

The Elephant in the Classroom, “Special School”. By Amy Clennell

(In memory of Deepak and my many departed friends)

Today would be your forty-first birthday.
We were both so young but you remain forever sixteen.
Yet, I wonder, where you are;
do you live again in Coventry?
Or do you now bathe in the holy Ganges?
Do you see the others, as I do?
Are you with your brother who left before you?

From infants we grew, alongside those who were able
to leap, dance and sing.
We watched too their decline,
those condemned to shrinking lives,
to fall still and silent like nurtured orchids.
We did not witness each floret fall,
merely the vacant space in the vase.
And, like them, for you there appeared no invigorating beacon,
yet you continued on your journey.
Perhaps it is as well that you did not stay, for today
you would be serving out your sentence in solitary confinement.

For some life's train stopped briefly at every station.
Some were victims of violent derailment.
A few, though clutching High Speed tickets, still took the slower train;
all ultimately to arrive at their inevitable destination.
It came not as a sudden realisation.
Cognisance gradually grew like shadows as dusk approaches.
We acknowledged those selected, not rejected, accepted and of equal worth.

Daily we ignored the predator posed to pounce,
until, in the morning, once more the train pulled into the station.
The mistress boarded our compartment,
our unwavering gaze upon her,
as the benevolent smile faded from her lips;
that familiar expression of suppressed melancholy
before she dutifully delivered her grim tidings.
Another of our fellow passengers had disembarked.
There followed tears, consoling cuddles and sweet tea and reminiscences,
before our journey continued on ... to the next standstill.

One morning I awoke with no tangible portent, but a sense of foreboding.
I knew I had lost you,
my intelligent, gentle, kind, supportive friend.
And in my musings we still dance to that same melody.