

# 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***

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# **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 guiltling 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 8<sup>th</sup> February 2015, just before her 28<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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](http://www.spirit-of-the-rainbow-heron.com)

