

An Anthology by Lincolnshire Writers

On Thin Ice



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Edited by Em Burton

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Foreword

I couldn't be prouder to be launching the second Lincs & Inks anthology, working with such incredible talent. Every single piece in this book has had hours of love, passion and hard work thrown at it, resulting in an end project that each author can be proud of. This book consists of poetry, prose, and scripts by writers from across Lincolnshire. They were tasked with submitting pieces that depict sadness, and I am so grateful for the number of submissions received: it was so difficult to narrow it down to just ten! This book is designed to allow you to wallow in your winter blues, so grab some tissues, snacks, and a hot drink. Enjoy!

This book is dedicated to Rita Peel. 1930 – 2023.

Endless beauty, always elegant.

Waiting For the Rains To Come

MD Cartwright

Bio

MD Cartwright is originally from Kent but moved to Boston in 1999. He has been a soldier and a manager in various industries and returned to education late in life and read Heritage Studies as an undergraduate at Bishop Grosseteste University and then took a master's degree in history at the University of Northampton. He has a passion for history and has written two novels based in the 17th century and a contemporary romantic drama set in the 1970's. He and his wife live in Boston and have three children and two grandchildren.

Waiting For The Rains To Come

Sitting watching a sky turn from blue to grey
Picking out the colours of a nearby tree
Yellow, greens and browns
Waiting for the rains to come

Air is still, not a breath of movement
Enthusiasm drained bodies lay still
Things I could do, things I should do
Waiting for the rains to come

The atmosphere smells of a coming change
Perspiration trickles down still bodies
No energy, no life
Waiting for the rains to come

Welcome shadows lure the innocent into their arms
The sun moves exposing delicate bodies to its rays
Before pain strikes
Waiting for the rains to come

Dry earth looks up to the heavens
Hoping for relief
Tasting distant droplets of memories
Waiting for the rains to come

A sympathetic breeze comes from nowhere
Gently moving the waves of grass
All search the skies in expectation
Waiting for the rains to come

The odor of summer waste taints the air
Eyes squint and nostrils flare
Anger is felt by those who do not care
Waiting for the rains to come

Sighs of inactivity can be heard at every door
No drive, no will to move
Just sit and swelter, dry lips, dry brain
Waiting for the rains to come

Idleness envelopes those who succumb
Can't walk, can't run
Limp bodies sag like sacks of grain
Waiting for the rains to come

Sweat gathers on top lips and cracks appear below
Glistening arms carry wants and needs
Tired legs begin to falter
Waiting for the rains to come

The chill of night only gives light relief
Darkness may hide the sun
But the heat lingers on
Waiting for the rains to come

Greying skies promise an answer to prayers
False hope seems to come every hour
Farmers look at crops with many fears
Waiting for the rains to come

Hearts then beat again as drops fall to the aching ground
Will this quench the earths thirst?
Or will all hopes be lost and will we again be
Waiting for the rains to come

Her Winters Return

Payslee Chardoux

Bio

Payslee Chardoux was born and raised in Lincoln, UK. Growing up just down the road from the famed Lincoln Cathedral, Payslee became enamoured with the Gothic and all things melancholy at an early age and continues to be so to this day. Since completing her Creative Writing and English Literature degree in an equally eerie York, Payslee has moved back home and now lives with her sunshine personified partner, and her fellow grump bearded dragon. Payslee is a short story writer, a local lesbian barista, a certified Sad Girlie, and a maybe someday novelist.

Her Winters Return

As once she was torn away, once again she returns.

My love is cold. My love is bitter. I'd lose my fingers and my nose to bask in the blue haze encircling her, an aurora bright keeping her beyond reach.

To feel her sting on my skin as it leaves her lips, the pin prickling sharpness of her every touch. A numbness like I've never known creeps its way through my bones, creating a home I cannot deny it there. She is inevitable, a seasonal chill brushing through the evergreen, her roots weaved under my own flesh.

Her frigidity is crisp, a cold snap impossible to ignore. A sharp edge to it, awakening an alertness in me that would be refreshing if it did not cause such an ache to see her grey and wither from the exertion.

She pushes and she pulls, a glistening frost coating her words – a sparkle upon the daggers of ice from her mouth, the frosted tears upon her lashes. Her eyes pillowy like the freshly fallen snow as the grief of the season blankets her as so. A blizzarding flurry surrounding her, a fog of self-preservation as though she herself were the bear in the woods, preparing for the long sleep to weather the oncoming storm. Like a chestnut fallen from a great tree, a spiny coating in which to hibernate her only hope of durability.

For her I endure it. I stand firm against the chill wind and the blustering snow. I allow the daggers to slice, and I wait. I peer through the fog, and I see the flakes fall, as it all begins to settle around us. The snow may turn to ice beneath our feet and the thaw may not be forgiving, but ice shall melt.

As cold cannot be without warmth, and the frost will not withstand the heat of life yet to come. A solstice upon us as the days get longer and the light takes us from that darkest night. Walls of ice built around her cracking, sounding as the logs upon the fire snap and break under the kisses of the flame. A spark of comfort, the flush along one's cheeks coming home from the cold, the first foot in the door.

My love is Winter, my love shall be Spring. Until the return of her Winter again.

Three Poems and A Prose Piece

RM Gurnhill

Bio

Russ is a short fiction writer and novelist obsessed with the construction and form of the story, and Ezra Pound's wish to 'make it new'. Despite his unique condition – Russ has half a heart (true) - he is currently engaged in untangling the Gordian knot that is life. Literary fiction is his passion, and, like his fellow writers, Russ aspires to be published: but more than that, to be read. So far Russ has had published six pieces of short fiction, in *Noctivagant Press*, *Fiery Scribe Review*, *Trash to Treasure Lit*, and *MiniMag*, and a non-fiction piece on mental health in *The Linc*. He currently has his first collection of short fiction, 'Timepiece & other Strangeness', on submission, and is editing the first of four novels he has written, ready for seeking an agent.

My Friend John

Hot rod
open top
Autumn heat
crowded streets

Grassy knoll

Faces pale
sirens wail
John bled
Jackie fled

Crying out from southern steeples
hope's high message for a common people
struck down by those too feeble to understand

my friend John

Did powerful men fear the clarion call?
Did paranoia demand one man's fall?
Ended with nought – could have had it all
if only they'd listened
to my friend John

Disputed Zapruder's silvered screen
shows constitution's silent scream
They shot a man but killed a dream

Liberty?
Equality?
Fraternity?
20. 2. 11.
19. 60. 3.
Our. Friend. Gone

The Towers

As I sit here in my rocking chair and look back on my life
I remember with dim clarity the cuts of culture's knife
it slashed into my ivory towers in such a final way
it spun my earth and turned my world 'pon its axis on that day
the horror of such loss was dreadful to behold
and I know for generations yet this story will be told

I lived my life in the shadow of the towers
I feel their fall in my lonely hours
and the towers resonate through all

the times I thought that I would die
just hanging from life's ledge
waiting for that knock-out blow
leaping from that Hellfire's edge
just waiting for my world's collapse
for my life to tumble down

I lived my life in the shadow of the towers
I feel their fall in my lonely hours
the towers reverberate through all

digging through the wreckage of my memories
sifting through the debris of relationships I've had
thinking of my lost siblings
my mother and my dad

picking through remembrances of people lost to me
left them, left me, gone, now ghosts they are to me

I lived my life in the shadow of the towers
I feel their fall in my lonely hours
the towers resonate through all

picking up the pieces of shattering events
looking at the past and trying to make sense
as I force my way towards a new and brighter day
these pieces of my life jigsaw are what made me this way
looking to the future now I make my calm way on
though memories, friends and family are beside me though they're gone

I lived my life in the shadow of the towers
I feel their fall in my lonely hours
and the towers resonate through all
the towers reverberate through it all

I am here
I am now
I will be
Forever somehow
I am them
and I am me
I am all
that will ever be
I am Death
and I am free

I am Life
in all you see
I am you
and I am me
I am the rise
I am the fall
I am all

Willie's Woman

Is a burning ball of Neolithic needs. Smolders
then ignites, every Friday night.
Watching her readiness, her steadiness, her building desire
casts a white-hot heat within his breast. A volcano of
turmoil that rages in his heart, staggers his mind,
and reels his senses, until his lenses and irises weep for release.
With the closing of the door, enters purgatory. She leaves him behind.

She prowls the bars like a she-tiger, surrounded by her pack.

Casting an indomitable, desirous figure
for all to fall for. To worship. To want. And
she plays her part well. Will she? Won't she?
Who can ever tell? Including herself...Hope her will is good.

William, meanwhile, ever faithful, ever fearful,
never knows how or when she'll return to harbor.
Or if she will...Will. The eons of the small wee hours
creep by, greying his hair, lining his face. Charming,
yearning, anxious as the hell he resides in, remains puppy-dog loyal
in his place. Fear etched upon his face and heart.
Watching every headlight that slides along the ceiling,
until...at last: one stops.

Heart leaps to mouth as he hears her getting out.
Engine fires, drive away. Bitter words leap to mouth at the key rattling in
the lock. Die on his lips at her pissed-up, messed-up smile
that mocks his existence in her post-club world.

Weary, war-ravaged silence reigns as, in vain, he tries
to communicate once again. To no avail.
No words. No words. If they could only
speak. And so, to sleep. Perchance
to dream of the dream, they had. Was it

always this bad?

She awakens post-meridian, sprawled
across the middle of their king-sized again. Her hangover
of the same proportions. Emerald eyes encrusted, mouth
a gash of crimson slashed porcelain across fastidious flesh,
tresses a mess. Tearful, weary, bleary minded, ever fearful
of the Truth – of pigeons coming home to roost.
Half the rent gone, the gin-sink oblivion of alco-pops
gurgling in her guts. Sound and vision driving her nuts.
Tentatively stretches out a tentacle to ensnare his humble heart -
and wallet - yet again. Riding his train. Satiates her
primeval fire to be desired by all men. At all times. As Eve:
libidinous and lurid. As Pandora never fails to lift the lid on that box
of possibility: what if?

And so, he gets six more days of semi-peace; of work that
will not cease. A treaty of time where only life's mime
for money exists. Until the weekend
comes around again. Until...
Yet he loves her. Still.

Haunted

Robert sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the large potted plant in the corner of the room. It had not been there when he went to bed the night before. How on earth had it appeared from nowhere? Nerves tense, anxiety triggered, he shrugged on his dressing gown and went to check the windows and doors, as visions of some strange plant-gifting intruder assailed him.

Ten minutes later, confident that his flat had not been broken into, he sat and ate toast in front of the muted TV, pondering the sudden apparition as he sipped tea. A three-foot high plant. Dark green foliage. Clustered, vibrant blooms, smelling strongly of vanilla. What did it mean?

As he washed the plate, cup and saucer and left them to drain, he turned the information round and round in his mind. Finally, drying his hands on the cotton tea-towel, perplexed and no nearer an answer to the conundrum, he readied himself for work, eyes straying to the five differently coloured flowers that adorned the plant as he dressed. The terracotta pot beneath sat unblemished and clueless. Ready to face the outside world at last, he snapped the plant with his phone and made his way to the office.

As Robert worried his way through the day, he pondered who to approach about the plant. Finally settling on his assistant Becky, he enquired as to her horticultural knowledge and was advised to seek the help of Jim in Human Resources. Jim, it transpired, was a keen amateur gardener and just as keen to share his enthusiasm and knowledge with Robert, who shrugged his indifference and pulled up the photo, in an attempt to end the ever-extending conversation.

“What is it?” Robert asked.

Jim’s snort was the first clue that Robert had mildly upset him with his lack of knowledge in everything horticultural.

“Robert – you’re on the wrong photo, mate,” chuckled Jim.

Glancing at his phone, Robert discovered a photo of the corner of his bedroom, plant resplendent centre-stage.

“What?” he asked.

Jim frowned. “Wrong photo. Where’s this plant you need me to identify?”

“There.” Robert pointed, perplexed.

“Piss off, Robert. Just piss off,” and Jim stormed off, back to his office.

Returning to his desk, Robert showed the photo to Becky and asked her opinion.

“Bit plain, Rob. When you said you were decorating, I thought you’d add a splash of colour. Not magnolia, but” she placed her hand on his arm and smiled kindly.

“I suppose the move was hard enough already, what with...” She trailed off, embarrassed.

“But the plant?” Robert persisted, ignoring her attempts at sympathy.

Becky peered closely at the photo.

“Yeah, that would work. Contrast the plain with colourful fittings and plants. A nice sunflower would look lovely in that corner,

brighten the place up,” she said, stepping away to answer the phone on her desk.

“And yourself,” he heard her mumble to herself as she picked up the receiver.

Walking home that evening, eyes glued to the pavement as he passed his old home, the numbness that enveloped his very being almost overwhelmed him.

The days dragged by; the interminable nights prolonging his numbness as he stared alternately at the ceiling, then back to the plant. Deep purple, almost-blue, white, lavender- shade, red. The flowers on each part of the plant were distinct and set apart from each other, all adorned with a white centre of varying degrees. The dark green foliage that surrounded them added to the depth of colour, the sweet fragrance that emanated from them reminding him of the baby powder of his childhood baths. His heart broke a little each time he inhaled its scent. Heliotrope, he knew from the app he had downloaded onto his phone. Yet the description only gave three colours, never five. This fact perplexed him more than any other, and he had avoided touching or trying to move the plant; despite its location in the furthest corner of the room from the window, the plant seemed vibrant as ever despite the lack of direct sunlight. The conundrum invaded his insomniac hours each night, and as time passed, he found himself distracted from the inner pain more frequently.

Then came the day he awoke to find the purple bloom gone. Not merely wilted or shrivelled, just – no longer there. He inspected the plant from all angles, still avoiding its touch, but the bloom had simply vanished, leaving four distinct shades. For some peculiar reason, this loss filled him with an anger he could not shake, and it was in an agitated mood that he passed the day. The journey home from work prompted an internal rage at the damned unfairness of it all: his loss. This mood persisted for long enough for HR to call him in one day to discuss his behaviour.

Trudging home, exhausted from explanation, with promises to behave professionally once more, contrite, and ashamed, he paused outside his old home.

“Sorry I’ve let you down,” he whispered.

That night the dam finally broke, and he wept for the first time, sobbing long into the deep dark of the night.

When he woke, he vowed to himself that he would control his emotions better, wondering if his own life would end should he be dismissed from his position at the firm. Wondering: if he had done things differently in the first place, would he be as he was? Lifting himself resolutely from the bed, he found the plant in its classic state: tri coloured. He could find no trace of the blue flower. Once more he pondered the mystery for weeks as he went about his job in as professional a manner as he could, seeming to assuage his employers, his life drifting on as before: days into nights, nights into days.

As he noticed, one morning, the third colour had disappeared from the plant, an intense sadness overcame him. He knew at that moment that the plant was leaving him, just as they had. He longed for their return. His heart fractured and broke as intense waves of despair threatened to crush him, the inanity and pointlessness of existence looming over him like some cosmic god of ire. On he trudged through the following weeks, anxiously awaiting the moment he awoke to a single colour adorning the corner of the room.

When it came, it was unexpected, the moment arriving after an unusual night of unbroken sleep: dreamless slumber that seemed to refresh and invigorate him deeper than mere muscle and sinew alone. The vibrant red that greeted him that morning was resplendent against the deep greenery surrounding it, the scent heady and comforting.

He welcomed the plant and sat for a while staring, contemplating their journey together. As he dressed and prepared for work, he looked continuously towards it, and as he closed the bedroom door behind him, he whispered a heartfelt “Thank you” to it.

That evening, walking briskly home, he stopped awhile outside the burnt remnants of his old home and remembered his parents, gone too soon, and gave thanks for all they had done, all they had been, all they had helped him become. Wiping tears from his eyes as he fell asleep that night, he whispered a final heartfelt “Thank you” to the plant, knowing, somehow, that it would be gone when he awoke.

Resentment

Greta Major

Bio

Greta Major is doing an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Lincoln. Greta is a poet who also writes articles for the Lincoln Tab. She loves to draw and go on adventures with her friends.

Resentment

I felt the need to change
Shut my mouth more
Become less awake
Made myself look more feminine
Softer
Wore white ribbon in my hair
Spent more time on myself
Wake up at 5am just to make myself perfect
What I thought your perfect was
Started a 30-day fitness challenge
Missed Lunch
Always wearing white
Broke all my mirrors
Always say yes to sex
Slowly went mute
I slept on a mat on the bathroom floor
Fell into your basement
Confessed my sins to the lord
Baptized myself
Got on my knees and prayed for an end
I whipped my own back
And asked for answers at your feet
I threw myself in the lava
I drank your blood
Sat and begged God for an answer
For a sign
I bleached my skin
I bathed in wine
And used the pages from the holy book to plug my menstrual cycle
Still, I lay with the same thoughts
There was a constant deep-seated need inside of me to know
Are you lying?
Are you lying to me?

Two Poems

Caroline Martin

Bio

Caroline Martin is based near Scunthorpe and is a prose and poetry writer. She has completed a fantasy novel exploring themes of loss, dislocation, and the process of integration. She hopes to take this to publication in the coming year. Caroline is a long term and enthusiastic writing workshop member and has recently begun to share her work at a local spoken words project. This is her first time to be included in an anthology.

Scanning for Salvation

I am lost.
My horse has bolted,
map and compass in her saddle bag.
All the familiar songs I knew by heart have deserted me
and I can't read the stars.
Once I strode out with purpose,
meaning measuring each pace.
Now my progress is broken.
Grace has abandoned me.
So, I turn in circles,
a speck in the vast emptiness,
scanning for salvation,
while the wild cats gather:
soft bodies piled on soft bodies,
their claws retracted for now.

Ageing is not for sissies.

Age and illness stripped you
of certainty and sight,
left you helpless as a child
and so full of fear.
"Who`s there?"
you would call every time the door opened,
marooned in your chair until the next visitor.

You who were a rock for so many
"Welcome in" and "Mind how you go."
Reduced, cast adrift....
yet not so long ago playing Rummy by your own rules,
taking cards from others` hands
And miraculously still beating me at Scrabble.

What`s left when senses are so lost
and the compass is inert?
It`s true what they say
"Ageing is not for sissies.

FXXXXD

Rosanna McGlone

Bio

Rosanna McGlone is a writer and journalist. She has written more than 100 features for both national and international publications. Her most recent book is *The Process of Poetry* a series of interviews with some of the country's leading poets including Don Paterson, Joelle Taylor, Liz Lochhead and Pascale Petit, exploring the development of an early poem into a final draft. Her first radio play was shortlisted for the BBC's Alfred Bradley Bursary Award. Her work has been supported by, amongst others, Arts Council England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Hull Truck Theatre, Vault Festival and The Old Vic New Voices Programme. Writing residencies include Capricorn Hill, NSW, Australia and The Hosking Houses Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon, England.

CHARACTERS:

Jo: expectant mother, 35

Kylie: newly qualified midwife, 24

There is the sound of panting in the darkness. When the light comes on, we see a few forlorn Christmas decorations strung across the ceiling of a run-down labour ward in Lincoln County Hospital. Jo is lying on a bed and experiencing contractions which increase as the play progresses. There is little scenery; projections can be shown where needed. A Christmas song plays in the background. Jo sits up and addressed the audience directly.

JO: I didn't expect to find myself here. Not now. Not after everything that's happened. D'you know how old I am? Have a guess. Go on. Don't be shy. Wait. (Ineffectually tries to titivate herself.) Obviously I'm not at my best. I mean can you remember what you were like after 9 hours of labour? I expect your wife wasn't feeling crash hot either. 36. 30 bloody 6. And you know what that makes me? A prima gravitas- an old fart basically. Too old for all of this. And don't I feel it?

She slumps back onto the bed.

KYLIE: How are you feeling now Mrs/

JO: /Miss

KYLIE: I'm sorry, it's just it says on your notes/

JO: That was yesterday.

(BEAT)

KYLIE: Right.

JO: A lot can happen in a day.

KYLIE: It's a nice time of year for a baby.

JO: Is it?

KYLIE: Christmas.

JO: Yes, yes, I can see that.

KYLIE: Let's take a little look at baby. See here, this monitors baby's heartbeats, look at the thin red line can you see it's nice and steady?

JO: Mine isn't. And my hands've gone all clammy.

KYLIE: That's perfectly normal.

JO: Not for me it isn't... I don't feel crash hot.

KYLIE: Look at me Mrs- Jo. Is it alright if I call you Jo?

JO: You can call me Father Christmas as long as you get it out soon.

KYLIE: You're going to be just fine. OK?

JO: Am I?

KYLIE: I'm just going to take a quick look to see how dilated you are.

JO: Are you married? (She tilts her head to one side and eyes Kylie.)

No, you don't look stupid enough.

KYLIE: Engaged.

Kylie dons some gloves and begins checking Jo's cervix.

JO: Ah. That's nice. Do you know there are two views from here?

Mind you there's only one from where you're standing.

KYLIE: Actually, we've just set a date.

JO: The prison.

KYLIE: Yesterday.

JO: Or the cathedral.

KYLIE: This time next year.

JO: That's a long time.

KYLIE: 20 th December

JO: To wait.

KYLIE: There's so much to organise: the venue, flowers, dress,

bridesmaids, the reception- oh I'm sorry. You probably don't want to hear this....

JO: It's fine. I wasn't listening.

(BEAT)

KYLIE: Right.

Kylie straightens up and removes her gloves.

KYLIE: And we don't want to rush things; that's what Sam says.

JO: Sam?

KYLIE: My fiancé. You're still only 3 inches.

JO: You make it sound like a personal failing.

KYLIE: I'm sorry, I'm not...?

JO: You've nothing to be sorry for. It's him, the bastard.

KYLIE: Right. There's no one else I could call? You know, to be with you. It's always easier with a birth partner someone to hold onto when things progress.

Jo shakes her head.

JO: The way I look at it, I need a life partner, not a birth partner. I don't want this little one getting a false start.

KYLIE: It's just most women...

JO: Don't want him getting his hopes up, do we, like his mummy did?

KYLIE: I mean- I think a bit of support might/

JO: /Only to get them dashed to smithereens like a crushed pomegranate.

KYLIE: Never had a pomegranate.

JO: Me neither.

KYLIE: Couldn't draw one either. They're not like a banana.

JO: No. They're not like a banana.

(BEAT)

They're full of those little pips, aren't they?

KYLIE: Bananas?

JO: Pomegranates.

KYLIE: Ah....Have you got a birth plan?

JO: I don't do plans. (BEAT) Not anymore.

KYLIE: OK, so how do you feel about pain relief?

JO: Pain relief?

KYLIE: Yeah. Some women they don't, you know, want any intervention.

JO: (Quickly) I'm not one of those.

KYLIE: You don't want a natural birth?

JO: I don't want a birth at all.

Jo slumps back on to the bed and closes her eyes for a moment.

I mean why can't getting it out be as easy as getting it in?

KYLIE: OK. There are a number of options/

JO: For getting it out or in?!

KYLIE: To control the pain. You might like to start with gas and air- see you breath in through this mask, hold it over your mouth and nose- yes, like that. You'd just take it when you need it, then if that wasn't enough you could move on to pethidine- that might make you a bit spaced out.

JO: (In a spaced out manner) Really?

KYLIE: Some women get a bit manic, or sick, depressed even. It affects different people in different ways. Or you might prefer an epidural?

JO: (Very slowly) E-p-i-du-r-a-l. That sounds nice and relaxing.

KYLIE: To start we need to make a hole in your spine.

JO: (Shocked) A hole? In my spine?

KYLIE: (Laughs). It's a very small hole.

JO: Can we just run through that again please? You deliberately puncture my back?

KYLIE: It's to put the catheter in. Then we send an anaesthetic through it. We'd need to call an anaesthetist to get that set up though so, it wouldn't be instant, but I promise you once it's in you won't feel a thing.

JO: Not unlike sex then?! Sorry. Sorry.... I expect you still have great sex. After all, you're not married... Bet you've never faked orgasm?

Ah! Ah! That's a contraction, not me faking orgasm. Mind you I've had enough practice. Will it make me go numb?

KYLIE: Numb?

JO: The epidural.

KYLIE: Oh, that! Yeah. It works really well. You won't feel be able to feel a thing from the waist down.

JO: Got anything from the neck up?

KYLIE: It's good you've kept your sense of humour.

JO: I haven't.

(BEAT)

So, what's he like, your fiancé?

KYLIE: Well/

JO: /I think I'd like some pethidine.

KYLIE: You don't want to try gas and air to start with?

JO: I've had the air and I don't think it's done the trick so I'll move onto pethidine.

KYLIE: Remember it might make you feel a bit high, you know out of control.

JO: I doubt you'll notice the difference... How long have you known him?

KYLIE: We met last New Year...

JO: You don't mind me asking all of these questions? It just helps me to take my mind off things.

JO: It's fine. It's coming up to our anniversary.

JO: Don't you have to be married to have an anniversary? ...Suppose not. Anno- Latin isn't it? Just a year of something- love, sex, adultery who cares these days. Have you ever wondered when the moment of falling in love is? Falling, when you think about it, sounds like an error right from the start doesn't it?

KYLIE: I can see things are still a bit/

JO: /Shit.

KYLIE: Raw.

JO: Kylie that wasn't a sentiment it was a bodily function.

Kylie looks confused.

I think I've shit myself.

KYLIE: Oh.

Kylie dons rubber gloves and turns Jo on one side ready to clean her up.

JO: This is why you came into nursing, right?

KYLIE: Everything looks fine to me.

JO: Sorry, my mistake.

KYLIE: You're a bit funny, aren't you?

JO: Am I?

Kylie checks the heart beat monitor.

KYLIE: Heartbeat’s steady. I think baby’s happy where he is for now; doesn’t want to come out.

JO: Sensible, little beggar.

KYLIE: I’ll just take a quick peak at your cervix.

JO: Whatever turns you on.

KYLIE: Everything’s progressing nicely. How are we doing with the contractions?

JO: I’m not doing too well actually Kylie, how about you?

KYLIE: OK. I’m just going to rub your thigh and then I’ll inject you.

JO: OK

KYLIE: Ready?

JO: How can you be sure, you know, that he’s the one?

KYLIE: Small prick.

JO: Aren’t they all?

KYLIE: The pethidine should kick in straight away. Remember you’re going to feel a bit woozy but it’s nothing to worry about. If you start feeling sick tell me and I can give you something for it.

JO: A sick bag?

KYLIE: An injection.

JO: I mean it might take a while but what if in ten years time you find yourself lying here.

KYLIE: Any moment now.

JO: Alone.

KYLIE: There.

JO: Your hope over my experience.

KYLIE: It’s all over.

JO: It was all over a long time ago.

KYLIE: Is the pain easing off?

JO: Will it ever?

KYLIE: I could up the dose but I don’t want to make you feel sick.

JO: I think it’s- (she turns her head to the side and vomits) too late.

KYLIE: Right, I’m reducing the dose. Nothing to worry about. If you get any breakthrough pain just let me know and I’ll adjust it

JO: I want to tell you. What happened with… Well, all in good time, eh? Is that OK, I mean d’you mind if I, if I ramble on for a bit?

KYLIE: Sure, you chat all you like. How’re you feeling? The pethidine should be kicking in by now.

JO: You don’t understand Cly, Climby.

KYLIE: Kylie.

JO: He was the love of my life. THE- LOVE- OF- MY- LIFE. They say you just know, don’t they? I say crap. Sorry. Sorry. Not a nice word Climby. True, but not very nice. Never, never believed it. Love at first bite. Pfff. Ridic- ridic- stupid! Then there he was a vision in oil, literally. Everyone else was in fancy dress: a school girl, a vicar, Louis XIV, Napoleon Bonesapart, you know the usual crowd, and he came dressed as a car mechanic, only he was a car mechanic. That’s different I said. Not for me it isn’t, he said wiping his hands on an oily rag before he shook mine.

KYLIE: That’s funny, my Sam’s a/

JO: /D’you know what he said to me the night that we met, ‘I want you to be the mother of my children,’ that’s what he said, daft beggar.

What about you? What do you want? A glass of bubbly and a vol au vent I said.

I’ve never really been one for fancy dress parties, me. Know what I mean? Actu- actu- to be honest I bet you’d be a great St Trinian’s schoolgirl. You’ve got the legs haven’t you Climby and the hair, bunches, or plaits, very perky you. I’m rubbish. No imagination. Well

more than him, obviously. No imagination. Not for dressing up, anyway. Do you know who I was?

KYLIE: No.

JO: Guess! Go on, guess.

KYLIE: Lady Gaga?

JO: Close. Cleopatra. It wasn't my first choice, but all the Blondie's had gone- expect they'd run out of bin bags- so it was a toss up between Maggie Thatcher and Cleopatra.

KYLIE: Maggie Thatcher's before my time.

JO: I hate to tell you this dear, but so's Cleopatra.

KYLIE: So go on, did he like it?

JO: He didn't get it at first. Thought I was an Egyptian mummy.

I said look at my asp. He laughed and said I was very forward. Then when I waved the snake at him he went bright red and said he'd go and find me that vol au vent.

KYLIE: You mean he thought you said/

JO: /Exactly. So you see we were off to a flying start. Sam, I said, Sam/

KYLIE: /No you're getting confused. Sam's my boyfriend, not yours!

JO: Sam, kiss my asp.

KYLIE: That'll be the pethidine kicking in.

JO: Get it? Kiss my asp?!!!.... D'you want kids Climby?

KYLIE: It's- Yeah. Yeah I do.

JO: And what does he say, Sam Sam wham bam thank you ma'am?

KYLIE: How are you feeling now?

JO: Grand. Just grand, Climby. Top of the morning to you.

KYLIE: I think I might lower the dose a tad.

JO: No! Don't do that I haven't had so much fun for years.

So, you were telling me after the wham bam/

KYLIE: /He's divorced so it's a bit different for him.

JO: OK.

KYLIE: Done it all before.

JO: Not with you, Climby.

KYLIE: No, not with me.

JO: Just with her.

KYLIE: Yes, with her.

JO: You do know you'll never match up to her?

KYLIE: Well, I'm hoping, in time/

JO: /Because Climby, you see, she's like the tooth fairy, she doesn't really exist except as this perfect memory in his imagination.

KYLIE: Right.

JO: A glamorous goddess.

KYLIE: Right

JO: A perfect/

KYLIE: /I think I get the idea.

JO: Got any children?

KYLIE: No.

JO: You won't be a wicked step mum then, at least that's something....
Get a bad press, don't they, step mums?

KYLIE: Have you thought of any names?

JO: Yeah, I've thought of every name under the sun.

KYLIE: It's hard sometimes, isn't it?

JO: No, not at all. I've got a long list of them.

KYLIE: Great. Go on!

JO: Shitface, hairy balled bast/

KYLIE: /I meant for the baby.

JO: Ah. Him. Yes. Just the one. After his dad.

KYLIE: And what was he/

JO:/ Ow. I think.. oh yes, I think he's coming! Do something! For fuck's sake Climby do something!

KYLIE: OK. Breathe slowly. Slowly. Don't push. Don't push.

JO: How the fuck am I going to get him out if I don't push, Climby?

KYLIE: I don't want you to tear. Steady. Steady.

JO: Steady?!

KYLIE: Yes, slowly does it.

JO: (screaming) Not for me it doesn't!

KYLIE: Slowl-

JO: I-CAN'T-STOP-HIM!

KYLIE: I can see baby's head. He's coming, he's coming.

Jo gives an almighty scream.

Baby's head, baby's head's crowning. You have a little boy.

JO: He's going to be a real daddy's boy.

Baby cries.

KYLIE: There. Go to mummy. (She is distracted by the birth, but finally looks up.) What d'you mean?

JO: Look, he's got a birthmark just like his dad. Hello Sam.

Kylie looks stunned.

END

Three Poems

Jenny Oyston

Bio

Jenny was a counsellor for 20 years. She is passionate about improving people's mental health and wellbeing by offering practical advice via her writing and courses. Jenny's book 'Who Am I?' is an inspirational guide to self-discovery, linking physical, behavioural, emotional and mental aspects of experience to lead to greater self - understanding and personal development. In 2020, Jenny won the Sandy Murray memorial prize for her essay entitled 'Key Strategies to avoid burnout'. She is a member of Lincolnshire Authors but although she enjoys a range of writing, this is the first time she has submitted any poetry for public consumption!

1. Pamela was my mum, a beauty in her time and an artist. Sadly, old age took its toll.

Pamela Danced

Pamela dances
Circles the floor in swirling flurries
Partners spin, music hurries.
Limbs whirl, hair bounces
Skirts twirl, chiffon flounces
Suitors flock to be her beau
Golden couple, stars of the show.

Pamela paints
Canvases vivid with vibrant hues
Verdant landscapes, stunning views.
Paint slides, brushes spread
Sapphire blue, carmine red
When she exhibits, many go
Acclaimed artist, star of the show.

Pamela hosts
Tables groan with haute-cuisine
Towering gateaux, scented tureens.
Ladies laugh, young girls chatter
Couples flirt, Romeos flatter
When Pam throws a party, they want to go
Supreme entertainer, star of the show.

Pamela danced
She sits at last in a world of her own
Spending her final days alone.
Fingers gnarled, eyes clouded
Skin shrivelled, expression shrouded
No-one comes to say hello
Faded beauty, nothing to show.

2. Therapy. I was a therapist, so this is not an indictment, but this poem gives the views of cynics who don't believe in the power of the talking cure! Their loss!

Therapy

The guy's got issues, bring out the tissues

Refer him for a course of therapy.

You can bare your soul, when life takes its toll

And all for a very modest fee.

Doctor, doctor I think I'm going mad.

Last week I loved my mother, today I killed my dad.

Do you think all this confusion could be merely a delusion

Or is the diagnosis something bad?

Come lie here on this couch son and I'll put you under

We'll enter your subconscious and in case you wonder:

Erotic transference is a thing I often see;

I fully expect you'll fall in love with me.

So tell me your fantasies and share your naughty dreams

Vent all your frustration in a primal scream.

Come out of denial and confront your fears -

It's all about attachments in your early years.

Doctor, doctor I think I'm getting worse

I have hallucinations which get ever more diverse

Do you think all this neurosis could indicate psychosis

Or have my mental powers gone in reverse?

There's a number of hypotheses in this profession

Maybe you suffer from endogenous depression.

Your symptoms could indicate deep-seated repression

If you want an answer, I've got a confession:

My insights on the matter are distinctly hazy

I lean towards the theory that you're simply crazy.

But whatever is the truth of it, I'd ask you now to think

Whoever in their right mind would come to see a shrink?

3. Another old age poem. This time, a partner watches their loved one succumb to dementia.

Old Age

Vague sensations through a veil of distortion.

Watery eyes perceive a patchwork of the world.

Now days are a daze and thoughts intertwine,

The strands getting tangled and losing the thread.

I knew you once and mattered then, part of the fabric of your life.

We shared together, multilayered wisdom interwoven,

Now reduced to tattered fragments.

We are estranged, worn in body and threadbare in mind,

Those we were just memories, frayed web of lace.

Three Poems

Joeph Pearson

Bio:
Joseph Pearson is an English writer who can't decide on a topic or style. He's currently doing a Master's in Creative Writing and currently works in a visual medium. You can find him on Twitter (X) at @JosephPearson_

Meander

I stumble along the path
Tripping over rocks, rolling down hills
These are my fields
This is my life

Dead, dry trees border us
I give the tour of my past
Holding hands as we stroll
I point at towering oaks

Rivers intersect our walk
Split off and follow the stream
One whittles down rocks
As the rest follow their course

In the centre, a little shoddy hut
We don't go in there
I squeeze her hand and simply turn.

When the Bells Toll

From the church, the bells toll.
And the cottages sing along -
Children thunder down the paths.
And run home.
As their mothers rattle around kitchens,
While fathers watch over whistling kettles.

I sit in a field.
Quiet. Calm and empty.
A lonely field that's full of life.

I'm Afraid of Becoming a Bee

And that I'll lose my way home
disoriented on the way back to the
amber metropolis and unable
to dance with family and

I'm afraid that I might fall into the
wrong kind of flower where
sweet-looking isn't that at all and

I'm afraid of being mistaken for
something far more sinister
that they might get the wrong impression
that I'm not just a little lost and

that is to say I'm afraid.
that one day I'll be told
I only have 6 weeks to live
and that my contribution
to society won't be enough.

And so I'm buzzing along,
hopping along flora,
and tasting the wonders.

Farewell's Under the Canvas

Josh Simmonite

Farewells Under the Canvas

Every morning a shining iris looks upon my canvas
painting with its unwavering gaze
in steady, bold strokes.
Shades of gold reach across the skyline from delicate bristles
and dance with my own clouded creations
yet in each evening that iris dips down the horizon
I do not fear if it will return again
brush aside wishing or waving farewell
for why say goodbye to a certainty?

Other regular contributors linger around the artwork
friends, family, and co-workers, even some strangers
seemingly definite too
as we all add to each other's pieces.
Some caress the art with pastel, glowing warmth
others flick on acrylic with careless wrists
until one day I awake to find
a set of brushes left scattered on the floor
and Prussian blues seep out of my chest
for the works they did not have time to add.

Sometimes a hazy figure puts away their palette instead
long before their own tender hues wash away
the want-to-be "expressionism" I smother onto a filbert brush
now clashing with their direction.
We try to avert our eyes from my leaking, sputtering tones
before embracing farewell in watery hues
so they drift away
into imagined futures made real.
My spilling colours retreat
tinged with bittersweet joy at knowing
that soul's brightness will lift many other people
and perhaps the sky itself.

Gaping up at the relics of the departed
dotted around the composition far above like stars on a clear night
guiding those travellers left to unreachable treasures
my brush edges toward the canvas, tentative
and gently kisses the indigos and whites with its own shades.
Wet-on-wet paints mix into ecstatic beauty
refusing to cover up aging art
behind mind-forged screens.
Colours not my own
of those I know, both present and past
never dry up
always twined within the brushstrokes
guiding my hands with a gentle touch.

I Smashed a Bottle on The Pavement

Maya Shell

i smashed a bottle on the pavement because

there's this peculiar feeling i get in my ears
it crowds me like the Mersey tunnels
pressing on the flat white of my skull
until i give in to the pressure

rocking my shoulders to a life more narrow
and tracing the veins that run
filigreed beneath the skin
i would slit them in a heartbeat
if you only asked

it doesn't matter if i listen to a hundred voices
or maybe just five
because they'll speak in the warm cryptics
of someone who doesn't know
that recently I've been stepping into traffic
and wetting my face with the hot wax of
the candles i stuck into ice cream
because you don't care much for cake

my brain is bruised in the pinks and purples
of red onion sat in my hands
or the weeping of a blister on my ankle
either way
it has pressed its way into my fingertips
and will remain until something breaks

Mentor



Meg Whitelock

Bio

Meg Whitelock is a British artist and poet based in Lincoln, England. Both her art and written work explore her masochism, relationship with fetishism, and mental illnesses. She is currently studying for her MA in Creative Writing alongside helping to run ‘The Lincoln Sloth Storytelling Event’.

Mentor

The boy is
light-footed.

If only he would
beware of absence.

As I wait
I gain consciousness. It tells me
this house won't hold

not even
with all my strength and
heavy breathing

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And lastly, I would like to dedicate this anthology to my late grandmother. Thank you for your unwavering support and belief in me. This is for you gran. I love you so much.

— Em