

*Trace Your Fingers Over the
Edges of Me*



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*Trace Your Fingers
Over the Edges of Me*

Oliver Doe

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Oliver Doe is an artist, writer and curator from London, currently working in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK. His first book was published by the LUMA Foundation in 2014 as part of the 89Plus & Poetry Will Be Made By All! projects, and he has since self-published a collection of poetry and drawings, 'Salty Sweet', as well as a number of pamphlets, and had inclusions in publications by Papaya Press and Zach Roddis, whilst performing as part of Durham Book Festival 2016. He continues to perform, produce and exhibit visual art and music in relation to poetic writing.

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*“Soon, sampled by everyone,
Stale and pallid,
I’ll come out
And mumble toothlessly
That today I’m
“Remarkably candid.”*

- Vladimir Mayakovsky
“Облако в штанах”

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Chapter One

I was so nervous that time





III

“Oh, Chr*st, he’s gonna read another
fucking haiku...”

My throat had seized up, he could see right
through my shirt. How embarrassing.

IV

Hyde Park, circa nine o'clock
at some point, some summer
*(I think I may have been
seventeen)*

and there's a show behind those panels over there.
We can hear Westlife, we laugh, close enough
to hear songs that we don't really know
and try to sing along, drunk, vaguely in key.

Three buttons undone (and probably a warm bottle
of cheap vodka tucked into the back of my jeans),
neck bare, staring at the reflections of the stage
lights

on the clouds. My eyes caught glancing once too
many;

found ourselves under a tree.

It was still a sapling, really,

protective plastic tube still cradling the base of it's
trunk

(only as thick as my arm, pressed against it).

*I know it seems melodramatic, but I swear that I
remember fireworks going off just after our lips met,
as if it were some tacky end-scene from a terrible
American Rom-Com. I was the quirky, conflicted
blonde (and so I ended up two years later) and you
the broody guy with well-maintained stubble (I*

suppose you did too). I don't think we expected it, and didn't expect it again, just carried on listening, watching those fireworks, excited and drunk. I don't remember either of us leaving.

I might have only seen you twice since,
and now only think of it having seen
your painting in an email newsletter.
It's nice (really) to see you doing better than me.

XXVI

I was so nervous that time,
I stepped on a hairdryer in the dark
as I tried to find my feet.

I was so nervous that time,
I slept on the floor in the other room
in case you saw me naked.

I was so nervous that time,
I wrote an ambiguous poem about it
nearly seven years later.

XXIX

His name was sadness, it was beautiful
as his bright lips and pale skin
seen so often through tobacco haze
at rooftop parties, that spirit of smoke.
And like smoke, he looked through me,
as I lingered, high, and watched
my desires become fluid
as the warm drink in my hand.

XXXIV

I saw you kiss her
and I know we were both drunk;
both felt your unease.

I saw you kiss her
and I know we were both drunk;
both felt your unease.

I saw you kiss her
and I know we were both drunk;
both felt your unease.

I saw you kiss her
and I know we were both drunk;
both felt your unease.

XLVII

How brief those awkward summers
when our tired eyes met, semi-naked in parks,
our careful bodies speaking a language of silence.

I will hide that desire in restless dreams,
in such quiet (I can see the look in my own eyes)
as our small world makes its peace;

And the nervous dew on this morning's grass
will tremble as my hands once did
at the sight of you in love with life.

XXXIX

I saw you, AH,
no shirt,
we shared a bed
and I barely dreamt
 (though I knew you had no
 cause for me).
Six years later and I,
with no cause for you,
still think back, with reason,
to bare chest and bed;
 I wonder who sees it now,
 and hope
they have cause for you.

XVII

[Figure 1] is dressed almost entirely in black (the T-shirt, now eight years old, is faded to more of a charcoal hue) save for a cracked and barely legible white print of a well-known L.A. hardcore band's logo.

[Figure 2] is dressed also in black jeans, but wears a plain white T-shirt (tucked in) under a denim jacket, and a pair of tortoiseshell glasses.

[Figure 2] does not wear shoes and is barefoot.

[The room] is of little visual interest: magnolia walls, dark green carpet, and a single veneered wood chest of drawers in the far corner (contents unknown).

[Figure 1]: I heard that record by [Figure 3, *unknown*] the other day. Sounds pretty good, better than the last... the lyrics are a bit weird though.

[Figure 2]: There are twenty-nine bones in my left hand; I know [Figure 3] was right about that.

[Figure 1]: Right... but why don't you use them? I mean, to make *music*?

[Figure 2]: [Figure 3] did that for me, I need them for other things. Maybe you don't understand yet.

[Figure 1] twists his right shoe into the pile of the carpet, back and forth, for a few seconds, and looks at the left hand.

[Figure 1]: Maybe. I can't see myself doing that. I can't see another use for my left hand. Not yet.

[Figure 2]: I have a book I can give you to read. It's called 'If you didn't know, you know now'

[Figure 2] pads over towards the chest of drawers, opening the first and rummaging, seemingly aimlessly, through stacks of paper, old cards and photographs. [Figure 2] pulls out a small, tattered copy of 'If you didn't know, you know now', knocking a [REDACTED] penny drops to onto the carpet and a number of five pence pieces spin gracelessly on top of the papers.

[Figure 2]: So...

[Figure 1]: I see

[Figure 1] takes the book from [Figure 2]'s outstretched left hand. The cover feels stiff and waxy. (It will take over three years to actually

read it.)

[Figure 2]: There is no dialogue: the entire book is a single monologue. You should recognize that from [Figure 3]'s record, it's quite similar.

XI

Tell me about the first time
that you listened to avant-garde jazz
whilst you had sex...

XVI

I once tried to inflate a full-sized double airbed for a friend with a bicycle pump (I did it in exchange for a few beers). At first, it seemed like a reasonably manageable task, before you realize quite how big a double bed is (and how small a bicycle pump is). Clearly exhausted in the 31°C heat, he came and put a menthol cigarette between my lips from behind, one hand on my shoulder, and lit it with a paper match from a book that had been in his pocket (from the counter of a Chinese restaurant somewhere in Essex) for 3 months. I turned to look and smile a thank you, but saw just my own reflection in blue-tinted aviator sunglasses. Eventually I gave up on the airbed when it was about half-full (that was enough). I never even liked menthol cigarettes, except just in that moment. Maybe I'd like them more now, even though I don't smoke, if he hadn't been wearing those sunglasses.

V

I saw an old photograph of B.M. in a magazine
when I was eleven.

I keep seeing that picture, *what's wrong with this
picture.*



Chapter Two

Perhaps I too will find

Walt Whitman





XX

Collapse your bones
into my softest tissue
- pearlescent over veins -
and ache your way to me.

XV

If I really am invisible,
I will walk through all of the aisles of the
supermarket,
past the cereal,
past the tins of tomatoes
and the jam and pasta,
and I will gently touch all of the melons (you don't
eat the skin)
and I will look directly into the red laser of the
scanners,
and I won't be blinded.

If I really am invisible,
I will quietly put items in other peoples' baskets;
a packet of basil,
a can of fruit salad
or some butter or flour,
and maybe a pair of bananas (just the two)
and I will watch as you put them onto the conveyor
belt,
and pay for them anyway.

If I really am invisible,
I will just be a social experiment
in a suburban supermarket,
because I have so little else to do

other than find the dusty corners of the internet
and bury myself there.

Perhaps I too will find Walt Whitman,
but I will not be his angel.

IX

I am a black and white cat
I am a wool jacket with silk lining
I am a high definition television playing an old
VHS tape
I am a one-size-fits-all T-shirt
I am a bottle of peach iced tea left in the sun
I am a five-blade Swiss army knife
I am a pen with no ink that I still keep
I am a bag of sweet and salty popcorn
I am a grey IKEA sofa bed
I am a writer running out of sentences

XLIX

Sexuality:
I separated my soul
in two parts for you!

VI

I wish you could see me now...
pink and existing
much like you never thought it would.

I sang for your harmonies
and traced around your drawn-out thoughts,
waiting with a suitcase
for time to come with me, too|

XXIV

Tongue has often cried over the telephone
who am I?
outside the bar where M.K. had paid me
for digging holes in Middlesbrough
or lying on my carpeted floor last winter.
I wonder the same
in the shower most days,
looking down at my Self
and drawing words on my thighs.
I have no holes to dig *here* any more;
I have not been up enough
to go further down.

LXIV

When tiredness strikes, Sunday,
with John on the stereo
 and Jake on the mind (it's
distracting me from my Selected Poems of Frank
O'Hara),
bones lie heavy, and love
for nothing
 - and I do nothing just to fill the
slow-moving afternoon –
but love and loneliness.

Yesterday, CL
etched lines into my leg,
perfect black and broken,
 and again, imperfection
 slipped its hands under my skin
and into my heart.

Sentences seem to have collapsed
into inadequate opposites,
 like sex,
distracting mind from mouth,
and letting thoughts rest heavy, and fade
to nothing
- and I need something to fill the chambers
of my heart –
but love and loneliness.

[Figure 1] lies prostrate on the floor, staring at a small crack in the centre of the ceiling. [Figure 2] looms above their head, gazing down.

[Figure 1]: I read your book...

[Figure 2]: and?

[Figure 1]: ...and I cannot love [REDACTED].

[Figure 2]: I hope you realize that wasn't the point. That character is meant to be a metaphor, a story that's inside the body, to be drawn out-

[Figure 1]: Not [REDACTED], him!

[Figure 2]: ...and why not?

[Figure 1]: I suppose that I'm terrified of the prospect of love, not least love for [REDACTED]. It's not much of a surprise...

[Figure 2]: You'll learn to live with that.

XIX

As I speak, as I think, I recognize that my voice and my words act like a minor second. There is a dissonance in my vocal c(h)ords that resonates throughout my being.

You can hear it in all of my words.

You can hear it in my voice as I read to you.

You can hear it in the sounds I make as we sleep together.

You can hear it in my late-night phone calls and texts.

I can hear it when I kiss you.

I can hear it when I read back this writing.

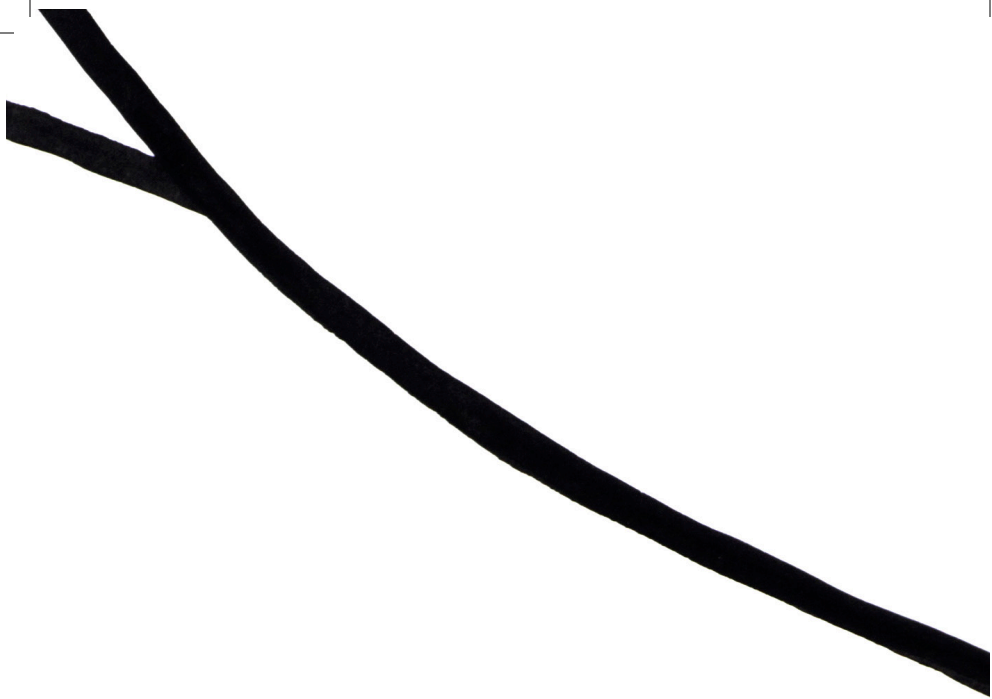
I can hear it when I sing.

I can hear it when I sit in silence.

As I try to tune one string, the tension pulls another out of tune; as I loosen it back it tweaks another one out of tune. I am both the saxophone and trumpet at the start of a slightly warped *Ah-Leu-Cha* record, never quite in harmony. I, and You, will play that record until the grooves wear out.

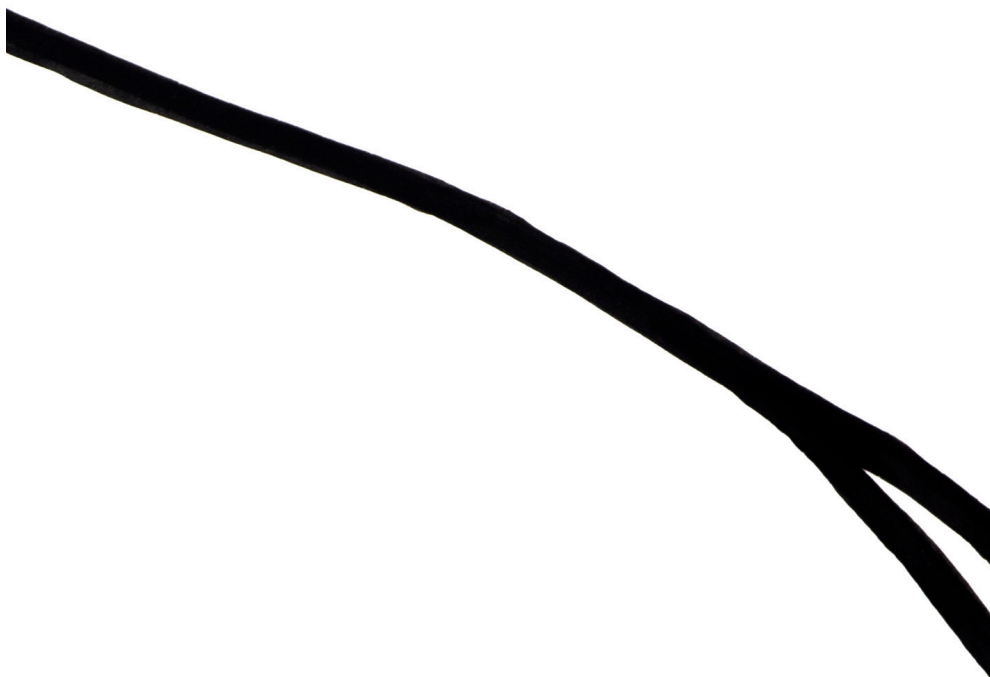
XII

I own three pairs of nearly identical black jeans, distinguishable only by the varying small marks of paint scattered across their knees or the small tears by their pockets. All three of them are totally different to me, each with their own stories, their own personalities, but those who see me with any form of regularity probably just think I wear the same trousers every day. I am the same, nearly every day, to you, but I am never the same to myself.



Chapter Three

Oh, absent body





XLVI

Oh, absent body:
Metronome of my heart,
and sweet harmony to my voice...

Find me in your veins,
or in the pit of your heart,
always wanting after you.

XLIII

1.

September 6th,
my mind is full of flowers
and moving pictures of clouds
that cannot find their form in a crowded sky.
Still, I have no images
to translate to verse for You;
I am staring at myself
naked in the mirror
that warps my chest and hair
(not that it will do me
any good at all).

2.

Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy,
Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy,
Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy,
Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy,
Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy,
Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy,
Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy, Intimacy,
Intimacy.

3.

Our intimacy
puts miles in the eight inches
between our bodies.

4.

September 7th, the clouds are fragmented and still,
and your memory takes myriad forms: the coffee
stain on my duvet, a blue t-shirt (that I cannot
find), a Pulp record, and an unlit scented candle.

*I hope that you collected me
around you
in the same way.*

You surround me
in quiet ways,
with a voice so loud.

XXXVI

A year or so ago,
I tattooed a heart
on the front of my hip.
Loveless and wine-drunk, sang
as my skin took up
the needles' offering.
I look down now; as
blue and deep below
my skin as you have been,
it lies as you have done,
gently, in my bed,
and calls me to find love.

XXXI

If I close my eyes
I can feel your breath on my neck.
In the morning,
let's make love when we're barely awake,
then fall back asleep again
to breathe on each others' necks.

LVIII

Our bodies fell into each other,
both in need
and both unsure
(for different reasons).

You laughed at me, so happy to realise that there, the sea was warm, even as I glowed like a harvest moon in the calm water. There, with you, I forgot my scars and let your hands cover my back.

Our mouths collapsed into each other,
both for want
of safe love
(for different reasons).

I smile, day after day, at that picture of you lying beautiful in well-kempt grass, a picture of happiness. Here, without you, I forget my surroundings and let your grace fill my lungs.

Fall with me,
for want,
or for need,
but for the same reason as I fall too.

XXXVII

Tell me why I stay...

I have found no love here,

 but I have brought love back
and kept it wrapped in tissue between books, safe
to know that my love is around me, my home
built from the walls of our bodies...

 and yet its door is three hundred miles away
 and I have little love for that place, but you,
now.

I am distanced from those cars, and towers, and
crowds

but then, too, distanced from the embrace of your
bones.

I have made my bed here,
where I feel you not between its sheets,
but in the biting winds,

 indefinitely longing for you
 but content in the quiet.

My soul will churn away through back-streets,
writing stories step by step
and distancing myself to a character in a narrative
of constant absence.

I have found no love here,

 but I have brought love back,
 and bring love with me every time I return.

LIV

Carry me, beating heart,
to the comfort of another body
to drink and dance
to bed
to the black spaces in between scenes
 and to the blank spaces in between lines
to the warmth of foreign tongues
 or to the void of what we know.

Carry me, tired lungs,
to the relief of another's breaths
to kiss and caress
to bed
to the interludes in between songs
 and to the blank spaces in between veins
to the warmth of foreign beds
 or to the depths of what we've forgotten.

XLIV

I waved at you in the street

~

I don't think you saw me,
As if you ever had.

LVI

Running out of words for love,
 perhaps for loving more than I can write
 perhaps for exhausting my voice
as my mother tongue abandons me,
I author my feelings with inked lines on skin,
with meaningless shapes that mirror my chest...

The piano has one key out of tune,
 a resonating vibrato that carries down the
hall
and through every bone in my body *in your body*
as I know that key is the key to the words that I
lack –
locked out by desire
 and a need to be yours...

...but my real solution is to listen,
every phrase of yours, a sonnet
 that works its way between my ribs
 to dilute my bloodstream!
Oh, sorry heart, listen close
to find that word.

XXXVIII

I wish I could find
more in you now, than I did
seven years ago.

XXX

That first sentence read by Mayakovsky,
and you feel paled
but safe in the arms of a shaven-headed angel
whose words and stare
are one and the same;
words for supermarkets
words for sex
words for gazing at people in the street
that might make fingertips frail
or knees weak.

I will be bought by no shred of heart
(except, for once, my own,
when I wake to see you in the morning)
and will sift through the chambers of it
to find your desires.

Oh, to catch those right words:
in what sullen ventricle?
‘Lust’ appearing amongst my platelets,
and ‘longing’ within my plasma...
The tastelessness of iron rises in my lips,
bitter as my coffee
and blush as the flowers that died
outside my window,
thinking that you’ll come here in two weeks
before I have wilted again.


Will I read you these words?
or will I pore over Volodya
as you wash your hair in the other room,
my mouth on fire,
and your eyes so weary.





Chapter Four

Body, I have given you
my all





L

Body,
I have given you my all.
My skin is dry and my palms open to the sun,
ready to receive (the pockets of my soul are empty)
the two cents of a permanently clouded sky
I stay indoors most days now.

Body,
you are not me.
I have cried and sweated salt for our soil,
I have lain naked and dreaming
of nothing but an ambiguous blonde figure
at the foot of my bed,
sexless and despondent, but still with some purpose
for
me, absent from touch.

What can *I* deny?

I imagine my future, fluid,
in halogen shadows pink and blue and green
on my ceiling
whose white body has been looked upon
more times than my pale chest.

Time has bitten my tongue...

...

Body,
you are lost,
pulling me every which way

(*oh, uncertain shell, give me direction*),
failing lungs and heart and legs and eyes
and all the rest along the way;
I feel your flesh under my skin.
It is not you who loves.
It is not you who smiles.
It is not you who cries
or who haplessly serenades at a piano.
I woke in the morning and remembered
you well,
folded within my bed sheets
like an old shirt creased
I pulled you on
every day for twenty-two years
and returned to my habits *whatever they may be*.
Body,
you've called to me in feverish tones
'til I fall dry-mouthed and tired into the fingers of
affection
where you look down at me sweetly.
I have looked down on you,
but it was more with bitterness as I have
seen your past;
do not hold me like that, Body,
do not caress my shoulders as I sleep
do not breathe wet on my neck
do not brush back my hair -
you are not mine.

Where are your boundaries?

Are they aligned with the periphery of my sight?

Body,

I have archived the sun sweat between my legs,

I have indexed every hair on my arms

in a library of veins seen through translucent skin

(a few years ago, Body,

they found a network of underground rivers on

Mars)

for no reason but to document myself

in relation to you.

Yet,

Body,

You have never known a lover

and no lover has known all your marks;

cascade yourself into my blood and bones

and pearlescent spit and semen,

and maybe,

Body,

you'll know me.

LI

Behind my pink tongue,
I am foreign to myself
and unknown to You.

LXI

Touch my eyelids
with a touch as soft as chalk,
whilst my mind crumbles around my skin.
Your breath on my neck barely lingers,
translucent
and tragic.

*I think the most tragic thing I've ever seen
was you smoking on your own*

My legs ache
and ache for love,
whilst my bones collapse into my bed.

X

Once, I tried to imagine attempting to apply Le Corbusier's principles to my own body. How could I make my body a home? How could I make it sturdy, welcoming, beautiful?

1. the basis of my new aesthetic is to replace the walls that I have built up around myself with a number of sleek, reinforced columns. These new *limbs and bones* will bear the structural and emotional load of my body and shall open up space about my person to love, to cry, to fear, to cherish...

2. the use of my internalised feelings, and physical being, shall not be restricted. My lungs shall be open plan, to breathe in whatever atmosphere I may inhabit; my heart shall pump blood, unhindered, throughout; and my beliefs about my sexuality, (lack of) religion, and mortality shall be explored freely and open-endedly.

3. the façade I build up around my Self will no longer rely on my physical or emotional needs, but instead my *desires*. My flesh, hair and clothing shall no longer bear the marks of physical or mental anxieties, but shall be sketchbooks for exploration of external ideas and beauty.

It is on points 4 and 5 that there is some trouble translating a relevant application:

4. How do I light my Self evenly? How can I make all aspects of my life balanced and equal? Which parts need more light (or less)?

5. How do I bring nature closer to my Self? Do I lie in dew-soaked grass, or dive naked into freezing lakes? These serve no real function (other than to give the artist, starved of ideas, something escapist about which to write), and here, functionality is key.

I am still so far from a perfect modernist building. But then, is it not more interesting to inhabit a house with small structural and cosmetic flaws, to give oneself something to fix? I want to challenge my Self. I want to break down my columns until my structure is straining, and to be able to count every beautiful thing that is there.

I will plant my garden outside of my Self, and let the rain soak through to my bones, and I will let parts of my Self glow brightly, or hide away, and change with the rotations of the sun and reflections of the moon.

LX

I have asked myself one thousand questions
what price is comfort
how heavy is identity...
to which my body has no answers,
which cast the first stone upon my chest
or legs
or throat
or throws me into confusion and longing.
I have told myself one thousand stories
of belonging
of being
to which my body has one thousand questions,
sifting through layers of skin
or blood
or bone
to seek solutions and pay debts to history.
...
Yet I stay resolute in confusion, a
home I am used to,
and here – construct selfhood
that in time I'll trust.

XXII

Last night I managed
to rub a large patch of skin
up and down and up and down
red raw
on the outside of my right forearm.
I was running out of breath
trying to dance as it happened;
I could taste the salt of my sweat
on my lips
glistening
and cascading from my forehead.
I like to think I looked as if I were somewhere
between an elegant drawing by Jean Cocteau
and a weedy sort of Tom of Finland character
in my black jeans and boots.
But in reality, I just looked
like a red and sweaty mess
with a figure past its prime.
I have been staring at that patch of pink
for five minutes now,
trying to see your face in it
but it's only a collection of blood under my skin
(I was never good at finding shapes in the clouds)
and I could never equate that to you.
You are bloodless under my skin,
outside of my veins,
but inside all of me.

XXXII

An attempt to draw a memory of your body with
words fails,
as my pen falters too, blotting on paper,
ink soaking back up fingertips.

Describe for me
the shape of your thigh
or the contours of your collar bone
and my line will trace
over your tongue
and across your chest,
down to my shoulder.

But from there,
my hands shakes as I try to draw my own body
in relation to yours,
its edges hard
and dissolute, translucent...
every limb a flurry of contours,
every bone fluid under surface.

Whilst you are a picture of beauty,
I am an unfinished portrait
trying to find its form.

XLV

What is left but my skin to survive me?
What part of my heart have I not given?
I am left cradling my aching body in sleep;
 complexion of cotton
 texture of cotton
 weight of cotton
 and yet I still cannot lift myself.

If the sky does not look the same
as it does in your presence,
 then I shall look to the grass instead
 and hope that you are growing beneath me
you
are always growing within me
(and perhaps even growing out of me).
 And now I still cannot lift myself...

Frank! Tell me what to do!
 Frankly, I don't want to do anything
 but lie down today, and read
and write about staring at my ceiling and loving
(what else really is there?).
Je ne sais pas qu'Est-ce que c'est
 que je veux faire, mais se rapeller...

What is left but a word to survive me?
What part of my tongue have I not given?
Today I am no lover,
 and I'll let Frank judge me
 for admiring portraits and their paint.
If I cannot lift myself,
 perhaps your likeness can.

[Figure 2] gazes blankly into a mirror mounted slightly askew on the wall. [Figure 1] stands behind, one hand on [Figure 2]'s left shoulder, visibly upset.

[Figure 1]: You've loved more than I ever will.

[Figure 2]: ...and it's been beautiful, honestly. [Figure 3] will hope it stays that way.

[Figure 1]: And what about your book? '██████████
██████████'?

[Figure 2]: I've thumbed through that well; I've taken what I can from it. Now it's a question of whether to settle...

A long pause interrupts. [Figure 2] removes the hand from [Figure 1]'s shoulder.

...or to keep questioning it all.

[Figure 1]: Is it worth questioning?

[Figure 2]: It will be for you! I think so, anyway...

[Figure 2] steps to one side, away from the mirror and [Figure 1], pacing back and forth for a minute, eyes fixed on the floor, before turning to face [Figure 1].

[Figure 1]: But wh–

[Figure 2]: I've loved more than I ever could. I've loved more than I ever could, and, still, I don't know my own body...

XIV

I cannot bear to
think of another person's
eyes on my body.

LV

Do not leave me foreign inside myself,
buried beneath fingernails and hair
with my stomach speaking in tongues...

 You found me between my legs
 but I have somehow ended up
 next to my heart.

Who's been wearing my clothes? *I still see their
shadow in my mirror*

they've left my eyelids naked!

...And now my blind silence
is competing with chromosomes,
dueling, *all dressed in white*

not the usual black,

for the rights to my image –

an image which stares back at itself like a puzzle
to solve

an image which keeps notes on its smallest
discrepancies

an image which drinks three cups of tea, staring
out the window in the early morning golden street
light

 and thinks of little but shades of pink;

an image whose voice can make me cry...

But will those tears sow salt on my desire?
...Or will my skin maintain my margins?
The vibrations of queer song
go still in my heart, and
the movements of my fingers
take hold of the movements behind my teeth;
any sense of identity
has been eaten by literature
 and regurgitated carefully into the mould
of a man
 whose blood congeals at thoughts of
himself.

Blood that cannot be taken
blood that can barely be felt
blood that bled for itself, a futile task
 to be left with little but shades of pink;
blood at the sight of which I no longer cry...

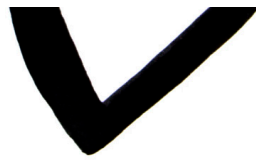
In moments of bliss,
pinned cheaply to my heart like instant photographs
(*why should I share you?*),
the bruises on my soul will fade
into the finest self-portraits.
The words on my lips will flow

into the cracks on yours...

And none of it will matter.

No word or painted beauty
will still the tremors of sex,
and no sex or gender
will still the pleasures of love.

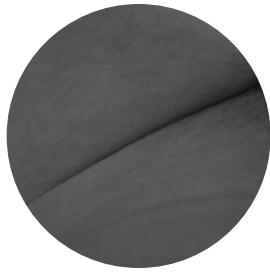




Chapter Five

I can't remember the last
time I used cardamom





XXVIII

Touch me as I touch you
Touch me as a lover
Touch me as a friend
Touch me as I wear a shirt that doesn't fit
Touch me as you play with my hair
Touch me as I turn in an empty bed
Touch me as I dream of Sisyphus and Tantalus
Touch me as I tell morose stories
Touch me as I make us tea
Touch me as I travel on trains to you
Touch me as a man
Touch me as a woman
Touch me as you need me
Touch me as you want me
Touch me as you want to touch me
Touch me, as I cannot.

XLI

“You’re the most normal person I’ve met all
night.”

But I’ve never met you.

LXII

Pulling my shirt over my head,
a memory returns
 of your cold fingertips
 on my ribcage, pale
in the morning sun of summer...

Inertia bites back
with one arm through the sleeve,
and a now cold mouthful of tea
held in the back my throat.

Swallow.

Pulling my thoughts back together,
a desire returns
 for some warm embrace
 on my torso, cold
on this dusky February afternoon.

Seclusion comes back
with one eye in the mirror,
and a fresh cup of coffee
sat in front of my hands.

Swallow.

VII

You told me via MSN that you wouldn't have
kissed me.

XXVII

Eyes flutter under closed lids; the opening arpeggios of *Moonlight Sonata* resonate through laptop speakers through thighs. A fingernail strokes back and forth over bare chest, blue veins showing through pale skin in the dim glow of weekend morning light. Neck sticks to the creaking leather of the chair, hair bristling on the surface. Thoughts turn to the neck of another body, hair pulled up by sleep against a twisted pillow, revealing three freckles and a pink impression from a crease in the cotton. Lips hover over the back of the neck, breathing softly until eyes twitch open, noticing the piano has ceased its mad ascents. The smell of coffee, now cold, lingers like the smell of perfume on that pillow from last weekend.

XIII

In my orange shirt, I look like a worse-for-wear, miserable St. Valentine (orange has never really suited me), and I don't particularly like yoghurt (I'm terribly sorry, Frank). I haven't been to the Frick, though, if anybody fancies taking me...

XL

I pulled a cardigan from the back of the cupboard.
Its torso smelt faintly of cardamom –

I can't remember the last time I used cardamom

– slipping it over my head, two thin strands of
hair catch themselves between the stitches of navy
wool of the neckline –

*silver threads woven by my own body, my extremities
manifest around my neck*

– and languish forlorn against my throbbing throat.

I spent two minutes tugging at its wrist, staring
blankly into a cup of lukewarm tea –

soy milk, one sugar, the complexion of wet cardboard

– before briefly chewing at my thumbnail and
lifting pen to narrow-ruled notebook. It always
seems that *I* am the first letter that *I* begin with,
top to bottom my | identical to my | –

*it becomes rather awkward to transcribe myself
when I am ill*



– One day soon I am going to try to begin a poem with a *Q*, but this morning, having tried to shave with no mirror in the new bathroom and missed two hairs on my jawline, I am distracted by | | hanging below my chin –

it would be too simple to return to the bathroom and trim them off

– Quite where I would start is another question. Rolling my toes stiffly into the shallow pile of cheap carpet, I close my eyes and begin to transliterate KH's piano against the sounds of vehicles passing the open French windows, lacing in subtle references to the awkwardness of gender and half-forgotten past sexual encounters. I open my eyes and quickly realise that it doesn't make sense, –

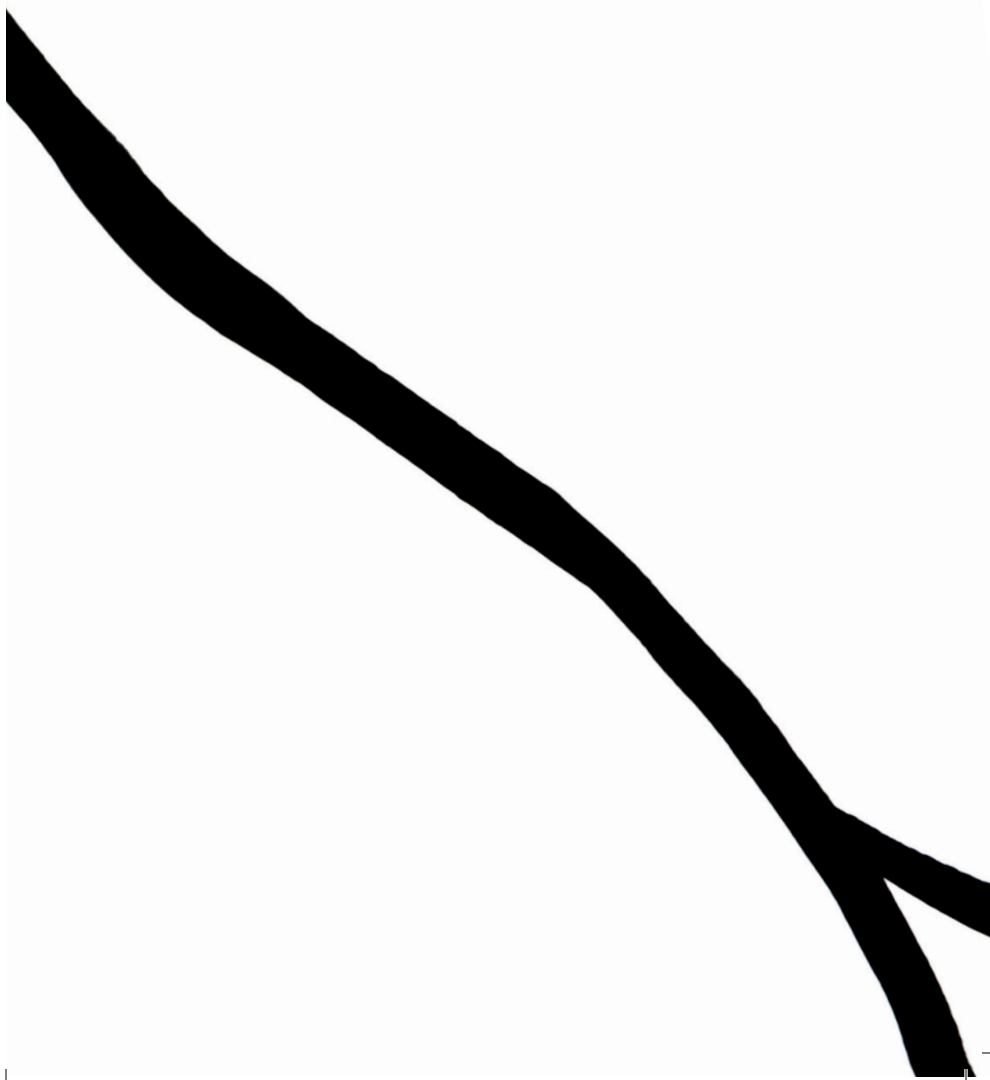
I still smell like cardamom

– but then I suppose that's the best way for me to write, so that you get some weird feeling for me, and I'm the only one that notices.



Chapter Six

Trace your fingers over the
edges of me





XLII

You met me,
drunk on tequila and cola
 and perhaps thinking me more exotic
 than you know me to be now,
before Christmas in a place
that neither of us really wanted to be.
We danced,
and kissed as night danced around us;
 and I saw you as the most beautiful in that
room,
 as you always were to me,
in every time and place
that both of us could be.

I

A finger paws a line over the contours of a ribcage.

Skin bristles, contracts, hairs raised as the
body swells with breath
and

folds back.

A heavy exhale, cotton shifts across thighs.

An arm stretches out,

presses a

button, a hum builds

I never thought of this as funny,

Another exhale, deeper, longer (was there a breath
in?)

Dry lips crack slightly, the residue of sleep built up
in the corners coats the outside of the dry lip of the
glass, the water tracing the tongue, cold and dusty
from sitting overnight.

Spine twists, bends up,

palms run across cheeks *it*

speaks another world to me.

Legs swing themselves away, down,
rubbing feet across the bare wood floor.

Radio silence.

Michael drowned out by a head rush, sat up now, a
document saved from Spring:

*“You always said you were never good on your own
Counting away the hours, staring
As the second hand eats away the time between
Working and waking.”*

Foot presses into a stray grain of rice, wedged
between two floorboards

wedged between two toes.

You and me

You and me

You and me

Mouth still not sure about that one.

II

I remember one time, whilst walking home, carrying a bag of peaches (the flat ones, they were on special offer), I saw a stone, slightly flattened like the peaches. Sat on the low wall outside a house, it reminded me exactly of one that you placed casually on my leg as we sat on the stony beach, staring at the sea, on the south coast. Somewhere, I still have that stone, in a box, or a drawer.

I enjoy those peaches.

The soft, pale skin, and the slight fold between the dimples on either side, each slightly different or misshapen. That stone had worn away on top, with a grey patch on one side. Perhaps I should keep that stone with the fruit. Either way, both remind me of you, in different ways.

XXV

*You trace your fingers over the edges of me
drawing my lines
to map a memory of my body
that you can bring home, to bed.
You've drawn me countless times before,
but each image seems to shift
and you seem to forget my boundaries
for another month.*

LXIII

Lay your bones into mine,
held tight with warm skin
as close as your breath
might be on my neck.

Weave your fingers into mine,
knit tight with warm skin

XLVIII

Your gaze moved over me like smoke,
suffocating me;
filling my lungs, I breathed you in,
inhaling your atmosphere.

You are all around me
and I am all around you
desperate to find air
in a fog of passionless longing.

My gaze courses over you like a river,
washing you;
soaking your skin, I flow around you,
absorbing your beauty.

LII

As my clock aches its way, grinding,
towards midday,
I lie naked, bathed
in the low light of sunrise

the street lamps are still on, yellow

and gazing at a stray hair,
yours,
on the bare, grey mattress
(one curled end is swaying gently with the
movements of the air from my breaths).
Millimetres of memory
contain you, perfumed

it still lingers, heady

and overwhelming.
I have all the wishes in the world,
yet only one want...

VIII

Left middle finger taps nervously
 against the *W* key
in time with Miles Davis, eyes staring at the
blinking cursor, just off beat with the snare.
Right middle finger wanders
back and f o r t h
over lower lip, chipped nail snagging
on chapped, wet skin.

I watch, as the black leather strap of my watch
slips slowly down my arm, bending the fine hairs
back. It tugs those underneath down with it until
they form a swirling, directionless spiral against
the blue-white-pink skin. I think of the hands in
a picture of a woman in The Van Gogh Museum
that we saw, curled over each other, and I want
to thread my hand into yours and stare at old oil
paintings.

LVII

Wake me with gentle hands
and sing to me with your eyes
in perfect silence,
and I will sing in wordless harmony
through broken lips.

LIII

Crossing my bedroom floor, an image of you
returns

in my towel, hung over a brass hook on the
wardrobe.

I stand nude as you did,
the scent of sex and peppermint soap and your hair
hanging in my mind,

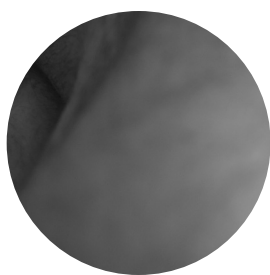
an image interrupted only by the sound
of passing traffic below the open windows.

I lie at the foot of that towel,
cheap carpet rough

against the hairs of my limbs; I think -

whilst you are not here,

I am not here for myself.





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