I’ll Show You Mine
Nonfiction
Fiction
Poetry
Sex
Other
Everything in the world is about sex except sex. Sex is about power.
_Oscar Wilde_

Suckin’ on my titties like you wanted me,
Callin’ me, all the time like blondie
Check out my chrissy behind
It’s fine all of the time
Like sex on the beaches,
What else is in the teaches of peaches? Huh? What?
_Peaches, Fuck The Pain Away_
I’ll Show You Mine

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Andrew McMillan  
Foreword

There’s a Virginia Woolf quote which I often come back to, from The Waves, in which she says: “sometimes I have to bang my hand hard against some door, in order to bring myself back to the body”. I used that as an epigraph to a long poem I wrote in my first collection, physical, and its something that I always try and hold in the back of my mind all the time. When in doubt, bring it back to the body.

There is often a lot made of bad sex writing, so much so that it even has its own award. That’s because it’s easier to do it badly, bad sex writing is as easy as having bad sex. Good sex writing is very hard to pull off (as it were) - and often ends up in obfuscation, or in innuendo, as you’ll already have seen. The difficulty with writing about sex, particularly in the country, is that we tend to be very, well, ‘British’ about it; the moment we try and describe something not as it truly is, but to dance around it, it begins to feel like euphemism, as though the poet or the novelist is looking away from their true intent. I’ve always hated those films where a couple would be about to go to bed, and then it cuts away to some curtains blowing and then to a couple smoking afterwards. If this is to be the subject of what is being written, then it has to be written about directly and without flinching.

The other danger with writing about sex is that we romanticise it, or smooth over everything; sex is so often messy, smelly, funny, difficult, anxiety-inducing, fun, scary- oftentimes all at once. Good sex writing, as we have here, recognises that, and doesn’t try to smooth the edges away.
James Smart & Melissa Wan
Introduction

I’ll Show You Mine began as a desire for conversation. As with young lovers on the precipice of experience, or old partners looking to explore greater depths; without dialogue, a thing dies.

Good sex disarms, surprises, reassures, validates, excites, satiates, challenges. That literature - our most realised method of experiencing the interior of another person - so often pulls from the act, from the looking, the watching, from the clouded glass, the exhausted bodies, the ruined sheets, the hum of anticipation, the quiet and loudness, seemed to us to be an act of denial; a betrayal of truth, filled with portrayals that exist in the service of taste that has been decided for us by people who are not us.

We wanted to see more work about sex, sexuality, desire, bodies, gender, shame, normalcy, intimacy, kinks, transgression, pleasure, the unsaid, the screamed, the whispered, the private, the public, fantasy, reality, the physical, the unknowable, the liminal, the concrete; good sex, bad sex, raw sex, fun sex, quiet sex, loud sex, no sex, just sex.

We wanted to experience work not at the mercy of publishing trends, of taste, of guilt or fear of judgement, and instead, work concerned only with honesty. Here, you have the work of thirty five writers and artists who responded to our call for dialogue on the subject of sex with honesty and openness. As with sex, there is no singular approach, definition, framework. There is no one position from which we should stand, watch, fuck, make love.

All we can ask from our literature, as with any form of intimacy, is for truth. With this collection of poetry, nonfiction, fiction and work that does not cleanly allow for categorisation, we can see that unfixed nature of desire, the shifting position of what entices, and the vast spectrum of sexuality - each position equally true - is what gives it power.

This journal is a celebration of difference, truth and sex. Let’s celebrate every difference, every truth, every intimacy. And then, let’s talk about it.

Big love
James & Melissa
Notes

Sex with you is the crust of us on my exhausted penis, sprawling cadaver-like, waiting for the detective to find me, waiting for my mind, waiting for you to get back from the bathroom so I can wash my fingers. Sex with you is the mind-maps we learned to make at school, a series of connections, nexus, and how I can find one of your head hairs crouched behind my scrotum or between my buttocks. Dearest one—with my head on your chest I ask how you’d feel if I called you slut sometimes.

Sex with you is secrets and parties, and not understanding how such smoothness could exist, being baffled and blind, wanting as children want. It’s pushing through the fear that I will hurt you if I hit you as hard as you tell me to hit you. It’s stumbling into the bright fact that you are a mammal, not a porcelain doll with a cold face and hair that won’t grow back. Sex with you is not a dance or a play-fight or a real fight. It isn’t Mass. We are not flowers or the ocean. We are not what the taxonomy says. But we are dangerous, we are beautiful. We breathe in when the other breathes out, until carbon dioxide fogs us both. It is a journey through landscape. It is a process, Sisyphean, a dose of pain relief with fleeting effect.

The land we travel cannot be built on, only tented.

Sex with you is the summit at which is hammered out the new republic’s constitution. The others might have pussies, you say, but mine is a cunt. And you take my hand in both of yours to show me the difference. We are against pet-names; we have no desire to coat our pleasure in sweetness. We glide anyhow.

And sex with you is the femme stuff I used to feel guilty for loving. Heels. Ouverts. Skirt on. It is the tip of your tongue on my foreskin, on my teeth, against my cornea. It is days later, when I smell my own body odour and my addled brain sends blood to my penis because it reminds me of your body odour, of stripping activewear and lapping your bacteria, your salt, your urea. Sex with you is underwear-to-the-side urgency, a series of small emergencies.
Sex with you is underwear-to-the-side urgency, a series of small emergencies. It is four questioning eyes, none of them quite belonging to a pair.

It is parting you with palms on hipbones, teasing you with breath, the first contact of your fingernails with the hair on my thighs. It is telling you I need you, a helplessness that had nothing to do with sex until rushingly it did. I need you. Sex with you is agility. Sex with you is evisceration, the cruelty of our differences, the cold fact of desire. Sex with you is the things I think desperately about when I don’t want to ejaculate, how brickwork and the lazy wheels of shopping trolleys have muscled onto my map, forever part of what I love about fucking you hard. And I have thought other thoughts, when nothing mattered but the sound of you in my ears and the fact that it must never, ever stop.

Who will read our emails when we die? Greetings to you, you archaeologists—the tomb is yours to loot.

Sex with you is your skill and my wonder. Great human gift, the capacity for awe. It’s the thrill of being deceived by a conjuror. It’s going to work with the last rust of your period on me, getting hard at the urinal when I see it, being unable to piss for the hardness, going instead to the cubicle to text you, and getting back to you nine hours later, ruined and dirty and desperate.

Sex with you is the things I’m still afraid to tell you. Our poet watches from the doorway. I slip out of you because the angle is a challenge but it’s one I know you like. Our poet slinks away, has seen enough. We hear the front door click and for a moment we are motionless. Sex with you is being as close as possible, closer than that, but still being alone. Because things cannot touch without being separate. It is the ceiling fan, refrigerator door, toppled glasses and sweat-printed vinyl and greasy sheets and handy cushions. It is the mirror, the other you and other me, who bare their teeth and announce themselves in a way we could never do.
Blueprints

Last night, I nearly stole your blueprints
from your desk

it was a good day – sunny, a few clouds
to shield the shoulders

there were voices in my head I didn’t recognise

there were oceans on the map I’d never seen before

and blueprints staring at me, behind
that locked pretence

some people are born explorers: they’ll
go down on you anywhere, regardless
of who can see.

I prefer the marked route,

the toilet wall, graffiti.
Coupled, You Will Need Both Equations to Solve for \( x \) and \( y \)

In the open wide where the stakes are high and the city’s hot mist blinds us to the reason for the things we are doing, I lie, long, eelish, in the foolish state of *how am I supposed to move?*

Shared bedroom, alleyway, tent, who knows, car, care, alleyway, alleyway ...

Anyway.

Love is forgetting about what has recently come to be known as the front-facing camera of your soul.

Unprofessionally angled bedmates attempt to soft-focus the mood but the light glares on: on unregulated body hairs, off-white vests, recent divorces, all the many ways our given bodies have abandoned us.

Love is brief and constant, curious and in debt, it is every time the pasty morning sun alarms upon a vulnerable out-of-hours cooperation; it is people at their weakest and, cupped up, shaking. Naked in the tower block, I like to imagine everyone is at it fleeting meeting.

When a partner says *kneel* and I say *don’t call me that*, I know I have become a full person with a core that cannot be chewed.

It’s a looping long-take of those linked arms in a dance that rush in, lock eyes, pretend to know what they’re doing, then let go and crash out of the room.

Uncovering is discovering. To de-shirt is to research. Covalent bonds, the heat from skin, binary stars, everything with mass emitting tiny particles toward everything else forever.

Anyway. *How do you do?*

*Lydia Unsworth*
spartans and athenians

i remember the scoop-backed swimming cozzie - just being there on my bed when i came home from school. mum was furious when i said in the gentlest voice i could find - because i really meant it - because this time i had not needed any coaxing - that i did not like it. i had wanted a racer back costume, in navy blue-black - because that was the colour of a deep and serious sea - of underwater feats, and disappearance acts. a racer-back would not catch in the hulls of its fabric, the lugs of milky lemon-squash coloured standing water of the council pool. i did not wish to be slowed down. at the beach, boys or sisters or best friends could ping your cozzie back, hooking a finger in the base of it’s scoop to laugh at your bum, lichened with seaweed and sand. but i did not wish to be looked at.

at school we learned about the spartans and athenians and when asked which side i would have liked to have been on I said the spartans, because they trained girls. and because their army was always ready, unlike the athenians who only trained at times of war.

much later i would wear stringy bikinis that cover very little. i’d go topless, giving it as little thought as my mum and the french women on the beaches of my childhood. but still, on regent street i am caught out by a lick of adrenaline, suddenly, looking at a topshop window display, and have to move into a side street. the swimming costume makes me dizzy. and i am surprised to learn in yet another way, of the difficulty in treading water, so that the past might catch up.

they are fashionable now, one-pieces of lycra that emphasise the bowls of our middles, channels between hips and thighs of baby skin that has never before seen the sun. nobody wears strings and corners any more. we are buoyant on thicker thighs. our chest bones have settled themselves, now that we are no longer on the atkins diet. they allow themselves to sit and be soft. and softer still are the u’s of backs, which even on this pale plastic, scuffed mannequin, i adore.
XI
The Interior of a Heart

AFTER the incident was concluded, the intercourse was more intimate than anything he had ever wreaked upon himself. In the remorse, the agony, the repentance, the self-reproach, the thoughts, expelled all that dark treasure lavished on the very man so adequately portrayed by his victim. The shy and sensitive pardoning his black devices.
Football for Sensitive Boys

Curling into the fetal position
that’s the kind of boy we need in defence.
One who’s held his mother’s hand
well into late childhood.

When the ball comes rocketing down
for the perfect header, we want the player
who will instinctively duck for cover
in the face of leather.

A boy whose run could be mistaken for a ballerina,
so smooth and strategic
we could confuse his footwork for a tap dancer.

A boy who is not afraid to be afraid on the park
football-shy, keeps his studs pristine
shin-guards high, fit for a queen.

The skinny soul trembling in the changing room,
up against the sour smell of stale gym kit.
Bone-thin boys, bug-eyed, fumbling
at the thought of getting undressed.

The aching boys who hate this scrum-up.
These growing bodies. This pained space.
The one who forgets his kit
so, he doesn’t have to play,
whose mum writes a note to say:

‘Boy has anxiety. Boy is not comfortable
with the bodies of other boys beside his.
Let him be a substitute. Let him sit at the side.
Please let him out.’
I have seen the bare backsides of boys whose sex is straight.
Wish we could lay our secret selves down in deep leaves.
I follow the ones I like from the side lines.
I want to be the ball boy, to run and catch
what you need and bring it to you
to keep the game going.
An Encyclopaedia of Orgasms

After your uncle Dave left to drive home a drunk cousin, I found you outside behind the reception hall. You looked uncomfortable as fuck in your shirt and tie; dark, shaggy hair hanging; shoes that looked like they’d been kicking a ball down a dusty road; one hand fidgeting at your collar, the other holding champagne in a plastic cup.

‘Richard—what are you doing out here?’ I asked. ‘It’s hot.’
‘What’s your name again?’
‘Nadine. I’m here with your Uncle Dave.’

We sat under a tree with our drinks. I brushed a pine needle out of your hair. You were twice my size.

‘Sorry, but redheads are my least favourite,’ you said. ‘I don’t mean you specifically.’
‘It’s okay.’
‘I’m not anyone’s favourite either, so it’s not like it matters.’
‘It’s fine, Richard.’
‘No one’s looking at this fucking body and smiling.’

Your email two days later discussed varieties of Cheetos, orgasms, The Hitchhiker’s Guide. The sheer green dress I’d worn. Were you drunk when you sent it? Like, why were you writing all that to a pretty much stranger, your uncle’s girlfriend?

In your email: your first near-orgasm when you were thirteen, waking up in bed with your dick throbbing all on its own. Your mom was in the kitchen making breakfast, listening to the Doobie Brothers.

When we met at the reception you were twenty and I was thirty-one. Soon, you were texting me.

‘What are the weirdest things anyone’s said to you during sex?’

You asked like you were taking notes. I gave honest answers.

‘What the fuck is that freckle?... ‘I wanted to go deeper, but you were on my leg.’... ‘Christ’s sake why are your tits so COLD.’

You thought about sex a lot. Liked to imagine the quickened breath, parted lips, stifled cries and O-faces of those who climaxed in ways other than yourself.
In your spiral notebook, an encyclopedia of orgasms: nipplegasm, skingasm, clitoral, g-spot; pelvic, prostate, blended, non-ejaculatory. Orgasms so intense people lost consciousness from so much blood rushing away from their brains. Stacie Walinski coming in her Levi’s under the bleachers; Tad Stinson jerking himself into a toilet bowl. Like your sad spurts into folded toilet paper, people in your notebook mostly came alone, thinking of someone who would never think of them.

Your uncle Dave was nothing special, a nice guy. Limp fish handshake, limp fish everything. Quiet, had no opinions on anything; couldn’t grow a beard. Delicate fish bones in a grown man’s body. Let’s leave him out of this. Behind your mother’s house smells like old wet leaves and rotten apples. We throw our empty bottles over the riverbank and go inside to watch Big Booty Babes Meet Killer Cock Cops.

‘This movie is so insulting.’

‘That guy’s dick is impressive, though.’

‘It’s like a special effect.’

‘I’d be frightened, honestly.’

Later, I’ve got my shorts down and you’re fingering my clit. I’m wet before you start—you’re lucky. Bartholin’s gland doing its thing. Second surprise: you kinda know what you’re doing. How the HELL. Feathery circles, clockwise, counter; gentle squeeze with the knuckles, firmer pressure with your thumb. You lick your fingertips to keep them wet. Pause, start again. Pretty soon I’m rocking with your rhythm. Up, down, around. Fuck.

Just in time I push you away.

‘But you didn’t come yet?’

‘Not right now.’

‘I want to watch you come.’

But I didn’t want to let you.

At the lake. You’re swimming in trunks and a Dave Matthews t-shirt, your limbs marshmallow white. In slanting sunlight bees buzz around a dead tree at the edge of the water. While you watch them, I swim up from behind, circle your soft belly with my arms. You flinch but keep watching the bees. They swirl in twos and threes, in and out of the sun. You’re hard immediately. I massage your
cocks with one hand over your trunks, the other arm around your waist, resting my head against your back. You thrust with your hips as I stroke harder and just like that you’re climaxing, thrashing under the water, whispering, ‘please, PLEASE.’

When you’re finished you fall back sobbing into my arms.

Your emails after I dumped Dave and left the area: porn and junk-food binges while your mom and stepdad were away; standing at the edge of the lawn in your work smock watching butterflies on the catmint. But, Richard, didn’t you understand that if you only look at the sun as it sets, eventually it feels like the day is always dying?

You wrote, ‘Did you ever see anyone so horny you could feel it? That’s me. I know you’re not in love with anyone, Nadine, but this is important to me. Please help me believe there will ever be anyone else.’

I imagined you so lonely that winter that the house creaking in the wind was your company; the fridge humming in the kitchen, the hiss of hot air from the living room radiator.

Since the last time I heard from you, it’s been Nadine’s adventures in wonderland: fucked up a couple relationships, still haven’t finished my degree, got thrown out of a family I was starting to love. Suitcase at the door containing my full possessions; boyfriend’s mother slicing tomato and avocado for my going away sandwich.

‘We’ve enjoyed your time here, Nadine, but we think this is best.’

One thing I’ve learned: anyone can fuck up their life, but sometimes it’s not permanent. So I won’t believe you’re still living at home, clerking at the Dollar General, masturbating into a sock in your room, keeping notes on every climax. NO. Instead, I imagine you’re finally back in school, dating a carefree, blue-eyed girl. You enjoy regular, mutual orgasms, and nobody writes it down anywhere.
Eating Coño Next to Ripe Mangos

Rascan my thighs your rastas
they scratch mi piel tus
dreadlocks de panela, papi
estás in my pelitos de coco
tú hueles a coconut y hierba
& me of open of open & me
the smell you can’t stop
licking, mira
your tongue y tu lengua
tus dedos que remember
your piercing bien frío, ay
but your feet
knock las clavas down
nos reímos y tu risa
el Claro river we used to
swim in

bebé show me what
you’re looking for
guayaba jugo lips
you smile like
joder like
i die
malabarista hands
me agarran
& the lamp en tu pieza
red & rota &
hueles a
dulce of
sucking &
blackest
eyelashes
eyes like melted
ternura
there are
ripe
mangos
next
to you.

Laia Sales Merino
Doll

I’ve gotta girl. They said I never would. At school, I was lone-a-lone-o. Where I sit it smells. Fish odour syndrome. You shall have a fishy in your little dishy. All of me fish from my pores. I eat the fish, it comes back out, behind me. On the chair. Scampi Fries. My finger sniff in cuff of shirt. Boys say girls smell of this.

*

I’ve gotta girl now. In young days, I could only dream, the girllinesses. Sit in fish and just be near, box of classroom holding us in. Lines of desk and I sat at the backs of them. Bras through blouses, layers, like sin, under their shirts, their skin, the bones of them. I touch my back. Oily as oilskin, nubbly acne frets. Braille. I’m not blind. I like to see bras and camisoles, containing, quartering. Sometimes straps so colourful with buds and bows like Christmas tree.

What is the point of it, pretty for the real of it, like butterfly or carousel?

All night I wake to dream of girls.

Catalogue has them in bras and pointing. I go up close to panties. Sometimes tiny darknesses of hair. White cotton. Some fullnesses coming down between their legs. I want. To touch. I sniff my pillow, it stink of fish. Fillet-o-fish.

I sicken.

I watch TV. I like the shampoo girl. She blonde light, teeth to dazzle, no smell. She shakes her hair like summer. I think her smile not open for me. I spy it anyway like light under the door. I walk alone. School bag digging, blazer itchy.

At night, I let it out. I see all windows glowing gold. I wake to sticky, cold and clam.

I’m too old now. School. I learned, I watched. There’s disco fuss, people signing shirts. I do not fol-low. My shirt is white and yellow rings on white. Grey where neck goes. Girls sign mine, up my back like tease. They know me, learn me, 16 years.

My back is crawling with pens and names up and down.
No one this close before.
Breath on my neck. Like Ma long ago. Eyes close, eyelashes.

*

After school, I work the cars, the engines. It suit me. Dark and dirty under bonnet, disappear. No smell of me that matters. I strip off boiler suit, I strip off me. I sleep. I make the insides growl. make the joins and shine and fit, I am understand the way of this. I am speaking only coffee break. Lads tease me virgin, tell me whores. Eyes slide. I no trouble. I cheap. Apprentice. I am earning.

I am mother-money. She happy, she wash my bed. She make my tea, she clean the grease and oil from shower. She get me Lynx. I watch through curtains people going out. I think of girl as I slide under cars. I know them like a song. I burn.

Now I get my car, I good to drive. I learn quick to gear and clutch. I know to guide the corners smooth, to think in steps, to see in bit by bit. Pay day I get cash and cash, it save and save, safe like curtains, like fat. I X-Box, 2am. I roll my body tight in duvet like hot dog. I rise. I burn. I wake to sticky dawn.

The girls in pub. Tip tap nails, hard eyelashes. Lines across the eyes all black. Smelling of flowers and cigarettes. They kind. They stay away.

I buy vodka, orange. They do not ask my age now, sonny jim. I cover fish in denim and still it swim out. Doctor give me pills. Still the fishy breathes.


We’ll Sainsbury’s together, hold hands. I’ll wake with her 10,000 days.

Girl from America. She take months. Emailing, questions, more money to the factory. I buy her bikini. I choose her size before, I see how her breast go in my hand. I buy her ring with blue stone like ocean in faraway. I love her. She come to me! Birthday. This now her birthday. Box like grandad coffin. UPS man need

Sarah Westcott
two to lift into front room, careful, careful. They wrinkle nose like all. Ma at gas fire. She not know we two-three now. *Whas that?*

*It telescope Ma, help me seeing stars.*

I must wait for name after knowing. I slit tape, lift her out. She soft and heavy like big animal. Her head tip back, her throat perfect. Toes coral. Long thighs. I feel the bones. She dressed in factory clothes. I lay her in bedroom and shut door. Ma is down to sleepin, fire bars glowing good.

*

*Hello, I been waiting for you.*

I slide off factory dress, white cotton like I choose. I know not touch, I do not know her yet. *Did you have long way girl, are you tired?* I gown her soft silk nightgown, red-flowers, I tie the waist. She special. She looks back blue eyes sees me standing there. Kneeling. I bend to kiss, she doesn’t blink, she doesn’t move she stare back like mirror.

I kiss her mouth and she hold it all. I give my razor to her and she lift it to my throat, half smiling, stroke it like I tell her to, like featherdown across my skin and soon we dreaming together, I inside her, bloodening, the whole long fishy swim of us away into the oceans.
An Outward Sign of An Inward Grace

as it happened you hushed oh je-
sus and i thought
there was no wound in your side
from which to taste truth
the moon wasn’t waxing no
bodywarm wine
our watchful lady wanes
away into a faint at the sight

a clean sponge
is as much water
as it is
itself
of your highest water
only the cup of my tongue

Jack Bigglestone
Other Practices of Everyday Life

She waits until the bright patch of pink-yellow sunlight dies to merge with the gray-pink of the walls. In summer, this happens around seven-twenty, exactly—almost two hours after she returns home from class.

By then, her clothes are on the floor. She puts a finger in her mouth and wonders if she should close her eyes or keep them fixed to the ceiling. Soft and grainy. Engorged. Peach. Plum. She is most certain that these were the words printed on the biology book they had to study from in sixth grade. She thinks of other things. Other words. Lips, ridges, lips, ridges. Words for sensations. Words for colours. She often wonders what they look like right before she comes, what colours the lips are. Dark, fleshy brown-pink? There must be more accurate words. Softer, without hyphens. But to what use? Desire, she thinks, is best left unpinned. A little vague. A little to the left.

Of course, she doesn’t come every day because something comes in the way. Mostly, phone calls.

From her lover of three months, from her mother (of always), from someone she doesn’t need to talk to at seven-thirty. She groans and picks up the phone, answers in groans – little groans to indicate yes, longer hyphenated groans to say no-not-now. She gets up from the bed and walks to the kitchen sink, barefoot, with only a shirt on to wash her free hand. She knows the interiors well, she has learned to walk in the dark.

After the phone call, there is no return. She unbuttons her shirt, hangs it from the hook farthest from the spice rack, and picks out her favourite knife. It is exactly the right length. She runs her fingers over its side, with a little hesitation and then a little hurry. She opens the refrigerator door, and crouches down to take out vegetables from the bottom drawer. She glances at her curling pubic hair, blacker in the warm light from the refrigerator as she picks out the vegetables, running her hand over them with slowness, with tenderness. Then puts a light on and she begins to chop.
Easier when alone.
Easiest in third-person.

Five months ago, when she submitted her first-ever university essay, the teacher had said something odd; that the essay was easy to look at, as easy as it was to look at its writer. What had she meant? Was it because she was skinny and straight haired and wore striped t-shirts? Was it because her handwriting was not cursive? Did the teacher appreciate the ease? Or was she lamenting the lack of mystery? Wasn’t it mysterious the way this teacher looked at her? What is the opposite of easy? Is hard nice? Is hard what she had to aspire to become? Hard to look at. Hard to read.

Weekends are spent in other rooms. When her lover, with his right hand slowly making circles over her right inner thigh, reads a sentence from her essay out loud, intoning the full-stops rather elliptically, she wonders if that sentence can ever belong only to her any more.

 Desire, she thinks, is best left unpinned. A little vague. A little ...

A little, just a little higher.

Tell me more.

Later. A desire to delay conversation so that the more urgent desire can be played out to last ... a little bit longer. Exactly ... almost.

Later, after dinner, she decides to open up a little more to her lover of three months. Opening up is always a dance between hurry and hesitation. She tells her lover how, three months ago, flying home for the first time after being away for more than six months for the first time, when one of her friends told another that she was ‘having maternal desires lately’ and the other friend cried out ‘exactly, same’, she felt left out but, in feeling left out, she felt profoundly
home on the tarmac ... and how she was full of questions for the two of them that she now wishes so bad that she had asked, for she wants to know what it meant when two eighteen-year-old women bonded over having the same sort of maternal feelings lately in an airport queue. Does it mean you want to be pregnant – want to have a living thing lodge itself into you and grown inside of you endangering you as you engender it without a lot of control – does it mean you want to have sex – penetrative sex with someone with a penis – does it mean you want to be entered and left – does it mean you want to believe in the luteal phase – does it mean you simply want a sperm cell – or does it mean you want to raise a human – want to attend to a baby’s minute-to-minute needs – perhaps it does not matter how this little human comes to you – through your own incredible strength to push or a surgery or from someone else’s womb with perhaps your and your beloved’s cells or your and a stranger’s cells or manufactured cells – or does that mean you want to feel spongy or like a bed or empty or perhaps it is enough if the baby desires you and you desire this – to latch on to your nipple between its gums – or check the milk’s temperature on your wrist as you squeeze out a drop from a bottle – or do you mean you want a clean kitchen sink – perhaps you’re full of love and want to love someone, to name a someone and take care of that someone for eighteen years or more – then perhaps what you desire is good old economic independence – perhaps you desire control over your resources to shape and influence a life – perhaps you want to function as a social unit and you desire organisation, planned consumption and enough production to keep the engine tank full – what do you mean when you say you’re full of maternal feelings? For she desires none of this, but wants to know what exactly—

Slow down. Says the lover. Says the other. Please slow down.
Other Ways of Knowing

“In short, the referent adheres”

– Roland Barthes

A much-explored possibility within this shadow close genre of life
A claustrophobic plurality. Second Person Queer:

A body stripped
down to its events amidst the low serious reds that
develop more than they reveal this body of work
so wet so wet so wet so wet so wet
it refracts. This performance

composes the schism, where
every image fractal framed spans the room-dark
gambit of these saturndays no one can say
from whence it came;

when taken in reverse the pockets of meaning remain
Bad girlfriend

Bad girlfriend melts your rented bedroom window. Only comes when you don’t. Hurts Christmas, September, & Patti Smith. Calls you a cripple in Brixton.

Bad girlfriend puts scare quotes on “relationship”, like a crap Prince Charles, on a Home Counties stile. Invites you for meals that you cook. Makes you read her angel cards to see who’s next.

She drinks the tears of Palestinians. Pauses fights to correct possessive apostrophes. In bed, she whispers all the things she won’t do to you. Asks if you want a happy birthday then dumps you in a Marilyn voice.

Bad girlfriend swaps your Sertraline for water tablets, your water tablets for Citalopram, your Citalopram for Yasmin. She wants you to read Jordan Peterson to her, in the bath, wearing a bubble beard, as foreplay.
Bad girlfriend weaves complex allegories
where you always play the role
of a large ugly fish
destroying the precious coral
which she prefaces with this
is just a metaphor but
I am the precious coral.
You start to find cartoons

of misshapen whales in your sex drawer.
Bad girlfriend wants you to get
a labia piercing & cries
when you remind her
that you don’t have labia.
The next day,
you find a piece of paper
with the heading

‘words that rhyme with labia’
across the top. There are two little lips
with faces on them
& one of them is weeping.
The Night Women

The night women do not need the darkness for their witching. On nights such as this, the sky is as blue as Ngozi’s mother’s chiffon blouse on the day of the Assumption of Mary. Ngozi is nestled between Lulama’s legs, shiny with petroleum jelly and scented with patchouli oil. Lulama shudders slightly as the car jerks to and fro, her thick legs rubbing against Ngozi’s cheek.

‘Ah, be careful, Sir. You’re going to jack my hair,’ Ngozi pats the top of her head nervously, smoothing down the raised kinks poking out of her braids. Though protected by any hairstyle-destroying movement by the anchoring presence of Lulama’s large body, Lillie and Mela both kiss their teeth in agreement.

The driver shakes his head. Surely, when they get out of the car, he will cuss them, maybe call out isifebe! As he speeds off but as Lulama looks ready to box him in his head, he keeps his eyes on the road.

There is no denying that the group are eerily quiet, though they often are right before the cinema nights at Yolanda’s.

The bootleg vodka bottles clank together on Ngozi’s lap, Yolanda makes her umqombothi too strong for Ngozi. Last time she drank it, the women watched Emmanuelle (without subtitles, so they guessed the plot) but Ngozi ended up falling asleep, curled up in a ball on the floor, right before the lesbian scene.

She had to hear it all from Lulama on the way home, ‘You should have seen her nipples! So big and dark, I thought all white women had little pink ones, like in, ah. What was it called? Last Thing in Paris?’

After her lover, Thandiwe, had left for work at the station, just before the sun rose, Ngozi slipped her bejewelled fingers slowly across her slit, stringing together Lulama’s descriptions of the scene. The women’s white mini skirts grazing at their supple thighs, parted ever so slightly. The suckling pink lips on large, erect nipples, a tiny tongue lapping against the smooth skin.

To the night women, the picture shows at the shebeen are true muti. Everything a mirage, all smoke, all mirrors. The erotic films, the ones Yolanda only shows to women (the past screenings including men were filthy affairs) hold the most powerful muti of all. Yolanda’s in itself is not a sensual haven; the air is heady with the scent of stale beer, the floors are sticky and the red walls are peeling and naked. Though, Yolanda’s is a place where all night women fantasise...
about. During the most intense of scenes, the walls seem to pulsate and drip with sweat and the smell and taste of hops becomes an aphrodisiac.

Tonight’s film is Venus in Furs and even for the most seasoned patrons, it is proving a little too much.

‘Yah, this man has a spiritual problem,’ bellows Mela, though her hard nipples poke through the thin fabric of her t-shirt.

Lillie shushes her, leaning forward in her chair, rocking slowly and spilling beer down her wrist.

There are other night women, huddled together in the dark shebeen, resting on mismatched chairs, illuminated by the rays of the screen, the dust in the air glitters as it dances through the lights.

Though she finds the men in the film hideous and, without subtitles, the plot seems to careen rapidly, there is something about the violent woman’s eyes, lined with kohl and heavy lidded which stirs at Ngozi’s navel. And the titular furs do not disappoint. She longs to languish on a creature’s hide and be caressed, to be fed, to be kissed gently.

Unlike some of the other night women, who discreetly masturbate under their long skirts or place their hand between another woman’s thighs, Ngozi is wary of wasting the muti, holding onto her desire between clenched legs until she steps out of Yolanda’s doors.

Dizzy from the umqombothi she swore not to drink, Ngozi stumbles out of the shebeen, her arms wrapped around Lillie’s tiny waist, holding her upright.

‘I told you not to mix the vodka with the umqombothi you silly goat,’ Lulama says, crossing her arms against the midnight chill.

Lillie giggles in response, pressing her breasts against Ngozi’s side. Ngozi presses her legs together even tighter.

‘Where is Tembo? You sure he’s picking us up?’

‘Come on, have you bumped your head? He always picks us up and he’s always late,’ says Mela, her features hardening at the thought of her husband arriving.

The late night illegal taxi men jeer at the small line of women through their dusty windows, Cheap cheap for you, baby. Come ladies. Manenberg, anyone?

Staring even harder are the jackals. A herd of young men who haunt the street surrounding the shebeen, especially on Yolanda’s females-only nights.
The night women are not the only ones who deal in fantasies.

Distinguishable by two thin scars down his cheeks and his large, long-lashed eyes; one blue with the onset of a cataract and the other reddish brown in tone, one jackal, wearing a leopard waistcoat as a shirt and ripped jeans walks over slowly to Ngozi.

‘Miss,’ he says quietly. ‘Would you like to walk with me?’

The jackal’s yellow gris gris pouch pounds against the little black bushes on the jackal’s chest. With every thrust, Ngozi’s lilac talons draw blood along his back. She salivates as she gazes at his long neck. Lapping at the skin behind his ear, she tastes spiced sunflower oil.

When the jackal has coated her soft belly with little white beads of come, he strokes the slick fur on her sex as if was the pelt of a beast. The water from Ngozi’s boiled lingerie drips from the rafters onto their spent bodies.

Early in the morning as the rice noodles bubble on the stove, Ngozi kisses scratches on the jackal’s back. Somewhere down the street, someone is playing Autumn Serenade on a battered stereo, the melody sputters and parries with horns of the first train.
Little Girls So Often Get Lost In The Woods
Chasing Pretty Butterflies

When the insect lands on the animal, data spools, mediates a beginning and - eventually - an end. Let’s interact, prioritise.

When the insect lands on the animal, it grips the surface with its clawed feet. I’m wary.

The labium is as erotic as implied, wide open, & engorged.

Symptoms include pain, dizziness, a transient swelling. We are functional if nothing else.

The labium is retracted the head is thrust I split.
This is a violation and men are ambiguous, avoidant, weaker in the mouth so I am told, so I know.

Sophie Essex
1 How many years had to burn to ash for one to rise/ a man divisible into millions/ of signs. 

2 All the nothing/ I feel for him/ who has not come/ in and see / the different patterns and shapes/ I can draw on the wall/ between dreams and reality. 

3 The first time a boy put his hands / in my pants/ the moon shone/ a communion wafer we bit together/ the A(men) of our bodies/ drawing him and I close(d). 

4 With the first boy inside/ me I went in search/ of others who promised to love better./ I believed the world/was bigger than any first love/ offered more than any two hands could ever. 

5 Him and I went in search/ of two others: a fantasy threaded/ through desperate pixels/ in our mouths/ between our legs/ in our anuses. 

6 Everybody/ was an opening to another body/ and another body: / one long tunnel of flesh promising to lead back/ to my mother’s birth canal. 

7 It takes six days to know for sure/ is what she said/ before putting condoms in my hand/ and a pat on the back. It gets better with time, she said/ like life/ like death:/ basement windows in a mansion. 

8 Appetite: every fire needs a fuel/ Every fuel can’t help but be seduced by fire. 

9 I tried counting/ the multiples of 3:/ him and him and the experience/ of us singing/ broken instruments / needing to be restrung. 

10 All the nothing/ I feel for me/ who came in/ and saw nothing’s most insistent possibility./ When you taste the lid of the pot/ in which you cook/ yourself, you taste the chef’s fingerprint and call it God. 

11 Only after you’ve eaten the flesh of feasts/ defecating everything, including yourself./ Only then will you be ready to hold/ the parentheses of two bodies/ whose zero’s are undefined by others/ but divisible by one another.
Infliction

The room smells of talcum powder. Mother stands before me in a black latex body suit.

‘I am going to do two gentle ones,’ she says matter-of-factly, ‘and then the third one will be hard.’

The crop whizzes like a dragonfly. In the beginning the sting was exciting. Now the whip of its leather palm on my ribs is like shower water, hot and soothing. But I am not doing this for me. Serving is the pleasure.

Afterwards, she cleans my broken skin and helps me dress. I take her dirty clothes to the launderette. In the hamper, there is lingerie and blouses and gym shorts and sweatpants. I think about the people who might have seen Mother in these items. I know I’m not her only “son”. That has never been misunderstood. Even if I pushed myself to my absolute limit, I could never be solely responsible for meeting all of her needs, nor she mine. She has others who come over when I’m sleeping, or eating, or attending my classes.

My real parents think I’m a personal assistant, which is part truth rather than a lie. I take Mother’s phone calls. I hoover the apartment. I fill the kettle up exactly half way, how she instructed, and cut the crusts of her seeded bread sandwiches. In return, she offers purpose and structure to what would be my otherwise listless survival. She schedules my workouts. She plans what I am eating each week. She encourages me to push myself in classes, apply for voluntary research positions, and introduce myself to new people at social events.

Sometimes we go on dates, just the two of us. We get iced teas, walk along the harbour and sit on benches. We talk about my goals and what she can do to help. We do not hold hands but, occasionally, to anchor us together when crossing a busy road, Mother will link her arm through mine. I am taller than her by half a foot and when we walk like this it seems we are roleplaying two entirely different people. She looks up at me and smiles with her lips closed. We are around the same age and she is not unattractive. We pass by a man walking with a shorter woman. The man catches my eye and smiles pleasantly, assuming he and I are the same half of a whole, and the idea that we have fooled him is thrilling.

Another of her children joins us for a shopping trip. We carry the weight of
her purchases between us. The large, rectangular bags bulge either side of our legs like the many skirts of a Victorian gentlewoman. Their rope handles pinch my fingers red. He laughs at one of her dry observations and I watch the muscles in his neck shift like plates beneath the sea. I think about what lines and scars he has under his clothes and which ones she has given him. Does she touch him with anything other than her instruments? What conversations do they have while he is turning her mattress? When he takes a break from his chores, does her timid Siamese curl up on his lap to sleep?

In the spirit of experimentation, she tries whipping us together in turn. I notice items in her room like I am seeing them for the first time. A lampshade with red tassels. The corner of the carpet, bright and untrodden. A brass hook by the door with nothing hanging from it. The crop hits me in the soft flesh just below my armpit and I cry out. Mother looks into my eyes, awaiting a signal. A dew of sweat has collected on her forehead. Her hair is slicked back like a swimming cap, her limbs are liquid obsidian. I nod. We continue.

He is more vulgar. His torso buckles with every crack of the whip, even the gentle ones, and he shrieks like a tennis player making a serve. He looks athletic. He and I have similar bodies. We are even wearing the same brand of underwear, but his are green, mine are black. His erection makes a tent out of the soft material. I don’t like hearing his groans so close to me. I shut my eyes and pretend the noises are something else in another room.

She asks me later, ‘How was that? Together with someone else?’
I have not thought about putting it in words.
‘It was like we were doing it to each other,’ I say. His noises, then mine. An argument. A duet.

She hums in consideration, then switches on the TV.
My ribs are sore and I wince throwing my book bag over one shoulder. I bend down again to lift the laundry hamper by the door.
‘Don’t take that,’ she says. ‘Come tomorrow, there’ll be more.’

We say our goodbyes and I glance down at the hamper to confirm what I had noticed at the top of the pile: a pair of her plain briefs, once white now dulled to grey, sporting frayed elastic in the tired waistband and a dark, red splash of something seeped into the crotch.

Vivienne Burgess
the syllables in the name of the good lord

“One cannot be religious in general: one can only believe in a particular god, or gods, to the detriment of others.”

– Slavoj Žižek

come across me like the nice goodnight i might have left long ago with the uber driver

quiet like the night before a wedding but the words so easy they shine like exquisite silverware won’t help anyone i say i’m going home the two of us all lonesome

my self and the good lord always run hot cold always that connection when the good lord rolls off my chest sighs wipes his hand on the duvet says I am here for you I am doesn’t say

I love you says good lord in the act of him eagerly jerking off all over my tits
Art

We want to put a piece of art in the living room. We cannot afford to have art everywhere, but in the living room, where people who do not live here sometimes come in and out, we feel there should be something on the wall. Online, I find a kit which contains canvas: skin-safe, slow-drying paints—blue, yellow, purple, red, green—and a frame. It is advertised as an erotic kit which should produce, at the end of a period of messy intercourse, a messy painting wrought with our bodies. It is no more or less fitting for the living room than any other painting. Perhaps it will be a secret source of pride for us as we offer our guests a drink of water.

The only review describes the stretching and stapling of the canvas to the frame as an enjoyable afterglow activity.

In two business days, the kit comes. The box is discreet except for a picture of two women playfully dabbing paint on each other’s noses, like children do when their teacher’s back is turned in preschool. This is not how I typically picture foreplay, you say, but we are open to a new type of pleasure-building.

A lot of planning happens before we can begin. First, we must find a suitable place to put the canvas down. The cement garage floor is smooth and would make it easy to wash off any escaping paint, but it is hard, and we are old enough that this discomfort deters us. The bed, of course, is christened and holy in terms of our regular sexual exchanges, and good for our joints, but I am in love with our good sheets and their high thread count, and I daren’t mar them with the possibility of a stain. Ultimately, we settle on the carpeted floor of the office, a room rarely entered by anyone else, and who knows? A swatch of purple or yellow in the polyester fibres might make you smile when you walk in to answer your emails, a reminder of this moment.

But, say that when making it, we discover that making love and making a painting at the same time is now our preferred method of making love. How
will we work this into our budget, and moreover, what will we do when our lovemaking paintings eventually begin to stack up, as we have very little wall space in the first place?

All this be damned, as we spread the canvas between our desks and remove our clothes. We pick up the paints to begin and—here we must stop again to decide what colours to use. All five? Should we each choose one, and let the blend between our bodies make a continuous spectrum? Maybe each limb should be its own colour and when we see the painting later, we will be able to trace back each position like a game of twister—your left hand was on the board, my right leg is missing here and must have been lifted over your shoulder. We smooth the paints over each other carefully. You are covered in hair and I in goosebumps, so we are not smooth applicators.

Finally, we can begin, kissing each other in the regular way, the practiced way, the good way. You bend to take my nipple in your mouth and stop. With the paint, there can be no ingesting. We must sublimate our oral tendencies. I lie down carefully on the canvas and you straddle me, and straight away I want to get up to see what’s happened so far and yes, my ass has left a print, in line with my shoulders, calves, and the backs of my heels. You be on the bottom instead, I say. This can’t be the way we do it, you say. It’s got to be natural, or else what’s the point?

So we start again but always in the back of my mind is what is happening under us. Once, when we were younger, you suggested we follow along to a porn video, and when we pressed the “Random” button on the site up came a clip of two blonde women sucking a man off. Their breasts were so large that they had to hold them up, one in each hand, so the viewer could see the cum dripping over them. I felt woefully inadequate. As much as we tried to replicate them with fidelity, our production could not match, was not something to be proud of. I worry the same will happen again.

I try to focus on the feel of you, slimy and warm against me. Your arms are coloured red. Where they hold my hips against you, where we shift against each other, muddy amalgamations begin to manifest. We are prettier where we are Lindley Keller
distinct. Perhaps you have noticed this. Your eyes are shut.

When we rise, our art is there and, in some ways, you can see the act. Bold shapes that shifted with the back and forth of us. The narrowing line of a forearm planted in the top right, two sets of knees and shins parallel near the centre, and handprints, stabilising handprints everywhere. The most important moment is invisible to the eye in every way, and I cannot help but be disappointed by it.

It is a poor portrayal of our lovemaking.

Our painting is not beautiful, my love, but you are, with streams of colour running down where you sweat, and cracks where the paint has dried on your back, and you stretched and strained for me. You will throw the canvas out. I will ask to take a photo of you in this state, and I will hang it in our bedroom.
Sunday Afternoon

Somewhere between tucking sliced aubergine under pasta sheets,
and sweeping my home dyed hair clippings from the coconut flesh tiles,
he held my bare foot in his hands.

He touched my toenails the way he does his enamel pins.
He brushed his thumb over my big toe,
smoothing the wiry hairs in the same direction.

‘These feet’
without lifting his eyes-
‘I love these feet.’

Jake Weaver
What You Don’t

Hey, Grandpa...
..
...
...
.

You are in Cambodia and you are on South Korean speed. You are not sure why.
.
Hey...kiddo...
.

You know exactly why. You are dancing in the DJ booth and you are invincible. You control the fog machines. You envelop everyone in a green mist. Or is it grey?
...

It’s good to hear your voice, Grandpa...
...

Tomorrow you will speak to your grandfather for the last time. Your grandfather is basically your father with a longer name. He would circle the dates of your math tests. He would teach you new words and ask about your opinions before anyone else listened. You are in Cambodia and you are on speed and tomorrow you will learn what death sounds like.
...
...

You are going to go home with a man, the club owner. You are on his motorcycle, you have never been on a motorcycle. You are on his motorcycle with no helmet, and you stop for bottled water. You experience an incredible thirst, you are not unlike a camel. You check your pockets. There is no phone. You are on the other side of the world, and you have lost the only way to say goodbye to your grandfather.
...
...

You track your phone down. It is in a casino in a covered market. The air is dense with cigarettes, you cannot control this smoke. You slip and scrape your knee, but you will see the bruise before you feel the pain many days later.
Nobody in an after-hours casino will talk to a tourist with a bloody knee. You know that now.

..  
*I love you, baby...Stay safe...*  
..

You are back on a motorcycle, your first motorcycle, but not the last one you will ride in your lifetime. You open your arms. You do not care if you fall. You know tomorrow you will lose your dearest friend, but tonight you feel limitless. You do not feel the blood pooling in your shoe.

..  
*I love you, too...Don’t hang up...*  
..

You are in the man’s apartment. You let him lick the blood off your leg. You call him Daddy and he does not ask why.

...

Tomorrow you will go to the police. You will buy a new phone with money you don’t have. You will accept when a passerby asks to take your picture. You will learn the Khmer word for crying.

Taylor Beidler
I called the manufacturer to complain about my flatpack boyfriend.

“He keeps leaving splinters up there,” I yelled, “and one of his hands is missing.”

Yet even though I made a real fuss they refused to take back a used model, and said they could only send me a credit note and a supplementary hand.
As I slammed down the phone he lay there looking at me with his washed-out pine face and sad knotted eyes, and out of pity I decided to give things another go.

I sanded and waxed him to try and make things easier, and every night I tried to unjam the cross-threaded screws that held his bits in place.

His new hand didn’t fit, but I soon grew to love our routines and his heartbreaking little stump, and he ended up being the best boyfriend I'd ever had.
However, the trouble with flatpack things is that they don't tend to last very long.

His ankles snapped first, then his elbows and pelvis, and after putting it off as long as I could I set off back to the store to spend my credit on a replacement.

That was when I found out they’d acted on my complaint and he’d been discontinued.
I ended up spending the credit on superglue, hooks and wire, and he does things to me now that he never could have done before, especially with that deviant hand.

I emailed a video and some photos of my design to the manufacturer, and they’re sending someone round to take the measurements tomorrow.

I’ll get a 5% cut of any profits if he goes to market, and a lifetime supply of spare parts.
Nobody Poet

“What’s love got to do [...] with it?”

– Ms Turner

we hardly talked before
we finished he didn’t fuck me

in the conventional sense
my body is reserved

for the unconventional
he did it with

pint glass eyes cloudy with the need
to empty with

a touch \ stopping
in the wrong / maybe-places

my hips never started
there perhaps theirs
did

waiting for the right

bones to rise up meet
him like ghosts

he never had the pleasure of
regretting a little death

who taught you to love like this? begets a little res

-urrection:

Nobody, poet.
write what you know that john wanted
what he wrote across my body all red and used unlike Ms Jones never
used up or filled in

like his posh little moleskine notebook when he read his handiwork back

he misreading his own signature attributed it to me

the illiterate fuck

Who taught you to love like this?
One day someone will sit up sigh

And ask:

Who taught you to fuck like this?

smiling I will reply:

Men.
Same Old Sex My Pretty Elbow

My bones press too hard at joints and wear through fibres
till even my pretty elbow peeps out where it rubs at threads

snuggled like capillaries, snapping and fraying. A pretty elbow pokes
out of the muscle of our entangled lives the evening you stand behind me
close enough to breathe on my neck and see the pale, exposed bone
send a shiver down my arm. You tuck your finger into the hole
and stroke my pretty elbow to let it know you know. In the morning
I choose a patch. I’ve kept our old shirts and jeans, scraps

I cut a circle of shell brown and with pricks of pink, stitch down a pattern
like cats tongues, overlapping the loving that mends us.

Alice Willitts
Quid Pro Quo

I’m sitting on the granite work surface in the kitchen, next to a rack of spices, when his phone rings. He draws up his boxers, wanders into the cream living room in just his underwear and the cool stone beneath my thong makes me shudder.

I’ve never even heard of some of the spices here. Piment d’Espellete. Nigella Seed. Sumac. They are as foreign as the photo opposite: a canvas of him and his wife, their two white-blonde children, all laughing from a palm-fronded beach.

He’s back in seconds, apologetic, aroused.

‘It was the Desk. We’ve got a front page. See what I said about sticking with me.’

When he lowers me onto him against the counter, it’s like nothing I’ve ever felt before. Afterwards, he quotes lyrics from Nick Drake, tells me I’m his ‘Northern Sky’, that he’s never felt ‘Magic Crazy’ like this.

‘We’re only together for the kids.’ I see the tears in his eyes, fight back my own.

We shower together in a wet room almost the size of my rented studio, then he makes me coffee from his Gaggia. The milk creams around the top of the tiny cup. He dips his finger in the froth and sucks it off my nipples. We have sex again and he holds me so tightly after he comes that all I can do is stare straight ahead. I read the dates on the calendar, the doctor’s appointments, the details of London Fashion Week, dinner at the Ivy. Next to them, the children’s clumsy crayonings stick to the fridge with magnets from Val d’Isere, the British Virgin Islands.

Their Dear Daddy scribblings are signed with names like the offspring of Hollywood stars. They are names that will never sit behind the counter at Tesco, work double shifts at Wetherspoons, fight their way to being the single state school intern at the national newspaper. They are names that will never ask themselves how they ended up shivering on the kitchen surface of a married colleague’s million-pound home, their fancy pants twisted around their ankles.
Animal Spirits (Ad Noctem Ignes)

They go on up into the absent parent’s bedroom, the one with the door that locks, away from the others in the kitchen.

Down in the yard, boys in twos are pulling into the yard in old trucks, bringing Seagram’s Silk Tassel whiskey, stolen for them by their older brothers from small-town liquor stores that close by nine. They’ll crack the seal and then hang the tassel on their turn-signal indicators. Look, they’ll say, these are my weekends, measured in Silk Tassel. I am at least the first amongst my peers, the tassels say, first in the manner of young men.

He lies on the bed, shirtless now, with his jeans undone. She undresses in the doorway, barefoot, rolling her jeans off of her legs and they come off like snakeskin; they were put on tight by lying down on a bed and hooking a coat hanger through the zipper to pull it up. She steps out of the cuffs of her jeans and she is naked and unafraid before him.

He holds his breath for her.

I’m ready, she says, I’m ready for you, and she walks to him.

Downstairs in the kitchen, another girl cries. Her friend puts an arm around her. A boy sitting opposite them shrugs his shoulders, holds his palms up to an imaginary God, then gets up and walks out to the yard.

Outside, a fire burns bright and hot in a cut-down metal barrel. Sparks from the fire climb and climb into the darkness, dancing around one another until they are joined and go dark. The fire wheezes and crackles like a death rattle. Someone has seen a coyote and the boys in trucker caps go to their trucks and bring out their .22 longs, their Grandad’s .30-30. Shoot it, someone shouts, shoot it, and the .22’s pop like bubble wrap but the old .30-30 cracks like there is a war on and the coyote is lost in the darkness, if it ever was there in the first place. There was no chance they’d ever hit it. Inside the ring of red light from the fire, looking out into the darkness, no one can separate shadow from Satan.

All coyotes are the same coyote, yellow-eyed and wild. Skin one and another will come back in that same flayed hide the colour a field of rye, with the same yellow eyes. They can pass through a screen door in either direction and go in or out like a ghost. They come to steal for sure, and to kill if they can.
They’ll come into your kitchen and eat your cat. They’ll take your dog too, if she’s in heat, and leave a single pup in her belly to grow and writhe its way out. A screen door is no barrier to a devil. Pray if you must but coyotes hear all prayers too. That’s how they find you.

Upstairs, in that room of someone else’s, they do not hear the shots for the music playing. She is astride him now, her knees on either side of his hips, and gently, carefully, surely, she takes him into her and embraces him down past his circumcision scar.

I think we are doing it, he says, the words squeezed out of him by something he doesn’t understand, a brief belief that something should be said to acknowledge this as ritual, or ceremony, to offer up confession maybe, or even an amen. He regrets it as soon as he says it.

I think we are, she says, and then she laughs, a high and pure sound that carries out over the bonfire unheard, and over those spiralling scarlet embers that seek each other’s embrace like living things, dancing their fiery dance in the darkness with their own hearts beating to the call of her laughter.

The boys in the trucker caps, their rifles cradled in their arms and the whiskey hot in their throats do not hear her. They are beneath the bedroom window, below and away. They are too close to the spitting fire with its light too bright and its yellow-cored flames so hot on their faces they have to bow their heads to talk. Out in the darkness, a half-mile away, the coyote hears her. He stops, sits and waits. The sun never really goes down in high June, the sisters of the Pleiades are barely visible. In the pre-light of five in the morning, the fire will have burnt to embers and all the doors of all the houses are shut and sealed. That coyote, and all the other selves of that coyote, can only wait.

Steve Passey
First Time

Outside, the loch sings like a sheet of glass, the summer rain’s gentle timpani on our caravan roof a soft caress as I light the gas lamp, its blue hiss filling the cramped space with yet another sibilant sound.

‘It’s OK,’ she reassures me again, already in the narrow bed and shedding her underwear beneath the covers. ‘I do it every day now,’ she adds, licking her lips like a cat. ‘It’s addictive.’

And, of course, we’ve kissed before, lots of times, and I’ve seen her naked loads before too but, tonight, in this place which our parents have deemed safe for an unaccompanied holiday, miles from anywhere and even a half-hour hike to the coast road, I’m about to do something that I know will change my life completely and I’m not sure if I’m ready.

‘Come on, come to bed,’ she coaxes. ‘It’s freezing, I need your warmth.’

‘Charming,’ I mutter, slipping out of my jeans and knickers, but keeping my sweater pulled down low so that she can’t see. ‘It’s so nice to be wanted.’

She throws her balled up underwear at me. ‘Get in here, idiot,’ she chides, lifting the blankets and letting me see everything, and though I’ve seen it all before tonight I’m aware of a huge lump in my throat as I slide in beside her and let her envelop me into her arms.

‘Get that off,’ she whispers, tugging at my sweater. ‘And the bra too. Fuck’s sake, Vanessa.’

‘You’re so romantic,’ I joke, trying not to let her see me trembling, I’m so scared. But she sees through my facade and pulls me swiftly to her and kisses me softly. So softly. The familiar scent of Pear’s soap on her skin. The warmth and feel of her nakedness against mine.

‘It won’t hurt, will it?’ I ask in a small voice as I feel her roving hands all over me, mapping my contours in her soul.

‘No, it only hurts with boys,’ she reassures, wet lips sliding down me, playing my ribs like I’m her mother-of-pearl-inlaid accordion. Making my body sing.

And, in the light of the gas lamp, the soft blonde down on her arms and legs is white as bone, her eyes like cold, wet sapphires.

‘You’ve got so much hair,’ she breathes in a voice that is not her own, her fingers finding what they’ve never dared to touch before and stroking shyly.
And I have no voice with which to reply as I let her do what she will with me, touching me in places that I have never even touched myself, awakening sensations that I never believed I could experience, her kisses getting more and more fevered as I hear a woman cry out in a voice that sounds like mine and she turns me inside out and sends me soaring out of my body and off out into space. Tears streaming down my face as I fall back panting and she rests her head on my thumping heart. Me sobbing and shaking and trembling like a mad thing.

‘I love you,’ she whispers. Although it will only be a matter of days before she contrives to kiss the baker’s delivery boy at the pier head stores and abandons me until the end of our holiday.
Girly

Maybe it’s because I wore nothing but gingham until I was eleven. Mom insisted. Or, because I’d still grind with my girlfriends in hot pants and bralettes, like a Pollyanna gone feral. Maybe it’s because all my baby teeth dropped out at six. (I kissed everyone.) Or it’s the Jawbreakers I licked until they bloodied my lips with the lipstick I wasn’t allowed. Or it’s because our curtains stayed closed a whole summer. Maybe I snuck out and stole the orange juice next door. Maybe it’s because my sister’s shoe looked so lonely, a lovely kitten heel. Maybe it’s because she was Supergirl every chance she got and was prettier than she knew. Maybe some people feel too alive to ever fear walking alone. Maybe it’s because my mother froze when a zombie cheerleader knocked at our door. Or how I shepherded her inside, still in costume, my Lisa Simpson cheek brushing hers, making her jaundiced. Maybe having your birthday on Halloween sounds the bomb, until you realise all your cakes will be coffins. Maybe it’s because biology killed me. And I hated sitting next to that kid who kept drawing anatomically correct vaginas on his notebook. Or it’s because I got my period once in gymnastics. Maybe its cruel all shorts aren’t black. Maybe Ethan heard that and felt sad. Maybe because his mother left and the house got so lousy some kid pinned him down and wrote UNCLEAN on his forehead. Maybe Magic Markers are everything that’s wrong with society. Maybe it’s because he’s five-foot-four and no one else said yes. Or, because when I look in the mirror, I still see gingham. Maybe I can’t live another day looking like an outline on the pavement. Maybe I watch too much Disney, and when they found that shoe on the street where my sister was last seen, for a second, I thought ‘Cinderella.’ Maybe I’m a sucker for bottled beer and playing *Fuck, Kill or Marry*...? under a moon like Fanta. Maybe it just felt right. Felt so good someone froze the documentary forever playing in my head. Maybe it was dumb, and I don’t care. I let him. Let myself. Ever since I’ve stroking my stomach, whispering *Girly, Girl*...
Lustral

I thought you underlined your eyes in blue
like lions lace their lips with blood.

That makeup didn’t matter in curtained rooms.
You’d learn like threatened hounds to look me in the eyes.

I thought holding you would feel like being held,
but you turned your back. Left me staring at tree

lines inked along your vertebra. I was wrong
about the safety instructions being perfect kindling.

That fire extinguishers were enough of an escape plan.
I thought we’d both jump from windows,

but you were locking the front door
not knowing if I was still inside.

Hilary Watson
I asked her, in the schoolyard, to kiss me and she said *yes,* *later* and I reminded her in her bedroom after school and she kissed me, too briefly, and I asked her to kiss me again, to kiss me *properly,* *more,* *like in the movies,* and I almost begged and she said *later.* We were amongst the low branches of a tree, in her front yard, and I felt a leaf brush against my cheek, against her cheek, and I wanted, again, *more,* and somebody, a sibling, screamed *they’re kissing!* We laughed, as if we’d coordinated our stories, and said *no,* *no,* *that’s not true.*

*I’ve heard that with chemotherapy comes the loss of desire. I wonder if, or how, that loss is telegraphed to children. I think of my mother’s death, now, as the point at which my relationship with my body and my instincts changed, though it cannot have been a point so much as a process, subtle enough that it went unnoticed for many years. I misplaced my instincts; I came to see my body as something that might hurt me, holding aggressive threats unseen. I didn’t understand when my classmates began to talk of crushes.*

*The following year, my grandmother asked if I found Leonardo DiCaprio attractive. She pointed to his face on the cover of a magazine and I squinted, as if my vision were limited and his appeal just out of range, and said *yes,* suspecting it was the correct answer for a girl of twelve. I felt a sort of shame, like salt in my mouth, which I took as the embarrassment of growing older.*

*Later, at my school of sixty girls, mathematics was optional but heterosexuality was compulsory. There was no resistance to this curriculum or if there was I didn’t hear the whispers. We never spoke about desire, only about achievements and appearance; we delayed all gratification until after graduation, or so I thought. On a hiking trip, once, we sat in a circle and played truth or dare and somebody asked about masturbation. *I don’t think I’d know how,* I said, truthfully, and nobody believed me.*

*I felt nothing for the first man I slept with, though I was curious. I couldn’t see any reasons to say *no* and so I said *yeah,* *sure,* *why not.* I wanted experience*
much more than I wanted him. I told him, afterwards, that it was fine, not as painful as I’d expected. It reminded me of an overhyped tourist attraction. I sensed that he wanted some evidence of emotion; I didn’t offer it. I asked him to drive me home and, once inside, I cried and cut my ankle with a razor blade in the shower.

* 
I wanted to feel something, always, even if it was sadness.

* 
I kept having sex with that first man. I told him, after a few weeks, that I was too confused and he suggested that it might be good practice to keep dating him. He said that I might lose my confusion, begin to feel attracted. We played at being a couple; I scrunched my nose in distaste whenever anybody said boyfriend. I thought of landscapes as we had sex, silently, of the curves of sand dunes and copses of trees. He bought drugs to take, hoping I might have an orgasm if I relaxed, falling into my body, but I came closer when I disappeared into my mind, tracing the contours of the dunes.

* 
I kept quietly dreaming about the girls I’d kissed, kissed too briefly, even when I’d kissed them for hours at parties, kept wishing that I hadn’t been so afraid of coming on too strong, kept thinking of these girls’ knees and inner thighs, traced and gripped through tights beneath tables, kept wishing I felt beautiful enough that I could be brave. I kept wishing that I’d stayed with these girls rather than retreating, afraid of my own eagerness, wishing that I’d let my hands touch more than fabric.

* 
I fell in love, though, with another man. He detailed his fantasies of watching me with women and I listened, letting him create for me a language of desire, losing myself as he told me about my tongue against the nipple of a woman with whom I’d locked eyes at a nightclub, my hands becoming sticky with her, our torsos sliding, slick, legs tangling. I didn’t need to pursue anybody; I closed my eyes and the scenes played out; my muscles pulsed and tightened against his narration. He held and touched me and I unravelled into our shared imagination, my chin against another woman’s hipbone, the brush of her pubic hair against my cheek, my lips and tongue wherever she wanted them. I felt my desires satisfied, sometimes, but my desperation kept increasing, stretching
as the relationship lengthened until, after four years, something snapped.

* 
It is a relief, finally, just to let myself want what I want.

* 
Desire spills across everything after years of constraint. I feel, as I write, my body warming, my pulse quickening and my hands drifting. I am alone in a room with my laptop and a vase of ten peonies, tight bundles of petal beginning to expand. I push my nose into the larger blooms, opening, their scent like burnt chocolate and bread; I draw my hand up the stems. I’ve always found pink flowers a little indecent. I think of everything I’ve desired, everything I still desire, and bite my knuckles.

* 
I felt, when I was younger, afraid of these stories, kept them as secrets. I use these memories, now, as prisms through which light might be refracted, bent into lines and spotlights, but I don’t trust my own account. I write, now, as if these experiences belong to the past, have somehow settled, yet sexuality is still a subtle, smudging force, chewing at narrative, making it nonsense, a different sort of unruly longing.
Thailand

Innocence moans through the door,

a silhouette of blood and sweat on the linens.

The tourist will tell his wife
how virgin, how warm,
was the beach.

(The UN estimates that more than 12,000 children are sex slaves in Thailand.)
Thinking about my first kiss at my late husband’s grave

Some girls practice in the mirror. Some make their hands into a fist and suck at the space between their thumb and forefinger. Others tongue mangos until they reach the stone in the middle. I watched my friend Rabia do that once, after school behind my house. The juice ran down her chin and stained the collar of her white blouse yellow. I don’t like mangos.

Here, Rabia said, thrusting the sticky fruit into my hand, you have a go. The tip of the mango stone pointed out of the tender, wet flesh, and as I pressed my finger on the stone I felt it pushing through my body as the yellow juices ran over my knuckles. You gonna kiss it or mush it all up? Rabia asked. Don’t you wanna practice for your future husband? Perhaps she wants to kiss me instead? His voice was a hot, sticky mid-summer’s evening just before the monsoons. Zaf. I think he was thirteen at that time, only a year older than me. I remember how he would run hotshot through the streets with his friends, throwing a cricket ball between them and punching each other on the arm when someone dropped it. I think he owns his dad’s shoe shop now. He might play cricket on Sundays. You’d have to ask him. As-Salam-u-Alaikum, greeted Rabia. Wa Alaikum Assalam, he replied, only looking at me. Well, do you? It doesn’t look like you want to kiss that mango. He took the fruit from my hands and chewed at the unkissed skin. The sweetness flickered through his green eyes and when the corner of his lips curled the mango stone pushed deeper into me, reaching the pit of my stomach. I shook my head. Well, in that case, you’d better practice on me instead. Call it a free sample. Rabia

Thomas Willett
scoffed, I think we’d rather wait until we’re married. I’m not getting married tomorrow, or anytime soon, I said. We had been friends for six years, yet at that moment, I didn’t want her there, trying to stand taller than she was, hand on her book satchel that I know held a copy of the Quran that she always took with her. I’d left mine behind at school. Why don’t you go home and pray? I asked Rabia. Fine, I will, at least I do pray, unlike you who only pretends to. I wasn’t listing to what Rabia was saying. I stood on my tiptoes and pressed my open mouth against Zaf’s. I could taste the juices on his lips, and even now I remember how it grew sweeter on the tip of his tongue as he roamed my mouth for something he’d only find between his bedsheets. By the time our mouths parted the mango stone inside my stomach had grown into a tree and blossomed. Rabia had left. I didn’t really speak to Zaf after that day. If we passed each other outside my house he’d look to the ground and walk on. Rabia would become increasingly distant too. After that day, whenever I’d try to talk to her, she’d cite the same verse of the Quran to me: and let those who cannot find someone to marry maintain chastity until Allah makes them rich through His favours. She would have me think that it was because of religion that we fell out, because I acted against Allah’s teachings. Talking to you about it now, I think it was probably jealousy. She was always meant to be a wife. She had told me when I first started school that the only reason her parents had sent her was because it would increase her marriage prospects if she was educated. I didn’t really understand her. What did marriage have to do with math, books and science? But she shared her pencils with me and afterwards we went back to her house to play with her dolls, so we became friends.
Then Zaf offered
to kiss me over her: the girl who had been training for marriage all her short twelve years, the girl who was supposed to be finding a man to take care of her. All these years later, I doubt

Rabia can eat a mango without thinking about me and Zaf. He wouldn’t be the last either. I would kiss many more boys before I would meet you, my love. I’ve forgotten most of their names and a few of their faces. But if you’d ask me to recall the taste of their mouths, I’d be able to tell you of the boy who tasted of black rubber, the one who tasted of grass in the winter and that one man who tasted of purple stars. Yet all of them had failed to make the mango tree that Zaf had planted inside me bear fruit... until you.
Neighbours

She hooks herself up with herself
in one corner of the bed, her pants hammocked
between her knees,

unaware that at the same time,
he, having crept up on his own nest in the dark,
is struggling to tune his mind to eager swells.

The signal keeps slipping: items in the news
or unhad conversations.

Only a thin wall between them,
but they are in separate control rooms
overseeing different sets of sensitive equipment;

she is lowering the cooling rods
to keep pressure from building too quickly,
the air beginning to glow
as she operates her upper console,

while he brings the needle up twitchingly,
roams the indicator lights of his thigh
and other busy modules.

Their cores hum.
Concentration spins its own cocoon.
He has such a hunk of lead.
She has such a riddle of heat.

When a car alarm triggers outside
it occurs to him
that what he took to be wheezy water pipes
might be her, just as it comes to her
that that sound of the roof-edge dripping
might be him.
The first time I’m in my college boyfriend’s room, I can’t take my eyes off of the tennis racquet hung on the wall opposite the bed. The head is broken and the translucent strings are snapped, sticking out at all angles. It looks like a dead jellyfish, I say. Liam replies he is pretty sure that jellyfish don’t grow to the size of sports equipment. Besides, the more accurate term is sea jelly as jellyfish don’t have a backbone, and aquariums are trying to educate the public about what it means to be a fish. Aquaria, I think to myself. Liam studies classics, so I wouldn’t mind if he used the proper Latin plural form. I ask what really happened. A foot went through it, he says. I don’t say anything about passive voice even though I’m an English major, and I don’t ask whose foot.

Over Christmas, Liam goes to Australia with the tennis team to watch the Australian Open and to train. He sends me updates on his game, texts that arrive in the middle of the night for me. Any message from half a world away feels romantic even if it’s about the ideal degree of bounce on a grass court or his racquet. Your grommet requires regular maintenance ;). My parents know I’m seeing someone, but they don’t know his name. He could be almost anyone. Then, I let it slip that I’m looking for a birthday card for Liam. Who’s Liam, my mother says. When she adds “tennis at Oberlin” to the Google search, she finds his picture. When he talks to himself during tennis matches, he calls himself a different name, but I don’t tell my mother that.

Liam texts me the night he returns to campus. Birthday card in hand and black underwear on, I walk to his room. We don’t hug, but Liam laughs at my card with our inside joke about penguins and polar bears cohabiting. He hasn’t showered after more than twenty-four hours on a plane, and he asks if that bothers me. No, I don’t mind, I say, which feels something like desire. He pulls down his gym shorts and his boxers at the same time, which I think means he wants me. He throws his dirty jersey over the lamp to soften the light. Liam’s tennis elbow makes repetitive movements difficult... I’m good, I repeat, and he replies that he needs a good night’s sleep for tomorrow’s match.
After the outdoor a cappella show, we go back to his room and crawl into bed fully clothed. We’re too cold to get undressed for a while, which extends the foreplay. When I ask for a hickey, Liam says he doesn’t want the guys on the tennis team giving me any trouble. I’ve already been name-dropped in the locker room, but the guys still don’t know what I look like. I move his hands to my chest. Are you teaching me your androgynous zones, Liam asks. I burst out laughing. You mean erogenous? One is Latin and the other, Greek.

I learned about desire watching the Isner-Mahut match in 2010. After four full sets, I was familiar with their ready positions, their groans, the speeds of their serves. The crowd was as wild as Wimbledon allowed, and the referee called a recess before the fifth set. Day Two began as the announcers filled the air with talk of ice baths and massages. At sixteen, I pictured the naked bodies of athletes who were more than ten years older than me. The scoreboard went dark at 47-47. The Y2K of tennis. Spectators were asked to use their imaginations to do the necessary math. At the end of the second day, the match halted again due to darkness. Spectators chanted, ‘We want more,’ and so do I.

On the last day of the semester, I am helping Liam pack when one of the guys from the team arrives. Liam steps outside with him while I take the sheets off his bed. I tape a box and crumple newspapers, eyeing the racquet on the wall and wondering how he will transport it without further damage. When Liam returns, I ask if the two of them bonded at the Australian Open. No, he didn’t come to Australia, he says. Why not? His ex is on the women’s team. So? So the teams stayed at the same hotel, and he’s not allowed within a hundred feet of her.

After Liam, I am involved with a series of unavailable men. The Catholic guy and I have the same taste in pie—cherry, but he’s waiting until marriage. My cat’s out of the bag, I tell him, and he pretends to laugh. He plays the cello and has tendonitis in his wrists; after marriage, repetitive movements will be difficult. Next there is the older married man. He speaks Spanish, and I know French, so there’s nowhere we can run away to. We take photos of each other and hold them side-by-side as if it were a photo of both of us. Then there is the tennis player-cum-poet. He played until his doctor told him he had overdeveloped
shoulders. It’s been years since then, but he can only put his arm around me for so long before it aches.

On the third day, let there be a winner, joked the announcer, as Isner and Mahut took the court. The hours of tennis have addled my brain because it sounded like the announcer called the scores, ‘15-love,’ ‘30-love.’ My brother said that zero looks like an egg, l’œuf, in French. Love was just something somebody misheard one time. I decided to switch to French next year, screw Spanish. After Isner won, he collapsed. In the stands, both families cried. The match was over eleven hours, a world record. The two men posed for pictures in their tennis whites—like a wedding, but sweater, and I uncrossed my legs.
Never Have, Never
(A Performance Piece for Two Female-Identifying Speakers)
(Text in **BOLD** is performed, not spoken.)

**Never have I ever.**
You played it?
*You drink if you’ve done the thing the person has said. Are you clear?*
Never have I ever played never have I ever.

**Raise your glass.**

Never have I ever had sex with a man on a higher income than me.

**Drink**

My Wall Street gynaecologist told me he liked musical theatre because opera singers are too fat and ballerinas are too boring.

   He told me if I wanted to stay in ‘the industry’, I should avoid Harvey Weinstein - he knew him ‘back in the day’.
   Then he diagnosed me with vaginismus - said I was ‘a tough one to crack’.

Never have I ever had sex in a park.

**Drink**

I’m 15 and I’m called Slagda. My parents called me it as a joke, but it stuck. It’s an identity. I do what I want because I want to and that’s enough. No consequences. No shame. I like my skin, my body, my body moving, your body, your body with my body. You want to fuck me and maybe I’ll let you. Damn right I look fucking good. White vans and house parties are a power trip, I’m pretty sure 15 is my peak.

Never have I ever been broken up with.

**Drink**

Taylor Beidler and Magdalene Bird
I would go twice a week to a physical therapist’s office, and a woman named Soo would put on latex gloves and water-based lubricant and we would stretch and breathe and stretch and breathe and talk about flight times to South Korea and jet lag and which neighbourhood in Brooklyn had the most reliable bagels (we settled on Williamsburg as long as the tourists stopped Instagramming the rainbow ones.)

At one point Soo asks if my pelvic spasming started with a particular partner - I tell her I’m indefinitely single and we focus on self-exercises.

*Never have I ever worn animal print panties.*

**Beat. Look at each other.**

*We’re vegetarian.*

I’m 21. I am 21 and grounded, sober, I enjoy crafting emails and going to the gym. I remember other people’s birthdays and am pretty fucking renowned for my head massages.

Some shit has happened but I’ve moved on, did my four therapy sessions and I’m good. Life moves on, you know? There’s no point getting stuck in the past. I bleed after sex, but I’m fine. If it’s a man I just ask them to push for the first few minutes until they’ve gotten in. The pain doesn’t last long. The blood isn’t enough to bother with the doctors. I go back to crafting emails.

*Never have I ever been with someone not knowing their name.*

Three months later, I will have sex with a woman I met at a Hot Rabbit New Year’s Eve party. She’ll ask me what my fear is -

‘Closing,’ I’ll say. I let her let me come.

Seven months later I’ll start to choke a man in a nightclub and cry at my capability.

*Never have I ever been asked to perform in the nude.*

**Drink**

I’m 22 and I’m having a slow panic attack in a naked bodies workshop. My friend has asked me to come because she knows I’m very comfortable in my body and
I am comfortable in my body. We’re in beige spanx and beige vests and I haven’t eaten for 14 hours. Pretty comfortable.

They’re filming the workshop for a documentary. It’s all about feeling safe in your bodies. We’re asked to close our eyes. To recognise how this space makes us feel safe.

Except I don’t.

Two months ago, I went to a cuddle therapist in Fulham. She’s Nordic, and made celestial mewing noises to calm my parasympathetic nerves. We held hands and I cried and she cried and we spent the rest of our hour together re-learning how to hug.

_Never have I ever stained mascara on someone’s shirt._

**Drink**

I have not felt safe in three years. It sits there solid.

With my eyes closed I do a push up on the floor.

I feel my muscles contract.

I feel strong enough to beat up a man.

We’re asked to connect with others in the room, to trust and share our trust, our safety. Then a man’s hand touches mine.

I nearly cry.

My friends and I start holding hands and neck-kissing on the Underground; we don’t think public displays of affection should be reserved for those who fuck in private.

Never will I ever ask you for an apology.

_Never have I ever expected one._

**Say thank you and leave.**

**End**
The Show Me Yours Prize
Winners

GRAND PRIZE
Angela Readman with ‘Girly’

Angela Readman’s stories have won the Costa Short Story Prize, the Mslexia Competition, and the Anton Chekhov Award for Short Fiction. Her collection *Don’t Try this at Home* was shortlisted in the Edge Hill, and won the Rubery Book Award. Her novel *Something like Breathing* was published by And Other Stories in 2019. She also writes poetry, her collection is out with Nine Arches.

HIGHLY COMMENDED - FICTION
Steve Passey with ‘Animal Spirits (Ad Noctem Igenes)’

Steve Passey is from Southern Alberta. He is the author of the short-fiction collection *Forty-Five Minutes of Unstoppable Rock* and many other things. He is also part of the editorial team at the *Black Dog Review*. Tweet to him @thestevepassey

HIGHLY COMMENDED - POETRY
Jack Houston with ‘the syllables in the name of the good lord’

Jack Houston is his partner’s (slightly) less-glamourous assistant in the running of their two-child household and also holds council-funded poetry workshops at Woodberry Down Library on the second Tuesday of every month. His work has appeared in *And Other Poems, Blackbox Manifold, The Butcher’s Dog, Magma, Poetry London and Stand*. 
HIGHLY COMMENDED - NONFICTION
Milena Williamson with ‘Tiebreak’

Milena Williamson is from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. ‘Tiebreak’ is her first nonfiction publication. When not exploring this new genre, Milena is often writing poetry. She is currently pursuing a PhD in creative writing at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen’s University Belfast. Her project is entitled ‘War, Image, Memory: Contemporary (Northern) Irish and American Poetry’. She was the winner of the Mairtín Crawford Poetry Award in 2018. Her poetry has been published on RTÉ and in Magma, The Tangerine, The Honest Ulsterman, Poetry Ireland Review and more. Find more of her work at www.milenawilliamson.com

HIGHLY COMMENDED - IMAGE
Ian Shine with ‘Flatpack Boyfriend’

Ian Shine’s stories have appeared in publications including The Stinging Fly, the National Flash-Fiction Day anthologies for 2013-16, Firewords Quarterly and Belleville Park Pages. Sally Rooney recently discussed his story Cute on the The Stinging Fly Podcast, and his piece Legs and Feet Dangling was read out at legendary Paris bookshop Shakespeare and Company as part of its New Shapes of Publishing event. Litro magazine interviewed Ian about one of his stories as part of its “Flash of Inspiration” series in 2015. Ian is represented by InkWell Management and is seeking a publisher for his first collection of short stories.
Biographies

Sohini Basak is the author of the poetry collection *We Live in the Newness of Small Differences*, which won the inaugural Beverly International Manuscript Prize in 2017. She grew up in Barrackpore and studied literature and creative writing at the universities of Delhi, Warwick, and East Anglia, where she was awarded the Malcolm Bradbury Continuation Grant for Poetry. In 2017, she received a Toto Funds the Arts prize for her poetry. Currently, she works as an editor in Delhi.

Taylor Beidler is a playwright, performer, deviser and dramaturg hailing from New York City. Her work has been produced across the US and UK, and garnered recognition from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. She is currently pursuing her MA in Scriptwriting from the University of East Anglia, as well as an MSt in Creative Writing from Oxford University with an emphasis on narrative non-fiction. She recently had a radio play recorded at RADA and a short film produced at London Film School. She will be an artist-in-residence at BarnArts this summer workshopping her most recent play with The New Collectives, where she is also a Resident Dramaturg.

Jack Bigglestone is a queer writer and reader. Originally from rural Shropshire, he now lives in Glasgow. He was recently published in *We Were Always Here: A Queer Words Anthology*, *Spam*, and *GUM*. For word-y things follow him on twitter @JackBigglestone.

Magdalene Bird is a scriptwriter, activist and performer; devoted to the Arts and helping others. She co-created the XRT Festival and currently is a writer in residence with FLY Festival. She recently performed her writing at The Pleasance Theatre and is writing short films for Drama Studio London.

Anna Kate Blair is a writer from New Zealand. She holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge and has had work published in journals including *Litro, The Appendix, King’s Review* and *Headland*. 
Frankie Blaus believes that language is terribly limiting. It may seem a bit odd, then, that they identify as a “word-artist.” And they’re fairly good at what they do. Frankie has, in partnership with organisations like Manchester Histories, Young Identity, NowThen Magazine, MIF, and HOMEmcr, published nine whole poems, and co-written multiple pieces of theatre (BODY LANGUAGE, 2018 / HATCH: Home 2018 / IMPRINT, 2019) Alongside fellow Young Identity alumni, Frankie manages the independent publishing house, Ivy Publications (NO DISCLAIMERS, 2018). Frankie is working on a few things right now, like keeping the lights on, finishing their degree, and curating two new collections to be published by Ivy Publications in partnership with MIF and HOMEmcr.

Timothy Boudreau’s recent work appears or is forthcoming at Riggwelter, Spelk, Fiction Southeast, Milk Candy Review, Bending Genres and X-R-A-Y. His collection Saturday Night and other Short Stories is available through Hobblebush Books. Find him on Twitter at @tcboudreau or at timothyboudreau.com.

Vivienne Burgess studied English with Creative Writing at Brunel University London. Her fiction has been published online by LossLit and 365 Tomorrows, and in print by Brunel University Press, Cuckoo Young Writers and The Nottingham Review, for whom she is now a First Reader. She currently lives and works in the North East of England.

Ruth Charnock is a writer, poet and academic. Her work is interested in bad feelings, popular culture, sex, feminism and embodiment. She is the editor of Joni Mitchell: New Critical Readings (Bloomsbury) and the author of Anais Nin: bad sex, shame and contemporary culture (forthcoming with EUP). Her latest creative-critical piece, ‘Bad Teacher’ will be out with Capacious journal this summer.
Sophie Essex is a softcore bunny and sexual synesthete living in Norwich where she promotes her adoration of poetry through micro-publisher Salò Press, lit-mag Fur-Lined Ghettos, and monthly open-mic night Volta. Her work has previously appeared in Leste, Lighthouse, The Belleville Park Pages, HVTN, and others. Her chapbook Some Pink Star is available through Eibonvale Press. Find her @salopress @capitanofelixio.

Jaime García-Iglesias is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Manchester. His research looks at new meanings of HIV in online kink communities and pornography. Originally from Spain, Jaime has a background in English literature and critical theory. He has published academic work on 18th century literature, queer chicano poetry and ethnoperformance. He has been writing fiction since 2016 and published his poetry, which includes free-form and shape poems.

Jack Houston is his partner’s (slightly) less-glamourous assistant in the running of their two-child household and also holds council-funded poetry workshops at Woodberry Down Library on the second Tuesday of every month. His work has appeared in And Other Poems, Blackbox Manifold, The Butcher’s Dog, Magma, Poetry London and Stand.

L. Keller has lived somewhere along the Rocky Mountains nearly all her life. She writes short fiction and poetry that amplify the female voice & female concerns.

Vijay Khurana’s fiction has been longlisted for the Galley Beggar Press short story prize (2018/19) and shortlisted for the Bath Short Story Award (2019). His project ‘A Little Death’, examining James Joyce and others, can be found on creative-criticism site Beyond Criticism. His children’s chapter book, Regal Beagle, was published in Australia by Random House in 2014. He lives in Germany and the UK, where he is currently completing an MFA at the University of East Anglia.
Colin McGuire is a poet and performer from Glasgow, who lives in Edinburgh. His most recent collection is *Enhanced fool disclosure* published by Speculative Books in 2018. He won the Out:spoken award for the ‘film poetry’ category and best poetry overall in London in 2018. His poetry explores the realities of addiction, anxiety and masculinity. He has been published in such magazines as *Gutter, Wasafiri* and *Punch*, he has been published in several anthologies. He is also a mindfulness practitioner, studying an MSc. in Mindfulness at Aberdeen University.

Laia Sales Merino is a poet from the Catalan Pyrenees. She is currently based in the UK. In her poetry, the English language coexists with Catalan and Spanish. Her work can be found in *Eyot, amberflora* and *Ambit*.

Jess Morgan is a writer and musician from Norfolk. She is a graduate of the University of East Anglia’s Creative Non-Fiction MA and her work has appeared in *Oh Comely, The Cardiff Review* and *Memoir Mixtapes*. She is currently working on a book about making families, hometowns and birdwatching.

Cilola Magdalena Mumbi is a British-Zambian writer and educator who resides in London. Her work primarily explores sexuality, taboo, and trauma within Southern African communities and diasporic communities in London. Her poem ‘plastic princess’ was longlisted for the HAART Poetry Prize and her short stories such as ‘The Lamb and the Flame’ have been featured in journals such as *What the Fresh Witch*. She is currently completing a collection of short stories.

Steve Passey is from Southern Alberta. He is the author of the short-fiction collection *Forty-Five Minutes of Unstoppable Rock* and many other things. He is also part of the editorial team at the *Black Dog Review*. Tweet to him @thestevepassey

Angela Readman’s stories have won the Costa Short Story Prize, the Mslexia Competition, and the Anton Chekhov Award for Short Fiction. Her collection *Don’t Try this at Home* was shortlisted in the Edge Hill, and won the Rubery Book Award. Her novel *Something like Breathing* was published by And Other Stories in 2019. She also writes poetry, her collection is out with Nine Arches.
Vanessa de Sade is a forty-something full-figure gal who likes to write hot stories about real women exploring the darker regions of their own sexuality. She is the author of numerous popular stories plus the collections, *Fur, In the Forests of the Night, Black & White Movies* and *Tales from a Tangled Bush*.

Ian Shine’s stories have appeared in publications including *The Stinging Fly*, the *National Flash-Fiction Day* anthologies for 2013-16, *Firewords Quarterly* and *Belleville Park Pages*. Sally Rooney recently discussed his story Cute on the The Stinging Fly Podcast, and his piece Legs and Feet Dangling was read out at legendary Paris bookshop Shakespeare and Company as part of its New Shapes of Publishing event. *Litro* magazine interviewed Ian about one of his stories as part of its “Flash of Inspiration” series in 2015. Ian is represented by InkWell Management and is seeking a publisher for his first collection of short stories.

Jon Stone is a researcher in poem-game hybrids and interplay, and co-runs Sidekick Books with Kirsten Irving. He has previously won an Eric Gregory Award. His first collection, *School of Forgery* (Salt, 2012), was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

Hannah Storm has recently discovered flash fiction and CNF after 20 years of travelling the world as a journalist. Now she writes to pay tribute to the people she’s met and to process her own experiences. Much of what she writes explores power and the abuse of power, in a range of contexts. She lives on the English south coast with her husband and two children and when she’s not working in the media or writing, she runs crazy distances for fun.

Jarred Thompson’s poetry has been published in *Typecast Literary Magazine, Type House Literary Magazine, Outcast Magazine, the Esthetic Apostle, Sky Island Journal, Odd Magazine, Best New African Poets Anthology of 2016, New Contrast Literary Journal* and one of his poems was longlisted for The Sol Plaatje Award and Anthology of Poetry in 2017. His chapbook *Universes and Paradoxes* was shortlisted for the Kingdom in the Wild Poetry Prize. His fiction publications include *Typecast Literary Magazine, New Contrast Literary Journal, The Rainy Day Literary Magazine, ImageOutWrite, the Johannesburg Review of Books* and The 2018 Writivism Mentoring Anthology *Transcending*
Lydia Unsworth is the author of two collections of poetry: Certain Manoeuvres (Knives Forks & Spoons, 2018) and Nostalgia for Bodies (Winner, 2018 Erbacce Poetry Prize), and two chapbooks: My Body in a Country (Ghost City Press, 2019) and the forthcoming I Have Not Led a Serious Life (above / ground press, 2019). Recent work can be found in Ambit, para.text, Tears in the Fence, Banshee, Litro and others. Manchester / Amsterdam. Twitter @lydiowanian.

Hilary Watson is a graduate of the University of Warwick Writers’ Programme and was a Jerwood/Arvon Mentee 2015/16 with mentor Caroline Bird. She has been shortlisted for the Troubadour International Poetry Prize and the Live Canon Prize, and has recently been published in the Butcher’s Dog, The Interpreter’s House, and Impossible Archetype. She lives in Cardiff with her girlfriend.

Jake Weaver is a writer and performer whose poetry unpacks love, distance, and queerness through vintage board games and complex-carb metaphors. For two years now he has been standing on stages in Nottingham and across the midlands insisting that Geminis are not that bad to people who never asked. His poetry will leave you laughing, crying, and wondering whether a co-owned fridge really is a good enough reason to stay together.

Sarah Westcott is a poet and writer who lives in Kent with her family. Her first poetry collection Slant Light was published by Pavilion Poetry and Highly Commended in the 2017 Forward Prizes. She has had work published in journals including Poetry Review, Strix and Magma and embedded in a nature reserve where it was triggered by footsteps. She teaches poetry at City Lit in London and is working on a sequence of tiny poems in the voices of plants.
For **Thomas Willett**, writing helped him to realise that, not only was he hella gay, he was hella gay and proud of it. Graduating Brunel University London in 2016 with First Class Honours in English with Creative Writing, Thomas spent his undergrad years exploring what it means to be gay, both on the page and off (meaning he met his now Fiancée in First year. Get your head out of the gutter!). Taking his academia to the next level, Thomas built upon his success to achieve a Distinction in Creative Writing: The Novel in 2018, also at Brunel. Love become his point of study; exploring how we love and define it can inform our identities and how we receive others. Now, Thomas lives with his fiancée and works as a Content Developer while polishing off his first novel (first of many, fingers crossed). He continues to unpick sexuality and identity in his works and hopes that his writing can help other queer boys, girls and ungendered individuals to find themselves in his pages and ink.

**Milena Williamson** is from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. ‘Tiebreak’ is her first nonfiction publication. When not exploring this new genre, Milena is often writing poetry. She is currently pursuing a PhD in creative writing at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen’s University Belfast. Her project is entitled ‘War, Image, Memory: Contemporary (Northern) Irish and American Poetry’. She was the winner of the Mairtin Crawford Poetry Award in 2018. Her poetry has been published on RTÉ and in *Magma, The Tangerine, The Honest Ulsterman, Poetry Ireland Review* and more. Find more of her work at www.milenawilliamson.com

**Alice Willitts’** pamphlet *Dear*, won the Magma Pamphlet Competition in 2018 and was published in 2019. She graduated from the Creative Writing MA at UEA with Distinction (2018). She collaborates in experimental poetics under the name Cathenka-Willitts and was shortlisted for the Ivan Juritz Prize, Kings College London, 2018. She is also a garden designer and plantswoman. www.alicewillittspoet.uk
Acknowledgements

I’ll Show You Mine began as a desire for conversation. With the symposium and now the journal, we have been overcome with happiness for how people have responded and joined us in this conversation.

We’ve been truly privileged to receive so many entries from such a diverse and eclectic number of artists. Thanks so much to everyone who entered and trusted us with your work. We feel incredibly lucky and excited to have been able to put together this collection of fiction, poetry, nonfiction and images and share it with you. Writers and artists - you are magnificent and beautiful and necessary. Thanks to our guest judges for the prize: Andrew McMillan, Yan Ge, Christopher Allen, and UEA Publishing Project head Nathan Hamilton, you are amazing. Thanks to all of our speakers at the symposium: Sarah Hall, Monique Roffey, Rachel Long, Lucy-Anne Holmes, Rachel Connor, Pippa Roscoe, Alison Graham, Rosalind Brown, V.C. Lancaster, Vijay Khurana - you made the day exceptional! Thanks too to Alex Hammond for chairing our session on The Landscape of Sex Writing. Thanks to Samm Campbell for his proofreading and copy editing skills. Thanks too, to everyone at UEA and the National Centre for Writing for supporting us in the symposium and this journal. It would not have been possible without your guidance, patience and kindness. Special thanks goes to Kate Moorhead, whose insight, warmth and sheer will were instrumental in bringing this project to life. Thanks to everyone who supported us on Crowdfunder, came to the symposium and submitted to the journal. And finally, thanks to you, for holding this volume in your hands. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Big love
James & Melissa
Sohini Basak
Jack Bigglestone
Anna Kate Blair
Timothy Boudreau
Ruth Charnock
Jaime García-Iglesias
L. Keller
Colin McGuire
Jess Morgan
Steve Passey
Vanessa de Sade
Hannah Storm
Lydia Unsworth
Jake Weaver
Thomas Willett
Alice Willitts
Taylor Beidler
Magdalene Bird
Frankie Blaus
Vivienne Burgess
Sophie Essex
Jack Houston
Vijay Khurana
Laia Sales Merino
Cilola Magdalena Mumbi
Angela Readman
Jon Stone
Jarred Thompson
Hilary Watson
Sarah Westcott
Milena Williamson