



LIGHTHOUSE

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Niki Strange

Float

I lift each stem and snip a fresh angle. Enlivening. Water absorption. Walk dog. Video meeting. Self-view on or off? Swab the tonsils. Mind the tongue! One line or two? Driving into the night after that first loss. From two lines to one. Equals to a minus. Sliding on ice. The tree trunk's maw. Coppices like fists. Unload dishwasher. Go again. Second loss. Go. Blastocyst. Progesterone. He tries to land the needle in the top right quadrant of my buttock. Pillow bitten. Don't strike a nerve or I'll hit the ceiling. Bills. Bump. Bliss. Bedtime stories. Swings and roundabouts. And sandpits. Go again. Two lines. Oh yes. Oh gone. Holiday or running away. Stage I melanoma. I see the robin every day as I lie in bed. Skin grafted from thigh to shin. We laugh at the zombie bite but it scares kids on playdates. Club fucking Tropicana – we didn't know about UV damage. Buzzing tubes all over the 'burbs. Where are my glasses? Back up. Bake bread. Swab nostrils. Fetch. Throw. Fetch. Clap. Unload shopping. Flash eruption. Menopausal magma. I find them, eventually, among the potatoes. Run. Run across the sh-sh-shingle into the amniotic waves. And float.

Robin Knight

Deflation

And when I say party, I mean Party. Balloons, Jelly,
twister, your candyfloss, my wotsits,
saucers fly, gems ice, bananas
foam. Sherbert, sherbert,
more sherbert,

the whole piñata. I fumble the balloon's
slim neck: you clap your excitement.
I let go, chasing it from wall
to wall, bouncing
off the ceiling,

laughing, screeching, cursing. I barge you,
clamber the sofa, spring upwards
to snatch it like a fly.
Everything stops.
I uncurl

dank latex cupped lifeless in my hand.
The skin of a departed poltergeist.
I breathe deep and turn to show
you, but you're not
there.

Livvy Hanks

This is not what I ordered

Just as we were about to get back to normal
a sky full of hail split
all over the April day.
You pushed away the plateful
which had arrived cold,
you emptied it on the frozen ground.

The neighbours delivered a package
which had been left with them,
so tightly taped your teeth and nails were useless.
I passed you the damn scissors
but you threw them at the wall
where they stuck, beak embedded, flapping.

The package sat in the hall for three days
before I noticed the name and address weren't ours.
We took it in our turn to another neighbour –
she said *I would ask you in*
but I've a lot on my plate,
but in fact we could see down the hallway
there was nothing on her plates at all,
several lay smashed beside the skirting board,
ketchup congealing on one half-under the couch.
At least things are getting back to normal, we all said,
and she closed the door.

We trudged back home. All the scissors in the sky
had fallen silent, and the universe
had no record of our booking.

In the kitchen they are plating up
course after garish course.
Waiter, please don't bring us anything more.
Can't we bar the swing doors,
lean our heavy bodies against them
and weep in peace?

Beth Booth

Summoning Gods

Those trees look sad, you say
peering at the bare-stump branches,
pale faces where limbs have been
brutally abridged.

Sad like when you sawed at the hawthorn on the front drive. It stood there modelling
its own carcass for months. I don't think that tree ever dreamed of abundance like I did:
I think it knew it suited the lifeless gnarls of its useless trunk. But regardless of our love
for it or how it lent its name to our home, useless things have to come down eventually.

They do look sad, I agree.
The sky behind them is too big
and spare, too naked. The dog shits,
which curtails my unnecessary
philosophising. This used to be
the way home, but now we have been
rendered tourists.

It wasn't our tree after that. It pointed at the sky as though it was summoning gods. My
own gnarls tightened around our house that was itself one quarter dead, trying to prove
my own aliveness – trying to prove my use. The tree stood as a testament: there is only
so long you can make fruit for birds and flowers for brides before the energy runs out.

We turn back when the energy runs out,
which is quickly. I am always tired now,
and always hurting and always older
than I could have sworn I was
just a moment ago. My heart
is a rabbit-quick thing and this
well-worn path defeats me without trying.
I do not think this grief will settle.
I think it will burn the life out of me
bit by bit, until there is only
one great accusing arm left of me,
pointing at the sky.

Kathryn Anna Marshall

Incantation to save an old orchard

Draw down cunning of wren
Dryw, dryw, dryw,
Draw down spark eye of magpie
Dryw, dryw, dryw
Wander land
Listen breath
Dryw dryw dryw
Watch for slowworm
Watch for ground beetle
Dryw,dryw,dryw
Hear mew buzzards
keen over high
Dryw,dryw,dryw
Whisper together
Weave sound to steel
Dryw,dryw,dryw
Rain crackle through wood
Sun silent is it?
Dryw,dryw,dryw
link spirit
left far
Dryw, dryw, dryw

Ruth Wiggins

Remedies – the wives

We gather bog moss for bleeding. Swap it for candles,
charms on scraps of sheepskin. Charms that sleep on
the scrap till called into life by the wishing wif who
cannot. Watch the ink now, swaddled. The rise in its
chest as she calls it away from sleep.

Then. Off she goes! Says–

I leap over this dead man's freshly-dug, say *THIS my
remedy for bitter slow, THIS my remedy for will not
grow*

I say this myself

Then. Off she goes! Says–

I leap over you, my cock-hard man, say *up I go, step
over you, with a lively child not a lifeless one, a fat
child not an ill-fated one*

I say this myself

Then. Off she goes! Says–

*THIS, by Woden-Christ is done, THIS, by Woden-
Christ is done*

I say this myself

Then the charm, she tucks it in. Shushes it away to
sleep. Now the candlelit lying-in. Sweet caudle to her
lips for strength to sip. The mihtig wif, who can.

Max Lury

Good Christian Boys

Harwich, 1693

I mean, Peter says, it's a post-Salem world.

John nods. The black brim of his hat casts a shadow over his face. Over his shoulder hangs a dead rabbit, its feet bound together with thin hemp rope.

Everything's changed, John says. Everything's changed. Do you remember where you were?

Where I was when?

When you heard.

Ah, Peter says. Excellent question.

They stand on the bank of a broad river. Thin pine trees line the shore. Shafts of sun slip between them and fracture on the water. Peter takes a breath, bends over and plucks a long stem of grass from the dirt. His hands are plump, and the backs are covered in thick hair, and when he speaks his teeth are yellow tombstones. When he speaks it is in a voice that is used to being heard.

Well, I think I was on my way back from a walk I'd taken, and making my way up Red Pine Hill, and William came running down the path, and he was shouting about witches and the Devil in Salem and he kept saying, oh, drowned, can you imagine, all sunk like a stone, and I was all like, right William, I'm going to stop you right there - *slower* - speak slower, take your time. And then he told me that nineteen of them, I think, nineteen, were all dropped in and drowned, and actually that some were hung-

Hanged.

Sure, whatever. Hanged. Some were hanged, but the funny thing is-

I heard they were *all* hanged, John says.

Well, yeah, says Peter. That's the official narrative.

They stand for a while, saying nothing. Listening to the river, to the call of the birds.

We both know what I think about that, says Peter.

And they do.

A companionable silence now. John takes a couple of subtle steps back up the bank so that his eyes are level with Peter's. He can taste the morning's breakfast on his tongue; rye cereal splashed with goat's milk, a slice of tough bread, and a thick strip of greasy bacon that he'd eaten in secret behind the outhouse, so that he wouldn't have to put it on the trencher and share it with his father.

Peter gives a small shout. Ho! he says and makes his way towards the edge of the river.

Well, I never.

You never what?

Come and have a look for yourself, John.

And so John takes a few steps forward and crouches next to Peter and takes a look at what's washed up in the clear water of the shallows.

It's a small pile of human teeth, collected in a little divet in the mud. John can make out the distinct shapes of the different kinds he's learnt from the physicians who come through town every now and then; who would explain, holding a leech by the tip with metal tongs, the importance of regulating the humours, and who feed him spiderwebs in vegetable broth to treat the nosebleeds he sometimes gets when a storm is on the way.

Teeth, says John.

Yeah, says Peter. Looks like it.

Looks like an omen, if you ask me, says John.

Peter tuts and shakes his head.

You're sharp, John. You know who'd know about that?

Who?

Molly Goode.

They go to see Molly Goode, who lives on the outskirts of the village, amongst a copse of dead trees. She is pale and her hair is always greasy like the scales of dead fish. Her cousin lived in Salem and she was one of the first to hear about what happened. It doesn't hurt, either, that John's sweet on the girl. They talk in her doorway, giving a wide enough berth so as not to be improper.

Look, fellas, she says. I don't know what to tell you.

You don't know anything about it?

Yeah, she says, no. I don't.

A whole set of teeth, Molly, Peter says. That's witchcraft in my book.

He seems a little frustrated and tucks a rogue strand of red hair behind his ear. He watches her with small eyes.

Did you count them? she says.

She's always been good with numbers and John can see something in her eyes when she speaks. There's something in the way she listens, the way she assesses the words as they come to her, dispassionately, like a goatherd checking the hooves of their trip. But a mischief there too, that hides in the small curl of her lip, or the tremor of an eyebrow.

Not me, says Peter. John?

John shakes his head. He didn't count them. He wouldn't know how many were missing, if he was honest. But he speaks anyway, changes the subject. He doesn't want to seem ignorant in front of Molly.

Right, says John, but you haven't had any, you know, strange itches, funny turns in the night?

She shakes her head.

Course, says John, yeah, silly question. Well. Good seeing you.

She doesn't react to this, just stands still, and lets her eyes flit between the two, as if she's making some comparison in her head. John looks at the floor. He doesn't really want to leave. Not yet. He peers past her into the keeping room. He can see a low table, flanked by two benches. A book at one end, resting next to a tall white candle and a small wooden bowl, with a quill lying flat on the yellowed pages.

That yours? he says. Didn't know you could read. Or write, for that matter.

Molly raises an eyebrow.

They stand like that, in silence, for a while, before Peter rocks back on his heels and says, a little too loud:

Right. We'll be off then.

And so they turn and walk down the path towards the village. Before long they can see the wooden houses topped by wreaths of chimney smoke, and they can hear the dull creak of wagons and the solemn footfall of the Puritans. Smells roll in with the wind: goat shit, whis-pers of sewage from the outhouses, and underneath it all the clean scent of wet pine.

The men give curt nods, their boots polished, their capes short. Their vanities are quiet, tucked somewhere between outward notions of piety and humility, and can only be seen if you know what you're looking for: the polished gleam on the barrel of a musket, the muffled jingle of bullets in their leather pouch, or the slight angle on the brim of a new hat.

John is elsewhere as he walks, caught up remembering the interaction. Peter hums tunelessly for a while until he leans in and speaks in a conspiratorial whisper.

Molly Goode, he says. She's a bit of alright, isn't she?

John looks around for a moment to see if anyone's within earshot, but the two are alone. Two women walk towards them, eyes focused on the ground, too far off to hear anything.

Come on, Peter says. I mean. Come on.

John nods. He's not sure if he's meant to comment on that, being a good Christian boy and all, but he can spare a nod. Peter's always been the more outrageous of the two. He had hair on his chin first and was as tall as a man before he was fourteen years old. John is still getting there. The Lord is good to those who wait, he says to himself each morning. The Lord is good to those who wait.

But he has always known about Molly. He knows how he feels about her the same way you know about a bruise, or an open wound. He has he wanted her since he was knee-high, since he was learning passages of the Bible by heart and finding her name everywhere: carved in the stone tablets on the top of Mount Sinai; spelt in the yellowed bones of great whales between the two halves of the Red Sea; or written in the footprints of the Devil in the desert.

They make their way back to their respective farms and for a while that is the last they speak of Molly Goode.

Their days continue as before. They take walks in the mornings, checking the traps they set the night before, and then tend their land during the day. They have each taken over the running of their family farms; their own fathers have grown old and prefer to read the good word whilst their eyes can handle the light.

The news of Salem hangs like a storm cloud over the town. People give unmarried women a wide berth. There are arguments late at night in the Church; people hammer crosses on every available surface; they crowd doorways and school walls and wagons and are clustered in the damp corners of family homes like spiderwebs.

Peter and John find a dead black cat swollen in the reeds by the shore of the river. When they cut it open they find strange things lodged in its stomach; chalk, a human finger, small bones picked clean, a glass vial filled with black ink.

They take it all to the Good Reverend, spreading the items out on the wooden table in front of him. He stands for a while, eyes focused, muttering the Lord's Prayer under his breath. He looks upwards and opens his hands so his palms face the ceiling, and he says O Lord, deliver us from evil.

He calls a town meeting. The inhabitants of Harwich gather around the wooden platform in the centre of the town square upon which stands the Good Reverend. He says they should all be thankful they live with Godly men like John and Peter.

John scans the crowd for Molly Goode. He cannot see her.

The Good Reverend says that there is evil and wickedness afoot, that the Devil himself is setting traps for those who spend time idle or who think of sin.

John thinks of Molly Goode all alone in that house on the edge of town. He thinks of the soft curve of her jaw, loose curls of hair at the nape of her neck. He thinks of her cheeks flushed by candlelight.

The Good Reverend continues. He says that they must all be diligent. Each and every one of them. He says they found witchcraft in the innards of a cat. He says there is something rotten at the core of it all.

In the distance a tree cracks and a flock of birds alight, scattering, silent, together making new and strange shapes against the flat grey sky.

In the quiet after he speaks, a quiet that consists of the shuffling of feet and the clenching of fists on skirt ruffles, Abigail Warren keels over and faints. Her husband takes her home, but not before looking up at the expectant faces and saying, these are dark times, mark my words, dark times indeed.

Time passes. More crosses are put up. Sleep leaks from the thick chimneys. The Good Reverend stumbles over his words during Sunday service and the congregation have bags under their eyes the colour of fresh Massachusetts plums.

Soon winter comes. The mist hugs the weeds and peels in plumes from the surface of the river and all around the trees are bare and in whispers people say the air is thick with ghosts. Children have strange dreams. They say they can hear the spirits of the witches dancing with soft feet on the treetops, can see dead eyes leering from the gaps between their fingers.

Someone finds a human tooth in the centre of a plum.

The biggest horse in the town begins to piss blood.

It does not sit well with John; this talk of the Devil and witches and women drowned.

He begins to see the horizon like the skin of a drum. Sometimes he thinks he can hear something beating faintly against it. He kneels in the river and chews his nails until they bleed. He presses his forehead against the cool walls of his house and mutters half-prayers long into the night. He lies awake in the dark and thinks he can feel hair growing between his teeth and in the palms of his hands.

He spends the morning practicing what he is going to say. He tries to be charming and to come across as a man who is both interested and interesting. He is concerned that Molly is perhaps making a bit of a reputation for herself, reading and writing during a time like this.

It is just from friendly concern, he explains to Peter. Sometimes you need a friend to explain things like this to you. To show you how it looks from the outside.

Just a friend? says Peter, with his eyebrow cocked.

Well, he says, and trails off.

You'd be so lucky, says Peter, as he taps down the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe. The Good Reverend calls smoking unholy. Peter calls it a private virtue. John stays quiet on the matter, and jealously watches the wisps of blue smoke rise into the air.

John goes to Molly's house that morning and he says look can you explain this numbers stuff to me. He is hoping she will have no real understanding of it, that she will mumble her way through some basic addition and then that will be that.

But she says sure, no problem, and explains that she's been helping check her father's books for years. That his eyes have started to fail him and so she makes sure they're getting a fair

rate for their turnips and parsnips and the meat that comes from the Jacobs' farm to the West.

She says if you would like to learn I can teach you.

So he watches her and sometimes when she is halfway through a problem she will sit back and look into the distance and move her mouth around silent words as if she is speaking to a host of people who are not there. He tries not to think about the way her mouth moves, the way her tongue just brushes the backs of her teeth.

She tries to explain it to him. Look, she says. It's not hard. She combines numbers so quickly he thinks she must have them written on the wet skin under her eyelids.

He tries and tries and tries. He sticks his tongue out the corner of his mouth and she can't help but laugh.

Sorry, she says. You just looked funny. It was nice.

He flushes for all sorts of reasons and stands up and says well then, if this is all so funny to you, maybe you should sit on your own and make yourself laugh. It's not meant to be funny.

Not much is, it seems, she says. He doesn't react to that and so she continues. It's not a big deal, she says. It's fine.

But she has this wry smile, like she is being watched, and for a moment he thinks that behind him, through the open window, are the bodies of the nineteen drowned, lined up like bowling pins, all bloated and greenish blue and smiling the same wry smile back at her. He imagines them all counting, turning numbers to something fickle and fluid, making strange geometric patterns with the bones they left in the reeds at the bottom of the river.

He begins to see angles as something to be overcome. His door holds four of them and reminds him of the broken music of her laugh.

If I'm not smart, he says to Peter, then what am I?

A bastard, says Peter with a grin, throwing another stone into the water.

Molly Goode is washing her clothes in the river.

John and Peter are walking past and stop and trade Bible verses just loud enough so she can hear. Peter said he'd help John out, that it was no skin off his nose, honest.

You're smart, Peter had said, you're the smartest man I know. God might have made you small where it counts but at least he gave you a big head and a big mouth with which to prove it.

John's heart is in his mouth now as they draw close, but he adopts a casual swagger, drops his shoulders, tries to walk like he's just been commended for diligent and persistent prayer by the Good Reverend himself.

1 Corinthians 6:13, Peter says.

Ho! Very good, says John. He returns with a little flourish of his own.

And let's not forget Genesis 2:18.

They both smile. Good Christian boys. So pure. Made purer by the sound of the river and the quiet way Molly goes about it.

She looks up and says, that reminds me of something. Would you like to hear a joke?

They look at each other. The Good Reverend says humour and jokes are a surefire way to temptation. They stand for a while, indecisive.

Molly continues, regardless.

She says, it goes like this.

There are five men in jail, all locked up in the same cell. One day, a new man's thrown in by the scruff of his neck – we'll call him Sam. Now, these men have been together for some years and so it takes a while for Sam to get used to the way they talk. There are all these words they use that he's never heard before, prison terms, you know, for referring to the hole in the ground where they shit or the thin slop they get for their one meal a day.

He's especially curious because sometimes one of the five will say a number and the rest of them will laugh and so he asks: what's so funny about these numbers?

And they explain that after being locked up together for five years they'd heard every joke they knew so many times that to make it easier they'd just numbered each of them. So now they just use those numbers to save time.

So he sits with his back against the bars and watches as the men speak.

One says, fellas, fellas, how do we feel about seventeen? And they all crack up.

Another says oh, but what about thirty-nine? And they all shake their heads and chuckle.

Eventually one of them pipes up and says, boys, boys, what about three hundred and nineteen?

This seems to be the funniest of all: they all fall over, slapping their knees, laughing so hard their faces go red. Tears are streaming from their eyes and they're clutching their bellies like they're about to burst and Sam says, wait, hold up, what was so funny about that one?

It takes a while for the laughter to die down, and then, wiping his eyes, one of them speaks, and says, in a voice made hoarse, that they'd never heard that one before.

Molly continues to wash her clothes. Somewhere in the distance a horse whinnies.

I don't get it, says Peter.

Neither, says John.

They share a look.

And then Molly laughs and says don't worry. It's a stupid joke.

Is it a numbers thing? John says.

No, she says, it's not a numbers thing.

It's not a joke about how certain numbers add up to make other numbers?

No, she says, and laughs again, it's not a joke about how certain numbers add up to make other numbers.

Peter smirks now and scratches at his face to cover it, but when he speaks John can tell, and Peter says, oh, come on John, even I knew that.

And John grows a little angry. Like she set this up to embarrass him. He says maybe you shouldn't be washing your clothes in this river, you know. Some people spend a few hours walking to avoid it. Filled with ghosts and the bones of drowned witches.

She says yeah. That's what they say. But her voice is distracted and drifts off down the stream.

John says maybe you should spend more time working and less time telling jokes about things that don't concern you.

Then his face goes cold and he says, witches don't float you know. But they say there's only one way to find out.

Molly has a private smile, then, and she looks deep into the river, where it is just black, no weeds, and she says something under her breath and when John asks her what exactly it was, she looks at him for a long time, eyes calm and unwavering, as if she's fixing an image of him in her mind for the future.

You got a short temper, John, says Peter as the two men walk away. You're a little powder keg of a man.

John grits his teeth so hard his jaw begins to shake.

The river begins to swell as the rain falls heavier. It pushes against the banks and each day it deposits something new in the mud; a stained woman's dress, three black boots, a toy house filled with little dolls made from hair.

John and Peter find these items on the banks and bring them to the Good Reverend each morning. They do not know what to do with all of this and so they burn it, behind the church, under a night sky the colour of a Bible. The Good Reverend quotes Exodus 22:18 and they hold hands and stare into the flames.

Molly Goode is nowhere to be seen.

People can't sleep.

They say that if there are witches in the forests there must be ghosts as well, or things like ghosts, that tremble and moan just under the night. That wear the pelts of wolves and deer and grow pregnant with dead broods.

One day Matthew stumbles home and says he saw a witch in the woods, dancing to a melody he could not hear, her skin riding up her leg like a dress and her mouth half-open, and then it's like the dam bursts and everyone comes forward at once.

And William says that he saw a young woman with dark hair and darker eyes run into a cave that appeared in the earth, all slick black rock, and that when he followed her in the walls were warm and covered in blood. He says they coupled like beasts in that cave for hours, trust him, hours, even though of course he didn't want to, and then, in the silence that follows, he says it again: *hours*.

And then Nathaniel steps forward and says that he was walking in the woods and came upon a group of women all naked and lay with each and every one of them, and that they stole his purity and threw it in the fire like it was the eye of a newt or a cat's tongue and that he lay there, panting and licked with dew, for hours until the Good Reverend came and found him.

Peter steps forward and says he has been having impure thoughts and it is not half due to the unmarried women in the village, who he is sure must have something of the witch about them.

And John becomes even more concerned about Molly, who, really, doesn't seem to care too much about all of this. He thinks that he will help her out, that she must be suffering in silence. He has a plan that he is sure is as close to God as a plan can get.

All the walk to her house he cannot help but hum hymns from his youth. Hymns like *Let Us With A Gladsome Mind* and he is so full of joy he thinks he understands why people say that love is divine. He feels like God has chosen him, wise and thoughtful so he is, to carry out his will and he thinks about marching right up to the base of that cross and thanking the big man himself for everything he's done.

He knocks on her door and waits.

She takes her time and when she opens it, she says in a small voice, oh, John.

He bows and says, Molly, no, the pleasure's all mine.

They stand until he realises that she never said it was a pleasure. They stand until it all builds up inside John, each part of it pressing against the cage of his ribs: he wants to say it all at once, to say he has always loved her and that he is sure that it is sacred, and that his proposal, his solution, to both of their problems is elegant and beautiful and will mean so much to both of them. He has already asked her father, stopping by when Molly was away, flanked by Peter and the Good Reverend.

John says to her, I think we should get married.

And she says, what, you and me?

He says, yeah. That's what I said.

And she smiles like she's thinking of something else and her eyes move slightly back and forth and then she says, sorry, John, that's just not really going to work for me.

You didn't even give it any thought, he says.

Yeah, John, she says. I did.

He stands there, the rim of his black hat in his hands, mouth open.

She shrugs, like, no big deal, and waves to someone passing over his shoulder. I'm sorry, she says, but my father's quite sick. This time of year is never good for his joints in the first place.

I've got to go. Nice seeing you.

And John storms back through town and into Peter's house who stands with his arms wide, like, how'd it go? What did she say?

John says she said that it's not really going to work for her, that she finished with *nice seeing you*.

Peter kind of smirks and he says, surely, John, you gave it a good go?

John knows that Peter has recently asked Sarah Nurse's father for her hand in marriage and that he said yes, and that soon Peter will be a married man and will have all that comes with that: the land, and the Nurses family wagon, and knowledge of what really happens between the sheets on a wedding night.

John shouts back that he did give it a good go, thank you very much, that he was polite and courteous and charming, and it doesn't help that you, yes you, Peter, have that shit-eating grin on your face, because he thinks the reason she said no is that she's a witch, that she's poisoning her father with strange brews and medicines so she can keep milking him for every penny he has, so she can do whatever the fuck it is she does with those numbers and keep coin for herself and-

Peter offers a smile. Say no more, he says, say no more.

They are glad to have found one, at least.

It is like the town can breathe. That morning the light through the trees is thick and yellow.

The trial barely lasted an hour. They'd kept her in a cell outside for the night with only a thin blanket and a lantern for company. People who'd passed it had said she spoke to herself all night, rocked back and forth holding her knees, and drew strange shapes in the earth with the long nails of her fingers.

John speaks first.

Do you think we're bad people, Peter?

No, John. Bad people do bad deeds. Have private conversations with Satan. That sort of thing. You'd know. He'd speak to you directly. You'd wake in the night and he'd be sat at the end of your bed, red and glistening and naked, stubby fat cock and dark nipples, and he'd say, right, John, I've got a little something for you.

John nods. It's sage advice.

He keeps his eyes levelled at the ground though, when he hears her footsteps on the wooden platform.

The Good Reverend reads the accusations levelled against her: consorting with the Devil, rejecting the good name of Jesus Christ, possessing more wit than her neighbours.

When John does look up, he can see Molly's eyes. They are red and raw, and her hands are shaking. She looks at him with a blank stare and for a moment he hopes she will do something awful, something wicked, like sprout horns and wings and fly away, or curse the Lord, or spit and scream and claim she never thought she'd be caught, but she stays quiet.

They ask her if she has any last words, if she wants to renounce the Devil, and she just says, I am so scared. She says, I am so scared and I do not want to die.

Her voice cracks and John looks to the floor. He feels, for a moment, the eyes of the congregation upon him. His mouth is dry and he clenches his jaw so it does not shake. He tells himself there is nothing he can do, nothing he could have done. What he offered was sacred and she chose to ignore it.

Peter says something about women lacking one of the four humours, black bile, he thinks, that means they're more likely to do this sort of thing. More inclined to flights of fancy, he says.

The morning air is cold and brings the promise of rain. The river has broken its banks and drowns the long grasses and the low pastures. Molly Goode drops short and jerks on the end of the rope and falls still. Her eyes are white and remind John of the eyes of dead fish that float belly-up in the shallows. Her hands are bloodless, her fingers black at the tip, and he imagines, with a funny feeling in his stomach, her last moments trying to dig through the cold earth to get to the woods.

Peter catches his eye and says witches brew, my boy, dirty hands from witches brew, and rubs the tips of his fingers together.

John doesn't react. Peter continues.

From the spells and that. He winks. Trust me.

Molly's body slowly turns from side to side, as if surveying the village. A small wind tugs at the hem of her skirt.

John says nothing for a while. The crowd slowly disperses, and after a while it is only him and Peter and the taut sound of straining rope.

Peter says, to no one in particular: I suppose that makes twenty now.

John puts his hand to his face and feels his lips are wet, and when he takes his fingers away he can see that they are red with blood. He wonders if what Peter said was a joke. If there was something he had missed.

Either way, he thinks, it wasn't very funny.

Well, that's just it, John will say, when he's older, recounting the tale to Peter.

Surely no one in their right mind would reject something divine, like love, unless they had something else going on. Some wickedness inside that had to be exorcised somehow.

Peter will nod, and say, ah, John, you always were the clever one.

And John will say, that's how I knew, Peter, that's how I knew.

Sharp as a fox you are, John. Sharp as a fox.

And neither of them will mention the whispers they still hear from the river and their plum-eyed reflections, or the way the local men look at their daughters: watching their skirts and blushes and curtsies, and the way their lips move when they count out loud.

Stuart Mugridge

cuckoo mourning

in late cuckoo-mourning bow
deep pink flags interrupting
blades and blades and blades
shearing autumn's light
into countless, untraceable
shifting green shadow-light rhomboids
shift, shifted, breeze-pressed
intermittently
across-ways, thrown
shining torn rags draped in
a lulling lea drawn by
a bird-calling, roaring wood canopy
of the east's sea-cold air

Matt Haw

Late Winter

– you went

before the season
you liked least
could really get going

the tealights lit
at three then four
then five

but you missed
the herring nets
being hauled up

woven with shivering
blue fish

now your jacket
hangs on its hook
in the outhouse
like a gutted cusk

glittering
with scales
from years past

you are not you anymore
& love the spring

have no need
for oilskins
where you are

on the sunlit side
of another island
in a skiff

pulling a long line
from the sea's
green & silent vaults

feeling the weight
of the luckless fish
nipping in your hands

breathless tasting
blood on your teeth
unable to let go

Luke Palmer

Homunculus in Milk

Rimy slosh
around my nugget body
meniscus like a
second face I'm lost
beneath the surface
surprised to find inside
the bright slab darkness
wet and close lightless
and without margin
bubbles vanish
in the folds of it
here's one squeaking
from my mouth my
voice reaches the surface
cracks against air and
I'm lifted placed on a
block by the fire I dry
to a sour thin sheen
then to dust

Marie Papier

Woman Cutting an Apple

for Dana Littlepage Smith

She has a way with apples
as mothers have with babies

How she looks at them
silently smiling, as if about to

nibble their flesh, lick
the smooth grain of their skin

and how tenderly she brings
her knife into play

the blade slicing through
the pulp, deftly sparing

the core – the fruit's
intimacy unscathed –

as mothers hold the integrity of their child
until self breaks free.

Louisa Campbell

Teapot

I'd like to be a French TV detective with tight jeans
and long untidy hair.

After 20 minutes applying makeup, I look
exactly the same.

Be yourself! She said, but she hated me.

Today I cried about something I should have cried about
three weeks ago.

I have learned to laugh like a teapot: you turn up
the corners of your mouth; lean forward a smidge.

I was angry with them, then I pitied them their politeness,
champagne and fitted bookcases.

What class am I?

Sorry, there's nobody here called "Mary".

I'd take myself hostage, but I don't know
what my demands would be.

I have only faked an orgasm once.

I could become a flâneur
(I already own a suitable hat).

I have my mother's eyes, hands,
and shame as a result of her criminal activities.

From my father: empathy; a love of clocks;
tendency towards exasperation.

Who is this, please?

I want a long untidy life.
Everything about me is all sewn up like Frankenstein.

I hate that I have to pick a thing to believe in,
or believe in nothing.

What if none of this matters;
what if the universe is leaking and grabs
the first thing that comes to hand to collect the splots?
Here, you be a mixing bowl, I'll be a bucket.
What do we both contain?
Can you describe it?

Charles Tarlton

We Thought It a Most Profound Moment

for Ann on her 68th birthday

We were driving along the Galilee Road
in southern Rhode Island, past Sand Hill Cove,
and saw near shore

 a mother doe and two fawns standing,
dark silhouettes, in a foot of Stygian salt water.

Around us, seen but then unnoticed things —
the traffic, swooping telephone wires, and highway
guard rails of twisted steel cable, white and yellow
painted lines on the asphalt roadway, and random tar
patches all became just muslin coulisse
for the silent ancient ritual enacted there.
The doe and fawns were as still as the dead
deer in the Smithsonian's diorama (deer carcasses are often
donated by hunters and highway departments).

The deer's imagined hush, the still ritual pose
 so full of meaning,
who can translate it — the wilderness, a savage world
of kill and be killed, here up to its knees (oh, I know,
deer don't have knees!) in the salty cove, frozen, as if
balanced between past and future — breathing fossils.

(What is it we think they know?)

Tawseef Khan

Storytelling

Nazish knew exactly who she was waiting for at Shah & Co Solicitors. The woman who had saved her life. But as they had never met before, she didn't know what to expect.

The floorboards creaked and a figure entered the room. Nazish looked up and stared at the tall woman, with fine features, generous hips and frizzy hair. She wore a grey suit, but her blouse was creased, her thick mane tied in a ponytail. The women in this country caked on their makeup, but she wore none and her face was pale and sickly, dark rings around her eyes.

'I was hoping you'd have your old file with you,' she said, reaching for the brown packet Nazish had brought and left on the desk. The lawyer moved with a jittery energy, fuelled by drugs or caffeine. She looked to be in her late twenties but had sounded older on the phone.

'You're my solicitor?' asked Nazish, raising a brow.

'Sorry, yes, I'm Jamila Shah. I thought we could use the privacy of upstairs.'

Nazish nodded, and Jamila sat down to read the documents in the packet. The premises were strange for a solicitor's firm. Scuffed skirting boards and cheap polystyrene ceiling tiles and woodchip wallpaper slathered in lavender paint. The carpet hadn't been spared the shoddy paintjob – in one corner paint pooled and cracked like a dried riverbed. She wondered if she had chosen the right solicitor. No – she hadn't chosen. No other would have her.

'What can you do for me?'

Jamila's lips parted, revealing a wide, gap-toothed smile. It reminded Nazish of her grandmother, who believed smiles like that brought good luck. 'The next steps are obvious. We pursue this appeal of yours. Luckily, your previous representative lodged the forms in time, so we can prepare for the hearing. It'll take a while. We need to get this right.'

'How?'

'Start gathering documents to support your case. I'll make a list. We need a new statement. We need to tell your story in a way that's impossible to refuse again.'

Nazish held her stomach as she absorbed this information.

She hated stories. She didn't read novels and she didn't watch television. She couldn't stand it when friends lingered over their tales, stretching them out for attention and effect. Yet here she was, expected to tell hers again. For the second time now. Or was it the third? We don't like your story; tell us again. That was how the immigration system played with her and she despised it too.

'What do you think of my case?'

'The Home Office are proper arseholes. Absolutely shocking decision to refuse you.'

Nazish noted the rage that reddened the woman's face. It pleased her.

'Honestly, I think your case is winnable. We'll need to work for it, though. No judge is handing this to us on a plate.'

Nazish folded her arms, sighing. 'Main apni puri koshish lagaoun gi.'

'I'll work hard for you too.'

'But let me tell you,' Nazish pushed her shoulders back, relishing her words, 'I'm not easy. People think I'm trouble and I'm at peace with this.' Being trouble was the only way she could stop life from completely flattening her. It was the only way a woman like her survived. But when Jamila laughed, Nazish's cheeks flushed.

'You're not my first difficult client. I'm not so easy myself.'

Nazish laid her hands flat in her lap. 'Not like this.'

'I'm strong enough, but thanks. I appreciate the warning.'

Jamila began putting the documents in order. Nazish couldn't quite believe how, just a week ago, she had been trawling the Internet for a solicitor willing to represent her. If sweet Pamela, her fellow Yar's Wood detainee, hadn't given the details of her own representative, she would have floundered. When the stupid Home Office refused her asylum claim, Nazish decided to resist. What she hadn't imagined was how quickly they would take her away, how quickly her solicitor would abandon her. The vulture, who had charged her £3,000 at the start, began citing watery excuses about competence and authority, 'not being able to deal with such cases'. Now she saw all of this as a blessing.

'I've got your first statement here, prepared by your previous solicitor for the initial asylum claim. It's not bad.'

Jamila spoke while teasing a staple loose from the statement, lining up the pages along her desk. Nazish searched for the gaps in her teeth, her good luck charm.

'We can use this as the basis of an updated statement. Add your recent activities, our rebuttals to the refusal, we'd be in a good place, I think –'

Nazish shook her head. 'Mujhe nahin chahiye. I want you to start my statement new.'

'Why?'

'I want you to use the statement I wrote myself. I emailed.'

'But why though?'

'I told you. This statement is not mine.'

She felt Jamila studying her over her round glasses and pulled her shoulders back again. For this partnership to work, Jamila had to respect her need for authenticity in this process.

'Naz – can I call you Naz?'

Nazish pursed her lips. 'No.'

'Fine, Nazish then. I'm just trying to help, okay? If we prepare a statement that's different to the one you submitted before, we'll get crucified at the hearing.'

Co-operative, they had described Mrs Shah in online reviews. Friendly and accommodating. So why wasn't she listening? 'First time, I did what they wanted – I tried to tell a perfect story – but what did that do? Kuch bi nahin. No, this is my life, my story, and there are so many gaps, so many things I don't remember. If I can't tell it as I want, I prefer

to go home. Or to some other solicitor.’

She didn’t mean this – she had knocked on enough doors only to have them shut in her face – but sometimes the other side needed testing. Nazish reminded herself to breathe. She inhaled deeply as Jamila eyed her, then switched on the computer. It didn’t take long to print the email. For the next ten minutes, she compared the two statements.

‘I think I can make it work,’ Jamila said, eventually. ‘For both of us.’

‘What?’

‘I know a compromise. Let’s get on with our storytelling.’

Nazish forced Jamila to find a common point of entry. What they agreed upon was this: Nazish was from Pakistan, one of three children, the middle child. Her mother was from Kashmir, her father from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and this, Nazish grew up believing, gave her a unique right over Northern Pakistan. The entire region was her home.

‘My nana-ji was Kashmiri too,’ Jamila said. ‘I love it there.’

This was the place where ancient pathways converged, to which civilisations were repeatedly drawn. Yet, Nazish, who was the daughter of this region and made of its salt, had been pushed out because of who she loved. It struck her as the cruellest injustice. She carried the grief of it wherever she went.

‘Tell them now,’ she said. ‘Statement mein likho, I never wanted to come here. Woh tho halaat hi kuch aise they. I didn’t choose; this life chose me.’

‘Sure, but let’s start at the beginning. What was your childhood like?’

Nazish wrinkled her nose. ‘Fine.’

‘When did you realise you were different?’

‘Kya?’

‘Different. When did you first feel different?’

‘Always. Even when you don’t have words, don’t understand emotion, you feel yourself different. Kabhi kabhi, when I was a young girl, main boht udaas hoti thi, depressed... thinking, feeling, I don’t belong anywhere.’

‘And when did you realise you were a lesbian?’

‘Yeh lafas – lesbian – it came late. Main kaise jaanpati? Yes, I was raised in an educated house, but where I grew up these things don’t exist. And before Internet, how I could have learnt this? Lekin jab maine parha, I felt complete.’

‘What about religion? Did you have any conflict with Islam?’

When the Home Office posed the question, Nazish had screwed up her mouth like she’d eaten something bitter. But she chewed on it, for Jamila’s sake, turning to the window on her right, glimpsing the full, green crowns of the trees and the pale, cloudless sky.

‘Kehne ke liye kuch hai hi nahin. Who I am is one thing, what I believe is another. I don’t see conflict, jo bi koi kahe.’

At the end of the session, Nazish got up, but Jamila stopped her leaving.

‘Explain something to me. You’re obviously a well-educated woman. You studied English. You worked at a university. Why do you keep replying in Urdu? It’s obvious you don’t need it.’

‘No, no, I’m bad.’ Nazish scanned the floor as if she’d dropped something. Ignorance was an old strategy of hers, shielding her from prying colleagues and family

members, but now her skin thistled under Jamila's gaze. She sighed. 'Kyun ke English is not mine. It's not safe for me.'

'What do you mean?'

Nazish zipped and unzipped her handbag.

'Oh, so you're giving me a nasty taste of how you'll behave at the tribunal?'

'I told you before. I'm. Not. Easy.'

'And I told you before, I'm made of stronger stuff. Now just trust me.'

*

On the day of their next meeting, one week later, Nazish woke up after noon. She was at the hostel the authorities had now allocated her to, miles from where she lived before. The mornings kept eluding her, as did a decent night's sleep, but she didn't mind. For whom would she sleep? For whom would she wake early? Alone in this country, her days became one.

She went to the park and sat on a bench, squinting against the September sun, watching joggers and young mothers and pensioners carried along by their middle-aged children. Sunlight dappled her forearms. The full trees fizzled, the thinnest branches calling to her, waving back and forth.

She told herself that she was comfortable with this life of solitude. These assurances rang hollow, though there were moments that lifted her. Several days ago, she got talking to the owner of a Pakistani takeaway. He offered her work. Last night, she went there and washed the pots and wiped down the kitchen, preparing it for service the next day. She left just after 2am, her feet and shoulders sore, grateful for some small purpose.

The walk led her to the supermarket. She found the discounted fridge empty apart from a bloody joint of beef and cut vegetables sweating in their packaging. Strolling through the aisles, she took note of the things she would buy with her first wage packet: fabric softener and loose-leaf tea and the jeera biscuits she would eat by the dozen in Pakistan.

Later that afternoon she made it to the office, where Jamila was sipping from a mug. A tube of biscuits lay on the table, the orange packaging wrinkled, the plastic thread unspooled. A couple of the biscuits had toppled onto the dark wood like fallen ruins.

'Go on.' Jamila held out the pack. 'Take one. Take as many as you like.'

'No, no, no, I can't.' Though she'd been raised to politely refuse such offers, she had skipped breakfast and her stomach betrayed her. Jamila slid the biscuits forward.

'Let's talk about home. Why did you leave?'

'Mere suqun ke liye.'

'Was there violence involved?'

Nazish rolled her eyes. 'Everything contains violence, Mrs Shah. It was psychological. Life or death. I had to choose. Kya mujhe zindagi chahiye with violence of all kinds or do I give up and have no life at all? Itni dehr baad, I chose another way.'

'Coming to Britain?'

'Yes.'

'What was life like in Pakistan?'

'Kyun?'

‘I need to know. You say that you came for your peace, freedom, so what was it about living in Pakistan that was un-peaceful, that left you feeling un-free?’

She gritted her teeth. ‘I didn’t say freedom. Not everybody comes here for their freedom, Mrs Shah.’

Jamila paused. ‘Okay. Peace, then.’

‘It’s a lot.’

‘Nazish, if you only described your life how I need you to, things could be easier.’

‘I want to do this another way.’

‘I get that, but your story also needs to make sense. This is a game, Nazish. If you want to win, you’ve got to play the game.’

‘I don’t want to play games. When I play I lose.’

‘Well, we still need to clarify your personal history for the judge. Can’t you see that I’m trying to balance what the system demands of us with you telling your story on your own terms? Isn’t that what you wanted?’

Nazish looked from her hands to Jamila. Her mouth had tightened and her voice carried a note of fatigue. The prospect of Jamila losing patience alarmed her. Words spilled out of her mouth.

‘My colleagues at university began to suspect me. Accused me of being in a relationship with another teacher. Somehow, they took pictures of us together, found letters we wrote to each other. They showed these to the administration and we lost our jobs. Then somebody told my family...’ Nazish had refused to cry over the years, believing it a weakness, but now, suddenly, she was unable to stop the tears from coming. She bit down on her lip, tasting the salt of an imaginary bead of blood.

When she looked up again, there was a glass of water on the desk and Jamila motioning for her to drink. She sank the glass.

After a while, she smiled and cast another look at Jamila, the look of a woman about to play a winning hand. ‘Waise, I also understand this process, more than people think. I know what it wants from me. To receive asylum, I must criticise my country. Betray it. Tell them Pakistan is hell and this place is jannat for me. I’m not that stupid.’ In the supermarket, bank, post office, GP surgery, nearly everybody she encountered in Britain talked to her like an idiot, like she didn’t understand what they were saying, but she was nobody’s fool. She snatched another biscuit from the table.

‘I get it. But if you answer questions like this, we have no hope of winning.’

‘I don’t care.’

‘But you do.’ She saw Jamila’s pen pointed in accusation. ‘Because you don’t want to be sent home. Nobody wants that.’

Neither of them said anything. No, I really don’t care, Nazish thought, glancing up at the ceiling, fighting to convince herself.

Jamila broke the silence. ‘You know, I do understand all of this. The struggle to live an authentic life. More than you would think, actually.’

Was she a lesbian too? She looked earnest and greasy-eyed, and though Nazish couldn’t understand why, she knew that Jamila wasn’t trying to manipulate her through a big display of emotion. She read people too easily to know that.

‘Chalo theek. This can be for you and me only then. Ek alag si witness statement.’

Alternative.’

Over the weeks that Nazish visited Jamila, it seemed two stories were being told, two statements being written at once; the official one for the appeal hearing, and the unofficial one for herself. Nazish couldn’t help her thoughts from escaping her mouth, though she was aware that Jamila selected only the most viable threads, weaving them into a statement that would help them in court. She chose not to dwell on this. It was enough that Jamila vowed to keep the final statement faithful. For Nazish, this promise was as precious as her grandmother’s shawl, the one she wore now and played with while she spoke, gifted when she left Pakistan.

‘Let’s talk about identity. How you’ve expressed your freedom in Britain.’

‘Kaunsa freedom? I’m not free, I am an asylum-seeker.’

‘You attend different social and support groups, don’t you?’

‘Sure, lekin Pakistan mein bi, main logon ko jaanti thi. I had a community there too.’

Jamila leant forward, fingertips pressed into the desk. ‘But Nazish, this is part of the process. We must show them you’re exercising freedoms you couldn’t at home. We need to prove you’re telling the truth. There’s no room for doubt. They don’t even accept that you’re a lesbian, for god’s sake.’

Despite her promises to behave, Nazish found herself leaning forward too: ‘Aur main pooch rahi houn, main paise kahan se laoun? I live on thirty-six pounds a week. Sometimes I have to choose, food or soap – or some other necessity. So how they are asking these questions?’

Just as easily, however, she conceded Jamila’s point and explained what living in Britain had provided her with: a place where, if nothing else, her sexuality no longer required daily management, where she could let her guard down and simply exist.

‘Do you have a partner?’

Nazish clicked her tongue.

‘Have you met anybody here?’

‘Where can I meet them? How I can invite them to my hostel, a place I stay with twelve others? In Pakistan it was possible, lekin yahan, yeh sab naamumkin hai.’

Jamila spent the next half an hour coaxing Nazish to talk, grasping at any lead. Nazish’s high school days, her earliest friendships, but she remained tight-lipped. Only when they touched on the topic of a gathering for LGBT refugees three months ago did Nazish allow herself a small smile. There was warmth in her voice as she remembered Fatou, the shy woman from Gambia.

‘We exchanged numbers.’

Jamila waited for her to say more, but when she didn’t, Jamila kept the pace going by changing tack. ‘What about your girlfriend in Pakistan?’

‘What you want to know?’

‘Start with what she looked like?’

Suddenly, speaking about the past became easy. When she thought of Warda, of their relationship, Nazish recalled how significant she had been, how essential. Beautiful Warda, whose eyelashes were as long as time. Who had kissed her, touched her in ways

she hadn't been touched before, nourished her mind with recitations of Mirza Ghalib and Ismat Chughtai. Love had softened Nazish's sharp edges, dulled her constant urge to fight. It inspired her to embrace the full extent of her womanhood. She recalled their hikes to crumbling temples like Tilla Jogian and Malot, bathing together in the emerald waters of Katas Raj, drying off in the sun while eating packets of Slanty. Yet the memories were so frail, foreign like they belonged to someone else. What did love feel like again?

After that meeting, Nazish sat at the bus stop for a while. It was a mild day for October. She unzipped her handbag and removed her grandmother's shawl from her shoulders. A box of jeera biscuits were nestled inside. Glancing back at the office, the gesture brought tears to her eyes. Jamila understood she was skipping meals to pay for bus tickets and hand cream. But when had she slipped them in there?

She ripped the box open and scoffed a biscuit.

In the detention centre, it wasn't freedom of movement that Nazish had missed, but air; breezes, sunlight flickering along her skin, the powdery scent of violets in the park. When the enforcement officers grabbed her, she felt like she had stopped breathing. When they drove her to London, she held her breath the entire way. Some of the other women in the van wailed to themselves, some were trapped in an intoxicated stupor, some bartered with their gods. Nazish closed her eyes and waited for it to end. People entered the continent like this, hiding in lorries, slotting themselves into nooks behind wheels. She had considered herself better, superior, for arriving through legal channels. But once captured, she understood that she was the same.

The detention centre had a dining room, day room, library, gym and laundry. The bedrooms were freshly painted, brightly lit, decorated with cheerful curtains and pine furniture. An idea of airiness, but synthetic, ultimately. Because Nazish still didn't breathe, not for the three weeks that she was inside, sharing a room with a Congolese woman who screamed in her sleep at night and threatened to knife her by day. The indignities of that time would not leave Nazish for as long as she lived. She had plugged her period blood with tissue paper. Eaten potatoes and chicken nuggets and other processed stodge that left her unable to use the bathroom. Shivering from the cold with nothing to shield her but the clothes on her back and her grandmother's shawl. Not until she sat on the train that returned her to Manchester, not until she made an appointment to see Shah & Co Solicitors, did Nazish dare to hold air in her lungs again.

*

Returning a fortnight later, she found Jamila looking unsettled. Nazish sat and skimmed the desk for snacks. Jamila passed her a box of mithai and she set about peeling the thumbs of tape.

'I wanted to check if you're happy with the process so far?'

'Abhi tak, yes... but I didn't read anything yet.'

'There's one more thing. Something I've been holding back.'

'Go ahead. Pucho.'

'It's about your detention.'

Nazish's hands began to tremble. She pushed the mithai away and kneaded her thighs. She looked up. 'Sorry. Aapne kuch kaha?'

'I was just saying, we have to cover this in your statement.'

'Oh.'

'Are you okay? Should I wait a little longer before we get into this?'

She saw Jamila chewing her bottom lip. She swallowed several times. 'I'm fine, go on.'

'I've keep putting it off, but I really must ask. Why were you detained in the first place? We may have gotten you out, but I never got to the bottom of that. They said you weren't reporting.'

Nazish reached for the shawl in her handbag and wrapped it around herself. She counted to three in her head, allowing herself some time to breathe. 'You want to know why I didn't report?'

Jamila nodded. 'It would help me to understand.'

Nazish took another breath. 'Were you ever woken from your dreams by men banging on your door?'

Jamila shook her head.

'Fajr ka waqt tha, still dark outside. I was sleeping after namaz. I heard banging on my hostel door, ek mard ki awaaz, shouting, "Open up, this is Immigration Enforcement." One by one, the girls in my room woke up. They were too scared, so I volunteered to open the door. The man put his hand on my chest. "Go get your documents. I need to see some paperwork." He snatched my registration card. "It looks like you're an immigration offender. You'll be coming with us." The girls were all staring at the floor. When he took me outside, not even one said goodbye to me.'

'Right.' Jamila's eyes were wide with sincerity. 'I'm so sorry, that sounds awful. But what I mean is, what made them do this? Why didn't you report?'

Nazish let out a long breath. 'It-it was like protest,' she said. 'Reminder to them of my dignity. That I was asylum-seeker, but still human. Ek insaan thi main.'

More than eighteen months ago, Nazish had claimed asylum. In the months after, she heard nothing. 'My solicitor said wait for decision, so I waited. Maine khoob intazar kiya, attending my support groups, cooking, trying to survive on their money.' Eventually, upon a friend's advice, Nazish requested the details of her caseworker. Only a caseworker could explain the holdup.

'Aur jab maine usko fone kiya, I find she's not there, she's on maternity leave, panch mahiney ke liye. I went crazy, screaming, I didn't care. For a year, I had been living miserable life. Not even life – I was on hold waiting to begin life.'

'I decided to do things for myself. If they don't take my case seriously, I don't report to them. Pehla mahina, I don't go to their office, they do nothing. Second month, same. Third month, end of, they come for me. They give me refusal and transfer me to detention centre.'

'And what was it like there, in detention?'

The muscles in Nazish's jaw tensed then slackened. 'Ek janwar ka behtar khyal rakhte hain yeh log.'

Jamila came and stood beside her. 'Let me get you a cup of tea.'

Nazish drank as Jamila opened a window. The sound of revving engines filled the room.

‘So, it was a protest! I mean, lots of people stop reporting, but I’ve got to admire your intentions, even if the Home Office had no idea,’ Jamila said. ‘Still, I worry. What if you pull a stunt like this at the tribunal? I know you now – and I’m afraid. You’re capable of anything.’

Nazish laughed. ‘Mujhe boht ghusa aata hai. Sometimes I think, bring me a bed and a girl. I will prove my sexuality. It feels like the only way.’

‘Don’t even think about it.’ Jamila lifted two pieces of barfi from the box of sweetmeats and passed one to Nazish. ‘But hey, you can’t keep pretending that you don’t speak good English. It’s clear you do.’

*

The day of the hearing came in early December. Nazish agreed to meet Jamila in town, close to the immigration tribunal. She waded through the crowds to reach her.

Jamila appeared momentarily confused. ‘What? Wow, look at you. You look amazing.’

Nazish was wearing a leather jacket and a white t-shirt, jeans and trainers. She had shorn her shoulder-length hair and fashioned it into a pixie cut. She carried a studded leather backpack.

‘Really?’ Her heart swelled. ‘Maybe it’s too much, but last night I felt excited thinking, this is almost ov-er.’ She sang the last word, jiggling on the spot. In Pakistan, her look would have marked her out, made a target of her, but here she would appear as she liked. ‘I needed some change.’

Jamila examined her again. ‘But you do look very different...’

Nazish frowned. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Couldn’t it have waited until tomorrow?’

‘Why should I wait? I spent my life waiting.’

Jamila stared at her for a moment, then nodded silently. Nazish zipped up her biker jacket, dishevelled her hair with one hand and walked towards the tribunal. But as it neared, Nazish smoothed her hair down, pulled at her jacket, lifted the straps of her backpack.

Jamila caught up with her. ‘Stop worrying. I’m here.’

Inside, Jamila went off to research the judge assigned to their case, leaving Nazish in the waiting area. A thousand times, a feeling in the pit of her stomach told her that it wasn’t too late; she could still run to the bathroom, wash her face and take off her accessories, lift out the old cardigan and shawl from her backpack, and almost a thousand times, Nazish dug deeper into the chair.

Jamila soon reappeared beside her. ‘Do you trust me to do what’s right for you?’

‘Why? What did you hear?’

‘Bad judge. She has a reputation with LGBT cases.’

‘What you mean “bad judge”?’

‘Not favourable to us. Bland enough in person but stings you in the decision.’ She

saw Jamila hesitate before continuing. ‘I hate to do this, but it’s how the game works. We don’t want a bad judge *and* a shitty Home Office Presenting Officer. A bad judge can break a case. But if you were feeling unwell, we could ask for the case to be adjourned, pray for a better judge next time?’

‘Whatever is going to happen, I want it to happen today.’

‘I’m telling you I think you should be ill. This isn’t going to work.’

‘I know and I don’t care.’ Nazish knew it was a risk, but she was tired of hiding. She had been hiding her entire life, ever since the seventh grade when she lied to her friends about finding their Urdu teacher so beautiful it made her stutter.

Jamila gripped her knee. ‘I’m not joking, Nazish. We could lose. Please tell me you’re feeling sick.’

Heat rose up her back. She brushed Jamila’s hand away. ‘Don’t you understand yet? I have to do this my way. Go, if you want, but I will stay.’

Nazish observed the judge sitting opposite her. She had thin lips set in a miserable line and dead birds hanging from her ears. She complained of not receiving their bundle of documents before the hearing. Luckily, Jamila had a spare copy. The Presenting Officer was also as callous as Jamila had warned – this tiny man with a receding hairline and outsized confidence, who prowled around the courtroom like he owned it.

‘That’s fine, Ms Durrani. I don’t need any more,’ he said, cutting Nazish off after every question. ‘Ma’am, the Appellant came to the UK in April 2010, but didn’t seek asylum until six months later, when her visit visa was due to expire. A genuine refugee, somebody honestly seeking protection because they feared persecution would have applied at the earliest possible opportunity.’

Jamila got up. ‘Ma’am, how can somebody claim asylum if they don’t know the provision exists – if they’ve never heard of the concept before, least of all on grounds of sexuality?’

‘The Appellant might have indulged in same-sex sexual activity in the past, but this does not make her a lesbian. She has had no romantic relationships whilst living in this country, has made limited use of lesbian groups, venues and services...’ The Presenting Officer moved his hand through the air as if to suggest an abundance of these services.

‘Since when did intimacy define sexuality?’ Jamila continued. ‘And since when did sexuality determine our interests or the company we choose to keep? Ma’am, many of the arguments expressed by the Presenting Officer today reflect an understanding of sexuality better suited to the past. A person can be a lesbian without being in a relationship. A person can be a lesbian and fail to socialise with other lesbians – though it’s worth noting that my client actually has. What truly matters here is that she has provided a thorough and detailed account of herself, the development of her sexuality, and her life in Pakistan as a woman concealing her identity to stay safe.’

The Presenting Officer pointed to individual items of Nazish’s clothing: ‘The Secretary of State believes that the Appellant has presented herself today as a lesbian solely to establish a claim for international protection. It’s the most cynical way of gaining status in the UK.’

Jamila sprang up, unmistakable fury in her voice – ‘Ma’am, this really is the most

misguided —’ but the judge turned to Nazish.

‘This is something you should answer, Ms Durrani, because you haven’t yet and I’m not sure I understand. Why has your appearance changed so dramatically from the photographs you provided? It does seem like you have modified yourself to appear more like a lesbian.’

Nazish looked ahead, startled. She had been sitting on her hands, turning her head left and then right. Her life had been floating down the river while she was stuck watching it from its bank. She freed her fingers, blood flowing back into them and straightened up. ‘Tell me something,’ she said, addressing the courtroom. ‘What does a lesbian look like, dress like?’

The judge repeated herself. ‘I am asking you, is this who you really are, or did you alter your appearance for the hearing today?’

‘And I am asking you, what does a lesbian look like? I am not different because I dress like this – it is part of the same identity. I did this to express something of myself. To tell my story, share more of who I am. Is that a problem?’

Nazish turned to gauge Jamila’s reaction. Had she ever seen a client speak up like this? Maybe it was her first time watching someone without power refusing to concede. Maybe she’d scold her for acting out. But Jamila’s eyes were on fire. She was glaring at the judge, who had glanced down to consult her papers, demanding an answer from her.

The judge eventually raised her head. ‘No, it’s not a problem. That is the very purpose of the asylum process.’

At the end of the hearing, the judge explained that her decision would be communicated to them in writing. Nazish felt oddly calm; she had done her best. She glanced at Jamila. ‘How did that go?’

Jamila stood up, started packing. ‘Given the circumstances, good.’

They were ready to leave when the judge spoke again. ‘Do you have an umbrella, Ms Durrani?’

‘Huh? Me? No.’

‘Well, you might need one.’

The judge looked to the large windows on her right. It was beginning to rain outside.

Nazish clutched Jamila’s arm. ‘What did that mean?’ she whispered.

‘Nothing. Don’t pay any attention to her.’ She sorted the papers in her bag.

‘But didn’t you hear what she said? She asked me to buy an umbrella. It means something. Preparation for my new life. You’re hiding something, I know.’

She locked eyes with Jamila, who shared none of her elation.

‘It’s raining, Nazish. It’s an umbrella. Let’s wait for the decision. In this country, it’s always raining.’

Francesca Brooks

Record of Rain

On our bookshelf, a record of rain,
the pale French flaps litmus-edged,
acid seep of Parisian skyline. That
night the rain seemed dull, at first,
thief of the city's expansiveness, running
rivulet routes towards shelter in
the dark. But the rain has a way
with memory, prints sensation in
lines of type, rippled pages. Now
all the images will reappear: liquid
tree hauntings, golden columns
in the arches of the Seine, band
practice by river currents, red glow
under vinyl awnings, the city lights
melted in plastic, *Le Depart*, sugar
crepes, Poseidon flashes, the city
stained blue under the Pont Neuf,
Pernod over ice, cigarette smoke,
an umbrella blown out like an octopus
in retreat. It will be days before the
staff refuse to work at the Louvre,
and weeks before the borders close,
and then months, and months, and
months ... and we will keep the Parisian
rain on the small world of our shelves –
tracing inwards, only, the routes
suggested by territories mapped in ink.

Grant Tabard

To the Memory of the Dead for the Good of Those for Whom They Died

I wonder if we'll review ourselves years
from now in a country pub. We're both stuck
for the night, orphans of a storm. I'm Clark
Gable, you're Claudette Colbert, the carpets
are wolves nipping at our toes. Sat by a
raging firebox, all Johnny Rotten spit
and working-class fury, you'll speak first, a
softer tone than I knew, not iron-pick
nouns drilled into the nectar of my teeth.
Peeling back the light of how we played Witch
with our son; a serenade of pans, horns
mixed with his laughter pinched with bogeyman
fingers. We'd turn off the lights to double
as the woods, this black house, where I write this.

Basil du Toit

Shatterproof

A dark sound from the corvid family
crashes right through the plate glass
without causing it any damage (something
to do with physics) – the glass might as well
not be there, so clearly and completely
does the voice of the bird crack through it;
its cry is as bright as chisels, or soft and dark
like liquorice – authentic Crow, perfectly
understandable despite its passage into
and out of the glass – the glass itself unaltered,
as if it just opened up to let the sound in,
then closed up again, like water – nothing
shattered, even though that anarchic cry
was hurled through the window like a brick.

Clare Marsh

Event Horizon

propelled by oxytocin induction
I hurtle at the speed of light
towards the black hole I face alone
as a reluctant cosmonaut

gasping grasping the gas mask
to carry me through relentless
contractions on an entonox stream
my scream stretches
while time dilates

reality distorts at the event horizon
where sucked into the vortex
gravity waves and spacetime ripples
rock my body tidal forces
rip me apart my skin splits
into spaghetti strands

I plummet towards the singularity
at my core and exit into a parallel
universe greeted by long-dead family

but urgently summoned back
for the final gravitational push
I eject a perfect mass
of reconstituted stardust

and emerge on the other side
in time to hear your first cry

Konstantin N. Rega

Maria Anna Mozart (*pianist, composer, mother, and
older sister*)

it is a single note that comes to me | at
times when no other sound is moving
beating its way to my eardrum | and when
the clatter and clang is everywhere in feet
trains horses bells chatter clothing birds
fire | when my first born came and was
taken away by my father for the first month
a few months for | ever since it is I who
have searched out that disturbance so
lovely my hands feel displaced whenever I
play any other key | keeping that cry
uncontested though two more came soon
after | not quite the same | but when my
little brother well when the letter
pianissimo with the news of his passing
came by courier by a ringing of the doorbell

Mark Fiddes

Achilles' Actual Heel

My perfect sandals sing to me as tremulous as mountain goats.
The salesman can't see that I also require a breastplate and lyre
so that my pallid limbs will glow gold and invulnerable.
I wish for wolves and bears to pad gingerly in my sole prints
as I half-turn to acknowledge them like Michelangelo's David.
The salesman suggests I go down a size and opens the spread
in Esquire where Brad Pitt models them by a sullen blue pool
as if bewitched by lotus-eaters, following the flop that was Troy.
On his lounge, he dangles one from a toe, dripping indolence
by the dollar, looking every inch the son of Peleus and Thetis
as I finger old scars on my Mastercard and prepare for defeat.

Sophie Essex

Rattlebox

pretty little things do us no harm
echoes an aposematic siren song
coral pink stuttered #414A4C

I want for nothing more than comfort
those spherical nutrient-rich parts of
you. & yet.

& with this body of mine I have
miscalculated & with this body of mine
I have become unstuck

this tremor this uneasy

Kitty Donnelly

Broken Sleep

01:27

In winter, when the spade could not invade the earth,
they laid out bodies in our cellar,
awaiting burials on the cold store slabs
we use to ferment our homebrew bottles.

02:58

If that was sleep, it was a grey half-conscious soup.
I remember I came 2nd in the Year 7 IQ test
to a boy who was later charged for indecent phone calls.

No stars tonight. Only the turmeric
rust of light pollution. I listen to my lungs inflate & slacken.

03:19

I failed my driving test for missing a sheep ‘that might
have crossed the road’, he said.
I’ve doubted my observational skills since that statement.

I think of the morning slug through Ravensthorpe & Mirfield,
eyes straining to follow the road.

Perhaps I lapse for a few minutes –
time appears to leap a little forwards,
then the walls are back in focus.

03:44

The school hall in 1990: auditioning for *Oliver & Annie*.
Trainer prints on Parque & the sweetheart pupil
singing like a lark
after private tuition.
I wasn’t quite girly enough for an orphanage,
too girlish for a pact with Fagan.

04.05

Oh let me sleep –

I take a mite sized bite of diazepam, weighing up
this tyranny of sobriety.

Why does the cat water cultivate algae?

The cats lap at it tentatively, tasting the difference.

Are spores multiplying in my bedside glass?

04.55

We didn't part so much

as fork like the tongue of an anaconda.

I will never be sorry for that.

My eyelids sag...

Peter Green in a council house in Great Yarmouth
growing his nails till they curl back on themselves –

05.28

I see the test instructor lurch theatrically
when I press softly on the brake pads –

There was never a sheep, I realise in this quilted cold.

Patrick Wright

The Moon on My Uterus

I hide behind a cloud. The sky is starless. My face is a sheeted mirror.
I give her pains. She reaches for blister packs.
They have no such thing as nano probes to eat away the trouble.
In seven years the skeleton will replenish itself.
I wear these mother-of-pearl colours and opal for the surgeon's torch.
I rest on her uterus. I am a moonset. I stab her
though she thinks it's her dream's assassin.
Behold my seas and hemispheres. Behold my tendrils of venom.
The bloodstream feeds me like a mouth. My shape is agape and fearless.
I am a surface on which a knife will never land.

Sally Jenkinson

Piss Twice Before You Can Go Home

Two health care assistants come with me to the toilet
I am mute with pain no small talk

perched
on the cliff-edge of consciousness
try my best to piss

I can't go home until

A sound escapes from my mouth
 iron filings and grit-salt
 prayer
 the centre cannot hold

One of them
starts laughing audibly behind her hand
we don't acknowledge it

my shame is filthy, slicked with sweat
I shove it quickly in my dressing gown pocket
Where it squats for almost a year

I can hear my daughter crying

Once
I saw a wild boar at the road-side
split open red
hit by a speeding car
and its legs were still trying to make it stand up

nobody could stop to help it
the road was too busy and fast
the traffic just kept coming and coming

Rachel Goodman

the weight of an eggshell is not much

but it can tip the balance – then
it might as well be heavy as a house

all summer long I watched you go
an unmoored buoy

a child's balloon
a yellow dot dancing

to the distance to become at last
so very nearly nothing

then one breath – one – not taken
and the sky rolled empty

Chaucer Cameron

I Take Your Heart

New Year's Day. A tired old man in a grey creased coat delivered your heart into my mailbox. It was larger than I'd imagined. Plump, smudgy, almost blue. It moved the way you used to. Quick, quick, slow.

Last October was bleak, the willow had uprooted. We'd gone to see the flooded brook, but found instead a badger's body, white and black, beside the trunk. Each stiff claw rested like a piano key against the bark.

And now spring. It's raining. I take you heart, wrapped up in the Big Issue, walk from Neptune's Fountain along St George's Road, notice for the first time how meaty you smell, how hungry I am, starving for you.

I sit beside you on a bench by the Honeybourne Line, wrap and unwrap you, grasp you between my hands, hold your flesh to my face, feel for a pulse, watch for change, listen for a sound, dying for the sight of you.

Simon French

Becoming Alone

Dad mopes in the hollow house. Half-dusts.
Pinches laundry onto the washing line.
Rounds up apples as she would have.

At evening he slumps in the lounge.
Remembers air heaving with garlic, thyme,
her condensations

haunting the kitchen window.
When she was inundated by steam,
the shower's perspex, moistured

like a rainy day; the waft of botanicals.
Says he feels apparitions of her breath
settling like dew on his neck.

Dad wishes he were like a dehumidifier -

her wet inside him

drawn down past circuitry,
pooling in a sacred lake
for the moonless animals that gather to drink.

Mike Farren

Stag

As if it were the best man's joke, when I open
the curtains, I am face to face with a stag
trespassing this garden, beneath the mountain.

I'm suffering from alcohol, too much
male company and that last-chance bravado
only just beginning to congeal to guilt.

There's a patch of mange on his pelt, his ribs
are showing and the absurd candelabra
of his antlers seem less like a weapon, more

like a burden. It's clear that there's no whimsy
in him being here, no punchline to a joke,
no moment of grace – only hunger and the cluelessness

of nature. Our eyes stay locked on one another's.
His offer no enlightenment. He chooses
neither fight, nor flight – he simply shambles

off, antlers held low, nose to the ground, grazing.
And even if we spoke each other's language,
we still couldn't begin to understand.

Zoë Ranson

Collagen

I was crochety/fuzzy headed
You were flatter than Coke Zero at Christmas
I was incorrigible/not sorry

You were disappointed, I think, demure
I was upstart/bon vivant/axeminder
You were a seashore, a grass harp. A flame

I was lipstick smeared the best way
You were obnoxiously sober and smug

I was in the queue for chips on the jetty
You were eating peach pieces from a ziplock

I was Dairylea on a cheeseboard
You were the good Gruyère, gone crystal

Sarah Wimbush

Sweet Shop

Warm doughnuts are rolling into the sea.
A grain of sugar hangs on the horizon.

The mosquito lands on my cheek,
its mountain fizzing in the corner of my eye.

Tate and Lyle sachets. Sugar-snips.

My mother walks across the veranda.
She is so thin. Actually no, she's sixteen.
I love that hair-clip, the small brass round one.

Chalk roll-up. Pink end. Puff.

I sink my face into my mother's knitting bag,
she's on every strand of wool –
unravelling jumpers, then knitting jumpers.

Who's that with her on the veranda?
The backlight, black-rust molasses.

Roll-roll-roll. Lick the rot soft Space Dust.

The waves empty out of my hole.
The ceiling fan is five cricket bats never quite meeting.

You're smoking sweet cigarettes,
I had no idea you smoked.

Feel the water. Feel the sticky hand-prints.
I trace my finger across the O imprint on my cheek.

Atma Frans

Lilacs Freesias Roses Jasmine

You meet your lover's mother
lounging in her garden,
straw hat tipped.

Ice cubes in a heavy glass.
Polaroid glasses mirror
the topiary elephant.

My son needs a nice Catholic girl
she says. She means, not a woman.
Not you. Bright and rumpled.

Laughter catches in your throat.
Her legs stiffen beneath iron-
smooth linen.

Toes point,
precise tips of a compass
about to set the course.

Margaret Adkins

I become a wardrobe

when I can't sleep.

I rise up in the dark
ordinary as a polite notice

that says Back Soon,
full of the unseen-until-worn

and I stare at the ceiling
with peplum-flaring thoughts.

My limed-oak sides still
want to move like ribs

with the ache
with the sobs

with the grief
of keeping the freshly

laundered and pressed
hung in order of colour

on velvet hangers
ready for morning

when I choose
what to wear.

I long for spring
when I will seize emerald

to blend in
with day-old beech leaves

for holding
between finger and thumb

ever so tenderly.

Sally St Clair

First Pizza

It was under the railway bridge in Wandsworth
& I'd run away from home & it was winter & dark

by the afternoon & I was pregnant. Or it was before that
but I'd still run away & it was still dark & cold but possibly

I'd gone back home for a while to see my mum. Or we
were in Brixton sitting on a bench in the park & you'd

been breathing on my hands to warm them. Or it wasn't
you at all, I was with the boy with the red hair & he

couldn't believe I'd never eaten pizza before. But anyway,
it was definitely dark, the streetlights were on & we stood

in a pool of yellow light under a lamp post, or
it might have been moon shine, I don't remember

but you were laughing & the pizza was burning my hands.

Author Biographies

Margaret Adkins writes at the foot of the Malvern Hills. Her debut poetry pamphlet, *Mingled Space* was published by V. Press. Her poems appear online and in print, including most recently: *Ink, Sweat & Tears, Atrium, Prole* and *Under the Radar*, and also feature in several anthologies. Her website: www.margaretadkins.co.uk

Beth Booth is a musician and poet from Liverpool via Cumbria, and an MFA student at the Manchester Writing School. She has had work published in several journals, and is a part of the 2021 *Queer Bodies Poetry Collective* cohort. She can be found online at bethboothwrites.com

Francesca Brooks is a writer and researcher living in Manchester and working at the University of York. Her poetry was recently longlisted for *Primers 6* (Nine Arches Press) and has appeared in journals including *PN Review* and *Structo*.

Chaucer Cameron is author of *In an Ideal World I'd Not Be Murdered* (Against The Grain 2021) She has been published in journals, including: *Under the Radar* and *The North*. Chaucer is creator of *Wild Whispers*, an international poetry film project. She is co-editor of online magazine, *Poetry Film Live*.

Louisa Campbell's first full collection of poetry, *Beautiful Nowhere* (Boatwhistle Books, 2021), draws on her experiences as both mental health nurse and patient. Her new work grapples with themes of spirituality and connectedness. She lives in Kent, England, with her husband, teenager and rescued Romanian street dog.

Kitty Donnelly's first collection, *The Impact of Limited Time*, was published in 2020. Her second collection is due out in 2022. She was nominated for a Jerwood Compton Fellowship in 2021. She has recently had poems in *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Rialto & Mslexia*.

Basil du Toit was born in Cape Town and has been living in Edinburgh since 1980. In 2015 he was a winner of the Poetry Business Book & Pamphlet Competition (judged by Billy Collins), and he is this year's winner of the Wigtown Poetry Prize.

Sophie Essex is a poet, editor, & softcore bunny living in Norwich. She runs independent press Salò Press, lit-mag *Fur-Lined Gbetto*, and monthly open-mic night Volta. Her work has appeared in *Leste*, *The Belleville Park Pages*, *HVTN*, and others. Her chapbook *Some Pink Star* is available through Eibonvale Press. @salopress @capitanofelixio

Mike Farren is a widely-published writer and editor whose pamphlets are: *Pierrot and his Mother* (Templar), *All of the Moons* (Yaffle) and *Smithereens* (4Word). He won the Saltaire Festival and Ilkley Literature Festival poetry prizes in 2020 and was 'canto' winner for Poem of the North (2018).

Mark Fiddes's second collection *Other Saints Are Available* was published by Live Canon in May 2021. He's a recent winner of the Oxford Brookes University Prize and Ruskin Prize. He's been runner-up in the Bridport Prize. Work has featured in *Poetry Review*, *The Irish Times*, *Magma* and many other titles.

Atma Frans searches for the voice beneath her personas: woman, mother, trauma survivor, immigrant, architect, queer, poet. Her work has been published in *The New Quarterly*, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Obsessed with Piperwork*, *The Dalbousie Review* and *Understorey Magazine* among others. Originally from Belgium, Atma Frans lives in Gibsons, BC, Canada

Simon French has had one poetry collection published - *Joyriding Down Utopia Avenue* (Coverstory Books 2021). He has had many poems published in magazines including *Orbis*, *Ambit*, *The Rialto*, *The London Magazine* and *Stand* as well as online magazines including *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears* and *Snakeskin*.

Rachel Goodman is a poet and painter. She has been published in *Aesthetica*, *Magma*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Under the Radar*, *Fenland Journal* and the *Wolverhampton Literary Festival Anthology*. She has an MA in Poetry from UEA and was shortlisted for the Bridport Prize in 2017 and 2021.

Livvy Hanks has an MA in Literary Translation from the University of East Anglia, and worked as an editor before moving into policy and campaigning work. She lives in Norwich.

Matt Haw is the author of *Saint-Paul-de-Mausole* (tall-lighthouse, 2014) and *Boudicca* (Templar, 2021). My work has recently appeared in *The Rialto*, *Poetry Birmingham* and *Anthropocene*. I divide my time between Norfolk and the west coast of Norway.

Sally Jenkinson is based in the Forest of Dean. Although she never stopped writing, she has been inactive in the poetry community whilst raising a young family. In 2021, she is beginning to dip her toes back into the waters. Her work recently featured on 'Power Lines' on BBC Radio 4.

Tawseef Khan is a Manchester-based solicitor. In March 2021, he published his first book, *The Muslim Problem: Why We're Wrong About Islam and Why It Matters*. He has a story in *Test Signal*, an anthology of Northern writing. He was the recipient of the Seth Donaldson Memorial Bursary at UEA.

Robin Knight is a mixed-race writer in Sussex, with poetry published in: *Rattle*, *The North*, *SOUTH*, *Filling Station*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Griffel*, *The Dewdrop*, *The Whirlwind*, *Visual Verse*, and elsewhere.

Max Lury is a British writer. He has just graduated from the Prose Fiction MA at UEA and is currently working on a novel titled: *NO GHOSTS*. This will be his first story in print.

Clare Marsh is an international adoption social worker. Her writing has appeared in *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Flash Flood*, *Pure Slush*, *Places of Poetry* and won the Olga Sinclair Prize (2020). She was awarded M.A. Creative Writing (University of Kent 2018) and nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2017.

Kathryn Anna Marshall is a poet from Coalbrookdale. Kathryn's work explores themes around mental and physical health, body image and inequality, as well the curiosity of living in an ex-industrial landscape that is slowly returning to nature. Kathryn has work published or forthcoming in *Mslaxia*, *Popsbot Quarterly*, *Sledgehammer Lit.* and *The Dawnreader*.

Stuart Mugridge is an artist based in South Norfolk. Words are one of a number of media Stuart uses in his work ... others include sound, performance and public art. Stuart's poems frequently find an initial inspiration in landscapes and thoughts run or walked.

Luke Palmer's second pamphlet of poems, *In all my books my father dies*, was published in 2021 by The Red Ceilings Press. His first, *Spring in the Hospital*, won the Prole Pamphlet contest in 2018. His debut YA novel, *Grow* (Firefly, 2021) is a Sunday Times Book of the Year.

Marie Papier is London Poetry School Student for the last 6 years, Marie has attended master classes, Seminars with Philip Gross and Greta Stoddart. Her poems are published by *Arvon/Daily Telegraph*, *The North*, *Agenda*, *Stand*, smith/doorstop anthology *Poems about Running: Online*, in *Calyx*, and *Weather Indoors*, two anthologies from Bristol Stanza.

Zoë Ranson is a writer and performer, based in Hackney, London. She makes work from micro to epic, sometimes for the stage. @zooeyr @tentative_line

Born in Krasnoyarsk, Russia, Konstantin N. Rega graduated from UEA's Creative Writing MA with the Ink, Sweat and Tears Scholarship. Twice a Dan Veach Young Poet's Prize finalist, he's been published by *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *decomp*, *Mikrokosmos Journal*, *The Claremont Review*, amongst others, and is Assistant Editor of *Virginia Living*. www.neomodernkonstantin.weebly.com

Sally St Clair's stories have appeared in Panurge & Stand. Poems have been variously commended, shortlisted or placed in competitions. They have appeared in Envoi & The Frogmore Papers as well as Beautiful Dragons & Raving Beauties anthologies. Follow her on Instagram @sallystclair.writer Website: www.sallystclair.com

Niki Strange rediscovered her love of poetry while undergoing cancer treatment in 2019. She went on to become poet in residence at Macmillan Horizon Centre, delivering workshops for people affected by cancer. Her poems have won second prizes in Second Light 2021 and Sussex Poetry Competition 2019. She lives in Brighton.

Grant Tarbard is the author of *Loneliness is the Machine that Drives the World* (Platypus Press) and *Rosary of Ghosts* (Indigo Dreams). His new pamphlet *This is the Carousel Mother Warned You About* (Three Drops Press) and new collection *dog* (Gatehouse Press) will be out this year.

Charles Tarlton lives at the Shore in Old Saybrook, Connecticut with his wife, Ann Knickerbocker, an abstract painter, and their black, female, standard poodle, Nikki.

Lauren Thomashas been published in various places in print and online, most recently, *Magma*, 'Choices' zine edited by Liz Berry and publications from Nine Pens and Black Bough Poetry. Her pamphlet, *Silver Hare Tales*, will be published in December 2021 with Blood Moon Poetry.

Ruth Wiggins has just completed a manuscript about the 900-year history of Barking Abbey. Her poem comes from this, and is an adaptation of pregnancy charms found in an Anglo-Saxon book of remedies. Ruth has published two pamphlets: *Myrtle* (Emma Press, 2014) and, *a handful of string* (Paekakariki, 2020).

Sarah Wimbush has published two pamphlets: *Bloodlines* (Seren, 2020) and *The Last Dinosaur in Doncaster* (Smith|Doorstop, 2021). Her first collection *Shelling Peas with My Grandmother in the Gorgioliands* will be published by Bloodaxe in 2022.

Patrick Wright has a poetry collection, *Full Sight Of Her*, published by Eyewear (2020). He has twice been included in the *Best New British and Irish Poets* anthology, and has been shortlisted for the Bridport Prize. He works at the Open University, where he teaches English Literature and Creative Writing.