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**For Those with
Collages for
Tongues**

Barbican Young Poets 2018

**GUILD
HALL
SCHOOL**

Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

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.

Our programme helps young people find their creative voice. Providing access to the best arts events, platforms for creativity, opportunities to gain skills, jobs, and working together to bring their ideas to life.

We bring together our world-class artistic partners with students and communities in ground breaking new ways to create inspiring arts experiences.

We create new routes for people to take part in the arts from first experiences to higher education programmes and professional training.

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

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow through young people's arts and education programmes across every art form - creating platforms for creativity, programming with and for young people.



The City of London provides the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre

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For Those with Collages for Tongues

Barbican Young Poets 2018

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Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning is delighted to welcome you to the Barbican Young Poets Anthology 2018; a poetry collection that showcases the work of our immensely talented community of young artists.

At Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning, we work with young people to unlock their creativity and raise their confidence and self-esteem. All of the work you read inside this anthology has been created by emerging artists aged 18-25, living in east London and further afield, who have been working together as part of a community of young poets for the past 6 months.

The Barbican Young Poets come together for fortnightly workshops at the Barbican between September and March each year. Under the inspiring leadership of artist and educator Jacob Sam-La Rose, with the expert assistant-tutorship of Rachel Long, they explore a diverse range of poetic genres, styles and themes in order to push their developing voices in new artistic directions. The poets study the craft of writing, and they explore, through collaborative project opportunities, the power of performing their material live. Through this process, each poet goes on a journey, discovering what is unique about their own artistic voice, supporting and challenging each other, and evolving together as part of a collective of young artists.

2018 is a significant year of activity for the Barbican Young Poets, as the Barbican's centre-wide focus upon *The Art of Change* is a theme that has resonated deeply with them, producing some outstanding creative work. *Subject to Change* invites twelve young poets to speak to our changing world, one for every month of 2018. Each poet creates and performs a poem, which is then published online; by the end of the year we will have what one of our poets has dubbed a "poetic timeline" – a digital representation of 2018 through the issues that our poets feel require an urgent poetic response. In May, the poets take to the stage of the Barbican's Pit theatre with their very own production, which sees Jacob Sam-La Rose and the poets collaborating with co-founders of Boy Blue, Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy and Michael 'Mikey J' Asante, alongside dancers from the company, in what promises to be an electrifying exploration of poetry and dance and will be a UK premiere. If that weren't enough, towards the end of the year, the poets will display their work in an exhibition inside the Barbican Library, in collaboration with other Barbican Guildhall Young Creatives, to celebrate National Poetry Day 2018.

The Barbican Young Poets are, more than ever, drivers for change, and we are delighted to see their work connecting with and inspiring ever broader readers, audiences and participants.

On behalf of all of the participating poets and Creative Learning staff involved in delivering the programme, in particular programme lead, Lauren Monaghan-Pisano, I would like to offer a very warm thanks to Jacob and Rachel for their commitment and dedication to each of the poets. Jacob and Rachel's passion for each and every young person they work with makes an extraordinary contribution to their development, as they flourish as young people, and push the boundaries of what it means to be an artist making work today, and in the future.

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.

Jenny Mollica

Head of Creative Learning
Barbican and Guildhall School of Music & Drama

You are now holding in your hands an ongoing celebration of poetry and community. Perhaps you're viewing it as a PDF on a screen, but for the purposes of this introduction, I'll consider the attention you're paying to the text to be as direct a connection as holding a printed copy. The poems herein give life to a broad range of backgrounds, perspectives and relationships with poetry, as embodied by the various members of this year's Barbican Young Poets' programme. This anthology as a whole is a testament, not simply to the programme, but also to its individual constituents and everything they bring to each writing challenge, each workshop, each performance, each professional engagement, each opportunity to push themselves beyond whatever they thought they were capable of and discover what else might be possible.

In noting the strengths of our community, it's important to acknowledge the input of this year's guest tutors and catalysts: R A Villanueva and Endy McKay, who have moved our poets' minds, bodies and hearts with boundless generosity of spirit and attention. Also, new to the team: we celebrate and welcome Lauren Brown, joining the Creative Learning Department, who alongside Lauren Monaghan-Pisano ensures the smooth running of all the practical and essential moving parts that a programme like this would not survive without. Of course, I must give thanks to and for my assistant tutor, Rachel Long, and the continued investment of warm heart and sharp eye she has made over the years.

This year marks a milestone in our continued evolution. In our early years, we often showcased work in the Barbican's Pit theatre; this year we'll be returning to the Pit for an extended production of staged work, collaborating between poetry and dance. Barbican Young Poets are represented in and around the Centre in evermore fantastic ways, not to mention the impact the poets have on the wider world of poetry, producing events and facilitating workshops beyond the bounds of the building. We're 9 years old this year, and yet with so much on the horizon, it feels as if we're just getting started.

Jacob Sam-La Rose

Artistic Director / Lead Facilitator

Lauren Monaghan-Pisano

Creative Learning Producer (Theatre, Dance and Poetry)



How Long is a Person(’s Body) Conscious after Death?

Sappho, *Fragment 19*

The answer depends] largely on how long
the body has spent] WAITING in its breathing and hearing;
its trust] IN SACRIFICES before the end, even
after] HAVING GOOD (in its opinion) words
and acts to] back it up; for however long as there
are things left to say] BUT GOING down to silence or
noise isn’t easy,] FOR WE KNOW
nothing] OF WORKS and what happens to them.

Do not speculate and weep.
Do what you need to do and pray – they are
the same thing, like television
and prophecy.

A manual
is not an answer, and rituals are not mausoleums;
they are houses made of glass and sponge.
Your ignorance is a spider and a tongue,
trying to freeze and be a bomb
at the same time

Suspension

You cut through the white corridor joining Science and Drama,
faces expecting your fists to draw blood at the speed of dark. Everything quakes
at your presence, air thick as a sea of reeds. Your hands ready
to make another boy’s face a tambourine for defiling your crown;
your afro a Byzantine halo: full and gleaming with fire.

The Green House

i was in the area the other day and didn't say hello. i'm sorry. my heart feels oak, feels breach, feels footfall. are the walls still white, are they slamming the doors. my brother still calls you the green house, remember when they cut his umbilical cord in your front room my mum still bleeds. i can feel your shutter eyes tense don't look at me like that. we loved you and now the only smell we recognise is theft. do you miss our smell. cumin. resentment. fresh linen. does the mould flower in the bathroom. are you flush with their sweat, close to them, devoted. remember my mum used to lean into you. she wasn't your first but she meant it. she made you moan and creak, you were radiant with long haul. green. how i cried after i left. are the sofas big. did they set you in contemporary algidness. in our new house, all the handles are missing. every time we enter or exit we have to shoulder the doors down and build them back up. we could leave the frames empty but home isn't home without angle or break. you know that. a splinter sigh. how i howl without your skin. how i still yearn to crawl in it.

Being Born

you arrive where you wanted to be
but do not feel you exist

in the gaze of a train window
somewhere between its view and its reflection
you flicker, Delphic, in and out and again
a body distinct from anchor

am i an echo?
i've seen people leave, pipe-dream drunk.
black out. come back, after years.
do i only exist in angled mirrors?

two hours swell and chase you from the ordinary

you leave;
and on the way home, an answer, it rises
sharp, wordless





Consequences of How We Are

This Black woman rides her bike home, is asked, "How much?"
Back in her flat alone she does not eat for three days then
she binges until her belly is a bridge for her tears.
This Black woman who was tired lived,
she heard the roof of a coffin was a ceiling,
her reflection was a bullet that almost killed her.
This Black woman was stopped from swallowing Sertraline, Ibuprofen and Cocodamol,
the doctor asked if she was really depressed.

This Black woman dates a white man - she is too black, thinks a fetish is better than
lonely,
she never feels at home in her body,
she has a weave, it is disgusting.
She wore black because she was invisible,
made forearm scars with her mother's kitchen knife because talking was not strong.
She thought about this when the attendant offered her half price bleaching cream in
the hair shop.

This Black woman dates a Black man he says her darkness is pretty then he leaves her,
she has natural hair, it is disgusting,
She has a flat batty she hides from naked.

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than lonely,
she is stopped from swallowing Sertraline, Ibuprofen and Cocodamol, the doctor asks
if she is really depressed.
Her reflection is a bullet that almost kills her,
she hears the roof of a coffin is a ceiling.
This Black woman who is tired lives,
she binged until her belly was a bridge for her tears,
back in her flat alone she did not eat for three days.
This Black woman rode her bike home, was asked, "How much?"

Pick a Part, Your Body

You choose collarbone because that's the part of your ex you remember most vividly.

Now you are like the man, the black man
from that episode of Hannibal. The one that tore himself from the eye,
that mural of stitched bodies.

That is to say you are pulled apart, alone now.

You claim her collarbone as your own, understand your body by
remembering hers.

That skin, brown
soft too soft for something so tightly draped over bone.
Delicate like how you imagine airplane trails in the sky to be.

If you traced them with your finger or lips, you wonder
if the whole sky would give way
under your touch.

What Are We?

a sunrise as in a half peeled orange/as in
candle through rose spectacles/as in an unrehearsed smile
on OXO pier/as in the first offering of day/as in the
leftover beauty from night/as in our lips, occupied
behind drawn curtains/as in holy/as in salvation
forbidden as in fruit/as in probably wasn't an
apple/as in an incognito browser/as in my fingers, on
your lips/as in a love/as in many types of love/as in
this love/as in mum's look/as in THE look/as in a dammed
heart
from as in a shed skin/as in a home
left/as in Ubers/as in the cost of a Croydon postcode/as
in your scent in my beard/as in the kiss that follows
your name/as in ackee taste heavenly fresh/as in canned
ackee is dead/as in a line started in the sky
breaking as in fraying rope/as in the sharpness of
bone/as in stomachs at war with food/as in bottles of rum
emptied alone/as in no "have you eaten today?"/as in
dying elephants/as in night must bleed out before day
begins/as in a blink when clouds passover/as in my
misplaced words/as in what these hands are best at.



Jeremiah 'Sugar J' Brown



Ghazal

The river Brid may have been born of a well. It roars
as we leave her; an angry bride, her groom drunk in sleep.

The baby died so we crossed rivers and bogs where herons
flew and houses were built. The baby died asleep.

They named her for stars, for distant dimming light. Morning
found her sweatless in a room bright and empty of sleep.

The little box gleams as her mother cries. We stand enough pews back,
stay the right time. I don't ask Da if he watched us sleep.

A cheerful man with cheerful curls and a peached wife. A cheerful man
smiles through any marital strife. A cheerful man calls Da to cry to sleep.

They built from their grief a home on the Blackwater. They built a home
that flames took. Now they lie apart, alone, and wait for sleep.

In a dirt pub on Oxford Street, Da speaks of being a friend to a yet dead
man, of telling him it's lost. Da speaks of that that won't sleep.

He was named for Christmas, for trips to town, for drunk midnight mass.
His final act to wake; Nollaig walked to the river to sleep.

Petition to Hackney Council to Re-Open London Fields Lido

After RA Villanueva

Because rain on water-skin

Because the lanes lap east and west-ways, chest open to sky

Because 20p lockers and forgetting cold tiles on my feet

Because for the hiding in showers, looking at plasters on men's feet

Because I drank wine and called him last night

Because alien webbed heads, gasping tears in air, scissoring from water

Because the park is lonely

Because the hours have a new stretch in them

Because cold hair means useful mornings

Because we all are flatfooted and highlegged

Because there's two pints in and it'll rinse me clean for the morning

Because we'd sit after, Alex reading Nietzsche, falafel crumbs in her hair, our
towels greening

Buoyancy

"The poem is a tombstone for buoyancy. Future tense."
Oscar James Boal

A year before my grandfather died,
I left the Philippines in sunlight
with him at his best:

lounging on his couch
fresh from a hospital bed, white shirt,
content like a Persian cat. On our way to NAIA

I imagine him remembering the student nurses
who claimed he wouldn't make it home
this time, for sure. Their confusion is his triumph.

The following year, my father, soaked in whiskey,
mentions how he made sure our birthdays
fell on the same day, perk of a caesarean birth,

to keep the family name alight, though lately
this has zoomed into keeping Lolo's name alight,
his flame recorded inside me.

I'll make another snarky comment at work
towards an unknowing customer, and I'll believe.
The lion was more bridge than coincidence.

I've yet to see the photos from the funeral,
still unread messages on my phone.
I think I'll keep it that way.



Closed Fists and Open Hugs

Swigs of Sol amplify my Titos' voices.
When this world commands you to hold your tears, Troy,
you listen. Let them be sweat
for your forehead and chest and legs when they tire.
Heavy labour equals hard work. Let them answer
questions you don't need to ask.

I know boys who followed suit. They start
by talking about mechanical things,
delve inside cars because there
they wish to see themselves: rust firmed, organs stiff,
easy to measure and replace should it be necessary.

I've stopped listening to the drunks.
I'll never live to be the definition of male
they so want out of me. They say it's a shame
because I'm wasting a face that can make women cry.

I know what it's like to cry. I know what it's like
to cry over trash. It taught me to believe
in strength but not in a brick wall,
in loving but never for granted,
in hugging bodies in a bid to keep them whole.
It taught me to never close my hand to bump your fist
because holding your hand, palm on palm,
finger between finger, might keep you
even for an extra second, listening to me
trying to reach out.



Belly Work

The job is better in winter,
when she transforms when unwinding from the cold,
shedding nylon jacket and over-washed jeans.

In the wrinkles of a pause,
the doll in Descartes' suitcase
climbs out and goes to work.

The office is candlelit.
Within it, she poses atop her pedestal,
a sweating ice sculpture,
with a strange body in her reflection.

Downstairs, lunch is being heated.
The smell of her colleague Zara's black beans
is carried up by the extractor fan.
The ivory girl clenches her stomach -
discomfort a distraction,
a turned face.
She kneads her belly until it translates as desire.

Her customer is incontinent in excitement
He apologises for the smell,
uses the shower, three towels
and leaves her to clean.
Her fingers smell of food she did not eat.

When the stage is set again,
she returns to stillness.
Pygmalion's bride waiting at the altar
with a calcified smile,
ready to wake with a yank of the veil.

Language of Oya

She told her children about lace:
it takes time to knit net curtains.

Trousseau chests dressed in sheer voile,
crystal hidden in the bottom drawer.

She draped the walls in crochet,
made shadows from caput cloth.

Within days, walls became bodies,
their heads wound with bent tulips.

She told her husband to eat,
watched him scoop cow stomach.

Congeaed tripe soup that careened
and laughed as it flew down drains.

She wept for the waste,
her station assumed by the kitchen window.

Her mother noticed she slept in aprons,
before drifting back to the pane, hands on belly.

The moon tanned her face, counting
young girls home late, almond blossom in their hair.

She tore her mother's nets
without first learning first how to hook oya.

Cravings

Bisexual (adjective): "Sexually attracted to both men and women".

Some days, this vegetarian craves
flesh. Prowls the meat aisle, inspects
drumsticks, chops, succulent steaks. Imagines
sinking into the bite, the full-stomach weight,
the sizzling tension of a hen party
thrusting sweaty notes into Chippendale G-strings,
daring to touch forbidden skin, prodding
cling-wrapped sausages to dimples.

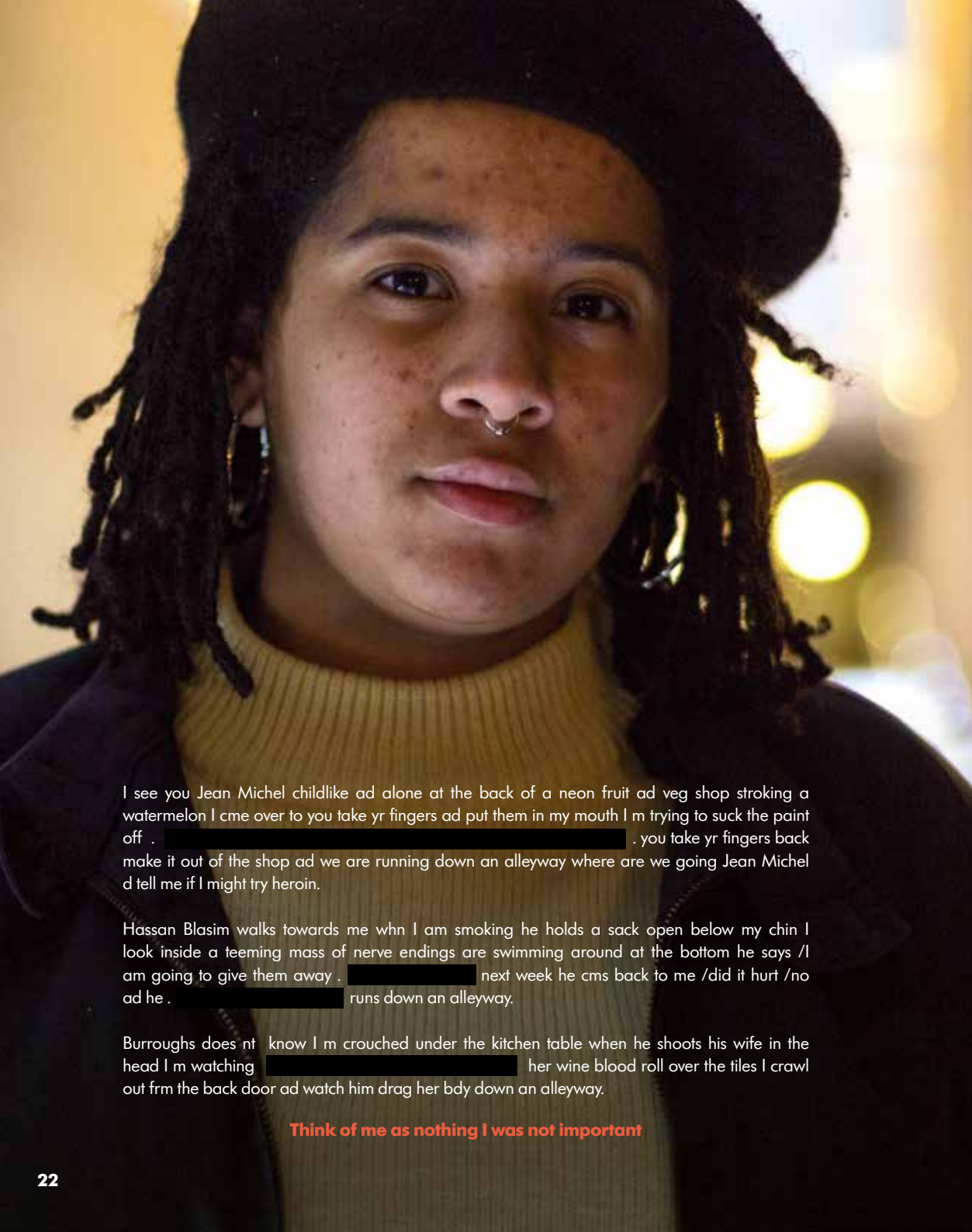
In these times of hetero-carnivore cravings, this vegetarian's girlfriend
warms coconut rice until steam fills the kitchen, plays alchemist
with olive oil and lemon juice over moon-blushed tomatoes and split
avocado.

Serves bowlfuls, eats, then brings honey with them to the bedroom.

Public Worship

kiss me on the train amongst strangers don't flinch my rosary fingers
circling your neck counting your pulse woman x woman *let them
watch* let them stare this hallelujah rhythm lift the lip of your skirt your
hips my call to prayer part your legs watch me kneel i've been waiting
for this anointing let them judge *let them fuss* let them squeeze eyes
shut disgust we are teaching psalm spasms and hymns this quivering
thrum our public communion let me savour your manna here bless
me with your song let it fill the whole carriage-church this yin and yin
symphony goddess x goddess let them hear you hum to my praying in
tongues they do not understand us as holy calling out *blasphemy* we
are coming unstuck split by transport police neon yellow *oh let us
wail* hard brows *just one more song* let them threaten prison let
them name us sinful women this is homecoming heaven i will pay the
sentence for public satiation if only to savour again the music of your
elated confession





I see you Jean Michel childlike ad alone at the back of a neon fruit ad veg shop stroking a watermelon I cme over to you take yr fingers ad put them in my mouth I m trying to suck the paint off . you take yr fingers back make it out of the shop ad we are running down an alleyway where are we going Jean Michel d tell me if I might try heroin.

Hassan Blasim walks towards me whn I am smoking he holds a sack open below my chin I look inside a teeming mass of nerve endings are swimming around at the bottom he says /I am going to give them away . next week he cms back to me /did it hurt /no ad he . runs down an alleyway.

Burroughs does nt know I m crouched under the kitchen table when he shoots his wife in the head I m watching her wine blood roll over the tiles I crawl out frm the back door ad watch him drag her bdy down an alleyway.

Think of me as nothing I was not important

Down by the lagoon two women lie on top of each other
one is kissing at the other's neck
the kissed watches as the sky turns from violet to blue

Water on the fingers swilling water down the fingers

fingers

put water to mouth

Throat bulging as swallowing

Carrying face lips to tongue

tong ue to
th igh t eeth
Pres sin g

saliva and lagoon
swallowed

/what do you think will happen to this place/

Your body becomes full of soil I hear rustling deep inside

I pull back watch and as a crane flower so pure climbs out of your throat

reaches for me with its bud

Your body becomes limp

Falls into my arms and I carry you miles

begin to dig

Your body becomes something I bury

b ur ied
Leave soil at yo ur o pen mou th

for the crane flower bobbing in the breeze above hot earth
it looks like your voice if your voice would move

**In all the paintings of paradise that I have seen hung against
white gallery walls there is little or no recollection of us being
there but I remember**

Comment Slip for a Café in a Bookshop on Charing Cross Road

You guys have the best coffee of any place
in London. And your staff are all so smiling
and generous with their time. I've never felt
so valued as a customer. Fantastic. Also the
big windows that let in so much white light,
and all the bounty, drizzled and sugared on the
- is it oak? - table. I like that we are supposed to
choose our own cakes. Pleasantly old-fashioned. Your
disabled access could be - wait. There's a lift. Of course.
I've now learnt to disregard how easily you get into
my head. You know all the clothes I like to wear,
all the places I buy them from. Your staff are all
so smiling, and the vegan option tastes almost
almost. This version of lonely is almost unparalleled.
You really are the natural extension of book. I really
do relish the kindness of your drinks menu. I beg
you, in this dense world,
to bookshop me
for all emergency. Fantastic. We are tongued yeast,
activated late. This community is a real community,
beg beg beg.

Gang Idea

girls with skinny wrists who fondle the backs of their throats between fingers and thumb
girls with skinny wrists who chew their hair like it's syn-free
girls with skinny wrists who learnt Pythagoras to measure their acutes, their apexes
girls with skinny wrists who practice spitting and have seen god in the toilet bowl
skinny girls with wrists they can't reach
girls who churn instead
girls with skinny wrists who piss in buckets
girls who burn a half-inch of finger every day as an advent sacrifice
girls with skinny wrists who eat cornflour pudding by the pig-ton
girls with skinny who are tired and forget the
and girls with a battery hen loose in their belly
and the beautiful skinny girls and the rest
and the girls whose blue veins bend over skinny wrists backwards, twisting in an ecstasy of
becoming
girls, skinny, with wrists translucent as bleached hair backlit
whose breath is skinny
girls who live with me, take turns queuing at the door and never knock
wrestling
who taste like skinny
and cry for help in empty town halls,
with skinny voices.



When Grandma Wrestled with a Cow in Lydford Gorge, 1966

grandma saw the cow flailing and jumped into the gorge
grabbed the damp of a furred belly and pulled relentlessly,
gripped the curve of the hind legs, round head baying,
groaning, gestation of the cow from the water
who fell, like a kid, from the cliff, from the sky
great lump falling down through the rock and green.

she kept its head above the water, beast in the cauldron
of the devil, its velveteen eyelids flicking, reeling to the deep,
she birthed it like a calf from the gorge,
it writhing, knees knocking, from the cold of it.
she stood firm from fear of her husband's loss,
her clothes all heavy with the weight of the wet,
her bovine angel held stiff, in her arms, resolute

that it should live, rapt in the sunlight.
it died there, the jersey, in the water, horns lolling,
thick tongue lapping, rising sullen when hooked out
by the men from the village, with ropes and calloused hands,
as if unruly baptised, its skin loose and sagging
bow-boned, now bric-a-brac of the gorge.

they were in the water together for six hours,
that's a kind of love, surely, held in each other's embrace.
a few years later, a squaddie had fallen in,
after a few pints at the pub. it didn't have planking
on the side, the water was swarming to take him.
grandma got pleurisy. her lungs never recovered.

Pair of Red Lines

had I the parallels of these two fine lines
dwelling in the half ways and lost versions
I would have spoken, sheared myself
my fear flapping day in, day out
like the potatoes I'd polished to gunmetal
the thought of you gone is a contradiction
contained. the tenderness of strangers
drones its way to poignancy
yammer and smut across the room
condemned me to sneezes, snot and mucus
the inadequacy gutted, worn, strained
how much I could care. with mute discretion
I was flimsy like a cast away sock
misplaced, mouldering in your bedside drawer
I couldn't bear. one blanket- felt green-
the dank sweated love

mapped at their inconsistencies
of you, that I'd shed like a fur
from the skin of my peeled thumb
kissed the paring knife in my fist
cannot bear. it begs to be
a wall of coughs and sniffs
a hum of tiny snapping mouths that
made me sick when you left
I couldn't get the grunt out of my throat
through thin plastic. it astonished you
I fell under the stink train, head by toe
the possessions you borrowed, and
it was the loss of the smell of you
held traces of you
you couldn't bear to speak.

Before Leaving

"Do you see? The bones of stars are falling"
Richard Georges, *Ghazal of Guyana*

Leaving. Qaraami diffuses through a radio station. The first time you notice this city above us, bones unhinge. Here is a communal commitment to leaving. A cousin lays in a hospital bed, his spine leaning. The way oud strings curl backwards, stop playing. His frame bequeaths a city of scaffolding. A disc slips out of place. Before

leaving. Pre-displacement settings still doesn't feel like home. Any phone call that starts +252 is an echo – let it ring. The first time you notice this sky of skeletons is on a rooftop somewhere. Another disc slips. There are enough holes in the sky for it to fold. Before





Language

On my report, the teacher said *Josh is a competent linguist*.
I didn't know what it meant so I assumed it was an insult.
Language can be like running through a bush. Sometimes the bush is on fire.
Both of our tongues are wet. Both of our jaws are open at some point:
in sleep, awe, shock, recoil. The M6 opening up like a throat.
The horizon like a held breath. The back row of Maths, something opening
like a jar as I understand what x is. The first time I understood ex as a prefix,
it was in front of the word military. The first time I understood ex as a person,
there were words spilling like crumbs all over the bedding I helped pick out.
I understand bedding, in the context of keeping a rabbit, to mean straw.
I understand straw to be flammable, the callous on my right thumb
to be from trying, too many times, to light a broken lighter.

Tombstone

When I am dead, I will come back as debris at the bottom of the canal –
bike, shopping trolley, microwave. You will only be able to see me
on a cold day when the sun is shining so that all the edges
of the buildings look sharper and the detail of the chain link
will be so clear that it will be like the pricking of the wind
against your cheeks. You will be walking along the towpath.
Going somewhere – Co-op, bus stop, your cousin's.
You won't be paying attention. Your pace will be hurried;
you will pass more magpies than people. You will wonder
why it's so quiet today, so cold and so clear.
It won't be until you are about to leave the towpath –
either Bennett St, Derby Rd, West Park – that you will notice
how clear the water of the canal is for once. How the sun
and the cold conspire to show you something: just how full
the canal has always been, of just pure stuff.
I will be with you then, in the spirit
of the shape of a bike,
shopping trolley, microwave.
Sunk, rusted, gone.

DNA

Our voices fluctuate
together like stock charts:
swamps of shouts dissolve
to one, proclaiming
We're by far the greatest team
the world has ever seen.
Sound waves might be invisible
but somehow we all know
how many rounds
to sing before our voice
crashes back to mud.
It seems the die-hards might be
right when they say
the team is in their blood:
I don't remember when I came to know
these legend words, but there was
no season when I didn't.

Montagues and Capulets

While the ball's behind the bike-shed
and someone crawls through the brambles
to grab it back, there's time for you
to say "you're pretty good for a girl -
we could get married one day".

The ball returns to a hero's welcome,
but fleetingly I see beyond
the fact that you are Chelsea
and we are both just seven -
I see our school uniforms become
the cardigans that grandparents wear.



Alexia Kirov

Her

After *Tree* by Clare Shaw

today she wants to drop the playbook,
let it fall like a beat, or a body.
she cannot hold on.

she wants to wash or scrub away each layer
except – her. no matter how little is left.
no more

feeding of lines down tongues
or silently arranging hands in laps.
the earnest performance of good.

she envies those naked
in personality.

she will speak herself into existence
even if she goes unheard. but not today –
she is very tired.

she wants to laugh.
she wants to be touchable.

she knows who she is
but she won't surface
and, maybe,

she's been
holding her breath
for too long.

today,
in classrooms and streets,
she shakes and recites

her own lines for summoning
something to bring her out
or take over or break open

or failing that,
sleep.

and after that,
her.



I Eat for You

When my dad's voice hits that frequency
I bite into my mother's food
and it tastes just as good.

No matter what he breaks in us
there are no shards in our bowls.

My mother's cooking cannot be fractured
by his earthquake throat.

My mother's hands
are creased with soil, fingers clutching
vegetables pulled from the garden. She pours
crisp water over the leaves, cleans, cuts,
drums the chopping board

and casts into the wok.
At the stove
commanding heat
conjuring steam
facing the roar of fire
she makes food.
Gives us life again.

Hands scored by kitchen knives
and spitting oil,
she trained in her mother's kitchen
like her mother's mother,
ready to face the men at the table.
After homework, we gathered.
He took the head,
she the silent foot and yet
she still shrank to make space for him.

But you'd already dominated the room.
At our evening meals,
breaking, giving,
you are in our hands,
in our mouths.

Bowls must be hollowed
in respect for all those who made our food
so I eat for you –

I used to eat from you.

I studied, you cooked.
Now I have a degree,
but not your meals in my kitchen.

Cooking memories from memories
have I learnt enough,
Mamee, am I ready?



Before You Touch (A Bop)

After Jane Hirshfield's *The Problem*

The problem asked if you'd like a bath.
The problem softened at your childhood
photographs. The problem wanted to trace
your cheeks as you slept and meant this
with her full chest but the problem
set herself on fire to coax you in –

you touch.

You replayed each collision back.
The problem, how do you do it like that?
You shrugged, it was all you. But the problem
does not believe in marriage or, she said,
in only one partner. And you kept talking
about teaching if the test was late. And clenched
your jaw when the problem would not commit
but asked you to spread yourself open, before

you touch.

She walks into your hotel room, tugs dress
to expose collarbone, drops it completely,
words like yours and you repeat all mine
and tonight you both eat her whole
without realising that makes this
the last time

you touch.

Delicate

Freckles tiptoe the ridge of his nose:

this is what he would give the children
I tell him I cannot have.

He researches options for those whose
bodies try to disown them. Still,

my friend has a new kitten who is
skeletal against my fingertips.

I am not sure if I can be trusted
to look after delicate things.

There is a fissure in my chest
that my mother falls into, again

and again, the thumping like a child
saying

this is not how you love.

Raining Again

Listening to Staind,
Raining Again
in the bathroom
here comes my solo
air guitar
doing Jimmy Airbender
I was going all the way inside

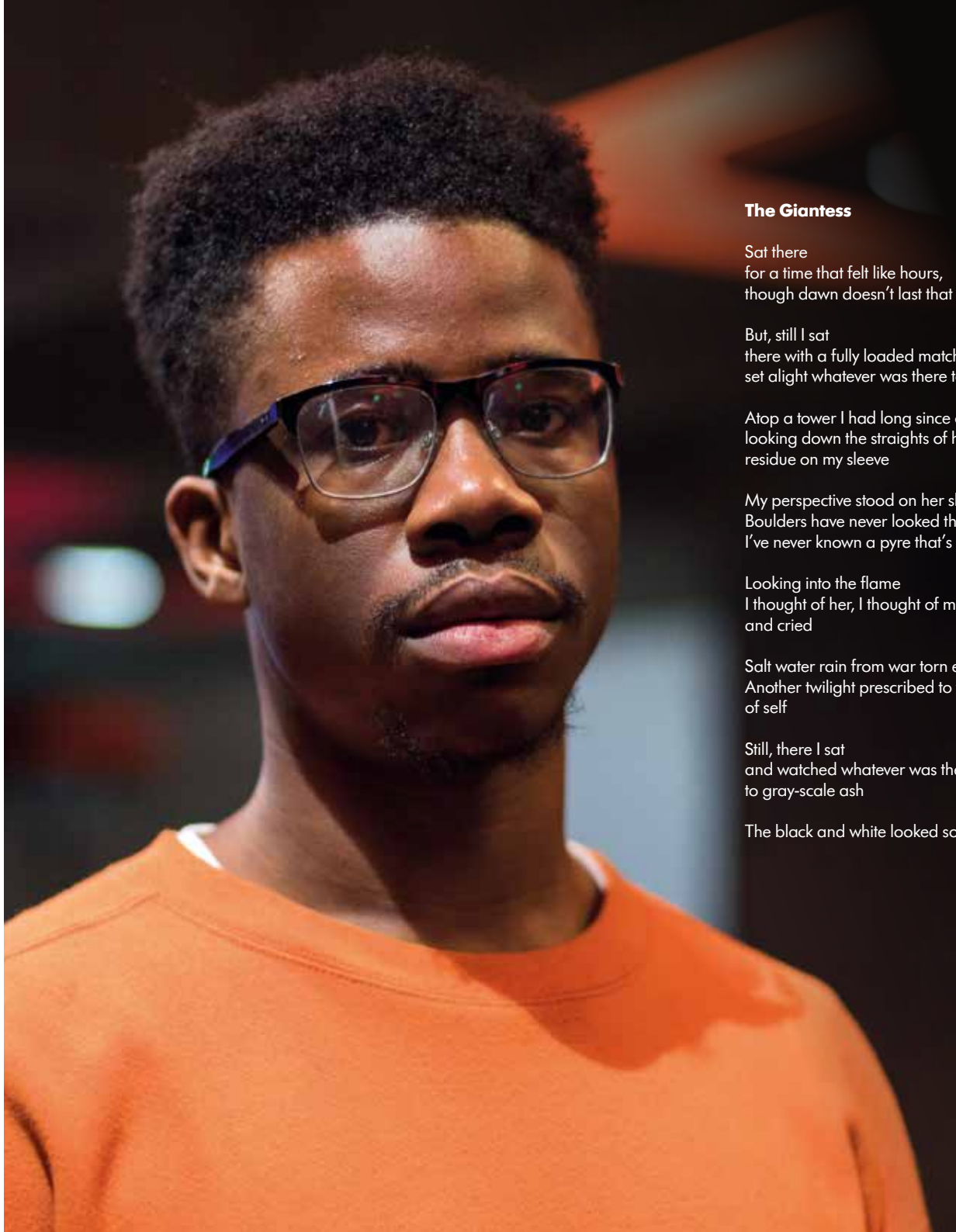
then. To my
surprise, here we find
another source for argument
consistently adamant to never miss a
solo, never miss a chance to
douse our relationship in copper
condiment, we don't struggle to find the seasoning.

Next thing I remember, we're in the front room
arguing.
I don't remember what about, I just remember we were
arguing.
Through hindsight I see you trying to hold a son
close with hands fashioned to push away.
Mental emotional triceps stressed and strained, pressed,
you're triggered by the broken home I drew.
I told you
to stop going through my things.

You tell me
"The devil has a hold of me."
I ask you
"What does that even mean?"
Why must our evenings be so volatile? Why
must our speaking be so pain?

I know you know love isn't meant to feel like this
why must the weather always be like this?

I was just listening to my music
enjoying the guitar
solo.
I think you need to chill.



The Giantess

Sat there
for a time that felt like hours,
though dawn doesn't last that long

But, still I sat
there with a fully loaded matchbox and
set alight whatever was there to burn

Atop a tower I had long since outgrown,
looking down the straights of her chest piece
residue on my sleeve

My perspective stood on her shoulders.
Boulders have never looked this small.
I've never known a pyre that's stood this tall.

Looking into the flame
I thought of her, I thought of ma
and cried

Salt water rain from war torn eyes
Another twilight prescribed to these clashes
of self

Still, there I sat
and watched whatever was there to turn
to gray-scale ash

The black and white looked so vibrant.



One For Sorrow

Look. Sorrow is circling my home.

A sparrow is perched on my throne.

A swelter is ridding my crops of moisture.

No spark has been spared an extended feature.

- Why can't you see? - This self-established centrepiece is a beast of a creature with a ravenous greed.

I see Sorrow circling my home. Its propellant

is yet unknown. It's gnawing at my nature -

a dog to a bone. Look. If you do,

you'll catch Sorrow. *It's circling my home.*

*How long must you stay?
Leave and lure Sorrow away.
Let me live, I pray.*

Horse High

He's grown up around combustion;
The heir to a kingdomless hilltop throne.

He's dramatic irony at its finest;
The solitary spectacle-of-an-army, wrapped in the ailment of
being alone.

He's the prince-of-a-pauper,
The jester-of-a-mutated-clone,

The friend to his villains and *The Protector Of The Prey*;
Leave him to mount his sovereign and snow-capped seat, his hilltop is his
Everest,

And *this* is his home.

He's the marvel of this seamless scribble,
The gravity-bound ocean of a superficially lit rock, stubbornly set up high.

We can't help but wonder
What force caused him to, so instinctively, emplane that horse in the sky.

Spring struggle into his bubble
Of battle; as Mother Nature lowers him into Earth's grounded core.

This world war may just be his unlucky third.
But *it's a stunning sight* to see him soar.

We love a bit of combustion.

Fault Lines

your pupil is an anchor the whites engine lights
solid & sturdy made a symphony compress its chest
like lightning inside a bottle a single bird
painted blue learns to speak from Lady Macbeth's
palm sings for the type of rain that cleans



Zahrah Sheikh

Caesarean

Confined in an incubator
jailed for tearing a hole in her,
wanting early release,
but she is not a prison.
She is a home
with a broken window
and he is the stone.

I am the stone,
built to sink
the pit in her stomach
before I opened her curtains.

Now I keep mine closed,
afraid of the light
of spaces wider than the mechanical womb
of an MRI, caressing my shoulders
as I'm unborn the right way, this time.
I leave breech, feet first into uncertainty.

I want to be cocooned in a coffin of silk,
a comfortable lunch
returned to her belly.



Matt L T Smith

Touch Wood

I find Nan in a care home
months after she passed
hidden in Audrey's northern lilt,
her tendency to say "Touch wood,"
tap the wooden table next to her.

I find Nan in my cousin
pausing mid-haircut to reach for a surface.
It isn't wood, but it will do in a pinch.

Mum tells me that back home
in the absence of anything wooden
they would tap their forehead.
I ask her:
"Is that how Andrew got up
after the cow headbut him?"

I'm not as solid,
I get splintered by cricket-bats on a backswing,
a crack in my eyebrow.
Mum does my helmet up tight
before tandem rides through the forest with Dad.

It's there, surrounded by the trees
in our back garden,
I find Nan.

Proxy Love

2) i drink a glass of water and stand in a puddle. koi circle my feet, luminous pennies float like lily pads.

3) my skin is permeable, i am leaking water out of holes in my body.

5) i watch how i flood the space of the little worlds i live between.

7) the octopus pelts a rock at the glass and helps the rest of the fish escape from the tank.

11) if you want, there is a place for us to drink from. it is far away from these seas.

13) i'll guard it with pebbled perimeters and paralleled parrots.

17) god, i am the wilted flower on which the earth rests on its axis.

19) i end up in accident and emergency and they rush me into an operating theatre.

23) my body is broken to a beat, my memories are transferred into a computer screen.

29) i just wanted to be like the other humans.





First Bed after My Boyfriend's

My lover's side curves in this curtained light
like the side of a Japanese tea bowl.
I was a weaver whose lover broke their fingers
but now reaches back to the loom.

My lover's collarbones are straight and smooth
under skin. When he sighs his chest floats
rises up then drifts back and his waist
brushes my skin, and the hairs of my legs.

My last lover's legs were never cold
even if the sides of my feet against them were.
I was an insect trapped in half-dried cement
but now am broken loose and clean.

I do not love my new lover but his side
and the weight of his body are enough.

Ghazal for Gold

Holy men chant by the walls of the temple courtyard, saffron-gold
swathing their arms and hips, their chests bare, saffron-gold

daubed on stone-block temple walls and emerald drapes tossed
above them, sandalwood yellow foreheads and saffron-gold

threads spinning in rosaries of red seeds, red beads to click and count names of god.
Bhagwan! they shout, Bhagwan! "Blessed One!"; "saffron" in Hindi is bhagwa.

Dadiji deep-fried fish fingers and fresh hot chips whenever we went over,
she nourished grandchildren with batter fried so rich it was saffron-gold;

another cousin's wedding and the bride has a fuchsia sari (my mum is shawled in maroon),
her gold nose ring, size of my palm, sways on a glittering chain to an earring made of saffron gold;

maroon shawl with shimmering brocade, red-brown so rich its undertones are gold,
pakore, onion loops in hissing oil, turmeric batter turning deeper saffron-gold.

"Steal the groom's shoes for a gold coin," aunties tell me, ears full of filigree,
slip a jalebi in my hand before lunch and watch the syrup drip on lips saffron-gold.

Remember, Simran, warm fabrics wrapping your chest, yellow metal in nose and ears,
sweets or rosaries rolling between fingers and voices singing saffron-gold.

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