

Arvon Anthology 2024



Toads, Spells and Shells

Edited by Emma Bouvier & Lily-Rose Pitcher

*Under these pebbles of light and time-eaten beams, we write and eat and talk,
enveloped in a uniting air.*

“Writing is a way of recording the human voice.” – Margaret Atwood



complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

blood harvested by a leech

Leeches conjured by the beach

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

reverse the hands of time

and turn humanity back in to

slime

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

Darkest hour wake thy power

ALL THINGS MUMBLED, GUMMED

AND SOUR.

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

Moss of the willow tree

Cast an evil spell for me

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

Every potion that has
formed into rubble
in my cauldron simmer and bubble

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

Light of moon, shadow of sun

Cover us all in blood and
rum

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

Wool of lamb clean and white

Pool of sand Peas and light

JB

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

Game of chance Lucks foul
cheat

make a broth of chaos sweet

ASM

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

Pheasant's beak and sparrow's wing

lock of hair & wedding ring

Abigail

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

From the tears the people weep,

stir the devil from his sleep

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

Wrath of lightning that strikes the ground

stop them from ever again making a
sound

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

Tail of newt and claws of cat

dust from a hat and wings of a bat

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

red ~~ink~~ with a bleed of froth

seal it with a venom drop

complete the rhyming couplet of the spell:

bounds this unbreak

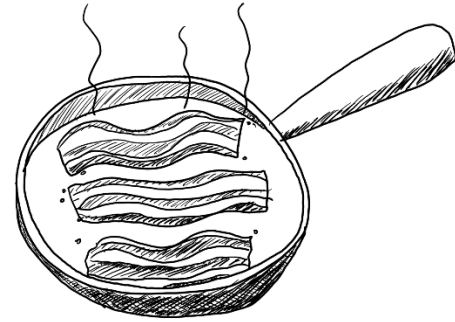
plet of the spell:

able charm

Eleven Things

I remember waking up to the sound of a rooster, say at 7 o'clock
Without fail, I would rise to his song in the morning, wanting or not.

I remember the smell of my grandmas cooking in the morning, bacon,
Or sometimes nothing when she worked, besides a loaf of bread.



I remember how the cold tiled floor of the living room felt on my bare feet,
And the smell of my Dad's cologne on his coat, left haphazardly on his seat.

I remember the first warm embrace of the air as I set foot outside,
Deceivingly cold like the embrace of a false friend

I remember the palm tree, who's shelter provided shade for me to nap in,
Although I would wake up slightly sweaty, and burnt on my legs

I remember the vineyard, and the grapes I would steal from the bunch,
And how my face would pucker when I realised: they were unripe

I remember the old sheep dogs, and how they would bark at each passer-by,
Their fur has since begun to grey, and their eyes have sine lost their gleam.

I remember how the sun would set in evening times on the horizon,
Shades of purple and yellow, an ocean of unrequited love.

I remember the smell of cigarette smoke coming from the kitchen window,
A sign that *Avó* had finished cooking, though I should wait for her call.

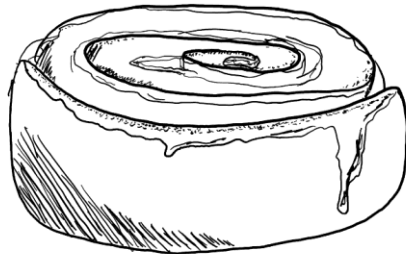
I remember how my dad would quietly slip into the house after his late shifts,
And how he would carry me to bed when I was already asleep.

I remember wistful dreams of a land where a younger version of me remains,
And now it seems so far away, and just out of reach.

Raphael Abreu

Yellow

Sunshine beaming on a gooey barbeque
Light tickling youthful eyes
A flock of giddy canaries twirling in the air
Laughter thrums from nourished bellies
Pure happiness.



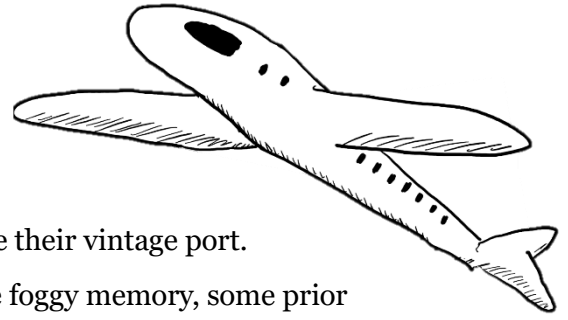
Cinnamon roll

A thick, bubbling dough is
kneaded and stretched by steady hands,
hands flecked with traces of flour,
small sprinkles of stray sugar slotted beneath raw fingernails.
The rolling pin glides over the dough,
teasing tiny pockets of sweetened air.
Cinnamon, like freckles flicked on a rosy face,
is gently dusted over the surface,
and slowly oozes out of the sticky layers it is lovingly swaddled in.
A pair of weathered gloves eases the tray into a gloating oven.
Time trickles lethargically.
An eagerly awaited ping entices us from the oven.
Greedy hands grasp at the steaming tray.
A sweet dribble is twirled across the dessert,
ready to be crucified by impatient forks.
The caramelised flavours tango on my tongue.
Bellies rumble with satisfaction, knowing
That we have created pure bliss in a humble bowl.

Alyssa Barnett

Airport

Her hair decides to take a trip,
Falling out over her eyes which get sucked into the trap
Of glinting red 'Duty-Free', her father driven to admire their vintage port.
Her mother smiles as the tannoys transport her to some foggy memory, some prior
Experience of watching this joy emanating from the pair.
Waves resurface, whispering like a parrot
The girl knows to stifle the trait
Which so oftentimes flattened the arks. She chooses to play her part
Head thrown back, laughing, limbs swinging over the cool Samsonite, as on they troop
Again through security again past checks, which she remembers like the tarot
Card sequence- pre-empted, foretold, painting her familiar portrait.
And yet she is pure delight: for within every second, every passing cloud holds her in rapt



Branches

We jump in puddles of our gutter-pipe dreams
Then decide to trawl our rakes through barren fields.
Time used to drag itself on its hind legs
And now we watch its tail whip out of sight
Over and over and over again

Cheeks burn where once there was paint
Clammy hands replace the plastic bricks.
We force upon ourselves discomfort
In hopes of extending offers of comfort to cold hard eyes
And claim we love it

I am terrified and I can see ourselves,
After the blinding white noise subsides,
I can see ourselves
Force-feeding future generations rotting figs
On silver plates

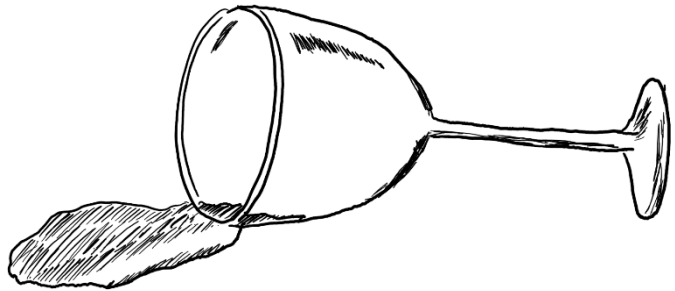
Emma Bouvier

Red

The warmth of embrace, fresh from the snow
Incandescence of two paths combined.
Their past and present: parallel times
Still intertwined, a sacrosanct connection
A lace bow sews them together.

The stain of one's truth
Lingers on the other's reflection.
Corporeal proof.
Damning evidence.
The fingerprint pressed into pristine glass,
Even when apart, they are one.

The seeping wound of wine
Spilt drunk. Knocked over in the fallout.
More than two flickering flames,
Now a blaze in the dark.
A predestined fate: two strings,
One stitch undone.



Painful memories of what was
Flushed with all the what ifs?
One more glance
One more embrace
One more kiss.

Jacob Browne

Locked

I can tie my shoes, shave, stare
sip and summarize my day.

Tomorrow will be today
and yesterday
and last week
and last month
and last year.

Yesterday
I pierced my hand
with the 3 inches of wire
at bottom end of the fence
as I tried to bore a hole into a conker

I can sigh, suck, sting,
strangle and spit.

Yesterday will be last week
and last month
and last year

I can stain, scour, scratch and skin.

Your fingerprints

A lilting leaf of a cheese plant
caresses the pane and
alleviates the space between the magnolia walls
with jungle green.
Clean kitchen space
for invention and dancing
(when the children were young.)
And the dinner table your grandmother's
money paid for
above which hangs the star
at Christmas
glowing
it's blades of hope
flickering.



Chris Browning



“Lifeline”

I wake to the world shifted sideways, my cheek pressed against the gravel, the setting sunlight shining into my eyes. I push myself into a sitting position, hands pushing into the cold ground. As I sit up, I feel something digging into the side of my thigh, and instinctively I reach into my pockets and rifle through.

It was a key.

A silver, small, almost weightless key.

Turning it over in my hands, I see the clear engraving of a small chrysanthemum on the bow of the key, within a circular outline.

I run my finger across it as I stand, taking in my surroundings while pressing the pad of my finger onto the cool rivets of the small metal. Fog envelops the side of the small mountain I am standing on, swirling around the edge like a massive potion. A winding road circles the edge of the cliffside, the end invisible beyond the mist. The sky is darkening, and I start to wander along the unending path of empty road, clutching the metallic key like a lifeline.

The sky gradually morphs into an abyss, the dark expanse of misty grey fog swallowing the last of the light, turning the sky into a mottled mix of navy, grey and black, the once aegean canvas splashed with dark ink. I held my arms close, the gale howling in despair, ruffling my sweater, and sending a chill into my bones, like needles stabbing at my joints.

Time seems to stretch as I continue to wander aimlessly, a growing pit of dread in my stomach, eating up all hope and exhaling constant distress into my bloodstream. My scuffed boots are dragging on the gravel, the left lace undone and trailing behind, scraping on the dirt.

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There's an opening.

I almost miss it, every jutting rock looking the same on the winding road, the night making its way into my vision. It's a large crawlspace, with just enough space for me to slip through if I crouch. I feel for the cold stone walls of the arch my fingers slipping on a moist, viscous liquid on the surface of the rock, as I press my hand to steady myself. The inside is damp, and the air hangs thickly, as if there was no oxygen, suffocating and choking, but mesmerising and mysterious. I turn the key in my hand, the rivets scratchy and wet, and strangely large. My hand feels warm, and I shrug it off, pressing my thumb onto the serrated biting, heart hammering in my chest, but clumsily forcing myself to push forward one step at a time, stumbling through the pitch-black cave outcrop, my hand throbbing, warm, but numb.

I stop after what seemed like an eternity, only when my free hand feels a dead end in front of me.

How insulting.

I sink to my knees, dropping the key as my body goes limp with exhaustion, my head colliding with the rock in front of me, letting out a hollow *thump*. In frustration, I spit out an audible groan to nobody, the noise echoing through the near-endless hall.

Hollow?

I feel the wall again, fingers brushing against a small device- small but jutting out of the rock unnaturally, with a small slit in the middle.

A new hope blossoms in my mind, and I scramble to retrieve my key, the one thing I grasped for hours like my life depended on it.

It does now.

My pinky knocked against a cool blade as I sweep the floor blindly for my key, slicing apart the topmost layer of skin and exposing the raw flesh underneath to the wintry night air. Wincing, I pick up the blade, holding it closer to my face and squinting, the familiar ridges smudged with dried maroon blood, clumped and clotted in what felt like biting once. I feel the sticky, hot mess of fresher blood, still crimson and oozing, on the handle of the blade, new and sluggishly flowing from my palm. Absentmindedly, I rub my index over the side of the knife, feeling a familiar engraving etched into the steel. I trace the small pattern with my fingernail, scraping at the reiterating lines, in the shape of a chrysanthemum, a circle surrounding it like a prison.

My palm continues to throb as I kneel on the floor of the cave inspecting the knife, so I set it down and run my other fingers over my hand.

Instead of skin intact and smooth, I'm met with peeling skin, soaked with warm, sticky blood, glueing the scraps of skin and small chunks of flesh to my hand like a morbid craft project. Small rivulets of blood ran down into my fingers, connecting my mangled palm to the pads of my thumb and index, lines sliced into them horizontally like the charred lines on a steak. In the darkness, I trace the drying lines of blood blankly, until the numbness wears off and the brunt of the pain hits me like a truck, heat and pain pulsing periodically in time with my thrumming heartbeat.

I take the knife in my other hand, the handle rough and slippery. I lean towards the door, feeling for the keyhole and slipping the knife into the slot.

It doesn't fit.

I clench my fists in frustration, my right hand screaming and protesting in agony, resting against the keyhole. My fingernails dig into the gaping wounds, embedding themselves in between the paper-like wisps of shredded skin. Warm blood trickles out of the end of my knuckle, dripping down my wrist and onto the keyhole. It seeps in like an injection into the bloodstream, glowing tendrils of light slithering from the keyhole and carving a pulsing red circle on the stone doorway, lines bleeding towards the centre to embed another chrysanthemum rune onto the stone wall. The stench of copper envelops the narrow, claustrophobic rock corridor, the trails of glowing blood connecting at the centre. A burst of light erupts from the rune, glowing tendrils of scarlet snaking towards my limbs.

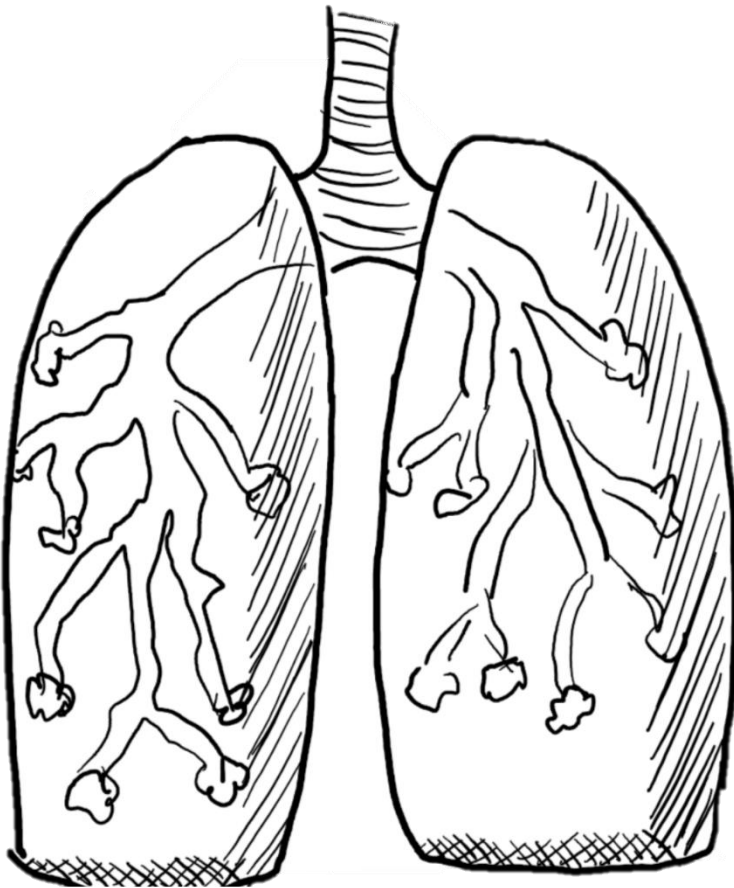


In a panic, I swipe at the strings with the knife, but it slides through like butter, reconnecting in midair. Horrified, I finally turn to run, but my exhaustion catches up to me and my legs give from underneath, and I would've toppled to the floor if not for the tendrils catching up to me and looping around my neck, gripping my skin and keeping me in place as the other vines of light snake around my arms and legs, slowly retracting back into the wall as they keep a firm grip on my limbs, dragging me towards the door.

A scream rips from my throat then, guttural and panicked, a howl of desperation. I thrash and kick with every ounce of energy I have left, trying to shake off my shackles, digging my nails into the stone as a bid to save myself. I feel my fingers slipping, a nail ripping in half, exposing the soft flesh underneath, but I ignore it, scrabbling to keep a hold on the ground.

In Quiet Moments

The world prefers to drift by,
carrying our laughter in the breeze.
I don't know what tomorrow holds for us,
we are only fleeting, spontaneous beings.
I can linger in this space of nothingness,
lost aimlessly.
Though the tightening of my chest reminds me
And to bear the burden of knowing,
that things will never be the same.
I believe in you, to accept this too.
Tomorrow will be different,
and we can only move.



Me Within

Indeed, did I burn,
in this crucible of contention.
Its walls are steep,
its lid sealed tight.
Yet, in sullen silence,
I can only listen,
to the weight of your words
pressing against
my heart, my stomach,
my lungs, my chest.
The reflux
Of every unspoken thought-
Why must I be the drain,
for your acetic flaws?
My emotions they surge,
they swell within,
Perhaps I should retaliate
So my lips stretch thin...

But instead my teeth sink deep
between the soft threads
And saline streams
With every trembling breath.

Suki Chen

The Sea

If I could pick a plain whose colour'd disappear me,
 Pull me down into a quiet sleep,
 In a fluster pull-apart my raft, and consequently my life,
And all the while feed mellifluous whispers and tales of the deep...

Whose blue and green folds writhing in the light
 Keep afloat humble coracles in which fishermen dwell,
 Working the oars hours before the coming of the night
To reel-in their catch, to eat and to sell.

Impartial: an open mouth, a hankering appetite,
 The innocent consumption of innocent lives.
 But also, the will to keep afloat those boats
With teeth and brandishing knives.

This feat I see in the seas of the North and seas of the South alike.

Though, question a Northern man on the seas of the South,
He'll tell you:
 'Our waves are handshakes, nods and hugs. Their glacial slopes
 take hundreds
a year'

And Southerners scorn
 'Their crashing waves, impenetrable vernacular'
 'Harsh on the ear'

Despite this, joined at the hip as they are, I see
 both seas as seen by the sky and the clouds -
 A vessel, both life and death,
 Procession of the lost
Home for the found.

And so, when asked to pick a plain:

‘The sky?’

‘Those meadows?’

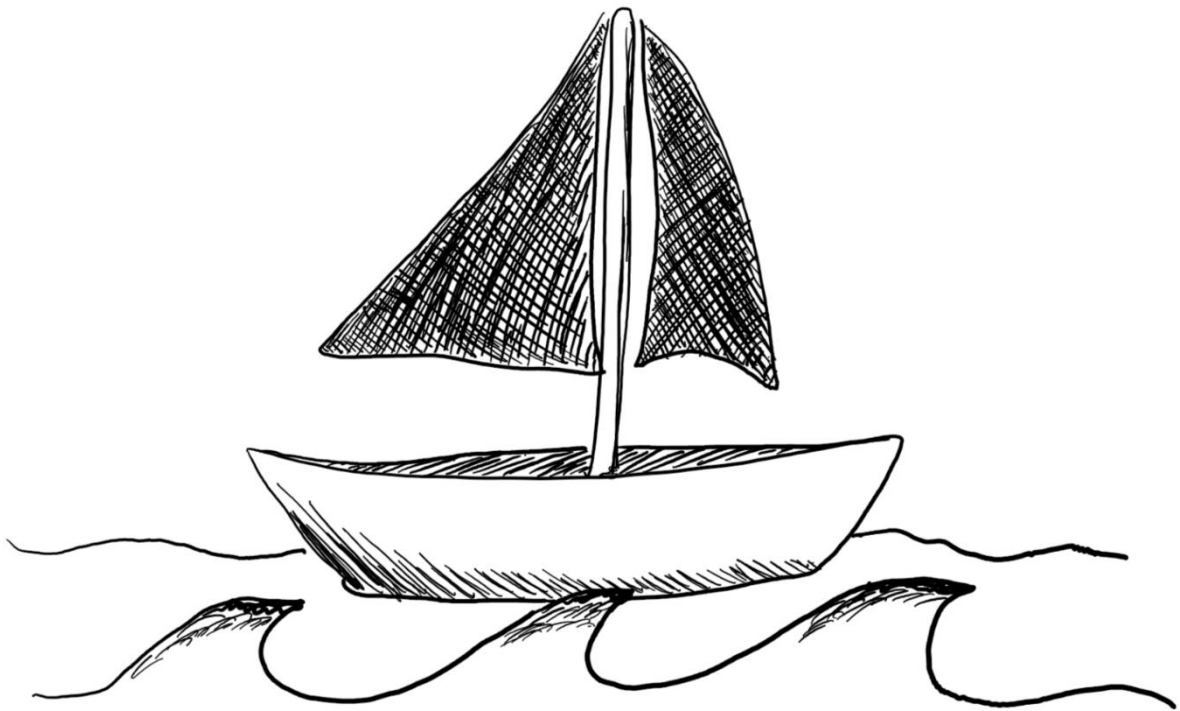
‘The fields I can see?’

‘No’

I’ll reply,

‘I think I’ll pick The Sea’.

Johnnie Diallo



Play

Winter carves its tyranny through bare trees,
whilst mornings lay empty with sunshine.
Inaudible words whispered in secret,
the answer is devalued before it is heard.

I watch opportunity wave as she passes by,
a saccharine smile twists her lips.
A corner of the earth turns on its own axis,
I braved the exposure for only a while.

Space age obscurity tightens its callous grip,
only adrenaline reminds us we're not invincible.
Open vowels roll off tongues like marbles,
Ears burnt and blistered by their beauty.

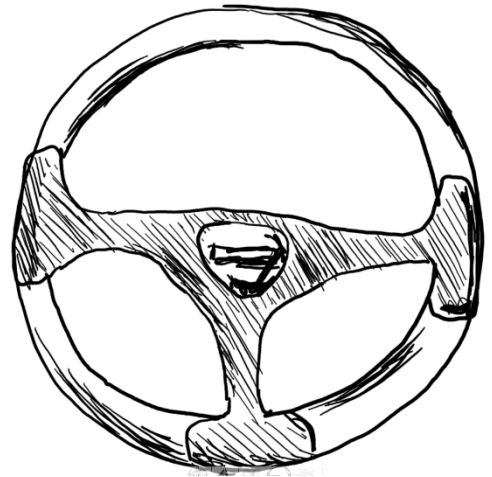
As water licks the rim of fleece-lined wellies,
A lifeboat bobs in dark, swirling oceans.
I wish away the best of my life on curiosity,
the foundations of impossible construction.

Jessica Legge



Father

Glazing the sticky intertwined insides of my **heart**
Fearing the drownings and droughts of a **tear**
A loving figure here to **hear**
At the steering of the wheel, driving at a **rate**
My Father is not easy to **hate**
At the bend of my day standing till **fate**
Eyes glued to me in the puzzled **heat**
Knackered in the crumpling of cinders in a **tare**
Beaming like last rays of sunshine blessing the **earth**
Swimming and staying at the bottom of my **reaf**
Without the need for a pricy **fare**



Effervescence of Nostalgia

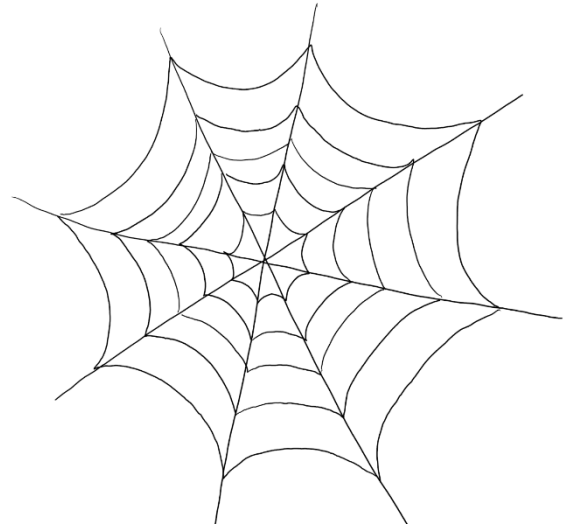
Glazing and glaring at me like a refraction of light hitting a prism, the pearly pink sparkle, spritzes in a cocktail. Painted and portrayed on every child's drawing engraved with silly cartoons. Beneath that, a hidden gem of diamonds reveals layers of colour. Dull shades of colour, red embers shoot about like a firework raining down in distress. Eating our energy. Slowly, hot plumes and fumes of sweet and salty mists waft ahead. It tastes sweet but with subtle hints of lemon and a dash of ginger. But as syrupy and treacly as honey; luxury like a perfect four-by-four smooth bar of chocolate. Amazing to taste with a smooth-buttery warm gooey taste. Never to forget. Like a toasty fluffy water bottle, with the softest fur, the scorching caramelised-hot and sticky substance inside burns. Crawling around my fingertips like a tarantula, the cozy and snuggly gleam cuddles me like my favourite teddy kept in my room for years and years. Yet, never kept in the same condition it was found in.

Jessica Lo

The void

It's heavy,
Slippery.
Trying to control it is like trying to hold boiling water
within soft, gentle hands,
It burns,
slithers through the cracks,
Breaking free of anything that dares to contain it.
Always present.
Conversations, gossip, information,
A thousand thoughts pulsing,
Intertwined.
Beneath their intricately woven web,
Screeching, continuously,
Sometimes discretely,
Allowing echoes of ideas and feelings to pass through.
Other times, when seeking attention,
The eerie scream grows,
Until dismissing it any further
feels like dismissing a baby's cry,
Once acknowledged, it crushes
and devours all surroundings,
Enveloping them in storm,
Until finally satisfied.
Pitch black,
A room flooded with darkness,
What is above you?
What is behind you?
What is beneath you?
What is ahead of you?
You don't know, you never can know,
Not until you venture out
And meet it yourself.

Heidi Mitchell



JOLLOF RICE

Of all the Nando's spice charts
donning their yellow, red peppers -

promises of burning lips and throats and . . .
Nothing comes close to the

heat that your orange grains brand
deeply, deep in me.

They offered me paella disguised under
specks of chilli flakes instead;

Paprika, was it? Sacrilegious to
your name.

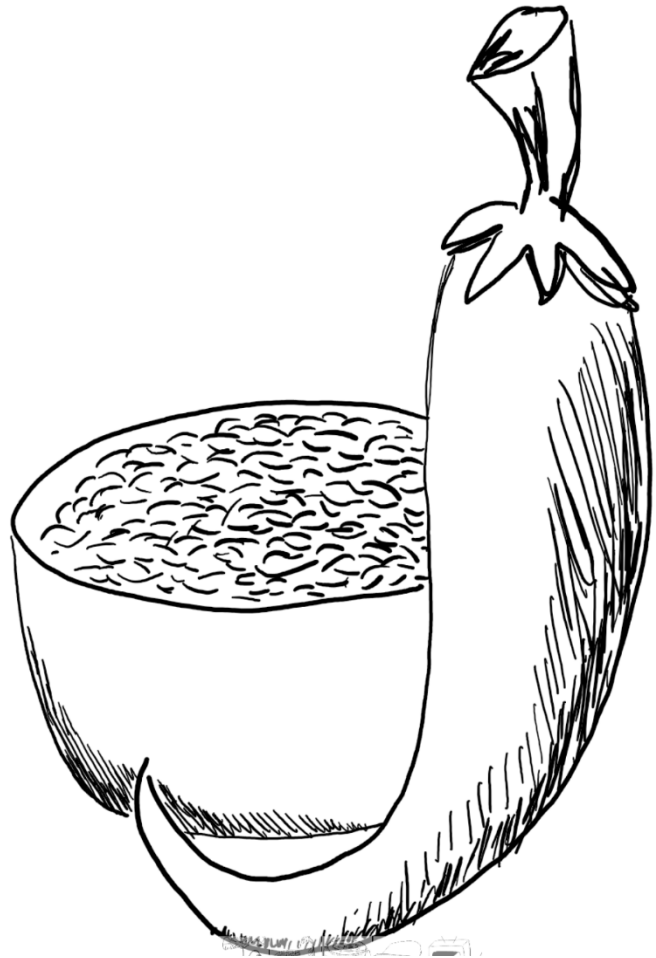
Yet as the cold air, alien to me,
bounces off. Tries to penetrate

the thick blankets
I must now hide beneath

in the name of warmth -
I find myself wishing for

paella, the chilli flakes,
bright orange grains,

a taste of home
to keep me. Warm.



WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON IN DEVON, 3921 MILES FROM HOME

Red peppersoup steaming,
bubbling upon our charcoal stove;
aroma drifting on my nose.

Mother running
shoes off running
Up and down the hilly estate.

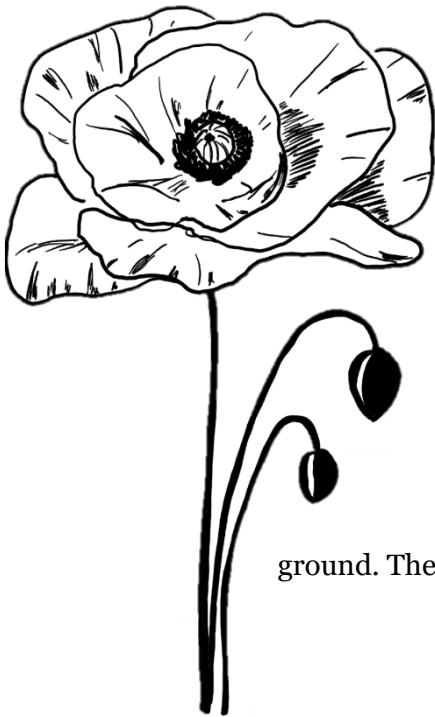
Father sat by the telly
checkered socks. Folded tightly in
his Ferragamo shoes.

Water. Blue as I
dart speedily through it.
Ankles flicking water up to the pulsing Sun.

Jadesola Okunubi

A Childish Peace

Space, and its absence
make pizza slices of light
on the east facing wall.
The day rotates,
slow moving and sticky.
Above, green leaves
glow yellow in the mid-morning.
A viscosity remains in the air.
The leaves oscillate
as the wind blows raspberries.



Novembers

The days collapse in on themselves, their bones
bent, nightfall tempting an ember
filled sky. Sunday: we veer
off the usual path and a puddle enrobes
the car bonnet. Later, a sombre
priest speaks redness, the chapel glowing like an oven
with poppy flowers. I read names through nerves.

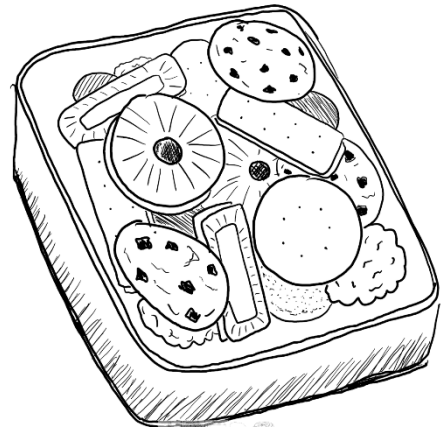
Seven
men who slipped beneath even
ground. Their bodies ripple, big, white mountainlike lines of speech; more bone
than body now. Bullets fly past, streamlined and sober.

is the quickening of dogs over furrowed earth,
their teeth, the heft
of their breath and this soft creature's fear.
You taught me to point a gun at something I did not hate,
to cut a bird's wings and pull its feathers out and down to slip my fingers deep into its fresh, wet heat.

Alix Scott-Martin

The Sacred Biscuit Cabinet

I have recently discovered the sacred biscuit cabinet,
which cowered at the end of the kitchen as my gaze fell upon it.
I stalked over to it, in great anticipation of the delights and wonders
that awaited my senses.
Little did the cabinet know of the carnage about to take place.
I knelt to reach the stubby cabinet, caressing its small door,
Faster than a snake, I struck.
The door offered little protection as it opened at the slightest jerk of the handle,
like a prisoner pleading for mercy.
The snacks were laid out like stacks of bank notes –
precise, orderly and proud.
The cabinet door that stood ajar seemed to shift slightly,
as if in protest of the burglary in action,
yet my moral compass would not be swayed so easily.
I glanced around briefly, and once affirming
that the coast was clear,
I swiped as many of the biscuits as possible,
aiming specifically for the jammy dodgers,
who seemed to be asking me something I couldn't dream of denying them.
Once satisfied with my load, I slammed the destitute cabinet door shut
and heart racing, bolted across the hall
up the stairs
through the corridor
to the safety of my room.



Yellow

I am suspicious of most yellows
They are too bright,
too happy
to be real, and so sickeningly obnoxious.

Pipe down, yellows, we understand you are
forever
eternally
permanently
Happy.

Yellows stereotypically represent 'positive' concepts,
The sun, happiness, flowers,
fruit, summer, the beach,
And all that nonsense.

I don't trust a single one of the yellows, apart
from the yellow of a dying sun,
for you are only ever true to yourself
When you know you have no other chance to be.

Our world and Their world

Unfair. Unjust. Contradictory. Hypocritical.

All words that come to mind when someone mentions 'our world'. In this beautiful little hidey-hole in the countryside, where the only gossip is that shared between squirrels across branches it is easy to forget about the rest of 'our world', and this temporary bliss brings solace to the mind. If there's one thing I truly believe about the world in relation to our hidey-hole, it's that we are an anomaly. One of countless others that when discovered is, at times, frowned upon, simply because people are jealous that they aren't experiencing our shared peace; jealous we have created a space away from 'them' and the negative worldly influences that corrupt everything in its path. In their world, we dream for the days to pass and nights to last, we know of yet don't know one another. In our world, we take the sunlight creeping over the hills and capture it. We bake and laugh and smile and eat together elatedly, then gaze at the golden rays of a tired star filtering the landscape a butter yellow. Until the corruption befalls us, we shall continue in this manner, writing our poems and sipping our tea, watching the fields sway and listening to the birds sing.

Viola Wilkinson

Ode to Kev

A flock of pigeons

A dark, distant silhouette

Kevin in a field

Johnnie Diallo, Emma Bouvier & Jessica Legge
Read *dramatically* by Mr Browning