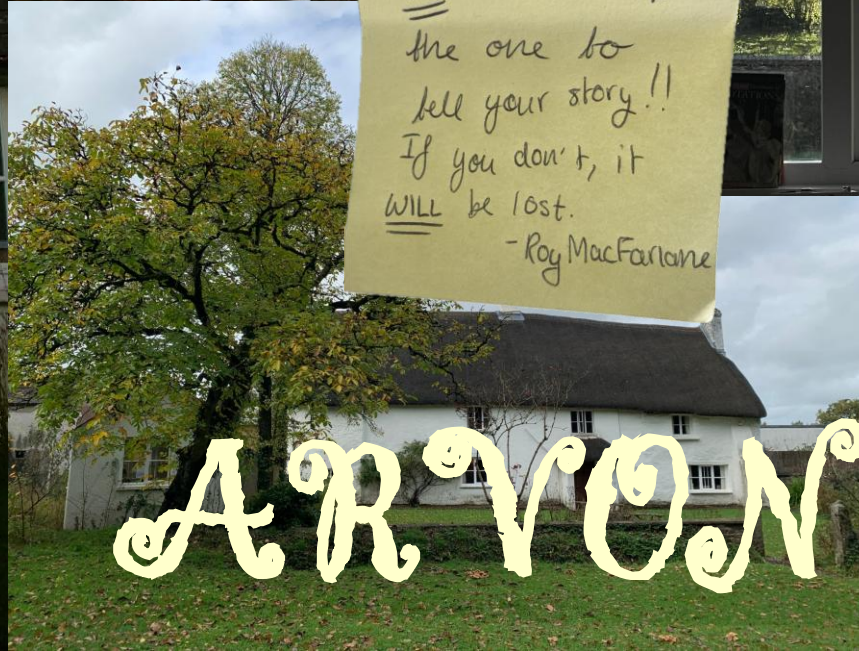




Totleigh Barton, Devon



YOU have to be
the one to
tell your story!!
If you don't, it
WILL be lost.
- Roy MacFarlane

ARVON 2025



Editors' Note:

A week in the countryside, a cottage full of writers, and so much talent in one place has led to this collection. Between endless hot drinks and biscuits, we wrote. Some pieces came easily, others were difficult to get down on paper, but either way, all of them carry a bit of that week's calm and chaos.

We are so grateful to all of the Arvon staff at Totleigh Barton for an amazing week of writing, along with our tutors, Belinda and Roy, and of course to Alex Scott-Martin, and Joseph Ryan, for always being wonderful.

- Diamond and Clemmie





in the beginning

the universe opened like a slit
fish swift glint
on a mariner's knife then
from still darkness
tumbling matter reeking
of seaweed and birth imagine
the wet slap of being
from non-being stars
scraped scales held in rough
palms tossed
to an ocean thick
as oil slick

we are all
pulled from dark
waters gulping
wide-eyed hooks
through our cheeks thrashing
our glistening limbs
on a cold moonlit deck

- Alix Scott-Martin

Welcome to the world

Before, there was silence.

Loud, cacophonous quiet, the quiet that makes your ears ring and your heart pound,

The kind of quiet where dreams are formed and crushed.

All around, there was nothing but quiet, nothing but blankness,

Until something shifted.

A disquiet among the silence,

A splash of colour on a blank canvas,

A murmur in an echo chamber.

Then, like a flower, blooming in the morning sun,

Unfurling and stretching up towards the light,

It spread like ink across the nothingness,

Infused every inch with its boundless scents,

Of rolling hills and jagged mountains,

Of massive whales and tiny mice,

Of smooth lakes and choppy seas,

Flowing and fantastic and free.

It blossomed and grew,

Expanded and filled itself with its limitlessness

Until it was satisfied.

Once it was ready, it pushed itself into the world,
Squeezed through the narrow tunnel promising freedom
at the end,

Burst into harsh white lights and large shapes flitting
about.

For a moment, the silence returns.

The room stills,

Holds its breath.

One second, then two.

Until a sound pierces the air,

Loud and shrill,

Louder than anything hears through the nothingness
before.

A laugh rings out.

Then a cry.

Relief floods the space,

Worry melts away.

The click of a camera echoes somewhere in the distance.

Blurs of colour spin,

Whirl round as voices coo and gasp, melting together into
a soup of sound.

Nothing is definite yet, but all will become clear.

Welcome to the World.

Remember – Remixed (after Joy Harjo)

Remember the roof you grew under,
Remember the people that nourished you.
Remember the vibrant colours, and the familiar
aromas of your mother's cooking.
Remember the legacy passed down to you,
In flavours and textures writing a history in invisible
ink.
Remember the sayings and the adages,
Remember lectures delivered to unwilling ears.
Remember “time waits for no man” and “how you go
is how you will grow”.
Remember the legacy passed down to you,
In wise words and advice given at just the right time.
Remember the coconut scent of hair treatments,
Remember the vivid colours of the beads swinging in
your hair,

Remember the clouds you walked on after hair day.
Remember partitioning hair with trembling fingers
growing steadier each minute,
Remember the legacy passed down to you,
In hair twisted into colourful shapes.
Remember Fridays spent at the church,
Remember the bright blue paint and the chemical
scent of cleaning spray.
Remember loud smiles and big greetings,
Remember the legacy passed down to you,
In warm hugs and boundless joy.
Remember community and colours,
Remember hot days and explosive flavours,
Remember who you are.
Remember the legacy passed down to you,
And never let yourself forget.

-Esther Olayemi

Remember the first day of school, (After Joy Harjo)

the beginning of the end.
Remember mother leaving
Remember all the new pink faces and the new yellow
hair
Remember the mean teachers
Remember the mean pink faces, not new anymore
Remember the laughing, the beatings of the chest,
the confusion of the 'weird name'
Remember the name change
Remember the people growing and changing
Remember the back and the forth and the back again
Remember the not caring anymore, or the
pretending not to
Remember the quickly discarded words of advice
Remember that you aren't there anymore
Remember that it's still in you, that it's a part of you,
that it will never leave you
Remember that it shaped you
Forget whether it was for the better or the worse

I come from (after Kim Moore)

I come from people who are nothing like me. I come
from people who are loud, proud, and always in the
centres of crowds. I come from people who always say
what they mean, who seem so confident. And they never,
ever, ever say anything bad about themselves ever, because
'The power of life and death is in the tongue'. I come
from people who would probably be cancelled if
everything they ever said was posted online, but I suppose
that's everyone sometimes. I come from endless words of
wisdom, but limited actions taken to solve problems that
have been around for generations. I come from 'respect'
or something like it. I come from say what you mean, but
not to me.

- **Diamond Kayode-Osunlana**

Nostalgia

Along the well-trodden path, a bridge between the yellow-brick farmhouses and the dimly lit church, I walk with my mother; matching mittens intertwined.

Biting wind caresses the brambles, riding on this breeze the heavy scent of christingle, choke on citrus smoke. Everyone marches on the same path: don't put your wellies on the grass!

Mingling in the thick mist is the icy breath of hymns just sang- phantoms. The steady tremble of the organ tumbles down the altars, thrown out by the bells which quench my soul's thirst.

A crack in the door

November. Drip, Drip, Drip, Drip.

Have I been reborn?

- Charlotte Smith

Untitled

I remember calling it home
the cliff jumps into salt-blue water,
the endless pub lunches that stretched into golden
afternoons,
the walks along the headland where the wind tangled
our hair,
the long lobster lunches,
fires that cracked and whispered as we talked,
with that constant hum of voices —
and never quite knowing who would be there when
we walked in.

I don't remember ever not loving it.
No awkward silences, no heavy moments,
no bad food or boredom,
no sense of time passing
just one endless season of happiness

I remember the first time I arrived
the sharp scent of seaweed tangled with tobacco,
the sound of the waves stitched with the low murmur of
the speakers,
the taste of Uncle Ed's prawn cocktail,
the scrape of gritty rock beneath my hands,
the soft warmth of Uncle Johnny's fleece,
the house looking down on us
with its sage-grey stone washed smooth by years of wind,
and the windows framed with careful, intricate carvings.

I don't remember the weak Wi-Fi,
or the wind battering the windows,
or the annual pleas for us to sit
and watch that same familiar film.

I only remember how it felt when we were all together
there,
the fullness, the warmth,
the endless laughs

I remember loving Plas Esgob.

-Flossie Whittle

Remember the language of the sea

Nova Scotia

I remember the crash of angry waves against the kitchen
table

The smash of doors and the rumble of quick-forming
thunder

Then the universe opens up like a crack in the mirror
July

The crabs bite the meat we spear with string
And revel in flying up up up into our buckets
Forgetting a time where the crickets were quiet
And the cicada's silenced their skiff band
August

I remember the scratch of rocks and the smell of salt
The seaweed singing its gelatinous song, and sand making
surprise visits to my bed
The iron taste on my tongue only washed away by the
ocean's patient tide
Floating up from the sea floor, watching the rise and fall of
waves like a sleeping child's chest.

I remember the lungs of the ocean gifting respite from
the sharpness of the air,
Muffling me in greys and greens and blacks.
Alge growing between my ears and when I opened my
mouth to talk, sea water comes rushing out.
The distance between the horizon and I growing, glowing
distant with every thunderstorm.

- Ceci Flinn

Untitled

I remember a feeling that cannot be explained.

I remember my stomach twisting into itself as my heart kicks
in my chest

hairspray, sweat

hands shaking, my eyes dart from corner to corner of this box
for a lifeline as i drown in the black-
i walk on.

a feeling that cannot be spoken.
yellow lights, pink lights
reds, blacks
blues washing over me consoling me with their warmth
i don't remember anything else.

you black out
you disappear
your fights and fears and wars are no longer yours because
you're no longer you.
your blank canvas has been painted by the lights that dance

around you
blood pumps through your veins like lava, galvanising you to
tell a story that can't be captured by words alone

i remember validation
you return
and you're greeted by screams that whisper

that every struggle
every misstep
every voice crack
every rehearsal for this moment
was needed for this moment

i don't remember a life
before this secret garden
that blooms over and over with every overture.
but i remember the stage.

I remember the indelible mark you left deep in my chest
and maybe I'll never be able to fully explain it,
but i remember and remember

and I will never forget

- **Francesca Odueyungbo**

Remember (after Joy Harjo)

Remember where you came from
Your roots
Your beginnings
Your ends
Remember the position of the moon which has glowed since
the beginning
Remember the same moon when it turns into the sun
A new birth which is given away by mother nature's beauty
Remember the breath which is braided into your lungs
The breath of your mother, and her mother, and her mother
Remember to feel the earth from which you were made
The earth from which gold-dusted memories wait to be
resurrected
Remember those memories and never let them go
For they make up
You.

- Clemmie Wilson

Untitled

don't just let any hand feed you

don't even trust your mother, or a lover

this is just another way for them to poison you

don't lick the plate clean

don't accept those blackberries

your head is in the clouds,

their voice is calming you down

but don't just let any hand feed you

-Ardeleah Aucote-Davies

Splintered

Splinters lie across the velvet table,
Some balls lie in a red-soaked sock.
She is shaking him; he is lying face down.
One half of the cue is still in the others hand.
Unable to process what he has just done,
The wood falls to the floor as his knees
Crack against the boards.
It was just one lunge.
Now the grain of the other half is
Soaking up his Life
He chokes and spits himself out.

Burn out

Cigarette butts on wet concrete slabs,
The muffled slew of drunken dribble,
And the aroma of whiskey and bile.
Leaning against a spinning wall
And sliding up to spilt my face
In a bloody crack on the curb.
Red, Blue, Green, Orange
Spiral through the cloud in my head
Until a slap and that voice I will always follow shouts.
I see her roll her eyes at me,
As she claims me,
And there it began.

- Kit Howells

Untitled

The flames lick over the brick wall of the fireplace, it
Blackens and burns but stays standing, it even takes
The heat, the ash the sparks and the embers, but
Eventually, the bricks will be charcoal and there will be a
Smoky scent hanging in the air, the logs burnt to a single
Cinder, their fading light glowing dimly, and from that
comes a spark
The spark breathes again, it's light illuminating the ashes to
Burn again, risen anew, flaming, fiery and fierce, to ignite
All it takes is one wrong move, all it needs is a
Single spark to fan the flames, to breed a fire

Untitled

To those who want to be heard
To those who want to speak
To those who tread lightly, the eye of the storm
To those in follow the path of their own
To those with lots of words to give
Fill a room with your quiet
Subtle, understated but never undervalued
A mother, a sister, a cousin, a friend
To the mothers, the protectors, the guides
You are the creators and the designers
Let the world be your oyster
And in turn, you can be its shell

- Jay Krishnamoorthy

The House of Mimi's House

Silence surrounds her, from the cold blue clouds to a welcoming whip of wind. Bare trees stare blankly from the middle distance.

Nothing cuts that white air save for the distant shriek of a hungry Kite, circling, wings shaking, its head still.

She is an outpost, a bunker, a shelter from brutal masculine elements. Barren for so many years, she is a vessel of memories, dust covers, gun metal and the kitchen table populated with bottles of moonshine. She smells the ash of a fire lit in somebody's early manhood.

And sits there now waiting to hold someone, anyone again. She whispers herself into madness, "the house of the house of the house...."

She waits on the hill

A bank of empty memory
famished

Untitled

The white walls against the molasses beams were almost all we could see the night the lights went out. Our low-lit faces by the fire told of witchcraft and fables, figures flickered past the window. Shrieked and gambolled like the final flames fit for Goya.

Wine, dark

Soot, dark

Smoky ashen fireplace

Late into the night

And cut off

Once that long dark day was over and that glow had caramelised, toasting the room with a warm treacle varnish. Specs of white glinted in our eyes through Rembrandt's viscous air. While the embers slowly expired, the rain insisted; a heavy mist, that seeped through cracks, slipping under us between stone slabs like tombs.

- Joseph Ryan

Untitled (after Raymond Antrobus)

My mother, urging me to study hard,
Always telling me: “Work hard and you’ll improve
day by day”

My mother, hardworking, never resting,
Doing work tirelessly, always kept a smile on her
face.

My mother, devoted, dedicated to the family,
Gave everything to her children

My mother, born from far away,
Never forgot where her real home was.

My mother, meticulous, a perfectionist,
Tried to make everything flawless.

My mother, prepared, an eager learner,
Was always ready for the next challenge.

My mother, kind, warm hearted,
Treated others fairly and with respect.

My mother, powerful, resilient,
Bore the pain and brought me into this world.

Untitled

Nobody wins a war. The
Countries are plagued by the smell of human flesh
and Death.

Crumbling cities purged Of
The young once here, blinded under the false
banner of Truth.

At the end of each weary night is
A minuscule triumph haunted by the
Souls of the past. Here countless have made the
Ultimate

Sacrifice in the name of a Victory
They’ll never get to see. For in the face Of
The enemy, all hearts turn cold and Evil.

- Daniel

Orpheus and Eurydice

The irregular trods of exhaustion,
followed by the certain ones of death
Chasing the mouth of the Styx.
Trying to ignore the screams of a thousands hanging from
the limbs of lamenting branches,
whilst following a torch that still would not light.
A journey of desperation to make a pebble too heavy for
Zeus to carry.

Eurydice, whose arm still leaks blood from the pin sized
paths that dragged her to hell.
Eurydice, whose breath did not come staggered. She did not
flinch when daggers of rock found their way through her
sandles. Stained with blood on their return.
Eurydice's eyes, two coins which have been flung into a glass
pond. In their fervent, primordial need to watch and cling to
Orpheus, they forget to blink. A feeble protest against the
Chthonic ones. those eyes which raised tears like children.

Orpheus, he who could not see the trail of blood
indebted to the snake.

Orpheus, who on his pilgrimage heard the anguish
from Sisyphus, so pure in its form, that it ran thick
as bile and rose from him. It's putrid stench
mixing with the freezing flesh and boiling blood.
Orpheus who had seen the eagle stretch and snap
Prometheus's liver. Seen it's ghost be sucked down
it's pulsating throats. He saw this again and again,
until it's had been scored into his eyelids like a
rune.

Orpheus, whose skin was pinned and pricked, as
sand, finer than specks of glass darted through
him, leaving behind a map of ruby red freckles.
Orpheus, whose vision was a tapestry of what had
been and what could be.
Orpheus whose breath was thick with miasma and
doubt.
Orpheus who feared the gods.

Orpheus who turned.

Eurydice, who's already wilting legs broke beneath her,
as the ground boiled all the remaining life and hope from
her.

dreams that had been snatched by the omnipotent's grasp.
Orpheus, who dropped his lyre and ran. Eurydice whose
feet had formed roots into the ground.

Orpheus who when, at the end of time had finally been
able to look at her, reach her, was flung back by Charon,
just as his fingers grazed the bark of her skin.

Hades watched on. A silhouette of arms beating against a
chest is an animalistic display of grief as Orpheus was
dragged up the path by the ferryman. The other silhouette,
Hades ruled over and understood, although it did not have
the energy to move, nor even echo the hatred it felt
towards the Pantheon and its games. Yet, Hades still
sensed the libations of love and loss that ran deeper than
any realm Poseidon could swim to. A figment of pity
fluttered in Hades. As Orpheus's wails, a far cry from his
earlier song of divine, reverberated around the pits of
inferno.

-Alice Trotter

