

clown snake the cat, red paper bat man

a collection of poems on queerness, bad parties and post-pubescence (2016 - 2021)

* themed in lady gaga inspired chapters

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part 1: the edge of glory

tell me what it's worth

i see you pressing plastic buttons,
teenage kicking
sickened 'til you can't see
if you're doing it right
and as you tell him that he's perfect
he disappears
one pixel at a time.
tell me what it's worth
tell me that we're here for a reason
that i'm seeing colours,
throwing shapes
and spitting blood
for some purpose.
hold my head
when it's lowered
into this ceramic wasteland,
tasting body fluids
that i didn't know I had
as soft guts turn inside out
and i cry like we used to.

gin drunk sad

she's
tying shoelaces to trip herself up
and turning vodka into wasted time.
she's tearing us apart with
love,
loss
and ecstasy
with one pink pill to make her feel
the presence of another man
down is up
and up is down
and we'll be absent 'til tomorrow
when the bin men come
to take our sins away.

lost boys

we sit in bed,
geometric patterns on cheap cotton
protect us from the pestilence
of post-pubescence.
we, the children who never grew up
a neverland nightmare of false starts
and fuck ups.
we wither and i wonder,
when it might get better.

always in the kitchen at parties

i'm acting out another
real life one man show,
my only friend the kitchen
and its fairy liquid hope.
i'm looking at the oven
wondering if I could fit my head in
and complete the cliché
- i pray to gods I don't believe in
to bless me with not breathing.

fish and chips

i come from a land where hook-scarred birds
beg for remnant scraps of fish and chips
and mothers queue for methadone scripts.
both are looking for acknowledgement,
the knowledge that they are needed,
that they have space
on these shores of steel and stone.
it's not something
that i ever found here.

icarus in ripped jeans

i flew too close to the sun last night
or,
at least something that resembled it.
as i made the daily dance around myself
i found there were things missing
rose petal bath salt parts of me
that i had left untethered.
i collapse,
a week-old birthday balloon
back into bad habits i fall
like the nun who missed laundry day
for pay-per-view sex lines.
pigeons sit on the satellite
for a tv we don't own
and i watch the man in a wheelchair
who breathes lighter fluid
to pass his days.

band name generator auto poem

Embryotic Data With The Enthused Jelly,
Head Of The Regret
Up Broken-hearted Latch.
Bubbling Absinthe With The Atlantic Kilo;
Till Severed Elegances.
Into Partly Laser,
Dope Peasant With The Lubricated Encore.

portrait of a brain on fire

i think my brain's on fire,
and i don't know how to put it out
i house a slow static, yearning
for something consistent
every leaf that falls from half-dead houseplants
- green tinged ghosts of a life half lived.
threads flicker,
chiselled routes through what i thought i was
and arteries connect across empty space.
while flailing limbs act on my behalf,
i wait to wake up.
the taste of consequence in my mouth
is nothing new.

some body

i've only spent three days alone
and to be honest my life was falling apart
long before this happened.
but the worst thing about having more time by myself
is not that i will discover too much
it's that there might not be enough
and months from now
i will emerge,
a body,
nothing else.
stacks of human pieces,
a mind melted down for parts.

two swans

two swans sit half-submerged in the harbour
like plastic bags
or a semi formed poem
while students share what they can
around an improvised pub garden.
i'm thinking about the lift to my flat;
that sometimes the person you thought
was heading to the same floor
walks out and leaves
and, somehow,
we have to make peace with that.
two swans sit half-submerged in the harbour
like plastic bags
or a semi formed poem
while students share what they can
around an improvised pub garden.

bus poem

i'm bored of condensation

of the breaths i used to take.

i don't want to be reminded

part 2: bad romance

pink jeans

today i walked through my childhood town
wearing pink jeans, eye shadow
and fingernails like sweet lilac tar.
i have never done this before,
long ago learning the lessons on how i should look
if i want to avoid the wrong kind of attention.
now, though, life is in lockdown
and this space is mine.
no one shouts *faggot* and i do not flinch;
it's finally starting to feel like home.

you (a puddle)

you told me
that you were
a puddle of
oil,
meaningless in your muddiness.

but i know in every drop
of you
there's a prism of colours,
reflecting your true form.

hopscotch to nowhere

i walk across cracked tarmac
on my way to being anyone for you.
under my feet
a half finished hopscotch grid,
drawn out in chalk
- childhood games reaching half way
to a future that we can't imagine,
that's no longer ours.
i've just eaten the worst sandwich of my life
and i miss you.

moving on

i stare out to cobalt rooftops
they tell me that you still exist
from a frame of fag-stained, peeling paint
yellow and ashamed.
your words were meant to hurt,
meditations made in margarine
that melt before they reach me.
i gather cold organs
and remember my worth,
uttering a final jaw full of apologies
that you will never hear.

fuck me when the sun comes up

you reach for the olive green bottle by your bed,
turning liquid to pleasure
in an act of alchemy
as our hands explore each other's caverns
and valleys
the geology of our bodies
beyond gender and sense.

censored love letter

lying arms push over
holding your pillow
around me
your shoulders standing there,
inside.

dragonball durag

i wonder if,
by some strange and no longer romantic coincidence,
we are both listening to the same song.
i also wonder what emojis
the man at the garage has sent me
on my nokia 3310.
both of these thoughts
are unimportant.

special delivery

you sent a postman
to pick up your shoes;
a convoluted way
to make the contact
that we have lost
until you say it's found.

window poem

early this morning
the sky was blushing champagne pink
i thought of you,
but listened to the sound of my own voice
telling stories that you'll never hear.
i don't know what that says about me
but for once i am untroubled,
and i can hold myself
despite what i've been told.

cracks in a pink plastic plate

i woke up thinking of you, again.
with appendicitic pain that sits
between my empty arms
and the bag of all your things
that i've left behind the door,
still hoping you might keep them here.
the second thing i did today
was drop a bamboo plate,
smashed serrated edges
making breakfast dangerous;
a nod to the level of excitement
that my life contains.

love poem

monday morning
is something to savour with you.
i feel your plans,
ambition behind brown eyes
as we wrap limbs like hanging plants.
fingers follow freckles,
stepping stones of melanin
across your flattened chest.

part 3: always remember us this way

empty fortunes

my sister removed
all the fortunes
from the cookies
we got with last night's takeaway.
now they are hollow and cheap
and tell us nothing of our future.
strangely fitting,
for a time like this.

the 5pm frontier

the 5pm frontier is here again
vener of spit and sawdust-speckled
moments of a day that won't forgive.
tasks completed, medicated
body washed and dressed
but still the horrors come for me
relentless, awful shudders
in my stomach and my skull.
i shop to pass the time,
but tinny speakers see me coming
they play *wonderwall*,
sounds of northern masculinity
between the stacks and shelves.
it's a terrible song
and i feel profoundly alone.

joni mitchell moment

a swollen river,
full circle
(life in no motion)

mountain energy

i lift rocks on spanish mountains
while mothers brush their teeth.
like the scent of a salesman
or the tears of a clown
i occupy an unimportant moment,
i am a little death.
later i find televisions
scattered on the wasteland
- transmissions of earth,
not yet received.
the bones of a cat's foot
speak to me from the dust
in which it rests
and the last few snakes
from the fading summer heat
crawl across discarded bathroom floors;
they say patriotism is the last refuge.
a man tells stories of light aircraft
over the menu of the day.
i am tired
and somewhere,
a tree falls.

very volcanic over this green feather

fields of coloured cloth
teach me how to cry again,
reclaiming what was taken.
the fabric speaks
and says
that we shall share this heaven
or you shall share our hell
and could the last one to leave
please turn out the lights.

eulogy for a dead cat

**made with words on the packet of cat food that you'll never eat*

you are food for cats since 1958.
you are everything we do,
you are a whole journey.
you are spirit and you are instinct
you are feline.
you are a stage of life
and you are every change.
you are 12 x 100 grams
of devotion.
you are *the good stuff*.
you are strong defences
and soft touch.
you are balanced mineral levels.
you are complete and you are love.
you are no fillers,
you are no nasties.
you are tins, pouches, pots and treats.
you are an encore.

mine

i found out
that the neighbourhood
where i now live
used to be a mining town.
houses built like rotting teeth
were warmed by coal,
chiselled from wounds beneath their feet.
now, the mines are flooded
and the water is warm enough to harness
hydrothermal energy,
coursing from dead space
as the mines heat homes once more.
i think that's how my mind works too,
the places where i've hacked away
are healing,
softening.
liquid seeps across old scars
and i am warm once more.

this hope might hurt

i arrived here from my past
less time travel, more my mind's unravelled
enough times to understand
how tender life can be.
i've come to tell myself
to remember that this hope might hurt.
that hope is hard and sweaty
that hope is a grazed knee.
hope is a tear that can't be shed
hope is a demolished hotel
that once stood tall in your childhood.
hope is the sting of rocks and shells beneath your feet,
hope tells you that you're living.
hope only works when it might hurt,
if the threads are loose enough
to let you feel your pain.
this hope might hurt,
but, my darling
i know that you will heal.

self service poem

at the self-service checkout
a tiny screen shows me
the limited potential of what i can be.
i know that i should scan the oat milk
before the man behind me
gets angry,
again.

futile gestures

tiny moments of protest
found in small connections
are all that keeps me here right now.
i'm trying to roll a cigarette in the rain,
a vague attempt to fumigate the pains
that i know well
and get the upper hand on the ones i haven't met yet.
i think of lost bodies, latent love
and every paradise lost
and wonder if i can spend another day
of trusting myself this much.

this is the sound

this is the sound of a dog walking itself on its own lead
and a man cleaning his driveway for the fourth time this week.
this is the sound of an unemployed clown's makeup
melting in the heat of an 18-30s package holiday to Mallorca.
this is the sound of a Tijuana brass band
covering the Beatles' greatest hits
and this is the sound of a paper hat
for a party that doesn't exist.
this is the sound of all the chimpanzees we sent to space;
in solitary orbit,
witnessing a dead planet
and the overview effect
in a manner that is poignant beyond the sign language that we taught them.