



Tiger

My lover prowls the room watching me write.
He is poised beneath thick sleek hide

which senses my fingertips tap keys
as forms rise behind glass - settle into chains.

Moonlight seeps through a gap in the curtains
onto his fur, the bands of orange and black.

In the space between lines I imagine
going to him, resting my head against his heart

to hear words echo in the cage of his bones.
I imagine curling into the pads of his paws,

his warmth, our muscles flexing as we sleep,
then I tilt my face to the cold bright screen.

My lover presses his tongue to the scruff
of my neck. Hot mute breath rises with my own.

by Shoreham poet Tess Jolly

Poems taken from: 'Touchpapers': published by Eyewear Publishing Ltd.



Valentine

Rubber hearts flash above the bar where we're propped,
making small talk while guests finishing breakfast murmur and leave.
Mr Evans shows us to our room. We avoid each other's eyes

as if the years weren't stacked behind us, as if we'd never done
what we've come here to do. You bounce the mattress for firmness,
I peel soft pink strips of salmon from salty gold, hold them

to dappled light, sinews rising like watermarks, then lay each one
like silk onto crisp shredded green. You smile, pour champagne
into plastic flutes: pale bubbles hiss and froth, subside

into delicate foam. I squeeze lemon half-moons in my fist.
You trace a line of drops with your tongue to the forked blue threads
on my wrist, place our drinks on the bedside table and lead me

to smooth sheets where we settle ourselves - spooned, then foetal -
for sleep. Damp leaves press at the window like children's hands.

by Shoreham poet Tess Jolly

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The Girl's Guide to Everything

Tonight I'm turning pages again, looking for a list of ways there are to love. Corners crease like puppies' ears, the spine breaks more easily in certain places. I follow crumbs left by my childhood self through chapters outlining varieties of cloud, how to tie a fishing knot, fold a square of paper into fox, boat, bird. Ghosting dark margins she whispers over and over: *cirrus, altocumulus, nimbostratus*, laces her fingers around each intricate twist and fold.

I echo planets she's memorised: *Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars ...* Their names spool through the room like a message I've left on an answer-machine: I know the words but I don't recognise the voice. She's the writing revealed beneath wallpaper, the pound notes unearthed from a diary and here, now, as I close the book on diagrams of how a body grows, she's the skin that blows across my bones, the shadow-fronds patterned on my fingertips.

by Shoreham poet Tess Jolly

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Bridge of Shoes

It's late afternoon when we reach the footbridge.
I'm wondering if I'll always marvel how quickly,
at this hour, the sun moves through the sky,
how of all the colours these are perfect to end a day:
love, warmth, the life that pulses beneath our skins.
Our children have cycled ahead. Kai is freewheeling
then he slows to ask what it is: pairs and odd shoes
tied to the fence by their laces or hooked on by their heels.
There is every type of footwear here: the new silver stilettos
I slipped off to walk, giggling, arm in arm with you –
the birds just beginning to wake, bakers at their ovens
and the milk van trundling through half-lit streets –
nothing more ahead of us than to curl together
into the hours we had left and sleep. The boots I wore
to climb Scafell Pike, tongues still whispering stories,
the Doc Martens your parents didn't like because
it wasn't what they thought a son of theirs would wear.
I learn later the shoes were left in protest but that's
not what they mean to us now: just visible
in the darkening sky are those who have loosened
their bindings and managed – if only for a moment – to fly.

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