

The title 'Cherry Tree' is rendered in a vibrant, 3D pink cursive font. The letters have a glossy, slightly translucent appearance with white highlights and shadows, giving them a sense of depth and volume. The text is positioned diagonally across the upper half of the frame. The background is a soft, out-of-focus bokeh of various colors, including shades of pink, purple, blue, and yellow, creating a dreamy and romantic atmosphere.

Cherry Tree

DANCE-FLOOR ROMANCE

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CHRIS TSE



AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

First published 2026
Auckland University Press
Waipapa Taumata Rau
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
New Zealand

www.aucklanduniversitypress.co.nz

© Chris Tse, 2026

ISBN 978 1 77671258 8

Published with the assistance of
Creative New Zealand



A catalogue record for this book is available from
the National Library of New Zealand

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Cover design by Greg Simpson
Internal design by Aleisha Marinkovich

This book was printed on FSC® certified paper
Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

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‘... in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling.’
— Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*



This book is for Michael



Plot a lifetime of joy.
Begin with a niece discovering how to dance;
end with a poet weeping happy tears
next to water.

Everything in between
is a shade of the first joy you encounter:
not by sight, but by the gradual recognition
of its caress.

Then, if you should be so lucky
to die at the hands of colour, you might finally
understand how sunlight strings its longing
between clockwork & rapture
with no interruptions.



I was a teenager once, blooming
into many silken forms:
sullen son; trick candle; anthem
with no country.

Bless the strangers
who waited in the dark for me
with their generosity dressed to match
each metamorphosis: closeted skeleton;
double-take on repeat; silver lining.

Bless the loved ones
who never asked why I chose to dance
when bystanding would be acceptable.



There is rebellion in every delight you collect
between first dance & final curtain call—
every colour, every work of art, every howl
at a charmed moon.

All your selfish designs
etched into a park bench. All your fantasies
soundtracked by an imaginary band.
The twinkle in your eye when it all
comes true. Blue skies for days.
Pockets filled with charms to give away.



Sometimes my joy was a riddle
penned in invisible ink—a cryptic message
never intended to be deciphered
let alone seen. Language with no root.

I did not ask
for witnesses or accomplices; I wanted
to keep it to myself.

To make such a bargain
was to house a shame that ignited every nerve,
the making of my own providence & a refrain
I grew to rely on.

Such a joy was unsustainable—
it required silver to fortify the tongue & a portal
leading directly to my ancestors
for guidance or assurance.



A body built to revel is a chain reaction
of ignitions—every touch summons an aurora,

every step is punctuated with strobe lights.

When exaltation takes over
you leave your body & watch yourself shimmer
from a distance, more spectacular than any
fireworks display fortifying the night sky.

What do you want to remember
after the sparks fade & you return to earth?



I believed my joy to be obedient
until it retreated, seeking comfort
in a room we had both agreed
never to revisit. An understandable betrayal,
but a betrayal nonetheless.

I knew my joy would
eventually realise its mistake & return
with apples & tear-stained cheeks.
But penance is too often shadow play.

Deep down I knew
something had to shift for us to move on.
I made notes of what I should leave behind
& what I should take with me. That old feeling
crackling in my bones once more, like a muse
shaking diamonds in a tin can.



Sara Ahmed says happiness turns us
towards objects, placing us in intimate contact
with the things that reinforce positive feelings.
Thus, we curate an atmosphere
where a lifetime blooms in movements.
First, the years of discovery.
Then, the days & nights
in which we grow into the bonds
between objects & feelings.

On an Italian mountainside
lies *Hase*, the giant pink rabbit, a sculpture
created to evoke feelings of childhood nostalgia,
slowly decomposing, mouth agape
in disbelief or indescribable rapture.



A past delight buries itself in my belly & rattles
its tambourine, calls attention to every pressing
charge & embrace. The upside
is that I am always feeling something
even if I recognise that joy & memory
collude to keep me wedded to delusion—
for my own good or to teach me a lesson.

I've told myself
it's perfectly fine to crave that slow effervescence,
tracing clockwork back to what's familiar & safe.

Sometimes I look
over my shoulder & nothing makes sense.
Black eyes stare back from Hades.
I remind myself that returning
to a catalogue of joys is a doomed exercise
if all you seek is comfort. Nostalgia
is a return to both home & the grief
hanging from its eaves.

When I linger
long enough, I see that my joy inhabits
vast origins, from a single word that delivered
new possibilities to a dog-eared novel
still waiting to be finished.

The more I see,
the more I need to know. It's hard to tear
myself from this hunger—a lone bird crying
in the dark, waiting for daylight
to catch up with its song.





2022 & Other Poems

Fortunes aren't free & neither is destiny.
Linearity comforts with one charmed hand
& strikes with the other.

*The poem lives between the days.
The poem returns but cannot stay.*

Morning brings a weathered flag; by nightfall
the city is occupied, its streets stitched
into a patchwork of lost signals.

*The poem lives between the days.
The poem learns how to disobey.*

We can't reach into or against time
without tracing clockwork back to
something we all believed in.

*The poem lives between the days.
The poem sings through a fiery blaze.*

If you had to choose, would you want
more sunrises or more sunsets? If you
could see the future, would you step into it?

*The poem seeks clarity in the haze.
The poem lives between the days.*

Search history

Ask your parents how
they unravelled the world

before search engines.
What did they do with

the burden of the un/known?
Water tells the story of time

& the weather makes
a space for fear to curve

between selfish joys.
There is never a question

too bright for the mouth
of the cave.

Ask your parents how
many times they returned

to ground zero as a way to
unearth belief in themselves.

Once upon a time there was
a sky for every hopeful glance.

Decades have passed; the world
is still too much for safekeeping.

It wasn't a phase, Mum—I still listen to Celine Dion

I'm almost the same age you were when
I asked you to bring back a copy of *Falling into You*
from one of your long weekends in Melbourne.
I could've asked for a boomerang but I didn't
because I was very gay. I thrashed that album,
dubbed a copy for the car, & belted its songs
in the shower until they became hymns of
steam & soap. At 41, you were a mother of two
teenage boys & a small business owner.
At 41, I am a childless poet with stacks of CDs
I can't play anymore. These days my fingers
search soju-sticky karaoke catalogues for Celine's
deep cuts while time plays its circular tricks on me in
darkened rooms of déjà vu. Everything comes back
to trend; everything is in fashion again to remind us
how many times we have danced around the sun.
I've lost count of how many parties I've passed through
like Marty McFly desperate for home, dazed & careless,
my youth trickling away in friends-of-friends' flats
thick with smoke & bass. I sought reprieve in kitchens
where everyone bluffed their way through conversations
that felt epiphanous in the moment, their bravado
on full display for anyone who might meet them
vibe to vibe. Remember that night Rajeev punched
a concrete wall just because someone told him to?
The party inside carried on despite his cries of pain.
Someone put on a dance remix of 'My Heart Will Go On'
as a joke, but the whole house shook with the drunken
conviction of thirty theatre students. Nowadays I walk
past that same house with students crouched outside
passing a precious joint between them. The walls
talk to those who have spoken to them. The years
are always waiting for someone to hit 'play' again.

BRAT by Charli XCX by Chris Tse

'Tis the season for reflection & there's a line
to be drawn. The line is salvaging the existence
of daylight in a windowless room where
our faces melt & drip from our skulls. In this poem
I will try to make something meaningful out of
the controlled burn of the past two decades
but I still can't shake the homosexual urge to pound
my fists & knees into this dance floor until the room
slips off its axis & I pass out from a different kind of pain.
I'm old enough to know that every zeitgeist is destined
to become nostalgia—this is how we learn to move
in time with whatever sadness keeps us grounded.
When I go to the club I want to be slimed & devastated
because I know that after strobe-light euphoria
comes a wave to shatter the illusion. Even hope
can destroy us. I try breathing slowly. I try making peace
with the horse bolting under scattered mirrorball gleam.
Part of me wants to go back to when forever was
a selfish wish & all I wanted was to be made & used
& told by a father figure that I am a very good boy
at being made & used. I used to trust the mirror but ignored
what it told me: that every gay sidekick is a dumb bitch
with a heart of gold & no matter how many sassy one-liners
they fire off to earn their screen time they will always
have to make do with never getting what they want.
Give me that blindness one more time, when happy endings
weren't promised in my mornings after, at least
not in the traditional sense. I try to think about those days
in a way that absolves me. I try to remember what it was like
being so carefree, when a night out meant the promise of
hooking up with someone in a dark corner, their hands
grabbing me in time with the music. Instead I got
a stranger in the bathroom hovering behind me
at the urinal asking to see my cock. All I wanted was
to fulfil my desire, to let go of the masks of my daily lives
& work through my escape plan with my hands in the air.
Was it surrender or ecstasy? You tell me.

I was busy thinking 'bout boys

I know what boys like & I know what boys are scared to like
I know what boys do & I know what boys like done to them
I know why boys bite back when the timeline is at its horniest
I know why boys run & how they shut down when their bodies are fevered
I know where boys go to earth & I know why they never leave a door unlocked
I know how boys do bloke, do gent, do chappie, do buster, do big shot like a dude
I know how boys check every room before slipping on fishnets & high heels
I know who boys pretend to love to deflect attention from the limp in their wrists
I know what makes boys flinch that proves boyhood was a battleground
I know when boys are quiet it means there's a fizzing in their brains
I know when boys look for love they are caught between the noun & the verb
I know fairy tales have lied to all the boys waiting in line outside the party
I know too many boys who recoil when they catch their reflection in broken glass
I know the season for boys to make amends is never close enough to touch
I know the boys are shapeshifters in training cracking every surface
I know if I think about boys too much if I think too much about boys with boys
I know I will have turned myself inside out to break free of my own snare
I know I was just like the boys & all the boys knew about a boy like me

'They were very regularly gay.'

after Gertrude Stein

gay as in carefree—forged in sunlight
without judgement

gay as in fucking (with) men—sapping
honey from their mirth

gay as in never fazed from being bent
over a rumour

gay as in our bodies slip tectonic
on the regular

gay as in soft-launching a superpower
under your petticoat

gay because the crime fits the punishment
for every lavender surprise

gay as in the passion of a cut sleeve,
your lover sleeping undisturbed

gay writes itself into & out of every
agenda's manifesto

gay to suggest an aspirational attachment
to a fulsome life

gay when the cockerel calls &
announces the time to be gay

gay when stars erupt, drunk on
a day of learning little truths

gay like a crop of headless torsos
ripe for cultivation

gay like silhouettes exchanging cigarettes
in the dark—faces framed in flicker

gay because you favour a fist's pleasure
over its other natures

gay is prepared to speak the language of desire
into yesterday's tomorrows

gay marks the edge of safety
for us to trace every day

gay gets the job done
when all other modes fail us