

FIGHT: A BAREKNUCKLE PLEDGE

ROUND 1

Contents

Zoe Alexandria Yapp <i>before the war</i>	pg. 2
Rose Hunter <i>Circus Catalogue</i> <i>Circus Poem</i>	pg. 3 pg. 5
Stephanie Chan <i>SOMEWHERE A MERMAID IS WRITING ABOUT HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN</i>	pg. 6
Katie Pukash <i>Pansies for Pistols</i>	pg. 8
Les Wicks <i>Ganges Blessing</i> <i>Pointy End</i>	pg. 9 pg. 10
Thabani Tshuma <i>Overtime</i> <i>Audience of Phantoms</i>	pg. 11 pg. 12
Paula Ethans <i>teetering; as understood from the inside</i> <i>dead weight</i>	pg. 13 pg. 14
K. A. Nelson <i>Conscience</i> <i>Okay... a poem about corona virus (under duress)</i>	pg. 15 pg. 16
Sponsors	pg. 17

before the war

Gently,
I put your hands down.
Watch you stumble away
from me.
You wanted answers and I couldn't give you any.
We were abandoned, left
with more questions.
We were alone
no one waiting on the other side.
You were waiting for him.
Why are we fighting? Please, don't
do this. Consider our anger
what it did to us.
Formless it muzzled you.
Formed, you rip off your muzzle.

You're there, you're there.
Oh, how we missed you.

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Circus Catalogue

They are out of town businessmen they are downtown
businessmen they are on their lunch break/
dinner break/holiday/after hours they are hedge fund managers
graphic designers non-profits they are furniture polishers
they are out there in the winter repairing power lines
they can show you frostbite scars. Mumbling and blushing
they seem afraid and prefer you take the lead, they know
what they want and don't ask permission. Frenzy-pouncing
they shove your head into their dicks
they grab you by the hair, by the neck. Poking you
like pressing buttons of an unfamiliar and perhaps teathed
machine, they describe the type of girl they like
who is nothing like you, they say you are wonderful
they say you are the best
they say they are filled with shame. Straight-up they say
they are on coke, you could be here a while.
Luckily an hour is an hour is an hour but this hour will not be
forty-five minutes. They're done in fifteen, you can go.
They are clock watchers who spend most of the time
arguing about the time, & howl like children
when you tell them you're leaving unless they pony up.
Other girls ask them if they work for free in their jobs
but you don't, you prefer not to cause offence
or risk retribution, and politely decline a
personal check. They have two kids
asleep in the hotel room shh! Can you
give them a blowjob in the bathroom? Their family
is long gone, they're addicts spending it all
on massage girls and hookers and coke and booze. They've
received a diagnosis so why not. Their wife left them
this is her money they're spending so why not. Nothing
special has happened to them lately so why not. They are
teetotalers, they are in AA. They are not in AA but
should be (you can call it when it comes to others). They make
racist comments, they make misogynous
remarks, they make
sick remarks about children. You try to change the subject.
But sometimes you let them rattle on too, because you
want to get out of here and whatever gets them off quicker
so you can leave is what you'll do. They are married
with boring lives, they are married with full lives

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they are married with wives busy with children, and wives
who stopped wanting sex, or are having affairs
and have given their blessing for them do the same
and wives who have no idea (mostly), but who, if they knew
would regard a ho as less hurtful than an affair
(because of the absence of emotional involvement)
although they haven't run this idea by her yet (mostly).
They are dotting sweet overworked with sick wives
who don't want to have an affair but don't want to give up sex.
They are single (sometimes), or they don't believe
in monogamy or other people's boring
morality. They are men who want you to know that they
never do this, and they are men who really never have
done this (before you). They are men who've
fucked whores in forty states
& not sure how many Canadian provinces, they
were getting to all of them, some of us have to have
goals. They are bright shiny men doing exciting things
like drinking water projects overseas or
counselling at-risk youth. You wish you
had their life, or could be their
friend (for real). They are men who hound you
to *make sure* you enjoy it, they will not stop
ranting on about it, and your best fake will not satisfy them.
They are women on two occasions ever. They are men
with a woman who is or isn't into it
but more often isn't, we roll our eyes at each other and make
him happy, not for the first time I think damn
I'm in the wrong racket (she gets paid so much better
than me)—then again, she has to go home
with him. Spewing vitriol about their ex-wives
& women in general, they are borderline homicidal
or maybe homicidal (you've left more than one hotel room
by then, hastily dressed and with your shoes
in your hands). They are undercovers who leave crime scene
pictures on the spare bed, you assume by accident
you give them a foot massage
and chat about the weather. They are forthcoming
and in intricate detail, grateful to have someone to listen
they frown and seem irritated by your chirpy inquiries (you
tone it down). They have laugh lines
around their eyes, they are mean, they are tedious
they are good and kind

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Circus Poem

Black velvet with black and red lace
floor-length with thigh-high slit
discount store special, vaguely
goth-funereal but for some reason
money; I wore it until the ass wore out, with
(faux, obvi) diamond choker
V-shaped, and matching earrings
silver glitter eyes
& glitter on my brow and cheeks too, Buddha
did I love glitter
on anything, anyway, once

I was working at an in-call with a girl, Daisy
two guys had come in
one for her one for me
no problems, we all came out
around the same time and talked
and laughed in the lobby. After
they left I looked in the mirror and saw my face:

lipstick smeared nose to chin, full clown mouth.

I scrubbed it off like cleaning grout then went
to find Daisy; *Why*
didn't you tell me? Don't worry, she said
it wasn't that bad
without asking what I was talking about
but it was really bad
I couldn't believe she hadn't said anything
often when I wore that dress I remembered

that

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SOMEWHERE A MERMAID IS WRITING ABOUT HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

and how his legs cross and uncross when he is anxious.
She isn't as jealous as you might think.

somewhere a mermaid writes about Hans Christian Andersen
trapped on an island while his prince marries the princess
as per the rules in fairy tales

waves crashing against rocks
like the sound of mermaid bodies
smashing against shore,
limp from the agony of tails
tearing themselves apart

she likes how you can't taste your own tears in the sea

somewhere a mermaid writes to Hans Christian Andersen
to tell him things will not be ok, except in this moment
with one foot in his kingdom, another foot in her world

points to the sea foam
at least men who love princes have souls,
even if the world won't believe it for
another 200 years,

but at least mermaids get 300 years
before dissolving into sea water.

Somewhere a mermaid is writing a story
about Hans Christian Andersen writing a story
about a mermaid, believes if she writes fast enough
she can write him a happily ever after
so he can write her a happily ever after.

Somewhere, Hans Christian Andersen is on an island
writing a story about mermaid while his true love marries
a princess. He is not sad. He is laughing,
tells the mermaid she has always been free
to write her own happy ending,

Somewhere a mermaid is begging
Hans Christian Andersen not to let her die.

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Or at least, not to have to choose
between stabbing a prince and dying a virgin.

Somewhere, the seafoam is laughing.

Somewhere a mermaid throws down her pen,
her dagger, throws herself into the sea, feels water
rush into her lungs for the first time, scratches her neck
bloody for a chance at gills, her body liquefying,

evaporating, floating
out of water
past palaces cliffs, palaces
into clouds.

“Fuck you, Hans Christian Andersen” she laughs

Somewhere a mermaid is writing about a prince who loves princes
who achieves immortality through his stories, how they preserved her
in bronze, how they memorized his face so they could sculpt it
out of gold a hundred times over.

Somewhere, the sea foam is writing a story
about how princes are just a means to an end,
and legs just the way to get there faster.

Somewhere a mermaid is writing a story about me,
another mortal trying to turn everything they read
on the internet into metaphors and moral lessons.

*Once there was a human,
still too foolish to tell the difference
between messengers and fairy tales.*

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Pansies for Pistols

The rain ruins my pink suede coat.
I never said that I was raped.
I incessantly say that *they hurt me*.

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I drink red wine along during the wintertime
when we are both full-bodied and aching.
My junk drawer is made up of nothing but Band-Aids.
I have been scratching my skin raw and tender.

-

This time last year I was packing up what was left of me –
moving her somewhere safe –
where my hands held all the locks
and pansies were planted in the front yard.

I think I have given up on trying to heal.
My elbows sharpened slowly after too many harrowing years.
I wish I could give you my heart, but all I have is a knife.
I wish I could give you my breath, but all I have is a gun.

I am soft when I say the word *hurt*.
I am gentle in the way I grab a pistol.
I am not one to stop my tenderness from rioting.
Some even say that pansies make great ammunition.

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Ganges Blessing

Dirty sun reflected
on dirty river.

Life is filthy with possibility
everything is everything.

Buy on Tuesday, burn Friday.

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Pointy End

It sees that sky
this big fat city
& of course has to poke it.

They pave over everything
even the air holes.

Build sharp, don't stop
only dare to ponder
when there is an auction for naming rights
to that shed previously called heaven.

I can see the light, just.
In summer there's the appearance of life
but in the cold times we people
are smears, shivering afterthoughts.
Connected only by the viruses we share.

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Overtime

No one came to work today.
Well, I did.
But I'm more non-person on paper.
Trailing without a blaze.
A would-be star,
collapsed by its own gravity.
Missing the atmospheric conditions to burn on.
Unremembered in a cubicle universe.
I look up.
The sky glows in fluorescent constellation lines.
Its shine would make cadavers of us all.
For now, no bodies haunt these empty halls.
Keyboard click and clack
tap dances through the silence.
Their tempo set to scrolling eyes, hungry for wonder.
Chain Smoking through the lunch break.
I'll breathe clean air when off the clock.
Dying feels better when you're paid for it.
And I'm here for the overtime.

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Audience of phantoms

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broken
syntax enjambed
into the cracks of perception.
Your eyes as calloused hands,
Clumsily tracing the remnants of feeling.
Believing in the blind leading the blind
on a braille paved road to nowhere.
There are ghosts here.
Half-forgotten moments, unsaid words,
and myriad traumas.
It is almost quiet,
save for the silent sound of tears
swelling from drops into streams.
Nothing is real in dreams,
save for everything.
Watch the wick of lingering
existential questions flicker.
Blow it out as you finish.
Read this in darkness.
Bring it to life.

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teetering; as understood from the inside

it's not a good love
(what's a good love anyways)
sure,
it's a tense love
leaves a pain in her gut love
she wouldn't call it
a bad love

the trees whisper:
it's a love that leaves her house on fire

cursed willows
they have a reputation for weeping

she stayed,
breathing in the smoke, because
eventually you get used to it
you don't notice how much your lungs hurt
short breaths are still breaths! if anything
they're a blessing – they
remind you to fight for your life
smoke stings the eyes
but it's nice to have an excuse
for being blind
to the things around you

it's not like she hadn't been burnt before
she had the scars to prove it
isn't that what they mean by beauty marks?

some of the shrubs in town
go so far
as not to call it a love at all

but she knows
a house isn't
a home
without a little
wear and tear

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dead weight

my hands knew
you would leave
long before
i did
i would wake up
fingers grasping at air
hold your hand
til our palms turned to puddles
pull my arm out of its
socket
reaching for you
held on tighter
to a hand
more ghost than grip

your body disappeared first
hand interlocked with mine
and you left
without your limb
as if to say
have it
that won't stop me

and i still
hold your hand
drag your arm
let it
scrape the floor
like a child and their blanket
everywhere

- dead weight

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Conscience

Does anyone remember the old primary school ruse,
twisting one hand into a fist on top of the other—
flat-open-palm—
Smell the cheese, you said
in what you thought
an innocent voice?

When the poor bastard
submitted nose to installation
smelt the cheese
your fist
leapt
forward . . .

Today, that fist has hit me—

blood runs from both nostrils

one front tooth is missing—

conscience is like that . . .

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Okay . . . A poem about corona virus (under duress)

One last sip—a good shiraz—
Huntington’s Special Reserve
Mudgee drop

2016

Meant to put it under the house
until 2030, but who knows
if I’ll be here then
or in thirty
days . . .

The year is 2020

Year of bushfire,
hailstorm,
flood . . .

rhymes with:

briar
born
blood

Try making poetry
or sense
out of what comes next

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FIGHT: ROUND 1

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