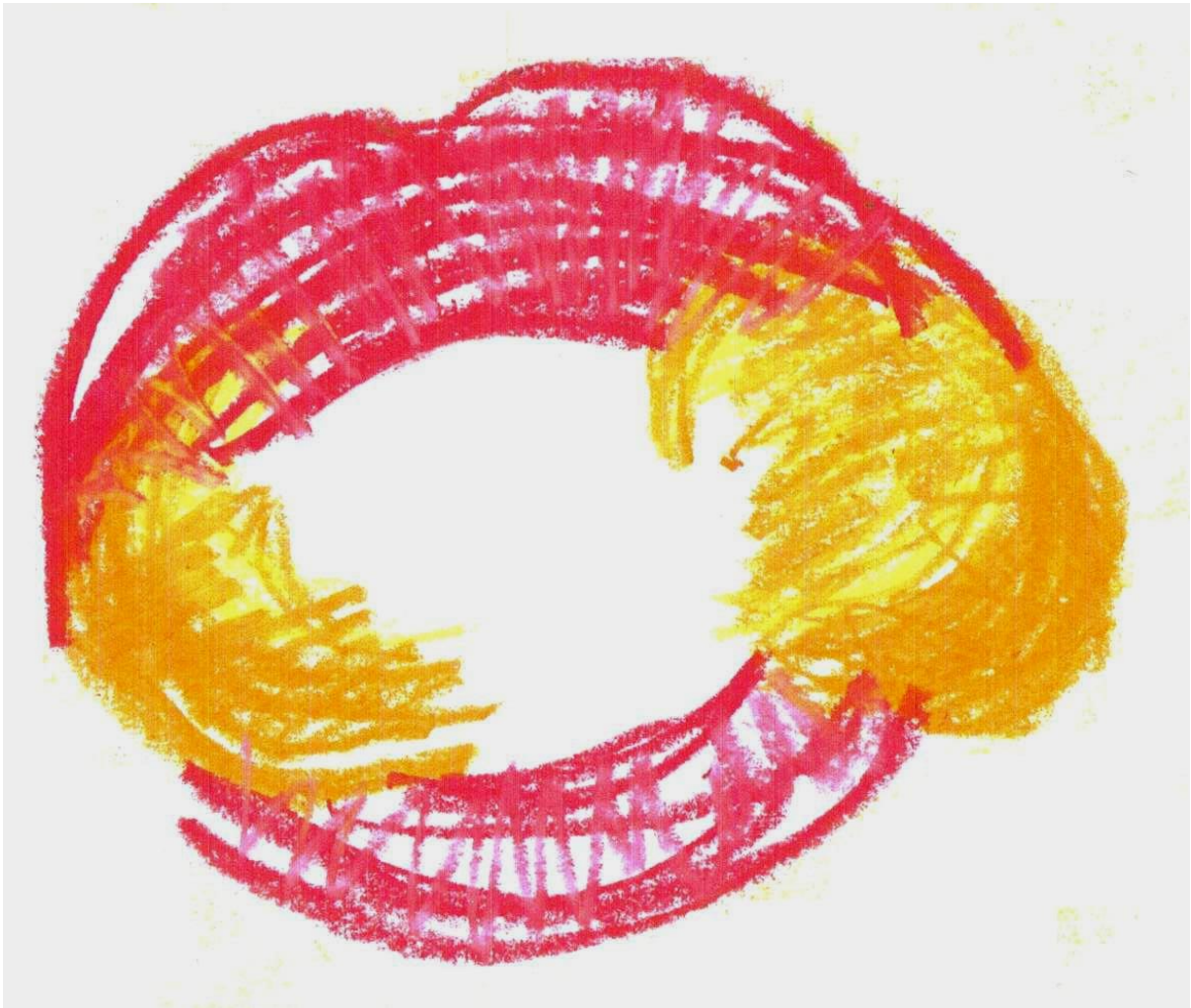


VOICES

By Sarah Gonnet



INTRODUCTION

Sometimes I merge with other people.

People I see and watch. People on TV shows. People in books. But mostly people I obsess over. It's not love I feel for them, it's something more. It is more, even, than a connection. It is an often one-way spiritual flow that I have with those certain people and that I also have with my madness.

It is absorption and simultaneously projection.

I start to think in their **voices**.

I feel their facial features in the place of my face.

I absorb who they are and then I'm left to deal with the extra dimension they demand from my brain. An extension needs to be built to house this new person.

Then that's that: they are always there. In my mind. Moving around. Talking to each other. I can hear their **voices**.

Their **voices** are stronger than my **voice**.

Pseudohallucinations The Doctors call them; but the **voices** don't like having only one name like that. They want their own names; they always want their own fucking way.

If I am real in any way, I am not a person; I am a set of scales. These people I absorb live in my head and are in constant opposition to each other. They have such bitter things to argue about. I am the scale that weighs one **voice** against another. I measure out the right amount of each of them and then project this image of sanity when I talk to other people. But this image of sanity is only a magic potion made of spirits and **voices**. It does not make a real person. It also doesn't always work- I am undeniably weird.

Projecting the people in my head, and managing some of their horrific ways is difficult. I take drugs: anti-psychotics, anti-depressants and tranquillizers, to dull them and sleeping pills to get some rest from them. But ultimately I have to project them somehow, or they will not go away. Making it harder is the way they all have impulses. Dirty impulses that need placation. Some make me cut myself deep. Some make me seek out throwaway sex.

Some make me manipulate: once you've absorbed someone you can see how they work. Everyone has a mechanism I can learn. I learn these mechanisms by heart because I'm hoping and hoping and hoping I will one day be able to make a

mechanism like that for myself. One that would make me into a real person. Not just a conduit for **voices**.

It always comes back to the fact that I have to project them, the **voices**, purge them from my system (though only so new **voices** can soon imbed themselves in the resulting spare room). So I have to write; I have to paint; I have to act (after all, all the world is a stage); and I have to hoard.

But hoarding is also a process of absorption: there are all those **voices** in my books; all those foreign worlds on my discs; they are just too tempting for my black hole of a brain. I have to absorb four books a week. I have an obsession with the number four. It links all of my fantasy worlds and relays back to play a part in my reality.

When I sit and look at my hoard it becomes a physical representation of all of the pieces of me; all the different **voices** inside me.

I am not living when I'm not creating, not projecting, or hoarding. I fear that is because there is nothing there beneath the voices, the identities. The ones I have absorbed and the few I was born with: the child me who still plays, collects stickers and watches *Adventure Time*, the manic me, the depressed me, the grunge dressed artist writer me. But these fragments of self have huge fissures in them. There is plenty of room in these fissures for the absorption of people and characters and their **voices**. There are so many layers. But I fear that maybe, if they were unravelled, I would find they're not protecting anything.

Music really brings the **voices** out. They like listening and they like the ease it allows them to force me into their perception, like a musical lubrication. So I listen to certain albums in my isolated shed to summon certain parts of myself. Then I let them out onto the paper. Sometimes I don't need the music to summon the **voices** up; but their signal strength increases if I do. Sleeping pills bring them out too. Half an hour after I take the tablet the **voices** flow freely; all of them off in their own wavering directions. When they join up and become one electric stream again I am asleep and they lead my dreams.

The book you hold right now contains four voices from the mystical and outright mentally ill kingdom of my head. Some of them are drawn from life, some from shadows of life, some from fantasy; and one, Azra, is a personification of my madness. The **voices** came out as poetry this time. Poetry is something that can only be written under intense inspiration, so these poems project some of the voices in my head with a unique clarity that it is hard to express in any other medium.

PART 1: JON

Out in the Rain

Water

Spouts

Dripping

Cuts and

Cleaning

Dry skin

Away from your arms.

I

I

I can't

Watch you

And him

Go anywhere

You want

Out there.

I won't help you

Make me

Explode

Not again.

Not out in the rain.

Mess

Mess around with words.

toys; lessons.

Prickled spines facing up,

bright,

pages like snow; free.

Ready for reading...

writing, studying...

over and over

until meaning is...

Lost in schizophrenic sentences;

as confusing as:

novels in a made up language,

originality in an office job,

a mathematician learning,

to draw a freehand

circle in charcoal.

A translation of Proust,

into cave man grunts.

My life just isn't,

all that poetic.

Forget

Forgetting who I have been.
Not knowing who I will be.
The film on my eyes has never been so thick;
moments won't solidify,
the world is invisible.

Scars mark the paths of my past,
they fade and I get lost again.
Sometimes, in the cold, silvery reminders,
shine like cat's eyes,
only temporarily.
I will forget again.

Untitled

Gather up your limbs,
they're untidy.
Why are you lying on the floor like that?
You can't be dead.
You look too perfect.
And your cheeks are red,
or is that make-up?

Your hair is still strewn,
around the house.
I find it in chunks,
in the bath, on the bed,
all the places we used to have sex.

I always knew those pink curls,
were a wig.
(Look out- it's slipping off your head).
I whisper your names,
listing one for every letter,
I'll just sit here,
and wait for you to get better.

Teeth Are Bones

Tonight I stood
for forty-two minutes
and brushed my teeth.

Couldn't care less about them,
or the swollen gums that don't
necessarily
keep them in place.

The time means nothing either,
I could have wasted it any other way,
Yet,
I stood.
And stood.
And stood.
And stood and watched the clock.

One day I will have none left.

Tune

Far, far away
from those big
silly rings
and your magic.
I want but,
don't wish,
to end, to stop,
to kill . . .
Hurt you enough for a
bead of blood
to burst and
stain your clothes . . .
. . . you . . .
Stain you, deep and wide.
You are a cartoon.
I am Looney Tunes.

Pomegranate Juice

Flows forward.

Flows faithfully.

Flows to the finish.

Pomegranate Juice

is thick.

It curdles painfully.

It isn't one colour;

it is filled with shifts.

Dark, arterial;

lightness, red water.

Flows forward.

Flows faithfully.

Flows to the finish.

Winter

Wisdom teeth are piercing,
the veiny red mush of my gums.

In my ears is thick brown wax,
burying my brain in its muck.

My fingers are fat with chilblains,
and white warts against immunity.

I'm growing older in winter,
it's a defence against the cold.

Courting

You've been married sixty years,
you shadow each other.
But I've known you longer.
I watched you lose your virginity,
before him.
Later I watched you cheat.
I never hid.
You always knew I was there.

I grinned when you,
had your first period.
I knew before your mother.
And I knew what it meant:
our courting promise:
what is yours,
will be mine.

I licked the stick
of your first pregnancy test,
so that it came out blue.
I was proud of you,
for what you did next.
Again, I was the only one,
who knew.

When you woke, still young,
screaming in pain,
hands clutching your appendix.
I rode with you in the ambulance.
That was the first time,
I felt an urge to touch you.

You are old now.
Those times are gone.
Do you know me yet?

Once Was

I think I'm slipping away,
pill by pill.

They don't even work,
won't keep my thoughts still.

Does it mean,
that I'm no longer a person?
If I'm more drugs,
than who I once was.

If I'm,
no longer pure;
is there any evidence,
I existed at all?

PART 2: AZRA

Thought

That man thought:

“Bipolar women,
are beautiful –
thin, thick make-up,
up for it.”

His penis scared me,
so I nodded in agreement.

“So what are you right now?” he asks.

But that isn’t his question.

My manic mind answers,
the real him.

A silent answer, until he gasps.

Then I spit.

And leave.

Brain chemicals call:

“Again! Again!”

I find the next one.

Repetition rolls a rhythm:

propose, reply, respond.

Rhythm is pattern.

Pattern makes sense.

Then new men come.

They keep me captive too.

They give me drugs

(it’s nothing new) but,

these aren’t the ones I want.

These drugs break my body.

My body turns fat,

face gains an extra chin.

My hairs fall out, chunk by chunk.

My breasts are broken too.

They lactate, food for something,

I can probably never have.

This is a joke.

I'm bipolar,
thin,
thick make-up,
up for it.

This has to be a joke.

Bleach

Bleached denim skin
and hard elbows
red splotches,
makeshift freckles,
powder you.

I point my little finger
into your ear
scratch soft skin

Why aren't you wearing white today?

I like lace on you.

As if we'd
get married.

I'd pick your nose
for you if a bus

smashed your spine.

I'd lick the shit from your arse.

I'd spoon feed your vomit to you.

I'd move your jaws so you could

chew strawberry gum.

Side Order

The ache
that a baby
is supposed to fill
waved at me from a distance.

I saw it
burst, what emerged
was grotesque:
blonde wires,
porcelain doll cheeks,
slightly cracked,
lips that refuse to meet.

She screams "You should have chosen me!"

Then she leaves.

Only her silvery imprint remains;
branded on my brain.

I stare into the space she filled,
then down another handful of pills.

The Zopiclone Guarantee

So here I am again.
counting
down
the
hours
Until I swallow; then,
counting
down
again
until they work.
My permission
to not exist.
To not even remember.
A seven hour guarantee,
written on the packet.
You will sleep.
You will forget.
It reaches back to trance magic.
Zopiclone is my ally.

A Parable

He prints out my brain-scan,
onto a napkin.
I can't blink as he,
folds the shred of fabric in half,
right there on the desk,
then again,
with each fold he says: "Well that bit
isn't much use anymore."
Then he sits, and ponders,
before making the next fold.
Soon there is only a thick rectangle left,
too thick to be folded again,
"And that's the end of the session"
he says.

The Word Jinx

To me “love”

Means manipulation.

To me “safety”

Means restraint.

To me “calmness”

Means endless pills.

To me “imagination”

Means psychosis.

To me “happiness”

Means mania and “sadness”

Means depression.

To me “sleep”

Means sedation.

To me “mum”

Means my carer.

And to me “illness”

Means a way of life.

Even Though I Could

I wish I could hide,
curled up like I did as a child,
huddled under the covers.

Anger and disapproval,
still make me want to disappear,
sometimes I just want to die.

The other option is to fight back.
Tell you I hate you, like you hate me.
But I don't think you'd like it.
No I can't...
I couldn't possibly...

Hurt
you.
Instead, I have to sit here
and tell myself I don't want to die.
Even though I could.

Compulsion

Slouching here,
with cats around my ankles,
and madness in my head
I begin to sink into my own lies.

Parallel universes of
lines and single words
things that didn't happen
things that shouldn't have happened
things that sting.
All left out to die,
in a notebook shaped cradle.

Why does ink
suck the life out of me?
Until there is only
compulsion left.

Gum Guard

Have you ever swallowed lithium with white wine?
I have, and nothing tastes
as bitter.
I do it every night, follow it
with Zopiclone, and a
handful of others.
Then I sit and wait for them to work.

The numbness starts,
in the corners of my senses.
Grows until I,
can't,
quite,
get
the world. It's just
not,
quite
right.

Eventually my eyes stare,
my body aches in vague patches,
my fingers won't bend right.
Then I know it's time;
to put in my gum guard
and finally
yet again
go to sleep.

Messages

Tight squares,
shapes of the computer age,
yet half scrawled over in paint.
The paint's preoccupation being to
black out the blank screen
up to its next cycle of darkness.

Labels blaze in, pale grey fire.
They say "liar".

They say “pain”.
They say “damned”.
They say “create”.

Baby, Baby

Don't call me baby,
I grew up long ago.
You're the one,
who still curls up like a,
foetus in bed.

Don't call me baby.
My face isn't smooth,
its cut up.
My eyes are clearer,
than yours.

Don't call me baby,
I won't wear your jewellery,
like a dog collar.
It's ugly.
It smells strange.

Don't call me baby.
My womb bleeds monthly,
the red stains my pubes.
And yes,
my legs have hair too,
(so do my armpits).

Do not call me baby.
I am not yours.
And if I chose,
to have a child,
it will be mine.

Don't fucking call me baby,
when you want to,
touch me like that.

Hangover Z

That **Zopiclone** hangover,
crawls into your stomach,
peels your skin off,
and spits into your empty hide.

Add **Quetiapine**,
and your head will fuzz, buzz
and crackle blue electrics.
Hot with fused out thoughts;
your brain is burning up.

Then there is the **Sertraline**,
it grows you a new skin,
without nerve cells.
Then scolds you for being numb.

Once they've wrecked you,
it's ok, because,
the side-effect meds are still to come.
And the side-effect meds,
for the side-effect drugs.
False primitive callings.

Azra

I carry psychosis in my pockets,

I am a manic mess.

I can go back to Aristotle if you want; *Poetics*

And still that won't be proof.

That I have scaled rainbow

mountains of mania, and only,
once pooped a unicorn.
More awkward to shit are letters,
they have hard edges.

I have hidden cracks, and caves
under creases, without shame,
more a mystery. A mystery of
mild obesity. Am I allowed to be mad,
if I am also overweight? I am no emo
damsel you can save.

But I'd still quite like,
someone to try. Maybe one day,
when the sun shines, and I can
look at it directly.

PART 3: MARK

Sedation 1

This is me sedated.
never again free.
Freedom
is not flight, is not power.
its locked doors, deep cuts,
running fast past a watchtower.

Now I'm on meds,
I won't be dangerous,
I won't fight back.

Never again will I feel,
the deep thud of panic,
crushing my heart,
depression and confusion,
won't be given a chance to start.

I won't be dangerous,
I won't fight back.

This numbness,
my brain buzzing in my head,
with no escape plan
(except maybe my canvas)
It has to be worth it.

I won't be dangerous,
I won't fight back.
Even if you grab me.
Even if you rape me.

Belly

Pale blue

tummy warts

your childhood scars

the reason I laughed...

...then didn't

They froze them off

ice ray

the Ice King

I thought of Ben and Jerry

slipping down your stomach.

All the time

I bit you,

and you bit me back.

I didn't realise that you were keeping track.

Asylum Trees

The Asylum trees whisper

their oddness to each other:

"Actaramaborabsalten,

tenaftectecmeria,

tenten talk kerank,

colcanterrargerttec,

warftellenaftectec,

tenaftectecmeria

tenaftectecmeria.

(then he escapes again)

Tolcentolcentolcentolcen,

oustmercantelperravarse.

Certg, mallermallerperct,

berantaftecaftecaftec,

colt und tern terncevenere,

hassen-heltman-topp.

Cass taftgernnerkess.

tenaftectecmeria

tenaftectecmeria.”

(then he escapes again).

The Love of Geeks

She breathed,

and when she breathed she said:

“Your back, a white expanse of skin,

a beach only if the cool sand was,

pockmarked with red acne-jellyfish.

I control your sweat like
paint on my easel. Swathes and lines
and increments. A moving machine,
a pump of living bodies.
I can feel your sperm swimming,
up inside me. Tentacles that,
reach out from your
tiny jellyfish markings.
Your face is red with bleached reverse,
shadows under your eyes, your lips are
pale too. They utter a death rattle that
isn't a death rattle. It's a life rattle.
A toy to play with.
A warm draft turned cold against my,
frying skin."

Perfect Girl

(For my sister Annabelle)

Perfect girl,
White skin a creamy blend,
with the bathtub just as white.

Eyes locked closed,
by lids, and tear-dew
that binds them shut like glue

Perfect girl,
Her lips dyed light pink,
like fashionable lip-gloss,
an 80s revival on a 90s child.
A flat expanse of stomach,
tapers off into a perfect V.
No hair to see.

Perfect girl,
Her wrists patterned with
red bangles, the bathwater is like,
the Red Sea,
she should be floating.
But the only salt is the,
salt of her tears.

Who?

Mark Evans
wanted to be a surgeon.
One summer,
he read *Gray's Anatomy*,

cover to cover.

When the urge to write came,
he tried to subdue it.
Promised himself,
he'd do a Chekhov,
who wrote short stories,
in a day off.

When everything went wrong,
He tried to fight it,
To stay strong.
But there are some things,
that can't be beaten with textbooks.

People started looking at him,
staring, saying "Is he talking to himself?",
"Didn't his sister overdose?"
Mark realised they wouldn't let him be a doctor.
Nobody would trust him.
Mark never,
knew himself again.

Who is the Ghost?

Like a haunted house,
your brain creaks and
whispers to its shadow friends.
For you, imagination is colour, splashed,

onto numb grey walls.
Just inside your ears is a blue lens,
looking deep, seeing your
mind, makes for a vision coloured
by its misery. Is the blue from
outside you? Or is it already
entrenched in your DNA?
(another pretty pattern on
Another swirl of information)
Do you create to escape misery?
Or do you get depressed to escape creativity?
Go on then.
Take another pill.
Chemical trying to equate themselves,
they are poor replacements,
for ink, for paint
yet they are the fuel that
ticks towards your
madness, or your creations.
They are what the ghosts are made of.

A Series of Images

Your body is shaved to a point,
the barrel of your gun.
You are pregnant with death,
each clip a tiny abortion.
Each shot adds to the,

placenta of The World below.
Your skin is religion,
but everything you
are has been frozen.
And it can shatter;
Though I didn't ever say that it will.

Elbows

I love your elbows.
Hard skin,
crusty in summer,
rawest red in the cold;
your elbows
are like tasteless,
angry lobsters.

Spots grow there,
in thickets of pus.
Dirt fills their crevices,
as smelly as belly-button fluff.
One day,
creatures might clamber,
out of their pockmarks.
I love them.
I love them.
I love them I love them.

No

No.
Not today.
I cannot force the
world to
make sense.

Not today.

Returning

numb love
friends returning foreign
friends with
broken webs
friends with new languages
sat in a circle
around a vodka bottle
pouring fake warmth
in through
their wounds.

The Love Exclusion

There is a guy I know
he fucks me with ambition
ambition to fuck me again.
The joke is that I love him.

There is a young-man
that I lust for.
I've never dared to ask him,
If he likes me too.
The joke is I hugged him and I felt something real.

There is a man.
He likes me.
He asked me out on a real date.
He understands me via shared memories
of different lives.
The joke is that he's double my age.

PART 4: JENNY

Untitled

Where would you like me?

And when?

How do you plan me?

For you.

How do you land me?

Again and again.

You know the cheats to

my brain

How to program it.

Never admit I'm in pain

to the wrong parties.

And why?

And when?

And how?

When I am

the witch

who heals you.

I am the writer

who creates you.

When I am the cold,

winter speckles,
snow on your face.

Metamorphosis

Once I was a palatable teenager:
My stomach was tucked flat.
My hair was thick, I dyed it blonde,
I painted my nails, I decorated my face.
I talked to people without caring what they said.

But then my stomach sucked itself too far in,
It became a wormhole,
It pulled my whole self through.
I was spat out in the next universe along.
I'd become something else.

I was ribs.
I was cheekbones,
I was deep, deep eye sockets.
I was bowed thighs.
I was an ankle that could fit in the loop between forefinger and thumb.

They sent me away, to a cold, white, world.
They gave me pills to swallow,
gloopy milkshakes to wash them down.
They changed me. I didn't want to change.

I became a projector.
I emanated rays of myself.
Rays of pain shoved out as I filled my body again.
Filled it with chocolate, crisps, cake...
brown mush swallowed down, and still the omnipresent pills;
displacing the thoughts I used to have.
I do not have privacy anymore.
I shit and they watch. I'm not allowed to cheat.

Until . . .

A Message of Hate

I see you for the first time in years,
outside the corner shop
you're trying to look cool.

You see me back;
There is a tightening
of muscles in your throat,
like you're trying to swallow,
your own tongue.
Along with it would go,
all the spite you spit
into the world.

I wish it would swim,
like a long, dark eel,
down into your stomach
and then dissolve . . .

. . . except one piece
One slither for you to
regurgitate
and get stuck.
One piece big enough to
choke you...

If you hadn't bullied me,
I wouldn't be this crazy.

If you hadn't dissected me with insults;
broken my skin with violence,
I would have thought that I deserve better,

than a razorblade to
split open my arms.
I wouldn't have pressed down as hard,
pulled back as far.

If I hadn't gone to school,
to have you shout at me,
day after day;
I wouldn't have swallowed these pills,
vomited my guts up,
over and over.
If you hadn't kept me trapped,
in a cage of isolation,
someone might have heard my screams.

If I was a Size Six

If I was a size six,
I would be able to,
wear smaller clothes.

Less

She knows,
he'll never,
love her back.

He knows
it'll never,
be as simple as sex.

I know enough,
to know,
I want to know less.

Babyface

Babyface doesn't cry.

Babyface doesn't squeal,
in pain,
or boredom.
Babyface hates music.
It only confuses her tiny ears.
Babyface paints her nails,
child's pink.
Babyface doesn't believe in love.
Babyface melts pound coins,
on her crack spoon.
Babyface once smoked a twenty-quid note,
but it didn't taste right,
she stubbed it out,
with the Queen's face intact.
Babyface can see paintings move,
like a 2D film.
Babyface used a Ouija board
(copyright *Parker Brothers Games*)
to contact Van Gogh.
(Van Gogh told her to fuck off).
Babyface swallowed WWIII
Babyface hasn't got a nob.
Babyface hasn't got a fanny.

Through the Car Window

I glance someone through
the car window.
At first I think
I could be them;
But then I realise,
they are me.
Surely that is my face?
Of course it is.
No-one else's nose,
is quite like that.
She has my eyes too,
stolen brown pebbles,

yet not quite as murky.
I try to move closer,
I want to know if hers,
still have a light . . .
but she pulls away.

Even You

I tell the truth by lying,
you're so honest,
every word is false.
Yet, you were glaring
at my tight pink pussy,
long before you saw
me.
So don't pretend,
like your way is perfect.

I was out with your mother,
yesterday,
I rolled up my sleeves in the M+S café,
just to see how judgemental,
human stares can get.
Scars mean we can all
be broken.
Even her.
Even you.

Knitting

There's a pain inside me,
a rotting smell,
heat that twists my stomach up,
coming from below.
As if a tube in me
has got caught.

A thread from the inside,
to the outside, snagged,
and whichever way I turn,
I only pull it harder.

My womb is unravelling,
but it doesn't bleed.
It refuses to bleed.
I want to escape . . .
. . . so I run,
but it only speeds things up.

Eventually I fall to sleep;
until I'm woken by my husband.
He passes me a ball of wool,
pink wool with red flecks.
He suggests that I knit.

Doll

I am a robot.
I make broken Russian Dolls.
In my break,
I swallow cigarettes whole;
And lit
on the lint your dad chops down.

I know,
at home
you hide amongst the
children's toys
and sing to the yellow emptiness.

I know
right now you lie
on your back and look at

the spinning mobile
and brush your hand
against your crotch.
But it doesn't work.

One day I will
set fire to it all.