

A thousand crossings

by Ian Humphreys

Before leaving, they seeded coded words
under sunflowers, milk thistle and jasmine,
submerged in a paddy field,
buried in dust
below a nailed-mute floorboard.

Sacred words,
slipped from one tongue to another.

And for one moment, perhaps just a breath,
fear fled their body until
they swallowed it afresh,
a gutful of granite and ocean.

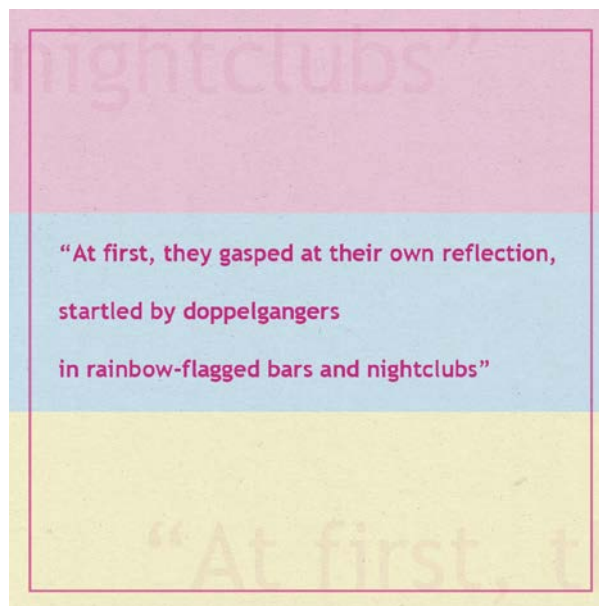
They moved invisibly,
folded between pages of the Quran, the Bible,
a locked diary. Tucked unseen
inside an amber-beaded purse,
under the chassis of a truck.

When they finally reached their new home
people looked right through them.

At first, they gasped at their own reflection,
startled by doppelgangers
in rainbow-flagged bars and nightclubs.
Most times, the mirror beamed back,
welcome-sister-brother-auntie-lover.
Other times, it fractured into dark shards.

It took a lifetime to embrace a new language,
to learn how to shout their own name.

Years after leaving, they dared dream
of words they had planted,
of new voices
stirring apple orchards, palm groves,
sweetening acres of yam,
pushing through clay, concrete and bone,
lifting city smog
and rising like music, song,
early morning prayer.



West Yorkshire-based poet Ian Humphreys was commissioned by West Yorkshire Queer Stories in 2019 to write five new poems inspired by stories contributed by Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC). Ian writes:

'A thousand crossings' explores the common theme of QTIPOC having to leave their homes or birthplace to gain acceptance. At one end of the scale are people, like myself, who leave a rural English village to 'come out' in a big city. At the other end: a gay couple who has to flee Pakistan because of death threats from their families and the Taliban.

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Like a record, baby

by Ian Humphreys

Last night, a boy told me
he'd travelled over 4,000 miles
to dance at Queens Court
and that if he spun fast enough
really fast
he could make the world rotate
a little quicker,
days glimmer that bit sooner
back home
for people like him.
For people like me.
*Come, hold my hand, he said,
and don't let go
or we'll fall off the edge.*
He vanished before the slow songs.



West Yorkshire-based poet Ian Humphreys was commissioned by West Yorkshire Queer Stories in 2019 to write five new poems inspired by stories contributed by Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC). Ian writes:

'Like a record, baby' references the nightclub 'Queens Court' [a fixture of the Leeds gay scene since 1996, occupying the spot of the former Charlie's Nightclub] which came up in quite a few of the interviews. The poem attempts to link, through surreal imagery, queer people living in relatively free and safe Western cities to those who are unable to 'be themselves' in their home country, because going to a gay club, for example, would be too risky.

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i

by Ian Humphreys

I black I white
I British I not?
I city I tree
I sessile pedunculated
I queer or straight

when I walk that mudded line
down the middle

I'm fearless boxed-in
Untickable ubiquitous
I'm northern South China

Ricepotatapastarasta

I, me, myself, the-one-and-only, I
I, product of another, other
I, I, I

I'm words crammed in my mouth
dripped on me tongue
I spit some
others I eat like air

I love, I hate, I'm love, I'm lost
I am my father, my son and
my holy mother

I am no ghost

I flesh I blood group O

I lyric third person natterjack
Formal Free



West Yorkshire-based poet Ian Humphreys was commissioned by West Yorkshire Queer Stories in 2019 to write five new poems inspired by stories contributed by Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC). Ian writes:

'i' explores Intersectionality and/or 'inbetweenness' - another common theme. None of us is only one thing or another, we're contradictions of many things, race, gender, sexuality, class, education, and many of us have fluid identities. The poem looks at how slippery identity can be, how QTIPOC are often 'othered', and at the same time it celebrates uniqueness.

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Seeing the light

by Ian Humphreys

The Vikings smashed through the roof.
*About nine hundred years ago –
four millennia after Maeshowe was built,*
our chirpy guide informs us.

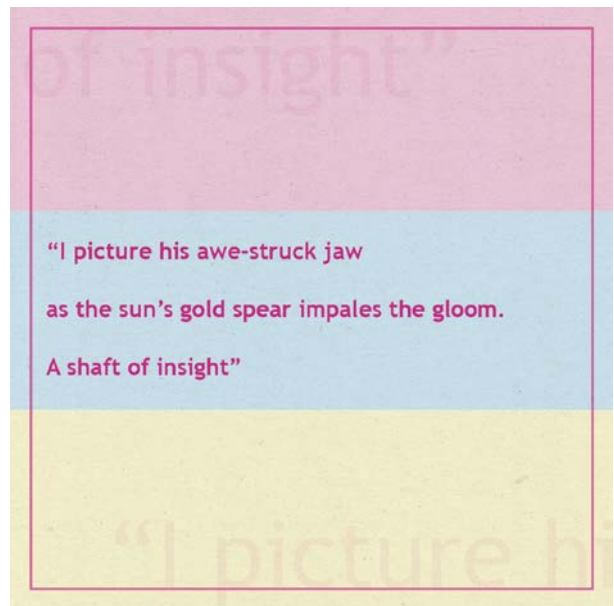
She translates a small faded wall engraving
that brings to mind a line of pine trees
scratched on a desk by a bored child:
Ofram the son of Sigurd carved these runes.

*Famously, Maeshowe's entrance tunnel aligns
with the setting mid-winter sun
to illuminate its central chamber
with a minor miracle.*

I imagine Ofram – longing to escape
a world of pillaging and chainmail
masculinity –
notching his name inside the Neolithic burial
cairn
nine hundred winter solstices ago.

I picture his awe-struck jaw
as the sun's gold spear impales the gloom.
A shaft of insight.
Battle axe clatters

to sandstone floor. And there,
projected on the back wall:
a shimmering doorway of light,
waiting for someone brave as a Viking.



West Yorkshire-based poet Ian Humphreys was commissioned by West Yorkshire Queer Stories in 2019 to write five new poems inspired by stories contributed by Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC). Ian writes:

'Seeing the light' touches on another shared theme I identified while listening to the collection: that moment of realisation when you know you have to take a step into the unknown to survive. Again, this could simply be a British QTIPOC going to a queer club for the first time; but it might involve a more perilous journey; a refugee fleeing persecution because of their sexuality or gender identity. I recently returned from a trip to Orkney and while there I visited Maeshowe, a place steeped in mystery and spirituality, which sparked the idea and central metaphor of the poem.

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Prayer for The Fabulous Ones

by Ian Humphreys

Hail *Big Maries*, full of gin,
The Love is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst drag queens,
and blessed is the fruit on thy headpiece, Jesus,
that is the *biggest drunkest Mary* I've ever
seen.
Holler-at-the-moon – you wigslip Mothers
of Stonewall, of Pride,
of Hamoudi al-Mutairi, aged 14,
stabbed to death in Iraq for 'looking gay',
of Russian queer rights activist, Yelena
Grigoryeva,
murdered after her name and address
appeared online
on an anti-LGBT 'hit list'. The year of our
Lord 2019.
Sashay for us, *Big Maries*
and those who sing against us,
now and at the hour of last orders. Amen.



West Yorkshire-based poet Ian Humphreys was commissioned by West Yorkshire Queer Stories in 2019 to write five new poems inspired by stories contributed by Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC). Ian writes:

'Prayer for the fabulous ones' was written to remind QTIPOC, queer people in general and straight people here in West Yorkshire and the UK that the LGBT+ community should not take our freedoms for granted. Although it's important to celebrate our culture, our Pride, we shouldn't lose sight of those less fortunate than ourselves and, ideally, we should fight for their rights in the same way others who came before us fought for ours.

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