

AUDACIOUS WOMEN FESTIVAL

AUDACIART WEEKLY

Dying On Your Feet

12 June 2020





AudaciArt – Dying On Your Feet

This week's theme, *Dying On Your Feet*, was suggested by a quote from Dolores Ibarruri, known as La Pasionaria (the passion flower), anti-fascist, Republican fighter and leading member of the Spanish Communist Party:

It's better to die on your feet than live forever on your knees

AudaciArt

Hallo Everybody

Here is the 10th AudaciArt publication: an even bigger collection this week of words and pictures inspired by a quotation by an audacious woman.

This week's contributions include much fascinating herstory and political comment as well as our first piece of fiction!

Women are invited to create and submit any type of work inspired by the weekly theme and the contributions seem to get better by the week.

The theme for Friday 19th June @ noon is: A Kind of Difference

And for the following Friday 26th June: Through the Portal

Physical Distance – Not Social

Remember, during this period of physical distancing Audacious Women is running a series of [online events](#) to help build women's community, and to keep in touch with each other and our audacious natures.

As ever, many thanks to all our contributors and to the Audacious Women Collective and volunteers who helped to make this possible.



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La Pasionaria

Sally Wainwright

Many aspects of the story of La Pasionaria seem strangely topical this week, during which the news has been filled with concerns about police brutality, statues, fake news and false claims about anti-fascists.



On the bank of the river Clyde in Glasgow, there is a statue of Basque politician, anti-fascist, and Republican fighter, Isidora Dolores Ibárruri Gómez - better known as La Pasionaria – which commemorates over 2,000 British women and men who fought with the International Brigade in the Spanish civil war. When the International Brigade was defeated by Franco's forces in 1939 it was Ibárruri who gave their farewell speech, before herself leaving Spain to live in exile in Moscow for the next 40 years.

La Pasionaria (*the passionflower*) was an early member of the Spanish Communist Party and was for many years its General Secretary. She was then named its honorary president, a post she held for the rest of her life. In 1933, she founded *Mujeres Antifascistas*, a women's organization opposed to fascism and war.

During the Spanish civil war La Pasionaria was the chief propagandist for the Republicans and in July 1936 she ended a [radio speech](#) with the words *¡No Pasarán!* (*They shall not pass*) which subsequently became the Republican slogan and is often used by anti-fascists today.

In an earlier speech during the miners' strike in 1934 Ibárruri made famous the phrase which is inscribed on her statue: BETTER TO DIE ON YOUR FEET THAN LIVE FOREVER ON YOUR KNEES.

Despite being so heavily associated with both these phrases, it turns out that Ibárruri did not coin either of them.

Whilst it's difficult to establish the first use of the phrase *¡No Pasaran!* it was certainly used at the Battle of Verdun in the First World War by French General Robert Nivelle. (*Ils ne passeront pas!*) and subsequently as a slogan by the military units defending the Maginot line.



No ¡Pasaran! had also been used the month before Ibárruri's speech, by British anti-fascists during the Battle of Cable Street in October 1936 when they clashed with the metropolitan police who had been sent to protect a march by the British Union of Fascists. Many who were there reported unprovoked police brutality.

Better to die on your feet than live forever on your knees is sometimes mistakenly attributed to Franklin D Roosevelt. It is claimed that whilst accepting an honorary doctorate from Oxford University in 1941 he said

We, too, born to freedom, and believing in freedom, are willing to fight to maintain freedom. We, and all others who believe as deeply as we do, would rather die on our feet than live on our knees.

The quote has also been misattributed to Che Guevara, but it is likely was originally used by Emiliano Zapata, Mexican revolutionary and founder of the Zapatistas. However, it's origin may be much older. The ancient Greek playwright Aeschylus (525 BC – 456 BC) wrote in *Prometheus Bound* 'For it would be better to die once and for all than to suffer pain for all one's life.'

When it was first suggested in 1976 the plan to create the Glasgow statue was controversial, with some local Conservative councillors threatening to pull it down if they ever gained power. One complained that Ibárruri was a 'notorious Communist war criminal' and a 'poisonous old brute'.

Some things never change.



Lived Experience

Hazel G Mansfield

I was at the Edinburgh Protest for the G8 in 2005, with my two young kids still in a double pushchair. I parked up behind a van and got chatting. A bunch of us followed down the road towards where the people were going. It was a nice day, sun was out, a light breeze. Some white vans lined up along a road going down a hill. Over a bridge, people about, some stress, some tension, some protest going on, there were some journalists, a helicopter and some police and some horses, and we found a march and walked for a while, slow with a double push chair, and sad, very sad at the place where everyone was handing out flyers urgently stating their case. This is why we were here, to save. So many to save.

And later I was close by when there was crowd control by kettling and I understood it at a level of lived experience, saw it forwards and backwards and I saw it in the body posture of the black woman ahead of me on the pavement. She was dressed in traditional African clothing with her child on her hip and she had been here before. She turned quickly and walked past me, away from the conflict, her face closed. I saw fear. I slowed the pushchair full of my children yet still moving forward, just more wary, but white and privileged and unable to imagine and I walked through the edges seeing Police in riot gear. I stepped forward ready to carry, as that seems to be the action we should take, when we have a little bit left over, to step forward to carry and shoulder our share, and then recognising a choice between into or out-of, the crowd control activities, I copied the woman I'd seen earlier and left, both of us going onward to safer places. There is only so much we should try to do on long days waking up. Standing up for each other, we stand up for ourselves.

And a lot later when I arrived home, very much wiser, quite exhausted and constantly checking the kids, I could see it sideways too. I was very busy in that strange place where things fall into place connected by new experience, while the initial shock translated into emotional education and political awareness. I see a lot more now, the difficult learning curve moving my awareness forward, growing the strength to be able to carry, and growing the soul to be able to choose what I carry. All of us stand together through the years, the living life working within our people, moving our compassion forward through standing together on front lines. And while, I admit there were times it felt like it while in the old city of Edinburgh walking through the dust that collects at the edges of our mind, I was not dying on my feet.

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Beyond Humility

Sally Freedman

My diminishment
May help you feel good now,
But I will learn strength,
And you will be left hanging
And bound,
By your sad ropes
Of ignorance and cowardice.,
While I collect my birthright.

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Respect

A **R**etha had it right
 Embodying her power
 Singing her soul
 Perfecting her role
 Exciting us to flower
 Commanding every stage
 Transmuting women's rage

Yes it mattered she was black
 White females also suffer flack
We're humans, never mind the skin,
Let's see the world we're living in
Humanity requires our skill
And competence to make goodwill-
Enough to dissipate the fog
Of minds and deeds stuck in the bog
Of ignorance and deep distrust,
Climb out and rise above we must
Move with passion, pride and worth
To save and share this distressed earth
And aim for renaissance, rebirth...

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Dying on my feet with my Christmas Jumper On

Jo Cameron Duguid

I fancy myself as a bit of a storyteller. At any ceilidh-style event, where contributions are invited from the floor, I will be on my feet at some point, sharing a story. I usually tell funny tales, as I enjoy making people laugh, and I justify this harmless activity by saying it's a positive way to channel my desperate need for attention. Obviously, I blame my outrageous tendency to act the show-off on parental neglect in my formative years, like any self-respecting socially maladjusted person should.

The art of storytelling does not lie in the ability to read a story out loud from a book. It involves learning the bare bones of a story (referred to as the “signposts”) and then improvising it in the telling, with no book in sight. This enables the storyteller to communicate directly with the audience, responding to their reactions in the moment. I make rare exceptions when I find something I want to share but don't think I could do the original justice if I didn't keep to the author's own words.

And so it was, in December three years ago, that I set myself up for one of the most mortifying experiences of my life. It started when one of my choirs was having a “party piece” session at our last meeting before Christmas. I found a version of the “Thank you Notes from the Twelve Days of Christmas” on the internet. There are several of these in circulation, and I had previously used one by the Irish writer Frank Delaney. This one was by an American woman called Alexandra Petri, and I found it riotously funny, not least because, unlike other versions of the “thank you notes” I'd seen, she accurately conveyed the cumulative effect of the gifts as described in the successive verses of the well-known carol.

Alexandra Petri's piece made references to American politics which, in any case, were already outdated by that point. Here in the UK, the Brexit negotiations were in full swing by December 2017, so I changed the political content to reflect that, renaming the main “characters” (all birds, as you might expect) Teresa, David, Jean-Claude and Boris. I thought it was a triumph! And, indeed, when I read it at my choir's Christmas celebration, people roared with laughter and told me afterwards how much they'd enjoyed it. Some asked for copies so that they could share it with their friends or use it themselves over the Christmas period.

Pride definitely goes before a fall. At that time, my husband and I used to spend Christmas at a guest house in the Borders which organised a house party each year. On Boxing Day evening, the tradition was to have a session where everyone could contribute to the entertainment. Flushed with success from my choir's reaction to the “thank you notes”, I decided to give the piece a second outing. I stood there at the front of the room in front of the other guests, preparing for hysterical laughter and admiring feedback. By the time I got to the end of the Third Day's note, which was the point at which I judged people would definitely realise it was intended to be humorous (it isn't always obvious when you start a funny story, and you have to hold your nerve), there had been no response at all. Nothing. Not a giggle, not even a smile of appreciation of the Brexit jokes.



Ordinarily, if one is telling a story and it is clearly not going down well with the audience, it's always possible to think on one's feet, gloss over some of the detail, take shortcuts in the action etc., so that the end can be reached more quickly, although to be honest I have never had to do this. Not so if one has announced that "These are the thank you notes from the twelve days of Christmas". There were clearly nine more days to go, and no way to escape my fate. I soldiered on, getting deeper and deeper into the mire, still with no response at all on the stony faces of my listening audience. There wasn't even a polite ripple of applause when I finally got to the end, just a few faintly hostile stares, and I sat down feeling as embarrassed as a Christmas Day cook who has forgotten to defrost the turkey.

It took a great act of will not to be so crushed by this experience that I decided to quit as a storyteller there and then. I had to conclude, "It was them, not me". Maybe they were all Brexit voters and big fans of Boris Johnson? But I have never used that piece by Alexandra Petri again, even though I re-read my version before I started writing this confession and I still find it funny even now.

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Dying on Your Feet

Tamsin Grainger

Every night she dreamed she was dying. She had no idea there were so many ways it could happen: sometimes she was shot while standing at the kitchen sink; other times drowned - that was a favourite it seemed. One night there was a great chase and at the end of it the car crashed and she was killed that way, crushed sitting in the driver's seat, squashed between the tree she'd hit and the airbag. She thought she'd read somewhere that you couldn't die in your dreams, but she did. Over and over.

One night she would be in her body, another watching from somewhere else. She could be the killer as well as the killed. In one incident, she was minding her own business when an ant, which had suddenly become as big as her grandfather, trampled on her while she was waiting for a bus, just minding her own business. Once, she was in the queue at the post office when a lorry drove through the window and she was pinned to the wall, dead on her feet. That time it didn't end there. She saw her children having to be told, and the funeral, although she didn't hear what they said, which was probably a good thing she reasoned when she woke up.

Waking up in the morning, she was always surprised that she was alive. And glad. She usually remembered what had happened, either straight away or in snippets throughout the day. In the middle of home-schooling the kids she would have a flash of herself hanging from the ceiling, feet dangling. That was disconcerting to say the least. And especially when she was taking her daily meditation walk the scenes were vivid. In a flash she was there again. It's amazing how immediately we can do that, she thought, be there, transported, right in the middle of the feelings, simultaneously from the outside and the inside of ourselves.

Starting her life over again so many times was a bit like that film where the guy wakes up, day after day, on the same date. From what she could remember, he starts out making the most of it, getting drunk and overeating, then makes it all good, plays God. Except in his case he never died, and in hers she was always at it.

Surprisingly she wasn't scared about going to sleep. She had a friend who had nightmares and dreaded going to bed, but for some reason it was okay for her, all this dying and coming back to life. Reassuring in a weird sort of a way. If she was honest, and she wouldn't want anyone to know this, she was a tad obsessed with death. She followed these blogs in the evenings, about what happens when you die. She thought that if everyone knew what she did they wouldn't be frightened. There was the blinding white light and then the waiting room, often the question about whether you wanted to go back, and the people, ghosts she supposed they were, welcoming you and showing you the ropes. She really liked that idea, although it had never happened in one of the dreams.

She looked it up on the internet and folk seemed to agree that dreaming about dying was all about going through a transition and being reborn. Funny, she hadn't noticed that she was changing - her hair was the same colour, and she still hadn't grown any



taller, though goodness knows she hoped that might happen one day, even if she was getting on a bit.

It reminded her of the Death card in Tarot - that skeleton wearing a black cloak on a white horse, asking you to take its hand. That's supposed to be about the same thing: letting go, moving on, new beginnings. Well, she hoped this bloody virus would end soon so they could all get back to normal. Perhaps then she would stop dreaming. But, would things have changed? She hoped they would. She liked having the children around her...most of the time! She reckoned they were getting a more 'rounded education' because they got through the school work in a few hours and then it was playtime, and they all liked to play. Actually, when she started to think about it, it was the same for her - she had less time to work but what she needed to do seemed to get done in a shorter time. And then there was the environment. They all agreed the world would be a better place if people stayed put more, used planes and cars less. Yes, she hoped that there would be a change. She didn't want to die, lying down or standing up, not now, there were things to do and she wanted there to be something left of this world for when the kids grew up. She thought of herself as an ordinary person, not knowledgeable about science and stuff, but she really hoped people would keep on being kind, the way they had been recently. She liked that.

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Friday in Bethlehem

Margaret Bremner



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Out of nowhere noise explodes.

Earsplitting sound that might have killed:

It's 'just' a soundbomb!

Fractured plastic, cuts and scratches:

We can just keep singing

Till it gets more drastic.

Tear gas, then, and that's the signal:

Throats seared closed while eyes stream wildly,

and sing no more as, well, you cannot.

Regroup, recover, and hold each other.

Share the onion to cry out toxins,



Then move together and breathe again

In the Wall's deep shadow; singing.

Suddenly

Armoured cars bearing ugly weapons

Bristle through gates

With their chambers loaded.

Canisters aim at the Palestinians

And we few supporters run

For Cover.

Closely shuttered hotel workers

See our plight as

We crouch, disoriented.

They unlock the door

And kindly beckon inside,

Balm amidst struggle.

But we're not all there,

And the shots continue

And my heartbeats thunder out of time

Thud, thud, thudditty,

With the army's clatter.

'Wait, just wait, we'll go look in a minute'.

'Wait, just wait, they'll return to the barracks'.

As in Wild West movies

The street reassembles,

In life after gunfire.

There surface the souls who've withstood the onslaught.

And my partner and friends

Quite safely return from a side street,

Ignored by the targetters this time.



My heartbeat, unsettled, wilds on for two more days,
Till breathing control can reset the pattern.
And I wonder how anyone's heart
Can establish a rhythm
With these wild interruptions
To daily activities.

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Dying on Our Feet

Sheila MacKay



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Chipko Slogan

'What do the forests bear?
soil, water and pure air;
soil, water and pure air
are the basis of life.'

'Take for example the peepul (ficus) tree which is considered sacred in our country. Now scientists have proved that a peepul tree having a canopy of 162 sq. metres can give 1,712 kg of oxygen in an hour and absorb 2,252 kg of carbon dioxide.'
Sunder Lal Bahaguna, Chipko activist.



I want to write something about trees because during this spring of 2020, during the pandemic, so many of my local walks have included the wonder and delight of observing trees as they change. At the same time I've been reading about campaigns to save trees and the threats to humanity from our greedy relentless deforestation. I've found myself hugging the trees (actually I've been doing this for years and I love it when you need five or six friends with you to encircle a tree in a hug). I've made more of an effort to identify and name trees although I'm really stuck at the few names I learned as a child and I find it hard to learn and retain new ones.

My understanding has grown about the need to conserve trees and especially big trees in the tropics and sub tropics so that we and our fellow creatures can breathe. My horror has grown at the speed with which these unique and finite resources are being squandered. Cutting down these trees is not cutting off our noses to spite our faces – it is tightening a noose around our own necks. If we have less and less oxygen doesn't it mean our children and their children will live shorter lives with poorer health?

Rant rant rant and I'm sure you know all this. But in case you didn't know.....

The Chipko movement in India brought tree hugging activism onto the world stage. 'Chipko' means to embrace. It won the *Right Livelihood Award in 1987. Logging brought much needed jobs to villagers in the Himalayan region – but the benefits were short lived when the deforestation led to deadly landslides and floods that year after year washed the fertile soil down the Ganges.

The village women were most affected because their role was to collect firewood, bring water, feed animals, and grow vegetables in the villages, and they could see how the loss of their trees was the loss of their sustenance. In 1973 the villagers protested against the felling of ash trees by a sports goods company. They said that they would bear the brunt of the axes if the trees were felled.

These were an echo of the words Amrita Devi spoke in 1731 when the Raja of Jodhpur sent his men to cut down the trees of her village in order to build another palace. Her people, the Bishnois, held the Khejri tree as sacred and viewed their trees as part of their family. She was beheaded as she embraced the tree outside her house, as were her daughters who immediately stepped up. 373 Bishnoi villagers were massacred as they hugged their trees. The Raja made a law forbidding the cutting of green trees belonging to the Bishnois from then on.

The village women marched and hugged trees all over the Himalayan region, singing songs and poems. They were protesting about cutting down the life giving forest for profit or to build dams or other construction work in the name of 'progress' forcing thousands of villagers into destitution on city streets.

I've been looking for records of their songs translated into English but so far I have only a few words that I copied after reading Arundhati's Roy's book *The Cost of Living*. I don't know whether these words are from Chipko women's songs or from Sardar Lal Bahaguna's writing:



'Soil ours
Water ours
Ours these forests
Our forefathers raised them, it is we who must protect them'

'I am a tree
I'm your friend
Don't touch me with that axe
I also feel pain
I bring you fresh air
I bring you water
I always bow down before you
Why do you cut me down?'

I want to add
'Let me die on my feet
and be replaced by my saplings'

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The Tardis

Emma Gibbons

White shoes click clacking
Rosie and I snaking our way through the indigo gloom,
Two verdant escorts in tow.
We separate.
The crimson paint splatters over her head,
She sinks to the back to hide behind the monolith.

And he came running after her chastity
As she spins in her Tardis prison.
Black night, white sheets.
The pin digs into the folds.
Stop Go Stop Go
As she vanishes into the next dimension,
Pinned to the blue walls.
A mixed blessing.
During, during, wires crossed.
White wedding,
White out.
Sheets left.

Tuesday at two
He's not revealing his crystal sword
To the BTeam
Down at the Grapes of Wrath,
Where Liberty Bodice meets Pinfold.
Bye Red Dwarf. I'm screaming.

In the next dimension,
Where the crossed rackets shine.

Pinfold Potterite sings hallelujah.
And my sweet child drops from my arms,
His head bobbing down the gritty church steps,
Boring, boring through my skull
Divided once more.

Now the child man clutches his flat headed cap
And slopes along the pavement with his entourage
Carefully crossing roads



Far from the Belisha beacons
On a day trip to Morrison's.
Up to the top and down to the bottom.
Don't cough.

Asymptomatic testing kits have arrived.
"We'll pin your sides if you move!"
Please EAT and don't mind the robots,
As they watch over your zochotic pacing.
Life's a gamble that is often tough.
A short life is worthwhile when full of love.

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