

“Megan Fernandes is one of my favorite poets because she does things on the page that I and most other poets can’t imagine. Her rhapsodic lineation, her liberated image and metaphor. All that wonder is on display in her new stunner, *I Do Everything I’m Told*. The collection is, at its center, a book of love poems like all the best poetry collections are. The pretense of love, the past tense of love, and what we do when the little galaxies we build with others start to come apart. Fernandes navigates these spaces with the kind of slick wit and care that love poems require: awareness, eros, and utter abandon. Her first two collections showed us the possibilities for a different kind of poem. *I Do Everything I’m Told* shows us what poetry looks like in the aftermath.”

—**ADRIAN MATEJKA**,

author of *Somebody Else Sold the World*

“Beautiful, provocative pleasures, these poems apply a sophisticated intelligence to the most vulnerable and insatiable yearnings. Fernandes degloves traditions of love poetry through her radically adventurous poetry, baring the muscle beneath the skin. Each poem, ungovernable and alive to the contemporary moment, carries forward an original and compelling vision. The result is a brilliant triumph—both poignant and bracing.”

—**LEE UPTON**,

author of *The Day Every Day Is*

“In *I Do Everything I’m Told*, we are embraced simultaneously by finality and ambiguity, rules made only to be broken, and in their tesserae lies a beauty that rejects its own existence while reflecting back our own. ‘Sometimes, I wonder if I would know a beautiful thing / if I saw it,’ Fernandes writes, making of wonder itself a journey beyond the veil where death, violence, and uncertainty herald revision, witness, and love. An incredible book!”

—**PHILLIP B. WILLIAMS**,

author of *Mutiny*

“I love the way this poet celebrates the contradictions of the human condition in poems that are as wise as they are wily. This is a poet whose work displays formal acuity, yes, as but also an expansive depth of play. This collection serves and swerves, sings and swings.”

—**TARFIA FAIZULLAH**,

author of *Registers of Illuminated Villages*

**I DO
EVERYTHING
I'M TOLD**

**I DO
EVERYTHING
I'M TOLD**

poems

**MEGAN
FERNANDES**



TIN HOUSE / PORTLAND, OREGON

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For the restless

CONTENTS

I

Tired of Love Poems / 3

Letter to a Young Poet / 4

Dinner with Jack / 5

Paris Poem without Clichés / 6

Drive / 7

Semiotics / 8

Orlando / 11

How to Have Sex in Your Thirties (or Forties) / 12

Winter / 14

Space Cowboy / 16

Shanghai / 18

The Trial / 20

Companion / 21

II

Sonnets of the False Beloveds with One Exception

or Repetition Compulsion

Shanghai Sonnet / 24

Brooklyn Sonnet / 26

Los Angeles Sonnet / 28

Lisbon Sonnet / 30
Palermo Sonnet / 32
Paris Sonnet / 34
Philadelphia Sonnet / 36
Wandering Sonnet / 38
Diaspora Sonnet / 39

III

Do You Sell Dignity Here? / 45
I'm Smarter than This Feeling, but Am I? / 48
In Death, We Met in Scotland / 49
Catskills / 50
Fuckboy Villanelle / 53
Rilke / 54
Too Much Eliot / 56
Get Your Shit Together and Come Home / 57
Reunion / 59
Masculinity / 61
Pound and Brodsky in Venice / 62
Debt / 63
Phoenix / 66
Sagittarius / 67

IV

I Do Everything I'm Told / 71

May to December / 72

Autumn in New York, 2020 / 73

The Poet and the Nurse / 74

The First Outing / 76

Beggars and Choosers / 77

Retrospect / 78

Magical Realism in America / 80

Company, Company / 82

Sonnet for the Unbearable / 83

On Your Departure to California / 84

Malaika / 85

Love Poem / 86

Notes / 88

Acknowledgments / 89

I

“Sit where the light corrupts your face.”

— GWENDOLYN BROOKS,
In the Mecca

TIRED OF LOVE POEMS

But we never tire of them, do we?
We wish to worship more than just each other.
We put a god first, sometimes a tree,
write a sonnet to a bird in the black
of night or offer a light to a stranger
and not call it love. But it is. To pull
out a chair is more than manners.
What we tire of is that we never tire of it.
How it guts us. How it fails, then reappears.
Because what is the bird compared to you?
The bird is replaced each morning.
You approach on a red bike in summer
and the poem takes shape. I entitle it
anything but Love, anything but what it is.

LETTER TO A YOUNG POET

If you haven't taken the Amtrak in Florida, you haven't lived. At 2:00 a.m., seven months into the pandemic, I'm looking up where Seamus Heaney died. It was Blackrock Clinic overlooking the sea and I wonder, sometimes, what is my thing with the Irish, but if the white kids can go to India for an epiphany, maybe it's fine that I go to Ireland. Don't read Melanie Klein in a crisis. She's depressing and there are alternatives. Like Winnicott or a lobotomy. Flow is best understood through Islamic mysticism or Lil Wayne spitting without a rhyme book, post-2003. To want the same things as you age is not always a failure of growth. A good city will not parent you. Every poet has a love affair with a bridge. Mine is the Manhattan and she's a middle child. Or the Sea Link in Mumbai, her galactic tentacles whipping the starless sky. When I say *bridge*, what I mean is goddess. People need your ideas more than your showmanship. L.A. is ruining some of you. All analysis is revisionist. Yellow wildflowers are it. It's better to be illegible, sometimes. Then they can't govern you. It takes time to build an ethics. Go slow. Wellness is a myth and shame transforms no one. You can walk off most anything. Everyone should watch anime after a heartbreak. Sleep upward in a forest so the animal sees your gaze. I think about that missing plane sometimes and what it means to go unrecovered. Pay attention to what disgusts you. Some of the most interesting people have no legacy. Remember that green is your color and in doubt, read Brooks. In the end, your role is to attend to the things you like and ask for more of it: Bridges. Ideas. Destabilization. Yellow tansy. Cities. The wild sea. And in the absence of recovery, some ritual. In the absence of love? Ritual. Understand that ritual is a kind of patience, an awaiting and waiting. Keep waiting, kitten. You will be surprised what you can come back from.

DINNER WITH JACK

A couple go scuba diving and by accident,
get left behind in the water. The boat roars off.
And there they float, in full gear and disbelief,
tanks low on air, stranded in a seamless blue,
deciding if they can survive until the next day, which,
of course, they cannot, because the average person
can only tread four hours without a life jacket.
The couple bicker: *Why did we go on this vacation?*
Why did you choose this company? Why did I choose you?
And even when it's too late, with fatigue building
in their arms and waves buoying their bodies
like a whipped dessert, they make their case of a soulmate
gone wrong. Because a real love story would never end like this.
Eventually, the couple must choose their deaths.
One removes their suit and slips into hypothermic sleep,
and the other cuts and spills blood to entice a shark.
Both choices tell us something about our protagonists,
who are maybe not even our protagonists since
they are so bitter one cannot fully root for them.
See, the logic of a couple is like a Beckett play.
Facing the end, you don't want someone with you
for comfort. You want someone with you to blame.
Jesus, I reply, and cut my steak like a heart.