

TAROT

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Introduction to this edition

Haere mai tātou — welcome to Tarot #4.

This edition, I am blown away not only by the calibre of poetry but also by the quality of conversations being had between these poems on the page: this issue dances through contrasts of stillness and anger, humility and pride, and innocence and desire (among others). Like the lesson in moderation and control we learn from Icarus (see cover art), perhaps there is a balance to be found between vice and virtue; perhaps there is a time for both deliberation and courage. I, therefore, invite you to reflect on each poem in this context as well as in isolation.

The cover art of this edition is a linocut of Icarus that I asked my talented wife Hilary (of Lumen Icons) to design and carve. It is set against a watercolour background of mine, and I hope that, as a whole piece, it captures something of the tension, anticipation, and resignation that I am feeling in this liminal, semi-post-Covid space.

I am pleased to introduce a wide range of familiar names and emerging poets alongside some Tarot regulars, and I commend their poetry to you. I hope this edition serves your needs. For me, it is an oasis in a tumultuous term of teaching; but maybe for you, it can be inspiration, provocation, excitement or reassurance. These last few months have been a lot. I hope you stay well and stay creative.

Kit Willett, June 2022

The Ukrainian Poets as Seen from New Plymouth

Trevor M Landers

This poem has venom in the ink.
On the 28th of February, oafish Russians invaded
the old motherland of the Kyivan Rus
with missile bombardments and a tyrant's impudence.
I thought first
of Serhiy Zhadan, asleep at home in Kharkiv
a blood-smattered copy of *Mesopotamia* in the rubble.
Memoir, travelogue, timely or untimely meditation
—or a mixture of all four,
the struggle of this generation
for democracy, and in our own epoch, for life itself.

Or the elfin face of Oksana Zabuzhko
weathered by daily heart-break
without tanks, a treasured copy of
Field Work in Ukrainian Sex, is just a novel,
but it will defend you and Kyiv, long I pray
as we watch the daily atrocities
with growing fury and impotent rage
as patriots stand before the altars of death
like the insurgent Ukrainian armies
written out of Soviet historiography,
just as in *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*.

This time we see you and stand with you!
Myroslav Laiuk knows a wonderful word: *vozdukh*.¹
The Russians want to take it away from him
because—they say—it was theirs so long ago
that it's already foreign:

He says: *we're inhaling words and parts of words*
“voz”... “voz”... “voz” ...
it transforms into letters.

The air is redolent with courage and unspeakable deaths.

Halyna Kruk, sits her office at the University of Lviv

a sea of humanity flowing like an undammed torrent to Poland

in the age of helicopter-gunships strafing civilian trains

your 2005 *Oblychchia poza svitlynoju/The Face beyond the Photograph*

just haunts me now, your iridescent eyes glisten from the dust jacket.

Please don't let them kill you, the whole of Taranaki should be
demanding

Please rush to safety, Ukraine will need storytellers

and I admire your eyes as much as your lines,

*dorohyy.*²

¹ Hard to translate as the word has gone out of usage in Ukrainian, but “the joy of air” is a reasonable approximation.

² A term of endearment like ‘dear’ or ‘cherished one’.

Golden Years

Conor Doherty

There is nothing quite
Like the present moment
With you.

The brown grass
Is ticklish on our backs
And the late summer sun
Casts our skin
Golden in re-creation
Of heaven
And the never-cool-enough wind
Blows in softly from the Pacific.

At the end of it all,
What more could we have done?
The chants and cries
Of the riotous crowds
Echo up the valleys.
Did we do it right?
Did we live it right?
Were we enough?

Seeing the world
From above,
Bathed in its soft pastels,
Will never be quite as
Peaceful
As it used to be.
Sliding over the aquamarine
Never again so carefree,
When you could get lost
In the rocking of the waves
And the whispers of the winds
And the worlds which saw you pass.

What path should we have taken?
Flames crackling up window panes.
Death in the air.
Blood in the streets.
No one in charge.
Wasn't it all inevitable?
Weren't we our own executors?

We're the audience
Of the show
We're all trapped in.
The laugh track
Plays and plays.
It hits all the emotional
Cues; there's ooohs and aaahs.
Tears and applause.
We turn off the TV
And go to bed.

Wind blows through
The long grasses
In the fields,
And you remember your childhood.
The end a cruel mockery
Of the beginning.
Puddles splashed,

Wrists slit,
Breakdowns
Of every sort.
I still remember
The scars you wore.
You can still see them.
The apples from
The tree at the end of your yard
Are starting to fall and rot.

God, it's a cesspit,
But where else would you have us?
No, this is our home,
This is what we deserve;
We made this bed,
And the night has fallen,
And it's time to tuck ourselves in.

fatherhood

Robyn Restieaux

Men hunt and fish you say
lines flying glinting hooks
jerking beneath the skin
finding purchase so the reeling can begin
surface calmly stippled
tugging and frenzy subcutaneous

This is that dance again then the
engorging of manhood eyes wide whites dry
lips thinning
that never-again long-ago child inside
never-again

you
baiting
him with

cruelty—flinging one-liners like a broken recorder
he's reeling suckerpunched suddenly bloodless
this man-child learning to
drink your stale
never-again
never-again

Remember that fish you landed last summer?
He lay gasping on the rock as you
waited for the air to settle
letting the words sink in
the hook clean through an eye

I watched something drain away
eyes cast over cold
never again

You've got his eyes

Denise O'Hagan

i.m. Patrick

You've got his eyes, she said.
And his smile, he added. They turned
To look at each other, their expression
One and the same. Literal minded
As we are at four or five, for a while
I considered myself a composite being,
A patchwork of pre-existing features,
Not an original, certainly not unique.

I was careful, later, with my own sons
Not to bequeath them a cast of traits,
A sense their aptitudes and by extension
Their paths in life were preordained,
Determined by genetics.

And then one day, one cicada singing
Summer afternoon, reaching for distraction
In old photo album, we opened at my uncle
In shirt and crooked tie, his shy half-smile
Lighting up the page. My youngest stared,
Then looked up at me, and said, 'Mum,
You've got his eyes.' I nodded and thought
Of my mother, the echoes and reverberations
She'd pick up in things and people
That others didn't see.

And my son, he had her mind.

Walking with Ghosts

Trish Veltman

at Chillingham Castle, UK

Living in town, we forget how many stars the sky holds,
how shy they are of unnatural light.
I'd like to stay and name them all, but the ghost walker
moves on—
this walk is not about the scenery.

A thin tremor of torchlight
keeps our feet on the same narrow way nomad monks
trod from Chillingham to Wooler.
Some fell by the wayside—trunks of ancient yews
bleed sadness. So heavy with memory they lie prone.
This one still bears a scar, a noose so deep
you can feel the weave of rope.

I don't believe in ghosts.
These fields are too quiet, the darkness too warm
to be a place of unrest. The only pale figures flitting
are elusive white cattle grazing.

The ghost walker leads us indoors. In the castle,
Arctic draughts, moving shadows made by candle flame.
Steps of unseen feet in this empty building.
Small children laugh where no children are playing.
A little boy shows his face in other people's cameras.

A little girl climbs on my lap, for comfort
the ghost walker says she never knew in life. Elinor.
Her ringlets brush my cheek. Tomorrow I'll think
she was a dream but for tonight, I hold her
and my arms freeze.

the iris

Hebe Kearney

the iris flowered today and i am not speaking to you.
its purple so deep almost black, and that
is the colour your heart turned, too.
i miss you.


when you gave it to me
you said:
be careful.

but i let weeds grow in its pot;
becoming a miniature, tangled jungle
bright with roaring dandelions.
i ignored you both.

when i weeded it a month ago
i was sure it was dead;
its leaves pallid and feeble,
i tugged at them
with clumsy heavy gloves.

but there it is, flowering anyway
for the first time in years,
an ominous beauty.

i want to tell you about it badly,
but pain holds back my hand
from reaching out to you
overgrown as you are
with dark anger.



Seasons

Sevgi Ikinici

Winter is Summer

They are the same person

They cough when getting a cold

And go for a picnic

When the Sun shines

Spring Cleaning

Anna McKay


The wind came and took you away.
You said spring cleaning.
And I looked at the bottom
of the concrete path leading
towards infinity.

It was late September,
or perhaps even October,
when the gail-force wind came.
Heavily, strongly,
cleansing our sins.

I walked to work the next day
and saw hundreds of branches
lying in the green grass,
immobile.
Freeze-frame.
And I flew over them,
hoping the wind might
take me away.

You said spring cleaning,
she is only cutting the chaff
And I thought,
how cruel a mother
to kill her young.

But perhaps we all need
to spring clean,
once in a while.



Three photos are still tacked by the window

Grace Shelley

They see full sun every four to six o'clock, the
her and the me of six months ago swaddled in
light just as we were on the days they were
taken. Our colours are becoming muted but
our smiles are no less vibrant.

The sailboat we both had tattooed on our arms
the day before she left has settled into my skin
like it has always lived there. We only saw them
fresh and raw and rich black and now I wear mine
like someone else forging my signature and I
do not wonder how she wears hers.

Perhaps one day she and I will meet and I
will be wearing the shirt I wore on our first
date. She will tell me its print has faded
in a way I have not seen because I have been
with it during the years she wasn't here. I put it
into and took it out of every wash.

Nobody sees a screw loosening itself until it
falls out, and I too am coming undone, slowly. Soon
something will fall out of me so quietly as to be
imperceptible. They say your whole body renews
itself every seven years. If she returns I will not
be the person she left. An entirely new skin will be
shrouded over my bones. Perhaps we will pass
in the airport, strangers with matching tattoos.

It doesn't matter if I take the photos down and
throw them away, or leave them to fade to
milky white; the effect is the same, and everyone
lies when they claim whether they would want
a slow death or a quick one.

High Fidelity

Gerard Sarnat

I've been worrying
That current attitude
Of sluffing under my bus

A few forever-close friends
Given new rubric, Sooo little
Time left, No way to be intimate

With those where too much baggage
Accumulated in out-dated relationships
—That you feared becoming like some

Dylan-esque ugly primitive Jewish Yahweh
My-way-or-the-highway-when-you-see-me
Coming-you-better-run type of angry old man

'Til a micro-dose psilocybin showed how to love.



1965
Gail Ingram

cotton ties of the stiff gown
shiver down her bare back as she tiptoes
along corridors holding
her stomach in her wet bandaged chest
the long walls at night still
heavy white close in
on the pink poodle clutched
in her left hand Mimi
she named her as she filled the legs
fine-combed the tuft
of her wool tail over the curve
of her belly she leaves
a trail of bright red drops drip drip
down the inside of her legs along the lino
to here

the breathing room
pauses in the quiet
she slinks
along the lines reads plastic tags
on the sides of metal cribs finds
her eyes wide open
the swell of lightness
pupil unfocused dream undefined
shape of her eyebrows of her
pink-splotch face little cap and coddled she takes all
the details in whispers
three words across her cheek the unbearable
milky smell of her already
and starch she slips

Mimi in
the tight pocket between
her sheet and steel bars leaves her
there in the crib she
creeps away the pull of her
cramping womb for
twenty two more years





Melanin

Erin J. Doyle

i am so white, that if i went for an evening jog by the roadside
i wouldn't have to stripe myself safe with reflective tape
i could just
roll my shirt up a little bit

i'm so white, that when i got a tattoo of a white dragon the
tattooist used my bare skin for the dragon's scales
his white ink
just for the shading

i'm so white, that if i walk naked to the bathroom at two in the morning
my lover may mistake me for a ghost


i'm so white, that on sunny music festival days
strangers forcibly apply sunscreen to me
because they're worried
but they need to be
i'm already wearing sunscreen
obviously
i'm so white, i have to swear sunscreen
when there's a full moon

i'm so white, that if i contain my bad hair day under a beautiful scarf
no bus stop stranger will wonder aloud what i'm hiding
or try to snatch it from my head

i'm so white, that if i tell you that i work at a university
you don't assume i mean as a cleaner and
if i do apply for work somewhere else and don't even get an interview
i won't be left wondering if they saw
my name in print
my picture on Facebook and imagined
i'd be lazy or
i'd steal or
i wouldn't speak English clearly or that
my application wasn't serious

i'm so white, that in twenty years behind the wheel
i have never once been pulled over or
asked to show my licence and
even in America
on the street
at night
it has never occurred to me that i might not be
one hundred percent safe in front of
an armed police officer

i'm so white, that when the Māori student advisor
told one of my students that if he ever needed anything
he could also come to me because
i am one of us
my student laughed
and i couldn't blame him



Binding the mother wound

Alexandra Fraser

You were a small girl
clinging to yourself

because everything
was left empty

orphaned
one way or another

you built yourself up
from the inside out

ribs first, a cage for lungs
shattered but lasting

breathe in breathe out
the heart with its pale

fragile beat, locked inside
its bars of bone, a stomach

tied in knots, a clever mind
storing every fact and hurt

your spine rigid, holding
certainty and loss

and hidden deep a womb
to bring the love you needed

You should have known
when you gave birth to me

that I was only a child
I could not feed you

clothe you, hold you
fast against the dark night

Past and future tense

Denise O'Hagan

'No event can cease to be, or begin to be, itself, since it never ceases to have a place as itself... '

JME McTaggart, British philosopher (1866–1925)

I see you look at the husk of me, and would have
Liked to let you know it's not what it appears,
And I don't want your pity. The weighing scales
Of body and soul are tipping now, working in
Inverse proportion. I gather up my days, feel the
Lip of time curl back on itself, washing away
My daily wearies, landing me on the shore of
Another place between a past that hasn't happened
Yet, and a future I know already. It's a coming home
Of sorts: every thought and feeling I've ever had, or
Might have had, or wished I hadn't—a nether world
Of possibilities, and future memories held in storage.

I could have done it better, sure, but—see? I put
Regret where it belongs, along with blame and
Grief and shame. I daisy-chain my smiles and
Tears, note the particular quality of the sky
At dusk, and admit again my shadow selves
I buried long ago with those I loved. Enough
Of such talk; it would mean as much to you
As Morse code would to me. Yet I see you
Discussing me, for I've become less a person
Than a predicament. Your words snowflake
The air; I sense the drift of your intent, and
Feel the white spaces of your pauses. I know
You know my circle's near-complete, but how
To intimate I'm far richer now than when
My soul was spread as thin as Marmite
In the heady rush of a full-blooded life?

This Summer a Radical Sense of Impermanence

Jackson McCarthy

But before you can sleep, the last of the adrenaline
turns the night into a woozy picture show.

Glowworms. Your new jeans. If you are in love,
go down to the sea. You think *Remember this*

and *Remember that*. There's a chance
you are staring at the centre of things.

There's a chance you are not. In the sky,
a smudge of cloud. What a ferry leaves in its wake.

In the sky, shifting like sheets, rain comes.
You run to catch your bus. Breaking in

your new shoes. So many bags, overstuffed.
During the school year, you had used this one

to carry your books. Boys and girls fling themselves
around in the wet. You look at them and think

Maybe I might stop writing. Early morning
and late afternoon. The sun's outer extremities.

Even the lights seem lazy. You stay on the bus
the longest. Watch people get on and off.

This makes you feel like you own it. You keep turning pages
and thinking you've turned two instead of one.

You haven't. There is no secret. No
in-between page. The paper is just thick.

Months pass. You lie on your front
and turn your palms toward the sun.

You're holding it up. Holding it still.

stripes

Miriama Gemmell

painting has no rules / you gotta go by / **like** feel
when you're a painter / or like a sculpturer / person
/ I mean **like** can a painter / always explain the
depths / of their thing **nah yeah** / so it must be ok /
to **like** write poems even / when you can't explain
what every little thing means **like** / oh man I can't

explain / **like** I heard lorde sees colour in music /
she has that thing like polly / from polly and grant
where your senses **like** mix / together and you see /
music and hear **green lights** / well I don't
like have that but I get how / it's all feel but
is it weird poems / are **like** words

but **like** I can't / explain the words in words nah
artists are always / **like** hippie and on the universe
has energies / vibe so like fuck it / and I reckon
lorde would like / my poems she'd be **like** that's so /
stripes whatever / plus who wants to hear
a painting / explained boring you can / just see



Memoir in an empty vessel

Alexandra Fraser

Archaeologists like pots
all the empty vessels holding stories
all the bowls flasks amphorae
with dried and baked-in residues
fractions of past sustenances
past pleasures

Scrape and analyse
dregs from those abandoned sherds
if you are willing
if you have the tools
to excavate the emptiness

scratch meanings from remains
subject them to analysis
reconstruct the lost
what might be left of me
my nothingness
for you to remember

I'm hunting through my past
it looks hollow
but I measure
carbon and nitrogen isotopes
see patterns find stoned
dancing at the old synagogue
the coldness of night sand dunes
dawn frost and bird counts
noon poetry
amorphous organic remains
absorbed in to the clay
enduring over millennia

terrestrial animal fats
aquatic animal fats
plant oils and waxes
a good stew by a blazing fire
and cheese of a sort

fermented rice
hawthorn grapes and honey
a wild white wine for
partying by the Yellow River
that brief 9000 years ago

Blend your own masala

Robyn Restieaux

My neighbour's masala blend
in its snack size zip top is down to its final grains
Geeta's a wiz with cumin and chilli and I'm about to
ask for more when my son
 Ngati Kahungunu on his Dad's shoulders
 and breathing the Satpura warmth of Chhindwarra
 on my father's side,
stops reading his Koran for long enough
to remind me of my grandmother
how she watched her Maa throw fistfuls of Jeera into her sabzis
its lemon aniseed and tree bark
fragrance dancing, DNA interweaving with mounds of Dhaniya
smiling, milky citrus and grandmother's Auckland kitchen
short-lived shrine to her maa back home
sang each night with the onions sugaring and curling in ghee

I remind my son before checking the corned beef
not all desis survived the journey eastwards
my grandmother soon learned to Monday grind the Sunday roast
kicking the lamb into gear with the merest lick of salt
the potatoes greying in their stiff little sniff of butter.

All those kitchen ragas their evening ululations
chilli and smoke kissing the rangehood—
have faded in the tidy Auckland air

I lack the knowledge, I tell him

My son fingers the Mushaf
and tells me to blend my own masala

The late afternoon early September sun
Grace Shelley

casts uncomfortably deep shadows.
Everything is orange, and it is disquieting.
Every day, pigeons arc in to sit on the roof
two houses over. What are they calling for?
Why do they watch? Orange is a disquieting
colour, on the fence and palm tree and car.
Cry for safety. The pigeons keep coming.
Sunshine lowers like the constant chirp
of the cicada.

Kettle

Christopher Palmer

Servile at first glance
as close as a favourite pet.

Upright, always exactly level
it greets us with blanched whiteness—

the modern kitchen's sunny fixture.
A simple press of a button

and it shivers and stirs
—a murmur lifting to a roar—

repeating itself with every gesture
but longing to be asked a different question

to have another answer.
In the lamplight, magnified against the wall

it projects itself onto a silver screen
striding high overhead, animate and elsewhere.

Containing the medium for life
it wonders about its maker when not in use

but is sterile inside.
Time is a slow drip within.

Conversation slips on smooth walls
until, after perhaps a thousand attempts

freedom comes at the end of a short lead
filling the night with its escape

the brittle, burnt out wires
a knot of fused colour.

The Last Abortive Ascent

Trevor M Landers

It is the Fuji-like symmetry
that sends the inexperienced to their deaths
a climb to the summit
seemingly deceptively easy.
On the day I set out on that climb,
no grief saddled our backs
no stones lodged in our shoes
no ominous clouds on the lower slopes of the mountain,
on the day we set out
leaving nothing behind,
nothing on the bed,
no version of myself,
no dream of a summit climb
turning two-thirds the way up
for a doctor's appointment in Manaia
with Hugh Dugdale
as the other two
made a successful ascent
I remember
the mountain is high in front of me,
as I look back
I have no voice to quantify the height
my knees feel the strain of gravity
the snow is a clerical collar
I am a study of confessions.

Late in the Season

Ian C Smith

He arranges memory on the deck
mind-naming cloud shapes as they break apart,
one a suggestion of Toulouse-Lautrec
from bright games sharing knowledge of fine art.
In dusk's fall he watches the light decrease,
no longer burnishing the sombre sea.
Holding hands, they had seen Cape Barren geese
arrowing to The Sisters Islands, v-
shaped in perfect symmetry, marine wind
not ruffling them, sleek over waves' white-tops.
His return ferry looking becalmed limned
on slate sky, he wants time back, re-run, stops
reminiscing, rises to mix a drink,
recalls he quit, returns to sit and think.

Pass the Dutchie

Hayden Hyams

We went back
To tidy up
Take a look around
Appreciate the fact
Our bones are still wet

We got high
So high we spoke
Incomprehensible soliloquies
Spiky things
They hardly mean a thing

I closed the windows
It was important
Who knows
What will get in

I thought about dirt enclosed in
Underground pots
Made of concrete
Every tree in London is a bonsai

I chose a new
Lucky number
It was important
Who knows
Number eleven

Too many strange things
Have happened
We can't come back here
Not again
Agreed

When we left we left
The door unlocked

Bailiffs
Like it like
That

Open to the push
We walked
Faces illuminated
By our phone screens
Bricks

Bosch
Skilled peripheral walkers
Barely look back
We leave access where possible

tupperware

Amanda Joshua

You saw that search tab I should have deleted
While you're helping me illegally stream Fantastic Mr Fox
'fun date ideas when its raining outside' was meant to be a conversation
between me and safari alone
I wanted you to sit next to me and keep watching
Even if it meant you'd see my most unsure
pitiful parts
So I let you watch me argue on the phone
with my mother, see the stains
on my mattress, let you touch painfully
unwashed clothes and the hair I missed shaving
On my left inner thigh
Stop shielding my breasts with my hands, kiss you
with bare unbrushed teeth
I feel naked, naked horrifyingly
Even more naked
than all those nights we soaked ourselves silly in the tub
And mostly you make me feel good, good horrifyingly
even more good
when you're laughing in the mornings, playing me recordings of me snoring
last night, telling me
with affection if I clutched for you any closer
you'd roll right off the bed
did you admire only the glassy
Polished parts
When the hardest things to offer you were ugly, uncut
and precious
I offered them anyway
I wanted you to sit next to me and keep watching
But you've packed your things, leaving my toothbrush
Startlingly alone
in its cup
I slice myself up like day-old birthday cake

hope you'll take only
the pieces of me you could stomach
in the tupperware

Converngaro #234

Miriama Gemmell

- Hinengaro:** Is wairua like confidence, fake it till you make it?
- Mauri:** Hell no, the spirits can smell fear.
- Hinengaro:** Oh man, I'm never going to have four walls in my whare!
- Wairua:** Why you gotta mess with her like that?
- Mauri:** I like watching her tentacles flail about.
- Wairua:** Hmm. It is oddly compelling, like old style screensavers.

Nest Imperatives

Molly Crighton

It is scientifically controversial to say
that birds are born with the innate knowledge
of how to build a nest.

Apparently it is trial and error
nesting and nesting in wrong places
with wrong materials until some arrangement
makes a home.

An imperative. Like other things.
There are the other things
that are imperatives too.

I have hit my head on the walls of lifts
and on drawer handles. I have used scalpels,
pencil sharpeners, pinking shears, vodka.

Unfortunately I have to.
Like settling in the crook of a branch,
not knowing what you're making,

your wings fluted like gills, calamus
spread open like a hand made of spines.
These things we can't explain or stop.

Skin opens up like the neck of a prickling cat.
Options everywhere—moss, scissors,
sticks, glass, needles, leaves.

I have only ever wanted
a home. I have only ever wanted
to know what to do.

Family Business

Christopher Palmer

For 50p I'd fill a bucket with stones;
the garden like a subterranean gibber plain.

I'd try to work out the monetary fraction
each stone represented;

what grain of time was held
within each rough or rounded shape.

Once, I filled it mostly with dirt
but you dug down like an excavator

exposing my fraud
growling at me to start again.

When I told you to shut up
a hydraulic boom and bucket

quieted me for three days.
We had to start again.

Taxidermy Falklands Island Wolf in the Animal Attic

Molly Crighton

Charles Darwin stepped off the HMS Beagle
and said you will soon go extinct, little wolf.

You are too trusting
and you have not learned how to be afraid.

And you skink-plaited between his legs
and ate from his evolutionist hands—

licked at his scientist fingers.
Learn from ours, said Darwin. Our wolves
bristle like a thousand thousand razors
in the shape of a predator.

They know what to fear. Here
you eat from the one hand while the other
holds a knife.
All the better to kill you with.

Now glass where there should be eyes.
Teeth with no bite. I want you
to come back to life

because I am alone too, and have also learned
how to be afraid. I would never kill you.

Come and sit on my lap, your warmth
rising taxidermy dust around us

like a cloud made of skin.
Come and eat from my hand.

An ode to abandonment issues and pornhub

Amanda Joshua

My favourite pornhub category lately
is 'couple in loving, solid relationship'
Under the sheets
I'm getting myself off to
the idea of stability, a home
of my own, an armchair
Moulded to the shape of this body
I own, also:
a kitchen table, content to be scarred
with marks I put there
I put them there over
the years, placing bowls of too-hot food
In front of people, people
who will never leave

I want to write so
 I-crop-the-edge-off-my-arm-in-pictures-so-you-won't-see-i'm-fat
 honest that
Your hand comes off the page bloodied by my shame
I want to write so small-specific-detail that
You know it was real life
You know I have shared something real
And something alive
I have shared it
With you

Short fiction

Tony Beyer

he told me he'd fallen in love
with a Russian girl
who wore her black hair
in two shortish pigtails

and dressed in black
to seem invisible
while she took lessons
in a third language

she worked in a meat restaurant
to cover her tuition
evading the hands
of customers and coworkers

he dined there on all her nights
neither speaking
nor raising his eyes
from the gristle on his plate

her shadow multiplied
by the down-lights over the table
surrounding him
would have to be enough

'lavender'

Hebe Kearney

though the front door
into to a hazy mist of talk & laughter
/ this is the party /
i am unlike other children.
i am never babysat.

inside is familiar / paintings all over
& a golden cat with a rhythmical wave
& a black stone panther in full snarl
& a cornucopia of books.
this week, i learned *cornucopia*.
abundance; ramshorn; small fruits.

can i get you anything?
i am a guest here / i clutch lemonade & look brave.
mum fills her wineglass a second time. i keep tally.
everything is numbered.

there is a real cat here somewhere
i want to find / make a circuit
into garden / up steps / through backdoor / down hall
it's a race! quick! watch shadows for fur but
all are smooth / frank is hiding.
humans too loud.

outside now / on lawn chairs
swinging feet / dusk begins
i am unlike other children.
i am asked questions / i answer
i say i read books & write stories.
they like this & praise.
out of lemonade.

mum is over by the ash tray
foot to foot shifting / crossing uncrossing arms.

dad is unmoving at garden table
leaned forward nodding / someone is saying things right.
both glow golden in dusk / radiate /
another new word / means better than glow.
everything is coloured.

bored now
go to look at paintings in lounge / paintings look back.
bald man, dark eyes / takes up most of wall
& wins staring contest.
i curl up out of his eyeline.
glad i brought a book.
/ animorphs /

distracted!
lost sight of mum & dad!
make a circuit looking.
into garden / up steps / through backdoor / down hall.

a room open / light inside / sound inside.
see mum's frizzy head
/ relief /
'mum!' step inside / dad there too & others
stand looking at the closet / slid open,
strange plants like alien hands hang upside down,
dried / mummified.
room smells heavy / dark.

mum & dad turn to me, faces saying
you shouldn't be seeing this. i say
'what's that?'
'it's... lavender,' says mum, 'drying lavender.'

i am unlike other children
& i am pretty sure adults don't smoke
/ lavender /

The Stone People

Erin Ramsay

On the phone my mother says
Think of all the stone in the soil where you live
Isn't it—scoria?
Go for a walk and look at the walls outside houses
Made from rocks dug out of the ground in people's back yards
All that volcanic rock—from Mount Eden, as it was before

On the phone my father says
When I was your age, in Australia
For months I felt immobile
Like I was dragging myself around
Though I always went to work

(In Farmers *Blue Monday* drove him mad on a boombox
And people returned hifi sets after weekends, claiming faults)

That immobility is dangerous, my father says
Too long without movement and it gets very tough
You need motion

In the early years my father took me to Mount Eden
Watched me careen on the flying fox
Months after I moved to Grange Road, he asked
Do you remember?

I hadn't, the fox not visible on my bus route
Now my neighbourhood mountain and the one in memory fused
In tectonic violence
Past rushing into present

In memory my grandmother, the stone woman, lies in bed
My grandfather, plutonic, hides the truth of his wife

On the phone my father says

I'm grateful I've never been as bad as her
Never faced destruction in the way she did

I want to go to Iceland, he says
It's volcanic there
And cold
And listening to Icelandic feels like listening to my past
I can hear those Scandinavian roots
The Northern England of my parents' families
Was settled by the Danes

When you are deep in it, he says
You cannot see above the barrier
And when you are out
You don't understand why you couldn't see

I imagine a wall of stone
And I am in the pit like Joseph
The man in the Catholic picture books
In my grandmother's back room (gone now)

In the shadow of Maungawhau I bless my metamorphic body
Slowing and hardening and loosening and moving quickly
In and out, every week, like breathing

The present point in a lineage of stone
Of mental difficulty, peppering the timelines like ash

What the phone calls really told me was
Bless the porosity of your body
Nothing short of a miracle, really
That a stone can live a rewarding life

In my thirties, or maybe forties, my father says
I had a realisation about the meaning of it all
I know it's hard, he tells me
But you'll see

Grieving Japanese man enters rain forest of Tai Poutini
and finds a silver fern

Gail Ingram

too			
dark			
only	not		
sound	one		
my	green	everywhere	
shoe	dark	water	
scuff	but	drips	he
	many	like	weeps
and	layers	bluegreen	she
breath		eyes	weeps
birds	your	of	we
like	blackgreen	foreign	weep
bells	emblem	ghosts	they
in	turns		weep
an	to	see	you
empty	sky	right	
temple	your	through	little
	silver	you	spiral
eye	belly		child
widens	faces	clean	in
on	down	cold	hairy
its	deep	stings	heart
own	like	the	of
accord	carp	nose	feather
	trembles		fronds
	under	drop	I
	surface	to	find
		one	you
		knee	in
			strange
			land

wake

The Lament of the Aral Sea

Trish Veltman

Once I was so vast you could not see from edge
to edge, you could not sail across in a day.

Now I am a shrunken excuse of a sea, withered
and parched like a leaf on a dying tree.

Littered on my beaches are not shells but skeletal
carcasses of boats marooned in dust.

You drank me dry. You drained me for your melons
and your cotton, bartering white gold

for the lives of all the fish who swam in my waters
all the muskrats who burrowed in my wetlands
of all the birds who nested on my shores.

And now you say I'm nature's error,
a sea without enough water to weep.

I am a casualty
of your cruelty, but you shrug your shoulders,
and rename me desert.



A lot of pictures of Drew Barrymore

Grace Shelley

When we first got the internet at home,
I printed out a lot and I mean A LOT
of pictures of Drew Barrymore and
blu-tacked them around my room,
which I didn't have to share with either
of my sisters.

Think about how long it would have taken
to download twenty pictures of
Drew Barrymore on 2001 dial-up, and then
how much ink it would have taken to
print them all out on our very first colour printer
which my dad probably still has in the garage
if he hasn't taken it to the e-waste collection.
I made sure not to pick them up too quickly
so the ink didn't smudge.

Our over-the-road neighbour,
a woman my grandmother's age who always
signed her name inside quote marks
as if she didn't really exist,
sold me and my sisters the tape of *Never Been Kissed*
at her garage sale and we watched it on repeat
because it was our first teen movie.

I liked the way Drew Barrymore looked with her
short blond hair so I Asked Jeeves for pictures of
Drew Barrymore.

I would look at the pictures of Drew Barrymore
before I went to sleep. "I'm such a big fan of
Drew Barrymore," I would think
as I closed my eyes.

Time & Other Occurrences

Conor Doherty

I had to write your name
On a form for
The first time today,
And I misspelled it,
And I wonder if that's indicative
Of something

I keep getting told how
Fast time is passing,
And that's not doing wonders
For my mental health.
Teachers keep talking
About exams around the corner
And my mother
Mentions universities
At least once per night
And my friends are getting
Jobs and restricteds and partners;
This is the happiest I've felt
In forever
And it feels like it's slipping away.
Every Friday night
When I get sad,
I want to write a letter
To my future self
Like I never wanted to in school,
Because at least if I can't hold
Onto this happiness forever,
I can remind myself
One day
That I had it once,
And maybe that will be enough to
keep going

I go for runs
Every Saturday
And I get out of breath
And I have to stop every 200 metres
And the headaches come and go,
But my coach tells me I'm doing
great
And I'm showing great progression.
And I spend hours in my room
'Working', 'studying', whatever,
But really I do nothing,
Because I can't make myself focus
Or maybe it's really because I just
Don't want to admit that I don't
know what I'm doing
Anymore
And I don't want people to know.
And I wake up
And I get on trains
And I go to school
And I go to parties
And I go to bed
And maybe Lorde was right,
Because Ribs won't stop playing
In my head
And it makes me think about
Stonefields,
And how I learnt to ride a bike
And how I climbed out on the roof
And how I put my head through the
wall
And how I was only 7
And lord where did that boldness go,

Because by god if now I'm not just
Some shell who blushes when called
on in class
And who can't talk to people he sees
every day

You should have nothing to
Do with this poem, really,
But like most things these days,
I link it back to you nonetheless.
And maybe it's because I don't know
what we are yet
Or maybe it's because I know how
it'll end
Or maybe it's because I know you,
you're like me, and I know we
can't work,
Not really;
But everyday my friend tells me
about how happy he is,
How he can't wait till the next time
he sees his boyfriend,
How they're both going mental
because they haven't seen
Each other in a week (gasp!),
And I want that,
God I want that,
But I can't feel it about you,
Or anyone, really;
Because I want that life
Of pining
And picnic dates
And kisses on public transport
And being so loved up everyone
hates you;
But I think I love the chase more
than the catch,
I think, to paraphrase another writer

better than me,
That I'm fundamentally broken,
In some subtle but essential way

But I still address every poem
As if you're reading them,
My imaginary audience;
Well, how's this?
I couldn't wait for puberty to kick in
And now I go nuts if I don't shave
Every other day (which you know is
more than necessary),
And should I be more guarded about
this?

Meh??
What's the point?
This way,
I get to hear my history teacher
Stumble terribly over my new
pronouns
(She is trying),
And watch the senior staff
Sweat over the threat of my existence
To their precious school image,
And worry day and night
In the back of my head,
Like a broken record player,
About how everyone else would
react,
And how I would look
(Would I be hot??),
And sometimes I look in the mirror
And am disgusted with who I am
And other times I look in the mirror
And am disgusted with who I want
to be.

I just feel like I have to make a
decision,
But I don't wanna ruin Senior Ball
And look like some grotesque in the
photos,
But my hips don't set until I'm 18,
I just feel like I'm running out of
time!

Time
Time
Time
Time
Time
It's always the fucking clock!
Ticking away
Reminding
Watching
Waiting
Death's faithful little right-hand man

The waiting line

Robyn Restieaux

In our line at the bank we are flat, silent
yellow feet
prayer beads
at hopeful 1 metre intervals.
There's a woman
preparing for combat
catches my eye then away with that
10 metre glaze.

Her eyeliner black flicks
uneven ticks on a pro forma
and she whispers 'aid' like she's calling for water.
Dehydrated triage nurse
leads her to a corner
draws the curtains and plugs her in.

I imagine her lying prone like a burn victim
endoscoped
financial hardship raising suspicious lumps in her liver
heart a bag of worms.

They'll eye her as they tap tap on ergonomic keyboards.
Inspect possible sources of salvation and
finding she still has KiwiSaver
signal for gastric suction.

There's a back door for people like her
finding themselves more invisible by the day
pale hands clutching at diaphanous skin.

Jenny Craig Weight Loss Poster by Countdown Central

Molly Crighton

Sally, smiling with her subcutaneous-white teeth,
looks very thin now.

She wears a red viscose top from Farmers
and bares SmileDirect teeth
like in a desert full of yellow bones
Sally is a spine bleached by the sun.

Beautiful Sally.
I heard we evolved from apes to homosapiens
because we started taking magic mushrooms
and found God.

My brain, your brain, Sally's brain,
all grey wet walnuts driving our meat machines
as we shrink and grow and shrink and grow
and waste our time counting almonds
and halving stock cubes and slicing cucumbers
and pretending they taste like chips.

Just eat some chips, Sally.
You and your magic brain and desert teeth—
hair a golden helmet, plate held like a god's attribute,
like hungry Minerva

like an ancient statue slowly shrinking as the desert winds
of seashells and low-cal rice cakes
blow all about you.

Sally—the lone and level sands
stretch far away. Across the distance you watch me
like the Mona Lisa, like a predator or a carnivore—
like something hungry.

Literally to my face

Erin J. Doyle

(a found poem taken from things said by people who care about my well being)

just how much do you weigh?
i know you said you want to gain strength but
you actually want to lose weight

i saw you eating cake and i was like
oh, honey no!
you have to stick to fruit and
i know you said you're not interested but
i'll send you the diet info anyway because
you aren't allowed to get enjoyment out of eating
you'd be a better person if you ate more plain foods

i can say this to you because i love you
you aren't strong enough and
it hurts me that you don't think about how it makes
me feel
when you eat
isn't that enough motivation for you?

i realised we were almost the same size and i was like
oh my god this,
this is my wakeup call!
but you're not that fat
i'll stop you before you get that big
i'll make you thin whether you like it or not
because it's less about you and more about the
people who have to look at you

now, don't go acting upset
it's fine for you to look like that
i'm just saying that

i

personally
would have to kill myself

i don't believe you
i've never seen anyone say
anything mean to you or any other
fat person
you're just making it up because
you've got low self-esteem

Dream-River

Trevor M Landers

ethereal
astonishing beauty
evoked through rapturous lensing,
swooping and gliding down rushing over stones
descending into your depths
alongside schools of startled fish,
I wish I was a frigate bird
witnessing from above the uncanny patterns
the waterways carve through the landscape.
a reaffirmation of the beauty of you, river,
and an urgent call to protect you
mainly, from all human-kind.

The Doors Of Dim Im/Perception

Gerard Sarnat

August afternoon down by the barn
With buddies doing what we do

Kids across forest creek make too much
Noise for us, disturb [un]natural mood

But then I start wondering to myself if they
Instead were our favored grandchildren

If you would be so damn annoyed by ruckus
—Before just blasting out Jim Morrison.

Duplicity

Denise O'Hagan

It began well. Loneliness took a back seat
In my new surrounds, my hastily appointed,
Pandemic-induced home-office where,
Bubbled away from the push and shove
Of city streets, the boredom of the boardroom,
My natural shyness ventured out, asserted itself;
Found solitude to its liking, demanded more.
In my new continuum, with the keyboard
My slim black portal to the outside world,
I cranked up the pace, accomplished what I had
To do in record time and, like a latent adolescent
Dizzied by the siren call of cyberspace, wallowed in
A myriad sites and groups, buffered by geography
And the knowledge I would likely never meet
The people behind the posts. There's relief in that.

Most of the time, I hold my duplicity at bay,
Quell the flaring of frustration that there's nothing
Between like and love, no way to say unsure,
Or give doubt due consideration. Yet in all this
I am complicit, and push away a foggy awareness
That a certain levelling out is taking place, that
I'm choking in the silken clutch of supposed
Communication. My coffee grows cold; so too
The irony that I've never had so many friends,
Yet have seen my neighbour only once.

Wanting Blue

Trish Veltman

late

pee in bottle
shake
and wait

cross fingers for blue

clock hands snail
five minutes a desert
a continent

ears conch shells to baited breath
heart knells in tight chest
waiting for blue

in no man's land

in limbo

mutter litany of amulets
please be blue don't be red please be blue

last minute
sixty seconds sprint to zero
twist lid
splash wrist
drips

spill

on pale carpet

red

Poet Biographies

- Tony Beyer** Tony Beyer writes in Taranaki, New Zealand; recent poems online in *Allegro*, *Mudlark*, *Otoliths* and *Stone Poetry Journal*.
- Molly Crighton** Molly Crighton is a Dunedin writer. She placed third in the 2021 Page and Blackmore story competition, was a resident for the 2021 Young Writers' Festival, and was a featured poet for 2019's National Poetry Day.
- Conor Doherty** Conor Doherty is a student living in Tāmaki Makaurau. They enjoy taking long walks through the parks in the city, looking pensive, and thinking about what they will write later.
- Erin J. Doyle** Erin J. Doyle is a scientist, fiction writer, and poet, who occasional goes on big adventures. Her work has previously been published in *Brief*, *JAAM*, *Mayhem*, *Best of Auckland*, and the *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook*.
- Alexandra Fraser** Alexandra Fraser is an Auckland poet and has had her poetry published here and there for years. This includes two collections, *Star Trails* and *Conversations by Owl-light*. She is sporadically working on a third poetry collection. She is a graduate of AUT's MCW programme.
- Miriama Gemmell** Ko Ngāti Pāhauwera, Ngāti Rakaipaaka, Ngāti Kahungunu ngā iwi. Miriama's poetry has recently been published in *Te Whē*, *Kapohau* and *Ko Aotearoa Tātou*. She washes yoghurt pots and feels closer to her tīpuna.
- Hayden Hyams** Hayden Hyams is currently based in the U.K. His poetry can be found in the *Poetry Zealand Yearbook*, *Landfall*, *Takahe*, *London Grip*, *Fast Fibres*, *Tarot*, *Mayhem* and *Milly Magazine*. He is working on his first collection.

- Sevgi Ikinç** Sevgi Ikinç's biggest joy in life is reading. She writes poems, short stories and blogs on Medium. Her poems were published in *More of Us* 2019 and *Somewhere a Cleaner* in 2020.
- Gail Ingram** Gail Ingram, author of *Contents Under Pressure* (Pūkeko Publications 2019) is an award-winning writer from Ōtautahi. Her work has appeared widely. She is an editor for *a fine line* and *Flash Frontier*, and a creative-writing teacher in Christchurch. More at theseventhletter.nz
- Amanda Joshua** Amanda Joshua has writing published in *Starling*, *Sweet Mammalian*, *The Friday Poem*, *Blackmail Press*, *Kate Magazine*, *Craccum*, *Tarot*, *Turbine*, *foam:e*, *LondonGrip* and *Poetry NZ*. In her spare time, she likes to read and contemplate dropping her law degree.
- Hebe Kearney** Hebe Kearney (they/them) is a queer poet who lives in Tāmaki Makaurau. Their work has appeared in publications including: *Mayhem*, *Starling*, *takahē*, and *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook 2021* and *2022*.
- Trevor M Landers** Trevor M Landers is a psychotherapist and academic manager who lives in Taranaki. He recently completed a Master of Narrative Therapy and Community Work. He also edits *Mātātūhi Taranaki*: A regional bilingual journal of literature. matatuhitaranaki.ac.nz
- Jackson McCarthy** Jackson McCarthy is a poet and student from Tāmaki Makaurau. He was a finalist for the Schools Poetry Award 2021.
- Anna McKay** Anna McKay lives in Christchurch where she works as a digital artist. Her hobbies include reading, writing, watching movies, listening to podcasts, all things spiritual and trying to figure out this thing we call life.
- Denise O'Hagan** Denise O'Hagan is an award-winning editor and poet, born in Rome and based in Sydney. She has a background in commercial book publishing in the UK and Australia. Her poetry is published internationally and has received numerous awards. More at denise-ohagan.com

- Christopher Palmer** Christopher Palmer is a poet and visual artist based in Canberra. He's been published in eleven countries, including in *Takahē*, the *Australian Poetry Journal*, and *Blue Collar Review* among others. His first collection, *Afterlives*, was published by Ginninderra Press in 2016.
- Erin Ramsay** Erin Ramsay is a Pākehā non-binary poet (she/her, mostly in the drag sense, and occasionally he/they). She moved to windy Pōneke this year to pursue an MA in History at Victoria (tentatively on the history of non-binary and gender nonconforming people in New Zealand).
- Robyn Restieaux** Robyn is a newly- and early-retired secondary English teacher, finally getting the time to indulge in her own writing after so many years of nourishing the writing of others. A privilege at both ends!
- Gerard Sarnat** Gerard Sarnat MD's authored *HOMELESS CHRONICLES*, *Disputes*, *17s*, and *Melting Ice King*. Gerry is published widely internationally, including *NY Times*, *Harvard*, *American Journal Poetry*, and *Poetry Quarterly*. gerardsarnat.com
- Grace Shelley** Grace Shelley is a writer and teacher from Tāmaki Makaurau. She edits *Overcommunicate*, a literary journal which publishes works by queer writers and artists.
- Ian C Smith** Ian C Smith's work has been widely published. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island.
- Trish Veltman** Trish Veltman writes poetry and fiction, and a blog verveview.com. She has poems published widely. Her story *Shoelaces* won Page & Blackmore/NZSAs 2020 short story competition, and *First, Joseph* won the 2021 Cambridge Autumn Festival short story competition.

