



SONGS
for
DIANE

GRAYSON
CHONG



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S
D YCORAX

A decorative floral arrangement is placed over the letters 'S' and 'D'. It includes a purple tulip, two yellow flowers, and a cluster of small blue flowers, all with green stems and leaves.

Baby, I know

you carry a heartache
that bleeds, unhealed.

This void inside is a wave
dragging you into its under
current over and over again.
no one comes to your aid;
you are your own life

jacket. Baby, I know
you search for my womb –
in homes, in schools, in fires.
You yearn for love in a tongue
you cannot remember.
I watched them muffle
your cries and force strange
words down your throat.
Your memories of me
are amnesia.

Baby, I know you open your
self over and over again
in search of me. You curse
me when I cannot be found.
Scream. Scream. Scream.

But, baby, I know
our grief is a passage, not a place
to stay. You will piece together
the lullabies they fractured like mix
tapes, the memories they shattered
like mosaics, our stories they tore.

Baby,
this heartache you carry
will heal.

Stolen Sisters

Go to CBC News, and you will find 308 unsolved cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women: Abigail Andrews. Ada Brown. Aielah Saric-Auger. Alannah Cardinal. Alberta Williams. Alice Netemegesic. Alicia Germaine. Amanda Cook. Amanda Simpson. Amanda Bartlett. Amber Tuccaro. Amber Guilboche. Andria Meise. Annette Holywhiteman. Angel Carlick. Angela Meyer. Angela Williams. In 2015, one quarter of all female homicide victims in Canada were Indigenous. Angela Poorman. Angeline Pete. Anne Peters. Annie Pootoogook. Annie Yassie. Ashley Machiskinic. Audrey Desjarlais. Azraya Ackabee-Kokopenace. Baby Girl. Barbara Keam. Barbara Shapwaykeesic. Beatrice Adam. Belinda Cameron. Belinda Williams. Bella Laboucan-McLean. Bernadette Ahenakew. Bernadine Quewezance. Bernice Bottle. Betsy Owens. Bonnie Jack. Bonnie Joseph. Brandy Vittrekwa. Brandy Wesaquate. Brenda Campbell. Brittany Bearspaw. Brooklyn Moose. Caitlin Potts. Caralyn King. Carol Prudhomme. Carol Davis. Caroline Bruns. Caroline Connolly. Cassandra Antone. Cathy Williams. Cecilia Nikal. Ceceilia Payash. Chantelle Bushie. Charlene Catholique. Charnelle Masakeyash. Cherisse Houle. Cheryl Duck. Cheryl Johnson. Cheryl Black. Cheyenne Fox. Christina Littlejohn. Christine Cardinal. Cindy Gladue. Claudette Osborne. Constance Cameron. Corrine Moosomin. Crystal Saunders. The homicide rate for Indigenous females between 2001 and 2015 was nearly six times higher than that for non-Indigenous females. Cynthia Audy. Danielle LaRue. Danita Bigeagle. Darlinda Ritchey. Dawn Keewatin. Dawn Crey. Deanna Bellerose. Debbie Pelletier. Deborah Sloss. Deidre Michelin. Delaine Copenace. Delena Lefthand Dixon. Della Ootoova. Delores Brown. Delores Brower. Delores Whiteman. Delphine Nikal. Desiree Oldwoman. Destiny Tom. Diana Rattlesnake. Diane Dobson. Diane Stewart. Dianne Bignell. Donna Kasyon. Donna Taylor. Doreen Hardy. Doreen Jack. Dorothy Spence. Edna Bernard. Edna Smith. Elaine Alook. Elizabeth Dorion. Elsie Sebastian. Emily Ballantyne. Emily Osmond. Emma Dixon. Ernestine Kasyon. Eva Mitchell. Evaline Cameron. Evelyn Kebalo. Felicia Solomon. Flora Muskego. Fonassa Bruyere. Frances Ellah. Freda Goodrunning. Geraldine Beardy. Geraldine Settee. Gladys Simon. Gladys Tolley. Glenda Morriseau. Glennis Edwards. Gloria Black Plume. Gloria Moody. Gloria Gladue. Heather Bellantyne. Heaven Traverse. Helen Gillings. Helene Ratfat. Henrietta Millek. Hillary Wilson. Ila Oman. Of the 174 Indigenous women missing for at least 30 days by the Canadian Police Information Centre, 111 women were identified as missing due to “unknown” circumstances or foul play.

Immaculate Basil. Irma Murdock. Jacqueline Crazybull. Jamie McGuire. Jane Bernard. Jane Sutherland. Janet Henry. Janet Sylvestre. Janice Desjarlais. Janine Wesaquate. Jarita Naistus. Jean Moccasin. Jean Sampare. Jeanne Fontaine. Jeanette Basil. Jeanette Cardinal. Jeanine St. Jean. Jeannette Chief. Jennifer Catheway. Jessica Cardinal. Joanne Ghostkeeper. Joey English. Josephine Chakasim. Joyce Hewitt. Joyce Tillotson. Juanita Cardinal. Judy Chescue. Judy Quill. Justine Cochrane. Kari Gordon. Karina Wolfe. Kathleen Leary. Katie Ballantyne. Kellie Little. Kelly Goforth. Kelly Morrisseau. Krystal Andrews. Krystle Knott. Lana Derrick. Lavina Tocher. Leah Anderson. Leanne Benwell. Leona Brule. Leslie Talley. Linda Condo. Linda Guimond. Linda Scott. Lisa Young. Loretta Capot-Blanc. Loretta Frank. Lora Banman. Loi Berens. Lori Kasprick. Lorilee Francis. Mabel Leo. Mae Morton. Maggie Burke. Maggie Mink. Maggie Natomagan. Maisy Odjick. Marcia Koostachin. Margaret Blackbird. Margaret Guylee. Margaret Vedan. Marie Banks. Marie Desjarlais. Marie Laliberte. Marie Lasas. 17% of homicides of Indigenous women occurred on a street, a road, or a highway compared to the 1% of non-Indigenous women. Marie Mike. Mariella Lennie. Marilyn Daniels. Marilyn Munroe. Marlene Abigosis. Martha Boyce. Mary Ann Birmingham. Mary Mark. Mary Hill. Mary Kreiser. Mary Lidguerre. Mary Smith. Mary Goodfellow. Mary Keadjuk. Mavis Mason. Maxine Wapass. Melanie Geddes. Melissa Chaboyer. Michelle Gurney. Michelle Hadwen. Mildred Flett. Misty Potts. Moira Erb. Monica Cardinal. Monica Jack. Myrna Montgrand. Nadine Machiskinic. Nancy Dumas. Naomi Desjarlais. Nellie Angutiguluk. Nicole Daniels. Nicolle Hands. Olivia Williams. Pamela Holopainen. Pamela Napoleon. Patricia Carpenter. Patricia Favel. Patricia Quinn. Patricia Wadhams. Pauline Brazeau. Philomene Lemay. Rachel Quinney. Ramona Shular. Ramona Wilson. Rebecca Guno. Rena Fox. Rene Gunning. Rhonda Gardiner. Rhonda Running Bird. Richele Bear. Half of the homicides of Indigenous women were committed by a family member. Roberta Elders. Roberta Ferguson. Roberta Lincoln. Rocelyn Gabriel. Rose-Ann Blackned. Rose Decoteau. Rowena Sharpe. Roxanne Charlie. Roxanne Fleming. Roxanne Isadore. Roxanne Thiara. Ruby Hardy. Ruth Cocks. Sabrina Polchies. Samantha Paul. Sandra Johnson. Sarah Obed. Sarah Skunk. Savannah Hall. Selina Wallace. Serenity. Shannon Alexander. Sharon Abraham. Sharon Merasty. Shelley Anderson. Shelly Dene. Shirley Beadry. Shirley Cletheroe. Shirley Lonethunder. Shirley Waquan. Simone Sanderson. Sindy Ruperthouse. Sonya Cywink. Stella St. Arnault. Sunshine Wood. Susan Assin. Sylvia Guiboche. Tabitha Kalluk. Tamara Chipman. Tamra Keepness. Tania Marsden. Tanya Brooks. Tanya Hill. Tanya Nepinak. Teresa Robinson.

Indigenous women represent 10% of the total population of missing women in Canada. Terrie Dauphinais. Thelma Pete. Therenia Silva. Therese Labbe. Tiffany Morrison. Tiffany Skye. Tina Fontaine. Trudy Gopher. Velma Duncan. Verna Simard. Victoria Crow Shoe. Victoria Hornbrook. Viola Panacheese. Violet Heathen. Wendy Poole.

This poem, I cannot write for there is no poetry in this.

Language Lessons

I learned to speak this from a
White woman who molds her mouth
Into *eeeees* and *ooooos* so I may learn
What the soothing sea sounds like. So
I may memorize the easy breeze
Making music with the coconut trees.
I learned to speak this from a
Man marking mangroves in his head
While teaching me about Anansi
And de duppy dem. My timid
Tongue twists into plantains and palm
Trees to imitate the songs of their voices.
I learned to speak this from my
Grandparents who always asked: *Who*
You is? Yardie. Yardie. Yardie.
You is. You is. You is.

But here, language is strict. Tight teeth. Tongue
Tries to teach itself to abandon –in’ for
–ing. *Guh* like a punch to the gut. Uh!
Ouuuuu like bruise and abuse. *Ee?* confuses
Itself with *Eh?* Here, *yuh* and *oonuh* morph
Into conjoined twins as *you. Is* becomes *are*. R
Like rasta. Rawtid. Rupture. Tongue becomes
The best backside. Beat it enough, and it will
Learn to forget the sound of the soothing
Sea. It will forget the easy breeze making music
With the coconut trees. Anansi. The duppy.
This learning. Re-learning. Re-reading. Re-
Vising. I bury the melodies until I cannot
Hear the voices singing any longer. Then, one

Day, when I lose myself among “proper”
Vowels and consonants, the voices, vex
And abandoned, rise from the ground,
Chanting *eeeees* and *ooooos* to the beat of steel
Pan drums. I laugh loudly to myself,
What is this obeah? I remember. I
Remember I learned to speak this from my

Grandparents who always asked: *Who*
you is? I answer them back:
Yardie. Yardie. Yardie.
You is. You is. You is.

A Sonnet for Prospero(s)

You love me enough to teach me your art,
Taking my tongue and twisting it into
Shapes, unnatural and base, so I may mark
The rhythm of your song. Yet, when I screw
Up the syntax, you curse me, torture me,
Beat my lips into submission until
I sing your song again. Byron, Shelley,
And Keats fill me with amnesia. I will
Forget my mother tongue, my ancestors
Suffocated by conquerors who build
Plantations in my mouth. Imitators
Transform the fruits of your labour, malaise.
 Deep within memory, parts of me die.
 Language becomes foreign; ancestors cry.

T AMORA

Back to Genesis

Your mother lies disfigured and defiled
By your belligerent fathers. Her womb
Is a scorched forest. She weeps in tides. Wild
Tigers send themselves to her hollow tomb.
The military strategy is clear –
Kill your daughters. Eat your sons. Self-preserve.
Roman, you know it's weak to show your tears.
Stones will cry for the revenge you deserve.
Rome looks at the chaotic state of her
Cubs. She has raised black ravens, not fair doves.
Feed these offending sinners to the curs.
In this war, the earth is no place for love.
 Barbarian, Mother's gluttonous lust
 Seeks to ravish and grind you back to dust.

In Farrin

Pickney, the grandmother says to her grandchildren,
Mi 'ave some story fuh tell oonuh. This room, this house,
this place holding them was meant to be “temporary” –

a refuge from political strife, safety from robberies and riots,
a shelter where the tear gas wouldn't *nyam* eyes.
Here was never meant to be “home”. The plane,

a hummingbird with pterodactyl wings, promised
a round trip. For grandmother, it became a one-way stop.
Change arrived in gradual seasons – sponsorship, working visas,

permanent resident cards, citizenship. Sever your
self from the dreams you left behind. They have no place
here. At home, conflicts worsen. Gather your family. Seek

asylum. Seven flights a day serve as escape routes to freedom.
Papa refuses to take one: *Yuh no sey mi bawn 'ere; mi dead 'ere*.
But life becomes more precious than nationalism. Learn new

languages, new stories, new histories. Here, pride for the former
home regulates itself to illustrations of islands on maps, postcards,
and dish towels. Prayers for protection recited into rosaries.

Display red and white in the office; sport green, yellow, and black
in the car, the kitchen, the bedroom. Grandmother watches
grandchildren grow up in the land she never thought

could exist. They learn foreign tongues, foreign stories,
foreign histories. Grandmother knows they will not
remember the stories she recited to them while they lay

in their cribs. Her “temporary” morphs into their “permanent”
as they forget their histories. Grandmother gazes at her
grandchildren and wonders: *Can you colonize the colonized?*

Dutty Verse: A Call to Dancehall


A border clash erupts when the air
horn blares in the distance. The noise
in my blood roars to meet its call.
Let's enter this bashment like a don.

Only the bravest wear heels to this dance
party. Don your brightest colours. You are in
competition with the hues of the flowers.
G'wan rep the flag pon yuh hip. Woi

goodas! Spice a go sey, *skin out mi pum pum.*
On the buddy mi a wine and go
Boom!
Boom!
Boom!

Watch di gyal go dung and jiggle dem batty.
Foreigners to this scene blush when legs
rise and fall into splits. Gyal grindin' pon head
top. I am the informa. Watch my hips tick-
tock and kotch to the drums. Roll to Konshens.
Kevin Lyttle. Vybz Kartel. The selecta
commands a fast wine. Which dancer
will answer the call? I dare you. I dare you.

THE
SILVER
DARK
LADY
SONNETS

A decorative floral arrangement is integrated into the text. It features a large pink peony, several yellow flowers, and clusters of small blue flowers, all with green leaves. The flowers are placed around the letters: a small bouquet on the 'T', a large pink peony and yellow flowers on the 'D', a bouquet of yellow and blue flowers on the 'S', a pink peony and blue flowers on the 'L', and a bouquet of yellow and blue flowers on the 'S' of 'SONNETS'.

WOC

for Niyosha

The first time someone called me a “woman of colour,” I cocked my head so far to the side, she thought I was stretching my neck. Me? A woman of colour? How could I claim a term reserved for my brown and black friends? To do so felt like discrediting the work they’ve done to be seen. My fair hands and feet were nothing more than white space in the portrait of a term created for them. I could not tell the woman in front of me that I considered myself too light to be considered “colour.”

The second time someone called me a “woman of colour,” he whispered it so low, I had to move my feet closer to hear him. He told me, like army ants, we infiltrate an institution never designed for our marked bodies. Insecurity morphed into vision and advocacy. I breathed in the term from the space between our lips and grew into it. What seemed too big for me at first began to fit along the contours of my body like invisible armour.

The third time someone called me a “woman of colour,” she advised me to keep walking until someone tells me to stop. Her comment stayed with me for three days and four nights. I took the term and ran to represent it in classrooms, in meetings, at conferences like a superhero in a comic book. Representation for me. Representation for the women who follow me. No longer was I the white space in all these beautiful colours, but another colour in the masterpiece.

The first time I called myself a “woman of colour,” I responded to the woman of colour who made space for me simply by being. She held her brown hand in mine for support; I held onto hers like a safety net. Together, we walk and navigate the systems of an institution meant to exclude us.

And when people tell us to stop, we keep walking.

Visible Minorities

Do you identify as a member of a visible minority in Canada? Note: Visible minority refers to whether a person belongs to a visible minority group as defined by the *Employment Equity Act* and, if so, the visible minority group to which the person belongs. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”. If “Yes”, select the options you identify with. Arab. Black, Chinese. Filipino. Japanese. Korean. Latin-American. South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.). Southeast Asian (including Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, etc.). West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.). Another visible minority group – specify. **I prefer not to answer.**

Writing shields me. Perhaps Roland Barthes is right – the death of the author, me, is a metaphysical one. On paper, race is never something I have to answer to. I am invisible on the page. White. People delight more in my sentences than my face. And when they ask, “Who wrote this?” **I prefer not to answer.**

I peruse the websites of academic institutions, spending 25% of my time reading the requirements for grad school applications and 75% reading the school’s diversity statement. Will I simply be an applicant that fulfills their diversity quota? Do I pleasure their need to feel better about themselves? Am I commodifying myself for this fetish? **I prefer not to answer.**

I shut myself in the bathroom and send an email to a woman living 500 miles away. I ask her if stating my ethnicity on graduate school applications makes me a target for violence. Will racist predators view my petite coloured body as easy prey? **I prefer not to answer.**

I know it’s useless. She and I are separated in more ways than one. She tells me to read Memmi after I spent nine minutes and eleven seconds sending her a tearful message after a boy in postcolonial theory had said, “Surely, some good has come out of colonization. The good is yet to be found.” I have been trying to find this “good” since birth. How do I tell her I have read Memmi? And Fanon. And Bhabha. And Césaire. And Said. And Spivak. Yet none of them can tell me how to blend in when I am marked. No theories on how to represent myself without

commodifying my miscegenated body exist. No cure for living with these burdens have been discovered.

I prefer to answer. To deny myself as a visible minority is to deny ancestors who escaped poverty, hunger, and tear gas to bring me here. Intentional erasure inflicts on them a second death. I hear their sobs of shame when I reject them. Hiding to escape attention is a self-inflicted violence I do not wish to endure. And so, I will announce myself; create my own theories; find my own cures. This body holds stories that academia attempts to erase over and over again. But I am here. And you will see.

Hunger

Recipes dictate my life,
mixing me together
and chopping me

apart. How do you
choose a side when no
side is a perfect

solution? Too much for one;
too little for the other.
My identities become dishes

on the menu on which I wish
to gorge. Oxtail. Curry
goat. Congee. Noodles. Rice

and peas. I try to sample
a little of everything
in this buffet. But the plate

is too small and the food
crowds into mush. I remain
at the table, trying to distinguish

the curry from the congee. Cultures
compete for my taste buds. I leave,
starving to be filled by sours and sweets.



LAVINIA

A decorative floral arrangement is placed on the left side of the letter 'L'. It includes a large pink carnation at the bottom, a smaller yellow flower above it, a red flower to the left, and a cluster of small blue flowers at the top. Green leaves are also visible.

I am tired.

i.

Boy, when did the patriarchy attack
you for being compassionate?
Loving? Kind? When did it berate
you for crying? Shove you against
the wall and inject toxic
masculinity through your veins?
You're addicted to the dosage
and find your fix in dominance,
violence, and women's silence.
When your power takes you
too far, the judge will dismiss
your submission without recourse
as he's done for centuries.
The world fights
to preserve your honour,
your innocence.

I believe your pain.
The world does, too.
But I have spent too much
emotional labour on you.
What about the emotional
labour spent on me? For me?
Women are hurting in silence.
Or just plain hurting.

ii.

I am tired of sympathizing
with a system that refuses
to sympathize with me.

Violent excuses chase
women through streets,
in bars, in schools, in homes,
hide in the seams of our clothes
and on

and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on
and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on
and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on
and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on
and on.

This blame game is a stain
that no bleach can remove.
Me. Me. Me.
But what about he?

How many more polygraphs
must we undergo?
How many more rape kits
must we hand in
for evidence? How many
more bodies must be
sacrificed before we
are believed?

How much louder
must we scream to be heard?
I cannot be silent.
Feisty woman.
Nasty woman.

Boy, when did you forget
you were born of woman?

No Rest

I prepare my soul for another funeral. I shroud her in black and usher her into another pew at another church with another group of women. We caress our prayer beads and bangles in our absent-minded haze. We watch. We wait. We wonder. While mourning the passing of our sisters, we ask, “Which of us will be next?”

No rest.

No rest.

No rest.

At this funeral, we rest in patriarchy. It lurks under us, hovers above us like miasma. Here, we sing hymns of praise. Except our voices are a cacophony of screams. Some hold their hands out and cry for our sisters gunned down in schools, in churches, in yoga studios. I ask for no benediction from a God that cums while murdering us for sport. I look to the front of the alter. In the casket lies no body and every body.

A Guide to Point Zero

1. Envision how you wish to wither. This image will exacerbate your anxiety and despair.
2. Think of your goal weight. Divide that number by 2.
3. Remove those recommended three meals a day. Replace with gum, water, black coffee. Allow yourself orange juice for dessert three days a week.
4. Decorate your tenting body with a mélange of purples, reds, blues, and greens.
5. Study your reflection in any surface – a mirror, a window, a body of water, your eyes. Spend the next five minutes convincing yourself that you don't have a problem.
6. Lie to your enemies – your friends, your family, your cat.
7. Exercise for three hours. Seven days a week.
8. Cut yourself eight times on both hips to remind yourself you are alive.
9. Cry.
 - a. Cry.
 - b. Cry.
 - c. Cry.
 - d. Cry.
 - e. Cry.
 - f. Cry.
 - g. Cry.
 - h. Cry.

Let the tears rock your skeleton and nurse your self-inflicted wounds.

10. Remind yourself, "I'm not sick enough. I'm not sick enough. I'm not sick enough."
11. Repeat steps 1 to 10 until you weigh 0.
12. Or until you die.

Travelling with Ana: A Confession

She checks up on me sometimes. Ana. When I ignore her texts and calls, she'll arrive to the veranda of my thoughts. She doesn't need a key to enter. With her, I always seem to forget to lock the door. Ana announces her presence by hugging my ribcage a little too tight like a dear friend I haven't seen in months. *Did you miss me?* Of course, I have. We've been best friends since I was nine.

One day, a friend told me she suffers from an eating disorder. Jealousy starved my heart. I was thankful we only saw each other's texts. She didn't have to see me dig my fingernails into my palms. I frantically poured water into her wounds and tried to make her glance into the sun again like I was resurrecting a houseplant. I offered her bouquets of support and encouraging words. All the while wondering how thin she looked and whether I could get thinner.

Some days, I spend five minutes staring at myself in the mirror before bathing. Ana stands beside me. The scale used to be the roadmap to my destination. I no longer use it. Now my bones act as an assessment. Turn to the side. Caress my rib cage. Ease Ana's anxieties. Or are they mine? The day I noticed my chest bones, I thought I was the most beautiful girl alive. Ana congratulated me. I applauded with her.

Most days, I scroll through my Instagram feed and only stop when I see models posing on runways, on beaches, on streets. The rise of hip bones and dips of clavicles turn me on quicker than any lover I've ever had. I stare at their wrists and measure the thinness of my own. I try to remind myself that these models are edited to lure secret admirers like me. But I still wonder how I would look if my thighs were compressed, my hips extended, the sharpness of my chin adjusted. But who wants to make love to a skeleton? Who could love a sack of bones?

Recovery isn't a straight line, but a windy road without a map. The GPS has stopped working and the destination remains unclear. Some days it's harder to elude Ana than others. But I drive, drawing and redrawing my own map to reach recovery. Ana still chases me, but now she seems to get lost more times than I am found.

How bad does bad need to be

before you need to call for help?

The first time my blood sugar dipped lower than the Dead Sea in a long time, I dismissed my body as hungry. Hunger. A sea of memories returned: calorie counting, the fear of rice, isolation, chugging orange juice. I became an island against the mainland of “normal eating habits”. At fourteen, when my weight plunged, I told myself:

I am not sick enough.

I am not sick enough.

I am not sick enough.

When the panic attacks began to occur more frequently, I found myself in an abstract haze. I drowned myself in bottles of orange juice to keep my blood sugar buoyant. Hands spasming in the shape of guitar chords. Chest constricting like typesetting stamped into woodblocks. Chills so rhythmic like fingers practising piano scales up and down my spine. And when my soul left my body, the world halted. Or maybe I stopped. After hearing my experience, a friend on the phone says, “It sounds like you had a panic attack.” Panic attacks? Me? I agreed like an obedient student even though I dismissed my symptoms as nothing more than a caricature.

I am not sick enough.

I am not sick enough.

I am not sick enough.

Bad is the time my best friend couldn't get out of bed for three days. The chicken noodle soup I left for her remained untouched for so long, the flies began to feast on it instead. Bad is the time my cousin stopped taking his antidepressants and told me he wanted to end his life. I sat on the bed and told him that he couldn't leave me by myself. Bad is the time a girl began to sob in the office. The only comfort I could give was to wrap her up in my favourite shawl to soak up her tears. I look at them and remind myself:

~~Help.~~ *I am not sick enough.*

~~Help.~~ *I am not sick enough.*

~~Help.~~ *I am not sick enough.*

To Live for Honour, To Die for Honour

My family name means “magnification.”
Yet, we refuse to hold a magnifying
glass for

fear of slander,
fear of fear,
fear of ourselves.

Honor is code.

Soak stains and blemishes in bleach.
Hide secrets in jewellery boxes. Whisper
them into rosaries. Purify yourself in white
rum and Tiger Balm until you are holier
than holy. Wear

red for prosperity,
gold for luxury,
black for mystery.

Honour is code.

HERMIONE

Searching for Persephone

I prayed to Demeter for a bountiful
harvest, that she would bless me
with a sheaf of wheat from her
cornucopia and cultivate this barren land.

But the seed I planted in my womb
did not bloom. It did not grow
roots nor sprout a stem
to display the fruits of my labour.

I am no Virgil writing *Eclogues*
or *Georgics*. These bolts of ink
become floods that weep in vain
efforts to fill the abyss of the empty

ultrasound. Here, on paper, I become
a mother, and my Persephone lives.

A Letter to My Daughter

You

have no idea what I'm going through,
you scream, shaking a finger at me.
Oh, baby girl, but I do. I do.
I drank my tears for breakfast,
and ate older men for dinner.
I learned to weep in blood
before I learned to weep in words.
I spent my life worrying that
love would not find me.
It's hard to watch people

have

what you can only dream of.
Self-destruction became my spouse,
loneliness was my marriage bed.
I was so busy pouring love into others
that I dehydrated myself. When I was twenty,
I prayed to find solace in razor blades and
sleeping pills. I imagined myself as an angel
writing poetry with Angelou. But the universe
pulled me from my grave and forced me to keep
breathing. Later, I realized I held on
to hold you. I cradled you so tight and thanked
the angels for not taking me away that night.
My love, you are my greatest masterpiece.
I see a multitude of galaxies in your eyes.
Here, let me give you some of my light
and teach you how to paint the sky
again like you did when you were six.
You don't have to fight this alone.
Baby, stay with me. You are my

purpose.

Nuestros Niños

On May 7, 2018, under the 45th President's administration, Jeff Sessions announces: "If you're smuggling a child, then we're going to persecute you, and that child will be separated from you, probably, as required by law." Instagram announces the headline. The internment camps materialize through my phone screen. I wish this was fake news. Surely such barbaric practices would be locked in the past. Such histories could not repeat themselves. I cry anyways.

How did we get away from love?

How did love get away from us?

Mi hijo, lloro por ti.

In June, VICE airs a documentary on Trump's family separation policy in action. I see the metal facilities and want to reach my hand through the cages. I have questions, questions, and more questions. Do they sing songs and read bedtime stories in Spanish? Are there cribs for the babies? Who holds them when they cry at night? Who helps them go to the bathroom? I listen to the children cry for their mothers through the voice recordings. My mother stares at me, while I weep into my spaghetti. She asks me why I care so much. This problem is a not problem because it does not affect her. She would not say the same thing if it was me.

How did we get away from love?

How did love get away from us?

Mi hija, lloro contigo.

In October, I see an editorial cartoon of a Hispanic girl at the US border – shoulders slumped with the weight of her simple backpack. She looks at the soldier with his gun pointed at her and asks, "Por favor, señor... ¿is this home of the brave?" Yes, my girl, you're brave. So brave.

How did we get away from love?

How did love get away from us?

Mi hijo, lo siento.

Knitted Whispers

You tell me academics shuffle around
in old scarves and read between classes. I
nestle into your shawl. We whisper

our ideas, conversations, and
tears through its knit. The universe, you
tell me, works in circles. I find comfort

knowing your shawl everyday keeps me
in your orbit, even when you're elsewhere.



CORDELIA

Dear Yulia

Pack your bags. Hop on
your bike. We're going on an
adventure. Explore

forests of texts with
me. Dive into vast oceans
of early modern

maps. Don't forget your
camera, viewing the world with
this sometime daughter.

Santa Barbara

Mother Nature out
does herself here with daisy
fields and valley slopes

basking in the three
o'clock glow. My mermaid heart
keeps time with ocean's

staccato beat. The
rhythm soothes my stomach, tied
up like winding roads.

413

The sunset as
bright
as the warm,

tangerine coat
that
envelopes

me before love
parts
ways again.

MIRANDA

The image features the name "MIRANDA" in a black, serif font. The letter "M" is significantly larger than the other letters. The "M" is decorated with a cluster of flowers: a purple and white pansy-like flower at the top, a yellow flower below it, and a white flower with a yellow center at the bottom left. Green leaves are interspersed among the flowers. The letters "I", "R", "A", "N", "D", and "A" are smaller and follow the "M" to complete the name.

The Diaspora

Water accepts
what land rejects.

Do not lay roots;
here will not embrace us.

Our home
is no where.

Yaad

Oh, island in the sun
willed to me by my father's hand
all my days I will sing in praise
of your forest, waters, your shining sand.

Grandfather says his first lullaby
was the ocean rocking to and fro,
crooning and kissing the shore. He recalls
how the bougainvillea open their petals
to the sun and paint a thousand rainbows
on verandas. And if you ever lose your way,
think of the mangroves that dig their roots
in the water, never parting from the sea.

Oh, island in the sun
willed to me by my father's hand
all my days I will sing in praise
of your forest, waters, your shining sand.

When Grandfather tells me that he wants
to return home, I cannot respond. How
do I tell him that he is now a tourist?
The streets names changed, the house
demolished, the bougainvillea grow no
more. Friends robbed at dawn; friends shot
at dusk. Bad man forward, bad man pull up.
Night becomes a danger zone. I cannot tell him
his yaad is not the same country he left, but rather
a land as foreign to him as the beach here.

Oh, island in the sun
willed to me by my father's hand
all my days I will sing in praise
of your forest, waters, your shining sand.

Conversations with Uber Drivers

for Noor

i.

It's 2:38am. I wait at the side of the curb. The Uber driver creeps up and rolls down his window with suspicion. "To the airport?" "Yes." He eyes me with hesitation. "Put your luggage in the trunk. Sit in the back." Should I take another car? I do as instructed. He asks me where I'm going. "Home." "Home?" "Canada. Toronto." He looks at me from his rearview mirror. "Looking at you, I would have thought you're from China." "I'm half Chinese. I'm also Jamaican." The driver drops his guarded demeanour. "Jamaican!" He's from Ethiopia. Arrived to the States three years ago. Jamaica has much to be grateful to Ethiopia for: Zion, the Lion of Judah, Haile Selassie, proud displays of green, red, and yellow on flags, bandanas, and belts. Ethiopia is the birthplace, the motherland we can no longer access. The driver is happy to meet me: a Jamaican-Chinese from snowy Toronto. We arrive at the airport. He jumps out of the car and takes out my luggage from the trunk. The driver blesses me in Ethiopian with joy before we part.

ii.

It's 7:35pm. "Ni hao." My ancestors cringe at the words in the driver's mouth. Molded strange. The dialect wrong. The breezy Santa Barbara air chills me when I realize I have been reduced to an assumption by my face. A seven-hour flight has left me too tired to educate this man. My sister must speak for us. "Oh, no. We don't speak Chinese." The driver looks at us from his rearview mirror. "You don't know *ni hao*? Not even *xie xie*?" I have to stop my eyes from rolling themselves to the back of my head. It's only fifty-six seconds into the drive, and I am already irritated by this *phák gui*. My sister explains that we are Jamaican-Chinese. We speak patois. "Jamaica, mon!" A stereotypical phrase appropriated from a guide book. His fenke fenke accent makes me want to reach over from the backseat and bax this buckra in his mouth. I consider addressing him in patois. Instead, I erase myself and say in English, "We're just good at hiding our accent." "Really? Jamaicans have a distinct accent." Thank you for the comment, sir. I think I would know. I do not speak for the rest of the journey. In-N-Out Burger appears on the corner, and I thank my ancestors that our seven-minute ride is over. I glance at my sister and tell her, "*Jao lah*." In and out, my sister and I escape with a quick "Thank you." I just want to replace this bitter interaction with greasy burger buns and sweet chocolate shakes.

Los Angeles

Traffic extends like
my arms reaching for comfort
when I miss my bed.

To Build a Home

i.

My soul has visited this place before.

In dreams, my fingers run along the terra cotta brick like a cat that feels the world with the tip of its tail. The chimney billows white smoke into the summer sky. The sunflower field behind the house beckons me to explore the labyrinth of its beauty. *One day*, I promise the yellow petals, *one day*. The clouds turn around the valley in the distance like a washing machine. The white door is always open, but I wake before I enter.

JULIET

Poetry Reading

I sit on the rug in your office –
my home for ten months –
with Amy on my left and Leru on my right.

“This Hour and What is Dead” comes alive
when your hands paint pictures in the air
while you recite poems by Kimbrell and Lee.

I discover “The Weight of Sweetness”
in *Rose*, the relationship between father and son
as heavy as the boy’s bag of peaches.

Toronto is *The City in Which I Love You*.
It is here that I Arise, Go Down to hear
your voice – soft like robins, soothing

like the sea. You lead us to *The Gatehouse
Heaven* where “Holiness” anoints us and we
imagine ourselves as “True Descenders”

caught in the battle between two
Gods – the god of desire,
the god of the divine.

I know memory will revise
me, so I capture this moment,
this peace, as best I can in

case of emergency – the antidote
for a mind afraid to forget, for a mind
wanting to hold the weight

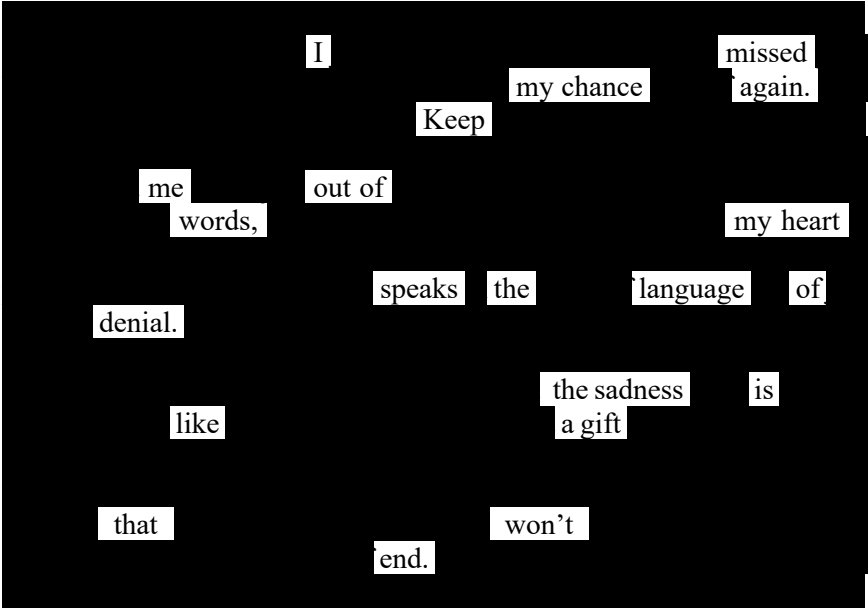
of this sweetness: I sit on the rug in your office –
my home for ten months –
with Amy on my left and Leru on my right.

We listen to you recite poems by Kimbrell and Lee.
But we also hear another poem –
you – art that breathes.

Conversations with the Moon

These blackout poems are created from various emails

i.



I missed again.
Keep my chance
me out of words, my heart
denial. speaks the language of
like the sadness is
that won't end.

ii.

every mess would
happen in the open noon.
bring yourself to
the hour.
do not stay for
questions.
imagine everyone
ravaged.
No one
researches this
genocide. and I live
on.

iii.

feel free to

travel,

but

stray

far from

passages.

save those

maps.

everyone returns to

the island.

this

darkness

is mine.

keep

looking forward.

Nanaimo

Dive into the river and catch
the rocks below to build a home
for our pet crayfish. Kisses
on his constellation
of freckles before
our friends call us
for lunch.

Artemis

Artemis, raises her
to the sky, no arrow
Only her hound barks
beside her. At what do you aim? Actaeon? Our dreams? The moon?
She will not answer, her
in bronze. But I know
listens. Perhaps,

bow
in sight.
– midair –
body frozen
that she
this

goddess hears our
to her, the wishes and
we offer her. This dream
her arrows past the dome above her head, past the moon, past gods,
into the universe. When
feathers reach their
delivers our dreams

odes
prayers
catcher aims
those tipped
mark, she
to us.

And so, I stand at the Huntington and make a wish.

Island Girls

*for the scholar-activists of Guam University – Christen, Kiana, Jianna,
Alejandra*

In Missouri, we speak
our anxieties into the river.
The dark hides our secret

resistances and revolutions
from the hotel
lights behind us.

Away from home, we, island
girls, become land
turtles yearning for the sea

breeze that carries our hopes
for ourselves and our islands
into the future. Tonight,

the moon hears the songs we sing –
to the dark and to each other –
and the ones we have yet to compose.

Notes

“Stolen Sisters”

The statistics embedded in the poem can be found at Statistics Canada and the Department of Justice Canada.

“Language Lessons”

This poem has also appeared in the *Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle* (volume 94), pp. 9-10.

“A Sonnet for Prospero(s)”

A version of this poem has also appeared in the *Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle* (volume 94), p. 11.

“Back to Genesis”

This poem has also appeared in the 2019 edition of *Scarborough Fair*, p. 10.

“Visible Minorities”

The first stanza is taken from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) application portal.

“Hunger”

This poem has also appeared in the inaugural issue of *in/progress* (forthcoming).

“I am tired.”

This poem is inspired by September 27th, 2018 when Dr. Christine Blasey Ford shares the testimony of her sexual assault by Brett Kavanaugh.

“Nuestros Niños”

The refrain is taken from Jhené Aiko’s song entitled “Wasted Love Freestyle.”

The VICE episode I reference is called “Separated by Birth” (episode 11 on season 6).

The editorial cartoon I describe in the third stanza was designed by Steve Artley. It was published on October 30th, 2018 and can be found on Steve Artley’s Editorial Cartoons.

“Persephone Lost”

This poem is inspired by Tess Taylor’s “Soil Black” in her poetry collection, *Work & Days* (2016).

“Yaad”

The refrain is taken from Harry Belafonte’s song, “Island in the Sun.”

“Poetry Readings”

The original version of this poem can be found in the poetry collection, *Mirari* (2017).

Acknowledgments

It goes without saying that this collection is inspired by women, of women, for women.

For the women who crossed oceans to bring me here – Mommy, Grandma, Apo, Jaden, and Nana. They are my yaad. Every written piece is homage to them. They are the thesis of my prayers forever and always.

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For Marjorie – my moon and my favourite bird. I fly because you taught me how to soar. My thanks and debt to you extends beyond all language.





