



Wild



## Contents page

	Page
<b>All Things Considered</b> by Blair H. Smith	1
<b>Glenduckie</b> by Jane Cook	2
<b>Introduction to a Whirlpool</b> by Maggie Bartlett	3
<b>Waters Skimmed</b> by George McDermid	4
<b>The Girl with Cinnamon Hair</b> by Margaret Bowman	5
<b>Man With a Plan</b> by Andrew Whyte	6
<b>The Storm Tree</b> by Barbara Rasmusen	11
<b>Mother Nature's waiting</b> by Jock Lamb	12
<b>Hide</b> by Kathryn Holme	13
<b>Wind Speaks</b> by Lilian Brzoska	14
<b>The Feast</b> by Sophie Caldwell	16
<b>The eye of a storm</b> by Ian Ledward	20
<b>Spine</b> by Cate L. Ryan	22
<b>Wild Rain</b> by Maureen Sangster	23
<b>A Wild Place</b> by David Sim	24
<b>Ma gairden in amongst</b> by Sheila McLean	25
<b>No place for man</b> by Marianne L. Berghuis	26
<b>The Wildness in the Wind</b> by Suzi Finlay	27



## All Things Considered

There is:

form in the chaos of wilderness, defined  
by the heather's hue, the gorse's glare,  
giving life, and  
holding me in thrall to the world;

comfort in the violent sea that pounds,  
pounds on the rocks, surrounding with mist  
hissing white, and  
synchronising my resting pulse;

reassurance in the rise of the storm  
that stirs the dead weight of sultry air,  
filling sails, and  
revealing surfaced hope in its wake;

fascination in the wildfire's flame  
whose flares draw the gaze of everyman,  
erasing all, yet  
re-founding its own evolution.

All is:

earth, water, air, or fire.  
Yet, still, we discern fissures in between –  
ethereal spaces.  
Here I find you.

**Blair H. Smith**

## Glenduckie

Harsh in the wash of watery sun and searing wind,  
nothing clear,  
on and on up the straight track,  
relentless, head down.  
Nothing to unearth, hard ground.  
Broken branches crack and trip us up.  
At the top the ancient fort is nowhere to be seen –  
only its view across the strath.

Back to the dark woods.  
An entrance you could almost miss in disbelief –  
so black and narrow –  
steadies into plantation trail. We relax  
until, side-on, a warp of fallen firs,  
fresh from last week's storm -  
great orange trunks, their tangled branches torn,  
curtains of pine needles everywhere.

We weave our way over-under, over-under,  
till sheer density of wood wins.  
We backtrack, unravelling, and try again,  
blundering uphill to light  
and make a loop around on lumpy mounds  
of moss and grass and stone;  
then sliding down the rugged, muddy bowl,  
emerging through the wall.

Wide open. All is straight. Signposts resume.  
We zig-zag neatly on tyre-marked track,  
confident again too soon. The crooked crossroads  
sends us up a terraced trail  
dead-ending in a distant wood.  
We cut our losses, our hopes of further summits,  
and take the long, straight path  
toward the setting sun and homeward strath.

## Jane Cook

## **Introduction to a Whirlpool**

It's a dark place, where a foot bridge crosses the water. There's a lot of water around and the twilight gleams on it in many places amongst dark trees. On one side a branch dips into the water, then rises, then dips again in a compelling rhythm.

Her Dad is trying to get her attention. He's prodding at her shoulder.

"Look," he's saying, pointing into the swirling water, "It's a whirlpool, can you see it?"

She drags her eyes away from the dipping branch.

"A whirlpool," she whispers, trying out the word in her mouth.

"It's like the water going down the plughole in the bath," he says, "only a million times bigger."

She stares. Does she hear the sound the plughole in the bath makes, or has her mind added that?

He lifts her as high as the top rail of the bridge and holds her there.

"If I dropped you in, you would get sucked down and down. Then after days, weeks, months even you would be spat out in Australia. You would have travelled right through the centre of the earth and be among strangers who walk upside down."

Her feet are scrabbling against the rail. She's trying to push herself away from the whirlpool. He laughs and holds her away from himself, out over the swirling, churning water. She's panicking, but knows not to cry or fight. She lets herself go limp and waits for him to set her down. Once he does, she runs to the car and holds onto the doorhandle as tight as she can. Perhaps the water can't suck her down if she has something as big as a car to hold on to.

**Maggie Bartlett**

## Waters Skimmed

As feet skim the waters, meet  
the surface, slice  
the thin membrane  
between  
life and death,  
a moment's splash then  
wind through feathers  
is mastered, controlled,  
uplift roars with my sharp intake  
of breath, and  
the fish soars.

A dance meets the sky  
where tumbles another entrance  
to *entrance*,  
and captivate the wind,  
faux falling in display,  
winding, spiralling,  
the fish flies  
from bird to bird  
and from across the bay,  
quietly now,  
I hear their cries.

Two dots skim  
the horizon  
and fade,  
while I shade my eyes  
from the dying light,  
wondering at the emptiness left  
by waters skimmed,  
now still,  
and empty air  
holding a memory so bright  
yet barely there.

**George McDermid**



## **The Girl with Cinnamon Hair**

She has a lonely task, high above the rocky shore;  
Alone she waits, keeping watch for a love that's gone before  
No one can see her soul, nor disturb her solitude  
Distant, deep in her despair,  
The girl with cinnamon hair.

I watch her as she gazes out across the raging sea;  
I walk the path along the cliffs, yet doubt she'll notice me  
I wonder why she stands there above the ragged shore,  
Her soul tormented, now laid bare,  
The girl with cinnamon hair.

A long, lost love I can't replace though my heart I'd give to her  
If she would only look my way, my love she could not spur;  
Through stormy seas and biting winds that rip and cut like glass  
Forsaken, yet for her I care,  
The girl with cinnamon hair.

One day I walked the cliff-top path, no sign I saw of her  
I searched the route I'd seen her go, but no glimpse or sight occur;  
A legend she is, or so I'm told, my heart's now broken too, so  
I'll take the lonely stance and stare  
For the girl with cinnamon hair.

**Margaret Bowman**

## Man With a Plan

It was barren, brown, and beautiful. It should have been boring, but it was breathtaking. The summer colour had shuffled off in an autumnal huff, leaving the strange mixtures of copper and bronze with dots of dark green here and there. This was what made Scotland such a spectacle. Whatever the season, whatever the conditions, it was picturesque, even against the gunmetal grey sky that was darkening by the minute.

Greg had paused to take in the scenery, but he now pushed forward to the small structure in the distance. He hoped to make the sanctuary before the deluge but doubted his chances. The yomp felt both familiar and distant. His sweating body knew the niggles and exertions, but it had been so long that any conditioning or fitness was a fairy-tale from the past. He resolved to do something about that. Always good to have a plan.

By the time he reached the haven, the evening had darkened and the downpour had drenched him. As he pressed forcefully against the door, he was aided and abetted by the gale that had arrived with the rain. Once inside, he struggled to shove it closed again. The wind had gained entry and was reluctant to leave. Extra weight helped with the momentum and eventually they managed to evict the weather back to where it belonged.

‘Whoa, you gave me a fright there!’ the man gasped.

‘Sorry, I didn’t expect the door to be caught like that.’

‘And I didn’t expect anyone else to be out here, especially in this. I’m John,’ he held out a hand, and Greg shook it appreciatively.

‘Greg.’ He quickly glanced around the room taking in the situation and his companion.

With the night now fully drawn in, the darkness seeped the edges of the place held only at bay by John’s camping lamplight. The brightness consumed the closer it came to the walls. The bothy was a utilitarian empty shell. An old crofter’s cottage, any internal walls or partitions long gone, the single window sealed to make it watertight and weather resistant. A basic shelter from the wrath of Scottish inclemency. Like most others, there was no furniture, occasionally there might be a plinth or raised area for sleeping, or a

hardwood surface, but it was surprising how quickly any left both furniture ended up destroyed by vandals or gratefully utilised as firewood. Not everyone appreciated the comfort and convenience of such places.

John had returned to his perch on the far side of the room. As the first, and only, occupant, he had understandably nabbed the best area, furthest from the door draught. Still, any part of the room was better than a sleeping matt on the cold ground of a windswept tent, especially in this weather.

‘Do you want some tea, Greg?’

‘Yes, please. I’ll get a meal started, but tea would be good if it’s going. I can even contribute a little additive if you’re a whisky man.’

John harrumphed. ‘Sorry, I’m most definitely not a typical Scot. I hate the taste of whisky, even the smell’s enough to make me boke. And as for porridge...’ the involuntary shudder and look of disgust on his face said it all.

‘Ah well. More for me then.’ He reached into his rucksack and retrieved a drinking cup and wandered over to John holding the receptacle out, ‘for the tea.’ He returned and unpacked his sleeping bag and roll mat and added a camp light to the chamber, increasing the ambient shade of the room from mostly darkness to hazy gloom. A few seconds rummage and a camping stove and a couple of food bags appeared, then a short-stubbed, lethal looking blade, a little like a dark, graphite coloured Skean Dhu. He skimmed the knife across the tops of the food bags to open them.

‘Is that a fixed blade?’

Greg nodded, ‘Been all round the world with me. That and my passport are the two things I seem to think of first.’ He twirled the weapon in the air.

‘Ex-forces?’

‘Yeah. Although that’s a lifetime ago now, and I felt it today on that terrain. You do much walking or camping?’ He busied himself with the meal preparation.

John shuffled across and placed the cup of tea on the floor next to Greg who nodded in thanks. He loitered as Greg continued

to stir at his food. 'Fairly regular. I'm stuck in offices and at screens mostly, so getting out and away from the world is always appealing. Especially when I want some *me* time and things are difficult at home.' He shrugged.

'I hear you. What sort of work, computers?'

'Finance. Commodities. Boring. That's why walking clears my mind and I love wild camping, the freedom and solitude. It's so, I dunno, liberating?'

'This a regular route or just a one-off?'

'Regular. I am mind-numbingly predictable and a creature of habit. This glen is my favourite, although I only use the bothy if the weather is bad. Much prefer the tent.'

The musty smell of the bothy was now tinged with the aroma of cooking. Greg prodded at his culinary concoction. 'So time away from home, things difficult?'

John hesitated.

'It's okay if you'd rather not discuss it, I get it. I just thought...'

John sighed. 'Yeah, more and more these days. I can't seem to do anything right and she's always spoiling for a fight.' He wandered back to his area as if the short distance moved the situation at home further away from him.

'Kids?'

'None. Maybe that's part of it, but doubtful, I don't think Sharon is the maternal type. Likes to party too much, even these days.'

Greg chuckled. 'You're younger than me. Much closer to party days than slippers, man.'

'I was never the partying type. Too nerdy, too driven for work and success. Maybe just too boring.'

'Maybe Shazz likes the boring types? Maybe opposites attract if she's a bit of a party girl?'

John looked at him as if pondering something.

'What?' Greg asked.

'It's just when you said "Shazz". She likes that, a lot of friends call her that. A lot of her boy friends...' he let the admission hang in the air.

'Ah, right, sorry. Been many?'

'Too many.'

'Why do you stay?'

'Truthfully? It's easier. The thought of starting again, finding someone else, it's not very appealing.' His eyes turned to the floor. He drew in a deep breath, 'Well, this is cheery isn't it? A wild night of fun and games, I don't think.'

Just then a gust of wind howled around the cottage and slapped against the door frame, which shook in retaliation. 'Speaking of wild, it's certainly getting up out there.'

'Yeah, you get used to it,' Greg said as he sporked a mouthful of food to taste and winced at the burning sensation in his mouth. He whooshed some air in to cool it and proffered the mess tin to John. 'Want some?'

'No thanks. I had food a bit before you arrived. So, what about you, married?'

'No, I like my freedom. And in my line of work attachments make things awkward.'

'What line is that?' John asked softly, eyeing the dark blade on the floor at Greg's foot.

'Probably best described as hired muscle, you know, doorman, security, that sort of thing. The odd freelance project here and there. Using the skills Her Majesty's, sorry, His Majesty's government trained me in. It's a living and something I've grown used to over the years.' He reached down to the ground and John's eyes tracked the movement. Greg lifted the tea and slurped, 'Hmmm, nice.'

John swallowed and cleared his throat. 'Working on anything particular at the moment?' Outside, the wind and rain suddenly dwindled and an eerie, still, subdued air settled, adding to the feeling of isolation in the bothy. Two people, alone and apart

from the world. The only sound now was Greg mixing the contents of his container and the spork tapping the tin. The seconds passed. 'Nothing particular. A friend of an old army colleague asked me to do some work, but I told her it wasn't the right project and she should go down a different route. Sometimes the easiest path isn't the most sensible. I think, as a walker, you would agree.'

They stared at each other silently.

John bit at his lip. 'I think it's time for a change at home. We're just making each other miserable and there's nothing really keeping us together.'

'Sounds like a plan.' Greg slowly turned his face to the door as if seeing through it to the world beyond. 'It's calmer now. I think I fancy a night under the stars.' He quickly finished his food and tea, packed his gubbins and fastened the rucksack.

'You're going?'

'Yup. You're a nice guy, John. Take my advice, try a walk on the wild side occasionally, you might like the change. There's more to life than work and success. Being a creature of habit makes you predictable, like when you go camping and always being here when the weather turns, but it also blinds you to other opportunities. I wish you well.'

**Andrew Whyte**

## The Storm Tree

On the ground beneath my feet  
lie gnarled twig fingers,  
white,  
naked,  
bark stripped,  
their joints exposed.

High in the branches  
sounds the whimpering of loss,  
the tree limbs sensing  
impending disaster.

The body of the tree  
retches,  
groans,  
twists,  
caught in the storm's fierce grip.

The loosened branches  
feel the tearing wind's force,  
their joints weakening  
their fibres stretching.

They crack and break.  
the carcass of the dying tree  
pulled to the ground  
by their enveloping embrace.

A groan of life departure  
sounds from the falling  
once living tree  
in the death of a long dying.

**Barbara Rasmusen**

## **Mother Nature's waiting**

Climbing the mountains, sailing on the seas  
Walking through the fields in a summer breeze  
Surfing on the waves and skiing in the snow  
Lying in the sun on the sand below  
It's deep in the ocean, it's high in the air  
It's under the ground, it is everywhere  
So take a thought, just look around  
And find the life that's to be found  
*Mother Nature's waiting*  
*Mother Nature's waiting*

Swimming in a calm lake, camping on the plain  
Running through the forest in the autumn rain  
Riding on a stallion, bathing in a stream  
Sleep beneath the stars in a silver dream  
It's deep in the ocean, it's high in the air  
It's under the ground, it is everywhere  
So take a thought, just look around  
And find the life that's to be found  
*Mother Nature's waiting*  
*Mother Nature's waiting*

The singing of the larks, the swaying of the trees  
Frolic in the meadow with the birds and bees  
Hiding in a haystack, rustling through the leaves  
Love is all around, a million reasons to believe  
It's deep in the ocean, it's high in the air  
It's under the ground, it is everywhere  
So take a thought, just look around  
And find the life that's to be found  
*Mother Nature's waiting*  
*Mother Nature's waiting*

So take a thought, just look around  
And find the life that's to be found  
*Mother Nature's waiting*  
*Mother Nature's waiting*

**Jock Lamb**



## Hide

The wind whistled through the open windows and Bill pulled the sleeves of his new fleece over his cold hands. "Buy a green one- to blend in," Mike had advised.

Bill placed the borrowed binoculars on the wooden ledge. He shifted his buttocks in an attempt to get comfortable on the rickety bench. Mike had raved about this place, all the wonderful sights.

Bill glanced at the lake, which was teeming with activity. He stifled a yawn before observing the family who had just entered. The mother was a rather plain woman, dressed in a garish pink padded jacket. She pointed, asking her son to identify a bird in the reeds.

'Please don't ask me,' Bill worried, flicking through his pristine copy of British birds.

"I think it's a common sandpiper Mummy."

Bright lad, Bill thought. Good looking too.

Bill reached into his inner pocket for his mobile. He discreetly took a photo and added a caption: Codename: ROBIN, score: 9 out of 10!

Mike was right- this was a great place to observe boys without detection.

He'd bring a cushion next time though.

**Kathryn Holme**

## Wind Speaks

I am Wind! Wind am I,  
Whistling round your doors,  
Whamming through great trees,  
Lifting waves, battering shores,  
Soochin' through yer bushes,  
Planting apple cores. Windfalls  
Yea call them. Lift or tread them  
Underfoot. They have true power  
Within, to seed an orchard  
Full of fruit.

I am Wind! Wind am I, whispering through green leaves,  
“Autumn's on her way, bringing storms and fruiting trees, leaves  
Aboon yer feet, True power moving in every breeze.”

See me? I bring Empire Builders to their knees,  
Lifting roofs and felling trees.  
Yea cannie see me. Yet I am There,  
Lifting your hair, shifting clouds, whirling papers around,  
Gently setting seeds on the ground.

I travel more than most.  
I change things, coast to coast.  
I can drop a branch on yer lines, or die back as you harvest vines.  
I can be at your back pushing you uphill, fill sails with speed,  
Assist your drying hours, or blow  
You to Kingdom Come, keep ships  
Tossing for hours, threatening lives.

I have no compassion for you.  
I am WIND. I have my job to do.  
Lean on me, I'll hold you, because I can, not because I favour man!  
My power is pure, commands respect.  
Through my movement ships are wrecked or safely blown to shore.  
Why do you honour me no more?

I am Air, your daily friend,  
In a form your kites befriend.  
I am the Breath of God playing Goddess Lutes and cave notes.  
I am worthy of your Love,  
Deserving of your fear. You'll  
Notice that round here.

I am Wind. I am with You every day, keeping weather moving,  
Giving each breath life.  
Remember me.

**Lilian Brzoska**

## The Feast

Pain rips through me, almost throwing me off course. I push on; eyes trained on the sea watching as the waves crash into white peaks. The end of a tail dives into the water; a movement so small that it would be missed by most, but the pain keeps me sharp. My wings clip in close as I use the next gust of wind to propel me into the icy depths below, angling just off centre to accommodate the ever-moving water.

Splintered wood and lumps of seaweed fly towards me, the storm making the water cloudy with debris. I clamp down on the escaping tail and rush back to the air, the pain lessening slightly at the prospect of a meal. At last.

I sail with the wind, floating away with my kill. Except. It was barely moving, and my dive hadn't been precise enough to kill it on attack. I flick my head to bring my prey into view and let go in dismay as the driftwood plunges back into the thrashing dark blue beneath.

The pain starts to ebb and lays claim to the lower half of my stomach, occasionally radiating up my body. A small circle to peruse my competition reveals that I am alone. Others had the sensibility to remain away from the teasing notions of the sea. I glide on the wind to preserve what little energy, and dignity, I have left. Soon the murky sand of the rugged coastline comes into view. A normally bustling shore of noise, waste, and goodies is now a sparse and unwelcome sight.

My eyes scan below helplessly, constantly tricked by old bottle caps rolling across the sand. Some find silence serene. I find it malicious, knowing that my comrades are elsewhere and screaming over whatever delicacy they have hunted down. My wings slow as I float over the browning grass, finally relenting to the idea of another unsatisfying graze in the soil. The wind uses all its might to push me back and prevent my claws from digging into the softened dirt. With feathers clamped down and wings angled to dive, I give a final push, but the winds have calmed, and I catapult headfirst into the ground, drifting along in a bundle of leaves until I come to a stop.

A worm wriggles slowly past my landing place and I crane my neck to reach it, feeling it squirm as it passes down my throat. Only another six to find before I can return. A three-hour trip with only

worms to show for myself. Why couldn't I have caught that blasted fish?

Pushing my fatigue to the side, I pull my body upright and brace against the hormonal weather. My feet subconsciously begin their dance on the ground, sending vibrations across the earth. I imagine the sound travelling down through the soil to the worms, enticing them up to the unprotected world above where their predators lie in wait.

Minutes tick by with no movement. I stomp harder, the failures of the morning too present in my mind for me to stop. Twitching my head to the side, I zone in on the movements below, blocking out the rush of the water ahead. One eye remains trained on the ground whilst the other moves in rapid, circular motions, constantly watching for danger.

Movement. Small at first but enough to pull me in. The dirt starts swelling slightly, a pulsing that gets more urgent with each passing second. A small hole breaks through the dank earth and with it comes a burst of colour. The worm writhes and squirms as it tries to pull itself free of its confinement until it eventually pops onto the grass. All movement slows as it comes to terms with its freedom. The orange of my beak contrasts with its pale body as I peck it down whole, catching it off guard as it plunges back into darkness.

This dancing hunt continues until my bulging stomach can't take anymore. Although the gales have calmed enough for my take-off, the added weight means there is no rest for my aching body. Soon the shore and its taunting waters fade below me. I let my mind wonder as my wings caress the air. Soon the jagged rocks meet the edge of a small forest and my heart swells slightly as green infiltrates the beige landscape.

Rocky edges give way to branches clutching onto their subtly changing leaves. Yellows and reds creep through the treetops, a constant reminder of the weather to come. For once the wind works with me, pushing gently from behind as it passes through the foliage below, whispering secrets to the creatures within.

A small clearing appears, and I swoop into the trees, counting four in and two forwards. The forest fills with squawking as black figures swoop past me, their wings flapping quickly against the

breeze and knocking my flight off path. The worms seem to move as one inside my stomach as I quicken my pace and rush to the shelter of home, nestled in the branches.

The nest took days of careful scouting and placement to create. Sticks were woven together in layers, secured with mud and spiders' webs resulting in a sturdy abode for my family. Then came the comforter, a carefully curated selection of fur and moss tucked into the crevices, filling up the gaps to ensure a safe surrounding for the younglings. The weather had thankfully taken mercy during this time, allowing me to secure the nest in a crook where the branches met the sturdy trunk.

A once soothing location now adopted an eerie feel, the branches in all directions were empty of fellow animals with not a squirrel to be seen. The nest was in the same place I had left it, its long curving edges preventing me from seeing its contents. I slow my approach and let my mind live in ignorant bliss for a few more seconds before I lower into the clutches of home.

Silence.

Stillness.

Not the way I had left it after all. The worms reappear, lining the base of the nest instead of the tiny beaks I had left behind hours before. A swirling remains in my stomach, small puddles of sea water landing beside my prey.

I'm back in the air, my lightened load helping me to swoop easily between broken branches and falling leaves. The black figures had appeared just before the clearing, and I rush back to the offending site. My eyes circle in different directions, desperately analysing the world beyond and searching for the small bodies I long for. The ground below rushes into view as my wings falter. I relent and scour the overgrown forest floor for any sign of life.

Stupid. Idiot.

Over three hours unprotected, what had I expected to happen? I had practically welcomed them in, begged them to take my chicks and set the table for their mighty feast.

Squawking passes through the trees once more and my head angles to one side as I briefly close my eyes. The sounds came from ahead, reverberating down trunks to meet me on the ground. I push from the earth and soar upwards, pulling in my wings as the wind pushes me through.

Black shapes adorn the branches ahead, poking through leaves with heads rotating quickly, their caws filling the forest. I barrel towards them, aiming for the most densely populated area, rage propelling me. Commotion ensues as I tumble into two of the crows, their large bodies unprepared for impact and tumbling easily from their perch. They fall through the air, caws cutting through the forest's serenity, the sound of war approaching.

I ride the wind and swoop back for a second attack, but halt suddenly. Bright red paints the branches in front of me, small specs jumping out from the dark brown beneath. Piles of soft brown plumage stick to some of the liquid, and I force myself to not look down, knowing a fresh graveyard lies below.

Time stops for the briefest of moments as I scream into the sky above, causing a collection of wings to flap in fright. The crows look on from their perches, letting out short, snapping caws, bodies heaving as if I was the clown of the show, the big finale. It won't be long before they grow bored and want a new plaything.

I turn from the carnage. My home, my family, all I had worked towards for months, was gone. Instinct takes over as my battered wings carry me away, back towards the sea. Something about its harsh rocks and unrelenting waters now calling to me. A new beginning lay somewhere amongst the coast's rolling waves, I just had to find it.

**Sophie Caldwell**

## The eye of a storm

As those who will, prepare to take their leave  
a large *pantoum* of flowers arrives for you.  
The words, they say, 'Can you forgive us all?'  
I say, 'It is the best thing you can do.'  
We must not be afraid to speak our minds,  
as I do now with you, my special love.

Sensations we recall from youthful love  
affairs, they linger with us as we leave.  
The memories of our kisses brush our minds  
and when the sun can't reach us, please will you  
become my light and do what you must do  
to share the gold of autumn with us all.

Because it is this treasure binds us all  
together, and as one, we call it love,  
and clever as it is, we must still do  
the giving of our gifts before we leave.  
The task - to lay them out - now down to you.  
And all the fury will become our mind's

eye of a storm, and leaving clean their minds  
when it has passed, fills me with joy for all.  
And yet, I have to think that there is you  
who may be left alone, without much love.  
So, what will happen when there's none to leave  
and nothing more that I can hope to do?

Among the empty nests, what will *you* do?  
You, in the dying breaths of love, two minds,  
and see the compass steer your thoughts and leave  
a lingering taste. The wind, bereft of all  
but other people's sins, now cleansed of love,  
an emptiness remaining cold with you.



So long has passed and I cannot see you,  
when once we would have flown through clouds, so, do  
please think upon the time when we knew love,  
and next time tell me we've not been two minds  
apart and dwelling with the angels all  
the while. We dream away and so must leave.

It's up to you if dreams can carry minds  
as I do what I can to give you all  
my love, and make it hard for you to leave.

**Ian Ledward**

## Spine

unending, narrow, winding,  
bereft of ribs.  
a bony road that nowhere leads  
and where no-one lives  
(though a whole people did).  
but sheep once built to run up cliffs  
now bow,  
bog-steeped  
in these mizzled heaths,  
craving grave destination,  
release  
to where trees once were,  
windswept, covered  
richer earth  
before.  
lone spindles, the birches weep  
for those great forests,  
ancient woods  
which would have outlived all of this,  
once.  
when the spine had ribs.

**Cate L. Ryan**

## Wild Rain

To inch through unknown streets with tapping stick  
And hesitate beside a taxi rank *To walk or not?*  
But then the rain came.

And Perth was wet!

Rain had heaved itself from far behind the stately stage set  
Of trees and park that decorates the view

across the many bridges,

An area so labelled with signposts *Coupar Angus, The North*  
That it is hardly anywhere at all but *The Beyond*.

From behind there, a giant form had groaned, then lurched, then  
Risen to its venelled feet and in a moment turned its testosterone  
To liquid form.

A drowning maleness fell,  
Strong yet sweet.

How could slim gutters take the streaming rain?  
I, in a taxi, - finding strange echoes of someone  
I once knew in a past a pawpaw crumples in -  
As the station soon was reached.

Now, it was Rain's sister

Brought to an end her sibling's furious form. "My turn," she said  
As he lay back on skies, quite pale, like grimy exhausted sheets.  
She tossed her percussive dreams

Minute by strengthening minute

Upon the fibreglass ceiling of the Victorian station:

All on platforms looked up

As gods demand and

All were the better for the wild rain gushing drumming.

The rain was not tears but a thundering rinse,

A steeping of the restless land.

**Maureen Sangster**

## A Wild Place

A stream of clear water runs through.  
Trees frozen crisp and hard in winter,  
dappled in summer times.  
An ancient site and full wood.

Nature's growth committee sits.  
No votes taken or motions passed.  
A fight for space and oxygen;  
no quarter asked nor given.

Crows and other flyers squabble,  
fight and die.  
Bringing reality to this green place  
of bluebells and foxgloves.

The sight and aroma of wild garlic.  
White star-shaped flowers framed by  
overhanging paternal ferns take care.  
Frogs and toads live, perish and grumble.

A water well needed by endless generations,  
graced this dell of mud and flower.  
Capped now by metal grid to prevent  
young or inexperienced souls lost forever.

An old and grey tower a close friend.  
A time when Kings and Queens counted high.  
Gravestones retell stories of war and plague,  
or melancholic juvenile losses over millennia.

This garden set next to Kirk and dead place.  
Separated only by ochre stone and pigment.  
With limed mortar to hold this neighbour  
close and in one piece.

A heaven of colour and smell.  
Strimmed and trimmed, but allowed to live  
in these kempt and strange days.  
With one majestic foot in the past.

**David Sim**

## Ma gairden in amongst

Clouds, every day different shapes, laden, ready to send their water to the earth. It might be in the form of sma rain, almost mist, that hangs in the air, soaks face, hair, legs. Or big rain, chunky, that pelts and bounces off the ground.

Earth receives. Water runs, splashes, roars, into rivulets and rivers, burns and brooks, streams, ponds, lochs, lakes, gutters. Water pours down the birch tree trunk, makes the bark shine silver.

Water heightens the colours of rooftop slates and tiles. My skyline shines. At night, through lamplight, the drizzle sparkles.

Sometimes, in winter, raindrops cool into snowflakes that cover the ground in a white hush. The snow piles, makes surprise presences of fence and gate and shed.

Beneath the snow, the cold ground holds capsules of life that quicken as the season warms into Spring. Bulbs stir, shoots break through their pale brown, papery skin; reach upwards, cell by cell towards the light, After the dormancy of winter, readied by the cold, the shoots swell and thicken until they show green above the soil. They have grown from patterns held in their cells; from instructions developed over millions of years.

They grow, those spring bulbs, into a delight of coloured light. Snowdrop, crocus. Circler after circler of primroses; tender, pale, yellow, sheltered by their crinkled leaves. Narcissus, tulip, muscari, wild hyacinth. Fritillary, an astonishment, chequered in cream and tan.

Smirrs of colour; geometries of balance.

Primulae, forget-me-not, rain, its sweet drench. Agrimony, dandelion, daisy, campion. Rain, rain, its sweet drench.

Our faithful natural world binds me with entrancing spells; spells strange yet familiar, magical, yet down to earth.

It is my luxury and my necessity.

**Sheila McLean**

## **No place for man**

Moss squelches underfoot.  
I inhale. The scent overwhelms me,  
As rusted, remote mountainsides  
Breathe out wholesome, unpolluted air.

Steel-blue waters glisten.  
I cup hands to scoop its icy flow  
My lips tingle with every gulp.  
The source is pure, no hint of chlorine.

Ancient forests whisper  
I lift my head to an eagle's scream.  
Sharp eyes surveying its land,  
An old drovers route chants of the past.

Glittering quartzite glows.  
These lands take me in a siren's hold.  
My heart beats like warrior drums,  
As my spirit soars in solitude.

Silent red stag startles.  
To fight or flight, he cannot decide,  
Imprints of man are painful ones,  
A wildflower uprising snubs them out.

Mist-shrouded mountains clear,  
Four days on foot, my mind now wanders...  
To a pint, a packet of crisps,  
And the warmth of a roaring, pub fire.

**Marianne L. Berghuis**

## The Wildness in the Wind

In the dead of night, the wind is blowing and the snow is tumbling from the sky. You are huddled close beside the fire, with sleep weighing down your eyes in the small circle of warmth and light which holds back the icy darkness that creeps in draughty whispers up and down your spine.

There is a sudden, slow knock on the door.

What do you do? When you start, and wake, and rise from the soft warm blankets with a question on your lips, what do you do? Do you go to the door and open it slowly, so slowly against the wildness of the wind, wondering who is out there in the forest in the dark and the cold? Do you glance back at the warmth of the fire with a premonition in your heart?

You open the door and see it is a woman, thin as a whip, skin blue and limbs cold beyond shivering, with black eyes that look straight into your heart and beg for your mercy. She holds a child, pale as death with huge hopeless eyes and ice in his hair who reaches out his numbed hands towards the warmth and the light.

What do you do with these pale strangers? Do you turn them away, back into the freezing night?

Or do you let them in?

They shun the fire. They stand at the back of the room, where there is warmth enough, and slowly some colour returns to their pale, pale skin. They sip the warming drinks and wrap soft blankets around their shoulders. They smile with closed lips. They eat hot stew with delicate bites and the dogs around the fire snarl softly.

And outside, there is harmony in the howling of the wind, a chorus of the wilderness which rises and falls, waxing and waning as the snowfall thickens and the night closes in.

You return to bed, and perhaps you sleep. But your dreams are uneasy, full of the pale, cold strangers and the howling in the wind and the soft, focused snarling of the dogs. So, you wake and go to the bedroom door. The dogs are piled up against the door, awake

and watchful in the draughty hall. They stir restlessly, moaning and growling and pushing their questioning noses into your hands.

The dreams linger in your mind, so you creep downstairs with the wind whispering around your ankles. The dogs follow you into the room where the strangers lie on the settle. The fire is low and casts a warm light on their closed eyes and heat-tinged skin. You creep closer. The dogs fidget restlessly in the doorway and refuse to come.

You approach the boy, step by step until you are near enough for your breath to stir the soft down on his cheek. His hair is golden in the firelight. As you stare, his dark eyes spring open. He smiles.

\*\*\*

Something wakens you from a restless sleep. You are feverish and cold. Your mouth is dry and your eyes ache. The early morning sunlight on the snow fills the room with a bright unearthly light. The storm has blown itself out, and the world outside is silent. It is later than you expected, and somehow the dogs have let you sleep. Uneasily you slip from the bed and open the door. The hall is empty and silent, and cold as the grave.

Downstairs the door is open and the strangers are gone. Snow has blown into the hall and there is ice on the mantelpiece. The fire is dead. Outside the door, huge paws have broken the crust on the ice and left their mark in the virgin snow. On the step is one perfect, crimson handprint.

There are eyes in the wood only yards from the clearing. Your old faithful hound runs to your side. You reach out your hand to rest it on her familiar head, but she stops short, out of reach, and scans the air. The day is so still you can almost hear her heartbeat and the hot blood rushing through her veins. Confusion furrows her forehead as she struggles to come to your side while her instincts tell her to run. Her paws dance in the snow as she agonises, and then she lifts her head and howls in heartfelt sorrow. She turns and flees into the woods, and you never see her again.

The light on the snow hurts your eyes. You retreat into the darkness of the house. It is many hours since you have eaten, but the thought of rabbit stew turns your stomach.



All day you wander from room to room, unable to settle, pain in your limbs and weariness in your soul. Thoughts fragment in your mind and you wish only for the day to end. And at last, it does.

The moon rises on a silent, silver landscape. There is silence too in the room except for the crackle of the fire as it consumes the pile of logs. Tonight, there is no gentle drift into slumber by the warmth of the fire. You sit on the settle, upright and tense, waiting for the sudden, slow knock on the door that never comes.

The wind rises. The waving trees sound like the sea, which you have never seen. And as the wind strengthens, the wild song of the wolves blends with the rushing, roaring sound that blasts through your mind and empties it of all thought.

You rise and make for the door, but the howling grows louder with each step you take. As quickly as you can, you pile furniture up against the heavy wood, barricading yourself inside. There is no weapon in the house and fear drains the strength from your limbs. It is too late. They are coming.

Massive paws scrape against the door of solid oak. You can almost feel the heaving bodies pressed up against the weathered wood. The door creaks and bows, and you imagine their hot breath upon your throat. And with sudden clarity of mind, you understand the price that has to be paid.

As the door shrieks and finally gives way, you turn to face them. Raising your hands in surrender, you close your eyes for the last time.

\*\*\*

And when the sun rises again, the door lies splintered and broken on the churned-up snow. The house is silent, and the fire is dead. The old hound creeps out from her hiding place and explores the rooms. They are empty and cold, and there is no reason for her to stay. She pauses briefly to sniff at the splashes of crimson on the scattered rugs, then she is gone, swallowed up by the wilderness until she is visible no more.

**Suzi Finlay**

Anthology compiled by Kathryn Holme

Many thanks to Fife Council Community Culture Grant for funding the printing of this anthology.



Fife Writes aims to provide opportunities for local writers of all kinds and abilities to improve their writing and to perform in front of live audiences if they wish.

For more details, please visit:

<http://fifewrites.org.uk>

<https://www.facebook.com/FifeWrites>

<https://twitter.com/writesfife>

