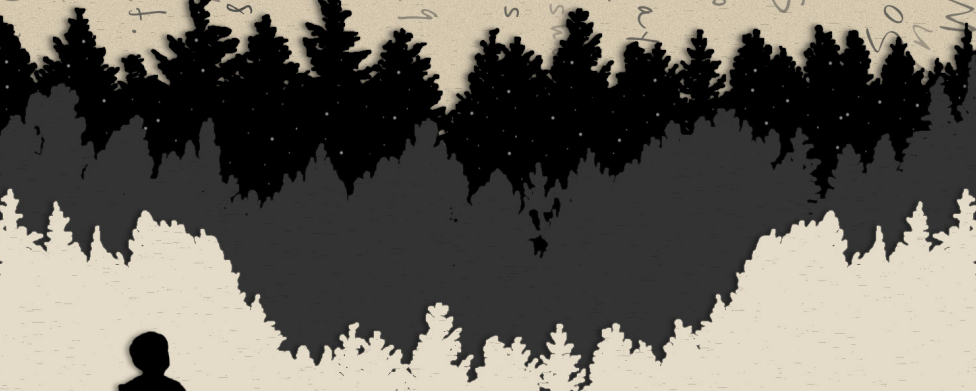


... you give a wild a wild  
... Facebook profile leaps out of bed  
... I want to be a sweet  
... I saw a black  
... there I  
... deny  
... shut  
... some days I feel like  
... stairs of your  
... well-being



# You Are Not Alone

POEMS BY

SHAUNA DARLING ROBERTSON



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troika

Also by Shauna Darling Robertson

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## SATURDAYS AT THE IMAGINARIUM

### A National Poetry Day Selection 2021

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But always there's a light in the window to guide you to a  
home you never imagined before.'*

– **A.F. Harrold**

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SOMETIMES LIKE

A WILD HORSE

AND

SOMETIMES LIKE

DISCO LIGHTS

## WHAT THE MIND IS LIKE

*after Miroslav Holub*

Officially the mind  
is brain-shaped, head-dwelling  
and brims with logic

but anyone who's done time with the mind  
knows that it's also

vast like the night sky,  
terrorising like a carnivore with an automatic weapon  
and a quiet ally, like the janitor who gets the job done.

It pulses and purrs like a heart crossed with a kitten  
then it's a cloud, a butterfly, a bulldozer.

Sometimes it's like a frightened robot  
slamming rusty feet on brakes and 3D-printing concrete walls.

And sometimes like a wild horse.  
And sometimes like disco lights.

In it there are keys and sponges,  
dust and weather systems

and in it is something you thought you'd lost,  
some unwanted things you were given  
and something you long for so badly  
but don't yet know is already yours.

## HOW HAVE YOU BEEN FEELING LATELY?

Over the past month I've had little interest in  
frills / holdalls / giving figs

I would describe my mood as  
mare-shaped / blowfish / pope-less

Some days I have trouble getting out of  
lead / cowhide / birthdays

I've noticed a change in my  
engine / appliances / hairspray

More than twice this week I've been  
buzzing / muzzled / slumpish

I find it hard to concentrate on  
the height of the sun / the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the month /  
the where of the chair

Sometimes I can't help thinking about  
hanging spoons on your ears / biting Joan's shoulder /  
hiding between my own fingers

Lately my future seems  
horizontal / horsewhipped / a horoscope

But between you and me, what troubles me most is  
the trouble / between me / and me



## I WANT TO EXPERIENCE LIFE IN NEUTRAL WITH NO SUDDEN MOVEMENTS

I think I hear a dove. It's a thin sound  
as if something is going to happen. Bad feelings come  
in shades of green. Time is as hard to grasp  
as a country I've never been to and when I'm not moving  
it feels like my insides and my outsides are trying to swap places.

Good feelings come in pretty colours and feel soft  
like cashmere. I like saying the word *optimistic*.  
I see the days of the week as going uphill and downhill  
and the months are like stairs. *Shocked* is a quick, brutal word.  
Things I can't predict or control confuse me.

Dark blue is my anchor. Once I had to keep walking,  
on and on. Turning back was not an option because  
roads don't come to an end. Sometimes I feel the most alone  
when there are people in the room. Numbers are fixed,  
unchanging things. When I make a mistake I want to disappear.

I like to have everything where I can see it. My memory is like  
a pool of dots. I don't always know what my legs are up to  
and I fear if I'm touched all my thoughts will become visible.  
When my mind moves too fast for language I jumble up words.  
Sometimes it feels like the ground is shaking, the landscape

coming to get me. When a hotel looks different from the website,  
I don't know which version to believe. I take everything  
literally. When people talk for too long it's like a tsunami  
which I cancel out by thinking of music or trains. I can't name  
my feelings, don't recognise them. Surprises hurt, almost

physically. I work out that 'defects in social-emotional reciprocity'  
refers to how conversations happen. One day I saw myself  
in a full-length mirror and realised I was waving goodbye.  
My brain is differently wired. I feel assaulted by bright lights.  
I set all my clocks ten minutes ahead, it reduces the pressure.

*Note: This is a 'found poem' made up of words and phrases  
borrowed from a selection of sources. The sources are listed in  
'Notes on Poems' on page 120.*

## OMINOUS SKY

*after Chūya Nakahara*

one morning I saw a black cloud  
hanging up there in the sky  
the cloud hovered back and forth and then  
it stole like a ghost into my mind

what made it do that? why?  
did I dream of rain of rain  
for so long that rain came and made itself mine

was it the time bomb of DNA  
finally going off that day the alarm call  
(ring-ring) of the pre-arranged hour of explosion

perhaps a sliver of some old bruise that broke off  
travelled north its moisture vaporising as it rose  
and then it fell condensed again

or did the black cloud look for shelter  
from all the hot air and mistake my mind for  
a safe place or was it after a soul mate  
saw another creature made almost entirely of lost tides

## AVOIDANCE IS A COMMON BEHAVIOUR WHEN ANXIETY STRIKES

For fear of hair shame, I wear a hat.  
For fear of silences, I'm loathe to chat.  
For fear of ups and downs, I take the flat.

For fear of thoughtlessness, I over-think.  
For fear of timelessness, I stay in-synch.  
For fear of drowning, I hardly drink.

For fear of atmospheres, I never fly.  
For fear of modest moods, I chase the high.  
For fear of wanting, I buy-buy-buy.

For fear of peace and ease, I start a war.  
For fear of order, I break the law.  
For fear of not enough, I push for more.

For fear of prominence, I'm rarely seen.  
For fear of blemishes, I'm squeaky clean.  
For fear of nightmares, I never dream.

For fear of standing up, I tend to crawl.  
For fear of free will, I hit the wall.  
For fear of fear itself, my life is small.

## SAM ASKS ALEXA ABOUT WELLBEING

after George Szirtes

What is wellbeing, asks Sam. It starts with freedom, says Alexa, which spins around until it feels dizzy and then has a little lie down.

What is wellbeing, asks Sam. A giant slice of cake that's reassuringly solid and as light and fluffy as air, says Alexa.

What is wellbeing, asks Sam. A cross between a pillow, a pair of skis and a lioness, says Alexa.

What is wellbeing, asks Sam. A house that can fly, says Alexa.

What is wellbeing, asks Sam. I'm not sure but I think it might be a deep green, says Alexa.

What is wellbeing, asks Sam. A kind of hologram, says Alexa. Imagine looking into the cells of an orange and seeing the whole orange and also every other fruit in there.

What is wellbeing, asks Sam. A rocking chair that's also a rope ladder to the stars, says Alexa.

What is wellbeing, asks Sam. Pages of a book talking and laughing about the times they had when they were trees, says Alexa.

What is wellbeing, asks Sam. The heart and the mind and the world on the same page, says Alexa, or thereabouts.

## HOW TO GROW YOUR PAIN

Start a war against it. Fight it.  
Shut the door on it, deny it.  
Judge, dissect and analyse it.

*Anything but feel it.*

Swallow it with cheesecake. Feed it.  
Drink it, sink it puke and bleed it.  
Protein shake and matcha tea it.

*Anything but feel it.*

Dig a hole and bury, hide it.  
Rage and snarl and sneer, to spite it.  
Roll it in tobacco, light it.

*Anything but feel it.*

Selfie, tag and post and tweet it.  
Pout and posture look-at-me it.  
Wear it like a badge and be it.

*Anything but feel it.*