

*A SERIES
OF
ESCAPES
OF AIR*

Saoirse Amira Anis

*In loving memory of Frank Larkins
and Paula Allan.*

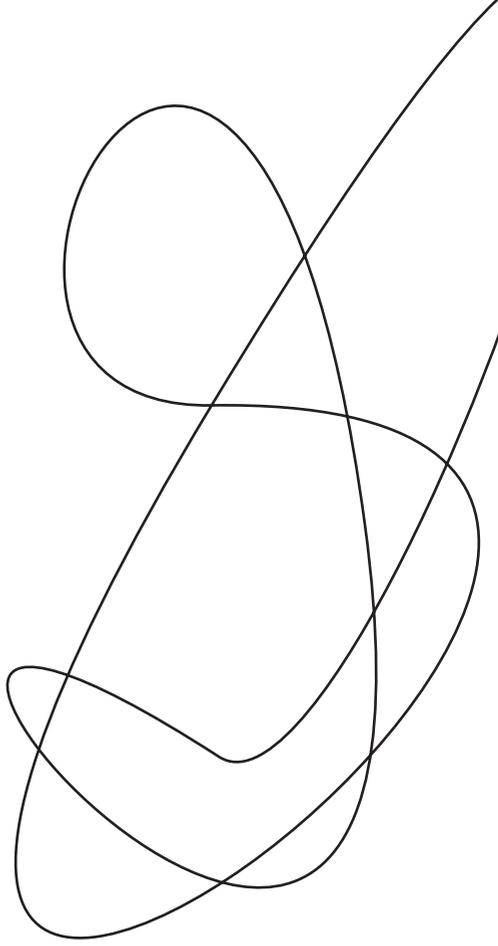
May your radiance endure.

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Written and designed by Saoirse Amira Anis

The following was written in response to *suspuration!* by Camara Taylor, and a series of zines by Meera Shakti Osborne, both of which were produced for *Slow Breath* (2021) at The NewBridge Project. I would recommend consuming both of these works of art before reading on - not only because they are the inspiration behind this piece of writing, but mainly because they are beautiful creations to which I owe plenty of thanks for their nourishment and guidance.

YEARN





INHALE
HOLD

— I YEARN for escape —

EXHALE
HOLD

I think I have too many feelings for too many people. Sometimes it's beautiful and sometimes it feels like I'm being slowly smushed through a meat grinder and swallowed up by the world. Like all the feelings need somewhere else to go and this casing of skin is consistently reaching its capacity.

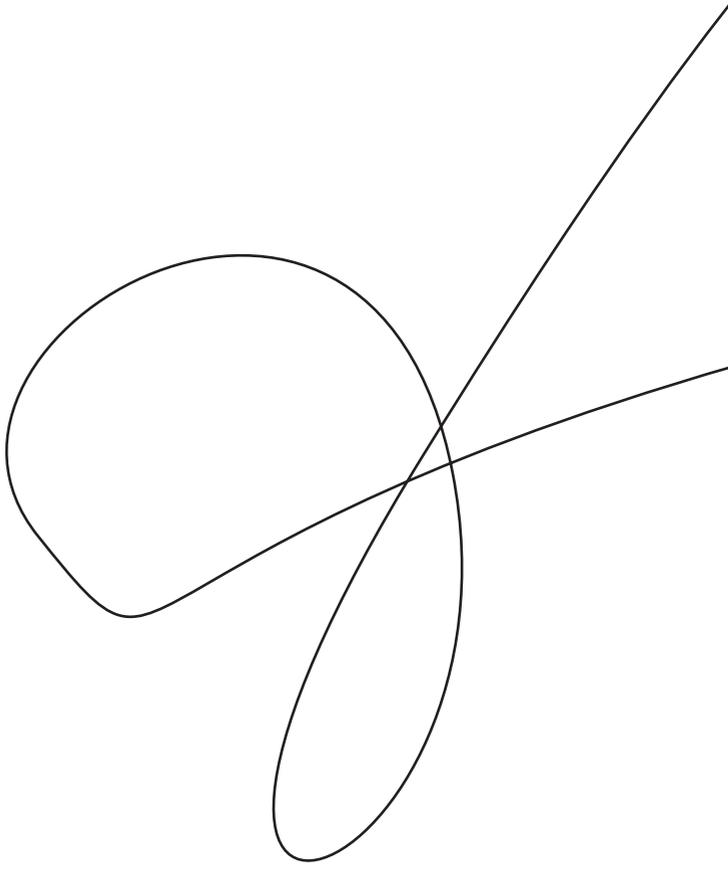
Different feelings live in different parts of my body. I used to think that the gnawing in my belly was the peak of anxiety, but at least in there it's contained, safe and comfortable. When it reaches my limbs, it's crunch time, and by the time it gets to my fingers and toes the only release is escape, and escape is not a coping mechanism but a last ditch attempt to put a stop to the gnashing of teeth in my tissues. There must be a way for the chattering to travel back up my hands and legs to the centre and into my belly - where it hurts, but at least it's safe.

Maybe being alive is basically just a series of escapes of air. Maybe some bodies have more air than others, and our air-holes aren't sufficient to let all the air that needs to get out, out, so it tries to escape through other means. It travels to the extremities and hopes the skin's

are wide enough, but it's met with disappointment and all this excess oxygen builds, igniting panic.

So begins the hand-flapping, foot-stomping meltdown. The air is explosively energetic with nowhere else to go. Sometimes the hand-flapping, foot-stomping works as release; sometimes the air is still in there, begging for escape. Perhaps there's a way to convince it to travel back to the core, back into the lungs, which can soothe it, and process it, and guide it out through the mouth.

MOURN





INHALE
HOLD

— I MOURN for the people who have been taken from us —



EXHALE
HOLD

I lost two family members this summer, and so have become quite accustomed to this feeling of excess air ricocheting inside my body.

Grief has done strange things to this body.

It's almost as if the urge to dance is stronger, but the ability is weaker. Where does the joy of the urge to dance go if the body is frozen? Instead it creaks when it moves and everything hurts. The excess air has turned to fire and I can't figure out if it needs water, foam, CO₂ or dry powder. I try each of them in turn, and the fire ebbs and flows, and shrinks and grows, and eventually plateaus. This respite still hurts, but I guess that's tough shit; these are the cards I've been dealt.

In an attempt to regain bodily control, I got my septum pierced. It made an explosion behind my eyes that obliterated the entire contents of the top half of my skull for approximately three seconds, until the urge to sneeze shocked them back into action.

It felt like I needed much more than a sneeze to fully shock me back into action, maybe eight times more? A

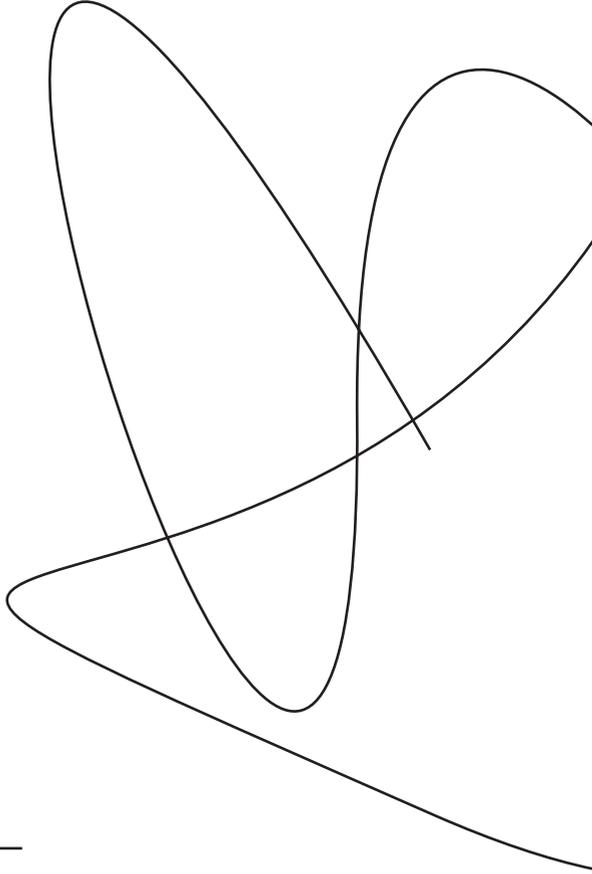
petite mort to cope with their *grande mort*.

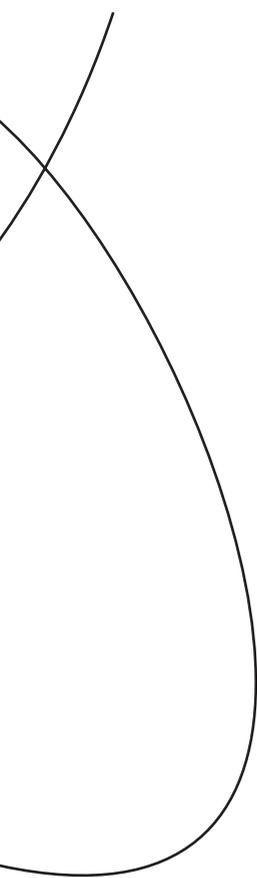
AAAAAAAAAAAA — — — *choo*

Maybe such a self-indulgent experience of pleasure is disrespectful. Would the dead be rolling in their graves from the vibrations of a coping mechanism that seems at odds with the process of death?

Or would they be grateful that I've solicited and secured a few short minutes of satisfaction?

ACHE





INHALE
HOLD

— IACHE for a respite from guilt —

EXHALE
HOLD

We said our last so longs and goodnights in a Catholic service. It had been many years since my last Catholic mass. I was reminded that one of the greatest disservices of Catholicism is the guilt that it inspires in its followers - a guilt that further complicates grief.

Guilt and empathy are a brutal combination; a recipe for ultimate emotional destruction. A childhood of indoctrination sets us up for an adulthood of self-imposed internal incineration.

I tried to respect the religion of my beloved dead, but I also tried to protect myself from it. I might have too much air within me, but my breath is too sacred to be used on confessions of guilt. Instead I converted the call-and-responses so they could nestle comfortably inside my head:

Peace be with you.

And with your spirit.

The assumption that merely existing is sinful and must be repented for is a mistake,

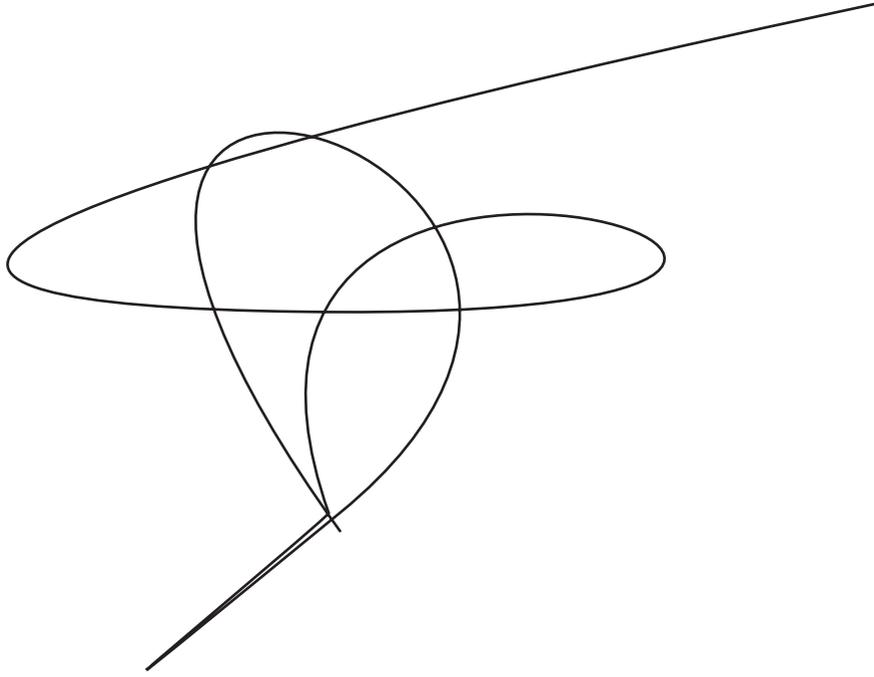
and it is not through my fault,
through my fault,
through my most grievous fault.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy on those whose lives are narrated by Your guilt-inducing expositions, and the prayers of misguided well-meaners, whose pious manners occupy compassion's rightful abode, and push empathy to the curb.

Have mercy on those whose problems You can't solve; who feel an unbearable weight because they couldn't get out of bed and do the dishes today. Lord, grant us the resolve to be kinder to ourselves than Your Word has been.

PINE





INHALE
HOLD

— I PINE for company —

EXHALE
HOLD

Mass, at its core, is the facilitation of a space to be filled with like-minded people. I have sorely missed the comfort of sharing space, sharing air, sharing company with my peers - this swirling whirling twirling collection of people with whom I share some central tenet of existence. Those people whose collective presence imbues a sense of belonging in a world that forces a constant questioning of that very right to belong. It is quite beautiful to observe just how transformative it is to be in a space where you feel held, and supported, and understood - where the comfortable silence whispers I love you I love you I love you.

This collectivity is similarly experienced at parties, where I love you I love you I love you is yelled rather than whispered: as sensual and accidental elbow bumps on a dance floor; as the soft hand of a new friend, borne from compliments at the bathroom mirror; as the aggressive shoulder shakes of excited dancers when good tunes come on.

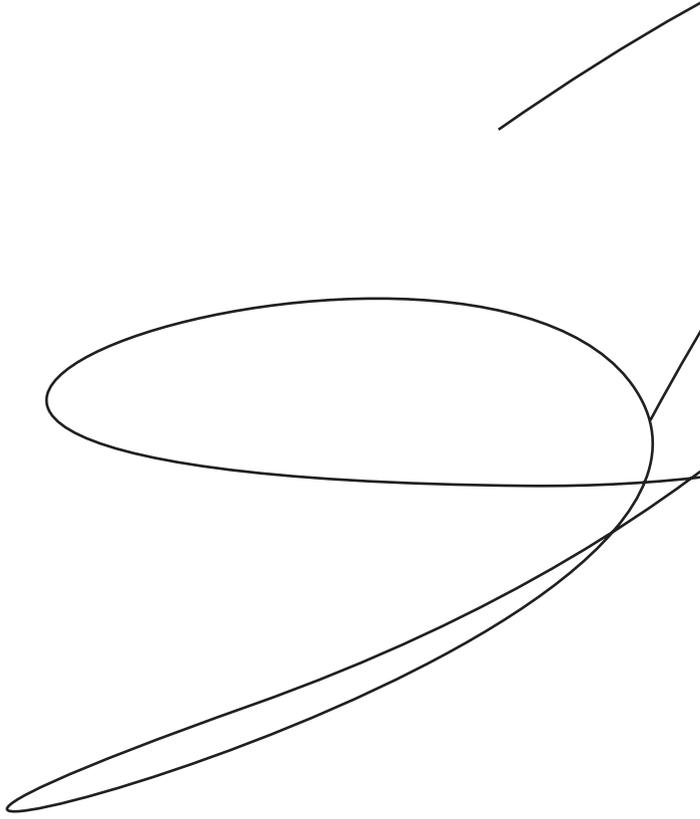
As the slow development of closeness with someone new, with whom you have an unspoken but undeniable tension as you both try to figure out if it's okay to touch;

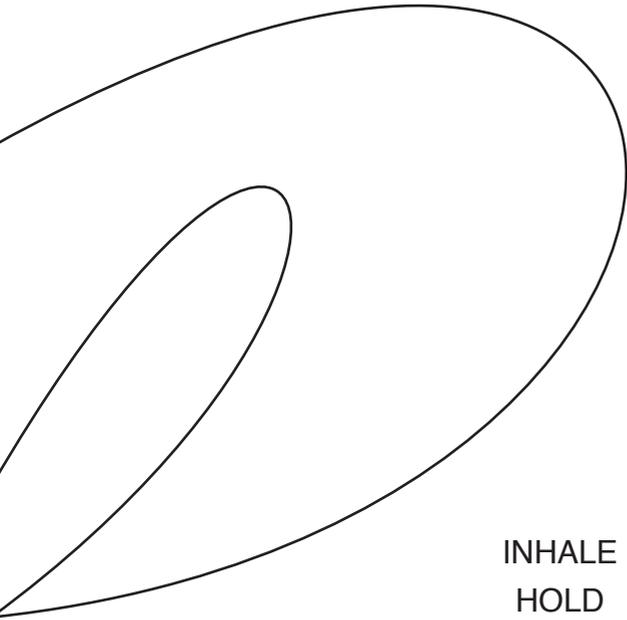
if the other wants to touch. One's hand rests on the other's arm - initially placed for storytelling-emphasis but now lingers tentatively, juicily.

A glorious connection that sparkles briefly and brightly; that explodes and fades but leaves a lingering sensation on your skin.

A return to this normality still seems a far cry from reality, but I'm not losing hope.

LONG





INHALE
HOLD

— I LONG for a rebirth —

EXHALE
HOLD

Sometimes I wish I could shed my skin like a snake and start afresh. I want to feel this casing slip away as I peel it off like some clothes I've outgrown. I guess I'd run the risk of shedding earlier than necessary - just how easy is to know when you've outgrown yourself? I consider myself to be quite in tune with my own body, yet still I often misinterpret what it's trying to tell me.

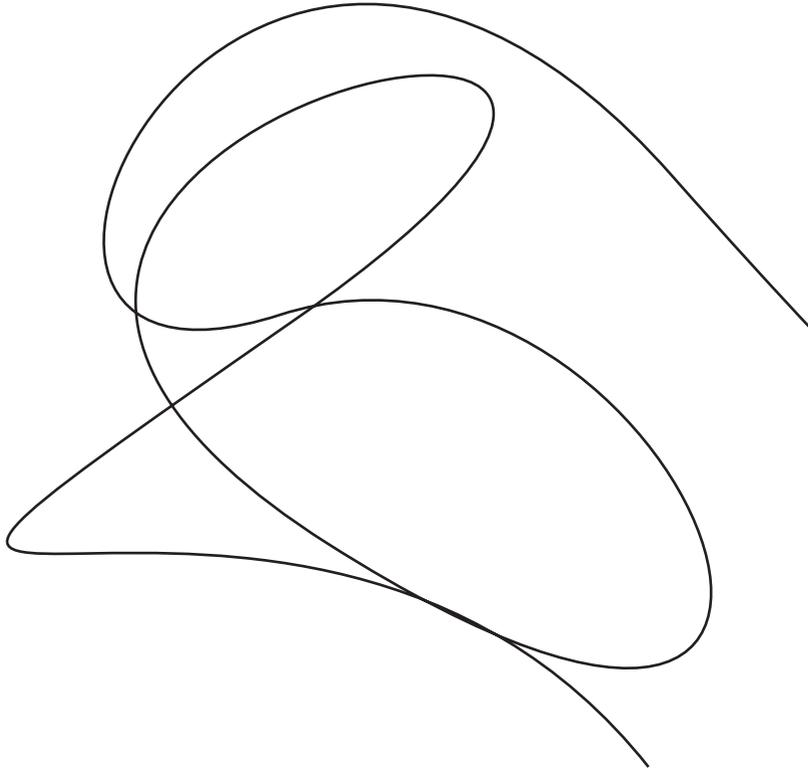
Maybe this is because there's so many thoughts and so many feelings floating around inside, that primal instincts have been adulterated by the masses of external considerations that humans need to survive.

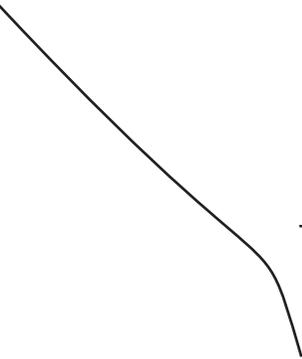
When I can't pinpoint a feeling, I like to be squeezed tightly enough to push the sad out of my body; tightly enough to pierce a hole in my skin for the excess air to hiss through. Ideally, it would be tightly enough to compress and contain all of my different flaming thoughts into one cute and compact ball of fire that I can hurl into space, where it could make its way to Betelgeuse, my favourite star, and settle itself in as a glorious, flickering reminder of what I've overcome.

I don't want to carry my past self with me long enough

to slip back into its skin but perhaps I don't need to shed
my casing - I just need to get the inside, out.

LAMENT





INHALE
HOLD

— I LAMENT for things unknown that
have been taken from us —

EXHALE
HOLD

I am boundlessly grateful for the company I keep, as I owe so much of myself to those who have helped shape me.

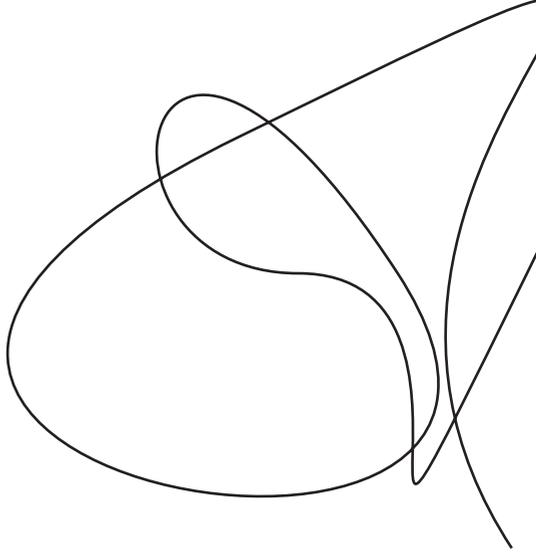
I am also grateful for the ancestors who live within me, as I owe so much to those who have paved the paths I take. Despite their spiritual endurance, there is little in the way of factual permanence. These lives have been denied the right to be recorded, and generations of their descendants have been denied the right to access their history, as though archival preservation is a privilege that they weren't granted.

Most of my ancestors' histories only tangibly remain in stories of torment and trauma, but their triumph survives intangibly, through social perseverance, and within the very essence of our beings. Magnificently, in a world dominated by those who harbour little respect for the people from whom I descend, our exuberance is inextinguishable.

The glee of generation upon generation has flickered and exploded and fizzled, surviving countless efforts to dampen it. Perhaps this joy lives on as cute little balls of

fire which have been hurled into space and made their way to Betelgeuse, my favourite star. Perhaps they feed on the same oxygen as the balls of flaming thoughts, and settle themselves in as glorious flickering reminders of the ingredients that went into the recipes that make us today.

WITH THANKS :



This would not have been at all possible without the support of:

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My casing of skin, and the body it contains.

A text written in response to *Slow Breath*.

Slow Breath was curated by Calum Bayne for The
NewBridge Project, Newcastle in 2021.

It featured work by Camara Taylor and Meera Shakti
Osborne.

