Stonecrop Review

A JOURNAL OF URBAN NATURE WRITING, ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

CONTRIBUTORS

Writers & Editors

Naomi Racz

Holly McKelvey

Maya Sokolovski

Kate Finegan

Magda Kaminska

Alison Green

Anna Moritz

Maggi McGettigan

Melinda Giordano

Gregory Wolos

Susan Fuchtman

Robert Boucheron

Denise Parsons

Muhammed Awal Ahmed

Mackenzie Weinger

Photographers & Artists

Juan Eduardo Páez Cañas

Roger Leege

Alison Green

Claire Cowell

Kate Herbert

Holly McKelvey

Overgrown Cover Image

Overgrowth by Alison Green

Map of Greenwich + Woolwich

Ordnance Survey 1st Edition map, 1805; Illustrated by Lt. Colonel William Mudge.

SOCIAL MEDIA @stonecrop.review
CONTACT stonecrop.review@gmail.com
WEBSITE www.stonecropreview.com

A Note from the Editors

When Holly and I decided to set off on the adventure of launching a new magazine, we worried we wouldn't get any submissions and that the endeavour would be an embarrassing failure. Fortunately, we didn't listen to those fears, and have been incredibly lucky to have received a great number of submissions, including the ones you are about to read and peruse. Each piece is unique, and yet the collective effect is a strong evocation of place.

This is particularly heartening to us, because we want to see a range of urban spaces, places and experiences represented in this magazine. I love that we are taken to five different continents through these pieces. In North America we meet racoons in Toronto, trace family histories in Brooklyn, and have our hearts broken wide open by grief in Philadelphia. We also have art work from Havana and photos from Florida and California. Heading to Central and South America we have art work and photography from Mexico, Colombia and Guatemala. After crossing the Atlantic to Europe, we stroll along the Thames in London, and smell the sea air in Gdańsk, Poland. Two artists from Greater Manchester give us a glimpse of urban trees in that conurbation, and we have photography from Scotland and Switzerland. In Asia, we travel to Irkutsk, Russia, and wander around a field in Even Yehuda, Israel, while in Africa we meet bush babies in Nigeria.

There are also some pieces in this issue that are not located in a specific place. Canids are a common theme across our two short stories *Iota* and *Wyckoff*, both named for pets – though there's some doubt about whether Wyckoff is a dog or possibly a coyote. Could Wyckoff be the same coyote that rears its head in *Iota*? As Gregory Wolos writes: *For those equipped to experience them, mysterious phenomena are as available as low hanging fruit.* Perhaps stories can exist across the minds of different authors.

The two poems featured in this collection compliment one another beautifully. While *no choice in the matter* contemplates existence itself and takes flight with a clutch of young robins, *Vegetable Curves* pulls us into the earthly, tangled world of a budding plant. And last, but by no means least, *This Grand Experiment* is a beautifully concise piece that asks: *what is all of this for?* And it answers: *we just need to remember to look up...*

I'd like to extend a huge thank you to all of our contributors for sharing their pieces with us and being a key part of the very first issue of Stonecrop Review. And a big thank you too, to Holly, for setting out on this crazy adventure with me.

Naomi Racz | Editor

“It all started with a card (well actually, it all started back at uni, but that's another story). Naomi had ordered a small lino print I'd recently made as part of a series on urban biodiversity, and I was packing it up to send off to Canada. I'd been reading Naomi's urban nature writing on her blog for years at that point, and was utterly in awe of her project to read and review every piece of urban nature writing from the last ~130 years. So, on a whim, I included a note with the print: “Let me know if you ever want to collaborate on an urban nature project!”

A few weeks later, Naomi wrote back. “Funny you should suggest that...!” she said, and described an idea that had been growing in the back of her mind for years: a journal for urban nature writing, photography, and artwork. And thus Stonecrop Review was born.

Putting together this first issue of Stonecrop Review has been an adventure and a privilege. Each submission opens up a door through which we catch a glimpse of the urban landscape as seen by another set of eyes, and together these portraits of place paint a larger picture of our human relationship to the cities and nature around us. As Naomi and I selected the pieces for this issue, it was important to us that we capture urban nature at every scale: from our gardens (*Roots* by Maggi McGettigan, *Vegetable Curves* by Melinda Giordano) to the suburbs (*Wyckoff* by Robert Boucheron, *Iota* by Gregory Wolos) to big, loud city streets with their traffic and their neon signs (*A Natural History of Brooklyn* by Maya Sokolovski). We trace cities' waterways in *Historical Overgrowth* by Alison Green, and learn how they capture the history of a place in *Mudlarks* by Mackenzie Weinger; Magda Kaminska takes us to the coastline in *Feet to the Sand*, and Muhammed Awal Ahmed takes us up into the forested mountains on his way to and from school in *My Grandfather's Stories*.

Of course, I took an especial joy in the photography and art submissions: *Vuelo sobre la Habana* invites us to lounge on the balcony of a magnificent building and watch as birds soar overhead. Robert Leege takes us on a tour of Florida, Mexico and Colombia through his lens, introducing us to an urban nature that is joyful in its explosive colour. And two contributions take us to visit the trees in our city parks: Claire Cowell takes us during winter in *Tree in City Park* and Kate Herbert brings us back in spring as birds build their nests and parkgoers spread out on the grass in her diptic *The Tree*.

I also had the opportunity to create much of the artwork accompanying our written submissions. Sitting with the texts and sketching for them was a pure joy. I tried to capture the stories of the city as described through raccoons in *Your Own Two Hands* by Kate Finegan; a fledgling robin tries out its wings in Susan Fuchtman's *no choice in the matter*; and a glimpse through a window recalls a forgotten landscape in *HaOdem 6* by Anna Moritz. Elsewhere, garden plants burst from coffee pots and honey bees spill across the page. Artefacts are preserved in mud and make-up is mixed together with botanical drawings of city tree leaves. A family photo recalls a day at the beach.

This first issue was a true labour of love. I am so grateful to our contributors for their beautiful submissions. I hope our readers enjoy exploring these pages as much as Naomi and I enjoyed putting them together!

Holly McKelvey | Illustrator

STONECROP REVIEW

ISSUE 1

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OVERGROWN


Coffee
OPEN

Your Own Two Hands

Kate Finegan

Kate Finegan lives in Toronto/Raccoon Nation and has a lot of feelings — most of them wildly enthusiastic — about raccoons. Her chapbook, *The Size of Texas*, is available from Penrose Press. She is Assistant Fiction Editor at *Longleaf Review*. You can find her at katefinegan.ink and on Twitter at @kehfinegan.

Raccoons have traveled over time. Starting in the tropics, they worked their way north. Like ticks. Like West Nile. Like the alligator recently spotted in Memphis. Like me, Texas to Tennessee to Toronto. Even still, in this city of bright lights, street music and car horns, high culture and fine cuisine, my keenest pleasure is silence, leaves beneath my feet, ravines in winter's snow-quilt hush. Wherever we go, we can't escape our hearts.

One hundred years ago, raccoons had not yet entered cities.

A female is called a sow, a male a boar. Through the year, sows live with sows, boars with boars, coming together only to mate. As a child, I always wondered why Sunday brunches ended with the men in the den and the women in the kitchen.

Sows are smaller than boars. My husband is eight inches taller than me. When I hug him, I can hear his heart.

The raccoon is described as medium-sized. I am exactly average height, but my size-zero frame makes me small. Even still, I so often feel my body has outgrown me—that this wisp of a thing is too large, like how the smallest grain of pollen or trail of smoke can make you sneeze.

Raccoons have five fingers. Watch them open a green compost bin—a new one, designed to be raccoon-proof. You'll swear you're watching your own two hands turn the nob counter-clockwise.

Wild raccoons live only two or three years. Captive raccoons can survive to twenty. I think how time is

relative, how it stretches the length of the runway as you're waiting, hot and anxious, on the tarmac, and how it hangs perfectly spaced in the notes of your favorite song. I think how my grandma lived over twenty years without my grandpa, how she was happy, truly, but she kept a *Family Circus* comic on the fridge. In it, the grandma tells her grandson that he shouldn't wish for her to live forever, because she has a date in heaven, waiting for her.

Individual raccoons don't travel far. In the city, their range is around one mile. When I was a kid, I looked like a wide-eyed Precious Moments figurine with golden hair. Men have always told me blonde jokes, always expected me to laugh. *When a blonde heard most car accidents occur within twenty miles of home, she moved.* Sure, that was dumb. Sure, she shouldn't have moved. But I can't help admiring someone who had the gumption to take something that scared her, and do something about it, who didn't let fear paralyze her.

I have never laughed sincerely at a blonde joke. There are so many things I've done, but not sincerely.

Usually for men.

Some diseases can be transferred to humans, a strong argument for steering clear of raccoons. But we are drawn to interaction. In "Inventory" by Carmen Maria Machado, a woman flees an epidemic that's spreading eastward across the United States. The story is told through an inventory of sexual encounters. A woman who used to work for the CDC observes that the disease spreads through contact; she says that people could overcome it by just staying apart. This is after she and the narrator have already had sex and before they fall asleep in each other's arms.

When I saw a raccoon, frantic, crying out, racing toward traffic on Bathurst Street, a major north-south artery near the heart of Toronto, I tried to walk past but couldn't. I watched it (*her*, I somehow knew) run and jump up a pole, slide down. She looked at me with eyes so much like my cats'—nervous, pleading. Another pedestrian shooed her across the road as I stopped traffic. No one honked. The world was kind in that moment.

The pedestrian and I both assumed the raccoon was a mother separated from her kits.

Kits don't leave the den for eight to ten weeks, and they'll stay with their mothers for just over a year. Wild raccoons live two to three years. So little time is spent apart, from mother, from children, and I think raccoons have this one right. We have our long lives, and so much time is spent in nostalgic longing, a hunger for lost contact.

Males do not help females raise children. On the bus, I saw an ad for car seats. It said something to the effect of *free car seats for mothers in need*, as if we were raccoons, as if fathers couldn't also keep their children safe.

If boars did help with kits, would they call it babysitting?


OPEN

Vuelo Sobre la Habana

Juan Eduardo Páez Cañas

Juan Páez was born in Palmira, Colombia, in 1973 and focuses on scientific and children´s illustration. With an M.A. in semiotics from the Tadeo University, Bogotá, he teaches drawing and visual appre-ciation at the district university in Bogotá, where he lives and bases much of his work. His work is faithful to the traditional notion of graphic drawing, but with a flexible style that is often inspired by the natural world and organic forms. He can be found online at caudapodo.

Feet to the Sand

Magda Kaminska

Born and raised in Poland, Magda Kaminska spent the last few years in a small French town. She is always on the lookout for exceptional nature, as well as for ways to combat pollen allergies. She loves creating stories through writing, video-making, and drawing. She has a special affinity towards collage.

I am walking towards the camera with a plastic bucket in my hand. Behind me, my brother is sitting down, facing the water. You can see his white back and the black cloud of his hair. I am only two, but I look invincible in that photo. Marching with my bucket, my toes in the sand, as if I just got hold of one of the most precious things in the world.

For most of my life, I found it so essential to live by the beach that even my brother's move to a different neighborhood was difficult to accept. The first thing that I listed as a difficulty while living in a French inland town was just that. It was inland! Some people claimed that a one and a half hour drive to get to the ocean meant that it was close. Not me. I needed the beach to be accessible to me in an instant. All this because I spent the first 19 years of my life having to walk just 300 metres to get to the nearest beach entry in Brzeźno — one of the city beaches by the Bay of Gdańsk.

On summer days, when the Polish weather is friendly enough, it is covered with crowds of sunbathing tourists and locals (guilty!). Drinking groups of friends take their place in the evening. When I close my eyes and the sunshine is crawling all over my slow-cooking skin, I'm also involuntarily hearing about Rysiek's small salary or the green bikini lady's next karaoke song (ABBA, obviously). I play around, pouring the golden grains from one hand to the other. Suddenly this cry gets very close: *looody, lody, dla ochłody!* Now I'm spitting out sand shot at my face by the rushing feet of kids chasing after the ice cream seller.

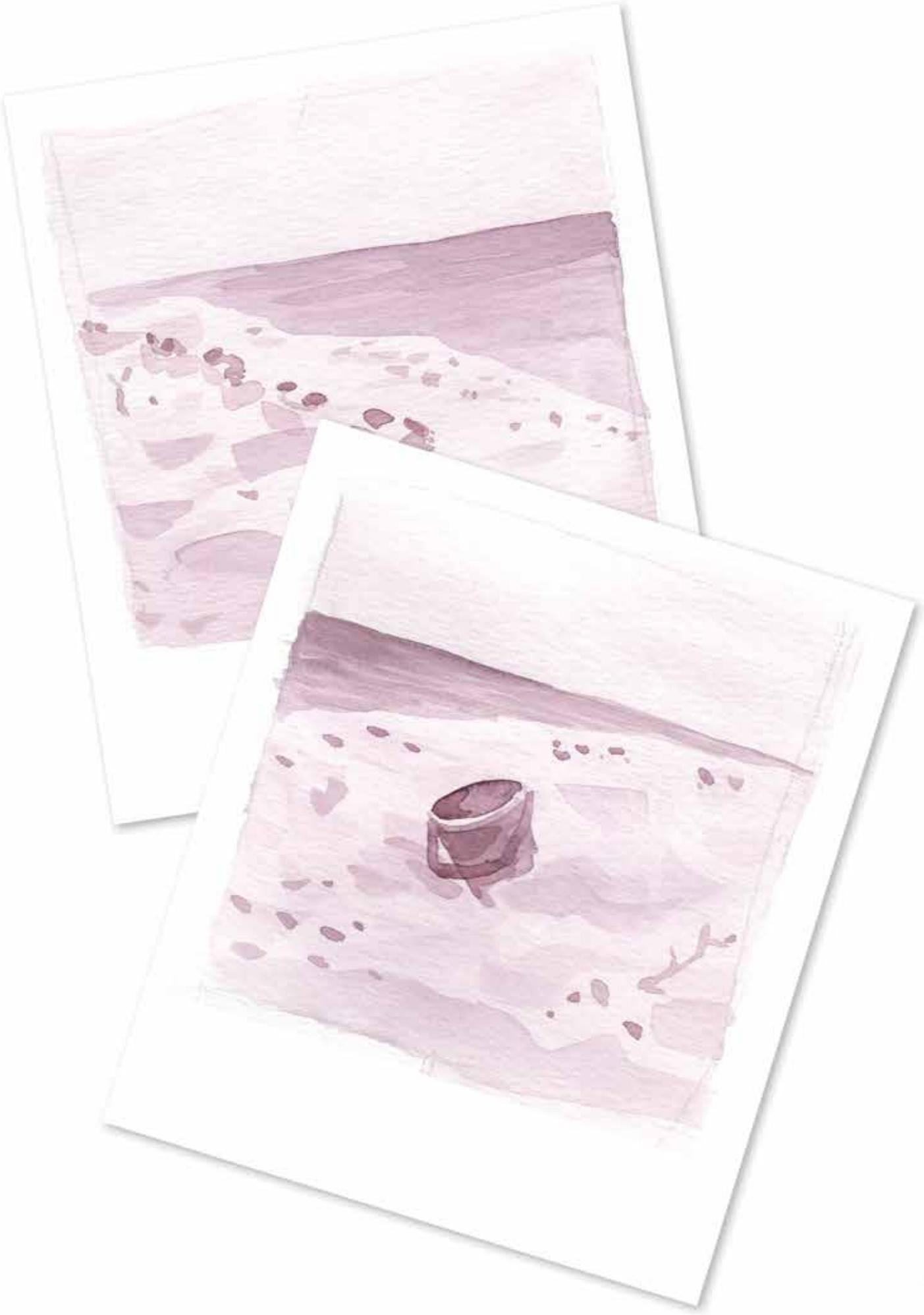
No ice cream sellers crushed the sand of the beach of Brzeźno before it became a health and vacation centre. It wasn't even officially a part of Gdańsk before 1914.

A tranquil 600 years as a fishers' village preceded the 19th century sand lovers coming here to spend their summers. There were three attempts of a functioning *dom zdrojowy* (health resort), the first two burnt down. It had different uses and was finally adapted for flats after the two world wars. There was actually a bigger building called *hala brzegowa* (coast hall) touching the beach. You know the story. It burnt down. During the war, this time. There is now only a giant pit of sand surrounded by a metal wall. In the 1960s, the construction of modern blocks of flats began in the neighborhood. The quality of water deteriorated, the glorious spa-like atmosphere was forgotten. Luckily, I was born in 1992, the exact year the water and beaches of the Bay of Gdańsk were declared clean enough to enjoy again. I could grow up taking advantage of the beach and of my bucket. 300 metres to get to the nearest beach entry, remember? And I still choose seaside travel destinations.

Most people I know like walking on a wide, white sand beach. The beach naturally takes care of itself. The water pours over the beach during storms, the sand concentrates on the dunes, some of it is withdrawn and submerged. In much frequented places, we tend to manage the beaches. Pump the sand back from the seabed, nourish the beach, rake it out zen-style. But the sand is cunning, it knows its way around. "You get into my territory? I'll get into yours," it says with a high-pitched voice. "I was a part of a giant rock, I am cocooned in a biological membrane with bacteria and microorganisms. The wind-supported waves crush into me on a daily basis. Being shifted around is my thing!" It doesn't ask for permission to get in my hair, in between pages of the book I'm reading, into my bag. We certainly didn't ask before we marched onto beaches, organized the coastline and constructed resorts.

It is January now. I am home in Gdańsk. I know the beach is near. I can hear the seagulls, see them circling outside the windows. Nonetheless, I feel like I have to physically get there, go through the entry by the protected dunes. The water is free from algae and people (except for winter swimmers and a couple of dog owners), my shoes meet with the crispy snow cover on the sand. Still, the human infrastructure doesn't disappear. The shore is curved, the buildings of Sopot and Gdynia loom over the shore, as well as Lival Hotel just behind me. To the east I see the lighthouse, by the entry to the port. Even looking straight ahead to the sea, I always spot some ships coming in or out. I ignore them on purpose, and loose myself in the freedom brought by the horizon.

Feet to the sand, mind off the human bioturbulant civilization. Every visit to the Brzeźno beach comes back to me. I listen to the subtle swooshing of a calm sea. Jump back to avoid getting my feet wet. Struggle to take a breath when a storm hits. My heart rate rises, my ears are freezing, I can't see anything because of my swirling hair. The wind rushes in my mind, leaving no thoughts behind. I can then wade back through the sand and walk home, taking those tiny grains with me.



no choice in the matter

Susan Fuchtman

Susan Fuchtman writes poetry, memoir, short stories, and has drafts of two novels awaiting a sufficient accumulation of courage to revise them. In the event of fire, after her family is safe, she will rescue the 450 books remaining after her Marie Kondo purge.

a robin built a nest
above our back deck
and hatched three chicks
a clutch
they were born desperate
for food
and couldn't resist flying
the moment they had the chance;
they had no choice in the matter

i had no choice in the matter, either
if i had, i would have been
too afraid to die
to choose to live
"no thanks" i would have said
all that long life to fear death
all that not really knowing
what happens next

but to choose is to live
and it would have been too late
once i could answer the question

it's odd, isn't it, that we just come
into being
without any choice in the matter
one day we are sentient
without any memory of not being sentient
and here we are
this life in front of us
to live

no one asked--
no one said can you do this?
do you have the courage to do this?

we just tip our noses down
and flap our wings
and can't resist flying

LEFT: *Viejo Vallarta*, Old Town Vallarta, Mexico

UPPER RIGHT: *Pineapple Street*, Sarasota, Florida

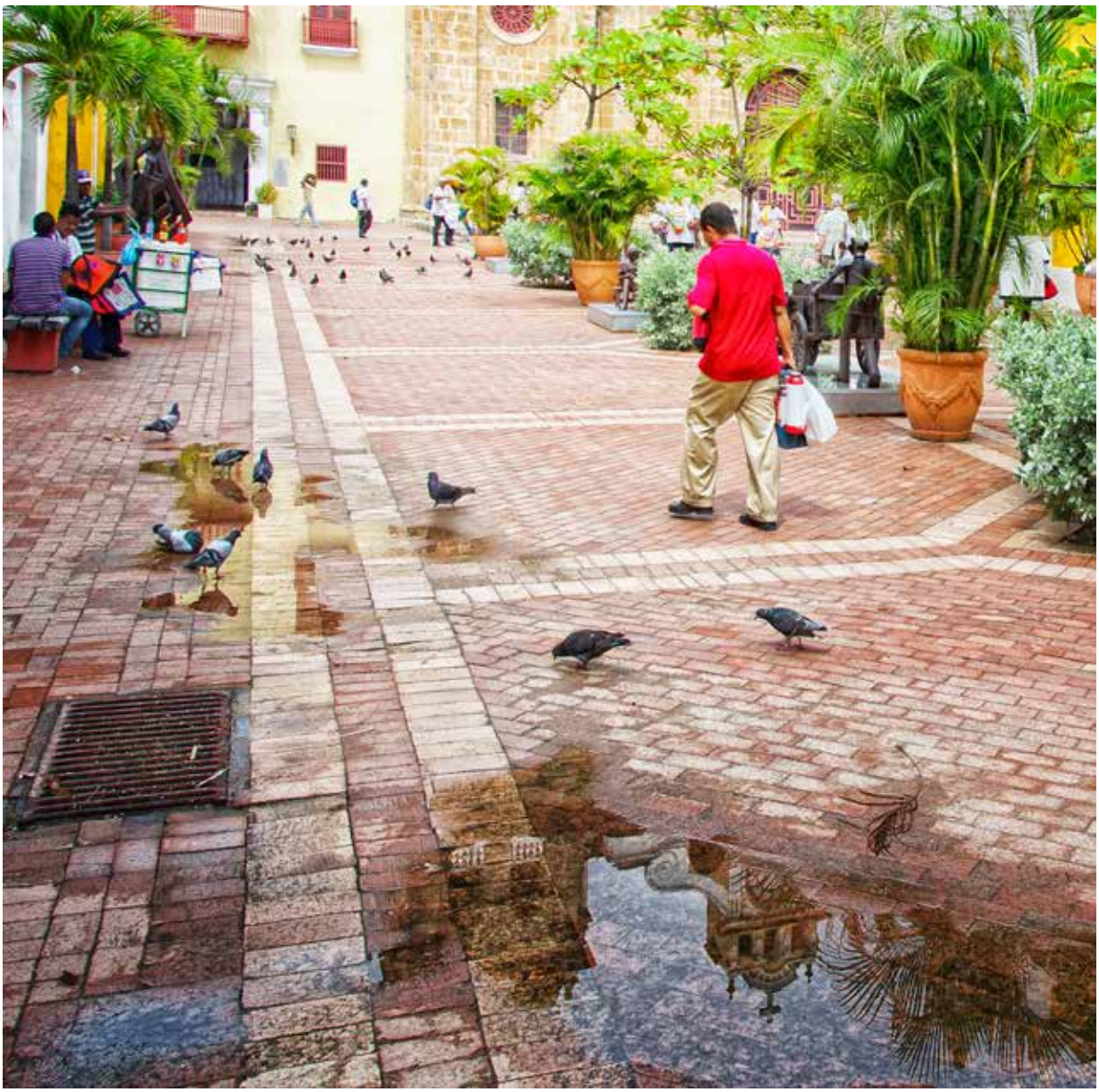
LOWER RIGHT: *Overgrown*, Vallarta, Mexico

ABOVE: *Taxi, Palm, and Politician*, Mazatlan, Mexico

RIGHT: *Melville's,* Mazatlan, Mexico

BELOW: *Cartagena Courtyard*, Cartagena, Colombia

RIGHT: *Palomas,* Cartagena, Colombia



Roger Leege

Starting out as a painter, printmaker and analog photographer, Roger Leege earned BA and MA degrees in Visual Arts from Goddard College. Following post-graduate study in computer science he became an early adopter and evangelist for digital art and digital artists' tools. He lives and works in Venice, Florida.

Overgrown

Overgrown felt like the perfect theme for the first issue of a magazine about urban nature. A city's overgrown spaces are often its most evocative – we were thinking of roadside verges left un-mown, busy with wildflowers and insects; abandoned factories whose grounds have become habitat for numerous plants and creatures; or the downtown heart of a city, wild with impossibly tall skyscrapers. We were curious to find out what lurks in these overgrown spaces and hoped that our contributors would get creative with this one-word prompt. They didn't disappoint.

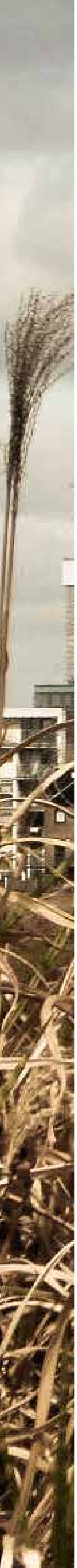
Alison Green takes us for a walk along the Thames from Plumstead to Tripcock Ness, and along the way she reveals how the city has become overgrown with layers of history: the Neolithic Belmarsh Track; the Royal Arsenal, shrouded in mystery and still not depicted on modern maps; and the tragedy of Tripcock Ness. There are also the fictional layers, the strange transformation of a stretch of the Thames into war-torn Vietnam. And of course, there are the layers we bring to a place, our own personal stories and histories.

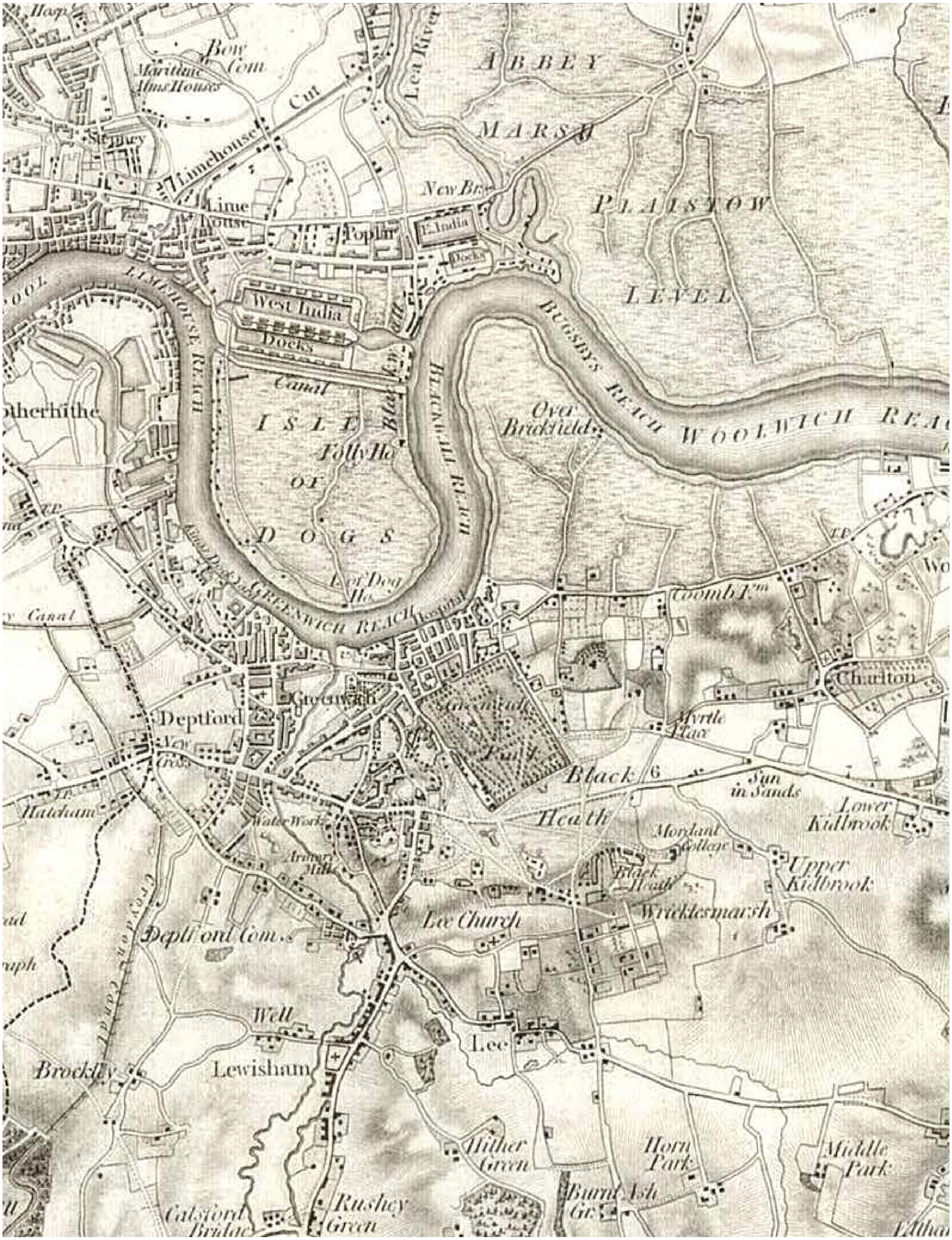
Anna Moritz has written a beautiful love letter to the field behind her childhood home in Even Yehuda. This overgrown, under-developed patch of land, behind a house Anna lived in for just a few years, seems to have had an exceptional impact on her life. Even after having left Even Yehuda and Israel many years ago, her memories of the field remain fresh and vibrant: the wildflowers and the weeds and the old man in a maroon golf-cap. Yet, as many of us experience with the places we leave behind, it is somewhere Anna finds herself unable to return to, partly out of a reluctance to see what has become of it. Will the field still be wild with flowers and weeds, or will it be overgrown instead with new houses?

Roots by Maggi McGettigan is a story that feels both quiet and loud, quiet with grief and yet loud with the determination to remember those who have been lost, to somehow keep them alive. In this story, overgrowth is something to be overcome, a way of sorting out the past and also moving forward into the future. At the heart of the story is a vegetable patch that, despite neglect, is still rich with the makings of a delicious salad – sometimes it's worth searching in the tangled weeds.

We didn't originally plan to include poetry in Stonecrop Review, but Melinda Giordano's poem spoke so perfectly to this theme that we realised we needed to include it. Vegetable Curves evokes the resilience of plants in urban spaces, those garden invaders, that answer not to us, but to their own call. It is a short poem that will plant a seed and set green things curling through your mind.

Go forth, and venture into the overgrowth...





Bow Com
Maritime Alms Houses
Cut
Lea River
ABBEY
MARSH
Stepney
Limehouse
Lime house
Poplar
E. India Docks
New Br.
PLAISTOW
LEVEL
West India Docks
Canal
LIMEHOUSE REACH
BUGSBYS REACH
WOOLWICH REACH
BLACKWALL REACH
therhithe
Over Brickfield
ISLE OF DOGS
Folly Ho.
GREENWICH REACH
Hospital
Coomb F.m
Charlton
Greenwich
Greenwich Park
Deptford
New Cross
Hatcham
Black Heath
Sun in Sands
Lower Kidbrook
Upper Kidbrook
Morden College
Myrtle Place
Water Works
Armory Mills
Lee Church
Wricklesmarsh
Deptford Com.
Croydon Canal
Well
Lewisham
Brockley
Lee
Hither Green
Horn Park
Middle Park
Burnt Ash Gr.
Rushey Green
Catsford Bridge

Historical overgrowth

Alison Green

Alison Green is an award winning writer who lives in Dorset, UK. She has published two novels set in Provence and writes a popular blog, centred predominately on her innumerable walks in the English countryside. Alison uses photography to act as an aide memoire.

If you're hoping for an account of redemption, one where nature overcomes the ravages of urbanisation to make an optimistically fresh foray, think again. Mine is a tale of despoliation: a history of a once fertile floodplain used to house a war machine that left the land derelict and largely uninhabitable by man, woman or beast. Nobody said that there's always a path through the undergrowth. Sometimes, overgrowth wins. It's a challenge, nonetheless.

I'm a walker of the countryside: a lover of the open air. I live on the backwaters of the Jurassic coastline in the south of England where excitement hinges on whether the sika deer have made a puzzled appearance at the end of my road; or, more opportunistically, the red kite has finally found its way through a myriad of now settled buzzards and is flying over the road to Dorchester. Just occasionally, however, I have a desire to see London and its river.

Woolwich is situated in the southern reaches of the capital within the Royal Borough of Greenwich; parts of the latter housing regenerated desirable residencies, an area into which the new cruise ships that now pollute the Thames disgorge their wealthy passengers. However, like most places, Greenwich has a darker side: it's the second poorest borough in the capital. On a late summer's day, having joined a small organised tour, we arrive in Plumstead, a district of Greenwich, whose name originates in the fruit orchards that once grew here. Possibly, they were planted by the Romans. There are no plums today and nothing to indicate that they ever existed apart from nomenclature and etymology. It's a dismal artery of an old coaching road from London to the English Channel port of Dover, where I'm advised against sitting on a handy bench in the interests of my health.

To reach the river, we walk along the side of a brand new road built on land reclaimed from the Thames floodplain and already jammed with modern history. To the left, for example, is a McDonalds; not very unusual, you may think, but further up the road is the first one that opened in Britain. I might be the only person in the country who's never had a McDonald's, unlike the largest member of our group who's already nipped off piste to grab an historic burger.

Despite a housing shortage following the attempted and partially successful destruction of London in the Second World War, not many folk wanted to live on what was effectively waste land, in all senses of the word. Neither did businesses want to relocate to a spot which, regardless of its proximity to the city, retains an aura of isolation. A different use had to be found for at least some of this spare land and ahead of us is the alternative venture: Belmarsh Prison.

This is a story of what lies beneath. Belmarsh Prison is a 'Category A' institution which means it houses some of our most dangerous high profile inmates. They're hidden away from the public; as is, apparently, any sign of nature in these parts. Here's an interesting thing, though, with a clue in the name. In 2008, whilst digging foundations for an adjacent jail, the oldest known timber trackway was discovered. The Belmarsh Track, organically preserved in a Neolithic peat bog, is 6000 years old; that's 500 years older than Stonehenge. Bel Marsh comprised wetlands, part of the Thames flood plain, which was an important source of food in prehistoric times. The trackway, like the Sweet Track on the Somerset Levels, was constructed to enable our ancestors to easily cross the boggy terrain; an impressively pragmatic feat of early engineering. Neolithic man and woman neither claimed nor adapted the countryside. Rather, they integrated themselves within the watery wilderness, living on what the river and its surrounds gave them.

Cameras hidden in bags, we avoid the prison by taking a necessarily circuitous route to arrive at a small housing estate. To hand is the first suggestion of grass we've seen: a spare piece of land from the centre of which a single birdless tree bravely rises. There are flowers beneath, though not of any naturally growing genus, for they comprise a funereal wreath across the centre of which the word 'GRAN' has been florally embroidered. Someone is remembering their elderly relative whose ashes may be scattered on this lonely and struggling greenery. Or perhaps this marks the spot where they were murdered.

There are two dominant features to this urban landscape: one natural, the other man-made. The former is the mighty River Thames which, having crossed a great ribbon of Southern England, has now left the city behind and is undertaking the final few miles to the estuary and the wide open sea. Above all else, it is the river, and this portion of it in particular, that forged the existence of London, its trading links past and present, and its once colonial history. And it is the river that has determined the ways in which humans have developed the land.

For example, the second highly dominant feature was the Woolwich Royal Arsenal. Originating with a couple of ordnance storage depots in the seventeenth century, deemed at that time to be far enough away from the city's population to preclude danger, the Arsenal had grown to a monstrous 1285 acres by the time of World War One, employing 80,000 people. In its various incarnations, the Arsenal manufactured armaments,

undertook ammunition proofing, and involved itself in explosives research. It boasted a huge railway system: 147 miles of track in two square miles, being the most complex and dense system in British railway history. And those are just the things we know about.

Given that the Arsenal had imposed itself on the natural environs to form such an enormity of industrial overgrowth, and that accounts of its history are plentiful, it comes as a surprise to learn that for most of its life it was such a secret place that it didn't appear on maps. Actually, vast swathes of it are missing on my ordnance survey map, which is a mere two years old. There's just a white space with an unexplained labyrinthine symbol in the corner. To my mind, this is the height of irony – ordnance survey with no ordnance!

We've walked this way in order to see the Broadwater Canal. Generally, I'm partial to a canal-side walk but this one, with its lack of water, its discarded shopping trolley, and its rejected office chair probably doesn't warrant another debilitating return visit. In a possible effort to confuse canal enthusiasts, it's been given a number of names: as well as Broadwater, it's also variously known as the Royal Arsenal Canal, the Ordnance Canal, and the Pilkington Canal but, whichever you choose, there's no denying that there's not much left of it.

It was dug between 1812 and 1816 by convicts; not those from the nearby and presumably (in comparison) luxurious Belmarsh, but those who, denied the privilege of sleeping on solid ground, were housed aboard prison hulks on the Thames at Gallions Reach (yes, that's the correct spelling). Its purpose was to deliver goods into the Arsenal from the Royal Gunpowder Mills at Waltham Abbey; a secondary raison d'être was as a defence boundary against a possible French invasion. There aren't many maps or photos of the canal due to the secrecy of the surrounding establishments. In fact, it didn't officially exist for much of its working life. There seems something bizarrely sanguine in constructing a concrete linescape to adapt part of the Thames and hoping no one will notice.

The swing bridge across the top end still remains but there's no sign of the lock-keeper's cottage which was once here. Like many similar buildings throughout the country, it looks quite attractive in the solitary photograph I found, surrounded by trees and with a small garden. Back in the river mists of time, before the Arsenal impacted the land to such an extent, there would have been visiting waterborne birds, eels and otters. Marsh Marigolds may have decorated the banks. Today, there is nothing much in the way of flora or fauna save two or three scraggly ducks. The canal was closed in the early 1960s and I feel someone's missed an opportunity here to reclaim the land and brighten the place up. Mind you, they probably don't want visitors. The overgrown site to the left, full of deadly warning signs, is alleged to be contaminated by who knows what. Like many of the dispossessed who inhabit the nearby estate, the canal has been abandoned and left to its own limited devices.

We emerge onto the Thames Pathway. The renaming of old trackways in England has burgeoned in recent years to the extent that it's nigh on impossible to take a walk without placing a foot on what superficially seems a new route: The Hardy Way, The Purbeck Way, The Jubilee Way and so forth. It's not a bad thing. Generally, these 'ways' are hundreds of years old, having carried rural travellers across the countryside back into the times of the ancients. Attaching new nomenclature encourages the modern day rambler; and often the

trackways come with committees of 'friends' who strive to maintain accessibility for walkers and bicycles.

Our path is now a tarmac covered route replete with metal waypoints. It is the modern incarnation of a track that would have borne man, woman and horse in either direction along the river bank once the marshes allowed access. Today, it runs alongside decommissioned and largely adulterated land now laid waste to the ravages of time and nature. The fenced off area to the left is not exactly a nature reserve. It's an uncared-for overgrowth of bramble and buddleia, so apparently impenetrable that I doubt that wildlife, other than the ubiquitous and well-travelled city rat, can be bothered to move in. There aren't even any moths or butterflies in evidence.

In fact, this stretch of the Thames Pathway is a lonely affair and I am grateful to be travelling in company and not constantly looking over my shoulder. Which isn't to say that it's uninteresting. The river shows fewer and fewer signs of being the same entity that graces the capital, with all its architectural innovations that nonetheless belie the scars of history. Here, although the Thames is wide, it's as if we're down in the murky backwaters where pleasure boats have been replaced by freight and wherein both banks are devoid, as yet, of homes for the wealthy. On the other side, a few buildings are emerging; it's difficult to say whether they'll be offices or domiciles. It's as if I'm standing in a temporal and geographical void where one can only hazard an intellectual guess at the potential new ways in which humans might adapt these final natural stretches of the Thames.

Meanwhile, on our side, the path is banked by yet more uninterrupted overgrowth and the site of that strange labyrinth I mentioned earlier. Apparently, it's the Thamesmead Tor: a sort of prosaic installation whereby plentiful detritus has been artistically placed to form a hill on which Sunday types can view the river as it courses a way to the sea. In this strange place, there's an optimistic plan to extend the Docklands Light Railway, thereby joining the forgotten folk of the notorious Thamesmead housing estate with the wider world. Well good luck with that. What we know is that this part of the old Royal Arsenal was used in World War Two for the development of atomic weapons detonators before this section of the war machine moved to Aldermaston. Who knows what lies beneath and behind all that fencing?

Tripcock Ness is reached, along with its last remaining beacon, which marks one of the most dangerous points in the Thames due to the strong current and the underlying rocks. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens introduces us to 'Gaffer' Hexam, a waterman plying his trade of collecting dead bodies from the Thames. I imagine he knew all about the Tripcock Ness, where captains used to follow the advice of watermen and avoid the usual directional etiquette of the river, taking instead to the slack waters. Last year saw the 140th anniversary of the worst peacetime disaster in British history, boasting the greatest loss of life and occurring at the notorious Tripcock Ness.

A paddle steamer, the *Princess Alice*, had taken a pleasure cruise down river to Gravesend. No-one knows exactly how many people were aboard as tickets weren't issued for children. However, on this dangerously overcrowded boat, there were estimated to be around 900 folk all dressed in their Sunday best. On its return, and within sight of the north Woolwich pier, where the first of the trippers were due to disembark, Captain Grinsted approached Tripcock

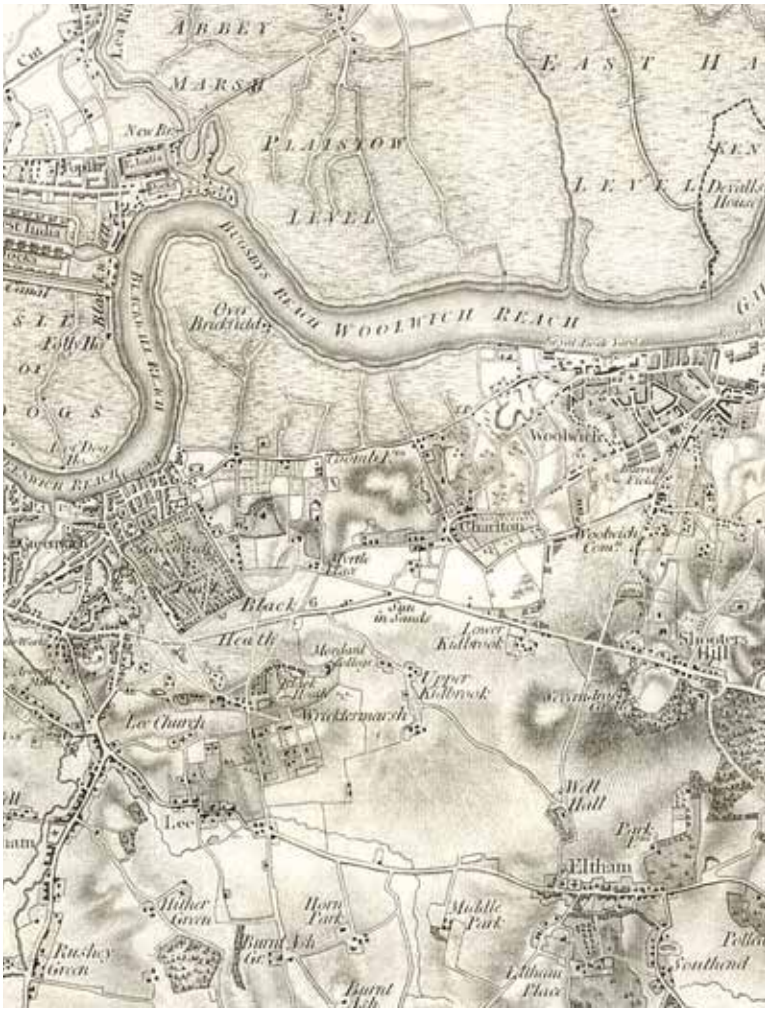
Ness. In the opposite direction, the collier *Bywell Castle* was fast advancing under the helm of Captain Harrison who took what he deemed to be the correct course to pass starboard of the *Princess Alice*. However, following what for him was normal practice, Grinsted changed course with no time for the other boat to do likewise. The *Bywell Castle* rammed into the *Princess Alice*, which split in two and sunk within four minutes.

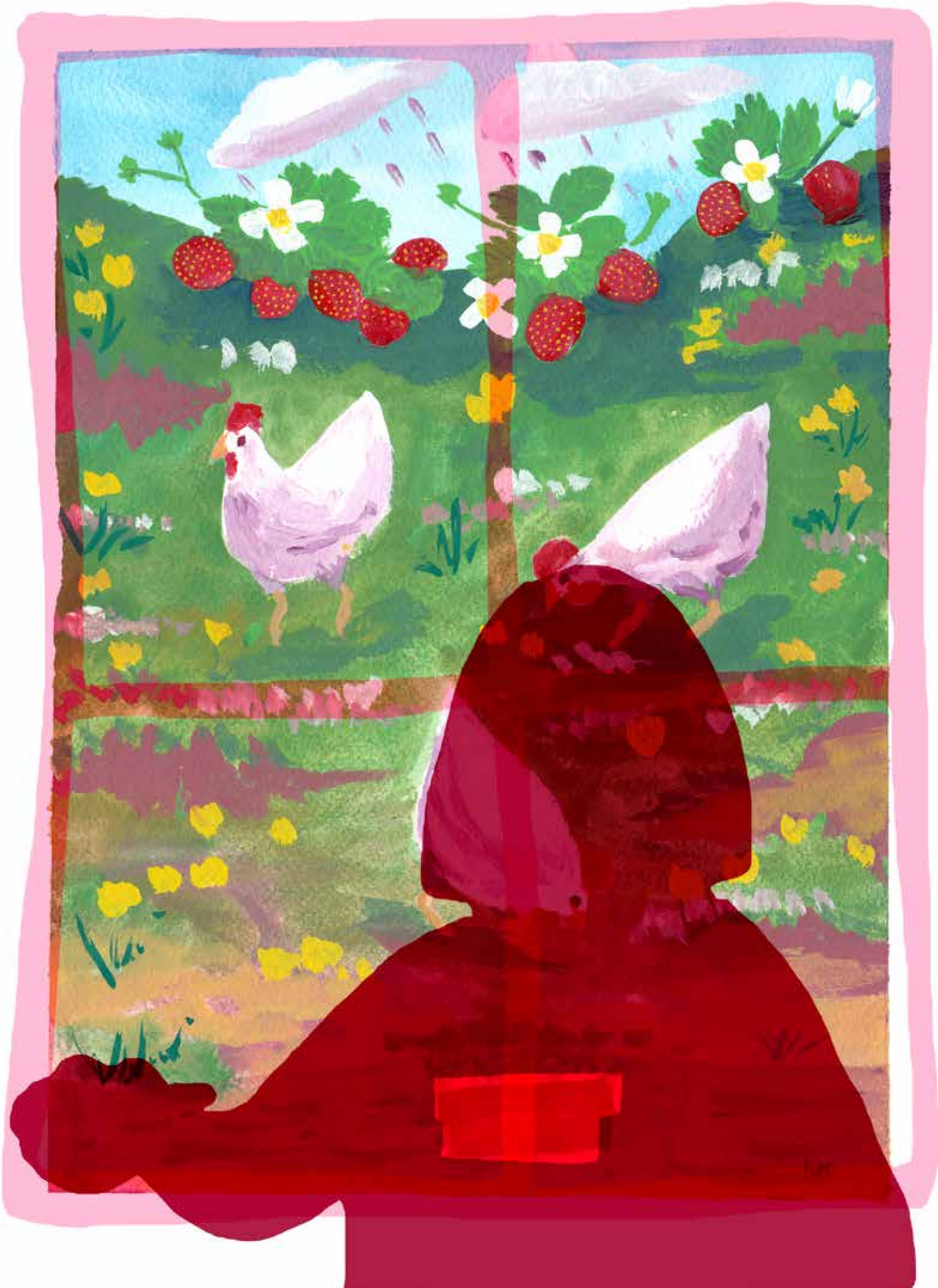
Looking back westwards, I can just about discern the Thames Barrier, a marvel of twentieth century engineering designed to successfully control the river's natural propensity to surge and flood. On the bank opposite my present position is the earlier constructed Roding flood barrier with its bright blue, portcullis-like defence. No such protection of humans existed when the *Princess Alice* met her sudden end, although man's mechanical intervention was present in the shape of the Bazalgette outfall sewer which, an hour previously, had dumped 75 million gallons of raw sewage into the Thames.

At least 650 people, floundering in their bulky finery, drowned in the waters and in the filth of London. Many of those who survived the initial horror died later from diseases acquired in the river. Watermen like 'Gaffer' Hexam were paid five shillings for each corpse they brought ashore, although many were never recovered. A good day for watermen.

Reaching the junction of the path, we stop to take a last glance at today's working river. Across the way, the first containers of Barking Water come into view. It's a bleak expanse which, in yet another nod to the human war machine, the film director Stanley Kubrick utilised in the final shots of *Full Metal Jacket*. The wastelands bordering the Thames were transformed into the equally grim heartland of a war-torn Vietnam as Kubrick destroyed, rebuilt and detonated the leftovers of English natural and industrial history in a riot of adaptation to suit his cinematic needs. Later in the evening, I watch the end of the film. Superficially, it would seem pretty realistic. Look closer and you can see an electricity pylon, a redundant gasometer and the hint of a container.

Age upon age, industrial topography upon natural geography we travel. From the timber trackway of Belmarsh, along the 'non-existent' Broadwater Canal and into a war-torn Asian landscape embedded in the Thames estuary, we are nothing if not inventive, adaptive – and destructive.





HaOdem 6

Anna Moritz

Anna Moritz is a writer and environmentalist based in Phoenix, Arizona. She earned her B.A. in Fiction Writing at Columbia College Chicago and has previously had work published in *Hair Trigger* and *The Lab Review.* She is currently the editor-in-chief of the online literary journal *Mental Papercuts*.

The field behind our house in Even Yehuda came in two colors: dead-dirt ochre and spring-rain emerald. It was dead-dirt ochre the day I buried my time capsule there.

The field was a remnant of when Even Yehuda was strictly agricultural. Before the private international school moved in and brought with it the diplomats and the sushi restaurants and the shiny new housing developments. Back when strawberries lined the rolling hills and chickens roamed as free as pigeons. The field was one of the last pieces of undeveloped land left in the growing city.

We moved there when I was twelve years old because my mom had lost her job and we figured if we had to leave our cushy government sponsored house, we may as well move closer to my school's new campus. The move was awful for my middle school social life, but it did cut my daily bus ride in half. Plus, I got one of only two bedrooms with a window overlooking the field.

From my second story window, I could see well past the border of our small rocky backyard, over the six-foot metal fence and into the dusty distance. The field sloped upwards into a steep cliff, turning what was essentially a vacant lot into a canyon behind the houses of HaOdem Street. We were HaOdem 6.

Israel's climate is nothing like most people expect; sure, to the south is the Negev Desert, but the majority of the country runs alongside the Mediterranean Sea. Where people actually live is all beaches and seaside cliffs. The summers are dry and scorching, the winters wet and chilly. If you can consider 10°C "chilly."

Much of the rain falls in the winter, which turns springtime in places like Even Yehuda into a menagerie

of overgrowth. Wildflowers pop up like soldiers standing guard in every nook and cranny of the landscape. Overnight, dust and rocks bloom into wild green things. And the field behind my house transformed from a dry, mud-cracked basin into a lush jungle of winding weeds. The vegetation got so thick some years I could only enter if I followed a strict path worn through by dog walkers and a slow old man in a maroon golf-cap that I watched from my bedroom window every morning before school.

I used to spend hours staring at the field from my window. It faced northeast, so every morning the sun would wake me up, beaming bright and strong through the glass. I would sit in bed, still in my pajamas, and stare out at the field. Occasionally, I waved hello to the old man in the maroon golf-cap, although he never waved back. I was just too far away to see.

In the summers I watched feral cats creeping across the sand. In winter I turned off all the lights in my bedroom and watched the lightning storms rolling overhead. When the rain fell, no matter what time of day, I would stare at the dust turning to mud and wonder just how far down the water really seeped. Wondering where the seeds began. They must have been there all along, biding their time until there was finally enough water to sprout. I dreamt of the vivid red and yellow poppies that sprang up in patches, dotting the verdant meadow like a secret path—one to be followed only when instructed by a sagacious old wizard. By the time May rolled around, the country once again on the cusp of summer, I would smile at the colorful grasses slowly fading into monotone earthy browns. Running out of water. Clinging to life for just one moment more.

It was summer when we got evicted.

There were no wildflowers blocking the ground then.

So I took a tiny wooden box, the size of a large pill box, and I buried it in the dirt.

It has been eight years now since I knelt in the dirt with tears on my cheeks, and solemnly placed that box a few inches into the parched ground. I have absolutely no recollection of what was inside. Perhaps a note, detailing the collapsing world of my fifteen-year-old self. Some dated token or other. Nothing but memories of a self that no longer exists.

Last summer I went back to Israel for the first time since leaving abruptly one February weekend. I had only a day's notice before we moved—so I never got to say goodbye. Not to my school nor my teachers nor anyone but my two closest friends. My only consolation was that time capsule. We left HaOdem 6 months before we left Israel; I got my goodbye there. I got to say goodbye to my room and the smells I had memorized and the countertops I nicked my fingers above and all the tiny things that make a house a home. Most importantly, I got to say goodbye to the field. To my field.

I wanted to visit the field while I was back in the country, but it never quite worked out. It was too out of the way. Too far from my dad's apartment in Netanya. Too far to rehash the past, anyway. And I think that's for the best. Besides, there was so much construction going on back then that I'm sure the field has long

since been excavated and bricked over with a whole new crop of houses. Even if it hasn't and—through some act of benevolence by an indifferent universe—the field stands as it once did, wild and unbound by the world of humans, there is little chance my time capsule remains. It was a cheap wooden box, likely unlatched and rotted by rain. Perhaps it has even decayed right back into the soil its wood grew from. There was nothing permanent inside, anyway.

If you go on Google Maps and type in the address, you can see the field as it stood in January of 2012, just a month before I left. The edges of the field that outline the cinder block structures of HaOdem Street are wild with overgrowth, and if you scroll down the street a little ways, you can even see a solitary evergreen standing proudly in the distance. I used to stand on the upstairs balcony and watch birds nesting in that tree. Crows mostly, silhouetted by the setting sun to the west. Just past my house's view of that exact tree was an IKEA I watched burn down only a year before that Street View image was taken.

I'm almost glad I don't know what the field behind HaOdem 6 looks like now. My past is a part of the field. It's embedded in the soil and it courses through the veins of each blade of grass. Nothing inside of that time capsule could matter as much as the pride I feel in knowing I once planted a part of myself in a field I spent so much time looking at. So much time exploring.

The field is forever a part of me.

I am forever a part of the field.

The field behind HaOdem 6.


hm

Roots

Maggi McGettigan

Maggi McGettigan is a writer and mother of two living in Pennsylvania. Her work has previously appeared in *Halfway Down the Stairs*, and she earned an MFA in Creative Writing from Arcadia University. She loves to garden but lacks a green thumb, so she'll stick to writing about it.

"She said she'd keep up with it, but of course she let it go. I don't know why I'm surprised. It's running wild back there."

"Em, you have to give Mom a break. It's been tough for her since Dad got sick. She's having trouble keeping up."

"She promised him she'd keep up with the garden is all I'm saying. Forty years he managed to get something to grow back there, and she can't even make it happen for one damn summer. He'd be livid."

"He's not here."

I walk away. Nothing to be said to that. Back out to the garden, through the tiny apartment kitchen where my dad made Sunday dinners for years on the same beat up stove he bought when we first moved in. The door sticks a little and I have to push hard. It's a thick July day and the smells of South Philly hang in the air. It's Sunday but there's no dinner inside, hasn't been in almost a year. Mrs. D'Andre's windows are open next door, lasagna. I look at the tomato plants, bent over their cages like trapped animals too tired to escape. Split skin, unpicked, overripe. Vines climb the fence, weeds strangling peas, both trying to climb out of this tiny backyard. I sit on the edge of the raised bed like I did when I was small, watching my dad move dirt with bare hands to cover seeds. I can't see the dirt through the weeds, now.

"Emily, is that you dear?" Mrs. D'Andre's voice through the fence. "I have a lasagna for your mother, come get it."

"Thanks Mrs. D." I shout through the fence, though she is only feet from me, and I reach through the small hole her son made when we were young. A football, I think.

I take the pan with the potholders and all, thank her again.

“She’s struggling, dear. You should come home more. I hear her muttering out there sometimes, not making any sense. Talking to your father sometimes.”

I hate this invasion of privacy, of my mother’s privacy and my family’s. I always have. As soon as I left high school I moved out west, where you can shout and no one hears you, no one calls to make sure you’re okay. My garden now is the size of my parents’ whole bottom floor, with backyard to spare. My father never saw it, he was always scared to fly.

I thank her again and take the lasagna inside. My sister Dani pours us wine. My mother comes to the table and we move half packed boxes of my father’s things to make space to eat. We do this without speaking.

My mother is outside when I wake up the next morning, I see her through the window of my childhood bedroom. She is sitting on the edge of the raised bed, just where I was last night. She mindlessly plays with the tomato plant leaves. Her hair, white and wiry, is piled in a mound on her head except for strands that have come loose and run down her back.

“Your father loved this garden,” she greets me when I join her.

“I know.”

“He always wanted to move out of the city so he could have a bigger one. I kept saying someday, someday. Now here we are, no more somedays left.”

“I know Mom. But here we are. Time to move on. Can’t drive yourself crazy.” I pat her hand. I stand up and start pulling weeds from around the base of a tomato plant. My mother does the same to another, but stops.

“It’s no use,” she says, and goes inside. Still, I continue.

Lunch is leftover lasagna, then Dani has to go back to New York.

My mother stares out the kitchen window at the garden, her back to Dani as she leaves.

“Bye Mom, I’ll come back as soon as I can.”

“It’s no use,” she says, “it’s too far gone.”

Dani and I exchange the look we have exchanged since the funeral, the look of helplessness, the look of not knowing where to look and finding each other instead. She leaves. The house is as quiet as it’s ever been. I go out to the garden, find my hidden cigarettes, and smoke.

My father used to garden in the evenings, after work, after he started dinner for us, after he made sure we finished homework and bills were paid and loose ends were tied up. My mother helped when she could, but she was often tired, sad. We never spoke it, but assumed she would go first. We never thought it would be she who had to live alone.

He had one pair of carpenter style pants he wore to garden, faded green and patched at the knees. Full of pockets, pockets full of treasures like the snail shell he found in the dirt and bits of smooth twine he used to tie plants to stakes. Dani and I would come out and sit with him after the dishes were done, and he’d empty his pockets on the small patch of cement--the only part of the backyard that wasn’t garden--and let us play with the treasures until it got dark.

Earlier that afternoon I had found the pants, but it didn’t

feel right to put them in the boxes of donatables. I tucked them back in the drawer.

It is evening when I go back inside. She is on the couch, her spot, cushion dented and sunken from so many years of the same body. The TV is on but she doesn't watch. She stares at the wall above it, vacant, sad.

"Mom, you hungry?" She does not respond. I reheat the remaining lasagna. "Mom, you want salad?" She nods, almost imperceptibly. I open the fridge, forgetting there is nothing. She gets up--I can hear the creak of the sofa and the low grunt of her effort--and shuffles into the kitchen. "There's nothing," I say.

"We never buy veggies in the summer, you know that." She almost smiles, almost forgetting.

"Mom, the garden is overgrown, you haven't taken care of it. You need to weed and water and, I don't know, take care of it like dad did. There's no veggies there anymore. I'll have to run out if you want salad."

She almost smiles again, the memory of something passing through like a ghost, and I follow her outside.

It is almost dark, faint pink in the distant sunset, one we never see from the valley of the city. Like leftover fire, like the stain of lipstick on a black napkin. She sits where she sat earlier, but scoots deeper into the bed, until the thick bushes almost hide her. She comes out with two tomatoes, perfectly ripe.

"Cucumbers somewhere," she says softly, a mutter. "Where's the cucumbers, Pop?" she says to my dad. She says something else, I can't hear.

I remember. "Mom, here, against the fence." We pull back thick vines and untangle the tendrils. It is slow work, but we see it together--one full cuke. "He always loved cukes in his salad, didn't he, Mom?"

"Can't have a good salad without 'em." She looks at me and smiles, full this time, one I haven't seen in a while.

We take our bounty back into the kitchen. She slices and piles and pushes and mixes. I admit to being impressed.

"I used to make the salads. You're father never let me do anything else, too much work he said, but I always did the salads. He gave the job to you, when you were old enough. Remember?"

Of course I do. He said Mom needed to rest, wouldn't I help and make the salad. That was when we started taking her tea into her bedroom for her, so she didn't have to get up. When we started having groceries delivered by the D'Andre boy, and when we were told to leave Mom alone when she was tired.

"I guess it's my turn to make the salads again," she says.

The loose strands of her hair had multiplied, leaving her bun a small tuft of hair on top of a billowy cloud of hair. I pull a bobby pin out of my own bun and take her loose hair into my hand, swirl it slowly, and tuck it up with the rest like a crown.

She is outside again the next morning, sitting in the garden. I almost don't see her at first in her green dressing gown. It smells like coffee, though Dani is gone and I can't imagine who made it. When I get downstairs, the counter is wiped clean and the coffee pot is full. I pour a mug and sit down at the tiny linoleum table, it's flecks making the same patterns they did when I was a kid, when I traced them with my fingers to make dragons and fairies. In a neat pile, maybe even freshly washed, sit my dad's garden pants. Time to get to work.

Vegetable Curves

Melinda Giordano

Melinda Giordano is from Los Angeles, California. Her pieces have appeared in *Lake Effect Magazine*, *Scheherazade's Bequest*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal* and *The Rabbit Hole*, among others. She also contributed poetry to CalamitiesPress.com with her own column, 'I Wandered and Listened' and was twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Writhing in vegetable curves
Coiled like petticoats,
Neither bud nor blossom.
A garden invader
That spun green and modest
And as workmanlike as a salad.
Wound tight as a shell
Or the helix of an ear,
It grew close to the earth:
A spiral of leaves curled to listen
Not to the sea
Not to words
But to the botanical life
That breathed and rippled
Through the silence
Of its earthy crib.

Iota

Gregory J. Wolos

Nearly eighty of Gregory Wolos' short stories have been published in journals such as *Glimmer Train*, *The Georgia Review*, *descant*, *The Florida Review*, *The Pinch*, *Post Road*, *Nashville Review*, *A-Minor Magazine*, *Yemassee*, *The Baltimore Review*, *The Madison Review*, *The Doctor T. J. Eckleburg Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *PANK*, *Superstition Review*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, and *Zymbol*. His stories have earned six Pushcart Prize nominations and have won awards sponsored by *descant*, *Solstice*, *the Rubery Book Awards*, *Gulf Stream*, *New South*, and *Emrys Journal*. His full length collection *Women of Consequence* will be released in 2019 by *Regal House Publishing*; also scheduled for publication in 2019 is a short collection, *Turnpike*, winner of the *Gambling the Aisle* Chapbook Prize. For a full lists of publications and commendations, visit www.gregorywolos.com.

This is to be the final day at the old house: the deal has been struck, the walk-through is tomorrow, the closing the day after. As Gifford exits the front door to give Iota the Dachshund her last walk on the property, he floats in a thin slice of time between nostalgia and the exhilarating potential of a new life. He and the dog will be the last of the family to vacate the house. Val awaits her husband in a condo minutes away from their daughter's home in the suburbs of a grand city two hundred miles east. Few of their friends remain in the old neighborhood, and Gifford and Val are eager to follow their daughter and assume the role of doting grandparents.

Iota's belly drags on the grass Gifford is no longer responsible for mowing. Usually, there's no need to leash her: even with Gifford's achy knees, she can't outwaddle him. But the new condo has strict rules about dogs being leashed at all times, and Val has insisted that Iota practice. Gifford studies the thirteen-year-old dog. She'll probably be their last pet. He can't imagine himself training a frisky pup, and he and Val have plans to travel.

"Say goodbye to the yard, kiddo," Gifford says, but nearsighted Iota stares up at her master instead, as if she senses he's considering life without her. Gifford looks away, letting his own gaze sweep unsentimentally across the grass, through the oak trees to the sparkle of the river. Preparing to move has been exhausting, and all his nostalgia has been sacrificed to Lance the Junk Man or packed away in RubberMaid tubs.

"It's all over but the shouting," Gifford tells the dog. He turns his back, closing this chapter of his life. They amble back toward the front porch. The flowers their broker suggested bloom along the side of the house,

and honeybees rise and fall among the blossoms. Crows nag from the neighbor's roof and white cabbage butterflies dance raggedly across the driveway. A bee zips by his face, as startling as a bullet, and Gifford sniffs, then smirks. *Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.* "Come on, Ali," he says to Iota.

But after a few more steps another bee shoots by, and this time Gifford ducks. Then three more honeybees, then dozens, streaming toward his house. And there they gather, a mass of bubbling gold on the freshly stained cedar shakes. He leans forward for a closer look, a few late-arriving bees circling him like tiny planets. One by one the insects wriggle into a tiny hole between the shingles. Panic flushes Gifford's cheeks and temples: this is a swarm. These bees have followed a queen that's probably already in the walls of the house establishing a hive. *Now?* With buyers set to examine the house in the morning?

At the hardware store Gifford asks the young woman assisting him for the most powerful wasp-killing spray on the market, afraid that if he mentions endangered honey bees, she'll insist he contact an agency that will safely remove the swarm from his house—an option he would gladly take if he had the time. But this is an emergency. He'd already risked being stung when he plugged the hole between the shingles with a stick. And in his basement he'd discovered dozens of bees crawling over the cinder block walls and concrete floors. How many more were burrowed in the insulation?

In a sixty minute mad rush, Gifford purchases, transports, and empties ten cans of spray and one container of quick-dry hole-plugging cement. Sweeping up the carcasses of a hundred bees occupies another quarter of an hour. Five more minutes to set up fans that blow the fumes out the basement windows. All told, in less time than it takes to watch a movie, Gifford eradicates a new queen's empire.

Amazing, Gifford thinks, driving eastward toward his new home, his wife, his daughter, and his grandchild: amazing that the walk-through and closing are done. The bee issue has wrung the last bit of sentiment from him—the future is all. If the honeybees return, they're not his problem. Iota snoozes beside him on the passenger seat. It's mid-morning and the highway is practically empty. He lowers his visor—it's the glare of the sun off the hood of his car that gets Gifford thinking about the green ray.

The green ray: a wink of green light at sunset, appearing for no more than a second or two at the precise moment the sun dips below the horizon. The rare phenomenon, requiring perfect atmospheric conditions, is said to possess mysterious powers—at least in literature and film. According to legend, the green ray bestows on its witnesses deep insight into their own hearts and the hearts of whoever they're with.

It's pure whimsy, Gifford knows, that inspires his and Val's pursuit of the green ray. But isn't that what retirement is for? They've tried once, lingering for a week at a Key West resort that advertised "green ray sunsets." But the experience had been a dud—clouds and mist obscured the horizon every night. Gifford catches his smiling eyes in the rearview mirror. He gives Iota's sun-warmed hide a pat. After they get their new lives settled, he and Val will try again, maybe Scotland's western islands or the coast of southern France, sites famous in fiction and film for green ray moments. Val has suggested Maui,

which the internet praises for its glorious South Pacific sunsets.

Gifford passes a sign for a rest area, but they're just an hour from his new home, and neither he nor Iota needs the break. The truth, he admits, is that the search for the green ray has already taught him something about himself— he's discovered that he's colorblind. Val had seen the flash of green in the French movie along with the lovers, but he hadn't, though he'd pretended to. After his wife went to bed, he rewound the film to the key moment ten times and saw nothing but reddish sky and blue sea. Then he sought out YouTube videos of the phenomenon on his lap top: where others gasped and applauded, he saw nothing.

A connecting link led him to Ishihara color blindness tests—the kind where numbers are hidden among multicolored bubbles. Again he saw nothing— it was as unnerving as staring at a mirror that didn't show his reflection. What else had he missed in life? How would he even know?

So, he acknowledges while he steers, the odds are not great that he'll ever see a green ray. Could it be that simply being in its presence is enough? Faint hope. But he would never spoil Val's happiness by confessing his deficiency. A green ray sunset is meant for sharing.

"Can't let the juice run out, right, Iota?" Gifford says when he notices his cell phone is low on power. However, the instant he tries to plug in the charger, a pain explodes in his thumb, and he jerks his hand away. The car slides in and out of its lane, and a passing eighteen wheeler blasts a warning. Gifford eyes his thumb: a honeybee is still there, its stinger stuck in his flesh. He closes his fist around it, squeezing until he feels a tiny pop, then flings the crushed body to the floor under Iota's nose. She doesn't react. She's lying on her side, exposing twin rows of tiny nipples she's never used.

Gifford's thumb hurts. Was the bee alone? In the engine's hum he hears the buzz of a thousand bees—has the swarm he thought he'd slaughtered taken refuge under the hood of his car? An attack *en masse* might block out the sun. Hadn't that happened with locusts a long time ago out west? Or was he thinking of the plague in the Bible? He switches the windshield wipers on for a few swipes, then flicks them off. No, he concludes, his attacker was a lone wolf, a sole survivor.

This injury is something else to hide from Val. If he tells her about the sting, he'll wind up spilling the beans about the invading swarm, and she'll worry that the house sale will somehow retroactively fall through. His left hand at 9 o'clock on the wheel, Gifford sets the heel of his wounded right hand at 12. He sticks up his swollen thumb, targeting the white dashes dividing the lanes. "Ouch-ouch-ouch—" he mutters with each strike. The glare off the hood stabs his eyes. The cloud-free conditions are perfect for a green ray—except it's morning. But somewhere in the world the sun is setting. For those equipped to experience them, mysterious phenomena are as available as low hanging fruit.

How long to establish a new home, to settle a routine, to grow comfortable with a fresh life? For Gifford, it's been three months—one season. His granddaughter Emma, barely a year old, is the catalyst of his rebirth. She can't say "Pops" yet, but squeals "Dah" for dog when she sees Iota, who sniffs her toes before licking them.

It's a Thursday, one week before Gifford and Val's first

Christmas in their new home. Thursdays are Gifford's mornings to babysit, and he and little Emma are in the car on their way to the library for Book Babies. There, Gifford sits every week on the carpeted floor, Emma on his lap, in the middle of maybe a dozen other toddlers with their moms or nannies. He's the only grandpa ("the elephant in the room," he tells Val), but no one sings or claps with more gusto when following the lead of the young librarian in charge of the session.

On this morning's ride, Gifford's attention, as always, shifts from the road to the rearview mirror, though he can't see his granddaughter because her seat faces backward. What is she looking at—the gloomy sky? Squirrels on leafless branches? Iota is asleep on the passenger seat, where she'll wait under a blanket during the half hour Gifford and Emma will be in the library.

Gifford wishes he could see the child's face. He doesn't like the silence. "How's little Emma," he sing-songs. "Keeping busy?"

Silence. For all he can tell, the car seat might be empty. He double checks the floor in front of Iota for Emma's diaper bag, which contains extra diapers and wipes, a water bottle, and, most importantly, the baby's EpiPen. The poor kid has tested allergic to everything from nuts to milk—including dog dander. Iota has been blamed for rashes on Emma's tummy, and just this morning his daughter suggested that Gifford limit their interaction.

"Your daddy has lousy genes," he says to the baby. "None of us on your mommy's side have allergies." He waits for a response, but none comes. Of course the baby is asleep—but shouldn't he pull over and check? And why did he say that nasty thing about his son-in-law?

"I don't mean you should blame your father—nobody's genes are perfect. I mean, I hope you don't inherit my colorblindness. I don't think girls are as prone to it, though. So you should be able to see the green ray. I'm at best a 'maybe.' Have I told you about the green ray?"

Emma lets loose a cry, startling Gifford, as well as Iota, who lifts her head. Of course the baby's fine, Gifford thinks with relief—but now she's sobbing.

"Shhh, baby. Everything's okay. Most people don't even know green rays exist. Have you got a poopy diaper?" He sniffs—yup. Better to take care of it now—the library bathroom might be too crowded. They drive past a sign for the state park, and Gifford recalls a lot near the entrance that would be perfect for a pit stop. It's by a pond where there were ducks and swans last summer. Gifford turns into the park.

"Want to see swans, baby? And ducks? Quack-quack-quack."

The sobs cease. "Kak," Emma murmurs. "Kak-kak."

"Quack-quack-quack," Gifford replies. There's no guard in the booth at the entrance, but the gate is open, and he heads down a narrow road that cuts through a thick pine forest. They pass a trailhead.

"Not the time of year for a walk in the woods. What do swans say, Emma?" What do they say, Gifford wonders.

"Kak-kak," his granddaughter answers.

"Maybe. Maybe swans talk duck. The ugly duckling was really a swan, and he understood duck-talk. We can look for that story in the library sometime. But now we've got to change your poopy-doopy diaper. Where's that parking lot?"

Gifford wonders if he's got his state parks wrong. If the lot doesn't turn up soon, he'll pull off the road at the next trailhead and tend to Emma. For a moment the scent of pine covers the poop smell. Gifford takes a deep breath and releases it in a shuddery sigh. He could be in a fairy tale—lost in a dark forest, protecting a princess. *Green ray—shmeen ray*—this is enchantment enough.

The parking lot finally appears, and, behind it, like a black mirror, the pond.

"Here we go," Gifford says, and, because he can't see Emma, he pats Iota, who looks up at him. When did her muzzle get so gray?

"Who needs a sunset, right, pup? Dogs are colorblind anyway."

"Kak-kak—" the words come loaded with the diaper's smell, and it occurs to Gifford that his granddaughter hasn't been "talking duck." She's been telling him that she's sitting in poop and he'd better do something about it.

"You mean 'kaka', baby. Don't fret, Pops is on it." He checks the rearview for a glimpse of the baby, but she's still nestled too deeply in her car seat. "Let's get it toasty warm in here," he says, reaching for the heater knob. A low, unfamiliar grinding stops him—it's Iota, her nubby teeth bared, growling at the dashboard.

"Girl?" Gifford follows his dog's stare—there, right on the knob he was about to touch is a bee. He swats at the insect, which sails over Iota, hits the passenger window, and bounces back toward Gifford, flying now under its own power. When he twists away, the wheel slips from his hands. The car bumps over the curb and skids to the edge of a ditch that parallels the park road.

"Whoa—" In slow motion, Gifford's view turns counter-clockwise as the car tips sideways into the ditch. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Iota slide against the passenger door, then scramble atop the window glass before the car bumps to a stop, upside down, leaving the dog crouched with flattened ears on a ceiling that's become a floor. Gifford, inverted, is caught in his seat belt and harness, his legs tangled in the steering column. His own weight crushes down on him, bending his neck and wedging his cheek against the vinyl ceiling fabric. Is he hurt? Every body part he can think to move moves, but he can't orient himself. Then the baby's whimper slices through him like a cold razor.

"Emma—" he wheezes. "It's okay, honey. Everything's okay."

"Kak," the toddler sighs. Wincing at the windshield, Gifford has to acknowledge the truth—he's flipped the car, which lies in this ditch like a turtle on its back. Who will find them in this empty park? A pale flash in the rearview mirror— the baby's hand. Emma must be suspended by her seat straps, belly down, as if she's flying. And she's waving.

Gifford tries to see more of her, but can't. "Super baby," he pants. "Quack- quack. Flying ducky?"

For a few moments he hears only creaks and squelches, the sounds of the car settling. Then Emma starts to coo. Gifford feels a gust of chilly air and discovers that the passenger door popped open during their tumble. Through it he sees a swath of the grass-covered ditch wall. But where's Iota? Outside? She must be okay if she can walk. She couldn't have wandered too far; she'd never be able to climb out of this ditch.

Iota, get help, girl, he thinks. But his old Dachshund isn't

Lassie.

Emma babbles to herself. Gifford reassesses his physical condition. He's still pinned down by his own bulk, and there's a dull ache in his neck and shoulder. But he believes that with maximum effort he'll be able to free himself, though he's a little dizzy from the blood collecting in his head. First he'll take care of the baby, then look for Iota —and find his phone, which was on the passenger seat with the dog, but now is nowhere to be seen. He's never had to dial 911 before—what will he tell them? An accident—started by a bee.

For a moment, he thinks he must have been mistaken, that he was hallucinating or suffering from a flashback: bees don't pop out of nowhere in December. But no, he definitely slapped at something— a honeybee— where did it go? Hopefully out the door. Everything is still, the only sound the baby's prattling. A bead of sweat slides down Gifford's cheek—then it reverses direction and trickles back up. It's not a sweat droplet—the bee is on his face. Gifford shallows his breath. The trickle stops, and he pictures the insect lowering its stinger, hunched like a shitting dog.

Maybe it's a cold breath of wind that brushes the bee from Gifford's cheek. The insect buzzes forward, skips off the windshield, and swerves past him into the back of the car. Gifford panics—with Emma's allergies, a sting could be fatal. He spots the bag with her EpiPen half out the open door. Rocking his hips, he frees a leg, but in spite of his contortions, can't extend his reach. He squints into the rearview and blinks to clear his vision. Is that the bee on Emma's hand or just a shadow? The tiny spot creeps onto the underside of his granddaughter's wrist, pausing on a pulse point. *Don't move*, he thinks, afraid that if he speaks, she'll flinch and be stung. Emma's nonsense syllables rise and fall like an incantation, and the bee, as if shot from a pistol, flies straight out the door. Emma points a finger after it as if she's conducting an orchestra.

Gifford shudders—there's a change in the light; maybe the sun has burst through the clouds. "You okay, baby?" he asks over and over. "Of course you are." *Unbuckle*, he thinks. *Find the phone. Find the dog. Get the EpiPen in case the bee comes back*. It's cold—is the baby warm enough? He fumbles with the clasp of his harness.

Movement at the door. Iota—one item to check off his list. But when he glances over, Gifford sees that it's not his fat little pet. A different dog, lanky, and raggedly furred, stands at the opening. Maybe it belongs to a hiker—are they about to be rescued?

"Hello?" Gifford calls. "We're here. We're okay."

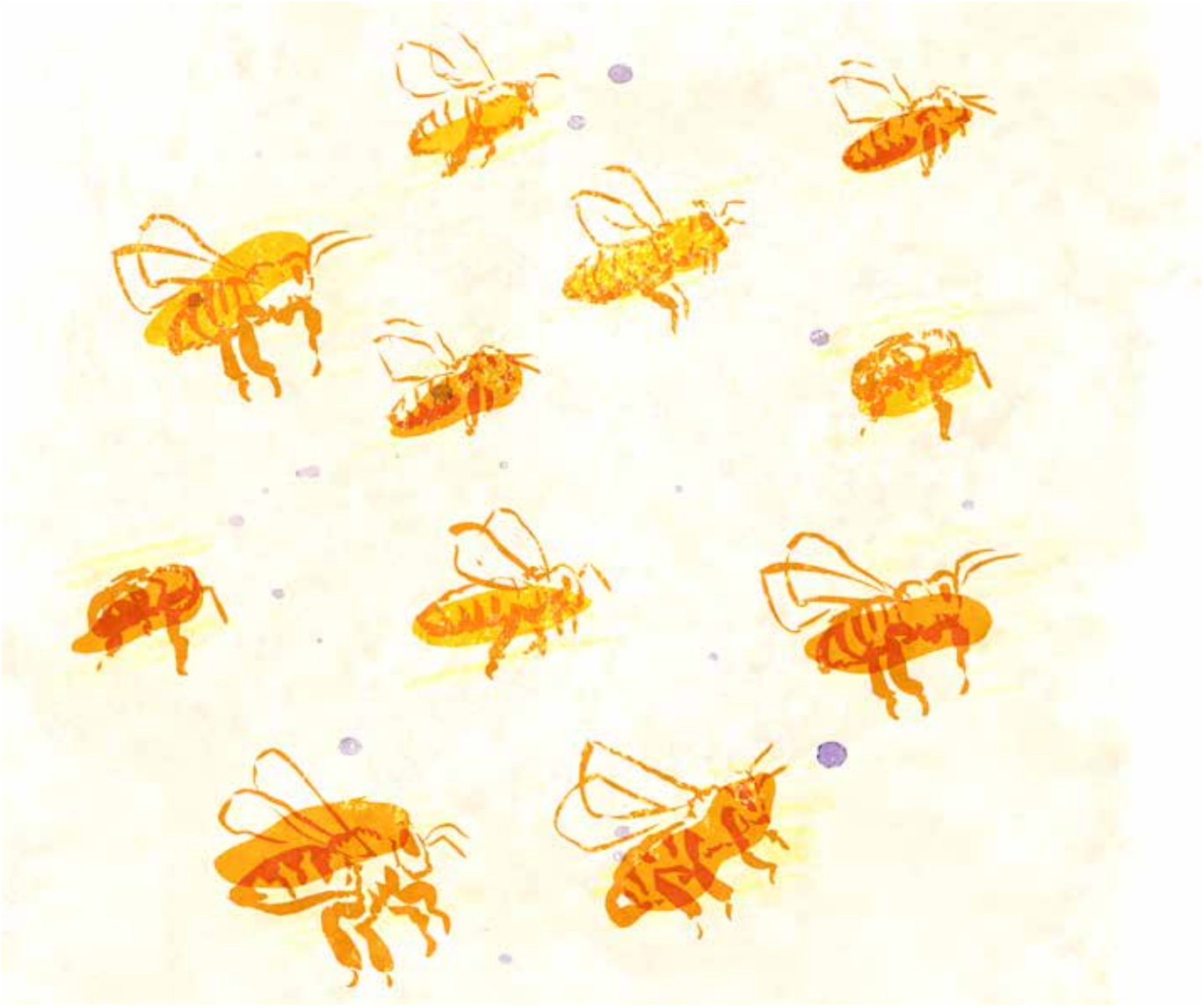
The canine studies him with honey-colored eyes. A coyote: the paper has mentioned sightings. Ribby, triangular head, pointed ears. The coyote yawns, exposing jagged teeth. Determining Gifford is a non-threat, it looks to see what's behind him. Emma is silent. Asleep? No—in the rearview Gifford sees her fingers wiggling like little white bait worms. The coyote's rank odor is worse than any diaper. Gifford's eyes fill with tears.

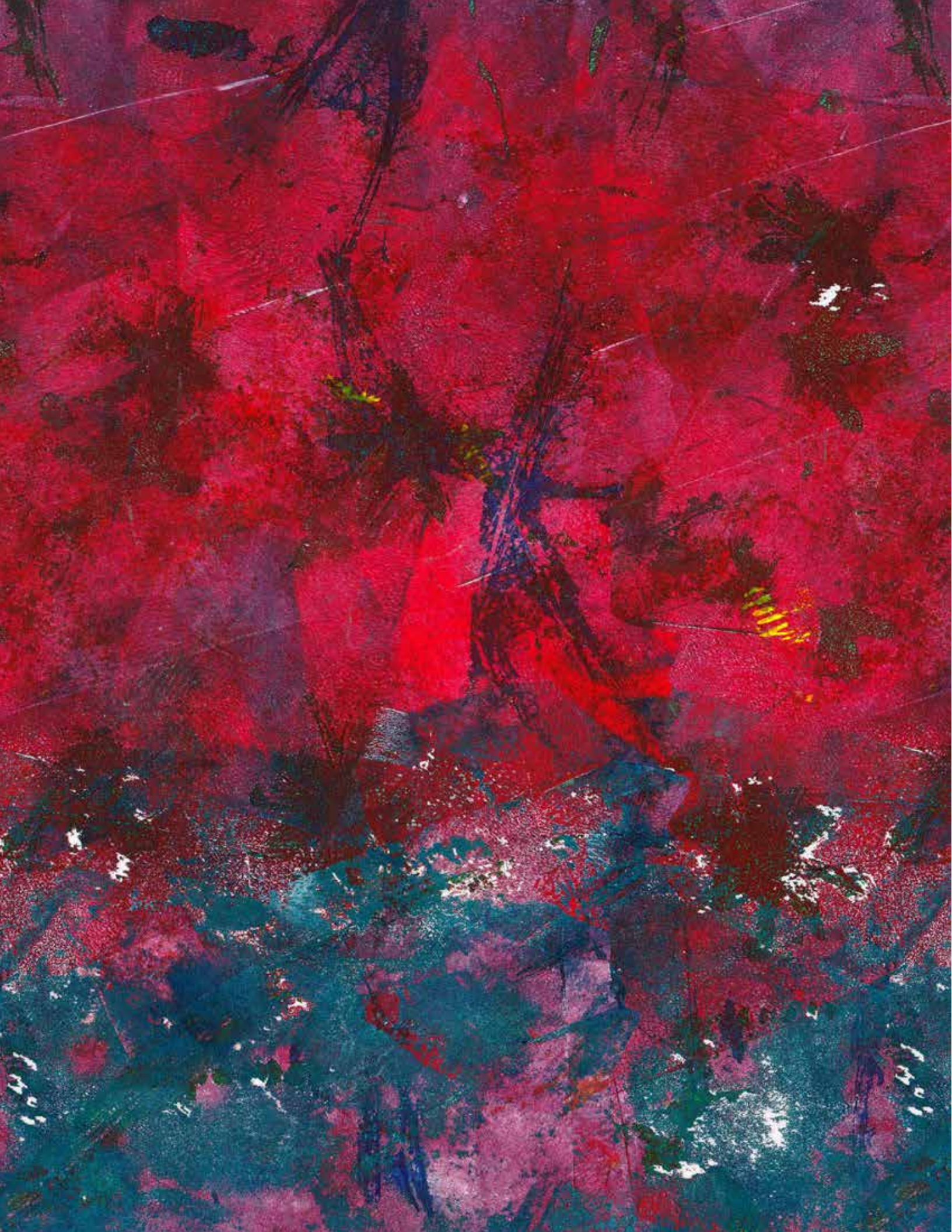
The coyote takes a step into the car, and Gifford screams, thrashing his arms and kicking his legs. He hits the horn, and the coyote pauses and cocks its head back. Those honey eyes. Gifford meets them—is that right for coyotes? Stare them down? Or is it the opposite? The coyote shifts its attention back to the rear of the car. Gifford bangs on his window, blasts the horn again and again, hollering until he's faint. The coyote ignores him.

What happens next will forever be a blur. The coyote advances, until Gifford can only see its hindquarters. Whether or not Emma whispers "Dah," will never be confirmed. But Iota appears at the passenger door. She hesitates, perhaps confused by the discovery that she could enter the car without being lifted.

"Iota—" Gifford croaks, not sure if he's summoning his dog or warning her off. The old Dachshund teeters, then waddles into the car, where her nose pokes the black tip of an unexpected tail. The coyote whirls, plucks up Iota by the back of her neck, dives out of the car, and trots up the embankment, leaving nothing to see but a wall of grass.

Years later, Gifford will stand with Val on the western beach of Maui, watching the sun sink beneath the horizon. Conditions will be perfect for the sighting of the green ray. At the climactic moment, he will shut his eyes and will hear his wife utter, "Oh—oh, my God, Gifford!" Her fingers will tighten around his wrist, while he replays for the ten thousandth time the image of Iota being carried off by the coyote. She resisted no more than if she were a kitten being moved to a safer place by a doting mother. As if it was the way things had to be. This is what Gifford vows to tell Emma someday before he dies.





Wyckoff

Robert Boucheron

Robert Boucheron grew up in Syracuse and Schenectady, New York. He worked as an architect in New York and Charlottesville, Virginia, where he has lived since 1987. His short stories and essays appear in *Bellingham Review*, *Fiction International*, *London Journal of Fiction*, *Porridge Magazine*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and other magazines.

A thin dog loitered in the front yard, its nose to the ground. The rib cage showed through a short brown coat with white spots. Or was it a fawn? Skinny legs and a naked tail like a snake. No collar. Dog or fawn, the animal was strange.

As Darcy approached on the sidewalk, the animal shot her a glance and slunk toward scrubby trees behind the house. Maybe it lived there, on the ragged edge of town.

The house looked abandoned—peeling paint, a drooping shutter, and cracked window glass. The shingle roof had dark streaks and patches of repair where the color did not match. Trash lay in the yard—lumpy bags, sodden newspapers, bits of foil, shreds of rubber tire, and fast-food boxes like the burst pods of an extraterrestrial life form.

Other houses on the block were shabby. The dead-end street was returning to the wild from which it was claimed a century ago. Aging cars parked here and there against the curb were rotten teeth in an old man's mouth. Darcy's official vehicle, a mid-size pickup truck, clean and white, was a healthy tooth amid the decay.

Darcy stepped up to the door, knocked, and backed away. Experience taught her to exercise caution. Feet shuffled inside, a bolt was drawn, and the door opened a crack.

"Who is it?" The voice was raspy and high, an old woman's. Withered fingers grasped the edge of the door. A pale eye peered from a maze of wrinkles.

"Darcy Wood. I'm the building inspector."

"A girl?"

Darcy wore a uniform of white oxford shirt, twill pants,

and tan work shoes. Her hair was pulled back, and her face was scrubbed.

“Not quite, ma’am. I’m twenty-nine years old.”

“Ha! I’m much older than that.”

“Are you Gladys?”

“What if I am?”

“Do you live here?”

The fingers withdrew, but Darcy was ready. She slipped the edge of her clipboard into the crack before it could close. A feeble shove followed, and a cry of anguish.

“I’m trying to find out if the house is inhabited,” Darcy said to the door. “Town records show the owner as Gladys Mephitic. Real estate taxes are overdue. Legal notices go unanswered.”

“This is my house!” The voice inside was a muffled shriek.

“Yes, ma’am.” Darcy waited. No one wanted to be told their house was in violation. Some became abusive, but every citizen had to be treated fairly. The clipboard registered another shove.

“What do you want?” That eerie voice again.

“Personally, not a thing. In fact, I’d rather be somewhere else than under the broiling hot sun on the stoop of a lady I don’t even know, a lady who probably knows plenty.”

Darcy let that statement settle, then went for broke.

“May I come in?”

The crack widened, and the eye reappeared. Darcy removed her dark glasses and slipped them into her breast pocket. Except for the clipboard, she was unarmed. Slender and still, she posed no threat.

The door opened enough to reveal a small figure with a wisp of white hair. Small but erect. She wore a faded print housedress and slippers. The dress hung loose on a body that was no more than skin and bone.

The old woman retreated, and the young woman stepped over the threshold. The air inside was just as hot. There was a bad smell, as of spoiled meat.

“Thank you, ma’am.”

By the light of the open door, Darcy did a quick survey. The hall and the living room to the left were furnished from decades before, with patterned wallpaper, closed curtains, and a cut-glass chandelier, unlit. It was a museum exhibit of domestic life in the early 1900s, but

dusty and brown with age.

Something lurked behind the old woman, silent and wary. It was the strange animal Darcy had seen in the yard.

“This is Wyckoff. He doesn’t like people.”

“What kind of dog is Wyckoff?”

“How should I know? He comes and goes by the back door. He finds things and brings them in the kitchen.”

“Is he yours?”

“He belongs to himself.”

“It’s all right if you don’t have any money, Mrs. Mephitic. The town has a program of tax relief for low-income residents. They also have grants for people to make home repairs.”

“Charity?”

“Think of it as neighbors helping neighbors.”

“Ha!”

“Utilities were cut off last year. How do you manage without water and gas?”

“There’s a stream behind the house to fetch from. The drains still work. So do matches and candles and fireplaces.”

“Here’s my card.” Darcy handed over her business card. “You can call me any time. I would encourage you to contact the tax assessor.”

“Or else?”

“They might take legal action.”

“I’m not worried.”

“What if the town tries to seize your property?”

“Wyckoff won’t let anything bad happen . . . to me.” A bony hand reached down and stroked the animal’s scrawny neck.

In the dim hall, Wyckoff bared his teeth and made a throaty sound. A growl or a chuckle?

Darcy had done her duty. Her eyes on Wyckoff, she backed to the door. Was he a hyena? The old woman withdrew her hand, as if to release him.

Tree in city park

Claire Cowell

Claire Cowell grew up in Manchester, UK, and has lived and worked there her whole life. Her mother is an artist, so she grew up surrounded by art. In the 80's she spent most weekends marching for women's rights, miners' rights, and more. She studied a Recreational Arts for the Community course and a BAHons in Modern Studies and was surprised to learn she could get paid to work as an artist in the community! She later trained as a teacher of Art and Design and taught at a school in Wythenshawe, whilst at the same time qualifying in Youth and Community work, before moving into a post as Youth Arts Manager at Manchester City Council for 9 years. Claire is driven and motivated by a sense of social justice and a determination to enable people without the means to access the arts to take ownership and believe that a gallery is for them.

This Grand Experiment

Denise Parsons

Denise Parsons is author of the novel *After the Sour Lemon Moon* (2014). Her work has appeared in the journals *Taproot*, *Kindred*, *Fish & Game Quarterly*, and *West Marin Review*. She lives and works in San Francisco, California. Learn more about Denise at www.deniseparsons.com.

Sometimes I'll walk along the street and think, what is all of this for? The men hanging off the sides of too-tall buildings washing windows, the wet newspaper pages and half-eaten pieces of fruit in the gutters, the lack of eye contact.

Then I'll see rain falling through rays of sunlight, right in front of me, right there, and I'll think, oh yes. I'll feel this sense of joy rising up inside of me and I still won't know the answer to my question, but I will no longer care.

Instead I'll be sporting a foolish grin and thinking, this is nice. And maybe that's all I need to know.

Maybe whoever made all of this happen—whatever this is, this grand experiment—maybe she knows more. But you and me, we don't really need to know what was intended here. We just need to remember to look up and see the rain falling through rays of sunlight, because now, just moments later, the sky has turned impenetrably grey.

A Natural History of Brooklyn

Maya Sokolovski

Maya Sokolovski is a communications specialist based in Toronto, Canada. Her prose and poetry have appeared in *The First Line*, *RIDE 3*, the *Journal of the Society of Classical Poets*, *Agnes and True*, and the *Eastern Iowa Review*. Her interests include reading, writing, weightlifting, volleyball, and fine cuisine.

A tree grows in Brooklyn – it is the *Gingko biloba*, and it has taken over the borough. Tall trees line the streets, scattering ripe green nuts and leaves as the warm season passes into the cold. The gingko's sidekick, hardy *Ailanthus altissima* (aka, tree of heaven), lends its foliage, too. On hot summer days, treetops simmer and release a foul-smelling odor, an odor that mingles with the garbage left in big black bags at the sidewalk's edge.

The smell of rot and vomit is overwhelming. The sidewalks are littered with scraps of refuse and spotty with ancient wads of gray gum. Cracks in the pavement, potholes in the roads, buildings in various states of decay. Commuters, bus drivers, pedestrians, motorists are all in a hurry, a great hustling rush. Everyone has somewhere to be, something to do, someone to see. In all this busyness, there's no time to stop, ever, for anything as banal as, say, a flower growing among the weeds.

Speaking of delicate flowers: Lana Del Rey, a New York native, sings of romance, jazz, beat poetry, churning out novels, and the freedom land of the '70s when she says, "I'm a Brooklyn baby." Let me tell you about my Brooklyn babies, my boisterous family, who make their home in that part of Brooklyn known as Little Odessa.

When I was 14, my older cousin Julia took me and my brother for a walk around the neighbourhood. As we padded in sneakers down unfamiliar blocks, Julia kept up a lively patter in Russian. That's the thing about Brooklynites, New-Yawkers: They talk fast. After a few minutes of this, she slowed her pace and reached into her purse.

"When I was in high school," she said, "my classmates, the girls, were so pretty. They had nice clothes, nice shoes, and makeup. I was jealous because I wanted to

be like them. Beautiful. But I didn't have any money." Julia had come to New York, alone, when she was a teenager. "Maya, it's important for you to look good, and clean your skin and wear makeup. Here." She passed me a crinkly twenty from her wallet. "And one for you," she said to my brother and pressed another bill into his hand. "Wow, Julia," we gushed, "thank you!" She waved her hand dismissively. "You're welcome."

Julia took us to King's Highway, then walked off to run some errands. "Call me if you need anything," she said. "I'll meet you later at grandma's."

Left to our own devices, my brother and I popped in and out of shops, stocking up on supplies with our new riches. I got a facial cleanser, red lipstick, plum lip liner, pink blush, mascara, and a couple of candy bars. My brother, less aesthetically inclined, bought two bottles of Mountain Dew, a hot dog, a hamburger, a puzzle toy, and a harmonica. We both had some change left over. You could buy a lot of stuff with $20 in those days. Pleased with our purchases, we walked back to our grandma's home on Ocean Avenue.

Immediately, I put my products to use. In the tiny bathroom, I scrubbed my face with the cleanser, then painted myself in bright hues. The effect was pleasing, in an ingenuous sort of way. My face was dry and peeling – in my naivete, I hadn't bought moisturizer, or toner for that matter – but I was made up. My brother found it funny and teased me, but our parents were more indulgent, and they thanked Julia for her kindness, too.

Fast forward a few years. Julia married and had a young daughter, Daniella, or Dasha for short. Dasha, with her fiery hair, olive complexion, and shuffling walk. Dasha is a Brooklyn baby in the truest sense. Born in Brooklyn, fluent in English and Russian, a talented child who gets her ear for music from her dad, her no-nonsense attitude from her mom. She's my favourite relative, my first cousin once removed technically, my niece informally. How I love her! And yet, I am not her favourite relative. O the conceits of youth! But I digress.

A tree grows in Brooklyn, and so too grows my family there. Julia later remarried and had two more babies.

My grandma and aunt continued their peaceful life in their modest apartment. I learned, after careful study, how to choose and use beauty products properly. My brother remained annoying. Our great big Russian-Jewish family – cousins, aunts, uncles, grandma, mom, dad, brother, and I – converge in Brooklyn for babushka's birthday every autumn. Or try to, for what it's worth.

My Canadian family's trek from Toronto to Brooklyn, then back, is long, arduous, filled with highways and expressways, exits and pit stops. But it is full also of excitement, of anticipation to see our American kin, to take in again the sights and sounds and smells of Brighton Beach, Coney Island, the ocean. And the food! Russian pastries, latkes, beet-red borscht, bagels, black rye bread, cold cuts, cheeses, deli sandwiches, salads and meats and soups galore. Not saying we don't have that in Toronto (aka Toronno, aka Hogtown). It's just that, when we go down to Brooklyn, the flavours of the city mingle and blend in a way unlike any other.

I must confess that as a city, Toronto was my first love. In "The City He Loves Me: A Millennial Romance," a story from my book of short fiction, I wrote:

"Her arms resting on the cold handrail, she looked out and over the city. No sunset here, just the dying shades of sky behind the urban sprawl. And then she saw it: the whole of the city rose up in front of her, lights shimmering, cars speeding, weeds growing, humanity exhaling on street corners. Sounds of movement, thunder in the distance, the rumbling of a plane flying overhead. The beauty of it took her breath away. The city he loved her – and she loved him back."

I was writing about Toronto, but this could easily be said of Brooklyn, too. Brooklyn, Brooklyn, my second city-love.

The Tree

Kate Herbert

Kate Herbert was born in 1928 and grew up in Lower Broughton, Salford. She was awarded a scholarship at the age of 12 to the Salford School of Art (pictured above at age 14 during her time at art school). Kate flourished and won several awards. Notably she met and received positive encouragement from none other than L. S. Lowry, who admired her line drawings and offered her the use of his studio. She also exhibited alongside him at Manchester City Art Gallery. At 21, Kate was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Her career continued with a spell as a sketch artist for the Manchester Evening News. Since retiring as a school teacher in 1995, Kate has continued to exhibit and between 2000 and 2002 toured churches and cathedrals across the UK with her exhibitions. Kate is 91 and continues to paint and sketch.

My Grandfather's Stories

Muhammed Awal Ahmed

Muhammed Awal Ahmed lives in Northern Nigeria with his parents. He enjoys traveling and exploring green lands, taking walks, and writing. He has a fictional dog called Chui.

In one of my Grandfather's stories, a bush baby sits heavy behind him as he rides down the mountain on his bicycle from the market where he sells thatched grass for roofs. The light of his bicycle pierces through the night and paves the way for dragons and fireflies. He pedals greatly downhill, his hands clasped tightly on the handlebar. The bush baby looks on into the night and they wrestle, the bush baby bleeds and nine more are born. Someone makes it home to his wives and thirty children, my Grandfather tells the story to my father who tells me while he works on the thousand papers he brings home on Friday night.

The little bush in front of our house could be a forest. Fireflies glow in the night and chameleons change their color to the clothes you're wearing. The Big James who likes my mum and wants to be a soldier makes a catapult for my brothers and me, from a branch of a cashew tree. He pulls it taut and fires at a bird, meeting it at the breast before it flies off. A lethal weapon. We patrol the great forest of the bush in front of our house and squirrels burrow deeper into the ground. We catch a bush rat and mother says it's a home rat. Home rats have darker skins like this one but we eat it anyway.

Grandfather dies and leaves father with a bow and an arrow and a Dane gun I later realized had always been father's. The bow and arrow hangs conspicuous on the wall of father's room. A relic, a reminder of Grandfather who wasn't a Great Hunter or a Warrior of the Igala tribe but a thatched grass seller on the mountain, on Eke market days. I see the bow and the arrow and beyond, the pile of books of my father's college courses of Economics and History, a sheathed sword I once unsheathed, presented to be black with the smell of a sharp razor. I cut myself a little with it, like a warrior. I pull the arrow a little on the string of the bow and it

releases a little from my fingers. It leaves a mark on the wall that only fades after decades of repainting. A lethal weapon.

The path to the Quran school is pleated between two great bushes that, if I was with my brothers that never leave a fruit unbothered, has cashews we would climb until the owner raises dust on his heels in pursuit of us, and other things; wild berries, mangoes, cherries we suck on and never make it to Quran school in time for revision before the Mullah cracks our back with skin hide whips. There are ghosts in the bushes to Quranic school too; ghosts like the ones in my grandfather's stories. There are bush babies that glow in the dark and steal babies from their mothers and takes plates of food every noon for the child. "An animal eats my head" is a phrase in Igala for great fear that leaves the hair on your skin standing when you pass through bushes leading to your Quran school alone because your brothers left you behind and stumped trees looks like monsters covered in leaves watching you, watching you…

I'm 16 when father buys a plot of land in the village of our ancestors, abandoned, and he builds a house that towers over the trees and we're the lords of these forests, Great Hunters, Igala warriors. We drive out there but we don't live there, merely a visit to the past with hoes and cutlasses and bean seeds and chemicals we spray to kill the weed. Lethal weapons. We farm deep into the forest and my father hangs his Dane Gun, not like his father because he was a thatched roof seller but the stories of my Grandfather come alive here, Bush babies snag their bodies on trees as they run from the modern hunter and leave a little of their multicolored hair that glows in the dark on branches of trees like the eggs of birds.

Grandfather says, when you find a bush baby resting in the woods, pick a fight with it if you're strong. If it stole children, you can return them to their grateful mothers but it is the hair you should take with you, their hair that glows like a thousand bright torches in the dark. Take it home, don't tell your wife, put it under your pillow as you sleep and you'll find more money than you can spend in a life-time under the pillow in the morning. I always wondered how it could fit, all the wealth of it all. I didn't wonder anymore, the morning I left multicolored hair under my pillow and I learnt the truth of my grandfather's stories. They were not for men that'll grow to kill bears in the wood, all the bears in the woods want to cuddle you, all the bears in the woods are dead. All the bush babies ran away, with the richness in their multicolored skin, from the fires we set to plant beans or cassava or flowers. In my Grandfather's stories, we're the villain.

Mudlarks

Mackenzie Weinger

Mackenzie Weinger is a journalist and editor currently based in Washington, D.C. She's written on foreign affairs, politics and art for publications such as the Financial Times, World Politics Review, and The Washington Diplomat, among others. Mackenzie, a Los Angeles native, has a master's degree in War Studies from King's College London and a B.A. in history from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Londoners have always used the River Thames as a dustbin. Today, that trash has inevitably become someone's treasure, and the so-called mudlarks who search for tokens and history in the black mud along the water's edge can be spotted most days picking through the leftovers.

The anaerobic properties of Thames mud means the trinkets and terrors it holds are stunningly well preserved. Mudlarks have tracked down everything from unexploded hand grenades to human skeletons, in between the more common discoveries of buttons, jewelry, glass and pottery.

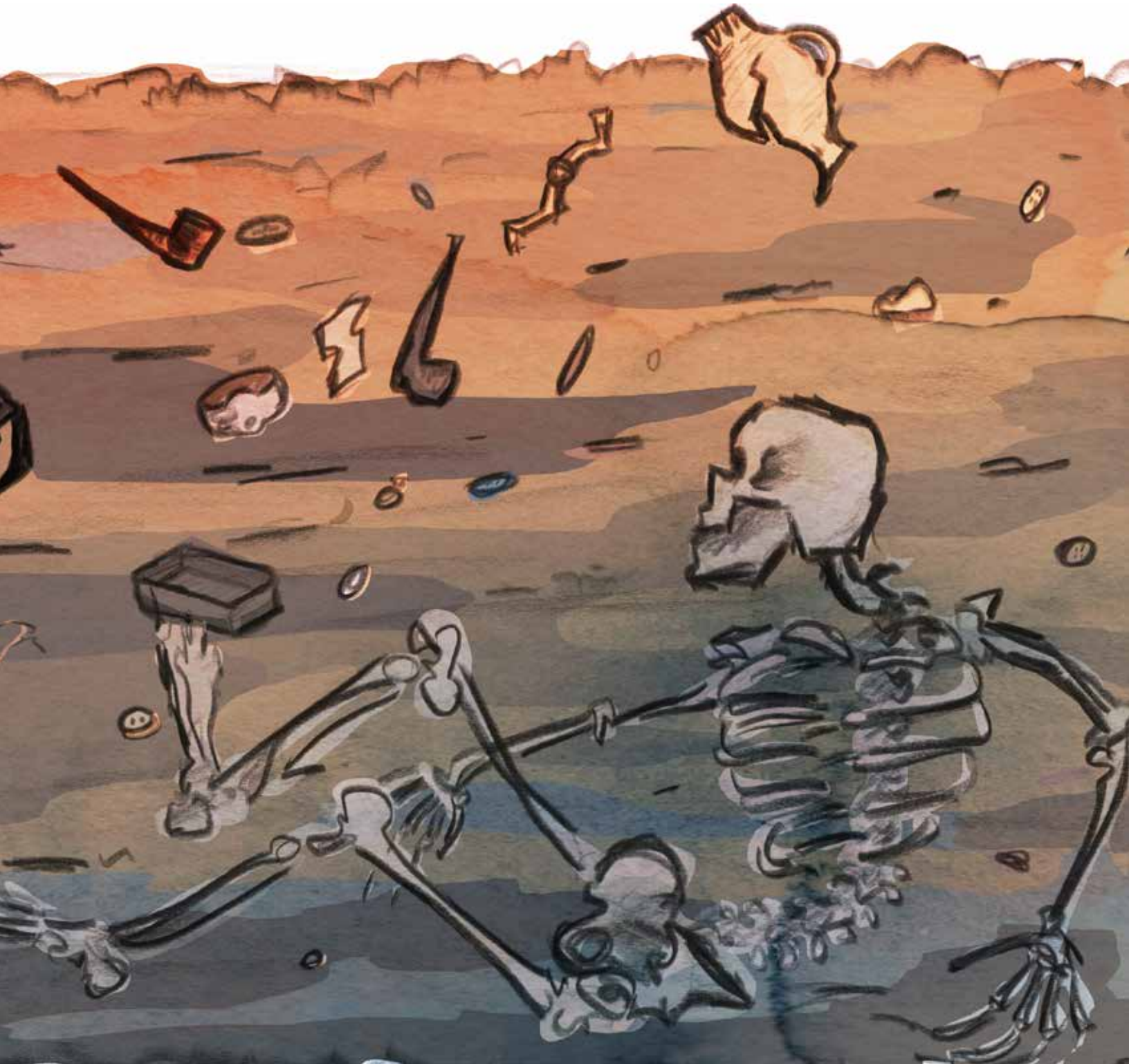
Nicola White can often be found around the Thames riverbank at Woolwich, head-in-the-mud, looking for pieces to both collect and transform into artwork. "For me, it's the fascination of the history behind the objects—whose pocket was it in, how did it get here, how did they die. That secret history," White says.

The mudlark community is tiny, but filled with some big egos, looking to make splashy, headline grabbing finds. It's a small group not simply because of the whole poking around in the mud bit, but thanks to—what else—the bureaucracy. The Port Authority of London requires a permit for anyone with mudlarking dreams. The Standard foreshore permit will allow digging to a depth of 7.5cm. But then there's the Mudlark permit, only issued to those who are part of the 50-odd member Thames Mudlark Society, which authorizes digging to a depth of a whopping 1.2m. Getting to dig in London's muck turns out to be an elite activity.

Mudlarks tend to stick to their own well-trod turf, with White holding down the fort in Woolwich and sometimes Greenwich. But all of London emerges in bits and pieces from the mud wherever they search.

One morning excursion yielded everything from a 19th century bullet to countless clay pipes to a small figurine of the Hindu god Ganesha, his familiar elephant head just nudging out of the mud.

All items of potential archaeological interest must be reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme Finds Liaison Officer at the Museum of London. Ganesha wouldn't make the cut, but anything over 300 years old would need to be brought in, points out Kate Sumnall, previously the museum's finds officer. And the mudlarks' discoveries have changed the interpretation of the past, particularly by unearthing little toys from centuries past. "This leads us to see things were not quite as grim and desperate as we may have thought," she says.



Down by the river, walking over modern detritus alongside Roman coins, Victorian jewelry, medieval pilgrim badges, and Neolithic Stone Age axes, the mudlarks are both digging up history and trying to decipher modern day London. For every religious offering or forgotten toy thrown into the river, there's an ankle tag that's been cut off or a bag of knives that washes up. "It's Woolwich, after all," a passerby quips.

So what's the appeal for those who spend their days down in the mud? "It's a hugely rewarding pastime. I once found a boring brass luggage label, but it had the name and address of someone on it. And from that, I found out he was a WWI soldier, married his landlady, and I traced his grave. All that from a tiny, little plaque," White says.

Landing over Lac Leman.
Versoix, Switzerland.

LEFT: a cat sits and watches. Irkutsk, Russia.

ABOVE: seabirds explore a snowcovered pier. St Andrews, Scotland.

Urban Nature in Black and White

Holly McKelvey; photo editing by Gennadi Janzen

During Stonecrop Review's first week online, as we began to introduce ourselves to the world and establish a social media presence, we were nominated in one of those "one-a-day" challenges that pop up now and again: in this case, the challenge was to post a black and white photo every day for a week. We were still asking ourselves whether there was even a demand for an urban nature magazine – it was the early days of this journey, after all. But diving into a photo challenge seemed as good a way as any to introduce ourselves. So I started digging through old photos from my various travels, looking for black and white images or pictures that could work well in greyscale.

And voilà! Here is our small, seven-day collection that provides a glimpse into the diverse interactions between human and nature, into the stories that emerge at this urban interface. An airplane lands over city roofs and trees on a cloudy day. Unexpected rain runs down a windshield in drought-stricken California. A cat sits in a window; birds leave footprints in the snow on a stone pier. Ferns grow out of the cracks in a stone wall, adament that there is substrate enough to grow. The aftermath of a windstorm reminds us that even in our urban environments, nature can still put us in our place. And both power lines and plants stretch skyward from a tile roof nestled in the foothills of the mountains.

Thank you to Gennadi for the beautiful photo editing!

- Holly

LEFT: fern on a rock wall. Edinburgh, Scotland.

NEXT PAGE: a rainy windshield. Fresno, California

RIGHT: urban roots, exposed. Altadena, California after a windstorm.

NEXT PAGE: vines and power lines. Villa de Leyva, Colombia.

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