

# PENNING

DIGNITY



JULY 2019

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Please note: The writing and ideas outlined in the pieces of writing contained in this publication represent the ideas and beliefs of the authors alone. They do not reflect or represent the ideas and beliefs of Scottish PEN.

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## This issue's guest editor is Nadine Aisha Jassat

Nadine Aisha Jassat, our guest editor, is in receipt of a New Writers Award from the Scottish Book Trust, and shortlisted for the Edwin Morgan Poetry Award. Her debut poetry collection *Let Me Tell You This* was published by 404 Ink in March 2019 to great praise, described as a 'powerful, punchy debut collection' by Makar Jackie Kay, 'An important collection... incisive, delicate and precise as it interrogates the trauma of systematic and everyday racism' by Nikesh Shukla

She has been published widely online and in print; including by New Writing Scotland, Litro Magazine, The British Council's 'Discover' Project (for which she won the UK Open Call), 404 ink's acclaimed Nasty Women, and she has appeared at numerous literary events including Neu! Reekie!, StAnza: Scotland's International Poetry Festival, Aye Write: Glasgow's Festival of Literature, and Edinburgh International Book Festival.

As a creative practitioner, she often works to address issues to do with gender and race inequality; including an art exhibition with survivors of domestic abuse (Scottish Women's Aid, 2013), creating theatre with young people exploring sexual violence (Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre, 2014), and working to invest in young women of colour's creative and political expression (My Big Beating Voice, 2018).





# FOREWORD

Welcome to the current edition of PENnings selected and edited by Scottish PEN's Writers In Exile Committee. We publish this online magazine bi-annually, and welcome submissions from Scottish PEN members, refugees and asylum seekers, and writers whose first language is not English, as long as we are provided with a translation into English or Scots.

Each edition focuses on a theme (though we are quite generous in our interpretation of this) and 'Dignity' was selected for the current one. Next up, the theme is 'Truth' – a sometimes elusive character! Our invited guest editor usually chooses the theme for the next edition, and we were delighted to welcome Nadine Aisha Jassat as our guest for this edition. Nadine is carving a busy path through the current Scottish scene and we are pleased to publish her thoughts below on participating in this PENnings selection.

A featured international writer, generally with first hand experience of censorship in their own country, is also a regular

inclusion in PENnings and this time we feature the distinguished Venezuelan writer, Rafael Cadenas. Assisted in this selection by Gianinni Mastrangioli Salazar, himself an exile from his native Venezuela, we are grateful for his help.

A special extra section of the writing of young people from Turkey appears as an annexe to this edition. Part of a project involving Turkish writing appearing in PEN websites across the world, we are happy to provide a platform for this new writing, some still in early drafts, some hurriedly translated into English, all of it created in difficult circumstances.

We hope you enjoy reading through all the current edition of PENnings, and perhaps feel inspired to contribute to our next edition on the theme of 'Truth'.

Liz Niven

Convener Writers In Exile Committee

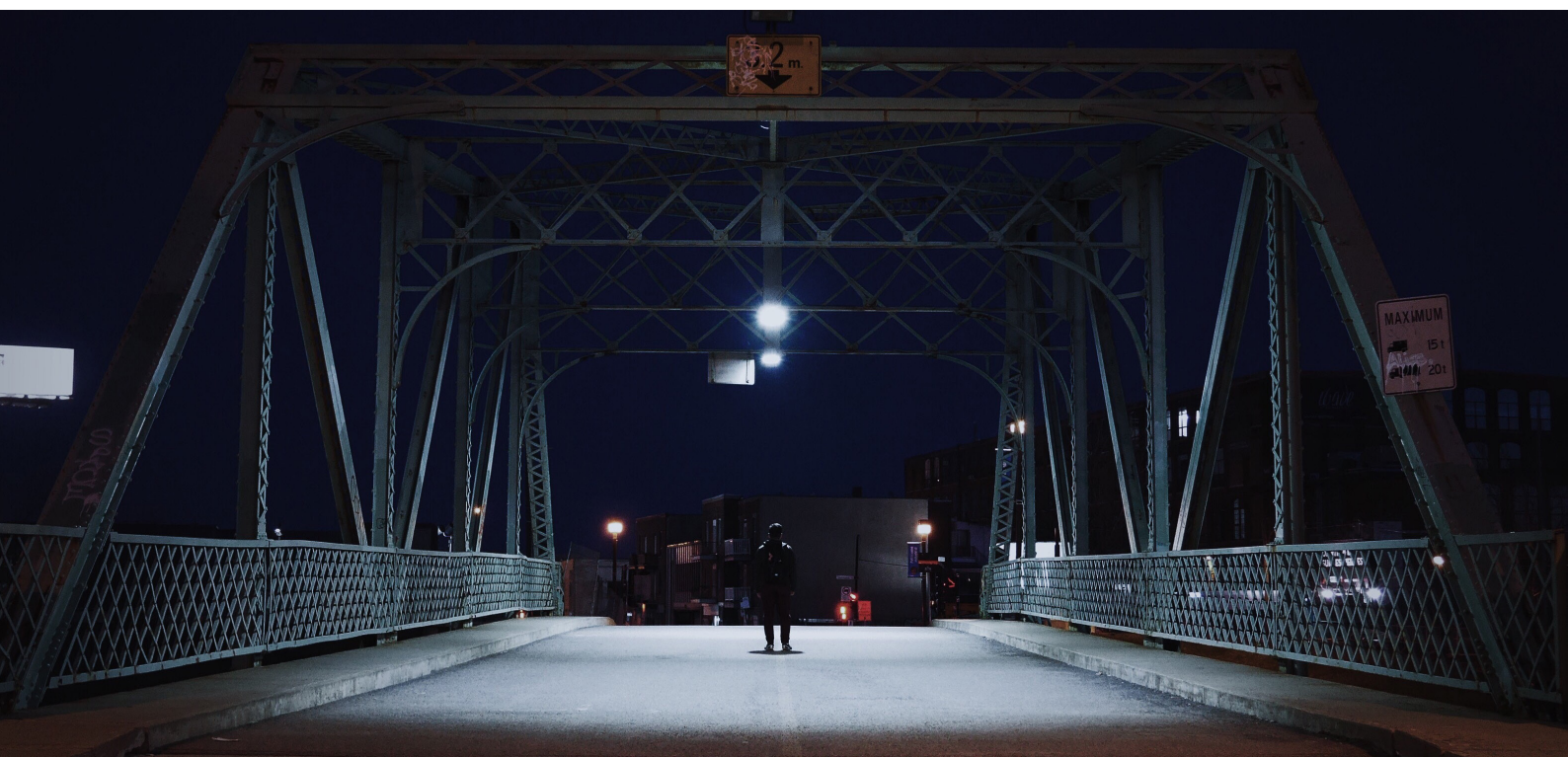
# INTRODUCTION

GUEST EDITOR: NADINE AISHA JASSAT

What does Dignity mean to you, what does it look like in different contexts, and from different approaches or points of view? Is it the rebellious teacher of *Reprimand*, throwing her hat into the river? Or is it, as in *Home*, 'the language of the mountains, the sea, the sea, the sea,' and 'the delicious feel of Arabic' in one's incantations, or the sense of grace of a highland lady, returning northwards, homewards, and looking out across the strath as in *Clearances*. Each writer in this issue offers their own take and interpretation, across poetry, prose, life writing, and in turn invites the reader to consider their own response to what 'dignity' means to them.

It was a pleasure to work alongside the Scottish PEN Writers in Exile Committee to select the pieces in this volume, and to take care together over each submission. Through our conversations we drew out a sense of our own understandings of this issues theme, and also small surprises in the possible interpretations others present. We shared a passion for the written word, and for writers having their voices heard. We hope you enjoy traversing these pages, and thank you to all the writers' who submitted their work, and to those published here.

Enjoy.







FEATURED  
WRITER

# RAFAEL CARDENAS

**Rafael Cardenas**, born 1930, is Venezuela's most renowned and celebrated living poet. He has been awarded the National Prize for Literature and the National Prize for Essay in his country, also the Queen Sofia Poetry Award. In 2009 he was awarded the FIL Guadalajara Award. Rafael Cadenas is a poet whom expatriation has touched the country profoundly. In the fifties, he was a member of the Venezuelan Communist Party, which forced him to leave the country and move to the island of Trinidad for a period of six years. Upon arrival, he was given the opportunity to learn English and to explore other cultures. Cadenas also participated in various literary movements such as Mesa Redonda, where he developed a greater understanding and appreciation of how exile could be turned into poetry. Cuadernos del Destierro then came to life in 1960, a book that is currently considered as one of the most valuable books that has ever been produced in contemporary Venezuelan literature. Throughout this masterpiece, both purity and fraternal palpitation are proofs of his constant fidelity to writing - as a place of belonging. In 1958, with the end of Marcos Pérez Jiménez dictatorship, Rafael Cadenas returned to the capital of Venezuela and continued to inspire new art tendencies across the hemisphere.

# MAKING PEACE

*Rafael Cardenas*

Let's come to an agreement, poem.  
I'll stop forcing you to say what you don't mean  
and you won't resist my desires.  
We've wrestled a lot, you and I.  
Why insist on creating yourself in my image  
when you know things I'm ignorant of?  
Free yourself from me  
Run away and don't look back.  
Save yourself before it's too late.  
See, you always outdo me,  
you know how to say what inspires you  
and I don't,  
because you're more than yourself,  
and I'm just trying to recognise myself in you.  
I have manifold desires  
and you have none,  
you just press on regardless  
not looking at the hand that you move  
and which thinks it owns you when it feels you spring forth  
like matter new-created.  
Impose your direction on the one doing the writing, all he  
knows is how to hide,  
to conceal novelty, to become less.  
His lot is tired  
reiteration.

Poem,  
push me aside.

*"Las Paces," ©Rafael Cadenas. Translation © 2014 by Lucy Greaves. All rights reserved.*





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# FICTION

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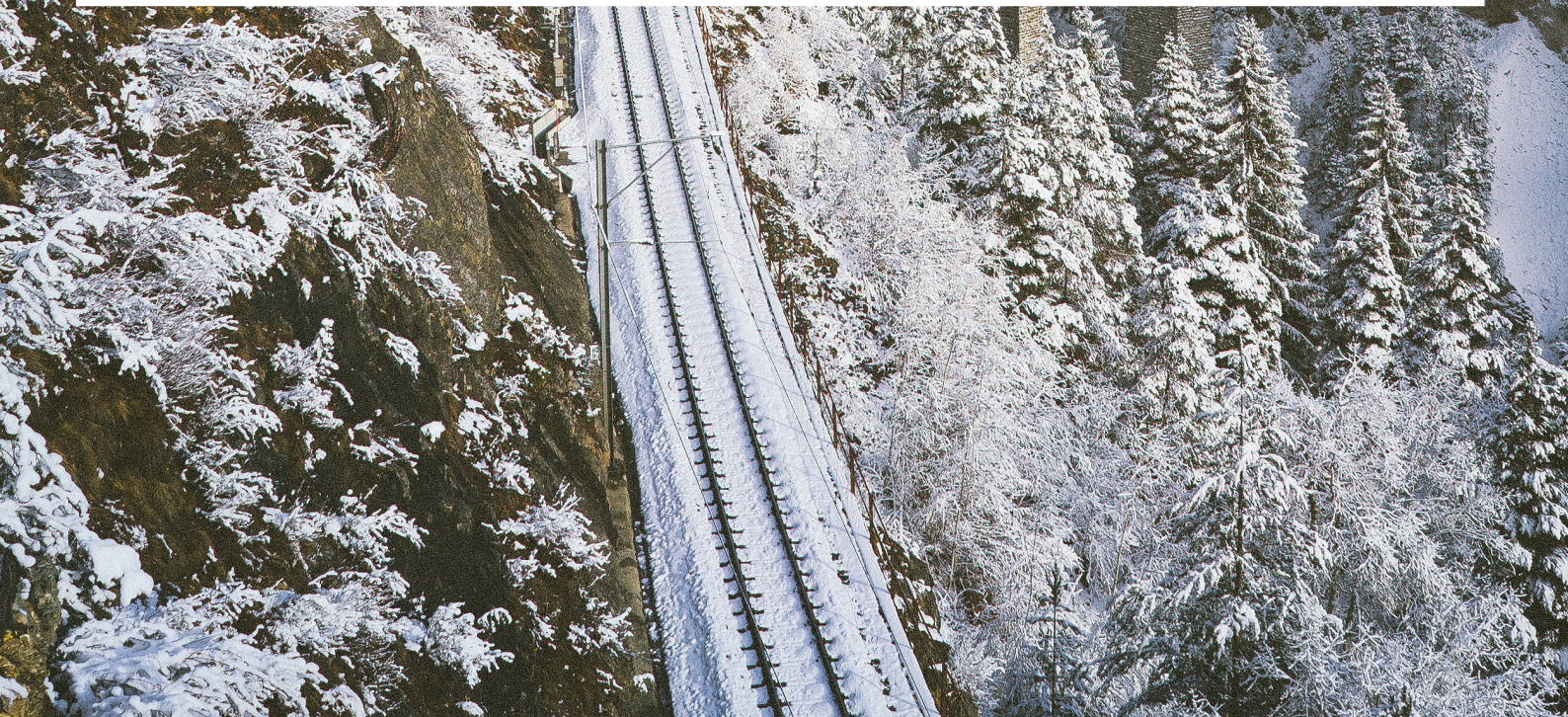
Benny scribbles a lot. He doesn't enjoy thrillers. He's also allergic to crime stories. He loathes descriptions and rejects semicolons. Sometimes he wonders what his scribbling's all about, but he does that anyway. He is the author of several short stories you'll never read. Most of them sit in a dusty desk drawer or go straight to the bin. Adopted Glaswegian, he's about to complete his first novel. Before Brexit kicks in. Before they shut the door, throw away the key and kick him out of Scotland. Scotland, he's desperately in love with.

## **BENNY ALLEN**

## **GIANNI MASTRANGIOLI SALAZAR**

Gianni Mastrangioli is a Venezuelan activist and writer who defends the freedom of expression being affected by Nicolás Maduro's administration. He is a professional historian, graduated from the Central University of Venezuela in 2015. Since 2017, he has dedicated to elaborate literary chronicles which are focused on breaking the silence of persons, situations, and spaces indisputably condemned to the obscurity of censorship. He is the author of the column "El aguacate pensante" (newspaper Caracota Digital), and journalist for World Trade Center Venezuela. He is Director of Cultural affairs for the humanitarian organization 'Yo estoy aquí. He currently lives in Edinburgh.







# BORDERS

*Benny Allen*

Ronald takes a big gulp of what's left of his beer. Then he stretches his arm up in the air. He says, "Deux autres bières s'il vous plaît."

I have to ask him what that means.

"The trick," he tells me, "is not to be too sober but not too drunk either. Do you follow me?"

No. To be honest I really don't.

He says how a few beers cure cowardice. But drink too many and you'll start panicking.

Panicking. He's telling me about panicking.

We've been here in Switzerland for a few days now. My baggage's gone. Lost. My big fat baggage with all my life packed and tucked in sleeves is gone. Somewhere in Amsterdam. After we landed. After we had to run away and come here.

Panicking.

My baggage's gone and my brother's gone too. My little brother who doesn't speak a word of French. My little brother, we lost him. Somewhere here by the Swiss border. He was with us this morning. We're never going to make it, he said. Crying on the bedside.

He cried, cried, cried. As if whining would get us on the other side of the French border. Ronald said to give him some time. He'll be alright. And I did. When I came back he was gone. Nowhere to be found.

My family on the other side of the world, and I lose my little brother here in Europe. Sorry mum. Sorry dad.

The waiter brings two more beers. "Merci," Ronald says, and refills both our glasses.

"It's tonight or never my friend," he says.

Ronald has got an Italian passport. Twenty years he's been Italian. No idea how he got it. But he's a trusted person.

Then Ronald looks at me straight in the eyes and asks if I can swim.

"The river," he says. "If the bridge plan goes wrong, our last chance is the river."

At this point I didn't even know we had a bridge plan.

He tells me I'm going to love France. France has got the best wines in the world.

Montoya Cabernet. Bordeaux. Pinot Noir. And Champagne. Oh, that



Champagne.

Those bubbles taste like God's kiss, he says. I should try some when we make it there.

If we ever make it.

And cheese, he says. In France they've got blue cheese. Goat's milk cheese. It melts in your mouth. White mould cheese. Washed rind cheese.

Cheese, cheese, cheese everywhere.

The sweetest life-pain antidote, Ronald tells me. A cloud of milk exploding into your palate. And voilà, you're making French love.

I tell him that last time I had cheese I got covered in pimples. My face was like red bubble wrap. So was my throat, I could barely breathe. Lactose intolerant, the Doctor said, you are lactose intolerant. Whatever's made out of cheese, stay away from it. Or it'll kill you.

Ronald takes another big slug. My glass still full, I can't drink any more.

It's late at night, I'm drinking beer and my brother's lost somewhere.

I feel like throwing up.

It's not that I really know Ronald. He's sort of a friend of a friend's friend. Basically I've no idea who he really is, but we paid him big bucks for this lifetime trip.

He tells me about about Italian food. And I just want my brother back. My life back. Or just a life back. Any life.

"You any hungry?" Ronald asks.

My stomach is shut. A sludge-shake of worry and fear. One bite and I'll feel sick. Then adieu new life. Adieu France. Liberty, fraternity, equality, and life dream my arse. All would have been for nothing.

"No, not hungry at all, thanks Ronald." And he asks for the bill.

It's wintertime here on the Swiss Alps. The streets are frosted. Trees are frosted. My face is frosted too. I'm freezing.

A half moon is bright shining in the sky. If I wasn't going through this disastrous life-change trip, the setting would be even romantic.

Ronald tells me about this Italian guy who wrote a book about Hell and Paradise. The Divine Comedy.

I ask if this Comedy book is like a bible. Another Holy book. I wouldn't mind a bit of celestial mystical help now.

No, he says. It's a book about a journey.

"Before going to Hell this guy gets to a river and waits," he says.

I'm not quite following.

"He waits for the ferryman," Ronald says. "Charon, the ferryman. To cross the river Acheron to go to Hell."

Ronald points at the concrete and steel bridge on the other side of the street.

Beneath, a river flowing impetuous. Everything flows. And I forgot everything about swimming.

"That's your Acheron," Ronald says, "and I, I am your very Charon tonight."

I say, I didn't know we were going to Hell. I say, I thought we were going the other way around here.

"Sweet, now how drunk do we feel?" Ronald says.

I'm not drunk at all. Not even close.

"Perfect," and he puts his hand on my shoulder, "you've been drunk before right?"

I think about Pisco and Chilcano. Distil fermented grape juice into a high-proof spirit. Bottle up. And there you go. The most famous national drink is served.

Wave of nostalgia. Somehow I miss home. I start wondering if this whole fugitive trip wasn't just a giant, grave mistake.

I say, yes. I've been drunk before.

"Well, just act like if you were." He wraps his arm around my shoulder and starts hauling me around. We're zig-zagging. Walking on the bridge. I can feel his weight on my neck. Step after step.

We're flamenco-dancing on the bridge.

Zig-zag. Zig-zag.

Not that I know much about geometry, but I think that by walking in a straight line this nightmare would be over in half the time.

Ronald says to follow him. To do whatever he does. Then he goes next to the bridge rail. Regurgitating.

He's spitting in the dark depth of the river.

Everything flows.

"You probably had one too many," I say.

And he asks if they are watching. I tell him that as far as I know God's watching us each and every moment.

The guards, he says. Check if the guards are watching us.

I look at the Swiss side of the bridge we just left behind us. Two guards are laughing. Then the opposite side. The French side, the freedom side, the new-life side. Paradise side. There, three guards are standing still. Smoking.

I say, yes. They're watching.

Ronald says, perfect.

And we start zig-zagging again. Drunk-fake on a bridge between Swiss and French border.

"When people died in the past they had left two coins, one per eye. To pay the ferryman. To be led to the other side of the river."

I have no money. No baggage. All the money I had, we gave it to him. Ronald the ferryman. My own personal fatty Charon. Metaphorically speaking. To ferry us

from one life to another. To lead us through this nightmare.

Ronald's raving and I wonder if the money we paid him was well spent.

And my brother's gone. My little brother's gone and I had six underwear changes in my baggage and family pictures. All gone. Ronald keeps hauling himself, dragging me along. We are half way through the bridge.

This is going great, he whispers.

Nobody whistled. Nobody stopped us. Not a quiver on both sides.

"In Hell this guy meets a multi-headed dog," he says. "Cerberus."

Multi-headed dog.

Bark, bark, bark.

If he's trying to perk me up, it's not working.

He says, we pass this multi-headed Cerberus dog and we are fine.

When Ronald says Cerberus he means the border guards.

Guards glancing at us from both sides. French eyes. Swiss eyes. The whole Alps looking at us both drunk-walking above this river. My Acheron river of salvation.

Here in the middle of the bridge. Between Switzerland and France I don't belong anywhere. Not any more. Lost child in a world doesn't even know I exist.

Then Ronald stops, looks at me, "Now hit me," he says.

We paid him all our savings to bring us across the border. In France my father's cousin's sister something something should be waiting for us. I never met her before. I've no idea what she looks like, but she'll recognise us. I hope.

She'll recognise me. Since my brother's gone.

"Let's get to France first," Ronald had said. "Then we'll find your brother. I promise."

Nobody else on the bridge. Just guards on both sides. Us in the middle, fighting for our little salvation, one heavy step at a time.

Ronald says, "I told you to hit me."

I say, I beg your pardon?

And then Ronald slaps me in the face. Five fingers palmed on my cheek. I push both his shoulders and he stumbles back. "This is perfect," he says. "Keep going."

Reverse Stockholm Syndrome. That's what this is.

I'm not falling in love with my kidnapper. I'm hitting and punching my saviour to death. Ronald, my Charon ferryman.

Push after push, after stumble, after drag, after slap, we are just by the French guards' post. Ronald's ranting, talking nonsense. Mumbling whatever.

His arm wrapped around my neck, he's dragging his feet on the floor. The guards glimpse at us. Then they puff, puff, puff on their cigarettes.

"Guards are used to that," Ronald tells me. He's no longer staggering now. He's





not dragging his feet. With a straight back and calm voice, Ronald tells me people always do that, back and forth. "From France to Switzerland and vice-versa. Guards don't bother annoying them. That's just a waste of time."

I say, hold on, so what now?

He opens his arms, the way you know God's waiting for you one day.

"Welcome to France," he said. "We made it."

We got to the train station early morning by cab. Ronald paid. On the way we drank a whole box of beers. Our little celebration. And I worked out the happiest hangover of my whole life.

I got off the cab sleepy and dizzy, my head hammering and pounding in my skull-sized kingdom.

And right by the station's main entrance I see him.

My little brother is there.

A burly woman next to him is ruffling his hair. "Boot," she said. "He made it here by himself in a car boot. No idea how he did it. But he got here last night."

This woman should be my father's cousin's sister something or whatever.

My brother's looking at me. A chocolate-moustache smeared on both sides of his mouth.

"*Penis au chocolat*," he says. And he offers me a bit.

He's only been here for a few hours and he already speaks more French than

me.

“Pain au chocolate,” the woman next to him says. “Pain.”

Then I hug my little brother so strong I can feel his ribs squashed over my chest.

I can’t breathe, he says.

But I don’t care. And I hug him for between ten minutes and a lifetime. Enough for him not to see me crying. Boo-hooing on my little brother’s shoulder. Spasmodically sobbing. On my cheek a smudge line of tears and chocolate.

I thank Ronald.

I say, “That guy. The one who crossed the river, who went to Hell. How did it end?”

He smiles. “I’ve no idea,” he says. “I have never read it. But I know that he makes it all the way to Paradise. To Heaven.” And he handshakes me.

Ronald wishes me the best of luck and tells me that the hard’s done. But somehow I’ve got the feeling he’s lying. Somehow I’ve got the feeling that we’ve just started.

I take a bite of the penis au chocolate. It tastes delicious.

And I think maybe life won’t be that bad from now on.

Maybe.



# BETTER NOT ASK

*Gianni Mastrangioli Salazar*

Friday 25th January 2019:

I received a notification on Twitter about the latest news of my home town. There was a picture of a thirty-five-year-old man who succeeded to climb a podium while flying a Venezuelan flag in front of a massive audience. "Upon our freedom, those ones who have been expatriated must prepare themselves for a potential return", online headlines said. I read it carefully, letting the words flash into my mind. I was shocked by such a proposal. At this moment my fears were to come without previous expectations, and I felt anxious, I felt thirsty.

- Could I have another whisky, please? – I asked the bartender.
- Absolutely. Are you paying by card?
- Aye.
- I bet you have been in Scotland for quite a long time, haven't you? – the bartender said.
- I have, why?
- I can see that from the way you speak. I mean, by replacing a 'yes' for an 'aye' you sound super Scottish. I suppose you like Scotland as much as you like our whisky – he laughed.
- Aye, that's true.
- Lovely. Do you plan to go back home, or will you stay in the UK? Where are you originally from?

I did not want to answer him, at least not immediately. I was at the Bobby's Bar on that Friday, near the Greyfriars cemetery, where the ancient Celtic civilisation is still to be perceived in the atmosphere. The rustle and hustle of Edinburgh vanish by the premise's medieval appearance. Walls that were built next to the borders of the graveyard, dinners who have their food and chat just right outside the tombs, proven facts that the essence of death cannot be separated from the heart of this city. There is a fascination with death and death-related phenomena in Scotland which I confess I struggle to comprehend at times; however, every Friday after work, death often becomes more innocuous, and thus less threatening. From the moment the bartender pours the whiskey until when I relish the last drops of my glass, death

looks benevolent, and so does life itself. It is that sort of a harmony that goes beyond existence what my home town is no longer able to provide, given that, over there, the perception of death is followed by weekly high rates of homicides. Pity. It is a pity to say that for us, the people of Venezuela, death happens to be by the streets on a regular basis. That is why very Friday I rather begin to image that that adversity is just a phantom, a myth as many others around Greyfriars cemetery.

The case is that, at the Bobby's bar, *home* is brought closer; it is how exile works. More whisky? Aye.

Under the effect of alcohol, being emigrants feels like a whisper that comes from the act of reminiscence, and the desire of a return feels to disappear with the sorrow. But it is all lies. Once sober, adversity ceases to be the innocent phantom I wish it was to come across as a demoniac possession. Soon after the drink runs out, sadness takes control of the thoughts to clear the way for guiltiness, confusion, resentment, and repulsion, which result in a purge of emotions that is supposed to be soothed by praying. With our faces jammed into the toilet, we Venezuelans pray for luck, though we never seem to be heard. The pain makes us expunge the contents of our stomachs, and it is in such emetic circumstances when the time spent abroad claims not to be ignored at all. What about those marvellous experiences around the highlands? What about those new friendships? What about that new flat? What about money? What about that stage of peace that has finally been achieved?

- I am originally from Venezuela, mate. Will I go back? Of course not! You crazy? – I answered the bartender.

I paid with contactless. I left in silence. Lies.

From the Bobby's bar to where I live, it is approximately a twenty minutes journey. Whilst on the bus, it came to my attention the wooden roofs of the houses; the darkness of the roads; the fog above the trees. I felt pleased to have chosen Scotland as a place of living, even if it was inevitable for me to remember of my loved ones. Grandparents. Cousins. Uncles. Aunts. Dad. Mom. Bunches of names for which the effort of a departure would be worthy enough. For instance, that 'phantom of adversity' I mentioned before lessened its supernatural power to let the pain efface, as I was to realise that it is my hands to redeem my own country from misery. Because exile is far away from a fully acceptance, it is a matter of urgency for us Venezuelans to put ourselves into action in order to abolish corruption; to establish financial confidence; to set-up the paths for progression; to destroy inflation; to arise morality; to stop unnecessary political passions; to deprive homicides from



happening. Etcetera. It is basically about retrieving the dignity we deserve. At this moment my fears were loosen up, and then I laughed so badly due to happiness. I saw the picture that was left open on twitter. "Upon our freedom, those ones who have been expatriated must prepare themselves for a potential return", I read out to myself. When I got off the bus, I experienced such a sense of relief and it was good, aye. It was indeed.

\*\*\*

Juan Guaidó is the name of the thirty-five-year-old man who succeeded to climb a podium while flying our national flag. Formally, he is the President of our National Assembly, as well as the Interim President of Venezuela. To stand up against the Maduro's regime, Mr Guaidó is trying to restore faith in people by promoting new political values all based on democracy. Implausible. People believe that the public speeches he makes are big signs of reconciliation. With no doubts, this might be the time for us to resurrect from the debris. It might just be this Celtic way of thinking what pushes me to interpret facts as if they were paranormal phenomena; however, I am certain that both ghosts and phantoms are abstract reflections of our deep concerns.

Who knows?

There was too much of whiskey on that Friday 25th, but since then death does not bother me whatsoever, nor does exile. Dunno. Better not to ask.



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# POETRY

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The Fool is a German immigrant who has been living in Scotland since 2008. They began writing poetry by accident some 15 years ago when initially they meant to write a short story for a course project, but then suddenly the lines of their very first poem poured out of their fingertips and onto paper. During the years that followed they only wrote sporadically, however, since 2018 they have been writing regularly and a large volume of poems, so much so that they started a poetry blog. Recently, they also started to make voice recordings of their works. The subjects they touch on are varied and can be anything from mental health problems and abuse to comedy, protest, fiction or love and life.

## THE FOOL

## JENNI DAICHES

Published poetry includes *Mediterranean* (1995), *Smoke* (2005), and contributions to many Scottish and other magazines. Fiction includes *Letters from the Great Wall* (Luath, 2006), *Forgive* (Luath 2015) and *Borrowed Time* (Vagabond Voices 2016) plus short stories published in Chapman and the Edinburgh Review. Writes on literary and historical subjects as Jenni Calder, and has published four books on Scottish emigration to North America, most recently *Lost in the Backwoods: Scots and the North American Wilderness* (Edinburgh University Press 2013). A collection of autobiographical essays, *Not Nebuchadnezzar: In Search of Identities*, was published in 2005. Has been an active member of Scottish PEN for many years.

After attending what was then Glasgow Drama College Fiona had a short lived acting career before moving into production on dramas from *Darling Buds of May* to *Casualty*. Fiona produced *Waterloo Road* and the Gaelic film *Eilbheas*, recently she line-produced *Father Brown in the Cotswolds*. In between Fiona took time out to return to University and earn an MA in Script Writing from the University of East Anglia, she has started to write full-time with two poems published in Uncovered Artistry and a short play *Just William*, selected for performance by 'In Motion Theatre'.

## FIONA BLACK



# MEMORIES

*The Fool*

Every night she sits on the windowsill.  
Eyes on the moon, completely calm and still  
While all her memories roll down her cheeks,  
Drawing deep lines on her face in dark streaks.

Silently, she feels them drop in her hand,  
Leaving little stains wherever they land.  
One by one they slowly disappear  
As she keeps gazing at the shining sphere.

The distance between them is too immense,  
Any hope would be nothing but pretence.  
A rift as only time could create it,  
Left her bereft and incarcerated.

– for Leon





# REPRIMAND

*Jenni Daiches*

I have to tell you –  
she said, peering over hard-rimmed spectacles –  
there are those who consider that you lack  
sufficient dignity for such a role.

Well. Praise indeed for a would-be rebel.

But – she continued –  
you are approved in spite of opposition.  
I trust you will measure up.

Deficient in dignity.  
Because the assistant head overheard me say oh shit.  
Because I neglected to wear my school hat.  
Because I wanted to ban the bomb.  
Because I quoted Karl Marx.

So I learnt to tell the juniors in the lunch queue  
to make less noise and to reprimand  
the unlucky few I spotted eating buns in the street.

On my last day I walked away from my grey-walled  
education and flung my hat into the river.

# MINERS

*Fiona Black*

Three men in flat caps and scarves  
stare away in the cold, they've finished  
back to back shifts, soot coated,  
shaded in charcoal, fags hang on lips,  
they look away from the lens.

Behind them -  
back to back terraces,  
windows darkened by shadows,  
shaped by washing lines,  
built on the windward of a hill,  
hung on the lip of a ditch.

Before them -  
Cold wives, staring children  
Evenings coated in drink  
Lives shaped by darkening lungs.  
Three men in flat caps and scarves  
look away from the lens.

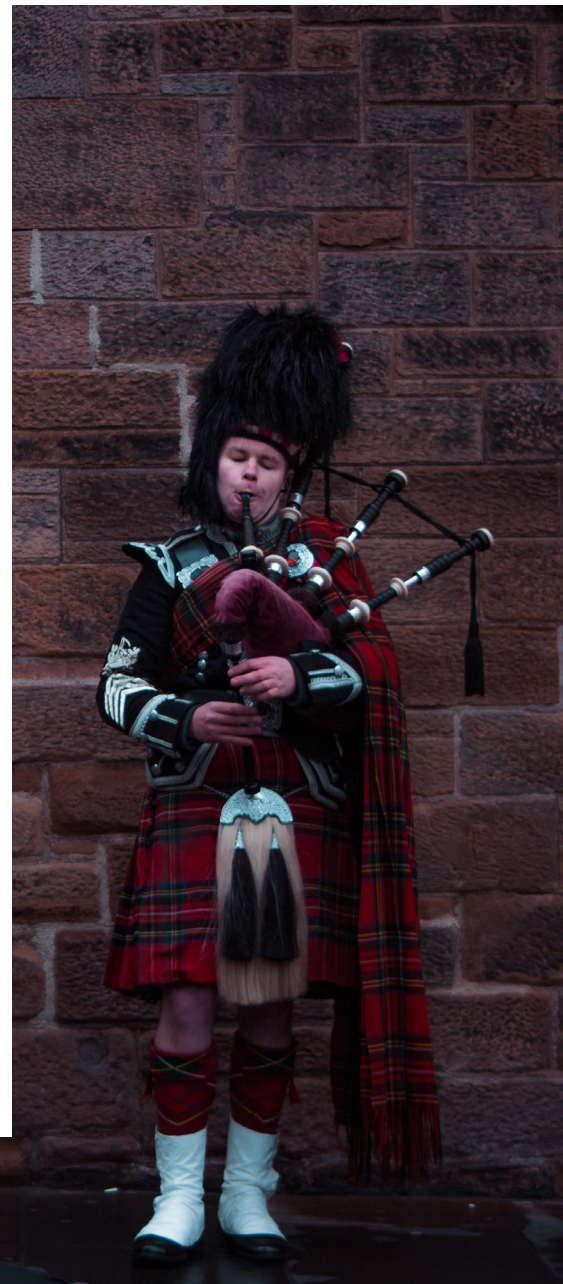


# THE PIPER

*Fiona Black*

Louder than hen party banter  
A single drone battles the chanter  
A piper played.  
Sauchiehall Street filled with a shrill lament  
The music and the figure both well-kent,  
It was a minor key ...  
It was a minor key ...  
Echoing the keen of the Dark Island tune  
with scally fingers on riddling reeds  
he made the sheep skin moan and bleed.  
That old lament!  
He held his face to the rain and sleet  
and let loose with the grace-note beat  
a lone lament  
like a curlew calling over the loch  
a haunting air!  
Regiments march to that piercing wail  
the keening note of the wandering Gael.  
Oh, isle of my childhood, I'm dreaming of thee,  
Where the beauties of heaven unfold by the sea.

He swayed as his fingers played  
and the pibroch moaned as light left the day.  
Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North,  
The birth-place of Valour, the country of worth!  
When the stars came out he continued his tune,  
drunken louts passed and howled at the moon  
But he blew and birlled that eerie wail  
Till at last he let the music fail  
and lay like the dead as the streets held their wheesht  
though he heard the skirl of the pipes in his sleep.



Leela Soma was born in Madras, India and now lives in Glasgow. Her poems and short stories have been published in a number of anthologies, publications. She has published two novels and two collections of poetry.

She is on the Milngavie Week Committee and serves on the East Dunbartonshire Arts & Culture Committee. Some of her work reflects her dual heritage of India and Scotland.

## LEELA SOMA

## JULIAN COLTON

Julian Colton has had five collections of poetry published including *Everyman Street* (Smokestack Publishing), *Cold Light of Morning* (Cultured Llama) and *Two Che Guevaras* (Scottish Borders Council). He edits *The Eildon Tree* literary magazine and contributes articles and reviews. He lives in Selkirk in the Scottish Borders.

Jim Aitken's last poetry collection was *Flutterings* (2016) and his last play produced was *Letters from Area C* directed by Karen Douglas of SpartaKi in 2017. Jim also tutors in Scottish Cultural Studies in Edinburgh and organises Literary Walks for groups around the city.

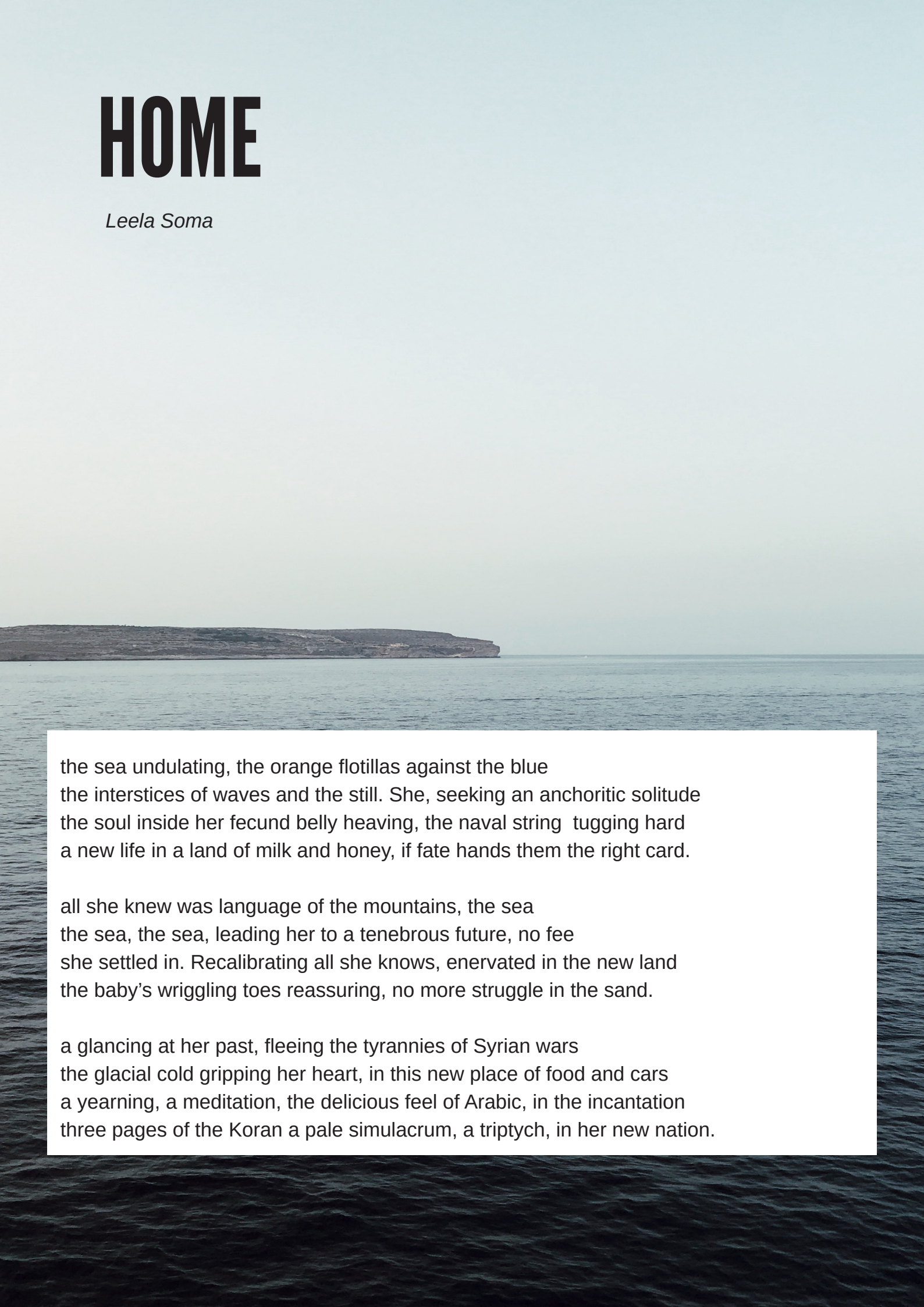
He also works with the Outlook programme teaching creative writing for people with mental health issues. His new play *Rosa*, about the life of Rosa Luxemburg, will be staged at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh in November 2019. Jim is also a member of Scottish PEN.

## JIMMY AITKEN



# HOME

*Leela Soma*



the sea undulating, the orange flotillas against the blue  
the interstices of waves and the still. She, seeking an anchoritic solitude  
the soul inside her fecund belly heaving, the naval string tugging hard  
a new life in a land of milk and honey, if fate hands them the right card.

all she knew was language of the mountains, the sea  
the sea, the sea, leading her to a tenebrous future, no fee  
she settled in. Recalibrating all she knows, enervated in the new land  
the baby's wriggling toes reassuring, no more struggle in the sand.

a glancing at her past, fleeing the tyrannies of Syrian wars  
the glacial cold gripping her heart, in this new place of food and cars  
a yearning, a meditation, the delicious feel of Arabic, in the incantation  
three pages of the Koran a pale simulacrum, a triptych, in her new nation.

# CALL CENTRE INTERVIEW

*Julian Colton*

I am number 29 at the Assessment Centre  
An overdressed shirt, tie and suit number.  
Unlike the predominantly young men sweltering  
Under the maxim burden of casually smart:  
Beards, open top button-down shirts, jumpers, Puffa jackets  
Tight trousers and unmatching trainers and shoes.

Three older men, of which I am one  
There are no women over thirty here  
No black faces, ethnic minorities.  
A few youthful girls whose eyes are too shrewd  
Mature people know when there's nothing down for them.

It's the usual pick and mix of Icebreakers  
Numeracy and literacy tests, background info  
New Service Economy labouring go-getting hipdom:  
We use unique buying and selling techniques  
The incentives and rewards are incredible  
I've worked call centres in South Africa, Jamaica and Belize  
Top of the pyramid – a middle-aged demi-god called Steve.

Senior lags eyes like mine have seen it all before  
But youngsters love 'Marooned on a Desert Island Beach.'  
Oldest, transpires I'm the last to get off  
Abandoned with a flint and mirror for company. Whoopee!  
Post overselling myself, I answer my 'Mystery Question'  
If you could be any animal or biscuit what would you be?



Morphing into a lazy dog, I pause, gaze at the assembled  
Beneath the stumbling, fumbling shy nervousness  
Most deserve a job before me.  
Though I've sackloads of experience, charm and 'transferable skills'  
Can I be this enthused selling cheaper electricity?  
Smart metre installation for newlyweds in Milton Keynes?  
Achieving such alchemy takes naïve expertise.

Do I really need to cash in team rewards?  
Go Karting, snowboarding, shots and bungee jumping?  
I'll leave it to the lads with bulging neck rolls  
The girls who've something to prove to absent Dads.  
This far down the line my mind is at rest  
After all this time it's just one more failed test.



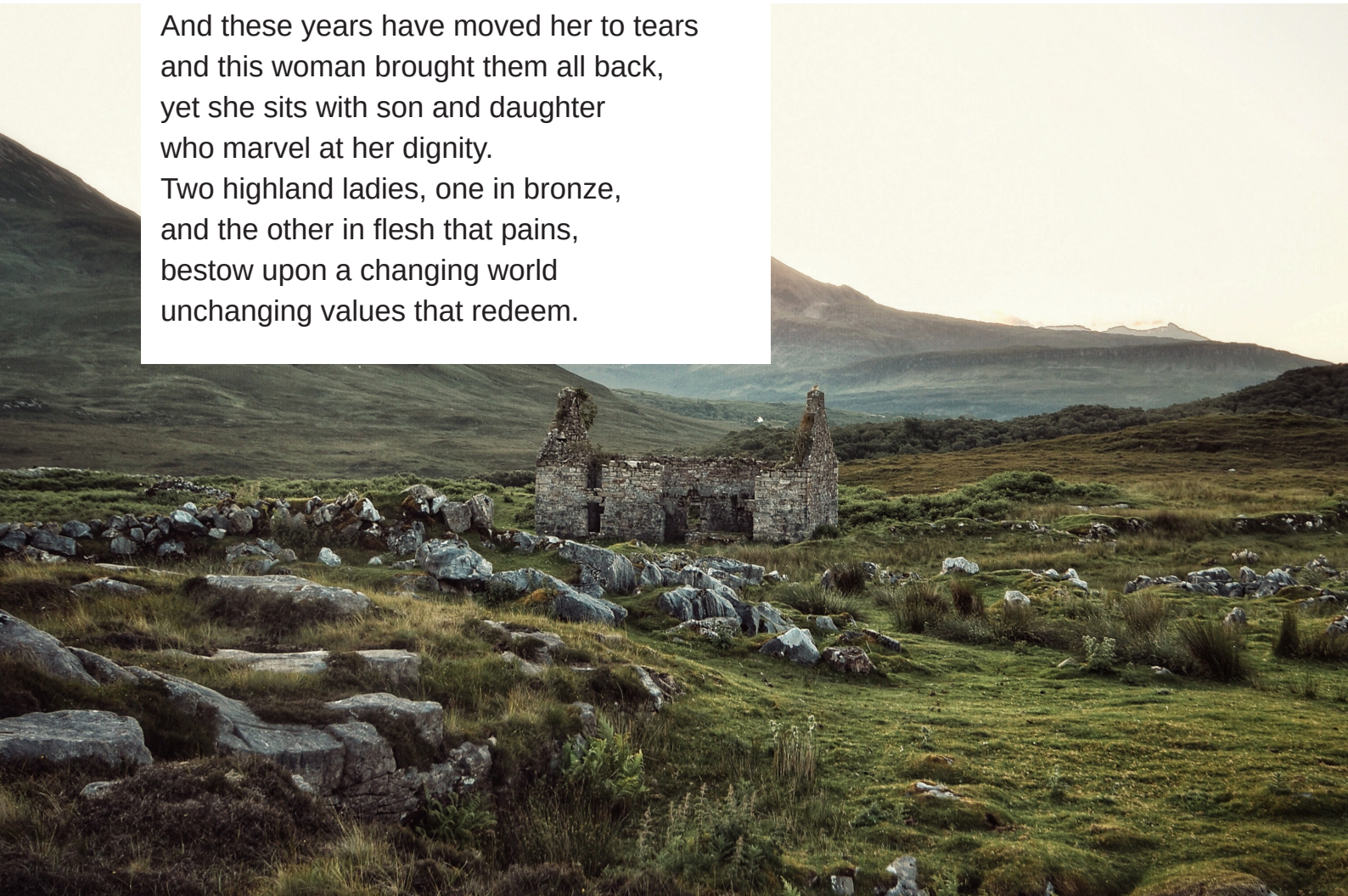




# CLEARANCES

*Jimmy Aitken*

From Dornoch we moved further north,  
not as north as where she was born  
but north enough to understand,  
to understand her returning.  
She sat there beneath the sculpture  
of 'The Emigrants' at Helmsdale,  
moved by the woman looking back  
to the strath that was once her home.  
For she too once had to leave here  
to work in service or in shops;  
she too, with some eighty years now,  
lived in the south and not the north.  
And these years have moved her to tears  
and this woman brought them all back,  
yet she sits with son and daughter  
who marvel at her dignity.  
Two highland ladies, one in bronze,  
and the other in flesh that pains,  
bestow upon a changing world  
unchanging values that redeem.





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# ILKYAZ

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Ilkyaz is a platform built to showcase and nurture the imagination of writers under 35. The platform's focus is young literature. But its job is exchange. Ilkyaz is an avenue where we can meet beyond our differences in opinion, and witness our communal home, that is the Earth through various windows. It's a precious common ground, we can find morale in and appreciate insight into experiences across the world in an era besieged by a lack of communication.

Ilkyaz has been developed with support from PEN International, Norwegian PEN and PEN Turkey. In partnership with PEN International, Ilkyaz has partnered with PEN centres around the world to showcase the work of young Turkish writers to international audiences. So far they have worked with Norwegian PEN, German PEN, PEN Flanders and PEN South Africa. Scottish PEN is proud to work with Ilkyaz as part of this project and the Writers in Exile Committee is delighted to feature this work in this issue of PENnings.

As part of this project, the following pieces have been edited and translated by Ege Dündar and sent to Scottish PEN to be published. The Writers In Exile Committee has not edited or modified the pieces and the pieces have been published in accordance with all communication with Ilkyaz and the original author.

# RAPUNZEL KISSERS COMMUNITY

Ahmet Uçar

*Born in November of 1989 in Isparta. Ahmet Ucar graduated university in 2013 and completed his masters degree in 2015 at Bilkent University Chemistry Department. He is continuing his PhD in Bioengineering at University of Edinburgh. His writings have so far been published at online and in print sources such as Notos, Kultur Mafyas?, De/Da. He keeps an amaterusih interest in photography and cinema.*

May the world crumble upon me  
Now that I've kissed Rapunzel.

"If the steel, armored wall has surrounded  
The horizons of the western front..."  
Was what Rapunzel said.  
Her hair was nothing like my mother-tongue  
"This hair can only be Swedish" I thought  
And I had only heard of Sweden  
From the chocolates my uncle brought.

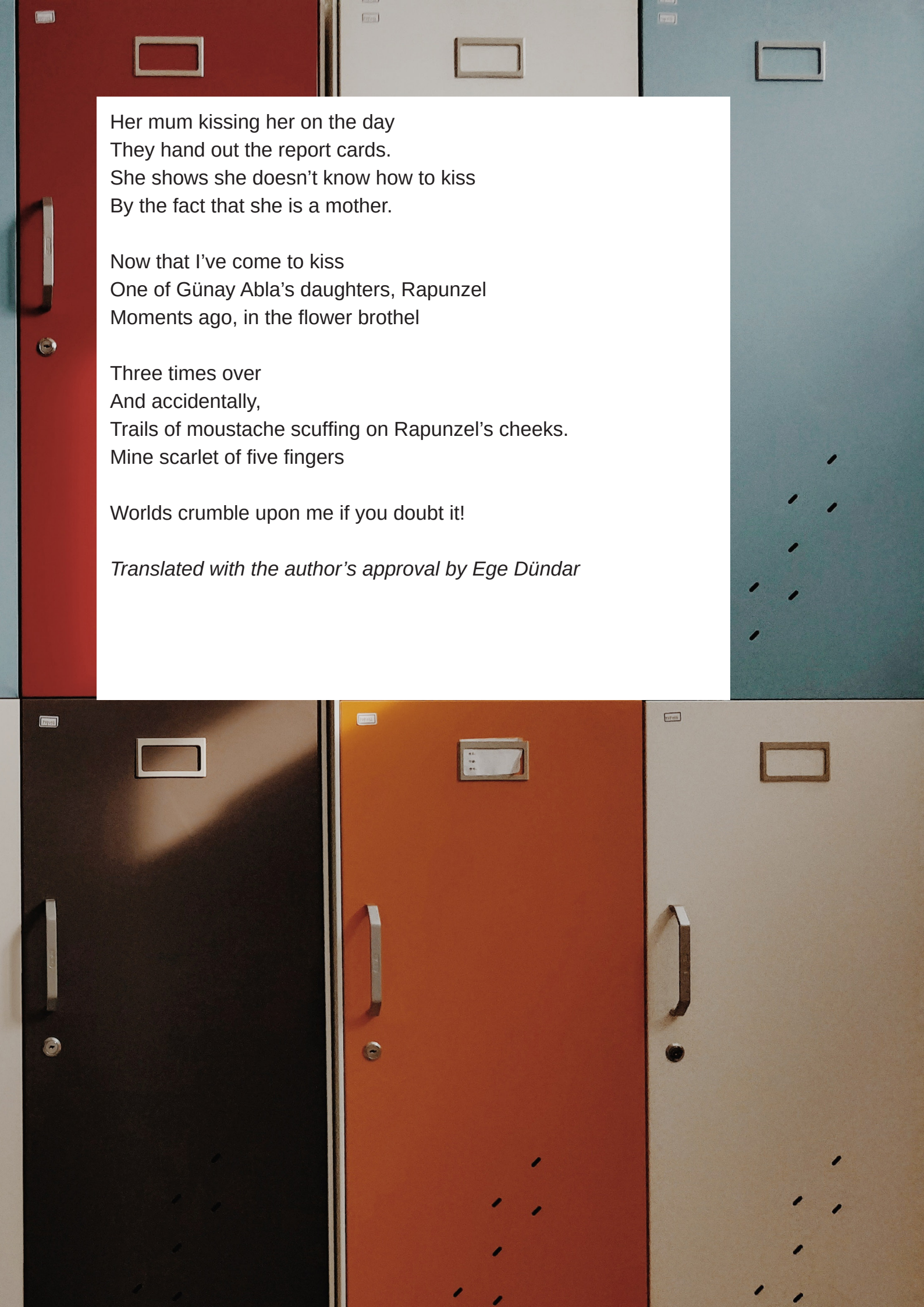
The teacher used to hand out almond candy to Rapunzel  
I would bang my head against the corner medicine cabinet,  
Accidentally.  
Everyone would look at me  
Rapunzel's hair down to her waist

Rifki would give crowns made of flowers to Rapunzel.

My arm would break  
A camel coloured, wilted dress on your birthday

An ache speared in my tummy





Her mum kissing her on the day  
They hand out the report cards.  
She shows she doesn't know how to kiss  
By the fact that she is a mother.

Now that I've come to kiss  
One of Günay Abla's daughters, Rapunzel  
Moments ago, in the flower brothel

Three times over  
And accidentally,  
Trails of moustache scuffing on Rapunzel's cheeks.  
Mine scarlet of five fingers

Worlds crumble upon me if you doubt it!

*Translated with the author's approval by Ege Dündar*



# THE LITTLE (RED) FISH

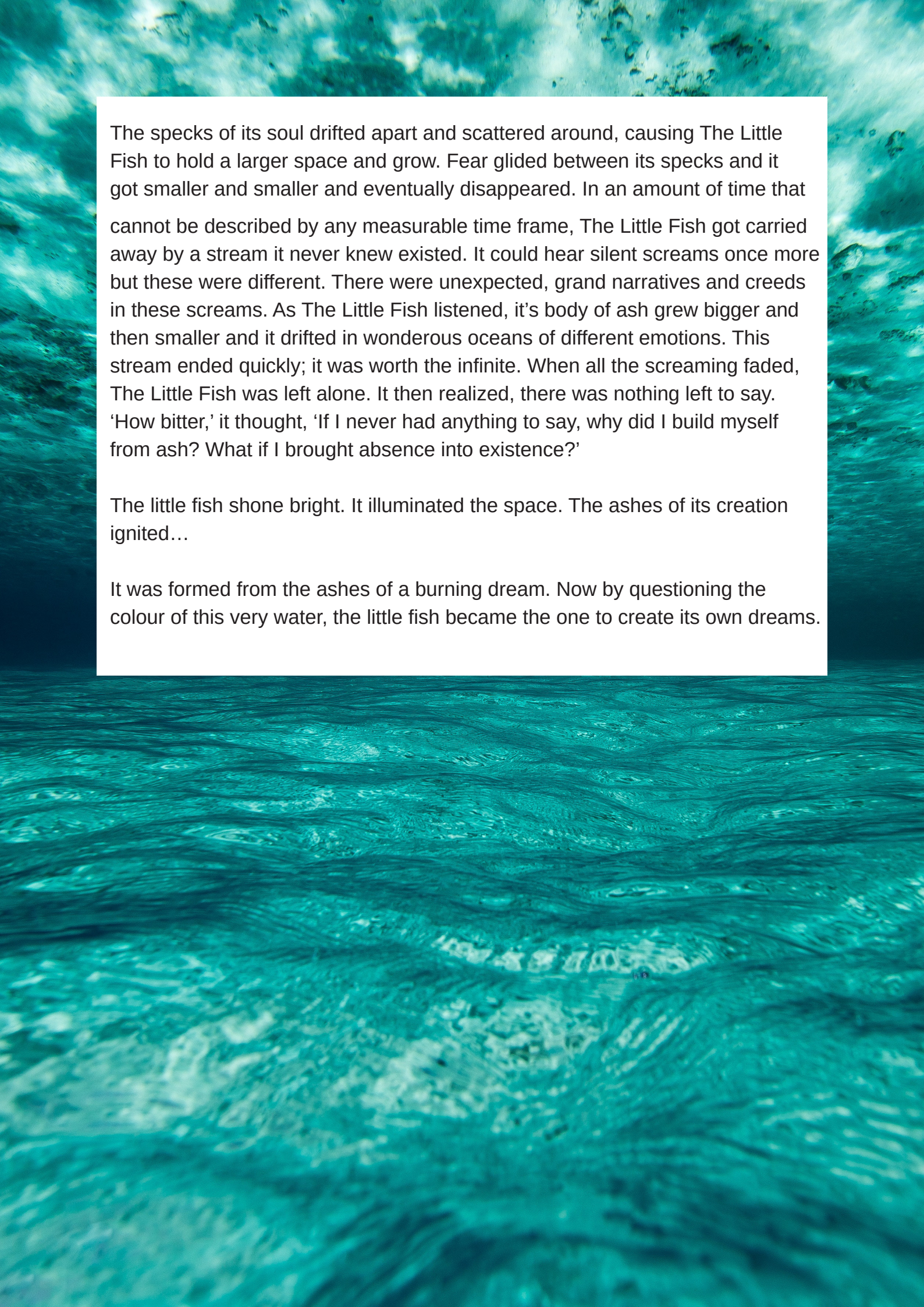
*Umay Sila Güzel*

*Tarik Bugra Social Studies High School, 10th Grade, Aksehir/Konya. Born: 2002/Mersin*

The ocean of attitude and noise, which was starved for insight, was unaware of the difference between a shark and a gold fish. Clogging the flow of its lone existence, those eyes witnessed lands built on dreams and illusions and lives of every being; but through all, it could distinguish the sky and that was surely enough. This was the reason why, eyes never recognized how drained The Little Fish was, who created itself from ash and the path it took towards infinity. The shark only kept to the stream of its gigantic being and waited for the end of time. On the other hand, the little fish was neither gigantic nor had the patience to wait for timelessness. The Little Fish detached from the ashes of a flaming dream and began swimming.

It encountered streams of conscience among cold and silent screams. Each stream followed an order. They crashed into each other and got destroyed for the sake of destroying; one moment they decreased and increased in another. After a long time of scattering around, Little Fish had to coincide with a stream of conscience which could hear her. This unreasonable chaos had to have a solid explanation to ease The Little Fish's flitting and flashing wonder, even for a little while. But after streams of conscience turned into ash once and for all, the unreasonable chaos intensified and spread. The little fish kept following orders. Orders which never seemed to end. The source to these orders was an invisible heavy mass which had a single purpose of existence; to keep fear alive and strong. The orders got heavier and heavier every time they were heard and regarded. The Little Fish felt fear conquering every speck of its being. It swam towards warm waters to defeat it.





The specks of its soul drifted apart and scattered around, causing The Little Fish to hold a larger space and grow. Fear glided between its specks and it got smaller and smaller and eventually disappeared. In an amount of time that cannot be described by any measurable time frame, The Little Fish got carried away by a stream it never knew existed. It could hear silent screams once more but these were different. There were unexpected, grand narratives and creeds in these screams. As The Little Fish listened, it's body of ash grew bigger and then smaller and it drifted in wondrous oceans of different emotions. This stream ended quickly; it was worth the infinite. When all the screaming faded, The Little Fish was left alone. It then realized, there was nothing left to say. 'How bitter,' it thought, 'If I never had anything to say, why did I build myself from ash? What if I brought absence into existence?'

The little fish shone bright. It illuminated the space. The ashes of its creation ignited...

It was formed from the ashes of a burning dream. Now by questioning the colour of this very water, the little fish became the one to create its own dreams.



# THE ADDRESS OF SOULS

*Vedat Fatih Yaman*

*I was born in Ankara on 23 June 1995. I am working on literature since I was 16. Apart from the zines, my short stories were published in Vapur Edebiyat and Öykü Gazetesi.*

Nazim Bey departed us a month ago. At his funeral, I gave my condolences to his family wearing shiny clothes and shades covering their foreheads, carrying the silence of a season foregone rather than sadness and haplessness. I watched my friend, like crockery or cutlery wrapped up in a table cloth, being dropped beneath a tree, into a rectangular hole in the ground.

“There,” I said, “a warden of memories devoid of all desire and belief, yet another hunchback of the past goes to the earth, to be forgotten.”

I shivered right after. It was foolish to associate this man with his body which I haven't witnessed in years instead of his handwriting, transcribing his dreams, thoughts and troubles to me on snow white pages. But what spoke to me must've been Nazim Bey's inflating spleen, spotted hands and short-sighted eyes, but his spirit longed for tales told in whispers and music.

How would that unit of crowds be connected to me? When I last saw him, he had come to the village to settle relatives muttering about his uselessness. He then sat across everyone at the village coffee house and spoke to us, responding to every question put to him with similar, stereotypical sentences. He had explained in various ways how trade was no oil painting, that children grew a little older each day and that, from his own childhood, he only had scars and memories of bruises to carry. He was surprised to hear that I visited my





parents with my family each weekend, jokingly asking me how I convinced the missus.

In fact, it was the first time he looked in my eyes during this day-long visit, the last time we were alone before his passing. I must admit that among those of us spending their time continuously cutting each other's words short and making edits, amassing a mountain of waste, I didn't look at his face often, but I could make him out from the back of my mind, amidst some other disenchanting memories.

Even while I wrote my letters, I was dreaming not of the man I've vaguely witnessed growing up, but rather a silk cradle inscribed with a slim wand on the desert sands of time. Besides in time, I came to not so much see, but solely know things about him. His hair combed to the right, his spotted face, his broken nose, his chirped lips; even such things became irrelevant to Nazim after a while. His golden dog tag/personal record, the fact that every day he drank too many glasses of milk to keep count had apparently disappeared from my memories of this old friend of mine, creating a spirit constructed of other things entirely.

As a matter of fact, a few days after the funeral, when our guests were nowhere to be seen, I felt a shiver when Sadik showed pictures of Nazim to Bedri Emmi on his phone. I had tasted a sense of guilt, not as if I witnessed nature's plan but as if I've sinned. I was looking at each unveiled photo like gossiping aunties, swallowing my spit as if I've just kissed an ugly baby, trying to forget the sight I saw. Given that up to now, I've claimed my only point of reference had been a soul, I must've achieved this or somehow made sense of myself and my past. A freshly cut hill top, a dripping jowl, and an unseen drop of sweat wouldn't sit still on his face.

After the funeral service was over, I kindly asked my wife for a Turkish coffee and I flicked through the letters on the balcony. Who knows where Nazim's first letters are? I couldn't find them anywhere. It's unlike me and Pervin as well. We don't even dispose of bank letters easily. The first had arrived a year following his visit. It even took around a month between when I read the letter and when it was written. Because Nazim didn't know either my school or home address, he sent his letters to my mum and dad. Somehow, the letter had been delayed quite a bit travelling to the village. Hatice Hanim (Or Sister Hatice?) passed the letter to me, saying "you've got news from Istanbul". May Allah rest her soul; it hasn't been long since we lost her as well. I didn't get it at first, getting mad when I saw my name on the envelope that they opened and read it. When I noticed it stood clean and unopened, I felt ashamed that I wronged her. Whereas if some neighbour in the city kept my bills even to hand them to me who knows what I would've done.

Why Nazim wrote that letter, even after all these years I struggle to understand. I also couldn't ask him during his health. Apparently, he was upset that his eldest son Selman was doing poorly in high school, sharing a few questions and seeking advice about how his grades could improve. Yet Selman, measured up to a paragraph at best. His entire remark fit a full page perfectly with neat handwriting and tiny letters. It was as if he worked time and again to create this picture, in pursuit of a certain image he wanted to present. He couldn't spare himself from the fire and detriment. May Allah forgive his sins.

At the start, he called me "the most reverend Muallim Efendi" His preamble resembled that of children suffering from the collision of evangelized courtesy and objectionable desire. It seemed he sought a piece of hope from the mischievousness of early days. He asked after my well-being, talking of new innovations he had heard of, in case they intrigued me.



Remembering my fondness for poetry, he enthused about some verses he had read and a moment later he timidly began talking about Selman's never-ending problems. He apologized and thanked at the same time. And this time for a change, he remembered sending his regards to the village community. Set aside my bewilderment, that day I wrote my lengthy response to his letter intimately; without avoiding the many events and obligations, focusing on good imagery, before nightfall, as if I was responding to nature's calling. My words were far from answering Nazim's questions. I poured my heart out to him. I still find it odd; how I wasted my words on this person.

The second letter must have arrived directly to the village; it was already there when I got back. I wish I had folded and placed it on the bookshelf all neatly and packed. Nazim is to blame too. Up until the time I warned him, he neglected the address written on the letter and kept sending them to the village. And when I warned him, he got offended and replied to my letter a bit later than usual. This shocked me. Not that he got offended but that they buried him at the village cemetery. Nazim was as moody as everyone else. He had his own kind of moodiness, like the rest of us. Despite being an experienced and hard-bitten





person, he got excited over every boat that strayed from its intended path and threw a line to them, seeking to create even the slightest bond. I read this from his letters, the amount of time it takes for his reply, his choice of stamps and mostly from his half-erased scribbles on the paper, complaining and requesting empathy for his childish behaviour and acceptance for his differences.

The craftsman took Nazim Bey to be a person committed to his land. I found that unusual. In colloquial words he was an “antique” man however, he seemed to be moody and tempered even. This had me thinking he had problem with Istanbul, which he kept in secret. Getting to rest at the village must have been equivalent to seeing the Bosphorus. I never heard him complain about Istanbul’s blurry sea, damp weather or suffocating crowds. He called it the “World Capital,”. Or was he feeling obliged to pamper Istanbul to me?

Nazim seemed to equate me with a bird not unique but precious to him that he saw when he was a child. He caressed me, heard me warble and was entranced in his imaginary world. But did he also have similar fantasies about the village? Was his wish to be buried here all about a romantic gesture?

That is where the problem begins by my side...I don’t want to believe this. Humanizing Nazim feels like an insult towards both myself and the memory of my old friend. Alongside his wish to live his dream, he knew how to keep me pleased too. He wanted his offerings to be enough. For example, Nazim never invited me to Istanbul, I have no idea as to why. Did he wish to live his dream or did he desire to forsake our souls?

How free I was in those letters. We had the chance to escape from the apartments decorated by the touch of an “evil eye” and talked about our dreams at the highest of skies. We screamed, fought and calmed down. What was the point of picking on his soul, acting as though I was his doctor? What a wonderful museum we were in. As all the world’s traffic and chaos was melting down like water running through asphalt roads, we enjoyed a great chat under a glorious willow tree.

I have to be sure and convince myself. I was friends with a soul. I forgot his face long before. And now, I will forget all the reasons.



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