

Fresh Ink - Nazmi McCartney

for the first time in your life, you feel like a fairytale princess

“rapunzel, rapunzel, let down your hair”
i imagine my knight in shining armour
my ticket out of here, getting my hopes up
once again before they crash back to earth.

i cannot help but lament everything i may be missing
it is happening in a parallel universe, so out of my reach
my sorrow weighs heavy on my head, like my hair
and i am so bored... maybe i could give it a trim?

i feel small, a tiny speck of dust floating alone
but i think big. i weave worlds, scenarios, dreams
travelling in my mind; a mind confined in a body
too tethered to these walls to travel with me.

my greatest dream is for my body to exist beyond
the horizon i see from my bedroom window
but i am sequestered to my tower
indefinitely.

you have become much like me. we are both
forced into isolation, spending a painful amount of time
looking inward and only out at the world through windows
and feeling there is no end in sight.

i have my ups and my downs

it's such an effort to lift a limb, like dragging
my arm through cement. it's even harder to stand
up, to drag this stupid lump of bones and flesh
upwards, heaving all of it out of this puddle of itself,
and for what? what is there for me to do? nothing
means anything to me anymore.

i'm a ghost
for the rest of today, i've decided.
not a word said to anyone,
not a body or soul touched. i don't exist
to anyone but myself if i'm in this room alone,
i'm only in people's memories –
see? that's what a ghost is, in the end.

small comforts

though you have grown numb to anticipation, you wake
and mumble good morning to a new day. the same day.

today, you will:

close your eyes when you hear the seagulls cawing outside
and pretend you're watching them soar over your head
as your toes sink into warm, soft sand.

discover a ruined building to roam and revere
as if it were a garden in bloom, and then conjure
in your mind the scene that led to the empty bottles,
charred wood and burnt newspapers littering the ground.

recall the last hug you had with someone dear,
think of all the places your body pressed against theirs,
repeat the words they murmured softly in your ear,
and feel the wind that rushed over you when your bodies parted.

cocoon yourself in fairytales and universes not your own
meet storytellers and their characters and imagine how, in another life,
you might interact with them, what your place might be,
how you might love and be loved, how you might be different
and how you might be the same.

you tumble through your new routine until it comes time to run away
to sleep. in the back of your mind you say goodnight to the world
and urge it to spin a bit faster, because you know you will wake tomorrow
to relive the only day your body can still remember
heaving you through, where you will return, yet again,
to the same small comforts.

on the back of a star

it has been five years since
i first heard the loneliness in my heart
brought to life in your song.
these days i find myself returning
to it with renewed desperation

with your dulcet retelling in my ears, i float up
lifted by the opening crescendo, a familiar journey
maddening everyday realities are temporarily blurred
and through the sepia-coloured film over my eyes
i see an image of myself that is new, and yet not

the most lost, child-like me, the me
who cannot see the path ahead
who doesn't know the next time she'll be held
the me who wants to share, who wants to be known, and yet
is more afraid of others than ever

with stark, searing clarity, i remember once again
how fragile i am. i remember the others and realise
how fragile everyone is. we are suspended
in our own corners of time, waiting
to plummet from an invisible security felt moments before

you remind me though that this feeling is cyclical
and that everyone is a star unto themselves
i am a star, and i will again join up with the others
to twinkle, to glitter side by side, as we brightly play
off each other's lights, settling into a new rhythm

this sound and your story were delivered to me
on the back of a star... they must have been!
since my world came to a halt, i find you are
soothing this cardinal ache of mine anew
and i think i feel less lonely.

thank you.

the unwilling companion

Three quarters of a year spent aimlessly. Walking, walking, shying away from the next ray of sunshine that will stab and ooze through my bedroom window. Before that happens, I find myself crawling out the door to another nighttime walk around the same streets. I see yesterday's - or tomorrow's? - me across the road, swaying. Is she singing or crying? She is clutching a year's worth of diary entries to her chest. One by one they escape from her arms to disintegrate around her, but I do not move. I am not her friend. Gentle wind scatters the remnants of the pages across the shadow we cast together. Eventually, she lifts her head, turns her gaze to me, and winces. I cannot meet her eyes. Not now, not when I counted in the year alone, far from home. As a chorus of jovial voices rang like bells downstairs, she loomed, foreboding at the foot of the bed, while I lamented in a body unable to move. Now, as I watch her form grow shapeless and ebb into the air around me, I hope I can look her in the eye next year. Until then, we will both carry on, walking, walking.