

# Animal Songs / Just So Poems

*poems about the lives of,  
and lessons to be learned from animals*

**Poetry Written for Children**

**English for Children**

**Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature 2017**

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## The Cat Who Walks By Herself

These things I know  
by heart and will  
not change:  
my hunter's claws,  
my teeth like knives,  
my pelt like scattered  
autumn leaves.

The places I go,  
I overturn with  
slight of paw.  
I measure moisture  
with pink-padded  
feet in little brooks,  
in puddle pockets  
on the street, nose  
to dry fish hanging  
and fruit straight  
from the tree.

I walk away  
bristled tail  
up straight.

But now, at this hour,  
my ear points at  
the window left  
open for cold air.  
A baby dreams  
of it, soft triangle  
of fur in its fist.  
Will Mama be lonely  
at dinner, or bright  
as her little pink ball  
swaying to my whip-tail?

Cats don't sing, but  
throat-rumble like

parked cars.  
Maybe Baby  
will dream of Daddy,  
coming home  
from day-hunting.

I won't stay.  
I'll go where  
the roads take me,  
the blind alleys like veins,  
choose where to set down  
and in whose place.  
I am only a little curious  
about what is gentle.

## **Song of the Oriole**

As long as I live,  
I could be like the sun —

blotting, and swelling  
    bright and burning in

its music, every trill  
in the afternoon,  
every stave  
on the bamboo flute  
    sweet and smooth  
    like a fruit

its absence  
when the light sleeps  
in the darkness, darkened  
    in the silent wood  
    and, I could

    reflect the sun  
    in each flight  
    its golden way  
    and its golden light

## **Song of the Maya**

Oh, oh, when I'm old,  
and smoke's blown off  
my brown coat  
I'll still sing to the city  
sweet odes

nest on lamppost  
the chestnut chicks and I  
called home

seedy treats on  
the church rooftop  
that like sun  
formed a dome

dance of rain  
on my wings  
as a raincloud  
unfolds

Oh, oh, I come from  
simple folk, and I'll go

whichever way  
the wind blows

## The Numbers Game

My sister's least favorite  
is the Numbers Game.

How many tentacles  
on the blue octopus?

There are eight tentacles,  
plus a thousand little suckers  
with which to pucker!

How many legs  
does the centipede have?

They've a hundred legs--  
and all hairy, crawly,  
squiggly, and red!

How many spiders  
are there in Mom's closet?

The last time we checked,  
there were nine – *aiieee*, ten!  
When we're feeling braver  
let's count them again!

## **Song of the Carabao**

we bellow, we work  
and we roll in the dirt  
    'cause there's no greater pleasure  
        than cool mud in this weather!

## **Song of the Jellies**

the ocean waves, here      they are green, they are gray  
here on these waves      we, the jellyfish, play

if you see our shapes      white, yellow, and red  
like mushrooms, umbrellas      like round and soft bread

our tentaculous legs      noodles, puppet strings  
be careful, don't touch      they are pretty, but sting!

we float and we ride      down the coast and the bay  
the ocean waves carry us      along night and day

floating along      we, the jellyfish      play

## Why the Fish Has Scales

Mama has told me  
the scariest tale!  
When I sat and listened,  
my face just went pale.

One day a maiden  
sat down by a stream;  
she admired herself  
and began to daydream.

Along came a critter,  
skittered on pointy legs.  
He lifted a blue claw –  
to the maiden, he said:

“King of Crabs they call me  
and a mighty king, that!  
But dearest young maiden,  
this sweet beaut to look at,

fear me not as I come,  
see me now as a friend!”  
But the poor frightened maiden  
was at her wits’ end.

“I wish for no friends,  
sudden, scary as you,  
please leave me alone  
and skedaddle now, shoo!”

“O, vanity’s curse!”  
cried the slighted King Crab  
and he leapt on her face  
and he pinched, and he jabbed!

The maiden’s fair cheeks  
now swelled rough with large welts.  
Weeping, she washed them  
but later on, felt

that they hardened to scabs  
and shone like a snake’s scales.

She jumped into the stream  
with a loud, saddened wail.

That maiden, said Mama,  
hereon was a fish,  
though we doubt the King Crab  
made a friend as he wished.

Well Mama has taught me  
of no greater danger.  
The tale's moral to me:  
never talk to a stranger!

## **Why the Dog Wags Its Tail**

Like the happy flag waves  
in the homeland it marks

Like the lighthouse's light  
that guides ships through the dark

Like the bird that sings bright  
as it greets a new sun

Like the bell that rings loud  
when your school day is done

I greet you with movement!  
This signal comes through:

    Come here! I am happy!  
    I have waited for you!

## **Are You There, God? It's Me**

Are you there, God? It's me,  
your dear friend, Butiki,  
who in folktales of old  
your good messenger be.

Do you hear my voice, God?  
Of your image I think  
even as hidden  
down here in the sink

and the cupboard of humans  
with whom I share home.  
Dear God, let me speak  
in my humble crick-tone:

May the storm of this season  
not hit us so hard  
or damage the roof  
and the door that I guard

Bless the humans who pray  
to be heard, once, like me  
for your dear protection  
and love, holy be.

If you're there, God, it's me  
their good friend, Butiki.

## **For Whom the Moon Shines**

The fruit bat, the cricket,  
cicada, and owl

the nightjar, the swallow,  
and all other fowl

The crawlies too – centipedes,  
roaches, and ticks

mosquitoes and moths  
who, in dark, their wings flick

My round face, in phases,  
peeks out from the clouds

the friends I know, watching,  
awake – still a crowd

## Song of the Hermit Crab / the Wandering Nomad

Oh, what to do  
but to look for a home!  
My old one was chipped,  
a bit frayed at the dome.

I was getting too big  
and was cramping there, too.  
This old home's not enough,  
but a new one will do.

I need a new shell —  
oh, to eat, wear, and sleep  
in a place that's my home  
and a good one to keep!

Maybe one that is white,  
don't mind spiky or round;  
just one that is sturdy  
to roost on the ground

or pull on my back  
as I walk through the sand  
for mile upon mile  
from the ocean to land.

Until then, I'll keep searching,  
I'll patiently roam.  
Oh, the places I'll go  
when I find my new home!

## The One Song of the World

Do you ever look up at the sky  
sometimes, and think  
has God planned  
for each little star  
to shine there,

or does he make each one  
light up along as he dares?

Will the cricket rehearse tonight  
each note it will play-rub  
on its leg's violin?  
Does the spider ever think  
of her size when she spins?

A whole universe woven  
in width of her web—  
or perhaps she is happy  
to spin thread by thread.

Is this strange song of nature  
a beautiful plan, or a beautiful song  
riffed beyond thoughts of man?

The world's beautiful song  
we sing lively  
as we can