

Muse

Winning poem by Isabelle Walker

Year 9 to 10 category winner from Bradford Academy in
Bradford, West Yorkshire

*It's 5:30 in the morning and I'm out listening for her.
A year and a half ago, she would have been listening out for me
but since then things have changed
She's like a dying dog,
unwilling to show her vulnerability and pain to anyone else.
But somebody notices it.
It's me.*

*It's 5:30 in the morning and I know what she is getting out of her car.
A woman who swore she would never smoke is a chimney now.
She smokes because of me,
and I smoke because of her.
She's past the point of trying to care that the smoke doesn't just come from her.
It's me.
We are a bonfire.*

I look at our daughter –
She looks strikingly like her father,
Strikingly like you,
You
Half of her genes but none of her life.
the man who robbed me of any dignity I so scarcely held on to
– And I don't recognise her anymore,
nor would I recognise you.
She reminds me of you:
how she dismisses me
how she shouts
how she doesn't care what I want.
And if she ever tried to leave as you once did
I think I'd pack her bags for her
Just to watch her fail without me
so, I could welcome her home again.

Sometimes I wish she never got better.
That she could remain
the miserable, emaciated girl
that she was year and a half ago.
Just so I could bring her home again.

*I resent her for not realising that I couldn't get better in 30 days
If she cared about my eating disorder
as much as she cared about her image,
As much as I care about the space between my legs,
the callouses on my knuckles would tell a very different tale.
The way we speak to each other is vile, all I can taste is bile.
How has she not realised?*

*And for a woman whose CV describes her as 'pragmatic'
I often wonder why my jaw had to ache for so long.
Did you ever look into my pupils?
If there was one thing I could inherit from her
It wouldn't be her nose,
her heart murmur,
or her wheat allergy,
but the strength she possesses.
She's like a female spider
Anything to protect her offspring,
Fine without her mate.*

She's getting older now
Like a cat dragging her hapless prey,
she meets a new boy every week.
I wonder if these boys will ever be aware
of how little they mean to her.
If anything, she is trying to fill cracks that you engraved in her
long before I could even hold her.

*Only 2 weeks ago I became somebody's show pony
for the first time.
I usually flaunt my body but the unwanted admiration of 3 middle aged men has
disembowelled me.
To those men I was their prey,
nothing more than a pretty face who wanted their harassment,
who put her body on display*

But worst of all, I foolishly entertained my sick audience of aliens

Why?

Still, I give in to their urges

I become an architect,

Sculpt my bodies for those who don't care about my face,

My race has become a hot topic

My mum says I look exotic,

Men say I'm dark but not too dark

I am like a zoo animal,

I wonder who holds the key

I reflect upon years of constant arguments

Time can't tear us apart

Shrieked in tongues

Two territorial female cats

Jealous

Aim for her throat

Her appearance

Why my appearance?

You share half of my genes.

We both know that the ash on the bathroom window ledge is mine,

and the cigarette butts in the recycling bin are yours.

But it's the same fire that lights them.

It's us

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Tracy Brabin
Mayor
of West Yorkshire