

## **1 Gather**

A L W A Y S K N O W H O W Y O U  
A R E G O I N G T O P U T Y O U R  
F I R E O U T A N D H A V E S O M E  
E T H I N G N E A R B Y T O D O I  
T W I T H B U I L D A F I R E N O  
L A R G E R T H A N N E C E S S A  
R Y C L E A R F I R E A R E A O F  
A N Y C O M B U S T I B L E S D O  
W N T O S O L I D F I R E P R O O  
F S U R F A C E B E C A R E F U L  
O F H I G H W I N D S L O O K U P  
F O R A N Y T H I N G T H A T M A  
Y C A T C H F I R E D O N O T L E  
A V E F I R E S U N A T T E N D E  
D B E A B S O L U T E L Y S U R E  
T H A T T H E F I R E I S C O M P  
L E T E L Y O U T B E F O R E L E A  
V I N G C A M P D O N T B U I L D  
F I R E S W H E N Y O U A R E A L  
O N E D O N T P L A Y W I T H F I  
R E U S E F I R E P L A C E S T O E  
N C L O S E A F I R E I F N E C E S  
S A R Y P U T Y O U R F I R E P L  
A C E I N A S P O T W H E R E F I  
R E W I L L N O T S P R E A D H A  
V E A L L O F T H E W O O D T H A  
T Y O U W I L L N E E D W I T H I  
N E A S Y R E A C H B E F O R E L  
I G H T I N G Y O U R M A T C H P  
L A C E Y O U R T I N D E R O N T  
H E S I D E T H A T W I L L C A T  
C H T H E W I N D H A V E S O M E  
K I N D L I N G L O O S E L Y L A  
I D O V E R Y O U R T I N D E R P



## How to start a fire

First we swap words.

Incendiary. Signal fire.

You trade me back beacon.

From Old English sign, portent, ensign.

Proto-Indo-European to shine. Related to beckon.

You beckon me over to your fire, where you made your camp. We find out the word for fire in five languages

tân

火 (hi)

آگ (aag)

oheň

You laid this fire slowly, and it took a long time. Before I met you, I thought in terms of touch paper, blasts, petrol, dynamite. You showed me how to lay sticks upon sticks. A small fire that starts slowly, but will burn a long time.

Beacon – both the fire, and the hill the fire is made on.

We'll lay small, slow fires. We'll polish pebbles until they shine.  
We'll beckon others over, we'll light up the world with campfires,  
make a map of warm routes.

How to start a fire

Anon.

## **Introduction**

In 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic began, theatres, community centres and arts venues across the UK went dark. The touring companies that ordinarily brought life to these spaces found themselves in an extremely precarious position, unable to tour work or to connect audiences and artists. In response, ETT (English Touring Theatre) and Headlong came together to imagine a project that would highlight the vital role that touring companies play in the ecosystem of UK theatre, celebrate the extraordinary diversity of the national touring network and be a warning signal towards the connections that we stood to lose. 'Signal Fires' was born.

The idea was 'open source': any touring company could participate. And 40 did, all across the UK, lighting fires real and virtual, in school car parks and abandoned churches, outside

theatres and inside village halls. New Earth Theatre led a torch-lit procession along Manchester streets while New Perspectives created a virtual bonfire on WhatsApp. Fuel curated a festival of storytelling in woodland in Devon; and Graeae sent a box in the post containing a campfire starter kit: a blanket, a recipe and a song. Hundreds of freelance artists were employed, sharing stories with thousands of audience members: a nationwide festival of collaboration and connection in the most difficult time our industry has faced.

This book, produced by Fuel with Graeae, Headlong and ETT, holds some of the stories that were told. It's not just a record of Signal Fires past, however, an archive to leave on the bookshelf gathering dust. Our sincere hope is that in times of darkness yet to come, readers will be inspired by its pages to light their own fires, real or virtual, to read aloud the words already written or fill the empty pages with their own. Gather with friends and strangers, around a bonfire, a candle, or even a phone torch, speak, shout out, sing together, collaborate and connect.

The idea is still open source: take it, it's yours.

Holly Race Roughan (Headlong), Richard Twyman (ETT), Kate McGrath (Fuel), Maddy Costa (Editor)



Akiyawerikumo Henry  
performs *Ngwino ubeho* (Come to life) by Odile  
Gakire Katese at The Woodland Presents,  
Dartington Hall Estate, Devon, October 2020.  
Photo: Kate Mount

**Francois Matarasso**

## **Blowing on the embers of community art**

*Hope today is a contraband passed from hand to hand and from story to story.* John Berger

No one intended to start a movement, not at first. It was only a matter of gathering what was to hand, materials, then people. The ancient ritual. Make a fire, make a circle. The heart, and the embrace.

Look through the flames and the sparks; catch another's eye. Start talking, tell a story, tell another. Make art. Make connection. Become a community. Become a movement.

The first community artists were survivors of a shipwreck. A stiff, stuffy, monochrome decade was sinking, with its jobsworth rules and paternalism, its austerity and gratitude – Hurrah! Strike out for the Sixties, bright, fresh and above all young, a new generation coming of age in peace, health and prosperity, with unheard-of possibilities for education and creativity. Yes, to be young then could be very heaven.

Only later did those who came up on this beach miss some of what had gone in the flood. Childhood. Place. Community. Taken for granted and irreplaceable.

But they had eyes on other prizes. Some wanted the simple wealth and celebrity now accessible to ambitious, creative young people with (or despite) working-class roots. Some wanted social change, transformation, a new Jerusalem: revolutions, even cultural ones, do go to the head. Some just wanted everyone to have the chances they'd had, and tried to connect art school (post-) modernism with working-class culture in a spirit of empowerment.

It was they who invented community art in the 1960s and 1970s, doing their best to undermine the authority of some ancient but shabby institutions.

They worked with what was at hand – unwanted buildings on peppercorn rents, scrap materials, money from the dole or government training schemes, all the flotsam and jetsam of a consumer society in flux. On these margins, it was always make do and mend, a version of wartime necessity, though a few who'd read French theory called it 'bricolage'. And they made bonfires to attract kids and their parents – real ones, yes, with fireworks, giant puppets and the burning of parliament in papier mache, but metaphorical ones too: inflatables and environments, playgrounds, murals, parades and festivals, anything to gather a crowd and so open a door for art to happen.



Community art was art in public – but never the condescension of public art – because nothing, not least audiences, could be taken for granted. Make a splash, make a fire: when you have people’s attention, who knows what’s possible?

Community artists set up camp in the poor parts of London, Leeds and Liverpool, Bath and Birmingham – what ministers and sociologists used to call the ‘inner city’. Without rules or models, without much help or encouragement, a generation of young people revealed a new territory of art-making, in the everyday, with everyone.

They believed, and declared, that everyone is an artist, or at least that everyone can be an artist, if they have the resources and desire. Kingsley Amis snorted ‘only if making mud pies counts as art’, but who was listening to the club bore? The one thing community artists never lacked was people who wanted to make art, especially those who’d been told that they weren’t clever, educated, white, male, straight or able enough to do it, the ones who’d been instructed to know their place because they’d never amount to much. They were legion and they were pushing at the door from the other side. Those with access and those without wanted the same thing: equal rights, for all – and a fair chance to tell their own stories.

No one intended to start a movement, but those first fires grew and spread; they glittered at each other across cities, new towns, estates and fields. Community artists saw what others were doing: they met, they talked, they found common ground, despite their differences. They built ideas and principles as well as bonfires. They scaffolded dreams with manifestos and campaigns. They heard about cultural democracy and made it their own. They became a movement.

That was fifty years ago – more. It's history, nostalgia, irrelevant.

There are plenty who'll tell you that community art failed, that working-class artists lost their chance: behind populist greasepaint and vulgar tweets, the elite is back in charge. The rhetoric of social change was just that, they say, vanity and illusion. Community art was rolled up, like so much else, by the neoliberal hegemony. Who needs art when the state supplies bread and circuses, Universal Credit and Netflix?

Perhaps they're right, if you believe the movement was about replacing the existing order. That didn't happen. On the contrary, it was post-war social democracy that was overthrown, by technology, financial greed and political hubris. The challenge of the inner city was solved by inflaming property values, and

shunting the people who lived there into ever more constrained spaces. A zero-hours contract takes all the time in the world: life then is nothing but make do and mend.

Since the 1980s, community art has kept its head down, always moving on forged papers. It goes by other names, at the risk of forgetting its own identity. It is contraband, passed discreetly from hand to hand, with stories. Yet its influence keeps growing. The idea that everyone can be an artist is no longer controversial: it is a given – or, more accurately, a taken.

The fires lit in the 1960s went out, or seemed to, stamped on, neglected, doused in cold political water. But fire, like ideas, like stories, like hope, is tenacious. It can live quiet and long, waiting for new fuel, for air. Nothing lasts for ever; not much lasts very long. The Washington Consensus is sapped by its own inconsistencies, and by the external forces of pandemic and climate change. Another ship is going down.

With it will go an art world become once again complacent, financialised, consumed. The sponsorship and retail on which it has thrived since the 1980s have ended with a virus that makes people wary of crowds. Pack 'em in and sell it high no longer holds. The institutions will regroup, they always do. It's much harder for the freelancers and self-employed artists, especially

those different voices, other stories, already struggling for credit at the margins. It is in one another that they must find solidarity, as the weak have always done. There is always strength in community.

On the beach, the embers of community art are glowing. A new generation will gather what it can, what it needs and wants. It will find a heart and an embrace, make do and mend. Dream. Rediscover and invent. Blow on the coals, make friends and allies. Make a community. A movement.

## **Graeae**

### **Toffee apple cake**

#### **Ingredients**

25g dairy-free margarine, plus extra for greasing

4 eating apples

195g light muscovado or brown sugar

100g self-raising flour (or use plain flour with 1 teaspoon of baking powder)

80g wholemeal flour (or more white flour)

1 ½ teaspoons cinnamon

1 teaspoon mixed spice

80ml sunflower or rapeseed oil

180ml water

Zest of 1 orange

## **Equipment**

square cake tin, 23cm is preferable • baking paper/parchment

• zester and grater • chopping board and knife • saucepan • wooden spoon • large mixing bowl • small mixing bowl or jug

## **Method**

1 Preheat the oven to 180oC/350oF/Gas 4.

2 Grease and line the base of a square cake tin. Take some kitchen roll and wipe it in your extra margarine. Wipe it all over the bottom and sides of the tin. Take a large square of baking parchment and scrunch it up, then smooth it out and press into the tin, as close to the edges and corners as you can.

3 Zest the orange and set aside.

4 Peel two of the apples and cut into 1cm cubes. Set them aside – they might go a bit brown, but that's OK!

- 5 Melt the margarine with 85g of the sugar in a pan. Stir gently to make sure it doesn't stick to the bottom! Then pour into the prepared tin. It should be a very thin layer.
- 6 Place the cubed apple in a single layer on top of the melted sugar and margarine. Set aside.
- 7 Combine the flours, 110g of sugar and the spices in a large bowl.
- 8 Peel and cube the remaining two apples and, in a separate bowl or jug, combine them with 180ml water, the oil and the orange zest.
- 9 Pour the wet ingredients over the dry ingredients and mix, quickly but thoroughly.
- 10 Pour the mixture over the layer of apples in the cake tin.
- 11 Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until a knife comes out clean.
- 12 Leave the cake to cool before removing from the tin. Try flipping it over to reveal the toffee apples at the bottom.
- 13 Enjoy!



National Youth Theatre  
rehearsing *The Last Harvest*  
at the Sanctuary Theatre,  
Soulton Hall, Shropshire,  
October 2020.  
Photo: Helen Murray





**Nima Taleghani**

**Whatever story we decide**

Questioning today, going back in order to find the answer  
before this land was polluted by the engine of a fast car  
or seagulls swooping down on Brighton Beach to lick  
inside the wrapper of a Mars bar  
before Beyonce's sister fly-kicked Jay-Z in an elevator  
and it caused a whole flipping palaver  
before we could open our hearts around a fire  
in a car park.

When we wanted answers we couldn't Google  
and we'd ask stars  
when we'd confide in the trees with the strongest leaves  
instead of barbers and bar staff  
when we believed in things we couldn't see like bank balances  
or karma  
when we'd look at the sun in order to work out what time it is  
before time, before words, languages and hieroglyphs

before seas were split open, before food banks feeding  
a line of kids.

Cos if these stories can't serve us to be better maybe it's time to  
set fire to our myths, and turn these pyramids to pyro-mids.

See how bright this fire gets.

The same type flame that was once upon a time, for the first time  
ever, ignited inside a crypt

with fascination she played with the flames

she's the equivalent to what we might nowadays call  
a 'budding young scientist'.

But this is the first fire ever, of all time, imagine dat bruv

and you got this little kid, she's barely six, and sparks a flame  
from rubbing sticks, without a lighter or a match cuz!

She's mesmerised, but no fear

learns to manipulate the flame within the cold cave, and it warms  
up her whole ear

she moves the flame across her face and it singes the eyebrow  
above her right eye

her shot-black brows now dotted with specks of white, so that little  
strip of hair above her eye looks like a starry night sky

so when her right eyebrow looks up to the heavens that evening,  
little fire blazing

the gods and her will both be seeing the same thing, ain't that  
amazing.

Her tribe learn of her fire-making skills. Six-year-old goddess tells  
her best friend: It's flipping wicked how all the adults respect  
me.'

Plus, because of her starry night sky-singed eyebrows (black as  
night with flecks of white) the tribe have endowed her with  
the name Specky.

For most six-year-old kids in a powerful hunter-gather tribe in the  
Middle East 8,000 years ago, getting endowed with a name  
would have them utterly elated

but Specky said to her mate: It's cool, like it's a nice name, it  
coulda been better, but fuck it fam I'll take it.'

So Specky becomes a Goddess, and tells stories around her  
flames when the sun hides and the sky blackens  
tells her tribe tales about their ancestors who were dragons  
how they are all made of stars and fire, so when they leave this  
earth, or cease to breathe and their hearts retire  
these flames will lift them up to the skyline, with clouds for pillows  
and the burning stars as a high-up funeral pyre.

And so Specky's fire burns into the future  
into a land of computers and youth clubs  
it used to be unmanned without guidance or a tutor  
swallowing the flames turns a freedom fighter to looter.

Once upon a time, these fires  
made a loada animals extinct, never to be seen again  
extinguished from our memories like the flames that engulfed 'em,  
blazing.

Now we don't even dream of them  
but the firepit is waiting.

So we gather round these flames in whatever weather  
whether you're a first timer or you got prior

this is the kinda celebration to make Guy Fawkes turn in his grave  
in desperation to have a look at our bonfire  
chopping logs while the young misfit kids spin a robbed tire  
into the flames that dance and sing like a hot choir  
ain't it a thing, that when the flickers started glistening, they  
reflected on to the sky and the stars got brighter.

Like it's 1569, the rebels are approaching, we learn from turrets  
being ignited and the blood-curdling scream of the town  
crier.

Like it's 2011 and no matter how hard you try you can't find  
a way over this fire gate so I got two choices:  
do I escape or try to jump the flame without getting caught  
in barbed wire?

Thinking of Xena the warrior princess on Channel 5, King Arthur  
and the Black Panther, like fam that was some fighter  
but somehow I don't think this game was rigged equal, paranoid  
like who conspired with the umpire  
there's so much Alzheimer's in the empire.

So as we gather around this fire we inherited and we see inside  
attempt to visualize the truth 'bout the past and read between

the lines

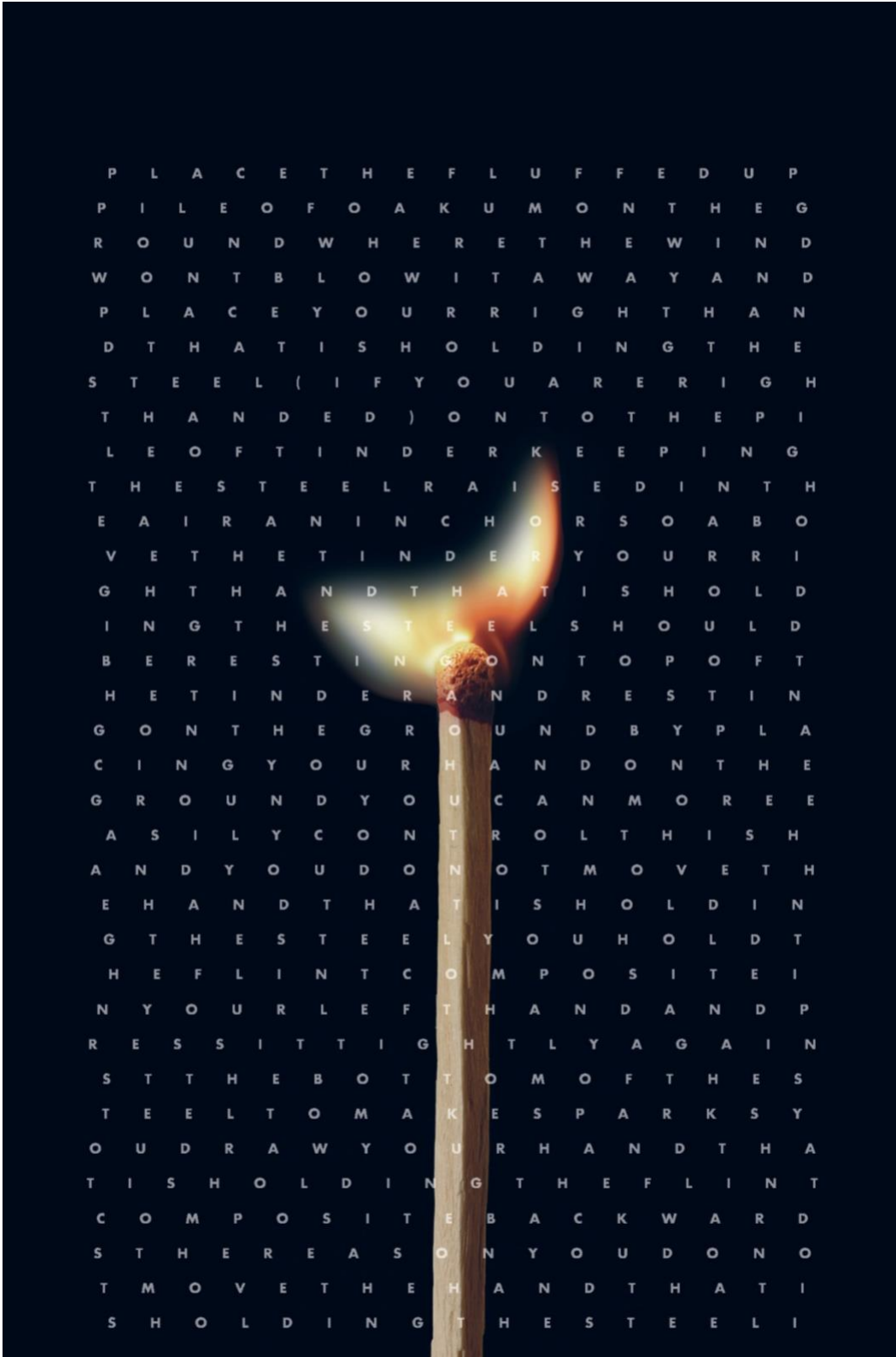
whether it's the flame that burnt above Specky's eyes or if it's  
redefined

know that we sit on the shoulders of whoever we decide  
dragons, tyrants, priests, truth and lies.

But whatever story we decide

why not choose a tale that gives us, even just for a moment,  
a little peace of mind.

## **2 Kindling**



P L A C E T H E F L U F F E D U P  
P I L E O F O A K U M O N T H E G  
R O U N D W H E R E T H E W I N D  
W O N T B L O W I T A W A Y A N D  
P L A C E Y O U R R I G H T H A N  
D T H A T I S H O L D I N G T H E  
S T E E L ( I F Y O U A R E R I G H  
T H A N D E D ) O N T O T H E P I  
L E O F T I N D E R K E E P I N G  
T H E S T E E L R A I S E D I N T H  
E A I R A N I N C H O R S O A B O  
V E T H E T I N D E R Y O U R R I  
G H T H A N D T H A T I S H O L D  
I N G T H E S T E E L S H O U L D  
B E R E S T I N G O N T O P O F T  
H E T I N D E R A N D R E S T I N  
G O N T H E G R O U N D B Y P L A  
C I N G Y O U R H A N D O N T H E  
G R O U N D Y O U C A N M O R E E  
A S I L Y C O N T R O L T H I S H  
A N D Y O U D O N O T M O V E T H  
E H A N D T H A T I S H O L D I N  
G T H E S T E E L Y O U H O L D T  
H E F L I N T C O M P O S I T E I  
N Y O U R L E F T H A N D A N D P  
R E S S I T T I G H T L Y A G A I N  
S T T H E B O T T O M O F T H E S  
T E E L T O M A K E S P A R K S Y  
O U D R A W Y O U R H A N D T H A  
T I S H O L D I N G T H E F L I N T  
C O M P O S I T E B A C K W A R D  
S T H E R E A S O N Y O U D O N O  
T M O V E T H E H A N D T H A T I  
S H O L D I N G T H E S T E E L I



## **How to start a fire**

If there is no heat in your heart and each breath  
is brittle. If passion has dwindled and all causes  
feel lost, ask yourself, what can I break  
on the altar of my life? For there in the gap  
left behind, lies the first spark to a larger fire

**Tom Burgess**

## **Rebecca Manson Jones**

### **Oxygen**

People didn't get why I did it.

People didn't need a job as much as I did.

People didn't realise... don't know, what that time meant.

And it's like anything – there are good places, and less good  
ones.

When I got a good one – this one – I realised what this job is supposed to be. We need to stop talking about it as if it's the worst job in the world.

I used to be a travel agent.

That's my degree.

I'd straighten my hair and wear high heels and encourage people to see the world. I thought it was a way of helping people become their full selves but it was just lining shareholder pockets.

I'd straighten my hair and wear high heels and encourage people to see the world. I thought it was a way of helping people become their full selves – but it was just lining shareholder pockets.

And they made me redundant

– Nothing personal, they said, it's because of the algorithm.

So now I don't straighten my hair, and I still put on my smile and I wear flats and PPE – when we can get it.

I didn't expect to like it so much.

My kids are at uni, so it was suddenly just him and me.

I took all the shifts I could.

Sometimes it's tough and it's boring. For the residents and for us.

And when lockdown came... When I moved in. It wasn't a heroic act. I don't like it when people say that.

Not everyone's a nice person, not everyone's had an inspirational life.

But they all have a story. We all do.

For me, it was a way of escaping the house.

Turns out I have transferable skills – but you can't overstep, get in the way of the family. Even if they're only visiting through the window. Even if they're idiots.

– At work, I'm at work. They need me.

– No, you can't come here. It's not safe.

With his bad chest, even he couldn't argue with that.

I wasn't sure where to go when lockdown ended and the other carers moved back home. But it is this quiet one – it is always the quiet ones – Violet Elizabeth Harrison – who gives me the push.

She says: 'Hey missy, you. Travel agent. I see you, you know. Helping everyone. Who take care of you?'

–

'You no good to anybody else if you don't take care of yourself.'

–

‘When the plane go down, before you go help anyone else, what you do?’

– You put on your mask, I say automatically.

‘That’s right. You got to put on your own oxygen mask.’ She smiles.

At first, I’m not sure what she means – and then I realise that she’s right.

I can’t build back. I have to keep going forward. I have to shield myself.

**ngwino ubeho (come to life)**

**Odile Gakire Katese**

There are in life

dreams

and wishes

which come true

just because they are

simple

persistent  
and justified.

1.

I unfurl the wings of time  
and to both tips I tie  
all the threads that weave your name.

Today I summon history  
to refresh her memory.

If needed, I will whip her to make her confess  
what she has not confessed yet.

I go into the attic of my heart  
to dust the paintings of your life.

With haste I take your name  
out in the fresh air  
to restore its radiance.

I carve the outline of your steps in the public square.

I sharpen the fine and delicate lines of your silhouette.

I rebuild a section of your life.

I take a handful of the earth that covers you  
and infuse each speck with a breath of eternity...

I extract your name from the memorial sites  
and I remind the world  
that only yesterday, you were  
that today, you are no more  
but that tomorrow, you will be again.

You will be the tree growing the fruits of life.

You will be the angel watching over our lives.

You will be the star guiding in the night.

You will be the spring cooling the desert.

2.

Then, they told me about your eyes  
how the sun shone in them in daytime and night-time  
how they welled up as soon as you smiled.

Then, they told me about your skin

how soft it was, and how lovingly it surrendered  
to the caress of the machete  
how your flesh, tender and willing,  
split open under the sharp spear of death.

Then, they told me about your heart  
how it was going at a hundred miles an hour  
how from the four corners of the world  
one could hear it bang  
with faith, with fire  
with passion, with power.

Then, they decided it was making a racket  
it was polluting the earth  
so they removed its beating permit.

Apparently it did not flee  
nor did it take refuge  
at the top of the head  
or the bottom of the heels.

No, it reliably stayed in its place  
stunned and dismayed.

The entire world heard  
the rhythm of your drumming heart  
take off, accelerate  
then slow down and suffocate.

But until the end it kept beating  
until the end it kept fighting  
until the very end  
standing until the last thump.  
Thu-thump. Thu-thump. Thu-thump.

Then, they told me that it died  
that, exhausted, it collapsed.

Then, they told me about your faith  
your fear, your love  
your anger.

Then, they told me about your outbursts



your passions.

In the end, they told me your name.

Yes, they told me your name

which I wear every day

to protect myself from cold and despair.

Since then, all my dreams look like you

they have your big eyes

and every night, it is against your name that I fall asleep.

Yes, they told me your name.

Every time they tell me your name

I break into a thousand ungrateful pieces.

Today, whispering these words

is a little like scratching your skin

like trying to raise your eyelids

in the hope of stealing the look in your eyes.

I lie next to your body

and try to feel your warmth

and try to make love to you.

I try to wrap your arm around my shoulders

and I caress your mouth with the tips of my poor fingers.

3.

Every morning, I get up at dawn

I search for you in the thick cotton fog

I turn every ray of sun upside-down.

Take my hand and let me pull you

out of the dark abyss where you fall

a little more every day.

Yes, take my hand now –

don't sit over there!

No!

Over there, it is wet

over there, my memory is pitted with holes

over there, I have a rattle stuck in my throat

over there, my eyes have not yet found peace

and my soul is still nauseous.

Over there, my humanity is in rags

my life is stench and ugliness

and my slumped silhouette

hugs the walls of shame.

Over there, my skin is all wounds

over there, I am incomplete

botched, unfinished, useless.

Over there, my patience loses patience

over there, my serenity has bitten all of its nails

over there, I am a shell

against which you might break.

Come instead to this side of my life –

yes, this way.

Here, the light is warmer

here, my memories have found peace

here, your presence is more vivid

here, hearts beat more freely

here, we flirt with the stars.

Lift your head now –

do you feel the warm caress of my eternal affection?

Open your eyes

and look at yourself in mine.

You are my most beautiful reflection.

You are the tear that I shed every day

over my parched and burned life.

You are a caress soothing my soul.

You are my son

my mother's son

my sister's son

my daughter's son.

Open your mouth

taste my maternal bliss.

My children are your children

their names are

Uwera – Ishimwe – Mugwaneza – Kalisa – Intwali Karemera –

Rwigema – Kamaliza – Uwilingiyimana – Kayisire – Umulisa

Listen!

Do you hear the echo of your life?

Listen to the emptiness

it is where I dreamt you blossoming.

Listen to the silence

it is where I suspended your future.

Listen to the absence

it is where I put away your dreams.

Come back to this side of life

for it was here that I embraced death

because it had your face

because it was you

it had chosen to resemble.

From now on I live here

here, I often come to find you  
and to better lose you.

Here, I often come  
to listen to the fading sound  
of your footsteps...

4.

It is over.

One must know how to let it be over.

One must know how to hold his breath longer  
to live until the end.

One must know how to leave  
when life slams the door in his face  
to live other lives  
and other non-lives...

Luckily, the days go by tirelessly  
and bring me closer to that time when I too  
will swing from one of the sun's rays

to cross over to that other side of life  
where hearts beat in silence.

5.

Tell daddy that I see the world with his eyes.

Tell grandma that I caress the world with her hands.

Don't tell aunt Teta that I have bent her mouth a little  
and that her smile has lost a little of its sparkle.

Tell everyone that no one has forgotten  
that even the stones have memories  
that our children carry your names  
that every day we whisper  
into the world's ear, your stories.

Once upon a time my father.

Once upon a time my mother.

Once upon a time my brothers.

Once upon a time their eyes.

Once upon a time their hearts.

Once upon a time, life.

Tell them also that life blooms again  
that our hearts have taken up the baton  
that they beat even more strongly  
and that they run even faster.

**Daniel Ward**

**my radical future**

*A fitness instructor can be heard through the TV. Bold text indicates that everyone speaks together. / indicates overlapping text.*

*J, Q and Z are on stage. They carry their own sounds. J is the sound of yellow. Q is the sound of deep blue. Z is the sound of space.*

*J starts jogging along with the TV.*

TV Go, Go, Go, Go!



J Just Go, come on J – *whoop* – today’s the day, pure cardio, fourteen minutes to go, five minutes to rest, just **Go**. I’ll rest when I’m dead, feel the fire in my legs, that’s the burn of success, let’s GO!

TV / I know you can do it.

Q (*talking into a phone*) / I know you can do it! I know there must be a way, we’ve been working on this for nearly two years, I have sweated blood and tears and I refuse to lose, do you hear me? I will not be beaten by this thing, I will not stop, so / don’t you dare quit on me!

TV / Don’t you dare quit on me!

J Let’s **GO**.

Z (*with pad and pen*) I quit... I can’t think. Wait! What if he felt no pain in his legs, would that mean he could run further? Run longer? Or would it lead to more complications? That’s terrible, I can’t think of jack...

TV Jack it out!

J (*starting jumping jacks*) Shit.

Q (*hanging up*) Shit.

Z Shit.

## JQZ **Let's GO.**

- J Getting stronger, getting fitter every day. Can't stop, can't slow, ten minutes to go and I just feel so... alive. Haven't had this time to improve myself, my state of mind and general health in my entire adult life, I've been a friend, a mother, a wife and now I just feel so... free, to be, just... ME.
- Q Getting more frustrated and feel more hurt every day. And it feels somewhat redundant to say at a time when lives are slipping away, but I feel grief. Not from the loss of a loved one but from the loss of a dream. Years working toward something destroyed by disease, made worse by the fact that I feel I should be pleased to be here. To be healthy. The guilt of not being able to find solace in the words: at the end of the day, it could be much worse.
- Z Getting nothing every day. I am a creative, so they tell me to create. It's a great time to be a writer, let the fountain flow. Thanks Dave, that's exactly how it works, how did you know? A man running on an endless track, swimming an endless sea, climbing an endless mountain, still feels incomplete. I feel like a piece of dust floating along in the vastness of space, how do you write about something affecting the entire human race?

TV Last push, you can do it!

*J goes back to jogging, this time as fast as she can. A cry of determination: Argh.*

*Q crumples. A cry of frustration: Argh.*

*Z looks to the sky. A cry of exasperation: Argh.*

TV You done it.

J Done?

Q I'm done.

Z I'm not done.

J That's it!? I was just warming up. I've got more to give! Not yet, another rep, another set, maybe I'll run five k real quick. Or bake. Or start the bake, let it proof, run five k, come back and stay in the groove, give it a knead, have my meeting at three and then bang the bread in the oven. I've just got such energy and I need to keep improving, the sky's the limit and I won't stop, can't stop moving. I won't stay still, while I'm here, while I'm not ill... I. Must. Keep. Moving.

Q I find solace in the stillness. I find comfort in my tears for years of work that will never be seen. And a thought starts to creep into my mind, difficult as it may seem... At the end of the day, what did it all mean?

J I. Must. Keep. Moving.

Q What did it all mean? What was it for? The late nights, the anxiety, pushing myself to do more. The work has gone and all that's left is a cup waiting to be filled with what I do next... But I don't feel the same. My priorities have changed. I think I'll call my mum.

J Must. Keep.

Z Still nothing. Every thought feels clichéd. Too much information and ignorance overwhelming my brain.

Too much sadness, anger, loneliness and rage. Too many people wanting too much, fucking up by not keeping the space. Too much appreciation, too much love, too much clapping, too much faith. As the numbers keep on rising, I see every number as a face and honestly I don't know how I can put all that on to a page. But maybe that's OK. I'm starting to think, maybe that's OK.

J I. Must. Stop. I lost my uncle. And I just couldn't...

Q I spoke to my mum. And it was nice.

J I thought if I just kept moving...

Q It was actually really nice.

J I've just been so afraid, to stop.

Z Maybe knowing I can never sum it all up is OK.

## **Tom Wells**

### **Lentils**

There's only so long you can live off lentils. I've had dal, I've had stew, I've had soup, I've had something with sweet potato in as well, baked, that I found on the internet and wouldn't do again. Lentil-wise, I've had enough. Run out of milk and all, which might not be easy to come by for a while. Teabags (vital). Lemsips, just in case. Obviously not in case of coronavirus: in case I get a cold while we're all in lockdown trying not to get coronavirus. Maybe in case of coronavirus too, though. Who actually knows? Sort of dawns on me: it's time. I'll have to go to Tesco.

The thing is, I'm not sure I've got it in me. The Hull Daily Mail's got all these photos on the website: angry shoppers, empty shelves. My mum said when she went to Withernsea yesterday, someone got tasered. In Aldi. Radio Humberside's wired: people talking about face masks, hospitals, ventilators. All quite anxious. Understandably.

But then a bit of me's like: 'Come on now. It's only a supermarket. Used to work there. Can't be that bad.'

Get my rucksack. Put a couple of tote bags in it too. My little thing of hand-sanitiser gel my mum got off her mate Jools, who made it herself. Few deep breaths. Head out into the world.

If you were looking for somewhere to set your low-budget post-apocalyptic movie, big Tesco's today would be perfect. If you were looking for somewhere you could stock up on loo roll, it wouldn't. I avoid that aisle, those angry people, but there're a lot of angry people, or stressed people, people panicking, in all the other aisles too. Everything's gone. Bread, milk, pasta, paracetamol, fruit. Stuff in tins, cartons. Flour. Which I've never seen people buy before but suddenly everyone's decided it's vital, they've got a sourdough starter off their mate who's trendy and this is its moment. I haven't really got the stuff on my list but I feel like a knob looking for mango at a time like this so I just get in the queue, the very long queue, hope for the best. It's massive, looping all round the back of the shop, past the booze, the bakery, the pharmacy, everything. Everyone in it's annoyed. Tense. Worried. And then: somebody coughs.

Just an ordinary cough, but... Just an ordinary woman with an ordinary cough, and she does it into her elbow, like they tell you to on the news, but the queue is suddenly very on edge. Like when a herd of gazelles spot a lion and they all sort of freeze. But instead of triggering the fight-or-flight instinct, like evolution says

would happen, or GCSE Science, people just: glare. Quite judge-y. Feel properly sorry for the woman. She tries to make light of it, laugh it off – ‘just a tickle,’ she says, ‘forgot there was a global pandemic’ – but the people round her are all well annoyed. Tutty. Everyone’s soon distracted though. Cos further ahead in the queue it’s kicking off.

I don’t know the details – something about Dettol spray – I just know you’re there quick as anything, and two absolutely irate blokes are now having a go at you – the supervisor – instead of this very timid lad – the shop assistant – who looks about fifteen and is stood behind you, out of his depth, shell-shocked. The men are shouting, I can’t hear what about except it’s swears and (I imagine) quite spitty, getting really close up in your face, stabbing their fingers at your chest. If you were going to draw a sketch of the idea of ‘toxic masculinity’, you’d draw this. Or maybe the idea of ‘knobhead’, I dunno. But you’re just calm. Just walk them away from the queue, away from the lad, who looks very relieved. You’re talking to them in this really measured way, as if it’s just a normal day, as if you’re not in charge of a chaotic, quickly-emptying-of-stock, bare-shelved bakery in a chaotic, quickly-emptying-of-stock, bare-shelved supermarket. You just act normal. And that means they sort of have to act normal too. Stop being angry and aggressive and that. Just walk with you, to the

aisle with all the cleaning products. I mean they're walking angrily, absolutely raging, but still. I'm sort of proud to know you a bit. Feel it in my chest. Fluttering.

That's what I think about in the queue. About the summer I'd just done my A-levels: English Lit, History, Religious Studies (I know). This place had just opened so a few of us got jobs here, just to save up a bit, 'til uni started. We'd all got reading lists from our first choices, properly exciting, even though the stuff we were meant to read was hard to understand and actually, secretly, boring. My mate Lizzie was spending her breaks getting to grips with Sigmund Freud. I was plodding through the *Iliad*.

Spoiler alert: it's shit.

Wish I'd said that at the time. Wish I'd told you that. Instead I made a bit of a show out of reading it in front of people, in the tiny staff room where all of us went for our tiny breaks. Everyone else just nipped to the loo, popped the kettle on, changed into or out of their uniforms if they were just arriving or off home (we weren't meant to wear them on the bus). I sat on the chair in front of the doorway, read my book. Went on about the poetry of it all to anyone who'd listen. Even if they didn't ask. (They didn't). 'The epicness...' I kept saying. Which I'm not sure is actually a word but it didn't matter anyway – I hadn't even read it, except the odd



paragraph here and there, which I didn't understand and nobody gave a shit about. I was just excited to be heading off into the world. Like the soldiers in the *Iliad*, I guess. Not really sure why they're fighting, not asking too many questions. As long as their armour was shiny. Which it was.

Homer quite liked describing the soldiers, I noticed. All brave, heroic, muscular, backlit by the sun. Like a sort of Ancient Greek power ballad. And they all had very impressive weapons. Those are the bits that jumped out to me. The funny bits. Daft. Never said though. Didn't seem like the sort of thing I should point out. Especially not to you. We didn't talk much anyway, to be fair. I was just mates with girls really. You were quite laddy. Gruff. Stubbly. Probably hungover, I thought at the time. Now I just think you probably couldn't get a word in. Which I guess is happening now as well, with the angry blokes and the cleaning products. I do think it's sort of amazing that you're managing. You are though. Or, you seem like you are.

It's only after I've queued and paid and (this is maybe a bit of a melodramatic way of putting it but) escaped into the open air that I wonder if you are managing really. Cos I see you. You're out having a break on the balcony bit, near the steps, outside TK Maxx. Having a Tunnock's Caramel. I'm just walking past, walking back to mine, and I don't know if I should say hey or not, dunno if

you'll remember me, so I just sort of leave it up to you really, sort of half-smile in your general direction. Which I do quite a lot near lads I fancy, dunno why, it hasn't worked yet. And that is when I notice that you're crying.

Trying not to look like you're crying, obvs, trying to look like you're just unwrapping your second Tunnock's, but you are. And there is a split second where I could go and check you're all right, listen a bit, tell you you did an amazing job, maybe give you a hug (actually I think maybe hugging is illegal at the moment but it's hard not to do it when you're quite a huggy person). But I worry you might be embarrassed if I do. Or I might be. Dunno. So I just look down, keep walking.

When I get back to mine I can hear the lads in the flat upstairs coughing. Through the ceiling. Properly coughing. A lot. And I think about how we share a hallway and a light switch and a door handle and how germs live for a few days on surfaces and they've been going in and out all the time. How my MS treatment means I'm immunocompromised and how the government have said Herd Immunity quite a lot and how everyone goes 'phew' whenever they hear someone who's ill has an underlying health condition cos that doesn't include them, but I've got one, it does include me. And it's not a biggie I'm sure but I have started to feel a bit hot, a bit sort of, well, um, feverish I suppose. I take some

paracetamol and try not to read a news story about how doctors might have to choose who gets a ventilator, which is another way of saying they'll have to choose who doesn't, and I feel very sweaty and very ill and a bit panicky and I just think: 'shit'.

I go to bed, and I don't get up for a good few days.

Big Tesco's is pretty different.

You have to go in underground, through the car park. The floor's marked with masking tape in two-metre boxes and there's arrows telling you which way to go. Ups and downs.

I waited 'til evening so it isn't busy.

Everything's in stock like normal again. Loo rolls. Milk.

Paracetamol.

Lentils. (Still not keen.)

People are doing their best to follow the rules.

It's the first time I've been out for seventeen days. Knackered already but. Just testing the water a bit. Just thought I'd get a few things.

I just had it mildly, it turned out. I mean it didn't feel mild, one night I thought I might die but I am a bit on the melodramatic side. And I was lucky, obvs. I didn't have to go to hospital or anything.

I'm trying not to think about the world.

They keep saying 'the new normal'. The news and that.

Too soon, I reckon. Everything's still up in the air. Not sure yet where things'll land.

I have a few hopes though. For a fairer world. Like if you've got to rebuild it anyway, I figure, rebuild it better. A bit kinder. A bit braver. For the people who've been keeping stuff going, I guess. Just quietly. I hope we all remember how much we needed them. I don't know if we will.

I hope I will, anyway.

Make a little promise to myself: to be a bit kinder. Be a bit braver. Think maybe that starts with you.

When I go outside, you're collecting trolleys at the edge of the car park. Trudging a bit. I guess it's been a long day. A long month. A long lockdown. You look like you could do with an early finish, a good meal, a good sleep. Look a bit like the soldiers in the *Iliad*, coming back from the war, a bit broken. And I don't want to be harsh, I know we all need a hair cut and it's not a priority at the moment but the thing is: you have got a mullet.

I don't think anyone could make that work.

But the sun's setting behind you. Long shadows on the ground and you're sort of, it sounds daft but, the truth is you are sort of golden. Sort of glowing. The outline of your body bathing in this long evening light. So I decide: tonight I won't just gaze at the ground, shuffle past. Won't just half-smile in your general direction, leave it up to you. I'll look you in the eye, and smile and say: 'hey.' Say: 'thank you.' Say: 'I hope the future looks a bit like you (except the mullet).'

And I do.

**Karen Spicer**

**Fireside pondering**

I'm certain in these uncertain times of my uncertainty, and certain that, within my uncertainty, I certainly am not alone.

Alone I have sat, exercised, written, typed, slept, not slept, been angry, fearful and occasionally peaceful.

I am not alone in that.

I have been here before,  
not knowing then that that experience  
would give me hope and resilience for this experience.

Inside, locked down for months,  
then suddenly, without preparation  
and with huge trepidation  
allowed out.

Into a strange new world of other people,  
of new-old sounds and feelings,  
of space, and hesitant, clumsy yet beautiful connection.

I have visited this strange new-old world before.

Alien to my world, beginning again.

The difference is, many now are remotely, or at a

distance                      apart                      with me

not quite knowing, being and not being

tested, to our very core of being,

trying to just be, or not –

what was the question?

The question is, how?

How do we cope with this now?

There are days when the need to do is amplified:

I must do my daily walk

I must do my weekly shop

I must constantly clean my hands and surfaces –

but I am not alone in this.

Now I speak with you, with others, of these uncertain times

of this thing that they tell us will be a new normal.

Of knowing that there is no normal.

I am not alone in that.

I have, like you, been terrified of losing those I love.

I have understood the fear of losing, in – maybe for me,

not necessarily for you – ways I haven't before.

I wonder, do we all stand to gain?

Something? Anything?

Can I learn to be?

Is that the question?

Learning, through this being alone,  
that I, that we, that you,  
are not alone.

That maybe in the storm we can join together.





### **3 Flint + Steel**

A L W A Y S K N O W H O W Y O U  
A R E G O I N G T O P U T Y O U R  
F I R E O U T A N D H A V E S O M E  
E T H I N G N E A R B Y T O D O I  
T W I T H B U I L D A F I R E N O  
L A R G E R T H A N N E C E S S A  
R Y C L E A R F I R E A R E A O F  
A N Y C O M B U S T I B L E S D O  
W N T O S O L I D F I R E P R O O  
F S U R F A C E B E C A R E F U L  
O F H I G H W I N D S L O O K U P  
F O R A N Y T H I N G T H A T M A  
Y C A T C H F I R E D O N O T L E  
A V E F I R E S U N A T T E N D E  
D B E A B S O L U T E L Y S U R E  
T H A T T H E F I R E I S C O M P  
L E T E L Y O U T B E F O R E L E A  
V I N G C A M P D O N T B U I L D  
F I R E S W H E N Y O U A R E A L  
O N E D O N T P L A Y W I T H F I  
R E U S E F I R E P L A C E S T O E  
N C L O S E A F I R E I F N E C E S  
S A R Y P U T Y O U R F I R E P L  
A C E I N A S P O T W H E R E F I  
R E W I L L N O T S P R E A D H A  
V E A L L O F T H E W O O D T H A  
T Y O U W I L L N E E D W I T H I  
N E A S Y R E A C H B E F O R E L  
I G H T I N G Y O U R M A T C H P  
L A C E Y O U R T I N D E R O N T  
H E S I D E T H A T W I L L C A T  
C H T H E W I N D H A V E S O M E  
K I N D L I N G L O O S E L Y L A  
I D O V E R Y O U R T I N D E R P



## **How to start a fire**

A fire starts with pain. Is mixed in with anger.

But to allow it to flourish there must be hope.

Hope for a better future. And soon that hope  
will become so strong, it will become a demand.

Fire does not negotiate.

Fire spreads until everyone has no choice but to listen.

No choice but to change.

**Maggie Thorn**

**Sara Shaarawi**

**We don't talk about that**

When Lubna was born, it was during one of those rare Egyptian thunderstorms. This is before we completely fucked the climate and rain and storms became the norm, this is before that, this is when it rained once a year in Cairo and we would run out of our classrooms to feel the drops. This was a time where there was still hope, when we could have done something about impending climate catastrophe.

It's 1990 and the most interesting thing that happened in Egypt in 1990 is that we qualified for the FIFA World Cup.

Lubna was born during a heatwave, so it was hot. Like opening-a-preheated-oven kinda hot. Then lightning split the sky and drops of rain sliced the heavy heat.

Grannies uttered prayers. Kids ran out into the streets. Stray cats hid in corners of buildings.

Her mother would say:

'You always liked the drama, from the moment you were born.'

Lubna's childhood was unremarkable. She played sports, she worried about her reputation and about burning in hell for all eternity. She didn't like school and didn't do particularly well.

When Lubna was eleven her favourite film was Stand By Me because she loved the boys' freedom. They could just lie to their parents and go camping.

Go looking for dead bodies.

Go on an adventure.

At eleven she decides that what she wants in life is adventure.

At fourteen she decides she wants to be an archaeologist.

At sixteen she has her first kiss and it's a little disappointing.

At seventeen she gets the flu and thinks, for the first of many times, that she is gonna die.

At seven she has her first dream that involves dying.

At thirteen she tries her first cigarette.

At fourteen she buys a manual to learn film-making.

At five she develops a fear of her own shadow.

At twenty she decides that the arts are not for her.

At nineteen she starts to fight back.

At eighteen she begins to read poetry.

At twenty she feels like she definitely wants to be a mother.

At twenty-three she feels like she definitely doesn't want to be a mother.

At twenty-one she starts to have sex, she was pressured into it but she likes it and then she likes it more and then she likes it more and wants more and wants people to stop dying and corruption and terrorist attacks and exploitation and no bread justice freedom and torture the police torture they torture

Ssshhhh...

We don't talk about that.

On New Year's Eve 2010, Lubna is at a friend's party and she is drunk.

Not messy drunk.

The party feels relaxed but tense.

Artists and activists sit and smoke and laugh and kiss.

Artists and activists is misleading, the people here are both. It's almost always both.

Lubna feels sad and heavy.

She looks over at her friend Nader, he looks bored and hazy. He says:

‘Wanna be my kissing buddy?’

She doesn’t but she’s lonely and sad and unwanted and Nader is nice and he’s been a good friend but no, it’s not a good idea, it’s messy and for once she’s not messy.

He says:

‘What are your predictions for 2011?’

Nothing comes to mind.

She says:

‘I will move out of my mother’s house.’

‘You will meet the love of your life.’

‘We will both stop smoking hash.’

They laugh.

They smoke.

Nader says:

‘2011 looks like it’s going to be the most boring year yet.’

Midnight strikes.

And someone slips and smashes into a glass tabletop.



Glass everywhere.

Blood everywhere.

Everyone is panicking.

They have to get him to a hospital now.

‘Who here is the most sober?’

Laughter.

‘OK, who here has only been smoking and not drinking and can drive a car?’

Nothing.

‘Who here has a car?’

Lubna spends the first few minutes of 2011 in a car full of drunk people, holding an ice pack to a bloody nose, and she thinks this is possibly one of the worst starts to a new year there could be.

She’s wrong, it could have been worse.

In Alexandria.

An attack a bomb a car bomb no a suicide bomb a...

...

We don’t talk about that.

Lubna remembers being in a taxi on the evening of 24 January 2011 and the driver asking:

‘Are you going to the demonstration tomorrow?’

And Lubna said:

‘Why would I go?’

She was lying of course. She was going to go.

She did go.

But we don’t talk about that.

We can’t talk.

We can’t...

At twenty-one Lubna falls madly and deeply in love during the revolution.

The revolution that we don’t talk about.

The love affair is passionate and turbulent.

It lasts a few years.

On again.

Off again.

Off but on again.

Sort of on but not really on again.

One day he stops answering her calls and her texts and her emails.

He does that sometimes.

But this time it's different.

He actually disappears.

She's worried he's been kidnapped by the state but friends tell her he ran away.

He lives in Europe now.

And all of Lubna is

pain and anger and absolute betrayal.

Why would he run away from her? Why would he leave her?

Friends say he's claiming asylum in the UK but they don't offer more information than that.

She decides she needs to find him.

On the night before leaving, she has vivid dreams, her dreams talking to her. She's given birth to two tiny children, they fit in her palm and she doesn't know how to take care of them, how to keep them warm without crushing them. Nader is there and he's ill and throwing up and she's unable to clean up the mess. She's stuck in traffic and is holding a bomb and she knows she needs to

blow it up, she walks to the tunnel in the air and puts down the briefcase and waits.

The end of the world.

This is it.

It's happening.

She waits.

Looks at the bomb and...

Nothing.

There's nothing here. Just black.

'Am I dead? Is this what dying feels like?'

'I like this.'

'I like nothing.'

And she wakes up.

When Lubna leaves Egypt, it's during a freak storm. Medi-canes they call them now. Hurricanes on the Mediterranean, a very rare event. The plane is turbulent, kids are crying, and Lubna utters prayers even though she doesn't believe in God. She's worried that the world will end while she's in the UK. The UK is absolutely the last place she wants to be when the world ends, except for

maybe the US. She puts in her headphones, takes a deep breath and says to herself:

'You will find what you're looking for and then you'll go back home.'

## **Aisling Gallagher**

### **Slam**

*VOICE is a well-spoken, southern English woman's voice, the kind you hear on an institution's answering machine message. A is a desperate woman in her late twenties. B is a frightened man in his late fifties. South London. May 2020.*

**Voice** Thank you for calling the South London and Maudsley community mental health service. Unfortunately we are unable to take your call. Please leave a message after the tone.

*Long 'beeeeeep' sound.*

**A** Hi, I've called a bunch of times and left a load of messages. I don't have an email address to contact even though I've asked for one because phone calls are so difficult. No one's getting back to me? I'm not really sure what to do.

- B** I've run out of my tablets. The lady in the pharmacy who orders them for me got it, she hasn't been in for near two weeks.
- A** I tried to explain this before it all happened. I told the doctor that things were bad then. Things are worse now.
- B** I don't know what to do without her helping. I can't ring my doctor. She knows I can't. But it's a new man in charge and he doesn't know me.
- A** I don't want to be difficult. I'm not trying to be difficult. But I'm just really scared? I don't know how much more of this I can take.
- B** I feel sick. I haven't slept. I can't get hold of the social worker neither.
- A** I've got that thing where your stomach is clenching really bad, but it's all the time, and my heart is just beating and beating and beating, my muscles are so tense and I know tomorrow I'll be aching. It's like someone has just ripped out the earth under you and you're left hanging there, about to fall into some massive dark hole below, with a complete absence of hope, full of sheer terror. Do you know what that's like? Christ, I'm talking to a fucking answering machine.

**B** I've got brain thingies, like zaps, twitches, like a shock. This happened once or twice before. I know it's withdrawal.

**A** I'm sorry, I'm really sorry, I know that everyone is really stressed right now and things are bad for everyone, not just me. I just . . . I'm just really scared.

**B** I need to get my tablets. I just need my tablets.

**A** Things haven't exactly been easy in the last few years. But this is the worst thing. I've managed to cobble together some sort of life. I have some stability, I have my flat, it's not perfect but it's safe and I can ration out the heating and get by and I can afford my rent. I have a job, it's part-time but it keeps me going. It took a lot to get to this point. It took years of hard work, fighting for myself, trying to build a life, convincing myself that my life was worth sticking around for. That took work. Really hard work. I'm trying. I've been trying so hard. I just need some help with this. I'm really, really trying.

**B** I need my tablets. I just need my tablets.

**A** I just can't keep trying on my own. I need some help.

**B** My tablets. Please.

**A** Please. I'm so desperate.

**B** I need to get my tablets. I just need my tablets.

*End of message tone.*

**Voice** Thank you for getting in touch with the South London and Maudsley mental health service. In an emergency, please call the Samaritans on 116 123...

*Voice crackles and fades out.*

**Aisha Zia**

**Bedlam before the burn out**

When you're not allowed outside, there's more to explore inside.  
What do you do now you've only got each other to look at?

The things you say and the things you feel, again a complete betrayal of who you are and who you want to be next. Nothing's real anyway and tomorrow hasn't happened, so it's all up for grabs, isn't it?

You start counting again.

Nought point one four minus nought point six nine

the final figure, the burger, the minus nought point fifty-five down



Always on the back foot the back foot burning back lighting the  
fire paving the way Skin crawling everything trawling To trawl, to  
look back thoroughly Fishing with pennies and pockets and  
people you used to know, in dreams you used to have Thinking  
feeling something Still pennies trawling Man fawning pawning  
something always pawning Fawning man, man fawning back  
round again, again finding the words, the right man fawn The right  
word porn The right song fawn The right rhyme, the right sing  
something, the right I, the right

EE

We want to keep our kids safe online. The internet matters.  
Exactly, not that mega, just dropped my mum off at the airport but  
all the flights have been cancelled Shit, now what?

This is massive. There's a big delay. Something's happened.  
Something's. Stop everything and stay at home. Girl Interrupted.  
And she was just trying to have a relationship.

Get home.

Home. Set up a new payment

Why did you send that email again?

Right

Just the right

Just the right getting it right

Right there

Just getting it right right there

Come back

Come back to me

Come back to me later Waiter,

I want a fag can you bring me a cigarette Please [!] There I said it

Pause. Breathe. Deep. Now.

*[Reads something online, probably from the Guardian]*

The death toll has risen by 169 people to 767 over the past day. Among the latest victims was a 52-year-old nurse from the Basque country. The number of confirmed cases in Spain now stands at 17,174.

Day 1: I sit here and think about it for a minute. From my bedroom. Room. For a minute. And I hadn't quite noticed everything. The colour of the doors behind me, the slight peel of the paint beneath the window sill.

The Polish builders outside my lungs, dig deep roads, the post still arrives, periodically, though we're not sure what the letters are for and who will open them in our absence. An absence there will

be. Still, hammering and humming, all the sounds as usual. Business as. Broken appointments cancelled meetings. Someone said something and then the other didn't respond. The noise from before, the old noise, the sound of the piano and a singing boy. Old sound. Our sound. The sound we loved going quieter and quieter. We still have windows. Looking out, looking in. Birds sing. Openly.

I'm borderline. When all the borders are closed and all the streets are cordoned off I'm still, border. Not sitting on the fence so much as torn in half. One piece lives close, Battersea Bridge, Wandsworth Park. The other where. Meadows and lakes, my home town. Mum calls. Got enough bread? Yes, I went shopping yesterday and now I'm online. Late. Sainsbury's. Eggs and cheese. Some baked beans. It's fine. Nothing to worry about, nothing to. Panic. Tinned soup and pasta. Fridge full of larder. That should last. That should last all week. Everything's cancelled.

Day 2: A knock at the door. But don't open it. Don't. Wash your hands. Wash your... lather.

Twenty seconds.

We can't have this, he says, we can't. It's already been. A fortnight. Dried fruit and canned stew. Nothing new, almost all.

Ration. I love you. Ration. People keep sending messages and I want to ignore them. I want to. Bury my head in your armour. I want to. Love you.

Standing still. All stand. – Still, never let go, but Have you heard? Look enough of the news, make your own Enough of the time, make yours better Better Still Did you see me standing, in the distance? Make space, my time, your waves Let the waves make waves and then the sun dance moon shine Let the moon shine  
Pause. Breathe. Deep. Now.

Day 5: The number of people who have died from Covid-19 in the UK has risen to 137 after 29 more deaths in England, three more in Scotland and the first death in Northern Ireland. The English patients were aged between 47 and 96 and all had underlying health conditions. Overall, around four in ten of the coronavirus-related UK deaths were in London, which the government has stressed will not be strictly Locked down.

Thing is, this is it now. This is how it is. We want to move forward. We want to be together. The fridge the freezer. We said it before. We watched the films, we read the books and they told us. 28 Days Later. Armageddon. The Day After Tomorrow. We knew. In our bones. We did this.

The sea, the sand. I hear you. Before the burn out it was difficult. It was glow in the night. It was morning light like, it was everyone everything. Doing doing then undoing. Cash flowed, pockets lined with mint green, London buzzed. Though, not really. Not really, still. Still, always, wondering why. Mild paralysis. Slow down. Big decisions. Unstable, unsteady, life, still life. Then over.

Flowers bloom. Organic life matters. Capture the change, seasons change. Ice caps melt. Trees and bees. The light is right. Don't panic, free the flow. Free flow, you know who you are. You know who you all are.

Day 9: Self-isolation. Quieter now. All calm, and settled. We see each other for the first time in days. Asides, there's not much else to look at. The smaller details, trying to muster up the strength. It's not the time to be grand, it's not the time to be. Big. I just want to sleep. Be small and quiet. Peace finds me finally in the early hours of the morning and I cherish it. Enveloped, it is familiar, like a dear friend yet also strange, like it's been gone a long time and we might have to get to know each other again. The feeling of comfort, an overwhelming sense of love for it, and people. I think of the earth on a micro level. The tiny details, the organisms, the virus, the flu. And I have love for that too. I stay away. To grow

stronger. We stay away to grow. We learn to cope. I find myself. I find you. Gratitude arrives. With desperation.

Day 12: hashtag pubsclosed

Day 19: I love you.

Day 28: I don't think we can be together. I don't want this any more. Maybe I never did. I think you lied to me. I think we lied to each other. This isn't what I want. This isn't what I need. We need time. We need...

Day 30:

Day 45:

Day 90: I'm alone again. The thing is, I've learnt things are relative to the situation I'm in. I seek solitude, not isolation. I want to be alone but not lonely. I want to be by myself yet I want to be with you too. I want to be close to someone, to people, I want physical contact, yet I need to be close to myself first, it feels fucked up it feels...

Day 91: What is happiness?

Day 92: The gap between expectation and reward. An unavoidable question. The realisation I was not alone.

Day 101: Are we going to make it?

## **Mike Bartlett**

### **Phoenix**

He shouldn't be here, Tim thought, as he stood in the dark, throwing plastic wrapper after plastic wrapper into the designer fire pit. He could hear behind him the muffled sound of his two-year-old daughter crying, and his wife of five years trying to get her to sleep. He had said there was a phone call to make and had escaped but that was a lie. He had needed a moment to himself, so he had gone to the car, grabbed the packet of Cadbury's Celebrations from the glove compartment and headed back to the designer fire pit where, up until an hour ago, they had been sat drinking wine. He'd stoked it and thankfully it had come back to life, the last couple of logs still with some flame. Since the birth of their child he had given up his vices. He drank in extreme moderation. He didn't smoke any more. Drugs were years ago. But he could still eat chocolate. And then he realised if he threw the plastic on to the fire he could smell the mildly toxic fumes that came out. And he liked that. The idea of doing something very slightly wrong.

But of course he was doing something more than very slightly wrong in this moment. That was the problem. He felt sick,

deep in his stomach. He thought this must be what it feels like when someone has committed murder but no one else knows. Or stolen something extremely valuable. Like when the crime has been committed but the other shoe is yet to drop. The shit yet to hit the fan. And only you know. Only the culprit is aware, through this sickness, that they are in the calm before the storm.

He stopped eating the chocolates. He wasn't hungry. Instead he just took the wrappers off and kept burning them.

He wished he had a fucking cigarette.

The sound of his daughter, still crying. And across the way, he could hear a television on in the big house. His parents were watching Downton Abbey. Not for the first time. His little family were staying in the 'Stable', a converted outhouse on his parents' smallholding. They'd had it a few years. It was tasteful, but soulless. Much like them.

His phone was filling up with emails every minute, but that was normal. If that stopped, then he'd really be worried.

How had he ended up in this situation? It all felt so... pathetic. And without influence. Buffeted by circumstances when he had spent his adult life telling everyone who'd listen, student societies, then campaign groups, think tanks and now the highest level of government, that one must always act strategically. Take



the time and press forward with what you want. You start trying to fix things, address problems, sooth, apologise, solve, salve or explain and you'll weaken. Sink. You'll never escape.

And yet that was exactly what he had done in the last twelve hours. He'd only reacted, spontaneously and impulsively, and as a result had made a number of terrible decisions. All leading him here, to this fucking designer fire pit.

And now his imagination was starting to work. This was almost certainly going to be the end for him. And his career, and his family. When the people found out that he had contravened the rules, the guidance, possibly even the law (was it the law yet? He had to find out) to come up here, they'd have what they needed to remove him. They wouldn't care that in these circumstances the list of people his wife would allow to look after their daughter was four people long and that two of those people were her parents who lived in New Zealand. And that him and his wife with this positive diagnosis were looking like they might get very ill indeed and so it really was their only option to get to his parents as quickly as they could. No one would hear that. Or believe it. And as he sat there he didn't think it sounded much more than an excuse. Others will, at this moment, be dealing with worse...

Why did he agree to her? She just went on and on at him. Saying there were no options, saying he had to put his daughter first this time, to hell with anything else, this was family and if he didn't drive them she'd get in the fucking car and do it herself, and he tried to make an argument but she didn't listen, she wasn't rational, she was just thinking about herself and their daughter and nothing else.

Which, he supposed, is what a parent is supposed to do.

In which case, what was he?

Throughout it all, he was thinking of all sorts of things. They could get an emergency nanny. They had friends. It would all be fine. And the consequences of breaking the rules could be disastrous, for the future. For the career.

But she had kept on. And he... he'd found himself getting their stuff in the car in half an hour then all getting in and setting off up north, only calling his parents once they were on their way... How had he made that decision? He found he couldn't remember...

His wife appeared at the window looking for him. He sent a text to her. 'Sorry this is taking a while.' She received it and looked irritated. He hated her for a split second. She had put on weight since the baby, but he had got fitter. She was greying. His

hair was thick and dark. They were heading in different directions as they got older, he was realising. He was getting more attractive, she was getting less. And she'd developed this hectoring tone...

Was that why he'd done it? He'd simply capitulated to her going on and on, like a downtrodden husband from a 1980s sitcom.

He thought of the last woman he'd had sex with before he met his wife. In 2014. She was thirty. A hotel receptionist in New York. She'd flirted with him, and at first he thought it was just her professional manner, but day by day she'd become more forward and he'd responded. By the end of the week they were having a drink on her night off. He'd ended up booking the best suite in the hotel. It had cost him a month's salary but it was worth every penny. They'd drunk and kissed and smoked on the roof overlooking the city, then taken each other's clothes off and fucked in all sorts of ways until they were sweaty and made a huge mess. They had woken early, showered and gone for breakfast at a terrible diner then walked in the autumn leaves in Central Park. At the time he hadn't known it was a last hurrah. But... hurrah.

A far cry from this. In the grip. Of a situation. Of a wife. A child. A role. A global fucking pandemic at the worst possible fucking moment. Just when he was getting everything done.

He looked out into the dark. What if he just walked away. He could simply start again. That would be wonderfully strategic. Convention would tell you there would be huge consequences. There wouldn't. He could find new low-profile work. He could deal with his soon-to-be ex-wife and child via intermediaries and emails. His friends would be shocked but the important ones would stick by him, putting it down to a mid-life crisis. His daughter would hate him, but there were millions of daughters who hated their fathers. And who knows, she might eventually understand it and they would have a relationship. And he would be free. To do whatever the fuck he wanted again. To change the world. To change HIS world.

The darkness. Out there. It appealed. He threw the Celebrations box on the fire. It burned quickly and disappeared.

To be honest he might have to escape soon anyway. After what he'd done, cajoled into this foolish trip, he would be forced to resign and everything he was trying to achieve in government would be at an end. And more than that, he was such a high-profile figure that his disobedience of the rules might lead to a

national collapse in confidence in the government's response. And that collapse could lead to people NOT following the rules, and that would, as things were right now, lead to deaths. Thousands of deaths. And yes, the more he thought about it, the more he realised there was no escaping that reality. When this emerged, as it no doubt would, he, and his nagging wife, would have been responsible for more people dead than would fit in a sports hall. Thousands maybe. What would that do to him? That would be all that his life would be about. This mistake. And the consequences.

His daughter calming down now.

His wife singing her to sleep.

A crackling fire starting to die.

He went over to the log store. It was empty. He went back to the fire then looked around. There was a tree in the dark. He had no torch and so stumbled across the field towards it. His foot hit a – what? – maybe a clump, and he tripped and fell into the dirt. He lay there for a second, enjoying the cool of the ground, enjoying lying down. The simplicity of the earth. Perhaps he could just stay here and see what happened?

He hauled himself to his feet and staggered over to the tree. He ran his hands on the ground, around the trunk and found dry

material. Not branches but a lot of twigs, protected from the rain by the canopy of leaves above. He picked some up in his hands but it wasn't enough. It would be gone quickly and he was enjoying the fucking fire. He looked back at it – it was nearly dead, nearly gone for ever.

Strategy.

He took off his jumper suddenly, leaving him in only a thin T-shirt. He knotted the sleeves and made a bag out of it, then he started filling it with dry twigs. When he'd finished, he started back towards the fire; the flames looked so small and nearly gone, so he ran. He ran, covered in mud and wet, holding his jumper bag, and as soon as he got back to the embers he tipped the twigs onto the last few flames. As he did it, dust went up through the air, and in a moment he realised he'd made a mistake. The tipping of the twigs had crushed the embers, stopped the oxygen and put the whole thing out.

He was desperate. Once again, he hadn't been thinking. What had happened to him? Whatever the unique talent was that had got him this far, had gone. He'd made a series of mistakes and his life had led him to a child he didn't love, a wife who disgusted him, a cold field and thousands dead, at his hands.

He shut his eyes...

... then suddenly he felt the heat. He opened them and saw the fire burst back, as the twigs finally caught, and it burned brightly, more than before.

He sat. The fire hot, and captivating.

His wife had come to the window, noticing the flames. She had a cup of tea now, and as the yellow light caught her face she looked beautiful. So much more sexual and wonderful and intelligent than that fucking hotel girl. This was the woman he loved. And she didn't nag, she fought. For their child. And that wasn't wrong. That was primal.

And now he remembered! He hadn't been nagged into the decision: there had been a moment, as he began to pack up provisions in their kitchen before they left, that he'd realised this was completely the right thing to do. Put his family first and figure it out from there. He would tell anyone else to do the same. And he was strong, he was literally in power, this was the right thing to do and he would deal with the consequences.

And as the flames danced he made a new plan. No one knew about this trip currently. Not really. He would keep it that way. Not hidden exactly but unremarkable. And if eventually it came out, he would be unapologetic. He did the right thing for his family. He was an important man doing important things. He felt

certainty in his core. There was absolutely one rule for him and one rule for them. Because he wasn't like them. He was exceptional, in the factual use of the word. He had got to where he was because he was not like the rest. And maybe there would be thousands dead on this occasion but because of his work, his interventions, his policies, his determination and courage, many more would live and thrive and not many individuals had the guts to deal with those calculations and take on leadership of scale and existence but it was necessary that some people did and he was well qualified to be one of those few.

He stood up, warm and bright, and ready to return to the house.

Fuck them all. He could do what he wanted. Because he was right. Sooner or later they would realise that. And if they hated him in the meantime he would just smile.

He wife saw him through the window, and looked surprised. She smiled at him. Like she saw him in a new way. Like he must look newly attractive. Sexy maybe.

Their daughter had gone to sleep. The evening was young. He smiled at his wife and started to head back to the house, feeling elemental, powerful and very much in control. He was ready.



His wife opened the door and they kissed. Tonight would be glorious. As he had told his colleagues for years...

There was an opportunity in any crisis.

## **Alice Oswald**

### **The watchman**

I am asking god to end right now this long year of watching lying like a dog on Agamemnon's roof propped on my arms. I know over and over the layout of the stars all the clear queenly lights that bring in summer and winter and the constellations with their risings and settings but here I am still watching for the flare of a signal to tell me Troy has been captured because these are her orders that man-woman with her muscular mind. Whenever I make my damp and shifting and dreamless bed where Fear not Sleep stands next to me and I can never completely lock shut these eyelids whenever I try to sing or hum as if to dose myself with the tincture of slumber then I weep for this house which is not disciplined as it used to be. Please let there be an end to these difficulties a message of light looking back at me through the darkness

Aeschylus: Agamemnon 1-21

A watchman stands before you  
winged – or is it robed

one foot forward,  
a figure on a frieze

watchful

.

What an old odd human  
like a moth on a leaf  
what a black jug, brimful

of all the dark I've peered into  
with drooping medieval shoulders  
and lifted chin  
watching the watchfulness of all things...

.

Each eye envious of the other  
each foot alone in its wet boot  
I am proud of this long-held pose  
    this swivel neck  
    these leathery goatskin hands

a watchman stands and stands  
under strict orders neither to sleep nor leave

    but keep watching

being worn away to one smooth eye  
watching the watchfulness of all things

.

I saw a plum tree once  
lean over a wall

switch on its night-bulbs  
and all the roads went indigo  
a hand was pulling a suitcase through a door  
a voice was shouting

You idiot! You idiot!

all that dark – all that not-knowing  
is trapped in the lining of my face

I have just this fissure of weeping-sight  
as I turn like a moon-vane to each smudge of light:

a watchman – weary – what a night

.

Not a star, not a stone

not a leaf, not a world

no thought, only eyesight

Sometimes a silvery light sweeps over my hands  
which might be the moon  
or a passing car – I don't care

I am here, at the back of the earth  
in the cone of its shadow

watching

each eye envious of the other  
each foot alone in its wet boot  
proud of my long-held pose  
my swivel neck  
my leathery goatskin hands

I stand and stand  
under strict orders neither to sleep nor leave

but keep

watching

.

Oh you who watch over watchers,

small gods of bedsides, spirits of windows –

let me not forget this tense and tilted pose

even if a fly

lands like a bronze age arrow on my hands

enter my amnesia

remind me to outwatch that watcher...

.

So I tried to pray once

but my voice too weak for all this dark

stopped

something tiny and sharp and vanishing-leaving-no-trace

came over me

whose touch was a tapping hand

which startled me peering out

seeing only the rain

dropping its glance into deeper and deeper dark

each drop a watchman

being worn away to one smooth eye

.

No wonder I lean to one side

peering into all this dark

for some flare, some signal of elsewhere

there should be a man out there

faraway on some invisible hill

setting light to brushwood

but the night

the night keeps pouring down and

putting it out

no wonder I lean to one side

in my rain-soaked skin with the wind blowing in

no wonder I'm pleading, face to face with nothing

tell me

is there a fine iron wire stitching my eyelids shut

is this whole place my own trapped tear?

.

Because sometimes a man stands framed and lighted over  
there

and a woman under a golden lampshade

moves to her window

sometimes a man stands framed and lighted over there

his head thrown back in a horror of halted laughter



and a woman under a golden lampshade

moves to her window

her two white hands, each with its own blind soul

adjusting her hair

now luck is lifting a man's foot softly upstairs

his head thrown back in a horror of halted laughter

and sometimes a man stands framed and lighted over there

sealed in the not-yet-known

like an insect in a prison of amber

and a woman under a golden lampshade

moves to her window

her two white hands, each with its own blind soul

flipping through pages

now luck is lifting a man's foot softly upstairs

sealed in the not-yet-known  
like an insect in a prison of amber...

.

One after another, each space reveals one house

each house reveals one window

each window contains

one watchman

awake like me with my lost look

sometimes under a golden lampshade

a woman moves to her window, takes her temperature

and finds for all her anger she is still

lukewarm

and sometimes a flute-player with mad elbows

tries to out-flute his reflection

and a cat

passes like a deeper night inside the night

sometimes there are two final remarks

shouted into the dark

You idiot! You idiot!

and sometimes a murderer grabs her coat and slips out

and her lover sobs and sobs

sometimes a stranger swats away a fly

and sometimes an apple sits replete in its bowl

and if you look long enough

its character escapes and starts dancing

and sometimes a bird speaks gently to an old man

I can't even think about the blind man

watching his listening

but sometimes a man stands framed and lighted over there  
watching me watching

and sometimes a wooden table and a tired chair  
sometimes a sleeper keeps one eye open

.

And sometimes gardens

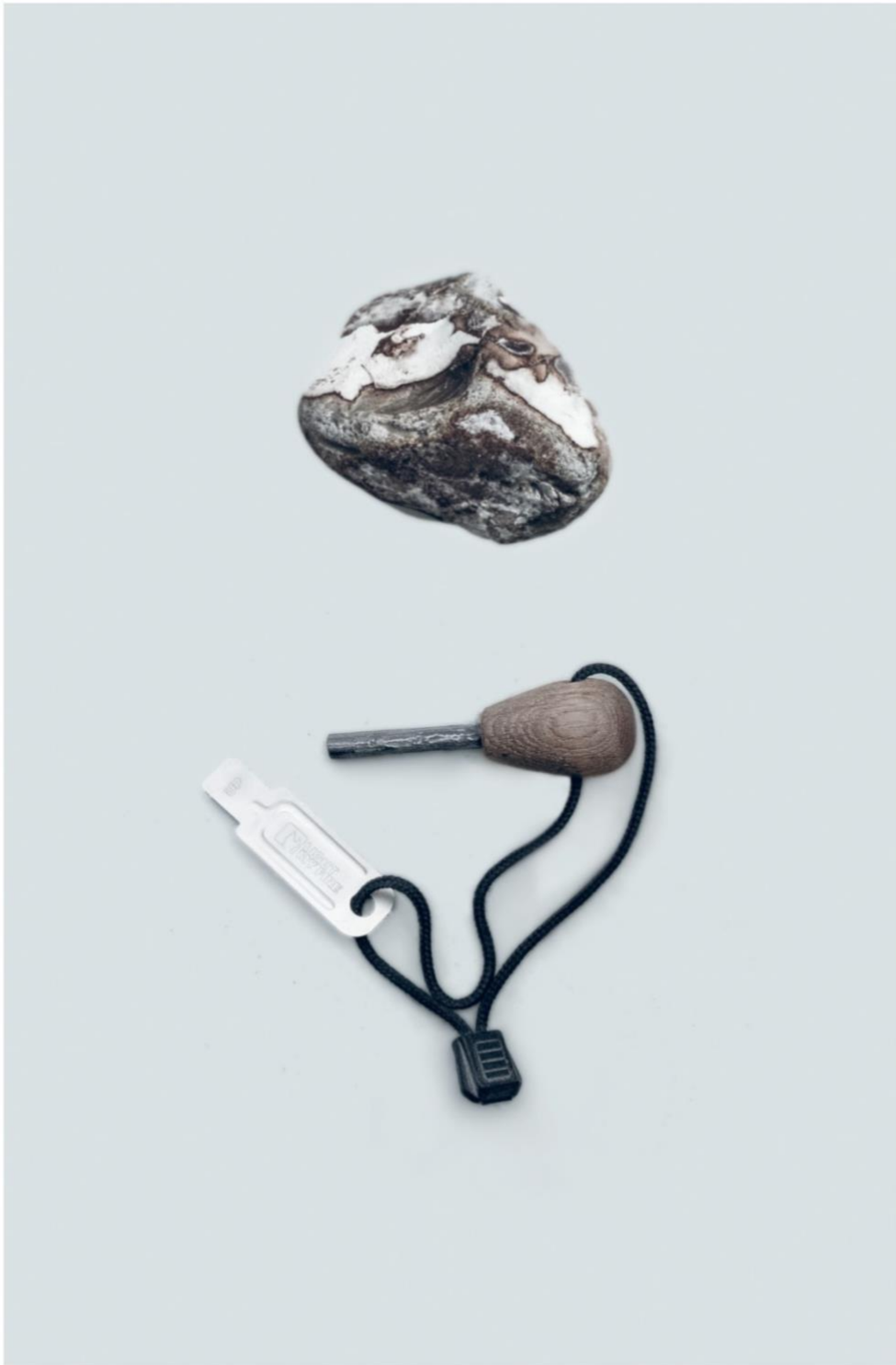
sometimes a rose appears

after all these years, a being made entirely of eyelids  
opening and then more opening  
as if to say

I too am here

under the same strict law  
neither to sleep nor leave

but keep watching



## 4 Spark

W H E N Y O U C A N T F L I C K Y  
O U R B I C A N Y L O N G E R B E  
C A U S E I T H A S R U N O U T O  
F F U E L D O N T T H R O W I T A  
W A Y Y O U C A N C R A M S O M E  
T I N D E R I N T O T H E T O P O  
F I T A N D H A V E T H E S P A R  
K E R S T A R T Y O U R T I N D E  
R O N F I R E T H I S O N L Y W O  
R K S I F Y O U R T I N D E R I S E  
X T R E M E L Y F L A M M A B L E  
L I K E A G A S S O A K E D R A G  
I F Y O U A R E T R Y I N G T O L  
I G H T S H R E D D E D C E D A R  
B A R K T H O U G H Y O U W I L L  
H A V E T O D O S O M E T H I N G S A L I  
T T L E D I F F E R E N T L Y D O N  
T L E T T H E T I N D E R C L O G  
U P T H E A R E A B E T W E E N T  
H E W H E E L A N D T H E F L I N  
T C A R E F U L L Y T A K E T H E  
M E T A L H O U S I N G T H A T S  
U R R O U N D S T H E A R E A W H  
E R E T H E F L A M E N O R M A L  
L Y W O U L D B E C A R E F U  
L N O T T O A C C I D E N T A L L  
Y D I S T U R B T H E M E T A L W  
H E E L O R T H E S P R I N G L O  
A D E D F L I N T T H A T I S J U S  
T B E L O W I T F L U F F U P Y O  
U R T I N D E R A N D P L A C E O  
N E E D G E O F Y O U R T I N D E  
R P I L E N E A R B U T N O T T O



## **how to start a fire**

Accidents happen, it's true.

A flame turns to a blaze.

A blaze creates new beginnings.

If you burn down the old ground

Trees will sprout from the ashes.

But the flame of a movement?

Who controls that?

**Stephanie Kelly**

## **Nastazja Domaradzka**

### **To rage**

*A stage. There are a few of them: A, B and C. They are busy. As if rehearsing, as if gaining courage. There is no fourth wall. Ever.*

**B** There are millions of questions I wanted to ask when  
someone once told me

**C** 'We do it differently here.'

**B** Differently?

**A** 'We don't do this here.'

**C** Here we don't

**A** know how to drink in the cities

**C** without hitting our heads on the pavement

**A** and crushing our heads while bowing to aristocracy

**C** bending our knees for honours and our Queens

**A** getting lost in between truth and myths

**C** of how it was and it will never again be.

**A** There's a dark truth about

**C** what we don't know

**A** and what we know

**C** and how we choose.

**A** We choose.

**C** We choose to

**A** hate

**C** hate

**A** and we choose to

**C** love

**B** love

**C** and

**A** come here.

**C** Here

**A** together

**B** agreed to it

**A** made plans

**C** drank wine

**A** or drank nothing

**B** just to

**A** just to

**B** to sit together.

**A** Not apart.

**C** So let's sit.

*In silence they sit. Some time passes.*

*(Half a minute of silence in theatre hasn't killed anyone. Yet.)*

**B** There are millions of questions I wanted to ask when  
someone first asked me

**A** 'What is the cost of a revolution?'

*Change. Change of tempo. They get into the tempo.*

*They are different now.*

**B** Where I come from there are strong borders –  
I don't wanna use the word hard,  
it feels like it belongs to someone else

up there to the west

past the sea, past a tiny little port

and on to the rocky roads with hedges and trees

that small place with

*A scream*

a hard border

but I'm not the one to talk about that

**A** yet

**C** *silently screams*

**B** so these lands

these bloodied lands

taken apart

cut, wide open

butchered by history that keeps repeating itself

high on its glory

drunk on its victimhood

the nation that goes on

**A** they are my lands

**B** in lands of blood and

**A** GOD SAVE OUR GRACIOUS QUEEN

**B** I'm not telling your story.

**A** They are my lands and this is my story  
*(starts singing GOD SAVE OUR GRACIOUS QUEEN)*  
THEY ARE MY LANDS AND THIS IS MY STORY!

**B**  
godsaveourgraciousqueeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee  
eengodsaveourgraciousqueeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeengodsave  
our gracious queeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeen  
xnjdbjsjdabhjaoeasvjev ekds

*Change in the air.*

*A different beginning.*

**C** *breathes loudly. As if in a trance. As if somewhere else.*

**B** Who are you?

**A** Who are you?

**B** Wer bist du?

**A** Kim jistes?

**B** КТО ТЫ?

**A** КТО ТЫ?

**B** De unde esti?

**A** ...

**B** ...

**C** *stops breathing.*

**A** That was so many languages.



**B** We could do more. And we could mix them all together.

*They do that, however they want: it's more violent than it was before, a battle of languages followed by silence; global rage of sorts.*

**B** Who are you? Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?  
Who are you? Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?  
Who are you? Who are you??

*A bit of silence.*

**B** Are you ready?

**A** ...

**B** We can leave the past

**A** konflikt

**B** conflict?

**A** konflikt

**B** behind.

**A** ...

**B** Promise

**A** now

**B** now

*There's a change: a glimpse of a dance that brings something new and exciting. **C** no longer just a presence.*

**A** In the future

**B** in the future

**A** in the lands where I belong

**B** and in the lands I do not know.

*They fade. They no longer repeat themselves. Histories are gone.  
Something new begins. C dances. It's a dance of THE  
REVOLUTION. It's bloodless yet uncomfortable. As if madness  
met love. Exhaustion comes. Then silence.*

**C** She ran. Fast.

Past lakes and mountains and big cities.

Ran.

Head spinning, legs breaking.

She ran.

Cold.

Then warm.

Eyes open wide, no bruises, no dirt in empty streets.

No cobbled scars or people freezing by the bin.

So she stayed.

Now she writes in her garden.

At night the streets are still quiet.

The birds asleep.

Her body wrapped in a blanket, soil behind her nails, lip bitten, hands cold. It must be past midnight.

She hums a melody, which once upon a time meant something to her, but now it is just a melody she hums when sat in her garden past midnight, soil behind her nails, lip bitten, hands cold, one foot resting against her calf...

She sighs.

It's not long now till 1am.

It will be time to go

time to lift her toned calf off the chair

remember to blow out the candle, appreciate the view

and remember

how dark and humid nights remind her of her childhood,

father asleep on the deck chair,

mother's sweat travelling down her neck

as she places the dishes carefully on the rack,

and she herself

pressing her hands against the slightly wet ground,

remembering her childhood

that time

when earth breathed.

She will think about that for a while  
small hurt in her stomach and  
timid smile on her face.

Then she will consider wearing shoes  
but only for a second  
because she knows too well how relaxed her feet are  
since they are no longer squashed and restricted  
instead  
they float on soil  
melt into the ground  
and they feel  
like they carry her –  
they do not drag  
they direct her.

Later she will regret wearing no shoes  
when, distracted by the smell of summer rain at night  
she will lean by the tree  
to take in a deep breath  
see around her

pictures she never gave herself permission to take  
with her eyes  
and then she will step  
only for a second  
on the tree's root  
which remembers the time before everything stopped for a  
second  
just a second.

The root  
sharp  
takes just a second to cut through her skin  
and it takes just a second  
to stop everything.

She touches the cut to see how much it bleeds  
the giant wood looks down at her  
tired  
yet thinking of how good it feels  
to just be  
allowed to exist  
with cuts  
but not suffocated  
to walk on earth

undisturbed.

She on the other hand begins to choke on her tears  
like that time when she cut her thigh  
walking through the bushes on the anniversary  
of all of it stopping

stop

Stops in the middle of the path now  
it's not the colour of the blood,  
the redness of it, she finds comforting  
the smell of it though  
so primal  
like that time during the anger  
when everyone's instincts were sharper  
more primal  
more overwhelming

This is why she cries  
she remembers now

When they shouted for space before setting themselves on  
fire  
the rage that burnt them  
even the tiny memory of it  
vibrations down her spine  
she sees the space they fought for with their bodies and  
grips  
the space they thought of in their dreams.

What is the cost of a revolution, she murmurs.  
Soil is now sand  
trees are more present here  
as if caressing the curve of the lake, asking it to stay this  
way  
for ever

What is the cost of a revolution...

It feels like for ever since she felt this  
thought about this  
her rage always present  
now bubbling with echo  
of trembling voices



forgotten days of stillness  
when everything stopped  
and then  
came rage.

The day anger began  
brutal, bruised, burned  
the day everything started collapsing

Maybe tonight she will take space  
stand firmly, her legs wide apart

Her foot is no longer bleeding as she enters the wet sand  
how could she possibly know it though  
that her foot is no longer bleeding as she enters the wet  
sand

How could she possibly know how to grieve for hundreds of  
thousands dead  
how to navigate a world where there is so much to feel yet  
so little to say

how to push your body against thousands of years of hatred  
and contempt  
how to love  
how to hate  
how to scream  
how to cry  
how to listen  
how to shout  
how to  
come up for a breath  
lift your arms  
and say

Maybe tonight she will take space  
stand firmly, her legs wide apart  
and speak of the day when the anger began  
and women stampeded through cities  
the sun burning their arms

How could she possibly know that day would change  
everything?

She stands here now older and wiser

takes space  
her legs wide apart  
her feet cold against the sand  
voices and faces  
familiar and warm

Anything could happen  
NOW

Floating  
beyond herself  
beyond yourself  
beyond ourselves

Sees. Around herself. Touches. Breaking and breaking away  
from each other. They no longer are.

Taking, and taking and taking and taking. A sound. Piercing.  
From the past.

So it was worth it, she thinks, as she digs her toes further  
into the sand

Stands there, her legs wide apart and

Breathes in

And then thinks

feels

what it must be like

never having the need to scream

Because she knows and yet doesn't

how to fight for your right

to come up for some air

to push your body through centuries of pain and

to keep building a room

to fit everyone in

to let everyone be heard

to listen

to relearn how to truly come up for air

and say

it's time

Moonlight half-lighting their faces now

her eyes disappoint her so much

she wants to be able to see them

when tonight she speaks  
of what it is like to fight and bruise and run out of breath  
to run out of words, places and tears

Yes, tonight she will speak of what it feels like  
to relearn how to come up for air  
and say it's time to rage.

*Change. Softness.*

- A** In the lands where I belong.
- B** And in the lands I do not know.

**Eilís Bevan-Davis**

**Finding home**

I know a place where people are  
where they dream up new worlds  
where they dance

I know a place

where the sounds of humanity reverberate in the floorboards

where bodies jump and tumble

and the people play

I've seen this space where strangers touch hands

and their weapons are left at the door

I remember this room where walls listen and feet speak to the  
floor

where our garments and backpacks – those attachments we keep

–

they're disregarded

This is the space of encounters

of meeting another so deeply that it's only a matter of time

before you clock eye to eye

with your own inner being

I've seen a space where stories are told in abstract narrative

where we drop into the cycles like a tribe living in time

I've seen a space so full of people dancing  
bodies and minds rolling  
slowly morphing, forward  
I've been that space  
my stomach is yearning  
I'm hungry – it's empty  
that space is weeping  
inconsistent  
the people keep aiming  
and missing

I know a place  
it's breathing – but sleeping  
it's dreaming of footprints on grain  
and light shining through windowpane

The  
space

is

grieving

It's waiting, building new ways

and casting blessings on future passings

it's holding

and wishing

gleaming to be needed

gearing up for a new beginning

And humankind will not reach it

without gently retreating

and we've got to mean it

and show it

that we do believe in

something greater

than owning and buying



I know that the people are in their right place  
that they're connecting in ways  
we never could comprehend  
You see screens they transcend  
it's contact with no measure  
a treasure of love and meaning

I see a place where the people are  
Where they live more simply and feel more complexly  
Where they are all seeing and knowing  
about connecting and being

I know this space where the people keep suggesting  
new ways of existing  
surprising, unknowing  
diving into questions  
a space where you find wonder  
and start marvelling at the splendour of how good it is

to be breathing

You see, I know a place and the people are there

they're all emerging from hibernation

wrapping arms around elders

and teaching their children

through giving and receiving

the gentle ebb and flow of living

We are that space and we'll keep on existing

treading lighter, and kinder

and finding

home.

**Houmi Miura**

**Parallels**

Hello and welcome to Houmi's fantastic tour of Manchester!

Do you know, I've lived in Manchester for fifteen years now. Came here for uni, fell in love and never left. Shows my age...

So here we are, under the watchful eye of the magnificent Ms Emmeline Pankhurst.

I always feel a bit starstruck walking past her statue.

You see, she was one of my many heroes when I was a kid. Emmeline, Elizabeth I, Marilyn Monroe, Whitney Houston, the Spice Girls (obviously), Belle from Beauty and the Beast.

Looking up at Emmeline, it reminds me how many of the big moments of my life Manchester has witnessed. Not just the break-ups, the make-ups, the friends coming or going, the raves, the laughs.

I'm talking about the big mind-melting revelations.

I had one of the biggest in my life while I was living over the water by Salford Central station. It was one of those moments where it felt like the universe was folding in on me. This huge life-changing, jaw-dropping, earth-shattering moment, where I realised that Ms Pankhurst, Ms the First, Ms Monroe, Ms Houston, Ms Spice Girls and Ms Belle from Beauty and the Beast... None of them were East Asian. It was the realisation that I had grown up idolising, worshipping, kissing the feet of heroes that did not look like me. Not one bit.

So I look up at Emmeline. And it's such a strange feeling – that rush of excitement at seeing someone I've adored for so long, followed by this sickening gut punch. The reminder. That, as a child, most of my heroes were white. If I worshipped them, but couldn't see myself among them, then where did that leave me?

I was maybe twenty-five, twenty-six – a whole quarter of a century had gone past and I'd never had that thought before. Ever.

And then over there, there's Wagamama.

There are three words, three words I dread the most when I meet my friends here. Three words of instant regret. LET'S. GO.

WAGAMAMA.

I know everyone loves it and thinks that's what Japanese food tastes like. I can promise you, it is but a pale imitation. It's not even an imitation, it's like eating the mangled remains of Japanese food if you fed it through Google Translate. Just not right.

'Come on, it's not that bad!'

'Maybe it'll be really good this time!'

Fifteen years of living in Manchester and bobbing back to Japan once a year to see my family at Christmas. It's like chalk and

cheese going from Manchester to Shim Matsudo. It's a little bit outside of Tokyo. Totally different... everything.

I've never put the two together. Here and there. Until one day, a couple of years ago, I went on a trip to Osaka with Mum.

It's weird. It doesn't look anything like Manchester, it doesn't smell anything like Manchester, it doesn't sound anything like Manchester. But something, beyond words, feels like Manchester.

There must be a word for *déjà vu* but with places. Like that feeling of familiarity but you can't for the life of you think why. The moment I stepped off the bullet train, it hit me like a sonic boom of... feeling?

It's something in the air. Gritty, bustling and hustling, a hive buzzing with life, a rooted grounding within the soil and the earth. You can feel the lifeblood pumping through the foundations, reaching its veins and arteries back through centuries. Like you can here.

Here, it's so immediate, like you can feel it connecting every time your foot hits the pavement.

My life hasn't ever been particularly grounded. I've never had roots. And maybe that's what I get from Manchester.

Just over there, I got off the tram once and discovered that a tub of hummus had exploded in my bag. I ran into the first place I could – you know, to try and salvage the bag – and it happened to be that Greek taverna over there.

Over there, before there was that glass walkway next to the library, it used to be my shortcut to 42s. I've drunkenly sung Sally Cinnamon at the top of my lungs so many times with a gaggle of friends walking through there.

Numerous people have shouted 'Ni-hao' at me from across the street: round the corner by the Britain's Protection, in Piccadilly Gardens, down the end of Canal Street... countless places.

Then down by the Arndale, a gang of rowdy twentysomethings giggled as their ringleader shouted 'wax on, wax off' at me, and I shouted something back that... was not family friendly. Let's just leave it at that.

A little further down, in Albert Square, a man once shouted at me to 'Get out of HIS country'.

See, that's what gets me. I get this much harassment but I can handle myself cos I'm gobby and I will give it back. But Manchester's a university town with loads of Chinese students, who also get shouted at when English isn't even their first

language, and they're only 19 and scared and wondering what they've done for people to shout at them and I –

It's not just Manchester. I get this pretty much wherever I –

Sticks and stones. Scars mark the battles, right?

Anyway. Over there, just round the corner, you can get the 38 to Swinton. After about half an hour on the bus, you'll find yourself at Salford Civic Centre. That's where I got my British passport. Back in 2012.

They call it 'naturalisation'. Changing your nationality.

If I'm being honest, the main reason I wanted to get a British passport was for the free access to the EU. Joke's on me, I suppose.

It's a lot of work, becoming British. Seriously. Being raised, educated and paying taxes for twenty-six years here isn't enough. They throw the Life in the UK test at you as well. To prove you really know what it's like. And I genuinely think that, even if you had twenty degrees and ten PhDs, you'd struggle. There's archaic stuff in there no one knows. It's basically a memory test.

But it paid off. Here I was, after six months of waiting, standing in Salford Civic Centre. Officially becoming British. Singing God Save the Queen to a CD that kept skipping. But that's where I

changed my national identity. In Swinton, of all places. It's not even in Manchester.

Thing is, the Japanese government doesn't like to share. So I had to renounce my Japaneseness. No more Japanese passport for me.

At the time, I don't think I was that bothered. To me it was just paper. It wasn't taking anything away from me.

At the time.

But now... I guess... Swinton was also where I lost a part of myself. Maybe that's why my opinions about Japanese food have become harder, why I seek a connection between places that don't really have anything in common.

You see, there's so much of me here. This city is covered in fifteen years' worth of my scars, my bruises and my cellulite, all stretching across the streets, the ginnels, into the Mancunian Way. And it's all woven into layers and layers of history. The Wonderwalls, the Guardian bunker, the cotton. All the way back to Roman times.

They used to call this place Mamucium, the Romans. Which apparently means 'breast-shaped hill'. Cos it looked like a boob from far away. Before all these buildings were here, when it was endless grass and woodland. And this big boob. Maybe it was



fitting that this is the city that birthed Emmeline Pankhurst. Big Female Energy.

There's no Mamucium or Emmeline in Osaka. But it is the same. Like the roots burrow so far underground here that they travel all the way through the central core of the earth, through to the other side and emerge in Osaka.

Parallel portals of energy.

It's comforting. To know there's an imaginary tunnel that goes all the way back there. A channel that connects my Japaneseness with my Mancunian... ness. So I can never really lose either side of me.

**Brittany J Rutt**

**Burn it**

The sky is on fire.

What a lovely metaphor.

No...

The sky is on fucking fire.

We're not talking about a pretty sunset here. We're talking about Australia, we're talking about the West Coast of America, we're talking about the fast approaching climate apocalypse we're hurtling towards.

What can we do?

Well how should I fucking know.

Oi, government, Mr Prime Minister, yeah you, holier-than-thou leader, what can we do?

Wait. Wait a god damn minute.

He won't be any use.

Because I've remembered, I've remembered it.

What's burning our planet to a crisp.

Capitalism.

Hear me out.

Did you know that a mere one hundred companies are responsible for seventy-one per cent of greenhouse gas emissions? SEVENTY FUCKING ONE PER CENT.

So no matter how much you, *singular*, reduce, reuse and recycle, that won't make a dent in the seventy-one per cent that is fuelled by capitalism.

What can we do to change, you ask?

Well, again, no fucking clue.

In London, in Parliament Square, every day there will be a protest, more often *several* protests. For imminently important reasons.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

TRANS LIVES MATTER

REFUGEES LIVES MATTER

STOPPING THIS PLANET FROM BURNING ALIVE FUCKING MATTERS

So sometimes, I wonder what it takes to get these messages into the thick lizard skulls of the people in charge.

When will they give a singular shit about the broken system they continue to champion year in year out.

But aye, there's the rub.

The system ain't broke to them.

If you're a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, middle- to upper-class man.

Then the system is working *perfectly*. Just as it was designed to.

So I say...

Burn it to the ground.

A lovely metaphor again.

No. Literally.

Guy Fawkes knew what he was on about.

Burn the system to the fucking ground. Blow up the Houses of Parliament.

Make them live through Grenfell.

But as the words leave my mouth I feel sick.

That *isn't* the way.

We can't fight like them.

So what do we do? That's the big question.

How do we burn the system down? Metaphorically.

Well.

You use your voice.

Speak.

Talk.

Debate.

Educate.

Because the protests aren't pointless.

Because we *can't* stop fighting.

Because in the next few decades mother earth will do it herself.

Burn us to the ground.

You can get so wrapped up in what you know and understand to be true that you forget not everybody *knows* these things. People can be ignorant through pure naivety. So talk. Talk. And don't be a dick about it. Stand up. Speak without judgement, talk, debate, educate.

Because the more people who know, the more voices we have.

Because you can ignore one person.

You can ignore a singular opinion.

But the time for singular is over.

We've got to fight as *plural*.

Because the system is hurting *us plural*.

Because when the day comes, the sky will *burn us down plural*.

What a horrible metaphor.

**Zoe Lafferty, Joel Scott and the National Youth Theatre**

**The last harvest (extract)**

My name is Hope. My mother was forty-three years old when I was born. She was told it was too late. But despite the odds, here I am.

She named me Hope because with my birth came the belief in a better future. But a better future cannot simply be built on faith. Even more important than hope, is action. And action is what we are here to demand.

This September was the hottest on record and the world has reached one degree of warming.

I'm going to take a gamble, sir, and say you have never held a scythe in your life?

So when we tell you:

The natural balance of the seasons is unhinged, yo-yoing between heavy floods and extreme heat waves.

That we have just suffered the bleakest harvest in thirty years.

That we didn't even grow enough food to feed ourselves.

Is it not time to stop talking and start listening?

Our community will be forced to clean up the debris left behind by the build bigger, build better, patriarchal policies of people in suits who think growth is numbers on computers and not seeds in our soil.

You promise us castles in the sky but can't guarantee food on our tables?

Before the end of this century we will have our Last Harvest.

Have you thought about us and the generations that will come after? When fantasies of eternal economic growth will be the living reality of the next generations' nightmares.

What are we building towards and for who?

We are young people from across the UK and we stand here united and defiant, fighting for an alternative future.

An alternative system that stands in harmony with the ground beneath us.

Let's create the space to understand each other, where history is learnt and justice is reckoned with.

Let's ground ourselves in acceptance and equality.

Look toxicity and oppression in the eye and rise.

It can start from this community, today.



Students, carers, teachers, writers, artists, nurses, cleaners,  
farmers. We are the 99%.

It's time to take to the stage.

## 5 Flame

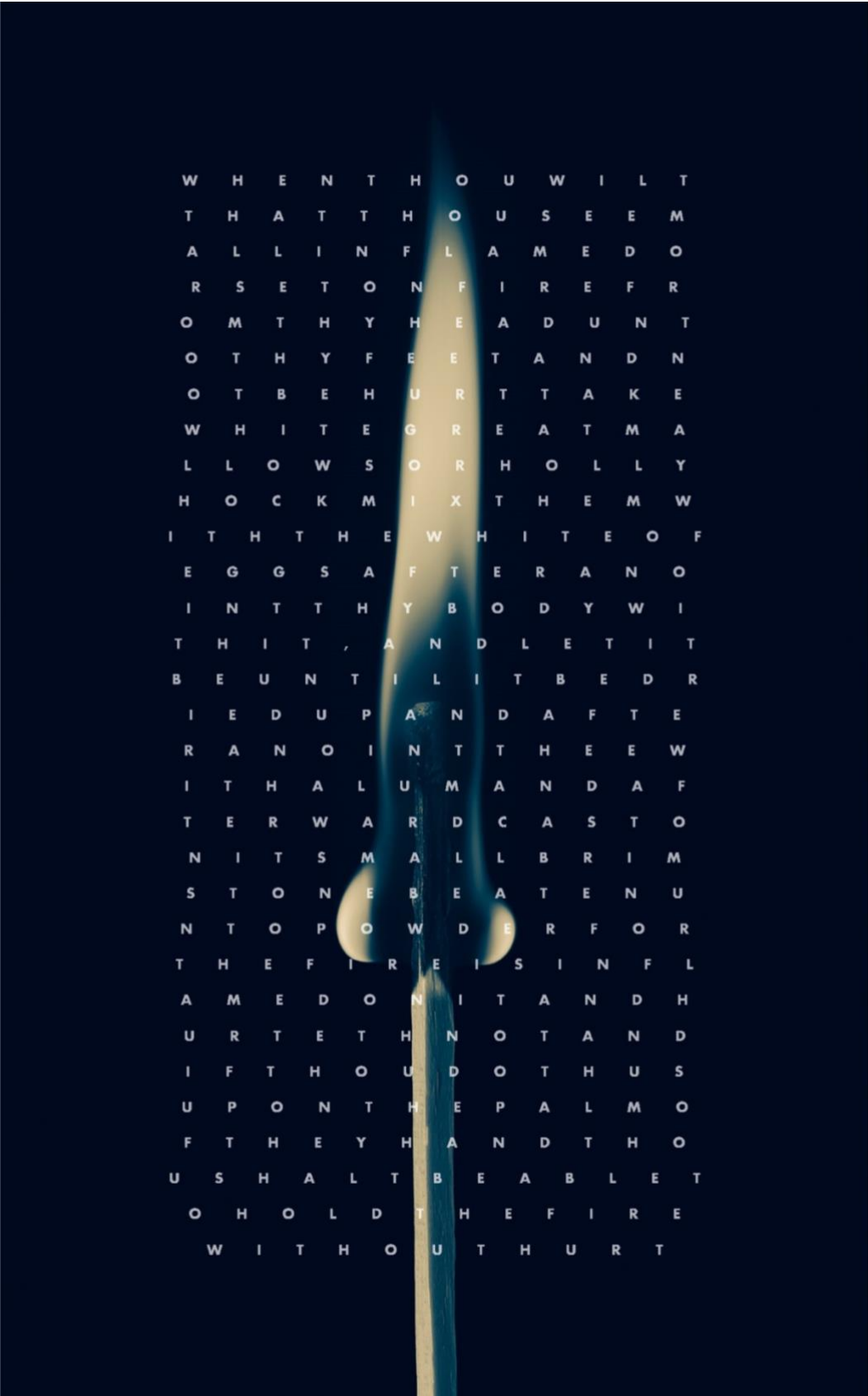
## **How to start a fire**

A list of rituals that involve light. A list of what has happened. An archway and an eye. Say I can make two flames where there was one. We wanted a scrapheap but could only find a candle. That's enough, someone said. To bring the eyes and words into orbit. To make a mark on the retina. Look, the flame divides.

**Rowan Evans**

Does it involve a wick. Does it involve a notch of red on the paper. Light the wick to pull the room into orbit. Does it take a year. How big is the night's room. Stare at the candle until a small red door appears in the darkness when your eyes are shut. Seeding a halo. Someone said stop looking at the sun. A history of people holding empty paper and staring into flames. We wanted to think about a greater structure but were distracted by the first ignition. Even this, even this. Keep staring until the cell of the flame divides. A list of rituals that involve light. A list of what has happened. An archway and an eye. Say I can make two flames where there was one. We wanted a scrapheap but could only find a candle. That's enough, someone said. To bring the eyes and words into orbit. To make a mark on the retina. Look, the flame divides. Even this. To see if it has worked, look away from the candle. Face a wall and shut your eyes. A small red door. Repeat until you see it everywhere.

W E T A T A B L E  
C L O A T H O R L  
I N N E N T O W L  
W I T H T H E L I  
Q U O R A Q U A V  
I T A E A N D P U  
T I T T O T H E F L  
A M E I F I T B U  
R N P R E S E N T  
L Y A N D D O N O  
T T O U C H N O R  
H U R T T H E L I  
N N E N I T I S P  
U R E A N D U N M  
I X E D F O R L I  
N N E N W E T I N  
T H I S W A T E R  
W I L L F L A M E  
A N D N O T B E C  
O N S U M E D F O  
R T H E F L A M E  
W I L L B U T G E  
N T L Y L Y E U P  
O N T H E F I N E  
S T L I N N E N A  
N D N O T T A K E  
H O L D O F I T B  
U T L I C K U P A  
L L T H A T I S N E  
X T O F K I N D T  
O I T

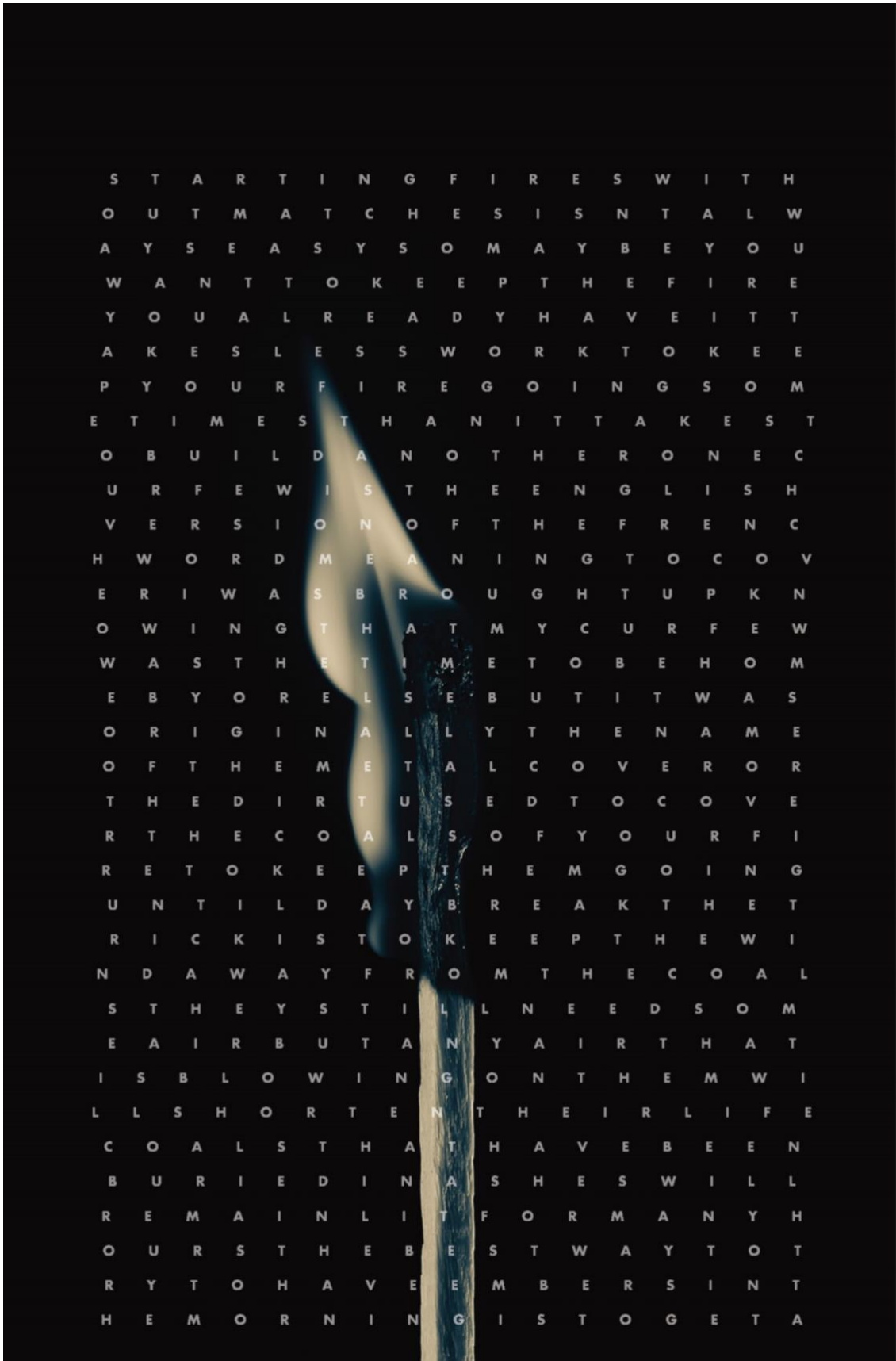


W H E N T H O U W I L T  
T H A T T H O U S E E M  
A L L I N F L A M E D O  
R S E T O N F I R E F R  
O M T H Y H E A D U N T  
O T H Y F E E T A N D N  
O T B E H U R T T A K E  
W H I T E G R E A T M A  
L L O W S O R H O L L Y  
H O C K M I X T H E M W  
I T H T H E W H I T E O F  
E G G S A F T E R A N O  
I N T T H Y B O D Y W I  
T H I T , A N D L E T I T  
B E U N T I L I T B E D R  
I E D U P A N D A F T E  
R A N O I N T T H E E W  
I T H A L U M A N D A F  
T E R W A R D C A S T O  
N I T S M A L L B R I M  
S T O N E B E A T E N U  
N T O P O W D E R F O R  
T H E F I R E I S I N F L  
A M E D O N I T A N D H  
U R T E T H N O T A N D  
I F T H O U D O T H U S  
U P O N T H E P A L M O  
F T H E Y H A N D T H O  
U S H A L T B E A B L E T  
O H O L D T H E F I R E  
W I T H O U T H U R T

## **6 Embers**







## **How to start a fire**

What happens when we start a fire?

We gift another crackling signal

to follow along this trail.

We sense, through tingling blood

there's more outside the glow

This darkened path is calling to us

to slow down

to turn up our chins and know

there are only clouds

between us and our dreams

And in the cracks of the quietness

we hear the whispers

of new ways of being

**Roseanna Dias**

**Luke Barnes**

**The ghost caller**

*The voice doesn't belong to a gender or an age. It's disguised, thickly.*

**The Ghost** Hello. Thanks for listening. Take a moment to make yourself comfortable. If you can, close your eyes.

You're thinking you're not quite sure what this is. You're thinking you'll be told when you can speak. You're thinking you thought that this was going to be a ghost story. Breathe. It's OK. This isn't scary. I'm not here to hurt you.

You're thinking you have a choice now: to play the game or to take the piss. You're thinking you're going to give it a go.

*A pause.*

You're thinking it's a long time since you sat in this amount of silence. You're thinking you should make more time for it but life is hectic.

*Silence. Longer. Just long enough for the mind to trail.*

You're thinking you can't sit still. You're thinking that now you're going to try and sit still and think of nothing. You need this time. You don't get it that often.

You're thinking that now you're going to count to ten in the next silence. You're thinking that maybe this will stop you being so distracted. You start.

*Silence for ten.*

You're thinking about the ghost stories you know. You're thinking about times and places you've felt the hairs stand up on your arms. Stop. I'm not asking you to think about that. I'm asking you to think about your ghost: the person you want to call but you can't because they're not here. But I am.

I am your Mum. I am your Dad. I am your grandparents, your brother, your sister. I am your friend. I am that person from school you didn't know that well. I died of cancer. I jumped off a bridge. I was in a car crash. I was murdered by a man in a pub who punched me once. I was old. I died in my sleep. I lay on a hospital bed with my family and friends and they held my hand as I drifted off and they sat around me because they couldn't leave me. I died alone because everyone stopped thinking about me. You know me.

*Silence.*

Hello. I know you. You don't believe me but I do.

You can see me if you think about it. You can feel my skin and see my face. You can smell me. You've probably forgotten my voice and that's OK. Think about that. I want you to know that when you die how you made people feel is all that survives you.

I want you to know I remember it all. I remember your eyes most clearly and in watching you they haven't changed. I remember what you said to me and it stayed with me until the moment I died. I remember everything and it only means something when you see it all together.

Do you remember how I made you feel?

I want you to know that I think of the good times not the bad. I want you to know that the bad times are what we needed for the good ones to work. I want you to know I would do it all again but better. I want you to know that I would draw it out if I could. I want you to know that I remember your smile. I want you to know that I wish I had more time.

Every time you think you saw me, it was me trying to get you to notice. That is all I've been doing. When you smell that smell and I rush to your mind it's because I have been blowing it towards you, desperate for you to notice me. When that song comes into

your head it's me sitting next to you and humming it into your ear, hoping you'll think of me.

Can you hear it now? In your head? Think about it.

*Beat.*

I watched you thinking about me. I have seen you cry. Forgive your friends for not feeling death like you do; they don't understand but you don't understand the death in their lives. Stop wondering if you could have done something different. Stop asking yourself whether my death was fair or unfair. Stop thinking whether it's right that I'm dead and the world carries on. Stop wishing we could have spent more time together. This is not living.

I know you think this is a game but I'm trying to speak to you. I want you to see that death is real. I am real. That's all we need to deal with. Deal with us. Think about me and you.

Breathe with me. I am with you.

*In. Out. In. Out.*

Take me seriously because one day you will die and you will want someone to listen to you.

You are more vulnerable than you know. The world is so much bigger than you. There is so much more than phones, dramas,

screens, waistlines, hair, what other people think about you...  
They are not important, no matter how serious you tell yourself  
they are.

I want you to feel me. I am watching you. I am actually here.

*The silence.*

It's OK in the end. And the sooner you know that the better. The  
ending is death. And before that there is only this. There is only  
ever the choice you make, now.

I need you to look at my death and live properly. Think.

Think about how I thrived and how I failed.

Think of all the best things about me.

Think of all the worst.

Think of how I would have lived if I hadn't died.

Think of what I would have done if I hadn't died.

Think about yourself.

Think of how much of your time is left.

Think of what you need to do. Not in the mundane: bigger.

Think that, by knowing my death, your life is full of possibilities.

Think about what's standing in between you and the boundless potential of your existence.

Think of living and what that means.

What are you going to do?

This is what haunting means. It's not the scares in the night. It's me begging you to live. Because I am dead, you have a better idea of what it is to be alive.

I will always be here. You will notice me when I show myself to you. When you think you see me, or feel me, or smell me, you will know that's me telling you to live.

I am here now. I want you to thrive. I want you to be everything you need in your life. I know it's hard right now. I can see that. But I need to know you're listening.

If you forgive me for dying, the way to prove it is by living. You have to live because I can't. Starting now.

*Silence.*

Do you need to tell me anything?

*They do.*

**Stand and Be Counted**



## **uLoliwe (a Xhosa gospel)**

uLoliwe wayidudula [“the train is pushing”]

uLoliwe wayidudula

uLoliwe wayidudula

Nang’esiza [“here it comes”]

uLoliwe wayidudula

uLoliwe wayidudula

uLoliwe wayidudula

Nang’esiza

Sul’ezonyembezi mntakwethu [‘wipe those tears off, loved one’]

Sul’ezonyembezi mntakwethu

Sul’ezonyembezi mntakwethu

Nang’esiza

Sul’ezonyembezi mntakwethu

Sul’ezonyembezi mntakwethu

Sul’ezonyembezi mntakwethu

Nang'esiza

Phezulu, eNkosini ['in Heaven, in the Lord']

Kuhlal 'ingcwele zodwa ['lives only the holy']

Mawufuna ukuya khona, thandaza ['if you want to go there, pray']

Phezulu, eNkosini

Kuhlal 'ingcwele zodwa

Mawufuna ukuya khona, thandaza

uLoliwe wayidudula

uLoliwe wayidudula

uLoliwe wayidudula

Nang'esiza

uLoliwe wayidudula

uLoliwe wayidudula

uLoliwe wayidudula

Nang'esiza

Xhosa is a Nguni Bantu language and one of the official languages of South Africa and Zimbabwe

## **Stephanie Street**

### **Dear unknown friend**

Dear Friend

Before this moment, of course, we weren't friends; you were just a dear unknown. But this pact, my words landing in your hands like this, taking shape in your mouth, means we must be. So, friend, I do wish I could see you as you read this... see what these words do to the contours of your face, how the shadows pass across your room, feel the shifting in the air around you.

In this year of extreme loss, I find myself in mourning for all the things that bind us as an intricate map of humanity, rather than a collection of discrete bodies: sinews of trust built over a meal with friends; the electrical exchange in the accidental brush of hand against hand; the ache carried by familiar scent on a passing stranger. I miss them all.

I miss the perfume of jasmine flower – sweet and aggressively musky at once. For me, it is the smell of my mother.

When I was a child, almost every weekend my vast Indian family seemed to be invited to a wedding – all of us, numbering anywhere up to twenty, under the matriarchal leadership of my Nani-ma. For my family this was always a great excuse to dress up and get out. I didn't like the dressing up so much; I wasn't that kind of a kid. But I loved seeing my mother transform from the tired, grouchy doctor she was for much of the week. I would watch transfixed as she crayoned kohl onto her eyelids, smudged vermilion on her lips and cheeks, took out her everyday earrings so she could clip in the dangly, twenty-four carat chandeliers. It was a sacred transformation.

The coup de théâtre would come when Ummi took out her little bottle of red nail polish and dotted a small circle on her forehead. Yes. Nail varnish. It lasted longer than bindi powder, she said. At the age of seventy-seven, she still has a little burn spot right between her eyebrows.

With her face complete, Ummi would take a crunchy, red poly bag out of the fridge, from which tumbled loops of jasmine flowers, strung together on thick cotton thread. Sat at her dresser, she would pin the flowers into my hardly combed hair before coiling them into her curls. That smell... I'm carried over continents, decades, across death on it.

On the other side of the world, thirty-ish years on, with only pixels and technology to connect us, I yearn to really feel my Ummi. The smell of jasmine, or of chicken curry made as she taught me, can carry me to her; sometimes in the morning quiet, if I'm lucky, I can catch the cadence of her voice on the air.

But the ache is extreme.

I lost my father to Covid in March 2020. Government restrictions forbade me from seeing him. He died not having seen any of his family in over ten days, alone in a hospital room. They told us he was holding the hand of a nurse when he went. I hope that was the truth.

I'm starting to understand how grief moves, how it can sweep down and consume without warning, shaking your insides out. I look at this sepia photo sitting by my bed, taken in Singapore, 1981, of a handsome man with a handlebar moustache, holding my four-year-old self in one arm like a kind of shirt-wearing Tarzan, and I can't comprehend the lack of him. Where is he now? I want to tell him I have finally learned to parallel park; I want to sit and watch the cricket with him; I want us to listen to jazz together.

As I lie with my own two children every night as they fall asleep, it's undeniable to me the necessity of human contact. Just

after being born, each one was immediately placed on my bare chest – a physiological necessity, the midwives said. The skin to skin stabilises the baby's heart and breath; it spins threads of oxytocin out of mother and baby that weave themselves into the unbreakable web of attachment that cradles us through the loudest toddler tantrums and teenage rebellions. That touch is the physical bedrock for unconditional love.

In fact, and many people think I'm crazy for this, I adored birthing my children. In the final stage of labour, the baby passes the cervix out of the womb, making their way down into the wide world for their first breath of air. During that phase, if you're lucky, you can feel this new life moving its way through you. That physical oneness I experienced birthing each of my children was, for me, the very closest I have got to ecstasy.

How do we live without contact? I think it is an impossibility. How do we touch one another across glass partitions, standing two metres apart, masked and gloved?

I have only one offer to steel us against the darkening nights and it is this: when you fold this letter away, when the vibrations of the words have died down, please take a moment before you go back to your emails, or to washing the dishes...

Let in this new world quietness, freed from the roar of planes and inner-city bustle. See if you can hear the small sounds, the hidden music – the screech of the fox, the crackle of the candle, the inside whisper of your grandfather’s singing.

Give yourself to the eyes of your loved ones. Take a moment in this pretty, flickering light to really look. Share with them your love, your longing, your sadness.

Breathe in the smell of their hair, of the food that is perhaps cooking on a stove, or a stick of incense burning somewhere. This, your home, your family, is your superpower.

I wish you all much love. And health. And strength for tomorrow.

Stephanie

## **Potential Difference**

### **This inscrutable future**

In January 1915, the writer Virginia Woolf wrote in her journal: ‘The future is dark, which is, on the whole, the best thing the future can be.’ Another writer, Rebecca Solnit, interpreting this

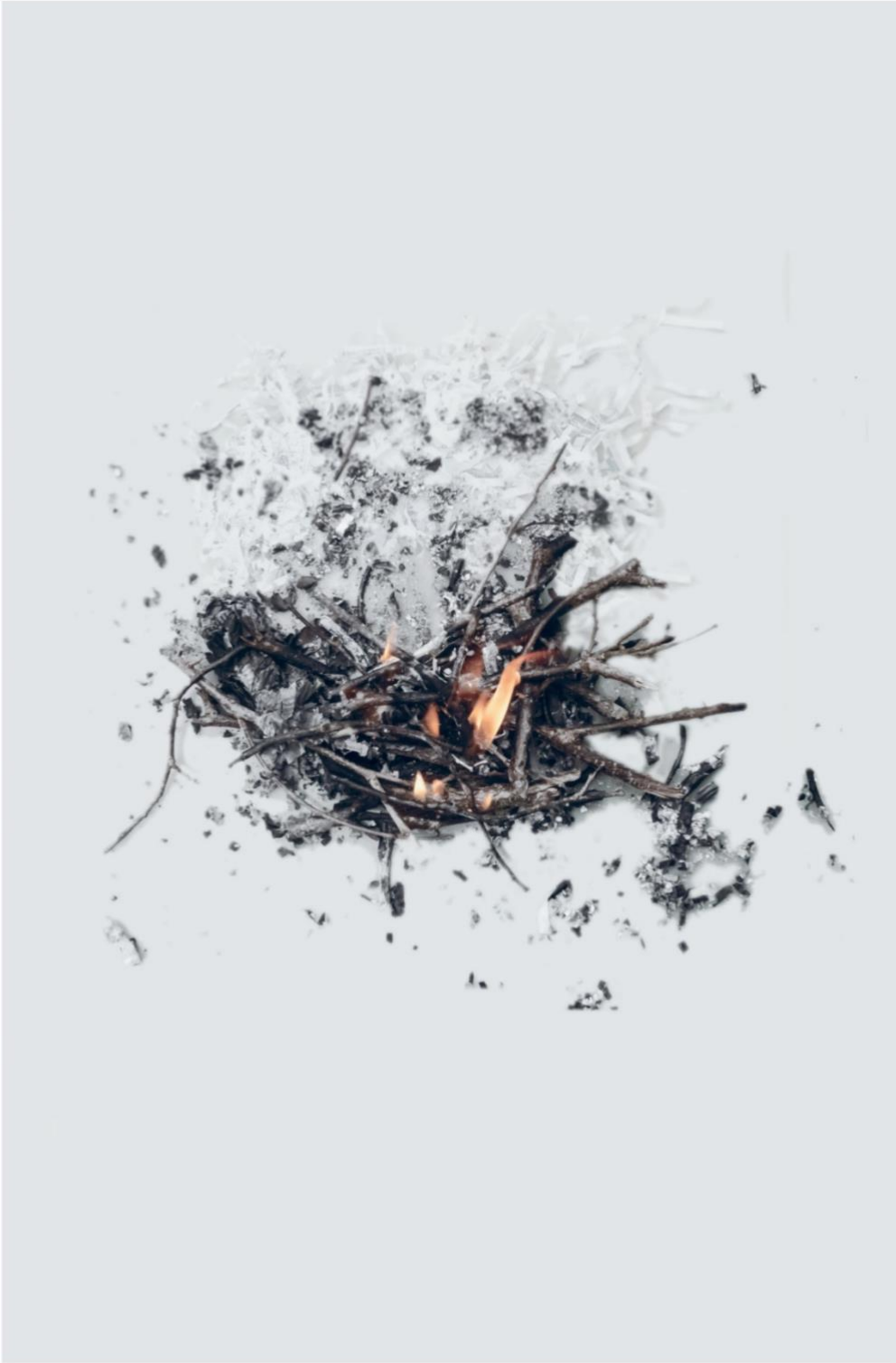
passage, said she thinks Virginia is saying 'dark' not as in 'terrible', but as in 'inscrutable'.

'We often mistake the one for the other,' she says. The future is unknown but we turn it into something certain: 'the fulfilment of all our dread. ... But again and again, far stranger things have happened than the end of the world.'

So let's take a moment to adjust our eyes to the dark, and to look for new performances, art, music and stories waiting to be found.

Let's light our lights, pick up embers of this fire, and hold on to them until next time we meet.









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Applications for performance of Phoenix by Mike Bartlett, including readings and excerpts, by amateurs in the English language throughout the world (excluding the USA and Canada) should be made before rehearsals begin to Nick Hern Books, The Glasshouse, 49a Goldhawk Road, London W12 8QP, tel (0)20 8749 4953, e-mail [rights@nickhernbooks.co.uk](mailto:rights@nickhernbooks.co.uk)

Applications for translation and for performance by professionals in any medium (and by stock and amateur companies in the USA and Canada) should be addressed to Lark Management, The Fisheries, 1 Mentmore Terrace, London E8 3PN, email [assistant@larkmanagement.co.uk](mailto:assistant@larkmanagement.co.uk)

## SIGNAL FIRES | SIX NOTEBOOKS

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