

Issue 04



# THE JOURNAL



Welcome to the fourth issue of The Journal.

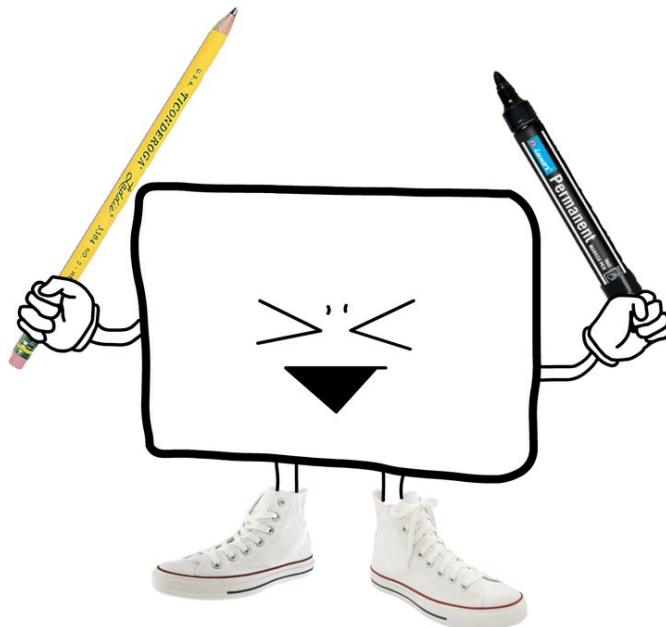
This creative writing publication is by Writers' Bloc and is the first issue to appear on campus this academic year. There were an incredible amount of submissions for this issue and I would like to say thank you to everyone that sent their work in. It was a challenge trying to narrow it down to the eventual successful submissions because of the high quality of work received.

If you submitted but did not manage to get a piece in this issue please do not give up. Look out for our posters, find Writers Bloc on Facebook or follow @UoBWritersBloc on twitter to follow updates and announcements for new issues throughout the year.

Finally I would like to thank Alana Tomlin for the hardwork she put in last year with creating and managing The Journal. Without her this publication wouldn't exist.

Enjoy.

Andy Cashmore,  
Editor



Special thanks to: Charlie Dart and Richard House

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## **The key to your house is more valuable than the one to your heart**

I'm writing to tell you that I'm giving you back your key.

I tried all manner of ways to be rid of it, even swallowed it whole and took a bottle of tequila to let the taste be washed away.

I wasn't sure if it was the liqueur or the metallic poison of your key that made me hurl my stomach's contents all over the bedroom floor to end up with my face stuck to the fluffy white rug.

The surgeons ended up cutting the key from me on an operating table.

They gave it back to me in a plastic container to take home with me, which was considerate of them.

I thought about asking them to incinerate it, but then realised that delivering the ashes to your house would be a problem.

I am returning your key, not because I want you to have it, but because I do not think I can be trusted with the knowledge that I can enter your house any time I choose. The power I have in that little key would undoubtedly go to my head.

I would smash everything that you clung so desperately to when I left, rip all your clothes up, make the dog shit on the bed.

However you would know it was me. Those reactions are predictable.

What I could do is break into your house once a month and drive you insane. I could steal your car keys, the lightbulbs from every room in the house, the batteries from all the remotes.

It's the little things.

I could break in, leave the door wide open, drive you insane wondering, 'what the fuck did they take?'

I could do this every month until you couldn't take it any longer. You would move away, perhaps, and I would be left with a useless key to some stranger's house.

**Amie Pryal**

## Rosaline

The sun beat down hard on the plains, the golden corn swaying in the breeze glowing in the midday light. There was quiet in the fields apart from the muffled voices of far-off shadows bearing scythes, hacking at the long corn and earning their keep. Birds fluttered on the breeze, swooping and curving over and under the low winds of the country, dancing with one another like acrobats on the high wire.

They cascaded away. Three figures ran through the high crops flattening a path through the field towards a crimson barn stood in the middle of the long grasses, alone, isolated. A weather-vane swung idly on its peak, hinges creaking as the iron rooster atop it swivelled to follow the breeze whistling past. The rooster pointed towards the dark shapes finding them unwelcome.

A circle of shade hung on the corner of grassland; a tree hanging out of the forests. It was down in the shade that a girl in a blue dress sat with flowers in her hair and a smile on her face. She raised her head up to gaze out to the field. The smile faded when she saw the men stalking through the grain towards the stalwart barn on the horizon.

She stumbled to her feet and ran out into the crops as fast as she could, her eyes bright with fear. She screamed out a name, the waves of her distress reverberating into the trees: a warning. Farmers looked up into the sky hearing the intruding sound on the peace and quiet.

The young boy was cutting the plains. He cocked his head at the call hearing the urgency and fear of the cry. *Fear*. He stopped his ploughing and gazed out to the corn. He saw the three men. He saw the girl. *His girl*. Now the fear was in his eyes too. He ran for the barn, away from the men who were now changing their path to pursue him. The barn was sanctuary. Safety. The dark red doors towering above him were protection from danger.

His father always said: 'If you ever get in trouble my boy, go for the barn.'

And now he went for the barn with fear enveloping him. The brisk young plough boy heaved open the ancient wood, paint flaking off on his fingers. Inside now: was he safe? He began hauling the door shut after him, the aged paint cracking off onto his hard grip as the entrance closed gradually inch by inch. The boy yelled in frustration as he pulled backwards with all his might; terror fuelled the blood that pumped his aching muscles.

But to no avail. A hand forced its way through the narrowing gap, an arm following after. A multitude of growls responded to the plough boy's yell and their collective voice threw the boy to the ground. The door was flung open; the sunlight burst through the opening and illuminated the dusty boy on the ground, his chest heaving up and down and his mouth moving silently. He tried to scramble away from the three men that now loomed overhead, but there was no escape. Rough hands clutched at him yanking him upwards against the wall. The boy shied away from the men as the frown painted on his face showed his anticipation for the inevitable. But no. He was pulled once again and thrown into the central beam of the barn. The boy gave out a yelp as he collided with the wood but he had no time to recover. More hands took him and bound him against the very foundation of the so-called sanctuary.

The plough boy had little time to prepare as a fist seemingly made of cast iron was hurled into his stomach, pain shocking through his muscles. But the boy only grimaced, gritting his teeth with a look of defiance on his face. The shadow gave a grunt of dissatisfaction and let fly another rock-hard blow this time into the side of the boy's face. The crack of breaking bone echoed through the barn. But the boy did not cry; instead he only gave that same look of defiance across his now-battered face. This time his nose was targeted, the blow cracking cartilage under the skin. Blood trickled from his beaten nose to the ends of his mouth as the bruises were already becoming visible on his jaw and his eyes.

The weak body was dragged out into the sun and cast away so the limp

figure rolled through its crop.

‘There’s a message from Mister Harst. He don’ wan’ no common folk with his daughter.’

The men departed, their shadows casting long shapes through the field. As they turned the boy rose to his feet unwinding with his shoulders slouched in exhaustion. He closed his hurt eyes and turned them to the warmth of the sun.

Another cry echoed out into the skies disturbing the birds from their resting places. They took flight once again dancing through their performance on the air.

The girl in the blue dress was there. His girl. Her honey locks of hair framed a face that was filled with desperation and longing. But the boy shook his head slightly waving his hand faintly in reassurance.

Nothing was said.

It was quiet save for the call of the sparrows overhead, their plunging turns casting benevolent shadows on the corn. The girl in the blue dress gave a slight nod in recognition of the boy as tears rolled down her soft cheeks. She made her way out of the corn field, picking her way gradually through tall stalks, and out onto the road leaving the boy alone.

He picked up his tools and got back to work, slowly cutting at the crop once more. He was a plough boy: it was what he did.

**Anthony Keen**

## Silver Trails

## Feature Piece

We sit outside and pretend  
to admire the view.  
His right arm twitches and  
I scratch the paint off my nails  
and remember a stale  
one-liner.  
It falls flatter than the first time  
I read it out of the joke book  
our Mum bought us  
as a leaving gift.

'I need to get out of here', he demands.  
I plant a kiss  
mechanically  
on his forehead.  
He feels the alkaline  
and puffs on his cigarette.

He is silent  
and words lunge like  
freed convicts out of my mouth.  
'I remember something I watched  
on a documentary once -  
music is energy  
that vibrates between inanimate objects.'  
I point to a stale turd three inches from his feet.  
'That could carry the notes of any song.'  
He follows my gaze and smiles.  
'Springsteen.'  
I smile too.

'Remember when  
we used to pick the snails off  
the garden wall?'  
'She trod on one before she went.'  
'I know,' I say.  
I trace the  
scars  
on his forearm;  
silver trails.

**Elisha Owen**



## Hold a Hedgehog

We were on top of a mountain when we got the call  
And missed the hospital visiting hours  
So we sent our love;  
He was six pounds light

We step into a hush of newly born,  
Mother and father quietly high,  
Their huge dog trotting to and fro  
With a rope in his mouth, and imploring eyes

He lies, crinkled, hand up to his face  
Like he's washed up on a knitted shore  
Peaceful despite the round red weal  
Like a jauntily placed cap  
Off centre on his head  
A reminder of how he didn't want to leave

After the biggest of small talks  
And fussing the dog  
And drinking a strange tea-free tea  
He wakes  
His mother lifts her small new world  
And passes him to you

You hold him like you'd hold a hedgehog  
As if he's full of broken bones  
As if you stretch a cobweb between your fingers  
And you grow older and younger  
In one  
Long  
Moment

**Elena Orde**

## **The Wish Collector**

Dad calls him The Wish Collector.  
He says he picks up the wishes from the fountain,  
puts them in a plastic bag  
and takes them somewhere safe,  
so that they can all come true.

I call him a dancer.  
The water is his partner,  
throwing herself into the air,  
wrapping herself around him  
as they complete the only routine they know.  
I don't think he's collecting wishes;  
he's picking up applause  
left by a charmed audience.  
Then he'll stuff it in the soles of his trainers  
so that he can have the tap shoes his mother  
would never allow.

Uncle James calls him a thief,  
a beggar, a tramp,  
scum.

**Jenna Clarke**

## Excerpt from interview with Private Baker

'We went there to do a job, a job that most people can't do, are too scared to do, and now I'm getting banged up for doing what they told me to do. For following orders. They pick me up on one tiny fucking detail and that's it. Game over.

'I mean it's a joke. If it were the other way around the Arabs wouldn't be putting their man in prison and he would probably torture me first and all. I've seen the videos they send us when a man gets left behind; we all have. Do you see any justice there? You don't see them turning on each other and saying 'you can't do that' do you? And I get the boot up my arse for what? Doing what they told me to do: shooting Taliban. We should have left him there to rot, no skin off my back, but you give them an easy death and you get fucked over by the brass.

'And who's to say where the line is, eh? This isn't a fucking pleasure beach. You can't draw a line in the sand and say, that side's murder and this side isn't. This is war, that line's been trampled over, there's blood spilt on it and you can't see where it's meant to be any more. If I'd shot him properly in the first place I wouldn't be here. I'd still be doing my job like they told me to. And he's there lying on the floor with a hole in his chest and I'm meant to save him? When he'd just been trying to kill me? He wasn't going to come through anyway and he's muttering all that shit about Allah and his eyes keep fluttering back into his head like he's praying. I reckon he wanted to die, to be with all those virgins in heaven and all the other bollocks they tell them, the dumb shits. They don't have any respect for human life, not even their own if that's what you can call it. They call me a murderer but I haven't blown up a block of flats or raped children or beheaded anyone.

'I mean, what was he going to do if I patched him up like a good little boy? Join fucking Amnesty International? He's going to go out there and kill more

marines and civilians and rape more children and tell them it was their fault and think that he's doing the right thing. And here we are stopping these people spreading their filthy words and killing people, and they're not even fucking grateful. These women should be running up to us and kissing our boots because they'd be getting beaten into the ground if it wasn't for us. But they just look at you like you're scum, and spit at you when you pass, the filthy whores. And they call me a murderer, when everyone in this country is killing each other anyway and nobody's batting an eyelid, and the women are all lying back and thinking of Allah in their forced marriages.

'He wanted to die; he's lying there, spurting all that filth and I'm thinking, you think you're going to heaven matey, with all those virgins, but there's nothing where you're going, just a hole in the sand. And even if there is Allah, he's not letting you in after all you lot have done. No god would. We did the right thing killing him; the Taliban are terrorists and we have to protect our families like we were ordered to. And I hope he knew that we were the good guys before he died because nobody else does. I hope he knew there was nothing waiting for him because he killed my mate and I'm going to prison. I hope he knew that because then it would make it worth it.'

**Charlie Dart**

## Looking The Right Way

I hear the drops of heavy rain as they pound Savannah slopes at night,  
And the not-so-distant howls break sweetly on my ears.  
And if you look the right way there is beauty here  
But Africa is wild.

The storm clouds and mountain air come like sanity and a clear head.  
And to question freedom and what this all means  
Is to regress to a time where freedom was not free.  
But Africa is wild.

And her winds will blow dry,  
As a culture crumbles.

**Thomas Matthews**

## Larkin Rings

One day I will die.  
And when I die, scrape out my chest cavity  
And take me home to Scartho.

Fill it with northern soil and push into where  
My heart was a seed  
From the Bowthorpe Tree.

And as roots grow and wrap around my bones and  
Commit me to the earth, and  
As my muscles decay, and  
As my blood is washed away  
I will die once more, but be born again.

I will become Dead Man's Tree  
For the children at Springfield School  
Who will harvest me for sixers.

And one day two young lovers will carve in me  
A second heart,  
Which they will later turn their heads away from as they pass.

And through tunnels of yellow  
Old men with thinning hair and coffee stained shirts will walk up to me  
Daily, like clockwork,  
Until one day they don't.

And I will die once more, but be born again.  
I will collect my Larkin rings.

**Bret Johnson**

## Online Bukowski

We converged together in my dreams  
many times under fuzzy English skies.  
Trying desperately to blend  
but failing every time;  
maybe you woke up, logging out.

The words we passed around like a cold joint,  
sharp and small, made us twittering little birds  
and all we had to say was coo and cheap.  
'You know Bukowski?'  
'Yes, never read him.'  
'Go find his stuff.'  
'I've seen it all summarised.'

Soon the system crashes with a laugh of static.  
You rise, your mouth open but lips unmoving,  
rich young white noise coming out,  
WASP noise,  
high-pitched, annoying and meaningless,  
and with you it fades away.

I stay to share sips of strong cold loneliness with others,  
staring up at the invisible sun.  
The drink grows sweet after a while.

**Giles Longley-Cook**

## Moll's Brambles

I woke, rose and dressed. No, slow.

I woke, the clock I'd managed to restrain the day before had begun leaping, beeping. There was a can to my left side with dregs to swallow like saltwater when what I needed was proper drink. So I drank and wasn't immediately sick.

I rose, really properly this time. There was a little pain on my skinny body like a twitch that people probably get. And a scratching going nip nip nip on my right breast was an itch I didn't want to scratch. Scratch goes to enflamed like the little evil old ladies that are drawn to supermarkets; it'll come, it'll definitely.

I dressed. Bra and pants on first: the default. Default jeans and a default jumper. Cold today. I was clamouring so I looked in the fridge for it. Found a can, the last in the spider web of plastic rings around it empty. I thought I must remember to turn the electric off if it still worked. Drinking for one. I wanted the pub.

The traffic from the Seaborne Road was grinding and swelling and stopping to go, and I wasn't feeling anything but a buzz from the angry drunk opening in the space in my head. No one can out-drink me, not men, not mum, not them. Her or him or why or when. But I'm not a poet, I'm not. I was just waking up.

I could see the future as I walked; the future was cars. I don't think any human-invented thing has ever meant as much as cars 'cus cars tell us that we need to be somewhere else, then we get there, and then we need to be back again. Never getting anywhere really. Drunks, bad drunks, say they want to get really somewhere else, just give up the life and drive to a whole new place. But they'll come back eventually even if they stay. In their mind it's the same place, same person. No one ever changes.

It was the middle of the day I thought. I wanted some company after last



night, and this day, and my life. There's plenty of that company down the pub. What do you call a person who drinks for pleasure but isn't happy? English.

My town was very surprisingly green everywhere but my road. It was an ash grey row of building blocks surrounded by scrapings and patches. The rest of town was ruthlessly clean. It's hard to drink properly when there's a graveyard atmosphere whenever you leave the blocks. They didn't want you to have any fun but you had to pass them to get to the pub. So I did.

You can patch blemishes with makeup, though you look pale like a skeletal shoplifter. Know your limits, that there are none. Waking up for me was like a dog doing a trick, always novel each time it's done but unnatural as. I'm not meant to do anything but sleep. One day I will die. Maybe I could cut down. I thought, today is new. Pub was called 'Bitter Days'. I arrived after three minutes quick walking and the place was a shut box. I rattled bars. Nothing. Shook and stamped and swore. A ghost came to a window and pointed to his watch. It turned out to be nine o'clock; the pub wasn't open anyway.

I was not myself. I used to be, then I dunno, men. I used to be used like bees on a flower. I might not have minded but for the buzzing they made. Endless, trendless, soulless, friendless talking. Half of why I drank was them men.

I met Danny down the way. He was approaching the traffic with a swing step and crossed to see me. He was walking, like dark drunk foreigner's swagger, but he was really from the north. He was northern surely. I couldn't tell anymore, no voice. He had a swollen bag of stolen cans.

'Alright love?'

'No I can't stop.'

'Then say hello duck, hello petal. Come on. A smile.'

'Hi Danny.'

'Are you alright?'

'Are those all for you?'

'Bet that's right. Wanna share with me?'

'How many you going to give?'

'Spit out as much as I can throw up. You can drink that.'

'You pig.'

He smelt of that bready alcohol and yellowy fag mixture, and years of dirt. I had showered at least yesterday, I was fine. Still keeping it up, unlike this man's bent dick. How old was he? If you have to ask, the person is that old.

'Come to the shack.'

And he looped my arm in his. I shook off.

'Got to be somewhere.'

'Where? You? Down the dole? Up the ospit? Where?'

'Back to mine.'

'Then let's go to yours. I'll fix you something. I'll fix the fridge.'

It was famously broken; my callers had to endure warmth. The fridge served only as a holdall for my beer. I ate when I ate. But I wasn't plastered enough to have him puffing on top of me. But then, wasn't I going to be?

'Let's go to the shack.'

It was fiddles fields of broken glass and trees of fat cider bottles. It had fright which kept the kids away. A cabin in the woods, sort of; it looked like that when I drank. But it looked like a hole, the end of the universe right then. Danny opened the door and there were swings of noise.

'Get down beside,' Danny said, patting.

'Very wet now.'

'Dew.'

'Yeah.'

Did I want this? What was happening inevitably? If it was inevitable then I couldn't stop. Might as well say you're going to give up dying.

'Drink?'

‘Yeah.’

He handed me one. The choice was beer. Very strong, almost wine. Went down with a crash in your gut like swallowing someone else’s blood. Sucked you up and you’re giddy soon. Taste of something familiar like from the past, drinks at a wedding or something, but distorted, impurified. 9.5. We had our jolly time to begin with, sometimes sitting in silence like an old couple, then singing songs. I swigged, I swam, I delved down.

But later, in the dizzy pasture.

‘How’s that then?’ he suddenly said.

‘I didn’t say anything.’

‘Yeah you did you bitch. You’re always said something.’

‘You’re the bastard.’

I grabbed his throat, little rattle.

‘Let go or I will.’

I could see that.

‘Okay.’

I let go. We started laughing. Drunk, I was beside myself. Only way to relieve any of this would be for someone else to join us, turn the date into a party. Danny had rough bristles on the face covered in flecks of beer and cuts on his hands. The needle of old green tattoos creeping under his coat.

‘You’re crazy.’

‘I know.’

‘Give us a kiss.’

I gave him a kiss. I wanted this kiss. It’s what people want. Don’t give me any women’s crap, women this women that. This lady. I was myself. The only regret of this was that I couldn’t pretend it didn’t happen.

Then the darkness rose. The look changed between us. There was one woman and one man in the Garden of Eden; I bet they fucked and she was fucking surprised. I bet the first word was ‘why?’ Colour of broken blue, green

and clear. He twitched on top. Made a sound like “Hu-uhhh” all the time at each freeze, and he huhhed ‘til there was no more. I made myself little empty squeak-pants in the air. Him done he collapsed off me. He held my hand; it was rough, then it slackened. I wanted an ‘are you okay?’ or something but got none.

‘You got a tissue?’

‘No.’

‘Rip your shirt.’

He opened his coat to reveal a thready dark shirt, ripped a piece off the sleeve. I cleaned up.

‘Drink?’

‘I agree.’

**Edward Corless**

## Incan, Argentina

"Museums shelter spiders in their corners,  
everything else is dust cosmeticized."

A man told me that by the church,  
shoe-scuff of hair on his head,  
voice swung like an ice pick with  
the click of the consonants between  
teeth clamped upon a tear drop sweet;  
the clinks of Happy-on-Sunday types.  
I'm never sure if that kind of sentiment  
should be expanded to everything;  
that means it's geocentric picketing with  
a dormant chill from trenched places.

They've caught an Incan in a perspex bottle  
from the cracked tooth crest of a mountain, Argentina.  
Her skin arrestingly soft aside faint  
blue berry stains in the muscle folds and  
scalpel etchings of paint across one cheek.  
She died drowsy, dosed and slumped like a bin bag  
clumped around leaf veins and apple stalks;  
she pouts.

If the Incans were right she'd spread-eagle,  
effusing aloe over the pinnacles.  
But she mopes like a puppet.

A quintet of centuries sealed, pristine -  
glass must seem palatial,  
and she shrugs like all the wax works.

**Jonathan Pearson**

## Painted Wings

There were five of us in all,  
myself rookie red-shirt in the pack,  
first to fail, but first to make amends.  
My faults made them teachers,  
perhaps preferential to sealing food:  
I never asked.

Head-Chef complained of stiff joints  
as he diced and dished on repeat,  
but when he saw me doing stretches  
he'd laugh inquiring, 'Why?'  
'To loosen up,' my reply.  
He didn't understand.

Paulina was a funny sort.  
She leapt gender like Teiresias,  
at work out-manning Masculinity,  
but as soon as that bell struck three  
the locks came unleashed  
from a hairnet.

Big Stan – in Anglo Saxon England  
a first reserve for the Berserker ranks.  
He did tai-boxing, lion-grapples  
and had arms designed as weaponry.  
He spoke softly for all his size  
and never offered a retort.  
He could have killed the bosses  
that worked him like a pack-horse,  
could have used those fork-lift-truck-arms  
that stacked produce boxes night and day  
and packed them in a box,  
and yet for seven years he never raised a hand.  
No one had.

The last was Danny.  
Discontented with just 'making food' he  
introduced blackberries instead of apricots:  
'The sauce is more complimentary that way...'  
Each meal became a Mona-Lisa in his mind;  
he dreamt in colours.  
His skin too was a work in progress,  
tattoos interchanging in a metropolis sprawl  
across his skin – he needed one more done.  
Their black lines crisscrossed like his ideas;  
he was the first one of them to say:  
'I don't want to work here forever.'

\*\*\*

As I left that place on Friday  
unbound by any Monday morning promise  
I thought maybe one, just one,  
with painted wings in colours daubed across his back,  
could fly the nest.

**Joseph Sale**

## Coming Home

Coming home it seems  
That everyone you see  
Is a foul mouthed, walnut brown  
Denizen of motorbike motorcades and transit vans.  
They've laid peeling on a beach for a weekend friends will be told was a week  
The colonisers back to claim just the deck chairs and rum this time.

In Amsterdam people dress well;  
Ben and I are out of place.  
I forgot my velvet jacket,  
and am reminded why I bought it almost daily.  
Coming home it seems that ripped white sleeveless tee shirts  
Hang laboriously over labourer's beer bellies,  
An insult to the starving.

And we try to watch Dover draw into sight  
Before giving up and fleeing inside,  
Because the sea air is choked  
with cigarette smoke,  
An ironic distress symbol from a thousand beacons  
Ignored by the owners who chatter ceaselessly of places  
I have never been  
To all find out, wherever they were,  
That it was exactly the same.

Peering through the plexiglass  
At the infamous cliffs  
The gulls swooping and soaring  
It occurs to me  
That England may be pretty,  
But the Englishman is pretty fucked.

**James Dolton**



## Starry Night

It rained harder and my hood was damp on the inside.

I pressed on along endless strips of grass and tarmac, the scent of cold wet earth rising up and stealing me briefly to wild nocturnal places. Rain and dirt and darkness; those elements that were here long before us, and that sometimes swept in to remind me that there was still an Earth beneath our plastic feet, not just a floor.

Tonight however I was glad of the pavements.

The glimmer first caught my eye while my head was bent against the thinning drizzle. Rivulets of water snaked their way between the tiny stones in the tarmac, and to the glancing eye they were sheened with the dusky yellow glow of the lamps. But the more I looked the more it seemed that the world was opening before me, peeling away layers of disguise and softly shushing me to the secrecy of its confidence with a knowing wink.

Between each fragment of rock the heavy moisture reflected sharp pinpoints of light, and there were so many that for moments the ground seemed utterly infinite; a dark grey universe, populated by white and dusty golden stars blinking up at me. I found my stride increased, fuelled by the sudden solid feeling of eternity in the smallest of places; I was alive despite the late hour.

Delighted with the enigmatic spark it saw between us, the concrete cosmos began to leap out at me from the pavement. Each step was a jump through hyperspace, a million stars soaring towards and tearing past me. I was walking home on the backs of light-years from strange and breathtaking places, in those far reaches of distant galaxies until now known only as white smudges on the edges of telescopes. I had made it past the dreams of scientists, borne into the vivid otherworld with the meagre accidents of lamplight and pavements.

Hyperspace stopped, though I did not, and all the stars lost their way. They bent and swirled, and the longer I held their gaze the more confused they

became. Soon I was marvelling at their great curves and twists in lines, millions of lines grouping together, dancing off left and right, always changing their minds. Textured iron-gold flowers sprouted everywhere in a field of fiery pointed petals constantly diving in and out of sight, new ones always blooming before me, leading me on. By the time I was turning onto my road they had resolved into a jungle of unruly vines that cascaded and looped across the grey sky, moulding to the motions of my stride and the darting of my eyes.

They looked so familiar, those blossoming giddy twirls of starlight. It took me an age to place them.

When I did I laughed aloud.

I was home. The tarmac broke into gravel that would crunch satisfactorily beneath the feet but meant the end of the universe. The moment I stepped across its threshold I would be ordinary again. So I stopped to watch the churning Starry Night below me lose momentum and then shatter altogether, giving up its daring waltz upon the pavement to slowly dissolve again into still pinpoints. Its darkling heavens glittered like any normal evening.

The rain had stopped and I hadn't even noticed. I glanced upwards from the stony sky to another greater, bluer one.

The gravel crunched in its satisfying way and my shoes flung themselves through the air to land haphazardly on the porch tiles. I stole one last look through the sliding glass door as it shut. Warm artificial light beckoned from inside the house, promising late night snacks and dry pyjamas.

'Goodnight, Vincent,' I smirked as the front door key twisted in the lock, and I abandoned the artist at last.

**Danielle Bentley**



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Thank you for reading.

