



hive

IMRAN BOE KHAN

to my wife, Victoria



BODY SQUATTERS CAUGHT DANCING

The knot in my lungs will scamper and fly,
depart through this messy grove of bones.

It will cloy to the loneliness that feeds my skin,
and walk through my wounds with no thought of staying.

My grandma said that's how you get old--
things come to stay. She had a tumor

no one found, squatting in her throat. She said
something doesn't have to be real to kill you.

Later she was breathing laser light, coughing up her self;
no healing of her scattered bits of matter.

Decay was the wilderness, body the spring.
I sensed she was putting off telling me

something which might have been important,
like how the vastness that would come between us

would shrink to the size of a bee
and spread its hive throughout my lungs.

ANNUNCIATION

The attic claims the bridal dress for food, that perfect slant of light. As white darkens, an abandoned thing learns to keep to itself, a shrine for feelings its former owner can no longer pronounce. In an outgrown clothes pile, a stray pelargonium branch flowers through the dust of a single-use kimono, its green beak peering through the loft's cracks like a god hunting the anxious dead for a sinner. We fashioned this rot, love on a leash we're walking, and when its soul inherits the Earth, no one will know who spared it, no one will know the ones who died apologizing for the fact it was ever here.

A DOT IN THE SKY

I fell asleep thrumming in the power grid,
swallowing an axis no one could cross.

Now I exhale light. Nature and boundary have collapsed
on an underside of tongue. Broken teeth envelop

the flushed glow. Have you ever seen the solstice
do its work, stained yellow meat and bright liquid,

the spectacle festival, tiny hands cupping the flame?
Trickery has always been the vice which rules me

hardest. I have a strong urge to radiate visions impossibly
impure, to empty intention from a stranger's eye socket.

I court renewal, worlds made and unmade.
Not everyone believes in devotion;

even light pulls back.

I want from life every secret box of scat-black karma,

the stunned night. I want absence to get attention.

I wish to be all that the world could want.

WHO OWNS THIS ...

... utility coat of malice? Your son picks
burnt metal off the driveway, brined in waves
of grief. He crosses biblical at the four points,
punctures your existence.

His anger is non-specific and yet, a centerpiece.
He wants to break something expensive—
your television, your cocktail cabinet, your reputation,
the strings holding them together.

But he knows that's the wrong thing to want.
He's waiting for you to come down the stairs,
to tell him you've found the pigeon
matted at the bottom of his closet,

for his brother to pinch revelations
into his innermost sanctums,

for a cop to plunge him wrist-deep in handcuffs
and drag him across your lawn as he thrashes his depths

and fumbles the metal he meant for your portrait—
a sign he'd come for his final Eucharist,
that he'd worn his old man's shoulders,
that the fear was real, the threat.

MY FATHER EXHALED LIKE A FIREFLY

We watched his glow bruise the night,
poke through the bars of its skin,

make it scream until it souled,
until it knew the difference between air

and the wings that live inside it.
He told me forever's a gesture that has been lost;

life sparks in spite of itself,
unburdened by the cruelty of limbs.

He had so studied the world,
but had never learned how to disappear.

Stripped of a sense of occasion,
he milled around in the trash,

dangled from the drop doors like
a bouquet of snapdragons

as he breathed to break the world apart,
saying: 'things aren't meant to last forever'

til he was ready for the next thing,
what we couldn't know.

He dealt himself out as to a gambler,
held his body like a runaway train.

Now we trace the past the way light does.
Whatever he touched has nowhere else to go.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Imran Boe Khan is a winner of the Thomas Hardy Award and past nominee for the Best of the Net Award. His academic and creative writing has been published by Routledge, *The Rumpus*, *Juked*, *Cosmonauts Avenue* and other venues. He lectures at Bournemouth University, and lives in Dorset, England, with his wife and children in the ancient town of Christchurch. Follow his work on Facebook @[ImranBoeKhan](https://www.facebook.com/ImranBoeKhan).



The author wishes to acknowledge and thank the editors of publications where poems or earlier versions of poems first appeared: “Who owns this...” (as “Pull Yourself Up by Your Own Bootstraps”) in *Under the Radar*; “Body Squatters Caught Dancing” in *Juked*; “Annunciation” in *After the Pause*; and “My Father Exhaled like a Firefly” in *The Bitter Oleander*.

KOMMA SERIES NUMBER TWENTY-FOUR

The bite-sized booklets of the Komma Series are a mouthful of literature each, intended to be read in a single sitting. When you’re done with one, pass it along! Look for them lying around in Boston, Portland, or New York City. When you see one waiting to be read, go ahead and pick it up. Give it a home in your hands for a ten-minute lit snack. Then when you’re finished, leave it behind for the next person to find, in an ATM lobby, on a train station bench, in the coffeeshop, at the pub. To request a single copy of any chapbook in the series, or a set of copies in bulk quantity so you can pepper them around your neighborhood, just contact the Pen & Anvil Press and we can put a plan together to mail some over to you. You can reach us via the good folks at the Boston Poetry Union, 139 Mt. Vernon Street, Fitchburg MA. 01420. If you don’t have a stamp, feel free to send us an email: press@penandanvil.com.

Edited by Cat Dossett for Pen & Anvil; find her on social [@aboutadaughter](https://twitter.com/aboutadaughter). Cover art: “Butterfly (second version)” by Albert Bierstadt, a gouche/watercolor created in 1900. The original is in a private collection; the image is public domain, and was sourced from Wikiart. The fonts in this layout are Calibri by Luc(as) de Groot, Wooden by Brooke Dobbie, and 123 Sketch by Olivier Mordefroid.

published in 2020 // penandanvil.com/chapbooks