The Poet and The Soldier

OR

Nothing to Write a Poem About

OR

Give Me a Love Story (I'll Make a Tragedy)

OR

Black Holes

OR

The Part Where Everything Makes Sense (Shut Up, I’m Getting to It)

OR

Ten.
About the Author

This is a collection of the final works of Isadora Heroux (1988 – 2014).
Dedication

For Anna.

I fixed it.
Nine.

"Please. You are – were – her favourite poet."

It’s this more than anything else which finally gives Isadora Heroux, one of the most renowned poets of the twenty-first century, pause. She turns to study the man sitting in her living room, noting the bags beneath his eyes, the trembling of his hands.

Connor Brown shifts under the scrutiny.

“I see,” she eventually responds.

Connor waits. After a while, she inhales sharply before continuing. “While I understand the recent loss of your sister in Afghanistan, I cannot simply create a proper poetic eulogy out of nothing. And patriotic sentiment is so,” she sniffs derisively, “uninspired.”

Ding.

Sent: 3:36pm

How’s it going?

-EG

“I understand,” Connor pauses, waiting for Heroux to look up from her phone. She ignores him entirely. “I understand this isn’t normal, but Anna, well, she is – was – really special.”

Heroux doesn’t even bother to look up. I’m trying Anna. Connor swallows.

“When – when we were younger, our dad, he wasn’t always... well, I guess you could say he had a bit of a drinking problem. But Anna, she was—”

Ding.

Sent: 3:38pm

You do realise we need at
least a draft by Friday week

for the publicity meeting?

-EG

Heroux stands. “Leave,” she waves distractedly, her stringy brown hair falling over her eyes as she taps out an irritated reply. Her fingers are long and slender and smudged with ink, and as she gesticulates her sleeve falls down, revealing an arm tattooed with an intricate pattern.

Sent: 3:39pm

ik, piss off im working

“She was always so strong!” Connor bursts out. “She was always the protector, she’s the only reason I haven’t grown up thinking all women are like my mother. She’s probably the only reason I’ve not – I’m trying not to turn out... like dad.”

Ding.

Sent: 3:41pm

I knew it. You haven’t written anything.

-EG

Heroux is still standing in the centre of her untidy living room, papers scattered everywhere and furniture overturned, with her arm raised in clear invitation to leave.

It’s difficult to reconcile the woman in front of him with the image in his head, constructed from glimpses of pictures in the back of books and Anna’s constant sighing and mooning when she’d discovered the then twenty-year-old-poet at age fifteen.

But the difference is more than that: her face is more drawn, her cheeks hollow, eyes sunken.
thres nothing worth

writing

“I always knew she’d do something like join the army, or the police.” Connor’s voice sounds smaller now as he slumps back. “Protecting people.”

He fixes his eyes on her extended arm, pointing him towards the exit. He can’t bring himself to meet Heroux’s gaze, but the silence stretches on into dangerously awkward territory and he can’t help continuing.

“She joined when she was twenty. She was on her second tour of duty in Afghanistan, when she—you, you never think it’ll happen. You fear, of course, but you never think that it’ll actually happen, until it does.”

In the quiet after his words, his examination of her exposed arm reveals the ridged scars concealed underneath the tattoos, and the faded, tell-tale marks that track up into her inner elbow. It is only once Heroux lowers her arm, shaking the sleeve back over her wrist that he drops his eyes, startled and ashamed.

It’s not his business, and God knows he’s done some awful things too. Things that Anna still managed to forgive him for. He owes her so much, and he can’t even manage this for her.

One more time, one last ditch effort. “She really did love your poems. She always said—”

“Shut up,” Heroux interrupts. “Don’t say anything. I’m thinking.”

Connor holds his breath.

She folds her arms over her tattered shirt, tracing shapes into the carpet with her bare foot as she frowns. Her phone is still in her hand.
“Okay,” she finally says.

Connor exhales.

“No, shut up,” she snaps. “I wasn’t done. I’ll take the commission, but I’ll be doing it my way.” She stalks forward, dressing gown flaring behind her as she steps up onto the sofa beside Connor and starts ripping off the papers pinned to the wall. They fall about him like oversized snowflakes, covered in scribbles and sketches.

Connor stays stock still, and waits.

“You will not tell me anything more about her,” Heroux continues. “What she loved, what she hated, her passions, nothing. I will not interview anyone else about her. I will not read her military files. Absolutely nothing, do you understand?” She pauses her tearing to stare at him from under her raised arm. Connor nods hastily.

“What I will need, is all your photographs of her.” She steps down with an armful of paper and dumps them on Connor. “Bring them over at ten o’clock tomorrow and put those in the bin on your way out.”

With that, she turns, stepping on her coffee table on her way to the window overlooking the street. Recognising a dismissal, Connor Brown collects the papers into a pile, stands, and leaves.

Isadora listens to him thump down the stairs and watches him walk across the street, only then allowing herself a small smile.

Ding.

Sent: 3:50pm

Well, you’re going to have to do something.
Your book deadline is coming up soon. We need to prove you’re still alive.

-EG

Sent: 3:51pm

i have a project. now

piss off.

Sent: 3:52pm

Oh? A client?

-EG

Sent: 3:52pm

A challenge.
Ten o’clock the next day finds Isadora Heroux sprawled upon her sofa with three cigarettes in one hand and a half-empty carton in the other.

“You really should keep your kitchen a bit cleaner,” Gregson complains.

“Do you really think I’m stupid enough to hide drugs in the kitchen?” she calls out, bored. She regards the emergency carton of cigarettes she keeps secreted behind the sofa cushions, then shrugging, pulls out a fourth.

She’s flicking the lighter when Gregson storms back into the living room and tries to snatch the cigarettes from her lips. She blocks his wrist, giving him a look.

He pulls back, holding his hands up in surrender.

“Just smoke one at a time, please,” he begs. He waves at the small mountain of ash on the coffee table beside her, “I can tell you already had about fifty before I arrived.”

Isadora just snorts, eyeing his fingertips. She lifts the lighter to her lips again, mumbling around her mouthful, “Hypocrite.”

Gregson clearly bites back a retort, nicotine-stained fingers fisting at his side, before he exhales gustily and sits down. Isadora can hear the cogs turning.

“Isadora,” he hesitates. Her gaze is fixed on her cigarettes. “I hope you know that I’m here for you. That we’re all here for you, I mean, if you find yourself needing—”

“Oh for Christ’s sake,” she groans, arching off the sofa. “I went to the clinic, I sat in those group therapy sessions with idiots who didn’t know a verb from a noun, and I stopped doing all the drugs! Well,” she amends at his pointed look at the cigarettes, “all the fun ones anyway.”

“Hey,” Gregson leans forward sharply. “Don’t talk like that. I mean, Jesus, I don’t think you understand what it was like, how it felt—” She rolls her eyes. “How I felt,” he grinds out, “needing to
track your goddamn phone to find you lying in an alleyway with half your clothes ripped off and your pupils as wide as fucking dinner plates—"

He shuts up, dropping his face into his hands, breathing heavily. Isadora blows out a steady stream of smoke, and closes her eyes.

There’s a pause as potent as a loaded gun, then a hesitant knock on the door.

Ah, her client. “Answer it,” Isadora commands, her eyes still shut.

She listens to the rustling of Gregson’s suit as he rises and navigates his way through the mess. The door opens, and light breeze stirs the curls on her forehead, the air from the corridor thick with the stench of paint from apartment C. Despite the apartment being in the basement, the heady fumes have managed to permeate almost the entire building.

There’s some murmured conversation as Gregson introduces himself to Connor Brown as her publicist, and Brown attempts to explain why he is carrying what appears to be a few forests’ worth of photo albums in straining plastic bags.

There are footsteps, a small crash followed by profuse apologies, and Brown enters looking terrifically awkward.

“Over here,” Isadora flops her hand at a clean spot on the floor within reaching distance.

Brown deposits his load then straightens, rubbing his hands together. Isadora doesn’t miss how they tremble, and his eyes keep darting towards her cigarettes.

“Would you like a drink?” Gregson asks politely. It’s what the man’s paid to do after all: maintain her image with the public. “Tea, water?”

“Oh. Tea would be nice, thanks.”

Isadora tries to block out the meaningless small talk by opening the photo albums.
They’re all titled with fancy pink letters, and the one she chooses is filled with photos of a small baby and labels like ‘Anna with Mummy!’ and ‘Anna’s first smile!’

Isadora’s absent page flipping stops. The baby’s lips are stretched, exposing the pink gums; her round, chubby face crinkles at the corners of her eyes. Her eyes. They’re huge, and so dark it’s impossible to differentiate the iris from the pupil. Isadora thinks back to the eyes of drug addicts twitching in underground dens, but the comparison is so wrong she discards it immediately. She frowns.

“If you don’t mind me asking,” Gregson’s voice cuts through her focus like a mosquito’s whine.

“What have you commissioned from Isadora? It’s a slightly unusual situation, you must understand, so I’m curious.”

Isadora picks up another album; the young girl in this one is often pictured with a little boy. She’s taller, some of the roundness of her face gone, but her eyes are still pitch black.

“Ah. It’s for my sister. She, uh, was recently killed in action. In Afghanistan.”

“Oh. I’m very sorry to hear that,” Gregson says.

Isadora shakes her head, irritated.

“So I suppose you have some interviews lined up then, so Isadora can get an idea of your sister?”

Huge, dark eyes. Dark. Very dark, like black holes, drawing you in.

“No, actually.”

“No?” Gregson sounds rather surprised; Isadora has no idea why the man thinks himself subtle.

“What about contact details for her friends?”

No, that’s not right. Black holes have connotations of destruction.

“No.”
This infant, this girl’s eyes do not connote destruction.

“Military files?” Gregson asks.

“Well, no. you see, Heroux – I mean Isadora, told me not to tell her anything about Anna, and that she just needed all my photographs. She told me to bring them over today.”

They’re more like...

“Right, okay.” Gregson takes a moment. “And just to clarify, sorry, she’s planning on writing a meaningful eulogistic poem in honour of your sister, who gave her life to protect our country, with only pictures – which you won’t explain to her – for reference.”

Like ink. Pools of ink.

Brown takes an uncertain sip of his tea. “Yes?”

Gregson twists to give Isadora a look so pointed it would pop lead balloons. “Isadora,” he says.

Anna Brown’s eyes are like pools of ink, just waiting for Isadora to wet her pen and–

“How many times must I tell you not to do that?”

And–

“Isadora!”

“For God’s sake, get the fuck out,” she explodes.

The two men freeze, looking vaguely gobsmacked. Brown, rather comically, has frozen mid-sip, whilst Gregson is recovering, summoning his death glare.

“Out! Out out out,” she chants, manhandling them to their feet then shoving them towards the door.
Gregson turns around on the threshold, only to receive a face-full of coats. He stumbles back a step, barely managing to jam his foot in between the door and the frame. He tosses the coats to one side and meets Isadora’s narrowed eyes through the gap.

“You said,” Gregson says quickly, “you promised me that you weren’t going to push yourself too hard.”

“I can assure you that I am fully capable of handling this project. Now, goodbye, Gregson.”

He winces as the pressure on his foot increases. “Yes, yes I know, we all know how good you are. Your work speaks for itself. But not even the greatest poet can create art out of nothing, you know that.”

Isadora says nothing.

“So please, just be careful,” Gregson’s voice drops. “We don’t want to – I, never want to see you end up like you were before. Alright?”

Isadora’s scowl becomes thunderous. Gregson waits.

“Okay, yes, fine,” she growls. “Now go.”

Gregson removes his foot and the door slams in his face. He sighs, rubbing his forehead, before bending to pick up the discarded coats.

“What should I do with this?” Connor asks. Gregson turns around to find Connor holding out his still-warm cup of tea, his expression a picture of perplexity.
“Asinine, sophomoric, nonsensically preposterous, imbecilic, cretinous—” To Isadora’s horror, she stops mid-rant, her mind failing to produce its usual spectrum of vocabulary.

Well, she supposes moodily, stalking to the kitchen. It’s not like it’s any different from the entire goddamn day.

Jerk open the fridge door, grab a bag of old bread, slam the door. There’s a few dull thuds and a shattering sound. Whatever. Her stomach’s protestations are beginning to become distracting. She easily used to be able to go several days without eating, but now, after rehab and missing breakfast and–

What time is it?

The digital clock on the oven reads thirteen minutes past midnight.

Right, so she’s missed lunch and dinner too. Whatever.

She shoves the bread into the toaster before dropping into a chair, holding her face in her hands.

“Never again,” she vows, muttering under her breath. “Never fucking aga—” she breaks off with a noise of frustration. No swearing while working; it makes her lazy in her articulation, makes her falter from the standards to which she holds her poetry.

It’s one of her rules.

However, even in her admittedly limited experience of commissions, they never go well. It’s true you can’t create poetry out of nothing, and after an entire afternoon and most of the night spent in effort with not a single useable line, Isadora had been rudely reminded of this.

She doesn’t exactly have nothing though, even if it certainly feels that way. After she’d kicked out Gregson and Brown, she’d spent hours flipping through albums, pulling out photographs.
Anna at birthday parties, dark hair wild and chubby face excited, aged six; Anna going to a school dance, arm in arm with another girl, aged sixteen. Anna on holiday, standing on top of a hill with her arms to the sky, hips cocked; Anna curled up with her little brother on a couch in front of the television, in profile her eyes tight, her mouth tense.

The toast pops up, burnt. Isadora growls and launches herself out of her chair, storming back into the living room and hurling herself onto the couch.

The rest of the room is trashed, the mess from this morning combined with the chaotic conditions in which she prefers to work. Photographs are pinned to the wall above the sofa, papers analysing the images stuck next to them; Isadora is futilely trying to build an image of this girl, this woman, in her head.

She feels ready to tear her hair out. The sheer ambiguity of the pictures is driving her insane. The girl Anna went to the dance with – friend, or something more? Clutching at her brother so fiercely – out of anger or fear?

If only she could ask Connor Brown. Just a short interview, nothing more, but her pride refuses to let her break her own rules. Brown already gave her several of Anna’s characteristics when he was convincing her to take the job, the chief one being protective, which spins off into questions of her moral strength, her standards, the lengths she would go to for those she loves. Loved.

God, she wants a hit. Just a little bit, just something to get the words going. To kick-start that snap moment of revelation as all the words and patterns fall into place. But she just can’t manage to summon the finely detailed techniques and technicalities that have always defined her work.

She rummages for her cigarettes, putting one to her lips and lighting it with shaking hands. Her eyes close, inhaling deeply to distract herself.

When was the last time she slept? Doesn’t matter, she doesn’t need it. She didn’t need it before she got clean, and between the insomnia and the cigarettes she doesn’t need it now.
To her horror, she can feel her throat constricting as the panic begins to build inside her; the pool of fear she’s been carrying in her gut being heated by the flames of her frustration, and the resulting steam builds up, cranking up the pressure like she’s an over-filled balloon.

She chokes on her next drag, her thin shoulders shaking as she coughs. She perches on the edge of the couch and stares at the floor between her feet as she hacks away, a sideways yawning sensation in her head and a painful ache twisting in her chest as she struggles to breathe.

God, she’s falling apart. And the only thing she can think is what if she... can’t. Do it anymore. Not without the drugs. It’s been so long since she’s tried writing fully sober, and she can’t tell if her difficulties now are a result of either her sobriety, or the sheer impossibility of the task she’s set herself. Writing about someone she doesn’t even know; too much faith in oneself can be as damaging as too little. Perhaps Gregson is right to be worried, after all.

Isadora looks over to her bookshelf, third row from the bottom, calculating. Gregson, despite all his searches, hasn’t found her hiding place yet. It’s so tempting it’s difficult to remember the reasons to resist—

There’s a knock on the door.

Too tentative to be Brown, too late for Gregson. Probably an irritating neighbour from apartment A, here to complain about the smoke or the noise. Isadora scowls as she wrenches the door open, a scathing reprimand held on the tip of her tongue.

But the cutting comment dies in her throat as she sees who is on her doorstep.

The dark skinned woman flashes her a toothy grin, “Hi.”

Isadora doesn’t move, doesn’t breathe. “Anna Brown,” she finally says, her voice echoing strangely.

“She doesn’t move, doesn’t breathe. “Anna Brown,” she finally says, her voice echoing strangely.

“Isadora Heroux,” Anna looks absurdly gleeful for a dead person. “I mean, Miss Heroux, it’s an honour, and just Anna’s fine.” She sticks out her hand and Isadora reaches out automatically,
flinching when she realises her actions, expecting her hand to fall straight through Anna’s... but it doesn’t.

Anna’s grip is firm, sending an inexplicable jolt up Isadora’s arm. Her skin lightens towards her palm, smooth except for the calluses that come from handling a gun regularly.

“Ah, Isadora, please,” she replies, feeling rather disjointed.

“Do you mind if I come in? It kinda stinks of paint out here,” Anna wrinkles her nose.

Isadora doesn’t respond.

Anna takes this as an invitation to shoulder her way past, the brush of her shoulder frighteningly substantial for a ghost, but that doesn’t account for the shock that sparks down Isadora’s spine.

Isadora refuses to flinch, and after a moment closes the door. She takes a settling drag from her cigarette, and when she has composed herself she turns and leans back against the grounding wood of the door, watching Anna pick her way through the stacks of paper and overturned furniture.

“Interesting interior design choices,” Anna comments, regarding the big leather armchair lying on its side.

Isadora watches Anna right it easily, exposed arms flexing with the effort. “I prefer it that way.”

Isadora, wearing her silk dressing gown with slightly-too-long sleeves, crosses her own arms more securely against her chest, cigarette still dangling from her fingers.

“Oops,” Anna settles into the armchair, casually crossing her legs before tilting her head at Isadora with a crooked smile. “Too late.”

Isadora observes Anna closely. There’s no obvious distortion, no staring discrepancies in the construction of the hallucination. What the hell has she taken?
She walks over to the bookshelf and ducks her head down to grind out her cigarette. She uses the movement to disguise her squint at the dust patterns on the third bottom row shelf. There’re no disturbances in the layer of dust, so she hasn’t taken something from her stash and somehow forgotten.

She gives the cigarette she’s been smoking a distrustful glare, but it’s her usual brand and she’s been steering clear of rollies a while now.

A sharp intake of breath makes Isadora whirl, dressing gown swirling dramatically.

Anna’s still sitting in her armchair, but she’s found a draft Isadora must have abandoned and she’s reading it with a funny look on her face.

“Is this... for me?” Isadora can’t decipher her tone.

A few swift steps forward and Isadora snatches the paper from her hands. She goes to tear it to pieces but Anna lurches out of her chair with a cry.

“No, don’t!”

“Too late,” Isadora mocks, ripping it with brisk movements and shoving them in her dressing gown pocket.

“But, that – that was~”

“Rubbish,” Isadora says decisively. She meets Anna’s unnervingly black eyes evenly as they consider her.

As a result of her lunge, Anna is standing far closer than Isadora is used to, and she hides a waver by lifting her chin, which tilts her face towards Anna’s. She feels unusually small, even though Anna is only slightly taller.

It’s more to do with the air Anna exudes. It speaks of assured capability, a sense of infinite control. She wonders if Anna had this aura before the military, or if it was only the escape from an
undoubtedly violent family situation into the even more violent environment of a tour of duty in Afghanistan that triggered it.

Her dark hair is cut brutally short and her biceps bulge as she folds her arms in a mirror of Isadora’s defiant pose. She is clearly still in peak physical condition, like she has only just left the army, and Isadora shivers slightly.

The staring match stretches on.

Anna breaks first. “Well, I thought it was amazing,” she offers, her face flushing as she steps away.

Isadora redistributes her weight, unaware that she’d been leaning forward. Her stomach fluttering, she keeps her face blank. Isadora stays facing straight ahead while Anna moves past her to examine the pictures and notes on the wall.

Isadora clears her throat after a moment. “It was terrible. It had no structure, no theme or direction—”

“Does it always need all that?” Anna interjects.

Isadora ignores her, “—while also failing in its primary objective.”

“Which was?”

Isadora pauses, and the silence of the witching hour wraps around them, heavier than any silence has a right to be.

“You’re dead,” Isadora says slowly, looking over her shoulder. Anna’s looking right back at her, but her smile doesn’t falter.

She shrugs as she turns to resume her study of the wall. “Well, y’know.”

Isadora turns fully, insistent. “How are you here?” It’s not possible, it’s not logical, it can’t be happening, but somehow it is.
“Does it matter?” Anna counters, still examining the wall.

Isadora flexes her fingers, wishing for a cigarette. She weighs her options, then throws caution to the wind and stalks forward, shouldering in front of Anna to retrieve her pack. Her quaking fingers and increased heart rate are just part of her desire for nicotine.

“Those things’ll kill you,” Anna says mildly.

“Don’t care,” Isadora growls, cupping her lighter to the end of the smoke as she retreats, perching on the arm of the overturned armchair opposite the one Anna set upright.

“You should,” Anna replies, still lightly, not moving to stop her, but Isadora catches the darker undercurrent. Cupping the elbow of the arm holding the cigarette against her body, Isadora takes a deep drag while she watches Anna.

“Why don’t we go for a walk? You clearly haven’t been out in ages.” Anna abruptly offers.

Isadora raises an eyebrow and glances down at her dressing robe and bare feet, then out the window to the night pressing in on the glass panes. “No thanks.”

But Anna moves determinedly towards the kitchen, disregarding Isadora’s growing tension that even the nicotine can’t dispel. Anna slips out of sight, and Isadora manages to hold out for about five seconds before getting up to follow.

“Are you planning to leave via window?” she calls out, trying for boredom but failing miserably.

There’s no response, and Isadora curses. “Anna?”

She ducks into her bedroom, the bathroom, but there’s no sign of Anna. She backtracks into the kitchen and the living room, even checking under tables and behind curtains, but it’s undeniable. Anna Brown, a soldier who died last year in the Helman province of Afghanistan, is definitely not in Isadora Heroux’s flat.
Which makes perfect sense of course. She was just a hallucination cooked up by Isadora’s feverishly frustrated brain, undoubtedly exacerbated by the paint fumes.

Isadora goes and sits back down on the sofa, fumbling for the cigarette pack, but in the middle of lighting it she notices something. She finishes lighting up, puts her lighter away and takes a deep drag before holding it consideringly between two fingers, staring at the single upright armchair in the middle of the living room.
For the next few days the flat is filled with the sounds of paper being rearranged, pens tapping against teeth, feet stomping back and forth across floorboards.

It’s eleven at night on a Tuesday night when Isadora gives up. It’s like there’s an itch deep under her ribcage, a tic in her brain she can’t soothe. The words are only just out of reach, but try as she may they refuse to come any closer.

She grumpily concedes to her body’s complaints, supposing that seventy-two hours without sleep might be a factor in the situation, but instead of seeing her comfortably spartan bedroom when she opens the door, she finds the local park.

Isadora draws back and peers both ways along the corridor. What the hell, she thinks.

After ascertaining that all else appears to be as it should, Isadora moves forward, her feet sinking into the dewy grass–

The droplets scatter across the surface of her leather shoes. She fingers the red buttons of her large winter coat. Plucking at the top one, she finds the looseness of the thread holding it in place strangely reassuring.

She twists around to find the door standing open and unsupported, and after a moment she simply reaches out to close it.

Shoving her hands with their fingerless gloves deep into her pockets, Isadora trudges out from the band of trees that borders the park, her breath condensing in small clouds; an imitation of the smoke that normally blossoms from between her lips. She makes her way towards Anna, tilting her head back to take in the stars.

Anna’s skin is almost perfect camouflage, her pale shirt her only distinguishing feature; a white wraith in the all-encompassing darkness. Then she turns to face Isadora, the white of her teeth
matching the white of her sclera, cinching the blackness of her iris and pupil to hold them in place, like they’re the pieces of the sky that fell and allowed the stars to shine through.

“Aren’t you cold?” Isadora asks, running her eyes over Anna’s bare arms.

“Nah.” Anna’s eyes dance. “Are you?”

“No.”

“Good, ’cause then I’d feel obliged to offer my body heat, and I’m not sure how much your boyfriend would like that.” Anna laughs, but her eyes are watchful.

“Boyfriends,” Isadora sniffs derisively.

“A girlfriend then?”

It clicks in Isadora’s head, and she looks over sharply, meeting Anna’s level gaze. Those black eyes are following her intensely, the side of her mouth twitching.

Surely she’s not so… obvious?

“No,” Isadora eventually manages.

“Good,” Anna hums, allowing her smirk to materialize as she shifts closer, putting an arm around Isadora and leaning down to whisper warmly in her ear. “Because neither do I.”

Isadora blinks, and the heat of Anna’s body abruptly vanishes as the ambient temperature rises by at least fifteen degrees.

Twisting around, disoriented, her coat gone and her purple dress-shirt having replaced her dressing-gown, Isadora registers the familiar surroundings of the Indian restaurant she occasionally frequents. Isadora frowns down at her shirt, one more button left undone than usual, which exposes quite a lot of–

“What’s good, then?”
Isadora whips back around, staring at Anna as she sits across the table, perusing the menu with pursed lips.

“I – I don’t know.”

Anna raises her eyebrows.

“Aadhira usually just chooses what he considers best this week,” Isadora elaborates.

“Aadhira?”

“He runs the place.” God, why is Isadora’s mind working so slowly? Anna gives her a smile over the top of her menu and her thought processes more or less stop. Feeling dizzy, Isadora reaches for the glass of water on the table, gulping it down. “He feels like he still owes me for a poem I wrote for his fiancée.”

Anna coos. “Are they married now?”

“No, Aadhira left her when he caught her in bed with his brother.”

Anna is quiet for a second. “That’s terrible.”

“Better he found out sooner rather than later,” Isadora argues. But when Anna doesn’t respond with a sharp retort, she looks down at the plates of food that have materialised, feeling queasy and off-balance.

Isadora picks up her fork, despite food having even less than its typical appeal. Jesus, thinking is like slogging through a thick field of mud, and her words are spilling out of her mouth in a nervous rush. For some reason, Isadora finds Anna rather tolerable, which is a refreshing change, and she can feel the sensation settling into her bones like marrow: filling gaps she didn’t even know were there and revitalising her blood, pouring her full of energy but anchoring her at the same time.
It’s like being high, only better – not something Isadora ever thought she’d say. But the last thing Isadora needs is another addiction.

“So, why are you writing a poem about me?” Anna forks more beef vindaloo into her mouth, chewing while she gazes steadily at Isadora.

Isadora shifts, running her blunt fingernails along the tablecloth. “I’m suffering from a dearth of inspiration and I have a deadline coming up. Your brother wanted to commission me, so it made sense to accept.” The next words scrape as they come out, not fitting in her mouth correctly: “You’re just a job.”

“I call bullshit,” Anna said, pointing her fork. “I’ve been reading your work since I was fifteen. You don’t just write jobs. So don’t lie. What am I?”

Isadora takes her time, laying down her spoon and straightening her other cutlery carefully. “You’re a sister, an older sister, meaning you have protective tendencies.”

“True. But?”

“But,” Isadora says slowly. “You’re a soldier. Your strongest impulse is to protect and assist, yet you pursued one of the only careers that would require you to kill.”

Anna appears to be waiting for something. “And?”

“I don’t know. You are a human being, a person, a female, God, I don’t know. That’s the problem. I have no idea, I don’t know you.”

Anna shoots her a look of disbelief, then sighs loudly.

Isadora feels her frustration from earlier rearing its ugly head. “You’re annoying. You’re persistent. English was one of your favourite subjects at school, second only to PDHPE. You’re homosexual and confident in—”

“Bisexual, actually,” Anna corrects.
“You’re impossible! That’s what you are—”

“Now that’s just ridiculous, of course bisexuals exist—”

“You’re not real,” Isadora hisses, pitching to her feet, knocking her chair over and rattling the table. The sharp flare of pain in her thigh is painfully tangible, and she looks to the ceiling, clenching her jaw.

When she looks back down, they’re back in apartment B and Anna is closer than she’s been all night.

“Do I not feel real?” Anna asks, her breath hot and sweet against Isadora’s upturned face. Her black eyes search Isadora’s as they draw closer, and Isadora can’t breathe, she can’t, she can’t, can’t breathe—

Isadora lurches awake with the sensation of falling. She has rolled off the soda, and lands on the floor with a loud thud, reflexively curling into a ball. She clutches her pounding head, taking deep breaths to ease the stabbing agony in her chest. It takes a moment but the pain somewhat abates, and she opens her eyes with a wince, pupils quickly contracting in response to the sunshine pouring through the window.

She sits up, rubbing her head, and looks around. The mess of papers on the coffee table remains undisturbed, her computer perched dangerously on a stack of notebooks, photographs still scattered around like leaves.

The silence is strangely loud, and under its security Isadora reaches out to pick up a pen abandoned on the coffee table. She stares at it for a moment as the words bloom in her head like a flower in fast-motion.

Without looking away, she reaches for a nearby notebook.
Edward Gregson is a busy man, but he always has time for Isadora Heroux. It’s more than the fact that she has won multiple awards and been nominated for several more, but, bizarre as it may seem to many of his colleagues, Gregson likes Isadora.

He gets out of the taxi after paying, shouldering his satchel as he walks up to the door of 136 Chaser street and presses the buzzer for apartment B.

Not all the time. God no, she’s difficult even at her best, and Gregson is getting desperate for anything to show at the meeting this Friday. Isadora had acquired a notorious reputation just months after entering the publishing scene, and Gregson has had to get used to barbed comments, snarling rejection and soul-destroying moods of ennui, amongst other things.

Like what recently happened. Gregson hesitates to call it recent, as Isadora’s history of addiction is... extensive, to say the least. She was very good at functioning normally – or as what passes for normal in the extremely artistic. Gregson only had sneaking suspicions, at least until the day he turned up at her flat to find her with eyes like black holes and a needle sticking out of her arm.

Gregson impatiently presses the buzzer again.

Things had only spiralled from there. She shrunk before his eyes, chain smoking and falling into periods of depression, only alleviated when inspiration struck. And to be fair, it struck an awful lot; Isadora produced some stunning work in those months. But it couldn’t last.

Isadora vanished. It was common for her to disappear for a few days, but after a week of no contact Gregson found himself wearing a rut into his bedroom floor.

It was about two in the morning when Gregson opened up the tracking software he’d guiltily installed on Isadora’s phone. He ended up in a dodgy area and the only other people on the street were a couple of rowdy, tattooed men walking away from the dark opening of an alleyway.
Gregson holds the buzzer down for a solid five seconds before stepping back, squinting at the open windows of the second floor, curtains drawn for the first time in ages. He tries to ignore the sudden racing of his heart.

Gregson had dragged himself into the alley, but it was so dark he only found Isadora by tripping over her. A pathetic limp form with torn clothes, blood oozing from cuts, bruises darkening the track-lined skin and an arrhythmic heartbeat that skittered and stopped like an autumn leaf being blown across a sidewalk.

Gregson hunts through his bag for the emergency copy he’d made of Isadora’s key. His hand trembles so much the key scrapes the surface of the lock for several seconds until he fits it in.

When he had visited her at the hospital, he gave her an ultimatum: the drugs, or the work. And although the fear in her eyes was painfully obvious, she agreed to his terms.

She went off to rehab, but when she came back, she was a shadow. Her hair was mousey, her brown eyes deeply set, flat and sad. Her skin was milky white, the scars from the track marks painfully obvious. In fact, one of the first things she did when she came back home was get two full sleeve tattoos.

This all happened only a little under a year ago, and Isadora hasn’t written a poem since.

Gregson topples into the entryway, tripping in his apprehension; the thumping of pacing footsteps above his head is an instant relief.

He moves towards the staircase, tucking his key back into his bag, when the sound of voices gives him pause. The tenants of apartment A are out working, and C still reeks of its recent paint job.

He listens carefully, identifying Isadora’s distinctively deep voice. It stops for a second, and there’s a muffled response.

His head still cocked in concentration, he misses the creak of the first step.
Both the voices instantly hush.

After a moment, Isadora’s voice rings out. “Are you going to spend all day dithering at the bottom of the stairs, or am I going to have to come down?”

“No, no,” Gregson calls as he starts up the steps. “I’m coming now. Is Connor Brown up there with you?”

But it’s too late, Isadora is already clattering down the stairs towards Gregson, offering a plastic folder in one ink-spattered hand.

Gregson blinks. It’s the first time in months that he’s seen her in something other than that oversized silk dressing gown, and the difference is discombobulating. Her hair is tied back, looking a shinier, healthier shade than usual. Her skin too has a glow to it, like she’s seen some sun, and her eyes are a deeper brown, not quite as sunken.

Gregson subtly assesses her pupil diameter, but Isadora just rolls her eyes and bites out an irritated “No, I’m not using again,” before thrusting the proffered folder more resolutely in his face.

“What’s this then?” he asks, taking the folder, but Isadora has already turned away, heading back up into her flat.

“Poetry,” she calls over her shoulder as she vanishes from sight. Gregson fumbles, and sheets of paper covered in looping scrawl fall out of the folder, fanning out across the staircase like a fresh bed of snow.
Four.

The door slams shut behind Isadora as she turns to face her silent apartment, having just seen off an astonished Gregson. That should keep him busy for a while.

She taps her fingers against her folded arms as she surveys her living room. The open windows let in a breeze that would normally be wreaking untold havoc on the usual papery occupants, but after waking up on her sofa about a week ago to find the floodgates of words had been opened, she’d been struck with the urge to clean – or to at least dig out some paperweights.

She’s also righted the other armchair, so now two of them sit facing each other in the centre of the room. They fit together like a chemical reaction, creating a sphere of gravity that keeps the rest of the room in place.

It had been that gravity that drew Isadora into the old stuffed armchair, pen and paper in hand, spewing out more words in a single week than she’s written in the last year. Whenever she’d paused in her scribbling, her head had lifted to stare at the unassuming, khaki green leather chair opposite. Sometimes Anna would be there, smiling back at her.

That’s why the poems have to be perfect.

She goes to stand on the sofa, flipping her pen between her fingers as she contemplates the pictures pinned to the wall. She gently detaches one of Anna staring straight down the barrel of the camera, like she knew Isadora would be there. She wonders what caused that particular expression.

“I still don’t know,” Isadora muses.

The leather of Anna’s chair creaks behind her. “Know what?”

Isadora turns, drinking in the sight of Anna sitting comfortably in her armchair, flipping through the newspaper with a steaming cup of tea on the table beside her.
Isadora jumps off the sofa and steps up onto her chair, sitting on its back with her feet on the seat. She poses her elbows on her knees, observing Anna over the tips of her steepled fingers. Anna continues to read, oblivious. At least, Isadora thinks she is, until Anna’s eyes flick up to meet hers, and she winks.

“I still don’t know what you are,” Isadora blurts.

Anna smiles behind the newspaper, not commenting as she flips to the international news section.

Isadora continues to watch Anna, examining the way she has settled into the cracks of Isadora’s life in just a week, wondering what it looks like from the outside, because from where she stands it feels as natural as breathing.

They clicked like a light switch, bringing brightness to her life, like a room that has been edging so slowly into darkness during sunset that the change is dazzling in its unexpectedness. And, like a light bulb, Isadora can feel the charge racing through her veins, weaving around them in a way that is electrifyingly horrific in its consequences, but she can’t bring herself to care.

A pretty generic addicts’ problem, that.

Isadora springs to her feet again, prowling through the room, picking up notebooks and putting them down. She glances over at Anna again, but Anna merely shakes the newspaper to straighten it out, the resulting rustle blending seamlessly with the faint sounds of traffic drifting in the open windows.

*Days of quiet domesticity interspersed with Isadora’s black moods, lessening in frequency; Anna waking screaming from PTSD fuelled nightmares and Isadora being right there beside her, endless cups of tea and restaurants and midnight walks around town when neither of them can sleep and getting home and falling into bed together with their bodies intertwining like yin and yang, with heat and gasping and the slick sound of lips parting, the silence in the space between like sunshine*
through storm clouds and you think of a future you didn’t know was possible paired with a past you didn’t know you had, you think maybe in an alternate universe, you think thank God I’ve found this—

A dizzying flash of déjà vu mixed with a stabbing pain in her chest has Isadora staggering, and Anna is instantly by her side, guiding her to the couch.

“Put your head between your knees,” she orders, straightening. “I’ll go get—”

“No,” Isadora says weakly, ignoring Anna’s instructions and feebly snatching her hand. “I know.”

When Anna doesn’t pull away, Isadora’s voice softens to a whisper. “I know.”

Anna’s silence is telling, and her eyes are unreadable as she gingerly lowers herself beside Isadora.

She hesitantly leans forward, biting her lip, and Isadora does what comes naturally and meets her halfway.

Isadora kisses away the dent on Anna’s bottom lip, discovering those white teeth are as smooth as they look, and the way Anna’s hands come up to cup Isadora’s head, cradling it as she tips it to the side speaks of an aching intimacy that shouldn’t be possible, but Isadora accepts it because there’s nothing she can do. There’s nothing she could ever do.

After all, she never could resist Temptation when she came calling.
A low buzzing sound awakes Isadora. She groans, rolling over to bury her head in her pillow. Her entire body aches deliciously, the complete opposite to the comedown from a high, and she thinks she could get used to this.

This.

Wait.

She blearily opens her eyes, looking at the other side of her bed. It is decidedly empty, the mussed blankets cool to her touch.

Isadora looks over at her bedside table as her mobile phone vibrates again, the glow of the screen shielded by the surface of the table.

Sent: 10:26am

These are good drafts.

-EG

Sent: 10:27am

Amazing, in fact.

-EG

Isadora is opening a new text to reply when a crippling pain explodes in her chest. Her vision goes white and she’s wracked with waves of agony. After an eternity, they recede.

There’s more muffled buzzing, and Isadora gropes through her sheets, her hands sweaty and her breath coming in ragged gasps.

Sent: 10:35am
I have a couple of notes though, I’ll send them later. I’d also like to talk.

This could easily be enough for a book.

-EG

Isadora fumbles at the screen, taking twice as long as usual to shakily tap out a reply.

Sent: 10:37am

not drafts. theyre finished

Sent: 10:40am

I thought we’d agreed to work on reducing the “robotic, technical, emotionless voice that characterises the majority of Isadora Heroux’s pieces”? -Sandra Barnes, The Times Magazine

Sent: 10:41am

not these ones. theyre
Fine. We’ll talk after the publicity meeting tomorrow evening. By the way I’d appreciate it if you turned up.

-EG

done

Sent: 10:44am

i want to do the reading

Sent: 10:47am

Who are you and what have you done with Isadora Heroux?

-EG

Sent: 10:48am

Im serious.

Sent: 10:48am

Really? You’re sure?

-EG
Sent: 10:49

Positive.
Two.

Isadora sits alone in the corner of the private bar room Gregson hired for the publicity meeting. Well, he called it a meeting; it’s more like a party – just not the sort Isadora is interested in.

Employees of her publishing company are getting tipsy on cheap champagne, the sandwiches being offered around on platters are soggy and sad and Isadora is fighting down the urge to go throttle Gregson.

She takes a deep breath. No. Isadora wants to do this, she has to get this right for Anna; it’s the least she can do. It’s not Gregson’s fault that she’d spent all of yesterday and today popping Panadol for the pain in her chest that refuses to go away, then struggling with the hurt of Anna vanishing and failing to reappear. Isadora keeps expecting to hear the click of a kettle she didn’t put on, footsteps apart from her own, a voice that laughs and curses and nags her to look after herself. It never comes.

Even if she didn’t want to do the reading, she might have ended up coming out anyway just to escape the oppressive atmosphere her flat has developed, as well as the quiet ringing that had started up in her ears.

But if anything, it’s worsened.

“Hello everyone,” Gregson speaks into the microphone up on the small stage by the bar, smiling as the conversation in the room winds down. “Thank you all for coming out to celebrate the return of Isadora Heroux, as well as to hear one of her poems from her new collection, The Soldier, which we are hoping to publish within the year. But no shop talk tonight – I know I didn’t come out for that.” He chuckles, and his audience obligingly laughs in response.

“I have a very exciting treat for you,” he continues, eyes flicking to Isadora’s hunched form. “Isadora Heroux herself has volunteered to do the reading tonight.” The room doesn’t erupt into whispers, but Isadora stubbornly weathers the surprised glances. She’s been getting them all night, but now it’s like they have permission to stare. The ringing in her ears swells.
“Isadora?” She looks over to where Gregson stands, hand outstretched. “If you would do us the honour?”

She rises, one hand to the wall to steady herself as the ringing abruptly increases in volume. Her heart is beating too fast, each thump prompting a corresponding flash of pain.

She walks slowly up onto the stage and Gregson hands her a copy of one of her poems, the clean black lettering stark and disconcerting.

Isadora lowers the microphone and clears her throat, concentrating on the words in front of her. The ringing stabilises, becoming clearer, closer. Swaying, she opens her mouth to say the first word, when she’s hit by a wave of nausea so powerful she almost retches. It feels like her stomach is trying to climb out of her mouth, only it can’t get past her burning chest, and the ringing in her ears finally resolves.

She’s deaf to the concerned muttering of the crowd, doesn’t feel it when Gregson takes her elbow because she’s confronted with the absolute, bone-deep certainty that all the poems she’s written are wrong.

She shakes her head, staggering slightly, the ringing painful in a different way to the agony of her chest. It’s familiar, it’s so familiar that she would pierce her own eardrums if she could, because it’s not just ringing in her ears.

It’s screaming. And she knows who it is.

The poems are all wrong. Fundamentally wrong. Wrong because Anna is not in them, because they come nowhere near capturing her, and the truth of it is almost as torturous as the sound of Anna’s unearthly, inhuman screaming.

*Wrong wrong wrong wrong* she wrenches herself from Gregson’s grasp *wrong wrong* get out *wrong* just get out now *wrong* and get home *wrong wrong wrong* it’ll all be fine if you just get *wrong wrong*
home wrong you can fix it if you find Anna and wrong wrong Anna stop it wrong wrong wrong stop
wrong wrong wrong screaming–

Gregson, along with the rest of the crowd, can only watch on helplessly as Isadora bolts towards the
doors with wild eyes, like she’s being pursued by demons.
The night air is freezing on Isadora’s face and arms, having left her coat back in that godforsaken bar room. But she hasn’t managed to escape the screaming in her ears, and she’d be begging for Anna to stop if all her breath wasn’t being stolen by the tightness in her chest and her greedy lungs as she sprints home.

It’s not far, a twenty minute walk, but Isadora is running and running, between the pain and the shrieking she can’t concentrate beyond putting one foot in front of the other, vaguely recognising landmarks and moving towards home from there.

She passes a small alleyway, nothing more than a slender fissure in the street facade, but trips over an overflowing bin and collapses in front of the entrance.

Gasping, she’s dizzily thrown back to another night when she was lying helpless on the ground, several hulking figures looming over her, silhouetted by the orange light barely filtering in from the street. Paralysed by the drugs, there was nothing she could do, the men’s voices turned into growling beasts and multiple sets of hands were touching her, restraining her, tearing at her clothes and there was nothing nothing she could do as the screaming in her ears morphs into a snarl of rage–

And then Anna appears. She rips the men away from her, utilising her military training to dispatch them with cool efficiency. And God, is she glorious. Isadora’s blurry vision struggles to focus on Anna’s dark form, but she looks like an avenging angel.

Then she’s kneeling beside Isadora, checking her pulse, speaking to her gently.

“Isadora. Isadora, that’s it, get up honey, everything’s fine, we just need to get you to a hospital.”


Anna pauses, and when her voice comes out, it’s cold. “What home?”
She vanishes and Isadora reels forward in the pitched quiet of the hole she’s left behind.

The sudden hush presses in on Isadora’s ears, the cars rushing by muted and her own footsteps inaudible as she doggedly continues homeward. The silence has an accusatory weight, expectant and seething like the calm before a storm, and Isadora has to get home. She has to find Anna again.

She realises now how wrong the poems are, and she’s sorry, but she can fix it, she knows she can.

The spell shatters the second she slumps through the door of 139 Chaser Street. The slamming of the door against the wall and her ragged panting fills the entryway, her heart thundering in her ears.

But then she hears it. Muffled shouting, the vibration of the ceiling as someone moves around and that awful, animalistic screaming.

Isadora’s feet drag her down the hall, up the stairs. Her hand forces the key into the lock. Then the door swings open, and everything hits all at once. The hot, dry air of a desert, the metallic tang of blood, the raging noises of a battle that ends in tragedy, that always ends in tragedy.

And there, lying on a metal operation table in a canvas tent with medics rushing around her, is Anna, a piece of shrapnel speared through her chest.

Her screams are tortured, cutting straight to Isadora’s core. She arches and twists, the medics shouting at each other to hold her down, one of them cutting away her shirt to reveal the ruins of her chest, blood pouring freely and dripping off the sides of the table, fresh and bright red.

Isadora steps into the nightmare, reaching out and pressing her hands over the horrific wound, trying to stop the blood. Anna’s pitch black eyes fix on Isadora’s, raw and desperate; she speaks, blood bubbling on her lips.

“Please, Isadora, I don’t want to die.” Isadora can only press her hands down harder, blinking against the tears.

“I know, Anna,” Isadora says.
“Isadora, I’m scared,” Anna gasps, as the blood, so much blood, just keeps welling up around Isadora’s hands and she feels like screaming and sobbing because—

“I’m sorry, I can’t stop it, I can’t fix it, I can’t.” Isadora grips Anna’s hand, slippery with blood.

“Forgive me, God, please, forgive me Anna.”

But Anna only chokes in one more breath, her dark eyes glistening as she returns Isadora’s pressure on her hand for one whole second, before it loosens and drops. Her black holes of eyes dim, and even in death, they are captivating.

Isadora lurches back, wiping at her eyes with bloodstained hands. She turns and feels blindly, groping at the books on the third bottom shelf, pulling out the box at the back, fumbling for what she needs. The pain in her chest is back, and when she looks down she can see a dark red stain spreading across the front of her shirt. Her hands slip as she tightens the rubber tubing around her upper arm, and it takes too long to prepare the needle. Her chest is caving in, blood spurting out as the flesh ruins itself into a terrible wound she can’t possibly hope to recover from—

Relief. The rush.

Her head falls back as the horrendous injury to her chest begins to heal itself, and after a few minutes, she feels strong enough to stand. When she does, her flat looks normal.

No screaming, no fighting, no blood. But it’s still all wrong.

If Isadora fixes the poems, Anna will come back. She’ll see, Isadora will make her see, Isadora will make her stay.

Isadora grabs at the pen holder on the table, her uncoordinated efforts resulting in the pens and pencils spilling everywhere. She seizes two thick markers from the pile and careens out of apartment B, clattering down the stairs.
The stench of paint is like a blow, sharpening Isadora’s mind to a razor point of focus. She needs space to write. More space than she’s ever needed before.

She sideswipes the doorhandle on her way into apartment C, and she stands in the centre of a room with fresh white walls, the painter’s tools abandoned in a corner. Isadora strips to her underwear, uncaps the lid to her first marker, goes to a wall and starts writing.

She scrawls and slashes her words, only stopping to rub her cheek up against the wall, pressing her body to it eagerly.

“Is this right Anna? Is this enough? Tell me, talk to me,” she whispers, smearing the wet ink with her lips.

There’s no response, but Isadora keeps writing, moving from wall to wall, feeling the words pour out of her the same way Anna’s lifeblood flooded from her warm, breathing body—

“What are you doing?”

Isadora whirls. Anna. Perfect in cargo pants and worn boots, her forehead wrinkled in confusion.

“It’s for you, it’s always been for you,” Isadora pants. Anna still looks puzzled.

“I’m writing the poems again, I’m doing them right,” Isadora begs her.

Slowly, Anna’s head starts to shake. Isadora lunges, but her hands close on empty air.

“No, no you’re not.” Anna’s standing on the other side of the room. She’s in military battle dress, helmet on head and rifle over one shoulder. Her face is grim.

“But I love you!” Isadora shouts, throwing hands stained red with ink out wide.

Anna’s expression shifts to incredulous. “Love me? I’m you. You can’t love me. I’m not real, we never met.”

“You’re real to me,” Isadora says. “I know you.”
Anna’s eyes are hard and dark as flint as she manoeuvres her gun, jamming it beneath her jaw so it points straight up into her head. “No you don’t.” She fingers the trigger.

“I was never here.”
Isadora Heroux’s latest and final work is a true masterpiece. Heroux’s genius use of language remains unparalleled, but *The Poet* is radically different from her previous work in terms of subject and tone. In this collection we are shown a depth of emotion that is not present in her earlier work, which while exquisitely crafted, is almost cold in its precise perfection.

All of Heroux’s earlier works are focused on particular people or events, often providing controversial insights that had her being hailed by some and crucified by others. Even though in *The Poet* there are many mentions of Anna Brown (the subject of her penultimate work, *The Soldier*), at the centre of this work we find Heroux turning this laser focus on herself.

It is unclear what exactly provoked Heroux’s change in style, but it is known that these poems were found at the location of her suicide, written on the walls and ceiling. Once her markers ran out of ink, she apparently started using her own blood, and when she ran out of space, she turned on her own body, carving the words into her skin with a paint scraper. Police have confirmed that at the time she had high levels of drugs in her system, and her publicist has confirmed that she did indeed struggle with addiction.

It is amazing what Heroux produced in light of these circumstances, and perhaps it is no surprise that *The Poet* is so intensely infused with emotion. Reading it makes you feel like you’re flying winded: exuberantly joyful as you soar, yet at the same time struggling for breath as the ground hurls ever closer.

Isadora Heroux’s death is a true blow to not only literary society, but the world, who have been deprived of all the great works she doubtlessly would have gone on to create.

May she finally have found the peace she sought.

*This article was written by Sandra Barnes for The Times Magazine, 2014 December edition.*
Note from the Editor

I hope it was worth it all, Isadora.