



if we grew up

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a collection of poems dealing with mental illness, childhood and death
in support of *Lifeline Aotearoa*

words by essa ranapiri

cover art by emily duke

my stuffed friend

i am holding the leg of my great big bunny rabbit
i talk to it at night time and know that it isn't really alive
because it is a stuffed teddy kind of bunny rabbit
but it's so big and great
look at the yellow it is
that couldn't be real on a real bunny rabbit
so i enjoy its silence and
imagine words it says like the bunnies on tv say
i never quite liked carrots as much as everyone thought
i say i know that you don't like carrots and it makes me sad
because everyone thinks you do
and when i am scared by how dark it gets after seven
i can feel the bunny grow in power
like a light
but a light to feel in its food scuffed fluff
and i make it say comforting things in my mind
but pretend they are out loud because that is a power i have

i'm hiding behind the couch with questions you can't answer

i found a question none of you know the answer to
my belly pressed against the carpet
worn down
what is the point
none of my classmates know
and it has everyone thinking
what is the point of being alive
i expected an answer
a caste on the leg of a wounded pup
a cold ice block pressed into a sweating hot forehead
now sticky but soothed
a paper mache face with a smile that curves down
you tell me it's not right
to ask these questions
that i am wrong for thinking about death
but i never even mentioned death
unless life means something else to you
cars go past this house faster than i could run
and you take three hours to find me here

it's inside me like a worm

inspecting my veins kissing the blue liquid
mouthing o's over oxygenated pulse
it's smothering its wet body over
thoughts
it is a thought
one i keep having
fingernails in the brain
protrusions
without feeling
there is no bird in this metaphor to peck out the
slugs in this landscape
of not wanting anything to do with it
bridge jumping in the summer
what a rush

in a normal week

two kids get out of it
decide to leave our system
with all sorts of performative
actions
all sorts of physical crossing-outs

crumple cans made from the institution
of family
the house polished right down to a tree stump
gums shining nakedly in the mouth
two kids every seven days isn't a clean mathematical problem
all the rooms spotless
it's not even a mathematical problem and
the vacuum isn't clean

what she did say

she told me that it would be bad if i was made to talk about it to someone for money every week like my cousin in wellington who had something wrong with her more so than the wrong i had with me

she only wanted what was best for me which involved me answering her questions with a lie right involved me saying i only wanted to kill myself a little bit but not really

she would find me behind closet doors laughing with ties around my neck which wasn't a cry for help because i wasn't crying *help*

my dad never learnt how to talk about his feelings

because that is not what men are supposed to do
he presses his right hand into the base of the steering wheel

they are supposed to be strong and that strength
is all in how much they don't say because you see
words are points of weakness are points that can

be turned into weapons if you're not careful
like the heat of a deadline the heat of hiding money in
the mattress

and adults never want to hear it because they have enough
problems as it is
he couldn't list them in time

they have enough weaknesses with the action of
trying to make two fraying ends meet
my dad never learnt how to talk about his feelings
until the words came out of his arms one night
with the help

of sharp objects

black wing

i can't get out of bed today
my brain is in charge today
and it wants me to not be doing anything
today
i become a shape that my bed wants my body to be
put headphones on and try to forget
that my brain is in charge today
and doesn't want me to be happy today
no light in my room today
no lightness in my body today

if something is a real issue like this is
a real issue like how people sliding off
the roads is a real issue

how could talking about it have a real kind of impact on it

it is a real issue and so is the vulnerable lapse of words sliding out of
our mouths

when the brakes are cut it is very hard to stop something from
moving forward dangerously

when there are no ways of saying a thing

it becomes very hard to say anything or continue to want to say
anything

when expression becomes impossible by regular means

the body becomes a performance of the available options that society
provides

the motor vehicle can do nothing but let momentum carry it
over the gap

my friend

push the trampoline on its side and lie down while still standing
like insects clinging to the wall
we hold onto the springs and climb
feet and legs in similar places we clamber to the top of the metal structure
it suspends precarious on its side as we sit at the apex
and survey the backyard my friend and i
the first boy i'll fall for
talk about Star Wars and what could possibly happen in the third one
fantasize about the different piercings we'd get
you say you'd even get your belly button done
i flinch at that
and suggest snakebites
because i've seen people in band posters who have them
and i want to be as cool as them someday

essa may ranapiri /// ~~aka-joshua-morris~~ /// trans po-et /// they-them-theirs

“whale & harpoon” as metaphor for /// the ?self?

no certainty like un /// certainty they will ~~fight~~ write until they are dead

[has words in *Mayhem*, *Brief*, *Geometry*, *Poetry NZ*, *Starling*, *Them*]