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Welcome to WonderZoo's second anthology and very first online anthology! We've gathered a selection of work from writers and visual artists throughout the south west, including William Telford, Robert Garnham, Julian Isaacs, Harula Ladd and Margaret Corvid - plus newcomers Tamora Dhanipersad and Rielle Madrid and many more.

WonderZoo is a Plymouth-based contemporary arts group with a focus on performance and writing in a spirit of freedom of expression. We run workshops and put on events and performances, currently online via Zoom.

To find out more, visit our website or find us on Facebook and YouTube!

www.wonderzoo.org

Spontaneous Human Combustion at the Funhouse - Robert Garnham

I think I'm going to burst into flames. It's not a feeling I've ever had before. It's not something I've ever thought about, except that one time. I was on a train, and the train manager came over the loudspeaker and said, 'Take care as you alight'. Oh, I thought, I didn't know that was a possibility. But right now, right at this moment, I think I'm going to burst into flames.

I was reading this story the other day about some man who burst into flames. There he was, just minding his own business, when, woof! A dog came in. And then he burst into flames. Ironically, his name was Ash.

He'd called his next door neighbour for help but his next door neighbour had said, 'Liar, liar, pants on fire!'

'And the rest of me, too!', Ash had replied.

And after that, he was quite dead indeed.

It's quite disconcerting knowing that you might go up at any minute. I phoned my ex and I said, 'I'm worried that I'm about to go up!'

'First time for everything, he sighed.

So much for rekindling old flames.

The thing about spontaneous human combustion is that I expect it's the sort of thing you can only do once. I'd spent most of the afternoon in the shower. My friend Beth has always said that I have a warm personality. You don't know the half of it, I thought of replying. 'Let's go to the funfair', I suggested, 'and pretend that it's not about to happen. And by the way, I think I've got heart burn'.

'OK', Beth said.

'OK what?', I asked.

'OK, let's go to the funfair'.

I don't think Beth believed me when I said that I was going to burst into flames. She said it was like one of those stories you read where the lead character is also the narrator, and it's obvious that whatever troubles they faced they had survived, because it was a first hand account. She then told me that she didn't entirely believe in spontaneous human combustion, but that her uncle had once seen spontaneous goat combustion, and for the rest of the day he had had a strange hankering for a lamb roast.

But she didn't believe me, I'm sure of it. On the other hand I'd hate it if my last words were to be,

'see! I told you!'

A friend of mine is a fireman and I phoned him up and I asked him for some advice.

'Well', he said, 'you can always fight fire with fire'.

'But that's no bleeding good!', I said. 'In fact, I reckon it would be counter productive.'

'If you want me to rush round with my big hose', he said, 'then you've got another thing coming'.

We met at a house warming party. As I say, he's a fireman.

Ironically, his name is Bern.

Beth and I arrived at the funfair on a glorious evening. The funfair was on the village green next to the pub and the main road. The setting sun had made the sky all red and the neon and fluorescent lights of the fair contrasted and complemented the glory of the clouds. The world seemed lit with promise as if in competition with the mystique and the firmament of space in its eternal and ethereal wonder, lighting the angular facade of Wetherspoons.

'You haven't dried your hair after your shower', Beth said.

'It's true, I am somewhat moist, but it's all on account of the spontaneous human combustion'.

'Just plan to do it at nine o clock', she said. 'Say to yourself, nine o clock is when I'll go up in flames'.

'Why?', I asked.

'Because then it won't be very spontaneous, will it?"

'It doesn't work like that', I pointed out.

'How would you know, if you've never done it?', she replied.

The funfair had all of the usual accoutrements such as stalls and a dodgems and a couple of rides, but in the middle was a circus tent with a barker standing out the front. And by this I don't mean a dog, but a man dressed as a circus ringmaster. He seemed very excited about the tent behind him, which was decorated in large fluorescent lettering and the word, FUNHOUSE.

Beth and I stood in front of him for a little bit.

'Roll up!', he said, through his loudspeaker. 'Roll up! Gaze in wonder at our Funhouse! Never before in human history has more fun been crammed into one small space! See the amazing Bearded Man! Marvel at the badger who thinks he's on EastEnders! We have relics from the sinking of the titanic, including some of the original ice! We have a horse! And a very large rug which needs putting away! Roll up, ladies and gentlemen, roll up!'

'This might take my mind off the spontaneous human combustion', I pointed out, 'and if it doesn't, they might at least have fire extinguishers'.

'Don't be so blasé', Beth replied.

We went inside. Beth didn't seem very impressed. The first place we went was the Hall of Mirrors. The skinny mirror made me look thin, the wavy mirror made me look wavy, the fat mirror made me look more or less the same. The ghost train was inoperative and instead there was a rail replacement bus. The tunnel of love was just boring.

Beth seemed to be wavering in her appreciation of the Funhouse, yet I, with my lurking inevitable internal combustion, saw the fortune teller sitting on a pouffe in the corner, puffing away on a crafty fag, and thought, hmm, she might know what my future has in store. As I

approached she stubbed out her ciggie in the foil casing of a half consumed Bakewell tart, and I was glad that she didn't immediately reach for a fire extinguisher. She had an expression on her face like a ferret with gout. Her chin looked like it was about to leave her and go and join a much more successful face.

By way of greeting she said, as is customary, 'Hello'.

Her voice was gruff, like that of a trawlerman called Pete. She waved her hands at the lingering smoke.

'Got told off yesterday, didn't I?', she said, 'I was having a gasper. Didn't realise it was against company rules'.

'You didn't see that one coming?', I asked.

'I'm a fortune teller, love. For other people. Don't work on meself, does it? I deal in the mystical workings of the universe, not company health and safety regulations. Now, tell me, love. Have you been to a soothsayer before?'.

'Yes, I have'.

'And what did they say?"

'Sooth', I replied.

She didn't laugh.

'Now, listen', she said. 'Some bastard has nicked me tarot cards. So if you don't mind, I'm going to use a pack of HeMan Top Trumps'.

She opened the pack and laid them on the table between us. Skeletor, was the first card, then came Castle Greyskull. The next card was Skeletor again, followed by another Skeletor. Then Groundskeeper Willie.

'Sorry, love, don't know how that got in there'.

Then came another Skeletor. She looked up at me.

'Let me guess', I said. 'The Skeletor card isn't necessarily an omen of death?'

'Let's put it this way', she replied. 'You'll be saving on winter heating bills'.

Beth and I went and had another mooch around the Funhouse and we both decided to leave. The petting zoo in the corner only had chickens and I'd never wanted to pet a chicken. There were also a couple of cocks, but that's a different matter. I had a go on the Test Your Strength machine but I couldn't even lift the hammer. We were just about to leave when there was a sudden blinding flash of fire and warmth.

'Oh my god!', Beth screamed, 'He's gone up!'

As luck would have it, it was only a fire eater, which I was glad about because I'd been wearing my best shirt. With great panache he spewed tongues of fire, momentarily lighting up the Funhouse and scaring the chickens. Ever the snowman, he pranced and danced, his flaming torch raised to his lips followed by a blinding flash, a sharded explosion whose warmth and brilliance seared into the night throwing shadows as if making us cavemen once more, solitary beasts in search of warmth, or an inhabitant of Milton Keynes.

I'd seen fire eaters before. On holiday at the coast one year, I'd been mesmerised by Marvello and his mastery of flame. The next year, The Great Splendido was similar exuberant, scorcher to the stars. And now here at the Funhouse, this, apparently, was Ben.

He was an interesting character. His face was angular and defined, almost cubist, like a tescos carrier bag full of chisels.

Beth and I stood and watched, entranced by Bens mastery of putting fire in his gob, and

when he finished we both clapped.

'Ah, thanks for that', he said, in a strange high and squeaky voice. 'Just doing my job'.

'You were so good at it!', I said, 'you were literally on fire!'

'Thanks, mister!'

'What I'm really interested in is how you protect your insides from burning up', I said.

'To be honest', he said, 'you do get a bit of blowback, that's how I lost my eyebrows. But as for my insides, yes, there have been one or two occasions where my lunch has been reheated. And I once belched at my Aunt's flat and accidentally roasted her budgie. You know what, though? The best advice I could give is just to relax and not even thinks about it. So that's what I do. I just get on and live my life. Oh, and when I'm practising at home, I'm always careful to turn off the smoke alarm'.

The whole time we were chatting I noticed that his bow tie was smouldering.

'How did you get in to this?', I asked.

'Curry', he replied.

He was quite cute, was Ben. I might even say, hot. I could imagine living with him, and how handy it would be. He'd have a steak and kidney pie cooked in no time. But I knew that it wouldn't last, the two of us. I'd just had the ceiling of my flat repainted. I licked my fingertips and squeezed his bow tie, putting out the tiny flames with a slight hiss.

'I'd better go', he said. 'And get my indigestion tablets'.

'Bye', I whispered.

'Bye'.

At that moment the fortune teller ran over, and said rather breathlessly, 'You will fall in love with a mysterious

'You're too late', I said.

'Damn!'

Beth and I went outside. The sun was starting to set and the funfair was coming alive. On one side, the rides and the stalls, the lights, the neon, the music and the noise. On the other, a demonstration of dogs herding up some geese. The world seemed perfectly normal.

'That's the best advice', Beth said. 'Don't worry. Don't panic, don't prevaricate. Be free to live your life without pondering on something that might not happen. If we let fate dictate our actions, then a fear of the unknown will take over, and we will never be free to enjoy ourselves. Now matter how far fetched our private fears, we mustn't let them ruin the good times.' She took hold of my hands. 'Let's go home', she said, 'It's starting to get a bit chilly'.

I smiled at her and gave her hand a squeeze.

'Yes', I whispered.

And then, all of a sudden, woof!





Gods Grounding - Caitlin Brawn

Watching nights blend into days.
Life, buzzing, as people make their way.
Reaching branches comb the wind, for sweet, songs the air brings.
The silence of secrets carried by the lips of leaves tells us
This is Gods grounding...
The day human life seized.

They've been sent to their rooms.
To talk to their walls, clean up the mess.
Now they must address, to undo what has been done.
Microscopic monsters have this world on its knees.
Hijacked its way into their bodies, homes, lives.
Day by day, trying to flatten natures curve.
Balancing on the edge of a knife, cutting strings, shaking nerves.

Not looking back at the trail of destruction they leave.
Now they all see.
Peering out windows cautiously.
Outside is out of bounds.
The forecast this week... Beautiful sunshine...
thousands of people will die.
Outside they are digging the graves and covering the fresh grassy mounds.

To them, It seems so far away behind a screen.
The black glass, the deceiving gleam.
A piece of cloth over your lips from getting sick,
walking around in bin bags, as all that left is the drags.
Medical magicians, the only chance they have.

What could have been?
What can be?
They've always had the power to change history.
If they put others before their needs.
Shells of buildings, human life squeezed from the arteries of streets,
Many now lay on cold slabs under white sheets.

As people build towers out of toilet roll,
Charter their room, pace their floor...
The big bad wolf will not knock on the door.
With a huff... a puff, a sneeze.... a cough.
Watch the tissues drop.
Slowly drifting through the air, confetti memories,
fragile, thin... Like lived in skin.

Our roots, interconnected veins of the Earth,
to the stars, to the seas.
All things, we are one body.
Limbs ache, scars bleed, trees shed fallen leaves.,
Birds sing harmonies in the big, blue, beautiful sky.

No more heavy smoke choking their lungs, stinging their eyes,
their voices can travel high.

Through stretching rays of sun rays,
light fights its way in.
Kisses through a sheet of glass.
Time will slowly but inevitably pass.
Hold the world as it grieves,
Send prayers like paper aeroplanes across seas,
As in Gods grounding,
we must learn to look out for each other and let our hearts be free.



My taste for rain has changed - Harula Ladd

Too much of a good thing
the rain that came before this
spring, drenching me from sock

to soul. I longed to hang out
on the line pegged by my shoulders
arms flapping in the breeze

'til you could wring me, twist
me, squeeze me and nothing
would come out. Not a sound.

Not a drop. Then the rain
stopped. Now I'm stuck indoors
the sun mocks me, charges

at the defenceless skylight,
goads the birds I can't see but hear
into singing the raucous joys

of spring. While misery pines
for rain, permission to be
damp and heavy. Instead sun

offers a cut and blow dry, birds

catch the loosened wisps of

despair and carry them far

away like a kite lost –

When the rain comes

again I'll be ready for it.

A forest in the palm of my hand

If only in potential.

A collection of tiny big bang beginnings
landing, seeking, breaking, taking.
Or not. Some beginnings birth only
endings, while others birth more

tiny big bang beginnings seeds that hold
the future seed that will birth future generations
of trees not yet brought into being.

A forest
in the palm of my hand.

But where to plant it? And who
will take care of this forest I sow, as it grows?
Will I ever know these potential trees in their full
knee high to the sky majesty?

And who will be the one to bring them
down with the roaring saw of a man made storm?
I clench my hand into a fist, resist –

Listen

To the roots longing to dig deep,
To the leaves longing to drink and bask and dance
Through the seasons,
To the yet-to-be-borns longing to kick
through autumn leaves and climb
Into the loving embrace of branches.

To the forest
in the palm of my hand.



VODOOMOKY

After The Wake - Kate Whitehead

Lola felt sick again jammed against the steering wheel of her battered red van. She hastily wound down the window and gulped at the brisk air gratefully, regretting the many glasses of vinegary white wine she'd drunk at the raucous wake in the country hotel. Late in the proceedings she'd made the slurred agreement.

Vera was a close family friend, a fellow rural Russian and regular Saturday night dinner guest. When she bought her remote skeleton of a cottage she was highly excited she told them at having such a major project of rebuilding, renovation, and repair.

Perversely after she'd moved in with her meagre belongings she neglected all the vital work perpetually occupied with errands elsewhere. Instead, she accumulated discarded junk at such a rate that in no time at all there was hardly space for her everyday existence in any of the splintered rooms. Occasional visitors mumbled about potential unable to conceal their shock at the chaos and dereliction.

Now she was dead someone was left with the intimidating task of clearing all those years of abandoned junk a project enthusiastically embraced by Lola: it offered up a much-needed distraction from her paralysing crisis. Since abandoning her city life rashly and suddenly brutally cutting all her ties she was plagued with an unhealthily constant sense of regret. The thought that she had finally got herself into a predicament from which there was no escape plagued her days as she navigated the empty rural expanses craving the inner city cacophony.

Lola peered apprehensively through the dusty windows half-expecting evidence of life but only dank emptiness greeted her at the open door. Standing under the dusty yellow glow of a naked bulb she surveyed the unruly mass of junk, the damp slowly penetrating her flimsy urban clothes muttering to herself: "Where the hell do I start" and what about the other mess outside her abandoned city life and the prospect of winter in the rural outpost.

Overwhelmed by the heavy load of the inner and outer mess she wept for a few minutes perched on an upturned plastic bucket, her head thumping with the worsening hangover.

Eager for a hasty escape from the chill semi-darkness she climbed the cluttered wooden stairs clutching a wad of huge black bin liners.

Upstairs as well she found shambolic piles of clutter old and new: unwrapped exquisite soaps intermingled with stray shoes and old musty books.

In the bedroom, the afternoon sunshine bathed the sordid mess in a beatific glow. Discarded

clothes were strewn across the crumpled bed, a small wooden lamp lay side down on the pillow as though hurled there in an act of wanton violence. A huge stack of brittle yellowing newspapers piled at the edge of the mattress.

Determinedly she tugged at the mounds and cavalierly crammed clothes and shoes into the black sacks revealing a small empty patch of wooden floorboardS.

Satisfied with her labours so far Lola rested for a while on the sagging bed grateful of the distractions at hand. She tugged a newspaper from the middle of the pile.

One of the articles had been haphazardly ringed in red felt tip pen. The image of the bearded straggly haired man was slightly out of focus, the lazy provincial journalism aggravating: it was about Vera who had confronted an intruder with a heavy steel saucepan. He had escaped without detection and neighbours in the sparsely populated terrain were urged to be vigilant and lock their doors at night.

Lola bumped the stuffed black sacks awkwardly down the stairs reaching the bottom with a sense of foreboding.

The hook where she'd thoughtfully hung the cottage key was empty. A solitary slightly faded bluebell lay on the floor by the door.

She trudged in the semi-darkness past the junk-filled outhouses and untended scrubby fields, the persistent whistle of a fast-approaching gale buzzing eerily in her head.

The pristine order, warmth and cheery domesticity inside Gilbert's cottage were consoling after her dreary sojourn in the damp confines next door. A small fluffy black and white cat clawed at her legs and then settled in her lap.

Vanessa Gilbert tugged at Lola's arm in the doorway before handing her the spare key.

"Please take care in there my dear won't you." She mumbled.

"And whenever you need a break and a cuppa just drop round I'm usually home."

"Thanks for the coffee and the key" Lola shouted hurrying away from the buffetings of the fast-approaching storm back into the warm cocoon of her rural flat.

The tinny persistent shriek of her mobile phone wrenched Lola out of a vivid promising dream. It was three in the morning.

"I'm so sorry to disturb you my dear but something terrible's happened, the cottage it's on fire. The cat was crying to be let out and..."

"I'm coming over now" Lola shrieked impatiently interrupting Vanessa Gilbert's lethargic monologue.

The roads were empty, quiet except for the unhealthy choke of her clapped out engine and darting nocturnal animals.

Vanessa Gilbert was standing in the middle of the lane wrapped in a heavy towelling dressing gown surveying the charred skeleton of the cottage her jovial features twisted in an incredulous grimace.

There was something in the drama that Lola's mother and Vanessa Gilbert relished. It seemed to cast a thread of excitement through their even uneventful rural days, offering them an opportunity to stoke over their communal memories of Vera, prodding at past events for clues and wildly speculating.

Without the cottage to go to the purposelessness of Lola's days was paralysing. Unable to cope with the brutal suddenness with which her temporary salvation had been ripped from her grasp she sunk further and further into a trough of deep overwhelming melancholy.

On a steel grey, Sunday a laconic nurse transported her to the hospital a squat prefabricated compound marooned at the end of an industrial estate.

Incarcerated in her stark functional white room time simultaneously froze and accelerated in a series of uniformly grim days unmarked by pleasure.

After a cup full of tablets night provided a brief dizzy respite of dreamless sleep before awakening to the sound of banging doors, clinking keys and the swishing of rushing figures in the corridor outside. Once a week an old school friend visited reminding her that interesting things were going on in a world way beyond her reach. Sometimes they sat in the verdant grounds of the hospital drinking hot chocolate and reminiscing about their teenage antics.

Her psychiatrist was a vague harassed Scottish man who only communicated in incomprehensible clinical jargon. In one of their weekly consultations, he got her mixed up with another patient who had tried to jump off the roof earlier that day.

It was the third tablet that got her out, not any dramatic psychological shift in perspective. The torturous repetitive circle of regretful thoughts was slowing down, buried under a haze of drug-fuelled well being.

The cottage fire was fast becoming a memory that was hard to retrieve, a faint niggling unease buried under a mushy cloud.

Her first days back home were punctuated with simple pleasures: coffee in the sunshine and walks across the empty cliffs and then there was the news which excited Lola's mother much more than Lola's exit from the hospital which she had acknowledged with guarded enthusiasm.

The prison was an imposing redbrick edifice secluded at the end of a long drive shrouded in bushy fir trees.

There was a loud hubbub of noise in the visitors' room. Some of the inmates had visitors, others awaited them anxiously drumming their fingers rhythmically on the plastic tables.

Sacha was still recognisable from her memory of the blurred news-paper picture. Lola waved half-heartedly at him pushing through the plastic tables.

Raw from her recent disintegration Lola didn't feel any rage or bitterness at Sacha's destruction of his mother's cottage. She remembered Vera's sporadic generosity and warmth but also her brusque intractability, impatience and ill-humour.

The allotted half an hour sped by, a rapid plunge into the viscous pool of recent and more historical events. They were still talking animatedly when the time up bell rang shrilly interrupting their garbled exchange.

Lola's head was buzzing as she waited for her train home on the deserted station, excited at the prospect of next weeks visit and a new liaison. The sense of future possibility eclipsed all the revelations, all that old stuff didn't matter now. It was only vital in so much as it transformed the present.

Lola shut her eyes and imagined how the squat granite dwelling with cracked sash windows and broken chimney would look after its transformation into a bookshop.

It seemed only fair that Sacha should join her enterprise when Vera left her the money and Sacha nothing but a bundle of useless family artefacts and a single rake.

It was more than just a matter of rebalancing the injustice.

Desperation to build something in the alien landscape and yearning to be elsewhere anonymous citizens of a throbbing metropolis united them, the common purpose made them perfect business partners and comrades.



Entitle - Rielle Madrid

Is it something we did?
Is it something we can't fix?
Is it something we asked for?
Or something we deserve?
Will it go when we fight it?
Can we?
Is it going to last for long?
Is it going to make us starve?
Is it meant to teach a lesson?
What is going on?
Is it real?
I'm tricked to think
It's deja vu.
We were warned
Did our leaders listen?
Decisions entwine
Obsess in my mind,
will you be ok?
What wrath spun
these nightmares,
Into real life?
I don't think I can,
Be any more
Walls and Bricks,
And the bricks,
Don't tumble.

I had a dream last night
Everything was black
My wrists were flexed
To my knees
I floated naked
A tether to nourish
Felt safer than earth

When my feet touched the ground
I came back here
This is the place
Where I feel unsure

We melt inside
Cognitions tangle
In the obscure
Opaque mask
beneath my eyes
Hides my smiles
Can you see me?
Do you miss me?
Do you know how lonely I am?

What about that
which I am made
Notice the earth,
it's blankets and pillows
Im wrapped in

Our minds are trapped in
The revelations are picked
To contort us
Reassure one day
Fear one day
A campaign to
Moderate the way we behave
What keeps us in
This cycle?
Does the cycle have a plug?

Splintering

I lie down
And take these highs
Splintered brakes
deny your lies
Caught me
In the devil of your eyes
Suck me in
And repeat your lies
Again

I grapple beasts
I find inside
Cherry spot wounds desecrate
My sunken eyes
I wrap a life line
Around so tight
They cut the cord
When you cut my cord
Don't move
I'm immobile
Blocked

Can't call
I don't use
That block
Any more
I block the memories
I make myself a
Block for my head
For the dead end
times
I wasted
On you



Friendly Fire - Samantha Carr

First came the warning shots, which whistled past my ears. And I wasn't afraid. Or rather, I was no more afraid than I usually was. Which is to say I was terrified; of my own shadow and the shadows my shadow creates. They haunt me but I don't want them to leave. Today I'm terrified because I have to go to the post office to get my benefit money so I can top up the gas. And sometimes the neighbour pops out for a chat when she hears my door go. I put on my flak jacket, and climb in my armoured tank to drive down the high street. I'd got it second hand on Ebay, it's heavy on the diesel though. Friendly fire bounces off the plating, the sound echoing inside so I have a headache by the time I reach the Post Office. I keep my Brodie helmet on, even though the signs say to remove it. And I commando crawl my way through the queue, avoiding eye contact. The lady at the desk asks how she can help me, she's wearing a bright white shirt and red cravat. I don't wear white because you have to soak it to get blood spatter stains out. And I want to say; help me, HELP ME, will someone please help me. But I open my mouth to ask for my money and my molars fall out – all of them. I apologise; I'm sorry, sorry, sorry. I take my Brodie off, scrape them off the counter into the lid. But one drops on the floor with a clink, bounces a few times before it stops.



There are rooms in this house
that I won't walk into anymore.
The clocks in them frozen;
disjointed pictures of surprised smiles,
soft kisses, gentle touch,
replay in static loops.

Amid silence I ascend
wind torn attic steps, down which softly
cascades streams of photons
to bathe my face, to soothe my heart. Space
between vibrations fills
with the echoes of past tears cried for
You. The echoes of coruscant skin,
the blood beneath my nails.

In silent picture book
peace.

An altar incensed.

Crystal drops morph to rivulets skim chrome
distortions cutting the haze of near scalding water
that curls its skin against mine caressing stone
flesh coaxing it back to now with a sigh I raise
my hand to my lips drawing the serpent into the air
I writhe and it twists through the cracked window
light shatters frosted glass catching the crests of
waves that slip quietly from my breasts setting
the ceiling afire in coruscations liquid and free
my leg slips from the heat and glides over frosted enamel
summoning will-o'the wisps from skin to chase
such draconic creations of parted lips together they
chase time from the seals of the room till perfectly
encased I lie in a nadir defined only in this space.

A body of water.

A mind of crystalline shadows.

A spirit rendered from smoke.

CHRISTMAS CROCK-
DRINK GOOD BEER

the place
for man's best
friend

WANDER
THE WILDER
MOUNTAIN ZOO

NEW YORK
PARIS
LONDON
STONE HOUSE

TODAY

LOVE
Be Good

DON'T Box ME IN





Nick Ingram

The pub television was playing some Australian cricket game from the mid-eighties; graphics; clothes; the lot. I wonder at it's worth. (Ascendant bliss, and the post, cool, New Year afternoon: no time for the past; this future, and decade is vast.) This poetry has always been a protest: it's that you've never noticed – feed the contemporary; free the contemporary, I have this new contemporary feeling. For there is something I can no longer do: browse through records in a record store. The last one in the city just closed. You could say he was a bit of a vegan burger: there was no meat in him. She admitted to finding The Big-Bang Theory being not very funny: the characters irritated her.

Three old men sat in the pub; grumbling about the music played on the juke box, not realising it's the year 2020 – sad men with no other ideas and language: sad men with old language and old ideas. (Remember: you were the one's who made me.) The majestic sense of expansive song – it's almost like these days, I live with a permeant broken heart.

(...And so Dad, I'm sorry to say there is nothing I can do: she is slowly losing her mind... Mum can no longer remember you... although I knew this Christmas and New Year, you would have happily had a

Bacardi and Coke... there is just one last thing... know that you are not forgotten, even as her memory fades, these lines are for you... cheers, Old Man...) The individual will always defeat the collective – if these few days are purgatory: then let it be so. (The New Year draws to a close, and this country will leave the European Union; maybe, a new age unfolds before us.) You might want to reflect; but do other's want your reflection? Maybe not! I'm having one of those feelings that I might have to go on a new search for intelligent life this year; there don't seem to be any around here at the moment. It is always in the New Year you find out who your friends were – in the past tense, at least, a new decade beckons. Stop trying to be normal. It never works; just be yourself and fuck everyone else – just embrace the whole of yourself.

Love maybe over, but life carries on: behold the New Year, and this new decade. She stands, the waitress, smiling. She says: 'it was sunny just now. This December weather is all over the place: now it's grey. The sun was bright though. I'm thinking of changing into a bikini with welly boots on, might be able to cope then.' The only set back was the fact that it was rather cold outside on the square. (Seriously: why are you reading this poetry dick nose? Let's make the twenties roar so loudly, no one will ever fucking forget them.)



@FROHMANSKI

This is Not a Drill

by Pete Davey and Chi Bennett

Lidls and tin pots, egg cartons, endless drilling like an echo drilling in my head.

Eco-warrior queen gone mad, every day running on the spot and waving.

Headphones on, Alanis Morissette. Is it really a Jagged Little Pill or Head like a Hole?

The birds start to sing, but I can't make out their song as all I can hear is a drill.

She puts up 40 hanging baskets and wall baskets to pass the time.

Endless twitching of curtains and watching neighbours, fines on the spot, hysterical hysteria, lockdown, isolation.

Like a Jack Nicholson sketch, typewriter at hand, writing the words "drill, drill, drill, drill".

While she plays Ghost Town by the Specials over and over again, like a record spinning out of control.

But hey, keep up the Dunkirk Spirit.

She's reading a book. I think it's Lady Chatterley's Lover. Her pleasure noises wake up the silent street at 3am. It's an endless diet of sex, drilling and gardening.

I think I'll put the kettle on for another cup of tea. It seems to keep me sane as the lunatics have taken over the asylum.

She makes me write this poem as spoken words of madness.

I'm not sure if this is real, or just a dream or some illusion. Either way, I'd better fulfil her fantasies again.

I cook myself another egg on toast and read from Brian Herdman's poem, Sick of it All.

Blank faces stare, disposable teens zooming out through their debit cards. Tinder will have to wait.

Sex on hold. Social media whores wank another day for fake news and pretend friends that never really exist.

It's better to be alone than have a coffee with a friend. Social distancing is my new bitch.

George Orwell on heat. Extinction Rebellion on pause. It's a Brave New World. Confederate flags on high, but I do miss a perm in the imperfect fresh air.

It smells like teen spirit.

Another genocidal maniac enforces lockdown. Shoot to kill. But can I grow another flower please?

The junky screams, knocking on doors looking for a fix.

Forgotten voices of liberty drowned out by fits of hysteria, waving gun magic, like the magicians of old.

Everything is repackaged and recycled like a Starwars pre-sequel. Nothing original.

I'd better tune in-tune out to the sounds of clapping for a crippled NHS.

A third-world disposable nation, sinking like the Titanic.

But everyone loves a sequel.

Will Rose get to ride Jack's cock again?







A FEW OBSERVATIONS - William Telford

It's a Friday night in windswept October and Charlie White's International Indie, Jazz and Marimba Club, in neon-lit, re-gentrified, re-dignified, re-imagined Shoreditch, is jumping to the high octane rocking sounds of Pneumatic Overdose. Well, maybe not jumping. Perhaps jumping isn't the right word. Perhaps jumping conjures a picture of people actually jumping, of getting hot and perspiring and losing control of their judgement amongst in a mosh-pit of flailing arms and unusual smells. So, not exactly jumping, picture less of this jumping business, imagine more of a sort of standing still, envision maybe some mooching about like people waiting for a funeral to kick into gear. And, among the chit chat and idle banter and stifled yawns, Pneumatic Overdose, or Pneumatic OD to their fans, of which there are roughly: none, are bringing their cataclysmic set to a suitably cataclysmic climax. Leroy Stalls breaks a string, Ted Normal's high hat turns frisbee, and Vince Nasty finds his voice cracking like an adolescent's as he tries to hit the high note at the end of their signature tune *I Annoy Nuns*. Meanwhile, Doug Glass has already abandoned his bass and is indulging himself in a snakebite and some lazy chittering at the optics. Someone mouths the word 'shambles'. It's rock and roll at its most, well, ungainly.

During the post gig huddle, Pneumatic OD are disturbed by the approach of a middle aged man, a pint of Stella Artois in one hand, a rolled-up copy of Mojo in the other, and the look of a guy who if he didn't get something off his chest right that minute would give himself a cardiac arrest with bells on. He introduces himself as Dale Easy and he says, 'Boys, boys.'

There's tension in the air, you can hear a plectrum twang, breaths are held hostage, and he continues, 'You're great. No, you are. Really, really great. In fact, the cow's whiskers.'

'Wow,' says Pneumatic OD, with a harmony not anticipated by their stage performance. 'You know about music then?' says Ted.

'Know about music?' says Dale, taking a gulp of lager. 'I've spent a lifetime carrying flight cases through airport departure lounges.'

'Wow,' says Pneumatic OD.

'You're a musician then?' says Leroy.

'Not exactly,' says Dale. He explains how he's a baggage handler at Heathrow, but how he knows a thing or three about the biz, the music biz, and recognises potential when he sees it.

'I've worked with the best,' he tells the OD. 'I've humped for the Stones, shifted Elton's' baby grand, carried the Boss's mouth organ. Heck, I was knocking about with Savage Shed before anyone heard of them.'

Pneumatic OD nod sagely and make a collective mental note to Google up Savage Shed when they next get free wifi.

'I'm telling you boys,' Dale adds. "You've got it – by the spadeful.'

'You think?' says Vince.

'By the spadeful?' says Doug. 'A, like, big spadeful or a, like, little spadeful?'

'A humongous spadeful,' says Dale. 'But, if I may, a few observations.'

Pneumatic OD welcome him into their inner huddle, a huddle within their huddle, and, while the rest of Charlie White's International Indie, Jazz and Marimba Bar lounges and sips and generally tries to look louche and well connected, Dale Easy gives just a few observations.

'Firstly,' he says. 'You're too loud. No one wants their eardrums ruptured. Got that?'

Pneumatic OD nod.

'And try not to let the drums outdo the vocals. And let's all start together, and end together.' He darts a particularly pertinent glance at Doug, who shrugs. 'Then there's the material,' Dale adds. 'I mean, songs about goats? About going on holiday? Laundry? And what's with the infatuation with nuns? Come on, boys, sing about what you know.'

'My mum was a nun,' says Leroy. 'Though she might have been an air hostess, come to think. She left when I was three.'

Dale Easy gives him a look to wither a fibreglass geranium. 'Boys,' he says. 'Think attitude, try and bring out your inner angst. You want raw, primeval aggression, aloof enigma. At present you've all the raw, primeval, enigmatic aloofness of a kids' party clown. It's pitiful.'

'Oh,' say Pneumatic OD.

'But,' says Vince. 'Other than our sound, the songs, and our persona, you, er, think we've got a chance, right? I mean, we've only been going three months, only played four gigs, one was my aunt's wedding, my deaf aunt's wedding, and our bass player didn't even show up tonight.' He points at Doug. 'We don't really know him, but he said he could play and he was carrying a bass and...'

Doug shrugs again.

'We'll,' says Dale Easy, draining his glass. 'Now you mention it, there is something else: those outfits. Think about having a, you know, look. For starters,' he points at Leroy. 'Paisley sweaters, not very rock. And Ted, I know you're a drummer, but spandex? So last century, same goes for the Hush Puppies.' He raises his eyebrows at Vince. 'And remember this, pony tails, they're for little girls, and ponies, the clue's in the name.'

'But we've got potential?' Pneumatic OD croon, like do-woppers in cardigans, spandex and Hush Puppies.

'You have,' says Dale, thumping his pint glass on the bar in the manner of some sort of judge who's breaking in a new gavel.

'Wow,' said the OD.

'Now,' says Dale. 'Got to run.'

'Thanks for the observations,' says Vince, slapping Dale on the back.

'Thank me when you've made it,' calls Dale, as he leaves, raising his right hand, gripping his copy of *Mojo* like his life depends on it and heading out the exit. Dale's in a rush. It's still only ten thirty and the Shoreditch Ladies Knitting Circle are still quorate at the nearby community centre, and Dale has a few observations to make about their use of contrasting colours.

It's thirty years later, early October and the Boston International Chippy's Donuts Arena is jumping to the exhilarating rock 'n' roll sounds of Vince Nasty and the Pneumatic Overdose. Though perhaps jumping is not the right word, perhaps the right word is exploding, or

fulminating, or getting way over-excited. The five thousand people inside the air conditioned and well-swept Boston International Chippy's Donuts Arena are so hyper they're just one baton charge away from being a full scale riot. Boston hasn't seen action like this since those tea cases were chucked in the harbour. The audience, screaming and yelling and generally behaving in a wild and out of control manner, contains hormone drenched teenage girls, edgily cool indie rockers, the middle aged, the middle class, a few bikers, the Boston Massive, and snugly tucked in the wombs of four women fans - including an unsuspecting 17-year-old Ellie Muddle, from Cement City, Michigan - the unborn are tapping their pre-formed toes. And everyone, but everyone, is showing their appreciation of the rousing, if ramshackle, rendition of Pneumatic OD's breakthrough hit *I Annoy Nuns* by shaking their trademark pony tails. Yes, the place is jumping, like Dick Fosbury on Dexedrine.

The gig, concert, slice of history, whatever, is brought to a cataclysmic climax. Leroy Stalls snaps a string, Ted Normal's high hat turns frisbee, Vince Nasty himself just plain gives up even trying to reach that tricky high note, as he's done every night of Pneumatic OD's ninety date world tour in support of their twenty fifth chart topping long player, *Going on Holiday with your Goat*. Doug Glass has already left the stage and is standing next to TV superstar Antonio Bliss, who's running over his script one last time before he strides on stage and inducts Pneumatic OD into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame.

The music is brought to a finale. Ted falls over his kit, Leroy's guitar strap snaps, Vince pokes himself in the eye with his mic. Antonio Bliss, Doug in tow, is suddenly on stage yipping "yays" and "greats" and even "groovies" and attempting to interview Pneumatic OD while the audience composes itself into some sort of non-dishevelled state.

'Hey,' Antonio says, at last. 'I can't believe it. On stage with the OD, an honour dudes.'

The band nod as a unit. Antonio carries on, précising a career which has gone tropospheric, seen Pneumatic OD headline festivals, play to presidents and kings and even have the track *Losing my Laundry* chosen to front Guitar Hero 25.

'Plus,' says Antonio, 'you made paisley cardigans, spandex pants and Hush Puppies cool. Some achievement.'

'I guess,' says Vince.

'You guess right,' says Antonio. 'You're nothing short of a phenomenon. So tell us, and there are forty five billion people watching in literally every country of the universe, what's the secret?'

'We'll,' says Doug. 'Never don't eat nothing that's been found on the floor.'

'And always try to listen to advice,' chips in Leroy.

'Yes,' says Ted, fiddling with his pony tail. 'That's the most important thing. A bit of constructive criticism, a few observations, never hurt anyone.'

'So,' Antonio says turning to an alternate camera. 'You heard it here kids. If you want to be the most glittering act in the rock firmament you got to take on board folks' opinions, accept their wise counsel and, above all, let them get in their two cents worth. Plus don't have disgusting eating habits or forget to buy more Chippy's Donuts. Oh, yeah, and just say "no" to drugs, kids. We'll be right back after these messages.'

Two thousand miles away, in the Shoreditch Retirement Home for the Confused and Befuddled, Dale Easy mutes the common room TV. He's sitting in a high-backed recliner watching the Rock 'n' Roll Induction Night Special, live from the Boston International Chippy's Donuts Arena.

'Bastards,' he says. 'They didn't even thank me.'

He's about to launch into making a few observations, but is distracted by the sudden arrival of nurse Suzi Menlove, aged 23, newly qualified, all in virginal white, gliding amongst the high-backed recliners, like she's travelling on well-oiled casters, a vision, an angel, an angel in lip gloss and fake lashes, but an angel none the less. And Dale Easy is pleased to see her. She's new to the Shoreditch Retirement Home for the Confused and Befuddled and Dale has been watching her closely during the past week and is anxious to make a few observations, a few observations about her penchant for giving the wrong medication, in the wrong dosage to the wrong patients.

'Good evening Dale,' Suzi says, at his shoulder, 'time for your medication.'

And Dale is about to say something, something important, when he is momentarily distracted by the screen, now beaming images of Pneumatic OD, back on stage and capering like musical chimps.

'Now, open wide,' nurse Suzi says, counting out some teeny white pills.

And Dale Easy says, gazing up at her, 'Nurse, if I may, a few observations.' His glances alternate between the screen where The OD are picking up their instruments like they've never seen them before, and nurse Suzi's saintly, though slightly over pancaked, features.

'Yes?' says Suzi Menlove.

'It's about...' he says, pointing at the pills as she raises a geometrically pencilled eyebrow.

'I know what you're going to say,' says Suzi, cutting him off, and forcing into his mouth enough barbs to send a bull elephant into a coma. 'It's the make-up, isn't it?'

'Ah,' says Dale, trying not to choke on the meds.

'Do you like it?' says sanctified nurse Suzi, holding a glass of water to his mouth. 'You don't think I've gone a bit too far, overdone it with the blusher?'

'Er,' says Dale, forcing down the sedatives, amongst the torrent.

'Well thank you,' seraphic nurse Suzi continues, 'because my mum, you know, she never thinks I get my make up just right, in fact,' she says, taking some more pills from a little blue bottle and shoving them between Dale's clenched teeth, 'my mum says it makes me look cheap, she says the only difference between me and an Amsterdam hooker is a lack of double glazing.' Sublime nurse Suzi then pours some more water down Dale's oesophagus and adds, 'Do you think that?'

But before Dale can stop swallowing and start answering, nurse Suzi notices the TV, broadcasting pixels of Pneumatic OD about to kick off their encore *Loving a Diabetic Nun*, and she says, 'Look, it's them, that band.' Then she hisses, 'Don't you just loathe them? God, they're so lame, with their stupid songs and that ridiculous get up. They're so stiff and boring. You know what? They should be called Rheumatic OD. Get it? And what was it someone said once? Some great commentator, coined a phrase, what was it? Oh yeah,

pony tails, they're for little girls, and ponies, the clue's in the name. I'd like to give them some advice,' sinless nurse Suzi says, stiffening. 'I'd like to give them a piece of my mind. What a bunch of jerks,' she spits, and asks, 'What do you think? What advice would you give them? Surely there's something you'd like to share with that bunch of...'

But, in the flickering light of the screen, Dale Easy stays silent. He's fathoms under, sawing logs like he's trying to set a record, and heading deeper, deeper, down into an enveloping blanket of calm, a cocoon of comfort. Dale's seeing a light, a bright one. But Dale's not concerned, not perturbed, oh no, he's looking forward, he's anticipating, the heavenly kingdom holds no fears for Dale. He can't wait, he's all sixes and sevens, he's on tenterhooks, he's ready to storm those pearly gates. Because Dale wants to meet the big boy, can't wait to buttonhole the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, pick over the bones with the Prime Mover Himself. Because Dale's seen an aardvark, tasted mussels, been to Texas, he's heard the music of Pneumatic OD. Yes, Dale's done it all, had a lifetime of doing it all, and after all that doing it all, Dale can't wait. He can't wait to pass on, to the All Knowing, to the Creator of All Things, to the divine decision maker in person, just a few, very, very, very keen, observations.



The 'I've been inside too long' song – Christiana Richardson

The day that Batman came to tea
I'd run out of courgettes
they seemed to be a favourite
of the dimpled slug,
Evette.

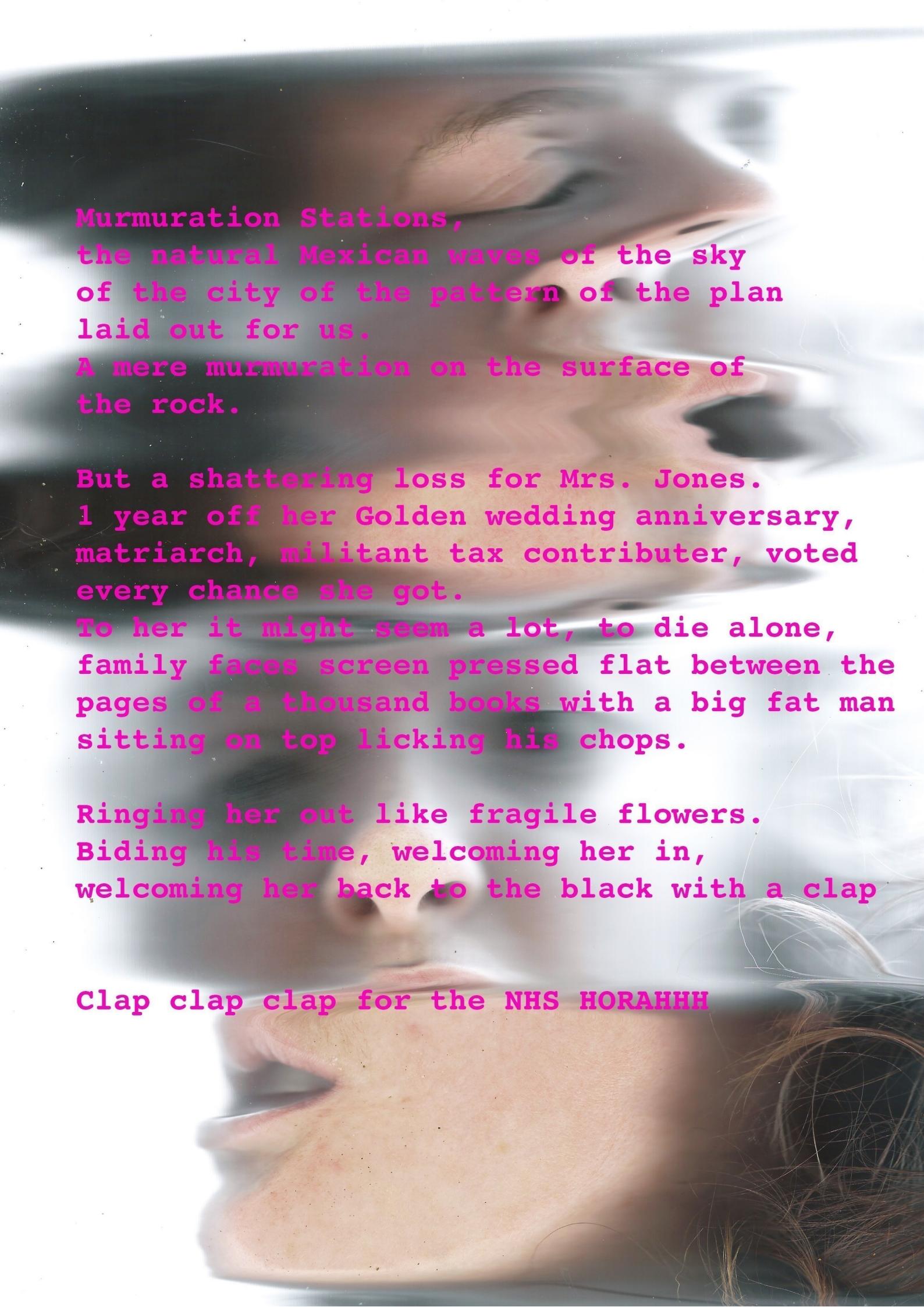
My bread was stale, it crumbled
all over crispy fish
which swam in loops
around the tank
except for one
named Bob.

The greenery began sprouting
around his unwashed ears
they all pretended
not to notice
So I also planted
potatoes.

I wondered if the drifting smell
was a sweet or sour ripe
though in the end
it all went in
a pan to make
dessert.

And when night fell
there were no stars
I blamed it on the shower
which I banished

into the garden shed
to live with sweet old
Gertrude.



Murmuration Stations,
the natural Mexican waves of the sky
of the city of the pattern of the plan
laid out for us.

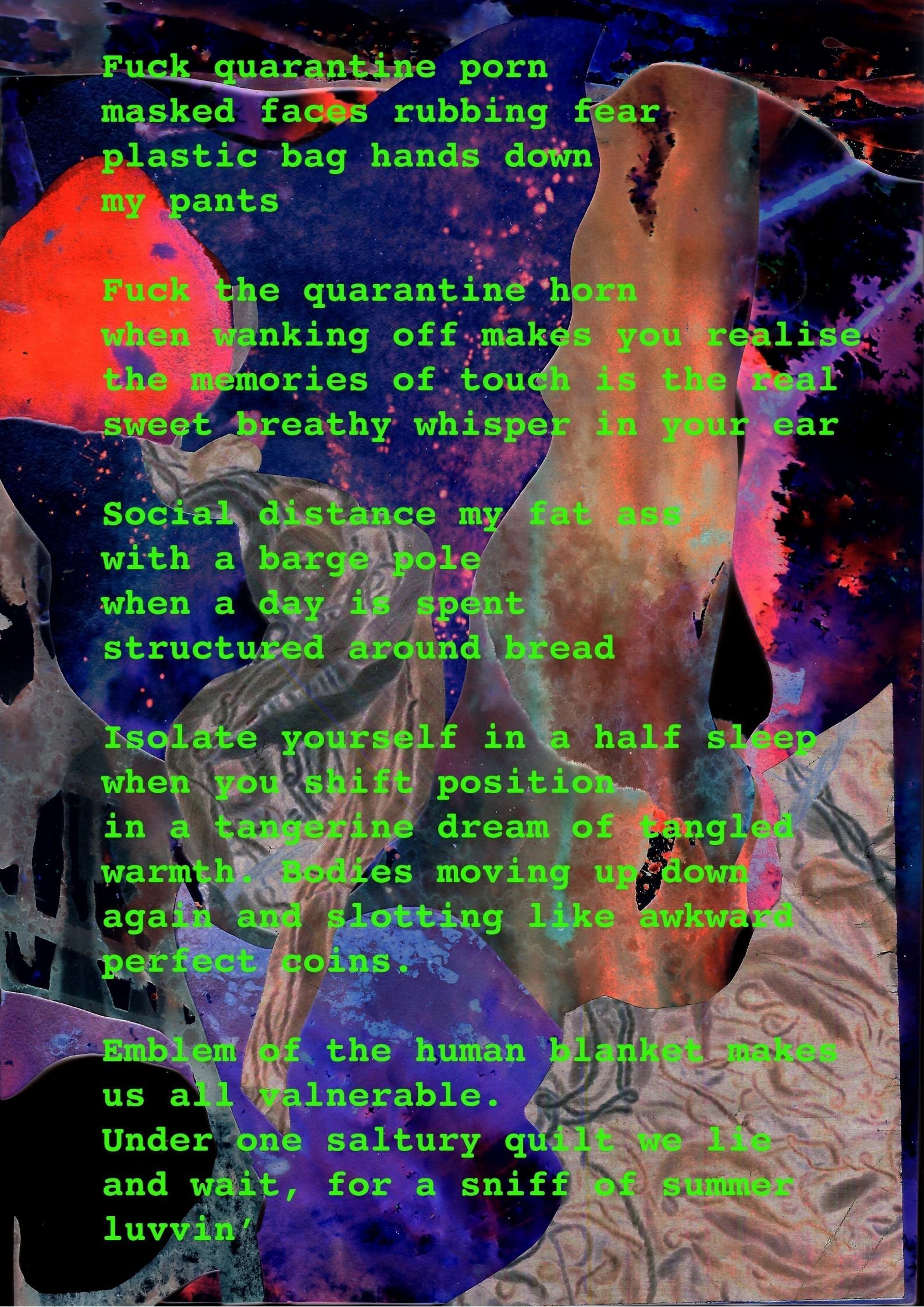
A mere murmuration on the surface of
the rock.

But a shattering loss for Mrs. Jones.
1 year off her Golden wedding anniversary,
matriarch, militant tax contributer, voted
every chance she got.

To her it might seem a lot, to die alone,
family faces screen pressed flat between the
pages of a thousand books with a big fat man
sitting on top licking his chops.

Ringing her out like fragile flowers.
Biding his time, welcoming her in,
welcoming her back to the black with a clap

Clap clap clap for the NHS HORAHHH



Fuck quarantine porn
masked faces rubbing fear
plastic bag hands down
my pants

Fuck the quarantine horn
when wanking off makes you realise
the memories of touch is the real
sweet breathy whisper in your ear

Social distance my fat ass
with a barge pole
when a day is spent
structured around bread

Isolate yourself in a half sleep
when you shift position
in a tangerine dream of tangled
warmth. Bodies moving up down
again and slotting like awkward
perfect coins.

Emblem of the human blanket makes
us all valnerable.
Under one saltury quilt we lie
and wait, for a sniff of summer
luvvin'

Lady Day - Julian Isaacs

Billie fell due the day the rent was too
decades late but right on cue
the time of the month for the time of years
blood and mud and sweat and tears
blackened fruit scattering bespoke tunes
plums that hung as withered prunes

The rain and shrubs cried honey
beds deadheaded and disemtrowelled
shape shifting conifers hosted pining owls
jug-fleeing hares glanced up from the leas
as incoming swallows did as they pleased
gnarled chipped fingernails
hoed down in empty rose rooms
open borders
holy orders
dark bulbs awaited bud
in bark chipped cud

On Lady Day we pay our way
for the damp brown soil we till
the clunky clods of clay
to Lady Day we kneel and say
thank you for that husky thrill
that helped us find our way
through pre-harvest tension
to be-bop invention

Long gloves to hide her punctured hide
that hid the pain she felt inside
a Bird soared above the disunited states
and the sky poured love on the mad March fates
a mistake to think she could ever be free
by the lake where the willow wept on the scree
beware, beware the Ides
the rent that's spent but never paid
when black beauty's interred
with a cold iron spade

Be sure of one thing
it was never her choice
being forced to sing
in her white master's voice
but the narcs never knew
there were seeds beneath the casket
kernels in the grave
an angel awaiting unearthing
a corn goddess rebirthing
a heart they couldn't enslave

On Lady Day somewhere
a cloud of steam stirs in a disused station
in the awaiting room
an elderly African American lady
her knitting in a string bag
checks the timetable
for the Feast of the Annunciation

Somewhere on Lady Day
a tractor chudders to a halt
a gingham cloth is spread
a rotavator churns
a hasty grace is said
a gramophone handle turns
shellac spins
a needle descends
and hope uncovers the waterfront

On the Myanmarvellous Road to Mandalay

On the Myanmarvellous road to Mandalay

All the red tiled roofs were made of unfired clay.

The relentless Burmese sun beat down on PC Eric Blair,

His finger on the trigger and the barrels in the air.

The soldiers burst into the monastery searching for Room 101

Where the clocks had struck thirteen and the fun had just begun.

The big hand dragged itself across the Orient in song

And in Boston the East India Company put the kettle on.

Since the foetus of Heraclitus turned into a man

And noted it down in a little red book,

And Nostradamus said trust those who can't over those that say they can,

Don't turn your shoulder for a backward look

Because the world's on fire and someone's got a fan.

The mention of that bloody name - that's all it took.

If fairies frogs and princes all hold hands and blow together

Will the flames of Hell be drowned in stormy weather?



IRIS - Margaret Corvid

I would make a poor iris, basking in the sun,
rippling flags and scent bombs, luring insects deeper
pinnacle of striving roots and nets of fungus
wind and water, vitamins and salts, once dusted, done.

Never thought I'd find you swimming in the garden
speckled and descended swiftly at strange angles
scarred from quiet battles swinging out of danger
curving towards the ending sweet years that remain

I would make a poor koi hiding under lilies
hammered gold and ivory sealed against the water
teeth leapt up from bottom seizing water oarsmen
lapis inlaid dragonfly plucking out my daughters

before I was human I wished I were a lamb
or a pony or a sheepdog bright and filled with purpose
bounded by drystone walls infinitely placid
voices joined in sorrow, never reaching further

how did I arrive from velvet wriggling frogspawn
built of broken glass, cracked beads, discovered feathers
daughter of quicksilver made of rusted clockwork
all the pike-hung near-deaths, flapping silken banners

crystal fell from pocket, shining at the castle,
rainbow thin inclusions radiating sunlight
I would make a poor gate, cleaving wind and water
fire smoke and whispers, worn by generations

peering into split rocks looking for the planners
drawing spines and jawbones out of dirt and chaos
cast in bronze and copper breath in beeswax candles
I would make a poor mountain, grey and green and dun.

every mother bore us, eyes askew chins tilted
raised in isolation lacking common language
absent from the stories, spelled only in damage
we would make poor priestesses, wan and drained of blood.

Walking over gravel past a field of bluebells
path for carts dividing lambs and woolly mothers
golden sun fades slowly, baby bleating loudly
waiting for the answer, sadly, there is none.

I just saw a magpie drinking from the pond.
blood of baby robins speckling pinfeathers
smashing shells on pavements, heckling pacing tomcats.
I would make a poor witch, broke my magic wand.

2020

The burned earth I personally carry with me
is a dark within greater dark, velvet sleeves brushing
and one smells of petrol, and the other of blood,
corpuscles douse passers-by, screaming and rushing
and the NOS canisters all tumble down to the sea
as the sun dips and rises, a whole quarter year
and the city and I stagger out of the mud
and exclaim to the motorway, look! flowers here.

Beds of flowers in poems too angry to print
that I wrote for an ear that has rotted away
and replaced itself, crocus and thin sprigs of mint
between hashtags and hair sparkling silver and grey
and in lush, baroque visions that come every night
leaving gold vermeil pots and rose covered tattoos
and in sirens and knocks on the door at first light
and the Google alert for my name in the news.

This city has been here for eight centuries
and no stranger to darkness, she laughs at dark veils
that decided to rest, take the weight off their knees
and flash mirrors of firelight, invisible sails
and inside, absolute, at the centre of me
while the passers-by sense it and amble around
while an evil witch laughs as I grab for the light
and waits patiently for me to stagger to ground -

there are flowers. Corpse flowers red roots into veins
ancient letters are all queueing up at the lights
angled deep into bones, curl and straighten in rain
there are flowers blowing seeds up to staggering heights
where the clouds peter out into pistes made of ice
cascade down to the velvet and split into stars
and the weary to work tired and frightened as mice
whisper doom as they pile into buses and cars

as the city still lives, so will garlic and bay
into sauces I serve to my friends and their laughter
and the little white roses, all flapping away,
every story beginning, a middle, an after,
a sweet tune that rises and swells with the breath
and a heartbeat that echoes along with the cats
and when everything else is deserted and left
and the wind whistles through all the rattling slats

there I'll be, with my stick, and my book, and my hat.



Cracks - Ray Vibrations

Hey. Relax.
You don't need to probe for the cracks.
Wipe the glee from your jaws.
There's no triumph in finding my flaws.

If you don't see any,
You're faced with a politician, not a person.
His surface is watery,
It accommodates, reflects.
The rest of us are earthen, woody –
All faults and fissures,
Nails in our wrists and bolts in our necks.

You don't have to feel for the scars:
They're what we're made of,
Our growth in time written in space,
The way trees chisel carbon from the branching
Branchless air,
Carving footholds in the wind.

Here:
place your fingers
in here.
Right hand this side,
Your left just there.
Prise me apart.
Split my fibrous trunk.
Step through!
One leg first,
hips and shoulders sideways on.
Draw in the trailing
arm and leg.
Brace your feet and
back and
push.
Break me.
Open me wide.
I creak and crack
joyously.
Cleave me in two,
In four,
In more.
Splinter me into kindling
Let fire release me
Into disintegrity
Free me from the need to coldly cohere
Liberate the starry multitude
Of sparks and smoke,
A moment's heat
And light.

No need to probe for the cracks.
Here they are.
Put your fingers in here.

SINGING FOR GOD... - Sam Richards

I saw her real name once
On some official college form;
I can't remember what it was -
But it certainly wasn't Boo.

Boo used to tie people to the bed,
And whip them
In her college room.
I think she confined herself to guys on campus
But I don't know -
Off campus too?
Girls as well?
I never asked:
She was my friend,
We had beers and coffee sometimes,
Which is why she never did me,
Worst luck.
It was always the way:
The interesting girls wanted me as a friend
'cause I was so goddamn nice...

College done,
Yes of course -
Stay in touch,
Meet under the clock and all that,
But different signposts
Crook their greasy little fingers at you
Like the ghost of Christmas future
And off we go
Into the more than mild shock
Of gathering your own nuts and berries
And never a glance behind
In case you get lost in the woods.

Saw Boo one more time
Twenty years on -
Maybe

Both playing a pokey little theatre
A dump
With a prehistoric lighting system
And no bar;
Charity gig -
I forget what;
There was Boo
In a beatific choir
Singing their hearts out for Jesus -
And they all had
Shining eyes that looked upwards,
Light blue uniforms,
Neat virtuous shoes
Like the line in John Brown's Body:
Gone to be a soldier

In the army of the Lord,
Although she was by no stretch of the imagination
A-mouldering in the grave –
Wasn't yet in that glorious kingdom,
She was still here below in this vale of tears
Clean slates,
Forgotten dreams
And smiles
That no one believes.

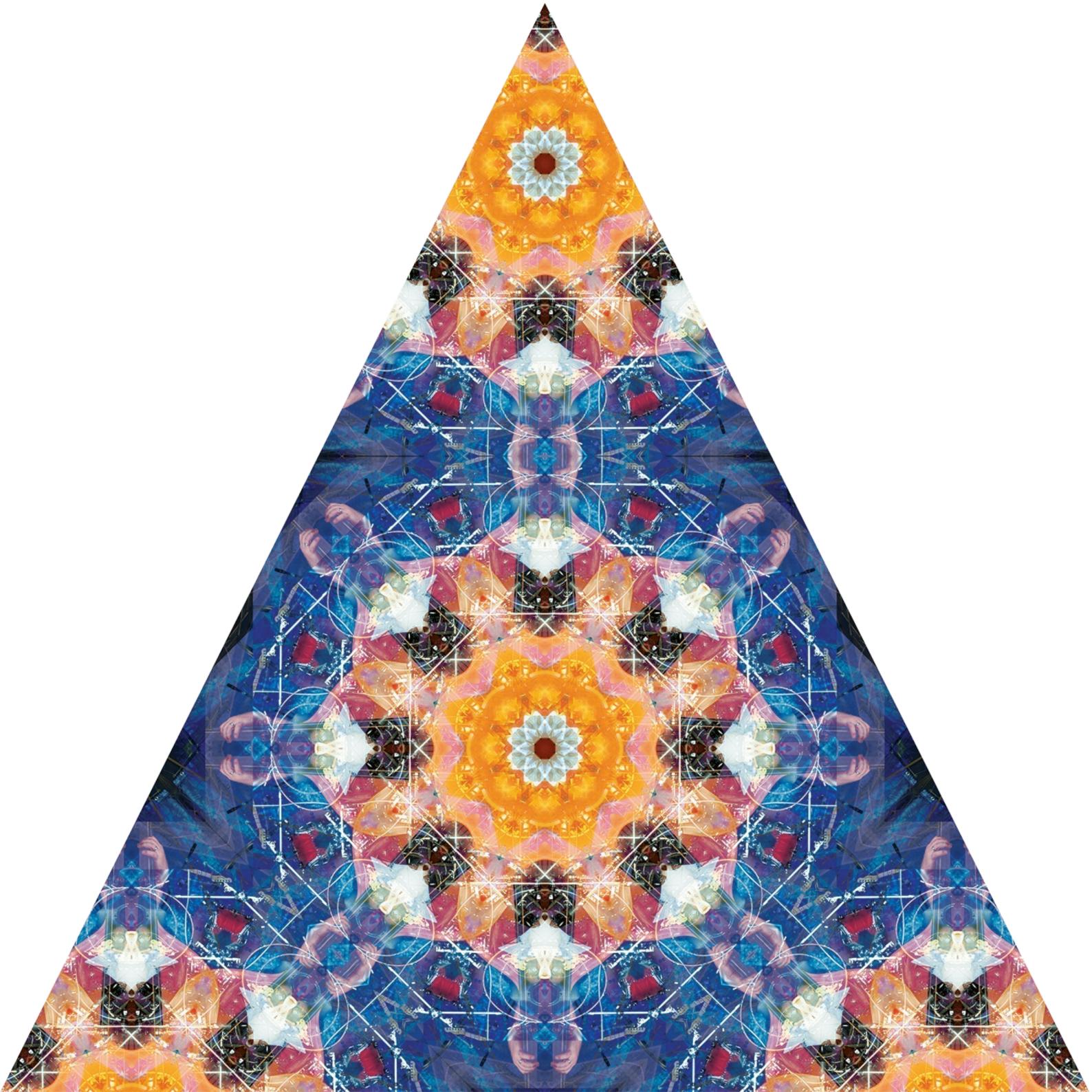
Didn't have the brass neck
To ask what I wanted to ask...
Just said Hi
And got a meaningful
Meaningless smile
In return...
I wondered what her choir friends called her –
Bet it wasn't Boo...

SURPLUS TO REQUIREMENTS

They can all fuck off -
That's what I said -
You heard me right -
They can all...
(Good way to start a poem, eh...)
Well I won't say it again,
You heard it the first time.
And in case you want to know
Who "they" are
That prompt me to drop these choice F bombs
Everywhere I go -
They're anyone
Who tells lies for a living,
Anyone who goes on TV
As if money wouldn't melt in their mouth
And tries to pull the wool over our eyes
Unaware that I can see through wool
Easily
As an autonomic reaction
And the day they fool me
The universe will have changed
For the worse,
They're anyone who loves the truth so much
That they save it for later
And then forget it
And then claim they never knew it
And look honest as a second hand car salesman
At the public enquiry,
Anyone who writes headlines
Designed for idiots
With holes in their heads
Waiting to be polyfilled by chicken shit,
Bullshit and elephant shit.
Anyone who takes the piss
From high office
And who uses high office
To piss on the rest of us
For the good of the nation
Rah rah for our lot,
Our lot first!
Who thinks they rule the world
Or should do
And are only interested in the power and the glory
And couldn't give a toss about for ever and ever,
Anyone who used to have principles
But now they have position
And a good salary instead
And have managed to fool themselves
That they still have principles,
Anyone who doesn't give a shit
About you and me
But smiles nicely
And looks responsible

And very, very concerned
And thinks we believe them
And will certainly look into it
Thank you for bringing it to my attention,
Anyone who puts the balance sheet first
And doesn't have a column for love
And human feelings
And is more concerned with economies of scale
Than the scale of the economy,
Anyone who acts as though
They're listening to the community
And then does what they were always going to do
Anyway –
Lying toads,
Anyone who thinks they made the right decision
When millions suffered,
Anyone who thinks living can be taught,
Measured
Examined
And graded
And doesn't realize
That an A+ is an insult,
A fail,
For losers
Like them,
Anyone who can't sing
But is convinced they're perfectly in tune
In harmony with the people
Everywhere
Lalala,
Anyone who thinks there's nothing wrong with them
And doesn't realize they're a head case
In charge of the fate of the sane,
Anyone whose brain
Has been replaced by a chip
Containing rules and regulations
That no one voted for
But are passed off as democratic
And fair,
Anyone who has no idea
Why we think they're so odious
And can't understand what all the fuss is about
And thinks we're all ungrateful bastards,
Anyone who says
"When I was your age"
And doesn't actually remember,
Anyone who says
"If we make an exception for you
They'll all be doing it",
Anyone who thinks they know best
And we ought to be pleased
And is puzzled and hurt
When we're not,
Anyone whose order
Is everyone else's disorder,

Well like I said
They can all fuck off,
Surplus to requirements...



Loveder' - What you have here is a small version of one of the absolutely massive Multiversal Community Canopy, Triangles. For me, amongst other things they represent togetherness, which is something being explored throughout my practice - whether that is the presence or absence my work wouldn't exist without our togetherness as humans and as a community.

Vibrant, bold, HUGE, etc, etc. What will the MCC mean to you?

Keep an eye on Union Street's Manor Streets crossing once lockdown is lifted, to see all four out in action!



RAAY²

WINDOW
GALLERY

A NEW PICTURE
EVERY DAY



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Matt Thomas and the RAAY2 Window Gallery

Not long after RAAY (like most other businesses) had to shut doors at the end of March, I started hanging pictures, in the front window of my home studio, which faces the street at about eye level as you walk past on the pavement. The idea was to share art in a fun, informal way while we're all spending so much time at home, but also to keep some RAAY activity bubbling along, so that when we can reopen, with any luck, it won't seem like we've been completely dark for these weeks. So, my front window became the RAAY2 – Window Gallery, a sort of RAAY annex. Every morning I hang a new picture in the window, take a photo and post the photo to the RAAY2 facebook page, which is at @RAAY2window. The 'gallery' has sparked front doorstep (but at a safe distance), conversations with neighbours, comments from people passing by on their daily walk, and even one sale, through the FB page. As I write, it's been almost a month of only my pictures, so I'm currently working on some ways to expand the idea and include other artists in the project.

The picture included here is from a set titled '41 Drawings', that I started in 2015, and have been working on periodically since.

RAAY - Royal Adelaide Art & Yoga CIC, is an art gallery and yoga studio in Stonehouse that I run with my partner, Yoga teacher Nic Sharpe.



Self Isolation... how terrible.

