

Foreword

Gobs Collective launched in March 2020. The group of emerging poets met in Nottingham Trent University's Dance Studio, starting on a journey of development in a series of creative-writing workshops with Lead Artists Loney Smallhorne and Bridie Squires.

Shortly after, the world went into lockdown following the news of the Covid-19 pandemic. Gobs Collective continued their workshops in online video-chat sessions and worked towards a digital stream of poetry films instead of the once-planned live showcase at NTU's University Hall.

During the programme, many participants were juggling working from home with educating and entertaining children, navigating supermarket queues, grieving, confronting anxieties, and coping with everything else that comes with a worldwide crisis.

The bravery and determination of everyone involved in this project is a testament to the resilience and creativity inside all of us.

Here's to the words. Here's to the collective.

Thank you to our partners Nottingham Trent University. Gobs Collective is part of NTU's Curated & Created programme and is supported by Apples and Snakes. Many thanks to Makermet and LeftLion Magazine too, for their continued support.

Cover by Lily Petkova

Contents

Cleo Asabre-Holt - Bathroom Lockdown on Berridge Road.....	4
Claire Lady - Window Frame Staring.....	5
Jenny 'Hibword' Hibberd - iAddict.....	6
Beth Parker - Shopping List.....	8
Cullen Marshall - Holding Back the Twilight.....	9
Aalia Zorko - Ali.....	11
Kate Hewett - I want to write you a letter	15
Lily Petkova - The Station.....	17
Daron Carey - Unborn Man Meets Father	19
Stacie Esposito - Dreaming.....	20
Emilie Mendham - Mother	22
Carly Williams - Grow	24
Ella Burns Robbins - Oxymoron.....	25
Annie Alleyne - Ticking All The Boxes	27
Jay Sandhu - What is Privilege?.....	28
Ferzana Shan - A Game of Conscious.....	29
Hugh Dichmont - Hostages.....	30
Prakash Mahato - Fragile.....	31

Bathroom Lockdown on Berridge Road

It's lockdown and I'm trapped in my bathroom
Door handle snapped off, clean
Surfaces beam back at me
"You live alone, you know."
But I'm not going to let fear take grip
Because there'll be a way out of this.

My fingers claw at door expanse
Finding nothing to clutch, prize open
Then I realise my phone's been left in the living room –
Which isn't my norm
So it's just me.
And the bathroom.

Broken nail file gets poked into keyhole
But nothing happens at all
So I pace
Wait
For an escape plan to float in
Blank space
Extractor fan swirls
"What a silly little girl."

Mirror catches me fretting
Letting panic set in
Pink patches of distress spreading
Reminds me of being ill:
How quickly I could spiral
Hospital admissions, way back.

Lax cold tap drips
"There's no getting out of this"
Echoes of so much overcome sadness
Where there really was no way out:
Of bedbound living
Of definitely not existing.

I start eyeing up towels for bedding
Consider this as my resting place –
It's lockdown and nobody's expecting me
So I pace
Wait
Peer through door hole
Hoping for an idea to come.

Sat on floor I rummage through toiletries
Toothpaste, hairspray: uselessness.
A pair of scissors: prize!
Once used for a different sort of release
I slot them into the chamber, twist.
And I am free.

Cleo Asabre-Holt

Window Frame Staring

It's 4 in the morning in
The quiet of this lockdown
The street light picks out leaves below.
As rain plinks on window pane
Occasional cars mix with
The earliest bird chatt'rin so.

I Zoomed until late
With friends from all over
Who DJed, we danced and dressed up.
We had such a laugh!
It went on for hours
It felt really good to catch up...

But when you switch off,
There's just you and a blank screen
And moments extinguished in air.
No ending, no exit,
No leaving, no walking,
Just dying emotions hang there.

So now I'm left silence
Just window frame staring
Watching leaves shrug off heavy rain,
Heads hit distant pillows
In London and Berlin
And I'm sealed in my lockdown again.

Claire Lady

iAddict

Hi I'm Jenny and I'm addicted to social media
I'm logging on more frequently and my posts are getting greedier
I'm hooked up on these likes and my hunger's getting speedier
I'm cluckin for the checkin,
I keep scrollin through ma feed and I
just can't stop
screenin till I drop
My eye lids loppin
Between upload poppin
I'm loggin in and loggin out of my big life
Out of my zig zag moments
My flow's entrenched in thinkin digital
My digits'll cramp up
and I'll be all arthritic pixels
I'm drownin betwixt all these algorithmic thought tricks
I'm a stalkin
I'm a squawking
I'm a chat to back quick talking
and I can't help nervin about exposure
Vulnerable emotions
All showing off
All poser
Tryna maintain composure
While my internal net worth
is mounting on my internet surf,
I'm getting wet for networks
Soaked eyes in
Hypnotised in
Even my sighs are online and
My brain's on contract
I'm a deal, I'm real, I promise
I'm visible, I'm seen
Dosed up on dopamine likes
Ego spikes
I post therefore I am
Lappin up waves of notifications
Red eyed seething quick elation
Pleasure troves of personal information
Spyglass crook peeking in
Looking in your windows
Watching where ya life goes
Or at least the bits you wanna show
Eavesdropping on ya convos
Camouflaged in ether poncho
Neither here nor cable
This cloak drapes me in fables
Comparison's labels
The more I engage the more I'm fake rewarded
Hoarding reactions
Making impact, gaining traction
I'm a ravenous squirrel, shovelling views
Groveling for first feed priority it's true
I'm virtually active, I must have superiority
Fast track my expressions

If I refrain, gosh
I'll be forgotten
I'll go rotten peach
I've been brainwashed to preach

Will I reach you?

Will you find me?

Will I ever find me?

Jenny 'hibword' Hibberd

Lockdown

Remember a time when the country was free
The locks on their lives they chose to leave be
shackles and chains they put on themselves
bolted and shut, sat tight in their cells.
Enslaving constraints to dwell in their box
musty dark holes, ruled by the clocks
Afraid to escape, tormented by doubt
the freedom they knew, they can't live without.
Alone with their thoughts, meditation profound
The world standing still, there wasn't a sound
So to dream of a place in their minds, truth to see
The walls of their prison, for them to break free.

Beth Parker

Shopping List

Cobs
Chocolate biscuits
Chick peas
Hope
Avocado
Oven chips
Self worth
Dog food
Decent sleep
Marmite

Beth Parker

Holding Back The Twilight

Her eyes jolted provided with full PPE
barrelling through to intensive care
stopped, behind the cold silence of a clean protective screen
Blinking passions mist over her hills

Her cornerstone laid slabbed
pale frail fixed to a ventilator
Unaware she was there
each excruciating beat tortured transfixed by dyspnoea
Selflessly she wished to swap places
watched breath falter body buckle
Out of reach from her loving arms
Nurses guarded what dignity remained
comforted his conclusion her bereavement
Their partnership so close, divided by the virus
She was one of too many scorned
Nearby, a witness to goodbye

Now she is carefully

Holding back

The twilight

Home
alone
Locked down
inside bleeding heart halls
zoning out to memory lane
preserving their halved hearthstone
in the fleeting robin who shepherds the morning

I call, asking how she's doing.

The landline crackled like a stethoscope over an inflamed chest
she plucks one star from her twilight, and shows me the other side of a black hole
like a blind person painting, she's instinct and muscle memory
Uncloaked a crumbling castle
leaves rubble in repair
saves her ears this solo of springs song
the promise of her autumn
abscission of a tomb stone
day dreaming of reunification

Holding

Back

the Twilight

Empathising through technology leaves a leering sparsity
A gut full of rusted iron
Trying to alleviate suffering, feels fanciful
though well intended, attempts to comfort sometimes feel demagnetised
Words fail, our letters blank
No floaty syllables to weave
just listening thoroughly

Holding ground for her to yowl
to weep what needs to be said
A gruelling shadow soup to swallow
She scoops a fleck of technicolour
throws it into the gathering night sky

Carefully
 She held back
 twilight
 between her teeth

Cullen Marshall

Ali

Born in 1990
A Nottingham nineties baby
The first child, grandchild of the family

Age 3
A brother
A replica
An impersonator

Age 5
Cars were his first love
Naming every car that drove past
Seemingly smeared colours flying through air
They were people
In his eyes

A 5 year old boy with bleach blonde hair
Hazel eyes
He looks up to the sky
And he wonders
Who am I?

10 years old
A baby sister
Bleached blonde hair like his
The same pure smile
The same hazel eyes

The two boys and the one girl
Three and free
Playing

A perfect life
A family united as a whole
A singular shoelace
That locks everything together
Unseparated

Life was a game of hopscotch
Leaping in synchronised hope
Into the unknown

The first hop: school, friends
The final leap: tying your shoelaces

Hop
Hop
Leap

"Mum, Dad; I want to be a lawyer. I want a bright yellow lamborghini so..."

A 10 year old kid with dark brown hair
Hazel eyes
He looks up at the sky
And he wonders
What is life?

Age 18
Uni

Learning how to tie his shoelaces

Year one - complete

Year two

Hop
Hop
Leap

A foreign feeling
Agonising every pound of flesh
Puncturing organs
Shredding the body

And then

A game of hopscotch
Unquestionable
Unanswerable

Hop
Hop
Leap

A young law student at the University of Birmingham
A popular student
A pressured
A young man
A brother

A 19 year old student at the University of Birmingham was found in a pool of blood at his student house on the campus on Friday 13th November. His death has been confirmed. The police are treating his death as suspicious

Under investigation

"We do not think our son would commit suicide"

SUICIDE

Suicide

SUICIDE

A 19 year old man with jet black hair
Hazel eyes
He looks up into the night sky
And he says
It's my time to die

A family
Torn apart
A mother
A father
A 16 year old brother
A 9 year old sister

Tormented by rumours
Yearning for truth

But numb

I thought
He would come back
It was Christmas

His birthday
My birthday
Easter
Summer
Christmas
Again?

Hop
Hop
Leap

Age 9
I stopped playing hopscotch
I tied my shoelaces

Unconscious
Blocking it all out
Oblivious to the world around me
Time drew nearer
It drowned me
Longing to just be
To be free
Once again
To stop all this pain and this suffering
To live a normal life
And then an emotion escaping explosion

A hop
Hop
And then a leap

And then
I was seeing
Finally thinking
Remembering

I grew

A 20 year old girl
With dark blonde hair

A 26 year old man
With jet black hair

A 63 year old man
With dark blonde hair

A 56 year old woman
With jet black hair

Hazel eyes
Green eyes
Blue eyes
Brown eyes

They look up at the sky

I miss you.

Aalia Zorko

I want to write you a letter

Fill it up with everything that is
Everything that i am not
Everything that
I am

Fill up the paper until the weight
Cracks through
Seeping through
The ink blackening nails

The words hitting the table
Vibrating into morse code

I want to write you a letter

And i send morse code

I wish i had stilts
a jetpack
Or wings

I would reach the clouds
Stay for a while
What happens to the people with unsent letters?

I pluck a cloud still warm
The wind takes it
I wanted to fill it with everything
That i am
That i am
Not

I sink back to write you a letter
To send in the post
The burning letter perfumes my clothes, hair, skin
Will these smoke signals reach you?

I wanted to write you a letter

I wanted to write to you
I wanted to
I want
I
I wanted to write you a letter

Kate Hewett

The Station

9am, frantically waiting for the same old train
The comfort of Nottingham to Newark,
2 stations 1 town.
I cry quietly to myself because I overpacked again,
And what idiot decided to make you walk between both.
Change at Sheffield, through Newcastle.
I fall asleep and wake up as we get into Edinburgh New Street
Except it should have been Old Street
But I was hungover
And what idiot decided not to wake me up.

You knew I'd do it so you're still there
Taxi ready, waiting diligently for my dumbass to walk out,
Ready to grab my overpacked bag and kiss my overworked forehead
And help me forget what I was running away from in the first place.

It's safe here.
Safe amongst the threatening statues,
The kind I've irrationally feared since I was 3,
But you made this place a home
So, I don't mind Mr Burns so much anymore
Even in the dark, even late at night
As we chase each other back from the last dumb club at 3am,
Because everywhere always shut so goddamn early.

Remember that time we accidentally went salsa dancing?
You can't dance.
You never could.
Instead I danced with a bizarre old man in between tequila shots,
Who twirled me around as you looked on, fondly
Watching me dip and trip and slip
Deep into the night.

And remember when we fell into a tiny pub
In the middle of nowhere
But somewhere
To listen to a wise old man with a feather in his hat guess
That I was a Gemini and you a Libra
Telling us, with conviction,
That it must be why we got along,
Before he picked up his fiddle and insisted we dance to his song.

Remember running home, docs sliding in the rain
Because it was always fucking raining.
Slipping through the university gates
Quick stop at the cobbled stones
Me onto my ass
You pulling me up.
'Marry me' the dumb 19-year-old in you says,
'Okay' the dumb 19-year-old in me agrees,
Through the haze of bargain beer and boujee whiskey.
And we both know we'll laugh at the stupid ring
Made of the embroidery string in the depths of my pocket
Tomorrow.
Because it was dumb, and we were dumb, and life was dumb.

Monday comes.
The station looms.
'I guess this is goodbye for now then?'
But we walk straight past
Aimlessly and yet with purpose
'Stay 'til tomorrow'.
We laugh.
We know we'll play the same game then.

Lily Petkova

Unborn Man Meets Father

Liverpool dockside 1956
Unborn man meets father
Before first time
Fathers sea legs steady on a new land

All Armada Irish eyes and cheekbone charm
Fingernails full of Erin's earth
A blind spot in his hindsight
Time bomb temper veiled behind a helping hand

Unborn walks father to the first of many fevers
Scoops runes from the barrel
And throws them into futures face

A ferry man drunk at the helm
Blacking his own nails
Necking chickens full of eggs
And crashing cars into border lines

No blacks No dogs No Irish
Commanded coup d'états on council flats
Throned a Queen
To the kingdoms of kitchen sink and rocking chair
And when our sovereign sailed
Taking the first born
A lesson, in pride
Its measure gauged by rising after every fall

When wasting won
Father lay slabbed
White robed and looking distant
His unyielding limbs like his mind in life
Stubborn and steadfast

Gently turning his humbled hand
To fasten a crisp cotton cuff
Revealed a crudely stitched wrist
Proof, the curse had been passed unseen
A double helix hand me down

And when the earth was sliced
To lay him in the Underland
We thought his coffin light
But knew, his shadow
We would never lift

Daron Carey

Dreaming

She was a young idealist.
Definitely the naivist in a family of self-proclaimed realists,
Who explained the world to her through the tight clenching of two fists,
But this was everything she refused.
She carried too much hope on her shoulders for knuckles to defeat this.
So she closed her eyes and opened her heart,
She had big enough hands to our stretch those palms
Towards the sky.
In the hope that she could catch a glimpse of other lives in the heart of a bird's eye.
And in the face of all that pain,
She maintained an open demeanour.
She said, the biggest fear in this life,
Would be if she ever ceased to be a dreamer.

And she was a dreamer.

When knuckles clamoured their way around my neck,
She was the one who dove to the sky to catch my breath.
She said life was cruel. So she drove through the stars instead,
And said: people may say they are already dead,
But their lights still hide in the dark.

Or the day I stood, my face dripping with blood in an empty alleyway,
Underneath the burning from the hottest part of the day, broken nosed.
She found the strength in that heat,
To be the carrier of both of my feet,
And took to me home.
She caught both my blood and tears into a cup,
So we could use them to paint watercolour, as we waited for the fears to develop.
Slowly. Through time, as the events buried themselves into the cracks of my psyche.

Veni Vidi.

She was the one who gave me a dream.
Solo wandering Rome, awestruck.
As we looked at unwavering faith carved out into stone,
As old as Julius Caesar.
But we never wanted to conquer, we just wanted to see them.
Even if it lay in ruins.
The same as all us broken humans.
Who exist mostly on our grand delusions

And dreams.

She was the drumbeat in my chest, drumming.
The guitar riff in my head, strumming.
We were supposed to sing together.

But, through time, I somehow grew to forget her.
I only let go of her hand for a minute,
A hopeless moment, but there, I lost myself in it.
To run from the fists, who we knew would always catch up,
The painting only waited for the fears to develop.
For a while, I became enveloped.

So this is an open letter, a pact setter,
Life still grows in the ruins and this, too, will get better.
So I will look through the silences of that dancing drum beat,
And search through the crevices of decaying concrete,
And scour the clogged skies.
I know you are still alive in one of these.
And I am sorry I ran from alarm bells that never rang true,
But I hope you know that, now,
My biggest fear,
Is if I never make it back to you.

Stacie Esposito

Mother

They gave us a new home that was alive.
And we ate their fruits and drank their wine,
And from their lips we learnt to thrive.
Thinking our greed would stand against time.

And so, we took the greens of their fields,
And the yellow of their sun,
And we painted past our needs.
Our house now left undone.

What had I done?
So brazen, so brash.
I had to be forgiven, I can't run.
Coat my hands in pity and ash?

I clamber through the warped gate,
And the air is soft on my smashed skin.
But my heart aches to feel, even hate,
I am shaking in my own self-beaten sin.

I curse myself as nothing but
A child grown big, and overmothered.
Yet the flowers grow from my beaten touch,
And warm to me like those who have suffered,

A gift from those that made me,
That is not all blood and sores.
But it is forgiveness for the free,
And it is bravery and hope with new laws.

It is kindness with each eclipse,
And the promise of finding beauty.
It is a whisper from between the tulips,
That something will grow from this cruelty.

They caress me with rose thorned truths,
Not gentle lily lies.
That soothe me like supple fruits,
I stroke the words and the cries.

Sore against my torn and bitten tongue,
They pour cold water on my sore eyes.
The flowers give life to my bruised lungs.
Rose milk eases my questioning 'whys'.

My house is greeted with a warm breeze.
And the shouts of the outsiders are mellow,
As I rise off the ground from my knees.
And as I touch my new wall, I learn of the echo.

It says one day again I will use my voice,
Despite believing my childhood was stolen.
It tells me that all along I had a choice,
Promises for when I'm no longer swollen:

Soon, I can repaint my milky pink walls,
And replaster the lavender torn rules.
So, I can rebuild the gift they gave me.

Emilie Mendham

Grow

From within these palms
tiny seeds
laid tentatively, into earth's clutch
can she do, what I have not?
I daren't believe they could

grow

Moments earlier
we'd held him
cradled in darkness
laid his body
into the earth
Still,
still
never to see him

grow

Death born of my womb
in these hands, life
certain to perish, calloused
fruitless promise
I don't believe anything would

grow

and
yet
From scattered
shattered hold
Beauty blossoms
Hope unfurls
stirring my sceptical heart
Still,

still
I daren't believe I could

grow

n
u
s

I did
I did

From reaper's grip
flora flourishes

I emerge
opening my clenched fists

g e
n h
i t
s
i r w
r o o
sap f r
reaching g
I

I grow.

Carly Martin

Oxymoron

Desolate and destitute

Struck

Backed up against a wall

Ivy trawling round feet

Unwebbing toes

Curling upwards

Interlocking spines

I taste it on my vertebra

The marrow of these bones was empty

A tap

tap

tap

echoed

Rattled down empty chambers

Looking for closets to get locked in

Yet, still, un-suffocated

More, elongated

Learning to straighten my back and trust

Retained by its clutch

Founded grounded in its roots

Always there

Holding strong

Telling me the world is not ending, despite my convictions

I spit fire

Yet it stays

Retorts not

Greeted by gentle touch

I remember at school, learning that thing where you put two contrasting words next to each other

[Gentle][man]

Two words that mean the opposite

Yet here you are

Ella Burns Robbins

@ellawritespoems

Ticking all the boxes

Ticking all the boxes that identify me!
Ticking all the boxes but never really being seen,
Ticking a box, clicking a link, what does it even mean?
Making up the numbers, for who... the statisticians?

Who am I, within that box?
Who is it that you're seeing?
Polarising people on a so-called equality mission.

Recording my characteristics, to show someone you care,
My race, my sex, my gender, my religion...
How can it all fit in there?

Am I white? Am I black? Why do you need to know?
Am I old, am I young? What does the information show?

Age is just a number and colour is just a hue,
Be honest with me now... what difference does either make to you?

Male, female, straight, gay and everything in between
Whatever our designation; we all deserve to be seen.
Seen for real, seen right now, seen for who we are.
Seen to be the people unified by our scars ...
our stories, our bodies, our hearts and our minds;
we all have come so far.

The infinite possibilities of the person I might be,
reduced to a few tick boxes, so you can make sense of me.

Andrea 'Annie' Alleyne

What is privilege?

Some parts of society, I wish was an absentee,
This is about the police stopping me,
Under this, covid, half locked, uk,
I went for a run in the sun today,
The 5-0 van pulled up,(skrrr), 3 times, glaring,
But the other bunch of runners, no melanin, no staring.

What is privilege?

2020 2/3 months in I've already had more casual racism than in the last 10 years,
How the fuck the leaders dropping travel bans, Chinese viruses, picinis and letterboxes
(feeding fears)

Getting called Mohammed and a terrorist, like its normal, at the end of the night,
Still getting called a Paki, thick mutha fuckers ain't even got the religion or country right,
I'm 28, since 2001, shits been getting worse not better,
Hopefully the kids of today can fix it, they can influence and be a trend setter.

What is privilege?

It's pretty much the whole gov going to the same school,
Misrepresentation in plenty sectors,
Ain't many teachers that look, sound and act like me,
It's not getting confused when in your rice, you get kidney beans,
Not getting ripped for ordering a korma,
It's understanding every grime reference
- budabobpop, sounds of surf,
It's there not being enough role models to represent our culture,
Nodding to people you've never met,
Because somehow they understand too,
It's before you even speak, people's perception of you,
Being locked down with a yard, heating, water and food,
It's not being locked down somewhere you feel unsafe,
It's having all your limbs, the ability to think,
It's not having to need,
It's being born into,
Something you can't earn,
It's a commodity,

It should, be a thing of the past,

But honestly I think it's here to last...

Jay Sandhu

A game of conscious

Roll the dice, 6 is go, luck of the draw
Strictly, abide by the Rules of the game
Everyone!
You landed on me - I'm not playing

No parking on double yellow
No driving through red traffic lights
It's for your own good,
You gotta play
It's your turn

Buy a hotel, go back to start, roll the dice - keep going
Advancing means breaking rules
Land in jail card
Think, Mahatma Ghandi, Rosa Parkes, Albert Einstein
Cheaters - it stood them apart
Excluded!

Be authentic, think outside the box
But how?
You've rolled the dice
You've gotta play, instructions came with the game
Cheating strictly not allowed

No fraternising with the blacks
No woman shall vote
Emily Pankhurst, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela
New games on the market now
Which game will you play?

Ferzana Shan

Hostages

I steal things from work.
I don't think about much when I do it.
5PM, the hands just click into place
Inside my pocket I turn the thing in my fingers, feel its edges.
For every day taken: one pen, a ruler, a stapler... One for each day.

Stationery wasn't enough.
It was a Wednesday when I disconnected my mouse.
Day after, a keyboard.
The following Tuesday, I was moving desks.
The photocopier proved a challenge.

The paper trays were fixed by hidden notches- I had to stand on them
My full weight through my legs, hands gripped to the machine's lid,
Kicking downwards, until the plastic clicked and cracked, and I could pull
Free.

I scuffed my way home that night, edging my treasure
forward like an obese snail- nearly put my back out.
Every evening at 5PM I take something: A potted fern, a partition wall.
9AM the next morning Mark, Marc, Lorna and Dougie, they just... work, and smile.

Lorna made calls on phones that weren't there.
Dougie sat at a missing desk on a missing chair, crooked like a zag, just hovering.
Every afternoon, post-brew, Mark would pour dregs from his teacup
into the spots where plants once stood. Didn't even blink.

I spent the best part of a rainy November Tuesday removing the disabled toilet,
until it was just a room of handles and strings.
Within a week it was littered with festering turds:
a wig of black flies dancing the room dizzy.

My flat became a shrine
My evenings mad, arranging everything as the office had been.
Water cooler here, Dougie's desk to that side.
I got the layout just perfect, and yet, it wasn't enough

I hated the thought of Mark, Marc, Lorna and Dougie
Across town
In that empty building, without partitions, machines, the fittings stripped, floors bare
Fingers wriggling in the naked air, 200 characters a minute.

So I hired a freezer van, and brought those missing pieces home.
When they thawed, condensation on their temples, the office seemed smaller
As if work itself was hugging each of them, like one happy family.
Only thing missing? Me.

Who else was going to drag my bed across town?
My hotpoint oven and Smeg mini-fridge, the fruit of years
My hangers of shirts and the Ikea coffins they live in
My objects of no use...

Hugh Dichmont

Fragile

First day

Young man, big bloated belly

Pushing his blue buttoned shirt extreme

Buttons that were still holding on

Not because the strings bought dirt cheap were strong

But his wife, who always found time to finish things up and

Sew the buttons together before it would fall over

If the government were as cautious with poor people's life

That disgraceful person by the road wouldn't be covered in dirt

And if people valued mending instead of changing

World would be better

But the tragedy is better things don't last

And the man, his wife and their young son

Were waiting for the God to do a stand-up

He needed to be on dialysis the rest of his life

Working hard in the extremes of heat

With sweaty palms and blistered feet

His kidneys couldn't keep up with his spirit

Seems like his sense of responsibility was stronger than the God's creation

Unfortunately, he was born poor in this rich nation.

The next week, the other and several others

He had turned into a familiar face

He was no longer just a patient

We would expect to see him every Tuesday and Saturday

He sometimes walked in

Was escorted at other times

In pain, breathing heavily and occasionally

Coated in what was supposed to stay within

But in his face I saw hope

A future where things were fine

Belief that his heart would keep its rhyme

Expectations that wouldn't run sort of time

Till his son turns young

Mature enough to erase the footprints he would leave behind

To fix the perfect things he would find

And take care of his beloved wife

With whom he had promised to get wrinkled together

In whose laps he hadn't had time to dream enough

The hands he swore to not let go when times would go rough

Whose strength he wanted to be when situations were tough

It was all just a bluff

An April fools life

One rainy day

10 PM

Everyone is asleep

Even the emergency room is calm

Just the beeping sound of the monitor from the other corner of the room

Then this siren sound in the background

Getting louder

With every ticks on the watch

We are all ready to save a life

He is placed on the triage area

I walk up to discover

It's him

Pulse less, stiff and cold

And to console I have this young boy left
Whom I have to confront
And admit
Life is unfair
And I am just a doctor
How do I tell him that his father is long gone?
That he had just tried too hard, the only wrong
And it's time for him to be strong
So I ask
Where is your mother?
She is at the tea garden, working, he says
With this I understand
The cruel life
The ugly poverty
That leaves people with no choice
But to prefer one over the other
While both to you
Are your kidneys
And your heart without them
Might keep you alive
But, without a life.

Prakash Mahato