

A writing magazine

Paper Bound

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For the young, and the young at heart

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS

with

MARCIE FLINCHUM ATKINS
MEGAN FREEMAN
RM GRAY
SASHA PEYTON SMITH
&
PHILIPPA GREGORY

PLUS

WRITING WEIGHTY
SUBJECTS FOR CHILDREN
BY AUTHOR ANNA GOODALL

BOOK REVIEWS
WRITING PROMPTS
& MORE...

NEW

WRITING &
ILLUSTRATIONS

From

CARMEN CARREIRA MEAT CHAUX IMOGEN HARTLAND GRACE KELLEY
SUE LANCASTER JOE PEARSON CATHERINE OLVER SHIRLEY SHELBY

STEPHANIE BUOSI CAROLE BROMLEY

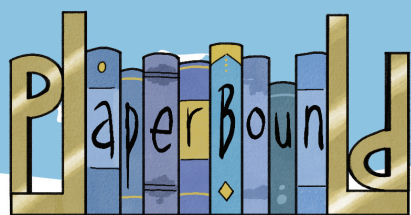
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BE INTERVIEWED BY US: IF YOU'RE AN AUTHOR OF MG OR YA FICTION, AND HAVE A BOOK COMING OUT, WE WANT TO KNOW! GET IN TOUCH!

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Page illustration by Shirley Shelby

Find out more about Shirley and our cover illustrator, Stephanie Buosi, on page 50

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PaperBound Magazine is an online magazine for the young, and the young at heart. It is dedicated to showcasing authors and illustrators of children's and young adult fiction. It strives to deliver inspiring content, new and exciting writing, book recommendations and top tips for aspiring young writers. PaperBound has been created by Emily, Lucy and Rayan who met while studying an MA in Writing for Young People at Bath Spa University.

If you are interested in contributing to the magazine please see full submission details on our website.

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Edited by Emily Ould, Lucy Mohan and Rayan Phillips.

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Additional images have been sourced from Pixabay and Canva.

Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Thank you so much for reading our new issue. As always it's packed full of new writing, illustrations, author interviews, articles and more. We can't thank our contributors enough for all their wonderful content! Huge thanks to them and the publishers who put us in touch with such awesome people!

We hope you enjoy the Light and Dark issue, which has a slightly new look!

Happy Reading!

Emily, Lucy and Rayan

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Illustration by Meat Chaux

Find out more about all the illustrators you see in this issue on our Meet the Illustrators feature on page 50



Marcie Flinchum Atkins

MARCIE FLINCHUM ATKINS CHATTED TO US ABOUT HER HISTORICAL VERSE NOVEL, *ONE STEP FORWARD*.



COULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR BOOK, *ONE STEP FORWARD*, AND WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE IT?

One Step Forward is a young adult historical fiction novel-in-verse. It tells the story of Matilda Young, the youngest suffragist to be jailed for protesting for the right to vote in the United States. Matilda was a member of the National Woman's Party (NWP), which really pushed for the 19th amendment to the United States Constitution, which gave women (though mostly only white women) the right to vote.

I first found out about the suffragists by visiting a local museum when we first moved to Northern Virginia (just outside of Washington, DC). The Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, Virginia used to be the Occoquan Workhouse, where Matilda and other suffragists were jailed. When I first visited the museum, I was blown away that I'd never heard their story before.

DESPITE THE FACT THIS BOOK IS SET JUST OVER 100 YEARS AGO, THE MAIN

CHARACTER, MATILDA, IS INCREDIBLY RELATABLE. HER VULNERABILITY PARALLELED WITH HER BRAVERY IS INSPIRING. DID YOU ALWAYS KNOW YOU WANTED TO WRITE HER STORY?

I knew I wanted to write a suffragists' story. At first, I told it from a collective "we" point of view (not the right one at all). I then tried to write it from many perspectives and Matilda's was one of those. My agent asked me to try it from Matilda's point of view exclusively because Matilda was a teenager. Once I tried it strictly from her point of view, I knew it was the right one.

THIS BOOK IS TOLD IN VERSE. WHAT LED YOU TO MAKING THE DECISION TO WRITE IT IN THIS WAY?

I always knew the story would be in verse. I've loved verse novels ever since I read *Out of the Dust* in the late 1990s. I knew that I could use verse to show the waiting that the suffragists had to do, and I hoped I could use white space and line breaks to my advantage to heighten the emotion.



"I WAS BLOWN AWAY THAT I'D NEVER HEARD THEIR STORY BEFORE."

WRITING A HISTORICAL BOOK ALWAYS MEANS RESEARCH! HOW LONG DID YOU SPEND RESEARCHING THIS ERA AND WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN THE US BEFORE YOU STARTED WRITING, OR DID YOU RESEARCH AS YOU WROTE?

I spent so long researching! I always find that I need to research a lot before writing. I started researching this book in 2017, and I don't think I started drafting that first collective "we" point of view until 2018. But I also do

research as I go because things come up that I didn't anticipate. Once I decided to make it from Matilda's point of view, I went to the DC Public Library and looked at her high school yearbooks. I walked the distance from her high school to her neighborhood, and I went to Duke University in North Carolina to read her personal papers. I try to be careful that the joy of research doesn't make me procrastinate drafting the actual story.

WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE WAS A LONG JOURNEY FOR THOSE CAMPAIGNING TO GET THE VOTE. WAS IT CHALLENGING TO WRITE THE MORE DIFFICULT SCENES, SUCH AS THOSE AT THE WORKHOUSE?

It was difficult to write because I knew they endured so much. It also gave me a deep appreciation for the women who fought so hard and at such personal cost so that I could have the right to vote. I take that very seriously.

On the flip side, it was the easiest part to write because there was a lot of source material. The Library of Congress had affidavits from some of the suffragists, I went to local talks about the "Night of Terror" where women were abused in November 1917 by the warden and jailers. It's a local story with national impact.

WE LOVE VERSE NOVELS HERE AT PAPERBOUND. DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VERSE NOVELS YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH OUR READERS?

I really love Kip Wilson's historical verse novels. Her most recent verse novel is *One Last Shot*. I think Jason Reynolds' *Long Way Down* is a perfect verse novel. Every single word counts. For historical fiction with multiple viewpoints, I recommend Irene Latham and Charles Waters' *Africatown*. I'm also in awe of Ray Shepard's nonfiction book in verse *A Long Time Coming*.

MARCIE FLINCHUM ATKINS

Marcie Flinchum Atkins is a teacher librarian by day and a writer in the wee hours of the morning. She writes nonfiction picture books and poetry for children and adults. Her debut young adult novel-in-verse is *One Step Forward* (Versify, 2025).

You can reach her at www.marcieatkins.com or follow her on Instagram @marciefatkins or Bluesky @marciefatkins.bsky.social.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SORT OF WRITING ROUTINE, AND WHAT MIGHT BE NEXT FOR YOUR WRITING JOURNEY?

I'm a big fan of routines. I write before I go to work as a school librarian. I'm up at 5:00am and drink a big glass of water and make some green tea. Then I read three poems, write a haiku inspired by my photos, and read a few pages of a craft book. After that little warm-up, I try to make progress on whatever project I'm tackling at the moment. I write nonfiction picture books, poetry, verse novels, and I'm trying to write middle grade. On Sunday evenings, I do a weekly review and plan out my next week.

In 2026, I'm excited to launch my next nonfiction picture book, *When Twilight Comes*, with Chronicle Books. It's about plans and animals that emerge at twilight. PB

One Step Forward is published by Versify (imprint of Harper Collins) and is available now.

MARCIE'S WRITING PROMPT:

Seek out a local story. In your local area, can you find a museum, an old newspaper article, or old photo? Carefully study the photo or article or artefact. Write a poem inspired by what you found. It could be a narrative poem or a found poem or descriptive poem. The sky's the limit!



Book Middle Grade Review Corner

GRIMSTINK

BY DANIEL PEAK

REVIEW BY W. Y. DOBSON
INSTAGRAM: @WY.DOBSON

When Layla Tenby is out delivering flyers for "Fences and Gateways at Incredible Prices" on her thirteenth birthday, little does she realise her hometown of Stockport is scheduled to be transformed into the capital of Armageddon. That's if cosmic villain Merrel-Graa, living ninety-thousand light years from Earth, has her wicked way. To do Merrel-Graa's dirtywork is Grimstink, Son of Grimstink who, by the power of the Tanglestone, trades places with Layla. Befriended by Layla's younger brother, Reece, Grimstink pursues his quest of laying the tarmac for world destruction – keeping his kill mission a secret – while Layla must survive deathbots and shenanigans on Moon Seven (a satellite of Qarl, not yet on Google Maps but hopefully by August, weather permitting), and bravely find her way home.

With as many twists and turns as a bag of fusilli in a washing machine, and pages bursting with humour, this book about friendships forged in unusual circumstances will keep you laughing and entertained until the hour of Armageddon itself (avoid Stockport in the first instance). Written by a BAFTA-winning comedy writer, *Grimstink* is perfect for children in search of aliens, adventure and side-splitting fun. And *abanana*.

Grimstink is published by Firefly Press on 10th July 2025



LOBSTER BLUES

BY JACQUELINE KING

REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND

Lobster Blues is the heart-warming sequel to *Cake for the Gestapo*, where the adventures of Clem, Joe, Ginger and Spinner continue under the stifling occupation of German soldiers on Jersey Island during World War II.

Inspired by the true stories of Channel islanders, readers are invited to step through a window of history to experience what occupation felt like in 1942 and glimpse the transformative power of kindness in the throes of global wartime.

There are strong-willed pigs, pranks played on the soldiers, and potatoes left beneath hedges for prisoners of war, all while occupation and strict regimes close in on the once-peaceful island.

With a surprise ending drawn from historical events, Jacqueline King weaves a story of friendship and resistance that renders it worthy of becoming a modern classic.

Lobster Blues is out now, published by Zuntold



OWNING IT: OUR DISABLED CHILDHOODS IN OUR OWN WORDS

EDITED BY JEN CAMPBELL & JAMES AND LUCY CATCHPOLE

ILLUSTRATED BY SOPHIE KAMLISH
REVIEW BY LAURA JONES



A collection of autobiographical stories from writers within the disabled community, *Owning It: Our Disabled Childhoods in Our Own Words* features 22 powerfully honest accounts of growing up with a disability.

Featuring contributions from across the world (including Nina Tame, Elle McNicoll, Ilya Kennedy, James Catchpole, Eugene Grant, Carly Findlay and Matilda Feyişayo Ibini), this highly relevant and thought-provoking book is a must-read for non-disabled children (and adults) as much as it is for disabled children seeking strength and inspiration during their own times of challenge and acceptance.

From the school playground to school trips, waterparks to basketball courts, hospital visits to operations, these own-voice stories champion equality and diversity loudly and proudly. Providing a unique opportunity for readers to share the authentic emotions and experiences of each author, each chapter is filled with honest reality, opening up worlds of laughter and joy as much as sadness and quiet reflection.

'It's just a part of my body,' Nina Tame muses in her witty, yet personal reflection on growing up with spina bifida. 'It's part of what makes me me. And that's enough.' With heartfelt reflections like this central to each story, this book has the power to influence change and teach readers of all ages that disability is - and should be - celebrated as part of everyday life.

Owning It: Our Disabled Childhoods in Our Own Words is published by Faber & Faber, out now.

MISS GIFTY'S SCHOOL

BY MELANIE & CATHERINE LEMESLE

REVIEW BY ALEX AND HIS DAUGHTER



What if the gifted kids weren't superheroes, just different—and hunted for it? In *Miss Gifty's School*, 11-year-old Christopher-Georges is plucked from a hostile world and sent to a mysterious boarding school for children like him: intensely bright, offbeat, and misfit. But this isn't Hogwarts. No spells, no wands—just the raw intensity of minds that don't fit the mold.

As CG unravels the truth behind the school and the government's plan to 'reform' the gifted, the story becomes a pulse-quicken escape—and a fierce stand against conformity. The danger is real, but so is the camaraderie between the students, from rebellious Camille to flamboyant Nadine. Each character is vivid, flawed, and fully alive.

Written by a real-life mother-daughter duo, this novel crackles with authentic emotion. It speaks directly to those who've been called 'too much'—too intense, too strange, too clever—and shows that maybe being 'too much' is exactly what the world needs.

Fast-paced and packed with heart, *Miss Gifty's School* is a smart, subversive adventure for fans of *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, *The Giver*, and *Wonder*. A must-read for anyone who's ever felt like the odd one out.

Miss Gifty's School is out now

THE BABY-SITTERS CLUB: MALLORY AND THE TROUBLE WITH TWINS

BY ARLEY NOPRA

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY ANN M. MARTIN
REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND

A refreshing new take on the bestselling series, this graphic novel introduces the world of the infamous Baby-sitters Club to a new generation of readers.

Told with charm and gorgeous illustrations across every page, when Mallory encounters a pair of troublesome twins intent on making her life as their babysitter difficult, it's up to her to figure out why they're always playing cruel tricks on her.

The artwork is beautiful for a middle grade audience with vibrant colour and the way the characters are written help the reader to see all sides of the story.

Imbued with little details that give the book an added charm, this graphic novel invites you to step into the world of the baby-sitters club in a whole, new way.

The Baby-sitters Club: Mallory and the Trouble with Twins is published by Scholastic and out now



I HEAR THE TREES

UNTAMED POEMS FROM MOTHER EARTH

BY ZARO WEIL

ILLUSTRATED BY JUNLI SONG
REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND

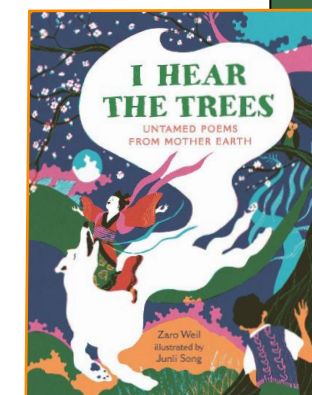
I Hear the Trees is a stirring and absorbing collection of poetry suitable for middle grade readers, inviting the reader to step into the world of nature and connect with it in a gentle, love-affirming way.

This book is a wonder to behold, complete with joyful illustrations that perfectly complement the tone and style of each poem spread across the pages.

The poems explored throughout this book and the language used emphasises the beauty of nature, from the 'bird banter' and 'blossomest blossoms' in *Bamboozled Berries* to the stars that 'giggled out loud' in *Otherland*. Emotional undertones are woven throughout too, showing us there is much good to be had from 'choosing poetry' and happiness can be found in any delightful 'Recipe for a Perfect Spring Birthday Cake'.

I Hear the Trees will leave readers enthralled with nature and hopefully inspire them to connect in their own way with this element of our world too, ultimately instilling a vibrant sense of hope. We absolutely loved it!

I Hear the Trees is published by Hachette and out now



The Sun and the Moon

by Carole Bromley



CAROLE BROMLEY



Carole Bromley lives in York, UK and writes for both children and adults. Her poems feature in many magazines and anthologies such as *Gods and Monsters*, *Heroes and Villains*, *A Whale of a Time and Space* (forthcoming). She is also the winner of the Caterpillar Prize 2022, and her children's collection, *Blast Off* (Smith/Doorstop) is out now.

www.carolebromleypoetry.co.uk



Once upon a starry day
the sun fell for the moon
*Oh, do not take your light away
for you have set too soon.*

The moon then turned her silvery beams
upon the dappled sun
and cold they were, cold as my dreams,
cold as the night to come.

*Don't shine your golden rays on me
pray do not waste your light;
you shine and shine the livelong day
but mine, all mine's the night.*

The moon then sailed behind a tree,
the stars too vanished soon,
the sun set though it was barely three
and the world plunged into gloom.

The tides, not knowing where to turn,
ran in and out at will;
the sundial with no sun to burn
was blank and dark and still.

The birds, uncertain when to sleep,
fell dreaming from the trees,
the owl he uttered not one peep
and whales snored in the seas.

At last, the reluctant moon came out
and lit the dark night sky
the sun rose, spread his warmth about
and said *In love? Not I!*

*You're beautiful. For a while I fell
for your beams of silvery white
but my secret love I'll never tell
except to the velvet night.*

And so, the tides they ebb and flow
as night must follow day,
the sun will come, the moon will go,
it's always been that way.



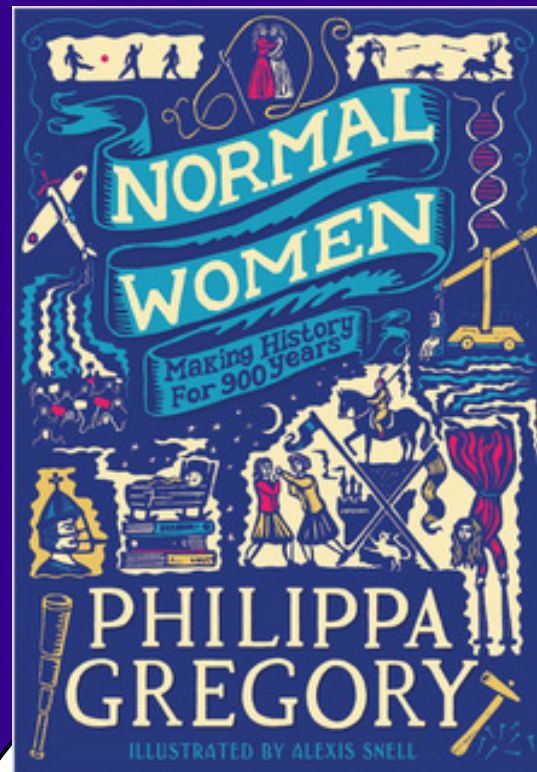
Philippa Gregory

Dr Philippa Gregory studied history at the University of Sussex and was awarded a PhD by the University of Edinburgh where she is a Regent and was made Alumna of the Year in 2009. She holds an honorary degree from Teesside University, and is a fellow of the Universities of Sussex and Cardiff.

Philippa is a member of the Society of Authors and in 2016, was presented with the Outstanding Contribution to Historical Fiction Award by the Historical Writers' Association.

In 2018, she was awarded an Honorary Platinum Award by Nielsen for achieving significant lifetime sales across her entire book output.

In 2021, she was awarded a CBE for services to literature and to her charity Gardens for the Gambia, and was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.



NORMAL WOMEN IS PUBLISHED
BY HARPER COLLINS AND OUT NOW

Queen of historical fiction, Philippa Gregory, reveals her secrets on what it was like to write her most recent book for young adults, *Normal Women*, sharing women's history as it should be written

COULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR NEW BOOK, *NORMAL WOMEN: MAKING HISTORY FOR 900 YEARS*?

I decided to write this book because in my fiction, I am almost always writing the history of women who are missing from the record – and I began to ask myself, why is that? Why do we accept a history of England where women are invisible? What we read is a history of men, as viewed by men, as recorded by men, who decided long ago that women were of no importance. From the research for my novels I knew it wasn't because women were not doing anything, but that the record keepers only made note of women when they did something out of the ordinary: a criminal, a beauty or a saint. I wanted to recognise the normality of women, however they are named: rioting women, power-mad women, manipulative women, angelic women, cursed women.

THIS BOOK ALSO SHARES A VERSION FOR ADULT READERS. WHAT WAS THE PROCESS LIKE WHEN IT CAME TO CREATING/ EDITING THE SAME BOOK FOR A DIFFERENT AUDIENCE?

When I came to adapt my best-selling non-fiction, *Normal Women: 900 years of making history*, for teens, I was determined that it would be a genuine history book: challenging, authentic, controversial and accessible – a shorter, but not lesser, version of the award-winning original. Now I've finished it – a year on top of the ten years that it took me to write the original – I see it as a bitesize version of its bigger sister: concise, an easier read – but just as important.

THERE ARE SO MANY INCREDIBLE WOMEN IN THIS BOOK. DO YOU HAVE ANY PARTICULAR FAVOURITES?

“Why do we accept a history where women are invisible?”

There are so many, it's really not fair to pick just one. Though I am rather a fan of Agnes Hotot, who was born in 1378 and put on full jousting armour to take the place of her father who had fallen ill before a fight. She unhorsed her father's enemy in a duel and only then, as he lay on the ground, did she remove her helmet, let down her hair and take off her breastplate to show her breasts – to prove he had been beaten by a woman. Agnes married into the Dudley family and they celebrated her victory with a crest showing a woman wearing a military helmet with loosened hair and her breasts exposed.

WE BET RESEARCH UNCOVERED FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE NOVEL IDEAS... DID ANY WOMEN YOU RESEARCH TEMPT YOU TO WRITE A NEW NOVEL ABOUT THEM SPECIFICALLY, AND DO YOU HAVE A PROCESS

WHEN IT COMES TO THINKING ABOUT NEW STORIES?

Yes, there are so many women who would make fantastic novels – but my next novel will be back at the Tudor court, I'm writing about Jane Boleyn.

IN COMPOSING THIS BOOK, WHAT STORIES SURPRISED YOU THE MOST?

Oh so many! That women had equal pay 1349 after the Black Death, and lost it again as employers and landlords deliberately forced women's pay down. That there was a higher rate of rape conviction in Elizabethan England with no police force, or forensic science than we have today. Elizabethan judges convicted about 20% of the rapists

brought to court – we convict fewer than 2%. But probably – if I can only pick one – it's that women's 'nature' has been defined by men for

centuries and this ever-changing imaginary label limits expectations on women, and demands that women live up to an impossible standard, or live with a sense of failure or rebellion.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SORT OF WRITING ROUTINE, OR ADVICE YOU CAN SHARE WITH OUR READERS?

I write for pleasure and I don't have much of a routine. I always write something every day and when I am working on a novel it will be a substantial number of words daily – about 3,000. But writing is such a joy to me that I rarely have to schedule time to do it. I just assume that I will write, and I do. It was different when my children were young and I would squeeze writing into their school time, but now that they are grown up and left home my time is my own and I spend it writing. ^{PB}

Twitchen, Twistin, and Scream



by Catherine Olver

After Eugene Field's
'Wynken, Blynken, and Nod'
<https://poets.org/poem/wynken-blynken-and-nod>

Twitchen, Twistin, and Scream-in-the-Dark
Shot off a cliff down a flume:
Shot through a torrent of sewers and sharks
Into a jellyfish bloom.
“Go back. Go home. There’s nothing you wish,”
The old moon warned as he set.
“But we’ve come to fish for the herring-fish
Whose beauty we cannot forget.
We’ve ropes of hope for a net,”
Said Twitchen,
Twistin,
And Scream.

The mad moon laughed and sang a dirge,
As they tossed in the gathering gloom;
A hurricane made the ocean surge,
Sucked up the jellyfish bloom:
Around, all around flew the jellyfish:
Their stings made a terrible net.
“You emptied the seas of herring-fish—
There’s only us to get!”
They cried as they tightened that terrible net
Round Twitchen,
Twistin,
And Scream.

They thrashed and splashed to escape that doom;
They dived—and falling—falling—
They sank to the sea-bed’s bone-white tomb,
Bombed by fishers trawling:
No homes, no schools for codlings and bream
To learn their alphabet;
Just miles of the Ocean’s broken dream,
Its wavering silhouette;
They couldn’t breathe, they were so upset:
Twitchen,
Twistin,
And Scream.

Twitchen and Twistin are little legs shaking,
And Scream is a gasping throat,
And the creaking bed in which you’re waking,
The wreck of their rickety boat;
Where are you now? Was it a dream?
Should you take a deep breath and forget?
Behind your eyes the jellyfish gleam
And the covers are heavy and wet
Where the empty waves tossed their boat in sweat:
Twitchen,
Twistin,
And Scream.

CATHERINE OLVER

Catherine writes for a greener future and a proud LGBTQIA+ present. Telling stories in verse, she sails between folk tales, fantasy and science fiction to imagine humans and nature in other times. She very much hopes to avoid the future explored in this poem! You can help protect ocean life endangered by industrial overfishing and warming seas by eating mussels, not fish, with your chips, and signing [this petition](#) to protect at least 30% of the oceans by 2030.

@thewordwoods (Insta & Bluesky)
www.catherineolver.co.uk



★ Book Teen/YA ★ ★ Review Corner ★



RED FLAGS

BY SOPHIE JO

REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND

Red Flags is a romcom reminiscent of *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* meets *10 Things I Hate About You*, complete with gorgeous guy protagonist Cam and loveable, feminist female lead Poppy – who KNOWS her romcom stories like it's nobody's business!

When Poppy is challenged by her friends to date a guy for two months, and Cam is similarly challenged *not* to break up with the next girl he dates, the pair are in for a long-haul – with Poppy trying her hardest not to compare him to her Dream Man.

Self-aware and down-to-earth relatable, *Red Flags* is a romcom that heralds all the best tropes of the genre with a contemporary flair. Exploring different family relationships (that don't hold back) and two characters that make you root for them despite their abundant flaws, Sophie Jo brings us another brilliant book that shows teens what healthy love *really* looks like.

Paired with friendships that reinforce figuring out the kind of love you deserve, *Red Flags* is a must-read for all romcom fans!

Red Flags is out now, published by Scholastic

THE WYCHERLEYS

BY ANNALIESE AVERY

REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND

The Wycherleys is a spectacle of a book, with vibes of *Bridgerton* meets magical society, bringing a Regency era ballroom drama to a YA audience. It follows Aurelia Wycherley, a compelling seventeen-year-old entering her debutante season as a witch, revealing a fun and interesting take on the genre.

The magic and world-building are lovingly crafted, interwoven within the historical setting of 1800s London which feels effortless to place yourself in, alongside a plot full of intrigue which builds as Aurelia discovers more secrets about her family and society.

At risk of losing her magic forever, she ends up forming an unlikely pact with Jules, a playful, unserious type, her polar-opposite and an enemy of the Wycherley family.

Their dynamic is a joy to read, their witty, scathing banter a perfect set up for them to fall hard for each other as the season ramps up. We can't wait to step into the magical world of *The Wycherleys* in the next book!

For fans of Lex Croucher, *Twin Crowns*, and *Sixteen Souls*.

The Wycherleys is out now, published by Simon & Schuster



LIVE

BY LUKE PALMER

REVIEW BY STEVE BLACKMAN

TWITTER: @66BLACKMAN

The YA shelves of bookshops are filled with stories about bands, about singers and songs, about their struggles and successes. At some point, all those stories mention the music, but I'm prepared to bet none of them are composed of music as completely as *Live*, the latest novel from Luke Palmer. *Live* has music in its DNA, music in every scene, music running through its core like a braided guitar cable.

The story follows George, a guitarist and the songwriting heart of his band, along with his best friend Owen, narcissistic vocalist Sam and problematic Fin. They can cope with creative competition from anyone – including talented new girl Beth, and shy vocalist Tadgh – but when tragedy strikes, it's as hard to return to the music as it is to return to normal life.

Live's characters are tangible, three-dimensional, and their interactions pop like bubblegum, but it does not shy away from drama, and when it comes, it reverberates with the gut-thumping beat of metal. There are ballads too, gentle harmonies that pluck the heartstrings and draw out tears. There's even a songbook, filled with the lyrics of the story's songs, plus a playlist.

In *Live*, Palmer skilfully weaves themes of friendship, love, loss, grief and betrayal. Those themes are so evocative of teenage life, they're more like memories, and at all times we're right there with the characters – invited into their inner lives as much as their home and school lives. There's doubt, love, confusion, betrayal; there's catastrophe so enormous and abrupt I threw down the book. Yet through it all, *Live* is filled with laughter, and the deep connections that only come with true friendship. Few writers capture real life this honestly.

Like a favourite album, this book made me feel things, all the way through – important things, different things. It comes together like a perfect mixtape. It feels like a symphony.

Live is out now and published by Firefly Press

Interviews with both Shelby and Kenneth are on our blog now! *New mini-reviews*

THE SHADOW BRIDE

BY SHELBY MAHURIN

MINI REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND

After the cliffhanger ending of the previous book, *The Scarlet Veil*, we couldn't wait to find out what the future had in store for Célie and Michal in this epic finale, and it did not disappoint. *The Shadow Bride* has so many twists and turns, your neck may ache (from whiplash, not vampire bites – although there are also plenty of those!), and we devoured every page! If you love your vampire tales gothic, gory, romantic and with some fantastic worldbuilding, this one's for you!

Recommended for older readers due to mature content.

The Shadow Bride is published by Electric Monkey and out now.



BEST OF ALL WORLDS

BY KENNETH OPPEL

MINI REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND

Best Of All Worlds is a thought-provoking sci-fi dystopia with an ending you'll never see coming.

Reluctantly, Xavier goes to the cabin by the lake for a holiday with his dad and pregnant stepmother – it's only for a few days after all. But when he wakes up, they are no longer by the lake. It's like the cabin has been lifted and moved to a completely new location. And, when the family explore further, they find they are under a dome, a dome they can't escape from.

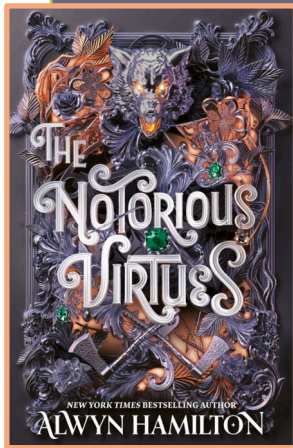
The prose sparse, suspenseful, and beautifully written, you'll be thinking about this one long after turning the final page.

Out now from Guppy Books

THE NOTORIOUS VIRTUES

BY ALWYN HAMILTON

REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND



The Notorious Virtues is the first in an addictive YA fantasy thriller duology where no one can be trusted. Part magical fantasy, part murder mystery, part tournament, this book is bursting with excitement, from fairy tales, family drama, romance and more!

When Nora's mother, a powerful heiress, is found murdered, the family's money and magic is no longer guaranteed and Nora has to compete against her cousins in the Veritaz trials to determine who is the rightful heir, a dangerous tournament based on virtues.

Things get even more complicated when Lotte, a cousin they didn't even know existed, arrives and that's not to mention the civil unrest, family betrayals and a young investigative reporter trying to get his big break. All of these threads are beautifully woven together in a lavish world full of glitzy parties, deadly trials, and impossible choices.

The Notorious Virtues has some wonderful world building, a unique magic system and a brilliant cast featuring some excellent relationships between the characters – Nora and Lotte's particularly stand out – but we especially loved the banter between Nora and journalist, August.

You'll want to keep turning the page even when there's none left to turn. Book two can't come soon enough!

The Notorious Virtues is published by Faber & Faber and is out now

You can read an interview with Alwyn on our blog: www.paperboundmag.com

THE HIVE

BY ANNA FEBRUARY

REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND

The Hive is a gripping, highly original teen/YA dystopia with a murder mystery twist.

Young bodyguard Feldspar awaits execution. Instead of dying when her charge was murdered, as is expected, she is somehow still alive and now the sole suspect in her charge's death. Feldspar's only hope is Niko, who has been sent to investigate how she managed to kill her charge and survive.

With just days to prove her innocence, and bodies mounting up, they are in a race against time. But are they ready for what they'll discover? Are they ready to question everything they've ever known...?

The Hive hooks you from the opening chapter and you could easily read this in one sitting. It features a unique dystopian colony based on the society of bees, with a dangerous monarchy and plenty of suspects that leave you wondering who you can really trust. The mystery keeps you guessing and the world building keeps you thinking, with surprising twists and characters to really root for. A refreshingly original take on both the dystopian and thriller genres.

The Hive is published by Chicken House and out now.



THE VULPINE

BY POLLY CROSBY

REVIEW BY LAURA JONES

Following her stunning YA debut, *This Tale is Forbidden*, Polly Crosby is back with another equally chilling exploration of the darker side of humanity. A dystopian fantasy, set in a world not too dissimilar from our own, *The Vulpine* explores a society where illness, disability and difference have been outlawed. Success is measured by genetic perfection with those deemed 'imperfect' consigned to a life within a government-owned facility, separated from their families forever.

Drawn to the mythical tales of The Vulpine, a group of monstrous creatures that snatch babies from their beds in the middle of the night, Ora's fears about her own 'imperfect' status are confirmed when she is betrayed by someone in her community and her parents are forced to confirm she has a genetic illness affecting her lungs. In a bid to seek answers and life-saving medication, Ora leaves behind everything she knows, and loves, to embark on a journey of unknown strength and discovery.

Successfully blending the patriarchal dictatorship of *The Handmaid's Tale* with the resilience and determination of Katniss Everdeen (*The Hunger Games*), Crosby has created another dystopian masterpiece, giving a voice to a cast of unexpected, but essential, heroes. A lesson in resilience and acceptance, Crosby's personal connection to Ora serves to make this story even more important.

Note: This book contains references to violence and explores themes of eugenics and discrimination.

The Vulpine is published by Scholastic and out now

You can read an interview with Polly on our blog: www.paperboundmag.com



JUDE

BY ELIN HERON

REVIEW BY PAPERBOUND

Wrapped in folklore, this book tells 15-year-old Nick's story of how he meets Jude, a boy full of mystery who has just moved to the village, staying in a horse-drawn caravan with his dad.

Jude is full of wild tales and tells stories effortlessly, like they've always been stored inside him. But when a girl named Jemma goes missing, some fingers start pointing towards Jude and his dad.

With Nick's dad a policeman, and the girl's disappearance getting more serious, Nick's parents urge him not to see Jude anymore, but he can't help seeking him out – especially when he makes Nick feel things he never has before.

Determined to figure out what's happened to Jemma when they discover this isn't the first time children have gone missing in the village, Nick and Jude delve into the case on their own, encountering magic and elements of folklore that the author weaves through the story with ease.

Jude is a beautiful story from the inside out that opens up your world, both as a reader and for Nick and Jude as their connection to each other grows, and the boys figure out the truth.

Jude is published by Lucent Dreaming and out now





R.M. GRAY

WE CHATTED TO YA AUTHOR R.M. GRAY ON HER FANTASY DEBUT, *NIGHTWEAVER*, AND WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO CREATE THIS TANTALISING WORLD.



YOUR NOVEL, *NIGHTWEAVER*, HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN MEETS SARAH J. MAAS'S *THRONE OF GLASS*. CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE IT?

Nightweaver follows seventeen-year-old pirate, Aster Oberon, who must team up with her enemy to avenge her brother's death. I'm a huge fan of *Pirates of the Caribbean*—specifically the supernatural elements that are so seamlessly woven into the plot. With *Nightweaver*, I wanted to create a world that combines pirate legends with vampire lore, elemental magic, moody manor houses, and traditional fantasy elements like unicorns and pixies.

THE MAIN CHARACTER IN THIS BOOK, ASTER, IS BOLD AND DETERMINED, CARRYING US EFFORTLESSLY THROUGH THIS ADVENTURE – AND SHE IS A WONDERFUL WINDOW INTO THIS EXPANSIVE FANTASY WORLD. WHAT WAS IT LIKE

WRITING HER AND FINDING HER VOICE?

Oh, wow! Thank you. Aster is so fun to write, and I love getting into her head. She has lived this very sheltered, dangerous life, and a lot of her internal conflict is the result of growing up. She feels very deeply, and at the core of her take-charge pirate-persona is the idea that being brave and strong doesn't mean you can't be vulnerable, too. So, I wanted to stay true to her feelings as a seventeen-year-old that's navigating grief, dealing with change, and choosing who she wants to be.

NIGHTWEAVER WAS ORIGINALLY SELF-PUBLISHED IN 2023 BUT IS NOW BEING TRADITIONALLY PUBLISHED BY HBG IN THE US AND PENGUIN IN THE UK. IS THERE ANYTHING THAT'S SURPRISED YOU ABOUT YOUR SECOND JOURNEY TO PUBLICATION?

The people! The bookish community never

ceases to amaze me, and they've been so incredibly kind to me throughout the publication process. I'm an introvert, and writing a book can be a lonely endeavour, but the readers (and my incredible teams at HBG and Penguin) have welcomed me with open arms. I couldn't be more grateful for all the friendships I've made, and meeting everyone at signings and festivals is truly one of my favourite parts of what I get to do.

ASTER'S BOND WITH HER FAMILY WAS LOVELY TO READ, AND THE MOMENTS WITH HER MOTHER, FATHER, AND SIBLINGS WERE VERY TOUCHING IN A GENRE THAT LIKES TO HAVE ABSENT PARENTS. DID YOU ENJOY WRITING THEM TOO? DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE SECONDARY CHARACTER?

Yes, and yes! I come from a big family, so there are parts of the Oberon family that are based on my own my siblings and the bond we share. However, my favourite secondary character would have to be Will's younger brother, Henry. Don't tell my siblings!

WILL IS THE CHARMING LOVE INTEREST THAT SUPPORTS ASTER IN HER QUEST TO DISCOVER THE SECRETS BEHIND HER BROTHER'S DEATH, BUT HE IS ALSO A NIGHTWEAVER. IF YOU WERE IN ASTER'S SHOES, WOULD YOU TRUST HIM?

I adore Will, but I wouldn't trust anyone in the world of *Nightweaver*!

NIGHTWEAVER ENDS ON A THRILLING NOTE READY FOR THE SEQUEL, *STARCHASER*. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN FINDING THE PROCESS OF EXPANDING THIS WORLD?

Liberating! In a lot of ways, having the foundation of *Nightweaver* gives me freedom to explore other aspects of the world in *Starchaser*, including some new characters that I'm so excited for everyone to meet. In *Nightweaver*, Aster's worldview is extremely limited having spent her entire life at sea, and she's only caught a glimpse of life on land, so it's been a real treat to expand her horizons and dig deeper into the truth—and lies—that she believes about her world.



WHAT ELSE DO YOU LIKE TO WRITE WHEN YOU'RE NOT EXPLORING THIS SETTING?

I spent years working on a story that I like to describe as *Treasure Planet* meets *Anastasia*, set in a fantastical galaxy that I would pack up and move to in a heartbeat. I pop over to that manuscript whenever I need a break from "work", and I'm sure you won't be surprised to know there are pirates in that world as well. What can I say, I like what I like, and what I like happens to be swashbuckling adventure. **PB**

NIGHTWEAVER IS PUBLISHED BY PENGUIN AND OUT NOW



R.M. GRAY

R.M. (Rebekah) Gray lives in Texas with her husband and two giant dogs, where she enjoys writing stories about pirates, magic, mystery, and all things fantastical. A self-proclaimed expert at whistling and a dedicated collector of lightsabers, she spends her days drinking too much Earl Grey tea, rewatching old cartoons, and thinking up new ways to break readers' hearts.

BOTTLING IT UP

by Sue Lancaster

SUE LANCASTER

Sue Lancaster is a children's author living in south west London with her husband and two girls. She has a couple of rhyming picture books published through small presses and has children's poems featured in a number of kidlit magazines.

Instagram: @suelancaster_author Twitter/X: @WritesSue



If I could bottle up a feeling and secure the lid in place,
I'd save the way I feel inside when sunshine warms my face;

Waking up on Christmas Day – that feeling is the best;
Or placing down my pencil when I know I've aced a test;

The final bell for summer; or playing in the snow;
An ice-cold drink in mid-July; the taste of cookie dough.

I'd save the rare euphoria of scoring for my team;
Store lazy Sunday mornings; preserve paddling in a stream.

I'd keep the bottles on a shelf all neatly in a row,
And reach for them on dreary days when I am feeling low.

Instead, I'm told I bottle up the feelings that are bad,
And keep them deep inside of me, which makes me really sad.
They come unscrewed at nighttime when I'm lying in my bed,
The bottles overflow with troubled thoughts that fill my head.

Like when a bully picks on me; or mum and dad fall out;
The butterflies before a test; or when my teacher shouts;
Being in detention; feeling sick with hunger pain;
The gut punch that I get when I'm the last one picked again.

If only I could keep *these* bottled feelings on display,
'Cause then I'd smash the glass and let my worries float away.



Writing Weighty Subjects for Children

BY ANNA GOODALL
AUTHOR OF THE
MAGGIE BLUE TRILOGY



JOIN ANNA GOODALL AS SHE SHARES HOW SHE TACKLES DIFFICULT SUBJECTS IN HER OWN BOOKS WHEN IT COMES TO WRITING FOR CHILDREN.



I hope this doesn't sound disingenuous, or worse, irresponsible, but when I wrote the *Maggie Blue* trilogy, I didn't consider this issue at all.

Because, after all, what are 'weighty subjects'? People in your immediate family struggling, divorce or financial disruption, depression, emotional pain, cruelty, self-hatred, struggling to fit in, loneliness, embarrassment, mental-health problems, disability....

Do kids know about this stuff? It's like asking if they are human and alive. Of course, they may think about it in different ways, they may not intellectually be completely conscious of it, and ideally, they may not have to deal with any of these issues directly. But the reality is that most kids do know something about these things, however much we long to protect them from any hurt or pain.

And don't get me wrong, there is always a place for escapism in children's literature (and in all literature and culture in general). I love those idyllic stories where essentially there are no real problems, like *The Secret Seven* or *The Famous Five*, utterly dated in

many ways, but this reassuring kind of outdoorsy England where the kids always win through. Or funny books, like the *Grimwood* series, or Terry Pratchett, or Sue Townsend's *Adrian Mole* books.

But what are the other kinds of books people remember from their childhood? Judy Blume and her incredible depictions of teenage angst, *Goodnight Mr Tom*, Alan Garner's books – I mean *The Owl Service*, what was going on there? Whatever it was, it was seriously unsettling. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* – a tale of real poverty and isolation, and a reclusive megalomaniac who disposes of despicable children and their selfish awful parents... *Catcher in the Rye*... the best coming-of-age novel and one that addresses the struggles of adolescence, alienation and mental health with wit and pathos.



Literature is a way to approach, be with, laugh at or maybe even process difficult emotions and different perspectives on those emotions. Something that powers most of Dahl's books is rage, rage at the powerlessness of his child protagonist at the hands of abusive adults... After all, not having power is something all kids can relate to.

When dealing with emotional issues, the thing that damages is secrecy, denial and lies – because that can only end in the need to hide and from that comes shame. And shame can be passed on almost by osmosis, without ever having a conversation about anything... without any words at all. To me, then, rather than avoidance of difficult subjects, the most important ingredients in children's books are hope and the ability to take action; if need be, to reject the world as the adults would have it and find new ways to live. Also, some humour helps... because humour gives perspective and maybe also hope, too.

And whilst I am not totally anti the billboard-style propaganda that children receive now about 'Just be you!' and 'Your imperfections are what make you perfect!' there is something sinister about these messages, too; sinister because they are so simplistic and unrealistic. As if we all know what you/we/I even is... And we can just get on being 'ourselves' once we've heard the uplifting message.

Great children's literature helps readers to go far beyond that to a more interesting and accepting place. Life can be hard, and it can be painful, adults do let you down, 'being you' is not always that great or possible or even clear. But life can also be beautiful, and it is worth fighting for, and you can find a different way to live. Ultimately, children's books are hopeful. And I think the books from our childhood that really mean the most to us, are the ones that deliver that powerful message of hope and change, without avoiding the realities of the world in which we all live. **PB**

Maggie Blue and the Lost Child
by Anna Goodall
is available now and
published by Guppy Books



ANNA GOODALL

Anna Goodall was born in London into a family of musicians. But amidst all the instruments and piles of music, there were also an awful lot of books. Her granny used to read to her every night, and family folklore has it that she loved to write little notes to herself before she could read properly. (The content of these notes is still unknown, but we strongly suspect that they contained gibberish.)

Even so, writing has always been a way for Anna to connect with herself and the world, and, alongside reading, the most important thing in her life.

Anna Goodall's first book *Maggie Blue and the Dark World*, was shortlisted for the Costa Children's Book Award 2021 and nominated for the Carnegie Medal. She lives in London with her family and a dog called Winnie.

THE Island OF Trapped Souls

by Grace Kelley

The ice-cold water makes my body scream.

‘Out to the buoy and back. Ten times,’ Granny shouts from the pier.

Mam stands behind her, arms crossed, pulling that face she always pulls when she’s worried.

‘G’wan, Claire, you’re doing grand,’ Granny bellows.

Granny’s been teaching me to swim since I was four – since Dad died. He sailed into a storm and never returned. They say it’s bad luck for fishermen to know how to swim. Such stupidity, Granny says.

Back home, stepping out of a hot shower, I hear muffled voices in the kitchen.

‘It’s our only chance. I might not be here next time. She’s ready.’

Granny’s voice is a strained whisper.

‘She’s only fifteen,’ Mam replies through gritted teeth. ‘We don’t even know if it’ll work—’

‘I know it will.’

‘What’s going on?’

They both jump and turn to face me.

‘Claire. Bed.’ Mam’s face is flushed.

‘No. We tell her now.’

Granny sits me down despite Mam’s protests.

‘It’s your father... He’s alive, but he’s trapped.’ Granny places a tattered, stained map of the coast on the table. ‘You and I are going to get him back.’

A hundred questions spiral inside my head.

‘The Island of Trapped Souls only appears one day every seven years,’ Granny continues, ‘and only to a few family bloodlines: mine, which means you and your dad. Your mam can’t come.’

‘I could try...’

‘And ruin our one chance? No, you wait here.’

One question bursts out of my mouth. ‘When do we leave?’

‘First thing tomorrow,’ Granny says.

The next morning, before dawn, Granny wakes me up. Mam is still fast asleep in her bed.

‘She had a bit of help.’ Granny winks, pointing to one of her many jars of herbs.

In Granny’s rusty fishing trawler, we chug out of the harbour, the rising sun behind us lights our path, a shimmering indigo horizon ahead.

Hours pass. The day is clear.

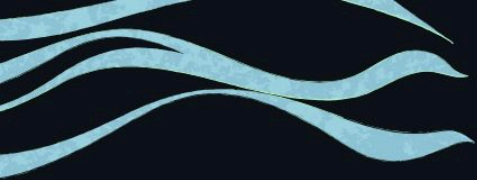
‘This isn’t right,’ Granny says. ‘There’s no fog.’

‘Isn’t that a good thing?’ My eyes dart between the map and the open ocean.

‘The fog is the gateway to the island. Without it we can’t go through it to the other side.’

I hear a flick of water, then a splash across my face. I look over the side of the boat. Big black eyes meet mine. A seal.

‘Hello.’ I give a little wave.



She dives and splashes. Another seal pops its wet nose out of the water. They stare at me and nod their heads to their left.

‘Granny, look, seals!’

Granny races across to the side of the boat. ‘About time, you two, I think we’re lost.’

‘Granny...’ I laugh and roll my eyes, but she’s quick to shush me. The seals nod again to their left.

‘Thanks! Lead on.’ Granny runs to the helm.

My mouth falls open but no words come out. The seals swim ahead, splashing, beckoning. Granny turns the trawler in their direction and we sail on. I sit at the back of the boat noting our direction on the map.

Then the engine chugs to a halt. A damp silence descends. My skin tingles. I look out in search of the seals but I can barely see to the other end of the boat.

The fog.

It seeps over the sides of the boat, swirling around my legs. The sun has disappeared. Everything is grey, cold, and quiet. I fold the map into my pocket.

‘Granny?’

‘Quiet. Don’t let any part of you lean over the side of the boat.’ Her voice calm but strained.

A current drags us through the fog, further away from where we came – from sunshine, the seals, home.

Then I hear it. Cries, no, wails coming from the black water.

‘The Merrows,’ Granny whispers. ‘Sea people.’

I turn to look over the edge of the boat. The call of the Merrows summons me to look deep into the sea.

‘Away from the edge, Claire.’ Granny grabs my right shoulder.

My left arm is suddenly cold and wet. I feel a tug. A slimy grey hand tightens its long bony fingers around my wrist. I punch and flail, trying to

loosen the creature’s grip. A dull chop is followed by a screech. The hand falls to the ground. Black blood swirls across the floor. Granny holds an axe above me, the blade smeared with the black liquid.

Before I can thank her, we see it, a dark shadow rising out of the water. The island.

Our boat is pulled ever closer to its shore.

My eyes try to pierce through the fog.

Is that...? Yes, the silhouette of a man, standing on the rocks by the shore.

Dad. It’s him. He’s ... alive.

‘James?’ Granny hollers.

He waves. The rest of his body is still, firmly grounded.

‘Dad, we’re coming.’

The boat draws up to the rocks. It’s him. He looks older, hairier. But it’s him. Granny throws him a rope, which he catches and loops around a pillar-like rock.

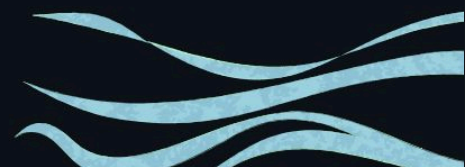
‘Stay in the boat, Claire. One person must remain in the boat at all times – a tether to our world.’

The urge to throw myself into his arms sets my heart galloping. But my feet know to stay.

The boat bumps up against the rocks. Dad puts out his hand and Granny grabs hold. He hoists Granny to the rocks and they embrace. She looks so small wrapped in his sinewy arms, scarred and sunburnt.

Granny whispers something in his ear. She holds his face in her hands and wipes away a tear before it disappears into his black beard. She kisses his forehead before pressing his nose to hers.

She steps aside, letting Dad jump into the boat. Before he can speak I leap towards him, wrapping my arms around him, my head to his chest, inhaling him. Salt and sweat.



The rope thuds landing at my feet. I look to Granny who is still on the rocks. She kicks the boat away.

'Last part of the plan, my love: a soul for a soul. It's the island's law.'

'Granny, no...'

Dad's firm hands grasp my shoulders.

'I'll come back for you!' The boat carries us away. 'I promise.' I feel the map in my pocket.

The boat is dragged away by the unnatural currents.

The fog rolls in, devouring Granny and the island. PB

GRACE KELLEY

Grace Kelley is a writer and editor based in Ireland, and holds an M.Phil in Children's Literature from Trinity College Dublin. She is currently a mentee at the Golden Egg Academy with her YA novel. She is one of the co-founders and co-editors of Paper Lanterns teen & YA literary journal, and is a recipient of the Arts Council Ireland's Agility Award.

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PAPERBOUND MAGAZINE
ALSO HAS A BLOG WITH
EVEN MORE BOOKISH CONTENT?



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MEGAN FREEMAN



A BETTER NIGHTMARE IS
PUBLISHED BY
CHICKEN HOUSE
AND OUT NOW

YA AUTHOR MEGAN FREEMAN CHATS TO US ABOUT HOW SHE
WROTE HER ADDICTIVE DARK FANTASY DEBUT, FULL OF
POWER, ISOLATION AND THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM ...

COULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE
INSPIRATION BEHIND YOUR NOVEL, A BETTER
NIGHTMARE?

A Better Nightmare is a dark take on the superhero trope. I was watching a Marvel movie one day with my sister and it was during one of those huge fight scenes, where half of the city seemed to go up in flames, that I suddenly thought to myself – the real world would never allow this. So from there I thought, OK, what would really happen if young people had superpowers or magical abilities? How would society treat them? As you'll find out if you read *A Better Nightmare*, the answer to this, is not very well at all.

THE STUDENTS AT WILDSMOOR ALL HAVE
DIFFERENT POWERS. IF YOU HAD A POWER LIKE
THE CHILDREN WITH THE GRIMM, WHAT WOULD
IT BE, AND WHY?

Oooh, so hard to choose. I think I would

like to be able to freeze time and get up to lots of mischief. Either that or flight, which I appreciate is an obvious answer, but I've always wanted to see the world from a bird's perspective.

IN THE NOVEL, WILDSMOOR SCHOOL IS SET
WITHIN A DESOLATE MOORLAND. DID YOU VISIT
ANYWHERE THAT INSPIRED THIS LOCATION IN
PARTICULAR?

“ I SUDDENLY THOUGHT TO MYSELF
THE REAL WORLD WOULD NEVER
ALLOW THIS ”

Yes, Dartmoor is the inspiration behind much of the setting. Dartmoor Prison, although now inactive, was said to be particularly well suited to high security prisoners as the surrounding moorland made it that much harder to escape. This was the jumping off point for Wildsmoor Facility, and I really wanted to inject that feeling of isolation and seclusion into the characters' narratives.

CAN YOU TELL US WHAT YOUR WRITING
PROCESS IS LIKE? DO YOU USUALLY START
WRITING AND SEE WHERE IT TAKES YOU, OR DO

YOU PLAN OUT THE WHOLE STORY FROM THE
BEGINNING?

Plotter or pantser? I used to 'fly by the seat of my pants' as they call it, just writing and seeing where it took me. And there is a gorgeous freedom to doing this, but the downside is that it's very easy to write yourself into a corner or end up with plot holes. These days, I do a bit of both. I usually let the first few chapters flow as they wish to allow the characters and narrative to take shape, but then I go away and write a clear plan for the rest of the novel. I find this system works very well for me.

“ I USUALLY LET THE FIRST FEW
CHAPTERS FLOW ... THEN I GO
AWAY AND WRITE A CLEAR PLAN ”

THE ENDING OF THE NOVEL (NO SPOILERS!)
IS QUITE AMBIGUOUS. DID YOU EVER INTEND
FOR EMILY AND THE OTHER CHILDREN TO
HAVE A DIFFERENT ENDING?

Yes, I did. Not sure how much more I should say on this but when I first wrote *A Better Nightmare* the ending was a fair bit happier...

CAN YOU TELL US WHAT YOUR ROUTE TO
PUBLICATION WAS LIKE?

I think my route was quite standard although a long, hard slog! I started seriously writing around ten years ago and I've got lots of half-finished manuscripts tucked away on old hard drives, notebooks, and forgotten folders on old laptops. I took part in the Faber 'Write A Novel' course in 2021, finally managed to finish a novel, and from this found my agent, Elizabeth, who read an extract of *A Better Nightmare* in the Faber Anthology. From there *A Better*

Nightmare found its home with Chicken House in the UK and has also been published in the US and Italy.

THE TITLE FOR THIS BOOK IS A GREAT ONE!
DID YOU EVER HAVE ANY DIFFERENT TITLES
IN MIND BEFORE LANDING ON THIS ONE?

Yes! Originally the book was called 'Emily Emerson has got The Grimm'. It was a wrench to let go of this but it's pretty standard for book titles to change during the publication process. Another title that was suggested was 'The Monster I Made' which I also liked although perhaps didn't quite fit the book. 🐔

MEGAN'S WRITING PROMPT

Emily ends up in Wildsmoor Facility after her nightmares come to life and attack her older sister, injuring her.

If you had the Grimm, what would your ability be? And how would your ability result in you being sent to a facility?

Write this like a miniature story, using the extract below:

'I DID A BAD THING, THAT'S HOW I ENDED UP
HERE...'

MEGAN FREEMAN

Megan Freeman is an author of fantasy and all things a bit magical. She lives in the far west of Cornwall with her husband and toddler with the moorland on one side and the ocean on the other. When she's not writing, she can be found surfing, swimming, or hiking along the Southwest coast path.

We STAY OUT late

by Imogen Hartland



IMOGEN HARTLAND

Imogen Hartland is an aspiring picture book author/illustrator. Her writing and illustrations have appeared in several anthologies and children's literature magazines (including previous editions of PaperBound Magazine!). Imogen lives and works in Dharawal country in Sydney, Australia, near some rock pools and the bush, and her favourite hours are twilight hours.

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Instagram: @i.hearts.arts.and.crafts



What colour is the dark?

**I ask you
and you furrow your brow
(crimson crinkles on peach).**

Black, of course! You laugh.

**We saunter across the lawn,
shadow-arms swinging
(dancing forest green on grass)**

**then we sit on the rock
as the sun
goes down
and the universe comes out of hiding
(shy on lilac; bold on midnight blue).**

*I don't know,
not for sure.*

**I catch the whites of your eyes
(silver like the moon)
and I wonder
whether
you can see in the dark.**





SASHA PEYTON SMITH

YA FANTASY AUTHOR SASHA PEYTON SMITH CAUGHT UP WITH PAPERBOUND TO CHAT ABOUT HER NEW ROMANTASY: **THE ROSE BARGAIN.**



COULD YOU INTRODUCE OUR READERS TO YOUR NEW NOVEL, *THE ROSE BARGAIN*?

The Rose Bargain is a young adult historical fantasy novel about an alternate history England, where the queen is an immortal faerie who tricked her way onto the throne during the War of the Roses. Now 1848, the queen has been ruling for four-hundred years and allows each of her citizens to make a faerie bargain with her. The 18-year-old debutante Lady Ivy Benton is expected to bargain for something that will help her find a husband (a more beautiful face in exchange for a memory, or a talent for piano in exchange for a toe, for example), but the queen shocks London high society by announcing this is the season her son, the prince, will choose a bride. Ivy is the first to enter the competition for his hand, but the prince's human step-brother comes to her with a deal—he'll help make her

his brother's dream girl if she helps him take down the queen and end her brutal bargains once and for all.

THIS IS SUCH A DELICIOUS FAERY BOOK STEEPED IN MAGICAL FOLKLORE. HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO WRITE A BOOK SET IN THIS KIND OF WORLD? AND WAS IT FUN WRITING ABOUT PLACES WE ALREADY KNOW, YET MORPHING THEM WITH FANTASY ELEMENTS?

My two great loves growing up were history and fantasy novels, so I love getting to combine them in my writing. Everything I write, I write for my sixteen-year-old self. My first series, *The Witch Haven*, was about a school for witches in 1911 New York. Similarly, *The Rose Bargain* combines fantastical elements in the real-world setting of Victorian London. It's so fun as an author to get to examine real history through the lens of magic and fantasy. I always start my drafting process by asking myself questions like: "What

would be the same?" "What would be different?" and "How can I use fantasy and magic to enrich this already familiar world?"

YOU ARE BASED IN THE US, BUT THIS BOOK IS SET LARGELY IN LONDON, ALBEIT WITH A FAERY TWIST. DID YOU ALREADY KNOW THE SETTING WELL BEFORE WRITING, OR DID YOU HAVE TO DO LOTS OF RESEARCH WHEN IT CAME TO THE DETAILS?

The Rose Bargain was inspired, largely, by the hundreds of Regency and Victorian romance novels I read during the pandemic and a childhood obsession with Queen Victoria. I went into drafting knowing I wanted to channel this fantasy version of London in some way. I longed to write a tense moment in a carriage and pining across a crowded ballroom. I travelled to England quite a few times while writing this book and did research at Kensington Palace, the V&A, the British Museum, the Tower, and Buckingham Palace. It was a fun world-building puzzle because I was tied to everything that happened pre-1471 when the faerie queen arrived. So, there were a number of things I couldn't change - big things like the existence of parliament or little things like the Prince of Wales title. But everything that happened post-1471 would have been influenced by the faerie queen's rule, leading to this fun-house mirror version of England. I wanted it to feel familiar but fundamentally off.

THIS BOOK FEATURES THE BOND OF SISTERHOOD SO STRONGLY, AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IVY AND LYDIA BECOMES COMPLEX ONCE IT'S TINGED WITH FAERY MAGIC. DO YOU HAVE RELATIONSHIPS

FROM YOUR OWN LIFE THAT YOU DREW FROM WHEN CREATING THESE CHARACTERS?

Long before I even had the idea for *The Rose Bargain*, I knew I wanted to write a sister book. I'm the middle of two sisters, and the relationships I have with my sisters have always defined my life. Lydia and Ivy's relationship certainly isn't a mirror to the personal relationships I have with my own sisters, but I did want to explore the tangled mix of deep love, anger, loyalty, and resentment that can exist within sister relationships, especially during your teenage years. There's really no love like the love between sisters!

"I WAS INSPIRED BY A LOT OF OLD ENGLISH & SCOTTISH FAERY MYTHOLOGY."

WERE YOU INSPIRED BY ANY OTHER FAERY BOOKS BEFORE WRITING THIS ONE?

I was inspired by a lot of old English and Scottish fairy mythology that was passed down partially from my English grandmother, partially from a lot of terrifying old fairy tale books I read as a child, and this movie my family owned on VHS about the Cottingley fairies in 1917. I've always been fascinated by portrayals of fairies as tricky, malevolent, distinctly unhuman creatures.



PRINTABLE WRITING PROMPTS AND ACTIVITIES

This writing prompt is based on the gorgeous illustration 'Two for Joy' by Carmen Carreira below.

Using this as inspiration, write a short piece of writing. This could be based on the illustration itself, zooming in on the observed colours or setting; it could incorporate the rhyme the title has been taken from, or anything else you can think of.

Let your imagination lead the way!



Find out
more about
Carmen on
page 50

THE MORE WE READ THIS STORY, THE MORE WE FELL FOR EMMETT. WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO WRITE TWO BROTHERS SO DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER, AND DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE?

Emmett is a character of profound contradiction—he has such confidence in his rebellious plans and the way he approaches Ivy about them, but there's a part of him that's so broken and aching for someone to love him. Bram, in contrast, lives with his heart wide open to the world. He doesn't share Emmett's need for secrecy, nor does he understand the deep pain he's hiding. Bram loves the world and assumes the world loves him back. There's a line in the book that says together they're a complete set, Bram the sun, Emmett the moon. That dynamic—these boys who love each other so much but are such emotional opposites was a blast to write. And I try not to pick favorites, but I just can't resist a sad boy!

WHAT A TWIST ENDING! WE DID NOT SEE IT COMING. DID YOU PLAN THE BOOK TO END THIS WAY ALL ALONG, FROM THE FIRST DRAFT, OR DID THE STORY TAKE SHAPE AS YOU WROTE?

I outline my books pretty heavily before I begin writing, so I always knew the book was going to end this way. I actually set out to write a stand-alone novel, but the more I outlined, the more I realised it had to be two books—and I knew exactly where book one had to end (I'm sorry!!) My hope, when writing a twist ending, is it takes you by surprise on the first read, but upon a re-read the clues feel like they're screaming at you. I always have re-readability in mind! **PB**

SASHA'S WRITING PROMPT

Your character is awoken in the night by a song floating through their open window on a gentle breeze. The song is so beautiful, so unlike anything they've ever heard, they're powerless against its pull.

They follow the tune out of their bedroom, down the stairs, and into the night.

On the edge of the treeline, shadowed in the dark woods, they find the source. Who is it and what do they want?

SASHA PEYTON SMITH

Sasha Peyton Smith is the New York Times bestselling author for young adults including *The Witch Haven* and *The Rose Bargain*. Her work has been translated into more than a dozen languages worldwide. She lives in a 100-year-old house in the mountains of Utah, with her husband and (allegedly) two ghosts, though she has yet to see them.

The Rose Bargain is published by Electric Monkey and is available now.



PRINTABLE WRITING PROMPTS AND ACTIVITIES

Our cover illustrator, Stephanie Buosi, has also created this brilliant piece (opposite) entitled ‘Chimera Library’.

There are so many elements in this piece that would make a brilliant starting point for any story. We can't wait to read what you come up with!

If any of our writing prompts have inspired you, we'd love to see what you've come up with.

Send them to us at paperboundmagazine@outlook.com

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Dear New Pen Friend,

Hello? Hi! I hope you can read this, out there in the dark. My name is Height-of-Summer, and I'm on the other, brighter side of the world – in Spire, the capital of Everyday. From my window I can see solar sails billowing, carrying the city away from the sunset. I sometimes forget we're flying – soaring over arid desert, so close to the generous sun.

Isn't it cool that our schools linked us up? Teacher says we're supposed to tell each other about our own species. Did you know my people are scaly like reptiles? That we photosynthesise like plants? Dad says that you eat red meat, that you've got shaggy hairs and long fangs, like the yetis and vampires in horror books. I hope you aren't too depressed, trapped over there in night.

Did you know there are other planets where day and night are shorter? Where they pass so quickly you can't possibly outrun them on foot? In theory, every species living on those planets could survive both day and night. Can you imagine? I wonder, sometimes, what life would be like if we weren't always on the move, running from the frozen side of the world. Would we learn from your species if we lived together? Could we ever adapt to your way of life?

Tell me everything, friend. Write it down in blood.

*

Dear Height-of-Summer,

They call me Shun-the-Sun. It must be so bright where you are! How can you see your computer screen? We don't drink blood in Longnight – that's a myth. Just like I'm guessing you don't eat rocks or sacrifice your first-born children on bonfires. How weird is it that we can never meet? You'd freeze thousands of miles before you reached my city, which is called Slumber, by the way – it rolls on giant treads that grip the ice. When I think of heat, I get shivers – isn't that odd? My skin would burn if I were ever in daylight.

Sometimes, I think of our ancestors, who walked on the ground at the speed of the Dawnline, before the great moving cities were built. We evolved to be constantly in motion. Was it fear of the encroaching dawn that sent them forwards? Is that why the world is so busy? Why slowing down feels like death?

Write me quickly, sunbeam. I'll always be impatient.

*

Dear Shun-the-Sun,

What odd legends you have on the planet's dark side! I'm a first-born child; no one ever burned me. I agree – so frustrating we can't be in the same place. Thank sunlight for email and satellites! My dad says the dark stops being scary as soon as you find out what's in it. Is that how you think of bright light? Does it burn your eyes? Do you fear what you can't see? I'm a girl, by the way. Did I tell you that? You're a boy – I can tell. Boys are always so serious. "Slowing down feels like death." Be more hopeful, friend!

I always liked stories from the olden days of your people leaving letters in bottles in the snow. When the planet turned and the ice all melted, their messages flowed into the oceans, where we lizard-folk found them, washed up

on shore – our first signs that life existed beyond the setting sun. I think we learn more about ourselves when we talk to others. We'd probably learn loads if we could sit side by side.

If you won't write in blood then at least tell me secrets. What's something you've never told anyone?

*

Dear Height-of-Summer,

Bright light, for me, is like losing control – I'm not scared of what's in it, I'm scared of it devouring me. Bright light erases things; it reduces comfort to ash. That's what we're taught, anyway: that the Dawnline is a sweep of destruction, burning up everything in its path. I will literally die if I cross it – you too! Finding out other beings existed past the dawn was hard for our people, because it meant admitting we aren't exceptional. Some other species could survive where we couldn't! When, thousands of years ago, my ancestors tamed snow lions into big cats of burden, they positioned themselves as gods. Then Everyday appears from shining light and says: Hi, so wrong! Guess what? You're mortals. Me? I think it's less the light that burns us and more the realisation that we've been missing something wonderful within it. There: I think you – and your species – are wonderful. That's something I've never told anyone before.

You're right; I am too serious. Here, let me tell you a joke. How many Longnights does it take to change a lightbulb? Before I tell you the answer, see if you can guess.

*

Dear Shun-the-Sun,

None. You just sit in the dark! I've heard that one before.

That was a really good secret you told. Like, just an exceptionally good secret. But also – woah there, buddy! You don't mess around! Two letters in and you're basically confessing your love for me. I'm the one who's supposed to be hot-headed!

Chill, though – (hah) – I think you're wonderful too. But I've already told loads of people here that, so it doesn't count as a secret. Here's mine instead: I sometimes close my eyes and keep them closed for a really long time. It's actually quite hard for us to do, our eyelids are vertical instead of horizontal like yours, and keeping them shut takes effort. But I sit in darkness (and a little pain) and I imagine myself on the other side of the world. I wonder what it would've been like to be born in Slumber instead of Spire, whether I would think differently, dream differently. Reach for different meaning.

I tried talking to Dad about you and he told me I was thinking dangerous thoughts. I didn't even know thoughts could be dangerous! He says there's no point trying to understand a polar opposite. But the poles are like big magnets, no? And for magnets, don't opposites attract?

Think dangerous thoughts with me, Shun-the-Sun. Open your eyes and dream.

*

Dear Height-of-Summer,

My eyes are nearly always open; we blink less than you, did you know that? While you fight to keep your eyes shut I stare at the horizon, thinking how many times over I'd have to cross it to get to where you are. Sometimes I'm so mad at my own species; we see in the dark, but we don't look for anything useful! Mum says I should use these letters to ask you about the litter your people leave strewn over the tundra, about why you mine copper until there's nothing left for us. It's odd, to me, that people can walk the same path but have completely opposed experiences; I mean Everyday and Longnight, but also me and Mum.



Do you feel that way about your dad? Do you wish he was different? That the world was different?

*

Dear Height-of-Summer,

Hey, are you there? Did I say something to upset you?
I'm so, so sorry if yes.

*

Dear Height-of-Summer,

I still think you're wonderful. I'm still thinking dangerous thoughts.

*

Dear Shun-the-Sun,

Sorry! Dad took away my laptop, but I stole it back. He thinks my thoughts are getting *too* dangerous. He read your last letter over my shoulder and started shouting that he'd not signed up for his daughter to be force-fed pro-vampire propaganda. He wanted this pen-pal programme to scare me off, convince me you're all blood-sucking weirdos and that I'm better off living in the brightest place on Earth. Now he's probably worried I'm going to freeze to death trying to travel to the dark side. He's so dramatic! Just another serious, serious boy.

It's sad though, isn't it? How people are so scared of difference. Opposite has the same root word as opposition; my Dad is so opposed to finding common ground! Sometimes I wonder what life would be like not in Everyday or Longnight but instead right on my sunrise, your Dawnline. Too cold for me and too warm for you. If my world is red and yours is deep blue, then what

colours fill in the margins? Yellows, oranges, purples and greens – a full-spectrum place where all the colours run.

Meet me there, at twilight; bring me something nice.

*

Dear Height-of-Summer,

I'm going to have to stop writing too – we're moving on to a new project at school, so they'll uninstall my mailing app. I don't have long, but I want you to know I've loved writing to you. Thank you for the dangerous thoughts. They can stop me writing, but they can't stop me dreaming of that place with all the colours. Imagine: you and I, living forever, in a place we were always told would kill us.

*

I'll never forget you, **Shun-the-Sun** – my serious pen friend from Longnight.

(Message delivery unsuccessful: destination mailbox disconnected.) 

JOE PEARSON

Joe Pearson is a British writer living in Paris who likes telling out-of-this-world stories with humour, hope and empathy. His writing has won New2theScene's short story prize and been longlisted for the Writers & Artists short story competition.

www.joepearsonwriter.com

Winner!

We loved Joe's short story so much that he's this issue's submission winner!

Congratulations, Joe! A little prize will be on its way to you soon.



MEET THE ILLUSTRATORS

Stephanie Buosi

Stephanie is a Canadian illustrator and freelance designer who loves drawing animals, fantasy creatures, and kids on adventures. She's an environmentalist, and in her spare time volunteers with Turtle Protectors in Toronto, assisting mama turtles throughout the nesting season.

When she's not doodling in her sketchbooks, you can find her outside among the trees, or escaping into new fantasy worlds with a good book and a cup of tea.

Stephanie illustrated the cover and a writing prompt in this issue

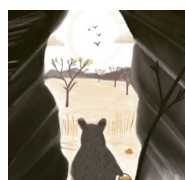
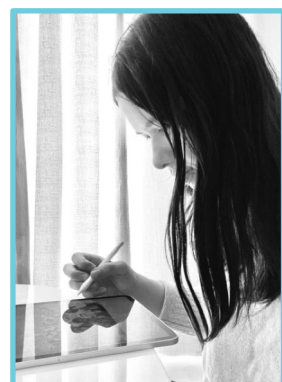
Check out more of her work at
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Shirley Shelby

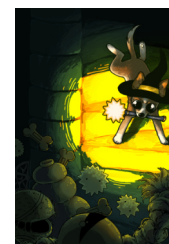
Shirley Shelby is a children's book illustrator and letterer. She usually works digitally these days using Photoshop or Procreate but also likes to hand draw her illustrations from time to time as well. She has taken several courses in illustration and design and loves to inspire others with her work. She especially loves illustrating animals and nature.

Shirley illustrated the letter from the editors page.



Meat Chaux

Meat Chaux is a non-binary illustrator based in the UK, currently completing their bachelor's degree in Illustration. They've recently started publishing work in small indie magazines as well as selling at local markets in their area. Much of their art focuses on fun & colourful characters in fantasy settings, but they love to explore a range of themes, genres and subjects in their practice.



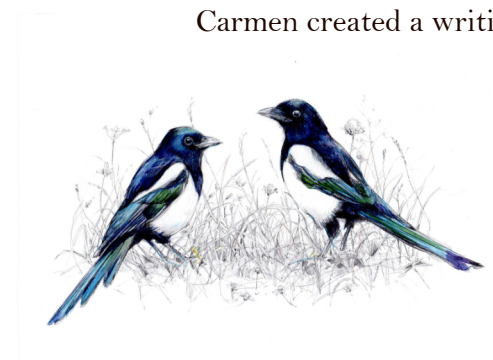
Meat's illustration can be found on the contents page and they can be found on Instagram and Bluesky under the name meat-martian.



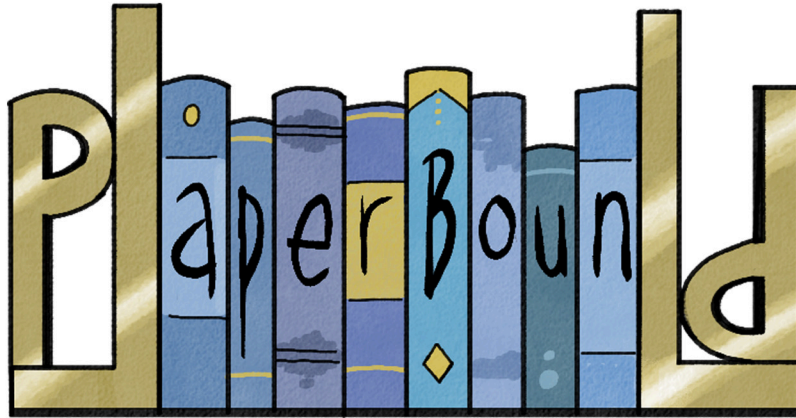
Carmen Carreira

Carmen Carreira graduated in Illustration from Kingston University, and has since produced book art for Random House, Country Living and the National Trust, as well as illustrations for greeting cards, magazines, private commissions and galleries. She recently worked on a public mural for her local high street and is currently exhibiting work in the Spring Collection at Obsidian Art gallery. Her home studio overlooks the fields of a local farm and her work is often inspired by the wildlife that visits there.

Carmen created a writing prompt in this issue.



Don't miss our next issue
coming Autumn/Winter 2025



for the young, and the young at heart

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