



Crowstep
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It Was as if When You Died the World Died Too

Like the sun closed down for the weekend
and forgot to open up again on Monday.
Like all of the flowers – I mean
all of the flowers – regressed,
wound down their petals,
and though there was something beautiful
in the rebudding I had to turn away, to go
upstairs and firmly press my forehead
to the bathroom floor, against the cold tiles,
just to feel rooted and new.

Jack Wright is a poet from Essex. He has completed a Masters in Creative Writing at Royal Holloway. He lives in East London and works in student support at a university. His poems have appeared in *Swim Press* and *Snippets Magazine*.

What she left me to find, on waking

imagine the scene:
decapitated head, severed limbs

and a police cordon: fences, tapes
around the immediate area
chalk marks around the scattered
parts

and the little post-it notes, the tiny writing
directing the reader, half-asleep
but now arrested in the act of reaching
for a tooth-brush,
to examine

still sticky,
the unwashed lego—

her meticulous recreation
of our fall-apart grief, as
comedy.

Hannah Linden, from a northern working-class background, lives in ramshackle social housing in Devon. She won the Cafe Writers Poetry Competition 2021, Highly Commended in Wales Poetry Award 2021. Her debut pamphlet, *The Beautiful Open Sky* (V. Press) was shortlisted for Saboteur Award for Best Poetry Pamphlet 2023. X: @hannah11n

liquidity, or, how to hold chaos

Close your eyes, sense the flickerlight that plays on your skin.
Number your bones. Bind the breaks, seal the gaps.
Make yourself a vessel with a wide-open mouth. Stretch

each inch of spine, of ligament, and vein, allow space
to expand, to bend, to flex. Touch your breastplate, trace
the cage that protects the heart. Press into the pulse. Step

into the refiner's fire, become molten, resist the coldseep
that will harden you. Burn, if you must. Hold the flame close
to your lungs, speak through the ash that sticks to the back

of your throat. Breathe the air. Breathe the water. Breathe
the dust of creation, permutation of life. Breathe
substrata and stratosphere until indistinguishable, until
liquid, formless, as it was in the beginning.

Exiled Creatures [1]

Confined to her bed by illness,
she heard the sound of the snail—
soon her true companion, moving
from African violet to desk paper,

chewing perfect little squares
with rows of serrated teeth.
In the day, it tucked up under the leaves
to shelter in its unnatural home,

both of them suspended, condensing,
becoming the space their bodies occupy
until there is only the distillation
of being whatever is left.

Here in my room, I have folded
into myself, now small enough
to pass through the perfect square
chewed in the corner of an envelope.

[1] inspired by the book *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating*, Elisabeth Tova Bailey

Nadine Ellsworth-Moran serves in ministry in Georgia. She is fascinated by the stories unfolding all around her and seeks to bring everyone into conversation around a common table. Her work has appeared in *Emrys*, *Theophron*, *Thimble*, *Pensive*, and *Kakalak*, among others. She lives with her husband and four unrepentant cats.

Grammar in a Worksheet

In a children's worksheet of homophones,
An example is of a girl, filling sand in a pail.
I think of her now, she must have collected sea water for waking up her siblings.
She would have enveloped the edges of that pail with overheard elderly conversations.
Unsure of alliteration in waterscape.
Thinking, no article comes to fill, the seed like shape in a half injured shell.
Her curious mind investigating,
All prepositions are in and around the earth, not on water.
By this time, she would have understood
How inactive, a pail
the moon and a circle.

Plucking a Song

Sleepless days are figs you see
I pluck one on right
tune.
Paper clean voiced technician took my arm to draw the blood in the lab.
His reflector style of locating vein
to draw the blood
his palpating finger
drawing C
of constellations,
in unripe closure.
I found being a garden of
unexplored herbs till this extent.
My arm, examined by him, hurt for a split second,
language, unlearnt like antiseptic solution on skin,
imagining the tallness or sameness of both fingers.
His non-alcoholic glance at the fragrant and drip like
Roots of my fingers.
Rooted I read
Anatomy of natural light
In an uncomposed image
Of triangles on body of water.
as
untold as
language
of fingers, clicked in a span
To breathe.

Jyothsnaphanija teaches English Literature at ARSD College (University of Delhi), India. her poems have recently appeared in *Quail Bell*, *ShotGlass*, *The Hopper*, *Mixed mag*, short stories in *The Bombay Review*, articles and reviews in *Kitaab*, *Cafe Dissensus* and others. She is also a singer and a traveller.

Aimless Hours of Glass

on their hands and knees
men with small hammers
fix stones for you to walk on
sharp silver sounds
out of the sun places
your own aimless hours of glass

we'd leave our dead at the sea
turned to silver fishes
our people nourished
by such treasure
grew strong

then others came
huge ships hauled the sea
for those we would never meet
now our own people dwindle
souls of our ancestors stolen.

as far as the eye can see small diamond stars tattoo
unspeakable skin
ancient linens a memory of water a beautiful woman once came
pure infant dreams deep on my strong shoulder swaying songs the rain peers into

nothing comes so softly as this day of leaving
even stones, once cursed
now picked up at random
savoured by mouth
a kiss let fall gently as if they'd remember only that

PD Lyons born and raised in the USA. Since 1998 has resided in Ireland. Lyons received Mattatuck College Award for Outstanding Achievement in Poetry, Bachelor of Science with honours from Teikyo Post University. The work of PD Lyons has appeared in many formats throughout the world.

night calls

the night embraces the sun which lays prostrate at the feet of the monarch of time, so we can all shift sleeping places — not for the new bride's bed of roses.

it was a call that is heard in harmony when the day sheds its slough for a new story— we sit under the stars and read its mystery in unison.

we toss and turn when the midnight cat sets its eyes on us as the whirlpools in the mind trample upon our eyelids.

the false security of mosquito nets trade daydreams for nightmares; the hourglass empties itself on the blind side of the altar.

Break

mama, i waddle to the journey of the unknown –hear me and listen to me– i'm without a breast to suck on/

fluorescent lights shine best in the dark

your light shines in the light

Bright Aboagye is a Ghanaian who dreams of becoming a surrealist blues poet, writer and – with a passion for cooking – aspires to open a restaurant. Influenced by Aja Monet & Akwaeke Emezi, he writes about themes of class, orphans, ecofeminism and all forms within African society. He holds a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Ghana and a Master's degree in Literature in English from the University of Cape Coast.

Barked Breath

Picture a brown girl
trying to fade
to disappear
to reverse engineer
her perverse haunting
by three flags.

She's inside
a school of swastikas
where decoupling
from her stinking
jungle-clad roots
is the primary lesson.

Here is hot barked breath
well versed in a
rusting history
of stereotype. There
is a cauldron
from which she clutched
disallowed dreams
of being and belonging.

Here are her reveries
where she took shelter.
Sickles of safety.

Dream Sutra

In the atlas
of my dreams
I wear a necklace
of African and Indian stars.
Jewel bright
in the late light
of my longing.

I skate along
the treetops of the tropics.
Their moon gleams
and the sun beams
blended into my
silky scented sari.

I weave through
curated courtyards
verdant verandas
the bougainvillea
and the jacaranda
nestled deep in
the greenest gardens
dripping hot wet heat.

In the splendour
of my sutra
I sit and savour.

My roots
ache to anchor.

Parlour Prana

Picture a brown woman running
back to her roots
having inhaled
limit and liberation.
The taste and state
of a high voltage
western world. Which
offers a great deal
on a soured down
happily ever after
stuck in her epiglottis.

She's bamboozled by
her Billy bookcases
strewn with starchy smiles
borrowed from bowls
of eastern breath.

Her blinded odyssey
is pleated
with complexity
finding her striding
over hooded philosophy
playing parlour prana.
All the while bound by
lynched laughter.

Here are her reveries
in which she
cleans cliches
reimagining
muscular veracity.

Navraj Matharu, an educational psychologist in the UK, enjoys travelling through poetry to explore themes pertaining to fixed and fluid identities. Other preoccupations are childhood, the psyche of parents and its influence, grief, and the natural and political worlds. Her poems are well considered by Bobbi-Mustard, an orange cat.

Pollen

The day is tranquil, and you carry yourself out to sit in it,
sky, still, blue,
painted with pocket-sized clouds

but if you look a certain way,
at just the right moment,
you'll see the incredible movement of pollen

rising like smoke from the trees
dancing, billowing, constellating

a blush of travelers,
spontaneously invisible

a thin film,
twinkling

from certain angles,
a layer of a dream

Release

I

Too late, I let you dissolve,
you were dust when you could have been rain.

II

I picture a picture I never should have seen
of you, a dream in your eyes
bent forward, toothpick dangling, in black and white,
the ghost story I fell in love with,
you always existed in memory alone.

III

In some tellings you were the firefly,
other times you were the jar,
more than you know,
we are the same
I promise I won't hold against you
anything you've done to get free.

I Know of a Place

I know of a place where
the mountains meet the sea

where the air smells of jasmine and bread and olive soap.
We walk rhythmically down old alleyways in the morning

where cedars humbly breathe for us,
where existence is the poet

I know of a place where
contradiction is not washed away but painted into the night

where chaos can be sweet and drunk like tea
while we walk barefoot through vines in the morning.

Some people close their eyes and see pictures
fully formed and tangible as paper

for others, to see behind our eyes
is a metaphor

an abstract idea of an image
just out of reach

yes, like this,
I know of a place.

Ellie Ellias is a poet, writer, and creative astrologer currently living in Ottawa, Canada. She finds inspiration in everything from dreams and nature to spilled wine and well-timed typos.

Homeland

Here the land is so wild
commandos train on it.
Even the village drunks
speak a language older

than English, a music
the Saxons never trusted.
My grandfather's watch sings
an altered time in my pocket,

a counting as old as the mountain
I clamber to crawl up.
Something in my blood catches
on the twisting corners.

Slowly, I know how
this flinty trail ends.
My name seems familiar
to the stones, the gulls.

Claim they've known me for years.
My hands reach for the wind
as though it were a harp.
I remember this fever

has a name: hiraeth,
a gentle cancer that feeds
in the heart's four rooms.
I descend. A clutch of voices

swim up from Capel Seion
seeking, as for centuries,
the shifting doors of heaven.
I know the words. I sing.

Under Story

My father kept moving:
hands, arms, legs.
Cooked, planted, tended.
Drafted. WWII Horse Cavalry.
He stalked Nazis across Italian mountains
and inside German villages.
Marched miles into combat.
His motto: protect your feet.

Wear good socks and sturdy shoes
Well-fitting. Low rise. Practical.
Smooth leather with saddle soap
and mink oil. Use polish.
The scent of his shoe brush
sits in my cupboard like
a soldier in reserve.

My mother weathered her own trauma.
Shopped to ease her orphan emptiness.
Nicknacks. Themed towels with sailboats.
Tablecloths to hide her secrets. Water damaged
cherry wood dining table.
Many moves later, her collection
drained and dispersed.

One thing I kept. Her
colorful narrow striped socks.
Slipped them on to walk the dog.
Thin and insubstantial
they slid down into boots.
Bunched up at the bottom
exposing bare ankles to freezing winds.
Anger rode up my legs and out my mouth.
Startled the dog with harsh words not meant for her.

Home again, I strip off her socks and toss them.
Now the caretaking is over, grief rides
a different cavalry.

Catherine Reid Day's story-based coaching method is published in the Journal of Individual Psychology. She's adapting her method into a workbook titled The Urgency of Who You Are. Her poems appeared in Willows Wept Review, Highly Sensitive Refuge, and the Park Bugle. Poems arrive for her while walking the dog or gardening.

Red Kite and Crow

Sat on brick dust cliffs
drinking the winey sunset,
as the low moon drifts
in bloody cloud, wine on the lip,
June fills up ruby roots and roses,
holly hawthorn hip,
with bloom and flame, and
opium poppy and sweet pea,
drowse and bloom
in the blowsy grass.

Below in madder seas
bladderwrack drapes the shale,
and above
the red kite flees the crow,
over burnt slate and rusty chimneys,
tides of flying seeds
and twigs crawling up the sky,
the red spreading flight
runs before a clattering black flap,
half its size.

Down Our Street

Down our street
dogs and children bark,
and when the rain huddles
on the tumbled-up houses
you can hear the quiet of their histories
in the puddles in the lanes,
in wet lilac dusks
and shiny moist evenings,

and when the silent sleet
muffles the glow of coal fires
I take my mind back
to a baked-white house
among scorched laburnums
where rain comes once yearly
and water runs warm from the tap,
set in heat.

While down our street
wet children pat wet dogs
and blow misty on their fingers.

Jan Martin is an artist with three published collections of illustrated poetry inspired by landscape: *We Are Here Between*, *Behind the Veil*, *Woods, Ways and Waters*. Shortlisted for: Exmoor Society Poetry Prize, Burnham Book Festival Poetry Prize and Walk.Listen.Create Poetry Prize. Her work appears in various print and online platforms.

Planting trees is an act of faith

that you, Dad,
indulged, atheist in love
with the lives of saints.
You revelled in cleverness,
thefts, a forest of stolen cuttings
rooted in white powder,
brought on in flimsy cups and old Stork tubs
lined on a brick-raised door,
planted out front when they were young
and pliable.

But when did you come to believe
in the reality of trees?

Was it when
their trunks were thicker than your grip?
When you had to stunt them for your safety?
When you got a man in?
When the front room swam
in half-tree light, and windows
rotted in the press of branches,
brown and leafless,
though you knew their names?
Was it when your house became
the strange house on the street?
When there were rumours?

Nancy

She died when it was almost usual, almost not.

Remembered with more
than a crossed name in a Bible,
with less than streets lined in shock,
crammed crematoria,
yearly flowers, toys.

There was a black-edged envelope,
with her notice,
her portrait,
colourised in a fairy wreath,
and a plait of hair,
tied with thin black velvet,
faded brittle pale
as if she had grown old anyway.

And, of course, there was her little sister
who had to pass her,
had to have a life.

Who, when she saw her granddaughter,
saw her.

Who kept the envelope
in her bedside drawer
away from family cabinets.

Who took it out,
occasionally,
for the few,
held the plait flat on her palm,
little fingers, washed and reverent,
allowed to touch it, stroke it.

As if it was a creature,
and still real.

Ann Heath lives and works in York. She has been published in *Dreamcatcher*, *Atrium* and *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears* among others, and in various anthologies.

Watching a landslide from Strefi hill

The noises, carrying themselves up here with a
backpack of trapped flies and crockery. Sam and I on

the verge of a sneeze; unknowing and both a little
fond of the other. Blue railings, evenly spaced inside

our ears while vision remains a charming gift. At least
a thousand churches and horses all in one eyeful, the gums

of Athens aching and swollen. We can't see the window of
our hostel from here so read these new books and let

silence do the sharing. All things left unsaid places his hat on to
avoid sunburn and politely jumps off the edge, we

edge closer together amongst sunflower seed remains. Sun
behind us, silently doing her job. The pleasant fullness of a

bladder. After dinner, the holiday will be over, leaving an artist's palette of crusted
memories
in vibrant colours, mostly mixed into

brown
but the red left
well alone.

OBJECTS 08/04/24

Ashtray. Orange book. Blue mug. In the - the? Sunlight. Yes. Their soft hands, removed at birth. Do not search for objects inside of me. People with wet morning hair walk past and do not know. The? Significance. I have witnessed a giant collision on this table. There is something to be said about subtle generosity of objects. Why don't they just walk away? Like people? I cannot comprehend. A sunrise does not last all day, it just dries up leaving an oil slick. A car crash on the? Road. My objects - unhurt and unfazed. I've got to tell you, how I can spend hours, watching the way these things arrange themselves. Who can be less self-conscious than the dirty rim of a mug? Tiny breasts of a young girl, growing under a summer orange tree. And now, my book. One single drop of satisfaction falls down the thigh of an ashtray. I stand up, empty at the waist and walk to the hotel, where I fall asleep inside a matchbox. It's not always over this soon.

A slice of bread in sparta

Do you really think so? I am all of those things? A bag
of salted cashews with their jackets on and my steel

tin of tobacco. Cross legged in the petrol station after
three long, hard days of marching a foreign city

on the edge of a smile. There's trouble fighting through
the skin of his own front teeth. I wear a neat little dress

and climb the 10 hour bus seat to an unknown greek
village, where an old lavender woman cares. Just like

kicking white legs in the ocean, unaware of eels and
jellyfish slipping past naked flesh, I fall asleep. It's quite -

darling, really - my heart. Under all that hard bone. Upon
waking, the woman's breakfast table is still warm from

milky leftovers of light. It's not like you to leave me so
down and out.

Blossom Hibbert has a pamphlet, suddenly, it's now published by Leaf Press. Her work has appeared in places such as *The Temz Review*, *Litter*, *International Times* and *Buttonhook Press*. She hides inside the wet walls of Jerusalem, drinking Turkish coffee and rising before the dawn.