

NEW CHAPTERS

An Anthology of Creative Writing

20
22



**THE
SIGRID
RAUSING
TRUST**



Peter Stebbings Memorial Charity

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Writing is power, writing is freedom.

– Joelle Taylor, New Chapters Workshop
in HMP Brixton, October 2022.

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Foreword

The National Literacy Trust is a charity dedicated to improving reading, writing, speaking and listening skills so that everyone has the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We support communities, settings and families and campaign to make literacy a priority. Delivered by the National Literacy Trust, New Chapters is a project that aims to inspire people in prisons, Young Offender Institutions and other secure settings through the power of creative writing. We support participants to raise aspirations, find their voice and tell their stories by improving their confidence with, and enjoyment of, writing. To do this, we organise creative writing workshops led by authors with lived experience that is relatable to the participants.

These workshops are relaxed, fun, inspiring, and often emotional spaces. Sometimes, people know what they've signed up for. Often, they don't. Occasionally, there are avid writers who have published screenplays or plan to write their memoir one day. Usually, there's at least one or two aspiring rappers ready to spit some bars. Always, there are those who have never written creatively before in their life. New Chapters starts from the premise that anyone is a writer and everyone has a story – that these stories matter and these voices need to be heard, especially the stories of those who have been consistently silenced and marginalised.

How it usually goes: the author leading the workshop will talk

about their journey and lived experiences, about how they discovered writing (or how it discovered them!) and what role it plays in their life. They might read a poem or a section from one of their books and there might be a brief Q&A. Then, it's over to the participants. They are given a pen and a shiny black notebook with a George the Poet quote on it ("We're all out here looking for something, and my poems are my way of finding myself."). A writing exercise or prompt is set. Shake off reluctance, overcome embarrassment. And pick up the pen and write...

The work that is produced from that moment on, as this anthology is testament to, is not only of breath-taking quality but extraordinary in its diversity. In these pages, you will find poems, short stories, rap lyrics, non-fiction and more. There are pieces to make you laugh and cry, those that open your eyes to something and those in which you will see yourself. Every single piece is unique.

To provide some coherence when organising this anthology, we have divided the writing into seven very broad themes within which we felt all the pieces could fit (some more loosely than others): freedom, love, forgiveness, violence, prison and identity. Each section opens with a brief epigraph taken from one of the pieces of writing in that section. At the end of the book, there is a final section called 'The Inherent Magic of Objects'. All the pieces in this section were produced as a result of a special writing exchange that took place between a group of writers on the London Pathways Unit in HMP Brixton and a group of volunteers from Buckinghamshire Library Service. The hope is that we can roll out more such points of exchange through New Chapters by using creativity to break down the barriers dividing those living in custody from those living in the community.

A quick note on language. Many of the pieces in this anthology

are written in the distinctive voice of the writers, with slang, dialect and grammatical choices often used as part of the creative expression of the piece. Wherever it was felt that stylistic decisions were intentional or part of the expressive qualities of the writing, we have left them in. Only when spelling and grammar errors were clearly unintentional have edits been made.

There are also uses of language, references and content which readers may find offensive and/or upsetting. Where these have been included, they are reflective of the lived reality and socialised languages of the writer and have been judged not to be endorsing hate and/or violence. Nevertheless, readers should be aware that many of the works may not be suitable for children and address triggering themes, in particular (but not exclusively) death, homophobia, racism, substance misuse and violence. Due to safeguarding and privacy concerns, all the writers have been anonymised. Except where the writer themselves asked to be completely anonymous, first names have been included.

We hope you enjoy reading this anthology as much as we have enjoyed putting it together. It has been a privilege running New Chapters in 2022 and if even a fraction of the powerful feeling and inspiration produced during the workshops can be translated in these pages, it has done its job. There are so many new chapters to be written – this anthology is dedicated to the freedom dreamers and storytelling schemers who can, and *will*, write them.

Angus Jackson
New Chapters Project Manager

Introduction

by Jamie Thrasivoulou

It was an honour to be approached by the National Literacy Trust to be asked to work on the 2022 New Chapters project. As always, it's been an absolute pleasure to work alongside the Trust on another vital literacy-based arts project. Hosting writing residencies and projects within the criminal justice system is something I have a great deal of experience in, and something I'm very passionate about as I have previous (although fortunately brief) lived experience of the system from my younger years. As someone who has turned their life around since those days and changed their narrative, I know first-hand the important role that projects like New Chapters can play in developing and refocussing a person at their lowest ebb. Prisoners are often shunned and looked down on by society, but the truth is everyone makes mistakes, which in turn means that everyone deserves another chance, and more importantly a chance to re-evaluate their choices and develop as a person.

I can honestly say that the two sessions I ran inside HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall this year as part of the New Chapters project were the best I've personally had the pleasure of facilitating within the criminal justice system. The level of engagement the young men showed was both humbling and astonishing in equal measure. The men put themselves out of their comfort zones and in many

instances engaged with creative writing for the very first time. This speaks volumes for the importance of such initiatives, and I hope that there will be many more in the future.

It shows a real forward-thinking approach from the prisons involved in the project for sharing the NLT's vision and recognising the benefits of providing this outlet for prisoners. Writing and storytelling helps raise the aspirations of people, helps them find a voice to air their experiences and opinions, and is a powerful tool for self-reflection and personal development. It can also be a vital therapeutic outlet for those struggling in a traumatising, and often violent, system. The way the men supported and encouraged each other in the sessions to share their work with the group and on National Prison Radio was a pleasure to witness. The energy inside the room for my sessions at Swinfen Hall was electric!

I hope that you enjoy reading the excellent work produced by the participants; I'm sure you'll agree with me that the writing in this anthology is emotive, brave, and of a superb standard. It's been particularly encouraging to read such a variety of writing styles within the anthology, with a multitude of genres catered for – from rap lyrics to love poetry, from pulsating short-stories to breath-taking haikus, the anthology represents the variety and diversity of voices in the prison system. I look forward to continuing my working relationship with the NLT, and working on many more vital projects in the future, but none more so than New Chapters which holds a special place in my heart. The future can always be brighter, if we all just let a little light in.

Jamie Thrasivoulou
Poet and Performer (November 2022)

Introduction

by Lady Unchained

The first word that comes to mind when I'm asked to describe the work I have done in the criminal justice system with the National Literacy Trust is empowering.

I found my creative voice while serving a prison sentence, a voice I don't think I had heard speak out loud before my time inside. So, when I meet people in prison and they tell me they are not writers, I remind them, that's exactly how I felt. Usually, by creating a space of guidance, inspiration and support, it doesn't take long before everyone in the room has a story to tell, before everyone is a writer.

Creativity in prison is a way to heal. It is a way to understand and face up to the issues we carry before imprisonment without even knowing. From a darkness no one wants to admit exists, it can allow us to see the world in a new light, to accept our wrongs and live with the wrongs others have done to us. At times, it can be therapy in a place where our mental health is tested daily.

As part of the New Chapters project in 2022, I led two sessions in HMP/YOI Aylesbury and Oakhill Secure Training Unit, and I can honestly say both had some amazing talent which emerged in the special space created by the workshops. In all the years I have led sessions in prisons, I usually save my tears for when

I get home. But the boys in Oakhill brought me to tears in the workshop itself with their writing. Their reality hit home harder than any other; these were children writing letters to the same emotions that led them to being incarcerated or to new emotions they have discovered while serving their sentence. Either way, it was the first time, for some of them, that they were asked (or allowed?) to describe how they were feeling and to unpack how they got to where they are. But, most importantly, they discovered that their story doesn't have to end there – that there are new chapters to be written.

Every single piece of writing created during a New Chapters workshop, and those featured in this anthology, tell a different story, with different pain and scars – scars I believe could have been healed a long time ago with the right support in place. But it also shows how broken our system is and how many hurt and damaged people are trapped in a system that doesn't allow them to understand that not all their wrongdoings are a result of personal flaws. Only one part of their story is highlighted: their crime. Writing allows them to tell their story in their own voice – to speak freely without judgement and dig up the roots that may have led them to crime. It supports them to take a deep look at the friends they had before prison and address where they may have been led astray or led someone else down the same dark hole they fell into.

I wish I had found my creative voice sooner and, once I discovered it, I wish I had known the power it held. Now, all I can do is pass the mic to those still lost or confused about how to tell their story and rebuild their life after prison. I hope everyone gets the chance to read these poems and see some of the incredible talent that lives just the other side of that wall. The voices that are usually silenced and left in isolation, with no outlet through which to

express either their pain or joy, their hopes or dreams. The voices we believe could never be us or our children. For those voices, creativity can often be their only escape.

Lady Unchained
Poet, Broadcaster & Performer (November 2022)



'I come from'

Untitled

After 'My People' by Kim Moore

I come from a city that is watched over by two stone birds. The male bird faces inland, keeping a watchful eye over the women and children. The female bird faces the Mersey, to stand in wait for the men at war. I wonder how she felt, perched up there, when ships docked beneath her filled with slaves. I come from a city whose streets have drunk the blood of gay men and women, beaten and broken for their choice of lover. I come from a city in mourning still, from the heartbreak from a football match in Sheffield. Justice would take four decades. I come from a city with a bombed out church, the outer walls a symbol of scouse resilience. I come from a city with four bugs in a cavern, who took over the world with their music. I come from a city overrunning with life. I come from a city which inhabits the friendliest people you could meet, we are the salt of the earth. I come from a city that bathes in rain and sun and love and sorrow and laughter and sadness and music and movies and museums, old pubs and new clubs and two football teams and two cathedrals and architecture and Chinatown and good unis and bad schools and young mums and working mums and mums in pyjamas and rollers in their hair and orange faces and thick eyebrows and thicker accents and dockers and stoners and pissheads and brothers and sisters and best friends and worst enemies and iron men all over the beach.

Ryan

Sunset Over the City

The best cities always make you love the sunset.
 I feel like I've grown up there
 Like the ivy you can't separate from the cottage wall.
 The lights slowly start to appear, glistening from the skyscrapers
 I love the drive when I see
 How it illuminates the horizon – it
 Confirms I'm in the right place this eve.
 I'm a man when I enter yet it brings the child out of me
 Who could contain their awe
 When you walk past the stores,
 the hustle and bustle leaves me wanting more.
 The best cities always make you love the sunset.
 That's because even when night falls
 You know that it will always provide,
 That which you are searching for.
 The best cities always make you love the sunset
 I'm part of this place because
 Ivy will always grow on that cottage wall.

Harry

Untitled

Noisy, really a sleepless city
 The traffic drowns me out and I miss my hometown
 Scream and shout but no one hears me
 Hoodie and a puffer but the cold cuts through me
 Pubs kicking out those all-night alkies
 People staying out for those all-night parties
 Mist in my breath and I miss my hometown
 Missing the palm trees, and sea salt breeze,
 Sun soaked beaches and barbequed meat,
 Christ looking over carnival on the streets.
 Cut me and I bleed blue, yellow, green.
 Miss that Brazilian heat
 Miss my hometown.

Paulo

I Come From...

I come from my mum and dad
 I come from South-East London
 I come from The Borough of Southwark
 I come from The Tabard Blocks
 I come from someone's happiness
 I come from God
 I come from hopes and dreams
 I come from challenges
 I come from a house of faith
 I come from Sierra Leone
 I come from a box pulled of talent
 I come from rights and wrongs
 I come from suffering
 I come from pain
 I come from smiles
 I come from a place where you don't trust
 I come from a place where your judged by how you look
 I come from a team of money makers
 I come from trials and tribulations
 I come from tears and sorrow
 I come from a place where a good meal is four wings & chips.
 I come from a place where opportunities are slim to none.

Nathaniel

I Come From...

I come from Wandsworth Road
 I come from my queen
 I come from Sierra Leone
 I come from dreams that turned into a reality
 I come from a pretend C Cat jail
 I come from a cell with a blocked toilet
 I come from a jail where the gov's chat shit an' cat to bang you up
 I come from a jail where it has to be your birthday to get a
 clothes parcel.

Ryan

I Am Not

From young I struggled to stay on task, I'm not a robot I find change hard. I am not like the weather in the summer one minute it rains one minute it thunders. I want to live a better life but as they say Rome was not built in a day, it's gonna take time to change. I like to make people laugh, when I was younger the teacher used to call me the class clown. I am not a tiny bug, I do not like to hide; I like to be in plain sight not like the boogi man hiding in your mind as a child as you struggled to sleep at night.

Mical

I Come From...

I come from South-East London
 I come from drugs, money and girls
 I come from flashy cars, clothes and lifestyle
 I come from get rich or die trying
 I come from being a prisoner, footballer or an entrepreneur
 I come from Nigerian parents
 I come from Kings College Hospital
 I come from Peckham
 I come from two sisters and one brother.

Trevis

I Come From...

I come from my mother, that's what I was told,
 I come from inner space to outer space in just nine months,
 I come from a small town: water, hills, chilly and cold.
 I come from the 60's, mini skirts and rock and roll,
 I come from a childhood, one parent bad, one parent good,
 I come from a child – to adult hood, faster than I thought,
 I come from working hard to being unemployed,
 I come from freedom to locked in a cage,
 I come from depression to happy and glad
 I come from all this, who would have known that?

Graham

Untitled

My name is Thiyakarasha. I came to the United Kingdom on 06/12/2000, I'm almost here for 22 years in London. I am here in the UK, working as a manager for a petrol garage, and also work with the Co-Op, Costcutter, Spar, and I am very happy in my job, learning skills and bettering my language – spoken English. I like to make new friends from the local community, helping people get what they need on a daily basis.

I also attend my church service, Church of England and my Hindu service each Friday, which I enjoy very much. I work very hard to support my family. I pay my tax on time also. I am terribly saddened by the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, but I welcome the UK in having Charles III being made King. I enjoy sport such as cricket and football. I love watching the lionesses, the England ladies football team, who have performed wonderfully in recent times. I like the men's cricket, India and Sri Lanka, as well as England, and I enjoy watching the England men's team in football.

I am business-minded and am hoping to open up my own business in the local community, as soon as possible. I love to relax and drink lovely coffee in my spare time with friends. I would like to learn more skills in this country and put them to good use. I am a big believer in God so I bless you all through the name of the Father.

Amen and thanks.

Thiyakarasha

Jackfruit

I am a jackfruit, spikey on the outside
but inside, I'm yellow like the sun,
sweet to the taste but fragile
to the touch. My flesh is filled
with a hard stone and if you're too rough
it comes apart in your hands.

My people love the jackfruit;
it is the national fruit of Bangladesh.
18 million lives run on its energy,
fizzing with every vitamin in the alphabet.

Like the jackfruit, I hang tight
to my family's tree, but I also travel –
jetting my sweet nectar all over the world.

Babul

I am

I am a Lion
stolen from the jungle
roaring in my prison cell
waiting to get out!
I would be red and black
and explode in volcanos
off the coast.
I am the bassline that holds
the room together.
I would be a mango connecting
me to my culture.

Tyrone

Writing to the ancestors

Dear Francis,

Reading this will probably baffle you as I know these words will be foreign but I wanted to just express my emotions. When I found out who you were, I was very surprised because it's a big difference in the social hierarchy. You with a huge mansion, businesses, servants, and a lot of money; me: working class, hardly any money and trying my hardest to build a business in the poor economic climate of 21st Century England.

We have a lot of written history on the premise of your time but not really an in-depth description of the lives of 18th-Century people. How was school like, and what was being taught? What was building a business like and what types of difficulties were there? So many questions for such a small piece of paper but the idea of even being able to write to you is astonishing. One thing that would be a big bombshell to someone like you is that I'm mixed-race; that doesn't mean I'm a centaur or a minotaur but that my mother, your great great great great granddaughter, is English and my father is Jamaican. It is a small island off the coast of America, formerly known as The New World, populated by freed slaves from the continent of Africa.

It is a strange time in the world in my time: a phenomenon called global warming is burning the earth, the economy is on the brink and everyone is warring over the littlest things. I understand that countries have to lay a foundation on the map to show others that they are not to be trifled with but the Russians, as always, are

fighting just to show they're still relevant. Small things like this don't bother me too much as I just want to enjoy the short time I have on this earth by exploring nature the way God intended and displaying a life my future family tree can be proud of.

I hope you can write back to express yourself also and let me know how things really were.

Deepest regards,

Astro

Salutations my dear Astro,

At least there is one thing your mother has from me: a giant creative side. If you have my flair and gift of speech, you will definitely go far with a name like Astro. There are not a lot of names like that in my time which shows that you must be very well inclined in the sense of worldly ambition. 'Star'. Wondrous.

Latin was actually an important aspect of education in my early years and I greatly enjoyed it. Another was history, learning about the great kings of old, the tyrannous emperors of Rome and the leaders of Greece, all contributing to the impact of change on the world. Growing up was an ordeal but, whilst you had to deal with the lower type of living, me and my siblings were of the higher class, with music teachers, swordplay training and horse-riding. When I arrived at my eighteenth name-day, I was given several hundred pounds from my father to pave my own path through life. I ended up becoming a fabric merchant for a time, buying and selling from both edges of The Continent; this gave me

a huge amount of capital that evolved into warehouses, factories and even mansions. Being a merchant in the 18th century was more haggling and the gift of speech than you would expect but, you being from my stock, you should have little difficulty there.

I have heard of these Africans on my travels, but haven't seen one myself. My father has a narrower mindset than I but I have no problem with it. It is astonishing, however. And the New World also. Fascinating!

It sounds appalling in the future, I would never wish that upon my kin so I feel for you deeply. My advice would be to continue exploring nature, it is the single most beautiful thing in the universe. Other than women – I adore women. God works in very mysterious ways so I implore you: don't give up hope!

Yours faithfully,

Francis Lovelake

Astro

Untitled

I came from Helmand, Helmandshier,
 All my innocent, inexperienced memories are buried in that place;
 I used to call you homeland,
 a motherland,
 But now, ponder, the wide world is my homeland.
 Born and thrive on your lap,
 Grow up with love, you gave me lots,
 Supplied the sustenance in abundance.

Harking back, my memories of those pleasant yester-years,
 And puerility of the school days of bygone
 Smoking a cigarette with schoolmates nonchalantly,
 around the pond
 K2 and KLM were the known brands.
 I had no knowledge of any other land but you,
 Due to my primitive knowledge I knew no other river but you.
 O, the green and swampy valley of the gallant's homo sapiens
 Stroll in the orchard of my late father everyday.

The pulpy Peaches, Apples, Figs, Pomegranates
 and not to mention Grapes.
 I lived in harmony with nature
 Every morning Rooster calling was my alarm clock,
 I could hear the howl of hungry wolves,
 the barking dogs on the vicinity
 birds singing
 the cacophonous milieu,
 But sadly, I could not hear the serenading Siren.

I'm a bit mature of Lycée boy now.
O, Helmand, you're my Indus, my Volga, my Nile, my Danube,
My Yellow River, my Mississippi, and my Amazon.
Coming from the heartland of Aryana
Flowing gracefully into the heartland of great Persia.
Looking through your reflection like a Narcissus,
No Echo, gazing moon & stars
In the pleasant silent darkness of the nights.


Let me divulge about your temper tantrum:
The Spring time of each year,
Your belly swelled with anger
Finding new paths, causing chaos,
Invading land, eroding banks, destroying crops
De-rooting trees, damping them off along with sleets elsewhere
With your merciless calamitous deluge
Causing unbridled fear.
But I'm leaving you now, under my protest, I have to flee...
How so!?
I lost my soulmate, my younger brother, fighting
The military incursion of the malevolent Soviets, the KGB.
My personal safety and security at peril,
I flew out, like an Eagle, cast a glance on the
snow-capped mountains
And down the marshy green
With a great sadness, remorse and tears.

A wayfarer of poignancy and lachrymose existence.
Now the epoch of my dotage, after nearly four decades.
That one-way ticket brought me to Brixton
Whilst I'm in perpetual pain!

*"The night is darkening around me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But the tyrant spell has bound me,
And I cannot, cannot go."*

Emily Bronte.

Mo

The background is a dark, almost black, textured surface. A vertical streak of lighter, grainy texture runs down the center, suggesting a light source or a reflection on a rough material. The overall appearance is that of a close-up of a dark fabric or a similar material with a fine, irregular texture.

‘Just anuva day in
dis jail house...’

Untitled

I wake up in my cell
Whenever I hear them yell
They bang the doors
They ring the bells
My toilet smells
This must be hell
I want a wife
I want a girl
But no one cares, I'm stuck in jail
My future's bleak
My spirit's weak
I hope I last another week
I'm in the grey
I'm in the blue
Please pray for me
I'll pray for you
I'm reading books with seedy crooks
Life sentence strong wish for repentance
Landline wire stringy and elastic
My fork is plastic it bends you snap it
No one to call it's alright I'm cool
I throw a ball straight at the wall
I like the walls clear and bare
Nothing to bug me just sit and stare
Turn it up to block it out no time to think let's lock it
Solitude they think I'm rude

I'm out for an hour that's including a shower
 No television I'm really in prison
 No tick tocks from the clocks just click clocks from the locks
 A fiver a week they don't want me to eat
 It's bye for now, I'll see you next week.

Phoenix

Seven Shocks

Life is a series of shocks, and many of them. Some may be semi-expected – but nothing is such a shock as those which are new and unexpected.

Shock One: Jury's Verdict

“Guilty!” What?! I am faint with incredulity. How is that finding possible? I never intended to do anything wrong! Surely agUILTY mind (mens rea) is still a necessary ingredient in order to prove a crime? That certainly used to be the case, well, whatever it was, it is no longer. An inexperienced jury, led by an ambitious, misunderstanding judge, willingly inspired by Prosecuting Counsel – Whatever I wrote or said has been clearly (deliberately?) misunderstood, or misrepresented. Whichever is of no consequence. Where is Justice? I'm now found 'guilty' of... [removed]. Immoral, to some, maybe – but NEVER criminal!

“Take them down!”

Shock Two: Steel Cell Door Clang

Judge's words: “Take them down!” still ring in my ears.

Double cuffs. What? I'm 66 years old. I'm (was) a professional. I'm NOT violent. I feel they're rubbing it in. “Just doing our job,” they say, as the heavy steel door slams shut behind me – for the first time. I am isolated – completely on my own, completely cut off, for the first time.

Shock Three: First Taste of Prison Transport & 'Hospitality'

The court cell clangs open. Double-cuffed, I'm led to the prison wagon, waiting to deliver us to our new 'home': Wandsworth. I've heard them described as 'mobile coffins' – surely they can't be that bad? They aren't – they're worse! Vertical tin coffin description is accurate – but no suspension, no view, total noise. Stop-start, stop-start; hundreds of times; lurching forward-brake. It takes two hours to get to HMP Wanno – Then waits outside for another hour! One needs to learn patience – This is past the point of normal patience. Oh, the noise! I feel sick, physically.

Shock Four: No Room at the Inn

Arrival late does not foster goodwill with the reception staff at 'Wanno'. Stripped down, body searched. Suitcase, packed in haste, emptied – clothes and all, tipped out. Some thrown out unceremoniously. Does NOT comply. No empathy here. See doctor – it's getting very late now – 11pm. He's more empathetic, even though he has had a long day – but he's professional (not prison staff). Given prison clothes and barely edible meal. Wait and wait and wait. There's no cell available – they're over full. At 01:30am, a grumpy Turk is woken for me to share his cell. He smokes non-stop. I fall into short, fitful sleep from total mental exhaustion.

Shock Five: Back to the Bailey

6am – four hours 'sleep' later.

Steel door slams open – light goes on. Grumpy Turk complains bitterly. "Get up – get ready for court. Van's leaving in less than an hour." I stumble to find something to wear to court. My suit is nowhere to be found. I find out later it's been "misplaced" (i.e. stolen). No shower, no breakfast. Double-cuffed

back through security then wait before long journey back to court cells. Can't see out. No food, no water, no suspension. Just smells, swearing, noise.

Shock Six: Sentence

QC has advised: "Get ready for six years, maybe seven." But you said before it would be four, at most! The Judge reads out his sentence remarks I don't recognise these facts, nor his interpretation. Is this our case? I look around at family, friends all horrified – they know this is NOT true. Then I see the Press, scribbling it all down – and it dawns – this is a political case. The press love it, the 'celebrity' of it all. – We're going down. The judge starts talking about 'THIRTEEN YEARS' – I'll be almost EIGHTY! He then "Generously discounts" – to TEN YEARS. I almost faint.

Shock Seven: First Xmas in Custody – on Basic

With 20 cells moves in the first 24 months, I shared accommodation with twenty new cell mates – all different – some violent, some okay. Sometimes you're fearful, but you soon learn: "NEVER show fear. Keep your head down: see nothing, say nothing. Prison rules."

First Xmas: cellmate caught with cell-phone. Put on 'basic' – no phone, no email/prisoner, no TV – Throughout Christmas and New Year! This is true loneliness – rock bottom. It can't ever get worse than this, can it? Ah, but it can! POCA/confiscation proceedings, a spell in Belmarsh, fighting against the inhumanity of POCA, Covid and isolation from family life. All lie ahead. Prison destroys your mind.

Rodney

Pointless Prison Lives

In the past it was hard labour
 They made us turn that pointless screw
 Faced now with reducing budgets
 Prisons provide nothing to do.

Pointless days become pointless months
 Pointless months become pointless years
 Pointless years produce pointless lives
 Hollow men with their haunted fears.

What's to become of hollow men?
 What is life like beyond that gate?
 Whether that life is good or bad
 We've likely missed the boat – too late!

Too late to enjoy life's riches –
 Success in life? Could be too late,
 Husks of ourselves, we're hollowed men
 Outlines of lives – denied our Fate.

This emptiness inside endures
 So, who's to blame? Whom to accuse?
 With days so dull the brain is numbed
 The mirror tells the tale – you choose!

Rodney

“Morning”

The birds tweet outside,
 In the trees tweeting, so free,
 Sitting in my cell.

In the morning light,
 The smell of toast comes inside:
 It smells like burnt toast.

Birds eating breadcrumbs
 Marking the morning routine.
 Now the door opens.

Anonymous

Inside Out

Officers don't carry property bags: not for prisoners they don't. So it might've been the sight of two of them toting bags that caught my eye. Certainly wasn't the old guy shuffling along behind them, all bent over and shrunken with a walking stick in one hand and something odd about his clothes. When he got closer I could see his shirt was open and that he was holding his unbuttoned kecks up by the waistband.

"Shepherd! We're gonna put Mr. Fergusson in with you. He's a bit..." The screw paused while she searched for the P.C. term: "doolally". I let them leave then offered him my hand.

"Hi, how you doing? I'm Vern or Vernon." Automatically, his hand shot out as he snapped into a well-rehearsed ritual of the hal-fellow-well-met executive to junior handshake: the sort which are firm and brief. Even his voice confident: "Fergusson, Peter Fergusson. M. D. for Beddoes. You know, the logistics people."

Then the poise collapsed as he glanced around in confusion. "Must apologise old chap for not wearing a tie. Extraordinary young woman took it off me downstairs! Just a moment ago. Cheeky popsie told me to be a good boy."

"Oh dear. So is it Pete? Peter?"

"Errr – perhaps Mr Fergusson would be more errr..."

"Fine, and would Mr Fergusson like a cup of tea?"

"Ohhh, kind of you old chap, but I'll have to be getting on soon. I seem to have lost my wife. D'you think the chambermaid might help?" I filled the kettle: this could take a while.

"Chambermaid?"

"Popsie who just left."

"That's the S.O. – Miss Cassatt?"

"Ahhhhh is she? I see." From which I guessed he'd never heard the term before.

"Appalling service anyway. Look at how they've just dropped my luggage on the floor. Won't be getting a tip from me if that's their attitude, I can tell you."

"Tea? Coffee?"

"Not for me old chap. I'll have to be getting on – I've lost my wife you see, and she'll be getting anxious if I'm not there to deal with people." I made him tea. "This room! D'you think they know I'm Fergusson, Peter Fergusson down here with Beddows? The logistics people, you know. What my wife's going to make of it I couldn't say."

He looked lost, so I sat down on the closed toilet lid and passed him a cup.

"Perhaps we could phone her?" He frowned.

"Well there we go again. The young popsie downstairs, took my tie and shoe laces then she stole my phone! Cheeky young mare! I said to her, you'll be getting a very stiff letter from our travel people. Not at all the sort of service I'd expect if you're looking for repeat business. Need to buck your ideas up young lady. Dear me..." He gave a satisfied grin and took a sip of tea.

“Mr Fergusson – you do know you’re in jail don’t you? That this is prison? That you’re an inmate? A prisoner?”

He looked bewildered, then: “Yes! MacNeice explained. Prison. Got the form – somewhere.” He bent and tried to search the bags while struggling to keep his trousers up and shirts closed. For a second I couldn’t understand what the problem was. Then it struck me: all his clothes were inside out! I would have said something, but at the same moment he straightened up and handed me his court papers.

“Peter Alden Fergusson – seventy eight – charged with murder – sentence – life – to serve at least twelve years.” I was throw. “You murdered your wife?”

“Yes. She wouldn’t listen you see. Refused to bring my work suit. Some nonsense about retirement. I was very angry with her. Do you think we could phone her? Because you know she worries if she doesn’t hear from me.”

“She’s dead.”

“As you say, yes indeed she is. I was very angry with her. Just a quick call old chap? To put her mind at rest.”

“She...”

“She’ll be worrying, you see.”

I didn’t know what to say. He was desperate to make the call and no matter how I said “She’s dead” he’d nod in agreement, then ask again. I needed time to think so I tried to change the subject.

“You’ve got your shirt on inside out mate. How about you let me give you a hand there?”

I thought he might complain, but he seemed used to it, raising

his hands and saying: “Reach for the sky like a good little boy!” It made me shiver. The shirt came off over his head and I reversed it before handing it back.

“Thank you, old chap.” He took it by the collar and pushed a sleeve back through the armhole.

“Why are you turning it inside out?”

“Needs to be reversed, you see. Then it looks right in the mirror when you’ve got it on.”

“Ahhhh.”

I still needed time to think, so I left him sipping his tea and went off to stores. Picked him up a couple of tee shirts and some jogging bottoms. Thought about some bedding but... He needs to be in Healthcare. So, knowing that Spikey was in the office, I went across and knocked. He listened then shrugged his shoulders.

“Not sure they’ll take him, but I don’t mind having a butchers if you think it’ll do any good.”

At the cell, just for a second I thought he’d fallen over. Till I saw the ripped bags and realised that his watch was gone. Spikey took out the radio and called it in. I could see blood and, scared that he was really hurt, knelt down. Turned out to be a broken nose and when I touched him he opened his eyes and smiles:

“Ah, it’s Astley isn’t it? I wonder old chap, you – you – you haven’t seen my wife have you?”

Christopher

Melted


Blackened sort of thick
Pastry crust of outer shell
Covering window.

William

Bars

Let me tell you bout dis kid, it's his first time in jail
Judge Potter gave him no bail, remanded till his sentencing
His uncle always said to him don't let nobody pressure him
Now he's on that prison bus just thinking about wettin' kids.
First time he stepped thru dem gates, stripped 'nd searched
Now he's got a blue bowl and a plastic blue plate,
Gave him dat starter kit toothbrush and toothpaste
And a couple caps to smoke thru vapes,
Screw took him to his cell, high risk prisoner
So he ain't got no pad mate so he's all by himself,
Mad thoughts going thru his head thinkin' dis is hell
Prison didn't know dat dis prisoner's got mental health,
Split personality and ADHD,
Dats a mad combination like Hennessey and weed,
You don't wanna see dis kid get angry cuz he'll throw fists like
headphones hands free,
Now he's down the block watching time go tick-tock
Just anuva day in dis jail house – shit sucks...

Tyreece

The image is a black and white abstract painting. The background has a fine, grid-like texture, similar to canvas or a woven fabric. Overlaid on this are several large, dark, expressive brushstrokes. These strokes are thick and layered, creating a sense of depth and movement. The colors range from deep black to dark charcoal, with some lighter, greyish tones where the brushstrokes overlap or where the background texture is more prominent. The overall composition is dynamic and textured, with a focus on the interplay of light and shadow across the different layers of paint and the underlying fabric.

'I came from a whole different
side of life, with weapons such as
money, drugs 'n' sharpened knives.'

Manny Boy

Let me express my feelings about a boy in Manchester,
Always on the street, no community centre.
All his emotions were thrown in a blender,
Didn't want to be called chi chi man or a bender.
School life he had a good education,
But people's poor perceptions lowered his patience.
Had to go to his olders, to him they were ancient,
But the advice they gave made him eternally grateful.
Headlocks and headbutts always in fights,
He could never back down, never seen in flight.
But one time, deep down in the night,
A group of opposition gave him a fright.
Took all his spends and gave him a beating,
Thought he was gonna die thought it was God he was meeting.
Didn't know why it happened, didn't know the meaning,
Didn't stop him cleaning up and start scheming.

Astro

Two stories about youth violence in the summer

I was in town with my friends, we were walking around. We walked up to the park, and J pulled out a knife on my friend, S. S just stood there. He was petrified. My other other friend, R, called the police. Before the police came my friend S started to run. J then started chasing after him and tried stabbing S. I was concerned for S. Luckily, the police came. J tried running but didn't get very far and got arrested. In summer, everyone is out so you should be really careful.

*

One day, there was a boy called J going down to the underground. My friends at the time were down there and pulled out a knife on J. The boy was terrified, his friend B came running down to help him but didn't know someone pulled out a knife. They were all saying sorry for what they done but the boys didn't accept their apology. The boy went to stab him and slashed his coat open and they robbed his phone and bag and ran off with it. The boy got arrested and let out on bail. Even though no one got physically hurt, there is always a next time. The reason why I have a better friendship group now is because they pulled out a knife and could have changed everyone's life.

Both stories are true.

Anonymous

Untitled

The last time I saw you
we was in Bricky
I see a young lad across
the road holding a flicky
I said to my girl come less go
Then the lad shouted 'No, no, no!'
'Where do I know you from?' he said,
I thought this kid wanted us dead
I then flagged a black taxi
To get out the area before he attacked me...

Jack & Charlie

The War Collector

He tried to stand up but he couldn't because his legs had just been blown up by a landmine, as he looked to his left he could see his squad commander laying in a pool of his own blood on his right side he could hear a soldier screaming "help me". Bullets were whizzing by and the sound of gun fire was coming from all directions, he couldn't find his radio it was probably blown up in the explosion. "Incoming," shouted a soldier, "Arrrggghhh!" He jumped out of his sleep...

He was suffering from anxiety, depression and complex PTSD from all the wars he had been to and it was clearly affecting his sleep. It was the third war nightmare he had that week, he knew he needed help but was too stubborn to admit it. He was an ex-soldier who had been to a dozen black ops and to wars all around the world. Some of the things he had to do in the military he done for his country, others he done because he was ordered to, he wasn't proud of it but in war people die and that's just how it goes. He served his country well and done the best he could at the time, now he was a lot older and he was a grandfather who loved his grandkids spending weekends with him. This coming weekend he was planning to set up some tents in his back garden and make a fire pit to keep them warm as they all gathered around to hear his old war stories. The kids loved his war stories. Mr. Ropican retired from the British Armed Forces with an honourable discharge at the age of 60. Mr. Ropican had two children of his own, two boys, Martin and Michael Ropican. Martin was an average working-class citizen who brang

three grandchildren for Mr. Ropican: Thomas, Peter and Jhon. Thomas was the oldest grandchild and was ten, Peter was eight and Jhon was five. Michael, Mr. Ropican's youngest son, decided to follow in his father's footsteps and joined the royal marines but sadly he died on a night rescue mission in the Helmand Province, Afghanistan, by an improvised explosive device set up by Taliban. Mr. Ropican kept his late son's dog tags alongside his own medals and war memorabilia from all the wars he had been to. He had been in wars a very long time ago, before GPS devices, when they used compasses, maps and old-school hand radios and he had collected something from every war and he kept them in his war room at home. Mr. Ropican's wife often joked with him and called him 'the War Collector'.

Michael

Extract from the opening of 'Aftermath', a short story

Chapter one: Impact

President Cruise had launched the nuclear strike. 50 nukes were now heading for Russia. President Putin was inspecting his troops when his security detail grabbed him: "Sir, America has launched their nukes, we must get to the bunker."

"What city is it here they've targeted?"

"All of Russia, sir."

Putin was put in the car and driven off to the bunker. The nukes impacted on Moscow and the rest of Russia. A massive mushroom cloud covered the sky, then the shockwave sent a thrash through Russia.

President Putin saw the nuke hit even the flames coming towards him. "Step on it, go faster!" but there was no running from the office. The car was hit by the shock wave and the car was spun on its roof. Russia was nothing but a wasteland.

President Cruise was still in the bunker when he got the damage report from the recy plane. Moscow, St Petersburg – destroyed. Other cities damaged with possible survivors.

"What of Putin?"

"Unknown, sir. He was at a military base."

President Cruise has a decision: to send a medical team to Russia to help the survivors or...

"Send a special team to look for Putin and a medical team to help the survivors and take them from Russia.

C47 planes fly over the cities of Russia looking for, and helping, survivors. Seal Team 2 were in Moscow looking for Putin. They started inside the military base and worked their way outside the base.

They were 4 miles from the base when they found President Putin's car on it's roof. They opened the door but the car was empty so they would never know what happened to President Putin.

The search for survivors had gone well and they were being extracted from Russia.

The real question was: what is the death toll?

*

Chapter Two: Her Solution

Today was a special day for Bella Summers. She was going to be sworn in as the new Vice President.

Bella was in the kitchen having her morning coffee. Bella's wife Amber walked into the kitchen with AJ in her arms.

"Morning honey, how did you sleep?"

"Not great, the baby kept moving last night."

Amber was pregnant. Today was the last day in the house. After the inauguration, they would live in The White House.

In The White House, Jason, Lisa, Hannah and Rosie were having breakfast.

“Lisa, I think you should stay behind. I don’t want you tiring yourself out.”

“I’ll be fine, Jason. Even I’m not going to miss Bella’s inauguration.”

With that, Jason, Lisa and the kids went down to the garage, then they got into car and they and they headed to Capitol Hill.

The presidential motorcade arrived at Capitol Hill. Agent Parkes opened the door and she followed President Cruise and his family to the Balcony. When President Cruise got to the balcony, he shook hands with Bella and Amber. He also said hello to former Vice-President Michelle Obama who would be swearing Bella in.

Charlotte and Kayleigh were in the crowd with Jodie. Michelle Obama opened the inauguration with a speech what is expected from the Vice President.

“Bella Summers, please step forward.” Bella did.

“Place your hand on the bible.” Bella did this and she spoke the pleas. She was the Vice-President of America.

After that, the national anthem was played by a singing band. Bella left the balcony with her wife and son AJ. They then entered an SUV and left Capitol Hill. Then, headed for their new home: The White House.

Jamie

I Remember

I remember seeing my mum’s face when my aunty died,
 I remember seeing them tears fall like snow in da night!
 I remember the pain in my chest and the hurt on my mind
 I remember people smiling in my face when they heard I
 was down!
 I remember every single feeling that drove me to fight
 I remember days without electric and boo tingz at night.

Bailey

Untitled

I close my eyes and I'm back in Mowbray, a young north-east lad, proud and out as gay.

I close my eyes and I'm running from biggots, again. They scream "Stop and fight faggot!", but I'm by myself and they number 40.

I close my eyes and he's pulling a knife, he says "Give me your money or I'll take your life." The guy thinks he's a highway man. He doesn't realise I've got a plan. I kick him in the bollocks and run as fast as I can... man... I miss Sunderland.

Hiding in Hendon at three in the morning, crying my eyes out, like I'm in in mourning cause they're getting to me man. Soon I'm gonna snap. Can't take no more. I grit my teeth. I grab the bat. CRACK!

Adam

Untitled

We lived in a 5 bedroom house no worries no struggles I was just 7 seeing mumzie struggle 5 months later sold sign on the front little did I know I was gonna grow up around guns and drugs now homeless housing one room one bed nittys shouting as they're clucking for their meds mums all depressed as she feels she lost it all don't worry mum it's gonna be cool I'm the man of the house now so I won't act like a fool but I can't be there all the time coz I'll be at school heard some good news we're moving to the endz that's where the olders are with there big skengz my first charge I was just 10 street robbery making me feel like he can't defend years later mummy got worse she just feeling like she wants to be in the back of a hearse seeing this from a young age that just made me feel angry with rage when I come home from school it's all dark with no energy so I would go out and go and fight my enemies.

Anonymous

Untitled

NCSWI 2

Hate crime, always finish too late.
People treat you nice but are only using you as bait.
Saying things behind your back thinking they're so great.
You find out they don't accept you for who you are now you're
back at the first gate.
They come back in a gang
And throw the bang
Now you have a tang
Taste of blood.
After the first punch
You hear the crunch
Now the light
Before your eyes is is bright
You try to fight
But you're in the corner too tight
And you've took flight.

They should accept you for who you are
But they didn't, and now it's gone too far,
now they're in the back-up cop car.
They think it's not a crime,
but now they're doing time,
thinking they're so prime.

At the end of the day, we all have a right to express ourselves
how we want without fear of being stared at, called names, being
attacked or worse.

Anonymous

NCSWI 4


¿Paradice?

After Roger Robinson's 'A Portable Paradise'

Paradice? What is paradice? Some may say it's seas, beaches 'n'
flashing lights. Well I came from a whole different side of life with
weapons such as money, drugs 'n' sharpened knives. See I see no
paradice I only see pride, pain 'n' paracites it's a feeling like the
whole world's gone Coraline. However, if I could have a paradice
it would be at my nan's house sat with her watching the soaps
she liked. When she would tell me to go in the other room whilst
she had her last cig for the night that would be my paradice.
Just to see my nan again alive for me to tell her that I will survive
now that would be my paradice.

What's yours?

William

The image is a black and white abstract painting. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a canvas or a wall, with a fine, grid-like pattern. In the center, there is a large, lighter, textured area that appears to be a sculpture or a relief. This central area is composed of many small, overlapping, brush-like strokes, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall composition is dark and moody, with a strong contrast between the dark background and the lighter central area.

'If only I could change my
reality and be unchained from
the things that hold me.'

Let Me Breathe

Let me breathe, get off my neck
 Let me speak and get this off my chest
 Because these words have history and your knee weighs less
 Than the perpetual oppression that brings on death.

I have a future, this won't be my last.
 I have a daughter, I can't be the past.
 Only saw me a second and you judged me guilty,
 But, I'm begging you, resolve this peacefully.

An instance does not define a man's existence,
 Yet ethnicity directs his destiny.
 Did nobody teach you that God made us equal?
 But this seems to be a mystery if we take a look at history;

Edison took credit for a black man's work
 America was built by a black man's dirt
 They took Ali's belts not because of war but for politics
 Because he fought for something greater than a boxing ring.

Now your knee digs in, as I'm "legally" restrained
 My dreams are pinned down and my last breath is drained
 "He resisted arrest, he is to blame!"
 He didn't have a weapon, and he had a name.

George now lies here a martyr,
 A used-to-be father
 George'll make strides for equality... without a step farther

Because his message won't die, and the people won't rest
We'll lie in the streets a unified protest
We won't plea the 5th, we just demand respect.
Let me breathe, get off my neck.

Paulo

Unchained

If only I could, if only I could change my reality and be unchained from the things that hold me. It's not the physician's pain that hurts but the pain from inside that you can't be freed from. If it was flipped and it was white ancestors chained would I have the power to unchain the damage they've imprinted upon me. It's not like I'm marked from lashes but the damage that their psychology has put on my future. Unchain me from the need to make money and watch the opportunities to make money fly in. My plans are chained, my time is chained, but my destiny will never be chained. Even as I'm chained now, it ain't forever cause my stars shine true.

Nathaniel

I Am Not

I am not racism, concrete thoughts on stigmas
 I don't stay conformed on ancient scriptures.
 I can't stay grounded on past ideas
 And can't allow my community to live in fear.
 I am not Bezos, with a life all glinted
 I wasn't raised with money, it wasn't easy making riches.
 I am not a mogul with no thoughts on my inferiors,
 I don't have a golden appearance with a rotten interior.
 I am not falsehood, a devil in disguise,
 If I see deceit, I cannot close my eyes.
 I am not a white lie, I can't cover up mistakes.
 I cannot just twist the past and flip my life's page.
 I am not Stone Henge, silent and still,
 I haven't been here for centuries, I don't have a life that's
 been filled.
 I haven't experienced the world's great resolve,
 I am not comfortable with the things I've been told.

Astro

Thatcher's Paradise

Money ain't important
 Unless you're working class like me
 I know it don't define us
 But the ride can get pretty shitty
 When you're counting out the coins
 Trying to see if you can eat
 Or skip another meal
 That's five times this week.
 Shivering in our house
 Trying to read the bills and see
 How much you owe for heating
 It's been off all month – that's crazy!
 Yet you all seem to act
 Like the burden's spread equally
 Only when we're fucking dying
 Do you open your eyes and see
 See money ain't important
 Don't make you happier than me
 But we're fucking working hard
 Shouldn't have to worry if we can afford to eat.

Harry

Untitled

In the wake of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, two months ago, once again I glue myself to the news, both radio and TV. At about 2am I turned to the BBC TV news headlines, watching the destruction and carnage of war in Ukraine. The Russians wipe out the city of Mariupol from the map of the world.

The apocalyptic scene of dilapidated ghost towns with half-demolished buildings were tacitly evidence of the skill of atrocities that might have taken place. I was horrified to witness an elderly babushka talking on the camera with the BBC reporter Leyes, holding her headscarf wiping her tears running down her face in profusion. The unfortunate bereaved woman had her only son shot (due to marry next month) dead by the Russian, her house demolished by rocket shell. Now to endure life full of despairs, with nowhere to go, no shelter and no one to look after her. So distressed I was in tears, with sullen empathy, eventually I've fallen asleep in the state of miasma.

Nightmare: the grotesque live coverage scene transmogrified into my sleep. I'm walking on the road infested with dead people, their blood-covered faces and limbless bodies scattered everywhere. No sign of traffic, no one walking around, an eerie atmosphere. In fact, the street turned into a huge necropolis.

Weird though, miraculously I took off like a bird slowly flying over the carcasses and at close vicinity for a short while and unexpectedly took rapid speed to high altitude, leaving the corpses lying on the open behind. Using my arms as wings, there

was a rapture of excitement, I must confess. However, to the vertex point, and I cast a glance down toward the earth: it looked a distant, celestial, lush, verdant globe in the abyss of an empty but barely luminous space. On this point, I was frozen in fear, my adrenaline kicked off and my heart began pounding violently. Ominous thinking in my head about how to descend and make safe landing.

Would I dive to death like Icarus somewhere in the ocean or fall on the arid desert, mountains or a woodland. Perhaps, it was in the gap of a split-second I was walking on the planet earth nonchalantly. Bizarrely, the phenomena of safe landing appeared to me rather arcane!

P.S. The above script was written in April, as I was suffering from a crippling bout of insomnia, fallen into a dormant. Then the nightmare, a residue of live coverage of news at the battlefield.

Mo

Three Haikus

I

I wake in the dark
Warm breath on my neck, question:
Who is that breathing?

II

And then the blood flows
And then the screaming begins
And then I smile.

III

Welcome to Russia
They found him with a lover
He hangs from a tree.

Ryan

10th & 11th November, 2022

Help, help; I'm stuck.

The plea echoes almost two decades.
Which of us will get out unscathed?

My light is dim more often than not;
I can't keep yours burning but please
Don't stop.

My tears well up as I consider our state:
No release date and forced to conform
By those assessing our risk who dislike my norm.

Protecting the public is the publicity theme.
What benefits us though?
That's our secret dream.

Our families and loved ones show stoic support,
Offering their love and patience, consistently;
That's something the government ain't taught.

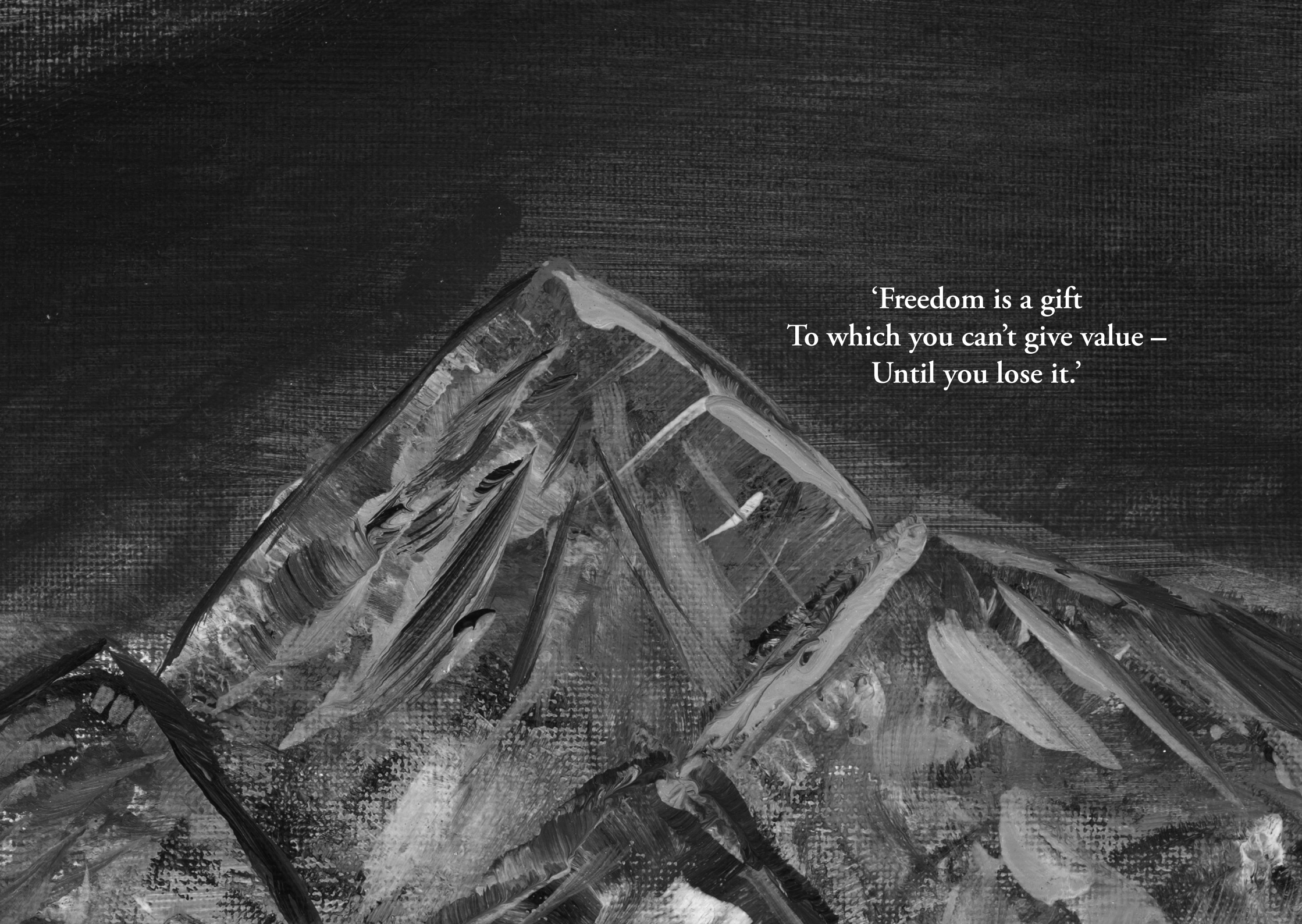
No talking to the dice, it's not allowed,
Just take what you're given,
We want you docile, meek and weak not proud and driven.

We'll remember Sky, John Wakefield, Bobby Beale,
You died incarcerated as IPP's,
But to us you are brothers, loved ones, sons, fathers,
grandfathers and friends at ease.

I ask Allah that you all find peace.

Love, Love and Salam, Salam, Love, Salam,
These are our feelings and principles
In this homo-sapien farm.
So don't you dare not hope
Or let them provoke
The worst case scenario
From which you won't wake, bespoke.

Ishmail



'Freedom is a gift
To which you can't give value –
Until you lose it.'

“When I get out...”

When I get out, I'm gonna say fuck it and I'll eat chicken and chips by the bucket.

I'll smoke a proper fag, I'll fill a shopping bag with 300 shades of calorific glory, spend the next fifty years writing a new story.

Adam

My Life

My Life

Soon home back to success no more stress because I'm way too
 bless, I got smarter just from learning from my mistakes even
 doe I love to risk take I got to give it in because it's a piss take.
 Leaving my loved ones all alone the only time I hear my daughters
 voice is when I'm on the phone every time we speak she sounds
 grown but I always remind her that daddy's soon home.

Gratitude

Thank you thank you thank you for all this gratitude thank you
 thank you thank you for letting me wake up in a great mood
 thank you thank you thank you for the water we drink thank
 you thank you thank you for all the positive I think thank you
 thank you thank you because life's so sweet thank you thank you
 thank you because mine will soon be complete...

Remember

Love gets you killed and trust gets you hurt but remember
 to put the family first life is like a rollercoaster with all the
 ups and downs so remember to keep that frown the other way
 around always remain firm and strong and to always remember
 right from wrong, 'I + I' from Beyoncé is one of my favourite
 songs remember...

Che

Reflection

For years I have been suffering an affliction
 Trying to beat my drug addiction
 It changed me in so many ways,
 That chasing drugs just filled my days
 It took me to a place so low
 That jail was the place I had to go,
 Sat in my cell thinking about my crime
 Thinking of ways to kill my time
 Missing my family
 Missing my friends
 These days seem to never end
 My drug says have come to an end
 Looking forward to my release
 Living a new life at peace
 Looking forward to my life that should have been...
 With my family, being clean,
 That's the way it shoulda been!!!

Kayleigh

A Memory of Summer

the blanket was clear white
 absorbing sol's golden light
 we placed our basket in the middle
 interwoven wicker
 one o'clock in the afternoon
 the sun's heat at it's peak
 we poured the violet gin
 all we could do was speak
 speak about the months past
 think about the months to come
 talk about sunflowers and butterflies
 and everything we had done
 I wish I could go back to that day
 the memory of it liberates me
 from a cold dark room now
 I can smell the heat, it feels free.

Harry

Forever in July

The breeze was gentle on my neck
 it was thirty-two degrees
 my tan was golden through July
 lasting quite like those melodies.

There wasn't a cloud to spot
 to distract me from the heat
 let me escape back there for a moment
 Forever – smiling, at home on the beach.

Harry

Orlando

take me to the place
I need to go
catching that thousand-
mile trip – to beautiful
Orlando.

Not for shining sun
for fun and amusement
to see the final home
of the ones I wish

I'd known.
My brothers and sisters
are there – nameless
maybe once
now residing in memory
in Orlando.

A message to a mother,
one final scream
you'll never stop them
though, their resolve
stronger than you'll ever be.

Take me to the place I need to go.
Orlando x.

Harry

Haiku

Haiku I: Taste

Is it good or bad?
Like beauty, it is found in
The beholder's eye.

Haiku II: Freedom's Paradox

Freedom is a gift
To which you can't give value –
Until you lose it.

Haiku III: Spring

Mower's music brings
Spring's welcome of sweet-
Scented new-mown grass.

Haiku IV: Covid's Reward


Covid reminds us
Of our life's fragility
Before we're released.

Rodney

Untitled

Freedom is beautiful freedom is righteous:
The moment it's taken away you realise freedom is priceless,
Everyday violence noisy neighbours 23 hours
Locked in a cell is that a way to rehabilitate us?
We're animals locked in a cage
While our human rights are getting broken every day,
Smoking weed to escape
Our day to day
While dreaming of being back in our better days,
Hold on to your loved ones tight
Because who knows what could happen overnight,
You only live once so live your best life
And stay away from crime.

Fabio



'It's never too late to forgive
And never too late to ask
for forgiveness...'

All About Me!

I'm in this place for a while
I walk around with a smile
HMP is not for me
It's not the life set for me
I have my children waiting for me
On 8th September I'll be free
When I see my children I will drop to me knees
Hoping that they will forgive me
Looking at them they will see the hurt in me
I can't remember the last time they seen me
I can't wait to hold them and feel free
I know words ain't enough off me
It must've been tough without me
I can't wait to see you and hold you tight
Soon I'll be there to kiss you good night
My little angels, you are my life.

Kayleigh

Untitled

7 years old when I turned out on roads,
 just to find some dough, to bring some bread home,
 mamma brought baby sister home,
 dad was laid out,
 having surgery, on his open heart,
 my eldest aunt,
 told me,
 now I gotta be the man of the house,

but no one looks at what went wrong,
 5 years old state school threw me down,
 told my ol' folks I would never be their pride,
 neurodiverse yet portrayed as a problem child,
 now I'm at this juncture,
 parolee,
 ready to get out licensed,
 part free,

these hypocrites,
 self-righteous Sophists,
 practicing their dark arts,
 ... sophistry,
 trigger my traumatic response,
 and Shanghai'd me,

so I show them how I manage,
 like I learned how to manage,
 since I was a pickney,

skin thick,
 like a rubber duck,
 stick me,
 I can come unstuck,
 easy,
 because the love of God,
 is the only thing that's kept me from my death,
 with my dying breathe,
 I inhale once again,
 come back with a force,
 like a man possessed,
 Oh yeah,

been through hell,
 baptised by holy fire and holy water as well,
 my scars healed,
 and the bleeding stopped,
 still I carry on,
 till the day I drop,

my soul fought with ghosts,
 only 2 weeks ago,
 now I'm back at Stoke Heath,
 with some people I knew,
 and some people I know,
 love my people I do,
 but my people they don't,

care about the struggle,
 still they want to judge you,
 see me less than a man,
 because I do more than they can,
 trip me up,
 that's their plan,

hop, skip, stand,
 look back,
 realise how fickle is the devil's list,
 got me feeling devilish,
 pinned up on a crucifix,
 pleading forgive me,...
 please forgive him,
 and please forgive her,
 do as you please with your forgiveness...

Razib

Sister – I'm with you always

Sister
 I know you
 probably don't want
 me there
 sister
 just know despite this
 I'm with you
 Always


Harry

Sister
 I'm sorry
 I truly am – I
 genuinely care
 sister
 I promise
 if you ever want me
 back, I'll be there.

Forgiveness

What I've realized is that
Forgiveness isn't an emotion
I wasn't ever going to feel like
Forgiving anyone point blank,
You're never going to feel like
Forgiving someone for doing
Something to you that is irreparable,
What I realised is that forgiveness
Is a decision it's not just a
One time decision it's a daily decision.
Everyday I have to wake up and I have to decide to forgive,
The reason why I decided to 'decide' to forgive is
because bitterness,
And un-forgiveness, is going to be like a cancer to no one else
Except for me, and it will only eat me up inside
If I hang to that.
So I'm forgiving the people who hurt me,
And hope one day
I can be forgiven for the hurt and pain I've caused.
It's never too late to forgive
And never too late to ask for forgiveness.

Graham

The image is a dark, abstract painting. It features a large, dark, textured background with heavy, expressive brushstrokes. In the center, there is a prominent, light-colored, somewhat triangular or irregular shape that appears to be a reflection or a highlight on a dark surface. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

‘Love: something I’ve learned
from very young is that this
really hurts...’

‘A starry, starry night...’

A starry, starry night – meteorically rise & fall
blisteringly bright-eyed & bushy-tailed,
followed by da feds – while looking for brown &
white with two ladies of the night in the
middle of the day
wearing dark glasses – drinking from the
bottle of whiskey in da jar-o
lifestyle jarring me said the other half
two become one when you leave me
on sinking sand – no longer da man I
thought (said) I was
on a starry, starry night.

Paul

Love

Love: something I've learned from very young is that this really hurts, mum told me I'd be lucky if another woman would ever give me hers. At 7 or so I remember complaining about this to Barnados on the telephone, it wasn't long after that I was kidnapped and boarded in a children's home. But then those days were years gone by and in the vagaries of my mental blackouts, it was when I was living with my aunt that I felt the fight my parents' love made to save me from my horror. Love turns sour in my life dealing with trauma after trauma yet I am this hapless romantic who fell in love with summer. To always express and expose my thoughts, my feelings to the woman I fell in love with was winter, is not half as much painful as it is more painful to know my love loves me not, which leaves me to ask why does love matter.

Razib

Love Trap

In a trap it's very dangerous and you can be distraught, when I hear those clogs and our eyes interlock, there's a great feeling that you've just unboxed.

When I hear your voice and hear your noisy laugh you make me the joyest person to be trapped, you lift me up on the tallest of hills, now I know our life will be full of thrills. You care for me on the darkest nights and this feeling in my chest, well, let's just say it's like a bombsite.

They saying being in a trap is tough and difficult but being in a Love Trap is high and beautiful but trying to get out of this will leave us both wanting more so I say let's just endure.

Dee

do you?

Mother can I have your approval – I know you say I have, but I don't feel it, my fault I know. I want to go to heaven but only if I can go with you – if you want me there.

Do you?

Harry

Mother

I

I once had a dear old mother,
She was so good to me,
And when I got into trouble
She would sit me on her knee.

II

One night as I lay sleeping
Upon my feather bed
An angel come from Heaven
And told me mum was dead.

III

Well, I woke up in the morning
Just to see if this was true
Yes, mum had gone to Heaven
Up in the sky so blue.

IV

So children obey your parents
And do as you are told
For if you lose your mother
You lose a heart of gold.

V

Now I am happily married

And have children of my own
I know they love their mother
Just like I loved my own.

Anonymous

My Princess

Sat in my cell thinking of my family thinking of how much I
miss them
Picking up the phone to ring home makes me realise I'm here
alone
But most of all, I love them all!
Mali you are my princess
I know I'm a mess but this can be addressed
I'm spending this time to change for the best
I miss you so much you make my heart ache
I can't believe we had to have this break
I've missed your first steps
I've missed your first words
But most of all I miss you
I can't wait to see you and hug you so tight
My little angel, you are my life.

Kayleigh

born to be blue

If I'm born to be blue
Is that why
My happiness depends
Solely on you
To bring me light where
There is none
Like a technicolour dream,
Or maybe the sun.

Harry

Sweet Hellfire

Its warm but caresses me softly
pure heat weathered gently
no burns just shame
dancing in sweet hellfire
for the rest of my days.

Harry

Untitled

Move, turn your body, baby looking for your soul,
 Before I met her, as cold as I was, I was a soul reaper,
 Sleep walker, sleep talking
 The old mantra, everything has a price,
 And the first offer was for a pound of flesh,
 I dropped that life, just for 99 pence,
 Leave you with a penny for your thoughts
 You can go, toss it in that wishing well,
 Oh! You wish me well?
 As a nappy-wearing baby, my
 Closest were wishing death for me,
 Yeah I'm hearing death calling,
 Better clear your debts homie.

Razib

'Heaven on Earth'

I am not anyone to you,
 You are anyone to me,
 You know I am in to you,
 You know you are in to me too,
 So if it's this that you want,
 If you want this from me,
 I want you to have the world,
 And place heaven at your feet.

Razib

Nine minutes, thirty-seven seconds

The nine minutes and
thirty-seven seconds I had to
listen to the song – was longer
than it took for you to move on.
I play the CD endlessly
Looking for the answers
to the questions you posed
it spreads through like a cancer.
I can't return home
nor is there someone to return to
the flood arrived and destroyed
the flowers I planted for you
what once felt like
a beautiful spectrum of light
ruined by the actions of one
in a single night.
The nine minutes and
thirty-seven seconds feels so much longer
what happened,
did it encompass you, the passion, the hunger.
When I get my first tattoo
will it leave me thinking of you
or will the disconnect now
prevent me feeling anything but blue?
My heart now matches the ink

I write poetry through
not like a bright summer day
no, a much darker hue.
I'll have it written on me however, that's true
to remind me of the nine minutes and thirty-seven seconds
I spent writing about you.

Harry



The Inherent Magic of Objects –
LPU/Bucks Libraries
Writing Exchange

All the pieces in this section were written as part of a writing exchange between a group of writers on the London Pathways Unit, in HMP Brixton, and a group of volunteers from Buckinghamshire Library Service, in the community. The two groups responded to the same writing resource, 'The Inherent Magic of Objects', to produce a short piece of writing about an object that is meaningful to them in some way. They then exchanged drafts and gave feedback (anonymously) on the work produced by the other group, before redrafting their pieces into the forms you see in the following pages. To preserve the anonymity of those who took part, we have removed all names.

1p Stamp

On my way home from the Doctor who told me to imagine that a posted envelope had landed on the moon. I must have imagined this Doctor is absolutely barmy, and is going to cause me to end up having to see a Quack!

Nevertheless, I was passing by the Post Office and remembered I need to take a photo for my passport application and send it to the Passport Office in Victoria, London. The photo booth charges £2.99 and wanted the exact change. All I had in my wallet was a £2 coin and a £1 coin so I bought a 1p stamp from Postman Pat and went and sat down in that photo booth. Just as the picture snapped the post master's black and white cat crept in under my feet which made me jump. So my photo was spoiled. The funny thing was - and what is life without a good memory or a pleasant thought - as I sat back to take the photo, my clumsy self pressed the button accepting the previous photo of me jumping out of my seat just as the cat came in under my feet. So I took the photo home with me, looking at it thinking, I have always been the ugly duckling.

As I rummaged through my pocket looking for my front door key, I pulled out the 1p stamp focusing on Queen Elizabeth II's face on it and my thoughts drifted into thinking what sending mail was like before email and Royal Mail. How long ago did they used to send carrier pigeons? - I never looked at a white dove the same, after learning they are only albino pigeons. But in any case, looking at the floor by my front door, which was littered by red letters and probably my eviction notice, I ignored these ever since they've been flying through my letterbox around that dreaded 5:30pm post run. Shutting the front door I remembered suddenly

that I had to cash my Giro, buy mum a birthday card and 'Happy 65' balloon. Seeing as though Valentine's Day was coming up, maybe also buy my girlfriend a pen from the Stationary collection back at the Post Office, or see if they have any glitter because I know she loves throwing glitter on herself and around the house, she says it makes her feel, and the house look, more glamorous when the glitter sparkles in the light. My pals say it's like I'm living with a life size Tinkerbell and the glitter that spreads everywhere, even on my clothes, is her fairy dust, which sticks to me like a witch's incantation. But there I was, so tired, after all having been at the Doctor's to talk about my current spell of depression. Realising I was sat in my recliner armchair, rubbing the Queen's nose on that 1p stamp between my fingers, I couldn't help but feel overwhelmed. Knowing now how manic my Monday truly was.

A 1p stamp that I bought to round up my change, finally found a purpose to me.

The Dinosaur

Automatic doors slide open,
Chip grease, salt and laughter,
Sweet candy floss, beats of music
Drifting on the brisk air
Through the amusement arcade.

Beside the 2p machine – a couple,
Not young or old, hesitant with one another,
Staring at the small, trapped toy
With an intensity
That defies its monetary value

A dinosaur from a lost world:
Powerful, graceful, vital
Wild carnivore
Transformed into a purple plastic beast
Inching its way towards the abyss.

The pennies drop in tandem
With no words
The couple work in a rhythm with one another
That only they know
And only they understand.

At the wedding, pride of place
On top of the cake
Sits the spiky, neon dinosaur.
Mass made in China,
A treasured reminder of future promise.

Mug

It's a mug's game – that's what they say. But who, or what, is the mug here? Me, or my mug? My mug is pasty, middle-aged, slightly wrinkly around the eyes, getting the inevitable sag around the jaw. Prone to pursing my lips at the slightest irritation. Prone to rolling my eyes at the slightest lack of urgency. This is my day-to-day state of play. My trusty workplace mug, branded with the logo of my favourite curry house, now long gone. My trusty workplace mug living in the staffroom, washed and dried, jostling for its place on the shelf amongst mugs branded with dogs, star signs, familial role (Number One Nan!), and packets of biscuits, jars of fancy coffee. How different it would have been, in my last workplace, now long gone. It would've ruled the roost, among those plain white budget mugs and the untouched budget brand coffee. It would've been carried up and down those stairs, listened in on the banter, listened to the workroom radio, seeing arguments, watching silently over promotions and redundancies. A handheld witness to another time, now long gone. It lives here now because of me and my choice. A better place? For sure, a more genteel place, a quieter space, perhaps a moment or two of grace. But maybe I preferred the rush and the pace, more upfront, face-to-face. Laughing and twinkly-eyed, jaw set in friendly determination, pursing my lips in curiosity, rolling my eyes at someone's bad jokes? My trusty workplace mug always in hand. That was my day-to-day state of play. But I will still grab my mug so long as it's filled with my expected brew, no surprises, and look for the positive. So, who's the mug?

Little Timmy

Little Timmy, my little monkey friend,
You came into my life when I was just a child,
Brighten my days making me smile,
Soft to touch with beautiful brown
Hair, you never let me down.
The smile you carried always cheered me up,
You always had that cheeky look in your eye.
I remember that day I set eyes on you out shopping,
I took you home holding your hand,
Looking up at me with your cheeky smile.
You said you'd comfort me in times of trouble
Make me smile when I'm sad and take the blame when I'm bad.
You was always there when I needed someone to talk to
You hug me when I was unhappy
Little monkey little monkey
Soft and sweet
Soft to touch, you comfort me
In times of sadness, dark and grey
You lifted my spirits and made me gay
A shard of brown, soft to touch
You made me happy
You never left my side
We would play and sleep together,
Your cheeky grin helped me smile
Taking away my sadness if only for a while.

My Tiny Wooden Aeroplane

That was a precious toy. I kept it for almost three winters until it went missing. Sad for many weeks, to find it, with no avail. Accused my sister could have hidden it somewhere or the little puppy could have been the culprit thrown it somewhere.

The aeroplane was a gift given to me by my near Nanny.

My hopes were shattered, I was planning a voyage around the world – going to the pyramids of Egypt, to Lapland, then Siberia to Sierra Madre.

And finally disappear into the infinite abyss of empty space.

I blame myself for not protecting my childhood toy.

My airliner, my little aeroplane.

After several years gone passed, kicking a football at the precinct of the house with my schoolmate and young brother.

On the corner, under the bush, my brother serendipitously unearthed the little yellow plane with wooden wheels. They were broken. It was half buried, but my memories were much alive.

It was the moments of elation and rejuvenation.

Tarnished Memories

As I hold it in my hand the hard cold metal turns warm. Why do I keep it? Its link to any memories of my father were tenuous at best. The smell of tobacco and old spice that leaps forth from the leather wash bag where I keep it evoke more memories of him than the medal ever could. Instead, the medal taunted me and, whenever I clutch it in my hand, I am forced to recall the harsh words an uncle, who was a virtual stranger, had uttered at dad's funeral. *'He always said he didn't take it. But I knew... I knew he had it.'*

I turn the simple medal in my hand, the most basic of honours, minted in pewter that would've been worn with honour on the chest of a grandfather I never knew. A grandfather who was long gone like the King that embellishes its surface. Like my dad...

On days like today when fast-moving time suddenly slows and my mind seems to only yearn for sadness, I think of the medal and imagine how the now faded yellow ribbon would've stood loud and proud on a dark blazer. The reality is that the medal is almost worthless. The civil defence is given to everyone who served. How did something so basic come to symbolise a divide between two brothers. One was dead and the other retreated back out of my life directly after the funeral. It would've been such a small act of contrition for the medal to pass from my father's hand to his brother's. Something that could never happen now. And although the medal meant nothing to me a part of me knew that I would never make that journey to place it in his hand either. My Dad must've had his reasons. I just couldn't reconcile the father I knew with one

would take it and lie about it without reason. Yet it called to me for resolution, and I never forgot.

The world turns and we get older and wiser. Fast time, life-sucking time, life-defining time stands ever at our shoulder, both enemy and friend, a gift and a curse. As we grow older, we stop thinking about our parents as legendary protectors or malevolent beasts keeping us from our dreams and we begin to realise they were humans, with frailties and weaknesses. They made mistakes, they held grudges, they were once jealous siblings. They could be poor husbands and still be good fathers. They could connect with one child and not another. They could spend time in jail but be basically a good. My father was all these things and more. It is very likely that my grandfather was all these things, too.

Often the world will show us the way when we can't find it on our own. I have found myself often working just a short walk from my uncle's home. Twenty years have passed and once or twice the medal has found its way into my pocket. One day soon this tarnished memory, this symbol of a past I will never know might just find its way into the hands of the man my father never gave it to and perhaps onto his son after him. Maybe the Medal will be a peacemaker, maybe it won't. But it won't define me. Never is not who I am.

Rendezvous with an Earthworm in the Indoor Plant Basil

Sow the plant with love, to my detestation you're hidden in
the soil.
Oh, sir I cause no harm, only navigating around the root.
My circumnavigation benefits the plant.
Into a furrow I snake through & around, laboriously searching.
The pot is my home, my safety and my security. That Basil, my
protection.
My immurement day and night.
I've freedom lurking around – what about you? Poor dictator!
Cutting leaf, dissecting trunks.
I'm better, I live a life in peace, I've soul, I've feeling and I enjoy
life, in different shapes.
Next time in metamorphosis of pretty yellow hairy caterpillar.
And then soar into the field of air with
fine spotty wings, butterfly
And pollinate as one dance to the polonaise.
What about you, you old buffoon?!

*

Men became dictators
For interfering with inhabitants of nature.
Global warming, the greenhouse effect
Air pollution
The emissions of gas, CO₂ and CH₄ per se
The moral message should be raised
If we continue our activities with such disdain.
That would cause the next generation with greater pain.

This Elephant

Too big to be a pet but here I stand in miniature.
Talisman – to what exactly remains a mystery.
Bad things still happened, but she still has faith in me.
I am safe and safety, a reassuring treasure.

Home is India, the jungle where her small hands made me,
Carefully carving and making.
My bright emerald paint still glows out from the shelf.
Untouched from play, preserved like a painting.

Luminous play-thing, or maybe that was the intent,
Too treasured to be a toy, I rest alone with the books.
A favoured companion watching over her life,
A matriarch. Guider. Observer.

An archive of memory.
Never forgotten; always found, always present.

Yo-Yo

My childhood toy
We've known each other
Since I was 10
Never angry or 'feeling blue'
You always seem to get me through
You make me smile and come alive
When my pain I need to hide.

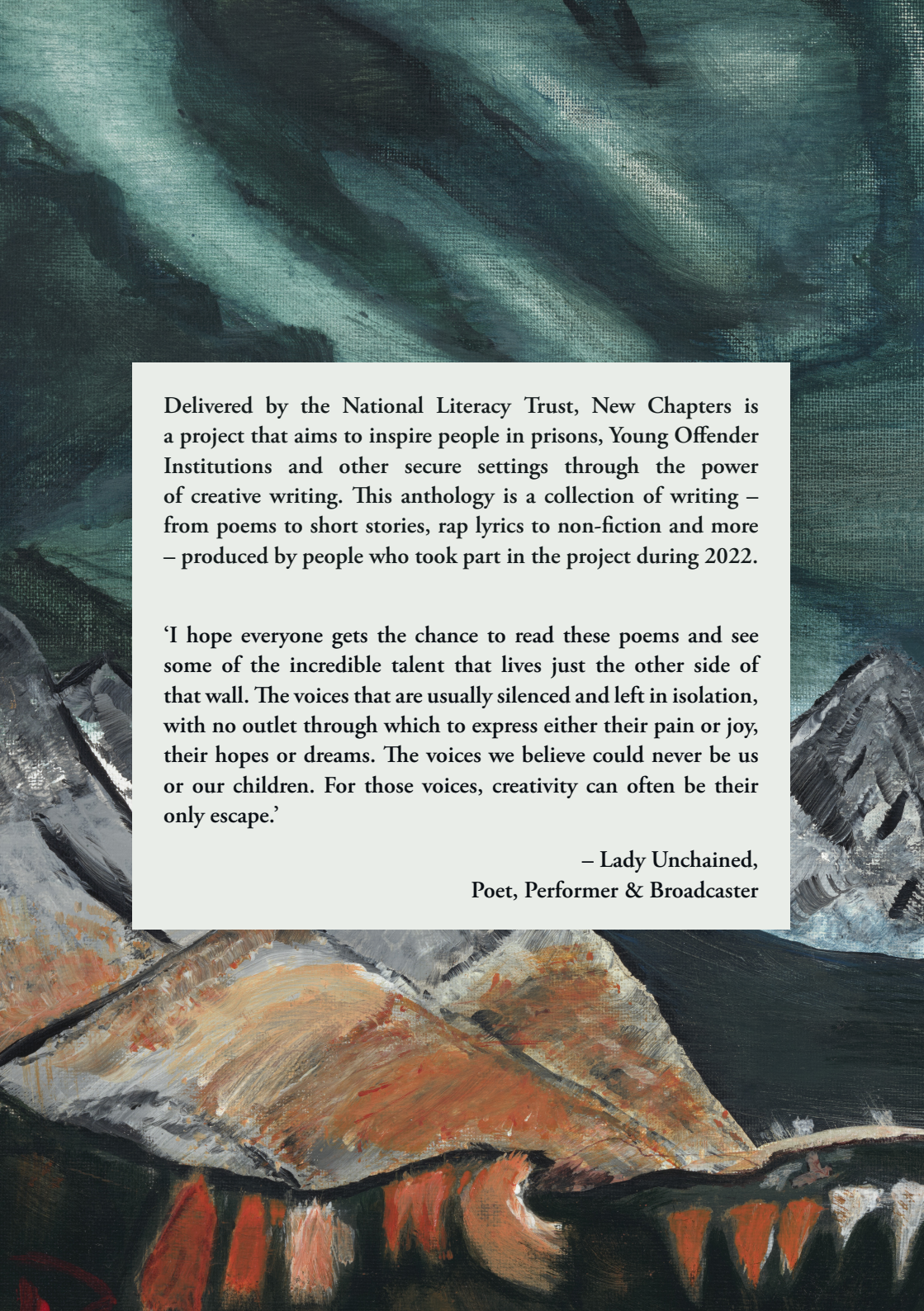
Yo-yo

You don't shout at me
Like my mother does
Just because of the shadows
And colour flashing in the living room.

Yo-yo, you're so kind and caring
Mum and Dad are always moaning
But I love you lots so I accept the pain
And carry on playing my game
Nothing to lose, a lot to gain
You always take away my stresses and strains
And keep away sadness and tears.

Yo-yo, let's go outside
So you can freeflow into the sky
Pulling you up and pulling you down
Making sure you don't hit the ground
No cracks, no breaks,
Just smooth and round
Dancing about with your flashy moves.

Yo-yo, you've tangled around my hand once more
No more fast and rather slow
Making my fingers and thumbs sore:
I believe it's time to say night-night
And time for the draw,
No more tangling,
And going no more.



Delivered by the National Literacy Trust, New Chapters is a project that aims to inspire people in prisons, Young Offender Institutions and other secure settings through the power of creative writing. This anthology is a collection of writing – from poems to short stories, rap lyrics to non-fiction and more – produced by people who took part in the project during 2022.

‘I hope everyone gets the chance to read these poems and see some of the incredible talent that lives just the other side of that wall. The voices that are usually silenced and left in isolation, with no outlet through which to express either their pain or joy, their hopes or dreams. The voices we believe could never be us or our children. For those voices, creativity can often be their only escape.’

– Lady Unchained,
Poet, Performer & Broadcaster