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Love Poems for Places: Poem-a-thon for Turkish and Syrian Earthquake Relief

bit.ly/lovepoemsforplaces

12-19 February 2023

Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan






€1246 raised!

**Thank you to everyone who donated
in support of AHBAP in Turkey and
The White Helmets in Syria.**

**Please continue to donate directly to
these vital organisations through
the links above.**

Love Poems for Places: Poem-a-thon for Turkish and Syrian Earthquake Relief





Thank you for being a part of Love Poems for Places. This fundraising campaign came about because of my Turkish family (BUPS '06 for life), and in particular my best friend Melissa Clissold in Istanbul.

I wanted to create a campaign that wouldn't portray Turkish and Syrian residents as the 'other' but as people who live familiar lives. They meet their partners on nights out, honeymoon on beaches, eat together on Sunday afternoons with family, dance with friends. Their lives are parallel to ours. They are our peers, our equals, our friends, and need us to keep shouting about this. Not a single person connected to Turkey and Syria has been immune to this disaster, with many family and friend deaths amongst the people I know. So please keep donating and supporting.

A note about these 41 poems. I wrote them in 7 days, and they are hasty, rough, and totally unedited! They are here in the order that I wrote them. So this PDF is more of a document of the week, and definitely not a full publication (my actual collection is taking me years!). Also writing is a job and poems certainly don't cost €10 to commission! [Match in the Dark](#) has a payment guide for literature, please refer to that if you ever want to work with/commission writers.

Thank you again for the generosity of your donations, but also for the generosity of your memories. They are extremely precious and thank you for trusting me with them. I hope I could do them justice.

Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan





epic

Blue smoke meanders out the open window
its sweetness kissing wrinkled sheets
on a bed made only for safety and sleep

A Galway sunset falls upon the field
moves across walls, across doors,
illuminating a good life freshly baked

For @SexSiopa

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Martian

I birthed a tiny astronaut
Her small hands grabbing at pages of planets,
dying stars and dusty red orbs.

Does she remember the galaxy inside me
where she was once pioneer, explorer,
both of us facing new frontiers?

I plant my feet firmly, eyes fixed on my belly,
as she laughs upwards towards a night sky
full of mystery she already knows too well.

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Shades of Peace

A park shimmers in gentle greens
rustling leaves and white feathers
a low cooing is a lullaby, a softness, a salve
bathing this day in a soft solitude

This is really good coffee

For @polinacosgrave

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Kernow

Your tastebuds remember summer
melted ice-cream slick, sunscreen sour,
the fizz of a cold bottle paid for in coins

Your skin remembers what it is to burn
your mouth laughing at the blueness of a Cornish sea
eyes drifting lazily over the endless weeks

At home with the heating off,
limbs stretched upwards, worry lines creasing,
it keeps you warm, still, after all these years

Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan

For a friend

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Stop and Start

Let's make a life in the shadow of a Martello Tower,
in the stretch of stone and grass and pebble,
a glance away from the salt and the blue

Let's take a break from the chaos,
from car drives, train rides,
from the hurrying scurry of life

Let there be only the swell of summer above us,
hot stones beneath us, and the
splash of swimmers echoing
beyond our closed eyes

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Amsterdam

In another universe, I was born in Amsterdam,
perhaps in a slim house overlooking the canal
or by a park by a school

In that universe, I built a life
perhaps where I'd fit, where I'd be home in myself
perhaps I'd laugh more and hurt less

In this universe, I see the veins behind my eyelids
and they are branches of lives I am not living
they are echoes of histories unknowable.

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It isn't Paris but...

...the year is only two days old and
our future is freshly popped
with a question

The living room is freezing and
the wind is whistling down
this end of the terrace but

we say yes, to this version of us
to this home, on this street, on this island,
where the only dazzling sight I need today
is you.

Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan

For a friend

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Bettystown

To my unfathomable friend for all seasons:
I will meet you between cold damp sand
and smooth greyblue sky
where you ebb, whispering, roaring,
offering yourself to those like me
worshipping here, forever loving
at the threshold between worlds

For @marycarty

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Dunnes Stores

She moved through clothes aisles
eyeing dresses and blouses, sales tags and stickers,
homeware and silverware, things that glinted
and shimmered and softened under shop floor lights

Where she was poise, I was panic, and I even now am
chasing her ankles through the swoop of a skirt
I am aching to be scooped up
into warm arms and fabric that smells like home

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don't forget how pretty she looked under the lights

I didn't trust my mind to remember / the way the
cheap disco lights shone on her upturned face and
flitted across her lowered lashes / but I needn't have
worried, because it was burned into me / the same
way memories are burned into the black walls of this
well-loved bar / the perfect backdrop to the the
moment when / her nostalgia became my awakening
/ became my instant deep loving / became the words
flowing through me onto an app on my phone / oh
no I needn't have worried that I would forget / a
memory as recent as sweat / as fresh as love.

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Lough Muckno

We are indulging in novelty,
in the delight of something newly taught,
in the wetness of ankles
under the warmth of sun.

Some rocks skim, some sink,
but we aren't judging them by distance
because we've bounced across water and landed
settling into the freshness of silt and pebble
in a place we could know as home.

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Sundial

On one of many sea-fresh mornings
full of salty wind and pier-blown skin
between the sundial and the bandstand

he offers up an ocean
a vow of sunshine and infinity
and witnessed by water

serenaded by seagulls
against sea and scaffolding
I offer a lifetime of oceans in return

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The Path of Lemons

How do we take in such citric newness?
The swell of yellows and greens
the peek and the shout of them

How do we revel in waters this blue?
Under clear skies and gentle breezes
Under the luscious bite of ripe things

How do we make our way back up
at the end of every sunwarmed day?
The answer is step, by step, by step,
together.

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For @suesy_sweet

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The Bear Pit

It sounds a lot sexier than it is
A reclaimed roundabout turned public space
Polite benches, coffee trucks, open air theatre

But we forget the burning fire
that leads to a grown forest
and so, maybe, there is no better place than here

to hold you for the very first time
to inhale the possibilities from your skin
to revel in what came before
so that we can be here now

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You're a Star, Rocky,

you're meant to be in front of the camera
and under spare-room beds
and cuddled at my side

You glow in Spanish sunshine,
and you don't even know the part you play
when I press rewind

but behind the lens, I am power
I am voice, I am eyes

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Dreamhouse

Were you also enamoured
with the bending of legs, the brushing of hair
the feeling of clip-on shoes?

Did you also revere both the dollhouse
and the bookshelf, stories unfolding
through smudged plastic faces
and page-turners alike?

Do you spend your days now
pressing characters together?
Do you note how their hair glows,
do you smile when they clash?

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Cats in Reykjavík

Rumour has it, Murakami wrote 'Town of Cats' after visiting Reykjavík.

Rumour has it, the cats read the New Yorker but did not find themselves in his story.

Rumour has it, the Mayor of Reykjavík is a cat, safeguarding their liberation with paw and ink.

But who are we to know?

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Arrival

Shell-strewn and foam-capped
Boscombe beach offers up its treasures
its small living secrets in pearly ridges
in deeply carved rivulets at sunset

Walking the length of it, we dream of legacies
beyond footprints in sand
perhaps a life as sturdy as the tide
perhaps something to hold in our salted palms

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For @_RuthDavies_

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Barefoot

For you I relinquish my claim on childhood
It no longer belongs to just me and your mother
when we moved sideways through the world
through a shared womb
through tennis courts and astroturf

You too will one day take off your shoes
Feel the world beneath your feet
disadvantage yourself on purpose
because you already know the joy
of not playing to win

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The Field

We used it for anything but sports

In summer it was our beach, our cafe,
our busy place for gossip through
mouthfuls of sandwiches and cigarettes

But in winter, in the knee-deep snow
you'd see only two pair of tracks
and hear only poetry, screamed into the sky

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The Raft

It started out as twigs and twine
scraps and glue and thinning hopes
The bar was low and all you wanted
was to keep afloat, but then

you began to build a boat,
and it weathered storms and seas
now, water calms, wind retreats
and in the stillness, you found rest
you found slumber, you built nest.

For a friend

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Rosses Point

Every flavour of gull,
every wingswoop, every yellow beak,
every flutter into the water,
every skittering of spindly legs

taken in with joy
with quiet, with pause
as behind us, a lone figure
offers herself to it all
head slightly tilted
arms outstretched

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Windswept

It's not exactly the postcard-perfect moment

yes, the sun is beating down
the sea is full of turquoise splendour
the sand is glinting platinum blonde

but the plates are threatening escape
the blankets and towels are feral and wild
and every laughing mouthful tastes like sand

It's the only thing worth remembering

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Mini

We are in a wonderland of miniscule opulence
of spiderthin book spines and
ladybug chairs

In the smallness of things
there is the intricate sculpting
of giant dreams

Outside, winter rages across the plains.
Does the vastness sometimes wish
it could be this small?

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26 Valentines Later

Many hours too late
I realise this 5am promenade
is of course a date, and when we kiss
under the dripping leaves
under a pre-dawn sky
on wet grass, the city beneath us,
we spark a sunrise
that still hasn't set.

For a friend

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Phở

Neither of us know how it's pronounced
We feign confidence by ordering
spring rolls (*safe*)
on a first date (*safe?*)
radiating trepidation
catching each others' eyes
searching for an anchor
in choppy waters

For @caitrionadaly

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In the long grass

They don't tell you in school
how to make friends
with creatures of the dirt

They don't pontificate
about the decadence of their eyes
the abundance of their legs and wings

They're trapped in dark rooms
while I live in a palace
of life and light.

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Two Queens

I am used to travelling alone
Replacing my name with a series of numbers
flashing above a coveted train seat

But once, there was companionship
joke names displayed above us
in our special flavour of royalty

No headphones, no silence
Only the muffled laughter
of people who journey together

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Cloughoughter Castle

From a distance she seems lonely
grey shoulders of stone, bare against the wind
isolated in the midst of sunset water

But if you look closer, she is home to many
filled to the brim with activity
the flapping of wings, scuttling of small things

She is where sparks catch and love blossoms
She is ecosystem, she is joy, she is family,
she is where things go to grow

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77A Cinnah Caddesi

You sent me the location where we all once
gathered / on my first day of being 18 / prosecco
poured by my mum (and chugged by the boys) /
before boozy cake and crisps / before fishbowls of
obnoxiously bright drinks / before a concert where
a boy held me close / before lip-syncing in a
language I didn't understand / before mattresses
and duvets and pillows / before we talked late into
a teenage sunrise / before all the before's that came
after / and here you still are in the after/ bringing
me back to the best of before.

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Erzin Oranges

From below the trees, we are being
summoned to a Sunday table
to strong arms, excited chatter
to cutlery clatter and full stomachs

Sticky juice runs down arms
gathering bark and matter
as we clamber down
from one kind of wild love
to another

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Scooter

In the safe pocket
between the strong back of one parent
and the firm arms of the other
I am compressed, distilled,
a perfect unit of cells, sun, and sand,
of singularity, of oneness,
as the road whips beneath us
with the sea at our side

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Cusco Creep

We've never been this close to the sky
and when a familiar tune comes on
we levitate, feet leaving the surface
thin air above
Radiohead around us
worn floor below
the music grounding us
even as we rise.

For @majekjess

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The Cave

He led me to the space
where salt water carved rock
and put me in front of the lens

under his gaze the weight of the year
releases into wet sand
my body lighter than water

We emerge into the brightness
into the new future
that we will carve out together

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Behind the glass lift

The world is half hidden
from our frantic fumbles
the awareness of our encounter
co-existing with commuters
fizzling behind closed eyes

we are ablaze, we are drunk
on the queasiness of anticipation
on the warmth of flames
all while hearing doors slide shut
knowing the time for departure is near

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Dinosaurs in Tepo

Have you heard the story
of the boy who talks to dinosaurs?
He roared before he could speak
and shook his soft curls with
hardened ferocity.

Now that he is grown
his mouth sounds out the names
of creatures long past
and everything he speaks to
comes to life.

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Relics

In the flush of summer
I cycle away from the corner shop
that is someone's home
penny sweets melting in my pocket
before even reaching my mouth

For @f_byrne

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4 x A

First we were two, on single beds in uni dorms
at house parties, in rented flats

then we were three, on a London street
tents in the living room, food in our hair

and now we are four, holding hands on cliffs
kissed by sunshine under Guernsey skies

overlooking a quiet sea
and all that came before.

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Listowel

What crowd is it this evening?

Is it the race-makers and bet-placers,
or the storytellers and the book-writers?

Playwrights or interviewers?

The Friday night locals,
or train-riders and car-drivers?

The front door closes behind me
and I am swept into whichever story
Listowel is spinning today.

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Friday night in Listowel

The front door closes shut
and I am swept into whichever story
Listowel is spinning today.

Will it be the hype of a post-race win,
or the gentle buzz of a new play in town,
or weekend gossip from next door?

Coat buttoned, scarf wrapped,
I step into the the river-rushed night,
ready to be woven into something new.

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D8

Ushers Island. Beside the Liffey
she says, when she asks for home
through a thick fog of memory.

A dentist in the Liberties
I say, when I think of a
particular childhood memory.

Dublin 8
we say to ourselves, in the quiet moments,
when we think of places that matter.

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Evie and Millie

Her fallen face, peeking above
a bright red winter coat.

Her father, smiling, encouraging,
nudging her into cheeriness.

The sunbeam of new life,
wrapped snug in my arms.

The two of them, sharing air
pressed tight to this bedraggled body.

How can my skin contain this much love?
How does it not burst through my pores,
creating a new sun, a new universe?

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AHBAP in Turkey

<https://ahbap.org/disasters-turkey>

The White Helmets in Syria

www.whitehelmets.org

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