

PENNING

WATER



JULY 2023



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PENning is compiled by the Writers
in-Exile Committee of Scottish PEN.
Submissions are selected anonymously.

Liz Niven

Moira McPartlin

Samina Chaudhry

FOREWORD

Charlie Gracie

I was honoured to be asked by Scottish PEN's Writers in Exile Committee to be guest editor for this edition of PENning Magazine. A further pleasure to join the editorial group of Liz Niven, Samina Chaudhry and Moira McPartlin.

The theme of this issue of PENning is Water. The submissions responded to this in its broadest senses from the physical to the metaphorical to the surreal and the excellent writing we have in this issue reflects that breadth of focus. The editorial group gave careful consideration of all submissions: thank you to everyone who sent us work.

I hope all readers will enjoy the selection as much as I enjoyed being part of choosing it.

I also note that, as we considered the submissions, the news was filled with the story of the destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam in southern Ukraine: the human capacity to harness water for good met the desire to use it to destroy countless lives. That brings into sharp focus Scottish PEN's mission to support writers who have the courage to speak up against oppression of all forms on all sides of all conflicts.

Welcome to our Water-themed edition of PENning. We're delighted to include Dina Nayeri as our International featured writer, and hope some of our PEN readers will catch her performing at this year's Edinburgh International Book Festival, where she'll be reading from 'Who Gets Believed?' .

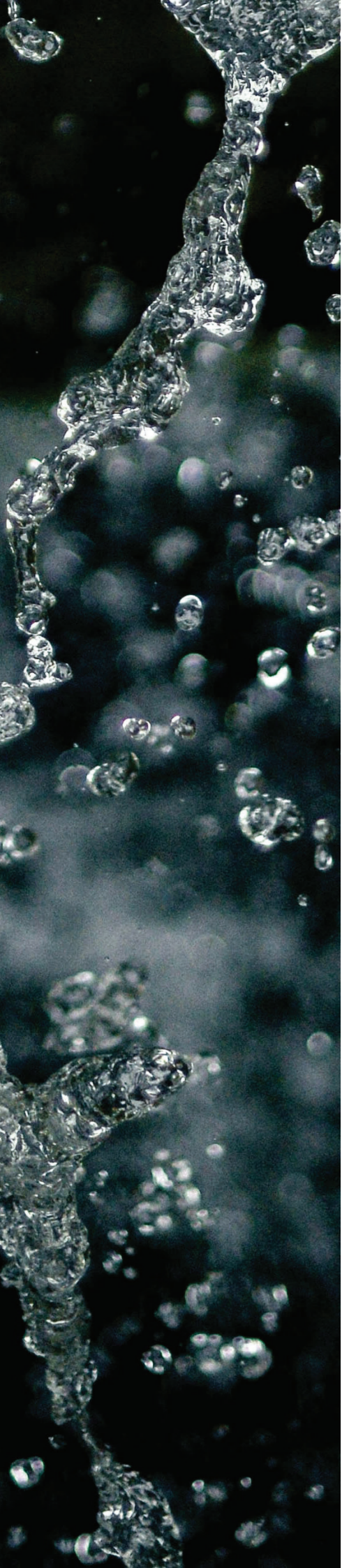
We're always grateful to our guest editor, and for this edition, it is Charile Gracie. The committee thank him for his insight plus the generosity of his time to select submissions with us.

Do enjoy reading and we hope you have a lovely summer.

Liz Niven

Convener, Writers in Exile Committee





CHARLIE GRACIE

Charlie Gracie grew up in Baillieston, Glasgow. His poetry collections, *Good Morning*, (2010) and *Tales from the Dartry Mountains* (2020), were published by Diehard Press. His first novel, *To Live With What You Are* (2019), was published by Postbox Press.

His work has appeared in a range of anthologies and journals, with some listed for literary prizes, including the Bath Novel Award, Cambridge Short Story Prize, Fish Poetry Prize, and Bridport Short Story and Poetry Prizes. His collection of poetry and prose, *Belfast to Baillieston*, a family and industrial narrative, will be published by Red Squirrel Press in October 2023.

Charlie was the 2020 official Scribe for the Federation of Writers (Scotland) and is a former Chair of the Scottish Writers' Centre. He now lives in Thornhill on the edge of the Trossachs.



DINA NAYERI

Dina Nayeri is the author of two critically acclaimed nonfiction books *Who Gets Believed* (2023) and *The Ungrateful Refugee* (2019), and two novels. Her work is published in more than twenty countries and in *The New York Times*, *New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, *Granta*, *Best American Short Stories*, *O Henry Prize Stories*, and many other publications.

She was the winner of Germany's Geschwister Scholl Prize, a fellow at the Columbia Institute for Ideas and Imagination in Paris, winner of a National Endowment for the Arts literature grant and the UNESCO City of Literature Paul Engle Prize, among many other honours. Her essays and stories on displacement and home are taught in schools across Europe and the US. She is part of the English faculty at the University of St Andrews.

FOREIGN MOTHERS, FOREIGN TONGUES

Dina Nayeri

For a short time in 2020, when my daughter, Elena, was four, we lived in France. On our first day, our kitchen in boxes, I took her to McDonald's and told her that the French call it "Le Macdo". I propped her up on a counter and read her the French menu items, as she giggled into my shoulder. "Mummy, the French are so funny!" A few weeks later, we ran into a boy from her school. He said "Coucou, Elena!" She waved coolly at him, then grinned at me. "Isn't that so funny?"

Her secret laughter reminded me of my first glimpse of family life in the west. I was nine and we had just escaped from Iran, because my mother was a Christian convert – an apostate. My mother, brother and I had been living in undocumented limbo in Dubai, and when the migrant hostel closed without notice we were taken in by a family of Australian missionaries. On our first night in their house, we three retreated to our room and giggled as we dissected their routines. We were grateful to have a comfortable room and a bed, but the family seemed so strange to us. There was also a thrill in scrutinising the habits of white people; we didn't often get the chance. My mother's eyes went wide when dinner arrived: plates of cold cuts, cold vegetables and leftovers. Each night, their son Nathan, a boy my age, got his private time, then official tuck-in with each parent, a bizarre ritual.

I had never been offered private time. My mother was in my business all the time. In the hostel, she had slept in my bed. Nathan's closed door seemed to me so performative and unnecessary. Did mothers in other countries close the door, count the minutes and wait for their child to complete some kind of playtime ablutions? In those early immigrant days, my mother, brother and I lived in a perpetual state of wonder and bafflement. Everything these anglophones did was weird, and at night we clung to one another and laughed about it until our mirth turned to tears, and we fell asleep in each other's arms, wishing that one day we'd get their jokes and sit easy at their table.

Nowadays I often return to Nathan's closed bedroom door. For two decades, my mother, brother and I lived deep inside each other's psychic borders, sharing mattresses and plates of food and a hybrid language. We became good at loving one another in crisis but bad at solitude, peace or privacy. Each of us somehow denied the other two their own points of view. No matter where we were – whether we were stuck in a refugee camp, an airport or a grimy Oklahoma apartment – it was as if we lived together inside a familiar old room, one draped in tapestries and smelling like dinners from home. Inside that warm bunker, we joked and wept and fought, shouting things we'd never say to anyone else. We released our trauma in ugly ways, expecting to be forgiven. No outburst could get you banished if you were blood. While outside boomed wars and displacement and chaos, we filled the inside with cosy family dramas. After many years, the outside noises died down and the inside grew darker and cacophonous. We grew taller, the air became rancid and my brother and I left, one after the other, seeking open skies and new families.

A few months after my partner, daughter and I arrived in France, we ran into another boy from Elena's school. "Coucou, Benjamin!" Elena initiated the greeting this time, pronouncing his name in such a nasal way that I snorted. Bah-Jamah. It was like she'd picked up somebody's deviated septum. She glared at me. "Stop it, mummy!" she whisper-shouted. I shrank back. Elena was disappearing into a passable Frenchness that I couldn't fake, because I had no hope of hearing a difference between en and an. Soon I was alone in our cocoon where the French are so silly, so funny. "Stop it!" Elena whispered each time I tried to speak French to her friends.

“Excuse me, miss,” I’d remind her, “but this is my third language.” These words transported me back to my first home in the American south, a tiny apartment where my mother, brother and I began the long work of becoming American. I’d make fun of my mother’s English and she’d say “Excuse me, Khanom (miss), but in Farsi, I have a medical degree.” I used to think that I stayed inside that warm, imaginary room with my mother for a decade. But maybe I left her there, a year or two into our arrival in Oklahoma, where I assimilated quickly and deliberately, altering my accent in a hundred subtle ways that my mother couldn’t hear.

I now know that the good-smelling room, that imaginary safe space I shared with my brother and mother, was never actually safe for a girl. An Iranian daughter isn’t ever meant to leave. A son will eventually go, but a daughter must rot there. She can never express any deviation from her mother’s values, or revel in any triumph her mother might find shameful. I realised this when, three months after my divorce in 2013, free in my pretty Lower East Side studio, two men in my family suggested that my mother and I move in together, since we were alone now and couldn’t possibly need privacy from each other.

Now, 10 years later and an ocean apart, my mother and I are sitting in our kitchens – me in my European tenement flat, she in her American farmhouse – and we speak through our screens in the presence of an English therapist. Privacy with my mother has become frightening, so I’ve suggested a compromise. “This isn’t normal,” my mother rails against my new boundaries: that I won’t discuss my writing, that I won’t be lectured on religion, that I won’t abide nightmares and paranoia (scheming relatives, meningitis scares with every itch).

But what is normal for mothers and daughters? I want a social scientist, not an Iranian mother, to tell me. In Iran, at great personal cost, daughters preserve a fantasy of closeness with and for their mothers. Mothers criticise. Daughters listen. That’s love, I guess. Over the decades, my mother has cooked thousands of extraordinary meals for me, pouring herself into each one. She has hemmed my jeans and plucked my eyebrows and made me laugh. She has also dismissed my expertise, instructed me to hang my diploma below my ex-husband’s, vilified my partners and accused rival mother-figures of brainwashing me. None of this is as big a deal to her as the meals and the plucking. She never considers that I might have earned my values, or that I may be insulted that she doesn’t believe me capable of forming my own opinions. To her, I’m just a stupid child who gets manipulated by cleverer people: wily men or witchy rival mothers.

As adults, displaced children crave to be normal again, free from the hundreds of daily calculations and errors. We want big heavy doors separating our psychic rooms from our parents’, some distance and tangible borders between the present and the past. Sometimes, that past is embodied by a heartbroken foreign mother always knocking on our door, issuing invitations. My mother’s face falls each time I enforce a hard boundary. She keeps dusting our imagined refuge, where we three were all tangled up together, wishing for her children to return to it for a cup of tea and a laugh. I

make a joke, and she thinks maybe the door is opening a crack. Her eyes light up. I wish I could sustain the warmth, but sensing danger, I retreat behind my own door. She’s alone again, mystified.

For all our clashes of culture, our biggest rupture is over this: my mother spent my adolescence covering my body, policing my manners and generally shaming me for becoming a woman. My repressed religious upbringing has become the single biggest influence on my own parenting strategy: I am vigilant against shaming Elena.

The other day, watching TV, my daughter, now seven, said: “They’re going to have some lovely kissing now.” I wanted to fast-forward through the four seconds of tame kissing, but I restrained myself. In return for this leeway, she tells me all her heart’s secrets. When I was growing up, if television characters began to flirt, my mother would squirm and change the channel. If anyone kissed, she banned the show as filth, and said things like “If you watch unchristian things, I don’t trust you with the TV.” To be fair, if she had watched television romances as a child, she would have been beaten and thrown out of the house.

Once, when I was 12, my mother snapped at me for a tasteless joke. My chest tightened and I choked down my meal. Later, to assuage my shame, she told me that, when she was a girl in pre-revolutionary Tehran, she was doing her



Dina Nayeri as a child with her mother circa 1981 (left); and with her own daughter in 2016 (right)

homework while absently muttering three interesting words she had heard on television. “Mary, Virgin Mother.” In Farsi it lends itself to chanting, all soothing ms. Her father walked past, heard her mumbling, realised what she was saying and slapped her hard across the face. Nothing would have happened to a boy in this situation, not in either of our generations, and that angers me. But the story also makes me chuckle: as a child, my mother had already discovered the mother of all martyrs.

“Let’s be weirdos, mummy,” Elena says, dancing joyfully, “not perfectos!” In public, she shouts: “Mummy, where does my vagina go?” If a stranger glances reproachfully in our direction, I stare back and reply loudly: “Up through your cervix and into your uterus.” Sometimes I pull up a medical drawing on my phone, but then, in that instant of believing that I’m somehow rebelling against my mother, I remember she was a gynaecologist in Iran. She showed me this same diagram. She may have tried to shrink-wrap and hide me the way Iranian mothers do, but she was also a rational, scientific adult, a doctor in a lab coat who solved complicated maths puzzles for fun. For all her magical thinking and religious dogma, my mother had strong arms and a big brain, and I worshipped her.

In Iran, “normal” is to make room for that duality. Good Asian daughters can easily slip in and out of fantasy realms. They are loyal and they perform for their mothers. They stay in the imaginary room, and pretend it makes sense, that the westerners are so silly, so funny. I guess I’m no longer a good Asian daughter.

During an exhausting two-hour talk a few months ago – before we found the English therapist – my mother casually called me a concubine, since I’m not married. The whole enterprise, our reconciling, fell instantly apart. I texted my friend, a fellow immigrant writer, to complain.

“They can’t help it! These overbearing, traumatised mothers ... it’s true, we all have the same mother!” My friend advocates for a gentle approach, wherein we fake loyal Asian daughterhood for our mothers, knowing that we will soon return to our own safe, feminist houses. “The way they were raised was so much worse,” she reminds me. “The cultural fuckery they were getting from their own mothers. Look how little of it they’re transmitting ... so much less than they got.” It’s true, our mothers endured upbringings we can’t even imagine. Beatings and long silences, body shaming, sexual shaming, gruelling work.

My mother had to spend cold nights in jail and drag her two children from her home and remake her life. My mother’s mother, who died last year in London,



Two of Nayeri's ancestors and a childminder, circa 1981.

was a child bride in Tehran. She was 13 when she married an adult man (mercifully 19, not 60, but this was no consolation to a girl who wasn’t even told the facts of sex before it was forced on her). After that, my grandmother rejected Iranian ways. Until she died, she drew hard western-style boundaries around herself. In London, she distrusted Iranians.

I ask my friend, who has a kinder heart than I do, what these Asian mothers want from us, why they can’t leave us alone. She says: “They want daughters who can understand and protect and translate them, in their old age.” Because the world is changing and our mothers’ rules, which might have seemed folksy in the 90s, the stuff of immigrant standup routines, are now unfathomable to younger generations.

I don’t know about that. I think our broken mothers, though they dominate their daughters, have a way of transforming into folksy movie grandmas for their grandchildren – woefully misguided but unthreatening, like a drunk uncle. My mother and daughter giggle about lipstick and drawings of birds. Elena dances like Lizzo and my mother drinks her in, forgetting to chastise. We want only to brutalise the generations above and below us. Skip forward or backward one and there’s enough distance for kinship, laughter, even understanding.

I believed my grandmother when she called my grandfather a rapist. Maybe this is because I wasn’t attached to my grandfather. The summer I turned 21, I lived with my grandmother in her London flat. She gave me Kahlua and pistachios for menstrual cramps, an affliction that she called “the bad situation”. Her family have always refused to acknowledge the rape, though there’s no denying the maths. My aunt and mother were 11 and nine when their mother turned 25.

My mother and aunt knew that as soon as my grandmother died, I would tell the world about her rape – so they broke into her home just after her death and cleared her devices, burned all her papers, saving a few of her poems and seven pages of harmless, but magnificently weird, Christian sci-fi she had written. Did she write stories from her aborted childhood? My grandmother's final words to me were: "I'm writing my memoir. Will you help me?" She had written the first line: I had a very short childhood. That first line is all that's left of her.

Until last year, when my grandmother died and her apartment was ransacked, her legacy destroyed, my mother and I still clown around sometimes. Over the years, as we assimilated, our jokes were more often about the strange habits of Iranians than those of Americans. During the pandemic, I was writing a short story. She gave me details from her childhood. "We used to pluck our eyebrows and tell people we had a hypothyroid," she said, chuckling into her fist.

"Just in your eyebrows?" I said, giggling. "A hypothyroid that makes just the bushy extra parts of your eyebrows fall out and nothing else?"

"It made our leg hairs fall out, too," she said, and I burst out laughing. A glandular problem that only affects unwanted hairs. Nothing could be more Iranian. "The grandmothers believed it!" Or they let it go. Or were in on it.

Briefly, as we drank our tea and made fun of our countrywomen, we were in that movable bunker of our migrant days, that sacred space where we laughed at other people for their vanity or their boundaries or their fanned-out plates of dinner meats.

"I do think we are dealing with intergenerational trauma," the therapist told us in our second session. Something more than just a culture gap. It's true that there have been migrations and abusive men and deep, reverberating pain. Everyone in my family is a little weird about sex, not just because of culture or theocracy, I now believe, but because of the repeated and community-sanctioned childhood rape of my grandmother, a crime that birthed us all.

Once at bedtime, I said something about locking the doors at night and Elena shrieked. "Don't tell me scary things! Don't tell me that stuff until I'm 20!" Do all mothers frighten the living crap out of their daughters, or am I transmitting something deep rooted and inevitable to her?

My mother, though, insists our problems are entirely about culture and the

definition of normal. "In my culture," she says, "you respect your mother. You don't make so many walls for her." Sometimes she says just what I'm thinking: "Weren't we close?" And my stomach drops because I know that one day, I will lose my private space with Elena. "Explain to me," my mother says, "at what age mothers stop being mothers." I have no idea; but I know it's inevitable, that fighting it will mangle my heart. I spend hours a day just smelling Elena's neck. At my grandmother's funeral, I gave my mother a reluctant hug, and she took a hungry sniff of my neck. I felt violated and stunned, but also sad for her. I yanked myself away. Her need was becoming nightmarish, and I started to think about myself, in two decades, holding too tight to my daughter.

Do you two see what you're doing to me right now?" the English therapist interrupts us, clutching her head; my mother and I have been shouting. We go silent. We've disgraced ourselves in front of a white person. We have a habit of returning to those chaotic days when every release was forgivable. Now we need an English woman in the room to make us behave. Though we're in the middle of a fight, I have an urge to translate my mother for the European, because that's my job. I've been doing it since childhood, but it's also my literal job – I write about Iranians for western readers. My mother hates that I write candidly about my insecurities or failures: I am revealing too much and damaging our redemptive refugee story.

The writer Matthew Salesses, whose work grapples with storycraft across cultures, writes that a sentence will read differently depending on expectations. "She was absolutely sure she hated him," could have a range of meanings. To a western reader, it signals that by the end of the story she will love him, or that she already does. To my grandmother, that sentence might signal that soon she'll be forced to marry him. This is precisely the kind of sentence my mother and I fight over. If I reveal a small flaw in a fictional Iranian mother, a flaw that might later bloom into understanding or connection, she dissects it for insults. "You think I'm just a dumb immigrant," she says. I explain that it's boring to show only resilience and strength, that you have to start in a different place from where you plan to end. Imperfect stories are more interesting, more redemptive than heroic myths. Flawed characters are more beloved. She waves away all of this. It's American nonsense.

For my mother, being unmasked in front of westerners is terrifying. For me, writing honestly, in my voice, is restorative, a kind of prayer. My mother enshrines our good days in her memory. She makes our clothes cleaner, our faces prettier, smiling at each other as in Hallmark cards. I store these same memories with our

cracks showing. I write what I find worthy of preserving. “You ruined my precious memory,” she says, when she reads my work. But why should we give these falsely soothing immigrant stories? Why should we run off into our corner and giggle about the plate of cold cuts alone? I want to invite readers to look through my lens, not appear presentable in theirs. I want them to see all the specific, glorious ways we’re jerks – I think that’s worth celebrating. Appealing to Iranian hierarchies: doesn’t compelling European and American audiences to consume my flaws put me on a higher rung? Doesn’t it make me a queen, rather than wretched?

I have friends who play the good Asian daughter at home. They morph into a flat version of themselves, deferential and sweet. My mother used to perform her respect for her own mother, serving her tea, addressing her with formal pronouns. Writing has made me hyper-aware of these falsities. I’ve always wanted to be myself, and if someone demands theatre, I stay away. Do I owe my mother – a woman who has suffered many injustices – a soothing performance, even if the ritual harms me?

We discuss the day the word “concubine” slipped out of her mouth, and my mother asks me to consider her culture – that she can’t help it. I’m reminded of how I defend myself when I mix up my students’ pronouns. I want to say, each time I stumble, be patient with me. I agree with you, but I have the habits of another generation. I’m trying. Sometimes, I remind them that in my first language, Farsi, we don’t even have gendered pronouns. And that the only reason I’m fumbling is that I’ve been Americanised. If I were my original Iranian self, pronouns wouldn’t even be a thing.

My students are a mystery to me, as I am to my mother. We both stumble in our newly acquired dialects. My mother asks for the benefit of the doubt. Maybe I should give it to her, because I need it from my students, and because one day I’ll need it from Elena. We are all displaced in time, the foreign mothers of the next generation.

look back, trying to be kind. I recall how my mother has tended to my wounds, though she was brought up by a teenager. She used to rub my muscles after taekwondo practice. She phoned me almost nightly during my divorce. Those calls comforted me because she was safely in Thailand then, a brave American Peace Corps volunteer. When she returned to the US, she showed up uninvited at my door with bags of tea and basmati and discount painkiller, the intrusive Iranian mother breaking my boundaries again.

Sometimes when I most crave time with Elena, she pushes me away. Have I done the same to my mother? Stuck in my point of view, all I hear is my mother in my teenage years, with her bad English and her haughty attitude, trying to fit in and failing. Maybe it’s enough to understand her briefly. To know that she’s (a little) right – everything is about culture and language. To me “concubine” is a slur. To her the word means nothing more than thousands of other words she’s said in her life.

My mother’s culture says that young women must serve and sacrifice. A few days ago, I asked Elena if I could eat one of her french fries. She thought about it, then said: “I’d like to give you a chip, mummy, but I’m sorry, I think I will want to eat all of them.” I laughed, trying to decide if this was time to teach her sharing, or to be grateful that my daughter knows how to say “no”. Deep down, I was relieved. My god, I thought, I did this. This is my reaction to a generation of overbearing immigrant mothers and their selfless-daughter dogma. And that dogma happened because of a previous mother, and one before that. My writer friend, the fellow Asian with the kind heart, sent me some words by the Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh. Our talents and our faults, Nhất Hạnh wrote, are all inherited. They’re not our own. My friend wants me to accept that we’re not very different from our mothers. She wants me to fight on, and to fight better.

Many grown children understand that you can love someone deeply and not like them at all. And we prepare ourselves to survive the painful moment when our own child struggles with this distinction – we hope they’ll like us and love us, too, but the frightening possibility remains: maybe it won’t be a struggle for them; maybe they’ll just decide that loving us is enough. So we close their bedroom door and count the minutes, trying not to listen as they do their playtime ablutions, negotiating borders that we’ll one day have to respect.

I understand now that Elena’s values will one day be unfathomable to me. But will I want her to perform a lie so that I can grow old inside a fantasy room? When I was younger, I’d roll my eyes when I saw children faking politeness or care so that they could get a treat. “Doesn’t that mother know she’s being manipulated?” I’d think. Now when Elena puts on an act, I’m just grateful that she’s delivering the lines. The performance is a gift. I imagine my daughter at 30, performing love and devotion, suppressing a long sigh as I sniff her neck, and I think, you know what? I’ll take it.

Sometimes I pretend for Elena, too – I don't actually care that much about unicorn politics from My Little Pony – and I remember all the times my mother has tried to mimic western-style boundaries for my sake. (It was too much to ask her to knock before entering my childhood room, or call before she visited my adulthood home, but now and then she'd toss me a ceremonial "is this a good time?") I judged her for navigating these American boundaries so clumsily, plodding along until something stressful caused her to stumble and her gargantuan rucksack of Iranian expectations spilled out.

"They've been through so much," my friend reminds me.

Be kind, she means, and remember the funny doctor who solved maths puzzles and, in another universe, could have been my friend. Imagine her as a confused child, tiptoeing that dark minefield of a mid-century Tehrani household, slapped for uttering a mysterious new word. I take a deep breath and agree to the next session with the English therapist who makes us behave. Briefly, I look forward to seeing my mother's face. I miss the good-smelling bunker. I turn on Zoom, we nod hello. Then we open our mouths, speaking over each other in our foreign tongues.

Listen to an audio version of this piece [here](#).

Images courtesy of Dina Nayeri

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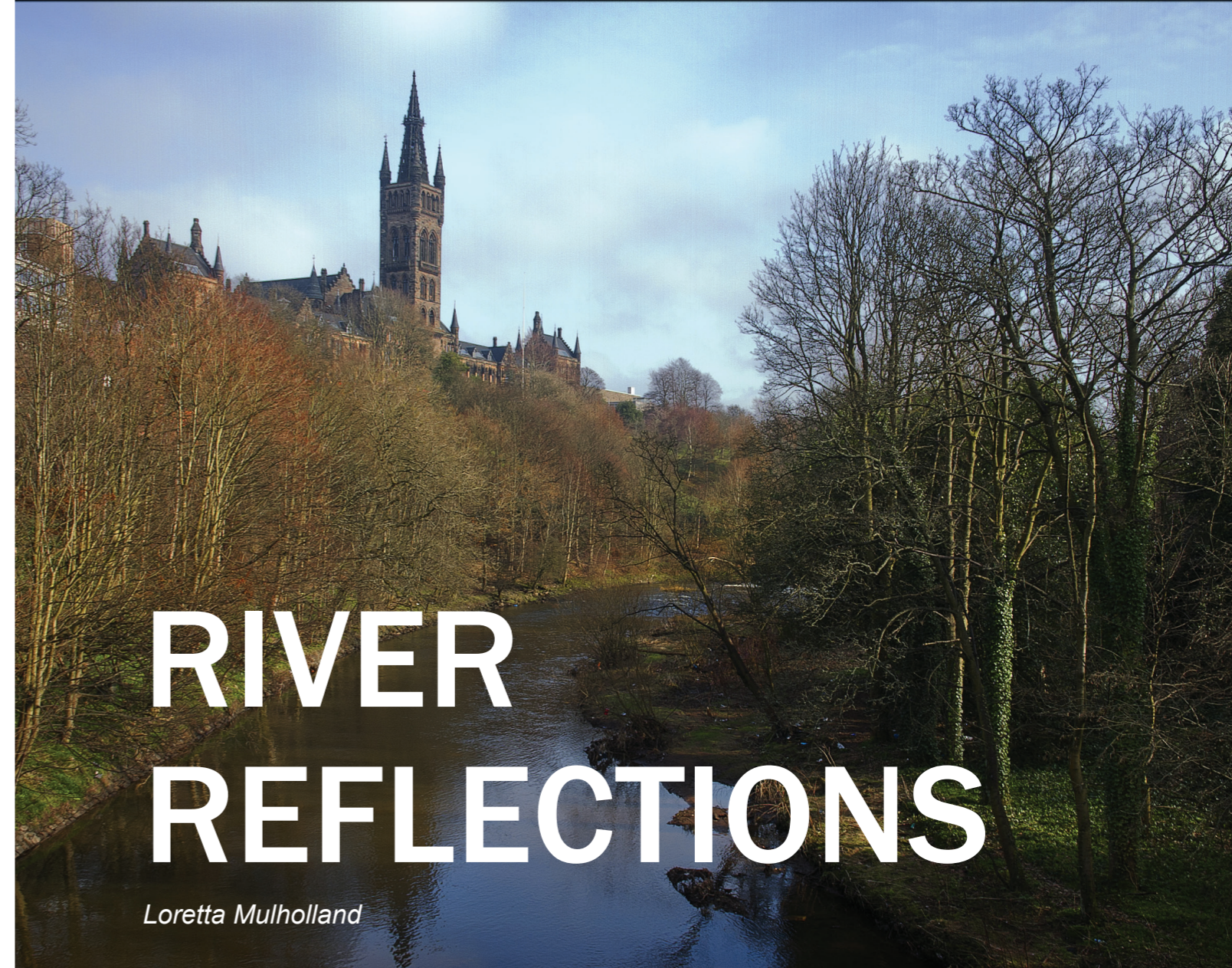
CREATIVE NON-FICTION

LORETTA MULHOLLAND

Loretta is studying for a PhD in English at Dundee University. She has been published in anthologies by Scottish Pen, the Saltire Society and Speculative Books, and by www.intocreative.co.uk. She contributed to the Dundee University Archives Exhibition, as part of Scotland's Year of Stories and has had short stories published in Northwords Now and flash fiction in Thi Wurd. She writes reviews for D C Thomson and www.intocreative.co.uk and is Fiction Editor for Dundee University Review of the Arts (DURA) online magazine. She has interviewed authors for www.imaginedspaces.org and was Social Media Assistant and Blogger for Paisley Book Festival.

HARRY WATSON

Harry is a retired dictionary editor (the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue) and a prolific translator of Swedish literary fiction and non-fiction. He has also written a history of his home village in Fife and a literary biography of the poet and academic William Tennant, as well as numerous articles on literature and local and family history.



RIVER REFLECTIONS

Loretta Mulholland

As a Glasgow girl I have always had a special place in my heart for water, and for the River Kelvin in particular. I remember walks over the Kelvin bridge, my father holding my hand, lifting me up to see the river flow underneath, before taking me into the park itself, to run on the grass, to feed the ducks, to play by the fountain, to visit the Art Galleries and Museum and marvel at the dinosaurs and Egyptian Mummies. But it is the sound of the water itself that holds the happiest memories for me, its rushing rhythm on rainy days, its stillness in the sunshine. Or it did. Until very recently.

In May 2023, I went on what was described as a 'slow walking as research' training afternoon, eager to learn what was meant by the term. I remain unsure.

The trip was historically informative, using Kelvingrove Park as the stimulus for a journey through time, but it left me wondering what the difference was between this walk and a history tour. I made some notes on my phone and am now trying to assemble these fragments into some kind of essay, regarding the experience, and how it might enhance my understanding of the past, through affect, as well as information.

...

Slow walking research combined with mindfulness might bring more meaning to history tours if we were to be in the moment at stops. If we were to listen to the sounds around us. To smell the air. See the squirrel, notice the dappled pattern that the shadow of leaves makes on the page as you write, or on the ground as you walk. Hear the child playing a conga drum in the playpark. If we were to inhabit our surroundings in this way, we might then imagine what you would experience with the senses when the park was opened in the mid nineteenth century. You might hear the murmur of the river, the clatter of hooves against paths, the chatter of ladies' voices as they stroll under parasols, promenading their way along the banks of the meandering water, or peek at nannies from Park Circus pushing perambulators above the area where ducks now glide the surface of the pond.

Imagine the contrast, as you notice flickers of sunshine in the clear, fresh water of the Stewart Fountain, with the contaminated source that exists in the overcrowded slums in the city centre and Gorbals in 1859 when Lord Provost Stewart drives forward the plan for the city's water supply to be provided by a freshwater loch forty miles away. Think of the engineering feat that brings the sparkling still liquid of Loch Katrine into the town's taps to improve the health of its residents. The workers. Extend that idea of water to the ships of the Clyde and the cargoes they carry. Kelvingrove Park might be the first green space provided

in the city for its middle-class West End residents, but it hasn't had the word Imperialist scratched over the south-east nameplate for nothing.

The hill leading towards Park Terrace almost took my breath away as we stretched up the incline towards the equestrian statue whose rider, Lord Roberts, led a host of Imperial Campaigns, but whose bronze frame is thankfully shaded from view by the greenery that surrounds us. This path that had me and a few fellow students panting, is a twenty-first century fitness route for those in the city who want to challenge their bodies. Several runners overtake us. Some appear to be bowing down to the earth, prostrating themselves to the sun above as leaves shadow their flattened forms, but no, they're doing push-ups before they unfurl their figures like spring fern and bounce back up, continuing on their way.

But we have stopped at this point and our researcher guide prepares us for some dark news. This area, to the far east of the park, away from the sandstone turrets of the Art Galleries and Museum, was the Amusement Area during the 1911 Scottish Exhibition of National History, Art and Industry. It attracted over 9 million visitors and had Mackintosh designed menus for the Miss Cranston tearoom that was housed in the centre of the Education Area. The Exhibition was planned as a fundraiser to set up a Chair of Scottish History and Literature at the University of Glasgow.

The researcher has given us the backstory to the growth of Glasgow's economy by now, alongside the growth of the Empire, which the Kelvingrove exhibitions of 1888 and 1901 celebrated. She has enlightened us as to why Glasgow was called the Second City of the Empire and how entangled our forefathers were with enslavement. But I am not prepared for the next part of the story. The exhibition of people in the Villages. The money paid to gaze at the Other, here in

the cold Scottish climate at Kelvingrove. Here in the park where children play and people challenge their own bodies to extremes. Here in the spot where squirrels scamper through branches and gaze down on our guided group. Here where the leaves rustle and clouds form overhead as the story of the Equatorial and Arctic villages unfolds.

The weather changes and people put on jackets that they've been carrying, to shield them from the chill. The cry of children playing downhill is a far-off sound as we try to imagine this spot and the hundred or so displaced people who were transported here to be on display with their homes, dress and dancing skills. The beat of drums and vivid colours of costumes that flutter in the breeze of my imagination are marred by a commanding silence as a laminated postcard of the entrance to the West African Village with its tartan border is passed around. The joy this park holds for me, from childhood memories of clasping hands with my parents on wintry Sunday afternoons or of feet scrunching autumn leaves after feeding the ducks is invaded by contrasting feeling of shame that my city was so deeply embroiled in such collective racist attitudes. To gaze upon people like animals in a zoo. To pay money to gape. To be part of the exotica that exploited the world and treated people like goods to trade with, to 'educate' or to amuse. I feel queasy in my gut.

...

There is, incidentally, no evidence of direct Glasgow participation in slaving.

This research event, looking at walking as decolonial practice, interweaving the past with the present, started off in a part of the park which I'd never been to and ended with an event that I'd never heard of. Our guide says she has

to remain impassive as she writes about her findings yet she cannot read this history objectively. Such is the dilemma of the historian. How do we frame these histories? This beautiful park, this 'dear green place' in this 'dear green city', with its skateboard area where a mansion once stood, its children with scooters, its statues to the past, its sun dappled paths, its shimmering leaves and glistening water, holds many secrets in its roots. The hidden histories. How do we feel these absences? How did this walk make me feel in the end?

I ought to be ashamed, yet I cannot entirely divorce myself from the joy of walking through this place, in innocent years, or even as a student, tearing past the Stewart Fountain as university bells chime knowing I am late for Moral Philosophy again ...

Two hours later, after a swim in the university pool, hair dripping, I'd be dashing again, this time to Economic History, to attend the Modern Scotland module, where I'd hear the above words - There is, incidentally, no evidence of direct Glasgow participation in slaving - delivered by the lecturer as I took notes on the growth of 'world' trade, the expansion of the Clyde, imports of rum, sugar, cotton and tobacco, re-exports to Europe. Afterwards, munching on a roll and square sausage in the Grosvenor Café, I'd be resisting the temptation of adding sugar to my tea without really thinking why. This is what students were fed at Higher Education level in 1970s Glasgow. Is it any wonder that the city feels queasy in its gut these days?

The trouble with exhibitions, fairs and public events, is that they are not only designed to educate and to entertain, but they are also organised to create a sense of pride. Civic pride, community pride and individual pride. Growing up in Glasgow you knew about the 'Pride of the Clyde', you heard the ships' horns blast

in the New Year, and you knew exactly where you were. Where you belonged. Or so you thought. There was little to say what that pride was actually built upon. What attitudes prevailed or what history was being hidden, at all levels of education and society.

Thankfully times have changed, and the University of Glasgow was among the first of British Universities to pay compensation to atone for its role in enslavement, but the dichotomy of pride and shame is one which the city's children must face and ensure that present and future generations are aware of.

And it all began with water.

Perhaps such slow walking research, allows for meanderings of the mind, like the route of the river itself and reflections which mirror reality but which might challenge past illusions through being 'in the moment'.

ENCOUNTERS WITH WATER

Harry Watson

I grew up near water, in a Fife fishing village. The seaside was my playground. My mother tried to enrol me in the local nursery but while she was talking to the teacher in the doorway I slipped away and hid down the seaside among the rocks. I fished from the skellies, caught crabs, demolished towers of old tin cans with well-aimed stones. Funnily enough, like a lot of local fishermen, I never learned to swim.

My granny's garden ended at the sea wall, and at high tide the water would crash over the wall into the garden. I never went to my granny's house by the road. I would head straight down to the seaside, play among the rocks, then climb over the gate set into the sea wall down into the garden and up into the house, where my granny and her younger sister, two old widows always dressed in black, cohabited uneasily, a rather odd couple.

My ancestors and uncles and cousins on both sides of the family had been a mixture of fishermen and merchant seamen, Royal Navy ratings, a Royal Marine, and not forgetting an aunt who was a petty officer in the Wrens in WWII, in charge of a squad of women packing parachutes for the Fleet Air Arm. Some of them had had intimate connections with water. An uncle won an award from the Royal Humane Society for jumping into Hartlepool bay to save a drowning man from a ship that had hit a mine.

My father's fishing boat was rammed and sunk off Scarborough by a Hull trawler and the crew were lucky not to end up in the North Sea. As it was, some family photo albums he had taken to show the older men in the crew did end up on the bottom, to my everlasting regret.

Some of my maternal Spink ancestors from Auchmithie in Angus, fishermen and Tay river pilots, became martyrs to the sea. In 1814 three Spink brothers and their brother-in-law were drowned near the Red Head. One of the men, David Spink, was my great-great-great-great-grandfather.

In 1821 an Auchmithie boat was upset in a "violent hurricane", and "all perished, except one, who was left to tell the melancholy tale. He had clung to the boat, and was picked up in a state of exhaustion which afforded little hope of life, but has since recovered." That man was my great- great-great-grandfather, and was another David Spink.

In 1836 an Auchmithie boat "spoke a vessel bound for the Tay, and finding that one of their townsmen had already been taken on as a pilot they were about to turn for home when the captain invited them on board for a glass of brandy. Exhilarated with this, they added to their allowance, at a tavern on the Shore of Dundee, before returning to Auchmithie, a few glasses of whiskey. When on their voyage homewards, one of the pilots, in managing the boat, fell overboard – his arm was caught by another, who in drawing him, was pulled into the water – a third took hold of the second, and was in like manner drawn into the water, and all the three were drowned."

A tragic story, but the last line of the newspaper report never fails to crease me up.

"They bore excellent characters for industry and general sobriety."

My ancestor who drowned that time was yet another David Spink, son of the David Spink drowned in 1814.

Ask me what my favourite lines of Shakespeare are.

They come from "The Tempest":

"Full fathom five thy father lies;

Of his bones are coral made;

Those are pearls that were his eyes:

Nothing of him that doth fade,

But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich and strange.

Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:

Ding-dong.

Hark! now I hear them,—ding-dong, bell."

I love the way in which the bard transforms a thing of horror, a dead body at the bottom of the sea, into a thing of beauty. The drowned sailor's bones become coral, his eyes transform into pearls, and sea nymphs minister to him.

My drowned ancestors would have survived their ordeals had they been able to walk on water. Sadly only one of my forebears had that ability. Local historian George Gourlay tells the story in his book Fisher Life. A boat was returning to Cellardyke harbour in Fife "in the face of a rising south-east gale" when it was dashed on "the deadly reef" known as Skellie Point.

“And so the death scene closes on one and all, save the solitary swimmer, William Watson, whose escape is one of the most romantic incidents of the coast.”

Tearing off his heavy jacket he plunged into the sea, and “I felt as if I walked on the water,” he told his friends, and so it almost seemed to others, so strangely was he borne on the great billow that swept him to the shore.” And for ever afterwards, Gourlay tells us, he was known as “Water Willie”.

William’s faithful wife Mary Galloway waded into the harbour and plucked out her half-drowned husband. When she died almost half a century later her death was recorded in the parish register with the laconic comment: “died of Water”.

FICTION

Alec McAulay is a writer, filmmaker and educator from Glasgow. He has lived in Japan since 1989, and is currently based in Yokohama. He has a PhD in Screenwriting from Bournemouth University, and teaches and researches Creative Writing at Yokohama National University. His short films have screened at festivals in Spain, France, Serbia, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the USA and the UK. He is Assistant Regional Advisor in SCBWI Japan, and is also a member of Screenwriting Research Network, and National Association of Writers in Education.

ALEC MCAULAY

TOM MURRAY

Tom Murray is a poet, fiction writer and playwright based in Dumfries. He is a Poetry Ambassador for the Scottish Poetry Library. Open Book Lead Reader in Eyemouth and Dumfries.

Publications include *The Future is Behind You* (poetry), *Sins of the Father* (play), *The Clash* (play) and *Out of My Head* (fiction). His website is tmurraytg.wordpress.com

CHARLIE, A JAPANESE FRIEND

Alec McAulay

The journey from Tokyo to Okayama takes four hours on the bullet train. About an hour in, the train passes Mount Fuji. My wife made sure to book seats on the right-hand side, to give us a prime view. Mo chotto, she says – not long now. She waits, camera in hand.

Thirty years in Japan, and still words crop up that I do not know. Shinobukai means ‘memorial gathering.’ How had I not come across it before? When the invitation came, my wife smiled at my ignorance. After all this time together, she is used to these gaps in my understanding showing up from time to time.

Charlie was my first Japanese friend, though ‘Charlie’ wasn’t his real name. It was Takuya Kanemizu, though I didn’t find that out till much later. Charlie looked nothing like Charlie Sheen, which was the first thing you got to know about him. You found out because you inevitably asked, “Why is your nickname Charlie?” “Because I look like Charlie Sheen,” he would reply. And that was the second thing you noticed about Charlie, and the first thing you loved about him – the child-like, mischievous joy of the man.

When I moved to Okayama at the start of 1991, my girlfriend Masako mentioned to her boss Kotani-san that I wanted to play football, and he introduced me to Okayama Milano FC. With the likes of Gullit, Maldini and Van Basten, AC Milan were dominating European football. Milano FC played in the iconic black and

red stripes. In Kyushu, I had made Japanese friends, but they all spoke English. I came to Okayama determined to speak Japanese with Japanese friends, and Milano FC seemed the perfect place. The J-league was still two years away, and people watched baseball and sumo, so only the truly dedicated were turning up on a Monday night in February to play football. The charms of my blonde hair and blue eyes, attributes that opened so many other doors in Japan, were lost on my teammates. Can he cross a ball? Does he have a first touch? That was all they wanted to know.

Charlie was different.

Charlie took to me straight away. When he found out that I had just moved to the city, we went to his company's storage facility on the north bank of the Asahi River. Charlie's firm were shopfitters, and I picked out a pine wardrobe and kitchen table they had salvaged from business premises that morning. Charlie urged me to take the revolving circular bed with velvet trim, an item recovered from a bankrupt Love Hotel. Hell, he would even throw in a free ceiling mirror. My refusal was one of the few sensible decisions I made at the time.

That night, we carried the furniture up the seven flights of stairs to my apartment, and had a few beers. Charlie wandered out onto the balcony, and said I was in a prime viewing spot for the summer fireworks festival. By the time August came around we were firm friends, and he and Hiroko arrived in yukata to enjoy the fireworks with me and Masako. They brought a navy-blue yukata for me. I got in a tangle putting it on, so Charlie had to dress me. It was thrilling, that hot humid evening, to be doing Japanese things with Japanese friends.

Moto, our centre half, lived nearby and would give me a lift to training. At the ground, we would be met by the guttural 'Ossss' greeting, ubiquitous in Japanese sports. But sometimes Charlie would greet me in English. His heavy metal music magazine featured an English slang term of the week, and I was Charlie's guinea pig.

"How are you?" he'd say.

"I'm good Charlie, how are you?"

"Peachy."

We giggled like schoolboys.

"Good evening, Charlie," I said another time.

"Hey! How's it hanging?"

Priceless. I explained the etymology. Charlie wept tears of laughter.

Charlie's ear-to-ear grin, his delight at getting to use these phrases with an English speaker, would give me a lift. I swear that in every game where Charlie greeted me with a new phrase beforehand, I played better.

Charlie had been with Hiroko since they were teenagers. Hiroko was Mama-san in a hole-in-the-wall bar called, for reasons never explained, Waikiki. The Hawaiian theme started and ended with the word 'Waikiki' painted in whitewash on a piece of driftwood on the front door. Inside, it was Christmas all year round. The windowless interior had twinkling ceiling lights, and the wooden walls displayed spray snow reindeer. There was a foot-high mechanical Santa on the bar who danced to a tinny 'Jingle Bells' every time the cash register opened.

Mizu-shobai, literally 'the water trade,' was a phrase Charlie taught me. It seemed to cover all manner of establishments where alcohol was available. Charlie asserted he was exceptionally qualified in water trade matters, as his name, Kanemizu, consisted of two kanji characters, 'money' and 'water.' He became my nighttime guide through the neon-suffused water trade of Okayama, though the currents always brought us back to Waikiki and Hiroko.

I was in Waikiki when I found out about Charlie's condition. Hiroko told me he had been hospitalised that morning. High blood pressure ran in the family; his older brother had died from a stroke at 34, and his younger brother had already had two hospital stays that year. Why had my friend never told me all this? Because my friend is Japanese, I rationalized.

When I visited, Charlie was sat up in his hospital bed doing paperwork. His boss had been to see him earlier.

“You look bored,” said the boss.

“I am bored,” said Charlie.

The boss brought out a sheaf of invoices from his bag. “This will help you pass the time.”

“Working in hospital,” I said to Charlie. “You’re so Japanese.”

So Japanese. That’s what I called him.

We laughed.

The following summer, Charlie had a new name for two weeks. My sister Patricia and her husband Charlie came out from Scotland on holiday, so my Charlie became ‘Fake Charlie,’ and my brother-in-law was honmono Charlie – ‘Authentic Charlie.’ In Waikiki, Fake Charlie introduced Patricia and Authentic Charlie to the joys of karaoke, at that time still unknown in the UK. My sister insisted she would not sing. Authentic Charlie, too, entered the bar reluctant to take the mike. But Fake Charlie loved a challenge. Twenty minutes after entering Waikiki, Patricia and Authentic Charlie were wrestling over the mike, each claiming they had ordered Fat-bottomed Girls. Fake Charlie watched them, and winked at me.

Mission accomplished.

Two months before I left for Tokyo, Charlie told me that he had broken up with Hiroko. When I asked why, he said naga sugita haru: ‘a spring that goes on too long.’ The next night in Waikiki, Hiroko smiled, and shook her head at my naivety. She told me that Charlie had been born in Japan, brought up in Japan, spoke only Japanese, had a Japanese name, and had never left Japan. But he wasn’t Japanese, not to the Japanese way of thinking anyway. He was Korean. Or more precisely zainichi – a curious term that means ‘in Japan,’ the only option the Japanese language leaves you because hyphenated identities like ‘Korean-

Japanese’ are not part of the lexicon. Charlie’s mother and father were Korean, and under Japanese law that meant Charlie was too. Charlie’s parents were adamant that he would take a Korean wife. If he married Hiroko, they would disown him.

I had known him for almost a decade – why hadn’t he told me? He carried a Resident Foreigner card, like me. He paid annual visits to the Immigration Office, like me. Why hadn’t we shared tales about this on nights when we sailed the water trade? The following Friday, a tad drunk, not a little belligerent, I asked Charlie what he was: Ethnic Korean? Japanese-Korean? Diasporic Korean? My attempts to impose some kind of abstract academic interpretation on his day-to-day life amused him. He refilled my sake cup.

“Drink your water, Gary.”

Charlie hadn’t kept his Korean background a secret – it just didn’t define him, any more than my blue eyes defined me.

I was ashamed. In part, because I realized that beyond Charlie, beyond Takuya, he had a Korean name that I did not know. But mostly I was ashamed because of the secret I had been keeping from him.

By the time I moved to a Political Science department at a small private college in Tokyo, Charlie was not just my best Japanese friend, he was my only friend. In Okayama, my university contract gave me more money and less admin duties than my Japanese colleagues, leading to resentment among the Japanese men I worked with – and the faculty were all men. The only other foreigner on campus was a morbidly obese Texan uninterested in football and on a mission to drink himself to death. Football, and Charlie, saved me from a similar fate.

Two years after I moved to Tokyo, Charlie had a stroke. He was 34, the same age his older brother was when he died. I went with Moto, Kotani-san and three other guys from the team to see him. Charlie couldn’t walk – he used his hands to propel himself across the tatami mats to meet us. He could no longer blink his left

eye, and wore a patch to keep it moist. He slurred his speech.

“How are you, Gary?”

“I’m fine Charlie. And you?”

“Peachy.”

If I closed my eyes, it was the same old Charlie. The giggle. The mischief. The warmth.

But eventually you had to open your eyes, and broken Charlie would be before you.

The next year, only Moto came with me. The third year, I went alone. And the fourth year, too. Every year after that, I was his only visitor from Milano FC.

Was it a Japanese thing that stopped the others from coming? Were they allowing him to save face by not confronting him with their own able bodied-ness? Or was it a universal human reaction to gently fade away? Maybe I kept going out of guilt, awareness of my betrayal. Hoping for absolution.

The last time I saw him, he was better. “Looking good Charlie,” I said.

“Feeling peachy,” he replied.

His words were lucid. Then he stood up, walked across the room, and shook my hand. They had put him on new medicine, and a new physiotherapy regime. The results were miraculous. My heart soared to see these signs of recovery. As I left, he hugged me and said, “Next time, bring Hiroko.”

So he knew.

I was too choked to reply, but I think he could tell from my face what his words meant to me.

Six weeks later, he had another stroke, and died. I was in Akita, snow country, delivering a paper at a small, unimportant conference, where I was the keynote. The organisers had taken me out for shabu-shabu, and I had my phone on silent. Back at the hotel, I saw that Hiroko had called me six times. I thought it might be about the kids, or her father, who was now in a home in Okayama with dementia.

I called and she told me Charlie had passed. There was apparently a small cremation, family only. I broke down and wept.

The Nozomi bullet train tilts on a bend and majestic Mount Fuji looms into view. Hiroko presses her phone against the window and takes a rapid series of photos. I used to think that the Japanese made too much of this dormant volcano, till Hiroko and I bought our Tokyo apartment that affords us a view of the snow-capped peak. The sheer presence, the unknowability of Fuji, enchants me every time she deigns to make an appearance.

I miss Charlie. I loved him, and look forward to the shinobukai, to being with old teammates who loved him, too. We will drink our water to his memory, and wish we were better friends.





THE PUDDLE

Tom Murray

On the first day I never noticed it, why would you notice a puddle after a torrent of rain?

On the second day with the rain sun chased to another place, there it was, a pool of still dark water, bordered by the dry concrete path. It lay underneath an overflow pipe, so I assumed, or my logical brain assumed this was the cause and decided to ignore what my eyes registered, that the puddle was a perfect circle. I confess to knowing nothing about black holes but when I stared into the puddle there was no reflection, and no shadow of the jagged white stones which lay on

that spot.

On the third day the sun still shone, the overflow refused to drip, and my brain agreed with my eyes. Still, I had to check. Puddles do reflect, don't they? I googled; they do.

On the fourth day I decided what I had really decided the day before. I wouldn't call the council, or the local university to investigate this....Discovery. For that's what it was, my discovery, and in a world where every corner of the globe paths have already been trod, is there anything left to be explored? Even space the so called final frontier, is it? Are we primed for an eternal nothing or planets waiting patiently for our arrival?

On the fifth day I stood poised at the edge of the puddle, foot dangling over its surface. I dipped my toe and watched the puddle lap my shoe, tried not to think of the possible dangers, but only the unknown possibilities of never witnessed before lands. I wasn't sure whether the sensation of my skin tingling with feeling, my brain urging me to go for it and not at the same time. I only knew I felt something maybe it the feeling of being alive.

My shoe submerged further and should have hit the path underneath, but nothing, and I nearly tumbled forward into the puddle but steadied myself, my hand scraping along the rendered brickwork of the side of the house.

I pulled my foot back, my shoe soaked but then in a blink of my eye as dry as my mouth.

On the sixth day I lay on my bed the whole of the morning. In the afternoon and evening, I hardly moved from the front of the TV. I couldn't tell you what I watched.

On the seventh day another morning lying staring at the ceiling on my bed. Then a sudden rush of desperate energy, and almost head over heels down the stairs, I rushed outside.

I was ready to explore.

The puddle was gone.

For the rest of the afternoon, I lay half awake, half asleep on the couch, TV marking time in the corner. I glanced back and forth, slept, and glanced and as the afternoon turned to evening both my brain and eye saw as one the words scrolling along the bottom of the screen.

Breaking News: Police confirm they are investigating claims that a woman vanished, witnesses insist, after jumping into puddle.

POETRY

XINYI JIANG

Xinyi Jiang was born in China's Qingdao and studied in Nanjing and Shanghai. She taught in Fudan University before moving to the UK. She had lived in England and Wales before settling in Scotland. Xinyi discovered poetry when studying with the University of Dundee and had poems published in Dundee Writes, New Writing Dundee, PENning, and Gutter.

GAZELLE BUCHHOLTZ

Gazelle Buchholtz mainly writes short stories that aim to strengthen people's connection to the natural world. She wishes to make readers ponder upon how we as humans manage resources and share the planet with other people and other species, as in her Danish published book 'Søvnløse Spor' (Sleepless Tracks). Some of her short stories in English are published online, find the links on www.gazelletext.com. With a Master of Science in communication of scientific knowledge and years of experience in the field, daily working life is centered around the involvement of citizens, companies and organisations in environmentally friendly activities.

Jim Aitken is a writer and poet. His latest poetry collection is called Declarations of Love, published by Culture Matters in 2022. In 2020 he edited the poetry anthology A Kist of Thistles and in 2021 he edited the prose anthology Ghosts of the Early Morning Shift, both published by Culture Matters. Jim teaches creative writing with Community Education and organises literary walks around Edinburgh with Adult Education.

JIM AITKEN

BETH MCDONOUGH

Beth McDonough's poetry is widely anthologised and published. She reviews for DURA and elsewhere. Her first solo pamphlet Lamping for pickled fish is published by 4Word. She has a site-specific poem on the Corbenic Path. Makar of the FWS in 2022, currently she is working on a hybrid project on outdoor swimming.

S E A

C U C U M B E R S

Xinyi Jiang

would they've
saved you –
had you had the
teeth to chew
stomach to digest
accepted their protein
no better than chicken
their food chain broken –

who'd have known –
the pool of liquid tar
choked with upturned fish
was prussian blue where
a fleet of freshly painted
trawlers lined up where you
posed in a stiff mao suit
watched tons of bramas
bigger than cattail fans
yellow croakers red gurnards
unloaded to queuing trucks
ration slips empty baskets

should we be grateful –
our longer legs burlier
frames fuller breasts
luxury villas for film stars
where office workshops were
with an uninterrupted view
of jiaozhou bay paid
your pension death grant
partially blocked the sight of
lime-green gutweed
every summer since 2008
gastrectomy for your ulcers
perforations from
anti-rightist campaign
cultural revolution
missing dentures
during lockdown
had made you crave
for nothing but soft
flesh of freshwater fish
extinct from
yangtze

Blue, thin line

BLUE, THIN LINE

Gazelle Buchholtz

The moon pulsates patches of indigo.
Oceans parting connected lands.
Wombs of mountains and mothers
release torrents of life,
flowing into ancient carved ruts
on to unknown terrain,
where tears grow thorns
on thickly packed bushes
of bewilderment.

Standstill reaches
no mind or matter that can float,
crossing rocks and flags unhindered,
unknowingly about borders and limits.
Fluidity transforms and stirs
us up
with the primordial sea and depth
of the orbiting, twirling Earth;
a drop in the universe.

crossing rocks and flags unhindered,
unknowingly about borders and limits.
Fluidity transforms and stirs
us up
with the primordial sea and depth
of the orbiting, twirling Earth;
a drop in the Universe.

BLÅ, TYND LINJE

Månen får pletter af indigo til at pulsere.

Oceaner skiller forbundet land.

Fra skødet af bjerge og mødre
strømmer liv,

der flyder ud i fortidens spor
videre til ukendt territorium,
hvor tårer giver vækst til torne
på tætpakkede buske
i forvirringens vildnis.

Stilstand har intet greb på
sind eller substans, der kan flyde,
uhindret krydser klipper og flag,

intetanende om landegrænser og begrænsninger.

Med evnen til forvandling blandes
vi

med urhavet og dybet
af den kredsende, snurrende Jord;
en dråbe i Universet.



THE FALLS OF SHIN

Jim Aitken

It looked and seemed like one enormous
pint of porter, constantly pouring itself.
And I stood there in awe drinking this in:
the dark swirling body, the reconstituting froth
and the sheer sound of the stuff
just rushing and racing in spume.
My senses were birling and I had to leave
vowing that tonight, after our meal,
I would order a few sleek ones of my own
to see if I could find the salmon leaping
up to the font to confront the barman,
whose hand had spawned this great torrent.

GOING IN, WATERFEARN

Beth McDonough

Try finding your way, when the burn backs up,
fat with high tide and nowhere to go.
Ahead, that black cloud pretends to be Cornwall,
and all the wood sanctions most paths,
and new light shocks where light never looked for
decades.

Small hollies frazzle in unsought out news,
birks cast their doubts and bright leaves on the world.
Nothing's the way you remember it here,
as exposed grasses grow pink at land's core.
Tracks to old corners are gone. Hold on.

New meanings now beat trails in sand,
so be amazed by the warmth of moss
where false chanterelles nest. A cliché of rainbow
arrives.

Find a Molucca bean on Birsay's shore.
It's travelled one hundred currents. Alone.

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