

'Blithe Spirits' appears in *strange fruits* by Maria C. McCarthy (Cultured Llama and WordAid 2011), published in memory of Karen McAndrew. All profits from its sale go to Macmillan Cancer Support. £754 has been raised so far (June 2011 – November 2012). Copies are available at £8 plus p&p from [www.culturedllama.co.uk](http://www.culturedllama.co.uk)

### **Blithe spirits**

Do women spirits glide ethereal  
in chiffon, ectoplasm-green,  
like in that Noel Coward film,  
or do they haunt as when the angels came –  
flannelette pyjamas; half-dressed  
in bra and slip; safety pins clasping at  
too-tight trousers – or well turned out  
as for a viewing of the deceased?

Do they hobble round in slippers,  
toes wrapped over toes,  
or does the afterlife's chiropodist  
pumice, balm, remould, render them to dance  
in six-inch high stilettos, forever bunionless?

*Maria C. McCarthy*

Maria's Foreword to *strange fruits* is reproduced below:

Karen had little interest in my writing. I would tell her if I was taking a poetry class, doing a reading, but I never showed her my work, or talked about books with her. Our relationship was based on simple pleasures – cups and cups of tea, nattering about our families, 'mooching' around the charity shops of Rochester followed by a pub lunch.

I haven't written a poem for Karen, but this collection opens with 'Blithe Spirits', which Karen would have liked. Karen's blithe spirit will be wearing jeans, a brightly coloured top with a bit of a sparkle on it and colourful jewellery, all found in charity shops. She may not bother with footwear now; she was a size 9 and had trouble finding fashionable shoes. Maybe there is a plentiful supply of size 9s in the afterlife.

The collection closes with a prose piece, 'Where the High Street meets Star Hill', about our last outing together. May Karen be sitting in a cafe with an endless supply of tea, or in a pub, in good company, drinking Pernod and lemonade on ice from a tall glass.