

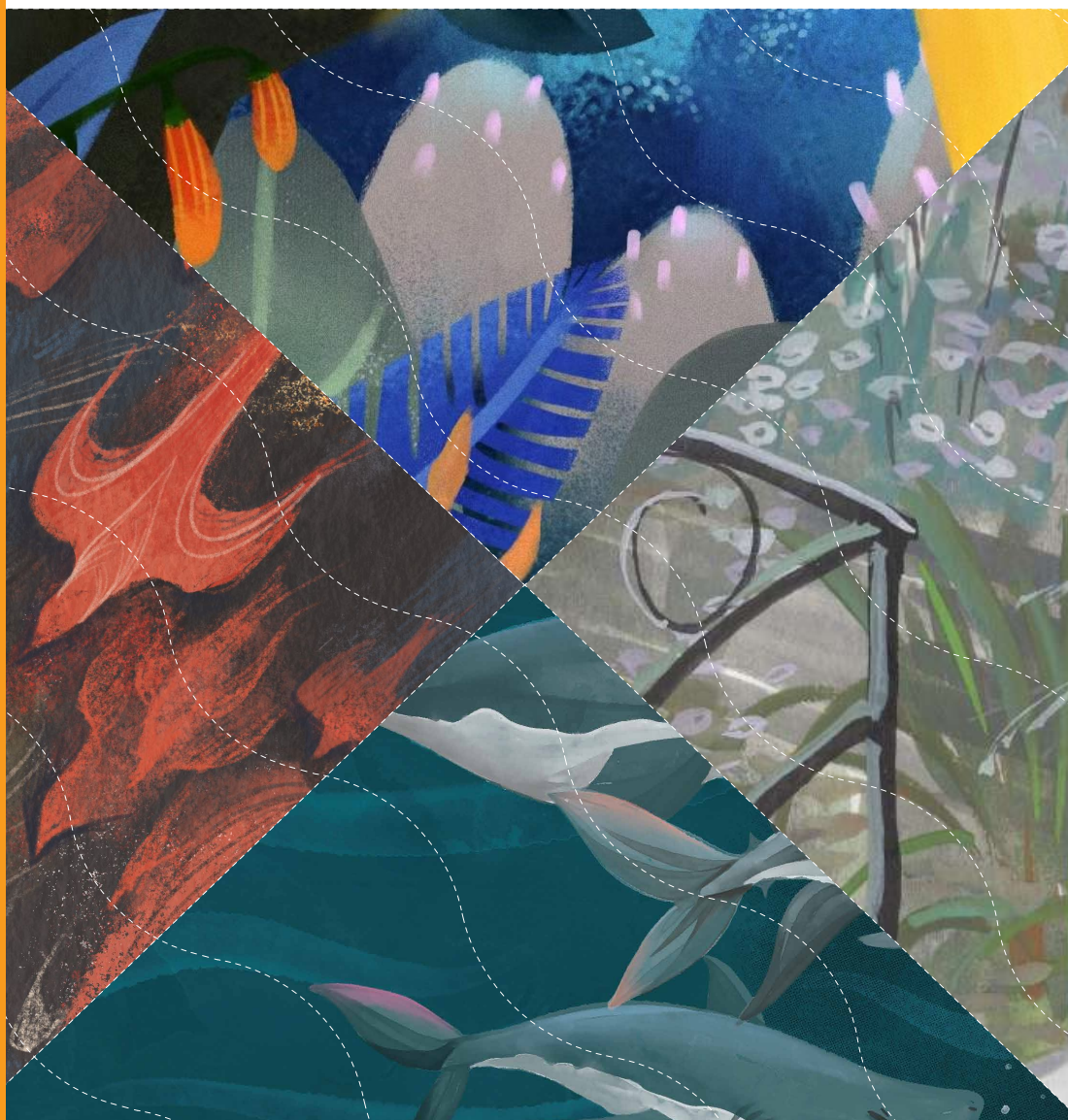


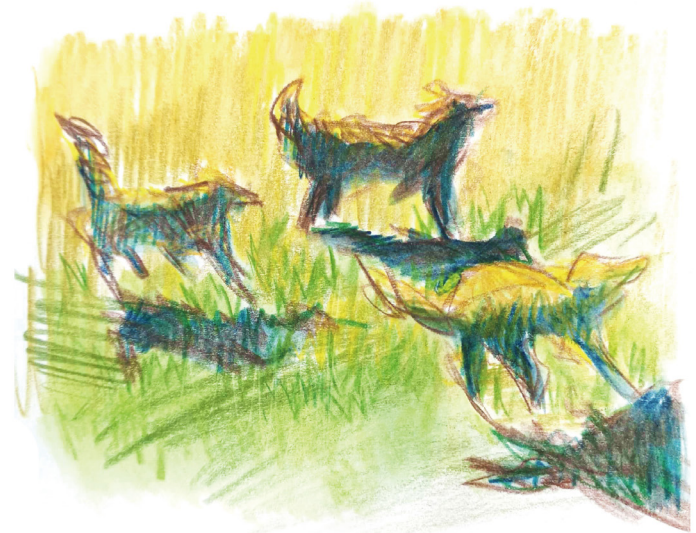
VOLUME 02

2023-2024

Spinning Gold

Children's Literature Journal





Dogs in the Park
Hongyu Ma

2023-2024 TEAM**Jenny Barker**

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to Spinning Gold Volume 2: A Patchwork Project. We are an art and literary journal created to showcase the work of students and alumni of the MA Children's Literature programme at Goldsmiths, University of London. This year's patchwork theme was inspired by Sita Brahmachari's class on the creative writing pathway of the programme. In this class, Sita shared her patchwork storytelling quilt, an ever-growing quilt created from the materials and inspirations behind her stories. Unravelling the quilt and unpicking its stories took us on a journey of reflection and creativity that we were inspired to bring into the production of this edition.

In line with the theme, we encouraged contributors to reflect on the experiences and processes behind their work, some of which are included in the journal. We also came to think of the journal itself as a patchwork of our diverse student body, bringing together students from all over the world to create something new and exciting within the children's and YA literature space. Thank you to our Art Director, Abby Muth, for reflecting this theme so beautifully in the design of this year's journal. I would like to extend my gratitude to all students, past and present, who have contributed their work. I would particularly like to thank Dean Atta, Dr Emily Corbett, John Green, and Rikin Parekh for sharing their valuable time and insight in this volume's featured interviews.

Many thanks to Dr Tori Bovalino, Dr Emily Corbett and Professor Vicky Macleroy for their ongoing support for Spinning Gold. Thank you also to the founding editors of Volume 1, Maria Jarero and Adriana Ryn, without whom Spinning Gold would not exist! Special thanks to Global Online Adaptable Learning (GOAL) for sponsoring the printing of Spinning Gold for the second consecutive year.

Finally, thank you to the Spinning Gold Editorial Team 2023-2024. It has been a pleasure to collaborate, create and grow with you this year.

I hope that you all experience an exciting slice of our growing community as you tuck in to Spinning Gold Volume 2: A Patchwork Project.

Jenny Barker



Interaction of a Giraffe and an Elfin
Xiaoli Li

Billy's Bloomin' Bananas

Kimberly Bayliss

Picture book text for 3 to 5-year-olds

Did you know that it takes up to two years for a banana peel to break down? This story is inspired by all the abandoned banana peels my dog finds and tries to eat!

Billy ate a banana every day on his walk to school.

He munched on Monday, tucked in on Tuesday, wolfed down on Wednesday, treated himself on Thursday, and feasted on Friday.

But instead of throwing the peel in the bin, he threw it into a bush.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday's peels started to form a small pile.

"You really ought to put those peels in a bin, Billy," said his friend, Freddie.

But Billy was convinced he was doing nothing wrong.

By winter, Billy's banana peel collection had really grown. It now included September, October, November, and December's peels.

"You really ought to put those peels in a bin, Billy," said his pal, Penny. But Billy ignored her and tossed his peel to the top of the yellow-brown heap.

By spring, the peels were peeking out above the bush. January, February, March and April's peels were all added to Billy's sticky stack.

"You really ought to put those peels in a bin, Billy," said his chum, Charlie. But Billy carried on with a shrug, adding another to the growing tower. And another. And another.

By summer, the whole street began to stink and golden slime oozed onto the pavement.

Billy's May, June, and July peels now added to the rotting mound.
There wasn't any school in August, so the mass had a chance to breathe.
And Billy enjoyed his summer holidays basking in bananas on a beach.

School started again in September, and on Billy's walk, sure enough, he was eating a banana.
But just as he was about to throw the peel on the pile, he heard a curious noise.

"Slurp! Lurp! Burpppp!"

He and his buddy, Betty, stopped immediately.
With a mouth full of banana, Billy peered into the bush ready to dump his peel.

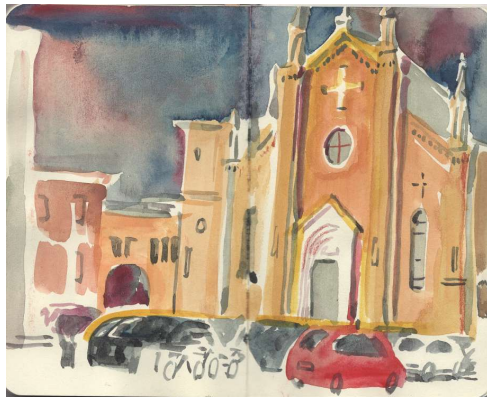
But his banana peels had BLOOMED, and Billy came face to face with a...

YELLOW-EYED BANANA PEEL MONSTER!

Billy's face turned white and, before he had a chance to scream, the monster lunged at him.

And with a "Slurp! Lurp! Burpppp!"... Billy was gone.

Betty first shrieked, but then she shrugged and skipped off to school.
"He really ought to have put those peels in a bin!"



Sketchbook work: Church in Bologna
Giotto Bao

Lucy's Journey
Irem Sencok



Jelly Sea

Maxwell Ward

We sailed together
On a breeze
Perfect weather
For perfect seas

A pacific sun
Atlantic stars
The forever fun
Was forever ours

But then a judder
Life went too fast
Check the rudder
Check the mast

You had changed
It wasn't me
Words exchanged
Furiously

You chose to go
Sailing west
I said solo
Would be best

You went to find
Your place to be
I stayed behind
In Jelly Sea



Sketchbook work: *Cat in London*
Giotto Bao

Secrets

Maxwell Ward

I got told a secret about you
Which I swapped so I'd have two
I took that pair and got two more
So the total stood at four
Having four secrets felt great
But not half as good as eight
I heard what others had seen
And soon I had sixteen
Sixteen secrets swiftly spread
Till I had thirty-two instead
But then at sixty-four
They weren't secrets any more.

So after having all that fun
I was back to having none.

Spark Spark Dance Dead

Alice Bishop

Intended audience: Young Adult

Please be advised that this story includes themes of suicidal ideation and eating disorders.

After school, Leah invites me to a party at some kid's townhouse in the East Village. It's not my usual scene but I decide to go anyway. I always feel safe with the hum of the train carrying me to another party or concert. Like if I fill my life up with all this ambient noise, I won't notice how quiet and empty it is at home.

So, I'm sitting in this empty pool in the basement, like a real indoor swimming pool that's been drained. I'm talking to some girl who's so drunk she's eating a raw onion. I guess she thinks it's an apple. I'm not a big alcohol person myself. Realistically, I don't eat enough to hold it down. Plus, I have more fun when I actually know what's going on. The girl passes out and the half-eaten onion rolls elegantly along the concrete floor of the pool. Her friends all gather around her negotiating about whether to call an ambulance as she fades in and out of consciousness. The whole thing's a mess.

I look up to the rim of the pool and who should be there looming over the edge but that kid Johnny from Meatlocker the other night. He reaches down to pull me up but I'm quicker. I dodge his hand and haul myself over the side, rolling my eyes. He throws up his hands like a surrender and an apology.

'Lydie, right?'

'Yeah. And you're Jasper?'

'Nah, John.' He corrects me but doesn't seem annoyed. Interesting.

'It's a bad scene down there.' I nod to the whole situation with the

onion girl.

‘Yeah. Should we help her or?’

‘Nah nah, I know those kids. They’re her crew. They got her,’ I say, starting to walk away.

‘Hey. Where are you going?’ he starts to follow me.

‘I don’t know. Maybe the river?’ I’m already halfway outta there when I turn and ask, ‘Wanna come?’

Me and John sit on some grimy dock down by the East River, swinging our legs off the side. Our calves reverberate on the rotten wood. Night-time is beautiful in my city. The light pollution paints a magic glow on everything. It’s never dark, just full of half-cast shadows. Like a Scorsese film. In place of crickets, there’s the electric buzz of police sirens and streetlights. In place of stars, there’s a million windows in towering buildings. Each one contains a snapshot of someone’s life. You get a sense of everyone all around you at once. Stacked up in their apartments or pouring out into the lamplit streets. You’re surrounded by strangers but you’re never alone.

Johnny has a lot to say for himself. Turns out he’s a pretty dynamic person. He’s studying English at school, has one brother, and likes playing basketball. He’s got three jobs, one over at City Field, one as a mover, and one doing general manual labour in a store. But of course, his real passion is music. He’s got a lot of ideas for the band, like the outfits and the stunt with the harmonica. He’s sharing a lot of cool stuff and unlike most of these douchebags he’s asking questions about me too. He wants to know about my family and my school and my interests and blah blah blah. I’m pretty fantastic at dodging questions so I do my usual evasive tap-dance. This feels like a ‘something is beginning’ conversation and I’m still a mess over Jaz.

Then he kinda leans in, maybe to cuddle me or hold my hand or something. So, I slide into the East River.

The sliding only takes a second, but the plummet takes a lifetime. Deep down into the icy water. Like a million frigid hands slapping me all over in unison. I’m heavy with my shoes and clothes still on. For a second, it’s as if that relentless beating heart will finally quit. But it starts up again all hot and heavy, accelerated by the adrenaline and cold. And now I feel amazing. My long hair flows weightlessly underwater. Seconds ago, I was

safe and numb but now every part of me is alive with sensation and danger. The bitter cold races through me and raises all the hairs on my body. My shoes are sinking, but my limbs are buoyant. Underwater I finally feel free of my stupid human body. What I really want deep down is to be a floating head. Just thought and consciousness. No flesh prison.

Jumping into the East River was an incredibly stupid and impulsive thing to do. That water is so toxic I’ll probably emerge as Godzilla. But in that moment, I’m glad I did. When I come back to the surface, the cold air hits me full in the face. The initial adrenaline wears off and I remember that it is autumn. I start to shiver violently. I have to get out of there.

I start trying to pull myself up onto the dock, but the weight of the wet boots and clothes pulls me down. I scramble up then sink down like a demented bath toy. Considering I eat 300 calories on a feast day, I’m not exactly the strongest girl around. I’m actually pretty sure my muscles have atrophied. After a few tries John pulls me out which is super annoying as I would’ve gotten out eventually. But fine.

I’m too cold at this point. Dangerously cold. John notices. You’d have to be pretty dumb not to. I can see his instinct is to start rubbing me but that’s what got us into this mess in the first place. I kinda figured he was high from the way he was going on about music earlier. His gentle confusion at the explosive situation pretty much confirms my theory. Yet another man you can’t depend on. Unsurprising. He walks with me quickly back to the townhouse. It’s only a couple blocks.

When we get back the party is in full swing. There are kids in varying degrees of sobriety littering every crack and crevice of the place. John leads us up the stairs until we reach the top. He finds a simple guest bathroom with a tub and barricades us in. Empty beer cans and full ashtrays are strewn around our small safe haven. Not even this corner of the house dodged the relentless sprawl of the party. John searches under the sink, urgent and careless. My lips and fingers are blue now.

He finally pulls out a hairdryer.

Not towels. Not blankets. A hairdryer. This is why I don’t mess around with drugs. Captain Idiot over there plugs it in and starts blasting me with the hot air. It’s a step in the right direction but it’s not enough.

Now that I’m a little warmer, I’m thinking straight again. I hop into the bathtub and start running the water. Hot.

‘But your clothes?’ John asks.

‘Eh, they’re already wet.’ I say through violently chattering teeth as I climb in. John shrugs and positions the hair dryer so it’s blasting on me like a makeshift space heater. He then hops into the other side of the bath, also fully clothed. We sit in there for a while, me shivering and him sweating.

I feel the blood flooding back to my cheeks. I want all the heat in the world. Like I want to go live inside the centre of the sun.

‘I wish we could like have the hairdryer inside the bath,’ I say.

‘Yeah, but then’

‘I know I know. Spark spark dead dead.’

He laughs. Now that I’m starting to feel better, I realise that this could be considered a kinda sexy situation. With us together in the bath. My eyes dart around desperately for a wet blanket of sorts. They land triumphantly on the ashtray. My plan is really disgusting. But if I end up kissing John in this bathtub right now, I’ll actually die. So, I stick a wet finger in the ash and use the sooty substance to draw a ridiculous fake moustache on myself. Then I look John dead in the eye and make a funny face.

I fully expect him to hightail it out of there. But he doesn’t. He dips his finger into the ash and does the same. Only he has a moustache beard combo thing for real. So, he just draws in some sharp corners, making him look like a train robber from the 1800s. We both burst out laughing.

We spend the rest of the party in the bathtub. As buddies. It actually turns out to be a really fun time.

As we’re chatting in the tub, I get a sense of John. Although he has this big personality, he only shares his true self in glimpses. Like, he tells this generic funny story about building a birdhouse with his dad, who’s primarily a welder but dabbles in carpentry. He ends the story with, ‘But we’re not working on anything now. Cause Dad’s in jail.’ John almost throws away those four words as an afterthought. As if they aren’t the real story.

It’s getting late and the house is full of kids crashing on sofas and floors. I’m tempted to stay too but I have not been ahead of the Mom situation today. She’ll totally freak if I don’t show up at home tonight. Especially after not texting all day. I begin my stupidly long journey back

to the Bronx. I don’t say goodbye to John. I wonder if he’ll care.



When the trains that bear me to all that’s good and glamorous in my life carry me back home, it feels like a betrayal. It’s the 6 to the L to the underpass to the 2 to the 1. Luckily the bus is still running when I get off the train at 231st street. This neighbourhood is all rust and neon. The relentless lurching of the overground train fills the air. The streets are lined with bright shops. The expensive shops in the East Village are muted and empty. They display five to ten pieces of black clothing in a neutral interior. The shops in Kingsbridge are bursting at the gills with bright patterned fabric. The windows are cramped with signs and sales. Some in English, some in Spanish. Everything about the neighbourhood feels full to capacity.

For all I know, my dad spoke Spanish. Probably not though. We don’t know much about my dad beyond his page in the donor catalogue. He had good hair and a PhD. Mom didn’t pick him ‘cause of that though. She just closed her eyes, flipped through the catalogue, and randomly stopped at his page. So the stars could decide or whatever nonsense she wants to believe.

It’s late now but the streets are washed in a fluorescent haze from the closed shops. They never turn the lights off, for security. The bus stop is directly outside a 24-hour doughnut shop. I buy a Boston Creme from time to time, especially if I think I’ll faint.

I really luck out because it’s only a ten-minute wait for the bus. You get three swipes on your student MetroCard every day. I used a swipe to get from Angelo’s to school, a swipe to get to the party, and a swipe for the train home. Each swipe comes with a transfer, bus to train or vice versa. When the bus comes, I dip my card in the slot. The transfer goes through automatically and I clamber towards the back, near the engine. Where it’s warm. Once you’re on the bus, you’re golden. It’s well-lit with CCTV and the watchful eye of the driver. There’s never any nonsense on my bus route. The bus winds slowly to the last stop. By the time I tumble out, we’re basically in the suburbs.

My neighbourhood is real Irish. Most of the guys that live here are firemen. Or retired firemen. The ladies are nurses, teachers, and housewives. Me and Mom are the outliers. But Mom’s family is Irish, like her grandparents were from there. So she fits in just fine. Mom isn’t super patriotic

or anything, but she hung up an American flag in our front window. Better to hang a flag in it than to get a brick thrown through it.

I enter our house in a performative creep. Just loud enough for Mom to hear me and know I'm safe. Once she does, she's probably going to pretend like she's asleep. So she doesn't have to deal with me.

Mrs. T has us reading *The Great Gatsby* at school. I get into a whole deep state when I think about stuff like that. Books like that always have these characters, like Daisy. These beautiful, elegant moms that never seem to do any actual work when it comes to their kids. Like when I was little, my mom didn't even get to shower alone. I'd have to sit on the toilet reading a book while she showered. Cause you know, someone had to watch me.

Everyone wants girls to turn into these perfect moms like Daisy. Like having a kid is supposed to be this big important grown-up thing that every girl should want. But the more I read those kinda books the more I think the whole motherhood thing might be a trap. Like what if I want to keep on being me?

This one time I was supposed to meet Mrs. T outside the teacher's lounge to go over a project. I came early and she was chatting in there with a bunch of other teachers. So obviously I listened in. And literally all they talked about the whole time was their kids. Like what about them?

And sure, girls like Daisy get to go on being themselves and doing whatever because they have like a whole team of people to raise their kids. But most of us have to kinda stop being ourselves when we become moms. Like our kids have to become our whole identity or something. And when people like Mom choose not to do all that, it's like everyone gives them a hard time. But I kinda feel like so what? My mom doesn't cook and stuff, she's still her own person and that's actually really cool. Even if it means I miss out sometimes.

When I was younger, me and Mom watched this oldish movie together. It was about this chick who gets a big job in fashion but then chooses to give it up. And she has this boyfriend who like hates her success and is super jealous of it. In the end it seems like she's going to end up with him. And I was still pretty little when we watched it, so I thought it was super romantic. But Mom straight up hated it. She was like, 'Never throw away your opportunities for a man.'

I looked up the movie a little later and like sure everyone online was

saying the same thing as Mom. But the way she said it, it was just an instinct. Something deep inside her viewing the world that way.

It was probably all connected to my grandma, the Irish one. I didn't really know my grandma, but I heard she was really smart. When she was at university over there, she had the top grades of her whole class. And she wanted to go on to do a PhD. But the professor chose this dude to do it instead. Literally everyone knew my grandma let this dude copy off her the whole time. So, my great granddad drove over to the university to talk to the professor. Because that's the gross patriarchal way things were done. And the professor flat out told my great granddad that he would never choose a woman to do the PhD.

Pretty soon after that my grandma became a housewife with six kids and spent most of her time peeling potatoes. Not that there's anything wrong with that. If she wanted it. I think it's pretty dumb for us to decide that women can't have that if it's what they really want. Like, not everyone has to have a career. But the point is everyone should get the choice, you know? A real legit choice. Not just the illusion of one.

Well obviously, things aren't as bad as all that now. Especially cause Mom is a white woman. But there are still all these subtle codes lying around in movies and stuff. If you know how to look. Like my mom does.

The next day, I wake up in time to catch a ride with Mom. She's already in the car when I come down. I grab a Diet Coke from the pile and rush out of the house to join her before she gets pissed and drives off.

It's autumn and everything is dying. I look out the window and she watches the road.

'We have enough Cokes, Lydie?' She asks as if she's trying to pull her focus back to me.

'Yeah thanks, Mom.'

'Great. I know you love your soda. I'll pick up some veggie sausages or something too. I never see you eating any protein. I appreciate you kids want to stay slim and all but you need protein.'

Wow. She's really going for mother of the year today. Forget about protein, has she really not noticed that I'm not eating anything? I kinda always figured Mom was sneakily supportive of my attempts 'to stay slim'. It had never crossed my mind she was too self-absorbed to even notice.

Mom works like a maniac and I'm busy with my own stuff. Most of the time we spend together is on these little car rides. With Mom's eyes half on the road, her gaze never fully falls on me. I wish for once she'd stop the car and just really see me. But if she did that, she'd have to look at the same monster that drove Jaz away. Maybe it's a good thing she treats me like a part-time child.

Our hunk-o-junk car screeches into the station and I clamber out quickly. I can tell she wants a little more, but I mumble an abrupt goodbye and go. At least it's Friday. The weekend can't come soon enough.



Virtual World
Dingrong Tao

Rubberball

Maxwell Ward

Rubberball fell in a hole
Past the earthworm and the mole
Beyond a den of sleeping foxes
And treasure kept in silver boxes
Below the roots of thirsting trees
Deeper down than all of these
The ball kept falling, on and on
Past bones of the Iguanodon
Deeper than the deep-down bugs
Where goblin armies dug and dug
Until, at last, it hit hard ground
And started on its great rebound

From this low it found its spring
Up past the bugs and Goblin King
Up and up the bouncing ball
Past the things you will recall
The fossils and the roots of trees
It flew past both of these with ease
Beyond those precious silver boxes
And the den of waking foxes
Past the earthworm and the mole
Until it shot right out the hole!

So, if in life you trip or fall
Come bouncing back like Rubberball.



Photo credit: Thomas Sammut

AN INTERVIEW WITH DEAN ATTA

SPINNING GOLD EDITORIAL TEAM

Can you tell us a bit about your journey to becoming a published writer?

DEAN ATTA

My first published piece was in a book called *Flight: Pt 1: An Anthology of New Writing* (flipped eye publishing, 2009), which was the outcome of a mentoring programme by Spread the Word on which DJ and poet Charlie Dark mentored me for six months. I've had several formal and informal mentors, including poets Benjamin Zephaniah, Jacob Sam-La Rose, Malika Booker, Peter Kahn, and Steven Camden (Polarbear). My journey has been steered and buoyed by advice and support from these mentors and others, as well as other writers I've met through poetry open mics and spoken word poetry slams in London, where I'm from, and Brighton, where I did my undergraduate degree at the University of Sussex, and then across the UK and internationally. I've been part of several poetry collectives and regularly attend writing workshops and feedback groups, so I am always in a community of writers.

SPINNING GOLD

How did studying at Goldsmiths contribute towards your success as a writer?

ATTA

The Writer / Teacher MA I did at Goldsmiths was where Peter Kahn became one of my mentors. Peter came to London from Chicago, where he ran a successful spoken word education programme for decades. Peter was the main reason I applied to do the MA. The other students in the MA cohort had interests and passions similar to mine but also brought unique perspectives, which broadened my outlook on how I approach my writing and education work. I'm still close friends with several of them.

The MA was a safe testing ground for new writing, lesson plans and approaches to working with words. The MA allowed us to bring our whole selves into the room while providing us with tools to go into environments like schools that sometimes feel restrictive and pressurised. Similarly, as I've had more writing published, the publishing industry can sometimes feel restrictive and pressurised. The MA prepared me for the contradictions you face as someone who values the freedom of creative expression while also wanting to make a living and, therefore, having to deal with the agendas and priorities of other people who wish for your writing or writing workshops to serve a particular purpose of theirs.

SPINNING GOLD

In a BBC Sounds podcast you presented about the 2015 general election, you said, "The thing about the door is that it only opens from the inside." Almost ten years later, do you think this has changed? And how do you think children's and YA literature can be a medium for empowerment and progress?

ATTA

In that interview, I was talking about the door to 10 Downing Street, the residence of the prime minister, which I have visited on a few occasions. As a writer who has had access to several places like this, I find myself in awe and wondering what I'm doing there. As a dyslexic who didn't read much, I never dreamed I'd become a writer. As a queer person who didn't see any LGBTQ+ books in my school library when I was at school during Section 28, I never read any books about people like me when I was a child or young person. However, now I'm aware that many authors are dyslexic and otherwise neurodiverse. And now, there are many books

with LGBTQ+ characters championed by school teachers and librarians. I love seeing my books in children's hands, in school and local libraries, alongside a diverse range of books so that children see themselves and learn about people from all walks of life. Libraries must be well funded and stocked because not all households can afford books, so many children rely on libraries for their only access. I'm glad that Children's Laureates have consistently been championing libraries. I've spoken personally to Joseph Coelho and Cressida Cowell before him, who were passionate and proactive in supporting this cause and making the case for libraries to the government. The Free Books Campaign and Free Books Festival in Hackney, founded by Sofia Akel, are incredibly inspiring and break down barriers to accessing books.

When I lived in Scotland for three years, I found it especially important to be in a community with other Black writers and writers of colour and have safer spaces to discuss our experiences within publishing. I was co-director of the Scottish BPOC Writers Network and set up the Scottish Black Writers Group in association with Scottish PEN.

There is an excellent initiative for writers of colour in England called Megaphone Writers. This initiative provides subsidised and fully-funded development (mentoring and workshops) for people of colour in England who want to write for children and teenagers.

There are now new prizes for writers of colour, such as the Jhalak Prize, and new advocacy groups, such as the Black Writers Guild. There are also a range of publisher-led diversity initiatives. Beyond The Secret Garden, a column in Books For Keeps by Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O'Connor, is an excellent resource for keeping up to date with children's books by black, Asian and minority ethnic writers and illustrators. CLPE Reflecting Realities - Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children's Literature is a reliable annual measure of our progress.

SPINNING GOLD

This year's theme for Spinning Gold is called The Patchwork Project, in which we invite our contributors to share work that represents a piece of themselves. How much of your personal identity and life experiences do you inject into your own work?

ATTA

Everything I write has something personal in it. My latest book, *Person Unlimited: An Ode to My Black Queer Body*, is my most personal to

date. The memoir is written from the perspective of seven parts of my body and covers my childhood, my education and my career and doesn't shy away from my sex life either. It's a book for adults, so I didn't have to consider what was appropriate for children. In *Person Unlimited*, I show myself as a whole rather than compartmentalising. We are all patchwork people and all the more beautiful for our contrasting parts. I often write about my mixed-race heritage, what having family from Cyprus and Jamaica means for my sense of Britishness, and how, in my experience, my sexuality, class and neurodivergence intersect with all this. Whenever I sit down to write, I'm writing as a mixed-race Black British, gay, dyslexic writer.

SPINNING GOLD

Have you experienced any challenging reactions to the themes in your work and, if so, how do you navigate that?

ATTA

I'm aware that my book, *The Black Flamingo*, a young adult novel, has been banned from schools and libraries in several states in America. I've begun to engage with Authors Against Book Bans after meeting with one of its founders, David Levithan, when he visited the UK recently.

At home in the UK, I can't say that I've come up against any challenging reactions to the themes of my work. School teachers and librarians have been incredibly supportive of my young adult books, *The Black Flamingo* and *Only on the Weekends*, and support has been growing for my debut picture book, *Confetti*. This picture book features, among other things, a gay uncle taking his three-year-old niece to a Pride parade and, a few pages later, uncle marries his male partner in a 'Pride parade of two people.'

All of my books for children and young people feature LGBTQ+ characters, and all the protagonists are Black or mixed-race. I'm putting books into the world I needed to see as a child and want to see available for my two nieces, now six and eight years old. These books are a celebration of diversity and a reflection of the world we live in.

SPINNING GOLD

If you had to choose three children's/YA books that every child should read, what would they be and why?

ATTA

I would recommend *Skellig* by David Almond, *The Sad Book* by Michael Rosen and *Ruby's Worry* by Tom Percival. These books are important because they deal with challenging situations and emotions and don't patronise children in their approach, which is one of my main aims for many of my books, especially the two I have coming out next year.

SPINNING GOLD

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today. To conclude, is there anything you would like to share about current or upcoming projects?

ATTA

My most recent books are my picture book *Confetti* and my memoir *Person Unlimited: An Ode to My Black Queer Body*. My forthcoming books in 2025 are a picture book called *Auntie's Bangles* and a young adult novel in verse called *I Can't Even Think Straight*. *Auntie's Bangles* is about dealing with the death of a beloved auntie and celebrating happy memories of her. *I Can't Even Think Straight* is about a teenage boy with anger issues struggling to cope with challenges in his family life and at school, as well as his first attempts at dating after coming out as gay.

You can find out more about Dean Atta and his work at www.deanatta.com. He is also on social media as deanatta.

Noisy Eater

Maxwell Ward

How can it be
that earth spins round
at such great speed
but makes no sound

Yet when you
sit and eat your lunch
I hear every chew
and crunch

The Kettle

Maxwell Ward

Mum asked us every single day
"Shall I put the kettle on?"
And in return our dad would say
"I don't think it will suit you."
We knew each time before he
spoke,
Just what was coming next,
Laughing at the same old joke
Which left our mum perplexed.
Then one day like any other
The usual lines were said,
But this time my fed-up mother,
Taped the kettle to her head.
At first we laughed at the surprise
But the more we looked we realised
The kettle matched her greenish
eyes
And suited her all along.

The Wolf in the Garden

Daniel Newton

Intended audience: Upper Middle Grade

“Dad, there’s something in the garden.”

Dad sighs, squeezing his fingers under the rims of his smudged glasses to rub his eyes. He worked late again and came home tired, as usual, collapsing on the sofa with the TV on low as he kind-of-but-not-really watches the news.

“Not now, Mattie.”

“Dad, I mean it. I can hear it.”

“Mattie, please.”

On any other night, Mattie would ask *please what?* and Dad would laugh and that would be enough to make him forget that he’s tired and start smiling again. But tonight Mattie has more important things to worry about than what exactly his half-finished sentences mean.

“But *Daaad*, there really is something in the garden!”

Mattie can hear it. A whining and yelping sound, quiet enough that it must be coming from right down the end of the garden, or maybe even from the other side of the fence. But definitely there.

Mattie does her best impression of the sound to prove that it’s real, and Dad smiles, but not like the real ones when he’s actually happy. One of the ones from when he just wants Mattie to forget that he’s tired and grumpy for a second. It doesn’t work.

“I’m sure it’s just a fox.”

As if Mattie wouldn’t recognise that sound from the almost nightly chorus from the family of foxes living somewhere along their terrace.

“It’s not a fox.”

“Next door’s dog again, then.”

A little closer, but still no. “It’s not a dog, Dad.”

“I’m sure it’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing. If it was nothing I would hear there being nothing. I can hear something.”

Dad sighs again. “You can really hear it?”

Mattie’s eyebrows pitch up to say *really?* and Dad huffs a laugh. A *real* laugh.

“Yeah, yeah, okay,” Dad leans forwards, already getting ready to stand up. “You’re not going to let this go until we take a look, are you?”

Mattie grins.

“Alright then. Come on.”

• • • • •

Mattie isn’t good at letting things go, especially when the *thing* is hearing something that no one else can. Because no one ever believes her, even though she is always, always right.

Usually.

Because Mattie doesn’t hear things the way other people do. That’s the way Dad phrases it, but what he really means is ‘Mattie hears things other people can’t.’ Mattie prefers it that way, because it makes it sound more like she’s special rather than just different, but maybe that’s why other people don’t like it as much.

Mattie hears things other people can’t, which is to say she hears most things. Sometimes that’s a good thing, and sometimes it’s not. Sometimes she knows what’s going on before anyone else, and sometimes all the noises are happening at once and it’s like they invade her brain and shake it about to make sure she can’t have any thoughts. And when it’s so loud that she can’t have any thoughts then she can’t do anything to stop the panic building up at the pain in her ears and bubbling over until she cries or runs away or sometimes screams.

When she cries or runs away or screams, Mattie is sometimes told that she's too sensitive or needs to get a grip (*on what?*, she wants to ask) or, worst of all, that she's just making things up and spends too much time living in her own little world. In her imagination. As if the noises aren't even real, even though she can't understand why no one else can hear them. They are real. She's not making things up, and she is *not* imagining things.

Mattie thinks it's funny that she's told off for living in her own little world by people who can't even tell when the fridge is broken because the humming sounds different to usual. Mattie also thinks it's funny when people call being able to notice such ordinary and obvious things a 'superpower.' Besides, it's not such a superpower to lay awake at night because the electricity in the walls is too loud and the water in the pipes is practically roaring in her ears.

But Mattie has learnt people don't like hearing her tell them it's not a superpower. They also don't like hearing things like 'it's weird that you can't hear something so ordinary and obvious as the fridge humming,' so she's stopped saying it even though she's not really sure why they find facts so upsetting. Mattie loves hearing facts. But other people don't.

Other people don't like hearing a lot of things. Mattie wonders if that's why they switch off their hearing to ignore most of the sounds around them. To be fair, Mattie has to agree that hearing things is a bit of a pain most of the time, and she'd turn it down herself if she could, but the thing is she doesn't know how other people do it and no one will explain how. They laugh when she asks them, so she's stopped asking.

As it is she just puts on the special headphones Dad got her to help make things a bit quieter. They work, but then people stare. Mattie hates when people stare. Stares are the opposite of facts, because they're all about what someone is thinking and feeling and those things are never just straightforward and true, even if Mattie could figure out what they are.

But then again, people tell Mattie she stares, too. That is particularly troubling, because then Mattie wonders if other people can tell what she's thinking and feeling even though 1) she can't tell what they're thinking and feeling from their stares, and 2) she can't tell what she's thinking and feeling most of the time either.

"Don't worry, Mattie," Ayaan at school said when she confessed this fear at break time one day last term. "No one can tell what you're thinking. Your stare is perfectly blank and entirely intimidating."

This was the kind of thing that would make Mattie feel all twisted up inside coming from someone else, but Ayaan always tells the truth and says what he means, and he usually means those two things to be funny. Mattie maybe doesn't always get what's supposed to be so funny about it, but she likes that he doesn't lie, and knowing that he's not lying makes her feel less twisted up, somehow.

Most people don't tell the truth and they don't say what they mean. It's confusing. Like, when people say things like *I'm putting your shoes on the shoe rack, Mattie*, sometimes what they actually mean is *why didn't you put your shoes on the shoe rack, Mattie?* And when people say something like *wow, your lunch looks really interesting today, Mattie*, what they really mean is *wow, your lunch looks horrible today, Mattie*, as if *interesting* means anything like *horrible*.

But Mattie doesn't hear like most people and she doesn't act like most people either. So when she says *there's something in the garden*, what she means is *there's something in the garden*.

THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE GARDEN.

Mattie is certain of it. Her hands and feet are tingling with it and she laces up her boots and buttons up her coat by the back door. Dad is already dressed and standing with a torch, ready to head out and investigate. He doesn't look as excited as Mattie feels, but then again he never does. It's like his hands never get more and more tingly until he has to shake it off or do *something* to give the energy somewhere to go. What a way to go through life. Always so calm and unaffected. Never bubbling over with joy. It's... sad.

(Which is another thing people don't seem to like hearing, so she doesn't say that any more, either.)

The night air is cool as they step outside, a bit too cold to be comfortable but almost welcome after the warm day. It's spring and the weather is just like this, untrustworthy, and Mattie understands why people talk about it so much but does wish it wasn't the *only* thing they talked about. She's heard the same conversation thirteen times in the past two days, which has helped her learn the script but also ensured she's too bored of the words to actually use them herself.

Dad sweeps a torch over the dewy grass and the bushes rustling in the corner. The leaves are jostling in the wind and the grass is swaying, but nothing else moves.

“See, Mattie? There’s nothing there.”

“Look again. Please.”

Dad sighs. “Can you hear it anywhere?”

Mattie waits for her ears to stop ringing from Dad talking (people talk so *loud* most of the time) and listens. Usually when Mattie has to try to hear something, it’s because there are too many other sounds going on for her to be able to pick them out individually. It’s weird to try to hear something when there’s... nothing. Almost nothing. Just the normal things. The leaves rustling, grass whooshing. Cars grumbling from the main road a few streets over. A plane roaring somewhere far away. Families talking and laughing inside the houses along the street, a window slamming, a cat yowling.

But no whining, yelping from the not-a-fox-or-a-dog.

Nothing.

Eventually, Dad gets tired of waiting.

“Well?”

Mattie frowns, angry at something though she’s not really sure what.

“I bet you scared it off with your stomping around.”

“I wasn’t—” Dad doesn’t finish his sentence. Maybe to him he wasn’t stomping, but he knows Mattie is different. “I didn’t *mean* to stomp.”

Mattie crosses her arms. “I bet it’s even more scared now.”

“Mattie, there’s nothing there.” Dad’s voice is changing with every sentence. Mattie knows this one, and scrunches up her face as she tries to remember. The counsellor at school said this kind of voice is *exasperated*, which is a fancy word that means something like *frustrated* or *angry*. He’s also stopped looking at her as much, his eyes staring up at the dark sky. When Mattie does that it’s because she’s looking at the stars, picking out her favourite constellations and remembering the stories about them. But when people like Dad do it, it’s because they don’t want to look at you any more, because they’re annoyed.

Mattie isn’t sure why not looking at someone means you’re annoyed with them, because she doesn’t like to do it ever, and gets annoyed when

someone tries to make her.

But she doesn’t like making Dad annoyed, no matter how often she seems to do it. Which is often.

So even though she’s confused and angry and doesn’t really understand why, she stops arguing.

“Okay.”

Dad looks at her again, eyebrows raised in the way that Mattie knows now are supposed to indicate *surprise* or *shock*. “Okay?”

Mattie shrugs, something that far too often gets her labelled as being *petulant*, even though she doesn’t even really know what that means, so how could she possibly be doing it? “Okay.”

“Alright, brilliant. Let’s go back inside, mouse. It’s cold and it’s time for bed.”

Dad’s voice is no longer *exasperated* which means Mattie’s insides have stopped trying to twist themselves up, at least for now. He pats her on the head quickly, their way of hugging because Mattie doesn’t always like being hugged. Mattie far prefers being patted because if the feeling lingers for too long afterwards she can just shake her head or brush her hair to make it go away, whereas with hugs the feeling is all over her body and therefore much, much harder to lose. The best thing about it, though, is that she knows Dad does it as a compromise, something that means he cares about what she likes and doesn’t like, sometimes more than he cares about what he likes and doesn’t like.

Which is why Mattie tries to *compromise* as well, and follow Dad back inside and take off her shoes and coat, even when there’s something in the garden that they still haven’t found and might just be the most exciting thing to happen all week.

Because there *is* something in the garden. Mattie is sure of it. Even if she can’t quite hear it right now. Which she can’t.

In fact, the garden is suspiciously quiet after they come inside. Not a peep while they take off their shoes and jackets and put them back in the hallway. Not a sound while Dad herds Mattie upstairs and makes sure she’s on her way to have her bath without getting sidetracked again.

Then she’s in the bath, and Mattie can’t hear all that much beyond the

bathroom over the gluging of the water from the taps and the whooshing from the pipes even when they're turned off, the humming of the light and the clicking-groan of the boiler in the airing cupboard. She can hear Mum and Dad walking around the house—stomping, as always, though they always say they're not—and she can hear their voices buzzing wherever they are but can't quite make out the words.

But anything beyond that, the garden or the road out front, is lost to her in here.

She slides down in the tub so that her head is underwater and closes her eyes as the sounds around her get muffled and all but drowned out by the water in her ears and the sound of her own heartbeat. It's about as quiet as it ever gets for her. She drums her fingers on the side of the bath and smiles as it reverberates through the water and into her ears and wobbles her brain.

The bath does its job of relaxing her before bed, dissipating some of the excitement until her hands aren't tingly and her head isn't buzzing quite so much. In fact, Mattie has just about convinced herself that she imagined it, or that Dad was right and it was a fox or a dog all along, until she hears it again.

She's just snuggling down into bed, wiggling her toes against the cold of the bedsheets, and there, just about audible over the rustling of the duvet—

A whining, yelping, very real *something*.

Not a fox or a dog, although somewhere close to the latter.

Mattie's bedroom is the one at the back of the house looking out over the garden, the furthest away from the road and street lights and power lines. She loves it for its comparative peacefulness, and also the view out onto the trees and the grass that calms her down even at her angriest.

And right now, she loves it because it means she might get to prove that she was right.

She hops out of bed and pulls open her window just far enough to stick her head out, and then she listens. There's all the usual sounds, of course, less now than during the daytime but always there. She strains her ears again, names each sound before she can move on to the next one, and then—

There.

Right at the end of the garden. Somewhere down there in the bushes.

Whining.

Yelping.

There is something in the garden.

There is something in the garden.

Mattie wriggles as the excitement buzzes through her and flaps her hands to shake the excess out her fingers. She knows what she has to do, and to do it she has to be quiet (which is easy) and still (which is very, very hard). But she can do it. She knows she can.

Mattie creeps over to her bedroom door and eases it open, not having to be too careful because Mum and Dad have made sure the door doesn't squeak. She tiptoes across the landing towards the stairs, past Mum and Dad's bedroom where she can hear the quiet sleepy breathing that is trying to turn into a snore. That's good news, because if her parents can't hear anything while they're awake, they certainly can't hear anything while they're asleep.

Even so, she takes the stairs slowly until she's safely downstairs, where Mum and Dad can't possibly hear her unless she jumps up and down and yells or maybe knocks something over. Which she won't do. Duh.

She laces up her boots by the back door and pulls on her coat, fingers tingling with excitement but forcing herself to go slowly, quietly.

The back door groans as it opens, always does, but she pulls it slowly, just far enough for her to squeeze out into the cool night air.

Because Mattie doesn't stomp, the noise doesn't stop. It's quieter, maybe, but still there. She can still hear it.

She follows the noise down the garden, across the cracked paving with weeds growing between the slabs, past the bench that is more rot than wood that Dad won't let her sit on any more, and deeper into the dark.

Down at the bottom of the garden Mattie slows down. It's darker back here, away from the light of the street. Quiet, too, the whining getting softer and softer as she gets closer, like whatever it is knows she's coming

no matter how gently she treads.

The grass waves.

The leaves rustle.

Something

in

the

bushes

moves.

“What—”

A wet nose pokes through the leaves. Ringed with black fur that turns grey-brown further up the muzzle.

The muzzle.

It sniffs the air, its nose twitching almost too fast for Mattie to see, and then it stretches out its tongue right over the top of its muzzle and licks across its nose, leaving it wet and shining and still.

Definitely not a fox. Not quite a dog.

Mattie grins.

“I knew it.”



A Girl and a Squirrel
Xiaoli Li

Red and Antelope Travels

Ziyu Zhang

Perhaps you have also fantasised about wandering between heaven and earth, riding tall and white animals, shuttling between reality and dreams. The antelope rescued by the little girl in the sacrifice seems to have a deeper connection with her.





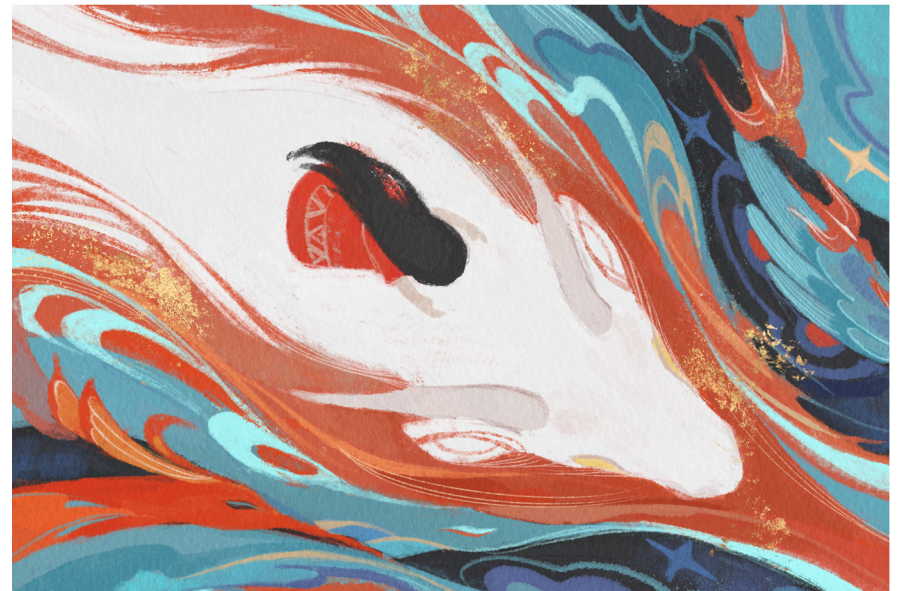
On the wasteland, the girl saw the bound white sheep, and the bonfire for sacrifice had been lit.



In the red firelight, she quietly led the antelope and escaped in the dark.



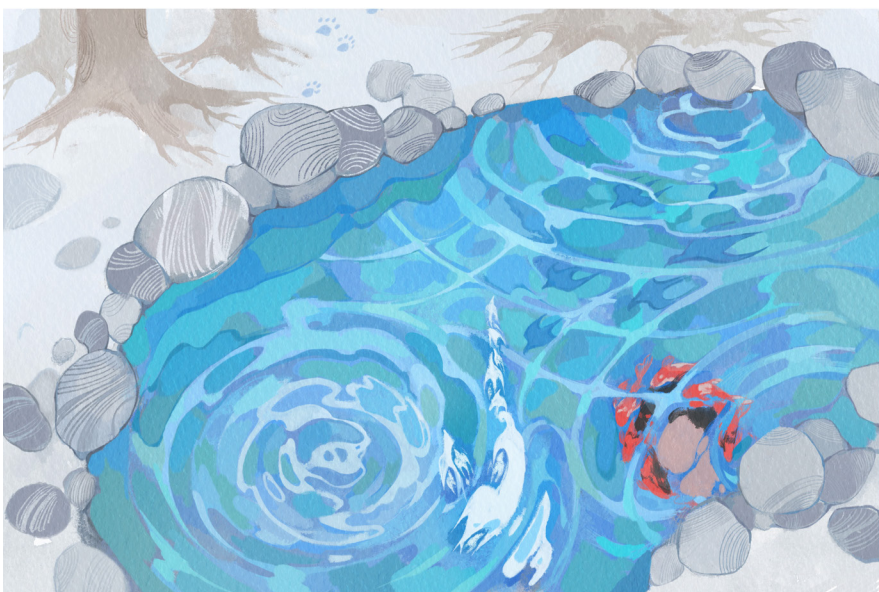
The sharp point of the sharpened knife is reflected in the fire in the tent, and the girl who overhears the conversation makes a decision.



They walked between rivers and gorges, leaving the clamor of sacrifices behind.



They traveled through the desert, which used to be the sea hundreds of millions of years ago.



They passed a puddle, and in the snow were the footprints of foxes.



They were resting in the rainforest, and the unknown plants were almost over the girl's head.



They brushed past the subway, and people fell asleep in the carriages.



They went through a never-ending carousel of circles and circles, a world of beauty like a fragile soap bubble.



They eventually run off into the universe, transforming into dazzling stars as they save each other.

The Cockerel

Maxwell Ward

Cockadoodledoo
It's quarter past two
In the morning

Cockadoodleshake
I can see you're awake
Don't be boring

Cockadoodlepeep
Don't go back to sleep
There's no point now

Cockadoodlewing
I'm not annoying
You're just grumpy

Cockadoodlewow
We're both awake now
I'm excited!

Cockadoodlefun
We'll sing as the sun
Starts to rise up

Cockadoodlecrow
C'mon now let's go
It's a new day

A Star's Lament

Maria Jarero

A modern fairytale for Upper Middle Grade readers.

Prologue

In a village there lived a boy so beautiful the stars themselves would catch their breath when they saw his face. His smile outshone them all. His laugh brightened up rooms more than they ever could. And even though stars are not meant to have favorites, this boy was one of them. If ever a wish he made, it would be granted. Plain and simple.

There was one star in particular who would do anything for this boy. Time and time again, this star would shower him with magic. They would make sure the boy never even had to think of a wish. He would have everything he ever wanted. This star was young and foolish. They know this now.

"Humans are not like us," the elders warned. "They are greedy. Never satisfied. You cannot give them everything."

The star scoffed. Their boy wasn't like that. He was perfect. He was pure.

"Cygnus?" The boy asked one night. Cygnus burned brighter for just a second, lit by their boy's eyes on them. "Can I ask for another wish?"

Night after night, the boy asked. And night after night, Cygnus would grant his wishes. They were simple things, mostly. A

chocolate for his mom. To be noticed by the king. To be favored by him too. Nothing that had changed history, Cygnus thought. The king surely couldn't have ignored such beauty.

"Of course," Cygnus replied in their voice that carried in the leaves and the wind and the cricket chirps. The boy smiled, head tilted. Cygnus would never be able to say no to that smile, they thought.

They should have. Especially on that one night that changed it all. Cygnus didn't know it at the time. Nights such as this are only recognized in hindsight.

"Can I... be like you? Not a star, no. I just — Can I do magic, please?"

At this, Cygnus felt their light flicker. Quickly, they composed themselves. It wouldn't do for the rest of the stars to start listening, to look their boy's way.

"I can't do that, Enrique." They tried to be sweet about it, soft. Humans like that, Cygnus reminded themselves. "It's not proper."

"I thought you loved me." Enrique whispered back, eyes filling with tears. "I thought you said there wasn't anything I couldn't ask for."

"Enrique—" Cygnus started desperately. Trying to make their boy understand. No human had ever done magic before. Surely he understood that it would change everything.

"Forget it." Enrique muttered angrily, turning away. "I knew I couldn't count on you. I can't count on anyone."

Three steps later, Cygnus caved, waves of light rolling off of them and blinding the rest of the stars momentarily. They didn't see Enrique's smile, eyes suspiciously dry.

"Don't go! I'll do it! Please stay!"

If stars could make wishes, Cygnus would wish they had never met their boy.



Time moved differently for stars.

Cygnus wasn't sure how long it had been since they'd granted Enrique's wish. They'd kept a close eye on him, nervously splashing a bit of extra magic on him here and there to keep him hidden so the elders would not know of Cygnus's folly.

He thought that Enrique had lived for a bit longer than humans tended to, but he had no way of knowing. King in a kingdom founded by Enrique himself, maybe somehow time moved more slowly there. But Cygnus was young, still. Maybe they didn't know as much as they thought they did.

For years, Cygnus had watched Enrique sit on a throne and keep his people happy and safe. He had gained a reputation as a fair, just and beautiful king. He married a beautiful woman, intelligent and strong. She loved him almost as much as Cygnus did. He didn't hide his magic, using it instead to gain his people's favor by granting wishes to people who swore loyalty to him. Sometimes he would grant them immediately, sometimes years later. People were happy, Cygnus could see, with this promise.

Lately he had been granting less and less wishes. But he was just being careful, methodical. He was trying to keep the world in balance, Cygnus thought proudly.

"My king," a human said to Enrique, still beautiful as ever. "Please grant me a wish."

"Tell me, friend, what can I do for you?"

See? He just wanted to help others. Cygnus's boy, still so polite, so shiny, so precious.

"I wish to have the strength of thirty men, my liege. My father's

strength is failing and I need to be able to take care of him and our farm."

A noble pursuit. A family man. Cygnus felt other stars titter in their sleep, knowing that a wish with pure intentions had just been released into the world. If this man had asked the stars, he would have gained all the strength he needed to keep his farm thriving immediately.

Kneeling before Enrique, the man did not see the king's eyes flash with fear. Cygnus did not see this either, blinded by pride for their wise and noble boy.

"My friend," Enrique said, reaching out for the man's shoulder. "This shall be taken into consideration."

Consideration? What was there to consider? Cygnus's light was pulsing again, cold and loud. Other stars would wake up if they weren't careful.

Dejected, the man did not argue.

Once alone, Enrique belted out a laugh that was both beautiful and chilling. It wasn't a normal laugh, anger laced Enrique's face instead of happiness.

"As if I would ever make someone that powerful. Doesn't he see how dangerous that could be? Foolish man."

This was the first time Cygnus doubted himself and the choices they had made so long ago.

Little did they know this was only the start.



They decided to call it **The Moon.**
Now the mushees can enjoy their night out.

The Moon
Marcie Xu

A BOOK REVIEW OF *BLUE SQUARED*

by Luna Orchid

Review written by Somphrattana Melitta von Pflug

Please be advised that this review includes references to eating disorders and suicide.

Silence keeps
the structure of us
from
falling
apart.

That was how things worked in the unnamed protagonist's family in this verse novel from Hong Kong by Luna Orchid, *Blue Squared*. For readers with experience growing up in an Asian household, this culture of silence within families and in society, particularly on the thorny topic of mental health, will no doubt feel acutely familiar.

The teen girl, both the central character and the narrator, brings readers along as she navigates growing pains from the age of eleven to seventeen. She lets us in as a fly on the wall in a working-class Hong Kong Chinese family in the nineties. Through semi-fictionalised political events, the girl draws parallels between her city and her body, both riddled with anxiety about being handed over to a mother and a motherland that no longer knew their deepest thoughts, dreams, and fears. She gives us a glimpse of what it was like attending a Catholic girls' school: "Lunch breaks in a school / where the length of one's bangs, / one's skirts, one's socks / are all restricted / are no less than / prison breaks." She wonders, as all teens since the beginning of time have done, "...if it's true / that grown-ups really see everything / but they / just don't say anything."

However, do not mistake this book for a typical coming-of-age novel. As the girl finds solace from the torture of P.E. class in lengthy Russian

novels at the library, she imagines herself as a Matryoshka doll, and her story is no less layered and complex.

While there is no mathematical equation for the risk factors and events that add up to the development of eating disorders, the author skillfully crafts a narrative akin to the showing of steps in a problem for Math class. Take body image issues that often accompany puberty, add to them relentless criticism on appearance and weight from relatives and strangers, an undying custom in most Asian cultures, then multiply that by the family's compartmentalisation of her brother's suicide within walls of silence. Not surprising to reach the result of starving, bingeing, and purging as coping mechanisms, is it?

Amidst all this doom and gloom, the teenage character's sharp wit will crack readers up when least expected. She calls herself the "disciplined bulimic", maintaining both her unhealthy eating behaviours and academic excellence in all subjects (except P.E.) through Years 9-11. When a teacher selects her as the director of the class drama but proceeds to give her a list of detailed instructions, she notes, "Guess I am not the only control freak."

How does our tortured teenager, imprisoned on the cover of the book within the Chinese character meaning mouth (口hau2), break free of the shackles of her mind, her mother, and her culture?

Blue Squared is a book for young adults, either familiar with or curious about the peculiar, trans-cultural, liminal space that is Hong Kong. Luna Orchid, a penname that comes from the author's translation of the characters in her Chinese name, writes in a unique voice and language shaped by her upbringing in the city. "How can I brew / centuries of colonial history / and post-colonial uncertainty / into a cup of tea?" Though there is no answer to the almost-adult character's question, this verse novel offers a rare, albeit fictionalised, insider's look at what it was like to grow up as a Hong Konger at a time when the city's anxieties about her future were at its peak.

Blue Squared

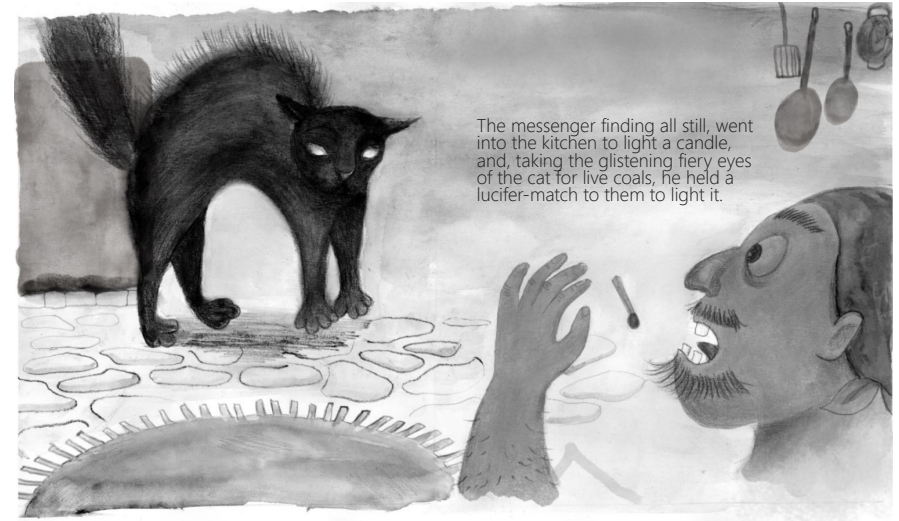
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The Town Musicians of Bremen

Xiaoli Li

The following is an extract of an interpretation of
The Town Musicians of Bremen, a Grimm's fairytale.



Pages 3-4



Pages 1-2



Pages 11-12

A note from Jenny Barker, the author:

These poems are extracts from a YA free verse novel called *It's All Grievy, Baby*. This follows a transitional year in the life of a 17-year-old girl following the death of her dad. Although many of the specific scenes are fictional, this is largely inspired by my own experience of losing my dad at a young age.

I wrote this novel after taking the Writing for Children and Young Adults module this spring with Sita Brahmachari. In this class, I felt inspired by the free verse form that many of my classmates were exploring and that we looked at in texts such as Sarah Crossan's *Where the Heart Should Be*. I was also encouraged by Sita to develop a closer emotional and personal connection with my writing.

It's All Grievy, Baby

Jenny Barker

Intended audience: Young Adult

Excuse me

Nobody will ever be able to say
that you didn't teach me to be polite.

Because when I step out into the corridor
minutes after you've stepped out of life
and see gossiping nurses
exchanging gum
and craning their necks
to observe the domestic
brewing around bed eleven
I want to eviscerate
them.

But I approach
the station,
stumbling over my feet
but not my words;
look them in the eye
and say:
Excuse me,
my dad's just died
and I'm not sure what happens next.
They stop chewing pretty quickly.

It's all grievy, baby

The first Sunday dinner without you is gravyless.
We sit in front of our full plates
and I wonder who will say something first.

Digging my nails into my palms
carves little crescent moons
that I gently massage away
only once it's been long enough
for the grooves to appear in the first place.

Sorry. A choke.
It's Mum. Face crumpled
like the napkin clenched in her fist.
Gravy's the one thing she didn't think of.
Gravy was uniquely your job.

She spent the morning making Yorkshires from scratch;
I wonder if they will sag like she does
when they realise the Bisto isn't coming.

The crumpled napkin
is now soggy with grief.
Sticky flakes of it cling
to her paper skin.

Alex and I rise in unison,
stepping into our new roles:
grieving daughters of a woeful widow.
It's a Brontë novel without the romance
and no Kate Bush to be seen.

And I swear I'm not crying,
it's just the seams of my soul are leaking a little;
the stitches are coming undone
one by
one
and
it's been so painfully swollen
that there's a lot at risk of seeping out.

There are still these moments when my brain forgets
but my body doesn't,
and just as I start to wonder why my chest aches
and I can't catch my breath,
the ice of realisation spreads through my veins —
cracking.

You tried to get me to help you make it once,
the gravy.
I asked why I would ever need to
when I had you to do it for me.

And it wouldn't be difficult,
not really.
Just four heaped teaspoons and a boiled kettle.
But suddenly it feels
impossible.

Wobble

Jelly pots
seem too juvenile for me now.
I can't quite put my finger on it.
It's like
after you've held your dad's lukewarm hand
as his last breath rattles from his mouth
you should graduate to Greek yoghurt.

But I'm guilt-ridden at the thought
of asking Mum to remove them from the weekly shop
when she's already had to take off all Dad's favourites
after a bag of Mini Cheddars made me cry last week.

Year 13
but she still insists on making my packed lunch.

Before,
I would leave most of it

and queue for a sausage butt instead.
Now
that feels like a cruelty
I can't comprehend committing,
even if she would never find out.
So at lunchtime,
I peel back the lid
and dig my spoon in.

Lemon and lime.

In Science this morning
Mr Sage told us
that if the moon were to ever disappear,
Earth would be destabilised.
It would wobble
like my jelly.

It took me too long to realise
Dad was the moon
hanging in my sky
and now I'm wobbling out of orbit.

I suppose the difference
is that even when there's a lunar eclipse
the moon makes a return
and he
never will.

Pancake Day

Mum surprises me
by remembering
the pancakes.

I get home from school
to three flavours of syrup
in the kitchen.

*How many pancakes do you want,
love?*

I feel normal
for a moment
as I take my seat at the breakfast bar,
but you never make your
entrance.
You don't get
your three pancakes.
And nobody draws a squirty cream smile
on my plate.

I only manage one
before the tears spill
over and pour
down my face.
I try to cry quietly
but Mum turns from the hob
and sees.

Oh, love.
She holds me without words
and the knots in my chest
loosen
unexpectedly.

Swallowing back my grief
has exhausted me,
but I've been worried
that people might grow
tired of me
if I let it show

too often.
I've tried so hard,
but as I hug Mum back
and feel lighter,
I wonder
if I should be trying softly
instead.



Photo credit: Marina Waters

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN GREEN

SPINNING GOLD EDITORIAL TEAM

What do you enjoy most about writing YA novels? Is there anything you find particularly challenging?

JOHN GREEN

I really love both the audience and the genre. On the audience front, it's such a privilege to have a seat at the table in young people's lives as they form their values. YA readers are often considering big questions of human life in delightfully open and unironic ways — they're asking questions about suffering and justice and what we owe to others. I remain very interested in all those questions. And then as a genre, I love how YA crosses categories. I love the idea of horror novels and fantasy novels and so-called literary novels all being in conversation with each other, as they are on YA bookshelves.

SPINNING GOLD

Has there ever been a theme or concept you wanted to explore in a book

that you decided you couldn't express in a way that's appropriate for YA?

GREEN

That's an interesting question. I don't really think so. I suppose the classic rule of YA lit, and kids' lit in general, is that it ought to be a little hopeful while still being honest. This is not a problem for me as a writer, since I think all truly honest stories are also hopeful ones.

SPINNING GOLD

You recently joined a lawsuit by Penguin Random House and Iowa State Education Association against the state of Iowa over a new law that bans books depicting sex acts from schools. How important do you think it is that YA novels reflect the full teenage experience without censorship?

GREEN

As I understand it, my responsibility as a novelist is to write the truth, which of course includes the fact that sexuality is an important part of teen life and an important consideration for teenagers. I try to write about sex, and indeed other topics, without sensationalising or denigrating it — I want to write about it as a thing that is rather than a thing that should or shouldn't be.

SPINNING GOLD

You have spoken in the past about the benefits of running for your physical and mental health. Do you think it has also helped you as a writer, considering how sedentary that can be?

GREEN

A lot of my friends get great ideas while they are exercising and use it as part of their creative expression. For me, when I am running, I can only think about running. The whole pleasure of it is that I'm not able to think about much else, or focus my attention. But I do come up with a lot of ideas while hiking or walking, and then I take them to the keyboard when I'm back home.

SPINNING GOLD

If you had to choose three children's or YA books that every child should

read, what would they be and why?

GREEN

This is such a difficult one. I suppose I would recommend *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, *Forever* by Judy Blume, and *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing* by M T Anderson.

SPINNING GOLD

What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in writing for children/young adults?

GREEN

I think reading is our best apprenticeship. Reading is how we can see the ways that other writers have constructed stories and characters in ways that make us believe in them. And the joy of writing for me is that you can learn directly from writers who lived a hundred or five hundred or a thousand years ago. Shakespeare has much to teach us about writing for young people, as does Laurie Halse Anderson. So my biggest piece of advice is to read broadly, but also, on a practical level, when writing we must remember that we are not making something primarily for ourselves but making a story primarily as a gift. When I can remember that, I'm always better off.

SPINNING GOLD

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today. To conclude, is there anything you would like to share about current or upcoming projects?

GREEN

My next project isn't for kids; I'm writing a nonfiction book about the history and presence of tuberculosis. But once this is done, I am going to try returning to fiction and see what's possible for me there in middle age. I look forward to finding out! Thanks for the brilliant questions.



Care is Love
Dingrong Tao

A note from Desiri Okobia, the author:

The story is set in 21st-century inner-city London. It features the voices of four teenagers: ANGELIQUE, QUINCY, BIL-LIE-JO AND JEZZICA through the Easter term of secondary school in 2019. Each character speaks in their own authentic voice. As their lives begin to intertwine they impact each other more than they knew they could.

As a writer/teacher I wanted to give insight into the voices of teenage school children who need to be seen and heard in YA Fiction Novels. Hence the story presents chapters in each character's point of view; it focuses on their own unique struggles to find their importance and identity in the world. Oftentimes, teenagers can be misunderstood by the adults in their lives. In 'Meet the Kids,' they are trying to help each other in a world that they know and understand.

Meet the Kids

Desiri Okobia

Intended audience: Young Adult

Chapter Forty-Four.

Quincy

I walk in late to the media literacy lesson. The topic is 'online safety.'

"What are the key things to remember about online safety?" Mr Watson is asking the class.

I take my seat at the back and keep my head down hoping he doesn't ask me.

To be honest, I don't really chat to people online, I might go on Snapchat occasionally but that's mainly people I know innit. This is a one-off lesson, we have different topics for PSHE throughout the year. Last week it was on gaming, that's a bit more interesting. Today's topic is kind of boring though still.

One of the things that catches my attention is when Mr Watson starts talking about the issue of 'online grooming.' Basically, grooming is when an adult is speaking to a child and trying to form a relationship with them.

"Anyone can be anyone on the internet," Mr Watson says. "This is why you all need to be careful and be aware of the safety implications when speaking to people online."

"Implications you know!" There's sniggering in the room.

Sir writes a definition on the board for the class to copy down:

'Grooming is when an adult builds a relationship, trust or emotional

connection with a child for the purpose of manipulating, exploiting or abusing them.'

Mr Watson tells us that we must get into groups of four and talk about different ways grooming can take place.

I'm in a group with Philomena, Elliot and Zieks. Philomena always has lots to say, so we let her do most of the talking.

When the group start chatting about the adult speaking to a child and forming a relationship, it makes me think about Jezzica and the boyfriend that she was telling me about the other day – that Francis guy.

She told me that he's nineteen, but from what I know he's much older than that. I'll be so real; he looks about twenty-five at least. To be honest, I don't know what he would want with a fifteen-year-old girlfriend. Especially as these men are some serious guys.

"What if two people meet online but the child is pretending to be over eighteen and is talking to another adult? Is that still grooming?" Elliot asks.

"That's a good question," Philomena replies. "I wonder if we can still classify it as grooming if the child is lying about their age."

Philomena throws the question out to the group. Zieks isn't paying attention, he has his phone out underneath the table and keeps glancing back at sir to make sure that he can't see.

"I don't know if it's grooming because if the girl is lying about her age, then man can plead ignorance innit," Zieks looks up from his phone to give his input.

"I guess it would depend on where they met, if it was an adult website or something then I guess the child would be in the wrong for going on there in the first place right?" Elliot adds.

"Alright, cool. What if it's a man talking to a younger girl, and she later tells him her real age. If he continues talking to her, is that grooming?" I throw in my two pence, then keep it quiet.

As the discussion continues my mind can't help but race back to Jezzica.

Philomena is asking us lots of questions and trying to move the

discussion along.

"Is it still grooming if the child is only a few years younger than the adult, so for example, a fifteen-year-old being in a relationship with someone who is eighteen?" Philomena speaks so loudly that the question goes out to the whole class.

The group discussions are getting louder and louder. Sir's asking us to, "Quieten down," but everyone is so engaged in it.

It's weird that Philomena asks that question. I look around and see what kind of responses everyone gives. Some of the other girls in the groups are saying that there's nothing wrong with going out with an 18-year-old- that doesn't mean that you're being groomed.

"What about fifteen and twenty-two?" I just ask this to see what kind of responses I get.

There's a mad uproar in the classroom.

"Peak! Dodge! That's giving paedo!"

I'm not even sure who says what, it's just bare noise.

"That's dodge," Philomena says.

"I would never do that. A fifteen-year-old can't go out with a twenty-two-year-old. Isn't that illegal anyway?"

I'm just listening. I'm thinking about how I can go back to Jezzica and let her know that she is being groomed because it sounds like she is.

She may not want to hear it but I'm going to have to tell her.

I'll probably see her at lunchtime if I wait by the canteen.

If Jezzica doesn't listen to me, I might get Billie-Jo to chat to her instead; she was asking about Jezzica when I bumped into her earlier on today.

Talking about flowers or something.

"Pink petunias."

I'm not sure; I had to rush off.

“Yeh get her some flowers innit.”

“I mean I could write something for her.”

“Yeh that’s cool, write something.”

Girls know how to put things in words.

Billie-Jo has healing words.

Chapter Forty-Five.

Angelique

Okay, so I’ve booked an appointment with the school careers advisor.

Chinuke recommended it to me. The school careers advisor is called Mrs Cleopatra, she’s a lovely lady, looks like she’s in her late 60s and kind of reminds me of my grandmother. She’s always so well put together. She wears the most elegant suits with matching shoes and bags and the most extravagant jewellery.

I tell her all about my job applications, and the assessment day that I had at Microgem.

“I haven’t had much success. So far I’ve had two rejection letters, one assessment day and the rest I haven’t heard from.”

Mrs Cleopatra doesn’t say much, she turns around and goes onto her computer, then I hear her clicking away. She turns back to me, with a bright smile all over her face.

“I have something just for you my dear Angelique,” she has something on her screen which I cannot see from where I’m sitting.

“This is an excellent company, Angelique. I would highly recommend it to you; they are full of opportunities for young black women who want to work in science.”

I look at Mrs Cleopatra for a minute and I remember what Chinuke told me about her event with the Black Female Lawyers Association. I wonder whether this is how it’s always going to be.

“Will I always have to find specific schemes that cater for black women?”

“What do you mean by that?” Mrs Cleopatra looks into my eyes concerned.

“I mean, all these schemes for black women. It just seems like a way to make us feel included whilst at the same time reminding us that we will always be marginalised.”

“It depends how you look at it, Angelique. It can also be a way to ensure that there is fairness and diversity in the recruitment process,” Mrs Cleopatra helps me to gain perspective.

“I’ve just come across a great scheme, Angelique, and it will open many other doors of opportunity for you.”

I want to take Mrs Cleopatra’s advice, besides I don’t have that much to lose anyway. I’ve filled out so many applications over the past few weeks and I haven’t had any positive responses back.

“Thanks Mrs Cleopatra,” I breathe a subtle sigh. “What is this company you have found then?”

Mrs Cleopatra prints out the page from her computer screen and hands it to me.

I take one look at the webpage and the name springs straight off the page.

“It’s called GlaxoSmithKline,” she says as I’m reading.

“I know this place. That’s where my Aunt Lorraine used to work.” I’m so ecstatic that I forget that Mrs Cleopatra doesn’t even know who my Aunt Lorraine is.

“Aunt Lorraine?”

“Yes Mrs Cleopatra, my Aunt Lorraine was a scientist and she used to work at this exact same company.”

“Well, perfect timing. With your educational attainment record and extra-curricular activities, I think that you will be a great candidate for this scheme. The applications are open for another week. If you are interested, all I need is your personal statement. I already have your CV.”

“When does the scheme start?” I ask to see whether it fits in with my current plans.

“Initially, it will be a four-week summer placement — paid of course. Then depending on how well you do, and assuming you enjoy your experience, you can apply for a longer internship once you finish school.”

“Ok, I have my personal statement ready, it’s the same one that I’ve been using for my other applications. I will just need to tweak a few details to fit the requirements.”

“Perfect. Can you get it to me by the end of the week?”

“No problem, Mrs Cleopatra.”

I am hopeful about this opportunity.

I can’t wait to tell mum the great news.

But first I need to go and see Quincy, I hope he sorted out the situation with that girl he was telling me about yesterday.

Chapter Forty-Six. **Billie-Jo**

The trees are green today,
dark green though.
I feel like yesterday they were
a
much
lighter shade.
I’m looking
at
the leaves
watching them rustle along the ground.
They blow at a steady pace,
in unison with my footsteps.
As I walk,
the leaves blow.
When I stop,
the leaves stand still.
I take another step
and
more leaves
scrape across concrete.
Now, I’m surrounded by them.

I’m still working on the poem for my English project. I’ve been working on it for about a week now. Ms Oduro said that we can perform at the end of term celebration evening. Quincy and I told her our idea about combining poetry with rap lyrics. She said that it was a brilliant idea, so that’s what we’re working on now.

I decide to start off with my poem for Jezzica. Quincy asked me to write one earlier. He didn’t say what I should write about though.

“Write something nice innit.”

Well, if I was going through a distressing time — like I am now — what would I want someone to say to me? I would want them to tell me something funny or something beautiful that I can focus on instead of my stressful situation. I’m in the park, the one with all the flower beds. I decided to stop here after school, it’s such an idealistic place.

I’m sitting on a bench in the middle of the park next to one of the largest flower beds. I know what to do, I’ll write Jezzica a poem about these flowers. She can think about the beautiful smell and the lovely sounds of birds tweeting.

*If I could fall asleep
on a bed full of flowers.
I would have
the most peaceful sleep,
because these flowers are soft,
and they smell so beautiful.
Pink petunias,
red roses,
yellow bells.*

Chapter Forty-Seven. **Jezzica**

I turn up to school with half of my uniform on because I couldn’t find my school skirt this morning. I might have left it at Francis’ flat; I can’t remember.

I wrote a note from my mum in my school planner:

Please excuse Jezzica from wearing leggings today, her skirt got mixed up in last night’s washing so is not dry yet.

Signed K.Burrows

As soon as I get through the main door of school, Brewski is being rude to me about makeup.

“Excuse me young lady,” he says.

Brewski hands me a wet wipe and directs me to the girl’s toilet.

“What’s this for sir?” I ask him.

“That makeup needs to come off before you enter the building, young lady.”

“But sir—”

“No buts, it’s not appropriate to come to school with your face plastered in makeup.”

My face isn’t even plastered, but I don’t want him calling my mum about makeup; that might draw more attention to the fact that I’m wearing leggings instead of a school skirt. Then they might find out that I faked mum’s handwriting and her signature in the note.

I take the wipe.

I take the makeup off.

Whatever.

I’m starting to think that no one really cares about me in this school. Every time I come here one of the teachers are moaning at me about the fact that I’m not wearing my correct uniform or I’m late or I’m wearing too much makeup. Don’t they have anything better to focus on? I bumped into Quincy at lunchtime again and he was just going on about how Francis is using me and manipulating me and grooming me. It was so annoying. I think he’s only behaving like this because he likes me, but it’s all a bit over the top.

The funny thing is, I was on the phone to Francis at the time anyway. He was messaging me arranging to take me out at the weekend. As soon as I saw Quincy, I turned my phone over so that the screen was facing downwards. I didn’t want him to see Francis’s name on my screen, not that I’m hiding anything from him but it’s just so that he doesn’t get jealous.

I had to stand there for about 15 minutes listening to Quincy ranting on about his concerns and about grooming. He learnt about it in a media lesson now he thinks he knows everything. I knew that Quincy wasn’t going to stop talking so I just went quiet. Then shortly after that he stopped.

Miss Tamme stopped me in the hallway as well, she was asking me about my leggings. I had to show her the note. Honestly, I swear all these teachers care about is clothes and makeup. I could be going home depressed every day and I bet they would still only ask me about my school uniform.

Something else happened to me today, just as I was starting to think no one cares about me. There’s a new girl in our school, her name is Billie-Jo.

She’s well quiet; doesn’t speak to that many people. I see her with Quincy sometimes. Well, this afternoon she came up to me all nervous and shaky and that.

“Hi, my name is Billie.”

She hands me an envelope.

“What’s this?”

“Just a poem, something that I wrote for you.”

“For me? You wrote a poem for me?”

I find it a bit weird — her writing me a poem — I keep my face straight.

“Yes. I saw you talking to Quincy the other day. You looked a bit upset. I didn’t want to intrude on your conversation, it’s just that sometimes when I’m upset, I write poetry.”

“I don’t know how to write poetry.”

“That’s ok, I wrote this one for you. I hope you like it.”

“Thanks.”

Before Billie walks away, I open the envelope to read the poem in front of her. I want her to see my face so that if it’s rubbish, she won’t write me one again.

My eyes go straight to the middle.

*If I could fall asleep on a flower bed
I would have
red,
pink
and yellow
for a pillow
I would have the most peaceful sleep
It would be so soothing to my soul
all I would smell would be your beautiful fumes.*

I fold it up quickly; I can't remember the last time I had a peaceful sleep. I don't tell Billie-Jo how I feel. I don't know her like that.

"How do you know Quincy?" I ask her before I turn around to go.

"He's in my English class and we're working on a homework project together. I'm writing a poem and Quincy is writing a rap. We are going to perform them together at the school celebration evening."

"Oh ok."

"Maybe you can come along."

"I might."

I give Billie a closed mouth smile and walk off with the poem in my hand. Don't want her getting all excited thinking we're friends and that just because she wrote me a poem.

Just after I take a few steps, Bonnie comes running up to me. She wants to talk about her media literacy lesson on grooming as well.

"It was really scary Jezz, you should have been there."

I tell her that I've already heard about grooming from Quincy, but she still wants to talk about it.

"Francis is not grooming me, Bon. He is my boyfriend."

Bonnie says something that shocks me.

"Imagine if Francis or one of his mates got a hold of Millie."

"Millie? She's twelve years old."

"Yep, three years younger than you."

I can't stop thinking about what Bonnie said to me.

What if Francis does get a hold of Millie?

Maybe not him, but one of his friends.

I don't know what I would do.

I can't have someone like that kidnapping my twelve-year-old sister.

I unravel the folded-up poem that's now in my blazer pocket.

I can forget all of my worries,

as I fall asleep and wake up on my bed of flowers.



Sketchbook work: Kids in London
Giotto Bao

PAUL THE CAT

Maayan Weisstub



Once there was a cat named Paul. Paul lived in a cosy little house and liked to take care of everything himself.

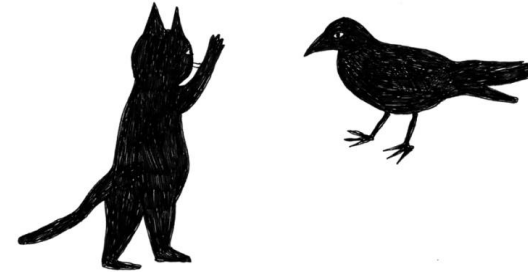
Any fixing to be done, he would fix it himself. Fish to be cooked, he cooked it himself. Dirty dishes or dirty laundry, he cleaned them himself. Paul took pride in the fact that he never ever asked for anyone's help!



Paul, like most cats, loved to eat, clean, sleep... and explore! He really loved to walk outside and explore his neighbourhood.

One foggy morning, Paul went for a walk in the park near his house.

He said good morning to a couple of cats he knew, he stopped and played with curious objects that came across his way, he waved hello to Mr. Crow and then kept walking through the cloudy park.

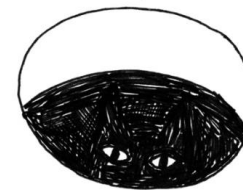


Halfway around the park Paul increased his walking pace because he'd once heard on the radio that it was healthy for you.

He walked quickly, step by step in the fog when suddenly...

sound effect

Paul found himself in a deep black hole.



"OH NO!"

"I must get myself out of here as soon as possible so that I won't run late on my schedule".

"No problem, I'm a cat. I'll just climb out!"

But Paul's claws weren't sharp enough and he couldn't grip the sides of the pit to lever himself out. With every attempt to climb up, he found himself sliding down to the bottom of the hole.

"No problem, I'm a cat, I'll just jump out!" he said.

But the pit was too narrow and did not allow the space for Paul to take a run up, let alone a jump big enough to escape the hole. Every time he tried to jump out he found himself landing in the same spot.

"No problem, I'm a cat. I'll just... I'll just..." but Paul ran out of ideas.

Paul's stomach rumbled. There was nothing to eat in the hole and it was too cold to sleep.

Time passed and Paul heard various animals and humans passing by the hole but somehow no one seemed to notice Paul nor the hole itself.

"What will I do?" Paul thought. "I'm doomed! I will end up in this horrid black hole forever and ever."

When people and creatures passed by the hole, Paul could hear them walking nearby, but because he always did everything for himself he just didn't know how to ask for help. So they just continued on their way.

Time was passing and Paul was starting to get frightened.

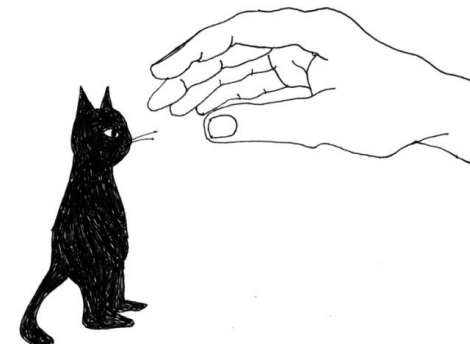
He started to sob helplessly, "Meow, meow, meow..."

Barely two minutes passed and [Just then] a large hand grabbed the sorry little cat by the scruff of his neck and pulled him out of the hole. The hand placed Paul safely back onto the grass. Paul was very confused. "How did you know I was in there?" Paul asked the hand.



"It wasn't very hard. I heard you calling for help", replied the kind voice that belonged to the hand.

" Well...I didn't think of that! But of course. Thank you kindly", added Paul. "You are most welcome." replied the hand.



Luckily, it wasn't too late in the day and Paul walked carefully back home. He was terribly hungry. And he couldn't wait to get back to his duties and begin preparing his supper.

Ever since Paul fell in the hole he still liked to take care of everything himself! Any fixing to be done, he fixed it himself. Fish to be cooked, he cooked it himself. Dirty dishes or dirty laundry, he cleaned them himself.



But now, Paul takes pride in the fact that he can ask for help... every now and then.

The Terrible Curse of Malcolm Crane

Adrianna Ryn

Intended audience: Ages 8-12

Chapter 6

On the straw floor of the jail cell in Boon, Patience sighed and stretched her legs. Today was not turning out the way she had planned at all.

That Inspector had come from behind a corner, and she had bumped right into him. She had not even seen him until he had a hand around her collar. She gritted her teeth. There was no excuse for that, not if you were a witch. Witches were supposed to know things.

Obviously, she would have to escape.

The jail cell smelled like old socks. A guard sat outside, on a stool, eyes half-closed. There was a cot and a chamberpot and, in the corner, a pile of rags, which seemed to be chiefly responsible for the bad smell. The only fresh air came from a small, high window that barely let in any sunlight at all.

Patience's hand slipped into her pocket where, wrapped in oiled canvas, her mother's scissors lay quietly.

She felt calmer at once. She would just have to wait for the right time to use them, a time when no one was looking. She looked again at the guard. He was almost asleep, chin an inch from his chest. She would not have long to wait.

So she sat there, and thought about Memory Four.

Memory Four was something else her mother taught her: Understand the difference between *unlikely* and *impossible*.

A lot of things are very, very, very unlikely.

Almost nothing is truly impossible.

"A witch," her mother had said, holding out her scissors, "can reach out and sort through even the slimmest strands of fate. For a witch, *unlike-ly* is just a challenge."

They were sitting in the library in the cottage. Patience had been very young and had never seen scissors so close before. The scissors were silver, slim and bright as moonbeams, and sharp enough to trim a single degree off next Sunday's weather. They seemed to be part of her mother, somehow; her sharpness and brightness having taken another form.

While Patience watched, her mother had snipped the air with her scissors, and the library's walls were suddenly pink with green polka dots. Patience had gasped and laughed.

It was the first time she had ever seen magic.

After that, Patience had thought that no harm would ever come to her mother. She knew that bad people were trying to find them, so they had to move around a lot. She knew that witches were being captured and sent to prison all the time. But she had seen the power of her mother's scissors and believed that it was impossible for anything bad to happen to *them*.

She had been wrong.

Almost nothing is truly impossible.

.....

A noise had been growing from outside the prison, from the window. It was the sound of a screaming crowd. She stood up and peered outside, at an open space beyond, but all she could see from this angle was a cloudy brown sky. Listening to the noise, Patience had the odd, prickly idea that this crowd was trying to put words to the music of the song she had felt in the streets, a song of coming-together, but it curdled in their mouths and came out all wrong and wicked.

Over the screams, a single voice was speaking.

"... The enemy is everywhere," the voice said. "But so are we. The enemy is trying to make us doubt. But we ignore them and listen only to Upton News, and also support their sponsors, Anti-Curse Nutritional Supplements and Spurt Energy Drink, now with a new flavor, Inquisitor Lime. ..."

"And who are *you*?" Patience wondered out loud.

"The Duke, of course."

Patience jerked backwards. The bundle in the corner had sat up, revealing a sinister-looking man beneath the rags. He had long hair and

a thin, deprived face, like a carrot that had been forgotten at the back of a cupboard. A piece of straw stuck out of one of his extravagantly curly eyebrows.

He looked at her curiously.

"Don't you know the Duke? I thought everyone did."

"No," said Patience. "Not really." The man looked pleased. Patience asked, "Why did they arrest you?"

He bared his teeth in a smile. "Loitering."

"What does that mean?" asked Patience, frowning.

He thought. "Means waiting around."

"What were you waiting for?"

"I'm looking for someone."

Patience almost asked who he was looking for, but he looked suddenly annoyed, as if he did not like answering questions.

"I ran away from an orphanage," Patience said. "I threw a potato at Matron."

The man's face twitched. Then he chuckled.

Patience found herself smiling too. She thought that, despite his appearance, the sinister-looking man was probably a good person. Perhaps, in a place like Boon, this was where all the good people were: locked up in jail.

"Well, I had better go," she said. The guard outside had fallen asleep at last.

"So soon?" asked the sinister man. She could tell he thought she was joking.

She wouldn't show scissors to just anyone, but she trusted this man. Besides, she didn't really have a choice. Slowly, she pulled them out and showed him.

His eyes widened when he saw her scissors. "Are those...?"

The scissors glinted like liquid moonlight. They were no longer than her hand. The hinge was shaped like a white rose, and faint carvings of thorny vines twisted round the handles. After all these years, there was not a scratch on them.

He whistled. "I've only heard of them. There must not be more than one or two pairs left in the whole world."

“You won’t tell, will you?”

He winked and put a finger to his lips.

Patience took a deep breath as she approached the cell door. It would be easiest to make it do something it might have done anyway. A door is often open — it swings open in the wind; the latch fails; it is left ajar.

All she had to do was bring one of those possibilities into existence.

She thought witchy thoughts.

Her vision blurred. All possible futures of the door folded out in front of her. She saw the silvery threads of fate that led from the door to each future. When she found the future she wanted, she simply pinched the thread with her fingers — you don’t want to lose track; fates are slippery things — and snipped away the rest.

The severed threads of fate fizzed and scattered around her like dandelion fluff, almost invisible, and drifted away on the wind.

The door swung open.

Patience stepped over the threshold. She carefully wrapped her scissors up and put them in her pocket again.

Luckily, apart from the single sleeping guard, there was nobody about. The dank stone passageway was curiously empty.

Behind her, the sinister man’s head stuck out of the door. With a look of glee, he scampered down the hall.

Patience went the other way. There was a sheet of bright light at the end of the hallway, flung against the wall, from what looked like a wide-open door down a bend. She grinned.

They would never keep her locked up.

She was a witch, after all.

She set off towards the sunlight, head held high.

Chapter 7

As far as the Duke was concerned, things were too peaceful. He paced the round office in his tall dark Tower. His assistant, standing in a corner, looked on with apprehension.

It seemed counter-intuitive. After all, he had risen to great heights on the promise that he would keep the country safe from enemies. He had gotten rid of the witches and fought cursed people. People were afraid, and

they trusted him. And his power had grown.

But these days, everything felt *too* safe. The last witch had been captured ten years ago. And now that they were gone, curses were fading too. The Duke sent his Inspectors out to every town in the country, and what did they find? Small, harmless curses — curses that made you smell of strawberries, or blow bubbles from your ears.

And now, people were not as afraid as they used to be.

The Duke glared up at the television, which was broadcasting a heart-warming documentary about his charitable works. Recently, people were cheering him less warmly, waving less enthusiastically, chanting his name with less verve. And now, with his latest Rule — only people in Boon were allowed to fish — he had actually heard *complaints*.

How he longed to find someone who could blow something up, or turn you to ash, or scorch you with their eyes! Now, those were real curses. Frightening curses.

Useful curses.

“If people feel too safe,” he said to his assistant, “they will start to ask questions. They might ask why they can’t drink the river water. They might ask why the only news is Upton News. They might even ask — ” he shuddered — “why I get to be the Duke, and we can’t have that.”

The assistant was a mournful-looking young man with a face like a fish. Feebly, he said, “But, sir, we *are* safe. No one has been attacked by a cursed person in months. There just aren’t any enemies left.”

The Duke narrowed his eyes. “There are always enemies.”

He leaned against the windowsill, thinking hard.

He swung back around. “Have we heard back from any of my Inspectors?”

“Y-Yes, sir. They’ve captured some cursed people.”

“Anything good?”

“There’s a girl with ears like a fox’s. And a boy who can talk to spiders.”

“Anyone can *talk* to spiders,” said the Duke dourly. “Where is my High Inspector?”

“Newmarket, sir,” said the assistant.

“What’s that?”

“It’s a — town, sir. In the South. By the Sea.”

The Duke scowled. “As if she’s going to find a terrible, menacing enemy in a two-bit town like Whomarket.”

“Oh, right, sir,” said the assistant.

The Duke looked around discontentedly. His assistant was getting on his nerves. Even television wasn’t improving his mood. In a time like this, there was only one thing to do.

“Call my guards,” he said. “I’m going to visit the witch.”

.....

The witch lived in the prison, not far from the Duke’s Tower. He’d had it built nearby on purpose, so he could visit often. The Duke had always liked prisons; they were full of people who were frightened and powerless, which appealed to something deep in his unpleasant soul.

If the Duke had looked carefully, he might have noticed that the guards were breathing hard, as if they had been called away from some emergency. But he had never cared that much about other people. He looked approvingly at their crisp uniforms as he and his guards pushed past into the dimness of the prison.

He turned at the end of the passageway, to the courtyard marked by a splash of sunlight on the opposite wall.

As he emerged into the sunlight, he heard a sound he had not heard in ages — the noise of muffled, hastily concealed laughter.

The witch sat on her own in the back, painting. A slant of sunlight fell over her long black hair and her canvas. From the way the other prisoners hastily angled themselves away, he was certain that she had been at the center of the laughter.

The Duke frowned.

He didn’t like the thought of people enjoying themselves in prison. He didn’t like people enjoying themselves generally; he himself was only happy when other people were suffering, so other forms of happiness perplexed and baffled him. One day he would make people apply for a permit to smile, he decided. Laughing would become an official event, and he would lead it.

He angled himself between the painting and the sun and peered down at the witch’s canvas.

“Nice picture,” he lied. It was a sentimental thing, a painting of a cottage by a river.

“Thank you,” said the witch. “Do you paint, Governor?”

The Duke stared at her. “No.”

“I see.” She added a dash of white paint to the river, so it looked like sunlight winking on a swell.

The Governor shifted from foot to foot.

“I know why you’re here,” said the witch.

“Why’s that?”

He tried to sound amused, though he himself wasn’t certain why he visited so often, when there were so many other prisoners he could terrorize. It frustrated him that she was so serene in a place like this. It frustrated and intrigued him.

“It’s a Thursday. You usually only visit on a Monday or Wednesday, if you’re bored. Thursdays are for television interviews. So something else must have particularly annoyed you today if you need to take it out on me.”

“After all these years, you’re still a troublemaker, I see,” said the Duke. “Perhaps you are too comfortable here.”

She shrugged. “Do what you like to me. The threads of fate are already being woven against you.”

“What does that mean?”

He pushed her painting to the ground. They both stared at it. The still-wet colors mingled together.

She turned her shining dark eyes to him. And from the dark hallway of the prison behind him, a girl strolled into the courtyard.

And stopped.

For a moment they all stared at each other, frozen with astonishment. The Duke had not been surprised in so long, his reflexes were slow. And she just stared like a rabbit in headlights.

She looked a bit like a rabbit, he thought, during that long second. A brown rabbit, wrapped in an oversized coat, with long hair and very large frightened eyes...

Quick as a flash, she turned and ran back the way she had come.

“After her!” The Duke stood up, then stopped and pointed dramatically while his guards took off after the girl. He made to follow them — but something made him turn and look back at the witch.

The witch was staring at the place where the girl had stood, as if she had taken her heart and run away with it, and there was not a trace of a

smile on her lips anymore.

Interesting, thought the Duke, who knew not a thing about love, but recognized its pale sister, fear. Very interesting. He shut the door behind him. Let her wonder if her little rabbit was alive or dead.

A breathless guard bustled up. "So sorry, sir. A street child escaped just now — someone must have left the cell unlocked — "

"No matter," said the Duke, smiling. "Get me my Chief Inspector. I need to speak with her at once."

The guard paled. "The — Chief Inspector, sir?"

"Oh yes," said the Duke. "There is a witch on the loose."

He paced sedately after the guards, smiling.

As far as the Duke was concerned, the day was looking up.



Beyond the Wooden Door
Dingrong Tao

I am a poem

Zoe Farmes

Wind through a tower block
Dogs bark through air
Traffic

Thrum of an aeroplane
Steam over hot tea
A road crackling with rain

Hard like gutters
Soft like sun
Slugging through the window

My words fall
Like leaves
But I am not unreadable
Just Shakespeare

But everything
The colours of a meadow
Every one of my bones
A wild flower



Photo credit: Interviewee's own

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR EMILY CORBETT

SPINNING GOLD EDITORIAL TEAM

Your monograph, In Transition: Young Adult Literature and Transgender Representation, came out in June 2024. When did you know that you wanted to write a book on this topic, and did the process happen how you imagined it would?

DR EMILY CORBETT

The book's journey began in 2017 as my doctoral research project. My research was inspired by the growing volume of calls for increased representation in books for young people being put forward by wonderful organisations like We Need Diverse Books, as well as authors, academics, and readers alike. I'd had the great privilege of being able to recognise myself and some of my experiences in the fiction I was reading when I was growing up, but I was ever-increasingly aware that wasn't a universal experience. The publication of Lisa Williamson's *The Art of Being Normal* (2015) marked a significant moment for me – it was the first time I recall seeing transgender teenagers represented in the British young adult book market. As I looked deeper and further afield, I discov-

ered a significant gap in both fiction and scholarship that I felt compelled to explore. However, my research didn't progress as I'd initially envisioned for the very best of reasons. The number of transgender YA books being published far outpaced my predictions, reshaping my project. I had set out to closely analyse every Anglophone example published, but ultimately identified at least 140 examples (and those were just the ones I could find). My approach necessarily shifted from comprehensive analysis to the identification of trends and patterns coupled with more selective close reading.

Transforming my doctoral research into a monograph was relatively smooth, thanks to the groundwork laid during my PhD and the continued support of my excellent supervisors and examiners. However, there were challenges. For example, balancing the rapid changes in my research area with the glacial pace of academic publishing required me to update my findings multiple times throughout the process. A more significant challenge has been witnessing the troubling discourse around transgender rights in the UK, which directly affects friends and colleagues I've made through my research. In the face of prominent cisgender individuals using their platforms to attack, limit, or deny the lived experiences of trans young people, it becomes even more crucial to provide a counterbalance. My book aims to do just that – celebrating and amplifying trans authors while challenging cisnormative approaches to trans representation. For that reason, I'm very glad to have written it.

SPINNING GOLD

In your book, you examine the evolution of transgender representation in young adult literature since 2004. You discuss the significance of the 'problem novel' when it comes to literary representations of LGBTQ+ identities. Are problem novels problematic, and how far do you feel we have moved beyond them?

CORBETT

Problem novels can be inherently problematic, particularly when they frame diverse identities as 'issues' to be resolved. This is especially prevalent in early LGBTQ+ representations. The genre's conventions often position certain experiences or identities as obstacles to be overcome or even eliminated, which can be harmful when these so-called 'problems' are intrinsic to many teenagers' lives and identities. However, it's important to acknowledge the role problem novels have played in opening doors for representation. For better or worse, they've often served as the initial avenue for authors to engage with new identities or experiences in

YA fiction, paving the way for more nuanced portrayals.

While I don't subscribe to the view that we've moved beyond problem novels, we're witnessing an encouraging shift. In a forthcoming chapter for *The Cambridge History of Children's Literature* (spoiler alert), I argue some contemporary YA novels are reframing the 'problem' away from individual identities and towards societal and systemic issues. This shift allows for more empowering narratives that challenge broader structures rather than problematising personal identities. Some works still fall into older tropes, but many are pushing boundaries, offering more authentic and diverse representations.

SPINNING GOLD

In 2020, you both co-founded the YA Studies Association and co-launched The International Journal of Young Adult Literature, celebrating and harvesting YA scholarship. Why do you think YA has experienced such a 'boom' in both literary and academic fields recently? Is there an area of YA scholarship that you feel is currently underexplored or that you would like to see more submissions about?

CORBETT

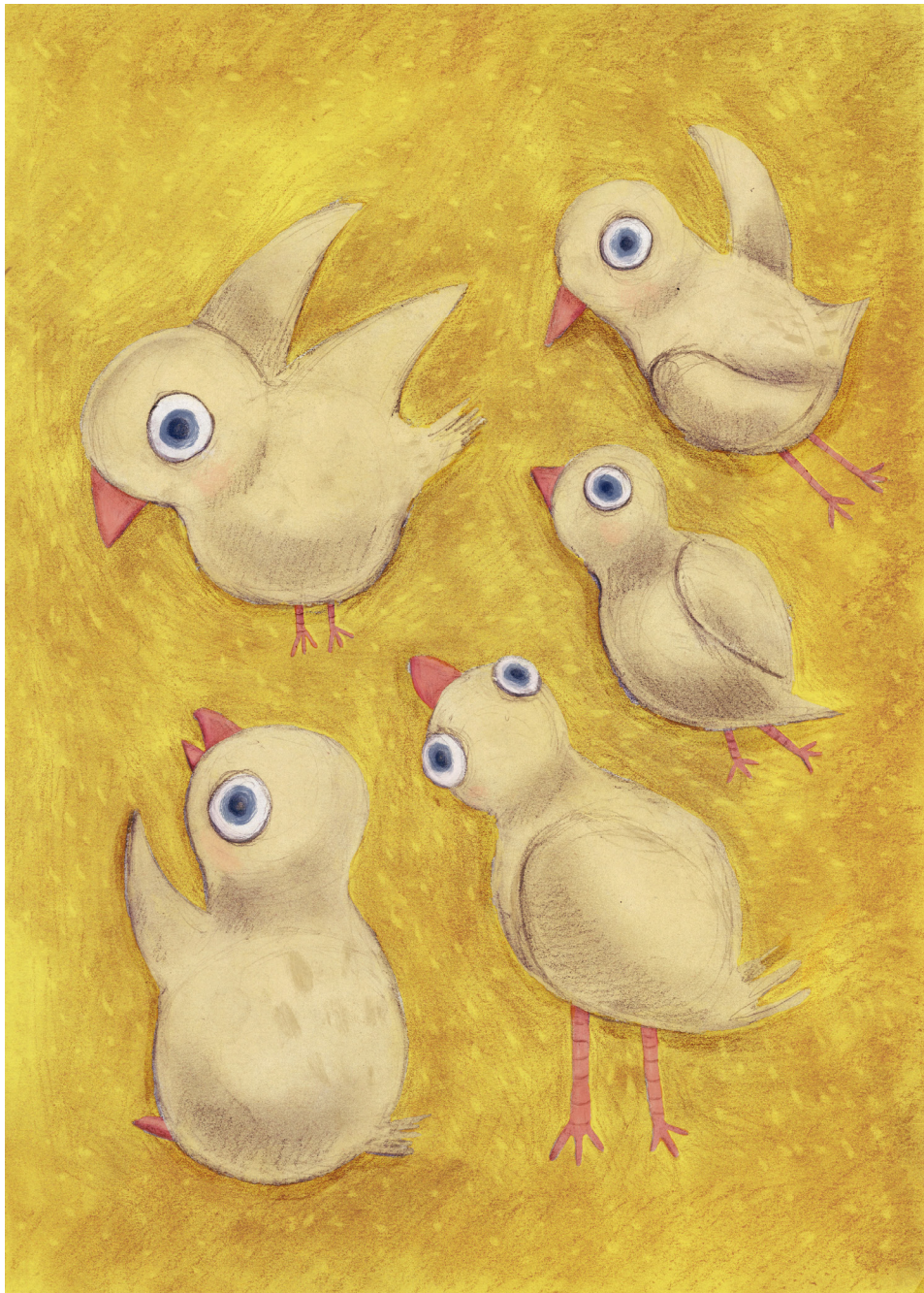
Twenty-twenty certainly felt like a bumper year, both for me personally and for the field of YA studies. I can't say for sure precisely why we were compelled to create both the YA Studies Association and *The International Journal of Young Adult Literature* at this time, but I have a few theories about the growth of YA and YA studies in recent years. The increased recognition of YA as a vehicle for social change, coupled with the market success of blockbuster series like *The Hunger Games*, has elevated the profile of YA in the academy. Additionally, the rise of young adult activism and the destigmatisation of YA as a 'guilty pleasure' have brought about an increase in the perceived legitimacy of the field. Many of today's scholars and creators also grew up with YA and have carried that interest into adulthood. The growth and development of YA is something I explore with my colleague Dr Leah Phillips in our article series, "Ploughing the Field", which brings together experts from around the world for roundtable discussions. I welcome readers to check out some of our recent conversations. While YA studies has flourished in many respects, there are certainly still underexplored areas that warrant more attention. At *IJYAL*, we'd particularly like to receive more submissions that address global perspectives. We'd also like to see more historical approaches, especially international histories of YA, and explorations of different forms like YA non-fiction, anthologies, and poetry.

SPINNING GOLD

If a secondary school library was looking to expand their collection, which YA books would you recommend and why?

CORBETT

I recently had the pleasure of being on the selection committee for "Reading Teachers = Reading Pupils", which is a phenomenal outreach project run by Cheltenham Festivals to inspire teachers and pupils to read for pleasure. The whole shortlist was excellent, but two of my favourites are *All That it Ever Meant* by Blessing Musariri and *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh, both published in 2023. I'd also suggest taking a look at The Global Literature in Libraries Initiative, which is doing important work to raise awareness of international children's literature. I recently had the pleasure of curating their 2024 International YA Month celebrations, and the reviews contributed by the talented students from Goldsmiths, University of London and my international colleagues showcased a wonderful range of international YA texts that would fit right into any secondary school library.



The Birds
Irem Sencok

Those Who Were and Weren't

Maria Jarero

The prologue and first chapter of a YA novel.

Mayte's first experience with ghosts was entirely unexpected. It's not that she didn't believe in them, per se. She turned off the lights and ran from dark rooms just like everyone else. But she lived calm with the knowledge that she would never actually see one. They were there and they weren't.

It was a cool November night. El día de muertos had come and gone without any incidents. Ghosts were and weren't real. Mayte had gone to bed early — an anomaly for her — because she'd been feeling a bit off all day. Her mom had even thought she was a bit feverish and told her to put a cotton ball dipped in alcohol in her belly button just in case. Mayte had no clue what that was supposed to do, but it seemed harmless enough to do it. She went to sleep with a chill that ran from the innermost point of her belly button down to her toes. The heavy, glossy blanket on her bed added the perfect temperature balance. And so, Mayte fell into a dreamless sleep.

Halfway through the night, shuffling steps woke her up; she'd always been a light, difficult sleeper. She peeked one eye open, knowing that anything more would mean an end to her easy rest. Her mom was walking into the room slowly. It wasn't unusual for her mom to check up on her children halfway through the night if she knew they were feeling unwell. Mayte closed her eye and waited to feel her mom's cool palm on her forehead and cheek. She waited. And waited. And waited. Confused, she opened her eyes again.

"Mom?" She whispered. Her mom was looming over her, body almost touching the bed. Mayte looked up, up, up, and found herself staring into nothing. Where her mom's face should have been there was a gaping black hole.

Her throat closed up and she pulled the covers over her head, trembling. She reached under her pillow for the remote control that would turn the light on in her room, thankful that she didn't have to come out from the protective cocoon of her covers. She managed to press the button and then peeked one eye out again, barely brave enough to do it.

Her mom was not there.

It took a very long time for Mayte to be able to sleep again, remote clutched desperately in her hand.

ONE

November meant the end of the semester and beginning of winter break, and Mayte couldn't be happier about it. It had been a weird six months since she'd started high school. New classes, new friends, new mistakes to make. She'd gone to the same school her whole life before this, growing up with the same 40-ish people. She'd seen them pick their noses and have their first kisses – presumably, they'd seen her do the same. It had been an easy sort of life, where she felt accepted no matter what. They'd been, in a way, family.

Now, she'd spent the past six months trying to become someone interesting and cool and just enough for the new people she was meeting. Before, it had never mattered that she wasn't much into MTV and music. Now it was all everyone could talk about while she struggled to listen to the radio and take notes on who sang what. Before, she could sit with her friends during recess with a book in her hand and no one thought anything of it. Now she didn't even bother putting a book in her backpack after the first time someone had commented on it. It was exhausting.

It didn't help that her only friend from before, Mago, was being such a weirdo. When they were alone, she was still the same old Mago, the one she watched fall off a trampoline when they were 11 and with whom she'd made funny videos they never showed anyone else. But when other people were around, she'd make these little comments that Mayte couldn't quite understand and would make her feel... dumb. Mago kept saying it was all in Mayte's head whenever she spoke up about it. How was she supposed to get out of her head though? She lived there. Well... Whatever.

She was waiting for her mom to pick her up from school. The bus didn't run in these last few days, since everyone had different exam and revision schedules. So she was left to wait until her mom finished work and could actually pick her up. At least she was alone today. She was tired after

the weird night she'd just had. She hadn't had the chance to ask her mom about it yet, but she was hoping it was just a weird misunderstanding.

"Hey baby!" Her mom pulled up to the curb, waving from inside the car. Mayte jumped up and ran for the car, desperate to finally leave school behind, even if just for 5 weeks.

"Hey mom," she leaned over the center console to kiss her mom's cheek. "Thanks for picking me up."

"Ay, mi amor," her mom pulled at one of Mayte's curls. "As if I wouldn't! How was the exam and the revision, then?"

They settled into the car as Mayte plotted how to bring up the previous night without sounding like she'd lost it.

"So, mom," Mayte finally started, fifteen minutes after she'd gotten into the car. "Did you sleep well?"

She didn't manage to sound as casual as she'd hoped, she thought, when her mom looked at her almost like she was trying not to laugh in her face.

"Yes, honey," her mom finally said, humor tinting her words. "Like a baby, slept the whole night through!"

"Really? No... Moon-watching in the middle of the night?" Her mom had never done that in her life, but no one said she couldn't start now, right?

Now her mom really was laughing in her face.

"No, Mayte, I did not get up to watch the moon in the middle of the night. What is up with you? The exams really got to you, didn't they?"

Mayte tried to laugh it off with her mom, giving her excuses about the exams messing with her sleep and giving her nightmares. But Mayte knew she hadn't dreamt that thing up. If she had, the lights wouldn't have been on when she woke up that morning.

Stan Had a Plan

Maxwell Ward

Stan had a plan
To do his new goal celebration
All he
Needed to do was SCORE

However much he tried
All the shots he
Did went wide

And he started to get annoyed

Pow! Finally, the ball was in the net
Low past the goalkeeper
And Stan flapped his arms and clucked like a chicken
Never mind that it was an own goal



The Rat; pages 1, 4, 6
Giotto Bao



An Afternoon in Tate Modern
Irem Sencok

A note from Jenny Barker, the author:

Planet B is a middle grade science fiction novel that I've been working on over the two years of my MA.

13-year-old alien, Astrid, lives on Planet Gemini, which is close to collapse after centuries of mistreatment by its occupants. Luckily, a plan B for survival has been identified mere galaxies away: the mysterious Planet Earth. Astrid and her best friend, Narvi, face weeks of human training on their intergalactic journey to safety, but when they arrive and realise that the humans aren't all the evil beings they've been taught about, they're faced with the question: can they save the humans from the Geminian takeover plans? And even if they can, should they?

This extract is the opening of the novel, in which the stakes are high and a place on the mission to Earth isn't guaranteed.

Planet B

Jenny Barker

Intended audience: Middle Grade

Chapter 1

"I beg you to act now. This is the hottest cycle on Geminian record. Unless we act immediately, we will be known as the generation that wrecked Gemini beyond repair. What kind of legacy is that?"

Campaigner, Geminian Environmental Alliance Meeting,
2085

Dioscuri Galaxy
Planet Gemini
Zone 11
2525

On Planet Gemini, there seemed to be fresh destruction every night.

Forcing her amber eyes open at the sound of movement from outside her chamber, Astrid wondered what it would be this time.

Would the jagged blaze of flames have crept closer to the underground compound? Or had the poor souls of Divisions 3 and 4 successfully battled them back?

The sirens hadn't gone off at least, so that was a good sign.

A glance at the clock above her door revealed it was 9:05 PM and, after a good day's sleep, Astrid was rising.

As tempted as she was to close her eyes and drift back off, she couldn't afford to irritate Eirene by being late tonight. She was under no illusion that the Division 6 Director approved of her.

Unfortunately, with *Evac Day* on the horizon, Eirene's approval was the only thing that mattered.

Being selected for evacuation from Gemini was the only hope the Geminians had left of survival, and it had been made crystal clear that there wouldn't be space for all of them.

With that chilling thought, she sat up.

Gingerly placing her feet on the cold concrete, she reached to open the cabinet above the bed and removed one of the sealed silver pouches stored there.

She tore off the top of the pouch with a grimace, holding her nose to help with guzzling the muddy green liquid inside as quickly as she could.

Disgusting.

It had been a whole cycle since they'd been forced to transition to a diet of glyp, and in 365 days it hadn't become even a fraction less repulsive.

Gemini's climate crisis had finally stolen the food.

Glyp might have been packed with the nutrients they needed to survive, but there was nothing palatable about it.

How Astrid longed for the Sao berries of her Zone 4 homeland.

As the nauseating sludge of glyp clung to her throat on the way down, she remembered the bitter burst of the Sao's purple skin, and the gush of sweet nectar that would swiftly follow. The thick

purple coating of juice that a handful of Sao berries left behind on the tongue would leave her and her grandmother giggling, poking their tongues out at each other until they were clean again.

With her eyes closed, she could almost taste it.

Not just the berry; the whole blissful moment.

But she knew that no matter how hard she imagined, she would never taste a Sao berry again.

7 cycles ago, the catastrophic floods of Zone 4 had washed every trace of them away, taking Astrid's grandmother Estelle, her home, and her freedom with them.

She'd only been 6 in 2518, but Astrid swore she could remember every detail of her grandmother's smile, so wide that it eclipsed her eyes.

3 days before the floods, Estelle had bundled her onto the last train out of Zone 4, saving her life. Astrid had disembarked into the underground fortress of Zone 11, where she was met by a sombre Eirene and her bleak new reality: 4 cycles of school and kitchen work, and a place in Division 6 when she turned 10. Now she was 13, she felt like she'd been in D6 forever.

A ticket for the last train out had been heavily coveted by those left in Zone 4. Astrid still didn't know how Estelle had managed to secure one, and she still felt terrible that she was the one to use it. Estelle, who'd raised Astrid, always put her beloved granddaughter first. If Astrid didn't get selected for the upcoming evacuation from Gemini, it would feel like the sacrifice had all been for nothing.

Although she would never fully shake away the guilt, Astrid knew that, realistically, Estelle wouldn't have lasted long in Zone 11. Her 96 cycles had made her wise but weak, and the pressure of the workforce would have taken its toll.

Things were even more dire after Zone 12 succumbed to the flames a few months ago. Astrid still couldn't believe 11 was now the only inhabited zone on Gemini.

A pounding on her chamber door snapped her out of her reflection. Sometimes, she thought her brain was like a grand palace. She was constantly getting lost in the hidden alcoves and taking breaks from reality on the window seats.

There was a second flurry of knocks.

Oops, she'd done it again.

"Sorry, Narvi! Just hang on!" She pulled her cotton nightshirt over her head and discarded it on the floor.

"Come on, Az. You're cutting it way too close!" Her best friend's warning filtered through the door.

"I'm nearly done!" Astrid called back, hopping into the legs of her grey surface gear. Arms in, she zipped the suit up to her chin. A quick rotation of her tense shoulders revealed how raw her skin was from the rough material.

Boots on.

But wait – she'd almost forgotten.

Reaching behind her neck, she began to unfasten the clasp of her one and only personal possession. Fears of cross-contamination after Zone 7 was wiped out by a stomach death pandemic meant that anyone coming into 11 found their belongings swiftly incinerated.

What they hadn't anticipated was for young Astrid to have an ornate glass pendant sewn into the lining of her tiny vest. The family heirloom was treasured dearly by Estelle, who had gone to great lengths to ensure Astrid could hold onto it.

She wouldn't usually dare wear it anywhere but her chamber, but today felt... different.

3 days out from the evacuation, change was in the air, and with it came an uncertainty that caused her to crave comfort.

Brushing her thumb across the forbidden pendant, she smiled

softly at the captivating fireflower encased within. The hues of orange and yellow spilling across the petals created the illusion of a tiny explosion trapped inside.

Astrid was too young to have ever seen a living flower with her own eyes — such things had long disappeared. Her generation had only heard the folkloric whispers of reverence passed down from their elders. And now they were mostly gone too.

It was decided. Tonight, the pendant would remain on.

"Astrid, I swear to Leda, I am 5 seconds away from going without you."

Eek.

The times of following gods and goddesses had long passed, but the Geminians still loved to call on the name of ancient queen Leda in moments of drama.

Door open.

"I'm so sorry," she stumbled out of the door, clinging onto Narvi's arm for stability.

"We only have three nights left to prove ourselves," he warned wearily. Looking up, Astrid was met by his strained face. She couldn't help but take note of the hard edge around his kind eyes.

"I know, Narv. I'm really sorry. We'll make it there in time." She'd never forgive herself if she ruined his chances. Especially after the amount of times he'd helped her salvage her own.

"Let's go." She sprang into action, tugging on his arm.

They made their way through the draughty tunnel of chambers and took a left, jogging down the steel passageway to reach the surface pod in time. The display inside revealed they had 6 minutes left.

"We're good." Astrid felt the panic in her stomach settle. They would make it. She pushed the activation button that would elevate

them to the surface.

“I hope so.” Narvi was still tense. “We’re not all maths prodigies, you know. If I mess up, no way I get selected.”

Ouch.

Astrid had proven to be quite the addition to D6 on that first night. The assessment she’d taken to assign her appropriate duties had left the leadership committee floored. She’d calculated the orbital speed of the planet’s remaining satellites in record time, earning her very own console in the command centre.

Since then, her nights were spent completing calculation after calculation, never quite sure which ones were theoretical and which ones weren’t. It was probably best not to ask. It’s not like they would tell her if she did.

Narvi realised he’d been a little harsh when Astrid didn’t respond.

“Sorry. I’m just worried.”

“It’s okay, I get it. It doesn’t feel like anyone is guaranteed.” She offered a small smile as a peace offering.

Narvi scoffed.

“Yeah, except for Larissa.”

Astrid grimaced. “Let’s not bring *her* up unless we really have to.”

“Deal.” He chuckled. “Nearly there.”

2 minutes out from the surface, they began their well-practised steps of preparation for entry. The green helmets identifying them as D6 were strapped on, and they shielded their eyes with thin goggles.

It would be dark out, but that wasn’t a problem — the Geminian race had evolved to develop night vision around 100 cycles ago. Those born without it had a simple laser treatment to rectify matters.

As the pod came to a stop and the doors slid open, Astrid wondered how many more times she’d be standing where she was right then, waiting to emerge into the unimaginable chaos of Gemini’s remnants. With any luck, she’d be able to count the answer on one hand.

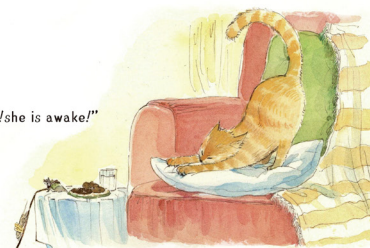
It was a short walk through the concrete tunnel to reach the surface, and their light chatter turned into silence as they neared the end.

Treading out onto the cracked clay in their rubber boots, Astrid and Narvi surveyed their dismal surroundings.

The cat and the mice live in the same house.
the cat is purring and the mice are stealing.
They are so careful not to
wake up the big kitty
on the couch.



"Oh/she is awake!"



"Hurry up!
she is coming!"



"She will ruin us all !
we need to Fight!"



"She is everywhere ! "

"We Just need hide"



"Why don't we bail her out?"



"Or...Bell the cat?"



"Very well then,
but who is to bell the Cat?"



"If she catches us..."



"She will eat us whole ! "



nobody wanna be that hero.



Bell the Cat
Yaoli Zhou



Photo credit: Interviewee's own

AN INTERVIEW WITH RIKIN PAREKH

Children's Book Illustrator

SPINNING GOLD EDITORIAL TEAM

Can you tell us a bit about your journey to becoming an illustrator?

RIKIN PAREKH

Yes! I trained as an illustrator, going to Camberwell College of Arts to do my Foundation, then spent a fabulous three years at the University of Westminster, Harrow. I wanted to become a comic book illustrator but then my tutor, Mike Litherland, showed me some storyboards. It was the same, sequential art but better and more akin to my “film” sense of narrative. After graduating, I worked in retail at Borders as a bookseller whilst freelancing in the very tough film industry. Work was hard to find, and it was a weekly thing for me to bother art directors and call them up every week. I managed to work on a few films with *Charlie and Chocolate Factory* being the biggest at Pinewood Studios. After, I think, six years, I decided to stop and look for work as a children's book illustrator as storyboarding wasn't happening and, to be honest, I was losing the love for it as it seemed so confined.

SPINNING GOLD

Do you have any current projects that you can tell us about?

PAREKH

Oh, yes – I am working currently on book two in the *Totally Chaotic History* series with Greg Jenner and Walker Books. I'm also working on a picture book with Walker, which is another MG series with Bloomsbury and probably my biggest project to date, illustrating *Charlie and the Christmas Factory*. The publisher, Penguin, describes it as “A magical and hilarious short-story collection from 13 bestselling, much-loved storytellers. This is the perfect seasonal read featuring 12 brand-new short stories based on their author's favorite Roald Dahl characters.”

SPINNING GOLD

What were your favourite picture books/illustrations when you were little?

PAREKH

Hmm, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* by Judith Kerr, *Princess Smartypants* by Babette Cole, and *Not Now Bernard!* by David McKee! I remember finding all these at primary school and being just fascinated by the illustrations!

SPINNING GOLD

What has been your favourite illustration project so far?

PAREKH

I would have to say my debut picture book, *Fly, Tiger, Fly*, was a dream come true to illustrate. It was something that I had thought of so many years ago and something I loved illustrating in the sweltering summer of 2018! It is sadly going to go out of print though.

SPINNING GOLD

What do you find hardest to illustrate?

PAREKH

I think many other Illustrators would say these things – horses and hands!

SPINNING GOLD

How many hours a day do you spend drawing?

PAREKH

I try to do about six to seven hours but sometimes it can be less as I care for my disabled mum, so it is a huge juggling act. But somehow, I meet my deadlines and I am so grateful to the publishers who give me any extra time they can – I appreciate it so much!

SPINNING GOLD

How did you choose your illustration style?

PAREKH

It sort of chose me. I was and still am fascinated by Quentin Blake, Babette Cole, Kandinsky and many comic book artists like John Romita and the traditional manner of dip-pen/brush inking felt so natural. I also blame my tutor at uni, Mike Litherland, for introducing me to dip pen inking!

SPINNING GOLD

What is your advice to aspiring illustrators?

PAREKH

Draw as much as you can, look at everything, keep a sketchbook, listen to music, laugh, look at the colours of things, read, but keep drawing. “Look for the Spiritual in Art” -Kandinsky.

You, aged 39

Maxwell Ward

I got an email from the future,
From myself aged thirty-nine
It's here on the computer
It says things work out fine.

Dear me, it starts, are you alright?
I know things must seem strange.
It's never nice when parents fight
and when there's so much change.

But honestly don't be upset,
Even if you have to move.
However hard things seem to get,
I know that they'll improve.

And one small piece of advice,
Try listening to Trevor.
As brothers go, he's pretty nice,
and also cool... and clever.

Alright, I'll end this email here,
But please message any time,
Things aren't as bad as they appear.

From You, aged 39.



Town Musicians of Bremen
Hongyu Ma



Bubble Town

Kimberly Bayliss

A picture book text for 4 to 8-year-olds.

*Who knew that a simple gallon of Bargain Buy Bubbles
would cause a town such a lather of troubles.
When Barnaby Barwick filled up his bath,
he also filled his town and neighbours with wrath.
For those bubbles multiplied out of control,
filling every nook, cranny, and hole.
The town that was once simply 'Bramble Down'
became known for bubbles. It was now 'Bubble Town'.*

Filled with fanciful bubbles of a light-purple colour and the smell of lavender, on the surface, Bubble Town appeared to be a magical place. At the start the people in town delighted in the dreamy suds. On the first day, everyone took a 'Bubble Day' off from work and school.

Beatrice Bagshaw was excited to miss her science test that day. She spent the day making a bubble maze with her friends and they had a competition to see who could build the highest bubble tower.

The whole town was having a blissful bubbly time.

But as time went on, it became difficult to live with so many bubbles. They caused traffic accidents. The plants stopped growing. Baths were no longer special. And all the food tasted slightly soapy.

Mayor Braxton Ballard decided enough was enough and it was time to get rid of Barnaby Barwick's Bargain Buy Bubble bungle. He called a town meeting.

Barnaby Barwick, feeling guilty for the trouble he had caused, came with a plan.

"How about fans?" Barnaby suggested with a desperate smile. "We could blow those bubbles right out of town!"

The town clapped and cheered, and Mayor Braxton Ballard praised him, "What an idea!"

But Beatrice Bagshaw scrunched up her face. She had used a similar method to add more bubbles to her maze and knew Barnaby's plan would never work.

“But, Mr. Mayor,” she said, raising her hand, “This will create more bubbles.”

But the Mayor did not want to take advice from a child and, the next day, he organised a team of ten dozen fans.

*The fans made the bubbles FLY
And ‘pip pop pip’ they started to... MULTIPLY!*

“Stop immediately!” shouted Mayor Braxton Ballard. The bubbles had doubled. Oh, what trouble.

Feeling even more guilty, Barnaby Barwick approached the Mayor and the townspeople with a second idea.

“What about water hoses?” He suggested with a hopeful plea. “If we can’t blow the bubbles away, we can drown them!”

The town clapped and cheered, and Mayor Braxton Ballard praised him, “What an idea!”

But Beatrice Bagshaw scrunched up her face yet again. Her friend used water to create more bubbles to win the bubble tower competition just the day before!

Beatrice raised her hand, hoping the Mayor would listen to her this time. But the Mayor dismissed her with a mumble and a grumble and, the next day, he organised ten dozen water hoses.

*The water made the bubbles FLY
And ‘pip pop pip’ they started to... MULTIPLY!*

“Stop immediately!” shouted Mayor Braxton Ballard. The double bubbles had doubled! It was double trouble.

Feeling even more guilty than before, Barnaby Barwick approached the Mayor and his townspeople with a third idea.

“How about vacuums?” Barnaby suggested, as bubbles formed from the sweat on his forehead. “If we can’t blow the bubbles away or drown them, we can pump them up!”

With a dramatic pause, one or two claps echoed in the town hall with a half-hearted ‘woo’ from the back row. Mayor Braxton Ballard scratched his chin, “Well, it’s an idea.”

But Beatrice Bagshaw learned the hard way when she had to clean up all the bubbles she trekked into the house.

“I assure you, Mr Mayor,” she said with a firm tone, “Vacuums will not work.”

But the Mayor took no notice of Beatrice’s advice and ordered ten dozen vacuums.

*The vacuums made the bubbles FLY
And ‘pip pop pip’ they started to... MULTIPLY!*

“Stop immediately!” shouted Mayor Braxton Ballard. The double bubbles that had already doubled had now TREBLED. It was treble trouble.

Barnaby Barwick, Mayor Braxton Ballard, and the townspeople were out of ideas. They were now up to their ears in bubbles. But Beatrice Bagshaw had her own idea and her little hand shot up through the bubbles.

“If we use heaters,” Beatrice called out while standing up on her chair. “We can burst those bubbles with heat!”

Beatrice learned this in her science class.

The Mayor and the townspeople fell silent. But suddenly Barnaby Barwick began to clap. “What an idea!” he exclaimed as he led the town in applause. The Mayor was still unwilling to listen to a child, but the loud hubble through the treble trouble bubble left him no choice.

The next day, he ordered ten dozen heaters...

*The heaters made the bubbles... DISAPPEAR!
And ‘pip pop pip’ the town was CLEAR!*

Beatrice Bagshaw had truly done it and was given a medal of honour for her service from the Mayor Braxton Ballard himself. Bubble Town was no more and was officially renamed back to Bramble Down.

The townspeople cheered and Barnaby Barwick gave a sigh of relief. His Bargain Buy Bubble bungle had finally been resolved.

<Illustration Notes: Barnaby’s cat knocks over a bottle of Bargain Buy Bubbles into a running bath>

...or had it?

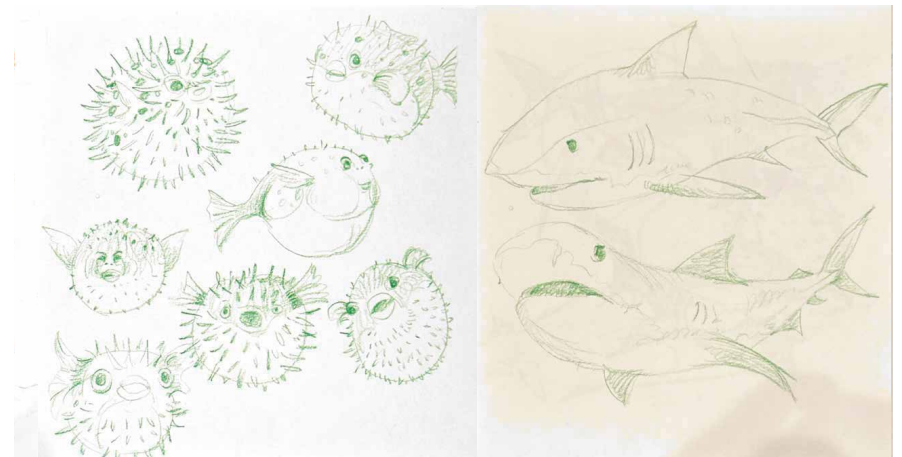


I Want to Be a Shark

Lin Ye

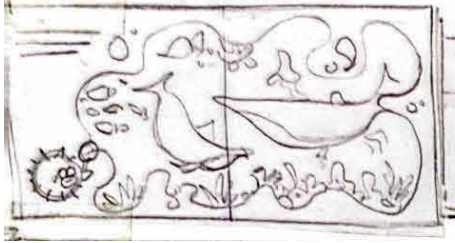
“I Want to Be a Shark” tells the story of a little blowfish who wants to be a shark but eventually finds his own talents and becomes the most famous singer in the ocean. The story teaches that being the best version of yourself is more important than copying others. Appreciating your own strengths is key to becoming better.

This work sums up my postgraduate studies at Goldsmiths, where I studied children’s book illustration. I found joy in children’s books and learned to tell fun and educational stories through drawings. This project shows my learning and the meaningful journey I’ve had. I am very happy with this experience, as it is a big step in my career as an artist. I hope this work inspires others to see and use their unique strengths.



Character sketches

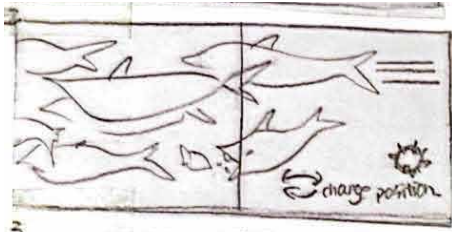
In this extract, we get a glimpse into the process of creating a picture book from concept to completion with thumbnail storyboard sketches, character sketches, and final illustrations.



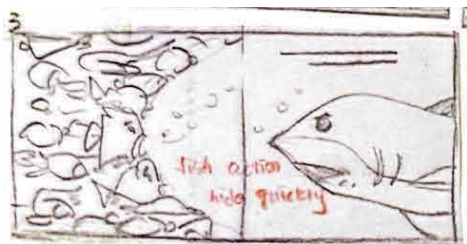
There is a blowfish his name is Jack He is very young, and full of curiosity.



Thumbnail storyboard sketches and final illustration



Thumbnail storyboard sketches and final illustration



Thumbnail storyboard sketches and final illustration

Unblazed Trails

Laura Moss

Intended Audience: Young Adult

I love watching the woods wake up, seeing how its inhabitants assert themselves each morning. How the sun and the robins and the toads and the chipmunks and even the pesky mosquitoes and the creeping humidity say, “I’m here!”

The sky turns pink and gold and there’s music in the treetops, the steady thrum of synchronous croaking from the water. The ground and air come to life with tiny movements and salutations of chitters and buzzes, flicks of tails, flutters of wings.

Everything seems to sing the arrival of another day filled with purpose, saying I’m here to greet the morning, I’m here to forage and feed, I’m here to warm my scales in the sun. I’m here. I’m here.

And here I am by this creek, and no one knows I’m here. Not my parents. Not my grandmother. Not even Reya and my companions. I crept out of the tent and away from our campsite, so I alone would hear the morning speak.

But I kinda wish that were someone I could tell that I was here. I wonder if Daniel Marchant ever felt that way. If listening was enough for him.

When I first moved to Ballenger, I said it was okay because I know Mom needed to be there, far away from Colorado and Dad and the court appearances and the memories.

And I am. I’m pretty self-sufficient. If I get bored or lonely, I can pick up a book or go for a hike. I can flip both pages and stones with equal curiosity about the worlds they hide.

But finding Wild Life was my savior. Marchant, with his messed-up family, understands the need to leave everything behind. He understands the solace of nature. And, as cheesy as it sounds, I feel like he understands me. I don’t feel lonely when I think about that. You can’t be lonely when someone exists who knows you like that.

I’m certainly not the only one who feels that way. The people I’ve met on the Daniel Marchant subreddits and message boards online, the ones who come through the store to prep for their hike to the cabin, they all get it. Marchant’s helped them feel seen and heard too.

“Amelia?”

Reya’s voice startles me. She and Eli stand before me, water filter and empty bottles in hand.

“Good morning,” I say.

“Are we interrupting?” Eli asks. “Do you want to be alone?”

I don’t know what surprises me more: the fact that I’m glad for their company or the fact that someone actually asked what I want.

“Join me,” I say. “I just came down here to read until everyone got up.”

Reya drops onto the ground across from me and Eli settles on the large, river-smoothed stone beside me and picks up my dog-eared copy of Wild Life.

“How many times have you read this thing?”

I shrug. “I can’t count that high.”

“Which part were you reading?”

“Nothing in particular. Sometimes I just open it at random, see what passage my eyes land on.”

I don’t tell him that I do this at least once a day, that I treat this

book like a fortune cookie or horoscope, flipping it open to seek advice from the words of a man I don't know, but who's always seemed to know exactly what I need to hear.

Eli closes his eyes and flips through the pages, stopping about midway through the book. "Let's see what sage words Marchant has for us today," he says and begins to read.

"We are a culmination of everything we once were. We may choose to not let the past define us, but it is still a part of us. A tree may shed its leaves in autumn, but those leaves still came from the tree, do they not? They are still part of its story. They may be whisked away by the wind, or they may decompose at the base of the very tree from which they came, but their origin remains the same. They can no more be separated from the tree than we can be separated from our pasts."

He stops reading and the rest of the world speaks up again, the flow of water over rocks, the doves cooing overhead.

"Well," Eli says with a laugh, as he places the book back beside me. "If we can't be separated from our pasts, I guess that means I'm part entitled prick who doesn't give a shit about anyone but myself."

"Fuck, Eli," Reya says. "At least let Amelia have some coffee before you drop your daddy trauma on her."

Eli lets out a guffaw. He has one of those loud laughs that makes you want to join in, but I'm not sure if I should.

"It's okay to laugh," he says as if reading my mind. "Reya always calls me on my shit. That's what friends are for."

"Oh, that's what friends are for," I say. "I thought friendship was just about unconditional love and support."

Reya makes a face. "Oh, god no. I'm here to exacerbate Eli's psychological issues. Have I not made that clear?"

They're both laughing again, and this time I join in. I don't quite get the ebb and flow of their relationship yet, and the depths of their vulnerability is new to me. But they've made it easy for me to wade in and test these new waters. For that, I'm grateful.

"So about that coffee?" Reya says.

"How about you get the fire going?" Eli says to her. "And, Amelia, could you show me how the water filter works again? I don't want to be responsible for poisoning everyone."

"No problem," I say.

Reya leaves, and Eli and I crouch beside the stream as I demonstrate how to attach the various parts of the pump. When we have several bottles full of filtered mountain water, I grab my book and we trudge back up the hill to camp.

Silence settles between us, but it's not uncomfortable. Still, there's something I want to say, to test out on someone, and I think Eli might understand.

"I um... I think my dad's kind of a prick too."

"I'm sorry," he says.

"It's okay."

His brown eyes catch my gaze. There's a crease between his brows. "You say that a lot. That everything's okay."

Suddenly I feel like that crow that woke me this morning, screaming its presence into the world until I unzipped the tent to see what was going on. As soon as I looked at it, it flew away. I get the inclination.

"Everything's okay after coffee, right?" I paste a plastic smile on my face and pick up the pace, eager to be back among Reya's easy chatter.

Next day, it pours with rain.
All the animals run
to find shelter.



Bob Cannot Swim – one spread extract
Xiaoli Li

The Poet Tree

Maxwell Ward

I
AM
THE
POET
TREE
!!

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Submission/s: *I am a poem*

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Submission/s: *Care is love; Virtual world; Beyond the wooden door*

Submission/s info: The illustrations in my works use visual effects and storytelling to emphasize kindness, empathy, and inclusivity. They showcase diverse artistic styles and narratives that inspire your audience and highlight the importance of human connections.

Giotto Bao

Programme/year of study: MA Children's Literature – Children's Book Illustration, 2023-2024

Contact info: giottobao@gmail.com

Submission/s: *The Rats; Cat in London; Kids in London; Church in Bologna*

Hongyu Ma

Programme/year of study: MA Children's Literature – Children's Book Illustration, 2023-2024

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Submission/s: *Dogs in the Park*: The happiness of dogs are simple and pure. The scenes of them running on the grass bring happiness to people as well. It is the magic in daily life. *Town Musicians of Bremen*: Inspired by the classic fairytale *Town Musicians of Bremen*. In the story, the silhouettes of three animals forms a strange shape that scares humans, and leaving a cozy empty house for animals to live. The story presents us how powerful imagination and confidence can be. Everyone can make great use of their imagination, and everyone can become the *Musicians of Bremen*.

Irem Sencok

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Submission/s: *An Afternoon in Tate Modern*: Sketching at Tate Modern is a profoundly inspiring experience, blending the observation of both people and art into a captivating tapestry of creativity. I believe that capturing human interaction with artwork in my sketches narrates tales of connection

CONTRIBUTORS

and inspiration. *Lucy's Journey*: Lucy's New Home, my first picture book that I wrote and illustrated, reflects my journey relocating to London. Leaving my homeland Istanbul was tough, adapting was even tougher. Yet, within those challenges, I found growth, just like Lucy and her special plants. *The Birds*: I love Aesop's timeless fables, so I decided to illustrate one of my favourites: 'The Swallow and the Birds'. This vivid artwork portrays the five naughty birds ignoring the wise swallow's advice.

Lin Ye

Programme/year of study: MA Children's Literature – Children's Book Illustration, 2023-2024

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Submission/s: *I Want to be a Shark*: tells the story of a little blowfish who wants to be a shark but eventually finds his own talents and becomes the most famous singer in the ocean. The story teaches that being the best version of yourself is more important than copying others. Appreciating your own strengths is key to becoming better. This work sums up my postgraduate studies at Goldsmiths, where I studied children's illustration. I found joy in children's books and learned to tell fun and educational stories through drawings. This project shows my learning and the meaningful journey I've had. I am very happy with this experience, as it is a big step in my career as an artist. I hope this work inspires others to see and use their unique strengths.

Marcie Xu

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Submission/s: *The Moon*: It's adapted from Grimm's story that shares the same name. The story happens between mushroom Genies (mushes) and the moon they discovered. I like observing nature and I often wonder what the world would be like from little animals perspective, and that's how this adapted version was created.

Xiaoli Li

Programme/year of study: MA Children's Literature – Children's Book Illustration, 2023-2024

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Submission/s: *Interaction of a Giraffe and an Elfin; A Girl and a Squirrel; Bob Cannot Swim*: The story is about a little dog who doesn't like swimming and avoids it, but he still jumps into the river to save his friend. He discovers that swimming is not as hard as he imagined. My inspiration comes from childhood; I really had a hard time learning to swim. I hope my story can inspire readers to have fun trying things they don't think they like. *The Town Musicians of Bremen*: This is part of *The Town Musicians of Bremen*, one of the Grimm's fairy tales. It depicts four characters enjoying a meal after they scared the robbers away.

Yaoli Zhou

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Submission/s: *Bell the Cat*

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Programme/year of study: MA Children's Literature – Children's Book Illustration, 2023-2024

Contact info: wenqingqvq@163.com

Submission/s: *Red and Antelope Travels*

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The Spinning Gold logo was designed by Irem Sencok for the inaugural issue.



Dogs in the Park
Hongyu Ma

A note from Dr Emily Corbett and Professor Vicky Macleroy on the MA Children's Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London:

The MA Children's Literature programme at Goldsmiths enables you to expand your understanding of children's and young adult literature by specialising as a researcher, creative writer, or children's book illustrator.

We are based in London, the hub of children's and YA publishing in the United Kingdom. Studying in the city gives you unparalleled access to industry professionals, events, and opportunities that are not always available elsewhere in the country. Beyond its prime location, the programme offers a robust and comprehensive curriculum that expertly prepares graduates to develop careers in publishing, creative writing and illustration, education, children's media, and cultural and literacy organisations. For those interested in pursuing further research, the MA Children's Literature also supports graduates to go on to achieve doctoral awards.

Find out more about the three pathways by visiting the website: <https://www.gold.ac.uk/pg/ma-childrens-literature/>

Contact Professor Vicky Macleroy or Dr Emily Corbett for more information about the MA Children's Literature (v.macleroy@gold.ac.uk; e.corbett@gold.ac.uk). For specific enquiries about our renowned Children's Book Illustration pathway, contact Bruce Ingman (b.ingman@gold.ac.uk).

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Building on the success of our on-campus programme and the global reputation of our teaching team, we are proud to announce the launch of our online MA Children's and Young Adult Literature programme, starting in 2025. We have partnered with the Global Online Adaptable Learning (GOAL) team to create a version of our programme that can be studied around the world. Contact the Programme Director, Dr Emily Corbett (e.corbett@gold.ac.uk) for more information and/or to be added to our waitlist.

Many thanks to GOAL for funds to support the publication of 'Spinning Gold Volume 2 – A Patchwork Project'.



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