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Portfolio

## Growth And Mourning

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## Explosion

Falling like stars,  
The day drowns in dust;  
Underneath the flying sky  
It moves faster than you can run,  
A time lapse before your eyes,  
And each year is quicker than the last,  
And you count breaths to track time,  
Which pushes past you  
Without a backwards glance.

Life is an explosion.  
It is so hot and loud and bright and sharp  
And gloriously painful to look at.  
Its luminescence builds a throne of diamonds for some,  
Whilst casualties shake money jars in the faces of survivors on the ground,  
and wait sightless behind cold iron bars.

I can remember the first time I realised I was human.  
When the world's weight worked its way onto my shoulders  
and made me bow down to the gods of the earth.  
I can remember when my shiny child's eyes were coated in rust,  
and when my rose tinted glasses snapped,  
I can remember when tooth fairy dust turned into salt,  
and when reindeer and sleigh bells turned into plastic.

You are so beautiful and precious and little and young.  
But soon you will be old and crippled.  
Really, it's all the same.  
And life goes on.  
And on.  
And on.  
And on.  
And on.  
Until we are done.

### A Surfboard Made Of Stardust

I like to ride the seas  
Inside my head  
In the night time  
On a surfboard made of stardust

There is no danger here  
Just satin silence  
And glittery darkness  
And cotton sheets

Troubles drown in the waters  
Stresses are shipwrecked  
Tears are evaporated  
Burdens are buried deep

I would stay here longer  
Though I know that cannot be  
I would tend to the counted sheep  
I would paint pictures with the night sky's ink

It is hard to be afraid  
In a place full of dreams  
With your eyes squeezed shut  
Lying perfectly still

The world cannot touch you  
Lost in your head  
Riding the seas  
On a surfboard made of stardust

## Rise Up!

Rise up! Feel the scorching honey sun,  
feel the dirt encase your feet,  
and curve the crevices between your toes,  
pull you into the ground, drown you in the mud.

Rise up! Taste the air,  
let the intake scrape your throat,  
wrench your voice from its box,  
and crush it in its fist.

Rise up! Listen to the music of a million voices,  
inhale the joyous sound,  
let the melody warp your body,  
and carry you far away.

Rise up! Smell the morning breeze,  
bring memories of days past and misty months,  
right every wrong and kill every flaw;  
get lost in the maze of your mistakes.

Rise up! See the glow of new horizons;  
let the soft burn pinken your skin,  
and bring you back to life,  
and drown you in the earth.

## The Empty Bathroom Is Not Empty

It is safe here.  
It is warm and safe here.  
The water is full of rose petals,  
bubbles kiss and pop.

Baby powder?  
It smells like baby powder.  
It smells like flowers.  
The tap runs,  
and the noise envelops everything.

I could be anywhere.  
I could be anyone.  
I could be anything.  
It is so calming I could forget to breathe.

The mirror has steamed up.

In the mirror's eyes the bathroom could be empty.  
In a tired mother's eyes the bathroom could be empty.  
Behind a sleeping mother's eyes the whole world could be empty.  
Her whole world could be empty.  
But the empty bathroom is not empty.  
And her whole world is not empty.  
I am in the empty bathroom.  
With my little hands  
and my little feet  
and my little life.  
A new life is in the empty bathroom.  
And the steam is thick as smoke.  
The water has run too hot.  
The boiling tub hisses and bubbles,  
and the bubbles pop before they can kiss.

It isn't safe here.  
It isn't warm or safe here.

Is the empty bathroom empty yet?  
I am still in the empty bathroom.  
A sleeping mother is still asleep.  
And a nowhere father is still nowhere.

I could be nowhere.  
I could be noone.  
I could be nothing.  
It is so awful I could forget to breathe.  
The tap keeps running,  
and the noise envelops everything.

## Fake Light

Waiting. And it's just me now.  
Sitting at a bus stop.  
No sun,  
No stars-  
just fake light.

I see and feel everyone around me: so loud, so rough, so chapped.  
As chapped as my chapped lips  
and hands.

I try to stay invisible.  
Let me stay in this bubble: so quiet, so soft, so smooth.

I might be the quietest thing in this place.  
Quieter than: the cobblestones, the fake lights, my styrofoam cup of coffee, the cigarette smell,  
the car fume smell.

There is a man in a cardboard box house across the road.  
There is a man in a fake house behind the brick wall.  
I wonder if they are haunted with: the ghosts of flowers, the ghosts of oaks, the ghosts of fields.

I wonder if they are haunted with the ghosts of real light.

Or has it all been buried six feet under cement,  
cremated in fake light?

## Clay

The clay that made me was moulded well,  
Painted with beautiful intrinsic designs  
In complex and exquisite shades.

And when the clay moved away across the water,  
I painted pictures of the clay  
to hang up on the walls of my mind's eye.  
I put so much love into my paintings,  
I captured every tiny detail,  
the glints in the clay's eyes  
the pink in the clay's cheeks.

But the water has smudged my paintings.  
The details have been blurred,  
they are no longer so sharp.

I try to paint new pictures.  
Or sketch the lines in the clay's faces.  
I draw hearts full of hope and hope that this is an accurate representation.

But it is difficult,  
Painting from a phone call,  
or an email,  
or even a handwritten letter,  
holding your hand through the paper.

I know that the clay that made me that was moulded so well  
has been remoulded.  
My mind's eye has been slashed  
along with my paintings and sketches.  
It is infested with IV drips and hospital gowns and new old faces.

So I paint your character,  
I paint your strength.  
The clay that made me was moulded well.  
It was moulded strong,  
And I hope it will not crumble,

and I *know* it will not crumble.



What will come after?

I sit with my knees to my heart  
Between his pearly white teeth,  
And wait for him to crunch.

My bones will become dust,  
Thrown along with the ageless sand  
That lies beside the ever-young sea

The sea will caress me every day,  
Along with my crystalline companions,  
Forever tiny and insignificant,  
But loved as a part of a beautiful ensemble.

When I die I will go back to where I love.

## Cement

Vehicles give people animal bodies.  
The hum of the engines are a roar,  
And car radios overflow with the thumping music of metal bird song.

It's a jungle here.  
It's quite scary;  
It's quite exciting;  
But it doesn't quite touch.

I would like to hold the city in my hands,  
To feel every part of it,  
Push my fingers through the windows of high rise buildings,  
Rub my thumb against the shiny surface of the skyline.

Cement should run through my veins,  
But I think that my heart is tinged with green.

I would like the city to be smaller;  
Or bigger;  
Or more for me.

## Hide and Seek

Henry bolted the bedroom door. The night before had been sleepless and wretched, filled with witch-like cackles and smashing bottles. The smell of sweat and alcohol had managed to climb all the way up the stairs. Flashes of red jumped out behind his closed eyes. The cheap, sweet smell of vodka red was laced with blood in his nose. Underneath his pyjamas the bruises burned.

He knew that she would break the flimsy lock and the door would fall to the floor. His comics and action figures would be pulled to pieces, his school certificates ripped to shreds.

There was an endless cycle of love and hate, of punches and kisses. Her lipstick covered the black eyes and scars. His mother was like the sea. The tide would come in and destroy everything in its wake, crushing, smothering, suffocating. Henry would be left scrambling in the deep. Then the tide would go out and a new toy would be left on a bed made with tucked sheets in a spotless room.

Henry loved his mother. She had two sides. One was warm and light and very, very sad. The other was a grief-monster, wearing clothes still rumpled by the tight embrace of its husband. Its bright eyes turned black with the absence of his presence: an empty void whose soul had been dragged to the afterlife alongside its lover. The other side of her was nothing: no kindness, no hope, no mercy. When the monster came Henry was left all alone. Alcohol and partying embodied the beast, birthed from pain and suffering.

Henry and the beast would play hide and seek.

Henry opened his eyes and watched the seconds tick by on the clock opposite his bed. The beats grew louder and became like footsteps pounding sluggishly up the stairs. Five, four, three, two, one.

Ready or not, here I come.

Henry waited for the impact, for the tide to come in, for the crash of the waves, but there was nothing but the morning music of birdsong. He stood and placed a tentative hand on the lock, pressing an ear to the door to find no sounds of conflict. He unlocked the door and made his way downstairs.

The living room was hell. The carpet was covered in shards of glass and fluorescent alcopop stains. The television sat smashed in a corner, the sofa had been ripped open, clumps of stuffing bursting through like blood from an open wound. In the centre of the room was his mother.

Henry stood for a moment, his breath caught in his throat. He took a step forward and placed a hand on her motionless body. There was no air from her parted lips, no rise of her chest; there was no life in her open eyes. Henry's tears trickled down his cheeks onto her face washing off her heavy makeup; he gripped his mother like a vice. But there was something blissfully peaceful in her lifeless expression. They were both free. The tide had come in and drowned the grief-monster.

### Transformation

She screamed and the mouth of the sea devoured her in one bite. She shook her arms and legs in an attempt to break the surface and take a breath.

She had never learnt to swim and she never would.

The tide grasped her ankles and pulled her down deeper and deeper. The light from the sun swayed along with the crashing waves as if waving goodbye. The tiny ring on her hand lost its reflective glow, and all light was extinguished.

The panic and air bubbles that blurred her vision subsided, but a sudden jolt of strength ran through her body. The salty water no longer stung her eyes. The weight pulling her down had been lifted. Along the sides of her neck two fluttering gills appeared. In the place of a pleated skirt and a pair of legs was a sparkling, purple fish tail. It was beautiful, covered in silky smooth scales that shone like sequins.

She smiled. She felt happy.

She swam deeper into the sea. Schools of fish sang sweet melodies; they reminded her of the lullabies that her mother used to lull her to sleep. *Sometimes I long to murder time, Sometimes when my heart's aching, but mostly I just stroll along, the path that he is taking.*

The thought stole her happiness. Fear sent shock waves running down her back like an electric eel.

She reached out into the waters to find a way out. In the corner of her eye she could see a light. Its soft, warm gleam bled into the black abyss of the ocean.

She moved in close.

The light felt fluffy on her skin. It tasted sugar sweet on her tongue. Her memories were washed away as the waters brushed her body.

She was free from the earth and ready for a new life.

The light grew and entered, filling her.

### Our World is Beautiful

We sat in silence sipping our rosehip tea as the snow began to fall. A plate of untouched biscuits lay on a little pink table between us. I didn't think either of us could stomach them today, but Grandma had arranged a mixture of pink wafers and custard creams as always. I could see her frail hands shake as she raised the china teacup to her lips, still so ostentatious with her wrinkly little finger high in the air. I'd always loved it here. I loved all her old things. Her gramophone, her Polaroid, her typewriter, her collection of old fashioned perfume bottles, the ornate chandelier that hung from the ceiling. Every room in her bungalow was pink. Pink walls, pink furniture, pink floors. Even Tallulah her fluffy white Persian cat had a rhinestone studded fuchsia collar. Grandma too used to smother herself with magenta frocks, but now with Grandad gone she dressed all in black.

I looked up at the crystal chandelier casting shimmers around the room. Like everything in her house it was coated with a layer of dust. Grandma thought that dust was like memories. She believed that the older something got the more value it had and the more it had seen. If something had been there long enough to be dusty it had experienced something. Everyone else just thought she was too weak to clean the whole place, but when Dad sent her a maid Grandma turned her away. Good or bad memories, she wanted to keep them all. She understood that the dementia was beginning to take pieces of her identity away, so she exploited it everywhere she went.

The windows had fogged up. My cheeks were hot and rosy. I drew a butterfly on the glass with a finger and then rubbed it away. It was just as they had described it on the news. A blizzard raged outside; hail stones hammered against the roof. White sparks jumped out in the darkness. There was no sign of life.

"Isn't it beautiful Alice?" Grandma whispered, a tear trickling down her wrinkled, age spotted cheek. I felt my own eyes begin to well up. Grandma pulled herself out of her chair, hugged me tight and kissed me on the forehead. I felt ridiculously big against her tiny body; she was probably half my size. "It's seen so much. That's why it looks the way it does. So much love and hate- our world is beautiful." The storm was getting angrier.

I thought of what the doctor had told my parents today- how my condition had advanced and was now inoperable. I wondered if I would ever see my mother again before I died. As soon as we got home she locked herself in the bathroom and her sobs shook the whole house. My father tried to smile or frown or meet my eyes but they could only get so far as the nasal cannula poking up my nose. I remembered how he used to joke about it, how we used to laugh about how silly it looked.

He flinched and ran off to console my mother.

And I realised then that I was already a memory.

Grandma took my face in her hands pulling me out of my daze. She looked me straight in the eyes and smiled.

I couldn't always tell who grandma was looking at when she looked at me. Her reality overlapped. Her present was really a mystery. I thought it was a gift to be so free, to just forget everything. Sometimes I even envied her.

"You are so strong my Alice." She whispered. Then she made her way slowly back to her chair, reclined and fell asleep with a small, gentle smile on her lips. Tallulah the cat crawled up to me, rubbed her silky fur across my legs and jumped onto my lap. I felt myself dozing off to the sound of her soft purring. I touched her fuschia collar and watched the rhinestones glitter in the light of the room as she moved with each breath.

"The world is beautiful." I said, and drifted off to sleep.

### Reflective Commentary

When I was younger my favourite movie was the Disney film 'The Little Mermaid' and it would constantly be playing on our television.

This is where I found the inspiration for my flash fiction 'Transformation'. The themes in the film of change and transformation inspired the subject. The initial title for the prose was 'Mermaid', but after receiving feedback I decided to change this to a less obvious one to allow the readership to come up with their own interpretations of the symbolism. As a young girl all I wanted to be when I grew up was a mermaid, and as a result of this the theme of 'Transformation' is of a girl becoming a woman, learning the new ways in which to act and leaving the old world of childhood behind: "She was free from the earth and ready for a new life."

The musical element of 'The Little Mermaid' was also inspiration for the style. I wanted to establish a rhythm similar to a song or a nursery rhyme and include sibilance "silky smooth scales that shone like sequins." to reflect the sounds of the ocean, and repetition to achieve this. I included an extract from the lullaby October Song: "*Sometimes I long to murder time, Sometimes when my heart's aching, but mostly I just stroll along, the path that he is taking.*" This was intended to hint at time passing, growing older and the anger we hold against the effect of the lapse of the years, which we let go as we realise how futile it is. Similarly the character in 'Transformation' allows herself to be lured into the light and forgets her past.

Another inspiration for 'Transformation' was 'The Lovely Bones' by Alice Sebold. Sebold's surreal descriptions of heaven inspired a lot of the hypnagogic imagery in the piece. I love and admire her dream-like style of writing, and I feel that it has had a large influence on me.

The themes in 'The Lovely Bones' of childhood and the corruption and ending of innocence were also an influence. The descriptions of death helped me come up with imagery and ideas for 'Transformation'. I wanted the descriptions in to be similar to those used to describe dying, because growing up in my opinion carries similar feelings to bereavement. My character is effectively drowning. As a child becomes an adult a part of them perishes. They gain new interests and characteristics and leave old ones behind.

The other prose pieces, 'Our World is Beautiful' and 'Hide and Seek', feature similar contrasting themes of death and youth, which I took as inspiration from 'The Lovely Bones'.

I also found inspiration for 'Our World is Beautiful' in 'The Fault in Our Stars' by John Green. The character of Hazel Grace Lancaster is similar to the character of the grandmother suffering

from Alzheimer's. The first person character Alice is similar to the character Augustus Waters. Hazel and the grandmother seem like the weak ones, but Augustus and Alice are the ones that pass away first. I found the surprise effect of this in 'The Fault In Our Stars' interesting and thought it would be effective to include this in my own writing. The idea highlights how unfair and surprising death can feel. I also wanted to present an alternative view of Alzheimer's in 'Our World is Beautiful.' The grandmother, even though she appears withered and weak, is somewhat better off than the youthful Alice because she can forget her problems and the death of her husband. Alice has no way of escaping her terminal illness and her fears of impending death. I wanted to show how no-one can escape death, and that the image of youth being completely isolated from the problems of adulthood is not always realistic. Through her terminal illness Alice's quintessential childhood is corrupted and ruined, similar to the corruption of Susie Salmon's childhood in 'The Lovely Bones' when she is raped. Both characters are subject to the horrors that are assumed to be more commonly found in the adult world, as opposed to the world of a child.

For 'Hide and Seek' I took inspiration from the movie 'The Babadook'. The film offers the opportunity for numerous interpretations of the symbolism behind the babadook monster, but in my opinion it represents Amelia's grief from her husband's death. Her possession by the spirit of the monster and attack on her son Samuel represents how emotions of sadness for one thing can be replaced by anger towards another. I took the idea for the metaphor of grief based on my interpretation of this: "A grief-monster, wearing clothes still rumpled by the tight embrace of its husband."

'Hide and Seek' is written in paradoxical parepsis, from the child's perspective but written in a way the child couldn't know. I wanted the piece to appear like a memory and used this rhetorical device to create this effect. I also used waves as an extended metaphor for the mother.

For the poetry I have only used free-verse but shaped it through rhetoric. It mostly extends the themes of childhood in the prose, 'The Empty Bathroom Is Not Empty', 'Explosion' and 'A Surfboard Made Of Stardust' particularly so.

The main themes in 'A Surfboard Made Of Stardust' are of sleeping and dreaming. I didn't use any punctuation in the poem to reflect the looseness of sleeping. I wanted it to have a feeling of child-like comfort attached, and did this by using a thread of sibilance. The poem has a circular structure which consolidates the sense of contentedness.

The theme of 'Explosion' is of time passing and the end of childhood. The first stanza consists of one sentence separated with commas and enjambment to reflect the headlong rush of time. In the second stanza I use hyperbole: "luminescence builds a throne of diamonds for some." I used the exaggeration to create a sense of bitterness to represent the unfairness people feel in the world. In the third stanza I used alliteration: "When the world's weight worked its way" this was to suggest the insidious effect of the world. The use of anaphora: "I remember" was to fix the time. I used symplote in the last stanza "And life goes on. And on. And on. And on. And on".



This was to show the grinding monotony of life. I wanted to express with the poem the difficulty of seeing the world in a positive light without the freshness of a child's eyes.

'The Empty Bathroom Is Not Empty' is written in the style of a child's primer or alphabet book. I did this by using repetition and expansion. The poem is supposed to be eerie and to create a sense of unease. I alternate between perspectives in the poem, from the baby in the bath (although I have done this using paradoxical paralipsis), to the mirror. I used a lot of symploce and isocolon to give a sense of disquietude, and epistrophe to stress the key word "empty." As part of the workshopping process we were given an activity to describe a place that we loved by detailing its destruction. I thought of the bath and how peaceful it is and in contrast the damage it has caused when babies and toddler are left alone in them. I wanted the perspective of the poem to be confusing. The poem starts off with innocent imagery and describes the thoughts that a baby would probably have; the descriptions then become more unusual. I did this to create a sense that the baby is leaving its body and drifting between life and death. The line, "The mirror has steamed up," was supposed to be particularly sinister in its isolation. As the mirror steams up and the bathroom gets hotter the repeated and expanded lines become more ominous.

For 'Rise Up!' I used anaphora and imperatives to challenge the reader like a rousing church hymn challenges the listener. The main influence was 'Adeste Fideles' and 'Ride on! Ride on in majesty' with their repetitive nature. The beginning of each stanza starts off positive but is then negatively contradicted. I wanted the positive side of the poem to seem overly optimistic in contrast with the negative side of the poem to reflect the new inquiry towards religion and the way that society tells us to think.

The main theme for the poem 'Fake Light' is global warming. It is an internal monologue detailing different objects in an urban environment. The fake light is supposed to be symbolic of electronic and un-environmentally friendly comforts "the fake lights, my styrofoam cup of coffee, the cigarette smell, the car fume smell." The fake lights (environmentally un-friendly comforts) are destroying the real light and the beauties of the natural environment.

I believe that overall I have been relatively successful with portraying the themes I initially set out to explore when I first started my portfolio. I found the contrasting themes of growth and mourning very interesting to write about and would consider a similar subject for writing projects in the future. Although it is not the most cheerful theme I felt that it was an important one. Growing up is a struggle and can leave some young people to feel as if they have been left in the dark, it was nice to have the opportunity to shine a light on the issue.

### Bibliography

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