

the Creative Writing Society

Compendium



Winter 2021

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Editor's Welcome

Welcome to the third edition of the Creative Writing Society Compendium! Everything you're about to read has been written, edited, and produced by members of the Creative Writing Society, and has been discussed and improved in our weekly meetings. This digital, termly publication showcases the work of our talented, wonderful group of writers, in a collection of prose and poetry with a variety of genres and styles.

We're incredibly proud to publish this. It has been a massive project for us, and we've been delighted with the level of involvement within our society. All who have participated have worked incredibly hard to make this happen, and we'd like to thank everyone.

If you're a writer or just enjoy hearing/reading others' writing, we'd love to see you at one of our meetings! The details are all on the next page, and if you're interested in getting involved with the next issue of our Compendium, get in touch!

President's Welcome

The Aberdeen University Creative Writing Society (AUCWS) was founded during the 1980s to offer students a platform to share, develop, read, and listen to creative pieces. Its goal is to create a welcoming place where writers can improve their work through encouragement and feedback. The society meets once a week to read out and listen to pieces of writing, followed by a post-meeting "social hour."

The most important rule here is to have fun! Whether it be sombre or light-hearted, short or long (within reason...), every piece of writing has its place here, and a diverse, enthusiastic community of people ready to listen and help each other grow as creators!

Welcome to students and non-students, writers and readers alike, the society has its doors open to all. We hope you'll join us!

How to find us?

If you enjoy anything we put in this Compendium, then you might be interested in checking us out on our various platforms!

Please send any inquiries or submissions you might have to our email address at creative.writing@ausa.org.uk

We meet at in the **New King's 1** lecture hall at 6PM every Thursday. If you're unable to join us in person, you can do so via a Google Meet link that will be given out on our Facebook page and Discord a little while before the meetings start.

Speaking of, do find us on social media!

Facebook: Aberdeen University Creative Writing Society

Instagram: @au_creativewriting

Discord: <https://discord.gg/EUmNTNFXve>

E-mail: creative.writing@ausa.org.uk

We sincerely hope you enjoy this publication, especially if you decide to join us because of it!

Happy reading!

Aidan William Armstrong

Skull and Crossroads

On a road, there walked a lizard. They had walked for many days. Nights too. Basking in the sun by daylight, sleeping in dead plants at the roadside under the moon. It was a simple, if uncomfortable, system. For food, they did not go hungry. There were many travellers on the road. Many smaller than the lizard. But there were many bigger too. Sticks and shrubs offered little protection from predators.

On a road, there walked a raccoon. He enjoyed his strolls through the night air. When he wasn't walking, he would sleep in logs by the roadside and dream of treasure. The raccoon had only two complaints, and only one that he would admit to himself. The puddles by the roadside were few and far between, and the raccoon preferred a more moistened meal than is ordinarily found in nature. Sadly, puddles are stationary and cannot be taken on travels.

At a crossroads, there lay a skull. It couldn't remember its name, nor how it ended up in its rather unfortunate position. If it had had a body, it had long since become submerged in the road or been picked away by travellers seeking a morbid souvenir. The skull could not remember which. The skull could not remember fun, or friendship, or food (which was just as well, because it had been many years since the skull had eaten. Thankfully, it no longer had to worry about petty issues like hunger pains, starvation or, indeed, death.). The skull could not move. It could not speak. It is debateable whether or not it could think or feel, but for the purposes of this story, it most certainly *could* see.

Through one eye, the skull saw a road and, creeping over its horizon, a lumbering blob of scaly green. Through the other, a similar sight. A road and, waddling over the point where the sky meets the land, a lump of fuzzy brown. The skull considered investing in a pair of glasses, but soon remembered the many reasons why this would be a waste of time. It swiftly forgot these reasons, as it had no brain in which to store them.

For the lizard, a crossroads came into view. They hated crossroads, for crossroads could mean only one thing: That they would need to make a choice. If there's one thing that the lizard hated more than crossroads, it was making choices. The lizard did not understand this paradox. They had a lizard brain.

The raccoon could just about make out a fleck of white in the centre of a large X dead ahead. He did not know much, but he was an enthusiast and collector of pirate novels, and if there was one thing that he *did* know, it's that "*X marks the spot.*" With a glint in his eye and a twitch in his nose, the raccoon picked up his pace, and raced to his promised treasure.

At a crossroads, a skull watched two shapes as they approached from two roads. As they got closer, the skull recognised them as a lizard and a raccoon. The skull clearly had a very selective memory. It could not remember its life, the whereabouts of its bones, or the meaning of food, but it could accurately identify raccoons and lizards at a distance with no eyes. From this, we can infer that in life, the skull cared far too deeply for lizards and raccoons.

The lizard arrived at a crossroads, and the choice was laid before them. Would they turn left, right, or continue forward? They pondered, if only to delay the inevitable decision. At the centre of the crossroads, they spied a skull poking out from the sand. It was big. Bigger than they were. Though they were rather small. Big enough to be a decent shelter. For a time at least. Maybe, they thought, they could just... sleep for a while? But surely, they should make their decision first? And so, they decided. They decided to make a decision, and then once the decision was made, they would reward themselves by deciding to take a nap behind the teeth of their new friend.

They looked to the road on the right. Nothing. They looked ahead. Also nothing. They looked to their left.

“What the hell are *you?*” they hissed.

Bugger if I know, thought the skull, thoughtlessly.

After a perilous and exhausting journey, the raccoon had arrived at the crossroads. At the X which marked the spot of his promised treasure, only... he didn't see treasure. He didn't see much of anything. He had expected fanfare! Riches! Heartbreak! Adventure! At least a plot twist or a proverbial lesson about greed. Sadly, his only welcome was a small, green creature hissing at him from behind a sun-bleached skull.

“Where's the treasure?” He tilted his head to the side and rubbed his ear. The creature crawled out from behind the skull.

“Treasure?” They flashed a pink tongue to wet their eyeballs. “What... treasure?”

The lizard climbed up to mount the white dome in an attempt to dwarf their opponent.

“Well.” The raccoon stood on its hind legs. “Xs are supposed to mean treasure.” He pressed his paws together and interlocked his raccoon fingers. He suddenly felt rather foolish, allowing his pirate fixation to cause him to strain himself.

The lizard paused. They darted their eyes from side to side, then looked back to the raccoon. “What the hell is an ‘X’?” they finally replied.

The raccoon blinked. “You know... I don't rightly know.” The raccoon was a raccoon, and as such, could not read. He considered that he may have dreamed of pirate novels. Or been one in a past life. A pirate, that is. Not a pirate novel. “So...” the raccoon said. “...there's no treasure then?”

The lizard let out a low grumble. They descended the skull.

“There's nothing here but you, me, and this skull.”

The pair paused. The raccoon let himself fall back onto his front legs.

“So, what you're saying is...” The raccoon circled the skull. He examined it as he walked. The lizard recoiled slightly. “...the skull... is the treasure!”

Without another word, the lizard scuttled their way back up the face of skull, turning their body into a rather fetching hat. Their tail ran across the nose of the skull as they climbed. It might have sneezed, but fortunately, it was dead.

“NO NO NO NO NO NO NO!” the lizard cried. They took a deep breath through flared nostrils, before letting out one final emphatic “NNNNO!”

A moment passed in silence. The raccoon approached the back of the skull. The lizard hugged the scalp.

“You know...” The raccoon licked his lips. “That thing would make a good porta-puddle...”

The lizard raised a scaly and non-existent brow. The skull would have sighed, had it been attached to a functional pair of lungs.

"...If we hollowed it out, that is." The raccoon sneered. The lizard tightened their grip around the hot bone below.

"THIS is my HOME!" The words escaped with a rasp and the pair found themselves once again in silence. The raccoon placed a paw forward. And then another. He sniffed.

"Gimme!" he snarled.

"Piss off!" the lizard screeched. "It's mine. Finders, keepers!"

"And losers quote stupid rhymes!" The raccoon crouched down, as low as his round, little body would allow. "I saw it first!" He pounced. The lizard ducked behind the brow of the skull and backed their way down to the teeth. The skull felt a sudden pang of anxiety that it had been so long since it had flossed. This anxiety was soon overshadowed by the continuous relief of the grave.

"You don't know that!" the lizard shrieked. "And besides... I need it more than you! All you want is a goth water bottle! I live here!" The raccoon leaned over the skull and batted at the forehead with his paws.

"How do *you* know?" he hissed. "Maybe I've been looking for a skull for years! Maybe it's my life's purpose!" The raccoon gasped. It had been a while since his daily routine had been interrupted with such physical effort. The lizard poked their head over the brow.

"...Is it?" They tilted their head. The raccoon panted for a bit.

"Well, no..." He let himself fall back from the skull to sit. "...But I want it!" The lizard slowly clambered their way back up the skull.

"Well... I want it too." The pair locked eyes for a moment, and then quickly looked elsewhere. The lizard thought for a moment before speaking again. "Let me see..." They climbed down to the bottom of the skull and placed their hands upon its jaw. Curious, the raccoon circled to skull and took a seat directly in front of it. The lizard held the jaw and pushed it up from the ground slightly. "Alas, poor Yorick!" they cried. The raccoon jumped. The lizard smiled. "I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy."

"Horatio?" The raccoon tilted his head.

"It's Hamlet." The lizard snickered. The raccoon licked his lips.

"Sounds delicious."

The lizard thought for a moment. "It's a play." They let go of the jaw. "Billyshakes, or something. You don't know it?"

"I don't know much." The raccoon lowered his head. The lizard took a step closer.

"You know pirates, though." They smiled. So did the raccoon. He made his way over to the skull and poked his nose under the jaw. He circled round and pushed his nose through the teeth, creating a horrid and jarring effect for the lizard. Slowly, he mouthed the words:

"Deeeaad meeeeen teeeell noooo taaaales..."

The lizard laughed. The raccoon did too. He pulled his snout out of the skull. "What did you say that play was again?" asked the raccoon.

"Hamlet. By Billyshakes. Or something."

The raccoon padded over and sat by the lizard.

“Have you ever seen it?” The lizard turned quickly.

“N-no.”

The pair sat together for a while. The skull watched them. It might have been touched, if it had emotions, or indeed a sense of touch. The raccoon turned to the lizard. He had only had two complaints in his travels, and it seemed that he was finally ready to admit his second.

“Would you like to?”

The lizard’s eyes widened. They once again extended a tongue to wet them. They had always hated making decisions, but this one was easy.

“Yes. I’d like that very much.” The lizard smiled. The raccoon smiled back. Together, they chose a path and started their quest. For Hamlet, or pirates, or home, or... porta-puddles. Neither of them had much of a sense of direction.

At a crossroads, there lies a skull. It can’t remember its name, nor how it ended up in its rather unfortunate position. If it had a body, it has long since become submerged in the road or been picked away by travellers seeking a morbid souvenir. The skull cannot remember which. The skull cannot remember food, or fun. But it remembers friendship. Perhaps not its own, but long ago, a few inches from its face, it witnessed something which set off enough of a spark to relight its memory. The skull cannot move. It cannot speak. It’s debateable whether or not it can think, but for the purposes of this story, it most certainly *can* feel. And for the first time in a very long time, the skull feels lonely.

The Penis Mightier than the Sword

Content warning: Sexual innuendos

“CEASE AND DECEASE, BRIGAND! LAY DOWN YOUR ARM AND GO IN PEACE, OR I SHALL BE FORCED TO PENETRATE YOUR TENDER CAGE!” Sarin spat. He drew his blade and the stranger stumbled back. A glass bottle slipped from his fingers and shattered upon the stones of the road before he moved his hand to a hilt on his belt.

“Ah ye bastard! What’d ye think yer doin’ shoutin’ like that?”

Sarin staggered at the stranger’s words. Such brazen disrespect from one such as this did not sit well with the knight. He needed time to form an appropriate response. “Bastard, is it? I’ve killed worse men than you for less than that.”

“And I’ve killed better men than ye for worse!” The stranger drew his blade and took a step back. Sarin paused. So did the stranger. They stood on the road, each pointing at the other with vaguely phallic intent. Sarin squinted as he tried to make out which of their swords was the longer.

“So...” he tried. “Where does that leave us?”

The stranger did not answer immediately. He glanced from side to side before returning his attention to the knight. “Confused I suppose.”

The pair stood in silence for a moment longer. Sarin tightened his grip around the hilt, making sure not to break eye contact. The stranger took another step back, before raising his sword in defence. Another moment passed. Sarin could feel his arms starting to tremble under the weight. He wondered why the stranger had not yet moved to attack. He had simply stood at the ready, while Sarin did the same.

“Well?” Sarin’s voice echoed slightly as he called through his helmet. “What are you waiting for?”

“What?” The stranger frowned.

“Look, would you just hurry up and advance already? I have a long day of smiting scum ahead!” Sarin smiled under his helmet. To his mind, the simple use of the word ‘scum’ was a cutting barb.

“I beg yer pardon?” The stranger lowered his weapon. “I thought ye were going to attack me!”

Sarin’s sword fell. “You what?” He took a step forward. The stranger stepped back. “Why would I attack you?”

“Ye think I’m thick? I know better than to tangle with big, armoured bastards on the road. What do you need all that extra plate for eh? The wolves? Do ye buggery. Yer a bandit. Plain as day.” The stranger thrust the point of his sword into the road at his feet. Sarin once again tightened his grip. He clenched his teeth in a vain attempt to hold his tongue.

“There are many beasts of the road, good sir.” Sarin raised his blade above his head and pointed to where he thought the sun ought to be. His helmet made it difficult to be sure. “I am here to defend the common folk!”

“The common folk? Ye mean the scum?” The stranger let go of his sword and crossed his arms. “I know yer type. Haughty adventurer made fat on killin’ rats for high lords. Think you can come out here and protect the poor liddle people, do ye? Well, the poor liddle people can protect themselves, thank ye very much.” He took his blade in hand, pulled it from the road and raised it to rest on his shoulder. It seemed remarkably light.

Oh, yes, Sarin thought. My sword is DEFINITELY bigger.

“Listen here, knave. I am performing a service. Defending the road from beasts, bandits, and other ne’er-do-wells. Would you stand in my way?” He held his sword out to the side, hoping that the stranger would take note of its tremendous length. His arm, however, quickly became tired and he had to lower the blade to rest. Sarin counted this as a victory.

“A service? Ye threatened to kill me!”

“Because you’re carrying a sword!”

“To protect myself!” The stranger flung his arm forward and swung the sword like a ragdoll.

“To protect yourself?” Sarin found himself befuddled, as he often did. “From what?”

“There are many beasts of the road, good sir.” The stranger smiled. Sarin did not.

“Look, friend, I’d rather not kill you if I can help it.”

“Wonderful. Well, it just so happens that I’d rather not die, so I’ll just be on my—”

“Not so fast, knave.” Sarin raised his sword once again. The stranger threw up his hands in defeat.

“Oh, what do ye want from me, ye sad man?”

“How do I know that you’ll go in peace?” Sarin stepped forward. The stranger held his ground.

“I haven’t attacked ye, have I?” His grip tightened.

“You haven’t attacked a trained knight, but how am I to trust that you won’t prey on the weak the moment that you’re out of my sight?” Sarin took another step forward. As did the stranger.

“How can I trust that ye won’t yerself?” The stranger flicked his tongue over his teeth with a lurid smile. Sarin stepped back.

“How... DARE YOU!” Sarin brought his sword down into the road with a mighty roar. “I AM A MAN OF HONOUR. I HAVE MADE A SOLEMN VOW TO DEFEND THE WEAK AND TO SMITE THE WICKED. I AM FORBIDDEN FROM EVER HARMING THE INNOCENT OR THE NEEDY, AND YOU ASK HOW YOU CAN TRUST ME?” An inhuman hiss echoed through his helmet. For another moment, the pair stood in silence as Sarin caught his breath.

“Forbidden, ye say?” The stranger took another step towards to knight. Through laboured breaths, he responded.

“That’s... that’s right... knave.” Sarin found himself leaning upon his sword. *Good, old, long, and slender*, he thought. *Always there to take my weight*.

“I suppose that means ye’d never fight an unarmed man then?” The stranger whispered, as he leaned over to the knight.

“OF COURSE NOT!” He shot back upright and pulled his sword from the road. The stranger, without another word, raised his sword above his head, before throwing it to the ground. Sarin froze. “What are you—”

“Cheerio, ye cock.” The stranger placed his hands into his pockets and sauntered past the re-befuddled knight.

“That’s...” His mouth fell. “That’s not fair.” The stranger kept walking. “Come back here!” Sarin ran to the sword and took it in his hand. “Get back here and fight me, coward! FIGHT ME!” He threw the blade to the ground. “FIGHT ME, YOU BASTARD! YOU BRIGAND! YOU FUCKWIT! TASTE MY STEEL! TASTE MY TASTY PHALLIC STEEL!”

“Piss off, pillock!” The stranger went on his way.

Sarin stared at the abandoned short sword. The abandoned... short... sword...

Short sword. Sarin smirked. And then he grinned. And then, he started to laugh. He turned around and made his merry way along the road. His sword had been the longer after all.

Emma Bristow

The Sledge

For the first time in so many winters, the white that fell from the sky was snow, and nothing but snow. It had been a long time since it was snow, instead of the soft yet heavy ash, or a sloppy mix of the two that the world had become so accustomed to. Back then, Cecilia had still been in school, still just a child. She'd considered herself so mature at the time when she really knew so little.

Although she was an adult now, she couldn't help but be filled by that buried childlike joy at the sight and the taste of snow—real snow—on her tongue.

After a few days, the snow had piled up. Tuesday hit, when both she and Maureen had nothing to do, no work at all, so long there wasn't an emergency.

Maureen, the overachiever she was, had of course gone to small building that served as their hospital anyway, as she did every morning, to confirm that the doctor wouldn't require another pair of hands today. He never did, but she still checked every Tuesday, probably in part due to their friendship. They'd likely gossip about whatever nonsense was currently going on for twenty or so minutes anyway.

Which gave Cecilia time to search for a crucial part of her plan.

She knew it was in one of the old, decrepit sheds near the back of the compound, behind several empty instrument cases and bicycles that had probably been broken longer than she had been alive, only kept around in case they would ever need spare parts. She came across the prize that she remembered packing away in here so long ago, when they were still putting this fenced little island of safety together—a sledge, in a salmon-ish pink that had once been red, out of the cheapest plastic. As soon as she lifted it up, she realised it hadn't survived the years well at all and was already cracking slightly around the edges where her hands were compressing it.

Cecilia set it back down and tried to think of another solution to her problem, taking long enough that she was found.

"Hey Ceci," came a voice from the doorway, somewhat amused. "Heard you were over here. What ya doing?"

It seemed even going to the sheds was enough to get the gossip wheel turning.

"I was trying to get a sledge... but, ugh..." Cecilia gestured towards the pink plastic mess of cracks in the corner. "I have no idea what to do."

Maureen stared for a second, then laughed, reddish curls bouncing around her face, but not in an unflattering way. She caught her breath again. "I don't think I ever used a proper sledge as a kid. They'd be something around we could nick—a bit of wood maybe?"

Cecilia nodded. "I'll go find some. Um—I was planning on taking you sledding today?"

"I figured that out."

"Ah. Um—"

"I'm in."

"Great!" Cecilia pressed a quick kiss to Maureen's cheek before going to find the wooden backup.

They went out of the compound, notifying the necessary people as they left, Cecilia carrying what was probably once the seat of a bench under her arm. Maureen had offered to help, but Cecilia refused. The end of the slab was frayed-looking and somewhat splintery, but the rest was smooth and safe. Their clothes would keep it out, although Maureen was keeping an eye on Cecilia's hands, the tips of which were exposed to the slight danger, her fingerless gloves not reaching that far.

It would normally have taken only 10 minutes or so to reach the hilliest area around here, an area that some in the compound obstinately referred to as London Road, despite it never having carried that name before nor been a road. With the snow around their legs, it took twice as long. Still, it was quicker than the times it was covered in ash before it got washed and melted away by the rains.

As they walked, Maureen fiddled her hair up into the same tight braid that she wore for work, not wanting her hair to whip her in the face. Then she let it go at the end, realising she'd forgotten a tie for it. The hair reached the tops of her thighs as it started to slowly unravel.

Cecilia couldn't quite tell if the red brushing her nose and cheeks was from embarrassment at this gaff—Maureen rarely forgot anything—or from the cold.

Standing at the top of the hill, they could see for what they thought were miles, the only sign of recent human life being the compound that was half blocked from their vision by trees. Otherwise, the world was silent around them, desolate. Maureen stiffened slightly as she looked left, to where the old, abandoned cell tower was, before shaking her head slightly and turning away, back to Cecilia, who looked at her in gentle concern.

"Can't normally see that from here," she explained, "but no reason to let that ruin this."

"If we go down this way," Cecilia said, gesturing to what was in fact a part of downward slopes, "you won't have to look that way, or we can go some other hill—"

"This way'll be fine," Maureen said firmly, but with a slight smile.

Maureen hadn't been in the compound from its founding, a decade or so ago—she'd only joined two or three years ago. Joined might be the wrong word—it'd be more accurate to say she'd been found, half dead and nearly buried in ash at the base of the tower. She had ended up never leaving again. Cecilia still hadn't found out quite what led Maureen there, and she didn't think she'd ever find out fully.

Cecilia turned, tugging Maureen's wrist slightly, stumbling as she overbalanced forward, forgetting she'd already set their makeshift sled down. Recovering, she mimed being a footman of a carriage, gesturing towards it. "Ladies' first."

Maureen shook her head lightly, settling on it, with the slightly taller Cecilia settling behind. "No one would ever guess you were the older one, how you carry on half the time," she teased.

"Hey! It's not as if anyone else's sense of humour survived quite as intact."

"It did... they just might have matured some."

"That's no fun." Cecilia gave a sly grin, before pushing on the ground with her hand, setting the sledge off down the hill.

Blair Center

To The Brandsbutt Stone

Leaning, sitting strong and firm but not a sulk,
repaired from every shattering strike and fall;
like Humpty Dumpty but instead one bulk
resurrected after sacrifice for a wall.

As a child I played around him,
this stone, not understanding depictions
marked upon his face nor the engraved Ogham,
the ancient script for such inscriptions.

He was made to break, but now he's whole
and has been left in peace forever since.
When I hear of his patience against time's toll,
my mortal weakness stings; the Reaper makes me wince.

Eulogy for Meldrum Meg

Meldrum Meg, she ran the line
back and forth from the Garioch's heart.
It was habit; she did it all the time
and in local industry she played her part.

Inverury → Lethenty → Fingask → Old Meldrum,
you see,
she went that way for years and years.
When she first came to town, folk declared with glee
that she was great. Back then, there were no fears

that in the thirties, she would host her final fare-paying friend
and would have precarious work from that point on.
None of her first observers could have foreseen her end —
just one-hundred and ten years until she would be gone.

A few folk gathered, with respects to pay,
when the sixties put auld Meg to death.
They gave her whisky to carry, sent her off on her way,
and with some smoke and a whistle, she went with her last breath.

Tae The Prop o' Ythsie

Aye, auld shada, ye great granite rook,
ye ay staun there in a grey coat, austere.
Ye're nae hidden awa in a wee tricky neuk,
nor ahin trees; ye're clear on yon hill there.

Ye've nae een but A can tell that ye glower,
exercising some auld, ancient magic pooer.
Restful Tarves asleep is fit ye watch ower.

Bit then, again, ye're mibbe nithin bit a steen tooer.

The Soldier's Denial

Content warning: Descriptions of war

A saw him layin' doon there, mam,
doon aneth the grun.
He's layin' doon in Belgium, mam,
nae kennin' the war's won.

A sa' his place, a muckle stane,
cut jist like a' the rest.
He went awa' bit nae his lane —
thocht Kitchener kent best.

A'd sweer A saw him there an a'
shinin' aneth the moon.
An angel waitin' tae rise, nae fa'
wi' a ring abeen his croon.

He says 'Noo loon, fit brings ye here,
tae 'is place ower deidly tae be.'
A says 'Naw, dad, ye maun nae fear,
the war ended in echteen.'

He says 'Fou lang awa' hiv A bin noo?'
A swat cam on me cauld.
'It's bin a file, A'll tell it true;
ye left fan A wis ten year auld.'

'An' o' yer mam,' he then did say,
'did she keep ma name alive?'
'Aye she did it ilka day,
tae mine on ye she strived.'

Mam, sorry ye couldna see yersel
the spot where he wis lain.
He couldna believe it within himsel
that he had lang bin slain.

A saw him staunin' richt there, mam,
A'll forivver mine the date.
He's noo on his wye up tae ye, mam,
an' he's sorry that he's late.

Gin A Hid A Boat

Gin A hid a boat, 'at wid be gran'
A'd say it wis ay a dream o' mine.
An' it wid be so affa fine
as a wye tae travel through the lans.

A'd sail it doon ma ain hame stream:
The windin' Don, salmon jumpin' through it
past far farmwives eence washed sark an' simmit,
each stitch an' seam.

The fields wid rin by wi' sheep an' coos
an' deer playin' through the hillside heather;
the rollin' parks an' finest wither
wid be my muse.

Sittin' steady on a lake,
the watter's edge in bonnie bloom,
the flooers wid aye gie me some room
for tae tak ma break.

Feet upon the stern or side,
the bonnie beasties a' gaan by;
the birdies an' the dragonfly
abeen the deep blue a' wid glide.

A'd tak it doon Ythan, Don an' Dee
an' gin ma boat wis ony bigger
A'd tak it oot the narra' river
tae the broad North Sea.

A'd tak her tae the hairbour o' the toon,
the granite glistening at the port.
Agin the ferries A'd seem sae short;
their splashin' wid near mak me droon.

She'd ride a' waves: baith braw an' bad,
dark waves tae mak yer belly loup.

Ma boat, she'd be as hard tae coup
as 'at o' ony auld Buchan lad.

A'd sail ma boat fae coast tae coast —
fit a time 'at feat wid tak —
bit fit a muckle friens A'd mak
wi' the hale o' Europe as ma host.

Wi' an oar or wi' a sail
A'd tak her richt across the watter.
Nae beast nor sea tae me wid matter,
whither kraken or an Arctic whale.

Though, A'd come hame by the Moray Firth,
'at great mou' in the North East's ja's.
Wi' a boat A'd nivver stop, nae pause,
'cause A'd need tae get ma money's worth.

Beatrice Cochrane

A Ghostly White House Game

“Bobby! Senator Kennedy? RFK? Whatever you want me to call you! I’ve been looking all over for you!”

Cindy rushed down the corridors of the White House and finally spotted the man she was looking for. Bobby was looking at the presidential paintings, as per usual, with an unreadable expression on his face. His mouth curved into a small smile as he saw the young First Daughter barrel down the hallway to him, full of energy and enthusiasm.

“Darn,” he said sarcastically, “I was thinking you couldn't find me here.”

Cindy skidded to a halt in front of him, folded her arms and quipped back with sharp a tongue. “I have a sixth sense about these things, now c’mon! Me and your brother are waiting for you on the roof!”

Bobby's eyebrows shot up in surprise. “The rooftop? Won’t people see us up there? Feels a bit risky...”

“Well, JFK told me he found a secluded spot! Now hurry up, you may have forever, but I sure don’t!” She tried to grasp his hand to drag him along, but practically fell over from her own force as she completely phased through her clear companion. She looked up in a dazed shock at his half smug half hysterical expression.

“You can’t, er ah, touch a ghost without their permission! Fun fact!” Bobby let out a chuckle of triumph, but still felt Cindy staring him down with daggers, unimpressed and getting a little antsy at having to wait so long. “Alright, keep your hair on,” he reassured her. “I’m coming to the playdate. Lead the way.”

Cindy tugged a satisfied smile and indicated towards his hand. He nodded in approval. As soon as she had him in her grip, they bolted down the hallway as Cindy had done a few minutes ago.

As they weaved in and out of the red carpeted maze that is the White House, they passed through rows upon rows of paintings and pottery of past presidencies. Cindy considered stopping for a short while to look at them all, but then she realised; why couldn't she just ask the people who put them there first? She literally had access to a minefield of lost knowledge at her fingertips. That’s the beauty of living with the ghost of every single President.

Huh, she wondered to herself. I wonder if any of them have watched Hamilton.

Bobby finally managed to point out the escape to the roof, and they cut through up the stairs like butter, hardly stopping to catch air by the top. Cindy was running on a pure adrenaline high in the moment, which was only heightened when her and JFK locked eyes and ran in for a tight hug. Both were excited to get the night started.

“You made a pretty fast friend there, Jack,” Bobby announced, somewhat joking, but another part of him was still sceptical of these brand-new arrivals to the White House.

Jack turned to face his brother, flashing a wide grin, and giving a good-natured slap on the back laughing at his comment. “Ah, lighten up Bobby! I, er, know that you love brooding in the corner by yourself, but while you were busy with that, me and Cindy here had a great chat gettin’ to know each

other! That's how we planned this, er uh, little thing we have here! She's gonna teach us how to play finger down!"

Bobby perked up a small bit. There was a sparkle of curiosity in his sweet blue eyes, as the cool January air on top of the White House blew ineffectually through him. "Finger down? Sounds... somewhat illegal..."

"Aw, cheer up! There's nothing illegal about it, c'mon, take a seat and we can get started." Cindy patted the ground next to her, wiggling her eyebrows to coerce Bobby to sit next to her. He gave a dramatic eye roll and plopped right beside her, smirking as they both beamed at his co-operation.

"Alright, Bobby is in! Now listen up, finger down is basically the best and only way college students get to know each other. You hold up both your hands, and one person says, 'never have I ever' and says something they've never done, and don't know if anyone else has done. It's possibly the best icebreaker game without it being weird or forced. Now c'mon you two, fingers up!"

Bobby and JFK both lifted their hands up curiously, waiting for Cindy to start them off,

"Got all that then? Alright! Never have I ever... got into a physical fight with someone."

Jack shot a knowing look to Bobby, who sheepishly put down one of his fingers, rubbing the back of his neck in embarrassment. JFK nudged into his ribs, edging him to tell the story.

"C'mon Bobby! You gotta tell the story once you put down the finger! It's the rules!"

"But you didn't mention that when you were explaining the rules!"

"Alright, rule explanation part two: If you put down the finger, it means you need to tell the story too!"

Bobby huffed but conceded anyway. He took in a deep breath to explain his rather messy story. "Ok! Ok, it was a long time ago. Early 70s if I do, er ah, believe.

"I had only been in the house a few months, and Lyndon had recently died. Now, I know I don't need to explain how me and Lyndon used to be. A real mess if I do say so myself. Well, I admit he may have been a bit more irrational than normal. He just turned into a ghost for goodness' sake. He felt the need to pick a fight, and of course, I was his first target considering our history and his... general physical advantages over me. He was rather harsh with his words, and the shouting match began to increase in ferociousness. Other presidents began to circle around us, trying to get a peek of what was going on. Even Jefferson was egging us on a little bit!

"We somehow got onto the subject of our deaths, and he said with his cockiest stance and most full-of-it tone—" Bobby placed his hands on his hips and mocked Lyndon's southern accent, venom dripping off every word, "—well, y'all Kennedy pretty boys may have needed an assassin to kill y'all so ya wouldn't have to suffer more election campaigns and dump all the work on us simple country folk, but us Texans can't hire the CIA to assassinate us, so we grind through the work and die of a stress-related heart attack like real men!"

Bobby dropped the accent and sighed in a defeatist fashion, cringing as he recounted the next moments. "That was a bit too disrespectful for me, so I lunged at him, and... Well, you can kind of guess the rest. We had a bit of a fight, but he was much bigger. To my embarrassment, he won pretty easily. Luckily, Washington was there to break us up and save me any more humiliation. He gave us both a stern word that day. Reminded me of my days as a schoolboy. But that's about it. That satisfy your curiosity?"

Cindy was buzzing in her seat, trying (and failing) to suppress her laughter. “Oh, that was more than enough, Bobby. Thanks!”

Even JFK was holding down a few giggles, and eventually, the two of them burst out laughing. Bobby was about to yell what was so funny, but looking back, he realised the story was rather funny, and joined in the hysterics. They laughed and laughed under the stars, and Cindy could’ve sworn she heard Bobby snort, but he adamantly denied it.

JFK, after catching his breath from a good few minutes of laughter, finally choked out some words. “Oh God, aha... Should we carry on then? Ahhh...” He wiped away a tear, and turned towards Bobby, a goofy grin, plastered over his face, replacing his normal, well-polished Kennedy smile.

“Do you wanna say the next one then, Bobby? Since you had to suffer the, er, last question there!”

Bobby’s smile grew wolfish, his mind running through all the possible ways he could put one of Cindy’s embarrassing moments out there. He was no expert on teenage girls, but this one was a classic. “Never have I ever,” he paused for dramatic effect, “kissed a boy.”

Cindy’s fingers remained on standby, not even flinching. Everyone’s attention was drawn to JFK, who timidly popped down one of his fingers and gave a lopsided smile.

“What? I’d think it’s rather obvious by now I’ve kissed a few boys in my life and death.”

Bobby relaxed, seemingly unaffected by this news. He hadn’t expected it would be his own brother to put down a finger. He had been aiming at Cindy, but now it seemed a lot more interesting to find out which men his brother had decided were worth his time.

“Alright, we both know your first man-crush and kiss was Lem. I er, ah, can still hear dad’s yelling when he found out! It stung in the beginning. I was scared for you but looking back, he did call you a ‘pink bellied pot washer,’ which I assume was an insult, but it must’ve been made in the heat of the moment, cause I’ve never heard something of the sort before or after the incident!”

JFK, instead of flinching at dredged up old memories, chuckled alongside his brother in good nature, and began his story. “Well, you all see here, this is the story of the first ghost I came to kiss! Now, I’m sure you’ve noticed, there aren’t many little lady ghosts hanging around here, so I’ve had to make do over these past 60 years. I don’t imagine I was the first president to go around kissing the others. It seemed there were already established relationships by the time I had arrived. If you can, er ah, believe it, my first kiss as a ghost was with none other than Abraham Lincoln—”

Cindy cut in with a soundbite of her own. “Called it! It’s almost common knowledge now that Lincoln had preferences for the male gender, but please, continue.” She sat back down politely and pushed JFK to finish his piece.

“Well, it really was rather mind-boggling when Lincoln came up to me with a flirtatious glint in his eye. I had only been dead a few months by then, and I was already getting a little needy for some contact.

“Lincoln must’ve sensed my weakness, as he went and, er ah, offered a, looking back rather romantic, walk through the White House lawn. He pulled me aside by the rosebush and held me closer than anyone had since my death. He ran his hands through my hair and asked, cryptically, if I was one for a good beard. I wasn’t quite sure what he meant and said yes, thinking he was looking for compliments for his own beard. Maybe he had trimmed it? But as soon as I started to wonder if you can even grow or cut your hair as a ghost, his lips were on mine. I was shocked at first, nearly pulling

away, but that was the most intimacy I had felt for a long few months, so I was definitely craving it. He felt rather rough, what with his beard and tough skin, but I admit to being rather clingy after that. I held to the kiss as long as I could, and it definitely led to a long make out by the rosebushes. I clawed a bit and tried to hold him as hard as I could, but eventually my craving for love fizzled back to regular levels, and we parted for the night. That happened a few times, actually, and I'll never back down from saying that Lincoln has a darn good set of lips about him."

JFK laughed as Bobby shoved him, face flushed red as his brother mimicked kissing noises and wrapped himself in his arms.

"Jack! Good story but take out the gory details please! We don't need to hear all that!"

JFK conceded and rolled to the floor in submission. "Alright! Alright, I'll, er, quit while I'm ahead, shall I? Now, it is my turn for the question!"

As JFK was racking his brains, Cindy began to wonder if another question was going to be targeted at her, but JFK wasn't quite as petty as Bobby. Maybe he'd find something to embarrass his brother instead.

"Ok! Never have I, er, ever dated the first woman that I found!" JFK laughed as Bobby fumed at him.

"Now c'mon! That was aimed at me. He knows that Ethel was the first and only one for me! Cindy, tell him—"

But both the brothers looked in bewilderment as Cindy put down one of her fingers. "Oh, I said the first girl—"

"I know," she said in uncharacteristic coldness. "I met Emily at 14, and I'm still dating them at 18. I most definitely got with the first girl I saw." Cindy's emotionless facade was beginning to falter slightly. They had seemed fine with JFK being with Lincoln. Maybe not her? Was there something wrong with that? She felt judged, like tiny nails pricking into her, analysing her every move and slip. She was about to burst to fill the agonizing silence until Bobby broke out the biggest sigh and grin she'd seen him do that night.

"Oh, thank God!" Bobby sounded relieved. "Imagine if I had to deal with all your boy trouble ranting, I couldn't do it! We both have way more experience with the other side anyway. Imagine having to watch Jack kiss Lincoln again to show how to kiss boys properly! I think I'd be scarred!"

Bobby dramatically fell over in jest on top of JFK's lap, wailing Shakepeareanly. "Oh, woe the day I see my brother making out with the Emancipator! His eyes so blue, beard so distracting!"

"Oh, stop it, Bobby! He might hear you, you know!"

The two laughed between themselves. As Cindy saw them joke and enjoy each other's company, she began to loosen a bit more herself. She half-heartedly joined them, gathering up a bit more volume and genuine feeling till they were all in hysterics like the beginning of the game. She wiped away a small tear and looked at the clock on her phone, cursing to herself as she noticed ungodly time and the deep noir sky that hung over their heads.

"Jeez, guys, it's stupid late. I better head to bed now..."

JFK, still recovering from his fit of giggles, retorted. "But you've got nothing to do tomorrow! What's a late sleep in if there's nothing to do anyways?"

A mischievous grin grew against Cindy's face, as she shoved all her things tucked away in her pockets and headed for the roof exit. "Because, my dear President Kennedy, I've got a ghostly tour of the White House tomorrow led by you and a few other ghosts of my choosing bright and early, so I think it best if we both headed to bed. It was brilliant fun tonight, but I believe it best for us both to retire. Toodles!"

And with one swift movement, Cindy was back down the stairs and rushing back to her bedroom.

"Now wasn't that a treat, Bob?"

"Eh, I've heard better at nomination parties."

"Bobby!" JFK elbowed Bobby straight in the shoulder, knocking him back the slightest bit.

"Alright, alright! It was good fun." Bobby rubbed his shoulder in offence, but still couldn't keep his smile from coming out under the depths of his brooding attitude.

JFK smiled as well, fulfilled with the day's activities, but suddenly turned to Bobby with urgency in his voice. "Oh Lord, I'd better head to bed if I'm leading that ghostly tour tomorrow! I'll, ah, need my game face for it! Beauty sleep is needed! Bobby, I know you need your 8 hours of hallway lurking a day, so I'll let you do your thing, but I'm off to bed, myself. Good night, Bobby!"

JFK floated down the stairs to his own corner of the White House, leaving Bobby alone up on the rooftop. Bobby sighed contently; a knowing smile crept onto his face as he felt the shimmer of stars above him.

"I think... I will stay out here a while longer..."

And so, he did, lying under the stars waiting for the sun to rise and bring warmth into the White House again. Ready for a new day, he hopped up with renewed vigour, and began his day afresh, ready for the destruction ahead as the ghostly tour started below.

Martina Ferretti

Airport

I'm out of the terminal, where to? This place looks so small from the outside. Which way am I going? Gate C4? I thought it was *that* way. There was a change? D4, got it. Didn't I pass that store before? That man is eating pizza in his pyjamas at 7AM. Good for him. Oh *god*, when does this hallway end? It's both too chilly and too warm in here. Am I late? No, three hours to go. Wait, the toilet's out of order? And the closest other one is in the direction I came from. Okay. D4? Does anyone know where gate D4 is? Oh, *that* way? But the sign said—Okay. Maybe I should stop for a break.

Could even take a nap. I haven't slept in twenty hours and that corner looks *really* comfy. Just a few minutes. Can't hurt, right? But what if I sleep past my boarding time? Can't risk that. Okay, okay. So many signs and *none* of them say gate D4. Oh, an attendant! Maybe I can—Ma'am! Ma'am, where—aaand she's gone. Great. I should take a break. *God*, my feet hurt. This place is a labyrinth. They must build these so people can never leave. Like *Hotel California*. Or IKEAs. Bet they don't have time pressures there, though. You just get in, get lost forever, and that's it. I've got *places* to be. Maybe it's not that bad. I can just live here. There's food and drinks and toilets and wi-fi. Kinda pricey though. Yikes. Eh, could be worse.

What the *hell* am I saying?

I gotta go. Still three hours left, but *where's the goddamn gate?* What—*that* way? But I thought—Okay. *Fuck*.

Squish

The first thing I think about him is that he's *goofy*. We meet on the first day of high school, excited and scared in equal measures. I've already embarrassed myself when Emmy and I missed our class being called out and ended up walking into the tiny room ten minutes late for orientation. But he's forgotten already, and beams around the slice of pizza he's having for a snack as he holds out his other hand. I shake it and can't help but smile back, wide though shy. His name is Tom, and we don't talk again that day amongst the whirlwind of introductions and new faces. I hang around Emmy and Lila because strangers are scary.

Once lectures begin properly a couple of days later, I start to notice Tom is pretty smart—in an unsure kind of way. He hesitantly raises his hand to answer questions, and he gets most of them right—then he lights up like he's surprised he knows the material he's spent a week reviewing. He likes science, he says, and I nod enthusiastically because we're doing astronomy right now and it's just the *best*.

Through PE periods, Emmy and I reach the conclusion that Tom's vain. Like, *really* vain about some things. His hair for example—I reach out to ruffle it and he whines at me that I'm ruining his curl. He takes a moment to fix it, and I take a moment to ruin it again, because he's learning things about me, too, and one of them is that I love to tease people.

Tom, Emmy, and I hover around each other most of the time. People function well in groups of three, and I like this one a lot. I've known Emmy for nine years, and at this point it feels weird in the summer when I don't see her every day; I've known Tom for nine weeks, and I'm just curious to know him *more*.

I talk about my school friends when I'm at home, and whenever I mention Tom, my mom gets a knowing smile I've seen way too often. She doesn't do the same when I talk about Emmy or Lila, and that's been happening for *way* longer! Must be because they're girls and Tom is not. I roll my eyes and ignore it. She's wrong anyway, I think.

Tom gets caught trying to cheat in a math test. He had a stack of formulae in his pencil case and didn't notice the professor approaching as he was flicking through. He looks up, horrified, when she clears her throat. She stays her hand; just takes away his notes and strikes out all the stuff he's done so far in menacing red pen. I wince on his behalf as he sighs in relief. He still passes that test because he's pretty smart—he should believe us when we say it.

I start to notice it when I begin re-watching a show I used to love as a kid because Tom is still into it and keeps rambling about it at school. This is weird, right? My mum still gives me that knowing smile, but my own is right-side-down. Just a month ago, I was telling Emmy I'd feel out of character in *any* relationship, and now I have a crush? Sounds wrong.

So, I pay attention. Tom is a chatterbox and shares a lot with me and Emmy. He shares his favourite books, he shares his desire to quit swimming, and he shares his crush on one of our classmates. I tease him about it, because of course I do, but it doesn't bother me. Isn't it supposed to? Is this over already? I talk Tom into trying out volleyball anyway, maybe because he'd be good at it and maybe because I want to see Emmy squirm a bit. Her and her hatred of sports in general, and volleyball in particular.

We visit an archaeological site with our class—it's clearly a rite of passage for everyone from our town to go see the ancient Etruscan city at least once, but I'll admit that it gets boring on the third such trip. The three of us chat all day at the back of the line, and then we play with gift-shop kaleidoscopes as the shadows grow longer. I fall asleep on Tom's shoulder on the bus ride back, and I'm not even a little embarrassed. I thought I would be.

I'm *pretty* sure I don't actually like him that way, but why, then, do I act like a puppy looking for attention? In the end, I give it a shrug and shove the strange thoughts into the back of my head. As time goes on and we get closer, Tom becomes one of my best friends, and I stop acting like I have a crush on him. Which I'm more and more sure I never actually did.

It's only years later that I find out what a *squish* is.

Loved

She was loved.

That much was immediately clear as soon as she waltzed back into the village with me dutifully trailing after her. Every way she turned, there was someone waving her over with a smile and some warm words, both of which she always returned tenfold. I watched her, hanging back, as she listened attentively to a small group of children telling her about their latest adventure; I watched her promise a woman help with tending the garden; I watched her beam as an old man thanked her for bringing flowers to his sick wife. She couldn't take ten steps without someone calling her from across the street or running up to her for a quick chat. It looked like she was everyone's favourite person to have around. I didn't really blame them.

I couldn't help but feel left out as a strange sense of longing settled in my chest.

Curiously, it wasn't longing to be part of the community—the bustling village where everyone lived in each other's pockets sounded exhausting—no, it was longing to know *her* as well as they did. To have stories and experiences to share with her, to exist in a world where I could just go out in the street and know that she was there too, with a chance of running into each other. The strange sense of familiarity I'd been feeling ever since meeting her at the edge of the forest seemed so insignificant in the face of a lifetime spent around her smile, her laughter.

I shook my head. Ridiculous. We barely knew each other.

I turned my eyes back on her. She straightened up and smoothed down her skirt after saying goodbye to a small boy and turned to me. "Shall we?" she said. It was the third time she'd said that after stopping to talk with someone, and we hadn't even made it past the entrance plaza of the town. But I nodded anyway.

"So," she started as she led me through the narrow streets, "what do you do for a living?" She linked her hands behind her back and smiled.

Small talk? "I, uh, teach." A small white lie. It wasn't like we'd see each other again once she got home safely. I ignored the uncomfortable feeling in the pit of my stomach.

But she frowned slightly. "Right. When *I* was in school, teachers didn't tend to walk around armed." She glanced down at the dagger on my belt, and, in that moment, I thought she knew about the other two knives hidden in my boots as well. I felt my neck heat up. "It's fine if you don't wanna tell me."

I paused, then I shook my head. "Uh, sorry."

She frowned. "That's okay." A woman called her from the door of a house, and we stopped again.

While I waited, a small group of people around my age rounded the corner.

Great, I thought, more interruptions.

I didn't know why I was getting annoyed. It wasn't like I was dying for this job to be over because that would've meant saying goodbye to her. I shook my head. I had to get back to camp. The others probably thought I was dead—and they still had to pay me, anyway. No time to waste here, no matter how... *intriguing* she was. *Whatever.* I refocused on the group coming our way.

They spotted her and halted in their tracks. A girl grabbed another by the arm and gestured towards us, saying something I couldn't hear. The other girl nodded and said something else I couldn't make out. Then, they all turned around and shuffled back the way they came. A guy's eyes met mine for a second and ducked his head with a frown.

I furrowed my brow.

She didn't seem to have noticed as she said goodbye to the woman and walked back towards me.

Again: "Shall we?"

I nodded.

We didn't talk much for a bit. When I'd noticed, I couldn't *stop* noticing.

I'd been wrong—not *everyone* seemed to love her. Older folk, children, adults—all of *them* had a smile for her, a kind word, a story. But younger adults and older teenagers? I hadn't realised it at the beginning, but none of the people in our age group seemed to want to say 'hi.' They skirted at the

edge of the streets when they spotted her, looked away or offered a tight smile if they happened to cross her gaze.

She didn't seem bothered.

She's used to it, I realised, and that thought sent a jolt of anger through my gut. *Why?*

I wanted to know, wanted to *ask*—but I didn't know how. I couldn't very well come out and say, 'Hey, you don't seem to have any friends your age—why's that?'

So, I just followed, silently stewing in my curiosity.

I didn't know exactly where she was leading me—she didn't need much protecting in her own village, I supposed—but we were heading to the farthest edge of the town. For some reason, it irked me even more to think of her living so far away from the main centre of life. Isolated.

Suddenly, she slowed down and looked back at me. "So, you got a girlfriend? Boyfriend? Partner?"

"Huh?" I blinked dumbly at her.

She shrugged. "I don't know which way you swing."

I shook my head. "That's not what I—No. No one."

She hummed. "Pity."

I caught my chance. "Uh, you?" *Are you as alone as I think you are?*

She gave me a funny look. "Psht, *no*. Certainly not in town."

"Huh?" I frowned. "What do you mean?"

She didn't reply.

We passed another group of young adults, who again didn't bother acknowledging her. These were the people she would've grown up with, I realised. In such a small village, they *had* to know each other. So, then, why were they ignoring her when everyone else seemed to love her so much?

But...

But they *weren't* ignoring her. They didn't talk to her, yes, but they didn't seem to be able to *look away*, either. She was her own centre of gravity, pulling in everyone around her with warm cheer and a quick tongue. I had to wonder if I was in danger of falling into her orbit too.

An old man called her from the weaved chair outside of a small bar and she made a beeline for him. I waited a few steps behind, playing idly with the collar of my shirt and looking around. The sun was setting low over the treeline and the steady murmur of the creek seemed to fill out the entire valley.

A girl about our age, nose buried in a book, was wandering down the street towards us. I saw it happen before it did. She stopped in her tracks when she realised that she was about to bump into us. She looked up, sucked in a sharp breath, gave a tight smile, and swerved to the side.

I frowned. The girl looked at me for half a second, a puzzled expression on her face. I glared at her, and she scurried away, book clutched in her hands.

Beside me, *she* bid her goodbyes to the old man and turned around. She followed the girl with a sad, resigned stare, then she looked at me and saw the scowl still on my face.

As she gave me a blinding smile that made my knees weak for a moment, I thought that maybe it was too late to worry about being pulled in by her gravity. Those kids were *idiots*.

Again: "Shall we?"

I just nodded. Whether I liked it or not, I felt like I would've followed her anywhere for reasons I couldn't quite understand. I glanced at her as she walked ahead of me, a light bounce in her step.

I want to love her too, I thought.

Tomorrow

We set sail tomorrow,
blue seas and blue skies,
towards an unknown
shining light in our eyes.

This world is too small:
can't see past the waves.
Is this where we'll live? Is this where we'll die?
I know that there's more 'neath this big starry sky.
Tomorrow it changes; tomorrow we go.
This world is too small but tomorrow we'll know.

Logs, sails, rope—
Is everything here?
Logs, sails, rope—
What did we forget?
Logs, sails, rope—
We forgot our goodbyes.
Logs, sails, rope—
There's still time yet.

We set sail tomorrow
as we answer the call.
There's something more out there
and I want to see it all.

Memories of home
haunt her dreams and her heart.
I can help her find that place;
I want to do my part.

"Don't ever change."
Why does she ask?
Sometimes it seems
she's wearing a mask.

He's not afraid—he's never afraid.
Wish I could be the same.
He takes a leap and dives right in:
it's our favourite childhood game.

I win—you win—you win—I win—you win.

Have you kept the score?

Winner names the raft;
winner gets the cake;
winner makes the rules;
winner for winning's sake.

What's the score?
Does it matter?
Not anymore.

The raft rests on the sand.
How far will it take us?
The waves crash on the beach.
How much will they fight us?
The island watches in silence.
How long will it miss us?

Will it forget, once we three are gone?
Our laughs, our cries, our dreams, our fears—
the island knows it all.

But
now that we leave, now that we go, now that we flee,
will it forget?

Will we?

We set sail tomorrow
with hope in our heart.
No room for doubt or fear;
this is where we start.

A beginning, a life,
the end of another.
But we'll pretend today's like any other.

We race, we spar, we laugh, and we talk.
Today's the last day—tomorrow's the first.
One sleep, one night, one dawn.
And yet we pretend
and carry on.

We set sail tomorrow.

Tomorrow we go.

Tomorrow's the day.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow.

But today's not over yet.

We sit on the beach and watch it all:

I don't want to forget.

The waves, the sand, the trees, and the sun:

My whole life they've been here;

my whole life have I loved them

but it's time to move on.

There's more to seek

so, let's go and seek it.

Once we set sail tomorrow,

I'll feel it in my spirit.

The sky is red:

sailor's delight.

But none of that matters;

the apocalypse is coming tonight.

Alastair Fyfe

Dunnideer

The granite is smooth,
its skin softened by countless hikers,
bearing cold scars.

An unusual place for a seat.
Not high enough for a view,
nor low enough to avoid the wind.

But there is strange comfort in it,
and those who climb this little hill
sit for a moment, unable to pass by.

Aulis

They smile as to the altar I am led,
off'ring words and love and gifts to revere.
This summer's day, at noon I shall be wed.

Past the harbour, ships rest at ocean's bed;
my bed waits tonight, drawing ever near.
They smile as to the altar I am led.

My mother's veil stirs softly on my head,
as I smile too, and hold the moment dear.
This summer's day, at noon I shall be wed.

My father guides me on with heavy tread,
a guard of honour bearing shield and spear.
They smile as to the altar I am led.

Upon each face is tired, impatient dread;
I pray that one day soon the skies will clear.
This summer's day, at noon I shall be wed.

Yet I cannot see an altar; instead
my father stops and sheds a single tear.
They smile as to the altar I am led.
This summer's day, at noon I shall be wed.

Sasha Gdaniec

distance

the distance from you to the nearest star
impossible to grasp, i assign it
to the meaning of my heart
from me, to you, an atom
from me, to you, the whole universe
flickering in and out
it ties me in ropes
and i wonder
how do i unravel me
until i can breathe
and you can breathe with me
...i love you, either way

splendour

Content warning: Suicide implication

forgive me
let me be forgiven

i know, no matter what I do
it will never find home

i beg of you -

i know, no matter what i say
i can never make my way home

i need you to -

i know, no matter what i feel
i will never feel at home

can't you see? you must -

one by one, an untied noose at a time
i will string together this mess

no matter what, i know you can't -

with every nail being the last in my coffin
and the foundation built of nothing

but i know i can -

i don't need home
to come my way and free me

look at me
look directly at my heart
have you found it?

head empty no friends

if i find myself, staring at you
and i open my mouth, as if to say something
but no words come out
pay it no mind
that's not me having a gay panic
pay it no mind
that's me wondering if i should be having a gay panic
pay it no mind
because, well,
the contact of you sends these thoughts haywire
and — i mean! i'm not sure if —
i don't know if —
there's —
i can't think — of people, okay?
so, stop leaving me so speechless
...
i'm gay

hate me

what do i look like to you?
tell me in some pretty words
pretty words of the crimson evening
when water simmers like blood
do you hate me already?
or was it not enough
tell me you do
it will be easier to defend the devil if you do
what was it you demanded?
i don't know
i told you i didn't know
and now you hate me
and i know

red

Content warning: Implied death

if red is the colour of love
then i understand precisely why
we fell in love when we did
the still red of nature's end surrounding us in warmth
cozy and languid
the eyelids falling
the voices quieting down
i felt the warmth of your hand, still
coloured red
the thoughts soothing out
the future slowing down
i felt the warmth of you, still
coloured red
and with the times moving slowly
with the love beating slowly
i woke up without the warmth of you, still
with white beyond my reach
and far
far too much red where you were left

Miriam Reiter

From the scratchy pencil of a five-year-old

66+3-2=

I saw "Sum 1" 2+2.

I wrote the no. "4".

I wrote and wrote un|till I saw "Sum 9" 66+3-2".

I wrote "67".

My dog

I had a dog.

We went to a bog.

The dog sank in the bog.

Now I don't have a dog.

pups and kits

I hate pups.

Pups like me.

I like kits.

Kits hate me.

the blue bird

The blue bird boy,

he went to a toy

But it was a fake.

He soon became cake.

My cat

My cat had a hat.

BUT, the hat was a mat.

My Mum

My Mum is neat.

Her cooking is sweet.

My dad

My dad loves me.

I love my dad.

Lillie Sanderson

Daydreams on the train

While sitting on the train, my mind always wonders. Today, it wonders “what if I didn’t get off at my stop?” This is a common thought. What if I kept going? What if instead of getting off at my stop, only three stops along the line, I just got off somewhere else? I could easily keep travelling for another hour and a half on this train line, landing me at the next major station. From there, I could go anywhere.

I could get off, drain my accounts, and run off. Start a new life, change my name to something common like Olivia or Katie, and be a new person. I could own a bookshop, one of those cute ones with cats and antique books that hosts author events, or I could hide away in a cabin in the woods and write the days away. I could become the mysterious new woman in some rich man’s story that eventually marries him and steals all his money, or I could just start again. I could get a regular job and a nice flat and find friends that share their day with me. It could just be me exploring the world, finding my place in it. I could just disappear.

The tannoy announces my stop, and I get up and wait patiently for the doors to open at the station because I always get off at my stop. I always get off, walk back to my dingy flat and my tedious job, and continue life as it was before I got on the train. The daydreams of running off to a secluded cabin in the woods are just that; daydreams relegated to lonely train journeys because I am nowhere near spontaneous enough for that, and my savings definitely wouldn’t stretch to a cabin, never mind a bookshop. I still entertain those daydreams, though, because dreams make the dreary bearable, and maybe one day, I might find myself lost to the world in a cabin, pouring my soul into words scrawled on paper.

Life and Death

Before there was anything more, there was simply Light. It was bright and golden and bathed the dirt of the realm in warmth until it baked. The universe, seeking to find balance, made Darkness. It was shadowy and black and blanketed the realm in night until Light chased it away.

Soon, Light grew lonely as she ran from Darkness, and from the tears of that, loneliness came Life. Life was curious and joyous and colourful. She flourished under Light. She turned the realm into a paradise of colour, noise, and chaos, bathing the baked mud in love and happiness until it willingly gave over to her. She was enchanting. Light loved Life, she gave her a purpose; and Life loved Light, she gave her creations the energy they needed to grow and flourish.

Light always gave way to Darkness, but Life did not. Life did not run from Darkness, for she was born of loneliness, one of the darkest places in the universe. Darkness adored Life; she brought joy and noise to his solitary stroll across the realm. Life also loved Darkness; he gave her peace, so she made him creations that would love the darkness as much as she loved him.

Life loved her creations. She took care in creating every single one, everything from the tiniest sprout to the biggest animal. Soon, she wanted a friend, someone who looked like her, someone who could help look after her creations. And so, she made souls.

At first, the souls shared Life’s joy and love for her creations. They cared for them as much as she did. They helped her nurture them, they helped to nurture each other, they cared and respected Life as much she did them.

Until they stopped.

They grew restless with endless days and nights. They wanted more. They wanted meaning, and Life, seeing meaning in watching her creations grow, was unable to ease their restlessness. They began to hurt each other, and the paradise Life had provided them.

Darkness, out of love for Life, strived to help give the souls meaning, and thus Death was created. Death was dark and beautiful and terrifying. Death was not restricted to just the dark. Death, like Life, prowled the light too.

At first, Life and Death were friends. They would play under Light together and fall asleep next to one another under Darkness' watchful gaze. Life and Death would walk hand in hand across their realm as Life showed Death all her beautiful creations, and for a while, all was well.

One day, during their usual walk across the realm, Life happened to glance behind her and finally discovered what Death's true purpose was. She saw each of her beloved creations she had introduced Death to, dead. Their souls leaving their bodies. Life, for one of the first times in her existence, cried. Her tears soaked the ground beneath them, creating lakes from her despair. Death, heartbroken from her response to his work, ran from her. Life, desperate to never have to witness her creations suffer again, ran from him too.

And so, that is how it has been ever since. Death running from Life, and Life running from Death. Perhaps they are forever destined to run towards each other until inevitably, they collide once more.

Eduardo Gil Torres

On the Rocks

Content warning: Violence, abuse, alcohol addiction, murder

What is it that makes a victim?

Is the mere act of being victimized in any way, shape, or form enough? Or is there a checklist we have to complete in order to call ourselves a victim? This also opens the question, who is more of a victim? The so-called “victim” or a murderer, or the murderer himself who has been driven to perform such a despicable act, either by evil in his heart or the circumstances that surround him?

If I may be allowed to weigh in on this question, for me, a victim is anyone who does not have the chance to retaliate against their abuser. You can’t blame a victim for being a victim, but you can blame a coward for letting himself become one.

Which is why when I first saw my chance at no longer being a victim, I didn’t hesitate. Let me tell you how it happened.

As I have told you many times before, my father wasn’t a particularly caring man. The house stunk of whiskey, and mama’s face was perpetually swollen with bruises. More than enough times, she had been told to fix the stairs, but who could help her? To everyone else, she had always been a clumsy woman.

The worst nights were, ironically, the ones when he wasn’t home. My mother stayed up all night, crying and worried sick. I never understood her.

“What if something happened to him?” she said with a cracked voice. “Don’t you worry for your father?”

“Good riddance,” I snapped back once. “He can rot in hell for all I care!”

I was fourteen then, but that didn’t stop her from smacking me so hard across the face that my cheek bled. Of course, she won’t acknowledge it now, nor when father died just over a year later. In a way, she never truly enjoyed her freedom once he was gone.

But there is one thing I can thank my old man for—scratch that, two things I can thank him for. Don’t confuse acknowledgement with credit because I still maintain what I said at fourteen. He’s where he deserves to be.

The first thing is that he didn’t make me a pussy. I had to fend for myself early on. Get my knuckles bruised, if you know what I mean. No one dared to mess with the kid who came to school bandaged nearly every week. The other kids probably figured I either fought as hard as a heavyweight champion, or that my life was already hard enough to deal with their shit. Both of those assumptions were right.

And, the other thing, he showed me this. Look around you. Aren’t you glad I brought you here? The waterfall roaring right below us, cold splashing air on our faces. The sun rising over the peaks, birds chirping. This might be my favorite ten square-feet of land in the entire world.

He used to bring me here every summer for my birthday, as I am doing with you now. For as long as four days a year, he was sober enough to make the hike, on the way to and from. For those days, I had a father instead of a deadbeat drunk who coincidentally lived in the same house as me.

I was fifteen when I did it. I had decided I had had enough. I will never forget that year. I brought empty bottles in my bag. He didn’t bring any booze, so I had to get creative to blame it on his habit.

We came up here during sunrise on my birthday. He stood over the edge and took in the view. I took out my pocketknife in case one push didn't do it. I heard it click in the absolute silence of dawn.

"I know what you're going to do, son," he said without turning around. "I just want you to know that I am sorry." He chuckled. "At least you thought of giving your old man a quick end. Your grandpa didn't have that luxury."

Not even your mom knows this, but I pushed him over the edge. He didn't even scream, or if he did, the waterfall was louder.

They didn't recover his body, no sir. The rangers found the bottles, bought my story that he stumbled outside of the tent in the middle of the night. Must've slipped or something.

My mom was a wreck, and later a husk. But I'd take that over a victim.

It wasn't until you were born that the true weight of his words caught up with me. I never cared to ask what grandpa did to fuck him up so badly, but if all the booze in the cabinet couldn't make him forget, I'm probably best not knowing.

Back to what I said in the beginning, son. We are never victims by choice, and we often don't care enough to think whether or not we are being screwed by one either.

I just want you to know that I am sorry. I'm sorry I treated you like this, but hey, it wasn't half as bad as what he did to me. At least you won't come out of this as a pussy, a victim. I saw what you put in my coffee this morning. Had to do it clean. I understand. You always were smarter than me. Don't call anyone now. You've done it, it's ok. You don't have to worry about anything. The rocks and the waterfall will hide it all for you. Just take care of mom. You must hate me for saying that, but she hasn't got anything to do with it.

Just remember, never be a victim, and please, don't make anyone else one.

Damian Wilson

The Decaying Lands

Content warning: Descriptions of death, disease, and corpses, implication of cannibalism

The mound of dirt grew ever larger as the battered shovel took another chunk out of the dreary earth. The solemn gravedigger took neither pleasure nor pain from his work, merely purpose. Hundreds of headstones surrounded him, each a scar left behind by the dead. He had buried most of those people himself.

This grave was different though. Wider, deeper, fit for more than one corpse. No headstone would ever recognize the passing of these four poor souls, whose bodies were piled up in the gravedigger's wagon. To disrespect the dead this way was uncomfortable for the staunch caretaker, but he suspected that many more graves would be needed soon.

The gravedigger hoisted himself out of the pit slowly, his aging body not as spry as it had been many years ago. He gently laid down the shovel and strode over to the wagon. The putrid stench hit him before he even reached the corpses. He glanced over all four of them. He had seen all manner of gruesome wounds in his lifetime, but the fate that had befallen these specific victims was truly horrific. Their skin was cracked and mottled, turning a sickly green. Gaunt, bony hands sported blackening fingers, and they were all missing massive clumps of hair. The carcasses were clearly rotting, despite the first of the four only having died less than two days ago.

He scooped up one of the bodies. Mikken, a grouchy but well-meaning person in life, was tossed into the hole. The gravedigger noticed specks of dried bile staining Mikken's blacksmith apron. It had started with the coughing and a fever. Mikken's family believed it would pass in time, that is until he began to cough up blood. His condition worsened rapidly, and six days after the first symptom, Mikken was puking up his own innards.

It was a similar story for Arla, a caring, widowed grandmother known to all in their little town. She was distraught when her grandchildren were kept away from her for their own safety, but soon enough her skin began to rupture, and purple blood ran from her eyes like cursed tears. The gravedigger barely even knew the names of the other two, but their hideous injuries told him more than enough.

Once the final corpse was dumped, the gravedigger began to replace the muck. Slowly, surely, the atrocious deaths were hidden, buried beneath the ground. The gravedigger placed his trusty shovel in the wagon before preparing to leave the cemetery. He followed the cobbled path which snaked its way to the wrought iron gate. Carefully closing the heavy gate, he sealed it shut as he turned the key in the rusty padlock chained around the bars.

The cemetery was far older than anyone in this squalid town, although he did not know by how long. The oldest legible tombstones dated back over three hundred years, but a handful were so ancient that the carved writing had worn away. Many parts of the town's history were unknown, even to the ruling lord himself.

The gravedigger did not have far to travel to return home. Tucked between the cemetery and the town wall, his relatively compact cabin seemed very isolated to some. However, the gravedigger relished the solitude. Most others found the graveyard ominous and frightening, but to him, it seemed almost comforting.

The splintering wooden porch creaked under his heavy boots as he swung the door open. As a boy, he would often come home to see his mother preparing a delicious meal, whilst his father would be hunched in the corner sharpening his logging axe. These days, the old hovel was as still and lifeless as the rows of graves he tended to. The gravedigger sat on his weary stool, his exhausted shoulders sagging.

Still laying on the table was a meagre amount of stale bread that he had faintly nibbled at a few hours ago. He tore off a chunk of the tasteless food, with only a mug of lumpy, bitter ale to wash it down. The snack would sustain him for now, but a more nutritious meal would not go awry. Rumours were arising among the disgruntled and underfed farmhands, of yet another disappointing harvest on the horizon. Potential famine would be a deadly burden for the townsfolk.

More pleasant memories of his youth surfaced as he rested, and try as he might, he could not ignore them. He was not a nostalgic man and strived not to dwell on that which he had lost. But he knew that these were not just innocent echoes of time passed. The future of this quaint town was dire, even if nobody else had realized it yet. Everyone would be tested as they neared the precipice of collective calamity. With such grim tidings ahead, what harm was there in seeking embers of hope from ghosts of the past?

Gerald of Riverwood

Content warning: Gore, violence, death, murder

Dust swirled in the calm breeze as the Gerald of Riverwood rode into town atop his fine horse. Citizens went about their work, toiling under the oppressive desert heat. All parted for Gerald. With a fierce grin on his face, and an even fiercer firearm on his hip, none dared risk trouble with such an unpredictable and dangerous new face.

Gerald wasn't the type to linger in any one place. He had a wandering soul, compelled to bounce from town to town, making the open road his home. Besides, his job necessitated plenty of travel. One day he might return to Riverwood a wealthy man, purchase his own cottage, and ride out his golden years in peace. More likely he'd be dead before his first grey hair. Folks in his profession didn't tend to live forever.

The armed rider observed the people milling about as he trotted through the streets. A youthful man with broad shoulders hauled stacks of lumber into an unfinished barn, whilst across the street a motherly woman appeared to be trading fresh produce at her own stall. The town seemed rather typical, far too sleepy, too dull for an adventurer such as himself. Gerald considered himself lucky that he enjoyed a more exciting existence than that of his contemporaries.

Gerald drifted by rows of wooden homesteads as he searched for his destination. He occasionally passed townspeople on horseback, replying to their tired, sullen faces with a cheeky smirk. The horses favored here were strong, imposing animals, bred for work. His own steed was much nimbler and more athletic and could bolt like lightning when pursuing a target.

Gerald brought his mount to a stop as he reached his destination. Ahead of him sat the local saloon, the social hub for all small western towns. He slid from the saddle, opting not to secure his horse. He knew he wouldn't be inside for very long. Gerald retrieved a crumpled sheet of paper from his satchel, scanning over the "Wanted" poster one last time before heading inside.

The smell of liquor and cigar smoke was heavy as he strode confidently through the saloon's doors. The bar was quiet at this time in the afternoon, mostly populated by older patrons sipping cheap whiskey. One man stood out. Hunched anxiously over the bar, cloak wrapped tightly around him. Gerald approached the man slowly, one hand positioned cautiously near his gun holster.

"Hey there, partner!" Gerald called out jovially. It was always best to start things out calmly, he had found, although he doubted that things would end peacefully. The man shuddered slightly as Gerald spoke but refused to turn around.

"I said HELLO, friend!" he uttered more harshly, demanding the cloaked man's attention. This time, the man turned around, his shifty eyes meeting Gerald's. Even under the hood, a quick glance was all the rogue needed to tell that this was his target.

"Uhh... hi, what is it you want?" the mysterious man stammered nervously.

"Well, you just seemed a little troubled, so I thought I'd check that you were okay!" Gerald claimed, although his smug tone openly displayed the falseness of his sentiment. "I mean, after the recent attack and all, it's no wonder anyone might be on edge."

"A-attack? What do you mean?" the man questioned, distressed. It was plain as day that both parties knew more than they were letting on.

"You haven't heard?" Gerald exclaimed with fake surprise. "A terrible thing happened over at Lilyvale two nights back. Some poor teenage boy and his girl were slaughtered, a gruesome sight if I've ever seen one."

The nervous man squirmed on the spot as Gerald recited the details of the murder. The suspect desperately tried to suppress his uneasiness to little success. This man was guilty as sin.

"You know, the locals chalked it up to coyotes, or wolves, maybe," Gerald continued, each word a stab of tension for his target. "However, I disagree. The sheer force and brutality of those claw marks, ain't no dog on Earth that kills like that. No, no, I think whatever killed those two souls was otherworldly."

"Otherworldly... like... like ghouls and demons?" the man asked, his voice shaky and his lip quivering.

"Oh, I'm sure you've heard the tales, they've been popping up everywhere as of late. Unholy beasts and creatures of all kinds, stuff from the horror books. They're very dangerous, and they need putting down. That's where I come in," Gerald explained to the man, who by this point looked as if he wished he were anywhere else on the planet.

"You some sort of sheriff?" the man squeaked, his entire body beginning to shake with fear.

"Not a sheriff, no. More of bounty hunter, you could say. I've wrangled in plenty of petty crooks in my time, but these days... I specialize in monsters!"

The suspect's brown eyes seemed to take on a reddish hue, and his skin began to shimmer ever so faintly as if it were covered with sugar.

"Come on now, let's take this outside. Two people are already dead, let's not endanger more," Gerald reasoned.

“Too late!” the inhuman figure growled back sharply, his voice suddenly sounding ghoulish and alien—a far cry from the meek voice he had been putting on previously. “You shouldn’t have come after me,” he threatened.

Gerald reacted as quick as a flash, drawing his revolver. His wrist was seized tightly before he could fire. Looking down, he observed that no ordinary human hand was restraining his own. The hand before him was blue and lumpy, with wicked claws at the end of all four devastating fingers. Gerald drew his knife, slashing the monstrous hand. The beastly man withdrew with a howl, striking Gerald forcefully in the chest. The creature possessed alarming strength, tossing the bounty hunter to the other side of the saloon, knocking the weapon from his hand.

The monster slayer crashed to the ground as a cacophony of screams erupted in the small bar. Gerald looked up, dazed, as his target started to glow and transform. His muscles began to bulge and expand as he tore free of his human clothes, and his bones snapped and twisted until they took on their true shape. His azure skin was both furry and scaly—a mixture between a werewolf and a gigantic lizard. The beast stood tall as the transformation finished, towering at least 8 feet above the ground.

As the terrified citizens flooded out of the saloon, Gerald surveyed the room for his gun. The monster stomped imposingly towards him as he leapt to his feet, swiping down powerfully with one arm. Gerald barely dodged the assault as the lethal claws split a wooden table in half effortlessly. He responded with a slash of his blade, black blood spraying as he cut the creature’s right shoulder.

The beast recoiled slightly before charging back after its prey. Gerald evaded another swing, retaliating with a gash across the monster’s chest. The two danced around each other, the bounty hunter wounding his target one cut at a time. Chips of wood flew everywhere as each of the beast’s missed strikes cleaved gaping tracks in the walls and floor.

Gerald finally spotted his sidearm lying beside the bar. He weaved lithely away from the beast, his back up against the bar. The creature hunched over, preparing to leap forward, claws bared. The hunter stared down the monster, locking on to its devious red eyes. Time seemed to slow as both combatants waited for the other to make a move.

The creature sprang forward, sweeping mightily with both claws. Gerald scarcely managed to duck under the attack, deftly swiping his gun from the floor as he rolled clear. The monster crashed through the bar, a storm of splintered wood raining down around them. Turning to face the monster hunter, the beast let out a blood curdling screech.

Gerald raised the pistol high, firing three rounds in speedy succession. Every bullet found its mark, blood spewing out with each hit. The monster wailed as it stumbled backwards, collapsing onto the floor. Gerald turned his back to leave as the life faded from the beast.

Stepping out into the golden sun, the bounty hunter climbed back atop his horse as the scared townsfolk covered outside. He set off towards the next town, as he always did, to hunt another monster.

Meet the Committee!

Martina Ferretti (President)

I'm a fourth-year English with Creative Writing student, who finally said "no" to the safe career choice of staying in STEM and decided to pursue her dream of being a novelist who doesn't just dabble in, well, transformative works. The Society has helped me *immensely* with honing my skills. Every time I submit a piece (mostly prose, though I have slipped into poetry a few times), I always leave the meeting having received praise, constructive criticism, and feedback from people from all walks of life. The Society is an incredible source of inspiration for me as well. In under four years of being part of AUCWS, I have gone from a scared introvert hiding in the corner at meetings and submitting anonymously, to a less scared introvert who is still, admittedly, not extraordinarily prolific, but who is much more confident about her work and skills. And I'm the President too, now! How weird is that? All this, thanks to the amazing community I found here. I am super excited to welcome you to our third Compendium and hope you have a wonderful time!

Freya Juul Jensen (Secretary)

I'm in my fourth and final year of studying English and Art History. My time with the Creative Writing Society has been a bit different than our other committee members. I originally joined back in my first year but took a break during my second to try out other things. I returned during lockdown in my third year, joking that I had an enemies-to-lovers relationship with the society. Now I'm here! Whilst I don't write much myself, I do really enjoy giving feedback and being part of the editing process. Rephrasing something in prose to make it even stronger or finding *just* the right word for a poem is amazing! This year, I'm also your Secretary, meaning I've been responding to even more emails than I usually do. If you've ever sent in a submission to our weekly booklet, you've probably been in contact with me. I'm very proud to showcase all the hard work of our members in our third Compendium!

Aidan William Armstrong (Treasurer)

I'm in my fourth year studying English with Creative Writing, and in hindsight, the society has been a key part of my growth and development as a writer. I've been going to meetings since my first week at uni, and at the end of my second year I somehow found myself on the Committee. Over my time in the Society, I've been able to meet and interact with like-minded people and share and develop my work in a safe and welcoming environment, and since joining the committee, I've been proud to be a part of organising our events and contributing to our compendium. My duties are mostly just related to managing the Society's funds, but I like to think that my role is more than just the money man. I enjoy writing a wide range of genres and forms, though mostly prose. I'm very excited for our third Compendium!

Alice Durand Degranges (Social Secretary)

I'm a Master's student (for the second time around!). After indulging in my passion and doing Creative Writing in 2019, I'm now doing a Master's in Ecology and Conservation. While I technically joined the society back in early 2019, I did not go for most of my MLitt and only came back in September 2020. So, depending on how you see it, I've been part of the society a year and a half or almost three years! But I love the atmosphere and creativity of the Society, which is why as soon as I joined back last year and heard that committee members were needed, I volunteered. So, after being Secretary last year, I am now the Social Secretary. If I don't submit much, I still love hearing all your stories, and I'm very proud of what we've managed to build and how we managed to overcome all the challenges we've faced. Yay us!

We are super excited to close out our third edition of the Compendium and hope you had a wonderful time! We'd be delighted to see you at any of our meetings (info way above, on page 6), and make sure to tune in for the next edition of the Creative Writing Society Compendium!

