

Issue 2

February 2025

GLYPH.

The literary magazine for the casual writer

the
foreign
issue



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The literary magazine for the casual writer.

Issue 2: foreign

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foreword.

To feel like a stranger, to feel foreign in your own time, extraneous in your own reality, is intrinsic to the human experience, just as much as falling in love or stargazing. Just as much as storytelling. It might be the reason why we all crave stories and why our first issue, *Folklore*, was so well received.

It is also probably one of the reasons why we travel: to find ourselves by getting lost. And so, we wanted to hear stories about those who left, no matter their reasons, and about those who stayed, despite what their hearts told them.

But tightly knotted to being foreign is the idea of belonging. And this is really (and probably unsurprisingly) the underlying theme of this issue, the thread that ties together our eight short stories.

There is a word in Spanish that I love. *Morriña*. As many of our beautiful words do, it comes from Galicia. It is the sweet-and-sour sadness that comes with reminiscing about one's homeland. In our collection, however, home is the people who make you feel *morriña* even before you have left, as Gracie, the protagonist of Fiona Nicol's "Pig Latin," becomes painfully aware of the summer before leaving for university.

For the ensemble cast of Holly Fleming-Gunn's "Girl Dinner", and Bailey, the young boy in "Gallows Hands," by P. W. Garrick, home is the people who they love and who love them back. The people who make their lives brighter, easier, warmer. The people who will literally save them from danger, and pick them up if they fall, time and time again.

Of course, leaving all and everyone behind can also be a blessing, as it happens in Moir McCallum’s “Foreign Affairs” and Alasdair Watson’s “Scorrie”—the opportunity to find yourself and rediscover what really matters, disguised under the awkwardness of a culture you don’t know well and the difficulties of a language you haven’t yet mastered. “Conversation Between Two Outsiders,” by Naomi Head, is the perfect portrayal of this disconnection between the foreigner and the place that receives them.

For many, leaving will be a sacrifice, as “A Child of Amphitrite,” by Andre Fryer, tells us in a beautifully painful tale of almost-mythical eco-justice, served by the hands of those who were never seen, rising to save their (our) planet. And for some others, myself included, leaving holds a special kind of magic as you create new bonds in strange, fascinating, new worlds, opening your heart with such a strength that you are forever part of the places you have been to, and they will always be a part of you. Exactly as the magical crow of K. C. E. Harrison’s fable “Straying Beyond City Limits”.

It is very easy to forget that we were once nomads. We have for millennia attributed ourselves the ownership of a land we once stumbled upon by pure luck, and have never stopped trying to forbid others from doing the same in their pursuit of happiness. In a time when being foreign seems only acceptable for some people (and only for a short period of time), the theme of this issue feels important.

Today, even if it doesn’t seem like it with our 21st-century-low-fare airlines and international free-movement agreements, travelling (and consequently, feeling foreign, maybe just from time to time) is still a privilege. And so is to read how others experience and understand the beautiful world we share.

Whether you take this magazine with you on your daily train commute, on a plane to your next holiday destination, or simply to bed tonight, we hope you enjoy reading this collection as much as we have enjoyed working to bring it to you.

Sofia

(Editor-in-Chief)

&

The GLYPH. team: Rach, Gio & Eleanor



pig
latin

fiona nicol

'Suffering feels religious if you do it right.'- Chelsea Hodson

Ana lowered her book to the ground and took a deep breath in. She had been lying on her front on the grass, propping herself up on her elbows with her feet in the air behind her. She slid her copy over to Gracie, who was lying on her back beside her, looking up at the few passing clouds through a pair of old sunglasses. Looking up at Ana, who was now wearing a slight frown and running her tongue along her top teeth as she shifted her weight onto her side, Gracie knew she was in for a speech. She lowered her sunglasses slightly, smirking, 'What?'

'I just don't know if I agree with that,' Ana said.

Gracie lifted her friend's book and studied the page, not following at all what Ana was about to say, but she knew she'd find out.

'I don't think there's anything that feels holy about suffering,' Ana started, 'the closest to God I've ever felt is when I'm happy. Like, when I'm making my friends dinner and having drinks. Or like right now, isn't this lovely?' She paused, 'Makes you appreciate things more, y'know. I think that's holy in its own way.'

Gracie laughed, 'Okay, Aristotle.'

Ana gave her a stone-faced look which only made her laugh harder.

'Aw, I'm sorry,' she said, 'yeah, you do have a point.' Gracie stopped, shuffling up to a sitting position, 'But she didn't say holy did she, she said it felt religious.'

Ana rolled her eyes. 'Same difference.'

'You do have a point though,' Gracie said, scrunching her nose to shift her sunglasses up her face. 'This is lovely.'

Ana began rummaging through her bag, the two of them had been sitting at the top of the hill outside their small town for a couple of hours now, and it probably was time to make a move. Both of them were pretty far from their respective homes though, and Gracie prayed that Ana wasn't going to leave her to do the long walk back with nothing but her thoughts to keep her company. Anyway, she didn't have a clue what she'd do with the rest of her day when she got there. The summer had been long and anxious. Waiting for exam results to know what sort of a life existed after the end of August. Waiting for universities to send offers or rejections. Waiting for Ana to be done writing and filming, or to be done spending time with her family; the two weeks Ana had spent in Greece had been torturous

for Gracie.

Ana stood up, placing a sleek pair of sunglasses she had retrieved from her bag on top of her head, forcing her thick, dark hair out of her face.

Gracie was absent-mindedly picking at the dry grass, clumps of it coming up between her fingers.

‘Ooh, those are nice,’ she said, squinting up at her friend through her own sunglasses.

Ana struck a tongue-in-cheek pose, ‘Thank you dah-ling. They’re from Greece.’

‘Mm-hmm, they suit you.’

‘You got lunch plans?’ Ana extended a hand to help Gracie up from the grass, ‘I’m headed round my Gran’s.’

Damn. A pang of disappointment pulsed in Gracie’s stomach. She shook her head, opening her mouth to over-explain her lack of plans, and to lie about what she might end up doing with her day.

She didn’t end up needing to.

‘Oh nice, you can come with, then. My Gran will be keen to see you.’

Gracie beamed behind her sunglasses; she loved Ana’s Gran. ‘Sure thing.’

The walk to Ana’s Gran’s house, or Gigi’s (as Gracie had repeatedly been told to call her by her first name), was sizeable. She lived across town from Gracie’s parents, the college, the church, and most of the main shops. The only reason Gracie ever had to venture into that neck of the woods was to go see Gigi, usually accompanied by Ana. She knew the route like the back of her hand.

They ventured downhill towards town, discussing what snacks to pick up on the way, and what other things they should really go do before their summer finished up. Ana had a lot to do.

She already knew what she’d be doing come September, she’d landed an unconditional offer for film school. Gracie had never had much of a doubt; she’d seen all the work Ana had put in, and it had paid off. Her grades were good, her portfolio better; and the offers rolled in. Gracie knew Ana’s top choice school had offered her a place, and they often gushed about it together, only changing the subject when the fact that Ana’s school was hundreds of miles down the coast was staring them in the face.

‘You heard back yet?’ Ana asked, the crunch of gravel under their feet as they started on an

upwards trajectory towards Gigi's house.

Gracie shook her head. She had needed 3 As to get into the sociology course she wanted, and her exam results had come back; 2 As, 2 Bs. She cried, hard, while her parents told her that maybe if she'd spent less time 'out gallivanting' she'd have easily come away with straight As. Lonely as sin, but with straight As.

'I reckon you'll definitely get in; I really wouldn't stress,' Ana said, extending her elbow for Gracie to link arms with. 'My mum was saying it's like a point-based system, all your grades are worth a certain number and 2 As and 2 Bs ends up adding up to more than 3 As would be worth anyway, right?'

Gracie shrugged. She genuinely didn't know exactly how it all worked, and all this not-knowing was the killer. 'It'll be fine,' she said, 'I've got a place on a different course at one of the other schools even if this one doesn't work out.'

Ana squeezed her arm, bringing her face closer to Gracie's, 'But is that what you want?'

Gracie laughed, leaning into her friend. 'What I want,' she said, 'is not to be completely in-the-shit with my parents.'

Ana laughed too. 'Well, I think that's what everyone wants,' she paused, jostling and digging her elbow into Gracie's ribs, 'not to be in the shit with *your* parents, I mean.'

'Right, okay,' Gracie scolded. Her father was the town's priest, and she knew exactly what Ana was getting at. She also knew that it was a friendly joke, but the defenses came up all the same. She dropped Ana's arm. There was nothing she hated more than a reminder of the difference between their families.

Once, when Gracie was around ten, Ana had come round for a playdate and things had gotten a little carried away. The two of them had been inseparable since starting primary school, and Gracie's mum quite often looked after both of them for the odd day during the summer, which was easy enough when the weather was good like it was now, but the summer Gracie hit double digits had been miserable. With her and Ana cooped up inside, it's no wonder tensions were high, no wonder there was some shouting, and no wonder Ana wasn't welcome round again.

They'd learned pig Latin from a book in the little class library. A 'secret' language you make by switching around vowels and consonants and adding an 'ay' sound in between syllables. Takes

Pig Latin

a while to master, but *oh* once you've got it! Gracie and Ana had whispered and giggled their way through that rotten summer in a language they were sure only they could understand, and they weren't far wrong, since with all the practice they'd had they were basically fluent. It was almost exclusively how they spoke to each other that year, until Gracie's father had something to say about it.

In fairness, they shouldn't have been being so noisy—

They shouldn't have been bothering her father while he was working upstairs—

They should've helped put the dishes away when they'd been asked to—*your mother went to all that bother to cook the least you two could do is be grateful*

David they're just playing

No Marianne it's about respect, and for that matter anything you can say to each other you can say in front of me, again, it's about respect and it's about honoring your parents and I—SHUT UP MARIANNE I DON'T CARE THAT IT'S A GAME

There was a slammed door, and a crash of the dishes, and Ana was sent home and told she wouldn't be welcome back. Gracie cried, hard, while her parents told her if she'd just been sensible Ana wouldn't have had to go home. She went to school the next week and begged Ana not to tell, and to her credit, she never did.

Almost ten years later, they very rarely spoke about it. Ana had never come round again, but Gracie didn't hugely mind, she was happy to spend the time out on a drive, at Ana's house, or at Gigi's. They arrived there slightly later than planned after taking a painfully long time to pick out snacks at the town's main grocery store and having to go to more than one corner shop to get the brand of cigarettes Gigi preferred to smoke.

Her house always smelled strongly of incense, which she claimed she just burned during her meditations, but Gracie and Ana reckoned it was mostly to cover up the smell of the aforementioned cigarettes. A warm hug and cup of tea was always provided on arrival, along with various questions about what the two girls were thinking of doing with their lives.

'And you've not heard back from your main one yet, sweet pea?'

'Not yet,' Gracie said, plopping herself down on one of Gigi's outdoor seats. She chuckled, 'Ana reckons it'll be fine though.'

'Well now, I'm sure it will be,' Gigi said, 'she's not often wrong. Neither of you are, you're

my pair of smart cookies. Don't know what I'll do without you both.'

Gracie felt a little lump forming in her throat; she'd miss Gigi. Badly. It hadn't really occurred to her that moving away meant being further away from Gigi. She wanted this university course a whole lot, she wanted the fresh start. She'd thought about all of it a lot in regard to Ana, she'd talked about it a lot, too. Mostly with Gigi, who had joked that it was so nice that the two of them were keeping each other's hearts warm, just in case a husband came along. *But God help the boy if he ever gets between the two of you.*

Gracie had laughed, she knew Gigi was kidding, and she knew that this wasn't the case.

But even if it was; even if she was a placeholder for Ana and their lives took off in completely different directions. Wasn't it love anyway?

Wasn't it love? ■

foreign

affairs

moir mccallum



Their tongues spoke different languages, but their bodies understood. Softly, so as not to wake her, Alex swept a lock of fine, dark hair from the brow of the stranger nestled into his side. Her breath blew a gentle rhythm on his chest, setting hairs aflutter in its faint flow.

She was foreign to him in every sense; and yet, he had known her from the moment he had first beheld her. She had *spoken* to him. Not with words, nor with anything so mundane as the physical form. Something greater, deeper, older had communed with him—instinct, perhaps. Or fate. Yes, fate must have a hand in it, he reasoned. Forces beyond his knowledge or control had made arrangements, and he was their instrument. He looked down at the woman attached to him, watching her head rise and fall at his own inspiration like a ship on a fair tide, and wondered if she felt the same. He thought he knew the answer.

*

The night before, Alex had been miserable. Had it been for any purpose other than work, a trip to Athens would have been a delight. The birthplace of Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus, great fathers of tragedy and masters of narrative; where better for a student of literature such as himself? Instead, he was just one of nine colleagues supporting the UK government's Foreign Ambassador to Greece—one small, insignificant cog in a titanic machine of bureaucracy. Alex thought he could have taught the Athenians a thing or two about tragedy.

Ταβέρνα βασιλικός had become their party's evening headquarters in the days since their arrival. 'Royal Tavern' in English, Alex understood the appeal, even if he did not share his colleagues' patriotic enthusiasm for the establishment: Union Jack alongside the Greek flag in the window, English translation—extra-large font—beneath every item on the menu, expat behind the bar. All that was missing was the Queen Elizabeth bobblehead. It was only natural that a band of predominantly-male, Cambridge-educated Brits would be drawn, as flies to faeces, to the only bloody gastropub in central Athens. Stick with what you know, as they say; when in Rome, do whatever Jim from next door would do. That night—the night he met *her*—was the eve of a particularly prestigious summit, at which the ambassador was to deliver a speech on European relations. Alex's speech, really; his words, his style. Everything but his soul. He snorted at the thought, took a sip of the half-empty pint in his hand. The job

had siphoned away his soul long ago.

‘Something funny?’

Alex glanced up at the colleague sat opposite him. Jeremy fit the political aide profile: middle-class, middle-aged, middle-parting. If Alex didn’t know him, he would struggle to differentiate the man from the rest of the group. With the inclusive exception of Susan and Uzair—the paradoxical duo of female secretary and overt diversity hire—everyone at the table was practically interchangeable. Alex was acutely and depressingly aware that he was included in that category. In Jeremy’s Oxford-buttoned, Windsor-knotted, thinning-at-the-crown-and-templed image, he saw an oracular omen of his own future.

‘No,’ Alex answered, despairing at that fearsome foretelling. ‘Nothing’s funny.’

He hadn’t always hated his job. In fact, at the beginning he had been excited—*Deputy Political Speechwriter* looked bloody good on his CV. It was some distance from the career author dream, of course, but it was a stable income. ‘A safe bet,’ his father called it. What else was he to do with a degree in creative writing? At least he was using the skills he had worked so hard to hone, the gift some generous god had granted him. In the months and years that had passed, whenever Alex had taken to LinkedIn and Indeed.com in the dark, desperate hours of the night, he heard his father’s voice like the whisperings of doubt in the back of his mind: *You’ve got bills to pay. You can write your wee stories in your spare time.*

Time, he had discovered, was never ‘spare’. Even now, on the eve of the event, when all the work was done, there was no escape from the pretentious prison of politics. The same familiar phrases he heard in his nightmares echoed throughout the evening from every corner of the table: ‘We’ve Brexit to thank for that,’ said one; ‘This is the post-COVID world,’ said another; ‘What about the cost-of-living crisis?’ asked a third. Alex knew these things were important. But were they *all*-important? Was there nothing else? Was there no place in adult life for art, beauty, and creation? He wanted to *write*, and not just empty words for politicians to recite. He wanted to *write*, and not for someone else. He wanted to *write*; but when he did, the words were hollow, anaemic, meaningless.

Sitting there in silence, among those who knew him only for the function he performed, Alex knew the sorrow of Prometheus, doomed to repeat the same suffering each day as a consequence of his own choices. He cast an unspoken plea skyward, addressed to whatever gods resided in whichever heaven, for a sign, a hint, a mere suggestion of a purpose. He received only reticence, a prayer unanswered.

And then, he saw *her*.

She did not notice his gaze at first, the woman at the bar. But after an age that passed in a heartbeat, she turned her eyes upon him, as if he had called her by her name. A recognition filled the air that separated them, a bridge of esoteric understanding: ‘I know you,’ it affirmed, ‘though we have never met.’ She neither blinked nor broke the connection, but maintained the meeting of both mind and eye. Alex felt the pull, gravitational, inexorable, as the Moon summons the tide. It was beyond him, even had he wanted to resist.

‘You alright?’ asked Jeremy, snapping his fingers under Alex’s nose. ‘Off in your own little world?’

Alex rose, without even looking at his colleague. ‘Back in a bit,’ he said; but the gods knew that was a lie.

He half-expected her beauty to diminish as the distance closed between them—the Sun is never more splendid than just before it sets. But she only grew more lovely the closer he came. She was Greek; he was certain of that. Dark hair framed a face of unrivalled grace, sharp and yet soft, proud and yet humble, and glorious in its contradictions. A strong, straight nose sat between eyes like deep wells, whose dark waters would lure anyone wayward. Her skin, the colour of sand shimmering in sunlight, spoke of ancestry that traced back to the very peak of Olympus.

Yes, definitely local, Alex thought. He cleared his throat as he approached her, and hoped his twelve-day Duolingo streak had prepared him for what he was about to attempt.

Still, she did not break eye contact, even as he stood awkwardly before her. For the briefest instant, his nerve abandoned him, and he almost retreated; but then she smiled, the slightest lift of her lips, and lent him courage.

‘*Γειά σου*,’ said Alex, a blunt greeting.

‘*Γειά σου*,’ she echoed.

That was nearly all he had, unless she felt like listening to him count to ten or order a coffee. He combed the depths of his memory, nervous still but emboldened by a slight tilt of her head—an iota of intrigue.

‘*Πώς είσαι*,’ he asked her—how are you?

Her eyes flashed with something akin to amusement. She raised her chin a little when she

answered, almost as if to challenge him. *‘Είμαι καλά, ευχαριστώ. Και εσύ;’*

The last part meant *and you*; he knew that much. Alex nodded—an affirmative response, but not his best work. She laughed then, a bright, warming sound that made his skin tingle. For a while, she simply looked at him, open and assessing.

‘Μιλάει—ah, no, Μιλάς;’ he tried, tripping over his loose, hastily-acquired vocabulary. He conceded defeat on that line of questioning. *‘Do you speak English?’*

‘Όχι,’ she answered. *No.* He was not sure he believed her. The glint of mischief in her gaze seemed to dare him to persist. She was worth it, Alex knew. If he were Sisyphus and she the boulder, he would have relished every inch of the ascent.

Inspiration struck him like a bolt from the heavens: where wisdom failed, technology would shoulder the burden. Fumbling his phone from his pocket, Alex called upon the most trustworthy translator of the modern era.

Can we talk like this? he typed into Google. Watching as the engine transmuted his plain, prosaic letters into elegant *alphas* and *epsilons*, Alex tilted the screen towards her.

She raised an eyebrow, took the phone, pressed the symbol to alter the language of the keyboard, typed a single word. *Yes*, the phone relayed to him.

What is your name? asked Alex, taking his turn.

She took back the phone. *Guess.*

He blinked, dumbfounded. How was he to know? He studied her, frowning, hoping for a hint in her expression. He knew nothing, except that she was fairness made flesh, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, her face sufficient to drive mortal minds to madness.

That rang a bell in his literary memory. What had Marlowe written? “The face that launched a thousand ships”—yes, that was it.

‘Helen?’ Alex asked. She wrinkled her nose, tilting one hand to-and-fro. Close, then. *‘Helena?’*

She took the phone and typed again. *Eleni.* The Greek version of Helen. It could not have suited her any better.

They spoke like that for what must have been two hours, though it seemed to pass in a matter of minutes. Alex did not notice his colleagues leaving; nor did he care. They knew him less than this stranger did, this woman whose words were foreign to his ears but whose essence was vernacular. He

would have translated with her until Apollo dragged the Sun above the horizon, banishing the night.

But his phone could not sustain the conversation. Warning—low battery, it protested, heating in his hand as if feverish from exertion.

Alex panicked. He had so much more to say, and even more to hear. It could not be condensed into a single sentence. But that, it seemed, was all he had. One last question, then. May it evoke the answer he prayed for.

What are you doing after this?

Eleni smiled again—this time, as if harbouring a secret. She took the phone, even as the screen dimmed, and typed a single word.

Guess.

*

The instant that the door to his hotel room clicked shut, she was upon him. Her fingers raked through his hair, firm and unyielding. His hands cradled her face, tilting it upwards, thumbs caressing her high cheekbones. He hadn't the time to slip the keycard into the slot that would activate the lights before her lips found his. She needed no illumination to find what she sought; her tongue, warm and probing, found its mark with ease.

Alex matched her eagerness. She walked backwards, leading him by the front of his shirt—half-open, now; her doing—to the bed behind her. Still cupping her cheeks, he felt the pace of her pulse near the sides of her neck, pounding against his palms. Her breath came heavy and panting, drawn in the brief moments when their lips were not joined.

His shins struck the hard edge of the bed frame, but the pain was eclipsed by his passion. All sensation but her touch seemed distant, remote—as if his body was not his at all, but the vessel for some higher being. There was divinity in what they did, he did not doubt that. They were like Ares and Aphrodite, Love and War, whose union was forbidden before all Olympus. He felt his blood swell, coursing like *ichor* through his veins as her hands moved to his belt. They would defy the very gods, and neither of them cared.

They fell into the bed, and paid tribute to Eros.

*

It was early when Alex woke. Sleep held no appeal for him; not while awaking to her was the alternative. He roused often through the night, half-conscious, half-expecting her to be gone, to have vanished, returning to whatever godly realm she had descended from. But the Sun rose upon her, casting her sleeping form in its vermilion glory.

His fingers traced a gentle pattern on the smooth skin of her back while she slept. One night. It was just one night; and yet, everything had changed. He found it impossible to imagine that only yesterday he had been so unhappy, so uncertain, so unsatisfied. Contentment had evaded him since he had graduated, in truth. He had almost accepted that he would never do what he wanted to do, never be what he wanted to be. When dawn had broken the morning before, whatever purpose he once had was dead.

But now, it stirred again. This woman, this Eleni, had revived his reason, resuscitating him, giving breath to the coals at his core which had burned down to mere embers. Perhaps she was divine. Perhaps she was one of the Muses, those daughters of Apollo who whispered in the ears of Homer, Virgil, Milton, guiding both hand and heart. Even now, he felt the foetal foundations of a story forming in his psyche—one about a lost young man, and a goddess.

His phone buzzed on the nightstand, startling him. He picked it up, checked the screen:
7:30am—REMINDER: ambassador speech @ 10am.

Alex stared at it for a moment, thoughts of work and mundane mortality invading the inspiration that incubated in his mind. *Bills to pay*, he heard, a faint echo.

He swiped the notification away, opened Google, and typed:

How to say 'when can I see you again' in Greek. ■

scorrie

alasdair watson



Captain's Log - 2624.6.24

Planet ID - Scorrie

(M1320)

I sank through the dreich morning's upper atmosphere, looking for a place tae set doon the ship, rest my bones, and dry my washing. This small rocky planet wis four fifths covered in ocean, but on a clifftop abuin the glentin grey sea, I spotted a wee boorach of tall speckelt creatures.

I decided tae mak first contact.

On fit I approached tae a deray of...squawks. A flaucht of aboot fifteen excitedly greeted me, beckoning with flaffing feathers. I stood afore them, eye to eye, and raised my haun in peace. They each raised their wings, and efter a pause, waggled their wee fingers. I waggled mine back.

This wis met with a stramash of rairie squawking laughter, thirty wings waffin in the air, ninety wagglin fingers, and fifteen dancing friends.

They led me tae a cave on the cliff side, offered me food, and sat me by the burning ingle. Berries, nuts, ground grain and water bubbled over the fire.

A rope of feathers wis placed aroon my neck, and a youngling began tae act oot a story, full of suspense and weer. The others, aw wide-eyed and timorous, listened intently, while the elders smiled softly. After the story's crescendo, skreichin applause broke oot intae song. I did my best tae join in, but the soaring range of notes wis sair oot my reach.

The youngling then gestured tae me, and aw those feathered heids rotated expectantly.

I telt them the story of Tam O' Shanter.

Gazing throughout my performance, they giggled at my drunken stumbles, clapped my jigs and reels, joined in the din of the deil's bagpipes...but held their wheesht as I described the final chase. Those wide eyes again.

Upon Tam's teetering escape, the whole cave cheered and skreighed; we jigged tae the dirl of pertend pipes, and together we sang For Auld Lang Syne.

Scorrie

Mirth and fun grew fast and furious as the ready chorus of elders and younglings worked out the melody and cooried intae the harmonies, fou and unco happy with food, story, and song.

It'd been so lang since I'd seen home, thought about home, I forgot that it's gone. But haudin that shine, sharing that lair, looking oot at the cauld skinklin sea, I could've almost been...

When the glow of sunset filled the cave, I signalled my exit to my new friends, and each one bid their own farewell, feathers bristling thankful.

I began lifting the rope fae aroon my neck, but the eldest placed a wing on my shoulder to stop me, gave a bar of Auld Lang Syne, and motioned tae the rest of the group. Then waved fae the elders tae the blithe auld handsel aroon my neck, and gave me another gentle, cannie smile.

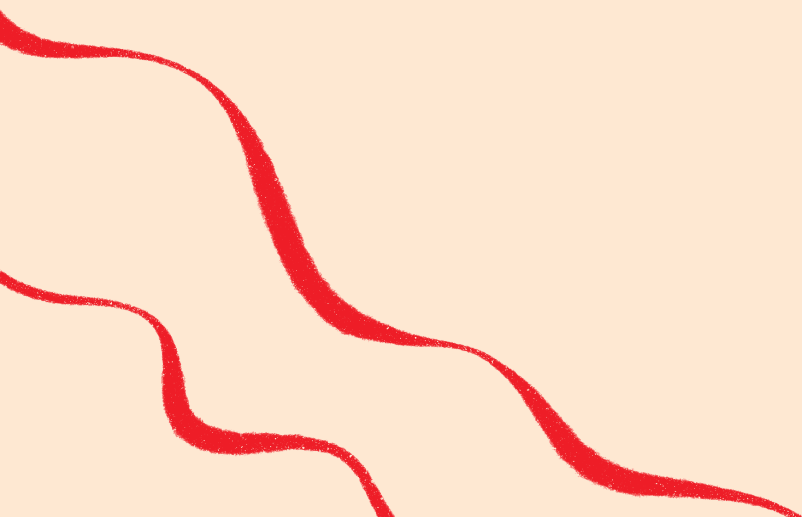
I raised my cup, thanked them aw for their kindness, and began ma clammer ower the craigs, thinkin on the the traik ahead.

While loading the ship, I reached intae my wash bag, and fae it gave one of the younglings a drying peg, on which I drew a wee face. They queeked brightly, held it tight, and took it hame.

As I took off intae the firey sky, boun tae airt the morra's bield, I was joined by six of my new friends who quick and quicker flew, soaring and swooping alongside me in the sunset, squawking for joy. ■

girl
dinner

holly fleming-gunn



Sunday tomorrow. They will sit at the table and wait for the week ahead to be served. They will toy with their cutlery, smooth the cloth napkins on their laps, and count their hours by the time spent at work: eating lunches prepped the night before, calories counted on an app, denying sweets because they have bikinis and wedding guest outfits to squeeze into.

Days spent staring at the screen they hate, looking forward to going home to the screens they love. Ironing, piles of it, never ending. The laundry hamper always overflowing with socks and sports bras. For every dish washed, another two dirtied. Never enough room in the dishwasher. Gym sessions squeezed into early mornings and late nights.

Books stalwart as they wait on the nightstand, spines uncracked, pages flat and new. They will crave sweets but will have apples instead. They will look forward to Friday night's glass of wine, the herald of another week done.

That is Sunday. That is tomorrow. But tonight is Saturday.

Tonight, they are together, finally. Their smiles, embraces, kisses on the cheek, all hard-earned rewards for the toil it took to find a date, time, and location that they could all make: a Saturday just after pay day, no holidays, no commitments, and, blessedly, sun, heat, blue skies that stretch, freckled only by little white clouds. The moon, out early, a pale beauty mark on the complexion of the evening.

They are in a restaurant that two of them have visited previously, not together, but enjoyed, and they are breathing in the warmth of the candles, tasting the air: waxy jasmine and cassis. From the kitchen, garlic and tomatoes. The lighting is soft, sunset darkening. They take their places together and admire each other—the dresses stowed away, sacred, for occasions such as this.

The wine comes quickly and there are cheers and pictures and the laughing begins and, already, shows no sign of stopping.

When the starters come, they trade forks and spoons and nothing belongs to anyone in particular. Bread is soaked in oil and balsamic vinegar, heavy and salty and so rich, everything is glorious in the dim, glimmering light of the candles. They talk through full mouths, words obscured by half-chewed pieces of meat and salad, because they have neither the time or patience for civility.

There are so many things they must tell each other.

Bottles are killed, marked as dead by their return to the ice buckets, only upside down. They are quickly replaced. There are anxieties, shared between them in the shape of little grimaces but not

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given breath, about the bill that will come. But the hands on hands, on thighs, the shoulders brushing together, are worth more than all of the cocktails and wine. So, worries are pushed aside, and decisions—substitutions—are made: *I won't grab a coffee on the way to work tomorrow, and I'll tap some cash off of dad, and, Klarna will save me, and the credit card will have to take a hit this month, and I've got an overdraft for a reason.*

Between the starters and the mains Hannah tells them she no longer feels loved by her boyfriend. Rachel, known for her brutality, advises an immediate breakup. Hannah reminds her that there is a mortgage, joint funds, a dog, a whole shared life, to take into consideration. This splits the table. Some side with Rachel—there's a whole life out there to worry about, money will come back, you can stay with me, or me, or me, and we'll all work together to kidnap the dog for you.

Others are steadfast with Hannah, who recognise that her life has become a braid, her strand tangled together with another, and their proposed remedies look more like quality time spent together on a holiday, an honest conversation, reigniting their sex life, and taking quizzes so they can discover and understand one another's love languages.

This brings on a conversation about love languages, shifting away from Hannah's initial problem, but she longs to forget it all, just for tonight, so she does. And, anyway, ever since she first told everyone how she was feeling, she had felt Ella's hand clasped in her own, and Ella kept it there. Her skin was soft, her hand small and warm, and they squeezed each other every now and then, sharing little glances—*still ok?*

Yeah, I'll be fine.

This had been the first time that Hannah and Ella had spoken in months. The first time all of them, together, had spoken in months. Their group chat had become a collection of memes and style inspiration pictures and the occasional compliment and/or follow up question about what one of them had posted on Instagram. All of this, often interrupted by suggestions that they meet up for a night such as this, propositions usually destined to fail.

The mains come, and the first quiet falls upon them as they indulge. They start up again with offers to swap bites, *take some of my chicken, I'll take some of your ragu*, the table a buffet more than anything else. A feast for a family. Everything freely given. Not even a thought. Dani is angry with work, with the way her manager treats her, with the lack of progression offered to her, angry about how working

isn't like how it was made out to be from *Sex and the City* and *Friends*. The girls are angry with her. Kris is worried that too much hair is falling out when she washes her hair—everyone tells her that her colouring is gorgeous, and she is given recommendations for shampoos and conditioners and oils and treatments and hairdressers, more than she can process. A slightly heated but mostly light-hearted argument breaks out about which is superior: books on Kindle, or paper and hardbacks. Then, which is better, *The Summer I Turned Pretty* novel or TV series? In the discourse, they call each other names, which are more ridiculous than scathing. They are like puppies playing in the pen—soft teeth and wet tongues falling from happy, open mouths. The waiter, in his oozy Italian accent, tantalises them with dessert. They share looks, little exclamations of *well, I haven't had tiramisu in so long*, and *I heard that the brownie is unreal*, and bites are of course preemptively offered. Plates are shared before they are even ordered. The waiter collects their menus, smiling deliciously. A few of the girls are happy to have pleased him, while the others roll their eyes. But once the waiter is gone, he is gone. Another fragment of the night, disappearing into the deep recesses of the evening like stardust after a supernova.

By the time the desserts with their thick coiffes of whipped cream, the espressos in lattes in their richly coloured little mugs, and the last of the cocktails come, the restaurant is near empty. The candles have either burned out or are burning down to their bases, thick globs of shining wax pooling in the candelabras. The last gusts of their floral scents mixing now with the smoky scent of wicks exhausted.

Each bite and sip now is truly savoured along with the understanding that they are among the last. So much still needs to be said. They speak quickly, fervently, close to their own language—they are all fluent, taking in every word.

The waiter, and the restaurant's closing time, loom. They start already: what if we make this a monthly thing? Or once every other month? Dates are proposed but Jenny is on holiday then; Kay doesn't get paid until the week after; Shan's girlfriend is away for work that night and the dog can't be left at home alone for too long. Murmurs from several of them: *we'll sort it out on the group chat*, which is accepted for now.

The bill is split evenly. There are speckles of resentment from those who had one less cocktail, less wine, for the completely even split, but such feelings are eclipsed by the equal measures of comfort and excitement from the presence of dear sisters.

Taxis, partners, and family are texted and called for lifts. Midnight, Sunday, and the rest of

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their lives begin to materialise. There's no stopping it: the night is drawing to a close. The bill has been paid. A large tip has been left—all the spare coins and small notes tucked away in their purses. They've just had such a good time, and everyone and everything has been so lovely, and even though the hostess says no need, they apologise for being a handful.

Their chairs scrape against the hardwood floor, groaning as though resisting, as they pull out to leave the table. They file out of the restaurant, singing a chorus of *thank you* to the remaining staff in the restaurant. They huddle together, bracing for the cold air. The sun has set and a chill has descended. The first of the cars have arrived. The hugs and kisses goodbye have begun. The night has ended.

The pain of saying goodbye is warm and close, sore in a harmless way.

No one is allowed to stand alone. Cars wait on the curb as each of them ensure that everyone has a secure, guaranteed way home. There is another chorus: *text me when you're home safe*, answered by, *of course, you too!* As the cars pull away, the drivers are immediately accosted by the stories of the night. Gossip, recaps of weeks and months of lives at university, of work, lives shared with family and boyfriends and girlfriends.

In mere candlelit hours, so much has passed between them. Warbling lips and watery eyes but tears and despair never allowed, sobs never made good, blocked by words and touches of comfort and understanding.

Sunday is here. The new week, the ennui, begins tomorrow. But each of them knows that every second of it will be laced by the sweetness of Saturday night. In meetings, their minds will be lost to the memories. They will flick through the pictures taken for days to come. In conversations with others, Saturday night will live on, will constantly reignite, as jokes that you had to be there for are retold. These moments will be lived again, but new. The when of it all is intangible and difficult, but there are stories that must be told and questions that must be asked. ■



gallow's

hands

p. w. garrick



It will be night when we cross the border.’

Those are the words my five times great aunt spoke to a young boy she had only met a few hours earlier. She had plucked him from a death he neither deserved nor had contemplated.

The harshness of the world had not escaped him, for he had experienced profound pain and sorrow from a very young age.

The voyage to his new home was long and fraught at the thought that at any minute, they would be discovered and he would be returned to his master. He did not feel at ease until his bare and rough-skinned feet touched the Green Oak earth at the other side of the Atlantic after three weeks at sea. The rain soaked his thin shirt and he shivered in the cooler climate, but it was a welcome thing to breathe free air. When he saw the house he dropped to his knees; whether through exhaustion or an emotional response, no one thought to inquire. It was a grand mansion which stood proud and yet foreboding at the highest point of the surrounding area, all of which was gripped in a torrential sea fret that had threatened them more gently when they had docked near Gourock not an hour before.

It was now fully enraged and lashing the shutters on the large windows of the house. There was no moonlight, so their way was illuminated by lanterns brought down by the house staff, who had carefully navigated the soddened and hazardous hill to greet the small party and quickly help them back to the refuge of the main hall. Within a fire crackled and fizzed as the rain continued its assault. The young man was ushered up the ornate and creaky staircase by two maids. He looked at my aunt with fear and hope in equal measure.

‘It’s alright, Bailey. They just want to find you some dry clothes. Hurry back, there’s food ready when you are. Molly, Esther, give him room.’

Bailey was given privacy at the request of his new protector. He was shown to a separate part of the house where a bath was already drawn, towels and clothes at his disposal. When he sat at the dinner table he had dressed like a gentleman. The woman responsible for his emancipation nodded kindly before they ate their hot and nourishing soup in silence under the warm glow of the candelabras.

That night Bailey could not sleep. Now he was here his mind was full of questions and his body struggled to find comfort, only being accustomed to hard ground or mite ridden straw and not the soft mattress that now begged his submission into slumber. Thunder had begun to accompany the

rain and the lightning threw unfamiliar shadows on the walls. He studied the art instead but the lush green scenes of unknown landscapes with tall trees only served to compound his anxiety. Aside from the weather and the strange and decadent surroundings, he also feared the scenes that would appear when he closed his eyes. Rest of any kind had always been a luxury, an indulgence, and now he felt guilty that he was here and his family and friends were so far away, still living under the rule of tyrants and abusers. Some hours later and just as the candle at his bedside was waning, he succumbed to his fatigue and fell under the spell of warmth and safety.

He was rudely awakened by physical force the next morning at dawn by the woman's brother.

Through a plethora of words growled rather than spoken, he made his position upon Bailey and recent events very clear; he did not agree with his sister's choice of action and would be remedying the situation very soon. The hostile and saliva laden vitriol was something that Bailey had gotten used to deciphering. Upon finally leaving the suite after his assault upon the young man's person, the brother was reprimanded by the head of the household staff upon hearing the commotion. The brother spat back his own retort and then proceeded directly to his sister's rooms. Bailey heard him swiftly ascend the stairs. There was the slamming of doors and muffled shouting as someone paced angrily above his head and then abruptly left.

Shortly after his departure, Bailey was summoned. He dressed quickly and smartly once more. Much to his surprise the woman was still in her nightwear, which was most unusual for him to witness. She also looked very ill. The mistress noticed his shyness and concern upon seeing her and assured him that he was not to worry. The journey had merely taken her energy and she needed rest. She conveyed that Bailey was to start his lessons today to allow her to convalesce. Her brother would not interfere with him again, but if he tried through any means to engage him, Bailey was to inform her at once.

The lessons began promptly after a breakfast of smoked fish, the freshest bread Bailey had ever tasted and helping after helping of the most delicious poached eggs, which Bailey took alone in the dining room. The serving maid enlightened him that the eggs were from the estate's own hens and this put Bailey in mind of his mother, who had been in charge of the hens on the plantation. If a hen died, Belle had to wear the carcass around her neck on a string until it degraded enough to fall

from her body. This macabre adornment was to be displayed in the day and even in sleep. The master exacted psychological torture by and large. He did not believe in physical punishment for the women or girls as many others did. However, the men and boys were fair game if they disobeyed orders. Bailey wondered if the servants here would be subject to similar punishments when animals succumbed to natural causes, or if they damaged anything?

Feeling isolated and homesick at the thought of his family, Bailey sought comfort from one of the items that had caused his creed so much suffering and over indulged in the jam. Not being accustomed to such sweetness, his teeth ached the entire morning.

Miss Remond, Bailey's teacher, was waiting for him in the book lined yet cosy study. He knocked at the door. When he was bid enter, he stood in shock as she turned to face him. She was tall, beautiful, very well dressed and had brown skin like himself. She spoke in such a way, that he had to force his concentration. She informed him that she was touring in the area from the U.S. and was to oversee his initial education in return for donated funds from the mistress of the house. The mistress, Miss Remond added, also thought that a more recognisable tutor might aid a more fluid transition: 'Do you agree?'

He nodded, captivated and a little overwhelmed.

The early hours flew by. He found her to be the most compelling of personalities. Eloquent, knowledgeable, firm and kind. His head swam with possibilities: How could someone like me know so much when I barely know how to read?

They ate lunch together. Missam R, as he would come to call her, told Bailey about her life in Salem.

How she was born free and about her parents' and siblings' active roles in helping other people to escape slavery. He wondered if she might be able to help his family. During the afternoon lessons Bailey heard the brother again in the house. Missam R continued unflinching as she moved to lock the library door but Bailey was reminded of that very morning. His mood took a sombre turn at the realisation of the very real possibility that he might never escape the brutality or legacy of bondage.

For a second time the head of the household intervened saying that 'Master Bailey' had gone out to attend his lessons. The brother scoffed and hurled those two words back before leaving. At dinner that night my aunt seemed to Bailey a little recovered. She spoke to him lightly about

various things that she was putting in place to ensure his comfort. He wanted to ask her why she was doing this for him, but he'd had the boldness beat out of him since he could talk by his oppressors. The presence of the brother twice in one day had served to compound the boy's lived experience. He seemed to brighten when my aunt sensed his need for further context and she proceeded to explain a little about her family. How the wealth that had built the house and bolstered much of the area had come mainly from sugar and other products from the colonies. How she was determined to make amends for her ancestors' greed at the exploitation and suffering of so many enslaved people. She also added, somewhat proudly, that her brother thought her efforts folly and insulting. She asked Bailey what he thought of Miss Remond.

He sat in stunned silence. Both at the mention of Missam R and of someone, anyone, asking for his opinion.

'She's quite something isn't she? I heard her speak in Glasgow and I knew instantly I had to make her acquaintance.'

Over the next two weeks Bailey's lessons continued. As his acumen grew at an astonishing pace, so too did my aunt's fever. She died just short of three months after bringing Bailey to Scotland.

Bailey attended the grave with Missam R long after the mourners had dissipated, for appearances' sake and to maintain Bailey's privacy and safety. Missam R handed him a locket and explained whilst they stood in the grey mist, that my aunt had left everything of her estate, including his keepsake, to him. He listened intently as she continued as per the instructions provided by his now deceased and sorely missed ward. A legal counter would certainly be brought by the brother in respect of the bequeathment. However worried Bailey was, he was not to concern himself with the particulars, as all the necessary documents were in place. The mistress had left no stone unturned when it came to her brother: 'He is your natural father, Bailey, though he would never admit it.'

Bailey's face betrayed the question his lips failed to form in response to Missam R's revelation. Missam R offered an explanation to the perplexed look:

'He was overseeing the family plantation and he took a *liking* to your mother.'

It transpired that the union had been covertly observed. Eye witness accounts had been documented on the instruction of my aunt as soon as she found out what had happened. Missam R continued:

‘The law here states that if you are claimed by any blood member of your family then you have a right to inherit.’

Missam R left a few days later to speak at an event in Edinburgh. As she was preparing her things for departure, she explained that a solicitor would be attending the house to speak to Bailey and that he could trust him. The solicitor spoke kindly, but mostly in jargon. He seemed steadfast that Bailey was safe from any future interference. There was also a legal challenge ongoing for Bailey to inherit the brother’s assets upon death, also set in motion by his now absent protector, which would take some years to complete. All of which would be much easier to ensure when Bailey came of age. Bailey was listless until Missam R’s return a few days later. She explained that she would soon be moving to Bedford, England to study and lecture at the college there, but she would make sure Bailey had a replacement who would treat him just as she had.

‘I will write to you and you may write back. That way I can make sure your learning is progressing.’ She made him promise her that he would make contact if he had any issues, no matter how big or small.

Immediately after Missam R’s departure, Bailey was regarded by the staff most courteously, as Master of the very house that he’d first set eyes upon only five months prior. Although his unease was slow to fully dissolve, he’d felt an air of calm since placing the locket around his neck. It also assisted that the new tutor was just as passionate as Missam R had been on subjects relating to his origins and the wider world.

On days when the weather was fine, Bailey started to explore the grounds but did not stray too far from the main house. The vegetable and flower gardens were vast enough to take a walk and exercise adequately but Bailey longed for greater freedom. This he had kept to himself, his teacher recently stating:

‘One day, Bailey, very soon, you will have the freedom to do as you please and I hope you will advocate learning, understanding and compassion as your motives, as did your benefactor.’

Bailey was growing fast and strong now that he was nourished by healthy food and a nurturing environment. He felt more assured of his place in the world but was careful not to squander the opportunity which Missam R had continued to remind him of through her regular letters. He fell into a brief but seductive lull in the unusually warm summer, temporarily leaving awareness out of

his consciousness. It was on a day in the midst of this reverie that the brother reared his calculating and cruel head. Men loyal to him had been watching the grounds to report when Bailey was out alone and on one clear day, he went out to meet the new master of an estate he coveted under the pretence of reconciliation. He started well and Bailey, now on his way to becoming a learned and respectful gentleman, gave him leave to say his piece. The conversation unravelled quickly upon the brother seeing the locket around Bailey's neck, giving rise to his anger. He grabbed Bailey roughly and marched him over to a tree where he pulled down a noose, most likely set in place as early as the boy's arrival in the small town:

'Now we'll set things right once and for all,' he barked as he slipped it over the young man's head. Bailey was neither enraged nor upset, sadly, he was rather resigned to his fate. He looked directly into the brother's eyes:

'As you wish, Father.'

The man stopped and looked at the boy for a moment, then down at the locket before snatching it from around his neck:

'You should've hung. My sister had no business taking you in. You were my problem to deal with.'

At that very moment, a loose apparition of a woman appeared beside them:

'And this is how you deal with your infidelity?'

The brother turned on his heel as the shape gripped him by the throat and raised him up.

'This is my nephew and I swore to protect him from the day I received word that he had been born.'

'You are determined to ruin this family, even in death,' gargled the brother.

'You are right, brother, I am determined. Determined to root out anyone who agrees with your acts of depravity, violence and brutality.'

As she released her brother the noose vanished from Bailey's neck and took the place of her fingers around her brother's throat. For a moment he was suspended, the weight of him held up by an invisible force.

'Bailey, go to the house now, quickly and see that as many people as possible know you are there.'

Bailey ran.

‘As sure as you would have sent your own son to the gallows, I now send you in his place. There is no escaping your cruelty whilst you breathe, so you shall cease to do so at the hands of your own making. I will see you safely into purgatory.’

‘Una!’

Bailey was already back at the house and in his lesson as the unseen force released its hold on the brother. The thought of the encounter caused his concentration to falter for the rest of the afternoon and the studies were cut short owing to the *master of the house* nursing a headache.

A body was found the next day after a search party was sent out. The cause of death was determined as suicide and my five times great grandfather was buried next to my aunt, her wish, so she could make sure he never hurt anyone again.

I still wear her locket to this day. ■

a child of
amphitrite

andre fryer



It has been almost twelve tidal seasons since I surrendered myself to the land dwellers. I can't be certain. It appears we have now met the conditions needed for them to hear me. After all this time captive, confined in my salt-water prison.

I am wheeled into a sharply lit and sterile chamber. Face to face with a grey-haired male. He is broad-shouldered and square-jawed. Trenches dissect his forehead as he watches me from behind a table. The three giant males who ushered me in are dismissed, and the grey male does a sequence of checks while looking up to a surveillance device in the top corner of the room, and looks at the time keeper on his wrist. This is called a watch, I've learned. It is important for land dwellers to be always aware of the precise passage of time.

'I've been told to call you Nuntius,' says the grey male. He looks, first, to me, and then to my translator, Erin. She is meek, dark haired, and intelligent.

I confirm to Erin that it means messenger, and that I am happy to be called this. She replies to him in their native tongue. Erin and I both wear devices on our heads that allow us to communicate through the water. She calls them water ears.

'Messenger.' The man looks down and the muscles in his jaw tense. 'And would you say, Nuntius, that what you did to that oil rig in the Western Pacific was a message?' He stares into me, never once breaking eye contact as Erin does her best to translate his words.

Yes, I say, I explain that the machine I destroyed was the beacon for my message.

'And the lives of the Americans who were on it?' he responds. A small vein is now visible on his left temple.

I tell the grey male that the tribe these men belonged to was not considered. As Erin translates, he looks at the surveillance device and shakes his head and allows himself a rueful chuckle.

'Well, Nuntius, I'm afraid it means a great deal to us that they were American. And that the oil rig is owned by an American company. And that the oil we lost represents a loss to America.'

As I listen to Erin translate his words, I can't help but notice the look in his eyes. He has a burning desire for power. The same look as the guards at my prison facility.

I tell the grey male that his tribe is not relevant to our message. The grey male and Erin exchange looks before he addresses me again.

'Our?' the man asks. And I can see curiosity flood the overhanging curvatures of his face.

I say that I am here on behalf of my people.

‘And who are your people?’

As Erin translates to me, I hear hurried mechanical whirring from behind the walls. A single bead of sweat leaves the same temple where his vein does a metronomic dance.

‘ $\Phi \circ \uparrow \text{日} \text{ㄗ} \circ \text{ㄗ} \downarrow \text{ㄗ} \downarrow \square \circ$,’ I say, and Erin dimples her chin before shooting an annoyed look my way. The grey male looks at Erin in quizzical frustration.

‘He’s using a word he knows I can’t translate,’ she says, both to him and then quickly to me, as a reproach, ‘we don’t have a word for it.’

I see a renewed hatred cross the grey male’s deep brow.

‘He thinks you are keeping secrets from me, from America. I told him that in your language, polysemic words’ meanings aren’t inferred through context or implied in tone, they are felt through vibrations in the water, so we don’t have translations.’ She nods to the grey male to continue.

Her own face is reddened slightly. It must be warm outside my portable prison. She turns back to me.

‘He wants to know the name of your people.’

Our eyes linger for a split second, and the passing of time hangs between us.

I tell her that he may call us Children of Amphitrite.

The man scrunches his face slightly, deepening the creases on his forehead and presses a button, leaning in and speaking softly.

‘He does not know the meaning of Amphitrite,’ whispers Erin into her water ears. I hold back a smile.

‘Like the Greek goddess?’ responds the man, casting a doubtful look at Erin.

I confirm his question, and explain that Amphitrite was a gift from my ancestors to the land dwellers of ages past. A cultural exchange.

‘When?’ he asks.

I say that I do not know the exact tidal season. It was many generations past. The grey male stares at Erin as she relays this.

‘We cannot explore the past now,’ he asserts, ‘we don’t have the time.’ There is a weight and coarseness to his voice that even I can hear underwater. It moves the molecules in the air between us.

A Child of Amphitrite

As Erin looks to me, I realise that the man is not as well-informed as he would like. Erin says that on land, they call this *being out of the loop*. My people call it *losing the current*.

Before I can think of what to say, he shoots another question my way, 'How many of your people are there?'

I tell him we are many. More even than the scales of our surface-swimming brethren.

He spits a question at Erin and she relays, 'He wants a number.'

We do not keep track, I explain. We are at the whims of the water, and it is a formidable home. Capable of great violence. Life and death flow like the arms of the great kelps.

'Then why have we never seen you? Why kill those men?!' he insists, almost rising from his chair to ask, looking sharply back and forth at Erin and me. I say their lives were not the target, but their deaths serve to emphasise our message. The unfiltered fury simmering under his dark eyes now surfaces.

'And what exactly is your message, Nuntius?'

I look at Erin as she speaks. I notice her fair neck hairs now standing at attention. She radiates a nervousness, and I feel as though she understands more than he what comes next.

*

Before I left to deliver my message, our leader counselled me a final time. She told me that I must remember myself on the land. That I would undergo great trials. I would be treated as an enemy.

Our objective, above all, is peace. If the land dwellers *can* be made to see our plight, they *must* be made to see it.

She said that because we have remained hidden, they will be fearful of me. Of what I represent. Of my power. We must give them the chance to know us as they know themselves. And she paused to look to her right, over our hidden city, the civilisation we have built and maintained for millennia. The peaceful existence our kind has been so careful to cultivate. She placed her hand on my shoulder before looking deep into my eyes with a renewed conviction. She told me, with a slow and deliberate cadence, that if they are shown and choose not to see, and that if they see, and choose not to act, then it will be upon us, the Atlanteans of land-dweller legend, the Children of Amphitrite, to

show them how deep these oceans run.

*

I tell the grey male that my message is simple. My people can no longer remain hidden while you poison the waters.

I see his nostrils flare as Erin translates this.

'Is that a threat?' he asks.

I think of all the ways I have been detained since I was captured. Deprived of food. Deprived of space. Deprived of stimulation.

Even Erin, who is their bridge between our languages, is jeered by the guards, as if she has become untrustworthy by association.

I want to tell this man it was a promise, but I remember the words of my leader, and say it is a plea. That we may share the earth with our land dwelling brethren, in harmony.

The man takes a beat.

'And you killing those people, that's your idea of togetherness? Of peace?' Erin looks at me.

I feel that, over the time she has been learning my language, my mannerisms, she has developed a fondness for me. Or perhaps for our interactions. I have noticed her joy in our exchanges. That joy is useful.

I ask the grey male if he would be taking this as seriously if no land dweller's life had been taken, and that any fair negotiation must begin on equal footing.

'And how would you call this equal?' he asks.

After all this time on land, ignorance, wilful or not, no longer surprises me. I remind him that countless species in the waters have perished by land dwelling hands. Even some Children of Amphitrite have passed as a result of negligence. You spill your oils. Our reefs bleached white and decayed into memory. The lost sounds of our brethren who travel beneath grotesque vessels. Erin is becoming tearful now, her cadence unsteady as she relays my words. She wears their weight across her shoulders, in her throat and mouth and eyes as she speaks. The grey male looks at her with disgust. He turns his ire on her, and she swiftly translates what she can as spittle leaves his lips.

A Child of Amphitrite

'Erin... killed fourteen...crying for him? Stop!' She becomes stiller than the sands on the ocean floor. Her eyes twitching to me and back to him. He continues to shout at her, all I can pick up through the water ears is the word, *KILL*. I do not have the same affinity for language that Erin does. These land dwellers have proven themselves to be who our cynical elders feared. Greedy. Profligate. Ambitious. And the rest of the planet must pay for it. There is always a price. There is always a rush to do more harm, before their precious time runs out.

The grey male turns back to me.

'What do your people propose, then?'

I tell him that land dwellers must leave the oceans immediately so that they can restore their natural equilibrium. In this time, our leaders can create a plan to coexist. We will supply resources to the families of those whose lives have been lost. I tell him this offer is time sensitive, and I must relay their response to my people.

A new calmness overcomes the grey male. Something far more sinister lingers on the tip of his tongue. His eyes betray him.

'Let me tell you what I propose, ocean scum.

'We use our submarines to nuke every fucking crevice in every ocean on this planet. You and your kind will be wiped out so fast, you won't even have time to become a memory. No textbook will carry your name. No heart will mourn your passing, on land or in the sea...' As Erin speaks to me, she decides for the first time to maintain eye contact. I see her struggle.

As I have observed, I have learned. I have learned to prepare for the worst. Erin is no longer translating as the grey male mutters and collects himself. I observe his insecurity. His inability to get the answers he wants means he must displace his failure onto others. Perhaps he, too, knows that he has lost the current. That stagnant waters will always rot, and those unwilling to leave them are destined to rot, too.

I turn to Erin, still staring with solemnity at the grey male, and tap on the inside of my glass prison. In our time together, I would do this when I wanted to get her attention without those monitoring our water ears knowing. A tiny, shared deception. But there are always deceptions that cannot be shared.

As Erin turns to me, I ask how much time has passed since my capture. She looks at the grey

male and says something.

‘Why do you want to know?’ he asks.

I tell him the conditions of my capture are not up to him entirely. He does not appreciate this.

‘You look, to me, like a fish man trapped in a jar. You are no longer a threat, even if your people may be. But by the time they know what we know, it will be too late for them.’

I smile at the grey male. Too late, I say to Erin, and she back to him.

‘Yes, too late,’ says the grey male.

I ask Erin to once again ask him how long it has been since my capture. Relenting, and perhaps driven by a blissful lack of awareness, he tells me.

‘Today is one year to the day. Nice and neat, don’t you think?’

I confer with Erin to make absolutely sure. Looking at her, I confirm that a year is, in fact, twelve of our tidal seasons and I cannot help but broaden my grin even further. The grey male speaks at Erin, his arms protesting.

‘He wants to know why you’re smiling like that,’ says Erin. She, too, seems confused. I ask the grey male if he can see the ocean from here.

‘Via satellite, we can.’

I tell him to look at the spot where I was captured. The ocean where I destroyed their machine. His eyes widen, as though he’s awakened to the yawning maw of a great whale.

He summons one of the giant males with a handheld device, and they begin pressing at it. Erin tells me that, ‘They are looking for a live view of the ocean you described.’

‘What will he find there, Nuntius?’ she asks.

She could not have known, and there is a part of me that feels for her. The land dweller who wanted to know me. And I showed her just enough. The perfect amount of light in the darkness to make her feel like she was breaking through. I tell her he will find the result of wasted time. That, when I was captured, I was only given twelve tidal seasons to make contact and convey my message. Once that period had elapsed, the fate of the land dwellers was no longer in my hands. I was their chance at peace, but they took too long. Too long to decide. Too long to start learning.

The grey male explodes out of his seat and waves, crazed, at the surveillance device. Erin’s

A Child of Amphitrite

eyes flit from me to the grey male to his screen, now flat on the table. From here, I cannot make out the image it depicts, but Erin does.

The grey male points at her and shouts instructions to relay.

‘He says you must stop them!’ She is frenzied. If my leader kept her word, they must be watching their nightmare come to life.

The grey male says something into a communication device. I tell Erin to show me the screen and the image in my mind is made manifest.

Millions, billions of resilient souls emerging from the water in a show of unity against extinction. Against the existential threat of the land dwellers.

Erin’s shock is vivid. She is agog more than the grey male, who waves his arms at her and smacks the side of my container, sending thick, craggy vibrations through the water. Another of the giant males rushes to hand the grey male a small container of orange powder. He looks at me and then at Erin.

‘Tell me how to stop this or you die,’ he says. She tells me this in between sobs, as she is now being held back. I wait a moment before I address him. I look at her, restrained for something so small as not wishing my death, but it has been written for some time.

Tell him, I instruct her, that I would sooner die by his hand than betray my cause. The war has begun.

His eyes tell me that he has wanted this since I destroyed that machine, taking the lives of his tribesmen. He is entitled to his rage. But these actions do not exist in a vacuum, and we must both pay for the ambitions of our people. His, for wanting to pillage the ocean. Mine for wanting to survive.

Erin stands helpless in the arms of the giant, her tears soaking the upper folds of her clothing. She once told me that her blue fastened cloth, a *shirt*, was her favourite because it reminded her of the ocean. She really did try to build a bridge.

As the grey male walks toward me, death in hand, like a grim reaper carved of a dry stone, I see Erin thrashing and the image of my kin rising from the ocean burnt into my mind. We will let them know how deep the ocean runs.

I take a deep breath, brace myself, and tilt the cylinder over. A torrent of salt-water rushes

forth, thousands of litres knocking even the giants off their feet. And I'm being washed over with a sense of inevitability. In the turbulence, Erin manages to grab my glass cage as the wave of water crashes away from us. She tries to pull herself towards me. I'm lying on my side and see her hair, loose and drenched.

'Why?' she asks, our water ears still intact. I tell her we simply ran out of time.

I feel my vision blur. The sound of panic is piercingly sharp. But even that dulls with every passing second. My lungs seize, I taste the staleness of the air land dwellers breathe. The finality of it all appears stark in the heavy dryness.

I think of my people. My Children of Amphitrite. I will never know their fate. I feel the urge to weep for myself and for them. And for the pain in my lungs. And for uncertainty. I am so overwhelmed. ■

straying
beyond
city limits
k. c. e. harrison



Following the roads outward, into the freshness that passed the peripheral city. Traffic became sparse, the thrum of an engine occasionally passing by. There was still sound of course, the traveller had just opted to swap the constantness of city life to trees, wind and calling birds. It gave the traveller comfort, knowing they weren't alone. The space the traveller felt was freeing; narrow streets and secretive alleyways were always exciting, intriguing, and held their charm, but so did the vastness and details beyond the cityscape, its appendages sinking into eternal landscapes.

Staying close by the edge of bramble bushes, the traveller arrived at a fork in their path. Sticking out of the wooden signage was an arrow facing east. The inscription written on it, however, was something the traveller couldn't decipher. The inscription was too faded and worn with age.

Unbothered, the traveller took a chance, taking the route left. This was a day for exploring with no pressing time restraints. Passing livestock in grazed fields, orchards of many kinds, the traveller was taking in the outside world. Yet as time passed, open fields thickened into darkening forests.

Unease twisted in the traveller's stomach as they realised that in search of respite, they had become lost while venturing. Roads turned to lighter, narrower paths. Paths seemed to split into a spiderweb of trails and the traveller was caught in them.

No cellular connection. The wanderer had wandered too far. The traveller was grateful for the trees that offered some shade, but a darkening seemed to loom with it. A crow called from a branch of a birch tree; the traveller turned. Familiar beady eyes met theirs with a head tilted at an observing angle.

'I see you've lost your way, such a shame.' The crow preened a feather.

'And yet, you who have found me, I presume, have not,' the traveller eyed them back.

'I always know where I am, but landscapes, cityscapes, and townscapes change. I have lost places but I am never lost; I will always find places I have been before, but knowing for certain if they will remain, I have never known.'

The traveller sensed some sorrow from the creature, as if they had mourned more than the traveller had drawn breaths in their time on land.

'So, you are not ever knowing but know what has been. Can you guide me on my way?' They looked up to the crow, whose eyes were now fixed into the distance behind the dense pine trees.

'I do have the knowledge to guide you.' The crow did not continue. They had the knowledge. Acquiring it would be a challenge in itself.

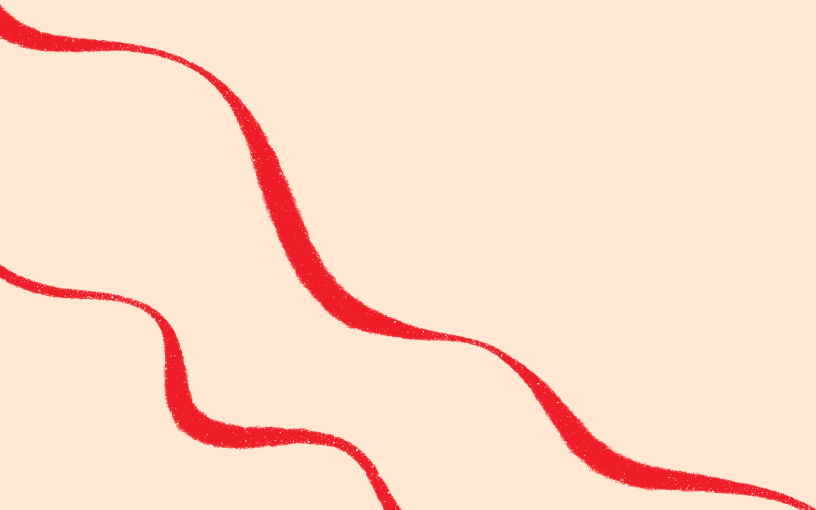
Straying Beyond City Limits

'So what will it be? I have no food to offer this time, what about my water?' The traveller swung their bag off their shoulder, beginning to untie its fixtures.

'I am not thirsty nor am I hungry. You may return to me a favour of my choosing.' The crow flew a few metres to a previously passed tree. 'Follow me now. I will be your guide.'

Quickly, the crow flew, so the traveller hoisted up their backpack, their footsteps becoming a light jog as they trailed the dark wash of flight. ■

conversation
between
two
outsiders
naomi head



It's hot at the bus stop. It's hot outside the shade. It's hot everywhere. I forgot it would be this hot on my return to 易俗河.

September in 湖南 sticks to me and sweat beads on my face, the back of my neck, my elbow crease, behind my knees, and I feel liquid making rivulets as it runs down my cleavage pooling between my body and my bra.

This autumn is nothing like autumn at home, where humidity barely exists or is broken by the incessant rain and wind, even during summer. The leaves will be on the ground already there, but here, I wouldn't touch the ground unless I wanted to burn my palms or melt my shoes.

I'm waiting to go from this dusty outskirts into the main drag of the city to the parks with manicured lakes and winding paths with secret pavilions and hidden teahouses. People won't stare any less, but at least they're more likely to leave me alone.

At the bus stop, a man is standing not too far from me under the shade of the stainless steel casing which holds giant public health and safety billboards telling local people things that I can't read, translate or understand yet. He is covered in dust and his hair is scraggly. I don't know when he was last able to clean his clothes, eat more than 方便面, or see his family. He might be a migrant worker, a 外地人, which is different from a 外国人 and possibly less rewarding than being a 外教, which is what I am. He's probably part of the construction crew working on the new highway just past the school where I teach and live. He probably thinks I'm rich, which is hilarious because I'm making less than a tenured native teacher and slightly more than a native student teacher. He probably wonders why I'm here stealing from his country.

The man has noticed me. It would be hard for him not to notice anyone else at the practically empty bus stop, but he notices me because I look nothing like anyone else who lives in his village. I don't even look like the other 外国人 who came here with me. He is both blessed and cursed to blend in—at least until he opens his mouth and his disguise begins to crack.

The man at the bus stop, who has clearly been itching to talk to the 外国人, rolls his question at me.「美女，你是哪里的人，啊？」

I smile. He thinks I'm being polite. He lines up another question, one I'm sure I'd understand by now, even if I hadn't been teaching myself Chinese for the last year.「你能听懂我说的话吗？」

I smile again, nod, and open my mouth.「是啊，我听得懂。我会说一点中文。」I chirp,

Conversation Between Two Outsiders

my tones are (as always) a little off but I think he gets the general idea.

「哇涩, 你的普通话说得很好。你很棒! 那美女, 你是哪里的人?」

Politeness dictates that I be humble after the man has complimented my Chinese, though my native friends always laugh at my manners and tell me I'm old fashioned, but still, I say, 「哪里哪里, 我说的不太好。我是英国人, 从苏格兰来的。」

He looks at me with surprise; I don't imagine he encounters many 外国人 who are keen, or able, to have a conversation. He gets a little closer as if he can't believe I exist in front of him in this time and space.

「哇, 我觉得你是美国人还是俄罗斯人。你的皮肤很白, 你的鼻子很高, 你的眼睛也是很大。你们俄罗斯的美女都是妓女, 对吧?」

I know he is describing my white skin, tall nose, and big eyes. I've heard this before from most people brave enough to address me. I'm a little surprised he's not commenting on my 'yellow' hair, which is just a light brown but is unlike the often long-straight jet-black hair of my native counterparts. I'm also surprised he hasn't told me I'm fat, even though I spent the previous year starving myself because all of my Chinese friends insisted I was too chubby to find a husband. I'm not sure but I think he's also asking if I'm a prostitute, something I will confirm when I get on the bus and have time and space to access my digital Chinese dictionary. But for now, it's time to deflect and regain face by telling him what I actually do.

「我不是美国人, 也不是俄国人。我是苏格兰人。我去年从英国来教英语了。」

His eyes grow wide and he finally stops describing me, he finally stops insisting that I'm a prostitute. He seems to think teaching is a more noble profession.

Before we have time to get into why I'm here, and how I came to be in this specific satellite town, my bus pulls up in a cloud of summer dust as the street gasps for rain. We part ways and I go on to be misunderstood elsewhere. ■

contributors

FIONA NICOL is a writer based in Glasgow, currently navigating her twenties and not writing as much as she should be. She graduated from Strathclyde University's MLitt in 2022, and mostly deals in literary fiction and feminist horror. For the girls that get it.

MOIR MCCALLUM is a Glasgow-based Creative Writing graduate working on his first novel. He loves reimagined mythology, Ancient history and subversive fiction.

ALASDAIR WATSON is a self-taught photographer and artist, creating stories about how we belong to each other and our surroundings, while connecting and supporting community/cultural groups. His artistic projects are passionately rooted in the landscapes and languages of Glasgow and Scotland, while exploring feelings around the environment, nostalgia, isolation, imperfection, and impermanence.

HOLLY FLEMING-GUNN is a writer of poetry and horror from Glasgow, who is currently working on her first horror novel. When she is not writing and/or reading, she is spending time with her cat, and either baking or cooking.

Over the last decade, **P. W. GARRICK** has seen their work creatively take flight, from performances to publication. In amongst many other projects, they have written commissioned content which continues to be of great ethical importance to them, recognising forgotten trailblazers of Britain's past regarding the social justice movements of Abolition and Suffrage.

ANDRE FRYER started writing fiction because a teacher from his nightmares told him he couldn't. So there. He also writes ads and walks dogs.

K. C. E. HARRISON is an architecture graduate and illustrator who explores the interplay between memory, place, and storytelling. Their work connects the visual and written word, drawing on experiences in urban planning and community narratives. When not creating, they enjoy travelling and capturing the human form through life drawing.

NAOMI HEAD (she/her) is a writer, poet, and creative facilitator based in Edinburgh. Her work explores identity, community, belonging, mental health, grief, and hope. Naomi's work has been published locally and internationally by SNACK Mag, Edinburgh Lit Salon, Beyond the Veil Press, and Sunday Mornings at the River. Her poetry zine, Kitchen Love, printed by Typewronger Riso Studio with illustrations by Hana Khan is available in independent bookstores across the UK.

the GLYPH. team

Sofía Artola Díaz (Editor-in-Chief of Foreign & Web Editor):

Sofía is a Spanish writer who finds being bilingual means struggling both in Spanish and English. Obsessed with commas and emotionally unavailable characters, she finds inspiration for her writing in her daily battles against energy companies, spiders, and heights.

Rach Macpherson (Editor & Social Media):

Rach is a writer with a love for mythology, fantasy and cosy romance. Always on the hunt for her next book boyfriend, you can usually find her surviving on caffeine, up a big hill or hunting for fairies at the bottom of her garden.

Giovanni Sebastian Cardillo (Editor):

Giovanni is a German-Italian writer who abandoned both of his native languages to write in what's left of the King's English. His prose and poetry are influenced by the shockingly mundane experiences and encounters he made while meandering across the globe.

Eleanor Grace (Editor & Graphic Designer):

Eleanor is a writer who switches literary genre as frequently as she changes her hair colour (read: often). Currently—though for how long we're not sure—she's trying to write the perfect villain and is meticulously plotting novels with colour-coded post-it notes.

Nicola Rose (Editor)

Nicola lives and writes in rural South Lanarkshire. She likes unusual stories about bodies and transformation and what it means to be alive at the same time as other humans. Her writing has appeared in *Gutter 27* and *New Writing Scotland 42*.

recommendations

*A selection of books recommended by our writers and the
GLYPH. team*

Moir McCallum

At Night All Blood Is Black by David Diop

P. W. Garrick

brown by Franck Pavloff

Fiona Nicol

Penance by Eliza Clark

Rach

Bookshops and Bonedust by Travis Baldree

Sofia

The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov

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