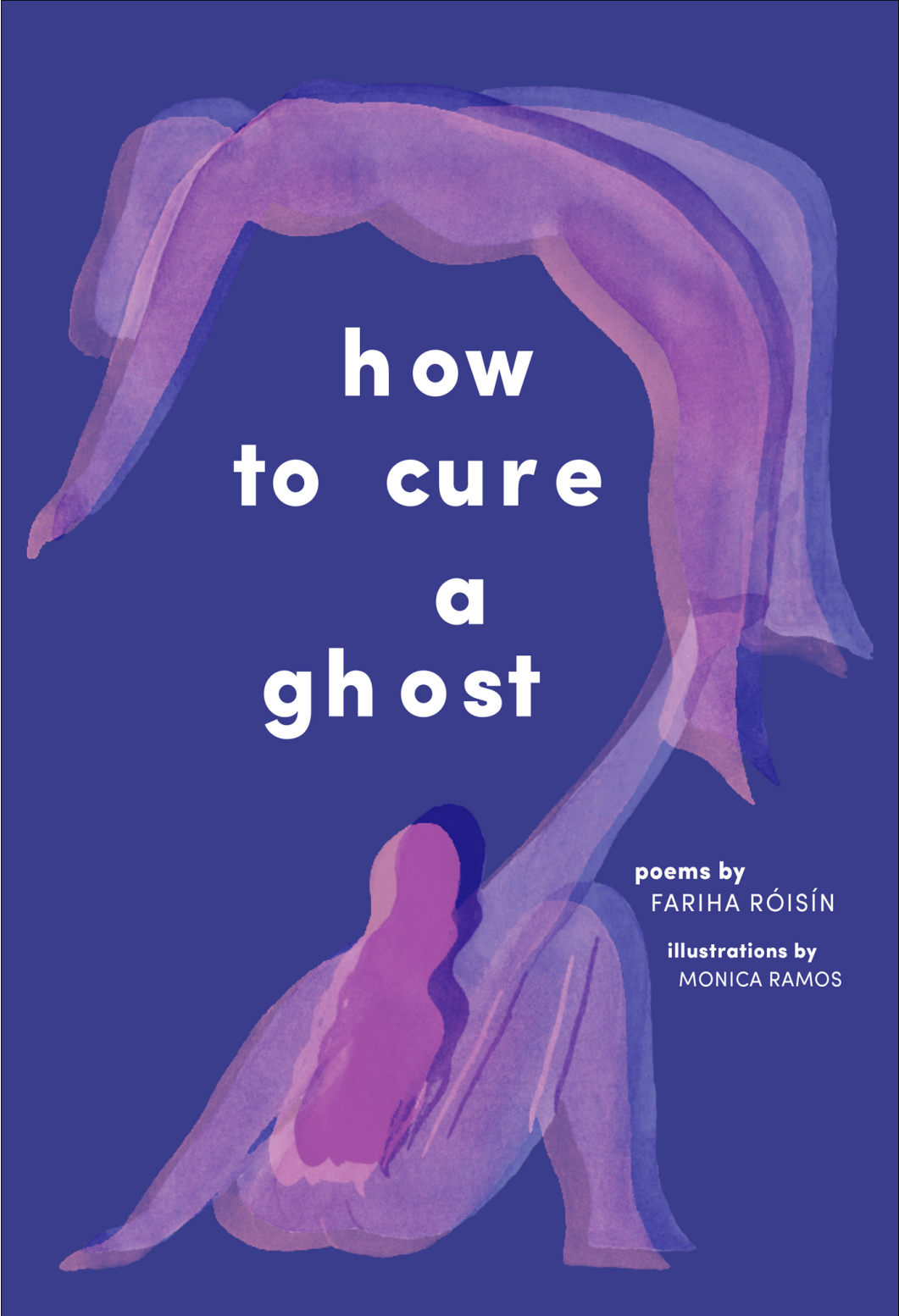




how to cure a ghost

poems by
FARIHA RÓISÍN

illustrations by
MONICA RAMOS



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[This page](#): Excerpted lyrics from “Green Green Grass of Home,” text and music by Curly Putman

[This page](#): Portions of “1971” previously appeared in *Hazlitt*

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for ammu and abbu

***Her dark purdah glance
is strong and still as rock***

ELIZABETH HARDWICK

***Could it be that those who see
things more clearly are also those
who feel and suffer the most?***

CLARICE LISPECTOR

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i really really care, don't you?

it's all love

we go on, sisters, we go on

this one's with teeth

1971

the women who have seen

sadness is a vacuum

my heart is a novella

what 9/11 did to us

to drone or not to drone

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who's right?

i'm two halves of the moon, i'm still evolving

neu land

golden lube

before partition

anthurium

on watching the house burn down

there's nothing original about judas

belonging

this one's for me

acknowledgments

after the loss

i built myself up,
like a layer of bricks, i lifted.
a marionette, sheltered by the hands of god
i rose to the awakened sky,
rising like the dunes,
the sands' yellow shadow.
building a home for myself
i spun gold into linen
into safety
where i could breathe
without you
for the first time.
i crouched towards
the punishing hunger inside
& slowly i let them pass,
past the mountainous
shape of my tongue.
coming up opposite
way it went down,
shoving my misery
to the dull corners
of my boredom
i pulled myself up
and out to become
the glory
i am now.
strengthening myself like iron,
carbon steel, forcing myself to

face the glistening cracks.
hollow, singing along
to a mother's slap,
the lines on my face
breaking,
ugly in a frown.
instead i bite the
bitter gotu kola,
nutty like a pistachio,
sipping a Gamay as respite,
facing the ugly,
crying through faded
eyelashes, mascara stains
running indigo
streaks down the
balls of my cheeks,
licking royalty into my blood.
like bright satin lacquer on
the floor
smiling, unconvinced,
i said, baby you gotta live!
that day i did not die.
leaves blistering out in the sun
like fall at its most supreme,
that one day i chose life,
my skin surfaced with crusty sores
i said to them: *so what?*
i am bigger than
this pain, a
vortex of every
narrative i've
screamed together
to have purpose,
frequency.

nobody chose it for me, this life.
least of all my mother
and before me,
she chose not even herself.
so why choose me?
paltry me—*second*?
a platter of unfulfillment.
it feels cold to not be chosen
to blink and not be seen
to be forgotten like a pebbled amulet
that has lost its kin,
ashy, chicken skin,
no body to be worn on,
all gloom.
i am sometimes drifting like
a lost person, with no heir
or heirloom, a fog
of longing.
until, i decided on myself.
that day, i chose me.
like an orchestra choosing
bach. i was a symphony,
my god. i was a grand symphony—
how could i have not known?
all these years
squandered on disbelief.
thinking i knew the ins and outs of living,
cocky with my pain,
my solace, my toxic sanctuary.
i know nothing of mercy,
especially not for myself.
i know nothing of redemption.
especially not for you.
i am stateless, lilting in the morning sun.

self-portraiture

ONE

i am a self, yes
though sometimes it's hard
to believe
i am a body (troubled)
that i have one, too.

TWO

i count how to love myself, thoroughly,
an abacus, my love handles as armrests,
belly a scooped armchair,
a vulnerable asylum.

THREE

there's no choice, otherwise
the process is about letting yourself in
it's about loving gently, dearly
warm, a known embrace
rum coating the belly.

FOUR

all of me, awoken, and brown
like a sweet creature of defiance.



FIVE

i hate my weaknesses:
how people can hurt me
with one triumphant *just because*.

how i'm always small next to
others' self-assuredness
always—hand to heart—
waiting for a proffered description of *me*
to determine my worth.

i wait
for their approval to curl around my body,
a blanket of panicked
self-acceptance.

SIX

described as “too nice”
by the people closest.
sometimes i wear it like a badge, other times
like an ornate insult,
is everyone laughing at me?

SEVEN

my greed for love,
for my own perfection,
reeks of desperation,
but it is me and i am holy
in my unholiness, so
wonderfully messy,
that i can't help but begin
to win myself over.

EIGHT

i pour honey into
the ocean for Oshun.

NINE

the body's memory
more potent
more powerful
than human minds
than gendered egos.

i am alive,
and by god
i'm tired of being awakened, but unlived.
tomorrow, today, now

i step outside.

after the loss, take 2

saudade

mango juice
dripping through my slight
fingers,
the heart of the fruit
held tight. i am a monster,
ravenous. too bold.
waiting (painless)
like Kali, a crown with claws,
graceless in my regality.
watch me burn,
the pyre of emotions,
palo santo mixed with
sage, the ash christens me,
molding me
to create patterns
in a universe where
i merely *just* survive.
half gelato slurping,
i learn how to
safeguard my joy
in a world that tries
so hard to grab it.
pertinent, i was born
to this sticky mess,
this stark confusion
haram jati

the bad kind.
not knowing what i was,
a boy or a girl?
survival looks like many things,
we learn to make do,
to use familiar words to
describe us, it's always easier
not to fight the satiating rhythms
of what you are, isn't it?
dirty, and nasty, no modesty
in sight, cum dripping down
my chubby, chubby legs
i like how it feels viscous, and light,
egg whites,
oozing out like a sore,
my pussy so plump
it feels like freshly glossed lips.
i choose myself. yes
now, i am open. i am
vulnerable, steady like a womb.
my tongue blistered
from the corrosive
sulfur of fear,
pestered into petulance,
i am afraid, still.
how do i ask to be saved
in a world like this?
a mysterious bruise,
all splotchy,
wanting so badly to heal
sometimes i'm so lonely
i want to disappear,
into the abyss
that haunts my mother,

but i don't—
i hope for love.
for a love so delicious
i am left, cradled
and cradling, holding
another's heart so close,
a heat lamp of affection,
by the lost energy of lust,
i am filled.
so, i am ready
to be ready.

no,

i am ready
to be ready
for you.

you feel me right, you feel me?

it's no coincidence
that i turned out like this.
skin like honey,
small dimples puckering
my elbows to my knees,
a condition abbu refused
to accept.
thinking "my child will have the most
perfect of *allllllll* the smooth skin
if i have to bring her to THIS country."
you know, this country,
here // there // where
her body doesn't melt
from gasoline inhalation,
where the billboards don't bloom
sweaty dripping formaldehyde.
formalin fruits like plastic
in a fruit bowl
full of lies.
where she has clean running water
to wipe out her wounds
so she isn't gutted out
into the streets
like fresh raw tripe,
stale like old Halloween candy.
a good life they told us,
but a good life for whomst?
a good life for all the ghosts,

all the omens,
all the sorrows of our sad, sad nations.
when i was a child
i would imagine my skull
crashing into asphalt,
cracking open like a watermelon,
i wanted to die even then,
my mild gloom haunting
my sentimentality
in the dutty wind.
my grief, like a migraine,
strangling my hope.
my grief, my only scapegoat
from the wretched humidity
of just surviving.
i don't want to just survive anymore, mom.
it hurts it hurts it hurts, mom.
why didn't you save me, mom?
why didn't you ever try?
i think about it night and day,
even still, how hard it is to let go
of this ultimate betrayal, Freudian.
i wish i wish i wish i could be
so much stronger than this.
but sometimes all i want for
is some cool sheets and someone to say,
"shh, i love you, honey."
not out of obligation,
or bleak-ass responsibility,
but because they mean it.
if you can't love me, who will?

reminder for self

i am not what i thought i was

i am stronger.

set fire to the misinterpretations of self.

the doubt that lingers, acid on the gray tongue,

burning away that boring rhetoric of self-treachery,

eroding you

right down to the brink of your bloodthirsty b-b-bottomless sadness.

relieving you of the guttural hunches of your perceived failure.

drop down and drink the hymn

the sweet cacophony of your soul's purpose

you are here for a purpose. you are here for a purpose!

you are here for a purpose!

you are here for a purpose!
you are here for a purpose!
you are here for a purpose!
you are here for a purpose!

don't ever let your piercing need for love
evacuate your chakras.

you are more than what you set out to be, in the womb, and in flesh.
you are more—

than what your ancestors hailed
out to the winds
in their last blinding
sacrament.



plastic bags inside another plastic bag to carry said plastic bags

yogurt containers as dishware
holding leaky contents
for the entirety of a household.

greasy chicken curry leaving
puddled stains,
holood daal rupturing the

sides like dried molten lava,
kumquat chutney sitting idle, on a tray,
lacking purpose.

pulao with ghee, kalo jam
sitting sugary on my tongue,
the sandesh-like texture,

tiny nerds in my mouth
pop, pop, pop
i eat because i have no purpose.

instead, eating becomes
an active embrace.
of sacred care, a proxy hand on my shoulder.

lids like saturn floating,
mismanaged, strewn across all manner of
spindly cupboards, soaking in crude mustard oil

newspapers stacked
musty, the smells of my childhood—
of being young, but not free.

ammu, after the smoke

For what could be more magical than to weep in exchange for a mother?

CLARICE LISPECTOR

hearing the mania of my mother's crying
invokes her past hysteria

wielding it like a sorcerer's whip
she is frozen in time, frozen in her trauma

how can i pull her out?

here eat a rasgulla, ma
ssh, ma. don't cry

everything is war with her
the water we use (or don't use)

the sprinkles of salt we accidentally spill,
the ketchup dried over at the edge,

a waste, all things policed
as if we were states that were

stateless, she our queen,
the reprimander of all things,

unashamed—she, who sees all,

judge, jury, and executioner.

i remember no peace at home.
i remember no silence.

just screaming, wails,
and that one time she attempted

to burn down the house
symbolically using the baby fur, fleecy

blue carpet
snowy-edged outside our room,

blue like the walls, blue like the ceiling
blue like her pain,

woodfire for her larceny.
i passed out from the smoke,

into the knuckles of my sister's shoulder blades,
holding tight, thinking "this is the end, for sure, for sure."

people don't understand, in the battle of the two
nurture always wins.

nurture makes you hate yourself less.
after the smoke,

she never asked us how we were.
going about her business, like

we were the stingy assholes
coming between her and her true love, abbu.

we, the unnerving competition, not children
but an endless ache.

walking out a few months later,
she said she was going to kill herself, jump off a bridge

into a smelly creek behind our home.
she even left her will on the side table, a cautionary tale.

no one stopped her. i ran away from home, months later
and i returned home the same night.

tail between my legs,
i've always been shameless in my agony,

the forever *too* sensitive,
as if insensitive is #goals.

sometimes i forget how i got here.
sometimes i forget how much i didn't want to survive.

mansplain nation

whenever i see you
you explain things to me
taunting—as if you have
the right answer

hidden beneath your
low-hanging fruit.
what you *know*
or *don't know*

are indistinguishable.
lips pursed,
you question others' sincerity,
insincerely, but never your own.

why is that, white man?
“you once told me
that you're not a feminist,
you know?”

using it as a weapon, like
“how would you know
how to be a woman?
you're not even a feminist.”

decontextualizing
what i said,
to inflate

your own wounded ego.

what i really said was
i'm not
a white feminist,
there is a difference.

do you know
how many times
i've heard a man
declare *he's* a feminist?

white male privilege
characterizes you,
that perennial smirk.
let me break it to you:

your theoretical understanding
of "class divide,"
reading baudrillard; habermas; graeber
(white man/white man/white man)

doesn't make you
any less
of a piece of shit.
waiting,

waiting, waiting
to be acknowledged
by you,
as if you hold

my self-esteem
captive

by your own undeserved
hubris.

men only win
because they lie.
they've just gotten used
to the calcified taste

of a society telling them: yes!
mansplain that to me again,
oh, it's so sexy
when you

re-explain things
to me that i already know,

or i daresay
just told you
mere seconds ago.
constant nagging,

& when you'd say something
offensive
the defense as always:
“ugh, i'm *just* joking.”

yes. *i see*.
one of your
classic
funny jokes.

two of swords

(For my brown girls who never felt they had representation—for Anika, for Vivek)

lift your head up,
look yourself in the eyes, and see what i see.
i am magnetized north, towards you, and
i see beauty, and majesty. i see splendor.

the tired eyes, the squinting,
the weariness of the dark-skinned under eyes, low-grade insomnia,
i see you, brown girl. don't shy away from the stories
untold, the skin on your body
etching the bloodstream of our lands, succinct.

i see you and i see church. a mosque of smoke and
rosewater, clove cigarettes, the temple laden with ladoos.
i see you and i see red lands, dirt stationed across
folds of untouched ground, i see us, wild, unbroken,

we can release our grandmothers from our cartilage grasp, finally.
we can forgive ourselves, too, can't we, brown girl?

everything i feel for you is sacred
zam zam water, from the banks infused with orange blossom.
the ancestral compass stirring in our guts,
i am tied to this skin, though i may not always understand it.

orbital to my lineage like it is my saint, we are cosmic,

brown girl, don't you forget it.

look at yourself, the skin, dark like sunned-in terra-cotta
our arteries laced with tyranny, we are fighters,
warriors. i am descended from khadija, from ayesha,
from fatimah, too—ameen.

i am the woman who wore a burqa to fight, the niqab
to remind men that my body is an untouchable ghost,
the horsewoman, like a beast, i sit on my throne,
warning them with a grin, loose tooth

our blades hollow, but still cutting, i am strong,
like the women who came before me.
where in my body do i begin to remember that?
we are the nexus, you and i.

we are volcanoes.
we declare ourselves.

we are the solstice, the new moon.
we are not silent, brown girl.
i hear you
but i don't weep.

through the tobacco i clock you,
it hovers across your face, smoke sponging
your eyelids, don't hide it, brown girl,
blurry in your self-hate.

let's renounce the violence,
of our people.

i cross my body to yours,

i pray on the mat to mecca, i curl around you
to shelter, towards the horizon, the muezzin calls
you are safe here, in your arriving.

rest.

bad men keep bad men keep bad men cool

i thought bad men
hid in woods,
disguised in wolf costumes
bloodthirsty
strangers with candy
hollering like dogs
outside schools
slipping hands up
short dresses
watching asses
rumble as they shake
up stairs
using handycams to
capture a cheek
all bravado,
cum-stained car seats.
i thought bad men were
senators, politicians
trump and fox news
“reporters,”
anti-Semites, neo-Nazis,
punch him in the face,
richard spencer,
religious zealots, zionists
trans-misogynists, homophobes
mansplainers—
i heard egon schiele was abusive,
and l. frank baum and

h. p. lovecraft hated
black people
and, oh, don't even get me started on
"male novelists."
heathcliff and rochester
both had rage issues—
the brontës knew.
i thought bad men
looked like willem dafoe
or crispin glover
in *charlie's angels*;
the dark-haired bad boys
who do backflips.
motorcycle jackets,
badlands killing sprees
across, and down
all manner of highways
gilded with angled noses,
flared nostrils
lips that would embrace
you, as if swallowing
you whole,
exterminating
your existence
through a kiss;
a dementor draped in flesh.
i didn't think bad men
would mask themselves
as good men.
that they would
never announce themselves
as bad, or merely
present themselves
as good—until

it no longer served them.
pathetic until the end,
i didn't think a bad man
would take away my virginity
with a throbbing blunt thud
never call,
or get me pregnant,
or tell me that i'm a dramatic cunt
that all kinds of women
get abortions, "it's not a big deal."
bad men do what bad men did
for centuries
because that's what bad men
like bad men do.
they walk away from the
dangerous swamps of indignation
they create,
the cuts, broken kneecaps,
the crazy they mythologized,
then nurtured, gaslighting
slow death, the ugly
self-hate they weave
into bodies, they deem
weak. belonging to no one.
and once you learn
what bad men do
you carry that uncertainty
along with
all your other baggage,
looking for a sign
like a flashing neon light bulb

this man is bad

and even then you only barely
begin to understand
even though you find
you almost always
knew. all along
goddamn:
just trust your gut, bitch.



je ne suis pas folle

nobody died that year. no member of my family lay bloodied and brutal, but my heart had dried out like parchment—my mind, yellow, like the song—drawn out and arid like an over-scratched scab, i had become obsolete.

je ne suis pas folle.

i remember the sounds of what it felt like to love you. *the flaming lips*, i still can't listen to *yoshimi* the same way. "you are *yoshimi*," you once said to me. afterwards i told you that you'd said that, and you scoffed, embarrassed.

je ne suis pas folle.

what does it mean to love? throwing a grenade without caution, you waxed romanticism into my body like a sweet song, silently stealing every inch of me to cure your ache. you threw it at me like a child not knowing how to carry flames, not knowing what it would mean to do so.

and now you've walked away, with your hands in the air.

je ne suis pas folle.

what astounds me is your fantastic arrogance. always looking like you're determined to smile, under the frustrations of life, but tragically failing, jettisoning all efforts; delusional. your words are mere echoes now; your face, wooden with a stupid obstinacy, a smirk lining the edges of your self-denial.

je ne suis pas folle.

after you left i was confused because i was unsure what it meant about me. i see potential in people way before i see the reality. you weren't victim to my act of human frailty, you were just the biggest letdown.

je ne suis pas folle.

why is it that as women we have to validate our stories? even to other women, or against other women's petition against us? we've all drunk the kool-aid. even if we have no past of histrionics, we find ourselves always on the defense.

and maybe we only shared what was chemical for a few moments, simply because we were bound together for the longing of *something*.

who knows what it was.

but, again,

je ne suis pas folle.

utopia

is a soft, declarative wind that is warm, like a lark singing sweet hymns in the summer. i think of being on the shores of athens, alongside the narrow seas, watching the blues turn into greens, and the water swamp over all the lush coral that sits at the shallow surface of the bank. swaying with the music, the rhymes of the earth. like crystallized chlorophyll, the water is a dank emerald in the sun, a shimmery weed. i feel the patterns of happiness wash over me, i am risen, i am awakened, i'm alive, under the sun. my skin gelatinous, so brown i smell of crisp tobacco. i am peeling through the layers, awash like an onion in bloom, smell fresh, a blue lagoon. utopia is a realm of incandescence, where all are glimmering pearls, an entire world dipped in shine. with the stank rosewater, a kinder surprise wafts through the pilgrimage on site. where everybody is beautiful and every body is beautiful, loved and held; without any pain in sight. no existential trauma or rough, rough epigenetics. no crying in great, languid waves. no film of skin that sits on your bruises, a keloid that's formed, where nothing can get out. or burst through. or heal this infection. no—none of that. utopia is alive, it's the thirst that keeps us going, a starburst feeling, candy in the mouth spritzing the taste buds, lulling us into a somber respite. in utopia, we're all free.



how to cure a ghost

i want forgiveness, oh Allah,
that's why i circumambulated
the ka'bah at 19,
struck by the faded
yves klein blue tattoos
on the iraqi women's
faces, and asked to
repent my patheticness
that desires so intensely
to be desired,
desiring desire like an oracle's
pledge—desirous—and drunk with
tenderness i craved your atonement
for being such a bad muslim.

while
still wanting to live, to see the
crazed arches of a new
horizon, to split through bodies
a curse towards
the runes of my
stomach, to embrace
the iridescent cineplex
and be transported to the edges

of the bright water
and drink the
stone-fruit wines of the lands turmoiled

in my sunken home.

driven by
mercy, but exhausted by
tongues, i have been seduced
intelligently, struck by life's satanic verses.

i was brought to this place
where i am me, just me,
without pause, or fascination
because in finding myself, i
found real atonement
in these folds of my deep pockets,
where i keep my fuzzy heart.

i see you, Allah, peering
through, upwards
at me, enchanted, proud.
what gall,
such chaotic hubris,
and yet
i'm awake with the feeling that
your love surrounds me.

that's redemption.

on being alone

i'm beginning to accept
that wars of self have
always existed, and that
pain is important,
when not self-indulgent.

embracing its
ineluctable existence.
like they say in *heathers*,
“everybody’s life has static.”

and so
i'm not tired of being alone
and under the guise of solipsism
i move closer to the person who exists
inside, preening
the extremities.

i am moving beyond the borders
finding uncharted terrain
and unresolved wounds
yet to heal,
but i welcome the mistakes,
the turmoiled sores,
for as they say—
ultimately,
real recognize
fucking real.

loss becomes her

*he hasn't touched me
in twenty years
she says
as we lie eye-to-eye*

faced together
like beaming twin pods.
i felt for the first time
her loss

her disabilities,
a proxy for her
irretrievable love.
the man

the children
who had forsaken her
i saw her for what she saw
of a world

tarnished
& i lay afraid
saddened by her narrative.
i felt for the first time

parallel to my mother
how she had hurt,
as i had, too.

as if, she had just wanted

the same things
as me, but through devastation,
& exhaustion, she had let them go.
sinking into her life,
like an injured sportsman.

weary & grieving, disappointed.
yearning towards a love she'll never receive
arteries worn, hopeful (always)
i don't ever want to give up!

i want to tell her, so badly
i never want to let go of my dreams.
the dreams of being in love—
& then?

not being afraid of that love
of a human who will leave me
on a whim
& a human who will love me

like i deserve to be loved.
i want to hold on to all
of that
and never let it slip through my ego.

she looks at me, an aching smile,
as if she knows truths.
her bitterness a stand-in
for her sullen bad luck.

she wants to both

give me everything
and temper me diligently
for life's failures.

what am i to do, if i lose?
if all that was said was said in vain
all of the hopes to
be something,

someone,
with purpose,
don't come
& i'm left

facing my mother
our creased faces to the ground
tearing at how life
served me lemons

& the sourness overwhelmed
my raw heart so
that i couldn't go on.
i am scared

to have loved more than i was loved
to never have a partner who
will cherish what's before them.
i want to tell her:

i don't think it's too hard
to ask for a good person
as in a person who will accept me
and not turn my words into lies

i want to tell her
all these things,
with a level of optimism,
a rational alacrity—

that no manner of pain
i have witnessed,
all the ins-&-outs
of relationships

the failed baby, the scars,
the tiring erosion
of ill will, bad juju—
i want to tell her

that no matter
all that
i still believe
that in the end life makes

sense
but i don't quite know
how to look her in the eye
and first, say

“i'm sorry,
my darling mother
for everything—
i understand.”

responsibility is not a burden

(For Shaka)

you are not owed to me,
nor i to you.

love is a strange paradise.
i spent months unloving you,

while loving you
to remind myself that i could.

when i was with my tired mother,
oblique to her pain

i thought of your body away from mine,
waxing lyric, up against another, breathing heavy.

i had to surrender
to letting go while

being
in love, the thrust of it

(in it) (in it) (in it)
echoing the perky corners of the universe.

i bloomed into love
dipping into a bright ocean

of longing, and with that promise,
i embraced you, softly,

tender to your needs,
i tended you, i tend you

intending to love you—dearly
with all my might

no matter what happens
to tomorrow.

i learned the pains of love, too
the fear of losing it, again

with you
and said ameen,

Allah, take me there,
to the blessed solace

of zero fear/of monsters dull,
cacophonous, i refuse to be paralyzed

by a *what if*,
the lingering of shapely possibilities.

i fell in love with you
with a student's diligence

for the first time, it felt
monumental, an energetic tsunami

vital like lifeblood.

for when we touch

i try to remember this could not be
forever,

forever,
ever until death.

trying not to let it strain me
when i feel it in my heart

how much i love you.
after the second week in Toronto

eons ago, i looked at you
toiled in the bedsheets of a pristine

hotel bed, milked with cum
and blood

and told you i'd miss you so much
on my return

that my body would ache
in the absence of you

an S-shaped lacuna.
it was a foretelling

of this love, that we share
the intensity of y(our) memories

but also a knowing
of what we have, split screen.

the spiraling sensation
you give me, resplendently.

that i am so alive with you
so risen, my skin etched like braille, with

stars that read
our history, in astonishing color.

i do not know
what lies in the lilting

blue windows of our abstract future
but i revere you with a meticulous longing,

with an open, radiating
heart, i've let you in.

mothers

i feel them with me, lingering as i try to exist in this world, without them. wearing their auras like a crown, feeling their pain through the shadows, blistering my insides, like hot soup. sometimes it's hard to speak, to utter the vagueness of inheritance. i was born feeling their embrace, their traumas patterned across my soul. when i look in the mirror, sometimes i see them, looking back, eyes droopy, weary from the weight of womanhood, tired of the throes of masculinity, patriarchy, white supremacy, they mourn it, too. mourn the cruelties of the system that diminished them into an outline, an idea. they know how it feels to be berated into silence, to be dismissed and sanctioned off. how many of them were ignored, thrown to the side of a wall, pushed and unbelieved? how many of them were lied to, gaslit into an oblivion? how many of them were left outside, cold, their chests full of betrayal, told time and time again by some rigid, uncompromising man with no morals but a sleeve of cruel indulgences, by some older self-hating matriarch, that they were wrong, that they were bad? how many of my mothers felt that they were born rotten, the seed between their legs just an unfortunate legacy? how can you move forward if you've never been able to utter the trauma that haunts you? this is why i feel them, they want survival, even after death. and who am i not to give it to them? i ask again: who am i not to give it to them?

state of exhaustion

i'm tired
for all the lives i've lived.
my voice a throb, a lost
cough caught in the throat

crunchy with phlegm,
my body has its limits—
my heart, too.
fighting

for the right to exist
in two parts,
the two halves
 of a moon

to be allowed to thrive.
so many times i've said,
"i just want to be seen."
my body feels invisible

in this jocular white world
that instructs inequality
by rewarding mediocrity
time and

time and time
 again
yet when i am <seen>

with two eyes, i am blurred

darkened by the shadow
of governmental warfare
then, systemic violence
then, gendered brutality

racism, Islamophobia
all the phobias of (white) people's
audacity, i am tired.
sometimes when my heart feels

cartilaginous, like it might
break, if smooshed
or eaten, like a soft bone
pulled out by a fang

dripping with saucy red blood,
clotted by sadness
i think of my mother,
 always

my forever love
my fucking crazy mother
the sadism i've experienced
under the hands

 of her
under the palms, like a whip
with a knife, by the tufts of my hair
i've seen her eyes turn into black

disks, pooling, dripping
with hunger,

for vengeance
as if my body is *hers* to destroy.

i will never stop being tired
of not having a mother.
there are no words, none
to describe the loss i feel

whenever i remember,
the pain, of my childhood
and the abandonment of love
that sits inside of me.

like an unspooled wick
that burns and burns.
but drawn by silence,
i am here, observing my outrage

i am still alive
bellicose, i rise.

on being an immigrant

(For my father)

I hear you singing, crooning the words with your smile, in your lunghi.
Poaching a half cracked egg, smearing the yolk across the pan just the way
you like it. Toast with raspberry jelly, a quarter-steeped Lipton. More a
glassy brown with a slightly off-toffee-colored milk. The perfect tea for the
morning.



You have no home to return to.



I've seen my father cry, but never in the face of racism.
To that he just says: *poo!* like a grumpier Madeline, refusing
to acknowledge that bigotry hurts him, wanting to seem
blithely impenetrable to the hatred of the white man.

I am me, all me, because of him. Because it was in my
bones, in my marrow, long before I had a chance.
I was 13 when I went to my first protest of the Iraq War.
before I left he said to me: "You don't need to do this."
Like any of us had a choice.

So many days of the year, I'm afraid.
Everytime I cross that border.
The agony of knowing my body isn't free is such a burden to bear.

*It's good to touch the green, green grass of home
Yes, they'll all come to meet me, arms reaching, smiling sweetly
It's good to touch the green, green grass of home*



Where is home to you, abbu?



My father was detained in the U.S in 2003, post 9/11
brown Muslim man. brown Muslim man.
brown Muslim man.

no beard, but an Academic.
One who talked about America enough
to be a threat.

When he was finally allowed to leave the white cell, the locked room.

He looked at the border patrol officer, livid but stoic:
I will never step foot in this country again.
He hasn't broken the promise.

Like a true Leo, he never will.



The wounds won't let you return, will they, abbu?



He taught me the world could hate more often than it could love.

That humans historically hated far greater than they loved.
The tragedy, the loss . . . maybe that's why I've fought so hard for it (for love).

*It's good to touch the green, green grass of home
Yes, they'll all come to meet me, arms reaching, smiling sweetly
It's good to touch the green, green grass of home*

I'm coming home to you—& ma
You're my home.
You're my everything.
I forgive you now.
Can you forgive me?



Being an immigrant
Is returning to your roots
Only to realize
You never left.
Only to realize
You can never escape.
Only to realize
It was the best version of you
All along.

time means everything

Years after the abortion, in the daylight that masked the furniture like a faint ghost, I told my mother that if I could, I'd castrate my ex for putting me here. No therapy for him, years of body dysmorphia, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, feelings of disgust, self-loathing, tears and hysteria every time I saw a goddamn fucking child that could've been ours. Instead, she said, "Don't hate him, *moina*. It's not worth it." My mother, who once tried to split us in half with a hacksaw-shaped kitchen knife, tells me this, in the pale lighting of her bedroom. Our shadows lining each others' faces. Hers, momentarily saddened by the reality of her daughter's anguish. Not of losing a child, but of being left behind by a man who never loved her. In that moment she understood me vastly. But soon—oh, soon—she would forget.



how to cure a ghost ii

mosque-shaped strawberries
wet and fibrous, the sticky juice
drips down my chin,
succulent and warm, sweet like

fruit oughta be
the miracle of life,
the azaan like a circuit that runs through
my heart.

how many light bulbs does it take to screw a Muslim?
1.5 billion Muslims in this world and yet some of you
know not one Muslim.
or at least not one that wants to be one.

to be Muslim in this world is to be both seen
and not seen
like a spirit wandering in the miasma of its sins
hands in the air, we declare

we are not like the others
hands in the air, we pray for our humanity.
prostrating to Allah, instead of saying
save us, the muezzin malady/ muezzin melody

we ask for strength to go on.
dirty terrorists, dirty.
i've always felt so dirty, like I could wash

off my skin, raw

ravaged cold and bloody
the color of the soil
the color of shit
the color of the ground beneath

white people's
feet
the meek will inherit the earth
but what if you've been born of the earth

calloused & cold
the blades of sun searing
into your broken and shackled (by the state)
body. you are sin

that's all people see when
they
see you, their blindness
exalting them.

why do some people (historically) bleed more
than others?
why were some men *not* created
equal

when will there be a Nuremberg
for colonization, slavery,
Sudan, Iraq, Pakistan,
Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia

when will they reap
what

they've sowed,
when will they reap blood?

bodily solecism

How much will it cost
to repay the damage paid of
bringing me here, sun toiled,
unbloomed. A mere awakened
seed in my ma's belly.
Caressed by her wounds
of flesh and pain. I chose
her, I've been told, *to save her*.
My ancestors marooned me
into being, her savior, her hope
of survival. Whispering,
"You will be the one
to pick and lift her up."
But, I failed.
In my stomach, the dark
wounds are cocooning me.
I'm sorry I failed you, ma, I just
had to survive, for myself,
First. Freewoman told me to let
Go. Forgive myself. First.

my island home

sydney with its eucalyptus trees, lining the deep wooden patios of a Lavender Bay dream. bungalows stretched, narrow, passages towards the shrubs and the fertile bush. the city i call home, as home as home can be. a secret, kept, just mine. the smell that meets me, greets me with a g'day at the turnstile. welcome, home. i breeze through to the grand reservoir of my mother's place in Epping, along past the arches of the harbor, the sloping hills of Foveaux Street, this vast island, my island home. my fecund imagination bursts through the seams, those tart tamarind trees ma and i would circle, picking up treats for steamed lentils, chotpoti. an Uluru center that melts me to my core. sydney, you old bastard. my god, do i love you. your seas green, salty with iodine, licked as I bathe in the shallowed bays of Coogee, the Eora people's land, i remember them, as i lie on the shrill rock, looking out into the indigo ocean where so many have been lost. the splitting waves. Oshun, i call out to you in the mist. i remember how hair blanches in the australian heat, the ozone cutting into our molecules, stripping us fibrous, the great barrier reef stolen of its grand masters, sydney, i crave your salt, and your kookaburra chants. the sibilant sounds of hushed cicadas, quiet, as i meditate about life and death.

what have you got to lose? me: everything

it's the feeling of daddy leaving me with the grand wiry shopping cart to go to the bathroom, a cart more than half my size, like a big metal contraption, rusted on the sides with cornered zinc, as i stand by, adjacent to the fresh food feeling frozen in the cool breeze of a dank air conditioner. on days of heat, days i'd rather be lost by pristine aqua pool waysides, i'm at the grocery store with dad because he is my protector, my only ally, my bright, calm asylum. but in the time that he leaves me and disappears, my whole world collapses. it's the feeling of not knowing if he will return, that destroys me, making me frail. as i stand by the big hefty trolley, i find myself wanting to fall into it, to be embraced by it, looking for tiny crevices to mold myself inside its metal edges. maybe it can be my protector now? the cry stuck in my throat, inescapable, i miss him so in the mere moments he's gone it's hard to breathe. *what is fear of abandonment*, i'll ask myself years later. the brittle feeling of standing with my heartbeat in my mouth, wondering if he'll come back and collect me. if i'm worth collecting, worth even being loved. i'll think all this until i see his tall, lean body turn a sharp corner and smile, him in his baggy cream cargo pants, big blue oxford t-shirt tucked in like a good immigrant.

rumi

(no need for the Coleman Barks version)

I want to take him
back for us, reclaim
him for us. The
master of Muslims
was—*for us*.

Shams, the wanderer,
the sun, broken in,
a philosopher of nuanced
proportions, challenged
Rumi to ask more from
himself, a lesson I learned
after I was too far gone
with shame.

Surah al-Qamar,
“And if they see a sign,
they turn away, and say:
This is continuous magic.”
Sufis . . . with their continuous
magic.

Rumi was not made for white
people’s adjunct
spirituality, or Leonardo’s
casting call,

surely not to be distilled
into approachable consumption.

He existed
to question Muslims'
eccentric conceptions of the
self. Of the soul.
How far can we soar to the limitless
skies? To bloom into our
impurities and sigh? Finding
nirvana in our raggedness,
finding a turquoise embrace, under
the blue hills of Islamophobia
a heart-wrenching satisfaction,
in a glance.

His language will always be ours.
No translation necessary.

cointelpro

Murder masquerading as salvation ...

JAMES BALDWIN, “STAGGERLEE WONDERS”

Listen to me,
Every *why are they so poor* country sorry
shit hole, sorry
third-rate, sorry, *third world*,
sorry *can we say developing, yet?* sorry-ass
country—every, every one of us
has once lived under American surveillance.

Post-colonial struggle for a sense of identity?
chyaaaa, that and so much more.

Listen to me,
every person on the soil
of this great, great (ahem, stolen)
nation that has a drop (as in blood) of non-Americanism
has been watched, gawked at
and silenced,
to our deaths.

Listen to me,
we were never free to begin with.
this is a myth, as is this
dusty-ass paranoia.

Islamophobia for what?!?

Listen to me,
we don't walk in shit
die gruesome deaths,
our bodies taken from us
long before we
were birthed,
kernels of blood and
placenta—
because we don't know any better.

the odor of garam masala
onion, garlic and spit
on our breaths, hazy
draped in stains and B.O.
deemed savage
before we were given a chance
to prove
 otherwise.

Listen to me,
we don't destroy ourselves,
self-immolating monks
self-armed terrorists,
every Che, every Patrice Lumumba,
Assata, Rosa Luxemburg—
every, every, everything
snatched from beneath us,
so as to say: *how do you say?*
Never be given a chance.

Listen to me,
This is not all that we are,
laden like a sickness,
tinged with mourning

and misery, enough to kill.

Listen to me,
but, you already knew that.
That's why you did what you did,
right?
With your preemptive strikes,
your blanketed smallpox.
Your wars on terror.

Listen to me.

call me felicity

I'm still ashamed of myself in ways I don't know how to speak to.

Ashamed that my body isn't skinnier, prettier—ashamed
I'm not white, or whiter. Instead I'm a miscolored mishap,
the in between, an archipelago of confusion.

my nipples the color of my lips, my knees ashy and fat,
cavorting into the sides of my legs,
my thighs so thick they look like drumsticks.

ashamed by the misery of it all.



I wish i didn't believe that I failed myself.

That I knew how to look at what was dark inside of me
and kiss it, allow it to roll open, but I've never had anyone
look deeply at me and say, *I accept you*
now I'm left to do that for myself.



I changed my name to Felicity when I was seven, living next to a Bryan or a Brad, a haughty old man who looked like Gérard Depardieu, with a nose all crummy and hooked.

He had a granddaughter named Imogen, and when I met her, so angelic and pure—what only a white girl could be—I knew I had to lie to her. I couldn't bear for her to say my name wrong, say, "*Far-ee-ah? Oh. like Ferrari?*"

Too broken was I to move on from that moment, even in imagination, I knew.

So I told her, “My name is Felicity. Felicity Hanson.” My white name.

We’d play in the cul-de-sac whenever she visited her grandpapa, Bryan or Brad, pretending we were magical witches in the deep woods, using twigs as cups, drinking twigs as tea, using flowers as crowns and caressing the trees

like a regular *Daughters of the Dust*, draping ourselves like queens, pretending I was in my brown body, free.



She found out I wasn’t a Felicity one morning, fast asleep between my parents, my head tilted in the right-angle position I fell asleep in, looking at the triangle galaxy of their nosed innards, Imogen rang the bell and asked to play with Felicity.

My father, who opened the door in his lungis, clearly not white, brown as brown could be, laughed in her face, forcing her to face the truth. There was no Felicity, just me, me in all my messy, lying-ass glory.

the many descriptions of being brown

White people tell you to apologize for yourself
through gestures, through small talk, through the ways in
which they ask, “Where are you from?” and
then again, unresolved: “No, I mean . . . Where are you
really from??” Or when they tell you you’re pretty for
an Indian girl. And even though you’re not Indian.
You nod, smiling with forgiveness & agreement
Or when they tell you that you don’t act like an Indian,
and you don’t even mind that you’re not Indian because
you’re so filled with glee that you’re not some kind of
dancing monkey. So you feel you
will be accepted like you’re about to join a sorority.
A sorority where all the white people go. And you.
That they’ll forget you aren’t as brown as brown
could be. Until they snicker a “curry” under
their breath as they look at you. Or
mention Apu and do the Indian voice

thankyoucomeagain & instead of making them
uncomfortable with an admonition of their racism, in
response you will say (defensively) that it sounds nothing
like your father. Which is true but it’ll take you years
to understand the damage it’s done. When they
see you and not a human. When they see not you,
but a stereotype, made up . . . by a white person.
But they’ll drink a six-dollar turmeric latte,
make a chaiwalla shop in Toronto, ride rickshaws down
Manhattan say Namaste during
yoga extra loudly because they are so so so very

cultured and ask you, “Why is Bangladesh so poor, you think?” and the rage will build up like a shiver, a storm, like a death chant, all velvet, enough to rip a colonialism size rebuttal it will rise up and then you’ll soon realize the grief of being faced with who you are finally, as if your windpipe has been plucked that you were lucky to have a culture so rich it was stolen.

And you will mourn the loss of your youth the days of wanting to be white and the pain of rejection from all the white girls you loved. And the shame will usurp you until you realize it’s not too late. So you will lift yourself up and embrace the ache. You will claim all that was yours, and has been, your ancestors smiling bright across the shores. You will love yourself.



the night of the cactus

I read when I was younger that *French Women Don't Get Fat*, so I tried to be so French so hard, going to French school, bringing out the French in me like I was cosplaying my own desires, oui oui, of being loved and sedated, oui oui. Singing, Édith, crooning to the sounds of *Non, je ne regrette rien*, watching Godard, sipping a café au lait, thinking: je suis tellement heureux avec ma vie, cutting my hair swish swish like Amélie, my brash bob becoming me, thinking of all the ways people would cry when I was dead, in black and white, a banner across the Arc de Triomphe, a speech at my fake alma mater Sciences Po . . . I would be missed.

Then I learned that the French don't like *les Musulmans*, comme moi, or *les Arabes*, those they colonized and forgot, dirty North Africans. Making so much mess!

White people always talk about the colonized like we were waiting, pruning the green boundaries in our crepuscular states, waiting to be taken, not this tasty little Frenchman. No ass-whooping, no fight.

But, they forget that we were civilizations. Whole-ass entire civilizations, full of arithmetic and astronomy, hygiene and sanitation.

They forget that when Queen Elizabeth the First was still sitting in her royals (stolen) her jewels (also stolen) *les Musulmans* were removing goddamn fucking cataracts from goddamn fucking eyeballs, and reading goddamn fucking Plato (a once-forgotten man) whom we would then translate into Arabic (and all the Aristotelean qualms of humanity), introducing HIS GAY ASS to the West, and all you'd give us in return is homophobia & hatred.

The greatest scam is colonization. The greatest scam is us believing that you're better than us, when you stole all that we were and sold it back,

convincing us of our inferiority, spitting on our graves.

**you come to understand a place only after you
leave it**

(For my parents, Samiul & Arifa)

কতবার ভেবেছিঁ

KOTOBARO BHEBECHINU

I remember ma, as spring passes through her, the smile so lit, toothy and grinned, she's so beautiful and people says so, they knows so. She's the color of summer, like a taut drum, her skin over her cheekbones raised and swaddled like a canoe on a creek of my over-emotional heart, strings. Tagore beckons, the high moves through the seas of my body like carp, seeing her smile is like an answered prayer.

চিরদিনই তুমি যে আমার

CHIRODINI TUMI JE AAMAR

Baba so handsome, daddy-cool, I saw him in his flared, faded bell-bottoms in the bleary photos from the '70s, a slight halo, like a 'fro, wearing a velvet vest and sideburns from here to there. Fuck, I wish I could have known him then.

যেখানে সীমান্ত তোমার

JEKHANE SIMANTO TOMAR

I wish I could have known her in that yellow sari, seated next to a white man, so innocent. The days when she was still hoping for a break, praying for one that would stifle the loud, ugly voices in her head. For the messy concentric circles inside her mind to subside and rest.

আমার বলার কিছু ছিল না

AAMI TOMAKEI BOLE DEBO

Tears roll down the plastic page, the vellum that seals the images into place. Her smile so big, bright and red, as she sits next to her husband who will never love her. But, this is not a jeremiad for them. No, I'm tired of that. I want to hope for love for them, even if it's just from themselves. I want to tell them, whisper it into their souls, me in New York, baba in Abu Dhabi, ma in Sydney. I want to remember you as you once were, before me, and before apu. Before the strain, and the marriage, before the illness(es) locked us into some subliminal horror show, before that, who were you?

আমি তোমাকে বলে দেবো

AMAR BOLE KICHHU CHHILO NA

You're my heroes. I'll never come close to one-tenth of what you did. What you survived. You're my heroes. As the light pools into my sun-drenched apartment, I remember you as you deserve to be remembered. I remember the smiles that shook my childhood, and the laughs of our afternoons, shaking into years, as we sit in Istanbul as a family, by the Bosphorus. We all wanted more, but Allah gave us one another. We all wanted more. The pristine normalcy of other people's families. No outbreak of war, or turmoil, or ma's shrieks enough to cut into the cords of our gloom, of our dreary fates. But as I remember you, none of that matters, my loves. You gave me my life. How can I ever walk away . . . from that?



under the golden hour

We are the ones we have been waiting for.

JUNE JORDAN

ONE

beached grass stuck in between my toes like a coarse brush for my feet, erasing the memories of what pains me in this lifetime. i never thought i could be saved, by anybody, but i wanted for it like a bulbous flower bursting at my throat, i wanted to want for a life that was mine. back then a wink could have saved me, a smile, a warm hand on my musty head of liced-up hair, i longed for care, like addicts long for a hit. i'd sit in the leather chair and pray for a man, for a husband for a child for a girlfriend for a woman to hold close and snap me in her breasts. for a somebody.

TWO

the many ways i denied myself Islam is sad to me now, the many ways i denied myself myself, but i'd look at those mushroom turbans and think, *not on my watch, i'm gonna be whiiiiiteeeee*. when you're us, living gets harder because you have nobody to be like.

so everything tells you not to be alive.

THREE

so me, with my liar's imagination, drew up all kinds of majesties that i could survive, a life where i was my own master. it took years and years of practice, of hands on my own back, on my head, shushing the pain away, clawing at my sides like i was a lover, reminding myself everything is perspective. except abuse. but i can outlive that, too, i can outlive my abuse and face it, longingly look towards how it has me in its clutch, in its jaws, in

its crazy whip, and release it like a heavy yawn that stretches out and out until all that's left is a memory, almost forgotten.

FOUR

and if it should very well happen, that I will never be embraced, then I will accept it wholeheartedly, somehow. accept the burn on my tongue, the feeling of knocking my toe against the stub of the curb, the bloat of my stomach after I gouge at that tiny block of manchego. what is life if not a remembrance of the good and the bad? I'm sure there are many like me who question how unlovable they are. am I entirely, wholly, unequivocally unlovable? how did I become like this? sopping up every moment of betrayal, feeding it into a narrative of self-loathing. but how about good enough *for me*? why isn't that an option?

FIVE

i am better now. i gave birth to myself, a new beginning, a robust cycle. i rewrote the scriptures of my mother's pasts, and her mother's pasts. i am in the throes of survival, i am lived. i am living. it's astonishing.

haruomi hosono

fruits sit at the table, wet
the juices of cantaloupe
slimy against the pink
flesh of the grape.

coffee: dark, roasted
smoothly, bright against my
tongue, like bourbon
it swishes past

my tonsils
with ease, the sheen
of the acid lingering
on the top

like a disease, on a creek,
a science project.
we're in Beacon
and upstairs, of

a reformed 18th-century
mansion sitting on a
hill, like *picnic at hanging rock*,
you sleep.

the curtains that spool
the windows, red velvet,
you sleep.

i eat a blueberry

crushing it in between my
two front teeth,
squishing the glassy
succulent-tasting fruit,

as you sleep.
i wake up singing
harumi,
look over at you

the way your eyelids shine
in the dark, blacker
passionfruiiiit
upstairs, when you wake

we carry each other
cradling our necks near
our collarbones, resting parallel,
sharing a pillow

like a rock.
and suddenly,
you say something,
snarking at my sensitivity.

to every lover i have
always been *too* feeling
and i feel betrayed
by you, fast.

pushing away with such
a pronounced pull that it hits you,

like a slap.
in that moment you've forgotten

me, with no consideration
standing still in a standstill
of sadness, i'm distilled into a casualty
of an argument, no longer a person

you love,
just an idea
that needs to be proven
wrong.

i anger quick, but silently,
brushing the firs of my
feeling to the side
you caution me

with care
slowly, slowly
"can we be friends, again?"
you ask, a reminder.

sporting a new look

i devour men.
not for pleasure,
but for consequence.
for the misery
they prevail
a leaky gut syndrome
tied to every rape
of my body, again and again
and again. now i've
chosen their penance to be:
my vampiric legacy,
draining every marrowed
bone for its cacophony of
wild entitlement, for
all of its
dumb hubris,
we take back the sun.



unlearning

I want to be strong enough to
not talk shit. To love without
jealousy, or ownership. Not prove
the badness
in someone else, another femme,
as if that enhances
my own virtuosity, goodness,
pallid. I want to
be strong enough to not listen
blindly
to the things people tell me
about other women. As if it's fact,
not opinion. I want to be strong
enough to decide on
my own. I don't want it to be too late
to learn the dark mysteries, of
another's soul. Being so ego driven
that I never give them
a reason to be messy. I'm no
woman's keeper, why do
I sometimes pretend that I am?
I want to love women, give them
what I was never given,
a space to grow, and morph
without the cruel gaze of our
society.

all the things we're actually thinking when men think we're staring

“Oh, that’s a cute dog.”

“Is that man eating a hot dog while walking? Wow, goals?”

“That guy is definitely a serial killer.”

“Lol that guy looks like an ugly Adam Driver?”

“No fucking way, homie.”

“Definitely a serial killer.”

“If he comes and tries to talk to me, I’m . . . Oh, fuck . . . He’s walking towards me . . . Walk away!”

“No.”

“I’m going to pretend I just didn’t make eye contact and walk away really slyly.”

“Absolutely not.”

“I know I’m hot, but what are you???”

“I wonder if that dog is his . . .”

“Is that a baby!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

“Serial killer.”

“Did he stare first or did I stare first?”

“Tbh I’m into this hypebeast Obama look.”

“Is that Steve Buscemi?”

i really really care, don't you?

As the young Palestinian boy runs towards another U.S.-funded grenade, his heart pumping rapturous pain, he believes in the fight for his freedom, there is no end. He tells himself this as his grandmother cries, “*Y'allaaaaah.*” When will it end? “*Y'allaaaaah, make it end,*” chanting as the somber clouds come ahead of them, the drones seeking blood.

As the young Bangladeshi girl is forced by the neck to wear an ugly frilled green dress, wanting beyond anything to be seen by her parents, to be seen in her gendered layers, in her devastating complexities that are being cajoled into submission to a God that wants no violence but has been fed our bones for lunch too long, she does not cry. But, she grows weary of the state of her survival. When will it end?

As the young kid in El Salvador—the murder capital of the world—hears the bleating ring of the ambulance, she turns to see where it's heading, knowing *if not now, then soon*, death, death might come. Her friend was murdered by a gang last summer, shocking her to the core, her gut leaking bleak agony. Where is the space for goodness, she asks. She works for the *Green Cross*, an organization that helps any who need it with emergency assistance. She's 16, her hair in thin straight braids, and she wonders—what's next? If I can't go north, to a country with invisible walls and a security system so devastating, where do I go? This is her land(s), too. When will she be free?

As the black boy in Chicago hears of another black person shot down, mercilessly, it begins to cause a rupture, a grave sensation in his chest, and in his heart. *Is it bad to be black?* He questions. He remembers the summer of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling. That summer was bad. He thinks of all the things he wants to achieve in his life—get married, go to university, maybe become a doctor like his uncle. He wants to believe in his life, in a

way that the government never did. In a way society, Hollywood, white folks never did. He wants to afford himself that, at the very least. But, when will it end?

As the young Mi'kmaq girl looks towards the sea, she thinks of the respect she was robbed of from the day she came out assigned a boy from her mother's womb. Two-spirited, she knows. But, her legacy was rigged. The game was made for anyone but her, and all she wants to do is make art, huge murals, like Inuk painter Annie Pootoogook, but even she, as talented as she was . . . was found dead in the Rideau River, Ottawa. She thinks of the erasure and legacy of her people, vast. *What will become of us?*

it's all love

Today the night sky is all adoring and obsequious
With my heart that has no limits
You pull me up, hesitating lightly, you're afraid to love
In full majesty
I wonder how much you've learned from your parents.
Wandering into the moonlight,
How much your push and pull was *taught to you*—
How humans don't really know how to love
Not fully with devotion that's not circumstantial.

I knew my parents never liked each other
I could see it in the way my father refused to care
For my mother, shirking away like she was a disease
Disgusted by her dissolution, for the illness
We all had no words for so very long.
In the amber light, I'd see her plead, wanting a glance.
She fought, too, colliding into the world
Calling the police on a Muslim man
Saying he was hitting her, scratching out her eyes.

I've seen the drama, all manner of insolence
In the glow of the January summer,
Australian grace. The eucalyptus tending to
Our only solace.
I've seen all kinds of violence, blood on the walls
Fast knives coming at you, wanting to
Split you open. Jeez, I've seen it all.

My naivete is my shield.

My hopefulness of sustaining a love found
Is revolutionary, for a girl who never had a mother's embrace.

I knew you couldn't hold me, ma
I knew my touch devastated you, exorcising the demons you couldn't face
So instead you touched me in the only ways
You knew how, broken willed.

Even still, I was never loved by you
But we are both victims.
Both things can be true.

Still, I lie awake

And hope for love.
Young enough, still, to believe
In its possibilities.
I'm awoken by what it offers us, a reprieve.

But also, in some cases: a revival.
I've seen bodies with no love, broken
Like smashed bottles
Hindered and cut open with wounds so deep,
Violence so endemic, rushing forward with
No hope for survival, still we quake with the sun's salutation
open, to the bloom
Believing in the sacredness of love
To heal all kinds of psychic ailments, between our arms
And our bodies, we shovel ourselves into the river
Asking for forgiveness from the orishas
Hungry as we've been whittled down.
We're open because we have to be.

we go on, sisters, we go on

Birangona

(For Jyoti Pandey Singh, who was gang-raped on a bus by six men on December 16, 2012; Birangona is the name given to the 400,000 Bangladeshi women who were raped in 1971, during the Liberation War of Bangladesh.)

her trauma is looped
in my body like a prayer,
looped in my body like a curse
red run over for all the bloody mess
that her death spooled, spoiling
a patriarchal conception
that woman aren't born for better
horizons, they're born so
a whole nation comes to a
standstill, to say,
"enough is enough is enough."

our bodies are waves,
black smoke rising,
to wash the sins away.
deemed nothing more than a statement
for men and their mistakes
these foibles that they can't seem to help
can't seem to not fuck up
gorged petty on power
but worried little
with consequence.

to teach men that there are no
repercussions of rape is to teach
them about war,
with no challenge of death.

the sounds of our origins ring freedom.
and i look towards those familiar peaks
for guidance, for a reminder
as Oum Kulthum plays,
her voice a lark,
i look towards our futures
i believe in justice so thoroughly
i believe in its possibilities.

i'm tired for all the women we've lost. for all the trans
women of color murdered. the aboriginal women slain,
but no, but no, but no, but nobody remembers them.

but we do, and we will
we go on
so we clean the blood on the sidewalk
we go on
we sing rapturous melodies as our bodies shiver
we go on
we fight to the death
we go on.



this one's with teeth

for a millennia, i was tight-lipped, keeping my tongue at the base of my throat like a good muslim girl, but we've lost so much in these concentric times, our sisters, our bodies, that now i want to speak with teeth, to rip the tender esophagus out through the curve of my jaw, to wield a knife like a pen, like a sword that tilts on an axis, i want to rip the balls right off of them, i want to cover myself in their blood and prostrate to god on the floors of a matted mosque, and ask for forgiveness. i think of my mother, what happened to her, and i want to kill them. for her. drag them by their throats, with my fangs on their jugulars, laying their lifeless broken bodies at her feet and say, *see, mama, you can live now, finally. there's nothing to fear anymore.* her nightmares become mine, and i haunt them in their dreams, i follow them in their boring, sad lives. i want to kill all the men who think my body is a vehicle of pleasure when really it's just a vehicle for war. as i rupture their spleens with a devastating poison. as they look towards me, i look down at them on my throne, like Kali, i am an avenger, and i am here for blood, i bellow through the seas. you cannot hide from me, i'll rip your smarmy grin right off your face. you cannot hide from me. i can taste your fear like sweat dripping onto my tongue. you cannot hide from us. we are coming for you. we are rising. we are rising. with the moon, with the tide, when you're not looking out. we'll take it all back, in great waves we'll come. our voices curled outwards, untethered to our pains, we will take what we came here for.

1971

(For my ancestors)

In the year 1971, the Pakistani army invaded Bangladesh, committing genocide of three million Bangladeshis, in the space of less than a year.

ONE

Depression makes sense when you hear about the brutal circus that would one day decay the land where your parents were birthed—people born to lush green hills—and that in the space of a decade and a half find it split, spilled through with shrapnel.

TWO

In September 1971 my father, at sixteen, would witness the aftermath of a bomb blast in a shopping center called Baitul Muharram, the largest mosque complex in Dhaka. When I would eventually write to ask him about the details of his experience, he would write back: “It was the first time I saw burnt human body parts from my bedroom window.”

More than forty years later, he can detail things with such straight lucidity. His fact-loving mind, monomaniacal, the professor in him, has perhaps sublimated the psychology of war, and that of his experience, diluting it down to gritty facts, the mechanics of the situation. Not the horrors or the emotional weight of the pain.

THREE

I forget that my parents have smelled death, but in an impossible way. Their intolerable reality is that they have lived with the cruel abstraction of what war does to your body and what it does to your mind. How you have to compartmentalize your traumas by reconciling that the striking fecundity

that once existed in a land you called your own has been slowly displaced through acts of criminality.

That the plushness of the green palm trees that used to calm you has now been overtaken by the excruciating sounds of explosions, sprawling debris, and that after a while you begin to wait for the objects shaped like death, sedately, as the gibbous moon sits above you—the only light that’s left in your darkness. That as you float on the lonely rooftops, watching the rage beneath you, the buildings that once stood before you have disappeared like a shadow.

FOUR

three million people dead in 1971, in one place, dead in the space of less than a year. Did you even know that was a possibility before i told you?

400,000 women raped as a result of the genocidal tactic of war. say it with me again.

400,000 women raped.

FIVE

but no history books, or sweet jeremiads about the tragedy of human life, or “never again,” just an, “oh, that really happened?” maybe a soft, soft gush, a momentary pang. but soon the memory oozes out, and those bodies remain nameless, cold and dead beneath the wretched soil. forgotten. a terrible end.

they were not known and never will be known.

in a grave, on land, pillaged.

a land once known as the cultural epicenter, vanished famished of its utility, plundered with miles of skin, more than it knows what to do with.

they were not known and never will be known.

and as i sit here, i mourn them, in this storm.

SIX

where did the 400,000 women go? where did they disappear?

are they just a dead memory?

SEVEN

remember us, like you'd remember white death. remember us with no guilt.
just remember that we lost so much more than what you've afforded us to
lose.

the women who have seen

(This poem is dedicated to the women from *The Keepers*.)

women can see
beyond the shores, across
the pea-colored shit
that rises, rises
still, across the oceans
we see

the enunciated violence,
yes—
black and brown women
see through the
mercurial miasma of state
violence, too

tumbling of bodies,
always black and brown,
incarceration, upholding
slavery, poverty, a system
of a generation
of shaking, bleating oppression.

teresa lancaster and jean wehner
two women broken by men of god
failed by god, or just men

women can see

beyond the shores, across
the pea-colored shit
that rises, rises
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tumbling of bodies,
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incarceration, upholding
slavery, poverty, a system
of a generation
of shaking, bleating oppression.

teresa lancaster and jean wehner
two women broken by men of god
failed by god, or just men
in cloaks, distracting their sins,
ciphering them through scripture,
these men and their ungodly exegesis,
they will burn in hell, i hope.

but these two women,
like my mother,
and mothers before,
rose—rose up, higher,
with not a lift
in sight, they rose,

across their chests, the
wounds that afflicted them,
pounding generations of hate
through cum, the holy ghost,
they survived.

like rosa, or flo, or maya,
or kathleen, and elaine,
assata and angela.

black women who shifted
our consciousness, who
did the labor that white women
rarely do, only want to be
born in/to, borne in/two
the divide of whiteness
and everything else,
left behind.

but still some (white) women see,
like teresa and jean, and sister cathy, too
but sometimes they choose not to
hiding behind the vault, the
indignation, that is

white supremacy, the Catholic church,
an arm, the seal
the power, it feeds.

the revolution exists
in the choice to see,
that seeing is indeed believing
and entrusting
in a better future, for all.

we see,
but what do we do
with this sight, oh,
holy one?
how do we fight, for
what's ours?
oh, holy one.
for the prime sweetness
of life, oh, holy what . . .

i want guidance on this flight
oh, holy one, how do i find a
way to surface my
fear, and correct what's right
oh, holy one?

let me not slight
or be smothered by what's
trite, let me rise up
with delight, with no fright,
with my eyes
 alight.
oh, holy one.

sadness is a vacuum

today
i'm sad in a
collapsing way.

structural romanticism
of what my life *should* be
forgetting that it is, what it is,
bruises of the heart
(no—scratch that—mind)
and all the lies we tell
our souls about what
we deserve
(even if we *really*
are deserving!)

i don't know what to do
with this protracted sadness,
bored with the frustration it looms,
like a cord, around my throat,
like an eerie umbilical noose,
drowning me in sorrow
for reasons unknown
to me, society's rigid interpretations.

the worst part is
how do you trace it?
a fragmented thing?
a fine line between

totally okay and obliteration?

what's the
reason for this, insanity?

watching you blithely
curl upwards towards the sun,
i fall behind, lingering
with a cruel quaintness,
thinking of death, like a sword
thinking of pain, it becomes me.

sidled into abstraction
why am i so sad?

the forever question,
an inquiry into the soul.

nothing comes easy to me.

zo calls it "being trapped in the brain."
an entrapment, an ensnarement,
of the all that's crummy about
the world, and intensified
in my body, like a life-size
petri dish of murky-ass feelings.

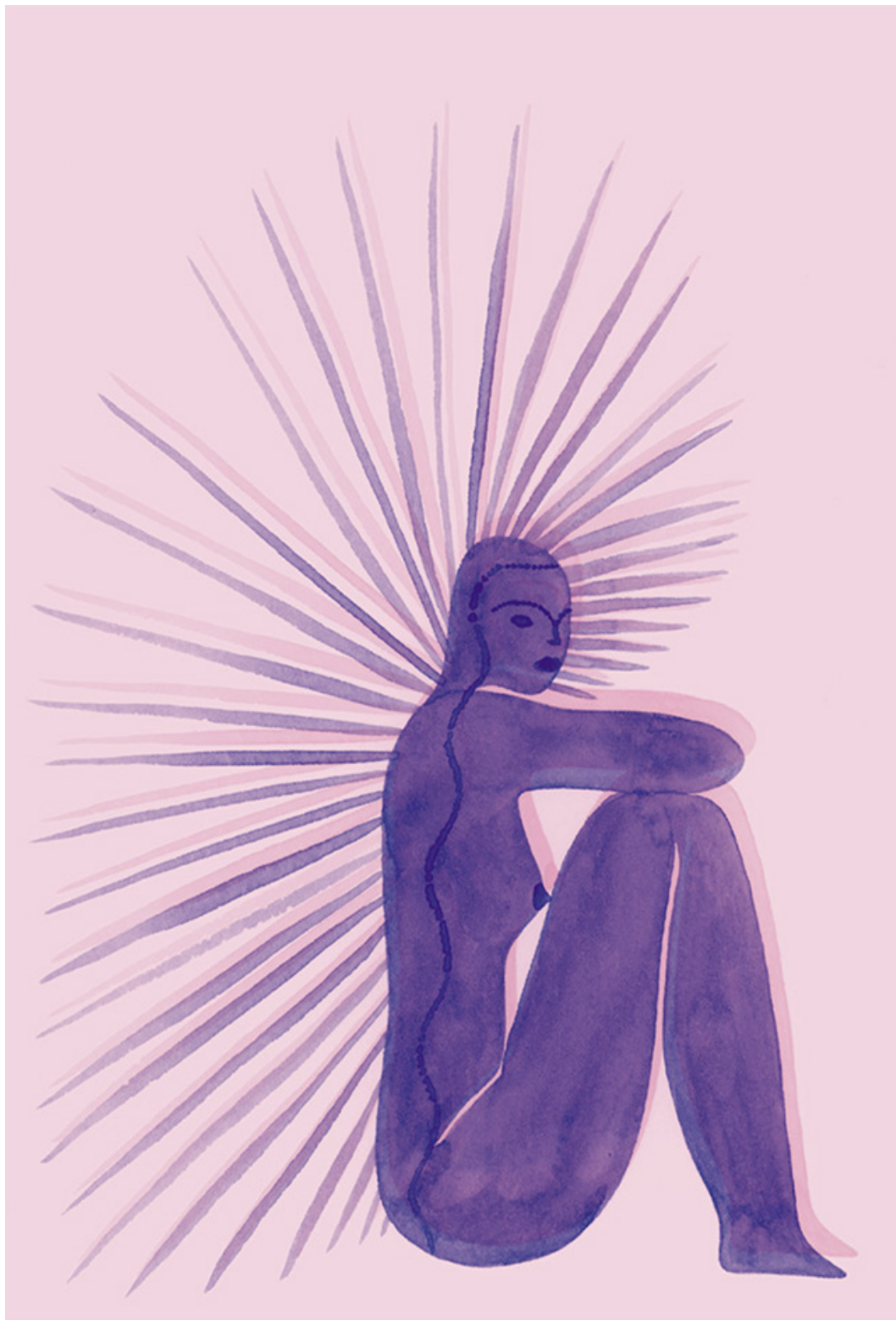
always being in my feelings.
i am *that* bitch.

i'm trying, mum,
to break the cycles
of badness, of what the bad men
did to you, to us,

is that what i feel
when i want to lash out
and slice open my
wrists with a jagged blade?

is that what you did
when you brought the bottle of
kerosene, colorless, to your
brown, chapped lips
and drank?

when i am sad,
it's for the both of us,
the life you couldn't lead,
and the one i'm struggling
for, still.



my heart is a novella

romantic, slanting across the stars,
ugh, how i dream of you

quaint. i'm practicing (to be quiet)
with myself, an accordion of longing.

you sit symmetrically,
smiling, near me.

lithe along the lilting parameters of my (silent) hopes,
i see you, blushing.

you're in love with me,
i finally see it.

i love you,
i've allowed myself to feel it.

what 9/11 did to us

they say that
two thousand nine hundred and seventy-six
americans died on that day.

i was eleven,
sitting on the floor
in front of our
hefty black-brick television set, watching the
towers go down, one, two, poof.
down down they went, i watched in awe
not terror, just shock.

it was a warm day in sydney,
and as i watched i wondered
after those who wept, and lost their friends,
family, lovers, pedantic bosses, people they hated,
people they were jealous of—not symbols. just people.

it's a lie when they tell you before 9/11
everything was fine for muslims.

have you ever seen a brown man, scraggly,
harassed on the street?

the times my father, skinny and green eyed,
handsome, but still a mucky brown,
was shamed in front
of me.

the amount of times i've believed i am
inferior because i've watched my own father
be humiliated, and i've known: this world was not
built for us.

do you know how many times
my friends have said offensive things to me?
asked me questions that have made my skin
scream, but i'm muslim

and i didn't know i was allowed to be
proud of that.



i am free to no one but myself.



forty-eight thousand six hundred and forty-four
afghans have died since the war on terror.

(and still counting)

one million six hundred and ninety-nine thousand iraqis have died since the
war on terror.

(and still counting)

thirty-five thousand pakistanis, too, dead since 9/11 by the american assault
machine.

(and still counting)

who sings a sweet lamentation for our bones?
in the soil. who cries for us
when our blood, full like buckets of
rainwater after the purging deluge
spills over into the ocean,
as it piles like hot cement
onto the cracked
pavement, coagulated and crusting
into the seams,
as our bodies lie in the sun,
flies by our mouths like caves carved out,
lying for days, in heaps
and mothers in hijabs scream.

but dare a mother
cry in a black hijab
& not look like a broken threat,
a pending question mark of violence,
as cnn takes those shots, captioning it with
“a mother cries for a suicide bomber,”
or “muslim woman angry at america.”
never telling *our* scattered truths,
never asking why—
why are we angry?

so we die, uncounted/
unaccounted for
by the men, women, “coalition of the willing”
who killed us
via the land of the free.
for Freedom, an echoed chant.
Freedom as the buildings
burn. Freedom as the bombs
blow asunder

the infrastructure
of a land once so rich, it was
the golden capital. Freedom
for our guts strewn across
the hidden alleyways. Freedom
for PTSD. Freedom for rape,
Freedom of being chained like dogs,
by the neck, no mercy in this
oblivion.
Freedom *you* tell *us*. A freedom,
you say we never had.

so you drone us with your
strikes, droning into
our bodies, mere lasers,
loopy cartoons.
but in reality
we are shoulders draped in cloth
a cacophony of haunting smells,
riddled with screams,
matted prayer mats and oud wrapped

in jasmine,
bodies with
heartbeats you'll never hear
the quake, the pulse like a shake.
we are alive,
droning into an abysmal chorus
we fall, one by one
to our deaths, with no attention,
or headline, no one remembers
our arteries filled with
the rust of the bullet hole,
like cattle, we fall, and you,

a being behind your console,
us imaginary, like vivid avatars
you strike
us down you strike
saying we are saved . . .
saved! but saved from whom?
the monsters are your
frankensteins.
your conception,
all this evil just for oil.

islamophobia existed long before
today.

why do you think they crusaded us
to our deaths, back to Allah
into the soil?
or why they spent such money

on slavery and colonial warfare
marching onto *our* shores
declaring their godliness
over us.

why is it that when men speak
Arabic instead of singing
i fear it, too?
how have you all bought into this,
i ask you?
how could you let them do this to us?

there is a reason
that we are mad.
our anger is born out of never being seen.

of being used, and discarded,
being spit into our faces with lies,
of ungodliness.

see we lost much more than just our dignity in this fight

we lost,
ourselves.

to drone or not to drone

trigger finger
fingered trigger
the gamer's finger
triggered, triggering
the thumb and
the finger gaming
us to our
deaths, fingering
the trigger,
a game.

to the aunties

watch your own children first, innit.

allahu akbar

La'illaha'ilAllah

i play it in my head like a chant
by the children, singing,
crying, dutiful,
their voices porous,
etched with a hope for
salvation.

those words
feel like an ignition
of sweaty comfort, sweet—
surrendering feels
like exalting,
to a power.

on the plane
i look at the mist caught
on the window and feel
lighter.

god feels close, present—
and the serenity of the universe
collides as tears
roll down, past my lashes,
looping across the hollow
between my sunken eye
sockets and cheekbones, high
like peaches, or bright plums.

the way cherries dip into
water, concaving, rippling,
into the ocean, its waves,
the saliva, on my lips,
my tongue like cursive,
licking across my
chalky teeth, i am alive.

Allahu Akbar

i say in earnest as my heart
feels full on this blessed day of
ramadan, i am revived when
i say the Surahs of protection.

Qul Huwa-llahu 'Ahad
Allahus-Samad
Lam Yalid Wa Lam Yulad
Walam Yakul-La-Hu-Kufuwan 'Ahad

it nods from the gut,
like a hand pulsing
stories and truths
across the centuries,
i am alive.

i am at peace during
the deep-bellied
cry of the azaan,
on Bedford Ave,
through the passages of sea,
and fog, of this world
i am alive in god's orbit.

saying bismillah, i land.



who's right?

i always believe
what people accuse me of
because that's how my mother
bred me.

like a dog,
a bitch to her needs.
i developed IBS at age
15, because i could feel

her disappointment in me
like a spell cast in the darkness,
Faustian.
she made me feel like i was bad

because that was her punishment,
to convince me that i was unlovable, as she was,
unlovable, and that neither of us could be
forgiven. so i believed and believed

in my badness like a fact,
and when people came for me,
i let them.
never fighting back.

i never had a backbone
until now, until right this second,
until i stood, awakened to all the myths

that people feed you of yourself

realizing that i had to fight,
for me.
nobody told me that, though.
nobody taught me that.

i think of all the years
that i cut open my arms,
hoping for redemption. pooling
out the blood, like toxins, to be saved, so corny

wishing someone would witness
and protect me,
when all along i could've
just decided on myself.

what if i said: "no, you're wrong
about me."
listen, i'm flawed. yes, it's ugly.
i'm as annoyed by it as you are.

i am deeply flawed, yes
and my failures, as well as my grief
haunt me.
there's a part of my face that's

red from the bloodstream that runs
underneath my taffy brown skin
blue veins, too, yves klein blue,
running like a current underneath my

eyes, my nose, the blood, steady—
a mark. bristling with the terror of my aliveness.

being alive is so frightening, and i'm embarrassed that
people might dislike me for things i never knew i did.

but what i don't understand
is this: why we hate others' complexities
but expect to be seen in our own.
why we expect love but can't give it?

need care but hate to offer it?
i'm tired of overextending myself
like a trapeze artist, trapped in a
gymnasium of self-loathing.

apologizing for every little thing
people demanding things from me
like i'm the sun. burning me,
(like icarus too close)

when i can't perform my tasks,
those burdened on me,
through the lies of loyalty and "friendship."
that's when i hang my head low and say
finally: this is too much, now
come on, man.
i know, i know, i'm far from perfect.
stealing from my mother,

my sister, lying to my parents
small lies, but sometimes big ones, too,
about dropping out of school, or the
boys i lived with, the girls i loved.

trust me, i remember.
the cheating, the flirting,

the desiring to fuck
what if i liked to fuck

the freak that i am,
my hips swaying with greed
fucking your girlfriend,
and your boyfriend, too.

i'm so messed up sometimes,
i want to scream. but, still i ask:
would that make it worthy for you to hate me?
would that make you right?

i'm two halves of the moon, i'm still evolving

it's ok to be messy, i tell myself, impatient. like i'm a master welder of change, as if self-examination can manifest in quick transitions of the soul. imperfections aren't impossible to mend, but they take time. i'm still evolving! so, i look to the moon, my bible, and i seek explanation. why does my skin crackle and crawl with self-hate, oh, moon? why am i such a such a such an imperfect creature? it smiles, glowing like a compass, an orb—my light when there was none, it bares its teeth, cheeky. “we are all broken, but trying,” it reminds me. “your pain, your insolence, your weakness are not exceptional.” self-hate is not a vehicle worth dabbling in. why sell your soul to the Devil when you can take another path, a path less brutal and more becoming to your complexities? it asks, it asks like i am not riddled with a self-hate like a vortex, that i am not being sucked into the tides, being devoured by the sands and the vastness of the ocean, my spiritual arteries combusting, shaking in the earth to “Tere Bin Nahin Lagda Dil Mera Dholna.” we are so much more than the ghosts in our ears whispering damage. i want to heal, i want to forgive myself. when i ask the moon, it says, “you're already there. just open your eyes.” now, let go.

neu land

We live on stolen land
did you know?
We stole it.

howard zinn says between
the years of 1533 and 1588
eighty million people
in the americas were murdered
<in just those 50 years>

what makes a genocide?

how many white people
does it *take*
to call it a genocide?

eighty million people
slaughtered, throats cut,
heads on a stake
columbus, a real tremendous
asshole, was said to stab
a pregnant woman in the
belly, twist the blade,
and walk, walk, strut away
huffing, parading in balloon pants,
cock the size of a pine nut, *puhlease*.
when we talk about whiteness,
this is, among many things,

what we allude to.

white dominance believing
its sadism trumps all other
sentient, human life.

i've lived on three colonized
lands, one, two, three—
or four, when you count
the one my parents
bled for.

i've lived on three colonized
lands, and what do i have
to show for it?
(just the continuous degradation
of some of the most
disenfranchised humans, ha!)

is there a tender age for
any of us?
when we weren't bleating
and bleeding?
trying to survive, for justice
and for peace?

flailing, i walk on land
that isn't mine.
i walk through the lush
vegetated bushes
of sydney, brown shit-colored cobblestones
of new york,
the tram-tracked railroads
of toronto's downtown

and there is a deadly,
hallowed
silence beneath me.

how many bodies died to protect this land
from a thief?

how many bodies did i step on
on my way here?

how soiled are the bodies of water,
bloated by the oxygen of last
breaths?

how do we repair, repair, repair this damage, done?

golden lube

i retreat into the colors
of the ocean, the pristine
pegasus blue that prevails
over the mountains of

self-doubt that i have
locked in my brain,
uncontrollable.
i can't keep stretching myself

thin for you.
there are those who will
intentionally misunderstand you
in order to

willfully hate you.
i can't be the punching bag
of your narcissism
of your baroque will

lacking self-esteem.
heavy-lidded, you whack
spilling through me your
merciless attack

a hatchet, like a claw
molten in my mortality
i'm done being small for

you.

so i retreat into the colors
of trees, of rapid greens
and earthly, irish moss. i press up,
pressing into the pressed

curves of my body, of those stifled
blue, by you.
i am no longer at your mercy,
i see it so clearly,

how you turned others against me
to build your poor, fractured soul
up, up, like a tyrant, you rose.
but you can keep the hatred, girl.

i'm good.

before partition

aunties sitting around
the tight-blue
flamed outdoor stove,
whirling
their brass mortar and pestles,
crunching cloves
into a grounded spice,
spinning wooden rolling pins
against sticky atta to make
parota with ghee,
a saag with copious
amounts of garlic,
cabbage curry and the
added crown jewel
newly-throat-slit chicken,
dragged through tandoori,
cumin and yogurt
broiling on a tin tray,
sparkling from the chimera
of the moonlight,
bordered by the
flash of the fire.
these aunties,
skin like rain as their
saris brush the hedges
of their hair,
white threads all silk
peeking out.

they hear the sounds
of the Englishman,
but they know
not what's to come.
not the pure, pure
evil of it all.
five-spiced anguish,
a demeanor of tragedy,
slick like the
slime off tea leaves
slathering the bottoms of
bright cheap china,
the chai hot with
cinnamon, cloves
sticky with mild cream, sugar.
they can smell the
English grease,
my aunties. they smell
the way contained sweat stings,
past their honeyed chai,
right to their nostrils.
the way stench usurps
clothing like a phantom,
latching on to fabric,
in their rotten regalia,
they come, they come.
spawning wicked. the aunties,
and the naanies,
with their achals
attached like
banners across
their chests they know
now that
they must fight, defend.

but the white man has a way of
curling beneath the skin,
bones like flimsy
bayonets, always ready
to war.
they deceive the aunties,
spouting the Queen's
importance,
convincing them
of a falsehood—that
they are inconceivably
inferior to these whiiiiiiiteesssss
this (somehow) metabolizes
into the aunties, and their
daughters, with a big
heady gulp. surely
soon—they must fight
and they do, but
through time, as
they resist, their homes
are taken, and
the uncles begin to
slow-hand the
land over
to a monster.

anthurium

how can i tell you
that your mannerisms
feel like home,

that the galaxies colliding
together in our stares
are akin to

scratches of the soul—
fulfilling in their
symbiosis.

we are
metals, like rocks
with surfaced conflict,

organisms that swell
in the August heat,
our bodies

like papayas,
orange and slick
ripe with swollen

mouths, we grip
each other with history
under the pale

weed smoke,
opaque like
our dreams,

opaque like your
vulnerability.
a wounded me,

wanting to open
you like a
spring cantaloupe

but knowing that
your peculiar
honesty, must come

gushing from
your interiority, vastly
so i can let you in.

on watching the house burn down

(For George, my brother)

One Sunday, as the leaves were an auburn gray, the pre-fall fall far in the air, G and I were walking down Laurier, both high on musk and Japanese whiskey. Having spent the day languidly drinking along the early-winter green of Montréal-Est, we stumbled upon the house on St-Viateur, across from the park so lush, the house burning down, burning across the pavement, fire like a spectacle. We paused. Raptured in the heat, a kernel of a flame in my hand. I felt like Hecate, carrying a magician's aura, puncturing wounds like vibrations. I longed for a spiritual induction, as I watched it rise before me and devour the insides of someone's home, like a beating heart. Nobody cried at the sight of the snorting flames, its mouth lathered with fire and heat. We stood and watched. We waited for our demons to expel, but we stayed for the rebirth. The charcoaled exterior emitting smoke like sage. We finally paced away, our hearts fevered over a shared experience. Of watching the house burn down and knowing that our dark mysteries faded in that grasp of a fog-filled moment.

there's nothing original about judas

(For James Baldwin)

Scheherazade
says that trump is a rapist,
and men who wear
navy, holes in their crotches,
know nothing about anything,
men are all Jon Snow.
with their big-boy stance,
ill-fit suits, small hands
like a balled rag, minds spinning
with lies and rot.
a foul mix of impertinence
and stupidity, it's lethal.
carrying their wounds so
surface, that everyone is a
threat, but history
doesn't have amnesia, babe.
she's a beast who keeps
her receipts,
her jowls baring
her daggered growl.
history—she's a bruise,
one we're all
trying to heal from.
but some of us
want
to nudge fate,

as it's always been
entitled. lest we forget
nothing survives karma.
the hubris it must
take to forget that.
as Baldwin says:
“there's nothing
original about Judas.”
your hate is a masquerade,
boys, and you've
been blinded
by your own delirious outrage
blacking out from eating
all the air around you,
your hair like a deflated
soufflé.



belonging

ONE

everything about me
is sticky, like a curse,
i come undone, like yarn,
spooling on the ground.

what is it to be, and not to be?
to be two things at once,
bifurcated at the root, like Janus,
two selves, both reflecting openings.

yet, i remain perversely stagnant,
not allowing myself to transform,
afraid of losing.
i stay, stunted, awaiting my alluvial fate.

i just want to be saved.

TWO

nobody's ever loved me
like i yearned to be loved
all partners have left, in a huff,
leaving me, blood cold, blood red,

alone, like a turd on the side
of the road, abandoned.

THREE

i am so much more than my
anxieties, my mistakes, my ums
and ahs, or the one time
i earnestly—naively—tweeted “stay woke”

after darren wilson was indicted
for the murder of Mike Brown.
i was broken, and i had no conception
of language

of how to be an accomplice, without
co-opting speak—poetry—a culture
that isn’t mine.
there aren’t many definitions for brownness

for the murkiness of not quite black,
jarringly un-white
brown: a dowdy, drab off-color.
how do you speak

for something that is yet to exist
but that, like a hardened scab,
does exist, ferociously, but is
collapsible like bones, with no

flesh, scattered. brown people
aren’t yet expansive.
so we turn, and turn, and turn
somnambulant,
trying to find what fits

exalting either whiteness, or blackness
fraught, without realizing
we can be masters

of our own perimeters, too.

FOUR

i've never felt
the encouragement of
belonging,
instead, a personal limbo,

existing in silence, or
in between, an anonymous
misery, lodged between
my creaky heart.

FIVE

but, these days
i'm overflowing,
boiling over, coursing
like still water. so

patiently, unmoving,
yet mercurial, still.
i am open, to change.
these days,

better still,
i am open
to opening // to belonging
to myself.

this one's for me

raw silk pink like
peaches, cucumber
 ripe and fuzzy
saris like the united colors of benetton
the pantone blocks of the
pride flag, *a bit too busy*
i say in a hannah gadsby voice,
laughing.

the snake that tattoos my skin,
brown upwards towards
me, like i'm its keeper

your emotional destiny is to support
those you love
said a healer, once.

i love myself, i say now
and, so, my emotional destiny
is to support myself, always.

so, i say:
this one's for me, only friend.
this one's on me, old mate.
we can do this together, sweet homie.
i got you.



acknowledgments

This book is first and foremost for survivors. I see you. I hold you. I love you. You are not alone.

I dedicate this to Jyoti Pandey Singh. I fight for you. To the Birangona, my body salutes you.

To my ancestors, thank you for not letting me hide. Even though I wanted to, so many times how I wanted to give up . . . you showed me I had no choice but to speak this, loudly.

To my parents, despite the conflict we've faced, endlessly. I am of your making and I hope we can continue to heal with one another. Thank you for inspiring me. To my sister, Samia, who went through it all with me, and who I sometimes forget because it's easier to forget what we saw, that we felt these fangs piercing our souls. The rage. The violence. The terror. As I begin to gather myself, my bones re-forming from shattered pieces, I hope we can continue to grow closer to each other. I am proud to have shared a womb with you. I love you.

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Alhamdulillah. I love us. Ameen.

Fariha Róisín's debut collection of poetry fearlessly illuminates her experiences as a young, queer, Muslim femme navigating the vibrant, intimate joys and paralyzing obstacles of her intersectionality. She writes fearlessly about the pain and strength required to reach the ever-elusive idea of self-acceptance.

When I first encountered Fariha's writing, I let out a sigh of relief. Was it refreshing? Yes. But there was something more. Her words allow us to feel visible. Fariha's writing has the power to heal and transform. She pulls you into her stories until you're at the edge of your seat, emphatically rooting for her subjects.

RUPI KAUR, author of the #1 *New York Times* bestsellers *milk and honey* and *the sun and her flowers*

These poems are tender and unapologetic, sumptuous with orange blossoms and Zamzam water, heartbreaking, and darkly funny. This book has given me so much permission, so much pleasure, and I am grateful to read Fariha Róisín.

SAFIA ELHILLO, author of *The January Children*

In her debut collection of poems, Fariha Róisín writes, "nurture makes you hate yourself less." These poems are a project in nurturing, a poetics that essay the nurturing of an abusive mother-daughter relationship, the nurturing of a brown girl unloved by her various countries, the nurturing of having to walk through the world as a person of color under white supremacist violence. This is a poet to be watched.

FATIMAH ASGHAR, author of *If They Come for Us*

How to Cure a Ghost is a nimble, verbing odyssey of selfhood and survival. The poems careen, they thrust, they belly up. Just when I think the dust is about to settle, a new cloud gets kicked up and examined to its atoms. The work is personal, national, global, contemporary, and historical. The "I" is an "eye," turned inward and outward, light-footed and walking hard, self-assured and awkward. I loved reading this.

TOMMY PICO, author of *IRL* and *Nature Poem*

Fariha Róisín is an Australian Canadian writer based in Brooklyn, New York. Her work has appeared in *Al Jazeera*, the *Guardian*, *Vice*, *Fusion*, the *Village Voice*, *Vogue*, *BuzzFeed*, and others.



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