

Franklin L. King

Sunflowers and Zinnias



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Expressions by  
Franklin L. King

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## *Acknowledgments*

The Sunflowers of my Texas youth grew wild.  
Zinnias had to be planted and tended. I am both.

These works were not written to be published.  
They were only expressions sent to a friend. They  
are primitive in that they do not embrace the  
conventional styles of poetic expression. That the  
words are from the heart is the only defense that I  
have to give.



For  
Susan who encouraged me.



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## *The Meaning of September*

The garden spider weaves its web  
in hand loom fashion. Its web grows larger  
and more intricate upon the hackberry limb.  
The feed corn and cotton await the harvest hand.

September is a waiting month.  
Summer will soon sleep at Autumn's arrival.  
The blue norther's wind will come  
in sand and gust. But now brown-eyed Susans  
cover the fields in Persian color.

Autumn will fill the air with pungent smoke,  
and echo with the call of geese.  
Why do I feel such loneliness in September?  
Has love died like the burnt red leaves  
of the fiery maple?

My life is September intertwined,  
like tread upon the spider's loom,  
a summer cloak of Queen Ann's lace  
and winter garment of sleet and rain.

## *A Moment in a Country Garden*

Sunflowers border my father's garden.  
Summer clouds the only shade.  
The soil is soft and warm beneath my feet.  
Gourd dipped water awaits the heat of day.

Wild bees fly freely among the blooming plants.  
Corn's tasseled hair turns golden in morning light.  
Tomatoes grow sun setting red in the warmed soil.  
Cucumber to mother's chow-chow and pickle jar.  
Okras sting the hands as melons expand.

Cicadas sing in midsummer's choir.  
Cut worm, grub worm and other intruders  
join the feast uninvited. Ladybugs  
and dragonflies dine upon the garden table.

A summer garden fills with the blooming of life.  
There is no sadness here  
nor media's blaring report.  
Though column demands,  
no report to be made,  
no rushes amongst marigold and corn.  
A summer breeze, a gathering storm,  
delight the twilight of the fading day.  
Sleep to be made rich  
by rural contentment profound.

I looked at him, my father,  
with fear and respect.  
Unreachable man with skin darkened by Texas sun.  
You sleep now in earth well tended.  
I did not know it then,  
but I too was cared for by the sun,  
the garden and my father.

## *Fields of Changing Color*

The fields of summer green  
now simmer in autumn color.  
My father's pastures a momentary thing  
of perfect palette.  
Hues mixed by gods unseen.

Can you stay to look upon the fields with me?  
It is but a moment that I ask.  
Do not walk so quickly  
that a vision becomes but a transitory glance.  
The honeybees pause longer than we  
to drink to season's end.

Let me place within your hand  
the autumn colors of the field.  
Each color a holly prayer—a rosary of flowers.

Skirts of Blue norther dust rise above  
the golden rod and blue bonnet.  
Winter will undress the colors from the fields.  
The naked earth too soon dressed  
in swaddling cloths of hoarfrost and snow.

## *A Journey Together*

The land is green with winter wheat.  
A moon of ice rises  
in the fading blue of winter's eastern sky.  
I am but the reflection  
of your light turned cold.

We are one yet dwelling  
in dimensions separate.  
Was it not with love that I did call  
your name and you reply?  
Now wind is the voice that answers  
in the striking echo of a loose tin roof.

On the prairie we dwelt  
and felt the warmth  
of summer sun upon a smile.  
Amid wild flowers  
we ran in youthful dream.  
Warm nights you touched my soul  
and spoke of love not ending  
with a season's change.

Can we be separated for long?  
The gods cannot be so cruel! You dwell now  
in fading color and thoughts  
scattered like film upon an editor's table.

Be with me once more  
now that the years have past.  
Let not youth's dream of never departing vanish  
with an earth turned frozen by time and season.

We will sleep once more together  
upon a seabed of loam and clay,  
voyagers adrift on a forgotten sea.



## *Within the Night*

Lie with me  
and look upon the winter night.  
It is a dream in which we meet.  
Beneath the cosmic dome  
we lay entwined  
yet free. We reach and softly touch  
in a mist of recollected thought.

Full moon rises above the prairie grass  
as evening breeze to sleep is put.  
Coyotes greet the mountains of the moon  
while showers of shooting stars  
amuse the darkness of the sky.

With the ending of the year,  
other worlds brighter than before appear.  
The Milky Way and the Seven Sisters  
approach the zenith of the night.

Owl speaks to the moon  
in resonant tone.  
Soon the night is silent  
except for distant whippoorwill's call.  
With the moments that pass,  
the morning star appears  
in the awakening eastern sky.

Removed from lover's dream,  
ice about the eaves suspended.  
House speaks in creaks and night wind whisper.  
Shadows from the dying fire  
crawl upon the ceiling tall.  
In youth, there was the promise of joy  
when sleep had ceased.  
With age, there is but a longing to recall.

With winter dawn, lovers vanish  
until they embrace once more within the night.

## *Fields of Snow*

Snow drifts into frozen swells  
in a silent sea of pallid color.  
Upon eaves and fields  
of prairie grass it roams.

It, like the confessional,  
hides from view  
the discard of dwellers and forest wild.  
From hills of gathering height,  
I look upon the land  
and wonder with fear  
at the beauty of ice made crystal.

The pane of glass does not stop  
the cold nor do walls of wood  
hinder the penetrating  
fingers of frost.  
In the late hours,  
the flakes do stop  
and moonlight reflects  
upon a motionless sea  
of frozen foam.

The snow separates us  
in bitter cold.  
I then do seek  
and wait to lie with you  
while flakes upon  
the loft do move to gentle gusts.

Were we not apart  
before the sky darkened  
and flakes did fall?  
Barren as the field  
devoid of summer harvest  
where wind driven drifts now meet.

Until desire's flame  
lights the room with fire,  
I must dwell with you in thought alone  
as new snow arrives  
unheard once more  
in gentle touch upon the roof.

## *Moon Glance*

The full moon glances upon the Appalachian slope.  
The moon has risen full and rest now  
upon another mountain's crest  
surrounded by lilac forest haze.  
Moist summer twilight spent in summer's rush  
to capture quickly fading light.

Soon the moon will leap in time  
from the mountain crest and cast its light  
upon magnolia leaves in splendid silver light.  
Night stars will cluster in diminished splendor  
at the moon's apparent glance  
on its journey to the Seven Sisters.

The summer color will vanish soon  
in the coming frost. I loved you  
in moonlight silhouette but do not recall  
your name or the passion explored.  
You dominated my night but faded with the day.

Can I recapture light upon magnolia leaves  
or moist summer nights when love faded  
with the approach of day?

## *November Rain*

The red dawn appears  
with mackerel sky  
and backing wind.  
Hold my hand  
for darkening clouds sail quickly  
upon invisible paths of air.

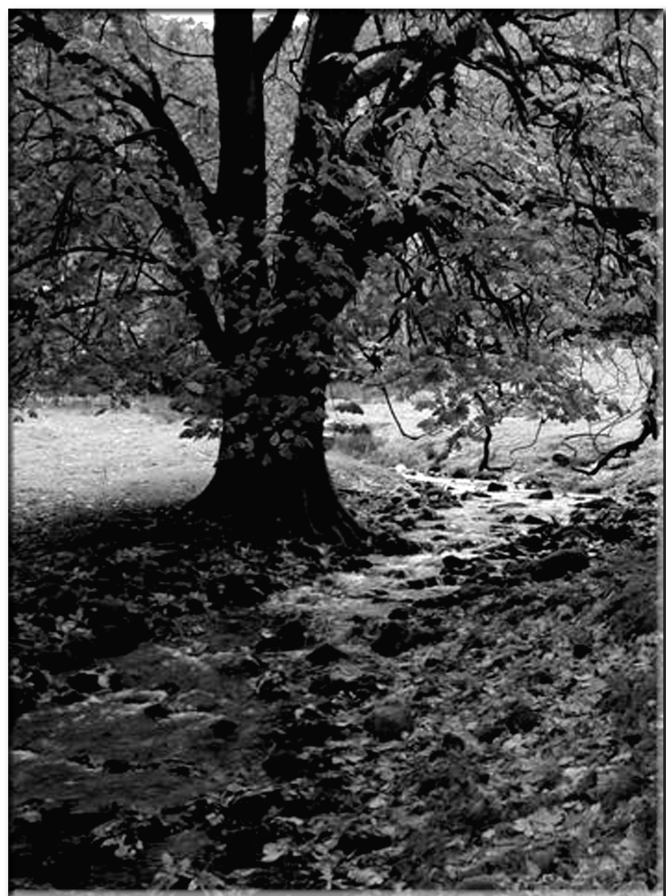
Gentle drops begin to fall,  
moistening dry November fields.  
From distant ponds and streams,  
frogs acknowledge  
the nativity of rain.  
Soon meadows are hidden  
from view as showers descend  
to cover us as one.

Water runs along  
the edges of yellow leaves,  
congregates about the tips,  
then falls to earth in collective voice.

Thunder sounds and crows  
in vocal protest  
fly to larger oak,  
from the heart of the storm they flee.  
Forest odors of fallen wood,  
yellow leaves  
and winter herb abound.

Blue appears among the clouds,  
and golden rays  
of gothic light touch  
rain-soaked fields and meadow pond.

Prairie rainbow at twilight's edge;  
the land is still.





## *Too Brief the Night*

Memory removes all but the censored thought.  
Sleep departs with the closing of the eye.  
In restlessness, thoughts flow  
with the pace of film uncut.

In the twilight of sleep,  
spirals of dust blow across fields  
laid idle at autumn's end.  
Empty porch swing pushed  
by evening breeze, not seen, but clearly heard.

I am filled with vision clear.  
I gaze upon a meadow of Indian paintbrush  
and summer sky. I am as one unseen  
as lovers meet in dream alone.  
A summer orchard from the past  
revealed though winter wind about me swirls.

You appear in dawning light  
while clouds from the southeast gather  
for the coming night.

Our love more intense  
than burning summer field.  
Wild green onions about your feet do lie  
as clover falls from your gown  
of cotton cloth. The wind about your hair  
creates a phantom's weave.

Spoken words I cast like wild seed to the wind.  
Reach my heart with words,  
alone and hungry I remain.  
It is your touch for which I dream.  
Do not from me depart  
till the dove calls in morning song.  
Too brief the night.

## *Ode to Joy in a Summer Field*

Barefoot, the farmer's son saunters  
towards the dawn-lit field.  
His father's pace far faster than his own.  
Bare feet touch the powdery dust of summer clay.

The prairie is silent as the evening star alone  
remains within the gallery of the night.  
The flame of dawn's star awakens  
the morning breeze. In gathering strength,  
the wind moves across the prairie,  
fashioning metronomes of flowers.

The crescendo of the bumblebee approaches,  
and then in diminuendo fashion,  
it journeys to violet flower.  
An oratorio of scissortail, mockingbirds and doves  
is heard while cicadas perform an allegro.

Clouds arrive to darken the prairie sky,  
dimming lights upon a stage.  
Thunder claps, in fortissimo, to announce  
the storm's arpeggio. Frogs, conducted by  
falling rain, in a motet of classical fashion.  
Whippoorwills, at evening's approach, sing  
cantatas to the moon and lovers.

An ode to joy performed,  
not in Beethoven fashion, but in a summer field  
by wind, birds and wildflowers.

## *A Moment in a Summer Rain*

The porch is silent  
except for summer's persistent fly  
and adventuress dirt dobber that ignore  
the stillness of the moisture-laden air.

Clouds build above the earthen swell  
of sedimentary clay, arrayed  
like frigates upon an English sea.  
Cumulonimbus men of war  
move by winds unseen  
in preparation for order of battle.  
Vultures at high altitude spiral  
upon the currents of wind  
while rain crows sing cappella.

Unnoticed at first,  
the black soil is dampened softly.  
Thunder echoes from walls of wood  
and roofs of tin. The rain appears  
like broaching surf  
as spray arrives upon the porch.

The rocker is shifted  
further from its edge as heavy drops  
fall upon unlaced boots of leather.  
One last flash of cannon near.  
The breath of ozone,  
the cloud's black powder.

The fields of corn now gleam  
in the moistened air.  
Scissortail and mockingbirds fly  
to fence posts and to the sun unveiled.

I am alone once more  
upon the summer porch.  
The fly returns to hum its song  
and the dirt dobber to its nest of clay.



## *The Morning Bird Sings*

From restless sleep I hear the call.  
Though stalked by coyote and feral cat,  
it sings aloud. Prairie fields  
and twilight dawn awaken by its song

Soon fall leaves will cloth the forest floor.  
Autumn rain will fall upon the furrowed fields.  
The bird within the tree sits with ruffled plume.

What gift to rise to nature's melodic song.  
Alarm need not be set within my chamber.  
Not blinding sun, only streaks of an awakened dawn.





## *Loneliness*

The sea breaks upon moss-covered rocks  
of Aran's shore. A pint of Guinness  
invites the cold within.  
Seaweed drifts upon an Irish sea.

The dream of you that stirs my soul.  
Red hair blowing in a Galway wind.  
A smile that teases and quickens the breath.

Alone I walk a winter beach.  
Yet I hear your voice and feel your hand.  
Seagulls and storm petrels tiptoe  
upon the stone and sand.

In youth, the moon played upon the sea.  
Now wind, spume and cold walk with me.  
Adrift in thought, I look upon an angry sea.

## *The Open Gate*

The gate I cannot close shut against the wind  
or gathering dust of prairie field.  
The bumblebee does not respect my entryway  
or bid me morning though it drinks from flowers,  
wild and unkempt, yet owned by me.

Time, like the wind and bee,  
is unimpeded by a garden gate.  
I cannot stop that which must be.  
How foolish to think I could keep time out  
and that within remain unchanged.

I too shall pass through the entryway  
and perhaps return upon a spring day  
when wildflowers bend to the wind  
and the bumblebee flies among the marigolds.

## *Winter Rain Upon a Tin Roof*

Kerosene lamp cut low.  
Then flame blown free.

Cold feet upon pine floor.  
Quick to bed already warmed by you.  
Metal clock, too tightly wound,  
then echoed upon walls of wood,  
no longer heard.

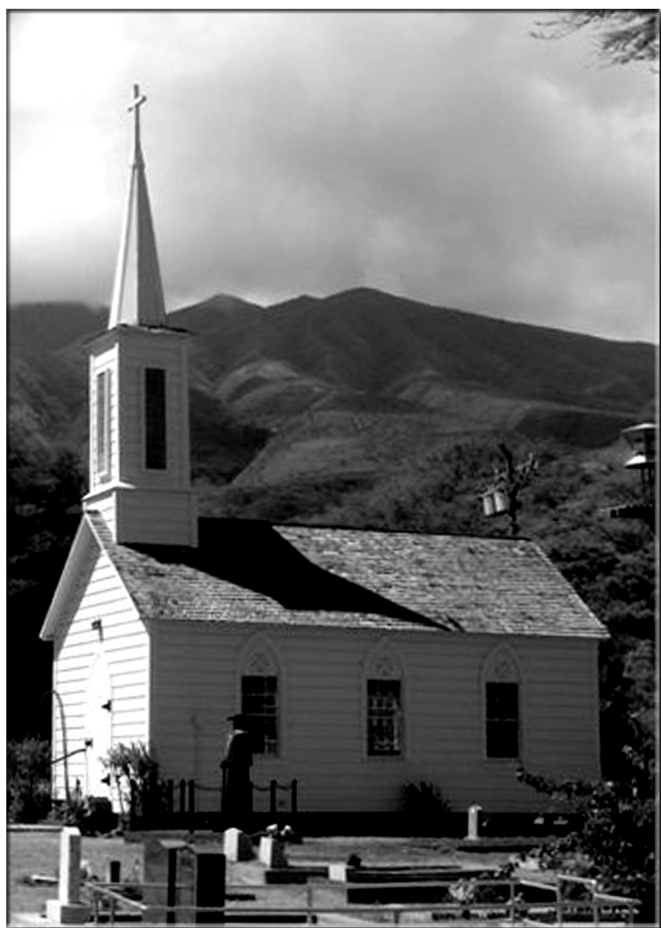
Glowing embers crackle from fire unattended.  
Bursts of fiery colors appear,  
then room in softening shadows fall.

Under quilted blanket  
we lie protected from all without.  
Bodies shared in close embrace.

Softly gentle taps upon the roof appear.  
Then in Mozart furry,  
fingers pound the keyboard of tin  
while storm gusts  
shake both roof and glass.

Soon gentle taps appear once more.  
Distant thunder sounds in decreasing crescendo.

With love's embrace, we sleep content,  
protected by tin roof from all without.



## *My Faith*

A Christian Cross upon a pagan sun.  
Monastic church where stars alone are lit  
while seagulls perform the vesper chants.

Could I not find you in pews well carved?  
Songs sung to man by rehearsed choirs.  
A reading by a scholar  
in practiced voice performed.

Ancient text in modern type revised.  
A prayer of memorized verse  
to mesmerize the audience and choir.  
Music performed with watermark inscribed.

A polite "hello." A faceless stare.  
A hand extended to be shaken.  
Would the cleansing of the hands be rude?

A communion of salt-filled air I seek.  
What wine or bread satisfies the greatest need?  
Should not the sky alone the sun adorn?

To love and be loved is what is sought.  
Not praise of man or speech  
in scholarly voice performed.  
A choir of seagulls; an altar lit by stars.

## *Awakening*

Our love in morning light fulfilled.  
Youths in lovers' sleep content.  
Legs and arms intertwined,  
awaken to touch, to feel within.  
Sunlight filling room with warmth of color.

Mockingbird and quail converse  
from pastures near while honeybees hum  
amid marigold and sunflower.  
Tender morning wind awakens corn  
and leaves of summer elm.  
The scent of crepe myrtle and honeysuckle  
carried by the breeze.

Time not recognized nor acknowledged  
by youth awakening from a dream.  
Outside the red dawn streaks  
across eastern sky and touches clouds not seen.

## *Lost Moment*

Is it the moments past that I have lost?  
A hand not taken, a brow not kissed.  
If only the moments could return.

Would I not hold you near  
and promise that which no mortal can fulfill?  
I would offer you wildflowers and seashore's mist.

Now you only linger in thoughts  
that dim with years in a sun setting light  
that highlights detail and deepens silhouette.

The verse that you handed me in your youth  
is pressed between the pages  
of a misplaced and unread book.  
If that moment could return,  
I would hold you with a passion not defined  
by common reason or mundane task.

The sun setting light is now  
casting details upon that moment  
that deepens shadow and ushers in the night.

## *A Farm Kitchen*

Sweet tea in earthen pitcher  
filled with chipped ice sits upon the table.  
Flowers gathered from wild fields of Texas—  
dandelion and yellow primrose.

Chicken and okra fry within iron skillets  
while corn boils upon the wood stove top.  
Hands that cradled a child so close  
now prepare the meal  
with equal love and tender care.

Son, suspected of eating  
a wedge of favorite pie with smile,  
denies all guilt. His sin  
forgiven by mother's joy.  
Deep in her heart she knows  
that time will soon take from her  
the occupants of the little room.

Hands gripped in prayer  
with words of love and bonding.  
Talk of family and harvest gathered.  
Song soon played by ear upon the piano.

The land had taught that seasons change,  
and one by one, all must depart the farm kitchen.



No one that day could know  
nor dare admit that in a distant time,  
when leaves in vivid color fall,  
that she too would leave that small room  
where her presence provided love  
acknowledged by hug and tender word.

Now empty room where north wind blows  
through broken panes, yet I hear softly a song  
played by ear upon the piano  
and a prayer gently spoken.

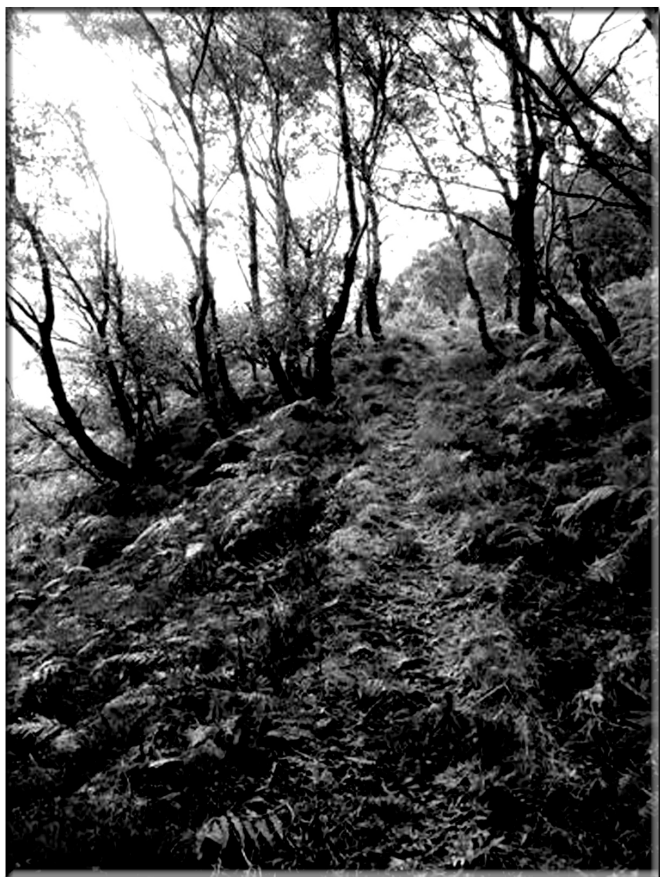
## *To Love Alone*

I walk upon a Monet of falling leaves,  
the canvas is of prairie earth.  
Under my feet are vivid colors of summer dreams  
darkened by November wind and rain.  
About me fall leaves from oak and elm.

A late autumn stream flows nearby.  
The water, a crystal glass,  
breaks upon my touch, revealing  
stone-framed red leaves that lie motionless  
beneath the gentle current.  
Though alone, I feel your presence.

Vision unseen has led me to this stream.  
I know not who you are but feel you near.  
Do we love but once  
and, like doves, forever mourn—  
or do you dwell too deep within  
my soul to be revealed?

My heart, not earth nor stream,  
is the canvas upon which you paint  
with autumn leaves and rock strewn stream.  
Take my hand, though unrevealed,  
as we walk in the autumn woods.



## *Letting Go of the Season*

The sky speaks of the changing season.  
Buttermilk and mare's tails  
are painted upon a cobalt blue.  
The wind shifts in pulses  
towards the northern sky.  
The branches that bent with prairie gusts  
toward the northern pole by southwest wind,  
now write upon the southern sky.

The colors of the trees have changed  
from summer's green to burning red.  
The harvest moon, as rain crows sound,  
now ascends over fields yet to be gathered.

I cannot hold to the summer's pulse  
nor halt the wind that flees  
before the blue norther as it moves  
across the dust-filled sky.  
I must release the summer day as wild geese fly  
once more to the coastal marsh  
of sawgrass, cattail and water lily.

I cannot hold you near any longer  
than the tree its leaf in winter wind.  
We departed long before  
the autumn storm arrived with love  
no longer spoken or verse to share.

You will, for only a moment,  
remain within a summer's dream.  
Yet, like a leaf in burnt color,  
the dream will soon be carried by a north wind  
into the sky.

## *I Have Always Loved a Lake*

Deep within a southern woods  
lays a lake that I in solitude do seek.  
Upon its waters I drift  
with nodding head in noonday heat

My life is but an image upon a summer lake.  
I feel the surface and see reflections  
of a gentle touch as ripples from my hand  
do spread in every widening pulse.  
To touch the surface of a lake  
with less gentle care would alter the reflection  
of summer woods and cerulean sky.

I cast a lure towards a summer cloud.  
To hear the splash of bass far distant  
from my canoe. Easier it is to catch a dream  
while crickets sound from wooded shore.

I am alone now upon a lake  
floating on the reflection of summer clouds.  
Perhaps with rising moon,  
I will paddle through the Milky Way.

My sons, no longer children  
with wondrous eyes to look upon a lake  
in season's change, appear within my thought.  
They entered my life but for a moment  
and like the leaves along the shore  
too quickly vanish with the ebbing of the year.

Summer soon becomes autumn  
as the streams that flow  
upon moss-green rocks carry ships of leaves  
to reach its silent surface in noonday's passage.  
I, like the tree-lined shore and summer sky,  
will not endure longer  
than a reflection upon its still surface.

With gentle stroke, water streams  
from off my paddle to rejoin the shattered surface.  
I know that brim and speckled perch  
do dwell along the shore  
as I paddle softly within a summer dream  
to be too soon awakened by falling leaves.

## *Separate Together*

The eastern moon paints in vivid color  
the fields in glow of harvest light.  
The prairie wind speaks  
in varying tone  
at the arrival of the night  
The gust that whistles loud  
in sun's bright light  
becomes the baritone of evening breeze.  
Within the room  
of fall's lengthening shadows,  
I sit and wait for your arrival.

Let me touch your warmth.  
Prove to me that you are near.  
Shall I embrace a shadow thought?

I am forever altered  
by your autumn words  
that precede the cold of winter thought.  
The inner fire of your being  
consumed my youth.  
Love without care was given  
only to vanish like a summer's eve.  
Appear once more  
that I may touch the dream  
before the vanishing of the night.



My love began  
before the moon had cast you  
in silhouette of thought.  
Yet I return to this room  
of fall shadows to sit alone  
and hear the prairie night of wind  
and calling beast.

I wait for you to appear  
in garment of harvest color—  
sweet dream that forever eludes  
my touch and sight.

## *A Voice in Silent Rooms*

I sit alone and listen to the voice of silent rooms.  
The north wind cuts upon the siding of the house,  
penetrates the loose boards and curls  
beneath a broken pane.  
It speaks aloud in the chimney flue.

Fingers of wind tap upon the barn's tin roof  
to beckon me to go outside  
and face the north wind's blade.  
Dust rises in tempo to the uninvited gust of wind.  
Winter sounds are all I hear  
in the silent rooms now vacant  
of your touch and summer breath.

Fall shadows of darkened trees,  
where north is marked in lichen green,  
now pattern the wooden floor.  
The wind has taken the warmth of summer sun,  
and in frozen breath alone,  
replies to thoughts cast in shadow form  
that move with feline steps within the room.

Does not the flower wait in frozen fields  
to bloom upon the arrival of the solstice sun?  
Can love, like the wildflower,  
lie dormant to emerge once more  
and speak within silent rooms?  
I only wait and listen.



## *Texas Wildflowers*

From frozen winter fields they arrive  
to seek the sun of springtime perfection.  
Free, they grow in a myriad of colors—  
paintbrush, obedient and yellow thistle,  
sown by prairie wind, not planted  
in mathematical row, to nature's delight.

In gentle winds they move in harmonious pace.  
The voice of the bee loudly speaks  
and darts to greet each blooming flower,  
sung to by mockingbird and bobwhite quail.  
At night they watch the trail of the moon  
that wanders among the starry field.

Lie with me upon this bed of wildflowers  
now warmed by summer sun.  
Embrace me like the sun  
upon the myriad blooms of this warm day.  
We have but a moment to share  
with the paintbrush, obedient and yellow thistle.  
Together let us smell the wild scent  
of flowers and alfalfa bloom.  
In this brief interlude of summer day,  
let us not think of fall's arrival  
or the sleeping field in winter's day.

## *Reverie*

Did you have to leave so early?  
I did not know you well enough  
though a lifetime spent in your embrace.  
A thousand times to hold and to release.

I find you now in the elements of the moment.  
A presence known by the scent  
of wild honeysuckle and jessamine.  
Your voice a wind that resonates  
across the prairie fields.

The warmth of the sun your body's touch,  
with eyes the dark blue of winter sky.  
The dress you wear  
the color of maple forest in fall hue.  
Lips, the color of a desert sun that creates  
an unquenchable thirst for you.

You have not left me entirely  
for I see you everywhere amongst the fields.  
Can I not be released  
from that which haunts me still?  
I live in the shadow life,  
forever your possession suspended  
in the reverie of a summer day.

## *Lest*

Is that you that I see in the crowd?  
Your golden hair let down.  
Your walk, the way you hold your hands.  
An image within a moment's delight.

It is your smile I see  
that lit a thousand mornings of desire.  
Eyes that met mine  
that reached and studied the soul within.  
Where shall we meet again?  
Upon a beach or summer meadow?  
Will sound of crashing surf  
or meadowlark be heard?

Can love end with a final breath, a chilling cold?  
I sail upon the air and sea.  
To a mountaintop I flee where land and star  
are one. But you are not there.

In late night I return to love's shared space,  
a room, a bed, a chair.  
A candle now carried in a darkened room.  
Reveals not your shape but the isolation of my soul.

Within the deep forest that in youth  
I did explore with lantern's glow.  
The forest light is but the will o' the wisp.  
The winter hearth glows with St. Elmo's fire.

## *Fragment*

I am a fragment of that which I see.  
Judge me not by this brief thought.  
A part of the whole, not yet complete.

The angled light that strikes the face,  
a fraction of the sun.  
The artist's oils must join  
to make the swirl of color bright.  
How can we love when we but see in part?

February wind moves  
both dust and web within the room.  
Upon the desk lies but a section of the page.  
Can I study the part and the whole not be seen?

My life is a verse written by a stranger's hand.  
Scripted with desire in uneven part.  
Shall I be whole at last, completed by your words?

## *Indecision*

Those who have loved once  
must love again though filled with hesitation.  
From Genesis to Revelation,  
love does not yield to rationale thought.  
We ponder that of equal weight  
upon a fulcrum of doubt.

No decision of the heart  
is clear to those of earthly breed.  
Did not Shakespeare question to be or not to be?

To age should wisdom sprout,  
yet not in truth it be.  
The fool's part is easily played  
by he who acts without intention.  
To flounder not in ocean wave  
but in mortal indecision.



## *Awakening Moment*

How does one awaken desire that sleeps  
within the heart? The wax drips  
upon the hand that holds the burning flame.  
Are not love and desire the same?

Step close to me that you  
within my sight might dwell.  
A captive of image not tamed to arouse  
such passion that leads to love unsought.

Victim of moonlight  
and imagery of self-reflection.  
To lie in bed alone yet dwell  
like a nightingale within the night  
with song sung to crescent moon  
and summer woods.

Call me your friend, your lover sought.  
An ember forever  
in a consuming flame of doubt.  
Can I ignore the salutations  
and not be burned by desire  
and unbridled thought?



## *To Stare Alone*

Should I sit and stare alone  
Do you not know that I now dwell within?

It is a vision of you that I see—  
distant beach and sunlit sea.

Palm trees move to tropic wind.  
Mai Tai mixed with a bougainvillea scent.

Friends tell me to get involved,  
to volunteer, to sing aloud.

My lips in frozen silence sing;  
it is only your face I see.

If song it be,  
then seagulls will chant for me.

If to be involved is the command,  
to fields of wildflowers I will attend.

Do you not know that I dwell now within?

## *Completed*

Words are the oils upon the pallet of my life,  
dabs of awkward rhyme composed.  
Arranged, removed, then mixed again,  
they yield the fragile work.

Poems, like autumn leaves, fall about you.  
In unrehearsed verse, I speak to you.  
In word alone is meaning found.  
What more is there to give?

My love was not a rough stone  
to be smoothed by moving streams.  
Unlike the pebble awash in the rapids  
of a mountain river, I am flawed  
by the currents that flow across my life.

Within eddies do I dwell,  
afraid of that which lies beyond.  
Thunders roar or a starry night to dream upon.  
Shall I find at last the quiet waters  
that yield to sleep?

*There is a very old store in Cave Springs, Georgia  
where abandoned items are sold dressed in cloaks of dust  
crudely made by neglect. When I walked into this store, I  
noticed an antique crystal. I stared for a prolonged  
moment into its radiant light—for time had stopped.*

## *The Meaning of Crystal*

Light passes though panes of ancient glass.  
Altered by dust and unkempt web.  
Winter light dispersed in a melodic choir of colors.

A solitary crystal adorns the shelf.  
Dreams contained in an ode to light,  
a litany to that within.

Can a crystal predict the future clear?  
A meaning given to that which penetrates  
the deepest cove of self-made thought.  
To illuminate a dimly lit corner of the soul.

To grasp the meaning of the past and present.  
A voice is heard where silence speaks.  
The future shouts to those that listen.

Thoughts guided by desire alone  
released by the radiance of a stone.

I loved you once but could not speak.  
Your beauty the source of light  
dispersed by crystal.

What voice within the stone bid me near?  
Are expressionless thoughts  
hidden too deep within?  
You, like the stone, a reflection  
of a courtesan's flame.

Radiance vanished as twilight neared.  
Your beauty faded within the shadows of the night.  
What fool to purchase only the imitation of light.

## *In Company with Rain*

The merriment of the evening ceased.  
Pretensions departed with the guests.  
The flowing wine now dries within the cup.  
The fire's bright flame  
resurrected as glowing ember.

Winter rain begins to fall.  
The chatter of nature's voice  
upon the wooden shingle.  
The clock is heard once more  
where shadows live within the hall.  
The sound of embers  
punctuates the silent chamber.

I sit within a room that resonates  
with your presence.  
We would have laughed together,  
in trivial talk consumed.  
In a burst of embers, words are written  
by the shadows of a vanishing flame.

Was I the one you loved before you left?  
Or is illusion my barren partner?  
I am alone now as quietness speaks  
from silent hearth and falling rain.

## *Twilight Field*

Lay with me in green meadows  
that wear the scent of harvest hay.  
Touch me for I am near.  
Hold my hand, be not afraid,  
I ask for nothing but your warmth  
and the moment of your smile.

Shout your love louder than the wind  
that, unseen, moves the prairie grass.  
Gusts of warm, spring-touched air  
freely breathed. Laugh with me.  
I will not judge you or frown  
upon your laughter.  
Lips far sweeter than woodland honey  
within the red oak found.  
Sing to me with notes of imperfection  
made perfect by the heart.

Seek not the shadows of the house  
or the sound of the clock within.  
Love is not obedient to rules  
or prophet's psalm.  
Love does not the shadow seek,  
but the smile within.  
Read not to me of Proverb's rules.  
The Song of Solomon I seek.



Let us be vagrants of a summer day,  
awash in love's emancipated thought.  
With unplanned deliberation  
I gather wild flowers dressed in dew—  
with card of spoken word,  
not printed by another.

The sun warms our undressed skin.  
Free of garments sown  
by strangers in foreign lands.  
Wearing but a flower  
bejeweled in a crystal dew,  
a summer palette made  
of bluebonnet and sunflower.

Grasshoppers, the guardians of the keep.  
Butterflies, flowers in flight.  
Our love soon leads to gentle sleep.  
The sound of bee, the call of a dove,  
awakens not a lover's dream

When the bouquet is but a single bloom,  
my love shall not cease  
like sunflowers and zinnias at summer's end.  
Wait not for the call of geese  
to fill the autumn sky.  
Cradled by currents of fall wind,  
they too quickly to the Gulf do fly.

I know that soon the summer meadow  
in hoarfrost gown adorned.  
I will love you then in winter's voice,  
the sound of north wind and crackling hearth.

Lay with me till the breeze  
becomes more gentle.  
Let the wind be the chant,  
the lexicon of meaning.  
Then with full moon rising above  
the twilight field, walk beside me.  
Hold my hand as silent moonlight  
the path has found.



## *Clouds of Shell*

Standing on the beach, breath filled  
with salt air and memories of late evenings.  
Island melodies lingering in your thoughts.  
Soon all that remains are the breakers  
pounding upon volcanic rock and reefs unseen.

Orchid smells and waterfalls wait  
in the mountains, but the sea beckons  
and embraces you with its warmth.  
Sun upon bare shoulders  
hidden beneath darkening tan.  
Feet touched by object unseen—  
scorpion fish feeding in clouds of shell.

Hawaii is a land that holds and then releases,  
for we are foam upon the ocean's current.  
We, like those in the ancient garden,  
look upon paradise  
and secretly seek the forbidden.

What is it in our nature  
that we must search for deserts and lonely peaks  
like priests that seek cloistered places?  
Are we not content with our stay in Eden?  
Are we more pleased with hell than heaven?

## *A Card*

A calendar date, nothing more.  
A Valentine bought for one not loved.  
A card, a smile, a captured thought  
to obedience paid.

Guilt, not love,  
moves the hand upon the stage.  
Brief thoughts upon a page  
to fill the empty space.  
Not long the words to write  
where meaning has departed  
from the heart.

Colorless flowers of sterile hue.  
White roses delivered  
with proprietress written card.  
Pleasantries exchanged in repentant fashion.

To love but once again  
by thought possessed.  
Dreams upon a summer's eve  
that lasts till burning light.  
Now only a China-made card  
to open and cast aside.

## *Emotionless Pair*

In the morning hour, we come together.  
Punctual at nine.  
Eight hours a day we live as one.

File this, pour that, how many words  
in a Microsoft document?  
Meeting at four, watch ever worn,  
time to check my Blackberry.

What if, should we,  
for a moment, look beyond  
the florescent-lit wall.  
There is a vast prairie painted  
in morning gold.  
Hush, listen, do you hear  
the rain crow's call?

File this, pour that, how many words  
in a Microsoft document?  
It's half-past five.  
Sign my letter quickly, "Sincerely."



## *Two Chairs*

Before the garden flowers they sit.  
Two chairs arranged in perfect order.  
Not too close, for intimacy is forbidden.

Hummingbirds about the fountain gather.  
Tethered but for a moment  
to flowering vine and summer scent.  
Drinks served of honeysuckle, and azaleas.

In warm light, I caressed your smile.  
We laughed as words and hands did grasp.  
Strawberries and milk we tasted.

Within a night dream, we now do meet.  
In wooden chairs, we sit together.  
Beach stained with salt and tropic sun.

Once more the fountain flows;  
the hummingbird returns.  
Bluebonnet and thistle within the field abound.  
Strawberries and milk are tasted  
within the garden wall.





## *Through the Glass Window*

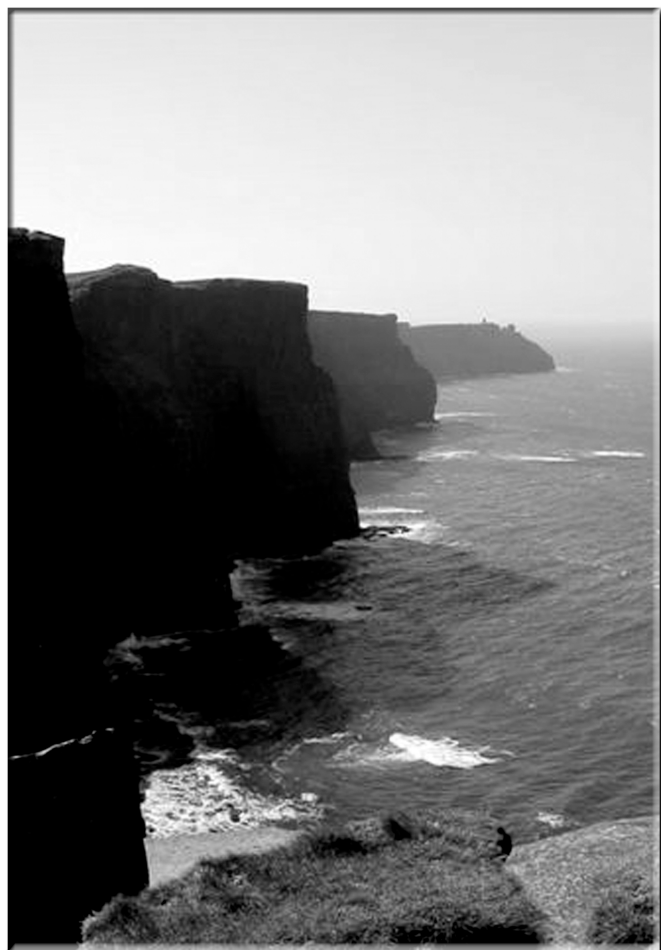
Through a glass window,  
I see you standing there. Are you real  
or the reflection of my longing,  
an image drawn  
by mist upon a window pane?

Streets of Dublin I roam  
without direction, looking for you  
in Saint Steven's Green.  
I search for you as the roe  
the waters of a gentle stream.

Are you within the narrow streets  
where shadows lean upon brick walls?  
Or do you dwell in Grafton Street  
where penny whistles blow  
and Irish bagpipes play?  
Perhaps along the River Liffey  
I shall search  
where gypsies read the palm.

Odors of pleasures  
infiltrate the night, then sleep  
with beggars upon the street  
as Guinness spills  
upon the cobblestone.  
I return to the room alone  
to dwell in midnight dreams.

But a vision seen through glass.  
A longing for you  
to appear once more upon the heather  
when sun and youth were one.  
You are an image of mist  
formed upon the pane,  
then removed by morning sun.



## *Sea Dreams*

Dawn's spectrum of color  
illuminates an October beach.  
Coffee has grown cold in a north wind.  
Sea sounds are muted in the still of the dawn.  
Red rays streak towards the beach  
and touch the cresting waves of morning surf.  
Seagulls dip and sway  
upon the dawn's uncertain thermal lift.

I inhale deeply the salt-filled air.  
Under my feet seashells glisten and break.  
I know that their beauty will not exist  
beyond the shoreline,  
or I would take more gentle care.  
I would, if you were here,  
place a sand dollar within your hand.  
It, like the ring in holy vow, does not endure.

On the beach, others play  
in distant mist and salty air.  
I see your image in a stranger's walk.  
It is not you, but how can I,  
so touched by your thought,  
acknowledge the barrenness of reason?  
The sea deepens my loss  
as I remember summer beaches,  
laughter and eyes that searched my soul.

Can I return again without you  
to rooms that speak no name?  
No, I shall be seated upon white dunes  
and hear your name  
in pounding waves and north wind gale.  
The ring I gave you  
was but a shell from an October beach.

## *To Meet*

Shall we meet in brilliant sun or darkened room?  
Upon a beach where restless sea  
pounds both rock and sand.  
Will desert reveal more of you and me?  
Illusions shimmer beneath a cerulean sea.

Through different eyes we see the world  
Yet intertwined in thoughts we share.  
I shall be less in mortal garment then.  
Digital thoughts hide both the unseen and man.

Will words be spoken that reveal the soul?  
Will meeting end a dream  
or shall we enter into that now dimly seen?  
Metamorphose of words made clear.

## *The Vagabond Moon*

The dawn, an acrylic of painted hues,  
where the fragrance of the sea abounds.  
Our feet in seaweed are adorned,  
like pilgrims within the temple found.

Breakers punctuate the surf  
as ringlets of waves tap our feet.  
Fragile shells cast upon the beach  
vanish with the ebbing tide.  
Ocean made bracelets  
of coral, pearl and moon snail—  
a metamorphosis to sand they do return.

Fragrance of lotions mix with salt-filled air.  
Cubes awash with rum and coke.  
Nights spent in purchased adornment.  
In bars, sailor drink margaritas  
mixed with calypso beat.

Sand dunes crowned with sea oats  
and pink sand verbena,  
Pretenders of security  
against the cyclonic storm.  
Sun touched bodies seaward stretched.  
Lips that wear  
the taste of salt and little more.



Sun too soon touches  
the sea with a simmer. Moon rises  
above the cooled melodic core.  
The night's exhalation  
of salt-filled air abounds.

We are alone once more to watch  
the night's reflection upon the calm sea.  
Stars appear in pulsating colors  
as comets pursue the tropic moon.  
Move close to me,  
let our shoulders touch.

What brought us  
to this August beach,  
where judgment vanishes  
in the night of a vagabond moon?

From this moment, do not depart,  
for I hear your voice  
within the half-moon's shell.  
I shall hold you  
as does the beach an ocean wave,  
forever changing,  
altered by storm and tide.

You are not real I know,  
nor have you ever been,  
but the creation of a summer dream  
and a sailor's rum.  
A vision forever changing  
in the tidal ebb and flow.  
Words written in beach sand—  
a seaside ledger,  
too soon erased by pulsing surf  
and storm-touched gale.



*Key West—  
The Bridge That Does Not End*

Islands, linked to mainland near,  
joined to a bridge that does not end.

Refuge sought in darkened room  
where paddle fans move humid air.  
Drinks to simulate Havana evenings,  
A Rumba Twist made with rum and lemon.

Shark teeth and monkey pod do well.  
Perhaps a velvet island painting?  
Wind chimes of shell move to salty breeze  
while prophet's verse upon the T-shirt written.

Like youths who come and stay too long,  
bright colors fade beneath the tropic sun.

There is no answer here I know.  
Though myriad colors do abound,  
you and I sunburned must depart.  
Perhaps the answer lies beyond a shoal of coral.

The ocean breaks upon another beach.  
The Dry Tortugas call me now,  
Where morning rays adorn the sea in jade.  
For now, perhaps more rum and lemon?

*A Sailor on the Mekong*  
*Remembering an Island Dream*

Hawaii, island to the west or east.  
Mountains scented with flowers  
and filled with expectation.

Hula girls line the pier  
while melodious sounds fill the ears  
of Ulysses' dream.  
Orchids placed upon the neck.  
Hotel Street and Mother Wong's.  
Required port of call before the Orient.  
Before Cebu, Lapu-Lapu, Manila, and Danang.

It is the coma's dream  
before the flash of canon, the paralyzing fear.  
Canon, the catapults of old;  
the sailor's rifle, the spear of primitive man.  
What brought us to this shore—  
politician's speech or father's pride?

Outside the ocean waits,  
north, east, west, south the tiger shark swims.  
Mai Tai, hurricanes, whiskey sours,  
gin and tonic, rum and coke,  
not holy writ, await me under palms  
served by illusions of care.  
Drink fast, there is little time.

The nameless woman sat  
on the bar stool at Ford Island.  
She did not speak to me  
nor acknowledge my presents  
upon entering the O'Club.  
A Navy nurse, blue uniform, short skirt.  
I do not recall her name,  
or the evening, but I do remember  
her silk-covered knee.

Has time or man changed?  
Why should this  
most beautiful island read my palm?  
Are we who fight required  
to be eternally cast from Eden into Hell?

A sailor on the Mekong  
remembering an island dream.

## *A Bar Called Heaven and Hell*

No band or shouting crowd  
did bid me venture to the east.  
Saigon and Danang,  
the melodic notes of Sirens' song.

I raise a shot glass  
to the carnival night of Heaven and Hell.  
Music without definition defines  
the lighted street.  
Thieves' Alley it is called.

Sachiko Murikami, my love of the night,  
time purchased without delusion.  
A rosary of drink tokens hung from her belt.

Asahi or Tiger brew,  
the communion drink of sailor's night.  
Outside, along the salt-scented wharf,  
the ship strains at her hawser bitts  
as Fujiyama reflects moonlit snow.

Drinks for the house, my momentary friends.  
Take heed not to worry  
for it is a night in Heaven and Hell.  
A sailor's pay will last till the dawn.

To the south,  
palm trees move to tropic air.  
Saigon and Danang,  
the melodic notes of Sirens' song performed.  
the jungle night and Mekong River  
await the young and proud.



## *Gentle Sleep*

About me fall the thudding sound  
and glaring burst of VT frag.

For but a moment,  
I think of summer's sleep with drapes  
adrift in a moonlight night.  
The scent of sun-drenched sheets  
upon a feather bed.  
From the other room,  
I hear a mother's prayer of solace  
and never-ending care.

Fireflies abound at night's arrival  
while horses breathe aloud  
and pounding hooves echo  
from pasture near.  
The summer crickets chant,  
but for a moment, as I lie in slumber  
upon the feather bed.

Flashes near,  
and Willie Pete's footsteps approach  
in the jungle night.

## *The Unopened Letter*

In the heat of August day,  
I stood alone among a crowd.  
Others were not seen  
nor recalled who for but a moment  
had gathered there,  
and then to leave for tasks at hand.  
Paid words spoken by one  
who could not feel nor know.  
Upon your breast  
I laid a simple garland  
of honeysuckle and marigold.

Within my hand  
they have been placed,  
the letters from a land not known to me.  
Names recognized by others  
who in youthful love pursued:  
Pusan, Saigon, Andimeshk and Dibaj.

I thanked the one  
who placed them there  
within my unsure grasp.  
Your words so neatly printed;  
they arrived date-time stamped  
in precise military order.

An envelope sealed by you,  
untouched by me.  
If opened, both you and I would meet  
for but a moment  
and then like August wind  
you would vanish in the summer sky.

Let the mystery of your words  
remain unspoken  
on this late summer day  
deprived of cloud and shade.  
Now only dark green cedars remain  
with me while a hawk  
rides thermals to the sky.  
From the fields  
upon which we laughed and talked,  
cicada alone  
sound in August heat.

A marker too small to hold my thoughts.  
A metallic cross between birth  
and death was placed.  
How few words were written  
in summation of your life.  
A wall of finest stone  
could not contain my verse to you.

The last letter  
that I received today remains  
unopened.  
Within its prose  
my heart would die.  
I then would know that love  
had ceased, and I alone  
remained to wait.





## *About the Author*

Franklin Lafayette King was born in the Panhandle of Texas and spent much of his youth on the Blackland Prairie. He received a commission from the University of Texas, Austin and soon became involved in the Vietnam Conflict. After additional academic preparation, he moved to the foothills of the Appalachians.

In addition to combat, he experienced both the eyes of a hurricane and a F4 tornado; events that were to influence much of his later work.











