With each breath,

I count one star.

Rajmoi Phukan

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Acknowledgement

This book is not what I was, I am, or I will be. This book is not moving on from a heartbreak or anything close to that. But yes, it is surely moving forward —with each breath, with each step, with each second —till the last breath knocks at my foot.

I acknowledge my fellow educator colleagues for that gentle push I needed. I thank my illustrator friend, Monikundal Bora, for these beautiful illustrations. My photographer friend, Akeef Saikia, for those lovely photographs. And those tiny stars. I also thank my publisher, and the entire Bluerose team, for making this book happen into a reality.

Preface

In House for My Immortality, I built a home out of love. Every poem was a door left open for someone who might return. I believed that words, if written with enough sincerity, could make time stand still — that love could be preserved between pages the way light is trapped inside glass (which is impossible). That belief became the pulse of my first book: a heart speaking in its purest, most hopeful form.

But love, I have learned, has its own seasons. It grows, it fades, it transforms, and in its leaving, it teaches us what it truly was. When the echoes of that first house began to fade, I found myself beneath a wider, lonelier sky. There were no walls to protect me, only stars — and with each breath, I began to count them, as if counting the remnants of all I had once believed eternal.

The arc of this book is that of movement — from attachment to release, from the intimacy of one story to the universality of many. If House for My Immortality was my heart speaking, this one is my heart healing. It listens, forgives, and learns that sometimes love's truest form is the peace that follows its absence. And yes, I'm moving on.

With Each Breath, I Count One Star *was born from that silence. It is not a rejection of love, but an honest conversation with it — an acceptance that tenderness can coexist with loss, that vulnerability is its own kind of courage. These poems are not about seeking forever anymore; they are about standing still in the moment and learning to see beauty even when it hurts.*

If the first book was my heart speaking, this one is my heart listening. And if, in these pages, you find even a shadow of your own longing or your own recovery, then perhaps, we are both looking at the same night sky — counting the same stars.

~Rajmoi Phukan

An ode to vulnerability

When was the last time?
I forgot. Do you want me to remember?
Please say, you don't. Please say.
Please, please say.

That drum beat of my heart,
When my father told me—
Kneel in front of the gate. And I did.
After giving me five sticks
On both of my legs.

Why? Why? Why did I go out that day?

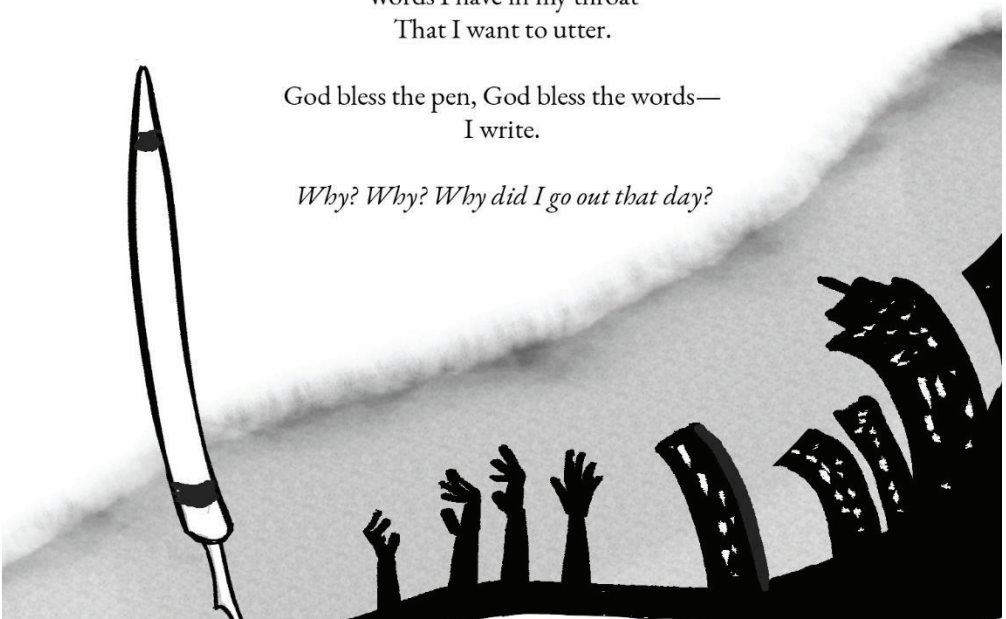
Sometimes I think,
That incident made me shut off—
Words I had in my throat,
But I couldn't utter.

God bless the pen, God bless the words—
I write.

Sometimes I think,
That incident made me block it off—
Words I have in my throat
That I want to utter.

God bless the pen, God bless the words—
I write.

Why? Why? Why did I go out that day?



Rage from a poison tree

Love, is not love,
Which alters,
When alteration finds;

Dear mother,
Please, save me from this sin—
I want to commit.

My hands strangling
Like a lion, breaking—
The neck of its preying deer;

O mother,
Please, protect me from this sin—
I don't want to commit.

Cream biscuit and milk bikies

Biscuits are poetic
Which complements well with tea,
I've tried multiple biscuits—
From multi grains to those filled with cream,
And I'll always prefer the latter;
Why? Well, multi grain makes me feel old
And cream? Sugar? Makes me feel young;
Do I lick the cream? No
Do I dip it in tea? No
Then? Well, I take one bite,
And then take a sip of the cup.
Tasty, isn't it?
But my personal favourite—
Will always be the milk bikies, I had,
When I was a kid.
Sorry I ate those without your permission, maa.

Murder in our lane!

Today, we are crying rain
There's a mother, cheeks drenched-
With tears for her earnest pain-
For she lost her only son,
And we, a fellow resident, murder in our lane!

What is this pain, of mine, unrequited love?
Brush off this scratch, o dear poet-
If we have this cruel life, to think of:
Theft, drugs, and murder, the end of that!
Murder! Murder! Murder in our lane!

You say, dear human? How can I be sane?
Social being as we, living as we, is this society?
Where sons inject illegal drugs to ease pain,
One's wife, and another's husband, ends up in a consummatory?
Shamefully shame! Shame! Shame! Murder in our lane!

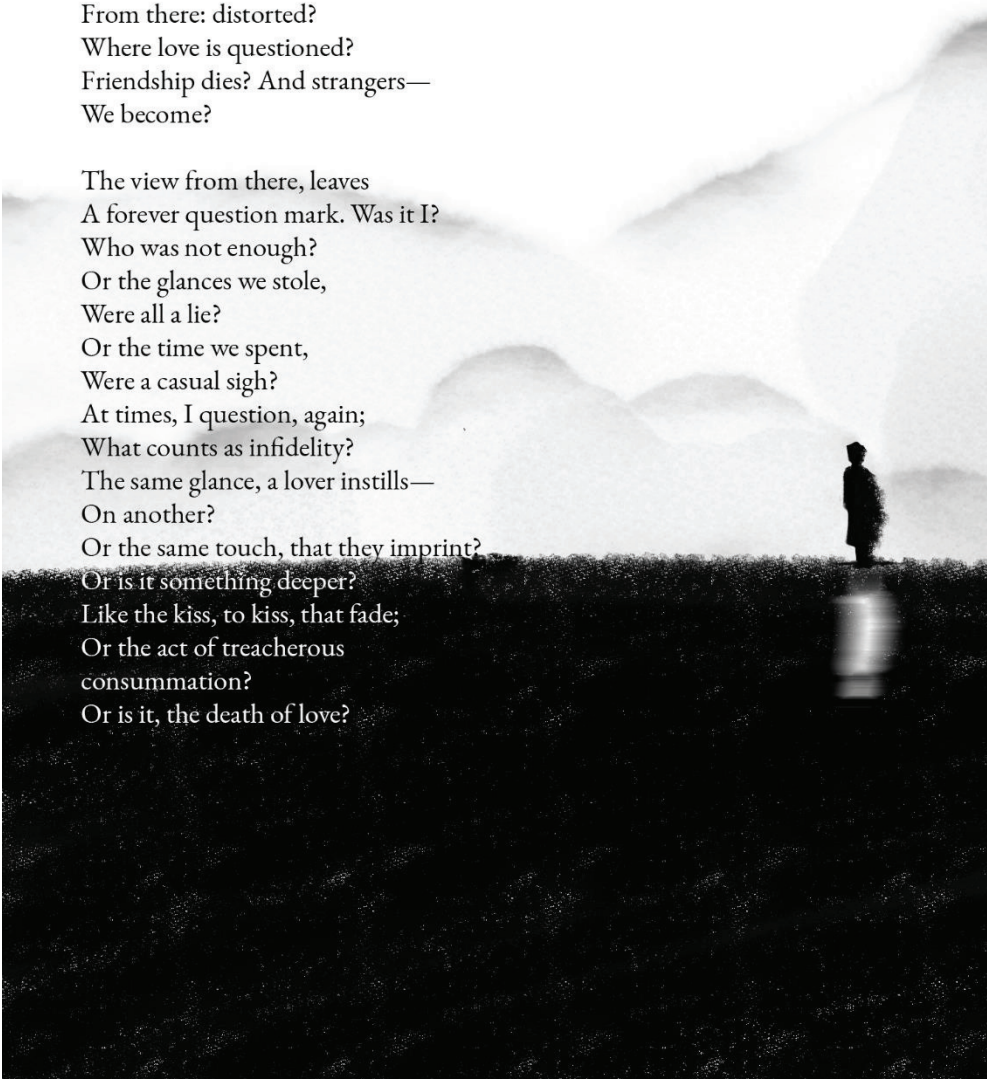
What is any political party? Go hell with that!
Today we weep a mother's tears, o me, o dear poet,
Brush off your scratch of a pain!
His life should not end in vain,
Murder in our lane! Murder in our lane!

In-fidelity

We dream of living in fidelity
We end up seeing infidelity;
Where I, a lover, she— a lover?
And the other? A lover, as well.

Now, you might ask—
Why the question marks(?)
My answer, to you, dear,
Ever seen a broken mirror?
No, not the trust, but the view
From there: distorted?
Where love is questioned?
Friendship dies? And strangers—
We become?

The view from there, leaves
A forever question mark. Was it I?
Who was not enough?
Or the glances we stole,
Were all a lie?
Or the time we spent,
Were a casual sigh?
At times, I question, again;
What counts as infidelity?
The same glance, a lover instills—
On another?
Or the same touch, that they imprint?
Or is it something deeper?
Like the kiss, to kiss, that fade;
Or the act of treacherous
consummation?
Or is it, the death of love?



Dissection of the universe, by a poet

In this night of star gazing, vast into the cosmos, through a telescope. I can't fathom how vast the universe is, where 'I was' 'I am' 'I will' never mattered.

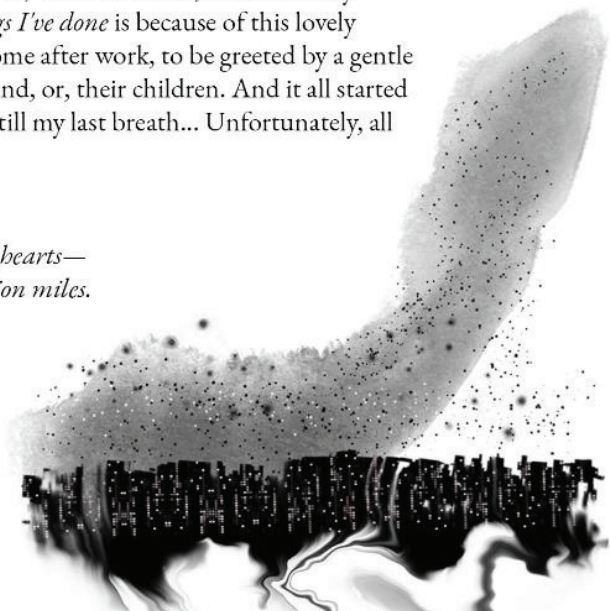
I see no star, but bright lights, that pass through light years to get to us. I blink, and remove my eye, I see tuni lights in the night sky.

For in a star, I see myself living on this earth. Where— 'I was' 'I am' and 'I will be'

A life from here, afar, these light bubbles defy any human reasoning, and burst into chemical formulas, destroying— everything that comes in its way.

To the moon, to the sun, the telescope shows me, holes, craters, and the biggest light ball, that will eat this place we call home- your sister, your wife, your mother, your father, your husband, your brother. And to the life beyond death, which is nothing but time, unfortunately. Yes, time is only the life beyond death.

...Some two hundred years from now, the houses we've built, will not matter. The land we bought will not matter. The lovers who can't live without each other, who says- I see only you, because his or her love is as deep as the ocean, will not matter, unfortunately. They'll say- *"for all the things I've done* is because of this lovely home", where they come home after work, to be greeted by a gentle kiss by his wife or her husband, or, their children. And it all started with their— as I'll love you till my last breath... Unfortunately, all this will never matter.
But, not from a child's eyes.
Not from those human lies.
And never, for those hopeful hearts—
Who has yet to walk, a million miles.



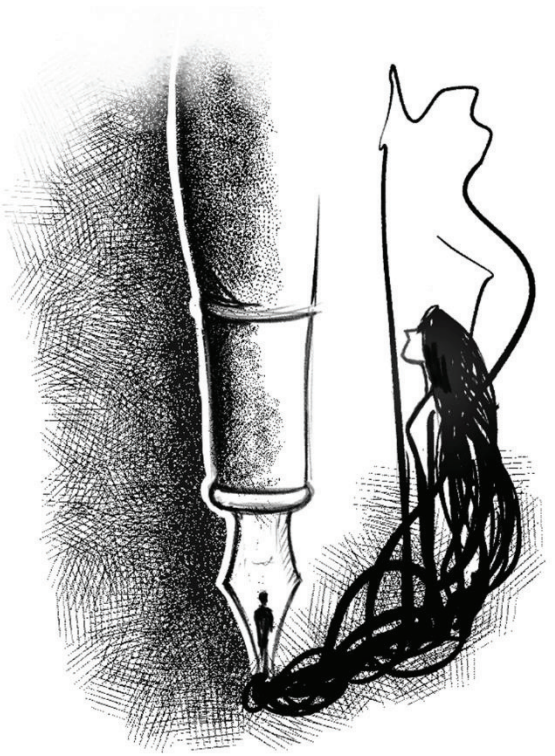
A reflection: Tattoo

Science says, the brain secretes, three hormones
Which makes us feel emotions, humans, alike;
And one hormone, for which—
Drops of water sip through our eyes;
Then answer me, o dear human—
Why is it? That, when a needle pierced
Through my skin— a million times,
No tears came out of my eyes?
The needles' stings, felt as if, a feather touched—
One of my arms, and my back, like a familiar soft touch,
That lingered, by another human?

Answer me! Dear human!
Why? Why is it? That—
When I used to sleep at night,
Tears were shed, like dew drops
Sliding on a taro plant's leaf,
Down my cheeks;
And sometimes, when I lay on my bed,
Even in winter—
My body was drenched in sweat,
As if someone's glance was a summer sun's
Radiating hue.

A reflection by the side of a beer bottle

Of all the most treasured things, I had
This pen was the sweetest of all possessions,
The passion, that once drove me mad
But, alas, this pen of mine lost its passion;
While you kept on singing—
Singing, songs of some famous star,
I weaved verses, writing, wondering, how you are;
Now I don't know, if the jokes on you
Or all the jokes on me, o dear lovely,
'cause now you are long gone
And me? I've moved on.



Clinging to belief \\ a poem before I take a session of therapy

There are a few reasons I believe
That, us, we, will work out, and a few
that we won't. I'll lay bare down
The reasons here —

At first, I shall say the reasons we won't:
For everytime I try to reach out to you
Through email, text, or call?
All I get are two binaries (0s and 1s) —
One is a two letter word, and the other?
An abstract noun.
"Thank you" and "silence"

And now the reasons we can, shall, and be, us:
For everytime people say you cheated on me,
I believe in, "let it pass. People will say,
As they say, as a way" with a hope of it,
Being a lie.
For everytime I see you close, with someone
With their arms around — I hope, it would
be an affection of flying friendship.
For everytime the silence creeps in, I light a lamp
made of clay, in front of the altar, to keep you safe,
to make you eat well, to keep you clean.
To make you happy.
For everytime, I try to eat junk food, I stop myself.
Because I heard you saying, it would make
me fat.

And for every reasons, I believe, we won't.

A reflection: scene from a movie

They asked,
What was the point of writing all those for?
Those lines, which I read over and over, again;
I said,
To make you feel rich, even if I was poor
To give you solace, even if I was hurt, in pain;
And they,
Thought, I wrote what I must
A poet in fire, with some love to feel;
But I,
I, am a poet, with some desire to trust
You, for what I felt, was too real;

An act, where I wasn't an actor
And you, a scene, of my favourite chapter.