

SIGN MY CITALOPRAM

Hannah Chutzpah



Spirit of the Rainbow Heron

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

My name is Hannah Chutzpah and I'm a performance poet. I'm no expert in psychiatry - training-wise I've got half an A-level in psychology, I once edited a psych textbook and I watch a lot of documentaries - but I (like most people I know) have experienced some depression and anxiety.

This book is a collection of work mostly from my one-woman poetry show which I first took to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2014 with the title *Asking Nicely*. It all began with the poem 'Permission', which I wrote after noticing that women in gay bars had much prouder, more confident postures than I was used to seeing in women. I was both in awe of this swagger and also sad that visible confidence was a rare thing in women. The best way I could describe it to a male friend of mine was "It's like they're not asking for permission anymore."

My friend looked at me strangely and asked "What does that mean? Are women usually asking for permission?" and I realised that yes, we are. All the damn time.

I realised that a lot of people (myself included) are anxious about whether we're 'good enough' or 'allowed' to act the way we want to act or do the things we want to do. We're waiting for someone else to give us permission for things that it's no-one else's call to make.

I had planned for *Asking Nicely* to be a poetry show about permission and politeness, and the power dynamics of both, using pop-psychology, case studies and anecdotes. As soon as I started performing the show, though, something strange started happening: people kept coming up to me after the show to tell me how much better they felt, or about life plans they'd suddenly decided to put into motion. The first time I ever stepped off stage from performing this show a stranger approached asking "Can I hug you?"

The show had hit a wellbeing nerve I hadn't even aimed at. One reviewer said she "left feeling three inches taller". Audience members said they were feeling less apologetic for their presence. A friend quit his (miserable) job after seeing it and said "you gave me permission to look after myself."

I started to realise that 'permission' wasn't the focus – it was about whether we feel like we deserve permission in the first place.

I've realised that a large component of the performance poetry scene/community does what 1970s feminists might have called 'consciousness raising'. Sharing our personal experiences and hearing other people who've experienced the same shows us that we're not alone - and that gives us validation and confidence. Meanwhile, hearing from viewpoints we have not experienced ourselves gives us insight, empathy and understanding. This is one of functions of many different kinds of art.

Talking out the ideas, and having frames to analyse them with, can give us the tools to recognise and deconstruct some negative thought patterns and start making changes. Or at least, it can let us know that we are not so alone or unusual as we might have thought.

It's an absolute honour to be able to take this show to more people with the generous support of the Spirit of the Rainbow Heron.

Hannah Chutzpah, 2016

CONTENTS

PART 1: CONFIDENCE TRICKS	7
Permission	8
“Could I have some of that too?”	10
Hippie Sumo Freak	15
Easy Mode	19
Sign My Citalopram	22
This is Your Twenties	25
Pressure	28
Fresh Water	31
Snakeskin	33
Beacon	35
Birthday Birthday Cake	36
Confidence Trick	39
My Favourite Jumper was Too Big When I Bought It	41
Breathe	43
PART 2: BRAIN-WEEDING	47
Brain-Weeding	48
Returning These Demons	49
I Called You Captain	50
Tumbleweed	52
No Spoons Left	54
This Body I Need To Live In	56
“Most girls don’t do that”	57

PART 1

CONFIDENCE TRICKS

PERMISSION

This is for the women who don't ask permission
To be themselves
This is for the women who are done with
Working on their contentment
And started working on their lot.

This is for the women whose posture says
"Fuck you, punk. I got it covered."
This is for the women who've come too damn far
To waste their time worrying whether you approve.

This is for the women who wear what they want,
Swear how they want,
Drink and fuck and love and fight and wring every ounce
Like it's only their business
Because it is.
And they've realised.

This is for the girl in class who's done with playing dumb:
Yes, she knows the answer –
Yes, no one else has put their hand up
For the past ten minutes –
Yes, the teacher is looking past her raised hand asking –
"Does anyone know the answer?"
"Anyone... else?"
But she'll be damned if she's going to hide her own light.

This is for the gay bar barmaids
Who know their regulars inside and out
And wear those memories proud: like diamonds.

This is for the sweet little old lady
With the dirtiest laugh in the nursing home

This is for my Godmother Sara:
Terminal, regal, naughty
And 'educating' her doctors
About the munchies.

This is for the liberated women
Who worked past violence and ridicule
To ensure that their daughters
Never needed to be liberated.

This is for the tough old birds and the earnest youngsters
Who know that life is too personal, too precious,
Too Goddamn important
To let the magazines take a slice.

This is for the women who've stopped counting calories
And started counting stars.

This is for Dorothy Parker's forked tongue
Patti Smith's horses
Boudicca's chariots
And Rosa Parks' tired feet.

This is for the women we could be, can be, will be
Just as soon as we stop
 Asking permission
 To be.

“COULD I HAVE SOME OF THAT TOO?”

Easter 2005

I remember when because at the end
Of our long weekend
We wrote the date in spent roaches
Photographed it in fits of giggles
Amazed at how many we'd smoked
We even had enough spare
To put a wiggly line around the words
Easter 2005

We were free, we were alive
We were lightweights
Passing spliffs, crisps, cans, and sweets

“Oh, could I have some of that too?”

We are old enough to cook for ourselves
And young enough that this is a novelty
We are hyper, fuelled by cider, M&Ms, herbs and spices
I'm the oldest by a year, so my ID somehow snuck
A trolley full of booze
Past disapproving checkout clerks.
The Easter holiday unrolls before us,
In rolling Devon hills
And a holiday home we were somehow allowed in

“Oh, could I have some of that too?”

Meet the person I want to talk about
Let's call her Jo, because Jo isn't her name
I don't know her that well, but the ten of us are friends
We must be if we're all here
Everything we have is pooled
We are so abundant in stuff, there aren't any rules

Passing to the left took too long
So we pass one each way, and maybe a wildcard third
While Rosie rolls a fourth
Sitting in the long grass in the sunshine

“Oh, could I have some of that too?”

Jo doesn't seem to know she's one of us
Jo doesn't seem to know she's allowed
Every time we pass something round
– And everything is always passed around –
Jo doesn't seem to know
That it's already coming her way
Jo's refrain over these few days is a timid

“Oh, could I have some of that too?”

Initially: we said “sure! Of course!”
But three days in and it's wearing thin
She has been told she's welcome so many times
But still every instance needs assurance
That she can have: a jellybaby, a puff, some dinner.
Sometimes it makes you feel rushed:
“Of course, everyone gets some pasta, just let me dish it up”
Sometimes it makes you feel bad
That nothing you say can put her at ease
But after four days of checking if she is allowed
Four days of needing assurance
It's becoming self-fulfilling.

“Oh, could I have some of that too?”

This checking “am I included, too?”
Creates a gap.
I never saw her as not part of the crowd
Until she kept letting us know

She felt like an interloper.

“Oh, could I have some of that too?”

It's five days in and I've lost patience
Breaking down her disbelief
Is manual labour I can't be bothered with.
I don't care enough to coax this frightened animal
Out of her burrow
Every time we pass some Pringles.
We are all entitled to some Haribo,
A look at that funny text, a toke
Of course you can have a toke! Are you joking?
It's going around the circle – that's how it works!
The food is here, the booze is here,
We are all sharing it all around
If that's not enough for you, then just– just–

I'm not proud of myself
But this verbal tick is taking its toll:
Too many pleases puts you down
Down one rung
Down one rank
Now when I hear

“Oh, could I have some of that too?”

I want to say no.
I hear others do it too:
The “Yeah, sure”
Has become “In a minute”
The “Of course you can”
Has become “We'll see how much we've got left.”

“Oh, could I have some of that too?”

2005 was a while ago.
(We were free, we were alive,
We were lightweights)
I can remember the holiday home
But not everyone's name
And life has knocked me on my arse
Numerous times since then
These days, when things are going my way
Often the first thing I feel is disbelief:
I double-check
Triple-check

"Oh, could I have some of that too?"

Jo, I think of you more often than I want to admit
And Jo, I'm sorry.
I remember you clearly not just because I know
I was a bit of a dick
These days I often find myself waiting
For someone else to welcome me
Waiting for some big shiny sign to say I am allowed
To things it's no one else's call to say
And I think back to you, and Easter,
And all those endless puffs of tea
And wonder how often I've put up my own walls
Driven things away with my disbelief:
–Of course the hot guy was just being friendly
–Of course that promoter was just being polite
–Of course my friend actually didn't mean it when they said
"Come crash with me in Spain any time,
"And I'm not just saying that, I really mean it."

Jo, you weren't just some friend of a friend on a long weekend
I remember you clearly now
Because I've always known your timid voice

I knew it long before I met you
I can try to put this in the past, call it 'Exhibit A'
Label this specimen with the date 'Easter 2005'
And your name
But sometimes, when things are going my way
Or when people I look up to treat me as an equal
Often all I can think is "are you sure?"
"This must be some mistake."
"I'm trespassing at this pub table."

And all I need is a little reassurance
Someone to hold my hand and guide it
Teach it to reach out and accept
What's already being offered
Instead of sitting on sidelines
Waiting, wondering, worrying whether:

"Oh, can I have some of that, too?"

HIPPIE SUMO FREAK

Eleanor Roosevelt once said
"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent"

When I first heard this quote I loved it
I hugged it.
I took it home to meet my mother
I loved its message that whatever they do
Just bluster through
And you'll be OK.

When I was seventeen I blew kisses at the girls
Who jeered 'lesbian' at my baggy jeans
Watched them recoil in horror
And got on with my day
Because I was OK
I knew that
"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent"
And if I'm not giving in, then:
I win.

But when I was fourteen I didn't have friends
And there's no comfort in a comeback
When no one's got your back

Hippie
 Sumo
 Freak
Hippie
 Sumo
 Freak

Those were the names I was called at school
I'm sure you had your own.

String them together and they're an indie band:
Hippie Sumo Freak

But when they hurled the word 'hippie' back at school
It meant I was weird, unliked and uncool
It wasn't the word but the way they would wield it
It wasn't the concept of hippies, but the cudgel it became

Ani Di Franco once said
"Any tool is a weapon if you hold it right"
And any description is an insult with enough disdain
It's not just the word, it's that intent to maim
To say 'just don't take that' is to victim-blame

A schoolyard can warp descriptions into curses
To a mean schoolkid, any description is fair game:
Fat, thin, tall, short, black, white, boy, girl

Any tool is a weapon if you hold it right:
A bunch of flowers and a bottle of champagne
Would be shit
If you were hit
In the face with them.

Sometimes you can wrestle the insult back off them
Grab that champagne cudgel
Shake it, pop the cork, and shower everyone
In a Formula One foam of
'Nyah-nyah-nyah I don't give a shit'
But that takes confidence you may not have:
It's hard to be rubber and make them glue
When their words already have hooks in you

You tell Hippie in her maroon school uniform,
Who's marooned every time they pick teams in P.E.

Or pick partners in class
You tell her not to consent to feeling inferior
When the consensus is
Of thirty kids
She's always liked the least
You tell secondary school Sumo there,
Fighting back tears, picking gum from her hair,
That she should not consent
To that.

But no one can make you feel inferior without your consent
So apparently we're giving them permission

And in *one* way I was – because I always answered back
Trying to beat bullies with: logic.
Handing over more information ammunition every time
'Til someone showed me the line:
Held my hand and showed me how to draw it

When I was a Freak at fifteen, in ruby red Doc Martens
A Good Witch took me under her wing
And showed me I'd had all I needed all along:
All I had to do was click my heels three times
And tell them to 'FUCK OFF' three times
And say it like I meant it.

'Freak' what Alex always called me
Alex sat directly in front of me in Spanish
And whirled around every lesson
Coaxing me into conversation
Which was baited like a bear trap

But one lesson I came in prepared
I'd done my homework
On holding my ground
Every time Alex turned around

I stared him straight in the eye
And told him, calmly, and clearly,
to "Get fucked."

The first time he turned, perturbed back to his work
The second time he was losing enthusiasm
By the third time the spell was broken:
I had spoken
He'd get no more ammo from me
I had built a wall of 'FUCK OFF' he couldn't get around
And he found that I was no fun anymore.

Access denied.
No one cried
But I took away his toy
And it tasted like victory

Eleanor Roosevelt was right. A bit.
You can't stop the bastards trying
With their barbed words and grappling hooks
But you can man your walls with 'SO WHAT?'
And 'FUCK OFF'
And sometimes that will work

But confidence doesn't just come from you
A lifetime of good things can make you as impervious as steel
But if your walls are weathered already
You have more holds for their barbs to stick
Here's the trick:
It's easy when you know how
It's easy when you can get away
It's easy when you're already winning

Eleanor Roosevelt wasn't wrong
But
Things are rarely that clean-cut.

EASY MODE

Entitlement is a learned behaviour.
If you're middle class you've been trained to ask
For more, for better, for attuned to you
'Don't you have it in blue?'
'I'd like to speak to the manager.'
'Why are you stopping *me*, officer?!'

To adapt your environment to your needs
It's not exactly greed
It's just you know you could have more:
Nicer things,
More gold rings
So why not ask for them?

Because all the world's a video game
And men women merely multiplayers
And one man, in his time,
Could play many parts on Easy Mode.

Other players will have levels of difficulty
That he perhaps will never see
Unless he listens to the other players' parts

Because if you're straight or white or monied
Or middle-class or male or able-bodied:
You could be playing life on Easy Mode.

On the difficulty of this setting:
A brokedown car won't break the bank
Late night walk home won't have monsters lurking
This game will have more loot drops and more lives
Other players might ragequit at stages

That you breezed through
And you might roll your eyes and wonder why –
Some people, eh?
But even though the scenery looks the same:
Some players are playing a very different game.

These different difficulties aren't on one spectrum
They're more like facets:
There's race, class, there's age, there's gender,
There's mental health
There's whether people think you're hot or not
Your gender could be cis or trans, please understand
There's not just one difficulty: there's an array
Of power-up mushrooms and banana skins
And if you're lucky enough to have been born
With booster rockets:
It doesn't mean you're a bad person
It doesn't mean you don't deserve nice things
But it means: you could be playing life on Easy Mode.

If police have only ever been polite to you
If you have the connections to breeze right through
If a pregnancy won't stop your education
If some weed won't mean incarceration
If your boss is a shit and you can quit
Confident you can find better, then:
You could be playing life on Easy Mode.

But some Player 1s will never find their Player 2
Some players never complete the level called 'school'
Some players are told their stats are in their looks
But they can never look like they 'should'
Some players are invisible in public spaces
Some players are scared to go in public places
Some players are stalked by security around every shop

Some players are scuppered by student loan turtle shells
And if none of these examples rings a bell
That's how you tell:
You could be playing life on Easy Mode.

Some players starts life with better kit mods,
Eton cheat codes,
And it isn't fair, current cabinet,
To look down on those struggling to scrape by
And say that
'Those players have been just wasting their time
'Not getting to the bonus levels
'Not running the government
'Not filling the media with people who think & look like them.'

Some players haven't done any of that.
They've been doing nothing
'Just' been surviving

On some difficulty settings: that's a full-time quest.

SIGN MY CITALOPRAM

I have broken a bone three times.
I have needed antidepressants three times.
I see them in much the same way:
Shit happens.
Get help.
Take time.
Get better.

When I've broken a bone
There's been the cast as proof,
The seat offered on the bus.
People ask me what happened
They open up and share, compare
Battle stories, cracks, spiral fractures
People ask if they can sign my cast.

When I've bruised my wellbeing
Cracked my anxiety thermostat
There's been the 'probably' diagnosis
The 'we'll see how this prescription goes'
The worry if it shows
The 'smile, it might never happen'
From people who don't know.

Would you sign my citalopram?
Because I need this visible enough
That we open up and share, compare
I don't need a seat on the bus
But a shoulder would be good
And tea, and time, and talking
– Gently.
Would you sign my citalopram?

If you feel like you're going to be sick
It's best just to be sick
But silence is a stopper, a cork in your throat
So you stay churning
Pretending it's fine
Preserving pretence over medical sense.

Would you sign my citalopram?

A husband and wife once
Separately struggled
But each convinced the other
Would not understand
They each never mentioned it
They each got prescriptions

(The same prescriptions)

(At the same dose)

They each went home
Kept their brave faces on
Kept their prescriptions

(The same prescriptions)

(At the same dose)

Hidden

In different spots
In the same bedroom.
For crying out loud

Would you sign my citalopram?
We can share battle scars, talk milligrams
Just like my rollerskate face-plants
And my crunched metatarsal
From ska-skanking too damn hard

Would you sign my citalopram?
Because I need this visible enough
That you know you can help

If only by carrying cups of tea
My hands are busy with crutches
– metaphorically.

Would you sign my citalopram?

THIS IS YOUR TWENTIES

This is your twenties:

Thank God for Facebook, emails and mobile phones
Because if we were landlines and filofaxes
Everything would be scribbled out three times –
'Til we switched to pencil for everyone.
Each page crumpling under the weight of its history:
Each erased address a ghost of a house share.
Forwarding addresses and forgotten postcodes.

This is your twenties:

Postcodes make good additions to passwords.
A techie taught you that
Seven jobs ago.

This is your twenties:

The impermanence isn't painful per se
But it takes something from you;
This lack of solid ground.

This is your twenties:

And you are one of the urban nomads
Lives organised by smartphones
And scuppered by batteries or broken screens.

This is your twenties:

And “Goodness, you’ve got a... diverse CV
“Can you talk it through with me?”
Listen, hundredth recruiter, if it looks scrappy
It’s because there are just scraps of jobs available.

This is your twenties:

How did you lose so many nights?
How did you gain so many biros?

A detritus gathering that you need to get clean of
– And you will –
Just as soon as you find the time.

This is your twenties:
You're in the prime of your life
But you've now had more jobs than sexual partners
And you think you might be doing this wrong.

This is your twenties:
Music and memories are digitised or discarded
Because who has room for hard copies?

This is your twenties:
And you're sure that dead laptop
Had something important on it
But it's moving time again:
So keep or throw?

This is your twenties:
Your years of experience are growing into something harder:
Not quite armour,
But people seem to think you're equipped now.

This is your twenties:
Crises typed for broadcast in the small hours
Agonies answered with animal gifs
Because our loved ones are always reachable
But usually too far away
To give us a hug.

This is your twenties:
Every object aching with memories
And each one a burden as you box and unbox –

Moving from postcode to postcode
And pick where to plant your roots
This season.

This is your twenties:
And every next step could be The One
Where you find the job with the pension scheme
You'll actually use,
Or the person you'll grow old with
But each 'maybe' is scattered across your CV:
Each pension contribution cooking in pots too small
To keep track of,
Each nearly-there relationship
Reminding you how close
– and yet how far –
You are
From ever finding
Home.

PRESSURE

After five hugs, two hours, and four cups of tea
My friend and I have worked out
What is wrong with her life:
Nothing.
Nice boyfriend, nice houseshare, nice job
And it's scary.

See, it's been so long
Since any of those were sorted
That happiness – for her –
Feels like waiting
For the other shoe to drop.

We weren't born like this:
Eyes scanning the skies for swarms of locusts
To sweep in and swallow it all
But after enough disasters, contentment can feel
Like a crisis looming
Like a catastrophe overdue.

Fear doesn't disappear
The second the threat has
The damage doesn't undo
The moment the pressure stops:
The after-effects can embed
Deep within us

Scuba-divers know this:
After the pressure bars relent
After the ascent to normality
The things you have absorbed
Can still bubble out
Surfacing alone won't stop it

Decompression sickness strikes
When the dissolved gasses absorbed
Under water, under pressure
Come out too fast
Bubble inside you

The gasses can crop up anywhere
In the joints, the bloodstream,
The bends can blister skin like bubble wrap
Affect breathing or the central nervous system.

Trauma can rewire responses to a hair-trigger
Can turn people to powder kegs
With threat detection sections
That light up siren-high in an MRI

Threat awareness doesn't care
If you've seen active service
Or your father's fist
It just knows it needs to be alert, aware
Always scanning the situation
To protect you.

And my friend?
Sure she could shout now
But she learned not to
Learned that 'no' was an avenue
She had no right to go down.

We are marked by our memories
Taught thought patterns, good or bad
And unlearning
Can take longer

The past can still bubble up
Make us choke, or stagger
When we thought we were clear.

We are all screwed up
In our own special snowflake ways
And a crumpled piece of paper
Will never be crisp again
But a crumpled bank note
Is still legal tender.

Buy some time
Whether you decompress in a boxing gym
On a therapist's couch
Or with hugs and mugs of tea:
Breathe into the cramps.
Gas dissipates.
Scars fade.
Fists unclench.

Read your own creased palm
For your next move
The future, featuring lessons learnt
Can be reached reading your own roadmap:
Uniquely crumpled,
Uniquely yours
Leading to something better.

FRESH WATER

There is a rib-knit scarf I bought for its shade of blue.
Its Mylar strands that nestle in the wool
Make it sparkle like a stream in sunlight
But I never wear it:
Its shape is too long and thin
To keep the cold out.

Mid-clear-out I come across it
Was about to throw it out 'til I realised
I could redeem this.

I unpick one end and cast on
Straight on from the old scarf to the new.
From skinny rib-knit I create
Wide, welcoming moss stitch
Knit one, purl one, flat and dappled.

My friend – not a knitter – comes over
I knit as we talk over tea
The scarf gently pooling,
Beneath my restless fingers.

She asks me to explain how I'm making this new thing
I shrug, say it's just string
She asks how I know if I'm doing it right
I say it's just a building block
This wool can be worn, strung and structured
Dozens of different ways

She looks at the old, unworn scarf,
Unravelling and evolving into one I will love
Says "As someone with a fear of failure,
It's really good to see it's not permanent."

I'd never seen my re-use as redemption
But creativity gives second chances
Means you can make your own multiple choices
Teaches you to turn test paper options to origami
Or paper mache, paperchain people or shadow puppets.

It means knowing there are other options
It isn't just win or lose, yes or no, there's always an 'also'

Each row unravels its rivulets
Runs in rivers which I
Loop, knit and purl
Into the lake, slowly pooling
Beneath the dam of my needles

Each row unravels its rivulets
Runs in rivers which I
Turn into something larger
Something which keeps the cold out.

SNAKESKIN

Years after I realised
"let's stay friends"
Was a promise only worth keeping
For people worth keeping
After the unfriend, the block,
The Darth Vader ringtone so I know when it's bad news
calling
She asks why I have a problem with her.

I want to give her a laundry list
Say "drop a beat and I'll spit you my three hour freestyle
"On the ways you are a sociopath"
But these days:
I know a trap when I see one.

So I say:
"Snakeskin."

Your idea of who I am
Is a pale outline
Which hasn't fit for years.
You're grasping at a ghost;
I have grown, split my skin and moved on
Countless times since then.

I know you think you know
Where the sore spots are
But I have cast off every inch of skin
You ever touched
Shed that shadow and slithered on
Not because of you –
It's just what we do.

So hold tight to the memories:
You're only holding snakeskin.

Sure, you charmed me once
Held me mesmerised
While I swallowed your stories whole
But I'm not spineless;
I'm flexible.
I can always wriggle free.
And I'm never going back in a basket
I don't hide under rocks: I bask.

When we met: change was overdue
I was faded, constricted,
With cloudy eyes and skin that barely fit
So I split and discarded it
Kept winding my way
Flickering my tongue
My scales shining that deep gloss
That was always there:
Beneath.

I've just remembered you're afraid of snakes
And that only makes it better
When I say:

My old skin holds the shape of the smaller me
The one that you once knew.
So hold as tight as you like
To my shadow's tail:

You're only holding snakeskin.

BEACON

An abuser is a heat-seeking missile.
Why you?
Because you burn bright
And warm.

They were drawn to your beacon
As are moths.
As are friends.

Resist the temptation
To see your signs of life
As signs of weakness.
Do not view the world as they do.

Though you still feel the threat of it
Remember:
Very few will view
Your light
Through crosshairs.

Do not camouflage or draw shades:
Walk tall and proud.
Illuminate your own path
Spilling light like water
As soft wings flutter
To be near you.

BIRTHDAY BIRTHDAY CAKE

“Birthday! Birthday!”

“Cake?”

“Birthday! Birthday!”

“Cake?”

They have impressive blood alcohol levels
Little English
Huge grins
And a cake
The size of a Stetson hat.

A small section has been sliced and eaten
The rest is shop-bought pristine
And these two, drunk as Lords
Dance through Slough’s dark streets
Holding the cake aloft
Like a trophy

I am shuffling, with colleagues
To the train, to the tube, to the bus
That will take me home.
We all cover too many miles
To have petrol left
For Fridays

But these two guys are sugar-high gorgeous
Delighted
To have cake
And now:
An audience

“Birthday! Birthday!”
“Cake?”
“Birthday! Birthday!”
“Cake?”

“Who’s birthday is it?” I ask
Birthday Birthday points at Cake
“Happy birthday!” I say
Cake holds up one finger for ‘wait’
Birthday Birthday opens his bag
Pulls out, from packaging:
A paper plate, plastic fork and napkin

“Oh, for me? Er... yeah, thanks!”
Birthday Birthday and Cake set about slicing a piece
Cooperation takes concentration
But they manage
Giggling like schoolkids when they succeed
Handing me a plate, a fork, a slice

I giggle a “wow, thank you!”
Look back to my colleagues to offer...
...they have frozen.
Holding back while Hannah
Talks to the weirdos

My new friends offer cake to them, too
My workmates shrink back further
“Hannah we’ve got to get the train”

I gesture ‘got to go’ say ‘thank you’ again
Say ‘happy birthday’ again
Birthday Birthday hugs me
Cake has his hands full with the cake
But nods goodbye with a grin
As wide as saloon doors

I catch up with workmates
Have a forkful halfway to my mouth
When Matt from design says
“You’re going to eat it?!”
And Claire from Editorial says
“How do you know it’s not poisoned?”

I eat the cake
I do not die
It is delicious

CONFIDENCE TRICK

I have been surprised how many times
Being confident has offended
And I think it boils down to
'How dare you?'

'What gives you the right?
'I'm better than you
'And I'm not there yet.'

Confidence breaks the rules.
Have you earned it?
Are you slim enough?
Are you smart enough?
Are you accomplished enough?
Are you enough
To have earned the right
To be confident yet?

Where are you on a scale of one to five?
Five being 'Strongly Agree'
And one being 'I am an Aching Void'—?

It's a trick question.
Turn over your the test papers
And fold them to origami
Or rip them to confetti
Or make spitwads
For whatever dickwad
Tried to cut down your person
Into Pass/Fail.

Confidence is not a medal
Earned at the finish line
It is knitted
It is perseverance given form
It is every stitch you know makes sense
Because the cloth growing beneath your needles
Knows
That this has worked before.

Confidence is a chainmail vest
Built loop-by-loop
Link-by-link
A clinking tapestry of times you made it
Before.

No one else can bestow
The right to hold your own head high
You learnt it every time you tried
You earned it every time you survived:
Loop-by-loop
Link-by-link.

MY FAVOURITE JUMPER WAS TOO BIG WHEN I BOUGHT IT

Words are spells that shape what we see
If we believe what we're told
We grow into the praise we're given:
Strong, pretty, creative, confident, disorganised,
Destined for greatness or jail
Practice makes perfect

Repetition writes our stories
Repetition rewires habits
Repetition rewires neurons

I can't
'Fake it 'til I make it'
Sounds like living a lie, tricking, on the hustle
I prefer
'You'll grow into this'.

I try to try on new things like clothes
Pull new thoughts and roles on over my head
See how they fit
And if they don't:
Well, I'm still growing

Whether it's a swagger in my step
Or understanding online banking
I am not faking anything, this is mine to try
Baggy enough to give me room
It will fit me just right - soon
I try it around the house until one day

– without realising –
I wear it outside, too
Just right for the weather, just in time for today:

Yes I do understand this contract
Yes I can teach the intern
Yes I am the headline act
Yes I am worth kissing

We grow into the things we tell ourselves
We accept as normal the things we already do

So I smell that new clothes smell
Feel that new jumper softness hugging me inside
And try to know that eventually this will be
My everyday wear: ripped and frayed
Thrown on to slouch to the shops on a Sunday
I am not faking anything
This is mine already.

BREATHE

Take a deep breath
Breathe in good air
Breathe out bad air
Breathe in good air for a count of three
Breathe out thinking
'If we've all just exhaled bad air then we'll be inhaling it too.'

Breathe in positive energy
Breathe out negative energy
And while we're at it – breathe out thinking
'That that doesn't make scientific sense.'

Breathe in knowing this might be worth a try
Breathe in the deep breaths that slow your heart rate
And calm your mind
Breathe out doubts about whether you're doing this right

Breathe in the things you know are good about you
Breathe out the comments that belittle you
That still have their hooks in you
Breathe in spells and facts that will drive those fuckers out.

Breathe in that time you stood your ground
And looked around
And saw eyes on you as you spoke strong and true.

Breathe out that time you held your tongue
When you knew it was wrong
But sod being right, you didn't want a fight, not that day
Breathe it out and away.

Breathe in the friends that make you smile for existing

Breathe out all Facebook friends you don't actually like,
But you've got so many mutual friends
That it would be awkward, right?
Life's too short.
Delete.

Breathe in knowing you are strong
And your feelings are valid
Breathe out ever 'knowing your place'
Expel that air
Expel that idea
Expel that ex that's still in your head
And bar the door.

Breathe in knowing you can always phone a friend
Breathe out caring what other people might think
Breathe in knowing you're allowed to leave the things
That don't work for you
Breathe out bad relationships, houseshares and jobs
Breathe in that you have the power to change things
Breathe out ever feeling trapped or alone

Breathe in knowing that you have beautiful eyes
And your name will feel like a prayer
On the lips of those that love you.
Breathe out worrying whether your bum looks big in this
Your arse looks ...fine
And you have bigger fish to fry

Breathe in feeling the weight of history light on your shoulders
Breathe out those who would pull the wings off of you.
Breathe in knowing you are good enough.

Breathe out the fact that we cannot change our pasts
Breathe in knowing that we can outgrow them
Flip off the playground slurs and the ghosts that throw them

Because life happens for one performance only
Without safety nets or audiences solely
You.
So what do you want to do?

What would you do if you weren't afraid
Of what other people might say?
Try it for a day and see where it takes you
And it won't be perfect first time
But that's OK:
Keep trying anyway.

But most importantly:
Hold your head high and your shoulders back
And breathe
You've got this.

Because this is for the people we could be
Can be
Will be
Just as soon as we stop
Asking permission
To be.

PART 2

BRAIN-WEEDING

BRAIN-WEEDING

I am weeding the ground of my mind
Picking through the thoughts that grow
Deciding which I want to keep
Digging others out at the root.

Some are fine but there isn't space
Some will not survive my soil
Some scattered seeds I never noticed
'Til they sprouted seasons later.

Some plants pull out clean, complete
Others put up a fight
Rhizomes of anxiety, self-sabotage
Stretch subterranean across my landscape
Shooting new spears through the surface
When I thought I'd got them all.

But this newly-bare earth is not empty
This blank space will not stay blank:
It is a tidy room
A new notebook
It is fertile ground
In which to plant
For next season.

RETURNING THESE DEMONS

I am returning these demons
You tried to give me
Palmed off as mine all along
They have been fed and watered
Wearied on long walks
Hyped up on candyfloss and fairground rides
They squealed and squabbled
The whole ride back
But they were never mine
Nice try
Their holiday is over
Back to you
The little red one needs a nap
Good luck.

I CALLED YOU CAPTAIN

The good times we shared
Were worth weathering some storms for
So I cling on in my crows' nest
Spying for when the view will clear
But we've been adrift for months
And our goodwill supplies are running low.

I had more stashed, so I restocked on the sly:
Fresh water, rum, biscuits and bog roll
But we're still going to run out
And you still consume like there is no lack
You still drink like you don't care
If we are left with only saltwater.

I wait
For the circumstances
Which were your excuses
To bleed out
To float belly up
To be dead and done
I harpooned them one by one
So we could steer back
To clear waters, balmy winds,
Back to when you were kind.

The tongue-lashings were funny once
But they've been growing crueller:
Lately they are all whip and no wit.

I have become bookkeeper
Logging the long list of small slights
Of favours given and never returned
And I see if we do break apart
We will never break even

Because you have a lifeboat
You have no need to settle this debt
I will float on flotsam
You won't even get wet.

I scrub the decks, scrub pots and pans,
Will kick myself after, for taking it lying down
But at the time it's just my most recent attempt
To mend our sails
At the time I never know that this is the last straw
The same way your keys are always in the last place you look
Only because
That's when you stop looking.

In the thin, grey light of day
I start to spy the end of our journey
Cold and clear as the dawn:
You just don't care
You'd let this ship drift anywhere
I have been skeleton crew for us both
You won't lift a finger to steer this
I am weary, weepy, wondering why
I ever called you
Captain.

TUMBLEWEED

They said we could be
Tall as redwoods
Bright as Autumn maples
Bold as monkey puzzles
But to survive
We are learning to be tumbleweeds

In another life
I would dig weeds
Plant trees
Learn every flower's name
Watch the seasons' green pulse
Across my landscape

But we know we never stay
Long enough to see
The fruits of our labour
So our gardens grow
Neglected:
Brambles, fag butts, plastic bags

We uproot after each season:
Each tenancy
Each fixed-term contract

Every time a phone is lost
We scatter new numbers like grass seed
And hope the lawn will grow back
As lush as before

In another life
We could be ecosystems
But here we ache to evolve

Fast enough
To adapt to each environment:
New neighbourhoods
New neighbours' names
Register again for doctors, dentists, votes

We have grown callouses
Where others grow roots
We are stunted
Bonsai

They said we could be
Tall as redwoods
Bright as Autumn maples
Bold as monkey puzzles
But to survive
We are learning to be tumbleweeds.

NO SPOONS LEFT

This is a statement of fact, an admission of defeat
It's not up for debate, something I want to repeat
But I don't have the energy, that is a fact
No, I can't come for just one – I'd still need to get back
And the journey home's already an Odyssey
Which will get worse with each hour that weighs on me

Why won't I come for just one? Because I know that you'll
Bargain me for another, and I'll feel uncool
Turning every tempting offer away
Because my energy isn't rationed from day to day:
It's a rollover debt, it runs from week to week
And I'm tired.

You're not asking me to stay for one more drink,
You're nagging me to have the energy to do that
In short: you're guiltting me to be less ill
(As if it were a choice!) Tonight I will
Have less fun than you
Because I don't have the spoons
To attempt the things that you will do.

And even that I could just about take
But don't you dare spin this as a choice I make
This is a situation which I negotiate
As best I can.

When you are ill you learn you can't just soldier on
When you are ill you learn to fear fatigue
Because it means you're already in your energy overdraft
But the cash point won't print you a statement
So you've just got to guess at what you've spent.

When you are ill you learn that you just don't have the budget
To do all the things you want to do.
And you try not to be bitter,
And you try to learn some acceptance,
And you learn to say 'no',
Because 'yes' isn't an option.

So: no.
I can't go.

This is a statement of fact, an admission of defeat
It's not up for debate, something I want to repeat
But the failure of my health leaves me washed-up
Here.

Go on without me.
Have a nice night.
I'll call you tomorrow.

THIS BODY I NEED TO LIVE IN

I am trying to find the words to speak about
This body I need to live in
Trying not to see value
In shrinking centimetres
From its perimeters

This body I need to live in
Is the only home I'll ever own
But in hard times
I have let hinges rust
Patched plaster with polyfilla
Saw structural sags and felt
Resigned.
Helpless.

Lately I have the resources to begin
Renovating
This body I need to live in
Lately I have been lifting scaffolds
Climbing ladders, rewiring, refitting
Watched wall plaster glow anew
There is still lots to do, but:
This body I need to live in
Is standing
Stronger than before.

I am trying to find the words to speak about
This body I need to live in
Without adding any asbestos
To the air.

“MOST GIRLS DON’T DO THAT”

Once it meant climbing trees and grubby knees
And the observation taught you.

Then it meant strong, fast or logical
And it was praise.

As you grew it meant competent or reasonable
And the praise stung,
Though you couldn’t explain
Why.

When dating you learnt
“Most girls don’t do that”
Meant either
Trying anything once
Or
Knowing what you liked already
And neither was praise
But they shrugged or squirmed
When you asked
“Why?”

But these days when people say
“Most girls don’t do that”
They mostly mean
The sharp canines on smirking lips
The lightning flashes from fingertips
The sonic booms, conducting tides
The levitation and laser eyes

And most girls don’t

Bother explaining
That actually
Most girls
Do.

SPIRIT OF THE RAINBOW HERON

The charity known as ***Spirit of the Rainbow Heron*** is based in Sheffield. It has been set up to commemorate the life and spirit of Dora Rachel Franks Daniel, who passed on from this life on 8th February 2015, just before her 28th birthday. Dora worked as Community Liaison for the University of Sheffield Students Union Volunteering Programme; she was well known across the city and had a positive impact in many ways. Dora was open about her own struggles with mental health; her bravery around this was inspiring and it translated into care for others. You can read more about her at www.DoraRainbow.com

Our small local charity aims to develop and run creative activities in and around Sheffield, to keep Dora's spirit alive, raise awareness about mental health in young people and help develop different methods of support. It is managed by a group of Dora's friends.

The work of the ***Rainbow Heron Small Grants Fund*** is financed with the Lump Sum Death Benefit we received from Dora's University Pension Scheme. Our Fund provides small grants to individuals [or small groups] around the UK to develop specific creative / arts-based activities - with the aim of promoting wider awareness about young people's mental health as well as exploring the connection between mental health and creativity. Members of the ***Spirit of the Rainbow Heron*** advise the trustees on grant activities.

We are very proud to promote the work of Hannah Chutzpah as our first grant recipient.

For more information about our work and to access other creative products, please visit www.spirit-of-the-rainbow-heron.com

