

The Art of Forgetting Just Enough

Barbican Young Poets 2015

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The Art of Forgetting Just Enough

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Welcome to the Barbican Young Poets anthology 2015; a poetry anthology produced by Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning to showcase the work of our immensely talented community of young poets.

Creative Learning aims to shape and deliver new approaches to engagement with the arts, involving people of all ages across a diverse range of styles, genres and disciplines. We are committed to working with young people to unlock their creativity and bring their voices to the foreground.

We have pledged to focus our programme of work on young people for the foreseeable future, helping them to access and afford outstanding arts events, giving them a platform to be creative, enabling them to gain skills and get jobs in a 21st century economy, and listening to what they want to ensure that our work meets their needs.

Our young poets are at the centre of the community of young artists who we support and develop here at the Barbican and Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and their inspirational work continually feeds into our vision for world class arts and learning. We are grateful to the young poets for their sustained commitment to the programme, and for the wonderful poetry and spoken word that they have created over the last six months.

On behalf of all of the participating poets and Creative Learning staff involved in delivering the programme, I would like to thank Jacob Sam-La Rose and Jasmine Cooray for their commitment and dedication to each of the poets. Jacob and Jasmine's continued support for each poet makes an extraordinary contribution to their development, as they flourish as artists and human beings in the world of today and tomorrow.

It is ever a delight to work with such a talented group of young people; we hope you find the same enjoyment in reading the work collected here in their anthology.

Sean Gregory

Director
Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

Over the last six months, the group of young people who take part in our fortnightly poetry workshops here at the Barbican and Guildhall School of Music & Drama has gone through some changes. Older members of the group have moved on to make an impact in a wide range of professional fields, many of them in poetry, while keeping in contact with us as alumni. Newer, younger members have joined, bringing fresh energy and creativity into a group where the oldest poet is currently 25, and the youngest is 14.

Members of the group who have been with us for some time, artists who are increasingly responsible for the shape of the poetry and spoken word scene, both locally and nationally, have been developing their skills as artists working in participatory settings, with two poets taking their place as trainee artist leaders on our pilot poetry programme for younger children, Barbican Junior Poets. Junior and Young Poets will join forces later in the year, showcasing their fantastic work at the Walthamstow Garden Party, and connecting with communities in Waltham Forest with their electrifying poetry.

Whatever stage they are at, each of the poets in our evolving community of young artists brings something special and unique to what it means to be a Barbican Young Poet. We are proud to be able to support their journey, wherever it may take them.

Lauren Monaghan-Pisano

Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

An object in motion stays in motion. So says Newton. And we've developed a tidy sense of momentum over the years. This anthology marks the finishing line for another term of Barbican Young Poets.

There are key things that remain the same, term to term, year to year. With a mix of returning poets and participants who are completely new to the programme, each year develops its own identity. But every year, a group of as many as 24 young poets meets on fortnightly Wednesdays between October and April. We challenge each of our poets to interrogate their relationship with their writing: how their poetics might be defined, and what they want their poetry to be capable of. Community is key: our programme isn't just another series of workshops; at its best it is a meeting space, a confluence of intent and intuition, page and performance, rigor and reward. We laugh together, we cry together and, most importantly, we write. Hard.

This year, it's been a joy to be supported once again by Jasmine Cooray in the role of assistant tutor, one of an ever-increasing line of poets who've shared the load of leading the programme with me. Also, a nod of acknowledgement to Lauren Monaghan-Pisano, whose tireless support of the programme is a solid foundation on which the programme's continued development is based.

All eyes (and ears) on the future.

Jacob Sam-La Rose

Barbican Young Poets



About the Author

After *About the Author*, Elizabeth Willis

About a cast iron skillet she is imagining owning and using.

It is all part of the image. Her father is from Iowa and he is thinking of cornbread sometimes and she wants it to be real. All these small town hay stack farm boy family home feelings she has. Waking up in the morning and speaking softly to the cows and moving the bales of hay from one barn to another, uselessly. Planting something, the same thing, for a whole acre. She is carrying the romance of a life without ego from one worry to the next. On her back like a small child.

About cold deck chairs and a frozen over lake.

No one is touching any of it. Her mother didn't live there but she got it in her head some day and now the lake is always ice. The trees wrapped up in dark red scarves. The sisters wrapped up in each other. Everyone is in love here. The mother is alive again. The father is alive again. The islands in the middle of the lake are always sending boats back and forth in the summer. Now they are resting. Whispering in their sleep children on ice skates like wisps of steam. Everyone holding hands and letting their coats flap behind them and laughing and hitting the ice and not falling through and all of it is a painting. She makes them all alive and then she looks at them and then she breaks things that aren't even hers because it isn't real.

About a microwave she never could reach on her own.

It is always the middle of the night and she is always taking out the pots and pans to build a village for ants. Leaning the chopping boards against each other for a temple. She doesn't know if the ants believe but she thinks that temples are beautiful and every town has one and now they can come to the kitchen floor to pray like she does. Lying on her back and thinking about everyone that almost died in this miniscule room. There is barely space for a fridge. How could a whole life fit. She dreams of buying it again and putting all the appliances back and sitting on the floor in front of the microwave and looking up and pretending like she lived her learning years when everyone was happy. Sadness is all blackout blinds and very heavy arms and swelling. Everyone she loves has carried it on their back like a small child. What are the children carrying. Who will siphon away the top layer of sadness. It is heavier than all the rest. She puts the pasta in the microwave for thirty seconds but it's all cold on the inside still. She breaks it up and puts it in for half an hour. Falls asleep listening to the humming.

About a broken nose that never did heal right.

A small pink reading lamp falling on her head while she slept. Red running into her eyes and over her cheeks and onto the pillow. Her face blooms in a quaint white scar the shape of Lake George and the shape of a row of ants filing into church and the shape of a boy making waves in a blade of grass with only his mouth because what else is there to do when you've read all the books and colour tv hasn't been invented yet. She is folding it up. She is setting it down. She is leaving it there.

Lament

Response to Shruti Iyer's form. The poem must combine two distinct, separate images on both halves of the page. It must read across as one poem, and also read down as two separate poems comprising each half.

Last Karva Chauth

the moonless, married women,

conspired to keep the moon

hidden, dirty like old soap

Fresh young wives starved

their dry, pursed lips, avoiding water

Under breathy vows, they spilled all

back into deep basins, an effortless descent

I heard widows whisper

The shame that stops you going alone

White chiffon lapping up their hips;

Soft hands scar the deepest –

only love could dare to be so harsh

I held my body up with them,

splitting thorns in their hands, as the graveyard

turned from their eyes: the most bitter mourning

was the kind from a lost love marriage

on the nights they arrived:

leaving petals soft as skin

letters of thanks for the person that lived

symbolising love

That's what God is

Reaching into dark with a dirty light –

a lust death managed so easily

Tears and fingers taught blindness best of all,

whilst the grey moon stared on, envious

War

I am unable to rebuild myself in your eyes
as anything other than a deep fault line
or border or armistice smashed
against the walls of a family home.

Your buffer zone of bad blood and holy water
running silently through me
splitting each of my seams.

I shelter the wounds
in which I have learnt to grow flowers.
I hope I am not the place you will go
to pluck the ones to adorn your dead.





In the Face of Adversity, Courage is Key

Tenderness comes to us clothed all in gleaming samite,
tenderness comes dressed in dank sackcloth.
Tenderness comes when a child names a ribboned bundle of straw.
Tenderness comes where the chisel will kiss the tombstone.
Tenderness comes with the lacing of a boxing glove yet
tenderness comes to nurse the bruise that forms.
Tenderness comes when there's fear for it to fight through.
Tenderness comes with a cold sweat, late at night.
Tenderness comes to hold hands that can't help from shaking.
Tenderness comes to slow jaws and stop teeth from grinding.
Tenderness comes from a tongue, from a fingertip and
tenderness comes quietly, if it comes at all.

Tenderness comes when the skin starts to love itself.
Tenderness comes when the scars start to heal.
Tenderness comes when one learns that
tenderness comes to us naturally, if it's allowed.
Tenderness comes to us when we least expect it but
tenderness comes with a cost.

Cold Hiss

The train's final carriage
will only hear the engine.
Moves last, stops last,
often with a lurch.
Their journey's just a little different.

Heartbeats take you home
in winter, not for your sake
but to hear their sound.

Girls in Arpeggio

I. Early Intervention

the smiles of the girls on the children's relaxer kits
told no lies. they were too happy
to realise they were poster-girls
for the effacement of themselves.

not knowing this either
we would sit there, still,
watching our mothers mix dreams
with a spatula,
watching the mirror
from under the roofs
of our alkaline cream caps.
we stared at the girl on the box – willing
to be cleaned before sin –
and as the soft, pink science got working,
pleasantly tickling the skin, we waited
until our blood-borne bonds would break
just enough, perhaps,
for all in the world that resisted us
to straighten out.

II. Forbearance

there is a toll charged
for choosing to be the exotic one.
the problem has something to do
with your acceptance of a cage
made from laundered gold.

*birds of paradise,
you were the first dreams to die
when the ships arrived.*

III. Forgiveness

oh daughters of Eve,
did you know
you were a quarter-formed thing,
or did you not ever pull the wings
off a fly, one by one,
and wonder what
to call it then?

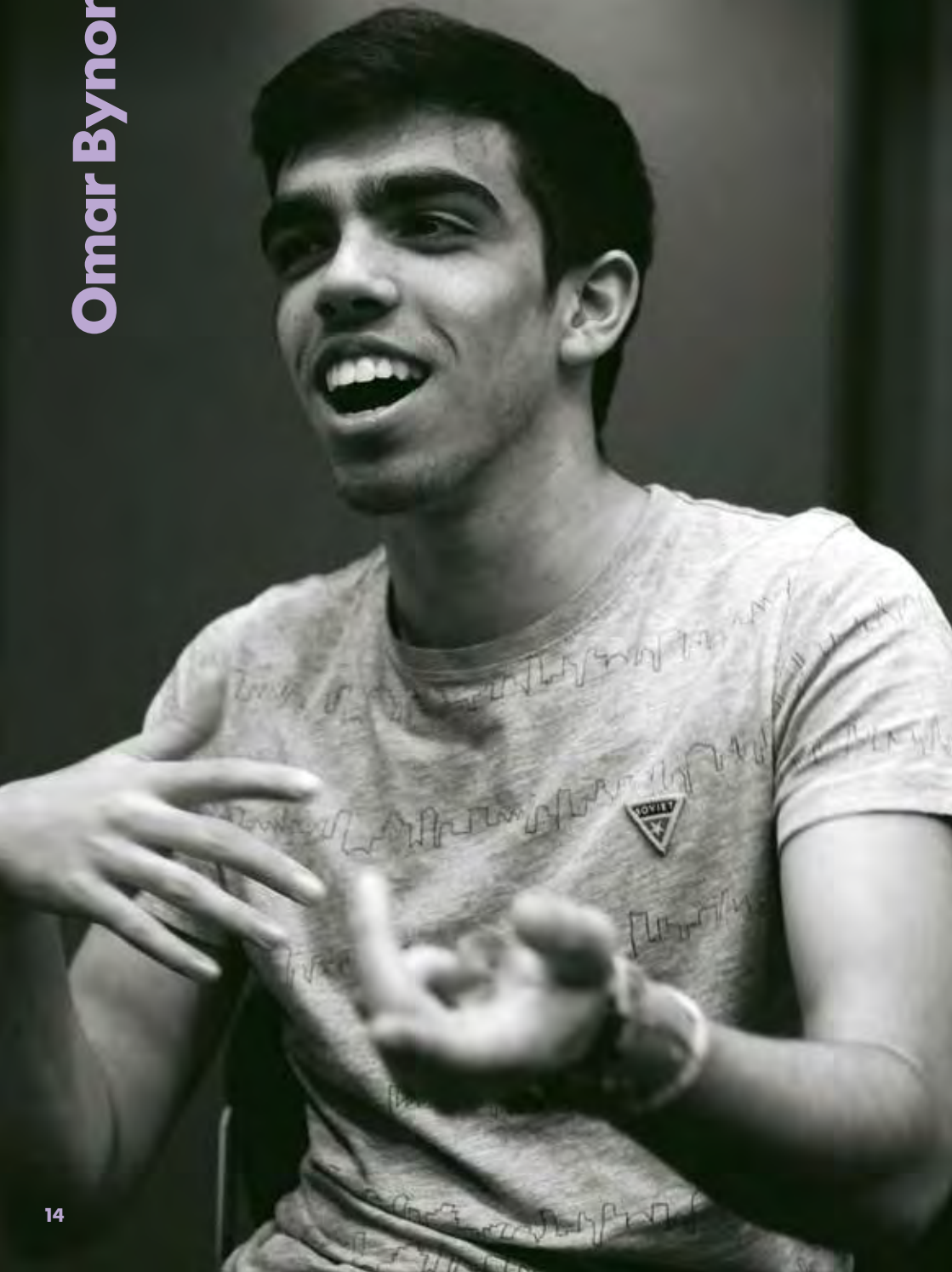
or did they only tell you and tell you
walk tall; hold your heads high,
you sweeter berries,
you picked-too-soon
and placed in the heat
to dry and stain
the pavement
apologetically.

IV. Realpolitik

somewhere in between the
pencil lines tattooed onto
the doorframes of their
kitchens – their only nation – these girls,
cacao-cored and peppercorn
pin-curled, decided to call themselves beautiful.
not chocolate or caramel, not coconut or tan.
not bounty, not Hovis best-of-both or burnt
wholemeal toast.
not Oreos or coco-pops, not buff nor carbon-cum-
diamond blick,
not lightly, not pick n' mix and match, not hair
enough to hang from,
not video girl, not side chick, not thick, not booty or
apple-bottom, not even Nefertiti –
for whom is Nefertiti?
not deputation any longer, not another word,
not vice, not hereafter any cover-teacher or stand-in
nor prefix; no sign nor understudy,
no other
for beauty anymore.
beauty, alone.

for these girls it was a violent act.
but after it
they slept better.





When the Wave Breaks in Front of You it's All You Can See

On ashen days like this
I catch you
looking up at the grey sky
like it's never gonna be blue again.

The day after you met my family you laid next to me and cried
because they liked you – told me
we may as well end this now.

Your fingers were whispers in my hair,
my lips – a tear on your cheek
I felt as close to you there as woven dreams do

and you were talking about distance
about how forever doesn't last
and this is all very nice but where has reality gone?

Reality makes children adults
and lovers strangers
I don't wanna grow up or apart.

I know it's too good to be true.

Let's lie together.

And With Every Charm, Comes a New Drunk Uncle

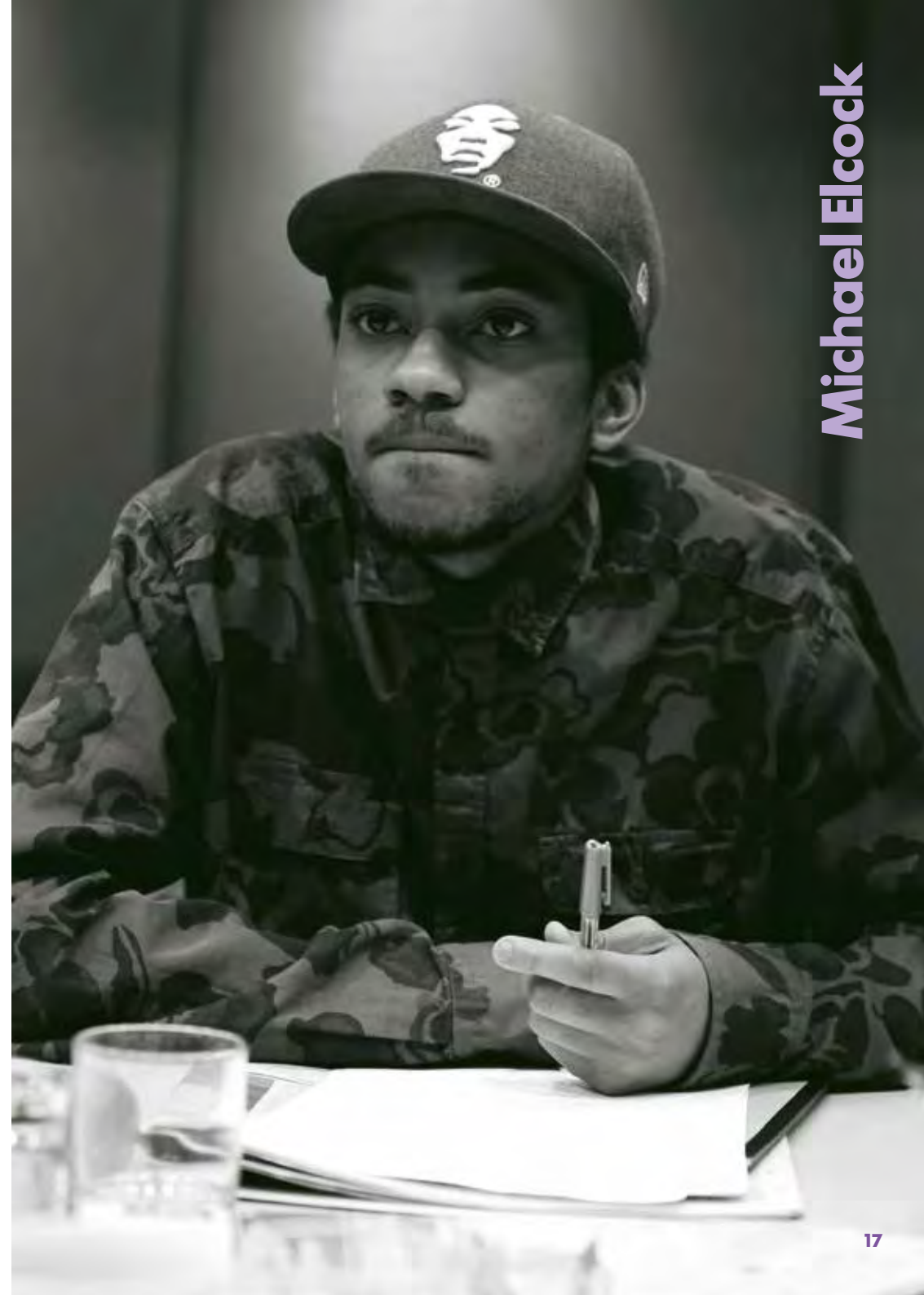
My uncles were born to drink.
Alcoholism is a bracelet passed down through the generations
and with every charm comes a new drunk uncle,
telling you to fill up his glass.

Are parties just an excuse to hang in joy from death's rope?
Let's blanket this bed with another drunk uncle
who sends shivers down the spines
of women cooking the meat he rips apart.
Place uncles in the living room
to drink the sorrow train further away from their station,
leave aunties in the kitchen
making chicken wings
to drown in the acid of their stomachs
Your destiny is a morning of regret
so try your best to run away from sunrise in a straight line.

I've been born into a house party,
where ice cubes kiss the lips of those blind to the morning after.
Your spirit is not in debt so drinking spirits won't pay anything back.

I know.

You can't help but give yourself away to the ocean.
It will drown you, over and over
until your liver grows gills
and needs Bacardi to survive,
swim with the fishes and find your way back to church.
Because we miss you. All of you.
The bracelet will continue to be passed down bruising more wrists
and you will continue to search for God in a good night out,
while your best friends become blurry stop signs around you.



Mother: Juggler of Clouds.

*Expert in holding the sky when it threatens to fall,
when the Gods strike their fists and the thunder
heads mercilessly for the Earth.*

There is a naivety in your belief,
threaded through your body
like embroidery on silk scarves.
I am unpicking the gullibility
you sewed into my skin.

An open heart is an unguarded target.
I once believed a boy
until my heart became a spinning top.

*

I apologise for trying to crush the questions,
ripe berries, in your mouth.

I must not bite the hand that fed me.

It is something that comes from learning
the origin of your body.

Surely you yourself have felt the dark descend?

One day I will ask which continent made your body
shudder least, think myself more like you than I imagine myself to be right now.

It caught me by surprise when the woman at the counter
said our eyes were cut from the same stone.

Two of my cousins have my face
but we do not talk.

*

Do you sometimes forget those years we shared that same bed
in the cramped bedsit we called home? I sometimes forget

the week you said you were visiting family so my body,
a thief of your love, would not clutter your mind.

Did you nearly believe you had not ended up here?
Was it a shock when I returned, as real as ever,
waiting to be fed?

*

If I were ruler for a day, I would decree a law:

Mothers, when your daughter reaches sixteen,
you must sit her down,
explain the process of how you came into yourself.
You may use photographic aids,
but you must also use your words,
those precious stones you have a habit
of storing – I wonder if they were stones
or unspoken words in Virginia Woolf's pockets?

*

Your silence is fierce and dark, without hope of light.

I would like to throw you a party, buy you a red dress,
give you a whole night with nothing to do in it but laugh,
admire the length of your legs in such alien heels.

Lady in Red,
as you slip the right shoe off and on, you think
it equivalent to the lengthening of your first born
in those initial six months of no sleep and less money.

*

Though I fear this life chose you, came toward you
like a grey cloud in a barren field,

there is laughter to be found, isn't there?

The same laughter that came when my cold feet
used to brush your leg in that bed,

there is laughter to be found, the other side of tomorrow,
when you realise you are still here.

Why did you think you wouldn't be, silly?

*

You have a skill of rebuilding the sky each morning,
refusing to break if some days it is not as high
as your God first placed it.

I am mastering that strength that comes from the gut,
when the rope pulling you up
is cutting your hands to shreds.

This life is a subtle balancing act.
*It takes practice, you say,
I've been juggling these clouds for a lifetime.*



No Smoke Without Fire

There is always a side to take.
A mother tends to her son's puffy eye,
whilst a teacher picks the reasons
from another boy's fist, pulls them out
like glass from cut knuckle.

Girl blames brother for
the fire. Says he spoke smoke,
fought like a lit match.

Haunted Dreams

He never believed it would come to this.
Three days stifling screams marooned
in the back of a truck from Italy to France
to England, earning each bruise like a rite of passage.

It had been six months since he'd left them,
a mother's tears burning holes in his shirt
with reflected candlelight and a brother,
a melting wax effigy in nests of rags.

He had left them dying together, shackled
to dreams which left him wracked with visions
of skyscrapers that gnawed at the clouds
and cut light from the darkness like stars.

And what had he gained?

A body scarred to shreds every day
for three copper coins in the pit
of his palm to send home
worthless as a faded photograph.

He had spent six months flitting from
ocean to ocean like dust for them, smudged
into greasy darkness from countless crates,
each day throttling his tears for them.

Still he was chasing old dreams, dreams so worn
they were nothing more than shadows.
Old dreams that might never come true.

Mirrors

The girl on the sidewalk raises her hand
and feels scales of rain cling to the tips
of her fingers. Two rivers converge
in the centre of her palm like lovers.

Soon, she cups in her hand a concrete sky
marked out like a pavement
by the cracks in her palm,
each slab heavy with clouds.

As she watches, a bird scribbles
an offhand comment across her palm
and pinwheels dazedly over her fingers,
falling through the sky like a casual

conversation. She follows its path, her lips
catching the curve of its wings as it dips,
twisting with the shape of the breeze
to grip the currents like a tide

before the sky is heavy
with nothing but rain.

As the girl on the sidewalk drops her hand
she feels slivers of sky cling to the tips
of her fingers. She watches each drop burst
and spill cracked concrete slabs at her feet.





Ayeeyo

When I first touched home, my mother dived into the sand yelling,
'Ciid gaduud, ciid gaduud! Oh how you have been missed.'

Never have we felt the sun so beautiful,
The sediments of memory swirling between our toes.

Across the border, Ayeeyo is levitating on a wooden throne made with hijabs.
The iiclan on her fingernails are delicate sunsets.
Her eyes, the colour of the Indian Ocean.

Happiness is witnessing your mother seeing her mother once again.
Ayeeyo's smile drifted the continents and bought her youngest island to her shores, home.

Crystal Giants

London is trying to kiss the sun, reaching for empty clouds of smoke.

22 metre tower at South Quay Plaza, the Shard
reflects our poverty from across the streets...



At Marathahalli Bridge

at Marathahalli Bridge, I meditate on
the back of your head
the way you loved the rain, like entire epics were crashing onto your skull
a skull always turned away, always ready to depart.
while I stood, yearning collecting itself into a stagnant puddle in my spine.
If you are a bird, I am water shapeless without your arms
as unreliable as a crack blooming in a ship's hull,
ready to burst forth
leaving remnants of wood and bodies adrift
in protest at how flight calls you to it,
outside the boundaries of agreed-upon borders and waters, how
insistent that in the sky, you would be sovereign.
my body will now always be no man's land.
I should have known better than to think a bird would sprout gills in the place of lungs.

The Flowers from my Mother's Soul

I
 I look for common links between my mother and I
 something to remind me of our past
 some kind of similarity
 a naked thought she embodies
 and has been passed down in my blood stream
 something to take away this restricted feeling of being the odd one

I look for common links
 because without them I would stand completely still
 and the universe would not bother with me
 would not care that we do not sync
 because if I can't find a link with my mother,
 what hope is there for the universe?

So I wonder how I can become my sister,
 she is my mother with a future
 without the memories and the hurt
 she looks like her and everyone says
you are your mother's daughter

I look for common links
 to give my heritage a reason to love me
 to give my mother tongue a reason to hold me
 and cradle me to the grave
 to give back
 to make hope synonymous with infinity
 to give God a reason to not feel guilty
 that I am still here

because it is these links that will save me.

II
 I see faint images through the gaps in my teeth
 past that burnt taste of solitude on my tongue
 I see the outlines of a body
 but my peripheral molars don't see the sharks approaching
 the snakes and crocodiles bring with them their death-ly stares

I see through my mother's smile
 through the teeth that she grew for me
 the only resemblance we hold
 linking our bodies

I see faint images through the gaps in my teeth
 gaps big enough for arrows to find their way in
 big enough to evict my teeth from ever meeting
 but not for my mother to find me



III
 The flowers from my mother's soul
 seem to resent my own
 they stay close but never touch
 my grandmother's head rests in my hands
 a face I cannot look at
 because if I look hard enough
 my smile will bring her home

Maybe then my mother would hold us
 if she knew I brought back the woman
 who she inherited her smile and hair from
 maybe then she'd hold me

Maybe I would feel the naked sound of the words:
I love you
 maybe she'll whisper it into my ear
 and before it leaves the other
 before I lose it for good, she whispers it into the next
 to make sure those words stayed within me forever
 maybe –

The flowers from my mother's soul beckon me
 with an outstretched finger, she calls me
 but misses my direction

I blame my mother's upbringing
 I blame her flowers and moons
 for not finding my love
 coupled with her desire for space
 I blame that
 that is the reason my mother missed me
 the reason she doesn't hold me

She can't see me –
 she can't find me.



Stolen Ribs
(Essays on love)

I don't know.
Maybe it's a holiday I need.
Maybe you're the holiday.
Maybe it's like Portugal outside and,
maybe it's not.
You said maybe was a word like mine,
sounded like mine,
Something I would say.
Maybe is a world like yours.
 Mine too.
 Mine too.

I'm pretty sure I feel whole around you,
Despite the hole around you,
Despite the whole,
I hear music in the background of your life,
That's why I like walking into it,
Because they always score a piece for the arrival of a heart.

But they also score a piece for the arrival of heart-ache.
My Heart-aches,
Yours too,
Yours too.
I don't want to be Heart-ache,
For you,
For you.

I guess pink and blue is not my colour,
I probably stick with cookies and peanut butter,
The problem is I know you well,
Cos I've lived life in hell,
You too,
You too,
and tar is all they're cooking there.

They all like you, yeah,
But they nothing like you.
I wish they were,
But only a storm will make men from boys.

I guess that's cos I love you though.
I don't want nothing from you though.
Nah,
Not even the rib you took from me,
When we were back there in the garden.

A Club in Cambodia Burns Down. Australian Tourist Dies.

Hot.

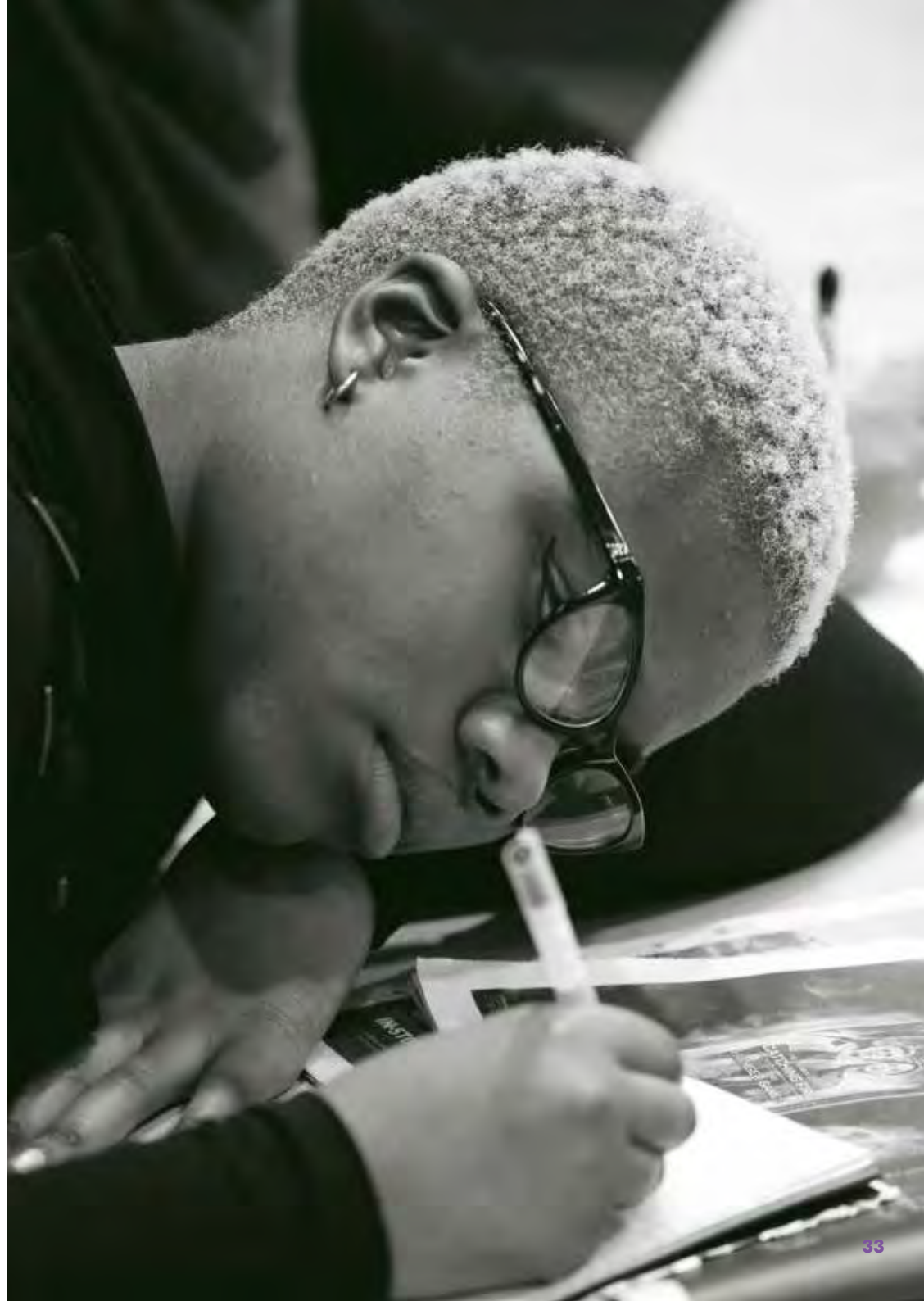
You feel the heat rise to your face. Two of them saunter towards you.
Slim as they all are. With eyes that pierce.
Hair long and wet. Stuck to their backs like tentacles.
These women are mermaids. Mystical.
From their rock they call you. You join them.
Pressed between their bodies. Their warmth fills your darkness.
You swear you see lights. You swear you see colours when they move.

Hot.

You regret not wearing linen. Your jeans now sticking to your body.
You're sweating and gyrating and laughing in *sralai*.
You can be seen in the dark. Your pale skin yet to be kissed by the sun.
You lucky devil. Heating the floor with these treasures of *Khmer*.
You choose one. Take her hand in yours.
Pull her towards you. Your bodies press against one another.
Bass booming back and forth. Between the cavities of your chests.
You exhale rhythms. You gyrate fire.
Look at what you're starting. The lights are out but there's a glow.
And for all your dislike of cliché, you're convinced it's coming from her.

Hot.

It's coming from her face, or her beauty or your bodies. Your eyes are stinging.
You let the sweat run in to them. It burns, but you allow it.
You want to be reminded that this is real.
You smell smoke. It peels at your nostrils but she won't let go.
She holds on — tighter. This is how she wants your bodies to be found.
Locked between one another. Not knowing where you start and she ends.
You shake her. She smiles and shakes you back.
This is not a dance, you want to tell her
but her eyes are firmly shut.
She places your hand on the small of her back.
You forget how hot it is.



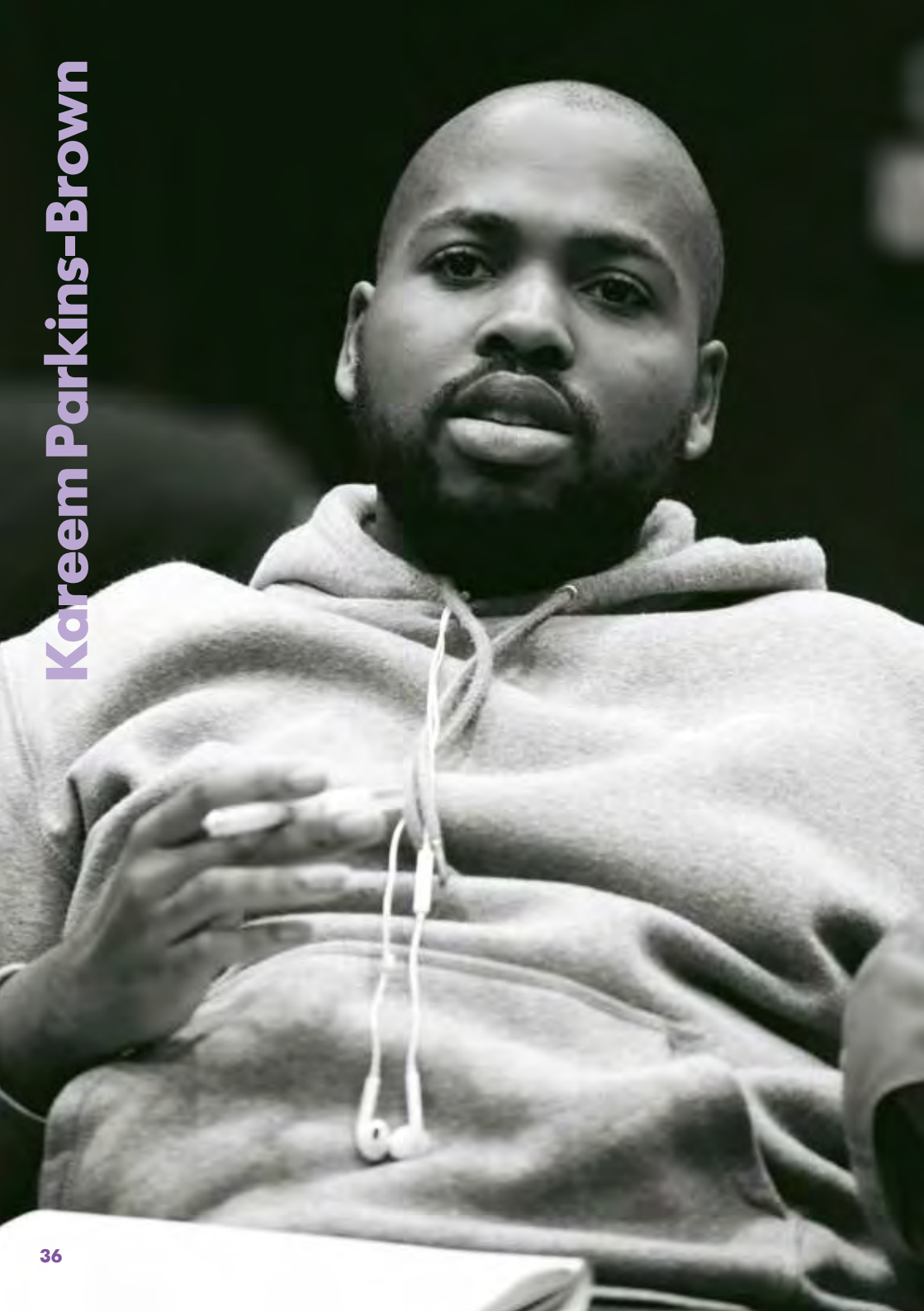
'Light thickens and the crow wings its way to the rooky wood.'

You said this to me. In the black dark you gave me a mound of earth, piled deep like the barrow of a Saxon king. I expected ghosts. You put want in my voice and yellow in the windows of the big house up on the hill. I wasn't alone this time. I am talking about books and flowers and Canada geese. The mist kisses my knees now, not my face. I am still not taller than the bracken. You send silence over the lake as trees growing on their sides send defiance skywards, branches pointing after the hurricane that tried to finish them thirty years ago. I am not alone this time. We cut through the graveyard, lit up by the cliché moon. These days the walk home is short.

The Lifecycle of the Eel

We end between the sea and sky: the fens,
the flat land where the river creeps like guilt.
White-bellied crabs lie tide-strewn in the bends,
and yellow eels turn black beneath the silt.
Before, before the mid-March wind, reeds shiver.
The mouth-bound elvermen with sturdy nets
ignore marsh birds for water thick with slither,
to heave at flesh more salty than their sweat.
On the surface of Sargasso, see, weeds float
like yellow hair, like shifting continents.
Atlantic now, these lungless snakes first wrote
their question-mark in mud. We can make sense
of space, explain the seasons, and the dawn;
but no one has found out how eels are born.





Rorschach

Why so many questions?
Why do you invite yourself
everywhere? Why are you dry rain,
body odour in a perfume shop?
Why do you look twice as long as we do?
Why do you screwface
that policeman
with his hand on his gun?
Why do you see Fear as an invitation?

7.

The black that fits in nowhere but the description. The black that sneezes and makes the police suit up in riot gear. The black that gets on the news and freestyles on the mic. The black that dances naturally like there's always guns pointed at its feet. The black that always has to argue to be here. The black that came out of its mother as a parental advisory sticker. The black that can twerk and get a degree. The black that was saying twerk almost a decade ago. The black that pitches its voice higher so the ambulance comes quicker. The black that isn't allowed to be a kid. The black they applauded at the poetry show and still crossed the road from after. The black that expects the revolution to take place over a Tupac song. The black that cried for its son in front of a police car, sirens flashing but silent: looking like the soundtrack to the American Flag. The black that gets sued for leaving a dent in the hood. The black that is always caught doing things it should not be: waiting for the bus, using big words, being surprised by the verdict.

A Stroll

I took a stroll down the barrel of a gun
Outta breath so I had a rest in the chamber
I sent shots at the setting of the sun
Saw so much death want a guard for my angel

My tongue took a trial as my trigger
But it held too much hate to articulate
Didn't care if my strays struck a stranger
With the passion that I'd generate

But bullets are like boomerangs.

And I was refunded in full
For the trigger I pulled

Happiness

I could have spent eternities
in the moment of silence after
my first kiss.

It would take 3 hours and 45 mins for my first girlfriend to dump me.
But even if I knew
my first experience of infatuation would only last 3 hours and 45 mins
I would still go back just to dwell in that silence.

I found refuge in the silence that settled after the repetitive bursts of laughter.
Around the kitchen table of my once whole home
there were often more shouts than smiles. Years before divorce was filed.
But despite the fear that grips my frame, when I explore the archives of my brain,
I retreat and find peace
in that silence.

Although I'm still gripped by ghosts of guilt
as my father explained his father's sins
as I knelt to catch my father's tears
as if his regret were mine not his.
I'd fight a thousand spectres to dwell
in that moment before he wept.

We are masters of voice but fail to realise
the potential of silence.

Each pause,
each breath
is as important as
each word

and there you will find
happiness.



Hooyo Does Not Like Questions

Who was the first man to touch you?
I was too scared to look your grandfather in the eye.

(Daddy died before he could hug back.)

When did you know you were a woman?
Girls gather shame. Girls can be ruined.

(I bled, blamed my body, asked them to turn me back into a girl.)

Would I still be yours if I hurt you?
You know there are creams that remove stretch marks?

(Don't leave the door open after you leave me.)

*

Have you forgiven the ocean for drowning the thirsty?
Dwelling on tragedy does the body no good.

(I'll tell you one story a year. Sadness can stop the heart.)

What happens when loneliness moves in?
Hani climbed out of a window at night, said something about feeling alone.

(Don't give yourself up to men. God is watching you.)

How large is love to you?
Daughters turn into the dead so quickly.

Making it Out After Shailja Patel

Make it out of all the houses that were too small for the entire family. Make it out of the bedrooms you weren't allowed to get familiar with. Make it out of the way you keep a suitcase beneath the bed in case you come home from school and are told you are moving someplace new. Make it out of neighbours that want you to burn and do not mind telling you about it. Make it out of the mother who dreams about things falling, collapsing, and breaking in half, then half again. Make it out of the mother you needed, all arms and warmth. Make it out of the father you got, whose hands show all it took to get you the fancy phone and laptop. Make it out of the bedroom you wanted to disappear in. Make it out of the time your father said 'you are the bad apple, all we need to do is remove you and everything else will be fine.' Make it out of your mother's fear of public transport. Make it out of the way she wouldn't be able to jump on the tube to come and find you if you didn't come home. Make it out of hushed breath and bloodstains on the floor when disaster stays longer than anyone expected. Make it out of the uncle who calls to remind you, 'I have people everywhere you go.' Make it out of a bloody mouth when you press too hard on the tongue, afraid of talking back. Make it out of the way you sat with that bloody mouth as he said, 'I've never been so proud. Look how clean you are, how great our family name.' Make it out of a pain you cannot explain. Make it out of the way it knows you so well. Make it out anyway.

Homecoming

On Friday the 13th
I went out to the bar where you used to work,
your name is scratched into the outside wall.
I was half afraid I would find her there too:
myself from back then, still waiting for you.

Remember that summer?
I tried to change my hair but in 3 days I was blonde again.
I painted my eyes dark but they were still the same;
it was haymaking season,
when the sun made everything gold.

These days I return to this place as a ghost.
I look back and rewrite myself as Diana,
turning the dog of your love back on you
so it tears you to pieces.

My nails were white when I first met you
now they are black.
My lips were pale when first I met you
now they are red

The H word

After Jack Underwood

When she arrived she was my parents' guest.
Sleeping on our sofa,
drinking our milk from the fridge.
We spied each other over dinner
but I had nothing to say to Happiness.

Then my brother brought her home from university,
he said to us, 'This is Happiness'
When he fell asleep in her arms,
watching *Casablanca*
I saw how happy they were together.

Then she was a friend,
when we went out together,
in shoes we'd borrowed from each other,
we sang songs until our lungs were empty
and hearts were full of Happiness.

Then she sat up with me
when I could not sleep, and I told her all my secrets.
I felt understood,
a strange, painful Happiness.

And in the morning after,
when I found her chatting in the place
where we all live together,
I asked her name and when she told me,
it was as obvious as the sun.

Woman in the Moon

i don't think i've slept last month.
the moon kept checking in on me through the window,
she said *it's okay*.
she knew what it felt like to be trampled on.
people say we're beautiful from far away,
but when they come closer
it looks like our eyes have been gouged out.

when it's dark i try to keep my eyes wide open
like the mouth of a well or the throat of a ditch.
before we spoke
i kept hating myself with the lights off.

i couldn't see past next week without binoculars.
you told me the brain develops cataracts
after waking up feels like you're tied to train tracks.
we weren't moving any time soon.
i figured house arrest made us restless.

if i had a rope you know i'd climb it and
if i had a jet pack you know i'd fly away
before i caught on fire.
it's like i'm playing that game as a child
jumping on stepping stones to escape the lava.

i think loving you is my new fire escape.

so now i don't need
the woman in the moon shining on the back of my neck anymore.

you said you're a burden but
i feel warm with you on my shoulders.

Hey Stranger

they built new office blocks behind the market.
i keep thinking about adults in suits
stepping in rotten pomegranates on the pavements with their
leather brogues. it must've ruined their day.

you've toughened up over the years.
you had a soft belly filled with playgrounds
and chicken shops and women who kept their nokias
tucked into their hijabs.

since you got new friends
we don't know how to say hi anymore.



A Fear of Staircases

Mum was listening
hard to the floor.
Ear to the ground.
Feet at difficult
angles.

In a totem pole.
Grave stone coloured.
I haul life upstairs
in fruit boxes.

In a satellite town
of a satellite town
mum was upside down
an upended tree.

A strings cut puppet
was hauled onto stairs
and red cleaned off
and airwaves cleared.

I carry movies
upstairs about
tragedies & families
and time melts wax

around my twitching
fingers that ache
with dragging a life
beside motorways.

She slinkied downstairs
foot over skull
and came to rest to
listen to the floor.

I am listening
hard to the floor
in the flat that
my mum hasn't seen

and every staircase
and every hard floor
in a totem pole
in a satellite town

is echoing with
the sound of falling.
Listen. She is still breathing.



If I Die Before I Wake (and God Bless)

God Bless London's damp
road map rung over every
head there is and God bless
blue suits, roadkill leaves sky
holes in concrete and God bless
midnight, time slips down the hands
of a clock and God bless new borns
echoing and God bless painting the
town red. God bless red and dusty
leaded windows and God bless net
curtains hanging out like brides and

God bless the police car's doppler
song and God bless midnight, forever
in winter and God bless mother and
God bless father and God bless the first
I loved to die. God bless every suicide in
Grimsby and God bless what it means to
be a man and God bless father, who only

prays for his children and God bless A roads
and the transpenine express. God bless
everyone who ever loved a place like heroin
and God bless getting on with getting on with
getting on with. God bless everyone who

promises to pray for me and God bless mother
and God bless father and God bless the moon,
which is the same wherever you are and God

bless the equilateral triangle between my
feet, my soul, and her silver squinting eye.



Gogyohshi-ku

Walking in the road with parcel in hand
I was made aware of the light
that brings us all to bloom.

When the fruit is ripe, it falls –
When the dandelion's blown, it ripens;

As the rising breeze
lifts the poplar branch to dancing,
so I spread my fingers

Her Account

In the Westminster Quaker Meeting, we
gathered the reams of our lives and
laid them in one line,
in silence.
The silence was precise.

Over lunch, we pored over
the balance sheets of our love affairs
for the record books –
to be confined to future
speculation.

Now we know our sins as they know us,
and our debts have been totalled,
with just one flaw:
through the cracks, there is light
that we still feel the need
to account for.

Light finds us in our silence.
It shines down in our silence,
and the silence –
the silence is accurate.

The Art of Forgetting Just Enough

Barbican Young Poets 2015

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Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

A pioneering cultural alliance between an arts centre and conservatoire, transforming 21st century creative learning.

Our role

Connector

We bring together our world class artistic partners with students and communities in groundbreaking new ways to create inspiring arts experiences for all.

Catalyst

We are using our 30 years' experience of working in east London to launch cultural partnerships that offer outstanding creative opportunities for every young person across eight east London boroughs.

Curator

We create new routes for people to take part in the arts – from first experiences to higher education programmes and professional training – developing interests, skills, confidence and careers.

Our pledge to young people

We will:

Help you access and afford outstanding arts events:

By offering over 50,000 accessibly priced tickets to Barbican events for 16-25 year olds and putting on free events every year at the Barbican and in your community

Give you a platform to be creative:

By delivering inspirational, hands on arts experiences for every 8-16 year old in east London by 2020 and giving you opportunities to perform and showcase your work.

Enable you to gain skills and get jobs in a 21st century economy:

By providing arts and training opportunities for over 10,000 young people and artists by 2020.

Listen to what you want:

Programming events by, with and for you. Listening to your ideas and supporting the teachers and artists working with you to bring them to life.

barbican.org.uk

young
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16–25

Over 50,000 tickets a year
Available for just £5, £10 or £15

It's free to join, simply visit
barbican.org.uk/youngbarbican

Interested in becoming a Barbican Young Poet?

Barbican Young Poets is a poetry workshop and community for budding young writers, which gives you the chance to create, craft and perform poetry and spoken word.

Led by internationally renowned poet and performer Jacob Sam-La Rose, you will explore diverse aspects of writing and performance, drawing on your passions, personal experience and the sights and sounds of the Barbican's rich artistic programme to develop and showcase your work in the Centre.

'I only have gratitude and love for this programme! I hope it continues like this (encouraging, stimulating, FREE) forever. Extremely important to support young artists and artist communities.' (Poet, 2013-14)

Barbican Young Poets is for young people aged 14-25. It runs between September and March each year, and is free to take part in.

Applications for September 2015 open in July.

Email creative.learning@barbican.org.uk to find out more.



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