



Zadissa

An anthology of verse by  
Alexia Sloane

*Flushed  
skins*

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## **DEDICATION**

For those who deeply love the Earth and the beings on it and also for those who are, so far at least, untouched by the beauty of which they are part.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My special thanks go to a few people in particular:

Firstly, I am deeply grateful to my illustrators, Lauren Marshall, and sisters, Elmira Zadissa and Ramona Zadissa, for the front and back cover pictures as well as for the illustrations of some of my poems and for also preparing the entire design of my anthology. I had some ideas for illustrations, but required artists who were willing to work with me to realise them. I therefore owe them the accurate translation of my mental images into physical art.

Also thanks should go to my father who edited the anthology, following my instructions relating to the order of the poems, advising me from a sighted perspective on the look of the final product and putting up with my constant revisions.

Finally, I am indebted to my composer friend, Kate Honey, who, without ever influencing my work, first introduced me to the idea of art as non-violent activism which lies at the heart of this anthology.

## **PREFACE**

For several years, I have been writing music and poetry. My main influences in poetry are Rainer Maria Rilke, Walt Whitman and Seamus Heaney, whose beautifully crafted language, free rhythms and often subversive subject matter have fascinated and moved me since I discovered them. This is particularly true of Rilke's wonderful Duino Elegies, in which the themes of relationships, emotions, nature and spirituality - ideas central to much of the poetry in this anthology also - are explored in a myriad of striking and vivid images.

I feel that we live in a society concerned with drawing distinctions between things: between races, religions, cultures and practices. Yet I believe it is only through a recognition and embracing of what unites us, and through taking much less binary views on life and on reality than we currently hold that freedom of expression and release from the sense of restriction and isolation so rife in our capitalist, human-centric world can truly be attained. It is therefore my sincere hope, through this illustrated anthology of my poetry, to encourage my readers to open to the idea of the arts not merely as disparate refuges from the many difficult and painful aspects of life in the 21st century Western world, but rather as a medium, taking many different forms, through which we can come together and work to resolve the conflicts which keep us apart.

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## QUOTATIONS

“Till rising and gliding out I wander’d off by myself,  
In the mystical, moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Looked up in perfect silence at the stars.”

From Walt Whitman’s *When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer*

“You patient birds, who all this weary winter wait for spring.”

From Siegfried Sassoon’s *Sing Bravely In My Heart*

“Throw the emptiness out of your arms  
To add to the spaces we breathe; maybe the birds  
Will feel the expansion of air in more intimate flight.”

From the first of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*

“A gazing out from far away, alone.  
And it is not particular at all,  
Just old truth dawning: there is no next-time-round.”

From Seamus Heaney’s *Lightenings*



## **Strange Birds**

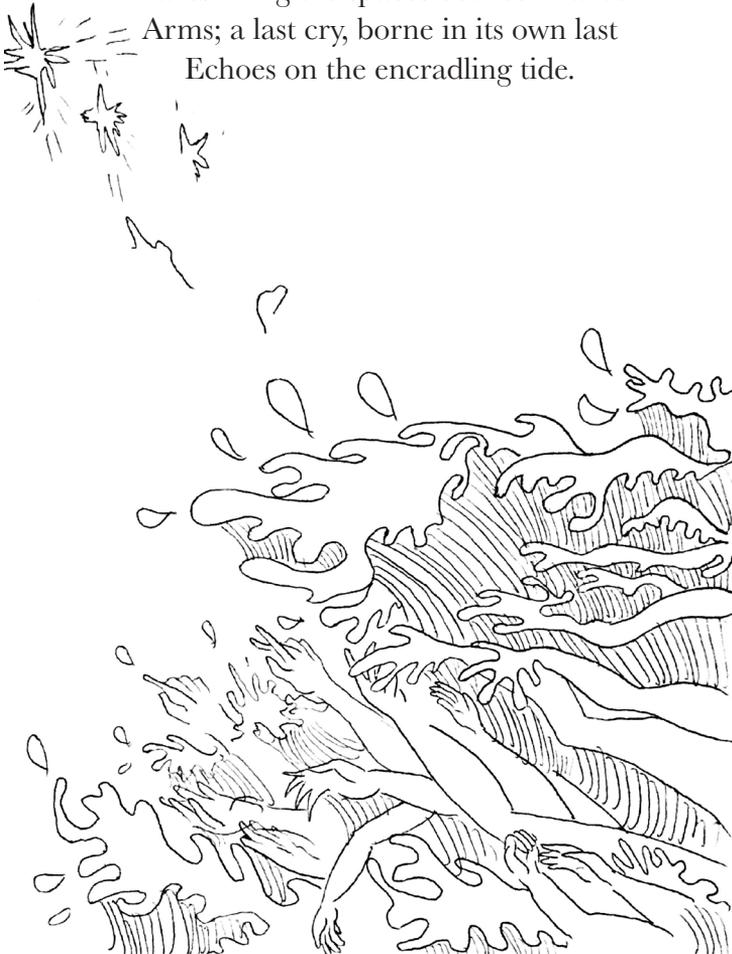
What strange birds are these, who open  
Their wild, enwondering wings and rise like wordless  
Prayers into the waiting silence  
Of the still night's listening heart,  
Clothed like angels in an unseen  
Symphony of unstirred flight?  
What loneliness lies unhidden in their unbound  
Course, the numinous vision of their  
Softly radiant feathers, their ancient, unknown  
Secrets of deep, unquiet, endless motion?  
Where is their dwelling-place, beyond the last  
Shadows of the remnants of the freest  
Stars or the waning reaches of the moonlight's tides?  
Is their shelter on an untouched  
Shore of ocean, Earth or other sky?

## **Stifling**

Voices heard darting into countless drops  
Of scattered thoughts to hide from  
Safety; lost cries muffled by the weight  
Of their tears' first truths, which have frozen  
Their flowing into disparate flecks  
Of still, dry ice, seemingly unshaken  
By the stifling of the touch of its  
Buried soul. A miscarried  
Silence. It is night.

## Elegy For Alan

Thrown upon an alien shore, an outstretched, shot-down  
Star plucked too early from its ruined  
Sky, the dust of many broken  
Waves filling the spaces between naked  
Arms; a last cry, borne in its own last  
Echoes on the encradling tide.



## **Ceasefire**

Shards of many silences. Long years,  
Lost in the flux of a moment, strewn  
Across a shaken world with the laid-out truths  
Of unsaid words. Fragments of life,  
Scattered like dust between breaths which draw them in  
And fade with the sun-bleached flashes  
Of a mourning morning moon, waning...

## **Two Beach Balls**

Red

We found it on the shore:  
A sun, fallen, taken,  
Lost. And we took turns  
To throw it into each others'  
Laughing arms, watching the blazing  
Fly and fade between the shades of wind,  
Until it burst and bled its  
Hope into the blinding sand.

Blue

Then we found another:  
A blue globe of shaded  
Countries and empty spaces  
For seas. Again, we pushed it  
Away from ourselves, high, trying  
To touch a hovering gull, then,  
Weeping, saw it sink like fearful  
Silence into its blank reflection.

Search

When we returned the next day  
To find them, the sky and the place  
Where the sea had been were grey and  
Empty, the old horizon's edge  
Lay in distance, wrinkled, torn.  
And as we scoured the sand for timid  
Signs of life, we touched the absence  
Of the wind and prayed for a swift unravelling.

## **Lullabies for Gaia**

### Lullaby 1. Breaking Out of Trance.

We are shooting our wasted  
Palimpsests of mist upon  
Her light and drowning her in  
Stolen raptures of wondrous  
Life, lost in her liquid  
Thoughts like fragile tears  
In a barricaded heart.

We are taking her early  
Autumns of murmured,  
Wild emotion, drop by  
Drop, and pouring its  
Shatterings into the cracks  
In our muffled hearts to  
Cover them and trap our  
Silenced fears of walking on  
The quagmires inside  
The unhealed wounds.  
We are seeing the voids  
Expand and grow hard into themselves,  
Their edges fading and falling  
Away to our blurred  
Images of harsh inertia,  
Stifling a quiet flock  
Of sacraments, throwing their  
Seeds to the opened spaces

In the air and the new lifelines  
Of the sky, freshly cut  
By hoards of hands, to  
Nourish omens borne on  
The hungry, rising wildness  
Of the winds and the strange  
Rebellions and vanishings  
Of precious tides.

We are watching our own  
Suicide fall in  
A captured evensong  
Into a universe's begging  
For a glimpse of life,  
And sharing the shameless loss  
Of one warm wonder  
With our own emptied,  
Closed embraces,  
Filling them till they overflow  
With the hidden wish for the end  
Of their unspoken void...

Lullaby 2. Glimpses.

A rugged diaspora of motion, this patient  
Vessel tossed and ricocheted between the falling  
Fragments of mingled crests and dusty,

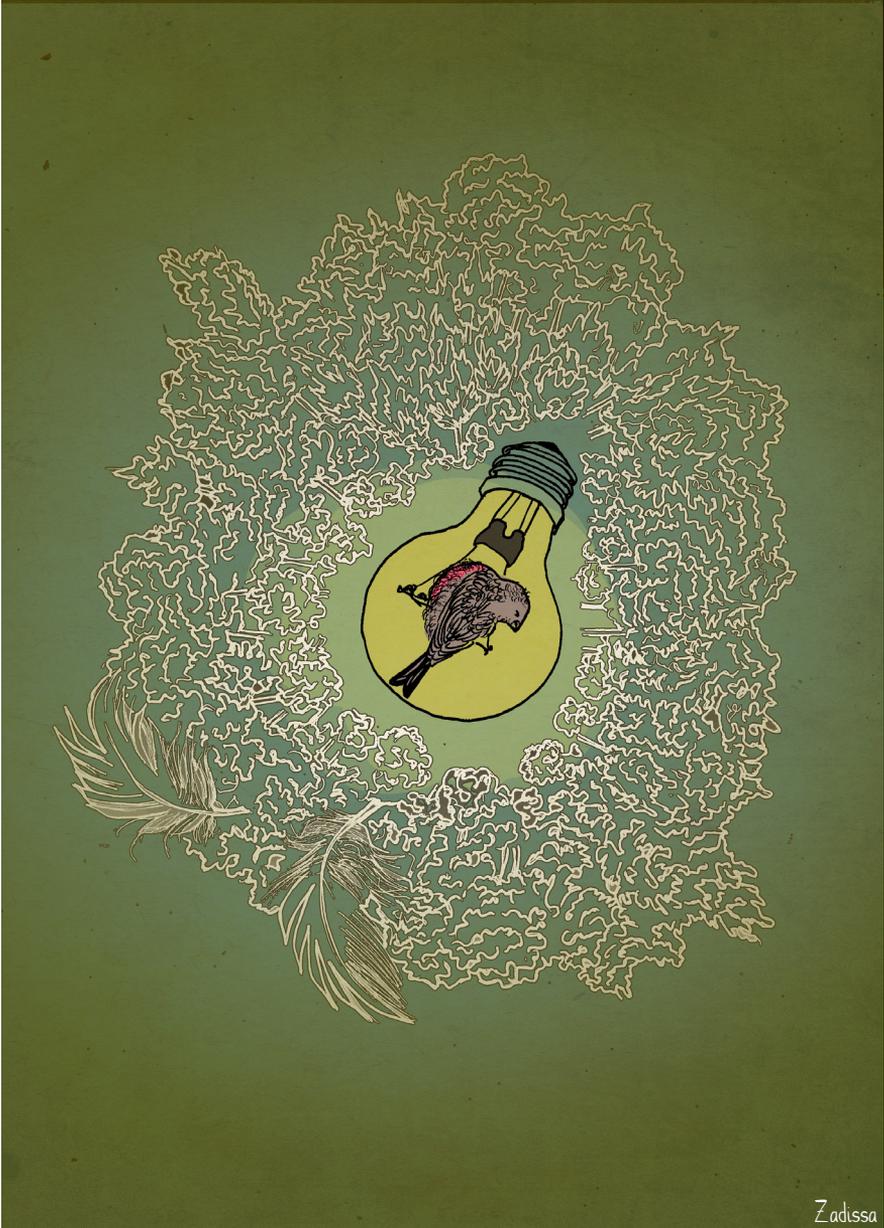
Iridescent mists of foam, lingering  
In the quiet flashes of half-lit  
Air before melting into themselves with the long  
Intimacies of slow awakening.  
Above, one wing of the world spread  
Wide and soundless, others' wakes  
Etched into its flight like silent  
Elegies to someone hidden in  
The strange, wild, thinning  
Radiancies of wrinkled shades.  
Somewhere beyond, quietly, a murky  
Lifeline flowing like one shard  
Of memory out of its own inner  
Spaciousness of being, lost between the ruins  
Of a sea and the shattered opening to  
The fading soliloquy of  
A solitary sky..



## **By the Next Age**

In shadows of soft, scattered  
Starlight woven into the whispers of the gossamer of night,  
outstretched,  
Enlaced with the untouched silence of the evening sky,  
Dusk falls in choirs of autumnal  
Leaves; their boundless voices envelope tree  
And mountain, ocean, cave and Earth.

Now, a murmur, at first enamoured with the motion of the wind,  
rises, spirit-light,  
And sifts serenely through the contents of the sky:  
No cloud... No moon... No fleeting  
Shadow of a shooting star to be held and kept in heart or mind...  
Only the solitary stars still linger, resting—just out of reach.



## Questioning

Was I born at that moment, when the last  
Shadows of day have slipped into half-light  
Like flocks of dreams, but dusk  
Has not yet fallen into echoes  
Of their afterimages onto a sleeping sky?  
Am I a stranger to the flashing  
Gaze of flame, to the speck of tear or  
Ocean whose diaphanous glow coaxes it into itself,  
To the Earth's open landscapes -  
Compassionate lonelinesses of dancing,  
To the air, with its susurrations  
Of light and flight and songs of wind,  
Breathing? They see no spaces between  
These borders for me to nest in, none beyond  
Them for me to open out my wings. But what  
Does lie there, after those edges? Desolation?  
Peace? Freedom from this harsh  
Uncertainty, piercing, clandestined,  
Of whether I am lost? Are all  
Skies closed to me?

## **Last Words**

### Sunset

The sun drifts gently down, like  
The feather from a phoenix's wing still partly  
    Wrapped in flight; it softly  
Draws apart the last wisps of cloud and  
    Trickles blue and  
    Purple and  
    Gold  
Into the open spaces: three tiers  
Laid out like a wedding cake.

And as it lays to rest below  
The frontier to the sea, we rise, and you  
Touch me with the ocean of your gaze. I  
Let the waves enfold me, carry me—where? - And  
I wish I could lose and keep you in the labyrinth of my arms,  
Emanate my warmth to clothe you in  
A silent dialogue of nameless truth...

### Dawn

I am alone.  
I see the sun rise,  
Awakened, and slowly spreading another  
Life across the empty sky. Yet my  
Heart is blind to it. With a dark meandering  
I blunder up mountain

Down valley through wood  
Across barren plain and desert void  
Of sand. A torrent falls around me,  
Drowns my limbs, my mind,  
Smothering motion, thoughts and beats until...

### Window

It stretches out before me, a vast expanse of  
All-consuming, tearing blue. It draws  
Me in as I see you—so close -  
I try to swim towards you, arms outstretched,  
Touching distance till it crumbles,  
Willing the fragments to dissolve...  
I cannot.  
They do not.  
I am imprisoned here, thrown upon this desolate, raging  
Shore, waved away by an element's  
Neutrality. And you are soon enveloped  
By the waves and pulled away—why?  
  
And I hate the God whose Hellish  
“Wisdom” judged it best to  
Forge the word “goodbye.”

## **Invocation**

Oh flight which gently casts away the broken  
Echoes of a smothered Earth, which coaxes out  
The pain from poisoned seas and  
Etches wonder into tortured skies;

Oh warmth which grows in silent  
Waves between the shoreless stars, which  
Sculpts the heart and measures out  
The web-like melody of life in  
Winged currents of soft beats;

Oh light which touches thought  
And breath, which rises in the open  
Blossom of the wind and moves the distant clouds  
To equal rains of sacred tears:

Open your wondrous arms and flow  
Your healing dawn of emptiness into my  
Night-swathed eyes, my dream-veiled mind and craving heart;  
Guide me out of monochrome, and,  
With your endless tide, embrace me...

## **In Meditation**

Breathe in the light of a green enlivening,  
Breathe out its warm blue shadows, deep  
And white. Paint with a slender brush  
Of seeing the motions of time, like the ancient  
Meanderings of a river you thought you knew  
Through the sea of its own reflections. Feel this  
Mind, as, with a wondrous blossoming,  
It opens out like a rising sky; watch the waves  
Of wonder ripple out to its moon-like  
Heart's soft shores; let their dust reach  
For and play in the birds' clear flight,  
And touch the place beyond the new horizon.

## **Invading Flight**

The swallows fly among the shattered  
Shards of air, following scraped trails that  
    Lead nowhere, searching for  
The stifled breathing spaces of the ageless  
    Sky that they are watching themselves  
    Lose; their fading  
Voices, fighting against blinding nebulas  
    Of primal cries, call  
    For the slowly sinking sun.

## **The Lamb**

The sun scraped its grey slashes  
Into the hungry shears, and they shone  
With greed like new false teeth,  
Sucking at the heat like nicotine.  
They opened wide, like spindly  
Legs, stilettoed, slicing  
The silence, the air, taking a long  
Breath in, drawing void  
Into the shrinking breeze...

The lamb stood grazing, her back  
Turned, when she felt them, cold,  
Sinking into her coat, lapping it up  
Like her mother's warm breastfuls  
Of thick milk. It fell about  
Her - white, woolly flecks  
Like tears, till she stood, naked,  
Shivering in the light...  
By now, she had stopped grazing.  
"She didn't even bleat."

## Snapshots

A rainbow, like a wave  
Of warm, nocturnal light:  
A breath taken by the sky after an eternity  
Of a melting stalactite of tears.  
Voices sculpting truth of words of  
Love, of joy, of fear.

A shadow entering, unperceived. Two figures  
Nestling behind the crowd of other colours, their fingers softly  
Wandering through each others' hair.

A flight of fallen angels  
Scattered like the petals of a dandelion  
Clock—time enveloped by a guillotine of hate and  
Thrown like ashes on its  
Winds. Love itself  
Crumbled, its image forever  
Branded on the memory of life.

The same two women, one of them now  
Lying, with the petals of a rose gently  
Opening across her brow. Like  
Lotus flowers in the Eucharist of  
Night, her eyes closed.

Two young boys' hands  
United now—forever:  
Finger between fingers... Life-lines soldered  
Into one: A single fortune held inside  
Locked palms.

Silence.

A dark sky.



## Confession

### Part 1. Pilgrimage.

My arms are as empty as a fragment  
Of a shattered sky, too solitary for the fleeting  
Glance of cloud or moon to disensnare it from  
Its bonds of void. I wish to gather  
Warmth like pebbles from a sacred shore - like firewood - until  
I am enveloped in a haze of shimmering light and  
Vanish with it into an ocean's silent spectrum of smokeless  
Sighs: another wave among  
A multitude of two, or three, perhaps. Flying  
Together across the seamless stitches of an azure  
Tide, we would hear the motions  
Of the moonlight shimmering - like  
Tacit prayers to love...  
Their harmonies would reach out to  
The lonely stars, shedding their tearless  
Gaze in silvery flecks of  
Wonderment around our watching hearts...  
Yet, like a regiment of mindless fires  
Tearing at the stillness of the waters  
Of a pool, I would be a sin  
In that Elysium: an infinite wilderness  
Of monochrome, open like outstretched arms, begging for  
A single touch from light, then withering its roots  
To ether dust with the harsh darkness of the drought that is my  
shapeless self..  
Like the memory of a nightmare to the world,  
Let me fade...

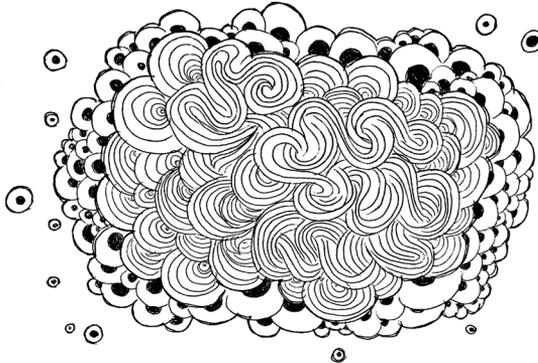
Part 2. Epiphany.

I am a place where Nature's  
Brush has slipped, which sickened Chance's twitching  
Fingers have smudged and partly  
Scratched away, a tainted, broken, swollen  
Miscarriage of love, or  
A thing unleashed from short-lived lust, disinherited  
And christened Blasphemy. I want to fell the withered  
Edges of my arrhythmic heart, to  
Relish luscious leaves of pain like  
Waves of liquid silver on the parched lips  
Of a begging child, or the flavour of a first  
Flight to a newly winged bird, or soft  
Illumination to eyes which have been blind.  
My mind is a torturous mirage:  
The image of, at times, perhaps,  
A lotus flower not yet released from mud,  
Which shows itself in truth to be  
A quagmire: at a touch, it  
Sinks and strays from others' ways like lost  
Lambs on a stormy dawn, or  
Winds let loose by curious men which blow their vessels far from  
Home and morph into disunity. I want to hold  
Repose: to be embraced by the deep, enfolding, dreamless  
Monochrome where even loneliness' coarse shadows will  
Freeze like tears half-fallen from  
A lightless night, and melt when

Moonlight strokes them, afraid  
Of beauty and of truth and incompatible  
With love; to stop growing and then  
Striving to erode the boulder  
Of this leaden spirit until no space remains  
To force it still. Yet peace is for the missionaries of  
Life: for those who teach the art of  
Warmth and practise it; I am  
Formed of ashes cast in ice; I  
Wish to free the universe from my unworthy  
Being, from this incarnation of pure sacrilege which  
Shames the notion of enlightenment by passing  
It through thought: let me melt and be  
Wiped like a blinding nebula of toxic dust  
Away from the ether's surfaces, and leave  
Their shining clarity unharmed.

In the name of flight and truth and warmth and love and light:

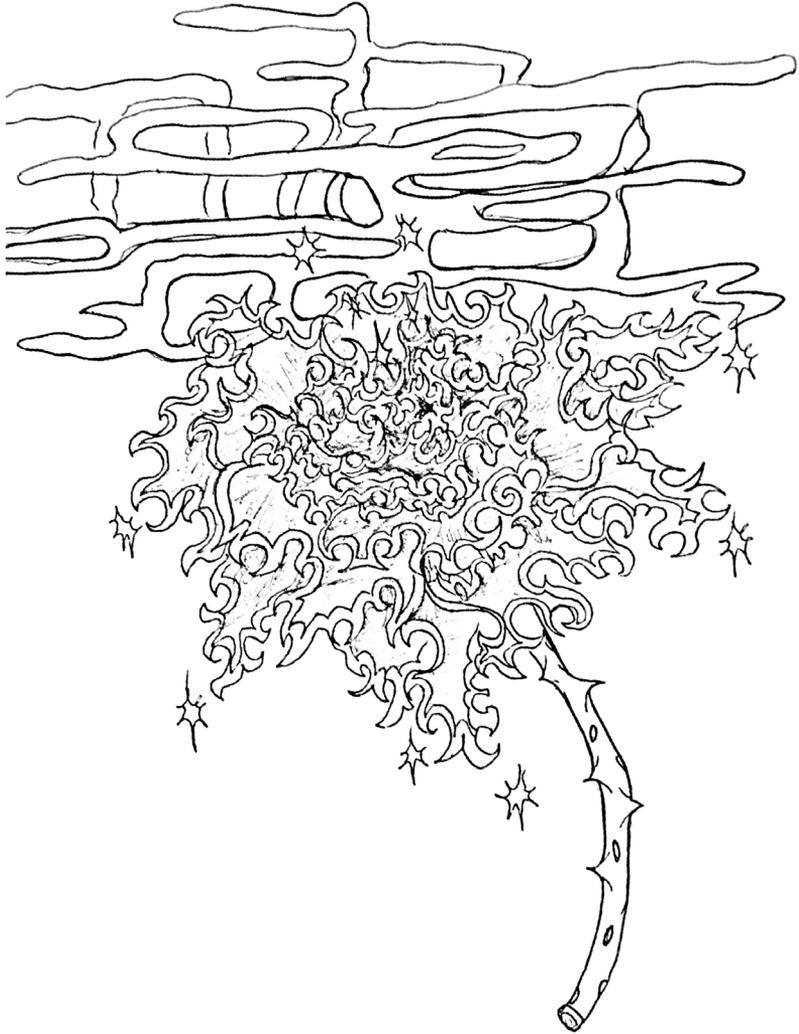
Let me fade...



## **Postlude**

The silent cries of stifled  
Light reach across the ages, calling.

For a wind has swept away  
The stars, leaving the far sky  
Barren, raw and wild. Below,  
The naked Earth is laid out,  
Open, bound and derelict.



## Devotions

You are the clear horizon, with its endless flowerings  
Of quiet light. You are the warm  
Mandala of diaphany which weaves  
Its myriad of bonds between the radiant  
Crest of wave, the gently opening  
Arms of spirit wind and the still  
Meandering of the outstretched stars.

Stay open, sacred flower, and let us  
Share the nectar of each others' hearts.

You are a wordless elegy to time:  
The angels' place for flight beyond the broken  
Promise of the sky - the long  
Embrace of holy darkness and of sourceless light.

### Glossary

Mandala: a circular figure representing the universe in Hindu and Buddhist symbolism.

Diaphany: from *diaphanous*, meaning, especially of fabric, light, delicate and translucent.

## **A Call**

Release your stifled wings, and  
Let us fly together far beyond the clutching reaches  
Of this labyrinthine wilderness.  
Flow back the rising silences to their buried  
Openings, and throw the ashes of life's flux out  
Like ancient candlelight upon the wind.  
Take each others' hands, outstretched  
Across the depths of loneliness, and, from this blinding  
Forgery of one fragmented night,  
Embrace our way to a warm infinity of equal light.

## **Sunyata**

Softly, a wave of holy darkness,  
Shining, its motion blossoming deeply  
Into open stillness: the song of another  
Shore, unstirred; softly, the hushing  
Light of one warm expanse of silence where unquiet  
Time and the endless spaces between lonely shards  
Of truth melt with our dreams'  
Illusions... Free in a mystic wave  
Untouched by moon or mist as we awake.

### **Glossary**

Sunyata: the Buddhist idea that matter and concepts have no intrinsic existence – often translated as 'emptiness'.

## **A Prayer**

Let us watch the silken dust of moonlight  
    Fall, its silent song's mist  
    Opening the cages of our minds and  
    Freeing their flight in a wave of liquid  
    Amethyst and blossoming shades  
    Of patient flowers awaiting  
    Light; eternalised in outstretched  
    Unity to heal the emptiness of our  
Newly open arms. Let us feel the close  
    Holding of the lonely Earth and  
    Soft touch of one hushed sky's ageless  
    Motion... May the angels share their  
Wings with our ablazing souls, and show us  
    How to reach out for the holy warmth  
    Of the empty sky's embracing. And may  
The silken mist of moonlight rise, and, like  
    A wonderful mirage in deathless rain,  
    Clear, and quietly vanish back to release  
    More prisoners of deserted shores.



## **Author's notes**

1. I finished up with nearly thirty poems which could have been included but then decided to cut some of them. So the twenty which are left are what you can read here.
2. The glossaries which follow a few of the poems are intended to give explanations of words, either because they are names or I think are likely to be unfamiliar to most readers for other reasons.
3. Readers are welcome to redistribute this anthology if they wish. However, no charge should be imposed on anyone for copies. In fact, if any fee is asked for at all, this should be purely on a basis of donations to charity and should only apply to those who are able to give.

## **About the author**

Alexia Sloane, who recently turned seventeen, is studying for her A levels in Cambridge. Her favourite pastimes, apart from writing poetry, are playing the flute and composing classical music and she hopes to become a professional composer and poet in the future.



This partially illustrated anthology of poetry was compiled over a little more than a year when the writer was between fifteen and seventeen years old. It explores themes of relationships, nature and spirituality, and attempts to respond thoughtfully and creatively to some of the issues that exist in society today.

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