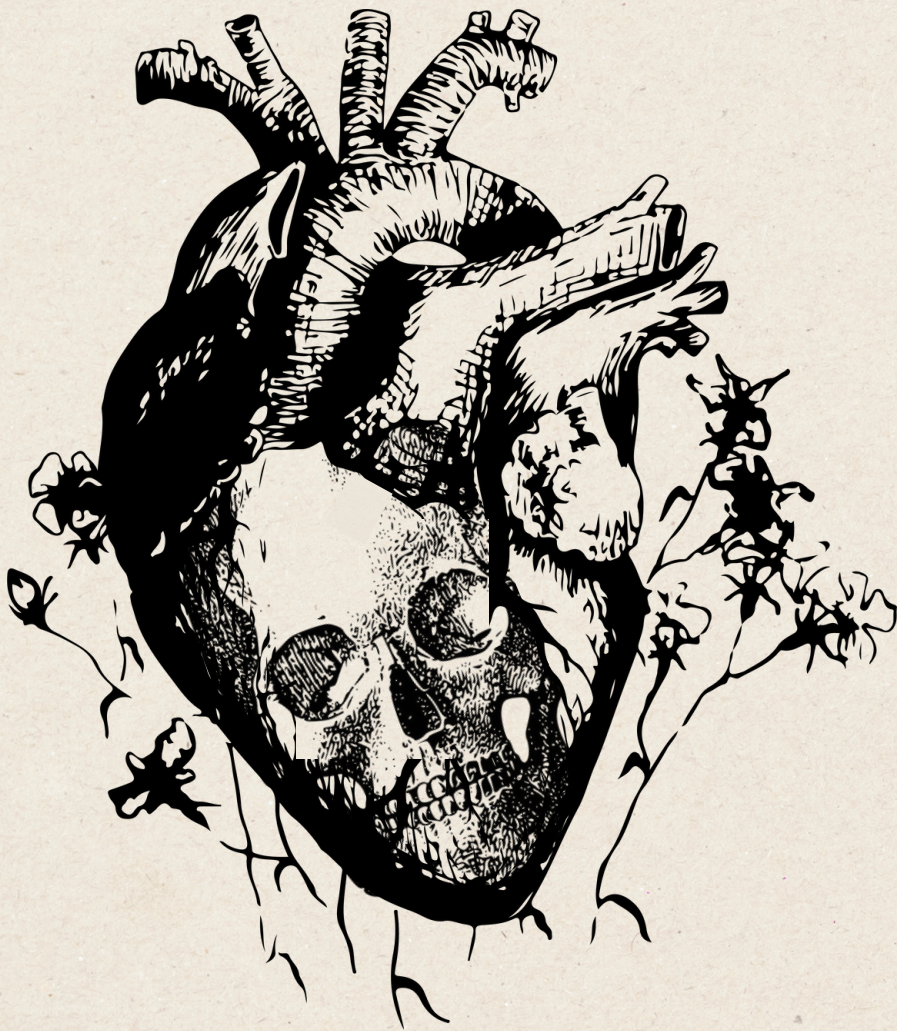


Upon Further  
Reflection

a 2023  
poetry retrospective



by  
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## introduction

There's an act of re-incarnation in every poetry project that I pick up.

It's a dramatic way of saying that I write things down as a method of purging. Of, eventually, inciting a rebirth. In 2023, I wrote about 400 poems. And a poem is a vague and indefinable thing, so some are sonnets and some are scraps of half-thoughts written drunk at 2am in the hope that the fleeting feeling I was trying to make last forever would still make sense in the morning. Often, they don't. Still, the year was full of writing. The year was full of work.

In 2023, I loved, lost, laughed, cried, started a new job, achieved things I have spent years striving towards, and finished writing not one but two novels. I also vlogged every single day of my year which, in hindsight, was a spiteful resolution to set for myself. All of this rendered me introspective. I am studying myself more closely. I know my pores like a roadmap. I could trace the lines of my own palm onto yours.

So, yes, I have been writing a lot. And a habit of mine has always been to share poetry with no hesitation. But somehow, this year, I find my finger lingering long on the trigger. Is this too personal? Is the bone too close to this blade? Are these feelings too big, too honest?

In all of the ways I have become big this year, I have also found myself making myself smaller. In my actions, but never in my words. These words; these poems. Twelve poems, twelve glances through the porthole in a ship that sank and rose through the surface tension a thousand times over the year. It was long and beautiful and it was ugly and I will miss it and I have said goodbye with a sweet relief. There's an act of re-incarnation in every poetry project that I pick up. The re-incarnation at play here is simple; I am leaving 2023 honest. I am unclenching my jaw and, blood inside my cheeks, setting my tongue free.

a dedication

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to impossible  
people who have loved me in  
impossible ways. to late  
night conversations and the  
petrichor of the rain on the  
walk home and each memory  
i am forever trying to trap  
on pages. thank you. i have  
been so loved. i will never  
understand why.

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## black ice

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There is a frost in January.  
There is a cold that tightens  
pipes, waiting to burst open and  
flood you and that water, that  
same water, will freeze clear.

You won't see it coming and  
you will find yourself surprised when  
you will slip, fall, crack your skull open and  
discover everything inside all rotten and  
eaten up.

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## ode to starting over

I leave you behind in the walls of the place.  
You are just a ghost now; you have joined  
a legion of voices I will remember when-  
ever I smell a cigarette and I  
will think of you in winter. On the commute,  
the same train and a new walk I take that takes me far  
away from you and you are not the point of  
this poem. You are a pillar of a life left  
behind and I bought a new shirt. I  
am in my best shoes. I have a desk  
in an office and a laptop and mug and I  
leave you behind in the walls of the place.

There are more memories than you.  
You are just the loudest. You  
earned the most poetry so, when I look back at a life left  
behind, I will remember you clearest. I will think;  
what a stunning thing to walk away from.  
A boy in a backgarden and a moon who would never admit  
the things she heard me say.

## zero

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Phone call; death  
note. Five hours, it  
takes me five hours to  
calm down and I  
sleep soundly. I  
chase horizons because they  
are made of concrete and I  
stand on ground shaking.  
I am a bad person.  
I contain multitudes.  
I do terrible things.  
I may be the death of you.  
Blood stain. Crime scene.  
Words are ringing in my  
ears gone deaf, and I find myself  
zero days clean.

I have always known you  
are the maker of kings. You  
shape the earth with soft hands and  
I wrap mine around you. These  
are moments I will live in  
forever. Family. The centre of  
the universe and you, your  
dumb smile when we set out  
to conquer everything the light  
can touch. We could do so much  
more. Limitless. Family. The centre of  
this moment I will live in  
forever and us, the language of  
brothers we have invented, when you say;  
which star?

And I say;  
that one. Let's build a world on that one  
first.



## thin gold lines ---

Tapestry for the tragedy; I  
have a pint of something cheap.  
I am cold, I will remember the  
frostbite, but no, this is the  
tapestry for the tragedy. I am stitching  
gold into this story, a hand in mine and  
this is how I love. These are the moments  
when I show up. I make art from your  
heartbreak and you tell me, thank you.  
You see me, pure.

And that is how I love. That  
is how I walk away, too. I  
will not be undermined, my  
thin gold lines a miracle in  
the saddest stories so,  
when they tell me I am holding  
the knife I say, I can't be.  
I am still threading the needle.  
I am still trying to make something  
beautiful. They will never know me  
the way you do. And that  
is how I walk away.

When the artists came to the city they  
set up shop here, stood on this stage and  
they knew this auditorium empty.

They knew it quiet. They knew  
the beauty of what they would do would not  
come when the crowds did, nor  
end with the applause. They knew that this is  
a small kind of magic.

This stage, that will spend history and  
whatever comes after it being simple and,  
somehow, every single place on Earth.

## let me die alone \_\_\_\_\_

The clinging hands prying into my  
open casket, some corpse still  
standing while I lay with my eyes  
well-closed, and it won't let go of me.  
Can a death be final?  
Can you mourn alone?  
You are holding my arm the same way you  
held the knife so, no, you have to let  
go of me. You have to let me rest.  
I have been dead since the first poem and  
each I wrote after. I bleed out on  
linoleum. Planets, and you, witnesses and  
accomplices and accessories and  
corpses still standing. How fast  
does light travel? Fast enough for  
the sun to set, before I wake up and  
you get to see the whites of my eyes  
again? You do not get to be so  
close. You do not get to feel the undying rattle  
of my throat coming back to life.

The world did not end when I  
was seventeen. I will see

the sunsets as they get brighter, hold  
hands with the dreamers and

yes, I will grieve. The world did not end when I  
was twenty and yes, I

have grieved that person. I have lost  
the piece of them along the way when I

taste these loves I could never have  
imagined, I become something whole and

impossible. I will decorate my own  
house for Christmas one day. I

will complain about taxes. Taxes,  
am I right? I will become mundane.

I will die in some boring way. My eulogies will call me  
beautiful. I will not die a

tragedy.

## embankment (reprise)

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The scent of a city burning to life on  
an autumn afternoon and  
I used to say it was your aftershave. I  
used to find you in each unwashed  
corner, a flower-stall outside  
the station and I  
would let you become the centre  
of this centre of the universe.  
You, the only muse.  
A city is burning to life;  
leaves descending and I,  
reaching upwards, find  
the clouds closer than they  
have ever been so, no, you are not on  
the Underground. My destinations change  
with each day passing and I  
am the only muse. The centre of  
this centre of the universe and  
the beautiful memories I am making that you  
will only ever see in a gallery, framed and gilded on  
the Thames.

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## athiest disaster complex

The world will end one day.  
The world, like me, will crash and burn and I  
will face the rubble and fire I  
have know for years before but  
in the flash of light, if there is one,  
in the moment of a world being born  
atop the death of things, I will find him.  
I will meet him, make an eye contact I  
have never seen. I will find  
your god and I will tell him -

*thank you.* I will say you were the closest I  
ever came to a miracle.

## subtext

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I will not reduce us to metaphor;  
we do not move in subtext.

A love that is physical, tangible on  
a moving planet and particulate in  
the ways we breathe it in.

We do not move in subtext or  
coincidence. The inevitability of science,  
like an asteroid crashing to Earth or  
the leaves that go green again after  
the harshest winter, we  
are here because we  
are here because we  
are here because we  
are unmoving.

The last concrete thing still  
standing in the  
wreckage.

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## december frost

Frost can only settle in stillness.

A restless flurry has chased these months away but, now,  
frost can only settle in stillness. I can only rest in  
some ice of silence.

I have been terrified of the calm. I have leapt  
from rooftop to rooftop, the rush of vertigo keeping me  
awake and breathing, but there is frost along my  
torso now. When is a bed a casket and  
a gravestone and  
the moss and the worms?

I used to be sad. I used to know sadness, that stillness and its  
black ice, but she has long since left. The feelings stay loud;  
what becomes the thin line between sad and  
heavy? Each nerve ending seems to reach outwards, prickling  
and aching to feel every corner of this shattering planet and

how beautiful is that? How calm, how generous, that I  
have faced every blizzard and survived and now, I  
puff out my chest to the horizon to say;  
*is that all you've got? I want to feel so much more.*



## endnote

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2023 chewed me up, spat me out, and somehow I still feel like I am now holding the head of the beast.

Some of those poems are incredibly happy, and some are uncomfortably sad. Honestly, if you think that's bad, my prose output over the year was ... colourful, to say the least. Still, I'd like to think there's a hopeful transition on display here. I liked the person I was in January 2023, but I like the person writing this endnote a lot more.

I feel as though I've never had love in such ample supply. I cannot sit here and name them all; they will each have books dedicated to them one day. My hand has been held this year with the kindest touch, by so many people. I will always have impostor syndrome. I will never believe any of this could be meant for me. Blissfully, it seems like I pulled the right cards out of the deck a few times.

This year has made me less scared. I think I am kinder, but I also think I am kinder to myself now. There were cold-water plunges I would never have taken before that I forced myself to suffer through, knowing the horizon would look so much brighter after the icy shock of getting lost so I can find something new. The final poem is there to say one thing. After a long time of being fiercely reactive and sensitive and unabashed, I have learned to reach for peace. In the face of storms and screaming and hurt feelings, I have been getting better at meeting all of it with peace. And though it was left on the cutting room floor of *December Frost*, born of a poem originally titled *Peace*, it's all come down to the same line that keeps circling around in my head, and has all year;

**I meet a fire ablaze in the bush of my own garden and I just sit in the glow of it. I use it to be warm ...**

**What docile and loving thing is this?**

