



**apples:
an unapologetic
anthology from the core**

A COLLECTION OF POETRY WRITTEN BY MEMBERS OF
THE CUMBERLAND WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRE AND
WESTWORDS INITIATIVE 'WRITING YOUR VOICE'

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foreword

Systems, histories, collective forces and violence try to seize the voices of women. Alongside this reality is the powerful and courageous act of reclaiming. Of resistance. As you read and hear this anthology I know that you will find, deep in your bones, a knowledge that the cacophony of voices enclosed in these pages *must* be heard. I have had the greatest privilege walking alongside these women. May listening to and reading their words open possibilities of nourishment and solidarity.

JULIA ELLIS

Counsellor & Psychotherapist

Cumberland Women's Health Centre



foreword

Nothing is more powerful than a Woman speaking her truth.

Too often, we Women apologise for our every word, often for our very existence. Too often we feel we don't have a voice, that what we have to say doesn't matter. But when a Woman puts her truth, her love, her hurt, her beauty and her pain onto the page, something in the world is changed.

Working with these Women was an enormous privilege. Most had never written a poem in their lives. To watch them go from zero experience to writing extraordinarily powerful poetry in a matter of days felt miraculous, and at the same time, the most normal thing in the world. Because I know the power of Women's voices. I know what we are capable of when we find a way to grant ourselves permission to externalise, through words and art, what simmers, sometimes roars, in the deepest recesses of our hearts.

Women are so used to being silenced that when we read our poetry in front of an audience for the first time, there can be an urge to apologise before reading it. Some years ago I took part in a creative writing workshop where it was 'forbidden' to apologise for your work before reading it out loud. If someone did attempt to apologise, the room would call out the word *Apples*. *Apples* was the code word for *no apology, stand strong, your words matter, we are with you*. *Apples* was code for writers to step into their work, to own it, to name the often unnameable—without apology.

This extraordinary group of Women embraced the *Apples* concept with great gusto. They stopped apologising for their words. They found their voices. They put their truths on the page. Their pens came to know no bounds. They bonded through their poetry and lifted each other up. I am in awe of each and every one of them.

Apples: An Unapologetic Anthology from the Core is the result of the deep well of creativity that lives in each of these Women and their bravery in daring to submerge themselves in it. It is a result their deepest fears and their most profound loves. These poems contain worlds. They are tender, heart-wrenching and raw. They are devastating, beautiful and wise. These poems come from the core. And for that, these Women make no apology.

ALI WHITELOCK

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contents

secret pleasure <i>by Sarah Traynor</i>	6
yoghurt being made in the backyard <i>by Daphnia Dixon</i>	10
what would you call it? <i>by Zohra Aly</i>	12
a letter to my hairdresser <i>by Joy Adan</i>	14
never enough <i>by Duaa Alamin</i>	18
trapped freedom <i>by Patricia Jbeily</i>	20
indifference <i>by Rebecca Coppe</i>	22
7th of september 1936 <i>by Sarah Pearson</i>	26
inked with sin <i>by Divya Mukundaraj</i>	28
an abbreviated life <i>by Ailsa Liu</i>	32
hunt for myself <i>by Vilasini Shanmugam</i>	34
our rainbow family <i>by Jane Chung</i>	36
you promised <i>by Daphnia Dixon</i>	38
marion bay fragments <i>by Sarah Pearson</i>	40
taking up space <i>by Joy Adan</i>	42
from dictator to democracy what a privilege to be <i>by Mary Joseph</i>	46
a place I call somewhere <i>by Kim Beenck</i>	48



tomorrow's sydney <i>by Brooke Webb</i>	50
to the obsessive compulsive dis-order <i>by Sarah Traynor</i>	52
where joy once sprouted in the cracks <i>by Zohra Aly</i>	56
mad justice <i>by Brooke Webb</i>	58
commemorating my death <i>by Vilasini Shanmugam</i>	60
the girl who didn't <i>by Paris Rosemont</i>	62
that girl <i>by Kim Beenck</i>	64
this is a letter to myself <i>by Rebecca Coppe</i>	66
my mentor <i>by Mary Joseph</i>	70
vitamin love <i>by Duaa Alamin</i>	72
my last lullaby <i>by Divya Mukundaraj</i>	76
not an orphan spirit <i>by Patricia Jbeily</i>	78
no longer yours <i>by Brittany Ramage</i>	82
before the final curtain <i>by Jane Chung</i>	84
eggshell blue <i>by Ailsa Liu</i>	86
what's mine is yours—and what's yours is also yours <i>by Paris Rosemont</i>	88
the hardest goodbye <i>by Brittany Ramage</i>	92



SARAH TRAYNOR

secret pleasure

I grew up with soap in all my drawers
Soap made the underwear smell extra
Clean. I also grew up with knitted
coat hanger covers, stuffed
with potpourri—but I didn't like
those

Soap was always in steady supply
Always the gift given to those hard
to buy for. Always in the bedroom
drawers

After my Nana died, I found drawers
full of soap. I didn't even know Tiffany
& Co. did perfumed soap. I get drawn
to the world wide web,

searching

Lily

Patchouli

Calendula

Clementine

Gardenia

Smoked Cedar

Cinnamon

Vanilla

searching





Artisan Hand made Natural
Luxury Goats milk Soap

But there is no touch. There is no fragrance

Only an aloof artisan shopping cart
and a two week delivery delay

I explore the supermarket aisles
The bright fluorescent lights make
everything crisply visible. I walk, eagerly
searching for comfort

No, not deodorant

No, not shampoo

No, definitely not shower gels

I stand still facing my choices

I search the cluttered shelf for appealing
Packaging. Smooth dusty pink, creamy
white, or coarse and recycled

No

Mauve and slightly textured. Yes

I choose one

I touch my gift's wrapping. Comfort.
I pick up my treasure. A firm block to touch
with neat bed sheet corners folded tightly

Lavender Oil

I drink in the bouquet
My eyes dance around the packaging
with joy. Relaxing Castille Body Bar
Triple milled. Organic shea butter
I close my eyes and hold my prize
in both hands.

My socks are going to smell lovely.





DAPHINA DIXON

yoghurt being made in the backyard

I come from Chester Hill. From a refugee father who missed his mother every day of his life. I come from a mother who was told to leave her home because she was pregnant, from a family of lost women through birth, war, lost mothers, grandmothers, lost fathers and grandfathers. I come from sadness, happiness, longing, fighting, fear, hope, from trying to be perfect, from yoghurt being made in the backyard, sunflowers growing, from the 70s, bell bottoms, surfies, sharpies, bikies. I come from anger, trying to be perfect, don't make your father angry, we won't tell him. I come from

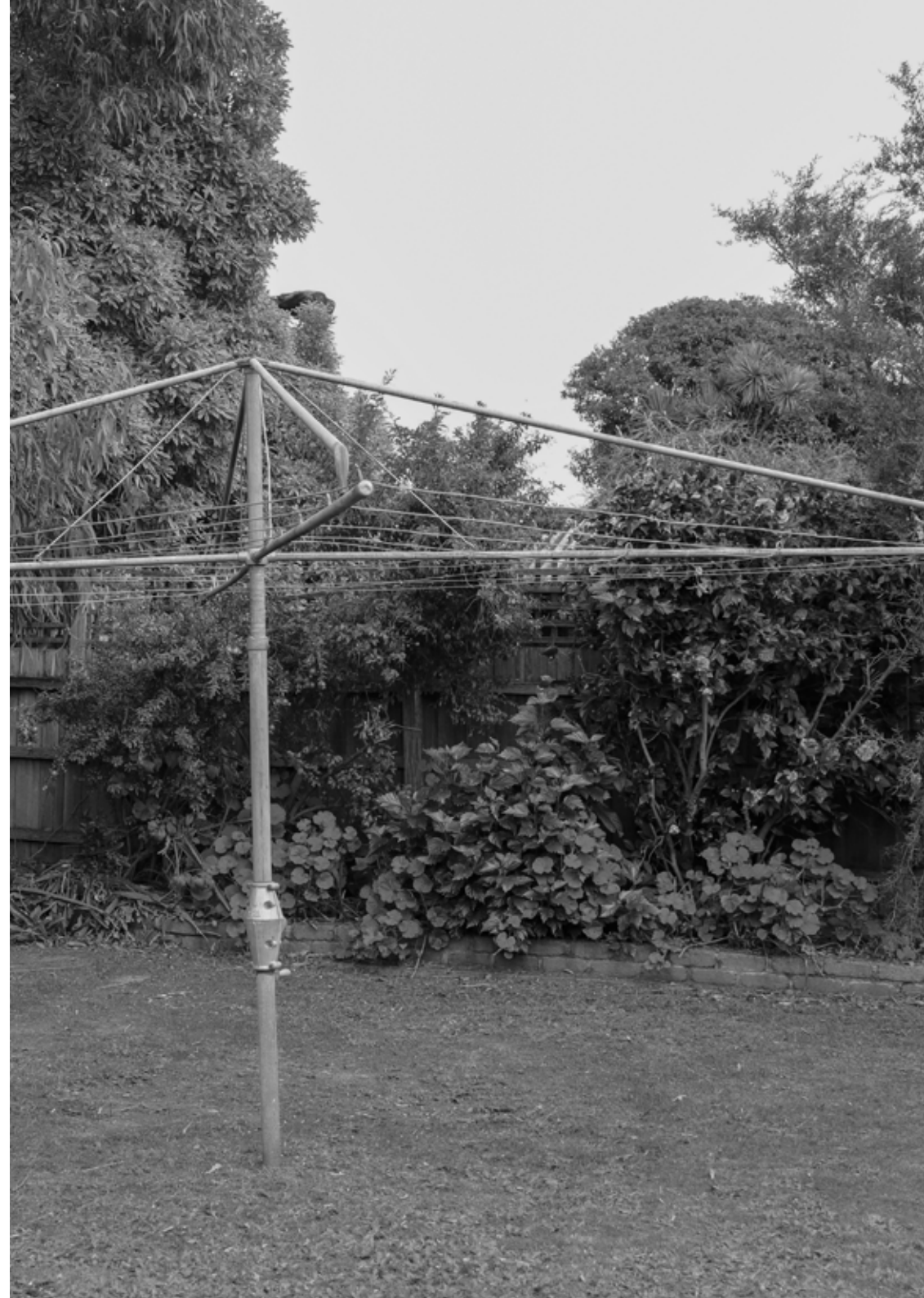
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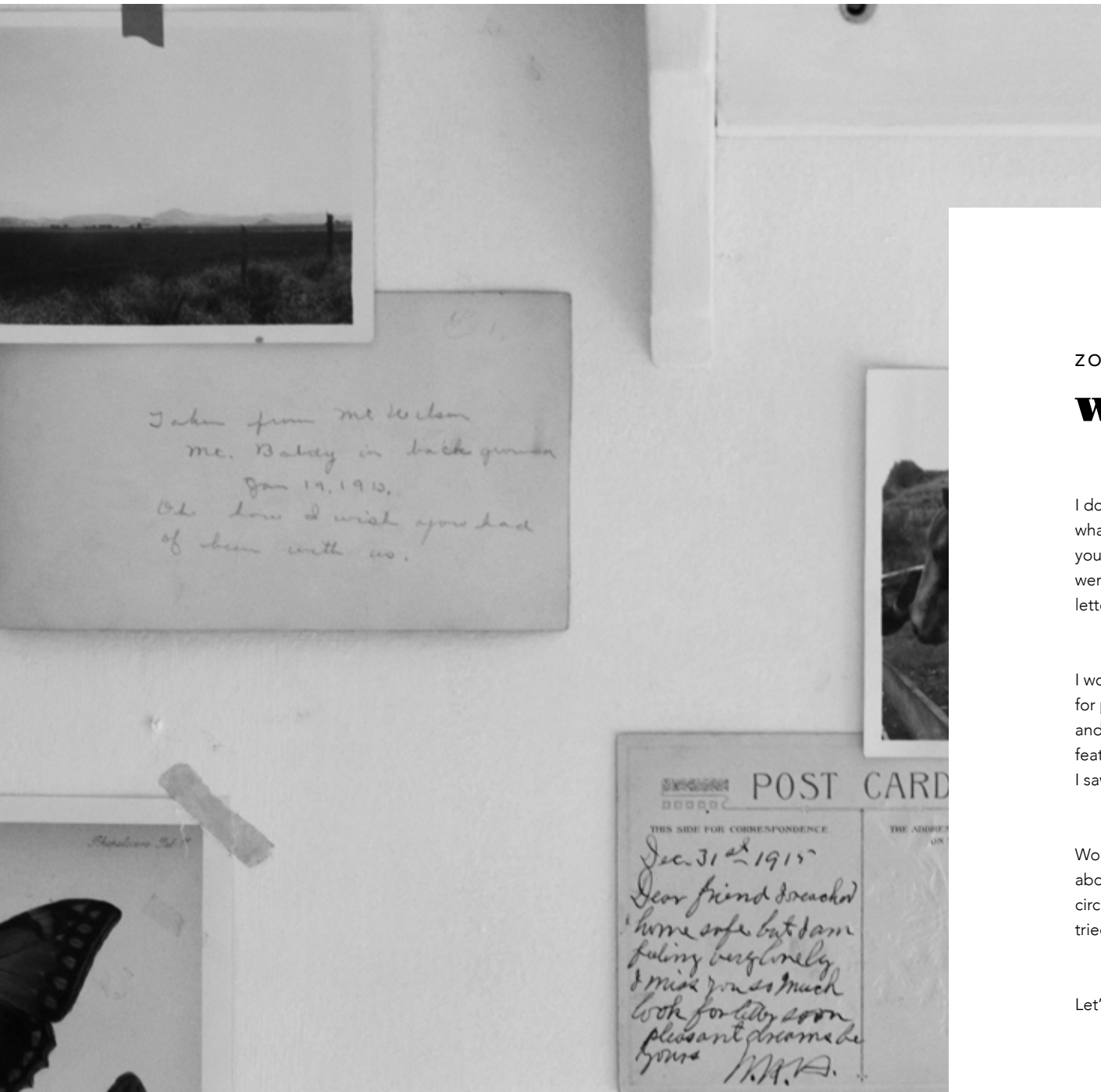
is

all

too

much.





ZOHRA ALY

what would you call it?

I don't know that I'd call it love, that's what you give someone who occupies your heart, your innermost soul. You were a faded photograph, a typewritten letter, an unfamiliar voice at the other end of the phone.

I wouldn't call it hate, that's reserved for people who fill your nightmares and wake up with you each morning. You featured in my dreams, the ones I saw when I gazed out of windows at happy families.

Would you call it grief? When I heard about the accident my big toe dug tiny circles in a sunlit patch of carpet. My heart tried to work out how to miss someone I had never met.

Let's just say it's forgiveness.
That will set us both free



JOY ADAN

a letter to my hairdresser

The magazines lied.

So did the tv.

They told me if I change my packaging, I'd
be unstoppable. I showed you the picture—
I want to look like *Her*.

But really I meant I want to *be* Her.

I want her skin – soft, luminous, healthy,
dewy; skin whose wounds can disappear
under calm water.

Familiar. Acceptable. Lighter. Safer.

I want her body.

Hips for carrying confidence, not children
Square shoulders, straight with strength,
taking the space it deserves.

The magazines lied.

So did you.

Sure, we can do that, you said

Snip *Your hair is a bit thick, so it might not look exactly like the picture*

Snip *Your hair is wavy, so you'll have to use product to look like
the picture*

Snip *Try this*

Snip *Apply that*

Snip *Shave this*

Snip *Pluck that*

Snip *Lose this*

Snip *Hide that*

Snip *Lean in*

Snip *Lie down*

The offcuts of my character create a carpet on the salon floor

Snip *Let's fix this*

I look at my reflection





Snip *I'd change that*

It looks nothing like the picture

Snip *The trick is it takes hard work, but we have to make it look
effortless*

There's a rock in my throat the size of an eyelash curler

Snip *We're all done - you look great!*

This isn't what I wanted.





DUAA ALAMIN

never enough

Remember me? I was the girl who came from overseas, from a country of war and despair the girl who was quiet and innocent, who only knew how to love, how to care

Remember me? I was the girl who gave up my world to keep the relationship and the family together, the girl who had endless patience, the girl who looked and is still looking after kids, yet there is no one to look after me

Remember me? I was the girl with that winning smile with lots of joy to share, the girl who was kind and beautiful inside and out, yet very strong in opinion
Remember me? I was the girl who would have ticked all the boxes for someone else. The girl who could never have satisfied you

Remember me? I was the girl who always wanted to be someone's someone.



PATRICIA JBEILY

trapped freedom

I hope that you dive like a submarine in a deep sea of sadness. Understand, scrutinise my written words from the core of my heart erupting like lava from an active volcano. I know that what I am about to mention will irritate you causing a sore throat. Hard to swallow words when confronted. Even mouth soothers wouldn't help reduce your discomfort. Leaving you with shame, guilt and despair.

I'll be pleased if you taste your own bitterness by drinking from the same cup that you made me drink from. Putting yourself in my shoes, reflecting and digesting your own awful bursties, gulping through your oesophagus. I wish you heartburns and an upset stomach. Hiccups meaning my words are expanding, invading your body, mind and soul. Stirring your feelings.

My cup is full. I swallowed my pride, dignity and self esteem. Not anymore. Enough is enough. I will exhale from my blowhole like a whale shooting plumes of mist. No boundaries, my sound will be echoing. There are moments that come as flashbacks. That night aggression was so present that if walls could speak and doors could cry they would have told a horror story but not from a fiction movie but a scene from a true story. The main character was me in a chapter from the book of my life.



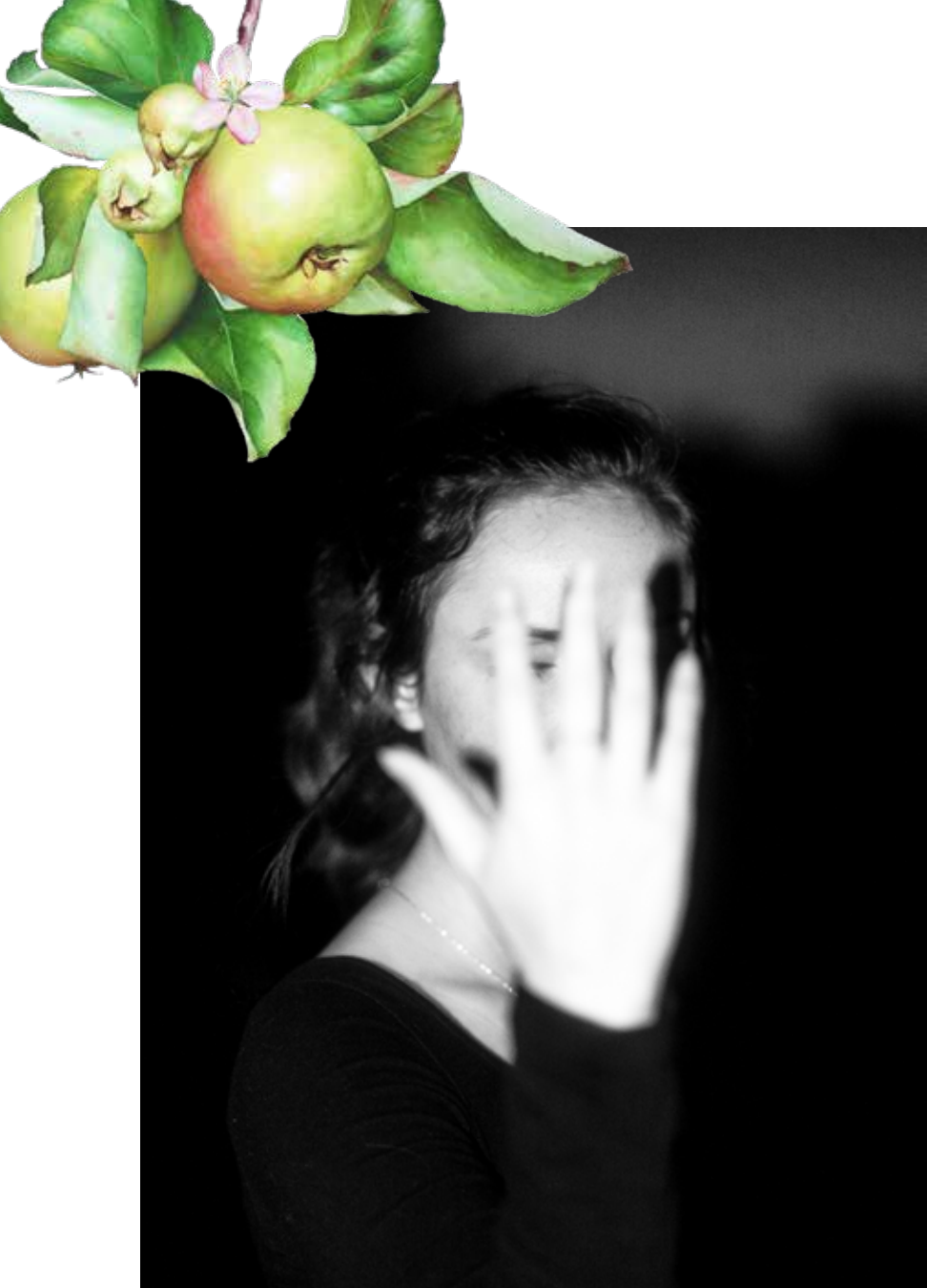
Same as you broke my heart, you destroyed and vandalised our home with your violent hands instead—of building it and providing us with a safety net. You exposed me, frightened me, left me with nowhere to escape and hide.

I wasn't amused by your drug use. Your abusive language was a sharp sword that cut through my skin. It made me bleed. Distressing, isn't it? The knife hit my neck with no remorse. I witnessed your dark evil eyes haunted by the devil. You must have sold your soul cheap.

Life is karma. All that I have mentioned above should be engraved in your heart, crucial to your soul and marked in your thoughts. I know that all those emotions are blinded by your ego. Be aware I am the boss now, not to carry the cross or be crucified and denied. Remember the traumas you put me through. It's as shocking as an earthquake followed by a split in the family. You're the only one that fell in that hollow place holding your guilt and shame.

You made me sober, it's over, fed up with your disorder. I will recover from your paranoia. Keep on gambling with your life day after day. Go mould your sculpture of betrayal with your dirty clay, pay the heavy price and be away I don't want you to stay. Regardless of all the battles I will be standing like the cedars of Lebanon. A red dot on a highlighted line.





REBECCA COPPE

indifference

Indifference.

Silence at any cost, the cost of self and self-worth.

The silent murder of closing, your eyes sitting back and saying nothing, being crucified by your words,

Prejudice and injustice runs rampant in our society. We hide behind social graces.

Where racism breeds, out of fear and the inability to understand, we need to question our primal thinking patterns and our generational and ancestral mediums.

We all crave love, to feel safe, to have shelter, to be respected, and play a part in this world.

We crave a better world for a children, learn from our mistakes, take on what we have learnt, make this world a better place.

It's primal, it's ever evolving, we cannot hide behind the cloak that is pulling our society apart by words and actions.





We can't hide behind comedy. Dark comedy, or a joke, or *where is your sense of humour?*

Drowning in the sea of looseness, aloofness, being battered by the waves, we have a choice, not to be battered by the waves of indifference. We will be a steady ship going forward through rough seas and calm waters. Not drifting and floating on stagnant waters.

GET UP.

GET UP.

GET UP.

Walk forward, be the beacon, the light that shines bright like a lighthouse in the darkness and the fog.

Don't allow evil to exist and silence be our guide, counteract the darkness as day breaks through the dawn.

We, as humans should stand as one and shout out from the wilderness about indifference and take a stand, even though it takes us out of our comfort zones.

It's ok to be uncomfortable, we must be brave and resilient.

Being uncomfortable is our inner voice reminding us we can do better.

Hold evil and evil deeds to account.

I refuse to be indifferent.

I must make a difference. I must challenge myself. I must move forward.

I will go to my grave, trying, I will face my maker and say I have tried, you are my beloved. You are my rock where my foundation lies.

We should be appalled and sickened by war and genocide, our voices should roar with thunderous passion from the mountains to the sea, so every ear can hear that this is not acceptable.

These ghosts that haunt are memory. As a human race we require more from our fellow man.

Then our souls will soar like eagles on warm, uplifting, winds. Our souls will jump for joy, for we have huge potential and possibilities.

People, don't lose hope, hope is our guide, we are good. People, stand strong and resilient, with compassion, a desire to do better.

We are ever evolving. Our words are powerful and our children are listening, let them know when we make mistakes we say sorry, we learn from them and become better.

I refuse to be indifferent.

I will make a difference.





SARAH PEARSON

7th of september 1936

The day you arrived, the end began.

You named us *Thylacinus cynocephalus* –

'dog-headed pouched one' – but branded us zebra

wolf, tiger wolf, Tasmanian wolf and introduced fear

and hatred from your homeland. You gambled

on sheep for your prosperity but marred your colonist

dream with ignorance, carelessness, and deceit.

We became your scapegoat, and bounties your solution.

Demonised and despised, your policies sanctioned our demise.

Soon we were few and you wanted us alive,

to feed a global network of exchange,

connected by cruel curiosity.

You had us evacuated, exhibited, examined,

and concealed our history in your Death Books.

You stripped our skin and consigned us to wooden tombs.

Made us into mimics, stuffed and stitched and arranged

in glass cages. Drowned us in liquid graves.

Your imperial collections became the warehouses

of our loss. Too late, you acted – for just fifty-nine

days you "wholly protected" us – not enough to reverse

the violence, prejudice, neglect that stain

our history, your history. I mourn our loss, your

loss, on this, our last day.





DIVYA MUKUNDARAJ

inked with sin

Part i

Had I written the same letter
to you, a few years ago, I would
have written all about fresh wounds
& pains, grief & tears & the silent
screams. But not today. Today, I try
not to remember bad dreams.

I can tell that I've healed from within,
rebuilt to strive for my new life to begin.
Never will I turn back the pages of past,
for all are inked with your sickness
& sin.

A few think the struggle has made
me crazy, weak & numb. Nope, I've
become steady, witty & definitely
not dumb.

Humour pulled me up, back to my feet,
she held my hands & did not flee. She
planted a voice, as magical as could be,
& joked at your stunts to make you
look so damn silly.

She shone light upon you & showed
the person behind you. You scorned
at people to cover your inferiority &
felt powerful with your tongue
dancing to mockery.

Part ii

You were truly a master in the faultfinding
territory, to trick yourself
that perfection is your personality.
You have my deep sympathy for
your fight with the inner ghosts of
your reality.

Well, I can't thank you enough,
for you tossed me out loud &
unfair. I stood up for myself finally
with all my might & dare.

You made me breathe rudeness,
blinded me with your hate, deafened
me with unkind words & made
me drink your glass of guilt.
You rubbed off your anger
& as I flared within, my shards
of despair pierced my dear ones
skins.

I've hurt my own & wasn't
even aware, that things have gone
far beyond repair.



The tremble from those tiny fingers
holding me tight, begged me to put
an end to the putrid night. I stood
up tall against all your tsunamis
& never felt more serene until
I swarmed you with your own
blight.

Part iii

I've ditched the past & walked
far from the sea. I may have
forgotten the waves I fought
but the lessons learnt stay with
me.

Everything has a time & place.
Tides change. Stars move.
Life takes crazy turns &
you will realise soon.

Honestly,
your realisations
your life
your sin
no longer matter to me.

Cause I'm already set free.
I'm grateful for your help.
Your help in reaping the best &
beautiful in me.



AILSA LIU

an abbreviated life

Dear Narges-joon,

The shape of your story a skink with its tail fallen off
a scrappy (not so) common beauty.
Little and little, you shared your worries and fears with me.

Your eyes fixed on the unknowable murky future,
trying to make the best decisions for yourself and for others.
You recognised yourself
 in my sensitivity.

The simple magic of a haircut,
after and before you met your husband.
Everything shifted and a new future opened up for you.

I am still thinking of this question.

 that runs on and on and on
 like an empty highway.

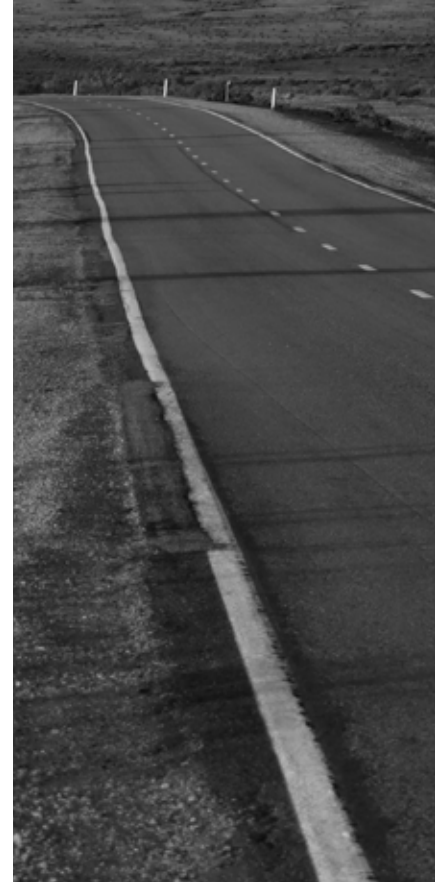
What does it mean to live free?

Meant more, coming from you.
Blank-faced
nothing
to miss
back home.
A bad place to be a woman.

What a tragedy it is
 that your daughter will never know you,
 or your love.

There's a decade between us
But year by year I am outpacing you.
 if only we had met sooner.

Jaat kali-ye Narges-joon
you will always have a place with me.





VILASINI SHANMUGAM

hunt for myself

I was a little child, spreading hands wider to cuddle the world. Jingling like a bell, cheerfully blushing like a daffodil in the morning. Overflowing with quest and enthusiasm.

Becoming a Girl, gradually shadowed the child in me. Shrank my world of desires. Escalated my inhibitions and fears, engulfed me with myriad confusions.

Blooming as a woman, family fences were raised against me. Doors of my dreams were slammed. Like the hands of a clock, pointlessly, I kept running, ignoring my emotions and passions.

I was celebrated as a daughter, a wife and a mother, but never as My Self.

Now I set to hunt for:
Who am I?
What belongs to me?



JANE CHUNG

our rainbow family

This morning a beautiful rainbow streamed
through the window onto a basin of water
a glorious display of gorgeous yellow and green
another colourful reminder of its sacredness

Rainbow colours are on display around me
in fruits, vegetables, flowers, foods, fishes, birds, animals and
throughout the whole Mother Nature scene and
most incredibly amongst the human race

The world is a very colourful stage graced by
rainbow People of all colours and shapes
from the glamorous adorned with diamonds and gold
to natural beauty in the eyes of the beholder

Sadly, the recent massive 'Black Lives Matter' riots in USA
remind that there is prejudice of our sacred colours
Black-coloured clothes are a common favourite but
not so on the human skin
this causes me much angst about my family's well being

Science has proven that the evolution of the human race has
begun on one colour only – BLACK
Through the act of MOTHER NATURE or Spiritual Advent
the human race has evolved in different continents
of the earthly universe with skin colours of
black/brown/white/yellow and matching coloured hair!

The surgeon's scalpel reveals the same one heart, two
lungs, a liver, two kidneys, a spleen and the rest of
its paraphernalia. We, the human race, do share
the same kind of human anatomy

Spiritualism has taught that on Judgement Day
our aura of colours will speak our truth
the degree of brightness shows who we are and
the level of goodness in our Hearts and Minds and
What if God is another Aretha Franklin?

There is a reason why rainbow colours adorn our world
Life would be so so boring if there is only one colour

Because WE ARE ONE
travelling through time and space
to gather life experiences on this earthly plane
and appearing in different colours and tones
to REJOICE as colourful Citizens of the World!

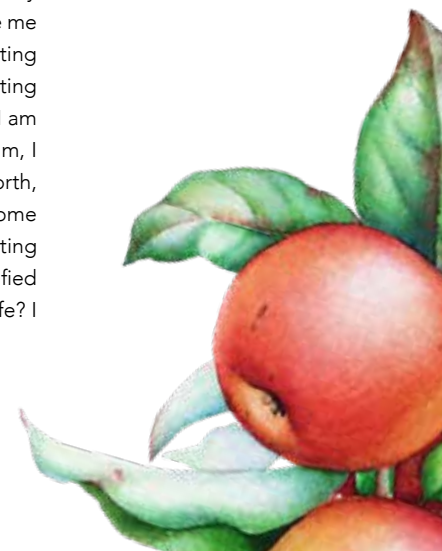




DAPHINA DIXON

you promised

I was 9, my brother was 6, my father had died a few months before. For some reason Mum decided she had to go to a friends house, a thirty minute walk. She could only take my brother John with her, it was afternoon still light, about 5 pm. I begged her to let me go with them, she said no. Why can't I go to too, I can walk, I won't get tired, I won't complain. I begged and begged. Mum still said no, said she'd be back before dark. I said promise you will be back before it is dark I am terrified of the dark I can't stay in the house by myself when it's dark I go inside, try and distract myself, watch T.V. and worry if Mum will be back before dark. Outside it starts to darken, it is 6pm. Where is Mum? 7pm still not home, I am terrified, I am scared to be inside, scared to be outside, I am terrified if I stay inside my father will come back and get me and take me away into the sky. I'm so angry, I go outside, I can't stand to be inside anymore. Where are they? I'm so angry, angry with fear, angry with hurt, angry she left me by myself, angry I can't trust Mum why did she leave me here? I pace up and down the nature strip, counting numbers, trying to distract myself, I am never trusting you again. Should I go inside, no, too terrified. I am terrified outside, terrified inside. So angry at Mum, I am beside myself. pacing, pacing, back and forth, don't think, don't feel if Mum doesn't come home soon I am going to die of fear. I am never trusting Mum again, pacing, pacing dark outside, terrified inside What can I do? Where can I go to feel safe? I hate you, I hate you, I hate you.





SARAH PEARSON

marion bay fragments

dawn – announced
by a currawong chorus
and crackling coffee

windows down while winding
into the park – a south-easter
delivers the sea

like a swimmer's sentinel,
a lone emu is stationed
high in the dunes

beyond the foam, boldly
treading water, waiting
for a ride

camp kitchen –
sand collects in concrete
corners, grime lines the bench

galahs criss-cross clouds,
crisps tumble into a bowl –
cocktail hour begins

across orange formica –
salt crystals revealed
by a kiss

three a.m. – tea-tree branches
scratch stories on the window
as I dream





JOY ADAN

taking up space

I was hiding

Brown skin, skinny limbs, hiding between
the uniforms in our wardrobe, beneath
the towers of dusty boxes in the garage,
behind the bottlebrush bushes
in the park waiting to be found

but you weren't seeking

I was lost

in the adventures of women
who weren't real. Eager eyes read
in the lamplight, devouring
every page hungrily. Little Women,
Wonder Woman, Carmen, Matilda,
Nancy, Kimberly, heroines, fighters,
friends, mothers, women who I wanted
to be, women who could rescue
me

Waiting to be rescued

but you weren't saving

I wasn't meant to be
here

Pimpled face, tangled
hair, taking up too much
space

*'Do I really need to
meet your teacher
watch your show
see you graduate*

'I've already done this before?'

Waiting to be seen

but you weren't looking

I wouldn't stop talking
Shiny badges on a secondhand
shirt, palm cards ready,
microphone in hand, filling
every room with words, so no
one would hear the silence
from your absence



Waiting to be heard

but you weren't listening

I made space
next to me, inside
me. An empty seat, an empty
heart, waiting, for your tired
arms and hardened hands,
for *'Later, I've got to go to work'*
'Why didn't you get first place?'
'That is a useless dream'
'Ask someone else'
'You're getting fat'
'What's wrong with your face?'

Waiting for your time

but you weren't giving.



MARY JOSEPH

from dictator to democracy what a privilege to be

Coming from a dictated country
with rules and regulations

No freedom of speech or
voice

Where yes means yes and no
means no, nothing more, nothing less

There is a great awakening in
my soul in this beautiful land of ours –
the land down under

Where individuality is respected
and the freedom to be just you and no one else

I take with me the joy of
being myself without someone hovering around
me to be someone else

Freedom. Use it wisely & it
will reap many benefits.

I take the rich culture of respect
for elders and diverse languages
that I have learnt in this land and I
embody the good, moral practices

I leave behind power,
dictatorship and all-controlling

I've had to live with for many
years within the home and within the country

Stinging and unhealthy I say

Change is hard. It is a
process. But it is unavoidable. The
best is yet to be.

The joy to be free while
I still call Australia

home.



KIM BEENCK

a place I call somewhere

when I die I want the sunshine
to warm my soul and fly
to a cosmic place whose deity
and their friends exist in joyous
symphony
unity
and all as one race
it has no name
I just know it's a harmonious place

a place I call somewhere

the lost feather of a phoenix
dances effortlessly in the wind
thrust high into the sky much farther
than a fly catching the scent of gardenias
lingering in the air a heavenly reminder
that dear nana you will be
there waiting happily for me
and all while you peacefully
sip your 5 o'clock wine

at a place I call somewhere



BROOKE WEBB

tomorrow's sydney

I come from the west where the sun always sets even though you can't quite see it — only glimpse it — between telephone lines that stitch the quarter acre blocks into the horizon¹.

I come from the west, one of those seven valleys between the seven hills

Where the trains diverge to Richmond or Penrith so you almost always get a fast run there and back:

Seven Hills

Westmead

Parramatta

Granville

Strathfield

Redfern

Central



I come from the West where the M2 and later M7 introduced the rest of Sydney to this industrial yet suburban part of the world.

Where infrastructure is extending, motorways have tolls and Westfields before libraries and theatres are renovated and art galleries still more of a mirage— than a reality.

And when Parramatta Road meets the M4 there's still the dragon of red tail lights more often than not as a slow drag of traffic.

Anyone else remember passing the Arnott's factory on the train? Or is it a warehouse? Or just another giant advertisement?

Seven Hills

Rouse Hill

Marsden Park

Don't have the same ring to it as

Hollywood.

1. Reference to *An Ordinary Ecstasy* by Luke Carman (2022)





SARAH TRAYNOR

to the obsessive compulsive dis-order

Why do you inhabit my daughter?
Why do you make her brain your home?
Why must you feast in there?
Why must you control her?

I have read about
You
I have tried to learn everything I could
fit in my brain
It's not the person
it's the condition
I was told to imagine you as a
monster

Don't accommodate the monster, stop
buying more toilet paper
Don't enable the monster, stop
refilling the soap
Don't feed the monster
Yes, baby I do love you, I was told to be firm





I have tried not to give in to your powerful ways
But your grotesque claws hold on so tight
They grasp my baby's brain like there is no visible join
You have merged into
one

Am I really here? Back and forth through the doorway
to and fro, to and fro
The drawer is not closed, or is it?
open and close, open and close
Something doesn't feel right.
I love you mum, I love you mum, I love you mum
I'm contaminated with a deadly virus

wash wash wash wash wash

You make her question a loving meal as
poison
You make her dread her own
actions
You make her freeze with
fear
You make her question our safe
reality

Obsessive thoughts are driven by intrusions
Repetitious actions happen for relief
Mental compulsions help her get through a task
Avoidance is constant because it's all too hard

But you are not a monster OCD
You are a dis-order
You are dis-ease
You are manageable
Treatable

You are not my daughter.





ZOHRA ALY

where joy once sprouted in the cracks

When I die, I don't want you to count
what went wrong. That list will be long.

Instead, I want you to look at what
I got right. I turned houses into homes,

The children I bore became adults. The
cats lived out all their nine lives.

Parents breathed their last on our shoulders.
We ate and we gossiped, we argued and we
travelled. Joy sprouted in the cracks amidst
tears and tantrums.

I want you to pray for me in those corridors
we paced, the children we taught, the food
we served and cleaned up after. In the prayer
halls we smiled at the congregation to mask
frustrations and fatigue and the never-ending
nature of it. Years later these will thrive in spite
of us, or perhaps because of.

I want you to name a grandchild after me.
Another will have my laugh. A third will
read my words. Show them how to water
my grave. Whisper supplications on my rosary
beads. Keep me alive in their eyes and their fingers.

I will watch from that cloud floating
above the gum leaves.

When I am gone, I want no regrets, only a soul at ease.
For one final time you will see my face marvel
At the jacaranda's purple spell, the ocean's swell
I will be where my heart soars, and you too my
loves, will be exactly where you are meant to be.





BROOKE WEBB

mad justice

I'm not mad with anyone
but I might be devastated
with most.

indifference to apathy
idols to idleness

To being less
than
and more
than we ever imagined

all at once.

To *Everything, Everywhere, All At Once*.¹

Writing from the core

and remembering to see

a bushel of a-p-p-l-e-s in the very word
itself.²

For
and
more
Myself.
now
forever

1. 2022 film *Everything Everywhere All At Once* directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert

2. 2017 essay "The Language Teacher" from *Every Word Is A Bird We Teach To Sing: Encounters with the Mysteries and Meanings of Language* by David Tammet



VILASINI SHANMUGAM

commemorating my death

I behold death as a --
celebration of my life journey
realisation of my peaks and valleys
remembrance of my love and good deeds
reconciliation of my broken relationships
repentance of my mistakes and misdeeds
reassurance of a bliss beyond death

Like a chick from its
shell, Death is just a goodbye
of the soul to the body
But with art, I live immortal
in many hearts reciting
the unsung ballads of mine

I behold Death
not as a farewell, but
a rejuvenation of my soul
through my eternal art.





PARIS ROSEMONT

the girl who didn't

Do you recognise the girl in this faded photograph? I was the girl *most likely* to:
succeed in life,
make a name for herself,
set the world ablaze with the brilliance of her potential.

I was the girl who failed to:
live up to the looming shadows of expectations,
amount to anything more than mediocre.

I wasn't even able to manage simple things, like:
having a home of my own,
carrying all my babies to full term,
keeping a husband happy,
or staying in that supposedly good job
that was sucking the spirit out of me.

Crushed under the avalanche of failed expectations, I begin to claw my way out from the rubble of my shame. Without a blueprint to confine me, I start mapping out a new path.
I remember now! I was once a girl who dreamed of becoming a writer. *Hello, old friend. It's nice to see you again.*



KIM BEENCK

that girl

Remember me?

I am that girl who had a
fire within a burning
passion for life once bright
like the Olympic torch
the shine has now worn off sunny
disposition smouldering around a
conflicted heart that once beat with
happiness now seldom holds joy

a conflicted heart

a scattered soul

a vestibule of moss covered crumbling
bricks and mortar falling before the main
façade once as bright as the lightest
sandstone unscathed smooth to touch

if you don't remember me
I am that girl who constantly tries
to hide her flaws pink tattoos down
the right of her body each one
telling a different story a life kept alive
another one survived enduring pain
physical

emotional

anguish

feelings

of indifference

Remember me, now?

I am that girl standing
in front of you seeing
now it was all in vain.





REBECCA COPPE

this is a letter to myself

Born premature. Every fibre
of my being was struggling
to survive. Later diagnosed
with cerebral palsy my body
contorting, spasming in
c o n t i n u o u s
agony under the knife I was
crucified for the sin of my
disability.

Every operation I wanted
to be made whole.

While my mother tortured
me with her viper's tongue,
her acid words, my father turned
a blind eye, a prisoner in his own
mind, afraid to see the truth, do
anything for peace.

My spine has been damaged,
pierced with a twisted knife
gnawing at my spine, the pain
comes like waves of the ocean.
Always constant, but
different degrees.





Pain means I am still alive.
It won't break me. Deafening
screams from a petrified child
hiding injuries in my shame,
tending my own wounds,
stripped bare, left battered,
bruised and bloodied. I envied
the release death would bring.

Rejected by my family, treated
like merchandise, they tried to
trade me like an unwanted animal.
To speak my truth even though
I felt my tongue was cut out, it
fell on deaf ears

Wanting desperately to be loved,
to give love without excruciating
pain, I married a sadistic and evil
human who revelled and delighted
in my anguish and despair. Grappling
with anxiety, depression and PTSD
it feels like I am standing on shifting
sands.

Nightmares echo like a siren in the
dead of the night. I am lathered
in sweat in the fight of my life

This cycle of abuse was a
m e r r y - g o - r o u n d
I could not get off.
I refuse to let evil beat me.

I
am
free

Strong like a mountain, fierce
as a lion, brave as a warrior, I will
not be silenced.

My faith is my compass. I must
love myself, before I can love
another.





MARY JOSEPH

my mentor

She's full of positivity and a breath
of fresh air

Penetrating the atmosphere with her
kind words and support and flair

NO judgement but only a pure motivation
to help

A kind heart and purity within
and without

Who would despise such a kind
soul

who always believes in you and
makes you whole.

I call her "Blessed" and
I find my soul refreshed.

The day is beautiful in her
company

Who gives you inspiration and
fills your mind with education and not
condemnation

A kind soul who is worthy to be
a mentor and a friend

A support and a strength till the
end.

Amira, you're beautiful inside out

Your wisdom and kindness expands
my soul

to develop an inner belief

Is really such a relief

Nothing more, nothing less

Just a rainbow of beautiful

Colours

A lasting picture of true
happiness and joy





DUAA ALAMIN

vitamin love

When I die I want you
to be strong
live life long
be a grown up
be ready for life challenges close up
and know that you don't need the mercy of anyone

Don't ever think I've been taken
away from you
sooner or later
that's everyone's destiny

But don't worry, I'll be watching over you

When I die I don't want
to see your tears
see you feeling down, sorry and crying

But please know, I will miss you a lot

When I die I know I'm safe
going to a better place, a space,
a place with no war, bloodshed or crime
a place for us all to be judged
a fair place

Don't say goodbye at my grave
it's a new beginning
new life
I'll be taken care of
by the only one creator
the beneficent the merciful

But don't worry, I'll be watching over you

When you cover my grave with soil
when it's dark
and keeps getting darker
I'm going back to where I was made of
back to the clay
it's not the end
my soul is finally free

Don't worry, my soul will be watching over you



Remember Casper, your favourite movie?
I'll be around watching it with you
I'll give you a reminder of what's due,
check your homework, review,
pack up your Rubiks cubes after use
and you just can't refuse—comb your hair,
sometimes you're just unaware.
You asked me once if I have eyes
on the back of my head.
see I'm watching you even
when I'm dead.

When I die I just want you to know
that I was proud of you
even though I've never told you.
I was firm, with high expectations
I couldn't do better combinations
forgive me for making you to do
more homework
for taking the LEGO away
so that you could focus

Forgive me if I wasn't a fun mum
all I dreamed for you to become
a successful boy, driven boy
I called my love for you *Vitamin Love*

I will infuse you with it from above.



DIVYA MUKUNDARAJ

my last lullaby

I close my eyes and wonder what is mine...

There goes my last warm breath
and as I turn cold, my flesh relished
by worms, bones lay lone. I'm just
another traveller leaving the mortal
world to an infinite *Realm of Harmony*.

As I walk on this eternal road, resonating
the echoes of my life, I reflect gratefully
on the lessons and blessings that made
my spirit a *Soul*.

I asked my *Soul* what belongs to me?
my *Soul* replied:

All those feelings and memories,
that I savour are forever mine. The
touch of tiny little fingers weaving
around my neck, the hurt from words
like a dagger in my chest.



Mistakes of past and the fear of repeating
them, like a snake looking into my
eyes and ready to sting. The anxious
butterflies fluttering in my gut, the
frog of guilt thumping on my chest.

Wild fantasies that never let me sleep,
and untamed dreams that never let me
weep. The brimming dark cloud above
my head, waiting to pour. The empty
cup of love, longing for more.

Lucky moments that made me feel
like a star, rough ones that wound me deep
with a scar. The feeling of being guarded
and connected in prayer chains, emotional
chaos that chains the mind with grief
and pain.

The strength of Mum's love,
the warmth of holding a child. Love
from dear ones bigger than the world,
and the hatred from the loved ones like
sails unfurled.



PATRICIA JBEILY

not an orphan spirit

All of us humans are merely visitors on earth. My time has finished. Life is not about the destination, it's the journey, adding real value along the way. While most are mourning my loss, grieving and sinking in a fountain of cries, I am in a heavy sleep. I am no longer in my physical body.

I want to rise from the grave to be given eternal life, to set my spirit free. Don't be surprised! My immortal soul is reunited in paradise with preceded loved ones. We will be together again, rejoicing at the open gates of heaven in the welcoming arms of the angels, sitting beside the throne of the Lord where there will be comfort, rest and peace.

God is the author of the book of my life. He has chosen its title and the time when its pages open and close. I am a character in each chapter of my life. Now I am present as a narrator telling you my destiny. My children, you are now readers listening to me and seeing detailed illustrations of my story. You are all my masterpieces, each of you a work of outstanding artistry.

I want you to know that you are all my gems, rewards and prizes. Always feel grateful, keep your head high and be content. I am above the clouds looking over your beautiful faces, sending you blessings. I will be greeting you by visions passing in your dreams, waking you with the sounds of enchanting symphonies played down memory lane. In all of the times we shared each other's company, my children, we were making memory deposits in the banks of our lives.

I know I will be missed in times of special occasions like mothers day, my birthday, Christmas day. Don't be lonely like a fish with no water but be at ease that you are swimming in the ocean of my love. Don't lose hope and think it is the end. No, God smiles from above and says, 'relax it's just a bend, not the end.'

I want you all to take a deep breath and be still. You will feel my presence with each smell of my perfume. I taught you everlasting lessons. I raised you to be empowered and not to hold grudges. Be moved to continue the road with love and bonding as brothers. I equipped you with faith. No weapon against you will prosper.

Always know there is more to life than we experience. Where does the wind start and end? If we only relied on our eyes and ears, we would lose out on the fullness of life. But when we rebirth, we become alive in the spirit and enter it with communion of our father Jesus.

Lift yourself up and realise all of you have a part of me with your inspiration, motivation, devotions.

Impulsively and repeatedly you will say that word that only belonged to me 'Allah yisaged!' This will be traced and handed down through your own speech. It will be recalled as my DNA, a trademark relating to me.

I don't want any of you to be sad or mad but be happy in the Lord and be glad.



There will be miracles when you believe.

I urge you all to create a positive atmosphere, to withdraw from anything toxic that ruins your emotions and minds. Trust your infinite knowledge and wisdom. Be flexible like plants that adapt to their environments, plants that have deep roots extending deep into nourished soil. This way, you will grow successfully.

Be empowered. I gave you eyes to see what God wanted you to see. Walk each day hoping in the Lord that He will renew your strengths, you all will soar on wings like eagles, you will run—not grow weary.

Remember that all of you are carrying a version of me by having a golden heart that doesn't rust. Even though fatigue and exhaustion invades, with meaningful words it will still shine. Wipe away your tears my boys and wash away your sorrows. I hope that my fruitful words will nourish your souls with joy, leaving you feeling as if the rain has fallen on dry land, watering it to rejuvenate again.

Always be inspired and thankful that you inherited the wisdom of a warrior. Overcome and endure. Knowing that hope is there, the sunlight will rise shining bright. Some days are going to be cloudy, thunderbolts only hit the top of the lofty mountains, the cliff only goes to stagnant waters.

Fear not my children, you have the luxury of the holy spirit that strengthens you. Even the hairs of your head are numbered by God. He said unto me, it is done, he is the alpha and omega. It is the first and the last, the beginning and the end.





BRITTANY RAMAGE

no longer yours

Remember me?

I was the girl you decided would be your next victim. The girl you used as an ashtray. The girl who you made feel crazy.

I was the girl who you isolated from the world. The girl you used as a punching bag. Who thought you broke her forever.

I was the girl who felt like I could never say no. The girl you used for sex any time you pleased. Who you abandoned in the city with no way of getting home.

I was the girl who wondered where I went wrong.

Remember me?

I am the girl who wishes we never met. The girl who no longer looks over her shoulder expecting your shadow. Who knows her self worth. I am the girl who stands tall and proud. The girl who has a support system. Who knows she is worth loving.

I am the girl who knows that "No" is:

A COMPLETE SENTENCE.¹

I am the girl who found happiness without you. Who rebuilt her life. I am the girl who is finally free.

Do you remember me now?

¹. As seen in *Grey's Anatomy* Season 18 Episode 14 *Road Trippin'* 4:01.





JANE CHUNG

before the final curtain

Like a cat with nine lives, life
keeps pulling me back, making
me thrive, not pulling the plug to
flatter—I still have poetry to master.

Most certainly when my earthly
journey ends I want a big celebration of my life
with friends as all pains and sufferings
cease, with no tears but pride of a
life well-leased.

Please do not carry me in a box
to invite the fox, please do not leave
me in the ground, maggots are around.

Unleashing the hidden dragon
with majestic pomp—
Drums beating boom, Boom, BOOM,
Cymbals clashing Clang, Clang, CLANG
Symbolising the life force of Ylang Ylang.

Four lions merrily dancing with the dragon
With gymnastic stunts of bodies suspended in the air
In tune with the force of the Gong
Reflecting life and its volatility, demanding
Mental and Physical Agility.

Tables and tables lined with dishes of lavish
Sumptuous feast, curry laksa,
Vegetarian Yum Cha and gourmet Dim Sims.
All hungry ghosts seen and unseen devouring
The satisfaction guaranteed Soul Food scene!

Loud music to sing and dance, to rise like a Phoenix
From the ashes, fluttering in a butterfly trance,
Chattering in a birdy crowd and floating
On cloud nine to Crossing the rainbow and
Fading
away
gleefully

with: *I did it MY WAY!*





AILSA LIU

eggshell blue

Remember the girl who cupped blue eggshell up against the sky,
the white membrane holding the pieces together.

Remember the girl with an appetite for risk,
shivering but diving in,
breaking the still water.

Remember the girl who couldn't balance the equation,
tunnelling into those two lines,
unequally weighted.

Remember the girl whose laughter punctuates
experiences of my courage.





PARIS ROSEMONT

what's mine is yours— and what's yours is also yours

Nothing I own is truly mine.

Perhaps mine in title, but only
as long as a sandcastle remains
just beyond the ocean's
grasp; a temporal existence
before nature reclaims it.

Objects weigh me down. They belong in a museum
of memories. I have no use for shadows. My allergies
flare; it's hard to breathe the pollen of my past. I open
a window—an escape hatch to cull the clutter.

I feel lighter already.

Even my body is not solely mine. Held hostage all my life, my body has been:

SMOTHERED and stroked and dressed like a doll;

FORCED to kiss bristly-whiskered “uncles” and sit on their stiff laps;

AT THE MERCY of a monthly cycle that makes me
cry and bleed and feel confused;

IN THE HANDS of boys who made me feel those same emotions;

COERCED into lying in a marital bed to serve my wifely duties;

USED rent-free as an incubator in nine-month leases;



TORN apart,
sewn back together
and pumped with gallons of strangers’ blood
(how much of me is even me anymore?).

Is it any wonder I have begun
using my body as currency
to gain attention from random men who want to look
and touch and look some more? Cheap thrills—some power
at last. But when the superficial hit wears off, I start
to feel empty again. I take scissors to my skin to numb the pain.



BRITTANY RAMAGE

the hardest goodbye

Only eight weeks along and so tired
A nap won't hurt
Oh how I wish I could make time reverse
The last time I slept with you in my womb
Waking with shooting pain in my side
Bloodstained underwear on
the bathroom floor
The Doctor and ultrasound
confirming my worst fears

*Unfortunately you're experiencing a miscarriage,
I'm sorry for your loss*

I feel a lump in my throat
Each word sending glass shards into my heart
Shattering my world
Did I really lose you?
I feel like I'm going to throw up
Is it my fault?
Tears welling up in my eyes waiting for
permission to fall down my face
I wish those words
were never spoken

Five years have since passed and I still find
myself wondering who you might've been

Would you have looked like me?

Would I have been enough for you?

Would you have been happy?

What should have been nine months of you in my womb,
cut short at eight weeks and replaced
with the heaviness of grief
Engulfed with despondency and rage
Is that really all the time we get together?
My heart aches with emptiness
Having to accept I will only carry you
in memory of what could have been
And not in my arms

Never to feed you,
Or read to you,
Or hear those precious baby babbles,
Only in my dreams when you visit me do
I get to hold you in my arms and sing you a lullaby
I wasn't ready to say goodbye.



WestWords

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We believe literacy, self-expression and creativity changes lives and communities. WestWords is committed to providing an environment where the stories of the communities of Western Sydney and the places they come from are celebrated.

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Systems, histories, collective forces and violence try to seize the voices of women. Alongside this reality is the powerful and courageous act of reclaiming. Of resistance. As you read and hear this anthology I know that you will find, deep in your bones, a knowledge that the cacophony of voices enclosed in these pages *must* be heard. I have had the greatest privilege walking alongside these women. May listening to and reading their words open possibilities of nourishment and solidarity.

JULIA ELLIS

Apples: An Unapologetic Anthology from the Core is the result of the deep well of creativity that lives in each of these Women and their bravery in daring to submerge themselves in it. It is a result their deepest fears and their most profound loves. These poems contain worlds. They are tender, heart-wrenching and raw. They are devastating, beautiful and wise. These poems come from the core. And for that, these Women make no apology.

ALI WHITELOCK

 WestWords

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