

# THRESHOLDS

Writings of life, experience and humanness.



# CURTAIN

I think I have always yearned to be known.

As a child in a very adult-oriented landscape, I have been moulded or seen in particular ways. I wonder now at their truth. Still, there remains the adage that I am 'the baby'- of the family, the church and my friends. Such a title makes growing up somewhat of a fight: having these models of who Nicki is leaves ominous gaps and ill-fitting chafing because; Nicola didn't decide Nicki. You see?

Such gaps have lead to uncertainty, chaos and rebellion; spilling over into the surprised laps of those who created the form. For the brighter the spotlight, the greater the shadow. And oh my; mine seemed centre stage.

Such shadows found child Nicola sneaking up the stairs- to find the upper rooms; double checking behind the draft curtains and opening, once again the dusty broom cupboard. Spaces that seemed to at once mystify and bore; much like adulthood itself.

A child reasserting her territory; reconfirming that which she already knew. These adults perhaps saw me; yet also saw through me. Equally I through them. Yet I value now the constancy and safety which became a 'landing strip' years later, after the perilous flight of adolescence.

I consider my childhood fleeting; the concept is even somewhat hard for me to grasp. An adult world producing an older-soul, perhaps.

Yet thinking of that landscape past; I could almost find her behind the curtain, once again.

# GRAVY NEWS

I remember watching the news.

Or rather, being in the room and the news was on, which means Dad was there. Playing, reading or writing - I don't remember. But this piece caught me which now I see was with an echo of affinity from the future.

There were institutions needed to support this overflowing issue: Interviewing two teens, emaciated, clutching a fashion magazine on which the narrative seemed to focus blame. And then, for some reason a cut scene to pouring gravy.

I remember recognising that it seemed to base to blame the magazine, vile though they are. I see now- the irony of media blaming media.

But; whatever the true perpetrator, I vowed that I would never be so easily influenced, a line of defiance that even now I still find hard to accept.

I was probably about nine.

It was already too late of course.

A few years later, and we are in a room, cold in colour and feeling. Curated in true council-funded fashion: the basics and nothing more.

A well-meaning man, I'm sure, with his balding patch and credentials and Male gaze further solidifying the emphasis of my lack of power.

I was a child to the eyes of the law. The most unchildly child, but a child of course. Stuck.

Shirt and tie toying at sending me away; discussing education and BMI and ginger pudding with custard, whilst my mother shook and stared and said how much she likes ginger cake and

I just sat.

Self enforced silence; carving out a mental tunnel to escape these condiment-obsessed confinements.

Magazines may be a tangible idol on which to pass blame; but the wholly overlooked issue was that I was trying to stay afloat, in a sea of broken love and unresolved pain; amidst a toxic culture of systemically unrealistic expectations.

The imploded innocence of my childhood left a chasm that no amount of custard, or gravy, could fill.

And no one ever noticed, it seemed;

That it never really was about the food.

# PEACE AT LAST

I didn't sit with it.

I didn't sit with it.

Classic hypocrite -

I pressed, and rushed, and carried on.

I didn't sit with it.

Because it's hard to stare

Into this gaping, dad-less hole.

Yet it sat with me:

Holding, hanging like a shadow -

Pressing on my day.

Thus catching up, at 2am

To sit, and sigh, and say-

Seven years going,

Seven years gone.

Half a life disturbed.

And now the scales start to tip

The echo of life's curve.

It's odd to see one's timeline,

Butchered up like sirloin.

On offer, available to weigh.

The latter full of growth and life;

The former full of growth and strife.

Both with adventure, journey, pace.

Grief, mottled through it all.

Fourteen, seven, seven -

The before; the during; the after.

And chapter four we open now;

The after of the after.

So I sit at butcher's counter;

Night-shadow enveloping.

Heavy presence; gradual absence;

...Irrevocable vacancy.

Life pulsing on, relentless.

# PEACE AT LAST (CONT)

I no longer need 'a dead dad tee',  
don't receive the head-tilt signs,  
no offers of lasagne.

Still;  
I'm sorry I wasn't there.

Oh Dad. What you have missed.  
It's gone so fast, what have I missed?

I'm veggie now - rabbit food you'd call it-  
And I've got two kids - oh man they're loud!  
But they're the boys you've always wanted.

And Mark is still the best, do you remember I said yes?  
I'm making, learning, teaching. They even let me on TV! TV-me!  
(Remember when I spoke on radio and you hovered in the  
background? Gosh, your pride was so distracting)

And I've also spent some time, figuring out your presence in my life.

As an adult looking back.  
Oh dad, It would have been so good  
To know you.

So weighing up this pound of flesh,  
Two AM now three  
We've aged, we've worked. We've rested

We've been pounded by the mallet

And I'm coming now to see:  
that in the mottled grief

Is the fat;  
That spits, and smokes and burns

But also gives life flavour.

# UPROOTED

I remember how uprooted we were,  
the resounding shock so loud.  
When we had to leave;  
To save ourselves  
From our home that was on fire.

Yes, it shook our core, with grief  
And more;  
The ripping, gripping change -  
But we could comprehend...

So how must it be?  
When the uprooting comes,  
To one with fraying thoughts.  
Fire ripping through cerebrum-  
Rather than the roof.

So that no preparation;  
Or patient explanation;  
Can stop the violation;  
Of abandonment.

We've tried to be kind;  
To bring peace of mind,  
But how to explain-  
That it won't be the same?  
Or that the close of that door-  
Is goodbye?

We can go back...but only to sort  
The decades of dwelling, are over.  
And as we return,  
I, in turn, learn  
That she never wasn't there -

The greengrocer doll, always upturned-  
Secret tricycle passageways;  
Painting easel set up in the garage;  
Cheese scones;  
And two handed waves.

The smell of damp,  
And pictures on the walls,  
Of a life told, unmuted;

A life of man and woman in love.  
With God, and each other, and life-

One gone, now one removed.  
Goodbye my Grampie,  
Goodbye my Grandma,  
Goodbye squeaking, unlevelled floors.

Your prayers; your prayers were heard:  
Oh, woman of faith-  
That in such a place  
Of ripping, gripping change

Your solace, your Bible-  
The one thing that stays  
Yes- God can move in too.

Of course we shall visit;  
But schedules do limit  
Quality space and time.  
So Lord, as we grieve;  
Bring peace, bring peace,  
bring peace unto her mind.

# TRACES

I was eighteen when I met them;  
And my world split open.

The value of things, and people and education-

Totally different.

My skin and hair collecting glances, and touched and praises-

Totally undeserving.

Realising that I was a player, in a corrupted value system -

Totally revolting.

Still, I carry them with me:

Each story line;

Every interaction;

Every silent face.

Their genuine horror and genuine joy:

Experiences of life lived in a so called 'third world'.

Altering how I engage in the consumerist western culture.

Their traces drew themselves into the outline of myself.

Traces, now burrowing into my core.

Traces, wishing I did more.

Traces, changing how I see, and serve and expect.

Each moment, each movement;

Also a shadow of those who welcomed me,

And demonstrated life - pure and unrestrained.

But still,

Sometimes the pull of a busy life-

A comfortable life-

It blinkers me.

And makes me overlook my privilege.

*I hate that.*

Because I don't want to forget.

Or take for granted.

Or join in mindlessly.

It's not always comfortable-

This tension place, and necessarily so.

But only in the being changed,

Might we also-

Be change?

# CHRYSalIS

I feel like I am being born once more:

The experience of burying my face in my eldest's hair;

Unsure where smell ends and touch begins.

Senses merging into one another.

Or the consuming experience

Of wrapping my not-so-baby-baby in my arms;

Pride and joy ever flecked with speckles of doubt.

Or the deep breaths of freshness that cut grass brings;

Filling my lungs with past nostalgia and future promise.

Or the feel of velvet bubbles cleansing my skin and teeth;

Moments where time stays still, and sensation rules.

A ritual space.

Or the holding of hands, under the duvet.

Skin a decade more calloused than before.

The touch, never tiring.

The smell of my mum; or my sister.

The two roles somewhat confused within my psyche.

Or the tangible breath of a soul-felt prayer.

A visceral engagement with the minutiae of daily life.

Reawakening like the dawning of the spring sun-

I consciously choose to engage with life.

Balance continues to evade me.

I imagine it will always be so.

But I feel the scales falling away;

In no small part due to me wilfully tearing out of the chrysalis.

Transformation- not a discarding of the past but a building upon.

I am all that went before me...

*And.*

Here; there is space for growth.

And change.

And life.



# A QUIET BEGINNING

He'd left me crying on the doorstep.

I'd prattled away happily,

And perhaps somewhat manically

All the way home-

And then finally, I'd noticed

That he was holding some thought back.

In an attempt, I believe,

Not to burst the ignorant, innocent bubble

(He wasn't *all* bad),

He tried not to say what it was.

But, I forced him.

And so, eventually-

He wanted a break.

A commitment free summer,

To then pick up in September.

*Yes, I hear it!*

But, my devastated teenage heart collapsed;

So intoxicated and dependent on his disordered love as it was.

So, I flatlined for about two weeks.

And then...

At 4amish, sat on my windowsill,

Looking at the cloudless, pure and breathy sky-

Truth dawned on me.

Slow, like that of the sun.

An intangible feeling,

Trying to wriggle into form,

Trying to express itself truly into word.

And settling instead, as a gentle understanding.

That I could see colour again.

And that that colour,

Was freedom.

# BUT STILL

So, I stand.

A member new.

Of this silent, female vigil.

Now, always part of this same crew.

The maybe-next-timers,

The never-forgetters,

The keep-getting-uppers.

My compassion, and sorrow-

It overflows.

Not just for myself,

But the many kin;

Different souls of the same skin.

One in four;

Or three in four-

Depending on statistics.

The scared-to-knowers,

The I'll-still-goers,

The do-I let-it-showers;

My heart is breaking:

Over those who went before.

And all who will go behind.

Our kindred spirits forming;

healing; breaking; clawing.

Reminded we're not alone.

I could rationale the loss away;

I could wait for pain to fade.

I could say 'I know they were ill'

but still

I miss my baby.

# HINDSIGHT

Remembering is full of questions;

Wondering what of my memory

is truth.

Trying to walk around the space;

to touch the walls, the trees, the faces

To find out what

is concrete.

For holding a memory is like holding water -

One can never hold it all.

Light refracting through it,

Splitting my perspectives.

So; then I question my validity?

Yet my truth is my reality - and that has formed me.

I try to look for the gold - the joy,

But to ignore the pain is dishonest.

Yes, hindsight brings a painful light:

'Knowing what happens next'.

Yet if I do not look back;

And attempt to make my peace,

How ever will I move forward?

For I am all that went before.

So here I am; here I was; here I shall be -

Questioning, wondering, remembering, growing.

For the sake of my future memories.

# FACETS

Friends are like facets of a stone;  
Formed with pressure, and time, and work  
Or maybe -  
Like those of a dice;  
Part luck, and thrill, and fun.

One of the flock  
Or one on one  
These bonds change us  
Frame us  
And rearrange the way we see the world.

Yet when I think of friendships  
I also feel a fear -

Historic toxicity  
Robbing vulnerability  
That really I need  
For genuine connection

It's easy to be a friend;  
Harder to have one  
So as I think of  
These precious gems

I question  
Whose am I,  
And whose are mine?

## ODE TO SPRING/OBITUARY OF WINTER

Budding trees; peeping out  
From woody branches bare  
Longer days with cautious sun  
Leaking through the grey

A shock of sage  
A splash of mauve  
A spray of jasmine-white.

Colours saturated in  
The special springtime light.

A breathe of air; sigh of relief  
That purer light is here -  
Made all the sweeter, I do think,  
By stepping out of winter.

## PINK AND BLUE

I remember being taught  
In art class - year nine?  
Of the radical change,  
In an artistic mind  
Of Picasso's periods-  
Pink and blue.

Only now, decades on-  
I see  
That this mind  
Can change too.

# AT WHAT POINT?

At what point-

Does a wrinkle become a tale?

Meandering, like breath on frozen wind.

And at what point-

Does a breath become a body?

A body, on which wrinkles

May play.

And at what point-

Does a fold become a crease?

And a crease become a scar?

Are not all traces,

Traces of that which went before?

Evidence, then-

Of touch. Of memory. Of existence.

And that, in it all-

We have lived.

Tired. Tired. Tired.

A modern day accolade,

Accomplice of importance,

Benchmark of success.

It is hard to express;

What this word does encompass.

My body does need rest;

Bones and muscles yawning, yes-

But its more.

More than that.

The fog of finding and refining my  
identity.

Many roles are spinning plates in  
reality.

# TIRED

The perpetual weight of being  
needed: day and night.

Life's a joy; a privilege; an honour.

For sure.

But sometimes-

I feel unmoored.

Like I've set a-sail

And forgotten how to anchor.

So I row:

On, and on, and on.

Because, I simply do not know

How to stop.

# THE LINE OF GRIEF

The reverberating shock.

That these people. Are. Gone.

Loss, echoing back.

With a breathtaking smack.

No, no, no-

*It's wrong,*

*it's wrong,*

*it's wrong,*

How are they gone?

The floor falling out as if this knowledge isn't ten years old.

But grief doesn't age in the same way we do.

It can feel stunted and scabbed,

Quite quickly actually.

Manageable.

Then rip open-

At a smile, or a song or a smell...

Years later.

Or, it may leak

Through the cracks of a pressured diary.

Minutiae of decisions;

Tailored by the tilted lens loss leaves.

Reactions and relations stained by a changed-forever stance.

For grief is not a straight line;

Connecting A to B.

No- it tangles and manoeuvres.

Knotting at points, unexpected.

Then leaping spans of time,

And looping back once more,

To the realisation of the moment;

The sorrow of what's lost.

And the yearning for what could have been

...If those two things are different.

Consciously, or unconsciously -

We traverse this line.

This tightrope. This edge. This ledge.

Step by step navigation somewhat blind.

For no roadmap can teach us our response

To the relief:

The plains, the highs, the valleys-

Or the surprise potholes

Which griefs throws behind itself.

Just one thing, I suppose.

A comfort of sorts.

That we all have a threshold-

A commonality.

For to be human is lose;

And to love;

And to grieve.

Yes, we all do it differently,

But we can at least,

Do it together.

# LOUD

You feel loud right now.

Reverberating around my trains of thought.

Distracting, dissecting and disturbing the flow of my intentions:

Relating, working, continuing on;

The floor just seems unsure-

My footing less stable than a week ago.

What changed?

I can't quite grasp,

Whilst disordered eating consumes mind and light and life. Irony  
rumbling around,

Like the echoes denied within my abdomen.

I will discover the floor once more,

I know.

But for now, I'm treading water.

Or perhaps; the water treads through me?

A well worn route by now.

Tidal, maybe.

Waves crashing, cresting and crushing.

Their crescendo overwhelming,

And yet-

Cleansing also.

For I must use these waters to rediscover the bank.

Because I can only grow by passing through;

And sitting with you.

And listening.

Yes, you're loud right now.

Do you need something?



# LITTLE EDGES

I am walking.

The wind licking over my skin,

And I realise that

In searching to define the edges

and the spaces in between

That I, also, am an edge.

A space and point of change;

at which me meets world, and world meets me.

And my edges are not so coarse and harsh and horrible,

as I have perceived them to be.

But instead, behind a smokescreen confidence,

They are soft and vulnerable and uncomfortably fleshy.

Curling at the edges, as wood in a fire.

How did I not see this before?

How long until I see something else?

If I cannot trust my eyes,

I must note my other senses,

When being wrung out

By disordered mind

and tired body.

So, I'll move a little slower.

Breathe a little deeper.

Listen a little longer.

Every act of existence

An act of defiance.

# HAZY DAYS

Chasing shadows, Searching rocks  
Library trips and talking socks  
Bashing heads, Grubby clothes  
Comments on my button nose  
Swimming lessons, Feeling fat  
Putting on big sister's hat  
Being 'arty'  
Being 'clever'  
Being one to do whatever-  
Brightest sun of hazy days  
Days that may have slipped my gaze;  
Because of storms which came next season  
I lost hindsight for that reason  
That, all in all I was a child  
And -  
Not all of it could be my fault.

# SHOCKWAVES

We will hit 24 hours  
We will meet a month.  
We will mark a year.  
  
5, 10, 15-  
The relentless annual clock.  
Or do these markers find us?;  
  
Time growing  
Around our shock  
Like scar tissue-  
Enveloping, dulling down;  
softening in time  
The 'never getting over this'  
Wrapped up with stuff to do  
  
Yes, we will find our feet again.  
Perhaps not on fully solid ground.

But we will live, and carry on.  
Through memory and pain.  
With grief, we'll grow around.

The markers:  
They may pass us-  
or hit us like a bus.  
That life has taken on this turn.  
An admission: *this is us.*  
  
And now,  
The shockwaves ricochet  
But perhaps with time  
They will  
Settle from crescendo,  
To dulcet baseline drill.

# HOT HOUSE

The key in the lock

One door, then the second-

Figure distorted by faceted glass;

Not dislike my memories.

Home from work;

Smelling of cold;

Musty - rustling - murmuring.

Skin slightly oily;

Hair short;

Glasses steaming up.

Always the same: 'It's a hot house in here'.

As you click the thermostat down.

Another day done; time's overrun;

Dad is home.

# ODE TO DEXTER

Three doors-

Suspension stretched.

But.. you had *heated seats!*

Our chariot for adventure.

In those early, and care-free  
days;

Taking lesser travelled roads.

When we would stay up all  
night;

Then- left left, right right right.

Those dusty roads-

That took us far from home,

but bound our hearts  
together.

The space in which we began  
to make

Our memories forever.

Swapped now, not sure  
where-

For George - our trusty steed.

To ship to school,

And swimming lessons;

These latest life-stage needs.

There's definitely a sweet  
space in

Our hearts for you - our car.

Thanks for all those journeys;

Our memories;

Our start.

# THE BACK OF THINGS

The back of things;

The overlooked-

That which is hard to say.

There's something precious in

The traces left,

By touch, or fold, or use.

And sometimes only when

We stop to look

From an angle unexpected

Or a road, perhaps less travelled

We might actually see-

The beauty.

# SPACES

The Architecture. The Geography. The Landscape.

All words that we use to describe,

A space that is bigger than us.

Reminders that we are small,

Yet significant-

Spaces that we are part of;

Spaces that are part of us.

# HOME

We are home.

We have returned.

These same walls,

Retaining echoes from  
before-

But so much has changed.

And we are not the same.

Are we home?

But then-

We have grafted together

Shaped together

Built together

And time has shown;  
that we are home.

No matter the walls.

# GLANCING

Glancing back-

A freeze frame, for the heart.

Our old home;

Sad to see it go; maybe a bit relieved?

Site of so many memories

Painful - precious - mixed.

Wishing I did better;

Knowing that I tried.

This sacred space, oft taken for granted.

How could anyone new value.

The weight within these walls?

But perhaps it doesn't matter;

For none can move into the house,

Of *my* memories.

That geography sits within.

# LOVING

Loving each other, best we can.

Family is funny you see;

Because you kind of get no choice.

Lumped together,

So together you grow-

*That's* not always easy.

But it happens in some form or other, either way;

Yes, it can be hard in the moment.

But there's nothing like death,

To bring a flood of grace,

Or acceptance-

Or a new perspective, at least.

# SEEN

Ah, it is just sad.

I realise-

It could be seen as liberating:

Being 'free'

From caring ties - from owing more - from reality.

Yet from walking there,

Within your fog-

I see:

That, really

*We want* to be bogged down:

Needed.

Known.

And seen.

# CHAOS

Your hand softly roots me,  
As I walk the line of chaos -  
I count your fingers  
And am reminded of the gift of life.  
Your unquestioning trust humbles me;  
And I feel a sense  
Of duty and desire and dedication  
Strengthen my soul.  
This moment is as building block;  
Stored into my heart;  
Creating a permanence and purpose.  
It is as brief as it is profound-  
and we walk on.  
You continue to play with your stick.

# VAPOUR

Our ~~my~~ baby lost:

A vapour

A breath

An ideal; expectation; want.

Our little life-

No longer live.

Ya have changed us always

We love you

so.