

The background is a complex abstract composition. It features a grid of thin, light blue lines. Overlaid on this are thick, dark blue and black diagonal strokes that create a sense of depth and movement. There are also lighter, yellowish-white diagonal bands. The overall effect is a layered, geometric pattern that resembles a stylized architectural structure or a digital interface.

RABBIT HOLE

2019

FOREWORD

Welcome to Rabbit Hole 2019. In this year's anthology, you will read work from a growing community of student and staff writers who are using words to reflect, protest and connect.

Over the last few months we have been on a residential writing course with the poet Caroline Bird and novelist Mark Illis, welcomed visiting poets Rachel Long, Maxine Sibihwana and Matt Windle, held a whole school poetry challenge, delivered writing workshops for primary schools, had success in local and national competitions, and held open mic poetry nights. There's no doubt about, Rugby School is writing.

The benefits of writing creatively are multiple. When we write, we lift our imaginations from routines, exams and mobile phones in order to better understand ourselves and to explore alternative ways of being. During our weekly writing workshops, we have had serious fun pushing boundaries and finding bold, original voices. As you will see in this collection of poetry and prose, we have celebrated the weird and the wonderful and steered directly towards the strange.

Brace yourselves...

Alix Scott-Martin
English Department

Artwork by Stella Gent

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NATIONAL POETRY DAY CINQUAINS:

My wife
read my cinquain.
"It's a bit pretentious –
I think you need to get out more,"
she said.

Richard Horner Chaplain

Cinquains:
First two, then four,
Building up to six and
Stretching out to eight before the
Ending.

Luke Houghton Classics

After
the events of
yesterday involving
uncooked spaghetti, I'm very
sorry.

Sophie Norton XX

Cease, now.
The sound of nothing.
The whispers of the dead.
The horrors of the living world.
Cease. Now.

Mahmoud Atta LXX

I sit -
just listening
to brittle leaves rustling
as if they are fighting the wind,
weakly.

Toby Bradshaw E Block

I feel
 dry clarity,
when watching concrete skies -
 the metallic smack on my
tongue
 tastes sweet.

Lucy Eaton LXX

Listen.
Can you hear it?
No? You're not listening.
Wait....here it comes again. Don't
move.
Listen.

Isabelle Norton E Block

Lost Soul

Longing
For his garden,
The man in the Midlands
Dreamt of Devon soil and roses,
And smiled

James Whitehead English

Brexit
May mean Brexit.
Greeks - Grexit? Swedes - Sexit?
Johnson Farage Davis - wrecks it.
Exit.

Tim Day Classics

Rugby:
Never liked it.
I'm not weak, I'm just smart.
I've not got concussion yet -
You have.

Aneel Stevens D Block

REALITY

Your fingernails are made of glass
and when you bite them, shards
pierce your gums; making them bleed.
Your sister is a firework – tugged at the ends
by each parent. On
your uncle's 42nd birthday she explodes
with the noise of an overweight man
eating a bag of crisps
and everything smells like gasoline.
Today you promised yourself that
last Tuesday you'll learn to love
your seven toes,
and that it doesn't matter that the
furniture doesn't like you,
or that everyone calls you "Alstromeria"
despite your name being "Moon".
At night your teddy bears kiss each other
and during the day your mother's hands
turn into electric whisks. We're all
suspended at the violet end of a rainbow,
and the pot of gold got stuck in the
chimney. Last week your grandmother
gave you a locket; inside was a
dead unicorn. You've tried, but you just
can't get its sparkly blood off your carpet.

Sophie Norton XX

MELANIA

You have a more important role,
yet you were never my husband before, Mr President.
My voice can't be heard but you seem to make up for it.
I have an opinion, you know?
You're their President anyway, not mine.

Your wigs and tanning lotion get more one-on-one time than I do
but I really don't care.
The miles I walk for you for an inch of your love.
I've given up.
Don't hold my hand. I don't want it.

Have you not realised that rain doesn't hurt?
Like war or the caging of immigrants.
I'm not an object. I stand for my kind.
Categorising women into: hot or not.
You can't own a woman and I can't stand you.

You hold me up, but no support,
just your prize. A trophy of what success?
They break me. The cameras. The lights, shining orange
reflecting off my thick, large framed shades.
Give it a rest, you don't know the whole story.

Melania Knavs -
I guess I'm not her anymore.
She left when I met you.
Faded into the night,
because you knew I was star struck,
played every move you could. I fell.
But you never quite caught me –

Mathilde Fry F Block

MRS. ARMSTRONG

That small dot pricked the sky,
leaving a thin tail of grey smoke,
as he crawled his way towards the ball of rock while
millions of pairs of eyes attached to the glowing box.
He spoke, *"That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind"* and
his voice echoed across the planets.

It's been hours now.
People are starting to lose interest
whilst I'm here standing on Earth
still staring up and up, waiting for his return.

The moon glows brighter tonight.
It is Earth's midnight sun.

Even though he may have the limelight,
He and I still shine bright.

David Bennett F Block

SILVER SHOES

Your silver glitter sang jazz notes to my toes when they sheltered in you.
You taught me to hold harmonious negotiations with my body parts,
and dance without looking like a wiggly strawberry lace.

You blessed my red blood cells to beat to your cha cha cha.
We fondled on the playground.
When I slid off the bridge of your velvet nose,
you had a heart-to-heart with the arch of my feet.

You endorsed my ankle when you sheathed me in your leather scarf
while your tender, satin lips warmed the forehead of my toe.
Then you said, "Twist on 3 and turn on 8.
Let your body lean on me". I tried.

Shoulders down. Back straight.
Chin up. Deep Breaths.
I tried again. You were unhappy.

There were knives in your eyes.
You whipped me with your mouth.
You swore at me.
I was naked and you scorned me.
You conspired with the cracks of the staircase

and the soapy towel on the floor. You watched me dive
into the depths of surgical procedures.
You stood by when my elbow stuck out of my flesh.
My vision was blurry,
your glittery eyes shining.

Rose Li LXX

SISTERS

We found her at the bottom of the garden
like a dropped apple,
cradled her in the
hollows of our palms, afraid we might
spill her, now that she was ours.

We kept her in an ice cream box,
lined it with kitchen roll,
pierced the lid for air,
made a matchbox bed snug with cotton wool
and that night she slept under a skewer hole sky.

We put a brick on the lid
when she tried to escape
and to stop the cat
who heard her scrabbling fingernails.

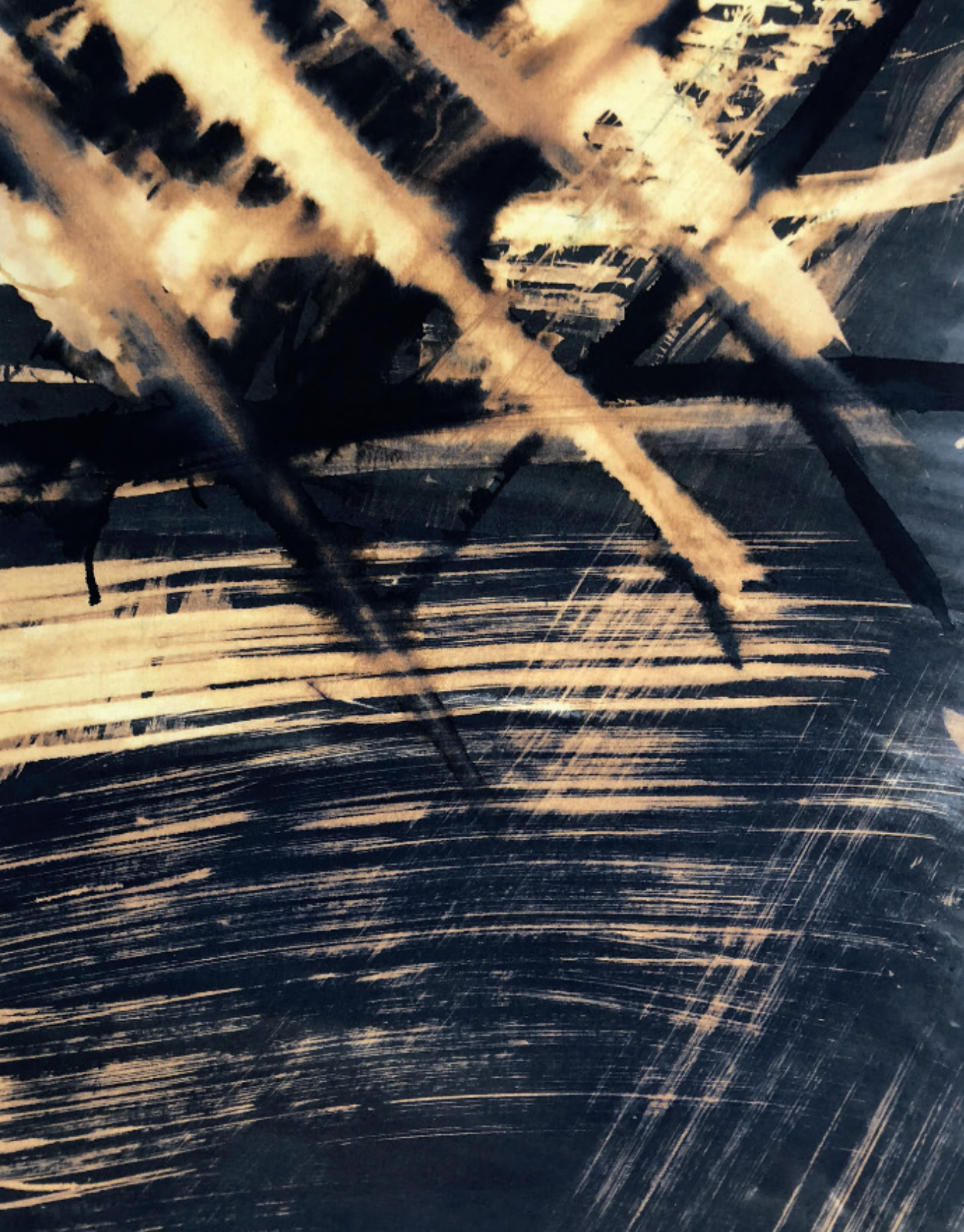
We were naughty -
held her eyelids down
and brushed them blue
with Mummy's make-up from the drawer,
rouged her cheeks.
We stripped our Barbies,
left them with no knickers, tits up,
and dressed her in their shimmering skirts
and netted gowns,
pushed her feet
into tiny plastic shoes,
cut her long hair short
to make her sexy.

We loved her all winter,
took turns to pop her in our pockets
and let her run along our arms.
It was your idea to sprinkle her with salt
like slugs. We tried pepper too,
giggled at her tiny *atchoo*.
We filled the basin to see if she could swim,
squealed when we almost lost her
as the water slurped and gargled
down the plughole.

*

When we found the box in the spring
we didn't want to lift the lid -
held it at arm's length -
would have walked away
if it wasn't for the stink.
We peered inside - you retched.
We brushed her into the compost bin
with the eggshells and peelings -
tried to forget those little rigid hands.

Alix Scott-Martin English



THE UNFORGIVEN

Aged seven, my sister five,
After a row about nothing,
She slammed the bedroom door into my head.
Down I went, flattened,
A bruise as bulbous and purple as a monster's penis erupted,
And I bawled.
She ran, across the landing, and into the laundry basket,
Like a snake, coiled, awaiting its charmer.
Mum arrived, scooting up the stairs, cartoon chicken legs beetling
underneath her.
Still giddy, I lay, looking at the purple ceiling of my bedroom.
It was 1971.
"What the devils be going on here?"
Whimpering, I gestured at my war wound.
She looked cross.
"Well it must have been your fault: you're the oldest."
In the bathroom, the viper sniggered.

Lizzie Beesley English

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH DEAD MAN

My mother hates him.
I bring him to Christmas and she loses it screaming,
'Will you just put him down!'
'Put him down?' I say,
'Well I'd love to but he (being slightly needy)
happens to like the human contact.'
I wish I could put him down
I don't know what he did in his 'alive' days,
but he's a pretty portly fellow,
leaving me with the back of a much older woman.

Another argument along the lines of,
'I'm not setting a bloody place for him at dinner.'
I point his face (bloated and mottled) towards her and,
appealing to her empathy for a lost soul ask,
'How can you say no to this?'
'Quite easily.'

I set him down next to me anyway,
But he can't hold his weight and slumps forward
into the Shepherd's Pie.
My mother screams and my father carries him out
And puts him in the neighbour's garden.

The neighbours are very good about it
And have put him up indefinitely.
I am allowed to visit on Fridays, Feast Days, Birthdays,
And Wednesdays.

During these visits I have been illicitly taking body parts
And reconstructing him in my room. (Don't tell Dad.)
The neighbours comment that he's decomposing nicely
And I agree with a knowing glance at my bedroom window.

Not long now.

Thea Edwards LXX

EARTH

Have you played and cursed the blisters on your soul?
Have you played and stubbed your knarly toes?
Have you played on stretched and straining arches of unbridled feet?
Have you played and felt the dust rising in the heat?

Have you played and slipped and slathered in the mud?
Have you played and curled your toes in grassy tufts?
Have you played and stepped and lost your grip?
Have you played and watched your feet turn black from grit?

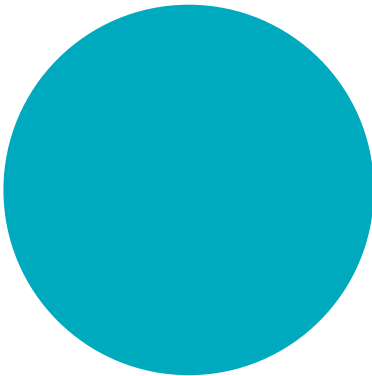
Have you played and danced like Fred Astaire?
Have you played and flown through summer air?
Have you played without a care for win or loss or fruit to bear?
Have you played in summer sun and winter rain? Have you played as
a child again?

Rajeet Ghosh Geography

EARTH

Earth: a glass ball filled with artificial junk.
Dust caresses the lifeless figurines and their eyes begin to stir.
They balance along the filaments of bulbs, their feet turn rosy as they envelope around the wire.
Every time a whistle blows, they cling onto the merry-go-round inside.
They take daily trips to the playground with the snotty sleeved children and the slides that smell of dried corn.
In daytime, they stand on black dots for registration and clap when their name is called.
At night, they sweep stars across the moon whilst eating orange segments.
They catch dripping oil from engines to quench their headaches from the baby crying in the back seat.
When you sleep, they crawl over your lips and dab your teeth with sugar-free gum.
They play stepping stones with pennies on the street, leaving rusty footprints.
They tiptoe through dollhouses, and eat biscuit crumbs off tiny porcelain plates.
At midnight, you'll see them nibble the rim of Santa's mince pie and rinse their hands in brandy.
They cup tears in their palms and lower them gently into the sink.
When you aren't looking, they turn your shoelaces into bridges and clamber into the holes of your Converse.
They get trapped in raindrops and tap the glass hoping you'll let them in.
They scoop colour in pots from your eyes to fill the cracks in rainbows.
They sleep in your tear ducts and after a cold day, they hide in your dimples.
When the dust settles, they become statues in a world of artificial junk.

Isabelle Norton E Block



EARTH

The earth in Devon is red,
A bit like blood, the devil,
All manner of horror;
Grotesque visions
Of murder, of victims,
Halloween antics,
Polanski's Macbeth,
A cardinal's hat.

Ochre tinges burn a shade of saffron though,
Not true scarlet seepage,
And the iron in the earth
For us all incarnadines,
Brings strange consolation:

The promise of growth,
Is of a verdant redness;
Strawberries in summer
The half-bloom of apples,
Various roses;
Then the rust-tinge of leaves
As Autumn arrives,
As rouged skies ripen.

This redness, this earth,
Cannot yet be denied
By pollution,
Or automation,
It is a strange, subtle
Strength in the soil;

Earth beyond earth
Somehow redolent,
Unencompassable,
An unsurpassable,
Energy of life.

James Whitehead English

THE CITY HAS NO WALLS

The City has no walls yet we are surrounded by fear.
We hang CDs from cedar trees to scare off birds.
The lifts always break when they go above the third floor. Lifts haven't been invented yet.
Bodies are stored four blocks down from the hospital. They can be rented. The hospital
burned down in 1961. I work there on Fridays.
The evening news plays from neon panels in the clouds.
Oxygen is sold in bottles, if we need it. The only thing not sold in bottles nowadays is water.
In summer, barrels of liquid fall from the sky. We are told to duck.
The traffic lights change with the weather. In winter, people are always late.
Everyone tries to drive away, and all the roads loop round and back. On maps, the city looks
like a rollercoaster.
The cartographer shot himself last autumn. In commemoration, we now shoot every tenth
person. The population is always increasing.
There is one singular note that hums through the electricity lines on volatile guitar strings.
It leaves us all on the verge of tears, in time for the morning milkman.
Buildings are limited to bungalows on the east side, so everyone can watch the sunrise.
People rent the bodies, so that they have someone to sit with.

Annabel Mitchell LXX

AN EXPLANATION

There's a nurse who shouldn't be there.
Words, calm words, words from the textbook,
stats that I'm not listening to,
and uncertain words that I leave undissected.
And I'm crying because I'm locked in the car park.

Cheerful phone conversations,
'It sounds worse than it is, but...'
But...I don't know.
Gaping uncertainty is filled with blind trust
not hope as it can't be that bad but
I'm staring at the floor,
my party shoes,
the dust,
and I'm crying because I have cancer.

Bubbles rise purposefully in the Champagne,
thrust into my hand by a friend.
Sixteen bunches of hair are laid out on the kitchen floor,
tails to pin on the donkey.
The mirror reflects the back of my brother's head.
And it falls, gradually but persistently,
like autumn leaves,
carpeting the bath, my pillow, so much of it,
aching, until I've had enough.
Bald and cold.
Now I feel like one of them.

Strangers are kind, so kind,
and intrusive, presumptuous and
I'm selfish.
My jaw tenses at 'chemo'.
Everyone is ready with a cancer story that
I don't want to know, I don't have enough left to give.
But if it's you,
you understand; you're in the club.

But the love,
pours freely and unasked for,
carrying me
through the cycles of needles
to precious, fleeting familiarity.

When the snow melts, you're half way there.
When the daffodils smile, once round the park is enough,
tomorrow will be better.

Miranda Jones Biology

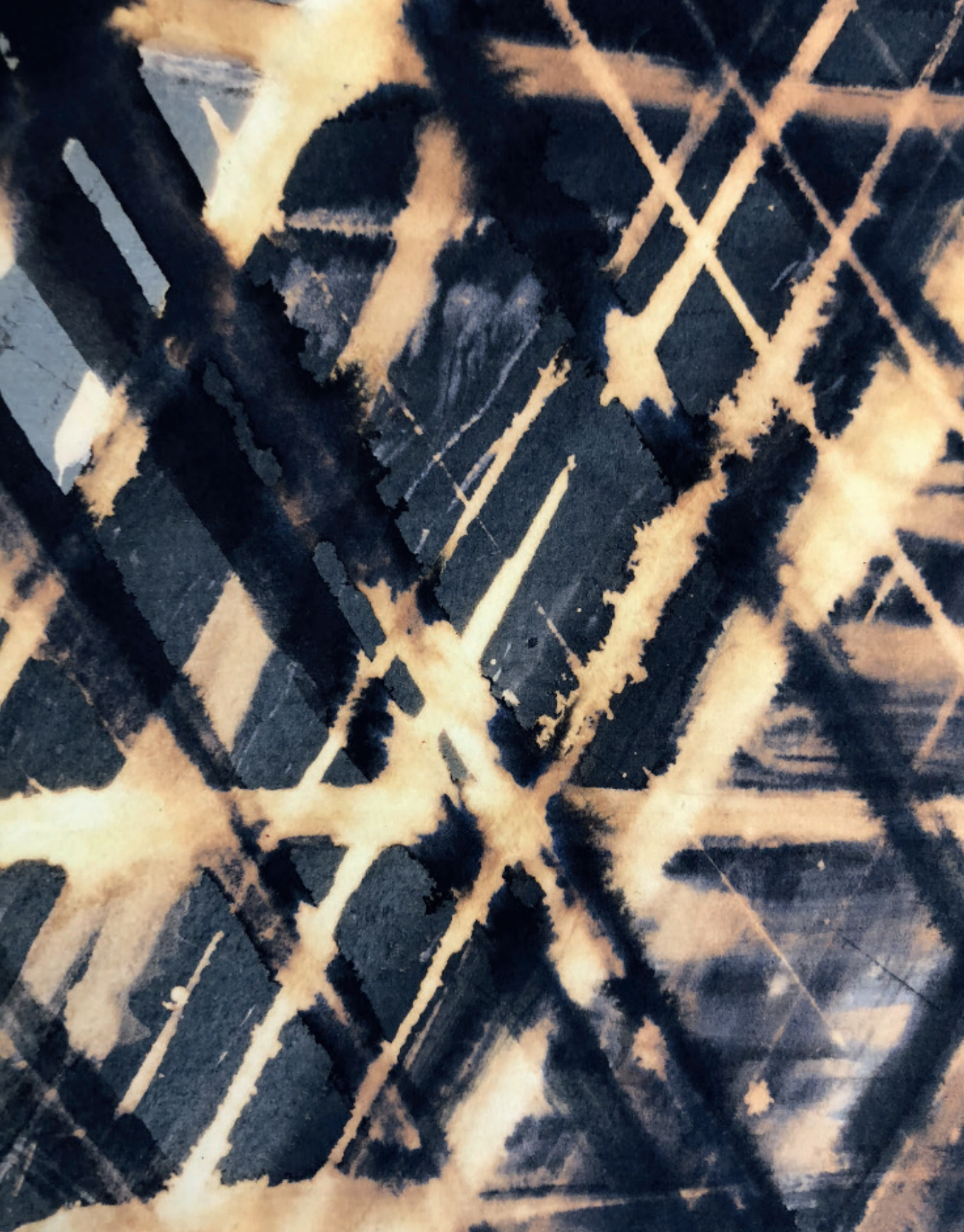
EXAM

Clammy hands clutch tired notes.
Steps on the path grow uneven as the thundering dread draws near,
Quotes, figures, decimals, cloud-anxious heads.
Skirt whips around expectant ankles bouncing in the queue
For the door, the echoing hall looming behind it.
A blur of faces, hands all scrabbling at last minute answers
To unknown questions.

He speaks and all talk dissolves.
And one by one the solemn procession enters,
Trembling paces boom, scraping chairs
Sing of the affair looming nearer.
A faint rustling of papers and the time starts.
Shaking hands put pen to paper, recalling knowledge until now forgotten,
And they begin.

We sigh with relief as the papers are collected.
The rustling seems brighter, the footsteps sprightly.
A surge of joy bubbles to the surface,
Even the clock-face is radiant.
The doors burst open and a hundred happy friends are free
To lift their faces to the sunshine
And forget all they have learned.

Maggie Baring D Block



FINE DINING

Women who hold their breath at dining room tables
Because their chair legs aren't tall enough.

Women who hold their breath at dining room tables
Because the porcelain dolls are watching.

Women who hold their breath at dining room tables
Because she's just so lucky.

Women who hold their breath at dining room tables
Because "Oh, it's too far north."

Women who hold their breath at dining room tables
Because statistics show she's happy.

Women who hold their breath at dining room tables
Because Wordsworth fills the silence.

Women who hold their breath at dining room tables
Because a guest never complains.

Shelly Fuxman XX

AVOIDANCE

Men who climb up the chimney
to play hide and seek
With their wives.

Men who climb up the chimney
To brush their bad breath away.

Men who climb up the chimney
to stare at a book in peace.

Men who climb up the chimney
As the in-laws make their opening speech
And inspect the dust on the vase.

Men who climb up the chimney
So the children don't see them
When they swear at their stubbed toe.

Men who climb up the chimney
To interrogate a fat-bellied man
Who refuses the front door and
Comes with the fulfilment of dreams
As an apology.

Men who climb up the chimney
To taste blood.

Men who climb up the chimney
To make up for lost time and to
Explore their own mouth.

Men who climb up the chimney
To cast their throbbing tongue aside
And cleanse themselves.

Men who climb up the chimney
As a result of banishment
To talk to the pigeons through
The means of mime.

Men who reach the rooftops
Forget what they miss.

James Gowen LXX

I REMEMBER

the times we spent lounging
drunk and spoilt on Cretan sun,
wearing Nivea Sun Moisturing Spray SPF 30.
our skins were dry with sea salt,
which dissolved in the mild chlorine pool
whose water was coldish, but sweet like your lips.
then I'd close my eyes and when
I opened them, everything was blue-tinted.

Mihai Marcas Economics

GOLDEN SHOVEL (*AFTER MR BRIGHTSIDE*)

A nasty drug: **jealousy**
with the strength of **turning**
devils from **saints**
until they plunge **into**
a place they call **the**
rage. A deep red **sea**
of ashes **swimming**
fast through and **through**
veins until at last they are so **sick**
that not even the sweetest of **lullabies**
can stop the **choking**
or smothered fury **on**
each cell of **your**
mind, stripped from all its **alibis**.

Rose Wang E Block

ATLANTIS

i know where all the lost things lie
where all souls drift and wave like seaweed
thin wispy forgotten
your darkest secrets are carved into stone
your nightmares sleep
veiled and blanketed in water

light drips in filtering through the inky water
dancing dappled over rocks that lie
there motionless as if they are trapped in eternal sleep
the light glows and sparks on scales that weave through seaweed
and the fish stops freezes cold and still like stone
and then on again it swims its fear forgotten

i don't want to be forgotten
i don't want to slip into the past trickle away like water
barely remembered just a name carved in stone
i don't want to be a place for flowers to lie
where all around me grass not seaweed
grows and all around me corpses rot decaying in sleep

i always loved going to sleep
and dreaming of a world where all my fears are forgotten
but now i'm scared that if my eyes close i'll see her lying there limp like beached seaweed
and you can't wash away death with water
trust me that's not a lie
but it hurts still like a cut from a jagged stone.

imagine the day that stone
shattered falling down into its final sleep
sinking into the ocean vanishing into the water
down to its resting place a new place to lie
a place for the lies for the promises forgotten
for the things we abandon where they hang in nooses of seaweed

i don't want to be like atlantis forgotten and trapped under miles of water
a drowned ruin of crumbling stone webbed in seaweed
i don't want to lie down and sleep not yet at least

Alice Broadbent LXX

SIRENS

The soft sound of the slapping waves
soothing sailors, moving closer
headed for us, ships pass
every sunrise as they savour the
light of the sunset.

Sailors catch sight of the salty islands
approaching every second,
soaring across the swell,
drawn in by our sweet looks and
silvery songs persuading them to visit.

As we weave our hair
it tempts them
to stop over and see
what sits on the slabs of rock
by the sandy black beach.

Secluded from the outside world
this is all they have.
Solitary, this can make them a bit senseless
on their ship, that is torn apart,
shattered.

Their flesh is too soft and
easy to split.
Clotted red pours out.
Hearts are my favourite
because I am eating their love.
But they were always

hypnotised. As you are.

Charlotte Ison F Block

KNIFE

She wasn't allowed it for years.
Kept in a safe it became harsher,
Like his hands.
It came out on her twelfth birthday,
Both a memory and a future.
The ivory handle was worn away with age and use,
And the slightly rusted blade,
Loose in its slot.
She's too scared to use it,
That the memories will rub off,
And then they will be gone forever.
She knows that memories are there to be lost,
But this is the one memory that she is going to keep.
She turns the knife in her hand and it
Catches the light with a flash.

Charlotte Mayhew E Block

EVERYTHING AND SHE ISN'T.

A lamb in spring, a duck and pecks the bread 'yum, yum, yum', a teddy bear, smells like home and dead. Delicate, greedy, dead – everything she is and isn't, was and wasn't, shall be and shouldn't. Soft and smells like fabric conditioner. Lavender. Green garden in spring, green tea in summer, green mould in the sink, rubber gloves on and scrub. When you don't love you don't breathe, when the tea is cold 'put the kettle on Fred'.

Last night I saw a ladybird, spotted and spotty. I tucked it in, put water by its side and said, 'good night' and 'sweet dreams'. Then I crushed it. Fed it to the birds. I met a cow in summer, quite real. Soft hair and warm tongue. I said to him 'I'll always love you, let no harm come to you'. I ate steak that night. Not twice I thought.

Everything I am she isn't but loves still the same. The flower of her womb my friends, sharing beds like little kids and hug dog. Make some brownies what a lovely idea. Reassuring and put on a coat, let's get in the car, time to go to Tesco.

The milk was half-priced.

Freddie Anderson LXX

GIVE AND TAKE

I remember you striding across the countryside,
clambering over crisps of heather,
and scrabbling over rocks, right up to the top.
you said it was like flying to stand there
right at the top of hill, and to gaze hawk-like across the
patchwork quilt of purples and greens and blues
from your perch on the big rock.

I remember you when you first got ill
and your walks got shorter
and they took longer and longer.
I remember the cacophony of coughing
that sounded like the caws of the crows as they swept over us
when you used to take me for marches through
the woods, dodging puddles as we went.

I remember when they brought it in.
after weeks of your coughing they brought in a coffin of their own,
and I remember the rain drizzling and the midges biting
as I watched them lower it down, down.
I saw the mud swallow you up, the earth sucking you in
like when we went walking and the mud used to climb over our boots
and cling onto us.

Alice Broadbent LXX

MONKEY

Thank you, Monkey, for sitting
On my bed. Monkey staring at me with his
Half smile and glass eyes.

The king of the apes with a thin smile of
Black thread wishing he could reach out his
Monkey Velcro hand to mine and hold it.

The stiff bristles stroke my skin
Letting me know Monkey's there. Monkey's
Large ears ready to listen and its dishwasher safe label

Prepared to soak up any tears. Monkey's
Elongated limbs taking a break from climbing trees
To wrap themselves around my neck.

Zea Cole LXX

SILENCE

I have never experienced such tangible silence. Twelve people. Eleven sit. One lies down. She is unmoving, asleep. A lone candle burns in the corner of the room. Cries bubble from out of her mother's throat.

It is still, so still. I can't breathe.
When they take her away, I cannot look.

We are hidden, behind a partition crudely and hastily fashioned. A woman slips into the partition as if she cannot be seen. We hear prayers from the rest of those in the building. Voices murmur. Low, almost inaudible.

The curtain parts, and a woman comes forward with some sort of makeshift stand. After she has set it up, six people carrying a coffin draped with a cloth enter and place the coffin on the stand. They too are silent. Someone pulls the cloth down and opens the top section of the lid.

Now we are supposed to say goodbye.

I stand on legs that have supported me for sixteen years and now suddenly I almost fall. A woman grabs my hand before I tumble and she squeezes it. She leads me to the coffin where women have gathered and are sobbing into their headscarves. 'Push to the front,' she whispers, 'They've been there long enough.'
Obligingly, I do.

She is lying there, asleep. The woman whispers to me, 'I think we did a really good job. She looks beautiful.' No, she doesn't, I want to scream. She is trapped there, in that box, her body wrapped in white cloth and she cannot move. She is asleep and I want her to be awake. It looks as if she might breathe in air once more and sit up and laugh at us for being worried. 'I'm fine,' she'd say. 'I'm fine.'

But she doesn't. She is tired, and thin, and her body was working hard to keep her alive and it couldn't anymore and now she is gone.

I don't want to look anymore. I push through the old women and my scarf almost falls off my head and I am crying now, for the first time.

We drive to the cemetery, where we will say goodbye for a final time. In the car, we talk and joke about the new things we have seen today and underneath broods grief and pain and confusion.

We stand far away. Pushed to the very edge of the plot, we say goodbye to our own from afar. At the graveside, the men lower the coffin into the grave with ropes that look too frail to support her coffin. Earth is smoothed by spades and hands and a mound of earth finally covers her coffin. The men seem anxious to get it done and when it is finished the bare, sandy mound looks too hasty. It is not what she deserves.

Four months later we go to see her. Just us. We bring flowers of rose and lilac and creamy hues and we plant them in the mound of earth that protects her from the world. Behind her head is a bench that he put there for her. I want to cover her grave in flowers. I will plant them soon. And then, she will come alive once more, in that garden that I plant for her.

Ischia Gooda D Block

ANCHOR HOME (extract)

"A picture is a secret about a secret, the more it tells you the less you know" - Diane Arbus

Some things never change. There was no one to meet her as she got off the bus in front of the American Hotel. Wandering along Main Street, Faith spotted an old friend and was soon inside sitting at the diner counter taking in the smell: fake leather, greasy French fries, milkshakes. With a nod to the waitress she ordered her favourite silver-dollar-chocolate-chip-pancakes and a glass of warm milk. She hadn't eaten there or them for – what? a year? that was the last summer she spent with him - but as they were put down in front of her and as she felt the sweet steam hit her face she knew she was home. She drained the milk from the heavy glass with the same red and white striped straw and ate the pile of pancakes from the same chipped plates. No one ever believed she would eat them all but if she'd eaten the plateful when she was six it couldn't defeat her now. An old photograph flashed into her head – pigtails, freckles, an empty, scraped clean plate and a slow smile on her face. He had been so proud of her - "I knew you could do it" - and she remembered the warmth of that even now. The stomachache afterwards had been worth it.

The diner door clicked shut but she didn't turn around. Pancakes had always been serious business. It had been a long day. Early that morning she had taken a train from home – Otis, Massachusetts (4 s's and two t's) where she and her mother and her dog, Amber lived. She'd arrived into New York City at Grand Central Station, ridden uptown on the no. 6 to 86th and Lex and then taken the Jitney out east to Sag Harbor. Or as her Gatsby-loving father would say, 'just off the road to East Egg'. How many times had she played this journey out in her head over the past few years? Too many to count. The slap of a

record as the jukebox fired up interrupted her thoughts and that slow smile returned to her face.

“Let me tell you about a girl I know, she’s my baby and she lives next door, every morning ‘fore the sun comes up, she brings me coffee in my favorite cup. .That’s why I know, yes I know, Hallelujah I just love her so.”

Ray Charles and her Dad were in the house. She spun around on her stool, and almost felt the warmth of him as he wrapped his arms around her in a hug and then stopped. An old man was shuffling back to a booth where his wife was waiting with a tender smile on her face. This was their song, not hers.

* * *

Memories fade. They are malleable, shaped by what other people tell us and photographs. Memory becomes blurred like an out of focus photograph. A photograph is just a snapshot of what is happening at a particular time, it gives no back story. Gone are the days when homes had a box of photographs or fading albums that children would thumb through and ask their parents who was in the pictures. With digital photographs every minute can be recorded, and they are private - kept on phones and computers and altered, shared, filtered, and rewritten. The lines between reality and memory are smudged and it’s hard to know if someone was even there. Family memories are like quicksand; firm footing lost over the years as stories are retold.

Mariella Satow E Block

DIGGING

Frost painted the ground a misted white, the winter chill stealing all vibrancy from the world. The trees were unnaturally still in the sleepy rays of early morning light. Wind still rustled at what leaves remained on the branches, but that was all, the trees didn't whisper. The only movement came from behind a small bush at the edge of the treeline, where a russet tail twitched slowly back and forth. The fox was bone-thin with black paws, as though dipped in paint, and small enough it could still be a cub. It was slinking back into the forest, paws tapping lightly over the frozen ground after another night of unsuccessful hunting.

As the small fox skirted through the undergrowth, it saw something curious and the paint-dipped paws froze. A man, tall and dark, was digging a hole. His breath made a cloud in the morning air, but already sweat rolled down his forehead. The fox stared, hesitant to carry on past the man, when its hungry nose found something. Dropping low, one paw sliding ahead of another, the dark snout drew close behind the man. It twitched, and the fox's eyes found their prize. Something square and soft, with meat inside. The fox was now so low its empty stomach touched the ground. It was focused solely on its prize. Its cold belly could already feel the food inside, and drool slipped from the side of its mouth. The fox crouched, ready to pounce, and –

'Oi!' A stone flew past the fox's eyes, startling it, causing the poor creature to leap back behind a bush, the sandwich left behind. 'Dumb fox,' muttered the man, resting on his shovel.

The fox didn't give up on its prize however, and several times crept closer only to be chased away. After a while, with the man still digging and the fox still hungry, it stepped out from behind the bush and sat openly, watching. By now the sun had risen and the ground was beginning to soften, making it much easier for the shovel to bite into the earth, and the sounds of a waking woodland made the man pause. He looked at the fox, and the fox looked back. Shrugging, the man picked up the sandwich and, still looking at the fox, bit into it. Something almost accusatory passed over the fox's face, its amber eyes seeming human for a moment, and it turned to leave.

'Wait!' Even the man didn't know why he said it, it just slipped out of his mouth. The fox stopped and was rewarded with the patter of some chicken thrown at its feet. Almost before the man could process this action, the fox had gulped down the food. When both man and fox were finished, the man returned to his work, and the fox to his watching.

It became a routine, over the next few days, for the fox to find the man in the early hours, digging the same hole. The man would talk to the fox and

the fox would patiently listen, in exchange for scraps of food. Both baffled the other, but fell into an easy pattern. So it concerned the man when, one drizzling morning, the fox didn't turn up. At first he shrugged it off, a wild animal is by its own nature changeable, he reasoned... But still his eyes kept flickering to the place the fox usually sat, and despite the easy give in the wet earth, he found himself packing up early that morning.

On his way home, to a little house just through the woods, he heard a whine. Instinctively he knew. The man left his shovel on the path and foraged through the wet trees towards the sound. Within minutes he came across his fox, and at first he couldn't understand why it was whining. Then he saw it – the paint-dipped foot caught in cold metal teeth. He started towards the fox and it growled. Slowly, the man reached into his pocket, took out the scraps he'd saved for the fox, and threw them on the grass in front of the fox. Then, as the fox was distracted, he reached towards the trap and tugged. The animal stiffened. The man tried again, pulling the trap open, until finally he felt a sharp release. As the teeth came out of the fox's leg it squealed in pain and quickly sprung away without even looking at the man, who simply shook his head and went back to his shovel with a bittersweet tang in his mouth.

The next morning the man arrived at his spot, and he half wondered if the fox would still come. He didn't wait for long though, as a russet snout soon poked its way through the frozen bushes and limped over to the man, sitting only a metre or so away from him. Again, those amber eyes looked so disconcertingly human to him. The man smiled at the little fox and went back to his digging. He was engrossed in his task, happily babbling to the fox, and so he didn't even notice when another sound joined that of his shovel biting into the ground; the scrabbling of two paint-dipped paws, digging alongside him. The fox was scraping away dirt, leaning heavily on its uninjured side, and upon seeing this, the man felt something warm twinge inside himself, in spite of the heavy chill in the air. The only watcher of this curious sight, a tiny fox and a tall man working side-by-side to dig a hole, was a plump robin, waking as the morning light stole over the trees.

Soon the day had fully woken and the earth had softened somewhat. Here, they paused, and the two workers shared a sandwich between them before returning to their task.

'You know, a fox'd-' the man stopped as his shovel hit something hard. The fox stopped too and looked quizzically up at the man. 'I found it,' was all he said.

Rachel Stevens XX

NEW HOME

As a child, I was utterly terrified of the dark. I would lie awake in my bed for hours. My body would be sore from being curled up so tightly under my covers. The blankets were far too warm for the summer months, but I endured the sweat in exchange for the illusion of the security they gave me. I remember watching the darkest corner, opposite my bed, trying to see what the bristling hairs on my neck told me was staring back at me. I remember the sudden intake of breath and how I would shudder whenever I imagined a dark shape stirring around my room or crawling across my floor. My eyes would hurt from the strain of keeping them open, but at least I could see something by the dim glow of the car headlights through the window, and I knew once my eyes were closed, that's when the shadows would come for me.

It was, therefore, an unpleasant revelation twenty years later, when I drove up to my new house and found that it was the darkest building in a row of otherwise inviting homes. It was the most ancient looking, with its rough wood siding and Victorian style tower, all painted a dark, faded grey.

The flyer I'd received from the landlord explained that the building was originally a mansion and had been bought and renovated nearly eighty years ago.

The wide porch groaned ominously as I ascended its uneven steps. I was faced with a doorbell. I rang it and waited in silence. After nearly a minute and a half, I sighed and rang again. There was a commotion on the other side of the door, which opened a moment later to reveal an old man with grey hair and a face full of scruff and brown spots. "Sorry for the wait," he said. "Please, come in." It was my new landlord, Mortimor. "I am sure you will love it here," he said with a nervous, almost fake smile. He left me my keys, and disappeared.

I shut the door behind him. I was overwhelmed by the inadequacy of the single lamp hanging from the ceiling. It gave a pale circle of light on the hardwood floor of the entryway, but the corners remained black. I continued to examine my surroundings. Dark wood panelling covered the lower half of the walls before giving way to a grey-striped, hideous wallpaper. No doubt it was the dreariness of the decor that

accounted for the lamp's inability to effect proper illumination.

I spent the rest of the afternoon moving into my apartment. There was a bedroom mostly occupied by a bulging canopied bed, a small bathroom, and a modestly equipped kitchen.

The first thing I did was turn on all the lights, but that did little to dispel the shadows lurking in every corner. The kitchen and bedroom each had a single window, but the dreary walls prevented the sunlight from accomplishing much. As afternoon turned to evening, my 'home' was slowly consumed by the darkness.

I made a quick supper when I was done unpacking and ate it just as quickly before slipping outside for some fresh air—and to escape the oppressive dimness of the house.

It became apparent very fast that I would need a torch if I was to survive living here. I tripped on every other step, ran into walls in the hallway and stubbed my toe on doorways as I struggled to turn on the lights. I finally gave up and felt my way to the bed, collapsing gratefully into the soft mattress. I

fell asleep easily, though my night was far from restful. My dreams were full of scraping whispers, shadows pacing the hallways, scratching at my bedroom door.

My alarm rang far too soon. It was with great difficulty that I dragged myself out from under the heavy black covers to meet the dull morning. A storm was brewing. Clouds loomed and rain was falling. Huge gusts of wind made my house shake.

I teetered about the bedroom, trying once more to find the light switch, before heading to the small bathroom down the hall. I was shocked to see my face in the dim mirror. With my sunken, bruised eyes it seemed like I hadn't gotten any sleep at all. I splashed my face with cold water to wake myself up and cautiously walked to the 'living' room, if one could call it that in a house as dead as this. I looked around to familiarise myself with my location once more, and on the medieval style bookcase that loomed over me, I noticed something. Curiosity engulfed me and before my brain had a chance to make a decision, I found myself holding a book. A diary? It was enveloped in dust. Untouched for decades so it

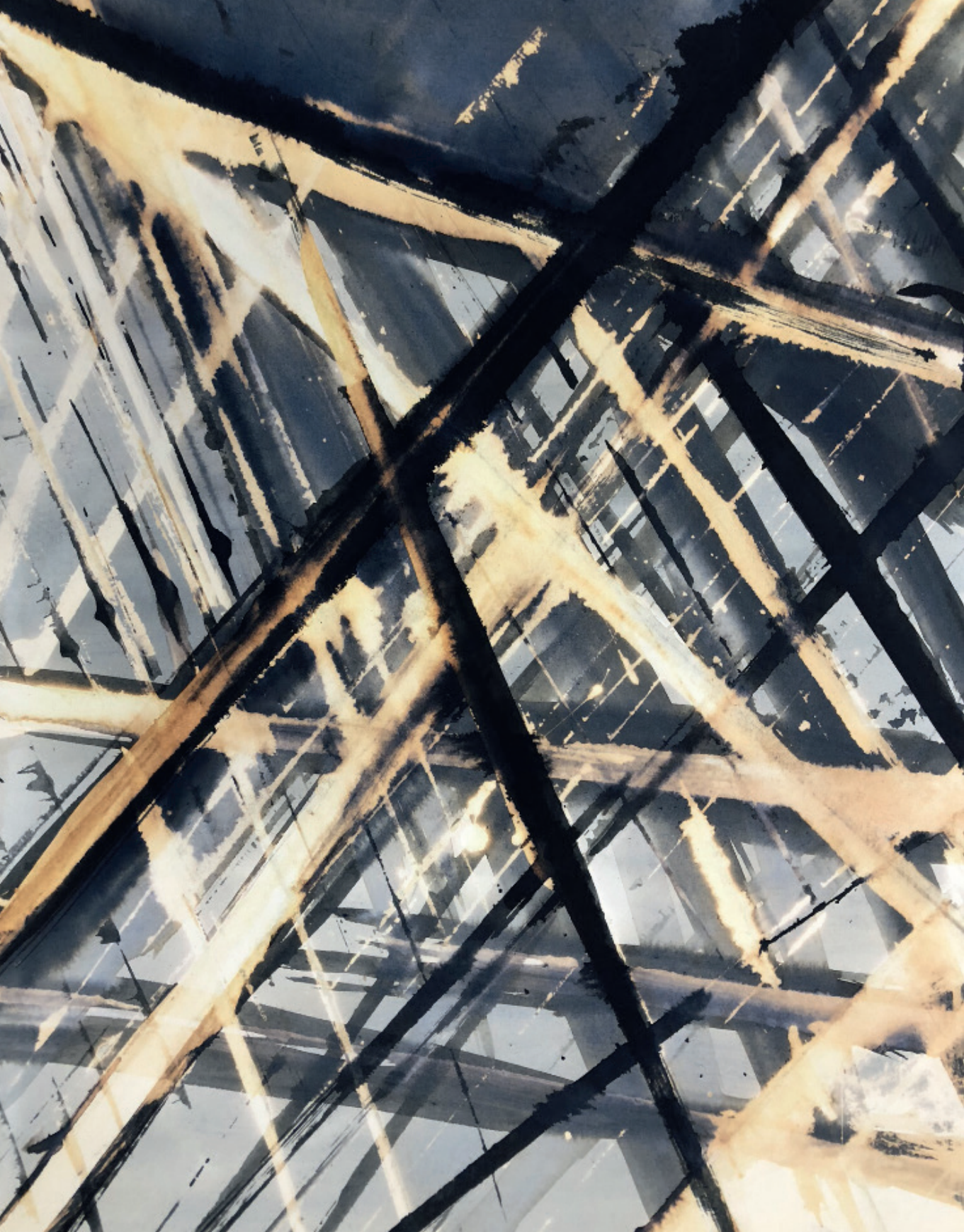
seemed. I took a cloth and gently wiped it. The front cover read: William Arthur Ponsonby-Jones. I opened it, careful to not cause any damage. My arms suddenly became weak – I put it down onto the table.

Reading that book was the worst mistake of my life. 'My brand new home. I love it here. My love says that something doesn't seem right.' The first three sentences of the diary. Something brushed past me. I looked up to see what it was. Nothing. I felt it again. There was nothing in my house physically, but there was *something* there. I could feel it. It was staring at me. Piercing me with its presence. Suddenly, a mirror shattered. I walked over to it and on the back of the glass, in an old-fashioned script, were the words 'Hello Thomas Spaulding.' My mouth was dry. I felt paralysed. I didn't know what to do. I ran towards the front door, with my torch, but before I could get there: it had locked it. My one escape route – gone.

'Everything that could go wrong at this moment, has.' That went through my mind several times – before it got worse. As I slowly walked back to the kitchen, I fell.

I had tripped on the threadbare rug that lay on the floor. My torch went out as it hit the ground and I lay there in the darkness for what seemed like an eternity. I reached for my torch. My stone-cold torch. I grabbed it and flicked the switch. Darkness. It was broken. My childhood nightmare had become a reality.

Skye Slatcher F Block



SYNTHESIS (Extract)

Charlie goes towards the market stalls opposite him and begins following them down the street until he's reached the fourth. He can feel people's stares; this isn't where a servant boy should be. In front of a row of tall, pristine houses, a big stall about 5 yards across is attracting the most attention. As he makes his way through the crowd, he hears a sharp crack. A moment of silence and then, a terrible, piercing scream. Public whippings aren't that uncommon in the city squares, but he's never heard a noise like that before.

The vendors are calling out over the noise, advertising their product as happens on market days, but these ones are yelling strange, seemingly random numbers.

"Two 17H32s! Well trained – good for security!"

Charlie pushes past people to hear better, and suddenly finds himself at the front of the crowd. He looks down and recoils in fear, bumping into a few people behind him who murmur disapprovingly. *What in the world is that...?*

He begins to back away as much as the packed crowd will let him, trying to remove his gaze from the thing. It looks similar to an animal, but still so scarily, intriguingly *human* and it's playing with Charlie's mind. He can't see it in much detail, the shadow of the counter spilling over the top of the cage, but he knows one thing. Something like that couldn't exist. It shouldn't exist, but all the same he feels strangely drawn to it.

As he steadies himself and his thoughts, he breaks his gaze away from the cage in front of him and looks at the rest of the long stall. All the way down until the end of the street there's a row of cages and a second row stacked up behind the first front row, probably one vendor to every five or six cages. Each cage has a plate on top or on the side, clearly showing a code tag to the crowd. Every time a vendor calls out one of these codes, there are multiple yells of prices from the audience, similar to an auction.

"13P33!" The vendor closest to Charlie shouts and the creature he had first seen tries to hide itself at the back of its cage.

"I'll take it for £400!" A woman calls. Another cuts in with £450, and yet another person asking to take the creature for £600.

"13P33 sold for £600!" The vendor grabs the handle on the cage and lifts it onto the counter through a gap in the cages. He opens the door and Charlie gets a proper look at the thing he saw. A girl, if you could call it that, crawls out from the cage shivering. Her long grey tail flicks back and forth and her charcoal ears are flat back against her head. She bares her sharp canines at the crowd, but the vendor grips the back of her neck tightly and she whimpers, her teeth retracting and disappearing. Charlie watches in horror as she has a collar locked around her neck and leashed tightly to a post on the counter while the vendor and the buyer, a large stern lady with too much powder on her face, exchange papers.

Olivia Hunter E Block

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING A POET (Extract)

They don't wear clothes.
They sit on grass in fields,
One hand clasping a glass of deep red wine
And the other stroking flowers –
Ahhh
'Smell the bittersweet aura of life.'
So they sit.
Cross legged.
Naked.
Black ink over pale skin
Like a chess board
For they are 'they are the game'
And 'the black is their soul.'
In this field is a cow.
He is worried.
The poet stares into the eyes of the worried cow.
The cow feels self-conscious.
He stares at the ground
Clearly insecure.
The poet cries
'Don't be scared of my nudity cow!
We share so much
You are black and white, just like I.'
The cow begins to stare at the poet's breast.
The poet grows red faced.
The cow thinks,
'The nib of the pen is the point of the breast.'
Of course!
Of course.
Of course.
At dinner parties
They'll often ponder
The undercooked guinea fowl or
The cheap crack in your ceiling.
Don't be alarmed if,
Amidst a silence,
They shout,
'This partridge is tough, but not as hard
As treading across the path of a rich man's
Hound.
You must just smile and nod...

Florrie Barshall LXX



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