



Meeting held on Tuesday 13th January 2026
Friends and Friendship

My own first choice is an excerpt from a much longer poem. My second makes me shudder.

A Hymn to Friendship by Fleur Adcock
(New Zealand poet who moved to England 1934-2024)

Somehow we manage it: to like our friends,
to tolerate not only their little ways
but their huge neuroses, their monumental oddness:
"Oh, well," we smile, "it's one of his funny days."

Families, of course, are traditionally awful:
embarrassing parents, ghastly brothers, mad aunts
provide a useful training-ground to prepare us
for the pseudo-relations we acquire by chance.

Why them, though? Why not the woman in the library
(grey hair, big mouth) who reminds us so of J?
Or the one on Budgen's delicatessen counter
(shy smile, big nose) who strongly resembles K?

—Just as the stout, untidy gent on the train
reading the *Mail on Sunday* through pebble specs
could, with somewhat sparser hair and a change
of reading-matter, be our good friend X.

True, he isn't; they aren't; but why does it matter?
Wouldn't they do as well as the friends we made
in the casual past, by being at school with them,
or living nextdoor, or learning the same trade?

Well, no, they wouldn't. Imagine sharing a tent
with one of these look-alikes, and finding she snored:
no go. Or listening for days on end while she dithered
about her appalling marriage: we'd be bored.

Some things kindly strangers will put up with,
but we need to know exactly what they are:
it's OK to break a glass, if we replace it,
but we mustn't let our kids be sick in their car.

Safer to stick with people who remember
how we ourselves, when we and they were nineteen,
threw up towards the end of a student party
on ethyl alcohol punch and methedrine.

In some ways we've improved since then. In others
(we glance at the heavy jowls and thinning hair,
hoping we're slightly better preserved than they
are)

at least it's a deterioration we share.

It can't be true to say that we chose our friends,
or surely we'd have gone for a different lot,
while they, confronted with us, might well have de-
cided
that since it was up to them they'd rather not.

But something keeps us hooked, now we're togeth-
er,
a link we're not so daft as to disparage—
nearly as strong as blood-relationship
and far more permanent, thank God, than marriage.

A Poison Tree by William Blake

"I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I waterd it in fears
Night & morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole,
When the night had veiled the pole;
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretchd beneath the tree."

Elinor's chosen poems

To My Sister Sian by Margiad Evans

Nature and Time are against us now:
no more we leap up the river like salmon,
nor dive through its fishy holes
sliding along its summer corridor
with all the water from Wales, nor tear it to silver
shreds with our childish arms when it bolted our
path for the day,
nor wade wearing our bindings
of string weed, white-flowering from our nakedness;
nor lie in the hot yellow fields with the cows.

We go home separately Sian.
Strangest of all changes, that you have one door,
I another! Dreamily I write to our childhood,
sisters with a brotherly friendship, one loyal to both.
There hang the black woods still with candles of
daffodils
lighting the draught of the wind, and our parted lan-
guage
speaks to each of us of the keepers' cot in the brack-
en corner
and the stream bed where the water had faded to
rock.
Easily we keep our secrets now, for no-one cares
if we dare the red floods together, two little fools in
the
darkness
whose souls flew high above danger, whose bodies
death had a hundred times in its reach.

Forever we
did not end, but passed over our paths,
I following you, dabbling our hands in the birds'
nests,
darting through ghost walk and haunted graveyard
when the year was dead in the church tower.
We had one home together. That put us beyond all
danger:
that set us forever, that and our unfathomable
friendship with trees,
fields and horizons. Two children
soilitary, pilgrimy, silent, inscrutably wishing
forever dallying with lostness, whether our choice
was through the jay woods, or over the mushroom
mountains,
or the old cider orchards.

Our secrets
were eternal and will always be. Forever dallying
with lostness, at last we were lost and all paths
were the path of our unforgettable double child-
hood.
All our secrets were one — secrecy.
The memory of what we kept secret is gone, but the
secret is true.
All the places were us, we were all the places,
and the inscrutable innocent altars of nature.
I see two children slipping into a wood
speechlessly happy. Two lives lived have not
changed it.
For our ways, our fields, our river, our lostness
were children. So we were our country.

Fiere by Jackie Kay

If ye went tae the tapmost hill, Fiere
Whaur we used tae clamb as girls,
Ye'd see the snow the day, Fiere,
Settling on the hills.
You'd mind o' anither day, mibbe,
We ran doon the hill in the snow,
Sliding and singing oor way tae the foot,
Lassies laughing thegither – how braw.
The years slipping awa; oot in the weather.
And noo we're suddenly auld, Fiere,
Oor friendship's ne'er been weary.
We've aye seen the wurld differently.
Whaur would I hae been weyoot my jo,
My fiere, my fiercy, my dearie O?
Oor hair micht be silver noo,
Oor walk a wee bit doddery,
But we've had a whirl and a blast, girl,
Thru' the cauld blast winter, thru spring, summer.
O'er a lifetime, my fiere, my bonnie lassie,
I'd defend you – you, me; blithe and blatter,
Here we gang doon the hill, nae matter,
Past the bracken, bothy, bonny braes, barley.
Oot by the roaring Sea, still havin a blether.
We who loved sincerely; we who loved sae fiercely.
The snow ne'er looked sae barrie,
Nor the winter trees sae pretty.
C'mon, c'mon my dearie – tak my hand, my fiere!

Dervla's two poems are below

An excerpt from To All My Friends by 'Hauntie'

To all my friends who have been with me in weakness
When waterfalls rush down my two sides

To all my friends who have felt me in anguish
When this earthen back breaks between two blades

To all my friends who have held me in rage
When fire tears through swallows behind tight grins

I know you
I see you
I hear you

A Priceless Gift by Helen Steiner Rice

Friendship is a priceless gift
That can't be bought or sold,
But its value is much greater
Than a mountain made of gold.

For gold is cold and lifeless,
It cannot see nor hear,
And in your times of trouble
Is powerless to cheer.

It has no ears to listen,
No heart to understand.
It cannot bring you comfort
Nor reach out a helping hand.

So when you ask God for a gift,
Be thankful that he sends
Not diamonds, pearls or riches,
But the love of a real, true friend

One of Valerie's two poems

Alone by Maya Angelou

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.



In Memory of Basil, Marquess of Dufferin
and Ava
by John Betjeman

On such a morning as this
with the birds ricocheting their music
Out of the whelming elms
to a copper beech's embrace
And a sifting sound of leaves
from multitudinous branches
Running across the park
to a chequer of light on the lake,
On such a morning as this
with 'The Times' for June the eleventh
Left with coffee and toast
you opened the breakfast-room window
And, sprawled on the southward terrace,
said: "*That means war in September.*"

Friend of my youth, you are dead!
and the long peel pours from the steeple
Over this sunlit quad
in our University city
And soaks in Headington stone.
Motionless stand the pinnacles.
Under a flying sky
as though they too listened and waited
Like me for your dear return
with a Bullingdon nose of an evening
In a Sports-Bugatti from Thame
that belonged to a man in Magdalen.
Friend of my youth you are dead!
and the quads are empty without you.

Then there were people about.
Each hour, like an Oxford archway,
Opened on long green lawns
and distant unvisited buildings
And you my friend were explorer
and so you remained to me always
Humorous, reckless, loyal –
my kind heavy-lidded companion.
Stop, oh many bells, stop
pouring on roses, and creeper
Your unremembering peal
this hollow, unhallowed V. E. Day, –
I am deaf to your notes and dead
by a soldier's body in Burma.

German Prisoners by Joseph Lee

When first I saw you in the curious street,
Like some platoon of soldier ghosts in grey,
My mad impulse was all to smite and slay,
To spit upon you – tread you 'neath my feet.
But when I saw how each sad soul did greet
My gaze with no sign of defiant frown,
How from tired eyes looked spirits broken down,
How each face showed the pale flag of defeat,
And doubt, despair, and disillusionment,
And how were grievous wounds on many a head,
And on your garb red-faced was other red;
And how you stooped as men whose strength was
spent,
I knew that we had suffered each as other,
And could have grasped your hand and cried, 'My
brother!'

Valerie's other poem

A Time to Talk by Robert Frost

When a friend calls to me from the road
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,
I don't stand still and look around
On all the hills I haven't hoed,
And shout from where I am, "What is it?"
No, not as there is a time to talk.
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,
Blade-end up and five feet tall,
And plod: I go up to the stone wall
For a friendly visit.



Irene chose an old song which we all attempted to sing!

Friendship— - Lyrics by Cole Porter

(There are many slightly different versions of the song, some for duets and some where the lyrics have copyright. Here's one I did manage to copy.)

If you're ever in a jam, here I am.

If you're ever in a mess, S.O.S.

If you ever get so happy that you land in jail. I'm your bail.

It's friendship, friendship, just a perfect blendship.

When other friendships are soon forgot, ours will still be hot.

Da da da da da da dig dig dig.

If you're ever down a well, ring my bell.

If you're ever up a tree, just phone to me.

If you ever lose your teeth when you're out to dine, borrow mine.

It's friendship, friendship, just a perfect blendship.

When other friendships are soon forget, ours will still be great.

Loddle doddle chuck chuck chaa.

If they ever blacken you're eyes, put me wise.

If they ever cook your goose, turn me loose.

And if they ever put a bullet through your brain, I'm to blame.

It's friendship, friendship, just a perfect blendship.

When other friendships are soon forgot, ours will still be it.

Ah loddle doddle hip hap hap.

If you ever lose your mind, I'll be kind.

And if you ever lose your shirt, I'll be hurt.

If you're ever in a mill and get sawed in half, I won't laugh.

It's friendship, friendship, just a perfect blendship.

When other friendships are are up the crick, ours will still be slick.

Ah loddle doddle woof woof woof, hep hep hep, chopp chop chop, dig dig dig.

Good evening friends.



Irene's second poem has a well-known theme

The Choosing by Liz Lochhead

We were first equal Mary and I -
With same-coloured ribbons in mouse-coloured hair
and with equal shyness
we curtsied to the lady councillor
for copies of Collins' Children's Classics.
First equal, equally proud.

Best friends too Mary and I—a common bond in being cleverest (equal)
in our small school's small class.

I remember
the competition for top desk
or to read aloud the lesson
at school service.
And my terrible fear
at her superiority at sums.

I remember the housing scheme
where we both stayed.
The same houses, different homes,
where the choices were made.

I don't know exactly why they moved,
but anyway they went.
Something about a three-apartment
and a cheaper rent.
But from the top deck of the high-school bus
I'd glimpse among the others on the corner
Mary's father, muffled, contrasting strangely
with the elegant greyhounds by his side.
He didn't believe in high-school education,
especially for girls,
or in forking out for uniforms.

Ten years later on a Saturday -
I am coming from the library -
sitting near me on the bus,
Mary
with a husband who is tall,
curly haired, has eyes
for no one else but Mary.
Her arms are round the full-shaped vase
that is her body.
Oh you can see where the attraction lies
in Mary's life -
not that I envy her, really.

And I am coming from the library
with my arms full of books.
I think of those prizes that were ours for the taking
and wonder when the choices got made
we don't remember making.



A Four-legged Friend by Roy Rogers (1911-1998)

A four legged friend, a four legged friend
He'll never let you down
He's honest and faithful right up to the end
That wonderful one-two-three-four legged friend

A woman's like cactus and cactus can hurt
'Cause she's just a tight-waisted winky-eyed flirt
She'll soon have your land and your pride and your gold
And bury you deep long before you grow old

A four legged friend, a four legged friend
He'll never let you down
He's honest and faithful right up to the end
That wonderful one-two-three-four legged friend

A two legged hombre is worthless as sand
He'll smile like a saint with a gun in his hand
He'll promise to stick by your side like a pal
But he'll also promise the same to your gal

A four legged friend, a four legged friend
He'll never let you down
He's honest and faithful right up to the end
That wonderful one-two-three-four legged friend

Who carries your burden, who carries your load
On tumbleweed land or a long dusty road
Who asks you no questions, who tells you no lies
That four legged friend with the two honest eyes

A four legged friend, a four legged friend
He'll never let you down
He's honest and faithful right up to the end
That wonderful four legged friend

That wonderful one-two-three-four legged friend



The Road to Dundee

Traditional song claimed by both the Scots and the Irish, who have their own version

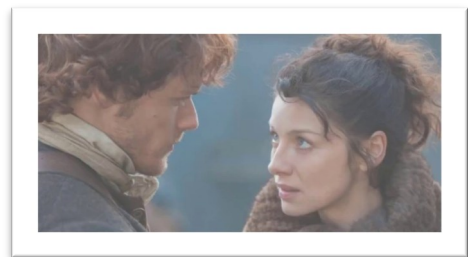
Cauld winter was howlin' o'er moor and o'er moun-
tain,
And wild was the surge of the dark rolling sea,
When I met about daybreak a bonnie young lassie,
Wha asked me the road and the miles to Dundee.

Says I, "My young lassie, I canna' weel tell ye
The road and the distance I canna' weel gie.
But if you'll permit me tae gang a wee bittie,
I'll show ye the road and the miles to Dundee".

At once she consented and gave me her arm,
Ne'er a word did I speir wha the lassie micht be,
She appeared like an angel in feature and form,
As she walked by my side on the road to Dundee.

At length wi' the Howe o' Strathmartine behind us,
The spires o' the toon in full view we could see,
She said "Gentle Sir, I can never forget ye
For showing me far on the road to Dundee".

I took the gowd pin from the scarf on my bosom -
And said "Keep ye this in remembrance o' me
Then bravely I kissed the sweet lips o' the lassie,
E'er I parted wi' her on the road to Dundee.



So here's to the lassie, I ne'er can forget her,
And lika young laddie that's list'rling to me,
O never be sweer to convoy a young lassie
Though it's only to show her the road to Dundee.

Linna's two choices

For W S Graham by Elizabeth Burns (1957-2015)
Written for her friend who moved from Greenock
to Zennor in North Cornwall

Sydney, I took a pint of Tinner's Ale
as you took yours: down at the pub at sunset light when
the Zennor sea grows fiercely blue

round this windblown spit of knotted land
where you fled from the knuckled whack of the Clyde,
ran into the lap of the lazy Atlantic.

Was it here that language had you in its clasp,
tossed you like a slip of driftwood on an ocean,
caught you in its net like silvered mackerel?

Did it nip at your tongue on winter days
as you strode the icy edges of the cliffs
and cranked your frozen bones with whisky?

Did it enter your skin when spring came in
with the flecks of blossom, the cuckoo-spit,
the honeyed smell of bluebells in the woods?

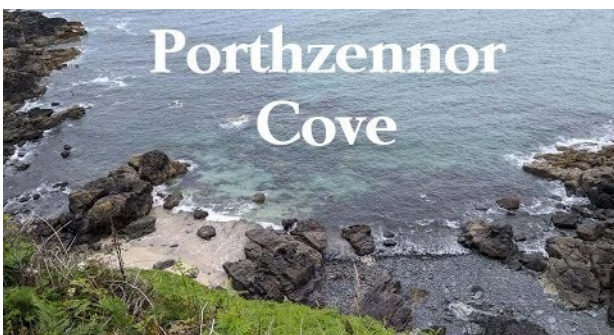
Did it spin in your head in sun-plumped summer
when Zennor meadows grow drowsy with bees
and hedgerflowers spill tipsily into the lanes?

Did it hurtle about you in blackberry autumn
when bold winds blow in from the end of the land,
making you cower from the gale and the growl of it

down by Madron where the rain in the trees
lulls you to sleep in the wide-eyed dawn
when sea is milky-green and dreams are fleet

and fat with words and you wake with a salt taste
on your tongue? Was this how it had you, Sydney,
all those years? And was the ale always this good,

this golden?



Two Girls Singing by Iain Crichton Smith

It neither was the words nor yet the tune.
Any tune would have done and any words.
Any listener or no listener at all.
As nightingales in rocks or a child crooning
in its own world of strange awakening,
or larks for no reason but themselves.
So on the bus through late November running,
by yellow lights tormented, darkness falling,
the two girls sang for miles and miles together
and it wasn't the words or tune. It was the singing.
It was the human sweetness in that yellow,
the unpredicted voices of our kind.



Two little poems read by **Mary**, who had not
expected to get to the meeting

This Little Bag by Jane Austen

This little bag I hope will prove
To be not vainly made--
For, if you should a needle want
It will afford you aid.
And as we are about to part
T'will serve another end,
For when you look upon the Bag
You'll recollect your friend

Smile by Jessica R Dillinger (Canadian journalist)

If you're feeling down; turn your frown upside
down.
Put a smile on your face; take the world in your
embrace.

Ask for a little help from the man up above.
And remember you have your best friend's love.

Lin's two poems about the friendship of pets

The Power of the Dog by Rudyard Kipling

There is sorrow enough in the natural way
From men and women to fill our day;
And when we are certain of sorrow in store,
Why do we always arrange for more?
*Brothers and sisters, I bid you beware
Of giving your heart to a dog to tear.*

Buy a pup and your money will buy
Love unflinching that cannot lie
Perfect passion and worship fed
By a kick in the ribs or a pat on the head.
*Nevertheless it is hardly fair
To risk your heart for a dog to tear.*

When the fourteen years which Nature permits
Are closing in asthma, or tumour, or fits,
And the vet's unspoken prescription runs
To lethal chambers or loaded guns,
*Then you will find—it's your own affair—
But ... you've given your heart to a dog to tear.*

When the body that lived at your single will,
With its whimper of welcome, is stilled (how still!),
When the spirit that answered your every mood
Is gone—wherever it goes—for good,
*You will discover how much you care,
And will give your heart to a dog to tear!*

We've sorrow enough in the natural way,
When it comes to burying Christian clay.
Our loves are not given, but only lent,
At compound interest of cent per cent,
Though it is not always the case, I believe,
That the longer we've kept 'em, the more do we
grieve;
For, when debts are payable, right or wrong,
A short-time loan is as bad as a long—
*So why in—Heaven (before we are there)
Should we give our hearts to a dog to tear?*



To Tavish by Lin Lacy

Round the corner of my heart,
Out the edges of my eye,
I see you.

A white shape, which walks
On the rim of my conscience.

A quiet footfall,
A gentle draught,

A brush of soft air against my leg,
An unseen pressure on my lap.

A loving memory,
Forever loyal,

Always running, (with the others)
But just beyond

My earthbound senses.

Liz chose this poem

On the Road by Jenni Daiches

It's nearly New Year and we've loaded the van
with clothes for cold weather, boots and thick
socks,

Christmas leftovers, the cat in a box,

and turn to the west. The fields are frozen
but rivers still run to the steely Forth.

The castle at Stirling floats on the carse,

and Ben Ledi's white head shoulders the blue
of a limitless sky. Ben Lomond borrows
light from the loch. At Rest and Be Thankful

the snow picks out the bones of the rock.

The mountains are darker, the sun at their back.
We're over the watershed, down to Cairndow.

Loch Fyne is like glass, and shows us the hills,
the curve of the shore and the lines of black trees
feathered in white, clear and still,

and there on the edge of this world, ourselves.

The wheels revolve, we've chosen the road.

We have to believe that we know where it goes.

Liz's second choice

Sisters by Elizabeth Burns

Even when she moved
five hundred miles away
telepathy was alive between them
and love as strong as ever

She sends in the post
pressed tulip petals
slivers of shell from the day at the beach
wrapped in tissue paper

She, a book of stories
golden earrings

and she, the painting of a windy day
the daffodil bowl

Even before the letter
saying, between the lines, 'come'
she is on her way

Isobel's other poem

A Broken Friendship by Samuel T Coleridge

Alas! they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
And constancy lives in realms above;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.
And thus is chanced, as I divine,
With Roland and Sir Leoline.
Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother:
They parted - ne'er to meet again!
But never either found another
To free the hollow heart from paining -
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;
A dreary sea now flows between; -
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder
Shall wholly do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been .

Isobel also chose a war poem

His Chum by T McWilliam

I saw 'm first, ae term-day, daun'rin doon
The main street o' oor far-famed granite toon -
A weel-faured hefty youth; an' near by till 'um
A rosy country queyn fa ca'd 'm "Willum".

Willum - a gleg an' pawkie chiel was he -
Stopt at a baker's shop that caught his e'e;
Syne waukit in, an' shortly cam' oot chowin'
A tipp'ny mince-pie wi's een fair lowin'.
Wi wista' look puir Jenny's blue een shon' -
She winnert at his greed - or wis't pit on?
"Is't gweed, lad?" said she. Wi' an awfa grin
He jist said till 'er, "By, you should try ane!"
"Gae back, ye greedy gowk! Get ane for me!"
An' back he gaed right smairtly, an brocht three.

I heard o'm aince again. 'Twis ower in France,
The Huns hid brakken thro by some mischance.
An e'en the Gordons wir sae sair distrest,
Some miles they hid tae yield, syne stopt tae rest.
Tae's Captain, Willum said, "Sir, lat me back!
Back there a bit, ma chum lies on the track!"
"You foolish fellow," said he in command,
"They'd get you there; 'tis an unhealthy land!"
"Jist let me gyang!" wis Willum's earnest prayer.
"Go back then, if you must, my lad. Take care!"

'Fa's that, that's comin' stagg'rin on our wy -
A man o's back, woondit himself, forbye!
Gweed help's, it's Willum!" an' the weary man
Reaches the shelterin' lea o' their dour stan' -
The burden's lowered gently. But, eh me!
'Twis but a corp, as ilka ane could see.
"You foolish fellow" said, with feigned displeasure,
The gallant Captain, who had Willum's measure,
"Amazed was I that you should even ask
To go back there. Yours was a useless task!"
"Na, na, sir!" Willum said "it wasna that!
For fin ane's awfa sair come at,
It's gweed to ken that something stan's the strain
O' a' this hell of warfare's blood and pain;
Fin I got to tell 'um, he lag deadly quait;
But sure he ope'd his een - O sir, 'twas great! -
The smile he gied and said, 'I kint ye'd come!
Ye see, sir," Willum said, "He was ma chum!"

