

# Vivian Usherwood Poems

5p



Belmonte Kim Wimpole

Vivian Usherwood was born in Jamaica,  
is twelve years old and goes to school  
in Hackney.

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LIFE

Life is playing me up  
Spite is having an affair with me  
It thinks it hurts me  
But it don't  
Life is hard  
I wish I didn't come here at all.

Once I was able to go into the record room  
Not any more  
It has been stopped  
Why, I don't know.  
But I have an idea  
The one which could be true.

It is no longer my heart  
That is broken  
But my brain  
It is confused.

BEING SCARED TO RESPOND

I am shivering, I am scared to respond !  
Scared of nothing.  
Only a skinny scared woman.  
She's scared of me.  
But she still takes the piss out of me.  
I'll find the last mouth from somewhere  
Yes, somewhere.  
But that's far from finding it.  
But it will come.  
It will slide down the bending mouth  
of mine.  
And people will get out of my way.  
I still think I try to make up my mistakes.  
Some day I will stand up for myself.  
I am waiting. Waiting for something,  
a shock.  
They won't forget it's me.  
They'll jump out of their skins.  
I am fighting hard too  
I talk to myself, wondering.  
My selves are wondering,  
They're splitting;  
They don't know what to do.  
I'll get mad one of these days.  
One of these days.

MISS MUGGENS

By

my word it is Miss Muggens  
She is doing the shopping  
For once.  
She is no longer lazy Muggens  
Because  
She does work  
She used to eat and eat  
Every minute  
She used to eat.  
Now  
She has a meal  
Four times a day and  
Five cups of tea and  
Seven slices of bread  
I wonder what got into her head  
She used to have ten meals a day  
And twice that amount of food  
She used to eat and drink.

HACKNEY

Why is Hackney called "Hackney" ?  
Why could it not be "Dirty" ?  
Its name stinks of steam and smoke.  
How much longer do I have to live  
in this place ?  
Everybody wants to leave and try  
to forget about Hackney.  
But I can't  
It's groaning inside me  
And that is why everybody smokes  
To forget about it.  
Everybody wants to leave  
and go to the country.

Prison is like a dream.  
You can't believe you are in prison.  
No human being should be in prison  
Unless they have done something.  
I am in prison because I have nowhere  
to go  
All the prison warders nagging you.  
You can't do anything.  
Plus I was here because I had nowhere  
to go.  
I wish I was in Trowbridge House  
Because there you have no one bugging,  
Stinging you in the heart.  
The only thing I like and precious to me is  
my things  
Birthday card, Easter egg box, two games,  
Garden of Eden and that is all.

TO BED

I had just finished my table tennis  
I was so tired I put my feet  
Across the arm chair  
Along came this long-legged animal  
and said  
"Right, I have warned you about this  
Straight to bed after tea".  
  
I had to go or else  
I would get a smacked bottom  
But fancy going to bed with the babies  
I think he has started on me  
So that is four onto one  
I will never be able to prosper.

WHY AM I UPSET

Why am I upset? Maybe a bee stung me in bed? Perhaps my sisters clobbered me? No, that is not so. I live in a home, Montague House and all the teachers gang onto me and make me cry to myself. But as soon as I get into my bedroom and into my bed I cover my head and cry. Little tears run down my eyes and drop into my mouth. Then a big one. Then an even bigger one. Has my heart bust? I stop crying then it starts again. Tears pour down my poor little eyes one by one. Next day they start again. One after the other. That is why I am upset. But that is not all. You try to please them, they say "Thank You", then they start again, but on me alone, no one else and I behave just the same.

THE SUN GLITTERS AS YOU LOOK UP

The sun glitters, is shining bright !  
The sky is blue !  
The clouds are no longer there.  
It glitters as I look up !  
Bright, it is bright as my sisters face !  
The sun looks like a face without a body !  
Just round. With a nose and two eyes.  
If only that beautiful face would come down.  
It will be mine.  
And I shall shine with it.  
As dim as I am now I will be brighter.  
Even brighter than the sun itself.  
So it shall be  
And I shall be as dim as ever  
For it shall stay there for many years to come.

MY NAME IS I DON'T KNOW

My name is I don't know.  
I wish it was something else.  
I work so hard trying to keep my world clean  
Along comes some unkind creature and drops a litter  
or two  
Then I have to clean it up.  
  
Along comes someone else and does the same.  
So I have no sleep.  
  
I wish there was someone else  
I would be able to have a nap.

IN TROUBLE

Whoever is caught I get the  
blame  
Wherever you go I get in  
trouble.  
If Tom and I was fighting and get  
caught,  
I will be the one to get in  
trouble  
And Tom gets a big cuddle.  
It encourages him to do it  
again and again  
Even over the dinner table  
Whoever is naughty  
I get the blame  
And they get the cuddle.



### THE EARTH HAS OPENED ITS MOUTH

As the earth rumbles I cry.  
The earth opens up like an alligator.  
And eats the people and the buildings  
without even showing.  
It suddenly opens without giving a  
warning  
Not even shaking.  
Then fills up the hole it makes.  
The mouth of the earth gives smoke  
Bursts through the hills and spits  
lava  
Shoots rocks and steam.  
People run helplessly without crying.  
They run and get into boats  
And row across the ocean blue and  
clear.

### SPY MAN

In this world there are spies.  
They creep up behind you and  
listen to your business. They  
use their beaks. When you  
want to change they watch you.  
They are terrible. Too nosey.  
Just as nosey as the blackbird.

### THE DYING WORLD

There is a world that kills itself  
 Bit by bit.  
 Dropping bombs,  
 Showing off !  
 They say people of today are  
     killing off their world  
 That doesn't show bravery !  
 Flying sky high then dropping a bomb:  
 Why can't they fight like a man ?  
 What a modern world.  
 They're no better than each other.  
 Just the same. No change !  
 From the first person to be born !  
 They're all monkeys that dropped off  
     their tail.  
 And hairs all over their bodies !  
 Well, long ones.

### ORSHE PORGY

Orshe Porgy Pudding and Pie  
 Kissed his sister and made her cry.  
 So when she came out to play she  
 Kicked and missed and got his ball

WHAT A GIRL SHE IS !

MY HEART IS BROKEN

My heart is just stopped beating  
Because of so many people ganging onto me  
They smash my heart to bits  
There is only one bit left  
That too will go  
Then I shall go  
Then everybody shall be glad  
To see a boy with no heart  
And died with no shame  
Dying with pride  
No shame, no sorrow, no pain.  
Just tears and unhappiness  
Last of all, a broken heart.

What does the name Vivian Earl Usherwood  
(Dixon) mean ?

I think it means punch, spit, kick.  
I was born to take it.  
You can even do do on me  
I have no shame, no pride, no luck,  
No heart and no pride.  
I was born to take it all.

Well they are wrong  
It is the wrong person  
And that is no lie.

### SPINNING IS MY HEAD

My head is spinning  
Ten different ways.  
It is hurting.  
It is only at the beginning  
And soon the end.  
It shakes as it goes round !  
Round and round it goes  
Like a merry-go-round !  
Then it starts to jump.  
It's getting dark.  
Soon it will be so dark  
That it will be invisible.  
In the dark as dark as  
The black board  
Without chalk.

### THE PIPE THAT LEADS TO NOTHING

As I climb the pipe my hands begin to burn.  
I am going. Misers are here. They're back.  
Why can't they go and kill themselves ?  
And I will be saved.  
Then I can stop climbing  
The pipe that leads to nothing.  
I am going  
I am going  
Never shall I come back to find misers  
Are still here.

THE AIR

As I breath in I begin to feather away  
First my body, then my head.  
But that's fallen off a long time ago.  
My feet shred at the flick of a second.  
When I run something takes over.  
When I write my fingers move.  
When I write my fingers take over.  
My nails are splitting in ten different pieces.  
I try hard to breathe.  
My lungs can't move.  
They need oil.  
So do I.  
My body is stretching.  
I am fed up with this world.  
If only I could get away  
I would run down the streets  
And in my house  
But I have nowhere to go.  
Only the stinking shitting house.

SNOW

Snow is cold  
Snow is good  
Snow has no taste  
Tom is bad  
Dick is crying  
The tramps are home  
My mummy is gone  
Rain won't come  
My sister is crying  
Tea has no taste  
Tea has no sugar  
And I am upset.

THE TWO-TIMER SKY

The sky is blue and nice  
It is blue here and there  
The world is blueful sometimes.  
Sometimes it rumbles  
like it is crying  
asking for food.  
It rains  
A patch of lighting strikes  
Then thunder, and it stops.  
The sky is a two-timer, good one day  
Bad the next.  
Just like the clouds.

LOST BATTLE

I had a fight with a boy  
My best friend  
And he said to me  
That he is going to get his gang  
So I ignored him  
He came back the same day  
With his gang  
And they gave me a clobber  
So I named it  
The lost battle.

MY CAT GOT AWAY

I used to have a cat  
A black cat

It used to look up to me  
Every time I put on my coat  
Like if it wanted to come with me

And when I come back  
Take off my coat  
It jumps up at me  
As if it wanted something

That same day  
When I left  
I forgot to close the door  
And the cat got away  
From that day onwards.

### THE SILENT PARK

The park is silent !  
There is no one about  
The swings are not moving.  
The dogs are laying quiet.  
The birds are sleeping  
And the park is dark.  
No one dares to enter.  
They're scared of nothing.  
Only the trees and the wind  
In the distance.  
Grass is everywhere,  
Only me, no one else.  
I am scared. Trembling !  
I quicken my stride as I go home  
The echoes make me cold.  
Cold as a doughnut.

### GRUMBLING MOTHER

Grumbling, grumbling, she is.  
She grumbles night and day.  
Now I am there I wish I was here.  
Wherever you go grumbling is with you.  
You can't get away.  
But I don't take any notice of  
Grumbling Mother.



MAD MAN

Mad man come from mad man town  
Skinny man come from skinny man town  
Fat man come from fat man town  
Tall man come from tall man town  
Small man come from small man town

But I come from  
Skinny-tall-small man town  
That is a new town.

BATH NIGHT

We have baths every two days.  
I am glad when it is bath night  
That is the only time I have to myself.  
All the rest of the time -  
Noise, noise, noise, noise.  
When I go to bed I hear noise  
But what could a person do to stop it ?  
When they go out I hear noise.  
I am getting used to it now.

WHO AM I ?

Who am I ?  
What am I?  
Where have I come from ?  
No one answers.

Was I born  
Or was I hatched ?

Morning, day and night  
I am getting in trouble,  
What for ?  
Is it because of my name ?  
Is it because I am small ?  
Or is it because I have new shoes ?  
No one knows.

I get into trouble  
For someone else.  
I no longer care.  
First time, I would cry  
Under the sheets.  
Tears coming down my eyes  
But I don't make a sound.

Tears, little by little,  
Then a shock !  
A big drop that stops me  
From crying  
Then I start to remember

The Noise

SLY DIRTY OLD FOX

Once upon a time there lived  
A sly dirty old fox  
Which lived in Hackney, Leytonstone Way.  
He was fatly built  
But he was not strong  
He challenges me  
I was found guilty  
Then taken to the two bells of Hackney  
They too found me guilty  
But what does a sly dirty old fox know  
But to trap a rabbit  
Well, it's prey  
And what a bell knows  
But to make loud noises  
I was eaten up  
Like a fool.

BLOB BLOB

Have you seen a blob ?  
The man that runs out of your fountain pen ?  
They wipe their feet on my paper  
I hate those men.

If I had a gun  
I would shoot the man  
Before I used the ink.

### TREES

A tree is tall  
A tree is small  
A tree is fat  
A tree is thin  
It comes in all sizes and shapes

Some grow themselves  
Some grow lichee balls  
Some grow apples  
But some are too lazy  
To grow something

I grow myself  
I am thin  
I don't come in sizes and shapes  
Because there is only me  
And I am small  
And I eat  
Instead of growing things for myself.

### I AM NOT SATISFIED

I walk down the street to the shop.  
I buy a bottle full of sweets  
I finish them in a day or two  
Then turn my eyes to my mother  
Saying, can I have some more.  
I am never satisfied.  
I like to eat more than I can take.

When I was a boy  
I used to go under  
The tables and the chairs  
And make the girls scream

Day after day  
I did the same thing  
One day I made a terrible mistake  
And I got up and got clobbered  
By the teacher

Boy that was a day  
I can never forget  
up to now

### THE LEA

I live near the Lea Valley, by Lesney Matchbox Toys factory. I sometimes go there in the evening about 5 p.m. It is said that part of the Lea is clean, it is not. Fishes are dying in hundreds and hundreds.

I caught a fish; it had no eyeballs, no tail. That is only one. All that is done by us. Mostly by the factories that dump oil in the Lea. We can't help the sticks that get in the Lea, from the trees.

We couldn't swim in the Lea, the way it is dirty. The dirt in the Lea pulls you under then the river weeds keep you under. Why? Humans trying to be modern, catching up with new cars. Which is called a development of the modern world.

NOEL AND CHRISTOPHER

I sleep with Noel and Christopher.  
I cannot sleep when they are awake.  
I go to bed at about five p.m.  
I am thirteen years of age  
And Noel who is five - he goes to bed at six p.m.  
And Christopher who is seven goes to bed  
At seven p.m.  
And I can't go to bed until  
They feel like going to bed.  
The annoying bit is, they wake me up at about  
a quarter to six every morning.  
I am beginning to love my bed because I go  
to bed so early. Even the babies go to bed  
later than me.  
And they call that punishment,  
I can't even go out anymore  
And that is punishment.  
Although they're not allowed to hit a boy  
or girl over ten, I would not mind being  
hit - than going to bed before the babies  
of four.  
I am nearly a grown up person  
Soon ready to have my young with my wife

UPSIDE DOWN

Why is everything  
Upside down?  
I must go and tell my mum  
The bad news  
It was a bit hard to get there  
When I told her  
She told me it was because  
I was upside down  
She made me seem a fool  
A great big one.

SCHOOL STRIKE

After dinner I went over the park  
I saw a most peculiar thing :  
Boys standing  
I didn't take no notice  
Until after I had had a game of  
    football.  
I saw teachers trying to clear the boys  
That were sitting in the streets  
And on the pavements.  
I asked the Ladybird  
He said it was a strike  
So I started laughing for it sounded  
    funny :  
Schoolboys on strike  
Hackney Downs Boys too.

MY TEARS SLIP BY

Why am I crying, I wonder why ?  
Perhaps someone hit me  
Tears are now coming down my eyes  
Suddenly I stop still  
My tears begin to stop too  
I realised I was silly to cry  
Because I had to go to bed early  
I no longer care  
I have no luck after all  
Because I get into trouble for nothing. I  
    was touching an orange  
    and I got into trouble.  
Instead of going to bed after tea  
I went to bed in the middle  
So I missed my afters.  
I got on my pyjamas  
Then she called me to finish my tea  
Everybody enjoys themselves  
Apart from me.  
Why ? They get away with murder  
But just one unlike move  
And I am in for it  
I just don't know why.  
They sent me to Trowbridge home  
To Montague home  
The only thing about Trowbridge was  
That they locked you in  
You couldn't get out at all.



OLD MOTHER MUSTARD

Old Mother Mustard lives over yonder  
She lives in an old house  
With one hundred and twenty-one children  
and more arriving each day.  
She cooks all day and night  
Poor old Mother Mustard.  
When they are naughty she has to  
beat one-hundred-and-one boys and girls  
But she only has ninety hands and  
two heads.

RICH MEN AND POOR MEN

The rich man lives in his house  
With thousands of houses he goes to.  
The poor man stands at his gate  
Begging for money !  
The rich man passes the old man  
without giving a penny  
And he has diamonds and money in  
his pocket.  
A young lady passes and gave what  
she had.  
Which was one pound and that is how much  
she had for the rest of the week.  
That is the world we live in.  
What a mean and miserable world.

### MEN AND COWARDICE

In some countries  
Men get guns and shoot elephants ;  
And then they go home and say,  
"I am brave"  
That's not bravery,  
Any fool can shoot an elephant ;  
My little toe can do that.  
Men are cowards.  
They make machines to work for them.  
They make ladies work too ;  
They have got enough to do ;  
They do housework,  
Carry babies in them for nine months,  
Then it is to go through the channel.  
Men have no guts -  
They're weak,  
Women could do better.  
Then they say women don't work.

HAPPY SONG

As the birds sing  
The trees flutter their leaves  
To keep in tune  
They sing songs.  
They play with the grass  
Then they try to find something to eat  
As they sing their jolly songs.

The trees keep their tune  
As the wind blows it keeps the trees happy.

Once again I look across the park.  
The birds sing.  
Not always they sing their jolly songs  
In winter they starve -  
They are so cold.  
We did this to the birds. ,  
They are scared of humans  
Or else they would sleep in our rooms.

RAIN

Did you know rain can be good  
It waters your plants in the garden.  
But it can be terrible when it drops  
on you. It wets you up  
Then you have to go inside.

Most people watch the rain  
Not me  
I am different  
I like it.

I hear it drop  
It drops like this sheet  
But when it drops upon the sea  
It sounds like this  
Drip Drop  
Dropping on the sea.

BIRDS

Birds of the world  
They are mad, bad,  
And sad.

We chase them all  
That is why.

RACE TO DEATH

I run from the wolves  
They chase me up and down  
The hill.

I saw a space in one of the hills  
I run into it  
I see a big bear growling at me.  
I run towards the open air  
I see the wolves once again  
I don't know what to do.

Only two ladies can help me  
They are kind and beautiful  
Even in their speech.

They release me from my troubles  
They please me when I see them.

### RATS

Rats can bite  
They can nibble our bread  
And spoil our carpets  
Somehow they get into our  
house and cupboards  
and eat our flour.  
They nibble half of our  
meat and leave half of it  
for us.  
They're crafty  
Then they hide.  
If I get those rats I'll kill  
the ruddy lot  
Wring their skinny necks and  
hang them by their tails.  
And cut off their heads.

### THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC

I come to school, there is music from  
human mouths and hands.  
They play hop  
To escape from school.  
Tom throws a piece of chalk  
and Henry throws it back.  
Henry throws it and it misses  
so he throws it again.  
That is called the throwing brigade,  
The name is given by a good teacher.  
Going grey.

SUN

The sun glares down upon us !  
It shines like silver,  
And as good as gold,  
White as chalk,  
Yellow as pine.  
The clouds attract the sun and make him  
dim !  
The tall flats nearly reach the sun.  
It is the master of the skies.  
Everyone thing, too, likes it.  
The trees start to beat the sound  
for the birds to sing.  
They sing twinkly, twinkly, my lovely  
sun.  
The winds blow the clouds and stop the sun.  
They are naughty.

DOGS

Dogs are terrible things  
It is meant to be man's best friend.  
But it is men's enemy  
That lives in his house.  
The only reason why dogs obey  
Is, that men feed them.  
So they begin to trust them.  
Cats are man's best friend.  
He makes money.

### LONELINESS

My friend's just left me  
My family just walked out on me  
My girlfriends run when they see me.

My enemies come up to me  
Look after me and break my heart  
When I walk on the streets the cars run  
The lamp posts walk with me  
But they do not say anything to me.

My property just seems to go  
As for my life it is trying to walk too  
But my body and senses go with it.

My bed even seems to move  
That is why it threw me off last night  
And I fell to the ground.



SCHOOL

I wish there was no school.  
If I was Samson I would smash the school to bits.  
Wherever you go there are schools.  
The teachers bother the school-boys  
and girls heads in.

I hate school.  
If only they would fly away.  
Once the earth trembled and threw  
them off the world

School, school, school, eeuk !



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