

WE ARE MADE OF SONG

what is a body, but memory carved into skin?
you came not only from me, but from all the
women who survived and used the mouth of
the river to whisper, and learnt how to
harness their tears, enough to salt the sea.

'where is your fire, girl?'

I point to my daughter's mouth that sings the
songs of those who could not be drowned
with sound potent enough to make the sky
swallow its own light.



butjangin (seed) / birra (to start)

many moons ago
we met along the seam of the sky.
night had slipped open just enough
to let the cosmic dust of her
settle in my ribs.
she came to me,
before breath could recognise the gravity of
us.
the world held quiet for her song.
she hummed the sound of survival and
I thought I saw the auroras
dancing in her breath.

daya (here)

a hull of bones and skin and hair,
belly ripe,
body split and sutured, a sacred unfolding.
past selves shed slow like an offering,
hips a reliquary of ancient pull, carved
like riverbanks.
the place she once floated,
tide-marked, estuary-wide.
my altered flesh a shrine, scar tissue
transcribed like scripture.

it is said that becoming a mother is the
closest thing to god.

I do not believe in a higher power,
but still, I speak her name like a prayer.

malya (dark)

motherhood has a way of stretching you
until most of you is gone.
thread by thread I gather evidence of my
unspooling:
silk subtly pulled from the seams of my skin,
a silent inventory
of what I have let go
and what remains to be stitched anew.
my days are measured by the slow tilt of the
sun
and the auroras that still cascade from her
breath.
there's a quiet ache that follows me, its
movement mimicking tide.
some days, the ache is more pronounced, like
the *s* in 'whisper'.
time presses against me like dusk on the
horizon,
and it's almost mechanical,
demanding ascension and extension
as if it were the price of belonging.
I am starved for witness,
for someone to say yes,
this labour is holy,
this labour is sacred.

mangan (to build)

sealed together like wax and wick,
a slow-burning surrender.
beneath the melt I can feel the warmth
but I often wonder where the light is.
in the absence of a village,
this house grows ribs and hollows hallways
to render us held.
walls whisper the dialect of solitude,
threading song through silence.

I stand in empty spaces of the house and
name myself again:
home. altar. archive. portal. vessel. mother.
but sometimes I long to just be: still.
if there is no village, I will build one from
breath,
sacrificing mouth and marrow.
my darling, I've learnt the art of keeping us
alive.

galnyadji (joy)

amidst isolation and the spill of sorrow,
joy clings to my skin,
like smoke after ceremony,
curling, warm and lingering.
time rinses through us while memory gathers
in my chest,
preserved like seeds until they are summoned
to sprout.
if we were trees, I would twist into the earth
beside her, and
reach outward my branches as if she were the
soft scintillating sun.
I would dance with her in the rain, sharing
prophecy beneath the soil,
until we curl dry and hard, like late summer
eucalypt leaves
and surrender ourselves to earthworm.

ganbina (rise)

when light thins and darkness begins to
unbutton the sky
I measure myself against it:
how much of this body is left to burn?
I turn to the old ways:
I think of my mum
I think of her mum
and hers,
whose bones learned the language of currents
long before my own were formed.
giving birth at the edge of the river
weaving the spine of the moon.

cummeragunja walk off while earth braced
their heels,
the first mass strike of our people, 1939.
old people donned with the armour of
possum skin cloak and ochre,
cradling both tenderness and caution and
still, they burn,
each pulse an ember of survival.
now, I gather what remains
tending the kindling with my hands,
holding the flame steady,
denying its end.



morning comes and I trace constellations
across my daughters back,
retelling the songs that shaped us.
I speak the names of all who came before:
yenbena (*ancestors*), rivers, dreaming,
connection,
mothers, the grief of ghost gums,
kin in hiding, lost words, blood on the
wattle.
I map them along her shoulder blades,
a landscape of what we've endured.
she lifts her head,
body carved with memory,
mouth full of song
and for a moment, the world tilts,
the sky swallowing its own light.
through hollowed hallways, I remember:
I am not alone in this burning,
I am made of what survived.