
she said.

The one with
the boater hat?
You asked.

Yes that's the one
she said.

And you remember thinking
as you looked at the painting
why put a dog on the table
with food and wine and glasses?

The waiter came
with coffees
and croissants and went off.

Sonya sipped her coffee
you nibbled the croissant
she talked about art
and Renoir.

But you were
only half listening
you were recalling
how beautiful she looked
in bed the night before
her hair spread out
on the pillow
as was she spread
on the double springy
ancient bed.

Terry Collett

And Has Sinned Mcmlxviii

The short monk
in black robes
limped up the aisle
of the church
like one half
of a comedy act
at the end of a pier,

I later learned
he was a theologian
and at work
on a book
on the benedicta trinitas,

sunlight in between arches
in the cloister
shadows elsewhere
and a monk stood
gazing into the sunlight
arms inside
his long sleeves,

hoc est corpus meum
Christ said
at the Last Supper
the institution
of the later Mass
fai questo in memoria di me,

c'est mon sang
shed for you
He said
drink from it
the tall monk
raised the cup
then slipped from it,

flowers
in the flower beds

around the outside
of the cloister
in the garth,

I weeded here
the bell ringing
each quarter
la voix de dieu
the French monk said,

I stood in the semi dark
during the office
of Compline
the voices chanting
plainsong
il mio cuore è colpito
dalla sua bellezza,

my heart
is also struck
by the beauty
of the incense
during Mass
parfum de dieu,

the raised host
between the fingers
of the monk
with Parkinson's disease
shaking as if caught
by an invisible wind,

I stood like one
who had misunderstood
and had sinned.

Terry Collett

And Mother Said 1963

Magdalene's mother yaks
about the price of things
in the shops

when she gets back
from town
and how she'd met

Bridget O'Connell
and how that woman can talk
it's no wonder her husband

goes away quite frequently
and what was Mary Maguire
doing here?

her mother says
just listening to records
Magdalene says

better be no mess
in your room
I only tidied it up

the other day
no mess her
daughter says

(she'd tidied up the bed
and floor and hid
the booze and cigarettes)

there's talk of her
at the school
from the sisters

Magdalene's mother says
what talk?
none to worry

your head with
her mother says
so what was she

doing here?
you know I don't like
her being here

don't you?
just listening
to the Billy Fury record

just friends
Magdalene says
(they'd lain in bed

and kissed and did things
and she reflects
on it now

as her mother
yaks on)
and that other

friend of yours
that Martha
there's talk of her

there at the school too
the nuns thinking her
being a nun at sometime

now if there's one
to encourage it is there
she's the one

the mother says
putting away shopping
don't want that Mary here

unless I am here too

understand?
Magdalene nods

it is easier than arguing
and I smell smoke
have you been

smoking again?
And with her?
she's a bad influence on you

I won't have it
and if your da finds out
you're for it

now let me get on
and make sure the room
is tidy because if I go up

and it's not then
there'll be trouble
Magdalene says nothing

watching her mother's lips
opening and closing
like a fish out of water

and she
the queer girl loving
daughter.

Terry Collett

And Not Me.

I see you
Yochana
thin as wire

shiny hair
narrow nose
looking back

towards me
eyes gazing
while Miss G

at the front
of the class
talks music

Beethoven
and deafness
how he had

his piano
cut down low
to feel sound

vibrations
on his skin
how you look

towards me
Yochana
vibrates on

my skin too
I mouth words
you're sexy

towards you
your forehead
creases up

eyebrows rise
thinking out
what I've mouthed

I love it
how you are
you look back

at Miss G
and her talk
on music

Beethoven
and not me.

Terry Collett

Anne And Her Phantom Leg

I sat next to Anne
on the lawn
by the round white table
after breakfast

she was rubbing
the stump of her leg

I ate my toast

Sister Bridget
came over to us

what was all the fuss
last night?
she asked Anne
staring at her
with stern eyes

my leg hurt

your leg has been amputated
there is no leg
the nun said

it still hurts
even if it isn't
bloody there
Anne said

language
I will not have
bad language
the nun said

I said bloody
that's not a swear word
I should know
I'm an expert

in foul language
Anne said

you did not
have to make such a fuss
you woke up
the other children
in the dormitory
and Sister Elizabeth said
you used
foul language then

Anne shifted in the chair
rubbed her stump

I finished my toast
gazed at them both

it hurts here too
Anne said
raising her skirt
to reveal the stump

put your skirt down
the nun said firmly
Benedict doesn't want
to see your stump

I looked away
carrying the sight
of her stump with me

he doesn't mind
he's always gawking
at my leg
Anne said

enough of that
the nun said

that's what I tell him
but he doesn't listen

Anne said
poking me
in the ribs smiling

I don't
I said
looking at the nun
with my Mr Innocent features

I suggest young lady
you go to see Sister Agnes
about some painkillers
for the pain
the nun said
avoiding looking at me

I will
Anne said

and better manners my girl
the nun said
and walked off
across the lawn

silly old crab
Anne said
here give me your hand
and she shoved my hand
on her stump
and rubbed it
back and forth

I tried to pull
my hand away
but she held it there

don't fuss so Kid
take it as
the pleasure it is

I watched the nun stop
over by the slide

and talk to two other kids
sensing my hand moving
over warm skin

if the old bat saw this
Anne said
she'd call it
a bloody sin.

Terry Collett

Anne And The Boys's Bath Night

It was the boys' bath night
and you had bathed
and were drying yourself

with the white towel
they had given you
when the bathroom door flew open

and Anne stood there one-legged
in her pink flowered nightdress
perching on her crutches like a hawk

her eyes bright and dark
a smile lingering on her lips
well bugger me

she said
what a sight
for a girl's lovesick eyes

and she entered the bathroom
and pushed the door shut
behind her with her bottom

almost uncrutching herself
in the process
you pulled the towel

tight around you
and stared at her
it's the boys' bath night

you muttered
girls aren't allowed in
while boys bath

she moved over
to the mirror
and gazed at herself

you're right
she said
I'm not a boy

I'm a tight titted girl
and she laughed
and crutched herself

over towards you
making you flatten yourself
against the wall

gripping the towel with one hand
and holding her back
with the other

and she leaned down
and kiss the back of your hand
then looked you deep in the eyes

what have you got hidden
behind that towelling skirt then?
she said

and you gripped the towel tighter
with both hands
and she menacingly moved

one hand cautiously towards the towel
her armpits gripping
the crutches tightly

as she moved
you shouldn't be in here
you said

I'm not in there yet
she laughed and grabbed
the towel away with a force

that took her and the towel

toppling to the bathroom floor
where she lay

like an overturned beetle
you stood naked
your hands covering

what your father
called your toolbox
gazing down at her struggling

to get up
well don't just stand there
like a prize parrot

help pick me up
she said
and so with one hand covering

you knelt down to help lift her up
but then she pulled you
down beside her

and laughed
and her laughter echoed
around the walls

but then she paused
and put a hand
over her mouth

hearing Sister Bridget's
nearby footsteps
and noisy calls.

Terry Collett

Anne's Chafed Leg 1959

Your leg stump is chafed
where the artificial leg has rubbed.

The nursing nun was applying
something to lessen the soreness.

You sat in a chair staring at her
black cloth covered head, her hands
rubbing gently. You said you hated
the bloody leg, wanted your old leg back,
the one the fucking doctors took off.

She said nothing, her hands rubbing
the ointment in and around. I sat in
a chair nearby, you having insisted I am near.

The stump was red; you muttered words
at the nun's head. She stood and washed
her hands in the small sink. She said to leave
the leg off for a few days for the leg to heal.

I carried your leg and you crutched yourself
from the medical room saying nothing
to the nun drying her hands. I put your leg
in your dormitory and we went out on the lawn
into the morning sunshine. You sat in the white
painted chair and I sat beside you. You talked
of going out the back gate and on to the beach
after lunch. I watched as you rubbed the stump.

The nun had put on a bandaging, now it itched.
I wondered what it felt like to have a leg missing,
but didn't ask, just stared, listening to you curse
and swear, your words, dark birds, fighting in the air.

Terry Collett

Anne's Departure 1959

Anne was leaving
the nursing home
Skinny kid
her one friend
was going
the following day.

So they walked out
the back gate
and onto the beach
for their last stroll.

Anne with her new leg
and walking stick
and the Kid beside her.

Out of all that lot
back there Kid
you are the only one
I'm going to miss
she said.

I'm going
to miss you too
he said.

You mean
miss looking
at my leg stump
she said.

He smiled
no all of you
he said.

I bet the penguins
won't miss me
she said
especially Sister Paul.

They stood
on the beach
and watched
the waves come in.

I like you
for your honesty
the Kid said
you made me
laugh at times.

Be honest Kid
that's the way
don't suffer fools
she said
looking at the gulls
above their heads.

Can I write to you?
he said.

No Kid this is it
this is the end
of our road
keep the memory
not the facade
of pretence afterwards.

Can I kiss
you goodbye?
he asked.

I don't kiss frogs Kid
I might find a prince
she said smiling
and allowed him
to kiss her cheek.

They stood in silence
watching the waves
and gulls.

Best go back
before the penguins
come looking for me
she said.

She walked
with her stick
her new leg
rubbing her stump
the Kid beside her.

As they reached
the back gate
she stopped
and kissed him
on the lips.

Remember me Kid
me 11 you 10
go marry
when you're older
and not a girl
with one leg.

She walked on
and he stood
watching her go
up the lawn
and out of view.

He stood there lost
with nothing more
to say or do.

Terry Collett

Anne's Hurt Leg 1959

Anne said
her leg stump hurt
and lifted the hem
of her red dress
and showed me.

It was inflamed
best get one
of the nursing nuns
to look at it
I said.

I don't want
those penguins
looking at my stump
she said.

What are you
going to do?
I said.

Don't Kid
wish they'd not
taken my fecking leg off
she said.

She looked back
at the nursing home
from where we were
on the lawn
in the white chairs.

It needs looking at
I said.

Looking at
the fecking thing
ain't going to help
she said

go get that skinny nun
she's best
avoid getting
Sister Paul.

So I ran across the lawn
and into the home
and looked
for the skinny nun
but I couldn't find her.

Sister Bridget
came out of the chapel.

Where's the skinny nun?
I said.

Skinny nun?
Sister Bridget said
that's not polite Benny
do you mean Sister Luke?

I looked past her
at the passageway
yes I think that's
her name
I said.

The nun gazed at me
why do you want her?

I don't but Anne does
I said.

Why does Anne
want her?

I looked at the nun's
broad nose.

Her stump is red
I said.

How do you know?
the nun said.

She showed me
I said.

She showed you
her leg stump?
the nun said frowning.

Yes she said it hurt
and sent me
to get Sister Luke.

I'll come and see
the nun said.

I followed her
out onto the lawn.

Anne wasn't pleased
I could see
by her face.

Just out of reach
she once said
of God's grace.

Terry Collett

Anny And The Process Of Shopping.

Anny Horowitz doesn't run down
the shopping aisles
as your grandchildren do,
she holds the trolley,

steadying it with her hand,
your ghostly friend,
your little Jew.
None sees her form,

her bright blue eyes,
her blonde hair
tied with ribbon,
her rosy complexion.

She ghostly moves,
amazed by the Aladdin's cave
of goods upon the shelves,
the packets and boxes,

the loud advertisements
hanging from the air
here and there,
everywhere you

and she stare.
Neither Strasbourg
nor Bordeaux
nor Tours

nor Auschwitz
was like this,
no overpowering display
of commodities on show

of this she tells you
and to a degree you know,
and what was on show
at Auschwitz is still there

in memories or records
or photographs
with staring faces
and deep set eyes.

Anny waits and watches
as the conveyor belt
moves the goods
to the woman

at the till
who pushes buttons
or scans bar codes
and pushes by

to the paid for end
and your son
and grandchildren
pack all away.

Anny gazes on the process,
then at you, smiles,
your little friend,
your ghostly Jew.

Terry Collett

Anny In The Mall.

Anny follows just behind.
The mall is crowded but
None see her in her 1940s
Clothes. You see her and
She knows. She gazes deep
In windows of shops and
Stores takes in the bright
Lights and treasures her
Blue eyes childlike see.
But she keeps an eye on
You as often she has before
Moving eyes from you to
Shop and store. Her blue
Ghostly eyes scan the views
Of things on show in big wide
Store windows she passes by.
Her blonde hair catches the
Bright lights above her head.
She follows closer. Her hand
Almost touches yours. That
Small hand that once waved
Goodbye to mother and others
She had loved and missed now
Almost seeks out one of yours.
Her eyes search out your dull
Eyes and seem to speak her
Words in silences and small bits
Spoken fill the air: death camp.
Jew. Child. Auschwitz.1942.

Terry Collett

Another

Another night
Molly said
between the sheets
of a cold bed
where emptiness
occupies the space
where you laid your head.

Another day
Molly said
wondering where death
has taken you
from my sight and being
with just a bleak day
and dark clouds for viewing.

Another hour
Molly said
listening to idle gossip
on the radio and TV
none of it's about you
or your importance to me.

Another minute
Molly said
Treading the water
of my life's routine
to keep me sane
knowing I have lost you
and will not to see you again.

Another second
Molly said
of the clock's tick tock
and the hand's motion
full of memories of yesteryear
and deep sad emotion.

Another Childhood Day

We're on the grass
around Arrol House
and I have my blue
painted metal crossbow

in my hand
with the two arrows
that came in the pack
and Ingrid says

what are you going
to fire at?
if I had an apple
I could do

the William Tell trick
what's that?
she asks
well he put an apple

on his son's head
and fires the apple
off with one
single arrow

and whose head
would you fire
the apple off of?
she asks

I look at her
and smile
no not me
she says

looking fearful
of course not
I say
just joking

I'd not do that
to anyone
I'm a lousy shot
she smiles uneasy

I mean it I say
so what are you
going to shoot at?
she asks

I pull out
a small
cardboard target
out of the back pocket

of my jeans
at this
I say
and try and hit

the bulls-eye
she takes the target
and says
where do I put it?

put it against
the bomb shelter wall
and up on
the first ledge

I say
she walks over
to the bomb shelter wall
and puts it

on the ledge
by standing on tiptoe
that's it
I say

just right

she moves away
and stands beside me
fingers held together

and watches
as I put an arrow
onto the crossbow
and set

the crossbow
ready to fire
and aim
at the target

with one eye closed
and set the arrow off
and it misses
the bulls-eye

by a mere fraction
you missed the bulls-eye
Ingrid says
I smile

told you
I was a lousy shot
I say
just as well

I didn't have
an apple
on my head
she says

or I'd be dead
I wouldn't do that
to you
no matter what

I say
and she gets
the arrow

just a part

of another
childhood day.

Terry Collett

Another Day 1955

Helen saw
a man in
black leather

fall off his
motorbike
and under

a red bus
as she was
looking out

the window
at the back
of a car

that Benny's
uncle was
driving in

o my gosh
he's fallen
off his bike

she uttered
who's fallen?
Benny said

that man on
his bright red
motor bike

just back there
Benny looked
out the back

car window
but the car
had moved on

and all was
out of sight
are you sure?

Benny said
yes I saw
Helen said

he fell off
and under
the uncle

said that's bad
what a sight
but Benny

couldn't see
anything
just traffic

behind them
moving on
Helen was

in deep shock
and shaking
so Uncle

drove her home
and Benny
explained to

her mother
what Helen
had just seen

then drove off
with Uncle
to his house

with his aunt

waiting there
and cousin

and his neat
electric
toy train set

all laid out
ready for
Benny to

have a play
and Benny
hoped that

Helen could
come and play
another day.

Terry Collett

Another Day.

We have kissed
at another time
than this,
have embraced
and faced a far
different reaction.

There is action far off:
you cough and hold
your hand there,
and stare
into the darkness.

Let us caress,
you say to me.

The sea is nearby,
I reply,
gazing at the dark sky
and bright moon.

They'll come soon,
you say,
along the bay
and up the hill.

We lie still;
ears alert, eyes gazing.

Far off
a red town is blazing;
screams are heard
and still hearing;
enemies are nearing.

Time is ticking away;
tomorrow, my love,
another day.

Another Night With Miss Pinkie

Miss Pinkie (she dropped
the title Mrs from
her name ages ago)
lay on the sofa

and said
take me if you want
spank me if you will
and he stood

looking at her
a glass of scotch
in his hand
the music of Mahler's

symphony number 4
coming through the door
from an outer room
she lay butt naked

her ample flesh
spread out
her hands resting
on her breasts

who's the orchestra
on the Mahler piece?
he asked
can't remember

she said shifting slightly
her blue eyes searching him
aren't you going to oblige?
she said

he drank back
the scotch
and put the glass down
on the small coffee table

can I sit first?
sure
she said and sat up
and moved over

to allow him room
beside her
he gazed at her
at her dyed blonde hair

at her eyes deep
like oceans of blueness
knowing she had
19 years upward on him

and all she wanted
was a few hours
of talk and laughter
and a leisurely screw

one of the old guys
died at the home today
he said
out of the blue

oh which one?
she asked
the one who sat
in his room each day

and looked out
the window
and said next to nothing
oh him

she said
think he was
broken hearted
she added

he took in

the beauty spot
on her cheek
like Marilyn used

to have years ago
so how about it?
she asked
are you ready for it?

the Mahler piece softened
some moving movement
well?
she said placing

a hand on his thigh
maybe you could put
on Brahms for a change
he said

sensing her hands
move upwards
maybe
she said softly

if you're a good boy
the lights were low
the lights from the street
added a different shade

of glow
ok
he said
and her hands moved

and did their work
and so did his
bit by bit
time over time

the music playing on
in the background
that and flesh slapping

and the sofa squeaking

was the symphony
of a sexual sound.

Terry Collett

Another Sort Of Kiss 1940

Philip has come
to wheel me
around St James Park.

I feel the warm sun
on my face.

He wheels me
in silence
along paths
I cannot see;
past people talking
then we come to a stop.

We're by the lake,
he says.

I can hear
the ducks,
I tell him.

I move my hand
along to my leg stumps
and pull the blanket
over them.

Are you
comfortable?
He asks.

Yes thank you,
I reply.

How are
the leg stumps?
He asks.

Healing
so I am told.

I stare in the direction
of his voice
with my blind eyes.

Good I'm glad,
he says.

There is silence
for a while;
I listen to the sounds
around me.

Grace I want
to ask you something,
he says.

I turn towards
where his voice is:
what is it?
I ask.

Would you
marry me?
He says softly.

Marry you?
I say bewildered,
you hardly know me
nor I you.

I know, but once
we get to know
each other better
would you?
He says.

I sense he is
leaning close to me.

Why would you
want to marry

a blind woman
without legs?
I ask.

I love you,
he says.

How can you
love me when you
don't know me,
I say irritably.

I love what
I do know,
he replies.

His hand
touches mine;
I feel it there
warm and soft.

how would you
cope with me?
And where
would we live?
I ask.

I will engage
a nurse at the start
until your legs are healed
and you can have
artificial legs;
we can buy a house
in the country,
he says convincingly.

Are you saying this
out of pity?

No of course not,
he says,
I love you.

He kisses
my cheek;
the first kiss
since Clive
kissed me last time
the morning the left
with his regiment
and died in Dunkirk.

I put my hand
where Philip
has kissed me.

I can promise nothing,
I say,
staring into darkness,
but maybe
if things turn out
as you say.

As I speak
my voice
sounds far away.

Terry Collett

Another Story 1976

His father
had been and gone;
he'd seen him off
on the last train.

Nine year since
last seen before that.

Talked of childhood
which was all
his father knew;
of cinemas and theatres
back then.

Time past
and time future
as Eliot had said.

Time present was gone
once you said it;
the now all there was
but then gone before
you could say now.

His father had a similar
moustache he had
when Benny was a child.

The same staring eyes;
same walk.

Regrets are
futile things;
he had none.

His father had gone;
the train out of sight.

Benny's wife

had welcomed
not knowing him
or the history.

But that, Benny mused,
was another story.

Terry Collett

Another War 1917

George walked
to the door
of his room.

Polly who
had been sitting
by the window said
where are you going?

I need fresh air
he said.

He went out
she followed
he walked along
the passage
down the stairs
his footsteps
walking slow
on each step.

She kept him in view
wondering if he
was going to have
another turn.

He crossed
the hall
looking
straight ahead.

She followed him
walking past
the new maid
who had replaced her
a timid girl who now
shared the room and bed
with Sally the maid
she once slept with

before George
came home
from the War
shell shocked.

George opened
the front door
went out
into the grounds.

Polly followed
closed the door
after her.

She watched
as he stopped
by the trees
peered
at the horizon.

She walked
close to him.

They're out there
some place
he said.

Who are George?
she said.

The Hun
he said.

He stared
at the trees
in the distant
swaying.

See their big guns?
he said.

She watched

the trees sway.

Keep behind me
he said to her
snipers out there
he pointed across
the grounds.

There was
no one there
just the wind
and birds
no war sounds.

Terry Collett

Anxious Stare Mcmlxxi

Only to please God
is why we are here
Dom Joe
(dear Bunny) said,

facientes voluntatem Dei,

he went and got me
macaroni cheese
for supper even though
I was late arriving
and a mug of cocoa
with skin on top,

agréable à la langue
et le cœur
a French monk said,

you can have me
anyway you choose
she said and I did,

the impudence
of the sinner
displeases God
as much
as the modesty
of the penitent
gives him pleasure
said Bernard,

from my room(cell)
I saw only the rooftop
of the abbey
and the grey slate
wet with rain,

Hugh talked of his
carpentry work

I made the chairs
in the guest house
common room
he said
he was no
George Hepplewhite
and I told him
and he sulked,

l'orgoglio viene prima
di una caduta
the Italian monk said
as we walked back
from our Thursday walk
to the abbey,

Dom Gregory stood
in the shadows
of the cloister
half in half out
arms crossed
staring into the garth,

she lay
on her bed welcoming
legs spread
her garden of Eve
visible and Elvis
sang from the Hi-fi,

I polished the choir stalls
after the office of Terce
and sunlight poured
from the high windows
on the polished wood,

blessedness is not
the reward of virtue
but virtue itself
said Gareth
quoting Spinoza
as we threw stones

at the incoming tides
on the abbey beach,

red and yellow bricks
on walls and cloister
and the church designed
by a monk and built
by local workmen
and I stared and ran
my hand along
the bricks as I walked,

ver a Dios y ser feliz
the Spanish monk said
as we worked
in the orchard
picking apples
for the refectory store,

the wooden Crucified
on the wall of my cell
aged by time and wear
at night before sleep
I would kneel there
and give it
an anxious stare.

Terry Collett

Appraisal.

I have just finished
working
on my appraisal
(at the office) .

The most
difficult part
is having
to grade yourself

on a scale
of one to four
(one equating:
fire me now

& four being:
you're lucky
to have me) .
Normally

I go for three
all across
the board,
but

this year
I've thrown in
a couple
of cheeky fours.

Written by my late son Oliver(1984-2014) (c) I have edited.

Terry Collett

Ariadne's Morning

Ariadne lies
beside Bernice
on the big bed
her once cropped
red hair
is now long
and over her shoulders.

Bernice sleeps
facing the wall.

Ariadne's
abusive father
is dead
alcohol poisoning
her mother
shacked up
with another drunk
as if she
were attracted
to that type
like a moth to flame.

She looks at her lover's
long mousey hair
the naked shoulder
visible from the duvet.

12 years together
since that pop concert
in the Park.

She wants to kiss
her awake
make love again
before work.

But she lets
her sleep

enjoys the sound
of her breathing
and her nearness.

They'd made out twice
in the night
each taking
the other
to a seventh heaven.

The sunlight pours
through the gaps
in the pink blinds.

Bird song
from outside
the window
and inwardly
a soft warm glow.

Terry Collett

Ariel & I

Ariel
sits across
opposite
from myself

looking plump
and balding

we're talking
of Tolstoy
(Ariel's
favourite
novelist)

he creates
the largest
fictional
canvases
Ariel
informs me

his large eyes
focusing
on his class
of real ale

now and then
looking at
a table
quite near us
where young girls
talk and laugh

their laughter
echoing
in the warm
evening
summer air

I prefer
Marcel Proust
I tell him

watching how
his eyes scan
the young girls

less manly
Ariel
says to me
don't like Proust
no substance
just gossip
from parties
he went to
you know he
was a queer

yes I know

wrote in bed

yes I know

he gazes
at the girls
taking in
their laughter
their bodies
their brightness

all his thoughts
of Tolstoy
put aside

I sip beer
wondering
what Tolstoy
would say here
seeing this
this canvas

intellect
dissolved in
human lust
words silent

write again
another
War and Peace
in English
now I trust.

Terry Collett

Armbands.

You worn black armbands
when your father died;
your mother made them
out of black silk strips.

It seems so old worldly now
that simple gesture
of loss and grief.

You wore them
on coats and jumpers
when you went out
to let others know
the grief stricken state
that you were in.

You look back at that
at a different time,
another grief, another loss,
and note the absence
of the black silk armbands
hardly seen in this modern age.

No sackcloth and ashes
for that other death,
yet it was felt as much
as that in heart and mind.

Even grief it seems
has its way to come and go
with fashion, no more
black cloth or features ashen.

Terry Collett

Arrived In Paris 1973

Arrived at the Hotel Napoleon.

Sonya unpacks; the concierge
pale looking unsmiling, showed
us our room. I look out the window
on to the Parisian street below.

Sonya begins to sing an aria;
she always sings an aria when
she is happy, usually a Mozart.

I have unpacked already: one
armful into a drawer. She sorts
each item into an appropriate drawer.

I move from the window and lie
on the bed, trying it out for later.

She moves with slow deliberation,
from suitcase to drawer, each item
placed into the drawer as if they
were babies into a crib. She has
a lovely figure. The aria stops.

She turns and looks at me:
Pas encore de sexe, she says
in her neat French. Mange d'abord,
I reply, eyeing her her fine features,
her soft breasts and o so much more.

Terry Collett

Art Viewers

She had class
I'll say that for her
had real class

we were in an art gallery
and I stood near
this painting by Degas
and she stopped too
and we stood next
to each other

she had this
wonderful perfume on
and she looked classy
and after we both
had gawked at
the Degas for a while

she turned
and looked at me
you like Degas?
She said

sure I like his bathing dames
and ballet dancers best
I said

she smiled a little
and said
slightly intrusive
the bathing ones

natural though
not posed as much
as some
I said

would you wish
to be painted drying

or after you were in a bath?

She said

depends who was painting

and how good they were

I said

would you?

not sure I would

wish someone to paint me

in my bath or

coming out and drying

she said

takes all types I guess

I said

yes I suppose it does

she said

coffee?

I said

coffee?

She said frowning

would you like

to have a coffee with me?

She smiled

don't think my husband

would really

appreciate that

she said

he's just ahead

with the Monets

o sorry about that

I said

another time maybe?

She looked at me

I don't think so
she said
but thank you anyway

and walked off
she had class
and a nice ass.

Terry Collett

As Before 1973

Sonya was puking
in the bidet
in the small hotel room
in Paris
after too much
bad booze.

Benny lay in bed
reading Dostoevsky.

The radio
was pushing out
Mahler's 6th
her puking played
along side.

Can I help?
he said.

She returned moans
and another round
of puking.

No sex tonight
he mused
putting the book down
and looking towards
the small shower room.

He got off the bed
and went to
the shower room
and opened the door.

Can I be
of any assistance?
he said
looking at her
kneeling there over

the bidet.

She shook her hand
and waved a hand.

He took note
of her lovely legs
her two feet
heels facing
her fine ass
smiling at him.

He went out
and closed the door
and the puking
went on as before.

Terry Collett

As Dragonflies Fly 1962

We sit on the fence
that surrounds the field,
Yehudit and I,
watching cows

move and munch,
sun on our heads,
hands by our sides
to help us balance.

Will the pond
be ok?
she says,
looking at me,

her eyes bright,
the smile forming,
the brown hair
gripped and ribboned.

Should be fine,
I say,
providing
there's none about,

except the ducks
and swans and dragonflies
hovering across
the water's skin.

We climb down
from the fence,
stretch our legs,
rub our backsides,

and walk off towards
the pond,
hand in hand.
My mother's suspicious,

Yehudit says,
wonders where I go
when I leave the house,
and asks: who

are you with?
and I say,
Benny,
the boy down

by the roadway,
whose father's
a forester.
What does she say

to that?
I ask,
feeling her
warm hand in mine,

her thumb rubbing
the back of hand's skin,
seemingly good,
but to her mother

no doubt,
a sin.
What do you
get up to?

she asks,
and I say:
nothing,
just walk

and see the birds
and trees
and sit by the pond
and watch the ducks

and swans

and dragonflies.
And what does she
say to that?

I ask,
sensing her perfume
(her mother's borrowed) ,
feeling alive,

flushing with want.
She just stares
and shakes her head
and says:

is that all?
Of course,
I say,
what else?

and she turns away
with a sigh
and that stern look
in her eye.

The pond is deserted,
except for a few ducks
and a swan
swimming around,

a dragonfly hovering
over the way.
We sit on the grass
and stare.

Then I bring her
into my side ward glance,
her body clothed
in dress of green

and black wool stockings
and whatever else beneath
I have not,

as yet,

seen.

We had sex here
a week or so ago,
back in the wooded area

out of sight,
just us alone,
except for ducks
and swans

and dragonflies
in flight

Terry Collett

As Far As We Went 1974

Dalya walked
from her tent
to the block

of showers
and went in
the place smelt

of bodies
of hot skin
of damp hair

she showered
dried herself
and came out

I came out
of the men's
shower block

all refreshed
where are you
going to?

she asked me
in the town
I replied

can I come?
I don't want
to be stuck

in my tent
with the Yank
bitch whom we've

just picked up
in Hamburg
Dalya said

already
she's started
about men

who she wants
in her bed
(sleeping bag)

where I am
going then?
I asked her

find some place
she replied
saucy cow

you can share
with young me
I told her

the Aussie
is sharing
the tent with

the Yorkshire
school teacher
you want me

to share a
tent with you?
Dalya said

just to sleep
I replied
and of course

everyone
will believe
I just sleep

in your tent?

I'm leaving
about 12

if you want
to come see
all the sights

of Hamburg
I told her
she nodded

and we met
dead on 12
and made love

in my tent
that's as far
as we went.

Terry Collett

As Girls Sleep

She sleeps as only girls sleep
dreaming of babies and diamonds
or how that rich guy got away.
She slumbers with lips pressed tight.

Her eyes flicker like flames of
a new touched fire. Her hands lay
like guardians over her womb,
beneath her dress. She dreams
of his lips. Pressed close, skin on skin.

Once upon a dream she made love
to her sister's husband. Once upon
a nightmare her husband kissed her
upon her vagina. In deep sleep she
smells of ashes from Auschwitz, her
mother's family perished amongst flames.

She rubs her nose in sleeps' hold,
scratches her head with unpainted
fingernails. Once upon a sleep she
counted aborted babes, the white
vacant coffins. She turns in her sleep,
her body moves in her favourite armchair,
too tired for bed. She has had nailed
her one Picasso print above her head.

Her husband is in Vienna, a floozy on
his arm, another between sheets,
never from love, always the lust.

She will have him back upon his return;
always his pupil, but never to learn.

Terry Collett

As Good As Dead 1963

Martha holds
the plaster statue
of the Crucified

and kisses the head
and feels the cold plaster
on her warm lips

smoothness
taste of salt
on her tongue

holds between fingers
thumb rubbing the head
feeling the beard

the chest and Sacred Heart
holds Him to her breast
tucks Him in closer

mothering Him
or is it other?
the O'Brien boy's a fart

with his touching
and words
as if she would

Mary introduced
he's a good catch
she said(Mary)

touching her
and lifting her skirt hem
lets us see them

he'd said(O'Brien)
she rocks the Crucified
against her

lets Him be near her
His arms crossed
against His chest

one finger pointing
to His Sacred Heart
she kisses His finger

licks His hands
hey
O' O'Brien said

what's the deal
why are you so stiff
with the holding hands

and such
Mary gives us a feel
she walks with her Crucified

to the bed and lies down
on her back
the Crucified held

against her
His eyes staring at her
blue and black dots

what am I to do
with the O'Brien boy?
she whispers

her warm breath
on His plaster head
it's Mary's fault

she will introduce
them to me
and I'm not wanting them

He says nothing

stares at her blankly
hands crossed

and pointing finger
His heart red and crowned
she lays Him

on the pillow
beside her
turns herself

and gazes at Him
what's to do with O' Brien?
she kisses Him

Agnus Dei
she whispers
runs a finger

along His arm
down to His feet
take O'Brien from me

keep him from me
burn his fecking fingers
for the touching

the Crucified stares at her
did He wink
or nod His head?

feck you O'Brien
Martha says
you're as good as dead.

Terry Collett

As He Has Before.

The charge nurse closes
the door behind Yiska.
Can I go home? Not yet.
When? When you are

well enough. I am well
enough. We think not.
Who are we? The nurses
and the doctors and I,

think you are not well
enough. But I feel well
enough. You are on the
inside looking out, we

are on the outside of
you looking in. So? We
see things from a much
different angle. But I feel

well. Feelings can betray.
But I feel well. You think
you are well. I am. We think
not. But what do you know?

We are professionals. But
I know what I feel inside.
The charge nurse taps his
pen on the desk, Yiska coldly

stares at him. You tried to
cut your wrists. Tried yes,
but I stopped. Not soon
enough. I am here aren't I?

The fact you decided to
cut your wrists says you
are unwell. It was how I
felt then. Feelings again.

It was a dark time. Wait
until you are better when
the dark days have gone.
You mean ECT? It helps.

Not me. Some it does.
Not me though. We saw
Improvement, we think.
You think? We professionals.

I get headaches. Side effect.
I feel sick afterwards. More
side effect. Yiska screws
her hands in her lap. The

charge nurse stares at her.
You mix well with Baruch.
He's kind. He's a patient.
He is unwell like you. I like

him. He has his problems.
Don't we all? He will not
help you. You don't help
me. He will not. I like him.

So we are informed. You
spy? We watch. Spy. We
need to watch all of our
patients. I want to go.

When you are well. Now
I want to leave here.
The hospital? Yes. No.
The room then. Here.

Yes. Ok. Yiska gets up
from the chair. The
charge nurse sits there
watching her. She draws

her nightgown tightly

about her as she leaves
the room. We are still
watching you and Baruch.

Yiska says nothing. The
door closes. She sighs.
The charge nurse folds
his fingers over his large

paunch and stares at the
door and folds away his
captured image of her
naked as he has before.

Terry Collett

As If It Was A Crime

Your mother had given you
a few coins to buy sweets

and on the way you met Fay
and you said

do you want to come
and buy some sweets?

and she said
I haven't any money

and you said
you can share mine

if you tell me what you like
but she said

my father wouldn't like it
if I had sweets he says

they rot your teeth
but she walked to the shop with you

thinking silently to herself
and outside the shop

you said
are you sure?

she nodded and stood outside
while you went in

and bought sweets
when you came out

she was waiting there
her eyes gazing at you

her tongue running over
her lips

you showed her
what you'd bought

and her eyes widened
here take one

you said
your dad won't know

if you don't tell him
she hesitated

her fingers lingering
over the bag of sweets

but what if he sees me
or smells them

on my breath?
she said fear entering her eyes

her hands falling at her sides
you put out a hand

and touched hers
it's only a sweet

it's not as if
you're having a drag of a smoke

or sipping beer
she nodded and smiled a little

best not
she said

if he finds out
he'll get angry with me

for eating sweets and lying
and you remembered

the bruises you'd seen
on her arms and thighs

that time
and you sighed thinking

as if eating sweets
was a big deal or a crime.

Terry Collett

As It Was

Ginny loved it
when the time came
For their annual trip
to the seaside

And her father rented
the house with the big garden
that lead onto the sea.
She and her brothers and sister

Looked forward to it
every year and it seemed the sun
shone almost constantly
And the house seemed

as it was the year before
nothing changed nothing new
just the same rooms
and outlook and young Lily the maid

who came each year too
to help their mother
around the house
and watch

the younger children.
Her mother
Was the organiser
the one who seemed most near

to the children who seemed
to know the children's needs
and wants and tried to keep
her husband happy

and allow him
his space and quiet
which he valued most of all.
Ginny liked it

when the sea was out
and there was plenty of sand
to play on to make a sand castle
with a moat and drawbridge

made from small pieces of driftwood
found on the beach.

But once her mother died
the seaside house

seemed less welcoming
the sea seemed

hardly ever to go out
than it was back again

the sun was less warm
less friendly

and her father
would mope

around the house
moaning and groaning

In his grief and bellowing
at Lily the maid

to do this and do that
making her cry

and only at night
when all were asleep

and Ginny was snuggled
Down in bed did it seem

as it was when her mother
would enter the room

and sit on the bed
and smile and whisper

the words she used to
placing a ghostly hand

on Ginny's brow
and kiss her cheek.

Ginny remembered the house
By the sea years later

with the yellowy sand
And walking with Lily

the maid
hand in hand.

Terry Collett

As Long As Mr Eddington Was There.

You think more
of Mr Eddington
her father said
than almost

anything else
and she knew she did
but her father drew the line
at her having him in her bed

and her mother
wasn't so keen either
I don't want cat's hairs
on the pillowcases

or on those sheets
or blankets
and so Mr Eddington
had to stay out

of her bed
and be content
to sit by the window
or on the window ledge

or on the small carpet
by the chest of drawers
and don't feed
the darn cat

at the table
her father said
it isn't polite
to have cat's spittle

on your hands
while eating
and so she sat
on the chair

with one foot
on the stool
in that
I don't give

a damn pose
and Mr Eddington
sat himself
comfortably

by the stool
and she sang him
one of those
Rock and Roll songs

she liked or recited
an Ezra Pound poem
which her father disliked
or she put her hands

behind her head
and whistled part
of an Elvis Presley song
which her mother said

wasn't ladylike at all
and to sit like that
her father said
with your leg up

with underclothes showing
is just not on at all
now sit like a lady
would sit

he said
and there were times
Jezebel thought
she wished them

both dead

so long as Mr Eddington
was there
she just didn't care.

Terry Collett

As Now The Pain

The grief will lessen,
the pain become
a mild ache, some said,
after the death
and the son dead.

Somewhat
like telling
someone
who is drowning
the substance
of water.

I cannot
measure out
the length of time
of my grief,
or how deep
the pain goes
by plunging a knife
into the wound
as if seeing
like some cake
or meat
if it is cooked.

I see each
morning dawn
shadowy,
as if ghosts
walk through
or clouds mask
what little light
I see or catch
or gone out
like puffed
out match

Even in silence

I sense his
being there
in the cool
morning air;
feel the loss
like sand
through fingers,
although his image
ghostlike lingers.

And at close of day,
when moon's
kingdom comes,
stars tell lies
by being there
when maybe
long ago they
burnt out
or were lost.

And you,
my son,
that last talk
we had,
mundane,
yet real,
tangible,
real then
as now the pain.

Terry Collett

As One Huge Joke.

Ed Sutcliffe said
he saw his cousin
walk from bathroom
to bedroom (not his)

starkers
nigh on
had to push
my eyes back in

the sockets
he added
you muck pig
O'Brien said

you did it
on purpose
so you could
have a gawk

I never did
it was just
one of those things
never in a month

of Sundays
would I have gawked
Sutcliffe said
is she worth

the gawking?
you asked
o to be sure she is
O'Brien said

would Eddie here
be gawking
at a titless wonder?
no to be sure

she's got to be worth
the eye strain
but not my cousin
Sutcliffe said

I'd not be waiting
outside the bathroom
to gawk at her
coming out

so say you Sucky
you lecherous bronco
I think I saw her once
you said

hasn't she got
white blonde hair
like yourself
and more curves

than the figure eight?
no
Sutcliffe said
that's not her

that's my mother
you've seen
you don't gawk
your mother

do you Eddie?
O'Brien said
what you take me for
of course not

Sutcliffe said
he's just joking
with you
you said

nothing meant

Sutcliffe walked ahead
in a strop
four letter words

coming over
his thin shoulder
poor old Eddie
you sure take

the urine
out of him
you said
ah it's nothing

O'Brien said
he'll get over it
as the bishop
got over the actress

and sure enough
as soon as you all
reached the school gates
Sutcliffe was his old self

wanting a quick drag
on O'Brien's smoke
thinking all
the old patter
as one huge joke.

Terry Collett

As Per Usual

It'll not be the first time he'll
Have said that and not meant
It and she knows oh how she
Knows that he will probably
Say it again and bring her the
Usual flowers and maybe a new
Dress two sizes too big for her
And have that look on his face
That look he used to give his
Mother when he was late home
Or if he'd not noticed her having
Had her hair done and she knows
He'll get down on his knees and
Pretend to beg for forgiveness
Yet at the back of his mind he's
Already imagining the girl in the
Office bent over her desk and him
Doing what he thinks he does best
And now as she waits for him to
Come home knowing he'll have
The words sitting on the end of
His tongue like obedient puppies
Ready for the false apology and
The flowers in one hand and the
Maybe new dress in the other and
Even though she will be able to
Smell the other woman's scent and
See her hairs on his jacket he'll
Have that dumb look about him
As if butter wouldn't melt as if ice
Wouldn't drown his drink and as
She waits for him she really just
Wants him not to come home at
All wants him to stay with the other
Woman soak into her sheets and
Into her skin with his two bit morality
And sin oh that he didn't come home
At all she mumbles as she hears his
Key in the lock and that stupid look

On his face as the door opens up and
The flowers and bag with dress in each
Hand and hair limp by the rain she knows
He'll say he loves her and she knows he
Will do it again the liar her lover the pain.

Terry Collett

As She Lay Sleeping.

It's the fifth hotel room
in as many days
the fifth morning waking
and standing there

by the window
watching her sleep
and he thinks
no one sleeps

like she does
no one seems to enjoy
sleep like she does
as if she were born to it

and he lets his eyes
rest on her
for a few moments
lets them move

over her lying there
wanting to climb
back in bed
and make love to her

but not while she's sleeping
of course
although he did
years before

with some other woman
that plump one
who had drunk herself
into a slumber

and had said
before she had nodded off
we must make love
and so he had

but it had been no fun
it had no satisfaction
he recalls
taking in

the sleeping woman
before him how
she barely seems to breathe
as she sleeps

and he moves closer
and puts his ear
near to her
careful not to let

his breath wake her
his warm breath
stir her awake
she is moody if woken

before time
will sulk over breakfast
down stairs
in the hotel restaurant

with a face like thunder
sitting at the table
staring down
at her cereal bowl

picking at the food
sipping coffee
no best to let her sleep
he thinks as he moves away

takes in her red night dress
the one he'd bought
in Chicago
and the store girl

had looked at him

as he stood there
with it in his hands
and smiled

and the girl had
a kind of sexy smile
one of those smiles
that seemed to say

wish we were an item
wish that red nightie
was for me
but it wasn't

and he left the store
with it wrapped up
in a neat package
and gave it to her

just before
they came away
and her eyes opened up
when she saw it

and she's worn it
the last five nights
and it has soaked her up
into its cloth now

her perfume
her perspiration
her skin touching it
and it enfolding her

like a mother
and o look at her
sleeping there
he says to himself

look how she sleeps
her red hair
matching her nightdress

o he wants to hold her

and kiss her
and feel her close
o how he wants
to enter her

and explode within her
she lets out
a soft sigh
he stands still

his hand in his pockets
she breathes out
one long sigh
if only she would wake

he muses
his tongue
at the corner
of his mouth

if only she would turn now
and say
come on
come and make love to me

but she doesn't
she moves her leg
her toes move
her buttocks twitch

her fingers scratch an itch
wake up Sweetheart
he mumbles
wake up

his disappointed self says
wake up you bitch.

Terry Collett

As You Walked One Summer's Day.

These lanes are very narrow
you said
walking with Jane

from the parsonage
where she lived
to where the farm road began

Are they?
she replied
I've never thought about it

just that the hedges are high
and the birds chock full
in them and their songs

Yes
you said
They are

and in London
there are no hedges
or narrow lanes

and the only birds
are sparrows
and pigeons

and you wanted
to take hold
of her hand

and squeeze gently
the flesh
and sense her pulse

but you didn't
you put your hands
in your jean pockets

and gazed sideways on
at her and her dark hair
and her profile

and the scent of her
like lavender
as if she'd dived

into a wide field of it
and embraced
the flowers and stalks

What bird song is that?
she asked
No idea

you replied
moving closer to her
the scent getting stronger

the desire to be closer
taking hold but still at bay
It's a blackbird

she said
You'll learn them all
the birdsongs

and where and how
they nest and in what months
and you nodded

and saw how
the summery dress
moved and swayed

as she walked
the flowered pattern
like a field moved

by a soft breeze

and her sandaled feet
touching the gravelled lane

and you thinking
how it would be
for them to be held

and kissed by you
if she were beside you
lying in a field

or in one
of those tall woods
and you pursed your lips

and she looked up at the sky
her eyes gathering
the blueness

and whiteness of clouds
and she said
Monet would have captured that so well

and You
you muttered
He would capture you well

each aspect
of your face
and hair and eyes

and she smiled
and looked at you and said
I'd want to be captured by Renoir

have his arthritic fingers
clutching brush
and capture me

and maybe secretly
lust after me
and she blushed

and turned away
and you thought
Oh yes yes yes

but said nothing
just gazed
and breathed in

her being
her beauty
all there

for you to view
the eyes
the hair

the profile
the way her lips smiled
and sway of walk

and the tall hedges
seemed to explode
with the wild bird's talk.

Terry Collett

As Young Boys Play.

Christina sat
on you lap
you sat
on the low brick wall

around the playground
leaning against
the wire fence
the summer sun

warming your head
as she sat
her grey skirt
drifted up

revealing thighs
over on the playing field
Goldfinch kicked the football
but missed the goal

(two coats put down
wide spaces apart)
and pushed his hands
in the air

with frustration
she leaned in close
kissed your cheek
her hair blocking

the view of field
her hands inside
your jacket
your one hand

about her waist
the other resting
on her skirt
covered thigh

there's no where private
for us to be
she said
no nook or cranny

to be alone
her small breasts pressed
against your chest
her warm breath

invading your ear
I've heard some
go into the woods
over the way

you said
no good
she replied
prefects go there

too often
to be much use
she loosened her tie
and unbuttoned

her blouse
shifting on your lap
she set herself
more comfortable

the grey skirt
riding higher
showing more thigh
she pulled the skirt

down to her knees
as a prefect went by
catching her eye
you should be

on the playing field

not here
like that together
the prefect said

looming overhead
Christina got off
your lap
and brushed down

her grey skirt
with small hands
you stood up
giving the prefect

a small smile
and wandered off
toward where
Goldfinch played

with ball
with boys
you saw Christina
saunter away

her hips swaying
her hand
giving a wave
then she was gone

amongst the other girls
who stood and stared
at boys at play
her small wet lips

imprinted
on your cheek
the kiss would be
unwashed away

you blew
from open palm
a secret kiss

to touch her

as she watched
the young boys play.

Terry Collett

Ash Wednesday Once

Ash Wednesday. The dab of ash
On the forehead by the old priest.
The way his shaking thumb pushed
It there. Lent begun. What are you
Going to give up? Peggy asked him
Afterwards on the way from church.
I haven't thought about it Henry replied.
You ought to she said. The feel of the
Priest's thumb still itched his forehead.
And what to put in its place in case the
Devil creeps in she added giving him a
Sideward glance. He sensed her glance.
Last year I gave up the smokes he said.
For two days she said. It was a try he
Muttered. No point trying if you don't
Have the will to succeed. He kept quiet.
There was that perfume of hers coming
To him on the wind. The perfume she
Wore that day they had sex in the school
Gym during the lunch hour before double
Science. He sniffed the air. It was still there.
The first time. The sound of others out
In the grounds. The mats and ropes and
Gym apparatus all around them. The gym
Mats were rough. I've given up chocolate
Peggy said suddenly pricking the balloon
Of his memory. I'm putting in an Ave in its
Place she added. Maybe I'll give up on
Chocolate too Henry said. You hardly eat
Chocolate said she. I can hardly fail then
Henry put in. That misses the whole point.
She stared at him. And what would put in
Its place? He thought of the way she lay
There in the school gym. The perfume in
The air. Meditate on the seven deadly sins
He muttered putting his hand in hers.
She squeezed his hand. Flesh on flesh.
Give up the smokes she said. Put a Pater
Noster in its place. It was Ash Wednesday.

Sex in the gym. Back then. She and him.

Terry Collett

Asleep Or Blind 1962

The girl Sheila
seemed quiet lunchtime.

We sat on the grass
looking towards school.

Rolly said
why sit with her
come ball
with us Benny.

But I sat with her
and we talked
but she was shy
and didn't say much.

I kept the conversation
going as best
I could.

I reckoned
she wanted to kiss
but I wasn't sure
and didn't want to
not in front
of the mates
kicking ball
so I didn't.

Then the bell went
and she went off
towards school.

I met up with Rolly
how was it
with her then?
he said.

She was shy

and quiet
I said.

They are the ones
to watch
have you into things
before you can say
how's your father
Rolly said
not bad arse
on her though
he added
as we walked across
the field towards
our afternoon
brainwashing episode.

How was the game?
I said.

Lost three goals to one
you'd have made
a difference
he said.

How is that
I'm crap at football
I said.

Better than Thorpe
he couldn't save a ball
if came at him
at a mile an hour.

I laughed.

Sheila had gone
by then
but I guess
she had a nice figure
and as Rolly said
about her behind

have to be asleep
not to notice
or blind.

Terry Collett

At Helen's For Tea.

After school
Helen's mother took you home to tea
and she was wheeling

the big pram along the pavement
with you on one side
and Helen on the other

and she said
hold onto the pram
while we cross the roads

I don't want anything
to happen to you
and as you crossed

the busy roads
you kept glancing over
at Helen with her plaited hair

parted in the middle
and her thin wired glasses
and her raincoat

buttoned tight
against the wind
and her small hand

clutching the pram handle tightly
and beside you
Helen's mother

short and stocky
pushing and puffing
and her eyes dark as night

and kind at the same time
and when you reached their home
and went inside

and she took off your coat
you went with Helen
into the sitting room

with a coal fire blazing
and the smell
of drying clothes

and past dinners
and Helen said
do you want to see my dolls

and the doll's house
my daddy made
out of boxwood

with lights you can turn off and on?
sure ok
you said

and you followed her
into her bedroom
where her toys and dolls

were laid up along the wall
next to her bed
and she took up a doll

and held her out to you
and said
this is my favourite

this is Jenny
and you said
hi Jenny how you doing?

and Helen smiled
her slightly goofy smile
and you liked that

her smile

and her eyes large as duck eggs
behind the thick lens

and she handed the doll
to you to hold
and you held the doll

and kissed the head
and hugged it close
thinking glad the other boys

can't see me now
here with this girl
and kissing and holding

the darn doll
out of some small boy love
and shyness

and you know
they'd laugh out loud
and point their tough boy fingers

and you're glad
they aren't there
just Helen

and her little girl love and kindness
against their rough ways
and small boy toughness.

Terry Collett

At Midday 1973

We'd been
and stood
by the Arc de Triomphe
had coffee in some street cafe

and Sonya
talked about existentialism
and Sartre and Camus

I sipped my beer
and watched her lips moving
and how she had brought
her blonde hair
into a fine ponytail

and the top
she was wearing
was nice and tight

and kind of hugged her breasts
and her eyes
so ice blue
I wanted to drink there
or maybe swim around

one creates ones own truth
she said
there is no objective truth

and I noticed how
she sat
the way her legs
were crossed

and how her foot dangled
as she spoke
sandalled foot
red-painted toenails

or there is also
the leap of faith idea
she went on

and I wondered
if when we got back
to our hotel late evening
and she was still sober
or I

whether we would
have sex and that
kinky foreplay
like we did late night
or that time
at midday.

Terry Collett

At The Convent 1980

Susan finds
the convent
just outside
the city
of Paris.

She pulls on
a bell rope
and a nun
dressed in white
opens up
a small grid
and peers out.

Are you our
girl Susan?
The nun asks
in her French.

Yes, I am,
Susan says.

The nun's key
unlocks the
black gate
and Susan
enters in
and the nun
locks the gate.

Goodbye, Jude,
she says in
her tired mind,
following
the old nun.

She ought to
have told him,
not left him

at the train
station like
she had and
not told him
about her
becoming
a nun in
a convent.

He had asked
her if she
would marry him
and she had
not said no,
but left him
thinking she
might in time.

He had waved
her off not
knowing she
was going
off from him
forever.

She follows
the old nun
down cloisters
white and sparse
and chilly.

She passes
a statue
with flowers
and tickets
with requests
for prayers.

She wonders
about Jude,
and what he
is doing,

what he thinks.

A bell tolls.

There is a
square of sky
visible
above her.

A bird sings.

Another bell
from somewhere
gently rings.

Terry Collett

At The High Lodge.

Auntie played the accordion
While others sang Goodnight
Irene in a discordant chorus
And the gas lamps had been lit
And you sat there amidst it all
Remembering the sound of crickets
On the way up to the high lodge
In the evening darkness with only
Uncle's torch and the glow-worms
To cut through the blanket sky
Of black and London a long way
Off now and the sound of traffic
And bright lights and the smell
Of coal dust and fumes and sitting
There watching Auntie play and sing
And her fingers moving over the
Keyboard and the sense of tiredness
And the countryside smell entering
Into you and dreams of Jolly Rogers
And cowboy shootouts waiting for
You in the upstairs bedroom with its
Garden spiders in corners and darkness
After Uncle's lamp went out and you
Imaging Mother in some far off train
Station still waving to you and London
Smells and lights hanging there about.

Terry Collett

At Tilly's House 1965

I went to Tilly's house
after work
got the bus there
walked the country lane.

Her mother
opened the door.

O its you
she said.

I nodded
in affirmation.

You best come in
she said grudgingly
how was Richmond?

I hesitated for a moment
had she guessed
or was she fishing.

It was fine
I said.

She closed the door
after me
Tilly was in Richmond
the same time as you
she said
standing at the doorway
to the living room.

Was she?
God what
a coincidence
if I'd know
we could have met
I said.

Yes couldn't you
she said
and walked off.

I sat on a sofa
no one else
was there
her sister
and brothers
were out.

After a few moments
Tilly came
didn't know
you were coming
she said.

Thought I'd
surprise you
I said.

You have
she said
she sat down
Mum knows you
were at Richmond
the same time
as I was
although she
doesn't know
we met
I think
she suspects.

I thought she might
by her manner
how are you?
I said.

All right
work is a bore

but it pays my bills
and allows me
to get the clothes
I want and not
what my mother
buys any more.

She kissed me
briefly
and you how are you?
she said.

Better now
after that kiss
I said
wishing her old lady
wasn't there
so we go
and try out
Tilly's bed.

Terry Collett

Attempted Escape.

Each morning Tess waited nervously for the nursing officer to arrive on the locked ward, and spot on time each morning he came with his small black briefcase and went to his office on the locked ward of the asylum, and after a few minutes she was allowed in for her daily requested interview.

She sat in the chair opposite him, he fresh from the sane world, sat there with his brushed teeth and groomed hair, intent look behind his glasses.

When can I get out of his ward and home? she asked him each morning; when we consider you are ready and safe to be let out, he replied each day with the same calm voice, the same deep tones. And off she'd go to begin another day with those whom she considered mad or seemingly dead.

Every day at the same time they would bring along the meals from the kitchen; they would unlock the double doors, bring in the trays of meals from a trolley, leave the doors unattended for the time it took to bring in the trays, and then locked the doors again. Tess waited and watched every time they came timing by the clock on the wall how long it took and how long the doors were unlocked.

This day she waited; time ticked slowly, as she stood in her dressing gown by the doorway to the bedrooms and watched as they unlocked the thick double doors.

She waited until they unlocked the doors
and entered with the first of the trays,
then she ran like one possessed, out of
the doors and along the corridors and
heard the commotion behind her as she
ran, and the shouting and screaming and
calls, and the thundering footsteps behind
and then two burly male nurses tackled
her to the ground and held her there
beneath their mass and smelly breath,
seeing the lights on the ceiling flicker on
and off, not far away a woman screamed,
nearby she heard a man's rough cough.

Terry Collett

Aunt Edna And Her Black Mask

Your Aunt Edna
had asthma
and she carried around
a big black

asthmatic mask
which frightened
the life out of you
especially when

she put it over
her mouth and nose
and her eyes went
big and dark

and she said
it's ok Tony
nothing to worry about
it's to help me breathe

and she managed
to laugh
and you kind of relaxed
and watched

as she sat down
and closed her eyes
and breathed in
and her breath

came back
of its own accord
and then she put
the mask down

and she was herself again
and her dark hair
was curled and wavy
and she looked like

an actress when
she wasn't gasping
for breath
and didn't have

that awful mask
over her face
and some days
she took you

to the park nearby
and watched you
run and play
or sat with you

on a bench
when she needed
to catch her breath
and you liked the park

with its tall trees
and wide green spaces
and the green
painted railings

that went all around
and there was that
gateway you went in
and you remember dogs

running and their owners
throwing sticks or balls
but you just sat
with Aunt Edna

as she put on her mask
to find her breath
and you and she
not knowing then

that hiding behind

the asthma
was ugly Mr Death.

Terry Collett

Auntie And Hand Washing

You made your way from the john
to the dining table
and Auntie said

have you washed your hands?
yes
you said

are you sure?
Auntie asked
looking at you

with her fixed stare
and the black mutt
under the table

gazed at you too
I washed them this morning
you said

let me see your hands
Auntie said
and so you held out your hands

and she turned them over and up
and held them looking at them
you're meant to wash them

after going to the toilet each time
she said
not just

when you get up
in the morning
she released your hands

and you looked at them
as if they were suddenly there
before you for the first time

so you had best wash them
Auntie said
before I dish up your dinner

and so you went back
to the wash room
and turned on the tap

and taking soap
between your hands
you washed and rinsed

and dried them
on the white towel
on the rail and went back

to the dining room
and showed your aunt
that's better

she said
now go sit down
and wait for your dinner

and the black mutt
put its chin on your lap
waiting in anticipation

for titbits from your plate
and Auntie called out
from the kitchen

remember to say your prayer
before meals
and you said ok

and muttered
thank you for what I'm about to eat
may there be few vegetables

and lots of meat

and the mutt's dribble
wet your thigh

its jaw lingering there
giving you
its dark eyed stare.

Terry Collett

Auntie And Mutt.

Auntie cut the rind
off the bacon
and offered it
to the dog

but before the dog
could put his lips to it
you made off with it
down the cast iron stairs

beside the barrack block
and the dog followed you
barking as it did so
and once you reached the ground

you went off
onto the grass
and the dog
chased you

and jumped up at you
trying to reach
the bacon rind
you held between fingers

and Auntie called over
the metal rail
let the mutt have it
don't tease him

and so you bit
the rind in half
and gave the mutt one half
and ate the other yourself

but sometimes after Auntie
put the bacon rind
in the dog's bowl
you picked it up

and tossed it
over the balcony rail
onto the ground below
and the dog raced down

the stairs after it
but now and then
you pretended
to toss it over

and after the dog
raced off
you would hold it
over the side of the rail

and called to the mutt
and said
I still got it mutt
and the dog raced back

up the stairs
and you sat there
on the metal landing
and the dog came

and licked and nuzzled you
and you gave the dog
the bacon rind
and he licked you

and wagged its tail
and Auntie called out
what are you up to?
what are you doing now?

Terry Collett

Auntie's Mutt

Auntie'd cut off
the bacon rind

and throw it
for the dog

and you'd grab it
and run down

the stairs with it
and the dog'd

run down after you
and the bacon rind

yapping at your heels
and you'd hold

the bacon rind up
and the mutt'd jump up

at it and you'd move it
higher and higher

and the mutt'd jump
higher and higher

until at last
he'd grab the bacon rind

between his teeth
and pull it

from your fingers
and run off

with his prize
and you'd stand there

clapping your hands
ready for the next

thrown out
bacon rind

from Auntie's hand
up on the balcony.

Terry Collett

Austen's Pottery Class 1959

Austen handed out
lumps of brown clay
and dumped it
in front
of each boy
in the classroom
onto a wooden desk.

I broke off
a piece of clay
like he said
flattened it
as a base.

Then rolled out
another piece
into a narrow
oval strip
about a foot long.

We had to twirl it
around the base
to make a pot
then smooth down
the joins.

Austen then walked
among the boys
with his stare
through thin
wire-framed glasses.

He stopped
by my desk
what's that?
he said.

A pot Sir
I replied.

He stared at it
bring it
to the front
he said.

I picked up
the clay pot
on the palm
of my hand
walked
to the front
of class.

Lift it up
so all can see
he said.

I lifted it up.

This is how
NOT
to make a pot
he said
Coles has
obviously
not been listening
or watching
what I have
been saying
or showing.

A few kids
sniggered
out of fear
of not doing so
rather than mirth.

Had you been
watching me
or listening
to me Coles?

he said.

Yes Sir
I said.

It does Not
look like it.

He took the pot
slammed it
on to his desk
shooed me
away from him
plopping
the misshaped clay
in my palm.

Go sit down Coles.

I took
my lump of clay
and sat down.

Other kids
stared ahead
shit scared
of Austen
to look away.

I stared at him
taking in
his stern features
and pockmarked skin
and grinned within.

Terry Collett

Awkward 1961

Jane taught me
all about the life cycle
of a butterfly
about the various kinds
and colours and patterns.

That day(Saturday)
we were on the Downs
we sat on the grass
and looked out
over the surrounding
countryside.

The sky she described
as a Blackbird egg blue
and clouds like cotton wool.

She was good at
describing things
by other things.

I looked at her
sideways on
and took in
her black hair
and her structured features
and brown eyes.

Her hands were
around her knees.

She wore a summery dress
and white ankle socks.

I felt warmed
by her being so near
a smell of apples
about her.

Benny have you seen
that Lizbeth recently?
she said
(we hadn't talked
of Lizbeth for some time) .

She came the other week
one Saturday
rode over on
her bike
I said.

Do you like her?
She asked.

She's all right
I didn't ask her
to come over
she just came
while I was helping
my dad saw logs
I said.

What did she want?
Jane asked.

Me I guess
I said.

Is she still after
sex with you?
Jane said.

I guess she is
but I wouldn't
you know that
I said.

Jane looked at me
I don't understand her
why at her age
does she want that?

Jane said.

No idea

I said.

We became silent
and stared straight ahead.

Terry Collett

Baby Loss.

The nurse said,
your baby's dead,
can't hear a heartbeat.

I just looked at her,
said Fran,
as if she'd sworn at me,
as if that was it nine months,
that was it,
nothing just gone
in a split second,
it was there
then it wasn't.

I said,
are you sure?

She said,
yes, nothing here,
no beat, nothing.

I looked at her
as if it was some kind of joke,
something out there unreal.

I wanted
for her to say,
April fool, caught you
out there, didn't I,
but she didn't
she just gazed
at me dumbly,
as if I was just
another woman
who'd missed
out this time,
it was just
a matter
of trying again.

I began to cry,
not just that
ordinary kind of cry,
but a deep throated,
deep down the guts cry.

She looked at me,
and I could see nothing,
but one big blur
of blue uniform.

I wanted to wake up
from the dream
nightmare kind of shit,
not believe it real,
not one miserable bit.

Terry Collett

Back To How It Was 1957

Benny waits for you on the balcony
of the flats outside his parents place,
he's looking down at the milkman
in his horse-drawn cart. He turns as
you approach: Hi Enid, he says, just
looking at the milkman and his horse,
wondering what it'd be like to ride him.

You look over the balcony at the horse
attached to the cart. With or without
the milk cart? You ask. Without of
course, he says. The milkman gets
down from the cart, and selects milk
from crates at the back, and walks
with two in each hand to a doorstep
out of view. I quite fancy riding that,
he says, be a proper cowboy then
wouldn't I? You nod, I guess you
would, you say, looking at his quiff
of brown hair, his hazel eyes peering
down. My dad's back to his old ways
again, you say, looking at Benny to
see what he will say. Benny turns
and looks at you: has he hit you again?
He did last night, you say, not going
into too much detail. The big suck,
Benny says, thought he'd changed.

He stares at you: does he mind you
being with me? He didn't say anything
about not seeing you this time, you say.

Benny looks at you, trying to see if
there are any visible bruises, but
there aren't any where he can see.

Benny looks over the balcony again.

The milkman takes four more bottles

to another doorstep out of sight.

Thought he'd be back to his old ways, thought it was too good to last, Benny says. You look over the balcony too. The horses eats from a nose bag. It's the wrong colour horse though, Benny says, needs to be black to be any good for a cowboy. I suppose it is, you say, looking as your father walks from the flats darkly over the way.

Terry Collett

Bad Start To Another Day 1959

Anne entered the room
where the doctor was
with Sister Paul;
You followed behind.

Ah there you are,
said the nun,
the doctor wishes
to see if your leg stump
has healed sufficiently
to try on
your artificial leg.

The doctor looked
at me:
why is the boy here?
He said.

Because if he isn't here
I ain't,
Anne said.

It invades
patient privacy,
the doctor said.

If he goes I go,
Anne said.

The nun pulled a face:
it's how she is doctor,
Benny won't
get in the way.

All right,
the doctor said
unhappily,
lie on the bed please,
he added.

Anne handed me
her crutches
and lay on the bed.

The doctor pulled up
her dress and looked
at her leg stump
and felt it.

The nun looked
on frowning.

I stood by looking
at the doctor.

Does it hurt?
He said.

Most of the time,
Anne said.

Does it hurt
when I touch it?

Course it does
what do you
fecking think,
Anne said moodily.

Language Anne,
the nun said,
sorry about that doctor.

No need
to apologise
I know
what children
are like,
he said.

He fiddled

around more.

How long
are you going
to be touching my stump?
I told you it hurts,
Anne said.

The doctor sighed
and pulled down
her dress:
best give it
another few weeks,
he said.

He went over
and washed his hands
in the sink.

Right Anne you
can get up now,
the nun said.

Anne sat up
and gestured
for me to give her
her crutches
which I did.

Anne said:
can I go now
or do you want
to touch me again?

You can go Anne,
the nun said
eyeing her angrily.

Anne got off the bed
and crutched herself
out of the room.

I followed behind her
down the passageway
a bad start
to another day.

Terry Collett

Bad Thoughts And Fears Mcmlxviii

Dom Thomas
sat in an armchair
and smiled
his large eyes sparkled
parlare con Dio come si
fa per me he said
I said I would try,

smell of incense
in the cloisters
after mass
as I walked to the library
to help sort books,

the tall thin monk
shaved wood slivers
off the block in a vice,

I watched his hands
grip the tool he said
le travail de Dieu est
tout bon travail,

the work of God
is all good work
I mused later
mowing the grass
behind the church
and the monks' cemetery
sun above me shining,

la luce del sole
che splende su di me
birds in the surrounding trees
making song
molehills among the graves,

molehills entre las tumbas
the Spanish monk said

looking beside me
in the cemetery
he walked off
shaking his tonsured head,

pour moi la prière
est une poussée du cœur
St Therese wrote
so I read in the book
in the common room
at the abbey,

rain on the roof
of the church
as seen from the guest's room
black and shiny
as black leather,

sans amour les actes
même les plus brillants
comptent comme rien
Thérèse de Lisieux,

acts done without love
count as nothing
I recalled Therese saying
and my deeds
seemed so then,

bell tolled for Matins
I walked down
the creaky stairs
to the door
and Dom Matthew met
and unlocked
the church door
and I gazed
at the 5.30am church
in utter silence
and listened
for God's breath in my ears
to drive away

bad thoughts and fears.

Terry Collett

Baltimore.

Baltimore.

Met him there,

beefcake type,
more hard brawn

than soft brain.
Yet there was

that aspect
of him that

haunted at
nights after

he went back
home to his

wife and his
other life.

Opened up,
and spat out,

chewed upon,
left alone,

far too much,
all too long.

Terry Collett

Bar Talk

You remember that dame
who didn't want to talk to
you and then later she did

by which time you had met
some other chick who really
turned you on? Joey said well

she's like that with most guys
she thinks it gives her a kind
of power you know the type

was probably kept under her
old man's thumb or maybe her
brothers kept her in her place

and she wants to break out or
in whatever the case may be
so I shouldn't take it to heart

Bud don't let it get to you
anyway if you see her again
give her the cold shoulder or

spin her some yarn that you
only go out with good looking
dames and Bud looked over at

Joey who was smoking a cigar
and holding a glass of beer and
said I know dames I was born

from one and I had four sisters
all of whom were nice chicks
and really made my youth one

hell of a heaven if that ain't a
contradiction so I don't need
no lessons on dames see I know

them and so Joey shrugged his
shoulders and sipped his beer
and drew heavy on his cigar

and said so be it next thing
you'll be telling me is you've
slept with your darn ma.

Terry Collett

Bar Talk Outside Tangiers

You entered the bar
at the base camp
outside Tangiers

the morning sun was out
like a fresh orange
on a blue plate of sky

some old Moroccan
was in a corner
playing a guitar

your mouth felt like
the inside
of an Arab's sandal

Mamie was sitting
at the bar
on a wonky stool

you woke up then?
she said
after last night
thought you'd be out
for the count all day

no I can take
a good night out
you replied
taking the stool
next to her
and breathing in
the hashish air
and smell of salt
from the beach

the guy behind the bar
asked what you wanted
and you said

rum and coke
and a salad roll
and he went off

and you looked at Mamie
her tight curls
and snub nose
and interesting
fall into me
eyes

what time
did you leave my tent
last night?
you asked

when your tent companion
turned up and almost
got on top of me

ah yes
sorry about that
Will does tend to come
at awkward times
I think he went off
to a trip to Marrakesh
in the yellow
ex army truck

almost crushed me
she said

good while it lasted
then eh?

no it wasn't
she said
besides you
were out for the count
after we did things

was I?

you know you were

don't recall a thing
you said

thank you Mr. Romantic
she moaned

o come on Sweet thing
you know it
meant a lot to me
having you near

she looked at
the old Moroccan
playing the guitar
I am glad
he doesn't sing too
she said

she sipped her Bacardi
and sat silent

the guy brought
your rum and coke
and salad roll
and you began
to eat and sip

can I have some
of your roll?
she asked

sure
you said
and broke off
half of the roll
and gave it to her

thanks
she said and smiled

you felt her knee
touch yours at the bar
naked flesh
on jean cloth
her jean shorts
ended
at her high thigh

you remembered kissing
that thigh
the night before
amongst other things

the smell of her perfume
and the mustiness
of the tent
the faraway voices
and guitar sounds

some party
at the beach
the night before

hoping no scorpion
had crept in
during the day

feeling her
beneath you
and the sound of sea
far off
and sight
of moon's glow
through tent's skin

some one sang
another laughed
some one puked up
away off
too much to drink

but you and Mamie
had a good night
you mused
I think.

Terry Collett

Base Camp Malaga 1970

The coach drew up
at the base camp
in Malaga.

Miriam and I
got off
and eyed the scene
the area of tents
and bars
and camp restaurant
and the club house
where they had discos
in the evening until late.

We followed our guide
who showed us
where our tents were.

I was with an ex-army guy
Miriam was with
some other dame.

See you later
at the bar
she said.

Will do
I replied.

The ex-army unzipped
the tent
we clambered in
with our bags
then he zipped up again.

Better than
the last camp
he said morosely.

I placed my bag
to one side
and got out
my sleeping bag
and lay on it
to rest
for a short while.

He unpacked
his sleeping bag
(better than mine
probably ex-army)
and lay down
staring at the roof
of the tent.

He talked about
his army days
and about his mother's
new boyfriend
and how he didn't
get on with him
and how he only left
the army because
of his nerves
and depression.

I listened
but in my mind's eye
it was Miriam
there undressing
and I thinking
that a blessing.

Terry Collett

Bath Sharing 1975

Come up
and see me sometime
she'd joke

knowing she lived
on the ground floor
and that seeing her

was never enough
for even that
short journey

I can offer you
coffee
and coffee cake

and maybe some fruit
you like fruit
don't ya?

Huh?
You know, fruit?
And she'd smile

that smile of hers
the kind of smile
to launch or sink

a whole lot of ships
and seamen too I guess
her coffee making skills

were OK
and the coffee cake
was fine in a dry kind

of crumbly way
but the fruit
well now that

was something else
and you had to be
in the mood

for the fruit
I mean there it was
laid out for you

ready for you
to indulge
get stuck in there boy

don't let it go soft
and she'd laugh
like she did

if I was kind of
getting to her
when we shared a bath.

Terry Collett

Bath Times As A Child

Bath times as a child were
a mixture of joy and fear,
Lulu remembers, rubbing
her neck dry after her bath,
holding her long hair out of
the way with her spare hand.

You must wash under the arms
and your neck and between
your legs, her mother said to
her as a child, leaning over her,
pouring hot water over her head,
feeling she was drowning, she
remembers, sitting on the edge
of the bathtub, almost seeing
her mother standing there with
her usual critique and that wet
hand slapping her legs or hand
if she missed an area of skin.

Lulu rubs under her arms, raises
her hand upward as if reaching
for the moon or stars. As she
leans forward to rub her feet,
pushing the towel between toes,
she recalls her putting her feet
into her mother's lap as she dried
them with harsh rubs, pushed
the towel between toes roughly,
causing wittingly or unwittingly
the long after remembered pain.

Her mother, hard as granite,
with reddened hands and stern
stare, cursed in the bed of her final
days, glared at Lulu as she blanket
washed her mother in the last weeks
before death came for her and carried
her off with her foul words filling the air.

Lulu lays the towel over her lap, sitting
still she leans her elbows on her legs
and hides her face in her palms, wishing
her mother could have gone out not
with curses or swear words, but psalms.

Terry Collett

Bathtime 1962.

Yiska sat in the bath
and threw handfuls
of soapy water over
her small breasts. She

wished Benny was there
to wash her back or
better still be in the
bath with her and then

they could wash each
other over. She smiled
at the thought. Don't be
too long in there, her

mother called out through
the door. Won't be long
she replied. What would
she do now if he was in

the bath and her mother
outside pacing up and
down the bathroom?
But he wasn't so it didn't

matter. But say he was?
She smiled and lay down
in the bath to rinse off
and then softly laughed.

Terry Collett

Bathtime Shared.

Fenola watched
as Eileen bathed.
She took in
the hand

moving
the lathered sponge
over the contours
of the body,

moving between tits
like some
venture ship of old,
moving down

the belly,
beneath the soapy water
to the pleasure dome,
then out again

around the neck
and under chin,
then whole body
over once again.

She knew that body well,
each inch of flesh,
each orifice,
each smell,

each loving touch.
Even the thought
pleased her
overmuch.

Eileen looked over
where Fenola sat,
on stool,
in bathrobe,

with feet
on mat.
Come on in,
she said,

room enough for two,
you rub my back,
I'll rub yours
and other places too.

Fenola thought awhile,
took in her eyes
that gazed,
the smile

that spread,
the memory
of the afternoon
in bed,

the positions held
and played,
the sex ensuing.
Eileen pointed

to the soapy bath,
come in,
she said
with sexy laugh.

Fenola stood up
from the stool,
disrobed,
set it aside,

stepped in the bath
and sat down,
the water engulfing.
Somewhere

from the other room,

Ravel played
from hifi speakers,
Bolero

or some such piece,
the sound touching
the bathroom walls
with steam and scent.

The girls rubbed
and scrubbed
and laughed
in soapy water,

each one
like a siren
of the sea
or Neptune's daughter.

Terry Collett

Battered Betty And Such.

Mum says she can't
afford for me
to have a hula hoop
Helen says

as I meet her
by Baldy's shop
early Saturday morning
but I have had a go

on my friend's
not that I'm
very good at it
she says

but it would have been
good to have had my own
o come on
I say

it's a hoop of plastic
and you put it
around your waist
and do a wiggle

of your body
and it goes round
continuously around
your waist

if you're lucky
I say
that's nothing
to mope about

she stands
by the side
of the shop
looking up towards

the railway bridge
in Rockingham Street
but I did like
having a go

she mutters
I'd like to ride a horse
like the Lone ranger
but I wouldn't want

to own a horse
I say
where'd I put it
if I did?

I'd love a horse
she says
white one
with a long

hairy tail
and she dreams
for a moment or two
about the horse

but you're right
she says
where to put it?
we walk down towards

the post office
to post a letter
of her father's
and then walk along

the Newington Causeway
what colour horse
would you like?
Helen asks

black shiny black

I say
she talks of her brother
dropping her doll

Battered Betty
and an arm
coming off
and how her dad

managed to
fix it again
but it was
back to front

and he had
to take it off
and put it
the right way around

and she's
at home resting
Helen says
resting after

the operation
and we come to
the New Kent Road
and walk along

to the Trocadero cinema
and pay out money
for the morning matinee
and we sit

half way back
ready to watch
the cartoon
and black and white

Batman film
then the big feature film
which I hope

won't be

a cowboy film
with kissing in it
which really
gets my goat

and Helen sits
next to me
waiting for the lights
to go out

still talking
about her doll
and the arm
and one eye

I watch the screen
not wanting to know.

Terry Collett

Baylitz's Wife And A Game Of Chess

Baylitz's wife served you snacks and booze
while you played chess in the lounge

at the small table set aside for games
and you watched her come and go

the swaying of her hips
the well crafted thighs

beneath the dress
the way her hands held the tray

her eyes green as emeralds
searching you as she laid it down

watch your bishop
Baylitz said

but in your imagination
you were already undressing his wife

for bed letting fall her dress
and bra and underwear

of flamingo pink or soft sky blue
you've left your castle well exposed

Baylitz muttered
his fingers over the piece

waiting there to pounce
you made a protective move

and he smiled and studied the board
as his wife stood by the window looking out

your eyes moved over her frame
caught in the sun's light

imagining her beneath you
in their broad bed

her lips on your chest
ah you've sacrificed your pawn too easy

Baylitz said and swooped in
for the kill of your piece

by his black bishop
you sat back in the chair

gave a sad expression
your eyes touching his wife's soft flesh

your king's in danger
Baylitz said

and your eyes moved back to the board
and studied Baylitz's fingers

lingering murderously
but too late

he moved in for the kill
checkmate

he stated
you sighed

and looked at his wife
who pulled a face

you sat
your dream of sex and love

stilled in frozen frame
another time maybe

Baylitz said
ok

you replied
unfulfilled.

Terry Collett

Be On Our Way 1960

Hannah said to meet her
at her flat
so I went across the Square
to where her flat was
and knocked at the door

Mrs Scot stood there

Hannah is it?
I nodded

Hannah's it at th' shaps
she said

o right can I come in
and wait?
I said

she stared at me
for a few seconds
as if I'd made
an indecent proposal

ah guess ye can
she said

and she stood back
to let me pass

I went to the passageway
and it smelt of yesterdays
dinner and boiling washing

sit doon in th' livin' room
she said

I sat down
looking around the room
and she went off to the kitchen

the radio was on low
playing Victor Sylvester music

there were black and white photos
on the sideboard
and a big photo on the wall
of a wedding

then the front door opened
and Hannah came in

I'm back
got your shopping
and she walked past
the living room door
o you're here already Benny
she said to me
good just putting this lot away
and we can be off

aff whaur?
her mother said

Benny's showing me
his new school
Hannah said

what's sae special abit 'at?
she said
coming out of the kitchen
like a warrior for battle

his new school in September
I want to see it
Hannah said

her mother pulled a face
and stared at me
is it a wee jimmies skale?

yes Mum a boy's school
Hannah said

I felt out of place
and stared at the wallpaper

right we are off now Mum
see you later
Hannah said
and we went out the door
and into the Square

don't mind her
Hannah said
she's always that way

and I mused
good start to a new day

so we walked off
to where my new school was
about a good mile away
glad to be on our way.

Terry Collett

Be There

Be there by the bridge,
Sorbus said,
I'll be wearing a flower
in my buttonhole.

But she never showed,
least not
that he knew,
she saw him through
the falling snow:
bespectacled,
black bearded,
with pointed chin
and hooked nose.

She wanted more
than that
to please
and feed
her hidden rose.

Terry Collett

Be Your Fantasy.

I want to be
your fantasy,
Lily said,
but her man
was too busy
with the business
to take note
of her pleas
or offer.

She knew
some guy would
somewhere out there
in that lonely world,
some guy would
let her be his fantasy.

So it came to be:
she was in some bar
in town, and a guy
at the bar near
to where she sat
leaned nearer
and said:
you all alone?
Can I buy you
a drink?

She smiled
and enlarged her eyes,
and said:
sure you can;
are you all alone too?

He nodded:
been alone since
my old lady went off
with some schmuck
in New York City

back awhile.

O that is sad,
she said,
loneliness
bites at you
don't it?

Sure does,
he said,
what you
having to drink?

White wine,
she said,
that's my poison.

So he called
the barkeeper over
and order her
the white wine
and a beer for himself,
and the barkeeper
went off.

Can I be
your fantasy?
She said.

The guy frowned
and eyed her squarely:
sure can,
he said.

And what is
your fantasy?
She asked,
sitting herself
more comfortably
on the bar stool
so that her ass
was right in

the center.

The guy mused awhile,
and then whispered
in her ear.

She listened,
then giggled,
and then she laughed
and nigh fell
off the stool:
why you big ape,
she said,
you darn fool.

Terry Collett

Be Yourself My Bright Eyed Babe.

Be yourself my bright-eyed babe,
Sense the wings beneath the skin,
Feel the frozen fires within,

Reach out with the timorous hand,
Touch the warm but dying frame,
Hold the heart and squeeze the blood,

Kiss the lips without return,
Which, being chilled with death,
Seal the coffin of your love.

Terry Collett

Beach Scene.

Joey sees her strolling
up the beach, young girl,
smoking a cigarette, been

in for a dip, her legs all wet,
aged 9 or 10, scanning the
sands and crowds, hair

blowing across her face,
her eyes dark, scowling,
he follows her barefoot

track wondering where
her parents are, where
she'd got the smoke,

the stance, the stare of
her giving the beach a glare.
Joey ponders as she turns

and looks back towards the
sea, the cigarette held between
fingers, the smoke rising,

then she waves a hand,
puts her head to one side,
and then Joey spots them,

the parents, he presumes,
the woman a long haired,
sun kissed bitch swaying

her hips and broad ass along
the sands, and the man,
holding hands, a beefcake,

suntanned, puffing a cigar,
gazing at the young girl,
presumably his daughter,

like one sizing up a gift horse,
letting out language and
words loud and course.

Joey watches them meet
up and walk up the beach,
each one kissing each,

then the older woman
goes off alone, as girl
and beefcake stroll to

the sidewalk and go off
and out of sight, leaving
Joey to sit and muse

and watch the sands
and sea, a slight breeze
tousling his hair, thinking

of the girl's fate, her life,
although she isn't there.

Terry Collett

Becoming Dim 1960

What do you know
about the Immaculate Conception
Benny?
Fay asked me

bright idea
I said
thumbing through
a pack of cigarette
football cards

no it's what the nuns
at school have been
talking to us about
she said

I looked at her
as we sat on
the grass in front
of Banks House
Saturday afternoon

so what's it about then
this immaculate thingy
I said

well our Blessed Lady
was born free
from original sin
by virtue of the foreseen
merits of her son
Jesus Christ
Fay said

none the wiser
I said
taking out a picture card
of Stanley Matthews
and gazing at it

well all of us are born
in original sin
that is the sin
we inherited
from Adam and Eve
called the Fall
I think it's called
she said

I put the Matthews card
on my thigh
and looked through others
who fell?
I said
thumbing through
other cards

Adam and Eve
in the Garden of Eden
Fay said

what did they fall over?
I said
looking at her
sitting there
her bright blue eyes
staring at me
her fair hair
long and free
from bands or ribbons

no not fell like that
but a fall from grace
from goodness
she said

and that's what
they teach you
at that school of yours?
I said

she nodded

what no maths
or English
or boring science?
I added

o we do that as well
she said
but more about religion
as well

I took out a Peter Brabrook
football picture card
and you believe that?
I said
about that immaculate thingy?

Yes of course
she said
that's what we've
been taught

and your old man
believes that too?
I said

of course he does
he's Catholic too
she said
doesn't your dad
believe it?

Unless it was mentioned
in a film starring Betty Gable
I don't think
my old man would
I said

I see
she said

my old man said
he would only believe
in a god if this god
gave him a wallet
full of money
I said
thumbing through the cards again
and putting
the Peter Brabrook card
on my other thigh
and shuffled the cards

that's not a good
idea of God
she said

no I guess not
I said
but each person
has their own idea
what God is like
or does

do they?
she said

guess so
I said
I put the other
picture cards away
and put the other two cards
in my back pocket
of my jeans

well what do you
want to do now?
I said

don't know
she said

I can show you

my collection of toy soldiers
or we can go
to Bedlam park
for a swim
I said

she looked at me
we can go swimming
she said
I'll go get
my swimming costume
and towel
and we can meet
on the balcony
she said

ok
I said

so we walked off the grass
and into the Square
to our flats
and walked up
the concrete stairs together
to get ready to go
for a swim

the sky was blue
but becoming dim.

Terry Collett

Bedding 1965

Tilly's mother
was out in the garden
hanging washing;
she'd let me in reluctantly,
and said Tilly
was changing the bedding,
and would be down soon.

I looked about the room
while I waited;
the furniture was old,
and photographs
were on most surfaces
old and new ones,
a photograph of Tilly
as a young girl,
a family group in some field,
no one smiled,
all looked at the camera
with distrust.

I could see Tilly's mother
walk by the window
with a basket
of damp clothes,
then she hung underclothes
with wooden pegs,
and I wondered
whose they were,
maybe the old girl's
as they were not Tilly's kind
from my memory.

The sky was blue,
and clouds drifted by.

Been waiting long?
Tilly said,
standing by the door.

About a week or so,
I said.

She laughed,
liar how long?

A few minutes,
your mum let me in
with a face of granite,
I said.

Tilly came and sat
next to me on the sofa,
and kissed me on the lips.

Just changed the bedding,
she said,
if you had come earlier
you could have helped me.

I guess I could,
I said,
could have maybe done
other things too.

She smiled,
it's your mind,
I meant bedding,
Tilly said.

So did I,
I said.

What are you two up to?
her mother said,
coming into the room
and staring at us.

Just sitting and talking,
Tilly said,
done the bedding.

Her mother looked at me,
want a cup of tea?
She said.

Yes, that'd be good,
I said.
Off you go then Tilly,
her mother said,
and Tilly
made the tea instead.

Terry Collett

Been There.

She stands there
at the sink

I can see
the outlines
of her bra
through her blouse
at the back

Milka's mum
is talking
about the
state of
Milka's room

complaining
never seen
such a mess

I sip tea
she's poured me

if I left
my bedroom
in that state
my mother
would have slapped
my backside

I nibble
a Rich Tea
biscuit that
Milka's mum
offers me

I forgot
Milka says
I'll do it
after this

washing up

never seen
such a room
her mother
says again

I can see
the outline
through her skirt
of panties
(Milka's not
her mother's)
the skirt's tight
about her

I dunk in
the Rich Tea
and nibble
the soft mess

just as well
Benedict's
not seen it

(I had though
the bedroom
the small bed
untidy
littered floor)

her mum says
giving me
her soft eyes
and a smile

I try not
to red blush
or let her
see that I'd
been in the room
and had sex

I study
the large broach
she's wearing

lovely broach
I utter

Milka's dad
gave it me
her mum says

Milka turns
and her eyes
look at me
and she knows
what I know
as her face
is blushing
a bright red
about the sex
on her bed.

Terry Collett

Before

Before she went off
having told you
she was seeing
someone else

you wanted to gather
her words in your hands
and jumble them up
to make a different

form of words
and a different message
and as you watched her
go back toward her home

you thought of the first kiss
she gave you
and that bright gaze
in her blue eyes
when she saw you
for the first time

and you realized
that you had had
your love chances
and had blown them away

and looking up
you saw
she had gone from sight
but years later

when hearing the wind blow
on the window
you see her still
in dreams at night.

Terry Collett

Before Choir

She pulled you
into the porch

of the church
and kissed your

lips while others
made their way

inside for choir
practice and no

one seemed to
miss you for the

time it took for
a kiss or two and

as you made your
way back around

the church along
the path between

graves half lit in the
moon's light she held

your hand giving it
a squeeze and now

and then beneath a
later moon's glow

with stars like glittering
coins in the sky you

imagine she is there
again and didn't die.

Before Choir One Friday Eve

Before choir practice
before entering
the vestry door
you and Judith

stayed behind
and waited until
the others
had gone inside

and Judith said
look at those stars
and how dark blue
the sky is

you gazed up
at the evening spread
of dark blue
and stars

and moon
to one side
and you put
your hand

around her waist
and drew her close
and she lay
against you

and you said
I read some place
that some
of those distant stars

burned out
centuries ago
and what we see
is the ghostly glow

of dead stars
and she turned your head
towards her
and kissed you

and the pressing
of her lips on yours
and her hands
on your waist

and her 13 year old
breasts pushing
against your
14 year old chest

and the sound
of the choir starting up
in practice in the church
and the flight of bats

across
the evening sky
and she holding you near
and the lips engaged

and the eyes closed
and the breathing
taken in
coming up for air

and behind you
the aging graves
the tombstones
with moss

and half lit
by moonlight
and star's glow
and you held her

in place face to face

with your hands
upon the cheeks
of her behind

eyes still closed
in the land
of the love sucked
blind.

Terry Collett

Before Death

Before death
you wanted to kiss

the girl in the lift
whom you rode with

silently each day,
wanted to read

War and Peace,
wanted to listen

to the whole
of Wagner's Ring,

wanted to write a poem
in Japanese,

touch the dress
Marilyn Monroe

wore in that famous film,
feel the embrace

of your late father's arms.
Before death

you wanted to sing
a Puccini aria,

look into the eyes
of your first dead love,

make love
for the final time,

climb Everest,
drink your last

glass of booze,
see your final dawn,

hold onto your final breath,
before your death.

Terry Collett

Before Tea One Wednesday 1956

Janice's gran
had ask me to tea
after school.

I was sitting
in the sitting room,
(Janice had gone
to the loo) .

You're Janice's best friend,
her gran said,
and I don't mind her
being with you
because you
are a good boy,
and I know your mother
would not let you
run wild or do silly things
like some children
around here,
and she always has you
dressed in clean clothes,
and feeds you well,
and because I am
responsible for Janice,
and need to know
she is in good company,
and not go on bomb sites
or knock on doors
and run away
or throw stones
through windows
of deserted houses
or take coal
from the coal wharf,
and when she is with you
I know she'd not
do those things.

I sat there listening to her,
waiting for tea to begin,
hoping there would be
good cake, and maybe
nice sandwiches
and maybe(although
I doubted it) coke or Tizer,
and hoped Janice
would not mention
going on the bomb site
in Draper Road
where we climbed
into an upstairs room
(hole in the roof) ,
and it smelt of piss
and dampness,
but we looked around still,
and hoped she'd
not mention us
(me mainly)
catapulting those window out
of that bombed out house
on the bomb site
behind the cinema.

Her gran was still talking,
and I smiled when she stopped,
and she said,
now some tea,
and Janice appeared back,
and sat next to me,
and smiled at me,
and her gran said,
I've just been telling Benny
about you, and what
you're not to do,
and I think Benny
is a very good boy
not getting you into trouble
on bomb sites or stone throwing
and things.

I sat with bated breath,
and Janice said,
yes he is good like that,
but sometimes we...
but her gran had gone
into the kitchen
to get the tea,
and it was just us
sitting there,
and I shook my finger
and said,
say nothing about the things
we've done less or more,
or she'll tan
your backside
as she did before.

Terry Collett

Before You

Supposing Death
to be a woman

what then?
She asked

would you embrace it
as willingly as you do me?

The afternoon sun
seemed to hang

in the sky
like a child's balloon

as you lay that day
in the tall grass

maybe
you said

if it had eyes
and a smile like yours

and she pulled
a stem of grass

and placed between lips
and stared above

as birds flew
to and fro

and would you go
willingly into the dark

as you do with me
into this tall grass?

You turned to face her
taking in

her blue eyes
and cheeks

maybe
if it allowed me

to kiss as good
as you do

and as long
and she turned over

took out
the stem of grass

and kissed your lips
welcome to Miss Death

she said
and you both laughed

and lay back
gazing at the summer sky

a deep blue
not knowing then

death would come for her
long before

it would ever
come for you.

Terry Collett

Behind Closed Doors.

Miss Bundlestun watches the man
Next door go down the path to his
Car open the door climb in slam the
Door look up at her and give her an
Up you gesture with his middle finger
Then drive off. She lets the curtains
Fall back in place wondering if the
Gesture was for real or just a signal of
The common lot seen too often in the
Streets below even by the young who
Pass her by with gestures of the fingers
Or spew of tongue. He plays jazz on his
Hifi loud not quite to her taste and she
Often bangs on his door and shouts her
Complaints of noise or rowdiness from
Parties held all night. Her mother says
Nothing but sits silent in her dull armchair.
There is a clinging smell of decay in the air.
She denies the factor of her mother's death.
She sits and talks or reads the news to her
Mother's corpse dressed in last month's cloth
And wasting skin. She thinks her mother (as she
Used to be) resides biting her tongue within.

Terry Collett

Being Dad 1951

Auntie and I
went to her friend
Milly's place
(a flat on the other side
of the parade ground)

she knocked at the door
and we waited
after a little while
the door opened
and Auntie's friend's
daughter Elsie stood there
staring at us

is your mum at home?
Auntie said

Elsie glowered at me
with her small eyes

I'll ask her
the girl said
and went back
into the flat

there was a murmuring
of voices from inside
then Milly appeared
o sorry about that
I was in the loo
Milly said
come on in

so we went in
the flat smelt
of past dinners
and hanging washing

we followed her

into the sitting room
and she said to sit down
so we did

Elsie her 5 year old daughter
stood by her doll's pram
staring at us

want some tea
and a bit of cake?
Milly said

that'd be nice
Auntie said

what about you Benny?
Milly said

can I have a glass
of water please?

she nodded
and went off
into the kitchen
and Auntie said
you go play with Elsie
let me and Milly
have a chat

I looked at Elsie
who was pushing
the doll's pram
around the room
looking at me darkly

ok
I said

Milly brought me
a glass of water
and a piece of fruit cake
and I said thank you

and then she brought a tray
with cups and pieces of cake
and sat with Auntie
and began to talk

go play with Elsie
Auntie said

I nodded and went over
to where Elsie
was rocking her doll
against her chest

I've come to play
I said

she looked at me
boys don't play with doll's
she said coldly

let Benny play
her mother said

don't want him
playing with my doll
Elsie said

you'll let him play
or I'll tan your backside
Milly said

Elsie stood looking
at her mother
then at me

you have to be the dad
she said
as if chewing
a piece of tough meat

I nodded and walked
with her to the pram

I didn't want to be the dad
or play with the doll
as I was a 4 year old boy
but it was better
than sitting listening
to Auntie and Milly talk

Elsie moodily pushed
her pram into the passageway
and I followed glumly

we're going shopping
she said
I push the pram
dads don't push prams

so I walked beside her
wisely silent
smelling the carbolic scent
she was wearing
and watching
her moody glare
wishing I was elsewhere
than there.

Terry Collett

Being Here.

I am here,
yet I'm not,
seemingly
unaware of being
as being
should be
(or so I'm told) .

No longer young,
no more
spreading out
beside some
young thing,
waiting to see
what she'll bring.

I'm getting old,
(so I'm told) ,
feeling
the aches more,
the pains
like companions,
sneak up close,
snuggle
into the bone.

I am here,
yet,
at the end
of it all,
I am alone.

Terry Collett

Being In Love In 1974.

Being in love
was like being ill
and that day
after Judy'd left

to go to Florence
for a week
you went to the big city
to take your mind off her

but she lingered there
wherever you went
every brunette
with long hair

was her
and when you sat
in the Royal Opera House
to watch a ballet

she was there
down in the front
at least it seemed so
until the girl looked around

and had a different
face and eyes
and sitting
in that coffee house

by Piccadilly Circus
you sensed her absence
and drank coffee
after coffee

the blues eating
at you
wanting her there
beside you

imagining maybe
she'd not gone off
after all and that
at any minute

she'd seek you out
by some kind of
lover's radar
but she never showed

and no other girl passing
was her
and you thought
of the time

a few weeks back
when after she'd
gone off home
from work

you had taken
a single hair
from her white
work coat

and twisted it
between fingers
and kept it
between pages

of Solzhenitsyn's
Gulag Archipelago
seeing it
and moving it

each time
you read more
of the labour camps
and death and snow

and tundra

and she off in Florence
with friends
and you left behind

depressed
and love blind.

Terry Collett

Being In Love In 1974.(Poem)

Being in love
was like being ill
and that day
after Judy'd left

to go to Florence
for a week
you went to the big city
to take your mind off her

but she lingered there
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of the labour camps
and death and snow

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and she off in Florence
with friends
and you left behind

depressed
and love blind.

Terry Collett

Being There 47bc

Annona
lays in bed
her husband

old Marcus
has gone off
having had

his breakfast
to meet friends
in the town

she wishes
he was off
on one of

Caesar's wars
not with her
in her bed

with his rough
love making
her slave girl

Amy comes
(such beauty
how the gods

could give such)
and attends
to her needs

helps her bath
brushes hair
dresses her

all the time
that's she near
Annona

just wants her
in her bed
huddled close

making love
soft touches
lips on skin

but Marcus
may return
and spoil it

so she sits
and feels her
sweet slave girl's

hands touch her
in dressing
and doing her

fine black hair
being there.

Terry Collett

Being There Mcmlxviii

That tall thin monk
dark and angular
reading in the refectory
from in sancti Benedicti regula
he reminded me
of a teacher at high school
whose name eluded me,

I took in the high bell tower
orange bricked
straight up pointing to heaven
misty clouded
I viewed from my window
in the abbey,

colui che ci ha creati
senza il nostro aiuto
non ci salverà senza
il nostro consenso
sant'Agostino
an Italian monk said
quoting St Augustine,

I read in the common room
leaning against the radiator
Abbas Marmion
black covered book
well worn
heat from the radiator
warming me up
against dull cold day,

parler à Dieu
the French monk said to me
talk to God that is part
of prayer
partie de la prière
and I talked
in my own fashion,

bell tolled from bell tower
la voce di Dio
the bells calling
to work or prayer
Dom Joe said
sitting in the old armchair
in the guest room
where I stayed
they guide us
la cloche parle,

loved the cloisters
the medieval sense
wind there in the day
or late in the evening
after Vespers
moon light in cloister garth,

voices along the passage
from other guests' rooms
some one spoke
another gave
a hollow laugh.

Terry Collett

Bell And Ear Mcmlxxi

Knelt down
weeded the flower bed
in the cloister garth,

orange brick walls
waist high
shadows in the cloister
where the sun
could not touch,

intrantes autem
in domum Dei
so I did
that first time in 68,

smell of baked bread
and incense
and aged brick
and sight of cloisters
in moonlight,

Domine da mihi
castitatem et nondum
Augustine said
I thought likewise
but never said,

she cupped me
with her soft fingers
and tongued me
in her dark room,

Hugh thin faced
grim featured
eyed the breviary
chanted the Latin text
beside me
I copied
best I could,

partecipare alla
vita di Dio
the Italian monk said
as we mended
broken fences
by the far grounds,

George read
the day's text
in practice
must be clever
Dom James said
clear as a bell's tone,

Twice armed
if we fight with faith
Gareth said in Greek
quoting Plato
twice armed
fighting with faith
or suchlike
he added
seeing my
incomprehension,

have me
she said
in whisper
soft breath
whiskey soaked,

rope between hands
rough against skin
bell pulled as bell tolled
vibrated loud
in ear's fold
and hold.

Terry Collett

Bella's Visit 47bc

Bella wife of Albus
looks over the wall
at Annona's villa

the sea below
waves crashing
against the rocks below

gulls in flight

sky a blue
light and cloudless

Amy Annona's slave girl
stands back a bit
but close to Annona

Albus leaves soon
for some campaign of Caesar's
Bella says
is Marcus to leave too?

Annona looks at Amy
taking in her loveliness
how she stands there
near the wall
not far from her

yes he told me last night
Annona says
feeling a sense of happiness
rise in her like a small stream
let loose suddenly
after being blocked

I shall miss him
Bella says
I always do when he's away
being in my bed alone at nights

trying to keep things in order
the household
the slaves
the affairs of duty and visits
how do you cope
while Marcus is away?

Annona puts on
her sad face and says
it is hard and I am often
at a loss and sleepless night
(she looks at Amy)
and the villa to maintain
and look forward to his
quick return
(she treads his return
like a foul illness)

I do too
Bella says
when Albus is home
I am like a young girl again
running to him at his feet
and he lifts me up
and well between you and me
he and I make love so much
that first few days
I can barely stand
and she laughs

Annona laughs too
and Amy looks
at the sea below
and senses Annona's eyes on her
and wants her master Marcus
soon gone so she
and her mistress
can go to bed again
and make love in their own way
and feel each others'
bodies close and kiss
and lay there in each other's arms

knowing Marcus knows
she shares her mistress's bed
while he's away
to prevent rumours
of any disloyalty
on Annona's part

Bella still laughs
and Annona stares at Amy
standing by the wall
looking down at
the sea and waves
gulls over head
sky blue
thinking a message to Amy
I want you
love you.

Terry Collett

Beneath A Morrocan Sky

You could tell
by Mamie's face
she was sick

of shish kebabs
in fact it seemed
that the whole Moroccan holiday

was kind of getting
to her sensibilities
from the standing

on the two brick toilets
to the shish kebab
food misadventure

let's go walk
on the beach
she said

before I throw up
with this crap
and so you walked

with her down through
the path to the beach
the moon and stars

above in a black
patchwork sky
the sound of the sea

rushing in and out
and the voices
of the others

getting less
and less
and she said

looking up at the sky
isn't scary that sky
why is it scary?

you asked
it's so vast
like it goes on forever

she said
I think Pascal found
the immensity

of the night sky
disturbing
you said

Pascal?
Is he on the coach?
Is he on the tour?

she asked
no he was a mathematician
and physicist and inventor

and Christian philosopher
in the 17th century
oh right

she said
boring shit
come on let's get

on the beach
and lay down
and stare

at the sky
and stars
and that bright moon

and then we can snuggle

up close
and we'll see

what comes
and she pulled you
onto the beach

and the damp sand
eased itself
between your toes

and the smell of the sea
hit you
and the sounds

and the wind
from off the sea's shoulder
and she pulled you

down on the beach
beside her
and you lay back

and looked up
and the vast sky
seemed to press down

on you both
and she laughed
and said

it kind of makes
you seem small
and insignificant

doesn't it
she said
you felt her hand

in yours
a soft pulse
of her being

right there
like a small beeping drum
and she turned

and looked at you
and smiled
and her smile was captured

by the moon's glow
and you said
we need to remember

this moment
this being here
this newness of being

and she laughed
and said
don't get too deep on me

and she leaned in
close to you
and kissed you

and her tongue
entered you
and the whole sky

seemed to witness
the moment
seemed to want

to embrace the kiss
the bright humanness
in her moonlit face.

Terry Collett

Beneath The Blue.

You both walked along
the narrow country lane

to the small church
and lay in the overgrown grass

in the churchyard
looking up

at the summer sky
and Jane said

It's so peaceful here
I feel as if part of me

were mixed
with the whole

of nature
you listened to her

looking at her
sideways on

seeing her profile
laying amidst

the green grass
her head facing

the blueness of sky
her hands resting

upon her breasts
with one leg straight

the other lifted upwards

with the knee bent

Do you feel that?
she asked

looking at you side wards
her eyes leaving the sky

and resting on you
Yes

you replied
but not thinking

of what she had
but of the beauty of her

and you being there
and taking note

of her eyes and hair
and moving lips

and hands at rest
and her soft youthful breast

and that glimpse
of thigh capturing

your eye
Yes

you repeated
I feel a part of that

feel almost drowned
in its beauty

and she turned
and you saw her smile

and heard birdsong

and felt the sun on skin

and the saw the expanse
of sky and clouds

white chariots moving
across the blue

and wanted that moment
for always and forever

and you reached out a hand
and touched her shoulder

and would had touched
and felt her more

had you been bolder
and she said

We lay here with the dead
but our bones and flesh

are filled with life and love
unlike theirs

wasted away
Yes

you whispered
feeling her bones

beneath the flesh
Just like us some day.

Terry Collett

Beneath The Moroccan Sun

The Moroccan sun was hot
and the sands
of the beach
down from the base camp

were warm
beneath your feet
as Mamie and you
took a walk

looking seaward
then skyward
the sounds
from the base camp

becoming faded
background buzz
and she said
those toilets are a disgrace

two bricks
over a hole
in the ground
and after a few drinks

one stands there
swaying fearing
to fall in
yes not quite up

to the 5 star hotel standard
you said
but this is a camping trip
across half of Europe

and beyond
not some top notch
holiday in the swanky
middle class arena

but still
she moaned
trying to balance
on two bricks

is no mean trick
you sensed her hand
hold yours
her skin warm

sticking to your skin
her fingers moving
between yours
and you recalled

the night just gone
while the guy
you shared the tent with
had gone on a trip

to Fez
you and she
kissed and embraced
and did the business

while outside
you could hear
the voices
of others

as they passed by
or music played on guitars
from the guys
in the bar

up a small way
as you both lay
on your backs
staring at the blue top

of the tent

the heat of the sun
pushed through
and the bodies wet

with sweat
and she put
a hand on your belly
and rubbed

in a circular motion
as far away
you heard
the sway

and run
of the Mediterranean sea
and nearby voices
and their laughter

and gossip
as you and she
kissed
lip to hot lip.

Terry Collett

Benedict At Matins.

Benedict stands
in the porter's lodge,
circa 1969, waiting
for Dom Tyler the monk,
to bring the large key
to open the church for Matins.

Dawn, cold air, smell of age
and incense and baking of bread.
He remembers Sonia,
the domestic at the home,
who pushed him to the bed
of old Mr Gillam and said
in her soft Italian,
Potrei fare sesso con te qui,
then in her broken English said,
I could have sex with you here.

Another joined Benedict
in the porter's lodge,
some holy-Joe type,
breviary under arm,
starved gaze.
The silence,
the smell,
the chill.
Dom Tyler opens the door
from the cloister
and rattles the key,
smiles, but does not
break the Grand Silence.

He takes them out
into the morning air,
opens up the church.

Lights are on, monks
are assembling, bell rings,
Benedict takes a seat

on the side pew,
the other sits
more in front.

The old monk who last time
talked to Benedict
of monastic life,
slides by, his body aged,
his habit like a shroud.

How he escaped Sonia,
how he managed
to get away unmolested,
he finds it hard to fathom,
except the promise
of the cinema,
the seats at the back,
the kisses and touching,
all in the dark,
the flashing images
of the film going on.

Potrei fare sesso con te qui,
he utters under-breath.
The Latin of early morning
Matins begins, he dismisses
her image and her words.

The holy-Joe opens his breviary
in the semi dark, his finger
turning pages, muttering,
his head nodding
to an invisible prayer.

Benedict imagines Sonia
creeping into the pew,
muttering Italian,
sitting there.

Terry Collett

Benedict Buzzed Wild 1962

watched Elaine
get on the bus
with her mouthy sister
and others.

I looked at her
as she came up the aisle shyly.

We looked at each other
I smiled and she smiled
then went into the window seat
with her sister.

Her sister yakked
to nearby friends.

I looked out the window
at the passing scenery
wondering if she
was looking my way.

I press my lips together
pretending I was kissing her again
as I had that Sunday.

It was a brief kiss
a sort of stolen kiss
while her mother
was out of the room.

I sensed her body
next to mine
soft and warm.

The radio on the school bus
was playing some pop song
about love.

Shall I look over at her?

I looked at the passing fields
trees and cattle.

I wanted
to kiss her again
but longer.

Her sister
laughed loudly.

I stared hard
at the far off hills.

The sky looked
cloudy and grey
rain maybe.

I looked over at her
and she smiled
and I smiled.

I looked away
and my insides
buzzed wild.

Terry Collett

Benedict Mused.

Benedict listened
to Thelonious
fingering out
Round Midnight.

That public house
off Charing Cross Road,
his old man
sipping a light ale
in a corner seat.

Colonel they call me:
the old man said;
Benedict looked at
the clipped moustache
and sad dog eyes.

All talk of
the Desert Rats
and Monty
and sand and winds
and free beer
now and then.

And that Irish woman
in the box office,
and him saying:
this is my son.

The woman
all glittering eyes
and broad smile.

Wonder if he had?
Wouldn't put it past.
Died years later alone
in some home
stroke and dead;
buried alone;

just a few staff members
at his funeral
and ashes scattered
in some numbered plot.

What year did he meet?
67, yes that year.

That girl in the club
above the Regent
eyeing him saying:
my boyfriend's
in the clink
for drugs
and I am in the hospital
drying out
come visit me.

Benedict did;
brought her cigarettes
and took her for a drink
down at the local pub
if the nurse permitted.

Thelonious Monk stopped.
Silence of the grave;
both his old man and Monk
gone now.

Looking back
colours it somehow.

Terry Collett

Bennett And I 1958

Bennett
was a big boy
a bruiser to look at
but he was a pussy cat
once you got
to know him.

He loved history
like I did
and he sat
at the desk
in front of mine.

He was wide
so I couldn't see
past him
so had to look
over his shoulder
to see the board.

Bennett
Mr Finn said
where was
the Magna Carta signed?

At the bottom Sir
Bennett said.

Fits of laughter
and guffaws.

QUIET
Mr Finn shouted
I meant
where about
in England
was it signed
the teacher
stated firmly.

Runnymede Sir
Bennett said
reddening.

Anyone else
where is Runnymede?

Kids looked
at each other.

I put up my hand
(a rare occurrence) .

Yes Coles?
Finn said
eyeing me.

Surrey Sir
I said.

Right who signed
the Magna Carta?
Finn asked
anyone except
Bennett?

King Henry VIII
said Dennis
wiping his finger
(snot green)
on his grey
trouser leg.

Finn shook his head
anyone else?

Bloody Mary
a girl sitting next
to Helen said.

Finn sighed

Coles?

King John Sir
I said
looking at
Bennett's back
broad as an oxen.

Correct
Finn said
and wrote it
on the board
with dates
and names
in white chalk.

There was silence
no murmuring
no grinning
no talk.

Terry Collett

Benny & The Brooklyn Broads

Benny liked the broads
From Brooklyn best,
Especially Betty
With the big boobs

Bursting from her bra,
Or Delia
With the delicious dimple
And dark drapes

Coming down
To her sweet knees
Or Lisa
With the luscious limbs

And eyes like lamps,
But most of all
He liked Suzie
Who oozed sexuality

And gave free samples
Of sexual delights
For those long
Cold winter nights.

Terry Collett

Benny Aglow 1962

Rolland and I
were walking
down the passageway
after biology.

Other kids were ahead
from our class
we were on our way
to Maths.

Other kids
were passing
going the other way.

Sheila was
one of them
she glanced at me
and stopped.

I stopped too.

You go on
I said to Rolland
he looked at her
then me
and walked on
shaking his head.

Wasn't sure
if would see you
she said.

Where you going?
I said.

Domestic science
she said.

Other kids

from her class
had walked on.

We stood looking
at each other.

I felt
my heart pounding
I drew her to me
and we moved
into the doorway
of the caretaker's room
it was closed.

We were holding
each other.

She leaned in
and kissed me
on the lips.

I could smell
a weak perfume.

I sensed her body
against mine
she felt
soft and lumpy.

Footsteps
in the passage
and we parted
and moved out
into passageway.

A prefect
was walking along
why aren't you
two in class?
he said.

We were looking

for something
I said.

Well get off
and no lingering.

We nodded
and parted
and went our own way.

I watched her go
her swaying
body moving.

I sensed
an inner firey glow.

Terry Collett

Benny And Anne 1959

I watched Anne
walk across the lawn
from the nursing home
on her new leg.

She had
a walking stick
helping her balance.

She sat on
the white metal chair
at the far end
and threw
her stick aside.

I went up there
and sat in a chair
next to her.

How's the new leg?
I said.

Hard work
she said
and it rubs
and I'm pissed off.

She looked it
I missed not
seeing the leg stump
it seemed odd
the artificial leg
being there
with the white sock
and brown shoe.

Now you'll
have to buy
two shoes again

I said.

She nodded
but this leg
won't grow
while this one will
so I'll have to have
the leg renewed
as I grow
she said.

I guess so
I said.

She stared
at her leg
fucking thing
looks ugly
she said.

I looked at her
you'll get used
to it
I said.

I don't want
to get used to it
that means
accepting it
and I never will
she said angrily.

Fancy a walk
by the beach
see the sea
I said.

She stared at me
yes why not Kid.

So we did
out the back gate

and along the path
both walking
no wheelchair
any more
just us
the gulls
and the sea
and seashore.

Terry Collett

Benny And Hannah 1960

The sky looked overcast
dark clouds moved
above me.

I knocked
on the door
to Hannah's
parents' flat.

Mrs Scot opened it up
and eyed me
whit dae ye want?
she said.

Is Hannah home?
I said.

Nae she's it
Mrs Scot replied
in her Scottish dialect.

When will
she be back?
I said.

When she's dain
wi' messages
she said.

Can I come in
and wait?
I said.

If ye main
she said gruffly
and stood back
to let me pass by
and into
the sitting room.

Sit thaur
an dornt tooch
she said
through thin lips
and walked off.

I sat in one
of the armchairs
to wait.

There was a photograph
on the mantelshelf
of a man in a kilt
and hat
and stern gaze.

I wondered
if he was Mrs Scot's father
he looked like her
without the beard.

After five minutes
Hannah returned
with the shopping
and walked past the door
and smiled.

Won't be long
she said.

I could hear
Mrs Scot moan
and Hannah reply
but couldn't grasp
what they said.

Hannah came
and after a few words
with her mother
we left the flat
with her mother's words

echoing after us
like a seaman's cuss.

Terry Collett

Benny And Helen 1955

Helen stared
at the playground:
what did Mr Finn mean
about the Plaque of London?
She asked me.

It was an outbreak
of the bubonic plague
between 1665-6,
I said.

What's bubonic?
she said.

An infection
I think,
I said,
Mr Finn said
it was spread
by fleas on rats.

She looked me
how comes you
hear things he says
and I don't,
she said.

I love history
and listen more I guess,
I said.

She looked at her hands
through her
thick lens glasses:
I'm not clever,
she said,
history bores me.

Never mind,

I said,
you must be good
at something.

Don't think I am,
she said.

You're good
at needle work
with Mrs Murphy,
I said,
I saw the thing
you took home.

She was silent
for a few moment
Mum said it was good,
Helen said.

It was,
I said.

She smiled:
guess I am good
at something,
she said.

The bell rang
for the end
of morning break.

Right back to class,
I said,
geography now
with Mr Good.

She stopped smiling
and pouted.

We went back
into school.

I'll never be clever,
she said,
always be a fool.

You're good
and pretty,
I said.

She smiled
going red.

Terry Collett

Benny And The Canary 1956

Janice's gran said
don't let the canary
fly out the window.

I won't
Janice said.

Gran made sure
all windows and doors
were shut.

Ok you can let
the bird out now
her gran said.

I stood watching
as Janice opened
the birdcage
put her hand in
the yellow canary
jumped onto her
small finger.

She brought
the bird out
on her finger
we watched as it
fluttered its wings
and chirped loudly.

Janice lifted
her finger
level with her eyes
and spoke to it.

I said nothing
but stood there
watching.

Her gran had only
let me in
if I promised not
to teach the bird
bad language
I promised.

Who's a pretty boy then
Janice said.

The bird held its head
to one side
chirped
but said no words.

He spoke that time
when I was alone with him
and told him
a few words
and he said them
almost straight away.

I wondered if
he remembered me
and would
repeat them today.

Terry Collett

Benny At The Farmhouse 1964

I cycled to the farmhouse
where Milka lived.

After resting my cycle
by the fence
I walked
to the front door
and knocked.

Her mother
opened the door.

She smiled
and welcomed me in.

She said Milka
was in the bath
and offered me
a cup of tea.

I sat at the kitchen table
and watched
as she walked around
preparing the teapot
and arranging three cups
and saucers.

I studied her
the way she moved
her hips
and how warm
she seemed.

She turned
and asked me
how I was.

I said I was fine
taking in

her ample breasts
and the colourful
apron she wore.

She turned again
and I breathed in the air
the smell of bread
and the logs burning
on the Aga
and her motherly
milky smell.

I wondered how long
Milka would be
and how she looked
in the bath
with nothing on
wishing I could go up
and wash her
back and front.

Her mother put
the cup and saucer
in front of me
and sat down opposite
and offered me biscuits
from an open tin.

I smiled at her
and she talked
about Milka
her eyes on me
large and liquidy
like small seas.

I pictured myself
a few weeks before
in front of Milka
on my knees.

Terry Collett

Benny Birdwatched 1962

I bird watched
from my bedroom window.

Saw three thrushes
a dozen sparrows
and a crow.

My mother
was downstairs
getting dinner.

My little brother
was in the garden
digging up worms
to chase
his twin sisters with.

My other sister
was trying to knit
as Mother had
shown her.

Dad was at work.

I mused on
Sheila at school
how we sat
on the sports field
during lunch.

She said little
and I seemed
stuck for words.

She did say
she had wanted
to be a nun
but had changed
her mind.

She didn't
say why
she being too shy.

My friend Rolly
played football
he had wanted
me to play
but I was with her.

I watched
now and then
they lost
three goals to one.

I like her
slim figure
unhappy face
but to my mind
a neat behind.

Terry Collett

Benny Down But Not Out 1958

I had an altercation
with the William brothers
on the stairway of the flats.

I had the tall one
on the chin
but the shorter one
winded me
with a crafty punch
to my gut
and I went down.

The tall one
put in a punch
while I was down
then went off
up the stairs
out of sight.

I stood up
and looked over
the balcony
at my manor
below and off
to the horizon
as far as the eye
could see.

Blue skies
pigeons in flight
kids on and by
the pram sheds
the coal man
delivering coal
over the way.

Girls playing
skip rope
or hand standing

against the wall.

Next time
I'll have
the short kid first
leave the tall one
after to pick at will.

But a punch
to the gut
leaves me feeling
out of salts and ill.

But that's life
some you win
some you lose
life is what comes
not always
what you chose.

Terry Collett

Benny Fight Watching 1955

A fight erupted
in the playground
two boys
circling each other
jabbing out
punches now and then
mostly wrestling
of a sort
then pushing apart
to throw
pathetic punches
once again.

I watched
from the sideline
within the crowd.

The tall kid
had the reach
but missed more often
than he hit.

The tubby kid
was slow but
when he hit
it struck hard
because the tall kid
winced
saw it
on his face.

No girls came
and watched
they were too busy
at other things
to bother
or they didn't like
the sight of blood
or roughness.

My money
(not that
I had any)
was on the tubby kid.

Hit him Watts
a voice said
from the crowd.

Then a voice said
prefects!
and the crowd dispersed
like a Red Sea.

The fighters merged
with the crowd
and there was nothing
left to see.

Terry Collett

Benny Imagines It 1962

When I got home
from school
and after saying hello
and how are you
to my mother
I went to my bedroom.

I tuned my small radio
to a classical
music station
and listened
hoping something
would be played
that I imagined
Yochana would play
on the piano.

Something with violin
and orchestra
was being played
didn't know what it was.

I stood by the window
and peered out
at the garden
and the orchard
on my left.

It was a summery
afternoon.

I thought about
Yochana's kiss
on the field
at midday recess.

Just the one kiss.

I licked my lips

trying to capture
a tiny particle of her
where our lips met.

The violin work finished
Beethoven the man said.

There was talking
from the radio.

The man next door
was in his garden
pruning his roses.

He took me
to hospital
some months back
when his son
accidentally cut
my foot
with a scythe
one evening.

The voice on the radio
said the name Schubert
and piano music began.

I looked back
at the room
and imagined Yochana
was playing it.

I was behind her
looking over
her shoulder
as she played
taking in her perfume
and sensing her there
imagining her fingers
playing on the keyboard.

My lips

on her neck
kissing
and her fingers playing
and not a note missing.

Terry Collett

Benny In Belgium 1974

We arrived
at Zeebrugge
then drove to
our first
base camp
at Bruges
only to find
our tents
were not there
so we slept
in a caravan
over night
in cramped conditions.

In the morning
I was up first
so walked
to the nearest shop
and bought a small loaf.

I nibbled it
on the way back.

I was the first one in
the cafe
had a coffee
and croissants.

The girl Dalya came in
and sat at my table
she had ordered
the same.

She complained
about the caravan
and overcrowding.

I listened
as she moaned

and lit her a cigarette.

We sat talking
and smoking
until the other members
of our group came in
each one was moaning
to our guide
and driver.

He explained
about the reason
said we'd get
a discount from
our overall charges.

Then our tents arrived
we loaded them up
on top our mini bus
and set off
through Belgium.

I sat next to Dalya
and the Aussie guy
who said little
but gave her
the smile and the eye.

Terry Collett

Benny In France 1970

From Dover
we got the ferry
to Calais.

There the coach
awaited us
about 28 of us
aged 18 to 30
piled in.

Bags and suitcases
loaded in the hold.

I knew no one
so I sat in a side seat
waiting for the coach
to start off
on the journey
through France.

A girl stopped
by the seat
and asked if she
could sit there
beside me.

She was a red-head
small framed
but good looking.

I said sure
and she sat.

I asked her
if she wanted
to sit by the window
she said she would
and so I got out
to let her in.

Once she sat down
I sat beside her
took in her perfume
and her frizzy red hair
and small
but firm bust
pushing outward
from her red tee shirt.

She talked a lot
about her family
(her parents
were doctors)
and about why
she came
and did I
like rock music
and so on.

I listened
and answered
her questions
sensing her body
next to mine
elbow to elbow
her thigh near
to mine.

The coach travelled
through France.

The evening sky
darkened
lights lit up
the roads.

We pulled up outside
a roadside restaurant
we all went inside
and ordered our
main meal of the day.

Miriam(she told me
her name)
sat with me
and we drank
and smoked
and laughed
and joked.

Terry Collett

Benny Liked Music 1959

Benny liked music;
even as a kid
he liked music.

They had a wind-up
gramophone and six
78rpm records,
one of which was
Green Door
by Frankie Vaughan,
his mother's favourite.

He used to wonder
what was behind
the green door,
and what his old man
thought of this Frankie guy.

Benny went to the cinema
with his old man
to see jazz films
like High Society
or The Glenn Miller Story
or The Five Pennies.

He made a paper
and comb instrument
to make fuzzy
trumpet sounds,
and pretended to be
Louis Armstrong
scat singing.

Benny liked music so much
he thought a black guy
on the old tram
(as a kid in London)
was Louis,
smiling at him,

without his trumpet.

Some things
he can recall
and never forget.

Terry Collett

Benny Loved Fay 1960

After school
I met Fay
on the bus.

She said a nun
at school
had talked
about the Mass.

She explained about it
but it was Dutch to me
but I didn't let on
as it seemed
to matter to her.

We got off the bus
and walked up
Meadow Row.

So Jesus is in
the bread and wine?
I said.

Yes under
the appearance
of bread and wine
it is called
a sacrificial meal
I think
Sister Bridget said
Fay explained.

She had lovely
blonde hair
and blue eyes
and she was
so near to me
I could sense her
being there.

Our hands were
nearly touching
just an inch
and they would touch.

We crossed
Rockingham Street
and walked up
the slope
to the Square.

I told her
about Eddie
getting the cane
for talking in assembly.

She seemed upset
about it.

We climbed
the concrete stairs
to the flats.

On the stairs
between
my parents' flat
and hers
we stopped
and kissed.

Lips to lips.

It was warm
and wet.

I didn't want
it to end
but we did.

She walked up
the stairs

and I went down.

I went into the flat
and said hello
to my mother.

I never said to Fay
that I love her.

Terry Collett

Benny On A Bomb Site 1957

It was raining
so I took shelter
in one of the bomb sites
off Rockingham Street.

There was a room
where there was no hole
in the roof.

I peered out
the glassless window
at the ground below.

There was rubble
and bricks
and weeds
and stones.

The room
I was in
smelt of damp
and piss
(probably where
the tramps hid out
at night) .

The rain
came down hard
the sky darkened.

I wondered
who lived here
before the bombs fell
whose room this was
did they get out in time?
or were they victims
of WW2 bombing?

The room had a roof

but most of the roof
had gone along the hall
and the stairs
were precarious.

I stood there
watching rain fall
9 years old
beginning
to sense the damp
feel the cold.

Terry Collett

Benny On Board 1972

Abela and I
took a boat trip
to the other island
this morning.

The sea was rough
and a few
of the people aboard
were puking
and the bogs were full
of vomit.

We were ok and sat
and thought
of the concert
the other night
by the string quartet
or last night
after leaving the bar
we made a big thing
of getting ready for bed
and had sex games
before sex.

It was like the build up
to the star act
she taking off
most of her clothes
I watched
then I undressed
real slow.

Then she put
the radio on low
(some classical work)
and we began
the sex games.

After the build up

we kissed and got
into bed just as
Mahler's 5th began
on the radio
we made out.

The sea was rough
people puking
the sun a dull grey
the island in the distance
she beside me
on the rough
rolling sea.

Terry Collett

Benny One Mid Morning 1956

A fight had broken out
between two boys
in the playground.

A crowd
had surrounded it
and a chant of
fight fight fight
went up
from the other boys.

A few punches
were thrown
but it consisted
mainly of pushing
and shoving
and wild swings
that went no where.

I stood in the crowd
watching seeing
who would win
or throw a decisive punch
but neither did.

Punches landed
on arms or chests
and be absorbed.

None of the girls came
and watched
they carried on
with their games
of skip rope
or hop skip and jump.

My mother had said
if any one hits you
hit them back

if you can't punch
then kick
if you can't kick
bite.

But as I wasn't involved
I just watched.

My money was on
the tall kid
the tubby kid
was slow
and missed more often
than he hit.

Then the teacher came
and broke up the fight
with words of
move away
move away
and stop the fighting.

The two boys were
taken off to
the head teacher's office
and the crowd dispersed
and went about
its mid morning
business of cards
or games of war
with imaginary guns
or swords.

I played cards
with Jupp
head down
not looking around
or up.

Terry Collett

Benny One Summer 1961

I could smell summer
in the air
birds singing
from bushes
and hedges
along Bug lane.

I waited for Jane
to meet me
by the water tower.

I had been
to the farm
for the morning milk
had breakfast
while Mother
cooked toast
in front of the Arga.

We had met yesterday
at the small church
sat inside and talked
and kissed.

We talked of us
then about Lizbeth.

The church smelt old
and damp
the summery sun
came through
the small windows.

I could hear a tractor
in a nearby field
cows mooed
a dog barked
from the farm.

I saw Jane
walking towards me.

She wore a yellow
summery dress
with short sleeves.

I wanted
to kiss
her again
hold her
as I did
the day before.

We didn't talk
of Lizbeth
but of the butterflies
and kinds of birds
lying in the field
beneath the sun.

We kissed
warm and wet
close lying there
without much talk
or world care.

Terry Collett

Benny Sees The Pond 1962

Yehudit showed me
this place
with a small pond
behind my parent's cottage
through the woods.

I waited for her
by the back gate.

Birds sang
a rabbit stopped
on the small path
and gazed at us
then ran off
into the undergrowth.

She held my hand
and talked
about her home life.

Her hand was warm
and held mine tight
as if she was afraid
I would run off
like the rabbit.

This is the pond
she said
as we came
to a clearing.

The pond
was quite large
and circular.

Ducks swam there
and dragonflies hovered
over the skin
of the murky water.

Are there
fish in there?
I said.

Of course
she said.

We sat on the grass
at the side
and looked
at the ducks swimming.

How comes you
have not seen
the pond before?
she said.

I've not been this far
in the woods before
or crossed that field
I said.

This could
be out lake
she said.

She leaned
close to me
our lake
she whispered.

I turned
and gazed at her.

Yes it could be
I said.

We stared
at each other.

A pheasant called out

from the woods behind.

A woodpecker rata-tatated
on a tree.

She moved in close
and kissed me.

Terry Collett

Benny The Conqueror 1955

Benny held
his conker
from old string

Derek aimed
at it with
his conker

then brought his
down with speed
whacked Benny's

conker in
a wide arc
twirling round

Benny's hand
has it spilt?
Derek asked

Benny looked
at his brown
conker no

it's ok
Benny said
my go now

Derek held
his conker
from new string

Benny aimed
and whacked it
into two

and it flew
to the ground
that was my

fiftenner
Derek said
he picked up

the pieces
and walked off
Benny watched

him go off
and put his
conker in

his pocket
and walked back
into school

as the bell
was ringing
for lessons

history
with Mr Finn
The Normans

William
the wild eyed
Conqueror

just like him.

Terry Collett

Benny's Bus Trip 1955

And then went down for the bus
(while 'twas in motion)
as you'd seen your old man do
and sat at the side
as the clippie collected fares
as she went,

about 1955
year before Suez
and year after Elvis
recorded That's alright Mama
and the 7th year
of your outward voyage,

our life is a luminous halo
or so it seemed,

conscious from the beginning
unto the end or conscious
of the end of the beginning,

at the beginning
the end of life
or some such,

Mr Finn tall and thin
moustached talking
of kings and castles in class
dipping pen into the inkwell
to scribe what he'd scribed
on the blackboard,

Helen peering at you
through thick lens glasses
her brown hair
plaited in plaits
her grey pinafore
food stained,

Finn on about keeps
and drawbridges and moats
and you drew what he said
drew as your granddad
had shown you
draw from life
he had said
take from life
draw what you see,

the bus on its way
the clippie clipping tickets
a machine around her neck
or shoulder,

you thinking
I'll be one of those
when I get older.

Terry Collett

Benny's Busy Day 1969

Busy day at the home
I bathed Sidney and George.

Sophia wanted me
to have sex
in the empty room
on the 1st floor
but I never had time.

She sulked
like a spoilt child
who wanted her
ass smacking.

Maybe another day
(sex that is) .

Wrote a letter
to the monk
saying I'll be visiting
in April.

Played Wagner's
Tannhäuser opera
musing on Sophia
her blonde hair
her icy blue eyes.

Mused on that time
we had it off
in the late
Mr Cutt's bed
she moaning
as if
she were drowning
and I listening out
in case
someone heard
and came in.

My mother
made cocoa for bed
asked
about work
and my day.

I said it was ok
but about Sophia
and sex
I didn't say.

Terry Collett

Benny's Hellhole 1971

The skinny nurse
was on duty today
alongside the brunette
with the beauty spot.

Big Sid
brought breakfasts
into the lounge
after making sure
both doors
were locked.

The radio played
pop music all day
with the usual chatter
in between.

The skinny nurse
brought around
the medication
each in little tubs
for each of us.

Yiska stood
by the window
watching the snow.

I stood beside her
watching it drift
heavily on fields
and trees
a tractor ploughed
a field beyond
gulls followed in
its track.

Yiska asked me
how I was.

I said
pissed off
waiting for
the ECT.

She said
she was too
hated it gave her
headache.

Me too
I said.

I wondered how
my mother
was coping
in the snow drift
how my siblings
were getting
to school.

Yiska's hand
held mine
it was soft and warm.

What time is
the psychiatrist coming?
Yiska asked
the skinny nurse.

Later
the nurse said
a mindful
of information.

I sensed
the bandaged
about Yiska's wrist
where she'd slit it
a few days ago.

We stood

by the window
watching the snow.

Terry Collett

Benny's Letter 1962

Yochana wasn't
at school today.

I saw her friend Angela
sitting alone in class.

At morning recess
I asked her where
Yochana was.

She said she'd left
that her mother
had sent her to
an all girls school.

She walked off
miserably.

I couldn't believe
I'd not see her any more
not hear her play
her piano again.

Later when I got home
a letter was on
the side for me
it was from Yochana.

She wrote saying
that they had moved
and she was going
to an all girls school
and that her mother
had forbidden her
saying anything until
they had moved.

She said she
would miss me

and her friend Angela.

There was a few kisses
at the bottom and signed.

I was shocked
like I'd been socked
by some big kid.

On the radio
(on some classical
music station)
they played Chopin.

I imagined Yochana
was playing
as she did
that time I stayed.

I want to dream
of her tonight
and give her
a farewell kiss.

Don't suppose I will
but I'll miss her still.

Terry Collett

Benny's Midday Adventure 1964

Milka and I
rode our bikes
to the old pond
I used go to
years before.

We rested our bikes
down in the long grass
out of sight.

We lay in the grass
by the pond
and lay on our backs
looking at the midday sky
with white clouds
and warm sun.

This is where
you used to come
with an old girl friend
of yours didn't you?
she said.

Yes few years ago
I said.

I turned on my side
and looked at her
lying there.

What was she like?
Milka said.

Well she wasn't old
we were just 14 then
and she was nice
and we had a thing
for a while
I said.

Why did you
come here?
she said.

So we could be
alone together
I said.

What did you do?
Milka said.

Lay by the pond
and watch the ducks
and swans
and kiss
I said.

Is that all?
Milka said.

Yes
I lied
of course.

I wish my mum'd
gone out today
then we could
have gone to my room
and did things
she said
but no she was
going later with Dad
then my brothers
will be home
from fishing
or it will be too risky
if they're not.

I kissed
her forehead
then her lips.

She embraced me
and I lay beside her.

Birds flew overhead
a blackbird sang
a pheasant called.

We were too
engrossed in
what we were doing
to lay and listen
or watch
the midday sun
on the pond skin
glisten.

Terry Collett

Benny's Plan B 1957

Lydia sat
on the red
painted tile doorstep
waiting to see
if Benny
would come along

she breathed heavily
angry and frustrated
her mother had just
told her that she(Lydia)
and Benny could not
go to Edinburgh
or Southend by train
as they had wished

she had tried to explain
to her mother the plan
but her mother
wasn't having it
in fact she had bellowed
NO NO NO so loud
that her big sister Gloria
was disturbed drunkenly
in the bed
she shared with Lydia

she watched the milkman
pull up in his
horse drawn wagon
and take out 2 bottles of milk
and walked with them
across the way
and put them on
the doorstep
then walked back

the horse was eating
from a nosebag

Lydia sat
a few more minutes
if Benny hadn't showed
she'd go and find him
and tell him the bad news

the man with the boxer dog
walked past
doffed his cap
and smiled
then walked on

then she saw Benny
galloping(on his pretend horse)
up from the slope
and into the Square

she stared at him
then waved him over

he galloped towards her
she felt angry and tearful
Benny rode up
to the red
painted tile doorstep

what's up?
he said smiling

we can't go
she said pouting

can't go where?
he said
his horse vanishing
into thin air

can't go to Edinburgh
or Southend by train
she said

who said?
he said

my mum said
no no no
but louder
Lydia said

Benny sat on the doorstep
beside her

she said at 9
we were too young
Lydia said
looking at him
her lower lip
pouting more

I'll have a word
with her
Benny said
turning around
to stare
at the front door

won't make
any difference
she said no
Lydia said

persuasion can
sometimes work
Benny said
my mum said if
you want something
bad enough
you must
like that Scottish king bloke
try and try again

you can try I suppose
Lydia said

they got up
from the step
and Benny knocked
on the front door
and they waited

the door opened
(after a few minutes)
and Lydia's mother
stood there
hair in a scarf
and a cigarette
hanging from the corner
of her mouth
and arms folded

why'd you knocked
the door?
she said to Lydia
you bloomin live here

I knocked
Benny said

what do you
want then?
the mother said

we want to go
to Southend
Benny said
we are willing
to forgo Edinburgh
until later
but Southend is a must
for us as a sort
of a trial run

the mother stared
at him coldly

I've told her
now I'm telling you
you're too young to go
anywhere at 9 years old
so the answer
is the same
NO
she bellowed
and slammed
the door shut

Benny stared
at the door

Lydia sat down again
and stared at the milkman
walking his horse along
to the next block of flats

plan B
the Benny said

plan B?
Lydia said
what's that?

we go anyway
but say nothing
to them
he said
arms folded
a determined look
about his face

do we dare?
she said

of course
Benny said
working the plan b out
inside his
9 year old head.

Terry Collett

Benny's Unhappy Monday 1962

Yochana didn't look happy
when I saw her
in class
Monday morning.

Her friend Angela
sat next to her
and was whispering words
to her.

I sat next to Rennie
at the back.

He was talking
about his weekend
and football.

I was taking in
Yochana's back,
picturing it
as I was next to her
in the guest's bed
that Saturday night.

Her parents asleep
in their room.

She had crept
into the guest's room
and climbed into bed
beside me.

I wondered if
her parents
had found out
and that was why
she was so unhappy.

Miss G came into

the classroom
and the talking stopped
and we sat up straight.

I tried to push
Yochana and her parents
from my mind,
pushing ahead
with the lesson
after registration.

But it was like
the blind
leading the blind.

Terry Collett

Bernice Sleeps.

Yours
is a contented sleep
of hot sex
and deep love
wrapped in the arms
of dream's hold.

Ariadne
beside you
in the bed awake
and musing.

Your mother
is dead
her MS
having taken
its toll.

Your father alone
in his moroseness
and grief
and non belief.

Your younger sister
married in New York
writes occasionally
in her scribbled hand.

You turn in your sleep
the dream demanding
the images bright
and eye blinking.

12 years
in your lover's
care and love
and rows and sex
and down
the long avenues

of trust and jealousy
of have and hold
doing what you want
and not what
you are told.

You sleep on
leave the outer world
to the waking hours
of tick and time
and love and kiss
and tell.

Sleep on you
same sex
loving girl.

Terry Collett

Beside And Beyond

bombsites to explore
more ruins to climb
more places
to hide and seek

and you showed Helen
around the place
finding a way through
the wooden hoardings

put up to keep kids out
and she stood
gaping around
and said

gosh isn't it big
and to think
that people lived here
and maybe died here

and she clutched
her doll Battered Betty
in her arm protectingly
and you with your catapult

in the back pocket
of your jeans
showed her
into what was left

of a house
climbing the wooden stairs
one wall missing
blown away

the sky visible
through the hole
in the roof
and she in her flowered

washed out dress
climbed gingerly
behind you
talking about what

her mother might say
if she knew
saying how her mother
would wag her finger

at her and say
don't go in those bombsites
they are dangerous
in one room

was a lopsided picture
still hanging
and there
in the wooden floor

a gaping hole
showing the cellar
two storeys below
she gripped your hand

with hers her other hand
clutching Betty
pressed tight
to her chest

and she said
what would
your mother say
if she knew

you were here?
she won't
you said
what she don't know

will do her good

less to worry about
and from the top room
of the house

you could see
the tabernacle
in the early morning sun
feel the sunlight

seeping through
on your face
and Helen said
she was scared

and could you go down
and so you went
back down the stairs
she gripping you tight

Betty hanging
by one hand to Helen
the smell of dust
and old tramp's pee

and damp wood
and bricks
and London still there
despite old Hitler's tricks

with bombs and fire
for you to wander
and explore
and taking Helen

carefully
went out the door.

Terry Collett

Beside Miss Pinkie 1973

I lay beside
Miss Pinkie
in her bed
in her flat.

It was morning
someone
was vacuuming
in the flat upstairs
footsteps back
and forth.

There was a sliver
of daylight
where her curtains
didn't meet.

I turned over
and gazed
at her sleeping
eyes closed
eyelids like pink
seashells.

Her mouth open
breathing shallow.

She was old enough
to be my mother
just about.

Her hair
was in a mess
not neat
as it usually was.

We'd made love
a few times in
the late evening

and night
it wasn't hot sex
but it was all right.

She said
she'd entered
a convent
with her cousin
when they were 18
she left
but her
cousin stayed.

Seemed a bit kinky
sleeping
with an ex-nun
wonder what
the bishop
would say
if he could see
how she lay
I mused.

My mouth was dry
I needed a drink
to wake me up
for real.

She opened
her eyes
and stared at me.

Her hand wandering
back towards me
wanting to feel.

Terry Collett

Best At The Back 1956

Old Mrs Murphy
made sure we were all
sitting quietly
in the classroom
and she began talking
about codes and puzzles

I sat watching
her plump frame
move bit by bit
by the blackboard
a long ruler
in her hand
pointing at the board
and occasionally
if someone
wasn't listening
at the pupil

she wore glasses
and her grey hair
was curly and permed

as I looked
away from her
I saw Janice
sitting near the front
(a place I tried
to avoid)
gazing at the teacher

I liked her
we were friends
and her grandmother
with whom she lived
(I had no idea
what happened
to her parents)
allowed her out with me

because she said
I was trustworthy
(to a degree)

Janice wore
a grey skirt
and red cardigan
and her hair
was neatly brushed
and tied
with a red ribbon

Benny are you listening
to what I am saying?
Mrs Murphy said

I looked back
at the teacher
and nodded
yes Miss
I said
looking at the board
behind her
where 2 lines of letters
were scribed

what have I
been talking about?
She asked
eyeing me severely

a code?
I said

and what is the code?
She asked

the class was silent
all eyes on me

I stared at the board
the top letters

are substituted
by the lower letters
to make
a coded message
I said

she raised
her eyebrows
so you have
been listening
good
she said
and turned back
to the class

Janice was looking at me
her blue eyes sparkling

I smiled
and she smiled
then turned back
to the teacher

I was glad
I remembered
the code
from the Eagle comic
I read
it saved my skin
or hand
from a smack
that was why
I liked it best
at the back.

Terry Collett

Better Days 1961

Lizabeth sits
in the lounge
after school

her mother
comes and sits
opposite

found a book
Mother says

Lizabeth stares
what book's that?

A sex book
Mother says

is it good?
Lizabeth says

in your room
Mother says

Lizabeth frowns
in my room?

Yes your room
in that old
chest-of-drawers
Mother says

Lizabeth stares
with wide eyes
perhaps Dad
put it there
Lizabeth says

don't lie now
you know you

put it there
Mother says
eyes wildly
staring out
it's filthy
the pictures
of people
doing things
Mother says

it's just sex
Lizbeth says
positions
suggestions
how to do
all those things
where's it now?

It's still there
in the drawer
Mother says
quite coldly
you're 13
not 18
why have you
got the book?

Just to know
about it
Lizbeth says

you haven't
done those things
I hope child
Mother says

of course not
(although she
nearly had
Benedict
in her room
that time but

he refused)

just as well
your father
never found
that sex book
Mother says

he'd like it
Lizbeth says
those pictures
of nude girls
legs spread

that's enough
Mother says
she almost
goes to slap
the girl's face
but doesn't
you'll burn it
this minute
Mother says

it's not mine
it belongs
to a girl
at my school
Lizbeth says

give it back
to her then
Mother says

Lizbeth goes
up the stairs
to her room
slams the door

Mother turns
on the old
radio

Mozart plays
sits and thinks
of all those
better days.

Terry Collett

Betty's Date.

Betty sips her drink and crosses
her legs and wonders if Chowbrew

will ever come as he said he would
and as she has been waiting for

over an hour she thinks he's not
coming, thinks he's gone off with

another. She sighs. All that time getting
ready, putting on the new dress,

making sure she'd put on fresh
underwear, showered, washed

her hair, filed her nails and still
he hasn't come. Betty, her mother

used to say, men are like buses,
if one doesn't turn up another'll soon

show, but it didn't follow in her

experience; if one didn't show,
she'd be left waiting until the bright

moon shone and the shining stars
flickered in the dark night sky, and

then she'd go home to bed, tuck
herself under the duvet, pull it

over head, and cry or swear or
maybe both. She looks at her

wristwatch. He isn't going to
come; she mutters to the air,

he's left me out to dry, all that

time I wasted; now I'm going
to cry. Betty, her mother often
said, men have only one thing
in mind, oh, yes, they'll bring
you flowers, chocolates, buy
you a meal, get you drunk,
but at the end of it all, it's
getting you into bed that they
are after, and she remembers,
in the background her father's soft
laughter. She empties her glass
and is just about to leave, when
a breathless Chowbrew stumbles
into sight, face flushed, clothes in
disarray, Sorry I'm late, got the
wrong cinema, she hears him say.
What an arse, she muses, what a
prat, doesn't know where he's
going or what he's at, but at least
he's here, she smiles and says,
Good to see you, Chowbrew dear.

Terry Collett

Between Drags

Between drags
on the cigarette
she muses on

the Rothko print
on Scalpon's wall.
It took her by surprise

hanging there
beside the front door
almost from ceiling to floor.

The smoke touches her throat
fills her lungs.
Satisfaction sits

on her tongue
like Scalpon easing himself
between her thighs.

The Rothko print
fed her eyes and mind.
She exhales and thinks on

Scalpon's secondary sex
and watches the smoke rise
as once from the chimneys

of those camps of which
Grandmother often spoke.
She inhales again

picturing in her mind's eye
the Rothko print
trying to forget Scalpon's

weird way of making love
upon the table
in the hall

while she studied
the Rothko
hanging on the wall.

Terry Collett

Big Difference 1972

Abela kicked Benny leg
under the table.

He'd been eyeing one
of the Serbian waitresses
passing by.

It is not good to me
you gawking at that waitress
makes me feel
surplus to requirements
she said.

Just looking
at the art form
he said.

What about
my art form?
She said.

Beautiful art form
he said
but one can have a Monet
but that doesn't stop
an art lover looking
at a Van Gogh.

so I'm a Monet?
She said.

More like Renoir I'd say
he said.

She pouted
I don't like you staring
at other girls while
you are with me
she said.

Ok
he said
I will be good
and look only at you.

She gazed at him
she put her head
to one side
as if measuring
up his words.

Am I the best girl
you have made love to?

Of course you are
he said.

Really?

Sure.

She looked away gazing
at the view of the sea
out of the hotel window.

Sophia was a wild one
he mused
that time
in her parents bed
while the were out
and the bed going some
and Yiska that time
in the ECT room.

Why do men
look at other women
when they are with someone?
Abela asked
looking back at him.

Animal nature

kicking in
he said.

We have moved
past that stage
she said.

Didn't seem so last night
he said.

She smiled
well that was different.

Very different
he said
thinking of them
in the big double bed.

Terry Collett

Big Mouth Cow 1962

Elaine goes to her room,
after saying hello
to her mother in the kitchen,
hoping her sister
says nothing
about the kiss
she had from John on Sunday.

She shuts the door,
and stares at herself
in the mirror,
and then goes,
and lies
on her bed,
and stares
at the ceiling.

Wondering what John
is thinking about,
how he'll be tomorrow,
what with the kids
on the school bus
now knowing,
and teasing,
all because her sister
couldn't keep
things to herself,
and had to blab.

What was her sister
on about about
doing things?
what things?

She lies there
hands together
over her stomach,
wondering what IT was,
and what her sister meant

about doing IT?

Don't trust boys,
her aunt had said
at a family gathering
a year ago,
they're only after one thing,
but her aunt didn't say
what thing.

We've only kissed,
she thinks turning,
and facing the wall
on her side,
running a finger
down the wall.

Well he kissed me
on Sunday,
and that time
on the sports field,
it wasn't as if they did IT
all the time
was that IT
was kissing the IT?

She can hear her sister
laughing downstairs,
loud voices,
music playing
from the radio.

ELAINE,
her mother calls.

Elaine sits up on the bed,
and wonders what
the trouble is now;
her sister's fault,
the big mouth cow.

Biggs And I 1958

Biggs
was a small kid
had wing nut ears
and bulgy eyes.

We played games
of football cards
against the wall
of the junior school
playground
in morning break.

Usually I won
but I liked him
so let him
win games
so I could see
his smile
which would spread
from ear to ear.

One morning
Cogan came over
and took
Biggs's cards
from the ground
and held them
against his shirt.

You want em Biggs
you come get em
Cogan said.

Biggs's ear went red
and his eyes
bulged more.

Let him have
his cards back

I said.

What's it to you?
shutup
or I'll take yours
as well
he said.

I picked up
my cards
and said
is that your face
or are you breaking in
for a friend?

You talkin to me?
Cogan said.

I stuffed my cards
in the back pocket
of my trousers.

If you heard
what I said
why ask?
I said.

Cogan looked
past me at Biggs.

If you want
your cards
come get em
he said.

Biggs headbutted
Cogan's gut
and the cards flew
in the air.

There was a rumble
of bodies and fists

and legs.

I picked up
Biggs's cards
and held them
again my chest
and stared.

A teacher came
and broke them up
and took them inside
to see the head.

I pocketed
Biggs's cards
and walked ahead.

Terry Collett

Bike Ride And Cloud Formations.

We'd been for a bike ride
along country lanes
and lay for a while
in some field
looking at the sky
and clouds
and making out
what cloud formations
we could see

that's a dog begging
Milka said
pointing skyward

I looked at her finger
pointing up
the hand small
the finger fragile

could be I guess
I said

that one looks
like Punch
of the Punch and Judy puppets
she said

I let her go on
with her suggestions
agreeing or not
as the case was

it was being close to her
in the open air
that got to me
her arm near me
her body
a mere few inches away
the short green skirt

the white blouse
the impression
of her bra
indicated there

perfume reaching me
as she moved
(her mother's
most probably)

birds flew overhead
as we watched the clouds

we lay out bikes
against the fence
of her father's farmhouse
and stood looking
at each other

it was a good ride
she said
I liked how we lay
in the field and cloud watched

yes it was good
I said

thank you Benny
she said

where are your brothers?

gone out I suppose
she said
did you want them?

they said we might
go see a film
I said

what film is that?

an Elvis film

she nodded
you could always take me
she said
her head leaning
to one side
her eyes gazing at me

would your mother
let you go?

Milka looked uncertain
I could ask
she said

another time maybe
I said

the last time
I had taken Milka
her mother had let her go
on the understanding
that she be grounded
for a week afterwards
(she had done something wrong
and her mother
only let her go with me
out of consideration
for me not Milka)

OK she said
she went quiet
looked at the farmhouse

best go in then
I said I wouldn't be long
she said
kissing my cheek

she walked off
towards the farmhouse

her cute butt swaying

I sighed knowing
I'd not see her
for another week.

Terry Collett

Bill's Known Facts 1997.

Bill knew the facts;
He lies abed.

Lifts up his eyes
to the shadeless
naked light bulb.

The Bay of Pigs,
that fiasco in 61.

Kennedy was fucked;
Castro survived.

The Agency
out to get him:
Pres JFK,
not Castro yet.

Conspiracy
they call it now.

A turkey shoot,
to take him out.

Bill had met him
in the White House,
good looking dude,
had talked briefly.

22nd
of November
year 63.

Bill lies smoking.

Framed Lee Oswald,
the patsy, then
taken him out.

Bill sighs out smoke:
Warren report
a damned whitewash.

Cover up their
collective ass.

Bill was young then,
a young green horn.

Then came black ops:
Other places,
other people.

Those arranged deaths,
those "suicides",
set up protests
in foreign fields,
regime changes.

Bill recalls now
that darn agent
in East Berlin.

Held her down firm
in the washhouse.

That spy in Rome
who had a fall
Bill had arranged.

Time past time gone.

Bill watches smoke
Grey white twisting
on the ceiling.

Long ago now.

Little conscience;
Little feeling.

Bit Of A Mystery 1961

Summer afternoon,
butterflies fluttering past,
lying in the tall grass,
Benny and Jane,
side by side.

That's a Gatekeeper,
Jane said,
pointing at a butterfly
passing overhead.

You know
so many names,
Benny said.

I've studied
my father's book
of butterflies for years,
she replied.

Do you tell
your mother we kiss?
she asked.

No she never asked
and I never say,
he said.

But would you
if she asked?
Jane said.

Guess so,
but I can't see
her asking,
he said,
would you?

She gazed at him.

I would have to
if she asked,
Jane said,
I can't lie
to my parents.

Have they asked?
He said.

No not yet,
but I think they wonder
as I am out with you
quite a lot
and we are 13
so she might
Jane said.

Would she mind?
Benny asked.

She might wonder
where it might lead to,
Jane said softly.

He looked
at the blue sky
and the slow moving
white clouds.

Lead to?
he said.

Things might happen,
she said,
looking away from him.

O I see,
he said,
but didn't quite see,
it was all a bit
of a mystery.

Blanket Bath 1940

I want a bath
but nurse Kavel says
sorry Grace the stumps
of your amputated legs

are not ready yet
to be immersed in water
but I will blanket bath you
so I lay there on the bed

and wait hearing sounds
from around the hospital ward
my eyes seeing nothing
but emptiness and I think

of that time Clive and I
danced at the ballroom
and he said I was good
and we sat down afterward

and he bought us both drinks
and he said you dance like an angel
and we kissed and afterward
when he walked me home

we stood outside my house
and there was moonlight and stars
and I said
do you want to come in?

and he did and we made love
and he stayed until early morning
and crept out
before Sally my maid
came in and saw us

poor Sally killed in the bombed house
that night when the bomb fell
and I lost my sight and legs

I am back

the nurse says
and I feel her pull back
the blankets and sheet
and she and another nurse

move me and place a towel
under me and together
undress me and I lay back
in darkness and nude

and feeling helpless and alone
and I feel a warm cloth
move over me
and soap and water

and the nurses talk
between themselves
about the bombing
the night before

and I think of Clive
killed at Dunkirk
and wonder if Philip
will come and take me

out to dinner some place
and then a warm cloth
washes me
over my face.

Terry Collett

Blazer.

I often
wonder what
happened to
that blazer
my old man
bought for me.

For Sunday
best, he said.

It was black
with silver
looking cold
buttons down
the boys' side
as fashion
dictated.

My old man
would fold up
an ironed
cotton white
handkerchief
for the top
small outside
pocket space.

I once had
a coloured
photograph
of me and
the blazer
one Sunday
out some place
with me there
with a smile
on my face.

My old man

is dead now
but where that
black blazer
is now I've
no idea.

Maybe out
there somewhere
in a lost
different sphere.

Terry Collett

Blind Leading The Blind

Christine sat
on the edge
of her bed

her white
dressing gown
wrapped about her

her hair unbrushed
she swung her legs
back and forth
like a child waiting
to play games

you sat
on the bed opposite
your borrowed
dressing gown
dark blue
you held tight
with your hands

as the nurses
had taken away
your belt and laces
in the locked ward

when I first had ECT
she said
they took me in that room
back there and laid me
on that black couch
and said it won't hurt
it will help

she looked at you
her eyes focused
making sure
you were listening

she brushed hair
out of her face
it's like being a virgin
before sex
you don't know
what to expect
she added
her voice quieter

she looked around
at the ward
others were elsewhere
or in their beds
or taking a shower

and that bit
when they put
the electrodes
each side of your head
and put that thing
to bite on

yes
you said
made me feel like
I was in a dentist's chair
back as a kid
with the smell of gas
only there isn't gas

no gas
she said interrupting
that's right
just feels like it

she took a deep intake
of breath
you watched her
her fingers held
the dressing gown
to her neck

the ring on her finger
she wouldn't remove
even if the guy
didn't show
for the wedding
she'd keep the ring
stuck there

like waiting to die
you said
and then they give you
the injection in the hand
a little prick
and the wave of nothingness
sweeps over you
and you blank out
and it's all dark
and empty

she nodded her head
her eyes still glued
to you
then you wake
with a headache
like a huge hangover
without the booze
she said
looking away from you
her profile adding
to her beauty

and it didn't work for me
she added
as a nurse went by
carrying blankets

me neither
you said
just the dreaded numbness
and the busted head

she got off the bed

and walked to the window
and you followed
standing beside her
looking out
at the trees
and fields
covered in snow

a tractor across the way
with gulls and rooks
following behind

and she touched
your hand with hers
the blind
leading the blind.

Christine sat
on the edge
of her bed

her white
dressing gown
wrapped about her

her hair unbrushed
she swung her legs
back and forth
like a child waiting
to play games

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and fields
covered in snow

a tractor across the way
with gulls and rooks
following behind

and she touched
your hand with hers
the blind
leading the blind.

Terry Collett

Blind To It

I see
she said

but she never saw
the way her beauty

stole your sleep
as if some thief

had stolen
a precious gem

or how her perfume
as she wafted by

invaded your mind
and heart

and tore them
both apart

or how her words
haunted you

as they echoed down
the valleys

of your dreams
or how the nearly

touching of her skin
could bring you out

in imaginary boils
like one embroiled

in deadly sin
or how

when she tossed
her head of hair

in natural gesture
or how with fine fingers

turned a page of book
it made you study her

it made you deeply look
so when she said

I see
not seeing

what was hid
she never did.

Terry Collett

Blow After Blow 1957

Blow after blow
Enid's father gave
her mother.

Enid ran
to her room
and closed the door
and stood by the window.

She peered at the door
in case her father
followed her there
and hit her too.

Cries came from
the other room
conflicting with
the TV sounds.

She bit her lip
waiting wondering
what started up
this latest argument
pushing the door shut
with her mind against
her father's entrance
should he come.

The TV stopped
whimpers simmered
from the other room
a door slammed.

Enid stared at the door
wished Benny was there
beside her.

She hugged herself
her small hands

on her arms
noticing the dark
wooden panels.

The radio
was turned on
from the front room
the crying stopped.

Enid ventured out
and stood
in the passageway
wishing her father
far far far away.

Terry Collett

Blue Moon.

Blue moon at least
That is what he said
It was but she had her
Doubts and anyway
That was the least of
Her problems her bleeds
Being three months overdue
And what was a girl to say
Or do what with the parents
Being such religious fools and
That cane over the fireplace
That her granite hard grandfather
Put there as a threat to breakdown
Of order or morality and moon blue
Or no she knew it was either to abort
The babe in some dark room or go.

Terry Collett

Bombed Out Land 1956

I am with Janice
on a bomb site
off Harper Road,
climbing along
a narrow flooring
like two wire walkers,
hands outstretched,
balancing with
childlike skill.

Benny is it
safe to walk?
she says.

No,
but if you're careful
you won't fall,
I say,
moving slightly
more to one way.

There's the smell
of damp wood
and bricks
and urine
around us.

We reach the other side
of the bombed out room
and stand looking back
the way we'd come.

Rozzers,
a voice of a fellow kid
calls out,
he clambers off
and away.

Janice and I

climb down and out
and see the rozzar
standing with hands
on hips and helmet
pushed back
on his head.

Bomb sites
are out of bounds,
he says,
stern faced,
eyes staring.

Didn't know,
I say.

Janice large eyed
and fearful,
says nothing.

Well it is
out of bounds,
what's your names?
the rozzar says.

The other kid says,
Michael Mouse,
another says,
Daniel Dare,
and say,
I don't remember.

The rozzar slaps
my face and says,
what's your name?

Janice is tearful
and clutches her hands,
thinking if her gran
found out
her arse'd
be slapped.

Benny Beanpole,
I say,
trying to keep
a straight face,
cheek stinging,
eyes glaring.

The rozzar doesn't ask
Janice her name,
he stares at me
and the other kids
and says,
get off and sling
your hook.

We look at each other
and saunter off.

Janice grips my hand
as we walk off
the bombed out land.

Terry Collett

Bombsite Conversation.

Fay sat beside you
on the concrete stairs
of Banks House
looking out
into the Square

where young girls
played skip rope
or boys having toy guns
reenacted WW2
taking no prisoners

firing noisy cap guns
and Fay said
where shall we go?
where do you want to go?
you said

away from the noisy guns
and skip rope games
she replied
and so you both got up
and went out

into the Square
and down the slope
the morning sun
blessing your heads
she in her summery dress

of yellow and orange flowers
white socks and sandals
and you in your grey tee shirt
and jeans and battered
black shoes

and you walked up
Meadow Row
between the houses

on either side until you turned right
by the public house

and onto the bombsite
behind the greengrocer store
and there you both sat
on the remains of a wall
looking around the ruins

and wild flowers
growing between bricks
and broken concrete blocks
and Fay said
I wonder who lived here

when the bombs fell?
what did they feel?
you studied her fair hair
tied in a bow
her blue eyes

scanning the scene
the white and yellow flowers
the weedy green
scared I guess
you said

I would be
she said
my mum said
she hid under
the dining room table

with her niece
where she lived
when the bombs fell
and there was the sound
of bombs falling

and explosions
and bangs
and people calling

and children crying
you said

Fay put her arm
under yours
and squeezed it tight
and lay her head
on your shoulder

and she whispered
I'm glad we
weren't here then
glad we were born
after the War

me too
you said
and she squeezed
your arm tightly
some more.

Terry Collett

Bombsite Walk

Fay walked with you
across the bombsite
off Meadow Row

the bombed out houses
like decaying teeth
in an old jaw

if Daddy saw me here
he'd spank me
she said

looking over the site
where weeds grew
in cracks and over

once backyards
and living rooms
there's no danger

if you step careful
you said
Daddy says

it's walking on the dead
Fay uttered
looking at you

sideways on
her hands raised at her sides
as if learning to fly

all things born
will some day die
you said

standing on a broken wall
come on let's go in
the haunted house

or so it seems
you laughed reaching out
for her hand to bring her forth

she hesitated
looked around
fearing her daddy's

beady eyes
then took
your hand

and followed in
the semi dark
of bombed out room

it stinks of piss
you muttered
she giggled and set her foot

on bricks and stony floor
what if it all falls in?
she asked

looking up at the sky
through cracks and holes
her hand felt warm in yours

her fingers curled
around your own
it's just adventure

you said
you got to take a few risks
we're a long time dead

and her eyes widened
and stared
and she whispered

I'm scared

and clung to you
what do think

the people here thought
when the bombs fell
and they hadn't made the shelters

or didn't know
you said
she shrugged

her narrow shoulders
and bit her lip
my mother said

all they found
of her neighbours' child
was a blown off hand

don't tell me
Fay said
I will dream of that now

sorry I shouldn't have said
you uttered
feeling her fingers

grip your arm
her thin nails
marking skin

let's go out
she said
and off she went

dragging you behind
out into the sunshine
she looking to see

if her daddy'd seen
her sinful tread
but for you

looking back
it was just an adventure
on land of the dead.

Terry Collett

Booze And Mahler And Sex.

If you want to come around
she said

bring a bottle of booze
and ring the bell twice

so you brought
a bottle of scotch

and rang twice
and she opened the door

and said
come in

and so you closed the door
and followed her

along the passageway
to the main room

and you heard the Mahler playing
and she took the scotch

and poured two large glasses
and said

sit down on the sofa Honey
and she gave you the glass

and you sipped
and she sat down next to you

and put her hand
on your thigh and squeezed

and she always managed
to get you stirred

and you smiled at her
and the Mahler symphony

was playing in the background
and you associated

that symphony
with sex

and sex with her
and each movement

of the symphony
suggested a given act

and as she moved
in on you

you almost drowned
in her scent

and the scotch
was on her breath

and her blue eyes
stared into yours

and her fingers moved
into your pants

for the prize
and you wondered

who the conductor was
on the Mahler record

and the same Monet print
hung on the wall

the one of some garden
and flowers

and she said
are you ready Honey?

And you said sure
and she took you

along the passage
to her room and bed

and the room smelt
of sweet perfume

and the Mahler faded
as she closed the door

as you both dropped clothes
on the carpeted floor.

Terry Collett

Both Shall Know 47bc

All the time
Aquila was here
my thought
were on Amy.

Aquila's talk
left me bored
to tears.

Talk of her husband's deeds,
and the price of slaves,
and who the latest gladiator
to catch her eye.

Amy stood nearby,
eyes on me,
eyes on eyes met,
while Aquila gabbed
to her heart's content.

Now I lie
upon my bed,
and think of Amy,
and if it were night,
how we could bed,
and love,
and she could
bring me to a higher
place in heart
and flesh.

Behind my closed eyes,
I see her,
her beauty none
shall share, my love,
and slave, and ex-gladiator,
whom I saved
(or Marcus
on my behest)

from a certain death,
if time had taken
its course, and some other
had a greater strength,
and skill,
to take down and kill.

I dread Marcus's return,
I wish him no harm,
but maybe
a longer campaign
to take him off
to other far off shores.

I lie here alone,
wishing Amy
could lie beside me,
but in daylight
it is too risky
than the night,
when others sleep,
and we can lie,
and kiss,
and make fair love
in hours' turn,
and moon's glow,
and her body and mine
can bring joy
which both shall know.

Terry Collett

Bow And Arrows 1956

Benny took
his bow and arrows
onto the grass behind
Arrol House.

Jim had a crossbow
with three arrows.

On the area
away from them
Jim had set up a target.

Mine is more accurate
he said
because I can view
along the line
of the crossbow
you have to view
along by where your hand
holds the bow.

Jim went first
and hit the target spot on.

Your turn now
he said.

Benny aimed
at the target
and fired his arrow
but missed the target
it fell on the grass behind.

Told you
he said
try again.

Jim went first
and fired

and hit
the target again.

Benny aimed
at the target
and hit it
and the arrow stuck
on the target.

That's good
Jim said.

They played around
with the arrows and targets
for quite some time
then his mother
said it was time for dinner
and he went in.

Benny went back
to his parents' flat
and put his bow
and arrows away
and had lunch.

He read in
a history book
that at the battle of Agincourt
an archer could fire
12 arrows in a minute
and an arrow
could wound someone
at 250 yards
but killed them
at a 100 yards
and in the battle
a 1,000 arrows
were fired every second.

I must tell Jim that
Benny mused
my arrows hadn't gone

that far maybe
if I took the rubber plunger
off the end
it would go
much farther
but it might be dangerous
he thought
and get in trouble
if I got caught.

Terry Collett

Box Of Tricks 1967

Standing on Westminster Bridge with Nima
I sense she is in a bad mood:
her features betray it,
her senses send out signals.

What sort of week
have you had?
I ask.

Awful without you;
I wish you lived nearer
so I could see you everyday
rather than just weekends;
that place is driving me mad,
Nima says,
turning to look at me.

I can't come in the week,
I work and by the time
I finish work and get a train
up here it would be so late,
I say.

I know, but I just
get so frustrated at the hospital;
and then Mother came
and gave me a lecture
and put me
in an even worse mood,
Nima says,
looking back
at the Thames below
where barges and small boats
and the occasional ship pass by.

Do you believe in God?
She asks me suddenly
staring at me again.

Yes of course,
I say.

Why of course,
she says,
I don't
I think its
just mumbo-jumbo.

Buses and cars pass by us
behind on the road;
people walk past
on the pavement
over the Bridge.

Then the whole universe
has no purpose,
I say,
it is all one
big pointless circus
without God,
I say,
looking at the Thames flowing.

How comes it's pointless?
She says,
I wish you'd
tell my mother that
and maybe then
she'd get off my back.

Without God
there is no real purpose
to anything;
it is all chance
and a roll of a dice
in black space,
I say.

Can we not
talk about God;
I feel depressed

enough as it is,
she says,
I want a drink
and something to eat
and a bunk up,
she adds,
taking hold
of my hand in hers.

What here?
I say.

No,
she splutters laughing,
in the Leicester Square
or somewhere.

What sex too?
I say.

That will be postponed
until we can get a room
one weekend,
she says,
becoming serious again.

Big Ben tolls
and I look at my watch:
it is 1pm.

All right
let's go then you and I
and have a bite to eat
and a drink to drink,
I say.

So we walk off the Bridge,
walk up Whitehall
and she talks of her mother
and the doctors and nurses
and wanting a fix.

I tell her about my week
and work
and the whole box of tricks.

Terry Collett

Bramshaw And Brassieres

Even as a child
Bramshaw was obsessed
With brassieres;
He liked the shape
And bright colours;
He liked to imagine
Them filled with firm flesh,
Warm and motherly.

When he got older
He'd steal them
From neighbouring
Washing lines, stuff them
Beneath his coat
And put them
In the top drawer
Of his dresser along
With porn magazines,
French cigarettes
And photographs
Of Bridgett Bardot.

He liked to imagine
The women who filled them;
Liked to rub them
Against his cheek;
Liked to sniff them
For scent or sweat,
But all he got
Was detergent
And the smell of soap
And warm fresh air.

Later he got
To put them on,
Sizing them up,
Feeling them
Against his chest,
Fixing them from behind

With his fingers
Almost breaking his arms
In the process, he'd walk
Around his apartment
With just the brassiere,
Swaying his hips
And sticking out his
Imaginary breast,
Pretending he got
Wolf whistles
From loud guys
On building sites;
Imagined he got the stare
From the guy downstairs
With the blonde hair
And large blue eyes.

Once he bought a pair in blue,
The correct size saying
They were for his wife Lou,
And the girl was all helpful,
All information; pointing out
The this and that of brassieres;
And all the time he was gazing
At her breasts, wondering
What colour she had, what size;
And only after that was done
Did he gaze into her eyes,
Into the window of her soul,
And saw small demons
Laughing at him
From each dark hole.

Terry Collett

Branded By Hot Lips

Christina sat crossed legged
on the grass of the school playing field

her friends got up and left
as you arrived after school lunch

where's your friend Rolland?
she asked

gone off with Woolgar
to play football

you replied
she patted the grass

beside her
why don't you sit down?

she said
so you sat down beside her

looking at her dark brown hair
brushed so so

and her green summer dress
just covering her knees

the black shoes
and white ankle socks

completing the picture
as if your eyes

had mentally painted her
for later reference

she leaned forward
and kissed your forehead

a damp patched
the size of her lips

remained there
she said

something to remind you
of me afterwards

while you're sitting
in class doing boring history

or geography or whatever
thanks

you said
actually it's maths

which is even more boring
so the kiss memento

will come in handy
she laughed and looked away

you spotted Rolland
over the way

standing in a goal
between two coats

Cedric can see us out here
she said

breaking the brief silence
why does it matter

if your brother can see us?
Will he tell your parents?

she shrugged her shoulders
don't suspect so

she said
you gazed at her lips

as she spoke
and her hands on her knees

just laying there
palms down

he does watch us though
she said

maybe he's jealous
maybe he wants to sit here with me

you said
she laughed

don't be silly
she said

and you moved
towards her

and kissed her lips
and she pulled you

nearer to her
with one of her hands

behind your neck
and you smelt

lavender water
and her hair brushed

against your cheek
and when your lips

left hers
they felt branded

as if hot coals
had been there

and she said
that was wonderful

and over her shoulder
across the way

Rolland had let in
a goal as his stretched

out hand
missed the ball.

Terry Collett

Breakfast Time 1916

Lady Elmore sniffs
as Polly enters her room
with a tray with teapot
and cup and saucer
and sugar bowl
and a jug with milk
and curtsies awkwardly
her black and white uniform
neat and tidy
she notes sitting up in bed
and staring,

Polly holds the tray
getting heavy
looks at Lady Elmore
through tired lids
stands still after her curtsy,

place it here Polly
the lady says
pointing to her lap
in the bed
her hair in a mess
grey strands breaking out
lips pinkish
eyes stark and black
or dark blue,

Polly puts down the tray
with careful art
makes sure it is safe
stands back
stares
waits hands in front
of her stomach joined,

Lady Elmore sighs
looks at the tray
is there breakfast?

Polly says yes Madam
Susie is bringing it up soon
(if the silly mare
hasn't dropped it) ,

the teapot is heavy
the lady says
can you pour for me?

Polly moves forward
and carefully pours tea
into the cup until
near the rim and adds milk
then stands back and waits
and watches as the lady
places two lumps of sugar
into the tea and stirs,

you may go now Polly
make sure the Simmons girl
is not too long
with the breakfast
Lady Elmore says stiffly
as if words were made
from bricks or stones
to be spat out,

Polly nods and says
yes Madam I will
and goes off and out
and closes the door
with a slight click
and leans against it
and sighs wondering
where Susie had gone
hoping to God
she wouldn't be long.

Terry Collett

Breaking Into Dreams 1916

Polly lies on
George's bed,
eyes closed,
feeling the mattress
beneath her,
trying to imagine
George there beside her,
or better still
on top of her,
as he was that last night
before he went back
to the Front and war.

She tries to pretend
he is kissing her,
touching her,
impregnating her
with his upper-class seed.

She holds herself,
embraces her body
with her own hands,

What you doing Polly?
Susie Simmons says.

Polly opens her eyes,
and leaps from the bed.

Frightened the bloody life
of out me,
you silly cow,
Polly says,
grabbing hold
of Susie's maid's uniform.

Sorry,
Susie says,
Gripe asked me

to see where you were;
what was you doing
lying on Master George bed?

Never you mind
what I was doing,
what the heck do
you think you were
doing making me
nigh wet myself?
Polly releases Susie's
uniform and tidies
her own hair,
and brushes down
her uniform.

Was you thinking of him?
Susie says.

What's it to you
if I were?

Nothing just asking,
Susie says.

Well let's get back
to Gripe
and see what she wants,
Polly says.

Susie nods and leaves
the room,
and Polly gives
a last look back
at the room and bed,
and keeps the memories
of him and her
in her head.

Terry Collett

Breath Full Of Sights

Benedict's mother
stood by the twin tub
washing machine
lifting the steaming wash
from the washer
to the spinner
with wooden tongs,
her eyes focused,
her arm straining.

He watched her;
a book, Plato's Republic,
lay open
on the table
by his hand.

He studied
the red hands,
the worn fingers,
how she wiped the wet
from her forehead
with the back
of her hand.

Plato's Philosopher Kings
seemed too hard
for his delicate mind
at that stage,
the Greek world
too far off
in the past
to give him comfort.

Maybe you ought
to read something lighter,
his mother said,
pushing down
the washing
with the end

of the tongs.

Find it hard to read
at all at present,
he said,
everything's
an effort.

Making the effort
is part of the effort,
she said.

You don't want to be
in the hospital again,
do you?

He closed up
the Plato book.

He wondered
how Julie was.
He'd not seen her
for months.

Good job too
his mother
would have said
if she had known
about her.

No, he said,
not there again.

His mother spun
the washing,
the noise rattled
the machine.

He rose from the table
and walked down
the passage way.
The machine rattled still.

He went in the back room
and put Miles Davis
on the hifi.
The muted horn,
the saxophone weaving,
the drummer
keeping pace,
jazz on a highway,
he closed his eyes,
head full of darkness,
breath full of sighs.

Terry Collett

Breath.

Breath on a mirror.
The writing with a finger

I love you in the steamed
up space. He rubs it off

with the edge of his hand.
If only she could wipe him

from her heart with as much
ease as he had wiped away

her words of love with brush
of hand from mirror's face.

He gazes at his reflection
and with a finger wets a brow.

She looks on hoping he will love
Her too, sometime, somehow.

Terry Collett

Brian Know Snow 1997

Brian sits
numb and waits
for his wife

to come home
he'd seen her
in Dublin

with that girl
that Una
holding hands

he knows now
where she goes
when she's out

not with him
he'd followed
her out to

see where she
went for fun
spying game

kind of thing
then she met
the blonde girl

that Una
and they kissed
he feels sick

can't believe
what he saw
then they went

off together
to some place
some bedsit

and went in
he opens
up a beer

and sips it
she was here
that Una

a while back
staying here
what's happened

to my wife?
why'd she kiss
that woman

on the lips?
is she queer?
he recalls

him and her
having hot
sex last night

she willing
lying there
having it

he sips more
of his beer
what to do?

what to say?
how long for?
and then what?

he feels sick
sits and waits
sipping beer

slips his mind

down inside
to first gear.

Terry Collett

Bride

The nun leaves
the warm parlour

off the cloister
and feels the cloisters' cold

and biting frost of early dawn.
Each bite and nip

of toes and fingertips
a minor crucifixion.

My self my enemy
you shall not win.

The cross signifies
the crossing out of I,

the I's greed and wants
and selfish such.

There is birdsong.
Smell that blossom.

Do not rush, walk as told,
remember that.

Sense that cold.
Feel those nails,

hammering flesh,
co-joined with Christ,

as His bride, day
and tortured night.

See that fresh born sun;
night's moon shies away.

The nun pauses.
Sniffs the air.

The time of bleeding.
Tombstone of another's death.

She sees, smoke like,
her rising breath.

Terry Collett

Bright Saturday.

and Jane showed you
where the sheep's wool
got caught along

the barbwire fence
on the top of the Downs
and she gave you
a handful and you

stuffed it in the pocket
of your faded blue jeans
and you both stood
looking out

at the horizon
the fields and trees
the farm and cottages
the church down below

where you sat
on the grass
last week
by the gravestones

and watched the sun
and clouds go by
it's beautiful up here
she said

I love this spot
the slight breeze
moved her grey dress
flapping it gently

her hands at play
in front of her
sure is beautiful
you said

nothing like London
with its many houses
and flats
and churches

and factories
and other buildings
and smoke
and other things

to harm
I couldn't live there
she said
I like the fresh

open spaces
and she breathed
in deeply
and you saw her

close her eyes
and the sunlight
caught her beauty
and you were moved

and touched by it
then she opened
her eyes again
and she talked

of the people
of the parish
and how she loved
the church

on a Sunday morning
and the smell of flowers
as he walked up
the aisle

and sunlight
coming through

the high windows
and as she spoke

you studied
her lips move
and how lovely
her eyes were

and you felt like
you wanted to kiss her
but didn't
but just watched her

looking at her profile
the colour of her hair
the red ribbon
holding a bunch

at the back
and she put out a hand
and touched yours
and said her mother

liked you
and how unlike
the local boys
you were

and you smiled
and squeezed
her slim hand
her fingers warm

touching yours
and you both began
the slow descent
and all the while

she talked
of butterflies
and wild flowers
and their scent.

Terry Collett

Bright Sunny Day 1957

Enid and I sat
on the concrete stairs
of the flats.

Her old man had
walked past us
going down
off to work.

He said a few words
but that was all.

How's things at home?
I asked.

They rowed last night
but he never came
into me or hit me
she said
he was all right
breakfast time
and Mum said
nothing at all
over breakfast.

I showed her
my collection
of football cards.

She took them
and looked
through them.

Want to go
somewhere?
I said.

Where?
she said.

Camberwell Green
I said
I want to show you
the hospital
I was born in.

Is it far Benny?
she said.

Just a bus ride away
I said.

I'll have to ask
my mum first
she said.

Ok go ask her
I said.

She went up the stairs
I went to the balcony
and looked over
down at the Square.

The baker
was delivering bread
with his horse-drawn cart
kids played near
and on the pram sheds.

Enid came down
and said she could go
her mum seemed
ok about it
but not to tell her dad
just in case.

I went told my mother
who was doing
the washing.

Enid and I
went on our way
on that bright
sunny day.

Terry Collett

Brighton That Last Time.

Brighton
that last time
late August
1980

treading
the familiar streets
looking
for the lost love

you drained
looking
for the way out
she

holding on
to what was left
walking along
by the beach

remembering old times
especially
the first time
in evening's glow

of moon's light
and heart's hold
knowing all that
is bereft

even the old restaurants
have gone
or closed
their doors

you sensing
the emptiness
the slipping away
of the love

she clutching
at straws
of familiar places
and old time

memories
even places
where once
you'd stood

embracing
and kissing
now hollow
with that

secret love
missing
street after street
passing hotels

you'd made love in
and slept
the night
and laid in bed

now shallow palaces
with empty rooms
instead
she thinking

something could
be saved
you knowing
all is dead.

Terry Collett

Broken And Numb.

She knows these are her
Last moments with her still
Born babe knows they'll take
The babe away and leave
Her arms empty like the
Cradle at home standing
In the nursery especially
Prepared with the wallpaper
Chosen and the new carpets
Laid and she hugs the babe
Close to her breasts tries to
Bring warmth to the lifeless
Bundle wrapped in a white
Blanket and we'll be back in
A while the nurse had said
and she left the small room
and the door clicked shut
With a small click and she
Walks the room rocking
The babe feeling the weight
Sensing her child there her
Flesh and blood and she
Wants to breathe life into
The tiny lungs want to see
Movement wants there to
Be a miracle to shock them
To say look there is life you
Must have been mistaken
But no matter how hard she
Breathes or rocks the babe
No life comes no movement
No miracle of miracles and
Out of the window as she passes
The trees have that winter
Bareness the sky the greyness
Of cannon smoke and a little
Way off a woman laughs a
Vacuum machine is turned
On and a baby cries but not

Hers for hers is silent unmoving
Becoming cold and stiff and
She kisses the pale cheek the
Forehead seeks out the small
Uncrutching hands the tiny
Curved fingers and holding
The babe up tight against her
She doesn't want the separation
To come doesn't want the nurse
To take away the babe in her
Arms but she knows the minutes
Tick away and the nurse will
Come and the empty arms will
Leave her broken and numb.

Terry Collett

Bruised Fruit Flesh.

Fay sat with Benedict
on the grass outside
Banks House. He wore
his faded blue jeans,

white tee shirt; she
wore a lemon dress
(one he liked) with
small white flowers.

It was warm, a summery
sun was in the sky,
trains moved over
the railway bridge

just over the way.
She talked of a nun
at her school, who
was strict and carried

a ruler around to hit
the hands of girls who
spoke out of turn.
Benedict sat cleaning up

his six-shooter toy gun,
wiping his handkerchief
over the silvery barrel.
Girls live in fear of her,

Fay said, she creeps behind
them and pokes her
finger into their flesh.
Have a teacher at my school

who pokes with a pencil,
Benedict said, digs it right in,
especially when he's making
a point about something.

Fay's eyes caught the sun's light;
he thought he could see angel's
playing there. She caught me
over my knuckles last week, Fay said.

Did you tell your parents? he asked.
God no, she said. Daddy would
have beaten me for sure; upsetting
nuns and such. O, he said, he loved

the way her fair hair shone in sunlight,
the way she moved her lips to form words.
He put his gun back in the holster
(the one his old man had given him)

around his shoulder. She spoke of
the mass and the priest who came.
Benedict didn't know what the heck
the mass was, but he just listened to

her talk, watched her lips make words
like some potter makes bowls.
He studied her hands as she spoke,
how they gestured along with the words;

small hands, thin fingers. He couldn't
understand how anyone could want
to slam a ruler over such thin knuckles.
She spoke of the Host and that it was Jesus

in the form of bread. He was stumped,
but listened on, taking in her every word,
the sound of the word, the way she
shaped it, the way her tongue seemed

to hold then throw out the word.
Then she stopped and pulled off her
yellow cardigan because of the heat.
He saw on her upper arm, a fading

green bruise, like damaged fruit gone off.

She put the cardigan on the grass,
and talked on about confessions,
about the confessional, how dark it was,

how the priest was hardly
visible through the metal mesh.
Benedict half listened; too concerned
about her bruised fruit flesh.

Terry Collett

Business Is Business.

See anything you fancy? Bertha
asked opening wide her fur coat

to the guy passing by on his way
Home to his wife or maybe his lonely

apartment but the guy just walked
on a little faster with his face flushed

and his hat slightly askew and she
watched him go off into the crowds

and thought well you can't win them
all some like the show some don't and

she pulled her coat tight around her again
and waited for the next potential punter

watching the passing dead going off home
after a boring day at the office or store

thinking of the time some office punk
gave her a hard time and wanted the

full deal in bed and then went off taking
her purse and money and underwear

and bra while she was in the washroom
after the awful sex but as her mother

once said you can't always get what you
want and besides business is business

and men are men one is bound to meet
some sad excuse for a man now and then.

Terry Collett

But She Knew

But I know
she said

that you love me
and you were sitting

by the pond
you with that cheap fishing rod

which caught nothing
and she sitting there

her hands over her knees
gazing at the still surface

even if you don't
say it often

she added
laying her chin

on her knees
her green skirt

just above her knees
and you caught

a glimpse of her thighs
where the skirt rose up

I do you love
you said

holding the rod
between hands

it's just I don't see the need
to keep on saying it

you added
stretching your eyes

to go as far
as they could

to get a better look
and she said

why do you come here
to fish when you catch

nothing except a cold
in the neck

and stiff joints
and do you want a smoke?

She pulled out
a pack of cigarettes

and you let a hand free
from the rod

and took one
and she put one

between her lips
and lit it with a pink

plastic lighter
then lit yours

and you both
inhaled and exhaled

the smoke rising
over the pond

seeming to sit there
in the still air

and she said
between drags

I do know you love me
I can feel it

in my bones
and in my tingling

flesh at night
as I lay abed

and you thought
of that image

knowing her mother
would be about

the house
with her stern features

and sharp tongue
and beady eyes

but the image was good
you thought

sitting there beside her
in silence

with the drifting smoke
over the pond

and her hand
touching you

and the sky
turning from

dull grey
to a soft blue.

Butterflies.

Holding butterflies
then letting them go on wing
to paint pale blue skies.

Terry Collett

By John's Pond.

I want to show you the pond
John says
ducks and swans
are there
and now and then
herons come

Elaine wonders
where the pond is
is it far?
she asks

no not far
just down through
the wood
here
down these rides
mind the brambles
he walks ahead of her

she follows

can you hear that?
he says

what is it?

blackbird
you can tell
by the song

she looks at him
ahead of her
she wishes
he would stay with her
she's not been
in these woods before

how big is it?

she asks

not that big
but big enough
you'll see
he says
back to her
walking on
that's a song thrush
he says
love the song thrush

she treads carefully
along the ride
she doesn't want
to catch her legs
on brambles

they reach a fence
and he climbs over
and waits for her

careful how you get over
he says
don't want to get
a splinter
in your leg

she climbs carefully
trying to keep
her skirt
tight to her legs
doesn't want him
to see up her skirt
but he looks away
out at the field

see pheasants
out there sometimes
he says

she climbs down

the other side
brushes her skirt down
and stands next to him

where's the pond?

over there
he says pointing
over the way
not far now

he walks on
and she follows him
he is just ahead of her
then he climbs over
another fence

it's here

she comes to the fence
and looks over

you'll have to climb over
to see it properly
he says

she climbs the fence
carefully

but he has gone down
towards the pond
staring at the water's skin

she walks down
beside him
standing there
a gentle smell
of flowers
hanging in the air.

Terry Collett

By Starlight.

She'd tell you
which group of stars

were what
in the evening sky

as you stood outside
the church after

choir practice
of a Friday night

and her finger
would lift up

and point it all out
and her words

would drift
on the night air

like cigarette smoke
and you held onto

her every word
as she spoke

not for what she said
of night sky

or constellation of stars
but for the sound

of her voice
how it disturbed

the universe
made the deadly silence

less deadly
how they could bring

you in close to her
could embrace you

as she did
when no one

was looking
or you were both alone

some place standing
or sitting face to face

and that particular night
as she pointed up

and out
her other hand

grabbed yours
in the evening dark

and gave a squeeze
and hold

and then let go
how deep

that love was back then
is hard to figure

but love it was
you know.

Terry Collett

By The Pond In Shade

She sat down with you
by the pond
the summer heat

and dragonflies
skimming across
the water's skin

and the odd duck or so
setting down there
and she said

I want to have kids one day
and be a good mother
and make my kids happy

and meet their needs
and not be a moaning mum
like my own

and you looked at her
taking your eyes off
the ducks and dragonflies

and letting them rest
upon her face
and wondered how Rubens

would catch her
or maybe Renoir
and you said

I'm sure you will some day
and they'll be lucky kids
and maybe you won't moan

or chide too much
and then silence
as you swam over

her features
her eyes
her nose

her rose kissed cheeks
the way she sat
her elbows on her knees

the summer skirt
showing a little thigh
and she said

pointing to the water
we used to swim in there
when we were young

before mother caught us
with that Barber boy
but it was fun

and innocent
but she never saw things
that way

and then she smiled at you
and you said
wish we could go swim there

like that today
while the sun's out
and the dragonflies

are skimming
and the ducks are here
but she just shook her head

and laughed
and ducks flew off
but dragonflies stayed

where you sat with her

by the pond
in cool of shade.

Terry Collett

By The Small Pond

We sit by the small pond
after school

Mother's still out shopping
Yehudit says
so we can sit
and talk awhile

the water's murky
no ducks or fish
in this small place

maybe tadpoles
or old boots
or rubbish thrown in

trees surrounding
are still in leaf

no one must know
what we did
and where today
she says

I look at the tin can
lying on the side
of the muddy pond

as if I would
I say

if it got out
my mum'd kill me
she says

what about your dad?
I ask

he would kill me too

if Mum told him
he could

a blackbird settles
on a branch
on my left
black
yellow beak
noisy

but worse than that
what would the other girls say?

lucky you?

no they wouldn't
she says
they'd say what a slapper
what a slut
and there of all places

she's quiet
and stares at the pond

but you're not
we didn't plan it
I say

but we did it
and what if someone saw us
what if a teacher
or prefect came in the gym
lunchtime and saw us?

somewhere to our left
a dog barks
smell of the farm
just over a cow moos

no one did
I say
live what is

not what might have been
or may have happened

she sighs
and looks at me
with her blue eyes

guess so

she looks at the wrist watch
on my wrist

better go
Mum'll be back
on the next bus
she says

we get up
and brush ourselves down
and walk through the woods

it was good though
even if it was
an odd place
I say

odd being
the operative word
she smiles

the fear of someone
coming in
made it seem
more daring
I suggest

daring?
absolutely mad
she says
but yes
it was good

we came to the back
of the cottage
where I lived

shall I walk you home?

no best not
she says
Mum's not struck on you
thinks you might
get me into trouble

I frown
me?
but butter wouldn't melt
in my mouth
I say

she smiles and walks on
I THINK IT WOULD
she shouts back at me
and walks out of sight

I turn into the garden
and along the path
thinking to myself
she's right.

Terry Collett

By The Sword.

Your father made you
a sword out of metal
at the place he worked

and brought it home
one night after work
and gave it to you

after tea and said
Be careful how you use it
I don't want you using it

dangerously
ok
you said

and went off
with the heavy sword
into the spare room

you called the toy room
the place you fought
bad knights to save

damsels in distress
or have shoot outs
with cowboys

on the wrong side
of the law
and got your gun

out of the holster
before them
and plugged them

full of caps
or the pretend saloon
where you could go

for a shot of red eye
and once you had
the sword with you

you examined it carefully
running a finger along
the blunt blade

and then
you were set upon
by the enemy knights

out of nowhere
three onto one
and you had a sword fight

and being the top guy
you soon had them licked
and lying dead

and you heard your father
call out
from the dining room

Be careful you don't
kill anyone with that
and you murmured

Too late
I've just put them
to the sword

and he laughed
and your mother said
You shouldn't make him

weapons of death
it gives a false view
of the world

but your father just said

It's just a toy
just a bit of pretence

and a kid's got to have
something to use
in his defence

against invisible foes
and then they rowed
and so you shut the door

and put away the sword
and got out your gun
you could blow away

far more of them
and it was louder
quicker and more fun.

Terry Collett

By The Water Tower

She waited for me
by the water tower
her bike by the hedge
her hands on her hips
her dark hair
hanging loose
untied by ribbons
or bow

I'd finished
my schoolboy work
at the farm
weighting milk
and cleaning out
the cow sheds

been waiting
she said

had to finish my work
I said

you said 1pm
and it's 1.20pm now

she looked at me
with an unhappy face

can't be helped
I said

where we going?
she said
are your parents home?

well my mother is
my father's at work
in the woods
a few miles away

where can we go then?
she said moodily

there's an empty cottage
down the lane
back there
I said

can we get inside?

no it's locked
but there's a shed

she sighed
maybe spiders or such
she said

maybe there are
maybe mice too

yuk don't like them

where to go then?
I said

she got her bike
and we walked towards
the cottage where I lived

must be some place
we can go
she said

I knew what she was after
and I didn't want to
at least not yet

what about the woods?
she asked
must be a quiet spot there

I guess so
I replied

so we walked up the drive
a muddy drive with trees
on either side and bushes

wasn't there a hollow tree
up here somewhere?
she said
that one we went to
a few months back?

I looked ahead
I remembered the last time
I took her there
she started to undress
and I told her it might be
unwise in case
some one came along
she wasn't happy that time
I knew she wanted
to have sex

but what if some one
came along?
I said

she had been moody
for hours afterwards

it's up on the left
I said

can we go there?

what for?

you know
we could have sex

I sighed

is that all
you think about?

when I'm with you
she said

what about nature
the trees
birds
butterflies?

what about them?
just because that other girl
you see is a dull cow
doesn't mean I have to be

she's not dull
she's full of knowledge
about nature
and wild life

O big deal
Lizbeth said

I stopped on the drive
looked back
from where we had come from

well where now?

where's the hollow tree?

up further
on the left
I said

so she walked on
and I followed
studying her swaying hips
and black dress
black stockings
and shoes muddied

by the muddy drive

the hollow tree came up
on our left
and she ran up to it
and went inside

I followed her
determined not to
no matter how much
she moaned and tried.

Terry Collett

Cake Business 1977

You moved the cakes
from the rack
and put them on
the pallet carefully
so they wouldn't fall,

you gazed at the metal
note board where
the cake orders were
20 cupcakes you read
and moved on to
where the cupcakes
were stacked,

Natanya the night before
stretched out on the bed
arms spread wide
legs likewise
you undressing
studying her fruits,

Socrates est negativa
you had read
in some book
before you climbed
the stairs to bed
questo non è mondo reale
the Italian guy had said,

you handed down the cupcakes
and placed them
on the pallet carefully
against the side next
to the ginger cakes,

Natanya watched
as you undressed
muttering about
this or that warm up game

you undressed
stood there waiting
your piece proud,

nessun altro mondo
the other Italian guy said
in the book you read,

you moved the pallet
on to the next cake section
and studied the list
40 Sandwich cakes
you handled the cakes
in between your hands
and on to the pallet
someone had inked
Led Zeppelin rock
on the pallet back,

Natanya moved
to the side of the bed
as you sat there games?
She said
if you want
you said
and she moved over you
and mouthed you,

questo è il mondo reale
the Italian replied
and you closed the book
and walked the stairs,

the list of cakes
was completed
and you pushed the pallet
to the checkers
who checked the cakes
with the list,

you mused I couldn't do
that brain deadening job

unless pissed.

Terry Collett

Call Of Birds 1916

There's a stillness
in his room.

Dust it well, Polly,
Gripe told me.

Smell of stale air,
mothballs, old smoke
still there.

The bed where we lay
and made love,
now still and vacant.

He away broken by war
and death seen
and felt at close quarters,
in some hospital
for wounds of body
and mind from war's touch
and hurl
and dug out flesh.

I sit on the bed
and muse of him there
and holding me
and kissing.

He would put a finger
to my lips and say:
hush Polly,
and his moustache
would tickle me
and his hands invade me
to a deep pleasure.

I bounce the bed gently.

When he was home last

(before the breakdown came)
he asked me up to his room
and it was so warm
and soft and him
kissing my neck
and slowly
each inch of me.

Now the room
is empty of him,
the bed a tomb
of where we were.

I hug a pillow to my breast,
kiss the cloth,
pretend it's him there,
holding him close,
closing eyes
and breathing out words.

Outside the window
the call of morning birds.

Terry Collett

Came To Nought 1955

And I told 'er
your old man
don't go round 'er place
for nothink
he must be up ta
somethink
the woman said.

Benny's mother
did not reply
but nodded
as in agreement.

His mother
never dropped her H's
and her vowels
were rounded
giving the impression
of upmarket
or posh sounding.

Stands ta reason
I told 'er
can't trust men
as far as you can
throw 'em.

Benny stood
behind his mother
gazing at the cakes
on display
in the glass case
shelf after shelf of them.

His mouth watered
at the ones at the bottom
with shredded
coconut on top.

He wondered
if he could persuade
his mother to buy
him a coconut cake
only 4d
for Christ's-sake.

But he never asked
he understood
that things
were tight
and it was only right
she spend her
money wisely.

But still
his mouth watered.

But will she listen?
the woman continued
not on your belly
goes all off with me
only doing it
for your sake
I says to 'er.

His mother nodded
looked at the woman kindly
but with a sense
of stiffness or aloofness
Benny thought.

Once the old girl
had gone
and the shopping bought
Benny's dream
of cake or cakes
came to nought.

Terry Collett

Can Can Dancer Gran.

I used to be a dancer
during World War 1
your paternal grandmother said

as she sat next to you
on the seat in her
back garden in London

and your grandfather
would come and watch
with his army friends

and afterwards
he'd come
to the stage door

with flowers or chocolates
or just stand there
with that awestruck look

on his face
and she looked
at the flowers

that your grandfather grew
along both sides
of the garden

and she smiled and said
Look at him now
sits in the same room

and says nothing
or moans about the bills
or how the country is run

or the noise of the traffic
by the front gate
and you sat there

on the seat
in the back garden
in your new suit

and with your hair
cropped short
and that fifteen year old

I'm bored as hell look
on your face and you said
Why did you give up dancing

you must have been good at it?
and as you looked
at your grandmother

with her white frizzy hair
and stocky build
you couldn't imagine her

as a dancer on a stage
with men gawping at her
especially not your soft spoken

quiet grandfather
who sat in his armchair
by the fireside

in a silent mood
occasionally reading a book
or giving that

I've seen too much
of mankind's foolery
kind of look

and your grandmother said
Well after we got married
I fell for your uncle Fred

and beside I wasn't that good

a dancer and your
grandfather didn't want

a wife of his
to be peered at
or have her legs

gawked at
by other men
and then she was silent

and watched
a white butterfly
go by

fluttering its wings
but
she said softly

getting up
from the seat
and doing a small

Can Can dance
the shows not over
until the fat lady sings.

Terry Collett

Can'T Get There.

I know as soon
as I see Dalya
that she's in
a foul mood;
we're both heading
for the shower block
across the camp
walking past
tents and grass.

How'd you sleep?
I ask.

Don't ask.

I already have;
bad night?

She looks at me
moodily.

That bloody Yank girl;
if I could get away
with suffocating her
in her sleep, I would.

Bad as that, huh?

Yes, bad as that
and worse.

What happened?

She happened;
I have to share a tent
with her because
no one else will.

I'm sure

the Aussie guy would.

Well apart from him;
I am stuck with her.

We walk past
the camp café and bar;
it's full already.

What's the matter
with her?
she seems jovial enough.

She too darn jovial
and how many men
she's had
is no one's business
and I have to hear
the long line of names
and what not
as I'm trying to sleep
and it's:
and he was a serious thinker;
he had this apartment
in L.A and O boy
could he go it some...
and all that
kind of thing
and it makes me
want to put
the darn pillow
over her head
and keep it there
until she's silent.

We reach the shower block
and we wait outside.

You can always
share with me;
I'm sure the Aussie guy
won't mind;

he can go share
with Miss Yank 1974.

I want more sleep
not less,
she says,
smiling for the first time.

I can only offer.

I'll think about it
under a hot shower blast.

And she walks off
into the female door
and I walk to the male's.

I know she won't,
but the thought is there
reaching out
even if I
can't get there.

Terry Collett

Canteen Talk 1975

I placed the Camus book
face down on the canteen table

other nurses sat over the way talking
looking at some magazine

smoke rose from a cigarette
put on the side of an ashtray

I sipped my coffee
and looked down
at the bumf on the back cover
of the book
The Outsider
by Albert Camus
and other black print

I felt an outsider
outside the circle
of behind the back talk
the chitchat of this and that

I thought the mentally ill patients
more desirable company
with their smiles
and odd stares
and drooling mouths

I thought about Natanya
the night before
us at it in the bed

she holding me
about the waist
me looking down at her
at her black hair
her eyes gazing

the bed rocking away

she maybe thinking what
her kids might think
might say

a nurse got up
from the table
and laughed about something
then she went on her way
out the door

the other three sat
and talked about her
probably or more likely
me.

Terry Collett

Card Swapping

O'Brien brought ☐
cigarette cards

to school
and showed you

what he had
in the playground

and Davis said
who's the dame?

Veronica Lake
O' Brien said

holding the card out
between finger and thumb

Sutcliffe took hold of it
and held it close

to his eyes
not bad

he said
you looked over

Sutcliffe's shoulder
my dad likes her

you said studying
the picture

taking it
from Sutcliffe's hand

who else you got?
Davis asked

and O'Brien fingered
through the pack

mostly soccer players
and the odd movie star

he said
hey got any Marilyn Monroe?

Sutcliffe said
gazing short-sightedly

at O'Brien's hands
what's a matter Eddie

got the hots for her?
Davis laughed

and Sutcliffe pulled
a face

wouldn't say no
he muttered

wouldn't say no?
O'Brien said

why Eddie you wouldn't know
one end of a dame

from the other
you'd end up kissing

the wrong cheeks
Sutcliffe pulled a face

I'll swap you
for the Veronica Lake

you said
holding it close

to your school jumper
sure

O'Brien said
and you swapped him

with a soccer player
you had three of

and he took it
and tucked it in his pack

and you put Veronica
in your jacket pocket

nice and snug
between the pages

of a jotting book
save and sound

waiting for
your bedtime look.

Terry Collett

Cat Comfort

Even when Jodrig
fails to show

for the promised date
or comes

on the wrong day
or comes too late

Tibbles never
lets her down

he comforts
with his rough tongue

on her smooth thigh
or gazes at her

with his one good
and one closed eye

or purrs her
to happiness

even if her life's a mess
or she depressed

he seems to know
the time to snuggle

his head against
her breast

or simply lay his paw
upon her open jaw

but when Jodrig
gets it right

and stays the night
for nightcap

or night love
then snores to sleep

Tibbles moves between
he and she

and snuggles down
where he's meant to be.

Terry Collett

Catapulting 1957

Benny stoned
a tin can.

He watched it fall
off the wall.

He put another stone
in his catapult
aimed and hit
another tin can.

Enid watched him
she still felt
where her old man
had beat her.

She watched
the tin can fall again
watched Benny load
his catapult once more
and aim
the last tin can
stood on the wall.

Her old man
had been
in a bad mood
her mother
had said nothing
no help there.

The last tin can
fell from the wall
with a loud sound
and hit the ground.

Want a go?
Benny said
offering her

the catapult.

She took the catapult
and he stood
put the tin cans on
the wall of
the bombed-out house
on the bomb site
off Meadow Row.

She watched him
as she held the weapon
he placed all three tin cans
on the wall
and came to her.

He showed her
how to hold and aim
he gave her small stones.

She put them in
her dress pocket.

He stood back
and watched
as she pulled back
the the leather holder
with stone and aimed.

The pain where
her old man beat her
caused her hands to shake
as she aimed.

Benny watched
took in the pale blue dress
her shaking hands.

She let go the load
it shot off
into foreign lands.

Cedric's Message.

Cedric approached you
in the playground and said
My sister Christina

wants to see you
on the playing field lunchtime
and he said it

in a quiet voice
as if he didn't want
the other boys to hear

he ran messages for girls
and off he went
to play with some other boys

leaving you to stare out
onto the empty playing field
and so lunch time

after you'd eaten dinner
you went onto the playing field
beneath the summer sun

and there she was
over by the wire fence
waiting for you

and you said
Cedric said you wanted to see me
and she said

Yes do you mind
if we walk off alone together
I don't want other's ears

to move in on our conversation
No sure
you said

Let's go over by the woods
by the far fence
and so you walked off with her

across the playing field
by other kids who were playing
football or sitting talking

or playing skip rope
or whatever
and when you came

to the woods
you sat down with her
and she said

You do love me
don't you?
I mean you're not

seeing anyone else?
You looked across
the playing field

to where you'd sat
with another
some months before

and she had asked
the same question
but since then

it had turned
momentarily sour
Yes and no

you said
looking back at her
taking in her dark hair

and deep eyes

and how her hand
lay on her thigh

covered by grey skirt
and her naked knees
just visible

to the eye
What do you mean
yes and no?

she asked
you watched
her lips move

and replied
Yes I love you
and no I'm not

seeing another
and she smiled at you
and put her hand on yours

and waited for a kiss
and so you did
her lips on yours

out by the woods
on that summer day
out of doors.

Terry Collett

Cedric's Sister

My sister likes you
Cedric said
and as he said it
he blushed

and well Christina
wasn't a bad looker
from what you saw of her
in the recreation grounds

at school
and once

you'd gone up to her
when she was sitting
with her school friends
in the summer

on the playing fields
and you saw
how she sat
with a small glimpse

of thigh revealed
and dark hair
and brown eyes
like chocolate drops in snow

and you said
you've got fine eyes
(you didn't mention
her thighs)

and she giggled
with her friends
and you thought
how she'd like to go

with you into

the tall grass
but never said it aloud
and so you said to Cedric

what'd she say?
And he said
looking down
at his black shoes

that she liked you
and wanted to know
if you'd meet her up
on the playing field

at lunch recess
near the tall grass?
And you imagined her
there on her ass

looking up at blue skies
with her chocolate eyes
uttering sexy sighs
and bringing you in close

Sure you said
and watched
as Cedric wandered off
like some messenger

of old having brought
his message of battle
and walked away wearied
having told.

Terry Collett

Chair Of Torture 1957

Enid told me
about the chair.
Just an ordinary
chair; wooden chair

with open spaces
at the back. Made
marks on her back
where he'd made her

sit so long and where
she leaned back. So
what did your old man
keep you in the chair

for so long for? I asked
as we stood by the metal
green painted fence
surrounding the grass

outside Banks House.
Cross examination,
she said, looking away
from me, her eyes behind

her thick lens glasses
gazing at the fresh fish
shop across the road.
What was he cross

examining you about?
Someone took money
from the money teapot:
15/- it was, so he said.

And he thought you
took it? She nodded
her head. Wasn't me,
I never took it. Who

did? No idea; my big
brother maybe, he
needs it, not me. I
looked at her standing

beside me by the fence,
our feet on the space
of pavement. Did he
hurt you? She bit her

lower lip. He kept me
in the chair. He said
he was keeping me in
the chair until I owned up.

And did you? I didn't take
the money. I thought he'd
give up once he realized
I never took the money

and let me go, but he
didn't, he walked around
me, hands behind his back,
asking me questions. And

where was your mother in
all this? She sat on the sofa
chewing on her handkerchief
saying: tell him the truth

Enid, tell him the truth.
Enid sat by the fence,
hands each side of her.
So what happened? I asked,

looking for signs of bruises
and such. He walked round
me and said: I'm not letting
you go until you tell the truth.

I said I didn't take the money.

He clouted me about the head
after ten minutes. You'll not
get off this time, he said.

My head spun. My mum
left the room. He told her
go get some tea on. I looked
at him, but only as he passed

in front of me, not all the
way round so sometimes he
was out of sight and I didn't
know what he was going to

do next. He hurt you after that?
I asked. He dragged me off
the chair and sat down himself
and gripped my wrist tight.

He made me stand there for
ages, him griping my wrist,
talking, talking. My legs ached.
Wanted to sit on the chair. She

was silent; looked at the fresh
fish shop. Then he dragged me
over, and hit me until I said
I had the money. And did you?

I asked. I knew she had.
The face told me. The eyes
behind her thick lens glasses
told me. She nodded, looked

away. A horse drawn coal
wagon went by along
Rockingham Street, the coal
man sitting on the sack cloth

seat dour faced. How about
some chips from Neptune's?
I said, looking at her, at her

grey faded flower dress and

the dull green cardigan, her
hair pinned back by two metal
hair grips at the side. I didn't
have it, didn't have the money,

she said, just said it because
of him hurting me. I know,
I said, don't talk of it again.
She nodded and we walked

up Meadow Row, in the slow
beginning coming down rain.

Terry Collett

Chapel Going

Janice(wearing a lime
flowered dress
and white socks)

met me by the iron bridge
to go to chapel
I didn't often

go to chapel
sometimes
I went to the other church

or the tabernacle
or not at all
but she wanted to go

so I said
I'd go along
and sing a few hymns

and see the old dame
plonking on the piano
out of tune

and some old guy
singing
like a bullfrog

out of water
Gran said
I'm not to get

my new dress dirty
and not to go
on the bomb sites

or play in the park
or I'm for it
just chapel

and home again
she sounded disappointed
I thought of going

to the bomb site
off Meadow Row
to get small stones

for my catapult
but I didn't want
to get her

into trouble
ok let's get
to chapel

and have a sing-along
I like your blazer
is it new?

yes my Mum
bought it for me
for Sundays

and special occasions
I also have these
new grey flannel trousers

and white shirt
and tie
we walked on

by the public house
and along
to the small chapel

she was thinking
of her new lime
flowered dress

and what the chapel goes

might think and say
I was thinking

of how many cans
I could hit
with my new catapult

tucked inside
my blazer pocket
touching it lightly

with my fingers
as we walked along
hearing

as we entered
the chapel
a dreary song.

Terry Collett

Checkout Meet.

There was this dame
at the checkout yesterday
Henry said
blonde hair greying
oval face
and black-framed glasses
and those kind of eyes
that pop out at you
in the dark

and?
I said

and she smiled
the kind of smile
that said I don't smile
that often these days

then what?
I said

then I smiled too
the kind of smile that said
I know what you mean
I don't much either

then what?
I said

then she packed her
purchases away in her bags
and paid the cashier
some young girl
with diaper marks
still on her ass

so?
I said

so she walked past me
giving that look that said
I get lonely at times
maybe pop around
and see me some time
and her ass kind of swayed
in these pale blue pants

and then what?
I said

I looked at her and said
give me a ring
on your lonely nights

how did she get your number?
I said

o
Henry said
I passed it to her
inside my lonely head.

Terry Collett

Chill Dawn

Yiska sits
in the bath
off the ward

no water
just sits there
all depressed
butt naked

scars on wrists
suicide
reminders

I stand there
by the door
never locked
the bathroom
on the high
risk locked ward

didn't know
you were here
I tell her

she looks up
you do now
but who cares
what's to see
you've not seen
she mutters
got a smoke?

I give her
my packet
of French smokes

she takes one
I light it
and light one

for myself

we inhale
in silence
her pink scars
like medals
on her wrists

her small breasts
hang lonely
her sex bush
between thighs
visible

you best go
she tells me
just in case
the nurses
come along

you OK?

I'll be fine
she replies

OK then
hold in there
I tell her
walking off

I don't mind
that you're here
she whispers
we're soul mates
on death's ship
on rough seas
drowning deep

I go in
and kiss her
on the arm
then return

to the ward
of chill dawn
waiting for
my new life
to be born.

Terry Collett

Choking Fit 1958

The film
was well underway
and I was sitting
next to my old man
in the dark
of the cinema
sharing a bag of nuts.

All of a sudden
my old man gets up
out of his seat
and disappears
up the aisle
out of sight.

I watched the film
a Western in colour.

I hoped no women
would appear
and spoil the fun
with all that kissing
business and hugging.

I liked the gun shooting
and fist fights in saloons
tables overturning
and dance girls
screaming.

An usherette
came down the aisle
to where I was sitting.

Your father's
had a choking fit
she said
best come see
how he is.

So I got up
and followed her
up the aisle
turning to see
where the film had got
and out into
the lit up foyer.

My old man
was sitting in a chair
with another usherette
beside him
patting him gently
on the back.

You all right?
I said.

Ok now
he said
choke on a nut.

He sat there forlorn
the usherettes
tending to him.

He breathed
in deep.

I looked at him
sitting there
gazing how the light
was shining up
his bald spot
where there
was no hair.

Terry Collett

Chrissie's New Love.

As I lay beside Beth
I think about Delia.

I guess I knew
it couldn't last.

She was
too wild for me
too immoral
and the last time
she slept with that
tall brunette
after the party
I knew that was it.

Beth is different
she's quiet
and loves me
constantly
and doesn't
betray me
each time
we are out
or after a party.

We met at a wedding
and Delia had gone off
with some girl
she was going
to live with.

Beth's parents
are good
and unlike
Delia's father
don't have an issue
with us
or what we do.

Beth has
turned over
towards me.

She looks
at me.

She smiles
I smile.

She touches
I touch.

She kisses
I kiss.

We embrace
face to face.

I smell
her perfume
and want to drown
in her eyes.

That long ago love
for Delia dies.

Terry Collett

Christina And Benedict And The Kiss.

Christina, dressed in her grey school jumper,
grey skirt, white blouse and green tie,
met Benedict by the wire fence,
which separated the playground
from the sports field. She looked excited
as he approached, he walked
his Robert Mitchum style walk,
met her with a smile, a scanning gaze,
taking in her eyes and hair and legs
and hands folded, standing there.

Guess what, she said, I've got an
Elvis Presley LP. Benedict nodded
and listened while she spoke.

Her mother had bought it for her
while in a good mood(she suffered
depression) , though her father
didn't approve, he allowed her
to play on the new Hi-Fi.

Maybe you can come hear sometime,
she said, the when and how were
not discussed, she living in the town
and he some miles on a bus route away,
but maybe, he said, someday.

They walked up the field,
the other kids enjoying
the midday recess in the bright sun
and cloudless sky, her hand
gripping his, he taking in
her soft speaking and hips sway.

She conversed on the boring maths
she'd had, the domestic science
where she'd burnt her cake, who'd
eat it anyway, for Christ-sake,
she added, giving him her eyes

to drink, her words to hold and think.

He spoke in turn of geography
and woodwork where he began a stool,
thanking her for her photo she'd given
him to keep, tuck between his favourite
book at home, taking out to scan
and treasure, now and then (such
is the way of boys and men) .

She spoke of love, the feelings touched,
the mind excited, her dreams of him,
talking in her sleep (her mother said) .

He stared out at the other kids at play
or wandering in talk or playing ball
or skipping-rope, a teacher spying as
he crossed the grass, hands behind his back.

She leaned in close and kissed his cheek,
he turned and kissed her lips
to smother any further words.

Someone laughed out loud,
across the field, disturbing birds.

Terry Collett

Christina And You And Home For Lunch

As you went by
the girl's playground
after getting off

the school bus
Christina called to you
through the wire fence

and said
my mother said
you can come home

for lunch today
if you like
ok

you said
where shall I meet you?
Cedric will bring you along

she said
and so when
the lunch time

recess bell rang
you followed Cedric
out of the school

and saw Christina
by the outer fence waiting
are you sure

your mother doesn't mind?
you asked
of course not

she said
Cedric walked on in front
leaving you and Christiana

to walk on behind
she talked about some girl
in her class who had a boyfriend

and claimed
to have had sex
and then she went on

about the teacher
who had been expelled
for taking pupils home

in his lunch hour
it was boys though
she added

and then you came
to her house
and she took you in

and there was her mother
in the kitchen
nice to meet you

she said
Christina has talked
about you so much

Cedric behind
his mother's back
was making gagging gestures

with his fingers
down his throat
Christina looked at you

and smiled
nice to be here
you said

are you sure it's all right

me coming?
of course it is

Christina's mother said
now sit down
and I'll serve up for us all

and so you all sat down
around the table
and Cedric looked at you

then looked down
at his knife and fork
and Christina said

glad you're here
and she put a hand
over yours

and gave your hand
a squeeze
then removed it

when her mother
set down the plates
and then sat down herself

and you all began to eat
in an unusual silence
Christina giving you

a bright eyed stare
and Cedric looking
over your shoulder

as if you weren't there
after lunch their mother
cleared the table

of plates and went off
and Cedric went
into the lounge

leaving you and Christina alone
what do you think?
she asked

about what?
you asked
my mother

what do you think of her?
she seems nice
you said

she gets depressed a lot
Christina said
but today

she was at her best
oh right
you said

sorry she gets depressed
come on
Christina said

I'll show you my room
you raised your eyebrows
won't your mother mind?

you asked
not if she doesn't know
Christina replied

isn't it a bit risky?
you said
yes

she said
that's what makes life
so interesting

so you followed her

and tiptoed up the stairs
and she showed you

her bedroom
and her favourite doll
and other favourites of hers

lined along her bed
then she kissed you quickly
and then stood back

and smiled and said
best go down now
or she'll wonder

where we are
and so that was it
and as you followed her

down the stairs
you could hear the radio
playing some classical music

and her mother
humming along
and sounding quite happy

and Christina giving you
another kiss
behind her mother's back

and after saying thank you
to her mother
you all left

to return to school
the clouds promising rain
and so back to school

and the boring lessons
once again.

Christina And You And The Great Wild Out Of Doors.

Christina sat
on the playing field
with a small group of friends
their laughter

giggling over
towards you
as you made your way
to see her after lunch

in recess
when she saw you coming
she got up
brushed down

her green skirt
and white blouse
open at the neck
revealing a hint

of small breasts
and walked towards you
leaving a chatter
of voices behind her

she swaying her hips
as she'd seen
in some black
and white movie

some dame do
and when she got to you
she stood gazing at you
her eyes feeding

on what she saw
how's it going?
you asked
all right

she replied
her fingers fidgeting
in front of her
let's go over

by the fence
you said
away from ears
and eyes

sure
she said
and walked beside you
as you walked

her hand
hanging loose beside her
near touching yours
the skin brushing

against each
as you walked
she talked
of the boring maths lesson

and old Parrot
giving it all that
she gestured
a beak

with the fingers
of her hand
her other hand
taking hold of yours

you sensing her hand
warming into yours
sensual
radiating feelings

old and new

down your spine
and nerves
she laughed

when you told
of how Parrot
threw chalk at you
in class for talking

and how you caught
the chalk
and handed it back to him
and all the time

you took in
her face
her eyes
the line

of her jaw
her lips
like small bubbles
of flesh waiting

to be pressed
into service
and at the back
of your mind

Reynard's words
about her back
in class during science
when the teacher

showed a picture
of some erupting volcano
and Reynard said
she'd like that inside her

that bit you see
at recess
but there beside her

all you wanted

was to place the kiss
the lips waiting
your heart racing
and she

by the fence leaning
gazing at you
the bright eyes
still feeding

her lips opening
and closing
as words came
and left

and you leaned in close
and sealed them
with yours
and all seemed silent

about you
in that great
wild
out of doors.

Terry Collett

Christina And You At Recess.

I saw you and that girl
behind the maths block
Reynard said
we were playing ball

and there you were
caught out
the corner of my eye
and as he spoke

you watched Parrot
writing something
on the blackboard
his curly haired head

moving side to side
as he wrote
and you could see
in your mind's eye

Christina leaning
against the fence
behind the maths block
her eyes lit up

with a young girl's passion
and you leaning in
towards her
wanting to kiss her

wanting to feel
her lips on yours
but she kept on talking
her lips opening

and closing
like a fish out of water
and her hands placed
over her groin like guards

and she said she wanted
a photo of you
to pin
to her bedroom wall

and you said you'd
seek one out for her
and she said
she had one

of herself for you
and then she spoke
of her parents
and her mother's

depression
and about her older brother
which was lost
in the whisper

of her words
and on and on
she went
and all you wanted

was to feel her lips
on yours
in the few moments
you had alone with her

and even though
you leaned in closer
she talked on
and on

her breath warm
and almost liquidy
against your face
her eyes

like small mirrors

dark and sinkable
and just as
she became silent

and you felt it time
for the kiss to come
the bell rang
and she up

and moved
and touched your hand
and left and you caught
a quick glimpse

of her thigh
as she moved away
and Reynard said
did you get your hand up

or get a snog?
just then Parrot
the teacher
turned around

and threw
a piece of chalk
at you
stop the noise

he bellowed
stop the talk.

Terry Collett

Christina And You In The Gym.

Christina was standing
by the school gym
her satchel over
her shoulder

her hand gripping
the strap
her hair windswept
when she saw you coming

she smiled nervously
and said
I wondered
if you'd come this way

why?
you asked
she took your arm
and pulled you

into the gym
and let the door
close behind you
the gym was empty

there were voices
and the sound
of people passing
along the passageway

need to see you
she whispered
why?
you asked

I don't see you
unless I stop you
in the school somewhere
or on the playing field

if the weather's nice
you gazed
around the gym
at the apparatus

the ropes
the mats
she continued talking
her voice whispering

you looked at her
her eyes dark
and staring
why here?

you asked
we can be alone
for a while
she said

she took hold
of one of your hands
and looked at it
and rubbed her thumb

over the skin
you're only 13
you said
you're only 14

she replied
she placed your hand
to her cheek
we're going to be late

for our next lessons
you said
so?
she replied

you sensed her lips

on your hand
her body moving
closer to you

then she kissed your cheek
then stood there
her mouth slightly open
thank you

you whispered
she smiled
and went out
the gym door

and along
the passageway
you stood gaping
at the ropes

and mats
and the high windows
and a blue sky

and heard voices
calling from the playground
from kids at play
just another moment

you mused
just another day.

Terry Collett

Christina's Fruits 1962

Christina
and I sat
on the grass

at midday
at recess.
The building

of the school
within sight.
It was hot

lemon sun
pouring down
its heat waves.

She sat down
her fine legs
under her

her cream blouse
open neck wide

her small fruits
pushing out
impressions

on the cloth.
I studied
secretly

as she talked
her mother
in a mood

at breakfast
scolding her
her bedroom

in a mess
her clothes not
put away

too lazy.
I listened
taking in

her two knees
just beneath
her green skirt

the white socks
ankle length.
Does your mum

moan at you?
she asked me.
Now and then

I replied.
Beads of sweat
trickled down

her forehead
down her chin
down her throat

down between
her two fruits.
I wished that

I could be
(just a while)
that flowing

bead of sweat
lying there
in soft warmth

of her fruits.
It's so hot

she confessed

I lay there
in my dream
softly blessed.

Terry Collett

Church Sitting

You sat with Jane
in her father's church
the bright morning sun

piercing high windows
pushing colours on flagstone floors
the silence caressed you

her nearness warmed
her ankle socks and sandals
had an innocence of strawberries

her flowered summer dress
rode up to her thighs as she sat
her hands resting on her knees

can you feel that breeze?
she said
cooling isn't it

you sensed it as she spoke
yes I can
you replied

your eyes moved along her thighs
then lifted to her face
as partial sunlight

seemed to show
grace there on skin
and dark black hair

and you watched her lips move
as she spoke and said
I was christened here

and maybe I'll be wed here too
to whom?
you asked

and she looked at you
a thirteen year old boy
then looked away

some birdsong from outside
had caught her ear
and she turned her head

and you gazed
at her neck and jaw
and saw her beauty

in a way you had not before
sunlight catching her
as it had coloured patterns

on flagstone floor
you wanted to reach
and touch her arm

her skin and sense
her pulse of life
that pumped within.

Terry Collett

Cissy And Cats.

Cissy liked cats,
liked to hold them,
kiss them,
feel them purr
against her skin
when she held them.

She liked kittens too;
playful creatures,
climbing and jumping
and running around,
meowing and making
soft voice sounds
with open mouths.

The new kittens
are lucky to be alive.

Mr Jones said:
they'll have to go,
can't have that many
cats about the place,
have to drown them
in the bath in a sack
tied up at the top
and plop plop and drop.

He didn't though,
just him saying things,
like he did.

She hugged the cat
and kittens,
kissed their heads
and paws.

Mr Jones won't drown
her kittens,
not after she said

about him kissing
that young Miss Fanny,
and that his wife
wouldn't like it
if she told.

Cat and kittens saved
for her being
truthful and bold.

Terry Collett

City Of Death

The city reminded her
Of a room full of dark flies;
The constant sound of buzzing;
The frightening hitting of

Bodies against the sides; but
Something more disturbing was
Brought to mind: the memory
Of Mr Danzinki who

Died in a room up on Eastside,
And no one found him for months
On end, and the flies got in
And laid their seeds, and they came

To fruition and buzzed in
Turn, and when his rescuers
Opened the door of the room,
There was that awful smell of

Decomposition, and a
Swarm of flies, and the image
That someone told her as a
Child of the sickening find,

Took up residence in her
Mind and stayed there, and somehow
Related to the city, and
The whole buzz and noise of the

Place, and maybe some dying
Corpse down there in the moving
Throng, and a sense of death and
Dying in the city's air.

Terry Collett

Class Room 1957

Miss A held up the card
with a word on it

who knows
what this word is??
she asked

the class stared glumly
at the card

a girl put up her hand
is it monster??
she said

no it's not monster
Miss A said moodily

another girl
put up her hand
is it mouse??

O'Brien snorted
a laugh behind
his ink stained hand

it is not mouse
the teacher said
her eyes lifted
ceiling ward

I put up my hand

yes Benedict??
Miss A said

can I go to the bog Miss??
there was a titter
behind my back

yes you can
but no you may not
she said sternly

I pulled a face
she looked at me
I unpulled my face

anyone else
have any idea
what the word is??
everyone has one
she suggested

O'Brien whispered
to me a word
I could not repeat

what was that O'Brien??
Miss A asked

muscle Miss
he said
(not the word
he said to me?)

no it is not that
look at the card
look look
she said

we gazed at the card
in her hands

who knows
the first letter??

a girl put up
her hand

it's M Miss
she said

and the second letter??

I put up my hand
it's O Miss
I said

she gazed at me
and the third letter??

Helen put
up her hand
it's T Miss
she said

already whispered O'Brien
ain't long had dinner

Miss A glared at him
the fourth letter O'Brien??

aitch
he said

Miss A sighed
H
she said
one breathes
the letter out
H not aitch
next letter??
she said

it's E Miss
a girl said
on the floor
sitting crossed legged

and the last letter??
Miss A asked

it's R Miss

O'Brien said

so what do all
the letters say??
she asked

Mobster
a girl said
with glasses
(who often
wet herself
if she couldn't make
the bog in time?)

no no
Miss A said
look at the letters

I lifted my hand

and she said
yes Benedict??

I need the bog Miss

GO
she said loudly

and I got up
and sped as fast
as I could

just as I got
to the door

Dennis said
it's Muvver Miss

Miss A looked away
she looked
distressed

it had been
a long
hard day.

Terry Collett

Climbing With Jane.

Jane had climbed
the Downs with you

and had hardly spoken
on the tiring climb

along the dried up tracks
on the way up

and then at the top
standing beside you

she stared out across
the countryside

and said
you can see

where I live from here
and she pointed out

to the church down beneath
and you said

yes
and took in the church

and the house
where she lived

with the parson
and his wife

and tried to pick out
which bedroom was hers

and she said
I like it up here

away from the crowds
and nearer to God

and you studied her profile
and her hair

and the way she stood there
in that summer dress

and sandals
and with that youthfulness

and you wanted suddenly
to kiss her

and embrace her
but you didn't

you just stood
and studied her profile

and moving closer
you reached out

your hand
and touched hers

and her hand was warm
and as you squeezed it gently

you sensed the pulse of life
run through

and the moment
seemed to explode

in your head
in a myriad

of colours and sounds
and you rubbed your thumb

along her wrist
checking the pulse

the life
wanting her

to be the one
and pointing upward

she said breaking through
your dream

look at the colour
of that sky

and feel the warmth
of sun.

Terry Collett

Closed Eyes

If you close your eyes
you can see him, can see
how he was that last time,
that way he had of saying

things as if they mattered,
as if his opinion was all that
was the case. You keep your
eyes closed and try and push

images of him away from
your mind, push anything
about him away from you,
his looks, his words, the smell

of him. Relax, the councillor
had said, close your eyes in
a place of safety with no noise.
You lie on the bed in the cheap

hotel; lie there relaxed as you
can be, letting your muscles
become rested. The landlady
downstairs had been welcoming;

had offered to carry your bag upstairs.
You hear birdsong, hear the sound
of soft voices along the hall, smell
mustiness. The bed is comfortable;

the pillows hold your head. If you
open your eyes you fear he might
be there; might have followed you
despite every effort on your part

to avoid anywhere he might know.
Within you you sense a warming glow.

Cloud Formations And Jane..

I like cloud formations
Jane said
laying on her back

in the small church yard
looking up at the sky
above her head

it's like a form of art
you said
grey and white

against a canvas of blue
that looks like a man's head
Jane said

the way it forms
and uniforms
you followed

the pointing
of her finger at the sky
that looks like a dog

over there
you said
she looked

and then gazed at you
her blue eyes
catching the sun's light

through a tree above
I like these moments alone
with you

she said
no one near us
no disturbance

no sounds save for birdsong
and the buzz of bees
you moved closer to her

and lay with you right hand
supporting your head
searching her eyes

her dark hair
about her face
daddy said

that Heaven is above us
and looking
at the cloud formations

I feel I see it
especially when the sun
shines through

she said
her lips moving
with slow motion

I think that sometimes
you said
she leaned nearer to you

and kissed your lips
then lay back
and stared at the clouds

and sky
and you lay back too
thinking inwardly

this is where
I'd like to lie
the day I die.

Cocker Spaniel At Grandmother's House

At your grandmother's house
on the stairs
there was a statue
of a cocker spaniel

medium sized
with bright eyes
that seemed
to follow you

up and down
the staircase
brown
and white

and cream
with that stiff tail
which didn't wag
and you patted

its head
as you went by
or listened
to see if it breathed

or if you tapped its nose
it might bark
and as it didn't
you imitated

a child's bark
and Gran called out
what that's noise Benedict?
you playing

with that dog statue again?
no Gran
you replied
just got a cough

and you went by
the cocker spaniel
giving it a cold stare
and down

in the passage afterwards
you imagined the dog
would follow you down
wagging the stiff tail

giving you
the bright eyed stare
but it didn't come
it just stayed there

icy cool
sans bark
sans waggy tail
and Gran called

come on Benedict
come down now.

Terry Collett

Coffee And Bread 1971

I sat in the refectory
for the first time
a monk was reading
from some book
on Queen Mary Tudor,

Deus videt in corde meo,

visitors sat in the center table
surrounded by monks
and no one spoke
except the monk reading
from a high platform
his voice in monotones,

and she spread herself
on the bed
legs wide
and said
enter my port,

Hugh talked of singing
in unison as if I wasn't
as if he hadn't chanted
like a cow in labour,

he should knoweth that
whoever undertakes
the government of souls
must prepare himself
to account for them
Benedict said,

I watched the monk
limp along the cloister
head bowed
and carrying a spade
head to one side,

bell rang from bell tower
God's voice Dom Charles said
picking apples
in the abbey orchard,

she spoke in that soft tone
she had velvety silky
and kissed me over and over,

Dieu ne se trompe pas
the French monk said
clipping the hedge
by the garden wall
and passing me
the clippings,

tolled bells rang out
across the cloister garth
and George spoke
of priesthood at some time,

the scent of incense
as I entered the church after Terce
and sunlight in the high windows,

Gott im Mauerwerk
the Austrian monk said
rubbing fingers down
the brickwork in the cloister
feel Him he added
and I did,

it is not enough to possess
a good mind but to use it well
Gareth said by the abbey beach
quoting Descartes,

Dom Joseph(dear Bunny)
smiled his broad smile
like a sun rising at dawn,

the abbot tapped

on the table
and the reader
ceased reading
and prayers were said,

after Lauds
I made my way
for black coffee
and brown bread.

Terry Collett

Cold Day To School 1955

It was a cold morning
and I called in
at Helen's place
to walk to school

with her
but she wasn't ready
so her mum said
to stand by

the fire and wait
Helen was finishing off
her breakfast
we overslept

she said
and Dad had
to rush off
without breakfast

and I had
to help Mum
get the kids up
and I dressed

in the cold
and rushed
to get warm
but still I am late

don't worry
I said
it's only school
the warmth

from the fire
warmed me
and I stood listening
to the radio playing

some music
and Helen's
brother and sister
were sitting there

eating their breakfast slowly
get ready
come on now
get a long

Benny doesn't want
to be late for school
Helen's mum said
Helen finished

her breakfast
and went to get
her coat and hat
and I stood

rubbing my hands
in front of the fire
before venturing out
in the cold again

sorry about this Benny
her mum said
we overslept
not like us at all

but there you go
these things happen
and she went off
to the kitchen again

and Helen came
in her coat and hat
and her thick lens glasses
and off we went

her mum kissed

her cheek goodbye
and we went out
in the cold air again

and I shoved
my hands
in my trouser pockets
and we walked off

to school
but I could think
of a hundred
better things

than this to do
but we walked on
along Rockingham Street
in cold shoes and on cold feet.

Terry Collett

Come On Henry

Come on Henry she said
come up and see me some
time but Henry said sorry

dame but I can't today it's
just not possible the wife's
coming back from the shops

and you know what wives are
like and she said oh come
on Henry that's not stopped

you before climbing the stairs
and knocking my door oh that
was for sugar or was it coffee?

Henry said I cannot recall oh
heck Henry don't be such a bore
you've been to my bed many

times before oh Honey don't
be so with me now I got to be
careful the wife's in a mood

the neighbours are talking they
twitch their curtains and peek
through blinds oh to hell with

them she said they've filthy old
minds oh listen baby maybe
tomorrow when the wife's away

I'll come borrow some sugar or
coffee or whatever you like and
share your bed you'll come now

Henry or not come at all the young
dame said oh come on sugar give
me a break let me come another

time and I will bring flowers and
chocolates and love and my body
hot ok she said if you promise me

such I'll cut to a break not for you
or your body but my heart's sake.

Terry Collett

Come She Said 1953

Come, she said,
dark tongued,
eyeing wide eyed,

(naked once dreamed,
he spied) , these are
our best years,

young spirited,
fresh felt, flesh touched,
loved then, loved much.

He went, having been there,
much wearied,
much spent,

paid by the minute,
hour, second,
time gone, not lent.

These were our
best times, she said,
best of works,

deeds done, good deeds,
or crimes, or having done
and gone, said goodbyes,

spoke truth as seen
or worse said, just long
in the teeth lies.

She lies where now
where death rules,
where dark shades lie,

where days
are untimed
or unspent,

here is all eternal
or in this vicinity,
pure infinity.

Terry Collett

Come To Stay 1962

Yochana can't wait
for the first period of lessons
to finish to tell Benedict
what her mother had suggested
about him staying over
at a weekend
(providing her father agreed
which he would she knew)

Miss G talks on
about Mozart's Requiem
and plays parts on the piano
and sings parts too
(how some boys smirk
and get away with it
she'll never know)

she gazes back at Benedict
in the back row
with the Rolland boy

Benedict gazes shyly at her
then down at the desk
she looks to the front again

Miss G says
about Mozart's death
when the bell rings
and she stops and says
all right get your books
and off you go
and remember to listen
to the Requiem if you
have the chance

the pupils gather books
and move towards the door

she waits with Angela

(moody today
because she's on)

Benedict walks towards her
with the Rolland boy

can I have a word?
she says

take your pick
Rolland says
piss or off?

it's all right Rolly
I need to talk to Yoccy anyway
Benedict says

the Rolland boy
walks off grinning

sorry about him
Benedict says
let's go and talk elsewhere

she nods and they walk
down the corridor
and stand by the indoor beehive
with a glass front

well what is it
you want to see me about?
he says
looking at her

don't call me Yoccy
it's horrible
she says
my names is Yochana

he nods and looks at her eyes
is that all?

no my mother said
you can come and stay
one weekend

he pulls a face
me? stay?

yes if my father agrees
which I think he will
Yochana says

is your mother unwell?

no she just wants to meet you
and as you can't come
after school a weekend
is the best time

he looks at his shoes
then back at her
I thought she didn't like
you seeing me?

she doesn't but my father
had a word and she wants
to meet you
Yochana says

I see
Benedict says

kids pass by
and some stand gawking
at the bees moving
on the glass front

don't you want
to come and stay?
she says
her mind begins
to have doubts
that he will come after all

that he will say no
and that it was all
some big error on her part

of course I'd love to
but won't it be awkward
if she doesn't want me there?

not with my father there
he'll keep things smooth
she says

Benedict stares at her
then at the bees

she feels panicky
as if he'll decide not to
and walk off
and she'll feel utterly empty
and lost

all right
he says
when can I stay?

as soon as my father agrees
and a date can be set
for both of us
she says

he nods and smiles

but my mother said
no funny business
Yochana says

funny business?
Benedict says
what's she mean?

God knows
but whatever you do

don't make her laugh
Yochana says

is it possible?
he says

no hardly
she has the humour of a nun
Yochana says

he touches her hand
she feels it
and breathes
through her nose

best go
he says
and goes.

Terry Collett

Coming Of Rain

She stopped by our cottage
on the way down the road
to the school bus
Yehudit and her sister

my sister and her sister
walked ahead talking
she walked beside me
at a slower pace

my mother
quizzed me last night
Yehudit said

what about?
I asked

you and why
we're together so much
and what was going on?

what did you say?

said we were just friends
and that we were in the form
at school and were
necessarily together
but she wasn't convinced
she said there were other reasons

I looked at her beside me
her brown hair tied
by a simple blue bow
her eyes focusing on me

someone ratted on us?
but who?

my sister most probably

why though?

she's mother little pet
we walked on
to the bus stop
in silence

I watched her sister in front
shorter maybe
more beautiful
but mouthy and spirited

we stood waiting
for the school bus
Yehudit staring at her sister

I stood next to her
our hands nearly touching

other kids
were at the bus stop too
so she said nothing
for a while

then the bus came
and we got on
and I sat next to Goldfinch

Yehudit sat next
to her sister at the front

Goldfinch talked about football
and who played what game
and who won

I watched Yehudit
talking to her sister
her sister blushed
and looked back at me
then she looked away again

Yehudit stared out
the window
at the coming down of rain.

Terry Collett

Coming Of Spring

Coming of spring over the fields
she sitting there in the tall grass

talking of the effects of art on the
human mind and fragile heart and

you sitting there beside her your
hand near hers as it lay there and

you half listening to her words while
taking in a glimpse of thigh showing

where her skirt rides high out of the
corner of your eye and she saying

without the essence art life would be
a mistake and you lean forward and

kiss her neck sensing the softness of
skin the smell of sweet scent wishing

Rubens or Renoir could capture her
with brush and oils and by stretched

canvas held with the coming of spring
in this green field where songbirds sing.

Terry Collett

Confidence Broken 1962

Elaine stands in the lounge,
her mother stands there
staring at her,
arms folded across the breasts.

Elaine's sister
standing nearby
glum and gazing at her.

Your sister here says
that boy John
kissed you on Sunday,
is that true?
Her mother says.

Once he did,
Elaine says,
just one kiss,
and I didn't know
he was going to kiss me,
so it isn't my fault,
and why she has to blab
I don't know,
it's not as if we did IT,
whatever that means,
and now she
has told others,
and it is all over
the school bus,
and my life
is a misery,
and so is John's,
and all because
of her big mouth.

That's enough,
her mother says,
your sister was just
doing what she thought

was right keeping me
informed about
what is going on
under my own roof.

Nothing is going on;
he just kissed
me the once,
and I told her
in confidence,
and now the whole world
and its wife knows,
Elaine says.

ENOUGH,
her mother bellows.

Silence follows;
the sister sits
on the sofa,
Elaine sits
in an armchair,
the mother
stands glaring,
pacing back and forth,
arms still folded.

I can't have him here
if he is going to start
that kind of thing,
the mother says,
if he comes again
then he will
have to behave,
and remember you
are just 14 not 24.

He's 14 too,
and it was just a kiss,
Elaine says quietly,
gazing at her mother,
waiting to see

if her mother glumps
her one,
but she doesn't,
she just stares at her.

If he comes again
I said he will
not kiss or anything
behind my back,
the mother says,
and what do you
mean IT?
What IT?

Elaine looks
at her sister;
I don't know,
she mentioned IT,
not me,
Elaine says.

Her sister looks at Elaine,
then at her mother.

Well what is this IT?
The mother says
to the sister.

The sister looks
at her mother
large eyed.

IT you know,
she says.

I don't know,
the mother says.

Doing things,
the sister says.

Doing things?

The mother says,
what things?

The sister glares
at Elaine,
sex things,
she says.

Sex things?
The mother says,
SEX THINGS,
she bellows,
she turns,
and looks at Elaine.

Well?

I don't even know
what IT is,
so I couldn't do IT,
Elaine says
staring at her mother,
waiting to see
if her mother
slaps her one,
but she doesn't,
she sits down,
and looks at both girls.

I don't want
another word
about this
no more IT
or I will,
she says firmly,
hit.

Terry Collett

Consequences 1957

We come out of the cinema
like let loose young dogs of war
up and along the New Kent Road
the daylight blazing into our eyes

the roar of traffic in our ears
and on and up by Neptune's fish shop
-not to buy no more coins-
and wait by the crossing

both Enid and me waiting
looking at the opposite side
of the road at the bomb site
the opening of Meadow Row

good film wasn't it
Enid says
looking at me
through wire framed spectacles

her eyes bright not dull
as they usually are
no fear there yet
of her old man

traffic stops and we cross
the road and then run
onto and across the bomb site
I'm riding my imaginary

black horse shining like crude oil
and she just behind riding
her pretend white horse
-not side saddle like some lady

but like me on the saddle-
the whole world stops for us
we are riding a new Wild West
our guns firing at advancing

bad guys or maybe Injuns
with tomahawks
then she stops in her tracks
and stands there sans horse

eyes full of fear
what do I tell my dad?
she says
he doesn't know about the cinema

what do I say?
I look at her
my imaginary horse dissolved
and I walk over to her

see her visibly shaking
and I've been with you too
what can I tell him?
she says

I look at her standing there
her hands holding each other
her eyes fear glazed
say you've been with

some else to the park
what have you
she looks at me
I can't lie he knows if I lie

she says
create a truth
I say
what do you mean?

she asks
tell him you've seen
horses up West
up West?

yes West End of London

but he won't believe me
about that what horses he'll say
be creative tell him some

of what you've seen
she frowns
about the horses?
yes be inventive with it

she thinks
and we walk down Meadow Row
she looking at the ground
mind in thought

I look at her walking there
knowing she'll not get it right
no talent for the invented word
her old man will whack her sure

and as we walk up
through the Square
I see him on the balcony
standing by his door.

Terry Collett

Continues His Day

Henry sees her
in the coffee bar
waiting in the queue
for the latrines

blonde haired
wearing a short red skirt
white blouse
and he sipping his latte

watches her
as she stands
behind others
quite the young madam

maybe the flirt
he sips further
then looks away
out the window

into the street
where other things
his greedy eyes meet
the latte is warm and sweet

and he looks back
to the blonde haired dame
still in the queue
but further down

looking every inch
the Hollywood genre
(if such there ever was)
then she's gone

out of sight
into the latrines
and no other
in the queue that's left

interests his eyes or mind
so he looks away
back to the street outside
where passing people

go on their way
to their lives or deaths
or loves or hates
then she's out

the red skirted girl
with a sway of hips
and confidence restored
she walks the street

and away
Henry sips his latte
and continues
his day.

Terry Collett

Control Freak

Her father was a control freak.
He had to know what she was

reading and seeing and hearing
and whom she was meeting and

hey he said who was that kid I saw
you talking to outside school today?

Archie she said he's just a friend who
likes the bands I like oh so he says

her father said you know what he's
really after? I'll tell you shall I? she

hated it when he went on like that.
Hated his presumption of knowing

what other's thought or what their
deep desires were. He wants to get

inside your panties that's what he's
after her father said and she blushed

and said no he's not he's not that kind
of boy oh what you telling me the kid's

batting for his own team? Huh? Huh?
And some other time as she was reading

a Dostoevsky book he said who's he?
some Russian writer? You read the enemy?

What's a matter with good old American
writers? Not good enough? She closed

the book and put it away in her schoolbag
and took out a battered copy of Naked Lunch

by William Burroughs and started to read.
That's better a good old American writer

her father said and smiled and sat back in
his chair by the fire not knowing the book

opened out a different world for her and
a whole new other kind of deeper desire.

Terry Collett

Conversation Overheard

You sat in Nero's
the coffee cafe
in the high street
sipping your cappuccino

and there was a guy and dame
on the next table talking
and as hard as you tried
not to listen

the conversation crept
into your air space
invaded your ears
and she said

I work all day
long hours
and when I come home
all he wants

is to have it off with me
and the guy said
what each day?
yes

the dame said
and I told him
I'm tired when I get home
it's not the first thing

on my mind
when I get it in
and what did he say?
the guy asked

the dame wore glasses
and sipped her coffee
and there was coffee foam
on her upper lip

like a moustache
and she wiped it off
with a napkin
and then she said

he said he'd been
at work all day too
and it was the first thing
on his mind when he got home

you sipped more
of your cappuccino
your wife was talking
about something she'd seen

in a store
but it was not her size
and you showed the look
of understanding

and your son
was probably thinking
of the next football match
on TV

and the dame said
all I want to do
when I get home from work
is take a bath or shower

and unwind
the guy nodded
and you supposed he wished
he could be there

when she took her
bath or shower
and you looked beyond them
at the crowded cafe

the various people there

trying to push
the conversation away
but it was still there

the guy said
what did you tell him then?
o him
he never listens

she said
he only hears
what he wants to hear
the guy leaned forward

and she said
it gets on my nerves
having that to face
each day I get in

from work
you looked
at your coffee cup
the whiteness of the china

the colour of the coffee
and the conversation going on
and he said
it's so bad that

he needs to back off
and the dame said
I gave in eventually
let him have his way

you looked at your wife
as she talked
of the weather
and the threat of snow

and you
looking at your cell phone
thinking it was time to go.

Terry Collett

Cool Inside Burgos Cathedral

It was cool
inside
the Burgos Cathedral

the people pious
and otherwise
was in rows

either side
the priest
was up front

muttering in Spanish
the people
muttering back

and you stood
trying to find your place
in the book of mass

tucked in the seat
in front
what are they saying?

Mamie said
why is that old guy
giving me the eye

she was sitting
beside you in one
of the pews

her short skirt
showing plenty
of leg

her tight bust
pushing
to be free

is it Latin?
she asked
no Spanish

you said
she dragged
her finger

down the page
muttering words
you watched the priest

hands raised
his hands open
to the heavens

some old senora
was giving you
the evil eye

her dark eyes
like prunes
in a basin

of dull cream
searched you out
that old guy

is still licking me
with his oily eyes
Mamie said

you smelt the incense
the stink
of bodies unwashed

her perfume
her bust close
to your arm

pressing nearer

her hair wild
and bushy

was held in place
by a red Alice band
the old guy looked away

he'd had his fill
his eyes watery
aged

sucked elsewhere
like aged slugs
Mamie closed

the mass book
put it back in place
and folded her hands

in mock prayer
like pose
her eyes drinking in

the scene
the priest
the altar

the windows
the statues
her voice soft

in your ear said
when can we
get out of here?

I need to pee
the priest held aloft
the host

the Christ
the Lamb of God
she pushed her hands

between her thighs
squeezed her knees
in anxious pose

ok you
said moving
from the pew

better go
before you wee
I suppose.

Terry Collett

Cosy Inside His Head 1962

It's a full moon
and a dark sky
and Benny stares
at the sky and moon

and stars and thinks
of Yehudit and her
being a little way off
in that cottage

with her family
and he with his
and he wonders
what she is doing

at that time
of the evening?
is she in her room
like him looking out

at the wintry sky
or is she in bed
lying there
thinking of him

as he is of her?
and he reflects
on the afternoon
when he and she

were by the pond
and it was warm
but getting chillier
and they lay

by the pond
on the grass
on her green coat
and she said

I wonder what we
will be doing
in years to come?
will we be married

and live here
or elsewhere?
he smiles to himself
taking in the shadowy trees

opposite and how
the moon shines
through them
as the moon moves

across the sky
or so seems
he had said
maybe Paris

and have late nights
drinking on the those
lit up streets
and she had laughed

and now as he watches
the moon come out
of the tree tops
he wishes she

was there beside him
holding his hand
both looking out
and his other hand

about her waist
but no it wouldn't work
his younger brother sleeps
in the bed behind him

and he just pretends

it is her there
waiting for him
and he breathes in

the night air
then closes the window
on the moon and stars
and gets ready for bed

with the image
of Yehudit
warm and cosy
inside his head.

Terry Collett

Coughing Woman

So what so the woman
Had a bad cough and they
Let her into the cinema to
Watch a film and there she
Was cough cough right through
The movie and it kind of echoed
And at times became the focus
Of attention and the odd person
Said Hey can't you control that
Coughing? And she coughed in
Reply and the guy next to her
Moved and the dame behind
Tapped her on the shoulder and
Said Oughtn't you to be in bed
With medication? And the movie
Rolled on and the people watched
Or moaned or did both and then
Towards the end of the film she
Stood up and slowly walking by
The people in the row and said
Sorry sorry and they muttered
Things and whispered words and
Finally she got out in the daylight
And beneath a bright sun and her
Coughing continued as it had begun.

Terry Collett

Couldn't Be Sure 1963

In the small school chapel
Martha stood in front
of the black wood crucifix
high on the wall

if she stood on tiptoe
she could just about
touch the plaster par
Crucified's
nailed feet

the chapel was empty
no sound
smell of incense
and old bricks
and aged bodies
of old nuns who once
fumed here

Martha stood on tiptoe
and kissed the Crucified's
nailed feet with her lips
soft lips on plaster feet

Jesus I want
to be your bride
want to hold
you close
want to
have you near
let your ears hear
she whispered

she went back
on her feet
watched the Crucified

His arms outstretched
His nailed hands

like claws
His eyes looking skywards
not particularly hairy
like her father was
not under the arms
or chest
she mused

what are you doing here
Martha Maguire?
A nun said
creeping up
behind her
having slid in
like a shadow
from the cloister

Martha turned around
talking to the Crucified
Martha said
eyeing the tubby nun

why are you not
in class?
The nun said

Martha turned back
to gaze at the Crucified
wanted to talk to Him
she said

not during class-time
the nun said
now get
on to your class
and don't be here
during school time
understand me?

Martha gazed
at the Crucified's eyes
heavenward gazing

His hands nailed cruelly

if I could
Martha said
I'd unnail Him
take Him
in my arms
and hug Him
to being better

the nun frowned
gazed at the back
and backside
of the Maguire girl

will you get yourself
off to class Maguire
I won't tell you again
or you'll be having
a ruler across
your palms once more

Martha sighed
she thought she saw
the Crucified eye her
but couldn't be sure.

Terry Collett

Couldn'T Make The Grade

Benedict knew
Miss Croft
was out of his league;
she was everything

he wasn't: upper
middle class,
well spoken,
well dressed;

had a nice face,
nice ass. The mere
thought she'd have
anything to do with him

was a joke. But he
wouldn't have minded
a poke; his pecker
would have obliged,

he thought. Nonetheless,
he knew reality when
it came, knew he was out
of the game, so became

content just to talk
and joke and laugh
and forgot all about
the poke, least for real,

in dreams a guy can
do whatever wants
or desires: create or
destroy worlds with fires,

make the perfect art,
sleep with whosoever,
become a saint;
dreams allow such things.

But reality holds in check;
but one does what one can,
he thought, and keeps what
reality brings. She was the

out of your league type;
he could have sworn she
had it tattooed on her ass,
highlighted on her passport.

He would have been just
a nice guy to her; have given
her what he could have afforded;
read better books, listened

to highbrow music, spoken
with a plum in his mouth
if it did the job, but he couldn't
make the grade, didn't have

the right tone in speaking.
He knew one couldn't always
get what one wanted
or was ever seeking.

Terry Collett

Countless Flies 1916

Polly stands
behind George
at the window
in his room,

the nurse has left
gone to have a break
and a smoke,

George stares
out the window,

see them, Polly?
see them coming?

Polly puts her hands
on his shoulders,

yes, George,
I see them,
she says,
watching the gardener
and the young garden boy,
walking
with their tools
along
by the vegetable garden,

if I had my gun
I'd shoot them,
George says,

I know George,
but you need to rest,
let others worry
about them,
Polly whispers
in his ear,

George sighs,
pushes his fingers
through his hair,
they got Miller,
he says,
took his head
clean off,
lay in the trench
staring at me,

I know, George,
you need to rest,
Polly whispers,

he sighs,
his fingers tap
the window ledge,
his eyes staring ahead,
the gardener and boy
disappear from sight,

they've gone the cowards,
George says,
hidden from sight,
ought to have shot them
while I had the chance,

you've no gun,
George,
Polly says,
rubbing his shoulders,
wishing he was in bed with her
as he used to
before the War
and this illness,
she the housemaid,
he the masters' son,

she watches as his hands
tap his legs
getting faster and faster,

steady George my love,
calm now,
she kisses his ear,

he sighs and relaxes,
turns and looks at her,
smiles,
then suddenly cries,
around him,
he sees a room
full of dead men
and countless flies.

Terry Collett

Country Scrumping

Your country cousin took you
Across a field to a vast orchard
Where low hung branches
Made the green apples within
Reach of your young boy's hands.
Don't eat too many of them
Or you'll get gut ache, she said.
Your eyes had never seen so
Many apples, row after row
In long lines down the field and
Fields beyond. You picked an apple
And bit into it. They make cider
From these, she said, picking off
An apple too and biting with relish.
Your younger sister looked nervously
On wondering if she too should pick.
Go on, your cousin said, pick and eat.
Your sister reached up and pulled
And a few apples fell to the ground
With soft sounds of thump on the
Short grass. She picked up one and
Brushed it off on her dress. Have to
Run if the farmer comes, your cousin
Said, and don't tell of this or we'll be
For it. For what? Your sister asked.
Your cousin looked around and replied,
A good telling off or a good tanned ass.
You stood all three of you eating, beneath
The apple trees, in the short green grass.

Terry Collett

Crucified 1963

Martha closed the door
of the side chapel.

Sunlight shone through
the coloured glass
onto the statue
of St Therese
and on the crucifix.

She stared at them both
it was so quiet
she felt she could hear
her heart beating.

She walked
to the Crucified
and touched His feet
with her fingers.

Looking up
she could see
His half closed eyes
looking down at her.

St Therese
looked down
at the floor
eyes unmoving.

Martha kissed
the nailed feet
felt the cold plaster
stood back
looked at His hands
nailed wide
hands making claws
in their agony.

The door opened

behind her
the old nun
who walked with a stick
entered and said
what are you doing
in here Macquire?

Martha turned around
and gazed at the nun
contemplating our Lord
she replied.

Girls are not
to be in here
the nun said
now go.

Martha looked
at the crucifix
and said
see you later
and walked past
the nun taking in
her aged face
as she did so.

She walked down
the passageway
the nun's clickedy stick
following behind
sounding like one
who was blind.

Terry Collett

Crying As An Art Form.

Mother made act of crying
An art form; she knew
Sense of tears on cheek
And leak from blue of eyes.
Father would have his way
Of bringing on the tears in
Her, making the blue eyes
Red, bruising the cheek of
Bone and flesh, making an
Art of bringing black and
Blue in such human skin.
You recall once the time
He slapped her cheek with
A back of hand for making
Remark in jest: you look like
A Yank with that camera held
So. You never could divine how
Love could have altered form
And made a mockery of care
And concern and deepest sense
Of being well and other's need
Of being needed here and now.
You think that Father lost it if
He had it ever at all. Some how.

Terry Collett

Curse Slet Slip Mcmlxxi

Dom Higgs came to the room
and spoke to me
of the monastic life
it was late evening
and the shutters were closed
so no moon no stars,

est forma mortis he said,

moon glow by bell-tower
especially after Compline
and the haunting looking cloister,

and she said her husband
wouldn't be home for hours
and there was time for it
so we did,

the French peasant monk
peeled onions
in the kitchen
peler sous l'eau he said,

I cut the grass
around the gravestones
of the monks
and flattened out
molehills before
the hour of Sext,

flying from the pains of hell
we desire
to reach life everlasting
Benedict said,

Hölle ist hier
the German monk said
pointing to his chest
with his thick finger,

Hugh made the chair
in the guest house
I saw it there
after he told me
he was no Charles Mackintosh
but it served it's purpose,

sancta Maris audi nos
Dom Peter whispered
in the cloister while waiting
to enter the church for Vespers
his voice thick as treacle
but pure as soft snow,

she undressed for me
with the skill of a whore
I a youth unravelling
the apple as Adam had,

Dom Charles sat
in the refectory at supper
his face still as a china doll
his eyes stern
and unblinking maybe
God-ward thinking,

Dio è con noi
the Italian monk said
as he showed me
how to sharpen the scythe
his hands powerful
fingers gripping the stone,

non veniam sine poenitentia,

the ultimate value of life
depends upon awareness
and the power
of contemplation
rather than upon
mere survival

Gareth said
quoting Aristotle
as we sat in the novice room
after Terce,

stars above me
moon bright as ghostly ship
I walked the drive way
letting curses let slip.

Terry Collett

Cut Throat

Delia Demoat cut her husband's
Throat. Delia slit it clean. She held
His hair tight with her small hand
In a firm grip. There was little fight.
Unexpected and sudden. He slumped
In the chair blood shooting across
And spraying the TV screen. Delia
Released his hair and stood back
The bloody knife in her right hand.
She was shaking, her hands shook.
On the floor by the armchair where
He sat a small book. Blood-soaked
Pages and cover. A gift from his lover.
She dropped the knife, stared at the
TV screen, some I Love Lucy show,
Canned laughter, black and white.
Flickering images. She peered over
The back of the armchair. He was
Slumped bloodied there. She ached,
The bruises showed on arms, her split
Lips mouthed words. Delia breathed
Hard, spat on his head, the phlegm
Sat there on his hair; she sniffed air,
Smelt cigar smoke, his aftershave.
She looked up. Lucy gazed at her on
The screen, canned laughter once more,
Surreal; show over, she peed on the floor.

Terry Collett

Dalya And Amsterdam 1974

Benny liked
the Van Gogh paintings
in Amsterdam.

You went with him
and after you ate
and drank
at a cafe.

You know poetry
don't you Benny?
you said.

Yes sure
he said.

Do you think
Whitman was gay?

He looked at you
don't know
can't say
I've not read
much of his stuff
or know much
about him
he said.

I read it some place
you said.

Does it matter?
Benny said.

Not at all
you said
just wondered
if he was.

Benny lit a cigarette
and offered you one too
and you took one
and he lit it for you.

What do you find
so fascinating
about Van Gogh's art?
You said.

It speaks to me
Benny said
more than any
other artist
I see movement
in his skies
and trees
and in the fields.

You inhaled deeply
and watched
as Benny spoke
about the Sunflower print
he bought and how
he gazes at it
as a kind of prayer.

You mused on him
sitting there
wishing you and he
were back in the tent
making out
on the sleeping bag
while the other girl
was with some other guy.

Benny had asked you
a question about Amsterdam
but you never heard
and didn't give a damn.

Dalya In Ravensburg 74

Dalya holds
the tall glass
of coffee
at the bar
looking round
the café

Ravensburg
I've marked it
on my map
she utters
just to see
where we've been
on this trip

I sip beer
looking in
the mirror
opposite
my hair's long
so's my beard
my eyes tired

long way yet
I tell her
there's Denmark
there's Sweden
and Norway

she thinks of
all the sights
on the way
through Europe

I think of
all the stops
all the bars

the shared nights

the hot sex
in the tent
on the thin
sleeping bed

the mornings
waking up
a bird song
from outside
and she there
still sleeping
by my side.

Terry Collett

Dalya's Moan 1974

The Yank bitch
shares my tent
yaks about the guys
she's had and how
and where
as if I care.

Ever read Sartre?
she says
all that existential stuff?

I say I have
just to get her
off my case.

We make our
own luck
she says.

I smoke
and study the tent
how the stained blue
looks cheap.

I wonder how often
it's been used
on these trips.

Did I tell you
of that guy
in Hamburg?
she says.

No I say
although she may.

Well he had this
big tool and I mean big
she yaps on

and spreads
her arms wide.

I said to him
you could fish
with that.

She laughs.

I smile picturing it
and did you?
I say.

Of course
she says
never turn down
a good seeing to.

The smoke drifts
from the cigarette
and floats about my head.

I wish Benny was here
and not her
wish it was him
lying there like her
completely bare.

Terry Collett

Dame With No Name.

Johnny didn't know
who the dame was at
the bus stop, but she

caught his eye standing
there on her cellphone,
blue eyes, and night pink

top, and well endowed,
and fingering the keyboard,
she looked at him then

looked away, he was going
to smile, but she looked
away too quick, but she

looked ok, nice figure, and
not too tall or short, just
about his size, he wanted

to know her name, and maybe
fix a date, but the bus stop
was crowded, and other kept

getting his view of her,
then she moved along, and
she was out of his sight,

and some old codger was
there standing sniffing, then
he saw her again she was

texting someone on the
phone, her face frowning,
then she tucked the phone

in her jeans pocket, and
looked at the road, Johnny
studied her, took in her frame,

the way she stood, her hips
and thighs, and her blue eyes,
and imagined maybe she's

say, hey mister you want to
come sit by me and we can
chat and all that? but she didn't

she just looked at the road,
then the bus came along, and
she was on board before he got

there, and the driver said sorry
no more I'm full, and so drove
off, and the dame in the pink

top had gone, and so had his
dream dame, nice hips, thighs,
and blue eyes but no name.

Terry Collett

Dance Haiku

Soft silk Butterfly.
Black dancer glides gracefully
as jazz music plays.

Terry Collett

Dark Eyed And Moody 1951

I walked Auntie's dog Dancer
across by the parade grounds
while Auntie did the washing
in the copper

the dog kept near me
as we walked
looking back at me
to make sure I hadn't got behind

we saw Auntie's friend Milly
with her 5 year old daughter Elsie

Dancer stopped and wagged its tail
and licked Milly's hand
and Elsie glared at me

hello Benny
Milly said

hello
I said

say hello to Benny Elsie
Milly said

Elsie stared at her mother
then at me
hello to Benny Elsie
she said stiffly

no you bad girl
say it properly
or I'll slap your backside
Milly said

hello Benny
Elsie said grumpily

hello Elsie
I said politely
as Auntie said I should

what's your auntie doing?
Milly said

she's doing the washing
I said

o I see
well do you want
to come to our place
and have a glass of milk
and a biscuit?
she said

Dancer too?
I said

yes Dancer too
she said

Elsie pulled a face
and we walked back
to Milly's place
the other side
of the parade ground
and we went up
some black metal stairs
and into her flat

Milly went off
to the kitchen
with Dancer following
to get him
a bowl of water
and us some
milk and biscuits

how are you?
I said to Elsie

she stared at me
like I was a bad smell
then said
hope you
don't stay long
I want to play
with my dolls
and don't want you
playing with them
boys don't play with dolls

I looked at her
trying to see
if there was a little bit
of a smile
but there wasn't
just her small lips
shut tight
and her eyes
looking at me

just come for milk
and biscuits
I said

Elsie put her hands
behind her back
and walked off
and sat on
a battered looking sofa

Milly brought us
milk and biscuits
and said to me
sit on the sofa
next to Elsie
and I'll go get
my cup of tea

off she went
and I sat next to Elsie

and she moved
along a bit
from me
and sipped her milk
and clutched her biscuits
in case Dancer came
and ate them
(which he would)

Milly came back
and sat down
in an old chair opposite
near the fireplace
with her cup of tea
well aren't
you two a pair
just like brother
and sister
Milly said smiling

don't want him
as a brother
Elsie said glumly

that's not nice Elsie
what's got into you
Milly said

Dancer came in
and sat opposite me
and wagged his tail
and looked at me
for a biscuit

I broke off a bit
and gave him some
and he took it gently
and it was gone
in the blink of an eye

then looked at Elsie
his head to one side

gazing at her

she broke off a bit
and gave it to me
to give to Dancer
and he took it gently
and then walked off
and sat down
by the fireplace

good dog
Elsie said

Milly talked
about her and Auntie
and about her husband
in Germany
and my uncle
in Korea

I sat a bit nearer
to Elsie as Milly talked
and Elsie looked at me
dark eyed and moody.

Terry Collett

Dark Eyed Doyle

Dark eyed Doyle they called him,
And he was dark eyed too. His eyes
Like black olives in white snow, his
Mother said. Had a way with girls,
An electrifying smile, an engaging
Manner. Not a bit like his father,
Grumpy, self righteous and always
Quoting the Bible, thumping the
Black cover. Danny Doyle could
Charm birds from trees, make his
Girlfriend's mother giggle like she'd
Been tickled, make her father fume
Behind his newspaper with thinking
He knew what that Doyle was up to.
Doyle was a closed book; many read
His cover and liked what they saw,
Others didn't and didn't venture any
Further or deeper than the skin on
His nose. Ah, said Doyle, God alone
Knows me inside out and He alone is
My best judge, others can only know
What they think they see, but God alone,
Knows my real faults, knows the real me.

Terry Collett

Dark Eyed Stare 1974

Dalya smokes
as I do
in some bar

in the camp
in Stockholm
want a beer?

she asks me
sure why not
so she buys

two large beers
and we talk
of the tents

that now leak
and the dame
who nigh sleeps

with most guys
on the trip
(not me though)

one of whom
a teacher
when back home

some wise prat
who claimed she
(that's Dalya)

was quite fat
I'd say plump
I tell her

Rubens type
not like her
Dalya says

skinny arse
and tit-less
that teacher

she goes on
I'll have him
on his own

and sit on
his thick head
we drink beer

listening
the music
from the large

loud speakers
some rock stuff
loud guitars

thrashing drums
and I think
she's sexy

standing there
in white top
and black jeans

with black hair
and her wild
dark eyed stare.

Terry Collett

Dark Night's Cold 1974

She's spread there,
Dalya, legs
set aside,

in the tent
that we share,
lying there

in dim light,
her soft fruit
on offer,

the two small
melon breasts,
her dark fig

waiting for
me to push
plough or kiss.

There's music
from speakers
blaring out

in the camp,
voices calling
from other

tents nearby.
I engage
her beauty,

handle fruits
of melons,
open up

the dark fig
(not apple)
enter in,

plough her trench
with fine skill
without sense

of time's clock
or moral scorn,
just us here

making love
in tent's hold
keeping out

dark night's cold.

Terry Collett

Dark Skies

Never trust dark skies,
Mother says, sitting next
To you in her wheelchair
Aged and infirm, her mind
Shot through with senility;
And you remember her telling
You, that as a young girl, she
Would walk with her mother
And younger siblings, to take
Her father's Sunday roast dinner,
Hidden in the compartment of
The pram beneath her two baby
Sisters, to the work place where
He waited, and her mother saying,
Make sure the others do not make
Off Etty, and your mother as she
Was then, with her big blue eyes
And long curly hair, having that look
About her, as if she could see her
Father's death in 1936, and him no
Longer waiting, no longer waiting for
Them all patiently and hungrily there.

Terry Collett

Dark Sky And Rain 1958

I didn't go
to Ingrid's father's funeral

it was a small affair
of mostly family
(reluctantly) who came
a few hangers-on

all dressed in black
they left the flats in cars
(unusual sight
in the Square)
and went off
I watched them go

later Ingrid came
and knocked at my flat door
and my mum answered it
is Benny there?
she asked

yes come in Ingrid
Mum said
how did the funeral go?

sad seeing Mum
and others cry
Ingrid said
looking past Mum
to see if I was around

I came out of the lounge
and she came to me
and put her arms around me
and squeezed tightly

want a drink Ingrid?
Mum said

Ingrid nodded and said
yes please
and Mum went off
to the kitchen
and we went in the lounge
and sat on the brown settee

what happened?
I said

we went to the cemetery
in the cars and there
were about a dozen people there
and the funeral men
and a vicar
and we went in some chapel
and sang hymns
and the vicar spoke about Dad
and it seemed a different dad
from the one I knew
no one else said a thing
and then after
we came home
Ingrid said

do the cops know
who knifed him yet?
I said

no not yet
she said
but the police came
around yesterday
and talked to Mum
about people
but she has no idea
who did it
she was quiet

Mum bought in two teas
and went off again
and I looked out

the window at
the dark sky and rain.

Terry Collett

Darkest Cold Night.

You tell them what it is you
want, what is on your mind,
what you feel, and they are
in some other world, other

ideas on their minds, to them
you're just a dame, a pretty
thing, a face to try to remember
in their busy lives, the one

they make love to, have meals
with, argue with on lesser
matters, but he insists it is
the way it is, it's a man's world,

man's circus, man's power to
dictate or rule, to take pity on
the female fool. Lisa, he said,
that's a pretty dress, those shoes

fit you well they match your
eyes, look, Honey, I'll be late
home, business at the office,
big deal coming through, and

you think screw you, Bud, I'm
more than a thing to view, dictate
to or screw, I'm a Cleopatra,
a Helen of Troy, an equal to

man or boy, a mind to fathom
thoughts as deep as any man,
to see the circle of the Universe,
the distant stars, unknown planets

beyond sight, a fellow victim of
the darkest depression and cold night.

Darkly Watched 1960

Whit dae ye want?
Mrs Scot said
as she opened the door
of her ground flat
across the Square

is Hannah in please?
I said

diz she ken
ye ur comin?
she said

I looked at her nonplussed
hoping Hannah
would come
and rescue me
from her Scottish mother

I said I'd meet
her here
I said

did ye noo?
she said
she looked behind her
and bellowed
HANNAH
th' loon is haur

I looked behind me
into the Square
then back at Hannah's
mother standing
gazing at me
with her dark eyes

Hannah came along
the passage

to the front door

o Benny
she said
I was in the bog
but I am ready now

ready fur wit?
her mother said

I'm going out
with Benny
she said

whaur ur ye gonnae?
her mother said

see the tennis
on the South Bank
and have a tea
or lemonade
Hannah said

wi' whose bunsens?
her mother said
staring at me
like a hawk

bunsens?
I said

money
Hannah said softly

I have money
I said
rattling the pocket
of my blue jeans

dornt be late
her mother said
I'll hae tatties

an' neeb's at 5pm

we won't be late

Hannah said

I nodded an affirmation

better nae

ur I'll tan yer backside

her mother said grimly

Hannah nodded

and we left

and into the Square

and we knew her mother

was watching us

darkly there.

Terry Collett

Darn Lies.

She'd had a shower
and felt as if
she hadn't,
felt kind of
out of it,
and wished
that she didn't
remember Joe
and his deeds,

What about
a night out
just us two,
huh?
He said.

But she had had
enough of him
and his ways,
and ideas.

So she just
dried after
the shower,
and wished to heck
she had never met the guy,
wished she'd not gone
to that party
and met him,
she hadn't liked
the party anyway,
all those giggling girls
and boozed up guys.

She wanted just to
forget it ever happened,
forget Joe even came
into her life,

and Lilly, he'd say,
you're the best thing
ever happened to me,
(fecking liar)
best thing ever.

She dried herself
and sat there gazing
at her nakedness,
her feet,
her toes,
and how plump
her thighs were getting.

He'd want her to go
to that show,
all that glitter
and booze,
and big dames
and thin dames
and dames like her
taken along to show
on an arm,
beauty on a stick
kind of thing,
and all that music
loud and gross,
and guys trying
to touch your ass
in secret in passing,
or gaze at your boobs,
eye you with their
dark eyes,
and talk to you
with their darn lies.

Terry Collett

Daydream Of Yiska 1962

I got home after school
after getting off
the school bus

after listening to Trevor's moans
about football about him(Benny)
seeing the bint
(Trevor's expression)
rather than playing
football lunchtime

Mum was cooking dinner
hot over a steaming stove
how was school?
she said

ok nothing new
I said

then Naomi talked to her
about school

and I went upstairs
to my room
and closed the door
and stood there gazing
around the room

the Spitfire hung
from the ceiling by string
pictures from the Eagle comic
were cello-taped to the walls
racing cars
I dreamed of driving one day

the window showed
sky and clouds and tree tops

I walked to my bed

and lay down

my brother Baruch
was out playing
in the woods

I opened up the book Kidnapped
and inside was the photo
of Yiska she'd given me
a few weeks back

I took it out and kissed it
and pretended she was there
and kissing me
as she had at recess at school
on the sports field

I held the photo against
my chest over my heart
to let her hear
how it beat for her

birds sang outside
the window
tree tops swayed
in the wind

I closed my eyes
and imagined her
there beside me
feeling her hand
(feeling my own hand)

running fingers
down her thigh
(my thigh my fingers
moved on)

then imagined her
holding me
(my hands embracing me)

I kissed her
and it was swell

then Baruch came
rushing in and said
saw this fox in the woods
and it stared at me
then ran off

Yiska had fled back
inside the space
inside my head.

Terry Collett

Day's Bright Dawn 1916

Clean Master
George's room
she'd been told

that morning
so Polly
with all her

cleaning stuff
climbed the stairs
to his room

and stood there
by the door
thinking of

those night she'd
crept down from
the attic

where she slept
in the cold
to enter

his warm bed
feel him there
him kissing

her wildly
whispering
his soft words

touching her
in places
making love

umpteenth times
in the night
now she stood

by the door
he away
with shell-shock

room empty
still she knocked
and waited

then opened
and went in
closed the door

tried to think
he was there
in the bed

waiting warm
for her cold
self to come

but he's not
bed's empty
and tidy

curtains drawn
shutting out
day's bright dawn.

Terry Collett

Day's Gloom 1916

Polly wakes
to a new day
in the bed in the attic

she shares with Susie
the other maid
it is still dark

but birds are singing
and traffic is heard
in the distance

breaking the night's
stillness and quiet
she rises from bed

and sits on the edge
and looks back at Susie
and sighs

the maid looks sad
in her sleep
mouth half open

eyes sealed shut
head to one side
one hand on top

the other tucked away
out of sight
poor bugger

Polly mutters
and gets off the bed
and goes

to the enamel bowl
and fills it
from the jug

with cold water
and takes off her nightdress
and begins to wash

in the cold water
and a piece of red soap
and washes her face

and neck and arms
and splashes water
under her arms

and taps at her breasts
then taking an old towel
from the side

she dries herself
as quick as she can
before the cold morning air

freezes her stiff
then looking at Susie
she pulls out

the chamber pot
and sits and unloads
and sighs and closes her eyes

and wishes Master George
had not gone away
but was there

in his room
so that she could have
slept there and not

sitting here in her room
feeling the encroaching
day's gloom.

Dead Is Dead 1999

Bill lit up a cigarette,
began to dress.

The young punk on the bed
yakked about left wing crap.

Bill turned off his hearing,
the sex had been good,
the talk not.

He buttoned up his collar,
tied his tie.

Exhaled the smoke,
put on his shoes.

Walked to the small kitchen,
flipped on the radio,
put on the kettle.

The young punk
got off the bed, dressed,
gazed at the older man
in the kitchen,
classic shit from the radio.

Bill offered
coffee and toast.

The young punk said: ok,
sat in a chair,
pushed fingers
through black hair,
shoulder length.

Bill took in the Debussy,
turned on the toaster,
made coffee.

The kid was talking away,
lit up,
watched Bill's back,
the shooter in an holster
over the shoulder.

Bill laid down
the coffee and toast,
sat opposite the punk,
gentle spoke.

The punk had liked the sex,
ate the toast,
sipped the coffee,
feared the shooter.

The Debussy ended,
Bach organ music,
punk yawned.

Are you a cop?
the punk asked.

No, Bill said,
in business.

Business?
the punk wondered
what sort,
exhaled smoke.

Worldwide stuff,
Bill said,
musing on
the arranged suicide
shit in Iraq,
dead is dead.

Terry Collett

Dead Kids In War

He just happened upon them
In a field lying there in the tall
Grass on their backs, seemingly
Sleeping, but dead; two children
Of Finnish origins, maybe, at least
By where they're found and area
Of ground. She lay as if trying to
Catch the sun's attention, with one
Hand by her side, the other resting
On her thigh. The boy lay a little
Way away small fists clenched tight
As if frozen by death in pose to fight.
The soldier walked slowly around
Them beneath the hot sun, wiped his
Brow, reached inside his pocket for
A cigarette, fumbled for a lighter,
Stood over the girl six or seven,
She oblivious of her state of dress
Or how she lay. The soldier inhaled
Deep, the hot smoke hit his throat
Made him choke. Kids killed in cold
Blood in war; no joke. It was 1942
He remembers now, taking up the
Photograph of white and black,
Taken in midst of war and battle
Scarred and brain in fog, wearied
By march and sight and smell of death.
Whose kids they were he never knew,
Sleeping in death's claim; two kids,
In a field without memory, without name.

Terry Collett

Dead.

Dead and yet
not forgotten

reminded of that summer
when she said

you see that tree
on that small island

in the lake?
yes you replied

taking in her eyes
that look outwards

the blueness
the brightness

and her hand
reaching out

for yours
glad of her presence

there alive
out of doors

and now knowing
she's gone

to some other place
maybe spiritual

out of sight
where none can see.

Terry Collett

Debate By The Pond 1962

We went to the pond,
(she called it a lake)
and sat on the grass
on the edge, looking over
the water's skin,
and ducks swimming there.

What were you and that
Rolland, talking and laughing
about at the back of class?
Yehudit said.

Some picture
in that history book,
I said.

What picture?
She said.

Cavemen, and one
had what looked like
a droopy thingy,
I said.

Droopy thingy?
She said, unsmiling
looking at me
with her lovely eyes,
the kind of eyes
I could drink from.

You know his penis thingy,
I said.

What was to laugh about?
She said.

Sort of looked out of place
in a history book,

I said.

But was it a thingy
as you call it?
She said,
beginning to smile.

Looked like it,
but probably wasn't,
I said.

What is it with you boys,
and looking at things,
and thinking about thingys,
and sex,
and girls,
and such?

Got to think
about something,
I said.

But why
those things?
Why not higher things?
She said.

We do think about
girl's breasts too,
if they have any,
and of course,
some girls do,
and some don't
have much,
I said.

She laughed
and hit my arm,
I don't feel safe
around you sometimes, she said,
putting her hand
over her mouth to try

and stop her laughter.

Never think about that
sort of thing,
she said, finally
pausing her laughter.

What sort of thing?
I said.

Sex and boy's things,
and girls, and how
much breasts they have,
she said.

You are ok,
I said, but that tall girl
in class has hardly any,
so Rolland said,
but a nice arse.

Terry Collett

Dee-Dee Boy 1976

Dee-dee tugged
at the hem
of my long white coat,
as I stood
on the children's unit
of the mental hospital,
hands by my side,
looking around me.

He tugged again
with his small hand
clenched tight
on the hem.

What do you want
Dee-dee? I asked.

I looked down at him
his fingers clenched tight.

He pulled me after him,
saying nothing.

I followed him,
walking in small steps
so as not to step on him.

We came to the half door
of the ward kitchen,
where he pointed
with his a finger
of his other hand
to a plastic beaker
on the side.

Dee-dee, he said
in monotone,
pointing jaggedly.

I nodded,
and he released
my coat hem,
and I walked in,
and closed the half-door
after me,
and picked up a beaker,
and held it up.

This colour?
He expressed nothing,
just stared.

I picked up another beaker
of a different colour,
and held it up
for him to see.

He stared,
and said Dee-dee.

I took the yellow beaker
to the bottles of squash
on the side.

Orange? I asked.

He expressed nothing,
just gazed at me.

I picked up
the blackcurrant squash,
and held it up.

Blackcurrant?
he stared at me
as though I
was a numbskull.

Dee-dee,
he said pointing
at the lemon juice

on the side.

I poured lemon juice
into the beaker,
and went to the fridge,
and poured water
from a plastic jug,
and then half filled
the beaker.

I handed it to him
over the half-door.

He took it with both small hands,
and looked inside
the beaker,
then sipped a mouthful,
and walked off slowly
with the concentration
of a tight rope walker
across high wire.

No thanks or gratitude
or show of further interest
if any or I existed or would,
he stood by a window
with his beaker of juice,
and sipped,
his small hands clutching
the beaker with little concern,
no sensation to know
or history to learn.

Terry Collett

Deep Down Lost Feeling 1916

Polly polishes
George's room
as Gripe had told her.

Rubs the polish cloth
over the sideboard
into a bright shine.

Polish smell;
sniffs it;
sniffs the cloth.

Rubs again,
another surface.

The window is open;
fresh air enters,
blows curtains inwards.

She hears birdsong
from outside.

She pauses polishing;
goes to the window
and peers out.

Wonders where
George is.

How he is doing
in that hospital
with shell-shock.

Across the Channel
war is on.

Men being killed;
men driven mad
with sight seen.

George said about
seeing a head gazing
at him on trench top.

She bites her lip;
wishes he
was back home.

The Master's son;
she a maid.

He and she making love
in his bed that last time.

Wants it again;
warm in his bed;
him kissing her.

His moustache tickling
her to giggles,
shafting her
to a seventh heaven.

She walks back
to the bed
and lies down.

Imagines him there;
knows he is not,
just lies and stares
at the ceiling
with that deep down
lost feeling.

Terry Collett

Deep Inside 1962

Yochana
arrived home
from the school

it had been
a good day
she had seen

Benedict
and kissed him
her mother

looked angry
when she went
in the lounge

you've seen him
I can tell
Mother said

who'd you mean?
Yochana said
you know who

don't pretend
you don't know
Mother said

Yochana
looked past her
mother's head

focusing
on the large
painting there

who told you
about him?
Yochana

asked her stern
faced mother
and sat down

Angela
informed me
at lunchtime

Mother said
how could she
tell on me?

she's my friend
Yochana
then replied

I asked her
where you were
and she said

Yochana
focused hard
at her hands

avoiding
her mother's
angry gaze

I told you
not to be
with that boy

or any
of those boys
at that school

Mother said
you promised
you would not

Yochana

looked at her
stern mother

he's in my
class at school
he's my age

yes 14
just 14
not an age

for mixing
with darn boys
Mother said

you are not
to see him
outside class

understand?
Yochana
said nothing

she could feel
Benedict's
kiss on cheek

that warm feel
that tingled
through her nerves

UNDERSTAND?
Mother screamed
but before

Yochana
could reply
a series

of hard slaps
rained on her
head and legs

and shoulders
and backside
Yochana

still held on
to the kiss
deep inside.

Terry Collett

Deep Sad Sighs 1972

When we get back
from holiday
Benny
we have got to get

some more modern art
you know
stuff from up
and coming artists

and not clog up the shop
with old master prints
Abela says
I mean we've had that

Goya print for ages now
I sip my beer
and light up a cigarette
and gaze at her

sitting in the street cafe
with that
I've just
woken up face on her

in that green dress
that comes up to
her backside
and those green stocking

that do nothing for me
other than me thinking
she's playing a role
in Robin Hood

and his Merry Men production
and you need
to be more assertive
she says

grab the customers
when they come in
and don't let them
out of the shop

without buying a work
of art or print
even if it is only
a postcard print of Sussex

I think of last night
and how she
undressed for bed
and being a bit tipsy

she fell over three times
and lay on the floor
at one time
like a wounded gazelle

are you listening
to me Benny?
yes
I say

I was just thinking
we buy in some of those
watercolours by the young girl
who is always pestering us

but to whom you said
her watercolours look like
bad art left out in the rain
Abela stares at me

it won't sell
it will hang around
the shop like a bad smell
it's art though

it may sell

she shakes her head
and sips her white wine
and lights a cigarette

and yaks on about
more abstract oil art
and I recall how once
she had got into bed

and her head touched
the pillow
she was off asleep
and all her rather

inebriated promises
can to nothing
and I lay there
watching her

with her mouth open
and hands tucked
between her thighs
with deep sad sighs.

Terry Collett

Deep Within 1940

I am in the wheelchair
outside on a lawn
(I suppose that
as I am blind
and cannot see) ,
and Jean sits beside me,
having just arrived.

A blanket covers
the stumps of my legs
from her sight.

What's he like?
I ask her.

Who is like?
she says.

Philip Kimberly;
what does he look like?
I say.

I hear her breathe deeply
and shift in the chair.

He's dark haired,
clean shaven
and good looking,
I'd say,
Jean replies.

I try to picture him
by her description,
but fail,
I am not used
to putting together
a mental image as yet.

He seems nice;

he says he works
for the Foreign office,
is that so?
I ask.

Guy says he does
so I guess he does,
Jean says,
does it matter
where he works?

I sense irritation
in her voice.

Anything the matter?
I say.

She sighs.

I listen extra hard
in case I miss any words.

No and yes,
she says.

That's a contradiction;
what is the matter then?

I turn toward her voice
as she speaks to give
the impression that I can
see although I can't.

Seeing you like this
upsets me,
she says.

It doesn't please me
none either,
I say,
reaching out
for her hand

and touch her knee
and remove my hand.

I picture you as you were
and as you are now
and it pains me,
she says.

Why come then?
I say before I can
stop myself.

Because you're an old friend
and a friend of Donald's,
she says touching
my hand and holding it
between her fingers.

That is how I am now:
blind and legless
and who would want
a woman like that?
I say harshly.

Philip likes you
and wants to take you
out to dinner and maybe
a concert,
she says.

So he said,
I say,
not wanting to dwell on it
in case it doesn't happen.

He's spoken to your doctor
and is making arrangements
for transport and a suitable place,
she says softly.

I take her hand
and place it on the place

where my legs end.

I end here,
I say,
half a woman;
who'd want that?

She removes her hand
from my leg stumps
and stands up
and walks around me;
I hear the swish
of her coat going by me.

This is not like you,
she says,
this self pity,
this drowning in darkness.

I spit at the air,
hoping I have missed her.

This is not self pity,
this is my reality,
I say,
trying to take hold
of her coat or hand.

My hand sweeps around,
but she has gone;
only birds near by chirping,
distant traffic,
and a wind touching
my skin; digging at me
deep within.

Terry Collett

Deeper Sin.

Early morning
book on Schopenhauer
under your arm
cigarettes

in your pocket
you sat in one
of the cafes
in Dubrovnik

having ordered
a coffee
and lit up
to smoke

the book
put on the table
the ashtray
set so

you observed
the passing people
the females mostly
the gentler sex

as is said
the sway of skirt
or dress
the fine legs

the shape of foot
the figures
slim or plump
the mental study

of the shape of ass
the tightness
of tits
and all the while

at the back
of the mind
the idea of God
the faith required

seemingly lacking
the St Augustine view
wanting to be saved
from sin

but not just yet
the waiter
brought coffee
and cake

just the nibble
for the breakfast's sake
and you thought
on the night before

the walk in the City
the lights lit up
the passing crowds
the concert

some pianist
playing Chopin
you and your brother
side by side

taking it all in
making the most of
and the indulgence
of wine

and the chatting up
of the waitresses
at the hotel
with no success

and you opened

the Schopenhauer book
the print of page
the scatter of words

ideas too deep
for the morning sun
you closed it up
and sipped the coffee

took a drag
on the cigarette
viewed the cute ass
as it passed you by

summer dresses
short skirts
tight tops
in all colours

shoes or bare feet
to please the eye
and the idea of God
observing

listening in
secretly pleading
maybe you do
or do not

to be absolved
from sometime
the deeper sin.

Terry Collett

Delia Abed.

She knew
it wouldn't last
with Chrissie.

Chrissie
was too moral
too limited.

Delia wanted
more sex and booze
the fast life
to see the world
and play
Bach or Bartok
on the piano
at five
in the morning
before the light
was dawning.

Now she lies beside
that young student girl
whom she befriended
after the Proms
and who sleeps
beside her now
full of soft fruit
and juices.

A viola player
not bad player
up for it after
a few drinks
and dinner at that
posh restaurant.

She wonders
what Chrissie
was doing now

whom she was with.

The young student
is lying face
turned towards her
mouth slightly open
sleeping like some
picture book princess
or sleeping beauty.

Delia smiles
feels hungry
feels hungry
for sex again
wants to finger
the honey hive
suck the juices
nibble the soft fruits.

Her father
is in Spain
sunning it
with that
young rich bitch.

Delia scratches
her thigh
and thatch
feeling an itch.

Terry Collett

Delia And The Arts Tutor

Delia who had bedded her
French nanny at fourteen
and had hot sex with the head

girl at boarding school, now
lies beside the arts tutor named
Ms Shopton in college. She has

explored the woman's body from
top to toe. Invaded each orifice
and landed her ninety ninth

plus umpteenth kiss. Sunlight
pours through the high window,
the woman's scent and body

odour invades the bed. She has
kissed most parts that can be kissed,
scanned the woman's skin, taking

in the freckles, the spots, the mole
inside the left thigh, run her finger
along the spine. She watches the

woman sleep, the mouth slightly ajar,
the perfect teeth, the tongue (who
knows where that has been) touching

the corner of the lips. She may well
get a high A for this piece of art work,
the effort put in, the juices taken out,

the fingering and touching, the final lay.
She breathes in the air, runs her tongue
across her own damp lips. She hears

the college bell, the time to get up, the
breakfast call, the wide awake stare.
The woman beside her sleeps on, lying

worn out, out for the count, lying there.

Terry Collett

Delia's Desires 1996

Delia has seduced
the girl who came
with goods
from the grocer
(in the bed
she shares
with Chrissie)

before that
on the Monday
she had bedded
the post girl
who brought a parcel
(that time on the sofa
the bed being unmade)

and before that
it had been Chrissie's
best friend
(the weird one
but who had
lovely boobs)

now she is heading
to the girl
Chrissie had asked
to weed and sort
the garden
who has a
lovely bum
(Delia had seen
from the bedroom window
and wants to seduce

but Chrissie is still
downstairs and spots
her(Delia) walking
down the garden path
with that look

in her eyes

Chrissie opens
the kitchen door
and calls Delia
where are you going?

Delia stops
thought you had
gone off to work?

not yet
Chrissie says
where were you off to?

Delia smiles
just thought I'd see
how the garden girl
was doing
Delia says

she's doing all right
Chrissie says
looking at Delia
why aren't you
at college teaching?

I'm in late
Delia says
wanting to go
and investigate
the garden girl's
behind and such

have you
made the bed?
Chrissie says

no not yet
Delia says
but I am hoping to

Chrissie sighs
well make it now
and don't forget
to put on the casserole
before you go

Delia nods and walks
back into the kitchen
with Chrissie
and closes the door

(she wanted to explore
the garden girl
and make love
perhaps or more.

Terry Collett

Depression And Black Dog

She rises from bed and stares
out the window. Another day.
No new horizons. Why do
people talk such crap, she muses,

senses the hangover bite in.
He said it was just a sex thing,
no strings, see what a new
tomorrow brings. Her mother

had this thing about what the
neighbours said, how things
looked from another's perspective.
There is a damp patch where

her hand has touched, blood,
bright red. She sees him or rather
his outline in the dark of the night
before. All ten minutes of excitement,

a two-bit joy. Her hand runs over
the patch, feels the stickiness.
Depression digs in its feet, plunges
in its dark claws, rips through her

sense of being, sees the outside
city, no real care, no pity, just what
is she seeing? Shadows and outlines,
people, cars, streets, sun, clouds,

business out there. She wants her
mother back, the loss of all those
years ago, lingering in the back of
her mind and center of her heart.

Depression and the black dog tear
All things and love and life apart.

Desire Within.

Monica watched Benedict
practise Judo
with her brothers
on the grass
by the fence.

She watched
from her bedroom window.
She had parted
the drawn curtains
with her fingers

enough to see
without being seen.
She cheered him on
in an urgent voice.
She would have gone down

and cheered him on
from the sidelines,
but she was still
in her nightwear
and by the time

she had a wash
and dressed
they would be gone.
Watching him
made her excited;

it was a physical thing,
something she could
almost point to,
sense and touch
with her fingers.

She stared down at him,
watched his every move.
Sometimes he would

take on both boys
at a time and defeat

them both, other times
he took them
one at a time
and they would end up
on their backs

on the grass.
Wish he would put me
on the grass, she whispered
to the pane of glass,
touch me

as she does them.
She couldn't describe
how he made her feel.
Whom could she ask?
Her mother would

scorn her
for even asking
such a question.
She wished she had
a sister to ask,

but all she had
was three brothers.
There was cheering
from outside, Benedict
had fallen. He had

miscalculated a move
and fallen on his back.
There was laughter
as he rose and dusted
himself off.

Oh, she murmured.
She put a hand
to her lips.

His head turned
towards the window;

she backed away.
Had he seen her?
Heard her voice?
She moved back
to the window

and peered out.
They were practising again.
But this time
it was karate,
they were breaking

pieces of wood
with the side
of their hands.
She wished
she could be out there.

Near him,
sensing him close to her.
He came most Saturdays
to be with her brothers.

They worked in the week
at the nurseries
half mile away.
Sometimes she was up early
and caught him

before her brothers were out
and she talked with him.
Once he took her
to see the peacocks,
riding on their bikes

to get there.
She had wanted him
to kiss her, but he hadn't.
So near to her,

yet she daren't

reach out
and touch him, that day.
She stood at the window
and stared at him.
He had taken off

his jacket and was
in tee shirt and jeans.
They fought each other now,
their blows barely touching,
the karate touches

merely skimming the skin.
Odd this sensation
flowing through me,
she said, this expanding
desire within.

Terry Collett

Despite The Lies.

DESPITE THE LIES.

Mrs Wren said
she'd have her husband back
if she could
but the guy was just

too wrapped up
in himself
and even though he thinks
the world of his kid

he thinks of other things
or others more
like that time
when he promised to come

to the kid's birthday party
and didn't show
o
he said

I had some one come call
and I didn't want to send
them away
(woman probably

the one he has at the office
who cleavage is to die for)
and that other time
when he said he'd

have the kid
while I had a trip
with the girls out
but no at the last minute

he doesn't show
it's all I had the flu

or I had one of my heads
(more like

the bitch turned up)
and I had to stay at home
while the girls went
and had a good time

or that other time
when he said I
was the most important person
in his life

and wanted me
as his wife
then he goes off
with a smooth talking

wiggly ass girl
with her own car
and only after
he'd got as far

as he could with her
did he return tail
(or something)
between his legs

and flowers
and chocs
and o so sorry honey
I had her all wrong

it's you who mean
the most to me
or that time
when we were on

our honeymoon
(the kid conceived
that time)
and walking arm in arm

along the beach
him spewing
all the words
the romantic stuff

but eyeing all the girls
taking in their bikinis
or their shapeliness
and one even came up

and had the nerve
to chat him up
while I stood there
giving her the glare

and he o so Mr Cool
forgetting me standing
like a fool
or that afternoon

I found him in our bed
with that woman upstairs
the one who borrowed
the sugar each week

and all he said was
you know me honey
I'm weak
I can't resist the eyes

but there you go
Mrs Wren said
I love him so
despite the lies.

Terry Collett

Did The Trick

You hear the bedroom door
open, you keep your eyes
closed, still your breathing,
keep it regular, pretend to

be asleep, keep your eyes
as still as possible. He walks
into the room, you can hear
his footsteps on the carpet,

soft yet hear him move now
about the room. If you wake
he'll want sex again, and you
really can't go through that

again, not now, not again
this morning. You can sense
him moving towards the bed,
can hear his breathing near

you, a laboured breath, as
if he wanted to wake you
by it, but you remain still,
eyes shut. You sense he is

close to you now, his face
maybe inches from your
own. You breath regular as
you can; your right hand is

visible over your breast,
the other hidden beneath
the bed covers. Your head
is reclined to your left so

that your right earring is
on your right cheek, just
laying there. You hear him
move away, he lets out a

small sigh, a disappointed
sigh, a deep frustrated sigh.
He goes away, but not out
of the room: he's at the

bottom of the bed, possibly
peering through the gap
in the curtains, out at
the morning. You remain

in your pretend sleep:
eyelids sealed smooth
as shells. He walks away
again, opens the door, and

goes out, closing the door
with a soft click. Pretending
to be sleep did it, did the trick.

Terry Collett

Did The Trick.

Under the railway bridge
in Rockingham Street,
Benedict met his cousin
who said: your mum's home
with your twin sisters,
best get home quick.

So he did and when he
got to the flat where
they lived he found
his mother holding
one of the babies
in an armchair,
breast feeding her.

His mother said his
other sister was in
the cot in her bedroom.

He entered the bedroom quietly.
He approached the cot
and looked over. There she was
his youngest sister, asleep.

Now he had to share
his mother with two more;
his other sister and brother
and he made five.
A five way split.
Less shares.

But not necessarily
less love or attention.
His mother had
a unique way
of stretching love
and attention
like a magican.

He smiled down
at the baby, touched
the dark curly hair
with a finger.
The baby stirred.
He withdrew his finger
and stood and stared.

After a few minutes
he returned to his mother
and the other sister.
The other baby was plumper,
more rounded,
chubby cheeks and such.

His mother looked tired,
drained. He hadn't seen her
for a few weeks, except
short hospital visits, once
he remembered he stood
outside in the evening air,
staring up at the sky
with moon and stars.

His mother laid the baby
in the cot with the other.
They lay there together
in separate sleeps,
occupying their own
new dreams, hands
tight in tiny fists.

He watched while his mother
went off to prepare tea.
After a short while he left
the room and drew
the door shut
with a gentle click.

One hand on the door,
the other on the handle,
drawn towards him

did the trick.

Terry Collett

Didn't Want To Know 1961

I had just finished
sawing logs
with my dad

when Lizbeth came
and stood
by the back gate
she smiled
and I nodded

who's your friend?
Dad said

her name's Lizbeth
from school
I said

he smiled
and walked in
the back door
to have a cup of tea
and smoke

rode on my bike
to get here
she said
leaning on the gate

her red hair
in a ponytail
she was
in a short black skirt
and white blouse
and an open coat

what are you
doing here?
I said
I'm with Jane

not at the moment
you're not
she said
anyway no reason
she should
hog you
all to herself
the virgin queen

you're a virgin
you tell me
I said

yes but she
wants to be
and I don't
there's a difference
she said

I stood facing her
by the gate
the air smelt
of cow dung
and earth and flowers
from the hedge side
bright sun

what do you
want me for
there are others
who'd oblige
I said

I don't want others
I want you
she said smiling

I'm with Jane though
I said

not now you aren't

besides I've come
all this way to see you
why not just
have a walk with me
it won't harm
she said

suppose not
I said
where'd you want
to walk?

anywhere not muddy
she said

let's go
to the little church
where we went last time
I said

that's a good mile
she said

yes 15 minutes walk
I said

she sighed
and we walked off
along the lane together

she talked
of her moody mother
and boring father
and her goody-goody brother
who had married
and gone off
with a buffoon of girl

she said how one night
when they stayed
she crept along
to their room

and listened at the door
as they were at it

at what?
I said

having sex
by the sounds of it
she said

should you
have listened?
I said

of course all part
of leaning
she said grinning

she asked me
about my family
and I told her

she said
her mother
nagged her to death
about not having
her room tidy
about not doing chores
about having music
too loud
on the record-player
or radio

then she told me
other things
I didn't want
to know.

Terry Collett

Different Sunset.

Kempton was one of your
Best friends at school he
Was a year older than you
And having had polio it left
Him with a limp and when
He ran it seemed as if he was
Riding an imaginary horse
And to keep up with him
You had to ride one too.
Your horse was brown
And ordinary but his was
White like the one the Lone
Ranger rode and when you
Both came out of the movies
You rode off into the sunset
Together you trying to keep
Up with him as he rode ahead.
You envied his small collection
Of knives. His father brought
Them back from the WW2 taken
From dead Germans and they
Were laid out in his bedroom
Like a small treasure trove big
And small ones and your eyes
Ran over them bound down
With an inner envy. All you had
Was a small penknife which you
Bought out of pocket money
You'd earned running errands
And kept in the loop of your jeans
Where the belt went through.
Kempton rode off into another
Bright sunset from you in 1961.
You think of him now and then
Riding into a different sunset
A young boy amongst old men.

Terry Collett

Dim The Light.

?The light in the cloister,
followed me, orange
bricks the cloister walls,
flowers in the flower beds,

the moon's light still there,
seen out of the corner
of my eye. ? Have mercy God,
uttered words, the

refectory, fresh bread(smell
of it) , urn of tea or coffee,
?the Grand Silence, none may
speak, silence at tables,

face to window light,
coloured glass, chill of
morning's touch. ?I wanted
like to see her face. I did

see it, bright face, eyes
searching. ?What position
would you like me?

The tall monk, dark tonsured,
stood beside me, nibbling
brown bread, hand held tea

steaming. What position?
I recalled her that time,
undressed, mouthing soft

mutterings: How is this?
The silence all around, no
sound?, the silence of God,

Dom Joseph had said,
breath it in, inhale Him.

The light is not so bright,
here my God, it is dim.

Terry Collett

Dining With A Schmuck 1932

So the schmuck
put his hand
over your wrist
as you sat
at the restaurant table
with him.

You see
he said
I had to tell someone
and you're the one
I know best.

(The schmuck must
have mixed you up
with someone else) .

You looked away
from him
in case you burst
into laughter
by his sincerity.

I had to tell
someone sincere
and who I could trust
he went on.

You put on your
I am listening to you
sincerely gaze.

He paused
and took a sip of wine
you sipped yours
(expensive stuff) .

A band was playing
up on the band stand

some jazz jitter stuff.

I want to marry Rachel
but I don't know if she'll
accept me what do you think?
He said.

You looked at him
that pencil thin moustache
that center-parting
of his dark hair.

Rachael would be a fool
to turn you down
you said.

(Rachel was a fool anyway
you mused) .

Do you think so?
he said.

You smiled
sure she will
she's told me
she is head over heels
over you
you said.

(Rachael said if she
was desperate she might
if he asked) .

Thank you Bess
you are the best
he said smiling
for the first time.

You smiled too
anytime Edward
you said
sipping the wine

looking over your shoulder
wondering the schmuck
had got to with the orders.

Your stomach
was asking your brain
if your throat was cut.

He let go of your hand
and you missed it
being there.

You wished it was you
he wanted to marry
not the bitch
with the hot itch.

Terry Collett

Dinner Invitation 1969

Sophia's mother
brings in
the dinner plates
and lays them
on the table
where containers
with an assortment
of vegetables
and meat are set.

Sophia looks at me
I look at her.

Her father sits
at the top end
eyeing the table cloth.

Her mother sits down
and the father says grace
he closes his eyes
as does his wife
and Sophia
closes hers.

I close mine
but allow
a slit of space
to see when Sophia
opens hers again.

This dinner invitation
is an uneasy event
like having a meal
at Stalin's table
or Al Capone's.

The grace ends
with a gruff amen.

All eyes are open
the mother speaks
in Polish in chilly tones.

The father looks at her
then at me
unsmiling he looks
at Sophia.

He says something
to her in Polish
she replies.

I sit and watch
the lips move
wishing there were
English dialogue lines
above their heads
to inform me
of the scene.

The father nods his head
and his plump hands
indicate for me
to partake
and put food
upon my plate.

The others take food
with tongs or spoons.

I timidly venture out
and take a little
of this and that
until my plate
is set out
like a small
child's meal.

I sense an uneasiness
at first hot then cold
like one who's ill.

Terry Collett

Do Not Miss Schinzer

Miss Schinzer do not undress
they said but she did and so
they locked her in the side
room alone and she heard the

key turn in the lock and that
was that she heard them walk
away along the passage heard
the footsteps getting soft and

softer then silence the silence
of that abbey she went to some
years back as a child and the nun
with her beady eyes said here

one must absorb the silence here
silence is our food and drink and
she remembered the way nun
empathised the word silence

the way her lips moulded the word
as if it were brand new and not to
be damaged or spoilt but that was
then as a child before the voices

began before the orders were laid
out for her to obey do not undress
Miss Schinzer they had said but her
voices inside said undress take off

garment by garment and as you do
so think of Christ and how he was
disrobed and hammered to the wood
and she did hearing as she undressed

the hammer on nails the jacket and
then the blouse and then the brassiere
and she felt the chill about her breasts
how they stiffened she thought waiting

to remove more cloth waiting for the
voice to say undress more of the clothes
and she recalled how Mr Dimpledone had
said the same thing but she was a child

then a girl in the choir but she didn't ask
why she just undressed and he just stared
at her and said what are you doing child?
but you said so she said no no he said gruffly

be silent unless you want to leave the choir
but she didn't remember him saying that not
then but couldn't be sure and the voices said
take off the lower garments and so she removed

her skirt the black one the one that made her
look like a nun she took it off and then removed
her slip and underwear and sat on the floor quite
bare remembering the hanging Christ the hands

curled like crabs nailed to the cross beam his
naked flesh the wounds the blood and she lay
down flat and put out her arms forming a cross
and her legs tight together one foot touching

the other and over in the corner knitting and
humming some Schubert her bossed eyed mother.

Terry Collett

Do Not Want To 1943

And it's got to be
a double wedding
and things got hectic
making sure the dresses

were ready in time
and your sister was so nervous
she puked once
but the grooms were on leave

from the army
(soon to be dispatched
to England)
and you stood in your bedroom

at home while you mother
fussed about things
and your hair needs
more doing to it she said

your sister was in her bedroom
with our aunt Bess fussing over her
and you thought of Chuck
and what it would be like

later that day after the wedding
and you were in bed for the first time
and what to expect
and yes a double wedding

and double bedding
(different places of course)
and you are getting anxious
and bite your nails

and your mother says
don't bite your nails
so you stare at her
and wish maybe

you weren't marry Chuck
but instead Brad
who is in Italy fighting
and that time Brad and you

kissed out back of the house
and his lips and yours
pressed so tight
no air could get between

and you touched and hugged
but that's all you kept it clean
but now you're going
to marry Chuck

and you do not want to
have him at all.

Terry Collett

Dodo And The City

Dodo draws on the cigarette.
The smoke hits the throat.
The city sucks her in with its
huge sick well of emptiness.
Bagteller wanted her to go
to his place last night and make
passionate love. What a laugh
that'd been. Him and his fetishes.
The schoolgirl uniform was not
her thing. Too many memories.
She told him to stuff that in one
of his tight dark orifices and walked
out into the city's cold night. Went
home to her own place and took
a hot shower. She is still sore from
the scrub. She wants to scrub her
past away with the brush and soap.
Nothing washes away the memories
that have sunk deep. She wakes to
a new day. The city is buzzing with
the walking dead and half living.
The cigarette smoke fills her lungs
and then out into the air. Mother said
men were not to be trusted. Father
said don't listen to her she's biased
and bitchy and smells of sour cream.
Oh that I could open up my mind and
wash it out and not have to see that
shrink once a month just after my bleeds
have gone she says. Dr Glexity with his
black suit and blue tie one green eye and
one grey. All that darn money and nothing
to say. She inhales the smoke and the city
and the living and the dead and sucks them
into her lungs broken heart and stuffed head.

Terry Collett

Doing Jobs For Uncle.

His uncle Mick asked Benedict
if he would mow the lawn
of the old lady at the cottage,
which he did, then clean out
the cowsheds at the farm,
which he did, then take some eggs
to the local shop, which he did.

It was a hot day, he felt a thirst
so went to pub called the Battleaxe
and ordered a pint and sat and drank
it slow outside in the sun. He thought
of the clarinet he'd brought with him,
the jazz he played in the front lounge,
which his aunt Eileen said was very good.

Do you still have and play your accordion?
he asked her. No, she said not now;
I've not played for years. He remembered
her playing and singing Goodnight Irene
on it when he had stayed as a kid.

Long ago now, he thought, finishing his pint.
He also mused on his recent visited
to see the MJQ in the City and afterwards
he met the band on the coach at the back.
Asked questions, got autographs.

Then another visit to the City with his
two cousins to watch them do their martial arts
and afterwards showed them judo moves
he and his friends had done a few years before.

He took his empty glass to the counter
of the pub and walked out in the sunshine
wondering what his uncle Mick would have
lined up for him next. There was talk of
digging trenches in the churchyard some
evening to lay pipes to the church and there

was that mowing of the grass he'd been
shown the other day. Yes, he'd do that now,
he thought, while the sun was out, the grass dry.

The mower was in a shed at the back, one
of those modern jobs, less work, less elbow grease,
less sweat. But also, those peas to pick
and shuck for his aunt. He wasn't done with his
chores for his keep, for six weeks, least not yet.

Terry Collett

Dolly And The Salesman

There's a salesperson at the door
someone said
and so you went to the door
and there was the young salesman

with a book in his hand
and in a sharp grey suit
and hair neat and short cut
yes?

you said
I represent Carson's stores
and it has been brought
to my notice

that you are behind
with your payments
is that so?
you said

yes
the young guy said
three months behind
and if you don't pay today

the item you have chosen to buy
will be removed
is that so?
you said

the young guy looked
into his book of figures
and script
so you called out

Dolly there's a young guy here
who says we owe him money
you both waited
while Dolly came to the door

what do we owe?
she asked
money
the young guy said

what for?
Dolly said
a vacuum cleaner
the young guy said

you are three months behind
now if you do not pay up today
it will be removed
Dolly raised her eyebrows

and put on her
don't mess with me face
and went off
the young guy

and you looked
at each other in silence
after a few minutes
Dolly returned

carrying the vacuum cleaner
here
she said
here's your darn Hoover

take the thing
and go stick it
where the sun
don't shine

and so the young man
held up the vacuum cleaner
and looked at you
and Dolly

and said

right don't come back
to the store
because you won't

be served again
and off he went
out along the road
in the falling black rain.

Terry Collett

Dom Joseph

I met you that first
time in 1968, after
the office of Compline;
and you took me into
the refectory and
brought me warm
macaroni cheese and
cocoa; we talked
during Grand silence.

That time in 1971,
you and I sat on the
abbey's beach with
Hugh, George and
Gareth in conversation,
we tossing those small
pebbles skimming
across those incoming
tides, and you smiled
your smile, while Gareth
talked of Wittgenstein.

The time I last saw you
in 1994, and talked and
you had grown old, and
you heard my confession,
blessed my new rosary,
I took your photograph;
I remember your soft laugh.

The parish priest told me
you had died just before
Mass; I sensed all those
memories of you and I
overwhelmingly flood me
and inwardly I cried.

Terry Collett

Done And Dusted.

She knows that's it.
All done and dusted.
Her father used to say
that: done and dusted,

usually when he done
someone and dusted
off his fists. Dead now;
done an dusted himself.

But Claude, yes, that's
done now. He won't
want her back now he
knows. It was a bit risky

having that young guy
in my bed, but I was
feeling low, and he seemed
a good idea at the time.

Ideas do seem good at
the time. Time has away
of paying back ill done deeds,
she muses. He hasn't rung.

Hasn't said a thing. His way
of cutting her out, and leaving
her out in the cold. He made
love his goal, well at least

the bedding kind. Had to be
the best bed, the best sheets,
silky and smooth. That time
in the posh place in that big

four poster, and she and him
giving it some, and there was
a knock at the door, and he
bellowed out obscenities, and

the knocking stopped, it
was silent like just before a
bomb is dropped. That's it
now, she muses, no more

Claude, no more bedding in
posh places, no seeing posh
prats or their wives and their
over done and dusted up faces.

Terry Collett

Done Her Eyes 1962

In the school corridor
Sheila waits for John,
gazing along the corridor
to see if he's coming.

Kids pass her by
on their way
to the cloakrooms
or lockers.

It is a clear blue day,
so she can go out on
the sports field
at midday break
and see him
if she doesn't
see him now.

Her elder sister stands
and stares at her and says:
Who are you waiting for?

Sheila stares back.

Jesus, who do you think?
Sheila says.

That's blaspheming;
I'll tell Mum when
we get home tonight,
the elder sister says.

Mind your business,
go say your prayers,
Sheila says moodily
and turns away.

Her sister goes off
with a turn of her head

and off down the corridor.

She sees John coming
with the boy Goldfinch
and is anxious
what to say or do.

John is talking
to the other boy.

Should she stop
and talk to him;
hope the Goldfinch boy
walks on?

He gets near
and her anxiousness
increases,
she feels so
self-conscious.

He looks her way
and nods and says:
how are you?

She fumbles
with her satchel.

I'm OK,
she replies,
wanting to say more,
but her words cease.

Good,
he says,
see you later
on the sports field?

She nods and smiles.

He has gone up
the corridor

with the Goldfinch boy;
she follows him
with her eyes,
wanting to touch him.

And he didn't notice
she'd done her eyes.

Terry Collett

Don't Ask 1997

How was your day?
Nuala asks,
lying next to
her husband, Brian,
in their bed,
hoping sleep
will come quick
before he gets
to wanting to have
his end away.

Tiring and busy,
he says,
looking at her,
his eyes searching her,
where'd you go?

She looks past him
at the curtains flapping
where the top
of the window is open.

Shopping in town.

Buy anything?

Not much; few bits,
she says,
thinking of her and Una
making love in her bed
in the new bedsit,
and twice going the rounds.

Nothing for me, then?
He says smiling.

No not this time,
she says,
knowing that smile,

that I want to have you
soon kind of smile.

Haven't seen
your friend Una around?
He says.

No not since she left us,
Nuala says,
hoping Una never left
love bites on her body
anywhere; she'd not
looked since she'd
been home and got
the dinner.

Shame I liked her,
he says.

I'll get jealous,
she says.

No need,
he says,
you're my number one.

She recalls Una kissed her
almost everywhere,
and her love making her
so moist and hot.

So how about it?
He says.

About what?
She says.

Us and sex?

What about us
and sex?

Are you up for it?
He says smiling.

Sleepy,
she says.

A quickie?
He says,
his smile still in place.

She resigns to fate,
and so he goes
about his task;
never get,
his mother'd said,
if you don't ask.

Terry Collett

Don't Care 1962

Elaine sits in class;
the teacher is writing on the board,
the white chalk on black board.

John smiled at me on the bus.
It thrilled me that he did.
My sister didn't see.
Well if she did she didn't say
and she would have done I know.

My own smile to hold in my head
and remember forever and a day.

The fuss about him and me
has died down since my sister blabbed
about him kissing me that Sunday.
He kissed me before that. At school.
Just out of the blue.

Elaine picks up her pen
and writes in her exercise book
what is written on the board.
The teacher stands facing the class.
He looks pleased with himself.
The pen nib isn't much good.
It blobs. She dabs it with blotting paper.

I dreamed of him last night.
John kissed me. He was in my room.
My sister was asleep. He was in my room
standing by the door. He blew me a kiss.

Mum was annoyed that he came last Sunday.
As if I had planned it. Don't you do anything she said.
Do any what? He kissed me. Warm kiss.

The pen blobs again. Damn it.
She dabs at it with blotting paper.

When he kissed me I felt funny inside.
My mind seems elsewhere. I love him. I don't care.

Terry Collett

Don'T Know When

Don't know when
she said

but as she spoke
her breath rose

like cigarette smoke
in the morning air

and it fascinated you
more than the words

like when your father
blew smoke rings for you

as some kind
of cheap entertainment

but
she said

it will happen
I promise you

and your lack
of response

still gazing
at her breath rising

made her repeat
don't know when though

and jabbed
at your chest

with her finger
oh ok

you said
coming back

to the moment
her blue eyes

fixed on you
the depth of them

like pools
of blue water

and oh how
to drown there

the thought arose
wanting the when

to be
as soon as

and the image
of her back then

with her eyes
and smile

and that way
she had

of bringing life
to a dull day

like some
top notch dancer

not knowing then
of her death

years later
of cold creeping cancer.

Don'T Know Where.

Don't know where
she said

standing by the back gate
which backed

onto the woods
with the evening creeping in

and she having snuck out
of her house without

her mother seeing
looked quite nervous

and kept looking back
over her shoulder

as if her mother
may have followed

can't go to my place
she said

or mine you said
they're always there

especially this time
of an evening

what about the hay barn?
You suggested

looking at her eyes
blue cornflowers

and that smile
that could have lit

fires in dark places
and she said

don't want no hay stalks
touching my ass

and she laughed
and you wanted to capture

her laughter
and that smile

and her bright blue eyes
and your youth

and that thinking
you had forever

and the monopoly
on truth.

Terry Collett

Don'T Listen

Don't listen to him,
Gran said,
indicating
with a nod

of her head,
to Granddad
in the other room,
sitting by the fire

with his loose clothes
holding in bones.
You stood by the door,
peeping through

the thin crack
between door
and frame,
your young eyes

like a hawk's,
catching the view:
Granddad lighting up
a cigarette,

to set him off
on the cough
and spit and phlegm,
and Gran's hazel eyes

lighting up with anger
and her tongue
like a viper's
ready to condemn.

Terry Collett

Don'T Take Lifts From Dames

Whose car
did you get out of?

Dolly asked.
Some dame

from the bedding department,
you replied.

She's been bedding you
I suppose? Dolly said.

No, you replied,
she's seven months pregnant.

So you got her pregnant huh?
Can't keep your hands

to yourself can you.
I just got a lift home

by her that's all.
You took off your coat

and went to the sitting room
and poured yourself a drink.

Dolly followed you in.
I found this name

in your pocket book.
A girl's name.

You recognise it? Eh?
She showed you

the pocket book.
You read the name.

That's just some dame
whose name I put down

who's been shoplifting.
So you say.

For all I know
you're having it off

with her too.
Maybe you're having all

the dames at the store.
I'm a security guard

not a Casanova, you said.
She went off

out to the kitchen
muttering to herself.

You drained your drink
and poured another.

You could hear her
in the kitchen

slamming down
pots and pans

and cursing the air.
I don't screw any dames

but you, you said.
You're my Sweetie pie.

Dolly came back
to the door way

and stared at you.
You mean that?

Sure I do.
Every single word?

Every single word.
I'm your Sweetie pie?

Sure you are.
And you ain't been sleeping

with no other woman?
No, of course I haven't.

Never would.
Dolly's glassy gaze softened.

She pushed back
her hair from her eyes.

Ok Sexy Boy
maybe I believe you.

Maybe you're telling
me the truth.

Maybe I got you wrong.
She turned and went back

in the kitchen.
You sighed softly.

BUT IF YOU'RE LYING TO ME
I'LL POKE OUT YOUR EYES

she bellowed.
Out in the kitchen

Dolly banged around.
You emptied the glass.

A love was dying.
You could sense it

in your bones and
in the hollow sound.

Terry Collett

Don't Throw Your Love Away.

Don't throw
your love away,
I heard her say
one day.

She was sitting in a chair
with moonlight in her hair,
brushing her fingers
through the long locks
giving me looks.

I give no love away;
I spend it wisely,
I replied
(although I knew
I lied) .

Real love is not
to be wasted,
she said
with a slight toss
of her head,
then went and lay
on the bed, and lying
back down on the bed,
indicated I lay
beside her
if I dare
or if cared to;
(I hesitated
what to do) .

I won't bite,
she said.

I took in
the nightdress
she wore:
a dull red.

Not what I heard,
I told her.

She smiled
(the kind of smile
to drive me wild) .

Well come try;
don't be shy,
she uttered
looking at me
temptingly
(silly me) .

Do I dare?
(the T.S. Eliot poem
came to mind) .

Come on,
she said,
don't keep me
waiting alone.

I stood looking at her
lying there:
do I dare to
eat a peach?
Or suck her fruits?

Taste my ware,
she said
with a slight shake
of her head.

Not sure,
I replied.

She lay back
and sighed:
don't throw
your love away,

I heard her say,
let me be
your testing ground.

I gazed at her
taking in her soft fruits,
but made no sound.

Terry Collett

Doomsday 1969

Sophia lies on Mr A's bed;
I put away his clothes
in the chest of drawers.

We go for meal?
Sophia says
(she's Polish
and her English
is broken) ,
looking at me
as I go about
my tasks.

I'm busy,
ask someone else.

No, I want you
go meal with me,
she says,
her legs crossed
at the ankles,
her shoes on the floor
by the bed.

My me?
What have I done
to deserve this?
Anyway you shouldn't
be on the bed;
if Mr A comes in
and sees you
he'll get the wrong
impression,
I say,
looking at her
lying there.

What impression?
I lie here,

do nothing wrong,
she says,
unless you lie with me
and we have the sex?

Look, I've got to go;
I have other beds to make
and clothes to put away
and Mr G needs his bath.

She looks at me
pouting her lips.

You not want the sex?

No, not now,
not here.

I open the door to go
and hear Matron's voice
along the passageway
and close the door quick.

Get off the bed,
it's Matron,
I say to Sophia.

She looks at me.

So what?
I tell her
you want the sex,
she says.

You can't
it's not true,
now come off.

She reluctantly
gets off the bed
and slips on
her shoes;

her hand on my arm
to steady herself.

She looks at me.

You have meal
with me?

Yes, ok, yes,
but get on
with your cleaning.

She picks up her cloth
and begins to wash
the sink and taps,
and I go out the door
and close it behind me.

Matron is by the door
of the bathroom.

Where's the Polish girl?
She asks.

No idea,
I reply,
I think she was
downstairs earlier.

Matron pulls a face
and walks back down
the passageway,
her heels going clip-clop
ahead of me.

I sigh and look back
at Mr A's room
where I almost
met my doom.

Terry Collett

Doppelganger

Miss Damson
was a doppelganger

for Bette Davis
right down

to the look
and eyes

and swagger
into the classroom

to teach
and it was said

that sometimes
she'd go into

the cupboard
and have a drag

on a smoke
and if any kid

spoke out of turn
she'd give a stare

to make his or her soul
seemingly burn

but you saw
the way she could bring

silence to a room
when she entered

or bring a shudder
of fear

into the hearts
of the classroom braggers

and when she drew chalk
across the blackboard

it'd set teeth on edge
or threw chalk

or the blackboard wiper
at any kid stupid

or brave enough
to open their mouths

and the way she wrote
upon the board

her back to the class
that firm ass

and with that neat script
her fingers tight

around the chalk
as if around

the throat of any kid
who dared to talk

and you
she'd say

you at the back
you with the dumb look

don't stare
out of the window

open the darn book
or hey you

girl with the bangs
don't sit there

with your mouth open
or you'll catch flies

and there'd be
an underground snigger

from others
or just dumb looks

anywhere
but at Miss Damson

even stuck between
pages of boring books.

Terry Collett

Doppelganger Or Such Like.

You remind me
of my brother
the woman said
after mass

meeting you
at the back
of the church
poor guy you thought

to look like me
and then the other day
while sipping a latte
at a Nero coffee house

you saw her again
sitting in the corner
with her husband
who was reading a paper

she looked up
saw you and smiled
some essence of her youth
held in there

at least in spirit
who is that?
your son asked
a woman from church

who says I look like her brother
you said
and what does her brother
look like?

he said
me I guess
you replied
taking in the Mozart music

in the back ground
some minuet
that Judy liked
some decades ago

whom you almost
made it with
until her parents
came home

before the time
they said
and she jumping up
altering her clothes

face bright and red
the woman's husband
put down the newspaper
and sipped his espresso

giving you a nod of recognition
you the guy
whom his wife said
looked like her brother

though he saw
little likeness
save for the beard
and moustache

and that look
about the eyes
you think
taking in his expression

imagining his thought process
he taking no notice
of the Mozart minuet
or knowing Judy's

white underwear

or red dress.

Terry Collett

Dottie Darning In Thoughtful Mood.

Willie's walked to the village,
Dottie sits darning stockings
by the window, her nimble

fingers pulling and pushing
the yarn through the cloth.
Sunlight brightens up the

length of her lap, warms
her fingers, brings touch
of Heaven. She pauses,

holds needle in mid sew,
watches a butterfly, Red
Admiral, flitter by the

window's square. If only
Willie was there. He was
up early, up and out in

the garden's span, digging
and planting, she watching,
taking in his moving arms,

his steady hands. She still
feels the damp place his
kiss gave, on forehead above

her brow, feels it still, anyhow.
She resumes the darning of
her brother's cloth, the sharp

needle pulled and pushed,
the fingers holding firm, the
in and out, of the narrowing

hole, the closing up. She looks
at the trees, the slight sway
of arms, the green covered

fingers, how she and Willie
sat beneath by the near shore,
sheltered by tall willows, the

sea view soaking their eyes, his
hand in hers, birdsong, distant
ship on horizon's brow. If only
Willie was here, was here now.

Terry Collett

Dottie Stirs At Dawn

Dottie stirs as dawn light seeps
through the bedroom curtains;
Willie breathes deeply in his sleep.

Sammy, who had arrived with
her brother Willie the night before,
sleeps in the guest room along
the passage. She listens to the birds
singing from the garden, watches
as the seeping sunlight plays on
the duvet covers like mischievous
children. She is happy; Willie is back,
Sammy has arrived with his talk of
the city, his books, the poems, but
nothing of his wife or son or daughter.

They had been up late with talk and
laughter and she had studied Sammy,
and was, she admits to herself, a little
envious of his wife to have one such
as he, when maybe it ought, she feels,
to have been her. But she has Willie.

She will always have him. He stirs then
turns over. She watches his breathing,
how his hand lies on the duvet, his
fingers still, the nails just so, neat
and trimmed. She had missed him;
missed him being there, reciting his
poems, and she writing them down,
their walks, their laying under the trees
watching the sky, or by their small lake
studying the birds, the ducks, swans
or occasional dragonfly. She looks at
the bedside clock. She will make them
breakfast and a pot of tea and go
breathe in the morning air, remember
the night. Willie had kissed her eyelids
shut to help her sleep. She can still

feel his lips there. She runs a finger
along his arm, making a snail like
move as if along a leaf or flower top.

She has missed him so. The tears she
had shed. The laying awake those nights
he was away. The headaches, the bleeds,
the monthly curse. She pauses her finger.

She has reached his hand; she rests her
hand on his, lets it lay. Oh for a fresh
morning, she whispers, oh for a new day.

Terry Collett

Dottie Waits For Willie.

Dottie wishes Willie would
return home. All night she
had twisted and turned in
his bed. She looks out of
the window of their cottage
for the postie to come with
a letter from her brother,
but there is no sight or sign.

She sighs. Later she will prepare
one of his favourite pies. He'll
bring Sammy and they'll go
for walks and talk and smell
flowers and hear the birdsongs
and sit beneath trees and study
the sky. She moves to the kettle
and switches it on and prepares
a cup of tea. One teabag, two
sugars, a small spill of milk.

She sips and thinks. If Willie
were here now he'd lay his head
on her shoulder and read her
one of his poems. She likes it when
he reads her one of his poems.

She knows them because she
scribbles them down as he recites
them as they walk along. I can't
write sitting down, he often told her.

I need to walk and breathe the
air and hear the songs of birds.
She sits and imagines him there
beside her, his head on her
shoulder as if a pillow, his
vibrating voice moving inside her.

She senses a headache coming,

feels the tremors along her nerves
like a coming storm. It is a time
of bleeds. The moon's pull drags
her down. If Willie were here he'd
say, Go lay down and I will come
bring you pills and water and kiss
it better. But her brother is away
bringing Sammy. The clouds are
gathering, dark grey and heavy,
the sky becoming black, oh, she
says, if only my Willie was back.

Terry Collett

Dottie Writes And Cries

Sunlight settles on the
table where Dottie writes.

Her journal records the days
since Willie left, the effects
it has had, her migraines,
the sickness, the stomach
pains, the blood loss.

She writes slowly, neat
and lucid, the pen tight
between finger and thumb.

She pauses, looks at the sunlight,
how the beams seem to dance
upon the cloth, she sucks the end
of the pen, her tongue sensing
the smoothness and plasticness.

She will write of the roses,
how they have grown, the red
like blood, the blood like that
on the sheet before the wash.

She misses her brother, his
departure to fetch Sammy
has pained her, causes her
loss of sleep, despite sleeping
in his bed, caressing his pillow.

She writes again, the pen nib
moving over the journal's page,
her eyes watching the flow,
the words settling on the paper,
the words holding the images,
the images for him, for Willie
to read and have on his return.

A bird song, she cocks an ear,

outside nearby, a robin, she
closes her eyes, grasps the sound,
turns it around in her mind.

She will write that down,
he likes birdsong, loves the
songs, the call of the wild.

She opens her eyes, begins
to write once more, she wants
to cry, pushes her eyes tight
to stop tears hitting the page.

Through teary eyes sees
the sunbeams dance on
what seems like water on
the patterned cloth, she
remembers Willie laying
his head down there once
side ways on and gazing at
her as deep fond lovers may.

She puts down her black pen,
she will write no more today.

Terry Collett

Dotty And Willy.

Dotty screws the pen lid,
puts the pen down, folds
her hands in her lap. Willy
has finished his poem, he

is now silent, his muse has
gone. She watches as her
brother sits back in his chair,
pushes his fingers through his

dark hair and sighs. That makes
her almost cry, that poet muse
going like that, him sitting there,
face empty, sighs leaving him

instead of words. Tonight she
will enter it all in her journal,
after cocoa and a biscuit and
Willy's kiss and him gone off

to bed, humming to himself.
She will sit by lamplight, take
out her pen, and write on the
clean page, how he wrote,

what he wrote, the words,
the muse, the leaving of him.
She will leave out the kiss,
the embrace, the seeing each

other face to face. Willy hates
writing things down, he just likes
to sit when the words come and
he can speak them and let Dotty

write the words in the air floating
there. He gets up from his chair,
paces the room, his hands behind
his back, his words gone, his mood

dark, becoming black. Dotty looks
at her hands, entwines her fingers,
makes a church, makes a steeple,
looks inside, sees ink stained people.

Terry Collett

Doubt Was Born Mcmlxxi

I opened the shutters
to my window
in the abbey at 5am
and smelt the fresh dew
on the grass of
the garth below,

Deus in omnibus,

touched the old crucifix
on the wall above my bed
felt the pierced feet,

Dio in noi e con noi
the Italian monk said
as I helped him
in the workshop
cleaning brass fittings
for the church,

I kissed her soft fruit
but it was no apple
like Eve's and I no Adam,

there are some
who want knowledge
for the sake of knowledge
but that is Curiosity
and there are some
who want knowledge
so they can be known
by others that is Vanity
and there are those
who want knowledge
so that they can serve
and that is Love
St Bernard said,

I watched as Hugh

walked to the refectory
grim faced and fingering
his rosary with an angel
at elbow and demon
at foot or so seemed,

à la fin du péché
de jour est le péché
the French monks said to me
as we scythed the grass
by the long drive
to the abbey,

I climbed her peaks
as we lay in her bed,

I opened the book
by St Augustine which
a priest in London
recommended along
with the poet Hopkins
and I remembered being
served tea and cakes
by a nun who worked
along side him,

George swept the cloister
as the Hoover
had packed up
dat is beter
het is rustiger
a Dutch monk said to him,

she spread her legs
like a butterfly and said
take and have your fill
so I did,

nolite iudicare
ut non iudicemini
so it said some place
in the Gospels,

the price good men pay
for indifference to public affairs
is to be ruled by evil men
Gareth said quoting
from Plato as we sat
in the novice room
awaiting Dom Joe,

I wanted to sense
God's breath on my neck
as I bowed my head to pray
but sensed only
a cold wind in the church
on a 5.30am dawn
and doubt was born.

Terry Collett

Downpour 1955

Helen's hair
hangs dampened
by the rain

as we wait
underneath
the hawning

of a shop
on the way
home from school

her thick lens
spectacles
are smeary

so I can't
see her eyes
will it stop?

she asks me
I hope so
I reply

don't fancy
standing here
till bedtime

I look up
at the sky
grey and black

rain falling
I'm all wet
she mutters

even my
socks are damp
in my shoes

let's run then
I tell her
so we run

through the rain
splashing through
deep puddles

on pavements
she clutching
my wet hand

semi-blind
in her smeared
spectacles

rushing past
the shop fronts
our passing

reflections
in windows
quite ghostly

as in dreams
thunder claps
above us

from the sky
and Helen
loudly screams.

Terry Collett

Downpour Of Rain 1995

Iris turns in her sleep,
Jodie sleeps beside her,
in her dream Iris is

a 22 year old teacher again
and Jodie the 15 year old student
at the boarding school,

that night when Jodie
crept into her room and her bed,
what are you doing here?

I'm cold and lonely,
you can't come in my bed,
I need to be with you,

you can't Jodie you'll have to leave,
I want to be warm
and not be lonely,

not here,
must,
no,

yes,
Iris opens her eyes,
Jodie snuggles up

to her 8 years on,
arm around her waist,
cheek against her back,

sleep sounds,
the dream repeats now
and then of back to that night,

the words echo
in the rooms of her mind,
you must leave now,

can't leave,
you must go,
need you to keep me warm,

not in my bed,
Jodie had grabbed her nightgown
and wouldn't let go,

you must go,
no,
you must,

she didn't leave,
she stayed,
hugging her close,

an owl hooted,
moon shone through
the gap in the curtain,

you must go Jodie,
no I can't,
she stayed,

cheek on her arm,
laying there
staring in the dark,

she lay next to her,
just tonight she had whispered,
it's illegal Jodie,

tired and cold need to stay,
she slept the night,
no one knew,

but she knew,
Iris closes her eyes again,
Jodie sleeps on,

outside the downpour of rain.

Terry Collett

Dream All The Rest 1962

Yiska takes me home with her
in the lunch recess
at school;
it's a sunny day,
and she lives
a few minutes away.

Her mum is out seeing
her sister in a far off town.

She opens the door
of the house,
and I enter in,
and she closes the door.

I smell polish
and fresh air.

Nice place,
I say,
smells flowery.

Mum's a tidy-house freak;
spends time on her housework,
and if she's on a downer
she spends longer,
Yiska says.

She takes me into the lounge,
and it is neat as a new pin,
and I look around.

Want a sandwich?
She says.

Have we time?
I say.

Of course; I can make

a sandwich,
she says.

So we go into the kitchen;
it is neat, tidy and spotless.

Sit on the stool,
and I'll get us a sandwich.

So I sit and she gets
bread, butter and cheese,
and makes us sandwiches,
and pours us some fruit juice.

We sit together on the two stools,
and she says,
I could show you my room,
but my big brother
might come home,
he does some lunchtimes.

You showed me
your room before,
I say.

O so I did,
she says smiling,
he'd tell Mum
and then there'd be
hell to pay;
he's a git that way,
she says.

We eat and sip the juice.

Maybe when I know
for sure he won't be home,
and mum's away again,
I can show you again,
and do something,
she says,
looking at me.

Do something?

I say.

Yes, you know, things,
she says.

If we have time
and not have lunch,
she adds.

After we ate lunch,
she takes me into the garden,
and shows me
her father's work.

Mum's the designer;
Dad's just her labourer,
Yiska says.

Then she turns,
and kisses me
full on the lips,
and holds me to her,
and I sense her there,
and her small breasts
against my chest,
and I dream
all the rest.

Terry Collett

Dream Of Her 1962

He picked up
the book of birds
on the window-ledge.

Opened it
and randomly
gazed at the pictures
of birds.

Downstairs
his mother
was cooking dinner;
the smell of onions
was on the air.

He glanced
through the window,
lowering the book,
to have a look.

The cat was in
the apple orchard
waiting for birds
to comedown.

He thought of Yiska
at school,
the meeting on
the school field
at lunch recess,
the kisses,
lips to lips stuff,
and she saying:
shame you don't live
in the town, Benny,
we could meet more.

But just at school,
just then

could they meet,
stolen moments
best they could,
doing what they wanted
not what they should.

He gazed at the sky,
late afternoon sun,
school done.

He opened the book
and took out the photo
she had given him.

Black and white,
she laughing,
hair caught
in some wind,
shirt rising.

He kissed
the photographic image,
held between
finger and thumb.

He recalled
Rennie saying,
the bit of skirt
don't half fancy you,
Benny;
bet she's
up for it.

The cat stalked
a bird on the grass
of the orchard,
head down,
paws slowly
preparing,
sleek and slim,
in for a kill
if the bird

kept still.

He placed the photo
back in the book;
closed it up
and placed it
on the window-ledge.

As he kissed her lips,
his hand had stalked
her thigh,
slow fingered
out of sight.

He smiled;
he would dream of her
that night.

Terry Collett

Dream Or Dead.

O look at that man,
she said,
look at that

kind of brings
it all home to you
don't it

kind of makes me
want to cry
the utter darkness of it

and I guess
he wants me
but at what price

and mother said
have to be aware
of men like that

and I was
well sort of
looking out for them

but you never know
what will turn up
what kind will

come from under a stone
crab like make its
way towards you

and I said
look Honey
I'm not that

kind of guy
but I guess they
are out there out there

waiting to pounce
on women
and she said

don't it make you
want to spit
when there's that

kind of feller
out there waiting
and I said

don't worry
about them now
you have me

and she sort of
calmed down
and put away

the magazine
and stared at me
and said

can I have
that drink now?
Sure

I said
and poured her
a glass of booze

and she drank it down
and closed her eyes
and I woke up

and the room
was empty
as was my head

and she was not

or a dream
or dead.

Terry Collett

Dreams Of Geula.

Baruch sipped the wine
Geula the waitress
had brought; he watched
her walk away, her hips

hypnotic, the sway of them,
dream inducing. Red wine,
sour, table used, not the best.
He rinsed his mouth, then he

swallowed. How she could smile,
he thought, the lips of her,
the teeth, the red tongue.
He could dream of course,

dreams are cheap, cost
nothing, are in the end,
nothing. He could watch her
for hours; see her walk the

restaurant in the evenings
serving meals and wine,
the smile always in place,
that swaying of hips, hands

busy, the eyes bright lights.
Some evenings he stayed until
late, she on her last legs,
about to go off duty, seeing

him, stopped to say goodnight.
She said she was not permitted
to date guests. Too complicated,
she supposed. Hotel rules, she

said, nonetheless. She smiled
and walked off. He could dream
she had said yes, of course where
shall we go? Wherever you wish,

he would have said. Knowing
nowhere, he would have left it to
her to choose. Where would that
have been? What cost? He watched

as the last glimpse of her disappeared
beyond doors. The last glimpse of hers
hips and swaying behind. The music
faded, the restaurant lights dimmed.

He stood up, walked away and stood outside.
The moon was full; stars like sprinkled
diamonds, lit the sky. One last look,
he thought, then off to bed, to see
dreams of Geula within my head.

Terry Collett

Dreams To Keep 1962

My parents said
you can come on Saturday,
Yochana said to Benedict,
outside the classroom
before maths.

How will I get
to your place?
He asked.

My dad said
he will pick you up,
and take you home again,
she said.

He looked at her,
and frowned.

Just for the day?
He said.

Yes, they want
to see what you are like
first before they
let you come,
and stay for a weekend,
she said.

A trial run,
he said.

Sort of,
she said,
Mum really,
Dad would be
ok about it,
but Mum isn't sure.

Other kids

milled about them,
pushing and shoving.

Speak to you
at lunch recess,
he said,
and wandered off
with Rolland,
and stood talking to him.

She moved over
to her friend Angela,
and they spoke about
the TV the night before,
and who was in what,
and who had done what.

Yochana watched Benedict
as he stood with the other boy.

She hoped he'd come on Saturday,
and that her parents liked him,
and that he could stay
the weekend,
and maybe,
she thought,
once her parents were asleep,
she might sneak along
to where Benedict was
to slept in the spare room,
and snuggle up to him
in the single bed,
and they could
do the things
she's heard about,
and dreamed of
in her nightly sleep.

Secret of course,
best way
for dreams to keep.

Drink It Down

Drink it down,
Mother said,

it's good
for the bowels;

it'll stop you
feeling bunged up

and unable to shit.
The spoonful

tasted foul,
it clung

to your tongue
like black glue,

brought
your stomach

to your lips;
your eyes to water

and slid
slowly down

your throat
like a slippery snake,

and Mother saying,
like some baying hound,

don't pull such a face,
it'll do you good,

it's not poison you know.
You gave her a smile

and closed your eyes,
wondering if this how

a sick man feels
when he dies.

Terry Collett

Drizzle 1958

Drizzle came
Lydia gazed out
her bedroom window.

She had wanted
to go out
now she'd
have to wait.

Her big sister Gloria
slept in the bed
behind her snoring.

The boyfriend
lay beside her
mouth open
sleeping soundly.

Lydia sighed
she had to sleep
in the cot bed
because of him
which was getting
too small for her.

She looked
as raindrops
hit the windowpane.

The radio was playing
in the front room
her mother
singing along
to some big
band music.

She wanted
to go out
and see Benny

and go somewhere
but now she had
to stay in until
the drizzle stopped.

She could see
the green grass
and the abandoned
bomb shelter
outside the window
of the flats.

Sometimes kids
played on it
making out
it was a castle
or a fort
to be fought over.

Drizzle
fecking drizzle
she whispered
not letting her mother
hear her or she'd
wash her mouth out
with soap and water
her 10 year old
naughty daughter.

Terry Collett

Dublin Kisses 1997

There's a trail
of discarded clothes
from staircase
to bedroom floor.

Curtains drawn
to shut out light
and sight of others.

Brian's never
done this,
Nuala says,
never made me
wet so and hot
as if I'd showered.

He's not my skill,
Una says.

They lie beside
each other
in the double bed,
eye gazing.

You've explored
each part of my body,
Nuala says.

Each part twice
or more,
Una says.

Kisses breast nearest.

Lips kiss skin.

What'd Brian say
if he could see this?
Una asks.

Don't ask.

Mind boggling
to even think such.

I've a mind to give you
love-bites
to make him jealous,
Una says.

He gives them
if he remembers
while shagging.

Do you have
the stop-watch on?
Time him?

No need the hand'd
not repeat itself
on the face piece.

They laugh.

Kiss lips.

How's he start?
Una says.

Soon as he's in bed.

But how?

Kisses my neck.

Like this?
Una kisses.

Near so.

Kisses again.

Not so good
as you do.

Where then?

Nuala looks
at Una's eyes.

He fumbles
with me.

Fumbles?
How so?

Nuala fumbles
Una's thighs.

Like so.

Here, too.

Seen dogs in the park
more killed,
Una says.

Nuala smiles.
First time he was done
in the time
I could sneeze.

Did you wipe
your nose?

Giggles both.

What time have
you to go?
Una says.

Soon or I'll not
get dinner on time.

Miss you
being here,
Una says.

Miss being
here with you.

What to do?

Do this.

They kiss.

Terry Collett

Dubrovnik 1972.

Dubrovnik seemed
a second home,
and you, in a street

cafe, sat drinking coffee,
with that book on
Schopenhauer open

on the table, a cigarette
smoking in an ashtray
unattended, thinking

of the girl in the hotel
restaurant the night
before, the waitress

who smiled at you as
she served and went
by your table, and your

brother said, I don't
fancy yours much,
indicating with a nod

of head, another
waitress over by a
nearby table, plump

and spotted, wearing
a scowl instead of a
smile, and all the while,

he eyeing, as young
men do the beauty
that had caught your

eye going by, but all is
fair in love, so men
have said, so picking

up the book on
Schopenhauer, and
further reading,

holding the cigarette
between the fingers
of the hand not

turning pages, you
inhaled with deep
concentration the

smoke and words
spread across the
page, written by a

philosopher of a
foreign tongue
and different age.

Terry Collett

Dudman's Cold Stare 1916

A car arrives in the drive
and stops outside
the front door

all the servants are there
and George's parents
wait there all importantly
watching the car door

the chauffeur gets out
and opens the back door
and George back
from the hospital
for shell shock
gets out and puts a hand
over his forehead
to block out sunlight
then looks around the grounds
around the house

his mother steps forward
and takes his hand
welcome home George
she says

George stares at her
he nods but doesn't smile
he looks into the faces
of all those standing there
by the front door
as if amongst strangers

his father moves forward
and gently takes his son's arm

George moves forward uncertainly
his feet unsteady
his hands shaking slightly
his eyes move over the servants

wide and staring

then he stops
and points to Polly
Polly
he says softly
almost a mumble

she gazes at him
uncertain what to do

the mother looks at Polly
come help Polly
Master George recognizes you
and indicates
with her other hand
that she should come

so Poly walks
to George's side
and says nothing
but smiles at him
and he smiles back

we'll go to his room
the father says

a footman takes the bags
and follows George
and his parents and Polly
inside the house
and up the wide staircase

the other servants
including the butler Dudman
move away from the door
and go about their tasks

Dudman goes in
and stares at the party
walking upstairs slowly
and sighs

Polly has overstepped the line
as far as he is concerned
he'll have to watch her
he muses watching the party
disappear from the stairs
and gives the absent Polly
one of his cold stares.

Terry Collett

Dull And Im 1916

Susie watches Polly walk
along the kitchen
tray in hand
eyes peering

Mrs Gripe moaning

Susie'd watched Polly
get out of the bed
that morning
in their shared room
in the attic
freezing cold
watched her go
to the basin and pour
cold water into the bowl
and taking off
her nightdress
(faded blue)
began to wash face
and neck and arms
all the time shivering
cursing under her breath

Susie'd studied
the body shiver
the legs
the arms move
the bottom move

then Polly turned and said
come on get up
get your arse out of bed
don't lay there
like some bloody princess

now she watches
as Polly puts the tray
on the side beside her

and look at her
her eyes searching

Mrs Gripe(the cook) saying
Susie girl
get a move on
with that washing up
there's more to do after that

Susie nods
and washes up quicker

and Polly says
Master George
maybe here today
and you know
what that means

Susie nods
and looks at Polly
as she moves away
the black and white uniform
the hips swaying
the hair pushed under
the white headpiece

and o yes she knows
what that means
she'll sleep alone
most of the night
while Polly's having it away
with Master George
while I'm hugging myself
against the cold

she looks back as Polly
goes by Mrs Gripe
getting orders
her backside swaying
side to side

o

Susie muses
if only it was me
she was getting all
excited about
not him
and a wave of darkness
comes over her
dull and dim.

Terry Collett

Dull Winter 1963

It's wintry
the woods are damp
the undergrowth is dull
and few birds sing

I walk with Yehudit
along one of the rides
narrow
part mud
part grass
most trees leafless
sky greyish blue

remember when we
came here
that first time Benny?
she asks me

(I do we were 14
still at school)

yes you showed me
the pond
I say

our lake
she says

yes our lake
I say

we walk down
by a shallow pond
dumped tins and cans
and rubbish over the years
have caused it to be dirty
and lifeless

we walk to the fence

and climb over
and go towards our lake
together through a muddy field

do you remember
when we ran through this field
that time it down poured
and we got drenched
and I changed out
of my wet clothes
at your parents' place
and your mother
gave me clothes
she had to change into?

(I do remember
I recall seeing her
go from bathroom to bedroom
wrapped in a towel
my mother lent her)

yes
wet day that
and I remember
your dress clung to you
revealing each aspect
of your figure
I say

trust you
to notice that
she says smiling

we climb through the fence
and stand by our lake
dull and motionless
no ducks or birds
or dragonflies hovering
over the surface

just dead leaves fallen
on the water's skin

we made love that time
back there
she says
indicating a wooded area
nearby

warm then
I say
sunshine
dragonflies
flowers and ducks
there were ducks then

and we heard that man walk by
and we had to remain so still
and I had cramp in my thigh
she says
and you were there
butt naked laying there

we stand staring
at the lake
dull water and sky

we hold hands
and sense time moving on
and better love making places
available now
and a love still there
in us and about
this dull grey air.

Terry Collett

Dunkirk 1940

Dunkirk 1940.
Clive died there
on the beach.

I remember
the last night
we had together
before he went off
with his regiment.

I had given
my maid
the night off
so we could be
alone together.

We made love
a few times
then talked
then slept.

After the War Grace
he said
we must marry
and settle down
and have a family.

But he died.

I lay here now
in the hospital
blind and
without legs
and left only
the memories
of Clive and I.

Anthony and Guy
visited today

they said Philip
had gone on business
for the government
and would see me
later in the week.

I sat in wheelchair
as they spoke outside
in the afternoon sun
trying to picture
Anthony as he spoke.

I'd only met him
a few times before.

Guy was his usual self
boastful humorous
full of his
upper-class jokes.

Now they have gone
and I am here alone.

The memory
of Clive chokes.

Terry Collett

Dunne Studying.

Dunne watches her mistress sleep.
There is the flickering of the eyelids
As if in dream. She gets out of bed
And with soft tread walks to her
Mistress's bed side and looks down.
She holds her breath. She takes in
Each aspect of the face and neck
And how the hair is spread upon
The pillow. She wants to lean down
And kiss the lips, put flesh to flesh.
She hovers like some hawk waiting
To fly down and take her fine prey.
She breathes out slowly. She watches
The rise and fall of her mistress's breast.
She moves out a hand to lay it there
But does not touch. She imagines so.
Imagines also climbing into the bed
And snuggling up close and kissing
The nape of neck. Her hand lingers
Over the breasts. Her eyes greedily
Study the soft cheek. She breathes
In deep. Her heart pounds within her
Breast. So near so near. She imagines
Lying within those arms and feeling
The hands caress her back. Her mistress
Stirs and she moves away. Walks back
To her own bed to await the light of day.

Terry Collett

During Nature Study Class.

Miss Ashdown
faced the blackboard
and chalked leaves
and buds and stems

her fat behind waddled
as she moved
from side to side
and Carmody said

if you peep through
the small hole
in the toilets
you can see

into the girl's cubicle
and see their panties
you stared
at the teacher's behind

half listening
to Carmody's yak
she moved the chalk
along the board

a stem appeared in green
her plump arm supported
her chubby hand and fingers
Carmody went on and on

about what he saw
in whispering voice
now
Miss Ashdown said

turning around
her big breasts bulging
behind her purple dress
here I have drawn the stem

of a flower and here
she said
pointing to the blackboard
is the bud and here is the stem

and so she went on
pointing out each aspect
of the nature study plants
she'd drawn

see her down the front
with her pink bow
and ginger hair?
Carmody asked

you nodded
to his whispering voice
your eyes on the girl
at the front desk

next to Helen
she wears blue panties
Carmody informed
saw them this morning

you saw the girl
raise a hand to ask
questions about the plants
or to be excused to urinate

her blue cardigan covered arm
lifted the small hand
waving in the air
and here

Miss Ashdown said
is the root layout
see how its spreads
to gather food

and moisture

to the plant
she ignored
the raised hand

and the blue cardiganed arm
went down and out of view
and her over there
Carmody said

by the chart of trees
she wears white
you moved away slightly
from Carmody's head

remembering
some one had said
that morning
he had fleas.

Terry Collett

Dutch And Girls 1962

Dutch was one
for the girls.

He only had
to look at a girl
and she'd
wet herself
with excitement.

Or so he said
and he said it
in such a way
I believed him.

Even at
the back of class
he'd eye the girls
especially the girls
I thought
beyond his reach
who considered
themselves
above the rest
of us plebish
school boys.

But no
he'd get them
to react
to make
faces at him
or smile
or mouth words
at him.

I'd sit there
beside him
wishing it was me
they were thrilled

over or reacted to.

But no
it was him
Dutch
they went for
him they
crowded around
on the playing field
at lunch recess.

Once he took a girl
in the small wood
up beside
the playing field
and I sat
watching other boys
play football
wondering
what he and she
were up to.

Later they
came back
and he sat there
beside me
and watched
the ballgame
and let off
an inner glow.

Why I didn't know
well I did
but didn't
want it
to show.

Terry Collett

Each Day 2012

Each day he goes
to the gallery
to see you.

Each day he stands
before your portrait
and gives stare,
glad to be there.

Your eyes stare at him
and he at yours.

Your flowing hair,
over shoulders,
your nose,
narrow and refined.

Your lips
he wants to kiss,
but others watch,
the gallery guardian
looks on,
so he gives
the kiss a miss.

He is jealous of those
who come and stare,
then walk on
without comment
or praise, nor gaze
that long
at beauty's gem.

He sits and gazes
and studies you
for hours on end.

Those lips.

Those eyes.

He hates it when
some come between you
and him,
stand there gazing
at you with their
cameras or I pads
or phones, and their
soft word moans.

Each day he leaves you,
says farewell,
blows a kiss from palm.

Outside the gallery
it pours with rain.

Tomorrow he will
see you again.

Terry Collett

Each Day Still Lingers.

Each day she's there in the cafe
Sitting in the same seat with the
Same shopping bag and the same
Coat as she drinks tea and eats a
Large blueberry muffin which she
Eats without delicacy but a great
Deal of pleasure and as you sit you
Study her taking in each aspect of
Her right down to the way her black
Shoes have worn down at the heel
And the lone gold ring on her plump
Finger and you think maybe she was
Married and he got away or died or
Ran off with some younger or slimmer
Other and as you muse she raises her
Mug of tea and like a child she seems
To look at the inside of the mug as she
Lifts it up and maybe you think her grim
Mother told her off once for doing just
That and smacked her hand but now that
Her mother has gone off and died or is
Shut up in some home for the aged she
Can sip and do as she likes without fear
Of censure or smacks on the hand and as
She lowers the mug she sees you across
The way and looks away and wipes the
Rim of the mug with her fingers as if the
Memory of her mother's chiding still lingers.

Terry Collett

Each Eye To Eye 1963

Magdalene's parents are out
him to work and her shopping
and so she brings Mary
back to listened
to Billy Fury
on the Hi-Fi
in her room
and sip some of her ma's vodka
and smoke the cigarettes
Mary borrowed
from her da's pack

they sit on the single bed
feet tapping

so how's things with your da?
Mary says

strained
Magdalene says
he has a tone of voice
he keeps just for me

she inhales smoke
from the cigarette

shame
my da's seems
to have forgotten
about it now
either that or he's
given up on me
Mary says
looking at the cigarette
between two of her fingers
smoke rising

Magdalene exhales smoke
into the room

I had a job to get
this fecking LP
Ma bought it for me
for my 14th birthday
she holds up the LP
Halfway To Paradise it reads

wish I was halfway to paradise
Mary says
instead of halfway to Hell
according to the nuns at school

this could be our
halfway to paradise here
Magdalene says
gazing her cigarette
watching the smoke
lift ceiling-wards

how comes here?
Mary says
looking sideways
at Magdalene

us here on my bed
music playing
vodka and all
Magdalene says
turning to look at Mary

what if your parents return
and we're in bed?
Mary says

Da's at work
and Ma's shopping in Dublin
takes her hours to shop there
Magdalene says

Mary muses
on the record cover

holds it between fingers
don't know
seems risky to me

Magdalene drinks back
her vodka and puts
the empty glass
on the bedside table
next to the statue of Our Lady
and stumps out
the cigarette butt
in the ashtray she'd bought
up from the lounge

our chance to be closer
Magdalene says

Mary stubs out
her cigarette butt in the ashtray
and gulps back the vodka
and puts the glass
next to Magdalene's

nearly got this far with
that O'Brien kid
only I didn't fancy him
and just played him along
then slapped his face
and walked out
passing his ma on the stairs
and she gave me
one of her looks
and I was gone
Mary says

glad you did
Magdalene says
wonder what his ma'd say
if she found you two
at it on his bed?

God forbid the thought

Mary says

Magdalene leans in close
and kisses her
a hand on her thigh

both gazing at each
eye to eye.

Terry Collett

Earlier That Day 1997

The game is about to begin,
Brian says sitting next to Nuala
on the sofa, a glass of beer on
the small table in front of them,

she sips her glass of wine,
staring at the TV, sensing his
thigh next to hers, wishing it
was Una's thigh there not his,

she turns and looks at him
sideways on, taking in his profile,
the jaw, the eyes staring hard at
the screen, she muses on what

she and Una did earlier that day
at Una's place, the Prod team have
no chance, he says, more chance
the Pope marrying you, he laughs

and so does she(playing the long
devoted wife) , he sips more beer,
she sips her wine, o look who's on,
he'll win us the game, the Proddies

have no chance, he says, swaying
in his seat, head going side to side,
I wish I could still play, he says,
but my leg injury fecked me up,

she nods and stares at him, you
could be on here now, she says,
left back or right back, right back
behind the goal or left back in

the dressing room, he laughs,
naughty girl, I'll have to smack
your arse later in bed, he jokes,
she smiles, the music starts up,

the game is on, she wishes she
was with Una now, wishes it was
her there beside not him, she watches
him sip his beer, looks at his ringed

finger, recalls Una's finger entering her,
touching deeply, no way are the Proddies
going to win, he says, moving side
to side, his backside near to hers, she's

not looking forward to his 60 second play
and game later in bed or his foreplay games,
she wants Una here and now, kisses, touches,
wants to love and play as they had earlier that day.

Terry Collett

Early Breakfast 1972

The hotel restaurant
was not busy
a few came in
bleary eyed
and silent
like a breed of nuns
or monks
of a silent order
and took seats
at tables
far from each other.

Abela and I
came in
and took a table
by a window
and looked quickly
about the room
then at each other.

She picked up the menu
and stared at it
as if it was in
a different language.

I'll have a simple breakfast
she said
after last night.

I studied my menu
running my eyes over it
me too
I said.

We both put our
menus down
and waited for a waitress
or waiter to come to us
and take our orders.

Music was playing
in the background
foreign stuff
which you could neither
dance to to listen to
with any zest.

She looked tired
as she sat there
her hair quickly
brushed into place
a minimum amount
of make up applied.

She had on a yellow dress
with small flowers.

I gazed at her
thinking of her
the night before
after we came back
from the town
after the concert
where some pianist
had played Chopin
and Bartok pieces.

We had got
into our room
and she was swaying
(we'd gone to a bar
after the concert)
and she undressed
as fast as she could
almost falling over
a couple of times.

Come on
she said
get them off
I want you.

I had undressed
as quickly as I could
in a kind of race
with her.

She won
stood there naked
and swaying
as if she stood
on the deck of a ship
in rough seas.

She lay on the bed
and beckoned me over.

I took off
the last piece
of clothing
and set it neat
over a chair.

She had gone to sleep
lying there
naked and bare.

All I could do
was sigh and stare.

Terry Collett

Early July Morning Love

Early July
and Judith sat
on the wooden fence
beside you

over looking the pond
which she called the lake
dressed in a plain grey skirt
and green blouse

her brown hair
brushed untidily
as was per norm
her hands beside her

balancing her
on the top beam
mum said men
are not to be trusted

Judith said
me included?
you asked
you especially

she said smiling
she didn't mention you by name
just said men in general
and my dad looked at her

sideways on
pulled a face
then carried on
with his breakfast

a jackdaw flew across
the pond noisily
making Judith jump
bloody bird

nigh on made me
wet myself
she said
following the bird's flight

what made your mother
go on an anti men campaign?
you asked
watching two ducks

move across
the water's skin
I think she saw us
coming through the woods

behind your house
yesterday after school
Judith said
we were too close together

mum said
but where she was
to see us I have no idea
hanging from a tree maybe

you said
don't think so
Judith said smiling
maybe she's spying on us now?

you suggested
Judith looked around her
then back at you
don't say that

I almost had kittens
it's not kittens
you have to worry about
you said

sunlight flickered

through high branches
birds sang
white clouds

moved slowly overhead
you touched her hand
with yours
felt her warm skin

her fingers
her short fingernails
she looked at the flickering sunlight
I know

she said softly
come on
let's go near the lake
she said

and jumped off the fence
and so did you
and walked over
the grass

to the pond's side
under a vast sky of blue.

Terry Collett

Early Morning Talk 1940

Lying in bed,
I hear voices,
see no faces,
just the faceless voices.

My ears hear,
but blind eyes
see nothing,
my eyelids are closed
pretending sleep.

That hospital smell
is still there.

Passing people,
nurses or doctors
or cleaners
or other patients.

My leg stumps pain me;
I want to rub them,
but want to pretend
to be asleep,
so don't move.

She went out then,
last night?
A voice says.

The voices are near at hand:
yes went out with some bloke
she's met in here,
I think,
the other voice says.

What? Patient?
The first voice says.

No some man

who visits her;
quite posh,
bought her
that red dress.

Looks tired now though,
the second voice says.

I lie listening
to the conversation
about me as if
I were not there.

Bet she misses
dancing poor girl,
a voice says;
Nurse Kavel said
she was enjoying
her night out so she said.

Couldn't take him
home for coffee
that's for sure,
the voice of another said.

They walk off
and I want to say
something,
but I don't,
I lie and fume,
and open my blind eyes,
and look about
as if I could see.

O you're awake, then?
A voice says,
I'm nurse Carshaw,
I need to look
at your leg stumps.

I look to where
her voice is:

who was here
just now talking
by my bed?
I ask.

A couple of patients
I think why?
The nurse says.

Nothing,
just heard talking,
I say.

O they can gossip
in here,
nothing better to do;
mind you one of them
got burnt in that
bombing of the jam factory
a while ago;
burnt her face and hands,
but she's mending
as best she will,
the nurse says.

Shame about that,
I say,
pushing their words
and comments away.

Terry Collett

Edinburgh 1969.

It was the year
man first walked
on the moon

but the third year running
you and your brother
walked the streets
of Edinburgh

and stayed
at the guesthouse
where the Yank guy
told you how
he was mugged
in some bog
at Waverly Station

I was in the stall
on the seat
when there was a banging
on the door
and someone yelled
open up I'm going to puke
so I did the
Yank said
and some guy
stole the wallet
from my pant's pocket
and ran off

your brother sat
at the breakfast table
bemused

why did you open
the door?
you asked

well I guess I thought

it would help
the Yank said
holding his coffee cup
with both hands
you know
kind of threw me
off course

I'd have told the guy
to go puke elsewhere
your brother said

but he seemed desperate
the Yank said
looking at your brother
with a Humphrey Bogart gaze
won't do that again
he said
sipping his coffee

you studied the guy's plump face
his bulky frame
his sausage size fingers
the gold ring
on his third
right hand finger
his I LOVE AMERICA tee-shirt
his blue shorts

no matter
guess we all learn
from our mistakes
you said
next time
someone bangs
on the bog door
tell them
go puke on the floor

the Yank nodded his head
his Bogart impression
faded

to a saggy dog face

and you thought
gazing at
his blonde hair
there
but for the grace of God
go I
and your brother smiled
and winked a blue eye.

Terry Collett

Edinburgh Views 1957

Go where?
Lydia's mother said

Southend
Lydia said

you can't go to Southend
on your own

I'm not going
on my own
I'm going with Benny

her mother
stared at her
Benny?
Go with Benny?
Your both too young
to go to bloody Southend
what put that thought
into your mind?
Her mother said

we talked about it
when we were
at King's Cross station

who is we?
The mother said

Benny and me
Lydia said frowning
fingering her fingers

o so you talked it over
o that's all right
then is it?
The mother said

just to Southend
as a first run
then we want to go
to Scotland
Lydia said

SCOTLAND
her mother bellowed
are you mad you two?
You can't go
to bloody Scotland
at your age
what 9 years old
and want to go Scotland
and alone?
The mother stared
at Lydia
as if she was mad

Lydia wished
Benny was there
he had a way with words
he might be able
to put it better

whose idea was it?

Both of us
Lydia said
we thought it
would be good
and we could go
to Edinburgh
and see men in kilts
and see the castle

NO NO NO
the mother bellowed

Lydia lowered her head
and gazed at
her mother's slippers

you can't go to Scotland
or Edinburgh
or Southend
not alone
the mother said quieter
staring at her daughter

when can we go then?
Lydia said
looking at
her mother's
stockinged legs

when you are old enough
and we say so
her mother said

when will be old enough?
Lydia said
gazing at her mother's
blue patterned apron

when we say so
her mother said
and walked off
back to the kitchen
where the boiler
was boiling washing
and steam came down
the passageway

Lydia sighed
and opened the front door
and went out
to find Benny
and tell him the bad news
and not being able
to see the Edinburgh views.

Terry Collett

Edna's Asthma

Edna had asthma
And she used to put
This big black mask
Over her face
To help her breathe
And she talked
In short gasps
And wheezed
Between words
And had the best eyes
You could remember
And a smile that lingered
Long after she turned back
To shove the mask back on
And stood with one hand
On the table to steady herself
And the other gripping the mask
And it seemed death stood
In the wings of the house
Biding his time
Leaning maybe against
The dresser or in the dark hall
And Mother said Edna thought
Others talk about her
Behind her back
And it made her quite paranoid
Hearing whispers
When it may have been
Just the harsh wind
Through loose shutters
Or dull women's mutter
And you guess she knew
You thought about her
And loved her down
The cold long nights
Thinking of you
As that young boy
With the cheeky grin
But then death

Took off with her
Worn out and thin.

Terry Collett

Eggs 1961

Eggs wren eggs
Jane said
leaning into
the hedgerow
parting branches
with her hands.

Benny looked over
her shoulder
smelt apples
and flowers.

We mustn't
touch them
she said
or the mother wren
won't return again.

Benny stood just
behind her taking in
her dark hair
shoulder length
her slim fingers
holding back
the branches.

He could see
the small eggs.

A kid at school
brought one
of those in
Benny said
it had a hole
at either end.

That's bad
she said
robbing nests

and taking a life.

I guess it is
Benny said
he had it wrapped
in an handkerchief
and was showing us
in the playground
at recess.

She stepped back
and let the branches
return to how they were.

You wouldn't do
that would you?
she said.

No of course not
he said.

She smiled
I'm glad you wouldn't
Daddy says it is
against God's will
she added.

There was a sparrow's nest
up over by the farm track
Benny said.

They walked up the lane
and he showed her
the nest and the eggs
still there untouched
or harmed.

Their elbows touched
as they leaned
together to look
skin on skin.

He wanted to kiss her
but didn't in
case it was
(in her father's eyes)
a sin.

Terry Collett

Elaine And Puzzlement 1962

I sit next
to my sister
on the coach
to school.

She is talking
to her friends nearby.

I look out
the window.

The radio is on
playing pop music.

There is talk
around me
like a babble
of sounds.

Fields and trees
and hedgerows
pass by
cottages
and country lanes.

I wonder if
John is looking
over at me?
he was when I
first looked over
after getting
on the coach
and he smiled
and I smiled.

But I don't know
whether
to look again.

If he is looking
and I blush
and my sister sees him
she'll joke about me
blushing to her friends.

The sky is dull
it looks like rain.

I hope it doesn't
I want to see John
on the field if I can.

Shall I look over?
I want to
but what if he is?
I try not to blush
but can't help it.

The bus stops
to let other
school kids on
they clamber aboard
like pirates
onto our ship.

They sit
more talk
laughter
from the back.

I wish
I wasn't so shy.

I look over
John's looking at me
and smiles
I smile.

I feel myself blush
and look away
and stare

at the sky.

Terry Collett

Elaine Musing

It's all there
in her head
the words said

while at school
in the class
whispered so

just near her
and outside
other girls

say things loud
how's the sex
frumpy girl?

she lies back
on her bed
while at home

some Elvis
song next door
her sister

playing loud
on the old
gramophone

if only
John would kiss
her again

but this time
to tell her
and softer

on the lips
she blushes
she senses

the redness
in her face
her body

responding
she hates school
hates lessons

all too hard
to take in
how's the sex?

what is it?
this sex stuff?
would John know?

the window
the sun's soft
warming glow.

Terry Collett

Elaine On The Bus 1962

John was sitting
with the boy Trevor
on the other side
of the school bus.

I sat
with my sister.

He looked over
and smiled.

I smiled but
blushed
and looked away
and gazed
self consciously
out the window.

I felt as if
a thousand eyes
were on me.

My sister talked
to her friends.

The radio played
some pop song.

I wondered what
John and the boy
were talking about
whether it was about
me or not.

The boy
was gesturing
with his hands
John looked
disinterested.

I looked briefly
to see if he was
looking at me
but he was looking
at the boy
or at his hands.

I looked away
thinking of John
and how I felt
and if we would meet
on the field again
if the weather
was fine but not
if it looked like rain.

Terry Collett

Elaine's Confusion

ELAINE'S CONFUSION.

Laying down
on her bed
Elaine thinks

of her day
while at school
other kids

the things spoke
not in jest
or in joke

boys and girls
hey Frumpy
been kissed yet?

who'd kiss you?
their laughter
or silence

just staring
the ceiling
is off white

in her room
curtains drawn
a spider

big and black
lingers there
by the rail

she wants John
to kiss her
once again

but then not

she's confused
feelings mixed

part wanting
the kissing
but part not

other girls
talk of boys
how sexy

and how hot
she's silent
feeling not.

Terry Collett

Elle Sits In Mid Act.

Elle sits in mid act
of dressing. The floor
is hard on buttocks,
scrawny arse, he had
said some short while

ago. Sensations still
there, stirred up, half
fulfilled, wanting more
on her part. But he's
gone off to smoke or

bath or set paint to his
canvas or paper. She
knows he likes his red
heads, the real thing,
not a dyed for the show

of it type. Pubic gives
the game away, he'd say,
laughing, pointing. He's a
weird type even if he
sets well paint to art.

To complete the act of
dressing, forget the sexual
aspect, dress and be off.
Mother used to say, save
your virginity like a precious

pearl, don't throw before
swine and give away after
a good meal and too much
wine. Mother, Elle thinks,
knew little of sex except

the one act from which I
came, then closed up shop
and set her legs to be

crossed when men were on
the scene. She puts on her slip

and necklace, the one he gave
her, the one with red stones.
He has painted her a number
of times, brushed her onto
canvas, eased her down with

artistic determination. Sold
to others to peer at, to lust
after, to have framed, placed
on some cold wall. She sits
half-dressed, musing, slow

fingering the red stones, like
drops of blood. He'll not want
her that time of month, not
with her pains and messy flood.

Terry Collett

Elsa And The City View

Elsa sits on the edge
of the roof of the building

smoking a cigarette
her thoughts on Bolright

her feelings on the downside
her get up

in the morning
and have a good look

out on the city
still intact

the stone on the rooftop
is warmed by the morning sun

and warms her butt
and thighs

and so what
she thinks

if he doesn't
come back again

what the heck do I care
I had a good time

had a good night
the bed rocking some

the Miles Davis CD
oozing from the hifi

rising in the air
and he was a cool lover

had that way about him
that make the most of

this baby because
you won't feel

the same again
kind of sensation

and she looks
at the passing traffic

the ant like people below
the smell of the city

the sensation
of the warm stone

beneath her
the warmth rising

through her skin
the touch pretty much

like his
but softer

more gentle
and she inhales deeply

on the cigarette
sensing the smoke

against the back
of her throat

sensing it take up
in her lungs

and thinking of him
trying to remind herself

of each moment with him
the touches

the kisses
the sex

oh yes the sex
and she exhales

the smoke
and laughs to herself

as if remembering
a private joke.

Terry Collett

Elsie's Words 1951

Auntie's friend
gave me
a cheese sandwich

I sat on
an old settee with it

her daughter Elsie
sat at the other end
of the settee
as far from me
as she could get
nibbling at a sandwich

why are you sitting
so far way from Benny?
her mum said

don't want
to sit next to him
Elsie said

you'll sit near Benny
and like it
her mum said

Elsie shifted
nearer to me
with a sucking lemons
sort of face
and nibbled her sandwich
not looking at me

her mum walked back
to the kitchen where
she was talking
to my aunt

what sort of sandwich

have you got?
I asked

bread
she said coldly

but what
is in it?
I said

corned beef
she said

do you like corned beef?
I said

why do you
talk to me
you're worse
than Billy the bird
she said

I like talking to you
I said

I don't like you
talking to me
she said

I ate my sandwich
in silence
for a few moments

what year
were you born?
I said
after swallowing
a bit of sandwich

1946
she said
that is why

I am 5

I nodded
and looked at her
I was born in 1947
in London
I said

that is why
you are 4
she said

she nibbled
more sandwich
Mum said
kids from London
got fleas
she said
a few minutes after

I haven't
I said

you smell of dog
she said

just then Elise's mum
came in and slapped
Elise's leg
with her hand
don't be horrible to Benny
I heard you

I nibbled my sandwich

say sorry
her mum said angrily

Elsie looked at her shoes
and mumbled a sorry

her mum walked back

to the kitchen

Elsie rubbed her leg
with her small hand
and looked at the sandwich
in her other hand

didn't mean it
Elsie said
her leg getting red.

Terry Collett

Emptied Out.

You are emptied out,
emptied of all things:
emptied of the coolness of mornings,
of the beauty of a daffodil,
of Trane's flight of solo
on his saxophone,
of a long ago lover's kiss
and her embracing arms.

You are emptied of all things,
emptied all out,
emptied of the joy of the lusciousness
of an ice cream,
of making love in the valley of hot beds,
of the sipping of a 10 year old scotch,
of a Picasso painting,
of holding your child's hand
as they grown out of childlike innocence.

You are emptied out,
emptied of all things,
emptied of the joy of life,
you wait to see
what death brings.

Terry Collett

Emptied Woman

And she had that feeling
of the new day

being no better
and he was always the same

with the constant
moans and the groans

and that way he had
of coming home

and giving her the eye
and the heavy silence

and she knew
what was coming next

and as he put on the TV
he lit up a cigarette

and poured himself
some booze

and then he'd sit there
picking on her

for this and that
and waiting for her

to step out of line
or say something

off the cuff
and then he'd start

the slapping around
or thumping

and then he'd say
in that tone of voice of his

call yourself a wife and lover
I could pick up some hooker

with more talent and love
I could walk into any bar

and see a dame
with more beauty and looks

and then he'd run down her family
and then he'd say

suddenly having bruised a cheek
or split a lip

or blackened an eye
you aren't so beautiful

as once you were
and he'd push her

into the bedroom
and force himself

on her and she'd
lay there

eyes on the ceiling
being bit by bit

emptied of self respect
and any deep down feeling.

Terry Collett

Encounter With A Nun 1963

Sit down,
the nun says,
bringing Magdalene
into her office,
pointing to a chair
opposite her desk.

The nun eyes her
seriously, her face
framed in a black
and white headpiece,
her hands on the table
in front of her
palms down.

Magdalene sits
and stares at her shoes.

Do you know why
you are here?
the nun says.

You asked me
to come in here,
Magdalene replies,
lifting her eyes
to the nun's face.

The reason why
I asked you
to come here?
the nun says firmly.

Magdalene shakes her head,
fidgets in the chair.

The nun sits back
in her chair
and stares coldly.

Silence fills the room
and Magdalene moves
back in her chair,
crossing her legs
at the ankles.

There have been reports
of you and Mary Moran
being seen entering
a toilet cubicle together,
is that true?
the nun says,
head to one side
as if her neck had snapped.

Magdalene shakes her head,
no, who'd say such a thing?
What wormy arse
would say that?
Magdalene says.

The nun eyes her colder.
Sister Bridget saw you,
the nun says.

With or without
her glasses,
Magdalene says,
she's a bit short-sighted,
she often mistakes me
for the Murphy boy.

The nun stares
and shakes her head
and says,
you should show
respect to the nuns,
and not try to score
points off of other's
disabilities.

Magdalene looks
at the nun's hands
on the desktop,
tapping away
on the old wood.

I was not with Mary Moran;
I was on my own,
and why would Sister Bridget
be spying on me
going to the bog?
Magdalene says.

The nun slams her hand
down on the desktop,
and says,
DO NOT BE SO RUDE
AND TELL THE TRUTH.

Magdalene stares
at the slammed down hand;
once it had slapped her thighs
as a young girl in R.E,
for not raising her hand
to leave the room
for a pee, now
she just stares at the nun
and says,
that's the truth
after all said and done,
cross my heart
and hope to die.

The nun rambles on,
but Magdalene
no longer listens,
recalls the kiss
on Mary's lips,
and the spark
in the nun's eyes
that glistens.

Encounter With Naaman 1962

Naaman saw
Shoshana
by the gates

of the school
other girls
were nearby

she looked shy
standing there
he asked her

how she was
she replied
that she slept

very bad
did you dream
about me?

he asked her
might have done
she replied

in soft voice
they walked on
a little way

I see you
around me
when at home

she told him
all the time?
he asked her

when you are
undressing?
she smiled at

him shyly
not always
just sometimes

do you think
about me?
she asked him

now and then
but mostly
when I see

the beauty
of a Red
Admiral

butterfly
he told her
she felt shy

of him there
thinking of
what she thought

about him
and of her
doing things

like she read
in that book
a friend lent

(which she hid)
the bell rang
in the school

best go now
she told him
got science

first lesson

and she went
he watched her

and the sway
of her hips
as she walked

Rennie came
and they talked.

Terry Collett

Encounter.

Isis had let the girl into
her small private room

at the school, she should
have said no, but she was

of two minds, and then
one, and then she just let

her in, and turned to the
window, not wanting to

face the girl, and let her
look break through to her

heart, and she had heard
the girl whisper, I love you,

so soft it seemed as if breathed,
as if a small knife had entered

under her ribs and inched
towards her heart, and she

had not turned around, and
had just replied equally softly,

I know, and then a few moments
Later, I love you too, and then

there was silence, and she
sensed the girl put her arms

around her waist, but she had
done nothing, just stood there,

looking out on the school grounds
at the playing field, and the girl

had released her, and Isis had
uttered, Best go now Jodie, and

she heard only quiet footsteps
and the door closing with a dull

thud, and the room seemed
suddenly empty, as if a world had

begun to die and another been
born, and over the playing field

a warm sun opened up like a
young god to a bright new dawn.

Terry Collett

Encountering Lizbeth 1961

Your school bus is early
Lizbeth said
as she met me
by the school gates

different driver
the other one's off sick
with gut problems
I said

other kids on the bus
walked past
my sister with a friend of hers
the kid from along the lane
who bugged me
who one day I'd thump

we can be alone
for a minute or so then
she said

and taking the sleeve
of my jacket
she moved me along
by the wire fence
and leaned me
against the wire playfully

do you think about me?
she said
peering at my eyes

sometimes
I said

only sometimes?
I think of you
all the time

all the times?
I said
even on the bog?

she smiled
especially when I'm
on the bog as you call it
she said

Hi Lizbeth
a girl said
as she passed by
Lizbeth nodded to her
but said nothing

in bed at night I do
and waking up
you're the first thing
I think of
she said

she released my sleeve
and stood beside me

I suppose you're thinking
of the Virgin Jane
Lizbeth said

I think of all things
I said

such as?
she said

about the farm
and cows
and birds in the book
I have
and which one
I'll see that day
and butterflies
that I may spot

enough already
Lizbeth said
God you will bore
the knickers off me
if you go on
not that I'd mind that
but not here
in the bloody playground
at school

you asked me
what I thought about
I said

well other than that then?
she said
do you think of me at all?

sometimes
I said

when?

now and then

when?

when I'm thinking
of nothing else
I said

Benny you're a bore
and a tease
do you ever think
about me in a sexual way?

I looked at her
standing there
red hair in a pony tail
eyes gazing at me
her lips and her small

breasts the impression
in her school blouse

not much
I said

but you do sometimes?

I nodded

she smiled
I think of you all the time
sexually in school
in lessons
at home while eating
in bed while dreaming
and now standing here
next to you
she said

she touched my hand softly
the bell rang
for the start of school

must go
I said

she squeezed my hand tighter
all the time
she said

she released my hand
and walked over
to the girl's playground
and I walked into
the boy's ground
and looked back
and she was swaying off
in the way she did
hips moving side to side
and I watched her go off
and sighed.

Terry Collett

End Bell

Lasciate ogne speranza
voi ch'intrate?

No hope
in this darkness?

She lay there
her soft fruits
all bare
and fresh
for the plucking.

I kissed
her pouting lips
and sensed
the moisture there.

Her tongue
like a viper
embraced mine
which was fine.

All is here:
she said,
and I said:
harvest time
is upon us
let us bring in
the harvest
before the sun
goes down.

I ploughed
her field
of ripeness,

plucked and ate
of her soft fruits
and she of mine.

I lay
and mused on her
as she lay
watching the sun
move across
the bright sky.

Shall we
be abandoned?

Is the light
gone for good?

Frutto della vita,

where once we lay
and plucked
and sucked,

her fruit dried
and her meadow fallow,

and the trees bare
and stark branches
wave at us.

She has only
wrinkled fruit now,

her field
full of weeds,

where no birds
come or sing,

and far off
we wait
for the end bell
to ring.

Enid And The Row 1957

Your mother
says goodbye to you
her eyes are red
she's been crying.

She and father
had rowed
during
the late evening
and night.

You climb down
the concrete stairs
of the flats.

The morning
is dull
a grey sky
greeted you.

Benny waits
for you
at the bottom.

He looks at you
how's things?
he says.

You try smiling
but he knows
you're not happy.

They rowed again
yesterday
and last night
you tell him.

He nods
but says nothing.

You walk on
through the Square
and down the slope.

What they row about?
he asks.

Money I think
you say.

You cross
Rockingham Street
and go up
Meadow Row.

He talks about
other things
trying to take
your mind off
the rowing
and home life.

You cross
the bomb site
listening to him
aware of his
hazel eyes
and quiff
of brown hair.

You want to say
how unhappy
you are
how you didn't
sleep too well.

But you walk
beside him
let him do
the talking.

You
remember how
you were fearful
your father would
enter your room
while they rowed
and hit you one
as the row
spilt over
in the passageway.

But he didn't
that time
they moved into
their room
and closed the door
and rowed the more.

Terry Collett

Enid Anxious 1957

I went with Benny
to South Bank.

We saw the boats and tugs
passing by
on the Thames.

Some people waved
and we waved back.

Benny said
my dad said
I could go
I hope so.

Mum wasn't sure
but let me go.

Benny bought
two ice creams
from a vendor
along by the River
and we sat
and ate them
watching tennis
in the tennis courts
along the way.

Mum and I wait
for Dad to come
home from work.

I hope he's in
a good mood
and did say
I could go
with Benny.

Benny wouldn't lie

at least not to me.

Mum's in the kitchen
getting dinner.

I sit in
the living room
waiting for Dad
to come.

Enid
he'll say
where and what
did you do today?

I can't lie
he knows it
if I try to lie
my eyes
he says
give me away.

The front door opens
he's home
the door closes.

Voices from the kitchen
Dad's voice is raised
Mum's voice replies.

An argument
of some kind.

I look at the floor
pretend it's
someone else's home
another flat
over the way.

Not me here
or if I am
on another day.

Terry Collett

Enid Still Hungry

Enid holds
the boiled sweet
Benny gave

in her hand
she opens
and closes

her small hand
feels paper
on her skin

sticky smooth
on one else
gives her sweets

but Benny
she's hungry
no breakfast

that morning
her father
had said no

too naughty
go without
now she sits

in the school
lavatories
the boiled sweet

in her palm
her stomach
grumbles noise

feels sickly
she unwraps
the boiled sweet

with fingers
and puts it
in her mouth

sweet juices
sugary
explosion

of flavours
on her tongue
she sucks it

turns it round
swallows down
the juices

on the wall
someone's inked
Mrs M

has a big
white bottom
Enid sucks

more juices
then swallows
the boiled sweet

her stomach
still rumbles
as she looks

at paper
slightly soiled
by her feet.

Terry Collett

Enid Unsure 1957

You met Benny
by the slope
off the Square.

People walked past
up and down
as you talked.

He said
we could go
to Camberwell
go round the shops
and I could
show you
the hospital
I was born in.

But you were unsure
whether to go
that far
especially
as your dad
was in a mood.

What's new?
Benny said.

He has been
all right
until recently
you said.

So what
he's going to know
where you go?
Benny said.

No but if he
asks me

he will
you said.

Why tell him?
Benny said.

Because I can't
lie to him
you said.

So where then?
Benny said.

What about
Bedlam Park?
you said
we could go there
go to the war museum?

He nodded
all right
I can show you
my favourite weapons
he said.

So you
went with him
along Rockingham Street
under the railway bridge
and then
to the subway
where Benny sang
a cowboy song
he'd heard on TV
it echoed
along the walls
he also
(to make you laugh)
made monkey calls.

Terry Collett

Enid's Apprehension 1957

Your father
is in a mood.

Your mother wary
walking around him
trying to please.

You dress for school
hoping he won't
pick up on you
no matter
what you do.

He sits at the table
by the window
the radio
pushing out music.

He mouths
his breakfast
in silence
eyes staring
into space.

Your mother
sits opposite
sipping her tea
gazing at him
apprehensively
on the edge
of the chair
fingers pushing
through her hair.

You sit
in between them
facing the window
the net curtains
filtering the light.

They had rowed
in the night
you couldn't sleep
lay there
watching the door
in case he came in
an overflow
from the row.

You spoon
in cereals
looking at
the table cloth
not wishing to be
the victim
of his wrath.

Terry Collett

Enid's Old Man And Me 1957

I was sitting
on the concrete stairs
of the flats where I lived
in Banks House

when Enid's old man
walked up

I was fingering
cigarette cards
of racing drivers

he paused at the lower step
and said
where's Enid?

she was in her flat
a while ago
I said
I asked her
if she wanted to go out
but she said
she had to wait
to ask you
so I thought I'd wait
until you came home

he looked at me
his eyes tired
where are you going?
he said

East Street market
I said
I want to buy a fish tank
for fish I won
at the funfair
the other night

he looked at me
why'd you need her
to go with you?
he said moodily

give her a bus ride
and see the market traders
plying their trade
I said

I'll see how
she's behaved first
he said
if she's misbehaved
I'll slap her backside
and no mistake
and she'll not go

I studied him
wondering if he
was back to his old ways
the Mr Nice Guy
mask slipping

ok
I said
I'll wait here

he walked past me
saying no other words
his footsteps heavy
on the concrete stairs

I wondered if she'd
be out and about
or if her old man
would find some excuse
to slap her one
and be as it was before
him being a pain
in the arse
maybe less

maybe more

Enid never showed
so I went off
to the market
to buy a fish tank
from a stall on my own
hearing in my inner ear
Enid's sad moan.

Terry Collett

Enter Friend 1960.

I knock
on Hannah's
parent's door,
rain spitting down,
the morning air fresh
and lung biting.

Mrs Scot opens
the door:
O it's ye,
she says,
eyebrows rising,
eyes peering at me
hawk-like.

I've come
to see Hannah,
I say.

Ah didne hink
ye came tae
see me,
she says,
moving back
to allow me
to pass by.

I pass her by
like a mouse
passing a cat,
my eyes sideways
gazing at her,
and moving past
as quick
as I can.

She closes
the door
and calls:

th' boy's haur,
gie it ay scratcher.

She indicates I go
into the lounge,
I do and sit down.

HANNAH!
She bellows.

She goes off
to the kitchen,
and I look around
the room.

Just coming,
won't be long,
Hannah says
from her bedroom.

Her mother says
something
incomprehensible,
and then all is quiet,
except for the ticking
of a clock.

The curtains
are drawn back
allowing light
to enter the room
(providing
it has wiped its
feet first
bringing
Dylan Thomas
to mind) .

The picture
of a kilted man
stares at me.

He has big eyebrows
like dark caterpillars.

On the mantelshelf
is a photograph
of Hannah
and her parents
and her brother
who is away.

The bedroom doors opens
and Hannah appears.

Hello,
she says,
I overslept,
just going
for a wash,
and she is gone.

Dornt be lang,
her mother says.

Be quick
as Ah can,
Hannah calls back.

Water runs,
splash, splash.

She's a lazy huir,
her mother says,
coming into
the lounge,
holding a cup
and saucer of tea
for me,
puts it down,
smiles
the thinnest
lip smile,
then goes again.

Outside,
as I look through
the window,
is heavy rain.

Terry Collett

Equal Rights

Sonya was reading
some Kierkegaard book

I was reading Dostoevsky
both laying on the bed
in a cheap hotel in Paris

the window was open
street sounds outside
traffic
people
snatches of conversations

want to go out
for a coffee?
I asked

if you're paying
she said

I paid last time

she turned a page
you're the male
you're supposed to pay
she said

I put down the book
and looked up
at the ceiling
I thought this was equal time
for women
woman's rights and all that?

what's that got to do with it?

equal paying of bills
I said

she sighed
and put down her book
you always
have to make arguments
always have to see things
so darn black and white
she said

do you want coffee or not?
I said

she turned over
and away from me
her backside
just about cover
by her tight skirt

why do women
have to sulk
when things
don't go their way?

who said
they're not going my way?

your butt says so

what's the matter
with my butt?

it isn't so pretty
as your face

she turned back to me
and gazed at me
it's always either or
with you isn't it?
she said

you've been reading
too much Kierkegaard
I said

you want sex again?

I looked at her lips
her breasts
her eyes blue
as washed out blue can be
sure if it's on offer

well it won't be
if you keep on
with this equal thing
she said

you like sex?

she frowned
yes of course

well I do too
so that's equal
so what's the problem?

she lay back down
on the bed
I'll have black coffee
and I'll pay
she said
but you get the food

I smiled
OK if that's
what you want

can we go see
some art afterwards?

sure
I said

she kissed me
and I kissed her

and coffee was forgotten
as we decided
to rock
the cheap old bed.

Terry Collett

Essentials

Catapult
small penknife
a few stones
handkerchief
piece of string
1/-
on the grass
by Banks House

is that it?
Janice asks

it's all there
I reply

why do boys
carry stuff
in pockets?

essentials
that is all
I tell her

she sits there
on the grass
in her green
summer dress
with that red
cloth beret
in her lap

what do girls
carry then
in pockets?

she empties
a pocket
in her dress
one hanky

one boiled sweet
her gran gave
and 3d

and that's it
she tells me

can I have
the boiled sweet?
I ask her

if you like

she unwraps
the boiled sweet
and puts it
in my mouth

we could go
to the beach
next Monday
if your mum
says you can
Janice says

I study
her blue eyes
there're white clouds
captured there

I'll ask her
I reply

a pigeon
flies on by
flapping wings

inside me
deep inside
something sings.

Evening Adventure 1957

I took Enid behind
the ABC cinema
on the New Kent Road
(on an adventure
trip of mine) .

It was dimly lit.

We passed
the side doors
of the cinema
which were
usually locked
from the inside
but sometimes
were open.

You could get in
for free if you were
careful and quiet.

A rat rushed past
Enid screamed
it disappeared
ahead of us.

She grabbed
my arm
a rat!
she said.

Yes I often
see them
down here
in the evenings.

A woman
in a short dress
was standing

against a wall
ahead of us
beneath a light
from a wall.

Who's she?
Enid said.

Don't know
my old man says
prostitutes
are up here
so maybe she's
one of them.

What's a prostitute?
Enid asked.

Don't know
but my old man said
they men happy
so maybe they're
kind of church women
I said.

Maybe
Enid said
should we say
hello to her?

Best not
I said
my mum said
not to speak to people
you don't know.

Enid nodded
O yes
I think my mum
said that.

Another sleeky animal

went past us

Another rat?

Enid said quietly.

No

I said gently

a cat.

Terry Collett

Evening Date.

Hi come in I've just put on
the Mahler the 3rd Ok? she says
and before you can reply she

ushers you into the lounge where
you remove your coat and hear
the Mahlerian sounds from the hifi

and the smell of her scent and two
glasses of scotch on the small table
by the sofa take a seat she says taking

your coat off to the other room and
you look at the Picasso print on the
wall and think how long before she

tries to undress you and you sit and
she's back and sits beside you and says
drink up and take in the Mahler and

guess who I saw today and she had
the cheek to ask how I was when she
knew she'd been gossiping about me

to the darn neighbours and you sip
the scotch and look at her plump face
and her deep blue eyes and the red

dress she has on and the overbearing
perfume and how her breasts try and
push their way out of the dress and you

try and get a word in something about
the 3rd symphony or how you like the
Picasso print but she talks on and over

you like a tank her words hard biting with
their Gaelic tones and then she puts her
hand on your thigh and rubs it up and down

all the time her words unfaltering stretching
through the air and I told the old crab to
go smell her husband's crotch and that was

it how was your day? she asks looking into
your eyes her hand still rubbing and your
pecker rising and you say a real downer of

a day but whatever now let's just get into
the 3rd and sip our scotch and she smiles
and makes a grab for your hidden crotch.

Terry Collett

Evening Out

It all kind of fell into place
the dame's face
the hair colour
the way she swayed

and the accent
of her voice
seemed to jog
your mind awake

yes she'd been quite a dame
and had been on your arm
at the fair
and you'd had a good time

and she'd laughed
and hugged your arm numb
and you kissed
and walked her home

and she said not to make
too much noise
as her old man was upstairs
and he never seemed to trust

guys she went out with
and how many guys
have you been out with?
You asked

looking up at the window
where no light shone
and she replied
Oh just a few

I'm not a darn hooker you know
I've just had a few men
here and there
and you wondered

where the here and there was
and how far did she go
with those guys
and she said

look I've only had sex
a couple of times
and that was usually over
in the time it takes

to say hullabaloo
and anyway she said
how about you?
You noticed the light go on

up in the bedroom
and whispered
got to go
your old man's about

and it was a swell evening
and you're my fourth dame
this month
and I've had sex more times

than you can say hullabaloo
and she stood there and stared
and her jaw dropped
and you walked away

beneath bright stars
and full moon
not a moment too late
not a second too soon.

Terry Collett

Every Day

Every day she sat
opposite you on

the bus looking
beyond you not

at you or turning
her head to some

other view than you
and she would mouth

words silently as if
in some secret prayer

and maybe her god
was invisibly sitting

there and whoever
sat next to her and

that varied day to day
would seem of some

different breed or class
having not her pose or

looks or beauty having
maybe some different

dream or else none at
all unlike she who sits

every day not seeing you
but always looking away.

Terry Collett

Every Day 1967

Every day
it was the same
the same
pressing machine
my hand pulling down
the lever
the two pieces
of the secateurs
pressed together.

Brain numbing
eye blinding work.

My father
up on the right
riveting pulling down
a lever moment
after moment
no relief.

Radio pushing out
pop pulp.

Other guys behind
each doing their own
brain numbing work
in sequence.

I thinking
of other things
about jazz
about playing
my sax
once I got home
listening to
Trane or Miles.

My father
(unknown to us

becoming tired
due to cancer) .

Some jerks behind
taking the piss out of
my hard of hearing father.

I had ago at them
I would have
punched them
but needed
to keep the job
and keep it cool.

My father not hearing
or knowing
or if he had
would have
had them
and lost his job
not a good thing
at his age.

A year later
he died
from the cancer.

I working
some place else
felt the deep loss
and pain.

I'd have punched
those jerks
if I had
my time again.

Terry Collett

Exhausted 1965

Thursdays were
Tilly's half
day closing

I met her
outside her
workplace shop

and went for
a coffee
and cream bun

opposite
where she worked
busy day?

I asked her
too busy
never stopped

she replied
where do we
go after

having this?
She asked
is your mum

home this time?
I asked her
she's not back

for an hour
or two yet
Tilly said

your place then?
If you like
she replied

so we ate
and drank up
and got a

bus to her
mother's place
Tilly got

out her key
and unlocked
the back door

and went in
I followed
a large clock

went tick tock
follow me
Tilly said

we climbed up
creaky stairs
to her room

sunlight shone
on her bed
a dark pink

candlewick
bed cover
lay on top

she undressed
quite quickly
so did I

into bed
Tilly said
so we did

and were just

starting to
get engaged

when we heard
two voices
down below

in Tilly's
front garden
we lay still

who is it?
I asked her
Tilly got

out of bed
and looked out
the window

my brothers
sawing wood
at the back

she whispered
best get dressed?
I asked her

not just yet
she came back
to the bed

and made love
half an ear
for voices

then lay there
afterwards
exhausted.

Terry Collett

Exlosions And Flares 1916

On his bed
in his room
George sees the remains
of Gilmore laid out
bloody and foul smelling,

Polly tries
to get him
to lie down for a while
to rest
to calm his mind
and nerves,

Gilmore's remains
are laid there
he says
pointing to the bed
with a shaking finger,

Polly looks at the bed
where George's pyjamas
fresh cleaned lie
ready to put on,

George stares at her
move them
put them
some place else
he says
his finger
shaking faster,

Polly removes the pyjamas
and places them
on the dresser
over by the wall
and turns back to George,

I have laid them to rest

she says taking hold
of his shaking hand in hers
and taps it gently,

he mutters about
the stench of the trench
about the young soldier
who shook so much
when the whistle
to go over the top blew
he pissed himself
and shook so much
we left him there left him,

George stares ahead
at the bed holding on to
Polly's hands and mutters
left him there,

Polly wishes George
was his old self
and would take her
in his bed as he had
before the War came
now he shakes and stares
as if all around him
were explosions and flares.

Terry Collett

Extra For Breakfast

EXTRA FOR BREAKFAST.

I saw her on the lower steps
of the stairway
of the flats
on my way
to buy bread rolls
for breakfast

my mother's money
warm in my palm

what are you doing here?
I asked

Enid looked at me
she licked her swollen lip
Dad told me to go out
she said

why's that?

she looked out
at the Square
he's in one of his moods
says he doesn't want
to see my face

I sat down beside her
have you had breakfast?
I asked

she shook her head
he said I wasn't to go back
until he'd left for work

want to come with me
to the baker shop
to buy bread rolls?

she hugged herself
against the morning chill
grey sky above
may as well
she said

so we walked
through the Square
and down the slope
to the baker shop

she looked cold
the shop was warm inside
and she looked around
at the bread and cakes
and other items on shelves
and the smell
of warm bread
in the air

I asked for the rolls
and ordered two more
and gave the man the money
and we left
with a big white bag of rolls
warm in my hands

we walked back
up the slope
and through the Square
and walked to the entrance
to the flats
she sat down on the steps

aren't you coming for breakfast?

she looked at me
what if my dad
looks for me?

he'll look for no one then

won't he?

she looked uncertain
won't your mum mind
me being there?

of course not
she likes you
I said

she hesitated
are you sure?

yes of course I am
so she followed me
up the stairs
to my parent's flat
on the third floor

we entered
Mum looked at Enid and me
extra for breakfast
I said
and I bought extra rolls

Mum nodded and said
come in Enid
get yourself warm
you look frozen

I gave my mother the rolls
and with Enid walked
to the sitting room

the radio was on
playing some music

I sat at the table
by the window
and Enid sat beside me

her swollen lip

getting bigger
a bluey bruise
showing on her cheek
and on a Monday
first day
of the week.

Terry Collett

Extra Special Date 1961

Lizbeth sat
at the dinner table
her father beside her
and her mother opposite.

The dinners
were before them.

What were you doing
that took you so long
to come down?
her mother said.

I didn't hear you
Lizbeth said.

Are you deaf?
I have been calling you
three times
her mother chided.

Busy tidying my room
Lizbeth lied
looking past her mother
at the clock
on the mantelshelf.

About time
her mother moaned
it has been like
a tip up there.

Still is
Lizbeth mused to herself
picking up
her knife and fork
and began to eat
thinking of Benny.

She wished
he was upstairs
waiting for her return
lying on her bed
undressed
and ready to go.

But he isn't of course
she mused
forking in a carrot.

Her father talked
about his work
and the type of day
he had had.

I would gobble
this meal down
if he were upstairs in bed
she thought
looking at her
mother opposite
wondering what she
would say if she found
her and Benny
in bed together.

Best not
to think of that
she thought
watching her mother's mouth
opening and closing eating
her mother's fingers
holding the knife and fork
in that posh way.

Lizbeth thought about
that time she had Benny
upstairs in her room
a while back
while her mother was out.

But he wouldn't
and her mother came
back early.

If only he was
Lizbeth said to herself
if only he was waiting.

Her father talked on
her mother ate.

She mused that Benny
was upstairs on
an extra special date.

Terry Collett

Eyes That Glow 1957

I come out
of the fish and chip shop
with 6d of chips
and Enid's crying

what's up?
I say
someone touched you?
she shakes her head

and wipes her eyes
no just don't know
how my dad'll be anymore
once I knew

what to expect
now I don't
just take each day
as it comes

I say
he'll be back
to his old horrible ways
soon or he may

always be bloody nice
and there you are
she looks at me
it unnerves me though

she says
like being out now
once he would have
belted me

for coming home
this hour
now he'll say nothing
or say something nice

and I'll be
out of step with him
here have a chip
I say

opening the newspaper
and putting
the chip bag
before her

the steam rising up
be careful
they're hot
she takes one

between finger and thumb
and gingerly puts it
in her mouth
I take one too

and we eat away
he even spoke to me
the other evening
on his way home from work

and I was on
the balcony
and normally
he just stares daggers

at me but he actually
spoke to me and smiled
and I thought
he was quite a nice guy

and maybe he's had
some religious conversion
and been saved
I say

chips are nice and salty

she says
licking her
finger and thumb

yes they are good
and vinegar
put some of that on too
she nods

take him as he comes?
she says
yes as he comes
if he's ok then

that's good
if he's as he was
then that's him being him
I say

we finish the chips
and walk back
across the road
and down Meadow Row together

and she talks about
going some place else
another day
I look at her

walking there
her big eyes
behind the thick lens glasses
her hair bit messy

and over the place
then we cross Rockingham Street
and up the slope
and into the Square

and walk towards
our block of flats
and up the concrete stairs

and just as we get

to my landing
her dad's coming
down the stairs
and I see she's frozen

and wide eyed
he looks at us
and smiles
and says

get changed Enid
we're going out tonight
to the flicks
my treat

and hello Benny boy
how are you?
I'm all right
I say

well I'll be back later
and he is gone
down stairs
and she watches

him go
with a smile
and eyes
that glow.

Terry Collett

Eyes To The Sun 1940

As I turn my blind eyes
to the sun(I feel its warmth) ,
I think of the Degas paintings
that Clive took me to see

at a London gallery: the
colours and the figures and
the shades of blues and pinks.
Now it is just a memory, and

as I sit here in the hospital
grounds in the wheelchair,
I have a sudden panic knowing
I will never see again, never

see a rainbow or see a blossom
or see the sunrise, and know
that Clive will never come again,
not since his death at Dunkirk,

and that last kiss, that last time
of making love, and I know I
shall never make love again,
and feel with my hands to where

my legs used to be, and feel
the bandaged stumps, and feel
them there, my fingers moving
over them. The sun is still warm

on my head, and when I turn my
face to the sun, I sense a kiss from
a while ago, and will I kiss again?
I ask myself and I want to know.

Terry Collett

Ezra Pound's Canto And The Girls's Behind.

It was the year
Elvis died
and you were working
in a warehouse

packing cakes
into pallets
reading Ezra Pound's
Cantos in lunch breaks

or studying
that book
on Spinoza
while the other guys

talked of ballgames
or sex
or who did what
to whom

in the daily news
and a young girl
from the upstairs office
came down

to the canteen
to use the drinks
vending machine
and as she turned to face

the machine
to make her choice
she wiggled her neat behind
and turned

and smiled at you
and Don said to you
I think she fancies you
I'm old enough

to be her father
you said
maybe she's looking
for a father figure

Kevin said
the girl pressed a button
and a disposable cup
fell into the slot

and hot coffee shot down
in a straight line
I'm happily married
you said keeping

a finger on your place
in Ezra's 20th Canto
she doesn't want
to marry you

Don said
she wants something
more basic
Kevin laughed

and the girl pushed
another button
and another cup fell
and cappuccino shot

into the cup
and you carried
an image
of the girl's neat butt

into your mind
where it mixed
with the Canto
and words

and images

Ezra was trying
to convey
and Don said to the girl

how far
do your legs go up?
and girl said
that's for me to know

and for you to guess
and she blushed
and walked off
with her wiggling behind

carrying the two coffees
in her small hands
and the guys followed her
with their lustful eyes

and you moved your finger
along the page
feeling like an old guy
weighed down with age.

Terry Collett

Face To Face 1940

I've been washed,
and dried, now
the nurse says, do
you want to try the

dress on Mr Kimberly
bought you, Grace?
I look to where her
voice comes from,

my blind eyes searching
through blackness.
What colour is it? I ask.
It's red and beautiful,

she says, don't know where
he bought it, but it must
have cost quite a number
of coupons in this day

and age, with a war on,
and such. Will it fit me?
I ask, wondering how
Philip had managed to

find out my size. Best
way to find out is to try
it on, the nurse says excitedly,
as if the dress was for her

to wear. Now, you mean?
I haven't worn a dress since
the night my house was
bombed by the Germans,

I say. All my belongings
went up, and were lost in
the explosion, including
my eyesight, and my legs.

I'll help you of course,
she says, I'll pull the curtains
around to give you privacy.
I am uncertain, I feel as if

I will always be stuck in a
night dress without underwear,
two leg stumps bandaged forever.
I hear her pull the curtains

around us. Lift your arms,
Grace, let's get the nightie off,
then we can try on the dress,
the nurse says. I lift my arms,

she lifts the nightdress off of
me, and I feel quite naked,
and exposed. I put my arms
over my breasts like a young girl.

There's only me here, Grace,
the nurse says, no need to feel
bashful, now raise your arms
again so I can put the dress over

your head, and get your arms
through the holes. I lift my arms
up again, and sense her put
my hands through the arm holes

of the dress, then over my
head; she pulls it down over
my body, then she says, lie down
while I pull it over your bottom,

and down over your stumps. I lie
down, and let my head rest on
the pillow as she pulls the dress
over my bottom, and down over

the stumps of my legs. There, it

fits fine, she says, smoothing it
down with her hands, pushing
out creases or whatever. I feel

dressed for the first time in ages.
Have I underwear? I ask. Yes,
Mr Kimberly bought those as well,
the nurse says laughing softly.

How did he know my size? I ask.
He asked us nurses a few weeks
ago, when he said about taking
you out to dinner, the nurse says.

I see, I say, wondering what else
he asked, and why, and not really
caring, but curious nonetheless.
You look a picture of beauty,

Grace, she says. But where is he,
I need him here now, face to face.

Terry Collett

Faces Unseen 1940

With my hands
I move myself
to the side of the bed,
and stare around
with sightless eyes,
wondering if the nurse
put the commode
near the bed
as she said she would.

I try to balance
on one hand
as I search around
with the other.

The pain
in my leg stumps
nags at me
each time I move.

I touch
the commode arm,
and try and move myself
in a position,
that I may
be able to get
on the commode,
but as I move forward
I fall into darkness,
and hit my head,
and land on my back,
and stare into
a painful blackness.

Grace,
a voice says,
what are you doing?

I face the voice:

I wanted to get
on the commode,
I say.

You must ask,
the voice says.

I want to be
independent,
I say.

Not just yet;
now keep still
while we assess you
for damage,
the voice says.

She calls out for help;
I hear footsteps
running and another
voice says,
what's Grace
doing on the floor?

She was trying to get
on the commode
by herself,
the other voice says.

Shall I call a doctor
to examine her?

I'm all right,
I say,
nothing broken;
just the usual
pains and aches.

Your head is bleeding,
a voice says;
other voices come.

I lie still
and stare at
the darkness
around me,
attempting to stare
at faces
I cannot see.

Terry Collett

Fairground Ride 1955

Helen wanted to go
to the fairground,
but her mother
only had a 1/-
so I gave her
some of the money
my parents gave me,
and we went
on to the fairground
which was on
the Meadow Row
bomb site.

It was busy
and noisy
with bright lights.
and she said:
what shall
we go on?

How about
the bumper cars?
I said

Will we be
all right
if with those
big boys get on?
They might
crash into us,
she said.

Then we'll crash
into them,
I said.

So she said ok
and we got in
one of the cars,

and I paid the youth
who came
and took the money.

Then we were off,
and I was driving
keeping an eye out
for anyone
coming our way,
and trying to avoid
crashing into anyone
if I could help it,
but it was nigh
impossible not to crash.

Two boys aimed for us
bumped into us
on purpose.

Helen looked shocked,
but I turned the wheel
and went after them
and followed them,
and just when
they thought they
were safe,
I bumped into them
from the rear
and sent them forward
with the bump.

Helen looked
apprehensive:
what if they come
after us again?
She said.

So what,
I said,
I am ready for them.

Then another car

bumped into us
by some man
and his daughter
and he gave me
a goofy smile,
so I smiled back.

Then we went
off again
trying to avoid
getting bashed,
but a car
from our left
came across
and the two boys
caught us from the side
and shook us up
then they were gone.

I was going
to go get them,
but the cars began
to slow down
and the ride
was over.

Helen sat there
gathering her thoughts,
and I watched
the two boys
get out and walk off.

You ok?
I said to Helen.

Yes,
she said,
that was good.

I was pleased,
but if the car
had gone on longer,

I'd have got
those two boys
if I could.

Terry Collett

Far Off Inside My Head Mmclxxi

Ego in domo Dei,

the abbey on a hill
surrounded by high trees
the spire reaching
finger-like heavenward,

la natura dell'essere
the Italian monk said
dimostrato da Cristo,

I hoovered the cloisters
with the hoover
whereas old monks
swept with a big broom
for centuries
there efforts
took more time
but less noise,

Dom Charles showed
how to pluck apples
from the trees
and to save the fruit
undamaged by wrong picking
he said to me
late afternoon
before the office
of None,

she had me
where she wanted
and come she said
enter as a ship
into harbour or port
so I did,

Dieu sait tout
the French monk said

as we tidied book
in the large library
of the abbey,

ohne Gott sind
wir als nichts
the Austrian monk said
I listened to him
as we prepared the altar
for the Mass
and laid out
gowns for the priest-monks,

I lay on my bed
and watched
the sky colour change
from blue to dark blue
a bell tolling for Vespers,

necesse est dolor
de peccato non autem
infinita distractione
said St Bernard
so I read,

I wanted her
and tongued
her sweet valley
as she spread
her wings for me,

sauf nos propres pensées
il n'y a absolument
rien en notre pouvoir
said Gareth
quoting Descartes
as we walked
to the refectory
for lunch after
the office of sext,

incense in

the air I breathed
in the church
leftover from Mass
mixed with the smell
of baked bread,

a voice sounds near
or far off
inside my head.

Terry Collett

Far Off Sea 47bc

I took Amy
into the City with me
there was talk

that Marcus
was to return soon
from the campaign abroad

so I wanted
to make the most
of the time

I had free with her
and have her
in my bed

until he comes
with his tall tales
and gossip of war

and blood and battles
and wanting his sex
and wants

it was crowded
people everywhere
the market

was so crowded
that we went away
as soon as we arrived

there was talk
and laughter
and arguments

and soldiers
marching here and there
so we went back home

and ate and drank
and I took Amy
to my bed

and in the quiet
of the afternoon
we made love

thinking of our being
and touching
and kissing

and not one jot
of thought
of Marcus's return

from some far off campaign
and his lumbering body
over mine

his lips soaking me
in wine soaked kisses
and the fingers

that held a sword
and cut throats
and cut off heads

fingering me
his wife Annona
o gods

may his ship sink
in some
far off sea.

Terry Collett

Fat Dame In Maine.

You know the fat dame in Maine
Whose husband used to carry a
Gun for the Mob until they banged
Him up for shooting some guy in
The head? Well she rang Eddie the
Other night and said why don't you
Come over and spend a little time
With me? And Eddie said sorry Honey
But I'm washing my hair then I'm sitting
Down with a JD and going to listen to
Some jazz and maybe get in a take away
And so the fat dame said ok then I'll
Come over to you and dry your hair
And share the JD and bring a pizza and
Snuggle up close and listen to some jazz
And maybe later we can hit the sack and
Make some hot sex and dig deep into each
Other so Eddie said hang on there Babe
I've just now remembered my mother's
Coming to see my new pad and I'm taking
Her for a bite to eat and maybe take in a
Movie ok the fat dame said then I'll stay
Home and drink my booze and watch the
Late night TV and eat some chocs and sit
Sad so well the next day they found her in
Her bathtub throat cut lying in water dead.

Terry Collett

Fay And Her Soul 1960

Fay and I were talking
on the balcony outside
my parents' flat
overlooking the Square

she was talking
about her school
and what one
of the nuns had said

Sister Angelica
told us yesterday in class
that it is our vocation
to be pure and virginal
Fay said

I looked at the coal man
and his horse-drawn wagon
and him getting off
and taking a black heavy
sack of coal onto his shoulders
and come towards our flat

virginal?
I said
what's that
when its at home?

it means untouched
and unsullied
Fay said

the coal man disappeared
beneath us
and was coming up
the concrete stairs

untouched by
what and what's unsullied?

I said
turning to look at her
in her green dress
and her fair hair
hanging loose

it means not stained
or tarnished
she said

what's not stained
or tarnished
whatever that is?
I said

the soul
Sister Angelica told us
Fay said
frowning at me
didn't you know?

no idea
I said
I thought the soul
was a spirit thingy
and couldn't be stained
or touched

she sighed softly
by sin
it is stained
and tarnished
she said

I see I said
(I didn't really
but wanted
the subject dead)

are you allowed to go
to the cinema
this afternoon?

I said
after a pause
between us

not sure if my dad
will let me
he thinks cinemas
are dens of sin
she said
looking at me
wide-eyed

not sure about
dens of sin
but they show
good films
I said
there's a good Western
this afternoon
with Jeff Chandler
plenty of gunfights
and hopefully
few kissing scenes
with dames

she shook her head
he won't like that
she said

he's not seeing it
you may
I said

she smiled weakly
I gazed at her
pale blue eyes
ask him
I said

he'll only say no
and lecture me
about the dens of vice

she said

shame

I said

could get an ice cream too
from one of the women
who sell them
in the intermission

the coal man walked
past behind us
with his heavy load
and went in a flat
along a few doors

then her old man
came down the stairs
and looked at us
standing there
on the balcony

what are you
standing here for?
he said
you are supposed
to be helping your mother
in the house with chores
he stared at me unfriendly

I have done so
Mum said
I could go out
for a while
Fay said softly

wasting time
with idle talk?
he said

not idle but instructive
I said
Fay was telling me

about the virginity
of her soul
and how untainted
it is

he looked at us both
his eyes dark
and glinting
I see
he said
glad she is talking sense
not rot

can I go with Benny
to the cinema?
Fay asked gently

he looked at me
then her
to what end?
he said

see a film
I said

and what purpose
does it serve?
he said

the battle
of good and bad
I said
where good comes
on top over the bad guys

he looked at Fay
is that correct?
he asked

she nodded
and said gently
yes it is

he looked at the sky
then said
see your mother
for the money
and say I said
you were allowed
to go this once

then he went
down the stairs
and we watched him
go through the Square

I think Fay's
soul untainted
was glowing there.

Terry Collett

Fay And The Day In The Park

Baruch took the bus
to Kennington park
he wanted to see
a different place

away from the usual
the familiar sights
and people
he had brought

Fay along
having paid
her bus fare
and saying

they'd not be late
(she worrying
about her father
getting home from work

and finding
that she'd not
completed her
school essay

on The Ten Commandments)
and also
that she was with him
(whom her father

termed the Jew boy)
and he said it was better
if she never saw him
which was impossible

as they lived
in the same
block of flats
and went by

each other
on the stairs
but her mother knew
and said

to keep it quiet
and gave Fay a 1/-
for an ice cream
and drink of cola

they walked around
the park
she gazing
at the flowers

and butterflies
and birds
and he imagining
Injuns about

to pop out
of the bushes
or over
the small mound

(he called a hill)
on their mixed
coloured horses
and firing arrows

from their bows
or shooting
from rifles
and as he walked

he patted
the 6 shooter gun
in the holster
hanging

from the belt

of his jeans
(hidden
by his grey jacket)

she talked
of the nun at school
who slammed
a wooden ruler

on the palms
of girls
who didn't know
their catechism

all through
and the girl
who had her
legs slapped

for wearing
her school dress
too short
(she'd outgrown it

and her parents
couldn't afford another)
and he talked
of the cowboy film

he'd seen the other day
where the cowboy
wore his two guns
back to front

so that he had to
cross hands
to reach them
and still out drew

the bad guys
and which he wanted
to practice until

he had it just right

she listened to him quietly
taking in
his hazel eyes
the wavy hair

and that
bright eyed stare
and he listened to her
gazing at her

as he did so
at her fair hair
held in metal hair grips
her blue eyes

her pale complexion
that nervousness
she seemed to have
as if her father

was going to leap out
at her from a bush
and the bruise
on her upper arm

he'd seen
when she removed
her cardigan
having got hot

in the midday sun
and after walking around
for a while
and then sitting

looking at some
old guy feeding birds
with broken bread
they bought two ice creams

and bottles of cola
and she said
a grace in Latin
and he mumbled

some Hebrew prayer
and they sat licking
and eating
and drinking

and once she kissed
his cheek shyly
and said they'd
best get home

before her father did
and he saw her
with him
the upstairs Jew

(as her father
termed him)
and gave her
what for

as soon
as she went
timidly
through the front door.

Terry Collett

Fay And You And Promised Doughnuts.

You walked Fay
to your new school
off Tower Bridge Road
one Saturday morn

she in her blue
cardigan and dress
you in jeans and shirt
and sleeveless jumper

traffic racing by
noisy exuding
smoke and pollution
it's a long way

Fay said
do you walk it
twice a day?
no my mother

gives me fare money
but sometimes
I buy doughnuts
and walk

I wouldn't dare
she said
my daddy'd want
to see the bus tickets

as proof and if he knew
I'd bought doughnuts
instead he'd spank me
and make me walk

thereafter
they're lovely doughnuts though
you said
you can have them warm

coated in sugar
and filled with jam
and when they enter
your stomach

on a cold morning
it's heaven
she fiddled
with her fingers

as she walked along
as if knitting
an invisible scarf
I don't think

I've had one
for ages
she said
we can buy one

on the walk back
if you like
you said
I haven't any money

she said
I have
you said
money for chores

I did
you added
she smiled
and walked on

and when you got
to your new school
you showed her
the entrance

and the high walls

and the top
of the high
depressing building

she stood beside you
and stared and said
her school was run
by nuns

who were very strict
her father insisted
she went there
because they were Catholics

and he wanted her
to have a good education
and not mix
with the riffraff

and that he wanted to know
each day how she got on
(if he was home
and not away

on business)
and you watched her
as she spoke
her fingers

nervously moving
her eyes scanning
the school
her lips

opening and closing
the toes
of her black shoes touching
as he stood

her white ankle socks
just so
no marks or holes

who chose

this school for you?

she asked

turning towards you

her eyes watery

my mother said it was best

being an all boys school

keep me out of mischief

strict teachers

the cane and all

oh

she said

have you been caned?

not so far

you replied

O'Brien bribed the prefect

with cigarettes

to get us off

oh

she said

putting fingers

to her lips

don't you feel guilty?

about what?

bribing the prefect

and escaping punishment

for wrongdoing

no

you said

they were O'Brien's cigarettes

not mine

she looked bewildered

and deep in thought

and you both walked back
towards home
you thinking of the doughnuts to buy
on the way

she musing
on what you'd said
and other thoughts
deeper inside her head.

Terry Collett

Fay And You And The Fading Bruise

Fay met you
at the bus stop
on the New Kent Road
she was dressed

in the lemon coloured dress
you liked
and her hair
was pulled tight

into a ponytail
where are you going?
she asked
to the Globe

you said
what Shakespeare's Globe?
she asked
no the fleapit cinema

at Camberwell Green
you replied
oh
she said

I've never been there
my daddy doesn't like
me going to cinemas
he says they're

dens of sin
she looked at you
as if you would confirm
her father's words

well it's certainly a den
you stated
but whether its
of sin I don't know

she looked puzzled
and touched
her ponytail
with her hand

are you coming along?
you asked
she looked about
as if her father

might be behind her
should I?
she asked
do you want to?

yes
she replied
then let's go
but I haven't any money

she said
I have enough
you said
my Mother gave me money

for chores I did
oh I see
she muttered
and she bit her lip

what would my daddy say
if he saw me?
he won't
how can you be so sure?

trust me
you said
fathers know little
of what their kids do

she smiled

if you think so
she said
sure I do

besides it'll
do you good
you said
giving her a smile

and then the bus came
and you both got on
and sat next
to each other

and you paid
the bus conductor
the fare
and as the bus

moved off
you both swayed
to the motion
of the bus

her arm touching yours
the fading bruise
on her flesh
a mixture of yellow

and brown
and blue
but you said nothing
besides you thought

if her old man
beats her
what the hell
can I do?

Terry Collett

Fay And You And The Orange Sun.

Early summer
after school
after low tea
of bread and jam

and a glass of milk
you sat with Fay
on the roof
of the pram shed

of Banks House
and looked up
Meadow Row
watching the sun

slowly going down
on the busy horizon
she clothed
in a grey dress

with black plimsolls
and you in fading jeans
and open necked shirt
and she said

my daddy says
I've to learn
the Credo in Latin
by the summer holidays

or there'll be trouble
what the heck's the Credo?
you asked
looking at the heels

of her plimsolled feet
hitting the wall
of the pram shed
it's the I Believe prayer

setting out the items
of our beliefs
in the Catholic Church
why Latin?

you said
noticing fading bruises
on her thighs
as the hem

of her dress moved
as she banged her heels
against the wall
because daddy said so

she said
looking
at the orangey sun
in the darkening

blue sky
I don't know many prayers
you said
at least

not all the way through
except the ones
they teach us
at school

even then
some of the boys
put their own words in
which I couldn't

repeat to you
she looked at you
her fair hair
adding beauty

to her pale face

and water colour blue
of eyes
best not to

she said softly
don't your parents
insist you learn prayers?
she asked

no
you said
my old man
wouldn't know a prayer

if it came up
and tickled his moustache
she smiled
and looked away

then after a few moments
of silence
she said
the sun looks

like a big orange
on a big blue cloth
doesn't it?
yes

you said
looking skyward
then watched
the traffic pass by

at the end
of Meadow Row
and the bombsite outline
on the right hand side

and the shadows caused
by the lowering sun
then you lowered

your sight

to the fading bruises
on her thighs
and the watercolour blue
of her bright clear eyes.

Terry Collett

Fay And You And The Ruler.

Fay met you
on your way home
from school
standing by the entrance

of Meadow Row
she was in her school uniform
a satchel
over a shoulder

how was school?
she asked
boring and the day
too long

you replied
but at least
you can learn things
she said

like how
to make a candle
holder in woodwork?
finding some river

in India
I'll never see?
you said
she smiled shyly

well maybe you will
she said
how are you?
you asked

ok
she replied
got told off
by Sister Bernard

for not having a ruler
what did you do
with your ruler?
you asked

lost it
she said
ah well
there you are

you said
naughty naughty
she walked on
down Meadow Row

and you walked
beside her
actually
she said quietly

my daddy took it
she stood still
and stared at you
he beat me

with it
she said
in a whisper
you looked

into her eyes
and saw your
reflection there
two yous

staring back
why?
you asked
taking in her paleness

her fair hair tied

in a ponytail
he said I hadn't done
my jobs properly

jobs?
you asked
around the house
helping my mum

and did you? help?
yes usually
but I forgot
this time

big crime
you said
won't he give
the ruler back?

no
she said
he said he will keep it
as a lesson to me

can't you buy
a new one?
you asked
I haven't any money

she said
you can have
one of mine
you said

I have plenty at home
can I borrow one?
you can have one
she smiled weakly

her eyes lit up
and she took one
of your hands

and held it

I'll have to hide it though
she said
or he'll take
that one too

quite a guy your dad
you said
she looked away
at the bombed out houses

on the left hand side
you saw her hurt
and sadness
some things you can't hide.

Terry Collett

Fay By The Bricklayer's Arms

You met Fay
by the Bricklayer's
Arms

she in her catholic
school uniform
satchel by her side
hand held

you hot
from the school day
sticky in your
grey flannels
and black blazer
tie undone
open necked shirt

thought I'd meet you
here today
she said
I got the bus down
from school

good to see you
you said
putting away
the football cards
in an inside
pocket

how was school today?
she asked

usual brainwashing
you said

she walked beside you
as you went along
the New Kent Road

how was your day?
you asked

don't want
to talk about it
she said
I just want to talk
about other things

the traffic roared by
the fumes
in the air

how about coming
to the cinema Saturday?
you asked

I haven't any money
she replied

I can pay
my old man
will give me
the money

best not
in case my father
finds out
she said

he needn't know
you said

but if he did
she said
there'd be
hell to pay

you turned right
down Harper Road
she seeking out

your hand
you feeling her hand
in yours

what if I asked him?
you said

God no
that would make it worse
he would think
I put you up
to it

silence settled
between you

what about going
to South Bank
we could watched
the boats and ships
along the Thames
and have ice creams
and soda pop?

Saturday?
she asked

yes
you said
after breakfast?

she nodded
her eyes alight
a smile opening
on her lips
her warm hand
gripping yours

the childhood
love adventure
out of doors.

Fay By The Thames

We looked down
at the Thames
from the Embankment

the river was dull
the day overcast

Fay peered down
at the water
people have drowned
in that water
she said
sometimes by accident
but mostly by choice
you know suicide

I peered
at the flowing water
one of Dickens' novels
begins on the Thames
I said
I think they used
to pull dead bodies
out of the water
and claim the booty
if there was any

I can't imagine
wanting to drown
in that dirty water
she said

I don't suppose
the water matters
if you're going
to snuff it
I said

Daddy says

that people
who are suicides
go to hell
Fay said

I guess people
who take their lives
think they're
in Hell already
I said

I pray for souls
in Purgatory
she said
the nuns at school
say we must
do you pray
at your school?
she asked

only for lessons
to be over quickly
I said

she frowned at me
I mean real prayers?

not real prayers
the boys repeat
what they're told to
but it don't
mean much
I said

I hope people
pray for me
if I go
to Purgatory
she said anxiously

what makes you think
you'll go to this

Purgatory place?
I asked

Daddy says I will
because I'm not good
she said

you're OK
you'll go to Heaven
if there is
a place like that
I said

of course there is
she said
gazing at me
don't you believe
there is?

I haven't thought
about it
but if you say
there is
I guess so
I said

she looked
at the river again
her fair hair moving
in the mild wind
her blue eyes fixed
on the water

if you go to Heaven
then I want
to be there too
I said
or Purgatory
or wherever you are
she looked at me

why?

she asked
why with me?

how I feel
I guess ought

you to feel like that?
we're only 12 years old
and you're
a non-Catholic
and my daddy
doesn't like me
to be with that type

you're with me now
I said

but I shouldn't be
she said

why are you?
I asked

the water looks cold
she said
and so filthy too

I nodded my head
I wanted to kiss her
but didn't
and thought
what is a boy
(Catholic or not)
to do?

Terry Collett

Fay Has Gone 1960

Fay has gone.

I'd seen her
go away
yesterday.

Fays' gone off
with her mum,
my mother
informed me
this morning.

I had known;
Fay told me
weeks ago
that she may
be going.

I wander
the bomb sites
foot tracing
where we'd walked
together;
thinking of
the last time
we had walked
the South Bank.

That last kiss
on our lips,
on the stairs
of the flats
in between
the two homes,
hers and mine.

Her old man
glared at me
this morning

as I walked
down the stairs,
but he not
knowing that
I knew things
why they left.

I stand still
gazing out
at the road
and traffic
passing by,
wondering
where she was
and if she'd
write to me
as she said
that he would,
if she could.

Terry Collett

Fay's Day 1960

I saw Benny
on the bus
and we walked home
to the flats.

On the stairs
between his flat
and mine
we kissed
it was a simple kiss
just lips on lips.

Then we parted
and I went upstairs
and he went along
to his parents' flat
and I went to mine.

My mother
was in the kitchen
preparing dinner.

My young brothers
were in the other room
playing with toys.

How was your
day at school?
Mum said.

It was all right
I said
Sister Bridget talked
about the Mass.

Mother nodded
and carried on
rolling out pastry.

When your father
gets home
I expect he will
want to know
what you have learnt
about the Mass
Mum said
I hope you remember
what you were taught.

I have
I said.

I went to my bedroom
and got out
of my school uniform.

The boys were playing
with their toys
in the front room.

I folded
my uniform
on a chair
and put on
a dress and cardigan
and sat on my bed
going over
in my mind
about the Mass.

Across the way
from the window
I saw a steam train
go over the bridge
smoke puffing out
into the sky.

I could still feel
the kiss on my lips.

I would have

kissed again
but felt shy.

Terry Collett

Fay's Kiss 1960

Fay and I
had been
to the cinema
to see the Western film
with Jeff Chandler,
and had ice creams
in the intermission.

We walked over
the bomb site off
Meadow Row.

Did you like
the film?
I asked her.

Traffic was rushing along
the New Kent Road
behind us,
the back
of the coal wharf
was in front of us.

It was good, but sad,
she said.

And not too
much kissing,
I said.

There was a lot
of shooting
and men
being killed,
she said.

That's life I guess,
but the good guys
won in the end,

I said,
best tell that
to your old man.

She looked at me:
he's my father
not old man,
she said frowning.

Sure your father then,
best make sure
he knows about
the good guys winning,
and not much
about the kissing bits.

She nodded;
we walked on
towards Arch Street,
then she paused,
and looked around us,
then she kissed me
gently on the cheek:
thank you
for taking me
to the cinema,
she said,
and for asking Daddy
for us to go.

I sensed the kiss
on my cheek,
wet and warm.

We looked at each other:
best not tell
your father about that,
I said.

No I won't,
she said,
she smiled,

she took my hand in hers
and we walked on
until we came
to Meadow Row.

We walked down
past the public house
and she released
my hand:
just in case,
she said,
Daddy's around
or sees us.

I walked beside her
trying to fit
the kiss on cheek
into my head,
but it stayed
on my cheek instead.

Terry Collett

Fay's Voice.

Fay met me
at end of the New Kent Road
after school

I told her I'd walk
not get the bus
(I'd spent the fare money
on doughnuts that morning)

she was in her uniform
the posh Catholic school
her parents said
she had to go to

how's it going?
I asked her

she pulled a face
usual stuff
had to learn
all about
the Assumption
of the Blessed Virgin Mary
into Heaven
she said

sounds fascinating
I said
glad I missed it

she smiled
no it was interesting
and an item
of our faith
but it's the way
the nun kept on
about it
and pointing
her finger at us

as if we would go to Hell
if we forgot one idea
she said

I know what you mean
Mr J is the same
about science
his beady eyes search us
like some new day Cromwell
what the heck
do I care what chemical
goes with what

we crossed over the road
and down by some shops
I want to show you something
I said

what is it?

you'll see

the last time you said that
you showed me a dead rat
she said

well it was dead
I said

I know but you didn't
have to swing it
by the tail towards me

I smiled
yes crazy thing to do

we came to the shop window
and I showed her
the item

a stamp album?

yes I thought
I'd collect stamps again
I said

she gazed at me
better than firing
that catapult of yours

and it's quite cheap
only 2/-

have you got 2/-?

not yet
but if I do
a few chores
I can get it I guess

lucky you
she said
I do chores
and get nothing
except build up
my bank account
in Heaven
my father tells me
by good deeds

sounds cool
only I like to see
the money now
I said

we walked on and down
Meadow Row
she told me all about
the Assumption
of the Blessed Virgin Mary
and I listened to the sound
of her voice
like some sweet melody
going round

in my brain

and when she'd finished
I said
tell me again.

Terry Collett

Feed The Cat.

Miss Cleves
(she dropped
the Mrs. when
her husband left)

stood by the doorframe
of the lounge,
dressed
in a flowery kimono,

which revealed more
than it concealed.
Pussy wants some milk,
she said.

Benedict looked around
at her from the sofa.
Percy will oblige
after his drink is drunk,

he said. Chopin's
concerto no 2 oozed
from the hifi. He drained
his drink and followed her

into her bedroom.
Once Percy had obliged
and Pussy been fed,
they lay abed.

She criticizing
his Marxism,
he her Scottish
conservatism;

she talked
of her husband's betrayal
and sex
with air hostess

trollops,
Benedict half-listened
taking in
the ending

of the Chopin.
She talked of the poor
and the slums saying:
you can take

the poor out
of the slums,
but you can't always take
the slums out

of the poor.
He raved
about the rich,
she scorned

the poor;
he talked revolution,
he pointed out Stalin
and Mao and the altars

of blood they brought.
Another drink? she asked.
He said yes
and she went off

to pour. He lay naked
on her bed wondering
what the priest would think
of him lying there

butt naked. He heard
the Chopin begin again;
she had thought of that.
Time to prepare, he thought,
once more to feed the cat.

Feel Them.

Feel them. Feel her fingers.
You do love me don't you?

she'd say. Yes, sure I do,
you'd reply. But the words

were not touching home;
not so much a lie as a sad

misunderstanding of their
meaning. She'd lift your arm

behind your back in some
kind of female arm lock.

You'd laugh and repeat,
yes, of course I love you,

of course I do. Her spirit may
rest now years after the sudden

death. At night if you are silent,
you can hear her breath.

Terry Collett

Feeling Glad 1958

I open the door
to my parents' flat
and Lydia's there
looking over the balcony

gazing down into the Square
she turns and says
I can go
to the cinema with you

mind you it took
a bit of persuasion
to convince Mum
I was best

out of her way today
as my dad came home
last night drunk
and singing to her

and my big sister's
in a mood and wants
her Spiv boyfriend back
despite having

one awful row
and so she said
yes get out
of the madhouse

so here I am
I close the door
behind me
and stand next to her

on the balcony
looking down
at the sights below
good

I say
taking in her grey-flowered dress
faded pattern
white ankle socks

and the plimsolls
she always wears
come rain or shine
so what did

your old man sing then?
I ask
Irish song I think
I was trying to sleep

so didn't try
to understand the words
Mum was hush-hushing him
and then he wanted to dance

with her along the passageway
and she's telling to shut up
and he sings louder
and my big sister

moaned in her sleep
about that Spiv boyfriend
I spot the baker
leading his horse-drawn wagon

along by the lower flats
and the horse has a nosebag
and is eating indifferently
to it all

what time does the film start?
she asks
9am
I say

she's excited

and I note her hair
needs brushing
but say nothing

I just say
got any money?
she nods her head
yes Mum gave me 9d

and says get a lolly
but is that enough Benny?
is it?
sure it is

I say
but if not
I'll buy it
I add

seeing her smile
and feeling glad.

Terry Collett

Feeling Undone 1940

The ward is busy
I hear voices,
and calls,
and a bell rings nearby.

My blind eyes see nothing,
but I turn my head
at each sound pretending
I can see.

A hand touches my arm.

Morning Grace, how are you?

It's Nurse Kavel isn't it?
I say.

Yes it is, she says,
how are you?

My legs hurt,
my toes itch me,
I tell her.

The stumps of your legs
will hurt,
but the itching toes
is in the the brain's memory,
she says.

Are my leg stumps healing?

They are improving,
she says,
once they have healed
sufficiently the doctors
will talk about getting
you artificial limbs,
and you will receive help

on how to walk again.

Will I walk again?

Yes you will, Grace,
the nurse says,
in time, but for now
we must do what we can
to make you comfortable,
and keep the stumps
clean and able to heal.

She pulls back the blankets,
and lifts up my nightgown,
and begins to unwrap
the bandage on my right stump,
and I look into the darkness,
and see nothing,
but in my mind,
I think of Anthony,
and us dancing
(Clive had died
a month earlier)
and he was trying
to cheer me up,
and get me back
into War-time society again,
and he had taken me home,
and kissed me goodnight
on my doorstep.

I lick my lips
as if the kiss is now,
and want it to be a kiss
from someone
not this darkness,
and feeling undone.

Terry Collett

Felt All Done Mcmlxxi

The taxi dropped me off
as the bell for Compline tolled,

veni creátor Spíritus,

best go to the church
because that's where
the monks'll be
a guy said
so I went into the church
February 68 that was
first time,

la casa di Dio,

red lamp at altar end
and a few lights
by the choir stalls
and a monk walked by
genuflected
and walked on by
to ring the bells again,

she had that sway of hips
and a nice butt
and I swam
into her deep seas,

Dom Joe said
have you eaten?
no I said
so he took me
to the refectory
and got me macaroni cheese
and hot cocoa
and sat talking
about the monastic life,

Dio chiama ma pochi risposta,

smell of incense
and hot bread
and smell of flowers
from the cloisters,

kiss me she said
there there so I did,

non introíbo
in tabernáculum
domus meæ,

listen and attend
with the ear of your heart
said Benedict
saint that is,

Hugh folded the napkins
with the carefulness
of a maiden
with the deep set eyes
of a seaman,

prier pour Dieu
dans la vérité
the French monk said
as he walked with me
to the chapter house,

moonlight and stars
and shadows
where the cloister walls
on the outside
allowed in light,

it is not enough
to have a good mind
the main thing is
to use it well
said Gareth
quoting Descartes

as we sat in the novice's room
awaiting Dom James,

plough my field
she said
sow seeds,

the bell tolled
over the cloisters
and it was getting dark
and Compline was ending,

making the sign
of the cross
as we entered church,

but that was later
in 71,
seeking through darkness
and felt all done.

Terry Collett

Felt Deep Relief 1963

The sisters(nuns)
at the school
are not happy with you
Mary's father said
at dinnertime
at the table

what's she done now?
her mother said

Mary swallowed a mouthful
of stew
eyed her father

not happy with me?
she said

not at all
her father said sternly
his eyes focusing on her
like a bird of prey

I've done nothing
Mary said

don't be telling me
your lies and fables
her father said
or I'll put my hand
across your behind

her mother looked down
at her plate
and mouthed food

Mary toyed
with a fork of beef

they don't understand me

she said
when I've one
of my monthlies
my mind is off balance
and it disturbs my moods

her father's face tinged
a slight red
around his cheeks

her mother chewed
and looked
at the tablecloth pattern
of blue and white

Mary forked in
another mouthful of stew

they say you're
rude and insolent
he said
looking beyond her
at the picture
of the Sacred Heart
on the wall
above the fireplace

just trying
to get through
the darn bleeds
she said
makes me not happy
being stuck there
in the classroom
while my mind's on
a low dive and the mess
and my mind down
and them standing there
like penguins
peering at me

THAT'S ENOUGH

ABOUT THE NUNS

he said
his voice heavy
his hand tapping the table
palm down

the mother gazed at Mary
eyes fixed on her
wondering if the father'd
slap the girl's behind

Mary put on her
I'm-sorry-I'm-just-
a little-innocent-girl-gaze

I've been to confessions
and told the priest
and got absolution
so I have
she said
eyeing her father

he stared at her
sitting there
a 14 year old
with a mouth of a 18 year old
and entering that arena
of womanhood with
its weird month
and week thing

well mind your manners
and see your mother
about these week things
he said

the mother gazed at him
then at her daughter
and nodded
and ate again

he looked at his daughter

and was glad there
was only the one
and ate a mouthful
looking away
at the Christ's
pointing finger
at his Sacred Heart

Mary nodded and stared
at her plate
and mouthed
a fork of beef
sensing a danger pass
and a felt deep relief.

Terry Collett

Felt Shy 1959

Fay's father was off
the weekend
on a religious retreat
at some monastery
she told Benny
on the Friday morning
on the way to school.

So will you be able
to go to the cinema
with me tomorrow?
Benny said.

I will have
to ask Mum
but I guess I will
she said.

They were walking down
St George's Road
towards school
traffic went past them.

What do they do
in a monastery?
he asked.

Say prayers and pray
for people and live
in a community of silence
most of the time
she said.

Boring or what
he said.

It's their vocation
she said.

Glad I haven't got
one of those
vocation things
he said.

Daddy wants me
to be a nun
when I grow up
she said.

What the heck
is a nun?
he said.

They are like monks
and pray and work
in missions and such
she said.

Do you want
to be a nun?
he asked.

I haven't
thought about it
just Daddy saying it
she replied.

They came to the school
and Benny said
see you later
got to go see
my friend Denis.

All right
she said
and watched him go.

She didn't know why
but when she spoke to him
she felt funny inside and shy.

Female Clown 1972

Are you some kind
of Schopenhauerian?
Abela asks,
peering over at me
as I read
a Schopenhauer book.

No, but I like
reading the guy,
I reply,
looking at her
over the book.

I want to go out,
she says,
see that string quartet
play at that hall;
they're playing
Bartók's string quartets.

Just this one paragraph
before we go,
I say.

She sighs loudly;
stomps around
our hotel room
like an elephant
with piles.

Ok, ok, I'm coming,
I say,
and put down the book
on the bedside cabinet.

She looks at me and says:
you haven't got to go,
I can always go alone.

I am ready,
I say,
and put on my jacket
and comb my hair.

She smiles and says:
if you're good
we can have
a good session tonight
and that foreplay I like.

I smile and watch
as she puts on
her small white coat.

She has a slim neat figure,
dark hair coming
over her shoulders,
and a nice ass.

She picks up
a glass of white wine
she had begun
and finishes it off
in one swallow:
just to warm up,
she says.

I know her warming up:
the night before
she was so warmed up
she feel asleep
on our bed fully clothed
(except for her shoes
which she kicked off) ,
and I slept on the sofa,
listening out for her
in case she threw up,
but she didn't,
she just mumbled,
and once at some god knows
the early hour,

sang a Mozart aria,
until I said to hush it.

We leave the hotel room
and enter the elevator
and prepare to go down;
some Schmuck enters
with his wife
who is wearing
a black fur coat
and made up
with make-up
like some female clown.

Terry Collett

Fenola's Loss.

You drive home
from work
to an empty flat.

You find it hard
to get used
to Eileen's death
after she lost
her long battle
with deep depression
and took her life
two years ago.

The traffic is busy
cars line up
behind each other
buses pass by
like giant green dinosaurs
in pursuit of prey.

You hope to meet
the girl you met
at the coffee bar
a date is fixed.

You are nervous
not wanting to put
a foot wrong
or give false signals.

You hate lying
in bed alone
no one to kiss
or hug close
or make love to.

Just an empty space
where Eileen used to be
and you lie in bed

at night as if
on a frail raft
on a wild sea.

Terry Collett

Field Lying 1965

I lay beside Tilly
in a field behind
her parents' place;
it was summery,
and the sky the bluest blue
I'd seen in ages.

What do you want
to do in the future?
She asked.

Lead a band,
and play my saxophone,
I said.

Lead a band?
She said.

Yes jazz band,
I said.

She turned
and looked at me,
Anything else?
She said.

Make a bit of money,
I guess,
I said.

She raised her highbrows,
anything other
than that?
She asked.

Travel the world,
I suppose,
I said.

And me?
What about me
and you?
She said.

Can you play
an instrument?
I asked.

No, but I mean
our future?

I looked past her;
a steam train went by
on the rail track.

O I see what you mean
us getting married?

Yes,
she said,
and a family.

But we're only 17;
too soon for that,
I said.

She turned away
from me,
and looked towards
the woods near by.

We won't always be 17,
she said,
so we could think
about it as a future thing.

I studied her back,
her waistline,
her cute butt,
the legs that
went on downwards.

Sure we can talk
about that,
I said,
remembering
the last time
we had sex
and her kisses
and hugs.

She turned
towards me again,
talk and plan things
in our heads,
she said.

What about the band?
I said.

What band?

The band I might lead.

She looked at me,
have you got a band?

Not yet,
but I may have one,
I said.

Talk about it
when you do,
until then...
she kissed me
and put her hand
around my waist
and drew me closer.

I put my hand
on her hip,
then her butt.

I smelt her perfume.

Then she moved away
and said:
Mum might be
watching us
from the upstairs window.

So we lay there
and watched another
train steam by
and go.

Terry Collett

Fighting The Pain 1940.

I am lying flat on the bed,
a nurse is rubbing my leg stumps,
her hands are smooth,
fingers skillful.

Another nurse
is beside me;
I can hear
their conversation
between each other.

She died in the night,
the nurse nearby says,
terrible wounds,
didn't think she
would survive.

I think of Jean
and how she had
just gone off after
our row yesterday.

Her children were dead
at the scene;
the house took a direct hit
in last night's blitz,
the nurse nearby says.

It is tragic children
being killed like that,
the nurse rubbing
my leg stumps says.

I stare at the area
of their voices as if
I could see,
but I see nothing,
darkness where voices
come from.

My hands lie dormant
by my sides.

It is oddly sensual
this rubbing,
painful but sensual,
as if the mixture
of pain and rubbing
combined to make it
seem sensual.

I remember Clive
touching me the last time,
his hands moving
between my legs
and kissing my feet
and even now
I sense his kisses.

The last time
we made love.

There between me
he lay.

Then, he was gone
and died at Dunkirk.

The reality shocks me
and I move,
Steady, Grace,
steady, am I hurting you?
the nurse says,
holding my leg stumps.

No,
I say,
no just a memory.

She rubs again,
the sensuality fighting

with the pain.

Terry Collett

Fill My Hole 1971

I smelt the morning air
as I walked the cloister
from church to kitchen,

oratio est labor,

Dom Francis busy
about the pots and pans said
bring me cabbage
from the walled garden
so I did,

the French peasant monk
wheeled a barrow
as if loaded
with the world's sins
over the rough grounds
of the abbey,

we must sow the seed
not hoard it
Dominic said,

sew your seeds in me
she said fill me
with yourself
and your squiggling fishes,

sunlight through
the high windows
of the refectory
as I swept the floor
but the sunlight stayed
with its tiny
particles floating,

Dieu voit tout
the French monk said
as he aided me

in the apple orchard
plucking fruit,

she opened to me
her valley and garden
and I dug deep,

the punishment
of every disordered mind
is its own disorder
Augustine of Hippo said,

I lay the benches for lunch
with jugs and bowls of fruit
and watched the Crucified
on the wall
above the abbot's bench
high above my head,

das Gefühl Gott in dir
the Austrian monk said
as I mowed
the monk's graveyard,

I sensed God
in me some days
other days nothing
but an empty wind
through the hollowness
of my soul,

come she said
lying there
on her bed
enter me
fill my hole.

Terry Collett

Final Home.

Final Home.

There beyond touch
the touchable, beyond speech
the speakable, my son,
yet to a large degree not
understandable, least not
in this sphere of the now and here.

I can mouth your name
and a mindful of memories
come flooding into the sea
of my being to rock the ship
of my soul to and fro as memories
of you come and go.

Be at peace, my son,
there on that other sphere,
far yet near, this now and here;
watch over my journey
on rough seas and dark storms,
be my guide where ever I roam,
until my journey ends
at the final home.

Terry Collett

Finally

Finally daylight enters the room
Like a shy virgin
Undressing for the first time
And you are urged
To get out of bed
And begin the new day
But the bed is rather warm
And the outside air is cold
And so you lay awhile
And think of those cold mornings
You had to get from bed
And go get his breakfast
And get the kids up
And dressed
And breakfasted
And off to school
And still he'd lay there
Snoring and you bringing
His breakfast and saying
Here's your breakfast
I'll leave it on the side
And he'd turn over
And mumble sure ok
Now go leave me
In my quiet and peace
And keep those darn kids
From making so much noise
And off you'd go
Tip toeing from the room
And closing the door
With a nervous click
Not wanting to raise his anger
Or feel his fists
And hushing the kids
And making sure
They were ready for school
And trying not to think
On him lying there
As you began

The house chores
And now looking
At the window
Sensing the warmth
Of the bed
And the kids
Grown up and gone
And him rotting some place
Knifed by you
Some years back
Dead.

Terry Collett

Finding Ingrid 1958

Ingrid lived
with her sister
off the New Kent Road,
and having found
the address,
I went to the house
and knocked at the door.

A girl about 20
answered the door:
what do you want?
She said.

Is Ingrid around?
I asked.

Who wants to know?
The girl asked.

Who are you?
I said.

I'm her big sister,
what's it to you?

Do you always
ask questions?
I said.

Ingrid poked
her head
out beside
her big sister:
hello Benny,
she said,
it's Benny,
she said,
to her big sister
who gazed at her.

Who the heck
is Benny?
The big sister asked.

He's my friend
from Banks House,
Ingrid said.

Better come in then,
the big sister said.

So we went in,
and the big sister
shut the door,
and followed us
into the sitting room.

I sat on a sofa
and Ingrid sat
beside me
grabbing my hand.

Suppose you
want a drink,
the big sister said.

Yes please,
I said.

The sister
walked off
and left us alone.

How are you?
I said.

Bit upset
about Mum
and her
being in prison,
and I want

to see her,
but I can't
at the moment,
Ingrid said.

Do you think she
done your old man in?
I asked.

No she didn't,
Ingrid said,
someone else
did it,
Dad had
many enemies
could have been them.

I miss you not
being around,
I said.

Miss you too,
Ingrid said,
have to go
to a different
school now,
and I hate it.

How long are you
going to be here
with your sister?
I asked.

Depends on what
happens to Mum
and if she's found
guilty or not,
Ingrid said.

Are you allowed
out with me?
I said.

Don't know
have to ask my sister
as she's responsible
for me
at the moment,
Ingrid said.

The sister came in
with glasses of milk
and a biscuit each
and put them down
on a table.

Can I go out
with Benny?
Ingrid said.

Where about?
The sister asked.

Could take a bus
to London Bridge
and walk along
by the River
and see the boats
and ships,
I said,
I got some
pocket money.

The sister went
to her purse
and gave Ingrid
some money:
OK but don't be late
and be careful,
the sister said.

We will,
I said.

She walked
off again.

Ingrid kissed
my cheek.

We ate
our biscuits
and drank
our milk.

I looked
at around the room
which unlike
Ingrid's parents' flat
did not seem
full of gloom.

Terry Collett

Fire Starter 1958

I was on the bomb site
off Arch Street
collecting pieces of wood
and newspaper

-screwed in a ball-
and small pieces of coal
liberated from the coal wharf
near by

plus a few Swan Vestas
borrowed from
my old man's box at home
I lit a fire

near the railway arch
and Ingrid said
are you allowed
to do that?

not that I know
I said
what if a policeman
comes?

she asked
I'll just say
it was alight
when I came

and I was
keeping warm
I replied
but that's lying

she said
stretching the truth
a little
I said

she frowned at me
her bruised eye
was on the mend
and was just a slight

memory now
-her old man's
handiwork-
what if you get burnt?

she said
risk of the game
I said
I shouldn't be here

if my dad saw me here
I'd be for it
she said
you're always for it

I said
you've only got to look
at your old man
and he whacks you

I replied
not always
she said
looking away

he slipped you
the other week
for dropping
that bottle of milk

she said nothing
but looked across
the bomb site
at the passing buses

on the New Kent Road

I got out a small tin
and opened it
want a cigarette?

she peered at me
then at the tin
where'd you get those?
she said

I made them
I said
made them?
yes out of dog-ends

I picked up
from the gutters
and borrowing
cigarette papers

from an uncle
I made them up
she pulled a face
but they must have

other people's
spit on them
she said
but the papers

are fresh
I said
and besides
the burning tobacco

gets rid of that
she looked at me
and said
yuk

I put the tin away
and we watched
the fire burning

a Rozzer stopped me

on here the other week
and said to me
did I see you smoking?
I said

no I've not been smoking
I'd flicked the butt end
onto the bomb site
behind me

and he looked
at me suspiciously
and said
better not let me

catch you sonny boy
and he walked off
I'd have wet myself
she said

if a policeman
stopped me
we watched the fire burning
for a few more minutes

then we went across
the bomb site
to the chip-shop
to buy 6d of chips

and stood outside
and shared them
watching the small bomb fire
burning across the way

on that cold
November day.

Terry Collett

Fireworks 1958

Fireworks

Benny's old man said
for you to use and enjoy
but be careful.

So Benny
and his sister Naomi
went down
the concrete stairs
of the flats
and into the Square
with the small box
of fireworks.

Benny lit them
they
and others nearby
watched and were thrilled.

After it was over
the other kids clapped.

Then Hem
Lydia's brother
threw a banger
at Naomi
she screamed
and Benny chased Hem
but Hem ran fast.

He ran through
the Square
down
the slope
leading
to Rockingham Street.

Benny was on his tail
filled with anger

that Hem had thrown
the firework at his sister.

Hem panicked
when he saw Benny
was on his tail
ran across the road
without looking
but nothing was coming.

Benny ran after him
cornered him
against the wall
of the big factory
pinned him there
punched him
with fury.

Hem pleaded
just for a bit of fun
but Benny whacked him
until his anger had seeped.

He walked away
leaving the boy
on the ground
holding his stomach.

The evening was
creeping in
the sky darkening.

Benny walked back
up the slope
looking behind
at the big
moaning dope.

Terry Collett

Firm Earth Beneath.

Milka escaped
from the farmhouse
without
her mother seeing

so she said
and her brothers
were out fishing
so she persuaded

Benedict to allow her
to tag along behind
(beside) him
what about your mother?

he asked
o it will only be
chores she
wants doing

Milka said
they walked
to the place
where the peacocks

were kept
and stared
through the wire
at them

the colourful cocks
but dull
as mud hens
making their calls

proudly walking
beautiful plumage
she drew up
close to Benedict

her hand hovering
near to his
but not touching
like a bird

in mid flight waiting
she talked
of the dullness
of the hens

and brightness
of the cocks
he listened to her
smelling the perfume

she'd liberated
from her mother's bag
he said he'd wanted
a job on a farm nearby

but he didn't get it
she put her arm
under his
and squeezed

him close
she was glad
her brothers
were fishing

or they'd
be with Benedict instead
practising the judo
or karate out back

at the farm
she wanted him
to hold her tight
to draw her nearer

than she was

she'd put on
the shorter dress
when she saw him

at the door
asking her mother
about her brothers
earlier that morning

and had rushed
to dress
to catch him
up the road

without her mother
seeing her go
they moved on
from the peacock place

and walked the road
and crossed a field
he touching her hand
the sky blue

and cloudless
he silent
she talking
of seeing

the latest
Elvis film
wanting him
to ask her out

but he didn't
he climbed the style
and through the woods
by the small river

and his hand
holding hers
she feeling

his fingers

on her skin
his thumb rubbing
the back
of her hand

and maybe
she thought
he'll stop
and kiss

and hold
but he didn't
he walked on
through the woods

breathing in
the smell
of flowers
and water

and air
touched by birds
and heat
she wanting

a heaven
but having
firm earth
beneath her feet.

Terry Collett

First Bath 1940

We had just made love,
then turned on our backs,
and lit up cigarettes,
staring at the ceiling,
where shadows
from the streets lamp
made patterns.

Why must you
join the army, Clive?

There's war coming,
and I want to be there
to push Hitler back,
Clive said.

But why you?
Why not someone else?

Grace I cannot sit back
and let others defend us,
he said.

But you're intelligent,
you could work
in the war effort
in other ways,
I said.

I don't want to do
espionage work,
I want to fight,
he said.

We lay there smoking,
and now and then
talking about
the coming war,
and afterwards

about marriage
and family.

Grace, Grace,
a voice calls me,
mind you don't slip
in the bath.

I look to where
the voice comes from.

What?

Don't slip in the bath,
not easy balancing
with just two leg stumps,
the voice said.

I move side to side carefully,
sensing the water
about me;
it's the nurse,
but I cannot see her,
my blind eyes
just stare in her direction.

Must have been daydreaming,
I say.

Your first proper bath
since before you
were bombed out,
she says.

Yes, it is,
I say,
sponging my breasts
over with soapy water.

How are the stumps healing?
I say.

Well, they're doing well,
the doctors are happy
with them.

They still hurt,
I say.

They will for a while,
the nurse says.

I'll be an old maid now;
no one will want to marry
a legless blind woman
like me,
I say.

The nurse sighs,
now I don't think
that is true,
that Mr Kimberly
seems struck on you.

What good would I do him?
I'd be a burden,
and I don't want anyone
to marry me out of pity.

The nurse is quiet.

I sit balancing
as I sponge between my legs.

There is pity,
and there is love,
she says.

I don't know what
he looks like,
and how can I ever
bring a child
in the world
blind as I am,

and without legs?
I say.

If you want to
you can, and will,
she says firmly.

She takes the sponge
from my hand
and washes my back
and around my neck.

I think what for?
What the heck.

Terry Collett

First Visit Mcmlxviii

Footsteps
down the corridor
a swish of cloth,

there was a knocked
on the door
come in
you said,

Dom Higgs came in
an old monk
wrinkled face
tonsured head
he spoke
of the monastic life
he smelt
of aged sweat,

monasticae vitae
he said
you listened
uno con Dio
he added,

it rained
the black tiled roof
shone like black liquid
as you watched
and saw,

per guardare
e vedere,

refectory rectangle
long benches along
each wall
monks sitting
in silence
another read,

you sat on
the guest's bench
gazing at faces opposite
God's chosen,

ceux que
Dieu a choisis
black robed
pale of faces,

high windows
coloured glass
light in upon floor
and tables
the reader reading
lectio Divina,

plainsong sang
in abbey church
monks lined against
opposite walls
in choir stalls,

if God calls
you may enter
Dom Joe said
as you walked
the abbey grounds
soft wind
and bird sounds.

Terry Collett

Fitzsimmons Returns

The mirror never lies,
Your mother said.
You look in it now,
The mirror reflects
You in the midst
Of half way dressing.
You hold the green
Corset strings, waiting
For the maid Fitzsimmons.
You've rung for her twice.
No sight of her or sound.
Been busy, she'll say,
Have other things to do
Other than run around
After you. And she'll say it
In that Irish tongue of hers,
With her deep blue eyes
Peering into your eyes
As if she sought your soul.
You fidget. Pull the strings.
Stare in the large mirror.
She's done your hair
Nice enough as she can
And does, then ran off
To the ring of some bell
From some other quarter.
You pull the strings tighter.
Breath in, pull even tighter.
She even laid out the clothes,
Neatly as she does; shoes
Polished to a bright shine.
You stiffen and listen.
A loud voice bellows
Down the passage;
The canaries in the cage,
Take flight in fright.
Fitzsimmons returns,
The passage vibrates.
Your thin fingers hold

The green corsets strings,
They visibly shake,
The maid is coming,
She sings, the swish
Of her stiff black dress,
You gaze in the mirror,
See eyes and hair
And a touch of fear
Burning there.

Terry Collett

Five Times That Week 1916

The butler
Dudman stares
at Polly
as she stands
in his stark
small office.

Master George
will be back
home again
very soon
with a nurse
for his care,
Dudman says.

Polly smiles;
o that's good,
she utters,
relaxing
(she'd thought he'd
summoned her
to complain
about her
domestic work) .

However,
Dudman says,
that does not
mean that you
will attempt
once again
to enter
or to have
sexual
dealings with
him in bed.

Polly blushes
lost for words.

I've told you
before this
about that,
and warned you.

But George
wanted me
to go there,
Polly says.

Master George
to you girl,
Dudman says,
know your place
in this house;
you will not
have dealings
sexually
with Master
George at all
or be fired
if you do;
understood?

Polly nods;
words fail her.

Understood,
Dudman says.

Yes I do,
Polly says
tearfully,
looking past
Dudman's head
at the wall.

She thinks of
George last time
in his bed
having sex,

his moustache
tickling
her pale cheek,
having had sex
with him five
times that week.

Terry Collett

Florence Bathing 1970

She had a fading tattoo
on her thigh
which caught my eye.

Winnie asked me
to help her
bath Florence
as she was alone
and I wasn't busy.

You don't mind
if Benny helps me
bath you
do you Florence?
Winnie said.

Me?
no make my day
for a young feller
to see my tattoo again
first time
in many years
I can tell you
Florence said.

Used to be
a dancer
back in
the early days
danced on stage
up in London
and sometimes
when we toured
we went all
over the place.

Once Winnie
had helped
Florence undress

I saw the tattoo clearer
it was in blue and pink
and was of a dancer
doing the can-can.

Is that what
you did Florence
the can-can?
Winnie said.

Yes that
and other dancing too
did more than
dancing too
other times
she laughed.

I smiled.

She had her
grey hair long now
as Winnie
had unpinned
the hair to wash it.

Had a young feller
who wanted
to marry me
but he got himself
killed at Mons
and that was that.

Another one came
back blinded
and although
I could have
married him
I wasn't keen
on marrying
a blind bloke
you know what
with me dancing

and touring
and having to
help him
I couldn't do it.

I think he married
some other girl.

Florence went quiet
had my chances
but never did marry.

Bet you were a looker
when you were young
Winnie said.

Got a photo
in my drawer
when I was a dancer
one of those sepia jobs
faded a bit like me
but you can see me
as I was then.

We eased Florence
down in the bath.

I wondered how many
other men had seen her
like I did
but didn't ask or say.

Once in the bath
Winnie did her back
and Florence talked on
all about once upon.

Terry Collett

Flypapers At Auntie's House.

Flypapers hung in the kitchen
Of Auntie's house. Death traps
For flies that buzzed at their ends
Or buzzed noisily from surface
To surface unaware the brown
Sticky strips were there to trap.
You stared at the long brown strips
Covered in flies, some buzzed fruitlessly,
Others were quiet and still, having
Given up the will to buzz or make noise
Just hanging there black corpses on
Brown paper, a graveyard swaying in
The draught from the wide open door
To buzz and fly and irritate no more.

Terry Collett

Following A Bright Star

Sitting on a field gate
looking toward the Downs
Jane talked
of butterflies

and birds
and formation
of clouds
trying to educate you

on the country ways
you sat in blue jeans
and white shirt
unbuttoned at the neck

and she wore
the simple grey dress
white socks
and brown shoes

muddied
from recent ventures
into muddy fields
London's is a doss house

compared to this
you said
although I miss
the cinema

and locality of shops
but then there's you
with your down
to earth beauty

and straight forward
country wisdom
I'm not beautiful
in any sense

she said
the only real beauty
Father says
is the sky above us

and all that lies beyond
you gazed
at her profile
the dark hair

the pale skin
the finely drawn lips
the way she tossed
her head

to remove hair
from her eyes
she jumped down
from the field gate

on to the grass
and walked on
and you followed
she looked back

and smiled
why did you look at me
in that way?
what way?

I don't know
that studying me
kind of way
as if you'd only just

seen me
for the first time
maybe I have
you said

maybe I've seen you

for the first time
in a different way
she looked away

her eyes scanning
the Downs
my mother trusts you
I am glad she does

you said
she trusts you
because you're not like
most boys around here

whom she doesn't trust
she picked cowslips
from the field
and sniffed them

and held them out
to you to sniff
beautiful aren't they?
simple yet beautiful

you sniffed them
and gave them
back to her
yes they smell good

you said
she put out a hand
and touched yours
her hand was warm

you rubbed your thumb
over the back
of her hand a
s you walked on

she holding the cowslips
in the other hand
sniffing them

now and then

what is it
you like about me?
she asked
moving off the field

onto the tree lined drive
up to the Downs
you're pretty
and quiet

and thoughtful
and I feel relaxed
with you
anything else?

I like your eyes
and your hair
and the way you smile
she laughed

and looked away
blushing
after a few minutes
she walked you into

a large hollowed out tree
and sat down inside
as if it were a large
inner room

do you love me?
she asked softly
you looked at her mouth
the way her lips

had moved so simply
yes I guess I do
you said
she leaned toward you

and kissed you
the meeting of lips
she put down the cowslips
and embraced you

with both arms
you held her close
smelling the freshness
of new apples

and country air
then she sat back
and pushed the hair
from her face

and said
I trust you too
and then she was up
and out of the hollow tree

with her cowslips
and walked on to
the drive again
and called out

come on we've away
to walk to the top
and you came out
of the tree

and followed her
noticing how slow
she swayed as she walked
the cowslips rising

and falling in her hand
her voice calling you
to follow her
and you did

near to her side
sensing her nearness

her beauty
the way she walked

and talked
and off to one side
a woodpecker
tapped tapped

on a tree
and you'd wanted
to be no where else
neither distant climes

or lands afar
but close to her
and following her
like some

tall ship
at sea
follows
a bright star.

Terry Collett

Following The Blind 1959

You saw Anne crutching herself
across the lawn as you came out
of the French windows. Sister Paul
was calling after her, but Anne had

crutched further away, her back to
the nun who seemed to stiffen with
anger. You came up beside the nun
and she looked down at you with her

dark eyes. You seem to have some
influence with Anne, tell her I need
her to see the doctor in 5 minutes,
she said. You nodded and said: I'll do

my best Sister, but you know what
she's like once her mind is made up
about something. The nun looked
down the lawn where Anne had sat

herself in one of the white metal chairs
and looked towards the avenue of trees.
Tell her it is about her leg, the nun said
to you, and stormed off, her black habit

flapping like a blackbird learning to fly
and failing. You walked down to where
Anne was sitting and sat beside her in
another white chair. Where's the penguin

gone? Anne said. Inside again, you said,
wants you to see the doctor about your leg.
Anne gazed at you and rubbed her leg stump
with her hands. I'm not see any fecking

quack about my leg; all he wants is to
have a gawk and have a feel, she said.
Maybe he's got your new leg, you said.
Feck the leg, she said, looking at her leg

stump where she had pulled up her skirt.
I want my old leg back, not a fecking
pretend leg, she said. You stared at her
stump. But your old leg as gone, you said,

at least you could walk without a crutch
and not be pushed everywhere, you said.
She sighed: all right I'll go see the old fart,
but you come with me Kid or I see no one,

she said. Ok, you said, and helped her up,
and she crutched herself back up the lawn
towards the nursing home sour faced, with
you following, the blind following the blind.

Terry Collett

For Harsh Rain 1957

She's dressing
in her room
having washed

hands and face
and below
in bathroom/

small kitchen
then fearing
he'd turn up

while she had
her eyes closed
and slap her

nakedness
but dressing
Enid feels

she is safe
as if clothes
were armour

to protect
from Father's
hard hand smacks

but he's not
done that now
for some days

leaving her
uncertain
and he smiles

speaks softly
not shouting
or frowning

as he once
used to do
her parents

are sitting
in the lounge
soft talking

then laughing
her mother
giggling

(where once she'd
be crying
or screaming

as he slapped
or beat her)
Enid feels

on an edge
of a cliff
looking down

at a depth
fearing she
will fall off

and into
her past life
of beatings

and bellows
and he there
watching her

every move
just waiting
for one step

to go wrong

and then whack
and she knows

it won't last
this calmness
this being

Mr Nice
smiles and teeth
that one day

one morning
she will wake
to his hits

once again
like watching
heavy clouds

for harsh rain.

Terry Collett

For Love Of

You're the boy
from near the farm
aren't you?

Jane asked
standing by
the school bus

after school
had finished
for the day

yes
you replied
yes I am

and you wanted
to say more
but your tongue

dried up
as if stuck
in some desert

someone said
you're new there
she added

looking at you
with her pale blue eyes
a few months

you said
taking in
her smooth skin

how dark her hair
how straight
and touching over

her shoulders
you ventured words
are you

the parson's daughter?
she nodded
rather than spoke

her reply
then looked away
as other kids

came towards
the school bus
and stood back

as they climbed aboard
their noisy voices
drowning out

the ambience
of her being there
like big guns of war

breaking through
the peacefulness
of a pre-war dawn

and you waited for her
to speak again
but she looked back

at the school
as if the audience
granted you

had ended
and you stood there
waiting to board the bus

like all the rest

come on Jane
someone called

and she turned
and climbed aboard
leaving you to stand

and watch
the lifting
of her leg

the black shiny shoes
the white socks
the way her hands

pulled her up
the next step
and you savouring

each moment
of her motion
full of a love

like one
for a work of art
full of emotion.

Terry Collett

For The Better 1952

It was good
while it lasted
it lasted as long

as it could
what with him
being as he was

me being
as I am
his wife being

as she was
so I am to go
go to Paris maybe

leave him to her
her ways
him to his

lost cause
the clock
is ticking tocking

time away
we had a good time
had laughter

love making
sex with a big S
his wife

didn't know
or we believe she didn't
so I will take

a last look around
the place
last gaze out the window

last look at the bed
and think
of his last words

the last look from him
and I will leave him
the small gifts he gave

he will say
o Rosie why go?
I will say

in the letter
it is for the good
and the better.

Terry Collett

For The Meeting Of Hearts And Lips

Julie took
one of the cigarettes
out of the packet
you had bought

and said
you're too kind
and lit it
with a small

plastic lighter
she took from her bag
you both sat
in a side room

set aside
for patients and guests
just off the drug
dependency ward

she was in
there was a scene
of a few trees
and bushes

from the window
marred by the sight
of the other part
of the hospital

over the way
glad you could come
she said
my parents

won't visit me here
don't they love you?
you asked
it's a matter of what

the neighbours might say
if they found out
I was here
she answered

inhaling deeply
and looking at you
with her dark eyes
her dark hair

was pulled back
in an untidy bun
and the hospital
dressing gown

she wore
was stained
and open
at the neck

and down
revealing a small cleavage
of young pinkish flesh
why did you come?

she asked
I wanted to see you
you replied
none of the others

from the Church come
she said
it's all talk
and promises

and God talk
but none
have come to see me
so far

she inhaled again

and stared out
the window
you studied how

she had crossed
her legs
showing
a glimpse of thigh

where her white
dressing gown
and nightdress
rose high

a nurse entered the room
and said
would you like tea
or coffee?

yes
Julie said
two coffees please
and the nurse

went out and off
her feet pitter
pattering down
the corridor

through the half
open door
I'm lucky here
she said

some druggies
get shoved in mental wards
or poked in
psychiatric units

with other
damaged goods
it seems ok

you replied

lifting your eyes
from her thighs
to her face
pure in its makeup

less state
and dark eyes
19 years young
she said

and already buggered up
as my father has said
I'm sure they love you
in their way

you said
taking in her neck
and the run
of her chin

and her mouth
with the small
moving lips
the nurse came in

with a tray
with two mugs
of white coffee
and a bowl

of brown sugar
and set it down
on the small grey table
and walked out

my parents love me
as property
not as a person
she said

uncrossing
her legs
and lifting a mug
and taking small sips

and oh you thought
(lifting a mug
and drinking)
for the meeting

of our hearts
and lips.

Terry Collett

Forest Flower

He goes to Rome
tomorrow,
the young monk,

tall, clothed in black.
I shake his hand
as other do

by the refectory door;
she opens herself
to me

like a forest flower
even in
my holy sleep.

The old monk
turns in his dying,
the church bells

chime him
the hour
in a steady peal.

Terry Collett

Forever 1961

That's a Desert Wheatear
Jane said
watching the bird
fly overhead.

We lay on our backs
in the field
watching the blue sky.

Not seen one
for ages
she added.

I breathed in
her apple
and fresh air scent.

How do you
remember all these birds?
I said
turning to gaze at her.

I studied Daddy's books
on birds since
I could first read
she said.

We gazed at each other
her eyes were dark
and sparkled
in the sunshine.

I only knew sparrows
and pigeons in London
I said.

Poor you Benny
not being able to see
what I see every day

and more
she said.

I sensed
my heart pounding
I felt at that
moment so alive
I could burst.

She looked back
at the sky.

I glanced
at her features
her dark hair
the fine jawline
the pinkish lips.

I wished to kiss
as I had
a few days before
but I turned
and gazed at the sky.

Clouds drifted by
white and evolving
into shapes
one by one.

Her hand lay by mine
she touched my hand
with a finger gently.

I touched her finger
surrounded it
with my hand
and held it loosely.

There it goes again
she said
pointing with a finger
of her other hand.

I watched it fly over
the tall grass and away.

I held her finger
and sensed
the warmth
filling me.

I wanted to lay
there with her
forever or
for all eternity.

Terry Collett

Found Out

The psychiatrist had just left.

Nima sat in a chair
by the window
staring out.

Where were you
this weekend?
A voice said
from the doorway.

Nima turned,
and saw her mother
standing there,
stiff in her black dress suit,
hair permed to a neat pile.

Out with a friend,
Nima said.

Her mother entered
the side ward.

Which friend?
Her mother said.

You don't know them,
Nima said.

Them more than one?
The mother said,
walking around
the small ward,
eyeing her daughter,
taking in the thinness,
paleness.

A friend,
one singular,

Nima said,
looking away,
avoiding her mother's
stern stare.

Male or female?
the mother said,
her voice stiff and hard.

Nima sighed.

Does it matter?

They let you out
with just a friend?
The mother stood opposite
her daughter;
I will asked what
they think they are doing
letting you with just anyone.

He's not just anyone,
Nima said,
he's from the church,
he's helping me.

Her mother raised
an eyebrow.

Where did you stay?

Nima sighed,
some place
for church people,
Nima said,
quiet place.

I know when you lie,
her mother said,
where did you really go?

Nima stood up,

and walked away
from her mother.

Aunt's place
while she's away,
Nima said.

Who did you sleep with?
The mother said.

Nima gazed at her mother,
a friend,
she said,
someone I like,
and who cares
about me.

The mother sat down
and sighed,
I hope he does,
her mother replied.

Terry Collett

Fragments Of The Cloister Mcmlxix

The old monk
almost slipped on the snow
on the path from
garden to abbey
he balanced unsteady
like a tightrope walker
on a windy day,

Dios oye así que
debemos también
the Spanish monk
said to me in
the cloister garth
as we weeded
the flower beds
that spring,

God listens so
ought we too
Dom Peter had said
I remembered
removing a huge weed
with a trowel,

la science de l'amour
oui c'est le seul genre
de science que je veux
Therese of Lisieux said
some place I read,

I held the bell rope
rough between hands
pulled with George
for the office of Terce
holding on with a tight grip
then letting go
at the right time,

Hugh talked of his father

and how proud he was
having a monk
as a son or near enough
still a novice,

m? ?? ???μ? ??? ??????
? ??????? ??????? ????????

Gareth said quoting Plato
love turns all to poets
or something like
I assumed,

moonlight made shadows
in the cloister as I walked
in and out of light
then in darkness
so was my soul,

mounds in the monk's graveyard
where I mowed
that creature of God
the mole.

Terry Collett

France At Night.

On the coach
between Paris and Tours
Mamie was seated
next to you

her head
of frizzy hair
against your shoulder
her eyes closed

her mouth ajar
fish like
the valley between
her small tits visible

as she lay there
rocking slight
to the coach's motion
music coming through

the radio
some Mozart piece
you looked
at her hands

in her lap
small and curled
like sleeping crabs
her bare arms

sans hair but freckled
and you looked at her
and sensed her head
against you

knowing some brain
buzzed beneath
her frizzy mane
thoughts exploded there

were explored
or put aside
sleep be drugged
like some child

in fairy land maybe
you studied her knees
just visible
where her

red skirt rose
flesh on flesh
how through Paris
in the coach

she had pulled
your hand
into her lap
held it there

the pulse of her
beating through
her garden of Eden
beneath the cloth

then the Mozart
piece ended
and Beethoven began
thunderous and loud

pushing through
the speakers
stirring Mamie
beside you

her lips moving
mouthing words
her hands opening out
the palms upright

you looked beyond her

at the passing scenes
of France at night.

Terry Collett

Fredericks And Something New 1958

Fredericks
was a tall kid
who lived opposite
the school.

He had black
straight hair
parted like Hitler
but without
the moustache.

We weren't friends
just acquaintances
who shared gossip
or new items
or swapped
cigarette cards
of footballers
or movie stars.

One day
he stopped me
outside school.

Hey Coles
you know girls
don't have thingys.

Thingys?
I said.

Yes you know
thingys to pee from.

Kids were passing
going into school
some hung outside
waiting for the bell.

Why not?

Don't know
he said.

How'd you know?
I asked.

He looked back
at his house.

My big brother
has this pin-up
on the door
inside his wardrobe
some nude dame
he said.

How comes
they don't have one?

How do I know
he said.

Maybe it
got a disease
had to have it
taken off
I said.

He didn't
look convinced
don't think so
Coles
he said.

What they
got then?

He shrugged
his shoulders
nothing

just a big bush
he said.

I nodded
looked back
at the school.

You watch
Gunsmoke
with James Arness
last night?
he said.

Yes it was good
I said
but don't think
he's as fast
as Wyatt Earp.

No guess not
or as flashy
as the Cisco Kid
Fredericks said.

A prefect rang
a hand bell
standing on the top
of the outside stairs.

Best go
I said.

Yeah
I might ask
Finn about
the girl's thingy
Fredericks said.

Yeah do that
I said.

He went up

the stairs
two at a time.

I followed
walking slow
that was
something new
I didn't know.

Terry Collett

Friend In Need

O'Brien went to the same school
as you and used to thief from

local shops and kid's pockets and
bags and from the teacher's desk

and probably from his mother and
father if he was at home asleep in

his chair and he used to take things
openly from the tuck shop without

paying and borrow things and not
give them back. O'Brien was your

best friend at school but never stole
from you for some reason anyhow.

You often wonder what happened
to him and what he's doing now.

Terry Collett

From You Fall.

The two catholic priests sat
in the Breakfast Room
off the refectory
in the abbey.

They looked up
when you entered
then continued
their conversation
about Dante
and you poured
yourself a coffee
and a small bowl
of Cornflakes
with a little milk
and sugar.

You sat down
and sipped the coffee.

There were prints
of Michelangelo
on the walls
and a crucifix above
and between
the two doors
that led to the
refectory
where the monks ate
three times a day.

The priests conversed
but said nothing to you.

Their words were uttered
in posh well bred voices.

One said
Few believe in Hell these days

and even fewer in Paradise
and those that do
have vague ideas
gathered from odd books
you find on airport
bookshop shelves.

You listened half heartedly
as they talked.

You wanted to ask
about the place.

Wanted one of them
to hear confession.

Maybe one
to give absolution
and perhaps offer a solution.

You could hear
the footsteps of monks
in the other room
getting their breakfast
of bread and jam
and black French coffee.

One priest laughed.

You never heard the joke.

The other guffawed loudly
in a girlish voice.

And the woman was seen
leaving by the back door
semi dressed and in great distress
the priest continued
And Father Denton
was never the same.

Then they were silent

and stood and smiled
and went their way.

You sat alone in the room.

The Michelangelo prints
reflected the single bulb
hanging above the table.

The Crucified seemed
above it all.

You would find some other
to hear confession.

To give absolution
from your fall.

Terry Collett

Frustrated And Hot 1916

Susie scrubbed
the huge pot
after breakfast

Mrs Gripe the cook
moaning in the background
in the kitchen

Susie thought of Polly
in the bed they share
in the cold attic

and how she snuggled
up to Polly in the bed
and wanted

to get closer to her
but feared Polly hitting her
if she got too familiar

and she did kiss
her shoulder once
while she was asleep

and held her
and pressed her nose
into her shoulder

and held tight
about the waist
to keep warm

and outside owls
were calling
and far off traffic

but up there
in the attic
a small kingdom

and warming
and loving or so
she wished

scrubbing around
the rim of the huge pot
feeling frustrated and hot.

Terry Collett

Gale's Medal

Gale shows me
a medal
in the palm
of his hand

circular
discoloured
old ribbon

my granddad's
he tells me
he left it
in his will
it's mine now

can I hold?
I ask him

sure you can

I hold it
in my palm
it's warm now
where his skin
has warmed it

King George V
image there
an old guy
grey bearded

your granddad?
I ask him
my finger pointing
at the guy

that's the King
at the time
he tells me

though Granddad
was like that
to look at

I hand him
the medal

he holds it
in his palm

the school bell
rings loudly
the playground
then erupts
then settles
into lines

Gale pockets
the medal
in the dark
sweaty warmth
of his thigh

out of sight
of my eye.

Terry Collett

Gallipoli 1915

Gallipoli 1915

I was there
George said
blood bath
that was.

Bodies
in the water
on land.

Many
of my chums
went down.

He sat
in the bath chair
as I ran the water
for his bath.

Churchill's idea
it was
right disaster.

I helped him undress
as after his stroke
he was paralysed
down his left side.

That photograph
by my bed
that chap
in uniform
is me
and my late wife
we married before
I went off to war
I came back
others didn't.

Once he was undressed
I helped him
into the bath
and set him down
and gave him
his flannel
soaped up.

Thanks Benny
he said.

He washed
his neck
and face
and other parts
of his body
he could reach.

I washed his hair
and rinsed it.

Never forget that
blood bath
he said
staring into space
bodies everywhere.

He closed his eyes
as I combed his hair.

Not a scratch on me
not through
the whole war
lucky bugger
he said
unlike those
other poor buggers
the dead.

Terry Collett

Gamble 1969.

Old boy Charman
stopped me outside
the upstairs lounge
where the old folks
were having their
morning slumber.

Could you put
a bet on for me?
he said.

Sure
I said.

He gave me
a piece of paper
with horse names
times
and how much
each way.

I gazed at it
he gave me
some money.

I'll do it later
I said.

He nodded
he was a fragile
framed man of 96
who'd fought
in the Boer War.

His wife
who was asleep
in the lounge was 94
and had dementia.

He went back in
the lounge and I
went down the stairs
to carry on
with other tasks.

I recalled him
asking me once
do you gamble?

Only on life
I had replied.

Life's a gamble
with no real winners
he had said
and named
and number
old friends
who were dead.

Terry Collett

Game Lost 1956

Janice is in the playground
playing skip rope
with two other girls.

I'm playing marbles
with Dennis and Dave
against the playground wall.

I have put
my favourite marble
out there
hoping to win the lot.

Dave crouches low
and flicks his blue marble
it hits Dennis's pink marble.

Dennis looks over
at the girls skipping
your turn Den
Dave says
standing up.

Dennis crouches down
and continues the game
his marble misses
and hits the wall
he stands up
looks at the girls again.

You can see their knickers
when they skip
he says.

Who cares
Dave says
crouching down
intent on the game.

I watch the game
hoping my marbles
don't get lost
especially the blue one
I think as lucky.

Dennis looks back
at the game.

The girls skip on
intent on their game.

I bend down
and aim and miss
and curse
and the game
is won and lost
to my and Dennis's cost.

Terry Collett

Gazing At Sunflowers

Your first wife's friend
came in with her

for a coffee and chat
and you were sitting

on the sofa
with the sleeping cat

and she looked
at the Van Gogh print

of sunflowers
over the mantelpiece

above the open fire
did you paint that?

the friend asked
staring at it

through John Lennon
type glasses

no you said
it's a Van Gogh print

oh she said
peering closer

I do like flowers don't you?
Yeah you replied

sunflowers have a way
when Van Gogh

pushes them through
and she stood in silence

taking in the print
and flowers

and colours
and you noticed

she had a run
in her stockings

from the back
of her knee

to where
her thigh disappeared

beneath her drab dress
and your first wife

came in and said
oh you're not looking

at that painting are you?
He knows all about

those arty types
with their odd ways

and weird eyes
and her friend said

turning round
scratching her ass

I know nothing
of art and such

it's way out
of my class.

Terry Collett

Gently Crying 1940

I wake up in a panic,
but it is still darkness
my blind eyes see,
having dreamed I saw
my garden at my house,
but then it dawns on me
that the house was bombed,
and as I feel for my legs,
I realize the stumps are there
and the legs gone.

I lie on the pillow
and stare into darkness,
listening to the sounds around:
voices, calls, bedpans
being used, footsteps,
wheelchair(needing oiling)
going by the bottom of my bed.

I smell disinfect and urine,
and perfume, and ointment.

Morning, Grace, a nurse says
to me on my right, how are
you this morning?

I dreamt I was in my garden
and saw the flowers
and the apple tree
and woke up to darkness
and depression, I say,
staring towards her voice,
trying to give an impression
I could see her.

Yes, that happens to those
who have seen before
they lost their sight,
the nurse says softly.

She lifts up my nightdress
and I feel her fingers
touch the bandages
on my stumps,
her fingers moving
over them.

They still hurt,
I say,
still painful, despite
the medication.

I know, Grace, they can
only take off the
edge of pain,
but they will get better
as time heals the wounds
and the stumps
seal up properly,
the nurse says.

Another nurse comes
on my left and says:
there was a jam factory
got bombed last night
and some of the girls
who worked there
got horribly burnt
by hot boiling sugar and jams.

Yes, I heard,
the nurse on my right says.

I lie and sink into
a deep hole of self-pity,
listening to the talking
as they unwrap my bandages
and finger the stumps.

As they touch me,
I think of Clive,

that night he first
made love to me,
his kisses, and him
lying between my thighs
and me sensing him
within me and the bed
moving beneath us
as if on a vast sea of pleasure
and we on a small craft
moving up and down
and him kissing my lips
and ear and head.

Now he is dead.

The nurses touch my stumps,
then clean them and wash them
and bandage them up again,
all the time talking around me
of the jam factory blast
and girls burnt
and some dying,
and I lie here
gently crying.

Terry Collett

George Broken Minded 1917

They're out there
George said
peering out
the window
of his room.

Polly who had been
making his bed
looked over at him.

Who are George?
she said.

They think
I can't see them
but I do
creeping along there
by the trenches.

She came across
and stood beside him
and looked out
the window.

Cows moved
in the field
over the way
tails wagging slow.

They shot Briggs
right through the head
and he was beside me
one minute
he was talking
next gone
a hole through
his forehead.

They won't get me

like that
he said.

It'll be
all right George
just keep near me.

She held his arm
a cow moved
behind the hedge.

Back back
George said
and held her close
and away
from the window
his eyes large
and staring.

She kissed
his cheek
he turned
and gazed at her
his eyes
frightened looking.

They won't kill me
will they?

No George
not now
she said
holding him.

He stared ahead
his eyes watching
a moving cow.

Terry Collett

George Unsettled 1916

The nurse,
whom George's parents hired,
begins to settle him down
in his room,
after his parents and Polly
had left.

Where is she?
George says.

Where is whom?
the nurse asks.

Polly,
where is she?

The nurse is unsure
who Polly is,
so sits him
in a chair by the window,
which looks out
on the grounds and drive.

Is she your wife?
the nurse asks.

George looks at her:
I don't know,
maybe she is,
he says,
looking at the nurse puzzled:
who are you?

I am Nurse Willows,
sent you look after you,
she says.

Where's Polly?
he says.

I'll find out,
you relax and sit quiet,
the nurse says,
and leaves the room.

He stares out
of the window;
it is still,
no bombs are blowing up,
no bodies are out there
in trenches,
the trees are whole,
not splintered
and blown down.

He looks into the room:
Wilkes's head
lies on the floor
by the bed,
the eyes gazing
at him questioningly.

An explosion in his head
stirs him to jump
from the chair,
and run to the wall
where he stands shaking,
staring at the head.

Be careful Wilkes,
be careful,
he says.

He looks at his writing desk
large eyed,
a hand lies there,
palm upwards,
a finger bloodied
points towards him.

No no,

I can't,
he says.

He turns,
and the door opens,
and he shouts:
GET DOWN!
SNIPER.

The nurse and Polly
stare at him,
then go to him.

Calm down,
the nurse says.

Polly takes his hand
and holds it:
it's all right George,
no one
will harm you here.

He looks at her childlike:
Polly,
you are here.
he says,
and holds her
close to him.

The nurse looks
at them uncertain
what to say or do.

Has he a wife?
she asks.

No not yet,
Polly says,
looking at the nurse
over George's shoulder,
as he hugs her
tight to him.

The door opens
and George's mother
enters in:
what is the noise?

He is unsettled,
the nurse says,
and called for Polly,
so I got her
not knowing
who she was.

The mother goes
to George and Polly:
settle him Polly,
then get back
to your work.

Polly nods.

Come on,
George,
his mother says,
you are home now,
time to rest.

George looks
at his mother
over Polly's shoulder:
who are you?
he asks.

I'm Mama,
she says.

He looks at Polly:
is she?
he says.

Polly nods:
yes George,

she is,
Polly says.

George turns away
from his mother,
and stares at Wilkes's head
on the floor by the bed,
the eyes gazing at him.

Get Wilkes's head
off the floor,
it can't stay there,
George says
pointing by the bed,
unable to get
the eyes gazing, out
of his mind and head.

Terry Collett

George's Sniper 1917

George's silent
staring out
the window
his mother
watches him
as she stands
beside him.

She has sent
the maid out
below stairs
so that she
his mother
can have him
to herself.

What's out there?
She asks him.

There's snipers
he whispers.

She looks out
at the fields
and hedgerows
the tall oaks
swaying slow.

How many?
She asks him.

Where's my wife?
He asks her
looking up
with his eyes
hauntedly.

She's gone out
she replies.

There's danger
I told you
he mutters
the snipers.

She'll be back
pretty soon
she answers.

Polly stands
by the door
of the hall
looking out
at the drive.

She's been sent
from the room
leaving George
alone with
his mother.

Listen George
why don't you
come downstairs
for dinner
we have guests
his mother
says to him.

Where's Polly?
He asks her.

She'll be back
she answers
wishing her
son was well
that his nerves
weren't so bad.

There's one there
he shouts out

his finger
pointing out
at the hedgerow
get down low
he utters
ducking down
out of sight
pulling his
mother down
beside him.

His mother
looks at him
and then sighs
seeing tears
welling up
in his eyes.

Terry Collett

Geraldine's Bus Ride To Work

Geraldine rides the bus to work.
She sways side to side with the
motion of the bus, sitting in the
compact human zoo, faces, limbs,

bodies, eyes, mouths. The sky
outside is an early morning icy blue.
A man opposite stares, his eyes
moving over her, his hands in his

lap, fingers playing with each other.
His eyes settle on her legs, drink
them in. She feels as if he were
undressing her, taking each item of

clothing off one by one. His eyes
are dark, deep set. She stares back
at him, takes in his lips, parted, thick
and saliva sits there. Her thoughts

move to Holly and the night before,
the game they played, the role plays,
the pre-sex drama. The man shifts
in his seat, wrinkles his nose, moves

his eyes to her breasts. She looks away,
senses his eyes fondling her tits, his
imaginary fingers groping. Holly would
have said something to the creep opposite,

would have shown him up, but she
doesn't have that way with her, she sits
it out, pushing thoughts of him away,
focuses on Holly's tongue licking the

inside of her thighs, sensation electrifying.
The man looks away, no doubt to masturbate
in his dark mind with his imaginary fingers.
Geraldine lets the thoughts of Holly and

her deeds linger, sucks in the hotness,
the scents, the sighs, the smells. She stares
at the man. He looks at his hands, his fingernails.
There is dirt beneath the nails, black as soot

as if he'd rooted in dark soil. She looks away;
Holly has set her (with her deeds) to sexual boil.

Terry Collett

Get Him Wild 1955

Cogan compared
his fists with mine
his were larger
with scarred skin.

I compared his face
to an ape
he didn't smile
but stared at me
you want this?
he said showing me
his fist.

Not today
I have already eaten
I said by reply.

He smacked one fist
into the palm
of the other.

Any time you fancy
your chances
he said
I'll be waiting for you
after school.

He thumped
his palm again
and walked away.

I watched him go
never hit a person
with glasses on
my mother always said
but in Cogan case
I'd make an exception
if he bugged me to.

Helen had been watching
over by the wall
of the playground.

What did he want?
she asked
looking at me
through her
thick lens glasses.

We were comparing
fist sizes
I said.

Why do that?
she said.

He tried to throw
his weight about
but I wasn't having it
I said.

She looked scared
what if he waits
for you after school?

He's said that before
and he never waited
or showed
I replied.

But he might
this time
she said
biting her lower lip.

Don't worry about him
the big hunk
I've watched Roy Rogers
fight on the TV
I said.

What if he gets you
before you can get him
she said.

The bell rang
for the end of recess
so we walked back
into school
and up the stairs
to the classroom.

Cogan was sitting
at the back
staring at me
as I sat down.

I gave him a nod
as I turned around
and smiled
just to get him angry
and get him wild.

Terry Collett

Getting Late.

It's getting late, she said,
you should go back to
bed. Can't sleep, I said.
Haven't you taken the pill?

Doesn't work. Ought to
knock you out. It doesn't.
Maybe ought to get you
something stronger, she

said. I looked around her
small night office; outside
in the corridor the rooms
of men and woman sleeping,

unlike me. What did you want?
she asked. To talk. About what?
Going home, I said. Not yet.
When? When you are ready,

she said, turning a page of the
magazine she was reading.
When will that be? Up to the
doctor. But I want to go now.

She stared at me. Not yet give
it a few more weeks, she said.
I can't function here. Others do,
they get better and go home.

When can I see him? Who?
The quack, I said, getting annoyed.
Doctor is busy, but I will mention
when he comes in the morning

you wish to see him, she said.
She turned another page and
gazed at the article. I can't sleep
I stare at the room and hear

the old farts snoring, I said. Go
back to bed, and rest or you will
be tired in the morning, she said.
Who's the nurse who comes in

with blonde hair and sways her
ass like a sower of seeds? I said.
She looked at me. Why? She makes
my day, I said. How? Gives me

something to think about while
I'm locked here in this madhouse.
She looked at the page: go now
and try to sleep. Can I have a drink?

I asked. What did you want? Cocoa.
Will you promise me to go to bed
afterwards? On my own? Yes on
your own, she said. Yes I promise.

She got up and walked off to the
kitchen. I sat and gazed at the
wall, and at a photograph calendar
of the sea and a bird in flight; I
thought the flying bird was me.

Terry Collett

Getting Quite Late

Shall I tell you what
he tried to do? Well
now let me see in what
order it went. He took

me out, and it was some
show he said I'd like,
and it wasn't bad, but
I've seen better, and well

one has to accommodate
men sometimes, I mean
sometimes they can get
quite moody, but anyway

I went to this show, and
put on my happy face, and
let him see I was enjoying
myself, when really I was

bored out of my mind, but
nonetheless afterwards he
took me to this posh, and
I mean, posh restaurant,

and pulled out the chair
for me, and I sat, and he
sat, and then he gawked
at the menu, and a waiter

gave me one, and I gawked
too, and those prices, they
were high higher than my
mother's skirts, and he

looked at it like it was
nothing, and I wide-eyed
them looking for the least
expensive, and no Martha

he said pick what you want,
and I did, and so did he, and
after a short while it, meals
came, like first course, and

second course, and then third
course, after which I was
nigh full, and ready for my
bed to sleep, and then after

taking me home, he said: can
I have coffee? I said sure
come on up and in, and I guess
he took that to mean more

than was meant, and well
after five minutes, yes five
minutes, he was all over
me like a snowfall, a big

hairy snowfall, and I had
to put him right, and he
was not please, and anyway
after a minute or two fuming

he settled down, and had
his coffee straight, and then
said goodnight and went, after
all, it was getting quite late.

Terry Collett

Getting Ready

The hotel
was behind
Charing Cross

some back street
in some room
up some stairs

Nima says
it will do
the bed's old
I bet some
old queen slept
in this bed

and died here
I reply
lying down
on the bed

she lay down
beside me

that old dear
who gave me
this old key
gave me the
once over
as if she
understood
the reason
we are here
I tell her

course she does
I bet she's
outside now
listening
for the bed

to begin
making noise
Nima says

I get up
and turn on
the gas fire

then undress
watching her
by the one
small window
already
without clothes

her tight butt
her slim waist
visible
to my eyes
feasting them

my pecker
preparing
for the job
that's ahead
in the old
black metal
double bed.

Terry Collett

Gillian's Mood Swing 1969

Gillian came into
the laundry room
of the old folks home.

She leaned
against the door
and looked at you.

Why are they
talking about us
having an affair?
she said.

Are they?
you said.

Yes I heard
a rumour
and one
of the old dears
said she'd heard
from one of the carers
Gillian said
with an angry tone.

You emptied
the tumble-dry
of some of
the old men's clothes
and folded them up neat.

Why would
they say that?
she said.

No idea
you said.

She gazed at you.

You looked at her
tall slim frame
and dark long hair
tied in a ponytail.

If my husband
found out
it could
mean trouble
she said.

Well it is nothing
to do with me
you said.

But it is
Gillian said
moving towards you
it is you and me
they are talking about
us having an affair.

It's a lie
you said.

I know that
you know that
but my husband
will think there is
and he will be moody
thinking it true
and he'll say
there is no smoke
without fire.

She fiddled
with her
thin fingers.

What are we
going to do?

You looked at her
do?
what can we do?
you said.

Well you tell them
there is nothing
going on
she said.

You sighed
will they
believe me?
you said.

They have to
she said.

The door opened
and Winnie came in
she smiled.
Busy?
she said.

A bit
you said
George wants a bath
and I have to bath
Sidney too.

I can help
with Sidney
if you want
Winnie said.

They'd be good
you said.

Winnie looked at Gillian
who was emptying
the washing machine.

You all right Gillian?
Winnie said.

Yes I suppose so
Gillian said
and went red.

She took
the basket of washing
out the back door
to the washing line.

What's up with her?
Winnie said.

No idea
must be
a woman thing
you said
wondering
what Gillian
would be like
in bed.

Terry Collett

Girl In The Green Raincoat

Each evening she got
off the bus and crossed

the forecourt of the gas
station where you worked

wearing her knee length
raincoat and made her way

into the small shop inside
and you stood there open

mouthed gazing at her hot
beauty at her black hair and

dark eyes and she said I want
20 of those cigarettes and

she pointed with her thin
finger and red nail to cigarettes

behind you and you turned
around and took down the

cigarettes pack and put them
on the counter and she took

coins out of her black purse
and placed them one by one

on the counter top and said
There that's just right and then

off she went no more words
just a wiggle of her ass and you

watched her go out of the door
and along by the forecourt of

the gas station and you sighed
and sniffed the air to capture her

perfume and held on to the sight
of her and placed it in your memory

like some rich guy putting some
precious gem in his vault and you

would sense that memory of her
wiggling ass like some fresh fish caught.

Terry Collett

Girl With Lost Name.

You remembered
the girl
not her name
but Ward

the kid next to you
in the science class
caught sight
of the girls

through the window
off across
the sports field
in their yellow tops

and green
short
P.E. skirts
and said

in hushed voice
look at that
all that girl flesh
and me stuck here

being brain soddened
by this science guff
when I could be out
with the girls

you saw her
out there
with skip rope
rushing after others

the sun warm
the sky hazy
the science teacher
sprouting off

about something boring
and Ward
his eyes
supping it all in

through the glass
the sports teacher
following
in her adult

blue top
and white P.E skirt
with whistle
between lips

and the girl
had been swallowed up
into the mass
of yellows

and greens
and legs
and arms
and the glass

of the classroom
like a huge
picture frame
holding for the eyes

the girls
in yellow and green
and the girl
with the lost name.

Terry Collett

Give The Game Away 1965

Tilly was making a pot of tea
in the kitchen,
her mother sat opposite me
in an armchair.

How is your work?
She said, gazing at me
with her stern eyes.

Fine mostly,
I said.

Her face showed no emotion;
Tilly has a good job,
and if she makes her way,
she could be shop manager,
Tilly's mother said.

That's good,
I said,
looking past her
towards the kitchen door,
hoping Tilly would soon return,
and save me
from this integration.

Girls these days
do not seem to value virginity
as they did when I was young,
the mother said,
they wear clothes too short,
and reveal too much.

(I wondered if she knew
about Tilly and me
or was she just fishing) .

I guess so,
I said,

looking back at her
sitting there,
knees tight together,
and face like granite.

A girl's virginity is her prize
to take to her wedding night,
and her husband,
not to be frittered away
at the first opportunity,
the mother said.

I looked at her features,
and wondered how
she managed to lose
hers at all.

Does your mother
trust you while you
are out with young girls?
She added,
looking at me sternly.

Of course she does;
she knows I would treat
a girl with respect.

(If the girl wanted it
however I would oblige.)

That is good to know,
the mother said,
raising an eyebrow,
knitting her fingers together
on her knees,
forming a finger church.

Tilly came into the lounge,
and set the tray of teapot,
cups, sugar bowl, milk jug,
and spoons on a small table,
and sat next to me.

Have I missed anything?
Tilly said.

I hope not,
her mother said,
I was talking to Benedict
about virginity,
and how girls
should treasure it,
and not squander it.

Tilly went red,
and looked at the tray.

I hoped that would not
give the game away.

Terry Collett

Glimpse Of Beauty

Humphrey sees the dame going
by the door as he's booking in at
the hotel, for the moment she
seems frozen there as if the gods
had wanted him to get a glimpse

of beauty before she moved on
and back into her life far from his.
He stands there gazing, his eyes
taking in each aspect of her shine:
the hat the shoes, the two piece suit,

the plenty of leg and best of all her
face and the way she was looking
at him. A posh car is waiting outside
the lobby, she stands there her eyes
drinking him in, he ignores the booking

clerk who is talking to him, what is
the jerk on about when he has beauty
just outside standing and staring, maybe
waiting for him, waiting for him to go
to her and converse. It's New York City

1920 and there she is, his Helen of Troy,
she who no doubt could sink a few ships
or break a heart or two, but what to do?
He stands and stares, his mind in a haze,
she moving off and into the car, no time

to think or wave, she's gone, the car away
along the street, lost in the sea of traffic,
he senses a tear in his heart, an opening
up, a lost chance, beauty fled. The booking
clerk talks, his words like rainfall on a tin

roof, his gormless gaze. Humphrey looks
at the face of the clerk, his dark eyes like
small black pits, Yes, that room will do,

Humphrey says, taking the key, wanting it
over, his day kind of blessed and spoiled,

beauty come and gone, a chance not taken,
a mind messed up, a heart near broken.

Terry Collett

Glimpse Of Lover

You saw Christina
and a few

of her giggling
school friends

in one
of the school corridors

in between
maths and biology

she
looked at you

her eyes shy
and yet searching

and her friends
unnoticing

how feelings moved
or what

was inwardly touched
some electric shock

pulsed through you
stood hair on end

or so it seemed
she in her green skirt

and white blouse
and ankle socks

with sight of flesh
as she moved

and you
in your dull grey

and black shoes
seeking to take

what image
of her

you could
to your dreams

to hold at night
and not a word

there was spent
or exchanged

or feelings unloaded
or spread

except whatever raced
like some runner

in your head
and she

in hers no doubt
wondering afterwards

what this love
bringing together

and separating
was all about.

Terry Collett

God In Us Mcmlxxi

Dei in nobis,

5am bell from cloister
woke from slumbers
to dim light
of dawn's kiss,

Dom James said
he missed his cigarettes
and would roll up
a leaf and pretend
to no real end,

the cloister garth
haunting in 5.30am light
as I walked
by the low wall
seeing the dark green
and first birdsong,

she slid my finger
upon her valley of Eve
and said this
could be yours
if you wish
and I wished,

for at all times
we must so serve Him
with the good things
He has given us
that he may not
Benedict said,

the peasant French monk
pondered the tall grass
needing the cut
from his scythe
and spat on his palms

and rubbed together,

senza Dio non
siamo nulla
the Italian monk said
lighting the candles
in the church before Mass,

I watched the dawn light
above the bell tower
like an angel
spreading bright wings,

take me from the rear
she said enter me
with passion before
my husband's return,

Dom Joe(dear Bunny) spoke
of God's mercy
in his soft tones
his rubbery lips
projecting the words
with a gentle finality,

Gottes Liebe
ist unermesslich
the Austrian monk said
as he helped me
pick apples
from the abbey orchard
before the office
of None,

good people
need not laws
to inform them
to act responsibly
while bad people
seek a way around
the laws Gareth said
quoting Plato

as we sat on the beach
by the abbey grounds
after lunch,

I closed the large
latin breviary
with a slow slam
and dust erupted
in the air,

dawn's bright light
over the cloister wall,

bells tolled
from the abbey
pulled by George and me
echoing outward
like ripples
from the stone cast
into the nearby sea.

Terry Collett

Goes Glug Glug 1997

Nuala
has to bath
and wash off

Una's scent
and love juice
see just where

the love bites
(a light brown)
are on skin

she sits down
in the hot
foamed water

lets it soak
into her
about her

Brian's in
the bedroom
in their bed

patiently
waiting there
wanting sex

he feels it
bubbling up
seeing it

in his mind
the sex scene
her body

beneath him
him surging
into her

Nuala
imagines
it's Una

in the bed
waiting there
butt naked

her thick thatch
welcoming
but it's not

it's Brian
laying there
thinking up

some sex games
to be played
she's been bad

naughty girl
he will say
as master

and will smack
her behind
in his game

Brian reads
an old book
of cowboys

and Wild West
wanting her
in the bed

in the dark
Nuala
pulls the plug

listens as

the water
goes glug glug.

Terry Collett

Gone To Skip And Play.

Woolgar peered
through the wire mesh
at the girl's playground
can see that girl you like

down there
he said
you walked
to the wire mesh

and stared through
see her?
he said
no can't see her

there over by
that fat girl
with the blue
ribboned hair

you stared harder
they keep moving about
you said
she's there

he said
poking his finger
through mesh
her with the dark hair

you peered
at where his finger poked
Jane was by the fence
playing jump rope

with two other girls
yes I see her now
you said
what's she like?

Woolgar said
like?
you said
what do you mean like?

Woolgar sniggered
and gazed stupidly
through the mesh
you know

does she kiss
and such
and what's it like?
that's for me to know

and you to guess
you said
some say
girl's lips

are like peaches
Woolgar said
or that they kiss
all wet and warm

you watched Jane
move the rope
around and around
with some other girl

while one other
jump high and laughed
does she have breasts?
Woolgar asked

peering like
some peeping Tom
or is she flat as board?
Or don't you know?

he asked

looking round at you
his eyes brown
and round

and aping dung
what's it to you Woolgar?
you still suck
your mother's dugs

or so I've heard
you said
seeing Jane
play skip rope

once again
you leave my mother
out of this
he said

rubbing his fingers
going red
walking off
muttering

and moaning
turning round
and fingering
you turned

to gaze at Jane
once more
but the skipping girls
had gone away

to some other place
to skip and play.

Terry Collett

Gone To Sleep 1962

Yehudit took me
through the woods
behind the cottage
where I lived
with my family.

It was a warm morning
birds sang
pheasants raced
across the track
in front of us.

We came to a pond
surrounded by bushes
and trees.

I call this my lake
she said.

It was a peaceful place
and no one was about
except us.

Do you come
here often?
I said.

Now and then
for peace and quiet
she said
sit down
the grass is dry.

So we sat
on the grass
and looked
at the pond.

A few ducks

swam there
and dragonflies
hoovered over
the water.

I felt a tingle
being so close to her.

Do you bring
many boys here?
I said.

No you are the first
she said
why did you ask that?

Just wondered
I said.

Wondered what
that I am some sort
of whore?
she said
staring at me.

No I meant that it
might be a place
of peace to bring
other boys to
I said.

And why would I
bring other boys here?
she said.

Silly of me
to say that
I said.

She looked away
from me.

You are the first boy
I have brought here
because I like you
more than any boy
I have met
she said.

We sat in silence
for a few minutes.

I like you very much
I said
watching a swan
descend onto the water.

How much?
she said
turning to look at me.

I kissed her
before she could
say another word.

That much
I said.

She sat
gazing at me.

She grabbed me
and kissed me
and we fell back
on the grass
and kissed more.

Then we lay there
side by side
holding hands
breathing deep.

The whole world
seemed to have

closed it eyes
and gone to sleep.

Terry Collett

Good Book Mcmlxxi

Dom Frederick
talked of his book
on the old abbey
as we cleared weeds
from the abbey garden,

hyacintho caelum
et album nubes,

summer sun on the heads
and hoes in our hands,

a single sunbeam
is enough to drive away
many shadows said Francis,

there she lay
and welcoming me in
and so I lay with her,

amplius lava me
ab iniquitate mea
et a peccato meo
munda me,

Hugh sat in the novice's room
glum faced and turning
a pencil between fingers
talking of Dom George
and his knitting,

touching the rough bricks
of the cloister wall with fingers
as I passed by
on my way to the church,

dans l'amour de Dieu
nous sommes sauvés
the French monk said

as he showed me
how to lay
the priestly garments,

fingers on smooth cloth
silk soft as her flesh,

a broken spirit
is the true sacrifice
Dom Charles said
quoting a psalm
as he breathed on an apple
and then polished it
on a cloth,

no matter how thin
you slice it
there will always be
two sides Gareth said
quoting Spinoza
talking of his student days,

fiducia a Dio
the Italian monk said
and he sliced an apple
for us both to taste,

enter me slowly
she said
my husband is far away
he will never know,

His glory covers the heavens
and the stars were His gems
and the moon his medallion,

George said we we sat
in the gardens for repose
I cannot stay here
much longer
the nights are too cold
and my bones complain,

Dom Robert spoke
of butterflies and said
the Red Admiral was his favourite
and he showed me
as it fluttered by
in the cloister garth,

His spirit breathes
and the waters flow
the Good Book
Hugh said
says so.

Terry Collett

Good Deed Done.

The old woman
was lying

on the path
from her

ground floor flat
along Harper Road

when you and Helen
walked by

on your way
from the shop

with your penny drinks
you both ran to her

and she said she'd fallen
so Helen

ran across
to the surgery

on the other side
of the road

while you knelt
by the woman

placing your
short sleeved pullover

under her head
you're a good boy

she said
but you'll have blood on it now

don't matter
you said

you stroked her head
and pushed

her grey hair
out of her white blue eyes

when Helen returned
with a doctor

he examined
the old woman

and said
he had called

an ambulance
Helen stood

next to you
her eyes tearful

her hand
touching yours

the woman said
thank you both

I don't know
what I'd have done

if you hadn't come along
it's the least we could do

Helen said
you waited

until the ambulance came
and took her away

and disappeared
off along Harper Road

look at your pullover
Helen said

it's got blood on it
don't matter

gives it colour
you replied

anyway Mum'll wash it out
she gazed at you

through her thick lens
her eyes awash

with tears
her small hand

still in yours
the path

from the old lady's flat
had a small stain

of dark red
where blood had seeped

where she'd laid her head
a bit like an abstract

pavement artist's work
you said

the white stone canvas
with that touch of red.

Terry Collett

Good Friday And More

Good Friday. Dark purple over
All the statues. Grimstock stares
At windows coloured glass light
Shines through. Kim Keltis on his
Right dressed in black mind in prayer
Standing there. Crucified on a brass
Crucifix a Christ hangs the eyes
Closed arms stretched out the hands
Nailed. Grimstock's eyes lower down
To the slim waist of Kim and lets
Eyes move over firm buttocks fleshy
Thighs her dark dress caressing.
Unaware of his eyes her eyes closed
Holds to prayer talks to God confident
God is there not knowing Grimstock's
Stare. Grimstock's eyes like feelers
Reach and touch suck and feed in mind's
Eye greedily the prayer book in his hands
Clutched tightly becomes part of the girl's
Fleshy thighs becomes this becomes that
His dark eyes moving up rest upon her
Brushed hair. Kim standing still in prayer
Not aware Grimstock's there with finger
From forehead to her breast from shoulder
To shoulder makes soft sign of the cross
Imagines her own sweet Crucified hangs
For her in pain there Sweet Jesus she mutters
Like eased breath. Grimstock dreams she's
Undressed beside him in his bed making
Love passionate utterings sexual soft touches.
Kim opens her dark eyes sees Grimstock's
Greedy stare travelling over her standing
There his rough eyes like fingers touching
Her ravishing her soft flesh raping her in his
Mind and knowing that deep down that this
Man pushes hard onto her Jesus' thorny crown.

Terry Collett

Good Trip

It was a good trip or maybe
It was a dream she couldn't
Quite tell it seemed all sensibility
Was pretty much muddled and
Her last realistic memory was
Hodgson giving her a drink and
Then things just seemed to dissolve
Into a swirl of images and sounds
And feelings of falling and being
Lifted up and put down and some
Clown trying to do things to her
Which her mother had said was
Not the thing that good girls did or
Let be done to them and a thought
Pushed itself through her mind
And poked at her and she saw her
Brother drowned in the bath with
His thin wrists slit and his few paintings
Left behind hung on the wall of his
Room and inside her as she lay someplace
The unfolding vision of his distraught face.

Terry Collett

Goodbye Ingrid 1958

Ingrid's mum
was arrested last night
for bottling her husband
outside the pub
the other week
and leaving him
to bleed to death.

It was news
buzzing through
the Square
like a bees' nest
over turned.

Mum told me
this morning.

What's happened
to Ingrid?
I said.

Gone to live
with her big sister
and her boyfriend
in Kent I heard,
Mum said.

What a to do,
I said.

Poor Ingrid
a double tragedy.

Her mum'll hang
for that I expect,
Mum said.

I went up
to her flat,

but it was shut up
and a copper
was outside
on the balcony
giving me
the dark-eyed stare,
so I went away
from there.

Don't suppose
I'll see her again,
I mused walking down
the concrete stairs
of the flats
and out into the Square
with its dull damp air.

Be all around
at school.

Kids gossiping,
saying horrible things,
saying: didn't like
her anyway,
she smelt a bit,
had fleas,
never had
clean clothes.

I liked her
and will miss her,
I said to myself,
coming back to our flat
with the crusty bread rolls
Mum had asked me
to get from across
Rockingham street.

Some people
you never miss,
some you miss
all the time.

Ingrid's the latter.

The buzz was till
in the Square.

Just others yakking;
they don't matter.

Terry Collett

Goodbye Night

Where will
that leave us?

Dark room
bed unmade
curtains closed
radio from a far room
Chopin stuff

is this it?
no more us?

Smell of bodies
two cups
with coffee dregs
standing on
the bedside cabinets

did she do
better than I?

that time in Paris
when we first
made love

a moth large and brown
flew in the window
in the night

it was just
the once

sex stains lie
on the bed sheet

this is
the end of us

the Chopin ends

voices speak
in an undertone

I love you

lips touch skin
of a shoulder

a Mozart piece begins
on the radio
in that far room

there can be
no us

birds sing outside
the window

where will
it leave us?

Indentation
on both pillows
fair hairs lay

forget?
forgive?

She draws the curtains
light enters
he stands beside her

again shall we?

A man walks
the pavement
a cyclist rides by

room in light
day has come
goodbye night.

Got Himself Killed 1940

My total
independence
has gone.

I can't see
where I 'm going,
my blind eyes
fail me.

I can't walk anywhere
as my leg stumps
prevent that.

I can't even do
the usual things
I used to do:
like urinate
or other.

Just dependant
on the nurses
to come
and deal with me,
and the things
that need doing.

I lie
in the bed
waiting,
listening to voices,
hearing bedpans
being taken by,
wheelchairs
needing oiling
being pushed past
the foot
of my bed.

I habitually go

to scratch a foot
that's not there
because it itches.

I go to get up
to go somewhere,
and I realise
I have no legs
to get there.

I call out
and wait
and a nurse
comes and says,
what is it Grace?

I want to get up
and dressed
and go out
in the sunshine
not be stuck
here all day.
I say.

We will be
with you
in a minute,
we had a rush on
last night
the German's bombed
the docks
and quite a few
were injured
and were brought here.

She goes
and I am left
here in the dark.

I think of Clive
that night
he brought

me home
from the dance,
and I asked him
to stay the night.

It was the day
before he was due
to join the army,
and I said,
it could be
our last time
for ages,
so he stayed,
and we went to bed
and made love
as never before,
and it was
the last time.

And that moment
after he left,
I felt so alive
so fulfilled.

Then went
and got
himself killed.

Terry Collett

Got Wild 1974

Dalya bought a burger
at the burger joint,
bought a beer
at the camp bar.

Sat on one
of the benches,
ate the burger.

Benny sat opposite,
ate his hot dog,
sipped his beer.

They'd been
into Stockholm,
saw the sights,
ate at some cafe
that did good meals.

Rock music churned out
over the loudspeakers,
ACDC stuff.

What you doing after?
She said.

There's a disco over
by the shower block,
he said.

Don't fancy it,
she said.

Where's the Yank girl?
He asked.

She's off
with the Aussie
in the City.

My tent or yours?
Benny said.

Makes no different,
she said.

If they come back
too soon we're screwed.

She ate,
eyed him.

He sipped,
eyed her.

Her knees touched his
under the bench.

Won't be back
in awhile,
she said.

The ACDC ended.

Crowd noise.

Beer stink.

Burger smell.

Led Zeppelin
music started.

After we can,
she said.

My tent is best,
she added.

He nodded,
smiled.

Music got louder,
got wild.

Terry Collett

Grace Reflects 1940

Philip came to see me
this afternoon.

I was outside
in the afternoon sunshine.

I felt it's warmth on me
I didn't expect him to come
I expect nothing
these days.

It all seems the same
in this darkness.

I don't know
what he looks like
a nurse said
he is good looking.

My blind eyes
focus only
where I hear him.

He held my hand
and kissed my cheek.

He lit me a cigarette
and we sat in silence
for awhile smoking.

When we did talk
it was on matters of me
getting artificial legs
and where he'd like
to take me.

All I could think about
was Clive and how
we made love

that last time.

Now he's dead
and I'm here
blind and legless.

For some reason
out of the blue
I whispered to Philip
make love to me
when we can
and he said
when we can.

I don't know why
I had said that
I suppose I wanted
to see if he would
even if I had no legs
and no sight
he would want to
and he had said
when we can.

I imagine
nothing now
not that
or having
those legs
to walk with
but in a bed
being made love to.

The ward is quiet now
the other patients sleep
just me here alone
wanting a future
of sorts
but not now
that will keep.

Grace's Dumb Stare 1940

I am lifted
by two nurses;
(I hear them
talk to each other)
and stare at each in turn
with my blind eyes,
hoping they won't
drop me.

They lay me
on a trolley,
and then push me
on the trolley past others,
and voices and sounds
coming and going.

Where are we going?
I ask.

To see Doctor Quinn,
he wants to see
how the leg stumps
are healing,
a nurse says
close to me.

How are my stumps?
I ask.

They seem to be
healing quite well,
a nurse says,
but the doctor wants
to see for himself.

I lie quiet after that
and we enter
a warmer room,
and I grab sounds

as I pass
trying to make
a picture in my mind
about where we are.

We come to a standstill,
and a man's voice says:
ah, Miss Meadows,
I am Doctor Quinn,
I am here to examine
your leg stumps
to see how
they are healing.

I say nothing;
I just nod my head,
and wait.

I sense his fingers
unwrap the bandages,
and I feel his fingers
near my skin;
he removes the bandages,
and fresh air
hits my skin.

Yes they look fine,
he says,
his fingers touch me,
lifts the stumps
one after the other:
I think we can soon
decide about maybe
artificial legs.

Artificial legs?
I say,
imagining
god knows what.

You will need
to learn how

to walk again
in a sense of course,
he says,
but it will come
and we will have you
on your feet again
I am sure,
he says,
but it will be a time
as there is a huge demand
at the moment
in wartime for them
as you can appreciate,
he adds,
not giving me a chance
to speak.

Right nurse
re-bandage
fresh bandages,
and keep
the stumps clean.

He goes
and I lie there
thinking and looking
into darkness
with a dumb stare.

Terry Collett

Grace's Just Awake Head 1940

I remember
it was after
the night dancing
and my legs ached

and we came back
Clive and I to my house
and after a few drinks
we went to bed

and I recall how alive
he made me feel
and I can distinctly
sense him entering me

and o it was so hot
and now it's dark
and my legs ache
and someone

is rubbing them
and I know it is morning
by the rush and bustle
and I am on

the hospital bed
and I'm blind
and my leg stumps
are being rubbed

by someone
a nurse
but why do I feel
so alive?

but I can't see
and feel only
half me
and I can't hold

Clive again as he died
in Dunkirk
and I sense the hands
rubbing my stumps

and the hands are soft
and the darkness
has an encroaching feel
and I want to be

and love still
but am here stuck
on this bed
with countless dreams

and thoughts
in my just awake head.

Terry Collett

Grace's Lost Soul 1940

I hear birds singing
and feel the warm sun
on my uplifted face,

I have been wheeled
into the grounds
of the hospital
I hear voices of others
I cannot see
my blind eyes turn
in the direction of sound,

I still have Philip's words
about marriage in my ears
and it unsettles me
as we hardly
know each other
and I without sight or legs
would be a burden on him
and I do not want his pity
although he says it is love,

I have told no one
about his proposal
it seems too unsettling
to talk about it yet
but I sit here
and look into darkness
and feel empty inside
as if I have opened a door
and blackness entered into me
and I feel lost,

I am dependant on others
on things which others
cope with on their own
and when they will and can
while I have to be taken places
and lifted or carried

to the toilet or bath,

I hear someone talk
as they pass by
another replies
far off the hum
of traffic
and a nearby laugh.

Terry Collett

Grace's New Horizons 1941

A lot has happened
in the last two months:
I have two news legs
a new maid
(thanks to Guy and Joan)
and a new cheque book.

Philip took me shopping
with the new maid(Iris)
and Iris helped me
choose the clothes
(with coupons)
as I cannot see
(but I trust
her judgement) .

I have left
the hospital
and am living
in a small place
(with Iris)
in Chelsea.

Philip comes most days
and we have dinner
(a simple affair)
and either he sits
and reads to me
I haven't learnt
Braille yet)
or we sit
and listen to music.

Once he has gone
(I dread him going)
Iris helps me undress
and I go to bed.

Iris has a room

next to mine
so she can hear me
if I fall from bed
or need her
during the night
(call of nature) .

Clive still haunts me
his death was a cruel blow
but Philip has proposed
and we will marry in June
(all being well
and Hitler has not invaded) .

I lay here on the bed
staring into darkness
listening to the birds
singing from the garden.

Iris is running me a bath
it won't be easy
but Iris said
we can manage it
and I expect we will.

I miss Clive
and my legs
and sight still.

Terry Collett

Grace's New Life 1941

I walked on
my new legs
up the aisle,
Guy beside me
to give me away.

Joan and Iris behind
holding the dress.

Philip was at the top
of the church
waiting for me.

It seemed strange
walking the aisle,
unable to see the flowers
with my blind eyes,
but smelling them
as I walked.

Guy stood me
next to Philip;
I sensed him beside me.

The priest began speaking
and I listened
to his every word.

I couldn't believe
I was getting married.

I could hear others
in the church in the pews
shuffling or whispering.

Last year
I never thought life
would be worth living again
after losing my sight and legs

in the bombing raid.

I had wished
I could have died,
but now I have legs again,
and Philip,
and a new maid Iris.

I stood there
staring forward
as if I could see everything.

We exchanged vows
and we kissed.

We were husband and wife
and I have new legs
and a new life.

Terry Collett

Grace's Thoughts 1940

I am lying in the hospital bed,
and it is morning, (I heard the
birds begin to sing awhile ago)
and lie here with eyes closed

(I'm blind) so can pretend to be
asleep, and two females stop
at the foot of my bed(nurses
I presume) . What happened to

her? a voice asks. Her house took
a direct hit in the recent bombing;
they found her in the rubble
with two shattered legs, which

they had to amputate above the
knees, and she's lost her sight,
the other voice replies. O poor
dear, the other says. Yes her maid

died in the bombing, but this
young woman survived, the
second one says, they call her
Amazing Grace. Will she survive?

the first voice asks. O yes she's
a survivor. The voices move away
down the ward, and I lie here,
and open my eyes, and gaze at

the darkness. I feel down as far
as I can with my fingers, and can
just reach where the bandaged
stumps begin. I do this every

morning to make sure they're
for real, and that I haven't dreamed
it, but the pain tells me it's real;
the ache, the itch of toes not there.

I lie here, and think of Clive, and
how we made love that last time,
and I had given the maid the night
off, and it was the last time because

he went with his regiment, and
was killed at Dunkirk; but that
last time we made love was so
brilliant, so utterly wonderful.

Now I may never make love again;
be left an old maid with no legs
and blind, and some days it occupies
my thoughts in my youthful mind.

Terry Collett

Grace's Visitors 1940

I am in a wheelchair on grass
outside the hospital

I hear birds sing and distant traffic
I stare into the darkness
trying to fathom my blindness

my toes feel itchy even though
my legs have gone
and the stumps well bandaged

hello Grace
a voice says from my right side

Anthony?
I say
is it you?

yes Grace it is
he says

I sense him near me
I reach out to touch him
he takes my hand

Donald said you were coming
I say

did he?
Anthony says

I hear someone else come
and place something
on the grass nearby

this is Philip
Anthony says

hello

a voice says
a hand take my mine and shakes it
how are you?
Philip says

rather lost
I say

any news about your eyes?
Anthony asks

they think I will always be blind
I say

o so sorry
Anthony says

I hear them sit down
and whisper things I cannot fathom

look Grace I'll be honest with you
if Donald told you
I was thinking of marrying you
then he got the wrong end
of the stick
Anthony says

I look toward the voice
and stare at darkness

I see but as you yourself
never told me about marriage
then it doesn't matter
I say
(Donald said Anthony said
he was going to ask
but I say nothing)
who would want
a blind legless woman
for wife anyway?
I say more bitterly
than I intended

it's not that
Anthony says
it would be out of pity not love
he says
I mean not the love
necessary to handle such
he adds

Clive may have done
but he's dead
I say
killed at Dunkirk

there is silence
I look away from the voice
and look downward

maybe you will find
that someone
Anthony says
after a few moments of silence

maybe I will
I say

a hand touches mine
I'm sure you will
Philip's voice says

and are you the expert
on finding matches
for blind legless women?
I say coldly

look Grace I must go
make a telephone call
Anthony says
and he goes off

it is quiet for a moment or two
how would you like

to go out for a meal somewhere?
Philip says to my left

like this?

no in a dress
and with make up
he says

who would want me
in their restaurant like this?
I say

I know a place where
we would be welcome
he says softly

and you would want me
like this there?

have you a dress and make up?
he asks

no my house was bombed
I lost everything including
legs and sight
I say with a sigh

maybe I can buy you a dress and clothes
if you tell me your size?

I have no coupons
everything has gone
I say

I can arrange that
I work for the Foreign Office
he says

why would you want to?
I say

I admire your courage
he says

I look toward the voice
I tell him my size and other things
then sit quiet looking
into the darkness again

Anthony returns and sits and says
look sorry about the short visit
but I've got an urgent message
must go
he says and he kisses my cheek
and goes again

I'll do what I can Philip says
and he kisses my hand and goes

I am left alone
with bird song
and itchy toes
which are not there
and I sit
and sigh and stare.

Terry Collett

Grace's Whys 1940

How was
St James' Park,
Grace?
A nurse asks me
as I sit
in a wheelchair
by my bed.

I turn my blind eyes
towards her:
good to go out
and smell
and hear
London out
of this ward,
I say.

She tucks in
the blanket around
my bandaged leg stumps.

You look better now,
the sun has caught you,
she says,
anything
I can get you?

New legs and eyes?
I say.

Eyes not possible,
but legs maybe
once your stumps
have healed
there is a good chance,
she replies.

I sense her
near me.

Sorry if I am
in a mood,
I say,
I think that man Philip
is trying to propose
or something like it
and I'm not ready
for that now.

She touches
my hand:
give it time
there are more
difficult times ahead
to worry about
than that,
she says.

She goes:
I hear her shoes
on the floor
going away from me.

I sense tears
in my eyes;
I stare into darkness.

Why would he
want me?

What future would he
have with me now?

Not pity
I couldn't have
someone marry
out of pity,
I mutter to myself.

I reach down
and touch my leg stumps

with my fingers
to make sure
they are still there
and I haven't
grown legs
or maybe it is
a dream or nightmare.

They are there
and the reality
of the legs gone
thumps my breast,
my heart.

I grab the sides
of the wheelchair
and bang them
with my hands
and break down
and cry
and say
why?
why?
why?

Terry Collett

Granddad And Jean Harlow.

Granddad said he saw
Jean Harlow once
While making deliveries

to the studio lot
and there she was
he said

real hot
just there
and looking my way

and I was struck dumb
my lips stiffened
my eyes were glued

and as she walked by
there was that glint
of unhappiness

that caught my eye
and I wanted
to reach out

a hand and touch
the goddess
of my dreams

but then she was gone
and the delivery made
I made my way

out of the lot
the truck heading
for the gates

the whole panoramic view
behind me
and she

Jean Harlow
back there somewhere
waiting for the next shot

and there was me
leaving that slice
of hell or heaven

the fantasy lot
and Granddad
sitting by the fire

his gaze elsewhere
maybe thinking
of Harlow

just beyond
his sad stare
some where.

Terry Collett

Granddad's Candy

Granddad offered candy
from a white paper bag
and you slowly took one

and put in your mouth
and the strong peppermint flavour
exploded on your tongue

as Granddad closed his eyes
and sank back
into his chair by the fire

and he said
if you go outside
to the john

be careful of the mutt
who sleeps there
and the spiders

which hang around
waiting for little boys
and look out

for the fairies
at the bottom of the garden
hidden amongst weeds

and you nodded
as you always did
and tried to swallow the candy

as fast as you could
and Granddad said
look over by the side

and pass me
the cigarettes and lighter
and don't let

your grandmother see
or she'll moan about me
and my breathing

and my heart
and you looked over the side
and picked up

his cigarettes and lighter
and brought them to him
and Gran said

from the kitchen
he's not smoking
those cigarettes again is he?

And you said
looking at Granddad
hiding them behind his back

no Gran he's just sucking
on a candy and he's given me
one to suck and one to keep

and Granddad had his eyes
closed still
pretending to be asleep.

Terry Collett

Granddad's Room Of Treasures.

Granddad had a front room
full of treasures

to your child's eyes
from paintings of Madonnas

or other holies
to bowls of fruit

filling the room
with that applely smell

and vases
of all colours

and shapes
and only opened up

when Gran opened
the door on the way through

to the lounge
where your granddad sat

or when you managed
to steal a moment alone

while the elders
where busy

you opened the door
and gazed around

the room like
an Aladdin's cave

the statues of spaniel dogs
or wiry cats

your ears listening
for the voices of the others

from the lower part
of the house

waiting in the doorway
your eyes wide

taking it all in
right down

to the smell of fruit
that filled the room

the half light
the dark shade

where another world
seemed to begin or end

until on hearing
your parent's voice

or Granddad's call
echoing along the hall.

Terry Collett

Granddad's Statue Of Boy And Dog.

There was
on the sideboard
in your granddad's house
a small statue

of a boy and dog
and you used
to stand and stare
at it each time you visited

the house on Sunday afternoons
running your finger
over the outline
as if to make the boy move

or the dog bark
but they never did
and each time
you hoped they would

and Gran said
mind you don't
knock it over Benedict
it's one of your granddad's

prized possessions
he bought it off a man
in the market
some years ago

and you stood
with your finger poised
a few inches away
eager to feel

the cold china once more
the smoothness
on the finger's skin
your eyes searching

each aspect
of the boy
the way he had
his hands

the dog looking up
expectantly
the boy looking down
affectionately

Granddad's dog
was not a bit like that
it was grey and old
and was kept

in the back garden
in a kennel
where it would
bark or whine

and Gran said
shut up Major
you've been fed
and sometimes

you'd go out
in the garden
and stroke its fur
or pat its head

its dull eyes
looking at you
disinterestedly
but the boy

in the statue
had an exciting dog
which probably
wagged its tail

and licked

its young master
although not
when you

were gazing
on Sunday afternoons
and your mother said
don't knock it off

the sideboard
or there'll be hell to pay
you said
Ok

and wandered into
the warm
but cluttered lounge
where Granddad sat

in the huge armchair
in his grey flannel trousers
grey cardigan
and thinning grey hair

and you sat still
while the parents
and grandparents talked
your eyes scanning

the photographs
on ledges and surfaces
faces you knew
and some you didn't

small statues of dogs
or a girl with fruit
or boy playing
a silent flute

or aged paintings
of country scenes
of hills or fields

or rivers and streams

but it was the statue
of the boy and dog
that filled your head
and night time dreams.

Terry Collett

Greater Love 1963

And Magdalene had taken
down the crucifix above
her parents' bed and dusted
it off with a yellow duster

and got the cobwebs off and
looked at the Christ nailed
there through hands and feet
and a crown of metal thorns

about his plaster head and she
remembered how Martha her
school friend had a fixation
with the Crucified as she called

him and once took a crucifix
to bed with her because she
wanted to be a bride of Christ
and her mother had told her off

for it she took the Christ over to
the window to see better in the
daylight and the Christ looked
old as if it had been around many

centuries she blew over it blowing
away minute particles she carried
it back climbed on to the bed and
put it back settled it straight then

stood there and bounced on her
parents' double bed a little she
wished she could bring Mary on
it wished they could make love in

it that would be a thrill the thought
that it was her parents' bed and they
might be home at anytime and be
caught she climbed off the bed

carrying the thought with her the
Christ looked down at the bed
hanging there how great a love it
must be to have your son nailed

there and still have the ability to
love mankind she mused something
she herself would not have or refused.

Terry Collett

Grey Saturday 1955

Helen and Benny
walked over the bomb site
off of Meadow Row.

It was early
Saturday morning
and they were going
to the morning matinee
at the ABC cinema.

My doll Battered Betty's arm
has broken off,
she said.

How comes?
Benny said.

My brother swung it round
and it broke off,
she said.

Can't your dad mend it?
Benny said.

He said will look at it;
I hope he can;
Betty's my best doll ever
and I have had it since
I was little,
she said.

They came off
the bomb site
and stood on the kerb
watching traffic
going past.

Should have gone
to the crossing,

Helen said,
be quicker.

So they walked up
to the crossing,
and stood there,
and the traffic stopped
and they walked across
to the other side,
and walked past
the fish and chip shop.

I went there last night
with my old man,
Benny said,
after we'd been
to the cinema
to see a Western film.

You get out more
than I do,
Betty said,
I haven't been
to the cinema
except for matinees
for ages.

Maybe next time
I go with my old man
I can ask
if you can come,
Benny said.

O that would be good,
Benny,
if my parents
allow me to,
Helen said.

They got to the cinema
and there was a long queue
of kids,

so they joined it
and waited.

The traffic passed by,
and a dull greyness hung
in the morning sky.

KI

Terry Collett

Grief Talk 1997

Nuala lies beside Una
in the small bed
in her bedsit

they had just had sex
and were
lying there smoking

my Ma died
Una says
I got a letter
this morning

o sorry
Nuala says
turning to look at Una
when?

last weekend

couldn't they
have said before this?
Nuala asks

no one talks with me
it was a friend
who wrote to me
and said
Una says

were you close
to your mother?
Nuala asks

no she shut me out
once she found out
I was gay
Una says

how did she died?

cancer like my Da
both heavy smokers
Una says
stubbing out
the cigarette
in the ashtray
by the bed

Nuala takes a quick puff
of her cigarette
and stubs it out
in the same ashtray
leaning across Una

they kiss
then Nuala lies back
beside her again
and hugs her
when's the funeral?

I don't know
can't go anyway
too much trouble
from the others
Una says

that's sad not going
to your ma's funeral

that's how it is
Una says

what was your mother's
last words to you?

go to hell
and she walked out
on me and slammed the door
and I left
Una says

maybe she'd forgiven you
at the end?
Nuala says

no Ma never forgot
nor forgave
she'd not do that

there is silence
birds sing from outside
hum of passing traffic

I'd best go
Brian will be wondering
where I am
Nuala says
she kisses Una's breast
and gets up
and dresses

Una watches
wishes she could stay
and comfort longer

she watches as Nuala
brushes her hair
and stares back at her
in the dressing table mirror
and mouths a kiss
to her lying in bed
and Una keeps it
captured in her hand
and to places it
in her head.

Terry Collett

Growing Up Before Time

You stood outside
the ABC cinema
with Helen looking
at the framed photographs

of the stills
from the film
then showing
she clutching her doll

Battered Betty
you standing there
pointing out
the main characters

my old man said
he'd take me
to see this
on Saturday

you said
Helen rocked Betty
in her arms
I hope our child

doesn't call you
old man
she said
maybe he won't

you replied
it might be a she
Helen said
sure it might

you said
you gave Betty a look
as she hung there
in Helen's arms

you looked back
at the photo stills
putting your hands
in the pockets

of your jeans
maybe
you can take me
to the cinema

when we are older
Helen said
and we can sit
at the back

like those grown ups do
and kiss
you sensed her hand
touch your arm

and rub it up
and down
Betty moving
as Helen's arm moved

sure
you said
long as I can still see
the movie

Helen handed you Betty
and you took
your hands out
of your pockets

and held her gingerly
like she might go
crap on you
and Helen put

a hand in her pocket

and pulled out
a few coins
I might have enough

here for some fries
she said
ok
you replied

and you walked
beside Helen
along the New Kent Road
to the Neptune's fish shop

holding Battered Betty
carefully against
your cowboy shirt
the one your mother

bought you
for your birthday
the year before
Helen talked

of children's names
and you thought
of the Wild West
and cowboy games.

Terry Collett

Gunfight At The Bomb Site 1955

Helen climbed
the concrete stairs
to Benny's flat
where his mother answered

and Helen said
is Benny home?
no he's out Helen
his mother said

out where?
Helen said
he went out
with his six-shooter

and cowboy hat
so he's maybe
on a bomb site
try the one

up Meadow Row
he's often there
his mother said
Helen nodded

and said thank you
and walked down the stairs
and across the Square
and down the slope

across Rockingham Street
and up along Meadow Row
she'd not brought
her doll Battered Betty

as her brother
had torn off an arm in play
and it needed mending
when she came

to the greengrocer shop
on Arch Street
she walked along
to view the bomb site

and putting a hand
over her eyebrows
to block out the morning sun
she gazed at the huge bomb site

anxiously (she didn't like
bomb sites alone)
she saw him over
by the railway bridge

firing his six-shooter
at an imaginary enemy
she called out to him
and walked across

the rough ground
of the bomb site
towards him
he stopped firing

and put his six-shooter
away in an holster
with a twirl of fingers
been looking for you

she said
your mum said
you might be here
Benny pushed back

his cowboy hat
to the back of his head
his quiff of hair
standing up

had a gunfight planned here

so had to leave early
he said
gunfight

she said
with who?
she looked around
at invisible enemies

Frank and Jessie James
he said
and their gang of course
she looked in the direction

he pointed and nodded
need any help from me?
she said
looking at Benny

through her thick lens spectacles
no I shot them both
and the gang fled
he said

did you get shot?
she asked
only in the arm
he said

pointing at his left arm
she looked at his 7 year old arm
but didn't see
a wound or blood

but pretended
looks bad
she said
maybe I should put

an handkerchief around it
ok if you like
he said

she fiddled in her skirt pocket

and brought out
a small girl's handkerchief
and tied it around his arm
and tied a knot

is that better?
she said
yes it is
he said

didn't want to bleed to death
no
she said
and they walked off

across the bomb site
let's go to Baldwin's
the herbalist shop
and get some sarsaparilla

to make more blood
he said
and she looked at his arm
and saw imaginary blood all red.

Terry Collett

Guys And Dolls 1977

The guys lounge in chairs
in the worker's canteen
smoking and chatting
and swearing
ogling page 3 girls,

I read
Spinoza's Ethics
Deus in omnibus,

two girls from
the upstairs office
enter to use
the drink machine
slim dames
one blonde
one brunette
ignore the guys
as they fathom
the machine's guide,

Dio in tutte le cose
I read not gazing
at the dames
but smelling
the scents of them
alluring,

hey Sheila
how was it
last night?
You give him
some huh?

Said girl
looks daggers
pulls a face
looks away,

I turn a page
then look up
capture nearest
girl's fruits
then back to Spinoza
eyes on the page,

guess she did
Lewis says
others guffaw
eyeing the two dames
wanting to paw,

ignore them
they're just too rude
the other dame says
waiting for the drink cup
to fall,

The world would be happier
if men had the same
capacity to be silent
that they have to speak
Spinoza wrote I read,

the girls depart
with their drinks
nice ass
you've got you two
Kev says smiling
watching them disappear
with guffaws and a cheer,

I close the book
their scent remains
lingering in the air
as if in a dream
they're still there.

Terry Collett

Guy's Mother After School 1962

Guy took me
home with him
after school.

Hot summer day.

His dad would
drive me home
that night
he said.

I'd never been
to his house before
so it was a surprise
to see his mother
in the lounge
in a loose blue dress
dark brown hair
and dark eyes
that focused on me
as soon as I entered.

This is Benedict
Guy said.

His mother smiled
and said
hello nice
to meet you
in a soft sexy voice.

Guy said
take a seat
I'll be back
after I've changed
out of my uniform.

I sat down
in an armchair.

Would you
like something?
his mother asked
leaning forward
on the sofa where
she was sitting.

A coke
would be nice
I said.

She got up
from the sofa
and walked
into the kitchen
through a side door.

I heard
the fridge open
and glasses rattle.

She came back
with coke in a glass.

Why not sit here?
she said
patting the sofa
beside her.

I walked over
with the glass of coke
and sat next to her.

She oozed perfume
and her eyes
searched me.

How is school?
she said.

It's ok

I said
you know studying
writing and reading.

She looked past me
at the lounge door.

Guy has never
mentioned
you before
Benedict
she said
in a whispering voice.

I sipped the coke
and looked past her
at the window behind.

Trees and flowerbeds
and a wide green lawn
caught my eye.

You must stay
one weekend
she said
I am sure Guy
would like that.

Yes I 'd like that,
I said
looking at her
taking in her
small breasts
and narrow nose
and her red lips
slightly open.

I'm sure we could
entertain you
she said.

She took

my hand
in hers.

I flushed hot
and went red.

Terry Collett

Had Never Been.

You managed to bum
enough money
out of your old man
to take Janice

to the cinema
in Camberwell Green
didn't your father mind?
Janice asked

no
you said
but he had queried
why the old biddy

couldn't afford
to give her
granddaughter money
when he was strapped

for cash himself
but you had given him
your lost puppy eyes look
and he gave you

the money and got on
his bus to work
no he didn't mind at all
you said

as you both waited
for the bus
on the New Kent Road
she wore her green

patterned dress
and red beret
her brown sandals
and white socks

you were in jeans
and white tee shirt
Gran said to be near you
all the time

because there are
some strange men
out and about
Janice said

like that one
who touched you
in the cinema
the other week

she added
yes the creep
you said
I told the female usher

and she soon rooted
him out of there
with a flea in his ear
then the bus came

and you both got on
and sat on
the side seats
and you paid

the bus conductor
the fares
and the bus went off
and you swayed

side to side
with the motion
of the bus
and some middle aged guy

opposite you

gave Janice the eye
through his thick
lens spectacles

lowering his gaze
to her knees
the tip of his tongue
sliding across

his lower lip
Janice looked away
you stared
at the guy

giving him
your Robert Mitchum glare
and he lowered his eyes
then looked away

mumbling
under his breath
then got off
at the next stop

and you fingered him
on his way
at Camberwell Green
you both got off the bus

but she never spoke
about the guy
and his creepy gaze
but took your hand

and you both walked
to the fleapit cinema
where you paid
and went in

to the big screen
and noise
and coloured film

blazing out

at you both
as you took
your seats
her hand

still holding yours
her eyes gazing
at the screen
as if the guy on the bus

and his stare
had never been.

Terry Collett

Hair Brushing And Love Wanting

The combing of the hair
the brushing
the hand holding the strands
brushing her hair

Coco wishes
it was her hair
wants to feel more
than hair

wanting to feel full stop
to enter in
to hold
to kiss

to take
each inch of skin
and lick
and o gods of wherever

is this love?
such overwhelmingness
such emptying
and the hair held

the fingers
letting run through
the sensation
the breath held

the breathing paused
love o love o love
and then
there is this

that wanting
to be with
wanting
to have and kiss

and the brushing of hair
and eyes taking in
each aspect
from each angle

and she is speaking
and Coco hears
but doesn't
listens but the words

are slippery as eels
and are gone
but there
allusive

just out of reach
and the neck
and the skin
and that space

her eyes settle on
and that bath time
that watching
as one does

that drying of another
as one is paid to do
but more
o love wants more

not once
not twice or thrice
but forever
if such there is

for this young miss
for Coco
to have and hold
and deeply kiss.

Half Ended

And it ended there
he had said
but had it
ended then?

How was you
to know it had?

How do you know
he's not having it off
with another?

All thoughts of this
engage your mind
as he sleeps
beside you
his back turned
naked in the heat of night.

His odour
a compound
of sweat
and aftershave
and god knows
what else or who elses
perfume is wrapped
up in him
as he sleeps soundly.

Dreaming of her
whosoever she is
the silly cow.

But is it ended
as he said?

Or is there
some other tart?

Some bit on the side
as they say
him giving her some
but not to you.

You he lets lie
and mutters things
but says he's tired
and overworked
and sleeps
mild snores.

All ended
he said
my big mistake.

You want to
hit his head
or stab him red
until he's dead.

But half of you
wants him alive
shagging you
to heaven in bed.

Terry Collett

Half Living Half Dead 1916

The nurse
has left the room;
Polly tucks
George into bed,
settling him down.

Quieter now
after the shouting
and disturbance earlier.

He had been convinced
Quigly was out
in No Man's Land:
out there
he had said,
pointing over
the grounds at dusk,
moonlight
making shadows.

I'll send help for him,
Polly had said.

Don't loose
more men on that,
George had shouted.

His parents came out
rushing onto the verandah
to see what
the fuss was about.

The nurse had tried
to quieten George,
unsuccessfully.

Laughter from guests
in the house
brought George to tears.

Quigly's bought it,
George had moaned.

His eyes were large
and staring out
at the grounds
where stars
had glimmered.

Polly had managed
to get him back
in the house;
the nurse following behind,
eyeing them both.

George lies
with eyes closed.
Polly leans over him.

She wishes he was
as he was before the War
and his time at the Front
and the mental breakdown.

He'd have had her
in his bed by now,
and have humped her
to joy and back.

Now he lies silent,
eyes shut.

She leans down
and kisses his forehead.

Him back
from the Front
half living,
half dead.

Hammer And Tongs 1975

Natanya and Jack
were going at it
hammer and tongs.

You sat there
in the armchair
trying to be diplomatic
but failing.

Jack ex cop
old boy now
stared at her:
if you weren't woman
I'd knock you flat
he said.

Ain't scared of you
you old fart
she said
standing over him
in her five foot frame.

You lit up
a cigarette
and said:
we are getting
too fraught
we need to sit
and be silent awhile
and get ourselves
in a meditative mood.

Jack gazed at you:
if you two
want to go
you can
I don't need you.

Right we'll

fucking go then
she said.

No wait
you said
sit down Natanya
have a smoke.

She sat down
and lit up
and stared at you
then Jack.

He sat back down
in his chair.

After a few minutes
he said:
did I ever tell you
about the time
in the Smoke
when I was
on traffic duty
when this woman
comes up to me
and says:
I've done a murder
murdered who?
I said
my old man
she says
so I had to take her
to the cop shop
and got her to repeat it.

What happened to her?
Natanya said
releasing a stream of smoke.

Hanged I expect
poor mare
Jack said.

Natanya looked at you
and said:
I came close
to topping
my old man
until you came along
now he can rot.

You smiled.

She did not.

Terry Collett

Hand In Hand 1963

Martha flinched,
but didn't cry
as the wooden ruler

hit the palm
of her hand;
to her

it was as if the nails
were once again
being nailed

into palm
of the Crucified;
the pain

was His gift
to her,
a sharing

of His pain.
Sister Rose,
who to Martha

had witch-like features,
brought the ruler
down with

determined effort
and gazed at her.
The sting

of the pain
vibrated along
her held out arm

and Martha's eyes
were fixed
on the area above

the witch's head
as if maybe
an angel

would appear
and nod
the Crucified's

approval
and all was watery
and out of focus.

Tu enim, Domine
Deus meus,
Martha muttered

under her breath,
musing through
the sting,

the Crucified's death.
Other hand,
Sister Rose said,

indicating
with a nod
of her habited head.

Martha raised
her other hand,
palm upwards,

put her wounded palm
by her side
seemingly on fire.

The witch
brought down
the ruler

on the open palm,

eyes bright
as an hawk's,

the same intent
to harm or kill
it seemed.

Martha wondered,
as the explosion
hit flesh

whether
the Crucified
would forgive

the penguin's
merciless hammering.
She supposed

He would
as was His wont,
but to her

the nun
was a fecking
cant.

Terry Collett

Hand Of Fate 1963

Mary forks
in meat
from the pie
her mother'd made

her father is looking
at the letter
that arrived
from the school

her mother pours gravy
onto her plate

what's this about
you and that
Magdalene Murphy girl
being seen
in the bogs together
by the sisters?
He says stern featured
mouth open

we were talking

talking in
the fecking bog together?

The bog stalls
were all full up
apart from one
and so we went in together

and did what?
He says
staring at her
his blue eyes
sharp as pencils

talking just that

Mary says
her fork hanging
in her hand
in mid-air

so why go into
the bogs to talk
why not outside
in the playground
why the fecking bogs?

She looks at her mother
who looks away
as if she'd remembered
something important

thought it'd be
more private
for us to talk
Mary says

and you did
no business?
He says

business?
Da it's a fecking bog
not a shop
she replies

and one of the nuns
saw you there?
He says

she's always gawking
in the bogs
I think she has
a secret urge
Mary says

I won't have you
saying things

about the good sisters
he says

Mary eats the meat
on her fork
sorry didn't mean
to cast aspersion thingys
about them
she says
anxious he'd not
belt her one
eating as fast
as she can in case

he stares at her
if I hear about you
and the Murphy girl again
and stuff like this
I'll tan her arse
to the colour
of her Ma's jumper
you understand?

She nods
and swallows
yes I won't or we won't
she says
gazing at him
and watching his hand

no more of that
with her
he adds
he folds the letter
back in the envelope
and forks up
a piece of meat
and chews and looks
at his wife

Mary looks
at her plate

and the hand of fate.

Terry Collett

Hangover Day 1972

Abela
sits at the
round table

in our cheap
hotel lounge
I sit there

opposite
eyeing her
she has a

hangover
she told me
like her head's

been kicked in
like her guts
have been deep

invaded by
kids at play
a young Serb

waitress comes
and serves us
good morning

she utters
hopefully
I reply

Abela
gazes at
the menu

Benedict
you order
I can't get

my mind to
focus on
the black words

I order
for us both
and the Serb

waitress goes
and I think
how lovely

her bottom
sways away
in the black

shiny skirt
Abela
stares at me

did we make
love last night?
not in bed

only in
my sore head
I reply

did I sing?
yes you did
sang Mozart

arias
in between
throwing up

was I good?
don't think our
neighbours liked

your cursing

and swearing
and one finger

gesturing
I reply
I guess I

was bad huh?
she utters
never mind

I tell her
it was a
case of the

blind leading
the darn blind.

Terry Collett

Hannah And Tower Bridge 1960

I knocked at Hannah's door
her mother opened it
and I asked if Hannah was in
she looked at me as if

I'd suggested something impolite
Hannah th' boy's haur
she bellowed over her shoulder
I took in her fiery eyes and turbaned head

her dark hair tucked away beneath
Hannah came to the door
where shall we go
she asked

so I can tell Maw?
What about Bermondsey docks
I can show you my school
then see Tower Bridge?

We're gonnae see Tower Brig
Hannah said to her mother
awe rite be cannie
her mother replied

so we walked off from her flat
and got a bus to Bermondsey
(my mother had given me coins
she was a kind soul)

sitting together in the front
watching the scenes go by
nothing spectacular
just London sights

and people passing
and vehicles going by
we held hands
moving to the motion

of the bus
her hand was warm
our fingers entwined
once we arrived

I showed her my school
(she went to a girls' school
nearer to home
her mother insisting no boys)

it looks a bit Dickensian
Hannah said
it is and even the teachers
are old as grime

she laughed and we walked on
to see Tower Bridge
and walked across to the other side
then had pop drinks in a small cafe

and shared a slice of cake
and sat and talked
I don't think your mother likes me
I said

o she doesn't like males full stop
not just you Benedict
men ur blecht
she tells me and my dad

what's that mean?
I asked her
means men are a blight
like a disease

she laughed
and sipped her tea
I sipped mine
smiling away

hoping that she

(like her mother
Mrs Scot)
never included me.

Terry Collett

Happening 1961

Greenfield said
where you from?

London you replied
I don't like Londoners

he said as a bee
buzzed in the greenhouse

where the rural science teacher
Gable had sent you.

Greenfield pushed you
against the potting bench

and you pushed him
against begonia plants

which fell to the floor
and he punched

your arm
and you punched

his jaw
and he grabbed you

around the waist
and you both

fell to the floor.
You smelt his sweat

and saw blood
drip from his lips.

Get up you gits
another boy said

Old Gable's coming
and so you pulled

Greenfield up
by the hand

and he brushed off
your school jacket

and you pushed
your fingers

through your hair
and he wiped blood

from his lips
and in came Gable

and said
what's happening here?

And why are the begonias
on the floor?

My fault you said
I knocked them

with my elbow
and Greenfield

was going to
pick them up

when he banged his jaw
on the bench by accident.

Gable glared
at you both

and said
well bloody well

pick them up
and clean up the mess

and left.
Greenfield held

his handkerchief
to his lip.

You picked up
the begonias

one by one
and put them

on the bench.
Greenfield put them

tidy and neat
and kicked

the spilt earth
under the bench

with his feet.
Gable's a toss

Greenfield said
and put out

his hand for
you to shake.

You shook his hand
and smiled

and he laughed
and said

I guess Londoners
aren't all bad

and the bee buzzed
out the open window

and you watched it go
and was glad.

Terry Collett

Harsh Fall Of Rain 1940

The nurses
must think I'm asleep
because my eyes are closed
but my blind eyes

can see nothing
whether open or closed
I lie thinking
about how I danced

with Clive back in 1939
what will happen
to Grace now?
one nurse says

talking nearby
her leg stumps
are healing now
but whether she'll walk again

depends how she copes
another nurse says
no sight either
how does she

make out that?
the first nurse says
she's still pretty though
no scars or facial damage

and that gentleman
who visited her
wants to take her
out to dinner when

she is more able
I lie still
pretend I am sleeping
wanting to hear more

my leg stumps throb
and my none
existent feet itch
and I want

to scratched them
but lie still
trying to act
a sleeping beauty

waiting for my prince
to come
her house was bombed
but she was pulled

out alive but her maid
was killed
the nurse says
breaking into my act

the feet itching
the stumps throbbing
my eyes wanting
to see again

the nurses move away
outside
hitting windows
a harsh fall of rain.

Terry Collett

Has And Can 1916

If she hadn't
seen George
with her own eyes
she would not
have thought him
the same man.

The young man
she had seen in the car
at the front of the house
seemed a broken man,
shaking in limbs,
eyes wide and dull,
hair unkempt
and cut short,
uttering words almost
incomprehensible.

She had been there
behind Dudman the butler
and Lady Elmore,
looking past them,
seeing and yet unbelieving,
unable to help
until at the last moment
when she helped Dudman
and Lady Elmore
walk him up the steps
to the house
and to his room.

He had not
looked at her,
even when
she was right
beside him,
holding his arm,
the same arm
which once held her

and squeezed her
when he was home
on leave last time.

Now as she washes dishes
in the kitchen sink,
hands in suds,
her thoughts are on him,
his look,
his hands shaking,
his words rambling.

Mrs Gripe the cook
talks behind her,
her words lost
across the space,
like a noise
in the distance.

Last time George
was here he and she
made love in his bed
at night if he
wished her to
and she would sneak
along and into
his warm cosy bed
away from her
rattling bed in the attic
with Susie
the other maid.

Now what?
she muses,
scrubbing the dishes,
hands soaked,
fingers reddening.

As she helped
bring him upstairs
her eyes were filled
with tears,

as she aided him
into his bed
she wanted
to climb in
with him
and hold him
and love him,
but she left with Dudman
leaving Lady Elmore
alone with him.

A broken man,
she muses,
war has done
what it has
and can.

Terry Collett

Has His Measure

Sister Cecilia fingers the beads.
The wood hard between finger
And thumb. The Christ has been
Rubbed smooth by years of prayer.
Shines like a new coin. Her feet ache
With cold. The fingers work their magic.
Her lips move to the rhythm of words
Carried on breath. She carries her
Christ in her breast close to her heart
His picture in the black and red book
In a pocket of her habit of black cloth.
She knows He follows her and listens
To her words and thoughts and watches
Her deeds done in darkness and light
In coldness and heat in cloister and chapel.
For weeks on end she feels His absence
Like a lover gone from sight on some
Distant voyage over rough sea or far off
Lands in search of some other treasure.
But she loves Him still her constant lover
And knows His worth and has His measure.

Terry Collett

Hating Saturday

Christine hated Saturdays
on the locked ward
the day her fiancé

jilted her at the altar
the organ music playing
in the background

the flowers
the aisle carpeted
with that pattern

she will always remember
and as you saw her
across the way

looking out the window
you saw Eric the day kid
who was brought in

while his mother worked
was aggravating her
was poking her

in the back
and you saw red
and went and pushed him away

and that brought the male nurses over
and they stood between you both
and Eric glared at you

and the big nurse said
what's going on here?
and Eric said

it's him he pushed me
and Christine said
Eric was poking me

and Benedict was just
keeping him away
well calm down now

the fat nurse said
keep it cool
and so you and Christine

walked to another window
and peered out
at the snow

and she said
the creep
as if we haven't enough

to cope with without
that creep aggravating us
but thanks anyway

for keeping him away
and you said
that's ok

he gets to me too
I'll bop him
one of these days

when the nurses
aren't looking
and she smiled

and said
let me know when
I wouldn't want

to miss that
and you looked out
at the falling snow

that was settling

on the fields
and tree tops

and far off
you saw a tractor
moving over the ground

and seagulls were following behind
and she said
quite picturesque isn't it?

Yes
you said
kind of Christmas cardy

yes
she said
taking your hand

I wonder if we'll be
out of here before then?
and you felt kind of numb

as if maybe the whole world
had gone black
and the snow fell

and you squeezed
her hand sensing
the warm flesh

and her thumb rubbed
against yours
and behind you

the unlocking
and locking
of doors.

Terry Collett

Have Cried

Martha stands
in the church
by the font

where babies
are baptised
she looks up

at the roof
then slowly
moves her head

downward to
the Crucified
old plaster

wooden cross
painted in
wound in side

plaster nails
in curled hands
and crossed feet

and painted
plaster piece
as the cloth

around His
centrepiece
(private parts

Mary said
not that He
used it mind)

Martha sighs
walks nearer
stands beneath

and looks up
and wonders
what she'd do

had she been
at the foot
of the cross

at the time
(Mary said
do feck all

like the rest
and just stare
and pretend

you weren't there)
Martha puts
her hand up

her fingers
touching Him
on His feet

(cold plaster)
then kissing
her fingers

(other hand)
places them
on His shins

and rubs them
maybe I'd
have done that

to the Christ
if those fecks
the Romans

had let me

she mutters
very soft

to the high
Crucified
His hands out

at each side
or would she
she wonders

just have cried.

Terry Collett

Having A Ball 1975

Mrs Reed said
get us a hotel
so I got us a hotel

and it was
a cheap place
but it was in London

and near to where
the action was
and the theatres

and shows and bars
and restaurants
and so we got there

and the old dame said
make sure you leave
the bed open when

you're done next morning
ok
I said

and so we went up
the creaky stairs
to the room

and opened the door
and it was dull
and cheap

and had a small bathroom
off the room
with an old bath

and two brass taps
marked H and C
so we undressed

she quicker than I
I was shy
anyway she lay there

while I undressed
and she said
if my husband

could see me now
he'd think twice
about going with those

other women
he'd think twice
having those girls

in the back of his car
I undressed and got
into bed beside her

and she said
I've slept with only
two men in my life

and you're the third
you don't mind do you?
she said

no
I replied
as long as I don't

have to sleep with them too
and she laughed
and the bed shook

and then we got down to it
and I remembered
her husband smiling at me

at the house when

I came around that Christmas
for presents for all

him not
knowing then
I was having a ball.

Terry Collett

Having Patsy 1980

The train is moving as far
from Sheila as fast it can;
her image still stuck in my mind;
her there on the platform
saying she found it hard to cope
when I wasn't there
and how long
will you be, Eric?
she said,
as long as the job requires,
I said,
hoping the train
would soon come
and when it did I jumped
on board as soon
as the train stopped.

Now she is miles away,
walking back home,
head down,
crying no doubt,
one of her heads
coming on.

In Paris I'll meet Patsy
and we'll settle in the hotel
and get down to sex
almost straight away;
last month it was in Bournemouth
in some seedy hotel.

Ring me,
Sheila said,
when you get there;
just to hear your voice.

I said,
of course I will,
I always do;

even that time
in Bournemouth
when I was in bed with Patsy
ringing her with Patsy
naked beside me,
laying there making
faces at me,
me trying hard
not to laugh.

Eric,
Sheila said on the platform,
I will miss you tonight,
got to sleep on my own,
hope the children
don't play up
as they often do
when you're away.

The train rushes past stations,
past trees, fields,
houses and I look
around the train carriage
at the other passengers
and wonder where they
are going and if they too
are hiding or have
secrets like me.

Whether the woman opposite
who is mouthing words
to herself is quite right
in the head.

I look away
at the passing view,
trying to keep Sheila
out of my head
and look forward
to having Patsy
in Paris
in the bed.

Terry Collett

Hazel On The Edge

Dunne watches as Hazel unpins her hair.
She can see her facial expression in the
Dressing table mirror. I usually do that,
Dunne says. I thought you'd like a break
From being my maid, Hazel replies, catching
Dunne's eyes. Dunne fiddles with her fingers,
Stares back at her mistress's reflection. She
Notices Hazel's smile. I feel useless if I don't
Do anything, Dunne says. Hazel turns around
And says, you are never useless to me. They
Look at each other as if time had stopped.
Hazel seems on the edge of a chasm. She
Wants to put her arms around Dunne and
Draw her close to her. She just stands feeling
A falling sensation. Dunne looks away and says,
Did you want me to prepare a bath for you?
Hazel breathes in slowly. Calm, she tells herself.
Dunne goes to the window to peer out onto
The Parisian street below. Hazel moves up
Behind Dunne. She looks at Dunne's hair,
The slope of shoulders, the smell of scent
She'd given her. Yes, Hazel says, a bath would
Be welcome after such a busy day sightseeing.
Dunne turns and smiles. Hazel is on the brink
Of putting out a hand to touch Dunne's cheek.
She holds her hands by her side. Dunne moves
Off and out of the room to prepare a bath in
The bathroom next door. Hazel sighs. So close.
So near. She holds onto the scent of Dunne.
She senses things fall away: prejudices, class,
Manners, mores; feels her emotions flood her
Mind. Love, all love, Father used to say, is blind.

Terry Collett

He Beyond Reach.

Benedict wasn't
in school that day
Christina heard
and the whole day

to get through
without him
to see or talk with
at lunch recess

on the field
she sat through
double maths
in a daze

of boredom
catching sight
of some boys
on the sports field

warming up
for sports
in their shorts
and tops

but it was of no thrill
for her
without Benedict
being out there

running about
with his legs bare
she sat all through
biology writing down

words from the board
into her book
without interest
or care

sneaking a peak
at the photo of him
in her writing case
the one he gave her

for the one she
gave him
the other day
she mused

crossing the T's
and dotting the i's
they'd gone
onto the sports field

after lunch
during recess
walked about
away from the boys

kicking ball
or the girls
sitting in groups
laughing

and chatting
up near the fence
beside the wood
they stood

he talking
of some actress
who'd died
or committed suicide

and she taking in
his neck
the open shirt
the tie undone

his bare skin

sensing unknown things
feelings awaking
and she listened

and stood near
his hand inches
to hers
and she talked

of her mother
and the moans
about this and that
and wanting stockings

but her mother saying
no you're too young
and how she sneaked
into her mother's room

and tried some on
and he smiled
and took her hand
feeling her fingers

between his thumb
and finger
pressing gently
and she looked

about her
turned and kissed him
her lips on his
his words lost

his fingers pressing
along her back
but now she sat
gazing at the girl in front

whose dark brown hair
was woven neatly
in a plait

resting on her sharp

white collar
and green knitted jumper
if only Benedict
was here

she thought
hands beneath the desk
touching
fingers holding

knees pressing
against each
but that was all a dream
and he beyond reach.

Terry Collett

He Did Those Things

He did that,
smoke rings,
made them,

Lizzy said,
opening her lips
to allow smoke to rise

and closed her lips again
and watched
as the smoke rose.

Grey and white smoke.
Rising towards the ceiling,
twirling as if magic.

He did that.
He cocky git
could do many things.

When he wanted
he could do bad things.
He did it.

Times gone;
him gone.
That time he came

and she said
o show Lizzy
how you make

smoke rings.
He did.
She laughed.

She'd laugh at anything
he did.
Her latest bit

on the side.
Her need of them.
Secrets came

and secrets kept.
Hush hush finger
to his plump lips stuff.

That card trick.
Magic she said.
Magic isn't it, Lizzy?

Not so.
Some where,
some place

the card had to go.
Lizzy made more
smokes rings.

He did
those things.

Terry Collett

He Is Dead Mcmlxxi

I went for an early morning shower
thinking the bell
in the abbey clock tower
had struck four
but after the shower
it tolled again four times
and I had got up too early
and so went back
to bed until five,

tempus et tempus,

the French monk weeded
the beds in the garden
his broad back bent
almost in two
I spoke but he looked
at me with his peasant eyes
and smiled,

take me from the rear she said
so I did and she said
her husband didn't understand
neither did I,

man is justified by faith
without the deeds of the law
said saint Paul
I read it in that Bible
I'd bought in my home town,

bell tower so tall
and we rang the bells
to learn the way it was done
release the ropes
or you'll go to the top
Dom James said smiling,

amare Dio ed essere salvati

the Italian monk said
as we worked in the sacristy
before Sext and lunch,

the reader in the refectory
read about Bloody Mary
he read in a monotone voice
his voice alone in the air
and we just sat there,

the higher one is placed
the more humbly one should walk
Gareth said quoting Cicero,

Dieu voit dans le cœur
the French monk told me
he was old and came over
from a French abbey in exile,

we made love as she wanted
to be loved her husband
was on a long trip with his lorry
and wouldn't be back until late,

loqui ad vos Deus scit
a monk said and George
who Latin told me
what he had said
while waiting
for Vespers to begin,

the huge table napkins
we wore during mealtimes
could have covered a bed
which made George smile
as we tucked them
around our necks,

fühlen Gott hier
a German monk said
pointing to his chest
then to his tonsured head,

that old monk Dom James told us
whom we helped last week
is no more
he is dead.

Terry Collett

He Is Not Dead.

Lauds,
the walk from cell
to cloister,

light of the divine sun,
birdsong from trees,
wind's gallop,

interior prayer,
the inner discourse,
hard put to do so.

With God nothing
is impossible,
?confidence in faith,

Dom Leo had said,
trust, faith.
I saw her lay there,

arms wide,
invitingly warm,
I placed my fingers

into the stoup,
made the cross over breast
and entered.

Smell of incense,
soft movement of monks,
light through high windows,

God is light,
the old peasant monk
had said humbly

walking from the woods
of the abbey,
and I had kissed

each breast in turn,
lipped, mouthed,
narrow road to God,

narrow the road
and rock to God,
indeed,

Dom Joseph had told,
that time on the beach
with Gareth and George.

I handled the prayer book
with care,
opened a page,

fingered down.
Finger here,
she said,

opening wide,
a bell rang,
tolled loudly,

the abbot tapped wood,
silence within,
hush the thoughts,

Deus,
in adiutórium
meum inténde,

my lips are opened,
see this,
she said,

Dómine,
ad adiuvándum
me festína,

God lives,

I mused,
he is not dead.

Terry Collett

He Never Did

Danny Cogan said
he was going to smash

your face in
after school,

but he never did,
it was just one

of his frequent threats
he dished out

to kids smaller
than himself;

You guessed
he didn't have

the patience to wait
or maybe

he didn't have it in him
to go through

with the threat
of punishment after all.

Then one day
he was taken off

by some weird guy
to the beach

and the cops
were searching for him

and his mother
was distraught

thinking the worse,
imaging him

dead some place,
buried in some woods

or damp ditch
or left on the beach

to be taken out
by the tide,

to the sea
and eaten by fishes,

but he wasn't,
the guy was caught

and Danny found
sitting on the beach,

eating an ice-cream,
looking out to sea,

untouched and unharmed,
thankfully.

Terry Collett

He Ok.

My son Nat
was in hospital
having had

an operation
late that night
I rang in
the hospital ward
how's my son?

I gave out his name
he OK
the nurse said

orientally
is that all?
I asked her
can I speak
with him now?

he asleep
he OK
she replied

she sounding just like
a Confucian monk
with a high pitched voice
how did the op go?
does he feel all right?

he orwight
she replied
is that all

you want know?
I hung up
I couldn't
be polite
and say anymore

I rang back
the next day
some young nurse

filled me in
with all the details
how he was
how he was feeling
the operation

she told me
was quite successful
he can return home

once the doctor says
it's Ok
I hung up
after I thanked her
I wondered

about that
communication
misunderstanding

with that nurse
during the night call
but I guess
she Ok
as she'd say.

Terry Collett

He Would.

He would, between
her gentle hands,

lay his head, like one
in sleep playing dead.

He would, if possible,
lay his tired body in

her lap, for her to tend
or make well again, or

her to ease or end the
pointless pain. He would,

if he were brave, plant
kisses along her brow,

wet and sweet, given in
love, not lust, but he has

small time, for this or that,
but loves her none the

less we trust. He would,
if time had not robbed his

chance, placed his hand
about her waist and held

her near, but time has gone
and he has left with none of

those things above, we fear.

Terry Collett

Heart To Mend.

It will never
be the same again.

He won't be back,
and the baby's gone
some place wherever
dead babies go.

There's this ache
and hurt deep down,
almost so deep
you'd need
a diver's gear
to get to it.

Do hearts break
and bleed?
I mean really
break and bleed?

He said:
get over it,
and left
when I couldn't
or wouldn't
according to him.

Do you know
what it's like
to lose a baby?
Huh?
I said to him.

He said something
about it happens
all the time,
and I said nothing
but walked to the end
of the garden

and whispered
a thousand prayers.

Tears blinded my path
and I saw nothing,
but drowned views
and things.

Baby was there
as it was
in my arms
that last time
and I wanted
to hold it
until God's
chosen end
and my head
and heart to mend.

Terry Collett

He'd Kissed Her.

He'd kissed her
he'd held her.

Elaine tried to put it
in order in her mind.

It seemed an oddment
like a piece of furniture
out of place or an object
left without an address.

The teacher was talking
something about a civil war
but she couldn't focus
since the kisses from John.

Had she kissed him first
or had it been him?

She had kissed his cheek
but he had kissed her lips.

A real kiss that was
he'd held her too
their bodies touching
as he drew her close.

The teacher chalked
on the board
his hand writing script.

She took out her pen
and opened her book
and copied what he'd written.

What comes after a kiss?
Another kiss? More kisses?

She wrote down the words

it meant nothing
just words.

John had kissed her lips
she could still feel
his lips on hers.

She felt odd
like in a dream.

Her body seemed
to be pulsing
seemed alive.

As if from a deep sleep
and somewhere
within her
something
seemed to seep.

Terry Collett

Helen And The Dead Cat 1955

Helen said
Mrs Knight's cat
had died
got run over out
on the road
squashed up
in the kerb.

Helen showed me
her face distraught
tears in eyes.

There it was
a tabby cat dead
and bloodied.

Does
Mrs Knight know?
I said.

Yes she's
most upset
Helen said
she asked my dad
if he could box it up
and bury it outback
in the small bit of garden
no one uses
and he said
he would after his dinner.

We watched the dead cat
it seemed old
and was probably
in cat's heaven now
I said
to cheer her up.

Do you think

so Benny?
she said.

Sure it is
I said.

She seemed pleased
and we walked off
leaving the cat
to Helen's dad
to pick up and bury
in the small bit
of garden
no one uses
except other cats
to shit in or wait
for birds to catch.

We walked under
the railway bridge
as a steam train
steamed over
and away.

Poor kitty
no more to play.

Terry Collett

Helen And The Small Penknife.

Having completed various jobs
indoors and out
such as running errands

and shopping etc
your mother gave you 2 shillings
and you went through the Square

to a shop on New Kent Road
where you bought
a small penknife

you'd seen in the window
and you showed Jimmy
whose knife collection

was large
including a bayonet
his father brought back

from WW2
but he was unimpressed
showing you in turn

a Nazi knife his father
took from a dead soldier
from some battle

he'd fought in
you never showed
your mother

but Helen saw it
on the way to school
next morning

and peered at it
through her thick lens spectacles
does your mother know

you bought that?
she asked
no not yet

you replied
pocketing it out of sight
maybe another day

don't you tell
your mother everything?
she asked

no not everything
you said
I have a need to know

basis I work with
what about truth?
she asked

you gazed at her
in her dark blue raincoat
buttoned to the throat

her wavy hair
in two plaits
her eyes peering at you

through those thick lens of hers
truth is like bubble gum
you said

sometimes
you have to stretch it a bit
to get a bigger bubble

she shook her head
making her plaits move
each side of her head

I don't want the future father

of my children to be a liar
she said

maybe he won't
you said
you are

she replied
you looked at
the record shop window

as you went by
a picture of Elvis Presley
was in the window

smiling
don't you like the knife?
you asked

looking back at her
as you spoke
only if you tell your mother

she said
ok I'll show her
and tell her

after school
you said
she smiled

and her big eyes
lit up
and she pushed her arm

under yours
and squeezed you near
and all because

of the small penknife
you'd bought from the shop
through the Square

but you did love
her big bright eyes
and wavy plaited hair.

Terry Collett

Helen And You And A Bag Of Chips

After school
after tea
of bread and jam
a mug of tea

and a slice of cake
you met Helen
under the railway bridge
in Rockingham Street

and she was holding
Battered Betty her doll
in her arms
and she said

Betty wanted to come
she gets lonely
stuck at home
ok

you said
as long as she's quiet
and doesn't cry
all the time

she won't
Helen said
does your mum know
you're out?

you asked
of course
Helen replied
but she said

not to be late
or come home
in the dark
you'll be safe

I've got my six-shooter
with me
you said
tapping the toy gun

tucked in the belt
of your jeans
I told Mum
I was with you

and she said ok
I don't think
she'd let me out
otherwise

a train clattered
over the bridge
over head
let's go

you said
and the three of you
walked up and along by
the Trocadero cinema

she talking about
Battered Betty's day
and what Carmody
had said at school

and how he smelt
of B.O. and cabbages
you watched the people
passing along

the New Kent Road
a constant stream
passing back
and forth

and still Helen talked

as you walked
Carmody's just a fink
you said

take no notice
what he says
and she clutched your hand
with her free hand

not clutching the doll
and you both ran
across the road
and stood outside

the Odeon cinema
gazing at the still photos
in the frames
of what film was showing inside

don't fancy that
you said
too much kissing
and women crying

and boring men
what's wrong with kissing?
Helen asked
better than men

shooting guns
or riding horses
over yellow deserts
making women cry

you looked at her
with her large eyes
behind her thick lens glasses
watery as lakes

and her brown hair
plaited into two plaits
sure

you said

how about a bag of chips?
she nodded then said
I've got no money
don't worry my dad

gave me 6d
for polishing his shoes
the other day
you said

ok
she said
and you walked down
towards the Neptune fish shop

and asked for 6d of chips
and the man
with the one eye
scooped chips

into a bag
and you gave him
the money
and Helen sprinkled

salt and vinegar over them
and you both went outside
and stood together
and shared the bag of chips

and each chip tasted
hot and salty
and warmed your insides
and Helen kissed your cheek

with her greasy warm lips
and said
thank you for these
and you said

no problem
anything to please
and you felt
the damp kiss

there on your cheek
and you smiled
to yourself
thinking

I won't wash that off
for a week.

Terry Collett

Helen And You And Six Pence Worth Of Chips.

When Helen heard
that Pete Badam
had poked your guts
she said

why'd he do that?
I scored
a home goal
you replied

so? what's that
got to do
with anything?
she said

he caught me
off guard
you said
I'll get him back

no
she said
don't go down
to his level

she gave her doll
Battered Betty
a hug
I don't want

our children
to have a father
who's fighting
all the time

she added
gazing at you
through her
thick lens glasses

no worry
you said
Dave Walker
got Badam

in the guts afterwards
Helen looked at you
horrified
what is it with boys?

fight fight fight
she put Battered Betty
over her shoulder
and patted her back

and walked along
the pavement outside
the ABC cinema
you watched her go

back and forth
the doll moving
over her shoulder
Helen's blue

cardigan and dress
was lit up
by the lights
from the cinema

and reflected
in her glasses
I didn't ask Walker
to hit him

you said
he just poked him
in the guts
and walked off

Helen paused her pacing

and looked at you
the doll brought down
into her arms

I don't want
a violent husband
she said softly
I want you

as you are
that's fine
you said
but that's

another time
and tomorrow
as we're only just nine
and she walked

with you
to the chip shop
in the New Kent Road
to buy six penny's

worth of chips
and a kiss
on your cheek
from her lips.

Terry Collett

Helen And You And The Abc Cinema

In the evening after tea
of bread and jam
and a glass of milk
you went out

and met Helen
under the railway bridge
in Rockingham Street
next to the Duke

of Wellington pub
and she was waiting
there looking up
and down the street

and when she saw you
she waved and walked
towards you
where's your doll

Battered Betty?
you asked
mum's washing her clothes
and I didn't want

to bring her out
with nothing on
she said
no that wouldn't be decent

you said
where are we going?
she asked
I want to show you

the passages behind
the ABC cinema
you said
it's like a cavern

of dark passages
and once I saw a rat
running along by a wall
oh god

she said
putting a hand
to her mouth
not a rat

yes it run along
one of the walls
not sure
I want to go there

she said softly
one little rat
isn't going to hurt you
you said

besides I'll chase it away
if it comes
will you?
she said

yes of course I will
nothing is going to harm you
while I am here
you said

you showed her
the toy gun
tucked in
the inside pocket

of your jacket
she nodded
and she took
your hand

and you walked her

along and up behind
the Trocodero cinema
and onto

the New Kent Road
and you crossed quickly
before the traffic lights changed
and once you got

to the other side
you took her
to the ABC cinema
and went down beside

the cinema walls
along the dark passages
that went on beside
and behind the cinema

all the time
she gripped your hand
and now and then
her grip tightened

when she thought
she saw something
out of the corner
of her eye

what was that?
she said
stopping still
clutching your hand tight

just a piece of paper
blown by the wind
are you sure?
yes just paper

she untightened
her grip
and you both

walked on

with the sound
of traffic and voices
in the distance
and at the back

of the cinema
you came to an entrance
where two doors where
and you said

sometimes the doors are open
and you can sneak in free
she looked at you
her eyes behind

her thick lens glasses
large and innocent
is that allowed?
she asked

no
you replied
if they catch you
you get into trouble

but if you're lucky
you can get in
no trouble
you said

oh
she said
my mum wouldn't like it
if I got into trouble

we won't get in tonight
anyway
you said
the doors are locked

another time maybe
and she gripped
your hand
and her face looked shocked.

Terry Collett

Helen And You And The Bombed Out Factory

Ought we to go in there?
Helen asked
as you both stood outside

the bombed out factory
off Rockingham Street
sure we should

you said
but it's got
STAY OUT signs

on the big doors
she said
you looked at her

with her thick lens glasses
and her hair tied in plaits
nibbling her finger in anxiety

come on in
you said
nothing will happen to you

while you're with me
she didn't look convinced
what if someone sees us?

she asked
no one cares around here
kids are always going

on bombsites
you said
she looked around

her eyes seemingly larger
than they were
are you sure?

she said
yes now come on
and you took

her small hand
and pulled her through
a small opening

in the side
where other kids
had made an entrance

she a pulled face
on the other side
of the gate

and rubbed her arm
where a line of blood showed
look

she said
I've scratched myself
you dabbed at it

with a grey handkerchief
and spittle and she watched
as you cleared up

the line of blood
will it be all right?
yes

you said
it'll be fine
and you walked on

across the yard
and into the bombed out factory by
a door hanging

on its hinges

and into the dark interior
she stood by the entrance inside

and took in the semi darkness
it's frightening
she said

no one is here
you said
how do you know?

she asked
it's too quiet
you said

she leaned closer to you
and grabbed your arm
what was that?

she whispered
a rat probably
what? she said

a rat
you said
let's go out

she said
nothing will hurt you
while I'm here

and you patted
the toy gun
in the belt

of your jeans
she looked at you
then out

into the semi darkness
you walked in
and up the stone stairs

by a wall
and she followed
her breathing

becoming louder
as you walked up
once at the top

and along a landing
you came to a small office
where the door was missing

and there was a hole
in the roof where a bomb
had blown it off

as well as other parts
of the building
you stood

looking around
the room
where rain had rotted

what furniture remained
and on the floor
were books soaked

and rotting
Helen said
can we go now?

you looked up
through the hole
in the roof

and there
was the afternoon sun
and a white cloud

moving slowly across

a blue sky
and she moved

next to you
and kissed your cheek
but you didn't know why.

Terry Collett

Helen And You And The Pirate Ship

Helen sat next to you
on the flat concrete roof
of the brick walled
bomb shelter

out the front
of Banks House
after school
she lifting

and lowering her legs
against the wall
her black battered shoes
making a dull thudding noise

and you sitting dead still
watching her white socks
go up and down
and she said

mum said
I couldn't bring
Battered Betty
because she'd given her

a wash in the bath
you took in
her thick lens glasses
catching the late

afternoon sunlight
her hair in plaits
her hands placed flat
on either side of her legs

on the concrete roof
and as she spoke
about the doll
you thought about the boys

who said she smelt
of yesterday's dinners
or called her four eyes
but they were dumbshites

you thought
they didn't see
the beauty of her
the way her eyes sparkled

behind the lens
or how being next to her
kind of brightened up
the day

not that you'd
tell them that
but you knew it
and they didn't

and she said
if you close your eyes
you can imagine
we are on a ship

at sea
the grass is the sea
and you said
we could be pirates

I have a sword
my old man made
from steel
and painted blue

and she looked at you
the sunlight blanking out
her eyes and her lips
still speaking

saying things

her words shaped
like diamonds
and she closed her eyes

and so did you
and she put her hand
on yours
and in the darkness

it seemed warm
and smooth
and she said softly
you can save me

from the bad pirates
the ones with eye patches
and black scarves
and scary faces

and you said
yes I could cut them
all down and not miss
and she said

yes and I could be saved
and could give you a kiss
and the ship sailed on
in the dark

behind the eyes
in a world made wonderful
where you could be
8 year old lovers

where no one betrays
and no one dies.

Terry Collett

Helen And You And The Truth

HELEN AND YOU AND THE TRUTH.

Across the road
from the underground station
next to the Christian tabernacle
you sat with Helen

on the standing wall
of a bombed out house
she clutched her doll
Battered Betty

looking around her
I've never been
on this bomb site before
she said

the people who lived here
must have been really scared
if they heard the siren in time
they may have got out

but some didn't of course
you said
trying to imagine
what the houses looked like

before the bombing
how the gardens
may have been well kept
may have had vegetables

and flowers growing
in the small beds
at the back of the house
a lady my mum knew

got blown up
and all they found

was her hand
with her wedding ring

still there
Helen said
screwing up her nose
making her thick lens glasses

move on her nose
my mum said
she and her stepfather
used to hide

under the large oak table
in the kitchen
if they got caught out
by the bombing

you said
and Mum said her stepfather's bottom
was sticking out
at one end of the table

Helen laughed
you liked it when she laughed
it made dimples in her cheeks
and her eyes lit up

behind her glasses
best not tell Mum
I've been on the bomb site
Helen said

she said they're dangerous places
they are
you said
but hell what would life be

without a bit of danger?
what does your dad say
when you tell him
you've been on the bomb sites?

she asked
rocking Battered Betty
in her arms
nothing much

except not to wear
my best clothes on there
is that all?
she said

yes pretty much
you said
what about your mum?
you looked at her

her hair tied in two pigtails
her eyes large
beyond the lens
she says be careful

not to climb
you said
but you do
Helen said

you did it just now
to get up here
yes I know that
and you know that

but my mum needn't
you said
banging the back
of your shoes

on the wall gently
don't you tell
your mum everything
you do?

she asked

I do
you frowned
I try not to worry her

you said
doesn't she asked
what you've done or been?
yes but I needn't

tell her everything
you said
she has enough worries
without me adding to them

I think it best
I imagine other places
or things done
to keep her

from worrying
Helen shook her head
you have a strange
sense of truth

she said
holding Betty tight
to her chest
her chin resting

on the doll's head
how about an ice cream
at Baldy's????
you said

Baldy's?
she said
where is Baldy's??
the grocer shop

before you get
to the railway bridge
down Rockingham Street

you said

the owner is as bald as a coot
she laughed
ok
she said

and so you both
climbed down
from the wall
and walked down

and along
to the subway
and on to the shop
to get ice creams

she smiling
with her battered doll
you with your cowboy
shooting dreams.

Terry Collett

Helen And You In The Rain

Helen looked up
at the rain drenched sky
as you both stood
under the extended roof

of the coal wharf
off of Meadow Row
she had on
her dark blue raincoat

with the hood
which was over
her head
and her thick lens glasses

enlarged her eyes
as she peered out
looks like
it's in for the day

you said
pulling your coat
around you
to keep out

the chill
just as well
I didn't bring my doll
Battered Betty

she said
she hates the rain
you stared out
at the downpour

it seemed endless
why does it have to rain
on a Saturday?
Why not a school day?

you said
Helen took off
her glasses
and wiped them

on a small white
handkerchief
you watched her
as she wiped them

her small hands
at work
the glasses
being cleaned

and cleared
you look pretty
when you're wet
you said

she looked at you
do I?
she said
sure you do

you said
but not otherwise?
she asked
you looked at her

as she put on
her glasses again
well you look prettier
you added

staring once more
at the rain
no one's said
I was pretty before

she said

they usually
call me four eyes
or horsey teeth

well you're pretty
you said shyly
not wanting to get in
too deep

a horse drawn
coal wagon
went by
as you both stood

beneath
the extended roof
the horse trotting
along in the puddles

on the cobblestones
the driver
staring sternly
into the pouring rain

you wiped raindrops
from your nose
and flicked them
into the air

am I really?
she asked
gazing at you
the hood of her coat

framing her face
yes
you said
and your teeth

are fine
don't worry
what others say

and she put

her arm under yours
as you looked away.

Terry Collett

Helen And You Trainspotting.

After morning matinee
and after dinner
of sausages and mash
and baked beans

you met Helen
by the post office
at the end
of Rockingham Street

she had on
the red flowered dress
you liked
and held Battered Betty
her doll
by an arm

her hair was held
in plaits
by elastic bands

and her thick lens spectacles
were smeary where
she'd touched them
but not cleaned them

where are we going?
she asked
how about London Bridge
train station?
you said
we can watch the trains
come and go
and watch the porters
rush about with luggage
and things

she gazed at you
through her thick lens

shall I tell my mum
where we're going?

sure if you think
she'll worry
you said

be best if she knows
Helen said
don't want her to worry
where I've gone

ok
you said
and so you both
walked back
to her mother's house
and she told her mother
and her mother came out
and looked at you
and said
ok so long
as you're with Benedict

and so you walked back
along Rockingham Street
and got a bus
to London Bridge
railway station

and sat on the seats
downstairs
by the conductor

and this guy with glasses
and a thin moustache
gazed at Helen
from the seat opposite
his eyes moving over her
his gaze focusing
on her knees
where her dress ended

he licked his lips
his hands on his thighs

Helen looked away
pretending she didn't
see him looking
you stared at the man
watching his eyes
dark and deep
they say it's rude to stare
you said

the man looked at you
kids should be seen
not heard
he replied

and you're seeing a lot
you said
he muttered something
and got off
at the next stop
giving you
a hard stare

Helen said nothing
but seemed relieved
after a while you got off
the bus at the railway station
and went inside

there were crowds
of people
and the smell of steam
and bodies washed
and unwashed

and the sound of trains
getting ready to leave
and voices and shouts
of porters and rushing
and going and coming

of people

and you sat
with Helen
on a seat
on the platform
she with Battered Betty

and you with your
six-shooter in your
inside pocket ready
to get any bad cowboys
who came your way

and Helen said
why was that man
staring at me
on the bus?

just a creep
wanting a peep
you said

peep at what?
she asked
I'm not beautiful

yes you are
you said
anyway it wasn't
your beauty
he was looking at
you said

what then?
she asked

oh something
he oughtn't
you said

and a loud blast of steam

echoed around
the station
and a voice called
and a whistle blew

and you all
sat watching
Helen
and Battered Betty
and six-shooter
carrying cowboy
you.

Terry Collett

Helen The Cowgirl 1955

Benny showed me
how to twirl
a toy gun
around my finger.

I managed to do
as he said
although it fell off
my finger a few times
before I did it right.

Mum said
it isn't ladylike
to twirl a gun
around my finger
but I like doing
what Benny does.

I like being
Maid Marian
to his Robin Hood
or Mrs Earp
to his Wyatt Earp.

He showed me
how to fire
a catapult
and knock a tin can
off a wall.

Mum wanted me
to help her
clean up
my little brother
as he kicked so
while she changed
his nappy.

I had to hold

his little legs
to stop him kicking
and the smell
was yuk.

On Saturday
Benny said we
can go to
the morning matinee
and see films
and cartoons.

I'll have to ask Mum
and see if she
can afford
for me to go.

Benny said
it's 6d.

Mum looked tired
when she said
it was bedtime.

I went to bed
but couldn't get
twirling a toy gun
around my finger
out of my head.

Terry Collett

Helen Wiped Her Glasses

Helen wiped
her thick lens glasses

with the hem
of her school dress

and you watched
her finger and thumb

move around the glass
in circular motion

Can you see much
without your glasses?

you asked
she looked up at you

and said
Not much

you for instance
are like a small tree

without leaves
with thin branches

hanging down
you smiled and saw

as she lifted the hem
a glimpse of thigh

white as one kept
out of sun and light

But what do I look like
with your glasses on?

you asked
looking at her face

and eyes that squinted
quite naked

without the specs
A boy who's cheeky

but often shy
especially around girls

and their blue eyes
and dark curls

and she giggled
and dropped

the hem of
her dress

and put her glasses on
and her eyes enlarged

and gazed at you
taking in

your unkempt hair
and school boy grin

and at that moment
as she stood stifling

her giggle with one
small hand

you sensed a love
you neither had before

nor could
in the light of day

and innocence of youth
quite understand.

Terry Collett

Helen Yaks 1955

Helen's there
by the shop
her mother's

shopping list
in her hand
she views it

through her thick
lens glasses
she's not sure

of the script
what's that word
Benedict?

she asks me
says butter
I tell her

and how much?
says 1lb
o I see

Helen says
I thought it
was saying

it's better
and I thought
what's better

never mind
I tell her
how's your mum?

she's ok
though baby
cried a lot

in the night
and Mum was
walking babe

up and down
the passage
rocking in

her soft arms
and humming
quietly

Helen yaks
quite a lot
once she starts

I listen
to her words
as she speaks

and Baldy
the shop man
says to her

where's your list
Helen dear?
she gives him

the short list
of items
which he reads

as she talks
and I note
her hair is

in two plaits
neatly done
with ribbons

at the ends

and her eyes
through her thick

lens glasses
are like two
large marbles

and she says
how are you
Benedict?

I'm ok
I reply
seeing one

of myself
gazing back
in each eye.

Terry Collett

Helen's Big Plans

Helen pushed
the old black doll's pram
over the bomb site
her doll Battered Betty
covered by a wool
knitted blanket

I blew my peashooter
at a tin can on the wall
of a bombed-out house

maybe we can have
our house built here
she said

the tin can fell
to the ground
a with a hollow crash
as I hit it
with a split-pea

where?
I said
looking round at her

here on this bomb site
she said
nodding to the area
around her

I didn't ask why "we"
I put another tin can
on the wall and aimed
with the peashooter

she began to wander around
leaving the doll's pram
behind her

here could be our kitchen
she said
standing in an area
of bricks and chickweed
but with no bath in it
as we have at home
but a separate bathroom
like they do
in posh houses

I blew the peashooter
at the tin can
and it fell
with a clatter

what do you think Benny?

I looked at her standing
with hands on her hips
her brown hair parted
into two plaits
her NHS glasses
thick lens
her eyes enlarge
gazing at me

looks ok to me
I said
unable to see anything
but brick and chickweed
and old stones

and maybe a sitting room
over here
she said
walking a few paces
to her right
and a fireplace here
one of those modern ones

yes I can see it now
I said

looking at her drab
green raincoat unbuttoned

can you?
she said excitedly

and bedrooms
how many?
I asked

she looked around her
scratching her
seven year old head

how many children
will we have?
she asked

how many did you want?
I asked

loads
she replied
looking around her

I pocketed my peashooter
and small bag
of split peas

how do you get them?
I asked

she looked at me
frowning
don't know
she said
don't you know?

I shook my head
I'm a seven year old boy
how the heck
would I know

she walked a bit more
maybe four bedrooms
just to be sure
she said

I looked at her walking
further on
her Wellington boots
mud splashed

let's go
get a couple of 1d drinks
I'm thirsty
all this talk
of houses and kids
I said

ok
she replied
but we'll have to
sort things out soon

I thought of the John Wayne film
my old man
was taking me to see

she thought(no doubt)
of curtain colours
and matching stuff

I walked on
as she walked behind
with pram and Betty
I had had enough.

Terry Collett

Help Me Grow Mcmlxxi

The priest suggested
I read Gerard Hopkins' poems
so I took a copy
to the abbey,

verbum Dei,

inside and out
in books
in souls
God speaks,

what I know
of the divine science
and holy scripture
I learnt
in the woods and fields
Bernard said,

hold me closer
she said
I want to feel
you enter,

I mowed the grass
by the church wall
and Dom Robert said
none do it like you,

Hugh brought
the meals into
the refectory
on the trolley
his thin lips
showed no joy,

Dieu est ici
the French monk said
touching his chest

with a tap of his hand,

viviamo per amare
the Italian monk said
as we walked
from church
to the garth
for afternoon tea,

she lay beside me
her hand touching
my pecker with skill,

charity must not
remain shut up
in the depths
of the heart
said Therese,

faith is an act of will
clinging to God
no matter how
we feel Bruno said,

the abbey bell tolled
echoing along
the cloister
as I walked to my room,

love is the joy
of the good
and the wonder
of the wise
said Gareth
quoting Plato,

I closed my eyes
hoping an extra prayer
would help me grow.

Terry Collett

Henri Comes Late.

Henri comes late.
You sit and wait.

The day unfolds
like an unknown map.

The ghosts of Paris
parade the streets,

but no sign of Henri
or sound of his key

in the lock. You hope
he will bring his camera

to capture you as he said.
The morning chills

your naked flesh
bringing goose bumps

upon your tainted skin.
Be my model Henri

suggested, be the one
to bring me my fame.

You posed and posed,
sat and stood, reclined

and lay, let him have
you as he wished for

black and white photographs
and sometimes his bed.

Maybe he is frequenting
the cafes with his artist

friends, or drinking wine
with some other girl,

promising her the same
as you, selecting poses,

suggesting dates and times,
and suggestive poses.

Henri is late. The dull tick tock
of the room's old clock.

Terry Collett

Henry And That Kind Of Kissing

Women kissing each other
on cheeks the friends
meeting for coffee kind

not the passionate
let's get to bed
and kiss

and indulge kind
but Henry wishes
the women at the coffee bar

were of that kind
just to break the boringness
of the day

just so he can get through
the hour without
the boring chitchat

of others around
on who was doing
what to whom

and who has just had
their kids in the right
kind of school

or whose husband
has made the grade
for body climbing

back stabbing promotion
oh if only
Henry thinks

that the dames
could embrace
and undress

and get down
to the woman to woman thing
right here

in the coffee bar
and he'd promise
he'd not spill a dropp

of his latte
or faint
or look away.

Terry Collett

Henry And The Scheme Of Things.

It was all part of the scheme
of things Henry thought and
even when the women looked
at him with that odd curiosity
he never failed (at least not in

the beginning) to make a score
usually with one of the females
less prettier than the ones who
left before and after taking her
for the drink and meal routine

and maybe to the cinema he took
her back to his place and poured
her a drink and put on a cool jazz
record on the hifi and set her down
on the sofa and she talked and he

watched her lips move the lipstick
red the kind his mother used to wear
and her nose was kind of pointed and
lifted up at the end and her words
went over his head he wasn't interested

in her philosophy of being or what
she had bought at the last sale he
studied her chin the way it rose and
fell as she spoke the words pouring
out and he said look Honey I know

you like to talk but how about you
and me going to bed? Oh she said I
haven't told you about the time I
went to New York and so Henry lay
back on the sofa closed his eyes

and let her talk a jazz saxophone
filling in behind her voice the record
turning her mouth opening and closing

and he thought of time passing and
remembering his mother's red lipstick

mouth scolding and after boredom had
set in deep he drifted off to sexless sleep.

Terry Collett

Henry And Woman Servicing

You don't want to go
With that kind of woman,
Henry's mother said.
What kind of woman

is that? Henry asked.
The kind that offer
themselves to men
who are not their

husbands, his mother
replied, sitting back
in the soft chair by
the fireplace, joining

her fingers, forming
what she used to call
her church. Henry watched
her church form of finger

forming, his eyes sliding
over his mother's dyed
hair, the grey streaks,
the nose, the thin red

painted lips. But isn't
that kind of women
providing a service?
Henry asked, walking

to the window, watching
his father mowing the
lawn, sweat on the brow,
the eyes dead looking.

Service? His mother said,
her tone icy, Service?
She repeated, that's not
service, Henry that's sin.

S.I.N. Henry raised his
eyebrows, there was in
the pocket of his pants,
a pack of fives, unused

as yet. Oh, Henry said,
Duncan Smold had this
woman in the back of
his car, he called it hard

smooching or some such
word. Henry's mother
eyed him closely, her eyes
narrowing. Then he sinned,

Henry, he sinned, she said,
pushing a hand through
her hair, her features going
red. Oh, right, Henry said,

I'll tell Duncan next time
he's in his car with some
woman in the back, that
he's sinning, Henry turned

away, he didn't want his
mother to see him grinning.

Terry Collett

Henry's Early Morning

Henry lies in bed.
Henry smokes.
He looks at the girl
beside him, young piece,

Swedish, blonde,
looks like his niece.
Inhales, lets smoke hit
throat, in to lungs.

Jazz on hifi
in background,
high trumpet,
low saxophone.

Girl turns over,
naked, small tits,
closed eyes, semi
open mouth. He exhales,

watches smoke rise,
drifts, stays motionless
momentarily, then
moves to one side.

He scratches his thigh,
itches, scratches.
Leans over kisses
the girl's shoulder,

tastes lemons, bitter,
tingles tongue.
He remembers sex,
loads of, all ways,

lights low, lights out,
semi dark. Neighbours
rowing through wall,
he loud mouth, she

Wild Witch of the West,
rowing gone now.
Met her on the stairs,
brunette, slim,

face pretty, lovely ass.
He, Henry met in the street,
loud and muscular, ape like,
low jaw, big of eyes. Jabbing

off about dames not knowing
their place, gesturing with hands,
Henry thought him dull
and dim and moved off.

Remembers. Thinks the woman ok,
likes the way she sways
when walking, the red lipstick,
eye shadow to hide bruises.

The girl beside him stirs,
mutters in her foreign tongue,
puts out a hand, touches
Henry's arm. Opens her eyes,

bright blue, spreads lips, smiles.
Takes his cigarette, puts
between her lips, inhales,
closes her eyes,

holds cigarette between fingers,
smoke exhales, sways, lingers.

Terry Collett

Henry's Light.

She is the wonder
of my days, Henry
says, the one who
makes the turning
of the hands of time
seem slow, or seemingly
not to move or go,
or make time as lost
as gods of old, or tick
of clocks as tittle-tattle
of nagging tongues have told.

She is the center of my life,
the being by whom I judge
all others who come my way,
or who's beauty does not
match hers, as hers is beyond
their measure, despite their
use of oils or paint or perfume
bathed or painted nails,
hers is my favoured beauty,
where that of others always
to my eye fails.

She is the maker of my day,
my hours and minute's promise,
whose skin smooth as silk
as soft as lamb's wool touch,
I love her deeply, love her much.

She is my treasure beyond compare,
she whose touch by fingertips
or breath or hint of hair's feel
against mine in moments togetherness,
burns me up within and without
with passion high, with kisses
doubled blessed, in touches fine,
and warm, and hot, that I am,
and who, I know not.

She is in my secret thoughts,
my silent muses, my heart's
deep plunge, as days be dark
or bright or take me in depression
to blackest night, she is my angel,
my one and only light.

Terry Collett

Henry's Love

She goes to my head
like a glass of high
class booze, Henry
said, invades my night,
and dreams to such
an extent that nothing,
is quite what it seems.

She touches my heart,
and mind so that I
walk my life, and day,
like one who's blind.

She moves me to
words I seldom use,
make poet of me that
words often fail or use
too ill, so that I can
feel but feel, but I
love her still.

She turns me inside
out, and outside in,
leads me to dark night,
and days like one one
minute a saint, next
one who moves to sin.

She brings tears to eyes
with both humour,
and scorn of words,
and deeds, she plucks
the organ of my heart
until it bursts or cause
to bleed, but still my
love I offer, my word,
and cause I plead,
wherever it may lead.

She goes to my head
as often to my heart,
as often I see her come
and go, I love her all
else is lost or found,
I love her good,
I love her sound.

Terry Collett

Her Beautifulness.

There's an empty cottage
at the end of this lane
Jane said

and there's a large apple tree
in the garden
and no one goes there

so maybe we can look
through the windows
and see what's there

sounds good
you said
and she smiled at you

in her shy manner
and brushed her fingers
through her long black hair

and breathed in
the summer air
and there were birds

flying overhead
and a small brook
running along side

the lane
and you felt happy
being there with her

looking at her profile
at the way her eyes
looked about her

and her flowered summer dress
she said her mother made
and the way she swayed

her hips as she walked
and you sensed her nearness
her just being there

just a fingertip away
and when you came
to the empty cottage

she ran ahead and peered
through the windows
and you came along beside her

and looked through the glass
at the emptiness within
and she said

let's see if the doors are locked
and she ran to the door
and pushed but it was locked

and she said
just a chance we could have gone in
and pretended it was ours

and imagined where
we could have put our furniture
and we could have gone up the stairs

and looked out and pretended
it was our bedroom
and we had just married

and then she was silent
and you stood behind her
and touched her arm

and said
let's go pick some apples
and you can pretend

you're going to cook

an apple-pie
for our dinner instead

and she smiled
and gently pressed her lips
on your cheek

a small wet warmth
entered you
and oh

you thought
as she ran to the tree
that she would always be here

just the summer sun
and she in her beauty
and 13 year old me.

Terry Collett

Her Betraying Heart 1997

Nuala opens
the front door
sees Brian sitting
in his armchair
drinking a beer
smoking a cigarette
without the TV on
which is rare

you're home early
she says
entering the lounge
looking at him
brooding over
his can of beer

where'd you go?
he says
looking at her

went shopping
in town
she replies
I told you where
I was going

she sits on the sofa
uncertain
of his questioning
a mood behind it

who'd you see?
he asks

people
and shoppers
why?
she says

you saw her
didn't you?
he says

who do you mean?
she says

your friend Una
he says

Nuala blushes
naturally
before she
can try
to control it

o yes
I bumped into her
while shopping
Nuala replies
her mind panicking

why'd you kiss her?
he asks
his eyes studying
her features

kiss her?
she says

yes you kissed her
he says

women do kiss
each other
as friends
she says

on the lips?
he says

how'd you know

where I kissed her?

Nuala stands up
walks to the window
looks out

I followed you
into town
saw you both
you went off
with her
to some bedsit
and went in
he says coldly
what'd you do there?

she gazes
at the passing
people below
at the passing traffic

why'd you
follow me for?

a game at first
I was going
to surprise you
in the shops
but then
you met her
and I followed
he says
hardness
in the tone

she turns
gazes at him

what did you do
while in her bedsit?

we had coffee

and a talk
Nuala looks
away from him
stares at the people
outside again

you were there
too long just to talk
and have coffee
he says

what are you
suggesting?
she says
acting offended
gazing
back at him

something weird
going on
with you
and her
he says

they stare
at each other
a silence comes
between them

all right then
I love her
we've made love
for months now
Nuala says
her voice shaky

he reddens
and opens
his mouth
to say something
but nothing comes

feck off
to her then
get your stuff
and go
he says
after a few moments
reflecting

she looks at him
her world beginning
to unfold
and fall apart
as if someone
had pierced
her betraying heart.

Terry Collett

Her Black Fog

The depression moves in on her
Like a dark fog. It seems to suck
All interest in life and events
From her mind so that she sits
And stares from the window like

One dying slowly over the month.
Outwardly she seems quite fine.
Little quiet perhaps. Not her usual self.
None of her unstoppable laughter and joy.
She hates it when the fog comes.

The curtains drawn in her mind.
The deep depression sucking.
There is the same view from the window.
Trees and lawn and the bird table unattended.
Snow had fallen last time. She remembers

The white blanket over everything.
The bird table like a white statue
Standing still unattended. The sky grey
And sucked of all interest. Her lover
Such as he is still wanted his sex.

She performed dully. No passion.
Nothing touched her or reached in
And moved her. Her lover did his thing
And finished. He turned over and snored.
The inner darkness invades each aspect

Of her being. Even her baby's cry
Doesn't move or stir her. She hears it
Like one hearing a far away thunder
And possible storm. Even her beloved
Picasso print fails to move her.

Music of Mahler pushes out
From the nearby shore of the CD player
And slides over her like a chilling wave.

There are voices speaking. Someone
She feels walks on her grave.

Terry Collett

Her Blue Dress Night 1975

When she wears
the blue dress
I know she
has a mood on.

She sits
crossed legged,
foot rising up
and down,
hands on her knees,
gazing at me
with her bright eyes,
like burning coals.

What's wrong,
Netanya,
what have I done
this time?

Her mind cannot find
the right words,
it fumbles like a juggler
with Parkinson's.

Teddy,
she mouths,
what was that bitch doing
being near you
at the party?

I reach back
through my memory
of the evening,
finger through faces
and deeds done and undone,
can't find the face to fit
or deed or fun.

No idea what you mean,

I say,
swaying,
holding bits
of conversation in hand,
pushing old words
into the long grass,
touches touched
or deed done,
but forgotten.

Netanya sways and says,
that plump bitch,
the one
in the green dress
with earrings like saucers,
that one(she hiccups) ,
who gave you
the come-along,
the plump biddy
who anyone
with a decent mind
wouldn't touch
with a barge pole.

I lie on the bed dressed,
looking up
at the ceiling,
an odd
I'm going puke
kind of feeling.

Netanya lies
on the bed,
too,
closing her eyes,
kicks off her shoes,
piss her,
she mutters,
bugger the booze.

Terry Collett

Her Deep Sighs 1963

Magdalene's
parents row
she hears them

from her room
nightly fights
loud voices

hands slapping
she turns up
her tiny

transistor
radio
and listens

ear up close
to some song
by Elvis

she's undressed
soiled linen
cast aside

short nightie
a lush pink
she then thinks

of Mary
on this bed
hours back

listening
to LPs
on her small

hi-fi box
both smoking
sipping slow

some borrowed
of ma's gin
Mary said

that idjit
boy Brian
tried to get

his feck leg
over me
but I said

go feck sheep
they both laughed
huddled close

Magdalene
put her hand
on Mary's

naked knee
moved upward
Mary said

go ahead
still rowing
downstairs

her parents
her da's voice
thundering

through the floor
her ma's voice
soprano

counterpoints
his tenor
as if in

opera

by Verdi
Magdalene

gets in bed
says her prayers
(old routine)

then lays down
in the dark
(light turned out)

dreaming of
Mary's lips
Mary's hands

Mary's hips
Mary's eyes
letting out

in slow breath
her deep sighs.

Terry Collett

Her Eyes Aglow 1964

Milka's mother
dishes up dinner

her father and brothers
sit around the table

Milka sits on the end
deep in thought

after dishing up all meals
the mother sits down
next to Milka
opposite her husband

the father says grace
and they all mutter an Amen
then begin the meal

the father talks
about a cow that's sick

her brothers follow
with talk of the fishes
they nearly caught
but got away

Milka says nothing
but watches her mother
who talks about a new coat
she'd like but was maybe
(gazing at the husband)
too dear

Milka wonders
if her mother
does fancy Benny
and if given a chance
she'd lead him up to bed
and have her

middle-aged way with him
and he just 16 and a bit
Milka muses darkly
mouthing mashed potatoes
after all she always seems
all over him if I'm upstairs
bathing or getting ready
always plying him
with tea and biscuits
and wiggling
(according to Benny)
her backside and pushing out
her middle-aged breasts
near him
(if what Benny
says is true)

you're quiet
her mother says
what's got you
in a mood?

they all look at Milka
with forks half way
to their mouths

nothing
Milka says
looking at the tablecloth
a fork stuck in the sausage
not in a mood
just being quiet that's all
she says

you and Benny haven't
had a tiff have you?
her mother says
leaning in towards her

no we haven't
Milka says
wondering why her mother

thinks that why she'd
be interested in her
and Benny

your face says different
her mother says

the others continue to eat
Milka says nothing
but eats on

Benny seems ok
at work
one of her brothers says smiling
must be all right
the other brother says
never seen him
so happy

that's enough
the mother says
no winding Milka up
you know what she's like
if tormented

Milka eats and stares
at her father
to see if he'll say anything

the hens are laying well
he says
more eggs coming along
than ever

that's good
mother says
looking at him

Milka gazes at
her mother's breasts
wondering if Benny
was telling the truth

about them being motherly
and how would he know?

she eats her sausage
her eyes darkly aglow.

Terry Collett

Her Faraway Stare.

Yehudit lay on her stomach,
chin propped on her hands,
staring over the pond, she
called their lake. Ducks were

there, floating like small boats
on the water's skin. Naaman
lay beside her his head leaning
on his hand. Last time they had

laid there they had just made
love in the dense woods behind.
Early evening that had been,
moonbeams played on the

surface of the water, the night
cool. She had been concerned
of her mother's rebuke because
of the lateness. The sex would

have been beyond her mother's
grasp. You used to fish here, she
said, turning to look at him. I got
bored, he said. I used to swim here

as a child, she said, until one of
the gamekeepers saw me and
informed my father. What did
your mother say to that? he asked.

Father didn't tell her, he told me
not to swim there again. I missed
that then, he said, smiling. Yes, you
did, she said. It was hot that summer,

I wanted to cool down. Maybe it
was like a baptism? he said. In the
nude? she said. Maybe it was a new
kind of baptism, he said. It nothing

like that. It was innocent fun, she said.
He touched her hand by the pond's
edge. Her fingers squeezed his. Her eyes
smiled. The sunlight filtered through the

branches overhead, glimpses of blue sky
reflected on the water. That evening we
made love back there, you said you loved
me, she said, did you mean that? Yes, of

course, he said. It was special to me, she
said, not just the making of love of you
and me, but the evening and the moon
and the stars and the smell of you and me

and the flowery smell of it all. He watched
as a duck took off from the pond, its wings
outspread, breaking the air, and she looking
at the pond's surface with her far away stare.

Terry Collett

Her Half Day Off.

HER HALF DAY OFF.

It was her half day off work
and your afternoon
between shifts
and she had come

to the house
while others were out
at school and work
and after talking

about her job
and the manager
being a pain
and the work

so different from school
you both made love
in your upstairs bed
and afterwards

as she lay there
looking out the window
on the left hand side
she said

my mother will wonder
why I'm home late
on my half day off
you looked at the grey sky

through the windowpane
sensing her beside you
feeling her arm
touching yours

what will you tell her?
you asked

well not
that I've made love to you

she said
turning and smiling at you
why not?
you said jokingly

o yes and never see you again
probably be locked up
in the tower
if we had one

she said
she leaned over
and kissed you
and you smelt soap

and toothpaste
and her hair
brushed against
your forehead

I'll say the manager
wanted me to stay behind
and such and such
she said

laying back
her head on the pillow
you lay your hand
on her thigh

felt her smooth skin
and would he ask you
to stay behind
for such and such?

you asked
maybe to stock shelves
if any of the other girls
weren't in

but not for such and such
she added laughing
you thought back
to the first time you

had kissed her
that Christmas while out
carol singing
with the choir from church

and it seemed
as if angels sang nearby
rather than the choir
and you caught her eyes

in the moonlight
sparkling like stars
in small oceans
what time will your mother

be home from work?
she asked
you looked
at the alarm clock

on the dressing table
at the foot of the bed
about half hour
you said

God we'd best get up
and dressed
she said
or she'll be here

and what would she say
if she saw us thus?
probably hope you
made up the bed

after you

you said
o yes I'm sure she would
I know she's a lovely lady

but I don't think
she'd say that
you both got off the bed
and began to dress

and you watched her
thinking of the times
at school when you used
to gaze at her

across the classroom
wondering as she sat there
what she looked like
without her clothes

or what colour her underwear
and now you knew
(she like some latter day Eve)
and you

her long lost Adam
sans fig leaf or shame
once dressed
she helped you make the bed

and you saw her downstairs
and out into the garden
with the chilly sun
and God's pardon.

Terry Collett

Her Mother Doesn'T Know.

Rosina's baby sister died.
The cot stood empty
in the darkened room.

Don't go in there
her mother said.
Rosina opened the door

and peered through
the gap instead.
The toys were still there

by the pink pillow and cover.
Leave the room alone
said her grieving mother.

Moonlight shone upon
the place where baby sister
once turned her face

and smiled or made
her baby noise.
Quiet now the room.

Unplayed with
the idle toys.
Mother cried at night

and often in the day
and stared through
the window at the far off bay.

Father was away
in some distant war
keeping his head down

in some foreign land.
Rosina's baby sister
was buried deep

beneath the ground
in a small white coffin
dressed in a ghostly shroud

with songs sung sadly
and tears in the crowd.
Rosina peered through

the gap of the door
at the cot
and moonlight's glow.

She's seen her baby sister's
ghostly smile
but mother doesn't know.

Terry Collett

Her Mother's Dark Moments

In one of her mother's
dark moments

of opening up
Clara's mother had said

of the baby
which died

after a few days
that she threw it

in the trash
before anyone

could find out
about the darn thing

and you could
back then girl

you could get away
with almost anything

if no one knew a thing
about it

and then her mother'd
clammed up

and go back
to staring into space

as if she'd opened up
too much

and Clara tried to imagine
what it must have been like

to have done that
and she tried to picture

her dead sister
lying amongst trash

and what she looked like
and what colour hair

she had
and her eyes

when she was briefly alive
what colour they were

and how they stared out
at the mother

glaring back at her
not wanting

not caring
and it all came back

to that in the end
the wanting of being

of love
and seeing he mother

there just sitting
and staring

and not wanting
and not caring

just the occasional glimmer
in eyes

that were becoming
darker and dimmer.

Her Name.

Her name's Jane I think
said Jupp

standing beside you
in the school hall

as the girl on the school bus
went by with a slow walk

carrying a bag
over her shoulder

and her dark hair
flowing down her back

anyway he added
how are you getting on

with that maths work
chisel face gave us?

You watched
until she disappeared

into a crowd of other
girls and boys

like watching
the sun go down

on a fine summer's day
and entering

a dull night
huh? Said Jupp

how you coping
with the darn maths?

All Greek to me
you said

carrying the image
of the girl off with you

as Jupp and you
made your way

along the corridor
to double metalwork

and this metalwork
Jupp moaned

it really pisses me off
what do I care

about making
a frigging tea caddy spoon?

And passing by
a print on the wall

of some Manet dame
you thought

how you'd love
to have a print

of the girl
to carry about

or have pinned
to your bedroom wall

at home
huh? Said Jupp

what's with spoons?
I've no idea

you said
all part

of the brainwash
I guess

and did the girl
move you?

you asked inside
oh yes

oh yes
oh yes.

Terry Collett

Her New Year's Eve.

Yes she'll tell him that
next time tell him about
it all but until then she'll
let him stew let him think

he has it all in the bag let
him think he's won the
battle but she knows he
knows only half the game

she knows that much more
and anyway the war's in
her sights now the game
is almost won she draws

on her cigarette lets the
smoke hit the back of her
throat feels the air about
her hears the music from

the other room as out in
the streets others celebrate
the New Year in their fashion
she hears their voices raised

their songs sung drunkenly
but he is but a loose page in
her book a mere footnote
in her book of life as if she'd

consent to be his lover or his
wife he thinks it's almost on
the cards almost in the bag
but she knows better knows

how the game ends then thinking
back to her childhood as she
blows out smoke her father's

dull eyes his voice filtering into

her dreams his hand punching
or smacking or lending the black
or blue her mother dull witted
saying nothing not knowing what

to do scars of her childhood leak
and ooze their memories and aches
and pains and dark corners and fears
as she inhales the smoke again yes

she'll tell next time maybe if the
mood takes her she'll wait and see.

Terry Collett

Her Own Kind Of Beauty.

Saturday afternoon
cycling up a 1in 6 hill
then along the road
toward the farmhouse

you dismounted
and laid your bike
against the fence
and waited

to get your breath back
the farmhouse door opened
and Mrs Putt came out
and said

Jim and Pete are out I'm afraid
her daughter Monica
appeared by her side
they've gone out

with their older brother
Monica said
ok
you said

tell them I called
sure I will
Mrs Putt said
I can go on a bike ride

with you if you like
Monica said
Benedict won't want to have you
to drag along with him

Mrs Putt said
Monica pulled a face
and pouted her lips
I don't mind

you said
better than riding alone
well if you don't mind
Mrs Putt said

mind you behave
yourself young lady
she said
and went indoors

and closed the door
just get my bike
Monica said
and went back behind

the farmhouse
you looked around
the farmhouse
and the surrounding fields

and trees and waited
after a few moments
she was back
riding her bike toward you

where we going?
she asked
lets go see the peacocks
along Sedge lane

you said
and so you got on your bike
and off you both rode
she beside you

in her summery dress
and sandals with her
brown hair tied
in bunches

you in jeans

and open neck
white shirt
the sun bright

and hot above you
the birds flying
and calling
the clouds puffy

and white
I've always wanted to go
bike riding with you
Monica said

but the boys don't let me
but I am now
you nodded and smiled
wondering Jim and Pete

would say if they knew
she'd got to go
bike riding with you
she chatted on about Elvis

and the film in town
and how she'd like to go
but no one would take her
and how her brothers

teased her
and her mother
nagged her
after a while

you came to the peacocks
in a wire cage
by a large house
just off the lane

aren't they beautiful?
she said
peering through the wire

her fingers holding on to

the cage
standing beside you
yes they are
you said

but of course
the cock bird
has the beauty
the hen

is just dull
and ordinary
odd that
she said

wonder why?
don't know
you said
I'm not dull

and ordinary am I?
she asked
looking at you
sideways on

no
you said
you have
your own beauty

do I?
yes you do
and she blushed
and looked away

and the peacock
called out
and moved off
opening its colourfulness

and Monica did a twirl
making the patterns
move
on her twirling dress.

Terry Collett

Her Own Way.

How was Florence?
But she never answered.
She'd been there with him
the guy with the dark eyes

and wallet the size she liked.
Did you see the art and the sites?
She stood and unpacked her bags,
emptied the dirty linen in the bins

in the washroom. Thank you for
the postcard; I liked the artwork.
She looked tired, her skin was pale.
Jetlagged, you surmised. Are you

coming out for a meal? For a drink?
She sat in the armchair, closed her
eyes. You sat opposite and stared.
There where you thought she sat,

emptiness gazed back. Her ghost
frequently visited at that time of day;
even in death she had her own way.

Terry Collett

Her Prayerful Breath

She sat on the grass
beneath the summer sun
looking at you
as if for the first time

and as she looked at you
you looked beyond her
at the distant sky
and how the clouds

resembled a woman's bust
and how humorous it was
when an airplane
went right through

on its way to some far off land
and as she took your hand
she said things about love
and how she felt

and did you feel the same
and you taking the image
of the airplane
and woman's entered bust

said oh yes of course
trying not to let it show
on your 14 year old face
how funny that image seemed

and not realizing how deeper
and more loving she was
back then beneath
that summer sky

with you thinking
of that day and her
and her later death
and you hearing

in the silence
of the drawn out dawn
her soft words
in her prayerful breath.

Terry Collett

Her Seventh Suicide.

Her seventh suicide,
attempts failed, saved,
the last by that medic
with the beard like Christ.

Thin sharp blade
against forearm,
the fingers shaking,
the eyes focused,
the voice of some French singer
in the background,
the red line,
the spurt of blood,
the walls, the bath,
splattered.

Seventh time lucky,
the water warm,
the water reddening,
the body becoming cold,
tired
she closes
her eyes,
is this how one dies?

Mother's demise
with the cancerous crab
screwing into her brain
and sucking up to pain.

She thinks on,
the French song
on the hifi
low, darkening.

That medic
brought her back
last time,
like some Lazarus,

back from the dark,
the unknown light,
the long night.

Seventh suicide,
attempts made,
unsuccessful,
buggered up,
teetering on the edge,
that time balanced
on the high office ledge
and that cop
with the Al Pacino look,
talked her in,
failed again.

Outside another day,
sound of pitter patter,
sound of rain.

Terry Collett

Her Sexuality

Even her mother
never knew

how much
sexuality boiled

beneath the surface
how much

she thought of it
when sitting down

in some cafe
watching men

at some nearby table
fantasizing

about them
dreaming about

what they might do
if she allowed

or while sitting
at the office typing

her mind on things
which'd make

her mother blush
the mighty rush

of images
and desires

and old Mr Fleet
talking to her

about some work
not knowing that fires

burned beneath
her flesh and skirt

that she made love
to herself

while in bed
while others slept

and even Kennedy
the office ram

would have choked
on things she did

in dreams or wrote
in her locked up diary

and once
when some girlfriend

of her brother's
stayed the night

and shared her room
and bed

she fantasised
of touching

and turning over
and kissing

all in the mind
she told herself

just one of those things
and even later

when she finally married
and lay beside him

at night having
sucked him dry

she'd stared
out the window

at the silver moon
in the dark sky.

Terry Collett

Her Sexy Sway 1970

What shall I wear
tonight in Tangiers?
Miriam asked
as we sat
in the base camp bar

what have you
got to wear?
I asked

I've one dress
I didn't think
we'd go out anywhere
to need a dress

we neither
I said

she sipped her coke
why do I have
to wear a dress?
she said

wear what you want
I'm sure all the dames
haven't got dresses
I said

I gazed at her
in her red top
and white shorts
and sandals

it's all right for you
you can wear
what you like
she said
but we have
to wear dresses

in the clubs

wear the dress then
I said

o Benny I hate dresses
I'd rather wear
jeans or shorts
she said

who said
to wear a dress?

one of the other girls
said it was best
Miriam said

wear what you want
I said

she sighed
and got off
the bar stool

what will you wear?
she asked

I've some trousers
and my jacket
and a proper shirt
I guess
I said

if you're wearing
proper gear
so will I
she said
but before that
I'm going to the showers
and having a good clean up

can I come

do your back?

I asked

no men allowed

in the women's showers

she said

shame

I said

yes it is

she replied

she sipped her drink

and went off

and walked away

and I watched her go

with her sexy sway.

Terry Collett

Her Single Lone Bed 1962

Benedict arrived
at Yochana's home.

He stood in the passageway
looking around
her mother was unsure of him,
her father greeted him
as he picked him up at home
and drove him.

Yochana was shy
and said little.

She showed him
into the lounge.

Her mother spoke platitudes
eyeing him like a hawk.

He talked shyly
of his home and parents
eyeing Yochana
taking in her face and eyes
and the slimness of her figure.

At dinner he sat opposite
the mother
her voice constant
like a dripping tap
moral and judgemental.

The father spoke
of his work and looked
at his plate.

Afterwards Yochana
showed him the garden
sorry about Mother
she talks so

not sure she trusts you yet
Benedict said not to worry.

Eyes watched them
as they walked and talked.

I'd kiss you but she
would not approve
Yochana said as they
walked by the flower bed.

Nor would I
Benedict said smiling
wait until later
is my bedroom
far from yours?
Night walk
sleep walk he said.

She smiled
near the parents
you'd have to
pass theirs first.

She showed him
his room and bed.

Small and neat
and Spartan.

He felt the bed.

Springy and OK.

She shut the door
and they kissed.

Lips to lips stuff.

Warm and wet.

The mother watched him

as he sat in the lounge
watching TV.

She talked all through
like some minor prophet
on morals and how
she saw things.

The father said nothing
read a book.

Yochana sat next to him
wanting to hold his hand
but didn't watched
the black and white TV
and the boring programme
waiting for bed.

Have Benedict either for real
or in her head
in her single lone bed.

Terry Collett

Her Soft Fruit 1972

Abela
sighs out a
big breathy

sexual
satisfied
woman's sigh

sex is done
we lie there
on the bed

satiated
she glowing
me sweating

just moonlight
in the sky
with sprinkled

shiny stars
hotel room
(3 star joint)

window open
some music
from afar

want more booze
she whispers
in my ear

I get up
out of bed
pour her a

white wine
myself scotch
with cold ice

we lie and
sip our booze
when we're back

at the shop
we must have
modern art

I suggest
that old stuff's
too boring

she lies there
sipping wine
her fine legs

slightly spread
no guessing
I suppose

studying
her soft fruit
what's ahead.

Terry Collett

Her Uncle's Place 1965

Tilly's uncle's place
at Richmond
was pretty run down
but it was functional

he had invited her down
to house mind
while he
was away a few days

she met me
off the coach
(she'd gone down
on the coach
the day before)

glad you're here
I don't like
sleeping here
on my own
she said
how long
can you stay?

I can stay
until tomorrow afternoon
then must get back
I said

that's something
she said
Uncle will be back
the day after

shall we have
a look around?
I said

no afterwards

she said

after what?
I said

I want you
and don't want
to miss out
in any opportunity
while you're here
she said

so she took me back
to her uncle's place
and took me
to the bedroom
she had been given
and straight away
she began to undress

come on then Benny
she said
a golden opportunity
while we can

so I undressed too
and soon we were
on the bed
and after a few moments
of foreplay
we were away
and in broad daylight too
no fumbling in some
hay barn or woodland shade
wondering if someone
might see us

here we were alone
and with just
yes yes yes
and the odd
grateful moan.

Terry Collett

Hers Was

Hers was a life of compliance.
Fulfilment of another's wishes,
observance of another's needs,
conformity to the rules set down
in stone. She was the rubber of
beads through fingers, touched
by thumbs; the beads of the rosary
would be sealed by prayers.

She was the self denier, who put
herself last, one who sacrificed
pleasures for a promised salvation,
whose menstruations were reminders
of babies that would never be,
children which would never be hers,
dugs that would never be sucked.

She carried the cross through cloisters,
sandaled feet trod the paved paths,
heard birdsong, saw butterflies in flight,
moths at night in the candle's flame,
she hidden away, unknown, no fame
with a saint's name. And each morning
rising with the bell, kissed by the early
dawn, touched by the chill of early frost,
she lived and moved, all for love of Christ.

Terry Collett

High Mass 1971

A monk,
dark robed,
stared at the sun
on the flower garden,

hands tucked
into the wide sleeves
of the robe,
another stood behind him

in the line,
head lowered,
eyes on his sandalled feet,
I stood at the front

with Brother Hugh,
eyes on the orange brick wall,
thinking of Mass
and the words in Latin

I'd learned for the hymn,
she stood by the bed
in the room and said
shall we?

and how?
I said,
you shall see,
she replied,

the bell tolled
from the tall tower,
we began to walk
into the church,

in twos,
line following line,
fingers into the stoup,
water on forehead

from shoulder to shoulder,
kiss me here,
she said,
and here and here,

and I walked to the choir stalls
and took my place
at the front,
Monks settled

into their places,
the abbot tapped on wood
and the Mass began,
chant,

voices,
unison,
slow paced,
high and low

like a huge wave
of Latin sounds,
I kissed her inner thigh,
lips touched soft flesh,

her hands
holding me in place,
one monk raised a voice
in high solo,

I see the words in Latin,
followed with a finger,
she put her finger there
and fireworks began,

her breath deep in my ear,
Corpus Christi,
blood stained,
eyes gazed across the aisle

from the high altar,

arms outstretched
as if in flight,
nailed in place,

hammered,
lance-pierced side,
and she said,
more and more

and I entered deeper
and one of the monks
(French peasant)
walked down the aisle

beside another
carrying the cup of blood,
who is this
that comes?

Dom Leo raised the body
above his head
Corpus Christi,
he said,

bell sounded,
one tolled,
I walked in line
to partake of the body,

opening my lips,
and he placed
on my tongue,
her tongue touched mine,

sucked,
licked,
here,
she said,

here,
the monk with Parkinson's
placed a wavering hand

with the body of Christ,

black robed,
fingers aged,
he mouthed his amen,
incense smell,

high,
rising roof wards,
I saw the abbot
make the sign

from shoulder to shoulder,
the Mass is ended,
one chanted in Latin,
I closed my eyes,

prayers said,
couldn't get her
half-clothed
from my head.

Terry Collett

High School 1961

Lizbeth put her hands
over my eyes
from behind
in the corridor.

Guess who?
she said.

Bridgitte Bardot
I said.

No it's me
she said
taking away
her hands
and turning me
around.

It was her
red haired
not blonde
and those
piercing eyes.

Miss me?
she said.

Yeah very much
I said
although I hadn't
in either sense.

I was worried
in case Jane
came along
and thought
I was seeing Lizbeth
behind her back.

What are you doing
this weekend?
She said.

Don't know
I said
help out
on the farm maybe.

And when you are
not on the farm?

Don't know
maybe see Jane
I said.

O the virgin Jane
of course
don't you get bored
seeing her
and her nature study
and birdsong
and what have you
Lizbeth said.

No I like birdsong
and what have you
I replied.

You will get bored
with her and when
you do maybe
we could spend
some time together
and you know
get down to it
she said.

Got to go
I said.

Ok Benny

but maybe
I will cycle
over Saturday
and see you
she said
and walked off
along the corridor
just as the bell rang
for after recess lessons.

I walked on
and hoped
she wouldn't
turn up Saturday
and spoil things
but have to see
I mused
and see what
fate brings.

Terry Collett

High Tea On Sundays.

On some Sundays
you went for high tea
with great Nan Seeley
and you sat around a big table

with bread and butter
and tomatoes and celery
in tall glass containers
and lettuce and bowls

of whelks and shrimps
and winkles and other
seafood and the big fruit cake
and white plates

and napkins and glasses
and a jug of water
and great uncle told
the tall tales or jokes

and gran said
not in front
of the little ones
o they'll not understand

great uncle said
and off he'd reel
and you sat taking
the bread and butter

and slice of ham and tomato
and looked at great gran
on the settee with her shawl
and grey hair and looking

weary and tired
and eyes closed
and your mother said
eat up and don't waste

do you want some winkles?
great aunt asked
(winkles) you remembered
what the other boys said

in junior school (are what boys
have in their trousers
and girls have clams
said one of the bigger boys

with a snigger seen that
fat girl in the lavatory) winkles?
great aunt asked again
no thank you

you said
such a well mannered boy
gran said
not like some these days

said great uncle
pinning out a wrinkle
with a pin
you ate the bread and butter

and ham and watched
your old man
with his thin moustache
sipping his tea

and holding a cheese
and watercress sandwich
and you saw great gran
with eyes closed

on the settee her head
to one side
granddad silent
like an undertaker

gazing at the table cloth

holding his cup
and saucer
sipping the tea

and you watched
great aunt breaking up
a shrimp pulling off
the head and tail

so I said to her
she said
there's no smoke
without fire

and great uncle said
cross talking over her
there were these two sailors
and the girl with a lisp

and hush hush
gran said
not in front
of the young ones

and you wondered
what a girl did
with a lisp
and why the two sailors

knew her
and your old man
lit a cigarette
and there was a howl of laughter

as the two sailor
and girl with a lisp
caused guffaws
and even gran double over

and granddad said nothing
but sipped his tea
and you heard

the big grandfather clock

go tick tock tick tock
and the room smelt
of celery
and cigarette smoke

and still laughter
from the sailor's joke.

Terry Collett

His Engines Fired.

Henry sipping his latte,
spied a girl with a dog
across the way,
small dog
sitting on her lap.

His group sipped
and chattered;
he studied her
as she waited
for some other dame
to bring their drinks.

The dog moved
on her lap,
rising up
her short blue skirt.

He looked away,
a member
of his group
asked about
an item of news
seen in the paper
which one of them held:
some financial deal
or war unending
in some far off land,
and talked of other things
that seemed more at hand.

But instinct urged him
to glance back at the dame
with the mutt on her lap.

Her friend had brought
the two cappuccinos
and put them down,
an older dame,

mother or aunt
or mother-in-law,
and the dame sat down
and the girl put
the dog down
to the ground.

Henry glanced
at the already risen
short blue skirt,
to see if she
pulled it down,
but she didn't,
she sipped her drink
chatting away.

Fine thighs
met his eyes,
two to gaze at
and dream of
what lay beyond
the borders
of the skirt's cloth.

But the group's talk
had reached a peak
and his involvement
was desired,
so he looked away,
his fires alight,
his engines fired.

Terry Collett

His Faraway Stare 1916

You are not
to go into
Master George's room
unless told to

Dudman the butler says
eyeing her sternly
Susie can take
his meals to him

and the nurse there
can nurse him
Polly says nothing
and walks away

back to her task
of polishing silver
watching him go off
and talk to the cook

and nod his head
Polly wants
the old George back
not the broken man

the War has harmed
in mind and soul
she remembers
when he was home last

from the Front
she lay in his bed
and they made love
in the late hours

of the night
him shafting her
to a kingdom come
remember what I said

Dudman says
passing her by
with that dark stare
in his eye

Polly watches him go
wishes she could
but knows best not
the nurse will be there

and George will be sat
at the window
with his lost
faraway stare.

Terry Collett

His Letter.

The letter has come at last.
You have been waiting for days.
You open the envelope with
Both excitement and anxiety
Gripping you tight. His script
Is as per norm: clear, well written
With that slanting at the end of words.
He hasn't signed with love or left
Those flying bird kisses. You see
Meaning between words, not those
He's written, but what it was he
Meant to say, but hasn't. You skip
Words on matters trite. You read
Deeply on the words that mention
You or how he feels. You hold his
Letter tightly between fingers of
Both hands. The page shakes.
He doesn't say he loves you or
Speak of that night of sexual passion.
You fold the letter carefully; place
It in the pocket of your dress. You
Gaze out the window at the passing
Crowds below. It isn't what he writes
That troubles you, but what he leaves
Unsaid that brings you now so low.

Terry Collett

His Mother's Best Friend

O'Brien fancied his mother's best friend,
Mrs O'Hara, she with the daughter
Who showed her panties to boys for sixpence.
How are you, Micheal? She asked, as she sat
With legs crossed in the kitchen between sips
Of milky sweet tea. I'm fine, he replied,
Studying her legs, trying to pursue
With his greedy eyes, the length of her thighs.
How old are you now? Her soft voice inquired.
Fourteen, he replied. He lifted his sight
To her weighty breasts, picturing his head
Wedged tightly between. Don't sit their gawping,
Go get to your play, his plump mother said.
He took a last look, trying to capture
Mrs O' Hara with her legs and breasts
And what lay beneath, for his nightly dreams
In his sweaty bed, be they wet or dry,
And gave her a smile and wink of his eye.

Terry Collett

His Road Taken.

He would have taken
that road, but that road
was taken, so he walked
elsewhere, where she

wasn't there, where her
perfume never reached,
where her eyes never
stared, where her lips

never spoke. The road
was lonely, there was
no traffic, no birds sang,
no nothing, but his sure

footsteps on the hard road,
and the echo of them after
he walked. The other road
was where they had once

walked together, where
they had laughed and sang,
the other road was narrow,
and birds chirped and flew,

and she had said: I love you,
love you, love you. Now
all was quiet; this road was
deserted: no traffic came or

people passed or talked, or
she not there to laugh or cry,
and his only companion was
the echo of her voice: why?

Terry Collett

His Silence

Granddad carried his silence
Like a cloak. His chair by the fireplace
Held his shadows, dark images
Of trenches, friends blown apart,
Decapitated, armless, legless,
Crowded around him as he sat
And stared. Some days in his garden
With you by his side, his comrades
Hid beyond the sun's rays,
The cloud's motion, the birdsong,
He'd speak in slow monosyllables
Of flower's growth or colour or scent
Not caring at that moment why the guns
Were silent or where his friends all went.

Terry Collett

His Soft Words 1962

Shoshana
mused on
Naaman a

boy from school
her sister
was in her

own bedroom
soft sobbing
Shoshana

had walked past
the closed door
she didn't

knock or call
just walked past
her sister

was pregnant
their father
was rowing

downstairs with
their mother
Shoshana

shut her door
slowly walked
to the wide

window and
looked out at
the garden

she could see
where her dad
had dug the

flower bed
there were birds
pulling our

soft earthworms
with their beaks
Naaman would

know which birds
they all were
she wished he

was there now
beside her
with his book

of wild birds
and his arm
about her

whispering
in her ear
his soft words.

Terry Collett

His Tongue.

His tongue entered
your ear

licked the rim
and lobe

and made its way
down your neck

becoming dry
as it reached

never mind that now
he never told you

he had a wife
back in L.A.

and that she
was dying

of cancer
and there he was

trying to get you
into bed

and have his way
and if it hadn't been

for that photo
of her

falling on the floor
when he took off

his pants
you would never

have known
but there you are

no matter how far
you look

you can never
look too far.

Terry Collett

His Young Man's Head

Milka wanted Benedict
to take her across
old Tom Dubbin's bed,
(the old boy was down stairs

in the lounge
waiting for death) :
she'd put aside
her mop and bucket,

unbuttoned
her light blue
overalls,
but Benedict

had refused,
said it wasn't
the time or place.
But still she lay,

her blouse undone,
her skirt hitched up,
pouting her lips.
They won't miss you

for a short while,
she said, besides
who will know?
Benedict tidied

the sink, washed
away the spit
from the old boy's mug,
straightened the towels.

I could always scream
and say you wanted
to take me here,
she said.

He pulled back
the yellow curtains,
opened up
the windows.

For everything
there's a season,
he said,
this is not it.

What if I say
you pushed me
on the bed?
she said.

They know you,
Benedict said,
they think you're a
whore anyway;

they know me,
know what I'm like
and will say, no way.
Milka got off the bed,

pulled down
her skirt
and buttoned up
her blouse,

tidied her
blonde hair.
One day you will,
she said,

one day.
Maybe, he said,
one day, yet in
his mind or in sleep

at night, he often had,

taken her,
as she called it,
across some

old boy's bed,
but so far not
for real, just inside
his young man's head.

Terry Collett

Hold Dear

Rolland didn't like her
but he wasn't in love
with her as you were
he never saw beyond

the skin and hair never
saw the inner beauty
the part that God or
some other deity put

there he'd sit with you
at the back of class in
school hands behind
his head acting like

Brando real cool and
you having her in your
sight remembering the
kisses and the feel of her

in your arms and she sitting
there in her school uniform
across the room looking
at you now and then with

a small smile and bright eyes
not knowing then that cancer
would have its grip on her
in some later year and take

away that aspect of her you
remember and hold dear.

Terry Collett

Hollowness.

Hollowness
of the mornings
and evenings
of sleep and dreams

and waking up
to another morning
and the radio
blaring out

hollow music
by hollow people
and they talk
in between songs

hollowness
in their voices
and the place
seemingly hollow

and hollow people
walk the supermarkets
filling trolleys
with hollowness

and Muzak pushed out
as they shop
and the comfortableness
and the pretend

contentment
but really just hollowness
there in their eyes
and the light

of their eyes
and that smiling
they have
which is as hollow

as their lives
and the morality
and rules of hollowness
rule and the pretence

it is not hollow
although deep down
they know it is
hollowness of nights

and dreams on dreams
of forgetfulness
and the waking up
of grief and knowing

it will always be there
like a ghost of what once was
and is not
and they lay down

to sleep and one day
it will be the final sleep
and the last kiss
of hollowness to bless.

Terry Collett

Holly's End Of Day

Geraldine
cooked dinner
as she was home first.

You came in
and kissed her
naked neck.

She said
she'd had
a long day
but the kiss
made her go tingly
weak at the knees.

She turned
and kissed
your lips
arms around
each other.

She carried on
with dinner
and you went
and washed
and changed
into something fresher.

You helped her
in the kitchen.

She said
her boss
at work
tried it on
with her
but she'd put him
in his place.

You said
you'd have
slapped his face
but she is softer
than you
less fiery.

She said
she felt humiliated
by him touching her.

You said you'd
go there tomorrow
and have a go.

But she was not keen
and said it would
be sorted in her way.

After dinner
you sat
on the sofa together
watched TV
sipping white wine
and a few chocolates
kissing now
and then.

As it was getting late
you both went to bed
and lay there
in each others' arms
made love
kissed
and lay at rest
your hand lying
on her sexual nest.

Terry Collett

Holy Saturday Gains And Losses

Holy Saturday. Lulu softly rubs her
Black rosary held between fingers.
The church cold and dark. Waiting
For the light. The candle brought by
The priest and others of his ilk to bring
Light to the darkness. Rudandoff stands
Still silent in shadows watching her
Outline in candlelight's glow. Lulu feels
Smooth wood on fingers and thumb
Mutters her pure prayers watching
The candle light up the darkness.
Rudandoff smells her the scent
Touching him the shine of her hair
Caught by passing light her profile
Moves him her moving fingers stirs
His dark embers stiffen his manhood.
The holy candle brings light to the
Church. The priest and others chant
Out the long prayers. Lulu's soft lips
Kiss the crucified Christ on her crucifix
Warm lips on smooth wood. Rudandoff
Wishes those were his kisses his manhood
Between her moving fingers her tender
Body beneath his hot frame. Lulu closes
Eyes imagines her Christ blue bruised
And beaten hammered and battered
Gazing through eye slits bringing her true
Love never forsaken. Rudanoff's hot lust
Swells in the darkness his sausage fingers
Want to reach and touch to squeeze and
Fondle to greedily suck her female juices.
Holy Saturday. She finds her love's light.
He loses lust's kiss and burns in darkness.

Terry Collett

Honey Drips 1986

Holly lies
in the bed
it's Sunday

and no work
she says and
Geraldine

is down stairs
preparing
the breakfast

standing there
in her short
silk nightie

but when she
returns and
we have drunk
and eaten

our breakfast
we'll make love
once again

before we
go out to
eat our lunch

in that small
restaurant
sit outside

watching the
world go by
sipping wine

eating our
Spanish dish

but till then

it's breakfast
after that
we'll nibble

each other
kiss soft flesh
investigate

fish like clams
kiss soft lips
speak soft words

as the sex
honey drips.

Terry Collett

Hopeless Seamus 1963

Seamus hopes
that the girl
Moran will
(he's heard she
maybe will)
have a touch
and a kiss
maybe more

he sees her
by the fence
standing there
moodily

other kids
going home
from the school
walking past
the wire fence

she sees him
approaching
his swagger
the dark hair
snotty nose

how are ya?
Seamus asks

who's asking?
Mary says
eyeing him
her satchel
by her feet

you now me
I'm Seamus
he replies
taking in

her fine eyes
her small bust

what you want?
Mary says
walking on

he follows
how about
you and me
meeting up?
Seamus asks

we've met up

I mean some
place after
school where we
can do things
Seamus says

what you mean
by do things?
Go to church?
Kiss a nun?
Go visit
the sick ones
or the poor?
Mary says
monotone

I thought of
something more
Seamus says
maybe us
touching up
kissing such

I'd rather
smell a pig's
foul behind
than kiss you

or let you
touch my skin
Mary says
her voice hard
(thinking of
Magdalene's
hands on her
and kissing
a day back)

up you then
prick teasing
Moran girl
fecking tart
he walks off
fingering
signs to her

hope you get
warts on yours
Seamus Doyle
Mary calls
after him

she walks on
home from school
muttering
to herself
fecking fool.

Terry Collett

Hornbridge And Girls.

Hornbridge likes to see girls undress.
But slowly. Their thin fingers and thumbs
Holding the cloth and taking off. Especially
The black negligee held just so. He fully
Dressed waits until the final article of
Clothing is removed and she stands gazing
At him with her bright expectant eyes.
He likes to have music in the background
Playing. Jazz or classic. Gerry Mulligan for
Some types or Mozart for others depending
On their breeding or class. Occasionally a Rock
Chick makes it through his defences and he
Puts on the Stones or something of their ilk.
He likes it when the girls place their hands on
Their hips as they wait for him to undress.
Yet there is always some disappointment.
Some flaw in either breasts or waist or legs
Or ass. Gloria spoilt him. Hard act to follow.
Those eyes. How he could swim there in that
Blue liquid of the two eyes. Those breasts.
How could he ever forget them? His dear friends.
The way they would be waiting. Her hands soft
And warm and gentle touching him. And how
She loved to disrobe to the tones of a turned
Down Vivaldi from the hifi. Sad she left. Final
Curtain. Big cancer. No fond slow goodbye.

Terry Collett

Hot Lips On A Summer Day.

Christina met you
on the playing field
after lunch in recess
the sun was warm

butterflies went by
clouds white puffs
moved over head
I saw you playing cricket

this morning
from the classroom window
during domestic science
Christina said

standing there
in your whites
your hands behind your back
looking bored

if I had known you were watching
I'd have waved
you said
you were not long batting

she said
after sitting down on the grass
pulling you down beside her
by the hand

no not my best performance
you said smiling
how good
is your best performance?

depends what I'm doing
you said
but not batting?
she asked

no not batting
you replied
looking at her hair
dark and well kempt

her lips parted just so
her white teeth showing
you kiss well
she said suddenly

do I?
you said
yes you do
but you could always do

with practice
yes I suppose so
you said watching Rolland
kicking ball with other boys

across the way
your sister said
you keep my photo
on the bedside cabinet

by your bed
Christina said
yes I do
not my best photo

but it's the only one
I could sneak out
of the house
without the parents

noticing
Rolland scored a goal
passing the ball
by a kid between

two coats

do you kiss it at night?
she asked
kiss what?

the photo my photo?
only if my brother's not looking
you said
but otherwise you do?

yes long as wet
you said
and she laughed
and crossed her legs

and you caught a glimpse
of her thigh
I'd like to take you home
for lunch again soon

if I can get my mother
in a good mood
not when she's depressed
she said

that'd be good
you said
she leaned forward
and took your hand

and drew you near her
and kissed you
on the lips
girls nearby giggled

and you looked over at them
feeling shy but warmed
don't mind them
she said

they're just green
with envy
you looked away

from the girls

and saw Rolland
score another goal
and a cheer went up
but they were lost

from view
when Christina
with feverishly hot lips
kissed you.

Terry Collett

How Deep Love Sinks.

Yehudit sits
at the front
of the school bus
with her sister.

I sit with Goldfinch
on the left hand side
half way down.

She turns
and smiles at me.

Her eyes glimmer
like moonlit waves.

Goldfinch talks
of football.

I hate football
but pretend
to like it,
throwing a few names
I know
into the conversation
to keep away
the silence.

The driver turns
on the radio.

A song about Mr Postman
and a letter comes on.

I look up at her.

She looks at me
the smile still there.

I wish she was here

next to me
instead of Goldfinch;
her thigh touching mine
as we sit,
her elbow brushing
against mine
in conversation.

Her smile seems to say:
remember yesterday?
I remember.

My lips holding
her lips in the that
first kiss.

Her body close to mine.

A pulse racing through me
like a chased cat.

I wish she was here
and not there.

I look up
and she has turned
to the driver and talks.

I wish it was me
she was talking to do,
my eyes
she was gazing into.

I look away
and catch a word
that Goldfinch throws.

How deep love sinks
and holds
no one knows.

How It Was

That is how it was that is how
The painting got painted with
You in it and the artist telling
You how to sit and where and
How to have the hat positioned
On your head and at what angle
And don't smile too much girl he
Said or look too dour and so you
Sat there in that antique chair with
Your hands held together on your
Knees and your legs crossed ladylike
And your feet on a small stool with
The shawl wrapped about you to
Keep out the cold you felt that day
You posed and looking back years later
You think what a hat to wear and what
A bored expression to have upon your
Face and you note he painted that small
Glass vase of flowers and that round
Mirror on the wall to capture the others
Who stood across the room posing in their
Childhood play only now you recall that
It all was fiction on the artist's part there
Were no others there across the room
To play their games that cold spring day.

Terry Collett

How It Was 1975

How is the bed?
She said.

I felt with fingers
pushing down
the mattress giving slight,
but bouncing back
as soon as left.

Seems good,
it will suit us fine,
I replied.

Draw the curtains,
keep out the eyes
of office workers
across the road
who may peer in
while we make love,
she said,
as she undressed
in a further
reach of room.

I drew the curtains,
and watched as workers
in the office went about
their daily chores
like unliberated bores,
then drew the curtains closed,
and began to undress.

She had undressed first,
and climbed into
the double bed,
and waited
resting her head.

Once undressed,

I too climbed into bed,
and lay beside her
snuggled up close,
kissing her arm,
breast, and later the rest.

While we made love
in the bed,
no thought was given
to the poor souls who worked
across in the office
across the road,
no thought of what they
must have thought
as I drew the curtains across
to block out their view.

We made love again,
and again after that,
the sky beyond the curtains
turning a darker blue.

The workers home
with their lives,
and husbands,
or lovers,
or faithful
or unfaithful wives.

Terry Collett

How Mother Looked

You want to look how Mother looked.
Makeup she used to use lies on her
Dressing table in the room father has
Had locked up. You have secreted the
Key and unlocked and closing the door,
Are sitting facing your image in the mirror's
Glass you've propped against a chair. You
Do not have your mother's hair. You have
Her eyes, Father said, although he says it
Less now since her death, as if stealing
From the dead. You want to transform
Yourself into her; be the woman she was;
Have her beauty; have her smile; her gentle
Manner. Cancer took her like thief at night;
Reduced her to a bag of bones and hanging
Skin, pale and thin. Forget that image, Father
Chides, cast it away, lock behind the mind's
Dark doors. You want to look how Mother
Looked before her sad demise, before cold
Cancer's deceit and lies. Still a child, Father
Says, you have all your life to live; leave your
Grief behind, but you want to be as Mother
Was, like the coloured picture in your mind.

Terry Collett

How They All Fall

O men
says Ariadne
who gives
a flower bud
about them

and she tells me
how she managed
to plant a kiss
on any naked part
of Bernice
that was visible

(why she was telling me
I don't know
unless she was trying
to embarrass me)

O how I like
to hold her
and place my tongue
on her tongue

and when her father
knew about me
he was quite off
with me

(I study her red hair
cropped short
her pale complexion
those thin lips
now opening
and closing
as she speaks)

but as I said to Bernice
it's how we are
it's how we are to be

(and I heard tell
she kneed some
young guy
who got on
the wrong side of her
and where she kneed him
brought tears to his eyes)

and if he doesn't like it
he can go
where all narrow minded
people go
and rot there
as if I care

(I see how
her slim fingers
touch each other
as she brings
her hands together)

and Bernice being
the soft hearted sop she is
became all sentimental
and said
he my father
after all
but I just smiled
and said
that's how
they all fall.

Terry Collett

How Time Has Fled.

Ah, my son, how the time has fled
since Death took you among the dead.

Time has not healed my deepest wound
although some had that it would.

I'd have kept you back if I could
or have died in your place, my son,
if God or your fate had allowed.

But as you said it was your time,
although I feel it as a crime
by those who should have cared for you.

You know my son I talk to you
in quiet moments of the day,
tears shadowing my saddened words
on their way to you as frail birds.

Terry Collett

How Time.

How will we
separate this one
from the rest?

How make
the new
not grow old or dim
or aged
before its time?

I once was new
and thought my age
the best and wise by far
and thought eternity
was mine
to have and hold
and tread places
brave and bold.

I once thought
that time was mine alone
to pick moments
from its ageless purse
but time is no ones' slave
nor bends to wise words
or pleads of more again
in life's passing light
into dark night.

I thought
I had forever
as youth does
and could spend my time
as one who has riches
more to spend
but all time goes
and is spent
at the end.

How Was It? 1965

How was it
at your friend's house?
Tilly's mother said

it was good
Tilly replied
(thinking on her feet
not to let slip
she'd stayed
at an uncle's house
while he
was away in France)

and where does
this friend live?
the mother said

near the coast
a train ride away
Tilly said
making it up
as she went along

her mother gazed at her
didn't know
you had a friend
near the coast

she's only
moved there recently
Tilly said

her mother looked back
at the cooking
she was watching

don't forget to write
and thank her
the mother said

I won't
Tilly said
thinking of the bed
she shared with Benny
at her uncle's house
the sex and all
the late lie ins
the breakfast come
dinnertime meals
and watching late TV
on the sofa next to each other

what did you find
to do all day?
her mother said
gazing at her again
eyes peering

stuff like girls do
went to the beach
and watched TV

her mother nodded her head
didn't get up to
mischief I hope?

no of course not
Tilly said
her mother
is quite strict
and had
her eyes on us
to make sure
we were good

just as well
Tilly's mother said
you girls these days
while in my day
we knew how to behave
we had standards

and knew where
to drawn the line
did you meet any boys?

Tilly remembered Benny
humping her good
and she spread eagled out
or so seemed

no boys
never saw them
not that we'd
be interested
Tilly said

her mother took off
the boiled potatoes
and began to mash them
with butter

there will be time
enough for that

yes I guess so
Tilly said
thinking of Benny
she in
the uncle's bed.

Terry Collett

How Was Richmond 1965

How was
Richmond?
Benny's mother asked.

It was good,
Benny said,
thinking of Tilly
and him
at her uncle's place
in the spare bed.

What did you
do there?
Mother said,
unpacking his washing
from his small bag
and sorting it
for the wash.

Looked around
the shops
and the park
and relaxed
watching
the small TV
in the room
of the B&B; ,
he said,
musing on Tilly
lying down
on the sofa
with him at her
uncle's place,
watching
TV programmes,
kissing and touching,
having eaten
fish and chips
bought from

the shop nearby.

Tilly was away
at her uncle's place
last week,
so her
mother said,
Benny's mother said.

Where is that?
Benny said,
looking out
the window
trying not to pay
too much attention
to what was said.

Her mother didn't say,
you know what
she's like never says
too much about things,
his mother said,
moving off
with the washing.

He mused
on Tilly, hoping
Tilly's mother
never said
about Richmond
and the uncle's place,
or his and her mother
would put one
and one together
and come up
with two,
and her mother
would blow her top
and that would be it
all over the village
like a plague

in medieval times.

He mused on Tilly
lying in the bed
legs spread
arms wide
such love
such sex
is best to hide.

Terry Collett

I Am As Nothing.

I am as nothing, said Sister Clare;
I am a tool in the Lord's hands, His
Words wake me from sleep, His
Utterance disperses my dreams.
I wake to the birds' chorus, the sun
Rises at my elbow, the moon goes
As my eyes take sight. I dress while
Uttering an Ave, wash the night from
My eyes and skin, sense the waters'
Coldness through my fingers' hold.
From my window I see the cranberry
Tree in the cloister garth; early birds
Perched in the branches, sunlight
Flittering through the green leaves.
Sister Blaise stares up at the sky, her
Hands hidden beneath her habit's cloth,
Her head to one side. God sees all, my
Mother said, He knows you better than
You know yourself, knows your thoughts
Like a well read book, He understands
Your ways and wants, marks your sins
In the big black book. I leave my room,
Walk down the stairs to the cloister's
Path, run my palm on the wall's rough
Brick, my feet taking the steady step,
My blue eyes lowered, my thoughts run
Off like children at play. I gather my
Thoughts like a shepherd his sheep,
I pen them tight into my skull's sides.
Flowers in the flowerbeds pull my eyes,
Yellows and reds and blues feed my mind.
Sister Rose stands by the bell, her hands
Holding the rough rope, her eyes lit up like
Candles at night, her smile like a child's kiss.
I pass her by with a gentle nod, taking note
Of her fingers' hold. I enter the church with
A steady pace, smell incense on the air's skin;
See sunlight through high windows, beaming
Down on the choir stalls and cold stone floor.

I sit and wait for matins to begin, wait for my
Bruised groom carrying the whole world's sin.

Terry Collett

I Didn'T Care.

If my old man said
get neat dressed
washed up

and do your hair
we're going
to the cinema

or up West
I washed up
dressed

in my best suit
and Brylcreemed
my hair

and I was there
just him and me
no other to share

I didn't care
I was there
not elsewhere

and it was
ice cream
or lolly

and best seat
in the house
and I was glad

I was there
not elsewhere
just us

I didn't care
yet when
my mother

took us away
and not there
but elsewhere

away from him
I didn't care
I wasn't there

but elsewhere
for he
was a bugger to her

and made her hurt
and cry
and didn't care

so I was glad
I wasn't there
with him

but elsewhere
with her
for he was not

worth my care
so I was out
of there

and elsewhere
so there
I didn't care.

Terry Collett

I Didn't Lie 1951

Auntie took me
to Milly's place
across the parade ground

Milly let us in
and Milly said
to her daughter Elsie
show Benny
the blue budgie

Elsie looked at me
sternly and unsmiling
budgie wants to sleep
Elsie said

budgies don't sleep
in the day
Milly said
show Benny
the bird

Elsie sighed
and walked
to the other room
where a birdcage
was hooked up
to a metal stand

I saw the blue budgie
on a perch

that's the bird
Elsie said glumly
looking at me

what's it's name?
I asked

why'd you

want to know?

She said

so I can talk to it

I said

talk to a bird?

She said mockingly

boys don't talk

to birds

I studied the blue budgie

hello blue bird

I said

the budgie chirped

and flapped its wings

it's name's not blue bird

Elsie said

what's it's name then?

I said

not telling you

she said

and walked off

is it Elsie too?

I said

she turned

and gazed at me

no it's a boy bird

boy birds aren't called

girl names

she said

Milly came in the room

to fetch a couple of plates

are you talking to Billy?

She asked me

yes
I said
he chirped at me

Milly smiled
that's good
she said

Elsie glared at me
as her mother
walked back
out the room

hello Billy
I said to the budgie
the bird chirped again

Elsie stood next to me
and stared at the budgie
perhaps he likes you
she said
I don't know why

I looked at the budgie
I like you
I said quietly

Elsie stared at me
do you?
She said

I nodded

I don't know why
she added
and walked away

nor do I
my voice
uttered softly to Billy

Elsie had gone
and the bird
flapped its wings
and flew across the cage
to the other side

I did like her
I didn't lie.

Terry Collett

I Forget.

There is light
from afar
but around
there is dark
and voices
around me.

Don't tell them
let them wait
hear Mozart
string quartet
the players
ghostly ones
unsmiling.

Someone sings
baritone
another
soprano
a duet
who they are
I forget.

Terry Collett

I Guess

I guess that's it, huh?
no more wearing
the wife's new clothes,
Don said sadly,

no more trying on
those dresses she gets
from that shop
on the high street,

no more pulling on
those panties and tights
when she's out
with her friends at nights.

I guess that's it,
no more dressing up
in her bikini
and doing the catwalk

along the hall
to the stares
of cat and dog,
Don sighed,

gazing at himself
in the mirror,
seeing baby Jojo
staring at him

from the cot;
that's it Jojo,
no more shows,
that's your lot.

Terry Collett

I Hear The Lark.

I hear the lark, said Alice,
it sings in my ear like an
angel's voice, brings me
pleasure in my darkest
hour, plays in my mind
like an echoing dream.

I see the morning sun,
its beams dance at my
feet, swirl around like a
child at play, my eyes
rejoice at the sight I see,
dread the thought of
blindness in some new
day's gift, push away the
ideas as if they were flies,
push all away like one fulfilled.

I smell the lily's scent, its
aroma brings me out in a
rash of joy, its smell invades
my nose like a vanquishing
army, opens me up to the
pleasures of smell, makes
me want to sniff forever,
drink in until my head swims,
my sleep recalls the aroma's kiss.

I feel my lover's fingers along
my flesh, sense his skin smooth
along mine like a skater on ice,
like one sliding across a polished
floor, the fingers caressing like
a butterfly's touch, tickling to
laughter, fondling until my voice
says, ah, don't stop, fill me up,
squeeze all on until the final drop.

I breathe the wind's breath,

inhale the morning's freshness,
the air of angel's exhalation,
my lungs take in like a greedy
girl, sup in each particle as I
dance along, remembering now
the air of summer, the filling
of my lungs like a fish the water,
opening my lips in a happy song,
my voice singing across an open sea.

I taste my lover's tongue touch
mine, feel the tongue and mine
in dance, lick and lick until the
pleasures erupt, the places engorge
and swell, I taste the saltiness
of my lover's sex, the sweetness
of the heavenly hive, the tongue
swimming along my lover's thigh
and arm and on and on, my taste
buds explode into a rainbow of
colours, my tongue feeling like
a snail's flesh, moving and sensing
until my mind says, No more, no
more and I hear the waves of dark
depression surge in on my shore.

Terry Collett

I Love Paris

Sonya stood
on the narrow balcony
of the hotel room in Paris

I lay on the bed
reading Celan poems

she was in her underwear
and bra
smoking
a French cigarette

most of the great artists
lived here
at one time or other
she said

I looked over at her
her blonde hair
touched her haunches
her tight butt
smiled at me

most yes
I guess so
I said

can we go
to an art gallery today?
she said
I love the Impressionists
this is the place
to see them

guess so
I returned to the book

where are we breakfasting?

where you like

she exhaled
that little café
on the corner is good
she suggested

you like the waiter
the guy with the Proust moustache

nonsense
it's the coffee
the cake he provides
she said

she gazed back at me
aren't you going to wash
and dress?

I nodded
after you

you're quicker
she said

she was right
ok
so I got up
and went into the bathroom
and washed
and brushed my teeth
and came out

she was on the bed
looking at the book
of poems

how do you
make sense of this?
she asked

open minded

and getting the vibe

she put the book down
and went in the bathroom

I dressed
lit a cigarette
and stood
by the window
looking down
into the Parisian street
below

I love Paris
I mused
love all this
and blew
a passing French girl
a palm blown kiss.

Terry Collett

I See Jane

I see Jane
on the bus
Saturday

shopping day
with her mum
at the front

I take in
her dark hair
long and loose

her summer
flowered dress
how she moves

with the bus
side to side
I wish that

I was there
beside her
our bodies

touching each
arm to arm
but she is

at the front
and I am
at the back

with others
mentally
I begin

from my palm
to blow her
a hot kiss

hoping she
will get it
on her neck

or cheek and
it not miss.

Terry Collett

I Stood There Mcmlxxi

Semi light
in the abbey church
red light altar end
a lone monk
in silent prayer,

in silentio
Dei loquitur,

I climbed the stairs
to the passageway
to my cell
the Grand Silence in force
after Compline
until after Mass
and wanted to speak
to someone but couldn't,

di dubbio è l'opposto
della fede
the Italian monk said
as we worked
in the abbey library,

Mrs Shepherd wanted me
to kiss her inner thighs
so I did
as she asked,

to fall in love with God
said Augustine of Hippo
is the greatest romance,

shall I make the grade?
said George in the cloister garth
after the office of None
as we sipped tea
and ate cake
I feel the cold so much

I said I thought
he would but he
left soon after,

ouvrir votre cœur
à Dieu the French monk
said to me
as I helped him
in the abbey gardens
selecting vegetables
for lunch,

she kissed me once alone
in the castle when other
visitors went off
with the guide
to the next room
warm lips
maybe tongue,

wenn Sie zweifeln
was dann?
the Austrian monk said
to doubt is to think
I said
I think therefore,

except our own thoughts
said Gareth quoting Descartes
there is nothing
absolutely in our power,

I tolled the bell-tower bell
for the Angelus
and the angel said unto Mary
and the sound reached out
to ears and hearts,

Dom James was desperate
for a smoke but did not
yield to it but pretended
a cigarette between fingers

and exhaled
cold morning air
and I know
I stood there.

Terry Collett

I Will Go 1916

Susie peels the potatoes
Mrs Gripe had told her to do
hands in cold water

back aching
the cook moaning
in the background

Polly by the other sink
washing pans
Susie wants it

to be night-time again
wants to be able
to put her hands round

Polly's waist again
to keep out the cold
and to smell Polly's back

as she had the night
before it was so cold
Polly didn't seem to mind

her hugging her
and secretly kissed her arm
while she slept

lips to her nightgown
covered arm
getting warm

snuggling there
feeling sensual
being close

to the other maid
in the attic bed
are you going to be all day

peeling those spuds
Gripe says
need them for dinner

wake up girl
Susie turns and stares
yes Mrs Gripe

she says
and peels faster
with the knife

avoiding nicking her thumb
as she nearly did just now
she glances over

to where Polly is working
mind elsewhere
thoughts on George no doubt

wanting him back here
not on that hospital far away
wish she wanted me

in the bed as she does him
Susie muses
wish she did to me

what she did to him
wish she kissed me

as she kissed him
Susie thinks
and when you've

done there girl
go fetch her Ladyship's tray
from breakfast

and don't slump so
and all Susie says

is sorry Mrs Gripe I will go.

Terry Collett

Ice Cream Van 1956

The ice-cream van
drew up
in the Square.

Kids stood
in a queue
to buy an
ice cream or lolly
depending
how much money
they had as to what
they bought.

Once the kids
or adult
had gone
he pulled down
the window
got in front
and started up
the van.

It was then
that us kids
held on
at the sides
out of sight
and held on
as long as
we could
before he
went too fast
or too far
then jump off
at the last minute
on to the tarmac
travelling along
trying to stand up
and not fall down.

Why do you do it?
Janice said
you might
hurt yourself.

Some kids
fell over
I managed
to stand
on my feet.

It's a bit of fun
I said.

But you might
have fallen
underneath
she said.

No way
he's going away
from us
when we jump off
I said
want a cool cola
from the 1d shop?

Ok
she said.

So we walked on
up through the Square
and across
Rockingham Street
and along
to the 1d shop.

It was hot work
hanging on
to the side
of the van

of the ice cream man.

Terry Collett

If Could Reach 1971

Then after
ECT
we both lie

on the beds
in the room
for us to

recover.
I wake first
from a sleep

(we'd been drugged)
look around,
see her there

still asleep,
laid out there
all in white

like a corpse,
but she breathes,
her small breasts

lift and fall.
Light shines though
the large window,

curtains wide
open now.
She awakes

and sees me.
How are you?
She asks me.

Thumping head,
I reply.
Yes me too,

she whispers.
She puts out
her right hand.

I put out
my left hand
and they meet

in mid air
and embrace.
I can sense

her life pulse
through her veins
and she mine.

We lie there
facing each,
and knowing this

that we'd kiss
maybe more, if
we could reach.

Terry Collett

If I Could Mcmlxxi

Deus amor est
a monk had told me that
that first time
in the guest room
while it rained outside,

trees along the drive
pruned well
looked like soldiers
on parade
and the tall bell tower
in the distance beckoning,

Dio è amore
the Italian monk said
as he and I made soup
and prepared lunch
in the abbey kitchen
amore incondizionato
he added,

the cloisters at evening time
dusk and just before
Vespers monks lined up
on either side
no words or whispers
just silence waiting
for the bell,

en attendant la cloche
my mind musing
on the monk in front of me
tonsured head
small ears
black robes
caught by moon's light,

primus gradus humilitatis
est obedientia prompta

St Benedict wrote
and the monk reading
in the refectory read,

George polishing
the choir stalls
with yellow duster
and polish
the scent mingling
with incense,

Hugh said
I made the chairs
in the common room
functional and well made
he added,

lectio divina
after Lauds
eyeing the pages
of the Bible
taking in the script
mediating on the words
and meaning,

??μ???? ??? ?????
?????μ???? ?? ???????μ?
μ? ??? ?????

Gareth read
quoting Plato
twice armed
if fighting with faith
Gareth said in rough translation,

the crucifix over my bed
aged by time
the Crucified
plaster worn
the wooden cross
dark wood,

I knelt and prayed

when and if I could.

Terry Collett

If I Smile.

If I smile or break into laughter,
don't think I've forgotten you
or the hereafter;
it's just a way

to get through each day
of deep sorrow,
and getting up
to a dark tomorrow,

knowing you won't be there
with your cool stare,
and huggy bear walk,
and soft-toned talk;

and you know, my son,
the value of laughter
with your own
sense of humour

and quiet wit;
so if you see me smile
or hear my laughter,
it's just my medicine

to get through it,
this sadness of grief
and sense of loss
until the hereafter.

Terry Collett

If Only He Did.

If only he wrote poems for
her like Byron did those
whom he knew, if only her

man took time to put pen
to paper, rather than his fist
to her cheek or jaw or pushed

her to the floor to have his way.
She liked the Byron book, kept
it by her bed or in her bag to

take out to read to suck the
words to her head. If only her
man had the good grace to

speak in such a way to make
her feel loved or needed, not
talked to like something on the

end of his shoe or poked about
till black and blue. Maybe one
day he will changed, she mused,

maybe he'll speak to her in finer
tones in lovers' words in softer
voice in kinder ways, as if some

inner fire blazed, not bellowed
at or cursed or punched till dazed.
She opened the book and read

her favourite lines, the words
caressed her, brought her joy
and enlightenment, not like him

and his dark side, violence, brutality
and punishment. Reading out loud
is difficult when her lips are swollen

or her bruised eyes are closed by
his vicious rage, then the words
sit silent on the open white page.

Terry Collett

If We Were Able 1965

We met in a coffee bar
it was our lunch break
she from her workplace
me from mine

I got coffees and sandwiches
we sat by a window
looking out

what'd your mum say
about last Thursday
half day and you
were late home from work?
I asked

I said I was stock-taking

what did she say?

Again you only did
stock-taking the other week
and I said I know
but something wasn't right
so we had to do it again

what did she say to that?
I asked

she pulled a face
like she had haemorrhoids
and went off
Tilly said

you didn't mention
us having sex
at my place then?

No thought best not to
Tilly said

she smiled

what time did your mum
come home from work
that afternoon?
Tilly asked

not longer after
I came back
from seeing you off
through the back
I said

lucky break then
she said

yes but she likes you
and I don't think
she would have you minded
you being there
I said

but she wouldn't have
been pleased me being
in your bed stark naked
Tilly said

no I guess not
I said

we sipped our coffees
and ate our sandwiches
I miss you
when I'm not with you
she said

me too
I said

when we were at school
we could see each other
every day in class

now we don't get
the chance
she said

no I know
I said

we sat and ate
a jukebox was playing
a Beatles song

I sensed her near me
her body oozing
a hundred waves
of possibilities
across the table
we would again
if we were able.

Terry Collett

In Bed Alone 1917

Having put George to bed
and after making sure
he was asleep
Polly goes to the adjoining room
where she has the bed
which was once
set aside for guests.

She closes the door
and looks around the room.

It is the best room
she has ever stayed in
better by far
than the room
in the attic
she once shared
with the other maid Susie.

There it was cold
and she had to share
the bed with Susie
who spent a good part
of the night hugging her.

Now she could
sleep in a bed
all by herself
and a bed
comfortable and warm.

She wishes she could share
George's bed as she used to
when he came home
on leave from the War
but now since his return
mentally broken
she can only watch
as he struggles

with his demons
and fears and sights seen.

But if he hadn't been
so attached to her
and imagined she
was his wife
she would still be
in the double bed
with Susie
up in the attic.

She undresses
and puts on
the nightgown
and climbs into bed alone.

She hugs the pillow
and wishes George was there
kissing her
and making love to her
as he used to do
in those stolen nights.

George asleep
in his own bed
sees frightful
and deadly
wartime sights.

Terry Collett

In Between Lessons 1962

Seeking out a little nook,
we squeezed into a doorway
that was mostly locked.

Kids passed on their way
to lessons; none saw it,
or if they did, kept dumn.

You kissed me quick,
greedily, as if I were prey
easily caught. I remember
your lips: soft and damp,
tasting of you and peppermint.

I felt your body close to mine:
the lumps and bumps and
moving bits. The bell rang again.

We had to part and go our
way to classes and lessons.
I watched you go out of sight.

I would capture all of you
that night, in bed alone, with
bright moon and wind's moan.

Terry Collett

In Clover 1995.

Fenola
had a bath
brushed her teeth

put on her
short night dress
then got in

the big bed
with Eileen
her lover

Eileen had
watched her dress
from the bed

why bother
getting dressed
we'll only

take it off
in a while?
Eileen said

that is why
the pleasure
taking off

Fenola said
Eileen talked
of her day

at her work
travelling
there and back

Fenola
listening
to Eileen

embraced her
body close
kissed her arm

her shoulder
her left breast
her fingers

walked slowly
up Eileen's
smooth soft thigh

touched her sex
Eileen stopped
her talking

let the words
melt away
lifted up

Fenola's
short night dress
and removed

it away
by the side
of the bed

then she touched
Eileen's ass
kissed her lips

held her close
in the street
darkness came

the moon shone
stars were out
someone laughed

an old car

backfired
they made love

in the bed
getting warm
getting hot

with kisses
and touches
and holding

of bodies
and whispers
in darkness

in the street
a cat mewed
a wild fox

ate from bins
turned over
but the girls

lay in bed
making love
as if in

wild clover.

Terry Collett

In Dark Rooms 1971

I watch her
on the locked
ward, Yiska,

standing there
by the large
lounge window,

looking out
at the trees
and the fields

snow covered,
her left wrist
bandaged up

where she'd slit
it open.
I study

her body
covered up
in the white

dressing gown,
her dark hair
hanging loose

and unbrushed,
arms folded
over breasts.

The docs are
not happy
with her now.

The recent
attempt of
departure

by slitting
her thin wrist
(now bandaged) ,

puts her back,
and them, too,
to a new

beginning,
building up
confidence

to converse
once again.
We converse

without words;
bodily
we touch vibes

echoing
along nerves
in dark rooms.

Terry Collett

In Dark Shadows.

the pepper pot

towards the nun
on her right.

The salt follows
once more given

a gentle shove.
To understand

another's need
without them asking,

an elderly nun
had said.

A nun is reading
from a high desk

in the refectory.
Some book on Cromwell,

a life, back whenever when.
She sips her soup,

the French soup spoon
held in her right hand.

The nun on her left
passes the water jug.

Offers to pour.
Sister Felicity nods

and smiles.
The nun pours

a liberal amount

then puts down the jug.

Opposite an elderly nun
dribbles soup,

her shaky hand
missing the target.

Nan did that.
How can one forget?

She remembers
her grandmother's

slow decline;
the slippery slope

down to the side ward
in the dank hospital.

Onion soup. Too hot.
She blows to cool.

Sunlight reaches down
through high windows.

Worlds explode
in dark shadows.

Terry Collett

In Dreams All Night 1962

After dinner
and a brief time
watching TV
Sheila went to bed

not in her parents good books
over her seeing
a boy at school
(her sister Ella

having told tales)
and wearing eye shadow
which she had to take off
which she did

and lay there
she waiting until her sister
came to bed
downstairs the TV

was still on
she thought of John
at school
how they sat

on the sport field and talked
and she wanted him
to hold her hand
but he didn't

she wanted to kiss him
but didn't want
to spoil things
or frighten him off

she pretended
they did kiss
(not that she has
kissed a boy before)

and he held her hand
and hoped that Loren
(the girl who always
talks of boys)

had seen her
and got jealous
and pretended she did
the door

of her bedroom opened
and her sister Ella came in
still awake then?
Ella said

fancy making
Mum's asthma bad
and Dad wasn't pleased
about that

you're lucky he didn't
smack you one
shut up telltale
go and pray to your Jesus

for forgiveness
for being a big sneak
Sheila said
I tell the truth not lie

Ella said
and began
to undress for bed
Sheila stared at her

just sat with him didn't
do nothing
how do I know
what you did

and besides

you are still too young
for boys
Ella said

at least I can get a boy
interested in me
unlike you
a boy would have to need

a white stick and a guide dog
to want you
Sheila said
Ella stood gazing

at her younger sister
then looked at the crucifix
on the wall above her bed
He is the only one I want

and when I am a nun
I shall be His bride
Sheila said nothing
and turned over in bed

and faced the wall
and carried on imagining
John was there beside her
and holding her tight

and was staying there
in her dreams
all night.

Terry Collett

In Either Head 47bc

Annona's friend Aquila
was here,
an endless talker,
gossip brewer,

eyeing me darkly;
she knew I was
Annona's slave girl Amy,
looked at me

as if I were hers
to order and chide.
I stood and looked
at Annona,

took in her beauty,
the hair I brushed
and prepared,
the clothes I chose

and dressed her in.
She looked at me
and smiled,
(Aquila didn't see)

asked me for this
and that
in friendly manner.
Now Aquila has gone,

Annona has gone
to lie down to rest.
I clear away the things,
make tidy things untidy,

wash up items
needing washing.
I think of Annona
and me last night

in her bed,
how we made love,
kissed and held,
touched and whispered

words and promises,
held and kissed,
made love again,
pushed all thoughts

of her husband Marcus's
return from war
on Caesar's behalf,
talked of where to touch,

how and when,
and outside
the moon shone bright,
and far off

voices of others
preparing for bed,
unaware of us
and love,

with no thought
of Marcus
in either head.

Terry Collett

In Her Head 1980

The convent
was quiet
but Susan

couldn't sleep
she thought of
Jude and how

she left him
standing on
the platform

while she was
on the train
should have said

I didn't
agree to
marry him

should have said
I was off
to Paris

to be an
enclosed nun
I didn't

I just said
was off to
think awhile

she stared at
the small cross
on the wall

a bell rang
off somewhere
she was cold

she could smell
starch and bread
and Jude's scent

lingered there
in her head.

Terry Collett

In His Own Way

I feel I'm in heaven when
I hear that music, Father said,
Sitting in the chair in the garden,
Recovering from some old illness,
Hearing the Couperin organ masses
Playing through the open window
From your old black and red hi-fi
Record player. He was nearer to
Heaven than he thought, cancer
Was creeping through him like a
Silent snake. He didn't go much on
Your Ornette Coleman's alto runs
And tweaks of free jazz; what racket's
That he'd say, trying to snooze in the
Afternoon sun, his companion Death
Lingering by, waiting for him in his
Own time to die. The garden's empty
Now; his chair vacated, no more of
Couperin organ masses or Coleman's
Free jazz playing out from an open
Window on a summer's day, just birds
Singing nature songs across the way.

Terry Collett

In Joe's Bed.

Henry met
his friend Joe
and his wife

Rosina
standing there
in shadow.

Joe yakked on
about things
how his boss

didn't like
his ideas
(Joe's ideas)

how the church
let him down
how his wife's

mother moaned
about him
and his wife

(behind him)
said jack shit
about her.

Henry liked
Joe's soft wife
imagined

she was scared
to offend
but hinted

by her eyes
looking back
that she'd be

willing to
if Henry
willing too.

Joe yakked on
endlessly
unaware

Rosina
in shadow
was mouthing

how about
you and me?
Henry mouthed

while Joe was
unaware
if you like

us tonight?
She nodded
her assent.

Henry smiled.
Joe talked on
angrily.

Sorry Joe
(Henry said)
I must go.

Don't forget
what I said
Joe added.

Henry went.
Joe walked on.
Rosina

in shadow

like a dark
assassin

followed him
waiting for
Henry's call

while Joe was
out at work.
She watched her

husband's back
as he walked
just ahead

musing on
cool Henry
and soft her

in Joe's bed.

Terry Collett

In London 1975

Netanya gazed
out the window,
saw grey morning,
heard pigeons coo.

Benny lay in the bed,
gazed at her backside,
naked, well figureed body.

It's all roofs and spires,
she said.

London is,
he said.

Come back to bed,
he wished.

She stared,
arms folded,
breasts rested.

The show was good,
she said.

It had been,
he mused,
watching her hair,
dark hair,
unbrushed.

You were all go last night,
she said.

It was masterful,
he mused,
moving eyes down
her body from head to toes.

I did my best,
he replied.

It had been.

Best ever.

She closed the curtains,
shut out London sight,
pigeons still cooed.

Got into bed,
kissed his head,
hugged him close.

My hubby couldn't
manage that,
not now.

Too busy with
the younger girls.

Has them,
know him of old.

Safe with me,
Benny said.

His pecker was up for it,
seemed hungry.

She talked of
her younger days.

The first child,
the father died.

Benny listened on,
his pecker retired,
like gun shot out
after being fired.

In Mr Atkinson's Room

You saw Judy on the south wing
of the old folks nursing home
near to Mr Atkinson's room
carrying towels in her arms

I need to speak to you
you said
what about?
she asked

you playfully bundled her
into Bob Atkinson's room
(he was either
in the lounge

or out down town
hobbling along
for small items of shopping
or at the second-hand

book shop looking
for boy's annuals
of yesteryear
which he read

from cover to cover
before cutting out
the pictures
and sticking them

in albums)
what are you doing?
she said
what if Bob comes in?

he won't
he's out
you said
but what if he does?

she whispered
well unless I was rogering you
to kingdom come
I don't think he'd mind

you said
pressing her 5'5" body
against the door
and looking into her

grey blue eyes
she gazed
into your eyes
and said

what do you need
to talk to me about?
I think I'm in love with you
you said

she sighed
that's the umpteen time
you've told me that
she said

she dropped the towels
on Bob's bed
and put her arms
around your waist

and drew you closer
you moved your left hand
around her back
and your right hand

on her buttocks
and said
that's because it's
umpteen times worse

or better depending

how you look at it
she kissed you on the lips
and you sensed

her tongue touch yours
her eyes closed
and you closed yours
the room becoming

a far away place
her perfume blending
into the air about you
the ticktock of Bob's

old clock on the bedside table
like some metronome
setting the pace
as if it was all part

of some song or some
deep aspect
of a Bruckner symphony
she pushed you away

and said
it's nearly break time
and people will wonder
why we're not there

and put one
and one together
ok
you said

removing your hand
from her butt
the warmth still there
her eyes still captured

in your inner self
thank you
for the Chagall postcard

I've put it on

my bedside table
along with that photo
you gave me of you
got to go

she said
and opened the door
and walked off
down the passage

you looked around
Bob's room
at the ticking clock
and the blue

candlewick cover
and the picture
of some boy
cut out of some

old annual
chasing a dog
over a field
and Judy's lips

and tongue
seemed still
to be there
in your mouth

and her hand enfolding
your waist and back
and Peter in the pants
going all slack.

Terry Collett

In Mrs Clarke's Wake

Mrs Clarke pushed
her battered bassinet
between market stalls

not listening
to the stallholder's
shouts and calls

Helen walked behind her mother
as told holding your hand
So I know where you are

Mrs Clarke had said
you sensed
Helen's small hand

in yours
her seven year old skin
touching your

seven year old flesh
her thin fingers
encircling yours

We'll see if they've got
a school skirt
for you here

her mother said
turning back her head
Helen nodded

and you noticed
Helen's enlarged eyes
behind her thick lens

spectacles
searching her mother's
large behind waddling on

stopping now and then
beside stalls
picking up clothes

searching for a skirt or dress
grey and the right size
Helen whispered to you

putting her head
close to yours
Rice pudding for tea

when we get home
with red jam
and sugar too

if you want
and she smiled
and you said shyly

That's good
because I'm starving
she looked at your hand

in hers and said
Then we can play
mums and dads

and my dolls
can be our family
her mother stopped

and picked up a skirt
and held it up
to the light

then held it against
her daughter's waist
judging for size

and you watched

her mother's hands
red with washing

and cleaning
thinking and gauging
the size and cost

as you studying
Helen's hand in yours
like a soul lost.

Terry Collett

In My Head

In my head
voices speak,
Ingrid says,
each one suggesting

different things,
proposing I do this
or that, each voice
distinct from the other.

The Psychiatrist
pares his nails,
gazes at the photo
of his wife and kids,

the silver frame,
the wife with that stupid grin,
and the voice of Ingrid
grating on his ears,

like some whiny cat
shut out in the night
with the heavy rain.
In my head,

Ingrid says,
voices are beginning again.

Terry Collett

In Silence He Speaks Mcmlxix

The cloister garth exploded
in afternoon sunlight,

post meridiem solis
the lone mulberry tree
the only shelter or shade
where monks gathered
for tea and cake,

luce disperde
le tenebre
an Italian monk said
as I sipped tea
he eyeing me,

light dispersing darkness
I mused seeing
Dom James pass by
he smiling
carrying his cup
and saucer to Dom Bede,

l'obscurité empiète
où la foi échoue
the French monk muttered
next to the other
I said nothing
but mused on his words
where faith fails
darkness encroaches,

cloister bell tolled
conversations ceased
the monks went their way
to task or prayer
or contemplation
I helped push the trolley
with the large teapot
and cups and such

to the abbey kitchen
Dom Patrick worked in silence,

in silentio est
verbum Dei,

God's word in silence
an old monk had
told me once
white bearded
tonsured of head
God speaks in silence
he said.

Terry Collett

In The Moonlight

In the moonlight
you saw how she
would look down
the corridor of years

waking in the middle
of the night calling
your name because
you had left the bed

to go for a pee or a
glass of milk to drink.
The moonlight would
not be the same moonlight

then and probably you
thought you wouldn't be
there anyway someone
else would occupy the bed

where you ought to have
lain and made love and
hugged close and kissed.
Some things never happen.

Sometimes they're almost
There within reach but missed.

Terry Collett

In The Night 1916

Susie wrapped
her thin arms
right around

Polly's waist
in the bed
in the cold

attic space
Polly's thoughts
were on George

in his bed
where she thought
she should be

making love
as they did
times before

but since his
return from
the war front

he's not been
his old self
mentally

off balance
she allowed
Susie's arms

to enfold
about her
permitted

Susie's lips
to kiss her
cold shoulder

but it was
his lips she
pretended

were kissing
his arms there
around her

holding tight
to keep cold
in the night.

Terry Collett

In The Swimming Pool In The Park

Your sister called her
the girl in the red beret

and there she was
in the outdoor

swimming pool
in the park

her gran sitting
in the stands knitting

and Janice saw you
and said

Fancy seeing you here
can you swim?

You stood
in the shallow end

of the pool
in your blue trunks

looking at her wet fair hair
clinging to her body

and her eyes bright
in the sun's afternoon light

No not so far
you replied

I can
she said shaking water

from her hair and head
I can swim the length

and back almost
you looked over

at Jimmy in the pool
talking to friends

she touched your hand
and said

I can show you
how to swim

and she smiled
and you felt her hand

on yours and hoped
Jimmy wasn't looking

seeing her touch you
Maybe another time

you said
pulling your hand away

and plunging it
into the water

I've got to go
you said

my friends
are waiting for me

and she looked at you
her eyes now sad

and she said softly
No stay with me

I like it
when you are near me

and she stood there
in her pink swimsuit

her hair sticking
to her face

her eyes watery and blue
and gazing hopefully

(the noise and laughter
from the pool

momentarily shut off)
at seven year old you.

Terry Collett

In The Tent 1970

Bill and I
visited
this old mosque

in Tangiers
Miriam
couldn't come

she was out
shopping with
other dames

what's she like?
Bill asked me
what's who like?

Miriam
she's ok
quite a laugh

I told him
what's she like
in the sack?

he asked me
she's like wine
gets better

each time we
have a go
so I thought

he replied
jealously
we left the

old mosque to
have mint tea
in some small

cafe place
he told me
he tried his

luck on the
plump French girl
but couldn't

understand
her English
well enough

to go far
Miriam
found us there

and showed us
what she'd bought
(haggled for)

and sat down
next to me
Bill went off

in search of
the French girl
just after Miriam

had said she
had seen her
not far off

I watched her
(Miriam)
as she spoke

taking in
the outline
of her bra

through her top

and her eyes
lit up with

excitement
and I wished
we were back

in the tent.

Terry Collett

In Your Heart

In your heart
is there room for her?

You move things,
make way for her,

push feelings to one side
so that she can have

an area in your heart.
You put to one end

old loves, past girlfriends
and like Dante's Paradise

you let light in
to block out

the dismal darkness
from her sad disquiet

and private hell.
You have made room

for her in your heart,
she needs it poor girl.

Terry Collett

In Your Sleep

In your sleep
Brando was alive again
playing an old wild one
with leather jacket

and slippers,
riding a three wheeled scooter,
and Marilyn Monroe
promised to kiss you

if you could recite
a Dylan Thomas poem
in French or Latin,
and your father came

in the dark robes of death
carrying the grey ashes
of your first burnt poem,
and Ezra Pound made a visit

to your writing room
insisting he'd written
more of those Cantos
from the other side

of the some god's light,
and as you turned over
seeking a comfortable position
in your long sleep,

you thought you lay
face to face
with Greta Garbo,
her eyes peering

into yours,
her lips waiting
to be touched.
In your sleep

someone wiped your brow,
kissed your cheek,
and recited
the Pater Noster

in your ear
and lay your arms
crossed on your breast,
muttering of eternal rest.

Terry Collett

Infringement Of The Rules

Any infringement of the rules
Or minor sin puts her head in
A spin, puts her soul just over
The edge, lingering there in mid
Air waiting for some dark demon
To snatch. Sister Angela rubs sins
From the black beads, utters long
Prayers from the tongue. She firmly
Wrestles with her demons in the bed,
In the cloisters, out there in the dark
Corners of the world, inside her head.
Her father used to say, your demons
Know you better than you do yourself;
They know your pitfalls, your small
Faults, your tiny imperfections that
Cling to your soul like dark bruises on
Fruit. Then he'd beat her black and blue
And leave her in her room to brood and
Suck in the emptiness of thick dark space.
She kisses the black beads as once she
Kissed that Boyle boy behind the bike
Sheds there, not from lust or love, but
For an unholy dare. The knees ache;
The back is stiff, the incense fills her nose
And head. Pray for us now, she mutters,
Her black serge habit tight about her form,
Pushing out her breath, and at the hour of
Our death. Her father lingers in his cancer
Bed; her mother rots in her grave where her
Father drove her with his drunken words
And fisted hands on frail skin. Sister Angela
Washes with her fierce scrubs any small
Infringements of the rules or minor sin,
Hearing her father's words harsh within.

Terry Collett

Ingrid And Silence 1958

Morning came
she woke up
in her room

she listened
the old brown
Bakelite

radio
was churning
out music

she got up
remembered
her father

had hit her
before bed
she opened up

the green door
and went through
the bright lit

sitting room
her father
sitting there

eating up
his breakfast
she passed through

he watched her
said nothing
she went past

the kitchen
and bathroom
her mother

was coming
out the bog
how are you

young Ingrid?
Mother said
Dad hit me

before bed
Ingrid said
why was that?

Mother said
I went out
with Benny

we played games
cut my thumb
Ingrid showed

her mother
the bandaged thumb
let me see

how it is
Mother said
she unwrapped

the cut thumb
how did you
cut the thumb?

Ritual
Benny said
what Injuns

used to do
joining thumbs
that are cut

blood brother

and sister
Ingrid said

is that why
your father
hit you one?

Mother asked
I don't know
Ingrid said

Mother washed
the cut thumb
and put on

a plaster
off you go
to get washed

then get dressed
Ingrid went
to the bog

and sat down
she could hear
raised voices

Father's roar
Mother's shout
exchange

of insults
a duet
of anger

words flying
like dark birds
Ingrid thought

where's Benny
wish he was
here with me

my brave knight
with his quiff
of brown hair

hazel eyes
and that sword
his old man

made for him
he like me
10 years old

the voices
had silenced
an eerie

cold silence
was out there
Ingrid sat

stiff as death
listening
with held breath.

Terry Collett

Ingrid At The Seaside

Ingrid stares
at the sea
the wild waves
the seagulls

we've come down
on the coach
from London
organised
by the church
of gospel
worshippers

what are those?
she asks me

they're seagulls

do they bite?

I don't know
want ice cream?

her brown eyes
gaze at me

no money
she tells me

I've got some
I tell her

is there lunch?
she asks me

I think so
there's money
from the church
for us kids

from poor homes
I tell her

her brown hair
is pinned back
by steel grips

she smiles wide
her rather
mild buckteeth
beam at me

fish and chips?
she asks me

I guess so

can I be
your girl friend
for the day?

want ice cream?

O yes please
she utters

I go get
2 ice creams
from a van
parked near by

what you want?
the guy asks

2 ice creams
with choc flakes

I watch him
fill 2 cones
with ice cream
then plonk in
2 choc flakes

I walk back
to Ingrid
here you are
I tell her

she takes one
and we walk
on the beach
in the sand
8 year olds
hand in hand.

Terry Collett

Ingrid On The Step.

Go and get
some bread rolls
over the corner shop
Mum said

so I took the offered coins
and went out
the front door
and down the stairs
of the flats

on the second level
I saw Ingrid
sitting on the top step

what are you doing here?

Dad threw me out
said I was too noisy
and said I had to go out
until he'd had
his breakfast

she looked cold
and hungry

when can you go back?

when he says so
I expect

I sat beside her
on the concrete step

had breakfast yet?

no not yet

come with me

I've got to get
some bread rolls
over the shop
then you can have
a bite to eat with me
Mum won't mind
I said

she looked at me
don't think I ought to
in case Dad says
to go back in
Ingrid said

bugger him
I said
come with me
if you're not there
he'll go to work
worrying won't he

shouldn't think so
he'll just paste me
when he gets home
this evening

I'll bring you a roll then
and you can eat it here
I said

she looked at
the steps below unhappily

guess I could come
Dad'll not be out
yet awhile
she said

good come on then
I said

and she got up

and we went down
the stairs
and through the Square
and along

how comes he thinks
you're too noisy?

she looked
at the grey morning sky

don't know why
I guess I talk too much
although I don't mean to
it's just that words
come out
and I can't stop them
as if they've a mind
of their own

Mum don't mind
she'll sit and listen
but Dad ain't got
the patience
or he's in a mood
or someone outside
has upset him
and since my brother
and sister have left
he's no one else
to moan at
apart from mum
and he gives her
what for too
if he's a mind to

we walked down
the slope
and catch a mild
orange sun coming
over the houses
up Meadow Row

and I smiled
and thought
she can talk on so.

Terry Collett

Ingrid's Departure 1958

Ingrid's sister
opened the door
of her house.

I asked
if Ingrid was there.

She looked at me
frowning
O it's you Benny
she said
no she's not here
any more
she's living
with an aunt
by the sea.

I looked at her
then looked past
her into the passage
behind
in the hope
Ingrid would appear.

Why is she there?
I said.

Our mum's
in prison for life
so it was thought best
for her to stay
with our aunt
who is older
and can give her
a more stable home
she said.

I see
I said

have you
an address
so I could write
to her?

She disappeared
inside for a short time.

I stood there
on the doorstep
waiting.

She came back
and handed me
a piece of a paper
with an address on it.

How is she?
I asked.

Very upset of course
her sister said
but she'll settle
with our aunt ok.

I nodded
and she closed the door.

I walked back up
the New Kent Road
with the piece of paper
guessing I'd not
see her again.

The sky darkened
and began to rain.

Terry Collett

Inner Doubts.

What does he see
when he looks at me?
you ask
hair, eyes,
strawberry lips,
earrings of pearl,
aristocratic features.

Yes, but what of me?
What beyond the eyes?

You have watched him
come and talk,
and smile and laugh,
and make love
(that greedily) ,
but what does he
know of me?
il me dentro?

You have heard his words;
seen his look
when he thought
you were not looking;
watched him at sex, at play.

What does he say?
You knows he likes
your hat, flower crested,
of straw crafted,
but what of me?
Of the inner self
he cannot see?

He is shallow,
skin deep,
a puddle brain.

Will he love me?

You say,
lonely once again.

Terry Collett

Inner Eye 1962

It was Sunday.

We stopped off
at the pond
after singing
in the church choir.

Yehudit was sitting there
on the grass
making a chain
from daisies
her fingers busy
at their work.

I'm not going
to church once
I leave school
and begin work,
I said.

Why not?
She said.

Because I have to work
most Sundays at the job
I am after,
I said.

Can't you go
on the Sundays you
are not working?

What's the point?
I said,
I find believing in God
slipping away from me.

You don't
believe in God?

She said,
looking at me
with her lovely eyes.

Well not so much
not believe in God,
but more I find it hard
to grasp it all,
I said.

But God
believes in you,
she said.

I saw the small gap
where her two tits
were at the top
of her low cut dress
and I looked at them.

Maybe God does,
but it is easier for Him
he knows about me,
I know little about Him,
I said.

I'll go to church
even when I start work,
she said,
it is my duty,
plus the fact my mother
won't let me not go;
please go just
to please me.

I'll see what Sundays
I get off,
I said,
looking into the woods
where we had sex once,
wishing we could again,
but knowing

there wasn't time
as her old lady
would be wondering
why she was late
home from church.

She dropped the daises
and leaned over
and kissed me
on the lips.

Best be getting back
or my mum will wonder
where I've got to,
she said.

Yes I guess so,
I said.

So we got up
and walked back
onto the road,
and I walked her
to the small road
that led to her cottage,
and waved her goodbye,
keeping the swaying
of her fine hips
in my inner eye.

Terry Collett

Inner Silence Mxmxlxx

Orange brick
in evening sun
dull and warm
and I felt with my fingers
as I passed,

il silenzio permette
lo spazio per Dio parli
the Italian monk said
placing two fingers
to his lips,

I hoed between the plants
in the abbey garden
sunlight upon me
like God's blessing,

smelt incense
with body sweat
and baked loaves
as I stood
in the choir stalls
before Vespers,

la oración es
un acto de amor
las labras no son
necesarias
St Teresa said
so I read,

I picked up
a handful of earth
and held it
in my palm
and crumbled it
between finger and thumb
like some
ancient conqueror

after battle,

the tall thin monk
tolled the big bell
pulling on the rope
with ease
then releasing it
and grabbing again
pulled,

silenzio e spazio
letting God in
where once
was noise and muddle,

prayer is love
no words needed
a saint said,

amour et prière
Dom Placid said to me
as we walked
in the cloister
before Terce,

interno la pace
as well as outer peace
the monk told me
harder to obtain
too much going on
within,

interius silentium
I stood on the seashore
and watched
the waves come in
trying to empty of self
but the sea could not
drive me from me.

Terry Collett

Inner Thigh.

Why doesn't he touch
my inner thigh?

She watches him
unfolding her some tale,

some family history
that leaves her cold.

His hands fold
against his knees

and he relates,
his eyes not on her

but above her head,
gazing at some yesteryear,

and all she wants
is that human touch,

that skin on skin,
lips to lips,

hand to hand.
She lets out a sigh.

Why won't he touch
my inner thigh?

Terry Collett

Innes And Sweets 1961

Innes said
want a boiled sweet
I have bag full?

Yes sure
I said.

He opened up
the bag
with his
plump fingers.

I took out
a boiled sweet
and unwrapped
the paper
and put the sweet
in my mouth.

Did your dad
ever kill anyone
in the War?
he said.

Don't know
he never said
I replied.

Mine did
he killed Krauts
either shot them
or bayoneted them
Innes said
in a satisfied tone.

He brought back knives
and gave me one
Innes added
a SS knife

he took off
a dead SS soldier
he saw
at the side
of a road.

I see
I said
rolling the sweet
around my mouth.

From the boys' playground
I could see girls
in their playground
some were skipping
or playing hopscotch
or standing talking.

Your dad met
the Queen?
He said.

No not so far
I said.

He took another sweet
from his bag
with two plump fingers
and unwrapped it
carefully then
plopped it
in his mouth.

Mine did
when he got
a special medal
at the Palace
he said.

Did you go?
I said.

No I was too young
just a baby
he replied.

Lizabeth was in
the girls' playground
I saw her red hair
over her shoulders
and remembered how
she tried to have me
in her room
that time
but I didn't.

You ever
kiss a girl?
I said.

Me? God no
he said
looking down
at his small
plump feet
going red.

Terry Collett

Innes's Yak 1961

Innes was a short
tubby kid
with black greasy hair
who rode to school
and back
on a blue bicycle.

Some lunchtimes
he would come
into the playground
sweating
and sweat would
run down his forehead
and his black hair
would glow.

What did
your dad do
in the War?
he said
one lunchtime
as we stood
by the fence.

He was in Egypt
I said.

What did he
do there?

He was something
to do with tanks
I said.

He gazed at me
my dad was one
of those who landed
on D-day
he said.

Got wounded
on the beach
but afterwards
went through France
and into Germany.

I looked at him
and wondered if
his old man
was short and tubby
and made
an easy target
for the Krauts.

What rank
was your dad?
he said.

No idea
I said
he never said.

Mine was a sergeant
and has medals.

I nodded
the sky
was a bright blue
the Downs
were behind us
green and vast.

I have an uncle
who was wounded
at Dunkirk
I said.

He looked past me
at the girls' playground.

My uncle Ralph

was a prisoner of the Japs
he said
came back thin
and ill looking
so my mother said.

I looked back
at the girls' playground
Lizbeth was looking over.

I liked the red hair
and her slim figure.

She waved
I waved back.

Innes stood looking
and continued
with his yak.

Terry Collett

Inside Her Head 1962

Yochana's father
ate slowly at dinner;
his wife watched him
as he ate;
Yochana watched
both in turn
eating anxiously.

The radio
was on quietly
playing Handel.

About the boy
coming for a weekend,
Father began,
when would it be:
Friday to Sunday?
He gazed at Yochana.

She looked at him anxiously,
Yes, that would be good.

Are you sure
it's a good idea?
Mother said,
a 14 year old boy
and girl together
overnight in the house?

They will be
in separate rooms,
besides you don't
have much trust
in your daughter,
if that is your only
reason the boy
should not stay,
Father said.

I trust her,
but not him,
I do not know him,
Mother replied coldly.

Have you met
this boy?
Father said.

Mother shook her head.

Well maybe
we can invite him over
on Saturday
just for the day
for us to judge him
and see,
Father said,
I can pick him up
and drop him
home again.

Yochana felt out of it;
no one even
asked her opinion
or what she felt.

Father looked at her
and said,
well how about
this Saturday?
Mother stared at her;
Father ate more
of his dinner.

Yes,
I'll ask him
at school tomorrow,
she said,
smiling awkwardly.

That's that then,

Father said.

Mother sat and ate
and stared at him,
then at her daughter
and then said,
what's the boy's
name again?

Benedict,
Yochana said.

Mother nodded,
then looked away.

Father ate slowly
in deep thought.

Mother stared at him
as she ate,
her face stern
and cold as ice.

Yochana wished
Benedict was there
beside her waiting
to take her up to bed
and they could do
things she does

Terry Collett

Inside Her Head.

Look at me
she said
look how I can fly
but of course

she couldn't fly
it was all part
of her mental illness
that aspect

she never saw
that o I am not well
kind of thing
just that

I am flying buzz
and so they tried
to get her back
from the window ledge

tried to get her
to unbuzz
come on in Lilly
come on in

the air is safer
in here
but she wasn't convinced
and so stood

her arms out stretched
eyes large and watery
it's so nice here
the air is fresh

and I can see
the tall building
where Joe used to work
she said

looking with a hand
over her brows
to block out the sun
come on in Lilly

they said
it is safer in here
o go to hell
she said

you're always
trying to get me
to do things
I don't want to

like that time
you made me
do those things
or Joe did

and hey where is Joe
huh?
where?
O come on in Lilly

don't be like that
don't be silly
she stepped to the edge
her feet half way

over the ledge
and she wobbled some
and then she looked
back at them

and said
it's all buzzing
inside my head.

Terry Collett

Insightful Mcmlxx

Insightful
or so it was
meant to be
time spent
in the monastery
more like self deception
one of the worst
deceptions,

auto-inganno
the Italian monk said
as we walked across
the field to the abbey,

amour de Dieu
the French monk said
I watched his lower lip
large and indulged looking,

smell of incense
in the church after Mass
light from high windows
on the flagstone floor
especially at lunch time
during Sext,

extra ecclesiam nulla salus
Augustine said
no salvation outside
the mystical body
of Christ,

tall thin monk
planing wood
in the workshop
shavings falling
to the floor
curled up
I swept up after

wondering who swept up
in St Joseph's
carpenter's workshop,

corpo di Cristo
held up by the Italian monk
during Mass
no longer bread,

I ate in the refectory
the monk reading
about Mary Tudor's life
light through window
onto the features of the monk
opposite as if blessed,

Dom James teaching us
about the plainsong
the notes and how long
to hold the notes
in unison all together
no harmony he said
and under the above lamp
his tonsured head
seemed red.

Terry Collett

Intake Of Breath 1997

You called my name
in your sleep?
Una says,
what did Brian say?

Nuala lies beside Una
in her bed in Una's place,
he just thought
you'd upset me
or that I was worried
about something you'd said,
Nuala replies.

Una looks worried,
turns to face Nuala,
and what did you say?
Una asks.

Just said it was a dream
nothing more,
Nuala says,
gazing at her,
at her eyes staring.

He bought that?

Nuala nods.

Una sighs and touches
Nuala's cheek.

Have to be careful;
he may not always
be so gullible,
Una says.

I can't help what I say
in my dreams,
Nuala says,

If you're on my mind
then it comes out.

What would he do
if he found out?
Una says,
running a finger
under Nuala's chin.

Break his heart,
that would,
Nuala says,
don't know what he'd do
other than that.

She sighs and looks
at Una's eyes and lips.

Would he harm you?
Una says.

Who knows what people
will do once they're
on different territory;
he might even kill me
and you or both of us
or none, I don't know,
Nuala says.

There is silence
as they lay there
touching and looking.

Una senses danger,
thinks of Nuala murdered
and Brian coming after her
with a gun or knife
for sleeping with his wife.

Nuala imagines Brian saying:
are you sleeping with her?
doing things with her?

his eyes large and childlike
and hurt and teary
and then angry
and cold words come
and bitterness.

They had just made love
for the second time
and Nuala says:
best go or he'll want
to know why I'm late
home from the office.

Una nods,
turns onto her back,
stares at the ceiling,
senses Nuala's wet kisses
on her skin,
her words nibbling
at her ears.

You'll come again?
she asks
childlike and unsure.

Nuala dresses slowly;
first underwear and bra,
then tights and blouse,
of course I will,
she says,
eyeing Una lying there
like a spanked child,
no doubt I'll be back,
and finishing dressing,
she kisses and waves
and goes and a door
clicks shut then silence
settles like dust.

Una sighs,
take an intake of breath,
then cries.

Terry Collett

Interregocation 1969

Who is the boy?
Sophia's father asked.

Sophia looked at him:
the greying moustache,
dark eyes,
short,
but solid build.

A friend from work,
she said.

Her mother walked
in the background
never interfered.

What's his name?
The father asked,
examining her,
eyes searching
her features for signs
of lies or deception.

Benedict,
she replied,
good Catholic boy,
nurse.

The father
walked past her,
then circled her.

She thought of Benny
having nodded
and spoken briefly
to her parents then
had left the house.

Good sex.

Mial dobry seks,
she said to herself
in Polish,
pretending she was
talking to her father.

Not dare.

Good Catholic?
Her father said,
he come to the house
and no one to safe guard
your honour here?

We talked; had coffee,
she said,
thinking of the safe things.

Those outside
may think otherwise,
he said.

Who?
Sophia asked,
sensing her father
walking behind her,
as he did when
she was a child,
then WHACK WHACK,
he did to her as a child.

Now he just walked
around her, hands behind
his back.

Neighbours see
these things,
think what they think,
he said,
in front of her
staring at her eyes.

Those who sin, see sin,
she said,
holding herself firm,
eyeing her mother
in the background,
no words,
not a sound.

This Benedict,
he likes you?
The father asked.

Yes, he does,
she replied,
thinking of Benny
humping humping.

He must consider
how it could look
to others,
her father said,
not come while
we are out.

She nodded,
looked at her feet,
wiggled her toes.

He may come while
we are here,
her father conceded,
eyeing her firmly,
walking away,
hands behind his back.

She breathed out
relieved
no whack
whack whack.

Interrogation 1977

I get home
from work
and he's there:
who have you
seen today
and what do they say
and have those guys
at the office
been eyeing
you over?

It's like
an interrogation
she said to me.

What did
you say?
I said.

I told him
I keep myself
to myself
I don't know if men
are eyeing me.

But he doesn't
believe me
and goes on and on
until I break down
and cry.

I can't stand it
much longer
she said.

Want me
to have word
with him?
I said.

Oh no
then he'll think
you have been
with me
or are having
an affair with me
and he'll have ago
at us both
she said.

I don't fear men
who pain women
I said.

But you know him
she said
he's not the sort
to reason with.

She cried
and walked off
back to the office.

Her old man
was a jerk
the kind of guy
who got a big kick
out of making
women cry.

I don't know
if guys eyed her
or fancied her
or if she encouraged
them or not.

I didn't work
in the office.

I worked
on the work floor

with the regular guys
who read the sports page
and the page where
some dame was pictured there
half dressed
posing seductively
who eyed the young dames
from the office
who came down to use
the drinks machine.

But she never
came down
for that operation
so I don't know
if that came in
as part of the interrogation.

Terry Collett

Interruption 1963

He turns to me
and gazes at me
her bed creaks
as she moves

you're lucky Mum's off
seeing my auntie Pat
Yehudit says
otherwise we'd not
be here
wouldn't dare
be here
she adds

I put my hand
on her thigh
warm thigh
soft and naked
she kisses me

I say
I can't imagine us
being here otherwise
well I can
but in a dangerous mission
kind of way

the bed creaks
as we move again
a chest of drawers
is by the window
a tall boy over by
her sister's bed
(who is at school)
there's a dressing table
at the foot of her bed

her small hand
touches my back

lucky for you Benny
that it's my half day
off work too
she says

lot of luck us being here
I say

she smiles
indeed it is
she says

what if one of your brothers
comes home early
what then?
I say

no chance they're at work
on a farm too far off
to come home for lunch
she says

you hope
I say

no you hope
she says smiling
moving her hand
to my pecker
and teasing it

I look over at the clock
on the dressing table
it's 2.15pm now
how long have we
before someone shows?
I say

she teases more
my pecker stirs
no one here until
my sister comes home

from school about
4pm or so
she says

I move my hand
from her thigh
to her ass
and kiss her lips

just as she is about
to turn onto her back
there's a sound downstairs
and she sits up
and stares at me
what's that?
she says

I sit up and cock
my head for sounds
more sounds of movement

someone's here
she says
jumping from bed
and gesturing me
to do so

I get off the bed
and look for my clothes

get dressed
she whispers
and begins to dress
as quick as she undressed

I dress as quick as I can
and put on a
what am I doing here?
kind of face

her face is one of alarm
her movement rushed

once we are dressed
she walks to the bedroom door
and opens it slowly
and walks out
onto the landing
and listens intently

stay here
she whispers

I stay behind the door
(brave sod that I am)

she walks down the stairs
one foot at a time
(the stairs creak
at each step)
she walks around downstairs

I listen
my ear to the door

o it's you Tibby
she says
it's only Tibby
she says
up the stairs to me
the darn cat

I sigh
feeling relief
like one thinking
he was about to die.

Terry Collett

Invitation To Tea 1969

Sophia's parents
had invited me to tea

best go
she said
they invite
it rude not to come

(she was Polish
and spoke a broken
kind of English)

so I went and I put on
my best suit and tie
and clean shirt
and there I was
at the front door

Sophia opened the door
and gazed at me
you come ok?

sure why not
are they both home?

she nodded

do they speak English?
I asked

she nodded

I entered the house
and the hall light
was bright and contrasted
with the coming
evening light outside

she ushered me

into the lounge
where the parents sat
on a sofa

the father stood up
a short stocky man
with a moustache
and a shock of short
greying hair
his hand was offered
and he said
you welcome
friend of our daughter
welcome here

(I had been once before
when they returned early
and almost caught us
in bed having a good time
and I crept by him
on the way home)

glad to be here
I said smiling weakly

the mother looked at me
her eyes were searching me
she didn't smile

Sophia sat in an armchair
and I sat in one next to her
and waited for talk
or questions

you Roman Catholic?
the father said

yes convert 1968
I said
go to Mass each Sunday

the mother looked

at her husband

where you meet Sophia?
he said

I work at the same nursing home
I said

you nurse?

yes sort of
I said

Sophia say you good boy
and respect her?
he said

o yes I do
I said
(pushing any images
of us making love on her bed
a few months previously
and my friend's flat
some months ago
out of my mind)

we want her to be pure
and marry untouched
the father said

of course
I said
looking at Sophia
who sat pale faced
and hands in her lap
she's a good girl
I added
highly respected at work

the mother smiled shyly
the father looked at me
his eyes searching mine

good
he said
that is good
our neighbours see you
and Sophia come here
that time and think things
but we knew she
would not do anything
to spoil herself
before marriage
he added stiffly

that's right
I said
not looking at Sophia
but at the mother
who was warming to me
she's a daughter
to be proud of
I added

he nodded his head
right now we have tea
he said

and the mother and Sophia
got up and went into the kitchen
and began bringing in
sandwiches and cakes
and teapot and jug
and cups and saucers
and plates and such

and I sat there gazing
at the father who sat back
gazing at me

you know the Pater Noster?
he said

I frowned thinking stupidly

of the Italian Mafia
then remembering
he was Polish
said
o yes the Our Father
yes of course and recited
the Pater Noster in Latin
softly and unsurely

you can say it
in English if it easier
he said

so I did
and all the while
the females were bringing
in the food and Sophia
like some virgin queen
looking innocent
and untouched
and secretly
I wanted her
o so much.

Terry Collett

Irish Girls' Secret 1963

The house was quiet
Magdalene's parents were out
her da was away on the farm
and her ma was out
visiting a friend.

Mary was lying
beside Magdalene
on her single bed.

Do you want to?
Magdalene said.

Have we time?
Mary replied.

To be sure we have
Magdalene said.

She kissed Mary's lips
quietly she moved back
on her side
and gazed at the girl.

You can kiss better
than the Kelly boy
Mary said smiling.

They lay gazing at each other
shall we undress?
Magdalene said softly.

What if your parents come
and find us?
Mary said.

They'll belt your arse
Magdalene said jokingly
come on.

Mary listened out for sounds
birds sang from the garden
a cow mooed
from a nearby field.

On your head be it
Mary said.

They got off the bed
and began to undress
each watching the other
remove clothing.

They piled their clothes neatly
on the dressing table
and climbed into bed.

Your hands are cold
Mary said
as Magdalene touched her thighs.

Let me warm them
Magdalene whispered.

They kissed and hugged
then after 5 minutes
there was a knock
on the front door.

Who the feck is that?
Magdalene said
getting out of the bed
and looking out
the window
at the front door below.

Who it is?
Mary asked sitting up
holding the sheet up
to her small breasts.

The fecking postman
Magdalene said.

She grabbed her
dressing gown
and went downstairs.

Mary got out of bed
and stood gazing out
the window.

The postman said something
and the door closed.

Magdalene came back
up the stairs
parcel for me ma
best get dressed in case
me ma comes back sooner
Magdalene said
disappointedly.

So they got dressed
and went down stairs
and went in the kitchen
and made tea
and sat at the table.

A few minutes later
her ma came in.

You are back early
Magdalene said.

My friend
didn't show up
her ma said
what you two girls
been up to?

Nothing just having tea
and a chin-wag

Magdalene said
keeping images
of her and Mary
naked in bed
locked up
in her head

Terry Collett

Is Dead

Is dead.
That's the part
you heard,
those words
through the gap
between door
and frame.

Who's dead?
or what?
the dog?
Uncle, Auntie,
Grandfather?
The old biddy next door
whose nose
spied through curtains?

Curiosity
like some virus
bit into you,
and your ears
lingered by the gap,
your eyes peered
at the adults talking,
lip reading unsuccessfully.

You torn
between the call
of nature (to piss)
and the needing
to know unfolding
of who had died.

Shame,
he was much loved,
the voices continued,
the ears flapping
for further news,
standing on tiptoe,

the bladder filling
to busting.

The King is dead,
long live the Queen,
Grandmother said,
circa 1952,
and you giving in
to nature's call,
walked off satisfied
along the dark hall.

Terry Collett

Is It

Is it fact
or myth

that you
made love

to Judith?
Maybe she's just

inside my head,
fact or myth,

it doesn't matter now
Judith's dead.

Terry Collett

Is Missed 1940

After being washed
and dressed in fresh nightclothes
and my hair brush
I am wheeled out
into the sunshine
outside the ward
and sit here listening
to the sounds about me
and smelling the flowers
I cannot see
and feeling an itch
in my toes which
I do not have

all alone?
a voice says
to my right

Philip?

Yes
the voice replies
how are you?

I turn and face where
his voice comes from

coping about
I say putting out
a hand to touch him
and feel his hands
and he takes mine
and kisses it

how was the red dress?

Beautiful or so
I am told
but I tried it on

and it felt beautiful
against my skin
and the new underwear
I say shyly
not knowing
if he blushes or not

he holds my hand
for a while longer
and says
I'm glad
sorry I couldn't be here
to see you in the dress
but I had been called away
work business
part of the War effort
he says but says no more

I see
I say
the nurse helped me
with the dress
and other items
I've never been so intimate
with some one
I can't see
the nurse I mean
she dresses me
and washes me
and all that private stuff
I add

I'm trying to arrange
a date for me
to take you out to dinner
he says
but the doctors
are uncertain yet
but it will happen
before you outgrow the dress
with being too well
looked after and fed

we are talking
about hospital food here
I say and laugh
and he laughs

and it reminds me
of Clive and how
he made me laugh that night
after going out to the dance
and he tickled me
to nigh wetting-point
and told me this joke
which had me in stitches
then we made love
and as I think about him
and the love making

I clutch out and grab
Philip's hand
and hold it tight
and want at that moment
for him to make love to me
no sight
no legs and all
just to have me
but I say nothing
just stare into darkness
and put on a smiling face

I say
maybe soon they'll
let me go out with you

he leans forward
and he kisses my forehead
with his warm lips
and says
yes hope so
you've been here
on the ward
for quite a while now

since the bombing night

Clive died at Dunkirk
I say suddenly
tears fill my eyes

Philip holds me
and I sense his body
close to mine
and I wish I had legs
and could get up
out of the wheelchair
but I can't and sit here
being held and kissed
and it's Clive
and legs
and sight
and life free
that I miss
and is missed.

Terry Collett

Is She In Love?

Is she in love with you
or what? Reynard said

indicating across
at the girl

at the other side
of the classroom

every time I look up
she's peering over

here like some hawk
after prey

he added
and you guessed

she was
but didn't say

to Reynard
who thought

all thoughts on love
were dumb

or should be left
between pages

of Shakespeare
or Keats

or maybe just
a cover word for

a fumble behind
bike sheds or woods

maybe she just likes
the way I comb my hair

you replied
looking down

at the science book
open on the desk

and by the way
he said

how much grease
you got on your hair

you look like
you fell in the darn jar?

Tooley the science teacher
looked your way

and Reynard clamped up
and began writing

in his book
and in between

scribbling words
in the exercise book

you glanced over at her
and took in her eyes

and that smile of hers
and smiled kind of

weakly back
and she mouthed

something to you
her lips making odd shapes

like some fish
out of water

and you tried to lip read
but it didn't make sense

so you just nodded
and hoped you'd not agreed

to anything
that her scary mother

wouldn't agree to
and then looked away

back to the science book
and life dull

and uninteresting books
full of boring questions

and Tooley at front
of the class

writing on the board
her fat ass moving

as she wrote
like some aging stripper

on her last show
and outside

the window
grey clouds

carrying
heavy snow.

Terry Collett

Is There Now 1962

After school,
and at home,
Shoshana goes
to her room,
gets out
of her uniform,
slips into
something casual,
tidies up,
folds her
uniform neatly,
and places it
on the chair.

She brushes her hair,
then the imagined
Naaman is there
(not the real) ,
gazing at her
behind her
in the mirror.

You shouldn't be here,
she says,
then realizes
it isn't
the real Naaman.

You gave me a shock,
she says,
putting down
the brush,
looking at him.

Wish you
were the real one,
she says.

Downstairs she hears

her father's voice;
her parents are
arguing loudly.

Must go,
she says,
opens the door,
and goes
down the stairs
to the lounge,
where the voices
are shouting.

She stands by the door,
and stares at them.

What is
the shouting about?
She says.

Her father looks at her;
your sister Miriam
has become pregnant,
he says,
and not married yet,
and that boy
she is living with
is not of the right sort.

I told her
about going away,
but would she listen?
The father adds.

She is a woman
not a child,
the mother says,
she is 19 not
like Shoshana 13.

It is still not right;
what will

the neighbours say?

What about our standing
in the community?
The father says.

Shoshana says nothing,
goes and sits
on the sofa;
the imagined Naaman
sits beside her,
bemused by
the raised voices.

I am going
to be an aunt
Shoshana muses,
folding her fingers
together on her knees.

She hasn't seen Miriam
for months
and the man
she is with
she has only
seen once.

She wishes
the real Naaman
was there
beside her now,
wonders what
her parents would say
if suddenly
he was there
and they saw him.

Then she is
glad he isn't,
because her father
would blow
into a rage

and throw
him out
and God knows
what he would
do to her.

She watches
as the parents row;
pretends in her mind,
the real Naaman
is there now.

Terry Collett

It Begins.

It begins
with dull morning
light through slits
in shutters.

It ends with moon's
bright gleam
and smile
and my doze
of a sleep.

In between
the getting through
the upward climb
and downward fall
and collapse or
half built up
and left undone
or incomplete
and failings
at my feet.

Books opened
but closed
page marked
with print of Picasso.

Music on the radio
half listened to or not
let slide
into the room
as I sit watching
the cat lick its rear end
or birds on the feeder
swinging to and fro
why? I don't know.

It begins as it ends
two slices of being

like slices of limp bread
with a filling
of dull life
like cheap meat
in railway sandwiches
years ago.

I go on
why?
I don't know.

Terry Collett

It Rained 1973

It rained after we left
the Musée d'Orsay
and Sonya and I
had to run for cover.

She looked beautiful
in the rain
(she looked
beautiful anyway) .

We stood underneath
a canvas covering
with others,
who also ran for shelter.

How romantic it looks
Paris in the rain,
she said.

I sensed the dampness
sinking through the cloth
of my jacket;
it didn't feel
romantic to me.

I've seen paintings
of Paris in the rain,
I said,
I remember seeing
this pavement artist
chalking a picture of Paris
and the rain came down
and he went
and the picture
became a murkiness
of colour.

The other people
spoke in French.

Nous sommes des touristes,
she said to them.

They nodded and smiled
and looked at me.

Maybe they thought
I looked like that guy
with a beard
in the Renoir painting,
I mused.

Sonya spoke
to them in French
and I watched
her talking;
the curve of her body,
her blonde hair
over her shoulders.

I wished
we were back
in the hotel
in the bed.

Let us go
have a coffee
some place,
she said.

The rain had paused,
so off we went
to find a small cafe;
another Parisian tour
and dull day.

Terry Collett

It Was Raining 1957

It was raining
so I invited Enid
in to learn
how to play chess

I shut the front door
of the flat
and we went past the kitchen
where Mum was doing
the washing in the boiler

just showing Enid
how to play chess
I said to Mum

she looked at Enid
and smiled and said
make sure he doesn't cheat

Enid nodded and smiled
and we went into the sitting room
and sat at the table
in front of the window
which gave us extra light

I got the chess box
from the side
and opened it up
and put down the chessboard
and showed Enid
where the pieces went
and how they could move
and how many times
and gave her the whites
and I had the black pieces

you go first
I said
because you're white

she looked at her pieces
which piece can I move first?

any pieces provided
it moves as I showed you

she gazed at the chessboard
and this piece is called the prawn?
she said

no pawn
I said
it's like a common soldier
it moves as I showed you

she hesitated her small
9 year old fingers lingering
over the pawn
forgot where
and how it can move
she said looking at me

I smiled and showed her
how the pieces moved again

she watched
think I've got it now
she said

ok off you go
I said

she moved her first pawn
and then sat back pleased
that she'd moved a piece

how's your old man?
I asked

she looked at me
her eyes bright through

her thick lens glasses
he hasn't hit me or Mum yet
she said
that's nearly two weeks
and he's been all nice
and patient and not rowed
and Mum's happy
in a nervous kind of way
Enid said

I moved my black pawn
do you think he'll go back
to how he was?
I said

hope not
she said
moving another white pawn
that's what I fear each morning
that he's gone back
to being as he was
and that'll come in my room
one morning and slipper me
or hit me around the head
in my bed

I moved my knight
to the front of my army
take each day as it comes
I said

we played out the game
I took all her pieces but one
her king
and he I checkmated
and won.

Terry Collett

It's Too Late 1997.

Brian's gone to work;
Una and Nuala
sit at the kitchen table
looking at each other.

Thought he'd never leave,
Nuala says,
sorry about last night;
you must have heard us;
I didn't want it to happen,
but he wanted to,
and I can't let him get
suspicious or he'll
ask you to leave,
and then I don't know
what I'll do.

I pretended it was us,
Una says,
imagined it was you
and me making love.

Wish it was,
Nuala says,
she puts out a hand,
and touches
Una's arm.

I can't do this
for too long;
it's mucking me up
in the head
wanting you,
and having to
make love to him,
Nuala says.

I'll find some place else,
Una says,

it isn't going work here
I know,
me wanting you,
and you wanting me,
and Brian
in between us.

There is silence
for a few minutes.

Have we time?
Nuala asks,
do you want to?

Of course I do,
Una says.

They stand,
and kiss,
and Nuala takes Una's hand,
and they go to Una's room,
and undress,
and get into bed.

They kiss,
and hold,
and after a few minutes
of whispering,
they make love,
and as they do,
the front door opens,
and Brian says,
I forgot my bag.

Nuala and Una lie still,
and stare at the door,
and wait;
there's no way out,
it's too late.

Terry Collett

Jackass 1974

Jackass
the drunk said.

Benny was looking
in the window
of a bookshop
in Charing Cross Road
waiting for his brother
who was buying a book.

Jackass
the drunk said again.

Benny looked around
the drunk
was looking at him.

You middle-class poof
the drunk bellowed.

Benny looked
at his own reflection
in the window.

The white flowery shirt
the pink flared trousers
his dark brown hair and beard.

Me? he mused
I am not middle-class
at all
Benny bellowed back
and if you want to see
how poof I am
come back here.

The drunk stood there
swaying
Jackass

he bellowed
and walked on
up the road.

Benny's brother
came out of the shop
what's the noise?
who were you
bellowing at?

Some drunk
called me
a middle-class poof
Benny said.

His brother smiled
told you not to wear
those pink flares
he said.

Did you buy
the book?
Benny said.

His brother
showed him
the book about
the Sole Brothers.

They walked on
to the restaurant
for a meal and wine.

Benny smiled
they sure knew
how to booze and dine.

Terry Collett

Jane And Bullfinch Eggs

Those are Bullfinch's eggs
Jane said
pointing at
the 5 eggs

in a nest
hidden in a hedge
and as she pointed
you imagined

that some god
modelled all female fingers
on that before you
how the nail was set

so perfectly
on the finger's tip
the colour pinkish white
the skin almost blending in

we mustn't disturb
she added
or the mother bird
will fly away

and not return
oh right
you said
gazing at the eggs

once her finger
had been removed
from the hedge
you studied

the pale blue eggs
speckled there
and sensed her presence
near your cheek

the lavender
that she wore
the way her hair dark
coming to her shoulders

was tied back
from her face
some collect them
Jane said

and pierce the top
and bottom
and blow through the contents
and have them on display

do they?
you said
seeing the sad expression
she wore

why is that?
you asked
she stood back
from the hedgerow

and looking at you
with her dark eyes
said
because they must have

they have to collect
what is there
for all to see
they must just have

for themselves alone
the May sun
was shining warm
and she took your hand

in hers and walked

you on along the lane
the small stream running
by the lane's edge

her grey skirt
and white blouse
and white socks
giving her a plain look

but her eyes lit up
and she smiled again
and you wanted
at that moment

as she held your hand
for that hour
to be there forever
not to be lost

thinking you knew then
the depth of love
and not its loss
of that

and feeling sense
and not the cost.

Terry Collett

Jane And The Butterfly Book 1961

I saw Jane
by the water tower
in Bugs Lane
I had come from home

after helping my father
saw logs in the shed
she looked pretty
in the sunlight

her dark hair
seemed aglow
and as I approached
she smiled

and it pinched me
inside in a way
I couldn't fathom
she had a book

in her hand
and swung it
back and forth
like a priest swung

the thurible at church
what have got there?
I asked
as I was by her side

it's a book
on British butterflies
she said
showing me

the book cover
which had various
butterfly pictures
on the front and back

thought we may go look
for some of them
she said
it's Daddy's

but he said
I could borrow it
ok
I said

that'll be good
-but being with her
was the real joy
just breathing in

her presence
her fresh apple smell
was the real goodness-
so we walked up

the pathway up
to the Downs
trees on either side
keeping out

the hot blaze
of the sun
for a while
except where it

broke through
overhead branches
and there were birds singing
and flights of birds

crossing over
and above us
are you all right?
she asked

-Lizbeth was unmentionable

between us now
we just never
spoke of her-

sure I'm fine
I said
collecting chalk fossils
you know

the ones inside
rock chalk
found two shells
inside one last week

that's good
you'll have to show me
she said
they're in my show tank

I said
along with animal bones
and skeletons of birds
in my room

have to ask
your mother
if I can see them
with you

she said
as we walked past
the big hollow tree
-yet when Lizbeth

came to my room
a while back
she never thought
to ask my mother

if she could go
to my room-
after a while

we broke out

into the open
and the sunshine
warmed us
and it was like

being born again
up there on the Downs
the grass
and the flowers

and shrubbery
and I liked being there
beside her
in fact it was

a love thing
just being there
let alone being there
looking out

for butterflies
she was
the butterfly beauty
in my eyes.

Terry Collett

Jane And You And The Butterfly

Jane sat on her haunches
and opened her hands
to show the butterfly

she had just captured
from a nearby flower
and said the name of it

but you were studying
her sitting there
the way she opened her hands

like some flower
in the morning light
spreading its petals

and her eyes bright
and deep
set on the wings

of the butterfly
and its opening
and closing of wings

and she smiled
and she said something else
but the words escaped you

not the tone or softness
of her voice
but the words

the structure
and meaning of them
and you looked

at her legs
spread downward
beneath

the summery dress
of red and orange
and the sun making

her warm
and you sitting there
wanting to lean forward

and touch her hands
maybe to stroke
the butterfly

but
no
she said

the wings are so delicate
they may damage
just look and see

and she moved her hands
closer to you
and you smelt her scent

the perfume
she said her mother
gave her

and you breathed it in
as you leaned forward
and the butterfly took off

and she watched it go
and waved it goodbye
and then turned

and looked at you
and you felt a warm passion
flow through you

as she gazed

into your eyes
and spoke

but the words
slipped away
like the butterfly

but the perfume
was still there
and her hands closed

and she placed them
over yours
as you sat opposite

and the sun warmed
and blessed both
your heads

and the butterfly
disappeared over
the high hedge

and away
and her words
were lost to you

that moment
of that summery day.

Terry Collett

Jane And You And The Gatekeeper

You sat with Jane
on the grass
in the field
beneath the Downs

she was looking
at the sky
and you
were watching her

her profile
her hair pulled back
in a ponytail
her eyes bright

as new coins
her pale blue dress
and white ankle socks
and brown sandals

she followed a butterfly
fluttering by
a Gatekeeper
she said

where?
you said
there that butterfly
it's called a Gatekeeper

you turned to watch
the butterfly
she had pointed to
as it fluttered off

down the field
stopping now and then
to land on flowers
I love butterflies

she said
how do you know
all their names?
you asked

I read Daddy's books
he has a number of books
on butterflies and moths
she said

she lay back
on the grass
and stared
at the sky

you lay down
beside her
your hands
behind your head

she smelt of lavender
you noticed
you breathed it in
let it fill within you

don't you read books?
she asked
turning to look at you
taking in your white shirt

and blue jeans
I'm reading a book on birds
you said
I bought it in town

the other week
that's a start
she said smiling
I guess so

you said

I didn't realize
there were so many kinds
she studied you

as you spoke
resting her head
on her hand
maybe we can go looking

for nests next year
when they begin
to nest again
she said

ok
you said
not to touch though
she said

just to look
birds don't like
their nests disturbed
in London

we only have sparrows
and pigeons
you said
how boring

she said
you watched
her lips moving
as she spoke

her eyes on you
studying you
I'm glad you're here
you said

glad to be here
she replied
she touched her fingers

to her lips

and blew you a kiss
and you did likewise
seeing a new world
in her deep dark eyes.

Terry Collett

Jane And You And The Hollow Tree.

Jane waited for you
by the narrow road
that led to Linch farm

the water tower visible
against the afternoon sky
of pale blue and white

cold clouds
she was dressed
in a grey coat

and her dark hair
was pinned back
with grips

you noticed
blueness
about her lips

the cold taking toll
wasn't sure
if you would show

she said
the coldness
and such

I said I would
and I say
what I mean

you replied
once you were close to her
she took her hands

out of the coat pockets
and linked her arm
through yours

where shall we go?
she asked
you know it better

around here than I do
you choose
you said

let's go up
the dust track
to the hollow tree

on the way up
to the Downs
she said

ok
you said
and so you walked along

and up the dust track
side by side
and she talked

of the wintery trees
and what birds
there were still about

and how she liked
spring best with the coming
of flowers and birds nesting

and you listened
looking at her
as she spoke

watching her lips move
how when she spoke
her white teeth showed

and now and then

her tongue would show
and it reminded you

of that kiss she gave you
up by Diddling church
as you stood looking

at the grave stones
and she gazed at you
and then kissed

and her tongue
touched yours
and it was like heaven

as if someone
had opened up
your heart

and stuck
their tongue in there
and as you thought

about that kiss
she talked of some girl
of a cowman

who'd got pregnant
and how did that happen?
she asked

and you said nothing
but listened on
and then you reached

the hollow tree
and climbed inside
and sat down

looking out
of the hole
in the side

and it felt cosy
in there
like a small home

and she leaned
in against you
and there was silence

and you looked at her
at her eyes
and hair

and how her lips
were parted
and her white teeth

showed and her tongue
waiting to speak
and you wondered

about that kiss again
and whether
it would happen this time

there in the hollow tree
out of sight
of others

and she showed you
tucked between
her small breasts

a small locket
which used to be
her mother's.

Terry Collett

Jane And You And The Primroses

Those are primroses
Jane said
pointing to flowers
in a hedgerow

after leaving
the water tower
and walking
by the farm

the smell of cows
and dung
and the sound of birds
and her voice distinct

soft as a water coloured painting
her left hand
in her grey coat
her hair

brushed straight
touching the collar
we ought not to pick them
she said

they're best left
where they belong
for all to see
as you went

to pick them
with your fingers
for your mother back home
I'll show you cowslips

they're yellow too
she added
taking your hand in hers
walking you onward

the sun beginning
to warm your face
the Downs in the distance
the trees

the fields
the variety of greens
dark and light
you told her

about the bombsites
in London where you lived
how few flowers
there were there growing

except in the shops
she listened
her eyes moving
over you

her lips slightly parted
white teeth
just visible
her cheeks pale

the coat parted
at the neck
the smoothness
of her skin

beneath her chin
how the only birds you saw
were pigeons and sparrows
not the variety

you'd seen around
the countryside
there and about
you both paused

as the farm

came into view
the buildings
and farmhouse

the cowshed
the cowpats
along the road
the smell stronger

look out for the black dog
you said
it bites
and you pulled up

your sleeve
and showed her
the healed wound
on your lower arm

where the dog had bitten
she ran her finger over
the softness of her skin
on yours

a tickling along your nerves
as if for the first time
you realized
the spark of love

the joy of being alive
the sensation
like the first kiss
months earlier

the dog barked
from the farm
her finger lingering softly
upon your arm.

Terry Collett

Jane And You And The Stolen Eggs.

Some one has destroyed
the robin's nest
and stolen the eggs
Jane said

she leaned
into the hedgerow
beneath the streamlet
and parted the branches

her voice choked
as her fingers poked
about the damaged nest
you stood watching

behind her
over her shoulder
watching her fingers move
who'd do such a thing?

you asked
all gone
not an egg left
she said

in saddened tone
you leaned near her
smelt lavender water
she wore

her dark hair
pinned back
with metal grips
why destroy?

she said
why steal?
you sensed her sadness
felt her ache

and how
it would feel
she withdrew her hands
and wiped them

on her dull grey dress
and looked along the lane
and back at you again
who would do such things?

you asked
she looked at the hedgerow
that now concealed
the damaged nest

and said
father says
such are humankind
that seek and take

and leave all fouled
and lost and leave
to nature or to God
to mend and count

the cost
I saw the nest and eggs
last time we came
you said

the beauty of the eggs
and nest made neat
Jane walked on
along the lane

and you walked
beside her
her dull grey dress
swaying as he walked

her hand reached out

for yours
her fingers slim
unpainted nails

her thumb rubbed
against your hand's skin
the sky
watercolour blue

with puffs of white
just the countryside
sans eggs and nest
and Jane and you.

Terry Collett

Jane And You And Warm Summer Rain

Once you entered
Diddling's small church
it cooled you both down
from the summer heat outside

Jane looked about her
she'd been here
many times before
but wanted to you show you

and let you feel
the coolness
and silence
and peacefulness

I came here first
as a child
she said
but more often at St Mary's

at the other side
of the village
I wouldn't have thought
any place could be

this quiet
you said
the church smelt
of flowers

and old plaster
some one had placed
a mixture of blooms
in the vase by the altar

she walked forward
her hand brushing
against the tops
of the wooden pews

on either side
one could get married here
she said
if you had few guests

and friends
you said
gazing at her dark hair
pulled tight

in a ponytail
tied with red ribbon
her light green dress
fitted loosely

her sandals held
her bare feet
maybe one wanted
few guests

maybe just a few witnesses
and the clergyman
she said softly
turning to look at you

her dark eyes
captured you
and held you fixed
for a few moments

one day perhaps
she said
doesn't your father
come here?

you asked
occasionally if the need arises
she said
mostly he's at

the other church

come and stand
at the front with me
she said

you walked towards her
watching her eyes
and her mouth
the lips slightly open

you stood next to her
at the altar end
the light coming through
the high windows above

she smelt of lavender
you could breathe it in
your head swayed with it
imagine us here

she said
pretend it's our
wedding day
and we are here

and the pastor
and a couple of people
as witnesses
she held your hand

in hers
her warm flesh
her thumb
on the back

of your hand
stroking slowly
would we sing hymns?
you asked

yes two
she said
closing her eyes

and we'll pretend

the organ played
at the start
and finish
she added

she sniffed the air
and plenty of flowers
around us
and bridesmaids?

you said
she thought
in silence
for a few moments

yes two small girls
from the village
she said
her hand got warmer

the dampness
linked you
and who
will give you away?

you said
father of course
she said frowning
she opened her eyes

and looked at you
too many people
have come
she said

it crowds my mind
and dream
then let it just be us
and the parson

and two others
you said
she nodded and smiled
it's good to pretend

and imagine
she said
maybe one day
it will be real

the sunlight played
and danced
upon the floor
at her feet

her thumb rubbed
deeper in to your skin
and you both walked
down the aisle

in silence again
outside
came sound
of warm summer rain.

Terry Collett

Jane In Love 1961

I woke to the sound
of birdsong and cows
mooing from the farm.
I lay in bed thinking

of Benedict. I had
never thought about
a boy before; never
had this feeling inside,

never had my mind
so muddled up
like a puddle in a
storm. Downstairs

mother prepared
breakfast. Father
was in his study
preparing his long

sermon for Sunday.
I used to be up and
dressed, out in the
early morning sun,

watching butterflies
in flight. But I lay
in bed as if it was
night, staring at

the wooden cross
on the white wall.
I wanted to get up,
but I felt as if I'd

not slept at all.

Terry Collett

Jane One Evening 1961

Father is in his study
writing his sermon.

Mother is knitting
by the fire
listening to the radio.

I am sitting
reading a book of birds.

I cannot focus
I am thinking
of Benedict
and seeing him
earlier today
at the small church.

I talked with him
and we kissed.

Mother never asked
if I had been crying
despite my eyes
being red.

Benedict and I
talked of that
Lizbeth girl
and how she
had tried to get
him to have sex
on a pew
in the church.

I couldn't believe
any girl would
attempt that
especially in church.

He hadn't of course
but why did she
think he would?

The sky is darkening
bats swoop
from the eaves
and flutter back
and forth into the sky.

Classical music comes
from the radio
Bach I think.

Mother knits quickly
her fingers
moving so fast.

I feel
Benedict's lips
on mine.

We embraced
in the church
before leaving
his arms about me
mine about him.

I close the book
I feel tired
and my mind
seems dim.

Terry Collett

Jane One Sunday.

JANE ONE SUNDAY.

When she fainted
at the bus stop in the town
and others gathered

around her
you stood watching
anxious of her

being such
but not wanting others
to know of you and she

(her choice)
you stood looking
through the crowd

of what you could
of her
the glimpse

of black hair
the yellow flowered dress
a white sock

then she was up
and someone
brushed her off

Jane gazed at you
pale white
her lips bluish

her dark eyes
black olives
on white plates

and next day(Sunday)

after church
she walked over to you

and(no one noticing)
you and she wandered off
beyond the hedge

her father shaking hands
at the porch of church
her mother talking

of some fete
and the making of cakes
Jane taking your hand

settled by a higher hedge
and whispered
glad you never came

to me yesterday
when I fainted
that would have set

the tongues wagging
I thought that too
you said

she smiled
why did you faint?
you asked

not sure
Mum thinks
it's my time of month

or some such thing
you looked puzzled
unsure what her time

of month was
or what it meant
(13 years old

as both you were)
I see
you said

but didn't
anyway
she said

feel better today
and then she talked
of a butterfly she'd seen

sounding like
some lady or other
you stared at her

the eyes bright
the skin still pale
her hand in yours

the scent of apples
freshly picked
her warmth on yours

her words silk like
whispering to you
and you thought

of the Sunday before
the walk up the Downs
the hand in hand

kind of thing
you thinking
of her nearness

something stirring
within
and she talking

of the spread of flowers

colours
design

petals
and how bees
come and go

and you sensing
each touch of her
skin on skin

her thumb stroking
the back of your hand
then someone called her name

beyond the hedge
over from the church
and letting go

of your hand
she walked back
leaving you to stare

and wonder and wish
as you walked back
another way

the churchyard
with its many dead
the flowers

the smells of summer
and you watching
wanting her instead.

Terry Collett

Jane Says.

She's pointing
at some bird
on a pond
in a wood
half a mile
from the farm

a moorhen
she tells me

it walks odd
I reply

I like it
like its eggs
the colour
she relates

she's happy
her eyes bright

I watch her
her brown hair
the grey dress
the black boots
thin figure

Daddy says
all creatures
are God's gift

she watches
the moorhens
some swimming
some walking

she has fine
bone structure
a fine nose

I guess so
I reply

we walk near
her hand soft
white near mine
close to touch

don't suppose
a London
boy's see them?
she asks me

I haven't
before now
I tell her
just pigeons
and sparrows
in London
except parks
then there's ducks
and such things

she walks near
the pond's edge
be careful
she tells me
a child drowned
here last year

I gaze out
at the pond
imagining
the dead child

my father
said the prayers
at the church
afterwards
very sad
Jane says

she's buried
in the small
church's ground
I'll show you
when we're there
the next time

I recall
the last time
at the church
in the grounds
watching clouds
overhead
laying down
with the dead.

Terry Collett

Jane's Dream 1961

Where are you going, Jane?
Your mother said that morning.

Going to see Benny, you replied.

You see Benny now sitting on
the gate to the field; he is in his
blue jeans and black Wellington
boots, a white open neck shirt.

You wonder whether to tell him
you dreamed of him the night
before; whether to say nothing
and keep it to yourself. It had
been a lovely dream, and when
you woke up you wanted to go
back to sleep and enter the dream
again, but then you dreamed of
something else. He sees you
coming and climbs down from
the gate. You feel self conscious
as if he could enter your mind and
share your thoughts; you blush slightly.

How are you? He asks. I am fine,
you say, taking in his hazel eyes,
the quiff of brown hair, his smile
that some girls say is an Elvis smile.

You stand before him and hesitate;
wanting to kiss him; wanting him
to kiss you. I've been helping with
the milking on the farm this morning,
he says. That's good for an ex-London
boy, you say, smiling, seeing him look
at you. I have surprised myself, he says,
A few months ago, I didn't know a cow
from a bull. Shall I tell him about the
dream? You want to, but what will he say?

You talk to him about a bullfinch you
had seen that morning at the vicarage,
its colouring, the way it sat there in a bush.

He suggests going up the Downs; you
agree and begin to walk beside him back
along the narrow road and up the track
towards the Downs. He talks of his father
working in the woods a mile away; about
the time his father took him with him and
how he found skeletons of rabbits
and birds. You watch him sideways
on; wanting to tell him of the dream;
wanting him to kiss you. He looks
up, points to the sky through the tall
trees, it's a bright washed out blue.

Terry Collett

Janette And You And The Slapped Face.

Janette Richie
didn't like you much
as was shown

that time
in Mr Finn's class
when she slapped

your face
for something you'd said
leaving you

with a spinning head
and a red cheek
but that aside

and her rather
plump frame
and maybe spectacles

you kind of like
her motherliness
the bossiness

around the class
the way she walked
the wiggly ass

but whatever it was
you'd said to her
to invite the slap

it was just a string
of words carrying
no malice or meaning

to hurt and the sensation
of her hand of flesh
touching your

young boy's cheek
a nearness
she hadn't thought on

or given any deeper
probe than the desire
to swipe an annoying boy

not realizing
that the gesture
and the plump hand

landing had more
than a momentary
feel or touch

you there after kind of
liked her in your
secret way

never repeating
the words said
about her plumpish

frame or swaying ass
or the spectacles
of thick glass

and maybe the other
boys laughed
and thought it some

joke of misjudgement
on your part
but you found

a secret place for her
in your nine year old
heart.

Janice And Al Capone 1956

Janice said
the man along
the balcony
from her gran's flat
had cut his throat
and the ambulance men
came and wrapped him
in bandages
and took him away
on a stretcher.

She said
it was horrible
blood soaking through
the bandages
his mother
walking beside
the stretcher
bemoaning him.

We were sitting
on the grass
in front
of Banks House.

I was cleaning
my silver looking
toy 6 shooter
with a handkerchief
from my blue jeans' pocket.

Why'd he cut
his throat?
I said.

Janice said
she didn't know
but that his mother
was moaning at him

as the ambulance men
were taking him off.

Some guy
on our balcony
did that a while ago
I said
think he was in debt
with a bookies runner.

A bookies runner?
she said
what's that?

He puts bets
on for you
I said
so my old man says.

She looked at me
it looked horrible
all that blood.

Guess it did
the guy on our balcony
had a scar after
made him look
like Al Capone
I said
aiming my gun
at the sky
at a flying pigeon
and going
KAPOW.

Who is Al Capone?
she said
does he live
on your balcony?

I smiled
no he moved out

a while ago
I said
not mentioning
he was a gangster
in the USA
and was dead.

Terry Collett

Janice And The Catapult 1956

Janice held
Benny's catapult
in her small hand
and taking a small stone
from Benny's held out palm.

She fitted it in the pouch
and taking the pouch
between her fingers
she pulled it back
towards her chest
and closing an eye.

Where shall I aim it?
she said.

Aim at the tins
I have put on the wall
of that bombed out house
Benny said.

She looked at the tins
and aimed.

I can't see
the catapult end
she said.

You have the wrong
eye closed
Benny said.

She closed
the other eye
o I see it now
which tin?

Any tin
he said.

She pulled
the pouch back
as far she she could
and then released it.

The stone whizzed
past the tins and hit
the wall behind
with a clatter.

I missed
she said.

You did
he said.

Shall I try again?
She said.

He handed her
another stone
and she put it
in the pouch
and pulled back
and aimed
then released it.

It hit a tin side on
and sent it spinning
out of sight.

I did it
she said.

You did
he said.

She jumped
up and down excitedly
and handed Benny
back his catapult.

He smiled
and went
and got his stones
over the low wall
finding the tin.

He mused on Janice
and what her gran
would say
if she knew
the catapult being
(as far as she
was concerned)
the big sin.

Terry Collett

Janice And You And Gathering Coal.

Janice helped you
to gather up
the loose pieces of coal
on the cobbled road

leading to the coal wharf
off Meadow Row
you watched as she put
the pieces in the sack

you'd brought with you
as the evening mist
settled upon the scene
her red beret placed

at an angle
her hair
smooth as water
is this allowed?

she asked
looking around
at the back of houses
still standing after

the wartime bombing
finders keepers
you said
or so Granddad told me

the other week
when I saw him
she gazed at you
unconvinced

but put in more
of the black pieces
you handed to her
what will my gran say

when she sees
my blackened hands?
Janice said
I can't tell her

or she'll tan my hide
as she calls it
you looked
at her coal stained fingers

the way they held
and placed the coal
you can wash your hands
at my place

you said
Mum won't mind
she likes you anyway
Janice looked at you

her lips spreading
into a smile
nice to know
she said

maybe when we're grown
and married
she'll like me better
the sky had darkened

the mist heavy
the moon glowing
I guess so
you said

wondering if her gran
would see it that way
if she lived
to see the day

that should be enough

coal now
you said
taking the sack

from her blackened hands
noticing the thin fingers
she rubbing her hands
together against the cold

the dark
and winter weather.

Terry Collett

Janice And You And Shared Love.

Janice met you
as you walked
across the bombsite
from the New Kent Road

to Meadow Row
you watched
as she trod
carefully over

bricks and stones
some half buried
under the settled
earth and mixed brick

her hands held out
like some tight-rope walker
and she saw you
and smiled

and said
Gran said I can come out
if I'm with you
so I came looking for you

and here you are
yes
you said
my usual place

amongst many
she stopped
where the ground
was even

and held her hands
in front of her
holding a small bag
you looked at her

in her red beret
and grey coat
her black shoes
and white socks

and she said
where are we going?
you looked at her bag
and said

what's in the bag?
a small handkerchief
and purse
with six pence

and a penny
and a bar of chocolate
we can share
she said

where are we going?
she repeated
where do you
want to go?

Waterloo
to watch the trains?
she said
I know you like them

ok
you said
and you both
headed back

to the bus stop
on the New Kent Road
and stood there
waiting for the bus

she in her red beret

and coat
and you
in your jeans

and pullover
with the wiggly pattern
and she opened
her bag

and took out
the bar of chocolate
and broke it
in two

one for her
and one for you
wrapped in
its silver paper

and purple cover
just like two grown ups
each giving
to their lover.

Terry Collett

Janice And You And The Catapult.

Janice sat beside you
on the bombsite
off Meadow Row
looking towards

the New Kent Road
watching the people
and traffic pass
you with your catapult

and she with the doll
her gran had bought her
from the market in the Cut
Gran said those are dangerous

Janice said
pointing at the catapult
not if you're careful
and responsible

you said
but they fire stones
she said
guns fire bullets

you said
they can kill people
David killed Goliath
with a stone

she said
I heard it in church
I only fire at tin cans
or other such targets

you said
she looked at the sky
at pigeons flying overhead
what about birds?

she asked
no I don't shoot at birds
although I did fire
at a rat once

but missed
and it ran off
I hate rats
she said

there was one
on our balcony once
and it frightened me to death
you laughed

you remember that coalman
who stomped on that one
along the balcony by your flat?
yuk

she said
horrible blood and guts
everywhere
and on his boot

you said
she hugged her doll
close against her
don't remind me

you studied the doll
in her arms
the way it was close
to her chest

her hands caressing
the painted china head
the yellow flowered dress
and small white socks

and black plastic shoes

you'd make a good mum
you said
watching her rock

the doll in her arms
do you think so?
she asked
yes

you said
maybe one day
I will have a real baby
she said

and rock it to sleep
and feed it with a bottle
and burp it
and change its nappy

like I saw a lady do
in the toilets
of Waterloo station
and Gran said

it wasn't hygienic
not there of all places
Gran said
I'd have to have

a peg on my nose
if I had to change
a baby's nappy
you said

I think men
have weaker stomachs
than women do
she said

I think mothers
are given stronger stomachs
when they have babies

it's God way of helping them

deal with babies

I'd rather have a catapult
than a baby
you said

or a doll

do you want to hold my doll
and I can hold your catapult?
she asked

no thanks

you replied
if my mates saw me
I'd never live it down

she kissed the doll's head
and said
likewise
but there was a smile

on her lips
and a sparkle
in her eyes
and a beauty

in the way she sat
in her orange coloured dress
and bright red beret hat.

Terry Collett

Janice And You And The Evening Stars

You sat on the edge
of the low wall
in Rockingham Street
opposite Meadow Row

Janice sat beside you
in her red beret
and black coat
buttoned up

to her throat
against the evening chill
and you
in your cowboy hat

and old coat
with your 6 shooter
(capped gun)
in the inside pocket

the sky is thick with stars
Janice said
looking upward
like God threw small diamonds

into the black expanse
reminds me of the time
You said
when I was with my old man

outside Guy's Hospital
and he left me outside
with my sister
while he went in

to see my mother
who was about to have babies
and I looked up
at the sky that evening

and it was like that
and it seemed
so big and wide
and I remember thinking

how I could get lost there
if I were a spaceman
looking out
of the spaceship window

at the stars
and moon and such
I could have been with you
Janice said

and have got you
food and drink for the voyage
I don't know
You said

girls don't get to go
on space voyages do they?
I guess not
she said sighing

but maybe
I could be the first to go
she added smiling
sure you could

but not with your red beret
You said
she laughed
and looked up

Meadow Row
at the street lamps
and the glow they made
on the pavements

and narrow road

and she pointed
at some kids
outside the public house

half way up the road
and said
Gran wouldn't leave me
outside a pub like that

while she went drinking
you gazed up the road
and saw the kids outside
one in a pram

one sitting
on the low wall
eating out
of a packet of chips

my mother said
it happened a lot
in her days
when she was a kid

but she never was
You said
Janice tucked her hands
under her armpits

to keep them warm
against the evening cold
I better go
she said

Gran will wonder
where I am
ok
You said

I'll walk you back
and so you both
got off the wall

and walked up

Rockingham Street
to where she lived
with her gran
in an upstairs flat

and she blew you
a kiss from the balcony
and that
was pretty much that.

Terry Collett

Janice And You And The Spider

You stood
in the playground
of St Jude's school
which was really

the basement
of a bombed out house
which had been gutted
and the basement tarmaced

and the walls
were still there
where kids climbed up
and around

the thin ledge
when Janice
put her hands
over your eyes

and said
guess who?
and you put
your hands

into the pockets
of your short trousers
and said
Miss Murphy

or Miss Ashdown?
no
Janice said
it's me

and she removed
her hands
from over your eyes
and you turned around

and looked at her
and she had
her red beret on
and a pink scarf

around her neck
to keep out
the cold
you must

have known
it was me
she said
who else

would put their hands
over your eyes?
her eyes were bright
and you thought

you could see yourself
in them
as if they were small mirrors
Jupp might do

or maybe Carmody
you said smiling
she didn't smile back
but pulled her lips

tight in a line
then she took your hand
and pulled you
along the path

that led
to the school toilets
and pushed you
inside a cubicle

and shut the door

behind you both
and said
don't you love me?

there was a large spider
hanging from
the cistern chain
close to

her red beret
and it hung there
suspended
swaying back

and forth
and you said
of course I do
right down

to your white socks
but there's a spider
above your head
and she looked up

and screamed
and a voice
outside the door
asked

are you all right
in there?
Janice's eyes widened
and she watched

as the spider
moved up the chain
and she said
yes it's all right

Miss Murphy
just a small spider
and you stood there

next to Janice

wondering what
Miss Murphy
would say
if she saw you

and Janice
in the lavatory
together
and the voice said

ok as long
as you
are all right
and the footsteps

moved away
and Janice took
your hand in hers
and you sensed

how cold it was
slightly blue
and it was just
9 year old Janice

and the big spider
and 9 year old you.

Terry Collett

Janice And You And The Stars

Janice watched
as you held on
to the ledge
of the ice-cream van

to see how long
you could hold on
in that dare game
the boys played

in the Square
and after
you jumped off
she said

isn't that dangerous?
sure it is
you replied
that's the point

to see how long
you can hold on
without falling
and getting hurt

she looked at you
and said
if Gran saw me
doing that

she'd tan
my behind
ah
you said

that's it
not to be seen
by those grown ups
and spoilsports

she raised
her eyebrows
and said
maybe

but it's not for me
and so you took her hand
and went along
through the Square

and across Bath Terrace
and into Jail Park
to the swings
and slides

and such things
and you grabbed
a swing each
and pushed off

and you looked at her
beside you
her hair flowing
in the wind

her dress billowing
as the wind caught it
and you said
how high can you go?

high as I can
she said
and she pushed
her legs out

and then under
the seat of the swing
getting the rhythm right
getting the swing

to go higher

and higher
and you did likewise
and you watched

as her whole body
got into the ride
and her hands gripped
the metal chains

and you saw
her legs rise high
and her brown sandals
and white socks

and she said
is this high enough?
and you said
as high as high

can go is high
and she laughed
and pushed her feet
right up into the sky

and you pushed through
the aches and pains
of the muscles
to reach the highest pinnacle

and she gazed at you and laughed
and there was that moment
when you thought
you saw new stars

being born in her smile
but then she slowed down
and the new stars
died out after a while.

Terry Collett

Janice And You At London Bridge

It was the fourth day
since the break up
from school
for the summer vacation

and you were riding
with Janice
on the bus
to London Bridge

and she was wearing
the lemon coloured dress
you liked
that came to the knees

which were pressed
together
and the brown sandals
with the patterned holes

and the red beret
on her fair hair
was swaying
with the motion

of the bus
opposite you
was a man
wearing a trilby

and a moustache
who kept looking at you
with his dark eyes
his head going

from side to side
as the bus moved
and he sat next
to Janice

his hands
on his knees
and he turned
and gazed

at Janice's knees
then up at you again
his features flushing
and then he looked away

at the passing scene
behind you
pretending
you weren't there

then at London Bridge
he got off
and so did you
and Janice

and you waited
until he had gone
walking up
and over the bridge

and you said
he was a queer fish
who?
said Janice

that bloke
who sat next to you
why?
she asked

he kept staring at me
and ogling
at your knees
did he?

Janice said

you wait
until I tell Gran
about that

she'll say
you watch out
for his type Janice
he's no better

than he ought to be
you nodded
and smiled
at her imitation

of her gran
and she laughed
and you both
walked down

the steps and by
Southwark Cathedral
to the embankment
by the River Thames

and stood by the wall
looking at the passing
boats and ships and tugs
and the occasional

ducks floating
on the brown water
and you felt Janice's
9 year old hand

touch yours
as she pretended
(as she often did)
that you were

a married couple
out for a romantic walk
gazing

at the passing scenery

with the added
small talk.

Terry Collett

Janice And You At Waterloo Station

At Waterloo Station
the steam engines
puffed powerful steam
reaching up

to the rooftop
and you stood there
hands in your pockets
your nose sniffing in

the white and grey smell
you can taste it
on your tongue
and Janice beside you

her eyes looked up
at the rooftop
as the steam
reached high

her hands clutching
the small bag
I want to be a train driver
when I'm older

you said
I want to smell
that smell
and breathe in

that steam and shovel
coal in the engine
maybe you will
Janice said

maybe you'll be
on a train like that
big and black
and powerful

she put her hand
under your arm
and squeezed
Gran said we can be

what we want
if we want it
bad enough
Janice added

you felt her hand
under your arm
sensed her squeeze it
we went to the seaside

on a big black train
like this last year
you said
and I put my head

out the train window
and my mum said
keep your head in
or a train

will knock it off
that'd be horrible
Janice said
she clutched

closer to you
as the steam train
puffed out more steam
and the sound was loud

and powerful
and she said
maybe
when you're an engine driver

you can take me

to the seaside
with Gran
yes

you said
and if you come
to the engine
before you take off

I can show you
the engine
and how powerful it is
and she smiled

and put her head
on your shoulder
yes
you said softly

when I grow up
and when I am older.

Terry Collett

Janice On A Rainy Day 1956

The yellow canary
sings in it's cage.

Gran sits sleeping
in her armchair
snoring.

I am by the window
looking out at the rain
raindrops sliding
down the glass
like tears.

I wanted to go
with Benny
but then it
started raining
and Gran said no
to stay in the dry.

I look out
at the block of flats
opposite where
Benny lives
with his parents
and brother and sister.

Bath Terrace is below
and across the way
is the coal wharf
where I can see
the coal men
coming and going
some drawn in
horse drawn wagons.

Benny said he would
show me his
favourite bomb site.

It used to be
a butcher's shop
but was bombed
in the War and
only the ruins
are there now
boarded up
but he said
there is a way in.

Best not tell Gran
or she'll not
let me go.

I hope it stops
raining soon.

My doll sits
on the settee
staring into space
hands holding out
as if she wanted
to be picked up.

Maybe she wants feeding
or her nappy changed.

The rain drops hit
the windowpane.

I hope it stops
and never rains again.

Terry Collett

Janice's Dress.

Janice folds
her new dress
quite neatly
and lays it
in the drawer
and shuts it

school next week
she tells me
nice to have
new clothes then

guess it is
I reply
got new shirts
and a pair
of trousers
my mother
got for me
from The Cut

I could hear
Janice's
grandmother
working in
the kitchen
getting us
some dinner

I like that
lemon dress
that you wear
I tell her

why that one?

the colour
lights you up

Gran told me
it's too short
to wear now
Janice says

that's a shame
I liked it

I've got lime
with flowers
Gran got me

she shows me
the lime dress
which she holds
against her
what you think?

it's ok

just ok?

just ok
I liked your
lemon one

it's too short
Gran told me
what is wrong
with the lime?

the flowers
too sissy

too sissy?
I'm a girl
sissy's good
Janice says

she adjusts
her beret
the red one

she puts down
the lime dress
brushes it
hangs it up

I look out
the window
at a train
passing by
on the bridge

dinner time
her gran calls

the train's gone
janice takes
the beret
off her head
her blonde hair
shoulder length
her blue eyes
watery

I like lime
she tells me

we go off
eat dinner
after grace
we eating
I watching
Janice's
sallow face.

Terry Collett

Janice's Paper Boat 1956

Janice folds
the paper
as Benny

had shown her
it became
a small boat

she could float
in the bath
in the flat

if her gran
allows her
to float it

in water
for bathing
she holds it

between thumb
and fingers
put that down

her gran says
get undressed
for your bath

the water
is just right
(she had boiled

the water
in the old
steel copper)

Janice puts
the paper
made-up boat

on the side
of the bath
and watches

as she slow
undresses
come along

her gran says
don't day dream
or I'll slap

your backside
8 years old
or older

Janice takes
off clothes
and gets in

the water
can I float
my paper

made-up boat
in the bath
Janice says

if you must
her gran says
steely eyed

that Benny's
contraption
I suppose

he showed me
Janice says
how to make

the small boat

as they both
(Janice and Gran)

watch it float.

Terry Collett

Jazz And The Hobo

It was a Saturday morning
And you were 19

and you were racing along
Victoria Street having just left

Victoria Railway Station
on your way to Dobell's

Jazz Record Shop
moving quickly

through the sea
of humanity

thinking of jazz
and what record

you were going to buy
at the shop that day

imaging yourself
fingering through LP sleeves

taking a mental note
of which one

you might buy
a John Coltrane or Miles Davis

an Art Blakey or maybe
a Dizzy Gillespie

a jazz record being played
over the loudspeakers

in the shop
you mingling with others

in the crowded place
when this hobo stopped you

taking hold of your jacket gently
and said

have you got some small change
for a sandwich?

no
you replied

I haven't
and rushed on

through the crowd
fingering in your pocket

loose change
silvery coins

and his voice
in your head

as you raced along
and your conscience

nagging you
maybe the voice

of the believed in Christ
so you stopped

and turned around
and made your journey back

through the people
passing by

your fingers taking hold
of the coins

the silvery loose change
and there he was

the hobo asking others
the same question

and they too went by
shaking their heads

or saying
no sorry no change

and you took his hand
and put in the loose silver

into his open palm
and said

here go buy yourself
a sandwich or whatever

and you turned
and left looking over

your shoulder
and he stood there

staring at his palm
and the coins shining

in the morning sun
and then you looked ahead

thinking of the record shop
and the LPs and the jazz music

being played
but deep down

in some other part of you
you knew you'd given

to one who maybe
was hungry

and had unconsciously
prayed.

Terry Collett

Jealous Demon Laid.

One Sunday
in the 1950s
your old man
took you

to London's West End
it was summer
and the evenings light
and the streets busy

and crowded
and he took you
to amusement arcades
and cafes for refreshments

and ice creams
and you saw the actress
Billie Whitelaw pass
along a street

with two guys in suits
and she gazed at you
and you knew
who she was

and she looked at you
knowing you
had recognised her
you a young kid

in short trousers
and Brylcreemed hair
and she kind of blushed
and looked away

and you followed her
as she went off
behind you
and your old man said

who was that?
you told him
and he gazed back
probably taking in

her ass
her sway
but you thought
of the Monroe lady

in the film you saw
with those lovely eyes
and red lips
and later

next day
at school
when you told Helen
who you'd seen

her eyes lit up
behind her
thick lens spectacles
and she looked

kind of jealous
of some other
female attention
you'd seen

so you said
of course I paid her
no mind I only
thought of you

wishing you
were there
with my old man
and me

licking ice creams

and boozing back
the coke or lemonade
and she smiled

and her eyes
fell on you
with her jealous demon
laid.

Terry Collett

Jodie's Secret 1996

You recall
that night
you crept
into Iris's bed
while she slept
and hugged up close
to her
in the coldness
of the room.

She woke
and said
what are you
doing here?

And you whispered
you were cold
and would go
in the morning.

She said
what if they
find you here?

But she let you
stay the night
your arms
about her waist
the smell of her.

You wanted to kiss
her body but didn't
you just lay there
and slept until morning.

She said
you had to go
but be careful
no one sees

you leaving.

You left
and crept along
the corridor
to your dormitory
with the other girls
before they woke.

You lay there
in the semi dark
thinking of her body
and her smell
and the warmth.

No one to tell
no other to inform
as you lay there
in the girls' dorm.

Terry Collett

Joe Doe And Hemmingway

He envied Hemmingway
everything except his death;

he envied his ability to write
neat cut prose, to travel widely,

to fight in battles and wars and
survive, to make love to beautiful

women with ease, to drink and
smoke and do as he pleased, to see

things beyond the horizon of other
dangerous worlds. He envied Ernest

everything except his death; that was
too messy, too bloody, a step too far.

Terry Collett

John Feeling Marooned 1962

Trevor talked
about football
and whom
to put in the team.

I sat next to him
trying to shut out
his football talk.

I looked over at Elaine
on the other side
of the coach
and smiled.

She smiled
and blushed
then looked away.

Trevor asked
about a kid
named Jones
whether he'd be
any good in goal.

I said I didn't know
how he'd be
I couldn't care less.

I wished it
was Elaine
next to me
not him
and his football yak.

I sensed her eyes on me
but when I glanced over
she was looking out
the window.

Her sister
gazed at me
with her scornful eyes.

I looked away
at the passing scene
fields and trees
houses and hedgerows.

I hoped I'd see Elaine
on the sports field
at midday recess.

Trevor opened
wide his arms
talking about
the big kid Bailey
how his reach
could save
better than Jones.

I said go for Bailey
he's the best
I said nothing more.

Felt like a marooned sailor
on a lonely shore.

Terry Collett

Judith And A Wedding Day

You and Judith
sang in the choir
at the major's

daughter's wedding
and after
you walked along

to the house and gardens
where the reception
was being held

where there were marquees
for food of various kinds
and a huge beer tent

where there was champagne
and beer and wine
and soft drinks and lemonade

and she said
I will never have
a wedding like this

and she glanced around
at the marquees
and the people

in their fine clothes
and large hats
and waitresses walking

with trays of drink
maybe not
you said

taking two glasses
of champagne
from the tray

of a passing waitress
not with the money
my dad gets

from farm work
she added
taking the glass

you offered her
and sipping
and you watched her lips

and how they worked
the crystal glass
and her fingers

holding the stem
as if it were a gold gem
worth more

than her father earned
in a lifetime
but I can always pretend

she said
and placed her arm
under yours

and walked you forward
over the grass
we can always pretend

it's our wedding day
and these are our guests
and over the way

in the entrance
of one of the marquees
Hill stood with his

schoolgirl girlfriend Shirley

both supping the bubbly
him in his Sunday best

and she in a pink
and white dress
and her blonde hair

and stockings
and white shoes
and you said

would we invite Hill
and his girlfriend
or Tidy and his thick

caterpillar eyebrows?
she looked over at Hill
and pretty Shirley

and said
we have to be generous
when in love

and it's our wedding day
and she lay her head
on your shoulder

and you watched
the bride and groom
over by the main marquee

kissing and embracing
and the people
around them

were cheering
and as you both
moved on

she said
where shall we go
for our honeymoon?

the south of France
you said
somewhere warm

and glancing at the sky
it carried a promise
of a coming storm.

Terry Collett

Judith And Her Thoughts On Death

That Sunday
after singing
in the choir
and changing
from the blue

and white gowns
and out
of the dim lit vestry
into the sunlight
at the back

of the church
Judith was standing
by a gravestone
reading the almost
indecipherable words

chiselled there
sad isn't it
she said
that these people died
and are buried

and then the time comes
when you can't read
who died or when?
you walked over
to where she was standing

and rubbed off
some of the green moss
with your hand
comes to us all
I guess

you said
when those whom we loved
or cared about die

and after we and those
who knew them are gone

there is no one left to care
who's buried there
she looked at you
and you saw
her eyes water

and her lower lip tremble
you won't forget me
will you? she asked
course not
you said

anyway
why are we getting
so darn morbid?
we're alive
let's live while we can

she walked away
from the gravestone
and stood looking
around the graves
behind the church

the sunlight
warming the stone
and her head
and you walked
next to her

and put your hand
on hers and said
I'll never forget you
if you go before me
she smiled

and looked at you
I'll always remember you
she said

other choir members
came out of the vestry door

and there was talk
and laughter
and Roger chased Shirley
along the path
and she looked back at him

giggling and making faces
and Judith said
some have no respect
for the dead
even in this

their resting place
human all too human
you said
and kissed her
sun blessed face.

Terry Collett

Judith And The Mutt And You By The Big Pond

You met Judith
in the woods
at the back
of the cottage
you had the mutt with you

taking it for a walk
on the lead
in case it ran off
she was by
the small pond

in her summer dress
her hair tied back
by a dark blue ribbon
why did you bring your dog?
she asked

the parents said
she needed
to stretch her legs
you replied
looking beyond her

at the small pond
where you used to sit
trying to fish
but caught nothing
where shall we go?

she asked
let's go sit
by the small lake
(as you called
the large pond)

and we can sit and talk
what about your dog?
oh she'll be ok

I can tie her lead
to the nearest tree

she'll have room
to move around
and sniff and root out
insects if she likes
you said

I bet you say that
to all the girls
Judith said
and laughed
and you smiled

and took in
her laughter
and the way
she laughed
her eyes

brightening up
her lips parting
like a breaking dawn
and taking
your spare hand

she walked you through
the woods stepping over
brambles and fallen branches
to get to the outer fence
which she climbed over

but you climbed through
and the mutt walked under
and as you walked
across the field
to the lake

she said
I hope no one saw us
the other day

when we did those things
why

what makes you think they did?
you asked
holding the mutt in check
as it tried to run off
just something

my mother said
before I came out
this morning
when I said
I was meeting you

oh
you said
was she on the war path?
no
but it was the way she said it

as if she knew something
about us or me and you
and that day
and where we were
a rook flew overhead

a black flap of wings
a loud call
shouldn't think
so you said

watching the rook
fly off
the mutt barking
maybe
she was just trying

to dig out something
or maybe she just thinks
the worst of me
you said

maybe

Judith said
and became silent
as you both moved
towards the large pond
(the lake as you called it)

and sat down
after tying the mutt
to the nearest tree
where it sat staring
at you both

with its dark eyes
as Judith laid her head
on your shoulder
staring out
at the skin of water

on the pond
and the slight shimmer
where dragonflies
came and went
on the surface

and whispered
I love you
which vibrated
along your shoulder
and into your heart

and you couldn't see a time
you'd not be together
or ever
this side of death
be apart.

Terry Collett

Judith And You And A Morning Mist

The morning mist
that hung over

the pond (or your lake
as Judith called it)

had moved away
by the time she came

and stood next to you
wrapped up in her

Sunday best
waiting until the time

for the bus to take
you both to sing

in the church
her breath flowing out

on the air
like cigarette smoke

her eyes focused
on the skin

of the still water
I dreamt of you

last night
she said

you and I
were snuggled

together in my bed
having made love

you watched
a magpie take flight

over the water
nice

wish I could
have been there

in person
you said

more breath
left her lips

and rose upwards
maybe next time

you can
she said

turning her head
spreading her lips

into a smile
just be my luck

your mother
will invade the dream

and catch us
you said

yes
Judith said

that would
spoil the dream

some what
there was a mist

over the pond earlier
you said

it looked beautiful
she turned

and stared
over the water

I missed that
as you missed

making love to me
in my dream

she whispered
drawing closer

her hands
taking hold

of yours
what did you

dream about?
she asked

an empty bed
and cold sheets

and a space
where you should

have been
you said

she smiled
and said

I couldn't be
in both beds

at once could I?
once more

there was the rising
of her breath

you couldn't tell her
you'd seen

an image
of her death.

Terry Collett

Judith And You And The Summer Sky

You were lying on your back
on the grass beside Judith
three days after
the start

of the summer holidays
she was talking
about some girl
in her class at school

who wore stockings
instead of socks
and how her mother
thought that

(the wearing of stockings)
was quite too much
too grown up
and you were watching

the formation of the clouds
and how they changed shape
and colouring
becoming darker

then paler
and now and then
a bird would fly
across your vision

and you
only half listening
to her as she spoke
her words

touching your ears
her voice
like a kind of music
there lulling you

and you heard also
in the distance
the sound of a train
its puffing of steam

the sharp sound
of a horn
as it went by
the crossing

somewhere down
the track
but I wouldn't wear stockings
Judith said

I like fresh air
getting to my legs
you have nice legs
you said

have I?
she said
yes
you said

right up to where
I can't see no more
and she laughed
and smacked

at your arm
beside her
if my mother
could hear you

she'd not
let me near you again
a rook flew over head
its darkness in contrast

to the blue of sky

if she saw us last Sunday
she'd locked you up
you said

and Judith touched
your hand
next to hers
and held it

she mustn't know
she whispered
course not
you said

well least not
until you're fifty two maybe
and she laughed
and her laughter

disturbed the birds
and kind of
dissolved the cloud formation
into blueness

and you loved her
nearness
her touch
her being there

beneath clouds
and birds
and sky
and maybe always will

you thought
until the day we die.

Terry Collett

Judith And You On The Bus Home.

Judith sat next to you
on the school bus
going home

holding hands
beneath her coat
on her lap

and she said
some one must have seen us
the other week

by the pond
because my dad
asked me about it

last night
and he said
not to let mum know

which I wouldn't
of course
but who saw us?

I don't know
you said
couldn't see anyone about

but who would tell my dad
about it?
did your dad say

who told him?
no he wouldn't say
she said

looking worried
have to be careful
where we go

you looked out
the window
at the passing scenes

her hand in yours
warm
her fingers next

to yours
what about meeting
in my dad's tool shed

that's quite big
and there's a couple
of old chairs in there

apart from his tools
and such
you said

I don't know
she said
what if your parents

see us?
we could go
into the house

they won't mind
me and you together
mum likes you

does she?
Judith asked
yes she says she does

you said
Judith smiled
and leaned closer to you

but didn't kiss

because of other kids
on the bus nearby

I like it near our lake
(Judith called it the lake
even though it was just

a large pond)
I like the quiet there
and the ducks

and fish just
beneath the surface
and the birds flying

overhead
she said
I like it there too

you said
us being alone together
just lying there

or sitting
looking over
the pond

the peacefulness
the aloneness
of us just being us

and you thought
of you and Judith
that last time

kissing
laying near
the pond

being there
feeling her near
smelling the perfume

she borrowed
from her mother's collection
feeling her lips

on yours
and as she looked away
out of the window

you wanted to kiss
the nape of her neck
but you didn't

you just sighed
wishing you were elsewhere
sans other kids

sans others' eyes
just you and her
and the pond or lake

feeling as if dawn
had just come
and you from some

dark sleep
and were now awake.

Terry Collett

Judith Knows 1962

Judith knows
this part of
the woods, knows

the trees, birches,
beech, field maple,
knows the pond

where we meet,
oval shaped,
grass surround

where we sit.
The water's skin
is murky,

ripples where
dragonflies
touch and skim

the surface.
Ducks swim by
gracefully.

Marilyn
Monroe's dead,
Judith says,

studying
the ducks swim,
overdose

they reckon.
So I heard,
I reply,

it was on
our old white
radio

on the news.
I have a
black and white

photograph
on my wall,
but don't tell

Judith that;
after all
she may get

jealous of
that factor.
I like her,

I utter
expressing
a small grief.

Judith says,
more than me?
Anyway

she was too
old for you,
old enough

to be your
own mother.
Not as much

as I do
you of course,
I tell her,

and it's true,
after all
Marilyn

occupies

a small part
of my dreams,

boyhood kind;
while Judith
occupies

each moment
when she's there
and not there.

But I don't
tell her that;
we sit and

stare at the
pond and ducks,
hands touching

each other's,
she thinking
if I'll kiss

what to do
or to say,
I'm thinking

of her bra
and what it
holds so firm,

the outline
seen through her
off white blouse

as she turns,
and within
me something

deeply burns.

Judo Practice.

You practiced
judo moves with Jim
on the grass
outside the farmhouse

where he lived
and his younger sister
stood on the periphery
watching the moves and falls

and she watched you
with her usual concentration
her eyes glued on you
her hands clapping

when you had Jim down
or made the right moves
and her mother
poked her head

out of the door
of the farmhouse
and said
Monica leave the boys alone

they don't want you
pestering them
I'm just watching
Monica called back

not doing any harm
do as you're told
her mother said firmly
and Monica slouched back

towards the farmhouse
cussing under her breath
kicking at the grass
as she went

I was only watching
she said to her mother's
disappearing back
then she paused

and looked back
at you and said
you don't mind do you?
no not at all

you said
but Jim said
pushing damp hair
from his sweaty face

go Monica
do as you're told
and she smiled at you
but gave Jim

a look
in passing
of sternness
and icy cold.

Terry Collett

Judy And You And Chagall

What did you think
of the Chagall postcard print
I bought you?
Judy asked as you both sat

outside the Fox Inn
I pinned it on my wall
you replied
and stared at it every time

I entered the room
thinking of you
she sipped her drink
her eyes searching you

her hair tied behind
in a ponytail
so I gathered
by your letters

she said
putting her glass
on the small wooden table
I missed you

you said
I went to London
while you were away
and saw you

in every girl I saw
even at the ballet
at the opera house
she looked at her glass

I was only away for a week
she said
it seemed a year
you said

you inhaled the cigarette
you were holding
taking in her hair
and eyes and how

her lips moved
as she spoke
Florence was fantastic
she said

I picked out
that Chagall print for you
in one of the art galleries
who did you go with?

you asked
friends
she replied
male or female?

both
she said
you inhaled the cigarette again
and thought of the first time

you kissed her
how the moonlight
shone on her face
as you moved her around

you mustn't be so jealous
she said
I have to see others
who was the guy?

Henrik
she said
you imagined her
and this Henrik

making out

in some Florence hotel
his hands touching her
I thought of you

every moment
you said
that's sad
she said

why?
you said
because no one
should think of another

that often
she sipped her drink
and looked around
at the evening sky

how was Florence?
beautiful
she said
like you

you said
I am like Shakespeare's' lily
she said
as it withers

she added
I see
you said
and you studied

her hands as they lifted
the glass to her lips
the fingers
the skin

the way they held
the glass
did you read my letters

when you got home?

you asked

yes

she said

every single one

my mother said

I must have besotted

some poor soul

and you thought

of the Chagall print

and how you had sniffed it

for traces of her scent

and remembered

your mother's words

nothing is given forever

things in this world

are only lent.

Terry Collett

Julie And You And Christ

Julie was walking
down Oxford Street
with you

one of her hands
was in yours
the other was holding

a cigarette which she put
to her lips and drew on
and exhaled the smoke

and said
pushing smoke
into the world

do you think Christ
ever came?
of course

you replied
the whole calendar
of the Western world

is spilt before and after
his coming
she inhaled deeply

and stopped to peer
in a shop window
don't like that dress

it's too darn middle class
too safe
you looked at the dress

in the window
at the colours and style
would your mother where it?

you asked
she'd wear it
but I wouldn't

be seen dead in it
she said
moving you on

squeezing your hand
reminding you
of the quick grope

and sex in the small cupboard
off the ward
where she was staying

while trying to kick
the drug habit
she spread out

amongst brooms and boxes
and you there gazing at her
wondering if some domestic

would find you there
well? do you think
Christ really came?

she asked
yes
you said

he split history in two
he made people
either love him

or hate him
and want to destroy him
and what he stood for

she laughed and said

you certainly got him
under your skin

I don't think he came at all
she said
before inhaling

her cigarette smoke
I think it was all
a big joke played out

on the Jews
to get them riled
she inhaled

her cigarette smoke
and was silent
as you walked on

down the Street
it was no joke
being crucified

no joke hanging there
on that cross
you said

she pulled you
into a shop doorway
and kissed you

and said
oh forget about him
and his crucifixion

I've had enough
of the parents
ramming him

into my brain
over the years
and she kissed you again

and you looked
into her dark eyes
where you thought

many a dream comes
and drowns
and dies.

Terry Collett

Julie And You In Trafalgar Square

Julie sat on one
of the fountain walls
in Trafalgar Square
and lit a cigarette

she looked about her
as if she were onto
something harder
as if she had some one

looking at her
from some secret place
you gazed at her
unused to seeing her

not in her hospital
dressing gown
and slippers feet
her hair had been brushed neat

and makeup applied
and she said
I was picked up here
some months back

by some guy
who wanted sex
he thought
I was a pro

and the things
he asked for
god that was the worse
and with that

she paused
and stared at the Square
at the people
and the pigeons

and she inhaled deep
and then exhaled
blowing the smoke
out of the corner

of her mouth
like you'd seen done
in the movies
what did you say

to the guy
who picked you up
and what did he want
you to do?

she looked at you
her eyes scanning
your features
and then leaning closer

she said
I told him I wasn't
a whore and to go off
some place else

you watched her fingers
holding the cigarette
the way she held it
between her fingers

as if it was some
precious item she'd found
what did he want you to do?
you asked

he wanted sex
in all my orifices
she whispered
before inhaling again

the cigarette was clamped

between her lips
and she rubbed
her fingers

on her jeans
she screwed up her eyes
against the smoke
my grandfather said

if it wasn't for whores
more women
would be raped
and attacked

you said
that guy was a creep
he smelt of strong aftershave
and body odour

she said
what a combination
you said
she stumped

the cigarette butt
onto the wall
and flicked it
across the Square

let's go and view the art
in the Gallery behind us
she said
and you followed her

to the Portrait Gallery
her buttocks swaying
like some ship at sea
the jeans tight

and clinging
and across the Square
church bells were pulled

and were ringing.

Terry Collett

Jupp's Dream Girl.

Jupp liked
the Whitmarsh girl
or so he said
hand at the side

of his mouth
whispered
as she walked
the corridor

from Maths room
to biology class
her friend the girl
with the teeth

like a horse
(Greenfield's cruel
Description made)
Jupp eyed her greedily

her grey skirt
swaying
as she moved
the white socks

knee high
her hair in two
ribbon tied
bunches

he looked too shy
too outclassed
to make a move
you thought

from his facial pose
and pitted flesh
I see her in my dreams
Jupp said

she likes me then
and speaks
Miss Whitmarsh
entered

the bio class
with friend
as you and Jupp
followed close

behind
what else
in his dreams
he does you

do not know
nor care
taking seats
with him

three desks away
him sucking up
his visual love
or lust

the former
you hope
and trust
she took out

her flowered
pencil case
and unzipped
taking pen

and pencils out
and laid
on the desk
in front

Jupp love sucked

or drunk
sat eyes stuck
tongue protruding

the bio teacher
speaking
and pointing
lecturing

on some plant
she had
her red painted nail
moving along

is this love?
Jupp asked
this pain in chest
and heart?

you wondered
spying Miss Whitmarsh
if she had clue
of her secret lovers' pain

or if she did
whether cared
or no
her pale features

her skinny frame
her slightly
pointed nose
which part it was

he loved
her all
or part
or all

of those?
who cared
you thought

or knows.

Terry Collett

Jupp's Girl.

Back at school
Jupp says no
he doesn't

want to know
which one girl
in the class

of 2C
looks at him
and likes him

it's playtime
the sun's out
boy's playground

with ballgames
and card games
she seems to

I tell him
all the same
those darn girls

he tells me
just a game
or a trick

I show him
a coin trick
handkerchief

and penny
anyone
can do that

young Jupp says
moodily
watch this then

I tell him
he watches
the coin trick

once again
but it's gone
in thin air

and he stands
mouth open
while the girl

from her playground
studies him
tufty hair

dull blue eyes
somewhere there
her love lies.

Terry Collett

Just A Drilling Job.

You entered the single
factory door
into a noisy
and busy shop floor

with a guy called Brian
who was older than you
and had a worn
and worried expression

a foreman came
and asked Brian to go with him
and set him to some job
over the way

then he came to you
and said
what's your name?
Collins

you said
right Colin
he said
follow me

and you were puzzled
why he had called you Colin
as you followed him
down the aisle

between machines
and people
he introduced you
to a middle aged dame

with glasses
who was short
and dumpy
there was another dame there

who was thinner
and a bit younger
who smiled
the plump dame

showed you around
her department
and set you to work
on a drilling machine

where you worked
most of the morning
then you had to go
to the work office

where a dame sat
you gave her the job sheet
how long were you
on the job?

she asked
about 6 inches
you said
she looked at you

a hint of a smile
on her lips
how long?
she repeated

how long what?
you asked
how long in time
were you on the job?

she said slowly
you said
3 hours it says here
mmmm

she said

you're new aren't you?
no
you replied

I've been around
for 21 years or so
she gazed at you
with her dark eyes

her lips were about to speak
but she nodded
then shut
the slide window

leaving you staring
at the window glass
you walked back
through the aisle

towards the plump dame
and her department
ready for the next job
before lunch

hoping it wasn't
another drilling operation
but assembly
or cranking

or any other job
than drilling
thinking of the dame
in the office

and something
more thrilling.

Terry Collett

Just As If.

Just as if
nothing had happened
and the world
had stopped spinning.

Just as if
her body wasn't
next to mine
like warmth
had disappeared
and angels didn't
stand on the end
of a needle.

Just as if
sin had never been
and the wars
had not taken place
and there was always
plenty and no homeless
or starving or abused.

Just as if
I had not looked
into her eyes
and seen paradise
or smelt the flowers
in her hair
or felt the edge
of space in her touch.

Just as if
no one lied
or hurt or deceived
where there was love
and no one grieved
or felt the loss of love
or another's soul.

Just as if
I never kissed her lips
or sensed eternity
in her touch
or saw forever
in her eyes
and no one dies.

Just as if
I never slept or woke
or was silent or spoke
or lay down or stood up
or made love.

Just as if
nothing happened
or would or did
if I hadn't
been born
it would be
as if.

Terry Collett

Just Before Breakfast.

It was just before breakfast time
and the old man was lying
on the carpet before the fire
he was semi clothed (decent)

and you and your sister
sat on the sofa
looking at him
do you think he's fainted?

your sister asked
you told her
go ask mother
and she did

meanwhile you sat
and watched him lying there
thinking maybe
there'd be no school

if he had died
or had to go
to the hospital
maybe you wouldn't see

Miss Ashdown in class
and she wouldn't ask you
questions about maths
or science you glanced

out the window and saw
a train go by on the rail track
over the way
steam lingered

where the train
had been and it hung
in the grey sky
like a sick ghost

what you lying there for?
Mother asked
your old man
I haven't got time for this

she added
and went out
the room
to get breakfast

and he stirred
and looked up at you
and smiled weakly
and got up

and walked off
like an actor
failing an audition
so there would be

school today
you thought
and Miss Ashdown
with her fat arms

and dark eyes looking
through her glasses
peering at you
would ask her

dumb ass questions
about science
or maths
and there'd be

the bottle of milk
at playtime
with the tubby woman
in the hat

warming it

by the radiator
and saying
get your milk

you got to get your milk
and all because
your old man
failed his audition

to get off work
with his pretend illness
out in the kitchen
voices were raised

and pans slammed down
where was Jesus
or Santa Claus
or the Coco the Clown?

Terry Collett

Just Before Dinner 1961

Lizabeth, your mother calls
from downstairs, dinnertime.

You move off the bed where
you have been lying thinking
of Benny, of how to get him
away from the Virgin girl at
school, and get him with you.

You sit on the side of your bed,
remember the time you got
him in this room while your
mother was out, but still he
wouldn't, despite the fact you
were semi undress, and then
your mother came back early,
and you had to pretend you
were just showing him your
record collection. Lizabeth,
your mother calls again, you
get off the bed, go to the tall
boy mirror and tidy your hair
and stand and stare. If only he
had, if you he had that time
on the pew in that church you
got him into, but he wouldn't,
said not in church. Lizabeth,
your mother calls you again.

You open your bedroom door
and go downstairs, COMING,
you call down, your voice loud,
your fingers on the lips drumming.

Terry Collett

Just Beyond

And Auntie saying Don't
Go too far so I can't see you
And off you'd go off down
The iron stairs with the dog
In pursuit and the wind in the
Sails of your coat and the sky
Beckoning above and Auntie's
Voice trailing away on the wind's
Wings and you happy as the sun
In the morning sky making your
Feet rush across grass and the dog
Overtaking looking back tongue
Out of the side of its mouth and
You saying Go on you mutt run
Run and your young legs taking
You far from Auntie's sight and
Yet looking back you know she'll
Be there hands in the clothes
Wash scrubbing away her elbows
Wet from the plunge and you
Throwing hands to the sky and
Saying Lift me up wind take me
To the great place beyond the clouds
Of white and sky of blue with just
The mutt and five year old you.

Terry Collett

Just Born 1959

I watched through
the open window
of the boys' dormitory
as one legged Anne
crutched herself
across the dew-covered lawn
of an early morning

the young nursing nun
quickly ran after her
and said
where are you going
at this time
of the morning Anne?

Getting some
fecking fresh air
Anne said
without stopping

the young nun
sort of ran beside her
trying to reason with her
but you've only got
your nightie on
and it isn't
that warm yet
the nun said

FECK OFF PENGUIN
Anne bellowed
and crutched onwards

the nun red-faced
ran along side her
the white habit
flapping around her legs

Sister Paul will

not like this
the nun said

Sister fecking Paul's
not doing it
Anne said
pausing briefly
staring at the young nun
who stood a bit breathless

you mustn't use
such language Anne
it isn't nice
for the younger children
the nun said

Anne looked
at the sky
and took a huge
intake of air
and closed her eyes

any other nun
would have stood
her ground
and have ordered Anne
to returned
to the nursing home
but this young nun
just stood gaping
at the one legged girl
standing on
the dew-covered lawn
unsure what to say
or do like a lamb
just dropped
just born.

Terry Collett

Just For Laughs

She wanted
it to last,

wanted the
secret love
to go on,

wanted him
to leave his
wife and go
with her, but
he left her
just like that,

that love squashed
like paper
in his hand
then tossed out
of his life,

staying with
his darn wife,

even though
he promised
that he'd leave.

Now she lies
in her bed
all alone;

vacant space
beside her;

memories
to haunt her;

his loving
promises,

lovemaking,

late evenings
or early
afternoons;

those nights
in Paris
on business
while his wife
as at home;

love making
in that posh
Spanish place.

All gone now
just a box
of hurtful
memories
love letters
photographs:

send them to
the darn wife
just for laughs.

Terry Collett

Just Him And Me Mcmlxxi

Dom James sent George and I
to clean out the guttering
on the back of the abbey
a view of the Solent
from where we stood,

Deus videt omnia,

dropped leaves
and bird's feather
clogged the black guttering
made water overflow,

Hugh rang the bells
of the abbey tower
we saw his thin shape enter
no Quasimodo was he,

make love to me
she said make me feel
and feel so I did,

pray as though everything
depended on God
work as though everything
depended on you
Augustine said,

le travail est notre prière
the French monk said
showing me how
to sow seeds
in the abbey garden
summery heat
on black serge,

George swept the refectory
he said sunshine poured in
through the coloured

glass windows
onto the tables
and benches
making patterns on the floor
as an art work,

the Austrain monk sat
by the cloister wall with me
and said
die Heilige Dreifaltigkeit
ist ein Geheimnis,

Mary has a special relationship
with the Trinity
Dom Charles said
daughter of the Father
mother of the Son
and spouse
of the Holy Spirit,

the abbot walked the cloister
black robed
head lowered
in thought or prayer
hands hidden in the pockets
of his black habit,

you must finger here
she said
and placed my finger
where she meant,

qui Dio ci parla
the Italian monk said
as we brought vegetables
in from the gardens
to the abbey kitchen
where Dom Patrick cooked,

I don't know why
we are here
but I'm pretty sure

that it is not in order
to enjoy ourselves
Gareth said
quoting Wittgenstein
as we sat on the beach
after lunch
casting stones in the sea
just us
him and me.

Terry Collett

Just One Drink.

He knew that if he had
just the one drink
that he'd be back
on the wagon again

back to the shut up room
and dead head
and stinking bed
and the woman off again

and the door slamming
and her voice echoing
up the from the hall
as her footsteps faded

come on
the guys said
just the one shot
but no he had to stay strong

keep the booze away
from hand and lips
and hey Joey come on
just a drink with me huh?

one lousy drink with a pal
whose lady's left him
for some other guy
no

he said
I can't have one drink
I don't do one drinks
I got to stay strong

got to look at the big picture
so his friend said
shrew you Joey
I'll find others

who'll drink with me
and off he went
and Joey sipped his lemonade
and looked at the bottles

behind the bar
looking back him
saying silently
ha ha ha.

Terry Collett

Just So.

Just so
it doesn't last
the whole circus
of a long ago
love affair
haunting the brain.

The avenues
of dark rooms
kept locked,
the echo of voices
no longer listened to,
the shadows
of lost lovers
walking the passageways
of the mind
like one who's blind.

Just so it leaves
an ounce of peace,
and the twilight hour
shines its own light
and not the light
of their haunting eyes
as once they did.

Just so the footsteps
in the hall aren't there's',
or that touch
on the shoulder
return again and again
as I grow older.

The rooms
of love making
the bed squeaking
and rattlings springs,
and the voice sounding
of pleased flesh

and lips on lips kissing
and afterwards knowing
something was missing.

Just so you know,
just so the silence returns
and the memories
like paper
in the fire grate
burns.

Terry Collett

Just Us.

As she got off
the school bus

she'd look back
to see if you

were following
her large blue eyes

searching each
aspect of you

having the wisdom
to take every moment

like some precious gem
and not let go of them

and as you descended
from the steps

of the bus
she was there

waiting
and an aura

of anticipation
about her

and that moment
stuck in your mind

the photo in your brain
without music

without words
just her standing there

by the school bus
the winter sky

drawing in
no one else

in the world
nothing mattering

just you and her
what she called us.

Terry Collett

Kenton Comes To Tea

Kenton comes to tea.
Dunne serves at table.
Kenton knew Hazel

even as a child.
Her late father's friend
watches Dunne pour tea

into his teacup.
Your dear father's death
was quite sudden he says.

We were in Paris
touring when news came
Hazel says softly.

Who was the other?
Kenton asks Hazel.
Dunne here my maid came.

Oh I see he says
gazing at Dunne's thighs
hidden behind cloth.

He was a good man
Kenton says firmly
I've known him for years.

Dunne wants to refute
but remains silent.
Her master's abuse

of her sexually
remains in her mind.
Hazel looks at Dunne

she knows the secrets
knew her father's deeds.
Kenton rattles on.

Hazel remembers
her months in Paris
with Dunne at her side.

Art and galleries.
Cafes on corners
smoking and drinking.

Talking and laughing.
Both of them bathing
always together

touching and feeling
kissing and holding
in one bed at night.

Dunne slices the cake
pours Hazel's black tea
her blue eyes searching.

Kenton eats his cake
talks between mouthfuls
spluttering small crumbs.

Dunne studies Hazel
her eyes undressing
her tongue like a snail

moves slowly between
her mistress's thighs
her hands embracing

the smooth naked skin
in her memory.
Hazel looks away

the room is so warm.
She knows that soft stare
sexual and hot

and she whispering

more of that don't stop
scratching through the air.

Dunne hears her and smiles
pours Kenton more tea.
He is unaware there's love in the air.

Terry Collett

Kept Well Hid 1964

I sit
at the kitchen table
in the farm house
with Milka.

Her mother
is washing dishes
from breakfast.

Milka is late down,
and eating cereal.

Her mother turns to me,
and says:
can I get you
anything, Benny?
Something hot?
She smiles and I
smile back,
and say:
yes a cup of tea
would be nice,
thank you.

Milka watches
the smiles,
and gently kicks me
under the table,
and mouths:
don't smile like
that at her.

I frown.

Don't smile
like that at her,
Milka mouths again.

I stop smiling,

and gaze at Milka;
she is not pleased;
jealous of her
own mother's
attention to me;
she thinks(she told me
the other day)
her mother is
playing up to me.

What are we up
to today?
Her mother says.

We? What do you
mean we?
Milka says.

Well you and Benny,
her mother says,
turning and putting
a cup of tea
in front of me,
smiling.

I gaze at her
motherly bosom,
her bright eyes.

We're going shopping
in town,
Milka says,
I need to get some things
and Benny wants to look
in the record shop
at Elvis LPs.

I see,
her mother says,
I may go
to town later;
your father is busy

on the farm,
so I'll have to go alone.

Where are the boys?
Milka says.

Sea fishing,
her mother says,
won't be back
until late.

I look at Milka,
she looks at me.

Right while you're
finishing your breakfast
I'll go do the beds,
and her mother
went out and up
the stairs.

Do you have to smile
at her like that?
Milka says.

Like what?
I say.

Gawk at her,
and smile;
you can see
she is after you.

After me?
What do you mean?
I say.

Wants you in her bed,
Milka says.

I doubt it,
I say.

Don't doubt it;
avoid gawking at her.

Milka eats her breakfast
for a few minutes,
then says,
if we come back
while she's shopping,
we can maybe
have time
in my room
and do things.

I smile
and watch her eat,
wondering about
her mother upstairs,
and what if she did.

I showed
no real interest,
but if so,
I kept it well hid.

Terry Collett

Kersteen's Bulemic Episode 1995

Whit ur ye daein?
your mother said
outside the lavvy.

Daein
mah business
you said
leaning over
the lavvy bowl
wiping your mouth
with the back
of your hand.

If yoo're makin'
yooself boak again
I'll tan yer erse
your mother said
moodily.

Aam nae
jist normal mince
you replied
leaning back
on your heels
looking at
the lavvyseat
yellowing
at the rim.

Ye best nae be
haverin' tae me
she said.

She walked off.

You sensed
the acid
in your mouth.

Your head
felt hot.

You got up
and wiped
your mouth
with toilet tissue
and threw it
in the bowl.

You pulled
the chain
water flushed.

You breathed in
the dank air
stench of puke
and shite
lingered there.

Terry Collett

Kersteen's Fall 1996

Kersteen locks
the hospital
toilet door
sits on the seat.

She's escaped
from the ward
has bought
chocolate bars
with money
she liberated
from her mother's purse
when her mother visited
her earlier that day.

Fit loch noo?
her mother said.

Aam still nae weel
Kersteen replied.

She eats
the chocolate bars
as quick as she can
then waits
and sticks two fingers
down her throat
to make her puke.

A bang on the door
ur ye in thaur
Kersteen?
a nurse says.

Kersteen
leans over
the bowl
wipes her mouth
with the sleeve

of her dressing gown.

Aam oan th' cludgie
she says
willnae be lang.

Whit ur ye daein?
na makin' yerself
boak again Ah hiner
the nurse says.

Nae ay coorse nae
Kersteen replies
swallowing puke
and spiting out lies.

Terry Collett

Kids And Coppers.

It was off Harper Road
on some bombsite
houses half standing
half rubble
you and Jim
and some other kids
were climbing
amongst the ruin

the holidays just begun
the sun shining
on your heads

Coppers!
one kid shouted
and you all began
to climb out
of the ruined house
and onto the rubble

a police car had parked
on the edge
of the road
and two policemen got out

what you lot doing in there?
one of the coppers said
come on line up
the other said

so you all lined up
against the wall
surrounding the bombsite

what were you doing in there?
the copper asked

playing
Jim said

having fun
another kid said

don't you know it's illegal
to play
on theses condemned houses?
he said

didn't know
a fat kid said
at the end

the copper
walked along the line
studying each boy in turn
asking each one
their name and address

you listened
sweating
your nerves on edge
your ears pricked
the answers the boys gave
were lies you knew
because Jim had said
Barney Broadbridge
and his address
was not were he lived

you
the copper said
what's you name?

your mind went a blank
don't know
you said

the copper smacked you
around the face
your name kid what is it?

your cheek stung

tears welled in your eyes
Brian Tolling
you muttered
saying whatever came
into your head

where do you live?
you made up a number
to a block of flats nearby

the other kids glared
at the coppers
as they walked
along the line

you saw a watery blur
of colours

right get off home
and if we see you
on here again
we'll come and see your parents
get it?
he closed
his black note book
and they climbed back
in the car and drove off

up you copper
the fat kid said
lifting a finger
to the far away car

you all right?
Jim asked

you rubbed your cheek
blinked tears
out of your eyes
he came in to focus
yes
you said

didn't hurt
frigging flatfoot

the other kids laughed
and the fat kid
patted your back
see you around
they said

and you and Jim
walked down
Rockingham Street
the sun peering over
the flats where
you did not live

back to Jim's place
to look at his knives
and get on
with your schoolboy lives.

Terry Collett

Kind Of Drowned.

I knocked on the door
and Mrs Woolgar opened it
and stood there
in a white sort of blouse
and burgundy skirt.

She smiled:
hello Benny
has Henry gone
to football?
She asked.

Yes he said he was,
I replied.

Good come in,
she said.

So I went past her
at the door and she
closed the door
behind us.

I smelt the perfume
she had drowned
herself in
and stood by
the lounge door:
shall I go in?
I said.

Do you want to
go in?
She said softly.

I stood unsure
what to say:
I haven't brought
my swimwear

for swimming,
I said.

O never mind
you can come
another time to swim,
she said,
go in
we can talk.

So I entered the lounge
and sat on the big sofa
and she entered the room
and said:
would you like a drink?

Have you cola?
I asked.

Sure have,
she said,
and went
to a drink cabinet
and took out a cola
and poured it
in a glass
and handed it to me.

She poured herself
a gin and ice
and sat next to me.

I sipped the cola
and she sipped her gin.

How was school?
She said.

It was good,
I said.

How did Henry get on?

She asked.

He did all right,
I said.

She leaned in
close to me
so I could drink in
the perfume
which made me feel
sort of unwell.

I sipped my cola;
I could see her bosom
peeking over the top
of her white blouse.

I tried not to look,
but my eyes disobeyed
and gawked.

I looked at her
burgundy skirt;
it was soft and her
knees kind of stuck out
where the hem was.

I sipped my cola
and drowned
seeing Henry
wasn't around.

Terry Collett

Kinkily In Her Head 1997

Nuala is waiting
in a park for Una;
her husband Brian
is at work.

Una is not in sight;
the place and time to meet
are imprinted on her brain,
and she goes over it
again and again,
looking around her,
taking in each
person passing,
each sound of voice.

Where has she gone?
Time going, and me
getting all excited
like a schoolgirl
on her first date.

I can't be doing this,
what if Brian were
to see me sitting here?

Nuala rubs her legs,
stands up, sits down,
stares in all directions.

She's not coming;
something's happened,
she's had an accident
and I won't know.

Una comes around
the corner flushed,
eyes large,
features reddening.

She sits beside Nuala
and says:
sorry had a row
with the landlady
about entertaining
guests at all hours
and she having to
maintain a good
reputation and all.

Nuala is a mixture
of gladness and frustration.

Glad you're here;
so what now?

Una shrugs
and looks at her.

Don't know;
she'll be peeping out
of her window seeing
whom I bring home.

Where can we go?
Nuala says, feeling
an urge to, but knowing
it may not be.

Can't we go
to your place?
Una says.

Nuala shakes
her head.

No, what if Brian
comes home and we're
at it in the bed?

And as she says
the words,

the image flashes
kinkily up
in her head.

Terry Collett

Kiss Eyes 1972

Fell from bed
twice last night
Abela

and me as
we made love
(having got

excited)
both lying
stark naked

on the floor
(carpeted)
now we lie

back in bed
after sex
relaxing

Miro prints
she utters
suddenly

looking round
and gazing
Miro prints?

Talk of art
after sex?
I ask her

for the shop
when we're back
she replies

I close my
eyes firmly
but this is

holiday
push all thoughts
of our work

and of art
to the back
of your mind

I tell her
just saying
that we must

she replies
I kiss her
on the lids

of her eyes.

Terry Collett

Kiss Her Again 1962

Elaine was sitting
in the coach
by the window
next to her sister.

I sat next to Trevor
I looked over
to where she sat.

She looked over at me
and blushed and smiled
then looked out
the window.

What you think Johnny
do I put Jones in goal
tomorrow or Redcliffe?

I don't know
I said
studying Elaine
or what I could see
of her by her sister.

Jones is ok
but he's so thin
that if a ball
came his way
he'd have to move
more than Redcliffe
who's tubby
and could block a ball
without moving
Trevor said.

Jones is more fitter
I said
gazing at the back
of Elaine's head.

Maybe he is
said Trevor
I'll tell him tomorrow
he's in goal
Redcliffe can
be left back.

Left back?
I said.

Yes left back
in the dressing room
Trevor laughed
no left back
near the goal
he added.

Elaine turned around
and looked at me
and blushed again.

She had a beauty
when she blushed.

She looked
at her hands
then back out
the window.

Can you play
tomorrow?
Trevor said.

Maybe right back
I said right
back behind the goal.

He frowned
O I see
he said
and laughed.

I licked my lips
remembering
kissing Elaine
and wanted
to kiss her again.

Terry Collett

Kiss Kiss 1973

Kiss kiss kiss
she squirmed
with delight
as my lips
touched her flesh.

She held me close
her arms about me.

Kiss kiss kiss
she opened
her mouth
fish out
of water mode
eyes closed
whispered
in my ear
more more dear.

Kiss kiss kiss
she opened to me
like a flower
at dawn's light
and heat
of the sun
come come come
she breathed.

I entered
like an angel
into Heaven
her wings wide.

Over her shoulder
world's burnt out
and died
and floods rose
and the snake's hiss
kiss kiss kiss.

Terry Collett

Kiss Me Quick 1975

Kiss me quick hats
ice creams
screams of seagulls

smell of sea
ships on the horizon
of the sea

smell of salt
and bodies nearby
sweating in the sun

kids laughing
having fun
and I lay

with Mrs Ford
on the beach
she combing my hair

talking about
her husband
how he sniffs

after girls
and beds
whom he can

I watch the sea
and waves
and smell the sun lotion

and sense her
near me
remembering that night

in London in that
cheap hotel
bedding away

until light of day
she talking
in her manner

her husband's deeds
on her lips
and I wanting

her again
even on the beach
in broad daylight

but being sensible
and at ease
will wait until night.

Terry Collett

Kiss Or Kisses

The kiss, Alber knows,
is the sign of great love
or great betrayal. Juliette
presses her lips to his.

There is spittle there
Somewhere, but neither
cares nor senses any of that.

In between kisses she talks
of the pregnant black cat.

He remembers his first kiss,
that girl whose mother never
trusted him as a boy, gave
him his first joy. Where had
it been? he asked inwardly,
pressing his lips to Juliette's,
ah, yes, in the porch of her
parent's house, the moon
bright, stars out like sprinkled
sugar on an expanded black cloth.

And about their heads that
darn moth. Juliette saying,
funny how they have such
low bellies, pregnant cats,
and have so many. He moves
his tongue inside her mouth,
along her teeth, touching her
tongue, exchanging warm fluids.

He presses his hands onto her
buttocks, feeling the softness
through cloth. She silent now,
and there about their heads,
that big brown fluttering moth.

Kissed Him There.

Naaman met Amana
as she was on her way
to the shop for her mother.

He was counting out change
in the palm of his hand.

The morning sun
was coming over
the fishmonger shop,
the sky was grey blue.

She spoke
of her parents rowing,
how she never slept
until late,
a series of slaps,
then silence,
she said.

Naaman put the change
in the pocket
of his school trousers;
he saw how tired she looked,
even though her fair hair
was well brushed,
there was a haunted
look about her.

He knew of rows,
slammed doors
at night,
weeping into
the small hours
from his mother's room.

Amana showed him
the list of shopping
she had to get.

He showed her his.
Doughnuts are warm
from the shop,
we can share one,
he said.

Won't your mother mind?
she asked.
You can only eat them
once she'll say,
Naaman replied.

They walked to the shop
across Rockingham Street
and entered in.

The smell of warm bread
and rolls and coffee
being made.

He stood behind her
as she showed
the woman her list.

Amana had on
her school uniform,
the dress well pressed;
the white socks contrasted
with the well blacked shoes.
Her hands were at her sides.
Thumbs down,
soldier like.

He had held that hand
home from school once,
warm, tingling
with the pulse of her.

That time on the bombsite,
collecting chickweed
for the caged bird

his mother kept,
she had kissed
his cheek.
Never washed for a week
(least not that part) .

He could smell
the freshness of soap
about her
as he neared to her.

The woman handed
the shopping over
the counter
and Amana paid in coins
which the woman counted.

Naaman handed
the woman his own list.
Rattled the coins
in his pocket.

Amana waited;
the bag by her feet.
She spoke
of the Annunciation
being taught at school,
the Visitation of an angel.

All beyond Naaman's grasp
at that time.
He knew of catapults
and swords,
of old battles in fields,
and the Wild West
where he rode
his imaginary horse.

He wanted to kiss
her cheek as she
had kissed his.
Shyness prevented.

She spoke
of the Virgin birth
the nun's spoke of,
the wise men coming
from afar
following a star.

Naaman liked the stars,
the brightness of them,
the faraway wonder
in a dark sky.

After he had received
his shopping and paid
they walked back out
into the street
and crossed to the slope
that led to the Square.

Then beneath
the morning sun,
bag in hand,
she leaned close,
pressed her lips
to his cheek
and kissed him there.

Terry Collett

Kissed His Feet 1971

I woke to the morning bell
like one electrified
like a switched on bulb,

quod esset lux copiosa,

a buzzing in my head
as if bees were awake there
and I woke with them,

Dom Andrew he of large beard
and tonsured head said
it was the way
the room were laid
as drew me
to the abbey
and he died of cancer
years later,

suck these she said
suck for all you're worth
and I did as a greedy child,

bóg jest w twoim sercu
the Polish monk said
by the abbey gardens
as I pulled weeds,

Hugh sour faced
polished the choir stalls
until his face shone
like a blushing bride,

breathe in this air
Dom Joseph said
God's breath is here
amongst us as we talk
and we sat
on the beach in conflag,

enter your ship here
she said into
my tight harbour
and she laughed
and I did too,

the world's thy ship
and not thy home
Therese said,

the smell of incense
as I entered church
lifted me up
from dark doldrums
at dawn's light,

être en paix avec Dieu
the French monk said
as I aided him in the task
of mowing lawns
and side paths,

George my fellow novice
laughed at the size
of the napkins
around our neck
and in our laps
like bedsheets he said,

we can easily forgive a child
who is afraid of the dark
the real tragedy of life
is when men are afraid
of the light
Gareth said
quoting Plato,

death and dark
are similar
to the child in man,

locutusque est Dominus
ad me in lucem,

was as if I were deaf or blind
and God knew and blessed,

ship into harbour
with ease and joy
and pines were a forest
to wade through to joy's gate,

the bells ceased tolling
and the echo evaporated
like drying water
in the sun's heat,

and would have washed
His head and if humble enough
have kissed His feet.

Terry Collett

Kisses His Neck 1997.

Nuala shows Una
the spare room
and leaves her

to unpack and closes
the door and walks
down the passage

to the lounge where Brian
sits watching TV
how long's she staying?

He asks watching
a footballer miss a goal
until she finds

another place to stay
Nuala says
sitting next to him

on the sofa
she wishes her husband
was out some place

so she and Una
could be alone
and get to bed

and make love
but he's there
gawking the box

a glass of beer
in his hand
I don't mind her staying

Brian says
just asking
he says

thinking how'd it be
if his wife were out
and the young girly

was on to him maybe
and well he is
only human after all

Una unpacks her clothes
and puts them in drawers
and cupboards

gazing at herself
in the mirror
of the dressing-table

gazing at the bed
wishing Nuala and she
could be on it now

and the husband away
some place
and she sighs

and wishes it so
she and Nuala away
there naked as babes

kissing and making
it happen
but no he's here

and watching TV
and Nuala
unavailable

and outside in the lounge
Nuala watches
the football

listening to Brian

gab on about
the ref and how

blind he is
and having
no mother

the feck
and turns towards him
and kisses his neck.

Terry Collett

Kittens And Warzones 1955

Helen said
the woman
in the flat
above hers
(Mrs Knight)
had a new kitten
to replace the one
that got run over
on the road.

It was a tabby
and when Mrs Knight
lets it out
it rubs
against my legs
Helen said.
I can show
when you
come round
next time.

We walked
to Jail Park
went on the swings.

I'm going
to get a kitten
when I'm older
she said
a tabby
like Mrs Knight.

We rode
the swings high
rising up
into the morning air.

I pretended
I was in a spitfire

shooting down
German warplanes
tat-a-tat-tat
I went.

Helen talk on
about how the kitten
drinks the milk
she puts out
on a saucer
but too often
or it'll want to live
with us
she said.

I shot down
half a dozen warplanes
the invisible pilots
falling dead.

Terry Collett

Knowing Martha 1963

Do I know Martha?
Sister Ruth said,
of course I do,
Father, why did
you ask?

Father Bede
looked at the nun:
she came to me
in church
and asked me
a number of questions
about Our Lord
and how tall he was
and what colour eyes
and hair he had,
the priest said.

What's so odd
about that?
She said.

Well she also
asked me
that if a boy
should ask her
about having...
he couldn't get
the word out,
not with
the good sister
standing there.

Sister Ruth eyed him:
sex? She said.

Yes, that's
that word,
if a boy

asked her
should she
tell him to...
he fumbled
for the word
Martha had said,
but instead said:
go away,
and I was so
flummoxed
that I said yes,
the priest said,
reddening,
looking at his hands,
not the nun.

Sounds like Martha,
I supposed she said
something less pure?
The nun said.

The priest nodded:
is she all right?
He said.

Well she's not quite
the ticket,
but she's harmless,
the nun said.

She wants
to be a nun?
He said.

So she does,
Sister Ruth said,
but she's as much
chance of that
as me being
Miss World,
the nun said
smiling.

But she seems
so keen on being
a Bride of Christ
is there no chance?
Father Bede said.

The bishop wouldn't
have her in
this congregation
but who knows
elsewhere they might,
the nun said,
eyeing the young priest
noting his
reddening features
and his fine head
of hair,
then said:
how long are you
here as curate?

He looked at her:
don't know,
until the bishop
moves me on,
Father Bede said.

If you see
Martha again
tell her she'd make
a good nun,
I guess we must not
dissuade her
from a possible
God's calling.

He nodded
and looking out
from the convent
doorway,
he noticed

rain falling.

Terry Collett

Last Kiss.

You probably wore
the red Christmas jumper
just a few times
that last Christmas,
my son, and captured
on celluloid, unknown
to us your final photo.

I sit in the armchair
you sat in that time,
you smiling at the camera,
gazing back with your large eyes,
a detected hesitation
in your features as if
an echo of your death
tingled along the wires
of your nerves.

You wore black
fingerless mittens
on your hands,
even indoors by the radiator
you felt the cold
of winter outside;
but you my stoic philosopher
said nothing of this,
your lips sealed,
as they were a month later
for my final kiss.

Terry Collett

Last Night 1962

And what did you
think you were
doing last night?
Yiska's mother said
terrible noise
coming from your room
woke me up.

Yiska had finished
her breakfast
and was sipping tea.

What noise?
Yiska said
I don't remember
making noise.

But she remembered
she had dreamed of Benny
and he had(in her dream)
come into her bed
and she had hugged him
and he had touched her
and they had kissed
and it seemed so real
and she had woken
in the dark in a sweat
and panting.

What did I say?
Yiska said.

I don't know
her mother said
like you were
jumping about
on your bed
I had your father
go into you

to see if you
were all right
but he said
you were asleep
but that your bed
was in a mess
he said he tidied
the bed up
but you never woke.

Yiska raised
her eyebrows:
no idea
she said
pushing the thought
of Benny getting dressed
from her head.

Terry Collett

Last Orders 1971

All the others
have gone to bed,
dribbled off
one by one.

Yiska and I sit
in the lounge,
smoking,
watching the night
sky darken.

The nurse turned off
the TV sometime ago,
looked at us,
but said nothing.

The night nurse
sits in her small office,
we can hear her
turn over pages
of the reports of the day.

Yiska exhales a line
of grey smoke outwards:
it unfolds as it goes,
I do likewise,
the two lines of smoke
embrace,
then disappear.

The wrist of the hand
that holds the cigarette
on her right
has a healing scar
where she slit it
a while back,
her left wrist
is bandaged
where she tried again.

She sits crossed legged,
her pale pink dress
riding high up her thigh,
catches my eye.

Wish she'd fall asleep,
the nurse,
Yiska says,
looking at me,
we could try again
in the ECT room.

Bet its locked
this time,
I say,
remembering how
we nearly did
the other night,
out of the nurse's sight,
nearly found us,
close thing.

We stub out
the cigarette ends
in the glass ashtray.

She lies back
on the black couch,
laying her head
on the patterned pillow.

I lay with her,
kissing her lips,
her body touching mine.

You two should be
in bed by now,
the nurse says,
standing by the door,
arms folded.

We wish were too,
Yiska says.

We get up
and walk each
to our own dormitory;
she blows a kiss,
I grab from the air,
smile and don't miss.

Terry Collett

Last Suicide.

Her last suicide.
Others had been rehearsals
practised in dark rooms.

Terry Collett

Last Time

After asking a nurse
where he was
we find Ole at the end
of the ward
sitting on the side
of a bed
attempting to eat
a sandwich.

He is puffed up,
his hands swollen,
his arms too;
his face looks puffy.

I am shocked how much
he had altered overnight.

What's happened to you?
Has anyone seen you
like this?

He shrugs his shoulders,
looking at us.

I take his free hand
and feel it with mine.

It must be water retention;
when did you urinate last?

Early this morning, I think.

You ought to have
a catheter in
to get rid
of the excess urine.

Have they suggested that?

He has a job breathing;
his words are soft
and yet strained.

No, but I did see
a doctor this afternoon.

What did he say?

They're investigating.

He labours for breath;
puts the sandwich down
on the small bed table;
sips the orange juice.

Stay here,
I say to his sister.

I go off down the ward
and find a nurse
in a dark uniform
who looks like
she may be in charge.

Yes? She says,
looking at me
as if I'd just walked
through dog's doings.

I'm not happy with the way
my son's being care for.

Who's your son?

I tell her.

What's the problem with him?

You should be telling me that;
he's all puffed up and swollen;
he can barely hold

a glass to drink;
his breathing is bad,
could be asthma-
he's suffered that for years;
and why hasn't he got
a catheter in
to take away
the excess urine?
he had a job passing
urine yesterday;
I assume that's what
the letter said
we brought in
yesterday evening.

I can't put a catheter in
without a doctor's say so
and he is in A&E;
at the moment
they're having a rush.

But my son needs to see
someone soon;
he can't go on like this.

I assure you he is
being cared for,
but as soon
as the doctor returns
from A&E;
I will ask him
to see your son.

It's upsetting
to see him like that;
he's not one to complain;
but that's no reason
to let him be as he is.

I will get a doctor to see him
as soon as he returns,
she reiterates.

I am fuming;
the whole ward
seems to have
a dark circle about it.

I've just been to the nurse
to complain
about your treatment
or lack of,
I say.

His sister looks at me
then at Ole.

I'm going to sit
in the waiting area;
I can't stand seeing you
in this state,
she says.

She walks down
the ward upset
and then out of sight.

I look at him sitting there;
I sit beside him
on the side of the bed
and put my arm around
his broad shoulders.

The abandoned sandwich
he puts back in the packet.

Want some more orange juice?

He nods.

I pour him a glassful
of orange juice
which he drinks down
in silence.

I ask him various
mundane questions
about how he slept
and the hospital food
and did he eat any.

A little; it hurts my jaw
to move it too much.

I ask him if he wants anything
else to eat or drink,
he says no.

He tries to lay down
on the bed
so I help him
the best I can
to sit back
and arrange his pillows
so that they
are behind him comfortably.

He lays there;
his breathing heavy.

I ask a few more questions
which he answers slowly.

He closes his eyes, tired.

I best go;
leave you to rest.

He opens his eyes.

I'll be up tomorrow
and bring more clothes
and stuff.

Ok.

I kiss his forehead;
touch his arm
and go back
along the ward.

The last conversation
between father and son;
death hanging
by the door.

I can say no more.

Terry Collett

Last Time He Saw Her.

The last time Benedict
saw his mother
she was lying
in a hospital bed,
eyes closed, mouth
slightly open, dead.
He'd been told by a nurse
over the phone of her demise,
the voice matter of factly
pronounced the words,
the meaning came in later.

He thought of her, whom
he'd seen the evening before,
the last smile and wave
she'd given, although held
by dementia she seemed
aware he(or someone) was there.

Now she had gone, moved
to a spirit world he assumed
or hoped, although he sensed
her loss, like a ripping apart
and smash grab of his heart.

He had, he recalled, kissed
her forehead the last time
that evening prior, the skin
cool, wrinkled less, seeming
at rest. 91 years old was not
a bad innings he supposed,
holding onto that final image
of the previous evening, not
the final one where her body
lay deserted, the emptied shell,
that usual sickly hospital smell.

No, he wanted the last image
to be of her smiling and waving,

not drowning sickly, but saying
a goodbye, seeing half-blindly,
that look in her eye, seeming
to say: we all come, all must die.

He still feels the loss, the empty
place in his heart, the vacant lot,
but the memories cram into the little
boxes in his brain, a holding on,
till, hopefully, happier, they meet again.

Terry Collett

Last Time Maybe.

Bird song
and the sun
high in the sky

and Yehudit seeing
from your bedroom window
the garden
and the orchard

you can see
the bus go by from here
she said
gives us time

no bus yet awhile
I said

she looked back at me
on the bed
my mother thinks
I am working
all day today
but I have a half day off
Yehudit said

I gazed at her figure
the hips
the waist
the hands
on the window sill
her hair brown
and loose

we have time then
I said

she nodded
and came to the bed
and lay down

beside me

how much time?
she asked

hour or so
before the bus comes
I said

she looked
into my eyes

there's a guy at work
I like
she said
well he doesn't work there
he delivers stuff most days

I looked at her blue eyes
does he know
you're here with me?

no of course not
we're not an item
I just said I like him
she said

maybe you
should be with him
and not me
I said

I am only saying
she said
I like you too
but we don't see each other
that often these days
and I see him
every day

I lay on my back
and stared at the ceiling

so what happens now?

I said

we could make love

she said

I chose to see you today

I could have gone home

two years ago

it was just us

and that first kiss

I said

we were kids then

and at school

now we're at work

and see other people

I guess

I smelt her perfume

not her usual

different

more powerful

she kissed me

let's make us

she said

not argue

our lips met

her hand

touched my thigh

O heck

I said

to hell

with this other guy

and there was bird song

and the sun

was high in the sky.

Terry Collett

Leading The Blind 1916

Polly waits outside George's room;
she anxious about his state of mind,
then being sent out by Dudman,
when all she wanted to do
was help George
in whatever way she could.

She stares at the door;
hears voices,
then silence,
the door opens and Dudman
comes out closing the door
behind him gently until it clicks.

He grabs her by the arm
and moves along the passage,
his hand gripping her tightly,
hurting her.

What were you up to
in there with Master George?
he says,
moving her along forcefully.

Let go of me,
she says,
trying to move his fingers
from her arm.

He stops
and releases her arm.

What were you doing to him?
he says.

I was trying to calm him down;
he was bellowing out
about someone called Gwyer,
she says angrily.

They stand staring at each other
toe to toe like two boxers.

She rubs her arm
with her hand.

No need to be hurting me,
she says,
I was helping him,
not hurting him.

Dudman stares at her,
his hands at his sides,
his body stiff and his
breathing heavy.

It didn't look good to me,
he says,
like you were up to
your old tricks.

Old tricks?
What do you mean?
she says.

You know what I mean;
last time he was on leave
you were in his bed
and God knows
what you were up to,
he says.

She reddens
and looks away.

Wasn't doing nothing like that
just comforting him;
he was upset about
the damn war
and killing and such,
she says.

He stands gazing at her,
at her inner strength,
the bosom on her,
the breathing making
them more prominent.

I warned you
about being with him,
Dudman says.

I was just doing
as you told me to:
taking his breakfast to him,
that's all,
and he kicks off,
she says.

He is silent;
gazes at her.

Keep his condition
to yourself;
don't want all and sundry
knowing what he is like,
Dudman says
quieter now.

She nods her head,
breathes in deep.

I'll say nothing,
she says,
but I can see him
can't I?

Dudman stares away
from her
along the passage.

As long as you don't try
and get into his bed,

he says.

She walks off down
the passageway.

He watches her go;
the sway of her hips,
the black dress
tight about her rear,
the nice legs
in black stockings.

She goes out of sight
and he walks
the opposite way
to report Master George's condition
to the young man's father.

Polly walks down
the back stairs,
her mind in confusion
over George and his
state of mind;
she feeling like
one with one eye
leading the blind.

Terry Collett

Learn By Rote 1960

Fay's father opened up his bible:
read the first paragraph.

Fay looked at the page
and read the paragraph.

Remember that,
I will ask you this evening
to recite it to me,
he said.

She looked
at the paragraph again.

He closed his bible:
remember what I said,
he said.

He stood up and walked off
with his bible
and into his bedroom.

How will I remember that?
she asked her mother.

What page was it?
her mother said.

Fay bit her lower lip:
it was Luke
not sure what page.

Her mother said:
what was it about?

Fay shrugged:
I didn't take it in
even though I read it
and looked at it again.

Once your father
has gone to work
I'll get his bible
and you can go through it.

But what if Dad finds out
I have I opened his bible?

He won't I'll put it back
as I found it,
her mother smiled,
don't worry about it.

But Fay did did worry
even when her father
had gone to work
and her mother brought the bible
and went through Luke.

That's it,
Fay said
pointing to the paragraph.

Copy it out on a bit of paper
and try to remember it,
her mother said.

But isn't that cheating?

Her mother said:
God won't mind
that is whom you need to please.

Fay nodded and copied out
the paragraph.

Her mother took the bible back
exactly where and how she found it
even the angel page marker
back exactly where she found it.

Fay read the paragraph
over and over until
it was stuck in her mind.

When her father
came home after work
he got his bible
and opened it
and said:
do you remember
that paragraph
you read this morning?

Fay's mother said:
why does she need
to remember a paragraph?

So she will know
the word of God,
he said.

She does know as much
as she needs to know,
her mother said.

He looked at her:
I don't want my daughter
to treat her faith like you do,
he said.

Fay looked at her hands
which were shaking.

A row was brewing
she could tell
and the evening
would be hell.

Terry Collett

Leave Taking 1997.

It was a close thing:
Brian called out,
but hearing no answer
picked up his bag and left.

Una and Nuala
lie in bed frozen in fear.

Has he gone?
Una whispers

I think so,
Nuala says.

They lie still
and listen out.

I'm sure I heard
the front door close again,
Una says.

Nuala gets out
of Una's bed
and walks to the door;
anxiously opens it up,
and peers out.

She is naked,
yet unaware she walks
into the lounge,
then into her bedroom,
then the kitchen.

He has gone,
she muses,
and sneaks back
to Una's room.

He's gone,

Nuala says.

Best get dressed then,
Una says.

So they dress quickly,
then stand
and look at each other.

Can't do this again,
Nuala says,
it's getting to my nerves.

I'll go and get
another place,
Una says.

What do I tell Brian
when he comes
and finds you not here?
Nuala says.

Tell him I 've found
some place else,
Una says,
I'll pack now
and find somewhere.

No you can't go like this,
Nuala says.

I must or he'll fine us
one day together
and then your marriage
will be over,
Una says.

Nuala nods her head;
ok, I must go to work;
will you be gone
when I'm back?

Yes I'll let you know
where I am,
Una says.

Nuala kisses her,
and goes to her room,
and gets her coat and bag
and leaves.

Una hears the door go,
and tearfully packs
her bag,
makes the bed,
and leaves
closing the door
with a soft click.

Terry Collett

Left In The Dark

Your father took you
to see a Jeff Chandler movie
and you sat there
in the dark

eating popcorn
sharing some with him
and taking in
the cowboys

and guns
and imagining you
were up there
riding your imaginary horse

shooting your gun
along side the others
when your father got up
and went off

into the darkness
and so you continued
to watch the movie
giving no further thought

to where he'd gone
the john perhaps
or to buy some smokes
or get some air

and you just stayed
sitting there watching
when some young dame
came down

and said
your father's had a choking fit
but he's ok now
and you said

shame he's missed the best bit
and she whispered
(her voice like Marilyn Monroe's)
I don't think he gives a shit

and the odd thing was
out of the blue
you said kind of shy
neither do I.

Terry Collett

Less Than Blue Sky.

Helen pushed
the second hand
doll's pram
over the bombsite

off Meadow Row
Battered Betty her doll
was tossed
from side to side

there there
Helen said
can't be helped
you walked beside her

practising drawing
your silver coloured gun
from the holster
your old man

had bought you
from the cheap shop
through the Square
you hit back

the hammer
one two three times
just like that
I can't get her to sleep

Helen said
stopping by the ruins
of a bombed out house
she tucked the doll in

with the woollen blankets
her mother had knitted
Mum said to take Betty
for a walk in the pram

but she still won't sleep
you put the gun back
in the holster
and pushed back

the black hat
your granddad
had given you
have to keep her quiet

around here
you said
there might be Injuns
and they scalp hair

off babes and kids
and such
Helen looked
around the bombsite

looks deserted to me
she said
pushing the pram away
from the bombed out house

you never can tell
you said
they hide
and when you're least

expecting it
they come screaming
over the plains
Mum said you'd make

the best husband
for me
Helen said
coming to a halt

opposite the coal wharf

you drew out
your gun again
and fired shots

over your shoulder
that's nice of her
you said
twirling the gun

over your finger
and then back
into the holster
Mum said

you would make
a good dad
one of the horse drawn
coal wagons moved away

from the coal wharf
and clip-clopped
along the side road
perhaps

you said
we could get our own
house on the prairie
or one of those houses

off St George's Road
with the big gardens
Helen got
Battered Betty out

of the pram
and rocked her
over her shoulder
patting her back

and said
yes and I could milk
the cows and you

could hunt buffalo

and we could sleep
in one of those
big beds
with buffalo skins

over by the main road
a red number 78 bus
went by
and dark clouds

crowded
the less
than blue sky.

Terry Collett

Less.

Less the money you
owe me for the coffee

I bought Jezebel said
and the man nodded

and began to undress
and she said Wait there's

the question of the fare
here I think it's less the

fare too and he nodded
again and removed his

shirt and she raised a
finger saying Hold on a

minute there's the matter
of the cost of the hotel room

and less the price of that and
he paused undressing with one

leg out of his pants and nodded
slowly taking it all onboard and

took money from his wallet and
said You're a demanding broad.

Terry Collett

Lessons Of Miss Bleu

Nature study lessons
were the best
because we had Miss Bleu

and she was young
and pretty
and to us boys

it was like being
in a kind of school boy heaven
we even took notice

of the things she told us
in her sexy voice
and her slim fingers

pointing things out
and those slim legs
and if she stood

on the chair to reach up
to get something
from on top

of the cupboard
her green skirt
would rise up

and we gawked
at her stockings
and the tops

where the suspenders met
and when she sat
at the her desk

she would sometimes
cross her leg
over the other

in that way she had
and us boys would
watched her like

young hawks for prey
now now boys
she said

settle down
focus on the subject at hand
and we did only

it wasn't necessarily
the subject she
was teaching

the girls in class
sat and watched her
for different reason

from us boys
to them she was how
they wanted to be

(or some of them)
who is going to help
put out these books?

she would ask
and a dozen boys
would fall over themselves

to do whatever
she wanted us to do
when she showed us

a frog once in class
it escaped and she jumped
on her chair

and at least 5 boys

leapt to her defence
and caught the frog

and put it back
in the glass tank
while other boys

studied the colour
of her suspenders
or well no mind what else

and when the bell
went for end of class
a soft sigh went out

from boys
rising to
the classroom sky.

Terry Collett

Let Go

Let go said Bettina
I don't want to live
any longer but he
wouldn't let go of

her hand and she
hung over the side
of the roof of the high
building looking up

at him and then looking
down at the street a
long way below let go
she bellowed I don't

want this world any
more I have had enough
but still he held on trying
to ring for help on his

cell phone looking over
the edge at the woman
hanging over the side
her hair blowing about

in the wind her skirt being
lifted up and down revealing
pink panties her eyes large
and dark as plums let me

go she bellowed louder I want
to die but all he could say
(his voice being carried off
on the wind's wings) was why?

Terry Collett

Let Her Be 1962

Sheila saw Benny get on his school bus. She had wanted to talk with him before he left. She watched the bus pull out and off. No sign of him. They had met in the corridor that morning on her way to domestic

science and briefly hugged and kissed in a doorway until a prefect came along and moved them on. Can still feel the kiss. His hands around my body. My heart pumping away. Couldn't focus in domestic science. Thought of us.

Of him. The bus had gone from sight. She began to walk home. Everything seems strange, unreal. Kissed me. I could have stayed with him all day. How to cook a fruit cake, the teacher said. All I thought of was him. She went in

the back door of her parents' house. Her mother was sitting at the kitchen table sipping tea. You look unhappy, her mother said. I'm all right, she replied. You don't look it, her mother said. Just thinking that's all, Sheila said. She smiled. Make sure

you change out of your uniform, her mother said as she climbed the stairs to her room. She entered her room and closed the door. She closed her eyes. That kiss. She sighed. She hugged her body pretending it was him. Footsteps on the stairs. She unhugged herself.

Her sister entered. What are you doing? Her sister said. Getting out of my uniform, Sheila said. Well get on with it, I want to have the room quiet while I pray, her sister. Sheila walked to her side of the room and took off her uniform. Her sister undressed from

her uniform. Wish Benny was here. Not her. That kiss. Once she had put on a grey dress Sheila went downstairs to leave her sister with her prayers and God. She had wanted to be a nun a few months ago, but since she had seen Benny she had changed her mind. She went into the sitting room, turned on the TV, hoping her mum would let her be.

Terry Collett

Let Him Wait

she says,
drying under arms
after her bath,
the towel rubbing the skin,

talcum powder
on the side
ready to be applied,

he downstairs waiting,
impatient no doubt,
pacing up and down
or sitting smoking,
cursing under his breath.

A woman's privilege
to take her time.
Beauty cannot be rushed.

She moves the towel
further down,
rubs between her thighs.

Even as a child
she imagines
he was impatient,
unable to wait,
unwilling to be kept
against his will
until the time was right.

She smiles.
She senses
the towel's roughness,
the rub of skin.

She recalls the wedding night,
the shyness undressing,
she blushing,

he awkward all
fingers and thumbs,
she turning her back on him

to put on her night dress,
he looking away,
unwilling to view,
she in bed
covered to the neck,
he undressing
bit by bit
avoiding her eyes,

she studying
the ceiling
the patch of grey,

he with night attire on
climbs into bed,
she feels him near,
his body nigh touching,
his hand out stretched.

In the dark,
she recalls,
they fumbled
and searched
and touched,
with grunts
and moans,
and woos
and ahs,
the night went on

until sleep
eased them
to a settled bliss,
ending with
that sticking kiss.

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she says,

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the towel rubbing the skin,

talcum powder
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Terry Collett

Let It Be.

She always had that, Let It Be, album
On the turntable, with him, the latest uncle,
Sitting beside her on the couch or in her bed,
Smoking, making out, and you were told to go
Outside and play and leave her be, and so
You'd go out and play or find some mischief
To do with Hawksmith, who always seemed
To know how you felt, what made you tick,
And he'd say, let's go up to Grundle's barn,
Let's go make out in the hay, and he'd laugh,
And so you'd go to the barn or down by Mullen's
Pond and watch him fish. She always played
That darn Let It Be album when she was high,
Had it up loud, the music blaring out over
The yard, and she and him, laughing and cursing,
And when you used to creep back to the house
Late at night the lights were on and you'd hear
The Beatles' album going round and round on
The turntable without reason or any sound.

Terry Collett

Let's Go 1951

Go sit outside
in the sun,
Auntie said,
don't be stuck inside
on a day like this.

So I went outside
and sat
on the black
iron steps
leading down
the stairs
from the balcony.

Dancer Auntie's dog
sat beside me
his chin
on my shoulder
wetting my shirt.

The parade grounds
were on my right,
sergeants
were barking orders
to soldiers marching below.

I stared at them:
heads turned,
arms straight as irons.

Then Elsie,
Auntie's friend's daughter,
came up the stairs,
one foot at a time,
her small hand
gripping the black
iron rail coming up.

I watched her

stepping towards me,
her head downwards.

Dancer growled;
hush,
I said,
raising a finger.

He groaned,
watching as the girl paused.

She looked at me:
why is he here?
She said,
pointing at the dog.

He's protecting me,
I said.

From me?
She said.

Guess so,
I said.

Send him away,
she said.

Dancer groaned;
go lie down Dancer,
I said.

He got up
and walked along
the black iron balcony,
and sat
by the back door.

Elsie eyed me,
then walked up
the remaining steps:
Mum said

I had come
play with you,
Elsie said,
looking down at me
as I sat.

Do you want to?
I said.

If I have to,
she said,
sitting down
beside me
on the step.

If I don't
I'll get a slap,
she added,
looking at me.

What you want
to play?
I asked.

She looked out
at the soldiers
marching below:
what is there
to play?
Have you dolls?

No no dolls,
I replied,
we can ball
if you like.

She pulled
a face:
boring ball games,
she said.

I can get one

of my toy guns
and we can play
cowboys and cowgirls,
I said.

Boring boys' game,
she replied.

What do you
want to play?
I asked.

We could play
hide and seek,
she said,
you hide
and I won't seek you.

I looked at her
5 year old face
with my 4 year old eyes.

Let's ask Auntie
for some milk
and biscuit,
I said,
and listen to the radio.

She nodded
her head
and we got up
and she said:
let's go.

Terry Collett

Lies Alone 1961

Having shut
her bedroom door
on her mother's
wisdom and yak,
Lizbeth leans
against the door,
looks around her room
which her mother
has tidied:
the floor cleared
of books,
tea cup,
plate,
and LPs,
soiled underwear,
and now spoiled;
not hers,
her mother's imprint
everywhere.

She sighs,
moves to where
she has hidden
the sex book,
and its is still there
she finds,
and is glad.

She opens it
up secretly,
peers inside,
smiles,
then closes it up,
hides it again,
sits on her bed.

She thinks
of Benny
at school

the other day
(not today
as it rained
and never saw
him at all) .

They had talked
and she
said to him
(she had
yank his arm
and took him
some place else)
what about it?
I can come to that
dead hole of a hamlet
where you live
and we could
some place.

No, no,
he said,
going red
in the face.

Time and tide,
the girl at school
had said,
(she who lent
the sex book)
tide and time,
he'll come around
safe and sound
or sex where ever
you want it,
I know boys
and yes he will.

But as Lizbeth sits
on her bed
it is still,
no no instead.

She lies down,
stares at her feet.
sees the black shoes,
kicks them off
in case her mother
comes in
and sees the shoes
on the bed cover
and moans.

She sighs,
wishes Benny
was there
beside her
on her single bed:
body to body,
head to head,
kissing lips to lips,
but he's not there,
she lies alone
instead.

Terry Collett

Life And Sand.

Lena sits and waits. The artist has
Wandered off, gone to the john or
To a bar or to have a quickie with
The local slut, she doesn't know.

She's been here before, the same
Being left behind, the silent studio
Situation, smell of paint, oils and
Other artist's tools and useful stuff.

She has modelled for others and
They've always been the same, being
Lost in another world, stinking of
Turpentine, paint, sex, and all the rest.
She crosses her legs. Sniffs the air.

Wearing the green dress he wanted
Her to wear, her well brushed hair.

She recalls the artist's antics the night
Before, the want of sex, the fumbling
In the dark, the creaky bed, the banging
Away, all those images left in her head.

She uncrosses her legs. Other paintings
Lay around, some leaning against walls,
Some framed, some not, some sold,
Some recent, all modern, some old.

She wonders if she will be like these,
Left aside, used, done with, her oils dried,
Sitting waiting, her youth has died,
And she waits with the ticking of the
Clock, the moving hand, the hour glass
And the slow running out of life and sand.

Terry Collett

Life Changing 1940

Life changing
the Blitz bomb
took my sight
and my legs.

Clive gone too
at Dunkirk.

I recall
our last kiss
as the train
left London.

I sit in
this darkness.

Hospital
smells around
and voice sounds.

Morning Grace
a voice says.

My blind eyes
turn around
to the sound.

Who is it?
I enquire.

Doctor Clay
I have come
to see you
and see how
your stumps are
the voice says.

They're painful
I tell him.

Nurse we need
Grace to be
lying down.

Between them
they lift me
on the bed.

Fingers lift
my nightdress
and unwrap
bandages.

Fresh air hits
the leg stumps.

His fingers
examine
what is left
of my legs.

They're healing
very well
he tells me.

Soon we will
have someone
sort you out
for new legs
he informs.

I thank him.

He goes off
and the nurse
(small fingered)
now attends
to some fresh
bandages.

As her fingers

touch my thighs
I recall
Clive touching
me there too
that last time
before he left
for the War.

I stare out
into dark
cold spaces
and a far
away shore.

Terry Collett

Light And Dark

You liked the light;
it pushed back the
dark; the dark brought
back fears of childhood;
the spiders hanging
from the ceiling, falling
on the bed or under the bed;
the bogeyman in the closed
cupboard; the doll whose eyes
you were sure followed you
across the room. The light
entered the room and made
patterns on the bedspread
and floor; made contrast of
light and darkness in shadows.

You knew him: he had light
and dark aspects; had dark
eyes and pale skin; had dark
moods and light humour when
the darkness of his mood fled.

Where shall light return? He
came carrying his dark mood
like a cloak. The spider and
bogeyman haunted again. When
will light return and end the pain?

Terry Collett

Like A Bird 1971

I walked down the drive
from the abbey
to stand near the road
and listened to the traffic
pass by before the office
of Compline began,

obcidi,

moonlight in the dark sky
and stars sprinkled like sugar,

smell of incense
in the church
after Mass overwhelming,

a monk with a black patch
over one eye like a pirate
stood facing me in the choir
book in hand
head lowered,

begin doing
what is necessary
then what is possible
and suddenly
you are doing
the impossible
Francis said,

Dieu est ici
the French monk said
pointing a bony finger
towards his chest
as we trod up the drive
from our weekly walk,

Gott ist überall
an Austrain monk said

not just in the heart and soul,

George hoed the abbey gardens
and said the sun is so hot
it's like a desert out here
and it was
and we were thirsty,

Hugh thin and gaunt said
to be a saint one must do
the ordinary extraordinary well
which he never did
or so seemed,

give the apples a twist
so the monk said
do not pull them off
and I watched his fingers
touch and twist,

and she lay there naked
as the day she was born
and asked me
to shaft her
so I did
and her husband
was driving on a long haul,

wise men talk
because they have
something to say
fools because
they have to
say something
Gareth said quoting Plato,

the abbot tapped
his small hammer
on his bench
and the meal was over
and the reader stopped
mid sentence

reading from the book
and the refectory
was in silence
before prayers were said,

I lay with her
and she mouthed me whole,

cercare di essere salvati
the Italian monk said
to me as I weeded
the flowerbeds
in the cloister garth,

try and be saved
listen to the word,

some days I wished
to take flight and begone
like some wild
flapping wings bird.

Terry Collett

Like A Pure Sea Mcmlxviii

Tall bell tower
caught in moonlight
Moorish design
I stood and looked
as bell tolled for Compline,

campana suonò
per compieta
smell of incense
as I entered the church
with only altar red light
and Dom Peter crossed
from cloister to bell tower,

sans Dieu nous
ne sommes rien
the French monk said
as he came to the guest room
to talk of the monastic life
to me I sat in the armchair
he on another chair
in his black robes
hands folded together,

manos juntas
skin on skin
prayer mode
knees aching
with kneeling,

we are nothing without God
Dom Charles said to me
as we picked apples
from the orchard
after lunch
in warm sunshine
a turn of the hand to pluck,

die Menschheit ohne

Gott verloren sind
the Austrian monk told me
before supper walking
from the cloister together,

stars in the evening sky
the moon bright
as a polished coin
chill in the air
standing waiting
for Compline to begin,

agnus Dei
that time in Mass
sensing the host
on my tongue dissolving
segno esteriore
di grazia interiore
Bruno said each
outward sign of inner grace
the sacraments
sacramenti,

monks chanted
the night office
and I stood and let it
flow over me
like a pure sea.

Terry Collett

Like Alice Does.

Alice sits brushing her hair,
stroke following stroke,

her husband sitting
on the edge of the bed

watching, studying her
hand and brush going

downward and out and
downward and out, and

as he watches he suddenly
remembers his mother

doing likewise and he
standing by the doorframe

of her bedroom, sees her
hand pull the brush through

her tight black hair, and
hears her sobbing voice

over the old white radio
playing some country song,

and senses an uneasiness
fill him like a wetting of pants,

and his mother gazing at him
in the mirror before her with

her red rimmed eyes and he
knowing as she lifts the brush

threateningly, that that way
pain comes and danger lies.

Like Blazing Fires 1967

After a weekend away
at her aunt's place
Nima was back in hospital
as her release

had run out
the nurse said
how was your weekend?
boring as hell

Nima said
shame
the nurse said
but at least

you were away from here
but you didn't do
any drugs did you?
of course not

Nima said
unless sex is a drug
in which case
I had an overdose

you never did
the nurse said smiling
who with?
that's for me to know

and you to dream about
Nima said
the nurse went off
and left Nima

by her bed
to change into her nightdress
and go sit
in the lounge

with other woman and girls
until bedtime
she undressed
and put on her nightdress

and thought of Benny
and wished he was there
by her bed
and had watched her undress

but he wasn't
he was at home
and she was there
with the others

and nurses
and cocoa to drink
and biscuits to eat
and lights out

by a certain time
and no one
to have sex with
no drugs to have

nothing except
the dull dark night
and pangs for
this and that

and other urges
and desires
flaring up
like blazing fires.

Terry Collett

Like Fingering 47bc

Amica mea columba,
I whisper to Amy
as she prepares my bath.

Domitia has left us
after a long afternoon
of talk and gossip.

Marcus is off
on one of Caesar's
campaigns;
his love making
(as such as it is)
has ceased.

Amy is now
my bed mate,
my love,
my dove.

Puella,
Domitia had called
to Amy,
as if Amy were
her slave girl
and not mine.

Now she prepares me
for the bath;
undresses me,
undoing the sashes
and undoing me
in heart and mind.

Last night her fingers
slid into me,
aroused me
from deep slumber,
broke me in like

a wild stallion is tamed.

Last night
I kissed her breasts;
lips touched soft flesh,
mouthed teats
as an infant greedily.

I am naked now,
ready for my bathe.

Annona,
she whispers,
the water is done.

She stands
and watches me,
her hands nearby to aid;
her eyes feeding
on my body;
her tongue at the side
of her mouth,
lingering,
that too,
last night,
inside me,
like fingering.

Terry Collett

Like Frightened Birds 1976

Netanya danced
like a wild thing
dark hair flowing
as she moved
hands swinging to the beat
legs moving so fast
it made one dizzy watching

I stood at the bar
drinking scotch
watching the dancing
and others boozing
at side tables

she's a goer your Mrs
some guest said to me
holding a glass of beer

yes she knows
how to move
I said

she like that in bed to?
he said eyeing Netanya
on the dance floor

no she don't dance in bed
I said
she sleeps or we make love

I sipped the scotch
he wandered off
staggering on the side
of the hall
gazing at the dancers

who's he?
the guy behind the bar
a friend of Netanya's asked me

some feck who lives
down the road from us
had too much booze
I said

I won't serve him
anymore booze
the guy said
he's had his limit

a while later
there was a bit of noise
and pushing
over the far end of the hall
the guy who had
too much booze
was causing hassle
with another guy

what's the trouble?
I said

this guy is trying to dance
with this girl
and she doesn't want
to dance with him
Netanya's son said

time for you to leave pal
I said

the guy looked at me
what's it to you?
he said

it's my wife party
she doesn't want trouble
so go

he stood there swaying
and eyeing me

voluntary or otherwise
I said

he took a wild swing
at me but it missed
by a mile and I caught
his hand and twisted it
behind him and lead him
from the hall

and out
he went into
the dark night
swaying away
cursing out words
that fled into the night
like frightened birds.

Terry Collett

Like Horny Men

Don't let the chickens out
Uncle said

close the gate
we don't want

the foxes getting in
and tearing them

to pieces
because they will you know

they'll go in for the kill
but maybe only go off

with one
and you stared

at the chickens
running around

as Uncle went
into the henhouse

to collect eggs
amongst the straw

and hay and feathers
you want to come in

and find the eggs with me?
Uncle called

and you followed him
into the henhouse

and smelt the henny stink
and shit and closeness

of hay and straw
getting up your nose

and Uncle held up an egg
and said

be careful how you hold them
don't want any broken ones

and you searched
amongst hay and straw

and feathers and picked out
a warm egg between

your little boy finger and thumb
as if it were some gem

pulled from a pile of dung
and you held it up

to the light coming through
the henhouse window

like some offering
to the gods

a fertility symbol
you knew nothing

about then
the ways

of wild women
and horny men.

Terry Collett

Like Wild Seas 1980

Rachel's there
beside me
on the train;

she's looking
at the scene
passing by.

Her blond hair
flows over
her shoulders

like water;
it catches
my vision

as she turns.
On our way
eloping

from our home
and parents:
her father

my mother;
step brother
step sister.

When will they
realize
we have gone?

Rachel asks.
I ponder,
thinking of

yesterday
when Mother
told me off

coming out
of Rachel's
pink bedroom.

I don't know
what you were
doing there

in Rachel's
pink bedroom,
Mother said,

but I don't
want to see
you in there.

I look at
Rachel's eyes
at how they

stare at me.
I don't know
when they'll know

that we've gone,
but we're here
together

and they're there
without us.
We almost

went further
last evening
than kissing

and holding,
but held back.
But maybe

tonight when
we're alone
in Scotland

in some room,
we'll make love.
The odd man

opposite
Rachel on
the train stares

at us both,
as if he
knew about

our love flight.
I stare at
him until

his dark eyes
look away
and my eyes

meet Rachel's,
and see there
two small men

gazing back
and it's me
in those eyes

which are deep
like wild seas.

Terry Collett

Lindsay Met Kersteen 1996

You saw the girl
sitting
at the corner table
of the cafe
in Edinburgh
thin
ill looking
sipping the coffee.

You walked
over to her
and said
ye swatch nae weel.

She looked at you
what's it tae ye?
she said
buck aff.

You smiled
and sat down
can ah gie
ye something?
you said.

She looked
past you
at the small
cafe door
then back at you.

Chocolate
if ye want
she said
her voice softer
less hostile.

You went
to the counter

and bought
a few bars
of chocolate
and another coffee
and sat down again
and gave her
the bars.

Aw fur me?
she said.

You nodded
and smiled.

She opened a bar
of chocolate
and ate it quickly
eyeing you steadily.

What's in it fur ye?
she said.

Depends
you replied.

Depends oan wit?
she said.

Ye can bide wi' me
at mah place
you said
eyeing her paleness
and her thinness.

She ate on
looking at you.

After the one bar
she ate the other
sipping at her coffee
in between.

Once she'd finished
and said
she'd go with you
but had to go
to the toilet first
so she went off.

You sat there
watching
the other people
in the cafe.

She returned
after a while
looking white
and her eyes were red.

You both left the cafe
back to your place
with nothing more said.

Terry Collett

Lindsay's Guest 1996

The girl entered
your small flat
and looked around.

She looked tired
and too thin.

What's yer nam?
you asked her.

Kersteen
she replied
what's yoors?

She looked you
with her tired eyes.

Lindsay
you said.

Aam feckin' wabbit
she said
can Ah sleep
some place?

You smiled
ay coorse.

You showed her
the bedroom
and the double bed.

She kicked off
her thin soled shoes
and lay on the bed
and closed her eyes.

You left her there
and made a coffee

and sat watching TV
wondering how long
she'd stay
if she would stay.

You sipped
your coffee
and lay on the sofa
wishing she was there
beside you
snuggled up close
her red curly hair
against your breast
her head softly at rest.

Terry Collett

Lingering There Mcmlxxi

The black robed monk
closed the huge book
his voice echoed
through the church
disturbing dust
from rafters,

et dixit Dominus
ad me,

Dom Joe found me
in the common room
and said I could come
the following year
so I did and left defeated,

parlare con me in tempi bui
the Italian monk said
that time in the cloister
before Vespers,

place a finger here
she said delve in
my silk purse
and I did
soft as kitten fur,

if every little flower
wanted to be a large rose
spring would lose its loveliness
Therese said
some place I read,

perdu avec à Dieu
the French monk said
as I was cutting the hedge
by the drive leading
to the abbey
and he passing,

she took my pecker
in her hand
and like a snake
charmer charmed,

the incense in the air
after Mass still there
at the office of Sext
and I sniffed it in
like one hooked,

Hugh made from wood
a bookshelf
for the common room
to hold the gifts of books
from guests who left,

George polished
the choir stalls
with yellow duster
and tinned wood polish
and elbow grease,

I wanted to lie
in the bed in my room(cell)
until midday sun
but the bell for Matins
tolled and I rose
at 5am to dawn's
dull light,

ecce homo
and I tried to behold
but my eyes saw
only shadows on walls
and mind caves,

Dom James wanted
to smoke but didn't
but nibble his fingernails
and the incense smoke

a reminder in the air
lingering there.

Terry Collett

Lip To Lip 1971

It is dark
early dawn
I can't sleep

so wander
from my bed
on the men's

dormitory
to the lounge
passing by

the night nurse
who's sitting
in her room

writing up
her report
can't you sleep?

she calls out
I walk back
to her door

and peer in
no I can't
thought I'd go

to the lounge
have a smoke
watch the snow

falling down
did you now?
aren't you on

sleeping pills?
still wake up
I tell her

she muses
looks at me
have to see

if the doc
will increase
the dosage

she replies
then Yiska
comes behind

puts her arms
around me
early bird

she whispers
kisses my neck
soft warm lips

not you too
the nurse says
have to see

the doctor
about both
of you two

put Benny
down Yiska
go and sit

in the lounge
and cool off
both of you

the nurse says
so we do
wander up

to the lounge

and go stand
by the large

lounge window
watch the snow
coming down

on the trees
and the grounds
below us

and the fields
beyond that
how calming

it all looks
Yiska says
like a big

Christmas card
I reply
we light up

cigarettes
and stand there
holding hands

two lost souls
on the bridge
of a slow

sinking ship
removing
cigarettes

then kissing
with passion
lip to lip.

Terry Collett

Lips On Skin Mmclxxi

From my cell window
the cloister garth
could be seen
the clock chiming
each quarter of an hour,

campana sonus
est vox Domini,

Dom Charles instructing
on apple picking
how to do and not to do,

George hoovering
the cloister
we used big brooms once
Hugh said dust
everywhere even using
sawdust and water,

she was naked
and we made love
on her sofa,

Dio parla nel lavoro
the Italian monk said
as I clipped the high hedge
by the church,

sing with silvery voice
the canticle of love
Therese said
(saint that is) ,

I tolled the big bell
for the Angelus
as shown by Dom James
last time,

Dieu est ici dans
votre cœur
the French monk
told me tapping his chest
as we stood in the cloister
waiting for Vespers,

she knelt down
and said take me wildly
so I did,

the impudence
of the sinner said Bernard(Saint)
displeases God
as much as the modesty
of the penitent
gives him pleasure,

I fingered the feet
of the Crucified
on the wall in my room
disturbing the dust,

hören Gott
the Austrian monk said
den er hört,

true happiness is to enjoy
the present without
anxious dependence
upon the future
said Gareth quoting Seneca
as we sat
in the refectory
before the abbot came in,

I kissed each
part of her
my lips
on her skin.

Lipstick On His Collar

What's that
on your collar Sutcliffe?
O'Brien said

you got some
amorous sweet girl Eddie?
Danny D said

what is it?
I can't see
Eddie said

lipstick
I said
red stuff

where where?
he said
pulling at his white
shirt collar
with the red lipstick mark

he opened his shirt collar
and pulled it downward
how'd that get there?
he asked

your cousin still
staying with you
is she Eddie?
Danny said smiling

no not her
not that bucktooth bitch
Eddie said
it must have been
my mum
she insists on
kissing me

before school

can't bring herself
to kiss your spotty skin
so kisses your collar
Danny said

she must have missed
Eddie said
how do I get it off?

who with?
O'Brien said
I ask that question myself
who's the lucky girl

what you talking about?
Sutcliffe said
how do I get
the lipstick off?

God knows
Danny said

soak it salt maybe
I said

but now
how now?
Eddie said

we walked on
toward school
Eddie rubbing
at his collar
with a greying handkerchief

that's the last time
she's going to kiss me
Eddie said

the red lipstick had smeared

more like a stain

it's worse now
I said
looks like a wound

thanks
he said thanks

you did it
not me
I said

what am I going to do?
can't go to school
like this

go home and change then
O'Brien said

I can't my mum's
gone to work
he looked at us
all tearfully

it's just lipstick Sutcliffe
no one's going to care
Danny said

of course they will
he said
especially Thompson
you know what he's like
he'll have out front
for a right pasting
if he sees me

come back to my place
I said
my Mum'll put it
into soak
and you can wear

one of mine

you'll be late
Danny said

you go on
I said
we'll get a bus
we can make it
if we run

O'Brien looked at me
you're all heart Benny
all heart

so Eddie and I
ran back to my place
and he took off his shirt
which my mother
put in soak
and he wore
one of mine
and off we rushed
to school on the 78 bus

Eddie all wide eyed
and I saw Fay
going to school
with her swaying hips
and blonde hair
and all I could do
was give
a keen eyed stare.

Terry Collett

Lisa And The Aftermath After Sunday

Lisa dresses for school,
buttons up the blouse
with fumbling fingers.
She stares down at her

bed where she and Mona
had lain the day before.
The same sheets, pillows
having no doubt her hair,

her smell. She puts on her
school tie, loops it through,
her fingers sensing the
smoothness of the cloth.

She remembers how they
had made love on that bed,
how they had lain naked and
hot and kissing. Best Sunday

ever, she muses, looking away,
stepping into her school skirt,
pulling it over her waist.
Her mother had called out

to her some minutes before.
Breakfast ready, not in the
mood for food. She looks out
the window at the farmyard

across the way, cows heading
out to the fields, her father
following, bellowing, a stick
in his hand, his arms raised

to move them on. She sits on
the bed and takes a pillow
and holds it to her nose
and sniffs. Mona's scent,

borrowed from her mother,
she had said. She feels along
the sheet with her hand.
They had laid there, their

bodies, their lips kissing,
their hands holding. No one
had known they were
making love. Her parents

and family had thought them
drying after getting drench
in the Sunday downpour.
She closes her eyes, imagines

Mona is still there, thinks
she feels her hands around
her waist. Her mother's voice
calls from downstairs. She sighs,

stands up and slips on her
socks and shoes. Leans down
and puts a kiss on her top
pillow where Mona had

laid her head, now she has only
images and memories instead.

Terry Collett

Lisbeth And The Artist

Lisbeth stands watching
The artist as he prepares
To sketch. Her elder sisters
Stand in shadows whispering.
Her younger sister plays
With her doll on the floor.
Their father said to do as
The artist instructed and
Don't misbehave or be rude.
The artist stares hard his
Dark eyes searching their
Every move and expression
And body gesture. The elder
Girls mutter in shadows
Their hands over their mouths
Their blue eyes like shallow
Pools. Ready? The artist
Asks putting charcoal to
Paper his fingers blackening.
Lisbeth says just as we are?
The artist nods. His grim
Features express do not disturb.
The youngest sister plays
Ignoring the artist her eyes set
On the game at hand. The girls
In shadow turn their profiles
Set to mystery their hands on
Their abdomens like guardians
Of virtue. Lisbeth wonders as
She watches the artist's stiff
Moustache and beard the slow
Movement of his mouth as he
Mouths words and stares hard.
The last artist employed some
Year before younger and less
Brutal in expression and manner
Had drawn them each in private
Rooms and set them down on couch
Or bed and kept their images inside

His head. He was dismissed and the
Drawings destroyed and nothing said.
Lisbeth had thought it just a game
Something done as lover might in
Private corners or lonely spots on
Quiet nights. The artist sketches.
His blackened fingers move and
Made their mark. Their images
Captured. The scene set. One sister
In the shadows yawns the other
Stares in still contempt. Lisbeth
Poses as young girls do. Nothing
To show of interest and nothing
Hid no secret self no other you.
That's it the artist says we'll begin
The painting another day maybe
Next week if all is well. The girls
In shadow look away and resume
Their secret games. Lisbeth studies
The artist's blackened fingers as
He rolls the charcoal sketch and
Puts away. He gazes at her standing
By herself a glimpse of smile and
Glimmer in her eyes like small fires.
He closes the tired lids of eyes
And smoulders down his old desires.

Terry Collett

Listening To Elvis 1962

Benny's mother liked Yehudit,
she often invited her home,
and allowed her and Benny
to sit in his room and play
on his record player;
this day they lay on the bed,
and didn't sit on the floor
watching the record
going round and round
and talking.

Do you see bats
at dusk?
Yehudit asked,
lying her head
on the pillow.

Sometimes I see them,
but they're so quick
hard to get a good
glimpse of them,
he said.

I see them
from my bedroom window,
she said,
and my sister says,
o Yehudit lie down
and shut up
about darn bats,
I hate them.

Benny turned
and gazed at Yehudit
lying there next to him,
her eyes staring
back at him,
her lips which he had kissed,
especially that evening

they went singing
with the church choir
and they had stopped
in the moonlight
and kissed and hugged
each other,
the other members
gone on to sing
at another house.

She leaned forward
and kissed him quickly
before he had time
to say: Jack shit.

He held her close to him
and she hugged him.

She released him
from the kiss.

Ought not to do it here
in case my brother
comes in,
Benny said.

Where is he?
She said.

Out playing
with young sisters,
I guess,
Benny said,
besides if my mum
sees us here
she might not
let you come again.

Yehudit nodded
and leaned back,
and got off the bed,
and sat on the floor

and listened to
the Elvis Presley
record playing.

Benny got off the bed
and sat with her
on the floor.

Best not I guess,
she said,
but it was nice
lying there,
felt different,
better than lying
in some bushes
some place,
more comfortable.

She leaned into him
and kissed him again.

One day maybe
we can here
when there's no one
about to disturb,
he said.

She lay back
on the floor,
her left hand
cushioning her head,
I'm sweet to do so,
she smiled
and said.

Terry Collett

Listening To Elvis 1964

I had bought
the Kissin' Cousins LP
by Elvis
and I played it on
the record player.

Milka sat beside me
on my bed
in my room.

My parents and siblings
were downstairs
watching TV.

After the third song
she said
it's not a big bed
is it.

No smaller than yours
I said.

But it looks smaller
she said.

My brother's small bed
was opposite
near the window.

We couldn't here
be too risky
with them downstairs
she said.

We can kiss and hug
and that sort of thing
I replied.

But then

we get carried away
and one thing
leads to another
she said.

Elvis sang on
Milka was in a mood.

The two coffees
were getting cold.

Maybe next time
we could go
to your place
I said.

My mum's hardly
ever out
and she'd not let us
in my room together
she said.

We did the other week
while your mum
was out shopping
and your dad
was on the farm
and your brothers fishing
I said.

Yes but that
was a rare thing
for them all
to be out
she said moodily.

Elvis stopped
and I watched the disc
go around around
and we made no other sound.

Little Boy Blue

I received a letter
informing me
that you were dead,
had been dead
about eight years.

It was from a firm
seeking to help claim
any money due
from the deceased.

Hard to see you
as the deceased.
Not seen you
in over thirty years.

No emotion, no tears;
end of an era which included
childhood and the odd times
after when I sought you out.

I didn't expect much:
you were often in debt
when I was a child;
they'd be lucky to cover
their search fees.

But you were a father of sorts,
if not a great one,
and a lousy husband.

Now they wrote
and said you had died.

That little boy who knew
you back then is sad
in my head, but never cried.

Little Lies Big Heart.

Janice undid
the budgie's cage
and put in
her slim finger

and the bird hopped on
and she pulled out
her finger with the bird
still there not moving

not flying through the air
see
she said
she will not go

you stood watching
with your back
to the door
hands on

the wooden panel
she spoke to the bird
it cocked its head
she muttered

nonsense sounds
the bird moved
its wings
but didn't attempt

to fly
just stared her
in the eye
I often get her out

to feel freedom
Janice said
moving around the room
the bird balancing

itself as she moved
what if the bird flew away?
you asked
it won't

she said
but what if it did?
you said
Janice moved her head

to one side
in imitation
of the bird
her red beret

still in place
ah then
Gran would tan my hide
redder than my beret

she said
the bird walked
along her finger
but it won't go

Janice said
and walked
to the open window
and held the bird there

the bird looked out
winking an eye
or so seeming
and looked away

but some time
you said
it might take flight
Janice walked

across the room

to the cage
and put the bird back
and closed the door

with a soft click
she smiled
maybe
she said

maybe
you moved away
from the door
and her gran came in

with sandwiches
on a large white plate
and put them
on the table

has Janice shown you
the budgie?
her gran asked
yes

you said
Janice looked at you
eyebrows raised
she didn't open the cage

and get it out did she?
Janice looked away
no no
you said

she just pointed it out
and we spoke to her
o good
because she has

the terrible habit
of taking it out
when my backs turned

and one of these days

it will fly away
Gran moved back
to the kitchen
to fetch the other

tea things
Janice said
you lied for me
well I didn't want

you to get into trouble
you said
Janice pulled a face
lies can land us

in Hell
she said
well it's either Hell
or a good tanning

you said
she smiled
and sat at the table
and you sat beside her

hearing her gran
in the kitchen
with cups and saucers
and the kettle

whistling loud and clear
Janice's hand
touched yours
and she whispered

in your ear
(so gran
wouldn't hear)
you are a dear.

Lizbeth Came 1961

Lizbeth was sitting
on the back gate
of my parents' cottage
this morning.

I had just
come back
from the farm
with the morning milk
in the green jug.

What are you
doing here?
I said.

Came to see you
Benny
she said
I rode on my bike.

Her bike was laying
by the hedge.

I can't go out yet
I said
I need to take
the milk in
and have breakfast.

I am early
she said
had to get out
as my mother
was moaning
and driving me
round the bend
like my skirt?

I looked at her

black short skirt.

Bit short isn't it?
I said.

I like it short
she said.

I'll just take
the milk in
I said.

Can I come in
and wait for you
or shall I
wait out here?
she said.

I looked at her
I'll ask
I said.

I left her sitting
on the back gate
her red hair tied
in a ponytail.

I went in
the back door.

My mother
was at the Aga
warming milk.

My siblings
were eating breakfast
my father was in
the bathroom shaving.

Lizbeth is outside
I said
can she come in

and wait for me?

I expect so
my mother said
why is she so early?

Don't know
she can sit in
the front room
I said.

All right
my mother said.

I went out
the back door
and called Lizbeth in.

She climbed off
the gate
and walked over
the yard
and in
the back door.

I don't know
what my mother thought
of Lizbeth's short skirt
but Nigel at school
had said
she was a hot flirt.

Terry Collett

Lizbeth Dreams

Lizbeth dreams
of Benny

having him
in her bed

just for kicks
her parents

down the stairs
in the lounge

unaware
she's upstairs

with Benny
having sex

in her bed
the first time

at long last
so she dreams

inside her
13 year

old young head
Benny dreams

of Spitfires
in dogfights

or finding
in hedgerows

a blackbird's
nest and eggs

all untouched
or holding

in his palms
a Peacock
butterfly

wings unspoilt
settled there

he dreams not
of Lizbeth

or of sex
anywhere

not in church
or her bed

and knows not
what's inside

his 13
year old head.

Terry Collett

Lizbeth Muses 1961

Benny is
looking over
at me from
the boy's playground
he's with another boy
the boy points
in my direction.

I am with a girl
from class
talking about
her mother's illness
and being sick.

I wonder
what Benedict
and the boy
are talking about
me I expect.

I don't know
the other boy
by name
but I know
he often
leers at me
when we pass
in the passageway
from one classroom
to another.

I wish Benny
would have had
sex with me.

That time
in my room
but he wouldn't
not even there

and me
almost naked
and bare.

That girl Jane
he sees
is a virgin queen
she was shocked
about me
trying to get Benny
to have sex
in that pew
in the small church.

She went red
but he wouldn't
and it was
a wasted day.

The girl talks on
about her mother
maybe cancer.

I wonder if he
will weaken
will falter
and have
sex with me
in church
behind the altar.

I wave to him
and he waves back
and other boy
stares across
then walks away.

I will have Benny
I am sure
one day.

Lizabeth Stumped 1961

Benedict
had left school
well at least

that one school.
Lizabeth thought
she'd not seen

him about.
She asked West
a boy who

was in the
school class
Benedict

had been in.
He just left
West told her

his father
got a new
job elsewhere.

She was shocked
he'd not said
not a word.

She was stumped
dream shattered
she wouldn't

have sex with
him after all.
No matter

how she tried
he wouldn't
not in church

(on a pew)
or her room
or his room

or that barn.
Dream shattered
she had tried

all her best
now he'd gone.
Early days

her mind said
other fish
in the sea

another
string to her
violin

(what a thing
to call it)
she murmured

sensing tears
in her eyes.
And that night

in her bed
she couldn't
get the fact

of him not
being there
out of her

dreams and head.

Terry Collett

Lizbeth's Talk 1961

Lizbeth stopped me
by the school tuck shop
where I was waiting
for Nigel to buy something.

Other pupils stood
or walked past.

I may come out
and see you on Saturday,
she said,
will you be at home?

I don't know
what I will be doing,
I replied.

Are you meeting
the Virgin Jane then?
Lizbeth asked.

I suspect so,
I said.

What do you
want to see in her?
She will offer you
nothing and talk
babble about nature
and birds and butterflies,
Lizbeth said.

I like butterflies
and birds,
I said.

I can offer you more
than she can;
I can make you a man

and feel things
you have not
felt before,
Lizbeth said
(in low voice so
that others in
the queue nearby
didn't hear her) .

I don't want
what you are offering,
and have offered me
since that time
in the church
when you wanted
sex on a pew,
I said.

She smiled,
and said:
O you remember,
that is good,
how good it would
have been
had you stayed
and not run off
like boy.

Nigel came
from the tuck shop
with a few items
he had bought
and saw Lizbeth.

What's she want?
He said.

Not you
that's for sure tubby,
she said,
see you Saturday
then Benny,

and walked off
along the corridor
and out of sight.

What did she want?
He said.

Her usual nonsense,
I said.

He shrugged his shoulders
and we walked
into the playground
where he shared
his items with me.

I hoped she wouldn't
turn up on Saturday;
I wanted to see Jane alone.

Nigel talked of her
in a dismal moan.

Terry Collett

Long Ago Talk

Mr Bedlows
showed you around
the old folk's home
the day had begun

at the new job
the smell of urine
and old age
drifted by the nostrils

the dimly lit passageway
he opened a door
morning Mr Grigg
morning Mr Mash

he said
to the old men
sitting on beds
then off

you both went again
more doors opened
other old men
welcomed

downstairs and up
the passageways
like circles
of Dante's Hell

the old men gazed
at you as you entered
their aged eyes
followed you

about their room
you the young guy
the wet-behind- the-ears
young thing

they'd seen wars
fought in trenches
seen men killed
blown apart

mind damaged
body's crippled
soul's laid bare
smoke and death

in the air
I'll leave you with Sidney
Mr Bedlows said
and went closing the door

trapping you
with smell and age
and Sidney's stare
half hour later

having cleaned him up
and washed and dried
and clothed him neat
you set him on his way

with walking frame
and slow pace
for him
another dreary day

for you the beginning
the other men
to coax
or dress

or wash
or comb the hair
or set them
on their walk

with old timers

chatter
or idle
long ago talk.

Terry Collett

Long Sad Drag

Why no light
at the tunnel's end?

Is there an end
to the tunnel?

Our lips touch softly,
press gently,
move way,
and back again,
press again,
each sense
the tongue
on tongue tip move,
exchange juices,
then away.

I kiss her two
soft fruits,
mouth where once
a child sucked,
now gone,
but I remain mouthing,
and she sighing pleased,
pleasuring sighs.

Is there a tunnel?

Which way
and where a light?

Nessuna luce qui,
darkness embraces
like a drunken whore
wanting nothing,
wanting more,
and she and I
remembering
a different horizon

another shore.

The fruits become dry
and sag and we sit
and talk and smoke
the one cigarette,
stare at darkness,
puff on the cigarette,
a long sad drag.

Terry Collett

Lonliness Complete 1997

Una goes into her bedroom
after Nuala's gone
and stares at the bed...

sees Nuala laying there
as she had done
spread waiting,
eyes bright,
smiling and giggling
like a school girl
in anticipation,
the pillows holding her head...

the room is silent now,
no one there,
bed unmade,
sheet and covers untidy
and pulled back...

she sits on the bed and sighs,
alone again,
feeling low and lays back
on the bed and tries
to soak in the sensations
the bed may have captured...

not the same bed
she had with Stu,
that was a different bed
which she had sold off
once Stu had died,
couldn't have her presence
here while sleeping or
making love to another...

you are different from Brian
Nuala had said,
I hope so Una had said,
he's a man and she laughed,

and Nuala had kissed her
and that first time both
had been shy
but Nuala had never been
with a woman before
in a sexual sense,
never had known this love
or this intensity...

Una holds herself tight,
pretends it's Nuala still there,
imagines it is Nuala
who is moving hands over her,
touching her cheek,
her lips and her hair,
Nuala who is unzipping her jeans,
she who is undressing her...

Brian never makes love
like this Nuala had said,
it's all over in a flash
and me laying there
all stirred up and him done,
me burning and him
burnt out wanting to sleep...

Una wants Nuala back again,
wants her beside her now,
pretends it is Nuala's fingers
touching her,
her breath breathing fast,
she who opens her up
like a flower...

the bedside clock
goes tick-tock tick-tock,
traffic goes by
on the Dublin street,
she sighs and stops,
Nuala has gone,
and Una's alone,
loneliness complete.

Terry Collett

Looking Back 1965

I was on the bus
back from Richmond
where I stayed
a day and night
with Tilly
at her uncle's place.

I sat looking
out the window.

Richmond miles away
and so was Tilly.

She'd shown me
around Richmond
the day before
(after a quick
bash at sex) ,
had dinner out,
saw the sights,
walked in the park
in the evening,
then back to her
uncle's place,
watched TV,
then bed.

I saw her
in my mind
as the bus drove along,
undressing in that room,
each piece of clothing
taken off
with a teasing motion,
then folded
on a chair,
then she watched
as I undressed
humming a tune

as I did so.

We got into the bed
and lay there.

She said:
what if my mother
could us now?

I didn't want to even
imagine that,
but she did,
it seemed as if
it was some kind
of get back
at her mother
to just imagine her mother
seeing us there
making out.

After the second time,
we just lay there
looking at the moon
through the window,
her head on my shoulder,
me kissing her head,
wondering what
her mother would say
if she'd seen us
making love
in the uncle's
guest bed.

Terry Collett

Looking For Why.

Dull morning,

light thin,

the sun taken
a day off,

you sit in the chair
by the window,

your woman in the bed
behind you,

huddled up
in a dream,

the birds
singing outside,

distant hum
of traffic,

people going
some place
or coming
from some place,

the question of why
unanswered
as Nietzsche said
if you have a why
you can put up
with any how,

but no why
so no how,

my woman sleeps,

the cat stalks
the lawn,

people have died
in the process
of this moment
as many born,

looking back
at the years past
spent the coins
of days and weeks
and months and years
adds up
to a tidy sum,

my youth
had excitement
my old age is numb
or dumb with a just
about hear hum.

Terry Collett

Lost And Gone Mcmlxix

Cowled and sitting
in the large church
the monks chanted Matins
matutinus officium,

I felt the chill
in my bones
as I watched
overcoat tight
about my throat,

un bacio sulla gola
the Italian girl said to me
I recalled as I listened
to the chants proceed,

auto-déni
the French monk
had said to me
the evening before
before Compline
la croix symbolise
un vide de soi,

Bro Andrew in the bookshop
bookbinding
snow on the outer window ledge
smiling
spreading his huge beard
come see he said
and handed me
a huge book
bound by him
evangelio de San Juan,

bells tolling
vibrating in the cloisters
disturbing the butterfly
on the window

seeking the sun
flapped away
before me watching,

the cross symbolizes
the denial of self
the self crossed out
the monk said
as I sat in the guest room
late one evening
his tonsured head shining
where the light
from the bulb shone,

I mused
on the girl's kiss
now lost and gone.

Terry Collett

Lost At Sea.

You remember now the sound of the sea,
The crashing of waves, the white and grey
Gulls in the sky. Mother said, don't go too
Far out; keep an eye on the young ones.
The cold water made you hop about when
It first went over your bare feet. You knew
Where the young ones were, you could see
Them there at the water's edge running in
And out as the cold water chased them.
The beach was crowded; the crowds seemed
To occupy each area with their deckchairs,
Windbreakers and towels spread on the sand.
The bright sun shone down heavily; the air
Was still. And Mother's voice loudly shouting,
Where's Baba? Where's she gone? And the
Place she was with the others was without
Her presence now; the panic gripped you.
Your eyes scanned the beach and sea; you ran
Along the beach near the water's edge gazing
Out at the wide expanse of ocean, ignoring the
Passing ships on the horizon, the sailing boats,
The far out swimmers, just looking for Baba,
Your eyes searching each face, each child, every
Little one running on the beach or out at sea out
Of reach. Mother came running down the beach
Towards you, her face red with effort, her mouth
Screaming out words carried off by the other
Sounds and the sea's call, pointing out at ocean's
Hold as a man came up and out of the waves,
Water dripping, eyes wide, and in his arms, Baba
Limp and her swaying head, hair hanging wet,
Seeming lost to you, small arms swinging, dead.

Terry Collett

Lost Dream

Lizbeth prepares for bed;
undresses, washes,
brushes teeth,
gets into bed
and turns off
the bedside lamp.

The moon light
coming through the window
makes an eerie feel
to her room.

What a waste of a day;
all dressed up
and out on her bike
to see Benedict
at the cottage.

He's gone out
with his father
to his father's work
in the woods,
his mother said,
I expect he'll be collecting
bones and bird's eggs
and fossils in chalk.

Was he expecting you?
His mother asked.

No, Lizbeth had replied,
hiding her frustration
and anger, just came
on the off chance.

His mother said
she could come in
for a cup of tea and cake,
but Lizbeth declined

and rode back home again
in a foul four letter mood.

Then her own mother
had a go at her
about the state
of her room
and the leaving
of soiled linen everywhere
and last night's plate
and cutlery were
under your bed,
she had moaned.

Lizbeth pulls the blanket
over her shoulder
and looks at the wall
by her bed.

She pretends he's there
beside her now;
imagines him
laying there
butt naked,
hand on her back,
his thingamajig
(she forgets
the name of it
in the book)
poking her belly;
him staring at her,
his hazel eyes
wide and sexy.

She closes her eyes;
pretends he's kissing her;
his hand along her thigh;
his lips hot and wet.

What would he say?
She asks herself,
imagining him

parting her legs
(she'd read that bit
in the book)
and her father's voice
says(on the landing
outside her room)
to her mother
(moody cow)
have you put out
the cat and locked
the back door?

The imagined Benny
has gone;
the space beside her
in bed now vacant.

Her eyes are open;
the moonlight
making patterns
on the wall
and now she can't
make love to him
at all.

Terry Collett

Lost Hankerchief 1964

Milka's mother
was in the kitchen
making us coffee
and she had

her back to us
and Milka mouthed
how about sex?
was it good?

I mouthed back
yes it was good
and she smiled
and said

can Benny come
to dinner one Sunday?
of course he can
her mother said

without turning around
just let me know when
so I can get
a little extra in

I will let you know
I said
gazing at Milka
her hair

and eyes
and her hand
on my knee
under the table

squeezing it
here we are
here are your coffees
and her mother

placed the two mugs
of coffee on the table
and she smiled at me
and said

I'm just off
to make the beds
and sort the washing
if you want a biscuit

Milka knows
where they are
she can get you
what you want

and then she was gone
and we were alone
in the kitchen
can't get you

what you want
in the kitchen
Milka said
but I can get you

a biscuit if you like
yes that'd be good
I said
the biscuits I mean

and Milka got up
and went
to the small larder
and I watched her

hips sway
as she walked
her legs that went
right up to

and disappeared

I went to my pocket
to get my handkerchief
when I realized

it wasn't there
and searched
my other pocket
no wasn't there either

then it dawned on me
where it must be
o God
I said

what's up?
Milka said
coming from the larder
with a round biscuit tin

my handkerchief
it's missing
so you must have
plenty more

Milka said
I do
but I had it
when I came here

this morning
while we were
in your room
before your mum

came back
from shopping
o God
you don't think

it's in my room
do you? and Mum's
up there now

making beds

and she rushed out
of the kitchen
and up the stairs
I could hear her

footsteps rushing
and then voices
and then silence
and I thought

what excuse would I have
for my handkerchief
to be in her bed?
and my brain went numb

and not a thought
entered my head.

Terry Collett

Lost In God Mcmlxxi

A monk pushed
a wheelbarrow
along the narrow path
in the abbey grounds
giving off
squeaky sounds,

perdidit in Deo
sitting in the abbey church
gazing at
the hanging tabernacle
where Christ resided,

dove Cristo è stato
a metal globe
hanging from chains
from the church roof
the priest monk
pulled down and opened up
during mass and held up
the host and said
ecco l'Agnello di Dio,

lost in God
Dom Thomas said
in prayer
and contemplation
and he sat
in the old armchair
in my room
hands forming
a church like structure,

estructura similar
a una iglesia
his hairy hands
and fingers
talking of contemplation
his tonsured head

shone in the overhead light,

perdido en dios
and the Crucified
above my bed
and the old brown cross
and plaster Christ,

perdido en dios
smell of incense
especially after Mass
hung in the air
like a woman's perfume,

she held me close
and kissed my forehead
and said
come to bed
so I did,

entertaining a thought
without accepting it
Gareth said
quoting Aristotle
is sign
of a trained mind,

the host held high
and the Austrian monk said
Körper von Christus
and ate the white host
after breaking,

lost in God
or so tried
excepting at times
he stayed lost
to my soul
or mind's cost.

Terry Collett

Lost In The Air.

I never saw you today
In the playground
Through the playground fence
You said as you boarded

The school bus
I was at the other end
Jane said with other girls
Playing skip rope

O I wondered
Where you were
You said
She sat

By the window
And you sat
Next to her
Well they asked me

To play and I didn't
Want to say no
She said
Who were you with?

West mostly
He came back
From lunch early
And we played cards

By the metalwork rooms
Not betting were you?
She asked
No

You said
If we had been
I'd have lost
As it was

I only lost cards
Not money
O I see
She said

There was a fine quality
To her voice
And her words
Were like a kind of music

You noticed her hands
In her lap
One laying on top
Of the other

The fingernails
Cut neat and pink
You wanted to hold them
But didn't want

The other kids
In the bus
To see
So you just looked

At the hands and fingers
As she talked
Of some butterfly
She'd seen

In her garden
And her father
Had told her
What it was

And how beautiful
It was
The colours
And the way it flew

And how it was all

A part of God's plan
And creation
But you were only

Half listening
You noticed
Gazing at her profile
How fine her lips were

When she spoke
How they moved
How her tongue
Moved like some dancer

How her eyes
Opened wide
At certain words
As if some inner explosion

Had brought them to life
And they blazed
Like a new world
Being born

And you lost
The meaning
Of her words
They were as music playing

In another sphere
You sitting there
Gazing like a soul
Lost at sea

At a far off ship
Going a different way
And any S.O.S
You may send

Was lost
In the air of the day.

Lourdes 2006

Jimmy opened his suitcase in the room
at Lourdes and said Oh no there's molasses
all over the clothes and shoes and I've got

a whole week here and he sat down in a chair
his head in his hands saying What have I done?
What am I going to do for clothes now? you

went over and looked in and sure enough
the molasses were over his clothes and shoes.
What am I going to do? he said and you said

Leave it to me Jim I'll sort it and you went through
the clothes taking out the items untouched
by the molasses and set them aside on the bed

and then carried the suitcase of black sticky items
Into the washroom and there one by one you carefully
washed them through with soap and water until

they were clean and smelt of soap and fresh air
and all the while 94 year old Jim sat in a chair
watching with his eyes watery and jaw hung loose

seeing the black water run down the wide plughole
and once it was done you wrung the clothes out
like your mother used to do when you were a kid

and hung them out on the balcony on the small
clothesline and placed the washed out black shoes
by the outside wall to dry out in the hot afternoon

sun and Jimmy came over and stood on the balcony
with one hand on the rail and the other on his stick
looking over at the Pyrenees in the distance and he

said That was real good of you. I owe you big time
and you stood next to him feeling the hot afternoon
sun on your face and arms and felt good and you

said You owe me nothing Jim I just did what some
good guy would and his watery eyes swept over you
matching the French sky's watery afternoon blue.

Terry Collett

Love At First Sight 1961

You never realized eyes
could smile like hers did,
and that she could smile
in such a way
as to make smiling
a gift of God.

You sat by a window seat
on the school coach
that first morning
a new boy at a new school
and she there at the front
eyeing you and smiling that smile
and you gazed out the window
at the passing views
trees in fields
birds flying overhead
cows in passing fields
eating grass or staring
at the coach driving past.

You looked up
and she was still eyeing you
and her smile still there
and you looked away
and felt something odd
open within you
and felt self conscious
as if the whole world
was in on it
and the eyes of each
and every kid on the coach
was aware of her eyes and smile
but none seemed to notice
or care if they did.

Just you and her eyes
and that smile
and you opening up

and becoming undone
like some poor sod
stripped naked
under a hot sun.

Terry Collett

Love At First Sight.

Love at first sight
or so Henry mused
gazing at the dame

at the checkouts
in the superstore
eyes met

and fixed there
not the first time
love at first sight

lasting moments
hours or days
(and nights)

love at first sight
walked the aisle
pink patterned dress

mousey hair
shoulder length
nice legs

not plump
or too thin
nice ass

moved side to side
as she walked past him
out of the store

love at second sight
gone from view
trees

bushes
blue of sky
shopping done

no more
love sighting
no more fun.

Terry Collett

Love Doesn'T End With Death

Love doesn't end with death, Mother
Said. A few days had gone since Father's
Demise and you stood in their room
While she sat on her bed and did her hair.
She stopped in mid brush and cried.
I wish it was me, you said, at least then
You'd still have him to love. She looked
Round at you and said, then I'd be grieving
For you. It's still grief no matter who
Goes or stays, she said. She wiped her
Eyes and brushed her hair once more
Looking at herself in the mirror. We never
Appreciate the time we have with people
Until they've gone, she muttered, half to
Herself and half to you. Ordinary days are
Best because they're more plentiful,
She continued, looking at you through
The mirror's view. You noticed the first grey
Hairs appearing where she'd brushed last,
Sitting there amongst hairs brunette.
Now she sits unaware of days gone by
Or grief; dementia's done its work so well
That all is wiped clean from brain and head.
She's unaware of being alive herself let
Alone Father not being there or being dead.

Terry Collett

Love Her Still

You never expected
your mother to die
although the hospital
hinted at such

all lost
in their
language trap
all in all

it was a double blow
as dementia took her
piece by piece
years ago

then the final punch
the knock out blow
remembering
someone saying

that's how
some loved ones
tend to go
and the relationship

between mother and child
is never simple
travelling as it does
through high hills

and valleys sometimes
dark and often deep
and remembering
all that

the need to weep
you reflect on all that
the final sight
of your mother

in that bed
the closed eyes
the small smile
remain in your head

and you know
after all such
you loved her overmuch
and always will

indeed
you love her still.

Terry Collett

Love Inside My Head 1940

There are cries
and the sound of rushing
and voices high.

I stare into the blackness
with my blind eyes
and turn my head
following the noise.

I sit up
balancing myself
on my leg stumps
hands each side
of my hips.

What's going on?
I call
what's happened?

Someone comes
beside my bed.

Girls got bombed
in the jam factory
the voice said
many killed
others covered
in hot sugar.

The voice went off
I wanted to get up
but I could go
now where
without legs.

I lay down again
peering into the darkness
wishing Clive was there
not dead some place

or where is Philip?

I lay my head
on the pillow
wanting him there
beside me on the bed
making love to me
inside my head.

Terry Collett

Love Is Here

Love is here
she said
lying beside you

in the tall grass
watching
a summer sky

love is rarer
than we think
love comes

like some thief
at night
and breaks into

our hearts
and dreams
but you

were watching
a flying hawk
the way it hovered

in mid air
like some magic thing
hovering there

and putting out a hand
she touched your cheek
her fingers brushing

down your skin
I knew
she said

when I first saw you
it was love
that first intake

of your eyes and hair
the way you were
standing there

but you heard
the words like
drifting smoke

remembering in class
Reynard's rude
and lurid joke.

Terry Collett

Love Not Sin 1972.

What's it like?
she asks me
my new friend
Abela

what's what like?

confessions
at the church
where you go

don't go now
lost my way
in limbo
I reply

but back then
when you went?
she asks me

went along
to the church
saw the priest
and confess

confess what?
she insists

any sins
that I had
committed

what's a sin?
she goes on

an offence
against God

involving

what actions?

Too many
to repeat

example
give me some

she lies there
in the bed
butt naked
hands behind
her dark brown
hair and head

having sex
outside of
a marriage
coveting
another's
sexy wife
or husband
and so on
I tell her

so you are
committing
a sin thing
being here
with me now?

both of us
are sinning
in God's eyes

but I don't
believe in
God at all
she answers

God don't care
about that

He doesn't
considered
that matters
sin's a sin
in His book
I reply

that's not fair
why should I
be judged so?
she utters

pulling up
the white sheet
to cover
her two tits
from my sight

forgetting
that God saw
what we did
all last night

I kiss her
on the head
on the cheek
on the lips
on the chin
hoping she'll
relent and
let me in
to her bed
and her arms
between thighs
to make love
and not sin.

Terry Collett

Love Of Mr Chowdy

You loved to hug Mr Chowdy;
You liked it when his wet nose
Brushed your chin or his long
Tongue licked your ear. Don't let
The darn mutt bark too much,
Father said, or he'll have to go
And sleep in the yard out in the
Doghouse. You used to feed him
From scraps saved from meals,
Or pushed him small pieces under
The table out of sight of the others.
Some evenings you managed to
Sneak him into your room and let
Him lie in comfort on your bed;
Listening out in case the parents
Came and turfed him off into
The kitchen or out in the cold.
Some nights you could hear his
Heavy breathing across the way
Beside the window where you let
Him lay. Now you're much older
And Mr Chowdy's dead; now it's
Your husband's snoring and heavy
Breathing that you hear in bed.

Terry Collett

Love Sick Feeling

Sheila stares
at the wall
of her room

on her bed
thoughts on John
what he said

his soft touch
of her hand
as he got

on the bus
leaving her
standing there

at the school
tomorrow
we will talk

he had said
she lies there
on her bed

on her side
staring hard
other thoughts

pushed aside
her mother
is downstairs

finishing
the washing
the dinner

is cooking
her brother's
in his room

listening
to Elvis
she can hear

the LP
being played
too loudly

she moves on
to her back
staring at

the ceiling
trying to
cope with this

inner love
sick feeling.

Terry Collett

Love Unsure.

Jane and I walked
to the nearest village
to get some shopping
for the parents
and get fresh air
and talk

what do you think
of the countryside now
after living in London
for so long?
she asked me

I've got used to it now
no street lights
no traffic noise
no noisy neighbours
or drunks as there was
in our part of London
I said

or the sound of trains
going over
the railway bridge opposite
or the trucks being shunted
all night
in the coal wharf

now its so quiet
so peaceful
and no pavements
on the side
of the roads here

she smiled
I've lived here
all my life
it's as I know it

I looked at her
sideways on
she was wearing
a grey dress and boots
and an open green coat

I wore my jeans
and shirt and jacket

I liked her dark hair
her deep eyes

why do you look at me
like that?
she said

a cat can look at a queen
I said

I'm no queen

I'm no cat
it's just a saying
people have

your mother
seems to like me
I said

she trusts you
unlike some
of the boys around here
Jane said

I nodded

and Daddy said
he can see
you have a honest eye

I looked away
the hedgerows

were high
a blue sky
a bright sun
birds flew
from hedgerows

we came near the village
and I hoped
we could buy a drink
from the grocery shop
and maybe get
to be nearer to her

her hand just inches away
the fingers slim
with unpainted nails
and her lips parted
just enough to see
the gleam of teeth

I felt undone
in love
unsure
just to be there
watching the flow
and slight wind
in her dark hair.

Terry Collett

Lovely Tours

Lovely Tours

Miriam

says to me
maybe we
can look round
you and me

sure

I say

and so when
the coach stops
we get out
and wander
keeping close
to others
from our coach

the hippie
couple there
out in front
he bearded
with a band
round his head
and his girl
with long hair
hanging loose
both smoking

Miriam

takes my hand
her own hand
small and warm
pulse going
her red hair
all tight curls
her bright eyes
over me

isn't it
exciting?

I don't do
exciting
I just look
and take in
and enjoy
I tell her

we walk on
through the streets
look in shops
look at stuff

she holds things
in her hands
handles them
values them

like last night
in the coach
in Paris

lying down
in our seats
us kissing
her fingers
exploring
my hot crotch

my fingers
spidering
up her thigh
as music
on the coach
radio
eases out
Beethoven's
piano piece
concerto
number 5

or such like

and she's there
holding me

my fingers
spidering
to her nest

lights dim low
music flows
down the rows
of coach seats

some sleeping
some talking
some of us
making out
best we can
in dim light
in Paris
over night.

Terry Collett

Lovesick 1974

You were lovesick over her,
but she was out of your class,
on a different plane,
different ideas and values,
but you were lovesick over her.

Wrote her too many letters
over too few days
when she was away,
and you so lovesick
you couldn't eat
or relax or read
and only music fed
your hunger for her.

She brought you back
a postcard
by some Russian artist
and you pinned it
to the door of your room,
and had the one photograph
she gave you framed
like some work of art
and you'd gaze at it
listening to Mahler,
looking towards
a future with her
you knew you wouldn't have
not in a thousand days.

You were lovesick over her,
over her bright eyes
and long hair,
and those tight,
but small breasts
you never saw,
but hoped to,
but never did,
just the outline

propped up behind
the jumper or tee shirt.

You were lovesick over her
but she went off
and the sickness eased
and went away
and you never saw her
another day.

Terry Collett

Loving North 1914

He has left the room, and left
you lying on the bed, and it
had happened so unexpectedly,
and with him of all people, and
you lie there looking at the door,
as if expecting he would come
back, maybe forgotten something,
and as it comes to you what had
happened, and how he had been
there, and you had seen him, as
you had often seen him: polishing
your husband's car, making sure
it was as shiny as he could get it.

You stopped at the door watching
him, taking in his arms, and how
muscular they were, yet not brutish
as some men's were, just protective.

He turned and looked at you, and
seemed embarrassed, as if you had
caught him at something unlawful,
and he held the cloth in his hand,
and looked at the car, and asked if
you thought it was good enough,
and called you my lady. You wanted
him to call you by your first name.

Poor North, how shy he looked.

You said: call me by my first name;
he did, and you went to him by the
car, and something opened up in you,
and you brought him close to you,
and kissed him, and held him tightly.

The rest unfolded, almost logically,
as if it followed from the first premise
of the kiss. He has gone, and you lie

there with a fulfilled, yet unfulfilled sigh.

Terry Collett

Lowly Faint 1980

Susan had found the ferry trip
over the Channel,
harder than she thought:
she'd felt sick
and couldn't eat or drink,
but sat downstairs
in the lounge,
either pretending
to be asleep,
or gazing at passing people
and wondering where
they were going or doing.

Jude was on her mind
most of the time,
how he was or
where he'd gone
after leaving her
on the platform
and seeing the train
off out of sight.

She had looked
from the train window
until he was a mere blot
on the far off landscape.

Now as she was on a train to Paris
she found she couldn't stop
thinking of him,
how she should have told him
about being a nun
on the outskirts of Paris,
but she hadn't,
just let him kiss her,
full of hope that
when she returned
from her journey
she'd say yes to his

marriage proposal
and that life would proceed
as he had thought.

And there was those
odd couples on the train
each of them escaping
like she was from someone
or something
to go somewhere
as if to escape.

She looks out the window
of the train to Paris
watching the scenery change,
hearing people around her
speak French and smile
and laugh,
only vague thoughts
of the convent
she was going to,
what would she have there,
what she would feel like
when the convent doors
closed behind her.

And her parents
they had not wanted her
to enter the convent at all;
Mother with her you'll
be dead to us and Father
saying I never thought
a daughter of mine
would waste their life
amongst lonely old woman
and making her feel
a traitor other than
a possible future saint.

The rush
of the French train
makes her feel

slightly giddy
and lowly faint.

Terry Collett

Lucky Strike 1962

And it was just a lucky moment
the room empty

the kids off
in the playground
the teachers off
to their meal break
and maybe have cigarette
and chat
with other doomed teachers

and Yehudit said
let's go in Benny
and have a smooch

and so we did
and shut the door
and listened for a moment
in case a prefect came along
and found us

then she said
seems ok

so she kissed me
and hugged me

and I felt her
in my arms
her body against mine
her lips on mine

and we closed eyes
and held and kissed
and I thought of her there
her pulsing body
next to mine
fully clothed
(worse luck)

her green uniform
and white blouse
and the tie undone
and I with my
school jacket open
and tie loose

and she said
got lucky here

and I said
blessed
and felt her waist
one hand touching
her behind

my lip kissing her lips
and cheek and head
and God it seemed forever

and then a sound
the door opened
and some drip of a prefect
said
what you doing?

biology lesson
I said
needs homework

what? he said
get out of there
it's out of bounds
for pupils
in non school times

so we walked out
him eyeing us angrily
and we walked on
down the passageway
of the school

hand holding
still wanting
to kiss and hug still.

Terry Collett

Lunch At Bordeaux 1970

We stopped at Bordeaux for lunch
and found a cafe

Miriam
sat next to me
the others sat elsewhere
around other tables

I'll be glad to get
to our first base camp
so I can shower
and get my hair washed
Miriam said

can I wash your back?
I said

she smiled
I think the other women
in the female showers
might object
she said

shame
I said

it is
she said

we ordered lunch
and beers
and she told me
about her job
and her parents

and I told her
about my nursing job
and my family

you're not married?
she said

no not yet
I said

do you want
to marry?

not yet
I like my freedom
to go where I want
when I want
I said

me too
she said

I sat studying her
as she talked
her tight red curly hair
her bright blue eyes
her small
but adequate breasts
her figure

did I really fall
asleep going
through Paris?
she said

yes you lay your head
on my shoulder

what was Paris like?

It was evening when
we went through
but it was all lit up
and the radio
was playing Beethoven
piano music

and it seemed
quite romantic
but you were asleep
so it was wasted
I said

shame
she said
might make it up
when we get
to Sans Sebastian base camp
she said smiling

hope so
I said

our lunches came
and the waitress
set them down
on the table
and walked away
with a nice sway
of her butt

do you always gaze
at female butts?

no not always
just nice ones
I said

she shook her head
and we ate
as it was getting late.

Terry Collett

Lunch Recess 1961

Greenfield lights up a cigarette
behind the metal work room
during recess

want a drag?
he asks

no I don't
I say

I can hear the other kids
in the play area
over the building
voices loud
laughter
girl's screaming
and shouting
from the their area
a fair bit away

where did you get
the ciggie?
I ask

I liberated it
from my mother's bag
he says with a smile
she won't miss it

he's shorter than I
plump with brown eyes
like conkers
he puffs away frantically

hate school
he says
all the bloody lessons
and teachers

Miss D isn't bad
I suggest
young with nice legs

not that young
he says
holding his cigarette
between two fingers
old enough
to be your mother
he says

only if she had me
very young
I say

what's it matter?
he says
she's still a brain teaser
he puffs away again

P.E. next
I remind him
football
or maybe hockey

sweat buckets either way
he says
puffing at me
who's the bit of skirt
who hangs about for you
by the school van?
he asks

just a girl
I say

that's it isn't it
just a girl
he says

the cigarette stuck

between lips

they're all the same
all thinking about
who to pick to marry
and have bloody kids by
and O god
I feel sick thinking
about it
best avoid them
he says

the cigarette hangs limp
from his lips

now bloody P.E.
he says
I'll tell Friggitt
I've got gut ache

he presses the cigarette
against the wall
of the metal work room

best go then
I say

and as we go
I think of Jane
across the roof of building
in the girls' area
her dark eyes and hair
driving me to distraction
but not despair.

Terry Collett

Lunch With Yiska 1962

I went home
with Yiska for lunch.

Her mother said little;
welcomed me
in a tired voice
and laid out
the small lunch
for us both.

Watch the time,
her mother said,
you don't want
to be late back
to school.

We've only just
got here,
Yiska said.

I know but if
you talk too much
you will be late,
her mother replied,
not looking at me
but at Yiska.

We ate our lunch;
her mother eating over
by the sink
while she worked.

How was
your morning?
I asked.

Boring stuff,
Yiska said,
double maths

and geography
and then biology.

You're there to learn,
her mother said,
looking around at Yiska,
ignoring me.

I do learn,
but it is still boring,
Yiska replied.

To learn you have
to take an interest,
how can you
have interest
if you are bored?
Her mother said.

If a tap drips
long enough
it still gets
things soaked,
I said,
same with learning.

The mother
looked at me
and said:
do you find
school work boring?

Pretty much,
I said,
but I take in
what they yak about.

That is not the way
to learn,
her mother said,
looking at me full on,
her eyes searching me.

Anyway eat your lunch
or you will be late
back to school,
she said.

We ate our lunch
hoping her mother
would go off somewhere,
but she didn't,
she stayed in the kitchen
working away
preparing vegetables.

We ate and once
while her mother's back
was turned
Yiska kissed me
quickly on the cheek.

After we had eaten our lunch
and I said thank you
and goodbye,
we returned to school.

Sorry about that,
Yiska said,
one of her bad days.

No worries,
I said.

We went off to each
our own playgrounds
and my heart
was making
thumping sounds.

Terry Collett

Lydia At Waterloo 1958

I went with Benny
to Waterloo train station
it was busy
people rushing about
getting on or off trains.

The white and grey steam
rising up to the station roof
or puffing out across
the platform.

Your old lady
wasn't keen on me
taking you here again
Benny said.

I looked at him
I think it's
the money thing
I said
remembering Mum
at the front door
that morning
eyeing him and me.

She went and got
the money.

Only a few pence
on the bus
he said.

That's how she is
I said.

A loud burst of steam
took our focus.

Benny smiled

don't you just love that
that power
and the smell
of these engines?

Yes I do
I said.

A porter walked past
pushing a wagon
of mailbags
his hat pushed back
on his head
sweat on his brow.

I wonder where
my dad went today?
I said
he went to Bristol
the other week.

Does he go to Scotland?
Benny said.

I guess he must
I said.

Edinburgh?
He asked.

Not sure
I replied.

Want to go one day
Benny said.

Me too
I said.

Could go together
he said.

I liked that idea
the long journey
looking out
the window
seeing the smoke
from the engine
going past
the window.

A loudspeaker
gave out information
about some train.

Out beyond
the station
came hard rain.

Terry Collett

Lydia Muses On Edinburgh 1958

Edinburgh? You want to go
get a train to Edinburgh?
Lydia's dad says. Not now,
when I'm older, Lydia says,

looking at her father's steely
eyes, sober, smile lingering.
On your own? He asks, gazing
at her, taking in her skinny

frame, arms, legs and long
straight hair. No, with Benny,
she says, we went to Kings
Cross Station saw the train

that goes to Edinburgh station.
Whose idea was that? He asks,
Benny boy's? No we both had
the idea, she says, wishing

Benny was there as he would
know what to say. Long way
to Edinburgh, her father says,
picking up his cup of tea at the

breakfast table. 6 hours the porter
man said when Benny asked him,
Lydia says. Her father sips his tea.
Lydia waits. So can I go? She asks

her dad. He looks at her. When
you're older maybe. Well, got to
go to work, he says, gets up, pats
her head, says see you, Lydia.

Lydia watches him go, hears the
door shut. Her mother comes in
with a cigarette hanging from her
lips, her hair in rollers. What you

doing? She asks Lydia. Going to
Edinburgh with Benny, Lydia says.
Her mother stares at her and shakes
her head. Well make sure you pack

your clothes and empty your piggy-
bank, her mother says and walks off
back to the kitchen. Lydia frowns,
gets her piggy-bank and shakes it.

It sounds empty, except for a few
coins rattling. Can I go out with
Benny? She calls out to her mother.
She puts down her pink piggy-bank.

She walks into the kitchen where her
mother is washing up. Can I? She asks
her mother. Can you what? Go out
with Benny? Again? You only saw

him yesterday? Her mother says through
a mouthful of cigarette smoke. Need
to see him about Edinburgh, Lydia says.
What about Edinburgh? Her mother

says her words clouded in smoke. Dad
said I can go to Edinburgh with Benny,
Lydia says anxiously. Did he now, well
he can darn well pay for it can't he, her

mother says, well off you go then, and
don't be too late, need you to help me
sort out the washing later, I don't suppose
your big slut of a sister will shift her

backside out of bed before noon. Lydia
bites her lip. Watches her mother doing
the dishes. Ok won't be late, Lydia says,
walking out of the kitchen, along the hall,

out of the front door, stares out at the Square,

wondering if Benny is about out there.

Terry Collett

Lydia Not Ready 1958

Lydia's old man
opened the door
after I knocked.

Come for the Princess
have you?
he said.

Yes please
I said.

He looked at me
where you going?

Morning matinee
at the ABC.

He nodded
how much is it?

6d
I said.

LYDIA
Benny Boy
is here
he called out
over his shoulder

Lydia came
to the door
she looked
half asleep.

Here
her old man said
and gave her
some coins
into her

small palm
behave or I'll tan
your backside
he went back inside.

Morning matinee
I said.

O of course
she said
I forgot
what time
does it start?

Soon
I said.

Won't be long
come in a minute.

So I entered
into the passageway
as she disappeared
into the kitchen/bathroom.

Her mother came out
of the kitchen
eyed me
she won't be long
just having
a quick wash
and brush her hair
come in
the sitting room
she said.

I followed her
into the sitting room.

Lydia's brother Hem
was sitting eating
his breakfast

he looked at me
then looked away.

We don't talk
since I punched
him down
after he threw
a firework
at my sister
the year before.

I sat on a chair
and looked
around the room
for a few minutes
in silence.

Then Lydia came
ready
she said.

So we went out
and off
through the Square
sorry I wasn't ready
she said
I forgot.

No worries
I said.

We walked
down the slope
and away
the start
of a new day.

Terry Collett

Lydia Unwell 1958

Benny knocked
at Lydia's parents' flat
to see if she
was coming out
to the morning
cinema matinee,

the door opened
and her mother stood there
hair in curlers
cigarette hanging
from the corner
of her thin lipped mouth,

yes what do you want?
she said folding her arms
over her aproned breast,

is Lydia coming
to the matinee?
Benny asked,

no she's not well
got a cold or something
the mother said
letting out a puff of smoke
as she spoke,

O Benny said
sorry about that
hope she's feeling
better soon,

the mother
looked at him
I will pass on
your words she said,

could I see her

for a few minutes?

Benny said,

no she's seeing no one
the mother replied
her eyes staring at him,

he nodded
and said ok
and walked away,

the door closed behind him
with a hard click,

he walked back across
the Square disappointed
Lydia wasn't coming
but there was nothing
he could do,

he took out
his 6 shooter
toy gun out
of the holster
and spun it
around his finger
a few times like he'd seen
Billy the Kid do
in a film he'd seen,

then quickly put it back
in the holster
with a flourish,

then walked on down
the slope towards
Meadow Row,

off to the matinee
at the ABC cinema,
across the bomb site,

looking forward
to going to the cinema
with his old man
that night.

Terry Collett

Lydia's Morning 1958

You wake up,
and your big sister, Gloria,
lies beside you
in the bed;

(her Spiv boyfriend
and she have a had
a row, and he
no longer sleeps

in the bed with her.)
Most of the night
she snored, and now
and then passed wind,

or called out
the boyfriend's name;
but you, Lydia,
drifted in and out

of sleep like driftwood
on the seashore.
You wonder
what day it is,

and scratch your head,
and look at your
sister's back at the pink
bra thing she wears,

which you can see
through her thin nightie.
Saturday, yes, Saturday
because your father

came home last night,
at some god knows
what awful hour,
drunk, and singing

in the passage
some Irish song
to your mother,
and she was guiding him

to the bedroom,
and he was singing
quite loudly,
which woke you up,

then it went silent again.
You sit up in bed
and look around the room;
your sister's clothes

are cast over the chair
to her left,
a pair of underwear
hangs abandoned

on the bedpost
at the foot of the bed.
You climb out
of the bed

and let your feet
dangle over the side,
your small
nine year old toes

wiggle.
Then you get up
and walk through
the sitting room,

walk past the sideboard,
and into the passage
then along to the toilet,
where you disrobe

and unload.

You think of Benny,
who said he was going
to the cinema

and did you want
to go with him;
he asked yesterday
on the way home

from school.
See what Mum says,
you said to him,
see if she has money to spare.

No matter about her,
Benny said,
I've money enough
for us both;

only going to be a shilling
if that, he said.
You sit and sigh,
and look at the white wall.

Maybe, you think,
Mum will
let me go,
after all.

Terry Collett

Lydia's Spin 1958

Lydia tried to spin
Benny's six shooter
around her finger
as he had done
but it slipped off
her thin finger
and fell on the grass.

How do you do it
and I can't?
she said.

Practice and practice
he said
picking up the gun
and showed her how
it was done.

Can I try again?
she said.

He handed her the gun
she put on her finger
and tried again
but it fell off onto
the grass once more.

He picked up the gun
and said
here let me put it
on your finger
and so he did
and held it there
now turn your finger
slightly upward
and spin it.

He released her finger
and she raised her finger

spun it around
and it stayed on.

She said
done it done it
and looped the gun
into her hand
now I'm a proper cowgirl.

Sure are
Benny said
do it again.

She spun the gun
on her finger again
and it spun around.

Good see you
can do it
he said.

He took the gun
from her finger
and spun it around
his finger quick
and slipped it
into his holster
at his side.

She was pleased
she'd done it.

They walked off
the grass and back up
the slope into the Square
as it was lunchtime
and her mother said
not to be late.

So he left her
at her door
and went up

to his flat to see
if his mother
had his lunch also.

He liked that he'd
showed her how
to spin the gun
and it had been good
and fun.

Terry Collett

Lying There

Will he return?
you asked yourself.
Doubts come.

Doubts large and
depressing. How
to forget? Him and

his words, the letters
he wrote, the way he
was. The seeing of

others behind your
back. That girl from
the office, the thin

one with John Lennon
kind of spectacles,
that's who you think

he's had or having.
Will he return? You
want him to, but don't,

that combination of both.
The question why he
did haunts you, and why

with her? You lay and
stare and want it different,
want it not to have been,

to have been a secret
you didn't know. Really?
You mused, secret behind

your back kind of shit.
No, not one bit. He said
he loved you. All words.

Words on words. Yours
is a lonely bed now. None
to share, just you there

crying and lying there.

Terry Collett

Magazine Viewing 1959

We found a quiet corner,
far from prefect's eyes
or nosing teachers
on the prowl.
You opened up the magazine
with females in all stages of undress
and in all kinds of poses.

Davis peered closer,
holding the page.

Sutcliffe stared
at the centrepiece.

What the feck's that?
You shook your head.
What do you think it is,
Eddie? You said.

I stared along side Davis.
The female lay on some bed,
pillow behind her head,
two large mounds of flesh
with brown peaks.

Where'd you find it?
Davis said.
Under my old man's bed,
you said, amongst others.

I scanned as each page was turned,
taking in the image shown,
learning bit by bit,
what was where
and what was it.

Prefect, coming,
Davis said, standing back.

The magazine was out of sight,
the prefect wandered off,
hands behind his back,
eyes peering about.

Close thing,
you said,
tucking the magazine
in a pocket of your jacket.

I took the images seen
with me into class,
that one's boobs
and that one's ass.

Terry Collett

Magdalene And The Beatles's First Lp

Magdalene watched Mary
bend down to put on the LP.
The Beatles. They'd saved

up and bought it together.
She took in Mary's stockinged
thigh showing through the slit

in the side of the school skirt.
Mary placed the LP carefully
onto the turntable, with her finger

put the needle arm down onto
the vinyl. The music started up,
Mary stood up and sat next to

Magdalene on the single bed.
Magdalene sensed her there,
her thigh next to hers, her

warmth, their knees almost
touching. What did your Ma
say when you said you bought

the Beatles? Magdalene asked.
She said nowt, Mary replied,
but Da said it was a load of

shite and where did I get
the money from to buy it?
John Lennon's voice sang

over the twanging guitars.
Magdalene said, did you
tell him we bought it together?

Mary nodded. Her hands
pushed between her thighs,
her young face lit up by

the room's light. Don't you
think Paul's a dish? Mary asked.
Magdalene shrugged her

shoulders, studied Mary's
knee where a spot of flesh
showed through a hole in

the black school stockings.
She wanted to move closer,
kiss the cheek, place her

lips on the skin. She breathed
in the borrowed scent that
Mary wore. Said she'd liberated

it from her Ma's room. Mary
talked of the boy they'd met
in the woods above the school.

Tried it on so he did, she said,
over the guitars and Lennon's
loud voice. Magdalene wished

she could put her hands where
the boy had tried. I put him
straight, Mary said, kneed him

where his fatherhood might flow.
Mary moved up and down on
the bed in response to the music.

The bedsprings complained.
Magdalene sensed the movement,
took in Mary's behind going up

and down on the bed cover.
Glory be. She wanted to kiss.
Needed the hand to touch Mary's,

the skin to join up with hers.

Downstairs a voice bellowed
to keep the bloody noise down.

Mary sighed and bent down
to turn the knob the thigh
revealed in the skirt's slit,

the spot of flesh through
the hole in the bended knee.
Magdalene captured the image.

Hid it in her memory bank for
later, for bedtime, for the cosy
pretend hold, maybe more if in
her dream she was lucky and bold.

Terry Collett

Magdalene And The Deep Dark

Magdalene looks from the window
into the dark. Things have been
promised, secrets kept, lies maintained.
Hands washed, dried, open curtains,

hold the cloth, the patterned flowers.
She sees no stars or moon, no galaxies
beyond, just the deep dark. If she steps
back she can see her reflection, the pink

dress, the pale face, black fringe of hair,
blackberry eyes. She can mouth words,
utter silent swear words, lips motion
them, but none hear. All is forbidden,

or so it seems, the parents marking the
boundaries, punishing trespassing, both
in unison, he scornful and hard of hand,
the mother sharp of tongue can cut her

through, telling her where she can go
and what to do. Magdalene can drink in
the deep dark; can swallow mouthfuls
of emptiness like a greedy child, silent,

staring, becoming slowly rebellious,
becoming wild. She can pull odd faces in
the dark reflecting glass, poke out a tongue,
say silently all the words that they forbid,

outlaw that she is in her pink dress and white
pull up socks. He has his ways, his finger
against his lips, swearing her to secrecy,
things done, not told about or spoke of,

kept between the four walls of her room
and confines of her bed. The deep dark
stares back, the starless skies, lost moon.
They'll come back soon, the mother to their

bedroom, giggling and laughter, he calling
for Magdalene, his voice shallow, his growing
along the walls, shadow. She sighs, waits, wonders
if, beyond the deep dark, some other life exists

for her, some other plan in later years will come
to pass, when he doesn't enter her or beat her ass.

Terry Collett

Magdalene's Misbehaviour 1963

Your da was in a mood
he'd received a letter
from the nuns at school
that you'd been insolent
and had been
punished for it.

Can't understand ya
he said
brought up
a good Catholic
and you behave
like this
I'd give ya
ma hand
but I don't think
it'd be any good.

He stormed out
to the garden
and took it out
on the vegetable bed
with his spade.

Now you've got him
in a mood
and it'll be me
that has to get him
calmed down
your ma said
just because you
want to act
the big lady.

She went into
the kitchen
and banged
pots and pans about
and moaned to herself

You went
to your room
and shut the door
feck the nuns
you muttered
and lay on your bed.

You had Mary
on this bed
a week or so ago
you and she
doing things
that'd make
your da's eyes
pop from his head
and his jaw
dropped like
a dead donkey's tool.

You kissed your arm
pretended it was Mary
she lying there
beside you
her snugly body
close to yours.

Downstairs
the slamming
of doors.

Terry Collett

Magdalene's Punishment 1963

Sister Bridget
slammed her ruler
over the palm of my hand
her features cold and stiff
as she did so.

I let no emotions show
in my features.

The sting came
and remained like stain.

She did it three times
on each palm
then let my hands
fall at my sides.

She stared at me
that Magdalene
is what happens
when you act
as you have
she said
go and sit down.

I walked back
to my desk
and sat down
next to Mary.

I will not have
such behaviour
in my class
while I am trying
to teach
she said.

The other pupils
in class

stared at me briefly
then stared at the front
and the nun who walked
back and forth
in front
of the black board
like a lioness
looking for more prey
to feed her emptiness.

Are you all right?
Mary whispered
leaning close to me
staring ahead to see
where the nun
was looking.

Silly old cow
Mary whispered.

I'm ok
I said
sensing the sting
still there
but keeping
my emotions in check
as I did as a little girl
after my father
had slapped me
in one of his
drunken rages.

I sensed
Mary's hand
touch mine
under the desk
she stroked them.

I wished we were alone
and I could kiss her
as we had
a few days ago

in my room
when my mother
was out.

The nun yakked
on about St Paul
and his voyages
and how
he nearly drowned.

I wished the old bat
would hang herself
with her rosary
or drown out
in some deep sea.

Terry Collett

Maid Marian's Shot 1955

I had a bow
over my shoulder
and threes arrows
tucked in

a mother-made quiver
and was walking over
Meadow Row bomb site
with Janice beside me

-my Maid Marian-
what are you going
to shoot?
she asked

isn't it dangerous?
gran would say
it was dangerous
no the arrows

have got suckers
on the end
they're meant to stick
onto a surface

not enter into it
I said
so what are you going
to hit Benny?

a target on a wall
I tell her
she form an O
with her mouth

what target on a wall?
she said
as we came
to a brick wall

of a bombed out house
here will be the target
I said
she stood and watched

as I drew the outline
of a man with chalk
-a kid always has
a piece of chalk

in his pocket
as well as string
and marbles-
who is it meant to be?

she asked
doesn't look like
anyone I know
it's just a target

an outline of a man
I drew in eyes
nose and mouth
and a heart

and stand back
there is the target
I said
what now?

she said
I stand back a pace or so
and try hit the heart
with an arrow

I said
she nodded her head
so that her fair hair moved
and the red beret shifted

on her head

we walked back
a few paces
over the stones

and rubble
of the bomb site
until we reached
a distant I could hit

the drawn target
I removed the bow
from my shoulder
and took an arrow

from the quiver
and licked the sucker end
of the arrow
then placed the arrow

onto the string
and drew the arrow back
with my fingers
holding the cock firmly

will you hit his heart?
Janice said
I eyed along my arm
and arrow sucker

and at the drawn heart
and released the cock
and the arrow whizzed
through the air

and hit and stuck
to the wall
just on the edge
of the drawn heart

almost got it
Janice said
almost killed him

I walked to the target

and pulled off the arrow
it would have
killed him anyway
I said

can I have ago?
she asked
what if your gran
sees you?

I thought you said
she said it was dangerous?
she did
Janice said

but I won't tell her
I had ago
and she won't see me
what if she did?

I asked
she hesitated
taking the bow
from my hand

and she looked around
the bomb site
and over at the road
over the way

then back along
Meadow Row
satisfied her gran
was not around

she took the bow
from my hand
and the arrow
and attempted to put

the cock end
onto the string
how's it go?
she asked

I showed her
and her thin fingers
held the arrow in place
and the other thin fingers

held the bow
she closed an eye
and looked down
her thin arm

at her other hand
and the sucker end
of the arrow
got it?

I asked
got what?
she asked
the heart in view

I said
no I can't see it
you have
the wrong eye closed

I tell her
o
she said
and closed

the other eye instead
o yes now I see it
she said
as she drew back

the cock end
of the arrow

then she released it
and the arrow shot

through the air
and bounced off
the target
by the drawn head

it didn't stick
she said
you didn't licked
the sucker end

with spit
I said
yuk
she said

and handed me back
the bow
wiping her small hands
on her flowery dress

if gran had seen me
do that
I'd be in
for a good hiding

she said
I walked off
over the rubble
to get my arrow

and she stood watching
with the noon day sun
over her
fair haired head

you'd have killed
maybe
I called over
and said.

Terry Collett

Make Peace 1997

Una folds
the letter
and puts it

in the white
envelope
grim reading

Mother'd died
from cancer
last weekend

no one rang
to tell her
not a soul

just the one
lone letter
from a friend

saying so
so she'd gone
to her God

closer to
Him than me
cut me off

from her life
now her death
Una says

to herself
all because
I was gay

and slept with
the women
not the men

God's curse on
you she'd said
now she's dead

Nuala
my lover
will console

me today
when she comes
we'll make love

in my bed
and make peace
with the ma

in my head.

Terry Collett

Makemkov's Muse.

Makemkov had a sudden
Thought while sitting on his bed,
Having a smoke, gazing out
Of the window at the new

Apartments across the way,
Where some young dame was slipping
Into something light and cool,
Unknowing that he gazed like this

On other days, the thought he
Had disturbed the sexy sight,
The image becoming blurred
Into another lustful

Smudge, he was going to be
Dead one day, the thought revealed,
Unclean or not so, he did
Not know, but die he would, he

Neither grand nor good, his death
Would come as all deaths came, each
With its owner's borrowed name.

Terry Collett

Mamie And You In Madrid.

Madrid
and after the street salesman
conned you

out of coins
in your change
Mamie said

well put it down
to experience
we all get caught

at one time or other
and they have
brought forth

great art
and you stared at her
at her hair and eyes

and said
yes I guess
but you were still peeved

about it but then
thought of the night before
when you and she

had slept all night
in the coach
through France

and into Spain
she with her head
on your shoulder

making little
snoring sounds
sometimes talking

in her sleep
other times
turning towards you

with her mouth
slightly ajar
and her hair

in a mess
and you had moved in
on her and kissed

her brow
like one planting
a soft kiss

on a corpse
and that made you laugh
and she said

what's so funny?
and you said
taking hold

of her hand
crossing a street
just something

entered my head
what?
she said

about kissing a corpse
you replied
what corpse?

and that reminded you
of the time they brought
your father's body home

for the night before

his funeral and as
he lay there

in the coffin
your gran had said
kiss him goodbye

and so you did
and that stayed with you
the feel

and chilled skin
and how it didn't seem
to be him

just a shell
but you loved him still
for all that

and when you told her that
she said
how sweet

and you gazed at her
at her eyes
and hair

and kissable lips
as you walked
the Spanish street.

Terry Collett

Mamie In Malaga.

Mamie met you
in the base camp bar

in Malaga
her curly red hair

damp from a recent shower
and said

Picasso was born here
In this bar?

you said
No

she moaned
In the city

in 1881
and she took the drink

you'd bought her
I like Picasso don't you?

she asked
taking a sip

of the drink
and you noticed

the tight tee shirt
snugly holding

her firm breasts
and her eyes bright

as sunlight's breaking dawn
yes

you said
I like his later work

not the Blue
or Pink period or

that Cubist shite
and your eyes

slipped downwards
along her slender frame

the tight blue jeans
caressing her small

but plumpish ass
her fingers holding

the glass
and you thinking

of other things
far removed

from Picasso's art
though knowing he

would understand
where your mind

had wandered
and what the scene

your mind had set
like some dramatist

preparing for a play
she sipped more

of the drink
her head thrown back

the nice turn
of the neck

the chin
the nose

the ears protruding slight
between her red

and curly hair
and wondered deep

as you drank your own
if the other hair below

between her thighs
was as red and tight

as that above
and she said

breaking through
your thoughts

Was it lust or love
that moved his brush

Picasso I mean?
and oh you mused

taking on her words
and squeezing

the meaning
from each syllable

that was uttered
on her breath

to lay my head
upon her breast

not to sleep
but dreaming rest

and you turning to her
said High love or low lust

fed by his fond muse
moved his brush I trust.

Terry Collett

Man Amongst Men 1940

Just when you think
your mind has accepted
a situation, it betrays you,
and asks: why have you
lost your legs and are blind?

And how will you cope
and gives a picture
of many mornings,
when you will wake up,
and see nothing again,
never see a sunset or sunrise,
never walk or dance again,
and it brings you down
and depresses you.

When I wake up
this morning,
that is how it is,
that numb darkness,
that disorientation,
that lostness.

I hear footsteps
on the ward,
near my bed.

Morning Grace,
how are you
this morning?

Who are you?
I ask.

Sister Wellings,
come to see how you are,
she says.

Depressed and fed up,

I say,
putting on a grumpy face,
staring towards where
I think she is.

Not surprised at that,
she says,
I'd be depressed
and fed up, too,
if I lost my legs
and was blind,
but you are a fighter,
Grace and will
overcome this just
give it time.

How much time?
I ask.

I sense her hands
move the bed covers back,
and her fingers
feel along
the bandaged leg stumps.

As long as it takes,
she says,
I was on a ward last month
where we had soldiers
wounded at Dunkirk.

Did you?
I say,
my boyfriend died at Dunkirk.

The thought wounds me,
and I almost choke
on the following words:
we were going marry.

O God, how sad
and now this,

she says,
as her fingers
take off the bandages.

I feel her hands
move over the stumps.

They're healing well,
she says,
soon have
the bandages off completely.

I recall Clive
touching my thighs,
and his fingers moving over
where she moves now.

Then what?
I say,
can I have artificial legs?

Of course,
I expect in time,
she says.

I try to imagine
walking on legs
not mine,
trying to balance
and trying to imagine
Philip watching me
and wondering what
he would think then,
and would he
then just be a man
amongst men?

Terry Collett

Marbles In Pockets 1954.

Look at these
I show her
in my palm

three marbles
blue and green
and one red

Helen pokes
with finger
turns over

and over
then she stares
through thick lens

of glasses
at the shades
of colours

beautiful
she tells me
standing back

her enlarged
girly eyes
look at me

I then move
the marbles
from my palm

to pocket
of my jeans
can I hold

one of them?
she asks me
sure I say

and get one
and place it
in her palm

a small palm
delicate
like a pink

rose petal
the marble
seems a gem

to her eyes
she moves it
with finger

round and round
red and pink
becoming

almost one
in her palm
she smells it

she rubs it
beautiful
she utters

you keep it
I tell her
as a gift

she lifts her
teary eyes
upon me

you mean it?
she mutters
sure I say

she kisses

the marble
and puts it

in the small
dress pocket
and leaves it

to nest there
like an egg
then we walk

slowly up
Meadow Row
to get chips

from Neptune's
for lunch time
to eat on

the bomb site
and I wish
as we walk

I was that
red marble
resting there

in the green
dress pocket
lying there
all unseen.

Terry Collett

Marks Of Sin

You waited for Fay
by the entrance
of the outdoor
swimming pool

in Bedlam Park
the Saturday afternoon sun
still strong
the voices and screams

of the kids in the pool
coming through
the high hedge
that surrounded all

around except where
the entrance was
with its turnstiles
and changing rooms

and wire boxes
where kids
kept their clothes
Pete Badham and his cronies

had gone by and in
a few minutes before
giving you the hard stare
which you returned

with equal share
you wondered if Fay's father
had stopped her going
finding some passage

in the Bible that he claimed
made it a sin
or maybe she had been kept in
for some misdemeanour

but then you saw her
coming through the park
in a blue dress
with a white towel

wrapped under an arm
thought you might not come
you said as she came
to the entrance

Mum let me come
after Daddy'd gone
off to work
she said

she opened a hand
to show the coins
held there
her eyes you noticed

were red
as if she'd been crying
glad you're here
you said

me too
she replied
and you both went in
each to the separate areas

for boys and girls
once you had changed
and put your clothes
in the wire box

you went out
to the pool
and dived in
the cool water

and waited for Fay

to come in
Dave Walker was there
at the deep end

keeping an eye
on Badham and his cronies
giving you the thumbs up
when Fay came out

she stood hesitant
on the edge
of the pool
dressed in her black

swimming costume
come on in
you called and waved
she climbed down

into the water
and swam towards you
her fair hair
darkened by the water

her legs flapping
behind her
as she swam
her hands pushing through

the water's skin
as she came to you
she put her arms
around your neck

her damp face
close to yours
you put your arms
around her waist

and she winced
and you let go
what's up?

you asked

nothing

she said

just a bruise

and she swam off

to the edge of the pool

and you followed her

and she pulled herself

onto the edge

and sat there

looking out

at the other kids swimming

you heaved yourself

onto the edge of the pool

beside her

she looked away

towards the high hedge

and you noticed

thin red marks

on her thigh

what's that?

you asked

pointing to her thigh

sign I have sinned

she whispered

Daddy said

to show the flesh

is a sin

and wouldn't let me come

and I answered him back

and he made the mark of

me having sinned

she stared at you

and touched your hand
say nothing to anyone
she said
promise?

ok
you said
let's go swim
she said

and dived in again
you seeing
the red marks
and sensing the pain.

Terry Collett

Marriage Bleeds

You see him go to work,
see him get in his car,
start up the motor, give
a wave. You wave back,
look at him, put on the
smile, watch him go down
the drive and out of sight.

The girl from the cafe
will come soon, will kiss
your cheek, take your
hand in hers, lead you
away from the door and
let it close behind like a
guillotine cutting off the
husband like a felon's head.

You feel a swelling heat
rise in you, a deep need
of her. Small talk done with,
little secrets revealed and you
take her hand in yours and
lead her to the guest room
at the end of the hall(not
the marital bed, in bad taste) .

She undresses slowly, article
by article, you undress slowly,
but inside wanting to get on
with it, feel her heat you up,
unfreeze you. You both recline
on the bed naked, hugging close,
kissing here and there soft places,
swallowed by the deepest needs.

Out there some place your husband
drives, unaware his marriage bleeds.

Marseilles 1970

Marseilles was good
Miriam and Benny
got off the coach
with others
and walked about
for a while
had coffee
and a bite to eat
at some cafe
and saw the sights
hand in hand.

I could live here
Miriam said
if I had a job
and you were here
with me.

No can do
I have a job
back home
to go back to
but it is a place
I guess you could
enjoy living in
Benny said.

Near the sea
and fishing boats
and fish everyday
she said.

And what
about nights?
he said
we could walk along
by the port and stand
and watch the moon
sitting on the sea.

And have sex
in some place
where we had a view
of the sea
she said.

The others were
walking back
to the coach
so they walked back too.

Marseilles had
been good
Benny mused
with a splendid view.

Terry Collett

Martha At The Mother House.

Martha was shown
into a parlour
inside the front door
of the mother house

by a plump nun
in black and white
who looked like a penguin
out for a stroll

wait in there
she said
someone
will fetch you

in time
so Martha looked around
the room at the plain
white walls

the heavy curtains
at the windows
the huge crucifix
on the wall opposite

whose plaster Christ
seemed battered
an aged
the plaster had lines

and cracks
on the legs
and arms
and the hands

were contorted
like a crab
on its back
with rusty nails

holding them in place
she moved nearer
and reached up a hand
so that her fingers

could touch the feet
of Christ and run
them over the toes
and feel the nail

going through the feet
she rubbed her fingers there
she used to rub the crucifix
in her grandmother's house

the big one over
the double bed
and if she stood
on the bed

she could reach right up
to touch the face
and beard
and see if she could

hear Him breathe
or if she reached
really high
she could feel His nose

which on her grandmother's
Christ the nose seemed broken
and her grandmother said
that was where

her grandfather
had thrown a shoe in temper
and crack the plaster nose
will he go to Hell?

she recalled asking

her grandmother
O no
her grandmother said

not just for that
and she was pleased
because she liked her grandfather
and his simple ways

and hard toffees
she felt each toe in turn
moving a finger
over the plaster

and remembered
her school friend Mary
who had pressed
chewing gum

into the bellybutton
of the plaster Christ
in the cloister
of the convent school

back in the 1960s
and when Sister Bede
saw it she had to gently
chiselled it out

with a screwdriver
threatening severe punishment
to the girl responsible
but no one told

and even when she left years
after the bellybutton
of the Christ still had
the scar where Sister Bede

had chiselled too hard
there was a cough behind her
and Martha turned

and there was a nun

standing by the door
her eyes dark like berries
and her thin mouth
slowly opened

and she said
are you the girl
who wants to be a nun?
Martha nodded her head

and the nun told her
to follow her and she
went down a dim lit
passageway

the nun in front
pacing slow
each footstep measured
her hands tucked

out of sight
with only the sound
of her heels going
clip clop clip clop

on the flagstones
and the black habit
swaying very gracefully
as she walked

no more words
no questions
no answers
because no one talked.

Terry Collett

Martha' Crucified.

Martha had this thing
about the Crucified.
The image, the cross,
the stretched out arms.

The one in the convent
school along by the chapel
always caught her eye.
Stood there staring.

Get a move on Martha,
the nun said. Don't gape so.
Or the image in the dining
room stuck up on the wall

above the abbess's table.
Painted on she thought.
Not the same. Her mother
had the one her mother

gave her on her deathbed.
Old wood and plaster.
The plaster peeling from
the hands of the Crucified.

Martha gaped at Him,
at His wounds, at the wound
in His side where the spear
went in. Forgive them for

they know not. They did so,
the bastards, she muttered,
putting her fingers on the wound
in the side. She had an ebony

rosary in her skirt pocket. Black
Christ on the small ebony cross.
She fingered in her pocket, said
the prayers, felt the stiff body

on the cross. Sometimes she
took it out and kissed it; the ebony
body, the head, the arms. Once
she had a cross around her neck,

silver, small, given by some old
codger. She felt it warm between
her small breasts. Lost it when she
took it off to wash and it slipped

down the plughole in the convent bog.
She knew her mother had this wooden
crucifix on her chest of drawers.
A dark wood, a fleshy plastered Christ,

nails through and hands and feet.
She kissed the hands when her mother
was out, her lips touching the smooth
plaster, the eyes closed, the feel of

smoothness on flesh. Not the real
Christ of course. Least not yet.
She'd wait her turn. The real thing.
See what death and Heaven bring.

Terry Collett

Martha Dusting 1963

Martha stood
on a wooden chair
to reach the crucifix
on the wall
of the old chapel.

She was dusting
with a yellow duster
(brought from home)
to wipe away
the dust
and cobwebs
attached to the crown
of thorns
of the Crucified
and those about
His beard.

Waaat are ye at?
Martha
a nun said
behind her.

Oi'm dustin'
Martha replied
looking around
at the nun.

Git down
dis once
the nun said
pointing
a thin finger.

But our Lord
is dusty an' full
av cobwebs
Martha said
turning her head

back to the Christ
wiping about
His beard.

Oi said nigh
the nun said firmly.

Martha sighed
and stepped off
the chair
which creaked.

Discipline
is the first tin'
if yer want
ter be a nun
Sister Luke said.

Martha looked
at the nun
yer Lord looked
so sad dare
covered wi' de webs
she said.

Enoof
av yisser blather
the nun said
on yisser way
ter class.

Martha looked
at the Christ
then walked out
the chapel
leaving the nun behind
musing on being a nun
it turning over
in her mind.

Terry Collett

Martha's Confession 1963

Martha closed the door
of the confessional,
and knelt down
in the dim darkness,

and peered through
the wire mesh,
behind which
the priest sat.

She could see
the shadowiness of him there.
Yes my child?
he said in a deep voice,

what do you ask of God?
Martha hoped
there wasn't spiders
anywhere hanging;

if there was she'd scream,
especially if
it was hanging by her head.
She searched as best

she could in the dimness.
Yes, my child?
The priest said.
Bless me, Father,

I have sinned,
she muttered,
her eyes peering
through the mesh,

I last came to confessions...
last Monday it was
because Ma said
to tell you everything,

but I forgot about
the forgetting to say
the Hail Marys,
and of course

I did think horrible things
about Sister Agnes
that old bat,
well she does go on so,

and she has this smell,
but no one tells her,
but it kinds of hangs
about the air,

and well I can't stand
strong smells,
so I said to her about it,
and she became

quite offended,
and that other sin
I forgot,
I did take a cigarette

from Da's pack,
but just the one,
and lit it you see,
and I neigh on choked

and swore,
and I known swearing's a sin,
and I know the Lord hears
and doesn't like

the swear words,
so I am here
to add those sins
to the rest

I am about to say

if I can remember them all,
...and Martha told the list
in a monotone voice,

and the priest sat
gazing at the mesh
wondering if
the Maguire girl

was going to be there
much longer and tried
to hold in a rumbling
stomach noise,

and mused,
but at least
she doesn't
talk about boys.

Terry Collett

Mary And Father And Letter 1963

Mary's father is sitting
in the lounge reading
a newspaper before dinner

Mary comes into the room
and sits in the armchair
by the window
and peers out

her father lowers
the newspaper
there's talk of you
from the nuns
he says

she turns and looks at him
is there
good I hope
she says

no it's not
he says

o well there you are Da
you can't please all
of the people
all of the time

never the time
with you it seems
with the nuns
he says
he shakes out
the newspaper
making noise

what's it this time?
she says
sitting back

in the armchair
letting her backside comfy

words you've said
he says
raising the paper
and peering over the top

what words?
I speak civil
and I answer
the feck questions
about God
and the religion
and maths etc.
what word is this?
she says

he sighs
wishes she were
a young little girl still
not some 14 year old
know it all
with a mouth on her
he lowers the paper
and takes out a letter
from his waistcoat pocket
(slightly screwed up)
and offers it to her
here read it yourself
he says

she leans out of the chair
and takes the letter
from his hand
and sits back down again
and unfolds the letter
and reads

he lifts the newspaper
and reads a sports page

I never did
Mary says
never in my precious
to Christ life have I said that

she reads on
staring at the page
as if it had criticized her
(which it did)
they're like
the fucking Gestapo
she mutters

I was not kissing Magdalene
I was whispering
something to her
Mary mutters to the page
(and her father
if he was listening)
and I never did
call Sister Clare
a virgin waster
Mary muttered on
then she refolds the letter
and puts it
on the arm of the chair
and gazes at her father

well?
he says
what have you to say
for yourself?

she gazes at him
once he'd have
tanned her behind
and sent to bed without dinner
but he'd gone soft
on her since
she'd grown tits
and tried negotiation instead

what's for dinner?
she says

wait and see
he says

so what about the contents
of the good nun's letter?
he says

it was one of those days
she says
womanly things
gets to me

her father lifts
the newspaper
and says tiredly
I see.

Terry Collett

Mary And The Old Priest.

The old priest sat
in the dark of the
confessional. A girl
had entered on the
other side and knelt.

A rustle of clothing,
breathing, a cough.
He was prepared for
the list of sins, the
the soft voice verbal

sprouting, the usual
schoolgirl misdemeanours.
Yes my child? He said.
Mary on the other
side stared at the grille,

tried to make out which
was the priest. Bless me
Father she began, then
the list ran. The priest
placed his hands over

his ears. The list was long,
indelicate, touching on
the obscene. He fumbled
with his beads, tried to
make out the voice,

the owner, which girl?
He thought, peering into
the grille, his eyes searching
through the semi dark.
Mary pushed her knees

together; she sensed the
need to pee. She knelt holding
herself in, pushed her hands

between thighs. How long
was the old codger going to be?

She mused. The priest coughed.
Sniffed, tried to discover the
scent. He said the usual words,
about trying to avoid the occasion
of sin, have faith, and so forth

uttered in a strained voice.
He peered hard. The outlined
figure fidgeted, moved from side
to side. Never in his born days
had he. He uttered the absolution,

made a sign of the cross. Then
she was gone. The light there
then not there. A smell of sin?
What was it? No, not urine?

Terry Collett

Mary Stopped 1963

Sister Martha
stopped me
in the corridor
of the school
her features fixed
in a hard gaze.

Girls are not
to run or rush
in the corridors
Mary Macquire
the nun said.

I stood
and gazed at her.

I am late
for my next lesson
I said.

I do not care
you are not to run
in the corridor
she said.

I was going
to be later
as the old bag
was going to
keep me there.

I want you
to walk back
to the beginning
of the corridor
and walk to where
I stand
she said.

I sighed
and walked back
to where
I began to run
and walked
towards her.

She stood there
staring at me
her hands hidden
from sight
like some magpie
perched there.

Once I reached her
she said
next time you
come along
the corridor
remember to walk.

I said I would
and she let me go on
walking slow
and not rushing
in case she made me
walked it again.

I never
looked back
I walked past
the holy pictures
on the walls
the statue of the Virgin
flowers at her feet.

Once I was
out of sight
of the nun
I stuck two fingers up
in her direction
and walked on

to my next lesson
now late.

Getting an excuse
in my mind
like trying to explain
the colour of the sea
to one born blind.

Terry Collett

Mary's Bathtime 1963

Mary undressed
for her Friday bath.

The water was steaming
steam rose
to the off-white ceiling.

She dipped in a foot
withdrew it again.

Feckin' 'ot.

She turned on
the cold water tap.

It cooled down
the water.

She turned off the tap
and put in
a foot again.

That's better.

She climbed
in the bath
and sat down.

Water reached
her small taut breasts.

Luk at de sight
av dem.

Two love bites
stained one breast.

Magdalene's work.

She picked up
a pink sponge
and soaped it up.

Washed her
neck, arms,
breasts and down
between thighs.

Nuns an' their
blather.

Buff an' blister
Thomas an' 'er
ideas for lent.

She wished the nun
would go to holy Rome.

She soaped
her sex standing up.

Magdalene
wud love dis.

She sponge down
with water washing
the soap off.

A love bite on her
right thigh high up.

Magdalene
lipped her
and kissed her.

That time
at Magdalene's
parents' house
while they
were out shopping.

Both naked
on the bed.

Nip as babes.

Mary stepped out
of the warm bath.

She grabbed
a white towel
began to dry herself.

Wish Magdalene
wus here nigh.

Ruba-dub-dub.

Once dried
she stood and gazed
at herself
in the mirror.

Jist loike Eve.

That time
at Magdalene's house
lying abed
with a thousand thoughts
going round
in her head.

Terry Collett

Mary's Beans Of Sin 1963

The old priest
toddles up the side aisle,
sways slightly side to side,
goes past Mary's chapel.

You watch him
from the pews
waiting for confession.

Old Mrs O'Connor's
next in line;
bet she'll be there
for a week or so.

You kneel down
on the knee rest
gaze at your knees.

The priest enters
the confessional,
closes the door;
silence.

Mrs O'Connor
lifts herself
from the pew,
wanders into
the confessional
closes the door
after her.

You sit back
on the pew.

The young priest
is down at the altar,
a nun helps him
fiddle with stuff.

Magdalene hasn't come.

What to say?

What not to say?

Bless me Father

I've been having it off
with Magdalene Murphy.

An old codger comes
into the pew,
kneels down
closes his eyes.

You sigh,
kneel down,
close your eyes,
put in a Pater Noster
and an Ave.

The door
of the confessional
opens,
the O'Connor bag
comes out.

It is you next,
so rise up,
go in, ready
to spill the beans
of sin.

Terry Collett

Mary's Encounter 1963

Mary inhaled the cigarette
and watched as the boy
came over to her in the park
and said
where's your weird friend?

she exhaled smoke at him
weird friend?
she said
who's that?

that Magdalene girl
who thinks she's something
when she's just another girl
with two arms and legs
and an arse
he said

what do you want
with me?
she said

thought we'd go
to the picture house
and sit in the back row
and get down
to some kissing and such
putting a hand
on her hip

she inhaled
and looked at his hand
then at him
she exhaled smoke at him again

take your paw off of me
you Proddy prat
if my da saw you
touch me he'd

take your arm off
she said

didn't think you
were worried about
a boy's religion
he said
removing his hand
from her hip

I'm not but my da is
he has no love of Prods
she said
and my friend's
not weird she's classy
something you
wouldn't understand

he stood his ground
staring at her
got a mouth on you
haven't you?
he said

couldn't talk
otherwise could I
she said

he eyed her sternly
you ain't' much yourself
he said
just a schoolgirl slapper

she kneed him
and he doubled over
and fell sideways
down on the grass

I'm not a slapper
she said
I'm a knee-er
and she walked off

inhaling and exhaling
and giving
a quick cough.

Terry Collett

Matter Of Beauty

That's Speedwell
and that's Red Sorrel

Jane said
pointing out

the wildflowers
as you both walked

down the lane
that led to the empty cottage

with apples trees
in the garden

and gooseberry bushes
in fruit by hedges

They all look the same to me
you said

Just flowers growing
she shook her head

and smiled and said
You townies

do you know nothing
of nature's beauty?

I'm looking at beauty now
you replied

and as you both walked on
down the lane

she in her summery dress
and you in your

open neck shirt
and faded jeans

you felt the morning sun
touching your head

like a fond mother
and the smell of flowers

and sound of birds
and she said

after a minute
or so of silence

Father says beauty
is only skin deep

real beauty lies
in a person's soul

if that soul is not blemished
by sin that is

and you looked at her
hand by her side

swinging as she walked
and the fingers curled

as if she held
something invisible

yet ready to throw
and you took in

her white ankle socks
above her brown sandals

and the calves of her legs
and her thighs

just showing
as the dress moved

and you breathed in deep
like one immersed

in water about to drown
of love or the feeling of such

and you said
I guess he's right

but I love the beauty
of skin pretty much

and she laughed
and her laughter

shooed off birds
from the tree tops around

who probably never heard
such a beautiful sound.

Terry Collett

Maundy Thursday And Later.

Maundy Thursday. The church
Was packed. Full of incense.
Miss Dogberry sat at the back.
Mudrift watched her. He studied her.
The way her hair hung black and long.
Her broad bridged nose. Sat next to her.
She unaware. Priest proceeded with
The service. Miss Dogberry smelt Mudrift's
Scent passions were stirred. She sniffed
Heavy her nose breathed deep. A bell
Was tolled. Candles were lit. Mudrift felt
Love or was it lust? Moved closer his thigh
Touched her thigh. Priest's hands were
Raised host lifted high the Crucified the
Bloodied lamb. Miss Dogberry whispered
Softly do you sense it? Mudrift nodded
His loins stiffened. The last supper the Judas
Gone the Magdalene followed him out.
My place or yours? Mudrift muttered.
Mother's at home Dogberry said no privacy.
Mudrift took her his hand in hers. I live alone
Mudrift muttered no disturbance. His room
Was warm smelt of old smoke and beds unmade.
He offered drinks and put on jazz with lights
Turned low. She undressed slow hand holding
Out each small item. Mudrift watched her
The nakedness revealed the plump body
The broad bridged nose the soft flesh lips
The melon breasts. Is that Stan Getz?
She asked Mudrift that baritone's his
Saxophone. Mudrift nodded his mind on
Sex not saxophones or soft jazz tones.
He kissed her lips his arms embraced her
Ample flesh. She didn't mind his lack of hair
On balding head or bearded face rubbing
Her chin. She wanted sex and saxophones
And him within. Maundy Thursday.
The Crucified above the bed upon a cross
Nailed hands out wide eyes looking down

Head to one side. Mudrift made love the
Magdalene Miss Dogberry gazed up above.

Terry Collett

Max Is Fixed.

I don't know what that son
of a bitch said but it's all lies

said Max I never touched his
lady I wouldn't have touched

her with a proverbial barge pole
but he's always had it in for me

that schmuck he thinks just because
he's got himself a good job and

lives in a big house and drives a
posh car that I'm just slum waste

but I showed him when I knocked
on his door when he was at work

and his lady let me in to fix the
waste pipe and once I got it fixed

she put her arms about my waist
and pulled me onto the sofa and

began kissing me like some cat on
heat and I remembered seeing the

Degas painting on the wall one of
those ballet paintings and as she

unzipped my pants and entered in
I could hear Ella Fitzgerald singing

on the hifi her voice reaching inside
of me and up to the big blue sky.

Terry Collett

Max's Black Book

And Max recalled
his ex wife saying:
if that's how you
like it, then go off

somewhere else, I am
not that kind of woman,
I don't mind doing
things, but that takes

all, I mean when I was
a little girl my mother
said: don't do that kind
of thing, and so now I

won't. He recalled that
clearly, that way she
had of saying things,
that look in her eyes,

that set of lips, and O
to think he'd bought
her that expensive bag
and coat and those

shoes. O God those
shoes how the heck
she walked in those
he have no idea. He

sighed and wished to
hell she was that kind
of woman, and he
thought that maybe

she was, but no she
wasn't, and so he got
out his little black book
that his old man gave

him, and in it were names
of dames to be called in
an emergency, and he
laughed: by God most

of theses are old dames
now, past their prime,
too old or with no time.
He scanned the pages;

names appeared, funny
names, long names, names
with just the letters together,
and ticks beside them

what the heck did that
mean? And did his old
man see all these dames?
Just writing in black ink
with names and names.

Terry Collett

Max's Moans

I see only dark alleys
and hear dull talk,
Max said,
cum imbecillitate
corporis vita
as the Romans
might have said.

She has gone from me
and off to another;
flittering from man to man
like some butterfly,
flapping her wings,
her bright colourings,
le papillon
I named her.

Well named
the bitch.

Should have torn off
her wings when I
had her last.

Spread wings
and open arms.

La chienne.

She promised much
as they all do
while being filled
and her fruits adored.

Now I have only
her stale perfume.

Wounds where her
talons scratched.

But there was love once,
once upon a time
as tale tellers begin.

That time
in that Parisian
hotel room where
she undressed me
to the sound
of some French tart
(on the radio)
singing an aria
from La Boheme.

She so anxious for it
that she almost
began without me.

Time comes,
time goes.

I see only dark alleys
and hear dull talk.

I do remember
the mouthing
of her fruit,
the sucking
of her toes.

Terry Collett

Maybe He Loves Him More

Grief tests ones faith,
Mrs Mullins said.

Her son was dead;
killed in the war.

Makes you wonder
how a loving God

can take away
the one you love

and what the reason is
and what for.

Maybe,
her six year old

daughter said,
He loves him more.

Terry Collett

Maybe Next Time 1961

Lizbeth lay on her bed,
kicked off her shoes
in case her moaning mother
came up and moaned
about the shoes
on the eiderdown.

Afternoon light
through the window.

Benny. His name.

Had him here that once.
Wanted him to,
but he wouldn't.

What's it like?
The other girl said
find out yourself.

But he wouldn't.
Or couldn't.

She looked at her white socks,
wiggled her toes.

Wanted him in me.
Had time that time.

She smiled.
Mother came back early
from the shops that day.
What if? We hadn't though.
Just as well. Just in case.

School had been a bore.
All that maths nonsense
and the PE teacher on at her
because she had forgotten

to bring her PE clothes.
Not forgotten
left behind on purpose.

She looked around her room.
The floor had been tidied.
Her records stacked away tidily,
her soiled clothes
put in the wash basket,
the plate and cup and saucer
taken downstairs.

He was here in this room.
Here near the bed.
Almost had him undressed,
but he changed his mind
at the last minute.

What if. If what?
But it hadn't happened.
Maybe next time.

She gazed out the window.
Blue sky, white clouds
like death shrouds.

Terry Collett

Meering Their Fate

Uncle said you can fed
the chickens and then

later you can choose
which one we have for

dinner tomorrow and he
went off to work someplace

leaving you to feed and fret
over which of the noisy hens

would meet their end by
Uncle's hand and end up

as the Sunday roast sitting
among potatoes and parsnips

as each of the family widened
their eyes and licked their lips.

You walked up and down the
wire staring at each hen in turn

wondering which one deserved
to live or die but they all had that

chicken look that unconcerned air
of being and walking each one

settled on the next mouth feed
the next bite and so you wandered

off not knowing which hen would
meet their mortal fate that night.

Terry Collett

Meet Place 1968

It was the meet place,
sea behind noise making,
dull sky threatening rain.

Enbright walked beside Bill,
white rain coat open,
hands in pockets.

Told them you
were best for the job,
Enbright told,
feet on damp sand,
shoes making tracks.

Where's the job?
Bill asked.

Looked past Enbright,
saw gulls,
beach deserted.

Enbright passed him
folded paper chit,
watched as Bill
opened it slow with fingers.

How they want it done?
Bill said,
watched gulls take off.

Accident kind of thing,
no leads back
to the Agency,
Enbright said,
eyeing Bill,
his pale face,
dark suit.

I am a pro

I know what to do
and how,
Bill said moaningly,
eyes on the sand,
ears cocked
for Enbright's words.

Not saying you're not,
just making it clear,
Enbright delivered,
pausing,
eyeing Bill.

They both stood
and looked at the sea,
took in gulls,
incoming waves,
no one about.

Heard your father died,
Enbright let out,
looking at Bill.

Yea gone,
Bill said,
Mom's taken it bad,
she was close to him,
I wasn't.

Enbright nodded his head,
breathed in the air,
grey skies,
sea rush.

Bill said nothing more,
silence enfolded them,
chilly hush.

Terry Collett

Meeting Anne 1959

What's your name skinny kid?
Benny. He looked at the girl
in the wheelchair with one leg.

I'll call you Skinny Kid. She
looked past him at other kids
on the lawn and on the swings.

Why you here? she added looking
back at him. Had an operation
and am here for rest. He looked at
her red skirt and the one leg visible.

What happened to your leg? She
pulled up her red skirt and showed
him the stump. Lost it, can't find it
anywhere; have a good gawk, Kid.

He did. Can I touch it? She stared at
him sure why not. He touched her
stump. It feels warm. Look out the
penguins are about. She pulled down
her skirt. The boy looked back at the lawn
and saw a tall nun dressed in black
walk towards them. He sat on one of
the white metal chairs. The nun stopped
by the table and stared at Benny. You are
the new boy? Yes I'm Benny. She nodded.

She gazed at the girl. I hope you are behaving
and not leading Benny astray. Anne looked
at the nun. I always behave Sister Paul.

The nun didn't look convinced. That has yet
to be seen. The nun turned and walked to
the swings and talked to other kids.

That crow is always on my case, Kid,
avoid her like the piles. Benny nodded

and put on one of his good boy smiles.

Terry Collett

Meeting At The Embankment 1967

I had rung
Nima in the week
at the hospital
(the nurse
wasn't happy about it
but she brought Nima
to the phone)

she said
she'd meet me
in London
by the Embankment station

so on the Saturday
I went to the station
and waited for her

people passed me
on their way up West
or back into the tube station
going elsewhere

then I saw her
coming out from
the underground
she smiled
when she saw me
and hugged me
and we kissed

glad to see you
she said
the quacks weren't
going let me out
but they did eventually
why wasn't they going

to let you out?
I said

my mother had said
I was not to go out
but as I am over 18
they said she had
no rights over me
so they reluctantly
let me go
but I have to be back
by dusk

that's ok
I said
where do you
want to go?

I need a drink
she said

so we walked
up the road
and found a bar
on Charing Cross Road

we sat in a corner
with our drinks
and we lit up cigarettes

I should be leaving
the hospital soon
she said
if I stay off drugs
and stay with my parents
so should be able
to see you easier
at weekends

that'd be good
I said
at your parent's place?

no way there

they'd interrogate you
like the Gestapo
Nima said
we'll meet in London
some place

ok
I said

we talked on
but I was just glad
to watch her
bright eyes
and happy face.

Terry Collett

Meeting Benny 1960

You saw Benny on the bus;
he sat at the back
on a side seat;
he was with another boy,
you saw him
over your shoulder
as you turned around.

The bus came
to the Elephant and Castle,
Benny got off the seat,
said goodbye
to the other boy,
stood at the back of the bus
until it stopped,
and he got off.

You got off after him
and followed up
behind him.

Hello Benny,
you said.

He turned
and said:
Hi Fay,
where did
you come from?

I was on the bus,
you said.

I didn't see you,
he said.

You both walked
to the crossing
and waited.

Why was you
on the bus?
He asked.

I had to visit a convent
so I can write
about it,
you said.

How is school?
He said.

It is all right,
you said,
not telling him
about the Seven Deadly Sins
you had to talk
about at school.

How's your old man?
Benny said,
still going on his
religious retreats?

You looked at him
by the crossing,
at his hazel eyes,
that quiff of brown hair.

Yes he is
going next month,
you said.

The traffic stopped,
you both crossed the road
towards Meadow Row.

What did you learn
at school today?
You asked him.

Not a lot,
he said,
what about you?

You wasn't sure
whether to say about
the Seven Deadly Sins.

You paused,
he stopped
and looked at you.

What is it?
He said.

We learned about
the Seven Deadly Sins,
you said.

He looked across
the bomb site
on your left.

What are they?
He said.

Well there is sloth,
envy, greed
gluttony, wrath,
pride and lust,
you said.

Quite a lot,
he said.

Yes they are deadly,
you said,
unless one is absolved
of these,
one can go to Hell.

He looked at you;

I like your hair
free flowing,
he said,
it adds to your beauty.

Benny,
you said,
I am being serious.

He frowned;
I do understand
what you say,
but what can I
do about it?
He said,
I haven't those
kind of things.

You smiled:
no I guess not,
you said.

He walked on,
you walked
beside him,
wanting to hold his hand,
but you didn't,
you listened
while he talked
of the cinema
and going there
at the weekend.

Can you go?
He said.

I'll have to ask
my dad,
you said.

Benny nodded,
you walked over

Rockingham Street,
wishing your lips
and his could secretly
and softly meet.

Terry Collett

Meeting Elaine In The Village 1962

John sat on the bus.
He was going to visit Elaine
at her village.

The bus was full
and around him chitchat.
Wonder if she's waiting?
I said I'd meet her there.

He stared out the window
at the passing scene:
fields, trees, hedges,
cattle in a field.

Two women behind
were running someone down.

He felt nervous
about meeting her.
He pushed
the old girls' talk away.

The bus drove along
to the village bus stop
and he and a few others descended.

She's not here.
Where is she?

The bus drove off;
the others who got off
wandered towards
the few shops.

He stood there
by the bus stop.
He had been there before
and managed to find
her parents' cottage,

but now he was not so sure.

He walked up
towards the shops.
Then he saw her
walking along towards him.

She was dressed
in a grey flowered dress
and her hair was tied
in a bunch behind.

The bus must have been early,
she said, going red,
looking about her.

Guess so,
he said.

They stood looking
at each other.
I've told Mum
you were coming,
Elaine said,
she said you can
come to the cottage.

That's good,
he said,
looking at her,
did she mind?

Elaine sighed.
The usual: behave
and no kissing and things.

He nodded and smiled.
She smiled shyly.

Do you remember the way?
She said.

Not sure I do,
he replied.

They walked past the shops
and along a country lane.
He wanted to hold her hand,
but didn't want to presume.

How is your Mum?
He asked.

Moans and lot,
but she's all right really,
she said.

His hand brushed
close to hers.
She took his hand
and held it loosely.

He wanted to kiss her,
but it didn't seem likely
if her mother was going
to be watching them
like a hawk.

Have to make do
with just sitting and talk.

Terry Collett

Meeting Judith In The Store.

School over
Judith began work
in town
in some grocery store

filling shelves
talking to customers
sitting on the checkout
and you went

saw her there once
busy
clothed
in the company's

uniform
she was filling up holes
on the shelves
what are you doing here?

she said
you said you had a day off
from the petrol station
where you worked

out of town
that you wanted
to see her
how about tonight?

you asked
I can't tonight
I'm working late
and I'm so tired

when I get home
what about tomorrow?
she said
I can't

you said
I work until 8
she continued
filling the shelves

you looked about the store
taking in
the closed in feel
like being trapped

she looked about her
can't talk for long
in case the manager
comes and bawls me out

she said
like being at school
you said
worse

she said
you looked at her
standing there
the uniform

the captivity of being
her eyes being fed
labels and prices
and contents of packets

her hands busy
the fingers moving
her cheeks flushed
her lips slightly pursed

as if wanting to kiss
but dare not
remember the first kiss we had?
you asked

yes

she said
pausing her work
gazing at you

Christmas while singing carols
with the choir
out in the evening air
no one looking

not seeming to care
she said
you just 14
me a still 13

going on 14
yes it had been like that
you recalled
and from the first time

you saw her
her eyes leapt out
at you and your heart
thumped inside

your chest
like some mad thing
wanting to get out
but that was then

you thought
watching her work
the school days over
the free time less

she in town working
all hours
you out of town
working the gas station

(you liked
the Americanization
of the term) till late

she busy

looking over her shoulder
time running out
love leaking away
she worried about

the manager seeing
you wanting to stay
but then
some store supervisor came

and moved on
to some other chore
and she waved
and you waved back

things weren't
the same
the love not
as it was before.

Terry Collett

Meeting Mrs Woolgar

You can come swim
at our place,
Hadley said,
my mother likes me
having friends home
for a swim and tea.

Ok, that'd
be good,
I said.

So I went along
after school
with my swimwear
and told my mother
where I was going.

Hadley and I
went to his house;
it was quite a place,
set back from the road,
and at the back
through French windows
was this swimming pool,
and over by
the far end
was his mother,
Mrs Woolgar.

She was blonde,
wearing orange swimwear.

Hello, you must be Benny,
welcome to our pool,
she said
smiling at me.

Hi, yes I am,
I said shyly.

Hadley went off
to get changed.

Come sit here
by me a moment,
she said.

So I went over
to where she was
lounging on some chair.

You like swimming?
She said.

Yes although I'm not
too good a swimmer,
I said.

She smiled.
Practise makes perfect,
she said,
bit like kissing and stuff,
takes practise to perfect.

I said nothing
just looked at her
in her orange costume,
lounging there.

She was quite
well endowed
and more sexier
than any woman I'd met.

Go get changed
into your swimwear,
she said,
and come back
and have a swim.

So I went off

to where Hadley was
and changed
into my swimwear.

What you think
of my mother?
He said.

She's good,
I said, pretty lady,
(couldn't tell him
I thought she was a cracker) .

She's ok,
he said.

After we changed,
we went down,
and she was in
the water of the pool
swimming around.

Come on in boys
the water's lovely
and warm.

So we got in,
Hadley diving in,
me climbing in
from the side
like some kid
stepping into water
for the first time.

Can I help you
swim better?
she said.

She swam
towards me.

I said,

sure why not.

She lifted me over
the the water
and held me up.

Now flap
your legs some,
she said.

So I did,
and sensed her hands
holding me
as I flapped there.

Hadley was up
at the deeper end
swimming.

That better?
she said,
her hands were
under my stomach
balancing me.

Yes, that's fine,
I said.

How about this?
She said,
her hands
were moving
further apart,
and I was still
flapping my legs.

Her hand touched
me elsewhere.

That all right?
She said.

I murmured words.

I was swimming
after a fashion
like I hadn't before.

She let me go
and I swam
a few paces,
then turned around
and swam towards
her again.

She smiled,
you may need
private lessons
to really improve,
she said,
why not come around
when Hadley has
his football training?

I looked over at Hadley
who was swimming
quite happily.

Yes that'd be good,
I said.

She smiled more,
yes it will be.

She swam off
to the other end
and climbed out
of the pool
and stood on the side,
and said:
you boys enjoy
your swim,
I'm going to shower,
and off she walked.

What do you
think Benny?
Hadley said,
she is a real help
for new swimmers,
huh?

Yes she sure is,
I said,
going warm
and red.

Terry Collett

Meeting With Hannah 1960

I walk across
to Hannah's flat
in Arrol House
and knock at the door

Mrs Scott opens
the door and stands there
she's a short thin woman
with a face of granite
with a slit
where her mouth is

whit is it?
she says
her Scottish accent
rough as stone

is Hannah home?
I ask

I dunnae kinn
she replies
HANNAH
she bellows
over her shoulder
Benedcit is haur fur ye
she adds
scowling at me

jist coming
Hannah replies
from back in the flat

yoo'll hae tae bide
Mrs Scott says

and walks back inside
leaving me
on the red tiled step

I look into the interior
of the flat
and smell breakfast
having been cooked

I look back
into the Square
kids are playing
near by
on the pram sheds
and over by the wall
girls are doing handstands
their feet
against the wall
dresses falling
over their heads
showing underwear

sorry about Mum
she has a mouth on her
Hannah says
where we going?
she asks

thought we'd go
to the South Bank
see the Thames and boats
and have ice cream
I say

do I need money?
she asks

just about 2/-
I say
for bus fares
and ice cream

I'll ask Mum
for a handout
but wait for the answer

Mum have you 2/-
I can have?
Hannah asks

fa dae ye hink
Ah am Rockerfeller?
nae Ah huvnae
her mother replies

no problem
I say to Hannah
I'll have enough
for us both

are you sure?

yes don't aggregate
your mother more
than you have to

so Hannah gets her coat
and we walk off
through the Square

she's like that sometimes
Hannah says
she's as tight
as a wing nut

we walk down the slope
and up Meadow Row

I ask her how her father is

she says
he's Ok but in
the doghouse more often
as not with Mum
but he's a softy
to Mum's hardness
but Mum says

he's soft in the heed
but he's lovely really
Hannah says

-I know her old man
he's English and a bit
simple after helping
to empty out Belsen camp
in 1945 where some
he told me were
more dead as alive-

we wait at the bus stop
she with her dark hair
pony tailed
with a tartan skirt
and white blouse
and me in blue jeans
and white shirt
and quiff of brown hair
and hazel eyes

she with a budding beauty
with her mother's
touch of tongue
who if roused
could give words
full lung.

Terry Collett

Memory.

Memory of your mother
rolling pastry
and you watching

her hands
and the rolling pin
and the way the pastry

was pushed down
and out
and then she took

the pastry
and put it over a dish
and spooned in

the cooked beef
and onions
and then placed another

rolled out piece
of pastry on top
and forked down

the edges of the pastry
and she said
do you want

the end clippings?
and you said
sure why not

and she gave you
the clipped off pasty
raw in your hands

and you began to eat
noticing how red
and raw and worn

her fingers
and hands were
and how tired

her eyes looked
and wiping hair
from her eyes

with the back
of her floured hand
she pushed out a sigh

and you saw there
how a thousand dreams
of young girls die.

Terry Collett

Mice Could Play 1997

She's a bit of all right
that friend of yours
Brian says
that Una

Nuala puts the dinner
on the table
and sits in her place

she's a good friend
Nuala says
peppering her dinner
been friends for years

but not seen her
until recently
Brian says
forking his dinner
odd that
her being
an old school friend
and all

she's been away
Nuala says

where away?
Brian says

she's been to London
now she's come back to Dublin
Nuala replies

don't recall her at school
I'm sure I'd remember her
with a behind like hers
he says

people change in looks

Nuala says

Betty Boyce hasn't
she's still as fecking ugly
as she was back then
Brian says smiling

Nuala eats her dinner
tries to push thoughts
of him and his words away

imagines his face
had he come in
and found Una and her
having it away
on their bed and the look
on his face if they had
and he'd seen it

mind you Betty
was a good lay
Brian says

Nuala looks at him
how'd do know?

the boys said
Brian says
looking at Nuala
blushing
looking away
recalling the Boyce girl
and him having sex
in her parents' house
while they were away
for the weekend

can't believe talk
Nuala says
gets distorted
by too many tongues

Brian eats and thinks

Nuala muses
on his facial features
and his words

Una may have
to stay here awhile
she says
she may lose her digs

Brian looks at her
stay here?
with us?
be a bit crowded
in our bed will it not?
he smiles

in the spare room bed
you idjit
she says

he pulls face
and Nuala finds it
rather pleasing
Una being there
especially if Brian
was away and while
the cat's away
the mice could play.

Terry Collett

Mid June And Midday Recess

Mid June
during lunch time recess
after cheese sandwiches
in the science room

which doubled
as a sandwich
lunch room
you met Christina

on the playing field
where she was sitting
alone on the grass
her school friends going off

when they saw you
walking across the field
their eyes on you
their giggles filling the air

like seagulls taking flight
don't mind them
Christina said
as you sat down

beside her
they're just jealous
because I have a boyfriend
and they haven't

you looked over
at the departing girls
walking off in a huddle
some doubled over

in laughter
I don't mind them
You said
count myself lucky

I didn't land
with one of them
Christina looked over
at the girls

heading towards
a group of boys
kicking ball
doesn't your friend like me?

she asked
what friend?
you said
that Reynard boy

you walk around with
you looked at her
and took in
her dark hair

brushed smoothly
her eyes catching
the sunlight
he doesn't trust girls

you said
he thinks
they're like icebergs
icebergs?

she said
yes
he said you only see
the surface of girls

its what you don't see
that's dangerous
she frowned
I thought

it was what you don't see

that held the interest
depends what's hidden
you said

well you know
what most boys are after
what they can't see
on the surface

she said
beginning to blush
looking away from you
and you studied

her profile
the way her hair
touched her cheek
and hid her ear

and lined up
with her jaw line
the open neck
of her white blouse

the skin there
the slight protrusion
of small tits
through the grey cardigan

maybe it's what's hidden within
that's more important
you said
maybe

she said
turning back
and gazing at you
maybe it's all that's hidden

that matters
she added
putting your hand

on her thigh

you sensing
the warmth of sun
and the feel of pulse
beneath the skirt

the beat of heart
pushing her tides
maybe
you said

smiling at her
what a girl shows
is as good
as what she hides.

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after cheese sandwiches
in the science room

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Terry Collett

Mid Term Break

It was mid term break
from school and she met you
at the back of your house

down by the small pond
you both called the pool
where you could sit

and watch ducks swim
and birds sing
in nearby bushes

and she said
I've just read about some nuns
who wear clothing

when they bath
so that God
can't see them naked

a magpie flew by
and you noticed
how difficult it was

to tell
its wing from tail
and you said

Would God be interested
in seeing naked nuns?
she gazed over

at the trees
on the other side
of the pool

her blue eyes
catching sunlight
Well they obviously thought so

she said
and she lay back
on the grassy bank

and you lay beside her
and she put out a hand
and her fingers

touched yours
and you lifted up
her hand and kissed it

and it tasted of soap
as if you'd dived
into her bathwater

and swam
between her thighs
How sweet you are

she said as you let
her hand go
and she held it

and looked at it
then a blackbird
swooped across the pool

noisily and broke
the momentarily magic
and she said laughing

You don't know
where my hand
may have been

and you taking in
the sunlight dancing
in her big blue eyes

Maybe not

you replied
not telling her

what
in your dream
you'd seen.

Terry Collett

Midday In The Sun 1962

Midday recess
on the school's sports field
Yehudit lies next to me

we're watching clouds pass by
kids over the way
play balls games

some girls in groups
chatting and laughing
you know Benny

until you came
I never watched
the sky and clouds

what did you do?
I say
just sat with the other girls

and chatted and laughed
and looked at boys
playing ball games

or about teachers
and what they did and said
she says

turning to look at me
you hear about
that English teacher

got in trouble with the law?
I say
no what teacher?

she says
that English teacher
we have or had

I say
o him
I thought he was good

and didn't he say
you'd make good writer one day?
yes that's him

I say
what did he do?
she says

took kids home
in his lunch hour
I tell her

what did he do?
don't know
but the cops

took him away
after a parent complained
about what her son said

well I never
Yehudit says
guess he won't be

teaching here no more
I say
she gazes at me

I'd kiss you
but there are
too many eyes watching

she says
later maybe
by the pond back home

I say

she smiles
yes OK

I turn and stare
at her blue eyes
and her smile

and touch her thigh
with my hand
a bell goes

from the school
loud ringing
best go

she says
see you in class
OK

I say
watching her go off
and whisper
nice ass.

Terry Collett

Might Be Better.

Mrs Milton became concerned
when Benedict slipped
and cut his wrist on the beach.
How did you do it? she asked,
fussing over him like an old hen.

Slipped on the pebbles on the steps,
he said. She looked at his wrist,
blood seeping, the handkerchief
he'd tied around it soaked red.
Best get you to the hospital,

she said. Her brother-in-law
drove them to the nearby
hospital and a nurse (some pretty
girl who oozed sexuality like a gently
squeezed lemon) washed and stitched

the wound up and bandaged it with
her gentle hands. Mrs Milton was
silent in the car back to the beach;
she stared out of the window, muted.
That night in bed, after an evening

of few words and cold stares, she said,
I saw the way you looked at that nurse,
taking in her figure, watching her hands
all over you, your eyes out on stoppers
each time she bent over you, her breasts

pushing against the cloth of her uniform,
reeking of some very cheap perfume.
Benedict laid there, his bandaged hand
over his chest and gazed at her.
She was nursing me, he said, that's

her job. I was just looking at her working.
Mrs Milton, who was lying beside him
turned and stared. Doing her work?

She was almost molesting you; I saw her
with my own eyes, she said, spittle on

her lower lip. That's ridiculous, he said,
she was just going about her nursing,
cleaning the wound, stitching me up,
bandaging the hand, that's all. All?
she said, there was nothing all about

that girl, she'd have had you in that bed
working you off given the chance and if
I hadn't been there, I dread to think
What the heck might have happened.
Benedict sat up on one elbow and frowned.

Are we talking about the same thing?
You were with me in the hospital while
a young nurse stitched up my hand; that is all.
I was there all right, she said, getting out
of bed and standing by the edge, I saw a

young bitch trying to get off with my man.
It ought not to be allowed to happen,
she said, hands on her hips, her faded
blue night dress failing to hold in her
40 year old breasts. He sat up, shook

his head. I'm not surprised your husband
walked out on you, Benedict said. He didn't,
I kicked him out, she said. I bet he was
glad to go, he said. She was silent and got
into bed and pulled the covers over her.

How's your hand? she asked. Benedict
looked at his hand. Painful. Much? Stings
more. Maybe if I kiss it better it might be
better, she said, childlike. Might do, he said.
She kissed the bandaged hand gently.

Yes, feels better already, he said.
She switched off the light. There was
an owl far off. A movement of the bed.

Terry Collett

Might Have Known

I might have known
said Dotty
I might have known

you were just like
all the rest of men
but

said Brintskin
don't you but me
you slime snake

Mother always said
men weren't
to be trusted

and she was right
I should have listened to her
instead going off with men

at such a young age
but hang on there
Brintskin said

I was getting a lift
in a woman's car
after a hard day's work

sure
Dotty said
sure you were

I know women
and I know men
and what happens

when they get together
and what did she want huh?
want to show you her etchings?

no it wasn't like that at all
she just asked
did I want a lift home

after work and I said yes
Brintskin said
I bet you did

I bet you couldn't
get that word yes out
quick enough

why I bet she had her panties off
before you could blink an eye
and as usual

you had to get
caught out didn't you
and Dotty paused

for a moment
to pour a drink
and sip it

all the while
glaring at Brintskin
and he stared at her

as if she'd changed
into a bullfrog
and then she sighed

and said
well what happened?
nothing happened Sweetie

Brintskin replied
she just offered me
a lift home in her car

and I said yes please

and so she gave me a lift home
Dotty sat down

in the armchair
and crossed her legs
and Brintskin studied her thighs

as the skirt rose up
as she sat down
and Dotty said

ok so maybe I believe you
maybe what you say is true
and I am just getting

the wrong end
of the stick
you sure are

Brintskin said
following the line
of his vision

as far as his eyes
could go
and caught a glimpse

of panty line
whiter than snow.

Terry Collett

Milka's Close Call 1964.

You leave Benny upstairs
and go downstairs
as fast as you can
hurriedly dressed,
Benny's juices
leaking down your leg.

Your mother is standing
by the larder looking in;
she turns when you
come in the kitchen:
ah there you are,
help me put
the shopping away,
your mother says.

Yes ok,
Benny's just gone
to the toilet,
you say,
giving an excuse
for Benny
to be upstairs,
hoping your mother
won't get suspicious.

Ok, O those shops
were busy,
I should have taken you
with me,
just as well
I took the car
or I'd have never
got this lot on the bus.

You help her
put the shopping away,
wondering how long
before Benny came down,

having dressed quickly.

So how long has Benny
been here?

Your mother asks,
tucking the potatoes
at the back
of the larder.

Not long,
you reply,
listening out
for Benny.

That's that done
for another week,
Mother says,
and comes out
of the larder.

Just then Benny
comes down the stairs
and into the kitchen;
he smiles at your mother:
call of nature,
he says.

Your mother
smiles at him:
want a cup
of tea Benny?
She says.

He smiles:
yes that'd be nice,
he says.

You don't like it
when he's so friendly
with your mother
or she with him.

He gives you a wink
once your mother's back
is turned;
you nod
and mouth:
it's all right.

He nods back
and you both sit
at the table,
while your mother
gets down mugs
and put three spoonfuls
of tea in the teapot.

Benny juices damp
on your thigh,
and he's sits smiling
giving you the eye.

Terry Collett

Milka's Feeling Fine 1964

We go in through the garage
to get to the back of the house,
past my father who's working
on a doll's house he is making,
he nods and smiles,
and we go in the back door
where my mother
is preparing dinner.

Ok if we go to my room
and listen to records?
I say.

Mum says it's all right,
and we go through
the passageway and up
the stairs to my room
and close the door.

It's a small room
with two single beds:
my brother's and mine.

He is out playing
with friends,
so we are alone.

Milka looks
around moodily.

Not much room
is there?
she says.

It's big enough.

For what?

Well nothing like that,

as you're on
and my brother could
come in at anytime,
I say.

She sits on my bed
and sighs.

What records
have you got then?
she says.

Elvis mainly.

Is that all?
she says,
laying back
on the bed
and staring
at the ceiling.

Some jazz records,
I say.

Lie here with me
she says
after you've put
an Elvis record on.

I put an Elvis LP on
the record player
and lie beside her.

Not much room
is there,
she moans.

It's a single bed like yours
and we have plenty
of room there,
I say.

She kisses me
and we snuggle up close
listening to Elvis;
my hand on her thigh
and her hand
on my hip.

Shame I'm on,
she says,
we might have had
a chance to do it.

I know it would be risky,
but say nothing,
kiss her lips,
hand on her arse,
holding close.

Elvis gets smoochy;
his voice filling the room.

She licks my ear,
tongues my tongue;
her hand moving
up my spine.

Would you like
some coffee or tea?
My mother calls up.

I say two teas please
and know Milka's
feeling fine.

Terry Collett

Milka's Foul Mood 1964

Milka was in a mood
as we left the farmhouse
and got on our bicycles.

What's up?
I said.

It's her
(meaning her mother)
having a go
at me about
coming downstairs
in my nightie,
and in front
of you as well,
how was I to know
you were there?
Milka said,
looking back
at the farmhouse.

It's how she is,
likes things done so so,
I said.

How do you know
what she's like,
you only see
the side she
wants you to see,
Milka said,
being all nice to you,
just because
you're young
and good looking,
I bet she fancies you.

Don't be daft,
I said,

she's your mum
not a woman
up the road.

Milka stood
gazing at me:
you fancy her
don't you?
You'd have sex with her
if she let you,
Milka said coldly.

That's stupid,
of course I wouldn't,
I replied.

She looked away
and got on her bike
and rode off.

I got on my bike
and rode after her.

She was in
a fouler mood now,
and peddled fast
as she could.

I followed,
peddling as fast
as I could
to catch her up.

She rode along
the country road
for a good half mile,
when she pulled up
by the peacocks
by a farm cottage,
and got off.

I pulled up

and laid my bike
against a hedge,
and followed her,
and stood next to her
looking at the peacocks.

I'm a moody cow,
she said,
of course you wouldn't
have sex with my mum;
who would?
I don't know how
my dad ever did.

I love you,
I said,
no one else.

She turned
and smiled,
and kissed my cheek,
then stared
at the peacocks again.

I mused on her mother
who had made me toast
and a drink that morning
while I waited for Milka.

I liked her plumpness
and her motherliness,
but that was it,
nothing more,
but sometimes
something niggles you,
and so did that,
that's for sure.

Terry Collett

Milka's Moring Rise 1964

Your mother calls
just as you have
finished dressing

Benny's here
she calls up

won't be long
you say
looking at yourself
in the dressing table mirror

Benny is early
you dab a wet finger
over your eyebrows

bet Mum's chatting him up
like she does
you muse
flicking back your hair
bet she fancies him herself
you muse frustratedly

you look around your room
the bed tidy
you thinking
of the other Saturday
when your mum
was out shopping
Benny was there
and you and he
were going at it great

hurry up up there
your mother calls again

you sigh
and open
your bedroom door

and go down stairs

just coming
you say

and into the kitchen
where your mother
is at the side
preparing toast and tea
and Benny sitting in a chair
with his hazel eyes
and brown hair.

Terry Collett

Milka's Morning Blue`s 1964

My mother
is out shopping
but Benny
can't come around
as he has to work
as do my brothers.

I am left alone
in the house.

I lay on my bed
staring at the sky
through the window.

It is a warm morning
I can hear birdsong
and cows moo
from the farm.

Why did Benny
have to work now
of all times
I muse.

I remember
that time
when he came
and my mother
had just gone
out shopping
and we made love
on my bed.

This bed where
I lay now
and even though
I knew my mother
had gone out shopping
there was an odd thrill

that she might
come back
and it added
to the excitement.

But she didn't
and Benny had
just gone
when she drove back
in the car
with the shopping.

I ought to get up
and wash
and dress
but I want to lay here
a bit more
and imagine Benny
is here
and he's
beside me now
and undressed
and we kiss and touch.

I sense the electric
run through me
and I want him
and we do.

But of course
we don't.

I lay alone
staring at the sky
listening to birdsong
and cows moo
not making love
and nothing to do.

Terry Collett

Milka's Mother And Me 1964

As I rode up
to Milka's parents' farmhouse
on my bike,
Milka's mother
was by the back door
shaking out a carpet.

I left my bike
against a fence,
and walked towards
the back door,
watching her
standing there
hands gripping the carpet
and shaking determinedly,
as she shook the carpet
her whole body moved,
and I took note
of her motherly breasts
bulging and swaying.

She turned when she
heard me coming
over the stony path.

Hello, Benny,
she said,
you're here early,
Milka's not up yet,
but still come in
and have coffee or tea
and maybe toast.

I smiled and said:
that'll be nice,
and I followed her in
as she carried
the carpet back
indoors again

and took it into
the lounge where
it had come from.

Take a seat,
she said,
I'll get us a drink
and some toast.

So I sat down
in a chair by the table
in the kitchen,
and she busied herself
getting down mugs
from a cupboard
and putting slices of bread
under the grill.

What are you having?
She asked me
tea or coffee?

Tea please,
I said,
watching her
slightly plumpish body
move before me.

She put tea
into a teapot
and put the kettle
onto the stove.

She turned and said:
what are you
and Milka doing
this fine Saturday?

Going to show her
the place I used
to go fishing,
I said.

Fishing? Milka?
didn't know she
was into fishing?
He mother said smiling.

She's not,
I said,
but the spot is beautiful,
and we could sit
by the pond
and watch the wildlife,
and maybe take
some sandwiches
and drinks of pop
and have a sort of picnic.

O that sounds good,
Milka's mother said.

I said nothing
about anything else
we may get up to
if the weather held
and it stayed dry.

She turned and made
the tea and watched
the bread under the grill.

I watched her
move about
taking in her
motherly breasts
her Rubenesque figure.

Just then
Milka came down
the stairs
and into the kitchen
in her dressing gown
and her hair

in a mess.

You're here early,
she said to me,
make me some toast
and a coffee
please, Mum,
she asked her mother,
and sat down
next to me.

You could at least
have washed
and got dressed
first Milka,
her mother said
looking at her frowning.

Didn't know
Benny was here,
Milka said.

Well he is,
her mother said,
so get yourself decent.

Milka sighed
and raised her
eyes heavenward,
and stomped
off upstairs.

That girl,
Milka's mother said,
just as well
her father's
not here or he'd
give her coming down
to breakfast like that,
just as well he's
up on the farm.

She poured me
a mug of tea
and two slices of toast
and butter,
and sat down
opposite me
and said:
you've a handful
there, Benny,
not an easy one
to motivate
into action.

No I guess not,
I said,
keeping the image
of Milka and me
in her bed
humping away
inside my head.

Terry Collett

Mind Quack 1971

Yiska feels as if
she's about to
split open
and her mind

pour out
all her thoughts
and feels like
she's about to vomit

but she doesn't
now she feels
as if she's constipated
and the thoughts

and words
won't budge
and the mind quack
(psychiatrist)

sits opposite her
at his desk
and she sits
cross legged

staring at him
and out
of the window
behind him

she can see snow
falling
drifting slow
then fast

as if it can't
make up its mind
what to do
and on his desk

is a photograph
of a family group
of smiling faces
and she hates it

the smiling
that we are ok
and living well
kind of look

she says nothing
the words
have become
bunged up

in her head
and he talks
about ECT
about how it helps

depressives
and others
with mental
health issues

and all she wants
is to go back
to the locked ward
and sit

in the arm chair
by the window
and radiator
in her night gown

and think of nothing
just good old nothing
and wait until
Benny arrives

and sits beside her

and they both sit
and think of nothing
and nothingness

enfolds them
like a warm
fat mother
and they just

like to be
close to each other.

Terry Collett

Miriam And Paris And Stuff.

It's Paris
Miriam
says to me

looking out
the window
of the coach

her perfume
tending to
overwhelm

my senses
beside her
her finger

pointing
at the sights
as we pass

the Eiffel
Tower thing
lit up loud

isn't it
wonderful?
she exclaims

just to think
of artists
who once lived

and worked here
Picasso
and Van Gogh

and writers
like Miller
Hemingway

Marcel Proust
she pauses
looks at me

and who else?
what perfume
do you use?

I ask her
just some stuff
of my Mum's

she gave me
she answers
well not quite

gave to me
I kind of
borrowed it

the other day
while Mum was
out shopping

I study
her profile
her snub nose

rosy cheeks
rose bud lips
the slim neck

small tight tits
she has tons
of perfume

she wouldn't
miss any
Miriam

rattles on

is it good?
enticing

I tell her
she smiles wide
looks at me

parts her lips
moves her tongue
over them

Ezra Pound
was here too
I tell her

the poet?
she asks me
that's the guy

wasn't he
a fascist?
I guess so

but he wrote
The Cantos
her lips close

she turns round
Paris's so
romantic

she utters
I lean close
breath her in

the perfume
inviting me
to drink in.

Terry Collett

Miriam Has The Hots 1970

There was that cathedral
in Burgos
the crowds of people
the priest
at the far end
taking Mass
in Spanish
not Latin
as it used to be.

Benny is beside me
I sat with him
on the coach
from the start.

All through Paris
and France
and into Spain.

I lay my head
against his shoulder
through Paris
and I vaguely heard
the radio playing
Beethoven stuff.

I felt his hand
holding mine
my thigh
touching his.

I kissed him
in the semi dark
of the coach.

I felt funny inside
I wanted to open up
to him like a morning flower
but I couldn't

too many people
about us.

We took
communion at Burgos
making our way
to the altar end
the crowds rushing
at the priest
as if he were a vendor
of wine and bread.

Be careful on the trip
my parents said
those foreigners
can be tricky.

I feel Benny near
and feel funny inside
feel sticky.

Terry Collett

Miriam Posing,

Miriam stands
by the camel

an Arab stands nearby
unimpressed
he holds a rope
tied to the camel

she smiles at me
with my camera

her red bikini
showing more legs
and arms
than the Arab guy
feels comfortable with

I aim
to get her central
her explosion
of red hair
matching that
of the bikini

she fiddles
with her shoulder strap

I wait
eyeing her
through the viewer
focusing
on her breasts
as the centrepiece
everything else
to match around

avoiding to get
the Arab in the picture
but it's hard

as he seems to move
closer to her
as I aim once more
he says something
in Arabic
nods to her

I shrug my shoulders

she smiles at him

he moves in closer
his head leaning
to one side
as if someone
has broken his neck

she adjusts the bra
of the bikini
gets it comfortable

I look away from her
hold the camera
by my chest

when you're ready
I say

she does a twirl
in the sand
and back again
facing me

the sands hot
she says
burning my feet

well wear your slip-ons
I say

she goes to her bag
by the camel's back

and takes out
her slip-ons
and puts them on
the Arab watches her
with a dull eyed stare

she comes to the spot
on the sand
where she had been standing
and poses again

the camel seems bored
and looks
at the Arab
then at Miriam
then out to sea

I focus on her again
through the viewer
of the camera
she pouts her lips
puts her hands
on her hips

I put the camera
by my chest

need to focus
no silly faces
or whorish gestures
I say

another Arab
a companion
to the other
passes by
gawking at Miriam
then stands by
the other Arab
then they both
look towards me

hope these to guys
don't want paying
she says

they usually do
I say
now settle
and pose

she poses her face
a weak smile
her eyes gazing
straight at me

where shall I put
my hands?
she asks

that's what you asked
last night
I say

she giggles
and stands
on one leg
the other trying
to balance her

pose now
I say

she puts both feet
on the sand
and becomes still
her hands in front
of her groin
as if she were praying

the Arab guys
wer

Miriam's That Kind Of Love

O yes
this is love
this is what Miriam knows
as love

not the maybe
kind of love
or what her mother
would have called

courting love
but the real thing
the thing that hits you
in the guts

that makes you not want
to eat or drink
but want to dream
yourself silly

over the kind of
love feeling
that drives you mad
with the thinking

of the thing
and yes
as the ordinary people
walk by

she feels sorry for them
not knowing
this love she feels
not understanding

that there's more to life
than the next meal
or pay rise
or promotion

if that was anything at all
at least not now
she feels like shouting
to the world not now

and o if only
he were here
if only he could see her now
sitting in her blue

short skirt
and pink jumper
and those underwear
he bought her

with the soft feel
on that stall
he said sit on
and o

she could squeeze herself
could hug her body
in a frenzy of excitement
and o to be in his arms

and feel his warmth
and to feel his cheek
on hers
and his hand

holding her hand
and giving it
that little tug
of here we go Honey

let's show the world
where it can get off
because this is love
she says

this is the big one

and she can sense
her body glow
and her pulse rocket

through her breasts
and arms and feet
and thighs
and o a thousand

other places
the world will never see
or know about
and yes this is it

this is the kind of
wake me
in the morning at 2 am
and kiss me

and rock me
and this is love
her mother never knew
not in all her

big American life
not in New York
or Chicago or no place
her mother knew

this kind of love pinch
this sort of electric buzz
of a feel
especially when he holds her

and blows
those small breaths
into her ears
and sometimes

between her thighs
o my God what to do?
where to go?

o this is the big one

this the time
to live life
to the full love
to stand on the ledge

of a tall building
and scream out
kind of love feel
and if he will show

right now in this room
and come in and say
love you Honey
love the woman you are

and she wants him
and wants his feel
his lips
his everything

is that him?
was that
the door bell ring?
no just the mailman

with a letter from him
saying in his neat pen
saying he can't make tonight Honey
but maybe when.

Terry Collett

Miss Arkle's Wart

Miss Arkle had a wart on
The back of her neck.
Miss Arkle taught maths
And smelt of lemons.
You wiped the blackboard
As she had instructed
Wiping away her handwritten
Workouts which made no
Sense to your tired brain.
The wart on her neck like
A dried brown prune caught
Your eyes. It sat above her
Pink scarf. It kind of spoilt
Her beauty like a bruised apple.
You wanted to slice it off
And flick it away. Having wiped
The blackboard clear you
Returned to your seat.
You carried the image in
Your mind like a damaged fruit.
Maybe you thought she should
Grow her hair and hide it there.
Miss Arkle had beautiful breasts
Like melons on show in a store.
You and other boys enjoyed
Your secret stare. Shame about
The wart now out of sight. You'd
Take both images of Miss Arkle
To your lusty bed that night.

Terry Collett

Miss Billings And Snow And All.

Miss Billings dismounted her motorbike
over by the garage wall
and in Marilyn Monroe like fashion
she walked up towards

the forecourt where you
were sweeping
between the pumps
with the big broom

Mr Fredericks had given you
a few minutes ago
to clear the last
of the snow

got you busy already kid?
she said
undoing the headscarf
and giving you the eye

yes he said to get off
the rest of the snow
she glanced around
the forecourt

well don't let me keep you kid
don't let it be said
I kept a keen man down
and she walked off

into the garage rooms
to the back office
swaying her backside
as she went

you watched
until she had disappeared
then swept more snow
from the pumps

until half hour later
(only three cars had entered
the forecourt for petrol)
you walked to the small office

at the front where the till
was kept and a small heater
was lit to keep you warm
when Miss Billings came along

and said
you want some coffee
or cocoa? or anything else
to get you warm?

coffee would be nice
you said
OK kid
she said

keep yourself warm in there
don't want you to freeze
your jewels off
and she swayed away

humming some song
as she went
you rubbed
your chilled hands

together to warm them
remembering that Christmas
when you and Judith
had walked

through the snow
carol singing
her cheeks red
with her cold

her hand touching yours

her breath exiting
her mouth
like cigarette smoke

and she pretended
she had a cigarette
between fingers
her eyes bright as stars

her hand squeezing
her fingers freezing
what you dreaming about kid?
Miss Billings said

putting a mug of coffee
by the till
O just thinking
of happy times

in my past
well hold on to it kid
she said
because it won't last

and she wiggled off
like some imitation Monroe
without the glitter or good looks
back to the back office

to play with herself
or make up the books.

Terry Collett

Miss Maitland Of The D.I, Y Store.

Miss Maitland
the student girl
who worked Saturdays
in the D.I Y. Store

wore tight jumpers
and jeans or pants
which hugged her body
in a way you used to wish

you could have done
but didn't and when
she walked up
and down the aisle

to serve
waiting customers
she wiggled
her compact arse

in a way that caught
your imagination
and set it to thoughts
not poetic

you write poetry don't you?
she asked
yes
what kind of poetry?

non rhyming
blank verse
kind of thing
you replied

what do you write about?
life and people
she stared at you
her eyes dark

and intelligent
what people?
yourself? me?
I don't write

about myself
you said
taking in
her small compact tits

beneath the cover
of her jumper
the way
they occasionally wobbled

as she moved
or lifted an arm
do you write about me?
she asked

leaning closer
the perfume invading
your nostrils stirring
deep passions

no fictitious people
oh
she said
and went off

to serve a couple
who had entered
the store
you watched her hips sway

as she walked
the tight arse
going side to side
and you feeling

a poem coming on

the muse waking
from its doldrums
Ezra Pound has died

she said
on her return
he was a fascist you know
hated Jews and such things

you watched her lips move
wanting deep down
to connect with them
set yours to hers

invade with your tongue
but he wrote good poems
you said
the Cantos

the translations
etc etc
does that excuse him?
she asked

as a man no
but as a poet
his poems will survive
long after

any moral judgements
of his beliefs
however wrong
or misguided

he may have been
you said
drinking in
her aspect

her tits and arse
the way she looked
and smelt

the bourgeoisie breeding

of her mind and being
she walked off
to serve again
unaware what

beneath her clothing
you were seeing.

Terry Collett

Miss Pinkie And Her Ship Of Love

Take me, Miss Pinkie says,
take me. A plump bundle
of pinkness, dyed hair, grey
at the roots, the blue eyes
whiskey soaked, the mouth

open, the naked skin, the full
moon flowing in. All aboard
who are coming aboard, she
says to the room, and he beside
her says, are you sure? now

of all times? yes, she says, lift
the anchor, set sail, take note
of the rough seas, the rise and
fall of the waves, and he looking
back sees moonlight on his naked

butt, the sound of Mahler's 6th
echoing from the other room,
and he sensing the high seas
and moving surf, climbs aboard,
set eyes to the horizon of bed

board and cool blue walls, and
hears the sirens sing, hears the
creak of bed and bones as he and
Miss Pinkie, on the love ship, hold
tight and smile, as it rises and falls.

Terry Collett

Miss Pinkie And Moonshine 1973

I brought scotch
to her flat
(Miss Pinkie)

late evening
no TV
but music

on her old
boxed hi-fi
Mahler's 1st

or his 5th
then she'd sit
next to me

on the couch
lights dimmed low
she made up

hair done nice
with a short
nightie on

and she'd say
now Benny
how about

you and me
getting down
this whiskey

a few chocs
then have some
real hot sex?

We added
a few more
good whiskies

some dark chocs
more Mahler
then we'd walk

to her bed
(big double)
and strip off

and climb in
or fall in
a bright moon

shining in
from the sky
a train passed

on the track
quite nearby
Mahler played

the final
loud movement
as we made

our prelude
or foreplay
little games

before sex
then the sex
then lying

on our backs
as Mahler
was silent

and trains gone
faraway
and moon shone.

Miss Pinkie And Puccini 1973

Miss Pinkie put on
the Puccini arias
(she dropped the Mrs
when her husband
went off with the air
hostess bitch
he was working with)
and bought me a scotch
into her lounge.

You what to stay
the night?
She said.

If I can my sister's
got a man friend
staying over and I said
he could have my bed.

She sipped her scotch
and looked at me.

What about
my reputation?
She said.

I can sleep
in the spare bed
I said.

But people might
see you leaving
in the early hours
and still come
to the same conclusion
she said smiling.

Guess they would
I said.

The Tosca aria
was being sung
by some dame.

Do you promise
to be good?
Miss Pinkie said.

Aren't I always?
I said.

She sipped the scotch
mostly so
she said
but you'll have
to leave discretely
can't have you
waltzing out of here
in plain daylight
or the neighbours
will talk.

I will be
as discrete
as I can
I said.

We sipped our drinks
and the La Boheme aria started
this is my favourite
she said looking at me
putting a hand
on my thigh.

Mine too
I said
finishing my booze.

She put down
the glasses
and turned to me

and said
you feeling tired?

No not yet
I replied.

Good let's go
to bed then
she said.

So we went
and she turned
out the light
and we walked
to her room
lit up by moonlight
and undressed
and got into bed.

The Puccini arias
still being sung
and Miss Pinkie
sang along in her
soft soprano.

I lay beside her
feeling along her thigh
and she stopped singing
and let out a sigh.

Terry Collett

Miss Pinkie In For The Kill

Miss Pinkie
had him spread out

upon her bed
an object

to seduce
and adore

his clothes folded
neatly on a chair

hers cast here
and there

upon the floor
there's an art

to seduction
she said

moving in
upon him

her tongue
about to lick

his pecker
he laying there

taking in
the tinted colour

of her greying hair
her eyes

opals of blue
not white

outside the window
the approaching night

and she
came down on him

and was silent
of words

but licked
and sucked

and he moved
as the motion

moved him
his pecker saluting

and he noticed
how her earrings

dangled
as she downed

upon him
and up again

for breath
oh

he thought
but saying nothing

what a way to go
what a pleasant death.

Terry Collett

Miss You Much.

I miss you
you I miss
time's hold
gone now
like water
through sands
once here
slipped through
hands touch
miss you much.

I love you
you I love
feelings bold
since birth's
unfold
and given free
from me to you
and you to me
and though there
you are not
but in other world
beyond my touch
love you much.

I need you
you I need
your quiet presence
solid form
wisdom embodied
and humour too
over years we knew
and always such
I need you much.

I want you
you I want
more than treasures
more than gold

more than life's
false promises
of riches far
out of finger's
greedy touch
I want you much.

Terry Collett

Missed The End.

Your father used to put
a folded white handkerchief

in the top pocket
of your jacket

and combed your hair
which he'd plastered

with Brylcream first
and even dampened

your eyebrows
to get them to lay down

with his spittled finger
and took you with him

to the movies
to watch cowboy

or war films
or now and then

those romantic ones
with kissing

and too much talk
which although good

you would avoid
if you could

and he took you
to your granddad and gran

and you sat there
bored out of your brain

watching the goldfish
swim round and round

the glass fish bowl
and him talking

about this or that
and once you recall

at a Friday evening treat
at the movies

he'd run off into
the dark

and you sat
watching the film

until an usherette came
and said

your daddy's had
a choking fit

and he's in the foyer
having a rest in a chair

and so you missed
the end of the film

as she took you off
to see him there.

Terry Collett

Misshaped Love.

You never talked about cowboys
or shootouts with Fay.

She was the girl
in the apartment above

who lived with her mum and dad
and younger brother.

You sat next to her
on the bus

your hands wanting to reach out
and touch hers.

You didn't
but held them in check

like hounds ready
for the chase.

She was about your age
eleven or so

give or take a few months
and she had long blonde hair

which her mother
sometimes braided

sometimes not.
What do you do

in your spare time?
She asked.

Oh you know
play about

on the bombed out buildings
or bombsites

or go swimming
or play ball with friends

you said.
She nodded and looked away.

There was a bruise
on her neck

where her hair parted
and sometimes

when you put your hand
on her shoulder

she'd wince
and move away.

But not that day.
That day she let it stay

and even tapped
your hand with hers.

She turned around
and faced you

her eyes filled with tears
like flooded cities

the blue islands
of her pupils

seemingly swimming
against the tide.

We're moving away
she said.

Where? You asked.
Somewhere far away.

Won't see you anymore
she said.

The bus drew up
at your stop

and you got off
and the bus drove away

and you saw her hand
wave at the window.

You never saw her again
or heard how she did

in later years
or if her father still beat her

as Mother said he had.
Sometimes you still saw her

waving goodbye
in your dreams at night.

The bus going over the hill
and your heart pounding

with a misshaped
small boy love still.

Terry Collett

Mistrust Of Sex.

Ginny had a mistrust of sex,
It led into dark corners
she didn't want to recall,
didn't want to explore,
didn't want to know.

Mother'd just died,
Father was too cut up
to notice the fingering and pooking
in shadowy places
out of sight of others.

Her husband tried,
years later,
in a gentle manner,
to open her up
to the joys of sex,
but she closed him up
and shut him down,
after kissing moved on
to touches and holding
and physical smut.

Ginny wished Mother'd been there,
hadn't gone off with death,
hadn't left her alone
with the bogeyman in the dark,
who touched her
and fingered her
just for a laugh and lark.

Terry Collett

Moby Dick 1973

She lies there
on the floor
of our room
in that cheap
small hotel
in Paris.

I wonder
who else has
lain naked
on this floor
wanting sex
in the raw?
Sonya asks.

You look like
a model
for Degas,
I answer.

Come on then
Benedict
don't dither
standing there
like the Pope
at a down
town orgy,
she tells me.

I undress
taking off
my black jeans,
and tee shirt,
and boxers.

The small white
radio
in the room
oozes out

a Mozart
aria.

Now undressed
I watch her
taking in
her plump fruits
and blonde thatch.

I descend
upon her
and harpoon
her softly
(my well known
party trick) ,
with my young
Moby Dick.

Terry Collett

Moira Outside Stockholm

Outside Stockholm
in that base camp
having put up the tents
and unloaded the bags

and suitcases
from the top
of the truck
you walked with Moira

to the camp cafe
and order two beers
and burgers and fries
and looked out

the window
at the spread of tents
over the campsite
and Moira said

if I have to share a tent
with that Yank girl another night
I'll go mad
her and her talk

and boasting
of how many men
she's screwed
and where she's been

and what she's done
and always wearing
that leather gear
all black and tight

showing her backside
and small tits
and so Moira went on
and you listened

half heartedly
wondering what Judith
was doing in Florence
and who she was with

and if she remembered you
and would bring you back
some gift like she did
from Amsterdam

that postcard
of a Chagall print
which you pinned
to your wall

and if she so much
as boasts of her education
once more
I'll break her

FECKING JAW
Moirra said loudly
so that people nearby
turned their heads

and stared
your thoughts of Judith
blew away
and the image

of the Chagall print
pinned to your bedroom wall
maybe she'll sleep elsewhere
you said

who else to sleep with?
she said
huh? who else is there?
what about that Yorkshire girl?

you asked

maybe she will
I'll ask
Moira said

can only say no
and she sat
and thought
and sipped her beer

and the other people
looked away
and returned
to their conversations

and you sipped yours
taking note of her small hands
and plumpish fingers
and the small breasts

pushing through
the tight tee shirt
and the small
silver crucifix

hanging down between
and her moving chin
and you wondered
how well she screwed

but didn't ask
being
you thought
rather rude.

Terry Collett

Molly's First Drink

Molly brings the gin
to her lips
and allows the glass

to linger there
oh that smell
that takes me back

she says
although none other
could hear

too busy
with the raptures
of someone else's

cheerful celebration
but nonetheless
she sips her drink

permitting the liquid
to swallow down
and it takes me back

she repeats
to that first drink
that Christmas

when Granddaddy
left the gin
in the parlour

the lid open
and me just
a young slip

of a girl
before the double figures came
and pouring a glass

and listening out
for the voices
of others

sipped quick
and hearing
a booming laugh

from the other room
probably Uncle Flint
tickling and touching

and the laughter
loud and dirty
was my Mother's.

Terry Collett

Molly's Moan 1958

He would say
when he got in
from work:
how's the dog
and kids?

Did you get
my cigarettes
and did Joe ring
about the horses?

Then he'd sit down
in his armchair,
sweat seeping
into the chair back,
and say:
get us a beer.

You'd get him
a beer and flick
off the top.

He'd down it
with that horrible
slurping sound,
and he'd turn on
the TV box
and sit staring at it.

The dog bit
the postman
and the kids
have played up
something bad
you'd say.

He'd laugh
at the TV,
some programme

he liked
and say nothing
about the dog
or kids.

Just slurp the beer
and burp and laugh.

You at the stove
getting the dinner;
and you could have
stood there naked
and he wouldn't
have turned a hair.

You wish
it had been
Max you went with
instead of him.

But Max
was too quiet
and was careful
with his dough
and said sex
was only
for after marriage
and he only wanted
the two kids
a boy and girl.

But no
you went
and married
this dick
and married
merry hell.

Terry Collett

Mona's Monday Morning.

Mona stands outside
the back door of the
cottage and stares up
at the morning sky.

Monday, school soon.
It seems a lifetime ago
since Friday. She and Lisa
had, the previous day,

burned into each other
a different relationship.
She can still sense each
touch, each hold and kiss.

The rainfall had soaked
them like a holy baptism,
a fresh start, a new beginning.
She breathes in the morning air.

Fresh in the lungs. Cows
moo in a far field. A crow
calls. She closes her eyes
and smells the farm across

the fields. Each part of her
seems touched. Each inch
of flesh seems hotly kissed.
The bedroom had been their

sanctuary, a place of rebirth.
The parents had not heard
or known or suspected a thing.
Teatime had been so innocent

after. Acting as normal, as if
the moments before they had
not made love, had not been
naked in each others arms

flesh to flesh, body against body.
Just tea and sandwiches and
cakes and the usual talk of
farm and land and weather.

She opens her eyes and
watches the clouds drift.
More cows moo. Birds
fly overhead. There is

a new life within, a new love
inside her heart and head.

Terry Collett

Monday Morning Feeling.

Helen awakes
to dawn's light.

Tick tock
of hall clock.

Light peeps
through blue curtains
like a nosey child.

What day is it?
she muses.

Monday.

Sighs.

Looks at her doll,
Battered Betty,
beside her
in the bed;
one eye open,
one eye shut,
dressed in
an old grey dress.

Time?

Radio plays
from sitting room.

Music drifts.

Tick tock
of hall clock.

She counts.

Seven fifteen.

Tick tock.

Time to get up.

Sighs.

Pushes back
grey blankets.

Puts her feet
onto the cold
linoleum floor.

Cold.

She sits
on the edge
of her bed;
looks at her toes,
her feet.

She looks back
at Betty.

Lazy girl.

Sighs.

She gets up
and walks
to the window.

Peeps through
the curtains
at day's dull light.

Coldness bites
at her limbs.

She stares
at the wall opposite;

dull coloured bricks.

She can smell
bacon frying.

Breakfast.

She walks across
her room
on cold linoleum.

Opens the door,
goes out
and closes door;
leaves Betty
to sleep.

She walks down
the passage.

Radio plays.

Music filters.

Bacon smell.

Her mother is
at the gas cooker
frying bacon.

Her hair in curlers,
dark hair,
plump features.

Fairies wake you up?
Mother asks.

No, just woke up,
Helen says,
sniffing the air,
looking at
the kitchen/ bathroom.

The table has been lowered
over the bath.

Plates set out.

Wash before food,
Mother says.

Helen takes
the boiled water
in the kettle
to the sink
and places a plug
in the hole
and pours
the water in.

She puts the kettle
back on the stove.

She turns on
the cold tap
and feels
the water get
to the right
temperature.

Turns off the tap.

Rolls up the sleeves
of her night dress
and washes: neck,
face and hands.

Dries on the towel
behind the door.

Go and sit
in the sitting room
and I'll bring in
your breakfast,

Mother says.

Helen walks through
the passage
to the sitting room.

Her father is
at the dining table.

Tea sipping.

Smoking
a cigarette.

Smoke rises
to the ceiling.

She gets that
dull Monday morning,
yuk school,
feeling.

Terry Collett

Monday Morning On The Bus

Mona sits on the school bus,
the noise of the other children
seems far away, she is indulging

in her thoughts. Lisa will get
on the bus soon. Her closeness
again. Sitting just here. Next to

me, Mona muses, patting the
seat next to her. The evening
before they had parted after

the tea. The bedroom romp
had filled her up. Each moment
seems to relive in her mind.

She looks out of the window,
passing countryside, cows in
fields, trees, birds. They had

almost drowned in the downpour
of rain from the woods to the
house the afternoon before.

Drenched to the skin. Get out
of those wet clothes, they had
been told by a parent. And they

did so. That started it all off.
Naked and drying. How had it
got that far? She thinks, watching

a girl on the other side of the
aisle of the bus talk about
watching such and such on TV.

She wonders how Lisa feels now.
The day after. After such things,
such sights, such deeds. The bus

draws to a stop. Others get on.
Lisa comes up the aisle and sits
beside her. She smiles and fiddles

with her school bag. Her fingers
nervous, like spiders on the run.
Sleep all right? Mona asks. Yes,

Lisa answers. Their eyes meet.
Mona feels a thump in her breast;
her heart seems to want to burst

open. Lisa leans closer. Dreamt of
you, she whispers. Did you? Mona
says, taking in Lisa lips moving, her

eyes, the nose. Lisa nods. Looks
around her. The bus moves on.
Mona wants to speak but her

mouth seems sealed. Lisa turns
again and looks at her. Seems
strange now seeing her clothed

after the nakedness and kissing
and holding. Lisa puts her hand
over Mona's, squeezes, touches,

flesh on flesh. Mona breathes
in deeply. The touch, the feel
of her. She thinks of the last kiss

the night before. Not now of
course. Not with others about.
Not here. They seem in a different

world to the others. Adrift on
their own ship, wild seas. Waves
of passion inside. They look away

each to a different horizon. Love

locked. Hands touching, skin on
skin. Father O'Brien would call it sin.

Terry Collett

Monday Morning Sales 1972

Abela stood talking
with the middle-aged couple
who were interested
in the watercolour
of a Sussex scene
upstairs in the shop.

Benny was downstairs
trying to sell the Van Gogh print
to the young woman
with the thin-wired glasses
and cute body.

The way he looked at her.
Undressing her with his eyes
if I know him.

Like he undressed me last night.
One piece of clothing at a time.

Yes, the Sussex Downs,
she said to the man.
The couple gazed
at the watercolour;
him taking it
and turning it
in different directions.

How Benny had opened me up
like a morning flower.
His kiss any place
he could reach.

We'll take it,
the man said.

She carried the painting
down the stairs,
the couple following behind.

Benny was all smiles.
The girl had gone
and so had the Van Gogh print.

She wrapped up the watercolour;
the man wrote out a cheque.

After they left Abela said:
you sold it then,
the Van Gogh.
Get her phone number?

He smiled.
No, she's not my type,
he said.

And what's your type?
She said.

You are,
he said.

She put the cheque in the till
and shut the drawer.

They walked to the back
and made coffee
and waited
for the next customer
to come in.

He mused on
the young woman's figure.

She on the coming
night's sin.

Terry Collett

Monkey's Wedding

Shoshana sees him,
watches him, he walks
through the playground
towards the cloakrooms,

his head turned away
from her, his profile,
snaps it with her eyes
like a camera, Naaman,

she thinks his name is,
the stride of him, so
goose-bumpily he makes
her, somersault of her

innards, her brain alive
like a wire shot through.
He stops, holds out a hand,
palm upwards, eyes the

sky, then her, standing by
the fence, Monkey's Wedding,
he says, smiling, then down
it comes rain and the sunshine

almost hand in hand like a
weird bride and groom, then
downwards falling, go run,
she hears him loudly calling.

Terry Collett

Moon Glow Mcmlxxi

The old monk was dying
one of the original ones
from France
back in 1907
and I washed
and made him comfortable,

sunlight through high windows
warmth on flagstones
in the church
monks walking in slow
heads down
mindful of God,

memores Dei
I sat in the silent church
at midday
before the office of Sext
stomach rumbling
musing on Iesus Christus
in the desert hungering,

nel famelica del deserto
that time in Tangiers
avoiding Western food
ate their stuff
wholesome while others
who ate Western crap
puked,

Hugh stern faced
walked the cloisters
taking in the way
the sole tree in the garth
swayed in the wind,

déplacé dans le vent
I mused on that time
walking through

a snow storm
my body swayed by the wind
back in 1965,

she opened her legs to me
and said
make me whole
my husband
can't or won't
so I did,

così ho fatto
or so thought
seeking truth
and Gareth said
???????? ????
μ?? ???? ?
???? μ??
quoting Plato
truth is my best friend
even if Socrates is a friend
Plato said
Gareth explained,

George felt the chill
of the cloisters especiality
in the evenings
waiting for Vespers
his hands blue
he moving them
into fists
and undoing so,

I watched the moon
move across
the dark sky
and its glow.

Terry Collett

Moon's Cool Glow 1971

Beyond that window
there's that world,
Yiska said,
she pointed
at the landscape,
snow was falling,
covering the tree tops
and the field,
where a tractor moved,
and gulls flew
down behind
as it moved on.

This world
is our world,
I said,
looking behind us
at the locked ward,
and patients sitting
or walking.

Yiska stood there
in her off pink
nightdress,
arms folded
across her breast,
a cigarette
between lips.

I stood next to her,
my nightgown
hanging loose.

This world
is our world,
she said.

I thought of the night
we had hidden

in the ETC room
on a narrow bed,
but the night nurse came
and found her
(I had hidden
from sight)
and moved her
back to her dormitory.

I returned
to the lounge
and sat staring
into the night sky
from the window,
taking in the stars
and the moon's
cool glow.

Terry Collett

Moral Of Kissing 1962

Elaine thinks
(while eating
her dinner)

about John
on the bus
how other

kids know now
about them
and the kiss

at her home
no secret
anymore

since her young
sister blabbed
to them all

her mother
sits beside
her silent

her father
(knowing not
a thing

about that
kissing stuff)
sits talking

about work
her sister
(blabbermouth)

sits moody
opposite
mouthing food

Elaine wants
that warm kiss
once again

but she wants
that this time
she will know

when he'll kiss
she forks up
a burnt chip

and mouths it
her mother
just after

her father
stops talking
says sharply

he kissed her
who kissed whom?
Father asks

looking wide eyed
at his wife
that boy John

kissed your daughter
the father
gazes at his

youngest girl
not Elaine
I thought he

was with our
Elaine not
Princess

he utters

he didn't
kiss Princess

but Elaine
Mother says
didn't kiss

me how yuck
Princess says
he went kissed

my Plump Hen?
Father says
gazing at

Elaine with
amusement
did he Hen?

Elaine blushes
stops eating
just the once

not a lot
she tells him
fancy that

he mutters
one never
knows what God

has in store
in our house
Mother says

when he came
that Sunday
he kissed her

just the once
Elaine adds
well no more

not again
if he comes
again here

Mother says
Princess yawns
Father smiles

fancy that
my Plump Hen
getting kissed

Mother glares
at Father
the moral

(immoral)
of kissing
has been missed.

Terry Collett

More And More.

Christina sat at the dressing table
to brush her hair, the hairbrush
her aunt had given her, in her hand.
She was still in her nightgown,

her school uniform
was on a chair by the bed,
the bed still unmade.
She looked at her features,

her hair a mess, her eyes
still had sleep in them.
She brushed her hair slowly,
a hundred times, her mother said,

does it best. She dragged the brush
through, pulling through the knots
at the ends. She thought on Benedict,
her friend's brother, the boy she

had become smitten by. She wondered
if she'd see him today; unless she
waited by the school fence and peered
through when his school bus arrived

and he descended and went by the fence
into his playground, she might not.
Maybe if it was fine and they were
permitted to go out on the sports field

she would. They'd met the first time there,
after his sister had told him that
Christina liked him. Thinking about
him now, made her feel excited, made

her insides turn over, not nastily, but
weirdly, as if fingers stirred inside of her.
She had dreamed of him the night before,
dreamed he had sat at the end of her bed,

and she had wanted him to enter, but
he just sat there talking. She stopped
brushing her hair and put the brush down
on the dressing table. They had kissed.

Hard to find a place at school where
they could be alone. They had found
a few moments in the gym during recess
a week ago, just them, the smell of

sweating bodies, gym shoes and feet.
They had their ears pricked for any
sounds, but then kissed. Lips on lips.
His tongue met hers, touched, strange

sensation that, she murmured to herself
sitting gazing at her reflection in the mirror,
as if she'd touched a live wire, it tingled,
rather made her feel open, wide open as

if someone had pressed something within.
She daren't tell or ask her mother even
if her mother wasn't in one of her low moods.
Only when she menstruated the first time

did she mention to her mother about her body.
Oh you'll get use to it, he r mother said,
the curse women have to put up with.
Sometimes in bed or when she got out

of the bath, she would put her arms about
her body and pretend it was Benedict,
imagined it was he doing the caressing
and holding and touching. Time to get

ready for school, she thought, taking out
of the photo of Benedict out of the drawer
and kissing it. He gave it to her after she
had given him one of herself. Not a good one,

she had to sneak one out of the photo box

her parents wouldn't miss. Benedict liked it,
said he kept it somewhere safe. His was
good, her damp lips had left an impression.

She wiped it off and held it against her breasts.
She sighed. At night she kept the photo under
her pillow and took it out to kiss before
going off to sleep. She put the photo away

again and stood up. Time to get dress
and get down for breakfast before her
mother bawled out up the stairs to her.
Out of the window she could see blue

skies, a sun was rising. Might see
Benedict after all, she said, taking
off her nightgown, and letting it slip
to the floor. Oh to see him always,
and see him more and more and more.

Terry Collett

More Cool 1965

It was late afternoon
and Tilly had this bright idea
that we should go
to her uncle's place

(it wasn't far a away)
and stay a few days
(he was away
for a week in France)

she told her mother
she was staying with friends
and had time off work
so we went and stay there

and it was odd being some place
and having to do things
for ourselves
like cook

and tidy up after ourselves
and actually be
in each other's company
with no other distractions

and after the first meal
which we both cooked
(after a style)
and washed up and dried

and put things away
and put on the old
black and white TV
and sat watching it

on this old battered sofa together
after a few hours she said
I'm taking a bath
and getting ready for bed

ok
I said
where I am I sleeping?
she frowned

with me of course
didn't think I'd bring you
out here and sleep
on my own did you?

O right I see
I said
now come share my bath
and let's start this up

I turned off the TV
and followed up
the creaky stairs
and along a carpeted landing

to a bathroom which
had seen better days
and a large old bath
she got towels out

of a small airing cupboard
and put them
behind the door
and began to undress

are you going to stand there
as a spectator or a participant?
she said
I began to undress

it seemed odd
in someone else's house
as if it was more
naughtier than usual

like that time

she came to my place
when all were out
at work and school

but this seemed different
maybe more cool.

Terry Collett

More Fun 1997

Why'd she leave?
Brian says,
I thought Una
was going to stay awhile?

She found
some place else,
Nuala says,
didn't want
to crowd us in.

Brian eats the dinner
and looks at his wife.

I liked her,
he says,
better than some
of your friends.

Well she's gone now
so doesn't matter,
Nuala says.

Silence enters
the room.

Has she a boyfriend?
Brian asks.

No, not yet,
Nuala says,
musing on she and Una
having sex that last time,
after Brian had left for work,
and he returning,
and they in bed stiff
with fear he'd find them,
but he didn't.

Some bloke'll be lucky,
Brian says.

Fancy her do you?
Nuala says.

No, but she's a nice girl,
someone will
snap her up,
Brian says.

I'll let her know
the next time I see her,
Nuala says.

Brian nods.

He did fancy her,
but not that much
that he'd risk his
marriage for,
he muses,
taking in Nuala's
dark features,
the tone of her voice.

Fancy a drink out later?
He says.

Suppose,
Nuala says,
can if you like.

They eat on in silence.

He imagining Una
giving him the come along
if Nuala was out
and Una still there,
maybe just to see if,
but no,
he muses,

it'd not work.

Nuala wishes Una
was still there,
still near,
be able to have her
when Brain was out at work
or better still
at her new place
when she gets one,
that'd be more fun.

Terry Collett

More Letters

More letters found stuffed
Beneath his brown best shoes,
Which had yellowed with age.
Love letters with small crosses
For kisses at the bottom
Of the page. Words neatly penned,
Love spoken of, gifts thanked for,
Places seen, shared and remembered.
He was a dark horse, Mother said,
Never knew he had these, so many here,
Stuffed, forgotten or out of sight and mind.
Granddad had had some woman
On the go at some time and place
Years ago, before Gran, before
The whole circus of living had ended.
A photograph tucked between pages,
Some woman in old-fashioned hat
And dress and wide-open eyes.
Secrets hidden and kept, words
Upon words on pages, scribbled
By a hand now sure to be dead.
Best burn them, Mother sighed,
Nothing to be gained, best nothing's said.

Terry Collett

More Than Charlie Would Do

You suppose
that is what he meant
when he left last night
that he couldn't
leave his wife for you,
what with her health
being as it was,
and her nerves being such
that he couldn't
leave her just now.

You inhale
on the cigarette,
look at the man
at a nearby table,
at his wife
(or so you assume)
with her hair done so and so,
and thick red lipstick,
like your mother
used to have,
coated on her
rather thin lips.

Charlie said he couldn't
leave his wife,
although he had said
he would once, would
have left her half dead
to be with you,
but not now,
not at this moment
in time it seems.

You exhale the smoke
into the air about you.

The woman at the table nearby
yaks to her husband.

He looks past her
and at you;
his eyes
drinking you in,
his lips parted slightly
as he prepares
to drink his coffee.

Charlie was all for it
at one time,
and in bed last night,
after having made love
for the second time,
he lay back and said
he couldn't leave
his sick wife for you,
and said it in those
wormy words of his.

The man at the nearby table
smiles at you.

His wife yaks on,
unaware her husband
has almost undressed you
and is about to
have it off with you
on the table
in front of you,
which you muse,
at the moment,
is more than
Charlie would do.

Terry Collett

More Thrilling 1962

Yehudit polished
the brass pieces
her mother had set
her to do.

Piece of cloth
and some Brasso
her mother
gave her to use.

Her mother was in
the garden weeding
the vegetable beds.

Her sister was in
the kitchen
peeling potatoes.

Yehudit thought of Benny
and how they listened
to Elvis on his record player
in his room
lying on his bed.

His mother downstairs
preparing dinner.

The radio playing.

Rubbed the brass piece.

Sat in the chair
wishing Benny
was there.

Kissed on his bed.

Nothing else
in case his young brother

came into the room
from his games outside.

She rubbed hard
wishing the brass thingy gone.

There were two photo
of Marilyn Monroe
in his room.

She'd died recently
and he said
he felt choked.

The woman in
the black and white photos
looked out
and smiled at her.

She put
the brass piece down
and went to the window
and looked out
at her mother
weeding the bed
with her back bent.

Brass rubbing wasn't
her favourite pastime.

They lay there
on his bed.

Elvis singing
with guitars playing.

His mother hadn't minded
them in his room.

No inquisition
like her mother
would do if

(by God's luck)
he came to her place
or room.

Soft kiss.

Lips on lips.

Wet and warm.

She'd felt
weird after.

Wanted more.

That boy David
up the road
would have wanted more
at least he seemed to
want more whenever
she spoke to him
which was rare
as she didn't
like him much.

I'll give you a bob
if you let me see
your boobs
he had said
once at the bus stop
to school.

She hadn't.

Not for a shilling.

Benny had seen more
for nothing.

Elsewhere not
in his room.

Too risky what
with his brother
maybe coming in
and his mother
downstairs.

Just in case.

The boy David
could stick his shilling.

Kissing Benny
was more thrilling.

Terry Collett

More Yes Please 47bc

Marcus has gone, off
on some campaign
on Caesar's orders,
Annona is glad,
the bed has more space,
his smell of wine
and sweat and maleness
has left with him.

The bedding is fresh,
where he once lay his head
Amy lies now, her smaller
frame occupies his space,
her eyes gazing at Annona
sensing Annona's hands
feel along her tender thigh.

Not in her own lonely bed
now, but here in her mistress's
bed, here with warmth and
love and holds and kisses.

Annona senses Amy's breath
as she draws near, warm and
fresh not of wine or staleness,
she feels along Amy's flesh,
her fingertips smoothing as
she goes, kisses the lips and
cheeks and neck and downward
moves in slow passion, lips
planting kisses as she goes.

Amy kisses the head, the two
shoulders, the breasts, feeling
a deep openness and entering
a thousand dreams explode
and flash, and words reduced
to ahh and oohs into the night.

Marcus had gone to his war,
Annona lies in Amy's arms,
feeling the safety of a lover's
hold, knowing the risk if sounds
are heard or someone comes
and sees their love or kisses
touched, but there she lies as
ship in harbour, resting after a
sexual journey through rough
seas and knowing Amy's thinking
as does she: more more, yes please.

Terry Collett

Morning And Memories

She had managed to get out
and met you by the pond

where you had been waiting
and the morning air was fresh

and the birds were in song
and the flowers around the pond

were colourful
and she sat beside you

and said
Had to sneak out

the back way
before my mother

gave me chores
and anyway

it's too nice a day
to be stuck indoors

and she looked at you
and smiled her bright smile

and you said
Glad you came

don't like being here
unless you're with me

it reminds me of you
this place

us being here together
and she said

Remember that time
we were here

and the rain came down
and we got drenched

and had to run to the barn
and shelter

and we were warm
and looked at each other

and then she stopped
and looked at the pond

and at the ducks there
and the bright morning sky

and you said
Yes that was a time to remember

and do you remember
that mouse that ran over your leg

and you screamed
and it echoed

around the barn
as if you were being murdered

and she laughed
and put her head

on your shoulder
and said

I can't help it
if mice frighten me

and you sensed her head
against you

and wanted that moment
like all moments with her

never to end
but some how

to always to be there
memories and moments

and feelings
and the ducks

and the smell
of the morning air

always to be in my mind
and always to be there.

Terry Collett

Morning Escape 1961

From the time
I woke up
and went downstairs
my mother moaned.

Lizabeth you have to
make your room tidier
I have never seen
such a room
and your dirty linen
needs putting
in the washing bag
not on the floor.

I ate toast
and tried
to ignore her
looking at her.

Her hair
was a frizzy grey
as if electric
was buzzing
through it
as she spoke.

That black skirt
is too short
she moaned on
my mother would
never have allowed me
to wear such a thing.

The cat was sitting
by the back door
waiting to go out
it was tired
of her moaning too.

I slurp my milk
(just to annoy her)
and said
I am going out.

Out this time
of morning?
she said.

I need to go
see someone
I said.

Who at this time?
she queried.

A boy I like
I said.

Not that boy
who was here
that day
when I got back
from shopping?
she said.

Yes Benny
I said.

At this hour?
she moaned.

He gets
busy later
I lied.

She moaned on
so I crept out
the back door
and let the cat out.

I got out

my bike
and rode off
before she could say
another word.

I peddled fast
like a wild
flying bird.

Terry Collett

Morning Sky

The morning sky
was one of those

cold January mornings
with redness

up there
amongst

the off white clouds
and she said

I dreamt of you last night
And you came into my room

and into my warm bed
and even my sister

didn't know
you were there

and you said
I dreamt

of Marilyn Monroe
and entered

into her room
and tried to get

into her bed
but I didn't want

to disturb her sleep
so just sat

and watched her
like studying some

fine work of art
then I woke up

to a cold morning
and she said

you were better off
in my dream

where we kissed
and cuddled

but then
my sister woke me

and you disappeared
into the cold morning air

and you said
yes I remember

I dreamt
of being there.

Terry Collett

Morning Song

Sister Elizabeth looks
out of window. No mirror.
Self unseen. Image only

Imagined. Pushes window
Outward, breathes air,
morning fresh, birdsong

From mulberry tree, old
still there. The cloister
Below, the red brick, arches,

Walls, no nun in sight.
At Matins eyes hard to
keep open, stifled yawns,

Chanted from memory, Latin
Words on page a dull blur.
Wonder how father is?

Aged now, pains most days.
She sniffs the air, breathes
in, tastes fresh air on tongue.

She places a hand behind
the pane of glass of window.
Her refection seen there.

Sin of sin. Vanity of vanities.
She looks at her refection.
Seen. Takes her hand away.

Makes sign of the cross.
Bell tolls. Bell tower across
the way. Who rings? Which

Sister? Lauds soon. Chants
And prayers. She fingers her
cowl, brushes nose, eyelids.

She looks away from window.
Cell tidy. Books put in shelves.
Crucifix on wall above bed.

Wooden and aged. Plaster
Christ, pinned by small nails
through hands. Mother bought

Her her first rosary. White, small,
silver cross and Christ. Mother
taught to say rosary. Word for

Word. Mother cancer eaten.
Prayers offered. She moves to
the door, goes out. Passageway

Clear. None is there. She closes
her cell door. Puts hands away
In her black habit. Walks, muses,

Silent prayers. Down the stairs,
as taught, slow but careful, not
to rush, no running. Into the

Cloister, morning sunlight touches
cloister wall and floor. Flowers
in flower bed by cloister wall,

Well tended, watered. Fingers
Rosary, thumb over the body
of Christ, rubs, smooth with

Rubbing. Goes by the refectory
door, smells of coffee, warm
Bread. On by the stairs to upper

Landings. Sister Francis by cloister
wall eyes closed, lips moving,
hands together. passes by, notes

White hands, fingers touching.

Smell of incense from church,
enters, fingers stoup, holy water,

Touches forehead, makes sign
Of Christ, moves into church,
genuflects, enters choir stalls,

Takes place. Stands till closes
Eyes, sees the image of herself
In window mirror reflected face.

Terry Collett

Morning Time.

Morning time
time to sit
on the side
of your bed

time to muse
on the night before
and that dame
who stayed

and as just left
and you know
it could have been
a better night

a better relationship
a more intense encounter
but there you go
that's life

it comes and goes
and leaves sometimes
a horrible taste
in the mouth

like a night spent
drinking too much
or smoking
or just plain being here

as a kid you would
spend this moment
in a prayer mode
you know

where you
close you eyes
and put your hands together
and you mutter words

which you were taught
by your parents
as they were taught
by their parents

and so it went on
but then one day
you stopped it
stopped praying

and just sat
on the side of the bed
with a fuzzy
kind of head

like now
and nothing
has changed
somehow.

Terry Collett

Mother Shucking Peas.

As a kid
you used to watch
your mother

shucking peas
over the kitchen sink
and see the skill

her fingers
and thumb had
of clearing out

the peas into a bowl
with a single move
and you asked her

for one of the shucks
to chew
and she said

shucks?
you want a shuck?
yes please

you said
and she gave you one
from her hand

and you chewed
the juices out
and let it move

around your mouth
like that old tobacco
the cowboys had

in the black
and white films
your father

had taken you to see
and then you swallowed
and asked for more

and your mother obliged
with a raised brow
and a continued

moving out of peas
from the shuck
with nimble thumb

and fingers' grip
as another green shuck
sat upon your lip

cowboy style
and your mother
with a shake of head

smiled and carried
on her work
of pushing out peas

from the pod
as you walked off
into the cowboy sunset

thinking of the Wild West
with no thought
of Boothill or God.

Terry Collett

Mother Silent

Those days are over now
you and your mother

sitting in the garden
she with her posh lady hat

and you in your cap
to keep the sun

from your balding head
she maybe muttering

but mostly still
and quiet and looking

as best she could
at the birds coming and going

as they picked up bread
now she is still

and silent once more
quietly dead

and you sit no more
in the garden

in your cap
and she

in her posh lady hat
with the sun

on your head
she is silent now

forever gently
peacefully dead.

Mother's Lecture 1961

Lizabeth comes home
from school
(a wet day so didn't
see Benny) ,
and walks past her mother
in the kitchen.

Did you take
that sex book back
to that girl?
Her mother asks.

Lizabeth looks at her:
of course(she hadn't
she had hid it
elsewhere in her room) ,
read it anyway,
didn't need it
anymore.

Her mother eyes her sternly:
don't bring
a disgusting book
like that home again,
her mother says.

Lizabeth sighs:
is that it?
Can I go
to my room now?

No, I want to
talk to you,
her mother says.

Talk to me
or with me?
Lizabeth says
gazing at her mother.

May I remind you,
my girl, you are
just 13 not 23,
and I will not
have you speak to me
in that fashion,
her mother says.

Lizabeth looks away;
the curtains are open,
letting in light
from a dull day.

If I spoke to my mother
like that I would
have had a good hiding,
her mother says firmly.

Lizabeth wants to get
to her room,
she is pissed off
not seeing Benny
and hanging round
is making her more
pissed off.

Sorry I shouldn't
talk like that,
Lizabeth says,
putting on her
little girl sorry
expression.

Sit down,
the mother says.

Lizabeth sits down
on a tall stall
by the kitchen table.

Her mother

sits opposite.

Why would you want
such a book?
Her mother asks,
and why did she
give such a book to you?

Lizabeth looks
at her mother's
strained features:
the hair tidy,
but greying slightly.

I wanted to know
about sex,
and she had
a book about it,
Lizabeth says.

Why did you want
a book about sex?
her mother says,
emphasizing
the word sex.

To learn about it,
Lizabeth says.

Why learn,
why now?
Her mother says.

Lizabeth wishes
she had seen Benny
at school,
but the rain
had prevented it.

I need to learn
or I won't know
what to do,

and I'm getting
to an age when
I am inquisitive.

Her mother
stares at her:
the red hair,
the eyes,
the way she sits
on the stool,
the school skirt
drawn up well
above the knees.

You are too young
for that kind of thing yet,
so do not bring
that book home again;
if you want
to know anything
ask me,
her mother says.

Lizabeth holds in
the desire to laugh;
the thought of her mother
telling her anything
about sex was laughable.

I will ask,
Lizabeth says,
straining to keep
a straight face;
putting on her
innocent girl face.

Well off you go,
and change,
and keep your room tidy,
her mother says.

Lizabeth goes out

of the kitchen,
and up the stairs,
sighing for the delay,
wishing her mother's
words of wisdom
would go away.

Terry Collett

Mouthful Of Lies 1912

Susie snuggles
up to close to Polly
in the large iron bedstead,
places her cheek
against Polly's back,
her hands wrapped around
Polly's waist.

Polly sleeps;
a long day behind,
a long day ahead.

The cold night air in the attic,
makes Susie snuggle
closer still to Polly.

She listens;
hears the other maid's breathing;
she wants to kiss her,
but dares not.

She puts her lips close
to Polly's back
and pretends a kiss.

She wants a real kiss,
to kiss the lips
and hold close
as close can be,
but she dare not:
Polly would smack
her face or worse.

She had watched
Polly undress for bed;
it had made her day
that removing of clothing,
each time a little more
sight of flesh.

Some mornings(at 5am)
she pretends sleep,
watching Polly undress,
washing naked
with cold water
from the enamel bowl,
watching through
the slits of her eyes,
but says nothing
just a mouthful lies.

Terry Collett

Move On.

Move on Mulligan would say
Move on don't look back and
Yet he'd be off on one of his
Journeys into his past talking
About the good old days about
Him and O'Connor and the things
They got up to and how they were
The boys to be seen with and how
They'd be all over the place with
The drink and all and the girls were
Hanging on to their arms and you'd
Say and what kind of girls were they
To be hanging onto your arms and
He'd laugh and slap his knee and give
You the look he gave when he knew
He'd said something he ought not to
But there you are he'd say men are
Men and so it will ever more be so but
For you it was always are the kids fed
Are they clothed are they happy in their
Shallow squalor but Mulligan saw no
Further than his nose heard nothing that
Wasn't clinking with glass and drink oh
Men my girls are they worth it you'd say
Putting the kids to bed makes you think.

Terry Collett

Mr Paddy's Capers.

Just when she thought
She'd found a place alone

To read her book, Mr Paddy
poked his nose between

Her and the open book, so
That pages are blanked out

By his huge head. Mr Paddy
Go off and annoy another,

She said, but he stood there
Determined to be where he

Was, between her and the
Brown covered book, held

Out in her small hands. Oh
Mr Paddy I cannot see the

Pages. Please go off and run
In the garden or in the kitchen

And steal a bone, she said. But
He wouldn't leave her alone,

He pushed his head against her
Young girl body, his damp nose

Dampening her wrist and her
White dress with blue sash, and

Dribble from his lips was wetting
The pages. Mr Paddy please let

Me be, I'm trying to read can't
You see? Mr Paddy's brown eyes

Scanned the pages, nothing there
But scribbled lines upon white paper,

And still he stood wet mouthed with
Big brown eyes and his silly old caper.

Terry Collett

Mr Toby And Love

I love Mr Toby,
Miss Tibby says,
lying on her bed,
with her red and white
flowered two-piece
bed suit on,
with legs raised,
lifting him skywards
in her hands,
(she fresh showered) .

Mr Tibby,
she calls,
kissing his paws,
a bluey-white,
where will you,
my darling,
sleep tonight?

He wags his tail,
either from fright
or trying his charms,
dangling from
her hands and arms,
and sexily meows
oft repeatedly.

She shakes her head,
pushing her black
haired head, into
the marshmallowy
pink pillow.

Where are you going
to lay your head, My Toby?
She says, sensing
his tail wag
between her thighs,
(a bit like Henry did,

but he told lies) ,
you can't sleep with me,
you naughty puss,
can't nest your
furry head beside
my head,
in my soft
and snugly bed,
can't sleep here.

He purrs loudly;
she can sense the slight
vibrations along her arms.

Bad boy,
trying your charms,
she says, (just like Henry
did purring between
my thighs with those
drinkable eyes) .

Mr Toby begins to wiggle,
either to be put
down and to lie,
or run away and play.

She smiles,
and kisses his nose,
and puts him on the bed
beside her head,
and he snuggles down
against her breasts,
purring mildly,
(just as Henry did,
but he more wildly) .

Terry Collett

Mrs Clark's Daughter.

Your mother stood talking
With Mrs Clark after school
And you were kicking your
Heels waiting to get home
To your toys and games and
You gazed at Mrs Clark's young
Daughter who poked her head
Out from around her mother's
Wide ass and stared at you
Through thin wired spectacles
Which made her eyes large as
Fish in glass bowls and her hair
Was ribboned up in two plaits
Either side of her head giving
Her a stern expression and Mrs
Clark said Helen here has a crush
On your son or so she told me
After school yesterday and Mrs
Clark gave you a big smile like
A hippo coming out of water
And your mother said he never
Talks of girls and such all too
Busy with his toys and games
And shooting from his imaginary
Horse around the house and
Mrs Clark said well boys will
Be boys and girls be girls each
Playing games with their own
Toys and Helen poked out her
Tongue and a boss-eyed stare
God was you glad when your
Mother took you out of there.

Terry Collett

Mrs Ford's Sexual Young Man.

Mrs Ford and you
walked the streets of Hove
taking in the buildings
and architecture

hearing the seagulls
and sea's swirl
and tides' rush
smelling the sea salt

and candyfloss
in passing kid's hands
she talking about Eire
and maybe

going there one day
and you listening
to her words
wondering what

passersby thought
of you and her
and the age gap
and thinking

of the night before
the hotel room
the noisy bed
the second rate

furniture
threadbare carpets
and someone's
transistor radio

playing from a room
along the hall
and she lying
on the bed

waiting
you undressing
like some stripper
making her laugh

and the laughter
echoing around the walls
and that old painting
of some sea scene

and she calling you over
and into the bed
and you thinking
of what her husband

was doing or what
he'd say if he could see
this scene
she there

arms spread wide
smiling
pubic hair
dark and tight

and you getting ready
for the plunge
the radio pushing out
some Rolling Stones

your pecker
like some fisher's rod
and the seagulls swooped
and dived

and all thoughts
of the night before
fled and you and she
laughed as you ducked

your head

there by the beach
the hotels behind
looking out

to sea and sky
and ships moving
across
the horizon's scan

Mrs Ford and you
her sexual young man.

Terry Collett

Mrs Netley And You

You followed Netley
through his parents' house
the rooms having
a middlebrow look
and out into the back
through French windows
and along to the outdoor
swimming pool

he introduced you
to his mother
sitting in a chair
in a bright red
swimming costume

this is Benedict
Netley said

his mother eyed you
with her dark blue eyes
have you come to swim?
she said

Netley said you had
if that was all right

she smiled at you
not at Netley
who stood beside you
have you any swimwear?
she said

no I didn't think
to bring any
you said

Netley find some spare
Netley said he would
and went off

you stood there
a bit shy

want drink?
she said

have you a Pepsi?
you said

of course
she said
help yourself

you tried to avoid
looking at her
sitting there
in that red costume
and her body exposed
where the costume
didn't cover

over by the wall
she added
pointing over the way

you looked at her
and smiled
and took the two fruits
wrapped in red
and carried them
in your boyish head.

Terry Collett

Mrs Oldham On The Slow Train And Before.

Mrs Oldham
on the slow train
to the castle
held your hand

between her thigh
and yours
beneath her coat
although it was summer

and the day was hot
in case some one saw her
and told her husband
hey I saw your old lady

with some young guy
holding hands
but no one did
and as you walked

around the castle later
listening to the guide
looking at pictures
and furniture

and suits of armour
you couldn't get out
of your mind
the picture of her

taking you home
while her husband
was working
and her dog barking

and her saying
shut up Napoleon
he's here as a guest
and taking your jacket

and sitting you down
on the sofa
and offering you drinks
and talking of babies

and how her husband
didn't want them
and all he wanted
was the sex side

and the booze
and cigarettes
and you sat there
thinking of how tight

together her tits were
under her pink top
and wondering
how she made love

and if she enjoyed it
as she brought you
coffee and sat beside you
her hand on your thigh

rubbing it upward
and downward
all the while talking
some music playing

some crooner
called Como
or some such guy
and her lips on your neck

sucking and kissing
you wondering
what her husband was doing
and what he was missing.

Mrs Tinkledrip's Demise

Mr Alfreds was saddened
by Mrs Tinkledrip's demise.

She had the two rooms
along the hall from his.

She had music playing
from some old gramophone

most of the day, old dance music,
foxtrots, tangos, waltzes and all

and he was sure he could hear
her footsteps some days

along the floor, tap tapping
and soft shuffling.

Mr Alfreds went
and painted her kitchen

a bright blue in 1932,
and papered her parlour

in a flowered design
in August 1939.

Sometimes he stayed for lunch,
and they'd chat

about the good old days,
nibble sandwiches,

and sip warm tea.
Mr Alfreds knocked

her door the fatal day;
the music played

on and on
the same old tune.

He got no answer
to his rapping;

he thought
she was napping

and went away.
They found her dead

and cold next day,
sitting by the window

staring into death domain,
while outside came

the gentle pitter-patter
of slow rain.

Terry Collett

Mugging In Edinburgh

The Yank came in over night
and at breakfast that morning

in the Edinburgh hotel
he said

I was mugged last night
at the railway station

and your brother said
how comes that happened?

Well I was in the john
the Yank said

and someone banged
on the door of the stall

and said
open up I'm going to throw up

and so I opened up
and the guy pushed me back

and stole my wallet
out of my pants

and ran off with it
and you said

you opened up
to let the guy in

while you were on the john?
well I wasn't thinking

the Yank replied
I just thought

well he needs to get in
and the other guests

at the table
looked at each other

but said nothing
and your brother said

what did you do then?
Oh I finished my business

and phoned the cops
the Yank said

and they
were most helpful

they said they'd
get in touch

when they caught the guy
and you said

you want any ketchup
with that sausage,

bacon and egg?
and the Yank nodded

and you felt his hand
touching your leg.

Terry Collett

Musing Over Latte.

Floptin sits outside
the cafe on the mall

and watches the three
plump dames sitting nearby

one slightly plumper
than the others

and as he stares
it reminds him

of his first lady
the one who showed him

the ropes of sexuality
who sucked away

his innocence one night
and he recalls

how liberated
he felt back then

how her plump flesh
flapped against him

and the sound was like
nothing he had heard before

and she said to him
sweet boy

you're a man now
you can tell your friends

you have made the grade
and now sitting at the cafe

on the mall
watching the plump dames

feeding her mouths
their chins moving

their eyes excited
their voices booming

and their laughter
sexual and loud

and looking at
the plumpest dame

how her hair
was pulled back

so and so
he smiles to himself

and wonders how
she'd make him feel

with her flesh flapping
and her eyes aglow.

Terry Collett

Musing With Milka.

We sit on a river bank
our bikes resting
against a tree;
Milka throwing
small pieces of branches
into the river's flow.

Some one said
you can't walk
in the same river twice,
she says,
don't know
who said it,
but some one said it.

Heraclitus,
some Greek guy said it,
I say.

She looks at me,
her eyes cow-like,
deep and sad.
What's he mean?

It's not the same water,
it moves on like our lives;
we can't stand still
no matter how much
we wish we could.

Where'd you read that?

I study her sitting there;
her hair brushed back,
tied by a ribbon;
her grey coat,
the brown and pink dress
coming to the knees,
black stockings.

Reader's Digest,
I guess.

I hate cold water;
had to wash in it
this morning
because the fire'd
gone out,
she says,
looking at
the river again.

I know,
I heard you moaning
at your mother.

She shrugs her shoulders,
continues throwing
branches in the river.

She moans at me
often enough.

But she's the parent,
that's what they do.

What would you do
if I stripped off now
and walked through
the river?
She says, smiling.

What would your mother say
if you did?

She'd not know.

If she did?

God knows;
slap me one, I guess,

but what would you do?
She asks me.

Nothing;
just watch the scene.

You wouldn't join me?

And get wet feet?
no, not me.

Spoilsport;
too cold anyway.

I open my cigarette packet
and take two out;
one for her
and one for me.

We light up
and sit musing,
the river flowing on,
slow,
moving over
small rocks and stones,
down a slight hill,
we sitting
watching its flow.

Terry Collett

My Apartment.

My apartment she said is not
That big and not in a state I'd
Like you to see but give me
Time and I'll tidy it up and put
Away the books and papers
Scattered over the floor and table
And put all my clothes and smalls
Away and hey open up the windows
To let in fresh air to let out the smell
Of cigarettes and the cat I keep after
Finding it by the trash and it looked
So sad and unkempt and you said sure
Whenever you like wondering what
She did all day while not out at work
And if she kept the cat in bed with her
And had cat's hairs everywhere and
How could she live in that untidiness
And come to think of it she did have
That catty smell when you stood next
To her in the lobby and yet you couldn't
Help being attracted to her couldn't help
Wanting to just plant a kiss on that cheek
Of hers and maybe get her into bed for
Sex then she said you must come over
And listen to my jazz records and maybe
Meet my mother and if you don't mind
Her passing wind occasionally we could
All have a good time and all of a sudden
You remembered you had to be out of
Town for a while and maybe after the Fall
You uttered with an awkward smile and
She smiled back and pushed her fingers
Through her hair (unbrushed and tied back
With a blue ribbon) all long and black.

Terry Collett

My Bridegroom Lifts Me Up.

My bridegroom lifts me up
from the world's dark, said
Sister Clare, He holds me fast
against the world's clutches,
His touch heals my deepest
wounds, my many failures.

His eyes search me and see
me as I am; there is no pretence
in His presence, no maybe
in His words. He lifts away
from the false prophets and
lying religions, He shows me
His love in a thousand ways,
His love has no conditions, no
limitations, no world's whims.

He calls me out of darkness
with the slightest word, none
is worthy of Him, none seek
Him as they ought. He seeks
me when I am lost, finds me
when I cannot see beyond
the narrowness of the me,
am blind to the reality of being,
too lost at times to the world's
sad ways. He will lift me up in
the Last Days; will save from
drowning in my deep depressions,
my eyes open to the brightness
of His face. I bathe in His love
and grace, hear His call even
when the noise of the world is
at its loudest beat, I shall know
His love, feel His tender touch,
even when I am sunk in darkness
and the wild world's too much.

My Hands

My hands, she said,
shall wipe away
the tears that flow
too readily, since

my demise,
from your eyes.
Shame that only
in a dream,

she said as such,
but you shall treasure
her words just as much.

Terry Collett

My Mind Dim.

And he acted
as if it was the norm,
said Coco,
and thought it ok

to cheat on me like that,
and with her
of all women,
she who I thought

was a friend,
and all the time
I was talking to her
about him seeing someone,

she said,
o I don't think he would,
and she was having
him off behind my back,

and so I had to get my head
around that, but each time
I saw her I knew after,
it was her he was giving it,

it was her
his thing was plunging,
and she sitting there
as if butter wouldn't,

but she had, and did,
and sat there in
that cafe smiling,
and talking to me

as if I didn't know
or guess, and I could
have scratched her eyes out,
and spat in her coffee,

but I just sat
and gazed at her,
and tried to forget
about him.

and the light of day going,
and my heart
getting cold,
and my mind dim.

Terry Collett

Myfanwy's Date 1959

Myfanwy supped her tea
from her saucer,
just like Auntie had
before death claimed her,

like some debt collector
thinking she owed him.
Tea warm and dark
and sweet, just how

she liked her men,
Auntie used to say,
and laughed until
she nigh wet herself.

Myfanwy stared
at the photograph
of Auntie
in black and white

and laughed.
Funny old biddy;
pipe smoker,
gin drinker,

man eater,
unmarried or divorced,
she'd not say,
better, she'd said,

that way.
She gulped the last
of the tea
and put the saucer down

on the table,
and lit up
a cigarette
and sat smoking.

Jones the Bones,
her useless boyfriend
(for want of
a better term)

had asked her out
on a love date
(he'd said
dyddiad cariad) .

She had said:
I'll think about it,
see how I feel
after Chapel

and Dai Thomas's sermon.
Jones had'n't
been impressed.
Wanted his end away,

I expect,
Myfanwhy mused,
watching the smoke
cloud out Auntie's features

in the frame.
Not that she
minded mind,
but he seemed

to expect it
like a dog a walk
after a meal.
She scratched her thigh;

that last time
in his rather
dilapidated room
and that single bed,

had not left

her thoughts
or her gin
soaked head.

Terry Collett

Naaman As Before 1962

Shoshana took me aside
in the corridor
of the school.

She whispered
that her sister
was pregnant.

How comes?
I said.

She said her sister
had been with some boy
and her father was angry
and her sister was crying
so much.

I looked around us
as other kids
walked past.

So what now?
I said.

She said she didn't know
and that the house
was not the same now.

Her mother seemed
to be the one person
who was calm
and trying
to get things sorted.

I was just about to ask
her a question
about us
when a prefect
came along

and told us
to move on to class
as the bell
was about to go
for lessons.

She looked at me
and kissed my cheek
and went off
up the corridor.

I watched her go
fired up about her
as before.

Terry Collett

Naaman Feeling Low 1962

I opened the Talmud
and read as was said.

I closed the book
and kept what I read
in my head.

I lay on my bed
and mused
on Shoshana:
dark haired,
dark of eyes,
lips to speak and kiss.

I dreamed last night
of her in my arms
and woke hugging
my pillow
smelling of my sweat
and dry shampoo.

I never saw her today
maybe she was away.

Naaman, you'll say,
did you miss me today?

Like the night sky
misses the stars
and moon
or the summer sky
the sun and birds
in flight.

She told me
her sister
was pregnant
and her parents
are mad

and all is intense.

She daren't
say about me
going to see her
not just now.

I see a moth
at the windowpane
fluttering against
the glass
trying to get in.

My parents
are downstairs
watching TV.

I hear their laughter
hang in the air,
some comedy show.

I watch the moth fluttering
feeling low.

Terry Collett

Naaman Muses 1962

Naaman thinks
of Shoshana
muses on her
as he writes
from the blackboard
in class.

The teacher explaining
the rise of the Nazis
the resulting war
and the Holocaust.

His grandfather died
in 1936
and his great-uncle
in 1941.

The stain of anti-Semitism
having touched his family.

He wonders if Shoshana's family
had been hit so from the curse.

Naaman writes
in his neatest hand
the script the teacher
has written.

He hopes she
will be there
on the sports field
at recess
if the weather is fine.

He hasn't brought
his book today
he wonders if she
will allow him a kiss.

The teacher has
finished his script
and stands back
to view his work
hands on his hips.

He has seen a photo
of his grandfather
back in 1929.

Before the Nazis
came to power.

He is smiling
bright eyed.

Unlike that
Naaman assumes
when he died.

Terry Collett

Naaman Muses 1962.

You walk back
to the school,
leave Shoshana
sitting on the grass
where she is talking
to some girl
who came up to you both
as you sat and talked.

The bell has just tolled
for the end of midday recess.

In your hand the book
of butterflies and moths.

You look back
and she and the girl
walk towards the school
across the grass.

She held your hand,
her soft hand,
and you wanted
to kiss her,
but felt unsure
what she might say,
so didn't.

Other kids walk
from the grass
towards the school.

Geography looms:
countries, maps,
and all that shit;
you like biology,
but geography
doesn't interest you
one bit.

Terry Collett

Naaman's Book 1962

Naaman showed Shoshana
the butterfly he mentioned
in the butterfly and moths book

he brought to school
at lunch recess
sitting on the sport field

both sitting next to each other
he opened the book
at the right page

she looked at the butterfly
its colour
the patterns

the brief words about it
and as she read
she sensed him near her

his words talking
she wanted to turn
and kiss him

but there were too many
other kids around watching
and she was too shy

to do so
but it was there
in her mind

and her hand touched his
as he turned the page
and he looked at her

and said
it's probably the most beautiful
of butterflies

and held her hand
briefly in his
and that sent vibrations

through her
and she wondered if
any were watching

and in a sense
she couldn't care less
just to feel him touch

then he released her hand
and turned the page again
and pointed to another butterfly

and said the name
but her senses were on fire
and she could hardly

focus on his words
her breathing was tight
and her eyes scanned

his finger moving
and wished it would
touch her and finger feel

but it didn't
he placed his hand
on his knee

having the book
spread out
she looked at him

but he was focusing
on the page
and the script

and she wondered if

he'd still read
the page

if she stripped.

Terry Collett

Nadya Imagines

If she could have got
inside her head, Nadya
thinks, she is sure, her

mind can expand like an
inner universe. The thoughts
moving around like lost

planets, clusters of stars,
images, words, faces, actions
remembered. If she could

just put her hand into a
hidden orifice and reach
into her brain and sort

amongst the galaxies of
ideas she could be brighter,
braver, wiser, and there

clinging to certain ideas
associations like Proust's
madeleines would be old

loves, broken heart moments,
melodies from favourite songs.
Josef has told her to leave

off the booze, to put away
the bottles, drink water, tea
or whatever. But he does

not satisfy. His love making
is a joke, all push and poke.
Sometimes she thinks her

thoughts come out of her
head and dance. Time for
another drink. She thinks

of Paris. Summers past,
spring walks. Josef's endless
chatter breaks in; those all

too intellectual boring talks.
She imagines him as another,
pretends some young Russian

overeager tends to her, embraces
her body, kisses each inch of her
flesh, pleasure giving. No more of

this boring life, more of that wild,
touching the new, exploring sex, living.

Terry Collett

Naming Of Things.

That's a Small Skipper
Jane said

And that's a Clouded yellow
as two butterflies

flittered overhead
as you both lay

in the tall grass
on the side

of the Downs
and you followed

her finger
as it indicated

the butterflies' flight
and then they were gone

and she gazed at you
and said

What?
How do you know

the names of things?
I'm a country girl

not a townie like you
she replied

her lips moulding
the words like a potter

moulds clay
and you caught a whiff

of her perfume
carried on the calm breeze

over your heads
and you looked

at her there
in the grass

her head turned back
to the sky

her eyes reflecting
the summer blue

and her left leg
bent upwards

so that her knee
stood naked

beneath the sun
and her right hand

lay next to yours
the white blouse

open at the neck
and she said

I often used to lay here
alone listening

to the overhead birds
and the winds' moan

watching tractors
in the fields below

and mother wondering
where I was

And now?
you asked

Does she wonder
where you are now?

she turned her head
and gazed at you

No not now
she knows I'm with you

and that I'm showing you
the store of nature

and the panoramic view
And she trusts you?

you asked
sensing her hand

touch yours
the flesh warm

and soft
She trusts you

Jane said
and another butterfly

fluttered by
like a ballerina overhead.

Terry Collett

Natanya Not Amused 1976

Benny had some book
he was reading.

I wanted him
to take notice of me
as I undressed
for bed
but he didn't
look at me
but turned a page
instead.

I slowly removed
my bra
letting all
fall free
but he stared
at the page
and not at me.

I took off
my underwear
and stood there bare
but he turned
another page
and didn't stare.

I put on
the baby-doll nightie
he had bought
white with pink lace
but he just turned a page
a blankness
on his face.

I climbed into bed
beside him
getting as near
as I could.

What's the book?
I said
moving myself
up close
wanting to have sex
in the dark.

Women In Love
he said
it's quite a lark.

I sighed
and lay down
head on the pillow
and gazed
at the light.

He closed the book
and laid it aside
how about it?
he said
turning off
the light
and moving
up close
touching
my thigh.

Ok if you want
I said
don't know why.

Terry Collett

Near At Hand In 1961.

I'm sitting on a fence
by the field
opposite the drive
leading to the church

it's a fine day
sun is out
birds are flying
and singing

I can smell flowers
in the air
and smells
from the cows nearby

Jane said
to meet her here
I wait
watching the drive

then she appears
she's dressed
in a green
flowered dress

her dark hair
is in bunches
tied with green ribbon
I like how she walks

her dress flapping
about her
her hands by her side
I get off the fence

and go meet her
she smiles
I smile
she waves

I wave
been waiting long?
I've been helping Daddy
with his sermon

for Sunday
o good
no not been waiting long
(I had

but I wouldn't
tell her that)
do you mind
walking with me

to the post office
and shop
I need to get
something

for my mother?
no sure
be good to walk
with you

so we walk
and I notice
she has a bag
wrapped up

in her left hand
her other hand is free
and is near me
I want to hold it

but don't want
to seem presumptuous
she talks of her cat
which has had kittens

and tells me

their colouring
and what they
get up to

and what
she feeds them on
and I am listening
not for the subject matter

but for the sound
of her voice
and her near by me
her hand close to mine

mere inches away
she asks about my pets
we have a cat
it's black and white

and it doesn't
get on well
with our dog
and chases her

whenever
she gets too near
o dear
Jane says

why is that?
no idea
maybe they'll
get on later

I say
our hands
are nearly touching
hers small and pale

and mine waiting there
itching to hold
but I don't

not until I'm told.

Terry Collett

Needs Washing 1963

Dominus misereatur
the nun said to Martha

what's that mean?
Martha said

Lord have mercy
the nun said

so why don't we say that
instead of talking to God
in a dead language?
Martha said

it is the language
of the Church
the nun said
and pointed out
other lines of Latin
to the rest of the class

Martha gazed at the black board
then lifted her eyes
to the huge crucifix
on the wall by the dark
wood boxed clock

there was dust and cobwebs
hanging from the arms
of the Crucified
and particles on
the crown of thorns
about His head

the plaster was aged
and here and there
it was worn through
to unpainted darkness

there was no hair
under His arms
as there was
under her da's arms
when he raised them
in his vest to brush
his receding hair
she mused

the nails had been
hammered into
hands and feet
causing the hands
to curl inwards like crabs

exaudi orationem meam
the nun said

a girl raised her hand
what's it mean Sister Paul?

hear my prayer
the nun said

Martha wondered if
the Crucified had
been a Greek
whether he would have
worn a cloth
about his mid-drift
or been stark naked
like some Greek statues were
she'd seen in books

His eyes were half open
looking upwards

His beard had a long
string of cobweb
hanging down

needs cleaning

Martha mused
needs a good wash
she muttered
looking at the clock
tick-tocking beside Him
at half-past ten

and she muttered
a soft Amen.

Terry Collett

Nesta Turned 1996

Nesta woke up
suddenly.

Her husband Phil
was not in bed
beside her.

She could hear
the baby crying.

She leaped
from bed
and along
the passage
into the baby's room.

Her husband
was shaking
the baby
angrily.

She grabbed
the baby
from him
held it
against her
looking to see
if it was all right.

What do you think
you are doing?
she said angrily.

He glared at her
it kept crying
I have worked
in the morning
he said viciously.

I don't care
she spat back
you do not do that
to my baby.

Your baby?
he said
he went to grab
the baby from her
thinking she'd do
as he said.

No you are not
going to touch her
Nesta said
turning away
from him holding
the baby tight.

He grabbed
her hair
but she held on
to the screaming baby.

He turned
her around
and pulled
at the baby's legs.

Nesta holding
the baby
tight against her
with one arm
grabbed a statue
of the Virgin Mary
with her other hand
and hit him
over the head
with it
with all
her might.

He released
his hold
of the baby
and stood
motionless
for a moment
blood came over
his face
and he fell
to the floor.

She held
the baby closer
rocking it gently
in her arms
there there
she murmured softly.

The baby took
deep breaths.

Nesta walked
the baby
out of its room
and along
to her bedroom
and sat
on her bed
with her.

The baby latched
onto her breast
and quietened.

Nesta stared
at the wall
opposite
listening to see
if her husband
was making
any noise.

Nothing
except the baby
sucking hungrily
eyes closed
the baby's little fist
holding her hand.

Nesta leaned down
to the baby's head
and kissed.

Terry Collett

Nesta's Welcome 1996

Nesta Owen
glanced
at the white
plastic clock
on the wall
of the lounge
gave
a deep sigh.

Phil Owen
her husband
of six months
had gone drinking
with his friends
and was going
to be late home
once again.

She switched off
the TV and sat
scrutinising
the yellow
flowered wallpaper
which she loathed.

In the last
six months
their relationship
had in Nesta's opinion
degenerated
and declined.

Phil
dark haired
good looking
had been the most
sought after young man
in Howell's
department store

where she worked.

He fell
he claimed
for her cornflower
blue eyes
and long black hair.

The front door opened
after her husband
had fiddled
trying to get
the key in the lock.

She went to see him
and was about to ask
why he was so late
when he hit her
so hard about the head
that she felt as if
she was inside a bell
that had been struck
and she fell against
the wall of the hall.

Her lips
began to swell
her watery eyes
stared at him.

He stared at her
walked past her
and up the stairs
swaying
as he walked
not giving her
another thought.

Her thoughts
had been spattered
all over the inside
of her brain

and she sensed
the oncoming of pain.

Terry Collett

Netanya And Brighton.

Even in the train it is cold.

Netanya snuggles closer to me,
her eyes searching me,
her hand clutching mine.

Had a job getting out,
she says.

Does he know
where you are going?

No, I just said
I was going out.

Was he suspicious.

Who cares?
She breathes out,
her breath like smoke;
it fills our area
of the carriage.

Why Brighton?

I like it there;
it reminds me
of my childhood.

She lays her head
on my shoulder,
her hand holding mine;
warmth moving
through mine.

Outside it is dark;
evening sky menacing.

How are things?

We rowed,
we always row.

I look at her hair
on my shoulder,
dark, wavy.

Won't going out
for so long
make things worse?

I hope so;
I hope he moves out,
hope he moves away.

What about the kids?

They'll understand,
kids do;
they like you.

I look out
at the passing view,
lights in the distance
from passing
villages or towns,
trees swimming past.

We arrive at Brighton rail station,
get out the train
and walk into the town
hand in hand.

We must come here
and stay the weekend.

When?

When we can.

I look at her beside me.

She's serious.

What would he say?

He'll say nothing.

He thinks it's just
a mid-life crisis
and I'll get over it.

We walk down
to the seafront;
the wind and cold
biting at us.

The sea's rough.

I like it rough,
I like to sense
nature's power,
she says,
snuggling
close to me.

We go into a shelter
and sit down
in the semi-dark.

We kiss and embrace.

No one is about.

It seems far
from my usual world,
kind of surreal.

Her lips are on mine.

Feel her pulse.

Her living through me
and I through her;

I feel along her back,
feeling the smooth coat
she is wearing;
my fingers sensing
and imaging
what ever is beneath.

We sit there
for what seems hours,
kissing, holding,
looking out
at the rough sea.

Was I being
someone else
or was I just
being me?

Terry Collett

Netanya And Sex.

Netanya
sits crossed legged
in the bar
(Irish bar
off Whitehall)

her red dress
above knees
the black shoes
pointy toes
and flat heels

I sit there
beside her

loud speakers
easing out
the music
of Ireland

what a night
she utters

never had
such a night

I sip beer
she sips wine

did you count?
I ask her

studying
her features
the slightly
broken nose
now mended
the green eyes
holding me

5 or 6
times it was
she tells me

feels like it
I tell her

she takes out
cigarettes
and offers
one to me
then herself
and lights up
and inhales

I'm 40
she tells me
but I feel
years younger

she looks it
her dark hair
set down loose

and you are?
she asks me

28
I reply

she smiles now
not thinking
about her
bald husband
miles away

we had sex
in the small
hotel bed
many times
seemingly

almost one
big session

then she moves
uncrosses
her fine legs

glimpse briefly
Eve's Eden
paradise
sight of thigh
paradise
ease a sigh.

Terry Collett

Netanya's Game.

Netanya smoked
and sat on the settee
her husband sat by the fire
his friends had come around
there was general chat
and laughter

I sat next to Netanya
watching the others
drinks were offered
I had a scotch and ice
Netanaya's husband
handed the drinks around

Netanya touched my thigh
unseen by him

and I said to him
I'm your man for that job
don't think of asking
anyone else
her husband said
to the others
it could be a big job
he added

her hand moved
along my thigh
squeezing me now
and then her daughter
saw her touch my thigh
I could see the amusement
in her eye

how long will you have to wait?
Netanya said

her husband looked at her
(her hand removed now)

I don't know
but it looks promising
he said

I knew you were the guy
for the job
the friend said

his wife
some dull looking dame
nodded

Netanya placed her hand
on my back
and rubbed it sexually

what do you think Benny?
Netanya's husband asked me

I guess you're the guy
by what Netanya tells me
I replied

he smiled
and sipped his drink

his wife's hand
was touching my butt
rubbing circular
in motion

we'll have to wait see
what happens
her husband said
never know
where things might lead

my pecker stirred
Netanya smiled
her daughter looked at me
frowned

I looked away
trying to keep
my pecker under control
watching the dull dame
over the way
having her dull worded say.

Terry Collett

Never More.

Never more
to have her place

her hand
through your chest

to pull out your heart
and let it hang there

dripping blood
or squeeze it

to make those
squishy sounds

as she said
she loved you

most of all.
She died

in another's arms
with their heart

in her hands
you recall.

Terry Collett

Never Said

That summer of 62
on the school playing field
and she sitting there
with her friends

and you trying to impress
and taking in her smile
and bright eyes and the way
she sat with her knees visible

beneath the green skirt
and the white ankle socks
and the scuffed black shoes
and wanting to say love you

sweet thing but only coming out
with words about the weather
or the way her friend had her hair
tied back with the green ribbon

or how bucktoothed her
other friend was and even though
she'd told you so many times
she loved you and hugged you

on the way home from the school bus
you could never bring yourself
to say the words that sat
on your lips back then

and there are lonely nights
you wish you had those days again.

Terry Collett

Never Say Never 1960

Fay said it may be our
last time out together
but to tell no one as her
mum was going to make

arrangements for them
to leave and go off
leaving her father and
brothers behind and the

very thought of her going
made me sad and so I
thought we'd have to
make the most of the last

time together and so when
I picked her up from
the flat upstairs and saw
her mum she said say

nothing to anyone not
even your parents or
siblings I won't I said
not to a living soul thank

you Benny she said and
went in and Fay came out
and we walked downstairs
and out into the Square

and Fay said where did
you want to go? let's go
by the South Bank and
have a Coke and ice cream

I said she nodded and
we got a bus from the
New Kent Road and sat
at the back side by side

the bus slightly swaying
to and fro and I watched
the scene go by and sensed
her next to me and thought

this could be the last time
we're together and I wanted
to make it last forever but
I knew it would go as time

does and as the bus got to
South Bank we got off and
wandered along by the Thames
and stood looking down at

the river flowing by with
barges and small boats passing
and she said can't believe
I may not see you after this

day out it stung me the reality
of it that that maybe it will
be you write to me? I said
yes once we're settled and

it is safe to I will write and
say where we are but please
don't tell anyone my new
address or Dad will find us

and God knows what will
happen then I won't tell
anyone I said she stared at
the water and a few ducks

passed and I smelt her and
the perfume she was wearing
nice perfume I said my mum
said I could wear some but

Dad doesn't like me wearing

perfume he said it's what
whore's wear and God hates
it too but Mum said I could

so I did and with that she
kissed me on the cheek and
we gazed out at the Thames
aware this could be the last

time we did so together
and an echo in my head
said never say never.

Terry Collett

Never Say Never.

There are days,
my son,
when I want to ring
in a ghost,
hear your laughter,
see your smile,
and your voice which
I miss the most,
but can't find
no such place,
so will have to
make do
with the memory
and photos
of your face.

There are times,
my son,
when it seems
a huge chunk of my life
has been snatched away
with your death,
leaving a large hole
where winds of darkness
echo through,
and all seems to
suck me down
like a big black hole;
I feel less,
not whole.

There are moments,
my son,
when I feel you near,
placing a hand
through the ether
of the two worlds
to meet mine
or a whisper in my heart

of your voice's love
and concern.

There are days,
my son,
when I wish to ring
in that ghost,
have you back
for a time
or for ever,
but maybe sometime,
and never to say never.

Terry Collett

Never Tell Mother.

Benedict turned the page
of the Dostoyevsky novel.

His brother puked in the bidet,
too much cheap wine,
Benedict thought,
but he'll be fine.

He immersed himself deeper
into the Russian world
of murder and fear
and dark corners.

Crime and Punishment
was one good tale all right.
Even the book cover held
the attention, he thought,
turning it briefly over.

His brother's moans
interrupted the puking.
Benedict asked an
are you all right?
There was a groan
of response.

Benedict recalled the time
he had been in that condition
in Yugoslavia the year before,
same cause: too much
cheap wine.
And that beautiful guide
came to his room
to see how he was
and sat on his bed
and all he could think of
was when would
the puking end.

No thought at all
of her presence there,
her body so close,
her perfume making him
more nauseous.

She was Croatian,
he thought, pausing at the page
of the Dostoyevskian novel.

And that waitress
he and his brother had liked
in the restaurant
at the Yugoslavian hotel.

Fanny. Yes, that was the name.
Got no where though.
Just the luck of the draw.

His brother returned
from the bathroom
and flopped on the bed.

The puking over maybe,
Benedict thought
and his brother hoped,
pale of complexion,
perspiration on brow.

Outside the window
the Parisian streets
echoed with life:
Cars, coaches, buses,
people, natives, tourists,
males and females.

Tomorrow they'd be out
on the streets again.
Sit in restaurants where
the famous once sat
over coffee or beer:
Hemmingway, Sartre,

Picasso, Henry Miller
and the others.

Art thrived here.
Ideas born
from philosophic minds.

Benedict book marked
the page and closed
the book and put it aside.

Some one laughed outside
in the street, another sang,
voices of ghostly singers
of the past, breathed
from the walls.

His brother returned
to the bathroom,
more puking.
Benedict thought:
poor brother.
Of course, he mused,
gazing at the Parisian
night sky, they'd never
tell their mother.

Terry Collett

Never Told Her That.

Sutcliffe walked
in a kind of shuffling his heels
kind of way
with hands in his pockets

and school tie undone
and hanging loose
you'd walked home
from school with him

as O'Brien was off
with dysentery
I find that pottery teacher
a bit of a twat

he said
the way he held up
your work
in that dismissive way

to show you up
you shrugged your shoulders
I hate rolling out
the messing clay

and I've no idea
how to make a pissy pot
than how to make
a pie like my mother's

he's a pockmarked
bugger anyway
Sutcliffe said
and the fecking car

he drives to school
that red sports job
you came to the road
where Sutcliffe lived

and waited
I'll surprise him one day
you said
I'll make him

the fucking pot
he wants
Sutcliffe laughed
and shuffled up

the stairs to his flat
with a wave of his hand
and nod of his
blonde haired head

you walked over
the crossing
and down Meadow Row
by the bombed out houses

Ingrid was sitting
on the kerb
with her face
in her hands

she looked up
at the sound
of your approach
what's a matter

with you sitting there
all glum?
you said
no one's indoors

I'm locked out
she said
where's your parents?
you asked

no idea

I knocked and knocked
but no one answered
she said

have to wait now
until they come back
when will that be?
you asked

God knows
she said
last time it was late
as they went to the races

and mum forgot
to leave me
the front door key
and I had to wait

out in the cold
on the stairs
until they got back
you should have knocked

at our door
Mum'd got you
something to eat
and you would

have been warm
by our fire
you said
didn't want to disturb anyone

she said
she looked at the road
and closed her eyes
well come home

with me now
Mum won't mind
and she'll tell

your parents

where you are
when they get back
you said
he won't like it

she said
tough titty
you said
she laughed

and got out
of the kerb
and stood
next to you

are you sure
your mum won't mind?
of course she won't
ok

she said
and you both walked down
Meadow Row
and crossed over

to the flats
through the Square
you knew your mum
wouldn't mind

she knew Ingrid's parents
and knew their ways
and faults
and his drunken voice

and pushed back hat
but as you walked
with Ingrid up the stairs
you never told her that.

New Cleaning.

Night Raindrops
Lightly tap

on my window.
Morning shines

now comes
a new cleaning.

Terry Collett

New Moon Not Old.

It is a new moon, not the old,
you watch it in the night sky,
see its attendants dance or wink
in attendance. You enter into
her embrace, kiss between her
thighs and kiss and kiss up to
her eyes. You lie there in her
arms, her soft fruits your pillows,
her fig your companion of joy.

Is this reality or a dream? she
says, combing her thin fingers
through your hair. It's a dream
of reality or a reality of a dream,
you tell her, your words fingering
into her soft ears by lip whispers.

She runs a finger down your spine,
slow, temptingly slow, her other
fingers encircle your narrow waist,
fingers smoothly encouraging
your proud piece. The old moon
has fled, the new moon blinds
eyes that stare, you indulge of her,
your lady, suckle what now needs
suckling, kiss each aspect of her skin,
as she waits mouth open, enter within.

Terry Collett

New Office

I came in today
to find I had
a brand new chair

(compensation
for this new
'OFFICE') .

The lengths people
will go to try
and keep me happy.

I even noticed
that some
of the women

are wearing uniforms,
not sure
what that's

all about,
but how can
the (old) office

compete with that?
Anyway,
back to the chair,

you'll never guess
what colour it is:
BLUE.

Like everything else
around here it's blue.
The doors,

the carpets,
the notice boards
all blue;

obviously
they're not all
in the same shade,

people would think
they had obsessive
compulsive disorder.

If you ask me
I think that secretly
they're all Smurfs

biding their time,
& when
the opportunity arises,

they're going
to invade the town
whilst singing

Eiffel 65's
number one hit
from the late 90s-

Blue(da ba dee da ba die) .
So run,
save yourselves

before it's too late,
only take
the essentials

with you
(TV & remote
for the lads,

its probably
a good idea
to hire a van

in advance

for the girls' stuff) ,
go run

there may not
be much
time left.

Written by my late son, Oliver.(1984-2014) (C)

Terry Collett

New Shoes And More.

Do you like
my new shoes?
Helen says
Dad got them

for me
I look
at the new shoes
brown like new

polished conkers
yes they look good
Mum says I can
wear them to church

today and I've put on
my Sunday dress
as it is Sunday
and what do you think

of the white socks
and the little pink
ribbons at the top?
and you'll never guess

I've got new handkerchiefs
and I've got one
with me now
and she gets it out

of her dress pocket
and shows me
and I gaze at it
waiting to get

a word in edgeways
but she says
and after that
Saturday morning

matinee yesterday
and that boy
attacking you
with that knife

Mum says she's
not sure I should go
any more
you know what

Mum's like
but maybe you
could talk her around
because I like

being there
with you
and o by the way
my doll Battered

Betty's other eye
is stuck now
and she can only
see through half

an open eye
it's my little
brother's fault
he banged her

with his toy hammer
o poor Betty
and to think
she could see

out of both eyes
when Mum bought
her for me
from that jumble sale

a few years ago

I nod having given up
trying to get
a word in

and see how neat
her hair is plaited
into two neat plaits
with pink ribbons

and her thick lens glasses
clean so that I can
see her eyes
large as oysters

and guess what?
she says
I have two
shiny pennies

for the collection
at church
Dad gave them to me
and said new pennies

for new prayers
have you got
pennies too?
yes I've got 3d

my Mum gave me
I say feeling it good
to get my words
out there on the stage

of the day
and she smiles
and that smile
blows me

a seven
year old kid
in my best suit

far away.

Terry Collett

New Worlds Bering Born

You rode bikes with Milka
to the bridge over the river
and stood looking down
at the flowing water

and talked
of the latest
Elvis Presley film
you'd seen

and she said that she
had wanted to see it
but her mother
had forbidden it

saying it was not
the type of film
for her age
then you talked

of the film you'd seen
while working
as a cinema projectionist
called Ben Hur

and the great
chariot races in it
she leaned close to you
as you talked

her hands
on the brick bridge
her hips pressing
gently against yours

she said she like it
when you came
to their farmhouse
and practised judo

with her brothers
and she could watch
and as she spoke
you studied her

her short fair hair
her large blue eyes
her delicate hands
the fingertips rubbing

against the bricks
of the bridge
the simple
green shift dress

she had on
and do you remember
that time you had them
both on the grass at once

in that karate fight?
she said excitedly
and you noticed
maybe

for the first time
her small firm bust
her figure
kind of huggable

although you hadn't
hugged her
and she went on
about wanting to go

out with you
but her brothers
had said
Baruch won't be

interested in you

he likes pretty girls
and you looked
at her eyes

as she spoke
how large they were
yet not unbeautiful
the orbs blue

portraying
wide worlds of you
and how old are you?
she asked

because they
keep saying
you're too old
for me

16
you said
well
she said

I'm 14
so that isn't
too old is it?
no

you said
seeing her eyes look
kind of watery
like small fish bowls

then she talked
of having seen you
in her dreams
and that in her dreams

you had kissed her
where did I kiss you?
you asked

on the lips of course

she said
no I meant
whereabouts
was I when I kissed you?

o
she said blushing
in the barn
by the farmhouse

o I see
you said
never having been
there with her

only with her brothers
to do judo fights
she looked down
at the water

her eyes wide
and watery
a bird flew by
a bird song sounded

you leaned close to her
and kissed
her ear
through her

fair hair
and she looked at you
and you saw
new worlds

being born there
amongst the blue
Milka smiling
at an older you.

Nichols And The Fight 1961

Nichols and I
had a fight
in the greenhouse
the first day.

It began
with a push
and shove
by the potted plants.

Then turned
into fists
and neck holds.

Only some kid saying
Groats is coming
that we moved apart
red faced
and sweating
and gazed
at each other.

Get you playtime
Nichols said.

Anytime
Squat-face
I replied.

Next day
he passed me
into class
and said nothing
not even
a shove or elbow
(which I would
have returned
with a blow) .

Then walking
to the metalwork room
he said
what part of London
you from?

Southwark
in South London
I said
eyeing him
(not wanting to say
the Elephant and Castle
in case he thought
I was taking the piss) .

Is it near
the Tower of London?
he asked.

Quite near
I went to school nearby
I replied.

He nodded
and said
sorry about yesterday
guess I was a bit rash
never met
a Londoner afore.

No probs
I replied.

We went into
the metalwork class
sort of friends
and that's how
this poem ends.

Terry Collett

Night After Night 1974

Night after night
you dreamed of her.
You wanted to return
to the dream once you

woke, but when you
did she wasn't there again,
just that sharp piercing
overwhelming heart pain.

You bought her the box
set of Mahler's 6th, , wrapped
it with a pink bow, not
a man thing, but well,

you know. In her eyes
you saw a new world:
blue skies, puffy clouds,
sun's light pouring down,

and sadly men that drown.
You loved her lips when
speaking or still, the redness
or paleness, the kissing from

and of them, which none
can condemn. You embraced
her in dreams and for real,
her body close to yours.

Arms encircling, hands touch,
words spoken, but not overmuch.
Night after night you dreamed
of her, kissing, making love,

holding hands, but that was then
in what you called, never ever lands.

Night Kisses 1916

Susie holds me close,
whispers in my ear,
Polly ain't you cold
with your arms
outside the blankets,
put them inside,
hug me closer.

I want George to hug,
not her,
his arms about me,
not her clutching me
in her desperate way,
his lips on mine,
not her wet lips
dribbling on my shoulder.

What you want me
so close for?
I say,
just get off to sleep,
and don't slobber on me.

But she hugs me closer,
her breath on my ear
whispering, Come on,
Polly, keep me warm,
I'm cold with the draft
from the attic windows
that don't meet properly,
Susie moans.

I put my arms inside,
put my arms about
her waist(skinny mare) ,
and think of George
stuck in some
hospital somewhere,
damaged by the War's

shock and blast,
and heads blown past,
and eyes sitting staring
on their own,
and wounded men's moan.

What you thinking of?
Susie says, sniffing
my breasts.

The War, and the Somme,
and Master George away,
hurt in mind they say.

Susie nods her head,
but wants me huddled nearer,
holds me close,
touches me, and says,
Shame about war,
and loss, and pain,
then she kisses
my neck again.

Terry Collett

Night Sounds 1957

Enid hears
cries in the night:
her mother,

an argument,
Father's voice
bellowing

through the flat.
Enid hides
beneath wool

blanketing
and grey sheets.
Mother screams;

more shouting.
Enid hears
the coal trucks

now being
shunted by
the shunter

on the tracks
in the old
dark coal wharf.

She stares out
in darkness;
just glimmer

of street lamps.
Whimpering,
then silence.

Back to sleep;
soul to keep.

Night Talk 1971

It was night
I wandered
from the men's area
to where
the night nurse
was sitting
in her small office
reading reports.

I stood
in the doorway.

Hello Benny
what are you
doing up?
she said.

Can't sleep
I said.

Come sit down
for a while
she said
closing the report
and sitting back
in her chair.

I took the chair
opposite her.

When can I
get out of here?
I said.

When the chief
nursing officer
thinks you are ready
she said
peering at me

through her blue
framed glasses.

When will that be?
I said.

He will know
she said.

I looked at her
when will I know?

When he does
she said
want a drink
of cocoa?

Guess so
I said.

She got up
and put
an electric kettle
on and filled a mug
with cocoa powder
and a coffee
for herself.

She was about 30 odd
with a full frame
and dyed blonde hair.

She turned
and looked at me
why did you try
hang yourself?

State of mind
at the time
I said.

Both times?

she said.

Guess so
I replied.

She poured
boiling water
into both mugs
and took milk
from a small fridge
and topped up
the mugs
and passed me mine
and set hers down
on the desk top
and sat down.

I sipped the cocoa
it was hot
and smelt
of childhood.

I wondered if she
had sex often
with her husband
when they were
home together
at any given time.

I noticed her gold
wedding ring
and gemstone.

I never asked
just looked at her
sitting there
with her bright eyes
and dyed blonde hair.

Terry Collett

Nima And Benny Again 1967

Nima met me
by the fountain
in Trafalgar Square.

I'd not see her
for a few weeks.

She looked
tired looking
and her hair
had been cut short.

She was wearing
a mini skirt
and pink top.

Wondered if you'd come
she said.

Once I got your letter
I decided I would
I said.

(She had my address
but I didn't have hers
not since she moved
back home
after leaving
the hospital.)

Where shall we go?
she said.

I don't mind
I said.

I wanted for us
to have a night out
at some cheap hotel

but my parents
have their eyes on me
and want to know
where I am going
and when I'll be back
she said.

I guess
they are worried
about you
after the drugs
and the hospital stay
I said.

I'm 19
she said
I am old enough
to be my own boss
they just want me
where they
can control me.

We walked along
Charing Cross Road
and entered a restaurant
and sat down.

We ordered drinks
and a meal.

The waiter went off
and she looked at me.

So how are you?
she said.

I'm ok
work's still boring
as hell
I said.

I gazed at her

how drawn she looked.

Are you back
on drugs again?
I said.

No I'm not
she said
you sound like
my parents
I'm not eating
as I should
I don't feel hungry
but I'll try
to eat this meal.

We waited
for the order to arrive
and talked
and drank our drinks.

I watched her
sitting there
her eyes dull
and that shortness
of her hair.

Terry Collett

Nima At Dinner 1967

I sat at the dining table.

I didn't want
to go down
from my room
but my parents
insisted.

Don't talk
about being
in hospital
or about
your drug addiction
Mother said to me
before she went down
from my room.

I sat in between
the thin lady
who looked
like Virginia Woolf
and the fat man
who had a moustache
like Oliver Hardy.

I sat mute
looking at them
as I ate
Mother eyeing me
in case I sang
like a canary
about my time
in hospital
for drug addiction.

The talk
was above my head
mostly medical stuff
or politics.

My father eyed me
now and then
in case I broke out
and gave
the game away.

Another guest
was an MP
who gazed at me
and smiled.

I didn't catch his name
but he eyed me over
but never spoke to me.

The Virginia Woolf lookalike
asked me what I was doing?

I said
eating dinner.

Mother chided me
for being rude
the lady said
not to worry
she understood
teenage girls.

I thought of Benny
how he'd be treated
amongst this snobbish lot
with their airs and graces.

I felt like spitting
in their food
and slapping
all their faces.

Terry Collett

Nima At Sea 1967

Nima's mother
has gone,
her nagging tongue
gone with her.

Nina sits
and watches
the passing traffic
from the hospital window.

She wishes
Benny was there,
wishes he
was coming today,
but she knows
he works
in the week,
and so won't
be able to come.

It seems a long week
when he doesn't come.

She wants
to meet him
in London
if she can get
the doctor's permission
for a day release.

She wishes
it could be
for a weekend again,
but her mother
has probably
put her spoke
in the wheel
and the doctor
will only allow

a day release,
her being
a recovering
drug addict
and probable suicide.

That last weekend
with Benny
was a laugh.

The landlady
coming the door
and Benny just
in his underwear,
and the sex good.

Now nothing,
just the nurses
and the doctors
sniffing around
like hounds.

She is so
sex starved
that at night
even the plump
night nurse
seems sexy
and desirable
to a small degree.

She feels
like a small ship
on a wide wild sea.

Terry Collett

Nima Back Home 1967

I am home
from the hospital
after months
being there
over the drug addiction.

I am in
my parent's care.

My room is
as it was
nothing moved
or changed
(except tidied up) .

Downstairs my mother
is attending dinner
(guests are coming) .

Be on your best
behaviour Nima
mother said
in the car home
none of your nonsense.

I told Benny
I was leaving hospital
and gave him
my address
I hope he writes.

Maybe we can
meet in London
if my parents allow
me out.

I go to my window
and peer out
it's a wonder

my mother hasn't
put bars at the window.

The sky is overcast
grey clouds
dull sun.

If only Benny
was here
and on my bed.

I don't miss
the quacks or nurses
at the hospital.

I go lie
on my bed
and pretend
Benny's here
but he isn't
so not joy or cheer.

Terry Collett

Nima Leaves Hospital 1967

Your mother
had brought the car
to the hospital
you were going
home at last.

Benny had rung yesterday
and you arranged
to meet him on Saturday
in Trafalgar Square.

The mind doctor
had been to see you
and you were packed.

You said goodbye
to the nurses who had been
like a family to you
while you had been
in the hospital.

Now it was over
all you had to do now
was stay off the drugs
not get in touch
with anyone who had
got you into it.

Your mother fussed about
then went off to talk
to the quacks.

You wished Benny was there
it seemed strange going
after the time stuck in here
except for weekends out.

You stood by the window
and looked out

on the hospital grounds.

You'd sat out there
with Benny a few times
now you were about to go.

Your mother came back
stiff faced her eyes on you
don't end up here again Nima
stay off the drugs
next time it won't be just hospital
it will be in jail.

It seemed odd
your mother saying that word
like someone
had invented
a barking bird.

Terry Collett

Nima's Visitor 1967

The nurse said
Nima's in
the garden

outside the
hospital
mental wing

so I went
to see her
there she was

on the grass
all sprawled out
how are you?

I asked her
how I look
she replied

that bad huh?
she nodded
and sat up

her hair tied
back loosely
her black dress

was screwed up
got a smoke?
she asked me

sure I have
so we both
had a smoke

from my pack
how's treatment
for the drugs?

slow process
like dying
she told me

any news
from your home?
Mother came

on Tuesday
all alone
what'd she say?

not a lot
she's a doc
talked to them

more than me
just the same
usual

moany talk
let's go walk
she told me

can you go?
I asked her
in the grounds

I'm allowed
so we walked
and we talked

and we joked
and we smoked
then hidden

by the bins
at the back
we soft kissed

and caressed

lips to lips
hands holding

tightly and
all the rest.

Terry Collett

No Applause 1980

It was the week before
you left her. That seaside
town you both used to
frequent 5 years before.

But it had lost its glamour,
lost the romantic mystery
it had back then. That day
you went through the motions,

ate at one of the restaurants
you used to go to years before;
sat on the beach watching
other lovers do what you

used to do, but didn't that day.
The sky was pale blue with
white clouds, and the sea did
what seas do, came in and went

out making that sucking noise
it does. You wanted her to say
something about the day, but
she didn't, she went through

the motions with you, like two
ham actors, knowing the scenes
and lines, but having no belief
anymore in the drama. At the

railway station she said about
having a photo taken together
as you used to do. So you went
into the photo booth together,

and sat, and the flashes came,
but this time, no giggles or
smiles, just you and her sitting
there, looking at the camera,

staring into a lost cause, in front
of no audience and no applause.

Terry Collett

No Beauty In Betrayal(Prose Poem)

You liked card games with Bart liked to sit there and watch him and his emotions play out as they did when he thought he was losing the game even if it turned out afterwards he won you in your white dress-white for purity he jested- and straight mousey hair and the white shoes you wore which he said reminded him of that nurse in the nursing home he went to as a boy who used to touch him in bed at night when she did her rounds and the other children were asleep touched him in places he thought unusual and thinking about it later as utterly sexual it was getting late the sky was dark and stars and a moon shone and you had lit the candle to give light and Bart stood there by the table-he stood as he got anxious of losing- holding his cards in his hand his other hands on the table him staring at you then the cards in your hands watching as you dealt them or laid some on the table you smiled at him he didn't smile but stared at you you're cheating he said how am I cheating? you said I cheat never you replied smiling unable not to smile at him with that look on his face he had an odd face-much as you loved him- his brown hair with the widow's peak largish ears elfish and brown eyes that stared and stared you put a card on the table he gazed at you as you put the card down any good for you? You asked he shook his head looked at the card you stared at him at his red jumper-he liked red it was his bit of revolutionary stand his ideas of communism much his own-I suppose you have a good hand he said looking straight at you both are good hands you said smiling I meant your card hand he said moodily not bad you said holding your cards against your small breast he held his cards behind his back and walked over to the radio and turned it on a fuzz of noise erupted then it settled on a station of classic music-he loved Bach he was a Bach addict- the music was Mozart a piano piece he walked back to the table and sat down his cards against his chest he was a genius Bart said who was? You said Mozart he replied you laid down another card he took it quickly and put another down in its place he smiled that's better he said the music was not too loud so did not distract you watched him as you carried on with the game Duncan's wife's pregnant Bart said you gazed at him that's her fourth isn't it? You said yes it will be he said poor girl you said having him on her having it away so often Clare is up for it Bart said moodily-he hated you saying things about Duncan- as she a choice? You said putting another card on the table of course she does Bart said he stared at the card but didn't pick it up you took the card and replaced it with another a useless card to you you looked at your hand of cards it was better Duncan was a Scot a big Scot and Clare was a small girl and you found it difficult to image them having sex him pushing her into the bed and thrusting into her like some old steam train into a tunnel Bart and Duncan had been university friends and Clare had been a student of art she painted water colour-not much good- Bart stood up as stared

at his cards his ears moving as they did when he got either annoyed or pleased he walked about the room what's up bad hand? You said he paused no not that he said just thinking about Duncan what about him? You said eyeing your cards taking a card from the pack on the table and laying it down on the table Bart looked at the card then looked away he's having an affair Bart said gazing at you wondering what you might say who's the stupid bitch? You asked picking up the card and putting down another card in its place your card hand was getting real good no one you know Bart said how do you know whom I know I might know her you said doesn't matter you're not to tell Clare it would do her mind in if she found out Bart said so who is this bit on the side? You said Bart hesitated looked at you then at his cards her name's Julie he said works in his office typical you said is she blind or stupid or both? She's a secretary and he has know her sometime Bart said you held your cards close to your breast and where do they go to have it off? You said you make it out to be cheap Bart said he loves her and the fact Clare is pregnant complicates things the Mozart ends and a voice mutters on about the piece I bet it does you said poor Clare I bet she thinks the sun shines out of his big backside Bart laid his cards on the table with a flourish the cards spread out like a coloured fan beat that he said you gazed at his cards on the table and smiled and laid your cards beside his how's that? You said he closed his eyes you cheat I'm sure he said just skill and luck you replied a Schubert piano piece started up on the radio Bart looked at you then sat down his face sulky you're not to say anything to Clare he said she'd not take it well you gathered all the cards together and shuffled them up another game? You asked no I'm not in the mood he replied I'd not tell Clare you said let her find out the hard way you said she won't find out if you say nothing Bart said grimly she'd tell me if your were bonking someone else you said putting the cards back in the pack I wouldn't do that to you Bart said looking at you with his brown eyes I'm glad to hear it you said but Duncan's thing is different Bart said he's fallen in love it's not just about sex it's love he told me and does he love Clare any more? You asked he didn't say just said he loved this Julie and they had sex a few times where did they go? You asked how do I know? Bart said in the office after the others had left to go home did he have her over his desk or on the floor? Why do you have to cheapen things? Bart said it's love and it has a kind of beauty to it you stared at him sitting there there's no beauty in betrayal you said he said nothing to that but stared at his hands on the table his fingers moving as if the table was a piano say nothing to Clare Bart said his fingers following each other on the imaginary keyboard I'll say nothing you said Bart stood up and turned off the radio the room became silent bedtime he said you blew out the candle and the room became dark lightened only by the moonlight Bart went out of the room and you followed closing the door behind you and followed him up the stairs looking at his light brown trousers and black shoes knowing it was going to be one of those nights with Bart wanting to have it away wanting his sexual

rights.

Terry Collett

No Big Sin 1965

This is where I work,
I told Tilly.

She followed me
around the place.

It was a Saturday;
the place was almost empty.

I had come to clear up
a few things from the day before.

You make marquees?
She said.

The women do,
I just help,
then go out helping
to put up marquees
all over the place,
I said.

Whereabouts
have you been?

All over the place;
did a racing stables
the other week,
some big wedding,
I said.

Not our wedding,
then Benny?

No not ours,
I said.

Shame,
she said.

I her showed
the area
we kept
the canvas and ropes.

Soft here to lie on,
she said,
touching a piles
of canvas sheets.

Guess so,
I said.

Anyone about?
She said.

A few not many,
I said.

Would they look for you
if you were
missing awhile?

Who knows?
I said.

I'd take you home,
but Mum's there today,
and she'd only give
another inquest into
what we may have done
the other week,
Tilly said.

I opened the door
and peered out
the passage way;
all was clear,
no one about,
I said.

She lay down,
and I lay beside her.

We kissed and hugged,
and I touched her thigh,
and she began
to unbutton my jeans.

Benny, Benny,
are you around?
a voice said
from down the passage.

I jumped up,
and she tidied
herself up,
and I got up,
and opened the door.

Yes, you wanted me?
I said along the passage.

The manager stood
in the doorway.

Do you know what
we did with the order book?

I think I saw Joe
put it in the green file,
I said.

Where'd he put it after that?
The manager said.

God knows,
I said,
maybe it's in the workshop.

I'll look there,
he said,
and walked off.

I went back to Tilly
who was now standing
in the room
against the door.

Has he gone?
she said.

Yes he was looking
for the order book.

I best go,
she said.

Ok,
I said,
and showed her
the back way out,
and she kissed me,
and walked off.

See you later,
I said.

She nodded
and I went in.

Almost made it,
but no big sin.

Terry Collett

No Bombs Here

Gran said it isn't safe
to walk about the bombsites

Janice said
as you walked with her

off of Meadow Row
towards the bombed out sites

of WW11
there might be

unexploded bombs
she added

holding on to your shirt sleeve
there are no

unexploded bombs here
you said

to reassure
you paused midway

and stared back
to where the coal wharf stood

and coalmen went about their work
loading trucks and horse drawn carts

how do you know?
she asked

her hand gripping
your shirt sleeve tight

don't you trust me?
you said

turning your head
seeing her eyes wide

beneath her red beret
yes but maybe there could be

hidden beneath ground
you looked around

with hand above your brow
none I can see

you said
she released your sleeve

and touched your hand
her smooth skin

like soft silk
moved over yours

you mustn't tell Gran
she said

she's forbidden me
to go on sites

you sensed her pulse
tap along your palm

of course I won't
you said

and walked across
the bricks and rubble

and weeds between
even here

amidst the bombed out ruins
a touch of green.

No Boy Scout.

Dick Morcraft said why
don't you come to the

boy scouts tonight in the
church hall and learn how

to tie knots with ropes and
light fires with two sticks

and how to raise a tent and
in the summer we get to go

out in the wild countryside
and sleep under the night sky

and stars and canvas and sit
round the blazing campfire

singing songs together? and
you said all right and went

along but you got into a fight
with some fat kid who tried

to push you off the ropes and
so the scoutmaster sent you

off home and Morcraft said
next day you should have and

ignored the kid and stayed but
you couldn't then and never did.

Terry Collett

No Church Meeting

Lizabeth sits
in a pew
church empty

damp smelling
old hymn books
on the shelves

hymn number
on a board
on the wall

come and sit
she tells me
I sit down

beside her
hear nothing
except us

breathing there
far off sound
of tractor

in a field
why not here?
she asks me

on this pew
do what here?
I ask her

but I know
sex she says
me and you

don't want to
least not here
I tell her

not in church
on this pew
why not here?

it's quiet
no one here
not for miles

her eyes stare
at my eyes
could be fun

having it
on this spot
her palm pats

the wood pew
don't think so
anyway

it's God's house
holy place
not for sex

she looks down
at her knees
lifts her skirt

with fingers
it's our place
or could be

she mutters
you're 13
I tell her

so are you
she replies
someone calls

from outside

there's voices
her fingers

move her skirt
we kneel down
in prayer mode

as someone
enter in
behind us

thank you God
Lizbeth says
and we rise

from the pew
and pass by
two old girls

sitting there
in their bright
summer clothes

that was close
Lizbeth says
wonder what

they would say
seeing us
doing it?

I cannot
imagine
I tell her

but I can
in my mind
and we walk

down the path
sound of cows
mooing near

and tractor
over fields
and her laugh.

Terry Collett

No Cissy 1955

There's something in my eye
Helen said
can you have a look Benny?

we were walking up Meadow Row
towards the bomb site

stop walking then
I said
and let me see

so she stopped
and put down her doll
Battered Betty
and she closed her eyes

I can't see if you
shut your eyes
I said

so she opened her eyes
and I said
which one is it?

the left one
she said

so I opened up
her eyelids wide
as I could
her hands were holding
my wrist and hand

can you see anything?
she said

not yet only an eyeball
I said

her hands were holding
my wrist and hand tightly
her other eye
was staring at me

maybe it's dust
from the bomb site
I said

can you see it?

no not yet
I said
moving her eyelid
higher and lower
gazing into her eye intently

think I see it
I said

what is it?

bit of grit I think
I said

can you get it out?
she said

sure I'll try
I said

I reached for an handkerchief
from my jean's pocket

what are you doing?
she said

looking for my handkerchief
I said

what for?

to get the grit out
I let go of her eyelids
and reach out
my handkerchief
and screwed up one end
into a point

she studied me anxiously
will it hurt?

no it'll be ok
I said

she didn't seem convinced
and stared at me
her hands were hanging
in mid air waiting
to clutch my hand again

so I opened up
her left eyelids again
with one hand
and with the other
tried to ease out
the tiny bit of grit
in the lower area
of her eye

her hands
clutched mine desperately
have you got it?

not yet
stay still
I said

she was kind of moving
like someone anxious to pee

I cornered the speck of grit
and slowly eased it
onto the handkerchief

and out of her eye
and wiped it
on my jeans

is it out?

yes it's out

really out?

yes really out

she closed
and opened her eye
seems all right now
she said
rubbing her eye

I put my handkerchief away
and stared at her
that ok?
I said

she nodded and smiled
yes it's better
she said

right lets go on
the bomb site
and look for stones
for my catapult
I said

ok
she said
and picked up her doll
and we went down Arch Street
and onto the bomb site
to look for stones

you're my hero
she said

clutching her doll
with one hand
and holding my hand
with the other

I thought
hope the boys don't see
her holding my hand
or they'll think me a cissy

then she paused
by a bombed out house wall
and kissed me.

Terry Collett

No Clothes 1976

She said who am I and
what am I doing here?
They all said that
he said all of them

but she was different
she had a darker
tone of voice
and her eyes haunt me

to this day
and she was often heard
at the opposite end
of the ward

singing Puccini arias
and some of the others complained
she'll drive us mad
drive us over the edge

so she sang Mozart instead
and walked about stark naked
and some of the guys
liked that but the nurses

soon dressed her again
after all one can't have
that kind of thing
he said can we?

She cornered him once
and said Bach gets jealous
if I don't sing his arias
but he can go suck himself

I like Puccini and Mozart
and now and then she'd concede
and off she'd go
with some Bach thing

loud and clear
as a bell in a valley
and she slept
in the women's dormitory

and hated it when the big woman
tried to climb into her bed for sex
she hated that
like a darn hippo she said

hippo in bed with me
do you know what
she does on Sundays?
He said she goes

to the hospital chapel
and sings the Mass in Latin
and pisses off the C of E clergy guy
and he complains

but she just sings louder
and that Monday last
she punched that fat dame
in the nose because

she touched her ass at breakfast
and broke her nose
and naked again
no clothes.

Terry Collett

No Date That Time 1951

We stood,
Auntie's dog Dancer and me,
on the black metal balcony
looking at the soldiers
marching on the parade ground
over the way;
sergeants bellowing
at marching feet
and turned heads.

Dancer wined.

I stared.

Elsie walked past
on edge of the parade ground
looking at the soldiers;
her small face unsmiling,
her eyes peering.

Slowly she climbed
the black metal stairs
up to the balcony.

Dancer turned and growled;
I stood watching her climb.

She was Auntie's friend Molly's
5 year old daughter,
a bit older than I was.

She stood on the top step
and stared at us both:
will he bite?
She said.

No he won't bite,
he just growls,
I said.

She walked towards us gingerly,
her eyes glaring at Dancer,
who looked away
and watched
the soldiers again
through the bars of the balcony.

She stood next to me:
Mum said I can play with you
if I want to,
Elsie said,
but not to get into mischief,
her voice was moany.

I never get into mischief,
I said.

Elsie stared at me.

Mum said you climbed
under one of those gates
back there with your dog,
and was climbing a window
looking at soldiers
in a classroom,
Elsie said
matter of factly.

Who told you?
I said.

Mum
said she heard it
from a sergeant, but never
told your auntie
in case you got into trouble,
Elsie said,
her eyes studying me.

O, yes I remember that,
I said;

what shall we play?

She looked at the balcony,
then the dog, then at me.

Why didn't you tell your auntie?
She said.

Don't like worrying people,
I said.

She looked down
at the parade ground:
the soldiers were falling out
and walking off.

What do you want to play?
I said.

Not sure I want to play
with boys who get
into mischief,
she said,
then she walked away
and down the stairs.

I played
with the dog Dancer
instead.

Terry Collett

No Deal 1973

Miss Pinkie
wore the most
hideous

kimono
I had seen
and I'd seen

quite a few
and she stood
by the door

and said
how about
you and I

stripping off
have a bath
together

then dry each
other off
have some booze

put some cool
jazz music
then get down

to some sex?
So we did
although the

bath was small
and tight for
us both there

(she being
a bit plump)
but we soaped

and rinsed off
and dried down
put on jazz

and drank booze
got ready
for some sex

but the dame
went to bed
for a snooze.

Terry Collett

No Donovan.

Miss O'Toole moves in her
Broad bed. She scratches
Her behind to relieve an itch.
Tries to harness her dreams
But they run off like hound
Dogs into the fields of sleep.
She feels for Donovan. Her
Fingers move along the sheet.
Sunlight eases itself beneath
The lowered blind. She screws
Up her nose. Scratches the bridge.
Mouths words. Dreams scatter.
The alarm clock rings. Dances
Along the bedside top. She opens
Her eyes and captures the leaking
Inward light. Her fingers find no
Donovan. He has fled with dawn's
Bright touch. She knows she loves
Him more than he loves her. He loves
Her body and that alone as such.

Terry Collett

No Fun 1940

I feel her
washing me
down below

(Irish nurse
this time round)
lifting up

my leg stumps
washing them
carefully

then drying
them slowly
I am blind

to beauty
she may have
or may not

my failed eyes
see darkness
nothing else

that better?
The nurse says
from my left

sensual
after that
rubbing down

I tell her
ok Grace
always here

to please you
once again
the leg stumps

are bandaged
then I'm dressed
by her hands

all decent
once again
and she's gone

just voices
in the ward
and me here

lying still
on my back
a female

now undone
with no man
to bring fun.

Terry Collett

No Funny Business 1960

Whaur ur ye gonnae?
Mrs Scot said.

Going out
with Benny
Hannah said.

Whaur abit?
her mother asked.

Maybe swimming
in Bedlam Park
Hannah replied.

Again?
Ye only went
lest week
her mother said moodily.

Hannah went
into her bedroom
to find her
swimming costume
her mother
followed her.

Ah guess ye want
some bunsens?
the mother asked.

Just a few pence
for the locker key
Hannah said.

Her mother went out
and Hannah
found her costume
and a towel
and waited.

There was a knock
at the front door
and Mrs Scot answered it.

Benny stood there
she stared at him.

Ye hud best come in
Ah suppose
she said to him.

He entered
and walked down
the passageway
Mrs Scot following
behind muttering.

Hannah met him
by her door
got your swimming stuff?
she said.

Yes and money
he said.

Mrs Scot
got her black purse
and gave Hannah
a few coins
and stared at them both.

Nae funay business
she said.

Of course not
Hannah replied.

They went
to the front door
and went out.

The mother
watched them
cross the Square
and out of sight
down the slope.

What did she mean
no funny business?
Benny said.

Just Mum being
her usual charming self
Hannah said.

Benny let the words
disappear from his
12 year old head.

Terry Collett

No Good End

You know how it is
Lilia said
you go to a party
and there's guys there

and booze
and loud music
and you want
to have a good time

and let your hair down
and feel alive
and young and well
you know be there

and make a noise
over the music
and some guy
offers you a drink

and says
you new here?
and you say
no I've been around about

18 years
and he laughs
or pretends to hoping
he may get lucky later

and laughs
and eyes you
and you smile
that smile girls give

and he walks off
and you look around
to see if your friends
are there yet

and they're not
and so you go find a seat
somewhere you can watch
and not stand around

like some whore
and sip the drink
the guy got you
and it's vodka

you suppose
and you sip it
although its warm and yucky
and then a friend comes in

with her boyfriend
the one who looks
a bit of all right
and you wouldn't

have minded yourself
but can't move on him
because she's
your best friend

and so she comes over with him
and says hello
and talks to you
and you are looking at her

and smile as she talks
but it's him you look at
over her shoulder
and he's standing there

blue-eyed
and he's sort of moving
to the music
and his head is going

from side to side

and your friend says to the guy
go get us some drinks
and one for Lilia too

and so the guy goes off
and you watch him go
his hips and his body
and talk to her

but it is him you want
and dream she's gone off
with some other
and he's all yours

and you imagine there's room
and bed upstairs
in this big house
of a friend of a friend

and hope to use it
to no good end.

Terry Collett

No Happy Endings

There are no happy endings,
Auntie said. Her words tasted
like bitter lemons in the mouth,
causing imaginary ulcers that

stung when ever words came out.
It was the way she said it, as if
she'd discovered some mystery
of the universe and hammered it

like brass. People meet, they have
kids and then after a while they die
and that's it, she'd say, giving you a
look, clearing breakfast things away.

To your five year old ears, this seemed
like harsh; no mention of an afterlife
or heaven or all things will all right in
the end God will see to that; her words

heavy with sadness, leaving an odd taste
in the mouth like a fizzy drink gone flat.

Terry Collett

No Innocent Rose 1969

The door opened
and your father gazed at me
with his dark eyes
and said to come in.

I entered the passageway
and he closed the door
he said a few words in Polish
to your mother
who had poked her head
from the lounge and she disappeared
he beckoned for me
to enter the lounge
and said to sit on the sofa.

He said you would be down soon
as you were getting ready
to go out with me.

I sat looking around the room
then back at him
as he asked where we were going
and what time we would be back.

I told him we were going
to the cinema to see the Patton war film
and would be back around 11pm.

He nodded like I'd seen
Mafia bosses do
in gangster movies.

He said you were a good Catholic girl
and had to be up early in the morning
for the 8am Mass.

I nodded and said
I went to 10am Mass
as used to sing in the choir.

He looked impressed
although I didn't sing
in choir anymore.

I pictured you
(as he spoke about
his childhood in Poland)
undressing that time
your parents were out
in your room urging me
to get a move on
and laying on your bed
waiting for me
(just as well he
couldn't mind read) .

You came down stairs
and entered the lounge
dressed moderately
(not the short skirt
but a longer one)
and he lectured you
about manners and such.

I eyed you standing there
like an innocent rose
as if butter wouldn't
but it did
but you kept that aspect
well hid.

Terry Collett

No Matter How Much

Judy sat
in one of the seats
in the pub garden
and spoke

of the university course
she was going for
in the late summer
and you sat opposite her

watching her as she spoke
taking in her blue eyes
and her little quaint nose
and her dark hair

held back
with blue ribbons
and you remembered
the kisses

of the evening before
while she waited with you
while you waited
for the bus back to town

and how that last kiss
was held by you
all the way home
and packed away

in the mind
in that part
you keep
for good moments

and she stopped talking
and sipped her Coke
and you said
you want to be a lawyer?

yes
she said
I've always wanted
to be lawyer

even as a little girl
and you tried
to imagine her
in wig and gown

in some high court
cross examining
some criminal
or maybe defending one

and she said
I got that parcel
you sent me
that Mahler 6th symphony

in the box
you smiled
you shouldn't
waste your money

on me
she said
I'm not worth it
of course you are

you replied
no I'm not
she said
but I love you

you said
I know
but although
I like you

I can't say

I love you
as easy as you
say you love me

and she sipped her drink
and you sipped your beer
and you wondered
if you would ever hear

her say the words to you
but she never did
and so at the end
of the year

after the Christmas gift
she gave you
and the farewell kiss
you never saw her anymore

some things you want
you can't have
no matter how much
you adore.

Terry Collett

No Monkey Business

The saying goes
that if you give
a room full

of monkeys
a typewriter each,
sooner or later

they'll produce
the entire works
of Shakespeare.

Now I'm no
David Attenborough,
but I'm pretty sure

that they'd just
throw them around
& shit

all over them,
& then
they'd only be

good enough
for writing songs
worthy of X Factor.

Written by my late son Oliver Collett(1984-2014)

Terry Collett

No More Echoes.

Two mental breakdowns
In as many years;
The ECT, she
Knows too well; the dark

Corridors; the sharp
Broken mirrors, all
Reflecting different
Selves; the slashed wrist;

Bath-almost-drowning
Business; the white
Coated nurse and docs
And the tricks up their

Long thin sleeves; and the
Emptiness inside
With the long slow fall
Into that so long

Awaited and wished for
Oblivion and
No more echoes from
The sad ghostly dead.

Terry Collett

No More Faces 1940

A nurse wheels me out
into the sun and fresh air;
I feel it on my face,
sense the sunlight
on my blinded eyes,
darkness unenlightened.

If you need me Grace,
just call out,
the nurse says,
and is gone off back
to the hospital ward.

I look around me
seeing nothing,
but trying to give
the impression that I can,
that I am not blind.

I listen intensely,
never thought
I would ever listen
so much to every sound
that came my way.

I am wrapped in a blanket;
my leg stumps
well bandaged.

I reach down
with my right hand,
feeling where the legs end;
feel a shock each time
that I have become
shorter than ever
after the bomb fell
and that was it:
my life changed forever,
blind and legless.

I sit and put my hand
back in my lap.

Voices come from nearby,
other patients maybe,
nurses or doctors or visitors.

I feel a prisoner
of my disabilities;
locked in my body;
unable to go to the loo
or bathroom unaided;
unable to see the beauty
of the flowers
in the grounds.

When the nurses
blanket bathed me
this morning it felt
oddly sensual:
hands moving
over my body,
fingers washing
between my own fingers,
my leg stumps lifted
and cleaned
and re-bandaged gently;
voices between them
in conversation, ;
my body tingling
by the touches.

I recalled Clive in 1938
moving his hands over me
that evening he stayed
and we made love;
his voice in my ear,
his lips on mine,
his fingers touching me
all over and in soft places.

Now all gone,
no kisses,
he dead,
no more faces.

Terry Collett

No More Nima 1967

Benny never heard
from Nima again.

Weeks past
then months.

He guessed
she either
forgot his address
or was back
on drugs or both.

But he looked back
at their time together
and smiled.

The times
they made love
and met and drank
and ate.

He remembered
his hospital visits
to see her
but that
was it now
the show was over
the actress
had left the stage
and the curtains
had dropped or closed
or whatever curtains
do on stage.

But he recalled
that night
in that cheap hotel
in West London.

That night of sex
and bathing
in that large
bath together
and the landlady
knocking at the door
with extra towels
and he Benny there
in his underwear
and the old girl
giving him the stare.

Terry Collett

No Need No Gain 1961

Jane invited me to her house
because of the rain
falling outside.

Her mother
was in the lounge knitting,
her father in his study
working on his Sunday sermon.

Is it all right for Benedict
to come in out
of the rain for while?
Jane said.

Her mother looked at me,
of course,
she said,
stopping her knitting,
would you like
a cup of tea?

Yes, please
that would be lovely,
I said.

Her mother got up
from an armchair,
and went out of the room.

I sat next to Jane
on the settee.

Jane was wearing
a grey flowery dress;
her long black hair
was in bunches.

Shame it rained;
I was going to show you

where I found a moorhen's nest
by a small pond,
Jane said.

What's a moorhen?
I said.

Some people call them
marsh hens;
they swim on water,
and can walk well
on their strong legs,
and have long toes
that are adapted
to soft surfaces,
and eat plant material,
small rodents, amphibians
and eggs,
and can be
a bit aggressive,
and territorial during
the breeding season;
they're often found
in fairly big flocks
on shallow vegetated
lakes or ponds,
she said.

I wanted to kiss her,
but was frightened
her mother would come in
at the wrong moment,
so didn't, but I touched
her hand feeling it
warm and soft.

I'll show you later,
she said.

Lizbeth wanted
to show me things,
but it wasn't moorhens,

but I didn't tell Jane,
no need, no gain.

Terry Collett

No No Dear 1976

I'm Blue

I'm a mental nurse

well I'm not mental

I'm a nurse who deals

with mental patients

and this is one

of the female wards

(no male and females together

for obvious reasons)

o yes they would

take my word for it

and no male nurses

on the females wards

for reasons in case

you never know and anyway

it's best believe me

mind you I do go to

the male wards sometimes

but that is different

well I am anyway

but this is Moon Ward

and that is Angel

don't be deceived

she may look like an angel

but she drowned her

two twins daughters

in the bath

and her husband

was away on business

and that was that

and she said they were demons

and she was doing God's work
and then of course
she went and strangled
one of the nurses here

and so we don't go in
alone to talk with her
and she can talk
and sometimes she's

as lucid as day
and other times she's not
and rambles on about
not seeing her husband

who is sometimes
a famous dancer
and sometimes he's
the brother of Al Capone

and once he was
the male nurse on Star Ward
who she'd seen in the grounds
one sunny day

and never be deceived by her
she can appear quite
the darling and sweet
but she can do things

to make you have nightmares
you see that thin woman
over by the radiator
well she's had her

in the female bogs
a few times only last week
she was trying to
have it away with her

poor girl
now stand here a minute

and watch her
no not too close

that's right now watch her
o yes she always wears
her dresses up high
sometimes it's barely

an inch from her knickers
and sometimes
she don't wear them
that's why there's no

male nurses or she'd
have them as quick
as lightening
see her?

she's fingering at you
I think she likes you
just stand steady
try and ignore her

in a nice way
there see she's turned
her attention to the tubby girl
that girl's called Princess

on account of her thinking
she's a princess and does
her waving hand stuff
and wants you to curtsy

but look at Angel
see she's moving to her now
no don't panic
they're ok

see how Angel works?
She's a smart one
calm as you come
she had her in bed one morning

when we came around
hugging her she was
the night nurse must
have been asleep or something

or she didn't care
or didn't want the hassle
of getting Princess
out of the bed

or Angel would go off her trolley
now watch her
Angel can be a real dear
see how she's holding her

putting her hand
around the Princess's waist
o yes she does that too
no no Angel

not here not now
no no dear.

Terry Collett

No Noise No Sound 1971

There were flowers
by the statue
of the Madonna
in the cloister
as I went past each day
fresh flowers
not drooping or faded,

communis mater,

Hugh thin and poker-faced
spoke about the cloister
being our Jerusalem
and we to follow
in the Lord's footsteps,

many of those
who are humiliated
are not humble
Bernard said
they react to humiliation
with their anger
others with patience,

Deus est Core
Dom Matthew said
as we spoke after lunch
in the gardens,

George said of the cold
how it got to his bones
at night and would
he stay or leave,

confiance en Dieu
the French monk said to me
as we picked vegetables
for the kitchen
trust trust he said,

we are what we
repeatedly do
excellence then
is not an act
but a habit
said Gareth
quoting Aristotle
over afternoon tea
in the garth,

and she lay there
wanting me to lay
beside her
and make love,

the smell of incense
in the church after Mass
made me feel
close to God
even on dark days,

Dio ci ama
the Italian monk said
on our Thursday walk
and that love he said
is the best love ever,

the bell tolled
from the bell tower
and rang out
through the cloister,

in my cell I had
the confessions of St Augustine
and poems by Hopkins
recommended by that priest
I met the year before
and a nun waited on us
hand and foot quiet
like some modern day Martha,

thrust into me
she said
enter me with joy and I did
her husband off
some place unaware,

vous ne pouvez pas mentir à Dieu
the French peasant monk said
as he wheeled the barrow
over hard ground,

I watched the moon descend
through the window
no noise
no sound.

Terry Collett

No Other Things To Do.

As you sit in the cafe
in the shopping mall
you see Sophie
and her man friend

smooching across
the table
he with moustache
and thinning

combed back hair
and she
with dark black hair
straight to the collar

of her white blouse
they purse their lips
he closes his eyes
leans forward

she likewise
as if
in some French cafe
in some 1950s film

you sip your latte
watch the show
he once worked
pushing trolleys

in some super store
she unsure
but with a carer
sometimes seen

walking the mall
or in the bank
or shops
and some days

she'll come up
and say hello
in a loud voice
as if she'd not

seen you
in a thousand years
other days not at all
or she'll tell you

some news
about her life
or some small trouble
that's got her down

today she sits
and kisses
and converses
with the man friend

and he'll laugh
and maybe she too
and hold hands
over the cokes and cakes

you sit back
in the chair
and watch them there
repeat their kissing

or holding hands
the Romeo eyes
now open
leaning near

mouthng words
you cannot hear
she lips still pursed
says loudly

of a love

she feels
or how hot
the weather is

or how his scarf
untidy looks
or unbuttoned shirt
others who do not

know them sit
and gawk
and make snide comment
behind their hands

make judgement
in their bourgeoisie world
but you like others
who know them of old

sit and drink
and make no judgements
of what they say
or do but watch

the kissing
and holding of hands
like in a B feature
at the cinema

waiting for
the real thing maybe
but content to see
the movie through

having no where to go
or other things to do.

Terry Collett

No Postcards 1965

Tilly got back from her uncle's place in Richmond, and her mother said, I hope you left your uncle's place tidy and not in a mess? Tilly

nodded her head, and said, yes it is tidy as I found it, and Uncle was pleased and said thank you for looking after the place while he

was away. Her mother scrutinized her. So what did you do while you were there? Had a good look around Richmond, sat in the park, watched

Uncle's TV, went to bed.(She then visualized Benny in bed with her and they having it away) . I went to Richmond once, her mother said,

unsmiling even at a memory, too crowded, too many people. I liked it, Tilly said, (pushing from her mind she and Benny undressing in front

of each other slowly and suggestively) . Didn't meet anyone you knew there, I suppose? her mother said, unpacking Tilly's bag with soiled washing and

the odd girly thing. No of course not, well apart from Uncle, Tilly replied, trying not to think of she and Benny

walking hand in hand in the park and French kissing) . Well you are back now, and have work tomorrow, so best have a bath, and I will put these things in

the wash, and her mother went off,
and Tilly thought of she and Benny
in the bath together and washing each
other, and afterwards having sex again

and needing to bath once more. Work
tomorrow, she mused, O what a bore.

Terry Collett

No Privacy 1963

Martha Maguire's mother
entered her daughter's bedroom
her daughter was asleep
in the bed

Martha what's the statute
of Our Blessed Lord
doing in your bed?

Martha woke up
bleary-eyed
hair matted

what?
she muttered

the statue
what's it doing
in your bed?

Martha looked around
at the Sacred Heart
of Jesus statue
beside her
on her pillow

feck me
how'd that get there?
she muttered

language Martha
in front of Our Lord

sorry Jesus
Martha said
nodding to the statue
and moving away
from Him carefully
so He didn't

fall side wards
into the bed

what's it doing there?

it's the Crucified

I know who it is
I asked you
what it is doing
in your bed?

I got lonely
and had no one
to talk with
Martha said

you can talk with Jesus
without having Him
in your bed beside you
it's not decent
what would the priest
have to say about that
I don't know
her mother said

Martha moved
to the side of the bed

can you go now Ma
I want to wash and dress
for school

you've nothing
I've not seen before Martha

a few things
have developed since
you saw me
in the bathroom last Ma
Martha said
waiting

for her mother to go

if your Da heard
how you speak
he'd slap your backside
so he would

the last time Da
saw me backside
it had talcum powder on it
and a crappy nappy
Martha said

her mother
raised her eyebrows
and sighed
and walked out
of the room
and closed the door

sorry about that Lord
she said
to the Crucified's statue
Ma has no sense of privacy

she moved off
the bed carefully
and pulled the sheet
and blanket
over the statue
and patted the head

the head of the statue
peeped over
the blanket at her

won't be long
just going for a wash
and clean and brush
me hair Lord
she said

she gathered up
her towel and flannel
and giving the statue
one last look
she went out
of her bedroom
and walked across
to the bathroom
and closed the door

she removed her nightie
and dropped it
to the floor
and stood there
gazing in the mirror
in her panties
and bra

musng softly
there's no sense
of privacy
with Ma.

Terry Collett

No Real Faces 1940

I am pushed in a wheelchair
along a corridor
in the hospital
by one of the nurses.

Where are we going?
I ask, seemingly rushing
through blackness,
like a tunnel
with no ending.

Dr Symonds needs to see you,
a voice says from behind me,
soft breathy voice,
passing with me
through the dark spaces
of my blindness.

There are smells and sounds
around me,
voices bodiless
as if floating in air,
like ghosts not seen,
but there.

I am pushed into a room,
warm and cosy,
the voices go,
the pressure of the air changes,
and a voice says
out of the blackness,
Hello Grace,
how are you?

I stare towards the voice,
a deep man's voice,
the doctor's;
I sense him waiting for reply.

My legs hurt,
my toes itch,
but when I go to rub
or scratch them
they're not there,
gone,
no legs,
I say moodily,
clutching the sides
of the wheelchair.

Hands rest on my shoulders,
soft hands,
gently massaging.

That's understandable,
it happens often,
Dr Symonds says,
nerve endings,
the mind misunderstanding
ghostly messages
from limbs not there.

Will I ever walk again?
I ask the voice
unsure where
I am facing.

We will have to see
how matters develop,
how your stumps heal,
what is available
for your needs,
he says gently
but professionally.

He talks on,
but I cease to listen,
my mind is reaching out
for meaning,
for a sensibility,
for an escape

from his voice.

I want to go out
for dinner with Mr Kimberly,
I want to be out of here,
I'm going mad in here,
I say,
my voice stretching
its boundaries,
my fingers reaching
for a real contact.

Hands hold mine,
soft hands,
a nurse's,
they squeeze gently.

That would be good,
the doctor says,
but there may be
complications,
matters which he
may not be aware of,
simple things;
your stumps will of course
be well bandaged,
but day to day issues
may arise.

What issues?
What matters?
I say moodily.

Where is he taking you?
The doctor asks.

A restaurant he knows,
I reply.

How will he get you there?
Is the restaurant accessible
for a wheelchair?

And what will he do
if you have a call of nature
while there?
The doctor asks.

I stare at the space
of the voice,
my hands held tight
in my lap,
I feel I am sitting
awkwardly there
and move my bottom.

The nurse helps me
get comfortable,
then her hands leave me.

I don't know,
I reply,
I don't know anything
anymore,
I seem like a child
in a dark room waiting
to be punished,
fearing shadows,
voices.

The doctor goes on
about matters,
about him seeing
and speaking with Philip,
and I feel a huge chasm
open beneath me,
my legs want to run,
to flee.

I grab my stumps
and feel for my legs
for the dancing limbs I had,
but they have gone,
and I stare
into the dark spaces,

seeing only ghostly voices
of the past,
but no real faces.

Terry Collett

No Sex Ith Her.

No she would never agree to
Having sex it somehow seemed
Something she couldn't have
Something in her past had damaged
That aspect of her but she didn't mind
Being held by you or cuddled to a degree
And kissed provided no one else
Was watching and some nights in bed
As you lay next to her (when she hadn't
Fled to another bed in another part of
The house) she'd allow you to draw her
Near to you and maybe touch certain
Parts of her anatomy but not too much
And it got frustrating for you and she'd
Say Leo I know this is hard for you but
You do love me don't you and you'd say
Yes of course I do and lie saying I don't
Mind a bit not having sex it means nothing
To me and she didn't know about you and
The maid Millie up in the attic the one she
Rowed with so often when her nerves were
Bad and she had no idea how you'd creep
Along to the room and be with Millie and
Have hot sex with her and you were always
Listening out for her voice waiting for her
To fall asleep and she was often on the
Edge of sanity often nearly about to fall
Into the deep darkness of her depression
And that night you dreamt you saw her
Walk into the fast flowing river weighed
Down with stones in the pockets of her
Coat with sounds of her gargled moans.

Terry Collett

No Sound 1958

It was Saturday morning
when I knocked
on Ingrid's door of the flats

her mum answered
and stared at me
want to come in?
she said

(she would never
have said that
if her husband
was still alive)

I noticed she was red-eyed
looked drawn
her hair was in a mess

thank you
I said

she let me in
I walked down
the passage way
to the lounge
where I had been
just the once
when Ingrid's old man
had been out
and I went to see her

Ingrid was at the table
eating breakfast
her mother was behind me
want a cuppa?
she said

yes that'd be nice
I said

she looked at me
then wandered out of the room

I went to the table
where Ingrid was
and sat near her

what you doing today?
Ingrid said

morning film matinee
I said

can I go?
she said

course you can
if your mum will let you
I said

I'll ask her
Ingrid said
she ate her cereal slowly

any news
about your old man's death?
who stabbed him?
I said

she shook her head
no the police came
and asked Mum questions
but they think he got
in a fight
or upset someone
and that was it
bottled outside a pub
Ingrid said softly

sorry for you
and your mum

I said

(even though he beat them
and made their lives misery
I guessed they missed him)

can't believe it

Ingrid said

I wait for him to come in

some nights

I dream he's come home

him and Mum

are arguing again

and he's coming to my room

to leather me

then I wake up

and realize he's not

coming back anymore

are you glad?

I said

him hitting us no

but him as my dad yes

she said

her mum brought me

a cup of tea in

a chipped cup

on a chipped saucer

but the tea looked

the right colour

and was sweet

she went off

back to the kitchen

what time

is the film matinee?

Ingrid said

in an hour

I said
looking at the clock
on the mantelshelf
over the fireplace

best get ready then
and ask Mum
about going
she said
finishing off her breakfast

after she'd finished
she went off
to get dressed
in her day clothes

I sat in the lounge
looking around
it was odd
no shouts
or screaming
in fact no sound.

Terry Collett

No Such Luck 1962

Naaman sat on the grass
at midday recess
the sun was hot
and pouring down.

He saw Shoshana
walking across the grass
towards him.

He put the small book
of butterflies & moths
down beside him.

She smiled when
she came up close to him
and sat down
on his right,
then arranged
her school skirt
over her knees.

Well how was your morning?
Naaman asked,
eyeing her.

Usual boring lessons,
but I survived
by thinking about you
and meeting you,
Shoshana said,
looking at him:
and you what
was your morning like?

He sighed:
well maths was gutty,
but biology was good;
it was about insects
and reproduction,

he said.

She wanted him
to hold her hand,
but so far he hadn't;
she thought
she ought as a start,
but was unsure
of his reaction,
so didn't.

You brought
your book of butterflies
& moths then?
she said.

Yes just while
I was waiting for you,
he said,
I want to show you
the moth that came
into the house last night
through the open window.

He took up the book
and opened it at a page
and showed her
an ugly looking moth.

What did you
do with it?
She asked,
putting her hand
next to his.

I caught it in my hands
and put it in a small jar
and studied it,
he said.

Then what?
She asked,

wanting to place
her hand in his,
but did not.

I let it go
and closed the window,
he said.

O I see,
she said.

He put the book down;
she took his hand in hers
and laid it in her lap
suddenly before
he could react.
He looked at her
and smiled:
I do think about you,
he said shyly,
I was looking forward
to seeing you
all morning.

She was pleased
and had feared
he would remove his hand,
but he let it stay there
and held her hand
too briefly.

She wanted him
to kiss her
(despite other kids
seeing them) ,
but he didn't,
he started talking
about the insects in biology.

He removed his hand
to show her about moths
and butterflies in the book

and reproduction,
but she was only
half listening,
and the kiss seemed
unlikely now,
his hand free from hers.

Inside she
was wanting him
to hold her and kiss
her somewhere,
but he talk on
and all she could do
was stare.

Terry Collett

No Touch Of Sin.

On the way home
from senior school
you met Fay
on the corner

of the New Kent Road
and Meadow Row
she was dressed
in her school uniform

with a satchel
over her shoulder
a hand griping
the leather strap

her fair hair
neat and tidy
hard day at school?
you asked

as usual
she said
the nuns strict
and the lessons

mind stunning
and you?
a good dose
of brain washing

and the usual
morons teaching
you replied
pushing fingers

through your hair
taking in
her lovely eyes
the shyness

the way she stood
her small hand
gripping the strap
sed libera nos a malo

she said
what the heck
does that mean?
you asked

it's from the Lord's Prayer
Fay said softly
it means
but deliver us from evil

my daddy says it
often to me
you nodded
my old man wouldn't know

what the heck
it would mean
if it bit his backside
you said

Fay laughed shyly
you liked it
when she laughed
like she did

it was like a small prayer
whispered
by a bright eyed angel
she looked back

at the passing traffic
the noise
the fumes
my daddy says

it's a daily battle

against evil
he says one must
drive out evil

and the evil one
by punishment
she said
looking back at you

there's plenty
of punishment
at my school
you said

not sure if it's evil
being driven out
or the breaking of school rules
you said

do you want
to come to my place
for tea?
you asked

best not
she said
Daddy's home early today
and he likes me

home on time
ok
you said
and you both

turned down Meadow Row
she touched
your hand
and you held hers gently

as if it were
a fragile pot made
from bone china

smooth yet warm

her fingers curled
around your hand
skin on skin
beautiful

with no touch
of sin.

Terry Collett

No Words Came Mcmlxxi

Dom Peter
in the workshop
planing wood
the wood in a vice,

ad opus est
ut oraret he said
as I watched
as I swept
wood shavings,

bell tolled
for the office
of None,

sunlight on
the cloister garth,

monks around
talking and sipping tea
I sipped and watched
but was silent,

kiss me here
she said
my husband never
kisses me here
so I did,

the bell tower tolled
George pulled
the ropes with Gareth,

prier dans votre cœur
a French monk said
God hears all prayers,

Hugh thin and gaunt
helped in the kitchen

with Dom Patrick
soup made
he said,

Arbeiten im Glauben
geschehen sind
Godly Werke
the Austrian monk
said to me
as we sorted books
in the abbey library,

I kissed along
her inner thighs
leaving moist kisses,

Christian lernen
von Christus wie
Sie sollte Christus
zu lieben
St Bernard said
so I read,

I sat in the church
in the semi dark
after Vespers
waiting for God
to speak
but no words came
just a flicker
of the red light
at the altar end,

? ??????????
??µ????????? ???????
??? ?????? ??????
????? ??? ??????µ??
?????????µ? ??? ??????
Gareth said
quoting Plato
as we sat
on the abbey beach

watching the tide come in,

I see her in my mind
legs spread wide
saying
enter
enter in.

Terry Collett

No Worries Or Care 1974

Dalya sleeps
in her sleeping bag
on the other side
of the tent.

I lay awake
thinking on the day
the visit
to the Van Gogh
museum.

The meal
in the restaurant.

Our conversation
on art and philosophy
and the psychology
of Wilhelm Reich.

Late night revellers
walk through
the base camp.

The rock music
from the loudspeakers
has ceased
and a peace
like deep fog
settles over us.

Someone drunkenly
sings going by.

When we made love
I noticed a mole
on her inner thigh.

I kissed it
for luck.

Tomorrow we make
the journey home
and each go
our separate way
our journey
in reverse
a fond farewell.

Seems an age
since we first met
that first day at Dover
awkwardly gazing
about us
waiting for
the minibus
to pick us up
to rover Europe's
camp-sites
and see the cities.

Keep in touch
she said
but I don't suppose
we will.

We live too far apart
to make it last.

A few late night
wanderers go by
into the night.

She sleeps peaceful
over there
like a child
without worries
or care.

Terry Collett

None Was There 1957

I was standing
on the concrete stairs
of our flats
waiting for an Injuns attack

when Enid's old man
came up the stairs quite lively
he saw me and smiled
and said

hello Benny Boy
how are we?
Once upon a time
he would have glared at me

but here he was smiling
and being friendly
(it was as Enid said
unnerving him being so nice)

I'm ok
I said
waiting for an attack
he stopped

and gazed at me
attack? What attack?
Injuns of the Blackfoot tribe
I said

o right
he said
and nodded his head
and was about to climb up

when I said
can Enid come out to play?
He looked at me
for a few moments

then said
I guess so as long
as she doesn't get
into mischief

we never get
into mischief
I said
she's too good for that

(unlike me I mused)
he nodded and went off
up the stairs
I walked to the balcony

and looked over
into the Square
and took out one
of my 6 shooter guns

and held it ready
the milkman was leading
his horse drawn wagon
along by the lower flats

his black hat at an angle
his white coat
buttoned up tight
Mrs Pignut was walking

towards the flats
she was carrying a shopping bag
a cigarette hanging droopingly
from her lips

smoke following her
like a ghost
but no Injuns in sight
any Injuns?

Enid said

coming up behind me
and standing beside me
no not yet

I said
who told you
I was waiting for Injuns?
My dad said

he passed you on the stairs
and that you asked about me
how is he?
I said

she looked at me
he's all right
he seems different
he hasn't hit me or Mum

for a week or two
and it's unnerving
all the time waiting
to see if he will change

and go back to how
he was
she said
tell me if goes back

I said
(although I'd know
by a bruise or welt mark
like I had before)

she nodded her head
we both stared
into the Square for Injuns
but none was there.

Terry Collett

Norris's Illusion 1959

Norris turned around
and looked back
Biggs was beside him.

Hey Coles
I could beat you
in a fight couldn't I?

Benedict nodded
guess so
he said.

O'Brien was beside him
at the back of class.

Norris asked
other boys
who likewise
acquiesced.

You could take him
O'Brien said
in Benedict's ear.

I know that
and you know that
but he doesn't
Benedict said
it's Biggs who's
the problem
he follows Norris
around like
a big bulldog.

Norris turned around
to the front of class.

There was chatter
amongst the boys

as the teacher hadn't
showed yet.

One whack
in Biggs's fat guts
and he'll go down
O'Brien said.

You reckon?
Benedict said
looking at Biggs's
wide back
and large head.

Sure he'd go down
O'Brien said.

If Norris tries it on
I'll thump his nose
Benedict said
and see what
Biggs's does.

The door opened
and Lee
the science teacher
entered the room
the boys stood up
the chatter stopped.

You could
as the saying goes
hear a pin drop.

Terry Collett

Not A Clown.

Open my lips,
book open,
dawn light dim,

the monks enter,
the church,
the choir stalls,

smell of incense.
?I am aware of
the Crucified,

hung high,
nailed there,
plaster,

coloured flesh,
wood.
The eyes see

what is seen,
held in mind,
captured image on image,

come my Christ,
utter to me,
for I am as one low.

Light from light,
light of the light,
out of the depths,

and she touched me,
the bell
of the church tower

sounding,
the bell rings,
rings into my heart and head.

I stand in the choir stall,
the abbot taps the wood,
the chant begins,

the chant rises,
voices in union,
her lips on mine,

pressed,
soft fruit.
?Come my Lord,

enter the soul,
awaken me,
my fingers,

her fingers,
finger me.
Matins sung,

light on light,
windows bring
dawn's light,

light upon light
light on light,
come my Christ,

light bringer,
soul saver.
I see her as she was,

naked,
flesh to flesh,
flesh on flesh.

come my Lord,
I am as one down,
a lost soul,

not a fool,

not a clown.

Terry Collett

Not A Trick

John is there
by the fence
arms folded
looking up
at the sky

Elaine feels
very shy
wants to speak
to be near
to feel safe

he sees her
waves to her

she blushes
walks over

you OK?
he asks her

I'm all right
she mutters
looking round
for others
who may see
both of them
together

but none seems
to notice
or to care
that she's there

let's walk on
she tells him
on the field
of the school

they move on
together
she feels his
hand brushing
against hers
electric
sensation
flows through her

beating heart
pumping blood
all around
her body

she stops him
holds his hand
feels his pulse

they tease me
the others
other girls
other boys
she tells him

why is that?
he asks her

they call me
the Frump
the sexless
old granny

you're not that
he tells her
not a frump
(he doesn't
known if she
is sexless
doesn't say)
you are you
a sweet girl
a bit shy

he goes on
talking words

but his hand
is in hers
she senses
the warmth there

the fingers
touching hers
pulsing life

electric
a love feel
running there
not a trick.

Terry Collett

Not Alone 1958

I am sitting on the grass
at the front of Banks House
polishing my silver looking
six-shooter
my old man had bought me
in the junk shop
off of the New Kent Road

Ingrid walks
along the grass
by the flats and sits
beside me crossing her legs
and putting her elbows
on her knees

I look at her
you look unhappy
what's up
your old man
had a go at you again?

She looks at the coal wharf
across the road
where coal lorries
and horse-drawn wagons
are being loaded up with coal

he did last night
she says
then this morning
there was an almighty row
between him and Mum
and I was frightened
he would hit me again
but he didn't
when I went past him
to my bedroom
he just glared at me
but did nothing

and when I came out
after getting dressed
he had gone to work
and Mum was sitting
there crying

did he hit her?
I say

no she was just so angry
with him that she cried
Ingrid says

so what now?
I ask

don't know
she says

what did he hit you
for last night?
I ask

because of my cut thumb
and because we
are blood brother and sister
after doing that
thumb cutting ritual thing
she says

he wasn't pleased then?
I say

she shakes her head

what did your mum say?

She just cleaned it
and put this plaster on
and went and rowed
with Dad about hitting me
now I don't know

what will happen
when he gets home
from work later
she says anxiously

I put my six-shooter away
in the holster on my belt
around my blue jeans
and say
let's go get a 1d drink
from the Penny shop
and maybe some
Black Jacks and Fruit Salads

have you money then?
she asks

I've got 6d
that'll cover it
I say

ok
she says
and gets up
from the grass

so do I
and we walk along
by Banks House
and into the Square

she talking about
her old man

I listen
looking at her
and a fading bruise
on her cheek bone

she thinking
(maybe)
she's glad

she's with 10 year old me
and not alone.

Terry Collett

Not Always What We Seek

After you'd got on
the school bus
and sat down

in one of the side seats
Jane said
who did you fight with

in the playground
lunchtime?
Woolgar

you said
he pushed me over
against the wire fence

and I got up
and went for him
she looked disappointed

I didn't think
you could be violent
she said

I'm not usually
but it was an automatic
response to being

pushed over
you said
my daddy said

one should turn
the other cheek
especially if you're a Christian

she said softly
the school bus
started up

and took off down
the school drive
sorry

you said
but the creep
got under my skin

and if you let them
get away with it once
they'll always do it

she gazed at you
then out
of the window

at the passing shops
and buildings
of the town

were you watching?
you asked
yes I saw you

from the girl's playground
she muttered
not looking round

guess it looked
kind of bad
yes it did

she turned
and looked at you
but at least

you don't do it
all the time
she said

and touched

your hand
with hers

and you felt sad
inside that you'd
made her feel like that

and you saw
how lovely her
dark eyes were

how there seemed
to be a mini universe
in them with their own

galaxies and stars
and moons
next time I'll think twice

you said
before hitting
the other boy

she nodded
and smiled
and her hand

squeezed yours
her skin soft and warm
her hair black

and drawn back
into a ponytail
sitting there

beside you
her grey school skirt
and jumper

and white blouse
the neck open
the sight

of her throat
and you wanting
to kiss but not doing so

her neck
her skin
the feel

of her hair
against your cheek
sometimes

you thought
we can't have
what we seek.

Terry Collett

Not An Answer Why.

Fay managed to get out
while her father worked
and she came

and knocked at your door
and said
You want to go out?

Sure
you replied
and you both went down

the stairs of the apartment block
across the Square
and down the slope

up Meadow Road
crossing over
the bombsite

behind the coal wharf
and on to the main road
where you walked along

side by side
Let's see what's on
at the movies

you said
and you stopped outside
the movie house

and peered at the programmes
Fay said
My daddy doesn't think

movies are right for children
he says they're sinful
and full of lust

and sex
and greed
and she stopped

and stared along the road
at the people passing
and the cars and lorries

going by
on the main road
and the evening air

choked up with fumes
and the street lights
giving a false perspective

It isn't all like that
you said
Some movies are about love

and laughter
and people enjoy going
it takes them out

of their dreary lives
Fay said
I've never been

inside a movie house
never seen a movie
Well why don't you come with me

to the matinee on Saturday
I can squeeze some money
from my dad for the two of us

Fay looked at you
and seemed interested
but then said

No I can't

if my father caught me
there'd be hell to pay

and apart from the lecture
on the immorality
of the arts and such

he'd belt me some
and not let me out again
for some time

and you said
Ok but some day
you're going to find out

things aren't always
as the parents say
then you're going to

have to find your own road
and walk your own way
and she looked sad

and walked away
from the movie house
along to the subway

and down the steps
into the bright lights
and noise of traffic

over head
and you touched her hand
and she gripped yours

and you walked down
through the subway tunnel
she in her flowered dress

and brown shoes
slightly scuffed
and you

in your tee shirt and jeans
and you pretended
not to notice

the bruise on her thigh
which caught your eye
as she skipped along

her dress rising high
as she went holding tight
your hand

her fingers wrapped
about yours
and up and out

on the other side
of the subway
with its bright lights

and evening sky
and too many questions
and not an answer why.

Terry Collett

Not At Me 1976

She said she was bored
and wanted to go out
but no where
I suggested

quite fitted the bill
and so she sat
in the armchair
with a face on her

and said
we never go no where
we just sit
around the house

looking at TV
or read books
and I'm bored
and Gloria's husband

takes her places
and buys her
new dresses
and takes her

to posh restaurants
and he bought her
that new ring
gold it was

and she never gets bored
but me
I am always bored
unlike Gloria

isn't Gloria the dame
whose husband
went and left her
for that young dame

the one with sexy hip
movement
who looks
a hundred dollars

but who Gloria said
was a piece of sexy shit?
I said
Netanya looked away

and stared at the TV
and not at me.

Terry Collett

Not Be Half Blind.

He first notice Elaine
as she waited
for the school bus
standing there

in the pouring rain
with her younger sister
and other kids
from the village

he noticed
how drowned she looked
her spectacles so wet
she couldn't see out

her dark hair
hanging limp
about her face
and she looked down

not up
as she climbed
aboard the bus
making her way

down the aisle
of the bus
like some female Crucified
and sat in the seat

by the window
and peered out
her sister sat
next to her

equally as wet
yet unperturbed
laughing at another
who jested

at her state
but Elaine's
was a separate state
a lesser one's fate

knowing other eyes
gazed and sniggered
and whispered
into their hands

but not John
he saw her through
his own eyes
pushed away

the sneers
and sighs
and sniggering japes
and saw a deeper soul

within peering out
through the window glass
that showed
the falling rain

he looked away
taking note of her hair
and eyes
and glasses smeared

and how she pushed
her wet hands
between the caresses
of her knees

and dampened skirt
how by the look
of her face
revealed

her inner hurt

and as the bus
moved off and on
the radio blaring

some Mike Sarne song
the voices of children
competing for the space
and John half listening

to Trevor talk
some such of fishing
with a friend
at pond or river

he did not discern
or Trevor's sister
across the aisle
chatting of some dress

her mother bought
not the fashion
she complained
but John held close

the image of the girl
who sat behind
across the aisle
whose dampened

state of dress
and soul
had moved his mind
and touched his heart

but said nothing
to either Trevor
with talk of fish
and rod

or Monica's dress
or clothes whatever
it had been

unfashionable or such

as undesired
he looked out
at the passing scene
as the bus raced by

thinking of Elaine
sitting a little way
behind
wiping the raindrops

from glasses
so she could see
and not be
half blind.

Terry Collett

Not Be Late

O guess what I've heard
Anne said
that fat nun
the one with moustache
well she's leaving

I looked at Anne
her one leg swinging
as she talked
the stump of the other leg
hidden by her red skirt
where's she going?

God knows
and he's not said
maybe she's going
to be a missionary
or join the Tiller Girls
and dance for a living

I smiled
the other kids
were on the lawn
on the slide or swing
some were on the grass
playing or sitting talking
Sister Bridget was talking
to the tiny Sad girl

Anne gazed at them
get me out of here Kid
the sight of them
makes me
want to throw up

where to?
I asked

the beach

yes along by the beach
let me see the sea
she said

I sat there looking
at her wheelchair
now?

yes now Kid
I want out of here

I looked over
at Sister Bridget the nun
what if she sees me
pushing you out
the back gate?

let her see what
she wants
I want to see
the fecking sea
she put on her
Don't Argue With Me face

Ok
I said
and got up
from the chair
and began pushing
the wheelchair
on to the path
leading away
from the nursing home
to the back gate

she wasn't heavy
but I was not over big
and thin
as a fag paper

where are you going?
the nun asked

coming over
to where we were

the Kid here
is taking me
for a short jaunt

where to?

just the end of the garden
through the avenue of trees
I said
see the birds and flowers

the nun looked at Anne
is that right?
she asked

would he lie?
Anne said

the nun looked at me
her dark eyes
peering through me
I tried to look innocent

well don't be long
lunch will be at 1pm
then it's afternoon sleep

Anne said nothing
put on her
lost little girl features

ok Sister

the nun walked off
I pushed on

keep an eye
on the penguin
don't think she bought

the tale

I pushed her along the path
between the trees

is she looking?

no

I said

she's gone in

good let's get a move on
to the sea Kid
to the sea

so I pushed her on
through the gate
hoping we wouldn't be long
and not be late.

Terry Collett

Not Beyond The Day

On that rattling train
and rocky bus
you went
with your mother

to the sanatorium
where your father
was shafted
with cancer

the bus
made you travel sick
the long drive upward
was lined with trees

and tall grass
the building
a one storey affair
rigid and unfriendly

stood silently there
you walked down
long white corridors
the smell added

to your sickness
the passing of rooms
and windows
and silence

mother said nothing
carry hope
in her handbag
and you waited

for the first sight
of your father
since he'd left home
a short while before

and there he was
in pyjamas
and maroon dressing gown
and slippers

pale faced
an old man
imitating
your father

death winged
and narrow shouldered
he stood
attempting a smile

the cancer his companion
creeping beside him
there was greeting
and exchange

of kiss and hug
and you taking in
the wasting away
the lines on features

the grey hair
turning white
the hanging on clothes
he took you

to a room
where you all
sat alone
given up smoking

he said
too late I know
but it gives me
the final word

mother sat

and talked of him
and home
and the other kids

and the pet dogs
missing him
and you sat silent
seeking the right words

the thoughts muddled
the sight of him
a shock
how are you?

he asked
he's travel sick
mother said
o that's bad

he said gently
as though it mattered
in the range of things
the smell of death

and decay
the last goodbye
seeing him no more
beyond that day.

Terry Collett

Not Caring 1997

Nuala enters her home
and leans against the door

she'd left Una
back in Dublin
after being in a cafe
for a coffee and talk
and having no place to go
they sat there
and talked

then Nuala realised
her husband Brian
would be home soon
and so said

look I have to go
Brian'll be home soon
and he'll wonder
where I am

Una nodded and said
I understand
when
can I see you next?

don't know
Nuala said
see you Saturday
Brian goes to football then
we can arrange
where to be together

Una nodded and said ok
and Nuala left her there
looking sad

now as she walks
into the lounge

she sits down
and stares at her hands

Una's landlady has got
all heavy with her
bringing me there
and I can't go
to her place anymore

as she sits there
the front door
opens and closes
and her husband Brian
comes in

been out then?
he says

she looks at her hands
yes just got in
she says
standing up
as he hugs her
and kisses her cheek

where you been then?
he says

seen a friend
and forgot the time
she says
taking off her coat
and walking past Brian
and into the hall
to hang up her coat

so who's the friend
that's kept my wife
from getting dinner?
he says

just an old friend

so what do you want
for dinner?
she says

thinking what if I'd
brought Una here
and Brian came in
and found us
in the bed
having it away
what then?

let's go out
he says
we've not been out
in ages besides
you look knackered
he smiles

she nods
imaging Brian's face
if he came in the bedroom
while Una was kissing
between her thighs

well you get yourself beautiful
and I'll get a beer
he says
and goes back
into the lounge

she watches him go
and walks to the bathroom
and undresses and showers
imaging Una behind her
arms around her body
kissing her neck

downstairs the TV's blaring
Brian's drinking
sitting there
not caring.

Terry Collett

Not Close

Where's the kid? Kirkehuse
asks. She's in bed, she's sleeping,
Mother says. About time; never
knew a kid to yak so much. She's just

a child. She's a yakker and she talks
too much. Mother cuddles up close
to Kirkehuse on the sofa as he sips
his booze. You're too soft with her;

she gets away with things. When I
was a kid I kept quiet and did as I
was told and if I didn't my old man'd
make sure I knew what'd happen if

I didn't, Kirkehuse says. Mother kisses
his stubbly cheek. I try, she mutters.
Well, you don't try hard enough.
The kid just yaks and thinks she knows

things she doesn't. Kirkehuse looks at
Mother's head of hair. He kisses her.
And what was that about the history
lesson, eh? She thinks we don't know

about the Kennedys? Mother pulls at
the hem of her dress; he sips his booze.
She's just trying to show she's good at school,
Mother says. Kirkehuse pulls a face.
If she were my kid she'd know her place.

Terry Collett

Not For Me

Not for me she said
I don't want to end up
like my mother
I want to reach out

and touch real life
and not end up
some man's wife
and be endlessly

at his beck and call
and she sat
by the pond
looking over

to the other side
where the woods were dense
and reached out
and touched your hand

and you wondered
if there were still fish
in the pond
and if when

you brought your rod
the following day
you'd catch any
and you liked the way

the sunlight caught
the pond's skin
and she said
I want to feel

being alive
feel the electric of life
run through my veins
and she leaned over

and kissed you
and placed her hand
between your thighs
and touched the hardness

of your crotch
and you said
do you know how big
the fish was

that got away
when I fished here last?

And she said
no but I know how big
the one I've caught is
and laughed

and released her hand
and gave you one
of her stares with her
large passionate eyes

and you noticed
a lone big bird in black
moving across
the bright blue skies.

Terry Collett

Not Forever

Not forever, Amelia said,
Just as long as I can find a way
Through this circus of life.
She knew her husband wasn't listening,
He never did, he just sat in front
Of the TV sipping his beer
And smoking his cigar, laughing
Now and then at some joke
On the programme, and she'd repeat,
I won't be here forever, you know,
Just so long as I think it's worth
The ride through this two-bit existence.
You see that, her husband said,
You see the way that guy did that trick?
Huh? He sipped more beer. Amelia stood
Over him as he sat and she watched
The TV screen, tried to fathom what
Made him laugh so, what it was that
Made him laugh so loudly. Hey, look
At that guy's face, Honey, look at that
Darn face. And he'd laugh aloud again
And she watched as his head rose and fell
As he laughed, and she wondered how long
Forever was, and how long the circus
Was in town, and how long she'd get for
Bringing the cold iron down hard upon
His head, but she just tapped his shoulder
Gently with her soft cold hand instead.

Terry Collett

Not Forget George.

I'll not get over George,
Alice said, not manage
to get him out of my skin
or memory. Her psychiatrist

said she might. Twat. Her
word. Heard it someplace.
Not sure where. No, George
she misses. Known him for

years, ever since the work
house closed and they were
dumped in some home for
homeless. He was partially

blind, saw badly, spoke in
a jumble of words. But she
was drawn to him; first out
of pity, then deeper out of

love. Possible, her psychiatrist
said, love may help whatever
it is. Arse. Her word. Heard
it somewhere, not sure where.

She kissed George first; then
he kissed her. Each carried the
work house haunting with them.
Young staff at the home for the

homeless, smirked, spoke behind
their hands. George seeing her
poorly imagined her better maybe,
she didn't care, at least he was

kissing her and he was right there.
Once they almost did it, but
George fumbled and they lost
concentration. And they gave

that up as a bad job. Best not to,
her psychiatrist said. Knob. Her word.
Heard it someplace, not sure where.
Then George died; stiff in bed, his not

hers, heart gave out, the doctor said,
poor Alice, loved mostly, cared much,
all gone, not wed, she alone, missing
George, in her single noisy spring bed.

Terry Collett

Not Having Any 1962

Yiska comes down
for breakfast
after dressing
for school.

Her mother stands
by the kitchen sink
arms folded.

Yiska sits at the table
eyes her mother
then stirs the cup
of tea her mother
had poured for her.

Well can I?
Yiska says.

Can you what?
Mother says.

Bring Benny home
lunchtime?

That boy?
The one
I met before?
Mother says.

Yes that one,
Yiska says
being as patient
as she can.

Why did you
sneak him home
the other day
while I wasn't here
and Mrs Moore

saw you?
Mother asks
unfolding her arms
and fiddling
with her apron pocket.

I didn't know
you wasn't going
to be home,
Yiska says
wondering how long
the interrogation
was going to
go on for.

What will people think
if you bring boys
home here
and I'm not here?
Mother says
watching her
daughter's expression
seeing if she is lying.

Nosey parkers
see only what
they want to see,
Yiska says.

Mother sits at the table
next to Yiska.

What did you do
with that boy?
Mother says.

Nothing
just got lunch
and talked,
Yiska says
wishing she and Benny
had done something

after all.

It looks suspicious
to those outside,
Mother says
wondering what happened
to her little girl.

Nothing happened,
Yiska says
then sips her tea.

Your brother
is a good boy
and brings me no worry,
Mother says.

Yiska sighs
and says:
Rick can do no wrong
of course he
maybe my twin
but he's
Mr Goody-Two Shoes.

That's enough of that,
Mother says angrily
wanting to slap her daughter
but not wanting to.

Yiska looks at her mother
and says:
can I bring him
home lunchtime?

Mother sighs and says:
just this once
and I expect
good behaviour
and not to bring
him home
while I am not here.

Yiska smiles
and kisses her
mother's cheek.

A peck.

Lips on
skin stuff.

Mother senses
the dampness
on her cheek
and smiles weakly.

Best behaviour,
she says.

Of course,
Yiska says
wondering if
a moment might come
when her mother's
back is turned
for a quick kiss
with Benny
better once
than not having any.

Terry Collett

Not Hurtful And Mean

And that was it
not a thing to be done
or said Ingrid thought

walking home from school
her satchel over
her shoulder

the battered satchel
her father picked up
from some shop

but if that wasn't
bad enough
the pink wire

framed spectacles
which made her eyes
large as saucers

were a target
for the boys at school
who called her four eyes

but it wasn't her fault
she needed glasses
and her parents

couldn't afford others
then there was
the dresses she wore

and the holey socks
and jumpers
and her hair was lank

and kept in place
with metal slides
even the other girls

in class avoided
sitting next to her
she crossed over

the road looking
both ways
as her mother told her

she hated school
disliked the lessons
she didn't understand

and only the boy Benedict
was friendly to her
only he talked

in the playground
and didn't
call her four eyes

and that time
he walked home
with her and said

she was pretty
no one had ever
called her pretty before

but he seemed
to mean it
and he showed her

his favourite bomb site
and shared
his bag of toffees

and bought her
a penny drink
from the shop

in Harper Road

and it was such
a hot day

and she was so thirsty
and she said
I haven't any money

not even a penny
and he said
it's on me

and that other time
they sat on the grass
by Banks House

and he told her
about Ivanhoe
and the metal sword

his father made him
and the cloak he wore
like Ivanhoe

which was really
one of his mother's scarves
she wished he was there

beside her now
but he was away
in some convalescent home

by the seaside
after an operation
she stood on the kerb

waiting for the lights
to change from red to green
if only other boys

were like him
kind and friendly
not hurtful and mean.

Terry Collett

Not Like The Birds.

</>Mother said
there would be men

like that
and that they'd say

and do
those kinds of things

and looking back
over the months

he has behaved
as Mother predicted

right down
to the cheap flowers

and false promises
and the always

wanting sex
and to be alone

and that constant groan of
come on Honey

one more time
and yet

as you reflect on him
and his ways

and that look he has
when feeling put out

and the what maybe
the real him

when he doesn't know
you're studying

his features
and gestures

and listening to his words
you know

you shouldn't be with him
but fly off

like the birds
but you're not

like the birds at all
you're just

a woman in love
and unsure

of the reasons why
so you'll not be

like the birds
and make off to the sky.

Terry Collett

Not Seeing.

That sudden realisation
that he doesn't

love you any more;
the words he had said

that evening,
the look he gave;

and it is as much
as you can do

to take it in.
The days and nights

when you thought
he was the best thing

for you;
now it is as if

he had emptied you
of all being,

left you
in the dark

like one not seeing.

Terry Collett

Not Sin On Sin 1961

Jane met me
by our back gate

I had just finished
helping my dad
cutting logs for the burner
and he had gone in
for a cup of tea

she stood there
leaning on the gate
dressed in a green skirt
and white blouse

you've been busy
she said

yes cutting logs
I said

nice day
are you allowed out?
She said

sure
I said
where are we going?

Shall we walk up
the Downs
and maybe look
for flowers and bits
of sheep-wool
on the fence up there?

That'd be good
(just being with her
was good)
I said

so I told my mother
where we were going
and we set off
along the lane
it was a sunny day
and warm and birds
were singing
and some flew
above our heads

we walked up
the long drive
in between trees
to the Downs

what did you think
of the Downs when
you first moved here?
She asked me

out of this world
I said
I think we walked up here
the third day of arriving
and we found that
hollow tree
and went inside
I said

o yes that one
we went in the other month
she said

yes that's the one
I said
(I didn't tell her
I went in there
with Lizbeth)

I smelt apples
and hay about her

and a small dose
of her mother's perfume

she talked of her father
and him writing sermons
and how he gets his idea
from life about him
and of course the Bible

as she spoke
I studied her hair
dark and long
and her eyes
so brown and shining
and the nearness
of her hand
which I wanted to hold
but didn't want
to presume to hold
and maybe just a kiss
(we had kissed in the past)

she talked about her mother
and how her mother
likes things to be so so
and the baby they lost
years before

I let my hand brush
close to hers
skin near skin
being human
not sin on sin.

Terry Collett

Not So Fast 1962.

Yochana
runs her slim
pale fingers
over keys
of the old
black piano,

the Mozart
sonata
coming to
life again,

but she sits
on the stool
a very
reluctant
pianist,

thinking of
Benedict
who had left
10 minutes
before hand
to go home.

Her mother
sits watching
her daughter,

how she sits,

the fingers
moving fast,

her body
moving slow
side to side.

Yochana

remembers
Benedict
hugging her
in his bed
(the guest bed) ,

kissing her,

their bodies
moving slow
close entwined,

listening
out in case
her parents' heard
any sounds.

Not so fast,

her mother
interrupts,

this part is
much slower.

Yochana
slows the pace
of fingers,

but the touch
of fingers,

Benedict's,

over her
still lingers.

Terry Collett

Not The Best 1997

Brian having done
rolls over to his side
of the bed
and breathes out

as if he had
little breath left
to survive on
Nuala lies there

feeling violated
undone
hot sweat
between her thighs

and damp and sticky
and breathing deeply
wonders if Una
heard the noise

of him and the bed
against the wall
and what she thought
if she heard

and wishes it
had been Una
and not him
not him but her Una

them making love
Una's hands
on her
holding and bringing

her to a new height
and fresher love
and kind of heaven
how was it for you?

Brian says
exhaling breath
gazing sideways at her
in the semi-dark

she looks towards him
and smiles a false smile
a mask of gratitude
best ever

she lies
making it sound
as genuine as she can
he kisses her lips

she feels his lips
shuts her eyes
wanting it to be
Una's lips

not his
her soft thin lips
not his thick lips
he turns back

and lies on his back
and gazes at the ceiling
where light
from the street

plays there
Nuala sees
behind her eyes
Una there

her body so close
the vibration of her body
oozing heat towards her
and pretends it is Una

is her so near

but knows it isn't
it's Brian breathing deep
taking an

after pleasure rest
not good at all
she muses
not the best.

Terry Collett

Not This Time.

He was all over me
like one of those
childhood diseases,
and I said:
look I came
for a good night out
not this wrestle,
I have a reputation to keep
and not be seen
kissing and fondling
a guy like you,
I mean you're all right
for the odd date
and such, but come
on now this isn't
my scene,
this handling me
like so much baggage,
and kissing me
like you've seen
in the movies,
I won't have you
you understand
I won't?

He stood there
open mouthed saying:
O but I thought
we understood each other
and you knew the rules
of the game.

This isn't no game Mister,
I said,
you want that
kind of thing
you go find yourself
that kind of girl,
because you're not

getting me
into your darn bed
and having me
like that, O no not
me buddy,
you go elsewhere.

But look Honey,
he said,
this is what happens
on a date,
I've been on dates before
and this happens.

Not with me you don't,
I don't want none
of your octopus kind
of handling,
you go fish elsewhere.

He looked at me
and cursed
and walked off
into street,
leaving me
on my lonesome
gazing at
my new shoes
on my tired feet.

Terry Collett

Not To Flirt 1961

Yehudit
looking shy
red blushing

lit up eyes
blue as blue
says to me

what you think
to joining
the choir?

what choir?
I asked her
church choir

where I go
Friday nights
and Sundays

I'm tired
after school
brainwashing

is it far?
Mr S comes
in his car

she replies
and who's he?
the vicar

of the church
Father S
Yehudit says

I guess so
(if only
to be near

where she is)
so what time?
half seven

will he know?
I'll tell him
she tells me

I can tell
how she looks
that she wants

to kiss me
but we don't
she walks on

and I watch
her swaying
hips and ass

the green skirt
being good
not to flirt.

Terry Collett

Not To Push Your Luck.1958

You walk around the small cot bed
pulling the blanket and sheet tidy.
It's too small for you, but your big
sister and her Spiv boyfriend occupy

the double bed she once shared
with you. You look at them there:
him facing the wall, one hand over
hers, and she lying there facing you,

her mouth open as if catching flies,
her eyes shut. The bedroom door
opens and your mother stands there,
a cigarette between her lips, smoke

rising. Lydia, I've been calling you,
that boy Benny's at the door, wants
to talk to you, she says moodily.
You leave the bedroom, closing the

door behind you, and walk past
the kitchen where your mother is,
and walk to the front door which
is ajar. Benny is standing on the

red tiled doorstep. Hi Lydia, are
you allowed out? I'm going to
the flicks and wondered if you
were allowed, he says, looking at

you with his hazel eyes, the
quiff of brown hair. You smile
and say: I'll ask Mum, she what
she says, you leave him on the

doorstep, and walk back to the
kitchen, where your mother is
sorting the washing. Can I go
out with Benny to the cinema?

You ask, putting on your little
girl lost expression. Your mother
looks at you through a cloud
of cigarette smoke. Again?

you only went last Saturday,
she says, waving away smoke
from her face. That was a week
ago, you say. She sighs and stares

at you. How much is that going
to cost me? She says. 6 pence is all,
you say, not mentioning 6 pence
for an ice cream or ice lolly. All?

What do you mean, all? 6 pence
is 6 pence, your mother says,
eyeing you. I'll do some chores
afterwards, you say. She muses

on the word chores. She closes
her eyes a moment as if this
might be a gesture of endurance.
All right, just this once, don't

make a habit of it, just because
he goes every week doesn't mean
you can too, she says, searching
through her brown purse. She

takes out a 6 pence coin and
hands it to you. I expect a few
jobs done for that, she says.
You grasp the coin in your hand

and say: thanks Mum. She puts
her purse away and carries on
sorting the washing, cigarette
smoke rising again about her head.

You walk to the door and say:

Yes, I've got my money. You
show Benny the 6 pence piece.
Good, he says, didn't she give

you any money for an ice cream?
You shake your head, no didn't
want to push my luck, you say.
He nods and smiles. You go

out the step, pull the door shut
behind you. Benny waits for you.
The morning sky is moving and
a washed out kind of colour blue.

Terry Collett

Not To Show It 1956

After going to Janice's doll's
tea party in her gran's flat
I thought I'd best ask her to
a cowboy's tea party as a sort

of pay back thing so she came
to my parent's flat and I said
hi glad you could make it she
came in along the passageway

past the kitchen where my
mother was arranging a few
items for the tea and then
turned left into what I termed

the toy room where I'd arranged
a small table(tea-chest upside-down)
and cloth of bright colours
(tea towel) and two small chairs

(large seaside buckets turned
upside down) with cushions
on the sideboard I had arranged
my toy soldiers and guns a rifle

a sword and bow and arrows
and a number of Dinky cars
she said I guess you don't have
any dolls? no no dolls I said

I can borrow one of my sister's
if you want a doll present
I said no it's all right she said
gazing at me smiling weakly

while we were waiting for my
mother to bring in the food
items I showed her my guns
and holsters and she picked up

a silver looking gun and held it
in her hands it's quite heavy she
said is it real? no it's an old one
my old man got me some place

looks real though don't it I said
it's one of my favourites she
lifted it and pointed it at the
wall and pulled the trigger

and the gun went BANG and
she dropped it and put her hands
over her mouth and said was
it loaded? she looked scared yes

it was loaded with a roll of caps
I said sorry I should have warned
you I picked up the gun and put
it back on the sideboard and handed

her my rifle which she held gingerly
is it loaded? she said no it's ok no
caps there I said she put it against
her shoulder and looked along the

barrel and aimed at the light bulb
and pulled the trigger and it went
click and she smiled and said I blew
out the light she gave me back the

rifle and my mother brought in
some items and put them on the
table and said what would you like
to drink Janice? may I have orange

juice please? my mother nodded and
said you Benny? Tizer please with
a shot of red-eye I said my mother
nodded bemused and went off to

the kitchen Janice looked at the items

nice cakes and sandwiches she said
and chocolate biscuits too yes I said
Mum knows you are special to me

so she pulled out all the stoppers
and here we are and we sat and ate
and Mum brought in the drinks
and left us alone to eat and drink

and talk and I told her about the
gunfight in Dodge City and how
I had shot the Billy the Kid Gang
and she sat impressed and told me

about the coming trip to the seaside
with the gospel church and that her
gran had bought tickets and was I
going? and I said yes I was pleased
she was going but tried not to show it.

Terry Collett

Not Wanting To Forget

The Modigliani print was on the wall
By the front door. Who's she? Bridshaw's
Dame asked, pointing at the print.
It's a painting by Modigliani, Bridshaw said.
Is he a friend of yours? The dame asked.
Bridshaw pulled a face and said, No, he's
Dead now. Shame, she replied, stroking
The print, her finger tracing the woman's
Outline, her tongue hanging out of the side
Of her mouth in concentration. She's a bit
On the thin side, the dame said, and I don't
Like the black coat she's wearing, like some
Darn widow. Bridshaw wanted to get the dame
In bed for sex; the Modigliani print was no
Big deal, he'd bought it in some art shop on
The high street from the guy with the Boston
Tones. Shame he's dead, the dame said, he
Could have painted me; I would have made
A good model, more meat on me than that
Woman in black, thin as a pole. Bridshaw
Nodded his head, Sure, sure, but you're too
Late, the guy's dead, now can we move on,
Get a drink, hit the bed, have sex, and then
A cigarette. Sure, the dame said, moving away
From the Modigliani print, taking the image
Of the woman with her, not wanting to forget.

Terry Collett

Nothing At Your Feet 1967

Can't go
to my aunt's place
again, Benny,
Nima said to me
as we sat out
on the grass
in the hospital grounds.

Why is that?
I said.

My mother's found out
we go there
and she will be
watching the place now,
and it will be too risky,
Nima said.

How'd she find out
we were going there?
I asked.

She managed
to get me to say,
but I think
she knew anyway,
Nima said,
looking over
towards the trees.

Does she know
about me?

Not who you are,
but she knows
I'm seeing someone,
and having sex
with them,
Nima said.

So what now?
I said.

Have to book
a cheap hotel
for the weekend again,
she said.

Whereabouts? I said.

She looked at me seriously,
I don't know,
not too far way
or we will waste time
traveling as I only
have a weekend pass.

I'll find us
some place near,
I said.

We lit up cigarettes,
and sat smoking.

She was in
a green top and jeans,
and her hair was neat,
but she had nothing
on her small feet.

Terry Collett

Nothing Else Could Matter

Benedict sat in a pew
of the old church
while Jane arranged flowers
up at the altar end
with an older woman.

The church smelt of flowers
and damp and age.
Sunlight poured through
the coloured glass windows.

He sat and watched Jane
sort the vase, her fingers nimble,
her body slim, reaching up
to the take down vases,
the sunlight catching
her movements.

Jane's mother had told him
she was in the church
when he called
at the vicarage.
She won't be long,
her mother had said.

He sniffed the air.
It had a churchy smell.
She arranged flowers with care,
her fingers patting into place,
her arms in constant motion.

The other woman
having completed her tasks
left the church.
Jane came and sat beside him.
Looks good doesn't it, she said.
Yes it does, he said.

She smelt of fresh apples,

he thought of orchards,
sunlight, warm days.
She leaned in and kissed his cheek,
her lips moist, warm.
He put his hand on her thigh,
sensed the pulse of her.

Let's go out in the daylight, she said.
They walked out of the church
and along the path to the lane
hand in hand.
I've just go to go home
for a minute for something,
she said and he followed her
to the vicarage
and waited outside.

After a few minutes she was out
and they walked along the lane.
The hedgerows were brimming with birds,
their songs and chatter filled the air.

It was never like this in London,
he said. Never this freshness,
never nature so near and alive.
I've only known this, she said,
this countryside, the small local town,
the cows and fields, the open sky.

Must seem odd to you the contrast.
He looked at her; her hair dark
and free from constraints,
her eyes dark, catching sunlight.

Yes, it is, he said, like escaping Hell
and finding paradise. She smiled.
With or without me? she said.
You're the icing on the cake,
the angel that makes
it all seem worthwhile. She laughed.
You have such a way with words.

They passed the water tower;
cows mooed in a nearby field.
She put her arm around his waist
and kissed his neck. They stopped
in the lane. Momentarily it seemed
as if the birds had ceased to sing
or chatter; as if the sky had exploded
with colour. He kissed her and held her.

Their 13 year old lips met.
This was paradise, he thought,
nothing else could matter.

Terry Collett

Nothing Left

There is always
the aftermath,
the after kissing
time. Time to sit

and remember
the lips touching.
She recalls that well.
His lips on hers.

Skin on skin. Time
to reflect on actions
made. Things done
and not done. Or

done at the wrong
time for the wrong
reasons. She knows
she will go to him

and do similar things
again. The love making
holds no surprises.
The holds, the way

his fingers move over
her, the positions she
engages in, those cigarettes
after, those French ones

he insists on smoking.
The after feel, the stale
breath, the feeling
there is nothing left.

Terry Collett

Nothing To Say.

Auntie took you to the hut
where the wives of the soldiers

met up to chat and drink tea
and eat cakes and you sat in

the chair looking at each of
them in turn wishing time

would go and you could go
back home to your few toys

and play but no Auntie carried
on the talking and the long

conversations were way over
your head and now and then

they'd break into laughter and
some woman's kid would cry

and she'd say I think she needs
changing and off she'd go wheeling

the pram to another room and
Auntie'd talk to another woman

and you'd lift your eyes ceiling
wards and wonder where Uncle

was fighting and how he would
cope stuck in the hut with women

yakking all the time and one woman
smiled a big goofy smile at you and

offered you a cake and orange juice
but you shook your head and looked

away in silence sulking with no good
thoughts in your mind and nothing to say.

Terry Collett

Now And Rare

It didn't seem
the case, at least
with him and her,

and that darn way
he had of making out
it did, and she

knew it wasn't
going to work,
he was just having

her along on his pretence,
and why should she
pretend any longer?

She brushes her hair,
sod him, she muses,
and drags the brush

through her long hair,
just like mother
used to do when

she was a young girl,
and her mother was in
a temper about something,

and it would be
her hair and she
who had to suffer for it,

and why should she?
She sighs,
the face she looks at

is hers, but she looks
like her mother used to look
when younger, that look,

that unsmiling face,
those eyes,
my gosh

they're hers,
but now mine,
and sod Jack,

he can go suck eggs
or something,
probably that fat

bitch he's seeing,
and I know, by God,
I know that look

he has, that guilty look,
in his eyes,
blue eyes,

big blue eyes,
greedy eyes
that could suck lemons,

or tits or me,
and she brushes
her hair to a shine,

and eyes sparkle
like stars,
like Mother's did

when she was happy,
which was rare,
and she's see it now

and then
there far way
somehow.

Now Wanting It More.

Fay sat opposite Naaman on the bus
from outside the cinema
to London Bridge
her fair hair tied

in a ponytail at the back
wearing the lime coloured dress
that Naaman liked
the white open sandals

touching at the toes
she was quiet
and looked out
the window

as the bus moved off
Naaman studied her profile
the way her hair
was drawn back

and tied with a black ribbon
her ear
with the small ear ring
her pale cheek

the eye blue
and gazing out
one hand over
the other on her lap

the nails clean
and neatly clipped
the bus stopped
and started

and people got off
and on
talking
staring

some standing
most sitting
when the bus
came to London Bridge

they got off
and crossed the road
and down by the Thames
where they stood

looking at the passing water
you're quiet today
Naaman said
looking at her

beside him
her elbows resting
on the low stone wall
I was almost

not allowed to come
she said
why?
he said

because the nuns said
I hadn't performed as well
as they had expected
in my tests at school

she said
and so what happened?
he asked
my father was adamant

I was to stay home
and work at my school work
she said
but my mother said

I could do that

when I came back
and that it was only fair
that I have some time

of relaxation
and that caused a row
and then after fuming
and slamming around

the house he relented
and said I could go out
providing the visit
to London Bridge

had some historical merit
and I said it had
and that I was going
with you

she paused
and looked away
at a sailing boat
going by

and then what?
Naaman asked
he wasn't happy about that
she replied

but I said you knew history
of the Bridge
and were going
to show me things

and he said do you
have to go
with the Jew boy?
I said I liked you

and he said
but his lot killed Jesus
and so on

Naaman gazed

at her lips as she spoke
he liked the way
her lips moved
as she talked

her eyes were bright
with an inner anger
then what did he do or say?
Naaman asked

he said I could go
but if he heard
any bad reports
there'd be trouble

and to know
what to expect
she sighed
he knew what was meant

but said nothing
how about something
to eat and drink?
he asked

I've only got 1/-6d
she said
which my mother gave me
on the quiet

I've got money
he said
my mum gave me
for chores I did

so they walked along
the embankment
to a cafe
and ordered two cokes

and shared sandwiches
and sat and talked
and watched boats
and ships pass by

on the river
she dreading going home
to her father's possible
chastisement

but not saying
he thinking
of the Roman fort
across the water

centuries before
she looking at Naaman
thinking of the kiss last time
now wanting it more.

Terry Collett

O So Much 1962

Elaine sits
on the loo
before school

she takes down
a small book
butterflies

(her father's)
opens it
in her palm

scans pages
with fingers
and her eyes

just in case
John says
have you seen

suchandsuch
butterfly?
she picks one

at random
from the book
Adonis

Blue she sees
captures it
with her eyes

and holds it
the image there
to tell him

the real one
she had seen
on the grass

at their school
one lunchtime
as they sat

on the field
he talking
(as he does)

her small hand
near to his
she feeling

odd feelings
inside her
about him

his closeness
then she saw
that soft blue

butterfly
on the grass
look at that

she had said
John had looked
Adonis

Blue he said
but his hand
touched her hand

she sits there
on the loo
closes up

the small book
puts it back
on the shelf

thinks of him

and his touch
wanting him

and his hands
and his lips
o so much.

Terry Collett

O Too Much 1963

Magdalene
doesn't want
any boy

to touch her
or kiss her.
She wants to

kiss Mary,
hold her hand,
lie with her

on the bed,
feel along
her soft thigh.

She dreams this
as she sits
at the desk

during maths,
Sister Ruth,
the young nun,

talks about
algebra.
Mary sits

beside her
at the desk;
smells her scent

(borrowed ma's) ,
feels her near,
elbows touch.

Magdalene
slowly sighs
deep within

o too much.

Terry Collett

Observation De Nuit 1973

Miss Pinkie stood
at the open window
of her apartment
looking out
at the night sky.

I lay in her bed
watching her
naked form.

We had made love
an hour before.

Can't sleep?
I said.

Too hot to sleep
she said.

I watched her
49 year old body
she was my senior
by 19 years.

Her hair dyed blonde
was over her shoulders.

Mahler's 1st symphony
was playing softly
on her radio.

Does your mother
know you come here?
She asked.

Yes of course
I said
but not what
I do here.

She turned
and looked at me
come see
these stars
she said.

I got out of bed
and walked over
and stood beside her
at the window.

She named
the constellation of stars
pointing them out
with her plump finger.

Pascal said
the eternal silence
of infinite space
filled him with dread
I said.

Who's Pascal?
she said
one of your
intellectual friends?

No he was
a French philosopher
I think
I said.

Beautiful though
she said
I love night watching.

We stood watching
the sky
a while
then returned to bed
and made love again.

The Mahler
symphony ended
then came the rain.

Terry Collett

Odette's Musing.

He'll not come
not after what
he said
you know it
but can't accept it.

That's how it is
no no
a voice says.

You know it
but maybe he'll
take it in his stride
me just me
being me
you muse.

You hold a hand
over your mouth
tears come
why do we do that
when we are
about to cry
hold a hand
over our mouths?

He'll not come
I know he won't
you let the words
talk in your head
just as well
he can't mind read.

He could
have had me
if he'd only asked
and not just
did those things.

Things
become watery
as your eyes
fill with tears
and your throat
becomes sore
with the crying.

Soft crying
Mother used
to say.

Like when
your father
(brute of a man)
would belt you one
for something
or other
and you'd
cry softly.

He'll not
come now
not after
what was said.

The garden
looks a mess
you see it
as you stand
by the window
of your room.

The apple trees
and filling
with fruit
wasps go
in and out
of the fallen fruit.

He'll not come
not now.

I want him to
but there again
don't somehow.

Terry Collett

Odette's Still Born 1996

The baby
still born
just the brief time
to hold

before they
took her away.
You didn't
want her

to be taken
wanted
to hold her close
to stare

at the sleeping
features
unbreathing.
No farewell wave

or look making.
You wanted
to breath life
into her

small nostrils
kiss her into life
pray her eyes
would open

at the last moment
but the eyes
stayed closed.
Unmoving tiny

pink fingers
sculptured neat.
You wanted her
to suck

your milky dugs
but the lips
remained shut
pinky white

tingeing blue.
Just the still
born baby
and you.

Terry Collett

Of Seeing You.

I guess I thought
that the pain of grief
would somehow
ease away,

like some small ship
eases from the shore or port,
into the mist
of an unknown

destination far away,
but it is there still,
just beneath the skin,
waiting for just a word,

or image, or memory,
or melody, to bring it out
in a rush, in an emotional wave,
bringing, like tigers

from jungles of childhood,
tears, fierce and hot,
and angry and sad,
and mixed together

like some heaving stew,
wanting you, my son,
wanting you.
I suppose I thought

that this pain of grief
would become less
with the tick tock of time
with the movement

of the hands
of the daily clock,
having got over
the initial shock

of your sudden afternoon death,
having read the cards
of condolences, having seen
the many flowers and seen

them fade and go,
having heard the words
of sorrow said and expressed,
that this pain would go

or ease like that,
like the rest,
but no, it is still there,
my son, still pains,

bubbling beneath the skin,
waiting for just that memory
of final hours, or words
or things I ought

to have said, but didn't
or words said but faded
by the passing hands
of time's erasure,

words I wanted to say,
or said but unsure if you
in your coma heard
or knew or whether

they came and went
into the blue, and haunting
images of that last time,
last time, my son,

of seeing you.

Terry Collett

Off To Camberwell 1955

Can Helen
come out to play?
Benny asked her mother

I expect so Benny
she's just getting her breakfast
want to come in
and wait for her?

Ok
he said
so they walked along
the dark passage
and into the sitting room
where Helen was sitting
at a large table
with her siblings
and baby in a high-chair

I got up late
Helen said

Benny sat in
an armchair
by the fireplace

no rush
got all day
he said
want to go
to Camberwell Green?
He added

Camberwell Green?
Her mother said
that's a bit of a way Benny
she said

not too far

he said
only a short bus ride
I go a lot
to the cinema

what are you going
to do there?
Her mother asked

look at some shops
and I can show Helen
the hospital
I was born in
he said

Helen looked
at her mother hesitantly
can I go?
She asked

well as it's Benny
and I think he's ok
but be careful
of the roads
and strange men
her mother said

she went out
to the kitchen

Helen looked at Benny
is it far?

No not far
short bus ride
he said
he watched Helen
and her siblings eat
and looked around the room

there was a homely feel
about the room

and a smell of cooking
and past dinners
and washing hanging
by the fire
on a clotheshorse

a radio was playing music
the baby was playing
with its food
in a bowl

Helen looked over at him
can we get an ice-cream
while we're out?

I expect we can
he said smiling

Helen finished her breakfast
and went to
the kitchen/ bathroom
to wash and change

Benny watched
the other kids
and listened to the radio
and the fishing forecasts
about Dogger Bank
and other places
gazing at the other kids'
jammy faces.

Terry Collett

Office Limbo.

I wasn't able
to compete
in the office limbo
competition today,

maybe next time.
There were a few
of us around,
Friday afternoon,

unsupervised
we thought
we'd make
the most of it

before we're
relocated
to the dark side
& have to behave

like real
office employees.
Ivan brought
a couple of limbo sets,

with two vertical poles
on stands
that have
little markers

for when you lower
the horizontal pole.
At first it was just Ivan,
Harry & George,

who were surprisingly
limber & then
young Lenny
(more flexible

than a slinky)
came in
& blew
the competition away.

Written by my late son Oliver Collett.(1984-2014)

Terry Collett

Office Move

I have spent
the afternoon

clearing my desk
in preparation

for the office move.
Ideally

my new desk
will be located

in an
'authority figure'

black spot,
whilst also

being in
an acoustic

sweet spot
(no one

can see me
but I can still

hear them) ,
but apparently

I don't get
a choice.

Written by my late son Oliver Collett(1984-2014)

Terry Collett

Often When Laughing

Often when I laugh
at something funny
either on TV
or book

or conversation,
I pause and feel
guilty that
after your death,

my dear one,
my son,
that humour
could still rear

its head
and cause
my laughter,
as if my laughing

was a kind
of betrayal
of my grief
or a hint

of forgetting you
or a watering down
of the pain I feel.
But it is not,

no less pain is there,
the grief still bites
as strong,
its teeth still sharp

as shark's jaws,
and as for
forgetting you,
my son,

more chance
of forgetting
self or my
own image wiped

from memory's hold.
Laughter's medicine
cannot dull
grief's ache or pain

or bring you
back again,
but it permits
a moment or

two or so
for me to close
my eyes or mind
and let it flow

in a calmer sea,
when there was you
alive and well
and happier me.

Terry Collett

Old Bob.

Old Bob lived
in a cardboard box

under the stairs.
Don't feed the mutt,

Granny said.
But you did, often,

with scraps from the table
or broken biscuits

from the battered tin
that Gran kept

on the lower shelf.
Bob was a short haired

fawn dog with eyes
like dark plump plums.

He'd snarl or growl
if anyone got too near

or touched his bowl,
except you; you he'd let

into his box and lick
your five year old face

and allow you to stroke
or hug or touch his tail.

He'd bark, snarl and growl
his dislike of humanity;

you, however, he seemed
to love, somehow.

Old Mrs Truber

Always be yourself, Mrs Truber said,
Don't be what you're not. You sat
And studied her as she sat opposite
Stirring her cup of tea, took in her
Greying hair, her lined features, the
Way her bony fingers held the spoon
That stirred. People try to be like others
And find themselves out of their depth
And drown in the waters of lies and deceit,
She added, bringing her light blue eyes
On you. You began to speak, but the words
Were stuck in your throat. She smiled and
Tapped your hand. We are what we are,
She said, but often we are tempted to become
Actors wearing a different mask, trying to
Be a different person. You nodded slowly
And thought how beautiful she must have
Been once. Her eyes sparkled as she spoke,
And as she brushed her hand through her grey
Hair, you thought you caught a glimpse of her
Youthful self peering out of eyes like a child
Staring from windows in a locked up room.
You sipped your tea and watched as she brought
Her hands together as if in prayer. You closed
Your eyes, but when you opened them again,
The room was empty and she wasn't there.

Terry Collett

Olive Eater.

And oh
she said

she was always
saying that

he thought
watching her place

an olive in her mouth
and oh

she repeated
this is not

what I expected it
to taste like at all

and she licked
two of her fingers

one after the other
and quite sexually

he mused
sitting opposite her

in the French cafe
taking in

her bright eyes
and the openness

of her mouth
and the tongue licking

and she said
I thought it'd have been sharper

more exciting
more out of this world

and he thought
how simple she is

how childlike
in her expression

and in the way she utters
her words

and she looked at him
and said

what are you thinking?
What's going on

in that bright brain of yours?
And he said

oh that would be telling
wouldn't it

that would be
allowing you

into my head
and she laughed

and sat there
with her wet fingers

just before him
as she waited

to pluck another
olive off the plate

and he allowed his eyes
to settle like butterflies

on her breasts
just momentarily

just sufficiently
to drink in

the beauty there
and she said

do you want one?
Do you want an olive

to eat or suck?
No no

he said
and thought

I'd like another
fresh fruit

to touch
and pluck.

Terry Collett

On A Lonely Shore 1962

I am the feeler of feelings,
said Yiska, my heart pounds
like a huge tongue within
a bell vibrating my being,

my eyes see him and want
him, wish to devour him whole
swallow him up between my
thighs; I am the dreamer of

dreams, I see him in school
and stand open mouthed like a
fool, drool over him as he passes
by, lick my lips like lioness

at passing prey; he is my lover,
the center of my being, my sun
who draws me in, my needle
of my compass whose point

leads me back to joy and sadness
and joy once more; I am the
sensor of wild things, of deep
things within me, passions set

fire, burning desire; I see him
and my mind is in a mess, my
whole life hangs on a thread
and swings like a pendulum

over the yawning gap between
wanting and obtaining, between
having him and losing him,
kissing him in school and not

as we depart at end of day; in
my dreams at night in my hot
snug bed my arms about my
pillow it is he whom I kiss and

hug and hold so close, he my
lover, my school boy want of
kissing and more, here in my bed
alone like a ship stuck on wet
sands all a lonely sticky shore.

Terry Collett

On A Park Bench.

People build their own prisons,
she said, build up their own walls.
He said nothing, knowing not
what to say. He liked just that

she spoke, her voice, the tone
and timbre of it. As she spoke he
watched her lips move, the way
her tongue danced inside her mouth,

upon teeth. Mental wards are full
of people who have totally entombed
themselves, she added, placing one
of the sandwiches she'd bought

inside her mouth, while she spoke.
The park bench was hard, there
was a smell of spring in the air,
he watched her chew, now silent,

her mouth closed, masticating.
Her silence drew his attention to
the way she sat, one leg crossed over
the other, the black shoe and foot

dangling. The lower length of stockinged
leg, showing, the dark skirt just over
the knee, nothing else to see. He lifted
his gaze to her cloth hidden thighs,

the way they disappeared into her
waist, slim, drawn in. Ones I used to
see on my tour of the wards had drooling
mouths and cross eyes, she said,

swallowing the small sandwich bits.
He moved his eyes from her waist to
her impressive tits, let his eyes settle,
rested them there, as if they were weary

travellers after a long journey. And the
smell, she added, reeked of urine; everywhere
one put one's nose. He wanted to lay his
head between or upon or even beneath

those beautiful breasts. She jawed on, he
wasn't listening anymore, he was engrossed
in a different story, an actor in a different play.
She took another sandwich and was silent

again, staring at him, taking his measure,
unaware, no doubt, of his silent pleasure.

Terry Collett

On A Sunday 1958

Sunday morning
and I walk down
the concrete stairs
to Lydia's flat
on the ground floor
over by the end.

I knock on the door;
her mother answers
and stands there
a cigarette
in the corner
of her mouth
and her hair
in a turban
hiding curlers.

Yes?
She says,
eyeing me.

Is Lydia in?
I say.

Yes she is why?
Her mother says.

Is she allowed out?
I ask.

She went out
yesterday with you
to the cinema
where now?
She asks.

Just out for a walk
to the park maybe,
I say.

Park?
What park?

Jail Park
just over the way,
I say,
indicating
with my thumb.

She looks at me sternly:
she was out
with you yesterday,
I can't have her
going out every day;
last week it was
the train station
looking at steam trains,
now the park,
she moans.

We like steam trains,
I say.

I don't care,
she says.

Lydia creeps
to the door
and appears
by her mother's side.

Hello Benny,
she says.

Her mother
looks down at her:
thought you
were making the bed?

I was going to
but Gloria's

still asleep snoring,
Lydia says.

Her mother
inhales deeply
on the cigarette
and looks past me
at the milkman
delivering milk:
Hey Milkie
three pints today,
she bellows,
making Lydia jump.

Righto Misses,
he replies
with a nod
of his head.

Can she go
to the park?
I ask
her mother again.

The mother blows
out smoke
like a dragon
without a flame:
I suppose so,
she says,
but not late
dinner's at midday
not later understand.

Yes of course,
I say,
and Lydia confirms.

The mother goes
back indoors.

The milkman

puts the pints of milk
on the doorstep.

Lydia and I
walk across the Square
making our way
to the park
for an hour or two
having nothing
much else
on a Sunday
to do.

Terry Collett

On A Vast Wild Sea

Chanan studied Shlomit
from afar. She sat
with a man and a child,

talking, smiling at least
on the man's part.
The child played games

on her mother's iPod.
Chanan noted unease
in Shlomit's features,

eyes behind spectacles
looked at the man,
more at the child,

whose tiny nimble fingers
played on. The man laughed,
teased the child, Shlomit

eased out uncertain smiles,
hand on her coffee cup,
other hand in her lap.

Chanan took in
her sandaled feet,
the red painted toenails,

the hair pulled
into a bun.
He watched as she

raised the cup
to her lips,
sipped,

gazed at the man,
talked.
The man, legs crossed,

hands holding
a mug of tea,
his head to one side,

seemingly to enquire,
spoke in turn.
Chanan over

his Earl Grey
watched the child
at play,

the fingers intent
on her game,
her mother beside her,

eyed her,
losing interest
in the man's chatter,

touched
her daughter's hand.
Chanan sipped his tea,

looked away,
carried his images
in mind, set

a different scene,
of a different kind.
The man and child

not there,
just Shlomit
and he

setting sail
in a small ship
on a vast wild sea.

On Lips

Elaine folds
and unfolds
a flowered

handkerchief
in her lap
in the bus

(the school bus)
her sister
beside her

talking to
her best friend
Elaine knows

the boy John
sits near by
she can see

him if she
leans over
the seat top

but she sits
where she is
feeling down

and depressed
she'll tell John
when she can

what they say
the others
Old Frumpy

they call her
her hand smooths
the flowered

handkerchief
in her lap
corners neat

edges straight
it is John's
handkerchief

he gave it
when she cried
the last time

it was clean
and unused
when he gave

smelt of soap
and fresh air
it absorbed

her wet tears
when held there
and John said

at that time
the kiss was
meant to show

what I feel
and she can
(if she sits

quietly)
feel it still
on her lips.

Terry Collett

On Santa

I have always
found
Santa (Claus)

to be too
inquisitive
for my liking:

'Have you been
a good little boy? '
'What do you want

for Christmas? '
None of your
business

that's what.
Now make
like a tree

before
I roundhouse you
old man.

Under different
circumstances
this kind

of interrogation
would entitle me
to some legal

representation
& a can
of Sprite.

Written by my late son Oliver Collett(1984-2014)

On Seeing Enid.

I saw Enid's old man
leave the flats

morning grey
chill
sky
cannon smoke colour

he walked down the slope
I gave an
up you finger sign
once he'd gone

and I went upstairs
to Enid's flat
and knocked
at the door

the door opened
a narrow slit
Enid's mother
peaked at me
through the gap

what do you want?
she asked

can I borrow sugar
for my mum?
I said

she hesitated
gazed at me

guess so
wait there

and she went
and closed the door

I gazed over
the balcony
the milkman's horse
was eating
from a nosebag

some kids were playing ball
by the pram sheds

the door opened
and Enid showed
with a bag of sugar

how much you need?
Enid asked

I gazed at her thin frame
her hand shaking
a slight bruise
over her right eye

I saw your old man go
I said

she looked at me
with wide eyes

had a go at you I guess

she said nothing
offered me
the bag of sugar

aren't you cold
standing there
in that white nightie?
I asked

a bit

can I come in?

she shook her head
best not
she said
Mum's not up to visitors

OK
I said

I took the bag of sugar
and she stared at me

see you at school
I said

she nodded
and closed the door

I walked downstairs
no more bruises
I mused
than I'd seen before.

Terry Collett

On Seeing Her Sister.

You turn
and gaze down
at Ness
by the stream,

her back bent,
her arm pecking
at the canvas
like a hungry bird.

You remember one like her,
the long hair
down the back,
the eyes

a piercing blue,
the mouth sensual,
full of words.
She has that sensuality

you fear, mistrust and lack.
You let your eyes
move over
her figure

like a sculptor,
smoothing out,
feeling the rough
and smooth, sensing

the secret places
where darkness looms,
easing out sharpness
and unwanted pieces.

Terry Collett

On The Day Mrs Modfig's Husband Died

On the day
Mrs Modfig's husband died

she was being rogered
by a Spaniard

she'd met
in Santa Fe

staring at
the off white ceiling

with a
I'm being

well taken care of
feeling

and didn't give
her husband

a second thought
thinking him

back home
working hard

sipping the sherry
smoking the cigar

feet up
watching TV

maybe seeing
that slut from the store

as he had before
no she was content

having this Spaniard
giving her the works

making the night
feeling young again

hoping for more sunshine
far away

from the rain
and her husband

and his moans and groans
and his occasional

rogerings
in their safe

and boring bed
and later

at the funeral
in her black hat

and dress and coat
and matching gloves

she shed
the crocodile tears

remembering
other loves.

Terry Collett

On The Grass By Banks House

Fay sat
on the grass
with you
with Banks House

behind you
the windows
with their lace curtains
revealed no spying eyes

and she had her hair
pushed back
with grips
and her yellow

flowered dress
pulled over
her knees
and she said

her father was away
so she could be out
and see her friends
without a third degree

and you watched her
as she spoke
how she gestured
with her hands

her fingers thin
the nails trimmed
and she said her mother
cried in the night

and she had gone
to listen and her father
was bellowing
and she crept

back to her room
and hid beneath
the blankets
in case he came out

of his room and saw
her still awake
and you took in
her pale features

how the skin
seemed transparent
as if you might see
into her heart

and watch it beat
and when she stopped speaking
you said Moorcraft
had taken you to the Scouts

but you only went
the one night
why?
she asked

I got caught up in a fight
you said
some kid pushed me
off the ropes and I fell

so I went punched him
she sat and stared
at you and was not impressed
that's not you

she said
be yourself
and she lowered
her eyes

and gazed

at her brown shoes
and you wanted
to say sorry

and take one
of her hands
and hold it
against your

cheek's skin
but you didn't
you spoke of
the sword

your old man
had made you
the blue bladed
metal sword

you wore
in the belt
around your jeans
lets talk of other things

she said and she
looked up at you
and said she liked
your patterned

no sleeve jumper
and your neat cut hair
but all you could do
was drink in

her girly beauty
and stupidly stare.

Terry Collett

On The Horizon

On the horizon
dark birds in the sky
set against a greyness
of clouds holding rain

and she snuggled
up close to you
and said
I dreamt of you last night

and we were making love
and the big moon
was shining through
my bedroom window

and shadows sat
in the corners
like old men dying
and then my mother came in

and said
what are you doing
with that teddy bear?
And you laughed

and she nibbled your ear
and there was the smell
of pine and damp grass
in the air

and you wished
you had shared
her dream
that night before

making love in her bed
but she's dead now
cancer claimed
and swallowed by death

but the wish still lingers
in your aged head.

Terry Collett

On The Night Ward.

The dark night was out there
even though the shutters
were up at the windows
and the night nurse sat

in the small office
with her coffee
and wearing glasses
and you entered

unable to sleep
you wearing pyjamas
and dressing gown sans belt
in case you tried

to hang yourself again
and you sat opposite
taking in her big blue eyes
behind the lens of her glasses

her hair brown
and well kempt
and you said
when can I go home?

when you're better
she said
when will that be?
you'll know

she said
and sipped her coffee
how good does better feel
you have forgotten

but do not ask
her upper lip has skin
from the milky coffee
hanging

and she wiped it off
with the back
of her hand
and Christine stood

by the door of the office
dressed in her nightgown
pale green
and open at the top

showing the indentation
of her throat
and the small valley
where her breasts began

can't sleep
she said moving in
and standing by the desk
you looked her

feeling an intrusion
yet glad she is there
her being there beside you
the smell of her

her hands on the desk
tapping
what is it with you two?
the night nurse said

if it's not one
it's the other
or both
can't sleep

Christine repeated
had a nightmare
dreamed I was at the altar again
and he didn't show again

and it happened again

and again
the nurse said
I'll get you both something

but if the doctor
hears of this
he may recommend
ECT again

she looked at you opposite
across my dead arse
Christine said
but the nurse had gone

just you and Christine
and her nightmares clinging
gazing out the office
onto the sleeping ward

in semi dark
and the dread
of the ECTs
hauntingly present

remembering the last time
in the small back room
waking with a head heavy
and in pain

and Christine
lying beside you
on another bed
eyes closed

stiff like one sleeping
but acting dead.

Terry Collett

On The Road

My aunt lives over there
you said

and Jimmy looked
over the back

of the coal truck
to where you were pointing

and said
we must be far

from home then
if that's where she lives

and you looked over
at the apartments

wondering if your aunt
was home or not

and the coal guy said
best keep your heads down boys

don't want people wondering
what the heck you're doing

in the back of a coal truck
and so you and Jimmy

got underneath
the tarpaulin

and the driver pulled away
to deliver more coal

and Jimmy said
if my old girl

knew I was here
she'd hit the roof

or worse
and you said

well it's been an adventure
it got us out

of the block
and on the road

for a while
and when we get

back home
we best sneak

out of here
and hope to God

we ain't covered
in that coal dust

all over out jeans
and tee-shirts and such

or we'll be in for it
and outside

you could hear
the pitter patter of rain

on the tarpaulin
and imagined

you could hear
Jimmy's mother's

sharp angry voice
through the darkness calling.

On The Road To Malaga 1970

We slept on the coach
from Madrid to Malaga
apart for getting out for meals
and to stretch our legs

Miriam sat next to me
sometimes laying
her head on my shoulder
other times looking out
at the passing Spanish scenes

that last meal was nice
she said
I could have eaten more

so that is why you
were nibbling my ear
back there?
I said

no that was
for different reasons
she said
if we were alone
on this coach
instead 30 odd of us
I'd have you
on the back seat

not sure the driver
we'd be pleased us
shagging on his back seat
I said

when we get to Malaga
and in our tents
maybe sex can be
on the cards
she said

but you share
with that quiet girl
who wouldn't say
boo to a goose
not sure she'd
appreciate it
I said

she laughed
not with her
or with her there

Piccaso was born there
I said
my favourite artist

was he?
she said

yes and there's
a Roman theatre there too
I said

not too much culture please
she said

ok
I said

she unzipped my jeans
and her put hand inside
to investigate my pecker
her fingers
like a bird's beak
pecking at it

I held her hand
and removed it

you'll have to wait
until we hit camp

I said

she sighed
and put her hand back
in her lap

I placed my hand
on her thigh
and touched her skin

she smiled
but wouldn't
let me in.

Terry Collett

On Tuesdays

On Tuesdays Max visited
A dame a few blocks
Away with the mutt that
Seemed to bark all day.
He went because he liked
The way she made coffee
And always offered him
Toast or cake and because
She was blind and had the
Most useless mutt for the
Blind in the whole world.

On Tuesdays she opened
Her door to him; let him
In to her world and made
Him coffee and offered him
Toast or cake and listened as
He spoke and told her jokes
And related the latest gossip.

On Tuesdays he listened as
She spoke of her youth, of her
Days of being a beauty, of the
Day she lost her sight, how she
Coped in her world of darkness.

On Tuesdays he took her for a
Walk to a local restaurant and
They dined and ate and drank
And she listened to the people
Talking around her and to Max
Who recited a new poem he'd
Written or she just sat listening
To the traffic pass by wondering
If there were white puffy clouds
Above and what the colour the sky.

On Tuesdays Max walked her home
After lunch and they undressed and

Had sex and smoked and lay on the
Bed, he gazing at her beauty and she
Glad to be living and stroking his head.

Terry Collett

On Westminster Bridge.

Fay looked down
at the River Thames
from Westminster Bridge

and you stood next to her
watching the boats
go under the bridge

and disappear from view
and she said
my dad said he'd take me

on one of those boats
and out to sea
but he never has

you looked sideways at her
taking in her blonde hair
and her blue eyes

and the way the wind
touched her hair
and made her dress

move about her legs
I've been on boats
on the river before

you said
making conversation
not seeking to impress

or boast
I like the chugging sound
of the boat

you added
Fay touched
the edge of the bridge

where she stood
and said
this bridge was built in 1862

I heard about it in class
Miss Ash told us about it
oh yes she

with her massive shoulders
and arms and big breasts
you said

and Fay laughed
and blushed slightly
God knows what my dad'd say

if he heard you say that
and me laughing
she said

looking at you
and shyly smiling
probably give me

what's for
she uttered quieter
ceasing to smile

her eyes taking on
a dark gaze
looking out

at the river again
you've got to have a laugh
now and then

haven't you
you said
wanting to put

an arm about her

but not doing so
just putting a hand

next to hers
on the bridge top
feeling the cold stone

wanting to feel her flesh
soft and warm
suppose so

she said softly
her fingers close to yours
almost touching

you moved your hand
closer across the stone
crablike and touched

her small finger with yours
she breathed in the air
and so did you

and she said
oh to be in London
and out of doors.

Terry Collett

On Yiska's Breast.

Yiska watched
as the nurse
bandaged Asher's wrist,
where he'd slit
with some other's razor,
in the washroom unattended.

Washed and stitched,
the nurse bound around
with careful fingers.
Asher said nothing;
the demons had returned
as he called
his dark depression.

Yiska, her hands pushed
into the pockets
of her white nightgown,
looked on, her eyes
watching the nurse's fingers,
the bandage holding firm.

She watched, not long ago,
as he tried to hang himself,
from the cistern pipe
in the unisex lavatory.
Watched as the nursing staff
banged and banged
on the door to get him out
before he succeeded.

She wasn't going to judge;
she'd been
on the dark ledge herself;
peered into the great abyss.

The nurse, having done
her best, went off.

Failed again, Yiska said.
Asher stared
at the bandaged wrist,
the pain awaking,
the pulse still there.

He looked at Yiska;
her white nightgown
unbuttoned here
and there,
her bellybutton
visible pink and bare.

Back to the drawing board,
he said, some other
opportunity will
present itself.

More time
in the locked ward,
she reminded him,
that double click
each time they
come and go.

He gazed at her dark hair,
shoulder length,
her eyes entering
into his, reflected
him wounded there.

How unkempt he looked;
much like some wanderer
of deserts seeking a god;
much like (in feelings)
one crucified on
cheap wood,
splintered and battered.

She, like one undone, trying
to hold together, took
his hand (the unbandaged one)

and led to the washroom
unattended and lay
his head upon her breast;
not for sexual comfort
or desire, but gentle,
peaceful, human rest.

Terry Collett

Once

Once upon a year
Maybe it was around
Christmas tide and
The choir had stopped
Outside some building
In the evening mist and
You were carol singing and
Lovely she moved onto your
Lips and kissed and it was
Like some angel had touched
You and you never wanted
That moment ever to end
And it felt as if God had woken
From a deep dream and seen
The beautiful effects of love
And remembered and maybe
Years later when you heard
She'd died with cancer and
You had never married her or
Made love to her you sensed
Part of you die and it seemed
As if there were a few less stars
In the dark night's cold sky.

Terry Collett

One Afternoon That Summer.

Despite the fact
that other local kids

were in the hay barn playing
Jane stood at the barn doors

looking in apprehensively
and you stood beside her

waiting for her to move in
or say something

but she just stood looking in
are we allowed in to play?

she asked
sure as long as we don't

cause damage to the hay bales
you replied

and she sniffed the air
and moved in

and looked around
the huge barn

with its semi dark
and smells of hay

and captured sun
and warmth

the other kids played
but took no notice

of Jane or you
as you entered

closed the doors
and moved around

the hay strewn floor
haven't you been

in a hay barn before?
you asked looking

at her bright summer dress
and white socks and sandals

yes years ago
she said

as she paused
at the edge

of the nearest hay bale
and sat down

and you sat beside her
in the semi dark

with sunlight making
small light through cracks

and holes in the walls
I don't like mice and rats

she said
and I saw one once

in another barn
and it frightened me

you sat in silence
for a few moments

taking in the air and smells
and then the other kids

ran off out side
into the sunlight

talking of playing
down by the pond

and catching things
you sat still

until their voices died off
and then she said

why have you
brought me in here?

you looked at her eyes
in the dull light

and her lips moving
with their small speech

to be alone with you
without prying eyes

you said
oh I see

she replied
and stood up

and climbed upwards
on the hay bales

with you following
behind her

seeing her sway
as she moved

her hands pulling
her upwards

her legs taking each step
onto a hay bale carefully

then having reach
high up in the barn

she sat down
and you sat beside her

if my father saw me here
he'd think things

Jane said
and she looked at you

with her large eyes
what things? you asked

watching her lay back
with her hands

behind her head
I don't know

he never said
she muttered

as she lay there
she lifted a leg

and her dress
slipped downwards

revealing a glimpse
of naked thigh

that's parents for you
you uttered

never saying
what they think

or saying things
but don't explain

you lay down
beside her

on the hay
as outside the barn

the soft sound
of pitter patter

on the roof
of sudden rain.

Terry Collett

One Afternoon 1965

I put on a Count Basie LP
on the blue covered
record-player,
Tilly lay on the bed
filing her finger nails,
looking at them
making sure
they were even.

I looked out
the bedroom window
onto the grass and hedge
and to my right
the apple orchard.

I loved the saxophone solo
on the Basie LP,
moved my head
to the beat.

Did your mum believe
you went to stay
at a friend's house?
I said.

Yes, she seemed to,
Tilly said,
taking her eyes
from her nails
to gaze at me.

Had to be convincing,
and lie of course,
Tilly added,
looking at me
more intensely.

Which friend
did you say?

I asked.

Pretend friend,
I haven't a friend
I can lie about
so convincingly,
Tilly said.

I guess so,
I said,
turning to face her
lying there on my bed,
the trumpeter soloing
on Basie track.

Doesn't your mum
mind us being up here
in your room?
Tilly said.

I said I wanted to you
to hear my new Basie LP,
I said.

I don't like jazz,
I like the Beatles
and Bob Dylan,
Tilly said.

Had to say something,
I said.

We had good sex
at Uncle's place
didn't we?
she said,
smiling,
putting away
her nail-file.

We had.

I remembered it
as I sat on the bed
looking back at her,
wishing we could here,
but it would be too risky
with my mother
just downstairs,
and my young brother
likely to come up
any minute.

Is your place
ever empty?
I asked.

Seldom,
Tilly said,
Mother is nearly always there,
doing her housework
or the garden
or preparing meals.

The Basie big band
was playing out the track
and then stopped,
and there was silence.

I leaned to her
and kissed her lips.

She put her arms
around me,
and we held close.

Lips to lips stuck.
We wanted to,
but we couldn't
worst luck.

Terry Collett

One Day Dead 1963

The nun stopped her
in the corridor
Magdalene need
a word with you
the nun said.

What word would
that be Sister Bridget?
the girl said.

A word of warning
follow me to the office
the nun turned
and walked back
the way she had come.

Magdalene followed
watching the nun
in front of her
how sexless she was.

The nun opened the door
of the office and held
the door open
so that Magdalene
could walk in
then she closed the door
and sat at the desk
and indicated
for the girl
to do likewise
opposite her.

It has been brought
to my notice that you
were seen with Mary Moran
in the girls' toilets
what have you to say?

Not unusual for two girls
to go to the girls' toilets Sister
Magdalene said.

The nun stared
not both
in the same cubical
the nun said stiffly.

Magdalene stared
at the nun
who'd say such a thing?
we were not
in the same cubicle
we were in adjoining cubicles
Magdalene said.

The nun gazed at her
you were both seen
coming out
of a cubicle together
the nun affirmed.

Magdalene looked
at the nun
at the pinched features
the nose
the black and white habit.

That was afterwards
I just went in there
to talk with Mary
Magdalene said.

You were heard
whispering in
the same cubicle
the nun said
eyeing the girl.

You are not
to be in the same cubical

with the Moran girl
at any time at all
do you understand me?
The nun said firmly
if I hear of this again
I will be having words
with both of your parents
and the priest understand?

Magdalene nodded
yes Sister Bridget
she said.

The nun stared at her
off you go
and remember
what I said.

The girl got up
and looked at
the large crucifix
on the wall above
the nun's head
and wish her with piles
or one day dead.

Terry Collett

One Day Scout 1959

Morecraft said
come along
and join the Scouts.

So I went
along with him
that evening
to the church hall
where the Scouts
were stationed.

I was introduced
to the Scout leader
some tall thin guy
with a wide smile.

What's your name?
he said.

Benny
I said.

Benny what?
he said.

No Benny Coles
I said.

No one laughed
his smile disappeared.

Show him
the ropes Dick
he said
to Morecraft.

So we went along
to where the ropes were
and he showed me

what to do.

So I did it
then some big kid
came along
and pushed me
off the rope.

I gave his leg a pull
and dragged him down
and a fight started.

The tall thin leader
came along and said
what is going on here?

He pulled my leg
and I fell off
the big kid said.

He pushed me off
I said.

I won't have
this behaviour
in my pack
you can go
he said to me.

What about him?
I said.

Go
the thin guy said
so I went.

Next day
Morecraft said
he wondered where
I'd gone to
and they said
I'd been sent off

for fighting.

Self defence

I said

but Morecraft

said nothing

and went off

to play football

with some other kids

in the playground

at school.

I went with Dennis

and played cards

and won.

A kid's got

to have something

have some fun.

Terry Collett

One In Nature Mcmlxxi

One in nature
but three distinct persons
Dom Charles said
of the Trinity of God
I watched him
as he showed me
how to pluck apples
from the trees
in the abbey orchard,

fiducia in Deum
He will always be
with you
Dom James said
I listened as he spoke
sunlight pierced
the coloured glass
of the high window,

Hugh spoke
of the chairs he made
for the guest's common room
carpenter by trade
but now a monk in training,

bell pulled in the cloister
by the tall thin monk
for Vespers
we lined up
on either side
of the cloisters
against the walls
orange bricks,

nam cum ego infirmi
essemus secundum
quod est tunc
fortis sum
said St Paul

when he was weak
then he was strong
or such I mused,

the Crucified
on the crucifix
on the wall above my bed
head to one side
arms stretched
hands pierced,

un ami de tous
n'est pas un ami
pour personne
Gareth said
quoting Aristotle
as we walked
through woods
of the abbey
towards the shoreline,

I tolled the bell for Terce
George beside me
tolling his bell
novices at work
at least for awhile
his dark eyes
and that warm smile.

Terry Collett

One Left.

There was one left in the box,
A large chocolate candy, the kind
She liked; but what to do? Pass it
Over to her to indulge and risk her
Putting on that weight, she was
Trying to lose or secretly, while
She was looking out of the window
At the birds, stuff it into your mouth
And hurriedly chew and swallow?
There's one chocolate candy here
In the box if you want it, you say.
She turns from the window, her eyes
Large green emeralds, her lips part
And she says, no, you have it, I'm trying
To lose that extra pound, and looks
Away, her voice not at all convincing,
Just a whiny drawn out, you take it, sound.

Terry Collett

One Leg Anne And The Innocent Flirt.

Sister Mary pushed Anne
in her wheelchair
to the white table
where you were sitting

with Lydia Sad
and Malcolm
and a curly headed girl
with burn scars

on her face and neck
there
said the nun
here you can sit

and wait for breakfast
and catch the morning sun
Anne looked glumly
at the sky

and said nothing
as the nun
walked away
I wonder

what's for breakfast?
Malcolm asked
stewed cat on toast
Anne said

looking at Lydia Sad
whose blonde hair
and blue eyes
gave her

an angelic look
that's horrible
the girl with burn scars said
don't eat it then

Anne said
Malcolm looked at you
it wouldn't be that
would it?

He asked
no
you said
Anne's just having you on

why do you have to spoil
my fun Skinny Boy?
Anne said
it's not funny

Lydia muttered
not funny to say that
about cats being on toast
how are your haemorrhoids?

Anne asked Lydia
saw the fat nun
giving you the bum pill
Lydia blushed

and Malcolm looked
at the white table top
I'm telling Sister Bernadette
about you

the girl with burn scars said
go put your head
between your thighs
and breathe the air

Anne said
the girl got up
and left the table
followed by Lydia

and Malcolm

that's got rid of them
Skinny Boy
Anne said

why are you so horrible?
you asked
looking at her red skirt
just covering the stump

of her amputated leg
have a good look Skinny Boy
and she pulled up
her skirt to reveal

the naked flesh
and plump stump
you noticed
how the scar

seemed to pull
into a smooth redness
what do you think?
Anne asked

I've seen it before
you replied
when?
She asked

you showed me
the other week
while you were being weight
in the bathroom

she smiled
and pulled down
her skirt
I like you Skinny Boy

you're just
an innocent flirt
and she laughed

and her wheelchair rocked

and you smiled
and wondered
what she meant
by the word flirt

and looked discreetly
at her short red skirt.

Terry Collett

One Leg Anne And The Kid

Anne poked Monica
the girl with burn scars
with one of her crutches

and said
Scam scar face
me and the skinny kid

want to be alone
and Monica moved off
and said

I'm going to tell
Sister Bridget about you
Anne indicated for you

to sit in one of the chairs
on the lawn
and said to Monica

Go tell her then
and kiss her arse
while you're there

and Monica went off
and Anne eased herself
down into the other chair

and laid her crutches
against the round table
Well Kid how's it going?

All right
you replied
Just all right?

aren't you blown away
and isn't your heart faster
on my approach?

she laughed
and stared at you
Well?

she said
after a few moments
of silence

Did you manage
to bum me a smoke?
you fumbled

in your shirt pocket
and pulled out
a cigarette slightly bent

Well done you
Skinny Boy
and she took the cigarette

and put it in the pocket
of her cardigan and said
I'll have that later

when I'm in the john
having a pee
What if someone sees you?

you asked
What in the john?
I hope there'll be

no one in the john
with me
well unless you want to come

you're quite welcome
No
you said looking at

her straight black hair

and her dark eyes
and the one leg

sticking out
from her red skirt
she saw you staring

at her leg and said
I think you've fallen in love
with my lone leg

and she lifted her skirt
and revealed the leg stump
coming a little way

from her panty line
Have a good look Kid
and she laughed

and pulled your left hand
onto the stump
and held it there

and you sensed
the warmth and softness
and when she released

your hand you seemed
to take the impression
of the leg stump

on your palm and fingers
and odd
that years after that

that impression
like some ghost
still lingers.

Terry Collett

One Leg Anne's Escape

One leg Anne
crutched herself
to the window

and stared out at the rain
Look at the pissing weather
she said

she let go
of the handle
of one crutch

and scratched her thigh
you stood just behind her
watching her standing there

like a dejected Napoleon
What do you think
they'd say if I got you

to push me out
in the wheelchair
in this Skinny Boy?

she said
looking at you
over her shoulder

They wouldn't allow it
you replied moving up
beside her

and peering out
at the rain
on the lawn and trees

I don't give a donkey's tail
what they'd allow
she said

being politer
than she usually was
Why do you want

to go out in the rain?
you asked
Because I hate

being shut up
in my room
or being pushed

around the corridors
like fecking Guy Fawkes
she crutched herself

away from the window
Come on Skinny Boy
let's venture out

But we'll get wet
you said following her
out of the room

Hush do you want
the grown ups
to know our plans of escape?

you stood beside her
by the backdoor
your eyes watched

the rain falling on
the path outside
Bring me a wheelchair

Skiing Boy
we're going to explore
you went to the store room

and pushed a wheelchair

to where she stood
and she sat down

and gave you
the crutches
Right off we go

she said
and you opened
the door

and wheeled her out
the raindrops
pattering on

and around you both
and she bellowed
Go go

on on
and so you pushed
and the rain fell

and she laughed
and opened her arms
and her hands

and said
This is living Boy
better to live

and be wet
than dry indoors
and dead.

Terry Collett

One Lost At Sea Mcmclxx.

l'uomo creato per
renderlo partecipe della
sua vita beata
said the Italian monk
sitting in an old armchair
in the guest's room
facing me,

created man to share
in His blessed life?
I said
speaking of God
an image far removed
from the old man
in the clouds idea,

si è giusto
he said
eyeing me
his thin eyebrows
like straight black lines,

bell tower
orange brick
reaching over
des arbres
deep bell sounds,

I stood watching
rain fall on black tiles
from the window
grey skies
moving dark grey clouds,

Ich bin immer mit dir
the Austrian monk said
over coffee
in the guest's parlour
after lunch,

indeed he is
the colonel said
eyeing the monk
with age eyes,

the monk tapped
his chest
to indicate
where God lay,

I watched them both
adding nothing
just listening half heartedly
taking in the colonel's
knuckly hands
time aged,

in His image made us
the old boy said,

I sipped my coffee
silent
like one
lost at sea.

Terry Collett

One Morning 1961

Having spent a while
helping my father
saw wood
I go off to meet Jane
by the water tower
by the farm drive

birds fly to fro
from hedge to hedge
across the narrow road

a slight breeze moves
the hedgerows

a sound of a tractor
in a field over the way

I look along
the narrow road
and see her walking
along towards me

her dark hair
tied in bunches
a summery dress on

have you been
waiting long?
She says
as she approaches me

no not long
I say

she smiles
and her eyes light up
as she comes to me

just been helping

my dad saw logs
I say

that's good
I helped my mother
with the washing
before I left
she says
where shall we go?

Don't mind
I reply

let's go to the top
of the Downs
and see how far
we can see
she says

so we do
we walk up
the drive
that leads to the Downs
and see the ruts
where the motorbike rally
goes sometimes

walk past
the hollow tree
where we have been
now and then
and up through
the avenue of huge trees
on either side

she talking
about birds
she has seen
that morning
about a Yellow Hammer
by a hedge
not long before

I watch her
as she talks
and take in
her fine black hair
and her brown eyes
lit up with life
and the excitement of being

I say nothing
just listen
wishing I could
hold her hand
and kiss her cheek
but do not
just listen
to her words
come and fly
like uncaged birds.

Terry Collett

One Of The Dancers.

She was one of the vaudeville dancers
he supposed. He had drawn back the
curtain and she was sitting there on
the stall one leg crossed over the other,
in that skimpy dress, white lace up shoes.

He had apologised, blushed, was about
to draw back the curtain when she said:
Oh, no leave it be. And he had and stood
there, slightly open mouthed, mind ticking
over, eyes stuck on her fine legs crossed.

They were nice legs he thought. Her dark
hair, parted in the middle was not well
brushed; it seemed as if she'd just got up
from a bed. Maybe she had. She gazed at
him, her eyes looked foreign. Odd to think
that, he thought. He wanted to drink her in.

Take in each aspect of her just sitting there.
I'm on soon, she said. Yes, definitely an
accent, he thought nodding. I'm a dancer,
she said. O right, he said. He thought as
much; the dress and shoes, the way she
had about her. White ankle shoes. Lace ups.

Not the sort to wear out in the street, he
supposed. Are you to watch the show?
She asked. Yes, I am, he said, looking at
her lips, the way they spread under her
nose, held in place by her cheeks, he
thought. What would his mother say about
her short dress? Far too short, shows her
backside almost, she'd have said scornfully.

Yet he still gawped at her. Her ankles, knees,
thighs. What a feast for the eyes, he mused,
trying to look away, but held bound, fixed
as if by some glue. The tassels on the end of

the short dress moved as she stood up. She stretched her arms. Shook her legs back into life as if they had died. Must be ready, she said.

Warm ups. Yes, of course, he murmured, and turned away, walking off, carrying the image of her and her shoes and dress and her dark hair into his mind. Fixed there. Captured each aspect of her being, placed in some room of memory, for later viewing, in his secret seeing.

Terry Collett

One Summer 1958

You sat with Fay that summer day
on the flat concrete roof
of the World War Two bomb shelter

down below the tall flats
where you both lived
and you said

do you want to go
to the movies with me?
she looked across

at the coal depot
with its trucks loading
and unloading

I don't have no money
she replied
you looked at her

my dad'll pay
you said
he's always giving me money

for the movies
she shook her head
and you looked ahead

at the sun shining above
the rain tracks
over the coal depot

you had on your blue jeans
and white tee shirt
and she you noticed

turning your head
had a red and white dress
which came just over her knees

and she wore sandals
on bare feet
besides my mother wants me

so she can see me
Fay said with a sigh
she raised and lowered

her legs against
the concrete wall
her sandals making

tapping noises
as they hit the wall
and you noticed bruises

along her thigh
as she moved
and her dress rode higher

what are those bruises
on your leg?
you asked

she looked down
and stopped moving her legs
and pulled her dress hem

over her knees and thighs
I fell
she replied

down the stairs
you looked at her arms
where other fading bruises

blended into her skin
like worn-out badges
we can see a Western film

you said

I'm sure
there's a Jeff Chandler film

so my dad tells me
but she shook her head
too violent

Mother says
Fay uttered looking away
but there's kissing stuff too

you added
Fay looked at you
her blue eyes

moving over you
like a smoothing
palm of a hand

I'm not allowed
to go to the movies
Daddy says

its sinful and only
wicked people
go there

to be tempted
by the Devil
she sighed

and you both sat in silence
for a while
watching pigeons fly

in the blue summer sky
then she turned quickly
and kissed your cheek

and said
don't have to go
to no movie

to see kissing
and you thought
of the boring bits in films

where the cowboy
gets kissed by the girl
after a gun shoot out

and having been kissed
by Fay
you were glad

and guessed that kissing
wasn't at all
too bad.

Terry Collett

One Summer 1962

Christina sat next to you
on the school playing fields
the summer day was hot

and she sat there
cross-legged
her school skirt

touching on her knees
and you looked beyond her
wondering if the girl

who had kissed you
at Christmas
while carol singing

was looking over at you
from a group of girls
across the way

I wish I had
my bathing costume on
Christina said

so do I
you said looking back
at her taking in

her white knees
catching the summer sun
she giggled and looked away

did Cedric tell you about me
and what I told him?
she asked

her profile
like some Renoir girl
yes

you said
remembering Cedric's words
and his blushing face

he seemed put out
you added
you don't want to worry

about Cedric
she said
he hates me getting into boys

as she said this
you looked over
at the girl who kissed you

and she was staring
over at you and Christina
and seemed annoyed

and as you gazed at her
you still felt that kiss
on your lips

and that embrace
in the moonlight
and Christina touched

your knee
and said
if you want privacy

we can always go up
into the woods by the fence
and you said

did you hear about Brilton
the teacher of English?
No

she said

what?
he's been sacked

why? she asked
running her hand
along your thigh

for taking boys home
in the lunch period
you said

oh
she said
removing her hand

what for?
You looked
at her knees

in the sunlight
how the light
seemed to warm them

no idea
you said
and you looked away

with a picture
of her knees
carried in your head.

Terry Collett

One Sunday 1962

We came out
of the small door
at the back
of the church

after the Sunday service
in which we sang
in choir
and stood looking

at the gravestones
spread around us
going back
to the river

I guess
we'll end up here
one day
Yehudit said

here amongst the dead
mournful aren't we?
I said
we're only young

not fifteen yet
and here you are
talking about
being here

we walked on
along the path
beside the church
but it's true though

we will one day
she said
one day maybe
I said

but why worry
about it now?
I'm not worried about it
just saying

she said
anyway the news
of Mr M's wife
drowning herself

in the park pond
brings it home
just how fragile
we are

we walked on
past more gravestones
some names
wearing away

with time and age
yes that was
a bit of a shock
sad when people

get to that stage
and feel the need
to end it all
I said

Yehudit's sister
passed us by
with a friend
walking faster

Yehudit held my hand
I sensed the hand there
feeling the warmth
her finger wrapping

themselves about mine

but we must focus
on living
she said

us here now
holding hands
being here
on a bright morning

not about death
or dying
we walked along
the lane away

from the church
between hedgerows
at the side
to avoid

passing cars and bikes
I'll see you
this afternoon
if I can get away

Yehudit said
if Mum doesn't want
this or that done
we walked on

she thinking about
Mr M's wife's death
and I thinking
of the afternoon

by the pond
and a kiss or two
and whatever else
young people may do.

Terry Collett

Only

Only if you want to, she said,
only if it means to you what

it means to me. The other
members of the choir were

ahead on their way to the next
house for carol singing, the full

moon luminous above, the voices
of others like faraway whispers

of ghosts. She looked at you; her
blue eyes searching every aspect

of you for an answer. Yes, it does,
you replied, your words hanging

around your head like tamed birds.
She smiled and closed her blue eyes

and moved toward you and kissed.
Lips to lips, flesh to flesh, no tongues

(at least not then that intrusion of
the mouths) just skin touching skin,

seemingly an outward sign of how
you felt within. She drew you into

her arms; you sensed her breast
beneath her coat, felt her body

touching yours. The kiss ended,
the lovers drew apart, the others

had paused outside another house
to begin their carol singing once again.

She held your hand in hers; electricity
sparkled; down came the soft rain.

Terry Collett

Only Human 1962

Yochana played
the Schumann piece.

Her fingers
nimble and soft
ran over the keyboard
to a preplanned purpose.

Her mother and Benedict
sat on the sofa listening;
her father was out
in the garden weeding,
classical music bored him.

Yochana played
from memory,
the Schumann
was a piece of cake
(an expression
she'd got from Benedict) .

Her mind was elsewhere,
on last night
in Benedict's bed
(or the guest room bed
where he was) ,
on how she had crept
across the passageway
to his room
and entered his bed.

A little slower there,
her mother said,
this is Schumann's
sensitive work,
needs more gentleness.

Benedict looked on
at Yochana,

trying to ignore
her mother,
listened to the music,
eyed her waist,
narrow,
the hips,
the way she moved
her body as she played,
her bottom easing
side to side
in her playing.

Yochana slowed
down a fraction,
her fingers
(if fingers
have memory)
thought of the motion
of opening Benedict's
nightwear buttons,
the touching
of his piece.

This is a difficult part,
her mother said,
take it carefully,
Yochana,
do not rush.

Yochana slowed,
heard her mother's
voice behind her,
imagined Benedict
sitting there
watching her
in his silence,
his mind on
other matters
than the Schumann,
after all,
she mused
soft smiling,

we are only human.

Terry Collett

Only Us.

There's only us here now,
you amongst the dead
and me amongst the living
(at least for now) , and
the moon above us creamy
and smooth as a politician's tongue,
and they are not here, not yet,
and dogs bark afar off, and cats
sit on walls looking for prey
or mates or meditating on
the moon's glow.

There's only us here lying
abed listening to the night
hours pass away, the tick ticking
of the old clock on the bedside
cabinet, the smell of bodies
washed, of a well-polished room,
of a descending doom.

There's only us, only the stars
flicking like diamonds in moonlight,
only the echoes of memories,
the visions of what may have been
but were not, of you and I once
young but now old or dead or waiting
to be dead, only the soft breathing
on the air, and you now dead
ascending the stair.

Terry Collett

Only Way

The only way that Nichols
could have any control

over his wife or put a smile
on her face was to put on

a Gerry Mulligan record and
turn it up loud so that the

cool baritone saxophone of
Mulligan could work its wonders

and she would say Why he's
so sexy and that sax of his it

drives me crazy and Nichols
knew he was second best to

that Mulligan guy and once
when he took her to a jazz

concert where he had a job
to keep her in her seat and

she swooned and gazed and
nigh wet herself and when he

got her home that night it was
one of the hottest nights of sex

he ever had which for a second
best guy wasn't at all bad.

Terry Collett

Opening Shutters Mcmlxxi

I opened the shutters
of my room
and the 5am morning
welcomed me
with dawn chorus,

the bell tower stood
like a giant in the mist
viewed from my window,

Deus movet me,

the abbey toilet was empty
and I filled my basin
with cold water
for ablutions,

lavabis me sunt
alba sicut nix,

my cup runs over
she said and laughed
after sex and so did I,

Dom James spoke
of learning Latin for plainsong
and to practise reading
aloud in church
and I dreaded such,

nous avons un Dieu écoute
the French monk said
as he showed me
how to lay out
the vestments for Mass,

George talked of the way
the dawn light
brightens up the abbey

in mornings and I said
I had seen,

kiss me here she said
and pointed with her finger
and I did
and did again,

ohne Gott gibt es nichts
the Austrian monk said
as we walked back
to the abbey after
our walk on the Thursday,

I brushed my hand along
the brick wall
in the cloister
sensing the roughness
and the smoothness,

Hugh said the Scottish monk
had funny ways
liked knitting in his
spare time and once
played the bagpipes
so I heard,

why must we suffer?
because here below
pure Love cannot exist
without suffering
said St Bernadette
so I read some place,

un peccatore pentito
the Italian monk said
lo siamo anche noi,

I tolled the bell
for the office of Sext
my stomach rumbling,

we are what we repeatedly do
excellence is not an act
but a habit Gareth said
quoting Aristotle
as we sat on the beach
in the abbey grounds
watching the tide roll in,

I counted her ribs
with my tongue
and she was pleased,

the monk reading
in the refectory read
on Mary Queen of Scots
in monotone
his eyes scanning
the pages of the book,

see this she said
as she undressed
and I turned around
and had to look.

Terry Collett

Other Nights 1970

After we set up our tents
Miriam and I
walked into Madrid.

We went to the Prado
looked at the art
at the Fra Angelicos
and Titians.

Then we had coffee
in a cafe.

I see you liked
the Eve painting
by Durer
she said.

Yes I like that
I said
and the Venus paintings
by Titian.

What is it with men
and nude paintings
always out to look
at nudity
she said.

We enjoy the beauty
of God's creation
the artists were not
ashamed to show
that why hide what
God made
so beautifully?
I said.

So God made my
beautifully

nudity then?
she said.

Of course
I said
mind you I'll need
to see it again
to comment further
can't see that much
in the darkness
of the tent.

She sipped
her coffee
we will see
that was a fluke
that that girl
I share with
was off with another
for the day
seeing the cathedral
in the Burgos
and other sights.

Shame she's not away
more and elsewhere
I said
for other nights.

Terry Collett

Our Paris 1973

Our Paris
still in minds
as Sonya

and I lay
in our bed
in that cheap

hotel room
French music
from the white

radio
playing out
to the room

she lay there
opening up
her flower

sweet scented
that waitress
Sonya said

swayed her ass
just for you
I am sure

I doubt it
just the way
she walked there

(maybe it
was for me
that I hoped)

if you say
Sonya said
some dame sang

some Mozart
on the white
radio

Sonya knew
so she sang
along too

I gardened
her flower
sweet scented

some Mozart
aria
in my ears

as we sexed
her flower
in the cool

late dark hour.

Terry Collett

Out Of Bounds 1955

I was on a bomb site
off Meadow Row
with Helen
searching for small stones
for my catapult

she had her doll
Battered Betty
in one hand
and was looking at the ground
through her thick lens glasses

how small do
they have to be?
she said

about this size
I said
showing her
with my thumb and finger

we searched amongst the bricks
and rubble and bits
of wood and weeds

is this small enough?
she said
picking up a stone
and putting it
in the palm
of her small hand

I went to her
and gazed at it
and picked it up
and said
yes that's about right
and put it in a small pouch
made from an old handkerchief

tied together
and tied to the belt
around my blue jeans

how many stones
do you need?
she said
because Betty
is getting hungry
and I will have to
feed her soon
with the bottle
in my dress pocket

o about a handful
I said
just a few more

ok
she said
and we looked on
Betty hanging
from Helen's hand
by her tiny hand

just then a copper
walked across the bomb site
from the New Kent Road
trudging at his own pace
towards us

Helen saw him first
and stood up
and clutched Betty
close towards her chest
her eyes large
and scared looking

I stood up and put
my hands in the pockets
of my blue jeans

you ought not to be
on bomb sites
he said
they're dangerous places

Helen opened her mouth
to speak
but nothing came
but air

we're collecting stones
for my catapult
I said

he stood upright
with his hands on his hips
staring at us both

I don't care
if you're collecting gems
for Her Majesty the Queen
I want you off now
and to go home
he said
his voice firm and baritone

only I need ammunition
I said
and this is the best
place for them

off and go home
he said peering at me
his eyes dark and enlarging

Helen was nigh
wetting herself

so I shrugged and said
ok but we'll be back
once you've gone

Helen stared at me
as if I'd passed wind

GO NOW
he bellowed

pigeons flew up and off
from the bomb site
at the sound

we walked off
the bomb site together

she looking ahead
eyes tearful

I gazing back
like I'd seen this cowboy do
in that Western film
before a gunfight
I'd seen with my old man
the previous night.

Terry Collett

Out Of My Head 1940

We'd danced until
there was no time left,
the people

were beginning to leave,
Clive and I
walked along

the London streets
hand in hand,
we walked back

to my house,
I invited him in,
the maid

had gone off
for the night,
as I wanted us

to be alone,
then once
we got undressed,

were in bed,
we kissed,
I opened up to him,

then I wake up to blackness,
I hear noise
on the ward

voices and a trolley
being wheeled around,
I am lying on my back,

and I panic
for a moment or two,
wondering where I am,

then it hits me,
I'm in hospital,
I'm blind,

I reach down
with my hands,
I know before

I am there
that my legs have gone,
just the stumps,

and I want the dream again
want Clive and us
making love,

but it has gone the dream,
and Clive,
I hear a voice call out

about a nurse,
but I feel on the edge,
feel along side

of the bed,
can't get the dream
out of my head.

Terry Collett

Out Of The Rain.

We hid under
the railway bridge
in Arch Road
by the back
of the coal wharf

it was raining
we stared out
at the falling wetness
coming down heavy

just as well
we were near here
Ingrid said
otherwise
we'd have got soaked

I peered out
the sky
was a dull grey
lightening threatened
and thunder

I felt the cold
as I huddled
into my jacket
and shirt
and blue jeans

have to stay here
until it stops
I said

she put her hands
into the pockets
of the green raincoat
she was wearing
her brown hair
pinned back

with hair grips
was damp

suppose so
but it could be ages
and my mum'll worry
if I'm too late
Ingrid said

I peered at the sky

hopefully won't be
too long

I looked at her
standing next to me

we could always
start a fire
if we get too cold
I said
I've got matches
and there's
an old newspaper
over there
and bits
of old wood
from the bomb site
and coal over there

she didn't look
impressed

we can wait
and see
she said

I've lit fires
before here
I said

she looked

at me doubtfully

over there
in the corner
a fair size one

she looked
at the corner
how did you
put it out after?
she asked

I peed on it
I said

she gazed at me
her mouth open
her mildly
buck teeth smiling
at me

what if someone
saw you?

no one can see
from here
not under
this bridge
apart from tramps
or hobos
who hide here
sometimes at night
but it was daytime then
I said

she stared out
at the rain

sometimes Benedict
you are not good
to know
she muttered

I smiled
gazed at the sky

two 8 year olds
hiding
from the rain
and I said
I wonder why?

Terry Collett

Out Of The Shade 1965

I sat with Tilly
in the park
in her lunch hour
from work.

How was your morning?
I said.

Busy as hell,
she said,
never seen
so many customers;
needed this rest.

I passed her
a sandwich
from the paper bag,
and ate one myself.

She looked sexy
in her work uniform
especially as the dress
rode above her knees.

What have you
been doing?
She said.

My half day;
so I thought
I'd come see you,
I said,
plus I wanted to buy
an LP of Elvis.

Did you buy it?
She said.

Yes,

and I showed her.

I'm more into the Beatles,
she said.

You'll have to bring
one of their albums
and we can play it
on my record player
in my room,
I said.

I'm sure my mum
will let me, will she?
Tilly said.

Of course if
she doesn't know,
I said.

Benny she
knows everything;
I bet she has
spies on me,
Tilly said.

All innocent,
just playing an LP,
I said.

She smiled;
innocent with you,
be more innocent
if Christine Keeler
was involved,
Tilly said.

My mum wont mind
you listening to Elvis
or the Beatles,
I said.

I'll see;
until she's
in a good mood,
Tilly said.

I'll be old by then,
I said.

She laughed.

I will try
and get to your place;
I'll tell her
your mum said
it is ok,
and she'll be there,
Tilly said.

I sipped some coke,
and she ate
her sandwich.

I gazed at her knees,
at the way
the work uniform
hid her gems.

I can open up
a bottle of wine
over from Christmas,
I said.

Tilly raised her eyebrows;
I'll try and come;
no promises made.

I nodded,
and felt the sun
on my head
and wished
for some shade

Out On Show 1940

I'm outside
in the grounds
I can smell

the fresh air
and flowers
hear bird song

someone has
wheeled me out
from the ward

where the smells
and voices
hemmed me in

hello Grace
a voice says
to my left

I turn my
blind eyes where
the voice comes

Philip is
that you there?
yes it is

he replies
I reach out
to touch him

he holds my
hand in his
whereabouts

have you been?
I ask him
war work stuff

its stop secret
can't say much
o I see

he squeezes my
hand gently
your doctor

has said I
can take you
out for that

meal next week
he whispers
take me out

into town?
yes up West
have to risk

the bombing
from Hitler's
bombing crew

Philip says
you don't mind
taking me?

why should I?
I've no legs
bloody blind

I want to
take you out
he utters

you can wear
that red dress
I bought you

I recall

the nurse talk
about it

the red dress
thank you for
taking me

I tell him
what about
other things?

other things?
what if I
need to go

to the loo?
I can't go
on my own

can't manage
I tell him
Joan's coming

with Donald
she'll help you
Philip says

a foursome?
just the four
Donald's driving

I sit still
and stare at
where he is

she won't mind
taking me?
of course not

anyway
Nurse Kavel
will be there

on duty
just in case
she makes five

Philip says
I am thrilled
to be out

not caring
who stares at
me that night

I can't see
I won't know
a weird one

out on show.

Terry Collett

Out With Helen

I met Helen
by the Trocadero cinema
after school
after tea

I mustn't be late
must be home
by 7 not 8
or my mum said
she'll tan my backside
a bright red
Helen said

ok I'll walk you
home in time
I said

we looked
at the photos outside
on the walls
and inside
in the foyer
of the film
and film stars
the coloured pictures
the bright lights

then we walked down
the road
to the subway
and down and up
the other side

and looked
at the photos
at the ABC
cinema

it was smaller

more compact
the glass doors
open
the inside
inviting

the bright lights
and large pictures
of the actors
and actresses
Robert Taylor
Doris Day
John Wayne
and others

then we walked
down the road
to the fish and chip shop
and looked in
through the window

what can we afford?
I asked

I have no money
she said

I've 6d
I said
that'll but us
some chips to share

so we went in
and asked
for 6d worth of chips
and the guy gave us
some crackling too

and we went over
by the wall and seats
and sat
in the warm

and ate our food

and she said
that boy Cogan
said I looked
like a four eyed chimp
do I?

no you look pretty
I said
he can't talk
he has glasses too
and looks
like a chimp
not you

she smiled
and took off
her thin wired
NHS glasses

and wiped them
on with the hem
of her dress
then put them
on again

and as we
looked outside
it was gushing down
with dull grey rain.

Terry Collett

Outshining The Sun.

Bob West said
why are you always

looking towards
the girl's playground?

Looking for someone
you replied

who? Bob asked
A girl who gets

on my school bus
Bob pulled a face

and combed
his black oily hair

is she good looking?
Like an angel

you said
and peered

at the playground
across the way

where girls were
skipping or walking

in pairs
See her yet?

Bob asked
no not yet

you muttered
wishing you had

hoping she'd come
into view

don't see any point in girls
Bob said

putting his comb away
in a top pocket

wiping his hands
on his grey trousers

my dad said
they're only after two things

money and babies
steer away from them Bob

he said
you watched

as girls moved
about the playground

each dressed in grey skirts
and green tops

haven't you ever
been moved by a girl?

You asked
moved? Bob said

moved?
Ain't no girl

going to move me
he muttered

spit hanging
on his lower lip

like a suicidal
waiting to jump

what's this angel girl got
that's so special?

He said taking out
a handkerchief

and wiping his brow
I don't know

you replied
and as you said it

you saw her
come in to view

outshining the sun
more beautiful

than summer
and staring at you.

Terry Collett

Outside Bruges 1974

We camped down
the first night
in some old

caravan
sleeping bags
everywhere

outside Bruges
next morning
we wake up

all cramped up
and annoyed
where are our

tents meant to
be set up?
Dalya asks

the guide says
got held up
just rang them

be here soon
he tells her
have breakfast

in the bar
and wait there
so we do

8 of us
4 young males
and females

have coffee
and pancakes
and a smoke

what a joke
Dalya says
we walk out

together
walk about
the camp site

you're Benny?
She asks me
yes that's right

what a crowd
for camping
a mother

and daughter
some teacher
from Southend

some Yorkshire
girl loud mouth
and Aussie

and the guide
Dalya says
do we share

two a tent?
I ask her
same sexes

she replies
so I'm with
Yorkshire lass

I suppose
Aussie's yours
she tells me

the teacher's

with the guide
at the next

base camp place
I like her
her spirit

her tight curls
and dark hair
and small bust

we walk back
to the old
caravan

for our bags
and our stuff
keep with me

Dalya says
and we'll see
how it goes

at the next
camping site
and maybe

she whispers
we can share
a whole night.

Terry Collett

Outside Burgos With Mamie.

Outside Burgos
in the base camp
after seeing the cathedral
and other sights

and having a beer
and a burger
at the bar
you went to a small disco

and danced a few hours
then went with Mamie
back to the tents
the moon quite bright

like a new coin
on a black cloth
and Mamie said
I can't remember

where mine is
where what is?
you asked
my tent

my bloody tent
what do you think I meant?
where about were you?
I don't know

we were only there
half hour or so
she moaned
and it was raining

and I was cold
and the girl
I was sharing with
was one hell of a misery

you could with me
but I'm with that young army guy
she looked at your tent
and said

where is he now?
inside maybe
you said
or out getting plastered

can't he find
someplace else to sleep?
she said
don't think he'd do that

some how
you said
well help me find my tent then
she moaned

ok I will
you said
and off you went with her
in the semi dark

walking between tents
trying to discover
her tent
out of so many

wait
she said
after five minutes
I remember we were near

an outhouse
because she moaned
about the smell
of urine and such

and she pointed to a tent

over the field
near a small outhouse
where people

were coming and going
that's it
she said
there

and so she ran ahead
to the tent
and unzipped it
yes this is it

she said excitedly
but she's not here
do you want to come in
for awhile?

you studied her face
and eyes and that
hair of hers
and said

sure why not
maybe she won't be back
maybe she'll fine
some other tent to sleep

not her
Mamie said
she'll be back
the moaning cow

but why she's out
we can at least
get down to kissing
and things

sure
you said
entering the tent

behind her gazing

at her pink hot pants
whatever fate brings.

Terry Collett

Outside Oslo.

Outside Oslo
in the base camp
after showering
you met Moira

in the cafe
for breakfast
and coffee
she was in a mood

about the Yank girl
and having to share
a tent with her
(when she wasn't off

someplace being screwed
Moira said)
and always chewing gum
and those panties

she wears
I've seen more cloth
on a finger cut
she said

I'll take your word for it
you said
she pouted
and stared at you

the finger cut I meant
you said
by the way
are you into

Oslo today?
you asked
mind if I hang along?
sure as long as you don't

talk about the Yank
or football or Mahler
or whoever else
is hid up

in that brain of yours
she sipped her coffee
and ate her breakfast
saying nothing more

and you watched
as she ate
her eyes dark
and deep

her hair frizzed up
after the shower
her tee shirt
holding tight

her tits
and her blue jeans
hugging her thighs
as you'd like to do

later in Oslo
you toured about
the streets
saw the sights

had a beer or two
while you sat
with her
in some bar

she talking of Glasgow
and her job
and her brother
and his girlfriend

and how

she had this awful
wiggly arse
and floppy breasts

and large eyes
like cow pats
soft and brown
and she laughed

and you liked it
when she laughed
it made her seem better
more human

less grumpy
less critical
and had you been
more brave you might

have kissed her
there and then
but you didn't
you just ordered

another beer
and talked of Nietzsche
and Mahler
just to watch

her lips move
and incidentally
bore her.

Terry Collett

Outside The Cinema.

After tea
you went out

into the summer evening
without cowboy hat

or rifle
but your six shooter

tucked in the belt
of your jeans

to meet Helen
under the railway bridge

next to the Duke of Wellington
public house

I thought you weren't coming
Helen said

standing in her summer dress
and holding her favourite doll

Battered Betty
my horse refused to come

so I had to walk
you said

Helen smiled
my mum knows I'm with you

but I mustn't be out late
Helen said

where shall we go?
you asked

let's go and see
what's on at the cinema

Helen said
so you both walked

along the back streets
until you came

onto the main road
and studied the cinema billboards

I saw Davy Crockett here
you said

who's he?
Helen asked

he was a frontiersman
who fought Indians

and wore a bearskin hat
you said

was he here?
Helen asked

it was a film
you replied

oh
she said

she swung Battered Betty
behind her back

from hand to hand
I haven't been

to the pictures recently
mum said we can't afford it

what about Saturday matinee?
you asked

you could come to that
it's for kids only

and it's fun
Helen brought Battered Betty

into her arms
I'm not sure

she said
I could asked your mum

you said
I'd take care of you

I've got my six shooter
Helen put her hand

in your hand
and said

ok she'd listen to you
Helen said

you felt her hand in yours
and hoped no boys

who knew you
saw this or

the following
small lips kiss.

Terry Collett

Over Breakfast 1962.

Even at breakfast
Sheila thinks of John,
even while mouthing
the baked beans with

cut up bacon, he is in
her thoughts, imagining
him across from her,
sitting where her mother

sits eyeing her (she not he)
what's up? Mother says,
her eyes digging into her
daughter's eyes, mood got

you? Sheila disturbed of
John in mind, opens her
eyes wide like one near
blind, nothing, just thinking,

she replies, trying to avoid
her mother's eyes. Her elder
sister beside her says, she
was twisting and turning

all night and calling out.
Calling out what? Mother
says, eyeing the elder daughter,
the one wanting be a nun,

a bit religious, the odd one,
Father had said. The sister
gazes at Sheila, couldn't
make out, wasn't a prayer,

I know. Just a dream, that's
all, Sheila says, recalling
John in the dream, kissing
her in bed, inside her head.

Disturbing dream sounds
like, Mother says, grim faced,
eyeing Sheila once again,
need to say about it, say

what it was about. Won't
you leave the girl in peace,
the father says, prior to him
sipping tea, we all dream,

some of us worse than others,
I dream of thee and that's bad
for me, he says poetically, shy
smiling. His wife is unmoved,

just stares at him. When one's
child is having bad dreams one
needs to know, she says, cold
stoneyfaced. Sheila smiles. Her

father's poetic wit has broke
the spell within her head, image
of John has sped, in case Mother
sees with her ex-ray sight(catlike

seeing almost in the night) . See
the girl's smiling, Father says,
just a dream about school I expect,
some lesson too hard or bored

to tears or other fears. Mother is
unimpressed, but says nothing
more, leaving Sheila to John and
the dreamt kiss as she had before.

Terry Collett

Over Damp Grass 1970

We stopped at Madrid base camp
and I put the book
back in my duffle bag

what you reading?
Miriam said

I took the book out
and showed her

The Apostle?
what's it about?

St Paul you know
the guy who found Christ
on the road to Damascus

o him
she said
why are you reading
about him?

wanted to read
what he was like
and did
I said

she shrugged
and said
everyone for their own
salvation I guess

I put the book away
in the bag

we walked
to a base camp cafe
and ordered burgers
and cokes and sat

at a table together

who you sharing
a tent with?
she said

some young
ex army guy
I said

what's he like?
she said

he moans a lot
about the army
and his mother
and his mother's guy
whom he hates
I said

shame you can't
share with me
she said smiling
but I've got a tubby girl
with me who eyes
all the guys
but the guys avoid

shame
I said
maybe she's all right

o she's all right
but not my type
she smiled
maybe we should
team her up
with that ex army guy
Miriam said
then we could shack up
and have good
night together

I looked at her
don't think
he'll be interested
he's off dames as well
some girl had
let him down
a few months back
I said

shame
Miriam said
it would have been good

I guess it would
I said

we ate and drank
and went back
to our separate tents
to change
for the camp disco later

I watched her walked
with that swaying ass
and I walked back
reluctantly
over the damp grass.

Terry Collett

Over His Latte.

He's only just sat down
in the cafe when she enters
and stands at the counter

waiting to be served. He lets
his latte settle. Allows his
eyes to scrutinize. The waitress

serves the woman in the white
hat and black dress. He notes
her fine figure, the low cut at

the neck, the thin straps over
shoulders. He tries to breathe
in from where he sits her perfume,

but it doesn't come. The woman
orders an espresso and says it
with an Italian accent. He follows

her with his eyes as she walks
to a table alone. She looks like a
girl Modigliani would have painted.

She looks at her watch and then
around the room of the cafe.
She crosses her legs, one over

the other, thigh revealed. He sips
his latte. Wipes his lips with the
back of his hand. Bad habit, mother

would have slapped his hand as a
child once. The waitress delivers
the woman's coffee; he notes the

waitress's fine behind, the hands
serving, the legs touching together.
Then she's gone. Just the woman

in the white hat to study. The way
she lifts the small white cup to her
mouth, her fingers holding delicately,

as if afraid to break. Get a life Brody
would say if he were there. But he's not;
he's away with that girl from the office,

having a lay. The woman in the hat
stares at him, her eyes devour, her lips
part like legs before sex. She looks boringly

away. He sips more latte. He doesn't like
her white hat or black dress anyway.

Terry Collett

Over Summer Love 1962

I sat on the bank
by the pond-
or lake as Yehudit
termed it-

Yehudit lay on her back
with one leg stretched out
and the other bent
with the knee
pointing skyward

I watched dragonflies
skimming
the water's skin
then taking off
zig-zagging
then off
out of sight

that cloud
looks like a swan
Yehudit said

I looked up
looks like your mother
I said

that's not nice
she said
saying my mother
looks like a swan

it's the neck
that does it
I said

she looked at me
smiling
her neck is not

like that at all
she said

or maybe it's the beak
like her nose?

she slapped
my arm playfully
that neither
she said

now the clouds changed
I said
the swan has dissolved
or moved on

she became serious
I thought
I was in trouble
last week
she said

I gazed at her
why was that?

I was late
she said
looking at me
seriously

late for what?
dinner?
school?
lessons?

no I mean my...
you know...
my thingy

I watched
as a duck landed
on the water

and swam towards
the edge

thingy?
I said

it was green
and yellowy feathered
it had a sense
of gracefulness
as it swam

my periods
she said

and that means?
I said
turning to gaze
at her

she sat up
and sighed
I thought
I was in
the pudding club
she said

o I see
I said
taking in
her features
the brown hair
a few loose strands
over one eye
her thigh visible
where the skirt
had moved down

but I was just late
it's ok now
she said
turning on her side

back to normal

I said nothing
it was a science
beyond me
another duck landed
on the water
skimming along
like an airplane
crash landing

must be careful
she said

guess so
I said

the image
of the duck's landing
and her thigh
stuck inside
my 14 year old head.

Terry Collett

Over The Hill.1962

Over the hill
they saw the horizon
of fields and sky
and trees and birds
in the air swooping
and flying high then low.

Yehudit holding
Benny's hand said
isn't it beautiful?

Yes it is
he said
sensing her hand
in his
the pulse of her there
he focused
on the feel of her
soft skin on his
her fingers
about his fingers.

Shall we sit here
and watch the scene?
she said.

If you like
he said.

So they lay down
on the grass
on the side
of the hill
the grass dry
and warm.

They lay there
looking out
then he looked at her

taking in her features
her tone of skin
her eyes
the way her hair
had been brushed neatly.

She turned to face him
what are you thinking?
she said.

We never stop thinking
he said
until we are dead
and maybe even after.

But now
what are you thinking
about now?
she said.

About you
he replied.

Me what about me?
She said.

How I would love
to kiss you
he said.

Why now do you
want to kiss me?
she said.

Why not now?
He said.

Because we have
all this beautiful
scenery to view
she said.

The scenery will
always be here
he said
but we won't.

She looked at him
and leaned forward
and kissed him
on his lips.

Is that what
you meant?
she said.

Sort of
he replied.

They lay there
and gazed
at each other.

He leaned
against her
kissed her lips
and they held together
then parted and sighed
as if at that moment
something of the past
had died.

Terry Collett

Overhead Sky 1962

Sheila didn't talk to Ella
on the way to school

she thinks about John
and seeing him again
despite what
she had promised
her mother and Ella's betrayal
the day before

she waits by the school gates
for John's bus to appear
hoping to see him
and talk with him
before lessons begin

kids pass by
a prefect talks
to a group of boys
kicking a ball at windows

Sheila hopes she can see John
before lessons

she dreamed of him
in the night
and pretended he came
to her room
and entered her bed

a girl comes to her
aren't you coming
into the playground?

no not yet
Sheila says
I'm waiting for some one

the girl goes off

and buses arrive
by the school
and she hopes
his one is there

she watches as kids
descend from the buses
she peers anxiously
looking at kids going by

then she sees him
descend a bus
and her heart thumps
inside her

she blushes and waits
until he is close
he is talking to a boy
by his side

hello John
she says
as he is near her

he stops and looks at her
and the other boy
goes on
hi Sheila
he says
been waiting for me?

she nods
can I see you lunchtime
on the field?

I guess so
he says

she gazes at him
I dreamed
about you last night
she says

he frowns
did you
was I good?

she frowns
can't say here
she says

he smiles
ok see you later

and he walks on
and leaves her
watching him disappear
into the boys' playground
her stomach unsettled
her eyes looking
at the space where he was
and all because
she wants him
and is unsure why
and her feelings darken
like the overhead sky.

Terry Collett

Owl-Hooting Night 1916

In her cold bed
in the attic
which she shares

with the other maid Susie
Polly dreams
that George is there

and has his arms
around her waist
and is kissing her neck

and holding her
close to him
and she breathes in deep

and wants him
and turns to him
and it's not him

at all
it's Susie holding her
in sleep's hold

kissing lips
to her shoulder
in some dream

and Polly sighs
and wants it
to be George not her

and tries to release
the grip on her
by Susie's hands

and be off elsewhere
but she knows George
is in some hospital

some place with shell-shock
and not in his room
upstairs where once

he had her
and she swooned
in his bed

and was had
and had until dawn's
bright light

after the good deal
of sex
in the owl-hooting night.

Terry Collett

Paper

Paper promises, Dunstead said,
paper cups, wallpaper being stuck

up on the wall for the next to last
time, paper tigers, paper to wipe

the ass and best of all paper to
create art, to have it from the heart,

to see it out there, being gazed at,
studied by some bearded guy with

glasses and paper money to buy
the next paper to create and then

if I'm lucky the muse turning up on
time and giving me the big nudge

in the right direction or some paper
picture of some nude dame giving

the long time wished for erection.

Terry Collett

Paper Plane Game 1956

From Banks House
balcony
I finish
the paper
aeroplane

Janice stands
next to me
will it fly?
She asks me

course it will
from up here
I tell her
it's a jet
sort of plane

I hold it
between my
thin fingers
and aim out
at the sky

we watch it
zoom outwards
then circle
then zigzag
downwards in
quick flight

it misses
the milkman
as he sits
on his horse
drawn wagon
full of milk

then skims down
to the ground

and crashes

didn't fly
very good
Janice says
looking down
from the brick
balcony

I guess not
top heavy
I tell her

it would have
made a good
paper hat
she replies
getting down
from the wall
of the brick
balcony

so we go
to get it
down the stairs

try again
Benny it
might fly well
if we try
once again

but as we
descend it
gets soaked by
falling rain.

Terry Collett

Paris 1900

We don't
talk much now.

We sit in the cafe
with our booze
and stare about the place
listening to
the Parisians talking.

He sits there
smoking his pipe
eyeing the girls.

I stare
at all the men.

Lulu he said
that evening
before we left our place
you need to talk more.

About what?

You and me
he said.

What about
you and me?

We don't
do it anymore.

We don't anymore.

Not after those
he's been with.

How do I know
he hasn't got the pox?

I couldn't not after
him being elsewhere.

He eyes them
all the time.

I sip my booze.

Think of the baby
we lost.

I lost more like.

Born dead.

Lifeless
lying there.

There's music playing.

Dancers on the floor.

Show girls.

Showing too much.

He likes it.

Eyes out
drinking them in.

Monsieur veut le sexe
the street girls will say.

After that
we don't anymore.

We sleep side by side
but don't do it.

I couldn't.

Not now.

Another drink?

He says.

I nod my head.

He hails the waiter.

The waiter goes off
with orders.

Edgar talks
in his sleep.

Calls out names.

Girls names.

He'd like to.

Not with me
he don't.

Vous poisson froid
he says.

Maybe I am.

Don't give a damn.

Terry Collett

Paris 1973 (Poem)

That year
in Paris

you took
Dostoyevsky's novel

Crime and Punishment
to read when

you weren't touring
the sites

and you became
so immersed in the book

that you became
Raskolnikov

and killed
the old woman

and her half sister
and looked about the streets

you looked for the detective
Porfiry whom you suspected

was following you about
and as you sat

in the Champs-Élysées
or stood by

the Arc de Triomphe
you thought of all

the famous
who had stayed here

in this fine city
Henry Miller

Ezra Pound
Hemmingway

Debussy
Van Gogh

and that fanatical
conqueror Hitler

with his sick smile
under that

silly moustache
and that evening

your brother
in the hotel room

puked in the bidet
after sour wine

or too rich food
as you looked out

the window on
the Parisian street

to see if Porfiry
was out there

waiting for you
to charge you

with the murderous crime
you didn't do.

Terry Collett

Paris Lovers 1973

Sonya loves
Paris streets
white French wine

fresh French food
and our room
with shutters

now open
allowing
sounds of night

to come in
I put down
my Russian

crime novels
as she lies
naked there

on the bed
some Bartok
on the white

radio
playing out
you ready?

She asks me
lying there
I'm ready

I tell her
turning off
the room light

making do
with street light
entering now

the wide bed
feeling her
beside me

her warm flesh
she kisses
her soft lips

kissing mine
her small hands
seeking out

my pecker
stirring up
the blood line

while my hands
explore her
plentiful

soft ripe fruits
her valleys
her taut peaks

someone speaks
in French tongue
from the white

radio
Bartok's gone
Bach begins

some music
Baroque stuff
we kiss hot

bodies move
to music
sounds invade

our memories

as we start
making love

with streets sounds
and lamp lights
and moon glow

and star shine
and waiting
afterwards

two glasses
with clear ice
of French wine.

Terry Collett

Paris With Dostoyevsky.

Tucking Dostoyevsky's
Crime and Punishment
Into the bedside cabinet
Of the cheap

Paris hotel
Having cleaned
The greasy sink
And bidet

You walked out
On the street
Breathing in
The Parisian air

Smelling the perfume
Of the restaurants
On the side walks
Seeing the sights

Taking photographs
As memoirs
Drinking the wines
And beers

And that fish
With eyes still there
Putting you off
You tried to get out

Of the cheap cafe
But paid for the meal
You couldn't eat
The fish eye

Gazing up at you
Dead eye
Battered fish
And the Left Bank

And night
And you taking in
The sights and lights
And those whores

Sitting in windows
Like gifts
To have wrapped
But not take home

Or the sexy films
You never
Went to see
In those cinemas

You just walked by
Or the Eiffel Tower day
Right to the top
The view splendid

The sight historical
Or those rides
On the Metro
Riding the wrong carriages

Looking out
For the train inspector
Pretending to be Aussies
Giving it the yak

And later
In your hotel room
Taking out
Dostoyevsky

And entering
The Russian world
Of murder and deceit
And being followed

You imagined

By the detective
Looking out
Onto the Parisian street

From the open window
Of your room
Gazing at street corners
And shadows

Or remembering
That French girl
In the cafe
Who served you

With bright eyes
Black and white dress
And white apron
The fine long legs

And wiggling behind
Recalling the old priest
Who once said
Too much sex
Will make you blind.

Terry Collett

Parisian Showering 1973

I look out
on the Parisian street.

Sonya is in the shower
showering away
our sex juices.

It's a fresh morning
I can smell life
and Sonya's scent
which occupies
the hotel room.

We are going
to Louvre today
see some art
eat in some cafe
and drink
in a few bars
then back here
for more sex.

Sounds like a good day
traffic passes below
people going about
their business.

A pretty woman
goes past
neat legs
swaying ass
dark hair flowing
as she walks.

Some French man
talks on the radio.

I look back
at the rumpled bed

a battlefield of pleasure.

My stomach rumbles
with hunger
we'll go to
some cafe nearby
have breakfast
and coffee
and listen
to the music
that oozes
from speakers.

Sonya comes out
of the shower
wrapped in
a big white towel.

I wish
I was that towel
wrapped about her
touching the intimate
parts of her.

Your turn now
she says
and don't be long.

I nod
and take my towel
and go into
the shower room.

She sings softly
some French song.

Terry Collett

Parisian Summer 1973

Parisian summer
I had showered and shaved
except for the moustache
which I kept.

Felt tired
although I slept.

Sonya was
by the window
looking out
at the Paris
street below
from our cheap
hotel room.

The Solzhenitsyn book
lay face down
on the bed
I decided to read
the Dostoevsky book
instead.

She smoked
hand holding
an elbow.

I dried myself
viewing her
fine figure
her behind quite neat
naked feet.

Think of all those
famous people who
lived here in Paris
she said.

Henry Miller

Ezra pound
Joyce and those
great artists
and even Hitler
came briefly
so I read.

Now all
of them dead
she said.

Now we are here
I said
just ordinary folk
who like to dine
and wine and kiss
and poke and joke.

That waiter
last night
in that restaurant
he eyed me
ever so much
she said.

Guess he did
I said
but what's in that
he probably eyes
all the dames
that come and go
then goes home
to his lonely room
and lonely life
or ugly wife.

Guess so
she said
walking back
to the bed
and lying down
stubbing out

her cigarette
in the ashtray
by the bed.

Shall we before
we go out?
she said.

So I lay
beside her
and it was
a Parisian summer.

The room was small
and bed hard
but we did
before we went out
cars hooted
people called
or gave shout.

Terry Collett

Partners In Crime

Lydia
unwraps her
Kit Kat bar
and breaks off
a finger
and eats it

I watch her
like some pup
hoping she
will break off
a finger?
for Benny

it's morning
the sun bright
coming through
the narrow gap
between flats

she bites off
more finger
her small teeth
less white now

want a bit??
she asks me
offering
half finger

that'd be nice
I reply

I take it
and mouth it
and eat it
explosion
of biscuit
chocolate

and sweetness

she eats more
as we walk
through the Square

my sister's
Lydia
informs me

you stole it??

borrowed it
I'll buy one
just for her
when I can

does she know??
I ask her

not just yet
but I will
I promise

she gives me
a finger
of chocolate
I'm paid off

now she eats
the last piece
screwing up
the paper
she puts it
in the small
dress pocket

it's all gone
we the two
partakers
of the crime
lick our lips

and walk on

it was nice
the feeling
the warm taste
chocolate
crisp biscuit

won't she know??
I ask her

not just yet
too busy
in our bed
she tells me
with the Spiv
smart boyfriend

we walk down
the wide slope
from the Square
gazing up
Meadow Row
where the Sun
smiles at us

Terry Collett

Passing Ships 1962

Yiska sees Benny
walking by
the tuck shop
in the corridor

she is with her friend
on their way
to Geography
with Mr P

wait
she says
I must talk
with Benny

and follows Benny
a few paces
then says
Benny

he turns
and sees her
where are you going?
she asks

science
he says
some nonsense
about gravity

and falling bodies
or such
wish our bodies
could fall

somewhere together
she says smiling
me too
he says

Yiska's friend
stood a few paces back
arms folded
a bored expression

on her face
what about lunch recess
can we meet?
she asks

sure why not
he replies
she lingers
feeling a kiss

coming on
her body bubbling
where abouts?
she asks

meet by
the maths block
quieter there
at lunch time

she nods
senses he might
go soon
and grabs

his arm
and pulls him
towards her
and kisses him

on the lips
Benny holds her briefly
feels her waist
then they part

the friend over the way

looks down
at the floor
see you later

she says
he nods
and walks off
in a hurry

to his next class
she watches him go
her body alive
her nerves aglow.

Terry Collett

Pax In Te Mcmlxxi

Pax in te
the young monk said
during Mass
his hands
touched mine
sign of peace,

trees swayed
in the early morning breeze
by the South wall,

Il vento
è il respiro
di Dio
the Italian monk said
as we stood
gazing at the trees,

I cleaned the toilets
after Terce
bucket and mop
and cloths
the smell of disinfectant
in the air,

Dieu est amour
Dom Charles said
l'amour de Dieu
est aussi dans
sa création
we had arranged flowers
by the statue
de la mère de Dieu,

in some cases
silence is dangerous
St Ambrose said
Gareth related
as we sat

on the private beach
of the abbey,

the bells tolled for Vespers
George and I
pulled as we were shown
le campane sono
la voce di Dio,

incense in the church
after Mass
the sound of plainsong
still in the air in echoes,

der Glaube an Gott
ist ein Akt des Willens
the Austrian monk said
I looked at him
but was stumped
by what he said,

faith in God
is an act of will
Gareth said
translating
as he thought best,

peace within
no act of will
just peace
and rest.

Terry Collett

Peacock Girl

The peacocks were behind wire
the sun warm
cloudless sky
and Monica had ridden

beside you on her bike
knowing her brothers
were out with the older brother

you not knowing had gone
to the farm house
to meet them
o they're out

their mother said
didn't they tell you?
no they'd not

you walked to your bike
and got on
where you going?
Monica asked

don't know now
you replied
I can ride with you

wherever you decide
she said
her mother
hands on hips said

don't go bothering Benedict
he doesn't want no girl
hanging on his tails

he don't mind
Monica said
looking at you

her big eyes pleading

don't mind if she comes
you said
giving the mother

a smile
if you're sure
she said
and walked back

toward the farmhouse
her backside moving
side to side

in her flowery dress
and you watched
until she had gone
sure you don't mind

me coming?
no I don't mind
you said

where we going then?
the peacocks again
o I like them
she said

climbing her bike
foot on the pedal
ready for the push off

her sandals open toed
bare feet
the off white skirt
contrasted

with the mauve top
her hair dragged
into a bow

at the back
ready?
sure am
and you rode off

along the track
from the farmhouse
into the lane

between trees
and hedgerows
she followed at your side
keeping up

her eyes seeming
on fire
her hands gripping

the handlebar
white and pink
and the small fingers
holding on for dear life

her legs up and down
pedalling
you felt the wind

in your hair
through the open neck
of your white shirt
pushing down

the jean covered legs
up and down
the lane narrowed

then widened
there they are
she called
the peacocks

she dismounted

and laid her bike
against a tree

and ran to the wire fence
and peered through
you put your bike
by the hedge

and walked over
to where she stood peering
her eyes bright

and fiery
how comes the cocks
are bright and colourful
but the hens are so dull?

she asked
that's how it is
in the bird world

you said
hens are just dull
I'm not dull
she said

holding the wire
with her fingers
making noises

at the birds
am I?
she said
looking at you

beside her
no you're not
you said

nothing dull
about you at all
I'm like a peacock

she said

bright and beautiful
aren't I?
sure you are

you said
you peered
at the strutting peacock
nearest the wire

out of the corner
of your eye
you saw Monica

nose inches
from the wire
call to the bird
her lips pursed

and opening
and closing
her arms soft

and reaching up
I'm a peacock bird
she said
her arms in motion

like wings
her hands flopping
above her head

her feet in dance
stepping
and dancing in turn
you watched her dance

and twirl
Jim and Pete's sister
the peacock girl.

Perchance To Sleep

She remembers how he
Would watch her sleep
His eyes running over her
From toes to the top of her
Head and she pretending
To be asleep taking control
Of her breathing being the
Actress putting on a show
Keeping her limbs just so
And now and then to move
Them as she would in sleep
No doubt move a little shift
About and she recalls how
Once he touched her and
She had to keep utterly
Frozen her limbs stiff trying
To keep him out of her inner
Being and that touch he gave
Lingered over her thigh and
Then moved along it softly
As if he wanted to wake her
Gently not wake her in a start
Not to get all wound up and
Frightened and that time he
Nearly caught her out nearly
Broke up the acting put her
On the spot but she managed
To keep control of her nerves
And limbs and opened her
Mouth just so as to utter
Nonsense words sleep induced
Ramble and he took no notice
And she caught sight of him
Through a slit of her eyelids him
Standing there that stupid look
On his face his eyes wide and
The whites almost drowning
The dark pupils and now knowing
He was out of the room she can

Open her eyes and breathe out
And sniff the air and sense he'd
Been standing there the smell
Of his cigarette breath and his
Lack of personal hygiene and
She moves her limbs and her
Jaw and wiggles her nose and
Toes preparing herself for when
He comes back and she resumes
The show not wanting sex with
Him but not wanting him to know.

Terry Collett

Perfume Left Behind 1963

Mary Moran can I see you
a minute please?
Sister Agnes said

Mary nodded and followed
the nun along the school corridor
walked past the statue
of the Virgin Mary
(no relation)
and into a small office
where the nun
closed the door after them

sit down
the nun said

Mary sat down
crossed her legs
pulled the hem
of her school skirt
over her knees
and looked at the nun blankly

do you know why
you are here?

you asked me to come
Mary replied
fingering
(she hoped secretly)
the rim of her school knickers
into a more comfortable place
unmoving face

the nun sighed
and sat at a desk
and put her hands
into a prayer mode
rudeness and disobedience

the nun said
that's why you're here

Mary looked past the nun
at the Crucified on the wall behind
dark brown wood
suntanned figure
dark nails holding
the hands and feet in place

and rumours of you
spreading rumours
about Sister Lucy
and Father Joseph

what rumour is that?
Mary said
leaving the Crucified
and gazing at the nun

you know
the nun said

how can I know
if you don't tell me
Mary said

the nun slapped the desk top
and said
dont try it on with me young lady
I'm not to be played with

(Mary hoped the nun wouldn't
contact her parents
her da was not in the mood
for bad news right now
and last time the nuns contacted
them about her
he tanned her behind
with his big hand
but that was years ago now
and well she was 14 now

and the hag seemed happy
just to moan so)

rudeness and disobedience?
Mary said
me being such?

the nun nodded her black
and white covered head
yes you Moran
and the spreading
of the rumours

Mary looked at the Crucified again
he hadn't moved
her fingers had sorted
the knickers rim out
to comfortableness

I'm sorry
Mary said
it's my menstrual mood swings
it gets to me and after
I feel so ashamed that I kneel down
in front of the statue
of St Therese and ask
for forgiveness so I do

the nun sat steely faced
her thin fingers joined
forming a kind of church structure

is that so?
the nun said

Mary nodded

then you will see Father Joseph
and confess to him
and see what he says about it
Sister Agnes said
eyeing Mary as she stood

and walked from the room
swaying her small behind

and muttered to herself
there's none so blind
as those that want to be blind
and the girl had gone
an odd smell of perfume
being left behind.

Terry Collett

Perhaps It Will 1975.

Perhaps it will
be better next time
Mrs Ford said.

Benny had just got
in the saddle
and shot his load
prematurely.

It happens
she said.

Benny withdrew
going red
and lay beside her
in the big double bed.

Got over excited
Benny said
usually I'm calm
and it takes a while.

Never mind
she said
just relax awhile.

It would take awhile
to reload after all
his pecker wasn't
some automatic
it was more like
an old musket
which took time.

Smoke?
she said.

Ok
he replied.

She offered him
a cigarette
from her pack
and lit it
and lay back.

When I first went
with my husband
he would shoot
his load before
he was onboard
the prick
he never was
much good
she said.

Benny lay there
inhaling the smoke
taking in
the drab curtains
in the cheap
hotel room.

He listened
to her talk
about her life
what it was like
being an idiot's wife.

All the while waiting
for his pecker
to reload and recover.

He pushed away
the thoughts of her
he had of her
being some small
kid's mother.

Terry Collett

Perhaps Tomorrow

Perhaps tomorrow
I can hang
around with him
Sheila thinks of

the boy John
but after dinner
and bed
and dreams of him

and such
maybe then
it will be that way
she sits at the table

as her mother
brings meals
and she opposite
her brother

and next to her father
on one side
and her mother
on the other

when she sits down
and all Sheila can do
is eat but ponder
on the boy

and what he will say
and she tries
to keep him at bay
in her mind

and thoughts
as she eats
but he keeps on
pushing through

into her thoughts
and being
and her brother says
why the long face?

what do yo mean?
the long face
he repeats
like you've lost

a long lost love
he adds laughing
you do look
kind of miserable

her father says
trouble at school?
no nothing
she says

pushing her thin
wired glasses
up on her nose
where they'd slipped

long lost love indeed
her mother says
she don't need no
love nonsense yet

if at all
Sheila looks
at the clock
on the mantel shelf

the tick tock of it
trying to focus on
the tick tock
bet she's found

some boy to

swoon over
her brother jokes
holding his fork

half way to his mouth
don't know any boys
she says
don't want to either

she adds
good for you
her father says
enough to worry about

with school without
the added problems
with boys
and that lark

young girls
have no need of boys
her mother says
sitting regal in her chair

pushing back
a loose strand of hair
Sheila tries to smile
as if it's all a joke

as if I need a boy
to add to my life
and woes
what woes do you have

her father says
young kid like you?
she says nothing
forking in her meal

hoping the boy
will let her
go about

with him still.

Terry Collett

Petula Said.

Push the boat out
they used to say.

The world's
your oyster
another would say.

Don't count
your chickens
before they hatch
your mother
would say
if you got too
excited about
something
or other.

Look who's calling
the kettle black?
your sister said often
in arguments of intent.

Sticks and stones
may break
your bones
and all that
kind of stuff.

You see
the buses
pass by
faces at the windows
like lost souls looking
out of each one's hell.

I am not
that kind of girl
you told him.

What kind
are you then?

What kind indeed
you muse
watching girls
walk past
on the side walk
their hair dyed
or cropped
or let down
or pulled up
in a bun
or ponytail.

Not that kind.

What kind?
he said.

Not the kind
you think I am
you said
going red.

Girls these days
your mother said
not like when I
was a girl.

Bet they were
some things
don't alter.

Push the boat out
the sea is calm
you'll not drown
won't come
to any harm.

No smoke
without fire.

No lust
without desire.

Terry Collett

Philip Visits Grace 1940

The nurse shows me
where Grace sits
in her wheelchair
out on the lawn
in the afternoon
sunshine.

Her blind eyes
peering up
towards the sun
she cannot see.

A blanket covers
her leg stumps
from view
her hands are in
her lap idle.

Hello Grace
I say.

She turns
her eyes
towards me
away from the sun.

Philip?
she says
reaching out to me
with a hand.

I take her
hand in mine
and kiss her cheek.
How are you?
I say
kneeling down
on the grass
beside her.

Depressed and bored
she replies
squeezing my hand
in hers.

Other patients
sit on chairs
or in wheelchairs
talking to others
or sitting alone
taking the sun.

Shall I push you
around a bit
away from the chatter?
I say.

The scene's
the same to me
where ever we go
she says moodily
sit beside me
go get a chair
she adds.

I go back inside
the ward
and borrow a chair
and take it out
and place it
beside her
and sit down.

Cigarette?
I say.

She nods
that'd be good
she says.

I take out a packet

and take out two
and place one
between her lips
and one in mine
and put the packet away.

I light both cigarettes
with a lighter
and we puff away.

She isn't
very talkative.

I talk of things
I have done
(except what is secret
hush hush stuff) .

She talks of her day
stuck in the ward
in the dark
being washed
and toileted
listening to the radio
on the ward
playing dance music
or talk of news
and war.

I study her
as we sit
wishing I could
take her out again
for dinner or just
to sit in St James's Park
and be alone.

I miss Clive
she says
damn the War
and Dunkirk
why did he

have to die?

I don't know Grace
the whole show
is going to pot
I say.

If I had my legs
I could fend better
for myself
she says.

They did talk
of getting you
artificial legs
when I was here last
I say.

But when
will that be
what with the War
and such
she says.

The sun is warm
and the sky
a bright blue
clouds drift overhead.

I try to sound optimistic
but it sounds quite lame.

Will you make
love to me
when we can?
she whispers.

I blush
but she cannot see.

When we can
I reply

looking up
at the sky.

Terry Collett

Photograph In Morocco 1970

Did you get a photograph
of me standing by the camel
on the beach?
Miriam asked.

Yes I did,
I said,
the two Arabs
didn't look impressed
with you in your bikini though.

I was clothed;
it wasn't as though
I had nothing on,
she said.

No,
but you know
what they're like
with women,
I said.

Bugger them Benny,
I am here on holiday;
what do they think
I'm going to do
wear a long dress
and head scarf
in this heat?

Never mind,
I said,
it is done now,
and I have taken the photo.

Will you send me a copy
of the photo
once we are back in England?

Of course I will
if you give me your address,
I said.

Make sure it is an envelope;
I don't want my parents
seeing me in my bikini,
she said.

I will seal it in an envelope
out of prying eyes,
I said.

We looked out
at the Mediterranean.

The water was calm and blue
and the sky a kind of white blue.

The sun hot and pouring
its heat on us.

Do you miss me nights?
She said.

Of course I do,
but the tents are only made
for two not three,
I said smiling.

She tapped my arm:
maybe when your friend
goes into Tangiers next
we could,
she said.

If he goes,
I said.

Hope he goes,
Miriam said.

And the memory of her
in my tent
the other day
buzzed around my head.

Terry Collett

Picnic With Janice 1956

Janice held the carrier bag
with sandwiches
and two bottles of pop
and packets of crisps
and walked with me
up Meadow Row

she was wearing
a red flowered dress
and white ankle socks
and brown shoes

I was in blue jeans
and a white shirt

where are we going?
she said

thought we'd go
to Bedlam Park
and have a picnic
I said
as the day's dry
and warm
and we're off
from school

I told Gran
I was going out
but didn't say where
because I didn't
know where
Janice said

didn't mind you
going out with me then?
I said

no she don't mind

me going out with you
but she did say
no mischief
Janice said

we crossed the bomb site
by Arch Street
and she talked of her
gran's sister and her husband
and I looked
at the traffic passing
on the New Kent Road

we walked on
and went by
the Trocadero cinema
where my old man
took me often to see
cowboy or war films

we went down
the subway and along
I began to sing
a cowboy song
and she said not to
but I did
and she blushed
and pretended not
to be with me

once out the other end
we walked along
St George's Road

I told her some
old dear near us
had given us her budgerigar
called Billy
as she couldn't
cope anymore
so now we've got it
I said

it don't talk though
so I can't teach
it rude words

just as well
Janice said
after you taught our canary
to say naughty words

I laughed
not funny Benny
Gran thought I
taught him
and nearly got
a smacking

sorry about that
I said
but they were
only words

rude words
Janice said
and Gran wasn't pleased

we walked along
past our school
and into Bedlam Park

where we found
a spot of clean grass
and sat and opened the bag
and began to
eat and drink our wares
and talked
and I ignored
the other boys'
stares.

Terry Collett

Pie Making With Mother.

Your mother rolled out pastry
with the rolling pin
her hands pushing the implement
across the board

and you watched
her floured skin work their skill
backward and forward
under the palms of her hands

the thinning pastry
spreading out to an inch of width
until her hands stopped
and she flipped it over

and spread more flour
upon the board
with a flick and smoothing touch
of her hand

once that task was done
she lifted it to the dish
and eased it around inside
and around the edges

with her fingers and thumbs
working their way
in a circular motion
around the dish

then cut with a knife
the over hanging
unneeded pastry
and put it aside

like an umbilical cord
once the baby's born
as her hands placed in
the stewed apple filling

you said
can I have the left over bits?
pointing to the wasted pastry
left aside

sure you can
she said
moving on with her skill
as you picked up the pastry

and walked away
noticing the sadness
in her watery eyes
and strained voice and words

following you across the room
as you ate the pastry
between your fingers
like a bird of prey.

Terry Collett

Pierce Hearted 1962

Yochana stopped
on the school sports field
at midday recess.

She waited for Benny
to come out after lunch.

You don't look happy
he said.

I'm not
she said.

Did your mother
find out about us?
he said.

No she didn't find out
thank God but she makes it
obvious that she doesn't
want you around again
although I don't think
Dad would mind
Yochana said
looking past Benny
at a group of girls passing.

Why does
she object to me?
Benny said.

You interfere
she thinks
with me and my piano practise
that I don't focus enough
on the music but on you
Yochana said
looking at Benny
her eyes tearful.

But I am not with you
when you practise
he said.

I know but she assumes
that I am thinking of you
and not the Mozart
or Schubert I am suppose
to be focusing on.

And are you focusing
on Mozart and this
Schubert fellow?

She shook her head
no all I can think about
is you and us in the bed
and being close to you.

Benny looked at her features
at her beauty:
I think of you too
he said
but I don't have music
to focus on.

Does she suspect anything
about that night?
maybe she heard us
in the bed whispering?

No she would have come in
and God knows what
would have happened
she wouldn't have
let it slide
Yochana said.

They looked at each other
then she looked about them
and taking his hand

led him onto the field up
to the fence at the top end.

They kissed
just the once
then parted
both wounded
and pierce hearted.

Terry Collett

Placing On Of Hands.

There will be the placing
on of hands. She knows
that, he has done that
before. There will be the

unbuttoning of her blouse,
the slow undoing, one
button eased through
the hole. Then he will

pause, breath in deeply,
then proceed with the
removal of her blouse,
each arm in turn taken

out, then he will place
the blouse on the chair.
Here she will smile, hide
her unease. Then he will

unclip the bra from behind,
she will feel fingers moving.
Her breasts will fall free
once he has taken away

the bra. He will then lay it
somewhere out of her sight.
Next he will take an intake
of breath; she will sense it

on her back, a warm breeze.
Then he will unzip her skirt,
the zip going down over her
ass, his fingers will linger here,

she will feel them, she will
then sigh. Next he will let
the skirt fall to the floor,
trapping her legs in the cloth.

She will step out, one foot
at a time. He will lift her skirt
and put over the back of the
chair and let it hang there.

After a short pause, he will
place his fingers inside her
silk underwear and take down
slow, as if unwrapping some gift.

Next she will step out and pick
them up and place on the chair.
Just her ankle stocking will be
left remaining. She will stand

as he walks around her, his
eyes moving over her, grey
slugs, damp and smooth. Then
he will go. Nothing quite as it

may seem. Each night he will
come, each night the same dream.

Terry Collett

Plan A

I have
a review
meeting

with my
Line Manager
tomorrow;

winding her up
last week
now seems

like a bad idea.
I know how
the game

is played;
last night
I walked her

to her car
because,
she was afraid

of going
to the poorly lit
car park

on her own,
where
she'd left it.

If that
doesn't work
in my favour,

I'll go to
plan B
(Whatever

that is.)

Written by my late son Oliver Collett.(1984-2014)

Terry Collett

Pleasure Bringing.

See she lies
with her bronze thighs
and diamond green eyes,

I am doped on her
drug like induced
in heart and soul,

which role
you going to play?
Huh?
Which role play?

See she turns over
like some young calf
in clover on some
summer's day,

I play no role
but sit and watch
and brew in
that dark
frustrated mood,

see her fruit
that fig
of viper's lush?

Wait my man
view but don't
go blush,

see that my man
calm now
don't shout
hush hush,

take your time
my boy

one step at a time
don't rush rush,

see she spreads
her thigh wings
and Bach softly sings
and pleasure brings,

I lie and watch
and listen cool,

I am no young kid
nor old fool
I listen to her
Bach singing
upgrading me
and pleasure bringing.

Terry Collett

Plus Side

The sandwich lady?
had run out?
of sandwiches?

by the time?
she had reached?
my office.?

Southern Water
has a water shortage.?
There's a lack?

of affordable housing.?
The country's in debt.
...On the plus side?

I've acquired?
an abundance?
of socks?

over the years?
in a variety?
of colours.

Written by my late son Oliver?(?1984-2014?) (?C?)

Terry Collett

Poitiers And Beyond

We were allowed out
of the coach
to stretch our legs
and have a quick look
around Poitiers
in France

Miriam stretched
her arms out
and kicked out
her legs
almost got cramp
she said

I could have massaged
them for you
I said
I'm an expert
at massaging
away cramps

sure you are
she said smiling
but not
on the coach
it's too impersonal

we walked around
Place de Gaulle
looking in shop windows
and cafés and restaurants

how about some coffee?
I asked

if you're paying
she said

anything for a lady

I said

and what did you want
in exchange?

she said
putting her hands
on her hips

who said anything
in exchange
I just want to buy
you a coffee

she smiled
OK if you say so
she said

so we sat outside
a small café
and ordered
two coffees and cake
and the waiter went off

I lit up a cigarette

what's the book
you're reading
on the coach?
she asked

it's called The Apostle
I said

what's it about?

St Paul

isn't he the guy
who fell from his horse
or donkey
when a voice
called to him

at Damascus?

yes something like that
I said

why are you
reading about him?

he interests me
I said

why?

well he went
from being a persecutor
of what we call
Christians now
to actually joining them
and becoming one
of their leaders

enough already
she said
I heard he
was against sex
and all that

I guess
he was not keen
on the idea

and you want to read
about him?
sex is a brilliant thing
without it
no one would
be here
not even that Paul guy
she said

the waiter brought
our coffees and cake

and went off

beside

she said

you weren't practising

what this Paul guy

was preaching

on the coach last night

never said I was

practising anything

but it was dim

on the coach

and most others

were asleep

she ate her cake

and I recalled

the coach radio

playing some Mozart piece

the night before

while she and I

tried to explore.

Terry Collett

Polishing The Silver.

Susie polishes the silver.
She hates polishing the
forks, the bits in between,
the stink of the cleanser.

She'd rather be in bed
with Polly in the attic.
Holding her close, feeling
her body next to hers.

The cold weather offers
a good excuse. Polly'd
say, get off me you queer
git, otherwise. She rubs

the cloth over the prongs,
the stink making her feel
nauseous. Dudman, the
butler will be along soon.

He'll snoop up close to her,
look over her shoulder;
press his body next to hers.
Maids are as nothing, he

often said, pressing his
finger into her back, or
pinching her arse. She holds
her breath as long as she

can; the stink is getting to her.
She thinks back to the night
before, Polly's nightgown
against her flesh, her smell

invading her nose, spooning
close. She recalls the moon
in the skylight, captured like
a painting, the stars spread

like vomit on a dark cloth.
Mrs Gripe the cook called her
a lazy cow over breakfast,
the fat bitch staring at her

with her cow like eyes. She
rubs between prongs, eases
along the handle. She'd love to
shove the fork into Dudman's

arse; push it in with all her
might. Soon the bell would
ring, someone would want
morning tea upstairs. She

breathes out, puts down
the fork, picks out a spoon
and begins the cleaning again,
thinking of Polly, her fingers

caressing the spoon's end,
imagining fingering along
Polly's waist, moving her
thumb into the indentation,

sensing her body move, that
weird overriding sensation.

Terry Collett

Polly In The Dark 1917

George lies
on his bed
in the dark.

I sit in the chair
by the window
curtains drawn.

I could have gone
through to the room
next door adjoined
by a door
where his man
used to sleep
before the War.

He joined
George's regiment
but was killed
just after George's
brain gave way
on the Somme.

I sit in case
he wakes
and panics
if I'm not here.

His parents
are not happy
that I am here
with him
but he insists
I am his wife
not the maid
he used to bed
while home
on leave
and before.

The nurse he had left
after George refused
to have her
in the room
and only me
to be there.

I wish
he was well
and back to how
he was
not this
broken man
who lies on his bed
in the dark
moaning through
another nightmare.

I peer through
the slit where
the curtains meet.

I see a narrow
wedge of field
and trees and sky.

I wonder what god
it was who brought
George back
but left
his man to die.

Terry Collett

Polly Strips His Bed

Polly strips back the sheets
where Master George has lain.
She folds the white sheets and
lays them on a chair. She lies

her head on the pillow where
his head has been. She sniffs
and smells him. Closing her eyes
she imagines she's there beside

him and he has her in his arms,
his lips against her flushed cheek.
She imagines they are in bed
together when dawn's light breaks

through the shutters and Susie
the other maid enters and wide
eyed she mouths a huge round O.
She opens her eyes; the pillow

is vacant beside her head, just
a small indentation where he had
laid his head the night before.
She fingers into the pocket of her

white apron a few black hairs she's
discovered on the white pillowcase.
She strips off the pillowcases and
puts them with the sheets. The bed

is now stripped of all coverings
and is left to air. She imagines as
she stands that he is still there,
laid out unclothed, skin all bare.

But in reality she knows he has
gone of to war as he has before.
She hopes he will return alive
and in one piece; no missing

limps or blind or gassed as some
have been she's read; but most of all
she dreads him laid out cold and damp
in some foreign field lying still and dead.

Terry Collett

Polly's Thoughts Of George.

He's gone off to war once more.
Polly has seen him leave from
an upstairs window. Master George
in his smart uniform getting into

the family car. He looked up at her
and took off his hat. No one else
looked thank God. Now she has
to sleep in the attic with Susie again

and not with George and his
warm loving ways and beautiful sex.
She stands by the window until
the car is out of sight. No more sex

for her tonight. Susie had the sulks
for the days she slept alone, the
cold sheets, the lone pillow, none
to hug and hold against the cold.

Polly walks from the window with
her mop and bucket and enters
the room where they'd lain the
night before and mops the floor.

She imagines he is still there in his
bed, the pillow embracing his dark
haired head, his eyes soaking her in,
drinking her up. She wants now to

imagine him putting his hands about
her waist, squeezing, kissing her neck,
the damp patches on her skin. War
mustn't maim him or kill him, she

mutters, moving the mop, war must
not take him from me. The bedroom
window is open to the morning air.
She leaves the mop and sniffs the

pillow where he lies no more. Her
cheek lies where he lay; she can sense
his smell, sniff him into her head, wanting
him back and whole, not lying in No Man's

Land wounded or dead. Dudman the butler
calls her name, along the passageway,
his footsteps treading, bellowing like a
cow in labour, she grabs the mop and

mops away, saves her thoughts of George
and love and sex for another day.

Terry Collett

Pond Date.

Yehudit sat by the pond.

The morning was warm,
sunny, white puffs of clouds
drifted overhead. Benny lay
on his back beside her, eyes
closed, hands behind his head.

She gazed at him. Not sleeping,
eyes motionless behind lids.

Resting he'd say. She took in
his blue jeans and off white
short-sleeved shirt, open necked.

She looked away, back at the pond.

Drakes and ducks swam. A swan
was over the far end. Elegant.

Can be vicious. Suppose they
can be. She put her hands around
her knees, fingers entwined.

Her skirt just over the knees.

Green stockings. Itchy. She
sniffed the air. Flowers, farm
smells over the way, water smell.

She looked at the long grass
behind her. Some months back
they'd been there. She gazing at
the sky, he on top of her. His
hazel eyes, looking into hers.

His quiff of hair on his forehead.

She liked that, the way it moved

as he did. She listening for sounds.

Footsteps in the grass, old broken
branches crunched under foot.

Voices on the wind. Wonder if
we would have? Maybe. Another
time. Too soon. She looked away,
back to the pond. The swan was
nearing the ducks. Circles of water
spread over the pond. There was
that time further in the woods,
dense wood, tall trees, bushes.

Unexpected. Suddenly they were.

She wondering: was this how it was?
He eyes closed, moving in a motion,
entering, sensed him. Her coat on
the ground, cushioning. The tree
tops swaying, his quiff of hair,
clouds moving slow overhead.

She looked at him beside her,
eyes closed, his breathing slow,
but regular like one who dozed.

Terry Collett

Portia In Florence

We were in
the Santa Croce
in Florence.

My mother
was talking
as she often did
about the process of things
and how
the capitalist system
would come to an end.

I switched off
and noticed Odette
walking nearby
one of the chapels.

She was alone
her cousin
must have been
elsewhere(thank God) .

She saw me
and blushed
but walked
towards us
in her white blouse
and blue jeans.

My mother paused
her Marxist talk
and asked Odette
how she was
and where
her cousin was.

Odette said
her cousin was with
the novelist

who was staying
at the same pension
as we were
and who talked
endlessly
about her books
and her plot
for her new book
set in Florence.

I noticed
Odette's breasts
pushing
against the cloth
of her white blouse
and how her eyes
seemed to light up
when our eyes met.

My mother began
her lecture
on Italian art
and the corruption
of the Catholic Church.

I wanted my mother
to go elsewhere
so I could be alone
with Odette
and capture
each aspect of her
and never forget.

Terry Collett

Practising Night 1962

Did you sleep well?
Yochana's mother
asked Benedict
at the breakfast table
next morning.

Yochana sat opposite;
her father sat
at the other end.

Yes,
very well,
Benedict said,
looking at Yochana shyly,
then at her father
who was reading
a newspaper.

Good,
that is
what I like to hear,
the mother said,
eyeing Benedict,
then Yochana.

Benedict smiled
weakly.

Yochana had crept
to the bedroom where Benedict
had been place,
making sure her parents
were asleep first,
her parents snored
so it was a good sign
all was clear to move
across the landing
to the room carefully,
and close the door softly.

Benedict was surprised
to see her enter the room,
and close the door
and leaving them
both in darkness,
he was even more surprised
when she entered
the bed beside him,
and snuggled up to him.

Must be quiet,
she said,
or Mum will hear.

He lay there
feeling her
touch him.

She unbuttoned
his nightwear
and felt around.

Do you want to?
She asked
in a whisper.

Want to what?
He asked,
gazing at her outline
in the light
from a street light.

Kiss,
she said,
here,
out of their sight.

That is a good
room and bed,
the mother said,
breaking into

Benedict's thoughts,
we have guests there
when we have any.

Yochana gazed
at Benedict,
she had been unnerved
creeping across
the landing to the room
where Benedict was,
but she wanted to
be with him,
be near him.

They had kissed
in the bed together,
she had unbuttoned
his nightwear,
then didn't know
what to do next,
so kissed him.

They lay there
beside each other.

They listened
for sounds.

He kissed her.
He felt her thigh.

Felt unsure
of himself.

Sometimes we have
guests who come
after concerts,
the mother said,
Yochana will give
concerts one day,
won't you dear?

Yochana looked
at her mother,
dismissing the image
of Benedict
beside her in bed.

Yes,
I hope to,
she said.

Yes,
she is a good pianist,
Benedict said,
I have heard her
at school.

Practice and practice
is what she must do,
the mother said.

The father said nothing.

He turned another page
of the newspaper.

Yes,
practice,
Benedict said,
that's the thing,
eyeing Yochana,
thinking of her and him,
practising,
practising.

Terry Collett

Preferable Changes

Dalya met Baruch in Oslo,
a small cafe in a back street;
he was eating a cream cake

and coffee. She was fuming
over the Yank bitch that she
shared a tent with back at

base camp. It's like sharing
with a scented skunk, she said.
Baruch listened, the fiery girl

sat opposite him, stirred her
latte, spat out words. Baruch
was halfway through the Gulag

book, the Solzhenitsyn eye
opener on the labour camps
of Russia. Dalya's gripe seemed

pretty shallow; her language
left little to the imagination,
rough words, hard chipped,

chiselled out of rock sort of thing,
he thought, watching her mouth
move the words. Always about

the men she's had, Dalya said,
as if I cared a monkey's. Baruch
forked in more cake, fingered

off cream from his upper lip
and licked. They'd picked up
the American in Hamburg,

squeezed her into the overland
truck with the others. And oh,
yes, where shes been, Dalya said,

she's been under the Pope's
armpit, no doubt. She sipped
the latte, stared at Baruch, her

eyes dark blue, her lips thin, her
hair dark and curled. Maybe she
has, Baruch said, but what's it to

you? I have to hear her jabbering
on in the tent night after night,
Dalya said, and me trying to get

to sleep. You can always swap with
me, he said, she can share with
the Aussie prat, who's in with me.

She didn't reply, but looked at her
latte, stirred with the plastic spoon.
And what would my brother say?

He'd tell the parents when we got
home. Baruch knew her brother
wouldn't have minded, he was often

drinking and drunk till blinded.
Baruch had only suggested it in
jest, nothing really meant, but she
was preferable to the Aussie in his tent.

Terry Collett

Pre-Raphaelite In A Cafe

The dame in front of you
in the Italian cafe
with the Pre-Raphaelite hair,
stirs memories
of the Brotherhood
and college,
and the tale
of Liz Siddel
posing for Ophelia
in a bathtub
full of water
in winter,
afterwards getting
very ill and severe cold
or pneumonia;
her old man
blamed Millais
and threatened
legal action,
so Millais paid
the doc's bills.

The dame is slim,
slim hands,
fingers holding
the mug of coffee.

You study her
momentarily,
sipping your latte.

Tale bellezza,
tale bellezza.

Then some older dame
comes in,
and they hug
then they both leave.

You sip and stare,
wishing
she was still there.

Terry Collett

Pretended Not To Care 1955

Benny and Helen
got off the bus
at Camberwell Green,
and Benny showed her the shops,
and they looked around;
he at the toy shops
looking at guns and holsters,
and rifles with pictures
of cowboys on the packet,
and she at dolls and prams,
and skipping ropes;
then he showed her
the hospital where he was born
which was a way further along
a long road.

That's where I was born,
he said, showing her the hospital,
pointing it out.

Why were you born there,
and not Guy's hospital?
Helen said.

Because my mum lived
in Dulwich then,
and not the Elephant,
Benny said.

O I see,
said Helen, wide-eyed
through her thick lens spectacles.

I was born in Guy's hospital,
Helen said.

They stood watching for a while,
then they walked back
to the shops again,

and found a cafe,
and went in,
and Benny bought them both
ice creams, and they walked
to Camberwell Park,
and sat on one of the seats,
and ate their ice creams.

I was in another hospital
when I was about 6 weeks old,
Benny said.

Why was that?
Helen said.

I had a twisted gut,
Benny said,
and nearly died.

Helen gazed at him:
her eyes big and shocked.
Did you?
she said.

Yes I was baptised
in the hospital,
and my aunt,
and some medical staff
were my godparents,
Benny said.

Glad you didn't die,
she said.

Me too,
Benny said,
couldn't have bought
these ice creams then,
or be sitting here with you.

And I wouldn't be here,
because Mum would

never let me come
this far on my own,
and then I wouldn't
have seen it,
or the hospital
where you were born,
Helen said.

They sat in the park
and ate their ice creams,
and then Benny showed her
the cinema he came
to sometimes,
a real fleapit,
he said,
but they show good films.

Can I come with you next time?
she said,
if Mum'll let me.

Sure you can,
Benny said.

She kissed him
on the cheek,
and he hoped that no boys
from school saw the kiss
in case they thought
him a cissy,
but it was a good kiss
he supposed,
as far as he knew.

But what was a 7 year old
boy, having been kissed
by a 7 year old girl, to do?

He pretended it wasn't there,
and pretended not to care.

Prettier Than Helen.

Janice you thought
prettier than Helen
more refined

whose voice
was softly spoken
as if her words

had been fresh baked
in an oven
in her mouth

and her hair fair
and well groomed
but Helen had

that down to earthiness
that brought her
closer to you

and something about
her thin framed
thick lens glasses

made her seem
more lovable
to your boyish world

and she stared at you
through them
and smiled

that shy smile
and said things
with a rough edge

as if she'd bounced
the words around
before she uttered them aloud

you can come to tea
and we'll have bread and jam
and a big mug of tea

or if mum's remembered
lemonade
she said at playtime

in the playground
out of hear shot
of the other boys

who kicked ball
or who swapped cards
or threw marbles

along the ground
or fought battles
with imaginary swords

or shot pretend bullets
from rat-a-tat guns
and she said

to entice you more
you can see my new doll
my dad brought back

from the store
ok
you said

sure
and she smiled
and her nose creased up

and her glasses moved
and some small place
in your chest thumped

like furniture being dropped

or a bed being bounced
in some small hotel

and you watched her
go off to play skip rope
that thin framed

thick lens glasses
working-class
school girl.

Terry Collett

Prior To The Dance

Watching the ballerina
tying her ballet shoes
preparing for Swan Lake
you remembered

that time in London
when Judy was away
for the week in Italy
and you were held

by the black dog
its teeth holding
onto your soul
going to the coffee bar

in Leicester Square
sitting there
gazing out the window
watching the people

feeling the dark mood
deepen
waiting for time
for the ballet to begin

at Covent Garden
then you are there
sitting in your seat
surrounded by others

well dressed
high talk
posh tones
and you thought

you saw Judy
in the faces
that were there
even one

of the ballerinas
seemed to be her
the same hair
the figure similar

and when the lights lowered
and darkness held you
you thought of her
beside you

her perfume
her soft voice
but some other dame
sat there some brunette

some thin bitch
dressed in blue
and yellow
then the music began

the Tchaikovsky
the black dog biting
and Judy in Italy
and you stuck there

at the ballet
some other time
some other year
and you watched

as the ballerina
having tied on
her shoes
stood and prepared

and stared
as you sat
thinking back
mixing it

with that depression dog

of black.

Terry Collett

Promise Made And Kept.

She stood looking out
Across the small lake
With the late afternoon
Sun reflected in the water
And you beside her your
Hand in hers the sound of
Rooks from the high trees
A slight breeze touching
Tall branches and she said
Softly this is our lake this
Is ours to view and sit beside
And be together and promise
Me you'll not come here with
Another she said looking from
The water into your hazel eyes
Promise me that and cross your
Heart and hope to die and you
Saw the two vivid reflections of
Yourself there in her bright blue
Eyes and you said yes I promise
I'll never come here with another
And cross my heart and hope to die
And you never did even after she
Died of cancer and the lake you
Think has her there standing now
Gazing ghostly across the water's
Skin thinking maybe of you both
And those days of love and youth
And both of you sitting and kissing
Beneath the vast sky's blue roof.

Terry Collett

Protecting Girl 47bc

Aquila comes and visits
with her endless talk
about her husband
and his importance to Caesar,

where he goes
and what he does,
and Amy is nearby
looking and watching,

I see her jealous eyes on her,
and I feel prized and
loved and protected.
Aquila has airs and graces,

has that way
of tossing her head
and throwing out
her arms and hands;

but it is Amy I watch,
her my mind thinks of
as I talk with Aquila.
In the small spaces

Aquila allows me,
I talk of Marcus,
and what he does
and where he has gone,

(not far enough) ,
all the time my eyes
scan the room for Amy,
search her out if she

is gone too long.
Don't you trust her,
Aquila says,
that slave girl of yours?

Up to mischief is she?
No I just like to know
where she is,
I say,

habit I suppose.
O Annona you are a one,
she says,
let them be,

slaves are what
they are,
the market is
full of them.

I listen to her voice
rattle on,
but it Amy
my mind is on,

her my mind's
thoughts dwell on,
taking in each gesture
of her hands,

crease of her face
for smile or frustration,
her attention to detail,
her eyes speaking

to me and her slight
nod of head to say
she understands.
As Aquila talks

of her husband's
prowess in bed,
I think of Amy
and me and the love

and kisses and not

of Marcus and
his shafting,
but Amy there

in my bed,
she holding and kissing
and there at my side,
her breath on me,

her hands feeling
me in and out.
Aquila lies
on the coach,

her hand supporting
her head,
staring at me
as I talk about Marcus

(habit not love) ,
what he has achieved
(bored me) ,
and made my life (tedious) .

She laughs like a hyena,
her spittle flies
from her mouth
when I express

something humorous,
detail a joke or reveal
about Marcus's shortfalls.
Amy is close,

waiting near,
her face expressionless,
her eyes searching me,
that slight wink

and I know all is well
with my slave,
my love,

my protecting girl.

Terry Collett

Pump Pump Heart 1961

I had finished weighing the milk
at the farm then walked home
with one of the cowmen.

What do you want to be
when you leave school?
he said.

I want to be a cowman
I said.

No you want to get
yourself a proper job
he said
this don't pay much
and you'll be stuck here
tied to a cottage
any ways
he added
you're a Londoner
you will find something
better in town.

He left me then
to go into his cottage.

I walked on
to my parents' cottage.

My mother was in the kitchen
preparing vegetables for dinner.

Jane came for you
she said.

Where is she now?
I said.

She said she'd meet you

by the water tower
Mum said.

I walked back
along the lane.

Jane was standing
by the water tower
she waved when she saw me
I waved back.

Your mum said
you were up the farm
and wouldn't be long
so I thought I'd
wait here for you
Jane said.

We walked along
and up the narrow path
up towards the Downs.

How are you getting on
at the farm?
she said.

Ok I helped get the cows in
from the field then weighed the milk.

Do you like the work?

Yes I do
I replied
can't believe a London boy
could get into it so quickly.

We stopped by the large hollow tree
and went inside
and sat on a ledge.

Back to school tomorrow
she said.

Yes don't remind me
I said.

I already have
she said.

We gazed at each other
then kissed then moved apart.

There was an odd pump pump
inside my heart.
Benny and Jane in 1961

Terry Collett

Purity Of Snow.

There's a purity about
falling snow, Yiska said.
She was standing by
the window of the locked

ward, snow was falling,
trees captured some in
their branches, fields
were blanketed. I stood

next to her, gazing out,
smelling soap, stale
perfume. She stood in
her dressing gown,

open at the neck, holding
a cigarette between two
fingers. See they have
allowed you to dress,

she said, looking at me.
Yes, but still no belt or
shoelaces, I said. Do you
blame them? After your

history of attempted hanging?
No, I guess not. She looked
back at the snow. I can't
even have a bath without

one of the nurses sitting in
there with me, she said, in
case I slit my wrists in the
bath again. Red water.

Something dramatic
about red water. I sniffed
in her cigarette smoke.
Calming. I can't believe

he jilted me at the altar,
she said after a few moments.
Me standing there in my
white dress like some doll,

and he didn't show. I wouldn't
have jilted you, I said. It
wasn't you I was going to
marry. But thanks anyway.

Undone. Undo-able. The past
like a locked door to a room
you want to go back to and
change the furniture around.

Her smoke entered my lungs.
I felt it ease me. If it wasn't
for the fact that the ward is
locked, I would be out there

in that whiteness, standing
there, arms outstretched,
mouth open, she said. If I
get low can I borrow the

belt of your dressing gown?
I asked. Only if you distract
the nurse when I bath next
time, she said, gazing at me

with her drugged up eyes.
Sure, each waits until the
other dies. There's a purity
about falling snow, she said,

gazing back at the scene
outside. I stared at her: the
thin white abandoned bride.

Terry Collett

Pushing One Leg Anne

Push me
through the avenue of trees

Anne said
I'm pissed off with the kids

asking how I lost my leg
and so you pushed

the wheelchair
along the avenue

out of sight of others
away from their childish chatters

and ball games
and cries of want and woes

go on you skinny arse
push push

she muttered
and you pushed on the handles

with all your might
over the dry grass

and she rocked
up and down

and side to side
until she bellowed

this will do small fellow
rest me here

and you let go
of the handles

and puffed for breath
and looked at her

sitting there
in the wheelchair

with her bright eyes
and black hair

and she pulled
your hand towards her

and laid it on her one leg
and said

that's your reward
for pushing me

and she rubbed your hand
over the red skirt

the soft texture
warming the skin

you watched her hand
holding yours

her other hand holding
the side of the chair

sensing her softness
beneath the hardness

and brashness
but saying nothing

just taking in
the sensations and newness

and she said
just as well Matron

hasn't seen this
or it'd give her

such a flush
and she laughed

and let go of your hand
and your hand lingered

over her thigh
like a bird set free

waiting to take
to the sky.

Terry Collett

Quid Est Amor.

Quid est amor?
the monk read on
but I looked
at his greying
tonsured head
how the sun
made it shine.

Dio e uomo
the Italian monk said
un po 'meno degli angeli
and what is man
that God should
care for him?
Gareth said
in his neat Italian.

Sunlight
on the orange
brickwork
of the abbey
in the afternoon
and I helping
to pick apples
in the abbey orchard
doing as shown
by Dom Charles.

Dieu a tant
aimé le monde
the French monk
said to me
as I helped him
in the side chapel
to arrange things
for the Mass
qu'il a donné son fils.

La peine pour

le péché est en effet
nécessaire mais
ce ne devrait
pas être une
préoccupation
sans fin
Gareth said
quoting St Bernard.

She lay there
on her bed
spread like
an opening flower
and I she said
to plough her field.

The French monk
quoted Plato
les hommes sages
parlent parce qu'ils
ont quelque chose
à dire les fous parce
qu'ils doivent dire
quelque chose.

What is love?
she said
kissing me
all over
in her bed
the answer rattled
like a pea in a pod
around my head.

Terry Collett

Quiet Please 1957

Quiet please
Mr Finn said.

The class
became quiet.

Benny at the back
with Jupp sat
staring at the blackboard
where the teacher
had written a number
of paragraphs on
the Great Plague
of London 1665
in white chalk
with red chalk
to illustrate names.

I want you now
to copy this down
Mr Finn said.

Jupp raised a hand
in our exercise book?
he said.

Yes in your
exercise book
Mr Finn said
gazing at Jupp
with a sense of pity.

Benny gazed
at the blackboard
with a sense
of excitement
(rare for him)
and began to copy
in his own scribble

what was written neatly
on the blackboard.

Jupp whispered
what a bore
who gives a monkey's
about a bloody plague
and especially in 1665
why that's history.

Quiet Jupp
Mr Finn said
pointing at Jupp
with a ruler.

Jupp took up
his pen
and began to write
what was on
the blackboard.

The bit about rats
on the ships
brought to mind
for Benny
the rat he'd seen
on the balcony
back home that day
running swiftly along
by the wall.

The coal man
managed to stamp
on it with his big
black boot
and blood oozed
over the balcony
and his black boot.

Lydia who had been
with him screamed.

Now in class
it seemed unreal
like something
he had dreamed.

Terry Collett

Quiet Pond 1962

Pond's quiet,
you said,
as we lay on the grass
by the pond
under the afternoon sun.

Yes, unusual,
I said.
And it was
most unusual;
usually there were ducks
and swans and moor hens
gliding expertly across
the water's skin.

I would, you said,
but I can't:
it's Mother Nature's week.

They say you need oxygen
to climb Mount Everest,
and to cope
with the beauty of you,
I needed oxygen too;
not just your eyes and smile
and lips and body and hair,
but all of you,
capturing my eyes
and stare.

Life is precious,
not always understood
until it's gone
into the great gulf
of death. Your death
years later swallowed by cancer,
took me back to the pond
and us and the summer of kisses.

We lay on our backs
and gazed at the sky.
Our hands touched,
the birds of sky witnessed us,
flew overhead.

They still fly,
but you are dead.

Terry Collett

Quinn The Twin 1962

Quinn
was a twin
his sister went
to St Clare's
a school for girls
who wanted
to be nun
when she was 21.

But he came to us
a school for boys
and girls
and to my class.

He was a tall
plump kid
with dark
thinning hair.

He sat
next to Brody
who smelt
of bubblegum
and Brylcreem.

What's your sister
look like?
I said.

She's like me
without the dark
thinning hair
he said.

How comes
she went
to an all
girls' school
and not here

with you?
I said.

My parents thought
an all girls' school
might be better.

They're
probably right
I said
can't trust
boys here.

He nodded
guess so.

Why does
she want
to be a nun?
I said.

She always has
since she was 6
and saw our aunt
who's a nun.

I see
I said
what about you?
you want to be
nun too?

No I thought
about being
a priest
though
he said
seriously.

So is that why
you don't come
to assembly

with the rest of us
you're
a Roman Catholic?
I said.

He nodded
yes all
my family are
but the Roman
Catholic school
is too far way
for me to go.

I see
I said.

I showed him
the girl I liked
up on
the sports field
who was
playing netball
with her class.

She was wearing
a short green skirt
and yellow top
and now and then
as she jumped up
a sight of green
underwear.

Quinn looked
away shy.

I stood
and gave
a steady stare.

Terry Collett

Quinn's Photo 1962

Quinn brought
a photo of him
and his twin sister
to school.

He said it was taken
the summer before
while staying with
an aunt and uncle
by the sea.

His sister
was better
looking than him
slim not plump
and her hair
was straight
and blonde.

I thought it
a shame
she was going
to be a nun
at 21.

She looks cute
your sister
I said.

Guess God
wants her
to be a bride of Christ
he said.

What will she do
as a nun?
I said.

Pray and contemplate

and be virginal
he said.

Sounded boring
I couldn't see her
as boring or praying
and contemplating
all day.

Is she sure
she wants
to be a nun?
I said.

Yes since
she was 6
she has wanted
to be one
he replied.

He tucked the photo
in his jacket pocket
as the teacher for Maths
came along
the passageway.

Other kids
were standing
yaking.

Quiet please
he said.

Silence
came upon us.

We followed
the teacher into class
and sat at our desks
and got out
our books.

I tried
to bring to mind
Quinn's sister
and her good looks.

Terry Collett

Quite Alone 1940

It is morning.
I heard birds sing earlier.

Used to look out
and see them
before my blindness.

The ward is busy,
voices calling,
bodies rushing past,
smell of disinfect
and body waste.

I lay back on the pillow
and wait for someone
to put me on the commode
and see how
my leg stumps are,
they ached something
awful in the night.

I hate being dependant
on others, that nurse
in the night I had to call
seemed rushed and said
of a terrible air raid
with many casualties.

Near here? I asked.

Jam factory, girls burnt
or injured in the blast,
the nurse had said.

I wonder if Philip
will come?

Each day seems
a slide down a long

dark tunnel with no light
to welcome, just an echo
of voices calling for me
from empty chambers
and cries from bodiless
voices as I slip by.

I need the commode,
I call, as a body rushes by,
swish of uniform,
won't be long,
a voice replies.

Hands pull back
the blankets, lift me
and undress me
and place me
on a throne,
then leave me,
quite alone.

Terry Collett

Rachel And You And The Day Trip

It was a day trip out
to some seaside place
arranged by the Gospel church
for kids whose parents

were poor
and having got on the coach
you sat in a seat
by the window

and waved at your mother
standing on the pavement
along Rockingham Street
and she waved back

then this girl sat beside you
who you didn't know
and she smiled and said
all right if I sit here?

sure
you said
and looked back out
at your mother

and waved again
and she waved back
and you thought
who is this girl?

and why is she
sitting next to me?
and she looked at out
the window

and waved to her mother
who started talking
to your mother
and they both waved back

to you and the girl
and you said
do you want to sit
by the window?

and she said
ok yes that'd be nice
and so she got out
and you got out

then she got in
and sat
by the window
and you sat

down beside her
and then the coach
started up
and drove off

and you both waved
at your mothers
until they were out of sight
and the girl turned

and said
I'm Rachel
this is my first time
to the seaside

and you said
you can walk around
with me if you want to
and she said

that'd be good
I don't know
anyone else here
and so she did

all day

walked around with you
along the beach
and on the sands

making sandcastles
and in the cafe
where they took you all
for a meal

of fish and chips
and she talked
and talked
and smiled

and laughed
and once she took
hold of your hand
and it seemed

for a while
that she was happy
at least it seemed so
by the width of her smile.

Terry Collett

Rain Falls.

Rain falls gently.
Spread the glory
of flower buds.
Light green paint
around the sun

Terry Collett

Rain In Paris

It rains while we are in Paris
we get drenched

so we walk back
to our hotel
(some dump place
small as a cupboard)
and get out
of our wet clothes

she turns on the radio
(she has to have music
while undressing)
some French dame singing
about whatever French dames
sing about

she says
I'm going to shower
want to come in?

why not
I say

so we shower together
body close to body
body touching body
soaping up
each the other
then showering off

then we get out
and towel ourselves dry

and now some
French guy is singing

he's singing about love
Sonya says

l'amour est l'amour

as we dry I notice
a tattoo on her upper thigh

not seen that before
I say

seen what?
she says

that tattoo
pointing to her thigh

o Benny
I have had that
for ages
she says

I've not see it before
I say

maybe because it is dark
when we make love
and you are too busy
at the time to study
my tattoo
she says smiling

I get closer
to have a better look
and it says
Du kan kysse hvis du ser
what does it mean?
I ask

it says you can kiss
if you see
or something like that

and can I?

you usually do
in the dark
so why not
in daylight
she says

so I do
and well you know
what happens
one things leads
to one thing
and that leads to another
and so we do

and still the radio
plays music except now
it's playing some aria
from Bizet

and I kiss each area
of skin I can
wet lips on dry skin
until it's wet skin
and wet lips
and wet everything

and still the opera
goes on
and the fat dame
can still sing.

Terry Collett

Rain In The` Air 1956

Our canary died
Janice said
as she and Benny
walked along
Bath Terrace.

How did it die?
Benny said.

I don't know
Janice said
Gran found it
at the bottom
of its cage
this morning.

What did you do
with it?
Benny asked.

Gran put it
in a paper bag
and dropped it
in the refuse chute
of the flats
Janice said.

Shame
Benny said
I used to like
talking to your bird.

I know you did
but you taught it
to say bad words
Janice said.

They came to the junction
of Rockingham Street

and walked by
the coal wharf
on their left.

Will you get
another bird?
Benny asked.

Don't know
depends on what
Gran wants to do
or whether she'll
just sell the cage
Janice said.

They walked along
the narrow road
behind the cinema
and Benny stopped
by the bomb site
and picked up
small stones
for his catapult
and put them
in the pocket
of his blue jeans.

Doesn't your mother
mind you having a catapult?
Janice said.

No as long
as I am careful
with it
Benny said
I only hit tin cans
with it not birds
or windows.

Can I have a go
some day only don't
tell Gran she

doesn't approve
Janice said.

I won't
Benny said.

They walked on
into the New Kent Road
and on to Bedlam Park
to go to the war
museum there.

The sky
was a dull grey
and the smell of rain
in the air.

Terry Collett

Rainy Day Under Trees

She stood with you
under the trees

the rain falling hard
the Sunday church service

had been a wet affair
the walk home together

then the bus
to the end of the road

and she said
Is it ever going to stop?

her hair was limp
and hung over

her forehead
her eyes bright

her complexion white
Sure

you said
But I've built an ark

in the woods behind
just in case

and she laughed
and took your hand

and said
How any animals

have you got so far?
Couple of woodlice

and beetles
and the odd worm or so

and you smelt
the scent on her

the warmth
of her hand

in yours and you both
under the trees

out of the rain
but the drops fell through

You remember that time
we went to the hay barn

to keep out of the rain
and we were wet through

and took of our clothes
and lay in the hay?

she said
snuggling closer to you

No can't say I do
you said

and she smack your arm
and said

Oh yes you do
and there was a break out

from the sun
through the branches

as if you say
I' still here

I'm trying to get through
and she looked at you

and you smiled
and said

I can still smell the hay
and you lying there

beside me
and the damp clothes

hanging over the hay bale
and you and I close

and warmth
and then she put

her finger to her lips
and shushed you

and drops of rain
came onto her head

Let's keep it kind of holy
she said

and kissed your damp ear
her lips like a blessing

soft skin on soft skin
and she moved away

and the rain eased
and you both moved out

into the woods
pleased.

Terry Collett

Randshaw Muses

Randshaw stands in a shop
Behind a young woman.
He studies her figure.
Nice legs. Bit thin maybe.
Not as thin as Minnie's.
Matchsticks. He moves closer.
She is next in line to be served.
Nice bottom; firm, but not big,
Not floppy; not like Bet's. Hips good.
Childbearing Mother would say.
The young woman moves forward
To be served. The waist goes in nicely.
Put arms about easy. Squeeze.
Would do if she were mine.
She moves nearer. Perfume,
Not cheap. Powerful, but not
Overwhelming. He wants to
Feel her hair, but holds his hands
By his sides. He sniffs the air
Around her. He cannot decide
Which brand. He holds in
The scent of her. Closes his eyes
Momentarily. Tries to imagine
Waking up beside her. He opens
His eyes and she's gone. Yes, Sir,
Can I help you? The till girl asks.
Maybe, Randshaw says,
Maybe. Let me see...

Terry Collett

Reached For The Sky 1997.

Nuala sat watching the TV
with her husband Brian,

Saturday afternoon,

football on, loud,

he talking of his team,
beer can in his hand,
cigarette in an ashtray
on the table,

she thinking of Una,
of what they'd done
the Saturday before
at her place in Dublin,

de winger's a bit av a prat
Brian said,

Nuala felt his thigh touch hers,
thought of Una's thigh,
wishing it was hers,

but de feckin' goalie's
master wan we've 'ad in awhile
Brian went on,

she lifted her glass
of vodka and sipped
and wanted to feel
Una's fingers along
her thigh again,

me da alwus said de team's
make it wan day but still
they've not done so
Brian said eyeing her
a sparkle in his eyes,

she smiled at him,
but inwardly Una was there
touching her,

poor Brian she shouldn't
be thinking of anyone else
but him but Una's there,

he sipped his beer
his eyes on the screen
large as life,
feck me yer man said
a near goal dat if ever
dare wus wan,

Una met her
at the company do
and Una said
'oy aboyt a draink?

Nuala had said
yes why not?
and one thing lead
to another thing,

whaen oi played football
i'd not 'av missed
loike dat idjit
Brian said,
Oirlan' is master
he added,

Nuala gazed at her husband,
at his lips, his nose,
she loved him,
had since they were kids
at school, but Una
had lit up something in her,
stirred her in a way
she'd not known before,

draink up Nuala
once games done we can
'av a bit av shag
Brian said smiling,

she looked away,
sipped her drink,
thought of how Una
had undressed her
and had kissed her,

Brian gulped down the last
of his beer and reached
for another and undone
the can and sipped,

she gazed at him
his eyes glued to the TV
one hand holding
the beer can his other hand
on her thigh,

Una had touched her
an electric rush
went through her
and nigh on wet her wide,

GOAL Brian shouted
standing up
his hand off her thigh
reached to the sky.

Terry Collett

Read The Book

Dolce said to read the book.
Don't skip any pages though,
Lizzy; I want you to read it
From cover to cover. Ok lover,
You said and examined the
Book's covers; the hard leather,
The well sewn pages. You knew
He wrote it without his name on
The spine with the title. It was
As he spoke, the words flowing
Across the page, the meaning
Carried on and over and into
Your head. You stopped on page
Nine; he'd written about the night
He'd screwed you five times, although
No name was mentioned, you knew
It was you. Even the bed and room
Were as it had been, written right
Down to the creaking springs and
The man next door banging on the
Wall with his darn shoe. You read on
Carrying that image with you, the way
He'd caught it all with the right words,
Hammered that night right home like
Some crucified butterfly onto the page
And into your head. You paused at page
Twelve. Some paragraph about some
Lark in the bushes in the park after dark.
That didn't ring true, at least not with you.
Who was the woman? Who was the screw?
You closed up the book; refused to look
Or read anymore; you wondered who it
Was he'd had that night in the bushes
Beneath the moonlight. Maybe it was just
Poetic licence made up to make it sell well
And the cash machines ring loud and true.
But the bitch in the bushes wasn't you.

Reading Bukowski's Poem.

You ran your finger
along the spine

of books on your bookshelf
and took down

Betting on the Muse
by Charles Bukowski

and opened it
at random

reading the stories
and poem after poem

then having
nothing better to do

you got to page 292
and a poem titled

the good soul
and laughed out loud

like a dog barking
in dead of night

and your shoulders shook
and your wife said

What's so funny?
and you said

Oh just words
and she turned over

and back to sleep
and you put down

the book
beside the bed

and turned out
the light

laughing at the poem
inside your head.

Terry Collett

Reconnected 1997

A week has gone,
and Nuala has not
heard from Una,
where she had gone,
or where she is.

Then just after
her husband Brian
had gone for work,
the phone rings,
and she picks it up,
and Una's voice says,
is it you Nuala?

Nuala nods
to the phone stupidly.

Yes, where are you?

Dublin, I've got
a new place,
a bedsit.

Where in Dublin?

Una tells her.

How long
you been there?

A few days,
Una replies.

Why didn't you
ring me before?

I was with a friend,
and didn't want
to worry them,

and I wanted somewhere
we could be together,
Una says.

Nuala pauses,
looks at the phone,
I was worried
about you,
she says.

Not easy finding
somewhere, and this
friend let me stay
a few days,
and I was so upset
about leaving your place,
and your husband
gawking at me
most of the time,
I couldn't
do it anymore,
Una says.

Who's your friend?
Nuala says.

A university friend,
Una says.

Did you bed her?
Nuala says
without thinking first.

No I didn't,
it's a he actually,
Una says brittlely.

Sorry I shouldn't
have said that,
I should have
trust in you,
not doubt,

Nuala says.

There is silence
on the phone.

Nuala looks
at the phone piece.

Are you still there?
she says.

Yes,
Una says,
still here;
please don't doubt me;
I'd not doubt you.

Nuala stares
at a photo of Brian
on the sideboard
next to the phone,
and turns him away
to face the wall,
I'm sorry,
I was worried about you,
and having Brian
asking questions
all the fecking time
asking where you were,
and where you went,
it got to me,
Nuala says.

When can you come?
Una asks.

This afternoon,
I can come then,
Nuala says.

You sure?
Una says.

Yes, this afternoon,
Nuala says.

I'll be ready,
Una says
in her sexy voice.

The phone
goes dead.

Nuala stares at it,
and puts it back down,
and begins to cry,
and knows,
but doesn't know why.

Terry Collett

Red Ink

Her many suicides.
Scrawled writing

on the card,
its ink

is bright red.

Terry Collett

Regrets 1967

Regrets
O those are
useless things
Nima said
have no value
to the now
of our being.

Benny listened
but said nothing
as they walked along
the Embankment
by the Thames.

What can you
do with regrets?
nothing they sit on
your conscience
if you have one
and haunt you.

They sat on a bench
and lit up cigarettes.

Do you regret
meeting me?
she said
gazing at Benny.

No never
said I did
he said.

So why regret
anything?
all things happen
so that is it
she went on
puffing out smoke

now and then
her words smoke
engulfed.

Had a bad day
at the hospital?
he asked
looking at
the Houses of Parliament
over the River.

Too true I have
she said
too bloody true
had enough of them
all the nurses
fecking quacks
trick-cyclists.

She sighed
and puffed on
her cigarette.

What happened?
he asked.

Said I couldn't
have a weekend pass
because my mother
damn her
middle-class morals
said I might zap
some drugs or sleep
with some druggy
although she knows
I am with you
I've told
the bitch that.

Benny looked
at her.

She has your
best interests
at heart
he said.

Nima gazed at him
whose side are you on?

No one's side
just saying
she may have
he said.

They were silent
for a few minutes
she musing on
the hospital
and the enforced stay
statemented because
of the drugs
and mental instability.

He wondering
if the Ornette Coleman
Jazz LP he'd bought
earlier on was as good
as he had read.

Their conversation
and dried up
like something dead.

Terry Collett

Regrets She Said.

Regrets are sad
like a cancer
that won't go away
she said
always there growing
like big black spiders
in my sleep.

The psychiatrist sat
in the chair
by the couch
where she lay.

We all have regrets
he said
part of the human make-up.

But mine are mine
she said
things I've said
or done or not done
or said and I can't
get them out
of my head.

The psychiatrist leaned
forward hands together
bald head lowered
a watch chain looped
from his waistcoat pocket.

What regrets have you?
he said
lifting his big
brown eyes to her
seeing a scenery of thigh
in the spilt of her skirt.

She looked at her feet

the black shoes
I got up the duff
and had the baby
done away with
she said
peering at the scuff marks
on the toes of her shoes.

The psychiatrist
raised his eyes to her head
the way her hair
was parted in the center
brown coloured.

And that is one
of your regrets?
He said
noticing her eyes
staring into space
the narrowness of her face.

Saw this picture
of a baby at the age
mine was when
I had it done
she said
looking at him
seeing his plump features
the lips moving.

Many women
have abortions each year
he said
some have regrets
some do not.

I didn't go see
my mum when she
had cancer
never visited her
and she died
she said.

Why did you
not visit her?
he asked
feeling a mild headache
beginning.

We had a row
about me having
the baby done in
and we didn't talk after
she said.

He nodded grim faced
and silenced
an inner laughter.

Terry Collett

Remembering Judith.

You used to sit
on the cross beams
drilling holes through
for the wiring

circa 1965
on some building site
where Clifton
had left you

with the tools
for the jobs
he wanted done
hand drill

screwdrivers
hammer
chisel
and enough electric cable

to reach
the North pole
in the background
transistor radios

were blasting out
pop music
Bob Dylan
the Beatles

The Rolling Stones
and here and there
other guys
plasterers and painters

and bricklayers
all doing their job
when and where
they could

and you wondered if Clifton
would remember
to pick you up
after work or if

you'd have to get
the bus home spending
your own money
which he seldom repaid

(the tight ass)
but sometimes
you thought of Judith
and what

she was doing
and whom
she was seeing now
thinking back

to the days
when she was yours
the bright days
the days you spent

by the pond
(which she
called the lake)
the kissing

the loving
the sun over
the pond
making shadows

and bright places
or the days at school
on the sports field
after recess

her words

her wisdom
her bright eyes
and smile lingering

as you bored the hole
in another cross beam
yours hands aching
from the constant turning

and Dylan singing
Blowing in the Wind
from some transistor
across the way

another hole to bore
another boring day.

Terry Collett

Result.

I had an injection yesterday
which is supposed
to prevent me

from getting
pneumonia
again;

then the nurse tried
to sell me magic beans
which I declined.

I did however
walk away
with a white coat,

a stethoscope,
keys
to a '67 Ford

Country Squire
Station Wagon,
several pairs

of rubber gloves,
a handful
of sugar cubes

& a life size
model skeleton...
result!

Written by my late son, Oliver Collett.(1984-2014) I edited.

Terry Collett

Retreat To Jail Park 1958

Ingrid's old man
was dead
his throat cut
in some drunken brawl

and left out
in the street
to bleed to death
I took Ingrid to Jail Park

to get her out of the flat
and give her mother room
to breath and get
organizing things

about a funeral
and answer
police questions
at the station

we crossed Bath Terrace
side by side
kids on bikes or scooters
rode by

a woman pegged washing
on a line on a high balcony
guess you'll miss him
I said

Ingrid looked ahead
yes I will I guess
she said
miss him not

beating you
and your mum
I said
he didn't always

do that
she said
he was till my dad
and he loved me

we entered the park
and walked along
the paths between
flowered gardens

funny way of showing it
I said
she looked at me
still my dad

she muttered
your brother and sister
left because of him
will they come back now?

I expect so
she said
for the funeral
and see how Mum is

and help with things
we entered the play area
and made for the swings
we got on a couple of swings

and began to push off
with our feet
who cut his throat?
I asked

don't know
she said
the police didn't know
we swung high

I noticed the sky

was a bright blue
white clouds
like woolly sheep

will you stay
around here?
I said
guess we will

she said
miss you if you left
I said
will you?

she said
sure I would
I said
I swung as high

as I could
my feet seeming
to touch clouds
maybe we can

marry one day
she said
we're only 10 years old
I said

plenty of time for that
she was swinging higher
than me now
her drab green dress

flapping in the updraught
guess so
she said
her voice carried off

in the air
her dress blew
up and out

but I didn't stare.

Terry Collett

Richmond Replay 1965

Tilly went to Richmond
the same time
you went for the day,
Benny's mother said.

Did she?
Benny said,
trying not to react,
trying to pretend
it was news
to him, too.

Yes her mother said
in passing,
his mother said.

Fancy that,
her being there
and me not knowing,
he said.

Yes, but I suppose
it is a big place though,
his mother said.

Yes it is sort of,
Benny said.

His mother carried on
with preparing dinner
and said no more.

But she knows I bet,
Benny mused,
walking out
of the sitting room
and up to his bedroom
to change out
of his work clothes.

Just as well
Tilly's mother didn't know
or there'd be hell to pay,
he mused,
having changed
and standing by the window.

Tilly had stayed
at her uncle's place
while he was away
and Benny had
visited the day
and they looked
around Richmond
then made love in the bed
in the spare room
before he returned
on the bus home.

Birds were in the orchard.

The sun was orange.

The sky a blue
becoming red.

He smiled
as he replayed
the scene with Tilly
in his head.

Terry Collett

Right O He Said.

And he said to her:
now come along now,
this is not the end,
there is always
a tomorrow,
there is always
a new love and life,
the old life
dies each day,
we are born again
each dawn.

She sipped her drink,
looked at him.

What boat did you
come off of, huh?
Look I don't want
to do anything,
I've had enough of men
to last me a life time,
I just want
to have a drink
and think
or not think,
you know
what I mean?

He sipped his drink
and looked at her:
OK look
I was just asking,
just seeing
if you might,
a guy's got
try his luck
or try at least,
you know we don't
live forever,

and if you won't
then there are
plenty of dames who will,
he said.

There are
are there?
well go find
another dame,
but remember
I was the one
who bought
your last drink,
she said,
looking at him
beside her at the bar.

I bought the last drinks,
he said.

Did you?
she said,
looking at her glass.

Yes I did,
I recall the bar-keep
looking at me
with those big
dark eyes of his
as if to say:
this is your last
you drunken bastards.

Did he say that?
She said,
looking at the bar-keep
at the other end
of the bar, serving
some girl in red
with blonde hair,
whom he was
chatting up

at the same time.

No I thought
he thought that
the way he looked at me,
he said.

She swayed a little:
look I will
if you are gentle with me,
and don't fall
asleep on me,
she said.

I never fall asleep
on a dame,
he said.

You did last night,
she said,
fell asleep afterwards
all over me,
and I had to push
you off of me,
you big lump.

Did I?
he said,
don't recall that,
he sipped the last
of his booze.

She looked
at her empty glass:
what now then?
She said.

Another drink?
He said.

She shook her head:
no pal, no more booze,

back home and to bed.

He nodded drunkenly:

OK,

he murmured,

right o,

he said.

Terry Collett

Rita Relates 1928

You sat
on the back bumper
of Howard's old truck
with faded flower
patterned dress on.

He seemed happy
you being there
holding your hand
gazing at the horizon.

Open neck
white shirt
black trousers.

Quite the gentleman
you thought
you off
for the day
from the store.

The weather fine
sun in the sky
and his sister
took a photo
with her old camera
box like thing
she'd decided
to bring.

She was
the chaperone
you guessed
just to make sure
nothing happened
that ought not.

He spoke
of going

to New York
and trying his luck.

But all you
could think of
was his sister gone
and sex
in the back
of the truck.

Terry Collett

Riverside Talk 1964

Milka and I cycle
from the farmhouse
to the riverside
and park our bikes

against the hedge
and walk beside the river
and sit on the grass
and look

at the passing water
that was a close thing
she says
if Mum had found

your handkerchief in my bed
I don't know what
she would have said
and I only just

found it in time
and she let me
make my own bed
I lay on my back

and stared at the cloud formations
I guess you could
have said you borrowed
my handkerchief

I say casually
Milka stares at me
o sure I just borrowed
Benny's handkerchief

although I have thousands
of my own
she says
she would have put

one and one together
and have come up
with us in bed together
and you would have been banned

(if not killed by my dad)
from the house
and I would have been
God knows what

they would have
done with me
I daren't think of it
she says

but she didn't find it
I say
you did so problem solved
she continues

to stare at me
eyes firmer
seemingly darker
that could have been

the end of us
she says
I'd never have been
allowed to see you again

that's if I had survived
in one piece and not
beaten to a pulp
she looks away

breathing heavy
hands by her side
staring at the river
where was the handkerchief?

I say

under my pillow
under my bloody pillow
she says

staring at me again
how did it get there?
I ask
how the hell do I know

when you were shafting me
I suppose
she says angrily
a large rook flies past

a cloud formation
looking like a dog's head
appears above us
that looks like

my dog's head
I say
pointing to the sky
what?

she says
the cloud formation
looks like my dog
she looks up

at the clouds
does it?
yes especially
around the ears

I say
she reclines on the grass
beside me
breathing heavy

her small tits
rising and falling
as she breathes

sorry about the handkerchief

I should have been
more careful
I say
it could have caused you

real trouble and me
a black name
and maybe a punching
she turns her head

and stares at me
I love her eyes
I could drink them dry
I think as I gaze at her

I suppose I could have said
you gave it to me
as a keepsake
Milka says

Mum likes you
she'd believe only
the best of you
and if she'd been younger

she'd probably fancy you herself
how disgusting that sounds
she adds smiling
I kiss her cheek

cows moo near by
in a field
more rooks fly overhead
I'm glad we're here

she says
sexually
but'd be happier
in my warm bed.

Road From Paris 1970

The coach had left Paris
and it was still dark
apart from street lights
and they became less

as we got
to the countryside
music was coming out
the coach radio

some Mozart
some French
radio station
Miriam sat next to me

her head slowly
resting on my shoulder
her curly red hair
tickling my cheek

she'd swapped with Bill
at the restaurant
in Paris
he sat with

some other guy
whom she's pissed off
beside her
music makes me sleepy

she said dreamily
don't mind me
resting on you
do you?

no sure
go ahead
I'd said
and she had

I thought of my mother
and her parting words
be careful
of your wallet

and your morals
and changed
your underwear
every day

I had my wallet
safety-pinned
in my coat pocket
and I changed

that morning
at the Dover B&B;
Miriam was nodding off
the slight sway

of the coach
meant she slowly
drifted into me
I saw her reflection

in the darkened
window beside me
her eyes closed
her mouth open

my shoulder
her rest
I studied
the pink

reflection cleavage
of her soft breast.

Terry Collett

Roberts' Talk 1962

Roberts came over
a big kid
broad shoulders.

We were over
by the far end
of the sport field
waiting for
the PE teacher
to come over
and arrange us
for teams.

See that wood
over there
he said
pointing
with his stumpy finger.

We looked over
to woods near
the playing field.

We nodded.

Well I had some
bit up there
the other lunchtime
he said.

Bit?
said Trevor.

Girl you dimwit
nice piece
quite willing
and all that.

All what?

another kid asked.

Sex
if you know
what that is
Roberts said.

What was it like?
Trevor said.

Like falling
into a warm bath
Roberts replied.

The PE teacher
was crossing
the field.

The kids
looked towards him.

Roberts made
gestures
with his
plump hand
and smiled.

I shrugged
my shoulders
and looked away
wondering
what position
the PE prat
would want
me to play.

Terry Collett

Room Is The Same.

Room is the same,
she knows, even
the curtains hang
similar to those she
had when it all began.

The bed has the
memories soaked
into the very fabric
and springs, she
bounces minutely,

to set the memories
in motion. She stares
out at the window's
view, the same old
houses and trees as

was before. She sat
here once listening
for the door. He'd come
back, he said. Would
have it set out in sexual

play, she would wait
until told, just her, the
bed, the silk flowered
curtains, the plain walls.
He came many times

after, played his games,
licked and kissed and
had her when and as
he pleased. She listens
to the wind now that

plays in branches of
the trees, that shakes
the window frame, that

seems to whisper her
naughtiness, echoes

her name. Yes, the room
is, she sighs, the same.

Terry Collett

Rosary Fingering 1963

Rosary
fingering
Martha sits

in the church
eyeing up
the young priest

who's just come
tall and thin
and dark haired

in the front
pew praying
she watches

no longer
fingering
the dark beads

getting up
from her pew
she walks down

to the priest
kneeling there
taps his black

cloth shoulder
excuse me
Father Bede

(she'd heard his
name mentioned
in the school)

the young priest
opens his eyes
stares at her

(he's nice eyes
she muses)
what is it

my young child?
the priest asks
sitting back

on the seat
Martha sits
beside him

do you know
just how tall
the Christ was?

she asks him
the tall priest
looks at her

looking for
a punchline
some meaning

no idea
probably
6 foot so

he tells her
quite tall then
she mutters

tall as me
no taller
he informs

her priestly
and had beard
and moustache?

she asks him

he studies
her two eyes

soul's mirrors
he's been told
probably

black and long
he tells her
why'd you ask?

he asks her
I'm to be
when older

one of his
many brides
Martha says

I love Him
think of Him
all the time

Father Bede
lends a smile
o that's good

(wondering
to himself
if the girl's

the full pack)
but do I
if some prat

of a boy
asks for sex
tell him to

go feck off?
she utters
sincerely

Father Bede
blushes so
puts the word

from his ears
best he can
remain pure

for Our Lord
as His bride
he informs

red in face
so I will
Martha says

and walks off
swaying hips
the thin priest

watches her
walk away
red faced still.

Terry Collett

Rosary Pushing

Sister Elizabeth,
the plump nun,
clothed in black and white,

thumbs rosary beads,
prayer on each bead,
finger holding,
thumb pressing onward.

Sancta Maria audi nos,
or so she hopes,
eyes closed,
kneeling,
knees numb.

Feels warmth of sun
through cell window,
dawn comes,
birds heard,
breathes in stale air,
night sleep.

Her Bridegroom comes,
at Mass, He will enter her,
on her tongue He will come,
the sacred host.

She senses wood under thumb,
smoothed by prayer and use.

Her mother spanked her as a child
for her mispronunciation
of the Pater Noster,
remembers,
word perfect,
word upon word,
tongue to tell,
libra nos a malo,
yes, that she recalls.

And that priest,
the old one,
his touch where he ought not to,
never told,
did not relate,
who'd believe?

The thumb pushes another bead,
another prayer hits the air,
sunlight through window shines,
warms,
comforts,
brings kiss
of maybe of her Groom.

Her cell is not her prison,
but her resting place
for sleep or study,
her own,
but not so termed,
Bridal room.

Terry Collett

Rose Like

The small slit.
The thin knife

does its job;
the wrist is crimson

like an opening rose.

Terry Collett

Rows Again 1957

Enid slept badly.

Voices came and went,
winds blew,
trains shunted.

She woke up slowly
to a grey morning.

The voices had stopped,
just the birds singing.

Had the rowing stopped?
Where was her father?

She sat on the side
of her narrow bed.

She could still feel where
her father hit her.

Back to how it was:
him hitting them both.

She got up and walked
to the bedroom door.

She listened for sounds,
but nothing was there.

She opened the door
and looked down the hall.

Had he gone to work?
Had her father gone?

She walked down the hall
to the small toilet.

Went past their bedroom,
the green door still closed.

Went to the toilet
and sat on the seat.

She felt the chill bite
at her naked feet.

What would Benny say
when she told him all?
Things don't change he'd say:
your old man's a suck.

Benny often said
your old man's a suck.

She heard fresh voices;
her father was up.

She heard his footsteps.

The door handle shook:
is that you Enid?
Her father called out.

Won't be long, she said.

You better not be,
her father replied.

They were arguing,
both her mum and dad.

She finished quickly
and opened the door.

Good about time to,
her father shouted,
what you been doing,
laying bloody eggs?

He went in and shut
the door behind him.

Enid saw her mum
by her bedroom door,
her thin arms folded,
her hair in curlers.

Best get washed and dressed
and don't be too long,
her mother told her.

Enid washed and dressed,
then ate her breakfast.

Still her parents rowed
loudly from the hall.

What would Benny say
when she told him this?

Your old man's a suck
and give her a kiss.

Terry Collett

Rozzer And A Bomb Site 1957

We were on a bomb site
off Harper Road
Enid and I and two
other kids
when a rozzer came along
and called us off

Enid was wide eyed
and scared her
old man would find out
and whack her one

what are you
doing on here?
the rozzer said
bomb sites are
dangerous places
now what's your name?
he asked one
of the other kids

Donald Mallard
the kid said

and you?
he asked
the other kid

Mickey Harvest
the kid replied

and you?
he asked me
hands in my jeans pockets

Benny Good
I said

and you?

he asked Enid

she's Enid Blyth
I said before Enid
could open
her shivering lips

he wrote them down
in a black book
you all live
around here?
he said

we nodded

well don't get on
here again or I'll
be visiting your parents
get it?
he said
now get off and away

I was looking
for stones
for my catapult
I said

I don't care
if you were looking
for flowers
for your old gran
now get
he said

we began to walk
off the bomb site
the other kids
walked down
Harper Road

Enid and I walked down
Rockingham Street

why did you say
my name was Enid Blyth?
Enid said

never tell a rozzer
your real name
I said

but those other boys did
she said

no they were giving
him false names
Donald Mallard
I said
is a run on Donald Duck
because a Mallard is a duck
and Mickey Mouse
as there's a harvest mouse
see?
I said

she opened her mouth
to say something else
but didn't
and we walked
on through the Square
to see if her old man
was home or not

he wasn't
so we went in her flat
and her mum made us
lemonade and we sat
in her lounge
out of the sun
and in the shade.

Terry Collett

Rubber Of The Rosary

I am the rubber of the rosary,
said Sister Paul, my finger and
thumb move over the beads like
a humble worm, I utter prayers

like a hissing snake, my breath
rising in the air like a frightened
bird. The silence enfolds me like
my lover's arms, its peacefulness

kisses my ears like my lover's lips,
the touch of the thick silence my
lover's fingertips. His breath breathes
upon my neck, His requests utter

In my ears, His love echoes through
my being. The darkness embraces
me like a black cloth, my eyes see
shadows in nightly prayers, my sight

fails me with its tired eyes, the late
nights, the on knees prayers, the
going up and down the stairs to
and from the chilling chapel. I am

a denier of self, my self denial is
my weapon against the selfish I,
my way of keeping the ego in its
place, the surging want of wants

kept check, each fight for self denial
takes its toll, the selfish I wants its
revenge, seeks its way through my
daily walks, my day to day talks,

the moment of eating, drinking,
sleeping, the dreaming nights.
My lover comes at my least request,
His eyes see me in the darkness's

hold, His fingers find me and release
my bonds, His words echo through
the blackest night, His love warmer
than the sun's kiss, His nearness

closer than air to lungs, than stars
to sky. My Lover comes, my prayers
are heard, my soul is lifted up, my
finger and thumb push round the black

beads, He is there, noting each whispered
prayer, he lays me upon my bed, rests
me down, His holy lips healing my soul,
granting peace to my all too human head.

Terry Collett

Ruby's Loss Of Child

I tread on eggshells, says Ruby,
my life is the fearing of the heavy
steps, the trudging where others

fear not to tread; I see dangers
where some see none, where
the shadows become real, where

shades become demons, I am
the fearer of the bogeyman. I hear
laughter in the nightly dreams;

hear the sounds of baby's cry,
the empty cot, the vacant spot
where baby lay, the moonlight

on the chilling room. I see my baby
as it used to be, its mouth around
my dug, its lips on the teat sucking,

the sound of that is my aching wound,
the lance in my side, the hammering
nails. Nine months I carried the

precious gem, my womb the dwelling
place of my dearest love, the moment
of the birth my deepest joy, the echoes

of my happiness ring in my mind when
I'm sucked and drawn by the depressing
nights, the lowest ebb of the sea of loss.

The smallest coffin carried they said,
the men in black, the coffin white,
crowned with roses, the smell of death

covered by blooms, the kisses of my
lips on the coffin's lid, the sleeping
baby held within, the tiniest shroud

to hold her warm, to keep her safe
on her journey's way. They sang hymns
to my deepest loss, their voices like

pinpricks to my ears, the sounds seeping
in my skin, eating at my grief. In my dreams
my baby's safe and sound, in my dreaming

arms not underground, I hear the baby's
words, the chuckling laugh, the open eyes,
the sucking mouth, the first steps across

the floor, the first day at school. I carry my
loss like a heavy cross, my baby forever in
my thoughts, the vacant spaces where baby

was seems to hold her ghostly scent, her
shadowed presence is my mind's pretence,
my need for holds and kisses. Bring back

my baby; let me hold it once again, here
comes the night and the ever present pain.

Terry Collett

Rude Words Chalking 1957

Lydia sat
on the red painted
brick front doorstep
of her parents'
ground floor flat,
in a mood,
fuming,
elbows on her knees,
chin on hands,
staring out
at the Square.

Behind her
in the flat
her parents rowed:
he arguing he had
come home drunk,
yes, but it had
sung to her:
I'll walk you
home again Kathleen,
and she(the wife)
saying: and all
the fecking Square
could hear you,
and I'm not Kathleen,
so who the fecks
this Kathleen?

Her big brother Hem
was out pulling wings
off butterflies or flies
or teasing the girls
on the block.

Her big sister Gloria
snoozed hangovered
in the bed snoring.

Lydia wanted
Benny to come by,
wanted his ear to hear,
his voice to calm her
and make her pleased.

The baker drew up
in his horse-drawn wagon
and got off
and got loaves
from the back
and took them
to the flats he knew.

She watched him walk,
and his horse
stand still nose
in a nosebag, eating.

The rows indoors
continued.

The horse stood
still eating.

Benny came across
from his parents' flat
upstairs,
hazel eyed
and quiff of brown hair
and a smile.

What are you
doing sitting there?
He said.

Waiting for you,
she said.

What's up?
He asked.

She nodded back
towards the flat
behind her
and rowing voices.

What's it about?
He asked.

Dad came home
drunk last night,
singing to the new moon
and my mother
on the doorstep
and an unholy hour,
she said.

And so?
Said Benny,
what's new?

He sang I'll walk
you home again Kathleen
and my mum's
not Kathleen,
Lydia said.

Where we going?
He said.

Not Southend or Edinburgh
that's for sure,
she said,
somewhere to get
away from this
until the air is cleared.

London Bridge
train station watch
the steam trains,
have glasses of milk
and biscuits?
He said,

I've some money.

She nodded,
looked back
the rowing flat,
sighed and took his hand
and walked through
the Square leaving
the rowing behind,
and down the slope
to get the bus
to the station.

Benny by her side,
walking and talking,
watching boys
on the wall,
rude words chalking.

Terry Collett

Rugskin And Wife 1935

RUGSKIN AND WIFE 1935.

Jackson Square
them sitting there
separated by
two feet or more
of space.

Rugskin
and his wife.

She sitting there
with that flowerpot
looking hat
and coloured
check dress
looking over her
spectacles.

Him
slouched there
black hat
thin framed glasses
gaunt features
unsmiling.

She thinking
of the new dress
she wanted
but he wouldn't buy.

Said it didn't suit her
would make her
look fatter.

You saying I'm fat?
She said
gazing at him
over the glasses.

Didn't say
you were anything
said it'd make you
look bigger
the way it would
cling tight to you
he said.

He thought of her
how she was
when younger
slim and blonde
and a figure
to make him sweat
at nights.

Now he
just sweats
at nights.

She gazed at him
how he was once
a tall trim
keen eyed
young man
whom the other girls
said was
a good catch.

Now she
felt herself
having
been caught.

I liked the dress
she moaned
it would have
suited me.

He looked at her
through his glasses.

Too young for you
he uttered
don't want to be
mutton dressed
as lamb.

She looked away
looked at the kids
over the way
at games
and play.

Terry Collett

Sad Faced Clown

Words are masks,
what lies behind them?
What the real things
they try to convey?

Max sits on the side
of his bed in deep thought.

She has gone
with whom he slept,
but didn't sleep;
just sex and words
and sex, then gone.

Now he feels
as if sleep
has fled and gone
followed the dame
who carries his sperm.

But not love,
not much besides
there resides.

He has known love,
not that kind
of simple fare:
here now gone there,
but a deeper kind
of body, soul and mind.

But rare, rare as pearls
in a sea of shells.

Then a kiss was like
a seal of love
sealing lips together
to keep out words,
words like masks,

words that lie.

That love went
when that lover died
and died twice over
first in mind in death.

He can hear her
last breath.

Eased out slowly,
then stopped,
then nothing
but that silence,
that dreadful silence
that comes after death.

Now he loves
none other.

O yes, he loves
their eyes or hair
or the sway of body
or them just
standing there.

But it isn't love
deep down,
just them made up
and sweet smelling,
and he
the sad faced clown.

Terry Collett

Sad Human Trick

Daily

I wait for him to come
said Joy

I go to the window
and peer out
and hope

that he's coming
hope against reason
that he'll come

but he doesn't
not a day goes by
when I don't go

to the window
to see if he's coming
but he hasn't so far

and I guess I know
deep down
he won't come again

that I'll become old
and decrepit
and still go

to the window
and see if he's coming
but he won't

I know that
I've known that
last month or so

after they came
and told me
he'd been killed

in that car crash
but it won't stay
in my mind

it won't stick
like it's
all make believe
just a sad human trick.

Terry Collett

Sadness Of Being

There's a sadness to our being,
Lola thinks, now swaying to the
Movement of the train, studying
People nearby, their faces in the
Morning light, their gestures,
Their inner thoughts unknowable,
Carrying their grief, their broken
Dreams, their unfulfilled appetites.

She senses the muscles in her bottom
Tense and untense as the train sways,
Her thighs stiffening to give balance,
Her hands folded on her handbag,
Ladylike, as Mother taught, some
Time ago, among other more important
Things, how to behave, how not to behave,
What to say in public and what not.

The train stops at a station, people
Get off and some get on, different
Faces to study, others lost, possibly
To sight for life, passing ships in a dull
Night, gone now never to be known
By her, never to be dreamed of or missed
Or grieved over some future death.

The train moves on, she sways again,
Her body moving to the motion as others
Do, and watching them, the way they sway,
The dying embers in their eyes, their words
Not said, the thoughts coming and going
Inside each head, sadness or some private
Joy, not shared, least not yet, not with her.

Sit still and be quiet, Mother would say,
Children ought (she always said ought) to
Be observed not heard, and as she sways
Now, thinking of her mother and her mother's
Words and ways, she feels she wants to shout

And jump about, to flout her mother's rules and
Words and sayings and laws, but she just sits and
Stares, silently, thinks rebellion, but never dares.

Terry Collett

Salty Sea Air 1959

Anne watched the Kid
walk back to the nursing home,
across the lawn
and past the white round tables,
past the swings and slide.

She'd told him,
Kid don't mention my name
when you ask the nuns
about pubic hair, OK?
she had added.

I want it to be as if you
were just interested,
she had said.

Ok, I will, he said,
and was gone across the lawn,
with hands in his pockets,
a determined look
on his young,
11 year old face.

Anne rubbed her leg stump;
it was sore and hurt;
her none existing
toes itched.

She watched until he
had disappeared inside
the nursing home.

After a little while
the Kid walked out
of the French double windows,
crossed the lawn,
past the slide and swings,
and sat on a chair
by the round table,

where Anne sat
in her wheelchair,
her red skirt pulled up,
rubbing the leg stump.

Well, what did
the penguins say?
she said.

The Kid sighed.

Sister Blaise went red
in the face and said,
why are you asking
such a question and why
would I be interested?

What did you say, Kid?
Anne said,
rubbing her stump.

The Kid eyed her stump,
red and fleshy.

I said that Colm
had asked me
and I needed to know,
the Kid said.

Anne scratched
the leg stump.

So what else did
she say?
Anne said.

The Kid looked away
from her leg stump
and into her eyes.

She said it was
the hairs that grow

in certain places
on the body.

That all?
Anne said.

The Kid nodded,
and stared at her leg again
and glimpse of white underwear.

Didn't say which
part of the body?
she said.

He shook his head
and said,
no, just blushing said
it was hair in certain
parts of the body.

So none the wiser?
Anne said.

None the wiser,
the Kid said,
looking at the white table.

Never mind, Kid,
she said,
pulling her red skirt
over her leg stump,
let's go to the beach
and discuss it later.

The Kid got up
and wheeled
the wheelchair away
from the table and chairs
and along the narrow path,
between the avenue of trees
and out the back gate,
and along by the beach,

him pushing the wheelchair.

Anne breathed in the air,
hands in her lap,
and said,
sniff that fecking air, Kid,
this is where I live best,
this is where we came from,
the fecking salty sea.

The Kid pushed the chair
and sniffed the air,
listened to the sea sound
and seagulls,
look over Anne's shoulder
at the one leg bouncing
slightly up and down
as he pushed the chair,
sniffing in the deep
the salty sea air.

Terry Collett

Sarsaparilla And Arm Wounds 1955

They stood inside
Baldwin's herbalist shop
looking around
at the various jars
and bottles
on the side
and shelves
going up high

Helen looked to see
if Benny's arm
had stopped
its imaginary bleeding
it had
so she removed
her girls' handkerchief
from his arm

it's stopped
she said
stopped bleeding

he looked
at his arm
where Jessie James
had shot him
in the gunfight
on Meadow Row
bomb site

so it has
he said
rubbing at
the pretend wound

how can I help you
youngsters?
the man said
at the counter

gazing at them

can we have
two glasses
of sarsaparilla
please
Helen said
to make some blood
as Benny here
was wounded
by Jessie James
in a gunfight off
Meadow Row
bomb site

or it could have been
Frank James
Benny said
I couldn't be sure
in the shoot out

the man nodded
and smiled
and went and got
two glasses
of sarsaparilla
and brought it to them

Benny paid the man
the coins from
his jeans' pocket
and they stood
by the window
and peered out

as they sipped the drinks
other people came in
and were served
some wanting other things
than sarsaparilla

what are you doing

afterwards?
Helen asked

might go to Jail Park
on the swings
he said

can I come too?
she said

of course
he said
if you want to

they sipped
their drinks
in silence
then she said
Betty's arm's broke
it came out
of the socket thingy

how'd that happen?
Benny said

she looked
at the other people
in the shop

my brother did it
swung Betty around
by her arm
and she hit a wall
and the arm
came out
she said

Benny looked at her
shall I try
to mend it?
he said

no Mum said
she'd do it
or get Dad
to do it
when he
comes home
from work
but she told
my brother off
for breaking
my doll's arm
Helen said seriously

Benny looked at her
standing there
in her thick lens spectacles
and her large eyes
gazing at him
and her white blouse
and red skirt
(slightly stained)

so they drank
their drinks
and left
but the other people
in the shop
talked together
and remained.

Terry Collett

Sarsaparilla And Janice And You.

You walked with Janice
to Baldwin's the Herbalist

at the corner of Elephant
and Walworth Road

she wore her blue patterned dress
and red beret

and white socks
and red sandals

and in her small purse
she had money

her gran gave her
to buy sarsaparilla

in a half pint glass
and you

in your cowboy shirt
and jeans and plimsolls

with your holster
and six shooter

in the belt
around your waist

and clutching money
your mother'd given you

for doing a few chores
Gran would never let me

go on my own
Janice said

but when I said
you were going

Gran said all right
but no sweets

they rot your teeth
I like the liquorice sticks

you can buy there
you said

they make your teeth white
or so my mum said

Janice looked at your gun
in the holster

and said
you can protect me

from outlaws with your gun
sure

you replied
she smelt of lavender

and toothpaste from tins
and she moved nearer to you

and her arm touched yours
as you walked along

here we are
she said

and opened the door of Baldwin's
and you both went in

and went to the counter
and asked the man

for two half pints
of sarsaparilla

and when he poured them
and you each paid him

you stood by the window
with your glasses

and sipped
and looked

at the passing traffic
and people

you feeling like Wyatt Earp
in the saloon

and Janice looking out
as if she feared

outlaws would be coming
pretty soon.

Terry Collett

Saturday Fun 1955

I was with Helen
on the bomb site
on Harper Road.

I was practising
drawing my toy gun
from the left hand holster
as I'd seen Billy the Kid
do in the film.

I was better
with my right
but I did it but slower.

Why do you need
to have a gun
both sides?
Helen said.

So I can shoot
two bad guys
instead of one
I said.

She watched me patiently
I drew my left hand gun
again and again
until I was happy
I was quite quick.

I showed her
around the bomb site
there was a bombed out
butcher's shop
and we got in
the back door
(which had been
busted open by someone) .

I showed her around
careful of the stairs
they're a bit fragile
I said
as we climbed
the shaky staircase.

Upstairs there
was a hole in the roof
and we could see the sky
we went to the window
avoiding walking
on the center of the room
(we walked
around the sides)
and looked out
the window
on Harper Road.

I got caught here
the other week
with other kids
and a Rozzer
told me off
I said.

Rozzer?
she said.

A policeman
I said.

O I would hate that
she said.

Don't worry
I will keep an eye out
I said.

We looked around
then came out

the back way.

We went
to the 1d shop
and bought two bottles
of 1d drinks
and sherbet dips
and walked back
to Rockingham Street
and we began
to drink and eat.

Terry Collett

Saturday Morning 1961

Jane climbed off
the Saturday bus to town

her black hair ruffled
by the wind

her eyes
looking over at you

her mother close by
you standing by the wall

having climbed from the bus
a few moments before

your mother stood
and spoke to others

you watched as Jane buttoned up
her coat against the winter cold

her fingers turning blue
then she moved over to you

and said
I saw you by the water tower last night

as we drove by
my father visiting

a parishioner in the village
I was watching the sun

moving beyond the Downs
you said

like some giant moving
away to sleep

she smiled
and surreptitiously

she touched your hand
her mother's head

looking the other way
talking to your mother

of her husband's work
of church or of weather

or whatever
you gazed at Jane's eyes

the turn of head
the smile on lips

the way her hands touched
oh to be with her

away from others
to talk and walk

and capture each moment
with her closeness

but then her mother
moved away to shop

and Jane followed
just behind

and as she walked away
you painted her figure

and beauty
in your mind.

Terry Collett

Saturday With Milka

I ride on my bike to the farmhouse
with Milka's brothers
after Saturday morning work

we dismount
and I wait with my bike
while they go in

there is a dull sun
and a wind coming across
the fields

won't you come in?
Milka's mother asks
gesturing to me
from the doorway

sure I will
I say
and walk to the house
and go into the warm kitchen

cup of tea and toast?
she asks me
the boys have gone upstairs
to change

yes that'd be nice
I say

I look about the kitchen
at the pots and pans
and shelves and cups
and the large oven range
and the table and chairs
in the corner

sit down Benny
she says

I sit down
and she is busy
with cups and toast

I listen out to hear
if Milka is about
I watch her mother
fuss about with things
to one side

Milka about?
I ask

if she knows you're here
she'll be up
and dressed in seconds
the mother says
not turning around

I hear voices upstairs
laughter
shouts
and then Milka
come down
and into the kitchen

they said you were here
and I didn't believe them
as they are always
teasing me about you
she says

where have you been?
her mother asks

tidying my room
like you have asked me too
Milka says

about time too
never seen such a mess hole

when I was a young girl
we had to keep
our rooms tidy
the mother says

Milka pulls a face
behind her mother's back
it's done now
she moves towards me
and kisses me quickly
on the cheek

I hold her hand
and squeeze

I suppose you
want breakfast now?

yes please
Milka replies

her mother says
what do you want?

I'll get it
Milka says

she goes off to the larder
and I watch her move
her blue skirt
and white top
the buttons open
at the neck too low
(her mother would say)
the legs
the way she sways
her hips
as she walks

here you are Benny
the mother says
and hands me

a plate of buttered toast
and a cup of tea

thank you
I say

and she moves off
to the other room
and I hear her move about

Milka says
didn't know
you were coming here today?

thought you might
like to see the new Elvis film
I say

she smiles
sure if Mum'll let me
she says

she goes off
to see her mother
in the other room

I eat the toast
and sip the tea
and listen

there are hushed voices
and few sighs
then more voices

it'll be my treat
I say
I'll treat her

Milka and her mother
come into the kitchen

it's not that

the mother says
it's just that
she's been grounded
the weekend
for misbehaviour

I look at Milka
who pouts her lips
and looks at me

I see
I say

and look at the mother
she gazes at me
and her eyes
are soft and brown

and she says
but I don't see why
you should be deprived
of her company
because of her naughtiness
she will not be allowed out
next Saturday though
she says

Milka beams
and her face lights up

and I say
thank you
I'll have her back
in good time

the mother stares
at her daughter
and I mean about next week
she says

I know
Milka says

her mother goes off
to the other room
we kiss
and she goes off
upstairs to get ready

I finish my toast
and tea
thinking to myself
lucky me.

Terry Collett

Saxons And Such 1956

I saw Janice
sitting at the front
of class
beside another girl.

I was at the back
of class
with Cardamom.

Janice had her fair hair
tied with a red ribbon
at the back.

Cardamom smelt
of the unwashed.

Mr Finn talked
of Saxons and Angles
and raids and pillaging.

I watched as Mr Finn
chalked on the black board,
his fingers holding
the chalk tight.

Guess what I saw?
Cardamom said quietly,
leaning his head
towards me.

No what?
I said.

Two kids kissing
in the bog,
he said.

I liked Janice's fair hair
tied with the red ribbon.

Cardamom talked on
about who they were:
fecking kissing,
he said,
two boys.

I nodded,
but said nothing.
I watched Mr Finn's chalk
bring a Saxon to life.

Then wondered
if it was drawn
from memory
or from his head,
from life maybe
his sour-faced wife.

Terry Collett

Say And Do 1962

Thanks to Elaine's sister
John and Elaine's romance
is all over the bus
(for those who care)

and when she
gets on the school bus
after lessons
there is a mixture

of jeering
and whispered talk
who's your lover
then Frumpy?

a voice says
does he kiss you?
another voice says
Elaine goes red

and sits quickly
by her sister
in the window seat
looking out

John sits looking
out the window
trying to ignore
the voices and jeers

you're a dark horse
Johnny Boy
a voice calls out
have you done it yet?

laughter and jeers
Elaine's sister
whispers to her
well couldn't be

a secret for long could it?
you told them?
Elaine says
well he did kiss you

so you said
her sister says
the bus starts up
and is on its way

and the radio comes on
and music
fills the air
and Elaine's mind

is in panic
and she stares out
the window taking in
nothing of the passing view

wondering what to say or do
and how will she
show her face at school
voices whisper

behind her seat
her sister talks
to a friend nearby
Elaine feels betrayed

feels stabbed in the back
I'd let you
sit with him
her sister says

but that'd mean
I'd have Goldfinch
in here and that
would not be on

Elaine ignores her sister

and tries to calm her mind
and instil some kind
of order in her thinking

some sort of normality
John stares
out of the window
focusing on

the passing view
of fields and trees
and houses and birds
in the early morning sky

and breathing in slow
and ignoring
Goldfinch's gab
about football

and who scored
what goal
and thinking of Elaine
and the kiss on Sunday

at her house
and who told about them
and how did Elaine feel
and what to say or do

and a voice from some kid
behind him says
been in there yet?
had it off?

John focuses
on the bullfinch
he'd seen in the garden
the other day

the colours
the beak
the excitement he felt

at seeing it

and marking it in
his little book
and the bus radio
plays away

some love song
and voices sing along
and a voice says
it's for you Frumpy

the love song's for you
but she ignores the voice
and sits and stares
at the passing view

wondering what to say
and what to.

Terry Collett

Say Or Do

If my old man
said to me
on Sundays

do you want
to go to church
with your uncle

or go up
the West End
with me?

I'd usually say
up West
there I liked it best

the bright lights
the arcades
the pin-ball machines

the chance of popping
into the a feature film
or see cartoons

or have a Cola
and ice cream
and see all those

odd people
on the streets
some singing

some sitting there
giving it
the big stare

but sometimes I'd go
to the tabernacle
with my uncle

and sit there
and sing hymns
or sit and hear

the prayers said
and people smiling
at each other

or being kind
and opening doors
or just being

what others called
being Christian
but most times

I went up West
and had a go
on the pin-balls

or drank Cola
or watched
my old man

eye up the girls
outside the cinemas
or theatres

(whores
I later thought
and later knew)

but what's
a 8 year old kid
to say or do?

Terry Collett

Scavenging For Coal

At the back
of the coal wharf
you and Fay
picked up coal pieces

that fell through
the iron railings
and put them
in an old bag from home

Fay looked
at her blackened fingers
and said
if my daddy sees

these fingers
and finds out
what I've been doing
he'll spank me

for sure
you gazed at her
beside you
and said

you can wash your hands
at my place
she looked around
at the bombsite behind you

the evening sun
slowly going down
behind the railway bridge
and nearby buildings

what if someone sees you
she asked
picking up these pieces?
no one worries about this

all the kids do it
you replied
my daddy says
it is evil to steal

she said
you put a black piece
of coal in the bag
and lifted it

to feel the weight
that's enough
you said
too much

and I won't be able
to carry it
Fay stood up
and looked around

at the darkening sky
you held the bag
in one hand
and scanned

the area around you
let's go
you said
and so you both

walked away
from the coal wharf
into Meadow Row
by the public house

where piano music played
and down towards
the flats
where you lived

and after climbing

the concrete stairs
to your landing
you opened the door

and put the bag
by the indoor
coal bunker
and showed Fay

where to wash her hands
turning on
the cold water tap
you both washed

your hands
with the red
Life Buoy soap
her hands near yours

her wet flesh
touching yours
the black water
running away

and another adventure
and another day.

Terry Collett

School Fight

How you got into a fight
with Woolgar in the school
playground God only knows
but it seems to stem from

him pushing into you and
knocking you against the wire
fence and then you rush at him
like a bull in a marketplace with

a flurry of punches catching him
high on the cheek with a tight fist
then a crowd gathers and an almost
perfect ring and on the periphery

out of the corner of your eye you
see them gathered excitedly chanting
loudly bundle bundle fight fight then
Woolgar put up his fists in front of

his face and you know instinctively
he's no fighter that he's not put
those fists up in a real fight and the
fire seeps from you and you move

your fists in the way you'd been taught
and duck and weave but you're just
going through motions now and his eyes
widen in fear and you know you ought

to go off and leave him there as the
anger has almost gone then there's
a shout of PREFECTS! and the audience
of eager schoolboys disperses and you

walk off into the crowd and Woolgar
drops his hands by his side and stares
up and out at the hills as if some voice
had called him like some ancient prophet

and the school prefects seeing nothing or
no one go off disgruntled and forget.

Terry Collett

Schoolboy Pride

One Sunday
evening after tea,
Benny's old man said:
do you want to
go see a horror film?

Yes,
he said,
that'd be good,
but it's an X film
and I won't get in
(He was about
12 then) .

Put your long
trouser suit on
white shirt and tie,
and we'll see
what they say.

He Brycreemed
Benny's hair,
polished
his black shoes.

He said:
if anyone asks
how old you are
say nothing,
I'll tell them.

So off they went
and stood in the queue
at the cinema.

Benny felt
a bit conspicuous
standing there,
but he put on

his unsmiling face,
stared at no one,
and squared his shoulders.

When they got
to the ticket office
his old man said:
two adults please,
and gave her
the money;
she gave him
the tickets.

They went past
the usherette
who just looked
at Benny,
but nothing.

They found two seat
and sat down.

Soon after
the lights were lowered
and the Pearl & Dean
adverts began.

Benny was then
inconspicuous
one of the crowd.

He had been taken
as an adult,
and got into see
an X film:
Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

He sat there
with a smile,
and with a bit
of schoolboy pride.

Scooter Riding 1957

I had a 2 wheeled blue scooter;
I rode it down the slope
from the Square
down through one
of the gaps at the end
and onto Rockingham Street,
then turned around
and scooted it back up again.

Enid stood watching me at the top
Can I have a go Benny?
she said.

Sure you can;
I handed her the scooter.

She put a foot on
and scooted down the slope;
she put both feet on the scooter
as it picked up speed,
passing people who were coming up
and going down the slope.

She went through the right hand gap
and onto Rockingham Street.

She looked back up at me and smiled;
she turned around and shooter up the slope
her left foot pushing the ground.

She got to the top
that was great,
she said
can I have a go again?

Sure you can;
she turned the scooter around
and off she went.

I watched her go
pleased to see her happy and smiling,
hoping her old man
didn't come along and see her
or she'd be for it
as he was in his dark moods once more
and she be for it for sure.

Terry Collett

Sea Escape 1959

Most of the other children
avoided Anne
but Benny was with her
most of the time.

Here Kid
Anne said.

Benny walked
to where she was sitting
in a wheelchair
on the lawn.

Once he was beside her
she said
we're going
to go see the sea Kid
is the coast clear?
Are the penguins about?

Benny looked back
towards the nursing home
other kids were on the lawn
some on the slide and swings
but no nun was in sight
as far as he could see.

No penguins about
Benny said.

Good right push me
through the avenue of trees
and through the back gate
to freedom
she said.

Benny took a last look
back towards the nursing home
and once he was sure

no nuns were about
he pushed the wheelchair
along through
the avenue of trees
and out the back gate
and along the path
which ran by the beach.

See that sea Kid
smell that air
the fucking salt
gets to me
love it
she said.

Benny pushed her
along the path
and looked
at the beach and sea
and gulls above them.

He felt the wheelchair
go along easily
on the path
and inwardly
he gave a little laugh.

Terry Collett

Seaside Maybe Or Beyond 1958

The big black steam train hissed out steam of grey and white and black which rose from underneath and the top and sides of the train like an angry dragon the steam then spread along the platform like a fog clearing after a while then fogging up again once the dragon hissed once more Benedict and Lydia sat on a black cast-iron metal seat on the platform and watched fascinated by the spectacle captured by the sight and sound and smells which was one of their shared joys along with exploring bomb-sites and riding swings and the slide in the park or swimming in the local swimming pool although neither could swim even though they were nine years old and went with classes to the swimming pool to learn but neither did hiss hiss went the train again Benedict looked at Lydia Im going to be train driver when Im older he said going to drive a big black one like this one Lydia stared at him me too she said a big green one like we saw at Kings Cross the other week can girls drive trains? She said Ive never seen a girl train driver she added taking in Benedicts quiff of brown hair and his hazel eyes focusing on her might by the time youre older he said out of wanting Lydias wish to come true rather out of any real belief that girls will ever drive trains do you think they will Benny? Do you? She said anxiously thinking her treasured dream might evaporate before she had even stepped onto the engine of a train yes of course he said asked your dad hell know Benedict said he works on the railway yes I will she said knowing when to ask him and when not to and best to wait until he was sober and in a good mood and not when drunk and forgetful the train belched out steam again and a loud blast of noise and smell and Lydia waved one of her small thin hands in front of her face to make a space for her to breath in fresher air and not steam we can drive a train to Scotland then Benedict said Edinburgh or Glasgow or Wales Lydia said never been there Cardiff or Swansea Mr Finn talked about Cardiff the other week in history something about a castle or something she added watching the grey and white steam rise into the air right up to the roof of the station she reached out and touched Benedicts hand near to hers and hoped maybe they would go to Edinburgh as they had talked about it a few weeks before about getting on a train from Kings Cross train station once they had enough money and clothes and food and drinks and once school was over for the summer holidays we will go to Edinburgh wont we Benny? Once weve enough clothes and money and things? Of course he said taking in her thin frame and lank mousey hair and dark eyes once we're ready for it and its a long six hour journey so need to get ready for the long trip and have enough clothes to wear he added seeing the pale green dress she was wearing needed stitching at the hem where it was coming undone and her off-white ankle socks looking grey rather than white passengers were making a last minute dash for the train opening doors and closing them with a bang and heads

appeared out of windows and hands waved and Lydia waved although she didn't know at whom she was waving or cared a while blew loudly and the train hissed louder and faster and the train moved along the platform slowly and surely leaving steam behind to rush along the platform like grey and white ghosts wave Benny she said wave to the lucky people going to the seaside maybe we can go to the seaside as a trial run she added looking at hands waving from the train windows and noises and smells hanging around behind the departing train Benedict waved his hand at the departing train yes he said the seaside now there's a thought yes that'd be nearer for a trial run before Edinburgh and no need of extra clothes or much food the train vanished from sight only steam lingered behind it like a dragon's tail then that too vanished and they sat watching the space it had occupied moments before which seaside? Lydia asked what's nearest? Benedict thought looking at the porter passing by Southend probably he said went there with my nan and granddad once or twice he said can we go? She said can we? She still clutched his hand with her thin small hand her fingers entwined with his yes course he said feeling her fingers clutch his and he hoping none of the boys from school could see the hand holding thinking him a cissy breaking the schoolboy code of not holding girls hands best look at the timetables for trains up by the ticket office he said after a few minutes musing good good she said excitedly squeezing his fingers more right let's go get a bottle of lemonade each and a pack of biscuits from the kiosk at the top end there he said have you money? She said I've none (she seldom did) I've a shilling he said that'll do so they got up from the cast-iron metal seat and she still holding his hand walked up the platform taking in other trains on either side on different platforms black ones and a green one and a small black one like a baby train out for its first run maybe she thought steam still hung around them and the smell and whistles blowing and voices calling out she thinking of the seaside and the sea and sand and seagulls and ice-creams and maybe seafood like her mum liked and he thought of being a train driver steam rushing past him as he stoked the engine and a thrill raced through him and he felt he couldn't wait for that far off growing up date.

Terry Collett

Seaside Visitation

Your grandchildren
play in the sea,
splashing and screaming
as the water chills.

You watch as you sit
on the stone wall,
your feet on the sand.

Anny stands staring out
at the broad horizon,
her ghostly hand
above her brow
to keep out
the sun's bright glare,
her small phantom feet
touching the beach,
far from the water's reach.

She hears the playful screams,
and ventures on down
between the crowds
who occupy the sands
with chairs and towels
and windbreaker walls.

She waits and gazes
at your grandchildren's play,
her blonde hair and bow
touched by the sun's glow.

You watch her as stands there
rooted in the sands,
knowing none see her
as you do now, her hands
resting behind her back,
seemingly in deep thought,
she wanders along the beach,
her eyes taking in

the seaside show,
her profile captured
by the sun's warm kiss.

She turns and looks at you,
knowing that you see her there,
smiling she waves a hand,
then she's gone from sight,
as once before
in Auschwitz's hold she went.

Nothing now but the sea sound
and grandchildren's laughter
and sea air and Anny's scent.

Terry Collett

Seaview Blues.

She stares out at the sea and you
Sit just behind taking in her green
Bikini and her brown hair tied back
In a ponytail and she says he drowned
One night out there someplace stupidly
Drunk after his stag party and hey they
Said hey why don't walk out in the sea
And so he did and drowned and they
Just stood watching laughing thinking
He was waving out there but he was going
Down once twice thrice and then gone out
Of sight and then she is silent and you say
Nothing because you have no words to put
To the tragic tale and as you sit and stare
Taking in her cute butt and lovely curves
And tied back hair you think but do not
Say I'm glad I didn't drown out there.

Terry Collett

Secret And Other 1962

Even as Elaine
gets off the school bus
there are jeers

and catcalls
and words like
we'll look after John

for you while
you're away Frumpy
no problems there

and the bus door closes
and it is shut off
and the bus drives away

and she looks at it go
and wonders
what John will

make of it all
after her younger sister
said about her and John

and the kiss on Sunday
and now
the whole world knows

did you have
to tell everyone?
she says to her sister

as they walk
towards home
didn't know

it was top secret
her sister says smiling
anyway they'd find out

sooner or later
anyway unless
you've been doing

anything else
we don't know about
no big deal is it?

What do you mean
anything else?
Elaine says

you know do it
her sister says
do what?

Elaine says frowning
walking on
looking at her sister

sideways on
her sister smiles
don't you know?

You don't do you?
Her sister says grinning
Elaine frowns more

don't know what?
Elaine says
ask Mum

her sister says
and walks on quickly
leaving Elaine

following behind
wondering what the heck
her sister

was talking about

and worrying if she had
not knowing

sensing her face
go red like
a smacked backside glowing.

Terry Collett

Seeing Art 1960

Benny walked
to Hannah's flat
and her mother
answered the door

(her mother was a Scot)
and stared at him
och it's ye
she said

best come in
HANNAH
the wee boy's haur
Benny followed her

along the passage
and she settled him
in the lounge
giving him her look

(which would have
brought fear
to a brave grenadier)
Hannah came

into the lounge
got behind
she said
all like a cat's tail

where we going?
Benny suggested
a trip to Jail Park
to ride the swings

and slide
want to go to
an art gallery
she said

see some art not
ride swings or slide
Benny nodded his head
and said
ok and talked
of where his old man
used to take him

in the West End
to see art
just going
to tell Mum

she said
and walked
to the kitchen
where her mother

was doing washing
in the copper
gang whaur?
her mother said

I've nae bunsens
just bus fare
Hannah said
the art gallery's free

her mother opened
her purse
(moths flew out
Hannah later said)

and placed a few coins
in Hannah's palm
aam nae payin'
fur heem

she said
hard faced
Hannah said

that's fine

and off they went
out of the flat
down the slope
to get a bus

to Trafalgar Square
and look at
the art in
a gallery there

Terry Collett

Seeing The X Film One Sunday.

It was late
one Sunday afternoon
when you must have been
about 11 or 12

just before tea
and Sunday bath
and your old man said
dress up in your best

long trousers and blazer
and shirt and tie
I'm taking you
to the cinema

to see an X film
an X film?
you said
yes Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

he said
but you have to be 16
to get into see that
you said

I know but if we get you
all smartened up you may pass
he said
and so you put on

your best blazer
and long trousers
and white shirt
and your old man

did up your tie
in the Windsor Knot
he was good at
and off you went

to the cinema
on the New Kent Road
and he went to the kiosk
and bought two tickets

and the old dame
behind the glass panel
looked at you
but said nothing

and gave him
the two tickets
and you followed him
to the twin doors

that led into the cinema
and the usherette
looked at you
and said to your old man

follow me
and you followed her
as she showed the way
to your seats

with her torch shining
and you went down the aisle
and along the row of seat
to where her torch settled

and pulled down the seats
and sat down
there was a cartoon on
loud and colourful

and people around you
were laughing
and you looked up
at the screen

then at your old man

and he was gazing
at the screen
like some worshipper

taking in the colour
and noise
and you settled back
in your seat trying to look

taller and adult
and laughed
when the others laughed
and then came

the intermission
before the big feature film
and he said
do you want an ice cream?

yes please
you said and off he went
to the ice cream girl at the front
with her tray of ice-cream

and sweets etc
and you looked about you
sitting up straight
to make yourself look older

and gazed at your old man
at the front
then at your shoes
then at the people

in front of you
then he came back
and gave you
the ice cream tub

and wooden spoon
then he sat down with his
then the lights

went out again

and the film began
Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
and you sat there
thinking of what O'Brien

would say at school next day
when you told him
you'd got into see an X film
o yeah he'd say

I bet you did
pull then other leg
it's got bells on
but it didn't matter

what O'Brien thought
or said
you were there
in the dark

watching the X film
at 12 years old
o what a laugh
you were there

watching it
not at home
getting ready for bed
after the Sunday bath.

Terry Collett

Seeking Love Mcmlxxi

Deus amor est
the old monk said
in Latin,

the bell rope
hung in the cloister
Dom Gregory
stood by
waiting to toll
for lunch,

birdsong in the garth
from branches
of the mulberry tree,

I swept and polished
the choir stalls
silence of the church
sunlight through
the high coloured
glass windows,

she whispered
her words to me
in her bed,

Dieu est
l'amour Dieu
d'amour
a French monk said
in monotone,

I sat listening
in the novice room
with Gareth and George
Hugh had not shown,

George told me
the Spanish monk

had told him
that St Bernard said
Dios mismo es la razón
por la que es ser amado,

Dom Joe
by the seashore
with us novices
casting stones
in the incoming tides
and he watching
smiling,

make love again
she said
so I did,

rain poured
down hard
tapping against
the windows
in the refectory
disturbing the monk
who read from the life
of Oliver Cromwell,

? ??????? ??????????
??? ?μ??

Gareth told me
quoting Aristotle
our happiness
is dependant on us
he said in English
rough translation,

eyes closed
she haunted me
and taunted me
like some goddess
of the sea.

Seems A Dream 1961

Jane sits there
on the grass
the sunlight

overhead
she's showing
me the birds

that she's seen
that morning
she's so near

I can smell
fresh apples
about her

her black hair
hanging loose
her dark eyes

scanning the
book's pages
slim finger

pointing out
the song thrush
and its eggs

I watch her
sitting there
a grey dress

covering
her slim legs
I've seen one

down the lane
in bushes
quite high up

I tell her
sensing her
so near me

she touches
my right hand
and holds it

squeezes it
then kisses
my right cheek

(Lizbeth would
have wanted
more of me)

come show me
she asks me
so we walk

across fields
to the lane
cows mooing

birds singing
hand in hand
walking down

by the stream
although real
seems a dream.

Terry Collett

Seems Endless 1961

Seems endless
from the Downs
this view point
below us
I tell her

Jane looks out
her slim hand
shielding eyes
from the sun

Father says
God's beauty
from blue sky
to earth worm
she utters

I sense her
close near me
want to touch
and hold her
kiss her lips
but decline
desires' drive
to brain's hold

God in each
particle
she tells me
in birds' song
butterfly's
wing colour

I smell her
applely
or flower scent
eyes light brown
or so seems

Spinoza
said as such
I believe
I reply

who is he?
She asks me
her head turned
eyes on me

some thinker
I read of
in some book
at the school
I reply
studying
each brown eye
as if God
had made it
just for me
to gaze at

our hands touch
skin on skin
hands holding

other thoughts
deep within.

Terry Collett

Seeped Into My Head McmIxxi

5.30am dawn
birdsong
smell of fresh flowers,

aperiam labia mea,

Dom Joe rabbit-like
(affectionately) put
a finger to his lips
to remind me
of the Grand Silence
that was in
the refectory for breakfast,

she presented me
with her soft fruit
and said take
and enjoy,

the breviary
black and heavy
held in hands
looking for the Matins Office
Latin and plainsong,

ascoltare Dio
the Italian monk said
as I helped in
the abbey library
to sort books
dust off shelves,

Hugh thin faced said
all rings and personal items
must be left
in the care of the abbot
all that is
of the past must
be left behind,

the smell of polish
and old bricks
and the French
peasant monk(lay-brother)
walked along the aisle
of the church as if
across a muddy field
in his heavy black boots,

love with tenderness
not passion
wisdom not foolishness
and strength
(St) Bernard said
I read some place,

parler à Dieu
de ne pas lui
the French monk said
to me as I am with you
as we cleared grass
at the roadside
to the abbey,

smell of incense
in the church
before Terce after Mass
and closing the eyes
and breathing it in,

I wanted
to suck her fig
but she giggled too much
so just kissed her lips,

if you want
be a real seeker of truth
it is necessary
said Gareth
quoting Descartes
that once in your life

you doubt everything,

afternoon tea and biscuits
in the cloister garth
the trolley pushed
onto the lawn there
and chit-chat
and talk of the day,

during Compline
in the semi dark
as monks sang
the Regina Caeli
I stared at the high windows
and mused on her
naked and lying there
arms open
legs spread
that image seeped
into my head.

Terry Collett

Self Deception

Self deception
is the worst deception
he said
it betrays
deep within
and when
the collapse comes
as it will
the two sides
are spilt like
two sides of a truth.

The quack sat
and listened
and lit up a cigar
and wrote down notes
looking up
now and then
and peered
at his patient
understandingly
or so appeared.

I thought
I thought it through
but I hadn't
I thought of only
those aspects
I wanted to look at
and think about.

The quack raised
thick eyebrows
and put on his
I know what you mean gaze
but inside thought
the patient was out
on a limb and had
no idea what to do for him.

I knew I didn't like it
but I pretended I did
I deceived myself
I fooled myself
and then I opened up
to myself and there
were two of us
me and him
the fucking cuss.

The quack frowned
puffed out smoke
stared at the patient
through a cloud of grey
just another patient
just another day.

Terry Collett

Sense Too Much

ee Yiska
the snow
is falling

a tractor
pushes its way
through the snow
on the field

gulls and rooks
follow in its wake

the sky a dull grey
the sun wiped out
or nearly so

hear Yiska
the wind
through the trees
the birds calling

hear the snowflakes
silently falling
hear our breath
expressing
as we speak
or remain silent

feel Yiska
the snowflakes
on our faces
on our noses

hold out
your slim hand
let the palms
hold the snow

feel my closeness

sense me
drawing near

the nurses are talking
they talk
of their love lives
of the sex
they've had

hear their words
how they tease us
their words
of lovemaking
and freedom
and normality

feel the emptiness
bite us

our nerves taut
as wire
as we walk

see Yiska
how they walk
the nurses behind us
and before us

see how
their heavy coats
hold them
their black boots
marching like troopers

hear the nattering
of their lips
and tongues

sense my mental fatigue
and yours and ours

wait Yiska

they will take us
back to the hospital soon
and lock us up
once more
in the white ward
with the dull
water coloured prints
and photographs
of yesteryears

be near Yiska
let our fingers touch
let us feel
too little
or sense too much.

Terry Collett

September Chill.

Uncle brings in the dead chicken by
The neck and begins plucking out the
Feathers with a skill that fascinates
Your 10 year old eyes and as you stand
And watch the chicken gradually becomes
Nude and some how not so grand not so
Chicken-like and then Uncle cuts off the
Head and throws it a side and then guts
It and washes it through with water and
Then puts it down on a large plate where
It lays in a solemn silence without fanfare
Or hymns or prayers just Uncle lighting up
A cigarette and you staring at the chicken
Clean and pure and still and from the open
Window a cool evening late September chill.

Terry Collett

Seriously Spoke

And there is
that thought

he may not return
and you fear he

may have seen
the letters that you

had hidden
but that you think

he found when
he searched the room

and all because
of that argument

and that thought
in his mind

that I had been
in love with another

and if he has
found the letters

he will read there
everything that

has been in my mind
and what I thought

had felt about Jacques
and if he reads the letters

and smells the perfume
I put there

and sees my words
burning into the pages

and the x
on the bottom of the letters

and what we did
and how and where

and when
he will know

and me as his wife
and he my husband

will be nothing more then
than a joke

like that amusement
in my mind

as he
seriously spoke.

Terry Collett

Sex And After.

She knows one day
Sex will be a memory,
A nightly séance with
Her dead self. Hardwick
Will still be just one of
Her many lovers, pissing
His pants in some old folks
Home, dribbling over his
Shirt, forgetting her as he
Turns to go numbly to sleep.

She inhales her cigarette,
Watches the smoke rise,
Sees in the corner of her
Room, a spider hanging.

Hardwick is due at seven.

He will bring white wine,
Foreign food, the hot sexy
Movie they both want to
See, then to bed, sex, sleep.

She exhales the smoke, holds
The cigarette to one side, her
Naked body sensing warm
The sheets. Suzie he'll say,
Putting the wine and food in
The fridge, placing the movie
On, can we try that position on
Page 35? Last time it was page
32, the position not much fun,
Too much work, quite hard to do.

Mother'd turn in her grave to
See her thus. Naked at four in
The afternoon, smoking French
Cigarettes, thinking of hot sex,
Wanting old age to stay away.

She sits up, stubs out the cigarette.

Mother died of cancer, too soon,
Too much, no answer. Hardwick
Will bring and expect the same:
The wine, the food, the sex after
The movie, the sleep after in her
Double bed, and all the time that
Humming of her mother in her head.

Terry Collett

Sex And Mozart 1973

Some dame sang
on the old
radio

a Verdi
aria
Sonya lay

on the bed
reading Kant
I showered

listening
to Verdi
filtering

through to me
through water
gushing down

how Sonya
could read Kant
after sex

I wondered
washing down
young Percy

my pecker
then Sonya
sang along

the Verdi
aria
I hummed some

Sinatra
melody
to contrast

the Verdi
recalling
entering

Sonya's fruit
in the bed
while Mozart's

aria
vibrated
in my head.

Terry Collett

Sex Book Returned 1961

Here is your book back,
Lizabeth says
to the girl
at school
who had lent it
to her.

The girl takes
the book
and hides it
in her satchel.

Read it?
The girl asks.

Yes all of it,
Lizabeth says.

What do you think?
The girl says.

It was educational,
Lizabeth says.

Had any luck
with that boy yet?
The girl asks.

No not yet,
Lizabeth says,
wishing she had.

Give it time,
he will,
they're weak
like that,
the girl says.

My mother

found the book,
Lizbeth says.

The girl stares at her.
Did you say
who gave it
to you?

Of course not,
Lizbeth says.

What did
she say?

We had a row
and my father said
to bring it back.

Did he want
to read
the sex book?

No,
says Lizbeth,
he's not like that.

Look I best go
and hide this book
in my locker
until after school.

OK,
Lizbeth says.

See you around,
the girl says
and goes off.

Lizbeth says goodbye
to the book
in her head,
wishing to hell

she could get
Benny in bed.

Terry Collett

Sex Game Lark 1964.

I thought of Milka
most of the evening
while listening
to the Elvis LP
or watching TV,
or later in bed
next to my younger brother
him asleep,
and I under the covers
with my small
white transistor radio
playing Radio Luxembourg.

I thought about the first time
we had sex in the woods
behind the farm house
where she lived
with her parents
and brothers,
how we lay
on my jacket
in amongst bushes,
birds overhead,
branches with the sun
blinking through at us,
sounds of traffic
going past
on the farm road
now and then,
and us lying there
exhausted after our first effort,
and she said:
Think that's how it's done.

I said nothing
(not wanting to say
yes it is or she would say:
how do you know?)
just lay there

watching her
breathing deep:
suppose it is,
I said eventually.

She smiled:
now I know
when other girls
say about it
and probably don't do it:
anyway that I have,
she said.

The radio was playing
some American woman
singing about breaking a heart
and not going to Heaven
if you do.

My brother stirred;
and I turned off
the radio
and lay in the dark
musing on Milka,
and what she called
our sex game lark.

Terry Collett

Sex In The End.

It all boiled down to sex in the end,
She thought, after the gifts and flowers
And the cards sent and the romantic words,
And the showing of affection, and the quick
Introduction to the parents, and the talk
Of marriage and kids and the nice home,
With the right sort of neighbours, and his
Job secure and the money in the bank;
Yet, late at night, when the moon pushed
Itself through the window, showing his eyes
Closed, and his love machine thrusting in
And out of her, she realized then, counting
The stars on the ceiling, it was about sex
Not about love, concern, giving, or feeling.

Terry Collett

Sex N London.

Where you been?
Nima asks

train was late
I reply

the ward smells
of urine
and bodies
and nurses
disinfect
up the nose

Nima sits
in a chair
by her bed
in a white
dressing gown
her bare feet
on the floor

what'd you bring?

cigarettes
chocolate
usual stuff
I tell her
putting them
on her bed

need a drag
she utters

so we go
out of large
French windows
and sit down
in two chairs
in the grounds

we light up
cigarettes
and exhale

how's it going?
I ask her

miss my fix
and hot sex
she mutters
between drags
miss music
miss Hendrix

she looks out
at the grounds
the tall trees
the bushes
a porter
walking by
two doctors
over the way
talking loud

glad you came
she tells me

glad to come
I reply

she looks thin
her hair lank
no make up
cigarette
held between
two fingers

she tells me
her parents
didn't show
had to go

off some place
with others
Nima exhales

you know what?
they're doctors
yet don't come
to see me

I don't know
what to say
so I say
not a thing

watch a bird
swooping low
gracefully
black winged bird
with large beak

I need sex
Nima says
suddenly
I need you
inside me

her dark eyes
eat me in

no place though
I tell her

she inhales
the white smoke
blows it out
making rings

someday soon
she utters
in London
in some room
some hotel

if they let
me go out
next weekend
with a pass

let's hope so
I reply
studying
the sun's light
in her right
gazing eye.

Terry Collett

Sex Serviced

I serviced them,
the men who came,
soldiers of battle,

politicians with bored wives,
husbands whose wives
(they said) never

understood their needs
or wants or desires,
young men starting on

an unfamiliar journey
on the road to sex.
I entertained

as their women
would never have done,
played the games

their women
would put
their fingers

to mouth in shock to
and never do,
I allowed them to touch

where they'd never
touched before,
to kiss where

their dames
would deplore,
I listened to

their brief tales
or sorrow,
know for me

there was never today,
and always tomorrow.
I was she,

and they knocked
at my door,
I was the paid up,

always on the ball and bed,
whore, who whored,
whom the women hated,

but their men
(I was sure)
adored.

Terry Collett

Sex Too Much 1961

That was a jay
Jane said
that bird
we've just seen

it belongs
to the crow family
it's an Eurasian Jay
I was listening to her

but taking in
the line of her jaw
as she spoke
the lips

opening and closing
as the words flowed
it's a lovely bird
I said

what colour eggs?
she told me
and we were
walking up the drive

up the Downs
trees on either side
birds calling
rooks and crows

and the sound
of pheasants
from the fields
and cows mooing

and her hand
was near mine
as she spoke
I wanted to hold it

and put it to my cheek
and feel
the softness of her
but I let my hand

stay just an inch away
and I could smell
the scent of her
apple and hay

and something
she'd borrowed
from her mother
(I'd smelt it

when I was
at her parents house
the other day
for the tea)

what do your parents
think of me
after the third degree
the other day?

I said
we stopped and she said
they like you
and trust you

she said
they trust me anyway
but it is you
they were unsure about

but yes they have
taken you as trustworthy
she added smiling
I smiled too

glad I'd been thought

trustworthy
especially after
her mother's

scrutiny of me
the questions
she had asked
just on the border of things

that Lizbeth's a different sort
Jane said
she and sex
go together

like cheese and onion
but I am not like that
I don't mean to
sound prudish but

I couldn't not
before marriage
I nodded my head
and was nonplussed

about it all
we walked on
she talked of the man
her father knew

whose daughter
had got herself pregnant
and she was only 14
and there was hell to pay

and they left the area
and the girl
was taken some place
and it has worried Father

ever since
I see
I said

and she took my hand

and it was soft
and I sensed her
skin and warmth
and her body near mine

and there was sounds
of rooks above our heads
in the tall trees
and knew Lizbeth

wouldn't talk
of birds or such
she liked her ideas
of sex too much.

Terry Collett

Sex Too Much 1965

I put on
the Bix Beiderbecke LP
on the record player;
Tilly lay on my bed,
hands behind her head,
head on the pillow,
gazing at me,
blues eyes liquidy.

What's this?
She said.

Jazz, Bix was one
of the great cornet-players
back in the 1920s,
I said,
lying beside her,
snuggling up to
her soft breasts.

But this is 1965,
haven't you anything
more modern?
Beatles, Rolling Stones,
the Kinks?

Another time maybe,
I said,
smelling her new perfume,
underarm hair still there.

She listened,
touching my pecker,
stirring him into life
like some hibernating snake.

Bix blew others on the LP away,
high notes, silvery against
their dross of muddle mess,

a clarinet, a trombone.

Tilly gave a sensual moan.
I touched her thigh,
moved my hand across
to feel her soft thatch,
lips met and kissed,
and sealed and heated up.

Some antiquated singer
sang up front,
Bix in the background
making jazz.

No more talk,
no words about this or that,
no more utterances
of life and such,
we loved sex too much.

Terry Collett

Sex, Drugs And Rock And Roll 1967

We lay
on the grass
in St James' Park
Nima and I.

Beneath a hot sun
and pale blue sky.

Wish there was
some place
we could go
she said
somewhere
we could go
and have sex.

Yes wish
there was
I said.

People passed by
on the path
kids played
on the grass
in their childhood
world and games.

Ducks and drakes
swam on the water
over the way.

Remember that time
we had that room
over by Charing Cross
and the landlady
came up
and you opened
the door
in your underpants?

Nima said.

I can't forget
the look
on her face
I said
with a smile.

You still off
the drugs?
I said.

She moved
her head
and stared at me
so far
she replied.

She was back home
at her parents' place
out of the hospital
with the nurses
and quacks.

Bought
that Beatles' LP
she said
looking back
at the sky.

I studied her
rising and falling
breasts beneath her
red tee shirt
her hands
behind her head.

Is it any good?
I said
wishing we
were in some bed
not here on the grass.

It's fabulous
she said
played it over and over
much to my parents'
disapproval.

I recalled
that night
in that cheap
hotel room
and watching her
slow taking off
clothes removal.

Terry Collett

Sexual Desire 1969

When Tata
said to me
Sophia he is all right

Benedict is all right
and I believe
you and he

have not had sex
I was relieved
and felt the perspiration

run down my back
and into my blouse
yesterday evening

and while he
was saying that
I had just pushed

the image
of Benedict and me
humping on my bed

him whispering
those words
love you

love you
in my ear
and when Tata

called Mamusia
into the lounge
and said

Benedict is all right
I believe her
when she say

she and he
have not had the sex
and he hugged her

and kissed her cheek
and I could see
she was relieved too

and now lying in bed
with lights out
the moon visible

through the window
of my bedroom
I can relax

and enjoy the image
of Benedict and me
here in this bed

humping away
like soldiers
on a mission

him above me
me beneath
being entered

and sensing him
sensing his every
touch and kiss

but now as I do so
I think but what if
Tata had not

believed me
what if he knew
I had had sex

with Benedict

in this bed
what then?

how I would be now?
and I visualize Tata
staring at me

his dark eyes
full of fire
burning out

all memories
of Benedict
and sexual desire.

Terry Collett

Share Her Bath 1964

I walk with Milka
from the farmhouse
to the fence
where we stop
and look across a field

you were sitting cosy
with my mum
while I was upstairs
having a bath
Milka says

well I did ask your mum
if I could go share
your bath with you
but she wasn't keen
on the idea
I say
so sat downstairs
and she entertained me

entertained you Benny?
you make her sound
like a brothel keeper
Milka says frowning

I can't see your mum
as a brothel keeper
I say

how would you know
what a brothel keeper
looks like
unless there is something
you've not told me?
Milka says

I've seen it in films
I say

seen what it films?
she says

brothels and thingys
I say

I think you fancy my mum
more than you do me
Milka says

what do you mean fancy?
I was only having a drink of tea
and a few biscuits with her
and talking with her
I say

that's how it starts
next she'll be steering you
towards the bedroom
while I'm bathing
Milka says

you're jealous
of your own mother
I say

jealous of her?
she's just a middle-age frump
who happens
to be my mother
Milka says her tone icy

just being nice to me
while I waited for you
to come down
after your bath
I say

too nice
I saw the way
she looked at you

while you weren't looking
and tea and biscuits
that's more than Dad gets
when he comes in
from the farm
Milka says

she stares towards the farmhouse
pouting her lips

I say nothing more
for a while and try
and think of her mother
and if she did look at me
while I wasn't looking
but I wouldn't know
if I wasn't looking
but she did have
a nice motherly
sort of breasts
and as she walked
her behind had
a smooth way of moving

it's all in your head
I say to Milka
I am as innocent as a lamb

Milka turns towards me
well be careful
she doesn't cover you
in sauce and eat you then
Milka says
looking at me sadly

baa-baa
I say

she gives a laugh
and I wish I could
have shared her bath.

Shared Cigarette

O'Brien held the cigarette tight
Between forefinger and thumb
He placed it between lips and
Inhaled. Danny Davis wanted
A drag too and Eddie Sutcliffe
Stood like a young pup waiting
For his chew on the bone. They
Watched the end of the cigarette
Flare up in the early winter cold
Eddie rubbed his hands together
In anticipation. You kept an eye
Out for school prefects or any
Odd teacher who might happen
To venture forth into the school
Playground. I liberated this from
My dad's packet, O'Brien said
Taking the cigarette from his lips
And passing it over to Davis who
Took a quick drag then gave it to
Sutcliffe who held it like a girl
Having her first kiss. No one was
Coming, so you had a quick drag
After Eddie had left drips of dribble
And inhaled the smoke. O'Brien
Made a comment about some
Girl he'd had or so he said the
Night before. Davis guffawed
Loudly, but Sutcliffe stood there
Opened mouthed while you
Half smiled and wondered if it
Was true about the girl's arse
Or just some smutty joke

Terry Collett

Sharing Chips 1956.

Helen walked
from her home
to the bomb

site where the
boy Benny
had told her

after school
he would be
off Meadow

Row behind
the old green
grocer's shop

but when she
got there he
was no where

in sight so
she was scared
-after all

tramps often
slept or hid
in the bombed

out buildings-
where was he?
she muttered

what to do?
she looked out
over the

large bomb site
biting her
finger nails

thinking that
maybe a
tramp would jump

out at her
then she saw
a figure

come out of
one of the
bombed ruins

she stared hard
panicking
thinking she'd

wet herself
when Benny
waved his hand

and called out
you came then?
-he sometimes

stated the
obvious-
I wondered

where you were
she muttered
he tapped his

6 shooter
silvery
looking toy

gun in his
black holster
on his belt

looking out

for bad guys
he replied

she was glad
it was him
not a tramp

want some chips?
he asked her
we can share

I've got coins
sufficient
although she'd

just had tea
she nodded
so they walked

to Neptune's
fish and chip
shop and bought

6d worth
and stood out
side the shop

and shared them
watching life
rushing by

both of them
beneath an
evening sky.

Terry Collett

Sharing.

Helen sat next to me
on the grass
outside Banks House

I was attempting to open
a bottle of lemonade

can I have a drop?
she asked

sure
once I get the thing open
I said

she looked around her
then over at the coal wharf
where coal men
were filling up
their trucks and wagons
with sacks of coal

I unscrewed
the lid of the bottle
and handed her
the bottle

she took it
with both hands
and took a swig
then another

pearls of sweat
sat on her forehead
her brown wet hair stuck
to her face at the sides
it was a hot summer

here
she said

handing me the bottle

I wiped the top
and took a swig

that's better
she said
I was really thirsty
my tongue felt
like the bottom
of my baby sister's pram

I handed her the bottle again
she wiped the top
and swigged some more

I watched her
as she drank
then looked away
and looked at the flat's
behind us
no curtains moved
no curtain twitchers
looked at us

she gave me back the bottle
and I screwed the lid
back on
and placed it
beside me on the grass

I'm getting
a new school dress tomorrow
she said
Mum said I've outgrown
my old one

I gazed at her
she was wearing
a tomato stained white blouse
and grey pleated skirt
white ankle socks

and black scuffed shoes

I may get new blouses
if they can afford them
otherwise I'll have to wear
those second hand ones
my mum got
from a jumble sale
not that I mind of course
but new ones
are always better

I took a white paper bag
from the grass
and said
want a bun?

is it fresh?

this morning's

OK thank you
and she took a bun
from the bag
and ate into it

I took one
and ate it
piece by piece
picking out the currants

I need shoes too
she said
but don't expect
to get them yet awhile
will have to
make them do

a horse drawn
coal wagon
moved out
of the coal wharf

Helen still talked

I watched the horse
trotting along the road
he didn't seem strained
pulling the heavy load.

Terry Collett

She And The 1890s Book Club.

She was always self conscious,
Always conscious of her shyness,
Her feelings of inadequacy; as if
The others could see inside her

Head, know her thoughts. She sat
Stiffly, the others around her, their
Chatter, confident talk, conversations
Expressed so sure of themselves

Kind of thing, yet she said nothing,
Listened, eyed them, smiled when
Looked at. She sat just a little apart,
One hand beside her, one in her lap,

Knowing they were judging her,
Sizing her up, especially the men.
Such manners, such talk, Mother
Would say of her friends, yet secretly

She wished she could be as them,
Could speak so unconcernedly of
Others' opinion, laugh, be open,
Intelligent talk, speaking of art, music

And the latest books. Three men
And six girls and all that talk and
Laughter and she not really a part
Of them, not one of the crowd, the

Odd one out, the shy outsider. And he
Sitting opposite her, on the other side
Of the small settee, giving her occasional
Looks, the eyes over her, taking in her

Fragile beauty, maybe, would say things,
Offer her a dance or drink, but she
Looked away, shyness flowing over her,
Drowning her in blushes. He looked

Away and smirked. She felt an urge to
Speak, to say things, to let them know,
Let them see. But she just listened to
Their chatter, the men's loud guffaws,

The girl's high giggles, the eyes studying
Her, maybe he, standing behind the settee,
Might give her consideration, may offer
Her the chance, to allow her to speak in

Her own good time, utter what she knew
Of art or philosophy, that book by Spinoza
She'd struggled with, the poetry of Byron,
That painting she liked in the gallery when

Her parents took her last. But he turned
To speak to another, his eyes having touched
Her momentarily, then gone, unconcerned,
As she silently smouldered, secretly burned.

Terry Collett

She Can Etch.

She can etch with
her finger the place
he lay on the bed;
see the indentations

where his head was
on the pillow. She can
smell his hair oil, his
body sweat mixed with

the lavender water.
She can close her eyes
and see him still lying
there, can sense his

presence, feel his finger
(ghostly) run along
her spine as she bends
over the bed, to sniff the

pillowcase. With eyes
closed she can pretend
so much, can imagine all
sorts of things, him doing

what he did best, and she
liking, wanting it all again,
just the once, just one more
lovely time. She opens her

eyes, just the indentation,
the smell, the faint stain of
hair oil. She lays on the bed
where he once lay, shuts

her eyes again, puts her
hands down by her sides,
imagines him kissing her
lips, wet and warm, his

tongue protruding her
mouth, touching her teeth,
moving within. She pretends
he is running his hands along

her thighs, lifting her dress,
moving between her legs, his
lips pressing hers, the bed
moving, her body alive again,

him there, she holding on to
him, wanting him to stay, not
go and away. She opens her
eyes and he's gone, just her

alone, lying still, motionless.
The spider on the ceiling of
her room, black and plump
as a pudding, hanging there,

suspended. All thoughts of her
lost love momentarily ended.

Terry Collett

She Couldn't Win 1960

Fay sat in the classroom
and watched
as the plump nun
swayed back and forth
in front of the blackboard.

The nun stopped and stared
at the children in the class.

Who can tell me
the Seven Deadly Sins?
She asked,
peering at the front row.

There was silence.

Fay wanted to put up
her hand, but didn't want
to be seen as a know-it-all,
so she sat there
her arm anxious
to shoot up.

No one?
The nun said frowning,
surely one of you
knows at least one of them.

The children looked
at the desks or at each other,
none looked at the nun.

Nearly all of you
are committing one
of them right now
it seems,
the nun said.

Lust?

said a boy
at the back
who sat straight faced,
but bubbling inside
to burst into laughter.

The nun stared at him:
that is one,
anyone else have a sin?

Fay put up
her hand and arm:
Pride Sister Mary?
She said.

The nun looked at her:
That is two,
anyone else
have a sin to mention?

A girl with black hair
in bunches and glasses
said: Greed Sister Mary?

The nun nodded her head:
Four more sins;
anyone else have a notion?

There's envy,
the boy said
who had spoken earlier.

Fay knew them all,
but was unsure
about saying it:
Gluttony is another,
Fay said,
looking at her hands
in her lap.

Three more,
the nun said,

swaying back
and forward on her toes
like swaying penguin.

Wrath is one,
a boy
with spiky hair said.

One more,
the nun said,
eyeing the class
like a warrior
before battle.

Pride,
a girl said
behind Fay.

The nun nodded:
That is right;
now tomorrow
I expect each
one of you
to know them all,
the nun said.

Fay knew them all
so she wasn't worried
about that,
but then she worried
because it sounded
like pride
and she thought:
now I have
committed
a sin of pride:
having knowledge
or not,
she couldn't win.

Terry Collett

She Liked To Dance 1977

She liked to dance.

The red dress swirled
as she danced.

There were eyes
watching her move.

I watched her
from my corner;
drink in hand sipping,
my eyes gorging
on her beauty.

The tango music
brought her
to a fresh life.

How the feet moved,
steps as if new found.

The music played,
the beat got her feet.

Others watched
in a silent gaze,
murmuring words
came later,
qualms about how
her legs showed
as she swirled
the red dress,
some caught sight
of underwear.

I said nothing
just watched her
dance and swirl.

My kind of woman,
my sort of girl.

Terry Collett

She Mourns.

She mourns.

Head on knees,
hands on ankles,
feeling with fingers
tired skin.

Child death
unlike all other.

We made,
he said,
I carried,
she replied.

The child died.

Ce qui peut venir
de tout cela?

What result?
He questioned
over dull coffee,
cigarette held low,
eyes mud brown
cast down.

Blessures comme
celle-ci ne guérissent pas,
she said.

Pictures of her child
swim in the waters
of her pained head.

Terry Collett

She Sinful Or Wild

All or nothing at all
her father had said
and it seemed right

until she met Harpoon
and he seemed her
Mr Right the one she

had been waiting for
the one she'd dreamed
about but then it all

went wrong and he
became Mr Wrong
and oh yes that was

the downfall that was
the way to her deep
depression and that

episode in the bath
when she tried to
drown herself as her

mother had before her
and she discovered her
as a child coming home

from school and the
door was ajar and when
she went in there was

her mother with her
wrists slit and blood
and her mother drowned

and dead and now sitting
there in her mother's
chair her father some

place her husband poking
some other and all or
nothing at all seemed all

there was left apart from
the few books on the shelf
the Bill Burroughs her mother

had read and left and that
Bukowski book she'd found
in some second shop and the

battered Bible which her
father had beat her about
the head and backside with

as a child when her father
had been boozing or she
had been sinful or wild.

Terry Collett

She Sleeps

She sleeps.

There is exhaustion.

Exhaustion of mind,
of body.

L'épuisement
de l'esprit.

Too tired to undress,
she sleeps in the clothes
he wore the night before.

Smell of apples,
fresh picked after rain.

Scent of her God given,
day worn.

Wonder if she dreams of me
or another
or of castle towers,
and knight rescues
after dragon slaying.

Maybe we made love
or else did other.

Contented sleep
looks like,
that well indulged
featured look
while sleeping
in some god's keeping.

Sommeil réparateur.

Bird song outside,

dawn chorus,
traffic far off.

Her hands
which once touched mine,
rest in their sleep.

Her lips just open,
once mine to kiss,
await kisses
in her dreams.

I lay and watch
dawn's light play
upon the ceiling.

I lay awake with that
marooned on a desert island
depressing feeling.

Terry Collett

She Sleeps 1980

She sleeps.

There is exhaustion.

Exhaustion of mind,
of body.

L'épuisement
de l'esprit.

Too tired to undress,
she sleeps in the clothes
he wore the night before.

Smell of apples,
fresh picked after rain.

Scent of her God given,
day worn.

Wonder if she dreams of me
or another
or of castle towers,
and knight rescues
after dragon slaying.

Maybe we made love
or else did other.

Contented sleep
looks like,
that well indulged
featured look
while sleeping
in some god's keeping.

Sommeil réparateur.

Bird song outside,

dawn chorus,
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Her hands
which once touched mine,
rest in their sleep.

Her lips just open,
once mine to kiss,
await kisses
in her dreams.

I lay and watch
dawn's light play
upon the ceiling.

I lay awake with that
marooned on a desert island
depressing feeling.

Terry Collett

She Wished

She wished
he was there still
still beside her
or in the bed
or anywhere else
but not in her head

he haunted her days
and nights

intruded her thoughts
and deeds

brought memories to mind
like photographs
opened up
in some album
for her to see

but it was all
in her head
not outside
not beside her
or in her bed
making love at night
not entering her with passion
as once he had
but no just in her head

just his image there
abstract and yet concrete
but not just his ghost
or spirit at most

she wanted him
beside her
wanted him
embracing her close
his hands about her waist

his lips on hers
but no just
the memory to haunt
just the once upon a time
to jeer

O she murmured sadly
wish you were here Honey
wish you were here.

Terry Collett

She With His Book Open.

There is
the open book

her inquisitive look
the way

with one stockinged leg
hanging over

the arm
of the chair

the centre parted
wavy dark hair

and he sitting
across from her

at the writing desk
writing to his mother

saying how good
he was being

all alone in Paris
reading the books

she'd sent
paying his way

paying the rent
eating out

working in
getting

the studying done
leaving the girls alone

no late nights
no booze

no cigarettes
no sadness

or regrets
and looking up

from the letter paper
seeing her opposite

with his book
open on her lap

her black
laddered stockings

the way she sits
invitingly

him smiling
dotting the i's

and crossing
the t's

periods at the end
whispering

to the dame
be there soon

kisses on the bottom
of the letter

for mother
and the dame's

(bottom)
maybe later

letting the ink dry
imaging what

beneath
the dame's dress

and underclothes
may wait

and his
deep sigh.

Terry Collett

She'D Not Seen.

Tanya had not seen
the thing from that
angle, she'd only seen

it from her own narrow
gauge of looking, and
of course there was

the blindness, caused
by hate, and he had
after all gone off with

that skinny tart, and
after all the effort she'd
taken to loose weight,

and oh yes, he had gone
and taken her favourite
dress the red one she'd

out grown, and the one
she'd once much favoured,
although she'd only worn

it the once, and now that
thin bean of a girl had it
on, oh how could he, she

spat out, while lounging
in the bath, the there water
almost to the rim, and she

there looking at her pink
plumpness, and how her
tits could almost swim, oh

come back, do not leave me
here, she moaned although
there was none to hear her,

except the guy in the flat next
door, but he was kind of queer,
oh where is love when you need

it? and where is some god to protect?
Oh, she said, all my plans are wrecked.

Terry Collett

Sheila And Her Sister Spy 1962

After school and at home,
Sheila plops on her bed.

Arms spread out,
hands open like
twigs on a tree.

Her elder sister
is downstairs
and gossiping
with her mother
about her day.

But Sheila lies there
staring at the ceiling,
eyeing a spider
in the corner,
small and black.

On the wall
above her sister's bed
is a crucifix
with a palm folded
and stuck behind
the Christ's back.

She breathes
in deeply.

Satisfied she'd seen John
at school lunchtime,
she smiles,
brings her hands
behind her head,
crosses her leg
over the other
at the ankles.

The weather stayed nice,

dry and cloudless sky.

He had noticed
she'd done her eyes
when he saw her
lunchtime.

Her mother wasn't happy
when she came in just now
and said:
what's that muck
around your eyes,
get it off.

She hasn't so far,
she would later.

John took her
onto the playing field,
they walked and talked.

She got flustered
at one point.

Would he kiss her?

He kept turning his head
to watch other boys
kick ball,
his hand not far
from mine.

I was hoping
he would hold it,
hold it near him,
but he didn't.

Talked about things:
his books,
butterflies,
what birds he's seen.

What have you done
to your eyes?
He said.

Just stuff to make them
show more I said.

Miss S told me
not to wear it again
when she told me off
after Maths.

Wanted him to kiss me;
Wanted him to kiss;
Wanted him to;
Wanted him;
Wanted.

The door opens,
her sister comes in
and says:
told Mum you were
with that boy,
she wants to talk to you.

Since when
did you become
Jesus' telltale?

Her sister looks at her,
sits on her bed,
takes up her black
bound copy
of the Bible,
opens it up
and says:
Mum's waiting
for you.

Go do
what the monkey does,
Sheila says,

and poo.

Terry Collett

Sheila At Midday Recess 1962

You wanted to be a nun
you even sent off for a book
about an order in Ireland,

but then that day
you saw John
in the playground,

the sun was shining
and it began to rain
and he said
Monkey's Wedding
over to you,

you smiled
and felt all funny inside
and couldn't stop
thinking of him
in class while the teacher
was talking about
some English king
and something or other,

today you saw
and spoke to him
and asked if you
could hang
around with him,

he said yes
and then you didn't
know what to say,

so listened
to him talking,

so sat there
on the grass
at midday recess,

felt all odd inside
and wanted to kiss him,
but you didn't,

you just sat there,
grabbing at his words
in the midday air.

Terry Collett

Sheila Over Dinner 1962

What's up
with you Sheila?
Mum said
at dinner.

Nothing
I'm just thinking
I said.

I had wanted
to be a nun
and the priest said
if I served God well
I would go to Heaven
but then I met Benny
crossing the playground
and he became
my heaven.

About what?
Mum said.

About not
being a nun
I said.

What's changed
your mind
you were set on it
a few weeks ago
she said.

Just changed
my mind
I said.

How come
you changed
your mind so quick?

the other week
you were going
to be another be
St Therese
Dad said.

Just thought
it through
I said
might want to
have babies.

What made
you think
about having babies?
Mum said.

I thought
about Benny
that lunchtime
on the field with him
being near him
but I felt shy
and didn't say much
hoping he would
kiss me
but he didn't
but I never told
my parents that.

Dad talked about
his work
and mum said
about the price
of stuff in the shops.

My brother Burt
talked of fishing
and where was going
at the weekend.

I thought of Benny

and the kiss
which didn't come
gazing now
and then at Mum.

Terry Collett

Sheila's Dream 1962

Sheila had
a troubled expression.

We were sitting
on the playing field
at lunch recess.

Sun shining
blue skies
white clouds drifting.

I dreamed about you
last night
she said.

I saw Rolland
score a good goal
the goal keep
was asleep.

I looked at her
what I do?

She hesitated
and looked away.

I took in her small
but neat bulbs.

She said
kissed me.

I looked
at her knees
poking out
the end
of her skirt.

Where'd I kiss you?

I said.

In my dream
she replied.

I know that
but where on you
did I kiss you?

O I see
she smiled
reddening
on my lips
she said.

Did I do
anything else?

She frowned
we held hands
she said.

I nodded
there was a roar
the other side
had scored a goal
Rolland
was not happy.

Would you?
she said.

Would I what?
I said
looking back
at her.

Kiss me
she said shyly.

What here?
I said

not thinking it
a good idea
with the guys about.

No somewhere quiet
she said.

Guess so
if you want me to
I said.

I do if you
want to
she said
looking at me
through wire
framed glasses.

I do
but not here
I said.

She smiled
and touched
my hand
with hers.

I hoped the guys
never saw
so made
a quick withdraw.

Look I got to go
see you later
some place quiet.

(If the guys
saw me kiss
there'd be a riot.)

Terry Collett

Sheila's Mood 1962

Sheila was in such a mood
such an over the top mood
that the teacher
thought her

well not to put
too fine point on it
slightly under
the influence

although there was
no smell on her breath
or aroma
about her person

there was the excitement
of character
that buzz in the air
about her

that the teacher
(Miss Hubb)
kept a deeper eye
on her during

the double maths
seeing how
the girl sat
how she turned

her head
how the hair
flickered
as she moved

how the girl
held the pen
as if it were a spear
to spike or kill

and not to scribe
or note
Sheila!
she called out

to the girl
who suddenly
as if woken
from a deep dream

sat up stiffly
and said
yes Miss?
What is wrong

with you girl?
Ants in your pants?
Guffaws from other pupils
sniggers from others

Sheila blushed
no Miss
nothing Miss
she replied

but the image
of the boy John
was there brightening up
her day set her alight

like an inner flame
set off a fizz and buzz
within her
then sit still girl

others are trying
to focus on the maths
(hardly any)
yes Miss

Sheila replied

and the fizz and buzz
quietly and slowly
died.

Terry Collett

Sheila's Musing 1962

Sheila sat on her bed.
School was a bore.
Benny was there,
but nothing happened.

We sat at lunch time
recess on the sports field,
but nothing. Others were
there: girls together or

boys playing football.
I felt all odd inside
being next to him.
Wanted to kiss him,

but I didn't I just sat
next to him listening
to him talk. How I got
through the boring lessons

without getting told off
I don't know. My mind
wasn't in it. Just Benny
in my thoughts. Those hazel

eyes of his. That quiff
of hair. That smile like
that Elvis I've seen in
newspapers. Be dinner soon.

Mum moaned about my room
when I came in just now.
So untidy she said. I wonder
if I will kiss him tomorrow.

Unless it rains and we are
stuck in during recess.
Sheila's mother called her
for dinner. Sheila stood up

and carried her thoughts
of Benny with her down
the stairs to dinner. Sometimes
it felt as if Benny was in her.

Terry Collett

Shifton Studied Sex.

Shifton studied sex; he had books
And magazines on the subject
Stuffed in his bookcase shelves,
Pages bent, corners marked,
Words scribbled along the sides
Of print where he disagreed;
His scrawl almost unintelligible
To another's eye. He had paintings
Of nude women on his walls;
Wagner's Tristan and Isolde
Blared from the Hifi; a statuette
Of Aphrodite stood on his cluttered
Desk next to a photo of his wife
Semi clad taken on their wedding night,
Her Pre-Raphaelite features holding
The eye. Shifton wrote erotic poetry,
His writing scribbled on anything
At hand; his wife looking over
His shoulder as he wrote, her hand
On his shoulder, giving it a squeeze,
Kissing his earlobe, nibbling, licking,
Bringing him to fruit. His wife modelled
For sex magazines, for art classes,
For Shifton in his need of artistic
Inspiration, for the landlord when
The rent was due, saying softy and sexily,
What is a poor young innocent to do?
Shifton laughed; took in the Wagnerian
Swirl of sounds, the fat lady singing
In the Brunhilde role; the statuette
Of Aphrodite in his hands, his lips kissing
The small breasts, the eyes moving over
The cold stone; his wife sitting in the next room,
Neglected now, sad and naked and alone.

Terry Collett

Shiver

Shiver,
that's what it did to her
sitting naked
in that river,

wanting to get back
to nature, as her mother
has told her:
get back to as it was girl,

rid yourself
of all that filth,
all that vanity,
all that god darn

modern take on beauty.
Shiver,
that's what it did her
lying nude

on Bret's bed,
the soft white pillow
beneath her head,
just as her man

has told her:
be close to nature,
rid yourself
of modesty,

rid yourself
of the thin cloth
of morality,
make love to me

until the dawn shows,
he said, lying butt naked
with her on the broad bed.
Shiver,

that's what death's kiss
did to her
as she lay undressed,
dying, unloved, unblessed.

Terry Collett

Shlomit Remembers.

Shlomit remembers
the slaps at the back

of the legs by Mother's
wet hand. Sins must

be punished, Father said,
lounging in the armchair

by the fire. She had
asked for more pudding,

milky, white, warm to
fill her small stomach,

the stinging hot flesh,
Mother's hand striking

slaps one, two and three.
Straight to bed, none of

the stories, no supper,
no tea. She recalls that

dark room, the cold bed,
the smell of nightclothes

over worn, infrequently
washed, the aching head.

She remembers that more
than once, always that

hand wet, flesh exposed,
the slaps thrice, painfully

given, not nice. She recalls
the hand marks left behind,

red on white, carves or
thighs, the stinging sensation,

the shame of it all and them
arguing down the darken hall.

Terry Collett

Shopping First 1955

Helen's mother said,
to get the shopping first,
then to go see Benny,

so Helen climbed down
the stairs with a handful
of coins, and a shopping list,

and along the street
to the grocer shop,
and waited there

behind Mrs Folkes
who had the look
of grim death

on her features,
and the smell of something,
Helen couldn't decide,

on her old fur coat,
and waiting there
she looked

at the small area
of sweet jars on the shelves,
all sorts of sweets

from fruit gums
to sherbet lemons,
and those Flying Saucer things

she liked to suck,
and she sighed because
she didn't have enough money

for even one,
not and get Mum's
shopping too,

and the shop assistant
served Mrs Folkes,
and that meant

Helen was next in-line,
and held the coins tightly,
thinking of meeting Benny

afterwards, and to go
some where, but Benny
didn't say where,

and she thought of him
his hazel eyes,
and brown hair,

and that quiff of hair
in front, and wondered:
where we'll go?

She mused,
last time they went
to Camberwell Green,

and saw shops,
and the hospital
Benny was born,

and before that
they'd been
to the herbalist shop,

and it rained,
and they stood there
watching the rain fall,

and Benny said
about some battle
where it'd rained,

but the place

or name
she couldn't recall.

Terry Collett

Shoshana In Class 1962

All through maths
Shoshana
thought of him

her Naaman
the real one
algebra

was a bore
the teacher
tall and thin

carried on
with his task
at the board

writing down
the maths work
at lunch break

she'd see him
on the grass
and could talk

or listen
and could watch
him closely

hazel eyes
his brown hair
the Elvis smile

hoping that
he'd touch her
hand in his

SHOSHANA
the teacher
bellowed out

you are not
writing down
the school work

are you ill?
She looked up
everyone

was gazing
at her there
she blushing

and Naaman
in her mind
sat smiling

and hushing.

Terry Collett

Shoshana Touched 1962

There was quiet talk.

My mother had
talked to Father
and my sister
cried less.

What to do
about the baby
seemed to be
the question.

I sit in my room
thinking of Naaman.

I kissed him
in the corridor
at school.

I told him
about my sister
he didn't judge
or condemn
just listened.

I see the neighbour
in his garden digging.

The sun is bright.

I wish
I could bring
Naaman home
but now is not
a good time.

What with
the baby talk
and the whispering

and bad looks.

When I kissed him
I felt odd
as if wires
connected
to my brain
and feet
and spaces
in between.

As if touched
by God.

Terry Collett

Should Have Told.

Should have told them years ago,
you mutter to the windowpane, told
them about the man who had said
he would take you to see the place

you used to live in the country and
to show you the old cottage where
you lived with your family as a girl,
but he didn't, he molested you in his

car, once he'd driven into a wooded area,
and you and he were alone, and you
said: what are you doing? You've asked
for it, he said, asked for it each time

you gave me that smile, each time
you laughed at my jokes. You became
dumb, words wouldn't come, and even
though you tried to stop him, he did

it anyway, and you watched him like
an onlooker to an incident out of your
control. Once he'd done he lay back
in his seat and said: our secret this,

and he grinned. You looked at your
dress, how he had ripped it at the end,
and how to explain that. Our secret,
he said as he drove you back again,

and dropped you outside your workplace.
But you said nothing; just went home
and said you'd torn the dress at work,
and threw your underclothes in a bag

and in the bin. Now years have past
after your umpteenth mental breakdown
and now at the hospital in the lock ward
at the barred window, the psychiatrist

behind at his desk, and you had told
him it all: just poured out of you like
vomit all over his desk, in his face,
in his middle-class ears, and he your
abuser, dead now, probably for years.

Terry Collett

Showing Dolls

And Mrs Clark said
why doesn't your son
come to tea
I'm sure Helen

would like that
she can show him
her collection of dolls
and your mother said

yes that would be nice
I'm sure he'd like that
and Helen peered at you
through her spectacles

her pupils like
two brown fish
in a glass bowl
and she smiled

one of those smiles
which frighten small boys
and Mrs Clark said
yes and you can come too

and your mother nodded
and off they went
into one of their
long conversations

and as they talked
Mrs Clark rocked the pram
with her youngest kid
wrapped up inside

and your mother stood
with you by her side
with the creeping dread
riding up in you

of tea looming
and Helen standing there
her plaits on either side
of her head

going back and forth
as she moved her head
and Mrs. Clark laughed
and the pram shook

and the kid cried
and she rocked the pram
backward and forward
and all you

could think about
was the dolls
and the baked beans
on toast

and Helen showing you
her dolls
as she had before
and taking

a secret kiss
behind a closed door.

Terry Collett

Sight Seeing.

Walking around the Arc de Triomphe
Looking up at the names carved in the
Walls wondering if you'd see any names
Of distant relatives carved up there
Amongst the brave and fallen knowing
The coach would be waiting soon and
Wanting to see more and take in the
Atmosphere of the place trying to avoid
The other foreigners with their cameras
And tourist garb and glasses wishing to
Capture with your eyes images for your
Minds to feed on and remember when
You lie in bed and talk with the lights
Out and seeing now the coach driver and
Guide waving their arms you know it's
Time for you and your lady to go back to
The coach and sit and wait for the next
City sight and the coming of a Paris night.

Terry Collett

Sightless Washdown 1940

Sightless,
I use my other
four senses to guide me
through the remaining world
about me.

I smell the disinfect
of the hospital ward,
I hear the passing
nurses and doctors,
and the cries and chatter
of other patients.

I feel with my fingers
where my stumps begin
and my legs end.

I taste the warmth
of the cup of tea
they brought me.

I hear talk of invasion
by Nazi troops;
I hear music
of a dance band
and someone singing.

Someone
is washing me
in the bed;
towels are under me
and over me;
I feel like a child again;
hands wash my stumps,
clean my body,
soap and rinse my breasts.

This darkness
behind my eyes

depresses me.

Will I walk again?
I ask at random.

Of course, Grace,
once your stumps
are healed sufficiently
and we can
measure you up,
the voice says,
not stopping
her work,
her voice dry as sand.

In my blindness
I recall Clive
touching me
where the nurse touches;
his hands there,
his lips kissing me
as we made love
before he left
for war and battle
and death.

I am being dried
by a towel
a hand feels along
my skin to see
how dry I am.

Clive has gone
and all I can think
is damn.

Terry Collett

Silent And Shy 1957

London Bridge
railway station
was busy
as Lydia and Benny

walked in and sat
on one of the seats
on the platform
where a big black

steam train
was about to go off
grey and white steam
shushed from beneath

and from on top
of the engine
Benny was fascinated
by steam engines

he loved to watch
the power and sound
and smell of them
Lydia's thoughts

were on her home
and her parents rowing
and her big sister
snoring away

after a boozy night
(as her mother
called it)
and her father

coming home drunk
and singing
in the Square
so all could hear him

the train steamed off
slow at first
then fast and faster
shush shush

and a loud whistle
and it was off
Benny watched it go
and Lydia turned her head

and watched it too
do you think
my parents' rowing
will end by the time

I get home?
She said
expect so
Benny said

usually short lived
they'll be all lovely dovey
by the time you get home
she wasn't so sure

they were going at it
hammer and tongs
when she left
and she didn't say

where she was going
and she supposed
she'd get a telling off
for that too

let's get 2 glasses
of milk and biscuits
from the station cafe
Benny said

she looked worried

come on
he said
race you to the cafe

she looked at him
they will have stopped
by the time I'm home
won't they?

I don't like it
when they row
of course
Benny said

all will be fine
when we get back
she nodded her head
and they walked

to the cafe
on the station
and went in
the place was quiet packed

but Benny told her
to get table and sit down
and he'd get the stuff
so she sat at a table

by the window
and Benny queued up
behind a man
in a stripe black and white suit

who smelt of tobacco
Lydia imagined
her mum and dad
going at each other

her mother throwing
cups and saucers
and her dad trying

to get a word in sideways

and her sister Gloria
snoozing in it all
smelling of booze
and a good night out

she looked over at Benny
in the queue
hands in his trouser pockets
head to one side

looking at the labels
of biscuits
in the glass window
of a cabinet

deciding which to buy
and she looking
all silent and shy.

Terry Collett

Simple Fact

There was the simple fact
she was pregnant and by him.
Three months late. Morning
sickness. Throwing up after

breakfast. If she had breakfast.
And Thornton knew nothing
of it and that was the way she
wanted it: him ignorant of that

fact of her being with child as
Mother called it. She'd not seen
him since the big bust-up after
the Chekov play. He rang twice

but she put the phone down with
a mighty slam. That temper of
yours, Mother used to say, will
be the death of you. Not yet at

least, she thought. Mother always
thought she knew best; a childhood
of constant nags and slaps. She lay
in bed listening to birds. Father

was a bird watcher, knew them all,
where they laid and when and
what colour the eggs of the birds
were. She remembered him and

his binoculars and that hat which
made Mother laugh. Soon she'd
get up and puke. The smell itself
was enough to make her puke again.

Thornton's one minute act of sex
brought all this. God's seven days
of creating beauty and light were
reduced by Thornton one minute's

sex, to making hell in a single night.
You'll make it all work, a voice
inside her head said. But it was a
big step from single self to another

human being lying helpless in the
hands wailing and flailing its arms.
She sat up on the side of the bed.
All thoughts of Thornton, Mother

and Father all mixed up with puke
swirling in her guts and in her head.

Terry Collett

Sinking Ships 1966

Yiska stood
at the window
of the truck
and flirted,

sweet cherry
Tony said
smiling at her
his eyes plum like
gazing at her,

she smiled at him
then said
you look like
Tony Curtis
but older,

I am younger
Tony said
looking away
seeing if traffic
was coming behind us,

the girl's a whore
Claude said
watching her walk off
to the kerb
her hips swaying,

I waved to Yiska
she waved back
I recall her
teasing me once
saying leave these
old men behind
and I can show you
a good time
but I didn't
and regretted it after,

you know her?
Karl said to me
I said yes
but not well,

Yiska waved to us
as we drove away
her smile
could sink ships,

Iris said
would you if I
could make it
down to you?

of course
I replied
thinking
of the night time
and the house quiet
and she tiptoeing it
down not wishing
to wake up the others,

if she was
my daughter
I'd slap her arse
Tony said moodily
looking at Yiska
departing up the road,

I tried not
to picture it
but he had his way
with words,

as I played
the Miles Davis LP
Iris eyed me
and winked
and whispered

how about tonight?

Miles' flugal horn
stirred the air
and I whispered
ok that's fine,

the girls a whore
Claude repeated
after Yiska
had gone
from sight
a memory only,

whore or not
she was hot,

John Coltrane broke in
on his tenor sax
after Miles
and blew me away
that day,

a sweet thing
Karl said
smiling oddly,

Yiska said
I want you
so close
our flesh
would be one
and I could
squeeze you
between my thighs,

the truck drove on
and we drove past Yiska
and her swaying hips,

we sailed seven seas
and knew

of sinking ships.

Terry Collett

Sister The Fool 1962

God's way is hard
Sheila's big sister said
but that is what
I want to do

and be a nun
Sheila tied her school tie
and let her sister yak
in the background

to her thoughts of John
and pretended he
had been there
in her bedroom

as she had dressed
(not watching her sister)
his hazel eyes
scanning her she imagined

especially after
her strip wash
not sure which convent yet
the sister went on

but one strict
and far from human
touch or noise
Sheila stood in front

of the dressing table mirror
and gazed at herself
pushing her sister's words
from her as best she could

but if John
had been scanning her
she knew she'd have blushed
and hid her naked self

with a towel or dressing gown
despite one part of herself
thinking it
and boys

the sister said
have to be watched
they are usually after
the one thing

Sheila damped a finger
with her tongue
and slid across an eyebrow
thing?

she said
what do you mean
one thing?
o never you mind

that now little sister
just trust to God
and put boys aside
the sister brushed her hair

and set herself
up primly
with the grey dress
thing though

Sheila said
what thing?
ask Mum she'll say
I expect

the sister said dully
and went out the room
like some drabness on legs
Sheila sighed

and gazed at herself

in the mirror again
adjusted her glasses
on her nose

and thought on John
being at school
and thought unkindly
her sister the fool.

Terry Collett

Sisterly Row 1962

Elaine undresses for bed

it had been
an awful evening
watching TV

her mother still moaning on
about the boy John
kissing her
(Elaine not
her mother)

her sister sitting
on the sofa
smirking each time
their mother moaned

her father adding
about the boy
actually kissing
his Plump Hen
and smiling
and mother getting
annoyed with him

the TV programme
boring as a fart
in an open field

her sister
is already undressed
and in bed
reading a book

that didn't go down
too well did it
the younger sister says
looking up
from her book

Elaine stands there
in her bra and panties
thanks for nothing
blabbermouth
Elaine says
at least a boy
kissed me
I'd like to meet
the boy who is
brave enough
to kiss your
blabbing lips

her sister
glared at her
at least I will be
kissing someone
who isn't
a butterfly freak
and yaks about freaking
birds and nests
and eggs for Christ-sake

no need for you
to open your big mouth
about John kissing me
it was just one
of those special things
Elaine says

special? freaky
more like
why'd he want
to kiss you?
her sister says

at least I get kissed
boys wouldn't even
kiss your backside
Elaine says

she puts on
her faded pink
nightgown
and buttons up

at least the boy who
will kiss me won't do it
in secret like some freak
the sister says

BLABBER MOUTH
Elaine bellows

ODDBALL
her sisters replies loudly

the door opens
and their mother
stands there
hands on hips
glaring
what is going on
in here?
it's bedtime
you ought to be
getting asleep
not ranting like
two bad neighbours

it's her
the sister says
ranting on
about that boy
who kissed her

I want to more
about it
not another word
or I'll slap you
both one
now quiet
not another word

the mother says
standing there
by the door

Elaine gets into bed
and pulls the bed cover
over her shoulder
and turns towards
the wall

the mother switches
off the light
and closes the door

the sister
slams shut
the book
she was reading
and lies down

big mouth
Elaine utters quietly

sexpot
the sisters replies softly

an owl hoots
sounds from the TV
downstairs

Elaine stares
towards her sister
and glares.

Terry Collett

Sit And Wait

Just sit there and wait,
the nurse said, Jinjang

sat and waited. The room
smelt of cheap disinfect

and sick body's odour.
She looked around;

took in the yellow curtains,
light blue walls, plain carpet.

The doctor's name was
unfamiliar and the plump

young receptionist had
been rude and gruff.

The pain in the breast
was still there as she sat

silent on the wooden chair.
Her fingers had found a lump

while she showered. Her sick
mother had died of cancer,

the woman her childhood self
had loved wasted away like an

unwatered plant in a dry pot
one hot summer's day.

Terry Collett

Sitter At Windows.

I am a sitter at windows, said Lucia;
I am a thinker of sad thoughts, a gazer
at stars and moon and the bright hot
afternoon sun. My thoughts taunt me

like bullying children, they repeat
words and images and strings of verbal
abuse like repetitive vomit. I sit at
the window with folded arms, my bum

numb on the window ledge, my eyes
peering through the netted curtains,
taking in the sights, the people, the cats
and dogs, the cars and buses, the odd

cyclists, the women pushing prams,
children crying at the side. I see and
know my childhood ghosts, the locked
doors, the no supper nights, the starving

rumblings of an empty stomach, words
bellowed through the doors by angry
parents. I am one who stares from windows,
one who snoops through netted curtains,

taking in the sights, hearing imperfectly
the outer sounds, the stolen kisses and hugs
from teenage loves, the backyards fondles,
sex on the cheap, lives, loves, kisses and

holds. I see new moons, quarter moons,
half moons and full moons and the lunatic
surge pulls me in and pushes me out, my
moods change like the waves of the sea,

the deeps drowning me in depression,
the black dog's bark, thoughts of death
in a bath, slit wrists, over doses, hanging
behind a bathroom door like mother had,

eyes popping, tongue protruding. I think
of past loves, dream of what might have
been, the boys who came and went, the
ones who stayed and spoiled, the girls who

stayed the night for sensual sex or schoolgirl
kisses, of visits to an asylum before mother's
demise, the locked doors, the cruel cries and
lunatic laughter, the odd looking staff, the eyes,

the tongues, the finger gestures from closing
doors. I see the work of the gods in my daily
stares, the passing people on their way to death
or work or love or indecent sex with another's

love, or a child innocent as a flower's bud
plucked and pulled and brain washed by an
adult hand and tongue. I am one who sees
what's come to an end and what's sadly begun.

Terry Collett

Sitting Beside Finbar.

She sits beside Finbar, he
knows she's there, sitting
there staring into air. That
silly hat perched on the top

of her head of hair, white,
seen better days, he thinks,
not says. He puffs his pipe,
bitter tongue taste, smoke

hitting lungs, head light, he
exhales the smoke. Had he
been younger, fitter maybe,
he might have given her a try,

been romantic, said the things
one says to the fair sex. But
he's past that now, going to
seed as his old father would

have said. He can smell her
cheap perfume, wonders how
she moves, what her talents
are, what makes her brain tick.

Her silence is unnatural for a
female, never short of a word,
seldom rest the tongue, but she
just sits and stares, her silence

like a cloak. Her glass is there
untouched, the wine near the
rim, no lipstick marks, no spittle.
Had he been younger, in his

youth, he'd have made a play
for her, given it a try, seen how
she spread herself on the bed,
but not now, he'd lost the know

how. He inhales, bitter tongue
touch, smoke in the throat. She
sips from the wine, her pink lips
touching the glasses' rim, her

fingers holding the glass. He
wonders what lies beneath that
dull coloured dress, what her
underwear, the colour, the shape

and size, how soft she was to feel
and touch, how she'd return his
want of feeling, his fires that burn.
Hush hush man, his inner voice

says, sucking on the pipe, exhaling
the smoke in the air and she just
sitting sipping, staring into air.

Terry Collett

Sitting In Leicester Square With Julie

Didn't tell you
my boyfriend's
in prison did I?
Julie said

As you walked
through Leicester Square
having met her
off the bus

from the hospital
where she had to stay
for her drug habit
(her parents

being doctors
had her locked away
as best they could)
no you didn't

you replied
taking note
of her tightly tied
ponytail

her eyes unfocused
the summery dress
long and colourful
got caught with drugs on him

in a raid
she said
o I see
you said

do you get to see him?
you asked
hoping not
wishing the bugger

to be locked up good
no
she said
he's too far away

for me to get to
in the period
I have free
from the hospital

and besides
he's not really
my boyfriend
more an acquaintance

she sat in a seat
near a cinema
and stared
at passersby

you sat beside her
remembering the times
your old man
had brought you here

as a kid to see the nightlife
or go to the cinema
for some film
he had to see

or some famous actor
or actress he said
he thought
might be there

I've brought you
some cigarettes
you said
o you are a dear

she said

and kissed your cheek
and took the packet
and opened it up

there and then
and took one out
and lit it
with a plastic light

from her pocket
did you want one?
she asked
no you have them

you said
and so she sat
and smoked
and in between puffs

and exhalations
she spoke of her parents
and the hospital
and the staff there

and how she still remembered
that time she took you
in that small room
off the hospital ward

and did things
as she put it
and laughed
and the smoke

went up
and the people
went by
and you sat

watching her
taking in her hands
and fingers

the cigarette

between them
the eyes still dull
and bluish
or greenish

depending how
the sunlight caught them
and your cheek
still wet where her lips

had been
and the blue of sky
and the nearby park
with flowers

and grass flushed
with green.

Terry Collett

Sitting With Gran.

Gran half blind stares at the sky.
Her snow-white hair bushes out
In an explosion of curls. I used
To sit here with you on my lap,
She says, and rocked you to sleep
While your mother went to the shops
Or off to work. You sit beside her
In your brand new suit and short cut hair,
Listening to her words as they hang in the air.
Your father was never much good at work
Or things that mattered, she says, knowing
He'd let her down, despite her brand of love
And concern. Don't be like him, lad, be one
To be counted on, to be aware of others
Than yourself, don't be blinded by self-love
Or what counts for you or your own
Small world. She looks at you with her blue
White eyes wherein a long ago world slowly dies.

Terry Collett

Skin A Rabbit

Uncle showed you
the way to skin a rabbit.
The dead furred creature
swung from his hand.

You remember the knife
slitting open
the soft belly
and the innards
dragged out
and cut
until all was cleared
out and ready.

Then he broke
the back ankles
and pulled off the skin,
like one undressing
a small woman
from her coat of fur,
until the naked body
remained
and the fur covered
the head.

You watched
with your stomach moving
as he chopped off
the head
and with the fur covered over,
tossed it in a bag
to be disposed of later.

There's dinner,
Uncle said,
one naked rabbit,
small and cold
and dead.

Sky High Flying 1961

That's Mugwort
and that's Red Sorrel
and that over there

is Red Campion
Jane said
we were walking

on the Downs
the sky
summery warm

almost cloudless
cattle mooed nearby
a flock of birds

flew over
our heads
her hand held mine

skin on skin
warm
soft

I sensed an appley scent
about her
we had kissed

the day before
and it had been
other worldly

and now
I wanted to kiss again
but didn't want

to push forward
but wait to see
what happened

and that
she said
is White Deadnettle

smiling at me
you know
the countryside well

I said
well you Londoners
know nothing of it

but at least
you want to learn
she said

I liked the flowery dress
she was wearing
red and yellow

with a yellow sash
tied about her
and the white

ankle socks
and black shoes
(slightly muddy)

I observed her carefully
wanting to know
more of her

of nature
of us
and that bird back there

was a pheasant
she said
we paused

in the corn field

and looked back
up towards the Downs

and she turned to me
and kissed me
and held me close

and I felt almost
absorbed into her body
and wanted

to feel more and more
and she parted
and said

I'm no expert
on kissing
was that all right?

not sure
I'll need to try again
I said smiling

and she took my hand
and squeezed it
and kissed me again

and the cattle
mooed louder
and a bird

flew overhead spying
before it took off
in the sky high flying.

Terry Collett

Sky Watching

Put your hand here
Yiska said

she took my hand
and placed it
on her stomach

it was soft
even through
the white school blouse
it was warm

I gazed at her
lying there
on the sports field grass
beside me
in lunchtime recess

the sound of other kids
on the field
ball games
tag games
others near by
talking
some laughing

what's it feel like?
she asked

a jelly
I replied

press a bit
she said

I pressed a little
my hand sinking inward
what's it feel like for you?
I asked

sensual
warming
she said
up higher

she lifted my hand higher
just beneath
her tight small breasts
and held it there

I feel your heart
I said

what else?
she smiled

a couple of small mounds
I said
what's it like for you?

like my heart
is going to break out
and sing
she said

I gazed over
her shoulder
a prefect was walking
our way
his beady eyes focusing
on us

best move apart
I said
the Gestapo are about

she moved away from me
just as the prefect
arrived at our feet

what are you two doing?

he said

talking about
the birds and bees
I said

looks like more
than that
he said
staring at Yiska

more than what?
she asked

more than talking
looked like he was
doing things
the prefect said

doing things?
Yiska said
what do you mean
doing things?

she sat up
and pulled down
her skirt
over her knees

the prefect looked at me
were you?

what?

doing things?

we were talking

and the rest
he said
I saw you
put your hand

on her

did I?

I asked Yiska

not that I remember

she said

the prefect stared

at us both

then back towards

the school

well don't

he said

I'll be watching

and he walked off

hands behind his back

his broad shoulders swaying

she smiled

eyes everywhere

she said

we lay back down

and gazed at the sky

I like puffy clouds

she said

they make funny shapes

sometimes

she pointed

with her thin finger

at the blue sky and clouds

I gazed at her finger

the pinky nail

that one

looks like an old man

in a bath
she said

I looked at the sky
that one's
like two dogs
humping
I said

the sports field echoed
with the sound
of her loud laugh.

Terry Collett

Sleepy Eye 1970

That's the Emperor Concerto,
I said.

What is?
Miriam said,
looking up at me,
her red haired head
lying on my shoulder.

That music playing
on the radio of the coach,
I said.

Thought it was Mozart,
she said.

No Beethoven,
I said,
kissing her forehead.

We'd only known
each other for 12 hours
since meeting at Dieppe,
and on our way
to Sans Sabastion.

I love it and Paris,
she said,
lifting her head
and peering out
the window
at the passing view
of Paris by night,
the lights and people.

After a few minutes
she laid her head
down on my lap.

So tied,
she said.

I stroked her cheek
with a finger,
then sat back
with my head
on the seat back
and watched
the Parisian view go by
to the Beethoven
piano piece,
sensing her head
in my lap,
her head there,
her eyes closed
going off to sleep.

I put my hand
caressing her,
touching her thigh,
looking out
at another world
with a sleepy eye.

Terry Collett

Slow Dressing 1986

Ariadne dresses slowly,
dresses with an eye
on Bernice,
who lies in bed watching
her dress
in the dressing table mirror.

I can dress slower
if you want,
Ariadne says,
eyeing Bernice,
watching the eyes
watching her.

Undress again
would be better,
Bernice says,
come to bed again
would please me more.

Can't got work to get to,
Ariadne says,
buttoning up her blouse,
fingers fiddling slowly.

Shame on you,
leaving me alone
in this bed,
all on my lonesome,
Bernice says.

Ariadne brushes her
short red hair,
eyeing the girl
in bed behind her,
the nakedness visible
where she lies uncovered.

Can't have me

all the time,
need to work,
need to get out
and earn,
Ariadne says,
putting the brush down,
smiling shyly.

Bernice sits up,
and gets
to the side of the bed,
and walks to where
Ariadne stands,
and hugs her tightly.

I got to work too,
but wanted you
just one more time,
Bernice says,
then kisses
Ariadne's shoulder,
lips on white blouse.

Time waits for no one,
got to go,
have me tonight
once I'm home,
Ariadne says,
turning,
kissing Bernice's brow.

She departs
and leaves the room.

Bernice stands,
and gazes at
the door now closed.

The bed is empty.

The smell of mixed scents,
and body odours,

and stale juices
fill the room
like invisible ghosts.

Bernice goes out the room,
and walks to the bathroom,
and goes in,
and closes the door,
and sits and pees,
and hums a few bars
of a Smiths song,
feeling unloaded,
but nothing's wrong.

Terry Collett

Small Lit Fires 1916

Susie lies beside Polly
in their bed
in their room
in the attic.

Chill in the air,
dark with only
moonlight to break up
the darkness.

Polly had cried
herself to sleep,
moping after Master George
and his plight

being home
from the Front.
She sleeps now
and Susie lays

her head against
Polly's shoulder,
a hand about her waist,
sniffing the body

for soap and odour
and hugging close.
Polly would have been
in his bed had he been well

and them up to no good
having sex,
but she is here now
with Susie,

keeping her warm,
satisfying some
of her dreams
and desires

that lie deep within
like small lit fires.

Terry Collett

Small Nose

Unfolding red rose
perfume permeates warm air
around her small nose.

Terry Collett

Small White Coffin.

The mourners come,
Each one set out
Along the way
From chapel door

To where the small
White coffin lies
And preacher stands.
One small red rose

Upon the lid,
To tell of love
And show the grief
Of baby dead

Which lies beneath
The coffin's wood
Which was a tree
And proudly stood

But now it holds
Like vessel womb
A baby child
Within its tomb.

Terry Collett

Smoke From Chimneys

Whenever you see
smoke rise up
from chimneys,
you think of her:

Anny Horowitz.
You think of Auschwitz.
1942.
A nine year old Jew.

Whenever you smell
smoke from chimneys
and see it
rise up into blue skies,

you remember her:
Anny with her blue eyes,
at Auschwitz
with her blonde hair

and sad face
dying there.

Terry Collett

Smoking Lesson.

Searching in the gutters
of Meadow Row
and up along by the back
of the coal wharf

Benedict picked out
and up
dog ends
or cigarette butts

as his old man
called them
and picking them up
he tore open the paper

and tipped the tobacco
into a white paper
sweet bag
how can you do that?

Ingrid said
all those people's
spit and dribble
on them

she pulled a face
he smiled
she looked serious
germs on them

she said
she wiped her hands
on her stained
green dress

he bent down
and picked out
another cigarette butt
and opened it up

between fingers
and thumbs
and emptied it
into the bag

you're too young
to smoke
she said
if my dad saw me smoking

he'd smack me silly
she said
he does anyway
he said

she bit her lip
and looked away
sorry
he said

didn't mean
to be like that
he touched her hand
she stared at him

through wire
framed glasses
she liked it when
his hand touched hers

no one else
touched her tenderly
she looked
at his cowboy hat

placed to the back
of his head
the six shooter gun
stuffed in the belt

of his jeans

the borrowed blue waistcoat
(his grandfather's given
a month or so back)

she put her other hand
on top of his
he took his hand out slowly
in case other boys

from school may see
and walked to the shelter
of a wall
of a bombed out house

and they both sat down
he took out a packet
of cigarette papers
(liberated from

his old man)
and pulled out
a paper and shoved
the packet of papers

back in the pocket
of his jeans
and taking a pinch
of tobacco from the bag

he fingered it
in a straight line
into the cigarette paper
then rolled it

as he'd seen
his old man do
then licked the end
to form a thin cigarette

Ingrid watched in silence
as his fingers moved
and his tongue licked

you're not going to

smoke it are you?

she asked

he put the cigarette

between his lips

sure am

he said John Wayne like

but you're only 9

she said

you're only 9

and you're watching

he replied

he took out a box

of Swan Vesta

(borrowed from

the cupboard at home)

and lit the cigarette

and puffed slowly

she waved a hand

as smoke came near

her face

my dad will smell that

on me

she said

and think it was me

smoking and tell me off

she said

beat you black and blue

Benedict thought

not said

he coughed and spluttered

and took out

the cigarette

and blew smoke
from his mouth
and spat out phlegm
brownish yellow

if your old man hits you again
I'll shoot him
full of cap smoke
he said

she laughed
and hit his arm
he flicked the cigarette
onto the bombsite

with a finger
and watched
as the smoke
he'd blown out

like a pale ghost
seemed to linger.

Terry Collett

Snow And Monks Mcmlxix

Snow in the garth
hanging on the branches
of the tree
like fingers of white
dea candidis,

the old monk shuffled
through ankle deep snow
cowled head bowed
hands hidden
in his black habit
wind moving about him,

Dei qui tollit
peccatum humilis
confessionis facit
Dom George said
quoting St Bernard
humble confessions
is the key he added,

white snow
on the window ledge
unspoilt untouched
et quasi virgo pura,

bell tolled heavy
bell disturbing snow
on the bell tower
rooks took flight
into the white sky,

parlare con Dio
the Italian monk said
lui ascolta,

I watched
the French monk
sweep snow from the path

long snow shovels
he moved,

un ange à votre coude
Dom François said
I gazed at my elbow
but saw no angel,

snow drifted across
the abbey like fleeing ghosts
twirling and twirling
round and round,

I read in the common room
a book on prayer
worn edges
aged sleeve
smell of damp and time,

Gott ist gut
the Austrian monk said
eyeing me
a small smile lingering
on his lips
I said nothing
but nodded slow,

after office of Sext
and lunch
I told the Prior
I would have to
pack my bag and go.

Terry Collett

Snow Bound 1971

It's snowing?;
I can see it?
through?
the ward window,

drifting slow?
and filling?
the branches?
of the trees,

and out there?
in the fields about.?
It looks surreal,
like it is being painted?

as I watch.?
Glad we're in here,
not out there in it,
Yiska says,

moving next to me?
at the window.?
I can smell her perfume?
or is it soap??

It has a kind?
of fascination,
I say,
trying to imagine soldiers?

on the Russian Front?
knee deep?
in to snow,
fingers freezing?

to rifles,
feet so cold?
they freeze off.?
She says nothing?;

looks at the fall of snow.?
You have imagination,
I'll give you that,
she says after a few minutes.?

Some days I want?
to just lie there?
and become numb?
in snow.?

I read some place?
soldiers froze?
where they stood?
like statues,

dead and white,
I add, ? ?looking at her?
beside me, ? ?her hair?
unbrushed, ? ?her pale?

blue nightgown?
hanging loose,
no belts or ties?
allowed?(?suicides?

always possible?) ?,
her eyes staring?
outward.?
If I could get out?

of this locked ward,
I'd be out there,
looking for a place?
to just lie, ? ?and go?

to sleep, ? ?she says.?
I imagine us both?
laying there out?
in the falling snow,

cold, ? ?freezing?

waiting to go.

Terry Collett

So Extraordinary.

So extraordinary
that each time you saw her

it was like the first time
as if you had been new born

to the vision of her
even that last time

when she went across your view
with her husband

to the grocery store
and looking over at you

she smiled that smile of hers
and her eyes had that same sparkle

and even though
you had not seen her

in a few years
and didn't know

her husband from Adam
you still felt seeing her

as if you had seen
a Degas painting

for the first time
or heard Beethoven

touching your ears
at a young age

or smelling your first Chanel
on some dame

but as she went by
into the store

and disappeared from view
you wanted to turn back the clock

to that evening
walking home from choir

and she turned
and kissed you

beneath the moon
and held you close

and happily sighed
but time was fixed

in its rut
for having seen her

that last time
she died.

Terry Collett

So Much Flotsam.

There would have been something,
but nothing, that you know and understand,
and it is in the understanding
that the hurt comes, bites into you,
almost tears you apart.

You wish it could have been otherwise,
but you know wishes are phantoms
and and are childish promises
that never come.

He could have said, but he didn't,
left you to work it out afterwards,
after he had left and with her,
her of all people.

You tell yourself not to sit and mope,
but you do, knowing we can't pretend
not to feel and be hurt.

You could lie in bed all day,
hide beneath the covers,
think of happier times,
but the time will come
when you have to get up
and face it and the world,
and know you are not
the center of the world
and never were
and never will be:
just so much flotsam
on a wild sea.

Terry Collett

So Never Mcmlxxi

Sunlight through windows
of the refectory
coloured glass
patterning
the wooden floor,

lux Dei
Dom Frederick said
and that book he wrote
I purchased
with a traveller's cheque
and an old monk
questioned it,

parlare con Dio
mio figlio
the Italian monk
said to me
as we sat
in the common room
after lunch,

kiss me here
she said
pointing with her
slim finger
and I did
salty tasting,

the peace of the church
unlike any other
the smell of incense
from Mass
and smell
of baked bread,

I feel that when
I am charitable
it is Jesus alone

who acts in me
Therese said
some place
Saint that is,

Jésus travaille
en nous
the French monk said
when I asked him
why he came,

take me
she said
I am so hot
with wanting,

there is nothing
absolutely
in our power
except our own thoughts
Gareth said
quoting Descartes
that time
in the cloister garth
after the office of None,

Hugh thin
and hawk-eyed
fingered where
I had dusted
looking for dust
and there was none,

mit Gott ich bin stark
the Austrian monk
told me as we sorted
books in the abbey library,

if I had done
as she said
I could have
sowed seeds forever

but I said no
and so never.

Terry Collett

Softly I Cry 1940

Voices around me
and I try to sit up
and it isn't easy

I have to balance myself
so that my stumps
are just so
or I'll fall back
on the bed

my hands steady me
in the darkness

I try and feel
just where in the bed I am
searching with my hand
while my other hand
steadies me

I make sure I'm not
too near the edge of the bed
and wait listening

a nurse comes
I hear her clothes swish
did you need something Grace?
she says

I reach out to touch her
a call of nature
I say
is the commode this side
I can't remember or see?

she touches my hand
other side Grace

since my blindness
I lose my direction

I say

wait there a moment
she says
and I hear her go off

I sit balancing
at the side of the bed
staring into darkness
hearing sounds

I sense the need to go more
and begin to panic

here we are Grace
another voice says

and they lift me between them
to the other side of the bed
and arranging my nightdress
they lift me onto the commode
and sit me down
and arrange me so I'm comfortable

hold onto the handles
at the side
a voice says
call us when you want us back
another voice says

I hear them walk off
the shush of the uniforms
and steps of their shoes

I sit and listen
and stare at the darkness
and try and think
of something to distract
my mind from the business at hand

I think of the last time
I saw Clive before he left

to join the army in late 1939
how we kissed
and that last time
we made love in my place
and Sally(my maid) was out
as it was her night off
and it was wonderful
and we lay there afterward
and smoked and talked
about the war and after
and what we would do

now what would he
have said or done had
he not been killed at Dunkirk?
the last time I had sex that was

I muse on that
and feel depressed
and want to see again
and walk and dance

I get choked up
and suddenly
I am aware where I am
and why and quietly
softly I cry.

Terry Collett

Some Boys Are Different.

Shlomit (whom most
of the boys disliked)
stood in the playground
holding one end of the

skipping rope while another
girl held the other end as
another skipped. Her wire
rimmed spectacles stayed

in place as she moved, her
holey cardigan had seen
better days, her grey dress
had been handed down so

often that it shone like steel.
Naaman stood and watched
her from the steps leading
down to the playground. She

sometimes smelt of dampness
as if she'd been left out in the
rain and brought in to dry over
a dull fire. He looked at her dark

hair held in place with hairgrips,
the hair band of a dark blue
remained unmoved by her motions.
Some girl pushed her away from

the end of the skipping rope and
she walked to the wall and stared.
That seemed unfair, Naaman said,
you were doing your bit ok. Shlomit

looked at him with her nervous eyes.
They always do that, she said; never
let me play for long. He stood beside
her; he could smell dampness mixed

with peppermint. Maybe you're too good for them, he said. She smiled and pushed the hair band with her fingers. Her nails had been chewed unevenly,

he noted, her fingers were ink stained. Would you like a wine gum? he asked. He held out a bag of wine gum sweets. She put her fingers into the bag and

took one and put it in her mouth. Thank you, she mouthed, her finger pushing the sweet further in. Naaman walked with her up the steps that led

up from the small playground and stood on the bombed ground and looked down. There used to be a house where the playground is now, he said, it got

bombed out. The playground was once the cellar. Oh, she said, I didn't realise that. The bombs missed the school, shame, he said, smiling. Daddy

said I ought not talk with boys, she said, looking at Naaman then quickly around her. Why's that? he asked. She looked at her fingers, the thumbs moving over

each other. He said boys were rude and mischievous, she said. I guess some are, Naaman said. She looked at him. You seem all right, she said. But you are still

a boy and he might find out I talked to you and then there would be trouble. How would he find out here in the playground? Naaman asked. Someone might tell from

here that saw me, she said anxiously.

Last time someone told him he beat me,
she added quietly. She pushed her hands
into her cardigan pockets. Best go, she said.

I like you, Naaman said, you remind me of a
picture I saw of a girl standing beside Jesus
in that Bible in the school library. Do I? she
said, did she have wire-rimmed glasses?

No, Naaman said, but she had a pretty face
like yours. She laughed and took her hands
from her pockets. He saw two reflections of
himself in the glass of her spectacles behind

which her own eyes gazed out. Maybe it was
me, she said playfully. Oh, yes, he said, taking
her thin ink stained fingers in his, no doubt.

Terry Collett

Some Brief Encounter

As you took
old Mr Wheale
to the lavatory

and sat
and watched
he didn't fall

or slide
you recalled
the night before

lying in Mrs Tuba's bed
the curtains drawn
against the night

the street lamps
shining through
the bed soft and wide

and she turning up
the Mahler 5th
and you thinking

of the parish priest
and what he'd say
if he could have seen you

there smoking
naked and bare
the book you'd bought

on the side
the Solzhenitsyn
gulag book

she wanted to read
the dresser
and chest of drawers

and photos
on the side
nearly done

Mr Wheale said
breaking through
your thoughts

his cataract eyes
staring into space
and you remembered

Mrs Tuba coming in
the room
dressed in her pink

dressing gown
open down the middle
her big breasts inviting

her big blues eyes
smiling
turned up

the Mahler
she said
bought these two whiskies

and she laid them
on the side
and climbed

into her bed
I'm done
Mr Wheale said

and so you did
what was needed
and helped him dress

and on his way

his metal frame walker
shuffled along

the passageway
the music of Mahler's 5th
a memory

Mrs Tuba
gone to sleep now
you guessed

the whiskies drunk
the sex forgot
a new day entered

the window on your right
swift it had gone
that sexual night.

Terry Collett

Some Dark Green Sea 47bc

Puella,
Domitia says to me,
she is with Annona,
my mistress,
on the balcony
overlooking the sea.

The way the woman
beckoned me
with her crooked finger
as if I were her slave
and not Annona's.

Amy,
Annona says,
bring us wine and fruit.

I bow and she winks
an eye at me
as if to say
it is just as things
must be.

They talk as I leave
the balcony;
I am not angry;
I am a slave after all,
but the way Domitia
just said Puella,
as if that was all I was,
nothing more.

Little does she know
that Annona and I
made love last night,
that I had licked my tongue
along Annona's stomach
from her nest to her neck,
that Annona had said

more more and I did
and I had to place
my hand upon her lips
to hush her sounds of joy.

I bring the wine and fruit
and lay it on the table
and then stand by in waiting
for further instructions,
watching Domitia greedily
gulp the wine,
as my mistress sips hers
and smiles at me.

Must she stand there
like some thin hawk
watching us?
Domitia says,
gesturing toward me.

Annona says,
I like Amy near me
in case I need her
and as my protector.

Protector? Her?
Domitia says
grinning at me,
her dark hair tied back
behind her head tightly.

Amy was a gladiator,
and Marcus bought her for me,
and saved her life
from certain death,
Anonna says,
eyeing me
then Domitia.

Gladiator?
And Marcus has her
here with you?

Domitia says frowning,
wine dribbling
down her chin.

I tongued Annona last night,
and she held me close
and kissed me all down
from neck to navel,
and as I stand there
watching Domitia gaze at me,
I wish her gone,
to drown in some
dark green sea.

Terry Collett

Some Days 2016

Some days
my son
the darkness encroaches,
and surrounds me
like black wolves
snarling.

Some days
a slither of light appears,
but is soon
swallowed up
by the mouth
of depression.

Since your death,
the days seem long
and slow unwinding
or short and quick
and snappy and gone.

Some days
all seems well,
but soon the ache comes
and the slow realization
that you are gone
and death has won.

Some days
I just want to sleep
and keep your memory
just in my head
as I lay in my bed.

Terry Collett

Some Days After School

Some days after school
having slipped by her mother's vision

she met you in the back woods
by the pool

and you were there
in the your tee shirt and jeans

and she stood there
for a moment

in her blouse and skirt
and you stared at each other

taking in the beauty
you saw there

enjoying the moment
the big now

shutting out the bird song
the rabbits by the trees

the far off sound of traffic
and she broke out and said

had a job get by her scanner eyes
had to slip out

before she gave out the chores
and she came over to you

standing there
and stood real close

so that you could sense her body
just about touching yours

her perfume teasing
your nostrils

stirring your body
and then she closed her eyes

and kissed your lips
and it was like

a first day of creation
as if God had said

there you go
feel the love

sense the glow
and you did

and it seemed an eternity
but was merely minutes

glued and touched
and wet and warm

then you sensed
the rain coming

and distant storm
and then the raindrops

hit the pool like small bullets
and grabbing her hand

you ran through the trees
away from the pool

carrying the memory of a kiss
and a bird's lone call.

Terry Collett

Some Distant Shore 1962

The finishing touches
applied to hair and eyes
and Sheila is ready for school,

her elder sister
prim and proper
and plain as grey
stares at Sheila's image
from the back
sitting on her bed
brushing her hair
thinking of how tarty
her younger sister is,

how God would judge
she knows not nor care,

names you called out
in your sleep last night she says,

Sheila stops her touching hair
and turns and stares,

names? what names?

her sister eyes her
don't know couldn't make out
boy's name sounded like,

Sheila studies her
elder sister's gaze,

the slit of lips,

dark eyes staring,

probably that male teacher
I don't like him
always telling me off

Sheila says,

which male teacher?
the sister says,

Sheila looks away
the sky is clear today
blue and white clouds,

Mr P with eyebrows
dark as bats and eyes likewise
Sheila says,

shouldn't mock our teachers
disrespect of teachers is a sin
the sister says
hands in lap,

God has placed them
where they are for a reason
He alone knows
and we not to judge,

Sheila sees birds fly the sky
wishing she could too
he mocks me
Sheila says,

why does God permit
that if He does allow?

her sister stares
and her slit of lips tighten
and she says no more,

thinking no doubt
of her Jesus standing
and calling her
from some distant shore.

Terry Collett

Some More 1975.

Benny guessed
Natanya's husband
knew he was a cuckold

but worse still
he had invited Benny
to the house

that Christmas
and never knew
about the hand holding

behind his back
but Natanya's oldest daughter
saw but said nothing

just stared
and that time
after Christmas

in London
in some cheap hotel
Benny and she

were having it away
in that creaky bed
and after

she thinking
what her husband
would say

if he knew
and Benny musing
on that Sartre book

he'd bought
a few weeks before
and she behind him

after a smoke
wanting him
some more.

Terry Collett

Some Nights.

Some nights, my son,
I stare into the dark,
replaying those last scenes
by your hospital bed,
over and over,
inside my head,
like a gum shoe detective
searching through the debris
of memories for clues
to a hideous crime.

Some nights though,
I sleep right through,
looking in my dreams
for images of you.
What else
can a father do?

Some nights are sleepless
to a great degree,
twisting and turning
like a boat at sea,
rising up and sitting
in another place,
putting together,
like a jigsaw,
piece by piece
your smiling face.

Some nights
I want to drift away
and be where you are,
to hold and talk again,
whether near or far,
or just to sit and stare
and just be pleased
to see you and be there.

Some nights, my son,

I lay awake
waiting for the new dawn
and light to break,
recalling to mind
your young days,
the mischievous boy,
the teasing little brother,
the young Sky-walker,
the adventure lover.

Some times on the odd night,
I just get up
and sit and write,
tap in the words,
trying to pin it all down,
trying to get through
the dark waters
and not slip off
into the dark depths
and drown.

Terry Collett

Some Part Of Beauty

Janice of red beret fame
with fair hair
to her shoulders
and dressed slightly better

than the rest
of there about
invited you
(with your mother's

permission
and her gran's invitation)
to tea after school
in the upstairs apartment

not far away
what did you want
for eats and drink?
Janice asked

bread and jam
you replied
bread and jam?
she repeated

as if you'd asked
for caviar on toast
no you must
have more than that

she said
Gran what's for eats?
and her gran
came into the lounge

where the cosy furniture
was set out in place
neat and tidy
with a canary

in a cage
on a stand
and her gran related
a list of things

you could have
far exceeding
what you usually
had at home

cheese and cress
sandwiches
you said
please added on

as an afterthought
and Janice
had the same
to be like you

and her gran went off
and Janice said
she likes you
says you have more breeding

than some round here
o
you said
thanks

and you pushed
your hand
through your hair
and pulled

your school jumper
in place
and tightened
the tie

we're going

to the fairground Saturday
will you come too?
you hesitated

and took in
her fair hair
and her fine features
and prim gaze

I'll have to see
what my mum says
you uttered
o she won't mind

Gran's already
mentioned it I think
Janice said
well yes then

you said
I'd like that
she smiled
and spoke

of learning French
at school
and the teacher
who took her

for that and history
she's a dear
and positively a beauty
I've got Ashdown

and she's plump
and has an arse
like a hippo
you said

Janice choked
and sputtered
with laughter

all at the same time

that's so rude
she said
putting her small hand
to her mouth

gosh don't let Gran
hear to speak like that
or you'll be off
her good boy list

as swift as lightening
you sat bemused
when her gran came in
with two plates

of sandwiches
what's so funny?
she asked
putting the plates

on the table
o nothing much
Janice said
Benedict told me

a little joke
o well as long
as it wasn't rude
Gran said

o no
Janice said
and looked at you
o no

you muttered
just a innocent joke
from school
her gran went off

to get the drinks
if Gran heard me
say thinks like that
she'd tan my backside

and no mistake
Janice took a bite
of her sandwich
and you ate yours

listening to the canary
sing and the bell it
rung inside the cage
and her gran singing

from the kitchen
in a soprano voice
and you took in
Janice's light blue eyes

wherein you thought
but did not say
some good part
of beauty lies.

Terry Collett

Some Place Else 1962

Miss G talked of Mendelssohn
put on some record
of some cave

Yehudit looked
back at me
at the back of class
and smiled

her eyes and that smile
drove me wild
moved me
to thinking things

Reynard sat next to me
drawing a matchstick figure
of Miss G in his exercise book
at the back

the music started up
the rest of the kids in class
sat still and listened

Yehudit turned
to the front

I sat thinking about her
taking in her hair
and shoulders
how her hair
touched her shoulders
and I wished
I was her hair
and could touch
her shoulders or maybe
her school skirt
that I could embrace her
or maybe her
hidden bra

that I could...

the music played

Reynard drew

Miss G sat
in her chair at front
gazing at the class
or sat with eyes closed
nodding her head

I wished
I was with Yehudit
some place else
instead.

Terry Collett

Some Schmuck.

She was sitting there
at the bar. Max saw her,
and wandered over to her
and said: can I buy you

a drink? I don't know, can
you? She said. He smiled,
may I buy you a drink?
He said. Depends what

you want in return for
the drink, she said. He stood
next to her. She had light
brown hair, blue dress and

blue eyes. Just a drink, no
strings, he said (although in
his head was an idea of maybe
her in his bed) . Why would

you want to buy me a drink?
She said eyeing him in his
brown suit and hat. Just being
nice, can't a guy be nice?

He said. She stared at him
and said: a gin with ice would
be nice. Max called the bar-keep
and the bar-keep came over

and stood eyeing him. What
can I get you? A scotch on
the rocks for me and a gin
and ice for the dame, Max said.

The bar-keep walked off in
a slow walk. Sit down, the dame
said, you are too tall to stand.
Max got a stool and sat beside her.

Smoke? He asked. Only if I
walk too fast, she said. He smiled.
Ok, would you like a cigarette?
That'd be nice, she said. He took

out two cigarettes from a pack
and offered her one and one for
himself and lit both. You new?
He asked, haven't seen you around.

No, not new, I've been around
a few years, she said. He sighed.
Are you new around here? Yes,
I usually frequent a posher kind

of bar, but I'm short of dough,
she said. She inhaled deeply
eyeing him. He looked her over.
Nice legs, he mused. She had

them one crossed over the other,
nice blue dress, low cut. Then
the bar-keep brought the drinks
and Max paid him. The bar-keep

wandered off to the other end
of the bar. Thanks for the booze,
she said. My pleasure, he said.
Why your pleasure? She said,

blowing out a line of smoke,
I'm the one going to drink it.
Max sipped his drink. I meant
my pleasure to buy you a drink,

he said. She looked at him deeply.
You come here often? She said.
Most nights, he said, you alone?
No, she said I'm with you. He

smiled, is anyone apart from me

here with you tonight? He said.
Look Max, she said, I'm your
wife for Christ's-sake, can we not

play this fool game every night?
Max shrugged his broad shoulders.
Ok, Honey, just makes the night
go with a kick, and gives me a thrill

that I can pull a dame still. She
shook her head, wished she was
with some other schmuck instead.

Terry Collett

Some Table Talk 1962

Sheila sat
opposite
her sister

at breakfast
you tell-tale
she lip mouthed

pulled a face
Sheila is
being rude

to me Mum
Ella said
that's enough

no nonsense
at breakfast
Mother says

Father reads
his newspaper
page 2 girl

Ella prayed
a short prayer
over meals

with eyes closed
as I said
(Mother said)

I want no
boy trouble
or seeing

or talking
understand
Sheila?

Sheila sat
eating at
her breakfast

just talking
nothing else
she muttered

they were close
together
sitting down

on the field
Ella said
what field?

Mother said
school field
where we sit

during lunch
recess time
Ella said

Mother eyed
Sheila
what were you

two talking
about then?
Mother asked

just about
butterflies
that he's seen

Sheila said
the first thing
in her head

butterflies?

Mother said
is that all?

And birds too
he likes birds
and knows names

and things on
them egg types
and all that

Sheila said
is he soft?
Father said

birds indeed
but what sort?
Feathered kind

Sheila said
I saw them
sitting close

Ella said
doing what?
Mother asked

just talking
Sheila said
but she wished

that John had
kissed her lips
as she wished

kissed her neck
put his hand
on her thigh

tickled her
to giggles
you're too young

for any boys
Mother said
no sitting

or talking
with any boy
Father gazed

at the girl
on page 2
Ella stared

at Sheila
I want to
be a nun

and I shall
prayer for you
when I am

Ella said
Sheila thought
of John's hand

and his lips
his kisses
and touches

and wished that
he had done
what she dreamed

in the night
maybe she
thought he might.

Terry Collett

Something Missing 1959

I walked with one-legged Anne
on the lawn of the nursing home
after breakfast and medication
and we sat on two chairs
at the near end of the lawn
around the round
white metal table

hey Kid
she said
have seen my clitoris
about any place?

I frowned
no don't think so
(I had no idea
what she meant)
have you lost it?
I said

yes can't find it
no where
she said

have you asked the nuns
if they've seen it?
I said

no wouldn't ask them nothing
she said
you know what those
penguins are like
they'd want to know
the ins and out of things
and how I lost it
and where I'd seen it last

I looked back towards
the nursing home

maybe you dropped it
some place
I said

yes maybe I did
Anne said

other kids came out
in the garden
some on the swings
and some on the slide

maybe they
might have seen it?
I said

maybe
Anne said
why don't you ask
one of them

ask Colm he might
have seen it
I said

she called Colm over
he came reluctantly
he didn't like Anne at all

what is it?
He said

Anne's lost her clitoris
I said

her what?
Colm said

clitoris
I said

what the heck's that?

He said

(I pretended to know)
you must know
I said

go ask the nuns
Anne said
maybe they've seen it

Colm looked at her
is it missing then?
He said

yes can't find it no place
Anne said

he looked at her
I'll ask Sister Bridget
she might have seen it
Colm said and walked
off towards the nursing home
and went inside

Anne shook her head
and said
hope he finds out
and laughed

then I vaguely remembered
what the clitoris was
a thing she showed me
one evening
while she bathed.

Terry Collett

Something Was Missing 1965

Tilly and I went back
to some of old haunts,
one of which was our
lake(Tilly's name for

the pond) , and we sat
there on the grass, and
gazed at the water's skin,
sunlight playing there,

and ducks swam, and
the odd swan went by
on the other side, and
dragonflies hovered

over the skin of water,
then zigzagged away.
Love it here, Tilly said,
so peaceful. She lay back

on the grass and looked
up at the sky. I lay beside
her. I was 14 when we
came here that first time,

I said. I was 13, she said
turning to look at me, near
Christmas it was, and cold,
and I had that big coat

my mother made me wear,
she said. That first kiss we
had I can still feel it, I said.
She smiled. Yes me too.

She sighed. Now I'm 17,
she said, and no longer at
school, and have to work,
and not see you as often as

I once did. I gazed at her
eyes, blue and deep. We
work at different places,
at different times, and I'm

in town, and you're out
here in the countryside still,
I said. She put out a hand,
and her fingers touched my

cheek. We made love back
there, she said, it was my
first time, and it seemed
a mixture of adventure and

disappointment, as these
things are at times, and I
remember a squirrel was
up there looking down at us,

and I felt spied on. I smiled,
yes we were, I guess, that
darn squirrel bet it went and
told your mother what it'd seen,

I said. It could have done but
she didn't know thank God;
gosh if she'd known I'd not
be here now, Tilly said. I leaned

towards her, and kissed her lips,
and she hugged me close, and
we lay there kissing, but looking
back, I think it was not there as
it had been; something was missing.

Terry Collett

Sonia And The Cinema Date

Her breath smelt of peppermints
she leaned over you
on Mr Spark's bed
where she'd pinned you

after creeping into the room
as you made his bed
her blue eyes
peered into yours

I want you
take me to cinema
she said sultrily
you felt her tits

pressing
into your white shirt
her hands either side
of your head

I'm kind of busy Sonia
you said
you can spare time
take me to cinema

she stated
you tried to move
but she'd
pinned you well

maybe at the end
of the week
you said
you say that

but you could be lying
she breathed
peppermint
invade your nose

her red lipsticked lips
opened and closed
I promise you I will
you said

your body
beginning to numb
you promise?
yes I promise

she lifted up a little
so you could breathe
if you lie to me
I will scream

and say you throw me
on bed for sex
she said
but I didn't

you said
I know and you know
but who they believe?
she uttered softly

you tried to ease her off
but she pushed down harder
promise me?
yes

you said
what we go see?
whatever you like
she smiled

small white teeth
showed
anything I want?
yes anything

she moved off

of you and sat
on the edge
of the bed

as you got off the bed
and brushed down
your white coat
and straightened

your red tie
and smoothed down
the bedcover
that'd become creased

she sat looking at you
her blonde hair
pinned back
with hair grips

one leg crossed
over the other
a foot dangling
the black shoe

rising and falling
where you take me?
the Ritz cinema
there's a good film on

you said
is sex film?
no war film
you muttered

looking at her
wondering
if you could make
the door before

she jumped you again
war film?
she said

is good?

is sex in it?

I guess so

you said

watching her foot

dangling up and down

good

she said

getting off the bed

we go then

at end of week?

yes

you said

and she kissed

your lips

with her bruising lips

of bright red.

Terry Collett

Sonia And You And The Promise

Sonia closed
the door
behind her
and leaned

against it
you go out
with me?
she asked

her Polish/English
grated on your ears
look I can't
I have other

things to do
you said
running a hand
to smooth

Mr Dubbin's bed
she looked around
the room
and said

what if someone
come in
and see you
here with me?

what if they think
you been having me?
but it wouldn't
be true

you said
standing up
and moving away
from the bed

you know that
and I know it
but others
they do not

she said
her voice
crisp and cool
what if I undo

my uniform
and show my breasts
and say you did it?
you blushed

at the thought
look
just leave me be
you said

she stood firm
against the door
her hands
on the lapels

of her uniform
you could say yes
she said
you could take me

out to cinema
and then
it would be good
huh?

you watched
as she undid
one button
at a time

you watched

her fingers undo
each button
with deliberate

slowness
if I say yes
you'll stop this folly?
you asked

if you mean it
I will walk
from the door
and we can leave

and I do up
the buttons
before others see
she stared at you

her pale blue eyes
on you
her lips parted
just so

you could see
her small white teeth
where do you want to go?
you asked

cinema is good
she said
in the dark
we can kiss yes?

the buttons
were undone
to reveal
her compacted tits

ok ok
you said
the cinema

it is promise?

she said coolly
you make promise
and keep?
yes I make promise

and keep
you repeated
she began to do up
the buttons

her eyes
looking at you
and she smiled
and said

good boy
we have fun no?
you breathed out
the held in breath

sweat dampened
the back
of your shirt
and trouser legs

but if
you do not
show up
she said

brushing her uniform
I'll say you make love
to me on this
Mr Dubbin's bed

and I make bed
look all untidy
and they believe
me yes?

I'll be there
trust me
you said
just let me go

I need to get
the other beds
made before lunch
she moved aside

and opened the door
her perfume
filtering your nose
off you go

she said
and be good
you went off
to make the beds

and show up
that night
as she knew
you would.

Terry Collett

Sonya Gets Ready 1973

I read to him
from Kierkegaard
he read Dostoevsky.

We lay on the bed
in our Parisian room
in that cheap hotel.

We had the narrow window
open to the evening
smells and sounds.

We are going out later
for a meal and drinks
soak in the atmosphere
the art
the lives
the history.

We made love
some hour ago
still there
that after glow.

We played
our sex games
that sexual foreplay.

I close
the Kierkegaard book
Benny shuts
the Dostoevsky
with a smile.

Best get ready
I say
into something cool.

He nods at me

and lies there
eyeing me
as I undress
piece by piece.

I go into
the shower.

I guess he's
listening
to the water run
imaging me
in his mind
having his
own inner fun.

Terry Collett

Sonya Sleeps 1973

Sonya sleeps. She sleeps
like a child, mouth slightly
open, thumb on her lower lip.

Benny watches her as he stands
at the window, looking at her
her body, how it lies there in

a fetal fashion. Last night they
made love a couple of times.
Each time like a first time ever.

Sometimes they have made love
and it seemed after as if they never.
He sips the coffee he has made,

looks away from her, looks out
at the Parisian street below. People
walk past going to a job or shopping

or to meet a lover or mind a child.
He looks at the buildings opposite;
they have balconies, French balconies.

30 years ago Nazis were probably
riding these streets, probably looking
for Jews or thinking of home, or sex

or food or drink. Sonya turns over;
her body now stretched out, her neat
boobs resting under the covers.

He loves her; they are lovers.

Terry Collett

Soper Beach Riding 1925

California 1925
and it was Soper
who was in the sidecar
of the motorbike
and his dark haired
wife Sophie
who was
beside the bike
getting ready
to ride it.

I want to ride
on the deserted beach
she said.

He was in
his black swim suit.

She in that
swimming costume
black with white stripes.

The beach is
empty of people
she said.

He looked at her
guess you can
no harm can be done
he said
looking out
at the sea
on the long stretch
of beach
yellow sands
making sure
he could see
no boulders anywhere.

She put her
25 year old leg
over the bike
and started it up.

He held on tight
to both sides
of the sidecar.

She looked
ahead of her.

Keep your eyes squinted
he said
in case you get
sand in them.

She nodded
and smiled.

He closed his eyes
he knew
when he met her
she was kind of wild.

Terry Collett

Sophia On Trial 1969

Sophia sat
at the dining table
at her parents' home,
her mother
was in the kitchen
finishing off the meals;
her father sat
at the table
eyeing her,
his eyes focusing
on her movements.

You have ended
your relationship
with the boy Benedict?
He said in Polish.

She looked at him,
preparing herself
to lie convincingly.

Yes, we have ended it,
she murmured in Polish.

He sat back
in his chair,
his eyes searching
her features,
how she sat,
trying to discern
any falsehood
in her words.

I told him
the other day
at work,
she said.

He sat there,

she thought,
like a Mafia boss,
short and stocky,
his eyes firm and dark.

What did he say?
The father said.

He was upset
about it,
but understood,
she said,
trying to avoid his eyes,
looking at the white
table cloth,
the flowered pattern
around the edge
and in the center.

I hope you are not
lying to me,
the father said,
his eyes wanting
to gaze into her eyes,
but she looked away.

Yes,
she said,
I tell you the truth,
pushing from her mind
how she and Benedict
kissed and petted heavy
on the late Mr Cutt's bed
that afternoon,
she listening out
in case someone
came along
and found them.

The mother came in
with the plates
for them both,

laden with meat
and vegetables,
then she went back
to get her own.

The father gazed at Sophia,
wanting to gaze
into her mind,
but seeing only
her features
and her blank stare.

Her mother returned
and sat down,
and Sophia imagined
Benedict was there.

Terry Collett

Sophia That Morning 1969

Sophia lies
on the late
Mr Cutt's bed
naked from
the waist down.

Benny puts on
his trousers
listening out for voices
from the passage.

He thinks he heard
someone call him
a few moments ago.

Shame you
have to go
Sophia says.

I am sure I heard
someone call me
he says.

Really?
she says.

Yes may have
been Matron
he says.

Sophia gets off
the bed and looks
for her underwear.

He having dressed
opens the doors gingerly
and peers out.

No one is there

just the TV sounds
coming from
the lounge up
the corridor.

Is it ok?
she says
getting dressed.

Yes no one about
he says
I'm going along
to see how
the old folks are.

He closes the door
on her and walks
along the corridor
to the lounge
and enters.

Two old men sit there
one asleep
the other watching
the TV.

How are you?
Benny says.

The old man
looks at him
I'm ok
what time is dinner?
he says.

Benny looks
at his wristwatch
an hour yet
Benny says.

Ok
the old man says

and turns to watch
the TV again.

Benny walks out
and back along
the corridor
and opens the door
of the late Mr Cutt's room.

She's gone
leaving the bed tidy
as it was before
or so it seems
from the bedroom door.

Terry Collett

Sophia's Father's Eyes 1969

Mama buzzes
about the kuchnia
like a bad tempered bee,

Ojciec sits in the lounge
staring at you
then back at his newspaper
then at you again,

you look at him
sitting there
as if he wished to know
each aspect of your mind
your thoughts,

a radio pushes out
Polish music,

you try to keep
thoughts of Benny
from your mind
in case your father
reads your mind,

does he go to Mass
this boy?
Your father asks in Polish
I do not see him there,

you gaze at your father
trying to wash your mind
of hints of Benny,

he goes to the late Mass
on Saturday you reply in Polish,

he looks at you
his eyes peering
dark eyes

as if they could
drink you in,

you push the image
of you and Benny
having sex on Mr Cutt's bed
out of your mind
but it lingers there stubbornly
the single bed
moving beneath you
the springs tingling
the curtains drawn
allowing only a slit
of light to enter

Father(Ojciec)
flicks the newspaper
and shuts you out,

Mama in the kuchnia still
her voice mumbling in Polish,

Benny lay
between your thighs
avoiding
your father's eyes.

Terry Collett

Sophia's Father's Joke 1969

Your father short and squat
like some mafia boss
tells Benny to sit
got a joke to tell you
he says.

Benny sits on the sofa
looks at you
then at your father
who sits in his armchair.

Your mother is in the kitchen
preparing lunch
muttering Polish noises.

A couple who died
before they could marry
go to the gates of Heaven
your father begins.

Benny stares at your father
deciphering the Polish
tinged English words.

They see St Peter there
we wanted to marry
the young man says
but we died
before we could
can we marry now?

St Peter said
wait here
I will go into Heaven
to find a priest
so he goes off
and the couple wait
your father pauses
warming to his theme.

Benny looks at you
wondering what
the punchline will be.

They waited for years
then St Peter came back
with a priest and said
sorry about the wait
but I had a job
to find a priest
your father grins.

Benny laughs softly
unsure if it is a trick
your father maybe playing
to catch him out.

Your father titters
and you join in
imagining the couple
standing for all that time.

Your mother enters
into the room and mutters
lunch is ready
in her Polish tongue
giving Benny a stare
wishing probably
he wasn't there.

Terry Collett

Sophia's Glow 1969

Benny and I
had sex
on the late
Mr Cutt's bed.

The bed was creaky
so we had to be careful
that no one heard us.

Then after
he thought he heard
someone call him
so he dressed
and went off
to see who it was.

I got off the bed
and picking up
my underclothes
I put them on quickly
in case someone
came to the room.

I combed my hair
with my fingers
in the small mirror
over the sink.

The sky was blue
and clouds went past.

I heard voices
in the passageway.

Benny's
and someone else.

Once I was sure
no one was about

I left the room
taking my duster
and polish
with me
and the bed tidied.

I walked along
to the next room
to be dusted
and polished
and cleaned.

I sensed
a stickiness below
and a warm
satisfying glow.

Terry Collett

Sore Wounds 1940

Comment allez-vous?
Someone asks me in French.

I am in pain, I reply
in my remembered
schoolgirl French,
facing the area
the voice comes from,
searching out
with my right hand,
my blind eyes stare,
wondering who was there.

Je suis ici pour
voir vos blessures,
she says.

I feel her hand,
small and soft.

She holds my hand gently.

You are here
for my wounds?
I say, wondering
if I heard her correctly,
my French not as
good as hers.

Oui,
she says.

She lets go
of my hand,
and lifts up
my nightgown,
and feels my leg stumps,
her fingers touching
as she moves.

She undoes
the bandages slowly,
unwrapping each leg stump,
then I sense the air,
and feel her fingers
on my skin.

I recall Clive
touching me there,
his fingers moving
my thighs,
his kisses there.

Ils sont la guérison,
she says.

They are healing?
I say,
unable to see,
but they still hurt,
I utter
in my poor French.

La douleur va persister
pendant un certain temps,
she says,
rubbing gently over
the area where
the wounds are.

How long will
they pain me?
I say.

She says it will be
a while, and then
re-wraps the bandages,
and pulls down
my nightgown.

Then she goes.

I hear voices
over the way,
a bell rings.

I lie there,
wondering what
will happen next,
remembering Clive
making love to me
that last time
before he left for War.

I feel with my fingers,
the wounds,
aching,
sore.

Terry Collett

Sound Of Dark Rain 1975

I entered you with ease
the fourth time around,
bed squeaked sound
as if in pain,
puffing out not again,
as if the bed lay
untouched for years.

Somewhere a car
backfired or a gunshot
sound going off.

Moonlight through
shabby curtains
drawn across
the narrow window bay.

What is she thinking?
I mused while riding
my way through
the valley of joy
without the 6 hundred,
her dark hair
tussled and wild.

What is he thinking?
no doubt she mused,
as she prepared herself
while being screwed,
the bed noisy
as a wounded whale,
pushing thoughts
of her husband
at the back of her mind
like unwanted stuff
needing discarding.

I pleased you and me,
like a young yacht at sea,

riding waves
of sensuousness,
being tossed and turned
by the hands of some
siren of this wild sea.

Just us,
she and me,
her tired tits
rubbing my chest,
her whispered words,
uttered on breath,
released,
let go,
as we rode to climax
of climaxes once again.

Outside
the curtained window
the sound
of dark rain.

Terry Collett

Spied

How was it for you?
Uncle asked, lying
Slumped across Auntie,
Some small-beached
Whale, his voice escaping
His lungs as would air
From a punctured tyre.

Fine, it was fine, Auntie
Sighed, her soprano
Voice easing beneath
His sweaty soft bulk,
Unaware their young
Niece was standing silent
By the half open door,

Capturing them in the
Semi light, waiting small
And innocent to ask for
Water, dithering, unsure
Whether to ask and stay
Or simply to close the
Door and walk away.

Terry Collett

Spitting Image 1960

Sit doon,
Mrs Scot said.

I looked around
the sitting room.

In th' armchair,
she added pointing
to an old armchair.

Will Hannah be long?
I said.

Hoo dae Ah ken,
she said,
walking off
into the passage,
smoke from
her cigarette
following after her.

I sat down
and looked around
the room.

HANNAH
TH' BOY'S HAUR,
she bellowed
from the kitchen.

Won't be long,
Hannah replied
from the bog.

I hoped Mrs Scot
would not return
to speak to me
without an interpreter.

Dornt keep heem
tay lang,
Mrs Scot said firmly.

I rubbed my crucifix
with my thumb
in my pocket.

The bog door unlocked
and Hannah came into
the sitting room:
sorry about that,
she said,
call of nature,
or as Mum says
caa ay nature.

She smiled;
I smiled weakly.

So where we going?
Hannah said.

There's a film
we can see,
I said,
if you've money,
or we can go swimming
in the swimming baths.

I've no money,
but swimming seems
a good idea;
I'll just get my stuff
and ask Mum
for a few pence.

So off she went;
I sat listening,
fingers held
in each other
forming a church

kind of thing.

Bunsens?

ye aye want bunsens,
her mother said.

Just a few pence
for the locker,
Hannah said.

Puckle bon
mah god,
her mother said.

I sat staring
at the wall
where a picture of man
in a kilt stared
back at me.

The resemblance
to Hannah's mother
and the man
was plain to see.

Terry Collett

Splendid Day 1964

It was time to cycle home
after spending a good part
of the day with Milka
and the latter part

with her family
(two of her brothers
had been ribbing her
about being with me

their old workmate)
we stood by the door
of the farmhouse
looking up

at the evening sky
at stars
and a quarter moon
the TV sounding

from the lounge
her mother's voice
moaning to one
of her sons

about something or other
good day
Milka said
it was

I said
nearly good caught
in bed together
and then you left

your bloody handkerchief
in my bed
and Mum nearly saw it
Milka said

staring at me
made it exciting though
I said gazing at her
standing in the frame

of the doorway
it wouldn't have been exciting
if she had found us at it
nor if she found

your handkerchief
with a B in the corner
in my bed
Milka said

guess not
I said
she stepped out
from the doorway

and closed the door
after her
she put her arms
around me

and kissed me on the lips
I sensed her lips on mine
and placed my arms
around her waist

my hands on her butt
what if she had found us
I said moving away
briefly from her lips

would she have been jealous?
no she would not
have been jealous
she would have slapped my arse

and God knows

what she'd have done to you
Milka said
her warm breath on me

her hands clutching me closer
just as well she didn't then
I said
we kissed again

then the door opened
behind us
and her father stood there
and said

say your goodnight
you and Benny
and best be off
it's getting late

yes you're right
I said
parting from Milka
and nodding a goodnight

to them both
by the doorway
the stars blinking
the quarter moon

looking on
bye
Milka said
and waved then

she went indoors
with her father
and the door closed
and I got on my bike

and peddled away
musing on us
in bed

and a splendid day.

Terry Collett

Sports Day 1962

It was sports day
at high school

and the field and tracks
were crowded with

teachers and kids
and the sun was out

causing sweat
and heat rash

and Reynard said to you
that girl who fancies your ass

is waving to you
over by the small wood

of trees and bushes
so you looked over

and saw Christina
waving a hand at you

leaping up and down
her short gym skirt

rising and falling
as she leaped

showing off
now and then

her dark green panties
mind she don't eat you

Reynard said
and walked off

to watch the races
as you wandered over

to where she stood
at the edge

of the small wood
don't you look

the sexy beast
in your black shorts

she said
eyeing you over

her right hand smoothing
down your white tee shirt

are you running?
she asked

yes a short sprint
you replied

anything more than that
and I'm buggered

she looked at the field
holding her hands

in front of her
and you gazed

at her white legs
and white ankle socks

and black plimsolls
I'm in the relay race

she said
I'll have to watch

to see when my turn comes
then she turned to you

and said
have you been inside the wood?

you looked behind you
no not so far have you?

yes we went there
in science looking for bugs

and such
she said

maybe you could show me
you said

what?
bugs and flowers

and butterflies
you replied

she smiled at you
maybe but teachers might be watching

or other kids or prefects
and what if my brother Cedric

sees us enter
and tells my parents?

just a science tour
to see all nature's gifts

you said
tell them that

if any see us go
and you watched her

fumble with her fingers
looking around the field

and whispered softly
no.

Terry Collett

Standing Beside Fay One Saturday.

It was Saturday morning
and Fay stood beside you

on the balcony of the flats
looking over the Square

she pointed at the baker
and his horse drawn cart

down by the wall below
my daddy says he's Jewish

she said
those who asked

for the death of Christ
you followed the baker

as he made his way to the stairs
carrying his bread basket

I don't think he was involved
you said watching the baker

until he disappeared up the stairs
she looked right over the balcony

gripping the brick wall
with her hands

I don't think he's Jewish at all
she said letting her feet

dropp back on the floor
and it doesn't matter if he is

I think he's a nice man
she added

looking at you
with her bright blue eyes

and you gazed at her
standing there

her flowered dress
colourful and coming

just below her knees
her battered sandals

having seen
better days

and her fair hair
tied into a ponytail

at the back
she looked over

the balcony again
I like to feed his horse

with sugar cubes
I get from home

she said thoughtfully
you lean over the balcony

beside her
your elbow touching hers

the pulse of her being
vibrating into your arm

you imagine
don't your parents mind

you taking their sugar?
you asked

she looked guiltily away
they don't know

she said softly
daddy would punish

if he knew
she paused and then said

you won't tell them will you?
the baker came along

the balcony behind you both
whistling happily

of course not
you said

taking in her
trembling jaw line

her blue eyes
and her lips slightly open

her words gone
it's a nice day

the baker called
yes

you both replied
I don't think he's Jewish

she said
anyway.

Terry Collett

Start Again Or Hide 1969

Sophia's parents
invited me to tea
one Sunday afternoon

Sophia opened the door
and I stepped
into the passageway
and she whispered
they think you
are all right
they don't think
we had sex
and they are happy now

I looked past her
in case her old man
was listening in
but no one was there
so I relaxed

she held my hand
be careful
she whispered
do not let him
catch you out
with questions

I'll be on my guard
I whispered back
seeing how far
the front door was
from the lounge
and how fast her father
could run
if it came to it

she took me
into the lounge
her old man

was in an armchair
her mother was elsewhere
not in sight

her old man stood up
and nodded
and shook my hand
a firm handshake
a kind of finger breaking
kind of handshake

you sit
he said
I sat

Sophia went to sit too
you go help your mother
he said to her

Sophia went off
and I sat looking
at the room
a crucifix hung
on the wall
a Sacred Heart of Jesus
picture was on
another wall

how you like Sophia?
He said
in his Polishy English

very much
I said

you respect her
of course
he said

o yes of course
I said
taking in

his moving moustache

no sex before marriage
you understand
he said
eyeing me

no sex before marriage
I said
putting from my mind
Sophia and me
having sex
in her bed
a few weeks back
while her parents
were out at some
Polish family reunion

I had talked her out
of having sex
on her parents' bed
as a step too far
so she said
my bed then
and we did

I trust her
goodness and purity
he said
knitting his fingers
into a finger church
then cracking
his knuckles

yes I trust her too
I said
she is pure as pure
I added

the mother and Sophia
came in with plates
of sandwiches and cakes

and disappeared again
back to the kitchen

when did you go
to confession last?
He said

last week
I said

and I told him the joke
about the guy
who went to the priest
and said
bless me father
I last came to confessions
three months ago
how much time
have you got?

He didn't laugh

I looked at the crucifix
and felt mentally
nails enter my hands
and feet and side
wishing I
could start again
or hide.

Terry Collett

Start Of Death

Yours was the bed
at the far end
of the ward.

Seems darker now;
the end of it all.

I walk that path
to your bed
in my dreams;
wanting to reach
you again;
wanting to be able
to hold you tight
night after night.

Dreams betray,
they never fulfil;
never bring up
what they promise.

I see you there
puffed up and breathless;
hear your words
fight through
a tightness of lungs
already closing down
(although
we didn't know) .

I felt along your arm
and touched,
sensing the puffiness
of skin,
the tired look
in eyes,
the fight for words.

I asked you questions,

sought for an answer
as a father does,
looking for the purpose
of a hurting son.

I argued with the nurse,
pointed out
your fading state,
your puffed up
skin and frame,
how you could
hardly hold
the mug in hands,
barely talk
through hard to
catch breath.

Unknown
to us then:
the start of death.

Terry Collett

Start Of Rain 1962

John caught up
with Elaine
just before
morning break
as they came past
an empty classroom.

He took her hand
and dragged her in
closing the door
behind them.

What if
someone comes?
She said.

They won't,
he said.

She looked around
the classroom,
then back at him.

What did you
bring me
in here for?
She said.

You said
I could kiss
you later,
he said,
now is later.

But here?
She said.

Why not
no one here

to see us,
he said.

She looked at him,
at his hazel eyes
and brown quiff
of hair.

He stood
gazing at her:
well?
He said.

She leaned forward
and kissed him
on the cheek.

He held her
close to him.

She sensed
his hands
about her.

He kissed her lips,
held so close.

She could feel
his heart beat
as well as hers.

He released her.

She felt all odd
like waking up
from a strange dream.

She felt as if
it wasn't real.

He said:
can I kiss

you again?

She nodded
and he drew her close,
kissed her again.

Outside against
the windowpane
the start of rain.

Terry Collett

Started To Rain 1960

It had started to rain
as I got to Hannah's flat door.

I knocked
on the black
door knocker.

Hannah's mother
answered the door
and stood there unsmiling
whar dae ye want?
she said.

Hanna said
to come over
yesterday
to play chess
I said.

Tae play chess is it
she said
as if not moving
her thin lips.

Yes she said
yesterday.

Best come in 'en
she said
moving to let me in
then closing the door
after me.

Sit in th' sittin' room.

I went and sat
in the sitting room.

Hanna's in th' lavvy

she said
and she walked off
to the kitchen.

I looked around
the room
I'd been there before
a few times.

I always felt
like a fly waiting
for the big spider
to come.

The toilet chain flushed
and the door opened.

I heard voices
then Hannah came
into the sitting room.

O you are here
she said
I was in the toilet.

Yes your mother said.

Did she bite
your head off?

No just said
to come in
and sit here
I said.

Come to my room
and we can play at chess
she said.

So I followed her
to her room
and she shut the door.

I sat on her bed
while she reached
under her bed
for the chess set
in a well worn box.

She set it on the bed
and put the pieces
where they should be.

I watched her
plump hand
moving the pieces
on the board.

Her brown hair long
but tied back
in a ponytail.

Once she'd done
she sat the other side
of the chess set.

Shall we begin?
she said.

Sure
I said.

You go first
she said.

I moved a pawn
two movements forward.

I could hear
her mother
in the kitchen
banging tins about
and cursing.

Bet she's burnt herself
Hannah said
she always forgets
the oven glove.

She said it coolly
no sign of emotion
no sense of love.

Terry Collett

Step Up 1901

You're what?

Mrs Broadbeam said
gazing at Mary the kitchen maid
who stood facing her
hands behind her back
red knuckles clutching each other

Miss Alice's lady's maid
Mary said softly
eyeing the cook
fearing her censure

lady's maid?
you?
who said?
Mrs Broadbeam uttered
spitting as she did so

His Lordship
Mary said
just now when I went to see him

Mrs Broadbeam breathed deeply
and stared at the thin girl before her
but you know nothing
about Miss Alice and she
hardly knows you
the cook said

Mary said nothing
about Miss Alice climbing
into her bed one night
and insisting Mary
be her adopted mother
as her own mother
was ill away in hospital
called an asylum

I know her

Mary said
I took her for walks
and we saw the horses
in the stables when the nanny
asked me to look after her
the other month

asked you?
the cook said
that's her job not yours

Mary looked past the cook
at the stove where a pot was boiling

and how am I to manage without you?
Mrs Broadbeam said

the nanny said she
will get another girl to help you
Mary said
looking back at the cook

Mrs Broadbeam sighed a big sigh
and when is this meant to start?
the cook said

Sunday for church and after
Mary said blinking
and biting her lip

there was silence and stares
and big heaving of breath quietly

all right well until then
don't stand there
there is work to be done
potatoes to peel
washing up to wash and dry

Mary nodded her head
and putting her apron
about her waist

walked off to the scullery
to begin more work

the voice of the cook
bellowing from afar
from the kitchen
pots and pans banging
then silence
then the cook's voice singing.

Terry Collett

Step-Father 1906-1968

That last time I saw you,
cancer ridden, gaunt, no
longer the strong man
I remembered as a kid.

That time as a young
man in East Lane market,
you rushing with your stall
to get a pitch, your mother

following short and stout
calling out. And that time
your first wife, after an
argument, threw tea over

your shirt, just before you
went out. The time I saw you
sitting there in the kitchen
with my mother, your son

having died in battle in 1957,
and mother comforting you.
That last time they brought
you home in the open coffin

to stay overnight, pale featured,
waxen looking, and we all
kissed your cold forehead
a sad farewell to you dead.

Terry Collett

Still Burn 1964

There was that time
and the time we made out
in your small room
with the sloping ceiling

and your mother
came back from shopping
just as I sat down
in the kitchen

and you were upstairs dressing
and your mother said
hello Benny how are you?
I'm fine

I said
where's Milka?
She said
O she had a call of nature

I said
want a cup of tea?
She said smiling
sure that'd be good

I replied
hoping you'd not be long
she got down three mugs
from a cupboard

and put the kettle on the stove
and spooned three spoonfuls
of tea in the pot
how long have you been here?

She asked turning
and looking at me
with her bright eyes
not long

I replied(lied)
biscuit?
She said
that'd be good

I said
she brought me the biscuit tin
and opened up for me
I chose a few

then she put the tin
on the table and walked back
to the stove with a movement
of her plump hips

and I wondered if you'd be long
looking at her motherly breasts
as she looked sideways at me
asking how my job was going

I replied to each question in turn
she not knowing how
twenty minutes before
we made love and still

at that moment burn.

Terry Collett

Stirred Up Inside 1962

Sheila said
what do you want to be
when you leave school?

Motor mechanic
Benny replied.

When you do
leave school?
she said.

After Christmas
he said.

She looked at him
with her sad eyes
I will miss not
seeing you at school
she said.

What about you?
What are you going
to do when you leave school?
he said.

I was going
to be a nun
she said
but then I met you
and changed my mind.

So what now?
he said.

She shrugged her shoulders
don't know
have to see when
I leave next year
she said

can I see you still
once you leave school?

Guess you can
he said.

Maybe I can get a bus
to the village
where you live
she said.

Sure why not
he said.

She bit her lower lip
do your parents
know about me?
she asked.

I've not said anything
he said
do yours?

She shook her head
no not yet.

The bell rang
for the end
of lunchtime recess.

They stood up from the grass
and looked towards the school.

Other kids walked past them
she stood and looked at him
meet me by the gate
before to get on your bus
after school
she said.

Sure I will
he said.

They walked back
across the field.

She went off
with a friend
and he walked behind them
watching her cute hips
and ass go side to side
stirring him up inside.

Terry Collett

Stoic Son 1984-2014

There it is again, that
almost unbelievable
vision of you on the
hospital bed, dead,

my son. Each day
brings it, some days
in a different form,
same pain again and

again. Time heals
nothing, it just tries
to objectify it, put it
out there in suspense,

ghostlike. I thought
the ache and pain
would ease in time's
moving hands, but

no, it just seals it in
to heart, vein, muscle
and pain. Come again,
my son, when and if

you can, my dead son,
my young brave Stoic man.

Terry Collett

Stolen Kisses Never Taken

After choir practice
you came out of the church
and she stopped

and said
I read someplace
that Pascal feared

the wide expanse
of the night sky
and you looked up

at the dark sky
and saw the moon
and scattered stars

and sensed her nearness
beside you
and smelt in the night air

her perfume
and you said
it makes you wonder

what's out there
and she turned
and said

pointing to her breast
and in here too
and you looked

at her breast
and wondered too
and you stood close to her

as others went by
to their cars
and you reached out a hand

and touched hers
and felt the pulse of her
the aliveness within

and never knew
that cancer would enter her
and take her too

and had you known
maybe you would have stolen
many a kiss and hold and gaze

before the death
in those far off days.

Terry Collett

String Quartet 1962

Yehudit looked back
at Benedict-
at the back
of the classroom

more with
that boy Rolland-
but he looked elsewhere.
Something the boy showed.

Titter of laughter.
Miss G, the teacher,
looked at them.
Clapped her hands.

Her bespectacled stare
silenced them.
Yehudit looked back
to the front, the blackboard,

something written
on Beethoven's life and music.
Miss G walked in front
of the class

talking of the last
string quartets.
Yehudit thought
of Benedict and her

by the pond
the previous day.
Sun warm upon them
as they sat on the grass.

She talked of the ducks
and swan and the heron
that landed nearby.
He listened,

but thought of kissing
and holding or so
he later said.
Miss G put on a record

of a string quartet.
Yehudit looked back
and Benedict smiled
and that made her day

and she never heard
the string quartet
of Beethoven
as it played away.

Terry Collett

Studied In The Study 1917

George's father called Polly
into his study.

She had been there
a few times before
as a maid
but this was different.

Sit down, Polly,
he said.

Polly sat down,
all the time
looking at him,
taking in his greying hair
and that moustache of his
and those dark eyes
piecing at her.

How is George?
he asked.

He is a little better,
she replied.

His mother said
he ignored her
when she came
to see him
the other day,
his father said.

He doesn't talk
to anyone much,
Polly replied.

He talks to you,
his father said,
why not others?

I don't know,
she replied.

The day before
walking with him
in the grounds
he spoke only
a few words.

How noisy
the birds were,
he had said.

And that time
the other night
as you were
putting him to bed,
he had taken your hand
and said: come to bed.

But you hadn't;
you said,
later, George,
but never did.

That would be unfair
to him and you,
you thought,
not like the old days
before the war,
or before his shell-shock,
when you and he
made love in his bed
at his request.

Has he improved at all
since he returned home?
his father said.

I think he is slowly,
you said.

I would have tried
to get him a man
to take care of him,
but he seems better
with you
and if I got a man
he might go backwards,
the father said.

I'll take care of him,
you said,
all the time
he needs me.

His father studied you,
his eyes searching you,
and you wondered
if he knew about you
and his son before this,
knew about the sex
and such,
but if he did
he didn't say
or give any hint
or say as much.

Terry Collett

Such A Terrible Thing.

That would be such a terrible
Thing she said seeing morning
Come through the window like
Some peeping Tom if he was to
Write and say he didn't want to
Meet and that he never loved
Me at all or indeed in the first
Place that it was all just pretence
And she waited each day for his
Letter to come saying precisely
That saying what she thought a
Terrible thing written in his neat
Hand with that hard pushed down
Period at the end of the last sentence
And with the absence of those crosses
Of kisses at the bottom of the page
And she lifted her head to the day
Coming through her window wondering
If the mailman would be late or if
Maybe he was on his way and maybe
He knew what the letter would say
And was on his way to deliver like some
Ancient messenger with news of some
Raging war or battle lost and it would
Be a terrible thing she thought if he did
Say those things if he did write them down
And she didn't know how she would cope
If he did wasn't sure if she could keep her
World intact wasn't sure she could cling
On each morning as the sunlight seeped
Its way through to her room and touched
Her bed and skin and head maybe she
Thought he'll say he loves me and write it
In his fine words and hand with those kisses
Like birds in flight at the bottom of the page
Otherwise she said it would be a terrible thing
For the traitorous two-faced mailman to bring.

Such Games

Such games they'd play
and it all mattered

not a fig
the bedroom romps

the bed making
just so to survive

the latest fashion
in the art

of making love
and she saying

let's try this
and him saying

if you like
and the handcuffs

and the little
weedy whip

and the nakedness
and oh

she'd say
let's pretend that I'm

the naughty one
and you're

the master
and he kept

a straight face
as best he could

and not let her see
he saw through

the sexual games
and that time

she'd had him
tied to the bed

and they heard
her parents' car

in the drive
and how she fumbled

to untie the twine
and he wanting to die

and him naked
as the day he was born

and the key
in the lock downstairs

and her fingers fumbling
and he saying

covering with hairy hands
his manhood pride

where can I hide?
and she finally untying

took off the twine
and he leaping from bed

put on his clothes
and so did she

and she whispering warnings
and pulling on her dress

his tee shirt
hanging out

her hair in a mess
and her mother calling

are you up there Chloe?
and he thinking

of the weedy whip
and unmade bed

and love making mess
and Chloe shouting out

yes mother
yes yes yes.

Terry Collett

Such Is Life.

The hat fits,
the hair in place,
the features
of the face

in the dressing
table mirror,
lie: aged
in lines and wrinkles,

and Mina knows it,
and wants it
as it was
back then,

and how it was
with men.
O yes,
mother'd say:

they have their place,
have their limitations,
but she was saying
how she thought it

ought to be,
not as it was for her
and women like
her back then,

with men.
The hat needs
a little adjustment,
slightly to the left,

just so.
O and sister
had her words
on men too,

and she had
that big heap
of flesh and shite,
as any woman might,

and she said:
O you don't want
him or not
that one to me,

and I didn't,
left it to them
to choose,
so I guess

I was bound
to loose.
C'est la vie,
as it is with me.

Terry Collett

Suffering As Such

Fay met me
off the bus
after school

she looked pleased
to see me

her hair
was bunched up
in a ponytail

her school uniform
looked well worn

how was your day?
she asked

boring
I said
being educated
by the unwilling
to the uninterested
and Old Thompson
was as cruel as ever

we walked along
to the crossing
and crossed

how was your day?
I asked
how were the nuns?

it was about suffering today
she said
Sister Bede said
suffering was a gift
from God
it was our way

to suffer
for the souls
in Purgatory
so that they
may be freed

sounds kind of dark
I said

what do you mean?
she said

well that God
should give suffering
as a gift
so that it might
free others
from this Purgatory place

some of the saints
have been honoured
to have been chosen
to suffer
she said

we passed
the greengrocer shop
I looked in the window
the young guy
was serving
some old dame
with potatoes

I suffer from boils
on the ass sometimes
does that count?
I asked
does that get
some soul
out of Purgatory

she looked perplexed

I guess so
she said

ask the nuns tomorrow
if boils on the butt
count

she smiled
don't think I will
she said

we passed
the public house
the smell of beer
oozed out
from the open door

Daddy said
that these places
are the roosting places
of the damned

plenty of damned then
on a Saturday night
I said
pretty packed
when I passed
on my way
to the cinema
last week

I guess
we should pray
for them
she said
Sister Bede said
our prayers
are worth more
than gold
do you pray?
she asked

only for the school
to fall down
or Thompson
to catch leprosy
I said

she frowned
that's not good
she said
we should pray
for good things
to happen

I liked her hair
and eyes
especially when
she gazed at me
as she spoke
her bright eyes
warming me
against the cold

ok
I said
I suppose
I could

we walked on
and across
Rockingham Street

I liked her
careful way
of walking
and her fine
small feet.

Terry Collett

Suffocated

Millie Allstruck suffocated
Her daughter. Millie held
The cushion down. Saw her
Daughter's arms flap like
Some bird in a trap. Millie
Held her breath for as long
As she could, until the arms
Stopped flapping, until her
Bird was dead. She stood
There holding the cushion
In place waiting for sounds,
Any motion. Millie removed
The cushion, stood gaping,
Holding the cushion, breathing
In deep. Her daughter lay there
Staring into space, a sense of
Peace on her three year old face.
Millie had pushed out the cancer,
Put out the fire. She had her
Daughter back sans pains, sans
The creeping disease, sans
The long nights. She put down
The cushion, placed her daughter's
Arms across her small chest, closed
The eyes, brushed the hair, thin
And fair. Millie Allstruck stood
And watched and saw sunlight
Touch her daughter's head as if
The finger of God had touched
And took away. Better to have
Loved and lost than not loved at all,
Millie heard her mother once say.

Terry Collett

Suffocation.

Sophie Syncope
suffocated

her sixth child,
placed the pink pillow

over the small head,
held it there, against

the struggling for breath,
until still, until dead.

Sophie waited, listened,
held her breath,

watched for movement.
None came; she removed

the pillow, stood holding
it by her side. The sixth

child lay closed eyed,
opened mouthed, small

hands in tight fists.
Sophie dropped pillow,

put child's hands crossed
one over the other. Dead child,

crucified mother. Pushed
mouth closed, moved head

upright, steadied. She placed
her palms on the child's cheeks,

felt smooth skin, knew
the stilled cancer within.

Cut short
the suffering,

snuffed out
the cancer's route,

released her child's spirit
to boot.

Terry Collett

Sugar Borrowing 1951

I sat on the top step
of the black
metal staircase
leading up to Auntie's
second floor flat

Dancer
Auntie's black dog
had its chin
over my shoulder
looking down the stairs

it was a warm morning
soldiers were marching
on parade on
the drilling square
to my right

the sound of voices
and marching feet
hung on the morning air

Elsie Auntie's friend
Milly's five year old daughter
began walking up
the stairs one step at a time
holding on
to the black metal rails
which held up
the banister rail
with her small hand

I watched her
walk up slowly
she looked at each step
as she came

Dancer softly growled
she looked up at us

what do you want?

I said

she looked at me pouting
got to ask your auntie
about borrowing some sugar
my mum said
Elsie said
as she reached
the third step
from the top
is your auntie in?

sure she is
I said
did you want me
to ask her?

Elsie reached the top landing
of the staircase
and looked along
where Auntie lived
no I can ask her
Mum said I was to ask
Elsie said
don't need
a 4 year old
to ask for me
she said

ok
I said and watched
as she walked along
to Auntie's door
and knocked on the wood
with her small fist

I got up and walked
to where she stood

Dancer just sat

on the step and looked at us

I waited to next to her
waiting for Auntie
to come to the door

where is she?
Elsie said moodily

knock again
I said

she knocked again
then the door opened
and Auntie stood there
and stared at me
o Elsie
what can I do for you?

Elsie looked up at Auntie
and said
Mum said to ask
for some sugar
as she wants to make a cake
but hasn't got enough
and I am to ask
if you have any spare
Elsie said

sure I have
Auntie said
and went inside

we stood
on the landing waiting
didn't need you
to stand next to me
she said glaring at me

just making sure
you got an answer
I said

she looked at me
with her dark eyes

Auntie came to the door
with some sugar
wrapped in a brown
paper bag
be careful Elsie
should be enough there
Auntie said

Elsie took the brown bag
and said
thank you for the sugar
and walked along
the landing to the stairs
then holding the bag
with one hand
she held each rail
and she went down
with the other hand holding

I walked along to the top
and looked down
and said
you want to come out
and play later

she looked back up at me
why would I?
she said
and walked on down
and off the bottom step
and began to walk away
then she stopped
and looked up and said
must ask Mum first
see what she says

I thought I almost saw
a smile lingering there

but she walked on
and it had gone.

Terry Collett

Suggestion Box

It was there on the wall,
a suggestion box,
painted white
as if to symbolize
purity or honesty.

He watched others
write on slips of paper
their suggestions
and then push them through
the thin slit at the top.

It gave some
a sense of satisfaction,
a small smile appeared,
a feeling of awkwardness in some,
maybe they thought
the suggestion dumb
or maybe they'd put in
a series of four letter words
to convey annoyance or grudge.

He didn't write himself,
didn't want to waste his time
with words that wouldn't change a thing,
knowing that maybe when
the box was emptied
it was cast into the refuse bin
without an eye scanning
a single word or set alight
and left to burn.

He watched as others
put in their slips of paper
hoping for a change
or great improvement:
he chose no comment.

Sullied

She plunges into the hot water
and begins to scrub. Brush and
soap on skin. She wants him off
and out of her. Undo him from her.

Unkiss his kisses, untouch his touches.
She breathes in. She reeks, stinks
of him. He seems to have penetrated
every orifice on her body. She pushes

herself under the water, holds herself
there, opens her eyes even the sting
brings no purification. She sits up and
holds the sides of the bath. Calm down

she tells her shaking hands and legs
but they disobey and carry on like
disobedient children in play. She tries
to think of other things. Think of

somewhere nice, some time once
enjoyed, some pleasure once had,
sipping of the best wine, greedy
eating of caviar or grape. But no.

Everything is focused on him and
the rape. She rubs and scrubs until
she's red and raw. Stop stop her
inner voice screams. Nothing is

what it seems. He pushes his way
even into her every thought now.
He seeps into every pore. The water
fails to clean. She sits there naked,

undone, brush in hand, hair in a mess.
This is not real she says, but knows
it is, she in the bath, wet, raw, sore
and sullied. Yes that's a word mother

would have used: sullied. Tainted,
tarnished, degraded or as Mother
would have said: dishonoured. She
focuses on each aspect of her flesh

as if seen for the first time. What
you focus on is your reality. Who said
that? Does it matter now? Dostoevsky?
The Idiot, that book. Who cares who

said what. The water is no longer hot.
He is still on skin and in orifice in spite
of the rubs and scrubs and tears and curses.
No longer the innocent, no more the

sipping of wine or eating of grape.
Just him and memory of the rape.

Terry Collett

Summer 1962.

Summer 1962
just you and

her sitting in
some field on

the green grass
beneath a hot

summer sun and
she speaking about

things between
you both and you

not really listening
but hearing a steam

train in the distance
and wondering how

high the smoke went
and seeing it in the sky

and she silent for that
moment and you turning

and looking into her
bright eyes and seeing

in the blue and white
the death of far off

stars in some future's
long black cold night.

Terry Collett

Summer 62 And You

That's the last of school
for a while

she said
as you both descended

the school bus
and walked home

with her sister and yours
walking a small distance behind

any chance you could meet me later?
you asked

have to see
if Mother wants me

to do chores
she replied

maybe after?
you asked

she sighed
and looked up

at the late
afternoon sky

you caught her profile
and the way her cheek

was so kissable
and yet you didn't

you just stared
have to see

won't we
don't want her

getting in one
of her moods

you walked on
in silence awhile

then she said
maybe able

to sneak out tomorrow
and see you

by the old pond
and you smiled

and you said
sure that'd be nice

but no funny business
she said

looking you
in the eyes

as if I would
you said

well Mother thinks you would
she muttered

looking away
so that her eyes

captured the horizon
and held it there

and you said
frankly Sweetie

I donâ€™t give a dam or care
and she smiled and said

oh so very Clark Gable
and you both laughed

and she grabbed
your hand

and whispered
she just donâ€™t understand.

Terry Collett

Summer Day 1962

We sit and stare
at the pond.

Summer day;
warm and
almost airless.

She has a white blouse
and blue skirt, sandals,
her toes visible.

I'll be glad
when school's over,
she says,
get a job
and earn some money.

Can't wait,
I think I can get a job
at the garage down
by the crossroads,
I say.

No more ugly
green uniform
and white socks;
can wear clothes
I like, not what
my mother chooses,
Yehudit says.

She turns to me
and her eyes
search mine.

Remember our
first kiss?

Yes, took

my breath away,
I say.

Wasn't here though,
was on that
Christmas carol
singing night,
under moon
and stars,
she says.

We did things
here though,
I say,
looking at her eyes,
how sunlight
brightens them.

And there was that
guy over there fishing
and we didn't see him
until later,
she says.

Maybe he never saw us.

Maybe he did.

He never told no one,
least not that
my mother
ever found out,
she says,
looking back
at the pond,
where ducks swim
and a swan floats by
over the other side.

Just as well
or I'd have been for it,
Yehudit says.

I kiss her cheek.

She looks at me,
her eyes burning blue.

That's how things start.

Guess so.

She kisses me
and we kiss more.

We lay back
on the grass
embracing and kissing.

A blackbird sings,
a woodpecker pecks
on a tree in the wood
near by.

I see a new world
in the beauty
of her eyes,
in the touch
of her skin.

I can can enter
that new world
if she'll let me in.

Terry Collett

Summer Rain Came Suddenly

Summer rain came suddenly
and you and she

had just got off the school bus
and had to run for shelter

and so entered the wood
and settled beneath some trees

which at least kept off
some of the rain

and as you both stood there
looking about the woodland

and listening to the rain
fighting its way through

the overhead branches and leaves
smelling the rain smell

hearing the sound
of rain falling

she said suddenly
That was unexpected

one minute the sun's shining
the next the downpour

and she turned
and looked at you

raindrops falling down
from her hair onto

the side of her nose
and sitting there

for a few moments
then sliding down

and moving along
her cheek

and you wiped
the drops off

with the end of your finger
and she took your finger

and mouthed it
and licked off the rain

and held your finger
in her hand

and said laughing
That was my raindropp

and you saw
how her lips parted

and in such a way
that you sensed

an inner explosion
of what you thought of

as love and said
Rain is rain

it's got its own smell
and touch

and feel
and she moved her lips

to your finger
and licked it once more

and you laughed
and felt your heart leap inside

and she said
releasing your finger

Love is love
something like rain

something you feel
and sense and know

and she kissed you and said
Mum' I wonder where I am

we'd better go
and moving out

from beneath the trees
you ran off together

into the falling rain
all over again.

Terry Collett

Summer's Day And Jane 1961

Summer's day
and Jane and I
were lying on the grass
in the churchyard
in an area
where there
were no gravestones
(at least not at that time)

birds flew overhead
and cows mooed
from over the hedge
from the fields beyond

do you think
of me often?
Jane said
turning to gaze at me
not the sky

most of the time
I said
looking and taking
in her dark eyes

what do you think
about me?
she asked

I looked at her lips
thin lips
and opening and closing
as she spoke to me

think I love you
I said

she looked away blushing
how love me?

in what way?
she said
her eyes watching
rooks overhead

not sexual
love you for being you
I said
pushing thoughts
of Lizbeth from my mind
knowing to even mention
her name would
cloud the day

not sexual not lustful?
she said

no of course not
I said
(but was it
totally true?)

her eyes followed
a swift go by
in the sky
do you think of her?
Jane said
looking at me
letting the swift go off

her?
I said

Lizbeth
Jane said

I try not to
I said

do you lust
after her?
Jane said quietly

as if she thought
the cows might
be listening

no I don't
I said
(but did I?)

I love you
Jane whispered
in my ear
a breathy sentence
words warm and soft
like marshmallows

ditto
I said

she kissed my cheek
then lay on her back

I couldn't imagine
her ever wanting sex
she seemed too pure
for such

unlike Lizbeth
who would have
sucked me off
as quick as look at me
but I didn't allow
even the thought to stay
in my head

my mother likes you
she said
and trusts us

I liked her mother
in a kind of
careful as I walk
kind of way

Jane held my hand
at her side
her hand in mine
fingers intertwined

a swallow flew up ahead
graceful and smooth
and quickly gone

Lizbeth would turnover now
I mused
and climb me
and be on.

Terry Collett

Summertime Blues 1962

I sit on the grass
with Yiska

warm summer day
lunch time recess

do you think of me
when you're home?
she says

most of the time
I say

I think of you
nearly all of the time
at home
she says

what do you
think about?
I say

us together
in my bed at night
she says
as I hug my pillow
and kiss it

I pick grass
with my fingers
every night?
I say

most nights
she says
do you hug your pillow
and dream of me
in your bed?
she says

not easy
I share a bed
with my younger brother
I say

of course
she says
do you wish it was me
there and not him?
she says

I scatter the grass
at my feet

I think of you lying there
and me hugging you close
and kissing and such
I say

my mother said to me
what's the matter with you
wandering the house
like a moody cow?
Yiska says
nothing I told her
just that time of the month
and my brother said
what time of the month
is that?
feck off
I said and mother
told me to behave
and not swear

I look at her sitting there
her hands on her knees

what does your brother say
about us sitting here lunch times?

he says nothing to her

I don't think he worries
and he'd not tell tales

she turns and leans close
and kisses me quickly
wish you were
in my bed at night
she whispers

so do I
I reply

Goldfinch comes over
aren't you playing football?
he says
we need you
for right back

not now
I say
I'm back here with her

he shakes his head
and goes

I look at her
and she smiles
and I imagine her
with no clothes.

Terry Collett

Sun & Soup

You hold the spoon
over the tureen

watching the soup
drip back with a plop.

You know Francis
will enter soon,

and stand watching
over you, him being

master of the kitchen,
wondering if you had

dipped your finger
and tasted the soup

with your tongue
and say, I hope you

haven't dipped your finger
in and tasted, it isn't

the done thing;
and he'd give you

such a look, as if you would,
as if Mother had not

taught you kitchen manners
with its dos and don'ts;

and as you look up
at the high windows,

sunlight leaks through
the coloured glass pane

throwing its golden finger
across the tureen's hold.

Terry Collett

Sun Block

The plump lady
who occupied
with her behind
the front two seats

of the green bus
has passed away
and no one went
to her lonely

sad funeral
except a priest
and the lady
from the sweet shop

who sold Sally
the plump lady
dark chocolate
bars each morning

and cigarettes
and the old man
who lived next door
who used to peep

through net curtains
as she undressed
in the evenings
and others sit

where she once sat
and sunlight shines
into the bus
where she once sat

and others sense
the morning heat
that she blocked out
by sitting there

whom none talked to
but all would stare.

Terry Collett

Sunday Morning Blues

So what others may say
and she can hear them
thinking that or maybe

inside her head hear their
voices say as such as she
sits on the stone steps of

her apartment thinking of
him and his thoughtlessness
and sure it's what most

people think is the norm
guys being guys thing but
she can't help being saddened

by his forgetting it being their
fifth anniversary since the
first day they met at the gallery

looking at the modern art the
Mondrian's and Rothko's and
her favourite Lichtenstein's

and how he had been all over
her that day being all knowledge
and kindness and fussing over

the smallest detail and taking
her to that restaurant he knew
and the music he put on in his

classy apartment and how he'd
been quite the gentleman that
night not pressuring for sex no

expectation of anything except
her happiness and now sitting
watching the early morning slow

ride by of Sunday traffic and the
odd passing person and their
usual rest day greetings she feels

depressed that he has forgotten
that he has not called and breathing
in the morning air she wonders

now if he really ever did care or
maybe he's grown sick of her and
her wants and ways or has found

some other woman to love and
caress and kiss and take out and
maybe he's in some other woman's

place lying asleep lying body next
to body face to face and she hopes
maybe he'll ring or text or better

still come round with chocs and wine
and suggest they go and dine but
she'll not text or ring him to remind

or find out where he's gone or
whereabouts he slept the night
before no sir she mutters I'll not

lower myself to do as such full of
cares sitting on her apartment stairs.

Terry Collett

Sunday Morning Fun 1955

Helen and I
were sitting on
the grass in front
of Banks House

it was a Sunday morning
bright and warm

she had her hair
in 2 plaits
and her thick lens glasses
enlarged her eyes
which were
peering at me

so he shot you?
she said
looking concerned

yes the creep shot me
in the back while
I wasn't looking
I said

so who
was it again?
she said

Pat Garrett
he's sheriff
or something
like that
I said

and you
were Billy the Kid?
she said
flicking one
of her plaits of hair

behind her shoulder

yes but I had
a good life while I did
I said

she nodded

I saw him in a film
at the flicks
I said
Robert Taylor
was him in it
my old man took me

she looked at the 6
shooter gun
in my holster
on the grass

how many guns
have you got?
she asked

I have 3
I said
and a rifle
sometimes I have
2 guns on me
in holster
sometime I have 1

why 2?
she said

so I can shoot 2
bad guys at once
or if I'm the baddie
then 2 marshals

she frowned
which do you

like best to be?
she said

I like playing Wyatt Earp
if I'm a good guy
or Billy the Kid
if I'm a bad guy

she passed me
a sherbet lemon sweet
from a white paper bag
and I sucked it

she talked of her doll
Battered Betty
who lost an arm
when her little brother
smashed her against
a wall but her dad
fixed it
and it has 2 arms
now again

I picked up
my 6 shooter
and took it out
of the holster
and began to polish it

she talked on
about her dolls' shoes
white ones but one
had gone missing
and she thought
her brother may
have stolen it

I sucked another
sherbet lemon
cleaning my gun
part of my Sunday
morning fun.

Terry Collett

Sunday Was Visiting Day.

Sunday was visiting day
the day when briefly
as the visitors arrived

the locked ward
was unlocked
nurses on edge

eyes on the doors
patients on beds
or in chair

in the lounge
drugged up
or not so

depending on mood
or demons or how
far down

the deep pit
they'd gone
you can't recall

Christine's visitors
can't remember
anyone there

but your mother
came through
the unlocked doors

carry smiles
and pinned in concerns
soft voice

smelling of perfume
or fresh air coming in
standing there

then sitting in the chair
by the bed
handing over sweets

or books or wash stuff
conversations
of how are you?

and what's the food like?
are you feeling better?
were noted

and exchanged
your mother worried
lines on her face

in her eyes
swan deep concern
you saw Christine

over the way
standing by the window
looking out

then by the doors
waiting
arms folded

her nightgown
held tight
about her

her slipped feet touching
then the visitation over
the visitors gone home

the doors locked
the ward quiet
the patients subdued

staring into space

or at each other
gazing

into eyes
as blank as each others
depression deeper

nurses doing rounds
giving out drugs
listening acutely

to souls in torment
with their sad
silent sounds.

Terry Collett

Sunflowers After Sex.

After the sex she stood
In front of the Van Gogh
Painting and gazed. Never
Saw that last night, she said.
It was dark, Max replied.
She touched the painting
With her fingers. Why have
A painting of flowers when
You can go out and buy some?
She asked. They last longer this
Way, he replied. So did you
Paint this? She asked in a state
Of semi undress, her eyes sleepy,
Her hair in a mess. No, Van Gogh
Did, he replied. Is he a friend of
Yours? She asked rubbing her breasts.
He sighed and shook his head. No,
Van Gogh painted that many years
Ago, now he's dead. It's a bit yellow,
She said, looking at the painting
Closer, what are those yellow flowers
Supposed to be? Sunflowers, he said,
They're big flowers; people grow them
For real. She raised her eyebrows and
Pulled a face. What about that drink?
She asked. Sure, Max replied pouring
Her gin in a tall glass. She took, sipped
And winked an eye. What about more
Sex? She sighed. Sure, Max, looking at
Van Gogh's Sunflowers, boringly replied.

Terry Collett

Sunny Saturday Afternoon

The sun shone bright
on the Saturday afternoon
as Helen put her doll
Battered Betty

on the bombsite rubble
off Arch Street
near the coal wharf
and sat down beside you

(crossed legged)
peering
at the bombed out ruin
of a nearby house

wonder what it felt like
being bombed?
she said
I mean

one minute
you're trying to get
the kids to sleep
next minute

a ruddy great bomb
blasts you all
to Kingdom Come
you offered her

a sweet candy cigarette
from a blue and yellow packet
don't know
you said

but my mum said
that when she was home
with my gran
during one bombing raid

they hid under
the kitchen table
with her baby niece Carol
Helen sat opened mouthed

her hand holding
the hand
of her battered doll
anyway

you went on
my mum's stepfather
(her dad having died
from TB in 1936)

was under there too
but my mum said
he had his backside
sticking out

from under the table
as if
that was unbombable
Helen laughed

and so did you
bet it was horrible
to be bombed
she said

but I would have hated
being evacuated
from my mum
even for a day

she sucked
on the sweet cigarette
held between two fingers
and stared

at the ruin

with half a roof
and two walls standing
revealing wallpaper

on the inside
of one wall
my gran said
you continued

an old couple
next to them
on hearing
the air raid siren

began to run
toward the bomb shelter
in the garden
when the old lady stopped

and the old man said
what you looking for?
my teeth she said
and he said

they're dropping
ruddy bombs
not mince pies
Helen spluttered

into laughter
almost on choking
on the sweet cigarette
don't

she said
I near wet myself then
and she clutched her doll
to her chest

patting its back
there there Betty
she said

it's only a story

and you looked
at her small hand
tapping the doll's back
the fingers tight together

love in each tap
a good mother
she'd make
you thought

with schoolboy love
looking at her profile
the thick lens
spectacles

the plaited hair
and her small hand
going tap tap
on the back

of the battered doll
in her flower skirted lap.

Terry Collett

Sutcliffe's Cigarettes 1959

Sutcliffe brought
the cigarettes
into the boys' toilets
(he'd been given them
by his cousin
who was staying
a real live wire
Davies said) .

We huddled
at one end
Davies
stood look out
for prefects.

O'Brien
had one lit up
and he lit one
for Davies
and I lit my own
and Sutcliffe took
the final one
and we smoked
huddled together
like old men
in some hostel.

Davies stood look out
smoking and puffing
smoke out
then waving it a way.

So what made
your cousin
give you fags then?
O'Brien said.

Sutcliffe blew
out smoke

she said
she'd give me fags
if I took photos of her
with her camera
he said.

What posing nude?
Davies said smiling.

No no
Sutcliffe said
just poses of her
in her undies
and bra thing.

You dirty old bugger
O'Brien said
what would she want
for a packet of 20
he added.

She's not like that
Sutcliffe said
it's for a fashion place
she wants to work for.

I took turns
with Davies
and kept look out
by the toilet entrance.

The playground
was full of boys
no prefects around
I could see.

Have you
any photos
of her posing?
Davies said.

In the nude

or otherwise
O' Brien said.

Of course not
Sutcliffe said
she has them developed
then drops them off
at this place
she wants to be
a model at.

What's she like
your cousin?
I asked.

Like?
What do you mean
like?
Sutcliffe said
peering at me.

I mean is she
tall thin
or short and fat?
I said.

She's slim
and average
and has blonde hair
he said.

O'Brien
hugged himself
and said
is this
what you do
with her Sutcliffe?

Sutcliffe took
a deep inhalation
and stared at the wall.

Prefect coming
I said.

We dumped
all cigarettes
down a pan
flushed
then departed
one by one
having had
a our smoke
and fun.

Terry Collett

Svetlana

Stalin's dark shadow
over the shoulder

of Svetlana
her ghostly mother

talks of her suicide.

Terry Collett

Sweet Delight

There was that sweet delight
especially when she
had that smile on her
and as you sat

by the pond with her
and she joined her hands
over her knees
and stared ahead

at the ducks out there
and you gazed at her
sideward on
and took in

her fine breasts
and thighs
and she said
ducks are very greasy creatures

to eat unlike rabbits
which are very dry
and you said
I guess they are

but my sisters wouldn't
touch either with a bargepole
and she raised her eyebrows
and sighed and said

guess they would
if they were starving
and you said
I guess people would eat

almost anything
if they were starving
and she turned
towards you

and said
I read somewhere
they ate each other
in the Civil War in Russia

and there was
some sweet delight
when she said that
and the way

her breasts and thighs
captured your eyes
with love of course
with a small dose of lust

mixed in
and that wished
for passion
and dream of sin.

Terry Collett

Swimming In Bedlam Park.

Janice
sans red beret
walked with you
to Bedlam Park

where you swam
in the open air
swimming pool
(she swam

you tried
but failed)
there in her
green swimsuit

her arms pulling her
through water
her hands
pushing away

the water's skin
while you stood
waist deep
gazing at her skills

her wet hair
her bright eyes
you gingerly standing
feet on the bottom

feeling the water's
pull and push
come on
she said

try to swim
be brave
and you dived forward
into the water

and splashed
and sunk
like some broken boat
water in your eyes

and ears
you rose
helped by Janice
to the surface

choking
and spluttering
wiping water
from your stinging eyes

she had her hand
in yours
holding you steady
keeping you balanced

she apologised
for not helping
should have helped
she said

not just stood
and stared
and you gazed at her
through wet eyes

forming an image
making sense
of the shape of her
her eyes on you

her damp hair limp
against her skin
o mermaid of the deep
you said

where is your tail?

and she laughed
and took you
by the hand

into the shallower water
her warm hand
in yours
her thin fingers

clutching
her damp swimsuit
dripping
try here

in less deeper water
she said
and let go
of your hand

and she lowered herself
into the water
and showed you how
to put your body so

and hands and arms
to move and legs
to kick and push
but all you could hold

in mind
could bring to bear
was her beauty
swimming there.

Terry Collett

Swing Time

You were with Janice
in Jail Park

two kids
looking for kicks

and Janice said
Can you push me

on the swings?
and you said

Sure if you like
and got behind her

as she sat on the swing
her hands holding

the small steel rings
that held the wooden seat

of the swing in place
her legs kicking outward

like some young bird
about to take flight

for the first time
and you heaved

the seat of the swing forwards
you then let it go

and off she went
upwards and downwards

her cry of exhilaration
filled your ears

and you pushed her
more higher and higher

to her cries of
Higher and higher

then you stood back
and walked around

the front of her
as she rose up

her legs pushing
into the sky

her black shoes
touching the cloud's skin

and you called out to her
Don't let go

or you'll fall
and she gripped

the small steel rings tighter
with her whitening hands

and her eyes
were wide

and her mouth opened
in a small O

and as her body
went by you

you pushed her once more
your hands pushing against

her summer dress
covered butt

and you sensed
the warmness of her

and the air
and her flying

like some young bird
way up there.

Terry Collett

Swinging High 1956

Janice and I
went to Jail Park
to have a ride
on the swings
and slide and see-saw

it was the Easter holidays
and a warm day
and I met her
by the pub
near the park entrance

she was wearing
a yellow flowered dress
and white ankle socks
and her hair
was in two bunches
tied with ribbons

how are you then?
I asked
coming out
from the Rockingham Estate

I almost didn't get out
she said

why's that?
I asked

Gran said
I had been naughty yesterday
and spanked me
and said
I was to stay in
all day but after
I did extra chores
she let me out only
she said

if I was with you
and I behaved

what did you do
that was wrong?
I said

I let the canary out
and it flew all
around the room
and almost got out
and we had a job
to get it back
in the cage again
Janice said

almost made
freedom then
poor bird
I said

Gran was so annoyed
with me
Janice said

does it still speak
those naughty words
I taught it?
I said

no not anymore
Gran was not happy
about that when
she heard it
but it says other
words now which Gran
has taught it

we entered the park
and went on the swings
side by side
and we both tried

to go higher
than the other

I pulled back
and went forward
trying to get
the swing to reach high
and I pushed my feet out
as if I was going
to touch the white clouds
in the blue sky

but Janice got higher
than I
I don't know
how or why.

Terry Collett

Swinging With Janice

Janice adjusts
the red beret
on her fair hair
and pulls at the hem
of her dress
as she sits
on the wooden seat
of the swing
in the park.

I sit on the swing
next to her,
ready to kick off,
my feet on the tarmac,
my eyes glued on her.

She winces.

Gran spanked me last night
for saying
that four letter word
you taught me.

You weren't supposed
to tell your gran.

You never said
not to tell;
I didn't know
what it meant.

Sorry,
I should have
told you.

(I didn't know,
but I don't tell her that) .

She pushes off

with her feet
and she's air borne;
her sandalled feet
high in the air
as the swing goes backward
then forward.

I push off, too,
holding tight
to the steel links
on each side of the swing.

Maybe your gran
should have washed
your mouth out
with soap
instead of a spanking.

I wish she had, too.

My old man's aunt
swears like a trooper;
I used to go
to Sunday tea with her
and her husband
and my Nan used to say:
that's enough
of that language,
there's children present.

What did did she say?

They don't know
what it means,
she used to say;
but Nan'd say, no,
but they might repeat it
to people who do.

And did you?
Janice asks.

No, at least not
if my parents
were around.

I am swinging higher
than her now;
my feet seem to reach
the nearest clouds.

She tries to swing higher,
but I am still higher,
by swinging backward
and forward on the seat
and the holding tight
to steel links each side,
I am up there
with the gods.

Have you ever
been spanked?

I look at her.

Once when I peed
in my toy box
and my cousin
told my mum.

She pulls a face.

How dirty of you.

Yes, I guess;
Mum thought so.

I feel a breeze
in my hair and face
as I ride high,
swinging back and forth
on the swing.

She's beside me

trying hard to reach
as high as I am;
her feet reaching up,
her legs swinging madly;
her body going
backward and forward;
her red beret,
clinging on
for dear life
on her head.

I reach my maximum height;
my feet touching
Heaven's gates
or so seems,
my body going
back and forth
as much as it can.

She's almost there,
smiling,
the wind riding
through her flowing
fair hair.

Terry Collett

Swings And Slides

And she likes to ride
on the swing and rise
higher and higher and
see beyond the hedges

and see houses and trees
and people passing
and wonders if it's always
so and as she rises higher

her hands gripping the
ropes of the swing she
feels her stomach turn
and turn and remembers

when her mother's new
boyfriend pushed her
on the swing a few years
ago how he would say

how high you want to
go Celia? and he'd push
her higher and higher
and she called out I'm

frightened slow me down
but he just stood there
laughing and waving his
hands and gawking at her

legs as she went up and
down and she tried to slow
herself down but he just
pushed her high again and

she said I'll tell on you
pushing me too high but
he just shook his head
and pushed her instead

and then once he felt he
wanted to he pulled on
her ropes and slowed her
down and put his hands

on her thighs and squeezed
and held her there for a
moment or two staring
into her eyes and said that

wasn't too bad was it?
And he grinned and she
wanted to say something
to her mother but never did

and when she got home
she said nothing and just
went to her room and stared
out at the park with its swings

and slides and the innocent
children laughing and smiling
and full of joy unaware as
she was then and knows now

how touches and suggestions
can end the innocence of
childhood in a single moment
once and for all and to no good.

Terry Collett

Take Part.

Who's the bint?
Reynard asks
as Yiska
walks away
her bottom
cool swaying
her grey skirt

a girl friend
I tell him

another one?

who's counting?

what's she like?

innocent
as flowers
(she wasn't
but said so
to no one)

time wasters
Reynard says
watching her
join her friends
on the grass
of the field
by the school

I watch her
different
year younger
than I was

football then?
he asks me
turning round

while there's time?

I smell her
still near me
OK then
I reply
walking on
to the game
just started

blow a kiss
back to her
she catches
with both hands
to her heart

here Benny
someone calls
throws a ball
I take part.

Terry Collett

Talk Of Art 1972

Abela
talks of art
what to buy

for the shop
once we're back
from our hot

holiday
in the sun
need new stuff

freshly done
not old crap
that won't sell

that Dutch guy
who brings in
those oils

they are good
I watch her
sitting there

in the chair
with a French
cigarette

between her
thin fingers
her legs crossed

but they weren't
crossed last night
in the bed

they were spread
like wide wings
of a wild

singing bird
I nested
in the nest

as she sang
some Mozart
aria

or that French
girl who comes
to the shop

with her art
that might sell
Abela

informs me
if priced right
yes I say

but thinking
of last night.

Terry Collett

Talk Over Tea

Her mother poured tea

her father sat talking
about his day at work

her sister sat eating
her jam and cheese sandwich

Elaine sat looking
into space
her eyes vacant

cat got your tongue?
her mother said
gazing at her
the teapot mid-air

her father looked at her
perhaps she found herself
a boyfriend
and smiled

some hopes
her sister said
more chance of you
winning at horses Dad

Elaine blushed
and tried to look
uninterested
in the conversation
such as it was or wasn't

so who's the boy
who's in love
with my Frumpy Hen?
the father said

no boy at all

Elaine said
just thinking

that requires a brain
her sister said
with a mouthful
of jam and cheese
sandwich

her mother said
what boy
I never heard
of a boy?

there is no boy
it's just Dad
having his joke
Elaine said
going red
feeling her body
become hot

I was going to say
you're too young yet
for boys and their
nonsense
you're just 14
why when I
was your age
boys were not
even on the agenda
why my dad'd
strap me one if
he thought I'd been
messaging with boys

Elaine couldn't get
a boy to look at her
let alone mess
about with her
her sister said
munching the mouthful

Elaine tried to bring
her heart into
a steady pace
her pulse was racing
she sensed her blood
rushing through her body
like lava down a volcano

I can't imagine
our Elaine with a boy
anyway
her father said
maybe a boy
with a white stick
he joked
with a guide dog

Elaine gazed at her father
and frowned

only joking
my Frumpy Hen
I dare say
you'll get some one
someday

not before she's older
her mother said
sitting at the table
not before she's
much older
can't have a girl
her age with boys
and all they get up to
like that Mrs Kimp's daughter
out all hours with boys
coming along the road
with a boy on her arm
not right and she
no older than Elaine here

Elaine tried to imagine
herself some place else
as she ate a ham sandwich
feeling like gagging
on it

if she was a daughter of mine
I'd give her what for
the mother said
sitting uneasy
on the chair
gazing at Elaine's
young sister
not at Elaine

I'm not thinking
of a boy
Elaine lied
feeling her body unfold
her heart racing along

good job too
her mother said
you're my good girl
giving Elaine a smile
as John crept
into Elaine's thoughts
all the while.

Terry Collett

Talk Over Tea.

Janice's gran
had left the room

to fetch another
pot of tea

and Janice said
Are you coming on

the day trip to the seaside?
I'm not sure

you replied
Oh please do

Janice said
Then we can be together

and I won't have to spend time
with those giggly girls

from the gospel group
you looked at her fair hair

and the way her eyes
were on you

and how precise
her lips were

when she spoke
I'm not sure my parents

can afford it
you said

Oh it's free for kids
whose parents are poor

she said
And after all

it's part of the point
of the whole thing

to show Christian values
and so on

and she smiled
and put her hand

on yours
under the table

as her gran came in
with the teapot

What are you two
talking about?

Gran asked
putting the teapot

down on the table
Janice's hand

squeezed yours
under the table

Oh just about the day trip
to the seaside

Janice said
Are you going too?

her gran asked you
you hesitated

and then said
Yes I think so

and Janice looked at you
her blue eyes bright

and she said
Isn't that good Gran?

Yes indeed
her gran said

and poured tea
into your cup

and added milk
and sugar

and Janice's hand
left yours

and the absence
of the warmth

of her hand
felt like

a dying world
in a vast galaxy

or drowning
in a deep blue sea.

Terry Collett

Talks With The Dead

He converses too often
with the dead. The talks
Remembered, taken in
Deep the words said.
He sorts through afterwards
The conversations, what
Was said by who to whom,
And how was said. And as
He spoke took in the eyes
Of those speaking, the open
Happiness there, the lack
Of worries, absence of fear
Of their mortality, being there
In that other place, just a finger
Tip, a cool breath's feel away.
He sees them, they pass by,
Time of no concern, no pressures
For them anymore, just the talking,
Soft conversations with those
Who have moved on, those who
Felt death's kiss and touch over much.

Terry Collett

Tangiers 1970

The Mediterranean Sea
caught the moonlight

as you wandered the beach
with Mame

she grabbed your hand
and kissed your cheek

isn't it out of this world?
she said stopping

and looking into your eyes
and breathing out

her peppermint breath
you smelt the sea salt

felt the slight breeze
coming across the sea

wouldn't you rather be
with one of the other guys

than be here with me?
you said

gazing at her fuzzy hair
her light blue eyes

oh piss the other guys
it's you I like

she said
brushing a hand

through your hair
pulling you in closer

to her small tight breasts
don't you like me?

she asked
I thought you fancied me

the way you kept staring at me
on the coach and in Tangiers

you heard the Berber drums
and voices from the camp base

coming on the wind
and wondered if the others

would guess she'd taken you
down the beach

for something romantic
or tumble in the sands

with all lips and hands
well?

she asked
standing there

in her flowered
two piece bathing cloth

sure I do
you muttered

sensing her hand
reaching down

your jeans
seeking an erection

a sign of interest
do you ever think

of those ancients
who may once

have stood
where we now stand?

you said
how they too

may have stood
beneath a sky

and stars
and moon like us?

she stood back and stared
and uttered coldly

no I haven't
and couldn't give a cuss

and off she went
up the beach

to the base camp
on smooth sands

and rough tufts of grass
and oh how she knew

to wiggle
her small tight ass.

Terry Collett

Tattooed Son

Your youngest sister
wants to have
your name

tattooed on her skin,
my son, not that
she'd forget you

or ever let the meaning
of you fade as her skin
will fade with age and time,

she just wants
your name there,
as a daily reminder of you,

her older, now dead brother,
your name like a prayer,
a mantra to say,

and see it there.
If I had more nerve,
and didn't have this

fear of needles, maybe
I'd have a tattoo too,
your name right there

over my heart
in blue and red,
to remind me where

my love for you is,
and the ache there
since you died,

and the fast thump there
each time from grief
I cried.

Terry Collett

Tea For Three

Hedley's mother had hairy legs.
That's one reason you liked to

go over for tea some days. That
and the fact she wore the kind

of short dress no other women
you knew would wear at least

not in front of minors like yourself
and Hedley. More tea? Cake?

she asked giving you the big smile
and oozing her perfume from her

nearby body. Yes more cake please
and are those salmon sandwiches?

Yes dear and there's plenty more
if you want she replied. She poured tea

and brought more cake and sandwiches
and sat down opposite you and said

how's your mother dear? Oh she's ok
you said gazing dumbly at Hedley's

mother and the way her hands moved
over the plates and held the teapot

with the red fingernails and the rings
on her fingers. Is your husband not here?

you asked. No he's away business calls
and such like she said giving you the smile

and bright eyes. Oh good glad he's got
plenty of work on you replied. Hedley ate

and drank and said little over tea. His
mother ate quite daintily her fingers

holding the cup with her little digit sticking
out as she drank. Ah she said suddenly

I forgot the jelly and ice-cream and off
she walked and you watched as she went.

Her hair legs really grabbed your attention.
Mothers huh? Hedley said. Keeping face

against the odds. Father's probably
screwing his female clients or staying

over in cheap hotels with the red-light girls.
Oh right you said guess some father's do.

Here's the jelly and ice cream Hedley's
mother said on her return hope you like it

she said I like it when it wobbles and the soft
taste on the tongue. Hedley said nothing and

nor did you. You were thinking of Hedley's father
and those cheap hotels and the girls he'd screw.

Terry Collett

Tea Party And Jane 1961

Jane's parents
invited me to tea
one Saturday
(my mother said
it was ok)
so I walked along
Bug's Lane to where
she lived and knocked
at the door.

Her father opened the door
he had his dog's collar on
(he was a parson) and said
come on in Benedict
glad you could come.

I stepped into the passage
and he closed the door
and there was the smell
of polish and cleanliness
and religious pictures
on the walls.

He showed me
into the sitting room
and Jane was there
helping her mother
lay out the table
with sandwich and cakes
and other items for tea.

She smiled when she saw me
and I smiled back
her mother looked at me
and her eyes searched me
then she smiled too
and said
take a seat Benedict and relax
so I sat on the settee

and looked around the room.

There was heavy wallpaper
and other religious pictures
and crucifix on the wall
over the fireplace.

Her father disappeared
from the room and then
her mother went off
to the kitchen to get more items.

Jane said
glad you're here
I think they want
to get to know you better.

I nodded not sure
what to say
and she whispered
I said about us not having sex
and they know I wouldn't
but they just need to be sure.

I was unsure what to say
so I said ok I understand
(although I didn't
but said nothing) .

The mother came back
with a huge teapot
and the father came in
with milk jug and sugar bowl
and set them down
and they hovered
about the table
like nervous hosts.

How are your parents?
her mother asked.

O they're fine

I said
Dad's working on the forestry
and Mum's keeping us
clean and well fed.

They smiled
and her father said
o that's good
I am glad they are well
and doing God's will.

Jane looked at me
her eyes bright and shiny.

Well help yourself Benedict
the father said
and we helped ourselves
to sandwiches
and the mother poured tea
and added milk and asked
about sugar
and then she talked
about my siblings and school.

Her father said
do you go to the church?

I looked at Jane
and her lovely eyes
and the small buds
of bosoms just pushing
her dress top out a little.

We go to the small church
at Diddling
I said
it's nearer and we know it better.

The father nodded and said
yes it's the smallest church
in the county
I preach there now and then

if the other parson
can't make it otherwise
I have my own church
to look after.

I nodded and saw
Jane's lovely curve of body
the way her hips were
and I wanted to talk
to her alone
but didn't get the chance
as the parents talked
most of the time.

I listened and ate
and drank and smiled
gazing at their only child.

Terry Collett

Tea With Sophia 1969

Sophia's parents' invitation to tea
had been what I thought
it might be

an interrogation into my life
and style and earnings
and moral fitness

minus the bright lights
in the eyes
and the torture tools
and rubber truncheon
(although I am sure Sophia
would have found a use
for that in foreplay)

when I knocked
her father answered the door
stiff as a corpse
eyes on me
his hands at his sides
his Polish English
understandable but stiff

witaj
he said
welcome

I said
thank you
and looked at him
then tried to look past him
but he was wider than I thought
and I saw his shoulder

Sophia came beside her father
and smiled nervously
hello
she said

hello
I replied

jestes tu
her mother said
behind her daughter

English Mama
her father said to his wife
giving her the hard stare

we went into the lounge
and he said sit down
so I sat down on the sofa
and Sophia sat next to me
her father sat in his armchair
and his wife stood gazing at me
as if I was a puppy
who had walked in with wet paws

you get tea now
he said
Sophia help your mama

Sophia rose up and went
with her mother leaving me
to my fate

he stared at me
his eyes icy
what are your intentions
with regards to Sophia?
he said
his Polish English was heavy

I unscrambled the words
good intentions
I said
(pushing our sex in his bed
with her that time
out of my head)

I'm Catholic and I work hard
I added

he looked past me
as if another waited behind me
for instructions
horyzont?
he said then added
prospects?

(to get her in bed again
as soon as possible
would not have applied
so I said nothing)
I just frowned

how are your prospects?
he said slower
as if he were talking
to an imbecile

o
I said
well I can make the grade
and become a full nurse
I added

his face remained still
nurse?
he said

qualified nurse
I said

he moved his head
as if his neck
had become stiff

and how are you in regards
to sexual relations? he asked

normal

I said

normal?

he said

I mean how to do you
think about sex after marriage
as the Church teaches?

(I pushed any image
of Sophia naked and on his bed
from my mind)
sure after marriage sex is good
I said

he smiled

I smiled

his wife and Sophia
brought in plates of food
and teapot and cups
and saucers and sugar
and milk and laid it all
on the table

all done
the wife said in Polish
(Sophia translated it in my ear)

good good
he said
nodding his head

his wife looked at me
daring me to touch
any food or drink

cieszyc sie
his wife said
(enjoy Sophia said)

I got up and took a plate

and filled my plate with food
and Sophia poured me tea
with milk and sugar

I sat on the sofa
beside her
sensing her knee
touch mine
then her thigh
(all hopefully far
from her father's eye) .

Terry Collett

Teacher Stopped Play 1962

I thought of Yiska
all through
double maths

thought of us
at midday break
behind
the science block

kissing and petting
until some teacher
banged
on the window
of the science block
and shooed us away
with a wave
of his hand

the maths teacher
wrote sums
on the black board
in white chalk

I copied down
and so did Reynard
he scribing
in his thin
penned script

I mused
on Yiska
beside me
on the wall

her lips on mine
her hands about me
my hands
about her waist

bang bang
on class
the teacher
stern faced
waving us off

just as I touched
her ass.

Terry Collett

Tear In Eye 1951

Auntie took me to the hut
where the wives of army men
could meet and talk
and drink tea and eat
home-baked cakes or buns

it was quite crowded
with wives and their kids
and she saw Milly
and her daughter Elsie
and walked over to them
where they were sitting

here sit here next to me
I'll get you a tea and cake
Milly said

o thank you
Auntie said
Benny you go with Milly
and she'll get you something

so I walked with Milly
and she got me a beaker
of orange juice
and I took a cake
and she got Auntie's stuff
and we walked back

Elsie was sitting
the other side of Auntie
and stared at me
as I approached

move up Elsie
Milly said
let Benny sit down
next to his auntie

Elsie pulled a face
and moved along a seat
unhappily and sat
staring at me

I wanted to sit there
she said

it's my auntie
I said

she's my Mum's friend
and my friend
Elsie said
you're not

I sat in-between
Auntie and Elsie
she pouted and glared
with her little eyes

I'm 5 and the oldest of us
so I should sit
where I want to
she muttered

I sipped my orange juice
didn't you bring your doll?
I asked her

no it wanted to sleep
and its too noisy in here
she said

maybe I can see your doll
at sometime?
I said

no it doesn't like you
she said

I nibbled my cake

did you want some
of my cake?
I asked her
looking at her

not if you've touched it
she said

Milly moved a hand across
and slapped Elsie's leg
don't be so horrible to Benny
she said
sorry about her Benny
she's got a mood on her
Milly said
and sat back
and talked to Auntie again

Elsie pouted harder
and stared at
her reddening leg
your fault
she whispered
rubbing the redness

want to look out the window
at the parade ground
and look at the soldiers
marching by
I said

she sighed softly
suppose can
she said

we got off the chairs
and walked through
the crowded room
and across to a window
at the other end
and climbed on chairs
to look out

she held my hand
to steady herself
then let it go
and we stared out
at the ground
and at soldiers marching by

I thought I saw
a tear in her
5 year old eye.

Terry Collett

Tears

Tears fill
the strangulated throat.

Absence is to break
the hearts of yearning.

In the door,
bring peace.

Terry Collett

Tessa And Molly 1997

Tessa put on
the Mozart Requiem CD
and relaxed
on the old sofa
in her student room.

Molly
was sitting there
beside her
having watched Tessa
move from the sofa
and put on the CD.

How her hips swayed
as she walked
and how
she knelt down slightly
to open
the CD player top
and slip in the CD
a sight of thighs
caught her eyes.

I love this Requiem
Tessa said
I want this
at my funeral
or rather
the first aspect of it
not the whole of course
or people will
have fallen asleep.

Molly smiled
hopefully you've
a wait before that.

Yes I hope so too
Tessa said.

Molly wished
Tessa was sitting
on her bed.

She was last time
she came
and it was a buzz
sitting there beside her
knowing that in
a different world
they could have
made out.

Only Tessa wasn't
into girls
but that boring
boyfriend of hers
whom she said
she loved
but who was probably
having it off
with any girl
willing to
at his university
if she knew him.

I prefer Jazz
Molly said
but won't bother
having any music
or hymns played
at my funeral
as I won't be alive
to hear it.

But you will
be there in spirit
Tessa said.

I don't believe
that nonsense

Molly said
once you're dead
you're dead.

Tessa frowned
how can you
believe that?
How can you
believe nothing?

That's how I am
dead means dead
Molly said.

The Mozart
played on
as Tessa lectured
on about her faith.

Molly watched
her lips speak
and her small breasts
move beneath
the tight pink tee shirt
and Molly
thought Tessa
a little teasing flirt.

Terry Collett

Tess's Typewriter.

That year they gave Tess
her first typewriter. She'd
not need to borrow her
brother's battered old piece
or write down her fragile
poems in her spiderlike
scrawl as her father called it.

The promise came while
she was getting her mind
together in that mental
asylum, after the mucky
love affair that went no
place and left her hanging
there, like one crucified
for all to see and most
to softly mutter and stare.

Get yourself mended girl,
Father said, and we'll buy
you your own typewriter,
so you can stab away on
the keys to your heart's
content and bring out
those poems of yours.

He never read her poems,
never read much apart
from the back page sport
or gawked at page 3 girls
with a tut tutting tongue.

That year she gazed out
of the wide barred window
of the asylum at the snow
on fields, at the seagulls
gathering and feeding behind
the faraway tractor as it
ploughed, at the grey

depressing sky, wondering
what it'd be like to not be,
wondering what the woman
with a cast in her eye, was
doing to herself in the toilets,
one night when she'd gone
in to pee unable to sleep.

The typewriter idea
and promise kind of got her
through the dark hours and
the ECT, and the following day
headaches and numbness.

After slitting her wrists (mildly,
a cry for help) she said on the
phone to her father, Come get
me out of this place, help me
get back together. Ok, he said,
Miss Humpty Dumpty, and he
put down the phone, and she
stood in the hall of the asylum
with the receiver in her hand,
the image of the typewriter
before her eyes, those poems
banging on the inside of her
head, new ones wanting to
get out, old ones left for dead.

Terry Collett

Thank You 1976

Thank you, thank you,
she said, the girl in
the mental hospital
not right in the head.

Thank you, thank you,
she repeated, like one
defeated. There was
a bright sun in the sky,
but no clouds like shrouds
to mar the warm day.

The nurse walked
away having given
the girl medication,
something to calm
her down to allow
her nerves to relax
like air leaking slow
from a big pink balloon.

The girl went to the
wide window, stared
at the hospital grounds
through window bars,
black painted, glass
smeary, not often
washed or cleaned.

Thank you. she whispered,
her breath on the glass.

Other patients walked
the grounds; some in
dressing gowns, others
dressed untidily, lost
in worlds or thoughts.

Thank you, she repeated

to the wide windowpane.

Out there some place,
beyond the walls and
doors, the world of the sane.

Terry Collett

That Austen Guy.

Here's your fare
for the bus to school

your mother said
but some days you walked

and spent the money
on doughnuts at the bakery

on the way to school
and you felt them warm

through the white paper bag
the baker had put them in

and you ate them on the way
then licked your fingers clean

like some fingery blow job
and Ed Sutcliffe met you

in the playground and said
You got sugar around your mouth

and he pointed
with his ink stained finger

and so you wiped
around your mouth

with your tongue
until all was clean

and you said
That Ok?

and he stared
at your mouth and lips

and said
Yeah that's better

and you said
Where's O'Brien?

He hasn't come yet
Sutcliffe said

but Austen's here
he drove up in his sports car

a few moments back
you sighed and looked

towards the place
where he parked his car

red and flashy
I suppose he'll be

in his usual
bullying mood again

said Sutcliffe
holding up

the clay pots
and saying

Look at this specimen
of a pot

and hold it
up for the class to see

Don't remind me
you said

Austen's a fink
with a face of pits

like the surface
of the moon

and Sutcliffe laughed
and it kind of eased

his nervousness
and you saw

in his blue eyes
that sharp fear

that people have
when another dies.

Terry Collett

That Christmas 1961

as you walked
up the lane
to the church

Judith stood still
by the hedgerow
and let others
pass by

and once they'd gone
she pulled some mistletoe
out of the pocket
of her winter coat

and held it
over you head
and kissed your lips
and you held her there

with what seemed
sparks and lights
exploding in your head
and her free hand

was on your back
and yours
were around her waist
the lips sucked in tight

and there was skin on skin
wet on wet
warmth on warmth
despite

the wintery sky
and cold outside
and a car hooted
and went by

but you didn't care
you and she
just held in there
breath held

breathing gone
head swimming
eyes shut tight
against the day

the darkness of love
opening up
to that inner light
that god bless us

kind of light
that walking on air
sort of feeling
and then

you opened your eyes
and she moved away
that expression
of what next

on her face
her lips half open
her tongue lying
on her lower lip

and you both stood
waiting for something
wanting something
and she said

I dreamt of you last night
dreamt you crept
into my room
and stood by my bed

on tiptoe so as not
to wake my sister

then you climbed
into my bed

and snuggled up close
and I eased out
the cold in you
the cold from the night

and dark room
and she paused
her lips open
her tongue so beautiful

just there
and her eyes
all lit up
and you said

staring at the mistletoe
held above her head
I never dreamt
what you dreamt

I wish I had
I dreamt of Marilyn Monroe
and me standing in line
for her autograph

then just when it got
to my turn she'd gone
and there was only
my bedroom

and the blue walls
and cold air
but you weren't there
wish you were wish

I'd been in your room
and in your bed
snuggled close
and warm and near

and Judith said
shame about your dream
mine was better
we made love quietly

so as not to wake
my sister
and she smiled
and you drew her close

and held her tight
and kissed her.

Terry Collett

That Great Out Of Doors

Summer recess had come
and she sat with you
out in the field
over looking her house

and the railway
was not far off
where the occasional train
puffed by sending

a sprouting of white smoke
as it went by
and she looked at it passing
and spoke of after school days

when she would begin
her adult life and settle down
and have children
but you were thinking

of a train trip with your parents
years before
to some seaside place
and you watched

the scenery go by
and the steam go by
the window
and the smell

and the sight excited you
and stuck itself
inside your head
and Judith said

what do you think?
and you said
about what?
and she said

about children's names?
what names
would you choose?
your brain struggled

to the surface
and whirled through
a list of names
that came to mind

boy or girl?
you asked
she sighed
either

haven't you been
listening to me?
sorry got distracted
by the train smoke

had a Proustian moment
you said
a what?
she said

a Proustian moment
you replied
what the heck is that?
she said

pulling her skirt
over her knees
where it had risen up
as she moved

Marcel Proust wrote
that eating a certain cake
took him back
to a certain moment

of his life

but you
haven't been eating cake
Judith said

her hand rested
on her knees
her eyes focusing on you
no it's just an example

you said
about how things
can remind you
of other things

or places or times
do you recall
the first time we kissed?
she asked

yes
you said
of course I do
it was near Christmas

and we were carol singing
and it was dark
and the moon was out
and the stars were bright

and your lips pressed
onto mine
ok ok
she said laughing

at least you remember
and as she moved forward
the buttons
of her white blouse

parted briefly
to reveal a hint
of fleshy breasts

so what names

do you like?

she asked

none come to mind

you said

she shook her head

what about Rachel or David?

she said

fine

you said

nice religious names

although David

brings to mind

a kid with a catapult

and a girl I once knew

with buckteeth who smelt

of old socks

she looked skywards

and sighed

and lay back

on to the grass

and you lay beside her

both of you

gazing up

at the expanse

of blue and white

her hand reaching out

for yours

in that one moment

of life

in the great

out of doors.

That Kind Of Man.

He was that
sort of man.

The sort of man
Mum said
not to mix with.

I mixed
with him.

When I say mixed
I mean had sex
with him
married him
sat with him
talked with him
met his friends.

He liked me
because I was me
and not
anyone else.

But he liked
that skinny bitch
at his office
more than me
because she
was herself
and not me.

I liked it when
he was nice.

He could be nice.

But once he met her
and screwed her
he wasn't so nice.

A friend told me
he was screwing
the bitch at the office
because she worked there
and the bitch
had told her
she was having it away
with him not knowing
he was married
to me but boasting
he was a good lover.

He was that
sort of man.

He was that sort.

He was.

I bottled them both
in our bed.

Wine bottle.

Half full or half empty
depending how
you look at things.

I was that sort
of woman.

I was that sort.

I was.

Terry Collett

That Kiss 1960

Fay sat on the grass
in front of Banks House.

Benny sat beside her
he had a book
in his lap open
he had been reading to her.

Do you read
religious books?
she asked.

No although I had a scan
of Pilgrim's Progress
Benny replied.

She looked at him
sitting there
his hazel eyes
and brown hair
with the quiff
at the front.

I mean other
religious books?
she said.

No don't think I have
apart from bit of the Bible
at school in R.E
he said.

I have to read
religious books at home
Daddy doesn't like me
reading worldly books
she said.

Like Treasure Island?

Benny said.

I suppose so
Fay said.

She took out a rosary
from her dress pocket
and showed Benny.

This is my rosary
she said.

She held it out
in her thin hand.

He took it
and held it
in his hand
and looked at the crucifix
at the end
and the white beads.

So this is a rosary?
he said.

She nodded
yes my mum bought it
for me and taught me
the prayers that you say
Fay said.

What prayers?
He said.

She told him.

He stared
at the crucifix
then handed it
back to her.

She kissed it

and put it back
in her dress pocket.

Do you pray?
she asked.

He looked at her
took in her blonde hair
long down to her shoulders
and her blue eyes
looking at him.

Only at school
in assembly
he said.

She nodded her head
and looked about them
at the coal wharf
across the road
up at the flat windows
behind them
then leaned forward
and kissed his cheek.

He smiled
and said within
I won't wash there
for another week.

Terry Collett

That Last Time

That was the last time
you saw her alive

going into a store
with some guy

you assumed
was her husband

and she looked over at you
as you sat opposite the store

and smiled her smile
like she used to

way back in 62
when it was just

she and you
sitting by the pond

or walking through
the small wood

talking as you used to
with youth on your side

and love hanging on
a chain about your neck

and that was back then
that day you were just

an observer outside
a store watching her

walk by with some other
not knowing Mr Death

was trailing her
even then

that cancer
maybe even as she walked

touching her
with its oily finger

oh how men love and lose
but the great memory

of her will hold
and ever linger.

Terry Collett

That Last Time In Brighton

Back in 1980 was a dead

Lost. The old haunts seemed
Changed, the restaurants

Closed or changed hands,
The seafront less friendly,

Less romantic, the glamour
Gone, all high dreams spent.

Pity really we ever went.
But we did, you at least,

Trying to bring it back to life
That old love, that closeness,

That cold-night rush-to-coast
By train romance, that last

Time just memory, being put
To rest, I guess. Even that crap

Hotel had closed down where
We made love on those dirty

Weekends, where one midday,
We unconcerned about that

Office block across the way,
With office workers, maybe

Spying, as we had sex that day.
Yes, the last time in Brighton

Was a lost cause; even the sad
Photographs we had taken there

Showed the dead love in faces

And eyes. The clicking camera,
Someone once said, never lies.

Terry Collett

That Moonlight 1961

That moonlight,
that Christmas,
Yehudit, you and I.

Stars in that dark sky.
You wrapped up
against the cold

in that old coat.
Carol singing in
that country lane

with other members
of the church choir.
Closer than we'd ever

been. Breath on the air
visible by moonlight.
Some held candles

and some torches.
I held your hand
and you held mine.

Yours eyes I gazed at.
Bright as stars. We
held carols sheets in

one hand and sang
from them. Our other
hands held each others.

We drifted slowly from
cottages to cottages down
country dark cold lanes.

We followed just behind
love matched. Kiss me,
you said. I kissed. We kissed.

Passions much stirred. Star
of wonder the choir sang.
Your lips held mine. Who

saw who didn't us kiss,
who cared? None saw
who said. Now many

years later no one sings
and you are dead.

Terry Collett

That Much

That summer that field
and she saying to you

how much do you love me?
And you sensing her eyes

on you and the warm sun
and the birds in the sky

and you opening your hands
like the one that got away

say this much and she pokes
your arm and says be serious

how much? and you widen
your hands and smile at her

and say this wide or maybe
the size of a horse and she

pokes your arm and says if
you can't be serious then I'm

going back home and she
moves to get up but you hold

her hand and say ok ok the
sky is not wide enough to

contain my love the heavens
to small and she says shut the

crap and say how much and
you kiss her lips passionately

with a wet red hot touch.

That Other Death.

After that death
there was that other,
that part of self,

that link which
had been torn asunder,
she felt, the dead child,

that part of her not
there anymore, that part
tissue, nerves, eyes, hair,

all of her now no more,
lost from her like some
fine gem lost on a faraway

deserted shore. Thoughts
of the dead child occupied
each inch of space within

her head. How and why
and where? Questions
poured over her like one

beneath a waterfall, so she
could hardly breath for grief,
the fingers at her throat

seemingly tightening, her
heart aching as if squeezed,
her eyes shut against the light

or the dimness at each night.
After the child's death, was
that other death, that part and

parcel of herself torn away,
flesh, blood, memories of eyes,
smiles, first words, first steps,

first kiss, first tug upon the dug,
all gone in that other death,
and other going through dying.

And beyond that, the magpie,
alone, up in a dull sky flying.

Terry Collett

That Place To Hide.

I can't believe
how raw I feel
despite the length
of unwound time.

The gripping heart,
like fingers
squeezing tight,
the same flow up
behind the eyes,

the same sensation
around the throat
like one about to choke,
like the inhalation
of flameless smoke,

the opening up
of wounds one thought
were healing,
that rawness,
that deep plunging in,
that cold hurt feeling
still sinking in.

O my dear one,
my dead son,
O you just beyond
my reach or seeming so,
tell me where you are
that I may go.

No, no,
I know,
time's hand
will tick it
soon enough,
I guess,
whether months

or years or countless
decades, like ocean's wide.

Still raw,
still seeking
that place to weep,
that place to hide.

Terry Collett

That Red Head 1961

See that red head
over in the girls'
playground
Nigel said.

I looked over
to where he
was pointing.

Yes I see her
I said.

I've heard she's
up for it
he said.

Up for what?
I said
seeing Lizbeth
talking to another girl
by the fence.

You know it
Nigel said
sex.

O I see
I said
hoping she wouldn't
wave to me.

I looked away
at the other boys
in our playground.

Wouldn't mind
giving her one
if she's that keen
he said.

Give one what?
I said
wishing he'd move
from the fence
and stop staring
to where she stood
yaking with the other girl.

Have sex with her
he said.

I gazed towards her
she wasn't looking
to where we stood.

You know her?
he said.

No can't say I have
I said.

I wonder if she's red
all over or if
she's dyed her hair
he said
staring at her.

No idea
I said
but she was
although I never
told him that.

I'd seen her that time
when she undressed
to tempt me
(unsuccessfully)
and she was red
there too.

Wonder what

her name is
he said.

No idea
I lied
wanting to walk away
but he stayed
and she looked over
and waved.

Terry Collett

That Self.

She would peel
off her skin
to escape herself
if self were wrapped
in that skin.

She would cut off
all her hair
if that self
were tainted
by the length
or growth of hair.

She would cry
a thousand tears
if that self
drowned therein.

She would smash
all mirrors
if that self
stared back at her
all too often
or so seemed.

She would
slit her throat
if that self
were tied to each sinew
of that nerve or skin.

But that self
is deep
echoing within.

Terry Collett

That Summer That Love

The summer sun
warmed you and Jane

as you made your way
up the dried up

muddy track
towards the Downs

the sunlight
pouring through

the branches of trees
overhead

you thinking
of your work

on the farm below
the day before

the weighing of the milk
the clearing out

of cowsheds
and the cowman saying

what do you want to do
when you leave school?

to be a cowman
you replied

you want to get yourself
a proper job

you don't want to do this
for a living

and Jane said
breaking you

from your thoughts
I want to show you

where I used to sit on the Downs
and where I used to collect

bones and skeletons of rabbits
and moles and birds

and you turned
and looked at her

as she walked beside you
her hands swinging

as she walked
her black hair tied

in a small bun
at the back

and her yellowy flowered dress
capturing your eyes

my father works in the woods
further along

you said
he works in the ditches

and hedgerows too
she bent down

and plucked a flower
that's Squinancywort

she said
showing you the flower

as she twirled it
between fingers

she offered it to you to smell
lovely isn't it?

you nodded
and carried the scent

with you as you both
moved on up the track

she turned to you and said
your dad does well

at his work for a townie
and you smiled

and so did she
and you captured

her lips parting
and her bright white teeth

and her eyes
moving over you

like a soft caress
and she whispered

turning her head away
do you love me?

and you whispered
yes.

Terry Collett

That Sweet Smell Mcmclxxi

Light beams down
in thin shards
from windows
onto the choir stalls
of the church,

lux Dei,

thought about the kingdom
beyond windows,

smell of incense
after Mass
in the cloister,

Dio è ovunque
the Italian monk said
as he showed me
the large library of books
in abbey,

I swam
between her thighs
supping juices,

pick apples thus
Dom Charles said
showing me
in the abbey orchard
his stern eyes
watching me,

charity must not
remain shut up
in the depths of the heart
Therese said
for no man
lights a candle
and puts it

under a bushel,

Hugh moaned of footsteps
by his door
in morning light
before Matins
I denied it was me
his thin lips
unmoving in reply,

incense smoke
drifted ghostly
during Mass
over heads of monks
in choir stalls chanting,

Dieu nous parle
the French monk said
as we walked
from church to chapter house
late evening,

spank me before sex
she said softly
speaking as
we undressed,

it is the mark
of an educated mind
to be able
to entertain a thought
without accepting it
Gareth said
quoting Aristotle,

I am sure God
has something special
he wants you to do
Dom Joe(dear Bunny) said
as we sat throwing pebbles
at the incoming tides,

dusze sa glebokie
the Polish monk said
as we dug holes
to plant young trees,

George held the sacred host
between finger and thumb
then placed it
on his tongue
allowing Christ
into his deep soul,

the old monk's
hand shook
as he held up
the host in Mass,

amissa anima
I seemed kneeling
in the darkness
of my abbey cell,

after making love with her
the scent of her
that sweet smell.

Terry Collett

That Was That 1960

I sat with Fay
(both 12 years old)
on the concrete stairs
of Banks House

we'd been to
the Saturday matinee
at the ABC cinema

I was putting a roll of caps
into my 6 shooter gun
(my old man had brought
it home the night before)

do you know
the Virgin Mary
had a special relationship
with God?
she said

no I didn't know
I said
fitting the caps in securely
who's this virgin Mary?
she live around here?
(certainly wasn't Lydia's
big sister who Lydia had said
her mother called her sister
a whore whatever that was)

Fay looked at me
you don't know
who the Virgin Mary is?
she said

no idea
I said

she is the mother of Jesus

Fay said

o that Mary
I said
closing the 6 shooter gun up
and clicking it shut
what special relationship
did she have
with God then?

Fay looked at the sky
beyond over the balcony wall
to our right
she is the daughter
of God the Father
and the spouse
of the Holy Ghost
and the mother
of Jesus the Son of God
Fay said
in the center
of the Blessed Trinity
Sister Paul said at school

sounds complex
I said
putting my gun
back in the inside pocket
of my jacket

I guess it is
she said
the nuns at school
explain to us
these things
don't they teach you
at your school?

not that I've noticed
I said
we had one of the teachers
ramble on about Moses

and the Red Sea
then my aunt took me
to see the film
and that was good

Fay frowned
and put a hand
on my hand
I can see you later today
as my dad is out
for the day
on some retreat
she said

good
I said
sensing her hand on mine
hoping no boys were around
to see her hand on mine
in case they thought
I was getting cissy

she got up
and let go of my hand
and said
see you later Benny
and she went up the stairs
to her flat
and that was that.

Terry Collett

That Way He Had.

That way he had with words,
That tone he could produce to
Make you go weak at the knees.
You remember him; the photograph
Did it, brought him to mind. You turn
It over, see the scribbled writing on
The back. A poem he wrote, scribbled
Down. The blue has faded, the ink dried
To a death, yet the written words remain,
The message clear: he loved you, compared
You to some summer's day, not original,
But moving in its way. Copied out of some
Book, no doubt, Shakespearean sonnet, word
For word, the meaning meant, the message
All set down. You kiss the photograph, cry,
Laugh. What a place to drown; what a place
To depart and break a heart: drunk in a bath.

Terry Collett

That Year 1968

Father died that year. So did
Bob Kennedy, although that
Was a different death, planned
Right down to the last dark detail.
But your father's was more personal,
More hurtful, getting right into your
Bones and heart. You were sitting
In the doctor's surgery with your
Father where he'd come about pains
In the chest and back, when some guy
Came in and said, Bob Kennedy's dead,
Some bugger's shot him (excuse my French,
He added, there women being present) .
There was muttering amongst the throng,
Whispers, coughs, splutters, then a silence
Deeper than awaiting death by your father's
Elbow, seemingly deeper than Nietzsche's
Haunting eyes. Your father said nothing
That you recall, but no doubt he felt the
Same sadness that most felt that day,
The waste of a life, a fine brain blown out
Like some candle in a dark room, another
Organized snuff out by some rogue element
Of government backrooms. Father died
That year unbeknown by the world at large
(As if it cared) , but death was just as certain
And thorough when it came, sweeping him
Silently from the hospital ward, his link to
Life cut like a bloodied umbilical cord.

Terry Collett

The Big Cow 1916

Outside the door
of the butler Dudman
Polly sticks up
two fingers at him
and mouths a string
of four-letter words

she strides off
towards the kitchen
where Mrs Gripe
(the cook)
is waiting for her

Polly's thoughts
are on George(master)
and what Dudman said
about her not
having sex with him
when he comes home
from the place
he is resting
with shell-shock
from the War

or you will be fired
she hears Dudman's voice
in her ears
as she climbs down
the stairs and along
the passage way

she passes Susie
near the kitchen
entering the scullery

where have you been?
Susie says eyeing her

never you mind

Polly says
and enters the kitchen
where Gripe stands
hands on her hips
and gazing at her

where you been?
Been waiting for you
Gripe says coldly

Polly bites her tongue
and goes to the sink
and begins
to peel the potatoes

cat got your tongue?
I said where have you been?
Gripe says

Mr Dudman wanted
to see me about something
but I am here now
Polly says

Gripe stares at her
what about?
Gripe says

ask him
Polly says
peeling the potatoes
with viciousness

I am asking you
Gripe says
and I expect respect
not rudeness girl

Polly gouges out
a potatoes eye
and turns towards Gripe
about something I do

and mustn't do in future
and I am sorry
for being rude
Polly says

Gripe stares at her
and Polly stares back

about you
and Master George?
Gripe says

Polly reddens
and looks away
and nods

be discreet and careful
if Master George
wants you
Gripe says quietly
and turns away
and puts a big saucepan
on the stove

silence comes
and Polly peels on
and wonders what
George is doing now
and maybe
she thinks
Gripe isn't always
the big cow.

Terry Collett

The Big Kid And The Tall Tale

The big kid stood
by the garden shed
with others kids and you
the horticultural teacher

was down by the beds
with some other kids
whom he was showing
how to dig

and the big kid said
I had her
back there
up in those woods

at the end
of the playing field
the other kids
moved in closer

to get a better grip
on the tale told
you stood on
the perimeter

of the crowd
one eye
on the big kid
the other on the teacher

bent over a kid
showing him how
to hold a spade
and you know what?

the big kid said
she was some goer
the other kids
looked at him

then at each other
some plump kid
with spots laughed
you looked over

towards the woods
by the playing field
a quaint woodland
over by the fence

and near the road
and you know
what it's like? Huh?
the big kid said

the kids nodded
you noticed
their eyes large
and their tongues

at the corner
of mouths
it was like slipping
into a warm bed

the big kid said
on a cold night
the teacher made
his way towards

you and the kids
by the shed
the big kid
made gestures

with his hand
and the boys sniggered
half catching on
to the gesture's tale

the big kid's hands

went into pockets
out of sight
the other kids

moved towards
the teacher's
calling voice
you followed

unwillingly
having little choice.

Terry Collett

The Biting Of The Cold

It was the day after
JFK got blown away
and Judith saw Benedict
briefly after work

outside the gas station
where he worked.
Shame about the President,
she said, I quite liked him.

Yes, bloody, Benedict said,
why do they do that?
Why blow away a good man
When there are plenty

of bad buggers to blow out.
Judith looked up at the moon;
her coat was buttoned up
tight to keep out the cold.

How are you? she asked.
Benedict gazed at her.
So so, bored with the job,
darn gas and oil and all that

moaning from the customers.
It comes with the territory,
she said. Apart from that then?
she said. He smelt her perfume;

it was different from her usual.
New scent? She smiled. Yes,
glad you noticed, she said.
Bought it from my own money

instead of having to borrow
my mother's. That other stuff
was your mother's? Yes, she said.
God, no wonder it was bad, he said.

She hit his arm. Only joking he said.
How can I tell with you? she said.
When I smile, then I'm joking.
She sniffed the air. Frost coming.

He looked at her walking beside him,
her hands in her pockets, her headscarf
on her head, her hair escaping,
the moonlight catching it.

Cold? he asked, I know how we
can get warm. Not tonight and not
how it went before, she said.
Shame, he said, the moon's out full

and the stars are bright.
Do you love me? she asked.
Of course I do, he said.
Then wait, she said.

He wanted to hold her hand,
but it was shoved in her pocket.
Can I kiss you? he asked.
She stopped by the roadside.

The hedgerows were like
small dark walls, trees stood
like silent giants. She took out
her hands and held him close

and they kissed. It was the first time
they'd kissed in a while, he
recalled the time before, her lips had
pressed lightly then, half not wanting

to, half unsure. He sensed her lips
there, the pressing was firm, her
warmth warmed him. He held her
about the waist, wanted to touch

her skin, her nakedness. Their

lips parted. They stood looking
at each other. He saw her eyes
catch moonlight, tears reflected.

She sensed a growing apart, she'd met
another, at work, in the town,
wasn't sure where it would go.
Benedict sensed uncertainty there,

something out of place,
a connection loosened, despite the kiss
and hold. The darkening night,
the biting of the cold.

Terry Collett

The Bombed Out Butcher's Shop.

On the third day
of the holidays
you met Janice

half way up Bath Terrace
at the entrance to the flats
where she lived with her gran

she was dressed in her red beret
yellow flowered cotton dress
white socks and brown sandals

she smiled when she saw you
and said
feared you might not show

I told you I'd be here
you said
she looked at you

and said
I know
but some people say things

but don't show
I'm not some people
if I say I'll be here

I'll be here
you said
glad you're here

she said
Gran doesn't like me
going out alone

she says there are strange men
out there who take kids off
and do things to them

and murder them
yes
you said

I read about that boy
they found murdered
near here

she looked concerned
don't worry
you're with me

my mum told me
where to kick them
if they try anything on

oh
Janice said as you both
walked up to the top

of the terrace
to Harper Road
where're we going?

she asked
a bombed out
butcher's shop

you replied
isn't that dangerous?
she asked

not if we're careful
where we tread
you said

isn't that breaking
and entering?
she asked

no we don't break in

you said
we walk in

the back gate
it's not locked
oh

she said
looking concerned
we won't get into trouble

will we? Gran said
she'd tan my backside
if I got into trouble

would I get you into trouble?
you asked
guess not

she said softly
you crossed
Harper Road

and went round the back
of the bombed out
butcher's shop

and opened the gate
and entered
into an empty yard

you shut the gate
after you
and she stood gaping

at the back of the shop
you showed her
the large walk in freezer

where meat had once
been kept
now empty

smelling of piss
and damp
what if you got locked in?

she said
the lock's busted
you said

oh I see
she replied
her eyes large

and her mouth open
in wonder
you took her into

the shop now empty
apart from a large table
with a marble top

where meat
had once been cut
and chopped up

it stinks
she said
yes tramps get in

sometime and shelter
for the night
are they here now?

she asked nervously
no they go off
in the day

you said
giving her
a smile

you took her up

the creaking stairs
to the upper landing

where the sky
shone through the roof
where a bomb

had fallen in
gosh
she said

how weird
one of the rooms
had an old bed frame

pushed in a corner
and the roof
was still there

except where a few tiles
had gone
someone slept there once

she said
and now
they're probably dead

you took her hand
and walked her
to the window

and looked out
on Harper Road
people would have looked out

of this window too
you said
sad isn't it

she said
and you sensed
her lay

on your shoulder
her fair haired
red bereted head.

Terry Collett

The Come Back.

Netanya had just
come back
after a week away
at her daughter's place
up country

and then brought
the daughter back with her
and the daughter
and her partner
had our room upstairs

we were on
the made up bed
on the floor downstairs

did you miss me?
she asked

of course I did

what did you
miss most?

your company

my company?

yes
and the sex
of course

of course
I missed you too
slept in a room
on my own
and thought about you
and had to cuddle
myself and pretend

it was you

we cuddled up
on the made up bed

what did you do?
she asked

I slept with Marilyn Monroe
and had Liz Taylor
pop in now and then
to break up the monotony
I said

no really
Netanya said
what did you do?

I hugged your pillow
and kissed it good night
and hugged it all night
until I woke up
and it was
on the floor

on the floor?

yes we must
have a had
a falling out

she laughed
and we made love

and the street lights
went out
and it was dark
and warm

and a dog barked
near by

and I saw
the pale moon
in her right
wide open eye.

Terry Collett

The Croft Girl And Saturdays.

Saturday
shop busy
you with Dylan Thomas's
Deaths & Entrances

poetry book
tucked in
your inside pocket
of your brown jacket

Miss Croft
Saturday girl
dark hair
ponytailed

swaying
her tight ass
in her short skirt
up and down

the shop aisle
Duff the manager
bespectacled
with curly mass

of dark hair
standing there
cigarette in mouth
conversing

with a customer and wife
about which paint
went best
with what wallpaper

giving the dame
the eye
giving the charm
you tanked up

(you worked better
that way)
with some old couple
wanting curtains

to match
the wallpaper choice
the blue flowers
the pattern

the old guy gazing
at the Croft girl
the way
she wiggled her ass

her la-de-da tones
her bright eyed
expression
then she talked

to friends from college
more friends
than Trotsky
had enemies

standing there
hands on hips
tight tee shirt
small tits

and can you order this
in a light blue
the old dame asked
the blue here's

too dark
the old guy nodded
his head turned
eyes on his wife's

profile

sure sure
you said
controlling the slur

the beer taking hold
the old dame
seemed pleased
her husband gave

the Croft girl
another secret gaze
her tight ass moving
side to side

as she walked
the aisle
her friends departed
you watched her

with her bourgeoisie
life and ways
her small tight body
wrapped

like a dream
and the sale complete
the old couple
went away

through the business
of wallpaper
and paint
all of a Saturday.

Terry Collett

The Darkest Night Mmclxxi

The bed against the wall
near the crucifix
on the wall above the bed
and a small lamp
on the bedside cabinet,

et sonus campanae,

time to rise
and prepare for Matins
opened the shutters
over the windows
to catch dawn's 5am light,

and she said
come back to bed
I want you to make love
to me again,

George in the toilets
getting water in the jug
for absolutions
but said nothing
because of the Grand Silence,

Dio parla nel silenzio
the Italian monk said
after Mass as we walked
from the church,

sunlight came and went
as we walked along
the cloisters after Lauds,

O Lord help me to be pure
but not yet
Augustine(saint) said,

I wondered that as I washed

down the walls
of the sluice room
after Terce smell of bleach
in my nose,

la remise de soi à Dieu
the French monk
told me as I helped
tidy the sacristy
before Sext and lunch
stomach moaning,

she was small but she
had this way about sex
that was tireless,

Hugh spoke
of his father's visit
and his father thought
he'd make abbot
but he left years later
and married,

the bell tolled
in the cloister
the French monk held
the rope as we entered
for lunch and grace prayers
and readings by the reader
maybe Cromwell's life,

hablar y Dios te escucha
the Spanish monk said
the rain fell as we waited
for Vespers
and I saw a rainbow,

it is easy to forgive
a child who is afraid
of the dark but the real
tragedy of life
is when men

are afraid of the light
said Gareth quoting Plato
on the lawn as we ate tea
and biscuits,

to walk with God
or in His shadow
looking for light
even in the darkest night.

Terry Collett

The Day Jane Fainted

Jane fainted in the town
by the coach
on Saturday morning
and her mother

and other women
were around her
and you stood
a little way away

wondering what
had happened to her
I think it must be
that time of the month

you heard one woman say
maybe
her mother said
but she's not usually

like this
she added
will she be all right?
you asked

bending down
next to one
of the women
who had gathered

her mother looked at you
and said
yes it happens
at certain times

of the month
oh right
you said
none the wiser

gazing at Jane
at her dark hair
her eyes closed
her features

white and sweaty
best give her some air
her mother said
and you all stood up

and her mother
fanned her
with her hat
then after a minute or so

Jane opened her eyes
and said
what happened?
I went all funny

and everything went white
you fainted
her mother said
waving the hat

in front of Jane's face
I want to get up
Jane said
and so you

and her mother
helped her
to her feet
and she leaned

against the wall
of the bank
and looked around
she'll be all right now

a woman said

it happens
another said
after a few minutes

they went off
to the shops
leaving you
and your mother

and Jane
and her mother
standing by the coach
I'll be all right now

Jane said
ok
her mother said
and you all walked

along the street
to the shops
Jane walking behind
with you

her hand stealthily
reaching down
for yours and giving it
a little squeeze

then releasing it again
looking up at the sky
which had become dark
threatening rain.

Terry Collett

The Dead Babe Thing.

He broke down
when his wife said
the baby in her
womb had died.

He seldom cried,
once when his father
was plucked with cancer,
another when he

thought she'd given
him the elbow before
he'd proposed, and
some kid stuff way back.

But this was a gut ripping
feel, as if some dark
hand had torn through
him and pulled at heart

and guts, no if or buts.
After she'd said it, her
words chiselled deep,
through bone and skin,

deep down within, and
he pictured the baby,
once kicking, moving
tiny hands and fingers,

pushing its closed eyes
against womb's wall,
mouthing words unheard,
unknown, small not yet

grown, now, he imagined
still unmoving maybe
floating, he didn't know,
just thought things. His

other babies had come
and grown and climbed
and spoke, but not this
one, there was the rub,

there the choke. Górecki's
Symphony no 3 was in
the background piping
through the speakers, he

had walked off to be alone,
the window showed trees,
the lawn, birds, sky, him
and Górecki, the music and
his own gut wrenching moan.

Terry Collett

The Drying Of Feet.

She had dried His feet
with her hair. She'd not
forgotten that. Not long
after she'd seen the same

feet nailed and bloodied
to the wooden down beam.
Her tears had helped wash
them, those feet, she later

remembered the tingle she
had felt as her long hair
dried them, something in
touching, emptied her of

self and opened up her
darker self. Had He seen
more than others, understood
what others were blind to,

forgave what others condemned?
That moment, His feet in
her hands, touching her hair,
her hands. His eyes spoke to

her, His words pinpricked her,
each sin (as others saw them)
scabbed over as he went by,
His shadow kind of healed her.

She knew that now, not then
so much, after His demise (or
so seemed) and the placing in
that tomb, she felt letdown,

emptied, like after some dark
passage sex. But she'd seen
Him after, the feet healed,
the holes unbloodied, His

voice soothed her inner coil
keyed up tight. But mostly she
recalled the washing of His feet
on that warm moon filled night.

Terry Collett

The Drying Of Hair.

Jane's mother gave you both
a towel from the airing cupboard

after you had been caught
in the rain

running from the church porch
to the parsonage

and then she went off
to carry on

with her pie making
and Jane took you

along the hallway
to her bedroom

and opened the door
and after you had entered

she closed the door
with a soft click

and you both stood there
in the quiet room

rubbing you heads
with the towels

pushing away
the wetness

from your hair
and you smelt the room

the smell of polish
the lavender scent

the smell
of fresh linen

and smell of the flowers
outside caught still

in the rain
and Jane said

You are only here
because she trusts you

she seems to see through
people's veneer

and weighs them
in the scales

in her mind
and you stood still

rubbing your hair
looking at her

the way she had
the towel in her hands

over her hair
the hair all messed up

and she having
that sparkle in her eyes

like the first spear
of the sunshine

pushing through
the window at dawn

and she gazed at you
with her eyes

like polished marbles
and her words

hung there
on the air

like musical notes
on an invisible stave

and you said
I'm glad she trusts me on

just the one look
and Jane smiled

and kissed your lips
her flesh on yours

and the pressing
of skin on skin

and she gently
moved away

and pointed to the sky
and said

Looks like more rain
and you just nodded

wanting her to kiss you
once again.

Terry Collett

The Electric Train Set

The electric train set
Was laid out upstairs
in a large room
in your cousin's house.

It compared unfairly
with your own
hand wound train set
at home, shut up in a box.

Your cousin pushed buttons
and the train and carriages
raced around
the long winding track
as you both looked on,
each with your own
deep down thoughts
and boyish dreams.

No labour involved,
no fingers needed
to wind the train,
no small circle
of metal track
as yours had at home,
but a room spread of track
in wider circle
from here, there and back.

You eyed your cousin's train set
with a mixture
of envy and awe
as you watched it
race speedily around the floor.

Terry Collett

The End Of Rain 1961

It was raining
so Jane and I
ran to the hay barn
and got inside for shelter

the door was open
so we stared out
at the downpour

do you remember
we came here
and other kids
were playing in here?
I said

she looked back
into the barn
and said
yes it was dry that day
and I was shy
and you sat with me
as we watched
the others play

she looked at me
then said
we must not
tell my mother
we came in here
out of the rain

why not?
I said

it won't sound good
she said

what coming in here
out of the rain

to stay dry?
I said

she looked at me
more intensely
no because some
might think
we did things
she said

did things
what do you mean
did things?
I said

I looked away
from her
and out
at the pouring rain
heavy and dense

it then occurred to me
what she meant
if I was in here
(God forbid)
with Lizbeth
she would have been
undoing my buttons
by now wanting sex
on one of the hay bales

we wouldn't
I said to Jane
turning to look at her

I know we wouldn't
she said
but other people might

I frowned
what other people?

she sighed
people say horrible things
if they saw us
or if we tell people
we were in here

I'll say nothing
to anyone
I said

it's best
she said
she leaned closer to me
and kissed my cheek
best not to say
she said
after the kiss

would your parents
think we had
if they found out
we were in here?
I said

no of course not
but other people might
suggest we had
and my mother
would feel upset
that people could think that

I touched her hand
and held it
(Lizbeth would never
be content with just
a held hand
she would want more)
she kissed me again

then we both stared out
at the rain
that was beginning to stop

and we watched
the sky grey
become blue again
and hoped
for the end of rain.

Terry Collett

The Falling Of Snow

On Yehudit's
first weekend off
from work
she met you

by the field
near the stables
arriving in her
cotton dress of green

and that raincoat
left over from school
and she said
been waiting long?

no not long
you said
although you'd been there
ten minutes or more

feeling the cold
bite into your skin
couldn't get away
Mum wanted

this done and that
she said
leaning against
the fence

thought you might
have changed your mind
you said
why would I?

she rubbed her hands together
to warm off the cold
said I'd be here
and I keep my word

she said
you sensed her uncertainty
the words sticking
in your mouth

we used to be closer
she said
none of this distance
between us

she knew about
you and Yiska
knew what there was
to know

the fact that Yiska had gone
made no difference
betrayal had been done
she sat on the fence

and looked out
at the frost covered grass
you sat on the fence
beside her

her knees showed
where her dress
had risen
she had a laddered stocking

what was she like?
Yehudit asked
I mean did
she kiss good?

you looked
at the laddered stocking
flesh showed
yes she was good

you said

did she let you?
she asked
let me what?

you said
looking away
from the stocking
your eyes

meeting hers
you know let you do it?
she said
pushing the words out stiffly

as if the frost
had got to them
does it matter?
it's history now

you said
it matters to me
she said
her voice

getting tighter
she looked
at the field
green and white

I guess it does
you said
we didn't anyway
there wasn't the place

or opportunity
you added
watching rooks
in the grey sky

their calls
filling the air
Yehudit looked at you

her eyes glassy

but you wanted to
she said
even if you didn't
you breathed in

the icy air
you remembered
that you and she
had made love

in some woods
back behind you
the evening
had been warm then

flesh to flesh
heart sensing heart
I've met some at work
she said

breaking through
your thoughts
I wanted you to know
not discover

and feel betrayed
you sensed a loss
bite you
a falling away

beneath your feet
I'm pleased for you
you lied
she climbed off

the fence
her feet sinking
into the frosted grass
see you around

she said
and walked off
across the field
you watched her go

sensing the cold
and the falling of snow.

Terry Collett

The Gift

The gift lay unwrapped,
you didn't want to open.
You knew the kind of thing
he'd give and want response.

The power lay with you now,
the power not to unwrap,
see, and give praise or care.
Your cupboard is chock full
of unwanted gifts, lying there.

Terry Collett

The Girl Who Held Your Hand

You got on the coach
for the day trip
organized by the chapel people
for kids who were poor

and this girl
sat next to you
and said
you can be my boyfriend

for the day
and she took hold
of your hand
and gave it a squeeze

and you looked out
of the window
at your mother
standing there

looking up at the coach
and you thought
is this part of the deal?
Is this girl for real?

And Mother waved
and smiled
and you smiled
uneasily back

with the girl's hand
holding yours
out of sight
and she looked

over your shoulder
and waved
but no one
waved back to her

because her mother
wasn't there
maybe she was off somewhere
or had to go to work

or maybe
she was still in bed
with another uncle
beneath the sheets

and maybe
he was holding her hand
and she was holding
something you never knew

or cared about
just sitting there
waving to Mother
beneath a sky of blue.

Terry Collett

The Girl With The Croissant.

You watch the way the girl
Pulls apart the croissant with
Her slim fingers and licks each
Finger in turn sucking on each
With the passion of one making
Love and yet as she pulls it apart
There is that slowness oh that
Deliberate tearing open as if she
Were now opening herself for her
Latest lover as her fingers pull and
Her eyes gaze and her tongue licks
The corners of her soft mouth to
Catch escaping crumbs as if they
Were the juices of her lover's sperm
Then she turns her head and sees
Your stare and you just wishing you
Was the croissant in her fingers there.

Terry Collett

The Gun.

The gun was tucked
into the belt

of your jeans
the hat (your father's

borrowed trilby)
pushed to the back

of your head
you had recently shot

the boss-eyed sheriff
behind the grocer's store

and rode with Jessie James
across the open plains

of the local park
and pumped Pete Badham

full of imaginary lead
in the back not the head

to have a better chance
and entering the bar

of the High Rider
you ordered a glass

of Red Eye
(water from the tap

in a borrowed glass)
and chattered up

the girl (slut as your mother
would have called her)

who wore feathers
and a very short skirt

(Dave Walker's sister)
and sipped the water

with a pulled face
and still had time

before sundown
(your mother calling

you in for bed)
to have it out

with Billy the Kid
and Wyatt Earp

blowing the smoking gun
just a kid

being a cowboy
having fun.

Terry Collett

The Guy Lied.

Max dug brunettes,
but blondes were never
a no-no. That broad in Paris
all over him like a plague,

but cute, and knew her Degas
like he knew booze. Camille
or such like name; cute dame.
Nous avons des relations

sexuelles, she said. It was all
French to him, but her friend
translated, and Max said of
course, and so they did. Max

inhaled his cigarette remembering.
The bar was empty except for
some broad at the far end. He'd
give her talk, but he was too

tired, and besides he knew her
guy, and she'd be poxed. Then
there was the blonde in Hamburg.
Neat dame, nice figure, short on

English words, but got the gist,
showed him around the city,
spoke of her old man, some
former SS, had a stroke, never

spoke. Max dug her deep; made
out for a month or two, then split
after some talk of her sister being
around too much. Max exhaled.

Sipped his beer. The broad at
the far end of the bar smiled.
Max smiled back. She wore black.
Her guy had died. Maybe she'd

not got the pox, maybe the guy lied.

Terry Collett

The Hotel Game 1967

The hotel
landlady
met Nima
and Benny
at the desk.

Newly-weds?
She asked them.

We're the Coles
I book it,
Benny said,
on the phone.

The woman
ran a thin
finger down
the book page:
here it is,
she muttered,
when did you
get married?

Yesterday.
Nima said.

A Friday?
The woman
said surprised.

Small affair,
just us two
and two friends
to witness,
Nima said.

Not pregnant
already
are you dear?

No not yet,
Nima said.

O that's good,
anyway
I'll show you
to your room.

Benny took
the 1 bag
to the room
following
the woman
and Nima.

Here it is,
she told them,
and unlocked
the white door;
she showed them
about then
she went off.

Not too bad:
got a bed,
a tall boy,
chest of drawers,
a TV,
Nima said.

Benny felt
the large bed
with his hand
then sat down
and bounced it:
bed's not bad.

Shall we now?
Nima said
try it out?

If you like,
Benny said

so began
to undress
(after they'd
drawn the dull
brown curtains) .

Nima was
down to her
underwear,
when a knock
hit the door.

Who is it?
Benny asked
stark naked.

I've brought you
some towels,
forgot them,
the woman
informed them.

He opened
the white door,
put out his
head and hand,
his body
hidden there.

O thank you,
Benny said,
taking two
white towels
carefully
from the old
girl's hands:
just changing
our clothing,
he muttered

looking at
the woman.

She half smiled
and walked off.

He closed the
door slowly
put the two
white towels
on the side,
then looked at
Nima there
in her pink
underwear.

Do we dare?
She uttered.

He nodded.

She undressed
completely.

They both got
into bed
and lay back
listening
for a knock,
but none came,
so they hugged
and got on
with the game.

Terry Collett

The Hush I Fear Mcmlxxi

Moorish bell tower
orange brick or yellow
in a different light
I welcomed on seeing
it in sight,

extra ecclesiam
nulla salus
said Augustine
or so read,

red light
at altar end
and a monk
black robed
walked from cloister
to bell tower
stopping in the aisle
genuflecting
then walked off
to the right
in the half light,

dimidium lux
evening moon shone
through high windows
as bell tolled deep and heavy,

altum et grave
tolled bell out of sight
breaking the still silence
of the abbey where I sat
sensing the chill of evening,

??? ???? ??μ?? ?????μ??
???? ????? ??? ??μ?? ???????
said Paul so read
in the epistle
he is strong when weak,

her two fruits pressed
against my naked chest
there may I rest said I
with a deep sigh,

soupir profond
taking in the chilled breath
in the air silence
of the abbey church,

Hugh said one
had walked
past his cell
making noise
in dawn's light
meaning me
but I ignored
etre comme le Christ
or so tried,

juger les personnes
et les choses dans
la lumière la plus
favorable à tout moment
said Dom James
quoting Vincent de Paul
in the novice's room
after terce,

she opened up
like a bird her wings
there her nest lay
and I engaged her
as she spoke
no laughter
no joke,

I weeded the graves
of the monks at rest
and moles had tunnelled
along side by the stones,

talpe di nuovo
the Italian monk said
pointing at the mounds
come piccole colline,

I knelt in the choir stalls
eyes closed
trying to capture
God's voice
but just silence,

sicut silentium
a pin could drop
and I'd hear
the deadly hush
I fear.

Terry Collett

The Jew Boy And The Father.

Fay met Buruch
by the entrance to the Square,
waiting by the wall,
eyes tearful,
fair hair in disarray.

She had shopping in her arms,
hands holding bread rolls
close to her breast.
Buruch took in her eyes,
the hair unkempt, unusual.

You ok? He asked.
They are rowing again, she said.
Who? He asked.
The parents, she said.

You got to take that home?
He asked pointing to the shopping
in her arms.

Yes, she said, I dropped the last rolls
and he sent me out for more,
after hitting me,
after the rows began again.

I'll walk back with you, he said.
They walked to the stairs
and climbed up side by side.

Don't you have shopping to get?
She asked.
I can get it later, he said, no rush.

They reached her landing
and he waited
while she went in the door.
Loud voices, shouts, crying.

He waited, hands in pockets,
wondering how she was,
wishing he could knock
and ask her out.

He waited,
looked over the balcony,
looked back at the door.

He knocked the door.
The door opened.
Fay's father stood there.
What you want kid? He said.

Can Fay come out to play? Buruch asked.
The father stood staring,
hands by his sides.

Who wants to know?
I do, Buruch said.
She's busy, the father said,
got things to do.

All day? Buruch asked.
If I say so, the father said.
Buruch stood staring,
hands in pockets,
head to one side.

So she's not coming out? He said.
The father sighed.
Do your parents know
you pester people?
Buruch said,
Yes, pretty much.

The father said, beat it kid.
I'll wait, Buruch said,
touching his toy 6 shooter
in the holster at his side.

You'll have a long wait,

the father said.
Buruch leaned against the wall,
pushed the cowboy hat at a tilt.

Ain't you that Jewish kid
from downstairs? The father said.
Aren't you the Catholic
who beats his wife and kid?

The father stood full stretch,
his eyes darkening,
his hands becoming fists.

Scram kid before I beat you,
the father said.
Buruch pulled out
his 6 shooter.

Touch me and I'll fill you
full of lead, Buruch said.
The father closed his eyes,
then closed the door.

Buruch waited;
more loud voices and cries,
as were before.

Terry Collett

The Last Time We Talked 2014

LAST TIME WE TALKED 2014.

We get to the hospital,
and walk to the ward
where you are, and I
notice straight away
something is wrong:
you're all puffed up
as if someone had
pumped you up with gas.

What's happened to you?
I say. Your sister looks
at you and I can see she
is as shocked as I am to
see you like you are.

You say a few words,
but they're too quiet for
me to grasp. When did
you pass urine last? I say.

You look at me with your
large eyes which seem
larger. This morning I think,
you reply, your voice soft
as if speaking was an effort.

Be back in a moment, I say,
and leave you with your sister
while I go off in search of
a nurse or doctor. Visitors are
coming and going, other
patients sit on beds or in beds,
and I see a nurse in a dark
uniform thinking maybe she's
in charge. I approach her,
and she looks at me. I'm Ole's
father and I am not happy

the way he is being cared for,
I say. Why? What's the matter
with him? She says, eyeing me.

He's all puffed up, he has an
infection of some kind, he can
hardly breathe, and he hasn't
passed urine since yesterday
morning to my knowledge.

She looks at me with frowning
brows: he was all right earlier
when the doctor saw him, she says.

Well he isn't now, I say, he needs
a catheter and something to help
him breath, he's in a bad away, I say.

I can't give an catheter, unless
a doctor tells me to, she says.

Well he needs one soon, I say,
and he can hardly hold the mug
he's drinking from, as his hands
are so puffed up. She looks over
her shoulder. I'll get the doctor
to see him when he's back from A& E,
she says, we're so busy. Well make
sure he does, I say annoyed now,
and on the edge of bellowing out,
but don't. She nods and walks off.

I sigh, and go back you still sitting
there, bent over, on the side of
the bed; your sister goes off,
too upset to remain. Can I get
you anything? I ask. Drink of orange,
you say. I pour you orange and add
water from the plastic jug. I complained
about how you are being treated,
I say. You nod: can you help me
on bed, I need to lie down, you say.

I help you on the bed and arrange
your pillows behind your head.

You slip the orange, then hand it
to me. I put it on the side cabinet.

You lie there staring at your puffed
up hands: I can't eat properly, you say,
my jaw aches as I eat. I look at
your puffed up features. She said
the doc will come see you when
he's done in A& E, I say. You say
nothing. I sit and talk to you about
mundane things, and you reply
gently finding it hard to talk.

Then you close your eyes,
and I say: look I will leave
you now, let you rest. You open
your eyes and say: Ok. I'll be
back tomorrow with Mike,
I say, bring you fresh clothes
and a book. You nod your head,
and I kiss your forehead and I go,
and you close your eyes for sleep.

That memory of that last talk
with you, I will always keep.

Terry Collett

The Letter 1963

Magdalene
watches her
father dig
over his
garden plot,
from her small
bedroom view,
his back bent
then upright,
sweaty brow
he wipes with
the back of
his large hand.

Her mother
is cooking
the dinner
in the hot
large kitchen
below stairs.

Father's got
a dark mood,
just because
the nuns wrote
about me
and Mary
being seen
in the bog
(lavatory)
together.

What were you
doing there?
He bellowed
once he'd read
the letter.

Just talking,

nothing else.

In the bog;
can't you stop
talking just
long enough
to answer
the call of
DARN NATURE?
He shouted.

Then he slapped
her backside
in passing
to go out
to his plot
to dig out
his anger.

She watches
as he stands,
straightens up,
rubs his back,
wipes his brow,
then proceeds
to dig more.

Her backside
still stings now,
but her thoughts
and feelings
are on young
Mary whose
body she
loves, whose
lips she kissed,
feck him, she
says, seeing
a Magpie
settling
behind him
on the ground.

Mary's dad
will not be
please if he
got a darn
letter too,
God's knows what,
she mutters,
he will do.

Terry Collett

The Lostness.

Mickey had locked himself
In the house and his mother
Was concerned he'd do something
To harm himself so you went
Around and knocked at the back
Door and called his name and
He said go away I don't want to
Talk to anyone but you stayed
And persisted and he finally
Opened up and let you in and
You said why this? And he said
I'm so like my old man that I
Hate myself and he stared at
The Van Gogh print on the wall
Above the fireplace with a look
Of deep unhappiness and lostness
On his face. You are what you make
Yourself you said taking in Vincent's
Sunflowers the way the vibrant
Picture hung there the smell of
Flowers in the late evening air.

Terry Collett

The Love Letter

She wonders how to begin her letter
She knows he will read each word
Greedy for any hint of love. She knows
He will sniff the paper for any scent of her

She leans an elbow on her writing desk
And clutches her pen tight. She has got
As far as, Dear John, but then the words
Stopped coming. Before she had sat down
To write, the words flowed through her
Mind like a rushing stream, now nothing

She sucks the end of the pen. Say what
You would if you were face to face, her
Mother always said. She tries to imagine
He is there before her and what she would
Say if he was, but still no words will come

He writes to her so fluently when he writes
He always seems to know what to write
And how to put it into words. She tries again
Puts the pen nib onto the paper, gripping
The pen tighter. She reads what she's written

Dear John. The pen moves, the words begin
To flow, her hand moves across the page
The images come into her mind as she writes
The things that they said last time they met
The things they did, she blushes slightly
That almost being caught out by the maid
In a state of undress. She pauses the pen
And sits gazing at the painting on the wall.

She looks back at the paper and starts again
The words tripping over themselves to be put
Down in ink upon a page; the images open up
In her mind, the colours, the smells, the events

The pen now stops. The love letter is written

The writing done. She looks at the words
Then she seals it in an envelope and writes
His address. She pictures him reading it: in bed
In his room, sleepy, in a state of his usual undress

Terry Collett

The Lunch 1962

Yiska was there
when my school bus
got to school
this morning.

As soon
as I got off
she said her mother
had said I could go
to her place
and have lunch.

The downside was
her mother
would be there.

I got the impression
her mother
didn't trust me
she never left
the dining room once
while I was there
(except briefly
to get orange juice) .

She sat opposite us
gazing at me
her dark eyes
summing me up.

Yiska did most
of the talking
her mother replying
now and then.

I spoke when
either of them
asked me something
otherwise I said little

wishing it would
soon be over
or that her mother
would go off
in a deep sleep
for an hour or so.

But she didn't
just sat there
gazing at me.

Afterwards
we walked
back to school
she talking
about how
her mother never
understood her
and how she wished
we could have
been alone.

We parted company
at the girl's playground.

We kissed quickly.

She went off
and I went
to the boy's playground
and saw Trevor
who yakked about football
all the time.

I waited for the bell
wondering about
Yiska my girl.

Terry Collett

The Measuring 1959

The Kid saw Anne on the lawn
with a nun and a man
standing by the table
at the far end,

as he approached
he heard Anne say
who said about
an artificial leg?

Your parents
suggested it
the man said
and I have come
to measure you
to see the size needed,

you will need
to stand up
so the gentleman
can measure you
the nun said,

hey Kid
Anne called
come over here
and help me up
on my crutches,

Benny walked
next to Anne
and helped her up,

she stood there swaying,

the Kid holding
onto the arm,

all right Benny

you needn't hold her
she is quite capable
of standing
on her crutches
the nun said,

I want the Kid near me
Anne replied,

can I get on now?
The man said impatiently,

get on what?
Anne said
what you think I'm
a bus or a chair
to get on?

I meant
with the task
of measuring you
the man said,

do as the gentleman wants
Anne and stop being
so tiresome,

the Kid looked at Anne,

she looked at the man
as he took out
a measuring tape
and measured her
for an artificial leg,

she sighed
hey don't get
too fingery
she said,

Anne that is enough
the nun said firmly,

the man finished
the measuring
that is that done
he said
eyeing Anne
it will be
a month or so
before we can get you
to try it on he said,

then you
should be able
to walk again
the nun said,

thank you
Mr Forbes
what do you
say Anne?

Yea don't
be too long
getting it done
she said,

Anne that
is not polite,

that is all right
the man said
I know children
I have my own
he looked at Anne
and smiled,

she did not
smile back
but looked at the nun
and said
is that it?

The nun sighed
and said yes
and walked off
with the man
across the lawn,

Benny watched
them go,

Anne sat back
in the chair,

did you see
that Kid
see how
he touched me
fingers on
my leg stump?

Benny nodded,

darn penguin
what's she
know about kids
and him why
I bet he's got kids
who dread him
coming home,

Benny looked at
the departing nun and man
at the far end
of the lawn
in conversation,

hey Kid
get my wheelchair
I want to go
see the sea,

ok Benny said
and set off

towards the house
full steam ahead.

Terry Collett

The Morning After 1972

I drank too much wine
the evening before
trying to chat up
one of the Serbian
waitresses
in the restaurant
at the hotel.

The morning came
and I was out of salts.

Serves you right
Abela said
chatting up that girl
she only understands
enough English
to get the orders
and say thank you
and such.

Not so loud
I said
my head is fragile.

Abela was unsmiling
I'd slept on the sofa
while she slept
in the big bed.

I just couldn't face
being in bed with her
feeling as I did.

You missed
great sex
last night
she said
I could have made it
a twosome.

Sorry about that
I mumbled.

I'm going
on the tour
you can stay here
she said moodily.

Sure enjoy
I said.

Someone
was drumming
inside my head.

She looked at me
then came and kissed
my forehead.

Hope you feel better
when I am back
she said
and looking at herself
in the dressing table mirror
went out the door
and closed it
with a click.

I lay there
on the sofa
feeling a big yuk
and sick.

Terry Collett

The New Conker 1955

Helen showed me
the conker
she had found
brown with a black area
at one end
she held it
in her small
pink hand.

I picked it up
weighed it
in my hand.

It was a good one
I told her.

She said
she found it
along St George's Road
on the way home
from school
the day before.

It was amongst
others Benny
she said
but it seemed
the best one.

We walked through
the Square
to get
my mother's shopping
the conker
in my pocket.

Helen said her
upstairs neighbour
Mrs Knight

had a new cat
a kitten all black
when Mrs Knight
showed her
the room behind her
smelt of cats
and old dinners.

I bought the items
on the shopping list
my mother had given me
with the coins
wrapped up in it.

I put the stuff
in the shopping bag
we went back
to my parents' flat.

I put the conker
with others I had
in my room.

We went out again
although the sky
looked like rain.

Terry Collett

The Next Night 1961

I should watch her
Jupp said

watch who?
I said

the girl who you
were talking to
this morning
by the school fence
he said
she's a tease

is she?
I said
knowing whom he meant
but not saying

yes she offers it
but then shuts you
out like a clam
he said
staring at me

she just came up to me
I said
and started talking

what's she talk about then?
he said

about birds and butterflies
and how she'd like
to work on a farm
I said

he studied me carefully
are you having me on?
if she did then

she's changed her tune
normally she's on
about sex and doing things
he said

do you know her then?
I said

he looked away
and stared at the girl's
playground to see
if she was looking our way
but she wasn't
because I had already
looked to see
if she was around

I've heard rumours
he said
from others who
she tried things on with

but she's only 13
I said
surely she wouldn't
do such things?

he shrugged his shoulders
just saying what I heard
he said

I won't go near her then
I said smiling

best not to
he said smiling too
and we walked on
by the fence
he talking about
being a cowman
when he left school

I thought of Lizbeth
and that morning
and how she cornered me
by the fence
and asked me
if I thought of her
and she not knowing then
how many of the other
boys did

and that time
she took me to her room
while her mother was out
and tried to get me
to do things which I didn't
which I didn't think right
but then thought of her
most of the next night.

Terry Collett

The Night Died.

Netanya was all
over the place.

I held her up
back from the bar,
she singing verses
loudly in the streets.

I held my booze well,
then up in the elevator
to our flat
and she to
the kitchen swaying.

Want a drinky,
she said.

Not now Baby,
lets get to bed.

I want a drinky,
she said.

You've had drinky,
now bed.

That's all you
think of is bed,
and sex, and me there
for you to ram into,
she said.

Sleep alone then,
but lets to bed,
I said.

She swayed
into the bedroom
and began to undress:

taking off her coat
and shoes, and then
stood there.

How am I supposed
to get this darn dress off,
when they put
the fecking zip
at the back?
She said,
swaying side to side.

Here let me
help you unzip.

She stood there placid
and staring at the wall:
unzip me then lover boy,
undress me
from my dress.

I unzipped her dress,
and she somehow
managed to step out of it,
and I hung it up
as she stood gazing
out at the night sky
through the curtained window.

Moon's out tonight,
she said,
and those stars things.

I got her nightdress
from under the pillow
and helped into it
and buttoned her up.

Into bed now,
I said.

All alone?

She said.

If you want,
I said.

If I want?
She said
swaying back and forth.

I helped her
into bed
and she lay there
staring at the ceiling.

Who's spinning
the room around?
she said.

Close your eyes
and it will stop spinning,
I said.

O right
and she closed her eyes.

I undressed
and went lay
on the sofa
in the other room
with the door open
so I could hear
if she had trouble.

Night night feller,
she said.

Night night Baby Doll,
I replied,
then she was quiet,
the night died.

The Night Dionne Warwick Sang.

Dionne Warwick was singing
you'll never get to Heaven
if you break my heart

over the small white
transistor radio
under the covers

of the bed after
having made love
to your girlfriend

and you both snuggled there
she running a finger
down your spine

and you kissing
one of her small breasts
and the transistor crackled

and the voice on the radio
went in and out of tune
and you said

hush Sweetie Pie
or the others
will hear you

and she put a hand
over her mouth
to stifle the giggles

and the smell of lilac
and sweating bodies
filled your nose

and the singing
made you sway
and you sensed

the flesh warm
and sweet
beneath you

and you listened
for the sound of others
maybe along the hall

or moving in their sleep
and her lips
kissed your ear

and her tongue
reached right in
and you thought that

paradise
that music
the warm flesh

the kisses
and her tongue
easing itself

in and out
of your ear
and the moon lit up

in the corner
of the window
bright and angel like

over the top
smiling glow
and you and she

in the bed
and you opened
your eyes

and you were alone

it had all been
a dream in your head.

Terry Collett

The Night Out 1975

Natanya met me
at the train station.

Evening sky
street lamps
sickly yellow.

I was beginning
to wonder
if she'd show
or if her old man
became awkward
and she couldn't come.

But she came
with an overnight bag
and her hair covered
in a scarf
to keep out
the damp air.

She smiled
when she saw me
didn't think you'd come
she said.

Thought your
old man
might have
caused trouble
I said.

He only asked
where I was going
and I said
to see Peters & Lee
in concert.

Did he ask

who with?

I said.

I told him

I was meeting a friend

she said.

People passed us by

up the stairs

we bought tickets

to London

and got the train.

We sat next

to each other

what if people

see us

who know you

and tell

your old man?

I said.

She smiled

you worry

too much Benny

she said

and kissed me

on the lips.

The train went off

the evening sky

darkening

the lights on the train

showing our

joint reflections

in the windows

of the train.

I was sitting next

to a woman older

than I was

maybe her final fling

or that kind of thing.

Terry Collett

The Novice Mcmlxxi

The Italian monk
eyed me
in the refectory.

I watched him
I had no choice
he was opposite me.

He ate slow
his jaw moving
to a slow rhythm.

God centered
he said later
in the scullery
as we washed
the dishes
after lunch
that is what we are
God centered he said.

Sunlight filtered
through the coloured glass
of the refectory
on to the polished
wooden floor
I gazed at it
while the monk read
from some book
on Oliver Cromwell
in a mono-toned voice.

We sat in her lounge
she kissed me
whispered
suggestive things
in my ear
in her warm
sexy voice

and we did.

George tolled the bell
for the office of Vespers
I lined up behind
the tall dark
tonsured monk
who smelt
of baked bread.

The afternoon light
was bright
and shone
through the branches
of the one tree
in the cloister garth.

Focus on God
the French monk
said to me
in French
Gareth
translated for me
I said I would
or did
or some
such answer
in my poor French.

Whatever you do
do with all your heart
Dom Joseph said
quoting St Paul
as we sat
on the private beach
of the abbey
the other novices
tossed stones along
the incoming tide.

She shut her mutt
in the kitchen

where it whined
we went
to her bedroom
and had sex.

She not thinking
of her husband
coming home
from his job
but I thinking
of just that
imagining him
standing by
the bedroom door
with a displeased face.

The bell
for Compline rang
the monks stood
in the choir stalls
in their black robes.

I stood
in the semi dark
mouthing
the Latin chant
of the office
the others
were professional
I was just a novice.

Terry Collett

The Parents Call 1980

We arrive
in Scotland
(Edinburgh)

and find the
old guest house
and book in

and settle
in our room
with one bed

(a double)
a tall boy
chest of drawers

and a small
old dressing
table near

the window
well we're here
Rachel says

here alone
just us two
I watch her

standing there
our parents
(her father

my mother)
back at home
wondering

where we were
five hours long
train journey

I utter
wanting to
undress her

and get her
into bed
but stand there

waiting for
her to say
do you think

they will know
where we are?
she asks me

of course not
how could they?
she's unsure

and anxious
Daddy'll be
mad at us

going off
like we have
I hold her

close to me
kiss her neck
we're here now

as we planned
in Scotland
us alone

in this room
us lovers
she turns round

and we kiss

the best kiss
that we have

ever had
and we're free
to kiss now

and make love
in the bed
without fear

our parents
will see us
and she is

probably
thinking of
her father

the doctor
and I think
of Mother

the staff nurse
suspecting
she was right

when she said
to me when
I came out

of Rachel's
room last night
and she said

I don't want
you in her
room ever

again do
you hear me?
we are here

in our room
now Mother
and we will

get undressed
into bed
and make love

not just once
but maybe
more than that

it's raining
Rachel says
can't go out

and we look
at the bed
then undress

and we're there
together
stark naked

listening
to rain fall
while back home

the echo
of parents
and their call.

Terry Collett

The Parson's Daughter

She always seemed
to be dressed in grey

the parson's daughter
and had little to say

but there she'd be
on the school bus

each day
a few seats in front

looking out
of the window

and you'd gaze at her
and wonder what thoughts

occupied her mind
and what feelings

ran along her nerves
and that time she fainted

and people muttered things
and you caught words

like must be that
time of month

or she gets that way
when it comes around

and you'd think
of moon shapes

and the moon's pull
and maybe her father's

long drawn out sermons
were too much for her

and the time
she looked back at you

on the bus
and you noticed there

a multitude of different
worlds and feelings

swirling around
and maybe one of them

was for you
and the way

you too
sat quiet

and said little
not one

for the small talk
or nit-picking chat

and having a bit more
of young love

which others
might lack

and you smiled at her
but she didn't smile back.

Terry Collett

The Phone Gift

Cedric gave you a photograph
in the playground
making sure no one

was looking his way first
Christina said to give you this
he said

you took the photograph
and gazed at a picture
of a girl laughing

with dark hair
looking at the camera
in mid pose

thanks
you said
putting the photo

in the inside pocket
of your jacket
she said she'd meet you

on the playing field lunchtime
Cedric informed
unimpressed

ok thanks
you said
to Cedric's departing back

at lunchtime
after eating your sandwiches
and fruitcake

your mother had made
and the watered-down juice
you went to the playing field

and looked for Christina
amongst the hordes
of boys and girls

basking in the sun
or playing ball
then hands covered your eyes

and a voice said
guess who?
you said

Marilyn Monroe?
the hands left your eyes
and Christina said

no it's me
and she stood there
her eyes almost feeling you

as they moved over you
did you get my photo?
she asked

yes it's in my pocket
you said
don't show it to others

she said
I'll keep it under my pillow
you said

I sneaked it out
while no one was looking
this morning

she informed
I'll be for it
if they find out

she said

when was it taken?
you asked

last summer
she said
when I was 12

you don't look 12
in the photo
you said

do I look 13 now?
she asked
she grabbed your hand

and walked you across
the playing field
not waiting

for your reply
you wondered if Goldfinch
or Rolland were watching

while kicking ball
Goldfinch said girls
were an alien race

and best steered clear of
at best ignored
she stopped on the edge

of the playing field
where a small woods
formed the boundary of the field

and looking back
towards the school
some distance away

she whispered in your ear
you'll see just how 13 I am
in that woods one day

and you gave a sigh
noticing big puffy clouds
in a bright blue sky.

Terry Collett

The Rest Of The Day 1962

During science lesson
Elaine thinks of John;
the teacher is talking
about compounds or

something. She sits at
the desk pen in hand
eyes on the blackboard
where the teacher writes,

her thoughts on John,
and how he said he missed
her last night, and couldn't
stop thinking of her.

No one has said that before.
No one ever thought about
her in that way. She feels
like a frump. Compared

with her young sister she
is a frump. She hasn't her
sister's beauty or frame of
mind, not the confidence

her sister has. She writes
down what's on the blackboard.
The back of the teacher's
head shows a bald patch.

Never noticed before, she
muses, pausing writing.
She looks away and looks
out of the window. Sky looks

bright and blue and cloudless.
After breakfast while brushing
her teeth in the bathroom,
she imagined John behind

her watching her, his hands
ready to embrace her and lean
in towards her. What would

she have done if he had?
She muses, putting down
her pen, and watching the
teacher pick up a glass container

and show them some liquid.
What if John and kissed her
neck, would she have screamed
and have her mother come

running? She can't imagine him
kissing her neck. Can't imagine
him thinking about her either.
Beware of boys, her aunt had said,

they're only after one thing.
What thing the aunt didn't say.
A bell goes off, no more science
for the rest of the long school day.

Terry Collett

The Room Dim 1997

You had a disturbed night,
Brian says sitting up in bed
gazing at Nuala beside him.

Did I? she says, what makes
you say or think that? you kept
calling out. She stares ahead,
wondering what she'd said.

Calling out what? she asks.

Brian looks at her concernedly.

A name, he says, taking in her
body, the breasts just visible,
one of her hands holding on to
the covers, the other at her side.

What name? she asks turning
to stare at him, trying to look
unconcerned, but is failing.

Una, I think it was, he says,
that woman you've met recently,
what's she done to upset you?
he says, raising thick eyebrows.

Just called her name? she says,
feeling panic rise within her.

Yes, but you seemed worried
about something, he says, she
been upsetting you? Nuala smiles,
no of course not, just a dream
I expect, she says. Brian shrugs
his shoulders, well whatever,
he says, so how about a tea
and breakfast? He lies down
beside her, eyeing her, or we

could before hand, you know.

She looks at him, the panic
evaporating, but not wanting
him to return to the subject,
she snuggles down next to him,
kisses his cheek, why not, she
says, wishing it was Una there,
wanting it to be her hand on her
thigh not his. He breathes on her
in his sexual way, his fingers like
sausages touching her, lies there
as he moves onto her, bull heavy,
words replaced by his grunts, it's Una
there in her mind, her on her not him,
the light blocked out by his huge frame,
the room dim.

Terry Collett

The Same Mother

They each shared
the same mother
shared the same loss of her

when the time came
gave the same
last wave

when she was
driven off
to crematorium

and then grave
but each had
their own mother

whom they shared
with no other
one with whom

they shared
a particular time
or place

sitting quietly
face to face
sharing a secret

or confessing
a deed done
or just

the mother to child meeting
with just the two
at some given time

at some particular place
some given year
to share a problem

or tears or anxieties
or deeper fears
and knowing

she would listen
as only mother's can
or do

sharing the time and love
with each particular
person called you

whether daughter or son
she shared
her equal love and time

and yet each knew her
each thought
they knew her best

and carried away
their own best times
in her company

without the rest
their own moments shared
but deep down

they knew
she had her love for each
and each was equal

to the rest
for she never had
a favourite

nor considered
any one the best
so they all shared

the same mother

in the end
all grieved her going

each in their own way
hoping or believing
they would share her

once again
some better place
some future day.

Terry Collett

The Secret Lover

I am the lover of my brother's wife,
Said Jane; we sit and talk when he's
Away at work. I love the way she sits
And the sound of her voice, the sparkle
In her eyes when the room lights capture,
Breathe in her scent when we draw near.
I touch her hand to feel her pulse, sense
The blood race beneath her skin, her fingers
Clutching the glass of wine she's poured,
The way her other hand rests upon my knee.
She is the object of my dreams, the subject
Of my thoughts and sight; she sleeps beside
Me in my bed at night, sometimes imagined
Often for real when her husband's away.
She is the sun of my body's planet, the moon
That lights up my dark in a universe of doubt
And deep depression. She is my guide through
Dante's Hell, my lover behind my brother's back,
The one who covers me in kisses, who puts her
Tongue where my tongue dwells. We embrace
Like vines about each other, our fingers touch
The contours of our flesh, trace out the features
Of each others' face. We make love now and then
On my brother's bed, my head upon his pillow,
My spilt juices where his have laid, my body
Brought to the highest passion, brought to life
And the hottest love by my brother's wife.

Terry Collett

The Sepia Photograph.

She knows she's in
the sepia photograph
but doesn't remember why
or who the others are

or why she dressed
as she did back then
or why there was a dog there
at the front

she keeps the photograph
tucked between
the pages
of the black Bible

some clergy gave her
and a dark secret
she was forbidden to tell
and sometimes

that short woman
with the Mongolian features
steals it to gawk at
then she has to go get it back

sometimes violently
which brings the nurses running
with their rough hands
and strait jackets

or that skinny woman
who always stares
takes hold of it
and stares at it

pointing to the various faces
of the males and females
and at the dog
and smiles and wets herself

and then laughs loudly
which causes
the other inmates
to bellow or laugh

or cry or scream
bringing the nurses trotting
with their what's going on?
or what's all this then?

she holds the photograph
to her bosom when she can
or tries to remember
who they all are

staring back at her
including herself
and when the quacks
question her

about the photo
as to who is who
or why she has kept it
she doesn't have a clue

and one said
she ought not to have it
as it disturbed her
but a nice nurse

(and there were some) said
o no doctor she needs that
there will be hell to pay
if she doesn't have it

tucked between the pages
of the Good Book
she kisses herself some days
talks to one or two

of the others there

but who they were
or to whom she speaks
she doesn't know

and on cold wintery days
she looks toward the sun
for a message
or a warming glow.

Terry Collett

The Shoes

The shoes were placed
row on row,

large and small,
some with laces,

some without,
black and brown.

If shoes could speak,
if their leather tongues

could pronounce words,
what hard histories

they could tell,
what deep sadness

they could relate,
and there at Auschwitz,

Anny Horowitz's shoes
lay silent, cast off,

forcefully abandoned,
left to their fate,

no history told,
no biography to relate.

Terry Collett

The Shore Breeze Mcmlxxi

And the silence
of the abbey church
overwhelmed me
and that solitary monk
sitting in the choir stalls
alone in semi-dark praying,

Dei silentium coram Deo,

that time in the latrines
in the abbey
late evening
looking out a window
towards the harbour
with lights of ships
and houses and cafes
and me there solitary
looking homewards,

luminaria in mundo,

and Hugh talking about
someone walking past
his door noisily
in morning time
thinking it me
but I went
another way
and told him,

nella preghiera
tocchiamo Dio
the Italian monk
said to me
as we stood
in the cloister
before Vespers,

Dom Leo by the bell ropes

in the cloister
outside the refectory
saying farewell
then off to Rome
and shook hands,

and that French monk said
jamais perdu dans
l'amour de Dieu
and he was tall
and seemed in another world,

I felt the rough brickwork
as I walked past
the statue of the Madonna
my fingers sensed it
at the tips,

she had undressed
and said have me
before my husband comes
so I did,

mozesz miec mnie tutaj
that Polish girl said
sex she meant
but it was an old guy's
bedroom so I declined,

be ready to do battle
under the biddings
of holy obedience
Benedict said
(the saint) ,

a philosopher
who takes no part
in discussions
is like a boxer
who never goes
into the ring
said Gareth

quoting Wittgenstein,

in silentio et lumen
Dom Joe(dear Bunny) said
God is found
and we walked down
the path from
the shore to the cloister
beneath trees
and that silent
from the shore breeze.

Terry Collett

The Show Must Go On.

The show must go on, Frogmore
says, and Lottie sits and has
a quick drag on her cigarette and
sips the foul coffee from the

drinks machine. Legs ache, head
banging, back stiff. She inhales
and thinks of Frankie and his
coming to her place the previous

evening and wanting to stay over
for the night. The cabaret takes it
out of her. The eyes on her, the talk
going on while she and the other

girls do their bit. Frankie such a
sweetheart, such a Mr Softy, curled
up on the sofa, his huge overcoat
as a cover, his head sunk into a

cushion, sleeping. She watches the
smoke rise from the cigarette, she
lifts it and the smoke rises in short
circles, like her father used to do

when she was a kid sitting on his
knee. Watch the smoke Kid, see
how it rises like some kind of message
to the gods. And he laughed about

that back then. She felt safe on his
knee even when he used to let it rise
and fall like some kind of riding horse.
Now it is just the cabaret and the lonely

nights and Frankie on the sofa because
his old lady threw him out and he won't
sleep with Lottie because he's a good
Catholic boy and anyways, he said, it'd

get too confusing and he'd just lay there
on the sofa on those nights and she'd lay
alone wanting company and maybe someone
to hug her real close. Hey, Frogmore says,

you in this next dance or what? What do I
pay you for, huh? Sit about and smoke
yourself to death? You want to die do it
in your own time not mine. She stubs out

the cigarette butt and drains the foul coffee
in one last gulp. The music has started up
their theme bit for her and other girls and
out there in the audience drinking, eating

and talking, maybe Frankie staring at her
father with his latest flame without beauty
or brains or nice figure or remembered name.

Terry Collett

The Smile.

Henry was sitting
down in a restaurant
waiting for his meal
to be served

when he saw
an Asian family
come in and sit down nearby
the young woman sat

and as she sat
she smiled at him
and he smiled back
she was dressed

in fine colourful clothing
and her dark eyes
seemed to sparkle
like moonlight

on a night sea
she had kids
young kids
and her husband

a thin guy
sat opposite her
and her mother-in-law
sat along side her son

Henry took her smile
and wrapped it up
and stored it away
like it was a piece of art

he took a fancy to
his meal arrived
delivered by a waitress
who also smiled

and left with a sway
of fine hips
now he had two smiles
stored away

he ate his meal
and sipped his coke
and now and then
glanced at the family nearby

another Asian girl
at the table
(the husband's sister
or his sister-in-law)

smiled at Henry
a thin smile
where the lips parted
as if she were about

to speak but no
just the smile
Henry looked at his plate
stored the third smile away

and ate on
and sipped more coke
the first girl had
slit in her colourful dress

right along her thigh
he'd not noticed it before
now it caught his eyes
and now and then

he'd glance over
and take a look then
look at the thin husband
who didn't speak

just ate or told

the kids to behave
and the mother
told the kids off too

not smiling
Henry gazed at the slit
and mused how far it went
there was a vermilion mark

on the young woman's forehead
but her smile was still there
when she turned
and gazed at him

a bright light
when all else was dim.

Terry Collett

The Summer Recess Of 62.

It was the second day
of the summer recess
and Judith and you
walked through the field

behind her house
and sat down on the grass
the sky above blue
like an upside-down ocean

with the white clouds
like small fluffy islands
and she said
Mother doesn't trust you

why not?
you asked
she doesn't trust any male
she says they're all after

the one thing
you looked at her
sitting there beside you
her hair brown and curly

and her eyes blue
and bright
and you said
not all males

are the same
she looked up
at the sky
and said

I know but that's
how she sees things
my mother likes you
you said

she says you're good for me
keep me focused
she smiled
and lay back

on the grass
and you lay
beside her
and turned

to look at her there
taking in her profile
and she turned
to face you

and she said
does your mother
trust us to be together?
sure she does

you said
an airplane
went over the sky
a sparrow hawk

hovered above
its eyes watching
and waiting
you put your hand

on her hip
and she placed
her hand on yours
you felt her hipbone

beneath her green skirt
moved your palm
gently over and over
she moved your hand

off of her hip

and said
just in case
mother's looking at us

from the upstairs window
would she?
you asked
of course

she said
she held your hand
and took it
and laid it

on her breast
her heart
somewhere beating
your hand sensing

the softness beneath
the white blouse
and she said
just as well

she never saw us
last Christmas
and you smiled
and remembered

and the sparrow hawk
flew off through the sky
and the sound
of a distant train

and your heart thumping
like the downpour of rain.

Terry Collett

The Try On 1963

Magdalene
shows her room
to Martha

(her parents
said not to
bring Mary)

Martha stares
at the walls
see a small

crucifix
above a
single bed

glad you got
Jesus here
Martha says

Magdalene
looks at her
in a long

black slim dress
hair cut short
you still want

to be a
bloody nun?
Magdalene

says to her
bride of Christ
I'd call it

Martha says
turning round
and looking

deep eyed at
Magdalene
want a drink?

what you got?
gin all right?
make it large

Martha says
no need to
piss around

half measures
Magdalene
pours two gins

both large ones
want music?
who you got?

Bill Fury
or Elvis?
Fury's best

Martha says
sitting down
on the bed

Magdalene
puts on the
Fury disc

then sits down
by Martha
both girls sip

their large gins
what would you
say if I

kissed you once?

Magdalene
says softly

just the once?
unless you
wanted more

why kiss me?
thought Moran
was your one?

like you both
equally
(though Mary

was more hers
sexually)
its a sin

you know that?
Martha says
just a kiss

no sin there
don't want to
go further

Magdalene
informs her
(lying through

her back teeth)
further what?
Martha asks

I don't want
bed you here
(fecking liar

her mind says)
why bed me?
I'm not one

for sleeping
in the day
Martha says

she sips gin
and ignores
Magdalene's

hand touching
her plump thigh
Christ sees us

sees all things
Martha says
Mary says

that some times
Jesus turns
a blind eye

does he now?
Martha asks
that Smithy

boy tried to
get his hand
underneath

my school skirt
I thumped him
on his nose

Magdalene
informs her
did it bleed?

his big nose?
on his white
fecking shirt

just one kiss

on the cheek
Martha says

taking off
Magdalene's
hand from her

plump warm thigh
finishing
off her gin

with a sigh.

Terry Collett

The Undone

Undone
opened up
spat out
and we see them
as we once were
arms about each other
lips pressed
to each
sun's warmth
on their backs and faces
undone
we lost to a god's
good graces,

they suck as we sucked
each their fruits
tongue where we
once tongued
juice joys joy's juices
we unseeing
once seeing
no more sucking
what once we sucked
we are done for
and fucked,

dove è la luce?
ciò che il buio
è questo?
They young lambs
fondle and kiss
and entwine and laugh
and are of good cheer
we undone
sit in the gloom
wishing for salvation
awaiting gloom,

where is the light?

What darkness is this?
They squander their love
and kisses in wanton ways,

we the undone
look on
lost times and days.

Terry Collett

The Weigh In

It was Friday evening
the time for being weighed
before bath in the nursing home
and Anne was standing

behind you in the queue of kids
leaning on her crutch
the stump of her leg
just visible beneath

her short red skirt
and she whispered to you
how much do you weigh Skinny Kid?
I don't know

you replied
maybe 84lbs
she snorted 84lbs?
my pussy weighs more than that

she whispered
her warm breath
on your ear
the kids in front of you

moved up and Monica
the girl with burn scars
climbed off
the weighing scales

what do you weigh Scarface?
Anne called out
don't be cruel Anne
the nurse near the scales said

oops sorry nurse
it just slipped out
Anne said
(so the bishop said

to the actress
Anne whispered
in your ear)
after a few more kids

got on and off
the scales after
being weighed
it was your turn

and you climbed on the scales
and the red line
showed 77lbs
and the nurse said

what it showed
and you got off
and Anne crutched herself
onto the scales

and you stood
and watched
as the red line showed 112lbs
now that

said Anne looking at you
is real poundage
and as she got off the scales
she ushered you outside

into the passageway
and said
here feel my thigh
go on

have a feel
and she grabbed
your hand
and made you

touch her thigh

it was smooth
and warm
you're such a thin bastard

Skinny Kid
you need to fatten yourself up
she released your hand
and you followed her

along to the lounge
where others waited
for bath time
she nibbled

your earlobe affectionately
and crutched herself
over to the armchair
in the corner

and pinched Monica
on her way
giving out
a snort of laughter

as Monica uttered
loud moans
and you sensed
the dampness

on your earlobe
like a loving memento
which you hoped
would last

but knew
it would
like passing time
soon go.

Terry Collett

The Weigh In 1959

Anne stands
on crutches
in the queue

to be weighed
by a nun
in the home

for sick kids
Skinny Kid
she whispers

to the boy
just in front
if I win

the choc bar
I'll share it
just with you

if you win
who will you
share it with?

you of course
he replies
in soft voice

other kids
up the front
fail to put

on more weight
so don't win
the choc bar

it's you now
Benedict
a nun says

Skinny Kid
stands steady
on the scales

you've put on
5 ounces
she tells him

he gets off
of the scales
and Anne

crutches up
on one leg
her stump swings

underneath
her red dress
steady now

the nun says
Anne stands
as steady

as she can
you've put on
7 ounces

the nun says
so you win
the choc bar

Anne smiles
and crutches
herself off

of the scales
the nun puts
the choc bar

in Anne's

dress pocket
let's go Kid

Anne says
and they go
out the back

on the lawn
she crutching
to the far

white table
and white chairs
with the Kid

beside her
making sure
she's ok

he pulls out
a white chair
and she sits

the Kid sits
beside her
and they share

the choc bar
between them
12 ounces

gained in weight
between them.

Terry Collett

The Who Talked To Fishes.

Fish tank after fish tank
all in a row, he peered in
at the fish: small fishes,

big fishes, different colours
and patterns. Some flashed
by or darted across the water

in quick agitation, or they
swam slow, philosophical,
floating before him, mouthing

bubbles at him, or just giving
him the steady stare, wondering
why he was there. He talked

to them watching them for replies,
taking the opening and closing
mouths for signs of silent words.

How are you? He'd whisper to
the glass causing breath stains.
He watched for them to say

something in their fish language,
or flap of fin. There were the big fish
in the ponds, large and colourful,

moving slow, coming to the edge,
thinking he'd come to feed,
or they'd move off in disgust

or disappointment, with turn
of head or fin or tail, and he
took that as an answer somehow.

Terry Collett

The Whole Night 1971

I stood in the cloister
and breathed in
the cold morning air
and heard the echo
of the church bells tolling,

Deus tactus,

birdsong on the air,

trees swaying as dancers
on the stage of the green fields,

ici est Dieu autour de nous
the French monk said
opening his arms wide,

she undressed slowly
revealing each aspect
of her body to tempt,

before all and above all
attention shall be paid
to the care of the sick
so that they shall be served
as if they were Christ Himself
said Benedict,

Hugh moaned of noises
as someone passed
his cell door,

I climbed the ladder
in the abbey orchard
to gather apples
as shown by Dom Charles
his tonsured head
visble from above,

Gott unveränderlich
ist es wir die wir ändern
the Austrian monk said
as he aided me to wash
dishes in the kitchen,

the smell of flowers
from the cloister garth
and the heat of the sun,

I shall spread myself
wide for you she said
I shall open up
like a flower at dawn,

I get tired of the darkness
all around me Therese said
the darkness itself seems
to borrow from the sinners
who live in it
the gift of speech,

God is unchanging
Dom Joseph(dear Bunny) said
it is we who change,

I entered the church for Matins
the lights lit up
in the chill morning darkness
as the monks gathered like ravens
at feast of bread,

i nostri peccati si aggrappano
a noi come i pidocchi
the Italian monk said
as we walked before Compline
stars above us
and moon bright,

come to me she said
come stay and make love
the whole night.

Terry Collett

The Wingless.

We are wingless
are silent
have blood
on our hands
and in our heads
and hearts,

once we had wings
and a voice
but spoke of those things
not the real
and we had our fill
loved and sexed
and more still,

angeli caduti
angeli senza ali,

once we had it all
and scant cared
for others outside
our state of mien
or race or tribe or creed
and watched the starving
as we ate our feed,

where the light?
whose voices are these?
we hug ourselves
wingless in our darkness
hopeless in our pride,

once our wings
spread wide
and our youth
and wisdom seemed wise
now there is an echoing call
and blood shot eyes.

The World To Rights.

Putting the world
to rights,
I expect.

She, Mrs Clark,
and Old Ma Collins
are like an outpost

of the United Nations.
They'd put
the world to rights

all right. No one else
would get a word in
edgeways. Had a bloke

like that in the army.
He could talk the hind leg
off a donkey. Bit simple

he was, but he did half talk.
Perkins he was called.
Ronald Perkins.

Lost a leg he did,
but didn't stop him talking.
Reckon if he lost his head

he'd still manage
to chat away
to himself somehow.

Terry Collett

Then.

Then she would say
if only I'd met you

before him
and you'd say

yes but that
is how it is

and those quick
chance meetings

in back offices
or far away cafes

or in the elevator
going up or down

when alone
you kissing her

and feeling
between thighs

and she
letting out

that oh god
take me moan.

Terry Collett

There Is Light

There is light
Ingrid sees
through curtains

of her room
as she lays
in her bed

she hears rows
raised voices
her father

bellowing
her brother
answering

her mother
crying out
Ingrid bites

at her lip
what's up now?
She wonders

sitting up
anxiously
her brother

shouting back
her father
barking words

she gets up
out of bed
listens out

at the door
of her room
don't go Tom

please don't go
her mother
pleads loudly

to her son
a door slams
then silence

whimpering
is then heard
her mother

in the hall
her father
swearing loud

which echo
in Ingrid's
ears and mind

she creeps back
to her bed
snuggles down

like a mole
under brown
thick blankets

hopes to God
her father
won't come in

taking it out
on young she
his daughter

but she knows
usually
that he does

she just waits

laying there
in her bed

for the harsh
bitter hurtful
bee-like buzz.

Terry Collett

There Is Peace.

There is peace around your grave,
my son, except when the wind
blows or birds sing.

We often stand to stare
at the words on the gravestone there,
trying to make sense
of the senseless, to give
a purpose to what seems
purposeless, to draw
some sense of peace
from the quietness
at your grave.

There are times when it seems
you are not there, not lying
beneath the ground and stones,
but elsewhere beyond my sight
or senses' hold, or standing
at my side in spirit's sphere
at peace unlike me standing here.

Terry Collett

There Out There.

There out there
they crowd the streets
and alleys and malls
and buses and trains,

she wanted no part of it
any more wanted to be away
from the rush and push
and shove from behind
and in front and and above,

she lies on her bed
hears the hum of traffic
the song of birds
the echo of chatter
on things that do not matter,

she muses on her plight
of that dark day
this dull night,

her father captured
in the claws of cancer
her mother unstable
unable to cope
hanged herself
behind a door
without rope,

her partner
misunderstood her
thought her weak
bullied her night and day
until just now
with her father's gun
she blew him away.

Terry Collett

There She Is

There she is
in the field
Jane waving

to the birds
in the sky
above us

wave she says
so I wave
to the rooks

overhead
then they've gone
out of sight

I watch her
her hair free
her eyes bright

this is it
she says loud
arms outstretched

palms open
this is art
God's own art

she utters
she is art
to my eyes

the beauty
of her form
her soft voice

uttering
we are here
we're alive

this moment
I love her
her being

her hands clap
birds fly out
from hedgerows

winging up
we need wings
she tells me

flaps her arms
I kiss her
in my mind

embrace her
in my dreams
let us fly

she calls out
I follow
arms flapping

don't know why.

Terry Collett

There She Posed

And there was Mame
posed between two Arabs
leaning against a camel

on a Moroccan beach
winding up her watch
clothed in a red and white

swim suit
and Johnny had said
You could've had her mate

the other night
she was yours
for the taking

(sex you thought he meant)
others have said
they've had her

and that settled the matter
and you just shrugged
and said

It never happened
it wasn't that type of thing
(kissing and embracing

beneath a bright moon maybe)
but not what he
or others may have thought

as they saw that you and she
had gone off into the night
hand in hand

Oh you could have ridden her home
Johnny said
but it never entered your head

that night
with its stars and moon
and she beside you

listening to the Mediterranean Sea
suck the shores of the beach
laying on your backs

smoking and watching
the smoke rise
talking of home

and another land
and the future's hold
and her hopes

and your wishes
and looking back
you know your life

turned out different
wondering if her hopes and wishes
of the then

turned out right
or floated lifeless
like dead fishes.

Terry Collett

These Things.

These things are sent to try us,
Gran said, her thumb
Moving itself over
The well-worn beads
Of her dark wood rosary;
Her eyes taking in the crucifix
On the wall above her bed.
You sat watching her thumb
Moving its way back and forth
Over the round black beads,
Her arthritic fingers clutching
Blue blankets and white sheet.
Never tries us beyond our strength,
She added, the strained features
Mingling with the yellow taint
Of wrinkled skin. You wondered
Who sent the things to try her,
Whose bounty of gifts left
Small tears wedged in the corners
Of her eyes, pushed out words
Between harsh sighs.

Terry Collett

They'LI Say That God Had Need Of Her..

They'll say that God had need of her
Before her time,
That angels sought her company

For beauty's sake
In mind or soul,
That stars will shine far brighter

In the night of all their dread
Now that she is dead at six years old,
And they must feel the cold

Of her departure all the more,
Like one whose ship has left the shore
For far off places,

They must have her face in mind
To keep as photograph,
In silver frame,

Until such time
That she and they
Are once again in arm's fond hold

And all the love returns
To cease the cold
And lonely days of aching grief.

Terry Collett

Thinking Of Yochana

Yochana
sitting next
to the blonde

Angela
is in front
of the class

at the back
of the class
Reynard R

sits with me
while Miss G
is yakking

about Bach
his music
walking slow

between rows
peering deep
through her

thick lens specks
Yochana
looks at me

and mouths words
do not kiss
me again

I smile back
and mouth words
it was good

she stares back
unsmiling
while Miss G

stops yakking
glares at me
then looks at

Yochana
this lesson
is on Bach

and music
Miss G says
not tit-tat

Yochana
blushes red
looks away

I watch her
sitting there
her figure

her shoulders
her black hair
as Miss G

goes to her
gramophone
and puts on

boring Bach
as I think
of holding

Yochana
and kissing
on the cheek

or her lips
tomorrow
or next week.

Thinking Of You 1961

You were there by the farm road,
waiting, wearing that flowered
dress I liked, your dark hair tied
in a ponytail at the back. I had

finished on the farm weighing
the milk and was pleased you
had come. Your mother said you
were at the farm, you said. Did

you want to go home first? No,
we can go wherever you wish,
I said. You smiled and we walked
up the track to the Downs. We held

hands, you having taken mine first.
We passed the hollow tree where
we had sat at times to be alone.
That's a wood pigeon, you said

listening. Yes, I guess it it, I said.
We came to the clearing at the top
of the Downs and lay in the tall grass,
looking down at the green fields

and the farm below. Do you like
working on the farm? You asked.
Yes, I love it, I said. Not bad for a
London boy, Benny, you said. No,

I suppose not, I said. We lay back
and looked at the blue sky. We turned
and faced each other. Eyes on eyes.
Think I love you, you whispered.

Love you, too, I whispered back.
I touched you thigh with my hand.
We mustn't, you said softly. I removed
my hand. My parents trust me; I cannot

betray that trust, you said. I nodded
and we kissed. We lay there looking
at each other. I thinking of your dark
eyes and you thinking of your mother.

Terry Collett

Thinks Of Sheila 1962

Once he's home
John passes
his mother

by the stove
how was school?
She asks him

it was fine
he replies
what are you

cooking then?
Irish stew
she replies

O that's good
John tells her
and goes up

to his room
shuts the door
his brother

(much younger)
has gone out
John walks to

the window
and looks out
Hebblewaite

the neighbour
is digging
his garden

John wonders
about the
girl Sheila

he'd seen her
just before
he got on

the school bus
waiting there
by the gates

of the school
hands in her
school jacket

her two eyes
excited
to see him

they had talked
quite quickly
words exchanged

almost kissed
but too shy
must go now

he had said
as the bus
would soon leave

she had waved
blown a kiss
so had he

Hebblewaite
seems to sweat
wipes his brow

John wonders
what she wears
underneath

(Rowland fault

suggesting
during maths)

he can't ask
her that one
or suggest

that she tell
lovely eyes
and that smile

he muses
looking on
as the man

Hebblewaite
wipes his nose
John whispers

Sheila's name
to the room
it sounds like

a steam train
starting up
Hebblewaite

continues
to dig on
John closes

his two eyes
thinks of her
deep within

her beauty
in the flesh
gently lies.

Terry Collett

Third Degree 1961

To get home
carrying
the image of him
the eyes hazel

the hair
the quiff
the way he looked at her
Yehudit

her mother says
where have you been
was the school bus
late again?

no I was talking
to a boy
she says wondering
what her mother will say

looking away
wanting to get out
of her school uniform
get into something better

what boy?
the mother asks
gazing
scrutinising

taking in
her daughter's face
seeing if the eyes
give anything away

Benedict's a new boy
at school
lives along the road

in the black cottages

the mother stares harder
boys can be problematic
she says
what were you

talking about?
Yehudit looks
at the photograph
on the mantelpiece

a family group
before her brothers
left to marry
about choir

he's going to join
Yehudit says
trying not to sound
too excited

well make sure that
is all it is don't
want you bringing
home trouble

the mother says firmly
of course not
Yehudit says
wondering what trouble

her mother means
just singing in choir
he's coming tonight
for practice

she adds
looking at her mother's eyes
the depth there
a darkness lurking

you're 13 not 23
her mother says
be 14 soon
Yehudit says

and how old is
this boy?
the mother asks
14 I think

he's in my class at school
so only just 14
I guess
Yehudit says

biting her lower lip
as I said
you're just 13
so no trouble

the mother says
or else
she walks away
towards the kitchen

where potatoes boil
or else echoes
in Yehudit's head
as she goes upstairs

to her room
to lay on her bed.

Terry Collett

This War Ended 1916

Each day I come
to Master George's room,
each day, Gripe says,
Polly keep it fresh
just in case.

As soon as
I open the door
I feel a shudder.

I fear he will not return,
that he will remain
in hospital of some kind
for ever, his mind shattered
by this War,
by what he saw,
his wounded mind.

I read that 19,240 men
were killed on the first day
of the Somme,
and 57,470 wounded,
of which he was one.

When will this War be over,
when will it be won?

I walk around
to the window,
and open it up.

Let air in,
refresh the room.

The curtains flap
in the incoming draft,
like wings of a bird
taking off in flight.

I begin to polish
the furniture, even though
I did it yesterday,
and the day before.

I smell him around me,
his scent, his shaving soap,
his having been here.

I look at the bed,
and remember how
we made love there
at his invitation,
me a maid, and he
the young master.

I put down the polish
and duster, and go
and sit on the bed,
bounce it a little.

I stare out at the view
of the window.

Trees sway, birds fly,
clouds drift by.

He kissed each
aspect of me,
kisses everywhere,
his lips there,
and his moustache
tickling me to giggles.

Now he is broken,
mind fragile as aged paper.

When he came
back here briefly,
he spoke of a man's head
sitting by his side
gazing at him,

a hand of one man
lying still on the trench
by his eyes.

I close my eyes,
and want him back,
back here, back mended,
and this War ended.

Terry Collett

Thompson's Non Date 1962

Thompson brought
his sandwiches to school
and we ate
our sandwiches
in one
of the empty classrooms.

He was a big kid
but a gentle giant
who liked to hear
my jokes or stories
or tales of London.

Sometimes
we swapped
sandwiches
he having one
of my cheese
for one of his jam
or one of his ham
and pickle
for my cold beef
(especially Mondays) .
Sometimes he'd say
to try his drink
(weak lime juice)
for a taste of my
warm tea
from a flask.

He liked girls
but found them
mysterious
like enigmas not
to be unravelled.

I tried
to get him a girl
but he was too shy

to meet her.

He said he
was too big
too tall
he didn't know
so was the girl.

I selected her
for that very reason
a rare beast
like a bird
out of season.

Terry Collett

Thornton's Offer 1958

She was a red head
wearing a red dress
smoking a cigarette
sipping her coffee.

You were
sitting beside her
black suit
blue shirt
black tie
holding a cigarette
between fingers.

I think he suspects
she said.

Suspects what?
You said.

That I'm seeing
someone else.

You took a drag
on the smoke
does he suspect who?
You said.

Not yet
but he will fish
and get to find out.

She inhaled smoke
and looked at the guy
behind the counter
serving another man
along the bar.

Let him fish
I don't give a damn

you said.

Maybe we should
go off together
she said.

Go where?
You said.

Anywhere
as long as it's
away from him
she said
turning
to look at you.

I ain't going
no where
you said
if you want
to leave the jerk
come to my place
he won't find you there
and if he does
he'll have me
to see him off.

She looked away
and inhaled smoke again.

He has a temper
and a gun
she said
exhaling smoke
as she spoke.

Up to you Honey
take it or leave it
I don't run no place
you said.

The jukebox

started up
some Elvis guy singing.

She sat silent
moodily gazing
at her mug of coffee.

I'll see how he goes
she said
can't leave just yet
see you tomorrow
afternoon?

Sure
you said
you bet.

Terry Collett

Those Days Of Tears 1940

We'd danced until late
and the went off
to some restaurant
Clive knew
and later a club
still open
then Clive walked me home

as we stood outside
looking at the night sky
I said
do you want
to come in for coffee?

you have coffee?
he said

yes a friend
got it for me
I said

all right
he said
and we went in
and had coffee
and the we ended up
in my bed

after sex
we lay there
and he said about
after the War
we could marry

Grace Grace
are you awake?
a voice says
to my right

I stare where
the voice sounds
yes I'm awake
I say
looking through
blind eyes at darkness

can I have a look
at your leg stumps
and give them
a wash down?
the voice says

who are you?
I say

Nurse Rogers
I've been away
back today

yes of course
I say
sensing her pull back
the blankets
and lift up my nightgown
and unbandage the stumps

I feel her cool soft hands
against my skin
it is ages since Clive
did that to me
rub my legs after sex
sometimes before
I muse
as she removes the bandages
and rubs the stumps

how are they?
I ask

they are looking all right
clean and no sign

of infection
she says

I want it to be Clive
doing that
but he died in Dunkirk
and lies elsewhere now
sleeping the eternal rest
so they say
I muse
tears coming to my eyes

am I hurting you
the nurse says

no no
I say
just memories coming back
of some one I loved
who died

o sorry about that
she says
so much death these days
what with the War
and bombing
we had a lot in last night
when they bombed the docks

I say nothing
I pretend it is Clive
touching me
his hands moving
about my legs
and thighs
I sigh
and wipe my eyes.

Terry Collett

Thought And Bet 1961

Rooks cawed
above our heads
as we walked down
the narrow country lane
there amidst
the tall trees and sky

I walked with Jane
hand in hand
warmth for warmth

the small stream
trickled over
small rocks and stones
and carried leafs and twigs
on short journeys
downstream

we avoided puddles
where rain had fallen
in the night

my father brought me
down here when I
was a little girl
Jane said
I still recall it now
and being fascinated
by the running stream
and call of birds

I walked
the streets of London
where mainly pigeons
cooed and cooed
and shite on your head
sometimes overhead

Jane laughed

poor you being born
in London
she said

wasn't all bad
I said
at least I had cinemas
and shops nearby
not a mile or more away
for shops and not
a cinema in miles

depends what you want
I guess
she said

yes I guess it does
I said
but I love it here
and I've learnt more
about birds and nature
since we moved here

she smiled
and me
she said

yes and you
(I never mentioned Lizbeth
and what she had taught)

cows mooed
from the fields
at the end of the lane
and there stood
an empty cottage to our right
and we leaned on the gate
and stared at it

could be ours one day
she said dreamily

maybe
I said noncommittally

(Lizbeth had been there too
and spoke of some where
to have sex if
there was a way in
which there wasn't)

there are hydrangeas
in there too
pink flowers with some blue
Jane said

I looked
still holding her hand
fingering the soft skin
with my thumb

when we're older than 13
she said
and are old enough to marry
we could be there
and stand at the windows
and look out on the grounds

I nodded my head
still feeling her soft skin

and we could have a family
and you could work
on the farm
she said

(Lizbeth only mentioned sex
and how to get in the door
and explore)

I told her of the names
of some of the cows
on the farm I remembered
where I worked

after school

then she kissed my cheek
leaving it warm and wet

(Lizbeth would have
done more than that)
I thought and bet.

Terry Collett

Thoughts And Sin Mcmlxxi

The French peasant monk
sharpened his scythe on a stone,

des choses
simples avec Dieu he said,

his calloused hands
did their task
with simplicity,

to one who has faith
no explanation is necessary
Thomas said,

bring wine when you come
she said I perform better
under its power
in bed that is,

I watched the peasant monk
as he sharpened his scythe
mine was less used
less blunt,

omnia enim possibilia
sunt apud Deum
Dom James said
as we brought apples
to the kitchen,

Gregorian chant sounded
from wall to wall
in the church at midday
as the office of Sext began,

George spoke of the chill
at dawn entering
the church how it
got to his bones,

Hugh pushed
the tea trolley onto
the cloister garth
after the office of None
his thin features
and thin hands
gripped the trolley handle
white knuckled,

dalle piccole cose
grandi cose vengono
the Italian monk said
holding a coffee bean
in the palm
of his hand,

she held
my small thing
in the palm
of her hand and said
see it grows
from small things
big things come
and laughed,

vines and trees
will teach you that
which you will never learn
from masters Bernard said,

Dom Joe(dear Bunny)
screwed up his nose
as he thought and said
God has a plan
for each of us but leaves us
to find it out,

his scythe sharp
the peasant monk swiped
the tall grass
his motion fluid

his head poised
as a dancer,

my prayer life was
as a puddle
shallow and murky
and I stirred it
with the fingers
of my words,

for a truly religious man
nothing is tragic
Gareth said quoting
Wittgenstein as we sat
on the beach watching
the tide coming in,

where I stood the waters
touched my life
and thoughts
and sin.

Terry Collett

Through Another Day 1963

The nun watched the girl Moran
stub out a cigarette
by the cycle sheds,
and flick it away.

She watched her
put hands in the pockets
of her coat,
and saunter back
towards school.

Mary entered
by the double doors
of the school,
and the nun stopped her
raising an open hand
towards her.

Want a word with you,
Moran,
the nun said,
eyeing the girl,
taking in
the bright of eyes,
the pouting lips.

What's up?
Mary said,
I've lessons
to be getting to,
and you know
what the Bridget's like
if we're late,
half wets herself
with anger,
so she does.

Hush yourself,
the nun said,

and follow me.

Mary followed the nun
into a side room,
and the nun shut
the door behind them.

Sit down,
the nun said,
and peered at Mary
with her dark eyes.

Mary sat and looked
at her hands in her lap.

I saw you smoking
by the cycle sheds,
the nun said,
and smoking is not permitted
in the school or grounds.

Was I smoking?
Mary said,
don't recall smoking,
may have been
the cold air;
sometimes when you
breathe out it looks
like smoke,
but it's just cold air.

It was smoke;
I saw you stub out
the cigarette
and flick it away,
the nun said,
walking in front of Mary,
hands tucked inside
her black habit
out of sight.

Was it a cigarette?

I had gum;
you may have seen me
flick that away,
Mary suggested.

The nun stood still;
stony faced.

It was a cigarette I saw,
the nun stated.

I see,
Mary said,
funny what you can forget,
if you're not paying attention
to what you're doing,
could have sworn
it was gum.

IT WAS A CIGARETTE,
the nun bellowed,
flushing at the face,
her hands out at her sides,
flapping like wings
of fledgling bird.

Don't be telling me
it was gum,
the nun said
her voice softer,
held in check
after the bellowing,
remembering her vows,
her Christ like vocation.

You're probably right,
Sister,
I'll see the priest
and put it onto
the sin list
I've to tell him
in confessions,

Mary said,
keeping her face
straight as she could.

The nun breathed deeply,
eyed the girl,
if you'd been a boy,
I'd have you caned
for your manners,
but as your not,
you can see me
after school at detention.

Mary nodded her head
and stood up and said,
can I go now?
You know what
the Bridget is like
if we're late?

The nun stilled her wings,
and nodded her head,
and watched as the girl
sauntered off out
of the room and away.

The nun crossed herself,
muttered a short prayer,
rubbed her rosary,
to get her through
another day.

Terry Collett

Through Paris 1970

As you rode through Paris
in the packed coach

the radio played
Beethoven's Piano Concerto #5

and Mamie
sat beside you

her head to one side
sleeping

her mouth open
like some fish

out of water
her hands tucked

between her thighs
her blue skirt

riding high
and the slow movement

of the Beethoven piece
began

the piano playing softy
as the bright lights

of Paris
lit up

the dull space
inside the coach

and you closed your eyes
laying a hand

surreptiously
over hers

hearing the piano
and orchestra

as if in a dream
and Mamie

never minded
your hand

on hers
or so you thought then

and as now
it would seem.

Terry Collett

Through Paris At Night 1970

Miriam and I
were sitting next
to each other
on the coach
through Paris

she laid her head
on my shoulder

it was night
lit up by the City's lights

have you heard
of Kant's moral argument?
I asked her

who the feck is Kant?
she said looking
up at me through
half-open eyes

German philosopher
I said
he said that that if
moral behaviour is rational
then moral behaviour
can only be rational
if justice will be done
and justice can only be done
if Gods exists
therefore God exists

she sighed
so if God doesn't exist
then moral behaviour
is not rational?
she said
is that what he means?

I guess so
I said

she closed her eyes
and I looked at her
red hair curly and wavy
and planted a kiss
on her head

a Beethoven piano concerto
was playing over
the coach radio speakers
soft slow movement
the keyboard being tinkled
by some one's fingers

I looked down at her
lying there
her tee-shirt gapped
and I saw the crevice
between her small breasts

her small hands
in her lap

I lay my head
on her head gently
and closed my eyes too

what else could
a sleepy guy do?

Terry Collett

Tidy

I have just
given blood

(at the blood
donor unit)

& in return
received

a free cup
of orange juice

and free
mini-pack

of Garibaldi
biscuits

tidy!

Written by my late son Oliver Collett(1984-2014)

Terry Collett

Tightening Nana's Corset.

Tommy passing Nana's room
hears her say
can you help me
with my corset?

sure
he says
walking into her room
a cigarette hanging

from the corner
of his mouth
what do you want doing?
he asks

can you pull it tight for me?
and she offers him
the two corset strings
and he take them

between his fingers
and gives a pull
she breathes in
and holds it there

her arms by her side
her face vacant
as if she's awaiting
something to happen

her mouth slightly open
he holds the strings tight
studies her eyes
the curl of hair

the way her mouth is open
her arms by her side
thinking how beautiful she is
how he'd not noticed before

smelling her perfume
trying to place
the make and kind
that's it

she says
can you tie it there?
sure
he says and ties the strings

behind her back
his nose a few inches
from her naked shoulder
breathing in her scent

wanting to kiss the flesh
the neck
the ear
to put his hands

upon her hips
that's done
he says
tight as a miser's purse

thank you
she says
that's much better
and kisses his cheek

and says
aren't you the man
from upstairs?
yes that's right

he says
do you play the saxophone
that I hear?
yes the alto sax

he mimics a saxophone

with his hands
and runs his fingers
along imaginary keys

usually I'm taking a bath
when I hear you
she says
or lying in bed

your sounds sinking
through the ceiling
oh sorry if it disturbs
he says

gazing at her small tits
under the cloth
I love the haunting sounds
she says

they sound so sad
as if your soul
were speaking
or calling from across

an abyss
he gazes at her neck and chin
her moving mouth
the pink of tongue

the sparkling eyes
yes
he says
that wide abyss

wanting to hold her tight
and place
upon her moving lips
a hot lips kiss.

Terry Collett

Tilly By The Pond 1965

You go to the old pond with Benny
and sit on the grass
in the summer's sun.

Not been here for ages
you say
looking at him sitting there.

Remember when
we first came here?
he says
it was one Saturday
and we were both a bit shy.

You remember
yes I do
you say
I wasn't sure
about you then
but was pretty much
fixed on you after
seeing you
on the school bus.

He smiles
of course.

You smile
thoughts enter you head
of later dates
by the pond
and while he's talking
you remember
that time
you and he had sex
in the bushes
behind you now
(you don't look around
but it is behind

where you sit now)
and the biggest fear was
that someone
would come along
and see you.

We made love
back there
you say
breaking into his words.

He pauses
and looks at you
then back
behind you both.

Yes we did
he says
and stares at the bushes.

Not now though
you say quickly
before he has ideas
it was a different time.

He nods and looks
back at you
yes it was
he says
and stares at the pond
and at the swimming ducks
and floating dragonflies
and muses probably
like you
on time that flies.

Terry Collett

Tilly's Lies 1965

I had just got in
from work.

My mother
was at the stove cooking.

Odd that you and Benny
were at Richmond
at the same time
and you never met
my mother said.

I didn't know
he was going
to be there
I said
I was looking after
Uncle's house
while he was away.

She looked at me
her eyes scanning me
I knew she didn't
believe me
but she had no proof
we had met
just her intuition.

The radio was on
in the background
some classical stuff.

The clock on
the mantelshelf
was ticking.

I hope you never
met with him
she said.

Of course not
I lied
putting on my
innocent gaze.

It would be
a betrayal of your
Uncle's trust
to have taken
him there.

Taken who where?
I said
wanting to go upstairs
and wash and change.

That boy Benny
back at Uncle's house
she said.

I wouldn't
dream of it
I lied
pushing thoughts
of Benny and me
having sex in the bed
for the second time
in an hour.

Best get changed
for dinner
she said
looking at me
the way she had
when she didn't
believe me.

I went upstairs
leaving her to stew
I wouldn't confess
there was nothing

she could do.

Terry Collett

Tilly's Morning Blues 1965

Tilly dressed for work
her sister up already
washed and downstairs
breakfasting before school,

Tilly gazed at her features
in the mirror's view
hair messed up
eyes sleepy still
a washed out feel,

Benny the day before
a day at the beach
seeing the tide come in
and gulls fly
and a bag of fries
on a seat gazing
at the sea just him and me,

her mother downstairs
loudly talking
calling up that
breakfast is ready
and get a move on,

Tilly sighed and trotted
to the bathroom
to urinate and wash and dress
and descend the stairs
with her weary steps,

she sat at the table
half listened to her mother's yak
and torrent of words
and sighs and stares
musing on Benny
and the seaside kiss and hug,

she ate and sipped her tea

thinking of Benny's hold
and kiss of lips
but kept all to herself
and let nothing
of the day out
with Benny slip.

Terry Collett

Time To Lose.

She was there
in the church
arranging the flowers

at the altar end
where her mother said
she'd be when you knock

at the parsonage door
some moments back
and you entered

through the old oak door
into the silence
and smell of age and flowers

seeing her
in her summer dress
unaware you stood there

her hands touching
flowers in vases
moving them into place

an intenseness
on her face
you moved slowly

down the aisle
not wanting to disturb
or cause alarm

then Jane turned
and smiled and said
I've nearly done

and tapped the flowers
in the final place
Where shall we go?

You moved closer
to where she stood
and said

To Heaven
if we're good
they say

she shook her head
and said
I meant where

about outside?
Wherever you like
you replied

studying her hands
as she wiped them
on her summer dress

how the fingers lay
how some god
brought them

to such beauty
and her eyes
and hair

and her
just standing there
enough

you mused inside
not out
to bring one to a faith

of some creative god
and she said
Why do you stare?

What holds you

rooted there?
Let's go climb

the Downs and look across
the vast expanse
of fields and trees

and birds in air
just you and me
and this love

just being there
Oh how romantic a mood
holds you today

she said and put her arm
through yours
and moved you on

and down the aisle
between the pews
unaware as youth

too often does
of hours passing
and having time to lose.

Terry Collett

Time To Sit

A time to sit, the doctor said.
The room silent,

the walls a dull grey,
painted God knows when.

The chair uncomfortable,
hard on the arse.

You look around,
cock your ears,

sniff the air.
Tell me, the doc said,

do you hear voices?
The carpeted floor

beneath the feet.
The shoes touch it.

You push hard down on it.
Not springy.

A small window high up
lets in light. The air is stale.

Body smell, sweat.
As if many have sat here

just like you on this chair.
The mind is a complex thing,

the doc said, layer upon layer
of memories and sensations

are buried there.
As if you didn't know.

He spoke with an Irish lilt.
Just like you. Softer though.

Photographs were on his desk in his room.
You gazed at them as he spoke.

The wife of his some posh bit,
clothes aplenty, eyes just staring.

And two kids staring at you
from another photo: well fed,

nothing much wrong with them.
No screw loose, all right in the head.

The sitting in the room does you no good.
The voices are back,

never been away.
Good day, good day, they say.

Terry Collett

To Be Missed 1974.

We'd been to
the Van Gogh
museum

and Dalya
said let's go
get coffee

so we did
and talked of
what we'd seen

the paintings
and the books
and the prints

there for sale
I've got a
large print of

Sunflowers
I told her
bought it last

year at some
small art shop
then she talked

about the
Yank woman
whom she shared

her tent with
back at base
all she talks

about is
whom she's fucked
and who she'd

nearly did
every night
the same thing

I am not
in the least
concerned

about her
sexual
life such as

it may be
all I want
is to sleep

but she yaks
in that drawl
on and on

Dalya said
and I guessed
I wasn't

on the list
of names the
Yank woman

talked about
wanting to
have sex with

which was good
because I
don't think that

Dalya would
have liked that
but Van Gogh's

Sunflowers

was liked by
both of us

even if
I wasn't
on the list

sometimes it's
just good not
to be named

and be missed.

Terry Collett

To Crap

Goldstein's left footprints
In the snow, they go off
Toward the woods. Birds
Take flight at the sound of
Gunfire, their wings clipping
The branches of tall trees,
Disturbing snow; a fall of
Whiteness settling upon
Crimson stains; Goldstein's
Dead eyes see nothing of this,
Hear nothing of birds in flight,
The open wound in his head
Seeps blood. Jackboots tread
Where Goldstein trod; the rifle
Silent now, hung over the sturdy
Shoulder, a cold hand gripping
The strap. The killer pauses at the
Edge of the woods, ready to pee
In the snow, time to ease and crap.

Terry Collett

To Go Or Die 1971

What books are those?
Yiska said.

Philosophy books
my mother brought in
to save me
from further madness,
I said.

I showed her
the titles.

She shrugged:
I'm too tired to read
after the ETC
this morning,
she said yawning.

She lit up a cigarette
and lit mine too,
and we walked
into the lounge
and sat on the sofa.

Nurses passed
by us.

The Scottish woman
stared at her hands
which were shaking:
the DTs,
she said,
need a fecking drink,
feckin nurses an' quacks.

Yiska's knee
touched mine,
her nightdress
had risen up

as she sat,
and my dressing gown
had no belt
(least I try
to hang myself) .

Did you not sleep
last night?
I asked.

No I didn't,
not well,
she replied,
I thought of him
leaving me at the altar
and got angry again
and lay there
in the bed
listening to rain.

She took my hand
and we walked over
to the window
and peered out.

Rain was falling heavy,
the sky a dull grey.

I sensed her fingers
fold into mine,
slim and warm.

I wanted you last night,
she said,
but all we had
was the Scottish hag
moaning in her sleep.

We both inhaled
our cigarettes
and stood watching
the dull sky,

both in our own ways
wanting to go or die.

Terry Collett

To Go Or Not To Go.

There's a fun fair
on the bombsite

off Meadow Row
you told Fay

that Friday
on the way home

from school
and she said

I can only come
if my daddy's out

he thinks
all such things

are sinful
and if he

caught me there
he'd beat me for sure

Ok
you said

and let it dropp
and walked on

beside her
the afternoon heat

making you sweat
and then she said

I will try
to come if I can

and she looked sad
and her pale features

seemed even paler
and her eyes searched you

and you said
I hope you can

but if not another time
when the fair returns

and you both paused
at the kerb

as traffic rushed by
and her thin hand

reached out
and held yours

her fingers
touched yours

her thumb rubbing
against your thumb

and when the traffic stopped
because of the change of lights

you walked across the road
still hand in hand

she just a few steps behind
a case of

(as her father
often said)

the blind
leading the blind.

To Jimmy 1912-2007.

I remember the last evening
I saw you and talked, later
after we all left, you died
in the night. That time as

a boy you were cruelly
punished at the school by
the Christian Brothers
and your big brother

complained. In the War
you fought as a sergeant,
and had to train amongst
others the Glasgow gang

boys, who needed a different
strength for this combat
on blood soaked foreign soil.
You spoke and read Latin,

and could have been in
a different age and time
an officer, but you were
from the wrong class.

That evening you said:
I must catch up on my
Shakespeare again, maybe
together you and I. But

we never did. But I have
fond memories of us in
Lourdes, how I helped
save your life, if only for

another year, in God's good
grace, in which we all walk
and have our being at His pace.

To Judith 1948-1993.

That first time I saw you
on the school coach, my
first day at a new school
in 1962, you at the front
with your sister, eyeing
me with your bright eyes
and that engaging smile.

That first kiss while carol
singing with the church,
under the shining moon
and bright stars, me just
14 you 13, lips pressed
on lips and none saw.

The time we lay down
in the tall grass that hot
summer, school ended,
and talked and kissed.

We parted you went your
way and I mine, saw you
now and then, still your
bright eyes and that smile.

Your brother stopped me
in 1993, said you had died
from cancer, knew I loved
you those years ago, spoke
softly of you. Gone now,
just memories of then, and
those kisses and firm holds,
counting the years, and how
in the end it all closes and folds.

Terry Collett

To Meet Again

Your mother died
a peaceful death
no heart attack

no fight
for breath
no death rattle

into the night
just a sudden
departure

like a switched out light
all her long life
concluding in this

a gentle going
death's soft kiss
a daughter

at her mother's
bedside
holding her hand

her dementia
needed Teddy
held there

at the end
your mother
died suddenly

to an unexpected
sleep and rest
all worries

and anxieties
gone away
all hoping

and believing
to meet again
some day.

Terry Collett

To Mother (1921-2012)

That time as a young girl
(in the 1930s) taking your
younger sisters to the park
(in Dulwich) , and the man

at the old water fountain
exposed himself, and a boy
chased him with a shout
and rout, and you having

no brothers, didn't know
what it was the man was
showing, you not knowing
until your mother later

told you and you never
forgot. And that time in
the sanatorium in the War,
when the jam factory got

bombed, and girls were
rushed in covered in boiling
sugar, screaming with pain,
and even some nurses cried,

you later said, not able even
years after to get from your head.

Terry Collett

To Obey Mcmlxxi

Three monks met me
on the driveway
from the road
to the abbey
black robed
and a welcome
taking my bags
we walked
to the abbey
domus dei,

unfold me
she said
plant kisses
here and here,

bell tower
reaching skyward
bell sound
disturbing rooks
from nearby trees,

George washing
the refectory floor
with the large mop
and steel bucket
and moving
side to side,

il sacrificio di Cristo
the Italian monk said
la Messa quotidiana
I listened to him
as I helped him
to sort books
in the abbey library,

I kissed her breasts
one after the other

my husband doesn't
do that
so you must
she said,

Dio ama ognuno
di noi come se
ci fosse solo
uno di noi
Augustine said
so I read
and only God
could do
that I mused,

I cleaned
the windows
of the chapter house
with cloth
and cold water
musing on the monk
holding up the host
during Mass
with his shaking fingers,

les nombres parfaits
comme les hommes
parfaits sont très rares
Gareth said
quoting Descartes
as we sat
in the novice room
waiting for Dom Joe,

I tried to put her
from my mind
during Compline
tried to put the image
of her beneath me
moaning with her joy,

George and

I rang the bells
for Mass
the following day
wishing I could accept
the will of God
and obey.

Terry Collett

To Talk About It.

To talk about it
will help your grief,
the therapist said.

But each time
I talk about your death,
my son,

it opens up a wound
full of images,
echoes of last words

tormenting talk
of last time,
and things unsaid,

and no final farewells,
no last moment hugs
or utters of love yours.

Just the real,
the last words so normal,
so banal,

promises of a tomorrow
which came in a coma sleep,
and final departure

into the big sleep of death,
and that last eased
out breath,

and flat-lining heart,
to pain me
and trying to tear

me apart.
Talk about it,
she said,

so I did,
over and over
from all angles and sides,

and grabbing out
for other words
to explain,

but none can carry,
my son,
the weight of pain.

Terry Collett

To The Cinema Or Not 1959

We were lining up
for school dinner.

Fay was in
front of me.

Can you go
to the cinema
on Saturday morning?
I said.

Don't know
have to see what
Daddy says
she said
he doesn't like me
going to the cinema
he says it is sinful
stuff shown.

I frowned
and looked at her.

It's only films
I said
kid's stuff.

I'll ask him
she said.

After we got
out dinners
we sat
at the same table.

What is sinful
about going
to the pictures?
I asked.

Daddy says
that sometimes
the films show
a wrong side of life
and is against
our Catholic faith.

I go nearly
every week
twice some Saturdays
if my old man
takes me
I said.

Doesn't your father worry
about it being sinful?
she said.

Don't think he does
I said
least he's not said
anything about sin
only who is in it
and if its any good
I said.

We ate our dinner
I looked
at her blue eyes
and blonde hair
drawn into a ponytail.

Ask him
if you can
I said
it is only
films for kids.

I will
she said.

But I felt
she was reluctant
and would probably wait
until her old man
was away on one
of his religious retreats
or off away on business.

After dinner
we went into
the playground
she to play skip rope
with other girls
and I with Denis
to play cards.

Denis lost
and I had most
of his cards
which made him moody
but all is fair
in cards and war.

He walked off
and swore.

Terry Collett

Todgrin Tooled Up

Todgrin tooled up.
Had the names of the perps,
Their whereabouts,
Who they were and why
They shot his brother.
He stared at his reflection
In the mirror, took in
The hard eyes, the steely features.
He rehearsed his routine,
How he was going to get
The perps, get them alone,
See the shit scaredness
In their eyes, take his time,
Stretch out the anxiety
In them, see them squirm.
He recalled his brother's
Last words, mumbled through
Blood and pain, saw the bullet holes,
The mess of body. He looked
At the mirror one last time,
Grinned his grin, sickly, dangerous,
One his brother said could kill
A hawk in mid flight. He waited
Outside the first perps's place;
Saw him go in, bided his time,
Smoked a French cigarette.
The perp was sitting at a table
When Todgrin pushed a gun
Into the back of his head.
He informed the perp who he was
And why he was there. The perp
Sweated shit, mouthed innocence,
Said it was some other, wrong guy.
Todgrin pulled the trigger; splattered
The table with flesh, bone, and blood.
He took his time cleaning his gun,
Wiped and put away and looked out
The window at a bright sun blessed day.
He flexed his fingers; shook his head.

Three more to go; three more perps;
To bang bang bang dead.

Terry Collett

Together Bathed.

It was there
we ate:
that long place
with a bar
at one side
and chairs
and tables
and so on
on the other.

We sat
and talked,
and you ate
like you had
never eaten before.

I wanted to know
where you had been,
but you were
reluctant to say,
you wanted talk
of whatever
I had done
that day.

But you were
in dark places,
and your mood
was like one in a hell
or such place.

I said:
how are you?

And you said:
beyond words,
a place my mind
seems in darkness,
and the only light

is your eyes.

I smiled,
but then
I saw you
and how dark
your eyes were.

I thought
of that time
in the hotel
that cheap place
in Paris,
and we had
made love
three times
in a row
(after resting) .

The last time
you said:
there are angels
watching
at the foot
of the bed.

I laughed,
then we went
into the small room
and both together
we bathed.

Terry Collett

Together Forever

Together forever that's what she
thought and maybe she said it too
you can't recall it being such a while
ago but hey you loved her right even

if you never actually said so in so many
words at least not to her face not so she
could drink it in and set it amongst the
other dreams she had as a 14 year old girl

and what she thought of 14 year old you
you'll never know now and she never said
at least not to your face not so you could
tuck it in with the dreams you had of being

a racing driver or movie star or some such
other but being together forever never
took off and maybe without answer just her
dying years later with cruel creeping cancer.

Terry Collett

Too Concerned With Self

People are too concerned
with self, said Father Higgs.
His aged face as if hewn from
Rock, sat before you on broad

shoulders, the lips labouring
with the words. Too much
worried how self will feel,
how self will benefit. He

hunched forward, his large
eyes moving over you like
tired slugs. The symbol of
the cross, he said with a

movement of his head, is to
cut through the I, the sign
of the self. You noticed one
high brow, grey, larger than

the other, hair in nose like
insects in hiding. He breathed
out deeply. Self denial is
the essence of the message

of Christ, he said, a left
inclination of his head, his
teeth (not his own) large
and discoloured. You wanted

to ask questions, but he raised
a hand. The word I is stated
too often in conversations,
he said, or self too much

brought in as myself or herself
or himself or such as may be
used in talk. You understood
this was his way of lecturing.

His black monastic habit was
stained about the neck by food
or dribble or dried up phlegm.
We ought to be concerned with

others, he stated, wheezing, face
reddening, eyes enlarging. Where
is my inhaler? he wheezed, I really
must be off, this smoker's cough,

my poor old lungs, must get myself
a stronger inhaler and he was off,
out of the common room he had
caught you in some hour back.

All you saw was his hand and inhaler
and departing monastic habit of black.

Terry Collett

Too Far From Auntie's Gaze

Auntie said
don't go
too far away
with the mutt

I need to know
where you are
and so you
and the mutt

went down
the metal stairway
and off
into the barrack grounds

at Aldershot
keeping close
to the places
that your aunt

could see you from
and you could hear
soldiers marching
on the parade ground

and the sergeants
bellowing their orders
to the marching troops
and you sensed

the cold air
and frost
on the ground
as you walked

and the mutt sniffed
the earth
and you said
come on mutt

let's go for a run
and off you went
and the mutt followed
and overtook you

its tail wagging
its eyes large
and brown
like pools of chocolate

and lucid like mud
and you raced him
as far as you could
then you had to stop

for breath
and the mutt
stopped too
and looked back at you

its tongue hanging
from the corner
of its mouth
and you looked over

to where your aunt lived
and realised
she wouldn't
be able to see you

from where you were
and the dog didn't care
and the air
was chilling

your lungs
and your tongue hung
in the corner
of your little boy mouth

and the soldiers marched

and marched
and you stood watching
bent over

with your hands
on your knees
and big black birds
called out from the trees.

Terry Collett

Touch Of Hair.

I guess he won't.
Didn't last time
he came. Talked

for hours, but no sex,
talked of books
and ideas, but no sex

on the cards.
The floor is hard
beneath my back;

sunlight comes through
the windows like
a bright idea, but I am

not amused, he didn't
do a thing, no kiss
or loving words or sex,

just talk of Wittgenstein
and how it all went.
Mother's downstairs

preparing lunch. Father's
at work labouring with
his pen. Horace won't,

if he comes, didn't last
time, not so much as a kiss
or touch, feel of me

somewhere, a finger brush
through my hair. When he
comes, maybe I'll suggest

he does. Give hint of what
it is I want and how and where.
Just a kiss or hold or sex

or just a finger touch of hair.

Terry Collett

Touch Of Malaga 1970

That base camp at Malaga
tents and bars
and a wash-house

and showers
and best of all
of course

(after the bogs
and showers)
was the bar

and Miriam said
there's a disco tonight
at this place

you coming?
of course
why not

as long as you're here
and there's booze
I said

so we went
and it was hot
and there was too

many bodies dancing
(or such as
it was called)

and you had to fight
your way to the bar
through tides of people

in all kinds of clothing
and body smells
and hair styles

and girls with too much boob
so it blocked your way
and then once you got

to the bar you had
to make the bar keeper
understand your language

and if he could hear
through the din
of disco music

you eventually
got your drinks
and Miriam was over

in a corner at a table
she hogged
from some French guys

and she said
some guy pinched my arse
did he bring it back?

I said
she snorted through her nose
bringing up the last

drop of coke
I'm seriously
she said

sorry about that
and gave her her drink
and sipped my

rum and coke
and looked around the place
to see who may

have pinched her arse

but there were
too many bodies

dancing away
and chugging about
so I sat and said

I guess you have
a cute arse
and someone needed

to touch it to see
if it was real
maybe so

she said
but it's
my arse still.

Terry Collett

Tough School Work 1956

In class Mr Finn
talks about fractions
and denominators
and other stuff
I don't care to know

I see Janice
sitting at her desk
her fair hair
ribboned
and her small hand
and fingers
writing down
what he is saying

I scribble nothing
my page has a few
fractions and numbers
and my pen
drips blue ink
on the page
as I look at her

we went to the bomb site
off Meadow Row
last evening
(not too late
or her gran
will slap her one)
and we talked of Jesus
(or she was)
and how He died
and why none
of the disciples
came to his aid

Mr Finn says
Benny are you
listening to what

I am saying
about fractions?

Yes Sir
I reply
although I haven't
I have not a clue

what did I say
about this fraction?
He points
to the blackboard

I stare at the board
I missed that bit
I say

he sighs and repeats
(for me I guess)
what he has just said

Janice looks at me
she has lovely blue eyes

I smile
she frowns

Mr Finn talks
of improper fractions
and stuff

I study what
he's written
and think
school work
is tough.

Terry Collett

Towards The Church

Along the lane
towards Diddling
you stopped

and looked
at the church
on the horizon

between
the hedgerows
beneath

the blue
and white
clouded sky

Jane
stood next to you
her hand

holding yours
the softness
of her skin

against yours
her dark hair
tied

by a green ribbon
one of my favourite sights
she said

the church
becoming
more visible

the closer you get
her voice disturbed
birdsong

from the hedgerows
a blue tit
took flight

the flutter
of small wings
we never had hedgerows

in London
you said
no blue tit birds

no wide fields
or Downs
just streets

and houses
and pavement
and grass

around our flats
where pigeons
or sparrows

settled
for thrown out
bread

from windows above
Jane gazed at you
her dark eyes

focusing
I'd hate that
she said

I love my countryside
and fields
and birds

and open sky

she sniffed
the air

and you walked on
along the lane
she pointed out

wildflowers
and hedgerow plants
and talked

of the farmhand
who died
when his tractor

turned over
in a field
and the first time

she remembered
visiting
the small church

and her father
holding her high
above his head

so she could see
the expanse
of the Downs

and you listened
to her words
the language

holding you
and drawing you in
her lips opening

and closing
her summer dress
moving

as she walked
her sandaled feet
treading the lane

you wanted
to capture it all
to recall it

years later
all over
again.

Terry Collett

Treasure Of Kings.

He was no great one in aristology
until she showed him the ropes

and helped him learn the basics
of cooking a meal

and preparation of vegetables
and how to set a table

and he remembers the time
she bought him a potato peeler

and how excited he became
owning his very own peeler

with the wooden handle
and that ease of taking the skin

off the potatoes
and her daughter laughing

at how excited he became
at such a simple thing

and she saying to her daughter
simple things can sometimes

bring more joy than the gold treasures
of kings and lovelier still

the echo of her words
to him than birds that sing.

Terry Collett

Trip To The Tower.

Ingrid sat next to you
on the school hired coach
to the Tower of London
sun poured

through the window
making you feel hotter
and Ingrid
who usually smelt

of dampness
smelt of oranges
fresh peeled
her usual well worn

raincoat and cardigan
were gone
and she was clothed
in a creamy blouse

and green skirt
and off white socks
and plimsolls
(her shoes in

the shoe smith
being mended
she had said)
and you in a grey

open neck shirt
and grey flannel
short trousers
(no jeans

the teacher said
the day before)
and once all the kids
were aboard

and the teachers
had counted heads
the coach took off
and the talking erupted

and voices filled the air
and laughter and chatter
and you looked by Ingrid
at the passing view

she looked out too
her hair you noticed
washed and combed
and on her lap

in a bag
her packed lunch
and she held
the bag tightly

and you noticed
her fingers
the nails bitten
but the ink stains gone

and she turned
and said how excited
she was and that
she'd never been

to the Tower before
and that her dad had said
she wouldn't have gone
if her mother hadn't paid

and moaning
about the cost
and don't we have enough
to pay what with

one thing and another

and she lowered
her voice
and whispered

that her dad had hit her
for wanting to go
and her mother too
for interfering

and she pulled up
her skirt and showed you
a bruise on her thigh
then she looked away

and was silent
and you thought
that if you saw him
you'd have pop him

one with your cap gun
(symbolic of course)
then she turned
and said not

to tell anyone
and you said
you wouldn't
and she smiled

and squeezed your hand
and you hoped
none of the boys about
saw her hand

but you were glad
she had and you felt
kind of grown up
with a girlfriend

of your own
like those in the films
you'd seen where

the cowboy gets his girl

in those usual boring bits
you tended to hate
but there again
you and she were

just good friends
and only eight.

Terry Collett

Troppo Tardi

She's like a fruit stall
has it all laid out
I can suck her
or fondle she says,

this place stinks
of bars and latrines
and unmade beds
and unwashed bodies
but we embrace anyway
and kiss what it is
hard to see,

frutta giovane
ragazza sexy,

she opens up to me
and I to her
and it is fun
and we dish up dirt
on those who
dish up dirt on us
and it is cool
and we laugh
have sex and bath,

how dark the place seems
a distant echo
of cries and screams
like one does sometimes
in dreams but here
is no dream or if so
a nightmare kind
and we see
nothing much
as if blind,

we lay in the afternoon sun
drink booze and smoke

and joke and have sex
again again
then lay back
let dry the sour juices,

no light
no love
no warmth
no hands touching
or body seeking
just that far away echo
of what might have been
had we known
or knowing seen.

Terry Collett

Truth In The Scales 1956

I met Janice
by the gates
of Jail Park
off Bath Terrace
as it was near
to the flat
where she lived
with her gran
and her gran had said
it looked like rain.

The park was packed
with kids
but we managed
to get a ride
on the see-saw
going up and down
using her legs
as pumps.

Gran smacked me
last night
Janice said.

What for?
I asked.

Well she asked me
what I had been doing
and I told her
I had been using
your catapult
and that was it
Janice said.

Why did you
tell her?
I asked.

I always
tell Gran
the truth Benny
Janice replied.

Always?
I said.

She nodded
of course
it says in the Bible
to always
tell the truth.

Once the swings
were free
we went over
and took
a swing each
and pushed off
racing each other
into the air.

I mused on what
Janice had said
as she rode high
beside me.

I told the truth
when it was safe
to do so
but if in doubt
I thought
leave it out.

Terry Collett

Trying To See.

It's like the world stopped,
like someone
turned off the lights,

like some kid
in a dark room
full of frights.

Where, my son,
do I go from here?

The horizon is dull
and unclear.

I played
the Led Zeppelin album
you bought me last.

Seem to see your ghost,
can't catch it,
can't move so fast.

It's like the seasons
have all gone wrong,
like emptiness
has become the norm,

and can't recall
the lyrics
of my favourite song.

Like a child left
in a storm,
full of lights
and sounds,

and ancient woes,
trying to see
where the dead ones go.

Terry Collett

Two Bricks Over A Hole

You were sitting on the grass
outside your tent

at the base camp
along the road from Tangiers

smoking a cigarette
when Mamie came along

and stood with her arms folded
and her red hair damp

and her face flushed
like a spanked behind

Have you seen the latrines?
She asked

No not yet
you replied

she took a deep intake
of breath and then said

I expected at least
a white bowl

but there are just two bricks
over a hole in the ground

and no paper
to wipe yourself afterwards

you exhaled smoke
and said

You're meant to
take your own with you

Your own latrine?
She said angrily

No your own bog roll
you said

she sighed
and looked down

towards the beach
reaching to

the Mediterranean Sea
I haven't unpacked

my bags yet
she said

and you gazed at her
standing there

in her pink shorts
and white open necked blouse

and tried not
to imagine her

crouched on two bricks
over a hole

in the ground
her legs bent

her panties by her ankles
and her backside

mooning over the hole
Well

she said moodily
At least now you know

what to expect
and went off

towards the beach
her hips swaying

side to side
her taut buttocks

captured in her pink shorts
and the midday sun

touching your head
in a kind of blessing

with its heat
and you inhaled

smoke again
remembering the rain

coming through
Franco's Spain.

Terry Collett

Una Lies Abed 1997

Una lies in the bed
in the spare room
she can hear movement
in the bedroom next door

where Nuala lies
with her husband Brian
Una tries to shut out
the sounds

imagines it's
some others making love
bed bouncing
against the wall

wishing it was her
and Nuala making love
them making the bed bounce
as they did that last time

at her place before
she lost her home
and that first time
when they met

at a party
and it just happened in bed
and Brian unaware
his wife was being bedded

by a woman
the sounds get faster
and nosier
Una closes her eyes

puts her hands
over her ears
to shut out
the love making noise

next door
beneath her
the soft mattress
of the bed

she pretends Nuala
is there with her
making love
inside of her head.

Terry Collett

Una Wanting Sin 1997.

Una lies
in her bed
in the dark

Nuala
in her thoughts
Nuala

is at home
with her man
and I'm here

without her
I can trace
the outline

where she lay
the last time
beside me

imagine
her near me
there's moonlight

coming through
a slim gap
between the

two curtains
there's shadows
all around

and the sound
of late night
revellers

in the street
Una hugs
her body

pretending
Nuala's
body's there

all naked
warm scented
sexy beast

her two breasts
inviting me
her soft thatch

wanting me
just dreaming
she's not here

she's out there
with her man
in his bed

her Brian
the big lump
the softy

humping her
I've no doubt
while I'm here

all alone
lying here
self hugging

pretending
she is here
in Dublin

wanting her
wanting sin.

Terry Collett

Unburdened.

It's not the sort of house
You'd want to go to again,
Mildred said, the smell hits
You first, the kind of smell
That climbed in your nose
And didn't leave for days.

She sipped her wine and
Sat down on the couch,
Carefully holding the glass
With her other ringed hand.

There was an unhappy
Feel About the place as
You entered in, a feel
Of neglect. She looked
At the black and white
Mat under the coffee
Table, at the books lying
There: Fashion books, art,
How to Dress for the Occasion.

We found the first child
Drowned in a bath, the hair
Was floating there on the
Water's skin. Someone sort
Of sobbed or maybe they
Didn't, seemed as though
They had. The second child
Was lying beneath a blanket
Where they'd suffocated.

That's where the main smell
Came from. She breathed in
And smelt pine air freshener
That Caser used in his house,
She wanted to smoke, pull
Out a cigarette and light up,
But didn't. The third child,

Baby really, was stiff in a cot.

Unfed, unwashed, a token of
Neglect. Someone pulled back
Curtains, light broke through
Darkness, lit up the sad scene;
Another nearby let out a cry,
The under the breath kind.

She pushed her knees together
As if about to give birth to a
Different tale, her hands played
With the glass, a finger tapped
The side. The mother was found
In a darkened room, wrists slit,
OD'd days back, slouched in a
Chair, dressed in death and black.

Had sleepless nights after, she
Said, ought to be used to, but
You never are, kind of gets
Under the radar. Caser looked
At her sitting there, her hair
Pulled in a bun, her eyes looking
Up at the Picasso print he'd bought.

She had told him at last. She had
Unburdened herself of the one
Last thing that she couldn't tell
Him at the psychiatric sessions
They'd had at his in town clinic.

Never did like Picasso, she said,
Turning away, putting down the
Glass, as of nothing more to say.

Caser watched her as she got up,
Brushed down her dress, sighed
And walked down the hall, left
His apartment, victim of the Fall.

Terry Collett

Uncertainty 1957

Enid's old man passed me
on the concrete stairs
of the flats.

Hello Benny
he said
pausing briefly
eyeing me
with his eyes.

Is Enid allowed out?
I asked.

He looked past me
as if Enid stood
behind me.

Depends what
you are up to
he said
his eyes
on me again.

I'm going
to South Bank
to look at the River
see the boats
and tugs and ships pass
I said.

He raised his eyebrows
not sure that Enid
would be interested
in boats
he said.

I'm sure she'd
like to see
the River pass by

and maybe see gulls
I suggested.

He looked past me again
I have to go to work
you can ask her
if you want
but don't be late back
he said.

No we won't be late
I said.

He nodded
and walked
down the stairs
and out of sight.

I went to the balcony
and watched him
walk across the Square
hands in the pockets
of his coat.

Once he was gone
I climbed the stairs
to Enid's flat
and knocked at the door.

Enid's mother
came to the door
yes?
she said.

I've come to see Enid
I said
see if she wants
to go see the boats
and tugs on the Thames.

Not sure if her father
will allow that

she said timidly.

I've just seen him
he said it's ok
I said.

She looked at me
are you sure?

Yes he's just gone
we met on the stairs
I said.

I noticed a mild bruising
of her left eye.

She stared at me
then called Enid
over her thin shoulder
she gazed at me
then walked to the balcony
and looked down
to see if her old man
was coming back again
but he wasn't
so she came back.

Enid came to the door
and I repeated to her
what I had said before.

Terry Collett

Uncle Fred And The Sand Dance

Your Uncle Fred
on Christmas Eve
at Gran's house

when you were a kid
did the sand dance
wearing an old fashion

man's striped nightgown
and a red fez
(he got that in Egypt

during WW2
Gran said)
and brown

open toed sandals
and Uncle Ed
turned the handle

of the windup gramophone
where an old
78rpm record

was playing
and there were
glasses of sherry

being consumed
and cigarettes being smoked
and you sat watching

clapping your hands
and Gran would get up
afterwards

and do her Can-Can
like she used to
as she young woman

on the stage
and Granddad sat there
quiet saying nothing

looking at
the people gathered
sipping his sherry

watching his wife
lifting her legs
her white fuzzy hair

going to and fro
as she moved
and you wanted

to have some sherry
but your mother said
no you have lemonade

little boys
don't have sherry
so you sat

with your lemonade
watching Uncle Fred
and his dance

and the music coming
from the old gramophone
and the smell of sherry

and beer and cigarette smoke
and Uncle telling the adults
one of his old army jokes.

Terry Collett

Uncleaned Sink

She loved Bach and listened
To him whenever she had the
Chance and while sitting listening
She gazed at her Picasso prints
And sipped the cola she mixed
With vodka and remembered
Ricans trying to make it with her
But she not interested in that
Side of being with him not wanting
To see the all too human side not
Wishing to see that aspect which
Made him all so much like everybody
Else just wanted that part of him
Which sat and listened to Bach and
Gazed at the Picasso prints sipping
Vodka and cola which she hoped made
Him think of higher things than sex
Drugs or the uncleaned bathroom sink.

Terry Collett

Uncle's Shave.

Uncle's Shave.

You used to watch Uncle
shave in front of the small mirror

propped on the edge
of the kitchen sink,

his face lathered
in white soap,

his cutthroat razor
held just a short distance

from his skin
by his right hand,

as the other hand
held the skin taut

in preparation
of the razor's slide.

You stood behind
fascinated,

your young eyes
searching the mirror's world

of Uncle's face
and the performers start.

Uncle watched you
in the mirror,

his lips breaking
into a small smile,

the razor held

just above his ear,

his eyes staring above
the shaving foam,

taking in
your fascinated gaze,

the open mouth,
your hands copying

Uncle's motion
in pretend shave.

Uncle drew the razor down
his cheek in slow motion,

the face becoming visible
as the soap gave way,

the hand dipping
the razor in water

to rid of foam,
to begin again,

more soap removed,
more skin revealed.

You copied Uncle,
but not so skilled.

Terry Collett

Under A Blue Sky

Look at that blue sky
she said

as you lay beside her
in the field

behind her house
and she pointed upward

and you followed her finger
as it indicated

the expanse of blue
and white clouds

and a few birds in flight
That cloud formation

seems like angels with harps
and that

she added pointing
further over

Looks like a horse's head
you nodded and said

And that formation
over there

looks like Miss Brody's ass
and she slapped your hand

and laughed
and her laughter

carried over the field
and there was that moment

you never wanted to end
like when she kissed

and her tongue protruded
into your mouth

or when she held you close
and you breathed in

her scent
borrowed from her mother

Just a dab
behind the ears

she had said
but that was years before

the cancer had her
but the memory of her

is still here
alive and undead.

Terry Collett

Under Apple Trees

She lay beside you
under the apple trees

the bees and butterflies overhead
the glimmer of sunlight

through the branches
and she said

I can smell the apples
from here

and if I close my eyes
I feel I'm in a foreign field

lying in some overseas orchard
and happy beneath the sun

and you turned your head
and said

Am I with you
lying in that orchard

beneath a foreign sun?
and you studied her profile

the shadows dancing
across her cheek

a butterfly just above her head
Sure

she said
As if I'd dream of anywhere

without you by my side
and she reached out a hand

and touched your fingers
with hers and it seemed

a pulse danced
between the fingers

as if love momentarily
could be felt

could be sensed
in the space

between fingers
and riding

in the hearts
and heads

and she turned
to face you

her eyes reflecting
a different sun

and your hand sliding
along her thigh

and she shaking
her head slightly

eased out
a soft sigh.

Terry Collett

Underhill In The P.E. Room 1962

On the playing field
Underhill
was second to none
but off it
he was a big turd
who bullied boys
smaller or less skilful
than he was at football.

We were in the school
changing room
waiting for the PE teacher
to pick his team
for the match.

Underhill came over
to where I was standing.

I've seen babies
dribble better
than you Coles
he said.

And I've smelt
their nappies
reminding me of you
I replied.

He squared up to me
his 6ft over my head.

You want to watch
your mouth frog.

You're blocking out
my daylight.

Other kids
made a small circle

around us
and chanted
fight fight fight.

I've seen toddlers
kick a ball
better than you
he said.

I shouldn't stand still
too long or a farmer
might mistake you
for dung and spread you
over his land
for fertilizer
I replied.

Fight fight fight
the kids chanted
about us.

I got on my toes
ready to weave
and punch.

He stood toe to toe
with me looking
down at me.

WHAT IS GOING ON
the PE prat bellowed out
from the changing room
doorway.

The kids dispersed
and I mingled with them
Underhill tried to mingle
unsuccessfully.

Well what is
going on?

Nothing Sir
Underhill said
just showing others
my passing skill.

The PE prat
looked around at us
his beady eyes
searching out victims.

Right line up
I need a solid team
to play against
Barnside Seniors.

We lined up
against the wall.

I wouldn't be chosen
(thank God)
but Underhill was
almost straight away.

I was hoping
the team lost
it would make
my day.

Terry Collett

Underhill Scores 1962

Underhill stood
in line with you
in the boys'
changing room
waiting to be picked
for the football team.

The PE teacher
walked the line
eyeing each boy in turn
picking whichever boys
he wanted
for the team
as he went.

He walked
past me
without even
looking at me.

He picked Underhill
who stood at the end
hands behind his back
eyes forward
staring at
the opposite wall.

You Underhill
can be centre-forward
the PE prat said
walking back
up the line
to select the last
few members.

He passed me again
and chose Jupp
as left back
and Rolland

as goalie.

Those of us
who had not
been chosen
stood in line
looking around.

You Brown and Tope
can be lines-boys
the rest of you
will have to watch.

The PE prat
walked off
and his team
followed him out
onto the field.

We no bodies
walked behind
the team
and stood
on the sidelines
waiting to watch
the match against
another school.

I was glad
I wasn't chosen.

I preferred
to watch
or look over
to the girls
playing netball
in the playground
seeing if any girl
I knew was there
jumping
and reaching high
their bodies beauties

in motion.

Underhill scored a goal
and a cheer went up
he jumping around
like a big girl.

But I turned away
and watched
the real girls
with their
bouncing bodies
and hair and curls.

Terry Collett

Underhill's Mood 1961

Underhill
was not impressed
he had not
been chosen
for the school
soccer team.

He stood with me
and other kids
who didn't
want to play.

Why'd he not
choose me
I am one
of the best
centre-forwards
he's got?
Underhill said.

I watched
the PE teacher
playing referee
blowing his whistle.

I said
I guess not.

You're full of shit
Underhill said.

You're full of bluff
I replied.

He was bigger
than I was
broader
and taller.

You've
too much lip
he said.

The whistle
blew again
and we both watched
the teams play.

Not your day
I said.

He stormed off
up to the lines boy
who waved a flag.

I thought
of Jane
who had
kissed me
up on the Downs
the day before
wet lips
soft
the best kiss
I'd ever had.

Underhill
was moaning
at the lines boy
in a mood
and I was glad.

Terry Collett

Understanding Women

Grassfly didn't understand women;
Never quite grasped their fundamental
Psychology; never quite knew the trick
To get them on his side. His mother was
A matriarch who ruled the home with a
Big stick and a tongue like a viper's spit.
Got to understand women, son, she'd say,
Else your limp life'll be worth shit. He loved
To play piano; it gave him an outlet playing
His Schubert or Chopin pieces against the
Backdropp of his mother's tongue. His woman
Friend, Big Bess, who wore outlandish clothes
And an XXL dress, was a mystery to him, like
Some character from Finnegans Wake, who
Loved to dance and say, Look Boy, see my big
Ass shake. Grassfly thought women an enigma;
God's afterthought; the proverbial eater of
Apples, the talker with snakes. He played his
Piano pieces, watched with dulled disinterest,
Big Bess's breasts and broad ass shake.

Terry Collett

Undesired Sex 1997

Even as
her husband Brian
shags her,
Nuala thinks of Una.

Even as his body
pounds into her
in passionate gaming,
she wants it to be
Una there not him,
not Brian.

She lies there
allowing him his pleasure,
his need,
listening to his sighs,
and grunts,
and 4 minute workout.

Even as he shudders
himself to a big climax,
she feels nothing,
but a tingle of regret
and unearned sweat.

He lies back on
his side of the bed,
breathless,
panting,
taking large gulps
of bedroom air.

She just looks up
gives the ceiling a stare.

How was it for you?
He asks eventually,
turning to gaze at her,
a look of satisfaction

on his face.

It was good,
she lies,
best yet.

He smiles,
and puts a hand
on her right tit.

Have you heard
from that friend, Una?
He asks.

No I've not,
she lies,
looking at his eyes,
and how innocent
they are,
how childlike
he seems.

He tells her
of his day at work
in soft utters;
she listens on and off
thinking of the sex
she'd had with Una
that afternoon;
how hot and wet
she'd been,
needing a hot shower
to get clean.

She lets him talk on,
hoping he won't
want sex again that night;
she's not up to it,
all she wants
is sleep and rest,
not more sex
with him,

the 3 minute trier,
and boring pest.

Terry Collett

Unexpected Father.

Your mother
had brought Helen

home for tea after school
and she had held on

to the handle
of the pram

your mother pushed
and you walked

along side
thinking of whether

to show her
your toy soldiers

and cowboys and Indians
and the guns

that fired
loud banging caps

or whether to just sit
and watch the TV

and eat your tea
and show her nothing

but once you got home
and your mother went off

to the kitchen to prepare
the tea stuff and such

Helen looked at you
and shyly smiled

and said
Can I see your sister's dolls

and pram
and does she have

a doll's house
I could play with?

you dismissed the idea
of showing her

the guns that fired caps
or your toy soldier collection

and took her
into the room

where you kept the toys
and pointed to

your sister's dolls
and the pram

and said
Take care

my sister doesn't like
people messing

with her stuff
and Helen nodded

and picked up a doll
and held it to her chest

and rocked it
to and fro

and walked up and down
murmuring there there sounds

that echoed softly
around the room

Where's your sister?
Helen asked

will she mind me
rocking the baby to sleep?

Guess not
you replied

and stood watching her
as she walked

and talked to the doll
in an undertone

and you stood there
hands in pockets

like a father
of an unexpected child

wondering what to say
or do and taking in

her thick lens glasses
and her eyes

seemingly enlarged
focusing on the doll

and the way her head
moved from side to side

so that her plaited hair
went from side to side

and up and down
and she said softly

and suddenly
We may have a baby like this

one day and you had better
say something more

than you are now
or I'll think

you didn't want it
and off she walked

up and down the room
and hoped your mother

would come soon
and save you from the fate

of being the father
of a doll with a dodgy eye

and a painted smile
but having a tender spot

for Helen
all the while.

Terry Collett

Unmade Bed.

She always left
the bed unmade,

left the sheets and covers
pushed back,

let in some air,
let the smells of night

and making love depart.
And there was

the occasional
making of love,

the now and then
exchange of fluids,

the kisses on flesh,
the fingerings,

the sighs and yeses,
the catching

of moonlight
through uncurtained

windows.
She left the bed

unmade like some
symbolic gesture;

a sign of this
is how it is

with me
statement.

Men and women
have wrestled

with love
and doubts here,

she seemed
to want to say.

Two indented pillows
on either side

of the bed,
two holders

of the frail
human head.

She left
the unmade bed

with stains and smells
and memories

soaked in
as each particle

of cloth held
and branded

the human state
of sin.

Terry Collett

Unnecessary

Unnecessary,
Auntie said,

when you asked
about taking the mutt

for a walk;
he can take himself

for a walk,
in fact,

she continued
straining the cabbage,

the green water
pushing through

the stainless steel colander,
he runs,

he loves to run
all over the fields.

You knew he did,
you used to run with him,

and being that kind of mutt
he'd let you run beside him,

you being a small boy,
you being the one

who shared his bacon rinds,
you the one who filled

his water bowl
when Auntie forgot.

Sit down now,
Auntie said,

dinner is about
to be served,

and I hope
you have washed

your hands,
and she'd dish you

a large serving
of cabbage

with your meal
and she didn't see

how that was so
unnecessary.

Terry Collett

Unseen Rainbows 1965

I met Tilly after she
had finished work,
before she caught
her bus home, we

went to a milk bar,
had a coffee and bun.
What did your mum say
about you coming to my

place to listen to LPs?
I said. She doesn't trust
you, Tilly said, and she
doesn't believe your mum

will be there to supervise.
I sipped my black coffee
disappointed. What about
on your half day? She need

not know you're coming
to my place; we can play
my sister's Beatles LPs or
my Elvis, I said. Too risky,

she might wonder why I'm
not home on my half day,
Tilly said. I lit a cigarette
and so did she. Tell her in

advance you've got some
stock-taking to do. Tilly
sighed: I've done more
stock-taking recently;

she'll suspect I'm up to no
good. I looked at her and
smiled; I tried and failed,
but at least I can look at

you now and enjoy your
beauty, I said. She frowned:
I am off on holiday the week
after next, maybe we could

arrange something then,
she said, I have an uncle
in Richmond and he's asked
me to stay and look after his

house for a few days while
he's away. Richmond? I said,
I suppose I could take a day
off and meet you. No, she said,

a night as well. I smiled and
so did she. Sometimes there's
a rainbow you just don't see.

Terry Collett

Until Early Dawn 1975

I liked her in her red dress,
I liked her out of it, too,
but the dress made her
more dangerous,
more dangerous than
she usually was.

Netanya, I said,
you look devilish
in that dress,
it brings out
the hotness in you.

Teddy, she said,
you're only just
saying that to get me
in bed tonight
and have your
wicked way.

Of course, I said,
but more than that,
there is a deeper danger
in you, and the redness
brings it out.

Shall I wear the red dress
in bed tonight?
she said, or go
to bed without?

I watched her dance;
other guys watched her, too;
some danced with her,
thinking their luck
would hold.

I didn't dance with her,
I just sat and boozed

and watched.

I slept with her
that night;
she didn't wear
her red dress,
but naked as
she was born,
and we made love
from dark night
until early dawn.

Terry Collett

Unwanted Gift.

Carmody said
what did you get
your old man
for his birthday?

well
you said
my sister and I
saved up

what money we could
siphoned off
some of our pocket money
took back

the empty beer bottles
to the off licence
did extra chores
for our mother

and went bought him
some cigarettes
and gave them to him
what did he say?

Carmody asked
said he didn't smoke
that kind
said they made

his throat sore
that was what he said?
yes and my sister
was upset of course

and went off
to her room to cry
but I just said
but it's the thought

that counts
and we just thought
you'd smoke the cigarettes
look ok thanks

for the thought
the old man said
and took the packet
and stuffed them

in his pocket
and read
the birthday card
we'd both written him

and put it on the table
and said
how much did you get
on the empty bottles?

so I told him
and he said
they were my bottles
I ought to

have had the money
for them kid
you have
I told him

In the form
of the cigarettes
what did he say
about that?

Carmody asked
he just stared
and took the cigarettes
out and opened them up

and lit one

and inhaled
and coughed
and I thought

good job too
and walked away
and Carmody
nodded his head

and sniggered
and you went off
with him to kick
around the ball

in the playground
at school
and said nothing
much more at all.

Terry Collett

Unwanted Wealth

On the way home from school
you and Helen stopped

and looked in the window
of the pie and eel shop

where a man was cutting off heads
of live eels

and then slitting them open
and knifing out the guts

and then chopping them
up into small pieces

and Helen said
yuk what's he doing

to those poor eels?
you were engrossed in watching

the man's knife slit through
the necks so easy

that the pieces still wriggled
after he pushed them

into a bucket on the side
people eat them

you said
whether jellied

or in pies
with mash and liquor

horrible
Helen said

how could they?
People will eat anything

you replied
turning to gaze

at her horrified face
her eyes magnified

behind her thick lens spectacles
I read somewhere

that some people ate others
in the Leningrad siege

you added
she grabbed your hand

and squeezed it tight
they never did

you're lying
she said

her eyes focused on you
and not the eels

or the man executing them
you saw her lower lip tremble

and said
ok they didn't

you said softly
she looked back at the man

and the eels
and sighed

and you felt her warm flesh
and her small thumb

on the back of your hand
and although you knew

what had happened
you lied to protect her

from the truth
not wanting her innocence

undone by brutal humanity
and its wars

and you kept it
to your 9 year old self

a whole bundle of facts
like an unwanted wealth.

Terry Collett

Unwittingly 1964.

Unwittingly
Milka's mother
turned Benny on.

He'd go there
on Saturday mornings
to wait for Milka
to take her out
some place
and her mother'd
get him tea and toast
and talk in that
warm motherly
voice of hers.

He'd sit there
watching her
seeing how full
her breasts were
through her top.

How smooth
her hips moved
when she moved
about the kitchen.

He liked the scent
she wore
it reminded him
of that actress
he'd walked past
in London as a kid
with his old man.

Now Milka
came down stairs
after getting herself
washed and dressed
(her mother

having insisted)
and sat at the table
next to Benny
and he drawing
his eyes back in
from her mother
and on Milka.

How's it going?
he asked.

All right
Milka said
eyeing her mother
who was busy
about the breakfasting.

You took your time
her mother said
Benny's been here
sitting patiently
waiting for you.

Benny put on
his innocent smile
and tucked away
her mother's fruits
and scent as if
he never seen them
or the smell not
heaven sent.

Terry Collett

Upon My Flesh 1962

It was summer,
the birds sang loudly
celebrating another day.

I sat next to Yehudit
on the grass
by the pond
(she labelled it
the lake) .

I could see
the outline of her bra
through her
cream blouse
as she turned
around to watch ducks
which had just landed.

Her brown hair
had been well brushed
and tied in a bow
at the back
with red ribbon.

What ducks
are those?
She said.

I looked and said:
live ducks, dead ones
don't move like that.

She looked at me:
funny I don't think,
no what
breed of ducks?
She said.

Don't know

what type,
I said.

I thought you
were an expert
on birds?

I know
some birds,
but it doesn't
make me
an expert
on ducks,
I said.

She looked back
at the pond.

Do you remember
that time
we first had sex
in the woods
back there
that evening?
She said.

Of course,
I said,
and we had a job
to find a spot
that was hidden yet
comfortable enough
to lie down.

She turned around
and smiled
and said:
and every sound
seemed louder
and we thought
we heard voices
and lay still listening.

I remembered
as she said it:
us lying there,
she naked
from the waist down
and me also,
still as statues there,
the evening
drawing in,
a chill beginning
on our skin.

Yes I
remember that,
I said.

She kissed me
and we lay back
on the grass,
staring at the sky,
bright blue,
morning fresh,
and an echo
of that evening
running upon
my flesh.

Terry Collett

Us Being There.

Beyond the pram sheds
Chana rode her bike.

I was with Helen
watching from the balcony
of the flats.

Rides well,
doesn't she?
Helen said.

I watched
as Chana rode
around and around
the pram sheds.

Wish I had a bike,
but my parents
can't afford one,
I said.

Mine neither;
even the doll's pram I've got
is from a jumble sale.

Chana rode down the slope
and out of sight.

What about Battered Betty?
where did that doll come from?

My grandmother
gave it to me;
I think it was hers.

Where do you
want to go?
I asked her.

What about the park
and ride on the swings?

Sure, fine.

So we walked
down the stairs
and out through
the Square;
the morning
sunshine warming;
other kids playing
here and there;
the baker's
horse and cart
parked by the wall
of the other flats.

The park was busy;
the swings
were all occupied;
the slide and see-saw
were also engaged.

We waited,
sitting in a seat nearby,
she talking of wanting
a new doll's pram
she'd seen in a shop
and I listening,
taking in
her two plaited bunches
of brown hair;
her thick lens glasses
and us
being there.

Terry Collett

Uxley Knew Nothing Of Women.

Uxley understood nothing of women.
He knew nothing of women except
Some dark memory of his mother's teats
Buried deep in his mind's depth.
Women, his father said, are an enigma,
An unsolvable puzzle, that no man
Can understand or get to grips with
No matter how old he is or gets.
Uxley missed his father's words,
His narrow perspective, his keen eye
For the women's physique, his philosophy
Of the Eve dilemma, the apple in the Garden
Of Eden problem. Uxley never married,
Never had sex, never saw a woman naked,
Except a onetime quick glimpse of his mother
Passing naked through the hall one cold Fall.
Even at cafes, sitting drinking coffee with friends,
He seldom gave the passing girls a second glance,
Not like his friends with their whistles and words
And wormy wishes. He sat and looked away,
Thinking the second sex a different species,
An area best left untouched, unknown,
Best left to the suckers who drowned
In the dark beneath. He recalled his mother
Clothed in the long robes, the tall thin features,
The drawn painted lips his father kissed,
The long red nails that jabbed in his back
To push him to school or bath, and there
In that memory her dark eyes and haughty laugh.

Terry Collett

Vacancy 1972

I saw it in the window
of an art shop
vacancy apply within
so I went in to apply

an old guy with a moustache
came up to me and said
can I help you Sir?

I've come about the vacancy

o Abela there's a man here
about that vacancy

a young woman came in
from the back of the shop
she was shorter than I was
neat and compact
with dark hair

you've come
about the vacancy?

yes I saw it
as I was passing by
I said

have you worked
in an art shop before?

no not in any shop

she frowned
she had a nice forehead
what makes you think
you can be of help to us?

I like art
and I know most

of the genres of art
and artist's names

she looked past me
then back at me
are you an artist?

no I'm a poet

she walked away
a few paces then
turned to gaze
at the passing people
outside the shop window

look it's nearly 1pm
maybe we can go next door
to the public house
and have lunch
and talk things over
she said

sure I'd like that
I said

so we left the old guy
in charge of the shop
and went into the bar

we ordered and sat down
with our drinks
and a round of sandwiches

what is your name
how old are you?
she said

my name's Benny
and 24 years old

she was younger
by a year or so

and what was your
previous occupation?
she said

I studied her as she spoke
she had white teeth
and a smallish tongue

I was a nurse

she frowned

why aren't you
still a nurse?

too long hours
and crap pay

she leaned back
in her chair
and flicked back
her hair

are you an artist?
I asked

she nodded

what kind of art
do you do?
Pop Art
she said

I sipped my drink
(small scotch)

what kind of poetry
do you write?

modern none
of that Wordsworth

kind of thing

she leaned forward
holding a sandwich

I noted the impression
of her neat tits

we close on Sundays
but you can have
another day off
in the week
but not Saturdays
as that is our busiest day
I have Wednesdays off
as I like a break in my week
she said

I've got the job?
I said

a month's trial
she said
and told me
the rates of pay
and the hours

so we ate and drank
and then we returned to the shop
and she said
see you Tuesday then
9am

ok
I said
and watched her walk
back up into the rear
of the shop

I waited as people
behind me walked pass
she had a fine sway

and neat ass.

Terry Collett

Valladoliid And Beyond 1970

You can get off
for half hour
and look around
if you want
the coach driver said

what's this place?
Miriam said

it's Valladolid
he said

so we got off
and walked off around
and we found a cafeteria
and sat outside
and a camarero
took our order

and we sat there
and Miriam said
isn't Spain good
I mean you read about it
and the brochures
but when you get here
it's quite something
isn't it?

yes I guess it is
although they mostly
show the best places
I guess even here
there are slums
and places you'd not
want to wander
too far in the dark

she raised an eyebrow
so? but most places

are out of this world

Pluto is out of this world
but don't mean
I'd like to go there
I said

you're just being awkward
she said

she crossed her legs
and sat looking
away from me

I liked her red hair
tight curled
and the way her boobs
kind of stuck out
in the tee shirt
she was wearing
and the red shorts

o I liked red
so intimate
and the way her leg
crossed over the other

it's a good sight
I said
plenty to see

she turned
and gazed at me
you like it?

sure good to look at
and better to be
about it makes the eyes
glad to be alive

glad you like it
she said

all this way we've come
and to see it up close

yes I like it up close
I said

she smiled
and I liked her smile
her eyes sparkled
like sunlight in water

and the camarero came out
with our order
and we sat drinking
our coffees
and nibbling the cakes

and she said
glad you like the view

I smiled
o I do
I said
I do.

Terry Collett

Very Well Don't 1977

Very well
don't then
Benny said.

Netanya turned
over in bed.

He could see
her bra strap outline
through her flimsy
night dress
of gentle pink.

Her dark hair
with tints of grey

She had one
of her heads
and was tired
and fed up
with sex anyway.

He stared
at the ceiling
in the semi dark
where patterns made
by street lights outside.

A car went past
headlights racing
across the room
then gone.

The dog barked
downstairs.

He thought
back to Yiska
years before

in the woods
by the playing field
at high school.

Them lying there
in amongst the scrubs
she removing underclothes
quickly in her passion.

He listening out
in case prefects came.

Boys playing football
gave yells and shouts
out on the field.

He entered her
and pumped
in amateur fashion.

Both excited
and exhausted passion.

Netanya's back
is curved away.

He can smell
her foreign scent
she buys.

No sex tonight
no game to play
or urge to satisfy.

Her passion
gone or spent.

He lay awake
drinking in
her foreign scent.

Victoria's Victory 1914

The two cops
cornered you
to a park bench
where you sat
puffed out
after the run
(as much as you
could run
in that heavy skirt) .

One cop
takes your wrist
as if you'd resist
after all that.

The other cop
looks at you
pityingly.

Big beefy men
whom once
would not
have looked
at you twice
what with your
dark straight hair
oval face
pale and thin.

One holding
your wrist
says something
about arrest
the other takes out
his handcuffs
and puts them
on your narrow wrists
and heaves you up
on your feet.

Others gather
women mostly
calling names
offering support.

You walk
as dignified
as you can
walking past
the crowd gathered
men jeering
women cheering.

Not to forget
(a voice calls)
you're a suffragette.

Terry Collett

Visit To The Train Station.

You and Fay got off the bus
and walked towards Waterloo train station

and you said
I often come here

just to see and smell
and hear the steam trains

and she looked about her
at the sights and sounds

and smell of steam off the trains
at the platforms

and she said
I haven't been here

since my parents took us
to the seaside once

and my father was in a cross mood
all day because we wanted to play

on the beach and he wanted to go
to the pubs and my mother sat there

most of the day watching us
in a solemn silence

and she jump back a little
when a steam engine

blew out loudly nearby
and she laughed

and so did you
and as you stood there

in your faded jeans
and off white tee shirt

and she in her pink
summery dress

she took your hand
in her small hand

and you watched her
out of the corner of your eye

and she seemed to be so alive
and happy and all the dark times

of her father and his moods
and stern punishments

seemed momentarily
to have fled

and a glint of sunshine
and happiness came

and rested there
instead.

Terry Collett

Visiting Judith 1962

Her mother
looks at me
there at the

door of her
cottage. Is
Judith still

allowed out?
I ask her.
She's upstairs

washing her
hair, she says.
Can I wait?

Wait for what?
For Judith
to go out,

I answer.
I suppose,
come in then,

she tells me.
I go in;
she closes the

front door
and shows me
where to sit

in the lounge.
Just wait here,
she utters.

She goes off
leaving me
all alone.

I'd been here
once before
for Judith's

14th birth-
day party
a whole month

after mine,
and we played
with others

(mostly kids)
hide and seek,
and we hid

in the tall-
boy in her
small bedroom,

kissing there
out of sight,
hearing voices

calling out.
Judith comes
down the stairs

her head wrapped
in a towel,
her mother

following her
just behind.
Judith smiles,

her eyes bright
like those stars
shining out

in dark nights

Terry Collett

Visiting Julie

Chocolates and cigarettes?
Julie says

as you sit in a chair
opposite her

in the rest room
of the hospital

in the psychiatric ward
I thought you'd prefer them

to flowers
you reply

yes
she says

flowers tend to lie
heavy in my gut

and she smiles
and you look at her there

with her dark hair
long but dishevelled

I haven't brushed my hair
or bathed yet

she says
seeing you look at her

but you can scrub my back
if you want

she says
watching you blush

best not
you say looking away

seeing out the window
a small garden

with summer flowers
but sensing

a slight movement
in your groin

at the mere thought
of her suggestion

how did you find me?
she asks

of all the hospitals
and all the wards

in this area
you managed to walk

into mine
she adds

you make me sound
like Bogart to Bacall

you say shyly
how about a drink later

down the road to the bar?
she says

You're permitted to drink
while on drugs?

you ask
studying her eyes

and her lips slightly parted
only cola

she says pulling a face
but at least it gets me

out of this place
for an hour or so

you look at her
a small stirring

still taking place
between your thighs

there's a small room
where they keep brooms

and brushes and such
where we can go

for a quickie
she says

looking at you
studiously

then breaking
into a laugh

at the sight
of your shocked face

some other time
you say

some other place
cigarette?

she asks
opening up

the pack you'd brought
you nod

and she hands you one
between her slim fingers

and you place it
between your lips

and she lights it
with a small red

plastic lighter
and you heave in

and feel the smoke
hit the back

of your throat
she inhales deep

and says
I prefer the ones

that make me float
and you see hollowness

open up in her
and her eyes

become wide open spaces
like cold winter skies.

Terry Collett

Viva La France 1973

Viva la France
Sonya said drunkenly
as we ascended the stairs
to our small room
in the cheap hotel
in Montparnasse.

She swayed at the top
of the stairs outside
our narrow room door.

I love Paris
she said
and tried to put
the key in the keyhole.

Why does it not fit?
she said.

Here let me
I said
and took the key
and opened the door.

She went in
and I followed.

We'd been arguing
in the cafe about philosophy
she and her Kierkegaard
and me picking holes in it
and pushing
my mixed up Marxism.

She flopped on the bed
arms wide
I WANT TO MAKE LOVE
she said loudly.

The windows open
the curtains flapping
in the evening air.

I guess most of Paris
can know that now
I said
looking down
on the narrow
street below
the Rue something
or other.

Come here
now to me
she said
softer more
seductively
beckoning me
with her finger.

Want another
drink too
she said.

I went to the small table
and opened
the bottle of wine
we had and poured
her a glass for us both
and handed her one.

She gulped it down
that is better
she said.

I sipped mine
and gazed at her
lying there.

She put the glass
on the bedside table

and lay there.

Undress me
she said gently.

I went over
and began
to undress her
but she went to sleep.

I left her be
and lay beside her
the sex would keep.

Terry Collett

Vocation Talk 1960

We sat
on the deserted
air-raid shelter
in the grass
by Banks House

it was Saturday afternoon
the sun warm

I may want to be a nun
when I leave school
Fay said

I looked at her
why would you want
to be one of those?
I said

I think I may
have a vocation
she replied
looking at me
with her blue eyes

what's that?
I said

a calling from God
to serve Him
in a religious life
she said

I looked at her fair hair
the way she had it
tied in a ponytail

what about us?
I said
I thought we might

get married years to come
and move away
from your old man
and see the Old West

she frowned at me
nuns can't marry
she said
they have to be celibate

I lowered my eyes
to the yellow flowered dress
she was wearing

what's celibate mean?
I said
turning to look
at the coal wharf
where coal lorries
and horse drawn wagons
were being
loaded up with coal

it means abstaining from marriage
and sexual relations
Sister Jude told me
Fay said

but we're not sexual relations
I'm just a friend
I said
turning back to look at her
but why not marry?

Fay gazed at me
because Sister Jude said
we marry God
marry Our Lord

I sighed
but you're only 12 like me
how can you be a nun?

I said

not now when I'm older
when I'm 16 say
she said

you said last week
your mum might take you away
from here away
from your old man
and brothers what then?

she looked at her hands
in her lap

don't know
have to see what happens
she said

she looked at me
don't tell anyone
we might be leaving Benny
it's secret
she said

I won't tell a soul
I said

she kissed my cheek
and said
thank you Benny

I took out a packet
of football cigarette cards
from my jeans pocket
and showed her
my favourite
which was Stanley Matthews

she took it and stared at it
then gave it back to me

she had tears
in her blue eyes
and they seemed as if
they were in water

I wanted to tell
her mum
not to take away
her little daughter.

Terry Collett

Vole And I 1958

Vole was a small kid
wore narrow
wired framed glasses
cropped
mousey hair
piggy eyes.

He sat next
to me in class
smelt of yesterday's
dinner
and last week's
wash.

But I liked him
he was funny
and generous
with his sweets
and the occasional
cigarette
which we would smoke
on the bomb site
in a bombed out house
on the way home
from school.

In class
he was forever
putting up his hand
to answer a question
or be allowed
to go to the bog
if he couldn't
hold on
any longer.

He got into a fight
in the playground
at mid-morning break

with some kid
from another form.

He was
a big ugly kid
with large fists
and curly hair.

Vole got smacked up
but never went down.

He caught the big kid
with a cheeky left
to the big kid's gut.

But then
the prefects came
and the crowd
broke up
and Vole hid
behind me
as the prefects
searched the playground
and only his
heavy breathing
made a sound.

Terry Collett

Waiting By The School Gates

Look who's over
by the school gates
Reynard said
and you looked over

and there was Christina
with her school bag
over her shoulder
and her hands tucked

in the pockets
of her green coat
see you tomorrow
Reynard said

and walked on
giving Christina a stare
as he did most girls
finding them an enigma

yet to be solved
when you got
to where Christina was
she took her hands

out of her pockets
and put a hand
on your arm
I wish I was going

on the school bus
with you
then I could sit next to you
and I could tell you

about myself
and not have to cram
everything into a rush
of words as I do

at school
you looked over
to where the school bus
was waiting

you still had
five minutes
or so before
it took off

and you knew
Fred the driver
always did
a head count

before hand
don't you wish
I was there
on the bus too?

she asked
squeezing your arm
with her fingers
you turned

and looked at her
sure I do
you said
but you live here

and I live miles away
I know
she said
and I miss you

once your bus goes off
and I know
I won't see you
until the following day

and the weekend is worse

because then
I don't see you
for two whole days

other kids
passing through
the school gates
stared at you both

and Hill said
come on
or you'll miss
the bus

and he laughed
and moved on
and Christina stared
after him and said

what's his problem?
and you said
oh he hasn't been born yet
he gets this way

and she laughed
and said
maybe I'll come
on the country bus

to your village
and we can meet?
sure that'd be good
you said

and her eyes lit up
and she smiled
and leaned
towards you

and gave your cheek
a peck
and you said

look I got to go

and you took her hand
and gave it
a quick kiss
then turned

and walked quickly
towards the bus
knowing her eyes
were following

your every step
and that maybe
she dreamed
of you at night

and imagined you
beside her
and her dolls
and Teddy Bear

and you in turn
maybe imagined
at night
you too were there.

Terry Collett

Waiting For

Enid waits
in her room
shivering

listening
for the time
and the sound

her dad leaves
home for work
her thin cloth

white nightdress
providing
no close warmth

her body
screams with pain
discipline

disciplined
her dad said
half hour back

beating her
when he's gone
she'll breakfast

(her mother
will provide)
but for now

she just waits
by the door
listening

feeling cold
her stomach
now groaning

she'll not tell
anyone
but Benny

the boy who
lives downstairs
will ask her

had breakfast?
and he'll look
for bruises

of colours
and he'll know
her father

has had her
she listens
the old white

radio
plays music
some Mozart

then its off
and silence
she cringes

holds herself
then he's gone
the door slams

she opens
her room door
and peers out

her mother
by the stove
one black eye

and thick lip

in the sink
water goes

from the tap
drip drip drip.

Terry Collett

Waiting For Benny 1979

So you want to be a
security officer?
What skills can you
offer me that I might
consider you?
The guy Lee said.

I used to box,
Benny said,
eyeing the natty dressed guy
who sat opposite him.

Box what?
The guy asked.

Other men,
Benny replied.

The guy rubbed his chin,
and looked at the notebook
in front of him: ok,
he said,
when can you start?

Next Monday,
Benny said.

Ok meet me here
dead on 9 o'clock
next Monday,
the guy said.

Later Benny told Natanya,
and she said:
a security officer?
What do you know
about security?

Benny said:

jack-shit, but he's
taking me on.

She nodded her head:
is the money good?

It's better,
Benny said,
and no more dragging
heavy wagons around
a warehouse.

Isn't it dangerous?
She asked.

No matter; you know
what Nietzsche said?
Benny said.

Who's Nietzsche?
She said,
some friend of yours
at that warehouse?

No, a philosopher,
Benny said.

Well be careful,
I don't want you hurt,
she said.

Benny kissed her
and she became all
amorous and over him.

Not just now, Honey,
I have to get back
to the warehouse
and finish my shift.

O Benny, can't it wait?
Can't you give me any?

Night time or later
when I'm home again,
he said.

Ok,
she said,
I'll be
waiting,
all undressed,
waiting in bed.

Terry Collett

Waiting For The Judo Boys.

You rode the steep hill
on your bike
to get to the farm house
where Jim and Pete were

to practice Judo
in the grass about the house
or in the small hay barn
their sister Monica

was by the fence
when you rode in
the driveway
are the boys about?

you asked
might be
she said
looking at you

what do you want them for?
Judo practice
you replied
getting off the bike

and leaning it
against the fence
can you teach me?
will your mother let you?

why shouldn't she?
ask her and see
you said
looking away from her

and gazing at the fields
and woodland all about
she might if you ask her
Monica pleaded

moving nearer
her hand holding the fence
by your hand
when you're older

you said
I'm old enough
she said
the farmhouse door opened

and her mother
put her head
out the door
the boys will be out soon

she said
do you want to wait indoors?
are you worrying
Benedict again Monica?

no just talking
is she being a pain?
she asked you
no she's ok

you said
I'll wait for the boys here
you said
ok then

but Monica come in
and help me prepare lunch
Monica pulled a face
like sucking a lemon

and sighing
and cursing
under her breath
followed her mother

indoors but before

she went in
the door way
she turned and blew

a kiss from the palm
of her small chubby hand
then disappeared
you caught the blown kiss

in the shell form
of your hands
and studied it
in your palm

then put it in the pocket
of your jeans
where it could evaporate
and do no harm.

Terry Collett

Waiting To Be Kissed.

Benedict watched Christine;
she was applying lipstick
to her lips, gazing at herself
in the bathroom mirror.

She mouthed her lips together
as he had seen his mother
do many times as a child
to spread the lipstick evenly.

That looks better, he said.
She eyed in him in the mirror.
Least I can do to make myself
liveable again. He smiled.

Her hair was brushed, not
messed up as was per norm.

Maybe you'll be ready to get
out of the locked ward soon,
he said. She lowered her eyes.

Brushing hair and applying
lipstick doesn't mean I can
forget that dickhead, she said.

Still have problems inside
my head. Maybe they'll stop
the ECTs, he said, give you
pills or such. She pushed
the lipstick in her dressing
gown pocket, walked out
of the bathroom on naked feet.

He followed her to the window
of the lounge where other
patients sat or stood and
peered out at the snow.

I want to be out there,
feel that coldness, that air,
that biting chill, want to be
alive, want to feel, she said.

Benedict smelt the scent
of old soap, sensed her fingers
touching along his arm, her
breath made mist upon the glass.

They can stick their ECTs,
she muttered, they do nothing
for me except mess with my head.

He allowed her finger to run
down his skin, to move about
his wrist, smooth the scar where
a blade once ran, touch his
lips waiting again to be kissed.

Terry Collett

Waiting's Worse.

Waiting's worse. She knows it.
That old feeling known since
childhood. Then it was the parent,
the heavy hand, the punishment.

This is like it, but not like it. She
waits for him to come home. His
footfalls in the hall, his voice along
the passage. To gauge the tone,

the loud or softness. She sits, waits.
Be prepared, the mother said,
years back. The clock in the hall
sounds loud with its tick tock. Puts

hands between the thighs, anxiety
bites. For better for worse, the
vows said. Bruises like medals,
black eyes as reminders, a colour

ranging from black and blue to green
to brown or whatever it is. She cocks
an ear. Him? Maybe. The last time
it was she'd been seen with some

feller. She'd not of course. But it suited
as an excuse. She'd lost the baby by
the fall down stairs. What was that
all about? Was that the time she had

been late with his dinner? Or was that
some other? Baby'd be walking now.
Missed the first steps, the first word,
the live birth. Is that him? She bites a

finger nail. Feelings seem to run along
the nerves. What to say? What words?
The door opens along the hall, his voice
echoes mildly, we shall wait, we shall see.

Terry Collett

Walk In A Park

You took Fay
to Kennington Park
it being a fine day
and with no school

and her father
away working
and she sat
on the bus

there in her orange dress
which matched
her fair hair
tied in a ponytail

her brown sandals
and white socks
hands in her lap
her eyes large

in expectation
you sat beside her
in your checked
open neck shirt

and faded blue jeans
battered black shoes
you both swaying
to the bus's motion

and when you got off
at the Park
she said hadn't been
to the park before

and that her father
took them
to the park nearby
sometimes on a Sunday

after mass
if she's been good
and could recite
the Pater Noster

right through
in Latin
without mistakes
what the heck's

the Pater Noster?
you asked
the Lord's Prayer
she said

the Park was busy
people everywhere
parents with kids
and without

and kids
with no parents
and she was talking
about the nuns

who taught
at her school
how strict they were
and the girl who was hit

over the knuckles
with a ruler
for not knowing
the Credo all through

you didn't bother to ask
what that was
but saw her eyes
bright blue

and looking around

the grass and trees
and bushes
and you both sat

on the grass
and you said
your parents brought you here
on Sundays

and you watched
the cricket or played ball
and sometimes
your old man

bought ice creams
or lemonade
and she talked
of her mother

and how she
had to work hard
to please her father
and sometimes

they rowed
and sometimes he hit
her mother if the row
got out of hand

and she went quiet
and looked at you
don't tell anyone
she said

I'm not to speak
of what goes on
indoors
I won't say a word

you said
what about an ice cream?
you said

I haven't any money

she said

I have

you said

my mother gave me 2/6d

for doing chores

o yes then

she said

and went with you

to the ice cream place

and ordered two

and paid the coins

and got your change

and walked along

the path

she taking hold

of your hand in hers

and you sensed

the pulse of her

through your fingers

and the sun was warm

and the sky

a bright blue

with just 12 year old Fay

and 12 year old you.

Terry Collett

Walk Through Kale.

Walking through a field of kale
Jane in front and you following behind
brushing on your hands over

the dew damp leaves
breathing in the morning air
she looking around

in case the farmer
or one of his farmhands
sees you wander

through the tall kale
you notice she has a slight wiggle
as she walks ahead

not intentional
not like some of the girls at school
you put on the wiggling hips

to attract the boy's searching eyes
it's just a natural movement
and you watch and take in

the decisive tread she makes
maybe in fear of mouse
or just cautious of doing damage

to the kale's green stems
then she pauses and turns around
facing you and says

I come here sometimes
and sit amongst the kale
just to be alone and away

from the pressures
and eyes of others
you nod and say

it gets like that sometimes
and as you speak
your eyes move over her face

and at her eyes
and the way her hair
is neatly brushed

and her lips parted slightly
as if about to speak
mother warmed me of boys

she says looking over your shoulder
at the farm beyond
she says they're not to be trusted

then she pauses
and looks you in the eyes
and oh you mutter inwardly

the way she looks
the way her eyes
move over me like an artist's brush

and you sense
a kiss waiting to happen
lips paused to press

tongues ready to explore
each other's orifice
warm and wet

but nothing happens
and you both walk on
through the dew damp kale

hoping for another time
another fresh dawn
another sexier now.

Walking Dead 1917

The nurse had left.

George had improved little,
but got angry when the nurse
was about, and was only calmed
when Polly was in attendance;
so His father let the nurse go
and allowed Polly to nurse him.

Dudman didn't like it,
but could do nothing about it;
another maid was employed
to cover Polly's duties.

George sat in chair
by the window
staring out,
January sun
was dull in the sky,
clouds drifted slowly.

Polly tidied up the bed
and arranged
George's clothes
by the side.

Look at them,
George said,
pointing out the window,
creeping along the trench.

Polly went to the window
and peered out
where George pointed.

The old gardener and his boy
walked along by the hedge
carrying tools.

Germans, Polly, see them,
where's my gun?
George said anxiously.

Polly stood beside him:
it's Cartwright and his boy
walking by the hedge, George,
she said softly.

George peered hard:
Not Germans?

No not Germans,
Polly affirmed.

George sighed,
held Polly's hand.

Look like Germans,
he said.

She wished
he was well again,
not unhinged
by shells and gunfire.

Shell shock,
the doctor had said,
who came the other week
after George had a bad attack
of nerves and shouted
and hit out at the nurse.

Only Polly
calmed him down
and he held her
as he wept.

Dunton was there,
George said suddenly,
one minute there next gone,
blown apart,

blood on me
and his arm in the trench
a few feet away.

Polly hugged him,
kissed his head.

George saw about him
the walking dead.

Terry Collett

Walking Under A Moon

He was with her
when they came back
from the bar

the moon was out
but dark clouds
hid it now and then

and she walked
with a sway
singing bars
from some song
she liked

and he watched her
walking just behind
looking at her
looking about him
the streets
the street lights
yellow upon black
bright lights

and she said
this is it
this is what I like
being merry
being liberated
from my normal self

and he said
ok let's get back home
take it easy
don't what you falling
and breaking bones

she paused on the edge
of the kerb
and looked at the moon

look at that moon
I guess people in Russia
see the self same moon
as we do
looking up
and seeing the same
bright light
the same pits
on the moon's skin

he said
come on Honey
lets' get back
and he put his arm
through hers
and tried to move her on

hey hey
she said
don't pull me along
I want to see the moon

so he stopped pulling her
and walked on
and looked back
at her staring
at the moon
her voice singing
her body swaying

he walked on
hands in the pockets
of his coat
head down

wait
she called
wait for me
I don't want
to be swallowed
by the night

and he stopped
and she ran to him
and put her arms
around him
and kissed his lips
and he could taste
the booze
the cigarettes

and he said
come on Babe
let's go

and so she walked on
beside him
her body leaning
against him
her voice humming
a melody
her feet picking
places to tread

his lips having
the taste of her
on them
the feel of her
on his arm

her voice
humming still
echoing into the night
hoping she'd be good
once home
hoping she'd stay awake
not fall asleep
but if she did
he thought
the sex would keep.

Terry Collett

Walnutt's Fags 1960

Walnutt brought
cigarettes to school
packet of five.

Davies said
the bogs was best
for a smoke.

I watched out
at the playground
for teachers or prefects.

O'Brien and Sutcliffe
and Davies and Walnutt
stood in a small circle
lighting their cigarettes
from the one match
Sutcliffe had.

O'Brien lit mine
and poked it
between my lips.

My big sister
got them for me
Walnutt said.

Good on
your big sister
O'Brien said.

Have you heard
about Austen
and the competition
he's having for
the best piece
of pottery
Sutcliffe said.

That's me out
I said
he says I couldn't
make a pot
to piss in.

Did he say that?
Davies said.

Not in so
many words
but that's
what he meant
I said.

Who gives a shit
about pottery
O'Brien said
how's your cousin
Sutcliffe?
she had her photo
taken again recently?
any nude pictures
to show?

No she ain't
like that
Sutcliffe said
just modelling stuff.

I looked
at a prefect
walking over
by the woodwork
classroom wall.

Prefect near
I whispered
hiding my cigarette
behind my back
exhaling smoke
through pursed lips.

They all took
deep inhalations
and tossed
the cigarette butts
in the toilet pan.

Davies flushed
the chain.

O'Brien waved
his hand in the air
to wipe away
any smoke.

One by one
we ventured out.

My cigarette
flicked behind.

O'Brien
thanked Walnutt
for the cigarettes
and for being kind.

Terry Collett

Want To Know 1933

You sit on the grey patterned sofa
beside him and he is talking
about things you have
no interest in

but you pretend you do
and you are dressed
in that open(too open) dress
your mother said

that is bright white
and your hair is permed
neat and tidy
and you wonder

what he really thinks about you
(if he thinks about you at all)
and he has that thin moustache
as if it took him ages to trim

and his dark hair
combed so neatly
and oiled too much
and not once

has he mentioned your dress
or how good your hair looks
or what you think about things
he just talks and talks

and looks at you
with dark eyes
(maybe undressing you
right down to the silky underwear

you have on)
and his arm creeps behind you
at the back of the sofa
his other hand is near your thigh

(you can see it
out of the corner
of your eye)
now he's talking about business

(his business)
and how well it's doing
and how shares are on the rise
after the fall

two years ago
but does he love you
is all you really
want to know.

Terry Collett

Wanted Him To Stay 1962

It was warm, the sun
was bright, girls and
boys on the grass enjoying
the midday recess before

afternoon classes. Some
boys lazily kicked a ball
on the field, girls sat in
groups chattering and

laughing. Shoshana sat
with Naaman on the grass
by the tree in its shadow.
She was picking buttercups

between fingers, he watching
her, thinking how nice she
looked sitting there. It's
your fault, she said, looking

at him holding a few buttercups.
What's my fault? He said.
I can't focus in lessons, she
said. How's it my fault? I

didn't ask you to think about
me, he said, but pleased she
did think about him. Can't
help it, I just do, she said,

going red, looking away.
What do you think about
you and me doing? He said.
Not saying, she said. Girls

over the way broke into an
explosion of laughter. Naaman
looked over. Someone is
the meat to chew over, he

said. You're there all the time,
she said, even at home, I see
you around me, even at the
dinner table while having

breakfast this morning.
Wasn't me, I was at home,
having my own breakfast,
he said. You know what I

mean, I felt you there, she said.
Felt me where? He said smiling.
Not like that, in here, in my
heart and head, she said.

Don't you think of me? He
gazed at her. Yes more often
that you'd guess, he said. Really?
She said. Sure, most of the

time, he said. He knew he had;
he'd thought of her that morning
in bed as he woke from a deep
sleep, she there beside him,

naked and warm, her hair
against his cheek. Then Rolland
came walking across the grass
towards him, and stood, and said:

want to come play ball? We
need another player, Brooks
has gut ache, Rolland said.
OK, be there in a minute,

Naaman said. Rolland walked
off. Sorry about that, must go,
see you later, and he walked
away, she watched him go, she

wanted him there beside her,

wanted him to kiss and to stay.

Terry Collett

Wanted Sin 1971

Yiska stared
at the nurse
the uniform

a pale blue
pink lipstick
peering eyes

don't forget
your tablets
the nurse said

can't have you
going out
on a limb

she walked off
Yiska watched
swaying ass

black stockings
and black shoes
Yiska saw

Benedict
deep smoking
inhaling

you all right?
She asked him
it's snowing

he replied
she looked out
saw the snow

blanketing
fields and trees
they both stood

watching snow
drifting down
their hands touched

skin on skin
sensations
in their minds

and bodies
both of them
wanted sin.

Terry Collett

Wants Her Whole 1963

Magdalene leaves
the confession box
after making

her confession
but without waiting
for the absolution

from the priest
which she didn't think
he'd give anyway

as she was unrepentant
of wanting and loving Mary
and she'd said too much

and walking fast
down the side aisle
of the church

past the statue
of the Virgin
past people on their knees

in the pews
out the back doors
dipping two fingers

in the stoup
and out into the street
looking behind her

in case Father Joseph
was following her
out of the church

like some hound
after prey
asking her

what did you say?
but he isn't
and she walks along

the street
her mind muddily
her hands in her pockets

her eyes searching
all who pass her by
will he know

who she was
who had said
those things

in the confessional?
will he seek her out
back at school

on Monday
and ask her about Mary
and her odd

affection for the girl
and was this Mary like her
in her wants and desires?

what about her parents?
what if he tells them
about her wants and stuff?

no he can't
what is said
in confession

stays in confession
let the fecking priest
soak in it

live with it

she says to herself
walking past shoppers

past shop windows
she wants Mary
wants her body and soul

not just bits of her
she wants her all
wants her whole.

Terry Collett

Ward And Chess 1962

Ward sat
just in front of me
in class.

Ginger haired
with ears
that seemed
to go red at the tips
when someone
spoke to him.

He seldom
put his hand up
when questions
were asked
and if he did
his ears would go red
and his ginger hair
seemed to stand up
on end.

You play chess?
He asked me
one playtime.

Sure been playing
since I was 7 years old
I replied.

Play you now?
He said.

Sure if you like
and he took out
a pocket chess set
from his jacket pocket
and set it on the ground
of the grass.

We lay there
and he set up
the small pieces
and then we began.

He was good
and won
the two games
then the bell went
and we went
back to class.

Yehudit looked
over at me
her big blue eyes
seemed to
be asking me
where I went playtime.

I smiled at her
she smiled back.

Ward played
good chess
but she was
good at kissing
even if she didn't
play chess.

She knew the moves
as good as Ward did
but in a different game
and a different rule.

I saw her later
on the bus
after school.

Terry Collett

Warm And Cold Crime 1997

Una showers after Nuala's left,

washes away the sweat and juice
and laboured skin,

the bath stands empty now since
Stu died there wrists slit
bathing in red water
and one eye open staring
into death's welcoming arms,

Una had tried to save her
but didn't know what to do,

held a hand but the sight
of so much blood made
her puke and run,

gone now buried at some distance
by Stu's family as much
she knew poor Stu,

the water cools her now
calms her down after
so much heat and passion
and their love making
after their fashion,

Nuala's rare talk of Brian
her kisses and touches,

the bed holding them near
the feet kissing and other things
the ticking time going by,

do you know what?
Nuala said I would be with you
if Brian wasn't such a soft
or had done me wrong,

she showers
eyes closed
water battering her
to smiles and tears
all at the same time,

why is love and loving
she cries
such a warm and cold crime?

Terry Collett

Warm At Night 1962

Benedict saw Yiska
coming towards him
as he stepped
from the school bus.

She looked jaded
hair brushed badly.

He smiled
as she came to him
passing other kids.

How are you?
He said.

Better for seeing you
she replied
can we go
some where alone?

He nodded
and they walked
out the back
behind the science lab.

what's up?
He said.

Mother and her
moans and groans
Yiska said
ever since
I got up.

He raised his eyebrows
and why are we
here alone?
He said.

She leaned close
and kissed him.

I needed that
she said.

She kissed
him again.

He sensed
her wet lips
on his
her body closer
her small breasts
pressed against
his chest.

The bell rang
from the playground.

Best go
he said.

Guess so
she said softly.

She quickly kissed
him again
and then walked off
in a flurry of hair
and skirt
and out of sight.

He wrapped up
the memory
of the kisses and hugs
to keep him warm
that wintry night.

Terry Collett

Wars In Play.

Kempton showed Benedict
his collection of knives,
long, short, sharp and blunt.
That's a German one my Dad
bought back from the War,
he said, taking one out
and showing with pride.

I expect it plunged a few bodies
before he choked it.
Benedict took the knife
and ran a finger
along the blade.
Sharp and coming to a point.

His own collection of knives
was small (dangerous things
his mother had said)
and kept in a drawer.

Dad took it
from this dead German's belt,
took other things as well,
a photograph of some German girl
or so Dad said, pretty and smiling.

Benedict gave back the knife
and looked at others,
all sizes and lengths.

This one's Russian,
Kempton said,
plunged a few Krauts I guess
before the Russian caught it
in the back, he added,
his dad having informed
some time before.

Benedict liked the Yank knife best,

took it into his hands
and sensed the holds
of yesteryears, the fingers
having touched, the bodies
entered, the blood sensed,
the fears felt.

After a while Kempton
put them away,
feeling content,
proud of his collection.

Benedict thought it swell,
his own small collection
of knives would be
no one's envy, tucked
in the drawer
with his vest, pants
and handkerchiefs
and that tie his auntie
had bought of red and grey.

Kempton and he left
the Kempton household
and went across the Square
to begin their wars in play.

Terry Collett

Washing Windows

Your mother used to sit on the window
Ledge of the tenement building and
Wash the windows of each of the rooms.
She'd push back the shutters and just
Sit there with a bucket of warm water
And a cloth and wash away. You were
Always afraid she'd lean too far back
And fall out and down to the ground
Several storeys below with a heavy crash
And break bones or neck or maybe die.
But she'd just sit there her legs holding
Onto the wall beneath her and push her
Right hand holding the damp cloth
Over the glass while her left hand held
The metal bucket tight swishing the warm
Water as she moved back and forth like
Some lone trapeze artist on the high wire
Without apparent fear or knowledge of
Was going on in the street below with the
Passing of the walking dead as Father used
To say and Mrs Febrile sitting on her window
Ledge with her daughter watching gossiping
And nosing about who did what to whom
While all the while you were frightened of
Your mother slipping out the window waving
Her hands and arms as she fell to her doom.

Terry Collett

Wasn't The Same 1957

I was flicking
football cards
with Jim,
when I saw Enid
going towards the slope
from the Square.

Be back
in a while Jim,
I said,
and walked over
to where Enid was.

She stopped
when she saw me.

What happened
to you yesterday?
I waited but you
never showed,
is your old man up
to his old ways again?

She looked back
over her shoulder
towards the flats behind.

He's sort of all right,
but he was
very moody yesterday
and Mum thought it best
I stayed in
and not go out
in case, but he
was all right
and never hit us
or anything,
but I did missed
not going with you

to the market,
she said.

I missed you,
but I got the fish tank
for the goldfish,
and it's ok,
I said.

She looked at me
and she had no
visible bruises or cuts
so I thought she
must be all right.

Are you allowed
out today?
I said.

Not sure,
I am just going
to the shop for Mum,
but I don't want
to push it while
he's in a mood,
she said,
where are you going?

Not sure yet
just playing cards
with Jim, but maybe
later if you come
around I'll see
where we can go,
I said.

She nodded,
but I thought
I detected her
old fears arising
so didn't push it.

Best get to the shop,
she said,
or Dad might
wonder where
I have got to.

Isn't he going
to work today?
I said.

No he's off
for the day,
he said we might
go somewhere,
she said.

She hesitated,
then walked on
down the slope.

I watched her go
until she went in
the shop across
Rockingham Street.

I sighed,
then went back to Jim
and the card flicking game,
but my thoughts
were on Enid,
and the game
wasn't the same.

Terry Collett

Wat Out 1968

The matron of the nursing home
took Benedict with her. She wanted
to let him see a death so he would
know what to do if it happened on

his watch. They came to the door
of the room. She opened it and a
care assistant was sitting in a chair
by the bed. She rose when she saw

the matron. No change, don't think
she'll be long, the woman said.
Ok we'll take over now; you go off,
the matron said. The woman went off

and Matron closed the door. Benedict
looked at the old woman in the bed.
It was Edna the Yorkshire Lass as
she used to call herself. There's trouble

at mill she used to say jokingly if there
was something going on in the home.
Now she was on the way out: no more
trouble at mill. The matron indicated

for him so stand and wait. Wonder what
it's like to die? What one feels or thinks?
Maybe we don't. The old woman breathed
heavy.; her face was white and clammy;

her eyes were closed. Won't be long, Matron
said in a whisper. He nodded. No more
trouble at mill, Edna, he mused silently,
watching the slow rise and fall of the old

woman's breast. Then suddenly the breathing
stopped; her breast was motionless. She's gone,
Matron said. They waited for a few minutes,
then the matron felt for a pulse. Nothing.

She moved the old woman's arms across
the breast; tied a small bandage around
the jaw and over the head and placed
the eyes down with sticky plaster. Watch

carefully, the matron said. Benedict watched.
The matron took cotton wool and filled up
the nose and ears and then pulled down
the blanket and uncovered the old woman

and put cotton wool in the other orifices below.
He looked at Edna packed up and ready to go.
Later the undertaker would come and whisk
her away before the other old folk knew

what had happened. Next time, Matron said,
you will know what to do. He nodded and they
closed the door and parted. Just like that.
Done and dusted. The Yorkshire Lass is no more.
He moved away giving one last look at the door.

Terry Collett

Watch And Stare.

Johnny likes
the back corner seat
in the cafe

it gives a good view
of those entering
and leaving

and a good view
of the baristas
as they work

at the bar
especially
the Clara Bow

lookalike
with her black hair
and cute cut

and dark eyes
and thin
almost

indecipherable smile
and in the background
the piped Baroque music

or sometimes jazz
setting feet to tapping
but this day

the barista is
the short girl
with the Italian twang

who gets
the orders right on cue
and who knows

your requirements
before you say
on a good day

the tattooed barista
has gone
his favourite gaze

to watch her work
and talk and smile
and the glitter

in her eyes
she works
elsewhere

for other men
to watch
and stare.

Terry Collett

Watching

You sat intrigued
by the way

the old woman
spooned her soup

sitting in the cafe
all by herself.

She had a bread roll
broken up

on a side plate
and fingered it

into her mouth
in between

mouthfuls of soup.
You watched

unnoticed by her
like some voyeur

studying some woman
undressing

from a nearby room
through binoculars

hidden in the dark.
You studied

her wrinkled features
the way the mouth

opened and closed
the fingers

with screwed up skin
fingered the roll.

Someone spoke to her
as they went by

on their way out.
Yes see you lovey

she said in a voice
that seemed to disown

the features and face.
You guessed

she must have been
some beauty once

and had men
gawking at her

for her looks and hair
with lustful stares

as she made her way
with a sexy wiggle

and show of leg
up a flight of stairs.

Terry Collett

Watching Her Sleep

He loves to watch her sleep.
Likes to hear her breathe in
And out; see her breasts rise
And fall like sleeping giants.

He likes how she exudes a
Sense of peacefulness as if
Angels touched her brow and
Breathed a deeper love somehow.

He loves how her red lips move
In silent conversation, how now
And then her tongue brushes her
Lower lip with moisture of saliva.

Should he wake her from deep sleep?
Ought he to kiss her lips and bring
Her from sleep's warm hold? Should
He touch her limbs with lust to life?

No, no, don't wake her from her sleep,
Too dangerous; for although he is her
Lover, she's his busy boss's pretty wife.

Terry Collett

Watching Mother

Your mother is peeling apples
for the apple pie

and you stand watching her
and say can I have some peelings?

Sure she says
it's probably the best part anyway

and you notice she has tears in her eyes
and wonder if the old man

has had a go at her again
like that time over the camera

and her saying jokingly
you look like some tourist

in upstate New York
and he thumped her one

and her lip bled
and you stood watching

keeping your mouth shut
but wanting to go at him

but you being too small
stood still

and as she peels the apples
you watch her hands

go over the apples
with a skill of years of experience

and you watch as the tears
run down the side of her nose

and fall like raindrops
on to her busy hands

and you focus like some artist
at the way that they land.

Terry Collett

Watching Mother 1960

My mother
was rolling out pastry
for an apple pie
in the kitchen.

The rolling-pin
eased over
by her palms.

She looked tired.

The apples
had been cooked
and were cooling down
on the stove.

I watched her.

My sister had
taken the two babies
out in the pram.

My kid brother
was playing with toys
in the other room.

Can I have
the apple peelings
to eat?
I asked.

If you like
she said
pausing and looking
at me.

She placed
the pastry bottom
into a pie dish

and spooned apples in.

I ate the apple peelings
watching her skill.

She placed the top
of the pastry
over the apples
and smoothed it over
and the kinked
around the top
until a pattern
had formed neatly
all around.

Open the oven door
for me
she said.

I opened the oven door
and she placed
the apple pie
onto a shelf
then closed the door.

That's that done
she said.

She looked worn out
and her face was red.

Terry Collett

Watching Mother 1960 (Poem)

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was rolling out pastry
for an apple pie
in the kitchen.

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onto a shelf
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Terry Collett

Watching Trains 1958

We sat in Victoria Train Station
watching the steam trains
coming and going
on the platforms

and watching passengers
getting on and off the trains
and wondered where
they had been or where

they were going
I'd liked to go to Scotland
Lydia said
see men in kilts

and eat haggis
and see Edinburgh Castle
maybe you will one day
I said

get a train
and off you'll go
can I go from here?
she asked

no Kings Cross train station
I said
can we go there next time?
she asked

sure we can
I said
I watched a man
in a bowler hat

rush past us
as we sat
on one of the seats
on the platform

he looks in a hurry
I said
wonder where
he's off to

to his office I expect
Lydia said
come from the country
maybe up here to London

the man had a brief case
black as soot
and he was rushing
like he had the squirts

I love the smell
of the trains
Lydia said
the sound of the steam

pushing out everywhere
me too
I said
I breathed it in

like it was perfume
I was sniffing
what did your mum say
when you said

you were going
to Victoria with me
this morning?
she said what are you

going there for?
to watch the trains
I said
and she said

what a queer couple

we were
she didn't know other
9 year olds who'd want

to watch trains all day
and my brother Hemmy
said we were queer
and went off laughing

then Mum said
you be careful of the trains
and don't fall off the platform
I wondered why she

gave me a funny look
this morning when
I called for you
I said

she nodded
and we watched more
trains coming and going
and she talked

of her sister
and her sister's boyfriend
sleeping in her room
and she being stuck

in the cot bed
which was
too small for her
and how her sister

and her boyfriend
made giggling noises
in the dark
and other sounds

let's go get a glass of milk
and share some sandwiches
I said

so we walked along

to the main part
of the station
and bought two
glasses of milk

and ate the sandwiches
my mother had made
and sat on one
of the seats

and watched the trains
coming and going
and saw one woman rushing past
with her white slip showing.

Terry Collett

Water In The Stoup Mcmlxxi

The water in the stoup
was cold and my fingers
tingled like a bell
in a shallow wind,

Dom James took us novices
to a convent where he
had to say Mass
a young nun served us
coffee and cake
in a small room
away from the cloister
fresh faced and angelic
in her framed headgear,

Dei pulchritudinis,

the tall monk tolled
the cloister bell
before the office of Terce
black robed and thin of face,

ascoltare Dio nel
vostro cuore
the Italian monk said to me
as we laid the tables
in the refectory,

she held my pecker
in her two hands
like a snake charmer
charming,

George spoke of the coldness
about him his hands he said
stiffen in the coldness,

Dieu est proche même
dans nos heures sombres

the French monk said
when he saw me
looking down at my feet,

I snuggled between
her soft mounds
as she sang a Beatles' song
and I kissed her milkiness,

I fear not Satan
as much as I fear
those who fear him
said St Teresa of Avila
I read some place,

I twisted the apples
from the branches
as shown by the plump monk
(after Lunch) in the orchard
tempted to bite
but didn't place
in a basket with the gentleness
of a child,

et quaerebant eum
tangere manu Dei,

Ambition said Gareth
quoting Spinoza
is the immoderate
desire for power,

I walked the dark cloisters
after Compline
the bell tolled me
to my early sleep,

the young nun's womb
was as closed
as a castle's keep.

Waterloo Train Station 1958

Shush shush
the steam train
started up.

Lydia and Benny
watched as the last
few passengers
jumped aboard
the train.

The guard
waved a green flag

When shall we go
to the seaside?
she asked.

When we get
enough money
he said.

How much
do we need?
she said.

Don't know
I'll ask at the ticket office
he said.

So they walked
back up
the platform
passed the ticket collector
who had let them
on to the platform
to watch the trains.

Benny went
to the ticket office.

A man with glasses
looked at him
Yes?

How much
does it cost
for two kids
to go to South End?

The man looked at him
then looked at a book.

Lydia stood
patiently
behind Benny.

The man told
Benny the fare
and Benny said
thank you.

They walked
back on to the platform
to watch
the next train come in.

He told Lydia
the amount
of money needed
for the fare.

It'll take us ages
to get that money
she said.

Guess it will
he said.

Ages
she repeated.

Want a glass of milk
and a biscuit
he said.

Sure
she said.

So they walked
to a small cafe
on the railway station
and had milk and biscuit
instead.

Terry Collett

Wedding Dress.

Hey Honey,
you want Mommy
and Daddy to marry again,
so Mommy can buy
one of those new
wedding dresses?
The dame said.

No,
the kid said.

Why's that Honey?
The dame said.

Because you
and Daddy'd have
to divorce first
and I can't handle
that kind
of emotional turmoil,
the kid said.

Awe Honey,
that's so sweet,
the dame said,
did you hear
that Hubby?
Huh?
What the kid said?

The guy(eyeing
some young sweet
ass girl walking
on by) sure did,
he said,
can't have him
go through
no turmoil,
over some wedding dress

or that divorce
kind of mess.

Terry Collett

Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting

That Wednesday night
prayer meeting

with that old guy
with the glass eye

and Miss Trilde
who had that fixed smile

like the wind
had caught her

that way
and the other kids

there too
because their parents

thought it would give them
an idea of God

and maybe save
their souls although

they never said
that as such

and the organ
that small thing

stuck in the corner
out of tune

and you and Jimmy
and some other kid

would put in
your own words

to the overloud hymns
or Carmody would let off

foul wind
to match the organ

and there'd be a titter
of kid's laughter

and the guy
with the glass eye

would peer out at you
with his good eye

and tut tut
while you looked

at the young girl
in front of you

with the cropped hair
and fat butt.

Terry Collett

Weekend Free 1957

I walked home
from school
with Enid
it was Friday
and the sun
was bright.

Enid said
her old man
was taking her
and her mother
to Sheerness
for the weekend.

I would ask
if you
could come too
but I am afraid
he would get mad
and call it off
she said.

No no don't
mention me
or he'll go off
the roof
I said.

I shall miss not
seeing you over
the weekend
she said.

Why Sheerness?
I said.

He has relatives
down there
she said.

We passed
a record store
a Guy Mitchell song
was being played.

I've been to Sheerness
with my grandparents
I said
nice place
I like the beach
and watching
passing ships
hope your old man
is in a good mood then
I said.

So do I
she said
Mum's not looking
forward to it
she told me
this morning
after Dad had gone
to work
but she said
we'll have to go
or hell
will break loose.

We walked down
the subway steps
and along.

What will you do?
She said.

Go to the morning
matinee flicks
and maybe
the afternoon one too
if there's anything

worthwhile on
I said.

We came out
the other end
of the subway
and along
by the cinema.

We stopped
and looked
at the photos
on the wall showing
what film was on
it was a war film.

I might go see that
if my old man'll go too
I said.

We walked on
across the bomb site
where I picked up
a few small stones
for my catapult.

We went our
separate ways
at the top
of the stairs
of the flats.

Mrs Tooks
was standing there
like some witch
with her two thin cats.

Terry Collett

Weeks And Weeks 1963

The young priest
sat in the chair.

Martha sat opposite
across the desk.

The priest gazed
at the girl,
uncomfortable
with a young girl;
he wished the old priest
could have been there.

So how can I help?
He said,
looking away
from Martha,
eyeing the desk top.

Martha stared at the priest;
he was the young one,
white as flour,
in his black gown
and white collar.

I want to be a nun,
she said.

A nun?
He said,
lifting his eyes
to gaze at her.

Martha looked up
at the large crucifix
on the wall
above the priest.

The Crucified's eyes

half closed or half open
depending how you looked,
she mused.

What sort of nun?
The priest said.

An enclosed nun,
Martha said,
not looking away
from the Crucified.

The priest gazed at the girl
whose eyes were staring
above his head.

Do you think you
have a vocation?
He asked.

The nails
in the Crucified's hands
were rusty or painted
a dirty brown.

Of course,
Martha said,
I wouldn't be here
otherwise would I.

The priest looked
above his head
and saw the huge crucifix
which the girl
was staring at.

Have you spoken
to any one else about this?
The priest said.

I spoke to one
of the nuns and she said

to come see you,
Martha said.

The priest lowered his eyes
to the girl: she seemed
serious if a little odd.

I see,
he said,
have you decided
on which order
you wish to join?

Martha looked away
from the plaster Christ:
not yet maybe the Benedictines,
she said,
staring at the priest
and at his watery blue eyes.

Maybe you should pray
and ask Our Lord
for guidance,
the priest said.

I do,
Martha said,
taking in a slight blemish
in the priest's cheeks.

I been talking to Him,
she said,
for weeks and weeks.

Terry Collett

Well Hidden 1962

Do you know
what sex is like?
Yiska said.

No
I lied.

We were lying
on the grass
of the sports field
near school.

A warm sun
overhead.

Wonder what it's like
she said.

No idea
I replied
although I lied.

She looked at me
I wish we could
find out
she said
but there is
no where hereabouts.

No no where
I said.

She lay on her back
gazing at the sky.

I lay beside her
other kids were
lying about
or playing ball

or chase games.

If my mother
wasn't home all day
we could go there
in our lunch time
but she's
always there
Yiska said.

Shame she
don't go out
I said.

Some girls in class
reckon they have
but I think they
just say that
to sound big
she said.

Guess they do
I said.

Any boys
in your class
reckon they have?
she said.

No one has said
to me such
I said.

Too young really
I guess
she said.

Yes I guess so
I said
keeping what Yehudit
and I did in the gym
that lunch time

well hid.

Terry Collett

We'LI Meet Again

We'll meet again she said
but you never did

at least not
as she had meant

as once before
but through a window

of a florist shop
where you were buying flowers

for some other woman
whom you thought

you loved
with passions hot

and thoughts crazed
and there she stood

gazing in
not seeing you

and you looking at her
standing there

remembered the time
when you and she

had almost made it
to her bed for hottest sex

when you heard
her parent's car

pull up in the drive
and car doors slam

and feet on gravel
and rushing

to put tidy clothes
in disarray or half removed

and she blushing red
like a bottom spanked

made haste to button
undone buttons

and zip up zips unzipped
and all before the key

undid the lock
and both of you in shock

made fast
your footsteps down

the stairs with faces flushed
and unbrushed hairs

and looking at her then
in the florist shop window

all proper and prim
you wondered

what it was
that made hot fires glow

then in short time
burn out or sadly dim.

Terry Collett

Wendy's Lot 1959

Wendy would show
the colour
of her underwear
for boys to stare
for a few pence
to satisfy
their boyhood
sexual sense.

Or cup her hand
over her little girl
armpit
bring down
her arm
to make
a farting sound
all around class.

Or that's the legend
the boys told.

But I knew her
as a friend
who walked home
with me from school.

We would laughed
at what
the teachers taught
and told
brainwashing
our childhood's hold.

She once said
her old man
beat her
bare behind
if he was
in a mood

or drunk
and the alcohol
stunk.

But she'd not cry
not give him
that satisfaction
for that cruel action.

Later I heard
she got cancer
out of the blue
and cried.

Something
her old man
in his drunken rage
couldn't do.

Terry Collett

West End 1958

My old man
took me
to the West End

it was evening
bright lights
from shops
and theatres
and such

I was dressed
in my best suit
my old man in his

a handkerchief
tucked in
my top pocket

my hair Brylcreemed
flat and tidy

we going
to see a film?
I asked

no we're going
to the amusement arcades
spend a penny or so
then have a drink
some place

see who's about
sometimes
you can see
a film star
here at night
in between shows
he said

I nodded
and gazed about me
usually we saw
a movie
took in some
old chestnuts
from a stall
on the roadside

once he took me
to some café
which sold pan cakes
and I ate them
with a sauce

we walked
the bright streets
he at my side
I taking in
all I saw
people passing
all different faces
and shapes

and then
there she was
Billie Whitelaw
I'd seen her
in a film or two
she was standing
between two guys
in suits

she looked at me
as I looked at her
then she was gone
in the crowd

and I said
to my old man
seen her

seen who?
he said

that actress

what actress?

Billie Whitelaw

huh?

she was just there
with two guys
walking along
in a white dress
I think
coat like fur

where is she now?
he said
peering about him

gone into the crowd
I said

he gazed
into the bright lit street
like some pilgrim
who had just
missed Christ
going by

he looked dumbfounded

I looked at the sky
don't know why.

Terry Collett

West Rides Home.

West rides home for lunch
then back again to school

he is a short tubby kid
with black well-oiled hair
slick as silk
and eyes dark
as oil wells

I see him enter
the playground
in his bright coat
and tie and neat
white shirt and well pressed pants

how was dinner?
he asks

I bring sandwiches
I say
can't stick school meals
lessons are punishment enough

he smiles
offers me
a white paper bag
of peppermints
mint?

I take one
sense its coolness
on my tongue

how's the maths?
he asks
any better
with the time tables?

I look beyond him

towards the girl's playground
but she's not in sight
other girls play skip rope
or tag games

got stuck on 7s and 8s
I tell him

he frowns
and talks of patterns
and number flows
and how it goes

I watch his lips move
but the words are like gone
like dandelion seeds
in the air

a girl waves
is it she?
I wonder

but no she wouldn't
not her style
too shy
some other boy
has that joy

another mint?
West asks

I take another
to keep the freshness coming

he doesn't talk of girls
or their ways or clothes
or figures or hair

he talks of how well
his new bike runs
and how he likes
the shiny blue

and the loud bell
he rings
to clear his path

over the heads of boys
I hear a girl's laugh.

Terry Collett

Wet Dreams 1972

The restaurant in the hotel was busy,
waiters passed with trays
hands beneath
holding confidently,
faces stern
eyes ahead like
ancient sea captains
eyes on the horizon
for new lands.

Abela sat beside me;
her eyes following
the waiters like some heron
watching fish swim by.

We had rowed the night before,
after the piano recital
of Chopin and Debussy,
when she caught me
chatting up
the Croatian waitress.

Benny, she had said,
if you keep looking
and chatting up
that waitress,
I will ask
for a different room.

We had slept
in the same bed,
but inches apart;
no sex,
just lying there close,
but not so.

What's on the agenda today?
I asked.

Don't know,
she said.

Thought maybe
take a boat
to that small island
the guide
was talking about,
I said.

A waiter walked past;
her eyes followed him.

If you like,
she said,
turning to look at me,
I wanted to last night,
she added,
but you'd gone to sleep.

I thought you wanted
a different room?
I said.

That's just me
being moody
after you chatted up
that waitress,
Abela said.

Just being friendly,
I said.

Well don't,
Abela replied.

I pushed thoughts
of the waitress in bed
in wet dreams
out of my head.

Wet Wave Dry Shore 1997

Una's new bedsit is cramped
and has just three rooms
a bathroom and kitchen
and a main room
which she has curtained off
for a bedroom

what do you think of it?

small but cosy
Nuala says
looking about her

Una looks at her anxiously
can you stay awhile?

sure I can
is it the same bed?

no it's furnished
like the last place
I've no stuff of my own
Una says

Nuala sighs
you're a bit of a wanderer
aren't you?

have been for years
Una says
you like it?
she asks

sure if you're happy here
Una nods
and looks at the bed

have you time?
to do things?

or just a coffee and chat?
Nuala looks at the bed
and then at Una

all three if you like
she says

how's Brian?
Una asks

the same
Nuala says

I think he fancied me
Una says

he's a man
he'd fancy any girl
in a skirt and legs
and an ass on her
Nuala says

shall we?
Una says

best draw the curtains first
don't want your neighbours
gawking as we get undressed
and make love
Nuala says

Una draws the curtains across
and the room becomes dim
they begin to undress slowly
wanting to do things relaxed
and not panicky as they did
that last time at Nuala place
and Brian came home
and they had to lie still
in case he came in
and found them naked
and in bed together

they get into bed
and lie there gazing
at each other

Una says
is that Brian's love bites
on your shoulder?

yes the idjit thinks it's funny
sucking my skin
Nuala says

so do you love him?
Una says

Nuala sighs
I thought I did
but I'd not do this
if I did I guess
she says

guess not
Una says

they kiss lips to lips
hands touching
holding and investigating
Una wanting to suck
Nuala's neck but doesn't
just in case Brian sees
and there's trouble
so she kisses more and more
like a wet wave
on a dry shore.

Terry Collett

What Cedric Said About His Sister.

Cedric followed you
around the playground
at high school

it seemed he wanted
to say something to you
but instead he just followed

you around until
as you stood looking over
at the playing field

where kids were gathering
in their break period
he said

my sister likes you
how do you know?
you asked

because she told me
he replied blushing
looking over at the playing field

isn't she your twin?
Yes
he said

going red
gazing at his sister
standing with a group

of friends on the field
you looked over at the girls
at Cedric's sister waving a hand

so that's Christina
yes
he muttered

the one with the dark hair
and waving a hand
then he went silent

and looked at you
Mother said she's too young for boyfriends
he said after a few moments

but she doesn't listen
she does what she wants
so she told me to tell you

she likes you
and so you nodded
and waved your hand

back at the girls
and there was an explosion
of giggling and laughter

and waving of hands
and then they ran off
onto the field

and as they ran off
you noticed Cedric's sister
had a cute butt

but you didn't tell him that
you just turned and said
fancy a game of ball?

and he just nodded
and said nothing more
about his sister at all.

Terry Collett

What Celia Saw In The Back Of A Spoon

Celia looked at her reflection
In the back of the spoon;
Her face was blown outward
As if captured on some balloon.
It almost made her laugh;
The memory of it;
How she and her sister Sassy
Would do that as kids,
Before the dark days,
Before her death in a bath.
That drowning, that sad death.
Sassy's husband had beaten her
Black and blue and green
And she'd hide herself away
So as not to be seen.
But she'd seen her,
Seen the bruises
Like smudged tattoos,
The closed eyes,
The swollen lips,
The hardly able to talk words
Pushing through the mouth
To say: he says he loves me still.
Celia stared at her reflection,
The way her own mouth was distorted,
Her lips blown up, her eyes enlarged,
Out of proportion.
She almost laughed,
But something about Sassy's sad death
Made her stifle any guffaw
That may have broken free
From her distorted reflected jaw.
There was the time she'd seen her
Undressing for bed when she stayed
Because Sassy's husband (the weird freak)
Was off on business, some big deal,
Needing to be pulled off,
And she saw the black and blueness
With tinges of green

Along her naked flesh,
The buttocks welted
Where he had belted.
Sassy had said nothing,
Had not noticed Celia looking,
Had not thought it unusual
To be unclothed as such
Away from other's peering eyes.
Now Sassy was dead;
Found in the bath;
Drugged out, wrists slit,
Having drowned recorded.
But he had driven her over the edge;
He had bullied and beaten
Like some spoilt cruel child
An unwanted toy.
Celia turned the spoon over
And put it down.
No more desire to laugh,
Just fond memories of Sassy
Before her death in the bath.

Terry Collett

What Colour Soul.

Miss Snoot sat
in the front of the class
near the teacher's desk
next to the short blonde girl

with the large blue eyes
Reynard said
never seen a girl so thin
I bet she's titless

you looked up front
from your place
at the back
studying the narrow frame

the thin arms
the lank black hair
down to her bony shoulders
Reynard talked on

his description getting more lewd
as he went on
spoken in an under breath
so the teacher wouldn't hear

over the Beethoven
she was playing
on the piano
to the class as part

of the lesson
you mused
on Miss Snoot's hands
held together

her elbows on the desk
her eyes closed
her pale features
giving hint

of distant meditation
and Reynard wondering
what colour
her underwear

what hue
her pubic hair
but you seeing
a slight sway

of her head
the hair in slow
movement and motion
wondered what dreams

she had
what place
she occupied
inside her head

how soft
her heart might be
what colour her soul
on that inward sea.

Terry Collett

What Dudman Said 1916

George had gone
from the house.

His parents
had sent him
to a place
for treatment
for the state
of his nerves
broken up
at the Front.

Who told you?
Polly asked
when Susie
had told her.

Old Dudman
(the butler)
just told me,
Susie said.

But gone where?
Polly asked.

Didn't say,
said Susie,
secretly
she was glad
that Polly
would not now
be able
to go sleep
in his bed
as she had
times before.

I must know
where he's gone,

Polly said,
and rushed off
quickly to
find Dudman
and ask him.

Where's he gone?
Polly said
to Dudman
who was in
his small room.

Where's who gone?
He asked her.

Master George,
she replied.

He eyed her
quite sternly;
where he can
be assured
of treatment,
Dudman said.

But where's that?
Polly said.

I can't say,
not to you,
he replied,
back to work,
and forget
your dealings
in the past,
in his bed,
Dudman said.

Terry Collett

What For?

I'd keep you here
within my arms
if death hadn't stole you;
I would tell you
all the things
that I left too late
to say.

Some nights
I go through it all
scene by scene,
episode by episode,
right down
to the flimsy
wire of death
and your final breath.

Some days it seems
so unreal,
as if you
were here still,
that it was all
some weird nightmare
of gigantic proportions,
but I know it's real
and you're not
here still.

Now and then,
I feel the rise
of panic
as the reality
of your death
sinks in,
reaching right down
to my core,
throwing up
the question:
what for?

I miss your
quiet humour,
your dry wit;
that depth of character
unfolding bit by bit,
layer after layer;
your stoic way
and stance,
taking things in hand,
leaving nothing
to chance.

Now you're not here
(some other
place maybe)
the place you
once filled
is vacant
like a desert waste
or vast sea off shore,
and rings out
the question:
what for?

Terry Collett

What George Sees 1916

George sits
by the window
of his room,

there are rooks
over the far trees,

over some field
cows moo
on the air,

he stares at the horizon
expecting explosions,

seeing the enemies' trenches
over by Tenet's farm
teem with life,

the nurse behind him
watches him sit
his head to one side
mumbling words,

George doesn't want
to turn round
he knows Wilkes' head
will still lay on the floor
mouthing words,

the nurse offers him
a cup of tea
brown and now warm,

he sees a sniper
walking along
by the drive
rifle over his shoulder
getting bolder,

you must drink George
the nurse says
putting the cup by his elbow
on the small side table,

Mitchum's hand lay
on the trench floor
at his feet
the wedding ring
still there
muddied gold,

where's Polly?
he says not looking around
in case the sniper
crouches out of sight,

she's busy
the nurse says
(having been told
by Dudman the butler
not to bring her) ,

bring her here
he says
I need her to see
the sniper fellow
to see for herself,

the nurse looks over
his shoulder
along the drive
the gardener walks
with hoe,

POLLY
George bellows
POLLY
he shouts again
causing the gardener
to lift his head and stare
who was there,

the nurse puts a hand
on his shoulder
to calm him down
she'll be coming soon
she says in his ear,

his eyes gaze
as the sniper disappears
into the door
the driveway is empty,

an explosion of rooks
hit the sky,

George wide-eyed
begins to cry.

Terry Collett

What He Said,

Was that what
he meant when
he said that?

They say he's a a liar,
that he couldn't
tell the truth
if it sat on his forehead
and shit in his eyes.

I wonder if what
they say about him
is true?

He has the eyes
I could drink from;
the hunk of a body
I drool over;
the smile that makes
me buzz,
she muses,
sitting by the window,
looking out at the grey sky,
cloudless, trees swaying.

He said those things.

They say he says
these things
all the time.

Maybe they are jealous
of me and him.

After all he has
the most sensual voice:
deep and velvety.

I wonder

if he meant
what he said?

He can kiss me
to a heaven.

He touches me
to a wetness.

But did he mean
those words?

Were they from love
or dark cruel birds?

Terry Collett

What He's Seen

Naaman takes note
Of the woman Sarah
as she passes him by.

Her blonde hair
and blue eyes
have him enthralled.

His cappuccino is too hot
to drink as yet, so
sits and watches
as she walks by.

She is tall,
her figure upright,
her sway is
as a fine ship
about to set sail
across calm seas.

He thinks of her often,
imagines her stopping
to talk, not just
walking by unaware
he watches.

He spoons the top
off the coffee.
Wipes cream
from his moustache
with a napkin provided.

Sunlight comes through
the glass roof, he feels
like some tender plant.

She pauses by a shop window,
stares at dresses and tops
and the dummies wearing

them, perfectly figured.

His eyes drink her in,
sup up her beauty.

There is bare flesh
upon her neck
where the top
of the dress ends.

Her hair touches it,
sweeps it
as she moves away.

Naaman closes his eyes
to file his images.
He opens his eyes
and she's gone,
only space
where she'd been.

The space is empty now,
but holds what he's seen.

Terry Collett

What I Saw 1974

It was Dalya's way
of looking at me
that warmed me
to the core,

(some place
outside Oslo) ,

we shared a cake
and ate with forks,

I was remembering
the night she crept
into my tent,

(the Aussie guy
and gone to the tent
of the Yorkshire lass) ,

and began to undress
in the small confines
of the tent,

and I lay there
watching and waiting,

(beat old
fashion dating) ,

her small breasts
tight and taut,

her slim figure,

and in the semi dark
I tried to fathom
lower down,

but she lay beside me

and we embraced.

This cake
is to die for,
she said,
forking in
the last morsel.

How about
some more?

Of course,
I said,

trying to recall
what it was I saw.

Terry Collett

What Is Love?

What is love?
She asked him
is this love?

This constant
having sex
no matter

how I feel?
Is there not
some other?

He turned round
hard gazing.
Weren't I good

was I not
amazing?
He replied,

eyeing her:
her pale eyes,
the thin lips.

There must be
more than this,
she told him,

more than shove
and rough hugs
and quick kiss;

much better,
more deeper.
what am I,

Sweet Honey,
love's holder,
love's keeper?

He replied
quite coldly,
sex is love

love is sex,
simple sum:
2 & 2,

me and you.
More to love
than poor sex,

she told him,
animals
do better

more constant,
with one aim:
reproduce,

but not love
not real love,
she uttered.

Go elsewhere
for your love,
whatever

your love is,
he replied,
this is love,

he lied.
She got up
and got dressed

and left him.
He lay there
all alone;

stuffy room,

nothing more
than dull day,

and wind's moan.

Terry Collett

What Is Sometimes Hidden.

Just as Minnie gets in the mood
to play the Debussy Violin

Sonata her mother says the
photographer is waiting and

so she has to go along to the
lounge and pose and have her

picture taken and as she stands
there with her violin dressed

to the nines the photographer
says no do not smile it cheapens

the effect and so she stiffens
her lips and stares at the young

photographer's moustache and
her mother says do has the man

wants dear and don't pout so
and so she ceases to pout and

gazes at the box camera and man
hidden behind the cloth his hand

visible and do not move he says
hold it do not fidget dear her

mother says and puts her hands
on her shoulders and places her

in the position her mother thinks
the photographer wants is that it?

her mother asks the photographer
smiling in that way she smiles that

gives the impression of an imbecile
yes yes he says that is it and so she

stands as placed the sensation of
wanting to urinate suddenly upon

her and so she squeezes her thighs
together her knees touching her

hands gripping the violin trying
silently to keep the urine in.

Terry Collett

What It Was For.

Dennis said
that girl you talk to
that one with glasses
and smells of damp

I saw her in the girls' bog
well not in there
but heard more like
after she went in

and she was kind
of crying soft
Benedict listened
as they walked

the playground
(as such it was
a bombed out cellar
of some house

before the War)
why was she crying?
Benedict asked
search me

Dennis said
and kicked a ball
to some kids
over the way

then ran towards them
showing some skill
so Benedict walked up
the steps to the girl's bog

and heard the weeping sound
through the wooden door
what's up Ingrid?
he said softly

she paused
silence came
sniffing
she opened the door

and came out
red eyed behind
her specs
she wiped her nose

and pulled
the door shut
and took him
secretly

to some corner
out of sight
and lifted her
grey skirt

to show a thigh
wounded and bruised
which caught his eye
then she let

the skirt down
and wiped her hands
and blew her nose
he sighed

he knew her father's hand
had made its mark
and curse
she looked at him

her eyes larger
through the glasses
power
and stared anxious

and bit her lip

and wiped her nose
once more
don't say a word

to anyone
she said in quiet tones
be worse for me
if others know

he sighed again
and made
his humble promise
to keep his word

here
he said
and took a wrapped
toffee from his pocket

and put it
in her ink stained
bony hand
she stared

then slowly
unwrapped it
and placed it
in her mouth

and began to chew
they walked off
and down the steps
to the playground floor

he talked
of the bow and arrow set
he bought
and how like

Robin Hood he looked
and would she be
his Maid Marian

when his game

again began?
she chewed slowly
her eyes settling
to a milder gaze

yes
she said
and could she borrow
his blue steel sword?

he smiled and agreed
and she talked
of her father's wrath
and row and hits

her mother's
blackened eye
and how he hit
she herself

as she hid
behind the door
having no reason why
or what it was for.

Terry Collett

What Liz Won'T Share.

Liz Barrett Browning
never carried a gun,
or strapped it to the
inside of her thigh.

That .38 revolver cold
against her skin, makes
Bonnie sigh. Warmer
in the palm of hand,

the finger squeezing
the trigger. She's done
with the poem. She'll
copy and send to the

papers who'll lap it up
like sour milk to a thirsty
cat. Penned it well, she
thinks. Clyde says nothing

on it; he reads the headlines
for the crimes. She read
Liz Browning at school
amongst others, that

woman thing, shared
insight, mutual feelings,
knows the monthly bleeds,
understands the feel of

men, the coming on, that
big hero thing. She feels
the revolver against her
flesh, metal on skin, warming

now, forgetting it's there.
This is one thing, Bonnie
says, smiling, Liz won't share.

What Love Can Bring

You see the dull morning sky;
you hear the song of birds;
feel the black dog barking
and growling in your heart

and head. You want the sunlight
of hot summers; want to hear
the spring song of birds; want
the caress of a goodnight kiss.

You feel the dullness of age
creeping along your bones;
see the dim light of winter
mornings enter your heart;

want those days of youth again;
want less age old pain. You see
the love of your young days die
from cancer; hear their words

over and over on a summer's
eve; you want your young days
once more. You see no sun
coming over the hill; hear a

mournful bird sing; you want
no more dark places, want
what deep love can bring.

Terry Collett

What Lovers Do 47bc

If Marcus
my husband
had knowledge

of what we
(my slave girl
young Amy

and myself
his bored wife
Annona)

get up to
while he's off
in combat

on Caesar's
new campaign
he would kill

both of us
brutally
but the risk

of such death
can't compete
with this love

that we share
the passions
the kisses

and holding
just being
together

without him
shafting me
like some ox

a dumb cow
without his
commanding

this and that
his drinking
his boasting

of old wars
and his wounds
let him sleep

while away
with his whores
let them feel

his phallus
enter them
like a stake

into meat
Amy comes
I see her

young goddess
to attend
to the bed

to make new
then to bathe
in the pool

out of sight
of others
just us two

doing what
lovers do.

Terry Collett

What Matilda Said

Matilda closed the door. Matilda
Saw Millie by the window. Her maid's
Uniform looked tight at the rear. She
Wanted to place her arms around her
Waist, kiss her neck. Millie turned and
Said, He's out there with Mrs Dimmable.
Matilda walked to the window and stared.
She sensed Millie beside her; heard her
Breathing, the brush of her sleeve against
Her arm. Looks happy enough, Matilda said
Of Mrs. Dimmable. You didn't sleep too well
Last night, Millie said, turning, going to the
Bed. She pulled back the covers, smoothed
Out the sheet. Matilda went around the other
Side of the bed and looked at Millie. You were
Tossing and turning, Millie said looking up.
Matilda helped make the bed and said, Sorry
About that. Millie stared at Matilda and said
You murmured words. Did I? Matilda replied.
Yes, Millie said, looking at her hands. What did
I say? Matilda asked. You muttered my name.
Millie stood back from the bed, gazed at Matilda.
You said things. What things? Said you loved me.
Millie blushed at the words. Matilda patted the
Pillow but said nothing. She brushed her hands
Over the covers, pushed away creases. She paused.
Looked at the window. Smelt the flowers in a vase.
Do you? Millie asked. Love me? Matilda stared
Out at Mrs Dimmable and the new gardener.
Her lips wanted to move but nothing came.
Her eyes watered. The world was awash. Millie
Walked to the window, put her arms around Matilda's
Waist, her fingers formed a knot on Matilda's stomach.
Matilda placed her hands over Millie's.
They do look in love and contented don't they?
Millie said over Matilda's shoulder. Matilda's sensed
The warm breath. Yes, she said, they do. Do you?
Millie's breath uttered softly into her ear, yes.

Terry Collett

What Max Said.

Max had bought you a drink
and lit your cigarette
with a lighter he produced
from a pocket.

You wore the black dress
your husband had bought you
before you left him.

Why black?
Max asked.

I like black
it gives me a sense
of mourning
you said.

Mourning for whom?
he said.

The world
the women in it
the poor souls
who are abused
and neglected
you said.

Are you that kind
that mourns for those
other than yourself?
Max said.

You inhaled
and gazed at him.

He was dark haired
and wore a white shirt
and black suit.

Are you?
you said.

Empathy or sympathy?
he said.

Either of them
you said.

Why did you
leave your husband?
he said.

He was having an affair
with some skinny bitch
at his office
you replied.

The bar keeper
brought the drinks
Max had ordered
and laid on them
on the bar.

Max paid him
and the bar keeper
went off to serve another.

How did you find out?
Max said.

A friend told me
she saw them together
coming out of some hotel
in town
you said.

Did he deny it?
Max said.

No he just said
ok so what?

so I left him
you said
and how is
your wife Max?

He smiled
and let out a puff
of smoke
she's away
gone to look after
her mother
who is unwell
he said.

You want to come
stay the night?
he said.

No it wouldn't be fair
on your wife
you said.

Max smiled
and said
just an offer.
he sipped his drink
and you sipped yours.

You may have
gone with Max
but you didn't want
to join the house
of whores.

Terry Collett

What Max Wanted

What do you want from me?
Max's wife said

and he looked by her
at the waitress

at the cafe
who was walking

with some order
behind his wife's back

and he noticed
the cute ass as she moved

the way she swayed
and the hands

holding the tray
huh? What is it

you want from me?
his wife repeated

her eyes peering at him
taking in

that aspect of him
as he turned his head

look said Max
following the waitress

to the table across the way
his eyes slowly

undressing her
his mind making up scenes

like in some movie
you say come on Honey

let's go out for a meal
and talk

and what are you doing
looking elsewhere

and not talking
his wife said

spittle on her lower lip
Max looked back

at his wife and said
oh yes sure

I was thinking
of the Picasso print

we saw the other day
you know that one

we both liked
and you said you'd like it

for your birthday
well maybe

I ought to get it
what do you think?

And the waitress
looked over at Max

as she went by
and he saw

a whole new ball game
in her eyes

and caught the cheek
and ear

and was sure
he captured some aspect

of her perfume
and his wife said

Picasso?
That Picasso?

are you sure Max?
and she went into a daze

and smiled
and Max imagined himself

and the waitress
and sex games

and a party
going wild.

Terry Collett

What Might Have Been.

And you stood there arms folded
In that street in Dubrovnik wearing
That yellow shirt and that moustache
Like some Latin lover with other people
Passing by while you posed for some
Photograph and you thinking of that
Courier dame who came to your room
The day before because your brother
Said you were sick and she sat on your
Bed in her short skirt and said how are
You now? And all you could raise while
Lying there was a small smile and you
Said feeling pretty bad and she touched
Your brow and looking so sad and the
Photo shot done you go back to the table
With the glass of wine and that paperback
Book on Schopenhauer and the hot sticky
Afternoon sun and you wondering if the
Courier dame would have been a good lay
If you'd been feeling better on a different
Day and your brother said lets' go see the
Sights and you finished the wine and began
To tour the city musing on the young courier
And the missed chance saying to yourself
Walking the streets oh my god what a pity.

Terry Collett

What Might Have Been.(Poem)

You had been in Tangiers
until the early hours

of the morning
and was brought back

to base camp on the truck
as the sun was beginning to rise

over the horizon
and had then gone

to crash down
in your tent

too tired to undress
and slept through

until midday
then showered

and sat in the bar
when Mamie came

and sat beside you
and said

where'd you go last night?
I thought you

were going to walk me
down by the beach

and watch the sun rise
from the sea?

I was too tired
you said

I crashed out in my tent
she looked at her glass of coke

I could have joined you there
she whispered

and done what?
you said

slept beside me?
she shifted her buttocks

on the stool and said
well it would have been better

than sleeping in my tent
with that Scottish hen

as her brother calls her
you sipped your drink

and watched
the old Moroccan guy

in the corner
inhale on his marijuana smoke

plus I had her snoring
and moaning in her sleep

Mamie added
giving you her side on stare

yes
you said

it would have been
better than that

and she put her hand
on your thigh

and rubbed it back
and forth and said

but it didn't happen
maybe next time

you replied
imaging it all

in your mind
right down

to the last removing
of clothes

and trying to move
in the tent's small space

your body drained
of all strength

wanting only sleep
the Tangier booze

and belly dancers
and nightclub smoke and music

clinging on your flesh
and ringing in your ears

and she trying
to get you in

the right place
and you closing your eyes

and drifting away
like one who dies.

Terry Collett

What Others May Think.

Apart from the water tower
and the farm

and a few scattered cottages
there were no other buildings

for a mile or more
just you and Jane

and birds in the early morning sky
I like it at this time of day

she said
I like the fresh smell of nature

and the farm
and having few people about

you walked beside her down the lane
that led away from the farm

you noticed how her black hair
seemed freshly washed

and blew slightly in the mild wind
does you father mind

you being out with me?
you asked softly

he doesn't know
she replied

he thinks I came out alone
for a morning walk

why didn't you tell him?
you asked

he was busy writing his Sunday sermon
and it was easier to just go out

and not disturb him
she said looking around at you

her eyes studying you
as she walked on down the lane

would he mind you being with me?
you asked

I don't think he knows you as yet
seeing as you have only moved here

a few months and don't come
to the church

you stopped and took her hand in yours
it was warm and soft

and pulsed with life
she looked at your hand

holding hers and she rubbed
her thumb over the back

of your hand
you wanted to kiss her lips

or cheek just to feel
her flesh on yours

but you didn't you just looked at her
and waited to see

what she would do next
she let go of your hand

and looked around her
there might be people looking

from those cottages up there
she said suddenly pointing up

at the rising bank which went up
to two cottages high up

if they see us they may tell Father
and then it would be awkward

and he might suspect things
and then she went quiet

and looked at the running stream
by the lane

but we haven't done anything
we just walk out and talk

and hold hands now and then
it's not what we do

it's what others think we do
she said softly

and stood looking at you
waiting for you to speak

but you said nothing
just leaned in close to her

and kissed her cheek
and said

even Christ permitted kisses
even the one from Judas

and she smiled
and the early morning sun

pushed through trees
and shone on her hair

and there was the sound of birds
singing in the air.

Terry Collett

What She Gave

She gave you a postcard print
Of Marc Chagall. You pinned it
To the inside of your bedroom door.
It had a Florence postmark
On the back; you imagined her spittle
On the stamp, her tongue licking
Until the stamp stuck. You wished
You could have been at her side
When she toured the Florence sites;
Wished in your secret thoughts
You could have shared her bed;
Felt her twist and turn in the night,
Sensed her body's closeness as you lay.
She had written neatly on the back;
Her words conveying that day's tour
And things she'd seen and done with him.
Before you'd pinned the card to the door
You had smelt the surface for her scent
As if she'd secretly hid some message there
Amongst the smells and aromas of her hand.
He's just a friend, she said, seeking the arts
Of Florence and its galleries and famous sites.
How little she knows how much her being
Fills your thoughts and life and weary days
And all your lonely long dreams at nights

Terry Collett

What She Never Saw.

Jill can see them
in the garden kissing:
her mother and the man
she has brought home
with her just now.

Father has left,
gone off
with the skinny woman,
who Jill saw with him
at the theatre,
whom he said
was a friend
from work.

She stares at them
in the garden
kissing and holding,
she smiling and he
standing smug
and satisfied.

Her mother had
introduced
the man to her;
he had looked at her,
smiled, spoke trifles,
then looked
at her mother
and spoke
of other things,
leaving her alone
as he and her mother
walked off
into the garden.

He'll probably
stayed the night,
probably share

her mother's bed,
as her father used to do.

She turns away
from the window
and sits
on the edge
of her bed.

She feels
out of it all,
feels put aside,
put out of mind.

Her father brought
his friend home
while her mother
was away.

She stayed
the night too,
in her father's room,
in his bed.

She heard
their laughter,
the friend's giggles.

She had crept
to her father's room
that night,
listened at the door.

By sounds she heard
she pictured,
what
she never saw.

Terry Collett

What To Do 1933

He grabbed your hair
pulled it
threatened
you again.

You recalled
the last time
he pushed a letter
in your face
and said
read it
read the damn letter.

But he pushed
you down
on the sofa
and held
the crumpled up letter
and said
what's it
going to be huh?
you want to go
with him
or stay with me?

This time
it was all over
him not
getting promotion
on his job
as if you
were to blame.

You never did
want me to get
that promotion
did you huh?
you want me
to remain

just a clerk
on the ground floor
don't want me
up there
with the pros
getting a real salary.

He grabbed
your arm
yanked you
off the sofa
dragged you
along behind him.

You tried to resist
but he was so strong
when he was angry
that you followed him
not trying any more
to hold back.

Once he had you
in the bedroom
he began
to undress you
like you
were some kid
then he ripped off
the clothes
the white blouse
the one you wore
to go places
the skirt he bought you
after last time's row
but he ripped it off.

You stood there
wide-eyed
staring at him
as he hit you
and the world
went white

then dim
and you didn't
know what to do
as he raped you.

Terry Collett

What To Do? 1962

As soon as Elaine gets on
the school bus
they start:
Where's your boyfriend
Frumpy? Has he kissed
you again?

Laughter and smiles
and looks,
but she ignores them
as gets into the seat
by the window
and stares out.

Her sister(big mouth)
sits next to her.

She doesn't know
if John was on the bus
or not: she didn't look,
she was too busy
getting into her seat
as the laughter died out,
and the sniggers
became general talk again.

Her sister talks
to her friends nearby;
the radio
blares out music:
some Billy Fury song.

She wishes her sister
didn't blurt out
about John kissing her.

What did it
have to do with her?

She is tempted to look
over to see if John
is looking at her,
but she doesn't
just in case he is
and she blushes.

She watches
the passing view:
fields, trees, cattle,
grass and cottages.

She dreamed of him
the night before:
he kissed her
and she kissed him
and it was lovely,
and then she woke up
kissing her pillow.

Will he wait for her
when they get off the bus
or will he walk on?
She doesn't know.

I hope he will,
she muses,
watching the school
coming into view.

What to say?
What to do?

Terry Collett

What Was Once

She would often stare at you
sitting by the pond
the summer sunlight

playing there
on the waters' skin
the holidays

having just begun
and she'd say
you do love me don't you?

and you'd look away
from the sunlight's dance
and reply

of course I do
and you'd see that look
in her eyes

like worlds
being born
and she'd say

Mother wouldn't want
me here alone with you
and you looking back

at the pond's water
would say
why is that?

what have I done
to cause her alarm?
Birds flew across

the pond
their cries breaking
the silence of the summer day

she moved her hand
and touched your hand
resting on the dry earth

because she's jealous of me
being loved I suppose
or maybe she thinks

we do things while alone
you look back at her
the way she sat

the skirt lifted
along her thigh
her hand squeezing yours

that summer
that love
the fresh life

of loving
the being
out of doors.

Terry Collett

What You Miss.

One day she said
you'll look back
and wonder why

you never took
advantage of the kiss
you could have had

and maybe
how comes you never
made it to our marriage bed

and why I chose
some other over you
and if you do

look back
at this moment
and apart

from this moon
and stars
and evening

chill wind
remember how you could
have made a difference

to our lives
by just a moment's
thought and kiss

instead of a different life
and what you have
and what you miss.

Terry Collett

What You Need.

Now
I like
destruction
& mayhem

as much
as the next person...
so you have
to pay a bit more

to prolong
your youth
& for a guy
in a tweed jacket

to give you
a certificate
which says
you're qualified

to do
x, y & z,
in the hope
that you'll

be able
to walk straight
into a job
you're not

experienced to do.
I never went
to uni &
yet everyday

I somehow
manage
to dress
myself.

Written by my late son Oliver Collett(1984-2014)

Terry Collett

What's Love Got To Do With It?

What's love got
to do with it?
He said,
we eat and drink
and go to bed
and have sex
and then lay back
and smoke
or talk or joke
and then another poke.

What's love got
to do with it?
He said,
we get up and wash
and have breakfast
and go to work
and get down to it
or try to shirk,
then have lunch
and back again to work
or shirk,
talk or lie
or agree to differ
with the boss
(big fool, total loss) ,
then home
on the bus or train
avoiding the wind and rain.

What's love got
to do with it?
He said,
we get home
have a bite to eat,
watch TV or go
or drink booze or wine,
then to bed
and get down to it

maybe once to twice,
then lay back
and joke or talk
or smoke in silence,
avoiding rows
and maybe violence.

What's love?
Got to do
With it?
He said
lying in bed,
nothing,
not one bit.

Terry Collett

When Her Brothers Were Away.

When Monica asked
if she could go with you
and her brothers
bike riding

her mother said
no you're too young
or if she asked
to go with you

and Jim and Pete
to the cinema
to see the latest
Elvis flick

her mother said
definitely not
it's not for young girls
and Monica'd storm indoors

slamming the door
shouting I hate you all
but when you called one day
and her brothers were out

(gone to see their big brother
about some old motorbike)
her mother said
yes come in and wait

and Monica was
pleased as Punch
especially when
her mother said

you could stay to lunch
and I can show you
over the place
Monica said

and after lunch maybe
we can go for a bike ride
along the small lanes
and maybe you

could show me
some judo moves
and her mother said
we'll see I'm not sure

Benedict will want
to do those kind
of things with a girl
and went off

to make lunch
and Monica showed you
all over the house
whose room was whose

and up in the attic
she said
this is my room
and took your hand

and took you
to the window
and said
see the view I've got?

Isn't it the best?
and you said
yes it's good
and you took in the view

and looking around
the room you saw her bed
and the big pink elephant
there by the wall

staring at you

and she said
that's Pinkie
isn't she great?

sure
you said
and she took you
down the stairs

to the kitchen for lunch
and her mother
chatted away
about her sons

and Monica sat there
gawking at you
her eyes studying
each aspect of you

her eyes large
as saucers
blue and beautiful
and after lunch

you showed her
a few judo moves
which she loved
especially when

your hands moved her
and you sensed
her almost ready
to burst with joy

and just before
you were ready
to go for a ride
on the bikes

her brothers came
and shooed her away
and she went off

giving them the evil eye

but you she gave
the young girl wink
the we know
what they don't smile

and off you rode
with her brothers
but she kept
those moments with you

(to herself)
as if you were
Romeo and Juliet
fond lovers.

Terry Collett

When Not To Gaze.

Have you read any Kierkegaard?
She asked her blues eyes searching
Yours almost reaching right in and
Making a grab for your soul. No
You replied wondering how many
Guys had spied her breasts tucked
Up neat and tight like some birthday
Gift and not been tempted to reach
And touch. Well you should she said
Better than that Nietzsche or Sartre
And she sat down in the chair by the
Window waving a hand for the waiter
And crossing one leg over the other.
No lady crosses her legs and sits like
That said Mother in your head some
Memory stirred. She ordered for you
Both in her best French and studied
You with silent stare and you trying
Hard not to gaze at her unclothed thighs
Breathed out deep and closed your eyes.

Terry Collett

When She Gets Older 1962

Yochana arrives
home from school.

Her mother is in
the lounge knitting,
a radio is on
playing Bach.

Her mother studies her
as she enters the room.

How did school go?
she asks.

It was fine,
Yochana says.

She waits a few moments then says:
I told Benedict he can come
and stay one weekend.

Her mother stops knitting
and looks at her.

Only if your father agrees,
she says,
which he may not;
after all you are only 14,
it isn't as though you
are an adult yet.

Yochana was going
to say something,
but thought better of it,
of course,
she says calmly.

Well get changed out
of your uniform

and make sure
your room is tidy,
her mother says.

She then focuses
on her knitting
and ceases to take interest
in her daughter's presence
any longer.

Yochana walks off
with her satchel,
and goes upstairs
to her room,
and closes the door
behind her.

She is sure
her father will agree;
after all it was he
who stuck up for her
when her mother had hit her
that time for even
talking to Benedict.

She begins to undress
out of her uniform.

The mirror of the dressing table
shows her looking
tired and strained.

She feels it, too.

Anxiety over Benedict;
whether he will want to come
and what her mother
will be like when
or if he comes
and what will her father
be like with him?

She stands there in front
of the mirror looking at herself.

She is thin.

Needs building up.

Wish he was here.

Wish he was here now
behind me and his arms
about my waist
and his lips
on my neck.

She puts on
a pale blue dress
and brushes her hair.

Tidies her school uniform
in a neat pile.

If only he was here.

She can almost sense
his lips on her neck,
on her shoulder.

Will she marry him
when she gets older?

Terry Collett

When We Get Older 1963

Magdalene sits opposite
her father at the dining table,
her mother is in the kitchen
dishing up the food.

Your ma says
that Maguire girl was here?
Her father says.

Magdalene looks
at him for a while.

What was she
doing here?
He says.

Listening to records,
and talking,
she replies.

But why was she here?
The reports from school
from the nuns
are not good, he says.

What mine?
Magdalene says.

No hers,
they've almost
given up on her,
he says.

Shame on them,
she says.

He stares at her,
no lip from you
or you'll feel my hand,

he says gruffly,
stay away from her,
she'll bring you no good.

Magdalene looks away
from him, looks
at the Scared Heart of Jesus
picture on the wall.

Her da goes on,
she listens to the music
in her head,
that Billy Fury song,
thinking of her and Mary
in the bed, kissing
and touching.

Her ma comes in
with two plates of stew
and puts them down
in front of them both,
then goes out again.

Her da still yaks,
Billy Fury still sings.

Her ma comes in
with her own plate of stew,
and sits down at the table.

I've told her to stay away
from the Maguire girl,
the father says
to the mother.

Make sure you do,
her ma says.

Magdalene gazes
at her mother.

Billy stops singing;

her ma's voice has
driven him away.

I will,
Magdalene says,
beginning to fork
in the dumpling.

Make sure you do,
I don't want her
round here again,
her da says.

Billy Fury sings once more,
Mary's hand touches her,
brings her to a seventh heaven,
and then she kisses neck,
and shoulder.

We'll run away,
Mary said,
when we get older.

Terry Collett

Where And When?

I saw you
keep staring
Yochana
says to me
while in class
this morning

we're watching
other kids
by the fence
at recess

why do you
stare at me?

I like you
I tell her

she looks out
at the field

why would you?
She asks me

I just do
no reason

you kissed me
on the cheek
suddenly

I remember
it was good

she looks round
stares at me

not for me
it wasn't

she then adds
at the time

and what now?
I ask her

I'm confused
what I feel
inside me

like when you
hear Chopin?

She blushes
looks away
watching kids
on the field
at their play

can I kiss?
I ask her

not right here
she mutters

where abouts?

I don't know
where abouts
but not here

you're pretty
I tell her

she pretends
she's not heard

after school
if you like
just before
your school bus
is filled up

she suggests

all right then
I reply

we stand there
by the fence
in silence.

Terry Collett

Where Has Time Gone?

Where has time gone to,
my son,
where has it gone,
where fled?
I among the living,
you among the dead.

Do my words
still reach you?
Do you still hear me
in my darkest night,
see me in my wandering
in dreams to find you
along the dark corridors
of that hospital wing,
passed ghostly figures
on a different way?

Time has gone,
has fled,
my son,
and where you were
in my heart,
a piece has been ripped,
leaving a hole
where a wind of loss
rushes though.

Were you there that night
when the realization
of your death
shocked me on waking?

You see me and know
that my aged heart
through loss of you
is aching.

Where has time gone,

my son,
where has it fled?
I here at a loss,
you at rest,
in peace
amongst the dead.

Terry Collett

Where Is The Light.

Where is the light
we once knew?

What darkness
is this?

Our fingers touch
fingertips on fingertips,
that electric buzzing
between us,
shocking us
in its pleasantness,
pleasing us
in its shockingness;
the buzz vibrating
through the dark
like that phallus
we both knew
vibrating between us.

Where her fruit
once overflowed
with juices,
a dry dying comes
and her heartbeat
is a pinprick sensation
tingling in the night air
like a dull bell
in a weak wind.

Where does
the darkness reach?

Why has
the light failed?

Once we took flight
in her wide wings motion,
her vibrant heart beating,

a big bass drum
sounding as we flew
in our loving
and sexual flight
in that far away night.

Her lips motion words,
the kisses less warm,
less soft;
where once her kisses
burned and seared,
just chill wind comes,
and less and less
as feared.

Baisers froids,
she whispers,
my cheek chills
to her kisses,
my heart seeks
a once upon love,
a touch to warm
as once before,
getting less,
but wanting
more and more.

Terry Collett

Where She May Be,

I suppose I saw her last
then, going towards the
food store with her man,

and she smiled that last
time, her eyes bright, that
smile I remember way back,

when we first met at high
school, and we kissed the
first time a month or so later.

Dead now, cancer fed. Years
back that was, her brother
stopped me and told me just

like that matter of fact. Where
she was laid to rest I've no
idea, where or how she was

put to rest I have no clue, I
didn't ask nor thought it right,
not wanting to intrude on another's

grief, but in my mind and heart
she still resides, that girl who used
to smile, with bright eyes, where

ever her body rests, sleeping lies.

Terry Collett

Where The Place.

Where the place? The nurse
watches as you fold and unfold
the towel after your bath, she
ignores what you say, her eyes
watch every move you make.

Where the place? you say, patting
the towel with the palms of
your hands, picking off a speck
of white. Maggie, that's enough,
the nurse says, losing patience,
sighing beneath her breath.

She walks beside you down
the dark passageway, never in
front (she's been told never to turn
her back on you.) Your hair is
cropped, your eyes stare ahead,
you mutter: where the place?

Upon the heath, you answer
yourself, there to meet...Hush
Maggie, the nurse says, eyeing
you warily, having read the report
on you, how you stabbed your
boyfriend's friend with a pair of
scissors, jab, jab, jab. There to meet,
whom will I meet? You say, looking
the nurse's way, taking in her pink
plumpness, the softness of her flesh,
her wariness of stare. You both enter
the main room. It is large and other
criminally insane patients sit about
or stand. Sit down now, Maggie,
the nurse says. You sit in a chair by
the wall. She walks off, her plump
behind sways as she walks away.

Jamie stands by the window; he

stares out. He still has the slit throat
you gave him as he slept in bed
beside you. He is silent. Moody fart,
you muse, wishing he'd go away, and
take his slit throat with him. Where
the place? You ask. He turns and looks
at you, but says nothing. You look
ahead at the passing crowd, the tall
nurse walks another patient by his
thin arm. WHERE THE PLACE?
You shout. Bells rings, nurses look
and rush towards you in sharp alarm.

Terry Collett

Where They Sat

This is where they sat
and watched the sea
and incoming tide.
Now he has gone.

The waves still come
in and go out regardless.
The sunset brings memories.
The way the sun sits on

the horizon like a Buddha
clothed in a red gown.
He held her hand on
these sands. They kissed

beneath that sun the warmth
like an embrace. It was
here that he spoke of love
and their future and the house

and maybe their children
running in and out of the garden
on summer days. She holds
a handful of sand. Squeezes

between fingers. Gulls fly overhead
making an awful din. If she
closes her eyes she can imagine
him still there. Almost smell

his presence. She sniffs the air.
Sea salt and after sun lotion.
His body shining with sweat
after making love up there

by the rocks. Children and
parents and others enjoy
the sea and beach nearby.
He said so many things.

They are still in the air.
The words about her head
like invisible birds. Then came
the suicide. The final note.

Out at sea some one waves
To her from a small white boat.

Terry Collett

Whether George Loved Alice

Benedict didn't know,
but Alice loved George,
she let it show.

Benedict saw the way
she looked when George
came in the room
or if she spotted him
along the passage,
she'd flushed and gawk
at him like some spotty
schoolgirl (though she
must have been near 70
if a day) and pat down
her grey skirt or mauve
flowered dress and make
sure, without mirror, her
hair was not a mess.

Benedict watched George,
poor of sight and bent slight,
enter the dinning hall
and make straight
for his chair and table,
sit down and fiddle
with the cutlery,
gaze at his face
in the back of a spoon
(though God knows
what he saw with eyes
like his, except blur) ,
while across the way
Alice would stand,
and girl like, swoon.

Benedict saw Alice
once or twice, when
courage allowed,
stand behind George's chair

and with fingers twiddle his hair.

George blushed at this,
looked straight ahead,
sensing Alice's hands
about his neck
in soft embrace,
her lips near,
wanting to kiss,
touched his face.

Benedict guessed
she never ventured
to George's room or bed,
least not for real,
but maybe in dreams
or in some loving corner
of her aging head.

Whether George
loved Alice,
Benedict couldn't say,
but he hoped George did
in his own odd way.

Terry Collett

While At Sext 1971

The Austrian monk,
stopped by the church doors,
made the fingered sign

of the cross,
sunlight on my head
as I walked the cloister,

bell chimed the one hour,
the office of Sext to begin,
blessed are they

who go by the pure path,
Dom Henry had said,
that time in the gardens

as I mowed the lawn,
she kissed me
so tenderly,

so softly,
I entered the church,
fingered the stoup,

watered I crossed myself,
Brother John,
sour faced,

eyed me as I stood
in the choir stall,
who walks in the Lord's path

are blessed,
Dom Henry said,
I mowed by the monk's cemetery,

molehills by the graves,
her neck smelt of flowers,
taste here, she said,

taste and see,
the abbot tapped on wood,
the chant began,

the sunlight flowed
through the high windows,
ora pro nobis,

the monk opposite,
eyed his book,
turned the page

with thin fingers,
I tasted her, salt and fish,
a splendid dish.

Terry Collett

While Hair Brushing

Juliette drags the brush
through her hair you have
to brush it at least one
hundred times her mother

had said years ago and say
a prayer each time you get
it through and maybe God
will bless you and as she sits

and brushes her hair she
remembers her mother standing
over her when she was a child
and the hair was as long then

as it is now and oh God she
says how I hated it the knots
and tangles and the number of
times I used to cry each time

she pauses in front of the mirror
the brush held mid air sometimes
when she brushes her hair and
stares in the mirror she sees him

there looking at her as he did back
then watching her every move
his dark eyes greedily drinking
her in and once he placed his

hands around her waist and kissed
her neck how she cringed his spittle
still there her uncle his breath his
hands touching always when she

was alone and once when undressing
he came in and stared and said he
thought she was becoming a beautiful
young girl now she brushes her hair

again the brush stiff and heavy gripped
in her hand and as she stares into the
mirror heavy with times and care she
thinks she sees him still staring still there.

Terry Collett

While Posing.

Mr Clementon says to sit
and wait and pose and you

sit as told and watch as he
prepares the easel and sorts

his brushes and paints and
all the while he sings in a soft

humming undertone his focus
on his task and not at all on you

and you watch and see how slim
his fingers are and not at all like

most men's fingers are and his
hands are white and his face now

turned to you is shaved clean and
unblemished like a baby's skin

and you think how soft it must
be to be close to him and sense

his flesh on yours and try and keep
your head still Molly he says firmly

bringing you down to earth and
drawing you from your thoughts

I need you to sit still and not move
unless I say and he begins and his

eyes move from you to the canvas
and back to you again and outside

the window the beginning of rain.

While Screwing.

I'll hold the window
in place
you screw it
to the wall
my father said

he had the seriousness
of a professional
his dark hair and eyes
firm
rock like

I took a screw
and proceeded
to screw the window frame
to the wall

my father
was engaged
in the work

I was thinking of Marion
the blonde
who sang
with a band sometimes
who I met some nights
over a drink

and she talked
about music
and how she
had a good relationship
with her father
and how she'd say
Daddy can I go
out dancing?
and he'd say
yes my crazy daughter
and she laughed

I sat there
just listening
seeing her
blue eyes shine
and her body pause
with life

and I asked
what about me
and you and bed?

you mean sex?
she said

well yes
I said

O my
I can't sleep
with anyone
not until I marry them
she said
that's like opening
a Christmas present
before Christmas
can't be done

so I put that idea away
and we just talked
and drank
and she sang
a few of the songs
she sang with the band
doing that wiggly dance
she did

her blonde hair sprayed
like a huge bouquet
of flowers

is it firmly in?

my father asked
you need a good screw
to hold it in place

yes that's what I
was thinking
I said
pushing the thought
of Marion
out of
my 17 year old head.

Terry Collett

While She Washes Up 1986

Fenola is washing up
the dishes after dinner,

Eileen watches her
from the table
in the kitchen,

Fenola talking about
her day at work,

about something
someone did or said,

but Eileen is watching
Fenola's body move,

the way the hands
(pink-gloved)
lift and plunge
in the soapy water,

the way her hips
move so sexually,

the tight bottom,

the way the skirt
holds her,

the black tights,

she thinking of later
after supper,

in bed,

after talk and kisses,

then thinks

of the night before,

the lights out
(just moonlight through
the slit in the curtains) ,

the perfume of her,

the kisses on her body,

the exploration
of each body in turn
or at the same time,

the soft words
of encouragement,

the later messages
of yes and yes
and there and there,

then Fenola turns
and says:
and her husband didn't
even remember
their anniversary
silly fool,

and she(the wife) said
he'd be for it
or rather he wouldn't,

and laughs
and Eileen laughs too,

taking in the shaking bosoms
as she does,

the sweet little piglets
lying there,

and all Eileen can do

at present
is stare.

Terry Collett

While Waiting For The Boys

You lay your bike
against the fence
and headed towards

the farmhouse
but Monica came out
of the house

and stood in front
of the door
where you going

with the boys?
she asked
the cinema

you replied
what are you going to see?
Kissing Cousins

going to see what?
it's a new film
by Elvis in it

you said
looking beyond her
towards the house

I'd like to come too
she said
will they let you?

they might
if you say I can
that's up to your mother

you said
but if you said
you'd like me

to come along
I'm sure she'd let me
she stood gazing at you

her arms folded waiting
another time maybe
you said

why another time
why not now?
I'm 17 you're just 14

don't think your parents'd
be keen on me
taking you out just yet

what do they know
she muttered
the door of the house

opened and her mother
came out of the door
hope you're not

bothering Benedict
she said
the boys will be out

in a moment
she said
turning to you

and giving Monica
a stern stare
ok

you said
I'll wait
by my bike

Monica pouted her lips

and followed you
as you walked

to your bike
in you come
young lady

don't want you pestering
the boys' friend when
they come calling

and so Monica turned away
following her mother
another daydream falling.

Terry Collett

White Moon's Glow.

Robbo drank beer
Robbo smoked thin cigars
made love
to skinny women
made love
with plump ones too.

He drew pictures
painted large art
read Tolstoy and Gogol.

He married late
some plump woman
of taste and education.

He married in haste
flirted with a skinny girl
half his age
made love to her
on their third meeting
at her place
some one-roomed flat
which she shared
with her cat.

Robbo was a drunk
he drank too much
smoked himself to cancer.

He divorced his wife
for a better life
he married the skinny girl
who moved into his apartment
as his ex-wife left.

Robbo grew weak
he had cancer
of the spine and lungs
and stopped drawing

and painting
and sat by a window
watched the world go by
skies blue
and sometimes black.

His wife half his age
divorced him.

He was alone
no art
no love
just his wife's old cat
and Mozart on the radio
and the night sky
and a white moon's glow.

Terry Collett

Who Is He?

Your husband stands
by the window, his tall,

thin frame is turned
from you, he is looking

at the fields beyond
the garden, the low

window that he looks
through makes his

mild stoop worse.
You gaze at him

with a mixture of
mild interest and

a vague knowledge
of who he is and

what he is doing there.

Terry Collett

Who Knows.

Brad is downstairs.
He has turned on
the radio. You sit
there on the bedroom

floor wearing the black
slip he bought you a
while back. You were
going to leave him,

but have run out of steam.
You put out your feet,
still with the red stilettos on.
Will he come up or think

you are out? You hope
he doesn't. Hard to explain.
Your dark hair needs
brushing. Mother used

to brush it when you were
a girl. A hundred strokes
she would say. You still
remember her doing it

with you between her legs
as she brushed. That smell
about her. Her plump thighs.
Dead now, cancer. He moves

about downstairs. You hope
he doesn't. You could have
been gone by now. Too fussy
about what to take what to

leave behind. Your bottom
feels stiff sitting there on that
hard floor. What if he does come?
What will you say? You close

your eyes. Try to push sounds away.
Almost made it. Bed last night.
Him wanting it and you not, but
you did it nonetheless. You know

he's slept with her. That bitch at
his office. Tight arse. Large eyes,
lips seductive. The radio stops.
The door shuts. Your red shoes

kiss together at the toes. Will
you go? Who knows. Who knows.

Terry Collett

Who Will?

Who will
come for us?

Who will
release us?

Snow is falling,
the whiteness
like a blessing,
a chill touches
our skin.

I saw a spider,
black plump,
hanging on a thread
swinging above
her head,
she knew not,
and I said nothing,
but stared.

Who will
release us?

Who come
for us?

She spread
her wings wide,
her fleshy fruit
in season and ripe,
occhi d'angelo.

I partook
of her fruit
and was satiated,
no angels sang,
nor sun burn
brighter nor

burn out,
just someone
down dark
corridors
loudly shout.

Terry Collett

Whom To Love.

Outside the church
after the Sunday service
after singing
in the choir

Judith followed you
out of the vestry
into the daylight
amongst the gravestones

at the back
of the church
where she stood
looking around her

with you at her side
you oughtn't to have done that
she said
what?

you said
put that button
in the collection box
when it came around

the choir stalls
I left my collection money
in my coat pocket
you said

but a button
she said
better to have put nothing in
than that

a black bird settled
on the top
of a gravestone nearby
then flew off

you're right
you said
I ought not
to have put it in I'm sorry

it's not me
you have to say sorry to
Judith said
it's God

whom you defrauded
she turned
and looked at you
with her big blue eyes

and that look she had
when she was disappointed
anyway
she said

I still love you despite
you defrauding God
of his collection pence
come on you two

her sister called
from the side
of the church
aren't you coming home

the bus will be here soon
ok we're coming
Judith called back
her sister and yours disappeared

and you said
I don't deserve you
or your love
no you don't

she said

but there you are
when can we ever choose
whom to love

we either love
or we don't and I do
and she kissed your cheek
and took your hand

and you walked
by the gravestones
along the narrow pathway
by the side

of the church
and I love you too
you said
softly walking

through the midst
of the buried
and dead.

Terry Collett

Whose Truth.

You have no monopoly
on truth, says Daultil.

It wears a many coloured
coat; each one picks out

colours for their own cloth.
We sit like those in Plato's

cave seeing shadows dance
upon the wall and think those

shadows reality and the fire
giving off flames some god

who cares. Daultil sips his
flask of booze. You watch

him lift it to his lips. His words
hang around your head like

flies about a horse's eyes.
Glunk glunk goes his flask

lifted by him to take his fill.
He sets it down, wipes his lips

and says, Pilate never knew
the truth, he thought it just a

random choice of this or that
of this sad world's philosophies;

he could not see beyond his
nose or dull thought's reach.

You keep your silence, watch
as Daultil undoes the buttons

of his pants and pees, his fingers
having DTs shake the piss upon

his pants but he doesn't noticed
or if he does he doesn't care just

lifts his head like some dozy bull
and looks at you with vacant stare.

Terry Collett

Wide-Eyed Stare 1956

We were on the grass
in front of Banks House
looking at the coal wharf
lorries being loaded with coal
and a few horse-drawn wagons
waiting there too

they must get dirty
Janice said
with coal all day

I guess they do
I said
and have to climb up
all those stairs of the flats
with a heavy sack of coal
on their back
and then have to tip it
into those coal bunkers
in the kitchen/bathroom

Gran doesn't like it
when they come
making a mess
and she has ago at them
if they drop
any coal on the floor
Janice said

I passed her the Tizer bottle
I'd bought from the shop
over the road
and she unscrewed the top
and took a mouthful
then put the lid back on
and past it to me

I unscrewed the top
and took a gulp

and screwed
the lid back on

want a bun?
I asked her
I've got 6

ok
she said

and I opened the paper bag
for her and she took one
and nibbled it

I took one
and took a big bite

Gran's canary says
a few words
of the Lord's Prayer
Janice said
holding the bun aside
from her lips

what words does it say?

deliver us from evil
Janice said

who taught the bird that?
I asked

Gran did
said it was a minder to us
Janice said

doesn't it say the words
I taught it?
I said

no not anymore
Gran was not happy

about that
Janice said
and I nearly got a smacking
because she thought
I'd taught him

sorry about that
I said
it seemed funny
at the time

Gran didn't think so
Janice said

I offered her
the Tizer bottle again
and she took another mouthful
and gave it back to me

I took a gulp
and put the bottle
on the grass

is your gran religious then?
I said

o yes
Janice said
she takes me to church every Sunday
do you go?

now and then
I said
usually to the gospel place
down Rockingham Street
by the railway bridge

is it good there?
she said

yes it's all right
some old girl plays the piano

and we sing hymns and such
and then have biscuits
and orange juice afterwards
and one of the blokes
talks about God or Jesus
they're having a trip
to the seaside soon
want to come?
I said

is it dear to go?
she said

no it's free
paid by the gospel group
I said

could I go?
she said

course I'll see
One-Eye about you
I said

who's One Eye?
she said

he's one of the organisers
only got one eye

how comes he's
only got one eye?
Janice said

lost it the war I think
I said

I'll ask Gran
if I can go
she said

ok

I said

and we lay on the grass
looking up at the clouds
in the blue sky

I told her about
the Treasure Island book
I bought from the shop
through the Square

she said nothing
but lay there
with a wide-eyed stare.

Terry Collett

Wildish Cat 1967

Nima says
we can stay
at my aunt's

apartment
she's away
in Ireland

what me too?
Benny says
they're standing

in the grounds
of the old
hospital

where she stays
to help her
drug problem

yes you too
Nima says
and she knows?

Benny says
of course not
but she said

I could stay
and I am
she needn't know

about you
a nurse comes
to see her

her face sour
here's your pass
for tonight

but be back
tomorrow
by nightfall

or we could
arrange for
the police

to get you
I know that
Nima says

the nurse goes
walking slow
over grass

blue and grey
uniform
swaying there

I'm sectioned
Nima says
as you know

he knew that
she told him
that night they

stayed in that
cheap hotel
in London

we can go
there right now?
Benny asks

we can go
I'm ready
got my pass

I'm all dressed

some spare clothes
in my bag

with my drugs
(legal ones)
and money

so they go
get a train
to London

(Benny told
his parents
he is at

a friend's house)
she like some
wildish cat

up for games
he unsure
like some mouse

being played
paw to paw
more and more.

Terry Collett

Wile Watching The Black And White Tv

Your old man
came into the lounge
where you were watching
black and white TV

and your mother was standing
talking to an uncle
it's the baker
your old man said

he wants his £50
what £50?
your mother asked
the £50 I owe him

well pay him
your mother said
I can't
I don't have it

you watched
the cowboy film
with half interest
you took a glance

at the debtor
well tell him
you'll pay him
next week

your mother said
I told him that
last week
your old man said

what did you want
to borrow £50
from the baker for?
your mother asked

her cheeks getting flushed
to buy my new suit
what new suit?
the one I'm having made

you noticed
your old man's
moustache flicker
and he stroked it

as he did
when cornered
your mother
breathed heavy

and you looked
at the uncle
ok
the uncle said

here's the £50
go pay him
what you owe
to get him off your back

but you better pay me back
or I'll bust your head
sure I will
your old man said

going out of the room
clutching the money
in his palm
your mother sighed

and the uncle
put away his wallet
into an inside pocket
and you saw that one

of the cowboys

on the black and white
TV screen
had been shot

and died
the other looked angry
and ugly
and mean.

Terry Collett

Wilful Bashful Beast.

The way Mrs Dillinger had
of making it
seem so simple

even that time
she said
come round
one afternoon

and we can discuss
your writing or politics
or whatever you like

but she didn't mention
that her husband
was out
or that she

was after your body
and wanted to hear
you read your work

only after
a good session
in her bed
but your pecker

wouldn't perform
wouldn't act
like some circus horse

and so of course
the politics
didn't get discussed
or your writing craft

maybe next time
she said
in any case

my husband
maybe back soon
and I don't want him
getting in

on the act
of discussing politics
or your art and craft

and so
you went away
your art
and craft intact

and your politics
undiscussed
and your pecker

breathing a sigh
of relief
well this time around
at least

you thought
the wilful
bashful beast.

Terry Collett

Will One Day Go.

Sorry about
your granddad's death
Judith said
as you stood

beside her
by the pond
at the back
of the house

in the woods
the autumn sun
lighting up patches
of the water's skin

it was sudden
you said
my uncle told me
she took

your hand
in hers
and squeezed
her soft skin

on yours
her thumb
rubbing
the back

of your hand
best remember him
as he was
she said

living and smiling
not some place
lying dead
you nodded

trying
to conjure up
when you'd
seen him last

sitting in
the back garden
of his house
months earlier

talking
of his flowers
he'd grown
from seed

his white hair
moved slightly
by the breeze
he liked my new suit

you said
thought it looked smart
she kissed your cheek
and said

hold on
to things
like that
your memories

place them
in a drawer
inside your head
a jackdaw flew

across the skin
of the pond
the black and white
of wings and tail

reflected

in the water
below
what comes

from God
she whispered
whether
nature's beauty

or ones
we love
will one day
sadly go.

Terry Collett

Window Fixers 1965

We were window fixers
my father and I
fitted windows
into spaces
in large buildings.

At this time
we fixed windows
into a small prison
for young offenders
outside London.

My father had a plan
where the windows
had to go.

I helped him lift
and get the frames
in place
and I held them
while he drilled holes
and screwed them
in place.

Other workers
were there
labourers
chippies
and sparkies
and radios played
all day long
from some area
or other.

I had heard
Marion sing
with a big band
the night before
a blonde dame

with a voice
like silver.

I sang in my head
the songs she sang.

My father stopped
for a cigarette.

I swept up the dust
from the drilled holes
looking out the bars
at the world beyond.

Some young kids
would be locked up here
some day
not thinking
of who fixed
the windows
shut up tight
and always closed.

Terry Collett

Wind's Moan Mcmlxix

The French peasant monk
scythed the tall grass
with a slow
motivated motion,

nunc et in hora
mortis nostrae
or each moment
of our time in life
temptations come and go
Dom Thomas said
even in the life here
in the abbey,

dans l'abbaye
that first time
late evening
bell tolling for Compline
moon glow
sprinkled stars
entering the church
in semi darkness,

nel buio semi
red altar light
incense aroma
silence about me
shadowy figures of monks
entering the choir stalls,

gli stalli del coro
well polished wood
dim light from high windows
out there the world's night life
has begun here
the monks chant the office
Santa Maria
the statue above the altar,

la mente è il proprio posto
e di per sé può fare un cielo
di inferno un inferno del cielo
John Milton said I read,

Dom Joe met me
after Compline
and led me
to the refectory
for supper alone
just him and me
and the evening wind's moan.

Terry Collett

Winter Cold.

Maybe you should
have said yes

years before
when the first kiss

had landed
and her eyes

were bright
as new coins

but no you
had to wait

until she'd met
someone else

and her heart
was no longer

yours to have
and hold

just that
late night

and the final wave
and the winter cold.

Terry Collett

Winter Musing

And the December weather
was upon you and the winter
evenings were drawing in and
she wanted to hold your hand

as you walked home after getting
off the school bus and the cold
air bit into flesh and you held her
hand and sensed the pulse in her

and the life there and the skin
on skin thing and some kind of
electrical buzz through your veins
and into your heart and head and

the traffic went by fast pushing up
wet from the road and you remember
the black tarmac then and her years
later by cruel cancer dragged dead.

Terry Collett

Winter Weather 1957

I see Enid looking over
the balcony outside
my front door of the flats.

What you doing here?
I say.

Just watching
my dad
go off to work,
she says,
he was in
a good mood
this morning
didn't row or hit
either of us
even joked with me.

I look over the balcony
but her old man has gone.

He's playing
cat and mouse
with you,
I say.

Cat and mouse?
She says.

Yes being nice
one minute being
horrible the next,
I explain.

He was all right
last night too,
even let me stay up
to watch TV.

So what's cheered
him up then?
I say.

Don't know,
she says,
as long as
he is nice
I don't care.

I watch
as the coal man
loads a big sack of coal
onto his back
and walks along
to the far end flat
where a door is open.

Are you ready
for school?
I ask.

Just got to get
my bag and coat,
she says,
and walks off
up the stairs
to her flat above.

The coal man
walks back
with an empty sack
and puts it on
the back of his lorry,
then heaves
another sack
on his back
and walks back
to the flat again.

Enid comes down
the stairs again:

ready now,
she says.

So we walk down
the concrete stairs together:
both dressed up
against the winter weather.

Terry Collett

Wishful Thinking 1973

Benny will you put
down the book
Sonya said.

I looked at her
blonde hair tied
in a ponytail
blue eyes
gazing at me.

I put down
the book
I'd been reading.

If we're going out
we need to get ready
she said.

I am ready
I said.

I'm not
need to sort
myself out
she disappeared
in the bathroom.

I heard water flowing
was she showering now?
why tell me
about reading my book?
she'd started showing.

I went to the bed
took up my book
read on
where I left off.

She was singing

in the shower.

I could have
joined her
we could have
washed each
other over.

She was singing
some Mozart aria.

The sky from
the open window
of our Parisian room
was blue.

We'd made
love earlier
to the passing
noise of traffic
and people below
in the street.

I wished
I was in
the shower
with her
kissing her
from her long
blonde hair
to her slim feet.

Terry Collett

Wishing Him Alive 1940

I remember Clive
making love to me
back in 1939;
we were both naked,
and he lay between
my thighs,
and I had my legs
around his body,
holding him there,
sensing him deep
within me.

Now I am lying on
a hospital bed,
my sightless eyes
peering into darkness,
my leg stumps
being dried by a nurse,
after the blanket bath.

My stumps are painful;
her hands dry me softly,
the towel rubbing me drier.

How are you today, Grace?
she asks,
her voice to my right,
gentle,
concerned.

In pain,
I say,
not wanting to pretend
anything anymore,
not to say what
I am not.

The drugs will help you,
she says,

but not all pain
will go just yet.

As she touches my stumps,
I think of Clive,
him touching me,
his body firm,
his voice in
my ears,
talking.

Now he is dead,
killed at Dunkirk;
no more to make
love to me,
even if he would
want to now.

There are other voices
on the hospital ward;
there is music
from the radio,
dance music,
some big band playing,
some singer
singing about love.

That's you dry
and bandaged,
the nurse says,
now to dress you again
in your fresh nightie.

I sense her place
the nightie over my head,
and I help her
the best I can,
putting my arms
through the holes,
and she pulls it
down my body
and I am covered up

warm and cosy.

I lie here on
the bed,
dressed,
but with nowhere
to go.

The nurse has gone;
I am in the darkness,
thinking of Clive,
wishing he was here,
wishing him alive.

Terry Collett

With Cold Rains 47bc

Since her husband has left
on one of Caesar's campaigns,
Annona keeps me close,
has me in her bed.

Amy,
she says,
come closer,
feel here and here,
and I do,
and we lie here at night
watching the moon
pass the window,
the stars wink at us.

I smell her
perfumes and ointments
and want to drown
in her beauty.

Domitia spoke to me
as a mere slave girl,
of no importance,
puella, puella,
she called,
beckoned'
me with her finger,
stared at me as dung.

Annona holds me warm,
kisses me everywhere,
brings me to high places
in body and nerves.

When her husband returns,
I must return
to my own room,
and sleep alone,
think of her with him,

him having her body,
his pores over her,
shafting her.

She takes my hand
and mouths my fingers
one by one;
her other hand
touching my soft place.

Suavitatem
et pussy mea,
she whispers to me,
her soft breath,
our bodies wrapped
about each other.

I would die for her,
protect her
from her enemies,
but I am like
soft clay in her hands.

Annona kisses my lips,
holds my body
close to her soul,
our eyes meeting
and gazing.

Far away her husband fights
in wars and campaigns;
I laze in the sun
of her love;
he lives in the dark place
with cold rains.

Terry Collett

With Dogs

If you lie down with dogs
you'll get fleas

Granddaddy said
and the stink'll stick to you

and people'll know
and you sat

next to him
in the garden

on that old seat
he made

out of cast off wood
and he said

keep to your own kind son
don't get out

of your depth
with that dross

and he stared up
at the sky

and you saw
his cool blue eyes

take in more
than you did

from the cloud shapes
to the passing

overhead birds
and you said

it's easy to get involved
with that type

they haven't got
the same degree

of choosiness
and he looked at you

and said
boy if they ain't choosy

they ain't bothered
and if they ain't bothered

they ain't worth
being with

and he pointed to flowers
growing near by

and said
I grew them from seeds

and cared for them
but those weeds

they don't get cared for
or loved

but they still grow
because they ain't bothered

and he looked up
at the sky again

and at the darkening clouds
carrying heavy rain.

Terry Collett

With Fay On A Bus.

The bus moved away
from the bus stop
and Fay sat next to you

her body rocking
side to side
with the motion

of the bus
her knees pushing
against each other

her hands in a prayer like pose
upon her knees
Are you going

to the cinema?
she asked
Yes

you replied
The Globe
That old fleapit?

she said smiling
her lips parting
showing

small white teeth
What are you going to see?
A cowboy film I think

you said
Why don't you come too?
I can't

I haven't any money
she said
Besides my dad

wouldn't like it
he thinks films
are the Devil's work

she looked out
at the passing view
you studied her thumbs

rubbing over each other
her nails pink
and polished

like small shells
He needn't know
you said

I wouldn't tell
she turned her head
and said

I would know
and he would know
by the look

in my eyes
he knows I always
tell the truth

and never tell lies
you put a hand over hers
and her thumbs

became still
and her hand
touched yours

Maybe one day
she said
I will.

With Helen At The Fairground.

Some fairground
by the coast
taken by the Baptist mission
by coach

and outside
some magic mirror tent
after having gone in
you said to Helen

not much in there to see
and the fairground guy
having overheard you said
not much to see?

come here and see again
and he took you
in the tent again
and showed you

how you looked
in front
of the various mirrors
in some you were thin

and tall and in another
you were broad
and fat or you were
squat as if someone

had sat on you
and squashed you flat
and you laughed at that
and the guy said

see there is much to see
so go tell your girlfriend
so you went out
of the tent

and said to Helen
yes it was good
the second time around
and Helen said

perhaps we should
go in together
and so you paid the guy
the money

and you went in
with her and stood
together in front
of the mirrors

and laughed
and she held
your hand
and you remembered

the guy saying
tell your girlfriend
and you guessed
she was

and that made
you feel happy
even schoolboys
of 10 years old

sometimes want girlfriends
secretly endeared
away from the sight
or knowledge

of other boys
as if it were some kind
of betrayal
of the schoolboy code

and as you walked

about the fairground
you watched
where others

on racing
wooden horses rode.

Terry Collett

With Kafka.

Kafka would have liked
the way you said that.

You kept his books on
the shelf next to those

of Burroughs and Joyce.
You like the painting on

the book's paper cover.
Paperbacks are cheap

and soon worn out,
Thornton used to say.

He liked hard covered
books, first editions if

he could afford. He said
Kafka was too morbid

for you. You need a lighter
read, he said, something

that doesn't mess with
your female head. You

take down the Kafka and
read again where you read

before, the whole drama
unfolding, the printed words

bringing a different world,
and ghostly by the window

with steady stare, Franz Kafka
in silence just sitting there.

With Mrs Ford 1973

Mrs Ford
went to the window
and peered out.

Just roofs
Benny
she said
and smoke
and grey skies.

I looked around
the bed
and breakfast room
we'd hired for the night.

Not much of London
to see from here.

See more later
when we go out
I said.

But it'll be
dark then
she said.

She drew
the drab curtains
and looked back at me.

Have you slept
with anyone before?
she said.

Yes a few
I said.

None
my age though

I bet
she said.

One older
I said.

She raised
her eyebrows
Casanova are you?

No just been lucky
I said
does your husband
know you're
with me?

She looked away
at the room
the double metal
bedstead.

Not with you
I told him
I was meeting a friend
and going to see
a show up here
she said.

Was he suspicious?
I said.

Couldn't care less
if he is or was
she said.

What shall we do first
go get a bite to eat
at one of the restaurants?
I said.

She looked at me
do you know a place?

she said.

Yes my brother and I
come here often
I said.

Or we could make
the most of our bed
and room
she said
before dinner.

She gazed
at the old bed
then at me.

If you like
I said.

We'd not
had sex before
so were
apprehensive.

She began to undress
and I began
to undress too.

I watched her
as she took off
her top and skirt
undressing myself
out of routine.

The wallpaper
was dull and worn
the single light bulb
was dim
and the shade dusty.

We stood naked
looking at each other

then at the bed.

I thought of what
her husband would think
and saw him
watching us
in my head.

Terry Collett

With Shell-Shock 1916

George's room
is quiet
the bed made

furniture
all polished
the window

opened up
for fresh air
and the maid

Polly sits
on the bed
pretending

that he's there
in the bed
not off some

other where
getting well
from shell-shock

(she hoping)
but is there
next to her

whispering
suggestions
his warm hand

running down
her left thigh
she lies down

on the bed
thinking him
lying there

kissing her
his left hand
undressing

her clothing
wanting her
she lies there

breathing hot
in this love-
making mock

knowing George
is away
some place else

with shell-shock.

Terry Collett

With The Hump 1959

Anne wheeled herself out
of the nursing home,
and out onto the lawn,
almost knocking Cam
(a young boy) over
in her path,
she was followed
by Sister Paul in flight,
her black habit flapping
as she walked.

Anne stopped wheeling
at a white table,
and turned
to face the nun.

The nun approached
out of breath,
you must let the doctor
see your leg,
the nun said.

Not if the Kid isn't there,
Anne said.

The doctor doesn't think
it ethical,
the nun said.

No Kid, no looking
at my amputated leg stump,
so it's up him,
Anne said.

He needs to see
how it is healing,
the nun said,
standing over Anne,
hands inside her

black and white habit,
and you ought not
have shown your leg
to Benedict,
it isn't ethical
to do so.

He was interested,
so I showed him,
Anne said,
and he helped me
get in the bath and out,
and he's my best friend,
and bugger ethical.

Sister Paul winced
at the lewd word,
and tried to push it away
from her mind.

He's a 10 year old boy,
the nun said.

I'm a 11 year old girl,
so what?
Anne said.

The nun closed
her eyes momentarily.

Anne looked past the nun
towards the nursing home,
and hoped Benny
would come out,
and see what
was going on.

The doctor will not
allow Benedict to be there;
he said it would
not be ethical,
the nun said slowly.

No Benny, no gawking
at my stump then,
Anne said firmly,
what, you going to get
the sisters to hold me down
while that medical clown
touches my amputated leg?

The nun gazed at her,
and sighed,
why do you need
Benedict there?

Because he's my friend,
and I feel safer
if he is there,
Anne said,
anyway he'll only
be seeing my leg stump,
nothing between my legs,
Anne said,
eyeing the nun
for her response.

Anne that is being
crude and rude,
Sister Paul said.

Anne turned around,
and gazed down
towards the avenue of trees
at the end of the garden.

No Kid, no quack
seeing my stump.

The nun walked away,
visibly with the hump.

Terry Collett

With Thought 1962

With the thought
of her big sister
being pregnant
and her father

moaning about it
and her mother
glum as Mondays
Shoshana went back

to her room
and lay on her bed
and looked
at the ceiling

at the spider
big and black
and juicy
in the corner

trying to hide
but not making
a good job of it
she mused on Naaman

and seeing him again
the following day
being next to him
lunch time

at recess
after the double maths
(yuk)
and talk to him

about things
and see his smile
(Elvis like)
and watch as his quiff

of brown hair
moves as he sits
and talks
and O just to be

next to him
she crossed her legs
at the ankles
folded her arms

under her breasts
she thought of the book
of butterflies
he had brought

and his talk
of this butterfly
and that
and the colourings

and patterns
and she wished
he had touched
her hand or arm

or just turned
and kissed her
but he didn't
he just talked

of butterflies
he had seen
or hoped to see
and her body

was yearning for him
she had never
in all her young days
felt such yearning

in her body or mind

and she closed her eyes
lying there
like one who's blind.

Terry Collett

With You

With you
he could settle down,

with you
he could help make

babies in the womb,
but without you

he drifted
in and out

of dangerous seas,
without you

he wandered down
dark passages to doom,

and all because
you left him

empty, sleeping
in his lonely room.

Terry Collett

Without A Sound 1916

George's father stares
at the nurse,

young thing,

blue eyed,

he wants her
does he?

Yes,
the nurses says,
calls her name out
and won't be calmed
until she's there,
but Mr Dudman said
not to bring her,

the father stares
at the nurse,
then out the window
showing the trees
and fields beyond,

if George calls for her
go get her no matter
what Dudman says,

the nurse nods,
feels relief,
George's hard to manage
once he's in a mood,

anything else?
The father says,

no all well otherwise,
the nurse says,
wishing she was back

at the hospital
caring for wounded soldiers
from the front
whose injuries
she could see,
not this mental type,

she leaves the study,
the father back
at his desk writing,

she walks along
the dark passageway
and up the wide staircase,

she sees George
by the open window
in the chair,

he stares out
at the view hands
over his eyebrows
as if seeing
through binoculars,

he doesn't turn around
when she enters
he stares
at the enemy soldiers
advancing,

Polly see them
coming?
He says suddenly,
pointing at
the field ahead
(cows slowly walking)

the nurse stands
behind him,
hands on his shoulders,

see them Polly?
He repeats,

She's not here George
she's not here,

get her now
I want my wife,
George says
turning round,

the nurse nods
and leaves the room
without a sound.

Terry Collett

Without Care 1958

Lydia
watches trains
beside me.

Waterloo
train station
people pass

for the train
some in suits
black pinstripes

and women
in all sorts
of dresses

or long skirts.
What you think
my dad said

this morning?
Lydia
says to me.

No idea
I reply.
Go away

on a short
holiday
she tells me.

Where about?
I ask her.
To Rams gate

the seaside
she replies.
A whistle

blows loudly
a green flag
waves madly

the steam train
puffs out steam
grey and white

going up
to the roof.
All of you?

I ask her.
Gloria's
not going

she's staying
behind us
so she can

look after
the old flat
and she works

she replies.
The train's gone.
Wonder where

that's gone to?
I ask her.
Somewhere nice

I expect
she replies
and are you

having a
holiday?
She asks me.

Don't 'spose so

I reply
go out days

I expect.
Another
train comes in

noisily
and we watch
as it stops

hissing steam
doors open
passengers

open doors
and get out
then walk on

the platform
with tickets
to get out.

Exciting
isn't it?
Benedict

(she calls me
not Benny) .
It sure is

I reply
taking in
the steam smell

and the sounds
and the sight
of power

of engines
we sit there
on the seat

without care.

Terry Collett

Without Guide Or Star

Between biology
and double maths
Christina met Benedict
in the recess of the tuck shop

and the passage
that led off
towards the hall.
The other members

of her class walked on.
she in whispered voice said,
I won't see you
on the sports field lunch time

because of the bloody rain.
He moved in closer,
sensing her body press
against his

in the small space.
It might clear up, he said.
Her hands wrapped about him,
she pulled him close.

But the grass will still be wet
and they don't let us out
if it's wet, she whispered.
He knew that, but wanted

to feel her breath against
his skin as she spoke.
The moment seemed to be
lacking of the motion of time.

Silence filled the air about them;
the darkness of the recess
seemed lighter as their eyes
grew accustomed to the dimness.

Miss you most
when I don't see you, she said.
Her hands squeezed him near her.
He sensed her soft breasts

against his chest.
I look at your photo
and when no one is looking
I kiss it, she breathed out

as she spoke.
I keep your photo tucked
in the small wallet
my mother bought me, he said.

he smelt her hair;
it had a scent of fresh flowers.
She pulled him in closer;
his hands felt the small

of her back, his fingers
sensed the pulse of her heart,
through the white cloth
of her blouse. The toes

of their shows touched,
she leaned in and kissed
his cheek, moving in damp
moves toward his lips.

The small space seemed
to hold in a silence except
of their words and breathing;
their eyes grew accustomed

to the dimness of light, each
saw the other's eyes.
Foot steps drew near,
the pitter patter on linoleum

floor, they broke apart,

held hands, squeezed themselves
against the door
of the tuck-shop recess.

A teacher walked by;
unnoticed they breathed out,
hands squeezing.
The sound grew fainter.

Best go, he said, late for class.
She kissed him again,
her lips pressed hard
against his. She went out

of the recess and off
along the passage.
He stood a few seconds,
then followed; she had gone,

the dampness still clung
to his cheek and lips' skin.
His pulse of heart raced
like the engine of a racing car,

he paced the passage like
some pilgrim without guide or star.

Terry Collett

Without Men 1997

Una folds
the bed sheet
Nuala

had lain there
smells the scent
in each fold

she holds it
under her chin
folds again

she wonders
how Brian
and his wife

Nuala
are doing
at this time

probably
making love
in the bed

him not her
having sex
Nuala

lying there
him on top
riding home

to glory
(same story)
Una puts

the bed sheets
out of sight
til next time

she can't bear
to lie there
without her

in the same
bedding sheets
Nuala

opened up
different sides
new angles

to their love
not man sex
but their sex

on their terms
in their time
now and then

just women
without men.

Terry Collett

Without Worries Or Care 1970

The Mediterranean Sea
is out there
Miriam said.

You and she
sat on the beach
looking out at the sea
lit up by the moon.

You and she
had just made love
in a small sand dune.

Stars sparkled over head
and over the sea.

And we are here
you said.

Behind you
up the beach
was the camp base
and the tents.

A party was going on
which you both
had sneaked away from
to be alone
and have sex.

She looked up
at the sky:
I guess my mother
is looking
at this moon now
Miriam said
she likes gazing
at the moon
but she is in England

and we are here
in Morocco
but same moon.

The party was noisy
you could hear music
and singing from the beach.

Those stars may
have burnt out
hundreds of years ago
or more
but we still see the light
from maybe dead stars
you said.

She lay down
and you lay beside her.

She kissed you
and put her arms
about you again.

She was still naked
from the waist down
so were you.

Someone
was playing a guitar
the sound hung in the air.

You made love again
without worries or care.

Terry Collett

Without You.

Without you,
my son,
there's just
the indentations
on the bed
where once you lay;
the echo of the words
you used to say;
the sun's gone in
and left the sky grey;
and the words,
like ancient manuscripts,
crumble in my mouth
as I try to pray;
time drags its feet
from night to dull day.

Without you,
my son,
the room's an empty space;
the mirror
where once you gazed
is missing your face;
and mealtimes,
long after you died,
I still laid your place,
and I feel
an emptiness
when I ask
for God's grace.

Without you,
my son,
my heart seems
torn in two;
my mind
a bog mire
of stagnant thoughts
of what to do;

I try to sing a song,
but it ends up
a dark depressing blue;
I go to places
where once you went too,
but you aren't there,
just a wind blew.

Without you,
my son,
there's a hole
in my aged heart;
my wounded soul
is torn apart,
thinking of
each aspect of you,
ticking off a chart,
naming each
precious part.

Without you,
my son,
all things
seem dull and dark;
life has lost
its spark
without you.

Terry Collett

Witness.

The child looked
From parent
To parent,
Took in the
Raised voices,
The angered

Features, the
Long pointing
Fingers now
Jabbing the
Air, the way
She was so

Overlooked,
Not really
There, some small
Entity
Standing by
The back door,

Wondering
If the peace
Would ever
Come or if
Like the day
Before it

Went on for
Ever more.
She lifted
A hand, gave
A pleading
Gaze, murmured

A small phrase,
Wishing it
Would end and
Be peaceful

Like former
Happy days.

Terry Collett

Woman To Woman Thing.

Her husband failed
to give her this, this
embrace, this kiss.
Her lover, this other

woman, this one whom
she could explore, wrap
herself in, tongue, lick,
smell, was suddenly

revealed to her, at a party
of her husband's, some
big do, some work related,
job promotion hogwash.

She almost dissolves in
this female warmth, this
female smell, this soft
flesh thing she has known,

yet misunderstood for so
long. Her husband's sexual
predatorial ways are over,
he can go find some other,

go to some girl at the office,
some tart he secretly (so he
thought) had bought. She
feels born again, as if erupted

from the womb a second
time, mouthed a fresh cry,
suckled at new breasts and
likewise the other hers, too.

What would people say has
long since ceased to matter,
love's intensity blows out
candles of such, puts far from

reach the narrow minded tongues,
the moralistic finger pointers.
They sleep together, eyes closed,
bodies wrapped about each the

other, dreams take on a new edge,
other shades and tones, nothing
of the old life, just this woman to
woman thing and loving moans.

Terry Collett

Woman With A Tattoo.

A woman with a tattoo
over the top of her breasts

above her red dress got
on the uptown bus and

sat down. Henry tried not
to look, he couldn't make

out the words that mingled
with the coloured flowers

tattooed there, looked away,
followed for a short while

the goings on in the passing
street, then turned again

and gazed surreptitiously as
if he'd not intended to stare

or find once seen, but still
the words were lost in the

flowers' hold. The woman
thumbed her cell phone,

messaging a text, while he,
giving a sidelong gaze, tried

to solve the puzzle of the
words and meaning that

she wanted to convey by
placing the tattoo there,

but no matter how hard
he looked or turned his head,

no sense was made, just
a puzzled aging brain instead.

She crossed her legs, a little
more thigh was shown, her

suntanned flesh too much
for eyes of Henry's age, he

turned away, carrying the images
seen to sup upon another day.

Terry Collett

Wondering Why Mcmlxviii

From the cloisters
the moonlight created shadows
across the garth,

a monk pulled
the cloister bell
for supper,

Dio è vicino
e lontano
the Italian monk
said to me
in the workshop
repairing a chair,

Dom Charles took an apple
from the tree
and twisted it just so
it came away
in his hand
and he rubbed it
against his black habit
to a shine and said
that's how it is done,

Dom George machined
the habit seam
as I watched
his tonsured head
shone in
the overhead lamp,

le opere che si fanno
possono essere l'unico
sermone alcune persone
si sente oggi
Francesco d'Assisi said
so I read,

I take my place
in the refectory
stand there
waiting for grace
to begin
studying the wooden floor
and how the overhead lights
shone there,

hoc autem qui parce
seminat parce
et metet et qui
seminat in benedictionibus
et metet
Paul of Tarsus said
Dom Joe told me,

who sows little
reaps little
whoever sows much
shall reap much
I mused,
orange bricks
brownny black
in moonlight,

bell tolled
against evening sky,

I walked the cloister
wondering why.

Terry Collett

Work

Work never killed anyone,
Smithers said, a fair day's
work for a fair day's pay.

You continued to paint
the wall, your hand rising
and falling with the brush.

Tell that to those who died
in Auschwitz and other camps
or the archipelago of gulags
in Russia, you moodily replied.

Those were foreigners in
different times and different
places, he said, your average
person never died from the
labours of over work.

The paint was an awful green,
the wall was bland, above,
a window allowing dim light.

Some stilled died from labours
pushed to the limits, you sighed.

Smithers scratched his ass
and said, there's always those
who've shirked and died.

You stood back watching
the paint dry, on a freshly
painted white glossed door,
was caught a fly, wriggling in
the stickiness, waiting to die.

Terry Collett

Worlds Die 1974.

Worlds die
she said
people die
but the gods live on.

Benny knew it
was the booze talking
but he listened to her
none the less.

In the background
the Mahler's 6th
coming from the Hi-Fi
over in the corner.

Where'd you read that?
he said.

Not read
she said
intuition a woman's
intuition.

She supped
more of the scotch
he had brought
he supped too.

You know what?
she said
making love
is to be with the gods
momentarily such
as mortals can briefly
so we need
to make love.

Her speech
was slurred now

but understandable.

Are you sure?

Benny said.

She stared at him
of course the gods
demand it of us
she said.

She closed her eyes
sipping the last drops
of the scotch.

He finished his
and placed it on
the coffee table
in front of the blue sofa.

She put her glass down
with a clatter.

What about the music?
he said.

It will play on
she said
Mahler shall be
our accompanist
to the love making.

She stood up
from the sofa unsteady.

Are you ready
for the task before us?
she said.

Sure am
he said.

She took his hand

and led him out
of the room along
the passage to her
bedroom.

Here is our altar
she said
pointing to the bed
unclothe yourself
she slurred.

She proceeded
to disrobe herself
swaying back and forth.

Are you sure
about his?
he said
undressing slowly
watching her sway.

It is as the gods demand
she replied.

He stood and watched
as she lay on the bed naked
her clothes thrown
on a chair.

She was silent
the Mahler filtered down
to the bedroom
the final movement.

He watched her
her eyes closed.

He began
to dress again
as she dozed.

Would We Row 1958

Lydia and I
were sitting on the grass
at the side
of Banks House.

We were
playing Snap.

She was wearing
an old dress
which had seen
better days
and grey socks
which were
once white.

A big row
this morning
she said.

What about?
I asked.

Well Dad
came home
late again last night
drunk and was singing
at the top of his voice
some Irish song
and Mum was not pleased.

Anyway it started again
this morning and ended
with Mum throwing
cups and saucers at him
and him ducking
trying to reason with her
but once she off on one
you can't reason with her

so I came out
Lydia said.

Sounds exciting
I said.

Well it wasn't
she said
don't your parents
ever row?

Now and then
I said.

SNAP
Lydia bellowed.

I looked
at the cards.

I wasn't looking
I said.

Well you have been
she said.

We started again.

Will we row
like that?
she asked.

When?
I said.

If we get married
she said.

We're only 9 and 10
I said
bit early to ask
that question.

She kept putting
her cards down quick.

But if we did?
she said.

Guess not
I said.

When in fact
it never entered
my boyhood head.

Terry Collett

Wound And Reward 1955

Helen fell over
in the park
and cut her hand.

I took her
to the first aid lady
in the little hut
at the park entrance.

How did
you do it?

I feel off
the swing.

She dab the cut
with yellow stinky stuff.

Helen winced
screwed up
her face.

Who is he?
She said
looking at me.

He's my friend Benny
Helen said.

Didn't push her off
I suppose?

No he didn't
Helen said
I fell.

Why would I
push her off?
she's my friend

I said.

You never know
what kids'll do
around here
the woman said
gazing at me sternly.

After dabbing
the cut clean
she wrapped
a bandaged
around it
and stuck it down
with pink plaster.

That should
keep it clean
best show
your mother
when you get home
the woman said
now shoo
I have other things
to do.

We walked
out the hut.

Helen looking at
her bandaged hand.

Shall we go
home now?
she said.

Sure if you like
I said.

We walked out
the park
and along

Bath Terrace.

Helen said
Mrs Knight's new kitten
tried to escape
but it had crept
into Helen's parent's flat
and they took it back.

When we got
to Helen's flat
she showed her mother
the bandaged hand
and explained
what happened.

Her mother said
good boy Benny
and gave me
a glass of lemonade
and a biscuit or two.

What else
was a 7 year old
boy to do?

Terry Collett

Wrong Day.

What day is it?

Miss Ashdown asked
waddling up the aisle

you looked at the board
taking the chalk marks
the hand script she'd made
then she said

Benedict
write it on the board
you looked at her
standing with arms crossed

so you walked blushing
to the blackboard
and chalked up January 25th
is that it?

she said
but what day is it?
what feast day?
you stared at the numbers

and letters
I don't know
you said
going bright red

the room narrowing
to her standing in the aisle
her arms crossed over
her large breasts

like piglets
under a blanket
at rest
sit down boy

anyone else
have any idea?
Monday?
a girl suggested

no you fool
Miss Ashdown said
it's the Conversion of St Paul
the girl put down her hand

and bit her lip
and stared at you
as you went by
her eyes were watery

like one about to cry
and you sat down
studying Helen's
bright red ribbons

holding
her plaits of hair
as she sat in front
of your desk

that tiny
patch of skin
showing above
the collar of her dress

between where
her hair almost met
then raised your eyes
to the blackboard

where the Conversion
of St Paul
in large script
was set.

Terry Collett

Wrong Time 1962

Yehudit lay on the grass
Yehudit plucked at a stem
mouthed it
sucked

mused on Benny
lying on his back
sky gazing

she eyed him
took in his hair
quiff of hair
hazel eyes gazing

she said
wrong week for us

he looked at her
brown eyes deep brown
wanted to
but unable
he said
that's how it goes
a female thing

she nodded
touched his arm
felt him

he said
another time maybe
thought of that time
in the hay barn
wet day
mice at play

she turned
and lay close to him
sensing him close

and wanted to
but not able

remember the hay barn?
he said
eyeing her
fingers touching
her high thigh

she did
she remembered it well
those mice everywhere
as we did
she said

he moved
his fingers upward
sensing her bottom
fingers motion

she took off his hand
laid it beside him
not now
don't tease
she said

he kissed
her forehead
eyelids
nose
lips

she lay back
lay legs straight together

he leaned over her
saw himself
in her eyes
breath on him
lips on hers

lay here

she said
here on my breast

he lay there
heartbeat
beating heart
he lay wishing
she'd spread apart.

Terry Collett

Xavier's Game Of Chess 1962

Do you play chess?
Xavier said.

Yes I've played
since I was 8
I said.

He lifted
his posh eyebrows.

That long
who taught you?
he said
in his posh voice.

A school friend
of mine
I said.

His friend Giles
watched as Xavier
set up the board
and pieces
in the classroom.

It was raining outside
other kids
sat and talked
to each other
some told jokes
one or two
chatted up the girls
who liked being
chatted up.

Xavier's girlfriend
Penelope
sat the other
side of him

watching us.

I sat watching
as he set up
the pieces
taking note
of her white blouse
the school tie
how her small
taut tits pushed out
the blouse.

He said
I'll go first.

He moved a pawn
after few moments
thinking.

I could smell
her perfume
as I sat.

I moved
a pawn forward
he looked
at the board.

I gazed
at her hands
neat trimmed nails
slim fingers.

He moved
another pawn.

I breathed in slow
the perfume
entered me.

I smiled
and moved

another pawn.

His chump Giles
looked on
his chin
in his hands.

I watched
as Xavier
sat gawking
at the board.

I wished
her hands
were in mine
or helping me
undress at night
before bed
but I guess
she did still
inside my head.

Terry Collett

Xavier's Girlfriend 1961

Xavier
was the posh kid
in the top steam
at high school.

His girlfriend
was a dream
brain dream
night dream
wet dream.

He talked to me
about knives
a Waffen SS one
brought back
by his old man
from WW2.

A Japanese
curved one
and a flick knife
his cousin
gave him
from some hood
in the City
and others
I forgot as soon
as he said.

Have you
any knives?
he asked.

Just a penknife
I said
what's your
girlfriend's name?

He gazed at me

Penelope
he replied
we live close by
and go to the same
tennis club
and last month
went on holiday
to Corfu
with our parents
of course.

I didn't doubt
one moment
the parents
would be around.

He walked off
with a chump
named Giles.

But his girlfriend
shared my dreams
dry and night
dry and wet
and no parents
about
in my dreams
of me
and Penelope.

Terry Collett

Yehudit And Farewell.

Yehudit walked away
from the bus stop

she'd seen Benny off
it had been more
than she had thought
and she felt unbalanced
all of a sudden

she walked along
the country lane
the moon shone
her a path
through the darkness
the hedgerows high

the bus would have gone
by now
and Benny aboard
and gone now
after the years
of being close

and now
there was another
and she paused
looking at the moon
listening to the night
feeling an ending
like a cliff edge
a sense of falling

she looked back
at the road way
the lights of the bus
moved over
the horizon of darkness

she remembered the first kiss

that Christmas years before
the meetings
the kisses
the holding and embraces
the sex

yes the sex
and she clutched
at the darkness
and ran her fingers
through the darkness

the bus had gone
and she was there
and he had gone
and another had come
and taken his place
and new love
and new sense
of touch and hold

she moved on
hugging herself
against the winter cold.

Terry Collett

Yehudit And Mother 1962

Benny had just left
and your mother
was walking about
the passage
as you gave a last wave.

You closed the door
and your mother eyed you
how long have you
known him?
she asked.

Since he started
at the school
the other week
you said.

You seem
very close to him
and he to you it seems
your mother said.

We like each other
you said.

Well don't like him
too much
I don't trust young men
they are always after
the one thing
your mother said firmly.

What thing?
you said.

Don't be flippant
you know what I mean
she said
moving close to you

and breathing on you.

We just talk
(you never
mentioned the kiss) .

Make sure that
is all you do
she said
and walked off
leaving you
staring at her figure
disappearing
into the kitchen.

Then she came out again
you can help me
with dinner
rather than stand there
with your mouth open
she said.

You followed her
into the kitchen
and helped her
with the dinner
help lay the table.

You thought of Benny
and the kiss that evening
and the hugs.

All kept secret
and undercover
from your
keen eyed mother.

Terry Collett

Yehudit By The Pond 1962

I sit by the pond
dragonflies Hoover
and swoop and fly off
over the water.

Birds sing
from the trees.

There is a smell
of summer
in the afternoon air.

I must bring
that new boy
Benny here
to sit with me
so we can be alone
far from the peering eyes
of my mother
or neighbours.

Ducks swim past
like small boats
drift effortless.

I wish he
were here now
I wish he was
beside me
right here.

I want to kiss him
and hold him tight
and for him
to kiss me
and hold me tighter.

A woodpecker raps
some place near

a pheasant calls.

I imagine he is here
and we kiss and such.

I hear the wood pigeon call.

I want him overmuch.

Terry Collett

Yehudit In Town 1965

I met Yehudit in town
in her lunch hour
off from work.

Mum's found out
you were in Richmond
the same time as me
she said.

Does she know
we met there?
I said.

No but I think
she suspects
Yehudit said
the way she
interrogated me
this morning.

But you denied it?
I said.

Yes of course
she said.

We went into a cafe
and had a drink
and sandwich
it was busy
the noise of chatter
around us.

Your mother told
my mum in passing
that you had been
to Richmond
and my mother
put two and two

together.

I sipped my tea.

Yehudit had lovely
brown eyes
innocent as a cow's
in the nicest sense.

My mother
said nothing
about it
I said.

What would she say
if she found out
we met there?
Yehudit said.

Not a lot
I suppose
I said.

My mother
would be down on me
like a pile of bricks
Yehudit said
she was spiteful enough
this morning
insinuating you
had a girl there.

She sipped
her coffee
and ate
her sandwich.

I sensed her thigh
near mine
the warmth of it
under the table.

I wanted to kiss her
and hug her
if I'd been able.

Terry Collett

Yehudit's Lie 1965

That boy Benedict
went to Richmond
your mother says
his mother said
the other day
in the post office
when we met there.

You stare out the window
birds are on the garden
looking for worms
after your father
had dug there.

Did he?
You say
pushing out the words
as if they were spoken
by some other.

You daren't turn around
and look at your mother
or her beady eyes
will search you out.

Yes he often
goes there apparently
his mother said.

I expect he has
some girl there
knowing him
your mother says
her voice spiteful.

The birds are busy
pecking at the upturned soil.

Don't suppose you

saw him when you
were at your uncle's place?
Your mother says.

No never went
into the town much
walked the park mostly
you say
your mind rushing about
seeking answers
to questions
she might ask.

Your mother comes
to the window
and peers out
and stands beside you.

I hope you are not
deceiving me Yehudit
she says.

You stare harder
at the birds
sparrows and blue tits
and blackbirds.

No of course not
you say
never knew
he'd be there
you lie.

Your mother stands there
and turns to gaze at you.

If I find out
you have lied to me
she says
her breath
on your cheek
there will be trouble.

Never lie to you
you say
your voice weak.

Your mind remembering
as a child your mother
standing you on a spot
and telling you
always to tell the truth
or my hand
she would say
showing you her hand
will slap.

She walks off
off to her tasks
don't forget
to make your bed
before you go off
to work
she says.

I have made it
you reply
the child in you
wanting to cry.

Terry Collett

Yehudit's Mother 1962

It was the first time
I had met Yehudit's mother.

It was after school
and Yehudit took me
back home with her
to introduce me
(her younger sister
had mentioned me) .

Get out of your uniform
is what she said to Yehudit
before even
acknowledging me.

Yehudit went off
looking back at me smiling.

So you are Benedict
she said
met your mother
at the village shop
best come in.

I entered the cottage
and she showed me
into the sitting room
a fire was burning.

Sit in a chair
she said.

I sat in
the nearest chair.

So you and Yehudit
are friends?
she said.

Yes we're in
the same class
in school
I said.

And what
do you say
to each other?
she asked.

Usual things
I replied.

Usual things?
What are they?
she said.

About our lives
and what we like
and don't like.

She sat down opposite
I want nothing
untoward happening
between you two
she said
lowering her voice.

I had no idea
what untoward meant
so said
of course not.

She eyed me sternly
I shall be watching
she added
and stood up
she will not be long.

She walked out
of the room.

I sat there
watching the flames
lick at the logs of wood
wondering what
untoward meant
and if we would.

Terry Collett

Yehudit's Thoughts 1962

You lie next
to your sister in bed
thinking of Benedict
the new boy at school.

He was on the school bus
down on the left next
to the Goldfinch kid.

Your sister snores,
mutters in her sleep,
moves and pulls
the blankets with her.

You wishes he
was next to you,
not her, him near
so you could
feel him there.

He smiled at you
as he came down
the bus to the front
to get out.

What's your name?
you asked him
outside Parrot's classroom.

Benedict, he said.
he didn't say much;
silent and shy,
he looked at the floor
or at the posters
on the wall.

He asked yours
as he meet you
after coming out

of Parrot's class
and you told him.

Others sniggered;
they usually do,
thinking no boy
could possibly
fancy you.

Your sister sighs,
you want to have him next
to you, not her.

You imagine
he is there,
next to you,
his body mere
inches away.

The moon in the corner
of the bedroom window
shines a sickly yellow;
the stars are few.

Even if he was in bed,
you muse
you wouldn't
know what to do.

Terry Collett

Yesterday Is A Maze.

History is bunk some one said.
History is an interpretation of
the past said another. Yesterday
is a lost land to Mother. Her half

blind eyes scan him and she says
who are you? He informs her,
but she is none the wiser. She just
smiles and looks away. Maybe she'll

remember him another day.
Nine months she carried him
within her womb. Her first born
whom she tended, fed and bred

and suckled, whom she nearly lost,
but saved and thought of in her
unclouded days. Dribble hangs
about her lips. Her words come

jumbled as if she pulled them
randomly from a box without
knowing or looking. Some days
they make sense; others, not.

Years ago she'd talk of art or
music or how to behave in a
certain way with a ladylike
manner in her stance or walk.

Now she sits most days in her
special chair. Her blue white eyes
in vacant stare. But he loves her
none the less. Still gives her

the honour due, gazes into
her eyes. Thinking that somewhere
within or beyond his Mother lies.

Yiska And Knife

Yiska slides
a knife blade
across her

soft pink palm
a thin line
of blood comes

seeping out
she watches
the blood seeps

down her arm
I watch her
and the knife

but am too
drugged up to
be alarmed

whose's the knife?
I ask her
thin red lines

move downward
I stole it
from the tray

supper time
while the nurse
was busy

with the pills
she tells me
want the knife?

not just now
too drugged up
I tell her

blood drips down
to the floor
pitter pat

Yiska no
a nurse calls
from the door

of the room
put it down
Yiska stares

at the nurse
then at me
up to you

I mutter
the nurse stares
anxiously

another nurse
comes along
don't Yiska

the nurse says
place down please
Yiska sighs

long and deep
then hands me
the handle

of the knife
I give it
to the nurse

the fat nurse
takes Yiska
by the arm

to a room

at the side
marked in red

MEDICAL
they go in
the door shuts

I stand there
while the nurse
the thin one

cleans the floor
of the blood
I study

the knife blade
Yiska's blood
settled there

best be off
the nurse says
how'd she get

the darn knife?
I am dumb
with the words

pack them off
in my head
as I walk

to gaze out
the window
at the fields

and tall trees
white with snow.

Terry Collett

Yiska At Tea Time In 1971

You hold
the corned beef sandwich
in your hand
bite it
sit back
and eat it.

The male nurse
puts down
another white plate
of sandwiches
fish
he says.

The Indian woman
looks at a sandwich
holds it
opens it up
stares inside
goes to put it down.

Can't do that
the nurse says
once you touch it
you have to eat it
he tells her.

She stares at him
her dark brown eyes
gazing at him.

If you touch
you have to eat
he repeats.

She takes up
the sandwich
and smells it
then bites it

and stares
at the sandwich
as if
it had offended her.

Benedict sits
next to you
and takes a sandwich
and bites.

You sense
his thigh next to yours
and an electric current
runs down your leg
and excites
your nerves.

The Scottish woman
moans about
the sandwiches
eyes the nurse
can't have sandwiches
without booze
she says.

Have to
the nurse says
haven't booze
on the ward.

The radio churns out
a Beatles' song.

You watch
the Indian woman eat
there is an element
of meloncony about her
that you feel
as sad
but sweet.

Yiska On Her Bed 1962

Yiska lay on her bed.

School had been a bore.

Most of the time
she thought of Benny
and the kiss they had
on the playing field
at lunch recess.

Lips to lips stuff.

How weird she felt after.

As if her heart would
pound out of her breasts
and go flying outwards
across the green grass.

Downstairs her mother
prepared dinner;
she could hear pots and pans
being moved on the stove.

Her mother was in a mood,
Yiska could tell by the look
she was given when she came
in from school
a little while ago.

Get changed out
of that uniform
and leave the room tidy,
her mother had said.

Yiska held herself,
arms around her body,
pretending it was Benny
doing it,

his hands there.

Her fingers lifted the hem
of her school skirt
and lifted it up.

You dirty flirt,
she said
as if to Benny.

She smiled.

Dinner's nearly ready;
are you changed yet?
Her mother called out.

Her fingers released
the hem of her skirt.

Benny had gone.

She sat up and stared
at the door.

What a bore.

She jumped up
and changed out
of her school uniform.

She stood gazing
at herself in
the dressing table mirror
in underwear and bra.

Shame Benny wasn't there.

Hurry up it's on the table,
her mother called
from downstairs.

Yiska lifted an arm

and sighed:
more hairs.

Terry Collett

Yiska One Morning 1962

Yiska heard
her mother call her
she wanted to turn over
and go back to sleep
but her mother
called again
and louder.

School day
lessons
teachers pushing
their wares.

She got out of bed
rose up and walked
to the bathroom
and locked the door.

She sat on the seat
and peed.

Why can't it be Saturday
or Sunday not Tuesday.

She rose and went
to the wash basin
and looked
at her reflection
in the mirror.

The only saving grace
about the day
was seeing Benedict
at school at the start
as he descends
from the school bus
and maybe later
if it doesn't rain.

Lunch break
we can meet up
and talk and walk
on the playing field
or behind
the maths block.

A knock on
the bathroom door
her father calling
asking how long
was she going to be.

She turned on the tap
and said
she wouldn't be long.

He went off muttering.

She washed as quick
as she could
then went back
to her room
and put on her uniform.

If only Benedict
was here now
and we could hug
and kiss.

Her mother
called out again.

She sighed
and went down stairs to
the kitchen
where her mother
was moaning
and put a plate
of eggs on toast
in front of her.

She didn't fancy it
but ate it
rather than hear
her mother moan on.

Her brother looked at her
her father sat beside her
eating and reading
the newspaper.

If only Benedict
was here
she mused
here beside me
touching my leg
under the table
and me trying
not to laugh
if I was able.

Terry Collett

Yiska Sighed 1962

Yiska sighed.
Benny's bus
had just gone;
she'd missed

the bus and a
chance to talk
and say goodbye
to him because

Miss G had kept
her in about some
talk of Chopin.
She watched the

bus go from sight.
She began to walk
home thinking of
him, of the kiss she'd

given him lunchtime
break on the sport
field, of how it felt
each time she kissed

him or touched him.
Back at home her
mother was preparing
the evening meal,

a black mood hung
about her head like
a dark rag, what's
the matter with you?

her mother said.
One of those weeks,
she replied. what
kind of weeks? her

mother said. Deep
depression and a
girly thing, Yiska
said, gazing at her

mother whose facial
features showed
nothing. Get changed
out of your school

clothes and fold them
up, not throw them
everywhere, her
mother said. Yiska

said nothing more,
but walked upstairs
to her room and shut
the door. The room

smelt of polish; her
clothes were neatly
piled on a side chair,
her records were now

returned to the rack
from the floor. She lay
down on her bed after
kicking off her shoes.

She gazed at the ceiling.
She licked her lips.
Maybe part of Benny
was there where she

had kissed him. She
kissed her small palm,
held the dampness there,
then blew it out towards

the window and uttered:

For you Benny. She hid
the photo of Benny he
had given her in between

pages of the Bible her
grandfather had given
her years ago. Her mother
never opened it as she

would have done any
other book or drawer
for some secrets hidden.
She took out the photo

and stared at it. The eyes
stared back; the quiff
of hair, the Elvis smile
Benny had. She kissed it;

held it over left breast,
feel that Benny, she soft
muttered, holding it there.
She wished he was there,

his head laying against
her body some where.

Terry Collett

Yiska's Morning 1971

Yiska reads
the newspaper
brought in
by one of the nurses.

She is sitting
in the lounge
early morning
sun just peaking
through the shutters.

Benny sits beside her
what's the headline?
he says.

Nothing much
she says
same old miserable news
depressing stuff.

She puts
the newspaper
down on the table.

Benny looks at her
will we be able
to go out
in the grounds today?
he asks.

I hope so
she says
especially as its
a nice day.

Depends I guess
if they have
sufficient nurses
to spare

he says.

Want cigarette?
she says.

Sure that'd be good
he says.

She takes a packet
out of her
dressing gown pocket
and offers him one
and takes one herself
and lights both.

They sit
and smoke
how's your wrist?
he asks.

Still sore
she says
showing him
the bandaged wrist.

Well you will go
and cut it
he says.

It's how my mind
was at the time
you should have seen
the nurse who found me
she must have nigh
pissed herself
all that blood
and me sitting there
with the glass
staring at her
from the bathroom floor.

I heard the noise

and saw nurses running
that way
didn't know it was you
he says.

Now the quack's
put me down
for more ECTS
Yiska says.

Hate them
they don't help
gave me headaches
Benny says.

The nurse comes
and takes the newspaper
and walks off
swaying her hips.

Benny watches her
the cigarette
limp between his lips.

Terry Collett

Yiska's Request 1962

Can I bring Benedict
home lunchtime?
Yiska said
to her mother.

Her mother
was at the sink
washing up
the breakfast things.

Yiska was getting ready
to go to school.

This lunchtime?
the mother said.

Yes if possible
Yiska said.

She looked at
her mother's shoulders
which we stooped.

The fake pearl necklace
she wore round her neck.

I expect so
the mother said
but he'll have to eat
whatever I have.

He don't mind
what he has
Yiska said
wishing her mother
was out so she
could bring
Benedict home
and they could

maybe do things.

Although she wasn't
quite sure about it.

All right then
but don't make
a habit of it
the mother said wearily.

I won't
Yiska said
although she wished
she could bring him
home most days.

Best get off
to school
the mother said.

See you lunchtime
Yiska said.

Her mother
offered her cheek
which Yiska kissed
sensing the make-up
on her lips.

Once out of sight
in the passageway
she brushed it away
ready to begin her day.

Terry Collett

Yiska's School Photo 1962

You sit on the grass
in front of the science lab
waiting for the photographer
to take the school photo.

You sit awkwardly
pulling your grey skirt
over your knees
watching the man
fiddle with his camera.

Behind you
other kids mutter
and fidget.

You think of Benny
and taking home
lunch time
of your mother's moodiness
and her moans and groans
and how just once
when she turned her back
you managed to get
just a quick kiss
on Benny's cheek.

Sit still now
the photographer says.

You sit as still
as you can
staring at the camera
hoping he gets on with it
gets on with the photo taking.

Briggs sit still
a teacher says
you wonder what Briggs
is doing behind your back

the big lump.

The man goes behind
his camera
his legs slightly parted.

You wish your mother
had been out at lunch time
then you could
have gone upstairs
but no.

Ready!
The man behind
the camera says
and everyone stares.

Terry Collett

Yochana's Practice 1962

I play the Chopin piece
over and over
on the piano.

Mother behind me
in her chair
listening critically
the tips of her fingers
tapping the beat of time
on the arm.

I think of Benny
being there
his chin on my shoulder
breathing
him whispering words
in my ear.

You played that bar
or so too fast
Mother says
go back.

I stop and go back
and begin again.

Trying to focus
my fingers nimble
my mind elsewhere
not on Chopin's piece
even as I play.

I muse
on Benny and I
in my bed at night
when he stayed
and I crept to the room
he was in
close to him

kissing and holding
but no sex
just in case.

That's not how
Chopin meant it
to be played
Mother says
pushing thoughts
of Benny
from my head.

Terry Collett

Yochana's Promise 1962

It wasn't until Rowland
poked my elbow
in music class and said
hey Benny
look at the titless
one at the front
with the blonde midget

I looked to where
his finger pointed
that I noticed Yochana
for the first time
sitting at the front of class
with a blonde girl
who was shorter
but that hardly
made her a midget

-Rowland and his humour-

I studied her as Miss G
talked about Schubert
and his music
and his life

I noted the thinness
of her body

- Yochana's not
Miss G's-

the black hair
smooth and shiny
and I never thought
about her titlessness
at time but something
about her caught my eye

later after the kissing

on the cheek thing
and the day after
I kissed her hand
I waited for her
at the end of biology class
when she came out
with her friend
the blonde haired Angela

-Rowland went onto
the tuck shop
and then to
morning recess-

when she saw me there
and I smiled
she shooed her friend off
and waited by the wall

she said
are you waiting for me?

shouldn't I?

why would you?

why not?

do you always answer
questions with a question?

do you?

she smiled
and looked me
in my hazel eyes
what did you want?
she asked

to talk with you
I said

is that all?

anything else
on offer?

what other else?

I don't know yet
but I'm sure
I can think
of something
I said

I'm sure you can
she said
is that it?

are you in a rush?

my friend's waiting for me
she replied

can't your girlfriend
wait a bit longer?

she'd not my girlfriend
she's a friend
who is a girl
she said defensively

I dreamed of you
last night
I said

did you?

no you wouldn't let me

let you what?

Miss G passed us by
and walked down

the corridor
giving us
a backward stare

kiss you
I said

shame
Yochana said

yes it was
I said

we stood in the corridor
a few seconds in silence
kids passing by

you kissed my hand
the other day
isn't that enough?
she said

no
a glimpse of heaven
isn't enough
until you get there
I said

she looked past me
then at the kids
passing by

not here
maybe lunch time
some place quiet
we can maybe kiss
she said

then touching
my hand briefly
she walked off
down the corridor

and I watched her going
with a kind of yearning
my inner soul
and my body
burning.

Terry Collett

You And Fay And The Globe.

Much too late
for thoughts
of what her father
might say

Fay went with you
to the Globe cinema
in Camberwell Green
a right fleapit of a place

but the film
you wanted to see
was on there
Daniel Boone

all about the Old West
and after it was over
and you came out
into the bright sunlight

your eyes felt
overwhelmed
after the darkness
of the cinema

what did you think?
you asked
Fay said
yes it was good

not the sort of film
Daddy would have let me see
well he won't know
you've seen it

will he
you said
unless he asks me
then I'll have to

tell him the truth
she said
why would he ask?
you looked at her

standing there
with her fair hair
and lovely blue eyes
he might ask me

what I have done today
she said
her eyes beginning
to show signs of fear

maybe he won't
you said
just tell him
you've been studying

American history
she looked at her hands
he doesn't like America
or Americans

she said
well you don't have to
like something to study it
I have to do it all week

at school
you said
maybe he won't ask
she said softly

looking at you
fiddling with her fingers
distract him
tell him something else

talk about a butterfly

you saw on the bombsite
she looked at you
and smiled

you don't know him
he'll ask me
what sort of butterfly
and I won't know

and he'll know
I've been lying
and that will mean
being punished

she looked up the street
toward the bus stop
we had better be getting back
she said

he'll be home soon
ok
you said
and took her hand

and walked toward
the bus stop and waited
for the bus
if I told my mother

the truth all the time
she'd have a nervous breakdown
it's more kinder
to keep her happy

in innocent bliss
of what I get up to
Fay looked haunted
and was silent

she still held your hand
a fading bruise just visible
on her upper arm

where her dresses sleeve

moved

how about some ice-cream

when we get back

I've got a Shilling

given to me

by my old man yesterday?

she hesitated

ok I'd like that

she said

and when the bus

came along

you both got on

and sat next

to each other

downstairs near

the conductor

watching the scenes

of passing people

and traffic go by

but a special place

in your mind and heart

of Fay

next to you

quiet and shy.

Terry Collett

You And Jackson Pollock.

How's the girl
with the red beret?

your sister asked
she'd seen you

and Janice
and her gran

on the way home
from school

she probably walking
with her friend

following behind
and Janice said

I made a picture today
out of cut up

pieces of paper
and the teacher said

it was the best
she'd seen

her gran said
Now now Janice

mustn't boast
I expect

there were other pictures
equally as good

But teacher said it
not me

Janice replied
Did you make a picture?

her gran asked you
her eyes falling on you

and taking in
your look

like a rabbit caught
in headlamps of a car

in the night
Yes

you said
I made a picture

of a morning sunset
out of red and yellow

and green for the grass
and blue for the sky

Janice smiled
and touched your hand

surreptitiously
her small hand

feeling along
your skin

Did you make it
out of cut up

pieces of paper too?
her gran asked

you sensed Janice's fingers
squeezing into your hand

No
you replied

I did it with water colour paints
and what did teacher say?

her gran asked
she said it reminded her

of a Jackson Pollock
whoever he is

you said
looking at Janice's red beret

and her hair
coming from beneath

so wonderfully
unlike your

short back and sides
and unlike her hair

with its red coloured
hair slides.

Terry Collett

You And Jane In The Tall Kale

You had never seen kale before
it looked like large cabbage plants
reaching skyward
so that you could hide in it

and not be seen
from the farm
and Jane walked
with you there

and you both sat there talking
she about her father
and how he prepared
his Sunday sermons

right after the one given
on the previous Sunday
and how he liked
to close himself away

from the family
for hours at a time
with just his Bible
and other books

and God of course
and get it down
and afterwards
polish it up

until he had it off to pat
and you listened to her
trying to imagine
what it must be like

to have a father
who was a pastor
and you'd met her father
a few times

and her mother more
(and was told
she liked you)
and tried to think

about what her father's sermons
were about
(you never went
to the services)

and as she sat there
with her flowery dress
red and yellow
and those white ankle socks

and walking-about
-the-farmland-shoes
and dark hair
tied at that moment

with a red ribbon
you noticed
how beautiful she was
in her own way plain way

and how her hands
were held together
over her knees
as she raised her legs

and how the sun light
still reached
you both there
in the kale

and warmed
and eased you both
and you talked
of London

and when you left

and why
and how so different it was
and how you could walk

to at least to two cinemas
whereas here
there was none
but that you didn't mind

as it was a new life
and next to nature
and you could learn
new things kind of life now

and she smiled
and that thrilled you
that smile
that spread of lips

that pierce your heart
and mind kind of smile
and her wrists
slim and white

and the fingers
thin and white
and the nails
had white half moons

on them
and you wanted
to sit there
with her forever

in the tall kale
with the bright sun
and secret love
and feel inside

and 13 year old
sensibilities
each wanting to touch

but not at least not much

and she pointed out
a Red Admiral butterfly
fluttering over the kale
and slowly by.

Terry Collett

You Know.

You know,
my son,
the road I tread,
the dark tunnels
that lead away,
that close up doors
at each new day.

You know the words
I speak to you,
the words I write,
and try to shape
to say how
your death
has pained
my heart,
that tragic event
that time has sent.

You know
my dark hours;
the black dog
at my heels
snapping and growling,
its deep down bark,
its tearing teeth
sharp as any shark.

You see I sleep
in drugged up doze,
that each new day
I think of you,
and your sad demise,
always there in mind,
before my tired eyes.

Terry Collett

You See.

You see the way she looked
when father died.

That lost
in a dark maze gaze;
that emptied
of being stare,
still there
years later
as could be expected
of a devoted wife.

Could see
in her eyes
worlds set ablaze
and burnt out
leaving just gutted ruins
where love had been
and lived and slept.

You see the way she studied
the roofs of houses
from her window
of her lonely room;
grey tiles and skies
with mists and gloom.

You see her now
mind gone
to dementia's claim;
hardly remembering
a face or place or name;
but still that lost look
that drowning
in a maze of words
in some dark
foreign language book.

You'll Lose

Station after station
goes by platform

passing platform
light to darkness

darkness to light
underground train

you sit there
on a seat

looking at your feet
knowing he'll be there

when you get home
knowing what he'll say

the way he'll look
those dark eyes

that sneer
that deep down

chilling fear
he brings you

and that guy at work
who tries it on

thinking himself
God's gift

and the way he waits
by the drinks machine

as if I would
you muse

seeking out
to win

knowing very well
you'll lose.

Terry Collett

Young Innocent.

Sure come round
and bring a bottle,
she said. So you did,
whiskey or wine,
depending on how
much money you
had in your wallet.

She opened the door
and stood there and
said: you look like
you could do with
warming up; come
in and let me oblige.

So you went in, and
after a scotch or two,
she went off to her
room and came back
just wearing black
thigh length stockings.

Are you ready now?
Sure, you said, and
followed her down
the hall to her room,
watching her fine ass
move as she walked.

Her room was small
with a double bed, a
dressing table and tall
closet for her clothes.

She lay on the bed
and looked at you:
come on, she said,
I won't bite, well not
unless you want me to.

So you climbed into bed
with her. Her hair black,
small red ribbon on top,
and small neat breasts
hanging there like small
soft fruits. She took your
tool and stiffened it up
between her small hands,
her dark eyes watching you.

You lay there the young
innocent unsure what to do.

Terry Collett

Young Man's Head Mcmlxxi

And the old abbot aged
and pulled down with cancer
walked the cloister,

et aestu saeculi nobis,

even though cloistered
and of God,

I swept the landing
after the office of Terce
with large broom
and dustpan and brush
and there was a huge spiderweb
in a window,

Salve regina audi nos,

Dom Kenneth sorted
the altar cloths and plates
and holy cup where
the Crucified's blood is sipped,

and she welcomed me in
and sat me down
and unbuttoned my flies
and took out the feller,

the deeds you do
may be the only sermon
some persons
will hear today said Francis,

au travail est de prier
the French monk said
as he helped me
with the refectory
cleaning up before lunch,

George cast his stone
further that the rest of us
after the office of Sext
and our lunch
and sitting
on the abbey beach,

don't let your sins
turn into bad habits
Teresa said,

mine almost did back then
and with her
Yochana that is
not Teresa,

bell ringing
as Hugh showed us
his thin frame and arms
but the tolled bells
carried to far and wide,

parlare con Dio
ed egli vi ascolterà
the Italian monk told me
but my prayer life
was less than his,

we are twice armed
if we fight with faith
said Gareth quoting Plato
and I had only read
the Republic that far,

Dom Joe(dear Bunny)
said to me
God has something special
in line for you
but I never found it
least not then,

?????? ??? ??????? ??? ???

a visiting Greek monk said
and Dom Charles
translated for me
but it went over
my young man's head.

Terry Collett

Young Traitor

Gran said
you can come with us
to the fair

Janice said
Provided your mum agrees
of course but Gran's

already asked your mum
so it's all right
you stood outside

the school gates
waiting for your mother
to come and pick you up

and so you said
Oh right that'll be good
but you didn't want Helen

to know you were going
to the fair with Janice
and even though

you hadn't planned it
or asked for it
you still felt guilty

about going
with Janice to the fair
and when Helen

came out of school
and stood waiting
next to you

for her mother
you hoped Janice
wouldn't say

anything about it
but Janice just stood there
smiling looking at Helen

as if to say he's going with me
to the fair and you're not
and Helen gazed at Janice

at the same time
putting her hand
near yours

and you could feel
her hand brush
against yours

and then she turned
and looked at you
through her

thick lens glasses
her eyes searching you
like a navigator

looking for a fresh route
to a new world
and Janice moved closer

on your other side
her hand seeking out
a finger to hold

and she said
Look here comes Gran
and she released

your finger and ran
and you stood with Helen
waiting

knowing her hand

was warm and feeling yours
and hoping she couldn't

read minds
or thoughts
or know about the fair

and she said suddenly
giving your hand a squeeze
Here's your mum and mine

let's go meet them
and off you ran
following behind

feeling a sense of betrayal
being a traitor to Helen
in your 7 year old mind.

Terry Collett

Young's Wife 1971

Young's wife
worked with you
she came
to the hospital
after you did.

At first
she was just
another face
amongst others.

Then one day
you got talking
and she said
where she
and her
husband drank
Friday nights
and maybe
you should go along
and have a drink
with them.

So you did
she introduced you
to her husband
and he seemed ok
about you joining
the small group of 6
in a corner table
by a window.

They all bought
a round of drinks.

You drank beer first
then went on to whiskey.

Young's wife

talked to you
and under the table
her knee
touched yours
on purpose.

She would
look at you
and smile.

Once while
you were downing
a whiskey
her hand touched
your thigh
and you near died.

You all right?
her husband said
as you choked
on the last
of the whiskey.

Yes it went down
the wrong way
you said
going red.

A few days later
back at work
she came along
and found you
and said
she lived nearby
and would you like
to drop by
and have a coffee
and chat.

Won't your
husband mind?
you said.

He won't know
she said
and what he
don't know
won't hurt him.

So you went
and she got you
a coffee
and you sat in
her lounge
and you got
to kissing
some how
but that is
another tale.

Terry Collett

Your Granddad's Blue Book Of Planes

In your granddad's bookcase
was a book you liked
with a blue hardback cover
with German warplane

pictures in it
and you loved to study
the photographs
even though

the words
were too big
or long
for you to read

and on that Sunday
you sat
while the parents talked
and studied

the bookcase
hoping your granddad
would get it out for you
if he saw you

looking that way
long enough
but the parents talked
and the grandparents

listened or talked too
and the book stayed put
in the bookcase
and you stared

and counted the books
on either side
taking in
the various colours

and sizes
on the shelves above
and below
and how neat

they were placed
and tidy
and well polished
it all was

but the book
kind of attracted you
with its German warplanes
with the Swastikas

on the wings and sides
and some pictures
had Spitfires
and Lancaster bombers

with red white and blue
on the sides and wings
but that Sunday
Granddad didn't

get out the book
and hand it to you.

Terry Collett

Your Mother And You And The Cherries

In the year the Who
and Jimi Hendrix
played
at the Isle of Wight

Rock Festival
your mother
was in Smallfields
hospital

having a kidney removed
and you sat with her
outside the ward
looking out

on woodland
and unkempt grassland
and you gave her cherries
in a brown paper bag

you had bought
she took the bag
and looked inside
I can't eat those

at the moment
what with the kidney
being removed and such
oh sorry

you said
not to worry
you eat them
she said

so you did
flicking the small stones
into the tall grass
your mother looked up

at the warm sun
and white clouds
shame you and Judith
didn't get together

she said suddenly
as you had just spat
a stone nearby
I liked Judith

she was a down to earth
kind of girl
you looked at your mother
in her pink dressing gown

and slippered feet
she'd got engaged
to someone else
by the time

I got around asking her
you said
there may have been
prettier girls about

but she had
a heart of gold
and lovely eyes
and smile

your mother said
giving you one
of her studying looks
you tried to picture

Judith that Christmas
when she kissed you
for the first time
while carol singing

the moon bright

and stars out flashing
in the night sky
you spat out

another cherrystone
there'll be an orchard
of cherry trees here
in years to come

your mother said
scanning the woodland
and tall grass
you'll have to bring me back

and see
she added laughing
how do you feel?
you asked

a bit sore
but otherwise
all right
be glad to get home

but they want me
to go
to a convalescent home
run by nuns

for a few weeks
to recover
will you go?
you asked

they insist I go somewhere
so might as well
go to the nuns
she said

miss you at home
you said
the others will

miss you too

your mother
went silent
the lines on her forehead
screwed up

as she thought
and you remembered
Judith's arms
around your waist

and the big hug
she gave you
as her lips
met yours

penny for them
your mother said
for what?
you said

your thoughts
she said
if I had a penny
for all my thoughts

you said
I'd be a rich man
Mother laughed
then said

think on Son
and as much as you can.

Terry Collett

Your Sister And You And The Pigeon.

You and your sister
found a pigeon
on the grass
outside Banks House

which couldn't fly
and so you took it up
the concrete stairs
to your mother

and your sister said
it can't fly
what shall we do?
it can stay the night

your mother said
but in the morning
you must take it
to the police station

and leave it with them
and so you found
a cardboard box
and placed the bird in

with a small bowl of water
and some broken up bread
and left it
in the lounge

over night
and you could hear its sound
and movement
as it walked around

the box
and in the morning
it was still alive
and looked at you both dully

and so after breakfast
you took the bird
to the police station
and the police officer said

what have we here then?
a pigeon
your sister said
it can't fly

oh I see
the police officer said
in mock surprise
can't fly ok

leave it with me
and we will contact
the appropriate people
to deal with the issue

and so you did
and on the way home
your sister said
I hope it will be all right

and have a new home
and you said
yes I'm sure it will
but with a mischievous look

in your eye
thinking
but not saying
in somebody's pie.

Terry Collett

Yours Always 1922

Yours always
she had said
or written on the back
of the postcard

with a photograph
of her on the front
in black and white
(not sepia)

looking back at him
with a dour expression
on her rather plump face
and her black hair

parted at the side
and her dark eyes
gazing at him
as if asking

do you remember us
that night in Paris?
And that white dress
and those pearls

yes those pearls
he remembered
her taking them off
in the Parisian hotel

the last thing removed
before they made love
after a night out
at a cafe and a show

with dancing girls
but why
the dour expression?
She certainly wasn't

dour that night
or that other night in Madrid
but the postcard was the last
and she never sent one again

despite her writing
always yours and dated
on the back May 1922
he kept it locked away

in a drawer
what else
could a broken
hearted lover do?

Terry Collett

Yvonne Straight-Jacketed 1946

The straight jacket
holds you firm;
they put you down
on the wooden bench,
sit there Yvonne, sit still,
the nurse says, and don't bite.

You watch
the nurse walk off,
her uniform dark blue,
the white headdress,
holds her brown hair in place,
but does nothing for her face,
hard and heavy jawed.

Your bare feet
sense the carpeted floor;
your toes scratch
against the rough grain.

Your black hair
is over you face,
you are unable
to push it away
as your hands
are bound
in the jacket.

You shake your head
to move it away,
but it falls over again,
shutting out sight.

You sit and sense hard
wooden plaits of wood
beneath your butt.

You had headbutted
that woman in those

female lavatories
who attacked you
in one of the stalls,
tried to touch you,
finger you
as you'd seen her do
to others in the past.

Now you are
straight-jacketed.

That fat woman's nose
was broken.

Blood everywhere,
on walls, on the lavatory bowl
where you pushed her over.

You hear the loud
calls and screams
from the ward,
the keys in locks
turning and turning,
and anger
in your head and heart,
burning, burning, burning.

Terry Collett

Zapped 1957

Enid met me
on the bomb site
off Meadow Road.

I had two
of my six
shooter cap guns
in holsters
each side
of my waist
hanging from my
S belt.

I showed her
how to draw
the guns
and shoot straight
BANG BANG
I went.

She jumped
and stared shitless
at me.

Is it loaded?

No just caps
I said
twirling the guns
around my fingers
as I'd seen
the cowboys do
in the cowboy films.

I let them
into the two holsters.

Can I have a go?

I smiled at her
if you like.

I undid the gun belt
and handed it to her.

She did the belt
around her narrow waist
and straightened the guns.

What's the string for?
She said.

It's to keep
the holsters rising
when you go
for the guns
I said
shall I tie it
around your legs?

She nodded.

I knelt down
and tied
the two
pieces of string
around each
of her thighs.

She winced.

What's up?

Nothing
she said.

I tied it gently
and stood back.

I guessed
her old man

had belted her again
hence the pain.

Ready?
I said.

She nodded
and stood
with her hands
at her sides
her thin fingers
moved like spiders
as she waited to go
for the guns.

She seemed nervous
looking down
at her hands.

Each gun
is capped
I said.

She went for guns
and drew quick
and shot
BANG BANG.

I was zapped.

Terry Collett

Zest For Life

Zest for life
rather than death

to be rather
than not to be

to hold the hand
of a lover
and not shake hands
with a deceitful betrayal

to smell a flower
and not dung

to smell
a beautiful woman
and not
a stiff corpse

to listen
to the music
of Led Zeppelin
and not the cries
of the dying

to drink beer
and not the blood
of the living

to hang
about in bars
rather
than Purgatory

to love
and not hate

to sleep only
when the need arises

and not the sleep
of death

but sometimes
the zest for death
may outdo
the zest for life

to prefer
not to be
rather than be

and the betraying kiss
of hurt and pain
and loss

or rather
to smell
the dying
rather than the scent
of lying women

to want nothing
but nothingness

zest for life
for being

for the sweet scent
of lovers and flowers

and more so
to be
and not wait
for the dying hours.

Terry Collett