

Cherished Pulse



Unconventional Love Poetry

By Magdalena Ball and Carolyn Howard-Johnson
Illustrated by Vicki Thomas

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Among those whom I like or admire, I can find no common denominator, but among those whom I love, I can: all of them make me laugh.
--W. H. Auden

Poem Credits

“Dark Matter”, “Aurora”, and “Galactic Collision” originally published in *Quark Soup* (Picaro Press) written by Magdalena Ball

“Body Language” originally published in *The Harpweaver* (vol 9), Published by Brock University

“Personality” originally published on *Totem Triptychs*, Edited by Don Swartzentruber

“A Woman’s Heart” originally published in *Inkspotter*, edited by Betty Dobson

“Another Day” originally published in *Subtle Tea*, Edited by D. Herrle

Magdalena Ball is also the author of a chapbook of poetry, *Quark Soup* <http://budurl.com/quarksoup> (Picaro Press).

Carolyn Howard-Johnson is also the author of a chapbook of poetry, *Tracings* <http://budurl.com/CarolynsTracings> (Finishing Line Press).

***Cherished Pulse* is the first in a series of special gift books including Valentine’s and other Love Occasions, Mothers, and Fathers. Other books in the series include *She Wore Emerald Then* <http://budurl.com/SheWoreEm> and *Imagining the Future*.**

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Magdalena Ball The Ocean



The Ocean

Spotting your face
not for the first time
transportation
a fractured place
between absolute familiarity
near invisibility
and the shock of new.

There's no feature
familiar as my own
not a wrinkle
I haven't traversed.

Yet you turn your profile
in gentle
fluorescent light
and my inaudible
gasp
is the voice
of a girl
discovering
the ocean.

Great Sky

At Brill on the Hill (with the windmill)
the sky ominous
a purple bruise threatened to knock
us off the bike
Nixy's little mill tenuous
perched alone,
six hundred feet above sea level
no trees to buffer the wind
three centuries
of lovebirds
non conformists
showing off calve strength
as they worked their way towards
a pint at The Pheasant Inn.

We too were tenuous.

Healthy children
eyes wide with cold
wild landscape
hungry for our future
the warm taste of flesh.

Your red and white leather
bolder than the great sky
bigger than the bleak landscape
grassed over clay pits
when you took my hand
for the first time
pulled me down
out of the wind.

No going back.

The windmill kept turning
the Pheasant
churning
hearty ploughmen's
while we rode
into adulthood.

Red and white bravado may be gone
with purple clouds
cracked childhood leather

hunger remains.

Don't let age blind you.
Under my crepe paper skin
lies a beating heart
blood moving bravely
through veins and arteries
Pull me down
out of the wind
like you used to.

Event Horizon

Matter collapsed to infinite density
the curvature of your spine
extreme
your beautiful body edges
the point of no return
my disembodied voice
a cosmological constant
begs you to hold back
raging hunger
denied for years.
Stay.

Traced out by light rays
that can never escape
you sit alone on the event horizon
the inward pull of gravity
overwhelming
locked off
to stupid mortals
like me
terrified at the vortex
you lean towards
ready to cross the threshold.
Stay.

What draws you forward?

Is the naked singularity
of your imminent
big bang
more provocative
than the warmth of human embrace.
The randomness
of madness
shakes beauty from your hair
leaves me alone
in the coldest space
while redshift
increases beyond bounds to infinity
forget it
glory's nothing against
the simple truth of presence.
Stay.

Personality

When the perfect
personality formula
of your tickbox life
leads you to the
swamp of overconformance
telling you who you are
whom to love
what to do
your world reduced to
gorgeous masks
you wear with aplomb
to order and control
random variation in behaviour
behind type
extrovert vs introvert
square hole or round peg

downy covers
hide a mess of wings and tears

ticking boxes mirrors ticking clocks
till time is up
candle snuffed
leaving only
taut masks
restlessly alone

that's where I'll meet you
at the Maginot line
of self perception
match in hand
to light the candle.

Dark Matter

It isn't possible to show you the imprint
small footsteps across the surface of my stomach
silvery scars up my hips
the change is deeper, more pervasive
dark matter.

Look directly and you'd miss it entirely
a still life, pleasant enough
empty of velocity's jostle.

You might count the years'
mellowing gravitational pull
visible dimming of light
dissipation and exhaustion in equilibrium
expect a fall in intensity or rotational speed
you'd be wrong.

In the cosmic hide and seek
of your soft heart
versus my hard head
or my soft heart
against your hard head
mass has only increased
perception important as proof.

Call it massive astrophysical compact halo objects
or weakly interacting massive particles
too large to measure, too small to be captured
or you could just say *love*
all the same
the pull stronger than gravity
greater than the mass of all galaxies
put together.

Body Language

If I could reach
into my heart
fingers caressing veins
arteries
past ventricles and valves
the steaming depths
of my chest
and bring out something beating
you might know
what hapless words fail at
every time I open my mouth
write poorly coupled rhymes.

If I could tear off skin
peel layers of derma
until there was only bone
you might see
the delicate structure of devotion.

I reach, pull
tear and peel
hands out
holding something I hope
reveals truth
purified by pain and blood
open my palm
find it empty.

Aurora

On your back
the night sky alight
you believed in magic

It didn't matter
what you saw was little more than
charged particles streaming from the sun
excited oxygen and nitrogen
in Earth's atmosphere.

Red, green and purple curtains
waved above you
like the God of your dreams
benevolent
present
anything but impersonal.

The ennui of daylight
gone
as you watched curved collisions?
energetic dance
moving inside of you.

If I could capture that spectrum
atomic neon sign of lost wonder
feed it to you on a spoon
when your vigil against
poverty and incompetence
becomes ball and chain
I'd give up my own food
turn my back to the solar wind
to keep you warm

I'd be your personal aurora
talisman against the lure of misery
an electrical current charging your ionosphere.

Galactic Collision

In the wake of our galactic collision
shaking stars from wet hair
frightened remnants
our newborn cocoon visible
amidst space junk
primordial remnants.

The centre of our wreck
trails of pain
crisscrossed by filaments, dark dust.

It's difficult to come to terms
with this rebirth.

Cold hydrogen gas
giant molecular clouds
condensed in your heart's
black hole
expanded into a cartwheel blaze
cosmic showdown.

Still simmering
from transformation
equal-weight individuals
to a single spinning spiral
we wipe crusty eyes
a billion years' conjoined spin
past a memory
caught on Hubble's film
future an open door
we can only enter
in a perfectly aligned motion.

Oubliette

Forget everything.

In the night
of your incarceration
stone ribs surrounding
soft heart
become windowless cell.

A tiny memory lights
the keep
faint candle light
too weak to warm
dank fortification
you gather around.

Your finger trails
the dripping Ivanhoe
of your mind
but can't find that
flame in the darkness.

I'd turn my back on the cloudless sky
become hellhound
storm your dungeon
to free you
if you'd only utter one word
of hope.

Baker's Dozen

it's nearly too close
background buzz
action, need, attention

I have to stop
stand back squint
gain perspective

to see
laughing blue
in the kitchen
a baker's dozen
care
so overwhelming
it's almost an irritant
till it isn't there

engagement
beyond anything an artist could dream
in the empty
self-absorbed days
before
you

Carolyn Howard-Johnson

A Woman's Heart



A Woman's Heart

The heart of your woman is not so easily read
as your girl's. Wisdom and doubt are matched

rings, once a perfect fit, later tight, soon will not
slip from your finger, must remain with you

through the night. Once you prayed for his call.
Warmed by his glance you watch him. Balanced high

on a ladder, you twist crêpe paper streamers, tack
them with the heel of a loafer to the boys' gym

wall, a diversion that fools no one. Today, given
roses, you hold them to your cheek, revel

in the colors. Coral and Cream. You smell
bruised gardenias from another bouquet.

Over the years you have learned
to smile with your lips and lower the lids of your eyes.

Watching My Daughter Say Goodbye To a Fleeting Love

Why would I want
this young Masai,
soon-chief, lanky
a Kenyan Kobe?
In the noon heat,
flies hum in our ears,
faces, eyelids.
He touches the curve
of my silver cell,
my shoulder, there
near my tank strap,
I taller than the others
in our tour group, whiter.
When by the fire we gather
to say goodbye, the embers
like flies, billions
in the night fly toward the stars,
reach for their light. I inhale,
not hope but something more
embodied.
Smoke fills
my eyes with tears.

Another Day

He, transformed to coffee table art,
my centerfold man, unthreatening
paper doll, marble-pure lips soft, private
parts unassuming, soft, hands big,
perhaps, as his sculptor's. David!
My first glimpse at love. I fold
my husband's shorts that first year,
fresh from the laundry, press
their Munsing to my cheek,
then to my nose and breathe. Pale
scent of line drying. Now I could restore
that moment. I push my hips
into his early-morning warmth,
hope he will not stir, ruin
the moment, idle memories
of when he and David were chaste
Carrera, like sweet-lime
upon the tongue, pungent
in those unripe days before this life.

Dreaming Lilacs

It's you who had me dreaming
lilacs, breathing April's sweetest
tears, tasting sugared lemon rinds,
hearing bougainvillea's fuchsia
song, taking shortcuts
across the lawn to kick
through jacaranda's silent
petalfall. Like Van Gogh's
flowers twist their faces
to the sun, I now turn mine
to the desert moon for warmth
and light and calm. As if you
were with me,
 as if you loved me.

déjà vu?

in my waking dreams, a fan
the color of forbidden doors

in forbidden cities, its ribs
bamboo slivers. I do not know

whose it was or what it means.
If...when... I see it again

I'll recognize its shape
or will it feel only like

a time and place
I've been before.

I want it to remain as real
as if I'd touched its silk.

Discovery

After unrealized passion
my head finds the curve
of his armpit. There
where my ear presses
his warmth, a sensual sound,
cherished pulse. Not
what he wanted
but enough for me.

From the Observation Deck

A stranger. His hand shields his eyes
to see the beach from here.
His face pushes into a grin.
Smile tracks at the corners
of his eyes, along his cheekbones
like those that play
in my make-up mirror.
I don't mind his at all.
A young woman, white and slender
as the egret on the shore
comes to fetch him. His face
relaxes; radiating lines
from lid to temples ebb
like waves on sand, creases
now streaks of white drawn
with chalk on tanning
hide, squint lines never colored
by the sun. They shout his age.
I frown, feel the crinkles between
my brows. His lady seems not to see
his, nor does she seem to care.

Hallmark Couldn't Possibly Get This Right

I don't kiss you
because you turn your lips away.
I won't send roses
because they wouldn't make you smile.
Here, a poem. Read it alone
so I can be brave
enough to send you another.

LA Love Story

Strangers, these palms.

 Seed themselves and sprout
 among our native
 oak, salt brush, through the roots
of my jacaranda, among
 my petunias, even push
 aside iceplant, (itself
 a transplant). Hardiness
becomes those not indigent
 to this place. I pull the shoots,
 (two green fiber-blades)
 and still they come.

I, too, thrive here in heat,
 smog and evening breezes.

Survivors.

Loving Lance

I shall not regret
biting into this apple,

however bitter,
it is now, the memory

will seem sharp
when November takes

away the season's
fruit--ripe or unripe,

perfect or scarred.
Perhaps this time

I will polish it first,
hold it on my tongue

to see if the taste
sweetens with age

and not have to wait
for winter before I understand.

About the Authors

Magdalena Ball



Magdalena Ball runs *The Compulsive Reader*. Her short stories, editorials, poetry, reviews, and articles have appeared in a wide number of printed anthologies and journals and have won local and international awards for poetry and fiction. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature from CCNY (New York), an MBA from Charles Sturt University (Wagga), and has studied literature on a postgraduate level at Oxford University (UK). Magdalena lives in on a rural property in New South Wales with her husband and three gorgeous children. She is also the author of *Sleep Before Evening*, *The Art of Assessment: How to Review Anything* and *Quark Soup*, and coming soon, a full length poetry book titled *Repulsion Thrust*. Visit her website at <http://www.magdalenaball.com>

Carolyn Howard-Johnson



Carolyn Howard-Johnson's first novel, *This is the Place*, and *Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered* are both award-winners. Her fiction, nonfiction and poems have appeared in national magazines, anthologies and review journals. She is an instructor for UCLA Extension's Writers' Program and has shared her expertise at venues like San Diego State's world renowned Writers' Conference and Call to Arts! EXPO. Her nitty gritty how-to book, *THE FRUGAL BOOK PROMOTER* won USA Book News' Best Professional Book and the Book Publicists of Southern California's Irwin Award. Her chapbook of poetry, *TRACINGS*, was named to The Compulsive Readers Top 10 Best Reads for 2004 and was given the Military Writers Society of America Silver Award for Excellence. Carolyn's newest book is *The Frugal Editor: Put Your Best Book Forward to Avoid Humiliation and Ensure Success*. Cheryl Wright of Writer2Writer.com says, "The Frugal Editor will become a well-used reference for writers around the world." Her website is: <http://carolynhoward-johnson.com>.

Vicki Thomas



Watercolor artist, Vicki Thomas, received her B.F.A. from Minneapolis College of Art and Design, after spending a year of study in Amsterdam, Holland. She was a freelance fashion illustrator in Los Angeles for 17 years before she eased herself into fine arts watercolor. Since then, Vicki has enjoyed painting bright, colorful watercolors in a multitude of subjects; each designed to bring pleasure and joy to its viewer. Her favorite subjects are children and whimsical themes, as well as floral gardens and bouquets. She is a published artist with limited edition prints/giclee prints on paper and canvas, greeting cards and many gift items in the marketplace. She has participated in numerous art shows and exhibits locally in the San Gabriel Valley area, as well as various California Galleries. The artist is active in several local art clubs and teaches watercolor classes to both young people and adults. A new area of writing a series of fantasy/fiction novels has entered in Vicki's busy life. Visit Vicki's website at: <http://www.vickithomasartist.com>

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