

Gutter

The magazine of new Scottish and international writing



No
27

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Sorrow-work

My mother's cancer is back. The cancer is back.

•
How to talk, or think, or fuck, or write?

•
In the Book of Mutter Kate Zambreno writes that *we search for other mother figures to follow, like orphaned Ruth wandering to strange lands just to be mothered*. I moved away. I found other mothers but now all I want is her.

•
I know that I cannot, should not, read reality like a book, skipping ahead with intuition, but the feeling that I can and that what I find there is truth seeps into all of me—she will die.

•
Before that happens, I want her to know my heart. I want to write my mother a sprawling Russian novel that explains everything but I don't have enough words in me for even a paragraph.

•
The first time my mother discovered she had cancer I was filled with rage. Now, I am sadness embodied.

•
I waver between infinity and finitude in a way that I suspect is spiritually immature. I read and reread *Holy the Firm* by Annie Dillard as if it might offer some kind of clue.

•
In a podcast, I hear Sharon Olds say *One of the first signs of our species is a girl buried in a circle of ram horns. We are an animal that knows it will die. What a situation*. I know and don't know that she will die. What a situation.

•
In my early 20's, death was a romance. There was too much life and I wanted to burn it away. Now, I am a coward. I am a cur when death comes close.

•
Today, Tuesday, she is having a port installed. I want to send her a postcard every day of chemo, but I know I never will.

•
All of the things a daughter could say to her mother.

I'm going to be filled with platinum and something that sounds like flowers
 my mother says of her chemo. I write it down immediately because it
 hints that maybe we are more similar than we realize.

•
 Is she being filled with the poison flowers of my poems or with healing
 flowers of which I know nothing?

•
 She thinks that she will be healed *either on this side or on the other side of*
heaven.

•
 If someone could manifest heaven on earth through sheer willpower, it
 would be my mother.

•
 I am shuddering with the thought of eternity.

•
 I am sorrow personified.

•
 I tend to my grief like a newborn. I am isolated like a young mother but
 my baby is the void.

•
 In Swedish, the word for grief is *sorgarbete*, *sorrow-work*. The Sisyphian
 task of it all.

•
 This is a document of repetition: my premature book of muttering, my
 grimoire of grief, her healing psalm.

•
 The cancer. Her cancer. Our cancer.

•
 I am lost. I am loss

•
 I am Artax sinking into the swamp. The Atreyu of my self is trying to
 keep this sad horse brain afloat.

•
 Sorrow transforms my understanding of my mother into The Mother.
 UrMamma: I know my mother will never fill this role. We are a bloodline
 of forever daughters raised by daughters. So, I turn to her. I mother her.

•
 Is grieving a constant waking up to the they never will?

•

A person is not static, they are a becoming (paraphrased from the The Way of Tarot).

•
Who will I be when my mother dies?

•
I used to think that each moment of my life was endlessly on loop; that each choice I made sent out a tendril of a universe where that choice wasn't made; that I was fragmented across an infinite number of selves across an infinite number of realities. Now, that my mother might be dying I am condensed. The umbilical cords of possibility are severed. Grief makes me singular. My fragmented selves combine into one raw ache.

•
Grief is a few half-remembered lines of a Sufjan Steven's song that pops into my head as I walk around Stockholm.

•
Grief only sharpens with time. Becomes more acute.

•
I carry you.

•
I bear witness to the unbearability.

•
Could this ever be more than a diary?

•
My obsessions lead me nowhere.

•
My kyrhole breathed a chilling threat
A silence triggered while I slept

•
Throughout the pain, I could not cry
A blueses creep back to the sky

•
Our touch and I will be there

Gutter is Scotland's leading independent literary magazine of fiction and poetry. We believe in the power of writing to surprise, to challenge, to move, and to enliven. With the very best new work from established and emerging writers, we hope you'll be inspired by the words within these pages.

'One cannot collect all the beautiful shells on the beach. One can collect only a few, and they are more beautiful if they are few.'

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Gutter publishes writers who were born, are living in, or somehow connected to Scotland, but the writing in *Gutter* spans the globe. We are diverse, as a magazine, as a culture, and as a species. An international magazine, the *Gutter* is an inclusive place to be.

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The Metro

'Both farcical and touching... sharp and witty.'

The Skinny

'The quality of writing... is reassuringly, and at times breathtakingly, high.'

Scots Whay Hey!

'The literary standard is high, with interesting work from the established, the emerging, and the standout.'

The List

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