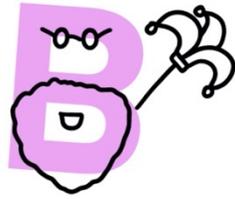




**LIVE, LAUGH,
LOCKDOWN**

2021 Poetry Anthology



Foreword

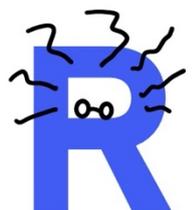
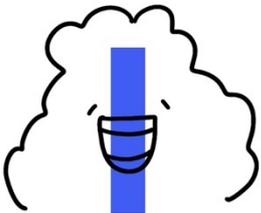
What a weird year. The plan was to wow you all with our incredible spoken-word performances, live on stage. Well. How daft of us.

I'm Bridie Squires – Lead Writer at GOBS Collective, together with loney Smallhorne. GOBS is a growing movement of artists. We're passionate about building community and confidence through spoken word, and thinking creatively in writing, discussion, feedback and performance sessions. This year has proved more than ever that we're stronger together than we are apart, and that art will find a way.

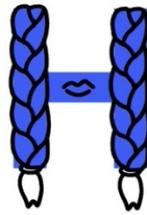
In February and March 2021, loney and I worked with our second group of talented, gobby Nottingham poets by running online workshops, masterclasses and mentoring sessions. The poets worked towards this anthology as well as a poetry film and live performance showcase – via live Zoom Webinar on Saturday 27 March – with Birmingham Poet Laureate Casey Bailey headlining the bogger.

Me and loney couldn't be more proud of what's been achieved by these incredible artists. We hope you enjoy the work just as much as we've enjoyed collaborating with them. We'd also like to invite you to get involved with what we're doing.

If you write or perform, or want to learn more about doing so, get involved at gobscollective.org



Contents



4.....Ingrid McLaren – The Portico of Absence

5.....Vicky Trotman – Sinkpiphany

6.....Richard Arkwright – Weather to Give

7.....Polis Loizou – This

8.....Gail Webb - White Privilege

12.....Cynthia Rodríguez Juárez – To The Languages Within Us

13.....Cara Thompson – Chronic

15.....Teo Eve - Strombus Alatus

16.....Rachelle Foster – Fungi

18.....Cece – Healing

20.....Ali Bonsai – Scenic route

23.....Ben Macpherson – Fridge Villanelle

24.....Francesca Mesce – Pillow Talk

26.....Demi Lloyd – Full-force Pessimism

27.....Safia Oakley-Green – Grass Houses

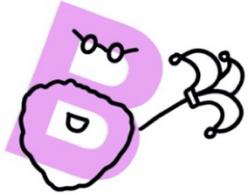
30.....Rebecca Summerscales - The Night Never Came

32.....Sophie Diver – Bossy

34.....Bridie Squires – 2020

35.....loney Smallhorne – Five Days in Lockdown

37.....Casey Bailey – Two Swings



The Portico of Absence

My eye covered the top of absence, but it wasn't empty.
There were bonfires in the autumn before home got lost in me.

I'd get up to shop with you when the birds were still groggy,
the roads were empty and the sky wasn't blue.

I liked the air, the flowers, the interesting characters
and I loved spending time with you.

You encouraged me not to be idle, to fight for what I wanted to do
and I guess I'm listening again because I have to be without you.

I will always have the fruit and the knowledge you gifted me
of how to pick the best yams and satsumas.

Things broke down and I needed space like all kids do
and I'm sorry I couldn't take care of you the way you needed me to.

Every time I got a bit better something swayed me, broke me,
hurt me and I was too much of a mess to be good to you.

I think you forgave me and I hope one day
I can forgive me for not being the me I know I can be.

Sometimes you have to scream to get better
even though I'm English and I really don't want to.

Sometimes I couldn't tell if you were being kind
or giving up but I'm so glad the last thing I did was be kind to you.

I'm scared no one will ever be as happy to see me as you were again.
I felt like I was losing everything before things started avalanching.

I hope there is rest and guineps and steamed fish where you are
and not one more wicked person trying to hurt you.

Ingrid McLaren

Sinkpiphany

My Arch Nemesis

Picking scabs from week-old wounds

Soaking off the stains

Of last night's Bolognese

Mum's recipe

Bare hands slip into water

Calm

As palms are welcomed

Dulled tip taps as pomegranate bubbles

Slowly

Dissipate

My Mind ticks over

My Hands grab lift dunk place

 Dum Dum Dum Dum

Like robot factory movie scenes

Over and over it roooIIIs in my mind

People

Flicker in and out of view

Cleaning Chopsticks

Like old teachers who taught me to knit
scarves

Skinny Dipping in Granny pants appears in wet
ceramic

Hands scorched by boiled water

Unnoticed

Glazed eyes

Hide my wondering mind

My worth lurks here

Floating leftovers,

tomato skins and chicken bits

avoided thoughts

Persistent

Coriander and curdled mayonnaise

Tea leaves in my stainless steel teacup

As I pull the plug on visions

Of future children jumping out from kitchen
cupboards

Gazing out windows

I tear the frying pan up through the air as
water falls off, dripping and my mind rushes
to Eureka!

Galileo Einstein and Newton, elbow deep in
dishwater, picking apple peel from the drain

It's a sinkpiphany!

A revelation!

A memory

A whisper in my mind

It's scribbled on paper

Or told to friends

It's I love you's and thank you's and never
leave me's

They're Golden nuggets uncovered in coal
mines

It's finding life

In the death

Of washing up

Vicky Trotman

Weather to Give

I just have a lot to give
my life is like a river
in a fairly controlled irrigation scheme
which sometimes can't deliver

the right amount of outpouring
from this large amount of rain
I have all sorts of water
in my sometimes marshy brain

in which I think I think to much
I'm the kind of scattered shower
that tries so hard to hold it in
and finally rains for hours

when I get very all over the place
and you get very wet
I just have a lot to give
please take, receive, accept

for when I know that I can be
myself to you and me
I'll just say "I love you"
without water imagery

Richard Arkwright

THIS

Young and bred on fresh-baked loaves
Ice cream dripping from a cone, I watch
The boys dive in
Off the jetty, through the foam
Sons of Aphrodite
My feet on roasted rocks
The crabs and urchins pinch
Frothing blood, rising,
Like this thirst in me

Sky as light as English eyes
And up there, Heaven—
Where the glare of icons,
Copper crowns and royal blue,
Subdue my restless tongue
The more eager of the two
Intertwined to a serpentine being
Ananke, Chronos, writhing
Like this dread in me

Lift-off from the hob-hot concrete
To land on soft-trod grass
Cows and pubs, pound shop fags
Hand-in-hand I'll walk with girls
Where branches curl above,
Where ghosts are one with God
And tables tip, a trick or treat,
Reynardine, a fox-man's smile,
Hell-bent to feed
This fear in me

Bolex dreams and same-sex scenes
Action, cut and edit
What I won't learn I'll never know
A boy with goals
Forging deals with faeries
Celluloid and carob leaves,
Boomerangs, flung across the sea
and back to me
To sink and breed
And keep
This thing in me

Polis Loizou

White Privilege

1. No black people
in our town,
none I saw,
only comments,
nudges;
faces lined with soot
passed along terraces
to home,
scrubbed clean
then to chapels
preaching Empire,
gold gleaming
off high altars;
men spoke
of all men being equal,
hit hard on the beat,
repeat, a sequel
in my heart I knew,
strike queue,
struggles
to overthrow
English owners,
Saesneg,
overlords,
we did not stand
all for one, one for all

2. A new girl in class.
No one speaks.
Her difference
is in her swagger,
black girl
all alone.
I try to talk to her,
a blagger,
not listening.
The divide is here
it never occurs,
my land is hers;
both outsiders,
accents
fan flames
of mockery;

the parakeet,
a loud bird,
blames you,
makes fun,
excludes;
guilty by association,
I walk on
into the crowd.

3. Hit the beat,
make it pretty later -
we move to a city,
a port full of voyagers
who cook curries,
wafting spice in the air.

We have money
to buy a new house,
it's fine for us
to migrate for work
we are the steel,
the coal,
the factories.

Others will steal,
do the dole,
all of these-
such myths,
dinosaurs
on plinths,
old riffs,
play on a loop
maintaining a
tentative
sense of privilege.

4. At university,
abstract exoticism ,
notes clashing,
touchstones
slowly changing,
no qualms

dancing with a friend,
from Birmingham,
a Black man,
they say
he's one to watch,
a Panther, who harms
though the only aggro
from him,
questions
my fashion tastes.
He makes suggestions,
then come reports ,
comments, questions;
white friends say,
he was violent,
today, we called him names,
cultural stereotypes,
he lashed out,
ruined our paradise;
broke a student's nose,
all blood,
unprepared
to overlook
racist taunts.

5. Unawareness

pumping
in pulsing rhythm;
a trip to Africa ,
apartheid
slaps these rosy cheeks;
on the beaches,
signs read,
coloureds, blacks,
whites, freaks,
sorted out
in laundry piles
washed
to look respectable;
extinct dodos
present,
still breathing,
haughty looks
omnipresent,
white battalions

swallow their guilt
hurt everywhere,
slipping
down throats;
screeching guitars,
castles, deep moats;
do not enter
this club, flags flying,
scurry with geckos
to hide away crying.

6. Days in the sun,
white privilege
has not been won,
handed down in class
this power
is a trespass,
an invasion
across
others' dreams,
there is no justice
until we end regimes.
No man is an island,
stop drifting by
as icebergs
calve into the sea;

we are alive,
the man kneeling
for police
will not survive;
statues of slavery
standing unchallenged,
time has come
to right wrongs
barely imagined;
face the music,
white privilege,
part of me,
lurking in history,
an albatross.

To the Languages Within Us

The languages that follow us,
from ancestors to ancestors,
peer to peer, new generations,
are treasures for navigation.

Madres, abuelas, cartographers,
from codex to cassettes and SMS.
Lyrical captains, seafaring through idioms,
built captions within our peripheral visions.

Indigenous, aliens, hegemony clashes,
have forced us to assemble internal translations.
Supremacist standards, inferiority complex,
our tongues tiptoe on eggshells,
stumble on clear intentions.

Stand up after you fall
and remember, *mi cielo*,
that our maternal lingo
is a hug from the cradle
of civilisation.

The words our forbearers would knit
are the mainsails that guide us.
No cause of shame,
but joy and recreation.

Acquisition devices
still surf on our plasma,
while we float on the knowledge
of past, future and present.

For the cold of the north,
as our envoy continues,
we wear dialects as coats.
Functionality and pleasure.

May every one of us decode
the messages contained
within our protein sequences.

Cynthia Rodríguez Juárez

Chronic

1.

She is a dewy eyed, bobblehead quadruped with a spring in her crawl.
All she knows is songs in C major and saving her troubles for later,
her only foe is the night-time and nappy rash.
She giggles at the hiss of hi-hats and lip syncs to 90s synths
that she thought she could sound out forever,
and plucks a pearl straight from the world's oyster to suck on at night.

2.

Turquoise skies turn monochrome and dewy eyes turn dry.
All she knows now is scratched up records and suspicious lumps.
A drone flies low overhead without any target,
blind to the monster that peaks over her fleshy horizon.

3.

The monster has a sense of humour,
and a funny, un-sexy name that no one can pronounce:
far too long to remember, far too serious to joke about with her friends.
It skips around the bends of her body, beat-boxes and scats to a grating disco track called:
'I'm. Not. Leaving'.

4.

She invests in some ear plugs but the monster starts a rock band.
It ravages her body in rehearsals and head bangs through the pores of her skin.
The shuffle of soaked bandages becomes its percussion,
and its encores only come to an end in a curtain of steam
and a pop of ibuprofen.

5.

They try to carve the monster out of her but it starts a choir and steals the headline slot.
Her entire body files a noise complaint,
wails and waits for the monster's latest corporeal concert to come to an end.
She sends the monster cease and desist letters.
It uses them as napkins to mop the sweat from its brow.

6.

She removes her ear plugs for the first time
and is surprised to find the monster's gurgles are starting to make sense. ____
She listens, _____ learns, relents to the monster's rhythms,
finds truth in its repetitions and in its raspy refrain,
She exchanges blame for patience ____.
She writes a symphony with her pain ____.

7.

She leaps out of her flesh
and calls the monster by its name.

Cara Thompson

Strombus Alatus

They told me the corpse
of a fighting conch
contained in its contours
the swells of the sea
as though it were nature's sound-recorder,
stowing memories
for eternities
it could not
remember.

An ocean inside itself,
each gentle pulsing tide
amplified
by labyrinthine chambers,
the space
where flesh
should be.
In a primary school music lesson,
I put one to my ear:

A distant scent of salt
on chips,
warm waves lapping my swim-strained legs;
and my mother's voice,
echoing out the heart of the shell,
calling my name
and holding a melting
ice-cream
cone.

second -
as if it were itself a conch,
silk wax scored by memory.

Sometimes I (think I) hear a rumour of receding seas.

Still, they could replay their lives
like storytellers,
every wave
and grain of sand
etched into vinyl wax,
carved as quavers and semi-breves
onto the staves of themselves,
soft lips coated with a thin crust
of outer whorl.

(expecting silence,
lies:)
Suburbia dissolved,
as though my town was a sandvillage
reclaimed by a hungry sea
in reckless advance.
I was, in my inland classroom,
at the beach.
A memory of seagulls' mews;

Pass it on
my teacher said,
and I tore the shell from my ear
and the beach dissipated,
its imagined sands stripped back by waves
no less tidal for being unreal.
The bare classroom walls materialised
heavy as city air, the traffic jam cacophony
drowning the sea-sounds that lodged in my ear
for a stretched

second -
now I pick up my phone's heavy plastic chassis,
invisible cord.

I listen out for you ~ ~ ~

Fungi

I spent all day in a damp cow field
looking for mushrooms
with a magic to turn waking life
into the stuff of dreams at night,
but all I found was poisonous fungi
popped up in itchy places
like styes on an eyelid.

What if I were the tumours
in my mother's breast and bones
attaching to her branches and grass
like death caps?

I would bloom in the winter's frost,
find my home nestled in the mush
of her marrow and blood.

When spring comes
I'll die by suicide
because her body is too warm
for my gills to breath with ease.

But I'd die
with a crescent moon touching my cheeks,
because I know I'm poison.
I don't carry the spells
to fix the aches made in childhood.
I am death and I know it.

So I'll drink in the chemo,
sip it like a fruit punch
on a hot day in July
and die.

Die,
so she
can live
and continue to stir magic
into teacups and mugs.

Like daffodils in spring
she'll continue to sing
in the dewy sun.

Although dead,
I won't be gone.

Always threatening to return
with the winter's frost.

This is the dance of hope and loss.

Constantly twirling
in the dizzy song
of a rave
in a cow field
where and when
the cows
have been ushered on
to graze on a grass that's greener
so brains can untangle their knots
in a quest for freedom
in places incantations happen
but fail to ward off the haunting
of my ghost
under the oak.

Rachelle Foster

HEALING

The weight of my pain and trauma
I just don't know how I carry it
I can hear it
whispering
getting me to the point where
I don't want to be here
just living feels
Heavy

They make out like it's lemon squeezy
go on social media
you'll see posts of pretty women dancing around in beautiful skirts
Burning herbs
chanting sacred sounds
it's not
Easy

Turning rocks into precious metals
turning dreams into reality
turning self-loathing into self-love
surrendering to the laws
to the balance of the Natural World
surrendering to the fact that
I am transmuting
magician
Alchemist

Self-love
love for others
peaceful
getting butterflies and palpitations
feeling that warmth
light and airy
knowing reality is OK
accepting who I am
I am worthy
I am
Love

Like that of a child running skipping hopping jumping twirling touching leaves and smelling flowers

I'm a fairy a unicorn an alien drifting through space-time dimensions

knowing anything I put my mind to

I can create

knowing my visions my thoughts

do not define me

I am in control

closing my eyes and manifesting

the life my higher self deserves

using my

Imagination

We all slip we all fall we all trip

it's getting back up

Giving up

Never

When you open your eyes give thanks

as you put your feet on the ground stretch high give thanks

it's a blessing

sentinel being

living a life that no one can explain

traveling on a ball of rock

around a ball of gas hurtling

thousands of miles a day

The key to success

Gratitude

Cece

Scenic route

Dante's being a dick again.
He's rattling the teeth
in slinky preachers -
off the cobbled back streets

Sharpening their
cuban heels
on whetstones.

Child pose conductors.
Heretic yoga.
And this
their art in human form -

I commence my practice
Prowling the street aisles
on all fours.

Infant cave shadows
Drunk with the *cold* of walls
Thrown at the morning
in neon overcoats.

The carefully lit photography
Of the big-gest mac
Dangling from a single thread

Wind buffeted pendulous spectres
at play with the unbaptised and virtuous pagans
below.

I
pass lower ranking bus stop practitioners
in plainsong
They have the foresight of
a journey ahead -

Sage seers
hemmed into the sides
of the city -

The stillness of waiting to travel,
or the charms of apathy
endear me.

Others I meet.
Groomed as tyrant saints.
Napoleon on weekends.

A dozen Town Criers
Touching tongues from the hurricane
The chink of
marble beaks
Waging battle to empty halls -

A multi headed snake at the bar
Ordering frozen mice

Old gods with faded tattoos
Reminiscing
Sipp-ing two for ones

A deep
Tight Chess
I have entered -

With red clay
through my feet
And feathers clutched in my hand.

Some beasts are so big
they can't even fit
Some so small
Yet
they take up everything.

As I push on
I wonder if
I walk through hell just to stretch my legs.

After a while
I see its form take on the horizon
And I come to my destination -

The lattice work on the back
of the monument -
Is it a sign of quality or overworking?

Maybe it's not meant
for me to ask
Maybe it's for the crows

to muse on
The retirement community of
the afterlife
The inner circle of swans
at the
distant reservoir

A place to slumber
Whilst I have dreams
of flying

Dante
exits
stage left
Throwing glitter and pulling faces

It never occurred to me
That I may be wild in the wrong wilderness

Ali Bonsai

Fridge Villanelle

I open up the fridge and I forget,
My thoughtless eyes swim over stuff within,
I had a reason to come here and yet.

I spot a half-refracted silhouette,
I loose it as it plunges in the chill.
I open up the fridge and I forget.

And what mnemonic have I left un-met?
Who would look here for anything but food?
I had a reason to come here and yet.

All scaly with those magnets you can get,
A silver body flecked with pinks and greens.
I open up the fridge and I forget.

I fish forgotten thoughts with tattered net,
There was a purpose when I came downstairs.
I had a reason to come here and yet.

Why did I start to write this fridge vignette?
The door swung wide, the light does not come on.
I open up the fridge and I forget.
I had a reason to come here
and yet.

Ben Macpherson

Pillow Talk

I miss pillow talk.

Those backward dives
into sanpaku eyes;
three whites,
two lives
finally entwined.

Curling myself
in cerebral folds,
a breaststroke
against a
juicy temporal lobe -

I want to bathe in a brain!

Slurp on a stream of dopamine!

Match my heart to
a beat of neurons
flirting in
fuchsia dreams.

Limbs tangled while
we gamble with
soul chips and
suck lips and
toe dip then
love trip
gaze first
toward
serotonin bliss.

Let me
love to
love you.
Wrap a
cognitive cocoon
round fragile
stems of this
lust bloom.

A vivid
recollection of
a cortex treasure,
already dying -

already
dying.

already
dead.

I miss pillow talk.

Drowning in
white lies.

Tossed by
a current of
adoring demise.

Little spoon
the echo of
quick-blinked time.

Francesca Mesce

Full-Force Pessimism

My watch must get so bored, ticking over the same numbers relentlessly.

They wish for new numbers and they're fed up of the eventuality of hitting midnight.
Slowly making their way to set numbers because it's their only job.

Putting my smudgy black make up on for the day, I think, I put this on just to take it off.
Every time I take it off in the evening it feels like it's a constant cycle, inky lines on
stark white wipes and the melting beige foundation. Day after day.

Wasting the time away I reach for a game. I choose Othello and I've decided that the pitch
black and angel white pieces represent life and death.
Then I wonder if Dad's life could've flipped to black if the operation went wrong.
Dad wins the game and my thoughts are replaced with annoyance.

The next day I look at the river and think, one day that will dry up and the mud will crack and
there won't be any ducks blissfully floating down stream.
The river then rushes to meet my window, crashing through the panes, refreshing
everything I am and ever was. While it still can.

Whilst I'm drying off my mum calls me and recites her birthday plans and I forget about the
death of the river. In the evening I watch a video about the eventual collapse of the sun and
the vastness of space scares me.
The carpet underneath my feet feels too warm and I think the earth is overheating already.
I'm messaging my friend and I realise that someday his heart will stop.
I look at my feet and realise that these plump toes will probably be
cremated someday along with the rest of me

I stretch out my limbs, take off my watch and wiggle my toes.
I smile because these things haven't happened yet.

Demi Lloyd

Grass Houses

“remember when the grass was cut at school”?
We’d waded through the dense musk hanging at nose level
Collecting armfuls, enough to build a mansion, flat.
Like a floor plan

Days diminished as nights protracted
Kids Innocence dying with the light
earlier each night
turning those grass houses with doors
shut tight to mush

You watch,
Perched high on mangled limbs
of naked trees
that interlock more closely
then you ever hope to be

Quivering like a small chick
dwarfed by an eagle
who’s fury turns red apples dark purple

Your dreaming of bath time
as crimson stains
more then just the skin
And the princesses on your toothbrush
have an opinion

Rose tinted glasses
ripped off....
Age 8

Auburn evenings
car window chills you cheek
as **lights** malicious burn
taunts
the retinas in flashes

Watching leaves on branches
imitate art like two bodys touching.... almost.

Question?

When does curiosity stop
consent begin
and
“ I dont want to do this anymore” work?

long snowy mornings
still horizontal
as a hot sun burns
through the pretty dress
the clouds made for the earth

Remnants of their artwork kissing passersbys,
who braved a coat, hat & scarf
Not you

Hear this?
Soft, empty laughter

images flood of bowling balls, too heavy
Eyes leak
and your freckles glint like glitter
or falling flecks of dust ,

Quiet
To the ground.

sunshine, sticky over the world
Glazed doughnuts
make your tastebuds tingle with sin
and blue and pink slushies
turn your brain to ice

Lazy afternoons
as yellow buttercups under your chin
finally tell the truth

Memories of branches
lost as leaves
hide winding secrets,
keeping you safe

Feel bliss,
becoming part of it
outside of it

Mouth still shut tight
like the doors of grass houses
memories fuzz around the edges
and life seems
almost worthwhile

Safia Oakley-Green

The Night Never Came

It has been so long and we have not slept.
I wonder where the moon goes now, who she twirls for, stares at -
I thought I would miss her peeking through my window,
but why would you need a lamp when the dark never comes?

They stopped printing horoscopes in the paper
because no one knew where the planets were.
Habit held hands with the world until our fingers pruned
and finally, we were forced to learn what our hands could do.
We never needed hours and weeks and Tuesday -
the night did not know me like she thought she did.
Mattress shops became fallout shelters and the nightlife choked itself out.
The post stopped coming n'all because everyone just kept arguing about
what "next day delivery" should mean, class came to mean summert else entirely
and everyone just stopped eating carrots because there were no dark to see in.

I think I misunderstood her until now,
the moon.

A Miss Ratchet in familiar imprisonment,
Cleopatra of the sky, Thatcher of the day, light thief I worshipped her,
spent nights picking craters into my face in offering and
I exchanged this all for ageing and egg yolks and I hope she never comes back.

I drink light without a breath:
Scorching tongue and throat, hands to elbows doused,
skin pink and flattered and in love -
Shoulders everywhere host these swelled pockets of life, suspended in
crusty blister like mosquitos scrambling in amber,
then burstin, rolling down coating the barks of Arms. The Eternal Day,
fossilised in me - my devotion for all that is hot and sticky.

One day I looked at the sky a little too long
and the stories about staring at what is holy were true
But that's OK. She cannot help it,
it is all a part of the healing she tells me It is all a part of the day
and it just turns out that being well is not always the difference
between the light and the dark -
some things need candlelight, or dimmer switches.

It is all worth it, I think. I hope she never comes back I declare
her dead. There is nowhere for her to watch me from,
No need for me to perform Nowhere for her
to hang herself Nowhere for me
To replay the hanging -,

Nothing keeps me up at night.

Rebecca Summerscales

Bossy

1 message

sophie diver

March 2021

To:

Please stand clear of the doors
With elevated coffee cup
You move with sharpened claws
Through the shroud of morning bulletins,
Let's walk and talk, tailored suits and
Downcast Metropolitans
You shrink into corners for
necessary alchemy, travelling vanity
beholden to mascara and low centre of gravity
Until the waltz of the 'sorry' and 'excuse me please'
Alight here for rush of bodies and underground breeze

Mind the Gap, he says

To a desk of one's own with
Window aspirations because This. Girl. Can.
Swivel chair and two drawers but
They never mentioned glass ceiling in open plan
This is your opportunity, time to really lean in
Time for going forward
Time for just checking in
Time for "I'm just popping out, so do you want anything?"
Time for "it was banter, but you knew that right, hun?"
And "yeah of course that's no problem
I'll get it all done"
For post-meeting analysis in the ladies
Were you a little too nice or a lot too crazy?
Remember, it could be a whole lot worse
It's a team effort
Doesn't matter if you said it first
Remember, you're here for the meritocracy believer
The same who ask
"Is there someone here more senior?"
You're here to lose the daily five degree fight
To change into Nikes
Before you leave for the night and begin

The *Evening Standard* stumble
To a chorus of ticket barrier canaries
Rushing home before the dark gets too lairy

Take a seat
In a steel capsule of allies refuelling their worth
Still firm in stance, in voice and
Immobile in birth
They scroll silent, without signal
Carriage after carriage
In contemplative vigil
In shared salute to those already been
That took up space, found a chair,
And refused a pseudonym
To Karen Silkwood, Norma Rae
Ford's machinists
And Hildy Johnson in *His Girl Friday*
For those who own that unapologetic drive because
Honestly, how many exclamation marks
Would Dolly have typed in 9 to 5?

And Mary Queen of Scots
Who never ended a letter with
'no worries if not!'

Mind the Gap, he says

...

—

Sophie Diver

'Writer'

@sophiedwrites

← Reply

➡ Forward

2020

I am a budgie
pecking on feed from a plastic cup,
claws clipped to the cage.

Tastes off.

Outside, a crow is burying a walnut
under a pile of dried grass.

He must feel my stare
as he looks up, swoops
to our window and **r a t a t a t s**
like a knife on the glass.

The woman baking
a Betty Crocker hash cake
wafts the threat away
with her grandma's tea towel,

pushing the smell of evanescence

around the room;
one hand blistered red
from holding a freezing tub
of Ben and Jerry's too tight.

She is nervously humming along
to *The Sims*, building mode.

So I sing with her,
push my toys around,
take a bath,
try to forget.

Bridie Squires

Five Days in Lockdown

And start I running
somewhere.

The government threaten
to ban exercise, people are too free
while an invisible killer
infiltrates the lungs
of the elderly and the young.
An ice rink in Milton Keynes
refashioned into a mortuary.

My arms pump, hands gripping at air
the pavement a conveyor belt
churning out strides, along the ring road
curving with the tram lines
past the factories at Basford crossings
encircling the parks.

I've ran once before
ten years ago when I was locked down
with a boyfriend who tried to kill me
frequently
until ran bare foot through the night
claiming a future with each stride.

My thumping heart, feet pounding, my breath.
4954 dead, we're told to stay at home
but behind these doors some women
have an underlying health issue that can kill
with any 'late' return home,

or any wrong meal, wrong T-shirt
or holding eye contact too long
or saying no, there bodies on the front line.
Some women have been enduring lockdown
under surveillance for years.

I remember isolation
not allowed to take a shower with the door closed
prohibited from leaving the house
for any reason other than work
until I was prohibited from going to work
from leaving the house, from leaving the bed
from saying no.

I considered running before that bare footed night
a fear of falling, loosing my footing
a doubting of strength, blockaded my feet.
But I'm greedy now, I want all the space
eat up my daily allowance of exercise
my strides wide and ravenous
a predators bite.

400 hundred more dead
stopping is not an option
my eyes lift a little higher, hungry
and think of the women who
be on the front line everyday

their mind is the only place to run to
their personal protective equipment
and it's running low. His words
attack until each thought is a clone of his.
Their eyes so infected they start
seeing themselves through his.

I keep running
knowing this is how survived last time
one foot in front of the other
with nothing but my body and mind
I lift my eyes to the horizon
realising I reached my destination

when I stepped out the door.
And I wonder if I'll react this way
each time my liberty is infringed.
If I will start running in any direction
until my body burns
I wonder If I'll ever stop running

loney Smallhorne

Two Swings

And they will not hold hands;
instead they will let little fingers
hang, intertwined. In this bond
they will keep the time he said,
I dunno, man, you're special,
and the time she said, *Yeah,*
maybe not all boys, just most.
Between this finger link
and his black Air Max 95s
brushing along the side
of her white Air Force 1s
they will hold a phenomenon
that breaks every rule of this
place. They will wrap it warmly
in black tracksuits, dip it in honey,
coat it with Demerara sugar
and rock it, back and forward,
on these swings, under midnight sky.

Casey Bailey

A huge thank you to

**APPLES
AND
SNAKES**

CURATED & CREATED BY



**Nottingham Trent
University**

Special thanks to

Casey Bailey
Rebecca Goldsmith
John Berkavitch
Makermet
LeftLion Magazine
Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature
Notts TV

Are you GOBBY?

We run:

Discussions
Workshops
Performances
12-week Experiences

**If you want to get involved
in our spoken-word community
head over to...**

gobscollective.org