

TE

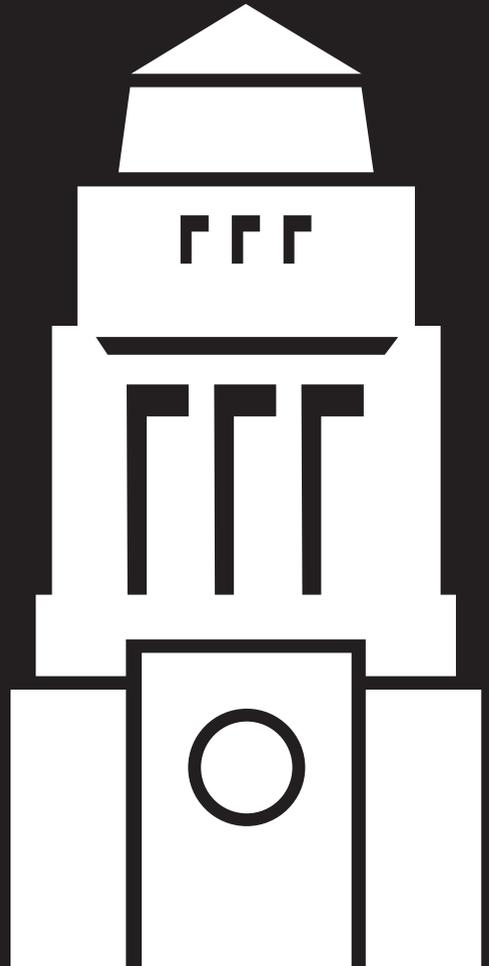
NT

ER

HO

OK

*New writing from BA ENGLISH LITERATURE
WITH CREATIVE WRITING students in the
School of English at the University of Leeds.*



Tenter Hook

New Writing from the BA English Literature with Creative Writing



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

First published 2019
by the School of English, University of Leeds
Woodhouse Lane, Leeds, LS2 9JT

This representative collection of new writing by BA English
Literature with Creative Writing students is published by
the School of English at the University of Leeds.

Contents © 2019 the authors
Editorial material © 2019 Kimberly Campanello
Typographical layout © 2019 Brett Greatley-Hirsch

The right of the contributors to be identified as the authors of
their individual works has been asserted in accordance with
sections 77 & 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or
reproduced in any form by any electronic, mechanical,
or other means, now known or hereafter invented,
without the prior written permission
of the author.

ISSN: 2632-4105 (Print)
ISSN: 2632-4113 (Online)

Typeset in Alegreya (Juan Pablo del Peral) and Roboto (Google)
by Brett Greatley-Hirsch.

Contents

<i>Foreword by Kimberly Campanello</i>	v
RUBY CARBONELL	
The Girl Who Didn't Drown	1
FINLAY CHARLESWORTH	
Stevie	3
E.J. COATES	
From Beyond the Veil	7
CHARLIE CROOK	
Frank	11
MARIO DE GIROLAMO	
An Electric Chocolate Bar	19
ELLA GRAINGER	
Summer	21
EMIE GRIMWOOD	
My Henry	23
FREYA HOWARTH	
A Lost Lover. A Lover Lost.	31
ELIZA KAYA-MATTEY	
1 or 2	33
PHILIPPA KENNEDY	
The Regiment	37
GEORGIA PALFREY	
Places	39
BETH SUMMERFIELD	
Training for Recovery	43

EMILY GRACE TABERN

Penelope and the Squirrel 47

MARIELLA WALKER

Castle Noctis 53

Biographies 55

Foreword

TENTER HOOK IS AN ANTHOLOGY OF WRITING by students on the BA English Literature with Creative Writing course. Published in the course's inaugural year, it attests to the students' diverse and exciting approaches to writing. Everything from evocative lyric poetry, to gothic-inspired fiction, to vivid portraits of contemporary life has emerged from this group of committed, inspired, and inspiring student writers.

Tenterhooks (or 'tenter-hooks') were ever-present in Leeds during the city's cloth-making boom. Wet woollen cloth was hung on hooks attached to wooden frames called 'tenters' in order to prevent it from shrinking as it dried. In the 18th century, the fields along the River Aire were lined with tenter frames, and to this day we have Tenter Hill and Tenter Lane. According to the OED, the word 'tenterhook' is associated with stretching, straining, unsettling, and creating suspense. We are all probably familiar with the phrase 'on tenterhooks'. In Byron's *Don Juan* (1823), the poet delights in the capacity of a literary text to unsettle the reader:

At present I am glad of pretence
To leave them hovering, as the effect is fine,
And keeps the atrocious reader in *suspense*;
The surest way for ladies and for books
To bait their tender or their tenter hooks.

It's not just readers who are 'on tenterhooks' in relation to texts – writers experience this feeling as well. To study Creative Writing is to be perpetually 'on tenterhooks' – whether it's creative strain from reaching for a good idea or the suspense of waiting for feedback on a new piece of work.

To study Creative Writing is to be constantly stretched by the possibilities of language. Writers must not shrink from this challenge, and the student writers in this anthology certainly have not. I am delighted to present this inaugural volume of *Tenter Hook*.

Dr Kimberly Campanello

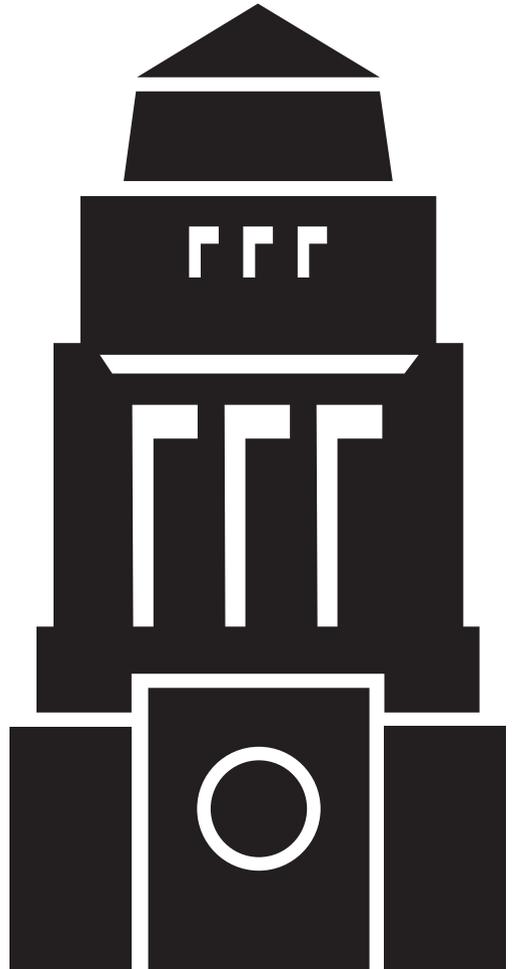
Programme Leader

BA English Literature with Creative Writing

School of English, University of Leeds

TE
NT
ER
HO
OK

*New writing from BA ENGLISH LITERATURE
WITH CREATIVE WRITING students in the
School of English at the University of Leeds*



This page left intentionally blank.

The Girl Who Didn't Drown

Ruby Carbonell

She stands there dripping
warm, a fire in her lungs
roses bloom from the soil of her flesh

the cotton of her heartbeat rips
roots entangle with the sinews of her thoughts
a blue glow radiates from her breath

she sighs a pool of red gunk
mud written beneath her nails
unaware of the empty space

she drips and then she drops
but doesn't flinch, she's soon lost
alone, in the company of a lake

the heavy air coats her face
bruised and purple like a wound
she cries but is numb to the sound

of distant waves and silent wailing
she feels heavy
doesn't know how she will be found

body inhaled by earth
her hair no longer blonde
alive, but she looks dead

her regret has been soaked
through her skins and through her bones.
Don't go into the lake, her mother had said.

Stevie

Finlay Charlesworth

STEVIE WAS DRINKING RED WINE; myself, half a pint of shandy. I didn't want to stay long, but it was his birthday and there was no one else in the pub besides us.

Anyway, it had been a long time since I last saw Stevie. After we left college, Stevie had gone to London to be trendy and get a Bachelors in Fine Art, for which his parents had not yet forgiven him. They hadn't burdened him with the middle names 'Alexander' and 'Isaac' (after Fleming and Newton, respectively) for nothing. When he was in his twenties, Stevie had tried to change it to 'Jean-Michel' (after Basquiat), but he didn't have enough money for the administration fee. 'Of course I couldn't afford it, I'm an artist,' he had joked.

He was already at the pub when I arrived, and it showed.

'I work for Rainbow Bear now,' he slurred. 'You know, the kid's arts and crafts online magazine thing. I design their Painting by Numbers sets.' Even he couldn't help but smile at himself. For me, this was a bizarre feeling. It's not often that a secondary school RE teacher gets to feel good about their career choices. I smiled though, in a friendly way, and tried to wash down my schadenfreude with a gulp of lager-lemonade. I choked.

He paused, waiting for me to die down. He had the look of someone with something to say, and someone not willing to waste it on anyone any less than completely focused on him.

'You know how people always are trying to say *what life is*? I think I've cracked it. Seriously, Ian. Life... life is like a Painting by Numbers set.'

A part of me wanted to smack him, for old time's sake, say something

pretentious, something like *But this isn't art, Stevie! You can do better than this! What happened to you, man? You coulda been a star... you coulda been a contender.* But I didn't – it was, after all, his birthday – so I let him play this one out.

Think about it: At the beginning, it's a blank sheet, with lines and numbers and paints and you're told *THIS IS HOW THINGS SHOULD BE*. There's even a picture for you to copy. It's colourful and it's beautiful and it's very, very simple. So, you go on, and you start to fill the picture in, and it goes well. You might even go wrong on purpose, put the wrong colour in certain areas, but it's not *really* wrong because even though that's not how it's *supposed* to look, it still looks good, it's unique and it's colourful and it's so *you*. Sure, the picture has a flower with pink petals and green leaves and a yellow sun. But what's wrong with painting the petals orange, and the sky pink and the grass blue? It still looks like a flower but now it's just *Avant-garde*, it's *Expressionist*, it's *Abstract*. Are you following me, Ian?

I couldn't for the life of me work out where he was going with this, but he was in full flow, riding a multi-coloured painted river scene with a big, blocky sun shining down on him, illuminating the truth. I nodded, and he continued.

'And then it goes wrong. It ALWAYS goes wrong. The most obvious issue is the paint, because you always run out of the colours you need and have way too much of something completely fucking useless. What is the point in having a metric shit-tonne of brown when what you really need is red? Brown is piss-easy to make, you just get a bit of everything and go BLEURGH in the palette, but you can't extract the red paint from a bottle of brown. And that's not all, Ian. Not all *at all*. Because then, of course, is the inevitable confrontation with the fact that none of us live in a perfect world by ourselves. The cat – the FUCKING cat – will walk across your masterpiece as you leave it to dry, a trail of smudges and brown paint paw prints left to RUIN.'

He stopped himself when he realised that he was shouting.

'The fucking cat.' He spat in his Merlot, a disgusting white globule floating on the red sea.

‘There’s another force out there, though, a much, much more destructive and evil force, which will tear apart the beautiful little world that you have created across the black borders on the card. The Evil Eye of others.’

Jesus Christ, I thought. He’s gone. Completely fucking gone.

“Watch out,” they say, “you’re a little outside the line on *that* area. Haven’t you finished yet?” they ask. “What’s it supposed to *be*, anyway? Don’t you have something *better* to do” – NO ONE ASKED YOU, FUCKER. Let me do my own thing. You can keep your spreadsheets and Proust and Devil-illed Eggs and perfectly-filled in Paint-by-Numbers sets without a single wrongly-stained ATOM. Fuck you. Fuck. You.’

He swallowed the rest of his wine as if to wash out a bad taste.

‘In the end, you’ll give up and leave it to sit somewhere at the back of a cupboard waiting to be thrown out like everything else you use once and never want to see again, unless... unless by some miracle you *do* complete it and it doesn’t look like complete *trash*...’

My ears pricked up, ready for the moment of redemption, but equally ready for a horrific anti-climax.

Then it came:

‘... nope, it makes no difference. You’ll probably still leave it to sit there. Cupboard purgatory.’

When he finished his rant, he didn’t say another word for some time, and neither did I. I bought him another drink, which he thanked me for. An hour later, Stevie was asleep at the bar. I hailed him a cab and carefully placed him in it.

‘Goodbye Stevie,’ I whispered to him as I closed the door.

I pushed twenty quid in the driver’s hand and said, ‘Take him home.’ I walked away even though the cabbie yelled after me.

I have not seen Stevie since. To this day, I do not know where Stevie lives.

This page left intentionally blank.

From Beyond the Veil

E.J. Coates

IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THE HAPPIEST day of her life, and perhaps it was.

The wedding venue was Hawthorne Manor, an ancient building that looked as though it had been carved out of the surrounding landscape; one great slab of weathered stone. Ivy clung to the dark exterior like a sickly child, and on that gloomy morning the glazed windows shone through the mist like tired eyes.

April reclined in the depths of the house, tucked away in the bridal suite. Her heart was beating to the rhythm of a broken metronome and her hands were clammy. The hard work had been completed. Her dark hair was lustrous and shiny, tumbling down her shoulders and studded with baby's breath like constellations in the night sky. April's lips were rouged and her brows tinted – everything was as it should be.

The bride's stomach did a giddy little flip as she glanced towards the dressing table mirror, which was furnished only with a pair of scissors. It took her a few seconds to realise that she wasn't alone in the reflection. Stood a few meters behind her was another bride, framed by the bathroom door. April jumped before realising that there must be another wedding taking place in the Manor that day, though the bridal suite was meant to be hers alone at this hour.

'Hello', April said gently, trying not to let her frustration show.

'Good day', the stranger replied mournfully.

April thought this was a peculiar greeting and the woman's garments were rather odd, too. They must have been handed down from her grandmother or some even more distant relation. Where April's gown was un-

derstated and chic, the other bride's was piled with meters of stuffy fabric and outdated pleats. It made the woman look like an old porcelain doll.

'Sorry,' April began, 'the bridal suite is supposed to be mine until eleven.'

'Oh,' the strange bride replied, 'don't mind me – you'll barely even notice I'm here. More importantly, who is the lucky man – some thorn in your side no doubt?'

'Well... I wouldn't exactly call him that!' April replied, growing indignant.

'No, my dear, of course not...'

The woman came and perched on the edge of April's dressing table facing her; a mere two inches separated them. April wondered if this was a practical joke, maybe something Mark had organised? She noticed that the bride held a withered bouquet of once decadent flowers in her hands, cradling them close like a baby.

'I think you might need a new bouquet', April said, catching the faint scent of decay drifting from the lifeless petals.

'Oh, these old things? They perished long ago.'

'Then why are they cluttering up the bridal parlour?' April asked pointedly, but with a smile.

'I rather suppose they're just a memory now.'

A pungent petal of a purple specimen broke away from the bouquet and fell like tainted snow onto the surface of the dressing table.

'Actually,' the unwelcome guest began, 'if it wouldn't be too much of an intrusion, would you be so kind as to hold them whilst I use the powder room?'

April was about to protest that she would rather not, for fear of staining her pretty white dress, when the woman thrust the dead flowers in her direction. April reluctantly received them.

The woman slipped out of sight. As she did so, the still-sharp thorn of one of the dried roses stuck deep into the flesh of April's finger and she let out a little yelp. Thick, red blood pooled up and began to trickle down her forefinger. She didn't notice – as her skin had been gouged, so too had her mind.

April sat entirely still, facing the dresser, not even breathing. Her eyes were glazed over and lustreless like those of a dead sardine. She looked in that moment like a corpse, held erect only by the binding fabric of her dress. Behind April's dead-fish eyes, images were beginning to take frightening shape.

Another bride jilted at the altar, humiliated and alone – the pink skin of her fiancé's chest caressed by the hand of another woman – pasty makeup running down the bride's face – her fiancé, like a starved vampire, kissing the other woman's neck – the bride looking over the edge of a three-storey roof – her fiancé thrusting himself inside another woman – the bride stepping over the edge – moans and the wet slap of flesh on flesh – the fabric of the bride's dress billowing out like the wings of a rare bird – her fiancé's final, fractured breaths, finishing – the dead crash of the bride hitting the ground.

In an instant, the fog in April's eyes cleared. She released the bouquet of flowers from a death grip and they tumbled to the floor, followed by still more drops of her blood.

She had seen her fiancé making love to another woman with pure, deadly passion – a passion he had never shown her. She knew it was recent because his hair had been flecked with the grey which had only started to show in the last few months. The bride had seemed somehow familiar, too.

The harsh electric lighting of a hanging chandelier sparkled in the sharp edges of the scissors on the dressing table. April picked them up, seeing her fellow bride behind her in the reflection. The skin was wasted on her face now, a thin veil of gauze pulled too tight over bone and hidden behind cracked and pasty makeup. Her hair, what was left of it, was patchy and grey. The light fabric of her dress twisted around her in the air as though it was submerged under icy water.

April smiled as though she was greeting an old friend. Then she felt the cold metal of the scissors in her bloody palm and thought of the look on her fiancé's face.

This page left intentionally blank.

Frank

Charlie Crook

FRANK McGRATH AND HENRY CLERVAL APPROACHED Hawtonville Cemetery, their faces covered by masks. They were both thirteen, but Henry was by far the larger of the two. He carried a heavy duffle bag over his shoulder.

'Are you sure about this Frank?'

'Of course,' he replied, his voice muffled through the latex.

'I wouldn't think any less of you if you backed out.'

'This is happening Henry.'

'I thought we were just joking around.'

'Think what you like,' said Frank, pacing ahead.

...rusty iron gates ivy's creeping tendrils steps on faded grey plod plod plodding tarmac grass fed on rotting human compost...

'I could go now and take the bag with me.'

'Do that and I won't speak to you again.'

'Come on Frank. I'm your only friend.'

'Let's keep it that way.'

...cheeky fucker thinks I should bow down to Lord Henry can I fetch you a lemon-scented towel only friend only fucker I can tolerate school full of reality-tv fed morons Christ it's hard to breathe in these...

Frank took off his mask, revealing red hair and freckled skin.

'Frank...'

'What?'

'This isn't going to work.'

'Maybe not, but...'

'No "buts", this is just... fucking stupid!'

'Calm down...'

'I'm serious! If we get caught, we'll be arrested.'

'Seems unlikely.'

“Seems”? Have you ever heard of “desecration of a human corpse”, Frank?’

'No.'

'Well, I looked it up, and it's not good!'

'On Google?'

'Of course on fucking Google!'

'What does it say?'

'It says we're fucked Frank!'

'If we get caught.'

They carried on walking towards the first open grave.

'I think that's the one,' said Frank.

Henry dropped the duffle bag.

...headstones jutting from the ground like crooked teeth jaws guarding pregnant soil bellies ...

'Now what?' said Henry.

'Depends... are you gonna help?'

'Do I have a choice?'

'Not really,' said Frank, smiling. 'Help me down.'

Henry stared blankly.

'Or I could jump in and make loads of noise?'

'Alright!' said Henry, snatching Frank's arms and lowering him into the ground.

'Hang on, just a little – woah!'

Frank landed on the coffin with a thud.

'You okay?'

'Fine,' said Frank, brushing himself off. 'It's dark down here, though.'

'You bring a torch?'

'No. You?'

'No... wait.' Henry pulled his phone out and switched on the torch.

'That's better,' said Frank. 'Pass me the bag, then.'

Henry handed over the duffle bag. Inside were all the instruments of reanimation: hammer, taser, syringe, needle and thread, some loose pages (torn from *Gray's Anatomy*) and a lunchbox full of ice.

...tools to 'infuse a spark of being'...

'What are you doing?' asked Henry.

'Nothing,' he replied, waking from his reverie. He pulled at the coffin lid: it was locked. 'Ah... no problem.'

'What do you mean, "no problem"?'

'The coffin's locked... but we have the hammer.'

'You've got to be kidding me?'

Frank unzipped the bag and pulled out the hammer.

'You'll wake up the whole estate!'

'No, I won't. Besides, there's no one around.'

'What if someone comes through the cemetery?'

'At two in the morning?' Frank smiled, 'You'd have to be a right weirdo.'

'I'm glad you're finding this funny because I'm not!'

'Alright, chill out. It won't take long.'

Frank swung the hammer – it struck the solid-oak panel.

'Frank, I swear to God, I'm gonna kill you.'

'If you think you can do better, you're free to try.'

'Alright, I will.'

Henry jumped down and snatched the hammer. He struck the coffin once – twice – three times, and what was left of the lid fell from the hinges. He stood there, breathing heavily.

'Thanks Henry – you're a star.'

'Don't push it!'

Frank smiled, pushed the panel to one side and knelt over the body. Then, he pulled a pen knife and lighter from his pocket and used the flame to sterilise the blade.

'Last chance to change your mind,' said Henry.

Frank thrust the blade into the man's chest – cold liquid splashed his face.

'Fucking hell Frank.'

He dragged the blade across the flesh.

'That's disgusting.'

'Can you shine the torch over here?'

'No.'

'Why?'

'We shouldn't be doing this.'

'Fine,' said Frank. 'Go then.'

'There's something wrong with you.'

'Get fucked Henry.'

'No, I didn't mean -'

'Save it.'

Henry glared at Frank.

'Are you going, or not?'

Henry climbed out of the grave, shouting back as he left: 'Good luck!'

...that's better can finally work undistracted maybe get this done tonight this morning whatever you call it after midnight need some light though... Frank pulled his phone out and turned the torch on *...can finally see what I'm doing won't lose a finger...* Frank stopped *...there's no one here to see...* He unzipped the man's trousers and pulled out his cold, flaccid penis *...ugly looks like newborn mouse pinkies they call them buy them in the pet shop feed them to snakes...* He reached into his pocket and pulled out a dog-poo bag. Then, he grabbed the man's penis and sliced through the base. He cut through the ball sack next, being careful to keep the testes inside their wrinkly envelope. Once the castration was complete, Frank placed the genitals inside the plastic bag and tied it neatly with a bow, then placed it in his coat pocket.

He returned his attention to the heart surgery. After half an hour, Frank had cut through all the tissue and bright-yellow fat. He could finally see the sternum. He was swapping to the saw attachment when he heard a noise – someone was out there *...shit what do I do maybe they'll go away best cover the light getting closer their footsteps best make a...* Frank jumped up at the ledge of the grave and struggled to pull himself up *...wish I had more upper-body...*

'Frank?'

Frank, startled, fell back in the grave.

'Who's there?!'

An indistinct figure walked to the top of the hole.

...shit shit shit wait I know that...

'Henry? What are you doing? You scared the shit out of me!'

Henry laughed.

'I'm serious!'

'I thought I'd see how you were doing.'

'Fine, no thanks to you!'

'You, uh, you've made a bit of a mess Frank.'

'It's unavoidable.'

'Is his dick bleeding?'

'No.'

'But his...'

'I said no!'

'Alright, alright, chill Frankie.'

'Don't call me that.'

Frank turned his back on Henry and carried on sawing through the sternum.

Henry watched, feeling queasy.

'Frank...'

'What!?'

'I think you're running out of time.'

Frank checked his phone: 4:00 a.m.

'Any suggestions?'

'I think it's time to go home,' said Henry.

'No.'

'Look, you tried. I never thought you'd get this far.'

'I said no, Henry.'

'At 8:00 a.m., my brother is coming to bury these bodies.'

'Yeah, and we paid him forty quid for the privilege.'

...apparently other men had paid for something similar with the pretty ones...

'Well, what are we gonna do then?'

'Let me think,' said Frank.

...always the brains of the operation I guess literally this time but how do we...

'I've got it!'

'Huh?'

Frank picked up the hammer *...careful now if the heart gets pierced this is all for nothing...*

He struck the sternum, breaking the bones, and picked out the lumps with his fingers.

'Oh, I get it,' said Henry.

A bone snapped; Henry winced.

When Frank had cleared enough space, he placed his hands around the top of the cavity – as if it were the collar of a nice, warm woolly jumper – and pulled his hands apart, stretching the flesh. Suddenly, Frank felt something warm and wet on the back of his head. He heard Henry retching and realised that he'd vomited on him.

'Henry, you'll ruin the heart! Everything has to be sterile!'

'I'll go, I'll go,' he said, then left.

Frank reached into the duffle bag, rifling through the pages with moist fingers *...got it looks a little different from the diagram though guess we all look a little different on the inside...* He studied the image one last time, then grabbed a pulmonary artery in one hand and his dull blade in the other. He hacked away at it, while it wriggled in his grasp. Then, he moved onto the other major blood vessels. Eventually, the heart was free, and Frank pulled it from the torso. It was heavier than he imagined, denser, like a cricket ball wrapped in raw beef.

...this is what made you live what it can do for another...

The deceased had hardly been a paragon of human virtue: he specialised in defending sexual predators. According to the papers, he'd just got a teacher off a statutory rape charge. Apparently, he was arguing with his client when they crashed into a school bus, killing them both. The irony wasn't lost on the papers:

School Predator Becomes Prey of School Bus

THE DEFENCE CARRIES OUT THE EXECUTION!

Lawyer Perverts Course of Justice, Justice Perverts Course of Lawyer

Frank held the cold mass in his hands ...*I wonder if a heart as dark as yours can save someone's life...* He knew the heart was not the source of moral or ethical decision-making, but the thought wouldn't leave him.

He placed the heart inside the lunchbox. As the organ was submerged, cold liquid overflowed. He clipped the lid shut, squishing the contents, then packed away his tools. Frank threw his duffle bag out of the grave and climbed up, with some difficulty. He was carrying the heavy bag, when he stumbled on something: his Halloween mask ...*Frankenstein's monster no real name of your own a little unfair considering but what would we call you with all those parts...* Frank carried on walking ...*whoever your brain is that's who you are...*

Frank came across the second grave, that of Mellissa Wing. He dropped the bag inside and lowered himself down. He tried the coffin lid, which was locked, but he found a latch around the side, which revealed the woman within. He's never seen a face so empty of emotion. The newspaper said it was a heart attack that killed her ...*I wonder if she'll remember what death was like is there heaven or hell or nothingness worse than unconscious...*

He unbuttoned her shirt, then dragged the blade down her chest: the flesh separated like sliced bread dough. Frank swapped to the saw attachment, working as quickly as he could. Eventually he could see the heart, which he disconnected and threw away. He connected the new heart with needle and thread, stitching as tightly as possible, and forced it inside of her ...*man and woman together a marriage of flesh...* He grabbed the syringe full of dissolved caffeine tablets (in lieu of adrenaline) and jabbed it directly into the heart. Then, he pulled the taser from the bag.

...to be or not to be...

Frank tasered the heart: at first, little happened, then it appeared to pulsate.

...it's working it's working...

Her muscles spasmed.

...if I've brought her back to life so long after death...

The body jerked violently; the heart beat faster, and frothy juices leaked

from the stiches ...*what's happening*... it burst, spraying onto Frank's face. He pounded the pulpy mess where the heart had been and fell back, lying beside his failed creation.

An Electric Chocolate Bar

Mario De Girolamo

The silent buzz. So illusory yet
There's a certain abundance that one feels
Whilst vibrations of unknown intent slowly freeze
The hypothalamus
Leaving us stuck at the crossroads of warming to pixel scratchings
Or perhaps
A small small talk, hats upon heads, each lace fully tied
No cool breeze to send someone onto a high
Just smiles, likes, posts.
Mine is of stronger lithium!
He boasts.
The buzz won't subside.

A forcefield, forcing sheep out of fields
But here, it's not so loud.

The lack of Wifi is needed, and now
It's the age of the sheep, let's hope
We're not cows.

Slaughterhouse.

This page left intentionally blank.

Summer

Ella Grainger

A tight white top, sticky
sweat seeps down her cleavage.

She waits on the rusting bridge,
rests her arms on the cool railing

letting the metal soak up her heat.
She waits for the next car to appear under her feet,

bringing a breeze through her dirty blond hair,
seconds of sanctuary between hot humid air.

Naked roads, few people cooking in cars
too busy bathing in the last moments of sun

before it dips, and there's no chance of tanning,
before kicking off the night's covers in hot boxes.

She watches as red tones lazily fade.
Lights switch on, roads come to life.

This page left intentionally blank.

My Henry

Emie Grimwood

MY EYES FLUTTER OPEN AT THE SOUND of the numbers flipping over on the clock: 05.06.1944. I try to ignore the years since the war began. When Henry, my husband, enlisted, he thought it'd be over as quickly as it began, but in those four or so years he has been moved from station to station, training for wherever they send him next. The sights he saw in Burma could scar a man for life. By the end of 1943, he was sent back to England for more training. Henry thought then that whatever was on the horizon would be a 'battle that ruined the men who trained to serve in it.' He tells me a great deal about the war, and it is easy to understand why he and the other men think that the idea it will end any time soon is a mere fantasy.

I go about my day as normal. Henry and I do not have an extravagant lifestyle; we live in a small house on the Suffolk coast, just a short walk away from the beach. The calmness of it is nice and makes me feel safe, but nobody is safe. Your age doesn't matter, or your sex. If you are a soldier in training or action, or someone on the home front, war takes everyone it can. It is a bitter reality these days.

In the beginning of all this, I was overjoyed that he was enlisting, serving the country, and doing his duty as a man. Now of course I just want him back with me, so I can be in his arms again. I go to the bathroom and brush through my deep brown curls, and then pin them back into a neat bun. I apply a little cream onto the bags that frame my light green eyes. I put on my red skirt and blazer two-piece with a dainty white shirt underneath, a pair of black heeled shoes, along with a little red hat. I take my bag from the hat stand and head to the market nearby.

There is a slight breeze in the air today. Despite the bright sun, it is still chilly. Perhaps all this war is making the weather mad, too. Henry loves weather like this. He would always say, 'It's warm enough to walk but cold enough to run'. It would never make much sense to me. Then he'd lift me up and run with me in his arms as if he was a fireman! It was truly not a public display, but it would have us both in hysterics. He was always doing things like that, ever since we were young. I don't remember a time when we did not know one another.

We'd grown up living close by, and my mother would always send me to play with him on the farm while our fathers went to work – how long ago that must have been. Falling in love with him was so natural. I think both our mothers and fathers expected it. It seemed they'd planned our wedding from the first day we played tag with one another. They were all ecstatic when he proposed, and so was I. We have been married for eight years now, since we were twenty-two. Henry enlisted in the war two years later, and the decades we have known each other seem to have gone by so much faster than these nearing on five years without him. My thoughts keep me company now, for long enough to get me to the market. The smell of fresh food, soup, and bread is all that is in the air. Richard, the local baker, a man in his early fifties, has worked on the market for as long as I can remember. There is never a day he is not inviting and happy, despite the mood of the country. Above all, he makes the most tremendous bread, and I am always happy to pay six pence instead of the average five for what he makes! I pick up a white-grain loaf and a pack of eggs, fresh from the farm, along with milk and butter.

The walk home is warmer and much less tedious. It seems that the wind has dropped, and the sky is clearing to make way for the sun's warmth. It's always pleasant arriving home. Childhood familiarity is so comforting to me. Seeing Henry walk along the coast to the front door of our home when all this war is over will be a sight even more comforting than that. Leaving my shoes at the door, I walk over to the kitchen, placing the bread in the bread bin, and the milk and butter in the fridge. The radio sits quietly in the corner of the room. I haven't had it on since the first few weeks of war

as hearing all those reports was just too painful. I don't know how people can worry themselves with such commotion. Sometimes I am curious though, about the fighting, the noble men and their service, but I never let it get the better of my mind. I am quite stubborn you see. Henry always joked with me about that. Opening the drawer under the sink, I choose a letter to read over a cup of tea. I like to re-read the letters. They sound like his voice in my head, and in my heart. It means he is with me.

02.03.44

My darling Sienna,

Life overall is pleasant. In the evenings me and my servicemen find ourselves in Southampton. We outnumber the civilians by and large. Soldiers are far more common to me now. I see uniform wherever I look, even on those that do not wear it. The walk between the beach and camp are pleasant, we talk of home, the other soldiers and me. It keeps us sane – God, you keep me sane. Some days we are told that soon we may not be able to receive mail, but I am certain we can still write. I fear a battle is looming my dear, and it may be one to take more of us than we believe is humane. There is a young boy with us here, there are a few in fact, but there is one I speak to. He is stubborn and has his wits about him, reminds me of you. I can only hope that our son will be like him. When I return, we will have a family of our own. I promise you my love.

Your Henry

My heart tightens at the word, *family*. If only he knew. A few weeks after he had left home, I wanted to help, as a nurse, in action or in one of the hospitals. My whereabouts did not matter to me, after all Henry was moved around so much, I assumed I'd only spend a few months at best, wherever I was first sent. I just wanted to know that I was doing *something* to help the men who were so willing to give up their lives for us all back home. It was only then that I was told I could not. When they turned me

down, it was not for my history, or my work ethic or anything of the sorts, but, put simply, I was pregnant. I was not fit for such work, not because of the duty, but because the sight of war in any sense is not good for a mother's mind. I wanted to be excited when I found out, but knowing that he did not know, knowing he may not see his child be born, or even grow older, depending on how long the war lasted, only made me feel sick with panic. I could not tell him in a letter. I did not want to burden him with more fear of not making it home. A month or so later, I discovered it did not matter about the sight of war, what it could do to my child, because the stress was enough to harm it anyway. I woke up one morning, blood on my sheets and a pain in my abdomen, and I knew I had lost it. I tell myself now it was for the best Henry never knew. When he gets home, we can have a proper family. The world could not be so cruel as to take my husband from me, too.

My eyes feel heavy after such a day. I climb into bed and the minute I do, my body sinks into the mattress.

08.06.1944

The clock reads.

I wake up later than usual. I never like it when I wake up late. I feel I have wasted some of the day. Nevertheless, I cannot pine over this forever. I get up and make my way to the bathroom for my usual routine. Looking at my hair, I realise it is a little more matted than usual. It is clearly not taking well to this weather. Once I am ready, I head through to the kitchen, soup would definitely go down a treat today, considering the state of outside. Tomato and chicken are my options and for that I am grateful. Henry always made me buy minestrone and I hated to admit to him, but I really was not fond of it. Pouring the tomato soup into the pan I stand by the cooker to keep warm. Cooking seems so much quicker when you're truly looking forward to eating; I eat the soup with some bread and put on my shoes and head out to the market, as I usually would.

The days this week are seeming to go by rather quickly, as if the world is anticipating something. Perhaps soon will be the end of the war and I will

see Henry once again. Yet something feels colder in the air. Unlike earlier this week, it's sharper, there's a pain to the wind as if it has been cut with something larger than itself and then distributed over the land. Rubbing my shoulders to keep warm, I feel a wave of sadness rush over me. This weather is truly not good for a person's mind. When I arrive in town, I head to the post office. In all this upset, I pray that there is a letter waiting for me. I walk in and look in the compartment titled 'B.' The box is empty, but I refuse to believe it. I walk to the desk, 'Excuse me, I don't mean to be rude, but is there any post today? The boxes seem to be empty.' I try not to sound unkind, but there is a certain atmosphere that is making me feel uneasy.

'What was the name?' The man asks, almost dismissively.

'Brown, Sienna Brown? I'm expecting a letter from my husband.' The words come out eagerly with a hint of sadness, as if that will make one appear.

He gives me a small smile and goes to the filing cabinets. After about five minutes, which seem far longer, he hands me two letters, one from last Friday, and one from last Wednesday. I breathe a sigh of relief and tear both letters open. My heart warms at the familiar handwriting.

2.06.1944

My dearest Sienna,

All is well here, I am healthy, and happy to be alive –

That is all I need to read. I feel a tear slowly roll down my cheek, and I brush it away. There is nothing more to know apart from that he was alright. When I walk out of the post office, I notice Thomas is not serving at the stall. Instead he is comforting an older woman with deep-set eyes and tangled hair. She makes eye contact with me and I shift my gaze. I cannot bear the sight of such sadness. All usual happiness appears to have been eradicated, and I just know that something must have happened. Something bad. I try to shake the feeling, clutching my letter, reminding

myself that no matter what had happened, Henry had survived it and he is okay. Heading over to Henry's parents' home, I cannot shake the feeling in town. So many people looked so sad, and now an inescapable sadness looms over me, no matter how far away I get. I knock on the door three times and Marie, Henry's mother, opens. I breathe a sigh of relief.

'Darling! Do come in, we have tea and cake, would you like anything?' There is a glow to her, a warmth in her smile, as there always is, that makes me feel more at home in this weather.

'Oh...' I laugh a little at how quickly she offered both to me. 'That's awfully kind of you Marie, but just the tea would be lovely.'

I give her a gentle smile, and she nods in approval.

'How have you been Sienna? Are you still receiving letters from our lovely boy. We have had a few, but we always love to hear about him from you. It's like when he was at home and you would tell us all about him when he was at work!'

At the mention of Henry being at home, I could see her grip tighten around the handle of the mug, and her eyes avoid mine. I felt my chest tighten.

'I have been well. The weather isn't particularly inviting at the moment though, I must say. I hate to think what it is like over there. But yes, I received two letters today, something has seemed to have happened though, the spirits were truly down when I went to the market today.'

I notice I am picking at my fingernails, in a nervous way, despite the fact I know he is alright.

'Well, I can only say I am glad! Frank, do you hear that? Henry has written, he is alive and well -'

Frank, Henry's father, nods his head agreeably. He has become quiet since the war began. He does not show emotion, and as much as Marie tries, he simply has shut down. She looks back at me, her excitement dulled by his reaction. I give her a small smile and take a deep breath in, in an attempt to loosen my chest from all the anxiety I felt earlier today. I hear the wind against the windows. It makes the room shake a little, and my gaze casts upwards.

Soon after, the sound of the metal teaspoon hitting the sides of the cup focuses my senses. I know that I am being spoken to, but something does not feel right within me. Frank goes to turn the radio on. They always turn it off when I arrive, but when I am not here, it is on at all hours. Frank has a four-by-four map in his office. When the news comes in, three times a day, he follows all the battles with a ruler to satisfy his mind. I try to pay little attention to the words being spoken, but I can tell by the frantic pace that something has happened. For the first time I see pain in Frank's eyes. He does not get out his map, or sit listening in his chair. He rises and shuts it off. Moments later there is a knock at the door. Marie opens it to a young boy in a uniform. I force myself to look at Frank, his eyes gloss over and he collapses to the floor. Marie holds the telegram in her hand. My hand reaches for my stomach where his child once was. A symphony of silence fills the room.

This page left intentionally blank.

A Lost Lover. A Lover Lost.

Freya Howarth

SHE LOOKS OUT THE HUGE WINDOW. It makes her body look tiny, shrivelled, as she only takes up a portion of the frame. The TV behind her blares out *When Harry Met Sally* for the fifth time today. Her hands cradle a now lukewarm cup of tea. Milk, no sugar. Her right hand carries a wedding ring.

Vacant blue eyes, like when you just don't know what to say. They focus suddenly but momentarily on next door's cat running over her garden. He's called Ziggy, after David Bowie's song. She used to wear earplugs to get to sleep through the endless music, but now she doesn't hear it. The cat flattens the flowers she'd spent all summer planting. Each free day she could get was spent making it look like the garden she saw in one of the magazines. But that doesn't matter now anyway, does it? The FOR SALE sign struggles in the wind.

Her three layers of thermals, two black and one stripey, give her a constant hug, whilst her thick beige jumper coats her in armour. Pizza boxes and styrofoam trays pile up on the dining room table. A table that had seen Christmases, countless Sunday roasts and fifteen years of birthdays, now a developing landfill site. The place mats have begun collecting dust.

Mousey brown hair with grey roots flows over her shoulders. But then again that could be the copious amounts of dry shampoo that she's used. Still, she stands, warming her legs on the radiator below the windowsill, forgetting she hasn't turned it on. With each blink, her face sheds the pink hues that once coloured it, leaving behind only yellows and blues. Her sofa looks weary. The shape of a small but heavy body has been printed into the

soft fabric.

Books are slumped in their glass cabinet, missing the ones that had lived there before, longing to be touched by the others, just one more time. The books with spines of yellow and pink are gone, leaving the browns and beiges behind.

Her face tells a story, of an adventure, like Cádiz in early August. Freckles covers her nose and upper lip as though the sun kissed her. A scar next to her eye, partly hidden by her hair, follows the shape of a slightly disfigured star. Could it be from the mischievous child who loved to climb to the highest point in the park? Or the reckless teen who in that same park tried her first cigarette and drank cheap cider on school nights. Or perhaps the small groove on her face paints an altogether more sinister picture.

Frameless hooks hang on the wall, waiting for new life to be shared, if that's even what it could be called. More like snapshots of a façade. No fantasy remains in the air; the house is far too cold. Her hopes and dreams have retired to a more stationary position, but remain, somewhere, although she can't quite remember where. They understand.

Missed calls and countless texts smile at her from the sideboard, waving from time to time as the screen lights up. They wait patiently on silent as the senders became more anxious. Occasionally, she picks up her phone and scrolls through Twitter or Facebook, either one will do. She isn't reading anyway. She returns to her window and focuses on the nothingness. A lost lover. A lover lost.

1 or 2

Eliza Kaya-Matthey

HE'S DRIVEN THAT WAY BEFORE. It wasn't new to him, nothing was. He'd lived long enough, a little while past forty, to have seen most things and made most decisions. He'd climbed a mountain and cut the umbilical cord of his firstborn child. There wasn't much left to do.

He wasn't speeding. He never would. You just can't do things the exact same way twice, it isn't possible. Every time you take a step out of your house, you tread on a slightly different part of the pavement than before. Every time you go around a corner, you swing a little bit differently.

Usually, it doesn't really matter. But no one writes stories about usually. No one cares if he went round the corner in the manner he always did and nothing remarkable happened. People want to hear that he crashed into a wall, but they won't show it. They'll still say, 'Oh, that's sad.' They want to experience it without it happening to them. You only revel in a tragedy when it doesn't happen to you.

He wouldn't read a story like this. Bit too vulgar for his taste. He's not got an appreciation for the macabre, not like we do. We wouldn't say we're better than him, but we'd think it, wouldn't we? Alone, to ourselves. After the story's done we would think, *Ha, well, I wouldn't have done that.* Maybe in a different world he would think that too. But that's far too complicated, for a man to think about himself outside himself. We're just not made for introspection like that. Always have to not know something, so that you can find it out later. That's what makes life interesting.

What would you do? A proposition: you are him, and you are in his car. You are driving a route you have driven one hundred times before. It is

raining, not enough to make you nervous to drive, but earlier it was pelting so hard you wouldn't have gone out in it. But you didn't see it then because you were in the office. You don't know how wet the tarmac is when you get in your car, not until you feel yourself skid a little as you turn the corner. To your left, on the pavement, is a woman. She is walking down the road in a large puffer coat. In the middle of the road, two boys are playing football.

You don't have much time to assess. You know that from the way your tires slipped like feet on ice, you will not be able to brake in time to avoid those boys. You note they are young, young enough to have entire lives ahead of them and mothers who are close by. You know that if you swerved, you could miss them. But the woman is fast approaching. You would do it without hesitation if it was just you crashing into the wall, but you know you'd hit her. And at the speed you're going, she will almost invariably die. Your airbag will almost certainly deploy. Whiplash, maybe, but what's a few weeks off work?

What is one woman to two boys?

You can't see her face, but you've already seen theirs. They have freckles and blue eyes, just like your son. In that moment you make the decision. The car's going too fast for you to wait. You almost had no choice, you almost had to swerve and hit her.

But you didn't have to, because nobody has to do anything. We all have a choice, in some way. Even if you think you have to do something, you never really have to. You chose to read this. He chose to hit her.

He did it with his eyes open because he didn't feel like he deserved to do it with them closed. It was quite surreal, watching her body slam against the wall. They always say a body projected is like a rag doll. He didn't really see how that was possible until he watched it with his own two eyes. A real-life woman hurled into bricks like a discarded pawn. It was loud, too, the sound of the crash. Metal against rubble. His airbag did inflate and had thrown him backwards in his seat. Had hurt his neck, but he wasn't dead. He rubbed it, as if that was all it needed, a good rub, and turned to look for the boys. They were fine, unscathed. Standing, staring. Their sweet cherub

faces filled with fear.

He called the police right away. He had nothing to hide. They would understand that he did the right thing. A neighbour came out and sat with him until the police came. The neighbour offered him a cup of tea, but he politely declined. It seemed the proper thing to do, that he should appear to be gravely remorseful, yet matter-of-fact and not hysterical about the situation. Drinking tea was too nonchalant. The police pulled up, and he told them what had happened. They understood. It was an accident, a horrible, unfortunate accident. He had never intended that day to set out and hit her. He wasn't a murderer, he was just a man who did what anyone else would do.

The ambulance came to collect the body. He thought he should at least stay for that. A police car had taken the boys home, and it was just him and the professionals left. And the woman. Or her body.

Her coat kept most of the mess contained. It was still zipped up to her neck. Her top half lay slumped over his bumper. He watched from the back of the ambulance as they shone lights in his eyes. The paramedics pulled out one of those beds that they put people on who are dead or dying. He hoped they'd put a sheet over her face before he saw it.

The paramedics straightened the woman upright. They propped her against their shoulders like a farmer undressing a scarecrow. They unzipped her coat. He prepared for a flood of scarlet to unleash from inside her. From beneath the soft padded coat, the paramedics unveiled the woman. She seemed to grow bigger as they unzipped her, larger and larger, ballooning, until he realised. Underneath the coat was a bump.

He did the sum in his head. Two lives. Two lives. His head started to ache, and he felt like he was bleeding behind his eyes.

This page left intentionally blank.

The Regiment

Philippa Kennedy

Rigid shards of glass
bonded into place
an army of transparent shapes
saluting the silent space

Ink bleeds
a network of slumped lines
wayward shapes
blurring into the silent space

The eye catches a branch sway
a leaf drop
a robin precariously placed

The eye squints
green turns to gallery grey
the invisible breeze drops
locking the soldiers into place

This page left intentionally blank.

Places

Georgia Palfrey

home

Hazy nights too humid
to let the cool breath of sleep
lull me.

Too many absent hours in the day,
my body runs anti-clockwise
off-kilter.

Eyes wide
in the taunting void of the night.

Awakening
long after the bird choir sounds its indignant call.

Too-bright sunlight,
the mumbling scales of voices
in the hubbub of a house warmed by routine
and pastel summer air.

I read on a lazy deck chair, legs stretched out
bare feet
kaleidoscopic glass full of sweet strawberry squash,
a bug's liquid hell.

the forest

The turn of the well-worn page as the ground
beneath
becomes crunchy and wet,
shoes flecked in mud
crimson, sapphire, moss,
dotted in a blending watercolour.

A sigh
as the days close sooner
sky an inferno,
the aroma of rain heady in the soil.

An airy kiss, crisp
on the tip of my nose and the pillows of my cheeks,
remnants of water droplets
clinging to arching leaves
and fawny eyes
peering through tangled undergrowth.

Paths well-trodden but forever a maze,
spindly fingers that scratch at my face
and tug at my coat,
a vibrancy: tantalizing, teasing at
my nerve endings.

alive

Rosy cheeks, flecked
with the glowing embers
of cheap wine.

Interlocked fingers
clammy, but gripping.
Fear of being lost
in the crowd of mirrors;
faceless replications.

Bare feet
hitting concrete,
the adrenaline of being
floods the glossy night.

This page left intentionally blank.

Training for Recovery

Beth Summerfield

I SEE THEM EVERY TIME I PAD DOWNSTAIRS, my soft slippers taking each step more slowly than the one before. They sit, or rather stand, if you pardon the pun, beside the coat rack in the hallway. The bottoms of their soles must be cold, aching the days away upon a shitty excuse for laminate flooring that covers some old newspapers from back in the day before I moved here, headlines peeking through gaps alongside the skirting boards. I meant to get new flooring, and new garden decking, a dishwasher, new carpets upstairs, but I never got round to it. I never got round to throwing out these trainers either, just part of the furniture now, another thing for Maureen to complain about.

Maureen lives next door. She's 40-something but doesn't half want to be younger, Nutribullet cup always in hand, the other holding the lead of a curly-haired mutt she can't seem to train. I don't blame him though; I'd try to run away from her if I were him, listening to her shrill voice every day, poor thing. She pops in on the way back from her run sometimes to *check-up* on me, pointing her beak behind closed doors to remind me to buy new curtains or inform me the kitchen floor is still *just concrete* as if I haven't noticed, and don't get her started on the overgrown plants outside. If she hates my house so much why is she always buzzing for a coffee in it? Even though she *can't wait to get home*? Imagine filling every nook and cranny of your life with *things*, just *things* to fill the hours. I'd miss the hum of the tumble dryer and the light buzz of electricity through the living room on a Friday night. I guess people fill their silences in different ways.

Though that doesn't mean I need mine filled for me. Along with the soft

furnishings, and the hard furnishings actually, she never fails to pick up on my trainers, always in the same position they were the last time she mentioned them. She says I *need* to throw them out and replace them. She says she could probably get me a discount on some Reeboks, which are *back in fashion now did you know*, as she's pals with John from Sports Direct who would be happy to help as he's definitely not sleeping with her. She says we can go running together if I do. For some reason, I don't think I'd much enjoy Monday morning runs with Maureen. I don't suppose she'd appreciate my company either, but it doesn't stop her mentioning it every time she sees me. This is usually the part where I shoo her out of the house with the politest tone I can muster because I've got some urgent ironing to do, she knows how it is, before I slump back into the comfort of my sofa with a now lukewarm mug of tea.

My eyelids flicker open to the sound of the TV. It's 4:45 a.m. I must've missed about seven episodes of *Coronation Street* – yes, back-to-back soaps. I know how it sounds, but it seems to fill my free hours these days, and these days seem to fill my existence.

Slippers on, I stand up, my eyes glazing over with flashes of coloured lights and a distinct humming that sounds like I've not drunk enough today. I pad towards the kitchen in search of a warm milk before I pad up to bed. The usual.

But as I pass by the coat stand, I catch a glimpse of movement, a small red dot my tired eyes squint to make out. A ladybird is crawling along the lace of my trainers, its tiny black legs moving slowly across the incline of their landscape. I bend down for a closer look, my knees creaking as I crouch, gingerly reaching out my finger. I'm as nervous as she is. This is the first life my house has seen – Maureen doesn't count as life, mind, just noise, and me, well, sometimes I don't feel very alive.

She crawls onto my fingernail, her little wings twitching comfortably. *Please don't fly away, please don't go*. I stare at her, such a tiny life entrusted in my hands. A memory obstructs my mind's viewfinder: childish amusement of rosy ladybirds on furry leaves in my Grandma's back garden as she dead-heads her poppies. Floral aromas of the past seep into my nostrils as

I contemplate my life and how I haven't smelled sweetness in years. I open the front door and my new friend flies away into the night with an unspoken goodbye.

I step back inside and glance at my trainers, the only shoes I own. The toes are tattered on the outside and even more uninviting inside, fabric ripped and curling up around the edges. The soles are painted with mud from varying decades, and the laces are frayed and lightly netted with cobwebs. I pick them up by their crinkled tongues. They feel like home to me. They welcome me every day when I pad down those stairs and they whisper goodnight each time I pad back up. They're comfort and safety and, and they're holding me back, leaving me stood in the same place for years. If these are the only things that can carry me out of my house and into the world, then that's a pretty dismal and unlikely state of affairs.

I open the door again and the wind whistles me a refreshing hello as I cautiously lift the lid on my dustbin and drop the relics inside.

Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.

It is now 6:30 a.m. but darkness remains hung in the sky as some keen birds begin taking out their song sheets. *Why stop here?*

I anxiously step out of the warmth and walk around the corner to my car, its cold metallic frame still there, set into the gravel, waiting for me. I haven't forgotten how to use the wheel and soon enough I'm parked right outside Sports Direct in my little Fiat, wearing a pink fleece two-piece with pictures of sheep on it, and slippers and a big puffy coat.

When I arrive back home to comfort, with my old floor and my old garden and my old curtains, my shivering fingers carry a box of treasure inside.

'Those are nice', sings Maureen the next day, sipping from her bottle of discoloured green smoothie as she muses over my new purchase, 'Nikes I see you went for, not as trendy as my suggestion, but, I suppose, at least they might get you out!' She laughs. Can't please some people, though I didn't do it for her.

This page left intentionally blank.

Penelope and the Squirrel

Emily Grace Tabern

MONDAY 15TH OF OCTOBER

Penny woke early this morning, much to my disappointment. Sometime around six o'clock I heard her little voice from the next room, shouting that she was *ready to get up now please*. So, hand-in-hand we pattered down to the kitchen, wearing our respective fluffy bed socks – a must on chilly mornings. You'll be pleased to hear it was bananas and porridge for breakfast today. It seems to be much easier to get her to eat healthily lately – probably because she likes it when I put a bit of golden syrup in the porridge (so it might be cheating a little). We had a slow afternoon watching a film and playing Hungry Hippos, so not much else to report for today I'm afraid. I hope you get off to sleep a bit better tonight. Speak soon. I love you.

WEDNESDAY 17TH OCTOBER

Sorry I didn't write yesterday, it wasn't one of our easier days. Your Mum came to visit just after lunchtime and mentioned the 'C' word. Naturally Penelope got excited and started talking about all the things we're going to get up to when the festive period rolls around...but then she said about how you were going to take her Christmas tree shopping and things got a bit less exciting. I had to remind her that it wouldn't be the case this year but that me and Grandma Ginny would take her, and we could even invite the cousins along, but it was too late. Firstly, the temper tantrum ensued, shouting about how it's not fair and you promised and how we do it every year. Temper tantrums are fine. Well, not fine, but I could've handled it

with a bit of help. But then the tears started, and things got a lot harder. Your Mum was brilliant comforting her, but I had to step outside. I'm sorry. She's not the only one that gets upset about missing you. I love you. Speak again tomorrow.

SATURDAY 27TH OCTOBER

Penny and I had a really lovely day today. Ben and Laura came over with the kids and we all went for a walk and a picnic – the grass was still frosty when we got there, can you believe? Winter really is on its way in! Penny managed to get dirt all over her new coat, but ah well, better that than have her catching a cold. The mums at school are saying that the flu has already started to do the rounds so you can't be too careful. After lunch, we walked through the little botanical garden just past the play area. You know the one that's normally locked? It didn't have quite the same effect as it would do in summer, but the kids had a great time chasing the poor birds around. We bought a bag of seed from the duck house by the lake and let them have a bit of fun. Ben and Laura's lot were running riot, but Penny was nowhere to be seen. I did have a bit of a panic for a minute, thinking she'd got lost or hurt herself, but after a minute of flapping I found her perched on one of the rocks by the back end. She'd somehow managed to coax one of the little red squirrels right up to her. I know what you're going to say, and, yes, maybe it wasn't the best idea to let her get that close without intervening, but I wish you could've seen her, Harry. Her little face just lit up when it came over sniffing, and she had that wonderful twinkle in her eyes. It reminded me of how she used to get when we'd take her to see Larry's dogs. I don't want to jinx it, but I think we might have a little vet in the making. I think she has a real way with animals. I do worry you know. I worry that all of this is going to affect her down the line. I don't want to make you feel bad. I know you can't change things now. But it was just reassuring today. It made me feel like she was going to be okay... like we were going to be okay. I love you. I rang up today and they said we could come visit on Monday. We can't wait to see you.

TUESDAY 6TH NOVEMBER

Happy belated anniversary, sweetheart. We went to a display last night rather than having everyone around at ours – you couldn't have paid me to host this year. I reckon we should do it again next year. It was actually really exciting being bundled up in the park watching the big pyros for a change – not to mention cheaper. I couldn't stop imagining you though. In there on your own. I know you said there are no windows, but I wondered if you could hear any fireworks from where you are. I suppose I thought that if you could hear them too, it'd be like you weren't really that far away after all. I couldn't bring myself to break tradition and got a bag of candy floss to share with Penny – although I think I might have gobbled up more of it than her! Next year we'll be together, my love, I promise. I'm going to ring up your lawyer tomorrow and see if they're any further on with the appeal. Love you more than ever. See you soon.

SUNDAY 18TH NOVEMBER

I got a call from the prison today, Harry, so there's no point in denying what went on and I know it wasn't just the other guy's fault so don't try and convince me otherwise. You promised. You promised after the last time that you'd just keep to yourself and do the time, but you couldn't even fucking manage that. Oh, and don't start fretting, Penelope doesn't know about Daddy's little temper tantrum. Although God knows how I'm going to explain why she won't get to visit you tomorrow. You know how excited she was to see you this week. She even made you a special birthday card in school, going around telling the teachers how Daddy can't have a birthday cake this year because he's in a special place with the bad men – *but Daddy isn't a bad man!* How long until she stops believing that? I think maybe it's for the best if we leave you to cool off for a few days, or even a couple of weeks. It's hard to think straight at the minute and Penny has to be my priority. I'll write again when I'm ready. Stay out of trouble until then, will you.

FRIDAY 2ND DECEMBER

I dropped Penelope off at your mum's last night before the police came around, so she didn't have to hear any of the details. I think I've managed to downplay the situation as much as is possible before I'm just lying to her entirely. I just have this nagging feeling that I'm doing the wrong thing keeping this from her, like a good parent would use this as a lesson for... well, I don't know what. Shouldn't we be teaching her about honesty and owning up to her mistakes? Even you've managed that one better than I have. But I just can't have her look at me like that, Harry. She's just too sweet. If she knew what I'd done it would break her little heart. I know that it was hard for you telling her, but it's different. She needs me now – she needs to be able to trust me, now more than ever. How would it make her feel knowing both of her parents have messed up? No, it's better to keep things as quiet as possible for now. I'll let you know how things go over the next day or two. Hope things have calmed down a bit where you are.

MONDAY 6TH DECEMBER

Penny went around to Georgia's for tea tonight straight from school. She was telling me all about it on the way home. Apparently, tuna and sweet-corn pasta is a new winner. Georgia's mum is a saint for getting her to eat fish and enjoy it! It gave me a few hours to get myself together a bit more as well. I decided I should go around to the family and speak to them for myself. I picked up a bunch of flowers and a card from Tesco on the way. I hope that they found it appropriate. They couldn't have been nicer about the whole thing and even the kids came down to greet me. The poor things must be heartbroken. I'll admit I felt a little embarrassed that I got so teary when they invited me in. It felt wrong that I should be the one crying when they're the ones that have essentially lost a member of the family, but I can imagine they've been grieving since it happened. They refused my offer to pay for the vet bills, but it would just feel wrong not to contribute so we exchanged details and I'll try and convince them to accept something. I managed to explain to Penelope the gist of what happened. She understands that it was a mistake and that it's okay to make mistakes. She got

a bit more upset when I explained that it was a dog involved though. You know how she is with animals. Anyway, I just hope that things look up for the poor family. I'll make sure to keep you updated with everything over the next week or so but promise me you'll write again soon. I miss you. Now more than ever. I love you.

This page left intentionally blank.

Castle Noctis

Mariella Walker

Perched on that floating isle
hunk of weathered rock
where salty waves slosh for miles
with no break or blemish in the skyline
tucked between folds of inky night
walls freckled with cancerous moss
mottled skin stretched taut
on the precipice of reality and not
at twilight she erupts with life
her court awakens
citizens born of moonlight
they pine for sun
motherless and yearning
weaned off the breast of dusk
but all she can offer
are shadows and starlight

This page left intentionally blank.

Biographies

RUBY CARBONELL was born and raised in southeast London and is currently studying English Literature with Creative Writing. Her writing tends to explore a sense of place and belonging, mainly in poetry and short fiction, though she is currently experimenting with other forms such as playscripts and novels. Her other interests include film, music, and daytime game shows.

FINLAY CHARLESWORTH (born 17 April 2000 in Livingston, Scotland) is a 1st year BA English Literature with Creative Writing student from Cambridge. He is currently exploring his writing interests and enjoys trying his hand at new genres and styles, though he usually maintains a sardonic and unsettling edge. Finlay's interests outside of writing include karate, rugby union, and film.

E.J. COATES is an avid writer of short stories and speculative fiction. He has always lived in Leeds and is fascinated by literature which deals with the supernatural or the complex nature of interpersonal relationships. He is currently working on two projects; a memoir exploring his experiences of gay culture and a traditional ghost story with a twist. E.J. intends to rival Stephen King as a master of the horror genre.

CHARLIE CROOK is from a working-class background and has worked in gyms, warehouses and call centres. Charlie dedicates his time to reading, writing, weight-lifting and his family. His favourite authors are Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Chuck Palahniuk and Brendan Connell. He is currently working on his first novel, *Meathead*.

MARIO DE GIROLAMO is from all over. He's travelled his fair share and enjoys writing and all forms of music. He is currently attempting to gain recognition in the music scene through DJ'ing, whilst simultaneously contemplating developing a videogame he thought up on a rainy night. Mario has since learnt to bring an umbrella around with him.

ELLA GRAINGER is from Leicester. She likes to read and write poetry; however, she is currently enjoying experimenting with plot and different characters in her novel. She aims to finish the first draft by the end of this year. Ella loves to play the piano and writes songs which are often inspired by her poetry. She hopes to perform at gigs around Leeds in the near future.

EMIE GRIMWOOD, from Suffolk, is currently studying a BA English Literature with Creative Writing. Previous works include self-publishing a four-part poetry anthology. She enjoys reading modern poetry and alternative history fiction. Her love for reading and writing stemmed from her mother who used to work part-time as a librarian. This love continued into her teenage years, inspiring her to delve into her passion for literature through further study.

FREYA HOWARTH is a 1st year student on the English Literature with Creative Writing course who has particularly enjoyed exploring writing poems and short fiction this year. She is also interested in writing plays and screenplays, having used verbatim methods to create the play *And the Bees Still Buzz* about the Manchester terror attack.

ELIZA KAYA-MATTEY is an English-Turkish writer. At age 10, she was published in an anthology of poems written by primary school children. She combines her studies in philosophy with her writing and endeavours to produce experimental, thought-provoking pieces. Eliza hopes to continue balancing academia and creative writing in her long-term career.

PHILIPPA KENNEDY grew up in Kent and much of her writing reflects her family life as a middle child of three. Her passion for writing developed in her early teens when she won an internal school prize for a piece celebrating Amnesty International. Her History and Art A-levels reflect her wider interest in the Humanities and Arts, and she counts diary-keeping, sketching, and climbing as hobbies. Philippa is currently studying English Literature with Creative Writing.

GEORGIA PALFREY (born 5 March 1999) is a 1st year BA English Literature with Creative Writing student from Oxford. She has been writing since childhood and would fill notebooks with elaborate stories in almost illegible handwriting. Although she has no idea what career she wants to pursue, she is finding the course important in challenging her abilities and developing her confidence in sharing her work. Above all, writing is a place for her to discover more about herself, and she hopes to be able to move people with what she creates.

BETH SUMMERFIELD is a 1st year BA English Literature with Creative Writing student from Lichfield, Staffordshire. Since her involvement with *Publishing House Me* during her primary school years and achieving publication in a *Young Writers* poetry anthology, she continues to explore the world of writing, adopting new styles and techniques along the way and enjoying each step of the learning process. She takes particular interest in experimenting with metaphor, voice, and meaning in her work.

EMILY GRACE TABERN (born 15 July 2000) is a 1st year BA English Literature with Creative Writing student. Born in the Merseyside town of St. Helens, Emily is enjoying experimenting with a variety of writing styles with a particular interest in writing short stories and memoir. She is also a keen dancer and has been actively involved in dance groups for a number of years.

MARIELLA WALKER (born 12 January 2000) is a 1st year BA English Literature with Creative Writing student. She first published a poem when she was ten, and she is currently experimenting with different genres and styles. Born in Chesterfield, her interests outside of writing include walking in the Peak District.

