

Poems of Compassion

By Beryl Johnson



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## **1. Romance**

Passion and Compassion  
Walked together hand-in-hand,  
Passion the inspiration,  
Compassion slave divine,  
Compassion is Passion's hand-maiden  
And should serve him so.

## **2. Solace**

When sick and weary of life's drudge  
Feed me with the food of love,  
Seen in a child's tender smile,  
Tiny hand slipped into mine,  
Seen in a gesture warm and kind  
From an unknown friend sent by God.  
Life eternal shines all around us  
If only we lift our souls to God.

## **3. Rest in Jesus**

Rest in Jesus!  
Now the loving arms hold you,  
All the pain and tears are left behind,  
The shadows of the dark have fled  
And left you whole in body and in mind.  
Now may he in his grace maintain you  
Until you reach your journey's end.

#### **4. At the Port of Heaven**

I held her hand  
As I sat by her bed  
And knew in the touch  
Some of the shadows had fled.

I saw in her eyes  
The anguish inside  
As she crossed the dark waters  
Of the Great Divide.

For all must sail the open seas,  
Confront the storms which threaten peace,  
Ride the waves, the troughs, the peaks,  
Before the final world's release.

I felt the beat of her heart  
Beneath my finger-tip,  
The slow, pulsating rhythm of life  
That holds us in its relentless grip.

Like the flashing beams of a lighthouse  
Warns of hazards on the way,  
Submerged beneath the surface of the deep  
Before the last, long sleep.

At the entrance to the harbour gates,  
The Pilot waits  
To guide the seafaring travellers in  
Through the ebb and flow of the narrow straits.

cont.

Safe journey home  
Where e'er you may be bound,  
And may you find a welcome  
When your anchor comes to ground.

Slowly, the signal lights faded out,  
Dim shapes beckoned on the distant shore,  
The mists came down, I  
saw her no more.

## **5. Life-line**

A cry in the night! I  
lift the receiver,  
Only an empty silence,  
Then a dreadful choking sound,  
The sobbing begins  
Increasing in intensity.

Who are you?  
No name given,  
Don't want to be identified.  
My every nerve and sinew stretched  
Trying to apprehend.  
Only an anguished silence.

Where are you?  
Nowhere.  
Just a telephone box by the roadside.  
I strain my senses  
Beyond normal communication,  
I see only the empty receiver  
Swinging in the silent air.

Somewhere out there  
Someone is dying,  
Voiceless, faceless, unidentifiable,  
Rendering me helpless, raw and bleeding,  
Twisting my guts,  
My pain will pass,  
Yours is interminable,  
But for Christ's sake, why?

## **6. Have a Care**

Have a care when you write a letter,  
Some words you dare  
Might be said better.

Words set down for one to read  
Is done, once you have done the deed.  
Words can be misunderstood  
Even if you meant them to be good.

Words of comfort you meant to bring  
Can be twisted to mean some other things,  
Words said in jest can sometimes misfire  
And not get the response you hoped to inspire.

Have a care when you write from your head,  
You might come to wish you never had  
Set pen to paper.

## 7. Hands

Some hands are beautiful!  
Those of elegant women,  
Softly white, perfumed and manicured.  
Of strong men  
Constructing great buildings,  
Creating new worlds;  
Of clever surgeons  
Exploring and repairing diseased tissue,  
Of skilled musicians  
Displaying their mastery of string, pipe and percussion.

Some hands are cruel!  
They hold guns  
And shoot to maim and kill,  
Exchange drugs for hard cash,  
Costly in depraved natures and ruined lives;  
Fingers that poke, point, pry and postulate  
Making fun of innocent people,  
Performing ghastly deeds of torture  
On the innocent victims  
Of religious and racial intolerance.

But best of all,  
My hands can hold yours  
In meeting and parting, In  
loving and caressing,  
In sickness and when dying, In  
peace and blessing.

## 8. In Memoriam

At the entrance  
A rusty, wrought-iron gate,  
A grassy plot  
Bordered by small grave stones  
Each inscribed with a name  
That ne'er will be forgot.

On the West side,  
*Amy, Smokey and Pipsqueak,*  
On the East side,  
*Snowy, Queenie, Mighty Mouse,*  
*Bumble, Dolly, Morag, Scamp*  
*Smantha and Ross.*

These few lines I pen,  
Hoping that now and again  
Some may read their names thus enshrined,  
And the affection they once inspired  
Will not have been in vain.

*Pets' Cemetery: "Mountains", Hildenborough, Kent.*



## 9. Metamorphosis (friendship)

It was like a slap in the face  
When you ended our relationship.  
I had assumed friendship;  
I had given gladly  
Knowing your need,  
Expecting nothing - but  
Sometimes to see your smile,  
The lightness of your eye  
And to hear your voice.

But it all ended  
Like a squall of wind in autumn  
That tears the leaves from the trees  
And blows them in the dust  
In eddying circles.

It is the end.  
There is nothing now between us.  
Within myself  
I have found resources  
Bubbling up like a hillspring  
Which seeks new courses  
Bringing healing and refreshment,  
Yet containing all that has been  
Given and received.

Love, truth and beauty,  
Contained in this way  
And built upon Is  
eternal.

## 10. In Later Years

Call up the sun  
When days are dark  
And gloomy thoughts invade your soul.  
Warm yourself with images  
Of laughing sunlight  
Playing on the faces of children;  
Of lovers folded in each other's arms  
On the golden sands.  
Plump figures in deck-chairs,  
Their wrinkled faces soaking up the sun.  
With these thoughts  
You can face the winter days,  
The cold, the wet and the dark,  
With equilibrium;  
Knowing in the ceaseless round  
Of evolving days and nights,  
The waxing and waning of your spirit,  
That the sun will surely rise again  
To shed its splendour  
Within your castle walls,  
`Til time ceases  
And thoughts and images are no more.  
Even `though the light burns low  
In the evening of your soul, A  
sun that will not go away  
Unless you close the doors.

## 11. The Man Born Blind

Awakening to the light of day,  
He could hear voices,  
Feel hands touching him,  
Holding him.  
See nothing but vague shapes,  
Indistinct images,  
Prismatic light  
Crossing the shutters  
Of his sightless, staring eyes.

All his days  
Stumbling and fumbling,  
Seeking direction from familiar noises,  
Clinging to unknown objects.  
His was a bleak world  
Of outer unfathomable darkness,  
Inner unrelated reality,  
Like the unexplored territory  
Of a lunar landscape.

Came a day,  
A Stranger  
Led him by the hand,  
Out of the City  
To a well-known watering place.  
He heard the scrape of soil,  
The spitting, the kneading,  
And felt the healing salve against his eyes.

"Go and wash in the pool"  
The Stranger said,  
Eager hands thrust him forward.  
Dipping deeply into the water  
He cleansed his hands and face.

Lifting his eyes from the pool,  
He sees for the first time  
Clear-cut images coming into focus,  
A kaleidoscope of colours  
Undreamed of  
Emerging before his eyes;  
Until his gaze is transfixed  
By the light in the eyes of a Stranger.

## **12. On the Death of Charles' Wife**

I wrote a note,  
Left a message  
On your answerphone.  
There was only silence,  
Deep, impregnable, unapproachable  
SILENCE.

There is nothing in me  
Which can respond to  
Silence  
Except my own  
Incapability  
And regret.

### **13. A Friend-in-Need**

When you're feeling lonely  
And the days seems long,  
And nobody comes to see you  
And everything's gone wrong,  
I'll be there for you to turn to As  
I always said I would.

When you're feeling ill  
And life seems hard to bear  
And you're full of aches and pains  
And nobody seems to care,  
I'll be there for you to turn to  
As I always said I would.

When you're feeling hopeless  
And tempted to despair  
And there's nobody to talk to  
Because there's no-one there I'll  
be there for you to turn to As I  
always said I would.

### **14. The Hospice**

In the compassionate quiet  
Of the clinical Care-Rooms,  
Unhurried footsteps  
Measure the time  
Of life's allotted span.  
Beds and wearied heads  
Are smoothed.  
Courage, endurance, acceptance  
Are written in the faces  
Of those who submit themselves  
To the tender administrations Of  
professional Carers.

Only the insistent ringing  
Of the bedside alarm bell  
Occasionally breaks the silence.  
Needs are attended to -  
Peace is restored.

Long-suffering friends and relatives  
Patiently sit by their beds,  
Or gaze abstractedly  
At figures moving on TV screens;  
Or watch the mesmerising movements  
Of tropical fish  
Swimming in the confines of their aquarium,  
A calming influence  
On disturbed and troubled minds.

Seen from the windows,  
Small birds swoop and feed  
On tasty treats  
Supplied for their daily need;  
A transient diversion  
For those who watch and wait.

A team of volunteers  
Move silently among the beds  
Radiating cheerful sympathy;  
Bring cups of tea  
Or titivate the floral decorations.  
Sometimes a prayer is offered,  
A Cross held between fragile hands  
Defining the boundary  
Between time and eternity.

For all who come here,  
HOPE is the watchword,  
REST IN PEACE the passing refrain.

## 15. Holocaust

Row upon row of gleaming skulls  
Unearthed from a mass grave,  
Evidence of a cruel Dictator  
And his monstrous regime,  
Acts of ghastly genocide.

Fathers, mothers, aunts and uncles,  
Nephews, nieces, cousins, infants,  
Butchered, led to slaughter,  
For whom those who escaped  
Could only grieve in fearful silence.

Where are their Spirits now?  
Are they left to haunt the place of no return  
Seeking unavailing retribution,  
Or do they inhabit some dark place of shades  
Awaiting redemption?

Let the whole world grieve  
And vow these dark and dreadful deeds  
May never be allowed to happen again.

## **16. Everyone belongs to Someone**

Everyone belongs to someone!  
The wealthiest tycoon  
In his lavish apartment,  
The poverty stricken down-and-out  
Curled up on the embankment.  
The most familiar forms and faces  
Seen on screen and television.  
The loneliest hide-away  
In isolated dwelling places.  
The fun-loving party-goer  
Or contemplative monk or nun.  
Everyone belongs to someone  
And some more than others,  
And none can go unnoticed  
When its time for their departure.



## 17. Dummy Love

Her presence dominated  
The otherwise bare living-room,  
Her shapely form  
Clothed in a clinging, gossamer gown,  
A fashion model  
More at home in a shop window  
Than gracing a front parlour.

Passing the shop window  
On the way to work,  
A sudden urge  
Had prompted him to purchase  
One of the unclothed forms,  
Paying a great deal more  
Than what it was actually worth.

Buying her sets of clothing,  
Her underwear and other fripperies  
And dressing her each day  
Filled an aching void  
That had been like a cankerous growth  
So long inside him.

Better by far  
Than an unfaithful lover,  
Or nagging wife.  
She satisfied his every whim.  
She never answered back,  
She greeted him on awakening,  
She was there when he returned,  
She never gave him any heartache,  
His perfect, dummy-loving, living doll.

## 18. Wayside Flowers

- Death                      They never knew what hit them!  
Out of the darkness  
Screaming tyres,  
Merciful oblivion!  
Wayside flowers  
To mark the spot,  
A nostalgic memory  
Of those who would never be forgot.
- Birth                        It's another girl,  
A sister for Rosie and Pearl,  
Not the longed-for son and heir.  
A bowl of fresh-picked blooms  
By the bedside,  
A new born babe-in-arms,  
To dispel the gloom.
- A Wedding                The Bride's bouquet  
Flung in the air,  
The Bridesmaid catches it,  
Hope alleviates care,  
Her turn next year.

## 19. Simone and Chantelle

We were born together  
You and I.  
When you cried  
I cried,  
When you laughed  
A gurgle arose in my throat.  
Our tiny hands explored each other,  
Were entwined in sleep,  
Skin touching skin,  
Bone and blood vessels,  
Tissues and organs  
All conjoined,  
Flesh of my flesh,  
Heart of my heart.

When they took you away  
They took part of me as well;  
They told me later it was so that I should live.  
Sometimes I lie on the ground  
Close to where your ashes lie,  
My face buried in the sweet-smelling grass,  
The wind caressing my hair,  
The sound of the sea cradling my loneliness,  
Oh Simone, Simone,  
You will always be a part of me.

## **20. Damilola**

In a Plumstead Cemetery  
A stark Cross  
In memory of Damilola,  
Never to be forgotten.

The day that Damilola  
Came dancing home;  
His life ebbed out  
On a stairway  
Leaving behind a trail of blood,  
Evidence for all to see.

Teenage gangs roam the streets,  
Whispers of evil deeds,  
Rumours of gang-rapes.  
The killers are out there.  
There are those who know,  
Those who won't say.

What of British Justice now?  
The victims despair,  
The killers go free!  
DamilolaTaylor  
Beautiful child of Nigeria,  
You will live in our hearts always.

## **21. Our Jenny Wren**

Most of her days were dancing days  
That short span of life that was hers.  
Her loving moonshine face,  
Appealing in its special grace,  
Welcoming all who came near,  
To all those who touched her.  
Her jerky movements  
Displaying an inability to grasp a hand  
Or direct a movement  
Spoon-fed, lifted, comforted,  
Our Jenny Wren,  
Opening her mouth like a little bird  
Seeking the mother-comfort of those who cared.  
She asked for nothing,  
She hurt no-one.  
Only those who served her needs  
Missed her in the Passing.

## 22. Candles in the Dark

Say a prayer for me!

Men and Women with bowed heads,  
Remembering their loved ones,  
Flaming candles  
Shimmering in the darkness,  
Each one represents a living soul,  
Bearing the prayers of the loved one.  
A sacrificial offering,  
Incense at the altar,  
Burning glory,  
A pathway of light;  
Away from the doom-ridden streets,  
The collapsed buildings,  
The shell-shattered roadways.

Keep the candles burning,  
Keep the memories alive.  
When one flickers and dies,  
A living soul has departed,  
A dream has been extinguished.

The memory, the flame, the offering  
Will always outlive the darkness.  
Where they have gone  
There will be no need of light,  
For there is no darkness,  
Only perfect day  
And peace with God.

### **23. The Catalyst**

He could read her like a book,  
The tantrums, the tears,  
The hysterical laughter,  
The attention-seeking  
Demands of loving.

He let them all slide off him!  
No doubt the result of  
A feckless mother,  
An alcoholic father,  
A broken home.

She cloaked her personality  
Like a chameleon seeking cover,  
Changing colours to suit the situation.  
When she emerged from her hide-outs,  
She was truly amazing - A  
really nice person.

He was to her  
A father-figure,  
A brother, a lover.  
One day, he hoped to discover  
This really nice person  
And to free her  
From her dark-side debt.

## 24. Humour Him

If he wants to lie in bed  
With a pillow over his head,  
Humour him.

If he wants to splash in the bath  
Let it be for a laugh,  
Humour him.

If he wants a glass of red wine  
Before you go out to dine,  
Humour him.

If he says he's got no money  
And that sounds kind of funny,  
Humour him.

If he doesn't notice your new dress  
Remember - friendships have been broken for less,  
Humour him.

If he's bad-tempered and surly  
He probably fancies another girlie,  
Humour him.

If he storms out of the door  
Saying he'll be gone for evermore,  
Humour him.

At the end of it all  
You may walk tall  
If you still love the guy.



## 25. Give us Love, Give us Joy, Give us Peace

(Written for A Christian aid competition)

Refrain:        Go out, go out into the whole wide world  
                    And make my people free.  
                    It's what our Lord commanded us to do, For  
                    the word of the Lord is true.

- Verse:
1. Go to the people dying in the sand  
Where the rain doesn't come and the food's run out.  
Help them to live and to work on the land,  
Give them love, love, love in their hearts.
  2. Go to the children of every land,  
Join one to the other hand by hand  
Tell them they belong , teach them to sing In  
the family of Christ the King.
  3. Go to the people warring in strife  
Where the bombs rain down and the sniper bullet strikes.  
Give shelter to the weak and protect the little ones,  
Give them peace, peace, peace in their hearts.
  4. Go where the mighty forests crash down  
Where lives and families the traders disown.  
Speak to the people who put at risk  
Our natural heritage, God's good gift.
  5. Go to the children of every suffering land,  
Who've lost their homes and don't know who they are.  
Be a father or a mother, a sister or a brother,  
Give them joy, joy, joy in their hearts.

6. Go where the dolphins splash and play,  
Where the mighty ocean flaunts its prey,  
Protect all these creatures of the deep,  
So all may of God's blessings reap.
7. Share all the good things that the earth has in store,  
Make it true that the earth belongs to us for evermore.  
Hold hands across the sea, Jesus died to make us free,  
Give us love, give us joy, give us peace.

## **26. Rhapsody in Prayer**

Make me a melody,  
Titillate my senses,  
Instil in me ecstasy,  
Ravage my soul.

Make me endure The  
naked flame,  
The exquisite torture  
Of unrequited passion.

Make me to dance  
In gay abandon,  
Gathering garlands  
To place at your feet.

Make me a casket  
Of the world's tears,  
A fountain of healing,  
A pathway of peace,  
The sacrifice complete.

### *Author's Profile*

*I started writing poetry in 1973 when we were living in Cumbria. To discover this gift was a surprise and a delight. I joined the Cambridge Poetry group in 1989. We write poems on a monthly theme and sharing ideas and reading poems aloud with other poets I have found very beneficial. I won a National Poetry Award in 1984 and have had many poems accepted for publication in Anthologies and Magazines. I am happily married with three children and six grandchildren. I am also a Licensed Lay Minister and assist the Clergy. This Collection of Poems reflects some aspects of my occupations and activities during the last 50 years.*

*My thanks go to David McLeary of CCVS who has taught me desktop publishing. To my sister, Mrs Joyce Griffith for proof-reading and to the late "Bill" Thompson for his earlier encouragement.*

*All proceeds from the sale of this Collection will go towards "Franciscan Aid", the Charitable Trust of the Third Order SSF, to relieve poverty and to advance the education of deprived people from Third World Countries.*

*Beryl Johnson*

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