

POETRY IS POSSIBLE

Selected Poems

VIKRAM KOLMANNSSKOG



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Sales Office:
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Wadala (East), Mumbai – 400037 India
Phone: +91 96 99933000
Email: info@leadstartcorp.com
www.leadstartcorp.com

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Editor: Kavya Shree
Cover: Ashwini Jadhav
Layouts: Ashwini Jadhav

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vikram Kolmannskog (b. 1980) is a writer based in Oslo, Norway. He identifies as Indian-Norwegian, queer, and spiritual. He is the author of *The Empty Chair: Tales from Gestalt Therapy* (Karnac Books, 2018) and *Taste and See: A Queer Prayer* (Mohini Books, 2018).

www.Vikram.no

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Belief”

A previous version was first published in Norwegian as “For Utøya” in *Gestaltterapeuten* 2, 2011, in response to Anders Behring Breivik’s terrorist attack on the 22 July 2011 in Norway. Prior to the attack, Breivik had paraphrased John Stuart Mill on Twitter: “One person with a belief is equal to the force of 100,000 who have only interests.” The last lines of the poem (starting from “may all beings be at ease”) are based on the Karaniya Metta Sutta, the Buddha’s words on loving-kindness.

“Homeland”

A previous version was first published in *Pink Pages India*, March 2014, in response to the December 2013 Koushal-judgment of the Indian Supreme Court, which effectively recriminalized gay sex.

“Know”

A previous version was first published in *Milk Sugar* vol. 9, 2011.

“My Cousin”

A previous version was first published in Norwegian as “Juni” in *Harvest*, June 2015.

“Neti Neti”

A previous version was first published in *Milk Sugar* vol. 9, 2011. *Neti neti* is a phrase from the Upanishads, meaning “not this, not this”. It is often used as a meditation on Brahman, Universal Spirit, which cannot be adequately captured by any words.

“Orlando, Mi Amor”

A previous version was first published in *Qvakk*, June 2016, in response to Omar Mateen’s attack on guests of the gay nightclub Pulse in Orlando, USA, June 2016.

“Poetry Is Possible”

A previous version was first published as “It is possible” in *Otis Nebula* no. 4, 2011.

“Queer Boy of Colour”

The last lines in the poem (starting from “That’s the kind of thing that makes passing hard”) are taken from “Passing” by the African-American poet Langston Hughes.

“Ready”

A previous version was first published in Norwegian as “Sol” in *Harvest*, April 2015.

“Someone”

A previous version was first published in *Gaylaxy Magazine*, 30 November 2016.

“Suraj”

A previous version was first published as “Your brilliant Son” in *Pink Pages India*, July 2016. In Norway, Land of the Midnight Sun, the sun does not set but shines all day and night during the summer months.

“The Cloud Messenger”

The title is taken from, and the content loosely inspired by, “Meghaduta” by Kalidasa.

“The Ocean Is Deeper”

The poem draws upon “The Ocean is Way Deeper Than You Think”, a film published by RealLifeLore on YouTube, 11 November 2016.

“Unlikely”

A previous version was first published in Norwegian as “Det verste” in *Aftenposten*, 27 January 2011.

Here Right from the Start

Here right from the start,
beginning of beginnings,
when waters met fires,
I came into being,
briefly.

Then all of this.

You see the light clouds drifting in the sky?
They are of my mind.
The brownish red soil beneath?
Of my flesh.
The creamy white stones?
My bones.
The blue and red sea?
My sweat and blood.
I am Ymir, neither male nor female,
yet both.

Some people claim they came from my head,
that they know it all.

This is false.

You did not spring from separate parts
of my body,
higher from head,
lower from foot.

No, all around you is my body.

And you are too, children of trees,
Ash, Elm and many more.

I, Ymir, was here right from the start,
neither male nor female,
yet both.

AMEN

Every night we said a good night prayer:

Dear God,
thank you for everything,
you take good care of me,
you protect the little and the big.

Ending with Amen as Christian prayers do, as dad and his parents and their parents had done for generations.

But after Amen my Hindu mum added the names of her gods, asking that they too may protect us. To me then Amen became one god among many:

Amen,
Ayu,
Shanker Dada,
Lirbai,
raksha karjo.

QUEER BOY OF COLOUR

I smear it thick on my skin,
factor fifty,
whiter just from that,
and sometimes I wear a hat,
but the summer sun is intense.

I try to build muscles,
I try to walk straight,
but suddenly it breaks out,
my laughter, so light.

You were there,
out and proud as you say,
but alone in the school yard.
You looked at me,
I looked away.

That's the kind of thing
that makes passing hard,
having to deny
your own family.

But what did you think of the girl with me?
Pretty good looking, isn't she?

FIELDS OF SILVER AND GOLD

Once there was a fight
over the nectar of immortality.

Vishnu took a female form:
Mohini.

She was seductive,
she succeeded.

Meditating, Shiva
had missed the sight.

He begged Vishnu:
Please be Mohini
once more, for me.

Suddenly she is here,
playing with a ball,

throwing it up
in the air,
catching it.
He watches her,
bouncing breasts,
slender waist.
She notices him,
smiles shyly.
He forgets himself and
everything else.
The ball slips
from her hand
and rolls away.
A gust of wind blows off
her only cloth.
She laughs and hides
behind a tree.
He chases her.
She runs.
He catches her.
She runs again.

None of this is deception.

It's a playful game of gods.

I imagine myself as
Mohini, man, woman.

And being a god too
I could perhaps
endure and enjoy
the potency of Shiva.
I could surrender
and still survive.
As he chases
me, catches
Mohini, loses
me again,
Shiva spurts
semen, creating
fields of silver and gold.

Everyone exhausted,
the game ends.
No shame.
Everyone realises
the greatness of their spirit
and of the universal spirit.
Vishnu is again Vishnu.
Shiva returns to meditation.
I get out of bed,
silver and gold.

THOR AND THRYM

Thor wakes up and
finds his hammer
gone.

The thief? Thrym.

In return for the hammer
he says he wants
to marry Freya.

Freya refuses.

Other gods suggest
Thor can dress up
as Freya,
trick Thrym.

Muscular body under

delicate dress,
red beard under
thin veil.
They feast,
they eat,
not without pleasure,
the two,
Thor and Thrym.

The hammer is brought,
placed on Thor's lap.
Tell me, says Thrym,
that you'll be my bride.

PREPARATION

- 1) Lukewarm water in the bulb
- 2) Lube on the nozzle
- 3) Insert and squeeze
- 4) Sit down and shit

Repeat 1 to 4
till you feel clean.

THE OCEAN IS DEEPER

He is lying next to me in bed.
Night is falling.

He doesn't want to pull out.
His cock, limp now, is still inside me.
I try to get loose, he holds me tight, laughing,
I stay.

I remember something he told me earlier.
As a baby, as a young child,
his young, too young, mother sometimes left him
alone in a room crying.

I love the ocean, he says.
It's deeper than you think.
He finds his iPhone,
YouTube:

Around 100 meters down,
diving can become dangerous because of
decompression,
but Herbert Nitsch dove to 214 meters with one
single breath.

Light from the surface cannot reach beyond
1000 meters.

The phone lights up our faces and a small area of
the bed.

The rest of the ocean is shrouded in permanent
darkness.

At 2250 metres: sperm whales and colossal squids.
The squids sometimes 14 metres long.
The sperm whales found on shore sometimes
have marks on their bodies from battles with the
squids.

At 4000 metres: numerous strange, alien-like
creatures.

At 6000 metres: the Hadal zone, named after
Hades, the underworld.
Water pressure here is equal to an elephant
balancing on a post stamp.

Still,

after five hours' descent,
two men in a submarine, Walsh and Piccard,
reached a depth of 10,916 metres in 1960.
I place his head on my chest, to rest.
They only stayed for 20 minutes.
A window cracked.
Shit, I say.
They came back up.

95 percent of the ocean's floor is still a mystery.
Who knows what we may discover there.

It's only our first night.
We fall asleep like this,
him holding me tight.

MY FATHER'S MELODY

When I was little, my father always used to whistle
a melody.

About the morning that has broken
like the first morning.

About the bird that has spoken
like the first bird.

Sometimes I felt all alone in the world.
You are my friend, my father would say then.
Am I not your friend too?

In school we had to learn to play the flute.
We sat in a circle in the music room.

When it was my turn, everyone looked at me.
I was shaking so much I could not play.
The others laughed.

When I had supper with my father that evening,
I cried.
He comforted me, a deep calm voice,
a peaceful face, a kind hand.
I found the flute and played for him.
It flowed.

He said I could imagine his presence,
focus on his face
when I had to play for the others.

I was always a little afraid when I said goodnight
to my father.
He was so good that he might be an angel,
and I thought
an angel could not be with me forever
but belonged to the whole world,
that one day I would wake up and be alone.

I moved out of my father's house.

I was lucky to have a tree outside my new room.
Two birds lived in the tree.
I kept the flute and played for myself.
My hands did not shake.

One night I was wandering around alone.
I walked past the house of an acquaintance
and I decided to ring the bell.
He was home.
He was cutting a friend's hair.
The boy was sitting on a chair in the bathroom,
a towel around his neck,
a pair of boxers on.
Apart from that he was almost naked,
that first time I saw him.
His dark hair
falling
onto the white towel
and light bathroom tiles.

Afterwards, the three of us shared a wine.
And we fell asleep next to each other on the sofa,
this boy with the new haircut and I.

He moved in with me.
He became my boyfriend.

I played the flute for him.

When my father's father was turning
one hundred years,
my cousin asked if I was seeing anyone.

Yes, I said.

Who is it? What is her name?

I gave him a girl's name.

The mayor was holding a speech,
honouring my grandfather,
his courage and contribution to the resistance
during Occupation.

I felt shame.

He was sleeping when I came back home.

I lay down next to him.

Half asleep he smiled and moved closer,
his body warm from the bed and sleep.

Before going to bed my father and I
would always say I love you and goodnight.
Good night, I now whispered to my boyfriend
and his real name,
I love you.

My father called me.
He told me about a phone conversation,
with my grandfather.
I want to leave now, I have been here for so long,
my grandfather said.
Where are you going? my grandmother asked
in the background.
To God, he answered.
Are you not happy here with me? she asked.

My father, his brothers and I carried the coffin.
It was a graveyard by the fjord.
The smell of moist soil.
The weight of an old man's body and a wood
coffin.

With ropes
we lowered
him into
the ground.

My father cried.
His father was dead.

We visited my grandmother.
There was hardly anybody left.
She was hardly breathing.
She fell in and out of a sleep,
dreaming and talking out loud:
It is summer, she is in love,
and they are picking blueberries,
my grandfather and my grandmother.

When I was little, my father always used to whistle
a melody.
But that is already a long time ago.
I have moved out.
His parents are dead.
He is alone now.

One evening I went to spend the night at his house.
When I woke up the next morning,
I heard that he was already up,
preparing breakfast.
I had brought my flute.
I found it and played.
About the morning that has broken
like the first morning.
About the bird that has spoken
like the first bird.

It flowed.
I don't know how long I kept it going,
but at some point I heard
my father whistling from the kitchen.

I put down the flute and joined him there.
We ate breakfast together.

MY COUSIN

My cousin lies here
soaking green in the sunshine.
No need for poetic projection,
nor spiritual sophistication.
It's material and sensual,
our relation.
Grass and I share
a quarter of our genes.
No wonder I feel at home,
barefoot on this extensive body.
Lately I've been learning
how to kneel
so I can kiss her lush face.

POETRY IS GOOD FOR YOU

Poetry is good for you.
Creating poetry, I mean.
(But reading is all right too.)

You have to pause,
notice,
perceive
this.

That's all.
But that's a lot for most of us.

That's god seeing and being seen,
god tasting and being tasted.

(You don't have to write anything down.)
(You don't have to get anything published.)

BELIEF

one
person
with
a belief
is equal
to the
force
of

hard metal against soft skin, flesh and warm blood,
hard metal against soft skin, flesh and warm blood sinking

fragile now
friends,
sisters, into
brothers,
siblings,
daughters,
sons,
children, moist
never
as him,
as her,
as them,
in this
form again soil

may all beings be at ease. whatever beings there may be, weak or strong, without exception, the great and the mighty, medium, short and small, seen and unseen, near and far away, born and unborn: may all be at ease. kindness over the entire world, spreading upwards to the skies and downwards to the depths, outward and unbounded. without fixed views or beliefs, free.

FOR A LONG TIME, I WAS AFRAID OF HER

For a long time, I was afraid of her.
I kept her out of my house.
I kept her at a distance.
I thought I could.

But recently I started noticing her,
again and again,
during daily walks in old Delhi,
and she became more familiar,
fear reduced to excitement and curiosity,
a gentler pull.

One day I invited her to my house.

I do not remember letting her into my bedroom,
but now, as I sleep,
I breathe a mantra I do not know,

and she gently whispers secrets
on my hands and thighs and everywhere.

What I feared and tried to keep at a distance
was already inside,
shadows that I have tried to hide
from myself and others,
acid green jealousy, dark red rage,
shadows sometimes projected elsewhere.

I look at her, dark skin, wild hair, tongue out.
She stands firmly on the ground.
She will teach me to stand like this.
I will stand like this when I need to.
But for now, since I can, I remain here on my back.
And she looks at me, with all that I am, shadows
and what shines, all of me.
In her eyes I am beautiful.
With her I become beautiful.
She lifts me up, she has raised me.
Loving her, loving me, I have nothing left to fear.
Ecstatically, we dance.

KALA JAMUN

Kala jamun
he fed me,
drunk,
in the streets of Bandra,
one sweet night.

NETI NETI

Not this,
not that.

Let's untie
the not.

This is
a poem.

You are
the poet.

NATH

Most likely it was the Mughals who first brought the nath to India.

Eventually, it was included as Indian culture. It is now part of the traditional jewellery worn by Hindu brides.

On the wedding night
a groom will remove my nath
and I will remove his.

HOMELAND

The words of lawyers
were never the highest law of this land.
Love was, is, and shall forever be.
Only lovers know what has been granted
and what, from each of us, is required.
Here is the Supreme Court.
Here is our homeland.

BOMBAY --- > OSLO

Smell of kerosene, soap mixing with incense,
cutting chai.

Later, more humid and hot, some sweat, fish, sea,
frying oil.

Paan dripping from sweet lips, spitting, red stains
on the street.

Despite attempts to Swachh Bharat,
Bombay is still sexy in that slightly dirty way.
In my mind I go, Boom, gay, Bombay!

The honking of rickshaws, saying,
Hey, I'm here only.
We hear them from the bedroom even.
And my well-travelled lover remembers
the importance of
not making noise like this in Europe,
Means fuck you there, na?
He asks me to leave him something I have worn,

wanting to savour my smell more, I do,
and I liked his too, not good or bad, just his.

Tired after a long flight, not yet fully arrived,
I almost say Hallo bhaisaheb to the taxiwala.
Somali, maybe he would understand me.
In my mind I still give directions in Bumbaiya,
Yahaan right, yahaan left, please.
He doesn't honk.

My little brother is at home.
I smile and give him a Fab India kurta,
He puts it on, leaves it on.
I put some extra jeera in the soup, and he says,
It is extra good this time.
We watch a Bollywood film and I cry.

I go out.
A person, fifty meters away, crosses the street,
then gone again.
So quiet I hear my heart beat and know I'll die.
I remember a conversation in Bombay,
my former lover saying,
Oh, it's so European, your existentialism.
Suddenly a guy passes by me, both of us wrapped
in layers of thick clothes.
Still, there is a smell, but of what?
An overpriced fancy perfume, almost no body left

here, all clinically clean and cool.

But this is unfair, I know, I cannot compare
Bombay and Oslo in November.

Come in May or June, I tell friends in Bombay.
Not now.

And I'll come again next November. Pakka.

MY LITTLE BROTHERS

On my way from
one place to another,
I saw the two
on the pavement,
just next to me,
small,
the light grey new feathers,
two seagulls.
I went past and
looked back.
Could they fly?
One started crossing
the road, a car came,
I stopped, hoped.
Could they fly?
The little one ran back
to his brother. I think it was his brother.
They seemed lost, and I,

heart aching,
what could I do?
At least together the two grey ones,
my little brothers.
My little brothers, I said
and continued
on my way.

THE CLOUD MESSENGER

See that cloud there?
Once it was here with me.
Has it changed?
What do you see?

Maybe a drop forms and falls.
As snow.
Or rain.
Lands on your forehead. Makes its way,
a tiny river across your nose,
towards your lips.
A cool fresh drop.
There.

Once it was here with me.

THOSE WHO NOTICE WILL KNOW THIS

Along the motorway,
cars roaring past,
there is some
yellow and green and purple,
refusing to be dismissed
as roadside dirt and weed.
They say,
Those who notice will know this
world wants to be beautiful.

ESTAR - SPANISH LESSON I

To be or not to be?

Sure, Shakespeare.

But it's also a question of what kind of be.

Estar: an impermanent state of being.

Ser: a more stable state of things.

Normally, one would say

Soy indio, Soy escritor,

I'm Indian, I'm a writer.

But this is poetry, so I'll instead try

Estoy indio, Estoy escritor,

the identification less strong.

Normally, one would say

Soy un hombre or Soy una mujer,

I'm a man or I'm a woman.

But this is poetry, so I'll instead try

Estoy un hombre, Estoy una mujer.

Shakespeare too might appreciate this,
his actors crossdressing, his sexuality unclear.

So when would I use the more stable *ser*?
What is always here?
Dios es amor,
God is love.

LA LENGUA - SPANISH LESSON II

Spanish is a sensual language.

Lengua means language as well as tongue.

Listen to the sounds, the o's and a's.

Antonio, for instance.

I first met Antonio in Marbella.

We had a drink.

Then he asked if we could go *a la playa*.

He wanted to smoke *un porro*.

We found a sheltered place.

He lit the joint and inhaled.

We stood *cara a cara*.

He offered me the joint.

He held it between my lips.

I inhaled the sweet smoke.

The whole time the ocean was there,
el mar como una madre, in the background.
I told him about the beach in Bombay.
¿Eres hindú? he asked me at some point.
Shiva es mi favorito, he continued.

We kissed, lips against lips, *labios*,
then tongues too.
I felt him growing, *su polla*.
When I looked down
it had grown so much,
glans uncovered,
above the loose shorts.
I kneeled religiously and
greedily swallowed his cock.

But someone could easily see.

He drove us
through the city
up into the mountains
where we parked somewhere in the dark.

He wanted to eat my ass, *comer*.
I wanted to suck his cock, *chupar*.
And then we fucked,
we fucked like dogs,
como perros.

Me corro, he said.
I learned another word.
Correrse means to come.
Literally *correr* means to run.
And the tempo was *rápido* and
hearts were racing and
he came.
I asked him to stay a little bit,
dentro de mí,
then I came,
and we rested, together, a slowing down.

I opened a window and sensed
the sweet smell of figs.
He told me that *higuero* always makes him horny.
Since he was little, he had spent much time
in the forest.
It was under a fig tree he came for the first time.
I smiled.
Then I thought I saw
some movement nearby.
Had someone seen us?
Caught us in the act?
He remained calm:
So?
He smiled and kissed me.
And I remembered Kali's tongue.
You know Kali? *La historia de su lengua?*

Well, my favourite version is this:
Kali and Shiva are fucking in the forest
when these saintly sadhu guru guys come along.
The holy men, shocked,
assume the two will be ashamed and stop.
But Kali just sticks her tongue out,
in defiance or in jest.

Having heard the story, he smiled, *una sonrisa*.
We kissed again, *labios y lenguas*.
We lit up the dark night.

A POEM BY WALT WHITMAN

Having pissed and washed my hands,
on my way back to a poem by Walt Whitman,
I catch a glimpse of something.

Through a half-open door, the bedroom,
I see it on the bed, my unmade bed,
something spilled, like liquid, bright.

Someone's spilled something on my bed. It's near
the window.

I come closer, touch it, this light,
and it's on my hand now, warm.
I look out the window and see the sun.

I sense myself smiling, grateful that,
having pissed and washed my hands,
on my way back to a poem by Walt Whitman,
I looked through the half-open door.

HIP BONE

I had trouble falling asleep.

I tried to get more comfortable,
shifting to lie on my back.
Suddenly the left hand came
to rest on the hip bone,
so I sensed the hardness,
skin but very thin over the bone,
a bone like any other bone
but this one a part of me right now, hip.
For the hip bone,
it's not important whether the poem is read or not.

I fell asleep.

DEATH OF A DOVE

a backpack girl looks
at stone tiles
under a train flyover
at a dove standing
another dove lying

not crushed so that she can't make out the head
with beak and eyes and body and wings
not crushed so that there is blood
but still crushed, a lump, still on the stone tiles

another girl arrives
the backpack girl says
it's obviously hurt, what's it gonna do
they stand there for a while
then both walk away

the dove remains here

next to the other dove
walks close, touches
the other's feathers with its feet

a man and a woman with baby in arms
the man sees the birds
the woman sees the birds
the baby looks elsewhere, into the air
kadunk kadunk kadunk
train on tracks
kadunk kadunk kadunk

the dove remains here
walks around the other dove
bends, beak
near the other's head

two young men, absorbed in conversation
looking at each other, closer to the doves
one man sees
oh shit
steps away
passing by

the dove remains here
pokes the other dove on the back
turns, stretches, fixes its own feathers

a boy and a girl arrive
oh, that's so sad
looking while walking away
the girl with a hand on her mouth
the boy with a smile
the dove walks on top of the other
the girl smiles
turns and walks back
takes out her phone
runs back to the boy
I can send it to you

the dove remains here
walks on top of the other, poking
feathers coming off

two boys arrive
hey, don't eat your friend

the dove remains here
walks around the other

a man with a plastic bag and a young boy
the boy runs around, the man shouts
the boy sees the birds
looks over his shoulder as he walks
almost trips over
runs after the man, takes his free hand

the dove remains here
looking at the other

oh guys, look at that
that's sad
it's a funeral
ha ha ha

the dove remains here
fixing its feathers
do you think he's been there
looking after him the whole afternoon

the dove remains here
beak near the other's head

oh my god, I need to take a picture
no, you don't
yes, I do
he killed him
no, he didn't kill him
it's very morbid
it's more morbid that you're taking a picture
hey you guys, we actually saw the fight
kadunk kadunk kadunk
kadunk kadunk kadunk

the dove flies

THE ROAD

He takes off his sandals before entering the room,
and I notice immediately

feet that have walked far.

We greet each other. I offer him some water and biscuits. He eats, almost everything. When I say Ethiopia, he cries. There was a drought. They starved. He is not old. He left to find a better life. When the boat arrived in Yemen, everyone on board was kidnapped. He had no money nor family to pay him free. Some of the others were sold. But the kidnappers eventually let him go. After three months of torture. He pulls up his shirt, shows me

scars, something cracks in me, my heart like a raw egg.

He walked from the torture camp in the north all the way here to Aden in the south. And then, open and raw, I think to myself that's far for someone to walk, and I ask how he managed, and he answers

people along the road.

Strangers, ordinary folks, they offered him water and food and shelter and kind words along the road.

LONGING

In the middle of the night, I woke up to the calling:

Allahu akbar.

Lying on my back, I looked out into utter darkness,
a foreign place.

Silence again.

I started writing you this email.

ONE YEAR

I'm sitting in the living room, writing.
You come in through the door.
Then I wake up, alone.
It's been one year since the separation.

WHEN YOU DO THAT

Almost naked on the rooftop terrace,
facing the summer sky,
still restless, stuck in thinking, I
feel a gentle, cooling evening breeze stroking my
toes, feet, legs, stomach, fingers, hands, arms,
chest, throat, face, and I say I love it when you do
that.

LIFE

A swarm arrives,
laying eggs on the skin,
around the mouth that has tasted,
kissed and yelled,
the anus that has been passionately fucked,
that most recently shat.

Then they hatch,
and lovely larvae enter.
Beautiful beetles also break through the mass.
There is gas, bloated body, liquids pressed out.

If left alone, soon only bones
remain on the ground,
washed by the rain, bleached by the sun,
only white bones with green grass around.

Cessation perhaps, but also transformation.
We are beetles, flies, roots and flowers,
divine that eats and is eaten, forever.
We are life.

I CAN'T

I can't.
I don't want to go there.
I want to cry.
I want to lie down,
disappear.
But

I go there,
and on the way I walk through the park,
and I decide to listen and see.

And it's the
ah of exhale and wind in autumn trees.
It's the
rhythmic clapping of feet and ground.
It's the
blood in my veins and water running next to me.

It's the
we will do this together.
It's the
you are not alone.

ALPHABETICALLY ORGANISED, INCOMPLETE LIST

Advaita ass
Bhakti bottom
Cross-dresser
Devi daddy
Ekalavya
Faggot
Gopi gay
Hari-hara hook-up
Iravan
Jivan jism
Karma kothi
LGBT
Mohini male
Nasty
Om
Paramatman panthi
Questioning
Radha-Krishna
Shakti sub
Tantra trans*
Urvashi

Veda vulva
Wonderfuck
XXL
Yogi yearning
Zero zig zig ha

PO'O-UOLI

Po'o-uli, po'o-uli.

A female found,
but next day gone.

Po'o-uli, po'o-uli.

A male now, but
no female around.
Biologists despaired,
no breeding to be done.

Po'o-uli.

Alone,
or a biologist by his side,
died,
26th November, 2004.

SOMEONE

Someone is trying to open
the door, the main door.
Probably a mistake,
easy to make since I don't
have my name on the door.
They'll soon realise, but
no, they insist.
I get out of bed, hard-on,
to the main door.
Someone trying to get in.
I open and close another door,
making my presence known, but
no, they insist.
If they break in and
I'm naked, it will be
so demeaning.
Perhaps they'll even
rape me, kill me.

My family will find me like that
on the floor.

They'll think it was
a random lover,
I had it coming,
since I pick up
men like that.

I go back to the bedroom and put on boxers
and trousers and black socks and button a long-
sleeved shirt.

LIKE STICK OF ZEN MASTER

sitting silent

hearing car starts crying joyfully

feeling face and body whole

afterwards in gym

doing doing doing back extensions to become
more attractive after all

mind on another man not here

snap goes the back like stick of zen master

walking away slowly softly laughing

HEADSTAND

When I saw my feet
and wiggled my toes
up there in the sky,
my head no longer
the highest top,
I smiled, an upside-down
kind of smile.

It was so refreshing,
even a revolution of sorts,
my perspective different,
my priorities changed.

But then I felt some serious pain.

Wikipedia listed many contraindications:
high blood pressure,
heart palpitations,
brain disease or injury,

neck or back injury,
various conditions with
Latin names I can't recall
but I may have one or two,
oh, and death, yes, death.

Now it's mostly savasana, just as well, corpse
pose. My head is still on the ground, my toes close
enough to the sky. Less risk of falling and injury.
And it's not to be dismissed as easy, this asana.
Still, letting go, dying, awakening. But yesterday
I was with my nephew and he is six and he looks
up to me. So

I took a risk
and stood on my head again.
His little feet and toes
at the level of my eyes,
his laughter somewhere
near my left thigh.
I wiggled my toes,
and smiled,
an upside-down
kind of smile.

AWARE

pause
breathe
in
out
sense
what is
send
love
wherever
it hurts
every
where
every
one

SABBATH

I've decided I want Sundays,
days of rest, reintroduced.
No Google,
no Grindr,
no Facebook,
no Scruff,
less get get get, it's never enough.

Waking up,
I stretch out my arm,
my eyes not yet open,
to check my phone
like it's another limb,
but it's not there now,
not on the nightstand,
not on the floor.
I open my eyes,
remember my new rules.

I've turned it off,
moved it to another room.

I remain in bed,
thoughts racing.
What was my last Facebook post?
Was I too emphatic, too absolute?
Did I really mean that?
What will people think of me?
I should nuance it.
Alone.
Many feel alone.
I could find another.
Sundays are great for gay social media.
Today the one I'm looking for,
the one looking for me,
he might be online,
and I'm not, but
no.

I smile,
eyebrows raised.
Impulses, thoughts, tensions arise,
I let them pass.

Something new now,
my phone off,
I sense a physicality here,

skin of right index finger,
normally on some screen,
now thin skin against soft sheets.
I sense these sheets,
these sheets exist.
I sense the sun on my cheek,
this sun and cheek exist.
There is a whole world here
on Sundays.

I FALL ASLEEP THINKING OF YOU

I fall asleep thinking of you.

You in my mind,
me in your mind.

What words can describe this sensation?
A lake in mid-air?

I dream about a dream.
Am I the dream?
You the dreamer?

Will you discern what is real?
Do I even want that?
No, this distinction is not helpful here.

Let's remain playful for a while,
you in me,
me in you.

BRIEF

Mayfly, they get a month in the English language.
Eintagsfliege, fly for one day in German.

In any case their lives are brief, and so is this poem:

Be born,
dance with others in this light,
catch another or be caught,
fuck,
fall to the ground,
perhaps some rest,
then die.

THE MOTHER SMILES

Kali, I will meet you, this evening in the graveyard.
I don't feel afraid. My desire is strong.

Arriving, I realise I'm not alone.
Old trees loom large, winter black and silent
in blue dusk.
In the treetops crows are having a conference.
Their talk sounds like your mantra.
Perhaps this is their offering.
Perhaps this is already your answer.

Sitting down on a bench, I realise that I have come
empty-handed.
I have come here without any offering.
I have come only to ask something of you.
I am ashamed of myself.
Are the skulls that you wear not of this selfish
kind?

I should be larger than this.
I should ask what I can do for you.

But no, you answer me in the form of sudden
sadness in my body.

And I allow myself to feel the desire.

And I ask you to address it.

In return I will let go and receive whatever you
give with gratitude.

Perhaps that can be my offering.

Perhaps that is appropriate.

After all I am small and you are large.

A woman and a child walk past me.

The mother smiles, I smile back.

READY

I don't know if I'm ready for this gift.

It has come, the sun,
shining in on me at breakfast,
warming my face,
striking the newspaper pages
and lighting up dancing dust
in the room.

It has come after a long and dark winter.

I don't know if I'm ready.

Doubt sits as a knot in my stomach.
I hear myself wondering:
Should I not have changed more,
become a better person,
accomplished more?
Still, it is already here,
suddenly, the sun.
So for a moment
I let myself rest in the chair,
look at the sun instead of the news,
listen to its silence instead of old words.

I close my eyes, I'm red and warm.

SUMMERBODY 2017

A friend is on the beach,
hashtag beach hashtag biceps hashtag instagay
hashtag summerbody2017.

Fuck, my finger already there,
a light touch on the screen,
summerbody2017:

A man, thumbs up, arms bent so biceps bulge.
A girl, thin and tender but with big boobs.
More people on beaches, almost naked in the sun.
People in gyms, fluorescent light on selfie bodies.
And salads, of course, ostensibly healthy and fun.

A sensation in my stomach,
hunger, while buns are heated
or only dread.

I look at it, not as toned as last year,
the body hair insufficiently trimmed,
and it's summer and sun and biceps and bodies,

summerbody2017.
I should too:
eat a small salad,
go to the gym,
shape summerbody2017.

I continue scrolling down, but now
instant grace even here on Instagram:

A belly, a pregnant body.
In the photo there is only belly
and sunshine bouncing off the skin.

A middle-aged man, not thin,
not toned, not trimmed,
smiling,
at his daughter, I think.
That's what it says, they're out on a family trip.

A mirror selfie of a young guy,
holding up his shirt.
But revealed here where abs would normally be
are black lines drawn,
marking an absence,
creating another kind of presence,
and a shortcut to sexiness.
A cheeky, cute guy,
hashtag summerbody2017,

hashtag ftm,
hashtag transbeauty,
hashtag transmen.

I sense myself smiling and exhaling,
coming out of the screen,
smell the buns from the oven,
leave the smartphone on the sofa,
take out the buns, hot in my hands.
I cut a generous portion of cheese.

I sit down with my plate.
It tastes good,
I feel fuller,
a sensation from the inside.

Maybe I'll go out later,
meet friends on the beach.

SURAJ

Auntie-ji, we need to talk.
Your brilliant son and I, we're having an affair.
And it's so passionate, I can't help myself.
He's so hot, I let him penetrate every inch of me.
Lately, it's been so intense I can't sleep at night.
I'm losing my mind, Auntie-ji.
What will people say?
Oh, don't worry. The problem is quite the opposite.
Only you have been so blind.
You see, he's ridiculously promiscuous,
your brilliant son.
And this is why I wanted us to talk.
I can't bear the thought of a single ray of his
entering another's body.
Please, talk to him, Auntie-ji.
I'm going crazy.
Arrange for our marriage now.
I beg you.

A FLY SETTLES ON MY HAND

A fly settles on my hand.
It irritates me.
I take it as an insult.

Flies sit on filth and shit.
Flies will sit anywhere.

And now this fly sits on me.

I watch the fly,
rubbing the forelegs together now,
touching its face with them too,
washing, it seems.

FOREIGNER

She will be seventy this year.
This is her third country.
This is her third husband.

Before any of the husbands,
on lush sugar-cane farms,
in her first country,
she had a good childhood.
She was close to her Ma.

But one day Ma was gone.

Her older sister tried to comfort her.
Ma would be back in three weeks.
Ma had gone to see her own Ma in her country.
The first time in almost thirty years.
She was dying.

Now her husband's son is visiting with his son.
Her third husband.
Her third country.
They speak in their language.
She goes upstairs.
She lies alone in bed.
She is crying.

He comes upstairs.
He tries but he doesn't understand.

You don't love me.
I'm a foreigner.
I'm tired.
I'm soon seventy.

Her older sister comes to visit.
She comforts her.
Ma loves you so much
(and Ma's Ma loved Ma)
and when we die we will all
(all foreigners)
be together.

She doesn't know if she believes that.
She has never been particularly religious.
But it is a beautiful thought.

SILVERFISH

I wake up,
need to piss,
go to the bathroom,
switch on the light,
notice something,
small and silvery,
soon gone.
I piss.

Back in bed,
I google
bathroom insect:
Silverfish.
What a beautiful name.
Shiny, silvery, scaled, yes.
Move in a wiggling motion.
Evolved 400 million years ago.
Wow.

Nocturnal.
Hide in cracks during the day.
Cosmopolitan.
I smile. That's what I call myself.
Don't spread disease.
Need water.
Don't bite,
but like starchy stuff,
such as dead skin.
I think I can live with silverfish.

In the morning
I have a shower.
I leave a small puddle,
some dead skin perhaps,
then turn off the light
and close the door
for my silverfish.

ORLANDO, MI AMOR

I heard about the shooting. Sorry I didn't get in touch sooner.

They say the gunman had seen you kiss.

It made me think of us again. Those tentative first touches, your scent, hearts racing. But outside the bed so brutal, my silly rationalisations: Public displays of affection are just vulgar, I said, it's not about being less gay.

Lo siento, mi amor. Of course it was. About being less gay. About the terror. I was terrified when you tried to kiss me at the station.

And then, te acuerdas, that time I fell asleep on the bus, my head resting on your shoulder? I woke up to an angry voice, I did wake up, that

white guy yelling at us, perverts, burn in hell, you yelling back, hearts racing. I kept my eyes shut, pretending to still be asleep, only later asking qué pasó?

Lo siento, mi amor. I've been so proud of you. And I've been so ashamed of myself. For not fighting more, fighting for our love.

But now, writing this, I also see that eyes closed, pretending to sleep, I at least remained with my head on your shoulder. At least I did that, while you yelled back. I hope you felt that.

And next time we meet, Orlando, for old times' sake, for a future, let's do a public display of affection. Hell, I'll even sing your favorite song. Bésame, bésame mucho.

MORNING RUN IN THE MOUNTAINS

Sunshine splashing
on my naked skin.

Long leaves and grass
gently whipping
my arms and legs.

Moist soil
yielding slightly.

This intimacy, as intimate
as I've ever been with any man,
as intimate as sex,
this intimacy of me,
sun, plants, moisture, soil.

KNOW

Know walking on the grass.

Know public display of affection.

Know dogs.

Know other gods.

Know hope.

HEY!

You just ran
naked
through my mind.

UNLIKELY

You ask questions.

I answer.

I'm gay.

I was persecuted.

They can burn you with a cigarette on the face,
neck, shoulders, genitals.

That is not the worst thing.

They can crush or break your fingers, hands, arms,
toes, feet, legs.

They can pull out your hair, teeth, nails.

That is not the worst thing.

They can penetrate you with a stick, a gun or an
everyday soda bottle.

That is not the worst thing.

I came to a safe place.
Now I sit here before you.

But do you believe me?

I smile, and you think I'm mocking you.
I cry, and you think I'm putting on an act.

The worst thing?
You can dismiss me and my story with a word or
two.

Unlikely.
Not credible.

POETRY IS POSSIBLE

Asking is possible.

Answering is possible.

Aurora borealis, this elusive northern light, is possible.

Banyan, this great tree spreading out through aerial roots and beyond through fruit eaten and seeds dropped by little birds, is possible.

Body, my brilliant body, is possible.

Breathing, this affirmation of life, letting go, connecting to plants and everything, is possible.

Cloud, this shifting soft shape in the sky, millions of light water droplets, is possible.

Continent, this mass of land, so heavy, slowly moving across the ocean bed, is possible.

Conversation is possible.

Dancing is possible.

Embracing, sensing his breath and heartbeat, a short moment together, is possible.

Earth, this mother, smell of moist soil and feeling of soft moss, is possible.

Flirting is possible.

Fucking is possible.

God is possible.

Holding my own hand, holding his, being held, is possible.

Homosexuality, our brave love, is possible.

I am possible.

Jacaranda, purple in bloom, is possible.

Kissing, on the cheek like little children, on the forehead like guru or god, or even tongues struggling like passionate wrestlers, is possible.

Laughing is possible.

Listening is possible.

Love is possible.

Music is possible.

Nature, this ant, this plant, this mountain, is possible.

Ocean, this vastness of waves reflecting the blue above, rippling currents, full of life and mystery below, is possible.

Peace is possible.
Poetry is possible.

Questioning is possible.

Refuge is possible.

Smiling to him, smiling unnecessarily to a stranger, a kind gesture, is possible.

Spider spinning a web out of his body, is possible.
Starfish under water healing themselves, is possible.

Touching him somewhere, tenderly, till now untouched, the back of his knee, is possible.

Union is possible.

Voluptuous thought is possible.

Waking up slowly with the sun shining on our
entwined bodies, is possible.

We are possible.

X, an unknown variable, is possible.

You are possible.

Zooming in is possible.

Zooming out is possible.