

Selections from

These Wild Houses

by Omar Sakr

Here Is the Poem You Demand

Here is contested ground, the soiled
earth at my feet.

Here is uncouth domestic abuse & plasma televisions,
the marbled fruit of my skin.

Here is the assumed socioeconomic background,
its backyard barbecues, its books, the blues.

Here is the un-italicised flavour of my tongue: jahash!
This is a song we have sung before and will sing again.

Here is the heat you desire, the tender cock,
the hardness at her core. The taste and twitch of it.

Here is the mosque you despise, minarets pinked
by sky. Never forget it in the foreground

no matter its size. These things are all about perspective.
Here is the forever tree bearing the bodies of loss.

Here is my name, over & over & over & over.
Repeat it until you get it right, until it calls.

Here is the noose I hang myself with
every day. Here is the blade I trust will sever it.

The H Word

My suburbs had hoods, baggy low-riders, we
all did. Around our necks, they hung

loose in the heat, rode high in the rain.
The alleys became the Hume then, a kind

of tunnelled vision: that this is all there is,
pockmarked streets and swollen knuckles

for homes, another H word.
The scariest one. Not horror or homicide

or haemorrhage or hate. Not hope.
Home.

If your home is haemorrhaging kids
into open graves and closed cell blocks in a flood,

pull your hood up. Hide your face.
Your feet will still be wet with red

correctional pens. It's hard to field
humour when hunger eats away your family,
when all you have is stale bread. 'Put sauce on it,'
my cousin said. It goes down

easier. Hood the suburbs, they go down
easier. It shouldn't have surprised me, but when homo

was added to the spread, everything hurt
just a little more. I came to map Hell,

every inch beneath my skin. Still, when days cool,
a hoody is my go-to. Sometimes

it keeps me warm. I pull tight the cords
to strangle sounds in my throat.

But even if I cannot speak my lips still frame it,
awake or asleep, crooked as hips

bent on hooking for a little H

on the side. The word is *help*. The day I die

I expect to look down and discover in my chest
a hooded heart, lying heavy and still.

Botany Bay

On a grassy plain overlooking Botany Bay
two men pray, facing the East
kneeling to sea. Children windmill
around the spit of land, squinting
in the heat as seagulls, bellies puffed
and ready to fight for scraps, tear
at each slim gift.

Blankets anchor double dates
on the green, the pebbled cliffs and sand.
Fish and chips steam in sun.
A couple walks with banh mi
in hand. Before me is spread pide, eggs,
cucumber and focaccia. Over there, my aunty
says, is Captain Cook's museum.

Through the haze, it looks both close
and awful in its distance, a thin bridge
connecting it to us. My grandmother,
too worn by salt and earth and time
for the rigours of prayer, just sits
rocking, faith on her split lips and skin.

Imagining the invasion, I lie upon blades
of grass, staring up at the hijabbed sky
footprinted with clouds and wonder
what Cook would have made of all this.

Election Day

Savour the day, there is no more important a message than that. Suck its marrow out, swirl it along your tongue, the sweetness in calm, stillness. Even the dawn is slowed, it seems. This is the day the spin stops. These few hours are all you're allotted to find your feet, to ditch your swaying sea legs, the blue-tied back of politics. This morning, get the bitter jab of Arabica beans knobbing your mouth, nose, throat. Anticipate the heat to come. Water the flowers before you forget and everything is reset to blur, dying coral reefs and hirsute miners in fluoro vests digging up some femurs, refugees mired in valuable rock. Men kissing men, ministers palming crooked money (& also kissing men) and hysteria everywhere, hijabs and halal kangaroos, child abuse covered up here, here and here, recurring beneath so many creeds you can layer a horrible rainbow

Just water the damn flowers is what I'm saying, and walk down to your local town hall or public school, lose you in the eruption of language, a bright-winged battle of parakeets and magpies, crash-hot and do your best to slip past the pitched tents of war; anything immovable in this uncertainty is not to be trusted. Go past the sunny child holding up his parents' placard – his naive bliss an incandescence, unaware his future isn't girt by sea, but consumed by it – and there, in the hushing echo, rustled newsprint and muted coughs, cast your voice into spin. Fate will have with it what it wills. As individual faces merge into almost familiarity & engines gun through street music, brace for hurtling the motion of upturned Casula, to hear your future announced in monotone drones on touch screens – brace hard for the impact of changing everything and nothing.

