For my fairy godchildren:
Leila, Zuri and Cassius
E. R.

To my family and friends.
Thank you for being there.
A. S.

And Everything Will Be Glad to See You gathers poems from all over the world.
Regional spellings and usage have been retained in order to preserve the integrity of the originals.

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AND EVERYTHING WILL BE GLAD TO SEE YOU

POEMS BY WOMEN AND GIRLS



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INTRODUCTION

When I was small, my great-grandmother gave me a poetry book. Her name was Granny M and Granny M had tins of marbles in her cupboard and interesting books that smelled of time. She used to let us drive her mobility scooter round her cul-de-sac. The mobility scooter was called Matilda. I loved her – my granny, not the scooter – very much.

Anyway, when I was very small, she gave me a poetry book. It was a collection of poems from all sorts of poets and all sorts of places: an anthology. Granny M loved poems, and she wanted me to love them too. Luckily, I did.

When you read a poem, you see, you get to see the world like someone else sees it. You get to see what they see and feel what they feel. You get to think, "Oh my gosh, ME TOO", or "I NEVER THOUGHT OF IT LIKE THAT BEFORE", and both of those feelings are magic. Sometimes I think those are the feelings that make us human: the feelings that make us know what it's like to be one person alive in a world full of other people. I love those feelings, and I knew when I first read that poetry book that I would never, ever, ever get tired of them.

There is a picture of me somewhere as that very small person, sitting on the stairs with my legs dangling, reading that book; and I remember exactly what I was thinking, sitting there. I was thinking, "One day, I am going to grow up and make books just like this one." So that is what I have done, more or less.

I say "more or less", because this book isn't exactly like that one my granny gave me so long ago. You'll find some of the same poems in this one, because I loved them – but this book is different. It's different because, in this book, we've left out all the poems by boys and men.

Now, please don't put the book back on the shelf right away. This might seem really unfair, but give me a minute, and I will try to explain why.

Most of the poems in this book are by women.

Some of the poems in this book are by girls. (Some of those girls are as young as six or seven years old!)

At least one of the poems in this book is by a non-binary person. ("Non-binary person" is a quick way of describing a person who isn't actually a boy or a girl. When you're making a collection of poems sorted by gender, it can be tricky to figure out where to put poems by non-binary people. This means they often get left out of collections by boys and left out of collections by girls. Some non-binary people would like to be in both kinds of collection, and some would like to be in one kind over the other, and some in neither – so you have to ask every time. Luckily for us, we've been able to include a poem by a brilliant non-binary writer in this book! We really loved the poem, and when we talked to the writer about it, they said they would really love to be included. I wonder if you can spot it?)

So, we've got poems by women, and girls, and non-binary people – and we've also got poems by someone named Anonymous.

Anonymous, as you probably already know, means that we don't know who wrote it: we don't know anything about them. We don't know their name, or who they were, or where they came from – and I have put in some poems by Anonymous because often in history what "Anonymous" really means is that the writer was a woman.

"I would venture to guess," wrote Virginia Woolf once, "that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman." (Virginia Woolf was a famous author, and she said many smart things about writing, and about women.)

But you are probably wondering why this would be, and actually, why it would matter to me at all that the writer is a woman. You might even be wondering whether it's really fair to have a collection of poems that are only by women and girls. Doesn't that leave other people out? What about boys and men?

These are all good questions and to answer them properly we have to look at the big picture. We have to look at the whole way our world is organised, and the whole history of the way we write things, and the whole history of who gets to write things.

Another very famous writer, Elizabeth Bishop, asked these questions too. She thought it was so obviously a bad idea that she refused to let anyone put her poems into an anthology like this at all. (We did ask anyway, though, because her poems are so good.)

Elizabeth Bishop thought that separating art out into art-by-men and art-by-women made it seem like art-by-men and art-by-women were completely different – like all boys' art had something in common that it didn't share with girls' art, and the same the other way round. Elizabeth Bishop thought that making anthologies just full of writing by men or just full of writing by women made it seem like the art that boys make is fundamentally different from the art that girls make. For example, if all the children in a class wrote poems, would you be able to tell which ones were written by girls if you didn't look at the names? Would you be able to say that all girls wrote poems like this, or all boys wrote poems like that? If you couldn't, then what's the point of making an anthology where the only thing the poets have in common is what's under their clothes? That's what Elizabeth Bishop thought, anyway, and maybe you agree with her.

Sometimes I think that I do, but then I think about this: in that first poetry book my granny gave me, there were many more poems by men than there were by women. Actually, this is the case in most poetry anthologies. Sometimes you have to turn twenty or thirty or even forty pages to find a poem that isn't written by a man. And when they make lists of famous poets in history, they are almost always men. And when they ask people to name famous poets, they almost always say men. And all but one of the UK's Poets Laureate – a special job, and some say the highest honour for poets – have been men. Twenty men![1] One woman!

Isn't that ridiculous? But it's true, all the same. So why would this ridiculous thing be true? Well, here's something unfair: male poets tend to be more famous than female poets, because they always have been. I know!

Books tend to be full of poems by boys and men because they have always been the ones who got to publish their poems in books. This is what we call "structural bias", which is a fancy way of saying that the problems are built into the structure of our world, i.e. the way our world works.

Because women haven't always been allowed the space to think, and the peace and quiet to make those thoughts into something beautiful. Women haven't always been allowed to explain why what they saw and what they thought mattered just as much as the things men saw and thought. Women couldn't vote, so they couldn't change anything. Most women couldn't even control their own property or decide what happened to their own children. Some couldn't even choose who they married, or how they spent their lives at all. Women were not supposed to have a voice. Don't ask me why. It doesn't make sense to me, either. But that was the way it was, for a very long time.

For a long time, people who seemed like girls and women didn't get taken seriously as poets, or – often – as people.

That includes people who were sorted into the "girl" category at birth, and never felt like it fitted them. It includes people who were sorted into the "boy" box at birth and never felt like that fitted them. It includes boys and men who act in "girly" ways. It includes anyone, basically, who doesn't fit into an old-fashioned idea of what a "man" should be – and this is also part of that "structural bias" thing I said about earlier. People who are girls, or who are sorted into the girl category at birth, or do "girly" things, have been taken less seriously for hundreds of years. And that's one reason we wanted to make this book.

[1] In America it's actually a bit better, but not much – six women, and sixteen men. This is mostly for complicated reasons to do with the slightly different definitions of Poet Laureate; in America you get one year, but in the UK you do it for life or ten years. I don't know why this is.

But there have always been some women who made it, I promise. You'll find lots of them in this book. There have always been some brave and lucky and clever ones who wrote, no matter how much the world didn't want them to do it; and sometimes they used their own name and just hoped people would take them seriously; and sometimes they used a more masculine-sounding name; and sometimes they used no name at all.

And all of this, I hope, goes some way to explaining why all the poems in this book except one are by women and girls. It isn't that art by boys is different from art by girls. It's just that, all through history, we've simply paid it lots more attention. And that's not fair, either.

This book is my best shot at being fair. This book is my best shot at showing you all the brave, lucky, clever girls and women who wrote poems when nobody really wanted them to. This book is my best shot at making sure that whenever someone picks up a poetry book, they'll find plenty of poems by girls, my best shot at making sure that when someone asks you to think of a poet, you think of a woman just as quickly as you think of a man. This is a world that belongs to everyone – to women and men and everyone in between – and everyone should get a chance to show you the world the way they see it.

And one day, maybe you'll see something, and want to tell the world about it, and you'll maybe write it down in a poem of your own. And maybe I'll see it, and think, "Oh my gosh, ME TOO", or maybe I'll think, "I NEVER THOUGHT OF IT LIKE THAT BEFORE", and both those things will be brilliant feelings. Maybe someone else will see it. Maybe the whole world will see it. Maybe one day you'll even put it in a poetry anthology, more or less like this one.

I say "more or less", of course, because your anthology will be different. You'll take poems from all the different books you love, and all the different books you write. You'll put in it all the poems that have made "your one wild and precious life", which is a line from a poem in this book. And then, maybe, you'll give it to someone, and you'll be part of a whole beautiful web of reading things, and loving things, and brave and lucky and clever people trying to show the world the things that matter to them, and doing it whether or not anyone told them they could.

And maybe you won't do any of these things. Maybe you'll just remember that someone loved you enough to give you this book, and that will be enough. Whatever you do, I want you to be brave, and I want you to be lucky. I want you to be free to show the world what you want from it – I want you to see it and be glad, and I want everything to be glad to see you right back. That's why we chose the title we chose for this book, which is another line from a poem. Poems can give you a life where you see things differently, and you're glad about it, and then everything will be glad to see you, too.

Love, always,

Ella

X

Ella Risbridger



93 PERCENT STARDUST

We have calcium in our bones,
iron in our veins,
carbon in our souls,
and nitrogen in our brains.
93 percent stardust,
with souls made of flames,
we are all just stars
that have people names.

Nikita Gill

COMET

(To be read as quickly as possible, in as few breaths as you can manage.)

I'm a spinning, winning, tripping, zipping, super-sonic ice queen:
see my moon zoom, clock my rocket, watch me splutter tricksy space-steam.

I'm the dust bomb, I'm the freeze sneeze, I'm the top galactic jockey
made (they think) of gas and ice and mystery bits of something rocky.

Oh I sting a sherbet orbit, running rings round star or planet;
should I shoot too near the sun, my tail hots up: *ouch*—OUCH—*please fan it!*

And I'm told I hold the answer to the galaxy's top question:
that my middle's made of history (no surprise I've indigestion)

but for now I sprint and skid and whisk and bolt and belt and bomb it;
I'm that hell-for-leather, lunging, plunging, helter-skelter COMET.

Kate Wakeling

WHAT IS NOW WILL SOON BE PAST

Just because you do it
doesn't mean you always will.
Whether you're dancing dust
or breathing light
you're never exactly the same,
twice.

Yrsa Daley-Ward

I SAW

I saw a peacock with a fiery tail
I saw a blazing comet drop down hail
I saw a cloud with ivy circled round
I saw a sturdy oak creep on the ground
I saw an ant swallow up a whale
I saw a raging sea brim full of ale
I saw a Venice glass sixteen foot deep
I saw a well full of men's tears that weep
I saw their eyes all in a flame of fire
I saw a house as big as the moon and higher
I saw the sun even in the midst of night
I saw the man that saw this wondrous sight.

Anonymous

THIS RAY OF SUN

This ray of sun I claim,
When warmth begins to wane.
On days when darkness lingers
In cold and ghastly winters,
I'll recall its intensity
that day it shined on me.

Triska Hamid

STARS AND DANDELIONS

Deep in the blue sky,
like pebbles at the bottom of the sea,
lie the stars unseen in daylight
until night comes.
    You can't see them, but they are there.
    Unseen things are still there.

The withered, seedless dandelions
hidden in the cracks of the roof tile
wait silently for spring,
their strong roots unseen.
    You can't see them, but they are there.
    Unseen things are still there.

Misuzu Kaneko

GHAZAL WITH RAIN AND BIRDS

Day opens its eyes: sky's pillowed with cloud.
Each morning's a gift, a melody bright with birds.

Rain is beginning, and rain is ending,
longed-for and sudden, as heavy, as light as birds.

A tree is a village, a garden, a town,
a thunder of wingbeats, a day and a night of birds.

Streets freshly watered, a telephone line
is strung as if pearled, with white after white after white bird.

The breeze brings a kite painted with flowers –
it's caught in the arms of the tree, alight with birds.

Come to the river, to its bed full of stones,
Come rest on the green of its bank, a delight for birds.

Shazea Quraishi