

It was your tongue that brought them back to me

for Alex Chalmers, Giulia Crispiani, Caterina De Nicola, Stelios Kallinikou, Eleonora Luccarini, Umico Niwa, Massimo Vaschetto

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Warning: writing about fragility is a rhetorical exercise; the page may well serve as a diary. It is through the artistic practices of Alex Chalmers, Giulia Crispiani, Caterina De Nicola, Stelios Kallinikou, Eleonora Luccarini, Umico Niwa, and Massimo Vaschetto that I have found the words to write. The "I" you will read about is mine, and its vulnerability is akin to the tenderness with which two little girls, playing on a summer afternoon, gently pull blades of grass. This is not about the precariousness of political-economical order, systemic violence, or the war crimes that break bodies, bending them to their plans and turn them into numbers—precariousness as the result of a distinction. Here, it is the fear of loss, like when I freeze before your eyes, like when our love resides in failure.

Dry cum stretched between your navel and the center of your chest felt almost like a wound. A gash, made to show me your inside, as if it were the latch through which I could enter. We spent months learning how to forge steel armour, leaving a few holes so the skin could breathe, so hands could stretch out to touch the flowers on the ground (Umico Niwa). Yet, those holes unraveled the iron mesh, and we saw each other, hidden at opposite ends of the room. *Shimmer when all your love is being trashed.*¹

There are nights when you tremble—when the front door and the window out the back are open, and the breeze fills the room. My body becomes a shield, I hold you. Then there are the nights we spend apart, our fingers aren't touching because they fear electric shocks. Sometimes I look and don't recognise you. *And I just stand there. It's been a while since I heard my own voice.*² I show you all of my fragility—when failure is how I walk, when stumbling becomes a chance to fly.

There are nights when you raise your legs, clutching them close to your body with your forearms, and you push. Around your hole, the skin crinkles, like a rose beginning to blossom. My wet fingers reach to collect it. We lean into each other, an opening that bends integrity. You sit over my hand, your eyes locking with mine. We are here—a mass of flesh, veins, fluids; we are sweat at the mercy of a kiss (Massimo Vaschetto).

In 1965, in front of a class at the New School, Hannah Arendt said that inclination leans you outward, towards what lies out there beyond me.³ She made it a moral issue—does a self that loses its structural balance disarrange the social grid? Here, it is a geometric matter: I lose my centre of gravity because I lean outward, and so I fall.

Precariousness lies there: when you don't hide the thud, when you don't rise swiftly (Caterina De Nicola). You show me all of your fragility. When the stones on the beach are sharp and you want to lie down, you rest your neck on my left thigh, falling asleep in the time of a verse, and there is the repetitive sound of the sea softening—it's cotton in your ears. I move clumsily, pick up a book, put it down, then grab a different one. Your face registers the jolts, but you remain still, horizontal, leaning against me (Stelios Kallinikou). It's the ontology of vulnerability that disrupts autonomy: the wholeness of the individual is a delusion, its individuality revealed as a mask (Eleonora Luccarini). You are already exposed, dependent—like when you reach out a hand to climb the rocks, your palm brushes mine, and the sole of your foot finds a place to step on. One isn't stable alone; we are already crutches, we are supports (Umico Niwa).

I walked alone through the streets of Stromboli, winding my way up dusty paths, hidden among reeds bent by the August sun. The noise of the town was faint in the distance, but there was the crackle of chickens pecking at the dry earth. The litter on the ground mixed with cigarette butts, tissues, and casually discarded trash. The grass, sparse and beaten down on the path, grew taller as I ventured further into the field. I turned right, leaving the trail. The blades brushed against my knees, and I stumbled over some rusty pipes. Just ahead, an old washing machine without the door had been left to the elements. I remember being moved by something—a kind of tenderness for its vulnerability, its uselessness, its sheer material presence (Alex Chalmers). I recall stepping closer and sitting down on its metal surface. I lit a Camel Blue. A faint smile crossed my face.

Ann Cvetkovich⁴ re-reads Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*,⁵ attempting to trace an emotional archive that acknowledges trauma as an everyday occurrence, vulnerability as a privilege, and receptivity (or passivity) as a choice. The butch—a lesbian who fuses female masculinity and homosexual desire in a gender subversion that is predominantly erotic⁶—does not articulate their emotion. The hardness of their demeanour is a callus around the heart; when fragility can lead to pain, one must mask it, hide. Thus, emotions become flesh, and to feel them, you must touch them. *You touched my loneliness.*⁷

¹ "Shimmer when all your love is being trashed"—graphic print on a T-shirt of a boy in New York City.

² From *just stand there* by Fred again... & SOAK, featured in *ten days* (2024).

³ See Hannah Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", in *Social Research*, vol. 61 n.4, 1994, pp. 739-764.

⁴ See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings. Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2003.

⁵ See Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*, Firebrand Books, Ithaca 1993.

⁶ It is complicated to define what *butch* is, and around the issue there is extensive literature. I asked to Giulia Sbaffi, academic and post-phd researcher, to help me finding the clearest words

⁷ See Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*, Firebrand Books, Ithaca 1993.

The little bottle of poppers slips between my hands as we use the lube. I hand it to you, you open it and inhale while I pinch your nostril, then you pass back it to me. The geometry of inclination has everything to do with the intersection of our curves, as the heat rises from within and shines in your eyes. You close them, and I see your eyelids flutter, the orb moving underneath, like a vortex. They become reflective, a sliver of light cuts across your face, and all the chaos of the world is there above us—and yet, we are here. We feel our bodies interlocked, trying to reach the bottom. When the farthest tip touches the wall of your intestine, you look at me: all the landscapes you've ever remembered are there, all the deep reds of the sunset, the sounds of a distant city, all the shapes you could have taken (Caterina De Nicola).

There is my loneliness and yours, all the past and future stories, the promises we've yet to make, all the dreams that spell out tomorrow. We are, *at once, millions of lives*.⁸ We become a brigade of resistance, our language made of hands intertwining and bodies merging. On our skin lies all the chaos of the world. These are all proofs of love, no matter who we are. And yet, we are indispensable (Giulia Crispiani).

The first time I touched your lips, I trembled for a moment. I learned to keep all of my emotions bottled below the cardia, where I don't need to understand them. It was your tongue that brought them back to me.

⁸ See Pier Vittorio Tondelli, *Camere Separate*, Bompiani, Milano, 2010.