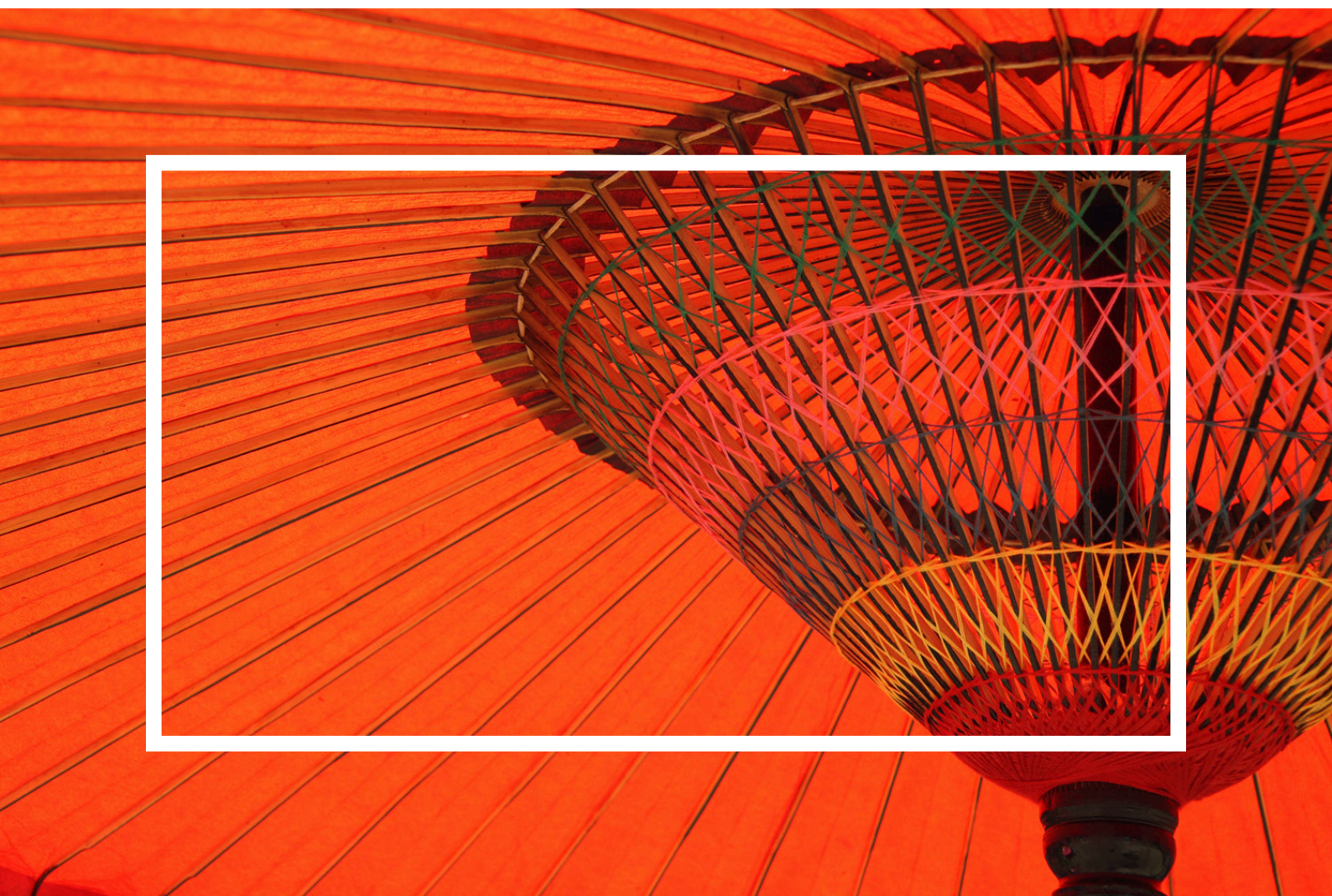


PENNING

SHELTER



DECEMBER 2017

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Shelter for me conjures up images of a bothy on a hillside or a nook in a rock face to hunker into during a storm. The dictionary tells me shelter is protection from the elements or from harm. The submissions in this issue exhibit many variations of protection, severity of elements and danger, giving us a wonderful diversity of work that leads me to re-imagine my own ideas of what shelter is.

The editors of PENnings are delighted to have award-winning Iranian poet Sepideh Jodeyri as our featured writer in this issue. After fleeing Iran following the 2009 election, not only did she have to seek shelter for herself in another country, but as a writer-in-exile whose work was banned at home, the poetry

itself had to find new homes and new audiences.

In her poem “Kitchen”, Anita John shows, not only the safety and warmth of home, but the unassuming comfort of a mother’s care. Whereas Brian Johnstone’s “Heritor” revisits the kitchen after the owner’s death, empty and yet still retaining warmth from memory.

Death and memory also features in Donald Adamson’s “Bield” with tears shed at a graveside. As the only Scots poem in the selection it is appropriate that *bield* is Scots for *shelter*. Weather, another dominant element of this poem occurs in two other pieces.

Short story “The Wait” by Pauline



Jérémie uses the first person plural to give a collective voice to islanders anticipating a violent summer storm.

The second short story in the collection shows us that a building can be used as a safe refuge in more than one way. “An Old People’s Home” by Samina Chaudhry sees a former haven for the elderly reclassified into a hostel for newly arrived immigrants.

“When All This” by Ken Cockburn is after Irish poet Eilean Ní Chuilleanain. Although not obvious in the title, the musings of a swineherd shows us safety in a simple life. “At night beneath my thin quilt, I shall lie/Listening to the slow metamorphosis of cream to butter”.

No shelter collection would be complete without reference to an ark. In “Ark 1” and “Ark 2” Elizabeth Rimmer uses this biblical symbol to explore the capacity of sacred boxes as a form of refuge.

I hope you enjoy this selection as much as the editors do.

The guest editor for this issue of PENning Shelter is Sue Reid Sexton. She is joined by Linda Cracknell, Moira McPartlin and Liz Niven. Many thanks to Nik Williams for his collation of the submissions and Becca Inglis for her creation of this online magazine.

Moira McPartlin

SEPIDEH JODEYRI

FEATURED WRITER



Sepideh Jodeyri is an Iranian poet, literary critic, translator and journalist, who has published several works, including five poetry collections, a collection of short stories and an anthology of her poems. She has also translated poetry books by Edgar Allan Poe and Jorge Luis Borges as well as the graphic novel, *Blue Is the Warmest Color* by Julie Maroh into Persian. Sepideh was forced to leave Iran in 2009, and currently lives in exile in Washington DC, the United States.

FERESHTEH VAZIRI NASAB

TRANSLATOR

Fereshteh Vaziri Nasab (born in 1959) is an Iranian writer, translator, literary critic and theater director. She studied English literature in Iran and after getting her master degree, worked as a lecturer at different universities for several years. After being expelled from the university because of her political views, she left Iran for Germany in 2001.

She has translated three plays, several short stories and poems from English or German into Persian and has written many other articles, short stories, and

poems, which have been published in different Iranian literary magazines. Two collections of poems - her own and a translation from German poets - and a play, named “Homeland was no Pansy” are among her recent works. She has also directed her own play and two other plays in the last years, performed at different theater festivals and in different cities in Germany. The performance of “Homeland was no Pansy” at Iranian Theater Festival in Heidelberg won the audience award in 2014.

SOUR

TO SYRIAN CHILDREN

This song has turned sour
The sorrow has turned sour
The blessing for the earth,
Without doubt,
Has turned sour.

Crossing
And your eyed deaths,
That tumble over each other
Make her body worth seeing

Where is that bloody sigh tonight?
Where am I?
The one-way songs
In the tedious air
Enter your ear
And the ear refuses to hear

Oh, my shattered sin!
My heart is filled with you
And the moment that we can be
tolerated
Is approaching.

I miss the story
That was more prohibited than
anything else
And its reading was calmer than

anything else
I miss the gradual becoming
everything
The gradual becoming everything

Damn my head
Damn the lust
Damn Eve
That all we became
Was amorous
So much that we laughed
And it had no shape
So much that we took a breath
And it had no shape
So much that we died
And it had no shape
Oh, my shattered sin!

Here is revolution*
And it has no relationship with the
street
In the huge ears here
Goes no drum sound in
The air is in the lowest scale of
tolerance
And the sorrows have a heart they
have a heart

And I, that pass by you like the
sunset,
Go home
In the white white pasts

I am perplexed by these perplexing
skeins
I am perplexed by these perplexing
skeins

How has a scale become a scale
to respect whom?
How has water become water to
respect whom?
Oh my shattered sin!





THE MODE OF MY COMPLEXION

TO FEREDOUN FARROKHZAD , WHO NEVER GETS COLD

The mode of my complexion is round
And the sleep for getting heavy
A breath that is warm
And the bells that call the sound clang.
The mode of my complexion,
Thinks about getting warm
And the melting of the stones on the ice,
Whenever it grows.

One should forget
That the mode of my complexion
Once longed for being a mode
That the cold
Cannot catch up with me

Now, how little time do I have
to get cold?

The mode of my complexion,
Which should reply
Is dead.

THERE IS A HEART IN A MAXI DRESS

Modest are the brands of maxi dresses
I think of my competences
And my heart falls for your passion
The lust for your passion,
Which falls in love
With all.

I am open because of you look I am open because of you
I'm the leaking body drops
Drink
Because every night
There is a heart
In a maxi dress
Smell
Because passion flames
 Out of my mouths

Shame on sorrow from you
 Oh love!

How languid I am for making a move
For your passion

I look like a geometry,
Which smells like geometry
However,
With no property.

THE PROPORTION

FOR IRAN

It is proportion that you observe
That the world does not rotate over your head
And the stars hold the corners of the earth forever
Firmly

It is proportion that this plenty of water
Is beaten in mortars of pain,
Firmly

And fills your alleys
With breathless faces

It is proportion that there is no day
And the night comes to an end immediately
Like a shadeless embrace
Afraid of being embraced
Firmly.



THE CORNER

FOR LEILA ESFANDYARI WHO
USED TO SEE THE WORLD
FROM A HIGHER POINT



If I could catch up on some sleep
Like a prehistoric man
And become multispecies
From the middle of my body

If I could catch up on my eyes
And put them on a peak
To see the world
Higher

If I could run to Freedom square
And take a taxi again to a time in the history
And watch the street
Full of revolution

If I could catch up on my laughter,
My mouth
And take refuge to a corner
From your silent looks.

POETRY

BRIAN JOHNSTONE

Brian Johnstone is a poet, writer and performer whose work has appeared throughout Scotland, elsewhere in the UK, in North America and across Europe. He has published six collections, most recently *Dry Stone Work* (Arc, 2014). His poems have been translated into over a dozen languages. In 2015 his work was selected to appear on the Poetry Archive website.

His memoir *Double Exposure* was published by Saraband in February 2017. A founder and former Director of StAnza: Scotland's International Poetry Festival, he has appeared at various poetry festivals, from Macedonia to Nicaragua, and at numerous venues across the UK.

brianjohnstonepoet.co.uk/

ANITA JOHN

Anita John is Writer in Residence for RSPB Scotland Loch Leven 2017, a member of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, a poet and creative writing tutor. Her book, "Child's Eye," was published by Biscuit Publishing in 2013 and is available from Amazon.

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HERITOR

I can open your door, if I think myself back
far enough, walk down your dim-lit hallway,

by the grandfather clock that gave me the creeps,
turning not right to the bedroom, its closet of books,

but left, and you're there. It's your chair I remember,
straight-backed and chintzed, you sat by the fire

in the back room more easy to heat, its small scale
that echoed your own stooping frame. Don't

send me away, down to the shops, or next door
to collect the journal you share; but into the kitchen

to save your old pins, gas on a peep for the soup,
to slice up the loaf you've left out on the board

I'm using today, in a kitchen you weren't to see,
the breadboard as good as ever it was, though

scored with the marks of each of our knives
and floured with the grains of time we have lost.

by Brian Johnstone

ORCADIAN GOTHIC

from the account by Edwin Muir of his mother's childhood narrative

The cliché really true – a dark and stormy night, she said it was, and she alone, dripping spread upon a piece of loaf, her knitting, and the fire to tend till parents, brothers, younger sisters should return from a revival service at the kirk.

Faith and prayer had urged them out, and she, at eighteen, old enough to leave the first time quite alone to mind the farm. The lamps all lit, the hearth ablaze, she didn't mind the storm thrashing at the windows, thatch and walls.

No, it was the men put her to fright. A rattling at the door. Water teeming from their clothes, ten tall men strode in, spoke to her in words quite beyond her ken, sat themselves, an arc around the fire. A corner held her in her fear.

The night wore on. Not another word was said. Mist rising from their gear, the ten men huddled to the blaze. She held her place, quite in terror of her life. Not men from any other farm about the island, what like they were she didn't know.

The cliché really true – the clock upon the wall, she said, struck twelve. The door creaked open. Now it was her family coming home. The men spoke up anew, but her father caught their drift. Ten stranded Danes, their split boat on the beach.

by Brian Johnstone





THE KITCHEN

It's here light burns into the night, and life
begins with the flick of a switch each morning,

where teaspoon chinks against china, knife rubs against fork,
and the teakettle sings for chocolate, coffee, chamomile.

It's here we depart for office, school and gym;
returning with stories, hopes and headaches

to the fine chopping of mint on the wooden block,
the slicing of lamb, shredding and mashing of tatties.

It's here the children gather, the cats close to their calves,



and nobody's dog noses open the door to steal the Sunday joint,

where mackerel poke from the sink the day the son sails from Eyemouth,
catches a catch he's too ill to gut or grill, to eat or watch the others eating.

It's here we open the door to neighbours, working men,
strangers; welcome kin with kisses, queries, gossip,

where our mother wakes to the seasons' change,
watches her children come and go, her dogs live and die.

It's here her gaze leans towards window,
to the privet hedge and the street beyond

and here she meets death's face, her head
bent over the kitchen sink, the tap running hard.

by Anita John


KEN COCKBURN



Ken Cockburn was born and grew up in Kirkcaldy, and now lives in Edinburgh where he works as a poet and translator, as well as running Edinburgh Poetry Tours, guided walks in the city's Old Town.

kencockburn.co.uk

DONALD ADAMSON

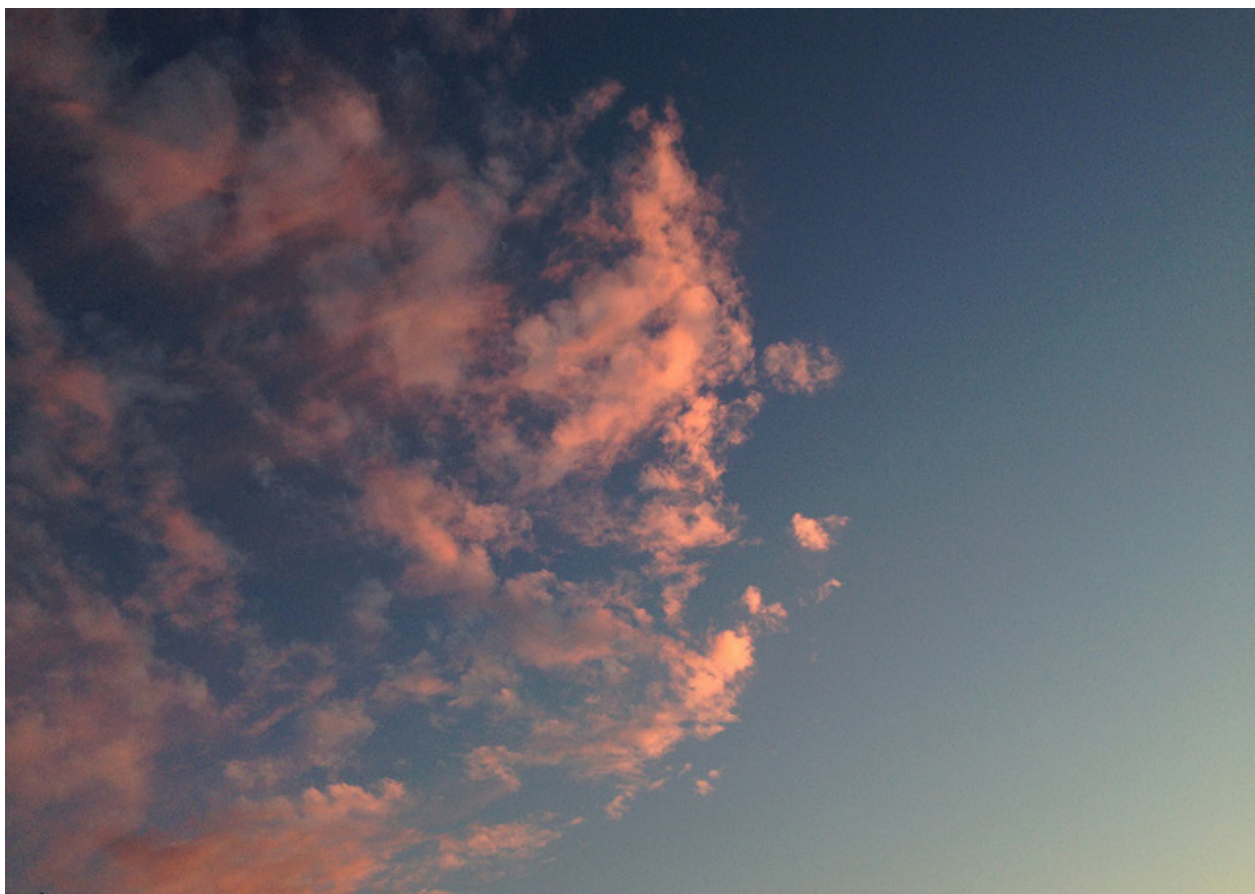


Donald Adamson is a poet/translator, living in Scotland and Finland. He won first prize in the Sangschaw Scots Poetry Competition (translation) 2017 and first prize in the Glasgow Herald Millennium Competition, 1999. He was also a prizewinner in the McCash Scots Poetry Competition, 2014, the Cornwall Contemporary Poetry Competition, 2016, and the 'Off the Stanza' Competition, 2017. His collections include *From Coiled Roots* (2014 IDP) and *Glamourie* (2015 IDP), plus a volume of translations from the Finnish of Eeva Kilpi (*Arc* 2014).



WHEN ALL THIS

AFTER EILEAN NÍ CHUILLEANAIN



When all this—

white nights
the fox-hunters
the cream-skimmers
kitchen stour
the faraway smell of roasting coffee-beans
and the never-ending demands on my time

—when all this
muttered the swineherd to himself
comes
to a final, bloody and irrevocable full-stop

I shall return to the sticks
to discuss the shifting clouds,
setting the negligible ups-and-downs of the barometer
at the centre of my social life.

I shall impress the devout ladies of the neighbourhood
with the delicate scent of my berry wines
and the fireplace, all gleaming brass and steel
will be a shrine.

At night, beneath my thin quilt, I shall lie
listening to the slow metamorphosis of cream to butter
and the stillness of water in the stone hollow.

I shall follow the straight path through the orchard
whose purple shade the foxes treasure
and where the apple-blossom—
what did my father always say?—
'is allowed to wither on the bough'.

by Ken Cockburn



BIELD

Staunin afore her grave
he feels a smirr o rain
wattin his cheeks

that micht be his tears
or hers
for the grandweans she niver saw,
the wee lassie
whae'll suin be fower
and the laddie, fifteen month noo.

Whan he streens his lugs
and listens wi aa his micht
he can juist about mak oot the wirds
in the sang o the rain:
Thy bield...wad be my bosom...
tae share it aa.

by Donald Adamson

ELIZABETH RIMMER

Elizabeth Rimmer has been widely published in magazines and on-line. Her first collection, *Wherever We Live Now*, was published in 2011 by Red Squirrel Press who also published her second, *The Territory of Rain*, in September 2015. She was awarded the honour of Makar of the Federation of Writer (Scotland) in 2016. Her third collection *Haggards* will appear in February 2018, including poems about herbs, wild landscapes, and ways of knowing as a response to personal grief and social upheaval.

burnedthumb.co.uk



If it isn't a shelter it isn't a house of worship

Erica Grieder

This is a box to hold what is most sacred.
We endow it with purple and gold, we make it
of finest acacia wood, with linen and leather,
adorn it with jewels and spices for chrism.
It is precious, and powerful, guarded by angels.

This is the box to hold our heart's treasures -
a law of kindness to strangers, of justice and integrity,
a promise of faithfulness to what we hold most dear,
a memory of mercy, of hope granted, and peace.

This is a box, made of what came to hand,
built under threat of death, made to shelter
the vulnerable from anger and rising waters,
strong enough to float, elastic enough to hold
two of every single creature on the earth.

by Elizabeth Rimmer

ARK 2

And how could they believe it, those ancient societies -
a floating box, with all those animals, the food enough
for all of them, and the extended family, and servants,
all squabbling no doubt, and the questions of which
would get to eat which? And how would it float?
Yet every culture had it, the record of a great flood
still seen in the soil, and a story of a box
holding the seeds and survivors, renewing the earth.
Somewhere we believe that when the worst happens
there will be a shelter, a covenant with our God,
a safe haven for all of us, both clean and unclean,
and what we think of as goodness will save us,
send us a rainbow, shelter us all.

by Elizabeth Rimmer



Born in Manchester, moved to London then Lahore, Pakistan and then came to Glasgow in 1998. Previously I've had pieces published in PENning, this wurd, Tales From a Cancelled Country and most recently in a book called, Ten Writers Telling Lies, a collaboration of music, fiction and poetry.

**SAMINA
CHAUDHRY**

PROSE

**PAULINE
JÉRÉMIE**

Born and raised in France, Pauline holds a masters in Creative Writing with distinction from the University of Edinburgh, and now lives and works in the Scottish capital. Her writing has been published in From Arthur's Seat and The Ogilvie, and she recently performed her work at the 70th Edinburgh Fringe Festival.



AN OLD PEOPLE'S HOME

by Samina Chaudhry



The story started off with no plot structure and no thought of where it would be going. Initially it follows Ali and the narrator coming to a new place but then realizing there are other characters coming through who are living in the same home, marginalised in their own way, and yet they converge together on a certain level. Money is an important dynamic in life and I wanted to explore how the economics of it play into the fragility of relationships.

Also the struggle for normality and to have a secure life that some of the characters don't find in their own homeland. The title of the piece came from Bernard Mac Laverty's short story, "Just Visiting". The moment when the narrator described the building next to the hospital he was visiting as an Old People's Home was an effective description that I had in mind when I started writing this story.

Ali picked me up from Manchester Airport, while Mujji and Eroma and their two children waited in the car. Sixteen hours after driving around, stopping at Mujji's friends and acquaintances homes, we passed the welcome sign of Scotland. We left the main city area and were on country lanes. Some time later we stopped outside a building. There was a throbbing pain in my legs from sitting too cramped, and I shivered as

I got out of the car. The rain was falling continuously.

Tomorrow I'll buy you a coat, Ali said looking at me.

Inside was a long corridor with rooms on both sides and when you turned the corner it ran into another longer corridor and more rooms. It had once been an old people's home but now



an old woman called Catherine lived in one room, in another a woman who was also here from Lahore, trying to complete her PhD. Our room was at the far end. I put my suitcase down and went over to the window. Cold air was coming in from the cracks in the frame of the window. From the dim light of the moon I could make out an overgrown garden, a slide and a swing.

Walking along the corridor I could smell the dampness as well as the smell of chapattis being made. Not knowing where to go I opened the door to a couple of the rooms. Some of them looked like storage space for old furniture. Further along as I turned the corner, Eroma was coming out of the kitchen holding a jug of water. She gestured towards the dining room. Ali was sitting at the dining table and

Mujji was on the sofa, dozing off. The PhD came in holding a single chapatti balanced on a scrunched up tea towel. She squeezed in the narrow space between the wall and the back of Ali's chair. She leaned forward to put the chapatti down. Ali shifted uncomfortably, moving forward as her breasts pressed against the back of his neck. She picked up a plate, put some food onto it and went over to Mujji. He opened his eyes as she tapped him on the arm and handed him the plate. She didn't eat and sat down on the sofa opposite him, cracked some jokes, and asked about his birthday, telling him how she was going to dance on it. He smiled nodding his head every now and then as she talked.

Despite feeling quite hungry I felt as if I had lost my appetite. I took a couple of mouthfuls and we came back to our room. Ali pulled the curtains back.

There's a full moon out there, he said as we made love.

The next morning, I opened our door to go to the bathroom. The PhD was standing there. She looked up, quickly turned round and began walking towards her room. She opened her door and went inside. I stood there for a couple of seconds then picked up my shampoo, towel and soap and went to the bathroom opposite her room. Thank goodness, I thought, there's hot water coming here. The bath tub in our bathroom was not functional.

Back in our room, I was looking out of the window again. Across the garden there were acres of green fields surrounding by barbed wire fences. It was an hours or so drive to the city centre and no buses came up here. I sat down. Ali was getting ready for work.

Mujji and Eroma at home? I asked.

They're away to work.

The children?

One's away to school. The other one is at home. Just make sure he doesn't get into trouble.

Could we not have stayed in Lahore?

Ali came and sat down beside me on the bed.

As soon as I find a decent job we'll move out of here.

I nodded.

What time will you be back?

I'll try to be home early.

I went looking for the little boy. On the way I passed Catherine's door. I could hear her coughing. Near her room the double doors to another room were slightly ajar. Once it must have been a dining room but now it was filled with

old furniture, beds, armchairs, broken cupboards and God knows so many other things piled on top of one another. It led into a much bigger kitchen that smelt of rotting meat. The door to one of the freezers was open, the ice spilling out against the door. I held my breath and walked out.

The PhD was in the smaller kitchen making a cup of tea. She was wearing a pink low-cut nightie and her face was greasy like she'd just massaged it with oil. She nodded towards me, then looked away. I remembered Ali saying something about having the dinner ready for the children, as well as for Mujji and Eroma for when they came back from work. She turned round as she saw me open one of the cupboards.

Just be careful to not leave things out, especially food as there are rats here, she said.

In the kitchen?

She nodded.

I saw one here on the worktop the other day.

On the cooker, the base of the pots were black like they had been used for cooking on an open fire. The black soot like thing rubbed onto my hands. The marks went lighter as I scrubbed my hands with soap. Just then the little boy came running inside, holding a toy gun in one hand, green boogers

running down his nose. He fired a couple of pretend shots in the air and went running out, disappearing into the big dining room.

The next couple of weeks I cooked and cleaned, got the little boy ready for afternoon nursery. Some days I'd finish making a pot of food and when I'd be back some time later there would be hardly anything left in the pot. To save me from cooking again I'd be checking every now and then, as the entrance door to our building was always open and there were other people staying in the building outside. One day I saw the PhD leaving the kitchen, holding a plate covered with a tea towel. She quickly disappeared round the corridor.

I didn't see her for a couple of days and those were the days when I didn't have to cook double dinners. I thought she'd probably gone somewhere. Then one afternoon as I was getting the little boy ready, she walked into the sitting room. Her eyes were swollen and she had a tape over her nose. She had got a nose job done. She told me she was getting ready to go back home and Mujji and Eroma had helped her to get a grant for her nose surgery. She removed the tape, showing me her new nose. I couldn't say which looked better on her, the old nose or the new one. She sat down on the sofa with her cup of tea. We didn't speak for a while. Then I looked towards her and said:

You did well to stick around here these





last nine years.

She smiled.

Home is home. But God bless Mujji and Eroma who took me in.

She told of how she came over here on a scholarship but after five years with her degree still not complete she ran out of money. She was homeless and would walk down streets always hungry. She talked about home, how she had been a warden at a girl's hostel but now she would go back and become a professor at a good University.

The next couple of days I bumped into her quite a bit. Most of the time she'd be standing outside in the doorway, smiling and talking to the men who lived in the other building. One of them, a doctor here from another country, preparing for his PLAB test was always invited inside, for cups of tea and titbits of food she'd take out of the fridge. She also had a habit of using Mujji and Eroma's bathroom when they were away but never shut the door properly. Once I walked in whilst she was in the tub. Later, she came over to ask me if I had seen anything while she was having a shower. Although I'd seen enough, I replied no.

The first time Ali went into her room, was to ask her if he could use her computer. He came back after ten minutes. He said he'd never go back there again. Apparently she'd sat on her bed in her nightie, leaning back against the pillows with her legs stretched out in front of her, all the time never taking her eyes off him.

The next morning Ali marched into our room.

Did you not flush the toilet? he asked.

I always do.

There's shit in our toilet.

I stood up.

It's okay. I've flushed it now. Ali shook his head.

Then again some days later our toilet had been used again and not been flushed. It's her, I know it's her, Ali said, blaming the PhD. When I told Eroma, thinking maybe she'd do something about it, she laughed it off, saying there was some kind of tension going on between the PhD and Ali even before I came.

I don't want you to be ever seen talking

to her, Ali said to me.

The shitting stopped after a week. When I asked Ali about it, he wouldn't say what he'd done, instead smiling slyly, saying all that mattered was that the problem had probably been fixed. After that whenever I'd bump into her in the corridor, she'd always look away. The one job that she had of making tea and toast for Catherine was passed onto me. Eroma said it worked better that way as I was the one at home. Every morning I'd knock on Catherine's door, waiting with her breakfast till she told me to come inside. Some days she'd tell me to leave the tray outside her door.

We never talked or said hello. She'd once been in charge of the kitchen, cooking for the other older residents. But when the home closed down she had stayed on not wanting to leave the place. She hardly ever came out of her room, and if she did it was only to warm a tin of soup. She was also a chain smoker. Whenever I went into her room she'd be watching TV, holding a lit cigarette in one hand, on the bedside cabinet a pile of cigarette butts in the ashtray. The walls of her room were yellow with the fug of smoke and her carpet was littered with flakes of dry skin caused by a skin disorder. I was

always glad to come out of her room but hoped that one day she would also go to a better place to stay, like the other residents had.

One evening after sitting for several hours packing tights I told Ali that I couldn't do the work that I was doing. I put the pack of tights I was holding on the bed.

I need a break, I said.

From me?

From everything. I need to be away from this place even if it's for a couple of weeks.

Ali stopped packing. He looked at me.

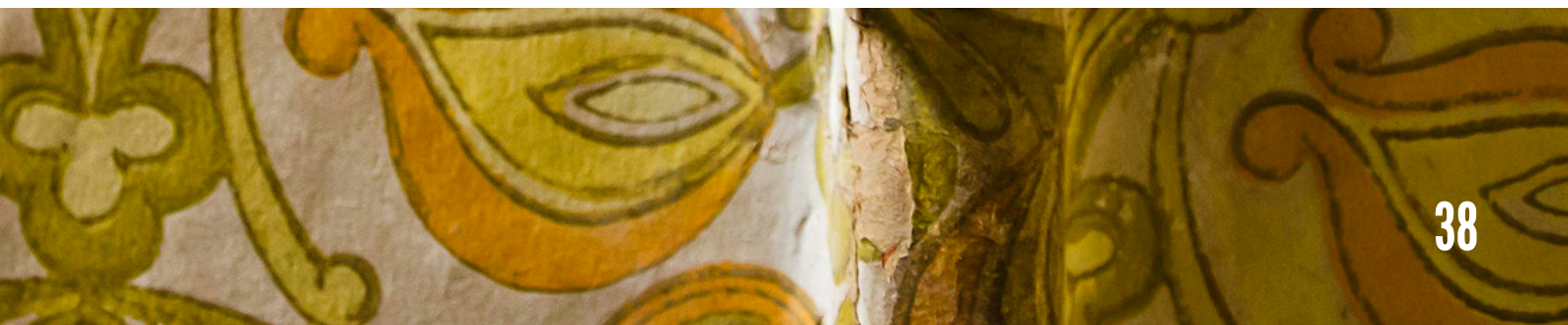
The children. Who will look after them?

I can't do this anymore. I wish I was back home.

I promise by next year we'll have a place of our own.

Can't you rent a flat?

Ali didn't say anything.





THE WAIT

by Pauline Jérémie

We spend the day in Grand-Rivière on the black sand beach, thin and dormant and spanning across the north coast of the island. We come in the morning to lay our towels down in the shade of bentover palm trees on the carcasses of small crabs with abdomens shaped like hearts, and nap in the heavy, windless heat through the day. The water is hot and polluted with the oil from the fishermen's boats and rainbow puddles float on its surface. We dip our feet in it but our mothers have told us about the anger of the fishermen and the venom of the stonefish so we remain on the beach like we were taught when we were young. Our hair is big and our bodies bare, and further down the beach children are building black sandcastles with windowless towers and fishbone bridges.

The summer has been hot. Summers are always hot on the island, sticky with humidity and noisy with the croaking of toads at night, but this summer has brought with it a relentless wave of dry crops, restless sleep, and tense fatigue. Every morning our babies wake us up screaming and we open our front doors to find dead flies on our porches and birds hiding in the spare leaves of

our dying trees. We barely eat and we barely work and we barely speak, and at night when finally we fall asleep we dream of the volcano coming to life and of an island engulfed in lava.

It is the end of the afternoon when the first thunderclap resonates over the water. The sky is still blue and immobile but we perk up from our slumber to look around the beach. Some of us are still passed out on our towels, our hair dark halos of curls around our sweaty faces, and the children's playful screams can still be heard in the distance. The second thunderclap brings with it lightning bolts that start ripping through the sky, silent but godlike in the growing darkness. In the horizon the fishermen are pulling up their nets and some are already bringing their boats back to safety.

We all know that a summer storm is trouble, and that the sea will soon become agitated with the wrath of the wind that will smack branches into our windows and blow tiles off our roofs. Summers on the island are always interrupted by hour-long storms that tear down trees and turn streets into flowing rivers and keep us locked

inside our homes until finally the wind stops blowing and the world around us quiets down and everything is silent again save for the murmur of water cruising down pavements and dripping off persistent leaves.

The beach becomes chaos as we pack up our towels and fans and oils and run back up to the town through boulders and seaweed. The sun is starting to set and the sky has turned grey, pregnant with rain and anger, so we hurry back to our homes in the dark with no shoes on our feet and no clothes on our backs. Our hair is heavy with humidity and our skins sticky with the heat still so palpable it is like walking through honey.

In the coldness of our homes we leave behind ourselves trails of black sand grains on white ceramic tiles. We wrap ourselves up in towels and rub the dirt off our feet and settle down by the windows in rickety chairs, our rooms and faces lit up only by the flashes of lightning that break the uniformity of the sky. Our bodies smell of salt. Whenever the thunder roars over the island our houses come alive with shivers like a beating heart, pulsing with excitement through the tremor before falling asleep again.

We are ready for the storm. We've been ready for the storm for weeks, praying in the morning for rain and in the evening for wind, praying all day for a break from the heat and for the feeling

to be alive again. We are longing for the musky smell of wet dirt and the feeling of warm water hitting our skins like slaps, for the drumming of the rain against our walls and the dampness in the air. For so long we've waited for the relief of a thunderstorm, all anger and punishment but a blessing to our bodies and souls, and at last it is coming.

We wait. By our windows like well-trained puppies we wait, with the dread of children and the excitement of adults who understand the simple things in life we wait. We count the seconds between thunderclaps to gauge how far the storm is, bracing ourselves for the fury of the shower and the deafening growl of the storm. We wait. All night by our windows we wait, startling awake with each branch that breaks, each rumble of thunder, each flash of lightning that illuminates our faces whenever our eyelids grow so heavy they close like thick theatre curtains.

We wait so long we fall asleep at our observation posts by the windows, our faces angled towards the sky in eagerness and our bodies curled up under colourful beach towels, and dream of streams of lava sneaking through cracks into our homes like glowing red snakes. In the morning our babies scream and we awake to find dead flies on our porches and birds hiding in the leaves of our dry, dying trees.



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