

our voices in the chaos

david ralph lewis

Our Voices in the Chaos

Erasures and Poetry

by David Ralph Lewis

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To Mel, the one who calms me when everything is loud.

David Ralph Lewis is a poet and short story writer based in Bristol, UK, whose work has appeared in *Neon* and *DogEar* magazines as well as the *Lies, Dreaming* podcast. He blogs regularly about politics and art and often scrawls over newspapers to create blackout poetry. When not writing, he enjoys dancing badly at gigs, attempting to grow vegetables and taking photos. He understands a very, very small amount of what is going on in the world.

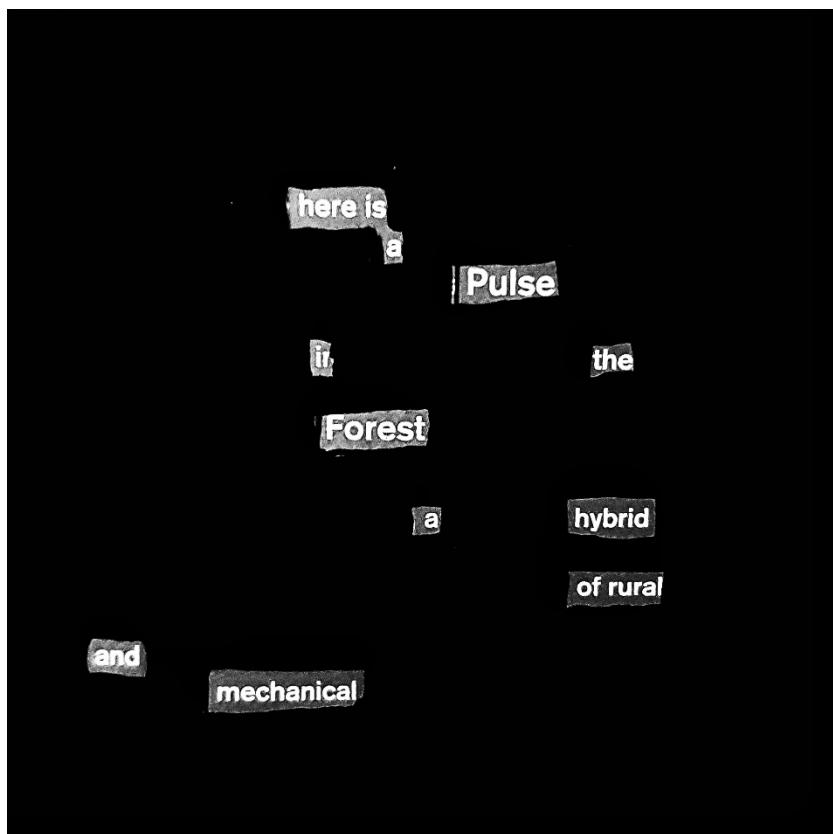
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Primed



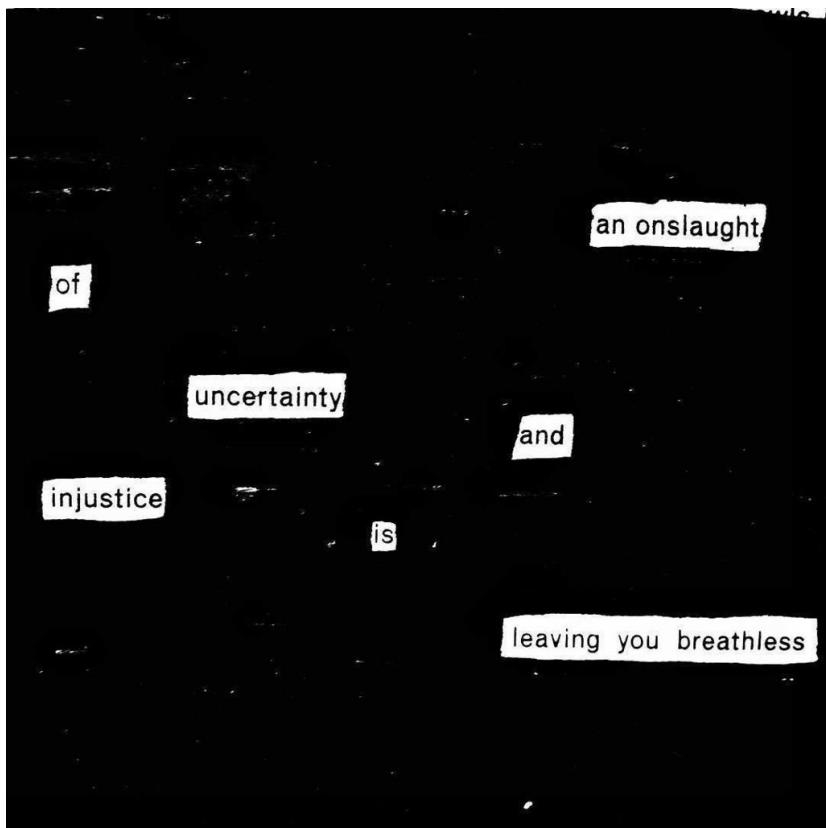
Here is a cog in a retina, slowly ticking,
imperceptible unless up close.

Here is the sour-sweet smell of
black mould mixed with engine oil.

Here is the machine, moss-smothered,
counting down, unstoppable, as planned.

Here is the moment, long forgotten
here is where the wings start to flap.

The News at Ten



Our top story:

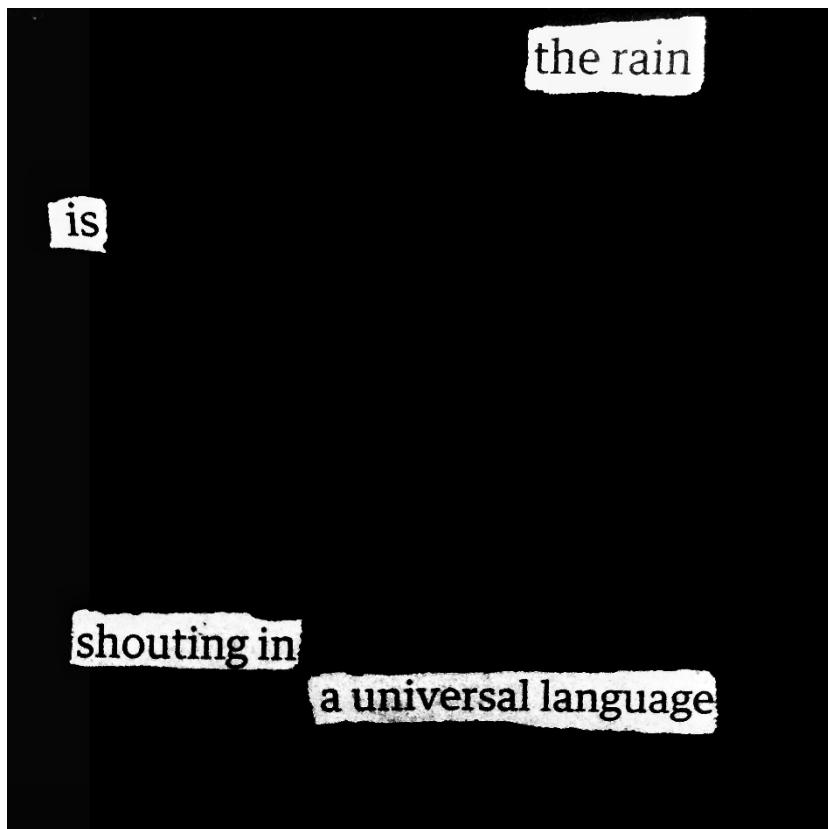
Also today: Politicians continue to be corrupt, disasters continue unabated.

The world is outside your control. Go back to bed.

We are receiving late reports that you woke this morning at three am and the shadows barely hid their threats from you. The sleeping world held endless rows of sharp teeth. You did not dare turn around.

And finally; here's a kitten who thinks it's a human!

Sleeping Late



These sheets are warm with us
there is nowhere we have to be

This day is just for us
we lie side by side until
the boundaries of our bodies
become fuzzy and start to blur.

Drops on the windowpane
will reveal their secrets if only
we are quiet and listen.

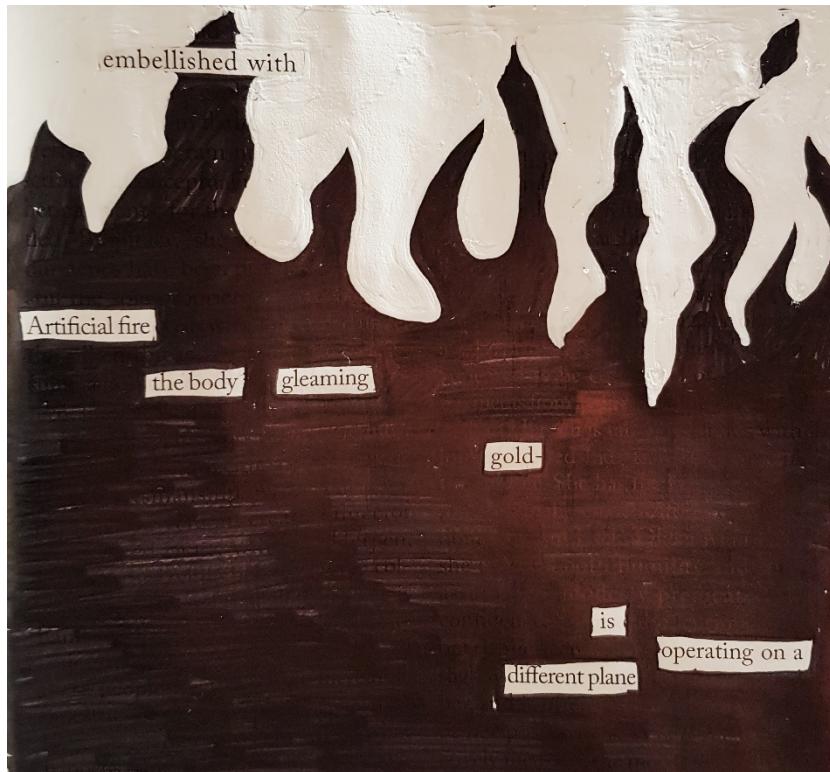
Golden

She'd always lived on our street
in the house nobody noticed.
Our parents remembered her
from when they were children
her outline faint and shimmering.

Ian's father remembered, with a wince,
how she once appeared to him
while the road was stuck in time
as if in a dream, but he was certain
he was awake. His eyes became lakes
and he would speak no more.

We dismissed our parents' stories
as the lightest burbling fantasies
before we were older and realised
stories carry messages like arrows,
warnings fired from close dimensions.

Now I wait, watching for the impossible,
in the before hours, she emerges
flickering gently, wrapped in morning,

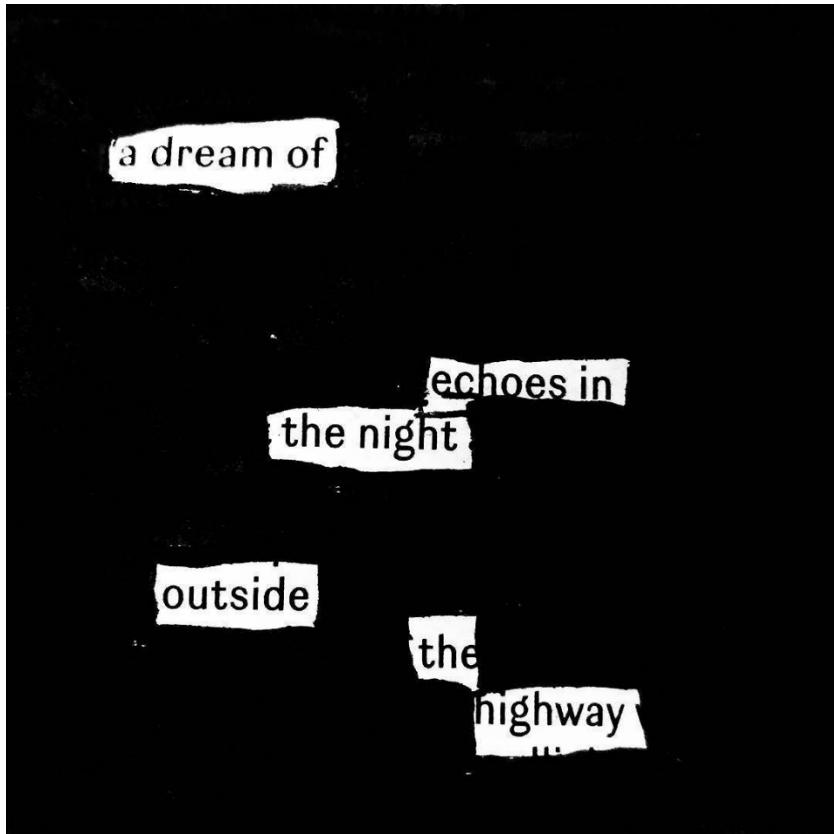


summoning the sun with a smile.

She walks the tow path by the canal
unaware of everything exploding
into golden flame around her.

I am lost. I am forgotten.
I am smiling as my bones burn.

Lucid

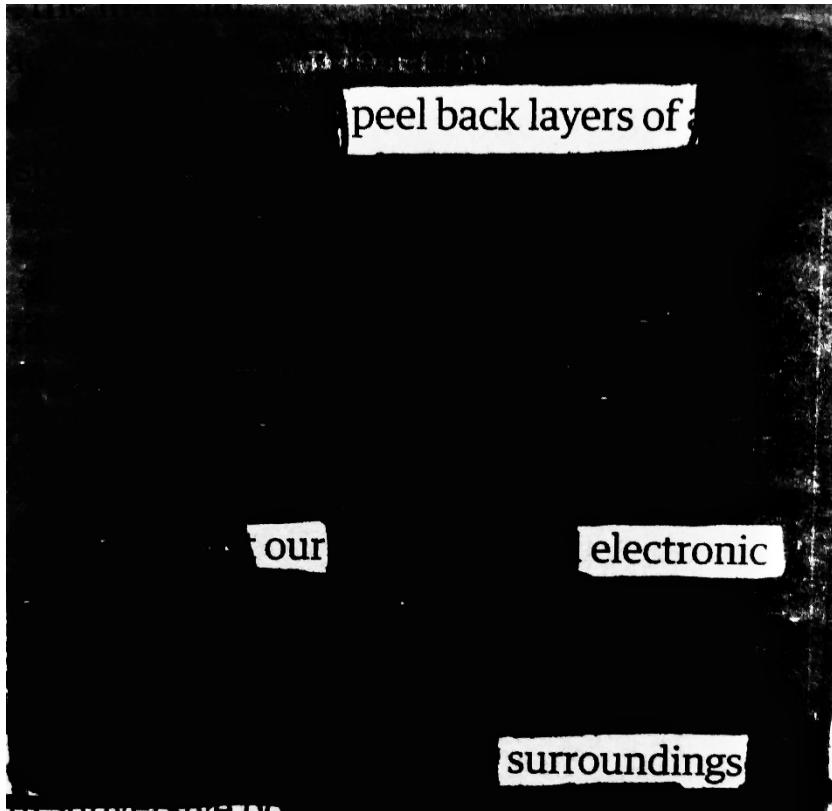


Another country,
another person
awake in a motel
listening to cars passing.
I am listening too.

Beyond, the night clerk
stares at a glowing
blue box, thinking
of all his bad decisions, hoping
half awake, for morning.

A lizard darts across
the dry stones
then turns to look
right at me but
I'm just waking
on a different continent.
We ripple into one another,
the night is always fading.

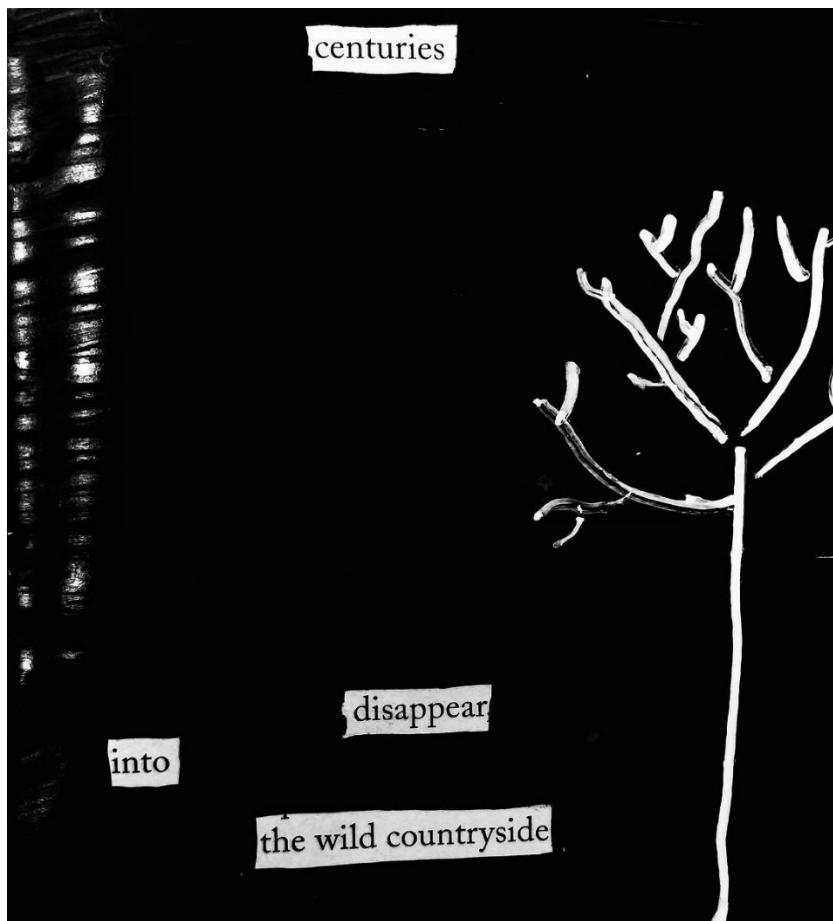
Electric Ghosts



The screens go first
with their glowing lures
and promises of success.
Maybe this time you will win a like.
Then the always seeing cameras
monitored by no offices
should close their eyes
slumber blind in darkness
These firewalls we have built
should fizzle and melt down
to precious molten ore.

Relax. You are left alone with
the simple sounds of the world
embracing you once again
and your own mumbling thoughts
long neglected, start to wake.

Inhale



Civilisations rise and fall
like breathing in and out.

Buildings grow and shrink
Lives flicker and are gone.

It is bright and I am.
Suddenly, I exist.

I am corporeal and taking
a lungful of cold air

confused by the sensation
of a strange pulse.

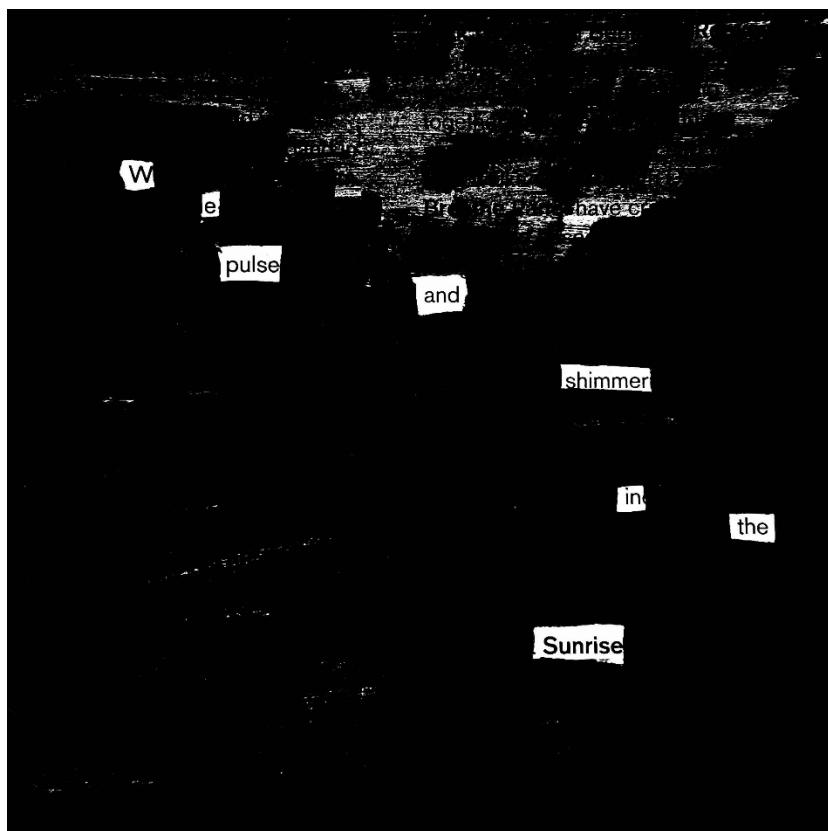
Before it is gone again
into the fog and

The tangled weeds consume
bricks and tarmac once more.

Early Morning

Today, we wake up in the dark
before all the streets come to life
after the clubbers have scattered
on the breeze across the city.
before the commuting crush starts
we dart through empty alleys,
Explorers with heavy rucksacks,
pushing onwards, watched by a single
street sweeper, bored and cold.

We reach the harbour just in time.
The gradual glow is just beginning
Your hand in mine, perfectly fitting
jigsaw pieces. Here it comes,
the relentless future. You smile.
No turning back now. There never is.
always pushing forward into the unknown.
We are both shaking as together



Hush

listen carefully

to understand

a precarious world

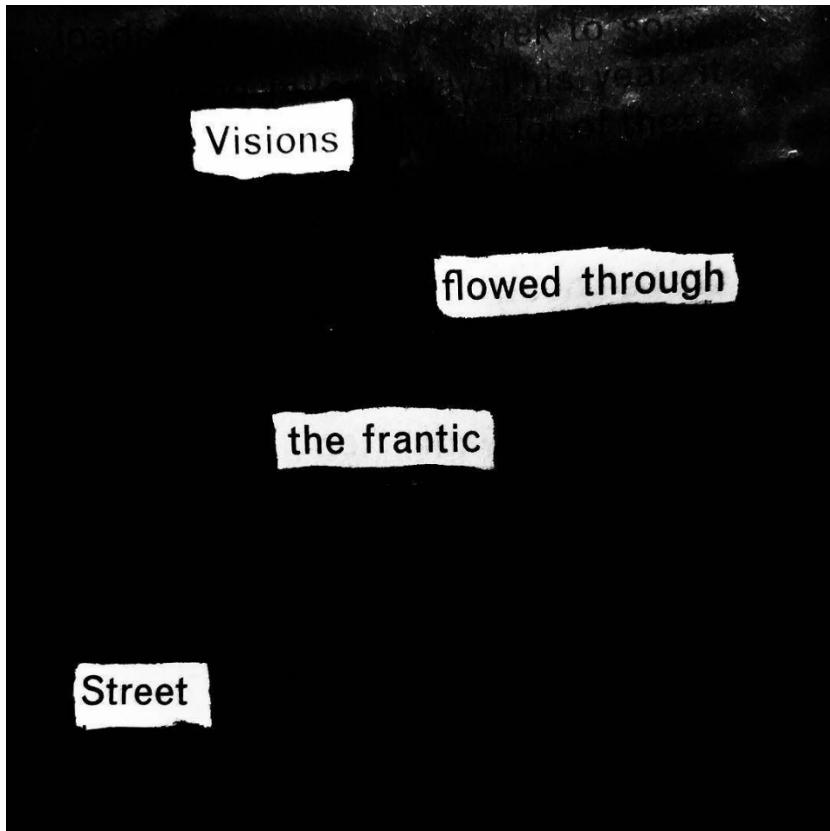
The wind making
endless music
from tree branches

The river's strange
siren song
capturing you again.

The gentle joyous
hum as grass grows
in the cracks.

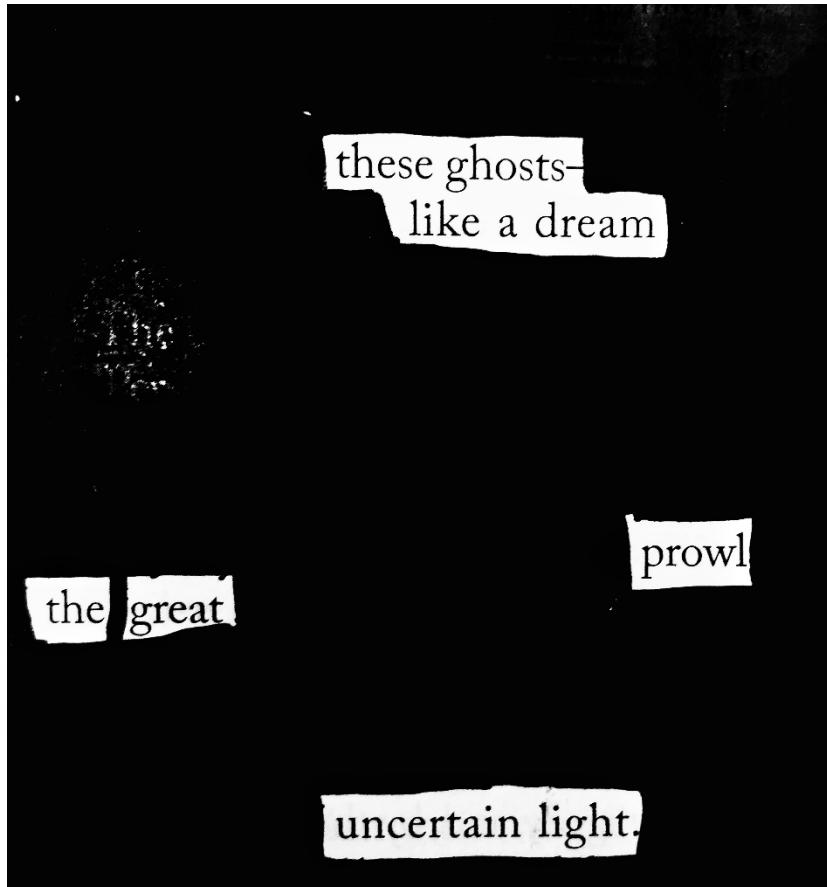
New life emerging
everywhere.

Change



ecstatic dreams of a better world
were a river around us, sweeping crowds
onto their feet as we called for more.
Holy was the sun filtered through clouds-
in this gloomy city we worshipped it.
Always, just out of reach, always we still
strived for it, powered by those visions,
even when the storm grew more angry,
even when the faceless built shield walls
even when they started to wield batons
we walked ever forward, hoping for more.
A transient mist of soft rain fell
all around us but did not touch our skin.
Together, we marched with eyes open
hands clasped, into a possible future.

Hunted by Shadows



Long ago, their hollowed sockets
held memories of eyes
now they roam empty, searching
for fresh mortal prey to feast

One follows two inches behind your head.
You see it only in glimpses. A shark's smile,
rows upon rows upon rows of teeth.

Another whispers sweet folk songs
from a distant century in your left ear.
You know these tunes from distant memory
when you were a child and the world
was loud, too intense and uncertain.

The last is invisible to mortal eyes
only known by a strange chill
However close you get to fire
your bones will never warm up.

The violent night brings silent screams.
We hide in shadows, waiting for a blessing
of morning, hoping for those first
gentle rays, straining, trying to hear
bird song. We huddle together

on instinct, guarding as one against
the terrible unseeable and unknown.

From Above

These days
are muted

with wings

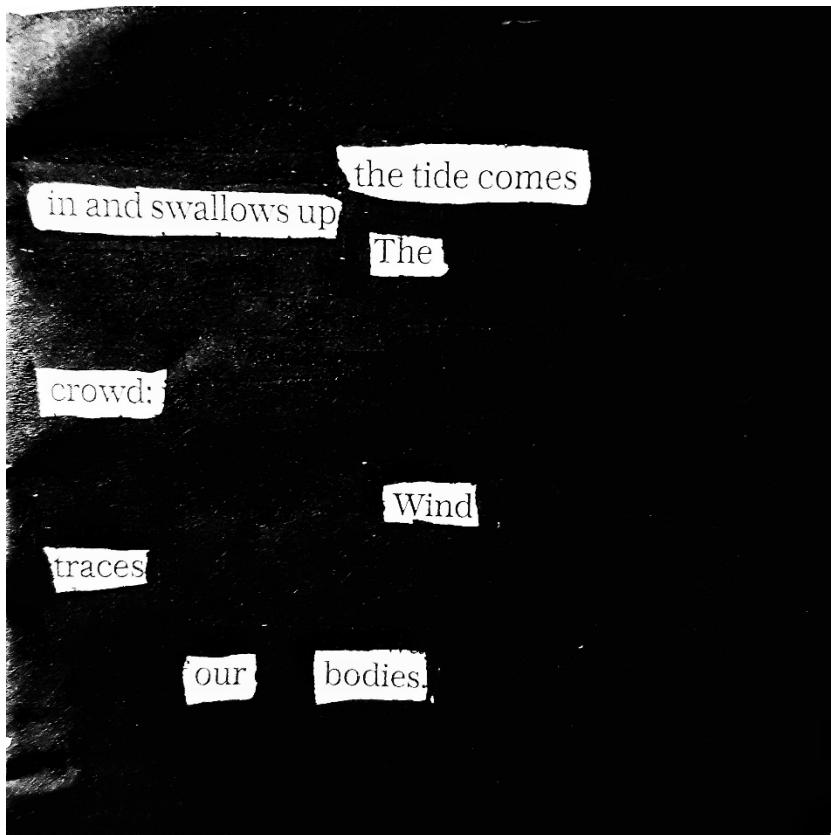
I criss-cross the dialled down sky
dragging reluctant air behind me.

There is a peace in falling
at terminal velocity, not accelerating.
I had forgotten how large and empty
this sky and this cosmos is
and how small and empty I am.

Freedom is a lack of land
a open cold expanse of nothing
and no constraints of gravity.

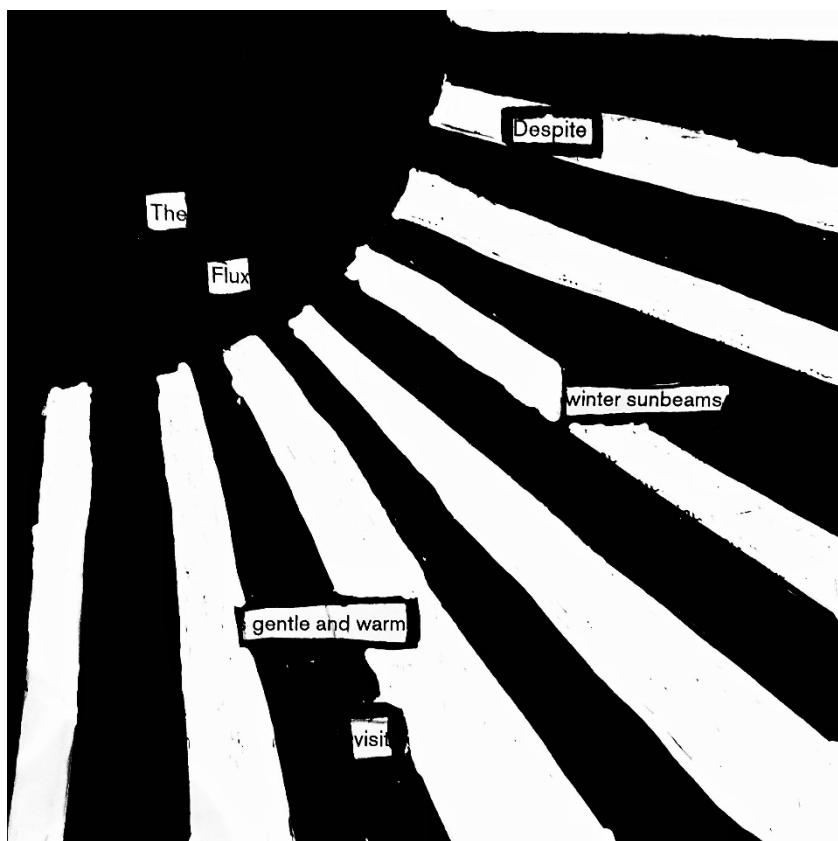
Summoned

It's three thirteen in the afternoon
I leave my desk and head out the door.
No-one stops me. A reflex action-
I chose flight. I am joined
by other pilgrims on the stairwell,
all decided at the same time
to walk as one mass of flesh.
I lead my followers out the front door
into the blinding streets. We merge
with other groups from other buildings.
I am no longer in charge. No one is.
We walk as one, unsure of the destination,
guided by some map we cannot see,
making turns and decisions as one.
Something is happening but we don't know what.
We do not talk but surge, like a wave
rushing towards land. We are flowing now
along the pavements and roads,
expanding to fill every gap. A turn left
and we are on the beach. We stride down
to the water's edge, the boundary between
two worlds and we wait. Every breath
is euphoria. The sun turns our bodies
to pillars of flame. Water laps our feet.



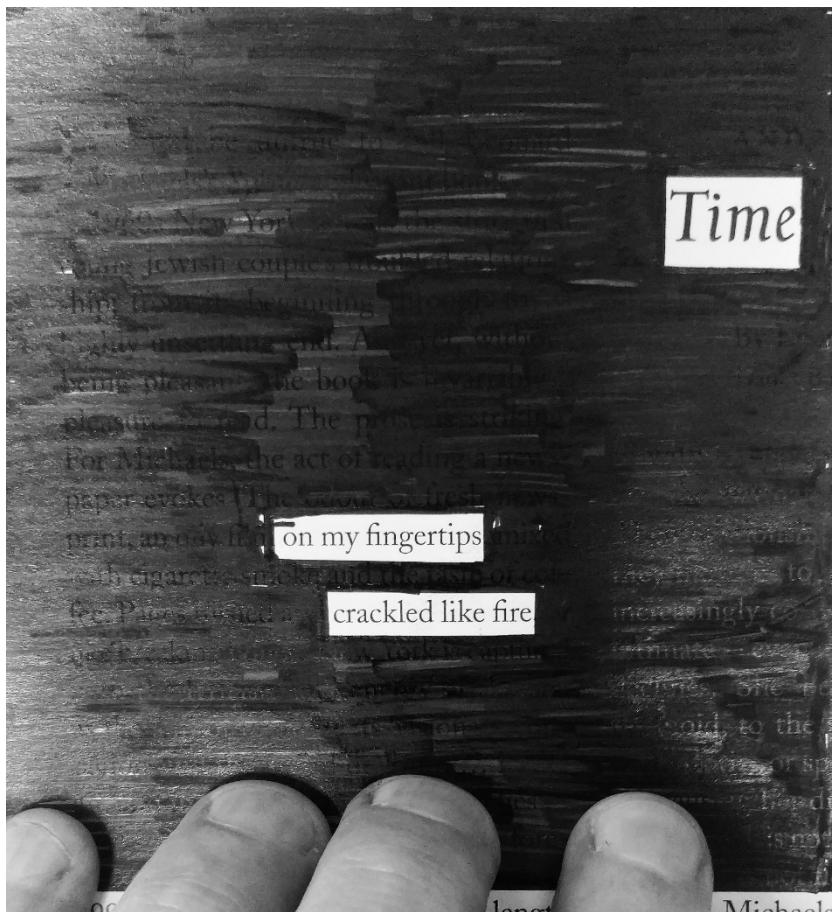
as they bob, face down in the waves.

Stockpile



I capture them in jars
store them in a locked cupboard
to open and bathe in trapped light
when the clouds roll in.

Snap



burning all that
came before. Single

moments vanished in
the blaze. Reducing
our fragile minutes
to ash, indefinitely.

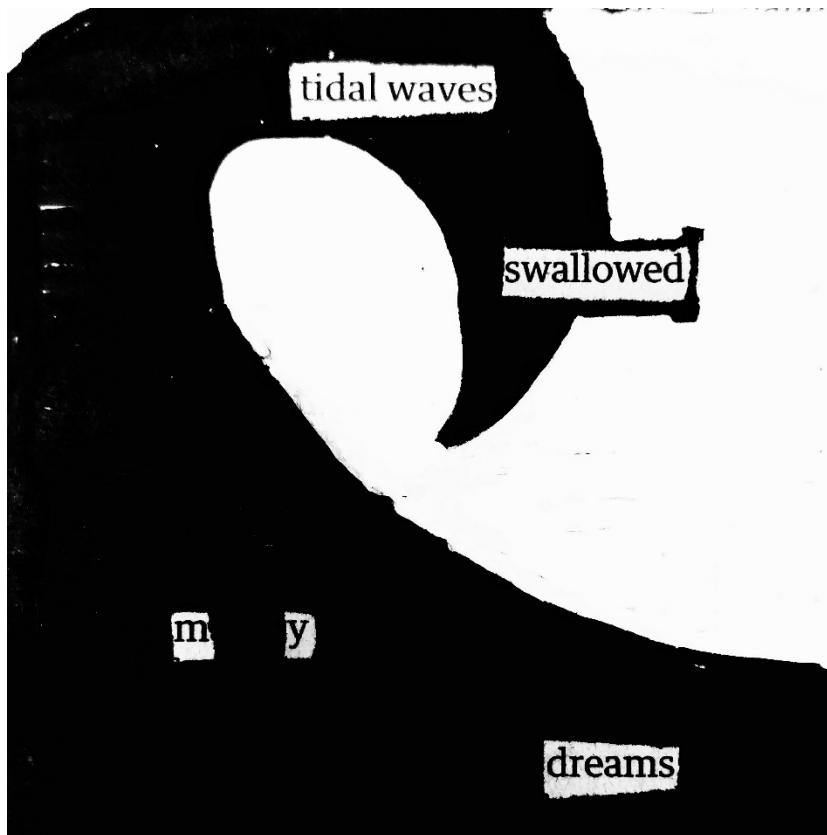
Between nanoseconds
there was only the
destruction of everything,
flames all consuming,

each moment created
anew. Each heartbeat
is the first. Even as I try
to hold this moment

us lying together,
before the day starts
a beautiful stillness
even as I try

it is gone, into the pyre.

Rising Water



Rushing rivers consumed all thoughts
all idle images, all aims
all half-faded memories
all the words I wanted to say
and everything I had pleaded for.

The vicious currents took everything
as my empty body was submerged
in vicious depths.

Down below, where
the light barely reaches. No sensation.
Nothing to see or touch or think.
No breath. I could have slumbered
for a billion years as stars die
and speed to supernova, lighting
up the sky before fading into dark.
Or I could have been underwater
for a matter of fleeting seconds.

Signals

hymns of

revolution

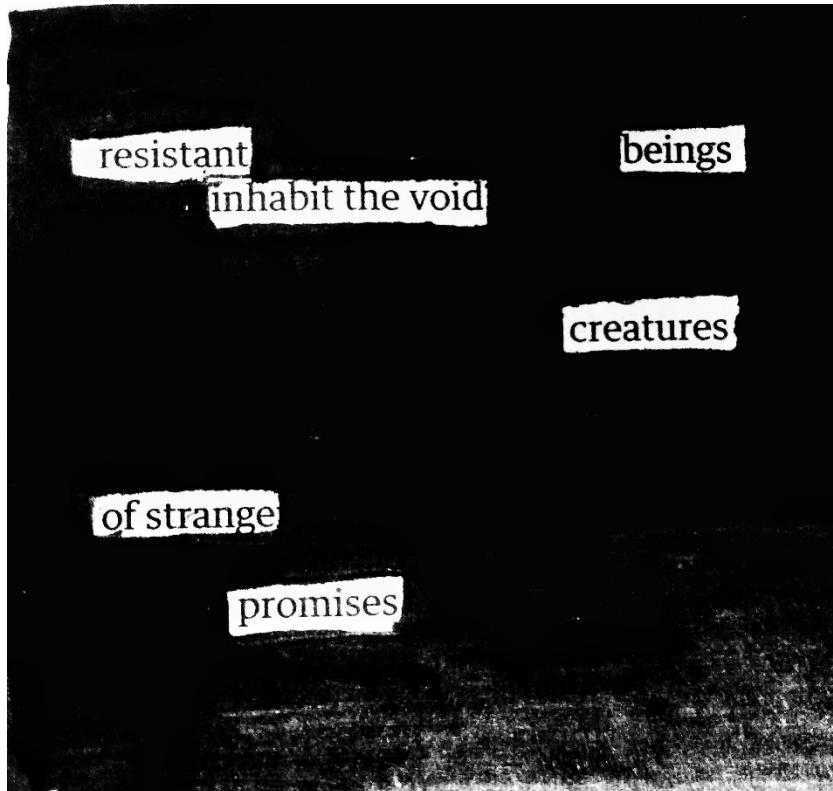
connected us

in the

chaos

Our voices were buried in the constant clack
of printing presses churning up endless
lies and distractions. Our voices were
a flickering torch, with failing batteries
signalling over a dark plain on a cloud
smothered night. Our words were scrawled
on walls by unseen hands, left as neon thorns
and directional signs. We talked in whispers,
ignoring the raging wind, until our voices
became a flood and swept us all away.

Thin Places



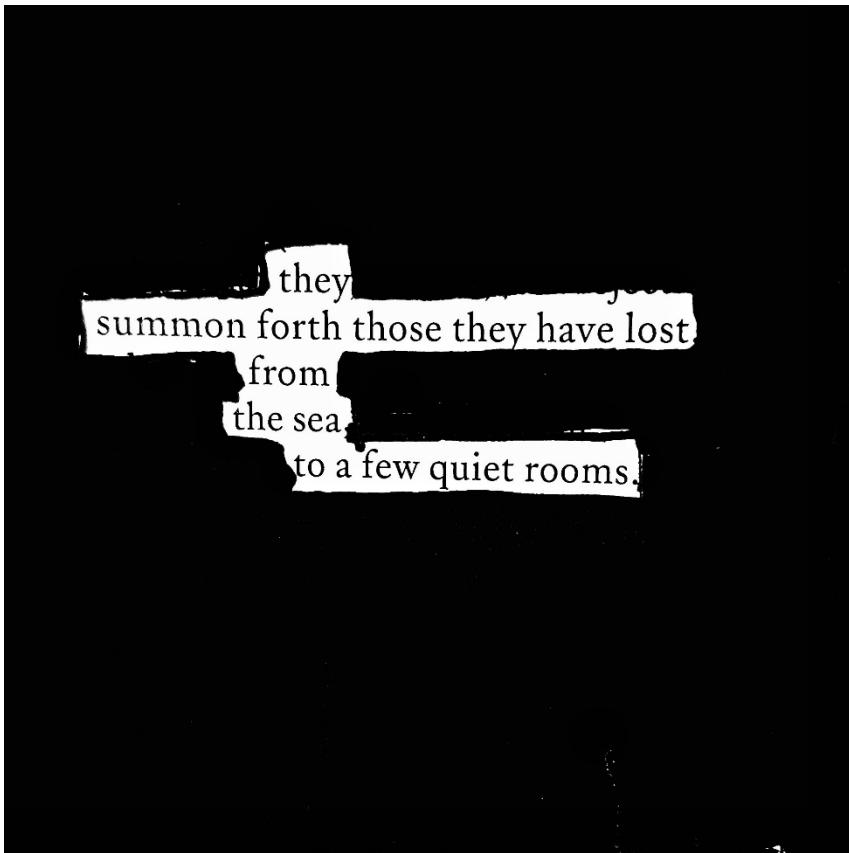
In the weak spots they whisper charms
and fabrications into waiting ears

Those tempted often fade at sunset
like a dream moments after waking.
We do not know where they go,
what realms they may roam through

I have ignored their strange songs
carried on the breeze, in quiet fields
But now I hear their voiceless speech
over soft waves, on an empty beach.

Now I listen for a precious second,
too long, thinking I am immune,
hoping I am unique, even as my skin
turns ever more translucent.

Dredged

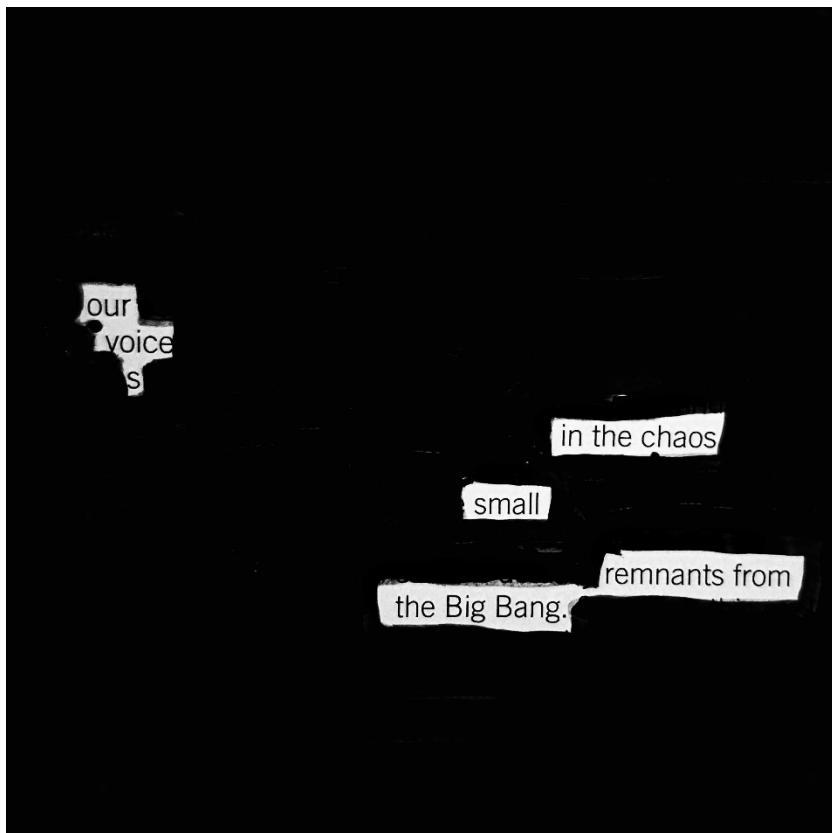


they
summon forth those they have lost
from
the sea
to a few quiet rooms.

Barnacle crusted, dripping with seaweed
eyes lost and holes rotting, the lost sit accusing.
Their families ask questions like 'how are you?'
and 'How has it been, sleeping beneath the waves?'
There are no answers. Only mouths that gurgle
fetid salt water, lungs that wheeze and bubble,
gestures that might say "Why did you dredge me from the deep?
I was happy there, resting among the corals.
There was peace where light does not reach."

In between

Too much emptiness to handle
once we found the structure of
all things we went quite insane.
A miracle but inevitable given
the particular starting conditions.
Mandelbrot was right. The same patterns
on different scales. Minuscule dots
spinning around each other.
The same over and over and
here we are, perched on a dust speck
hanging in in the great absence



Final Act

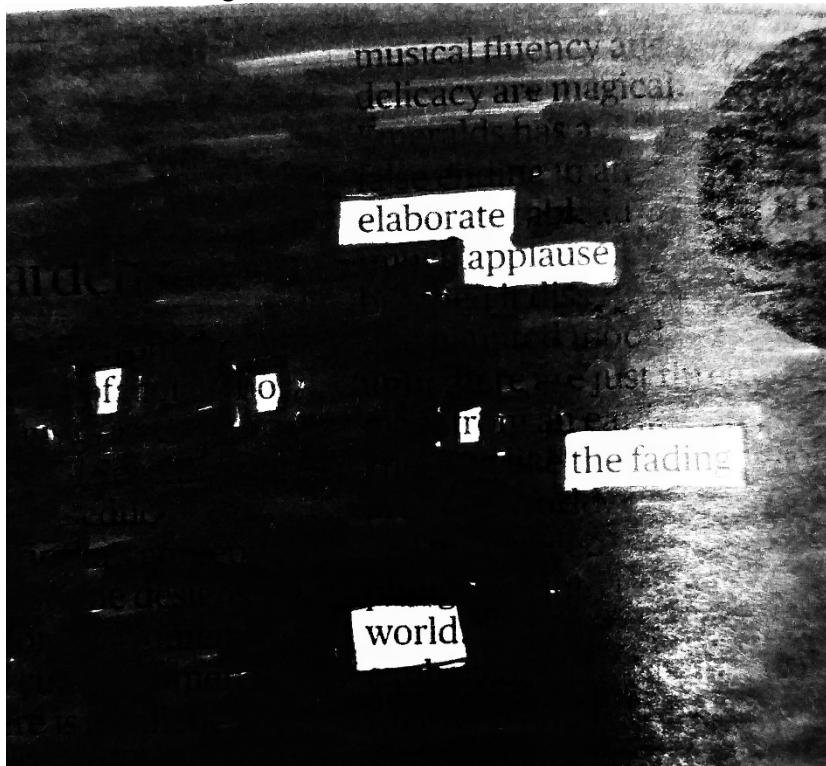
The band strikes up a final
sad tune. The main theme,
but slower now. Minor chords.

One last grasp at redemption.
One reach to the high ledge.
One final leap across the void.

Fingertips come so close
within millimetres, but cannot
stretch those final cruel spaces.

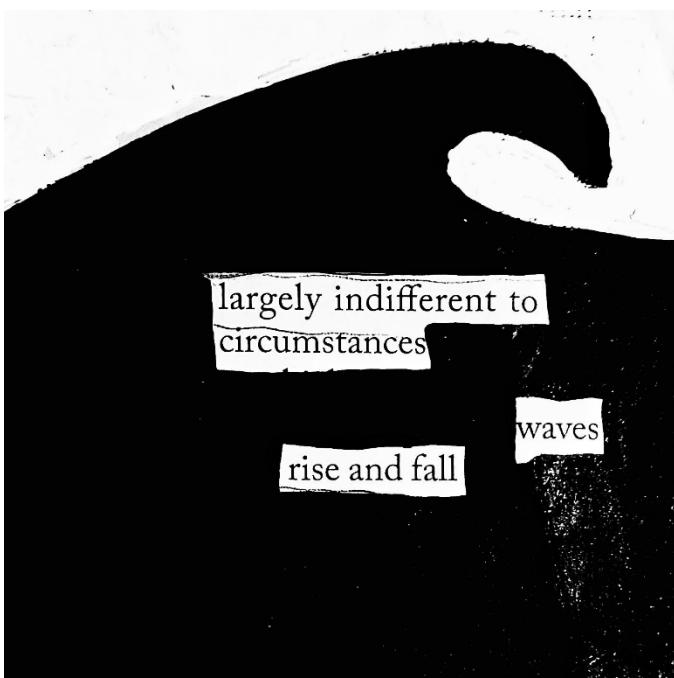
Then inevitably, the fall.
dropping towards the ground
as the band plays presto.

A final collective holding of breath
A long pause. Then like the sound
of sudden rain on glass windows:

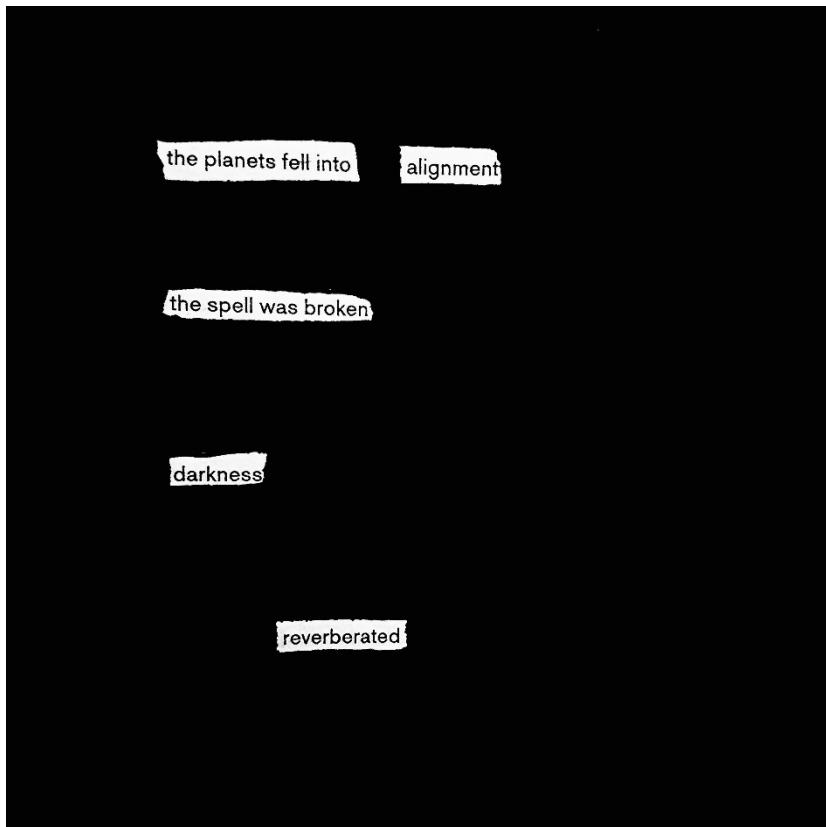


Frogs

Attention spans
dislocated, we stay put
in our orange boxes,
turn the volume up on TV
as a riot roars two streets over.
CONSUME OUR PRODUCTS
The air boiled so gradually
we didn't realise it was scalding us
sudden lesions over our skin.
Adverts invade our peripherals
at all times. No escape
as half the country falls for
pyramid schemes and votes
to make things much worse.
Dreams become disjointed
skipping records in the dark
needles scratching our skulls.
Madness reigns. Plague
sets deep into our bones.
BUY OUR SERVICES
The flat screen screams
at your inert body.
The atmosphere is steam
all our cuts and wounds open
and are ready. Who is in control?
Does it matter anyway?
IGNORE THE OUTSIDE.
BUY. CONSUME.
It's summer in October
and we can't jump out
of the pan now, too late,
and the volume won't go higher
and all you can do is laugh as
a brick flies through your window



Dark Matter



echoing out from the centre
ripples in space-time
Hail the creator! The destroyer!
Yawning expanding nothing
Could we bind it?
Was there another rune?
Constant absence
filling our view
The theories were right!
We cursed the nothing
as moons vanished
without sound
How far had it gone?
impossible to tell.
Saturn was no longer there
incomprehensible blank sphere
engulfing everything.
Logarithmic growth
across the void
So long to Mars!
We were mute
watching as one
waiting for the inevitable.

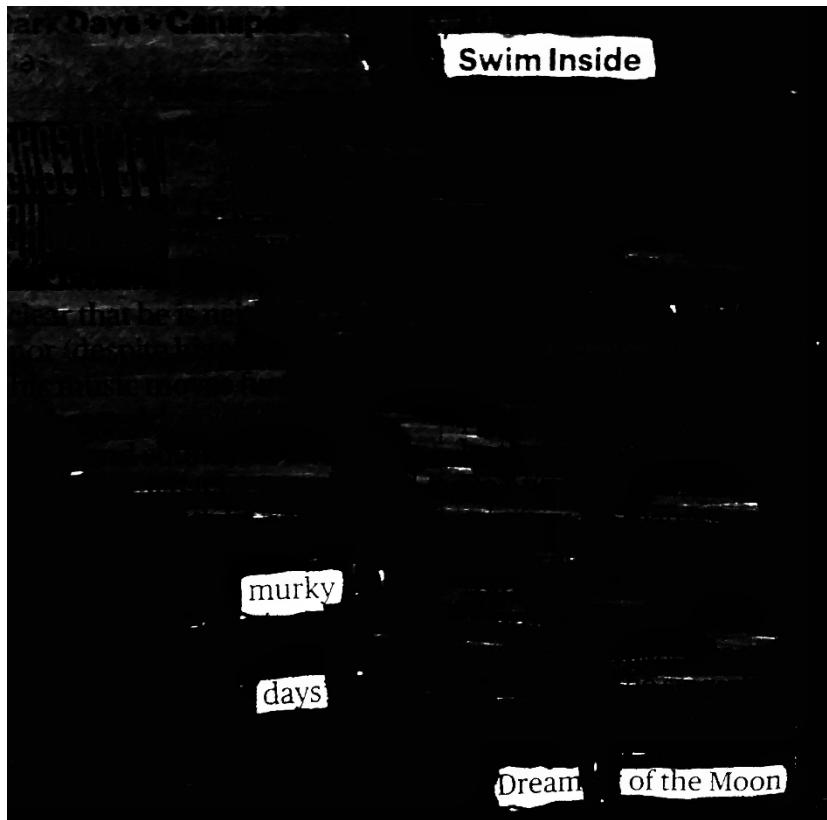
Rest

Forgotten by the light
roaming in darkness

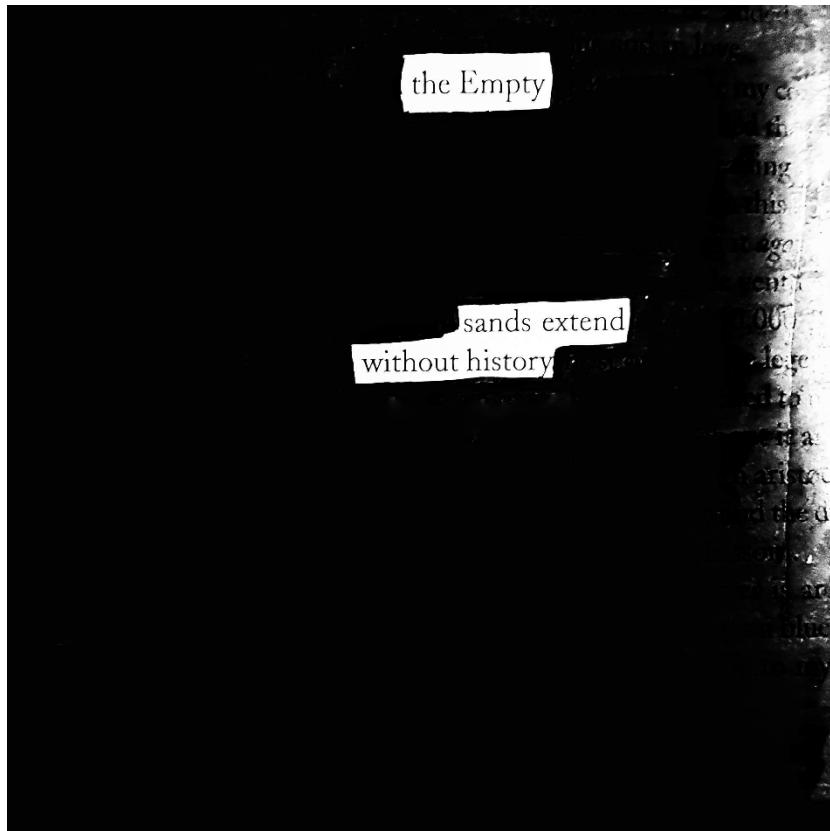
You snarl up binary
mouth full of broken code

It will all fall apart some day.
Does it matter if you are there?

Under careless endless stars
crawl next to my prone body



Arid



The wind does not remember
words, only snippets of songs.

Cactuses only pay attention
to the possibility of rain.
Maybe tomorrow. Maybe three weeks.

Dunes rearrange themselves
on whims, creating new towers.

Here is a space to forget
And to be forgotten.

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