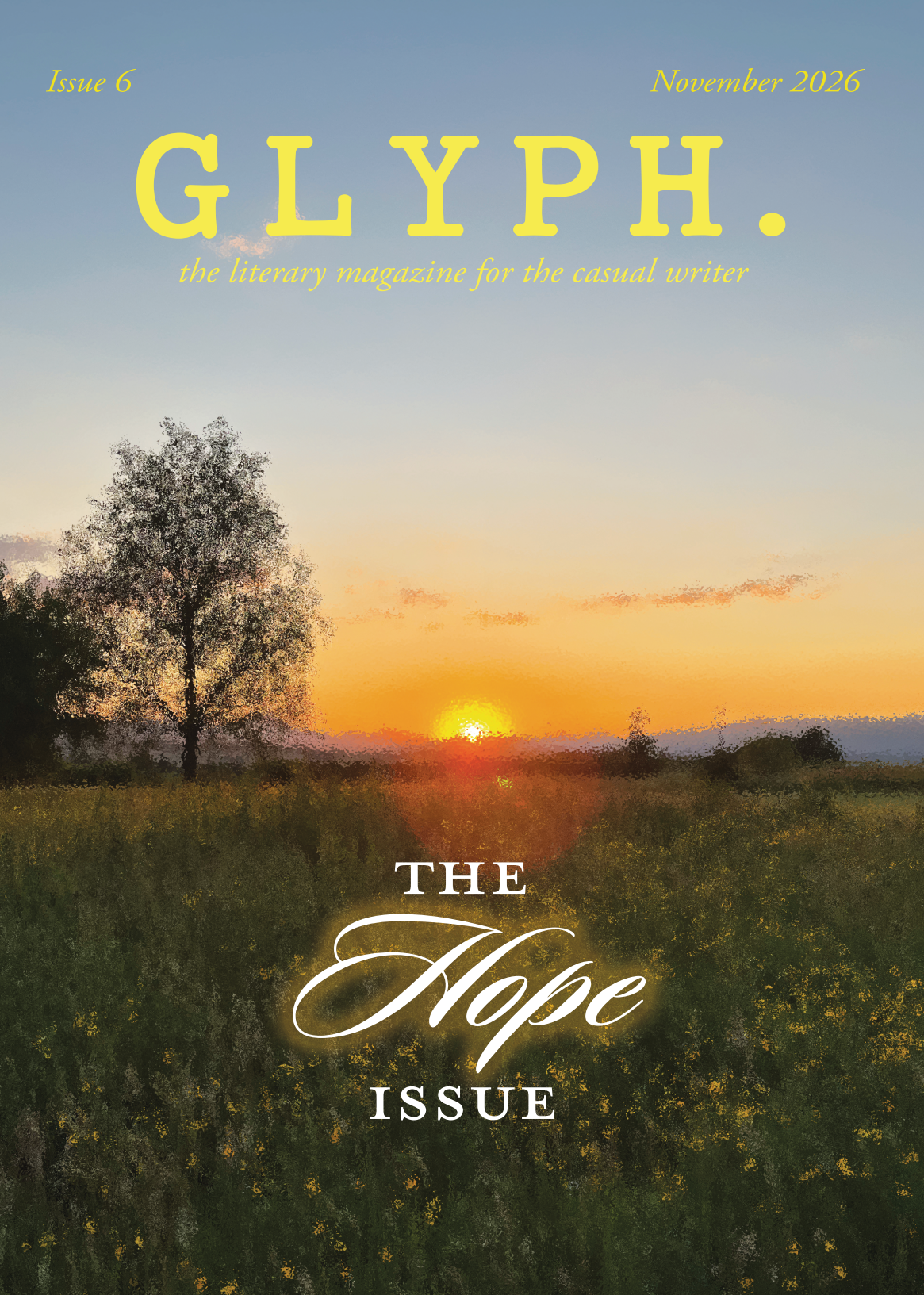
Issue 6 *November 2026*

GLYPH.

the literary magazine for the casual writer



THE *Hope* ISSUE

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The literary magazine for the casual writer.

Issue 6: hope

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ISSUE 6: HOPE

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Foreword.

Firstly, as always, GLYPH would like to thank our community for their continuing support over the last year. GLYPH is now almost three years old, and with six (and a half-ish) issues under our belt, we're so grateful that so many of you have entrusted your work and time to our little mag.

Secondly, we'd like to welcome you to Hope.

When I first started thinking about the theme for this issue, I knew I wanted to pick something more uplifting, particularly with it due to come out in the latter half of the year, when the evenings have more bite to them. It wasn't until I had a conversation with my husband at the pub one summer evening that I was able to give that feeling a name, and thus, GLYPH turned from Horror to Hope.

In a strange turn of events, crafting the Hope Issue came at an unexpectedly scary and difficult time. What initially began as an attempt to capture a bright positive feeling transformed into something deeper, and something completely unexpected. As so happens during challenging times it can be easy to feel alone in grief, whether that is caused by the loss of a loved one or loss in itself, but in reading and selecting the various pieces for this issue, I instead found comfort and solidarity in unexpected places. No two humans are the same, nor do they share the exact same

experiences, and I believe that's abundantly apparent from the breadth of stories within this issue. From managing grief after losing a loved one like in *Assembly* and *Before the Rush*, to the surprising connections with strangers that bring a little light to your life like those found in *The Evening Light*, to the joy in everyday occurrences like speaking to your family, as in *Steel Toes*, or curling up with your cat in *I Couldn't Name Why My Chest Felt Full*, even in just finding hope within a certain place and time, as in *Thermal Paper* and *Darulaman Road*, or perhaps even in the simplicity of finding hope again, like in *plant me a seed* and *The Light*.

In short, I was not alone.

We are not alone.

A lot of tears have been shed in the making of GLYPH's sixth issue—although I am happy to report that most of them have been happy ones. At the time of writing this, the festive season is almost upon us and what will be the most wonderful time of the year for many, can also be the worst for others.

Hope is fickle, like a flame flickering on a wick, it can be as easy to extinguish as it is to light. I can't presume to think that all the work contained within this issue will strengthen or dim the light in your life, but I can certainly hope that reading them brings you as much joy as it did for our team and that they may help you feel a little less alone.

The GLYPH team is looking forward to seeing what lies ahead in 2027, but most importantly to working again with our long-standing community and to the many more writers, poets, and artists we're hopefully yet to meet.

Rach

(Editor-in-Chief)

&

Team GLYPH.

Eleanor, Gio and Sofía

Plant Me A Seed

DUGALD KINVIG



When I die, and my body which has carried me far is now fit for so little more than compost that they'd be burying me anyway, I hope they also plant a seed on my grave. That way, I might live one more time, before I go for good, as a tree. I feel that existence would appeal to me by then, to be sedentary as I will likely have become accustomed, but to also be standing proud and tall again as I will likely have forgotten. How fine it must be to have leaves to catch the wind and drink the sun.

And when I die again and am sawn up, being rather more useful than I was the first time around, perhaps I will be part of a fire. A brief and energetic life lasting no more than an evening, touching others with warmth once again. Only to then float off as ash and fall on newly fertile ground. Perhaps to become many more trees.

The Light

MAHIR





The sun is a slow spill,
the dark stayed for a long time.
It sat like cold water in our shoes,
we forgot the shape of the morning,
we forgot how to speak without a sigh.
The year had teeth.

But a room cannot stay dark forever.
If you watch the wall long enough,
a tiny crack of yellow appears.
It is small like a pin,
but it grows.

Someone is offering a hand.
Not to pull you up too fast,
just to hold your fingers in the quiet
until your knees remember how to stand.
The monsters are just smoke now.

We are blowing them away
with one long breath.
The earth smells like fresh rain,
like the grass after a storm.
The old fears are melting into the soil.

Look at the wild green grass waking up.
We are walking out of the deep woods.
The air feels soft on our faces.
The sky is wide and open and clean.
We are finally in the light.

What The Bees Told

GEORGE PREW-STELL





'The Queen has died. We, um…we give thanks for her service, and…we wish her well. In whatever comes next.'

Telling the bees is an ancient tradition in beekeeping circles. The idea is to inform bees of the death of their master so that it won't come as a shock and they won't flee the hive or down tools or…honestly, I'm not actually sure what we're worried about happening.

I'm new to beekeeping. My job with the council lets me—requires me, in fact—to work from home, reading through endless applications and accepting or, more often, rejecting them as appropriate. The bees were an attempt to make the best use of working from home, to reconnect with something a bit more natural. I had a garden, wonder of wonders, so why not use it? I never realised when I started out that I was signing up to have such difficult conversations with them. But it was tradition, and, if I was their master, then surely the Queen was mine, and so the conversation had to be had. I had tried to remember the BBC's wording, but they seemed to be weirdly non-specific, like the Queen was an old dog they'd taken to the vet while we were at school. She was *gone*, sure, but even when they finally told us she was dead it didn't feel like they said *dead*, you know?

I didn't want that for my bees. I would tell them straight and clear. And now I have. And I think it went rather well.

The two little hives at the bottom of my garden keep on buzzing. There are no wails of grief, but there are no protest songs either, and there is something reassuring about all that. Through new heads of state, through global pandemics, through all the drama the world can throw at us, we all keep on working.

*

The first bee comes to me later that afternoon. She buzzes against my closed window and bumps against it, once, twice. I think she must have gotten lost, so I open the window a crack, letting the little fuzzy body in along with the wet September air. To my surprise, she makes straight for me, and I go still, suppressing a shiver as she buzzes up to my ear, six little legs clinging on hard.

To my even greater surprise, she clears a tiny throat. In a little voice, barely

more than a human whisper, she tells me, 'Scent of Honey has died. We give thanks for her service, and we wish her well in whatever comes next.'

I hear and feel nothing further, and it occurs to me that my little visitor is awaiting a response.

'...Thank you,' I say.

This seems to satisfy her, and she gives my ear a little squeeze as she takes off back out the open window.

I close it behind her and turn the radiator up.

What was *that*? The scent of honey has died? Is something wrong with the hives? Something bad enough that the bees had to come and *tell me*?

The apiarist forums never mentioned anything about this.

Maybe this whole business with the Queen has rattled them more than I thought? I determine to check on the hives as soon as I have finished evaluating the latest application.

I have not finished it by the time I hear another bumbling knock against my window. I open it, and, just the same as last time, but perhaps with a little more certainty, another little body alights on my ear and, in a tiny voice, says, 'Pollen Knowledge has died. We give thanks for her service, and we wish her well in what comes next.' That done, she buzzes away, and I close my laptop.

What is going on?

I take my beekeeping suit off the peg, pull it on, and, braving the misty September morning again, I check the hives. Nothing appears to be out of place. The hives are…well, hives of activity. The big buckets of honey at the bottom of each of the two hives are full and undisturbed, ready for winter when the bees, all huddled together around the queen for warmth, will be able to keep themselves fed until the winter comes, but it has been a largely warm autumn, and there are still plenty of workers floating in and out of the hives upon their business. All is well.

Until, as I walk back to the house, a bee latches onto the gauze of my veil and sits, refusing to move. Judging myself to be far enough away from the main hive, I relent and remove my veil. The bee, as I am growing to expect, immediately detaches itself and lands on my cheek, crawling over to my ear to say, 'Jelly has died. We give thanks—'

I actually find myself joining in this time, attempting not to jostle the bee as I whisper along to the rest of the mantra: '—for her service, and we wish her well in whatever comes next.'

This surprises the little bug on my cheek and she seems to freeze, as if wondering whether this sudden audience participation is quite proper.

I take advantage of her indecision.

'What did you say?' I ask.

This seems to startle her more. I feel her knead the flesh at the top of my jaw with anxious little steps.

'Um…' her little voice is trembling, 'Jelly. She has died. We thank her for—'

'Her work and we wish her well, of course, but who is, or was, Jelly?'

'Jelly was…' the bee pauses, seeming to reach for the right word, 'my hive-mate. In Hive 2. We worked together. She worked hard, and we thank her for it, and—'

'Absolutely, right,' I break in again, trying to figure out a way to ask my next question without sounding rude. 'But why…why are you telling me?'

I fear I failed.

'It is her death notice,' the little voice explains, growing louder, more fervent, a bona fide mumble now. 'You taught us this morning. We did not know we were supposed to tell each other when someone died.'

A buzz. A little, furry pressure against my other ear. 'First Out The Hive has died. We give thanks…' The first bee and I join in with the ending of the notice, and the new bee bumbles back to the hive.

'I see,' I say, addressing the first bee again. 'But I only did that for The Queen. You understand.'

'I understand what?' The voice is more subdued now, and, now that I'm catching on to the bee naming conventions, I realise that she might have known First Out the Hive.

'You understand that the Queen is…was…particularly important?'

'Why?'

'Because The Queen was…The Queen!' I say, shaking my head in disbelief

for a moment before I remember that this might be rather inconsiderate of my guest, 'Like your queen.'

'*We* have a *queen*?'

'Yes! Of course you have a queen, you're a hive! She's the big one. You all feed her? She laid all your eggs? Soon you'll all bundle around her and keep her warm for the winter?'

'Oh!' Laughs the bee, 'Mum! Yes, of course, we'll tell you when she dies, too.'

'Right,' I say, 'but you see that she's particularly important? Because of who she is? And that's the same as The Queen I told you about.'

'Ah,' says the Bee, 'like Pollen Knowledge. She was important because of who she was. She was Pollen Knowledge. And like First Out The Hive. And like me!'

The bee seems quite pleased with this realisation, and, a skip in her step, she takes off once more, little wings tickling my cheek as she leaves.

What a way to learn that all bees are queens.

This knowledge does not help the situation.

For the next few days my work is interrupted by a constant succession of little buzzy death notices:

'Larva Keeper has died. We give thanks for her service, and we wish her well in whatever comes next.'

'Pollen Face has died. We give thanks for his service, and we wish him well—'

'Fine Dancer has died. We give thanks for her service, and-'

'Long Legs has died—'

'Last To Sting has died—'

'Honey Gather has died—'

'Dog Tangle—'

'Pride Of The Hive—'

'I am dying! We give thanks for my service and we wish me well in whatever comes next.'

This last is accompanied by a particularly weak grip on my ear, and I catch

the bee in one hand as her legs fail. I bring her over to the kitchen table and drip a couple of drops of sugar water by her mandibles. After a minute or two she perks up and happily bumbles off.

After a week or two of this, I even start hearing other accents, different formulations.

'Daisy Nester has died. She will be remembered.'

'Tattered Wings has died. I'm shocked her service was this long.'

'Water Lover has died. I'm sure you can guess how.'

I ask this last bee which hive Water Lover was from.

'None of yours, big'un.'

'What?'

'Water Lover was a free bee, like me, not one of your pets. Your bees are good company, though, and they always find the best flowers.'

'I'm sorry, so why are you telling me—?'

'You're the one we tell about deaths.' The voice has a shrug in it, 'That's what I heard, anyway. Your bees got the word out that that's what we're doing now so here I am, doing it.'

This really seems a step too far. I feel responsible for my bees and their sudden obsession with memorialising their dead, having accidentally started the whole thing, but I really can't risk becoming the obituaries section for an entire species.

The next bee to come by is one of mine. When she latches on, I listen politely to the notice, then ask her to stay as I walk to the hives. Once there, I address them all, like I did on the first day, but this time with a little emissary hanging like a big, furry earring.

'Hello, bees. I commend you all for your diligence in bringing me your notices, but I fear it is becoming too heavy a burden, for us both. I need to work, and you need to hunker down for winter. You must have noticed the weather turning and you can't risk coming out to tell me every time one of you…well, every time there is a death. You'll all freeze!'

The hives buzz, contemplatively, I think. A whisper in my ear.

'What do you suggest we do?'

I haven't really thought about that. Ideally, I'd suggest that they stop. But I can hardly suggest that they stop memorialising their dead, even if I'm responsible for them starting it.

'Um…' I say, trying to buy time, until, for once, I get a good idea from work. 'How about a daily update?' Hearing it out loud it still makes sense, so I repeat it more firmly, 'A daily update. At the beginning of each day, one of you will notify me of all the bees who died the day before. One bee won't bring the temperature of the hive down too much, and I'll keep a pot of honey available for the messenger so that they can refuel before they head back.' The hives are quiet as the bees think about this, and I start to wonder again if I have offended my bees.

Then, there is a little squeeze at my ear.

'And so we shall.'

And so they do. Day after day, as the autumn wears into winter, I start my day by opening the window a crack and receiving the daily update:

'223 hivemates died yesterday. We thank them all for their service, and we wish them well in what comes next. The names of the dead are…'

'196 hivemates died yesterday—'

'215 hivemates—'

'182—'

'217—'

'352—'

This update-bearer needs a little honey just to get through her entire list. She takes it quietly and then stoically returns to the rollcall.

This is a better system. For me, and, I'm sure, for the bees. Still, though, the… morbidity of all this, day after day begins to weigh on me. My happy little hives. How did they end up so focused on death? It's winter, sure, we all feel that way and the bees maybe have more reason to than most, but still this all feels a bit much.

One day near Christmas, I receive the latest death report over my morning porridge, sweetened with the same honey I offer to the messenger after her duty is dispensed. She takes it gratefully, but still bumbles back, seeming dazed and numb in the cold air, so much so that I worry she might not even make it back. Right

there I make a decision. I begin to don my suit, then think better of it. The bees and I have a bond of trust by now. Instead, I pull on my thick winter coat and brave the same freezing morning my little messenger has just flown through to address the hives once more.

Raising my voice, and assuming again that strange formal tone I always use when addressing the bees, I say, 'Bees! Thank you for so dutifully reporting to me throughout the cold winter mornings. But we cannot keep going on like this. You need to stay warm, stay in the hive. I've left you with enough honey to survive the winter, just stay cosied up. Some of you will die. Some of us die too, out here, out in the cold outside the hive. But you can't always focus on that. *You're* alive! Every one of you, hearing me! Isn't that wonderful?' I listen for any response, but the hives are silent. Suddenly I worry that they aren't alive. The daily updates have been returning normal daily numbers of bee deaths for hives like mine, but I still can't help fearing that, daily, by hundreds, the hives have been emptying and now it is only that messenger I met this morning left. I resist the temptation to tap a hive, get some answering buzz. It seems beneath the relationship we have now and I don't want anyone alive in there using up any energy unnecessarily. Instead, I wrap up my speech.

'That's…that's all,' I finish. 'I won't bother you while you're keeping warm. But I'll see you all again in spring. Stay warm, sleep well, and…well. Keep alive, I suppose.'

I stay, waiting a final few minutes for any answering buzz, another little fuzzy emissary, something. But there is nothing. I return inside, hang up my coat, and, like my charges, I do everything I can to store up the warmth in my little home.

*

That is my last communication with the bees for a long time. They spend the winter bundled around their mum like little flying penguins, while I assess application after application, laptop resting on my knees and back against the radiator. I worry about them often—are they OK? Did I offend them? How many more have died?

Lacking the updates, I keep fearing the worst. All through Christmas Day, New Year, that last question vibrates around my head, which does not put me in the state of tranquility needed to deal with my distant relatives. It continues through the lonely months of January and into back-to-business February.

I finally get my answers one morning early in March. The sun is out, and, for the first time in months, I look out my window and I see bugs flying about. It is time.

I leave my suit on the peg and trek out to the hives in just a t-shirt and jeans—It really is a glorious morning. Nevertheless, I approach the hives with some trepidation, fearing the worst.

As I near the hives, I see a couple of little bodies bumbling lazily toward the first blooms. They seem to hurry back to the hives at the sight of me. Some haven't died then! That's a good start.

I stand, looking at the hives, and clear my throat.

'Um…bees?'

There is a buzzing. Then a rumbling. Then, a swarm. Thousands of little furry bodies shoot out of the hives and alight on me, blanketing me. The heat of all their legs and wings is so intense that for a moment I don't hear it, but they are all, each and every one of them, giving their report, repeating, overlapping, becoming one single message:

'I'm alive.'

'I'm alive.'

'I'maliveImaliveImaliveImaliveImaliveImaliveImali—'

'I'M ALIVE!'

And, as ever, their reports delivered, they each bumble off to greet the new day and to get to their work each their own separate ways.

As the final bees deliver their message, detach, and leave, I raise my own voice, loud enough to reach each and every one of those little survivors off to explore the springtime.

'I'm alive!'

And do you know what? I think I just might be.

Thermal Paper

ELEANOR HARPER





There is no doubt I love you,
down to the marrow of my ribcage.
Even when I hug my resentment,
and spit your name like a venom.
Jump the grey line one direction,
just to walk myself back again.
Chase our ghosts to old favourites;
close, but so far away from it.
It ain't over, till it's over.
Is it ever really over?
It isn't southern California,
so maybe it's okay if it rains.
It's not a sadness exactly,
yet the smile sits wrong on my face.
Your arms are cold and thin,
but the best I've ever been held with.
Lithium stars flick with reckoning:
there's a last time for everything.
They're cutting paper tickets,
and it's all already different.

I am not the city I live in. I can end
and have a beginning.

Darulaman Road

A PARFITT



The rubble was already several years old when I arrived,
those were homes, here were streets
you could see delineation of city grids and post codes
underneath the heaps of brick
and thin ferrous trees like fossilised screams,
writhing, contorted,
poked out of pillars of broken concrete.

I had cycled there to see the palace
which sits on the horizon,
not yet restored,
haunting the south of the city

Darulaman Road is long and flat
and so were the city blocks
that once branched out
to the East and West of this,
the district's main road

make-shift shops and street-seller's carts
thinned out, grew sparse
and then just stopped, the further along I went—
daily life gave way to a devastation
of unmistakable origin
—the same place pounded again and again,
day after day,
to a plan—

Nature is not this meticulous.

and now, they led there, these nests of lives,
reduced to piles, like white-washed Lego,
like a petulant child had vented its wrath
using a grown-up's weapons

around the corner from my house
the plaster on walls was pebble-dashed with bullet holes
and imagined echoes of past gun battles
would ghost into your mind
if you let them.

like the life you find under over-turned stones
you'd catch glimpses of humans making lives among ruins,
in the open-front doll's house of bombed-out buildings,
stringing up blankets in place of curtains and
instead of street-facing walls

that was twenty and some years ago.
Today the Palace remains.
in green formal gardens
two decades of trees stand
shading the paths from the sun

a fabric-scrap-quilt of suburban gardens
mosaic the roadside on its route to the city
the Kabul River trickles on like time;
Babur dwells in a paradise of white marble;
things can be rebuilt

Before The Rush

JOHN BARRETT LEE





Rosa loves the hour before seven, when the town breathes softly as if waking from sleep, pavements rain-washed and gleaming from the street sweeper's rounds. The day feels clean and unused. There's no one around to ask if she's happy or how she's coping.

In the kitchen of Café Marrone, she's prepping for lunchtime service. It's small but serviceable, with just enough room for her sous-chef Marta to squeeze in alongside her. Upstairs is the little flat she lives in; her whole life stacked in this end-of-terrace shopfront. Sometimes the scent of braising ragù rises through the floorboards, but she never minds. It's like living inside her own memories.

Soon, Giorgio the veg man will arrive, his van loaded with knobbly lemons and fennel still dusted with red Tuscan earth. Later, Luca the deli man will turn up with cured meats and cheeses, from milky mozzarella to crumbly pecorino. But for now, she's alone in the world she's created. Morning sunshine filters through the rosemary and bay on the windowsill, glinting off the stainless steel worktops.

A stock pot simmers, perfuming the air with parsley and peppercorns. It's made from her grandfather's recipes, carefully written in an old notebook smudged with his fingerprints. From the small sash window comes the freshness of earlier rain, the April air still holding a chill.

On the spice shelf, a radio plays Classic FM. Beneath, on the counter, rest three corn-yellow balls of pasta dough. She always makes it fresh. It's a matter of principle—of obsession, really. Soon, she'll stretch it into tagliatelle and stuffed pasta—the squash ravioli in sage butter always sells out. Time slips by as she moves through tasks she's repeated a hundred times. Alone, but steady. Focused. For now, it feels like control.

Rosa often marvels at how many Italians live in Wales, even in this sleepy corner. Many, like her family, came from Abruzzo—a rugged region of mountains and shepherds' trails. Her grandfather Francesco, a wartime POW, stayed after the war—there was nothing to return to but ruins and poverty. He built a life and learned to love the rain.

Perhaps it was the Preseli Hills that called to him, purple with heather, bristling with gorse. He would tramp the moorland with a shotgun, bringing back rabbits for the pot, or disappear for hours hunting mushrooms as he once had in

the Maiella mountains. Rosa remembered him returning with mud on his boots, his wax-jacket pockets stuffed with wild herbs he claimed only grew in the hills. Had this stony and windswept landscape given him back a piece of his homeland? It's too late to ask now—he died when she was seventeen, an age when identity barely crossed her mind. Now, at thirty-four, she pours her energy into recapturing her roots in this sanctuary she's created. She tells herself she's continuing both the family tradition and that of all the Italian immigrants who opened cafés across South Wales.

With a floury hand, Rosa turns up the radio. She's caught the opening of *Un bel dì, vedremo* by Puccini—her mother's favourite. She believes Italian music makes her cooking better, foolish as that sounds. As she breaks eggs into a well of mashed potato for the gnocchi, she begins to sing along. She's no Renée Fleming, but no one can hear her.

Her singing is cut short by a knock at the kitchen door. Assuming it's Giorgio or Luca, she wipes her hands and turns down the volume. Glancing at the clock, she sees it's just before eight. She turns—and the handsome face at the glass makes her suddenly self-conscious. No make-up, old Kasabian T-shirt, Crocs, chef's trousers, and a floury apron sitting awkwardly on her hips. She wouldn't worry with Giorgio or Luca—they'd tell her she was *bellissima* in a sack.

Brushing the sweat-damp hair from her forehead, she opens the door. The man is wearing football shorts, trainers, and an old T-shirt—scruffy enough to make her feel better about the state she's in. Oddly, he's out of breath and carrying a boxed cake and a supermarket bouquet.

'Hello,' he says. 'Are you the chef?'

Rosa isn't sure if it's rhetorical, or if he thinks she always dresses this way.

'I am indeed,' she says brightly—then cringes. 'Uh, can I help you?'

He's a foot taller than Rosa and very lean—which makes her feel unfairly like a ball of mozzarella. His dark curls are clipped short.

He stoops under the doorframe. 'I've booked a table for tonight,' he explains, straightening up. 'For four. It's my mum's birthday, and I thought I'd drop these off after my run.' He nods at the cake and flowers. 'I realise I look ridiculous. They've been slowing me down since Tesco.'

Rosa smiles at the absurd but romantic image, feeling mildly disappointed the gifts aren't for her.

'No problem,' she says. 'Let me just make a note. Those flowers need water, or they'll be dead by dinnertime. I'll take care of that.'

She takes the reservation book down from a shelf and finds today's date.

'The name?' she asks, pulling a pen from her apron pocket.

He sets the cake and bouquet on the pass and offers his hand. 'I'm forgetting my manners—Giuseppe.'

As they shake, a warmth quickens in her chest—the familiar comfort of shared Italian heritage, mixed with something else.

'I mean your surname. The name the table's under.'

'Oh, it's under Jones. Eight o'clock.'

'Jones?' Rosa repeats, the Welsh name incongruous. 'Giuseppe Jones?'

He shrugs and grimaces. 'It happens with an Italian mum and a Welsh dad.'

Rosa laughs. 'I know how you feel. I used to be Rosalina Rees. Can you imagine? I changed to mum's surname when my father ran off.'

Giuseppe shifts, his smile faltering.

God, Rosa thinks. *Oversharing again—better change the subject*. She puts a hand on the cake box. 'Do you need candles? I'm sure there are some half-melted ones in a drawer.'

'No, no.' He waves a hand. 'I've been organised, for once.' Still flustered, he draws a breath. 'Is this Café Marrone connected to the old one on Bridge Street?'

Rosa looks up from scribbling in the book. 'It is—but I'm surprised you remember it. My grandad owned it. It closed nearly twenty years ago.'

'Maybe I'm older than I look.'

Rosa pegged him at twenty-five, but as she looks more closely, she sees the beginnings of crow's feet around his eyes, and a dusting of grey at the temples.

He smiles. 'You don't remember me, do you, Rosa? I'll be honest—I wasn't sure it was you at first.'

There's something familiar about his features, but she can't place him. 'I'm sorry.' She rubs her hands together. 'I know your face, but…' she trails off, colour

rising in her cheeks. She fiddles with her apron, suddenly aware that she's alone in the kitchen with a strange man.

He smiles and nods. 'Don't worry. It was a long time ago. You remember a kid they called Gypsy Jones who worked Saturdays in the old café?'

Rosa thinks for a moment. She blinks hard. Yes. Of course. The eyes. She should have clocked them earlier—soft, always watching her. She pictures a mumbling, tubby kid with braces helping in the café. He called her grandad Nonno Frank. Fond of the boy, he had taken him under his wing, as he often did with waifs and strays.

'You're Gypsy Jones.'

Giuseppe laughs. 'No one calls me that anymore. I go by Beppe now. And fortunately, I've shed the acne and puppy fat.'

Rosa is shocked. Poor Giuseppe—most of the kids in Haverfordwest couldn't speak proper English, let alone Italian, and it had seemed a good laugh to mispronounce his name. Gypsy Jones. She'd been one of the culprits. He used to gaze at her like she held the moon, but she paid him no notice at all. Once, he'd handed her a Valentine's card—one of those padded, over-the-top ones with satin fabric, a ribbon rose, and gold script that read *I've Only Got Eyes For You*. It must have cost a chunk of his wages.

She'd opened it on her break, out of sight, and something about it—his careful handwriting, the sheer earnestness—had moved her. But she never said anything. She'd smiled vaguely when he brought out drinks, pretending nothing had happened. If that wasn't cruelty, it was its quieter cousin: carelessness.

Embarrassment blooms, heat spilling from her cheeks down her neck. She suddenly feels compelled to apologise for her bad behaviour.

'Sorry we called you Gypsy,' she says, staring at the tiled floor. 'It was unkind, and I was a silly teen—hormones running riot, trying to fit in, you know. And I'm sorry I didn't thank you for the card. It was beautiful. The biggest one I've ever got.'

Giuseppe leans against the sink. 'I'm not here for an apology,' he says softly, then hesitates—as if weighing something. 'To be honest, I was a walking cringe back then. Blushing, braces, *always in the bloody way*—as Nonno used to say when

he was in a grump.'

'You're letting me off lightly. You were a sweet kid. I was a cow.'

He glances at her sideways, a teasing smile on his lips. 'Quite a pretty cow.'

Rosa chuckles to hide her awkwardness—both at the sting of how she used to be, and a dart of joy at the backhanded compliment. To change the subject, she asks, 'When did you move back?'

'A few weeks ago. And when I heard the laundrette had turned into Café Marrone, I had to see for myself if it was one and the same. I've got happy memories of the old place—Nonno was good to me, and I was gutted when it went under. I heard he died soon after.'

'It broke his heart,' Rosa says. 'He was eighty-two, but the café gave him a reason to get up in the morning.'

'Fifty years of work.' Giuseppe shakes his head. 'A lot of places went to the wall in 2008—people couldn't make ends meet, let alone pay for frothy coffees.'

He looks around the kitchen. 'But it's great to see you've resurrected it. Smells delicious.'

Rosa smiles, though she knows her Café Marrone is different. More of a restaurant, really. But the feeling is the same—warmth, care, food that lingers in the eating and the memory. That is what she wants to keep.

Giuseppe nods toward the shelf above the prep counter, lined with Italian cookbooks—Hazan, Artusi, Carluccio, Jamie Oliver—a row of spines leaning together. 'It's funny,' he says. 'I remember you swearing you'd rather eat a Pot Noodle than another plate of spaghetti.'

Rosa laughs, shaking her head. 'I'd never accuse my teenage self of having taste.'

'So, what happened?'

'Lockdown happened. And I went down the rabbit hole—Italian grannies on YouTube, late-night eBay bids on cookbooks and vintage gadgets.'

'Better than staying up till three watching videos of old Nintendo games.'

She arches an eyebrow. 'You haven't changed, then—your thumbs were glued to that Game Boy thing.'

'I'm still a geek. I didn't plough my life savings into a video game shop,

though.'

'I guess my geeky hobby turned into an obsession. Nonno's notebooks were still there, boxed up in Mum's attic with the remnants of the café. Then, when Mum died…I don't know. It was the only thing that made sense.'

Giuseppe's eyes narrowed. 'Jeez, I'm sorry, Rosa. I didn't know.'

He hesitates, his voice softening. 'She was a kind woman. I remember her giving me a lift home more than once, when I missed the bus.'

Rosa flinches, just barely, as if the mention touched a bruise. 'It wasn't just losing her,' she says quietly, her voice catching, 'but how we lost her. Alone, behind glass, no one holding her hand. You always think you'll have time to say all the things you wanted to say, and then…suddenly it's gone.'

Giuseppe nods and rubs his stubble. He clears his throat. 'You're right—loss strips everything back. It was during lockdown that I realised I was always in a rush—striving, working sixty hours a week. I felt the pull of Pembrokeshire and a different life.'

'And I couldn't go back to working in the bank after that,' Rosa says. 'Cooking was the only thing that got me out of bed.'

'Mum left me a little money—enough to take a year off for catering college and pay the deposit on this place—but more than that, she left me with this feeling that I had to carry something on.'

Giuseppe pauses. 'All I can say is, good luck. I'm looking forward to sampling your cooking. Is your ice cream as good as Nonno's?'

'Same recipe,' Rosa says proudly.

'Never.'

'It is. He wrote all his recipes in notebooks, and I dug them out after Mum died.'

'How about your coffee?' Giuseppe asks. 'Nonno's was the best.' His eyes sparkle like a boy's. 'I'll never forget that ancient coffee machine,' he says. 'The way it used to grumble and hiss. Do you remember how it used to steam up the mirrors and make all the glasses rattle? Only Nonno knew how to use it.'

'I know.' Rosa hugs herself tightly. 'And he always gave sweets and chocolate to the kids. It drove my granny up the wall. "You'll put us out of business, Frank,"

she used to say. In the end, it was the bloody recession that did that.'

Rosa finds that the emotion is getting to her. Giuseppe is stirring up memories she hadn't realised she buried—of the shallow, disinterested kid she used to be, trying to shrug off the roots she now cradles like freshly cut pasta. Poor old Nonno. She called him Gramps. It felt easier, safer, less foreign. Yet a gawky kid they called Gypsy, who wasn't even his grandson, had managed to say Nonno—and mean it.

Giuseppe's face is soft now with something like longing—but not for her. Not anymore. It is a quieter ache, steadier, aimed at the same lost time they'd grown out of too fast. He doesn't need her attention. He simply offers his presence, and that feels like enough.

Rosa touches his arm. She doesn't usually eat with customers; doesn't invite anyone in. But she didn't want him to leave—not yet. 'Come on, Beppe,' she says, her voice wobbling. 'Grab two chairs from the restaurant. We're having ice cream for breakfast.' Looking upwards, she adds, 'Nonno would approve.'

While Giuseppe heads out for the chairs, Rosa puts the supermarket flowers in a bucket under the counter. On the pass, the boxed cake sits quietly, beading with condensation on its plastic window. She switches on the sleek new Gaggia espresso machine and wonders what Nonno would make of its polished chrome and push-button ease, compared to the growling beast only he could tame. Next, she bends to fetch the ice cream from the chest freezer. She pries the lid off the stracciatella and begins to scoop it into two glass sundae dishes—the ones her mother rescued from the fire sale when the original café closed.

From the front of house comes the clatter of a chair tipping over, followed by a muted 'Damn.' Rosa smiles to herself. *Still that clumsy boy. Somehow still the same.*

As she straightens, her eyes drift to the corkboard above the prep counter, cluttered with old Polaroid photos.

One she hasn't noticed before, bleached almost to nothing by the sun, shows her grandfather and a chubby boy with braces, both laughing behind the Café Marrone counter. Frank's hands are on the boy's shoulders. The camera caught them just as they burst into laughter—mouths open, eyes creased, joy spilling

out—so ordinary, yet blazing with the knowledge that time was already slipping past, unnoticed until it's out of reach.

Beside it is another photo—her, maybe sixteen, in her apron and school tie, flashing a peace sign at the lens. She looks radiant, carefree, alive. Rosa studies her own face, caught in a moment so humdrum she hadn't thought to treasure. Was she being too hard on herself? Teenagers weren't supposed to treasure moments. They were meant to move through them.

Looking now, her breath catches in her chest. Giuseppe had belonged, even then—more than she did. He called her grandfather Nonno and meant it. And there they were: captured in a scene so ordinary, she hadn't realised it was precious. Maybe they hadn't known it, either.

She rests a finger on her grandfather's face. There he was—Francesco in Abruzzo, Frank in Wales, Nonno in old age, Gramps to her. And there too was Giuseppe, who had been Gypsy as a boy, then Beppe as a man. Rosalina, who pared herself back to Rose for a time, then in the end embraced Rosa. And her surname, reclaimed: Marrone. In English, Brown. So ordinary it might be overlooked, yet it had been theirs: earthy, steady, the colour of bread crust, of espresso crema and chestnut shells, the mud on Nonno's boots. The name of a family, and of a place where people felt at home. She murmurs it: *Marrone. Rosa Marrone.*

Names aren't just names, she thinks—they are doors you walk through on the way to yourself, and sometimes, if you're lucky, back towards home. She rests her dough-crusted fingers on the scuffed freezer lid, the old machine humming. Her hand lingers, as if touching something sacred.

On the counter, the ice cream is beginning to melt. She doesn't mind. There is still time, the day outside as yet untouched. From the open window comes a gust of April breeze, as brisk and fresh as if blown down from the moorland. The new machine answers with a small hiss—a last quiet breath before the rush.

Assembly

CLAIRE SIMPSON





Sitting cross-legged on my patio with a bag full of screws, I sent you a message I knew you'd never read. *Help, I need your brains and your brawn.* The irony wouldn't be lost on you. You were always an ectomorph with limbs like boiled spaghetti.

I hadn't expected to take on furniture assembly today. For six days in a row, I woke up to sunlight filtering through the blinds. I got tired of missing it. Just like I was tired of eating out of the freezer. And tired of forgetting to get dressed. I was tired of feeling tired.

I wanted to feel summer's glow again, so I ripped open the cardboard box with your Stanley knife. We used to laugh at people who got excited about garden furniture until we got the keys to our house, and our spare weekends became filled with trips to garden centres.

You chose this patio set because it had an 84% customer score on *Which*. I wanted it because it had stripy cushions, which made me think of the Italian Riviera. We forgot to consider the complexity of the assembly.

I wasn't supposed to build it alone.

I want someone to pat me on the back for finally getting it out of the box, a year after we chose it together. I feel an urge to take a picture of all the bits and send it to my dad. You'd tell me to bloody get on with it. You always hated my ability to procrastinate.

I think I have a decent excuse this time.

Remember, when we lived on the 11th floor of that high-rise in Tower Hamlets? We had a little balcony and we'd sit on fold-up chairs from Ikea and drink beer straight from the can. We were always complaining about our lives. The crazy neighbour who held techno parties at 5am. The stairwell that stank of piss.

We couldn't wait to get away from there, but those times were some of the happiest of my life. Chatting shit with you. Fantasising about the future. Sometimes life is better inside your own head.

After you died, people were queuing up to help. *Let me know if I can do anything.* It was all anyone had to say. I didn't know how to micro-manage their support, so I let tasks pile up. That leaky tap. A council parking notice. Raw chicken turning rancid in the fridge.

The requests to help dry up, replaced by invites to other people's life events. You say no, and those stop too. Did someone forget to tell me there was an expiry date for grief? I knew I'd surpassed the deadline when a colleague sent me a link to a dating website.

So, here I am kneeling on concrete turning an Allen key into a stubborn screw. I can hear your voice: *Righty, tighty, lefty Lucy.* But your spaghetti arms can't save me now.

I don't cry when I screw the legs on the wrong way round.

I don't cry when I twinge my back turning the whole goddam thing over.

I don't cry when I can't find the missing screw at 11pm.

I still don't cry when I finally sit on the garden sofa I built alone, and snap the ring pull on a beer can, as a pearly moth flutters past, glowing in the dark.

Steel Toes

SOPHIE RUTH





I took the job with my dad
the summer after uni,
because it paid,
and I couldn't bear
another Tuesday in bed.

Unanchored,
scrubbing mildew from patios.
Unanchored,
pressure washing the vestry.

over humdrum and drone
Dad hummed Van Morrison,
and handed me the familiarity
of extension cords.

My first girlfriend
used to text while I grafted
what are you wearing?
Steel toes, love. x

And we didn't talk about it.
The queerness.
It hung quiet between us
like mist on stone.

Still, he made me tea.
with two sugars
and asked if I wanted Greggs for lunch.

That's how love sounds,
where we're from.

The Evening Light

DEEMER CAMILLERI



He had lived in the flat for eleven years and still did not know the name of the man upstairs. He knew when the man got out of bed. He knew when he showered. Every Sunday morning, the man apparently helped someone move the same wardrobe. He knew the woman two doors down had a small dog that barked at delivery drivers but ignored everyone else. He knew which neighbour put glass in the wrong recycling bin. He knew the side gate never closed properly unless you lifted it first.

Names never seemed necessary. People came and went. Doors opened. Doors shut. Footsteps passed along the corridor and disappeared into other lives. At forty-five, his own life had become difficult to describe. He worked. He came home. He ate something. He slept. Most days, that was enough. On the days when it was not, he did the same things anyway.

That evening, the kettle clicked off as he was taking his coat into the bedroom. By the time he returned, the kitchen window had steamed slightly at the bottom. The plant on the sill had been dying for months. Every Sunday he watered it. Neither of them seemed to be making much progress. He poured the water into his mug and looked outside. The lamp was already on.

It stood in the window of a flat across the courtyard. An old thing, unlike the electric lights around it. Its glow was yellow and uneven, and every few seconds the flame gave a faint twitch.

He had first noticed it months earlier when a bird flew into his kitchen. There had been wings, a knocked-over spoon and several frantic seconds in which both of them wanted the other gone. He opened the window as far as it would go and waved a tea towel until the bird finally found its way out. That was when he saw the lamp.

It had been there before, of course. He must have looked towards that window hundreds of times without seeing it.

After that, he noticed it most evenings. Not always. Sometimes he made his tea and sat down without going near the window. Sometimes he worked late or stopped at the supermarket on the way home. Once he spent an entire week barely looking outside at all. Still, the lamp was there often enough to become familiar.

It was not especially beautiful. The metal base had gone dark with age and

the glass was slightly cloudy. It leaned a little to one side, although that may have been the windowsill. There were no curtains or blinds in the flat, which made it more obvious. It stood alone against the darker room behind it, glowing in the same place each evening.

He never saw who lit it. Now and then, something moved in the background. A shoulder, a hand...the outline of somebody passing from one side of the room to the other. Once, a figure stopped beside the lamp and adjusted the wick. That was all.

Some people become part of your life long before they become part of your thoughts.

On Monday, the lamp appeared shortly after seven. Tuesday, a little earlier. Wednesday, just as rain began tapping against the glass. By Thursday, he was late home. A meeting had overrun because nobody wanted to make the decision they had arranged the meeting to make. Afterwards, one of his colleagues suggested a drink. He almost said yes, then remembered he did not particularly like the colleague and went home instead.

It was nearly nine when he entered the flat. He dropped his keys into the bowl by the door and stood for a moment without taking off his coat. The place had the cold, untouched feeling it always had when he returned late.

He turned on the kitchen light. Across the courtyard, the lamp was still burning. He stayed at the window longer than usual, the mug warming his hands. A few minutes later, the lamp went out.

*

Winter arrived without much ceremony.

The mornings grew darker. The evenings began before the working day had properly ended. By the time he got home, most of the windows around the courtyard were lit. Televisions flashed against walls. People crossed rooms carrying plates. Shadows bent over tables and disappeared.

The lamp kept its own kind of company. Its light did not fill the room. It gathered close to itself. Sometimes he imagined an old book beneath it. Sometimes

a pair of hands sewing. Once, for no particular reason, he pictured somebody sitting beside it with the radio on, listening to a programme they had followed for years.

He knew these thoughts were inventions but he preferred them to the truth, which was that he knew nothing.

*

Christmas came.

At work, someone asked, 'Going anywhere for Christmas?'

'No.'

'Lucky you.'

Neither of them believed it.

He accepted an invitation to the office meal because refusing would have required a better excuse than he had. The restaurant was crowded and loud. Everyone talked about travelling home, seeing parents, buying presents for children or trying not to argue with siblings. On the way back, he bought a bottle of wine he did not really want.

The courtyard was quiet when he arrived. Small coloured lights hung in several windows. A paper star glowed above one doorway. Somewhere nearby, people were laughing. The old lamp was on.

For a moment, he thought he saw a person sitting beside it. He lifted his hand. It was barely a wave. More of a movement that had not yet decided what it was. The figure did not respond. He lowered his hand and opened the wine.

By January, the decorations had gone and the windows returned to normal. He began checking for the lamp before he took off his coat. He did not admit this to himself. There was no need. It was simply where his eyes went.

Some evenings it was already lit. On others, he waited. He would make his tea, wipe the counter, open the fridge without wanting anything and glance outside again. Sooner or later, the light appeared. Then the evening could begin.

He sometimes wondered whether the person behind that window ever noticed his. Probably not. His kitchen was like every other kitchen. White light. Cheap cupboards. A plant on the sill that had been dying for months but refused to

finish the job. There was nothing worth noticing.

One Thursday, he was later than usual again. The train stopped between stations and stayed there while a calm voice apologised for a delay nobody could justify. Around him, passengers stared at their phones. A child began to cry. Someone sighed loudly every few minutes, as though reminding the rest of the carriage that he was suffering more than they were. By the time the train moved, his phone battery was almost dead.

He reached home after ten. The lamp was still on. He stood in the dark kitchen and looked at it before switching on his own light.

Almost immediately, the flame opposite dipped. Then it disappeared. Perhaps the person had simply gone to bed. Still, he smiled.

*

Spring returned slowly. A colleague left. Someone new took her desk. The upstairs neighbour stopped moving the wardrobe on Sundays, which was almost unsettling. The lamp continued.

Then, one Tuesday, it did not appear. At half past seven, the window was dark. At eight, it was still dark.

He made tea and sat on the sofa. Ten minutes later, he returned to the kitchen. Nothing. He told himself the person had gone out. People were allowed to go out.

At nine, he checked again. The empty window looked wrong. Not threatening. Just unfinished. He went to bed earlier than usual but slept badly.

On Wednesday evening, the window remained dark. He considered several ordinary explanations. A broken lamp. A visit to family. A holiday. Perhaps the person had simply grown tired of lighting it. Habits ended. There was nothing unusual about that.

Thursday came. He worked late, although nobody had asked him to. When he got home, the opposite window was dark. He left his own kitchen light on while he showered.

On Friday morning, he looked across before leaving for work. In daylight,

the flat seemed smaller than he had imagined. The room behind the window was plain. A chair stood near the glass. There was a little table beside it and something folded over the back. No movement.

He thought of knocking on the door. The idea embarrassed him. What would he say? Hello. I live opposite. I have been watching your lamp. He left for work.

The removal van arrived on Saturday. He was drinking tea when it reversed into the courtyard. Two men climbed out and opened the back doors. He watched them carry boxes from the building opposite. Books first. Then a small cabinet. A rolled carpet. The chair from the window.

He stayed where he was. A woman came out carrying a cardboard box marked KITCHEN. She placed it inside the van and went back into the building. He told himself it was none of his business.

He rinsed his mug. He wiped the counter. He put the mug away, then took it out again. Five minutes later, he was crossing the courtyard.

The main door stood open. He entered and followed the sound of paper being folded somewhere above him. He nearly turned back twice. The flat was on the second floor. He knew because he had counted the windows many times without realising he was counting them.

A woman was kneeling beside a box when he reached the doorway. She looked up. She was perhaps fifty, although he was not good at guessing ages.

'Sorry,' he said. 'I live across the courtyard.'

'I know.' That stopped him.

'I hope we're not blocking your entrance,' she said.

'No. Nothing like that.'

He looked into the room. It was ordinary. A faded square on the wall showed where a picture had hung. There were marks in the carpet where furniture had stood. On a small table sat a pair of reading glasses and a mug with a brown line around the inside. The lamp was gone. He could see the clean patch it had left on the windowsill.

'I just wondered…' he began.

The woman waited. He had not prepared the rest.

'The person who lived here. Are they all right?'

Something softened in the woman's face. 'My mother died last week.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Thank you.'

He looked towards the window. 'I noticed the lamp.'

She gave a small laugh, 'You noticed that old thing?'

'Hard not to.'

'It leaked paraffin everywhere. I was forever telling Mum to throw it out.' She wrapped another plate. 'She never would.'

He nodded. For a moment, there was only the crackle of newspaper.

'You worked late on Thursdays,' she said. He frowned.

'Sorry?'

'Thursdays.' She folded one side of the paper over the plate, 'Mum always knew.'

'How?'

'She'd wait for your kitchen light.'

He said nothing.

'If it came on late, she stayed up.' The woman lowered the wrapped plate into the box. 'Soon as she saw it, she'd say, "Good. He's home."'

The room became very quiet. He looked across at his flat. From here, his kitchen seemed smaller than it did from inside. The dying plant sat on the sill. The light above the sink was off.

'She didn't know my name,' he said.

'No.'

He nodded. There was nothing else to ask. At last, he thanked her, although he was not sure what he was thanking her for. He crossed the courtyard and returned to his flat.

The kettle was where he had left it. The mug was still on the draining board. Everything was exactly as it had been before. He made tea. Across the courtyard, the room was empty now. The chair had gone. So had the little table. Sunlight rested briefly on the clean patch where the lamp had stood. He sat at the kitchen table until the tea went cold.

Later, as evening settled, lights began to appear around the courtyard. One above him. Two along the opposite side. A small blue light in a room where somebody was watching television. A warm one behind curtains left slightly open. A desk lamp beside a window he had never noticed before.

The next Thursday, he left work on time. He told himself there was no particular reason. The train was crowded, but he barely noticed. He walked home from the station without checking his phone.

When he entered the flat, the courtyard was beginning to darken. The opposite window remained empty. He placed the kettle on its base and switched on the kitchen light. While the water boiled, he looked across at the other windows. Most were still dark.

Then one came on above the courtyard. A figure moved behind the glass and paused. Perhaps they were looking down. Perhaps not.

The kettle clicked. He poured the water into his mug and carried it towards the sitting room. Halfway through the doorway, he stopped.

He went back into the kitchen.

Then he left the light on.

I Couldn't Name Why My Chest Felt Full

DÉSIRÉE PENNER





I Couldn't Name Why My Chest Felt Full
of rain, so I did the next best thing
and adopted a tabby kitten.
She was a whiskered, wild thing—
full of thunder rumbles and fishhook claws
raking along the hull
of my grandma's paisley sofa,

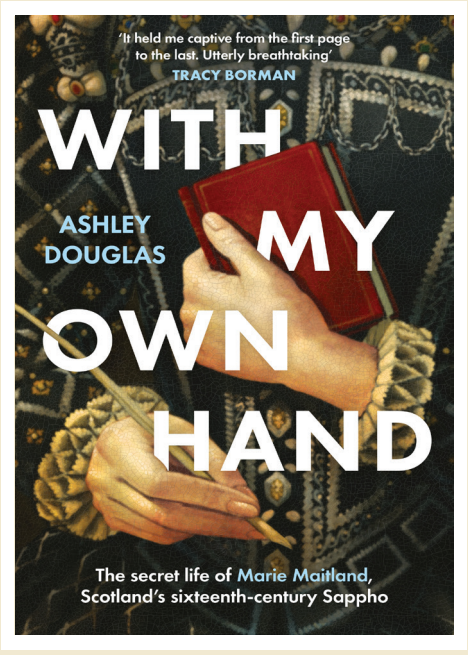
until it barnacled with loose threads.
My insides still jittered, but on rare afternoons
I flopped onto sun-warmed planks beside her
like a marooned trout
with magnificent, dragging yawns.
In the corner, an eager fan oscillated

soft-shushing storms—
against my barely moving body.

In conversation with: ASHLEY DOUGLAS

GLYPH spoke to Ashley Douglas: Scottish historian, translator and author of the recently published *With My Own Hand: The Secret Life of Marie Maitland, Scotland's Sixteenth Century Sappho*.

Ashley tells us about her latest publication, her writing routine, and how to not get caught up in the all-consuming research stage of crafting a book.



Can you tell us in short, who was Marie Maitland, how did you find out about her and what compelled you about her story?

Marie Maitland was a remarkable woman who lived in sixteenth-century Scotland at the time of the Scottish Reformation and alongside figures such as John Knox and Mary, Queen of Scots. In this most hostile climate, not only did Marie live a unique and meaningfully independent life as a woman, but she was also a woman who loved other women, which we know from the powerful lesbian love poetry she left us behind.

I first stumbled upon Marie Maitland and her poetry entirely by accident, while researching for the National Library of Scotland's 'Wee Windaes' project. When I opened the Library's modern edition of a sixteenth-century manuscript of Scots poetry, I was not expecting to find a woman's name on the front page, let alone to find lesbian love poetry inside. As a lesbian myself, I immediately recognised the significance of Marie Maitland's poetry and felt a strong personal connection to it. From that day on, I made it my mission to find out everything I could about this woman and to tell her story.

As a literary mag aimed at casual writers, we'd love to hear if you had a specific writing routine for this book?

I am very much a morning person, and so I generally always tried to write first thing in the morning, with my first cafetière of coffee, starting around 6am!



Of course, when I had big deadlines to hit, I sometimes had to write in the evening as well—but my preference is always to write in the morning, and my advice to any aspiring writers is to work out what your best writing time is, and try to protect and write within that time as much as possible!

Research can often be an important aspect of writing, whether you're crafting fiction or non-fiction. What advice do you have for writers who get lost in the research stage to get out of there?

I totally understand finding it difficult to stop researching! My book tells the story of Marie Maitland for the very first time and is based on many years of original archival research, through which I uncovered and decoded records that had been unseen for centuries.

When I first embarked on searching for records of Marie's life (as distinct from her manuscript of poetry), I didn't know how many there might be; I might have found nothing. Fortunately, however, I found loads! One kept leading to another, and I was still identifying, and being granted access to, exciting primary records, right up until the week I had

to submit the first draft of the book to my publisher! Having a publishing contract, and therefore a hard deadline, certainly provided a very practical form of motivation to stop pursuing new research avenues, and focus on writing. I was also very conscious of my word limit for the book, and knew that I had already filled it, based on what I had already found. That also helped me to, finally, draw the line under research, and just write.

What do you hope readers, especially LGBT+ readers, will take away from Marie finally having her voice heard?

I hope that readers take away the fact that women who love other women—women like me, like my wife, like many of my best friends—have always been here, and that our stories are just as much a part of our history as any others. I hope that gay women, and LGBT+ people, in particular feel themselves validated and affirmed, and see themselves reflected, in Marie's story—just as she, living in the sixteenth-century, found herself and her sapphic love reflected back at her, positively, in her classics and in her Bible.

What's next for you in writing projects, if you can give us a little sneak peek?

Last year, I published The Lass and The Quine, which is the first ever LGBT+ inclusive children's book in the Scots language. In many ways, it's a traditional fairytale—but, rather than a prince, the princess falls in love with and gets married to another girl! I'm very excited to say that I'm currently working on a partner book to The Lass and The Quine. Entitled The Lad and The Loon, it is a love story between two boys, set in outer space (also featuring aliens and a space dog!) I am co-authoring this book with the brilliant Scots writer, Shane Strachan, and it is being illustrated by the wonderful Kate Osmond, with whom I also had the joy of working on my first children's book.

Ashley's book, *With My Own Hand: The Secret Life of Marie Maitland, Scotland's Sixteenth Century Sappho,* **is available now.**

Contributors

DUGALD KINVIG is pretty new to writing and is "far more at home with the visual side of art where any meaning feels far more dubious and nobody makes you spell anything more complicated than your own name". Dugald is finding the segway into the written word rewarding, challenging and most importantly fun.

MAHIR is a 19-year-old poet and spoken word artist tearing up stages across the London scene. A nationally and internationally published writer, his debut collection, Different Colours (2026) became a multi-category Amazon bestseller. He is quickly making a name for himself—most recently being shortlisted for the Wordplay & Flow Award for Best Spoken Word Newcomer 2026.

GEORGE PREW-STELL is an Edinburgh-based writer and archaeologist. His cosy weird fiction has appeared in Storytree Magazine and he was runner-up for the Cymera Prize for Short Fiction 2026.

ELEANOR HARPER is a 25 year old writer based in Glasgow and (for a few months), Sydney. She loves iced coffee, Phoebe Bridgers and thinking too much about things; and often creates her best work when she hits all three in the one sitting.

JOHN BARRETT LEE is a Welsh writer and teacher based in Vietnam. His fiction has appeared in Fairlight Books, Panorama: The Journal of Travel, Place, and Nature, Sheepshead Review, and Spare Parts Lit. He was the winner of the 2026 Exeter Writers Short Story Competition. When he is not writing, he is busy being a father to two young boys, cooking Italian food, or singing in a choir.

A PARFITT is a long-time poem reader and recent poem writer. He is a lecturer in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) in an F.E. college in Glasgow. He doesn't know where he's from, having spent half of his childhood in North-East Scotland and the other half in North-West England, followed by a decade working in various places in Africa and Asia. He's been based in Glasgow since 2010.

CLAIRE SIMPSON is a marketing manager who enjoys writing short stories, flash fiction and poetry. She has previously been published in Ink, Sweat & Tears.

SOPHIE RUTH is a Glasgow-based poet and writer concerned with all that is worldly (or otherwise).

DEEMER CAMILLERI is a Maltese writer based in the UK, although he spends as much time as possible somewhere warmer. Travel has a habit of feeding his curiosity and finding its way into the things he writes. The Evening Light is his first published short story.

DÉSIRÉE PENNER (she/her) is a queer Canadian prairie poet, painter, and MSW student. She lives in a 150-year-old farmhouse, once belonging to her grandparents. In fall, you can find her on sandy escarpments writing poetry. She is an Al & Eurithe Purdy Residency Recipient for June 2026, with many published poems.

Team GLYPH.

RACH MACPHERSON (EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF HOPE & SOCIAL MEDIA):
Rach is a writer in love with mythology, fantasy and all things romance. Always on the hunt for her romantasy, you can usually find her thriving on caffeine, annoying her husband and her cat Cheese, battling her novel, and hunting for fairies at the bottom of her garden.

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.

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.

SOFÍA ARTOLA DÍAZ (EDITOR & 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.

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