

Queen of Hearts

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Contents

- 5 Year 11
- 6 I Want to Tell Someone I Love Them
- 8 Predators Beneath the Sand
- 9 The Paperback Version of this Body is Really Quite Flimsy
- 10 Beauty
- 11 Exhibitionist
- 12 Preparing a Body for Deep Sea Exploration
- 13 Danger:
- 14 Fashion Always Comes Back Around
- 15 If This Were Read in Court it Would be Without Emotion
- 16 Age Progression Software
- 18 Do you ever think about all of the photographs
in which you're accidentally in the background?
- 20 Convalescence in May
- 22 Colonel Mustard is Waiting in the Dining Room
- 23 The Mark Holland Trust
- 24 Last Night, I Finally Remembered the Screaming
- 25 Not All Bombs Get Dramatic Conclusions
- 26 Queen of Hearts
- 27 Missing Posters
- 28 Clairvoyant for the Unconscious
- 29 Listen, I love you. Joy is coming.
- 30 James Bond with a Stairlift
- 31 A Family Christmas
- 32 Jesus Loved Men Too
- 33 What I Wish I Could Say in this Pandemic

*For K,
Minute to Minute. We've got this.*

Year 11

Secrets are like injuries from bullets. On entering the body
there's a small entry point, on leaving
there's a huge, open tunnel.

This is a tracing of deceit, as a lie grows bigger
and bigger. He lied about having heart failure,
told me this, fifteen minutes before

a chemistry exam. As I walk the winding path back
to the start, the bullet's trace grows narrower
and narrower, organs like obstructing hawthorn.

I re-examine the scene in which he told me,
outside food tech, beside a bin. He produced
a pill box and blood pressure cuff as proof.

How easily that bullet shredded me, his tongue
an awful trigger. He left me bleeding
for eight months. Eight months

of his pretending to be dying, whilst I actually was.
I retained water, my skin tightening
like a swimming costume drying

to salty crispness. He took that year from me.
A year in which I should've been drinking
blue wicked behind the cricket pavilion.

He forced hospitals inside of me before I needed
a corridor linking my organs. Foreign objects
are rejected by the body. Secrets, they always come out.

I Want to Tell Someone I Love Them

I was born in a bedroom drawer,
growing and growing until I moved
into the sink, the dresser,
the wicker basket by the fire.

Eventually I relocated to the fridge,
its plug ready for use
when doctors tell me
the terrible things they know.

I graduated from sixth form
into nothing, the space
where God was thinking
about creation, but hadn't

finalised his plans. I waited there
for someone to pluck me
like a fresh egg from the coop,
to crack my head and see

if I have a brain of double yolk.
I went through a phase
of sleeping on top of hedges.
My neighbours found me

on their hawthorn
and called my social worker.
I keep falling in love
with inanimate objects –

dearest, understand.
I wait inside wardrobes.
They're the closest replica
to the entrapment of a body.

Predators Beneath the Sand

Darkness has no bottom, as you get deeper
it crushes organs into dehydrated vegetables.

Bring me a submarine, dearest – place tanks of air
on my hips, tuck folded instructions into my bra.

Know that I'm in love, but that is not enough.
The sea creatures are eyeing me, my bowel an octopus

inside my abdomen, patiently
swimming in the dark.

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Thank you, reader. Your kind words and encouragement sustain me across platforms.

To my medical teams across the NHS. Thank you. Extra thanks goes to the Palliative Care and Hospice teams which oversee my care. Ironically, I've done a count and you guys have saved my life the most times out of any other specialism. Gold star! That's another misconception smashed as well.

To my family, thank you so much for your care and generosity. I hope this pamphlet (and my first full collection from Seren earlier this year, and my broken sleep pamphlet later this year) explains why my room is always messy... (psst... reader... Do you think that'll get me off the hook? I doubt it somehow...) I love and appreciate how much you've sacrificed for my safety throughout this pandemic. Thank you.

To my friends – I appreciate your kindness and understanding when it comes to both my creative and emotional ebbs and flows. I see you, and I thank you so much. Thanks also to Poetry Group (not a typo), our space has allowed me to try out new things within my work and be kinder to myself.

The title poem, 'Queen of Hearts' was commissioned by The Dead Women Poets Society, as was 'Danger:'

'Not All Bombs Get Dramatic Conclusions' won the Magdalena Young Poets Prize, judged by Fiona Benson, in 2021.

'The Mark Holland Trust' was first published in *Interpreters House*.

'What I Wish I Could Say in this Pandemic' was commended in the Young Poets Network x Bloodaxe competition; and is published on The Poetry Society website.

'Age Progression Software' was first published by *Butcher's Dog*.

'Convalescence in May' was commissioned by a project 'Reimagining Laforgue'.

'James Bond with a Stairlift' was published in *Brittle Star* magazine.

'Fashion Always Comes Back Around' was included in the Dove Cottage Young Poets pamphlet at Kendal Poetry Festival.

'Listen, I love you. Joy is coming' was commended in the Young Poets Network 'Love' competition and is available to read on the Poetry Society website.