



# Realisations

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### **Gratitude and thanks**

It took a huge change in my life to arrive at this collection, and I would not have survived very well, if at all, without huge forbearance by my wife Claire, and the lovely people at the Clare Project in Brighton for people exploring their gender identity. However, none of this might have been worth sharing, except for the wonderful mentoring in the art of poetry writing by Kim Lasky, who probably never realised what she was letting herself in for as Andy became Andie in writing and in person. Thank you all.

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## Preface

*Realisations* is a collection of poems about the real 'I' – the discovery of an authentic self whose gender is not congruent with the life lived thus far.

Whilst many of these poems reflect stages in my own journey, others are written to represent viewpoints that are neither mine nor those of my family. Some were sparked by a chance word or shared experience, but don't tell any specific story, rather evoke the difficult, fun, ironic or poignant moments that female men or male women – or however we best describe ourselves – experience.

This collection does not in any way intend to be definitive of the many diverse experiences of being transgender. Some readers will feel unrepresented and ask 'where am I?' or say 'it's not like that!' The poems are just descriptions of how it is for some, some of the time, or at some point along the way, and only ask to be read because there are so many of us, wanting to be recognised, understood, and accepted as we are.

*Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half-light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.*

W B Yeats



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## Why this volume?

Oh my goodness! Who wants to know all this angst-ridden stuff about some very odd people we don't see much of, and like to joke about? What are they? Transvestites? Transsexuals? Transgender? All sounds very kinky to me! Isn't all that lesbian and gay literature enough these days?

Well, hold fire for a moment, because through poetry we can sometimes gain a sideways look at something we haven't noticed before, and come away with a new perspective on another's world. Or *our* world; a world of incredible diversity among even this human species, where we assume so much about the clarity of gender.

Whether it's Adam and Eve, or X and Y chromosomes, or the simple (or is it complex?) pleasures of sex, we feel safe with what 'male' and 'female' mean. Don't we? Well, it isn't nearly as easy as that, because clear, unequivocal male/female physical sexual identity relies on just a very few gene expressions that set in chain a series of consequences soon after we are conceived, that depend on the mother's circumstances during pregnancy, and that can become apparent only later on at puberty.

This means that there are people with the 'right' male chromosome pair who develop as women, people with the 'right' female chromosome pair who develop as male, and those with more than just a pair of sex chromosomes. There are those apparently born female who apparently become male at puberty, and as many as four per cent of births could be counted as intersex. A lot of instant decision-making goes on about babies whose external sex is less than clear. But all this is just biological discussion of genitalia. It is not an appreciation of gender. Male and female brains have differing characteristics too, and on top of that, people have very individual personal psychological perceptions of their own gender. If you want to know someone's gender identity, you will find it between their ears, not between their legs.

We don't talk about it unless it directly involves us. Have you ever met an intersex person? Or whose sexual identity at birth was ambiguous? The chances are you have, but you have neither need nor right to know. Have you ever met a transsexual (someone who

has had corrective medical or surgical treatment)? You may well have, and not be sure, because the person you met will feel entirely realigned to present as the gender they felt was properly theirs from birth, and they have no need to recount the biological misdirection.

It is the transition and adjustment in adult life that creates the greatest discomforts. You get used to someone presenting as one gender and then suddenly they're dressing in the 'wrong' clothes, maybe not doing it well, and telling you they are the 'opposite' gender, or that they are dual-gendered, or non-gendered.

Wow! That's weird!

Why? because it doesn't fit our social mental picture of how things 'should' be? Well, the chances are that readers of these poems will not derive from tribes with long historical acceptance of transgendered people—those who cross the divide in any way. Maybe Western thinking on gender is the one that is culturally inadequate.

The consequence is that unlike sexual orientation, mainstream acceptance of gender diversity issues is very mixed indeed. For anyone in the middle of discovering and reconciling their own gender, they will know that there is anything from hate to aversion thrown at them, even by friends and people they have loved for a long time. Families find the adjustment excruciatingly embarrassing, largely because of the lack of understanding. Marriages can be destroyed because a loving wife 'needs a man' or a loving man 'needs a woman', and can see no way of supporting or loving the person they have known half their lives, in large part because of 'what it makes them' to accept a same-gender partner, even though that person in most other ways is no different at all—though maybe more at peace with themselves.

It is a very difficult place, but heard in poetry, there is happiness, resolution and fun, as well as tears, and the chance to say a few things about what it feels like to those concerned. Listen to them.



## Seeds

The subtlety of poetry is subversive,  
creeping under cover of familiar words  
to plant, not a charge, but a seed.

Stories say trees can grow in your lungs  
where it's warm and moist and secret –  
until you explode with acorns!

I will place seeds more subtly than this.  
You will breathe and never know –  
until roots enmesh your mind.

See? You never thought like that before.  
Are my seeds new truths –  
or are there others to keep that you prefer?

If I told you facts they would fall  
in boxes by shape and fit  
to every thought you already had.



# A Sense of Gender

Very many transgendered people remember things they said in all childlike innocence, to parents or teachers, at a very early age. All will remember times and incidents, experiences and feelings about where they did or did not fit in. And yet there are so many (especially those over 40) who either had no awareness that anything could or should be done about it, or who felt it was 'just them' and that it was something one had to live with. Their stories are very diverse.

Here we are invited to think of flowers; yes, girly, pretty flowers that contain male and female organs in order to create seeds that have no gender. We think about polarity in nature, and question simple certainties. Life is a journey: did we get it all right at the start, or do we need to adjust as we go along? I have a name that I have changed until I am more comfortable with what it says about me. Going back to school, we go beyond 'the kid who didn't fit in' to the trouble of having to be a boy or a girl. Would you Adam and Eve it? No, we have the same ribs and the same senses, so why are we supposed to feel so differently about the same things?

## Before the petals fall

Petals fall.  
A flower is undressed.  
Male and female parts  
revealed both in green –  
combined, becoming fruit.

The petal in my hand is  
frail, waxy, beautiful.  
Traces of pollen on its surface still  
witness to why the flower at all.  
    And this is what I see.

In autumn the fruit feeds freely –  
not caring who or what –  
knowing what matters is seeds  
lying freshly degendered.  
    And this is what we do not see.

Spring and warmth and green.  
Colours open, flags and fancies.  
Insects come and take and bring.  
And this is what everyone sees:  
    ‘These flowers are pretty!’

Male and female and pretty.

See the flower  
before the petals fall.

## Living ground

I was Adam once – *‘of the ground’*:  
life and form from clay, from dust, from  
the very spittle of god – made a man.

Yet I am also Eve – *‘the living one’*:  
because my soul was in the malleable rib, which  
in the hands of god was moved and shaped.

I am both Adam’s loss and Adam’s gain –  
the route to happiness but also out of Eden:  
knowing too much to taste the tree of life.

Gardeners of our dreams, cast out for fruit  
that did not kill, but opened eyes to the span  
of life, the need to grow towards an end.

To learn, to love, to labour, to earn, to be –  
succeed and be succeeded, in our dreams,  
still by rivers out of Eden – our *‘delight’*.

When I as Adam first stood here, I wondered  
why my rib was not missing, and why I did not  
hunt or kill, and had become my own downfall.

I am Eve, I am Adam, I am living and I am dust –  
I am what I am, from a mother god who perhaps  
simply could not anticipate the outcome of Eden.

## How the boy got her name

I was born a man.

Correction: I was a boy-child.

No: I was a baby  
whom no-one had ever known or seen,  
interpreted or asked.

I was discovered from the outside in  
and so the baby was a boy.

A boy-child.

A boy-toy-child.

A voice-sinking, lengthening  
growing-up boy  
child-man.

And so I dangled;  
last chosen for every team.

Hung  
for not being manly.

They called me 'Andrew'.

'Andros' - man.

And somewhere between  
top of the class, last in the team  
I lightened it to 'Andy' and thus  
lost my male ending 'os'.  
Reflecting that 'os' meant bone.

I always liked my pretty things  
but grey became my suit.  
And ties.  
And jobs and marriage, kids and baggage,  
strong and handy, dependable Andy  
settled.

Except for what lay hidden in  
backs of drawers, under clothes,  
feminine stores, purged, restored -  
hidden from view.  
'My things.'

Something else.  
Someone else.

Someone. Only screaming silently  
with the anguish that loses its voice  
in breathless gape and empty void  
and never stops.  
How could you have heard?  
How could you have known?

I was born a man.  
Discovered inside out.  
Unsettled.  
Someone  
with a lighter, female voice, saying  
'I am Andie.'

reflecting that 'ie' explains  
who I am.

# Jane

We were ten.

I remember her. And her friend.

I even remember her face to this day  
five times ten years later; the girl I sat beside

on the desk block with girls. Jane.

It was like finding a different sort of friend  
not interested in running rough in the yard –  
just her, not a boy directing my play.

I felt at home. Too young for love.

I can't remember how, but our teacher,  
gentle father figure to us all,  
decided we might like to choose new friends.

✽✽✽

But not for long, as boys' grammar beckoned –  
and then for years no girls at all.

Except friends and sister friends,  
pretty in their clothes that I liked so much.

Our schools were merged, with doubts and fears.

And again, the same recall, as groups of girls  
gathered in doorways talking, not running  
with balls and shouts and jeers.

So where should I join in?

With boys and games, or with the girls –  
who thought I wanted just one of them, while  
I just wanted to belong.

✽✽✽

As life, career and family pushed along,  
I would always have chosen girl-talk to balls,  
coffees to beers, and dancing to sport,  
and a blouse to a shirt.



And Jane?

I met her once, ten years after ten.

She remembered me and I remembered then:  
the girls' desks. So pretty. My friend.

If she could see me now, I wonder  
if she'd understand my girl-talk,  
over coffee, in a pretty blouse, at home,  
and why I wanted to sit with her

at ten.

# Teams

I'm not fat. I'm not unfit.  
Maybe I don't know the rules  
because I don't get to play.  
I'm not skinny, and I'm not stupid.  
Maybe it's because I don't play the game  
every break time with the rest.  
Here I stand, the last, the same unchosen,  
facing two teams of equal numbers  
and wondering why I'm here.

I have the socks. I have the boots.  
My shirt is regulation red  
but it isn't Arsenal or Liverpool and  
I don't know their names or positions.  
I only know my own, and no-one  
is calling it because we all know.  
This isn't my game at all -  
it's theirs and we don't need  
each other for this embarrassment.

Every week at the start of games  
it's the same and no-one thinks  
or wonders why it is - the teacher  
suggests I play the reserve as if  
I can't learn to play, or that I  
might actually be good, given  
a chance to run, or kick, or pass.  
In summer it will be the same - unseen  
on the quiet cricket boundary.

It's a boy's life out there, in the mud,  
grass stains on the white shorts,  
shouts significant to those  
who understand and strive to score.  
I could do this, but only six are really  
playing and the rest fill out the teams  
to shout, run, maybe get a pass -  
even Fatty Foster, Simon Specs and  
the skinny Bob the Bones.

Afterwards I've nothing to talk about  
as they recount the slip, the post, the  
penalty, the brilliant fluke that was  
genius - and my straight 'A's, top of the class  
have nothing to do with teams in the  
steam of washing the mud away (and I have  
none to my name) - not even names to  
explain the sidelines, the boundary  
where I stand aside for games each week.

# Equator

I

After so much working out  
(and I thought I'd grasped the maths quite well)  
*my equation simply didn't.*  
My x's and my y's should have kept  
in balance with z's as equals.

I wondered if some of them had taken sides  
between my marks. An x had invited a y  
to t and stayed to equate a while  
in a slightly different way.

II

I'm always asking why -  
and it's Y that makes me male, from science at school -  
*except it isn't. It's just one gene: called SR Y.*  
On chromosome Y where it usually lives -  
and sometimes, just sometimes, it visits X.

And maybe *chromosomes* really are coloured,  
not those pictured black-striped poles  
(I wonder how many are pink and blue?)  
and I could be both X's and whys.

III

Need my poles be north and south?  
It isn't how the earth goes round,  
but, slipped askew as a hat, could flip  
and pass through my equator  
turning about as a world might do.

Equally I am divided in he/miss-fears,  
about my waist, about misplaced  
x's and y's and the setting of a sum  
that doesn't add up to a pink-blue sky.

## No spare rib

Eyes refusing hope, heart  
yearning weight  
of nurture on ungendered ribs.

Fullness of a form, found  
wanting recess  
from a male domain.

What eyes don't see, his heart will –  
grieve the unborn  
girl that unmakes him.

Seeks re-dress, but none  
can see or feel  
the beat beneath ungendered ribs.

Man-aged loneliness, secret  
too long to tell  
spoken in sighs, sadness, places

where he cannot go – suddenly  
sprawls helpless,  
raised to bare ungendered ribs.

Nature-born, gestation  
of too many days,  
the female now demands the male

seeks nurture, kindness  
all to grow  
and find her woman's liberation.

Adam gave, they say  
so Eve was made  
but count them and you'll find the same.

*In the heyday of women's lib., there was an influential magazine entitled Spare Rib*

## Dress sense

Do you feel the wind?  
In trees, and hair, quite free -  
all breath brought together as a breeze.

You see the ox-eye daisies dance?  
Fabric of joy jostling with the wind  
on this, their day, to beckon bees.

Hear them, joyous petals buzzing?  
Wing-songs of intent  
to gather, gather, gather.

Smell the honey in the heather too?  
Harvest of the bees who love to labour  
winning where our patience fails.

And taste of sweetness?  
Healing remedy of ills, unrefined  
excess of nature for our good.

In every sense we sympathise -  
no abstract thought to wonder if  
my brilliant blue is just your gauzy grey.

So why - in this cool rose room,  
perfumed, quiet, indulgent in delight,  
as silken gown falls round your form -  
surprise that I should want the same?

I too feel each satin fold forget its hold and sigh,  
breathing sensuous on skin with subtle air.  
I am the wind, flower, song of sun-days  
Wearing all the senses that we share.

# Facing Change

Society isn't ready for gender fluidity, when it goes beyond a bedroom fetish or fun in drag. It imposes such a stigma on partners, family and friends, that being associated with an openly transgendered person evokes deep fears. Fears about what is happening to the trans person now they are expressing their needs, fears about a changing relationship, and fears because this person is daring to change them and their implied sexual orientation (about which, honestly, even the most liberal folk still harbour phobias). It isn't just about appearances, though goodness, that's bad enough!

It's about 'what next?' There will be a new body language to match appearance, maybe adjustment to vocal pitch, and longer (or shorter) spells in the bathroom. Hormones? They will affect mood, and self-perception and shape. For partners used to heterosexuality, there is a looming tragedy and loss. In all this, for the trans person, there is just a putting right: a pursuit of normality through a huge struggle. All relationships with a trans person are put on the line. Some will survive and thrive, others, with great sadness and pain, will be lost. It's all about preparedness to change. A trans person by this point has sensed inevitability: change has gone beyond choice. For everyone else (aside from legal obligations at work, for example) that choice remains.

So here is your trans partner, friend, family member: how much less commitment are they now worth? They didn't ask for this to be part of their lives, and many don't welcome it. Those who transition from one gender to another have a past to leave far behind and a different present and future to inhabit. Those who don't feel the need to correct their body, will remain in between – same mind, same body, different clothes; new peace.

Why is it so easy to feel it's 'their fault' that they are causing those around them so much fear, so much sense of alienation? It is a very difficult place to inhabit, for anyone either wanting to change, or to retain more than a simple gender identity. As a trans person, you risk gaining yourself and losing everything else. How do you talk about *that*?

## Not talking about it

I used to imagine a nowhere place.  
It was brown and dim. There was a wall.

And if I wrote on it loud enough  
with my thoughts, you might hear.



All my heart and fears went there  
in churning nights, with a head  
full of desperation for understanding.

But it was a silent place of screams  
that didn't even echo except in whispers  
and even they weren't heard.

A corridor aside from time, where,  
I hoped, you might pass and read.  
Your fingers on my fading words,

eyes with sadness scanning such  
unfamiliar sentences as if in Braille.  
Sightless symbols for the sensitive touch.



You never came, however much I willed  
your own night wanderings to my wall.

Mornings moved your eyes to wake  
with words about whispers.  
What was I saying in my dreams?

I turned to a bird on the topmost twig  
of this tree from our window, wondering  
how it could hold on in such a breeze.



## Your man

Has he lost his strength, like Samson,  
because he shaves his legs?

Is he any weaker  
because he shows his weaknesses?

Does the ground resist his spade  
because his toenails pronounce in pearly pink?

Is his stride in life restricted  
because the wind catches his flowing skirt?

How does his balance  
on heels compare with yours?

If new hair wraps his grizzled head  
does his brain become witless?

Or is he aware of strengths you need,  
being less forceful in knowing?

More sure in his footing, purpose, presence?  
His mind renewed, courageous, caring.

Your man:

is only what he might have been.  
That you might long have known and loved.

And if he now looks a little more like you -  
welcome her in ways you never could.

## Those nights

You know the ones, unsettled settling into sleep.  
Unspoken sighs, conversations out of place unsaid.  
Because there is no understanding.  
No understanding to be had because there is none.

*Who are you?  
Who am I?  
I don't know.*

When unravelling isn't falling apart but falling into place  
it seems there is none to gather my skein  
as mother to grandmother used to do -  
making tidy woollen balls all of a colour.

Those nights of unfinished thoughts and fears  
when comfort isn't ready and touch is spare  
despite so many years of love, of loving.  
And you are full of fears as yet unknown,

while anguish oozes from my unformed breasts  
squeezes my forbidden tears into silence.  
Everything cannot be unsaid so hangs there in the dark.  
My truths. My homecoming. My surprises.

*Do you really mean that - why, and what?  
Just what am I meant to do with this? You're not the same.  
I am. You are. But not! It - changes things ... Why? What?*

It's that point on every journey where  
there's no going back, only into storms  
long before comforting tea and cakes -  
if we ever find them. Shaken hearts aren't sure.

And so we lie with thoughts unbidden in the dark and sigh.  
Each wanting the other to feel their small sighs, reach out -  
but now is not the time. *To sleep, perchance to dream.*

Your dream, that this dream dissipates to air,  
my dream, that falling into place is falling into you.  
Sleep briefly touches us, neither dream arrives, and so  
we wake, no closer, no further than the night.

Those nights need such opened hearts and minds  
that understanding fades as a requirement of love.

I feel like you. That's all. Like a woman, falling  
into place beside you. Please don't turn away.

## Entitlement of tears

What right have you to cry?  
This mess is of your making –  
the upset that you cause and  
the woman that you're faking.

*But darling, this is me  
this wig is no disguise  
it's just my inner woman  
and all that that implies.*

I cannot understand it,  
this path that you are taking –  
it leaves me feeling so confused  
the rules that you are breaking.

*But darling, this is me  
my love has never changed  
my inner is my outer  
it's just ... well ... rearranged.*

You threaten me, with all my friends  
and challenge what I am  
I want a man, and not a wife  
it's not what we began!

*But darling, this is me  
and for me, this a blessing –  
I simply show what's always there  
uncovered by my dressing.*

I know you, but I feel I don't –  
I don't know what to say.  
I must accept you as you are  
this change won't go away.

*Yes darling, this is me  
the man is not estranged  
and all I ever felt for you  
is – will be – never changed.*

What right have you to cry –  
it's me who has the hurt  
of seeing you, pink nails and skirt  
instead of jeans and shirt.

*I think I understand you, your  
embarrassment and fears  
but feel for me and share with me  
my entitlement of tears.*

## I, object (coming out)

People I knew spoke to the man I was born, with  
honour on their breath, respecting that I hid

my uncertainties of a woman's claim to be me -  
her soul, a heartbeat below my sir-face.

As I find this person - her story behind the hidden myth,  
the epic quest for golden gift, my self miss-taken

I am become object. A mist of each breath becomes clouds  
obscuring the person, who listens - and learns

how things don't have ears, but eavesdrop on whispers,  
silently absorbing their opinions into a glaze.

I am digital gossip - twitters, cheap, mutters on social  
media, scatterings of some Medea escaping.

I am as stone - smooth in a palm, or pain in a shoe,  
treasured or shaken away, a sole discomfort.

I am irritant for an expectorant of any vapour or  
taste of intolerance, a cough at each breath.

Or sand perhaps - an unseen source for a hidden pearl  
from being sighed over, and over, by every tide.

*In the myth, Medea kills and dismembers her brother, scattering him behind her ship  
to avoid capture.*

## Rehearsal

I'm counting bars, trumpet at my knee,  
ready to resume my presence in the piece.

Then looking down, I'm wondering why  
I'm wearing these strange man's clothes?

An oboe cue - I lift the trumpet's loops,  
my lips kiss breath into golden chords

and together we sing the blues and die.  
I insert the mute, suppress the song

but fingers dance the notes in purple gloss, as  
lights against my grey - spots of fun and freedom

for the girl whose heart is playing, hides and  
speaks this way to those who spot the clues -

their kindness reassures, prepares for when  
I'm no longer rehearsing, nor muted in my play

not counting, waiting, wondering when to come in,  
but bright and free, as the new girl in the line.





# Appearances

Oh my God, it's a man! Well that's not the worst I've had in the street, but when a trans person who has lived as male all their life wants to present as a woman, she has a lot to do, and some things that simply cannot be refined without great expense and pain. Should more of us be brave and wear beards and skirts together, and stick our tongues out as we create a new gender-queer culture? No-one criticises a woman who presents as male a persona as they like, and full transitioning is outwardly less obviously fraught with errors (I didn't say it was easy!) But a male body in a dress? You have to really work at it.

Pierced ears? Painted nails? Hair colour, style, or a wig? Women's jeans or a skirt? Which way can your buttons go? Everything becomes, at least for a while, a question of how much can be reversed by a quick wash and change. Living as the 'opposite' gender is a matter of choice and degree, often in a balance between one's mental state and personal integrity, and the cultural pressures around you. And that's why many of us in discovering our trans identity, want to leave clues rather than live in blank concealment, so that friends and those around us pick up hints that we aren't 'just a man' or 'just a woman'.

What do people think when they see a transgendered person with a body that doesn't match their self-image and sense of identity? A few, a very few, will offer support—even helpful, improving advice. Others will laugh, turn away, 'observe loudly' to show how witty they think they are. Most probably think: 'thank God I'm not like *that!*' And the trans person who is learning simply to be themselves, will hurry home, scrub up, strip off, and become for the sake of others, everything they least want to be. They are taking part of themselves off, not a disguise.

## New nails

A perfect parabola  
the shape unfamiliar  
on my finger -  
the red trace, solvent smell,  
the dipping clacking brush.

Five perfect parabolas  
a pretty row, bright  
red for danger they  
punctuate a high alert -  
and speak too loud.

Watch this instead -  
cotton wool bleeding red  
draining each  
perfect parabola  
back to pink and white.

Do you see the shape  
and ask yourself  
why these hands  
and what they signify?  
They write my other name.

## Piercing

Such little things – and yet  
I know the big conversation  
the lesser gossip, the different  
sizes of minds I must meet

simply for the sake of – studs

that took so long to wait  
for courage – the permission  
I never needed, except for  
how I yearned to be seen

in little signs and gestures

inviting enquiry without  
judgement or disdain – for  
simply realising how small  
things had become big

too big to contain any longer

oozing out in small drops:  
my life, my self, expressed  
like breasts too full of nurture  
to rest passive or without purpose

or as ears, too full of listening, speak –

now pierced, anchored,  
small silver studs a stamp  
of arrival at some waypoint  
awaiting interrogation

fragmented, avoiding big questions

begging to be asked – if only  
they will dare hear small words  
in attempted explanation why  
this is so important to me.

## Mixed messages

The message is the way I dress  
with limbs in a language to learn.  
Read this man at your leisure, see,  
speak and let me interpret her.

*Once upon a time, there was a man.*  
Let's describe him, in five bullet points  
on each hand. Round, shiny,  
pink bullet points. Listing

commandments: thou shalt,  
thou shalt not. This man made  
of things to be, and not to be.  
Why pink? That is the question.

And with the list a leaning  
and a lie of the legs, or the  
draping of the arms – a gesture.  
Small truths to read, too simple to grasp.

Mentally you compare two pictures,  
*five deliberate mistakes.* You compare my shoes (one!)  
look for the missing button; is he wearing  
glasses! Are they the same? (two!)

(Yes, toenails painted too – but hidden.)  
Small beads hint at one cuff; (three!)  
some men do. But this isn't a leather  
thong with wooden chase.

My watch. It's too small. (four!)  
Between the two pictures you check; compare.  
You're right! And the face is pink,  
though the hands speak a common truth.

Is it time to tell? Read on, read on.

You're learning the language as you  
check my shirt, the buttons male  
but the trace, the slight black trace of (five!)  
lace in the neck, subtle pattern through.

My ears are my betrayal. Naked.  
Hearing much more than they speak  
in wishes for colours, gems and strands;  
ears forbidden speech, would shout.

*Once upon a time, there was a man.*  
Describe him now from your pictures,  
listing everything you see.  
Which shall you choose, left or right?

Left, alone a long while since?  
Right, where there are no mistakes?  
Reading matters, so read carefully,  
learn this language, join the words.

*Once upon a time, there was a ...*  
falling asleep. A story. A dream.  
An unreality to resolve. A question:  
to me or not to me?

That is the question.

## To a café, hurried

It's only a flower, blue  
crystallised, pretty, and set  
in silver. There's a butterfly

that holds the flower close  
pressed to its soft ear cushion  
beneath my cascade of hair

and you look – before I see  
and turn to raise my cup,  
reveal the other flower too.

I catch your eyes, blue  
clear, pretty, and set  
in perplex. There's anxiety –

of ears with flowers that I forgot  
when turning from myself  
and the other flowers around my neck.



*There's a man, drinking coffee  
pretty patterns in the froth –  
brown flowers and a heart*

*but his heart isn't in it as  
the cappuccino drifts and spoils  
to breath. He has pretty ears.*

*Her sigh pierces the space  
between their cups attempting  
soft landings in hard saucers.*

*Brown and blue – flowers and  
eyes – meet and speak in  
regret rather than reprimand.*

*He doesn't realise, gestures  
as perhaps a man does not –  
he must have hurried to be here.*



I'm scanning for giveaways  
up from shoes, brown, to grey  
to check, too slow to arrive, still

at my waist and rising –  
as your finger and thumb are  
already at your ear, where

silver geometry hangs –  
your hand hesitating away,  
protecting your throat.

Brown flowers are a swirl,  
silvered studs are turning  
in my fingers now, gathering away

into palms feeling blue  
remnants of the girl – from  
whom I hurried to this café.

# Integrity

When you look at me you see:  
someone else. Of course. I too  
am surprised. But I see someone  
I never was – though always knew.

Sometimes I feel born old.  
I wonder at lost years,  
pretty years  
unseen years.

But *look* at me. At *me*. This new,  
old, familiar stranger is not  
someone else, offers nothing different  
asks nothing – only to see me as I am.

The hair? The 'bumps'? They're  
sticking plasters on my reality  
covering gaps too late to heal.  
Disguise? No – a repair for my integrity.



# Mane

Your mane -  
your golden silky mane that  
moulds your face to gentleness,  
soft eyes, kind creases and  
a smoother chin

this mane -  
to me some hat, disguise  
that takes this man away  
in fool's gold, from a lion  
to a little cat

lovable -  
in the main but somehow  
not the same. Bright beads  
continue the curve around  
your open neck

strangled -  
balls on a silver chain  
that match your mauved eyes  
below this golden mane, for me  
so misplaced

this mane -  
placed so comfortably,  
for you completes a person -  
not a picture like the one tangled  
under my hair

I'm here -  
because my eyes have closed  
to hear your same 'I love you' as  
it always was - with me, unsighted,  
in the mane

this man -  
what was it I wanted that becomes  
obscured or lost beneath the mane  
when everything you are and do  
remains the same?

## Poor homme; ma femme

I shall never go out in your compliments

*You are so lovely*

With your praises singing in my ears

*Beautiful in your dress*

And your eyes sifting through my hair

*Your necklace catches your eyes*

Your appreciative hands, smoothing my breasts

*Those gorgeous shoes and shiny legs*

Observing details of my attention

*Your scent is divine!*



You can tell me, when you see me  
that I'm pretty. Or, if you prefer

*my dress is lovely.*

You can tell me, when you see me  
that I'm lovely. Or, if you prefer

*the necklace is well-chosen.*

You can tell me, when you see me  
that I'm beautiful. Or, if you prefer

*the co-ordination is good.*

You can tell me, when you see me  
that I'm graceful. Or, if you prefer

*I get it right.*

But you won't. Because you see me  
as remembered. Or, if you prefer

*I'm well-disguised.*



You will always go out in my compliments

*Please be smart tonight*

With my praises singing in your ears

*I like your grey jacket*

And my eyes sifting through your hair

*I prefer the other tie*

My appreciative hands, smoothing your breasts

*Black trousers are fine*

Observing details of your attention

*Ah! 'Pour Homme' – I like it!*

## Let's party!

Rebecca's dress is fabulous, and her *hair!*  
I don't know *how* Sally does it, but she's looking *so* good –  
and those *heels!* Mandie: I didn't think you'd *dare!*

All the girls together, an exciting night!  
Everything forgotten except how we look, and feel and  
the hours we've spent between us looking right.

Clatter of heels as we chatter away to the bar.  
And all of us together – we can go where we like, and have fun  
and dress as we please and to please, and be as we are.

Nobody minds except us, and nobody cares.  
But a night on the town with such friends as others won't know  
is a night to remember, and none are in pairs.

And what we *bring* to this party! Hearts of gold.  
Fabulous in every layer all the way down to our toes  
inside and out, girls in every zip, tuck and fold.

Tonight we're drunk with more than wine.  
Realisations, gorgeous celebrations, girls come of age at last  
heading home and heady, though feeling fine.

Visions of what we may be, or what we desire.  
For some, less happy returns of the day as front doors open  
onto ill-fitting worlds of masculine wear.

# Social Awareness

Ignorance has always been the biggest barrier to understanding life as it is, rather than as we have become accustomed. We don't (on the whole in the West) any longer regard homosexuality as a curable disorder, but while there is pathology attached to being transgender, we will not teach in schools that gender can be fluid and highly varied. Despite all we do know about the emergence of gender expression, we perpetuate the tragedy of young people confused as to why they have to be 'a boy' or 'a girl' within a fairly constrained interpretation of how to behave.

So whether it's a child finding out at school, or daring to be different at a non-fancy dress party, it doesn't take a taboo to marginalise trans people. There can be real venom in the bigotry against gender-nonconformity: against trans children as well as their parents, and against trans parents as well as their children. Why? Gender diversity only appears to undermine social order because *we have always got it wrong about gender*, just as we did about sexual orientation. And one has precious little to do with the other!

Realising that you are transgender is very complicated. Satisfying different groups of people in different contexts as you emerge, whilst retaining their respect – whatever legal protections exist – can become impossible. Why *should* people have to hide a significant part of themselves, or live inauthentic lives and tolerate rudeness and abuse? For trans people in society, we have a long way still to go, even if homophobia is a diminishing problem.

## Shoes

There's a boy in my son's class  
who wears girls' shoes.  
Next term, we've been told,  
he is Katie.  
My son has no problem with this.  
I said: *He is Katie?*  
My son has a new girl friend;  
he says she's funny.  
And happy now  
she wears girls' shoes.

Parents stand, all jeans and  
coloured t-shirts in the playground  
and wait in trainers  
for the bell.  
I wonder what I'm training for  
as Katie and my son  
run bursting out  
for Mum.

They part to race to me,  
to her. She stands,  
perhaps in training too, but  
wearing sandals and a skirt -  
pretty as a flower.  
She stands alone, with  
Katie in his shorts and shoes.  
What does he know?  
He waves to my son,  
takes her hand  
and skips away.

Mum!  
You could wear pretty shoes too!

I could.  
But it isn't uniform  
and I am in trainers  
pretending to learn.  
Katie's mum  
moves on  
trailing eyes and opinions.  
Katie has a friend.  
So does my son.  
I hope he's happy  
in his shoes.

## Closet cross-dresser

I know a man who has a woman hidden in his bedroom.  
His wife doesn't know because she's never been seen.  
Revealed only in a mirror, perhaps she's a ghost,  
shrinking from daylight and crowds of two or more.

She's pretty and lives the life of a butterfly, short  
as the time it takes for a breeze to blow her colours away.  
He loves her, and as gladly as he greets her anew each time  
he grieves her going to her life in pieces under and behind –

longing to hear her heels click as she walks, even if away.  
But the only sounds she makes are sighs and the rustle of skirts  
as she turns and turns, sits and crosses and uncrosses her legs,  
glossy nylons sliding easily, skirts rising on shapely thighs.

I don't know who is the more lonely, he or she, tonight –  
because there's a party on and she isn't going. He is,  
but he is lonely – as his wife, happiest in crowds of more than two  
pulls on stockings under a chiffon dress and makes her face.

And so they are ready and close the bedroom door behind,  
on ghosts who will not greet each other or say goodnight.  
Parties are such sweet sorrows – as he straightens his ties,  
unlocks the car and lift the toes of shoes that will not dance.

I know a man who has a woman hidden in his heart.  
His wife doesn't know because she's never been heard.  
Maybe she's a mirror reflecting all his ghosts inside  
where heels click, and skirts rustle in colour and light.



## Dressed for a party

'This is Jack, his partner Rob,  
And Sarah - lives with Sue.  
Jenny came with Martin -  
(No, not Alan, this one's new!)  
I thought you'd bring your husband?  
But introduce me do -  
I *love* that dress and necklace -  
I'm sorry, do I know *you*?  
Oh. I see.  
Well, to each his own.  
Or hers,  
I suppose, if true.  
Well ... must move on my dear -  
Ah! There's *my man* Hugh.'

## Bugger!

*She* booked the car for ten  
so Sarah has to go,  
but Simon has to be at work  
and no-one else must know.

And Simon knows that Sarah  
requires enough concealer  
that seen beyond the office doors  
becomes a clear revealer.

The lipstick may be optional  
mascara not a must,  
but Simon must be careful  
so Sarah isn't sussed.

He should just have the time  
to switch from skirt to jeans  
from Sarah into Simon – and  
whatever else that means.

And day by day as Simon knows,  
and Sarah follows suit,  
he's only ever halfway here –  
the rest is always mute.

And Sarah calls and Simon cries,  
she only wants to live –  
but Simon is expected, so  
it's always take not give.

And now it's five, and Sarah's shoes  
are too far out of sight, so ...  
*Ah! Your wife's car sir?*  
*Yes, it's perfectly alright.*

## Jerusalem

Peace and Jerusalem come to mind –  
the hair a bowl in my hands  
cooling, and laying to rest while  
still filled with my thoughts – my  
heart sinking to the floor with my  
skirts and the rose-framed spectacles  
on the bed now framing down-cast earrings,  
bracelets, beads, small-time watch.

Cotton pads become my face, but  
all smudged, blurred and blended,  
all lips and eyes, the foundation  
of an abstract, discarded and limp –  
while a man's face examines me  
from the bathroom mirror, tells me  
the bra must go with its silicone  
bounty for a plain, striped shirt.

The unheard ticking under the  
pink face behind the rose-framed  
lenses the shape of eyes, oversees the  
truce of the refugee woman who does not  
exist outside her timeframe, placed  
as she is in a holy time that is not  
Jerusalem except that it is contested behind  
a wailing wall with prayers for peace.

And for the sake of peace she is in  
retreat, falling to pieces, shedding to  
lighten the burden as she flees away  
to secrets, first spread in colours on the  
bed where she cannot rest, then folded  
gathered, rolled and ark-ived wholly  
without covenant or promise except my  
benediction: you shall never be denied.

## False pretences

She sees the suit, the tie,  
the shoes I wear, and slips into  
a correctness of style that jars.

It's the 'sir' place she puts me in  
as she takes my order, pen poised with  
trained politeness of a false persona.

And I too, in my false persona –  
the male diner required  
for an evening of celebration.

She's immune, and glances up  
expectant of my choice.  
My choice, I say, is for starters

please don't call me 'sir'.  
'That's alright sir – she says –  
what would you like for a main?

You're very polite, I say – not 'sir'.  
But no-one gave another name,  
so now she's stuck for words.

And I'm stuck for a pretty name  
on a man night when I am 'sir'  
full of mistaken respect.

Everything else is named, from  
thermidore to dauphinoise and her  
badge says Eloise. Eloise, I say,

for tonight, quietly if you must,  
let's play equals. You shall be Eloise  
and I shall just be Andie. Let's play

pretend, that we're here together  
and I want you to be happy too  
that I'm here to enjoy your food.

And as I admire her neatness -  
black trousers, white pressed shirt  
shined shoes, short cropped hair

I think of the dress I didn't wear  
the wrap, the face, the heels and legs -  
and wished she'd called me madam.

# Are you a man?!

*Hey! Mister Transvestite!*

Are you a man?!

The small white car, the window wound,  
the girlfriend to impress, observance  
in the absence of sight or sense – all  
wound into the tightness of a mind  
so glazed it couldn't see out of itself.

Not spoken, not enquired,  
but shouted – all up the wide unpeopled  
traffic-busy street, wounding open summer  
windows – while my mind is unconcerned  
to even air such self-evidential things.  
His, too small to enclose the size of a reply.

The street received his words – so good  
at collecting litter, dust, detritus – I thought  
to turn and answer; but who? The girl –  
does he always behave like this? The man –  
yes, I suppose I am a man (if I'm a transvestite)  
but a nice one; and you?

The T-word is not a word I like to use – reserved  
for self-assurance over a glass, regretted afterwards  
because it was said in expectation, in place of  
a better term, more understanding, more  
politically correct, accepting and descriptive –  
but I shall use it. He was a twat.

And if anything hung there in my thoughts,  
it was the girl, who saw me at the crossroads  
looked again and told 'her man'. I hoped  
she saw two people as themselves: me and him –  
saw one with quiet confidence, and another  
with his certainties insultingly plain.

The small white car, its windows wound,  
diminished having made no mark, except  
inside. Two people were slightly changed  
that sunny afternoon, after the jokes, the self-  
congratulatory jibes, and the transvestite who  
made their day - walked away, and defined a man.

## Front page news

On the day a man swims the Thames  
and raises a million for all those miles,  
a boy, 10, goes back to school a girl.  
Together, they are front page news on every seat  
on trains in and out of London today.

And tomorrow, one will have a bath  
and be glad he's going nowhere except  
to a fluffy embrace, be dry, warm – and will  
reminisce about the day he also saved a dog,  
and talk, and tell and forever be – the man  
who swam the Thames.

The other has plunged into a turbulence –  
white water with only his body board, and miles  
ahead, so many miles, and his alone to leave behind,  
in swirling judgement of parents unwilling to see  
the reach of an unfamiliar stroke, of a girl  
in a class of her own.

One page – picked up, picked over, passport of a morning  
and tired but persistent on the journey home –  
carries its stories to three million hands (and a million  
pounds for the courage in a river no surprise) –  
but the courage of a daughter born a boy?

Reported ignorance, condemnation, shock and taunts –  
protests at 'lack of consultation' by the school  
reflected in uncharitable commuter chat and chafe –  
and the prayers of many quiet knowing hearts in stations  
everywhere, who have travelled home this way before.

*Actor and comedian David Walliams (who, ironically plays a comedic parody transvestite) swam 140 miles up the Thames for sports charity in September 2011. He did in fact save a dog on his way. The articles appeared on the front page of The Metro newspaper on September 13.*



## Drab

Today I am dressed in a language of grey  
striding, unconvincingly, on dull flat feet –  
while my inner eyes are still ablaze with colour  
in rooms of songs and dance so loud  
I'm surprised you cannot hear.

Today I am present with many absences,  
vacancies in every thought and word, with  
lively gestures hanging hidden in hands by sides  
so straight you wonder that a wind could ever  
catch my colours, make them flow.

Today I am pressed as a flower in leaves  
of a book whose words are an irrelevance,  
whose weight only matters for preservation  
of a summer's day delight in dry, thin petals  
that lost their lasting lustres.

Today, for you, I rest in retrospect  
attired in respect of expectations rehearsed  
once more in past futures where I was all  
you wanted for sureties, betrayed today beneath  
this long-learned language of grey.

Today I rest dressed, pressed and present  
until tomorrow returns my colours and a breeze  
blows the leaves apart, raises dancing heels,  
fingers feel phrases in the air, filling my spaces  
with the language of living.

## You may not ask

No, you may not ask  
lest I ask you the same.  
Of course you're curious  
and so am I, about your need to know.

Why, if pressed, do you wear trousers?  
Is it to hide or show something  
that I don't know about you?  
Tell me, how many tattoos on your legs?

Or does it turn you on that you  
can jingle coins and keys?  
And that tight collar and tie -  
tell me, *are you into bondage?*

Do you imagine a tug on that knot  
to excite you in tedious meetings?  
While you try to see, between cross words,  
up the skirts of two across?

Have I changed? (You know -  
down below. Have *you?*) Are you  
still a teenager between your thighs?  
I will only say I am myself. And you?

No, you may not ask -  
if I touch you arm  
or incline my head, or care  
to ask you how you're feeling -

whether I do something different  
in bed or with whom or how  
or with what; because your  
mental sex life is not my concern.

So if you want to ask,  
tell me first about yourself:  
your hopes, your fears or fancies,  
where pensions meet your passions.  
Tell me how you found  
who you are and when,  
and why you're where you are  
and where you're going.

And if you really want to know -  
I'll tell you how my cat  
comforts me, and hills inspire  
stout shoes and wind in my hair.



## It's Personal

There is a lot to deal with on a personal level. I speak as a male to female trans person, but I hazard that these conversations are familiar to all. Let's face it, if it was simply hard work and no fun, it would be all courage and no reward. But it *just feels right* to find your gender balance, and when something feels right, it feels good. Not comfortable necessarily, but good. Some talk of the courage of coming out, the courage to present as a 'different' gender, the courage to express self, authentically and with integrity. But it's my world too, and no-one owns me. I'll respect you, if you respect me. Well, actually, I'll do it anyway. How about you?

## What's dis for 'ere?

He wasn't stupid.  
He just misheard in innocence.  
I tried to explain my skirt but he stared  
at my handbag beside his beer.  
*What's dis for, 'ere?*  
That's my handbag, I said.  
It goes with my gender.  
*But you're a bloke, yeah?*  
Well, yes and no.  
(Do I look like one, I mean, really?)  
It's just that when you say man or woman  
you leave no space in between.  
And that's where I am.  
*Yeah, but I could tell,  
so why do you do it?*  
Because it just feels right.  
Do you like that t-shirt?  
I pointed to the alcoholic brand.  
He laughed.  
*Yeah, that's why I'm 'ere!*  
Why am I here?  
I sat with him because he jeered.  
He wanted friends to know  
he was the quick and clever  
spotter of trannies on the street.  
I could never wear a shirt like that.  
Would your girlfriend?  
*Nah, it's all flowers and stuff for 'er.*  
But you wouldn't mind?  
*S'pose it would be cool.*  
And go with her jeans?  
*Well, yeah, but that's dif'rent innit?*  
So we're all a bit different really  
and girls can be boys?  
*Yeah, but not the other way round,  
I mean, it's, well, girly.*  
And I don't feel laddish;  
it's not what's inside me, so  
this is what you see.  
Like I said, it's 'dys-phor-ia',

gender dysphoria:  
I'm just uncomfortable as a man.  
*Still don't understand, mate.*  
No, he never will.  
I take my bag and smile.  
Maybe I should have given him a miss.

## Joy

The clasp of my bra hooks into joy –  
roses on my blouse release happy  
sighs around taut buttons tugged  
to the waist of my skirt. I turn.  
Forgive me if I radiate an inner  
loveliness too easily on your world.

For all the price  
of an inconvenient difference,  
when I am woman I am free.

Eyes lit in shades of mauve,  
lined – long lashes that move  
over dusted horizons – lips  
glossed, plum ripe to perfection.  
Nothing borrowed  
features in this face.

Just a joy, an unexplained  
completeness of myself, generously  
gendered beyond the man.

Happy heels rise and roses run,  
my skirt a spread of colours  
sending signals to those who read –  
and sail with me to winds  
of wildest liberation, finding  
lost lands loved again.



## Laser hair removal

I last smelt this when I lit the gas  
too late. A mistake that left  
shrivelled hairs along my fingers  
breaking crisply to my touch.

Now sunbed goggles glimmer red,  
focus senses on the sound.  
High-pitch crackles in my ears then  
a thousand needles sticking in.

But they aren't there, it's inside out.  
An army of bristle soldiers, caught  
in barracks on my face, break free,  
blasted from their deep dark cells.

Two-thirds will rise again and grow;  
stubborn morning marchers  
facing four sharp blades per stroke,  
to raise their spears again by five.

Six weeks on, the battle will resume –  
an unforgiving follicidal fight,  
cutting down another wave as  
lasers rays erase the razor's right.

## Prerogative

He held the door.  
I said 'thank you'  
in a voice too deep.

My skirt fluttered,  
he stuttered.  
I guess he knew.

But I was so tall!  
Not in heels but in heart.  
Just proud to be

a woman.

I'll work on the voice.  
And stop holding doors  
(except to be kind!)

## Fit for an occasion

I don't know why these heels raise me to new confidence.  
Walking taller, better balanced -

such sure shoes of mine.

I don't know why this dress graces me rather than betrays.  
But it seems to like me, and in acceptance -

lets me dance.

I don't know why this skirt fits me better than my trousers.  
It doesn't hang on shapely hips -

it hangs from my heart.

I don't know why this pendant suits my neck and feels so light.  
It never falls to blending curves -

the bead, a captured tear.

I don't know why, but when things fit you shouldn't ask.  
You wear them gladly as if with honour -

fit for an occasion.

## Roses

A dozen red to my hand  
is her yes. And her eyes  
share their jewels of rain,  
stretch a moment  
that words might break  
or a sound could tear.

I close five red fingertips  
around her stems, lay five  
against her cheek –  
a kiss, for her silent words.  
She has read my meaning  
and spoken in this present.

❧

These have always been hers –  
valentine expectation of  
restated, unnamed, love,  
now shaken, questioned  
in the gender of the rose  
its reflection of my own.

That thorns mean one,  
and blooms the other –  
always 'the rose between' –  
wounds, and draws a bead,  
red as my fingers, lips, love  
and longing for her gift.

❧

The silent damask whorls  
released to my hand, accept  
that flowers never change,  
but in the giving is a losing  
of the lover found in thorns  
to one too close in kind.

Now see why the gentle hand  
though strong, is open, asking  
to be equal in pretty things?  
And roses, read right,  
speak all discomforts  
that love is made for.

# Psychiatrist

I know who I am.  
He doesn't.  
He looks at me through spectacles  
of iridescent doctorates  
and asks me all the formal questions.

Insulated from each other –  
the right answers  
to his necessary enquiry  
prepared for diagnosis  
are in his head long before mine.

I am afraid.  
Of prior knowledge.  
Of dire knowledge. Gnosis.  
Dire gnosis. DSM.  
I am becoming disordered.

I know who I am.  
He doesn't.  
He sorts me into boxes,  
typecast for his report  
or an exam for him to pass.

I tell it as I am.  
He gazes –  
the interested professional  
sizing my life, or do I mean seizing,  
for where he thinks I fit.

I know who I am  
in my head.  
In his hands I'm not certain.  
He gives a lot less away than I must.  
My conviction is not my sentence.

# The Shock

The most blessed people on this planet are those who know they have a gender dysphoria (discomfort), tell their future partners, and marry into the bliss of total acceptance and support. For most others it is a profound shock. Being found out, or hiding – either can be a disaster. A discomfort that grows, hidden over many years, can become a strain too hard to bear. A long-term partnership or marriage on one end of that stretching rope is an intense tug of war. How can anyone choose between the love of their life and their own identity? Does it make love conditional, after many years believing it to be unconditional? None of us said: ‘for richer and poorer, in sickness and health, maler or femaler ....’ Unlike some animals, we don’t expect to change gender with age or the weather. For some, life is not worth living if their true selves cannot be realised. For many partners, the shock is simply too great for the relationship to survive: the love was, in the end, conditional on the ‘what’, not the ‘who’, and a new partnership cannot be forged.

So what can we expect of partners? The social web is bigger than ever, and opinions and expectations are much more present, visible and exchangeable than any village gossip ever was. This is not like breaking a bone: make no mistake, it invades life like nothing else. Isn’t this the greatest unfairness to visit on a partner or wife? My God, what have you done to her? Couldn’t you restrain this unreasonable behaviour? You could destroy her socially and ruin her reputation! There is no more choice, however, than with the broken bone, and the latter often bears some fault or blame; but society doesn’t exactly help you work together or lend support, through what can be a long period of uncertainty, unfamiliarity, pain and change.

A life partnership is a deeply complex thing, threaded through with every prior expectation of love, every preconception of gender and its role in the relationship. It also reaches unseen to places that remain unspoken. Continuation, when one partner realises they are transgender and must change, becomes a choice again.

## Shocking

Whose?

The accusing angle of her finger  
suspends distaste – and a stocking.  
No relief wrapped in a reply  
can change this *gift*,  
this poison present.

Her fear.

Two answers hang –  
neither the better truth –  
she doesn't want to know  
the other woman  
whose lace-edged discovery  
invades her home.

His delight

slips from her finger  
curls foetal on the floor  
its elegance as lost as words.  
Its lie even worse.  
He wills it to rise and run,  
be unfound before she speaks  
or fear to anger springs tears.

His faithfulness

so complete, so safe,  
worthless as any words.  
'It's mine.'



## Night dressed

Carpets collect their weary days:  
groomed, clean, stripped to self,  
as lights are slipping out.

*She reads.*

Neat in sensuous black and quiet,  
quilt-curled, in scents, and inner sense:  
raises eyes to night's address.

Cerise cascades from weaving arms,  
shapes his body, smooth as he was born,  
and dances to his knees.

*She sighs.*

Nothing except everything, changed  
beneath the fallen silk:  
boyfriend, lover, husband, man.

Together in this truth they lie,  
all love and lace and tight as time.  
Sapphic fears are hands on breasts.

*Held strong.*

Comforts; but aches with loss of otherness.  
Eyes closed, her fingers loving find –  
and drifts, escaping into sleep.

## Postcards

*How could I have known my husband was a woman,  
in some recess I had never known, nor noticed*

*how he travelled places where I've never been,  
nor seen the sand on his shoes, or souvenirs?*

The clues, the clothes, strange books and pages –  
your postcards to me that I didn't understand

until you said how strange it felt to be a man,  
and I realised it was I who was in transition.

Of course I cried. Hopelessly, helplessly to the  
backs of doors where hooks cried for answers

and tears to friends would have drawn questions  
to hang, aching, in a space I have yet to inhabit.

You journeyed – leaving me here at base camp,  
an ill-equipped tent we made with all we shared –

while you, head in air a thousand feet above  
my despair, offered an ice axe for my desert place.

You are the closest thing I have to my heart, yet your  
coming home is to an old place with a new language.

I should have known your postcards with foreign stamps,  
that read 'wish you were here' in your hand

were taking longer to arrive, even after  
I greeted your return. Your forgiveness-flowers as

appreciations for all my partial understanding –  
false reassurances, not of love, but of your journeys

in places so familiar to your feet by now – like  
the back of your hand, now absent of its hair,

all my landmarks erased or plucked, the map  
drawn blank as the back of this door.

Postcards, where the sea is too blue, the sky too bright -  
pictures of familiar things in unfamiliar places and

people you've met and stories you tell of a strange  
dream where a husband wants to be a wife.

And your wish-you words leading me along seashores,  
the washing waves so dizzying I daren't look down -

your confidence, a self-belief racing a tide chasing  
your heels with waves reaching, grasping, drawing, sighing -

the choice you seem to have lost - your clues, despair  
and pleading to be her. Of course I cried.

## Not every day

It isn't every day you find your husband in a dress –  
least not for the first time.

But now I almost wonder what's wrong  
if I come home and he's in trousers  
and the washing machine isn't in pieces  
on the kitchen floor.

It was the chill of the first time I realised he went out –  
like that. Like a woman. Like a *what?*

Who was this man I loved?

It wasn't just the clothes any more  
it was him. Being ... being *who?*

He has a name! He wrote it on a picture

of a pretty woman. Of him. And he's not gay!

And he's not a woman, not my wife. Not  
my lesbian lover.

Unchosen and filling my doubts.

You know when you wake from a dream not knowing  
how it might have ended?

And you want to know but you don't want to dream it again.

Today, as usual, I woke up and touched him

In his pretty silk nightdress.

He felt lovely. Sensuous in the dim morning light.

I got used to it – it's nice. I even like it.

But he doesn't wear breasts in bed. Or a wig.

Those are the falsehoods to me. They're mine and  
he has stolen them.

Sometimes I think he has gained so much.

My god, what confidence! To walk down our street

looking more glamorous than I do – most days –

except close enough to kiss, you see the stubble under the slap.

And everything he has gained sometimes feels like a loss to me  
except in bed. He feels nice there and it's as good as ever.

But I don't want to have to explain him to my friends.

Because I don't understand myself.

No, I don't understand myself. Either.

Because today I came home and held him  
silicone soft against my breasts,  
his long hair tickling my cheek and  
smudged his lipstick in a kiss.  
And it is such a beautiful dress ...

## Not like a bone

If it were my bone – the unmistakable crack, the grinding,  
splintered ends, transformation by pain,  
and body thrown from symmetry –

then I would not contaminate or as dis-ease infect the tale  
you'd tell of how and where and when it happened –  
all the efforts that you make.

So no colour-chosen cast, no bindings, sticks or wheels –  
the bestowed badges reducing time as a healer into  
a mere inconvenience.

No itches and aches, the murmurs that all is well  
to reassure you that soon, sticks returned and cast aside,  
exercise will seal the memory.

Instead there is a silence in the grinding splintered ends –  
an unheard scream inside, pain of transformation,  
an identity out of symmetry.

And I contaminate you with my wound laid bare  
that you cannot touch, tell or show to friends,  
with honour, for your help.

You are the one pitied – as if my stress fractures were yours  
instead – and my sticks strike and bruise you  
into the sympathetic arms of friends.

There can be no pride – as when pushing wheels, being  
the missing hand or leg, the shoulder, ear or care –  
for this insult is on you

as if my wheels attached themselves to your knees, or my  
sticks clamped your arms or my cast swallowed up your leg  
and my bindings blinded your eyes

and my bone became yours. Because I question the absolute of my gender, speak of pain unseen that changes my appearance for all the world to see – and changes you.

You can explain a bone, but there is no heroism in being the wife of a man whose accident is gender and who suddenly looks so beautifully wrong.

## Not walking away

I am not walking away.  
Not because I can't walk in heels - I can!  
But because I'm arriving, not departing.

I know you didn't invite her, my girl  
my 'inner woman', femme persona,  
into your life.

And it's hard, because you still think  
I'm departing. Well, I'm not.  
You grieve the hairy body while I -  
I delight in feeling my own skin.

You count my skirts and want me man-smart,  
while I, un-tied, float pretty and free.  
I've addressed myself,  
re-dressed myself and so I've changed.

No, not my jokes, my hammer arm,  
my love, care, understanding all the same -  
but men don't wear dresses, do they?

And you've never kissed a woman, until now.  
I love you, I need you, and you are mine.  
So I'm including you.

Not walking away.



## Tell me

Tell me the story of your tear  
the one that hesitates on your cheek  
that tells of something in your heart  
seeking a way to be heard.

The lightness of that glistening spot  
contrasts with the weight of thought,  
speaks that it wants to be known  
not hidden in a sideways glance, brushed hand,  
pretend for another time.

One tear, a gem: a penny for your thoughts.  
*It's too complicated.* No – please  
tell me the story of your tear, that spreads  
and dries beneath a glistening rim, before its salt  
flavours hidden secret thoughts  
and makes them more succulent than truth.

*It's too complicated. You wouldn't understand.*  
I look, to say I might and wait –  
a silence that tries to tell of trust  
of listening, learning, leaning to your heart.

Tell me the story of your tear.



# Family Acceptance

Families are all different. The family of a trans person can be a triumph or a tragedy. Those that look inwards with love achieve remarkable acceptance, those that look outwards to how their lives will be affected by other people's prejudices, can fall apart. They didn't choose this either. Whether a sibling, a son, a daughter, a father, mother, uncle or more distant, they too have been invaded by 'this thing'. And there is no retreat, even if they are ill-equipped to face it.

The fault? Surely a lot of the anger and injury has to be ascribed to being taught and socialised into a binary gender order, to the marginalisation of trans people, and the erasure of conditions from birth. Family hurts; but so does the thought of yet another generation growing to learn the same disinformation and the same prejudices and fears. Was it always like this? It isn't everywhere, but as Western ideals destroy other gender traditions elsewhere in the world, we lose alternative paradigms and ways of seeing gender and people, not as pathologised unless 'hetero-normative', but as colourful and creative.

## Prague spring, 2011

*In early 2011, a burial was unearthed, of a male interred as a female and was promptly billed by the press as 'WTF? First Gay Caveman!'.*

*The 1968 Prague Spring was a period of rapid political liberalisation ...*

Five thousand years, layering  
this on that, of change on chance  
to be dug, this day, these

crouched bones face – respected  
male bones placed, inflected  
by pots, not knives – east

away from warrior west, in the  
suburbs of Prague-to-be: a woman  
who is not a man, for

five thousand years, in which  
we have learned to write with  
fast fingers, blog and fear.

One grave, one loved person, and  
five thousand years – from clay tablet  
to wired world – in a waste of words.

Not gay. No cave. No vestments.  
Just acceptance lost this spring,  
in Prague, pressed, and buried.

## Found images

The sepia girl stares expressionless,  
shuffled from the pack of brown mottled paper  
in crisp white lace dress and Sunday shoes.  
She's young, innocent and a long time ago –  
it's the camera that says she cannot smile.  
I imagine her jumping up and running free.

Next a military man, too young to fight,  
a smaller square, a formal pose –  
maybe the one before leaving on campaign.  
He's innocent too, unsmiling but proud  
in uniform undisturbed by war.  
I imagine him standing up and marching away.

Now a grey-tone picture of an older man,  
and he is grey too, gravity of age, no smile  
in suit and tie, tall starched collar, cane.  
Nothing in his stiff upper lip betrays his life –  
his wars and wages pushed it deep inside.  
I imagine him staying there when all have left.

'That's your great grandfather', she called.  
'All of them. Yes, I know – the dress.  
They all did. Such pretty boys that  
went to war, to colonies, to banks –  
trading British manliness for all their lives.  
I imagine they forgot their growing days.'

'I wouldn't look at those', she called.  
'Erotica is as old as the camera – or paint!'  
The tiny prints scatter on the table,  
ivory nudes, draped in studios –  
nature for the discerning gentleman.  
I notice one is different, lift it up.

There's a coy sepia smile in this one,  
unblemished by time, rarely seen by light.  
In elegant gown, jewels, upright, proud –  
and innocent too. On this rare occasion  
inside out, this one true picture of him.  
I imagine he remembered the lacy dress.

## Trans drop-in

He half-rises as I drop my bag, a gentle hand extended.

'Hi! I'm Karen.'

'Hi! I'm Andie.'

We exchange these ambiguities with a shake, and smile.

By way of explanation he extends a book -

photos - opened at a party. I take it.

'That's my daughter': the proud finger hovers  
on a lovely girl laughing.

'That's my wife', as the finger slides  
to her smiling with a glass.

'And me.' His unhesitating hand now rests.

She's lovely; in an evening dress.

Yes, even in a dress, Karen with her family.

A happy family. And here he sits.

The smile between balding brow and shirt reads Karen,  
that's all I need to know, this afternoon.

We're all 'at home', in normal places such as these.

Karen came a long way, left her hair behind, but sits  
among all our differences in a peace of understanding.

She's just like me. I wish my family was like hers.

## Wives

His wife told us how he runs  
with cavaliers at weekends, playing war –  
and keeps a pikeshaft with his greaves  
in the garage, oiled against rust  
and mould.

Another mourned the early risings when  
her husband runs to chase the steam –  
coal dust in his hair and clothes on  
returning, elated and late with pictures  
and cold.

A third wipes black grease from taps  
as guttural motors run to shouts –  
black roundheads, studs, chains,  
leather and unlost youth, if grey  
and old.

My silent wife just sympathises  
at men being men who run –  
and leave wives to houses, tea like this,  
wisteria and wistful wishes all  
in gold.

My wife could tell how hers irons and  
mends clothes, writes poetry –  
wears her breasts and hair and  
listens to stories of these men as they  
unfold.

They all try to understand their running  
men retrieving histories in remote places –  
but prettiness at home, a female hand?  
It's a secret in the marriage, oiled for trust,  
untold.

# Gifted female husband

Wholly strange

like a gift – in a box for a power tool –  
that is soft, scented, indulgent.

The whole estrangement of content  
that doesn't do what it says on the box –  
instructions strangely inappropriate.

The confusion of misplacement –  
a box that led me to believe one thing  
and a gift that simply says you love me.

So who got the power tool, if I got the box –  
and the thought, and the imagination in it?  
You left nothing out, the box is full.

With this gift – of you to me – you are  
content and everything about you is  
strangely whole.



Strangely whole

like some tuck in a garment  
released to its true shape, falling.

Making itself the meaning of design  
the intent of pattern in every stitch  
responding to every move imagined.

Making sense at last to me, despite  
unfamiliarity – simply right in my mind  
yes, in my right mind – in what I am.



I gave you a box, unrecognised as small,  
and filled it with all the love I found,  
wrapped in something rather different -

but nothing that isn't true of me - though  
a gift of a female husband is, I know,

wholly strange.

# Hands

This is your lover's hand –  
fingers in hair teasing out your day  
or disentangling dreams.

It is broad as your memories,  
strong as the love you ever felt,  
gentle as on a sleeping child.

This is your lover's hand –  
light on smooth breasts, loving  
them, that announce you woman –

still adoring the swell and curve –  
a hand that sees with night vision  
and treads so lightly on your skin.

This is your lover's hand  
and, if not quite the hand of a man  
or of a woman – how is its touch?

When these lover's fingers  
part you, probe you, decide  
which thigh to walk before the other,

travel, and return with gifts  
of touch and tenderness to  
speak to you only about love –

which part inside of you,  
head, heart or belly, reads:  
'this is my lover's hand'?

Speak to this hand –  
tell these fingers at your face that  
you have a lover's hands too.



This is your hand - let it love  
where once it found coarse hair  
and is pressed - on absent breasts,

on your lover's lace and silk - inviting  
an attention you never imagined  
when welcoming their hand on yours.

This is your hand - let it inform  
your heart, your head, your belly -  
not your sex, your gender, parts -

no, not those necessary parts,  
those instructions to your eyes  
that reassure your nature.

Just let this hand in giving  
share with the hand that loves  
and simply touch, uniquely.

As lovers do.

## Trans parent

There is nothing so opaque as being  
a trans parent. And yet, in familiarity,  
they see right through you. Able only to see

in a distance who you were, without  
resting on your heart. It's hard  
to understand whether a father left off

caring, understanding or being strong  
when somewhere, inside this not-mother  
a voice speaks, vulnerable as they.

I shall never pass here, only be different –  
as if swallowed, digested, absorbed  
by someone uninvited to their home.

I have become thin – a veil on their whole  
lifetime, from first blue-eyed recognition  
to this struggle with a strangeness.

So thin, so hard to focus on, that I am  
deep as an ocean, clear as water, a sea  
through which a seahorse passes unseen.

# Finding Resolution

Let's be clear; resolution is intensely personal. How can you live outwardly as one kind of person and inwardly perceive yourself completely different? The pressures are immense, compounded by uncomprehending society where fear of difference turns to hatred, hatred to ridicule and ostracism, and then too often to violence. It can hardly be surprising that the suicide rate among transgendered people is so very high. Some do manage to live out their identity solely through presentation and simply living as the experienced gender, be that binary or more diverse.

For many, the only resolution is surgical correction or restoration of a body shaped by hormones and perhaps malfunctioning genes, into the wrong gender. One gender reassignment surgeon has pointed out that almost no other surgery confers such long-standing and life-enhancing benefits.

This final part of the journey may simply be a disappearance into normality, almost invisible and indistinguishable, getting on with life. Some want to use their experience to help others as a vital part of moving society on in recognition of a very real conflict between simplistic views of gender and reality. It's the wrong identity that gets left behind, not the person, however free they become to express their personality more fully.

## Dear Alan

She wrote the final letter without regret –  
he wasn't there, and there would be no reply.  
It just sounded like every other ending,  
no-one to blame, an amicable agreement, a  
parting of the ways

like the Red Sea – dry ground long enough to reach  
a promised land dreamed of, as yet unknown –  
a place of peace and plenty, an end of journey,  
foundations, not tents, night-guards stood down –  
a coming home

without him, his protection and the reassurance  
that had reminded her always of her weakness,  
each time she tripped and felt his arm, or leaned  
because it was the way to be seen, with a manly,  
leading friend.

The letter – that declaration of departure, that  
ticket without return, that single, that journey alone,  
marked with regrets, with memories and more –  
a life of trying hard to stay apart in order to  
keep it together

but knowing that once she has left, with love  
and respect for the man she leaves, she also takes  
his life: he fades – as the ink grows stronger, trails  
all that describes him away, success, failure and  
every best intent

and signs with love, for the man she was, whose  
friends and family feel so betrayed by this woman –  
who was his heart, his soul, his fun, his other self  
hidden in wisdom, humour, strength and care,  
preparing her

to fold this letter, kiss, lick, seal and post away –  
as she clears his clothes, empties his life, knows  
the new space is a thanksgiving, not a loss, is a gift  
for his for staying a bit too long, for finally letting go,  
to the woman within.

Dear Alan, she wrote, with love and finality - remembering good and bad, protecting his memory. Strong in her re-investment, her independence, her sureties and style - and signed herself 'Shana', meaning 'beautiful'.

## Realisations

There is never a choice, but only many choices  
never a coming out, rather many revelations

and never a realisation, just one after another again –  
as a morning veil withdrawn across the sky

with that natal, waking, feeling of something new,  
like the wonderful unfolding of flowers.



She waits quietly in a place she has made her own  
able only to be what dawns have revealed

and through the choices, the constant revelations  
the realisations, the makings of herself

one thing holds true: the bud, the early flower, dew  
were never seen – the morning but a dream.



Now never more real, never more ready for life, one  
single sadness: *she* has never been loved.

Not taken, not possessed, not seduced, persuaded or  
taken home – but met, embraced and wanted –

even desired, simply for *who she is*, without sense  
of being tainted, but rather perfumed by her love.



## Hold this day

*Hold this day, this birth day*  
write it in your diary, send me cards.

Never has a vaginal passage  
delivered such a child as this -

she is an inversion of another  
a restoration, a renaissance.

And this is her day, emerging  
without cries, or protest, or recoil

but claiming birth-right almost  
in defiance of everything umbilical -

with pain, blood, trauma and delivery  
come to claim her world, her way.

Waking, ethereal, calm, complete  
from mists of anaesthesia, almost in

disbelief at her prior parent, pregnant  
with this progeny lain so long -

a gestation - no, an indigestion,  
an indignity of containment.

I grasp this day, this birth day  
red date in every diary, calendar

every future memory, mark and  
milestone - and slip into life.

## First Fathers' Day

I couldn't find a card  
so I drew this flower instead  
and wondered if we should  
switch to Mothers' Day.

No. You're Dad, this is yours and  
I never knew your breasts.  
Which I still can't understand  
but I do like your dress.

Shall we go out then?  
It's your day, not any day  
and I still love you and nothing  
changes me from daughter.

Let's just remember I'm your girl.  
Let's play Daughter's Day to celebrate  
the one who fathered, nurtured, cared  
and loved me into who I am.

That's what we are.  
What we always shall be.  
Here, I bought you this necklace.  
It's very pretty, don't you think?