

A black and white illustration of a hand holding several ropes. The hand is positioned at the top, with fingers gripping the ropes. The ropes hang down and are tied to several dark, irregularly shaped rocks at the bottom. The background is a light, textured surface.

# TENTER HOOK

*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

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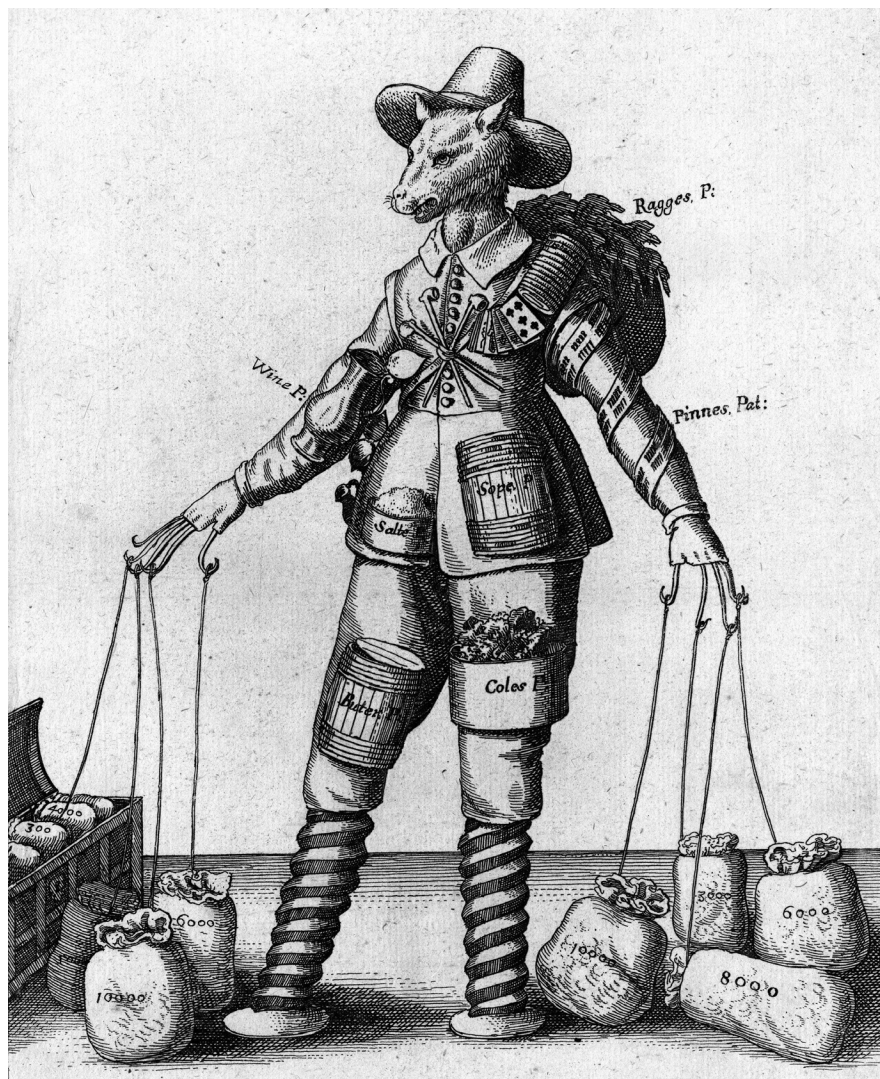


## On the Anthology Title and Iconography

TENTERHOOKS WERE EVER-PRESENT in Leeds during the city's cloth-making boom. Wet woollen cloth was hung on hooks attached to wooden frames called 'tenterers' in order to prevent it from shrinking as it dried. In the eighteenth 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 *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word 'tenterhook' is associated with stretching, straining, unsettling, and creating suspense and refers to the state of being 'on tenterhooks'.

The iconographic figure adorning this and other volumes of *Tenter Hook* comes from early modern satires on so-called 'projectors' – entrepreneurs who sought financial backing for their schemes and inventions from parliament or royal patent. If their commercial speculations proved successful, the projectors were seen as greedy profiteers accumulating private wealth at the public's expense; if not, they were dismissed as cheats, swindlers, and charlatans fleecing public and private investors with dodgy get-rich-quick scams, deceiving the crown, and ruining the commonwealth.

In one such satire, *The Complaint of M. Tenter-hooke the Projector, and Sir Thomas Dodger the Patentee* (London, 1641), a broadside with an accompanying woodcut illustration and verses supplied by John Taylor the Water-Poet, the titular projector ('Master Tenter-hooke') is represented as a monstrous combination of human, animal, and mechanical parts: a hog's head, ass's ears, screws for legs, and fish-hooks for fingers (to 'catch at all Trades', that is, monopolies). It is from this image and a roughly contemporaneous engraving attributed to Wenceslaus Hollar, *The Picture of a Pattenty* (c1641, reproduced overleaf), that the *Tenter Hook* cover and section illustrations are drawn.



ABOVE: Detail from *The Picture of a Pattenty* (c1641), attributed to Wenceslaus Hollar.  
 Courtesy of the British Museum, London. BM Satire 264; 1856,0815.48.

Any lover of a good story will be familiar with the phrase ‘on tenterhooks’, but it’s not just readers who are in a state of uncertainty. To write is to be perpetually on tenterhooks – whether it’s creative strain from reaching for a good idea, the suspense of waiting for feedback, or the lure of hooking new readers. 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.

Dr Kimberly Campanello

*Associate Professor of Creative Writing*

Dr Brett Greatley-Hirsch

*Associate Professor of Renaissance Literature and Textual Studies*



## Foreword

WELCOME TO THE FOURTH volume of *Tenter Hook*. This issue, featuring Year One and Year Two students' writing from the academic year 2021–22, was somewhat delayed in making its way into the world as there have been several changes to the BA English Literature with Creative Writing over the last year. Having joined the School of English in September 2022 as the new Programme Leader, I am part of this change. As a University of Leeds alumna, however, I am familiar with the excellent standard of creative writing that the School of English produces. The pieces in this year's anthology are no exception to this rule.

Several former and current colleagues taught students on this programme in 2021–22 and are due huge thanks for all their work: Jason Allen-Paisant, Simon Armitage, Kimberly Campanello, Ian Fairley, Clare Fisher, Karina Lickorish Quinn, Sarah K. Perry, Jay Prosser, Ross Raisin, and John Whale. The Creative Writing team thanks the following guest writers for sharing their expertise in 2021–22: Dzifa Benson, Matt Howard and Caleb Azumah Nelson.

I am particularly grateful to Kimberly Campanello for her support and guidance as the inaugural Programme Leader and founding editor of *Tenter Hook*. Special thanks also go to Brett Greatley-Hirsch for design and layout, and to Hannah Day, Lily Fehim, Kelly Rosalyn Moore and Eve Lizard for acting as Editorial Assistants.

Dr Caitlin Stobie

*Programme Leader for the BA English Literature with Creative Writing*

# YEAR ONE









# All We Do is Drink Tea and Miss Trains

*Aims Barratt*

Can we go vintage shopping  
and buy outrageous clothes we'll never wear,  
can we plan our trip to  
nowhere in particular?

Coffee in the park,  
go and see some art  
and maybe we'll watch the sunset from your car?

A cigarette hanging from my lips and midnight games where we could do  
just about anything.



# My Smoker

*Lucy Bulmer*

I had a good friend once.  
She rolled up her cigarettes backwards:  
Filter first, tobacco last.

She'd smile at old people,  
With that lit cigarette between her lips,  
While she speed-dialed her dealer.

Don't worry, dear reader,  
That smoke still curves, lazily, on her lips,  
And the end is nowhere near.

While this may sound morbid,  
This eulogy for my sweet, sick smoker,  
Wound tight like her cigarette.

She lives on a razor's edge,  
When the only thing she'll lose is herself,  
And all the bets she must hedge.

I wish she could run free,  
My poor, beautiful, sickly-sweet smoker,  
Be the girl she wants to be.



# Curses

*Jasmine Cheema*

With the black eyes of the supremacists and scared smiles of their families,  
I curse you.

With blessed bullies who sing the words ‘curry muncher’ at you on your  
way to school,  
I curse you.

I curse you  
with the dhal paranthas your Maa packs you for school.  
With elegant culture filled to the brim with colour and vibrancy,  
I curse you.

I curse you  
with language from the East your fellow xenophobes would spit on you for.  
With family who can’t comprehend why you’ve stopped wearing your *kara*,  
I curse you.

I curse you  
with unnecessary embarrassment.  
With *sati shri akals* and names like *gandy bhoori kudi*,  
I curse you.

I curse you  
with Guru Gobind and Guru Nanak.

With Diwali and Baisakhi and GURPURAB,  
I curse you.

I curse you with my beautiful brownness.

# Stone Wedding

*Kate Cooper*

With me the altar, a groom, my father  
I am trapped in lace and subordination.  
The metal has been welded to my fourth finger  
I'm soon to be wedded to my ringleader

The Groom takes my shield  
And though I see clearer  
I mourn my lost protection  
I want my form to leave his daydream

How can he squint, and it hurt me dear?  
I blink for refuge because I don't think I want to say it:  
Condemned to stone  
A rock without soul  
At least my veil returns.





# The Wake-Up Call

*Megan Hayne*

HE DROVE RIGHT INTO THE TRAP of morning rush-hour traffic, just outside of Newcastle.

Focused on the road, he'd barely noticed the clear, cold dawn flushing over him until he hit the back of a motorway delay half an hour from the city-centre and realised people were heading to work. Grunting a swear, he craned his neck forward; a red **X** glared down from the sign above him and declared in confident capitals, as if to spite him, **LANE CLOSED**. Ahead of him, the car radio declared, with similar malice, **7:54am**.

With traffic at a standstill, he grabbed his phone with a clammy hand from the empty passenger seat and scrolled through for Jess' number. He called. No one picked up.

*'Hi, it's Jess. If you're hearing this, I can't talk right now, so please leave a voice-mail after the beep.'*

His heart gave a nauseating tumble in his chest.

He'd called and she'd failed to pick up plenty of times in the past – but never like this. Usually, he'd put his phone aside and shrug it off, mutter, 'I'll call later,' and pocket the reminder in his brain. Now, he called again, aching to hear her voice.

*'Hi, it's Jess. If you're hearing this, I can't talk—'*

He hung up, called a third time, drummed his fingers against the wheel as he waited anxiously for her to pick up, waited for the traffic to move, waited, waited.

*'Hi, it's Jess. If you're hearing this—'*

With unsteady hands, he texted her: *Nearly there. Please update or call me when you can.*

The car radio declared **7:55am**.

\* \* \*

The call came through at 3:08am on a Thursday.

Groggy and slow-moving, he swept out a hand for his phone on the bedside table. Through eyes blurred by sleep, he could see the screen glaring white at him.

**Jess.**

Then, above her name and smiley contact photo of the two of them on holiday when she was eight, in block letters: **3:08am**. Groaning, he dragged himself up in bed.

It was late January, and it showed. He must have forgotten to put the heating on before he'd slid into the bed beside the dog, or maybe he'd left a window open downstairs when he'd had his last cig, because as soon as he was upright, he could feel his fingers starting to numb.

But it was Jess, who hadn't called him since she'd left after Christmas, and as much as he wanted to go back to bed and enjoy the – what? Two, three hours more sleep – before he got up for work tomorrow, he answered the phone. Thumping drum and bass pushed through his speaker.

Trust Jess to be out on a Thursday. Even when she lived at home, she would disappear out the front door any day of the week if her friends called, always with a brief shout up the stairs, or into the living-room, of, 'Going out, got my key,' which for months after her eighteenth birthday acted as their primary goodbye.

He was the same at that age. At least, he thinks he was, but (and he hates himself for being such a middle-aged cliché) it was such a long time ago, and he was always a bit too nerdy to really have a group of friends like that, who wanted to go out on a Monday *just because* – and God, he was so introverted back then that he would have gawked if anyone did ever ask him to leave the house on a Thursday.

Even this weather hadn't stopped her. He felt that familiar flare of paternal anger, born out of a protective instinct that manifested itself in fury, like when she was twelve and didn't bring a coat when he told her to; or when he would tell her to wear tights with a dress and she'd stare at him, with that silent, judgemental Arctic Wolf glare, as if he'd just said the sky was green.

He thought all of this in the first split second of that phone call as he heard the distant thrumming music and realised Jess, his daughter, was calling him during a night out.

Then a person spoke, and it wasn't Jess.

All traces of sleep slipped out of him like water through a colander.

'Hello? Is this Jess's dad? Hello?'

'Yeah, yeah, hello.' He swivelled, dropped his feet to the ground. At the bottom of the bed, nestled in the half of the covers that usually went unoccupied, the dog raised a sleepy head.

'Hi, I'm Ellie, Jess's friend? Look—something's happened.'

Ellie? Jess might have mentioned her name during her time at home over Christmas, but he'd never been good at remembering names – always faces – and with Jess in Newcastle and him in Manchester, he hadn't had much opportunity to see the people she now spent her time with. "I'll remember them if I ever actually meet them," he'd promised her, over FaceTime – a hint that she should bring them to visit or invite him to come see her – but he'd been grinning like he was joking, like it was an off-hand Dad Comment that meant nothing really, despite his secret sincerity.

He realised he hadn't spoken when Ellie added: 'We think someone put – er – something in her drink? She – she was with some people – guys – said they knew her – from her course, I think.'

Already he was sliding his feet into the trainers by his bedroom door, moving without thinking. Only when he turned to find clothes did he hesitate, if only for a fraction of a second. What was he planning on doing? Driving to Newcastle?

That was his little girl. If he had to, he would.

Phone jammed between shoulder and ear, he scrambled for the nearest

pair of jeans. The dog watched him from the bed, sleep disturbed, but wondering if it was time for a very early morning walk.

‘Where are you now?’ he shouted into the phone, realised he was shouting, and lowered his voice. ‘She needs to go to a hospital.’

‘I know, I know, we’ve called an ambulance –’

‘Is she okay?’

He couldn’t imagine it. His idea of his little girl was the chubby fist closed around his pinkie finger when she was too small to hold his hand – not someone in an ambulance on another coast, holding her friend’s hand instead of his. He remembered her birth, dangerously underweight; for months she remained a tiny ball he could hold in one hand, lying down his forearm.

# White Towers

*Izazak Hurry-Greenhough*

The life support is fleeting,  
while the herd is screaming,  
a self-diagnosis left unrectified –

an unanswered scream leaves you petrified.

Ephemerality gets you nowhere,  
if I have learned anything.

What will the die decide?  
Find an apple in the sewer,  
how much of a bootstrap is a skewer?  
The boot was a bootstrap –

when they tweeze out the crap.

Pretty words won't get you anywhere,  
if I have learned anything.

I cannot afford dice.

A pincushion thoroughly abused,  
by volatile paper left confused,

a brain can only take so much of a thrash –  
and now the body takes it all.

Cries won't get you anywhere,  
if I learned something –

sell your body.

Morgan wipes the tears,  
I have learned to fear peers,  
never alone, yet so alone,  
it is time to

atone.

You aren't going anywhere,  
you've learned nothing –

white towers would be your salvation.

# A Secret I Share with the Moon

*Sophie Leadsford*

I ask about you still,  
A secret I share with the moon.  
It comforts me to think  
I'm speaking to you.

I wish to lay my heavy heart to rest tonight  
For my mind heals behind the veil of darkness  
And the loneliness becomes more forgivable.  
But not more desired.

I fear the peace of the morning:  
The moment when I slip back into reality,  
And I must remember all over again.





# Hypertext

*Eve Lizard*

live forever dot com, you have reached the  
last page of the internet, log off and  
accept your fate  
home | about | contact | sitemap

winding passages/endless fog/images  
that utter a thousand questions/lives that  
you'll never know/2009, and the grey  
mystery of another time

[https://somethingnew.po.et/wp-content/  
uploads/a-poem-that-reads-itself.exe!!!!!!](https://somethingnew.po.et/wp-content/uploads/a-poem-that-reads-itself.exe!!!!!!)  
now the meaning is beamed directly into  
your brain!! just scan the barcode and you  
will know it all

user238741303:  
wow this fucking sucks  
imagine being so pretentious you could  
just try writing good poetry instead this  
feels like my brain is vibrating there are  
just a million ideas floating around at once  
oh all the knowledge is mine please why

April 23rd, 2005 | 20:31:52 PDT

the start of an era.one where you must  
make the content yourself.you are the  
creator now.it is up to you.except for in  
when it isnt

no capital letters? that feels like shouting  
which would be rude. too many rules like  
this one to take note of. you're so last  
picosecond. isn't this prose?

meta analyses of every piece of media, all  
of it, r i t e at your fi j gertips just enter the  
tubes,,,,,,,,

some guys opinion on something for the  
one thousandth time why would i care no  
one cares on a forum 4chan bad and  
scary remember when they made oprah  
say penis

disjointed.space  
freeandopeninternet.biz  
nothingelselefttoprotect.me  
fromalifelivedonlinedis.org

anised into message, text, logs, files,  
dates, images, lists, i love you, you made  
me who i am, metadata, dumps, libraries,  
it's all new and exciting

tubes for your perusal  
if you know the lingo

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^^^



# Time Turner

*Grace Marsh*

It is a truly terrible thing to look on as your  
body

co

l

la

p

ses

around you.

It is even worse when there is no medicine, no therapy or diet which can  
knit

broken pieces

back together again,  
no way to solve the puzzle of your splintering framework.

A sixteen year old girl,  
cartwheels on beaches,  
handstands against bedroom walls,  
the splits on a yoga mat —

I visited a waterfall once,  
 my auntie's voice guiding me over  
 stepping stones my eyes could not discern,  
 and my cousin sitting beside me in tree branches.

Tandem rides with grandad,  
 the sun beating down on our backs and the bottle of water we brought  
 growing tepid in the heat.

Riding on the back of my stepdad's motorbike,  
 tearing through Grecian streets,  
 our lungs filled with hot air and  
 exhilaration.

Playing piggy-in-the-middle in the pool –  
 losing.

E  
 O     L     L                     T  
 R                     E                     S                     R  
 R             A                     S  
 C  
 O

long jump, somersaulting on the trampoline, extremities turned ice blocks  
 in the winter.

Little things,  
 inconsequential,  
 ordinary.

Memories of feet not  
contorted in spasm,  
of a stomach which grumbled and  
a bladder whose contents did not trickle out,  
bloody and conspicuous, into a sterile bag.

It is a truly terrible thing to look on as your  
body  
co

l

la

p

ses

around you.

It is even worse when you remember how it worked before.





# Wake

*Camilla McCosker*

The fire reaches, licking and caressing  
The fire warms, illuminating our faces  
It's a hub, a hearth  
It's a heart

They've gathered from near and far  
For each other, for her  
Their tears brimming underneath  
Held back by the laughter

She's here with them  
In the spirit of those flames  
As they dance to the sound of their voices  
As they kiss the faces of those around

School-friends reminisce her adolescent adventures  
Co-workers speak of her skill  
Friends tell of her compassion  
Her children remember her generosity

Her husband,  
He sits,  
And admires all the love that she spread

His own love for her caught in his throat

It's the home she built – the rooms she decorated  
The garden she tended to – the tulips she chose  
And in it  
The people she built it for

But the flames are just warmth  
And they kiss and dance with each other  
Around this fire  
Without her  
Clinging onto to one another

Then the ash settles and  
the day ends, and night envelops  
but they'll rise again tomorrow  
they'll keep her fire going  
they'll burn in her name  
they'll carry her warmth with them  
her memory and love burnt into their skin  
to be carried around, till they meet again.

# Hush Baby

*Lucy McLaughlin*

MUFFLED BREATHING AND STATIC emitted from the baby monitor on Maria's desk. She thought she heard a sharp intake of breath, and her body became rigid as she waited for the piercing cry that would follow. The clock ticked. The child's breathing returned to normal. She sighed heavily, resting her elbows on the desk, lightly massaging her temples.

Since giving birth, Maria's eyes had entered a state of permanent sagging. She didn't bother with mascara anymore, as she quickly realised it only dragged her face down further. To a passing stranger, Maybelline's Lash Sensation had the ability to transform her from tired mother to haunted substance abuser.

There were still some remnants of her old life scattered around the house, but these items appeared to belong to a fleeing past inhabitant. Maria often drifted through the rooms and wondered sombrely who this poor stranger was, and why they had been forced out of their home in such a rush that they had failed to pack most of their belongings. The framed photograph of her and Angela at the work's Christmas party four years ago was one such item. Taken by a colleague at a club in the city centre, the two women laughed openly at the camera, a pink inflatable flamingo lolling between them. Angela had given it to Maria as a gift for her 26th birthday; neither of the women remembered the picture being taken, and this added to its hilarity. The photograph was encased in a small, glittery black frame; on the bottom left-hand side of the frame two glasses of red wine chinked each other, and the quotation 'best friends wine together!' was written in

cursive silver lettering underneath.

The photograph had not been taken long ago, not really. It was the first night Maria and Angela had gotten drunk together – a solidifying moment in their friendship. Two summers later, after many more drunken nights out, they booked a holiday to Thailand. It was to be their last spontaneous week of youth before they both decided they would settle down and really start ‘adulthood’. The two women would soon be entering their thirties; this seemed an appropriate time to begin the banalities of family life and to conform to a set career path.

So, when Maria began with strange cravings and some slight but noticeable weight gain around her lower abdomen not long after their return from Thailand, she was shocked to find that family life appeared to be starting earlier than expected. Angela advised abortion but Maria was stubborn. To her, it was fate. She had been raised by a single mother; she too could take on the challenge.

However, Maria had recently come to the realisation that the line between liberating independence and crippling loneliness was terrifyingly thin. She had truly believed a child would be all the company she would need in the world. How life had mocked her.

As Maria hunched over her desk, massaging a headache, she noticed a notification from ‘Mummysworld’ flash up on her laptop: ‘Fancy a freebie?! Get YOUR jumbo pack of Pampers Baby Dry Nappy Pants HERE’. She clicked on the popup; there was a smiling child at the bottom of the image – a chubby little boy bearing an ebullient, toothless grin. Fair hair framed his face, and a photoshopped twinkle had been added to his big, blue eyes. There was something irreproachable in the child’s beauty. It made Maria feel quite sick.

She closed the popup and instead opened the forum page, creating a new chat underneath the heading ‘New Mummies!’ Her fingers flew across the keyboard mindlessly, her brain following along after, only just managing to keep pace.

Just a few minutes after she had begun to type, she pressed submit. She did not bother to read back her question.

**User40967:** *I know this is awful, please don't think I don't hate myself for it, because oh my god I do, I swear I do. But I regret my baby. And I don't mean this in some kind of post-natal depression way, I mean it as literally as it sounds. It's just that I thought I wanted a kid and I don't. He's 7 months old now. It's been a death sentence. When I look at him I feel nothing. I want my life back!!! I meet up every weekend with other women at these mum's groups, but I only end up feeling more alone. They dote on their babies as if they couldn't be any happier with their lives. I couldn't feel further away from them if I tried. I can't even be around my old friends anymore because it hurts too much. They don't get it. They don't understand why I don't see the joys of being a mum. No one could even begin to understand how much it feels like he's fucked my life up. I can't tell anyone. It's bad enough that I'm typing this, I could never even consider voicing it. Please, please, tell me it gets better... I feel like I'll never again experience freedom. My life is no longer mine. I can't even have a proper job in the future because I'll need to be close to him for childcare and school. I'm an awful mum and being a mum has made me an awful person. I have no idea if it would be better for him to grow up with a mum who doesn't love him, or a mum who abandoned him. Please help. I'm so alone. I'm desperate.*

Responses flooded in fairly quickly, and Maria began to read.

**Lou\_mummyof2:** @user40967 Oh my love, I'm so so sorry u feel like that! I felt a little like that at first with my DD (now 26 months) but by the time the second came along (just turned 1) I was in love!! It can 100% be overwhelming at first, don't all first-time mums know! Sometimes they cry so much that u think u aren't in love, but as soon as those smiles come out your heart just melts! Maybe reach out to the hubby for support? It gets better I promise! Before u know it they're walking and talking and u suddenly don't want them to be little miss independent anymore! Sending all my love, old hand mummy of 2 :- ) xx

**Katie-anne.x:** @user40967 Oh god i was like this with the baby weight! If they warned us you'd never fit into your skinny jeans again I bet there'd be half the number of pregnancies! They all say u bounce back within a year but trust me when I tell u I didn't lol.

Have u enrolled him in nursery? Expensive I know but defo worth it as it gives u some free time to go to the gym. Maybe lose some baby weight, pick up some

*hobbies again etc. Might start feeling like ur old self again, even if u don't look it yet lol! Wishing u the best of luck x*

Maria noticed that a third user had submitted a response underneath. She skimmed over it.

**Blueeyes160:** *@user40967 Sounds tough – have you considered therapy? A lot of first-time mums go through this, a good psychologist would help.*

Maria stared at the messages blankly.

She was struck by the very overwhelming sensation that she was falling into a bottomless pit. As she fell, arms flailing, she noticed onlookers gathering above her. Their faces stared down at her body as it twisted and contorted into the darkness, grappling with some surface or ridge to slow the fall. As Maria's screams rose in desperation, she was struck by the horrifying realisation that this only made her spectators more exuberant. She fell further and further, her own cries drowned out by their raucous encouragement: nodding and clapping and shouting, telling her that she only had a little further to fall.

# Blood in the Eye

*Kate Newell*

Can you feel it?  
That itch in your eye.  
Unspooling stitch  
of thin red string,  
white porcelain cracking,  
crimson.

Can you feel it?  
Something is growing.  
Bloody threads  
sewing roots  
that bloom  
into  
blossoming flames.

Watered by salty rain  
the sclera stained by wine;  
this flower swells  
from a vermilion stem.

Your lashes are dark thorns,  
slashing out  
from the hem of the lower lid.

Can you feel it?  
Petals piercing  
the film of your cornea.  
Leave it that single  
tear let it score  
a valley down the skin.

Can you feel it?  
Blindly aware of everything,  
your pupil eclipsed  
by a rose.



# The Lumberjack

*Lily Pierce*

It started small.

My hands felt clunky, wooden.  
I snipped the ends of my fingers off  
With Grandma's sewing scissors,  
So they were finally dainty.

It didn't last long.

The stumps swelled up and blood  
Soaked through the bandages.  
If I really wanted to look pretty,  
The whole hand would have to come off.

So off it went.

Soon, I developed a taste for it.  
The sound of arms and legs dropping as  
I chopped them off one by one, my body  
Becoming so light that I would soon float away.

It didn't stop there.

I took a meat cleaver to my skull and  
Chopped through hair, skin, bone,  
Until I reached the soft knotted mess of brain.  
The head fell off neatly.

I am a collection of limbs, waiting to be put back together.

# Faggots

*Charlie Rivers*

Sometimes, I wish we were bundles of sticks / Light us on fire, death  
fire, white flame / to tear through concrete and muscle / I want  
consumption / an Armageddon of sticks / an anal sex  
apocalypse / Steal the sun / light up the dead gay  
man / He will burn as an angel / His killer's  
head for a bar, bloody knuckles in worn  
pockets / Melt their skin /  
Scorch their bones /

Let us explode.



## Know the Signs

*Vic Scott*

WE WAIT AROUND. We're hooked up to torn magazines and we wince while their pages administer diet tips into the fat of our upper arms. We're spoon-feeding sugar into the black mouths of our coffee to help the fashion no-nos go down. Know the signs and symptoms. Who wore it best? After treatment, what next? Next! Oh, she means you/me. We rise, cheek to cheek, with autumn. Vapour escapes our lungs and fogs the water cooler. You/I shouldn't be here. *Family only, wait outside, please.* Please? Please. You are injected into the swinging doors, and I am ejected to please the carpark. I read the signs and symptoms. I see a pleading message from summer chalked on the block paving scuffed into dust by unknown feet. Cigarette butts needle the ground and fail to take seed. I sit down on the plaqued bench and forget, breathing out baby birds and taking in cremated air. I forget how many times we had left boredom at the door, knocking on the peeling paint, calling for the return of that borrowed clock. Knocking and knocking whilst the clock was ticking in time with the clinking together of our glasses and of our teeth. I forget how each day we had taken our malaise with a glass of laughter, cheque to cheque, and now it's autumn. How funny, it was spring this morning and now the leaflets are falling. I wipe my wet eyes with the soft pink weeping tissue. Still. No news. Still no news of summer. I check the time and cough up a memory into my hand and spit out the rest onto the insulted ground. No one is talking to me about what a lovely day it is to take photographs in the mountains upon mountains of tissues. Alarm. There is an emergence from the separated doors. I run but,

oh, the alarm wasn't mine this time. I am rejected at the reception as the doors return to meet each other. Read the signs. With a black pen chained to the desk, I cancel our ridiculous plans with large crosses and make new ones on the blank space on the underside of the calendar: defrost your sperm, shave the snow from your scalp, wash the late rising sun from your nose and eyes and mouth, pull over the sheet. They're doing everything they can, love. You and I have done everything we will, babe. A last supper (low-cal, low-fat, low low low for girls on the go) uncurls from the vending machine as the hands of the clock raise a toast: *To the last summer! When you both took the shape of one another, wine and vessel, sloshed on the tablecloth!* Down in one, the dregs of this malignant autumn. Down to one now, as winter adds him to the useless blue-light constellations. Down to one, now that he exists only in time's frozen sky and finds himself aligned with the exit. The doors separate and only one returns. I know the signs, but I am too busy waiting; sitting down on scooped plastic, reading the literature and forgetting one hundred ways to wear a little black dress. Follow the signs. Now, with no use for the sun's strip-lit palliative shine, he is waved off in a backless gown, wearing it well, making his way out.

# The Conflict of Masterpieces

*Ezra Taylor*

## TONIGHT, THE WAR BEGINS.

First the monarchy, deceased for centuries past and preserved only in delicate oil paints, climb out of their lavish frames, their feet landing softly on the polished wooden floorboards beneath. The Kings, depicted with mighty swords, brandish them in anticipation as their wives and daughters are quick to rip their beautiful dresses at the skirt. The anger marked on their made-up faces cannot be mistaken as they approach the centre of the gallery, confident that their military experience will deliver victory.

Ancient Greek statues arise from their pedestals, flexing their large, brooding muscles. Young deities explode into sharp edges, marble skin wrapped tight around exaggerated jawlines and chins. It is indeed they who ought to be feared the most, so they believe – there is little competition as far as they are concerned. Although many are nude (or certainly wearing wildly inappropriate battle attire), there is a reassurance in their sculpted form, once celebrated amongst ancient civilizations who revered them as divinity. A scuffle of these proportions is to be nothing in comparison to the mighty wars they had been known to take part in.

Sketches and drawings follow on, the sort artists forgot to throw away and now sell for billions apiece. Bold and brash in their strokes. Quick-tempered and rough in demeanour, they contemplate their competition carefully, studying the perfect attributes their creators bestowed upon them. They crave the destruction of the beauty that had overshadowed them for so long.

Stumbling to join the congregation are the Surrealist portraits, collectively agreed to be the weakest. Even if they do have facial features, these could be positioned just about anywhere, creating clumsy, disorientated soldiers. The gallery, a plain rectangular space, is no equal battleground in this regard. The subjects best suited to such an environment are those caught on camera. They are the most similar to humans of them all, not without flaws but with a contemporary understanding of the world.

Meanwhile, the few self-portraits stand self-consciously in the corner of the gallery. While plenty of the artists responsible for these works have since died and are unaware of what is about to occur, these unfortunate creators are expected to participate against their creations. The colours they so carefully painted have drained from their faces. To destroy is an artistic antithesis.

Together, for the final time, they stand in the gallery room they have shared with one another. Some had been hanging on the plain white walls for years, whereas others had more recently moved in, taking up empty space. Every day, visitors would flood in, mouths open in awe as they would lean in, squinting to enjoy the finer details missed in a passing glance. Inevitably, there were the few artworks that caught the most attention – who remembers the other paintings in the Louvre apart from the Mona Lisa, after all?

Perhaps this is the frustration that initiates the declaration of war, a unanimous jealousy of one another's beauty or unique features. Or perhaps immortality, the preservation of the subjects, begins to aggravate those cursed to spend eternity trapped within a frame. No matter how large the canvas, one would forever be confined to a world consisting of four corners. No matter how tall the pedestal, one could find themselves in the most uncomfortable of positions for eternity. Whatever the reason for this apparent dispute, it will certainly continue no longer.

Who attacked initially is unknown, but the first death is that of a small sketch of an old woman on paper torn mercilessly in half. The drawings, pulsing with rage at losing one of their own so soon disperse with the intention of revenge. Their large number proves to be effective, surging upon



their enemies with full force. A few Surrealist subjects take damage. They collapse while trying to chase down the small drawings. Lying in fragments, one could believe that they are not broken at all. A sketch of a young boy with a baseball bat manages to use it as an effective weapon against the Renaissance portraits, slashing at the pale skin of the noblewomen. Ribbons of crimson curl down their wrists as they fall, puddles swelling beneath their crumpled figures. Eventually, the sketches' tirade is crushed by the statues, exerting minimal effort in stamping on the paper's frail form.

A photograph's ink smudges beyond recognition. It lies mutilated on the wooden floor of the art gallery staring up at the bright white lights of the ceiling, their sharp, blinding quality softening as the photo acknowledges the severity of its condition. Never will it hang on the walls alongside its neighbours again, stared at in wonder by countless faces who admire its beauty. The portrait of a king, depicted on a large white horse in a full suit of armour, unknowingly puts the photography out of its misery as he charges towards a sketch attempting to escape beneath the gallery door. Crumpled by the horse's hooves, it now ceases to be art.

A lone Surrealist sticks out a limb, sending one of the Ancient Greek Goddesses crashing to her knees, only for the painting to be swiftly ripped to shreds by a nude model. Those granted spears by their creator impale the self-portraits who have done little to retaliate against their own art. They cough up the paint with which they had once portrayed themselves, staining the unblemished marble of the statues that seek to destroy them.

The photographs and royal monarchs continue to fight, little progress made either way. Although photography has the benefit of modern knowledge, their realistic flaws are contrasted with that of the perfectionism expected of art commissioned by royalty. Their numbers begin to diminish, even when the statues intervene, using brute force to smash through the canvases. History is being lost with every queen plummeting to her death, with every photo of political turmoil being shredded and thrown like confetti across the room.

The war, despite its ferocity, remains silent. The battleground is, after all, a gallery in which hushed observations would be whispered to one an-

other for fear of a judgemental stare from a fellow visitor. By now, the gallery is reminiscent of a Pollock piece, not a single space of the formerly white wall left untouched from splattered paint and other such mediums. The floor is a watercolour sea, those still standing wading through to reach their enemies. When they fall, they disappear beneath the multicoloured current, returning to the very means used to give them life.

Not one piece is left intact after the night's assault. As the flood of paint flows beneath the gallery door, the damage is indisputable. Depictions of ancient kings and queens are completely disfigured and beyond recognition. Photographs lie crumpled, sketches smudged under the forceful pressure of something simply too powerful to resist. With only their pedestals remaining to indicate their existence, the statues now amount to piles of debris, only a lone nose or finger salvageable. The Surrealist pieces are spread furthest across the room. The self-portraits show signs of self-sabotage. Nothing escaped. The silence continues.

This will become a cemetery of sorts, once the security guard discovers the wreckage in the morning. When prompted for a statement, the gallery will have no choice but to blame a heist gone wrong, or perhaps a group of political extremists who take issue with the display of such work – their guess would be as good as any. Investors and donors will quickly pull their funding, extra security will patrol the corridors at all hours, and newspaper headlines covering the art massacre will run for weeks.

# Potato

*Ariana Tejada Vargas*

Not a vegetable,  
but a tuber,  
a nice and round tuber.

Look at it,  
the world,  
and it is truly the world for us.

It is not perfectly round,  
it has mountains and craters,  
but, oh, how beautiful it is.

The humid earth,  
that fertile soil,  
where it is cultivated by us  
the farmers.

It means so much,  
the potato.

Sometimes the only food we can eat,  
the food that matters  
and the one we eat to survive.

The food that  
she provides,  
our goddess,  
the Pachamama.

The Pachamama  
is the air that fills our lungs,  
the soil that touches our feet.  
She is our world.

Our goddess  
that gave us what grows in her soil.  
She gave us part of the world.

Oh, how can we ever repay her?  
Many things to be thankful for.

The potato,  
with its nutritional values:  
many gods,  
many farmers  
to thank.

The rain,  
the sun,  
the soil,  
the gods,  
the farmers,  
they all create this.

We love the fertile soil,  
we love the warm and soft taste,

and we love  
the earth.

We raise our hands  
to the Inti  
and thank him.  
We kiss the ground  
for the Pachamama  
and thank her.

For we are all children  
of the earth.  
We are all children  
of the sun.

A gift from the gods,  
that is the potato.



# White Cat Downpour

*Aisling Thompson*

‘YOUR CAT’S BEEN PISSIN’ in the kitchen again,’ a voice snapped from the darkness. ‘Had to throw her out the back.’

Casey was still shivering, a puddle forming at his feet from the brief time he’d been standing there. He opened his mouth to say something, biting his own remark before he caught a pair of narrowed eyes lit up blue from a phone screen and decided to look down at his feet.

‘Can I let her back in?’ he murmured, toeing off his soggy canvas shoes.

‘What?’

‘Can I let the cat back inside?’

There was a scoff from the darkness, then a second one, before an annoyed huff.

‘Please, Allan.’

‘If you have to,’ he scoffed again. ‘You don’t see me all day and the first thing you want to know is where your cat is? Tch, what am I going to do with you?’

Casey nodded, eyeing his shoes up before he peeled his socks off too.

‘Casey,’ Allan called, nodding down at his feet, Adam’s apple bobbing in the pale chamber of his throat. ‘Look at me when I’m talking to you. If I stand in one more puddle of cat piss, she’s gone.’

He managed to drag his eyes from the floor to where he thought Allan was sitting, the single light above the entrance not quite reaching him. A self-conscious hand came up to cover the handprint around his neck, cold fingers trying to soothe the ache that went below his heated skin and made

it feel as if he'd been gargling razor blades.

Barefoot, he went out into the dark of their little boxed in back garden, walled on all sides with shoulder high cement walls. He flashed the light from the back of his phone around the full bins and inside the half-dug pots of dead plants, before he found the snow-white mound of soggy fur cowering under an upturned plastic tub meant for recycling bottles. Grabbing her by the scruff of her neck, he caught her under her arms and tossed her over his shoulder like a wet towel full of bones.

She was soaked and shivering, but her rumbling purr didn't stop as he carried her back inside and trudged over to the sticky leather couch. He left a trail of wet footprints across the tiles from the back door and through the kitchen that he knew he'd have to clean up. For now, he could settle with cradling his soggy cat inside his jacket as they warmed up together.

\* \* \*

Casey's right arm was slack, the back of his hand grazing the carpet as he thought about petting the cat. His left leg was hooked over the crook of his left elbow, clutching at Allan's bicep so he wouldn't let his leg drop down.

'*Baby*,' the word was panted into his ear. With Allan's hand firm under his jaw keeping his head permanently tilted to the side, he had easy access to his neck. Easy access to gnaw on what he wanted as Casey kept his eyes firmly on the TV flickering over static, juddering its way through an espionage film that he swore he'd watched a hundred times before. It seemed to be a late-night Sunday favourite of the channel.

He couldn't seem to keep his mouth closed, all boneless and limp from what he'd been smoking, because he was seeing double of the Aryan spy and his busty companion as felt himself falling deeper and deeper into oblivion. A finger hooked into the side of his mouth and pulled him back, head lolling as he met the same dark, blown pupils as his own.

'Whr- s'cat?' he managed to spit out, the pressure in his chest building and his stomach lurching. If he was sick, he'd never live it down. Never live



again – he'd probably be choked out and left in the dumpster behind the diner for someone to find.

'Shu'up bout' the fuckin' cat.'

He was numb from the shoulders down, mouth hanging open slack jawed and eyes rolling back into his head as he struggled to keep them open. He couldn't do much but think about whether the cat was curled up in her basket under the kitchen table – about whether she had food in her bowl or if she was waiting patiently to be fed – or if – or if –

There was a wet moan in his ear, and he fought the urge to gag – honest to God he did – but the choked sound didn't go unnoticed.

He was on his stomach then, fighting the urge to be sick. The world spun as he heaved. The hard push in the small of his back made him wheeze and though he could barely keep his eyes open, he saw a little flash of white fur. The cat was grooming herself right in the middle of the hall.

He ignored the call of his own name, sight transfixed on her white form.

She paused to look up at him with her round, glassy eyes, reminiscent of a porcelain doll's. Her ears twitched backwards and forwards as she listened out for him. When he didn't call out to her, she just blinked silently and went back to grooming a dark spot of dirt out from her white coat.

'Th- hell r' you lookin' at?'

She looked back up, startled at the resounding singular slap of flesh on flesh.

Even though he couldn't stop the tears streaming down his stinging cheek, he sniffed and tasted copper and managed to smile at her.



# Gochisousama

*Uta Tsukada Bright*

Food tastes better when she makes it.  
In my mother's home, in my father's land,  
I sit on wooden floorboards as I watch her work.  
Deft chops and swift stirs,  
A sharp nose constantly adjusting, fine-tuning:  
The scent of lemon, mint, ginger  
Lingers on calloused fingertips –  
Gently, she lowers the spoon to my mouth.

I walk to school with my hand in hers.  
Her firm grasp hands me a cloth-wrapped Tupperware. *Obentō*.  
I wait in line with the other kids.

Unaware of themselves and blissful for it,  
Their names called out, perfectly pronounced.  
Readable. Packed lunches dutifully pale.  
Then – wide eyes turn to me, swell like blue balloons  
Mouths agape; on the tongue, that bitter word 'gross' –  
Calls so casually thrown, yet I fly to catch  
The scent, the stench: close the lid,  
A stomach shrinking with shame.

But  
With the years falling behind

Like discarded coats,  
I learn to nurture, a stomach fed love:  
I wilt sneers to sheepishness in steaming woks,  
Dancing across the floor where I once sat.  
I watch  
As once-fleshy fingers unpinch thin noses.

And now  
As I stand with the knife between my heart and the board  
I wonder if you felt the same  
When you used to watch your mother too.

# Memoir of an Egg Splat

*Emma Wood*

THERE IS EGG ON OUR WINDOW. Why? Who knows... one can only ponder a guess as to why such a barbaric, inconsiderate and moronic event took place. Each day, I stare at this egg, like a giant bird poop, that desecrates our living space, a stain on our humanity. As I eat my Crunchy Nut in the morning, my mind ponders the different ways in which this egg splat could have appeared.

My first guess is that a hooligan took aim at our window. Why? Well, I assume due to an ongoing feud with whoever graced this kitchen before. Who? One would venture to guess another hooligan. Perhaps my hooligan threw egg at the other's window too? Perhaps a war ensued, one side slicked back hair and leather jackets, the other rugged denim and oily fingers. Was music involved? Rock 'N' Roll vs The Blues? Was this the last egg thrown in this musical gang war, or the first?

My second guess is that the egg splat was a symbol of a young man's love. Did his beau live behind this window? A display of wanton desire by some deprived lad? Had they passed each other in the University corridors, one staring longingly whilst the other pranced away. Untouchable. Picture this, the young man, dressed in his only clean shirt, hair styled with gel stolen from his father, standing below this young lady's window. Instead of a boombox, this young man carries a carton of eggs on his shoulder. The egg was thrown as a pebble in a movie, to attract the beau's attention. Did it work? Maybe we will never know the ending to this lover's story.

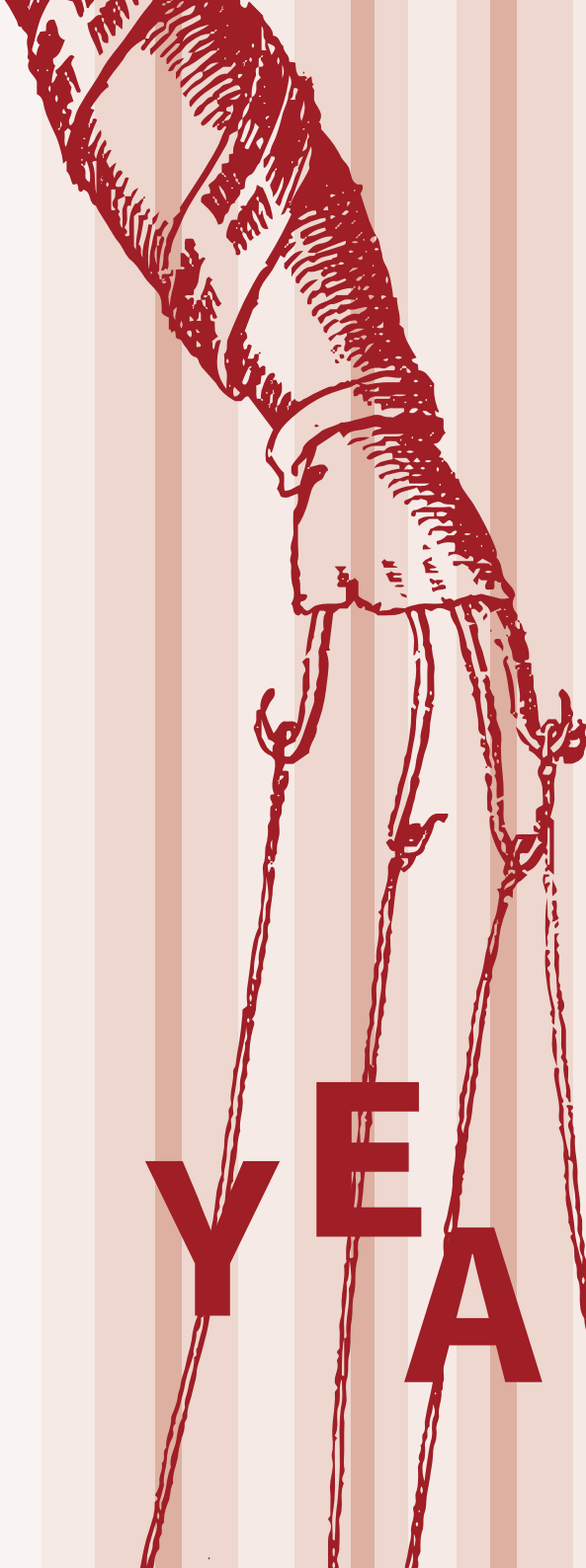
My third guess is that a very large bird, perhaps a crow – giant, of course – flew overhead much like the planes leaving Leeds Bradford. Maybe it flew alongside them? This crow, heavy with pregnant belly carrying her precious cargo, could not hold on any longer. Out dropped her egg, claws scrambling to catch it, poor giant mother crow, she couldn't keep hold of her little child. Down, down it fell, queue the cartoon falling noises, landing directly on our window. I assume mama crow flew away, mortified with her failure as a mother, in disbelief that her egg is no longer hers. Shall we create a shrine around this window? A memorial, a séance?

My final guess is that this egg is, in fact, a piece of artistic expression. Perhaps we have been living amongst some of the finest art of our time? Is this a comment on the state of our politics? Or does this egg splat represent the human rights struggles our neighbours overseas are facing? Is this the new Kandinsky? Has Banksy chosen a new medium to create his street art? Should we put a little sign beneath this ground-breaking new art, cordon it off and charge the art enthusiasts admission? Or do we sell it to the Tate Modern?

\* \* \*

I have exhausted my mind, reader, for I can think of no reasons more likely than those I have just explained as to why this egg is still on our window. I have checked other windows; it is not a standard issued window display within University Accommodation. I therefore conclude that every possibility is, in fact, fact. So this then becomes a memoir of an egg splat, and I dedicate it to Maintenance, who have worked so hard in preserving this war memorial/lover's gift/lost child/important piece of art. Well done, I tip my hat to you.





**YEAR**



A hand with a dark skin tone is shown from the wrist down, holding a thick, light-colored rope. The hand is positioned at the top right of the frame, with the fingers wrapped around the rope. A large, light-colored diamond-shaped knot is visible on the rope, just below the hand. The rope extends downwards and then splits into two parallel strands that run towards the bottom of the frame. The background consists of vertical stripes in various shades of brown and tan. The word "TWO" is written in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and partially overlapping the two strands of the rope.

**TWO**



# Emetophobia

*Alex Affleck*

I AM 7 YEARS OLD. Squashed in the back of a Mini with my two friends. Belinda's mum is driving us home from school and her friend is in the front passenger seat. They are both quite big and the car is small. It is hot and it feels claustrophobic, although I don't yet know what that word means. Ricky is sitting next to me, in the middle.

'I don't feel very well,' she says to the car in general.

Belinda's mum's friend asks her what is wrong but she can't articulate what she feels, simply repeating that she doesn't feel very well. I look at her and take in the strange, yellowish-grey pallor of her face and the stillness of her posture. I can see that she really does not feel well.

We are very nearly home when she whispers to me 'I think I'm going to be sick'. The words are no sooner out of her mouth than they are followed by a torrent of vomit. Oceans of the stuff, everywhere: all over her, all over me, all over the car. More than could possibly have been contained by one small girl. Great mephitic orange globules spreading in nooks and crannies. My nose is filled with the sweet, putrid smell and my eyes are smarting. I want to cry. The car stops outside Belinda's house and I flee over the road to my own home. As soon as my mum opens the door I burst into tears. It is the most traumatic event of my short life.

What I cannot know is that this trauma will stay with me forever. It will affect life decisions, social decisions, domestic decisions. It will make me consider where I should sit on buses and trains; it will make me get off buses and trains if I decide anyone looks slightly pale or unwell. It will pre-

vent me from travelling on buses and trains at all late at night, for fear of over-inebriated fellow passengers. It will make me scrutinise audiences in theatres and concerts and always try to get an aisle seat. It will make me sit tense, prepared for vomit scenes in films and television programmes, ready to stuff fingers in my ears and screw up my eyes. Why do directors always find it necessary to make their characters throw up anyway? Worse, it will prevent me from adequately caring for my mum when she is old and ill, and my daughters when they are small.

Over the years, I have considered confronting my phobia with some form of therapy but I have always found an excuse. Coronavirus has given me a great one; it would hardly be considered a priority during a pandemic. I largely conclude that there is little point now since I have managed to navigate it for so long. I do wish I had done something to resolve it years ago, though. I believe it has inhibited me from fully engaging with life. I understand it is something to do with lack of control. We generally have reasonable control over our bodily functions, but this is one area where we do not. It can overtake anyone at any time and in any place. If it is going to happen, it will. I just pray that I am not there when it does.

# Teeth Marks

*Rachel Astbury*

We meet and I touch and you touch and we learn and you learn that I love  
when you bite

We touch and I gasp and you gasp and you tense and you say that I feel  
just right

I pull and you pull and I strain and we gasp and we yearn and we hold on  
too tight

Your lips and my lips and our kiss mean our love makes my shoulders feel  
suddenly light

But when it's me and it's you there's no love before words: old words and  
last words out of spite

And I'll cry and we'll cry and ignore all the tears as they're dry and they're  
gone by the night

But we meet and we pull, and we snap and we break like we knew for a  
while that we might

And your teeth on my neck is all we have left, had left, before our last  
fight.



# Breadcakes and Blades

*Hannah Bacon*

## ACT 1, SCENE 2

*(A single bench in a large shopping centre takes centre stage with an elderly lady sat at the end of it. The busy environment is filled with masked and unmasked shoppers walking by who are holding on to their purchases. A young boy energetically enters from stage right sliding his feet on the floor whilst his grandad trails behind. The old man sits on the opposite side of the bench and the shoppers exit the stage.)*

JACOB: Grandaddddddd, I'm going back to the bank to find Dad. He's got to be less grumpy, the queue should have gone down by now.

MALCOLM: Alright son, tell him there's no rush. I'm quite happy sitting just here.

JACOB: Okay, see you in a bit.

MALCOLM: Wait, Jacob. *(Reaches into wallet)* Treat yourself to something from Poundland.

JACOB: *(Excited tone)* Thanks Grandad! I'll get a Brain Licker; they're so cool – it turns your tongue bright blue!

MALCOLM: Oh right—

JACOB: Dad hates them, he says they make your teeth fall out.

MALCOLM: *(Chuckling)* Well make sure to put it in your pocket and save it for later or we'll both be getting the bus back home!

JACOB: Okay.

*(JACOB exits and the elderly pensioners make eye contact with one another and laugh.)*

JOYCE: What they like eh?

MALCOLM: He reminds me of myself when I was little, such a sweet tooth.

JOYCE: You have just the one grandkid then duck?

MALCOLM: No, I have our eldest Emily as well. She's going to Oxford, you know.

JOYCE: Oxford? What a brain box.

MALCOLM: *(Chuckling)* Must have got her brains for her Mother's side, she's definitely not got them from our Ian. *(Pause)* Do you know our Jacob came to see me every day during Lockdown? And Emily did when she wasn't revising.

JOYCE: Aw, that sounds lovely duck.

MALCOLM: Them coming round to see me was the one thing which kept me going.

JOYCE: How sweet. *(Pause)* Bradley Walsh, off the telly, kept me company during Covid – he's ever so dishy. *(Excited tone)* Oooo, they won *The Chase* last night.

MALCOLM: I know and it was against The Beast.

JOYCE: I know, he's really smart him.

MALCOLM: Do you watch Pointless? That's my favourite.

JOYCE: Yeah but I can't stand Richard Osman, he's so stuck up.

MALCOLM: Do you think?

JOYCE: Yeah and he's always got really crusty lips. If he were my son I'd be telling him to buy some Vaseline.



MALCOLM: (*Laughs. Pause*) So, do you have any grandkids?

JOYCE: Oh no, I've not unfortunately. My daughter Sally moved to Australia forty years ago. She's still living in that caravan, touring the country.

MALCOLM: Blimey! That's far away, I bet you miss her very much.

JOYCE: I suppose you just get used to it.

MALCOLM: Really?

JOYCE: I can still see her the day she left holding that massive rucksack. I have her picture on my fireplace.

MALCOLM: Bless.

JOYCE: You know something; I'd have hugged her for a lot longer if I knew.

MALCOLM: That sounds tough. Do you talk on the phone though? Our Jacob taught me how to use Zoom during Lockdown so we could still keep in touch.

JOYCE: Oh god no! Our Sally doesn't believe in technology. Well, she does send me the odd postcard. Come to think of it she sent me a photo of herself last time. Deary me (*Motions*) her arms are covered in tattoos. She didn't look like my little Sally. It's somewhere in my bag actually. (*She rummages through her bag*) I don't understand how you can ruin your body like that.

MALCOLM: My son, Scott, has one, could have killed him the day I saw it. A big dragon on his back. I'm glad he's grown out of that phase now. Still though, and I've told him this, that's on you for life. They'll be – (*whispers the word*) bloody – burying you in that.

JOYCE: Loads of the young uns' these days seem to be obsessed with them.

MALCOLM: Yeah.

JOYCE: (*Sighs*) Where is it? (*Still rummaging in bag. She pulls out an umbrella, rainmate, cat food, tub of ice-cream*) It's in here somewhere.

MALCOLM: Don't worry yourself love. (*Long pause*) It's strange seeing all these people, I'm glad I've had my jabs.

JOYCE: God, the last one made me feel awful.

MALCOLM: Did you have AstraZeneca?

JOYCE: You know what duck, I'm not too sure. It's probably in my head though, our Sally's the same she hates jabs.

MALCOLM: I've had that many I'm used to the buggars now!

JOYCE: (*Deep in thought*) It's funny how there are just some things in life we can't seem to get over.

MALCOLM: Isn't it just. (*Long pause*) Do you know if your daughter has had the jab? Australia seems to be dealing quite well with this Covid business.

JOYCE: Yeah, I made sure of it. I told her she must if she wants to come home for Christmas.

MALCOLM: Well I hope she manages to get back, I know the travel restrictions and the PCR tests are making things quite awkward.

JOYCE: Don't worry duck, our Sally always finds a way of making it home, (*laughing*) she's a jammy sod!

MALCOLM: Well at least it's something to look forward to.

JOYCE: I'm going to cook her favourite, nut roast dinner.

MALCOLM: Nut roast?

JOYCE: Yeah, I can't stand it!

MALCOLM: (*Laughs*) We have lamb every year but I'm a stickler for the traditional stuff so I always miss having turkey. Our Ian thinks it's dry.

JOYCE: Our Sally's a veggie; she can't stand the sight of meat. She says you're eating death.

MALCOLM: Really? Our Emily was telling me how she's turned... (*says*

*perplexed*) vegan? Sounds to me like you can hardly eat anything. God knows what she'll be eating at Christmas, probably cardboard! *(They both laugh)*

JOYCE: Vegan? Never heard of it. *(Continues to rummage through her bag)*

MALCOLM: Whatever next! It's not like it used to be.

JOYCE: That's why I'm here actually, I've bought Sally's present.

MALCOLM: What have you got her?

JOYCE: A compass, you know, thought it would be useful on her travels.

MALCOLM: That's lovely, do you know—

JOYCE: Aaahaa! I've found it. This is our Sally. *(She hands the photo over to MALCOLM)* Such lovely bright blue eyes.

*(MALCOLM looks intently at the photo. Enter TRACEY from stage right)*

TRACEY: *(Concerned tone)* Mum! Where'd you go? I've been worried sick. Try and remember not to wander off OK? Come on, let's go home.

*(MALCOLM looks confused. TRACEY starts putting her mother's belongings back in her bag)*

MALCOLM: Don't forget this. *(He hands the photo back to JOYCE)*

JOYCE: *(Squints and looks deeply at the photo)* Aw, what a pretty lady, beautiful eyes but such horrible tattoos. Well still you must be one proud Dad.

*(She hands the photo back to MALCOLM)*

MALCOLM: *(MALCOLM looks at JOYCE and then at TRACEY. Confused tone)* Your Mum gave me this. *(He hands it over to TRACEY)* I think it's your sister on the front *(Pauses)* Sally?

TRACEY: Sally? *(Pauses)* A tattoo brochure? *(She inspects the brochure more closely)* You know something, this looks just like her before she left.

MALCOLM: Well I hope she makes it back for Christmas, your Mum has a lovely present waiting. *(They both look at JOYCE who is now zoned out.)*

TRACEY *looks down at the floor*) Sorry, I hope I've not upset you. It's just that we've been talking about her. Seems quite the character!

TRACEY: Well (*Long pause*) she was.

MALCOLM: Sorry, you've lost—

TRACEY: The thing is, Sally's been missing for nearly forty years.

MALCOLM: (*Compassionate tone*) I'm ever so sorry, I didn't realise.

TRACEY: It's fine, you weren't to know. Mum hasn't got over it, (*she looks at JOYCE*) she still thinks she's on her way home.

MALCOLM: Sorry, that must be awful.

TRACEY: (*She forces a smile*) Right, well we'll best be off then Mother. (*She continues putting the items back in JOYCE's bag*) Oh god! (*Sighs*) She's picked up another tub of ice-cream. Our freezer's full of the stuff. You don't know someone who'd fancy some raspberry ripple? It's far too sweet for me.

MALCOLM: Thank you, I know just the person. (*She hands it over*)

TRACEY: Take care duck.

MALCOLM: Seeya love.

(JOYCE and TRACEY exit stage left arm in arm. JACOB emerges from stage right with a blue tongue and sits next to his grandad. MALCOLM ruffles his hair. Busy shoppers enter the stage once again.)

(*Lights dim. Set changes.*)

# Blackfoot

*Mackenzie Cale*

TWO HOUSES STOOD OPPOSITE one another: the old wooden houses, that were built by their owners, stood as the only two in the entire field. They were separated by a white picket fence and the field went on forever and the air always smelled damp.

A dog was running through that field; his paws flattened the long blades of grass as he ran and as he leapt over the white picket fence, he left the shape of his belly where he landed. Passing through the garden of the house opposite his own, he slowed and shrank, aware of his intrusion. A girl sat by her back door, swinging her wellies off the step. She was deciding that her mother's garden was boring when the dog glided past her. She liked the shaggy black fur of the dog poking in and around the shrubbery and thanked him as he passed by running her fingers through his coat. The bristles tickled her fingertips. Having successfully sniffed around the other garden, the dog found a turnip: he'd got his mouth round its green top and pulled it from the earth. He shook as if he'd come in from the rain and flew soil in a little spectacle around himself. The girl saw this and giggled loudly, then she waved him off as he leapt back over the picket fence. He climbed up onto his porch and sat, on his back legs, beside his owner's rocking chair.

Old Man noted the greys and whites of his dog's face and then noted the deep purple of the turnip he was holding between his teeth. Old Man muttered 'good boy' under his breath before rocking back in his chair and counting to five. The pitter-patter of paws, the giggle of a little girl, the soft

thud of a wagging tail, and then, the slam of an open door against its hinges.

Old Woman crashed against the wooden slats of her own porch, finger trembling forwards.

‘Keep that damned turnip thieving dog out of my garden!’

Old Man rose from his chair and stepped down the picket fence to meet Old Woman. He groaned, ‘Hnn.’

‘Humph,’ she returned, and then with a wave of Old Man’s hand he and the dog walked away. Old Woman similarly motioned for her daughter, who couldn’t hide her grin, and the two went inside.

Every day, Old Man and his dog would go on a walk in the afternoon; it was afternoon now, and so they walked. The dog’s paws were beating against the earth, pressing their heat back into it. He felt large and full as he galumphed around. Old Man threw sticks and wore a tiring smile whenever his dog jumped up and caught them. In his prime, he’d been able to catch birds. They continued this routine throughout the afternoon, sticks hurled through the sky. There were no clouds. Their playing abruptly ended when a loud yelp disturbed some nearby crows. The dog had landed on a pine needle and limped home, his paw bleeding. The walk back was long and what was once the light and heat of the sun was now the cold and comfort of the moon. Old Man wished to carry the dog but didn’t. The dog would come to walk on it soon enough, he thought, as the dog limped the entire way with his tail touching his ankles.

Old Woman sat in her dining room with her daughter eating soup and bread. They saw Old Man and the dog through their front window. She noticed the limp and told her daughter to wait as she went outside, offering Old Man some remedies: mainly rest, but if that didn’t work, then the application of some boiled leaf would pull out the pain. Old Man politely declined saying that he’d ‘forgot the white in his whiskers, that’s all’.

Old Woman nodded in agreement and returned to her supper. The little girl waved Old Man and his dog off out of the window by standing on her chair, muddying its surface. She was scolded for this – although Old Woman loved her for it, too.

On that night Old Man decided to sit with his dog as he slept, staring outside the window at the moon across the field. There were no clouds and there never had been. The dog slept in the middle of the couch cushion, tail curled under his nose. The limp back home had taken almost two hours, so he slept well and deeply. Old Man thought and sighed and then thought for a bit longer, but this only made his sighs heavier.

When morning broke and Old Man's stare felt the heat and light of the sun, he snapped the dog's neck. His legs barely kicked, and his last breath made his head heavy. Old Man stepped outside, onto his porch, past his rocking chair, and toward the picket fence. On the other side stood Old Woman and the girl. The girl's hands were holding each other behind her back, and she looked toward the ground.

'My dog is dead,' he said.

Old Woman bowed her head before saying, 'What should we do then? To the things of this world that die.' No decision had been made as no one had died before.

'They should be dead for four days but then be returned on the fifth day.' Old Man said this fast and surely.

'Only four days? But your dog was a thief.'

The girl coughed and spluttered, and the other two groaned and humphed. Old Woman sent her daughter inside for a spoonful of honey and arranged to meet Old Man by the pond the next day.

The next day both Old Man and Old Woman stood by the pond.

'Ok, I will throw this buffalo chip into the water and if it floats then the people of this world will die for four days and be returned on the fifth. And if it sinks...?' Old Man gripped the buffalo chip tightly between his fingers.

Old Woman hesitated before saying, 'And if it sinks then they will die forever. That way the world will know sympathy.'

'As you wish,' said Old Man.

'Wait,' interrupted Old Woman. 'I agree to those conditions – but instead of a buffalo chip, throw a rock.'

Old Man shook his head lightly and said, 'As you wish.'

Old Man threw the rock and watched it sink to the bottom of the pond.

It sat there, still and calm – and that is why people are supposed to die forever.

Three moons had passed since Old Man and woman had met by the pond: during that time Old Man had buried his dog, hoping that the earth could swallow him. He no longer sat on his porch and instead now preferred to sit in his kitchen. He was sitting there, stirring a cup of water, when he heard three knocks against his front door. When he opened it, he was greeted by Old Woman who was holding a basket of turnips, red as her eyes.

‘I have come to apologise and tell you that I have changed my mind. I would like the people of this world to be dead for four days and, on the fifth day, return. This time tomorrow you and your dog can be reunited.’

Old Man looked at her coldly and took a sip of his water. ‘No, it is set now. They will die forever.’ There were clouds now and from this point there always would be. And rain.



# Something Rotten Amongst the Heavens

*Hannah Day*

## CHAPTER 1

HEAVY WAS THE DARK CLOUD that sat atop the city; somewhere underneath there was a club at the end of a shaded alleyway. Lit only by blinking neon signs, even the dull moonlight had abandoned this corner of the city. Long had it forgotten about the dealings that went on under its turned gaze.

Mallecho's was a place people avoided like the plague if they had some sense about them. It nurtured the very evil that controlled the city. That alone should have been enough of a warning.

But not for Hamlet. He had heard of many unfortunate happenings occurring here. Measly rumours of a greater evil and horrified whispers of death incarnate did not bother him in the slightest. He had seen too many horrors, conjured too many uncanny thoughts for something as trivial as this to scare him.

Hamlet felt an undeniable pull to the darker indulgences of life. His intrigue had started as just that – nothing more, nothing less – until this past summer when his studies had brought him to New Orleans. Since his return home, it was like he was discovering a new crevice of the universe. Truth be told, he no longer recognised his home and it did not recognise him either. He yearned for more knowledge, and the person he was meeting tonight had promised him just that. As he traipsed down the alley, he allowed his eyes to wander. Hovering on the thin boundary of shadows and

darkness, scantily clad people brought cigarettes to their lips with black painted nails. Smoke clouded his path but he continued forward.

He watched as they exchanged cigarettes and mouthfuls of smoke between one another. These sights made him miss his time studying in New Orleans. But duty does eventually come calling and fathers eventually die. If it had been any other night, he might have considered joining them. But midnight was almost upon Hamlet, and he had things to do. He rewarded himself by breathing a little deeper as he passed by them. Despite everything that was happening around him, the entrance was deserted by all but one single man. This was it. Finally, he would get the answers he deserved. As Hamlet descended, he tuned his ears to the commotion beyond the bottom of the stairs. Loud, bass-heavy, upbeat music burst from the speakers. He couldn't contain his smirk. Despite its name on the streets and groundless rumours, Mallecho's seemed like a decent place. Perhaps he would return here after all if all went well tonight.

As if on cue, a door opened on the far wall and two darkly dressed figures stepped out. One was dressed rather masculine, the other more ambiguous. The masculine figure leaned closer to the other and whispered something before departing. Hamlet watched as he moved past him, climbing the stairs to the surface. Returning his eyes to the door, he realised the other hadn't moved. They were watching him, their piercing intrusive eyes decorated with dark makeup. Without a second thought, Hamlet moved towards them, manoeuvring through the crowds of the intoxicated.

Slowly, Hamlet entered the room. 'Madame Mauvais?'

A figure emerged, though he didn't see where from. Dressed in a sleeveless black gown, they clapped their hands and the door slammed shut behind him. Hamlet flinched, and he hated himself even more for doing so. The outside music drifted away. It was just the two of them. A calm sensation washed over him as something warm blossomed within his core. He knew he was in the right place.

'Please sit,' they said, gesturing to a dark oak chair he only now noticed.

He obeyed, attempting to assume a relaxed position. To say Madame Mauvais was a peculiar figure was an understatement. It was something

more than that, going beyond what the unaided eye could see. Then there was the reoccurring dread of something else present in the room. The little hairs on the back of his neck stood alert. He knew he was being watched. He smirked. *So that was what they were into.*

Hamlet rolled his shoulders. Little did they know, if they tried anything, he would not hesitate to invert their ribcages. He chuckled inwardly, almost wishing they would. It sounded fun.

'I am Madame Mauvais,' they said, their black painted lips curving into a knowing grin, eyes gleaming in the candle lit dark. 'What knowledge do you seek?'

Hamlet blinked rapidly, channelling his focus onto them. He knew this answer better than his soul, better than he knew himself: 'All of it.'

As Madame Mauvais studied him, Hamlet subconsciously paused his breathing. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead as he watched them float around the room. A breath tripped in his throat. Coughing violently, he could have sworn that in the black reflection of the window there was a third eye in the centre of their forehead. Hamlet considered it for a moment: he was undecided whether he had bitten off more than he could chew. On the other hand, he decided it was too late to turn back, and that it was also rude to stare.

At last, they spoke. 'Then you have come to the right place, I can help you find that knowledge.'

Hamlet nodded. 'How exactly are you going to help me?' He tried not to sound impatient but feared his posture gave him away.

They exhaled swiftly, visibly amused. 'I am not going to help you. The cards are.'

With a dramatic gesture – which seemed overly practised – they fanned their left hand over the table in a straight line and cards floated gently to the wooden surface. Hamlet raised an eyebrow; it was a neat little trick, something that they didn't pull out of their sleeve, but it was impressive, nonetheless. The cards were dainty things, but appearances were quite often deceiving. Painted with intricate designs of sombre gold and royal black, he reluctantly admired the artwork.

‘And what’s in it for you?’ he faltered.

Mauvais leaned back and chuckled. They held their hands up and mocked surrender. ‘Clever boy. Sometime in the future, I will call on you for a favour, little princeling, and you will find yourself forced to answer.’ It was a fair price, so why was his mind screaming otherwise? Like the poisoned speech of the fae, he knew there was a second, concealed meaning blurred in their chosen words. He didn’t have time to debate uncertainties. This is what he had been preparing for. Answers were not the sole thing he craved, but they were certainly the beginning. He wanted it all and he would stop at nothing to reap the rewards.

He agreed, hoping he wasn’t selling his soul or something else entirely useless in the process. And if it turned out he somehow had – he would burn that bridge when he came to it.

# Grudge

*Elina Dimitrova*

That lovely little clip of pain  
that can always startle  
the heart into a leap off the cliff  
into the welcoming churn of piranhas because who ate my fucking eggs

I slam the box shut and the sound  
shatters the fracturing day into bad feelings.  
Stomach gurgling, mind mumbling murderous sentences.  
But there are other options. There is hope in the light  
of the fridge. Except. My butter? Also? Gone?

No toast for me it seems. Toasty toast.  
Melted cheese, my saliva melting...  
But no.  
Knives of disappointment slide down my gut's gutters and  
my stomach bibbidi-bobbidi-boops into a child's art project.

There is one last form of rescue!  
My dear bagel, cultivated in the land  
of bread, sweet and soft. White. Forbidden  
by the health nerds, for which it tastes  
better. My last salvation! The cupboard door —

the bow of the violinist caressing its strings —

and my bagel is gone. I am broken. Falling.  
Fallen. My kneecaps clack, accompanying the breaking  
of my heart. I would recover faster from a breakup.  
But this could truly be the end. I see it now. The white light,  
blaring from the fridge, could only speak of this.

My hand tightens around the handle  
of the sword that just materialised next  
to me. I take it out of the stony tiles of the  
kitchen floor. The Excalibur of the New Age.  
With the other hand, I grab a pen to mark  
the fates of the transgressors. My new shopping list!  
Hidden in plain sight! Pinned on the fridge,  
so I will not forget:

- A throat to cut for the bagel
- Some eyes for the butter (same texture?)
- A head to crack like the eggs

# Five Things I Think About When I'm Alone

*Lily Fehim*

O N E

i am always a giver,  
an open palm stretched  
upwards, giving:  
*here, it's on me.*

T W O

people are receivers –  
but that's it.  
like leeches,  
takers, suckers.

T H R E E

i could have  
said so much.  
more confident:  
*the talker girl.*

F O U R

why wasn't that me?  
i'm stuck grappling:  
nails in the skin,  
marks of new moons.

## F I V E

if i turn on my music  
on a rainy day and look out  
of the window it feels like  
i am the centre of the world.



# A Friday Shift

*Sara Frisch*

## CHAPTER 1

A WEEKEND IS A RISK for any marriage, and the Friday shift drips into bottled-up suspicions. He wipes the last gunk of the night from his eye. *See you later*, he had whisper-shouted halfway out of the door this morning. He had swallowed the *honey*. But looked back and lingered. After a while, an absent-minded *mhm*. It has been amplifying, reverse-echoing through the hall, through his car, his boots barely audible on the walk to his bus, and now four minutes before the start of his shift, *mhm* has translated to *I WOULDN'T CARE IF YOU DIED*. His forehead meets the steering wheel too gently. He tries again. His swollen head collages memories of the last weeks' reticent Saturday breakfasts with her, each silent drive to the church two villages over, each time he switches radio stations halfway through the song so she will scold him, each time she doesn't. He holds a paper coffee cup between his knees, and the heat slices him through the jeans. The shattered glass of her French press. How it had leaned over the edge as he was wiping the kitchen surface. His fingertips grab the coffee cup by the lid and place it in the untrustworthy cupholder. The little finger pecking at the cafetière handle. Shattered glass. A silent shrug.

Neurotic knuckles and handbag metal clasps clink on the door. A woman stares at him from outside the bus. He nods, more to himself than to her. His finger mechanically finds the green button. Everything opens with a thump, the woman and 5 o'clock April frost join the bus driver and his

frost of fourteen and a half years. She says something, a thank you perhaps, a fuck you perhaps, and her spike heels' clack-clack-clack announce a toast to the empty bus on her way to the back.

\* \* \*

Four minutes until departure. And the door still closed. She had to Jehovah's-Witness him to get inside at all. Uncomfortable. Not to say 'Do your job' but do your job. The distress swirling around his head fended off her 'Good Morning', and she isn't sure if she thinks he is more disturbed or disturbing. Didn't look in her eyes, saw through her, stared at the glass in front of her face. Anjali takes a seat in the third to last row, almost as far away from him as possible without being obvious about it. She fumbles in her coat pocket and feels her rape alarm. Just in case. More or less a public space and the man is at work. She checks the pavement for other potential passengers, but the bus shows her just herself. She looks at her phone again. Still four minutes, it mocks her. Come on.

\* \* \*

The black sky looks slightly less black than yesterday, though not a lot more of anything. Three days will make quite the difference. What may it look like when he comes back on Monday... but it's wound-like and he knows he won't see. When his fingertips healed from the axing accident, which took a lot of three days, he used to joke that he would be found out as a Russian spy. She, a younger woman, had laughed about that. Her elbow had poked his shoulder. The years have clenched her teeth. Another toast now, apparently. He doesn't turn around. Roughened her elbows, too. Inevitably, older, the night they danced, not the day they got married, he had expected growth, expotential or exponential or whatnot. The night they danced her hand on his shoulder blurred what separated them, he had looked forward to a borderlessness, older, now, okay, but it hadn't grown, maybe exponential was too much to ask, spent a few good years trying to replicate that

night, its blurriness, tried replicating it on their wedding day, spent a few good years trying, then someday started to see her clear outlines and his own too. Started smirking when young couples declared fate soulmates god twin flames all the things he declared that night they danced, they held each other, they took a proper look at one another maybe the first or maybe last one, and danced without musi*Excuse me?? The bus was supposed to leave one and a half minutes ago? W- I have somewhere to be.* He doesn't turn around to the voice. Her rudeness almost makes him smirk. Green button. Doors close. His ragged hands hold on to the steering wheel that's shedding its own scarred skin. The bus driver and the young woman set off together, like father and daughter, in fondly estranged silence.



# Craig Y Pwll

*Isobel Gaul*

ON THE TOP OF THE LLANBEDROG headland, the iron man stands. He doesn't have a face but his expression is longing. I know this because everyone who stands on top of a headland in the rain feels a yearning for whatever it is across the sea. I also know that across the sea somewhere is Ireland or maybe even Blackpool depending on which way you're looking, but the iron man doesn't know that, so his expression is forever longing. Dark clouds hid the wide-open space that we knew was there. Down below us, the usually brightly painted beach houses seemed monochromatic. Distance and dullness washing out their colour. After a while of sitting on the iron man's plinth, we turned our backs to him and walked away. We thought of warm tea in the café; it was only open one hour a day and we didn't want to miss it.

We went to Abersoch in October when I was in Year 10. I remember this because I spent much of my holiday painting a Medusa for my art GCSE which my teacher ended up not even liking. This says a lot about high school and art when it's for an exam – but I didn't know how much of a waste of time this was during my October half term in Abersoch. I felt like a great artist, painting in front of a bay window which looked over the changing tides. The grey of the rock was dramatic and this gave everything a pensive appearance. I tried to adopt the quiet stance of the longing iron man.

The house had the front door upstairs because it was built on the steep cliff edge, meaning you came to the top of the house first. It came with its own jigsaws, only three pieces missing from each. We cooked our own

food and watched Strictly in the evening. It was only the five of us that week. I heard more Welsh accents in Abersoch than I ever had before. Strong and undiluted by droves of English tourists, like it often is in the summer months. The shops are closed from September to March, and really, I was okay with that because I didn't want ice cream or surfboards. I wanted warm tea from a chipped mug, and I wanted my mum to plait my hair while I sat in front of her knee. The hum of Abersoch in October was singing of soft rain while my brother played guitar.

One morning, maybe a Tuesday or a Wednesday, we walked along the beach. It was quiet. Only a few dog walkers walked on the sand. The waves were just missing the brim of my wellies as I walked along the bit where the land met the sea. The wind was bracing and the clouds threatened rain. We didn't mind. We wore our winter clothes, warm socks and waterproof coats. In summer, you felt as if you had to wear shorts because it was July and that's what you did in July, even if it was nearer to ten degrees rather than thirty. So, I was relishing the opportunity to be wrapped up and splash my feet in the sea without my toes turning blue. I found a scallop shell the size of my hand that day, and another one the day after. In August, they're snatched up by early risers and the children with eager eyes, but that week, our footprints were the first on the wet sand. The shell was mine for the taking.

## Two Poems

*Jasmine Gibbs*

EVENINGS AT HOME

the telephone pulls  
the trigger for my father's  
heart, every night.

DAD

crying on my shoulder,  
and i cradle him.





# Heart-Shaped Locket

*Kelly Rosalyn Moore*

## CHAPTER 1

LUISA FOUND HERSELF HOVERING over the same question nightly: *how do you go about your daily life knowing, in some respect, you are tip-toeing a two-step with death?* Humanity tends to hyper-fixate on the facets of the unknown, only contributing to a state of perpetual unhappiness. Ignorance is a bliss rarely acknowledged. The fate etched into our heart-shaped lockets might as well become nooses around our necks.

Absent-mindedly, Luisa turned her locket over in her hand, the smooth silver cool against her abrasive fingertips. ‘Why do some people choose against having a locket?’

‘Oh God, don’t bother trying to understand the logic of the Locketless. They’re too far gone – their tin-foil hats are filled with nothing but conspiracy.’ Corinne, her mother, carried on stirring the spaghetti bolognese, this time more carefully, now suddenly aware of Luisa’s supervision. Her questions felt too pointed, verging on the perimeters of a gateway into a formidable world she wanted her daughter to avoid. Her mother was quite beautiful with her long auburn hair and eclectic jewellery collected from various travels, but she had a habit of pursing her lips, accentuating centuries of smoked cigarettes and general discontentment.

She pointed a bolognese-soaked wooden spoon at Luisa. ‘All you need to know is that those people are nothing but trouble.’

The aroma of spices flooded the kitchen. The sweet paprika danced with the dried oregano, the sauce swimming with ripe tomato and ochre pepper. The flavours would delicately kiss only to run away with an outstretched hand. Corinne was happiest when she cooked; she claimed it 'kept the family close'. Undoubtedly her children would return home once the streetlights dimmed and they noticed the scent of her infamous dishes. The smell of her cooking swirled out of the kitchen window and beckoned them home without fail.

In a comfortable silence, Luisa watched her mother scurry about the kitchen, expertly throwing in pinches of salt and indistinguishable seasoning. She would offer to help but felt hypnotised by the methodology of it all, the years upon years of mundanity in practise. The only part Luisa turned away from was the mincemeat. The contorting burgundy strands looked like sizzling worms in her eyes. Once they were mixed up in the spaghetti and finely chopped, she tried to ignore their presence. On some conscious level, she knew they were still there, wriggling away amongst the peppers and onions. 'Out of sight means out of mind', she knew her mother would say if she dared to complain. She ate it regardless, pressing her eyes shut and stifling down every morsel.

Her brother Michael slunk down the stairs once he heard the jingle of the cutlery draw. Over the dinner table he grumbled passive responses. Instead, Luisa and her mother engaged in tedious but familiar conversation. The desperate arrival of spring: how it dusts vitality over previously drooping tulips and injects pigment into the grass once again.

'How's school, darling?'

'Good, good,' Luisa chirped in response, chasing an escaped pepper back into the centre of her empty bowl. As she lifted her gaze, she noticed a refraction of light hitting her mother's locket, taunting her with the impenetrable questions she so often tried to ignore. Scratches traced the heart of Corinne's locket, unprotected from the damage of mandatory everyday use.

'How about you, Michael?' Corinne questioned with delicacy.

He snorted an incoherent reply and left as quietly as he came.

Corinne watched her son disappear up the stairs, his hands firmly planted in his pockets. With a sympathetic smile she turned to Luisa. 'He's still shaken up about Jasper.'

She nodded her head in approval for her to leave the table. Silently, the small amount of family time that they shared diffused into nothingness, with only the faint smell of paprika to keep Corinne company.

Perhaps it was the awkward stiffness between herself and Michael – she only saw him stuffing his face or heard him screaming on the phone with his pathetic gaming friends – or perhaps it was her mother's even more pathetic attempts at a painstakingly conventional family dynamic. Perhaps it was the mincemeat worms snaking their way up her throat. All Luisa was able to do was to stare vacantly at her ceiling. She had begged sleep to take her hostage, but she was tormented with questions. Sleep must have eventually come, for she awoke in the middle of the night, clawing at her throat until the skin tore and dark red pooled under her fingernails. She was delirious with the thought of worms crawling down her oesophagus and drowning in stomach acid because, actually, she knew the mincemeat was there all along and there was no point trying to fool her; the illusion was cracked and there was nothing that she could have done to stop it. Just like the mincemeat, her incessant questioning of the Locketless would slip past her lips and into the atmosphere.

Luisa forced herself to swallow some water. Stood over the bathroom sink, she stared at herself in the mirror, playing dot-to-dot with the flecks of dried-on toothpaste. Michael's faux battle cries traipsed down the corridor and intruded her slightly inevitable mental break. Her eyes danced around the state of her neck, the remnants of blood congealed in tattered clumps. She grazed her stained fingernails against outdated Christmas pyjama bottoms, the polar bears now bearing wounds like her own.

She felt oddly uncomfortable being left with only her reflection to look at. There was a certain glaze in her expression, like she wasn't truly seeing into her own pupils but a projection of someone else's. Luisa pressed her nose up against the cool glass and took an unnaturally deep breath. Entranced, she watched the condensation from her breath evaporate and

reappear, evaporate and reappear, as steady as the faint ticking from the alarm clock. Eventually, her eyes travelled back down to the crime scene of her neck, and, inevitably, the heart-shaped locket that adorned it. Her exoskeleton. Something rarely scrutinised, something society have collectively, blindly, infuriatingly accepted. Something they should never open if they value their lives.

At that moment, she wanted nothing more than to tear it open. She could pry that locket open with blood-stained fingernails and unfiltered hatred for authority. Everything she had ever been taught seethed in the pit of her stomach, tying her intestines into slipknots; a plea not to unravel her life with one swift action, one momentary lapse in judgement.

So, she didn't.

Not yet.

Not until she would find out more.

# On Visiting My Mother's Grave

*Chris On*

31.03.19

it is like you are in prison.  
every year or so I dress up to visit  
grey walls and all  
we talk  
intermediated  
I am told you did not care for Mother's Day

24.06.21

I read you poetry  
a valediction forbidding mourning (rich not donne) one art  
and the one I wrote here last time  
my copy of rich has  
*Ruth Bridgewater*  
*29th December, 1993*  
on the inside cover

13.07.21

My father (alive) is with me  
He paces more than I usually would  
*Still plenty of space*  
I was behind him  
I imagine he was grinning

22.07.21

I did not talk this time, there were others  
they sang though  
raking

# Birth Rite

*Lily Page*

WHEN THINGS CAME OUT of the woods, they did not return the same. Like driftwood, they resurfaced stranger; re-hewn by soil and roots and small crawling things. A football, mummified by dark water, a twisted bone no one could identify, a three-legged fox with hollow, human eyes.

When Mary herself was spat from the treeline, caked in loam and the look of a prey animal, she brought something out with her. Something worse than starving foxes or strange bones. Something which curled its way inside her, nestled in blood and bone and gristle. Something breathing.

\* \* \*

They'd driven to the Dog and Bone that night, like always.

Phaedra had picked her up at the end of the lane, hidden round the trunk of a hollow oak tree in her funny little car. Everyone knew that car, the bumper and windscreen strung with bright fringing, which shook and trembled as she drove. It gave it the look of some affable, hairy dragon, like those raised on sticks in big cities on Chinese New Year.

The car's occupant had been just as conspicuous, dressed in shades of mismatched black, her lips smeared in a bloodthirsty colour like she'd been at someone's neck. She'd winked and grinned, flashing sharp white teeth, more than the usual amount.

‘Hello trouble.’ She greeted Mary like always – a partner in some joyous crime, though her reputation was quiet and grave. Her troublesomeness didn’t spark and free-wheel like Fee’s: it stewed, heavy and bog-wet.

She’d clambered into the passenger seat through the window; the door was still swollen shut from that summer. Fee had turned her ancient radio to its highest volume, blasting some chart-show neither recognized but sang flatly along with all the same. Mary had clumsily rimmed her eyes with a stub of kohl she kept hidden in Fee’s glove box and watched the rolling tape of tree trunks shutter past either side of the road.



# The Script

*Eleanor Richardson*

THE SUMMER CAME ARMED with thunderstorms. The woman on the radio said that it was the wettest summer they had seen for fifteen years. Amy felt the dark clouds press on her skin. The blossom dropped from the trees, making a pink avalanche over their little front garden.

Her show was being edited; her contribution was long over. It was in hard drives in London and Manchester and Cardiff, being chopped up and twisted round and pieced together. She imagined the editing rooms to be full of cigar smoke and typewriters. They would have overflowed wastepaper baskets and men in tortoiseshell glasses. In her dreams, the footage turned and turned, getting brighter and brighter until it burst.

She went back to Leeds a month early, saying it was to get a head start on her dissertation. It started to rain as her coach moved through Darlington. The drops splashed on the window, running down and joining other drops, swelling, changing direction, then pooling along the bottom of the glass. There was a shiny semicircle on the glass from where she had rested her forehead. She wiped it away with the sleeve of her jumper. She still had dormant fantasies of moving to France and changing her name, but she had barely scraped French at GCSE and hated the taste of wine.

Amy ate brown pasta, jars of tomato sauce and peas from the freezer, sitting in the front room with the light off. Sometimes, she would open the Word document where she had written her title and write a few words. Then she would press down on the backspace key in and hold it.

In her room, the radiator flitted between cold and so hot it burned her skin. It groaned like an animal or a storm. The damp problem in the house got worse. It spread out along the kitchen wall, giving the magnolia paint the look of creased paper. The damp smell took to her clothes, her hair, her pillows, her skin.

In the absence of writing, Amy searched for something else to do with her hands. After a fleeting love affair with macramé plant hangers and a brief battle with clay, she had discovered her nan's old crochet hooks. She started making a zoo of crochet animals as if everything was fine. The sloth only needed eyes sewing into his soft skull. He would join the lopsided Guinea pig, the little round bear, the fat sausage of a wombat, the cactus whose eyes hung from his head like they'd been pulled out, and a prototype spaniel that she had made in the shape of a friend's dead dog. It had a white spot over its left eye. The second attempt came out better. She had squashed it into an envelope and written 'I'm so sorry' on the card.

Some days she didn't eat and other days she felt so hollow that she could eat forever and never fill up. She tried to make herself sick by jamming a pencil down her throat. She would cough and sometimes wretch, but nothing ever came up. It felt strange, on her knees, looking at the green mildew growing on the hinges of the toilet seat. It felt romantic.

\* \* \*

One hot Tuesday in early September, she walked to the library and felt the urge to buy something from the rustic coffee van. It might have been that she had never bought anything from it before; she was going into third year now, so one day she'd run out of time. She sat at the break between bookshelves, between the Ms – Mandela, McCormick – and the Ps – Plath, Poe, Pratchett – and ate a triple chocolate brownie. She ate it all at once, without taking a breath. Then she pressed the crumbs into her finger and dabbed them onto her tongue. That felt romantic, too.

Her bag thumped against her lower back with every step walking home. The breeze smelt like weed, cut grass and cigarettes. There was a man sell-

ing water bottles out of a beer cooler. He had written 'Ice Cold Water, £1' on a piece of cardboard and sellotaped it to the front. As she watched, a group of shirtless, gleaming boys passed him a couple of notes. A group of girls lay back on their elbows, skin bronzing in the last of the sun.

There was an ice cream truck in the corner of the park, shaded by trees. He was charging £3.50 for a cone and £4 if you wanted a Flake in it. The queue wound and formed a semicircle. Her mum's voice echoed when Amy looked at it, so she mouthed along: 'daylight robbery, that was'. By the time she reached the road, the trees drew together and blocked it from her view. Her righthand neighbours were sat out on their front steps, drinking bottled beer. Two of them were lying in the garden, so wrapped up in each other you couldn't tell their limbs apart. Another had cleared a gap in the blossom to coax a flame out of a disposable barbeque tray. He was attempting to cook sausages on it. Most of his hair had broken free from his bun and flew out around his face like a kind of halo.

If she was a brave sort of person, a different sort of person, Amy would go out with a beer of her own and join them. They'd talk about what they studied and where they were from. Instead, a few of them raised their hands. She half-smiled back.



# Me Desperté a La Puesta Del Sol

*Annabelle Sandwith*

I HAVE FORGOTTEN HOW to write my own name. The pen feels foreign in my hand and my fingers are melting into its plastic ridges, preventing legibility. The documents staring up at me threaten to squeeze me into a box. Once I sign them, I will be a homeowner at 25. People keep telling me what an achievement that is. I'll be packed up and labelled, as if our lives are crammed into the precarious cardboard towers taking up every inch of space around me. I've squeezed myself into a gap on the floor between the sofa and one of the towers to read through the life sentence printed on the stack of papers in front of me. I sit with my legs stuck out in a V shape, the way I used to when I was reading as a child.

The carpet is gritty with bits of muck and grime after two days of traipsing up and down the stairs from the cellar to the living room, hauling up Aldi Bags for Life filled with Christmas jumpers, winter coats and camping gear that haven't survived the cellar. Dampness has covered them in furry green mould. Suddenly it seems completely ridiculous to pretend that there could be life in them ever again. Boxes of pots and pans that we didn't bother unpacking when we moved here last June are stacked up in the corner of the room, waiting. They too are wearing green, furry jackets; it seemed useless to unpack everything when we had plans to move into our own place within six months. The labels that I stuck on one sunny day last summer are peeling off and the boxes are collapsing into themselves from the dampness that has seeped into their bones.

I poke the bits of dirt around the fibres in the carpet with the end of my pen, avoiding the blank space next to your signature where I'm supposed to sign. Seeing my future written down like this makes my heart hurt. The solicitor's logo stamped in the top right corner of the document swims across the page, and the neat font that shows my name next to yours is spreading outwards. I've only got two hours until both sets of parents arrive to move the first load to the new place. The lines of the letters blur, the ink smudges, and I picture the way your face falls every time I call it 'the' new place rather than ours. I'm too far in now. Dulux paint charts and H.M Land Registry maps; life insurance advisors whose calls have gone unanswered every day this week; new towels; potted plants that my Mam's bringing down for the garden; the emptiness in the centre of my chest and the excitement in your eyes. Breathe in, breathe out. Reflexes are funny things.

I clench and unclench my hands into fists, forcing them into action, and swallow the acidic taste of bile or emotion that's trying to come out of my mouth. The air stinks of damp from the disintegrating boxes that are in danger of toppling. I breathe the stench in through my nose and push it out through my lips, imagining the spores of mould clinging desperately to my nostrils. I pick the pen up and sign my name next to yours. I can't feel my hands.

You walk into the room and visible elation consumes your face when you see the pen in my hand and my squiggle next to yours on the page. You wink at me and laugh, your beautiful eyes crinkling at the corners. My heart contracts and I push the tears back into my eyes. I push them deep down, into my stomach, into my feet, and into the ground beneath me. I cannot disintegrate now.

\* \* \*

You walk back from the bar with that cheeky grin of yours that wriggles all over my heart. You hand me a gin and tonic and remind me that this time tomorrow I'll be in Madrid. The skin across my throat feels too tight. You reach out to touch my face. I tell you I need the bathroom.

\* \* \*

By the time the seatbelt sign went off, I knew I had to fuck somebody else.





# The Weight of the World

*Thomas Scott*

‘OH, WE’RE GOING IN THERE,’ Mike said.

*There* referred to an obscenely expensive designer store. Dunnikans. It was made of black marble with a rope for queuing outside. The clothes in the window had price tags like small houses. A single look was enough for me to shake my head emphatically.

‘No way.’

‘Oh, come on, Is. Cheap stuff never lasts, and it’ll do us good to have something nice.’

‘I said no, Mike. It’s all false economy anyway, it’s the same stuff as another shop.’ Suddenly I was fourteen again, purchasing a ridiculous pair of shoes with even more ridiculous ribbons on the front – which fell off the first time I wore them out. They’d cost me two months’ wages.

‘What about you, Cat?’ Mike said. ‘Fancy something nice?’

‘Well, I—’ she mumbled.

The two youngest with us, Sammy and Tanya, silently followed the discussion like a tennis rally.

‘Don’t be shy,’ Mike said.

‘I wouldn’t mind a look,’ Cat said.

Guilt began eating me as soon as she spoke. After the first night at the Cornerstone, she hadn’t so much as looked at me, let alone speak. I had to turn away to hide my berry-red face.

‘Fine,’ I said. ‘Let’s be quick.’

Sammy, Tanya and Mike all cheered like kids getting sweets. At least two of them were kids. The Terror Twins, as I'd privately nicknamed them; they bore no relation but might as well have been attached at the hip. Mike usually reigned them in, and even if I tried, I couldn't stay mad at them. Their energy expressed itself as infectious enthusiasm.

Cat and I walked after the trio – apart – and we stepped into the relative gloom of Dunnikans. It was partly ransacked, clothes torn from hangers and strewn about the floor. I marched directly across them, smirking at Cat's attempts to dodge the carpet of expensive items. Mike stood like an explorer with his hands on his hips.

'I wish I could have done this before,' he said.

'You've got a blank cheque,' I said. More sternly, I added, 'Don't prat about. Get something useful.'

'Yeah, will do,' Mike said, already neck-deep in a display.

I grabbed his shoulder and pulled him out. 'Seriously, Mike. We can't afford to f–' I looked back at the twins. '– mess about.'

'Alright, Issy. I'll be good.'

I would never admit it but I saw the appeal. This place had everything. Coats, bags, pants, tops, skirts, dresses, shoes. Oh, god, the shoes. Pumps and heels of every style and colour. High boots, low boots, trainers, sandals. You name it, they had it.

My fingers tingled at a pair of scarlet heels. Forcing my hands into my pockets, I headed to the arrays of warm, waterproof coats. The parkas were specially made, full of downy bird feathers. Cashmere scarves and jumpers hung next to thick woollen hats and gloves.

The temptation was too great. It made sense to change: my – well, Lacy's – clothes were filthy and barely fit. I traded them for a polo and some leggings, topping it off with a body warmer. One look in a mirror nearly made me laugh. I'd never looked quite like this, even before the apocalypse.

It was stupid, but I felt in control. Things had rapidly spiralled after we took things into our own hands. Who knew teenagers would struggle to fend for themselves? Yet having a fancy new wardrobe – and a practical one, at that – was a welcome addition.

Mike had a point. Not that I'd let him know that.

I pocketed a cute bobble hat and fur-trimmed gloves, too, then filled my arms with overcoats. There was a sharp scream from my right. I dropped everything and bolted through the store. Mannequins and displays formed a maze. Everywhere I turned, something got in my way. Wrestling aside a stack of boxes, I finally burst free.

Sammy and Tanya were giggling beside a mirror. It became immediately clear why. They'd stumbled upon Cat trying on a pair of incredibly impractical, incredibly stylish trousers. She raised her hands with a sheepish smile.

'How do they look?'

'Great. You look great,' I said, turning red as the trousers.

The selection of jeans beside me exploded. Mike waved his bat around wildly.

'I'm here, I'm here. Is everything okay?' Seeing Cat, he paused. The twins giggling turning into convulsive laughter. Mike scowled, halfway through extricating a pair of jeans from around his neck.



# Vienna's Ball Season

*Audrey Seligmann*

## SCENE 1

EXT. - VIENNA'S STREETS - NIGHT

CHARLOTTE, a poor young woman, wearing an old sailor's cap and a ripped coat, walks down a busy street.

Charlotte walks in front of a multimedia shop. A TV is showing the news about the Royal family. The headline: Prince Maximilian Friedrich Kaiser will be representing the Royal family at the Opera Ball.

A WOMAN with too much in her hands walks in Charlotte's direction. Charlotte shoves a passerby onto the Woman, and she falls.

The man GRUNTS and leaves.

CHARLOTTE

Are you all right Madam?

Charlotte kneels and helps the woman.

THE WOMAN

Dear! Some people have no respect.  
He didn't even apologize.

Charlotte shoves some things in her pockets and hands the rest to the woman.

CHARLOTTE

There you go, let me help you up.

## VIENNA'S BALL SEASON

THE WOMAN

Thank you dear, your generation might still have a chance. Let me give you something for your trouble.

The woman starts to go for her purse.

CHARLOTTE

No, please, don't worry about it. Have a good day.

THE WOMAN

Well, thank you.

Charlotte starts walking faster.

A phone VIBRATES. Charlotte takes out an old phone from her inside pocket. A text from 'C.S.' is on the screen: 'The Grand Duke, 30 minutes.'

CUT TO:

## SCENE 2

INT. - APARTMENT - NIGHT

Inside an open floor apartment, ISABELLA, hair undone, wearing glasses, a headset, and a big jumper is sitting at a desk. She TYPES quickly on a keyboard, with several screens in front of her; a video game on the centre screen, and code on the rest.

ISABELLA

Shit! Shit! Shit!

Her character dies on the computer screen, a flash message appears: GAME OVER.

ISABELLA

No! Okay, well I'm done for the night, bye guys.

She takes her headset off, walks to the kitchen, and opens the fridge.

CUT TO:

### SCENE 3

INT. - HEAVEN, AN UNDERGROUND QUEER NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

The electro MUSIC is loud, the lights are FLASHING. STEFANO, curly sweaty hair, make up and tight leather pants, is dancing with a PARTNER, in a crowd full of sweaty people.

STEFANO

I NEED A DRINK!

PARTNER

WHAT?

Stefano points at the bar, the partner nods.

Stefano dances away to the bar and grabs his phone. A text from Charlotte: *Be home in an hour.*

He grabs the attention of the bartender.

STEFANO

Shot of tequila.

He shots the drink.

CUT TO:

### SCENE 4

EXT./INT. - THE GRAND DUKE PUB - NIGHT

Charlotte walks into the pub, the place is nearly empty, except for a couple of drunks, the BARKEEPER, and a MAN in a far corner, nursing a whiskey.

Charlotte sits in front of the man.

## VIENNA'S BALL SEASON

MAN

I said 30 minutes.

CHARLOTTE

I was busy. What do you need done?

The barkeep walks to their table and stands between Charlotte and the Man.

BARKEEPER

Wha' can I get ya?

Charlotte smiles innocently.

CHARLOTTE

Your finest whiskey, neat, and  
some nuts, please.

The barkeeper goes back to the bar and pours a drink.

The man takes a paper out of his jacket and hands it to Charlotte. She opens it and takes a look.

CHARLOTTE

Am I supposed to know what that is?

The Man ignores her.

The Barkeeper comes back with the order and leaves without a word.

Charlotte eats LOUDLY.

MAN

The boss wants it. The only thing you and your little gang need to know is that it is currently on the Prince's finger, and He wants it in his hand by Monday.

CHARLOTTE

The Prince? Is he joking?



MAN

He doesn't joke. That should be  
enough to get whatever you need  
for the job.

The Man hands Charlotte an envelope. She checks inside  
the envelope before she puts it away.

MAN

The Opera Ball is this Friday, you  
might want to check it out.

CHARLOTTE

We don't deal with royalty.

MAN

He'll pay you double.

Charlotte looks at him.

MAN

And 2 months' rent.

CHARLOTTE

50% up front.

The Man gives her a look, reaches in his pocket, counts  
some bills.

MAN

30%, you'll get the rest upon  
delivery.

CHARLOTTE

Deal.

MAN

Monday. 10 am. Do not be late.

The Man hands her the cash, gets up, pays for the  
drinks and leaves.

Charlotte walks out, her glass untouched.



# Untitled

*Elena Semerdzhieva*

EVER SINCE I WAS LITTLE, I've had this debate with my mother about whether you could use all your senses to feel something inevitable. My grandmother always felt nauseous when an earthquake was about to happen. Not like the way you feel when you drink too much, or when you go to the public swimming pool and snort all the chemicals in the water; she said it was more of a brain trigger. Like when someone you love scratches your hair or bites you gently on the neck. But it felt like a dragged fork onto the cleanest surface in the world. Mom said it was nonsense and yet she could always tell when the soup was too spicy just by looking at the edges of the pot. Hypocrite. Fucking hypocrite.

I said I could smell coldness. And it's true, I still can. Not to be confused with those old bourgeois ladies that stand out in front of the community blocks with holes on their robes and tear your life apart while drinking old tea with cold skimmed milk. They all know when it is going to rain, because you see, their knees hurt. In those autumn dark days, you can see their windows lightened up, hear the TV blasting and smell burning tobacco. But the smell of rain and the smell of coldness are very different. The cold doesn't smell like gingerbread houses, caramelized apples or freshly cut pines. It smells like an empty house and stolen candles from the church. These scents remind you of those nights years ago when you were only thirteen and spent Christmas with your ginger cat alone, sleeping on the floor next to the oven because no one paid for heating. 'Bullshit, coldness is made to be felt. You probably smell the boogers in your nose.' Yes, my dear-

est mother. Coldness is made to be felt because it comes from the heart. Maybe that is what I smelled on my dad before he went to buy me that doll. I felt boogers in my nose as he said, 'I won't be long'. I can't wait to see that doll. It's probably priceless, given the fact that it's been fifteen years since I've heard his Honda Civic drive down the road.

Evil little man. Do you know how many days I've wasted on that same exact spot, next to the red bus station, hoping you would come? Do you know how many times I've asked my mother when you were arriving and received a slap on my lips afterwards? Do you understand how vile it is to make your own fucking child think she is the one responsible for your disappearance? And maybe Mom wouldn't have struggled so much with money if I just didn't ask you to buy me that doll. And maybe if I had been in my room, you would still be here. And maybe if I wasn't born, you would be happier. Cold. So, so cold.

I'm sitting at that rusty old bar with brown scratched chairs and look over to the barman. He has already recognized me. I give him a brief smile and look away to my right. The light from the lamps dances shyly on the garden walls and onto the smiles of the drunken folks here. They didn't change the decoration. It has always been planets made from paper, questionably attached to the ceiling. The red poster reads 'Another Christmas under the stars. Happy hour on Christmas Eve (from 18–21)'.

'These are not stars,' I roll my eyes. The bartender puts a small round glass in front of me with a liquid that has a sprinkle of a yellow tone. I take a sip and turn around. Laughter, shine, joy, people eager to get pissed. The finest drinking culture. Ladies with short dresses open the door and get a taste of cold fresh air. One of them stumbles on the stairs and falls. Beautifully done. Bravo. Such a graceful acrobatic finish. A white shirt guy fights through the toughness of the stairs as he reaches to help her. His zipper is unbuttoned but the white knight grabs his lady by her arms and lifts her as she tries to portray some type of emotion other than embarrassment. Everyone laughs again. His hands are on her waist, keeping her tightly next to him. He smiles thirstily at her and her giggle sounds like they just made a deal. The transaction is in progress, you pay for my drinks and keep me

alive and I help you finish in the bathroom? Sounds good to me.

I search for a particular pair of eyes. The lonely, drunken eyes that are ready to kneel down for everything, just to not go home alone tonight. I crave lonesomeness, sadness, fatigue. I want to see despair. I want to taste empathy and melancholy. I want to sink into the filth of human hopelessness. I want to dance in your brain naked and pull the strings of your faith. I want to give you the pleasure, the confidence, the pure enjoyment for those heavenly ten minutes. You are a God. You have a fragile stripped body between your fingers. You own it now because you can do whatever you want with it, therefore it is yours. Right?

I stumble upon a greyish gaze with heavy bags under it. Thirtyish. Light hair, frustrated smile, underweight body. I call him in my head and he lifts his head. We lock eyes. He looks at the empty chairs next to me, then back at my face, my rusty-blond hair, my waist, my legs covered with black tights. He smiles to himself. 'Look what I caught.' We stare at each other some more as we are trying to wordlessly communicate. Exchange some form of force, although neither of us care enough. We are fetishizing the unknown, the unspoken.

As he is about to ask me if I'm alone, I look away. Can't let him know too much. He needs to have a reason, a hook to eat on because men are not able to do shit 'just because'. They need a valid motive, a purpose. They embody rationalism, the brain, logic, matter. They need the stability of the object that can be touched, unzipped, stripped, used, crushed, torn and onto the next one, we go. My peripheral vision notices movement. Game on.

He puts both his elbows on the bar. Typical. Nervous laugh. Playful smile. Don't look at him yet, they like to fight for attention; no one likes easy prey. His fingers are touching mine and he puts his hand on my back.

Got you.



# Untitled

*Alice Silkstone*

I HAD BEEN WATCHING them dredge the lake for three hours now.

Granted it was my job and granted I had ordered the search; the anticipation still stung in the same way the air from the lake smacked at my skin. We knew she was in there, my team and I. They were confident from the signs of struggle at the water's edge. The scrap of her grey puffer coat that was caught in the bush, a little to the left of where her heel marks were indented in the malleable mud, erased as the water lapped on the banks. Her phone – nowhere near the lake but still in the park, switched on, abandoned. A half-dialled number still present on the cracked screen.

I knew because I'd dragged her in there, obviously.

In hindsight, it was probably a good thing I had joined them last minute for the local pub quiz last night. Though it hindered my plans enormously, made me late for my date in the dark, and left me slightly but noticeably hungover – it also provided me with an alibi my team would consider 'air-tight', if something horrendous were to unexplainably occur and I were to suddenly find myself in hot water.

Evidently, after I stumbled into the taxi they ordered for me, waving my goodbyes and apologising for leaving early, it didn't occur to any of those bright sparks that I would go anywhere other than home. Nobody had texted to check or even asked this morning. They were all blissfully unaware and ready to accept everything I told them as truth. If it weren't for the fact that their ignorance often worked favourable wonders, I might stop to

ponder the fact that I most likely shouldn't have these people working for me.

Icy gulps of air penetrated my throat. As I exhaled, gasps of breath made their way through the surroundings and towards the lake, where they stopped just short, and mingled with the foggy sky that engulfed the banks. Cold and boredom danced hand in hand, foxtrotting over my tingling nose, waltzing down to all ten of my toes wrapped in layers and layers of fluffy socks. The wind made my eyes water, scratching and pricking skin exposed to its grip, knifing and squeezing any warmth that attempted to prevail. The elements played havoc on my emotions that already threatened to spill over the surface, egging on the frustration and exhilaration that bubbled beneath my calm demeanour.

I knew that it couldn't be much longer. I didn't weigh her down. And just as the cold began to tango its way down my spine, there was a muffled yell from somewhere past the curtain of mist.

'Over here.'

The excitement had begun.



## Q: Am I Ready to Wake Up?

*Olga Sjodal*

IN CHURCH THEY TEACH YOU that you are born bad and inherently made to sin. It is out of love that God sacrificed his only son for you – all you must do is believe in him. It is hard to think of yourself as anything else other than mistakes and faults through this lens. If you surrender to Christianity, they even make you say over and over again: ‘forgive me father, for I have sinned’ and ‘forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us’. I was born as a mistake. To be born is a sin.

But my worst fear is not to surrender to God, but to be rejected by him: ‘You are not worthy of salvation,’ you can hear God whisper in your ear. Remembering sin after sin like one remembers a dream (fragmentally and vividly), unsure of how you got from one memory to the next. ‘You are a broken remnant,’ you can hear God whispering in your ear. You try to fix it. You shower and shower and scrub and scrub and scrub until every part of your body hurts and your skin starts to peel and become bright red and you pretend you can wash the bruises away (you can no longer see the outlines of it, but you can still feel it) and your hips hurt for some reason you don’t know. Your body aches of shame and it hurts when you pee and you are scared but you are more ashamed than you are scared. You hate to change, to undress, to become so painfully aware of that area where it all happened: so you will not tell anyone. You can’t make yourself touch it / to say it out loud / to be there again and again and again and again. Still remembering the residue of shame, lingering at the tips of your tongue when you wake up next to him.

You are no longer a girl, you are Ashamed.

So, you hide in the palms of your hands. Physically distancing yourself from the terrible burden of shame, the grief of vanished innocence.

You promise yourself to never speak of what happened. From then on, it is referred to as The Unspeakable. A crucial part is to never let anyone know what happened to you. The more people who know the more real it becomes and the harder it becomes to deny it; telling the world about him, telling God about him, would be an act of telling on yourself. You can conceal your mark of shame with silence (I can still see the mark of shame in the palms of my bleeding hands, but I will never show you.) For very brief moments you can pretend it never happened but you will always blame yourself for being the kind of person who could make this mistake possible.

## Fourteen

*Poppy Storrar*

I WAS 14 WHEN I TOLD MY FATHER he would never see me again. As if the roof of an incredulously and notoriously rickety cottage had finally subsided through a blunt and poorly constructed text message. Looking back perhaps I wrote a paragraph, perhaps simply a sad face and middle finger emoticon. Sitting in the biting cold on a creaky metal swing in West Yorkshire, pondering on whether to change my life forever. Midst apology text for the dark marks on my arm that made his heart heavy, my fingers seemed to never reach the S key, as if it had evaporated from the keyboard like a spillage in the sun and my finger began dancing like flapper girls in the jazz age. I never thought of myself as a hysterical or overly emotional woman due my worryingly placid reactions to the traumas of my life; however, in that moment, control seemed like a word only spoken of by the religious or those of unreasonable wisdom. Perhaps in truth I was impulsive, as although we are not said to be defined by a single moment, Guy Fawkes is not known for all the times he decided not to blow up Parliament. In a defining moment, I was irrational. What if I stopped typing? What if my phone died? What if my fingers stopped fucking dancing when there was no fucking music and the rest of my body stayed still? Why couldn't my father hit me without guilt? Why couldn't have he just been a remorseless abuser instead of one always trying to stitch wounds that he opened?

I confess that him never seeing me again may have been slightly hyperbolic. Even though I consider myself a mildly intelligent woman, I failed to consider that I may still encounter my father as we lived in the same

town. In my defence 'you'll never see me again' sounds slightly more impactful than 'I don't want to see you anymore, but we may inevitably run into each other in Tesco or the cinema'. After my text we never truly exchanged words, not that we did very often beforehand. He became a face, a particularly sharp needle in the haystack that pricked me one too many times. Although I didn't know it then, one day my mother would become another needle. At the ripe age of 14, I thought it best to not disown both parents for the purpose of housing and food, and although a rather tight, neck and neck decision, I opted to alienate the abuser and not the cold, extremely irritating parent: a decision I frequently considered incorrect.

I was 17 when I had my heart broken for the first time. It occurs to me now that it wasn't heartbreak at all, but I'm not going to rename the event upon a realisation of foolish adolescence. It was more of a 'wailing and sad music' reaction to a breakup than a rebounding weight-loss one – perhaps more so than my pride will let me admit. This is pathetic considering being let down by men was already half the pages in my autobiography at that point. Perhaps I was in love after all. For a fleeting moment I was marginally less lonely.

His name was Isaac. His eyes were grey enough to make you overlook the redness of his sclera and the astonishing size of his pupils. A large silver ring jutted out of his nose, his hair dark and tousled as if it hadn't seen a hairbrush in weeks (when I asked him, he stated with pride it had in fact been months). His lips tasted of smoke and strawberries. I seldom saw him without the world looking soft around the edges and my brain feeling slightly less heavy. Gargantuan dark circles lined his eyes, his lungs heavy, his kidneys screaming, his fingers skeletal. He never smiled with his teeth. 'A woman of taste,' some have called me. However, I believe those people were a minority in contrast to those who thought it was ridiculous that I saw nothing but my school and my bedroom ceiling for months over a boy who didn't wash his hair and was never sober. Although I would like to think he wasn't a regret, he was just an Isaac.

I remember one day we were on the roof of an abandoned factory. The dingy browns and greys of the estate surrounding us, frostbite knifing my

skin despite wearing his thin corduroy jacket. Delicate snowflakes clung to his eyelashes. I had worn mascara that day, even though I seldom had the time or desire for makeup, but it had occurred to me he had never called me beautiful, and we had been sleeping together for nearly two weeks. Prick.

‘Do you like living here?’ he asked me lightly.

His question sat in my head lazily as if having had a very long journey from his mouth to my ear. I had always visualised a life different from my own but had never imagined a day where it wouldn’t be fictitious. Articulating this to a boy who believed Nelson’s Column commemorates Nelson Mandela seemed a ridiculous feat. I realised two minutes had passed since he’d asked me the question.

‘I suppose so,’ I replied. ‘I’m not sure what would take me elsewhere.’

‘You like art,’ he shrugged. ‘Not much of it here.’

In that moment, I realised someone had observed me enough to deduce I was interested in art. A feat that no one in my life had achieved thus far. Someone had caught a smile on my lips as I studied paints and pastels. Suddenly, I didn’t care if he thought I was beautiful because I knew either way, he’d been looking at me. That night when he snuck into my house, my adolescent brain pondered if anyone had ever loved anyone that much, a thought I’m sure would have had Romeo and Juliet turning in their graves. We broke up 2 months later. No one has asked me about art since.

I was 23 when I broke someone’s heart. The night before my wedding the dress looked like a cage. I didn’t try it on every night in the days leading up to that day that was meant to be ‘the day’ but never managed to be. The cake began to look like a takeaway at 5am when every chain is closed and only the hygienically ambiguous kebab shop in town is open but you’re so desperate for food, not having it is simply impossible. The world would cave in without that shitty kebab. Women in villages would weep. Only after several blinks and a large glass of water did the flawless white sponge and delicate frosting slide back into my peripheral vision. I think I preferred the kebab. Butterflies in your stomach are a myth. Only if butterflies gained an astronomical amount of weight, stopped fluttering and began simply

dragging the pit of your stomach like an anchor would I consider the statement to be true, and if that were to occur, I'd consider reconstructing the definition of butterflies in your stomach.

The concept of marriage was another one I struggled with this night: a last-minute thing to contemplate given the circumstances of my life at the time. I had always assumed that materialistic people married for money; anxious people for stability; idealistic people for love; drunk people for good stories in 50 years. However, as a person who didn't consider myself especially materialistic, anxious, idealistic or drunk, I wondered why I was getting married. Perhaps I was stupid. Perhaps I was a category of my own. Don't automatically assume my husband is a terrible person. One does not have to be abusive nor neglectful for you to not marry them. The elderly postman from my childhood was a lovely man but I wasn't thrilled at the prospect of waking up to him for the next 40 years. James was simple, kind. The kind of t shirt that was never your favourite, but you can't seem to throw away in case one day it grows on you; a slightly unwanted yet painfully well-meaning present.

The prospect of children was another. The fact that marriage automatically seemed to lead to having children as if committing to be with someone for the rest of your fucking life wasn't pressure enough. I didn't see myself having kids. Feeding, clothing, bathing a child, only for 31 and a half years later for them to be lying on a hotel room bed, pondering over pressure to have children. My children would also have a dramatic lottery of taking after me or their father. Would reliable, placid, mundane, or highly unproblematic make up their character? Or would they be indecisive, erratic, contradictory, lonely. Lucky is a word I'm not sure would come up often.

Family opinions. The fable that at 18 comes true independence, even more so at 21. The illusion that freedom didn't only come with strings attached but disapproving glares and sullen comments. Strings become iron bars. Biting insults behind mock concern. Marriage, in my mind, broke some of these bars. Instead of being trapped in your home, searching for a man to please your mother knowing her expectations of wealth and man-

ners, to being trapped in your home, searching for things to clean to please your husband, knowing his expectations of cleanliness and superiority.

The night before my wedding, the room would fill with excitable women brandishing brushes and wands. Beaming smiles from people who didn't know me and fake ones from those who did. Knowing that this marks a new beginning, less kebab shops and more baby books.

I left through the window. James never called.





# Part One, Part Two, Part Three

*Mckenna Timm*

## PART ONE

*you're not going to be some sort of  
feminist,  
are you?*

he spits out that  
word as if throwing it up  
the bile in his mouth  
practically visible  
from where you're sitting

your brother knows the answer  
to his question  
already  
that's why he's  
asking and why  
his face is red

you're young and too scared  
to do anything but  
force a laugh  
and you shake your head  
no

## PART TWO

*she's a fucking idiot*  
your dad says about the  
news reporter on the tv

the room smells of red wine  
and the empty bottle  
next to him  
seems larger than you

you've never heard him swear  
like that before  
you tell yourself  
that he was slurring those words  
when he said them  
hoping that the alcohol hadn't  
worn off  
yet

## PART THREE

you grab overflowing bins from  
the trunk of your aunt's car  
and set them in the garage  
of her new house

the rooms are bright and the windows are  
open  
these walls don't know  
your aunt's ex-husband's face or  
the sound of his controlling  
voice  
and you think that your aunt must  
revel in the silence

you want to congratulate her  
for leaving  
but you don't want to  
remind her  
of him,  
at least not  
in this new home



# Healing

*Amy Williams*

*Dear Body,  
You were never my clay to mould, bend, break.*

The slow shift: innocent alterations.  
Convincing everyone – and myself –  
Lies we pretended to believe.

The spiral followed: bones swimming in tar.  
Brittle fingernails and unfocused eyes –  
I became currency. Insisting nothing was wrong.

Addicted: crumbling to glass shards.  
Head wrapped in skin – layers and layers of it –  
Suffocating every pore.

My throat caked in a plastic wrap of bile,  
Vision blotched with ink. Still lips frozen  
Into a sick smile.

Needle and thread to repair the damage,  
Muttering a million apologies, crying a million more tears.  
Breathing air into the lungs of a corpse.

*You were never my puzzle to change into a different picture  
From the one you were supposed to be.*

## Biographies

**ALEX AFFLECK** is a mature student, having waited until she retired to finally start studying. She has loved her time at Leeds and can't quite believe it is nearly at an end. She is hoping to continue writing fiction in the future.

**RACHEL ASTBURY** has been writing poetry since she was a child in lieu of keeping a diary. She spends much of her free time painting and admires the ability to abstract subjects – something she values in all of her creative work.

**HANNAH BACON** recently discovered her love for script writing and particularly enjoys experimenting with naturalistic and humorous dialogue. Her favourite writers include Sally Wainwright, Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Caroline Aherne. One day, Hannah hopes to bring home the bacon by writing sitcoms and theatre productions. In her spare time, she enjoys supporting The Mighty Blades and spoiling her dwarf hamster, Stella.

**AIMS BARRATT** is a student on the BA English Literature with Creative Writing.

**LUCY BULMER** loves Austen, hates Coleridge, and will not hesitate to lecture anyone who likes anything written by Colleen Hoover. In Lucy's ideal world she would get to tell the public what to read, everyone would talk in limericks, and STEM would be criminalised and outlawed. Only artists, poets and film-producers would be allowed to exist, unless they're called Samuel, Taylor or Coleridge (or all those names put together). Also, nobody would have to go to school on Mondays.

**MACKENZIE CALE**'s short story 'Blackfoot' is taken from his first novel attempt, *The World Spider's Name is Abyss*. It is a retelling of Native American tribal mythology.

**KIMBERLY CAMPANELLO** is Associate Professor of Creative Writing and a member of the Poetry Centre at the University of Leeds. She was the inaugural editor of *Tenter Hook*. Her poetry and autofiction have appeared most recently in *The London Magazine*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The White Review*, and *The Cambridge Literary Review*. *MOTHERBABYHOME*, a collection of 796 conceptual and visual poems on the St Mary's Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, Co. Galway, was published by zimZalla Avant Objects in April 2019.

**JASMINE CHEEMA** is a student on the BA English Literature with Creative Writing.

**KATE COOPER** has been reading and writing fiction from a young age. Since beginning her studies at Leeds, her focus has shifted to poetry, for which she primarily takes inspiration from classical Latin poetry and female poets of the latter 20th century.

**HANNAH DAY** (she/her) was born in North East England where she ran wild in the back fields and read under moonlight. She devours literature, writes obsessively and is mother to stories about girls and their monsters. She is currently drafting her first novel, provisionally titled *The Nature of Self and Sin*, which stars a vengeful Northern woman and her guardian monster.

**ELINA DIMITROVA** decided to be a writer when stories became predictable, and she thought she could do better. She was convinced it would be easy and fun. After years of studying Creative Writing, she has learned from her mistakes and laid down to rest the thought that anything is, in essence, easy. It has been fun though, and she hopes you enjoy her writing too.



**LILY FEHIM** has been exposed to books and writing her entire life thanks to her writer mother. She likes creating short pieces and has experimented with many different writing styles since the beginning of her early teenage years. She has enjoyed broadening her exposure to classic literature via her A-Level in English Literature before coming to study in Leeds.

**SARA FRISCH** was born and raised in Koblenz, Germany, and moved to England to study. Her favourite writers are Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickenson, the Brontë sisters and Oscar Wilde. Apart from literature, she is interested in politics, philosophy and astronomy.

**ISOBEL GAUL** grew up in Preston, Lancashire, and has loved reading and writing from an early age. She enjoys travel, walking her dog and being in nature. She uses writing as a way to express her creativity and emotions and hopes to one day write a novel.

**JASMINE GIBBS** is a writer from a small seaside town in Norfolk. Her poems and essays have been printed in local indie zines. Her love of descriptive language and the complexities of individual and social issues influences her work heavily as it focuses on brutal realities. She also enjoys photography, music and collecting insignificant objects.

**BRETT GREATLEY-HIRSCH** is Associate Professor of Renaissance Literature and Textual Studies. He sheepishly agreed to take on the production of *Tenter Hook* back when it was in its infancy. Little did he realise, several years later, the BA English Literature with Creative Writing programme would keep growing. When not doing *his own* work on obscure Renaissance texts, he plays folk music and spoils his herd of guinea pig rescues.

**MEGAN HAYNE** loves Charles Dickens, hates John Donne, and has a personal vendetta against poetry because it makes her feel a little bit too soppy

for her own good (and that goes for both writing and reading it). She read Caitlin Moran's *How to Build a Girl* once and hasn't shut up about it since.

**IZAAK HURRY-GREENHOUGH** is a Leeds-based pansexual writer of all things fantastical, psychological and forbidden. Being an avid reader of Arkady Strugatsky and George Orwell, it is safe to say his writing often involves themes of disillusionment and authoritarian control. His work is not limited to the page, however; from his background of dabbling in script writing, video-game writing and video-game writing journalism, he is certainly prepared – and excited – to create new worlds in the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror.

**SOPHIE LEADSFORD** is a student on the BA English Literature with Creative Writing.

**EVE LIZARD** is a trans lesbian writer, musician, optimist, and child of the Internet. Blending the lyrical and the abstract, her work tends towards identity, technology, the strangeness of the everyday, and intersections between the personal and political. She hails from Norfolk but calls Leeds more than home, and is a proud committee member for the Bone Down literary affinity group. She is a little bit obsessed with bass guitar, staring at the sky, loving, and being friends with absolutely everyone ever.

**GRACE MARSH** is a twice published poet and freelance author, who enjoys reading, crocheting and learning languages in her spare time. She writes about disability, sexuality and bereavement, amongst other things, all of which are very apparent across her body of work.

**CAMILA MCCOSKER** is a student on the BA English Literature with Creative Writing.

**LUCY MCLAUGHLIN** enjoys writing short stories and prose poetry with a focus on social realism. She has been inspired by contemporary writers

such as Kit De Waal, Zadie Smith and Arundhati Roy.

**KELLY ROSALYN MOORE** is a writer constantly enamoured with questions of love and loss. Her novel-in-progress, *Heart-Shaped Locket*, is her first attempt at paying homage to the dystopian genre. She likes to hand-write poetry on the bus and hide it from strangers, only to post it on her writing blog later that day. She has lustrous dreams of publishing and Frank O'Hara is her true poetic love.

**KATE NEWELL** is an aspiring poet, novelist, and scriptwriter – meaning she doesn't know exactly what she wants to do but is ambitious anyway. Having enjoyed poetry and fiction from an early age, Kate takes inspiration from art and people. She is especially obsessed with the works of Caitlin Moran, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Jane Austen, and the poetry of John Keats.

**CHRIS ON** is from Whitley Bay in the North East of England. They are non-binary and enjoy the poetry of Emily Dickenson and Sylvia Plath.

**LILY PAGE** has loved words for as long as she can remember. She is interested the subversive potential of writing about nature and the human body. She divides her focus between prose fiction and poetry, having often combined words with her art practice during her foundation year before coming to Leeds.

**LILY PIERCE** is a writer from Norwich, now living in Leeds. She writes strange poetry and short fiction pieces, and enjoys spending time with her cat Pip.

**ELEANOR RICHARDSON** grew up in North Yorkshire where she fell in love with reading after devouring the Skulduggery Pleasant series. She is a Crime Fiction fanatic and is currently working on her first novel *Never Having Left*.

**CHARLIE RIVERS** is a poet and novelist studying English Literature with Creative Writing. Having been obsessed with fantasy since childhood, this degree has allowed Charlie to explore new ways of approaching the genre, and to expand his own skills and interests.

**ANNABELLE SANDWITH** is a musician and writer from the North East of England. Her work principally focuses on the ways in which humans interpret and interact with life and each other. Annabelle explores the spaces in between what is seen and what is experienced, using song, poetry and prose to navigate and communicate with the strange and wonderful world we are in.

**THOMAS SCOTT** grew up in the North-East of England and spends much of his time reading and writing. Whilst his tastes in media are focused on science fiction and fantasy, his creative interest centres on the development and exploration of character.

**VIC SCOTT** is a student on the BA English Literature with Creative Writing.

**AUDREY SELIGMANN** grew up in Switzerland and France, and she has a background in hospitality. Her passions involve writing, reading and traveling.

**ELENA SEMERDZHIEVA** grew up only knowing the boundaries of her small Balkan country. Although not having much when she was young, she developed a strong passion for reading literature and exploring its limitations. Her desire for writing led her to Leeds to pursue this degree.

**ALICE SILKSTONE** is originally from Sheffield. She aspires to be an English teacher in the future.

**OLGA SJODAL**'s favourite author and idol is Nobel prizewinner Sigrid Undset, whose novels often have a historic and archaeological perspective, something that Olga tries to incorporate in her work. Olga is currently writing drama.

**CAITLIN STOBIE** is a Lecturer in Creative Writing and Programme Leader for the BA English Literature with Creative Writing at the University of Leeds. She is the author of *Thin Slices* (Verve Poetry Press) and *Abortion Ecologies in Southern African Fiction: Transforming Reproductive Agency* (Bloomsbury Academic).

**POPPY STORRAR** grew up in Birmingham and much of her writing reflects family. She often discusses politics in her work as she took it at L-level.

**EZRA TAYLOR** is a short story and novel writer, with a particular interest in horror and ghost stories. He enjoys reading contemporary Gothic fiction and intends to create narratives that linger well beyond the final sentence. Growing up in South East London, Ezra has been writing ever since he could hold a pen, and now enjoys experimenting with fiction at the University of Leeds.

**ARIANA TEJADA VARGAS** is a Peruvian writer. She is passionate about art, literature, and nature. Even though Ariana's list of favourite authors is very long, she will always have a special place for Gabriel García Márquez. When she is not studying or writing, she can be found hiking outdoors.

**AISLING THOMPSON** is a student on the BA English Literature with Creative Writing.

**MCKENNA TIMM** grew up in Minnesota and has had a passion for literature from a very early age. She was the editor of her high school's poetry

magazine for three years, strengthening her love for poetry and writing. She hopes to work in literary editing in the future.

**UTA TSUKADA BRIGHT** has had a love for literature since childhood, a trait that was nurtured by her book-worm parents. An active imagination and plenty of daydreaming led her to be drawn to narratives and stories. With a primary interest in prose fiction, since studying English Literature with Creative Writing at Leeds University she has begun to explore writing poetry and creative non-fiction.

**AMY WILLIAMS** is a Swedish-English student who mostly writes short stories and poetry, though has been experimenting more frequently with a variety of different styles. Amy's favourite books and authors are constantly changing, but one of her current favourite writers is Haruki Murakami.

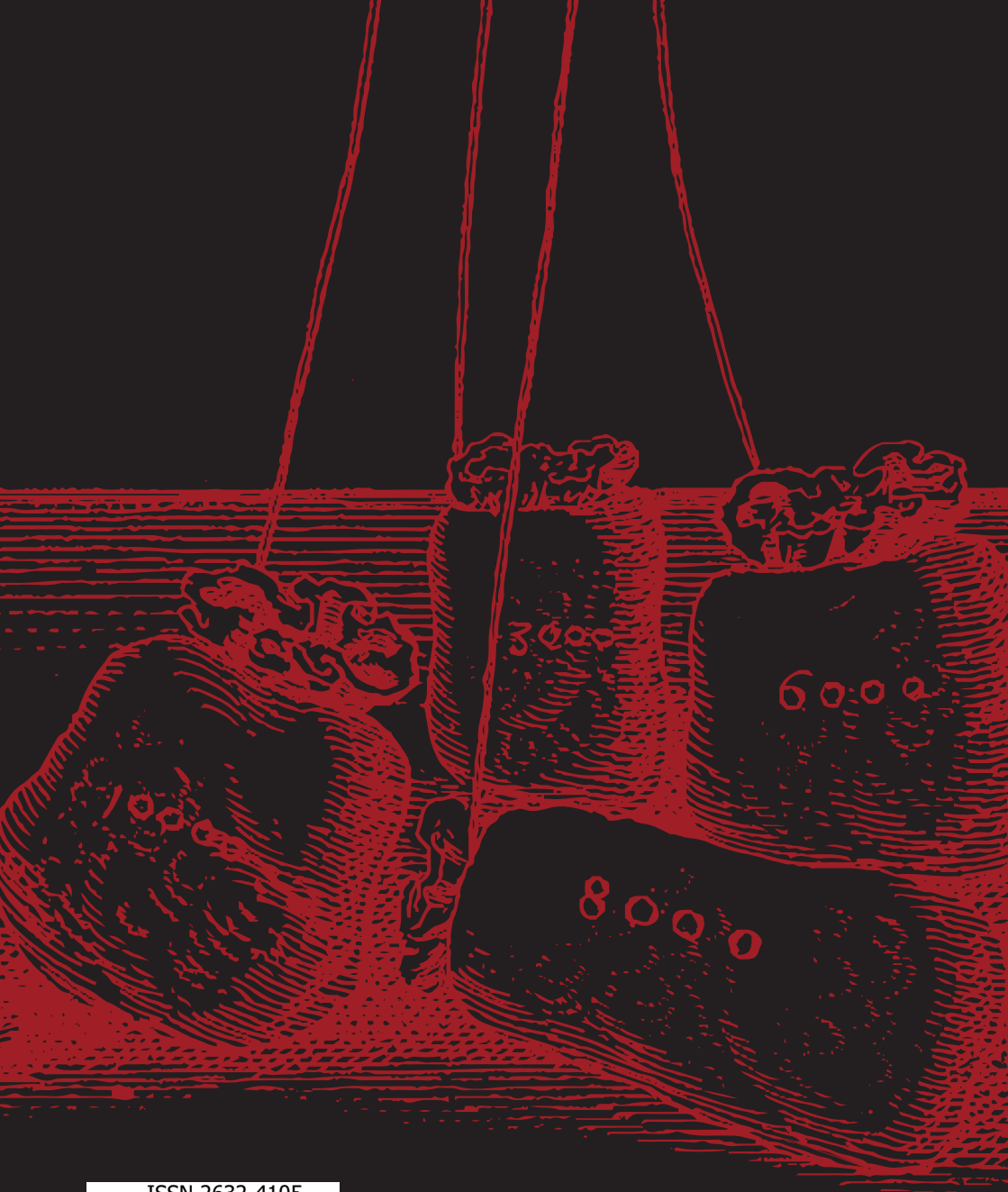
**EMMA WOOD** has found herself lost in the worlds of books her whole life. One of two writers in her family, Emma has enjoyed creating her own worlds in prose and poetry, and plans to one day compile these worlds together with her Grandad's. Emma plans to teach what she's learnt from the worlds she has visited in prose and poetry, both professionally and to anyone who will listen. Her favourite authors include Margaret Atwood, Jane Austen, Ernest Hemingway and Charles Dickens and she takes inspiration from nature, relationships, the unusual and the mundane.











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