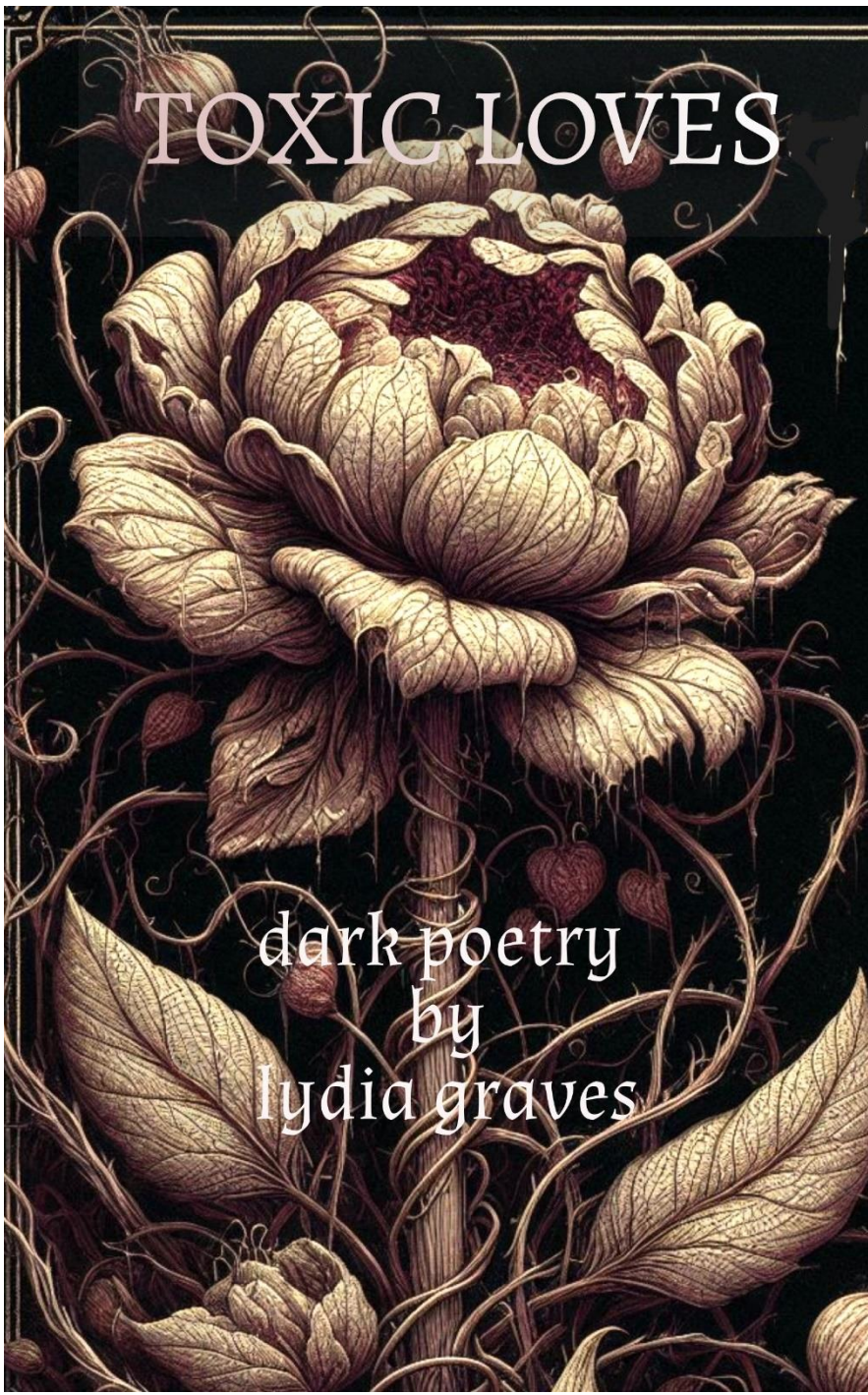




TOXIC LOVES

dark poetry
by
lydia graves

TOXIC LOVES

*A collection of
poetry*

BY LYDIA GRAVES

“A startling and melancholic chapbook of dark poems... A poet to watch.”

–Lee Murray, Bram Stoker Award®-winning poet and author of *Tortured Willows*

“Resonant and familiar...Scathing yet sensitive, a lens by which to examine injustice, trauma, and pain, and the dark secrets often hidden behind closed doors.”

–Lindy Ryan, award-winning author and editor of *Under Her Skin*

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Dedication
To all my sisters.

TOXIC LOVE

Stunned



Her soulmate left something to remember him by –

A knuckle shaped bruise, a dark purple nugget. Syllables
in deep hues

The strained vowels of truth

- I hurt, you will, too.

She refuses to talk about it. Clutching a soft cushion, she
slides from view, remembers the sounds of impact:
flinches when the door closes.

When a sparrow flies into the window she ducks and
covers her ears as though he is back.

Her fragility makes a giant of the room. From her stunned
expression, she could have flown into the window. If only
a kind soul would scoop her up, put her inside a shoe box
and watch her till the morning comes and sunlight lifts
her wings.

Common



Michaelmas daisy are common in January
Bouquets of red roses in February,
Bluebells in March and daffodils in April
Apple-blossom in May; Honeysuckle in June.
Lily of the Valley in July and cornflowers in August.
Sunflowers in September, delphiniums in October,
Carnations in November, poinsettias in December.

But toxic love is common all year round.

I leave this wreath to all the dead days:
For the ghosts of former selves.
Black flowers for their secrets and blue forget-me-nots
Strelitzia, the Bird of Paradise for its promise
Poppies for love
A white Christmas rose for all the celebrations denied.

Toxic Love



When I move
My bones scrape
Full of him
Fit to burst
My abdomen is getting bigger and bigger
I barely recognise myself
Soon this satiated body
Will tear, a thin limb will protrude
Perhaps try to escape to another host
I hear it tapping against my sides
Tapping, tapping
Pushing, ripping almost ripe
Reminding me it's there –
As if I could forget –
I feel eyes explore my insides

Tentacles entwined in my intestines

Eating what I eat

Hard to fully inflate my lungs

With Love there

Growing

Taking me over

Becoming one.

A new day is born

Love is out of my body

But still the virus of desire and familiarity lingers

The wound is infected, open –

Love's hand reaches down into my throat

Bangs against the prison bars of my rib cage

I hear it rip as Love crawls back inside

To undo me all over again.

My Friend Poppy



Night-time was free from sirens and shouts:

She didn't sleep.

Lotus petals

Had no meaning in her universe.

Bright white teeth of my sympathetic smile –

His cauldron of love,

The screams and cries pinning the day

To a blemished bedroom wall, that she understood –

Not the punishment of gentle cruelty.

Celebrities' children bear names

In memory of where they were conceived –

Paris, Chicago, Brooklyn.

My friend –

We could conjure fields of wild poppies;

Paint red spotted meadows

Pretend she is as delicate and pretty,

But my friend Poppy knows more

About the colour red

Than any person should.

ANTIDOTE

Safehouse



The swan's nest of sticks –
Grebe's floating platform –
Egret's roost high on a ledge.

The wren's soft lined cup –
Leaves, grass, mould
An entrance facing away
From cold winds.

The kingfisher's narrow secret tunnel
The bald eagle's durable playpen
Lined with feathers
Plucked from their breast.

The binding and waterproofing
from spiderwebs and lichens,

mud, saliva, caterpillar silk.

Structures of beauty

Ingenuity

Sacrifice

Safety.

The House Misses You.



A wire sculpture of hangers possesses the empty half of the wardrobe. Its doors have been slapped. The duvet is swollen, crumpled from the bags you hastily packed on the bed. Dust will find a forever home on your bedside table.

The sound of your laughter took flight a while ago, a paper plane on the trajectory of summer air. Now it is autumn, and the unflinching mirror in the hall won't retain your damaged look a second longer. Those limp curtains at the bay window can hang all they want in front of stretched raindrops.

Pillows have a memory of a foreign shape.

The cutlery is in the drawer but there's no hunger any more. All this, as the open fire cradles a scorched message in its hearth.

The house speaks.

Goodbye.

About the Author

I've always been drawn to the eerie, the mysterious, and the spine-tingling. My bookshelves groan under the weight of Mary Shelley's timeless creations, Daphne du Maurier's haunting prose, Stephen King's pulse-pounding narratives, and Ania Ahlborn's chilling tales to name a few.

With a hyperactive imagination as my constant companion, I tread the fine line between quiet atmospheric horror and blood-curdling gore. Whether it's a ghostly whisper in an abandoned mansion or a gruesome revelation in a moonlit forest, I aim to unsettle, thrill, and shock my reader.

<https://linktr.ee/Lydiagraves3>

By the author

Daddy's Girl

Truth Twister

Wrath Did Grow

Acknowledgements

'Survival of an Empath', *Dark Winter Literary*

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'Anxiety', *Paragraph Planet*

'Locked in With Dreams', *Pen of the Damned*

Thank you to you readers for choosing to read my poetry collection (and please leave me a review!). I would like to thank Joe Shooman for his thoughtful and subtle editing.

LG x