A dark, moody landscape with bare trees and a rocky slope, with bright yellow flowers in the foreground.

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 shimmer 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.

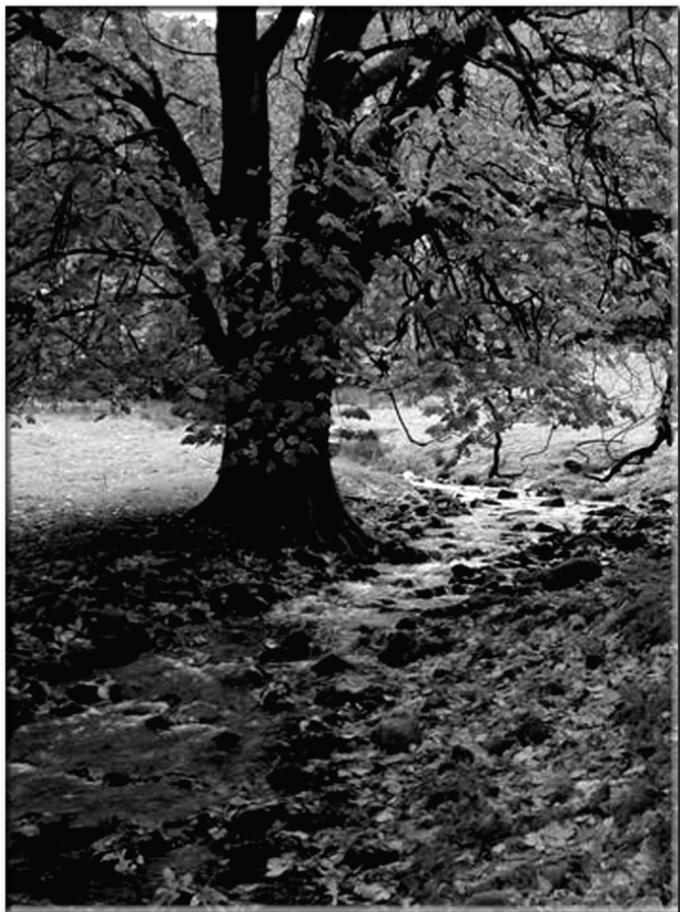
Gentle drops begin to fall,
moistening dry November fields.
From distant ponds and streams,
frogs acknowledge
the nativity of rain.
Soon meadows are hidden
from view as showers descend
to cover us as one.

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 adventures 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 awoken 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 steaks 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.

Lost

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.

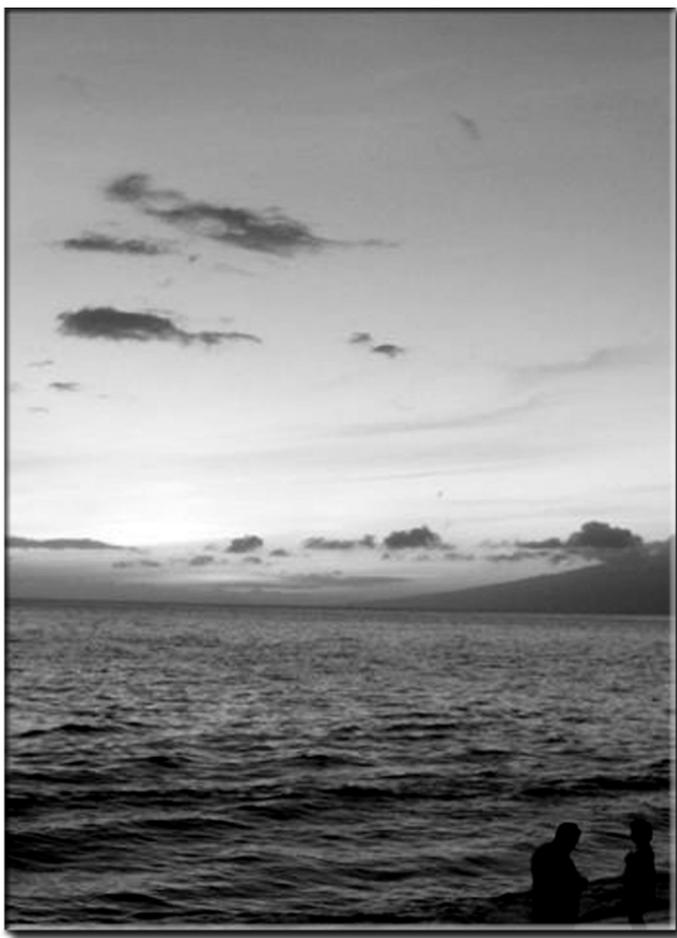
The sun warms our undressed skin.
Free of garments sown
by strangers in foreign lands.
Wearing but a flower
bejeweled in a crystal dew,
a summer palette made
of bluebonnet and sunflower.

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

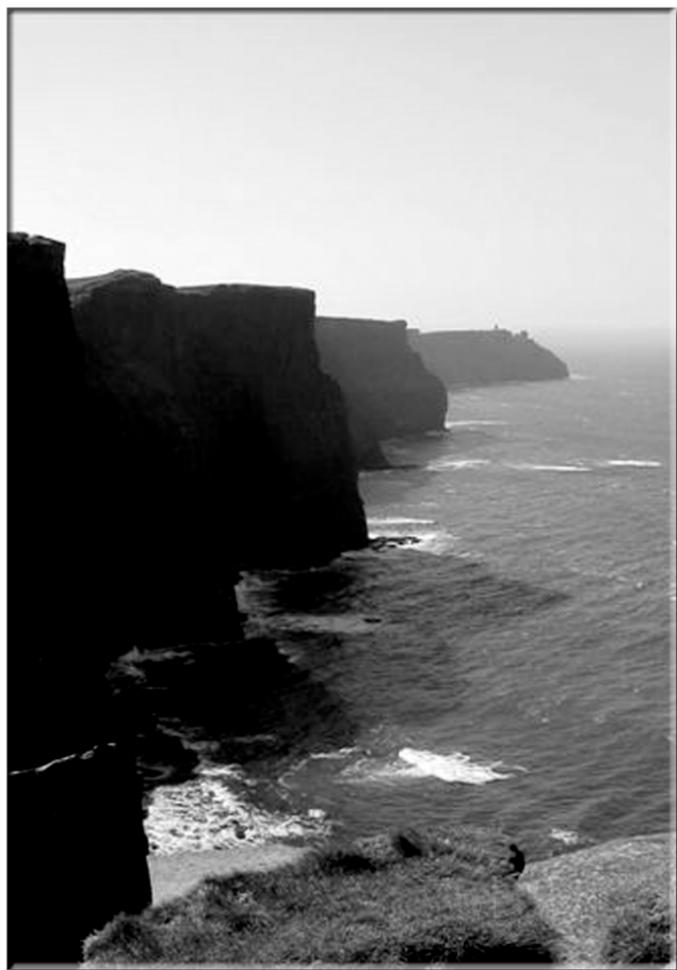
Through a glass window,
I see you standing there. Are you real
or the reflection of my longing,
an image drawn
by mist upon a window pane?

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.

