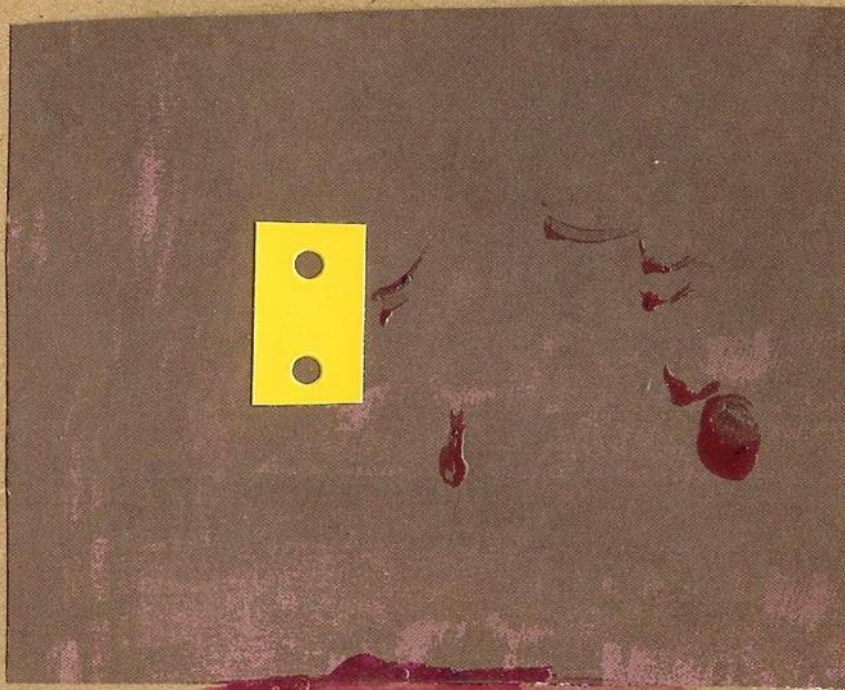


Soft Foam
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Dusie Kollektiv 4

Blood Pudding Press 2010

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Semi-Extraneous Consort

I'm a stowaway in a transplanted suitcase.
The zipper is stuck.
The zipper is broken open.
Maybe the broken zipper is my mouth.

I could be mute or I could be gaping.
I could seem secure then suddenly loosen
as a Bluish Green Hairstreak flits from a rift
in a secret compartment. To swelling strains of almost
glistening angst, a spider attaches silk
to a substrate and leaps into the air...

I'm his new wife.
I could be the blackthorn at his side.
I could be the wide-eyed doe. The sloe
in his gin. A spiked distraction
soon to lose fizz, to exhaust its own effervescence.

The old wife is dead, but she could be phosphorescent.
She could be a glowing expanse of silk underneath
my faded fleur-de-lis bedspread. Entangled in sheets,
a Sad Green Hairstreak wilts in the death web.
In a dream, his old wedding ring floats back
onto his finger. His hand blooms amaranths.

I'm his new wife.
My teeth tingle when I hear that phrase;
when I fear the ache of a fresh bite
that feels like a secret beheading.

A flash of stained fleur-de-lis.
A fake bird called Broken Zipper Wing.
I could seem like I'm flying then suddenly crash
as Many-Banded Daggerwings dart my eyes into shirring.
I plummet face-first; my teeth loosen into
her neck; start dissolving. Pieces of me
mutely break. Once-hidden rifts gape

into streams. They could be a naturally beautiful
convergence. I could be a solitary green leaf
trapped beneath a rock they
flow past, burbling...

I could be a homeless pygmy goat,
gnawing fallen apples by the side of the road;
my teeth not quite cutting through to the core
of this debris. The suitcase could be broken open.
Glowing artifacts could be strewn with cheap forgeries.
I could unzip my mouth and chew
all these sharp tiny interlocking pieces...

Metallic Remnants

Yesterday's hair
is a rainbow on the floor.

It blooms weird flowers
out of torn boxes,
secondhand goblets,
empty tins. You

are still asleep
on the busted couch.
Looks like you carved your way out
of an orange rose. Soft foam
stuck in your stubble.

Something is humming.
Some generator moves tiny
gears inside me. I
am still hungry.

I collect loose strands
into sandwich bags.
I run water through
used coffee dregs,
go sit by myself to think.

There's gold glitter on the sidewalk
where we smashed an old TV
with a sledgehammer, exposing the core
--shiny shards under soles, sharp metallic
remnants in six outstretched hands.

Half Moon

Blood-streaked petals wilted
around a center still sticky
with bright pollen.

A ruby-stained cotton swab
tweezed from a hole.

Red felt tip pen
on white hem, scrawled words...

Pinkish fingerprints dusted off
a decorative rotary phone.
Decorative as in unplugged.

A voice in a small sandwich bag
on a black answering machine tape
to be played later (again and again).

In an adjacent bag, fragments of party streamers,
flecks of fondant, half moon shaped slivers.

Her abandoned place setting begs
so many questions such as why
and where does her ghost reside.

An unsipped sip of sweet wine
might have dried into residuum
at the bottom of stippled glass,
(except I sipped it...

Giant Squid

I can't die because his first wife did, something to do with ratios, probability. Not that I could ever understand those so-called proofs or anything else mathematical,

but I'm in tune with underwater jet propulsion, rhythms of pulsing tentacles. Something invades a natural habitat with a misguided statistical inference or am I feeling

paranormal interference? Maybe she wants me to succumb to suction cups imprinting their circular scars, stained with dark ink. Sharp, finely serrated rings.

Wedding rings. Maybe she wants me to give something; to cross over with her love letters, to cross over with her what ifs. A gelatinous material holds them together;

all these eggs are punctured, but none of them drained... Interior a dunk tank teeming with the giant squid and me seated precariously above it. Throw the first rock.

Haunted Sea Urchin

It may go for long periods without food.
It is way too spiny to hold inside my cage
where it lays dormant then suddenly turns on
a constellation of glowing photospheres.
Tiny spotlights revolve around me
as I collapse into an unstable stage.
I thought she would sink not float.

I spill like prickles in vitreous fluid.
She spills like blue-green light from a fish
that lives deep under water. I thought it
would float down not up. I thought it would settle
at some bottom until the bones were smoothed, until
her flesh was digested into tiny plankton. Intestinal flora.

She unfathomably surfaces again, her skeleton
sharpened, her wedding dress of plant and animal scraps,
swimming towards me, a phantasmagoria
of photosynthesized tongues darting
my stomach, tincturing my wet eyes
with tainted bioluminescence. What if
my sodden head is a carnivorous sponge?

Red-tinged saltwater makes stiff casements
out of my silk pillowcases. I lay awake.
It may go for long periods without sleep.
It is way too deep to contain these
clots of algae in my sockets. Who
can transform a tangled algae bloom
into a sweet silk suturing? I hack up

weedy sea dragons like cryptic, beautiful
aliens. Their fins stop humming, but
their mouths keep foaming inside
my own foaming mouth until I go blind.

Hot Water

My tongue is tethered to this pearl-making ache.
This longing to escape the bivalve open & shut.
I can't turn off the steam. Like abalone
in hot water when he flashes his eyes at me.
Flares his nostrils (please). Already attached, but

this multicolor seizes up my partial formation.
Shiny and gritty. The messy truth is
I want them both.
I'm so tempted, I've pretended
the timing was off when I knew

my impulses are non-linear.
Not about the nice fit.
Whole enough to roll between his fingers'
small circles, but not perfect spheres that might be strung
around a couth neck, an orderly solar system model.

My adornment is misshaped. Debris field
desire to spill down his naked chest.
I don't want to be fastened. I want
to stay open. I want to be crushed
by the entire wild weight of his body.

Neon Plasma

I am in close proximity to unpredictable animals
and discharging my pheromones & danger from neon tubes inside me.
High voltage marquee for the latest double-header.

The animal has two heads. One wants to be petted
and one wants to bite. In one dream, it took the form of a baboon
toying with a domesticated cat, pretending to be nice.
Maybe I don't want it to be nice.

Maybe my quills are quivering.
I can hardly even stand this
fulgurating feeling of waiting for something
I might never receive. I need to release

while collapsing against (what I want to do to) you.
My neon tubes are Roman candles;
the stars are burning through my
already flickering defense mechanisms.

You could part my porcupine spines like the Red Sea
and (hot) cross (bun) me. One could sink
teeth deep into sticky white frosting.
One could light me up like a glowing coral reef.

Sink or Float [quick fix witch]

Do you think I'm a witch, a quick fix,
a gimp twitch in a blood bath of blood
pudding without the blood. Do you
think I'm a crusted-over cut, cruddy
antithesis to airbrush, fucking lush
glut of bruises, ripe juniper berries
oozing through delicate rice paper.

I feel your heart beating in my stomach;
I think this means you lied. You tried
to feel me up like some cult sensation;
succulent tubers split my lips, dripped juice.
Then they were dirty drainage tubes;
saturated gauze pads on bended knees.
Do you think I'm a succubus, a bad fruit medley.

Even after our hearts tried to slither away,
I flicked my tongue. I didn't want to get stuck
in any one position, in the shallow basin
of a cold spoon. I want sharp, I want gush,
I want ripe enough to erupt through skin.
If I be the witch, will you be the leech?
I'm a lush blood bath of hot berries.

Sink or Float [curiosity killed]

I'll be the apothecary label; you peel it off me.
Read me. I reckon you've tried never these
ingredients before. Oh, you have? Maybe
female intuition failed me. I like to imagine
I'm so unique, but sometimes I'm easy
access. Sometimes I'm Syrup of Ipecac.

Sometimes I'm a sinful curio-
sity killing off a content pussy,
wanting you, wanting you to,
wanting you to beat it while I
do this to myself. What I mean is
seemingly content, seemingly purring,

but there are other explanations for this sound.
Listen. I'll be the witch if you vow to drown me
in high stakes spirits. No more of this carnival
dunk tank, plush prize, wine cooler game for me.
I'm not that kind of girl, or woman as it were.
I like it hard. I have a high tolerance. Try me.

Sink or Float [chilled spirits]

So what if I store my heart in a flask
with chilled vodka. Whip it out.
Pour it free from sloshed clamor;
vaguely metallic aftertaste.

Tongue a cat-o-nine-tails.
Tongue a planchette on the fast track
witchboard. Tongue a blurred
mise en scene into high relief.

Sink or Float [drunk fantasy]

This drunk compliments my legs.
I compliment my own legs in my head
in an other's voice. All it takes
to induce another fantasy.

Where do you want my hands?
Direct me. Which one should I suck from?
Tongue a planchette awaiting guidance.
Tongue a fulcrum. Tongue a psychic v...

Sink or Float [sticky draining]

Someone or something is draining me.
I've been skimmed into an anemic
nutria queen. My sticky fur trickles
weak juice. Blue bottle flies crown me.
I'm not the luscious drink I wished to be.

What if I was a leech handler, but
kept dreaming I was a wine stomper?
Barefoot in a vat with leeches swollen
as grapes, skin slipping off as they engorge
and ferment, wet husks beneath my feet,

a strange suction inside me.
What if I swallowed a leech?

Sink or Float [ratty dangling]

Little rat feet skitter blood clot spangling.
On whose hook am I dripping and dangling?
Who is holding the rod and do they see me

as succulent bloodfeast or bait? Don't leave
me hanging, don't leave me wet and un-

From a distance I'll look like a glittering little
jewelry box ballerina dancing, slick red herring,
unbitten mouthful of sticky bun tangled in fishing line

Squiggles in Wonderland

1.

Some days are stained with bittersweet pangs
of missing the blood-hued Mary Janes;
but sometimes old shoes get so battered,
they must be pitched down the rabbit hole.
Like white gloves stolen from
an Alice in Wonderland who keeps her shape
shifting until I rip off her fingers.
Twist them to create *candy gags*.
White chocolate bunny with pink sugar eyes.
White cake body with a hankering to knife
me sweet slices with squiggles inside.

Squiggly things squiggle inside my head—
more leech than peach
gel from a pastry bag tip.
My head isn't so sweet.
It's occupied. It shrieks. Her *squiggly things*
are squeezed decorations. Caramelized strands
and edible toes. You know you want to insert
a candy thermometer inside. Taste her mouth.
Suck the color out of those sweet cheeks.
Make her gasp. Make her gape open.
Bite off her head. Is it hollow inside?
Is your tongue such a creamy dream
you feel like a queen? Then the cloying aftertaste
takes over. That would be me. A 33
(34, 35, 36, 37) yr. old woman & still she persists
in wearing gimmicky knee-socks, you might think.
Well, why don't you eat shit and

chocolate, jellybeans, cupcakes with strawberry filling.
You might think I'm flaunting my fairy tale legs, but
maybe these socks are hiding flesh from the ravenous
flock of shrikes. They shriek. They plummet. They peck
out eyes and replace them with *chocolate-covered cherries*.
Maybe these socks are hiding my scabs from hooked beaks.
Maybe I want to RIP THEM OFF, RIP THEM
OFF WITH HER HEAD! Maybe I want to see red
spray across all her *pink cupcake* papers...

I'm not a *flaky cream puff w/fluffy filling* replacement.

2.

I'm a liar, an imposter, another basket
case of misplaced identity. Maybe it's me
who is hiding inside candy coating

because sugar is not a perishable good
(unless it's invaded).

It disguises my graying hair,
glazes my thinning lips,
turns my tears into pink & white
almonds at somebody else's wedding,

because who am I
to cry over somebody else's broken
eggs, cracked shells, dead babies?

I only cry at movies
about death (misplaced e-
motion), swallow hard.

Ghost Passage

My negligee is a diaphanous jellyfish skirt;
almost invisible tentacles flirt
with sheets, tangle in comforters.

My foxfire hairpins shed
from wet split ends.

Why won't the prow-girl's expression stone into statuary?
Why won't her infernal ringlets stop dripping?
Why won't her insatiable hairline cracks stop expanding?
When will she learn how to steer at a steady keel?

Gully, ho, gully, ho, gully.
Another ghost ship marks
its passage; in its wake, another rank
bundle. Another placenta of peonies
swaddled in seeping gauze.

An inexplicably pitched corsage
soon to be submerged unless you pick it
out of its roiling froth. Why won't you?

Maybe you're trying to decide between
a paint flaking figurehead and real
live blood & flesh, but consider too
this gushing watercourse; this waterlogged skin,
swollen to the point of wet splintering.

Queen termites could be crawling
out of cracked lips if this habitat
was not so saturated, but it is.
Sometimes violent frothing; sometimes soft foam.

Sodden sawdust in my wrists
spills out and what am I to do with this?

I think it's exhausted until I feel it again.
Spatial overextension until another spiral
binding works its way through my blood stream.

Postscript

You have to be willing to get rid of little things.

Clumps in the sugar vessel, old love letters. I could read them. I could try to stir them in and drink them (sweet bullets),

I could throw them away, I could secrete them in my own bookcase (the purloined letter) and then pretend they're not there,

even though I know they are always. Three choices and none of them quite right in the head, in the heart, in the holy.

You have to be willing to get rid of the love of your life and build a new heart. A new ship-mate. That new one is me, sometimes happy;

sometimes afraid I'm playing somebody else. Reading /writing a passage through dark water that does not belong to me. What if I'm an invader

in this trinity. What if I created all these clumps with my stirring spoon, flung them into every nook and now they're weighting

down the ship. It wasn't a routine lumpectomy. You never did tell me about the scar on your wrist (a love letter). You could try

to lick off the candy coating, but then I would be perishable, too. All these holes open to taking on water and nobody bailing it out.

I have to be willing to throw myself overboard.

acknowledgments:

Some of these pieces have been published, sometimes in earlier incarnations (and sometimes with different titles) in the following literary magazines: *Combatives* (a special single-author supplement to *H_NGM_N Magazine*), *Melusine*, *Sein Und Werden*, *Spooky Boyfriend*, *Taiga*, and *Wicked Alice*.

Concept:

This collection is partially inspired by intersections between love and death—and the others who lurk at the peripheries of our most significant relationships.

My husband lost his first wife to cancer, suddenly. When he & I became involved, I found myself surrounded by the artifacts of a past life; found myself feeling strangely haunted.

Recently it occurred to me that upon my next birthday, I would be turning the same age as my husband was when we met. Even then, I was already older than his first wife was when she died. I have an uneasy relationship with the passage of time and have not yet come to comfortable terms with the idea of nonexistence.

I've felt a strange compulsion to preserve her documents. I'd want to be remembered and preserved if I died. I wouldn't want potential artifacts to become mere debris, although I realize individual memory is also a kind of documentation.

After death, there are so many possible reconstitutions, reconstructions, reanimations, and re-imaginings. The dead have the power to impact even those who did not know them in real life through residual documentation and more.

There will always be mixed feelings, uncertainties, what ifs.
There will always be others at the peripheries.

I chose 'Soft Foam' as this collection's title due to its multiple connotations. It could be the calmed down version of a violent frothing, but it could also be something that is purposely sprayed into rifts and crevices to contain the gaping. To put it another way, it could be ebbing & flowing expression versus repression—and although I usually think that expression is far preferable to repression, I also understand that defense mechanisms take place for a reason.